

Tackling the South Sudan Conflict within a Complicated Regional Security Complex

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South Sudan's civil war, paused by a tenuous peace agreement, remains a major threat to the region, with the potential to severely reescalate if the peace agreement fails. The young state's conflict, started in 2013 amid a power struggle between President Salva Kiir and his former Vice President Riek Machar, quickly escalated, engulfing the military, political leadership, and civilians across the country. It has cost South Sudan immensely in terms of human life, displacement, and destruction of property, with more than 50,000 killed,¹ 1.5 million internally displaced,² and widespread reports of the use of child soldiers, rape, and other human rights violations by both sides.³ The conflict has also had serious socioeconomic and security effects on neighboring countries and the international community. If they are to mitigate these effects, the nations of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)—consisting of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda—and international partners must continue to support efforts for long term sustainable peace.

Since the beginning of the conflict, IGAD has sought to mediate between the warring parties and the group played an important role in the August 2015 peace agreement. However, because of a lack of commitment on the part of the combatants and clashing and incompatible regional interests on the part of IGAD members, IGAD has had difficulty negotiating and enforcing a substantive peace agreement. In the past, IGAD-led peace processes have collapsed over disagreements about power sharing, security arrangements, and a federal system of government. "IGAD Plus," along with international partners including the Troika (the United States, United Kingdom, and Norway), African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), and China were able to force the warring parties to a peace agreement with the threat of United States and UN sanctions, but a sustainable solution will remain out of reach if the underlying factors are not addressed.

Policy Options and Recommendations

The following measures are urgently needed to protect civilians, end the conflict, and build peace in South Sudan.

1. For "IGAD Plus" (IGAD and International Partners)

- a. **Include of a variety of South Sudanese stakeholders in "IGAD Plus" discussions:** The peace processes under the expanded "IGAD Plus" – an organization that includes the IGAD member states as well as major international partners including the United States, UK, Norway, AU, EU, UN, and China – should include a wide range of South Sudanese stakeholders such as churches, mosques, women, youth, civil society, opposition political parties, and semi-autonomous armed groups. This inclusion would help to create a common understanding and sense of ownership among all South Sudanese stakeholders. It

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could also serve as a catalyst for local political, ethnic, and tribal leaders in the most war-torn states of South Sudan, particularly Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile States, to begin local peace processes to create reconciliation and stability in their communities.

b. Develop a peace agreement that addresses underlying root causes and provides for long-term political solutions: Negotiations focusing on power sharing are insufficient unless complemented by mechanisms that can help transform governance structures at local and national levels. In South Sudan, IGAD Plus and the warring parties need to think beyond short-term political fixes to find approaches that deal with the intrinsic nature of South Sudanese structural conflicts and their historical roots. In other words, there need to be fundamental reforms in the economic, security, public service, judicial, and political sectors.

c. Enhance communication and cooperation among the IGAD Plus members: This is critical in order to take swift and decisive action to end the ongoing violence and to enforce the negotiated agreement. IGAD should take a more visible lead in coordinating international partners, especially during the execution phase of the peace agreement.

d. Hold violators of the cessation of hostilities agreement to account: Collective action by IGAD and international partners should be taken against any party responsible for violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement. Repercussions should include targeting top rebel, political, and military leaders with sanctions, undertaking military interventions to protect civilians, and taking action to control and slow regional arms flows and contain the violence. Both IGAD and other international partners should also be responsible for establishing inclusive mechanisms for the verification and monitoring of violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement.

e. Exclude Sudan and Uganda from the peace process: The roles of Sudan and Uganda in the peace process have been detrimental to IGAD's mediation efforts in South Sudan. If they persist in this role, these two countries must be excluded from the mediation team because of their deep-rooted and irreconcilable interests. IGAD should either capitalize on the Nairobi Peace Agreement between Uganda and Sudan, negotiated by the Carter Center in 1999, or initiate a new peace dialogue between the two IGAD member countries to reach a peace agreement pledging not to destabilize one another, for the purpose of regional security in general, and of peace and stability in South Sudan in particular. It is critical that the United States encourage such dialogue.

2. For the African Union

a. Release the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan: Armed actors, on both sides, have committed gross violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, such as ethnically targeted killings, torture, and rape, which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Those responsible for these crimes and actions should be held accountable, regardless of their affiliation or position. Therefore, the AU's recent decision to publicly release the report of the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (AUCISS) is welcome, and should be followed through as soon as possible.

3. For IGAD member countries

a. Uganda, Sudan, and Kenya must do more to encourage a peaceful resolution to the crisis: Uganda, Sudan, and Kenya should realize that if South Sudan's security and economic situation continues to deteriorate due to war, massive military spending, and falling oil prices and production, as neighboring countries, their economic well-being will also be negatively affected. It is, therefore, in their

best security and economic interests to work for the restoration of peace and security in South Sudan.

b. Ethiopia must take a more assertive role in working with South Sudan to resolve the conflict:

As the IGAD chair and a host nation of the peace talks, Ethiopia should understand and tread carefully in diplomatic engagements with the warring parties and among regional rivalries. In recent years, Ethiopia has had good diplomatic relations with both Sudan and Uganda; Sudan, for instance, will be a major beneficiary of hydroelectric power produced by the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Ethiopia should leverage these good economic and diplomatic relations with Sudan and Uganda to contain or even prevent their further interference in the peace process.

4. For the United States and China

a. China and the United States need to increase their engagement within “IGAD Plus”: Given their regional influence and close ties with the regional powers, active engagement by both China and the United States is critical to resolving the protracted conflict in South Sudan. The United States in particular must be fully and actively involved in the IGAD Plus discussion and use its influence to advocate for swift and decisive action to end the ongoing violence and to attain an inclusive negotiated agreement. President Obama took a step in the right direction with this during his visit to Ethiopia in July when he noted in regards to the then situation in South Sudan, “if we don’t see a breakthrough by August 17, we’re going to have to consider what other tools we have to apply greater pressure.”⁴

b. Both the United States and China should exert strong pressure on Sudan and Uganda to help mitigate regional tensions and rivalries: Specifically, the United States has considerable influence on Uganda, one of its main security partners in Africa, while China has extensive economic influence on Sudan. In addition, China can wield its economic leverage over the warring parties, as its state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) holds a 40% stake in South Sudan’s oil extraction facilities, the government’s key source of revenue. Therefore, leadership by the United States and China in particular as part of the IGAD Plus peace process is critical to bringing the necessary pressure to bear on regional states to stop manipulating the situation with the warring parties.

For a more in-depth analysis of the role of IGAD in the South Sudanese crisis, see the accompanying Africa Program Research Paper No. 8, by Getachew Zeru Gebrekidan.

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