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ABSTRACT

South Sudan as a state has borne out of the protracted civil wars that have been waged for decades in the Sudan. Despite it won its independence after a long and bitter struggle on 9 July 2011, the much expected peace dividends of the independence and the democratization process that has been set in motion since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Kenya in 2005 could not be sustained for long. After three years of independence and respite from long and bloody civil wars and the miseries that it causes, South Sudan has reverted to another episode of civil war. Based on literature review, this article examines the problems and challenges of the current conflict in South Sudan and illustrates windows of opportunity for managing it. The findings of the analysis suggest that, first, the South Sudan civil war transcends structural, proximate, and regional causes, and second, the empirical strength of the existing and implemented solutions for managing the conflict and bringing about durable peace seem to be weak.

Key Words: South Sudan, Conflict, Problems, Challenges, Windows of opportunity

1. INTRODUCTION

South Sudan as a state emerged out of the prolonged civil wars that have been fought in Sudan for decades. The civil wars traced its origin back to the colonial past where North-South Dichotomy was set in motion, consolidated and defined the north and south asymmetrically in socioeconomic and political terms, the northerner who claimed to be Arab with Islam as a fusing force dominated all aspects of life relegated the need of southerner who are Africans with diversity. The colonially inherited marginalization of the south by the north has continued in the form of 'politics of domination and exclusion' in the post-colonial years as successive regimes of Sudan pursued policies intended to assimilate the south and exclude them from the political process and economic benefits of the state. This has brought to the surface southerners' quest for autonomous status and the prolonged civil wars fought to realize it. Attempts were made by state and regional actors to silence the civil wars in negotiation meetings held particularly in the Addis Ababa Accord of 1972 and in the Kenya Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005.

The Addis Ababa Accord awarded South Sudan autonomous status within Sudan. Yet, Numeiri's unilateral abrogation of the Accord that undermined Southerners' regional autonomy in 1983 contributed to other round of civil war culminated in the signing of the CPA in 2005. The CPA not only brought to an end the 22 years (1983-2005) protracted civil war and drawn an Interim Period of 6 years (2005-2011) to facilitate the conditions and/or institutions essential for a referendum to take place at the end of the years to decide whether Southerners remain intact with or independence from Sudan but also the Interim and Transitional Constitutions came out later promised a democratic decentralized governance system to accommodate the Southerners' diversity and laid out the foundation from which to start with economic and social transformation of the society affected by extended civil wars. Despite such promises, competition for power between elites of different ethnic milieus mainly of Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups that has traced its origin during the struggle for independence reached at its peaks in the recent alleged coup attempt and the ensuing crisis that consumed thousands of lives and of material resources.

Despite efforts, by state and regional actors, of pushing the IGAD-led mediation for peace and agreement between the protagonists of the conflict sought solution has not been materialized. This piece argues that the problems and challenges that underlie the recent South Sudan conflict have not been adequately dealt with, despite existing opportunities to address it. The study therefore aims to analyze the problems and challenges that undermine the efforts so far made to solve the current conflict and identify windows of opportunity to address it effectively.

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2. THE TERRAIN OF THE CURRENT SOUTH SUDAN CONFLICT

2.1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT

The current conflict in Sudan in general and South Sudan in particular traced its genesis back to the colonial past. The seeds of the civil wars that have been fought for decades in Sudan were sowed by the Turko-Egyptian and Anglo-Egyptian colonial rulers that administrated North and South Sudan separately (Mawut, 1995). In 1821, Turko-Egyptian forces invaded the northern regions of the Sudan aimed at controlling the lucrative slave trade channel of the South that involved European, Egyptian and northern Sudanese merchants (Johnson, 2003). And the beginning of north-south divide was linked with this commercial exploitation of the Sudan (ibid). Major factors that contributed to the divide were inability of some areas to carry on the burden of new forms of taxation and land ownership and the resultant expansion of slave-raiding and slave-owning that mainly contributed to the exploitation and subjugation of the South (ibid). Though this galvanized Sudanese resistance against the Turko-Egyptian rule under a Muslim leader, Al-Mahdi, who managed to oust the joint rule in 1885, his regime continued slave-raiding in the South has become a divisive element and shaped the north-south dichotomy of slave-master relationship that shaped deeply the political development of the later years (Deng, 1995).

The Anglo-Egyptian condominium rule that ousted the Mahadist and established in 1898 was dominated by the British which administered the North and South Sudan as separate and different states under a Governor General. This policy reinforced Arabism and Islam in the North while South Sudan was ruled as an African colonial territory, which encourages African identity (Khalid, 2003). Besides, the British introduced the policy of 'Closed Districts' that alienated southern areas from the north and thus prevented Sudanese from interacting to each other (ibid). Yet, in 1947, the British suddenly reversed such policy and decided that the South and North would become an independent country, but without allowing people of the south 'Closed Districts' to exercise their right to self-determination, which became the main reason that resulted in the first civil war called Anya-Nya I (1955-1972) in Sudan (Woodward, 2003). The successive regimes of Sudan after independence subsequently failed to accommodate Southerners' demands for a federal arrangement that was outlawed by the central government (Deng, 1995). The Southerners' quest for regional autonomy thus stood contrary to the integrationist policies that were pursued by successive regimes at Khartoum (Lesch, 1998).

The Addis Ababa Accord of 1972 ended the first phase of the civil war by recognizing the ethnic plurality of the Sudan. The Accord that offered the South regional autonomy, proportional representation in the national assembly, and recognized English as its principal language, however, was revoked by President Numeiri in 1983 who established the Islamic Sharia as the supreme law of the Land that triggered Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army/SPLM/A to be established against it in the same year (Bahru, 2006; Woodward, 2003). The similar policy Bashir pursued since 1989 coupled with his conflict over oil and water resources with the SPLM/A led to the second episode of the civil war known as Anya-Nya II (1983-2005) and to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of Kenya in 2005 (Bahru, ibid; Jok, 2012).

During the civil war, more than two million people died, four million were uprooted and some 600,000 people sought shelter across Sudan's borders (UNMIS, 2014). The Transition Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan came out due to the 2011 referendum that formalized the divorce of the South from the North, promised a decentralized democratic system and aspired to reconstruct South Sudan and transform the economic and social fabric of the society that had long been affected by decades of civil wars. Despite such constitutional commitments, what has been observed since independence, however, is rivalry for political power between elites of different ethnic backgrounds mainly of Dinka and Nuer that traced its origin back to the 1990s has reached peak in the recent alleged coup attempt and left the country in chaotic situation.

2.2. THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE CURRENT CONFLICT IN SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan became an independent state on 9 July 2011 following a referendum that was held on 9 January 2011 (Lacher, 2012). It consists of more than 60 ethno-linguistic groups, of which Dinka and Nuer respectively are the dominant ethnic groups, and divided into 10 states in three provinces: Bahl el Ghazal, Equatorial and Greater Upper Nile (Transitional Constitution, 2011, Art.161.1 and 1.2; Jok, 2011). Three years after its independence, South Sudan has reverted to internal conflict. The question that must be raise is thus what causes the conflict? Both the structural and proximate causes contributed to the conflict.

Competition for power between elites of different ethnic milieus and their subsequent inability to provide basic services to the public lies at the heart of the recent conflict in South Sudan (Blanchard, 2014; Mehari, 2013). The current political crisis that also assumes ethnic dimension traces its origin back to the 1990s, where leaders of the SPLM/A competed for political power mobilizing support along ethnic lines that resulted in spilt within SPLM/A of those who allied with Dr. John Garang and Salva Kiir and those with Dr. Riek Machar, Dr. Lam Akol and Gordon

Kong. The rivalry for power that has caused ethnic atrocities by all sides brought to calmness by reconciling the major factions in the early 2000s (Ajak, 2014; Jok, 2014). The fissure that has been created within SPLM/A in 2012 resulted in what the public considered as autocratic and in some aspects unconstitutional move of Kiir's dismissal of the entire cabinet and some state governors elected by the people (Awolich, 2014). Political instability has been backed by rampant corruption that suggests the weakness of the legislative, regulatory and enforcement mechanisms of the state (Mehari, ibid). In this line, President Salva Kiir convinced that corrupt officials had stolen $4 billion in oil revenue from government coffers in 2012 (Raghavan, 2013).

Unfair distribution of political power and resources is also structural factor that precipitated the conflict (Jok, 2011, 2013). Key political positions (that are dominated mainly by elites from Dinka ethnic groups) (Lacher, 2012; Jok, 2013) have often been used to channel public resources to private coffers as exemplified in the corruption case above. Besides, resources that are much needed to develop the bureaucratic apparatus intended to deliver public services were instead drained away into patronage structures (Lacher, 2012). Consequently, the central government was unable to provide protection for citizens from ethnic and communal based conflicts that have frequently erupted and affected citizens' lives and resources besides paucity of public services in education and health and of infrastructure (Jok, 2013). In this line, Jok (2011: 2) wrote that "….. corruption, nepotism, exclusion, and domination of government and business by some ethnic groups all seemed to erode the public's enthusiasm for the upcoming transition."

Moreover, the failure of the state building project that has been set in motion since the transitional five years period after the CPA signed in 2005 (beside the above reasons) mainly due to the inability of the government to: (a) create institutions and transform the SPLM/A from guerrilla movement to a ruling party and a professional army (Ajak, 2014); (b) incorporate the demands for reforms within the party/SPLM (Jok, 2014); (c) disarm and integrate the multiplicity of militias of various regions into the community (Crisis Group, 2014); (d) attempt to set the pace for the Permanent Constitution to replace the Transitional Constitution by 2015 (De Villiers, 2013); (e) hold accountable those who committed crimes on ethnic based killings in the past and recompense the affected citizens; (f) create Dinka-Nuer healthy relations that has long been characterized by rivalry and enmities; and (g) benefit the youth from the fruits of independence (Awolich, 2014; Jok, 2014). Due to such fragility, the state has not been able to provide services for its citizens nor has it managed to exert political authority over and to control its territory (Ajak, 2014). Booth (2014:3) summarizes the underlying causes of the South Sudan conflict as follows:

> The roots of this crisis run deep. The government attempted to contain inter-communal violence without fully committing to the hard work of addressing its causes which include trauma from decades of war, economic disparity, historical grievances between communities, human rights abuses, and political grievances due to real or perceived underrepresentation. On top of this, the government had also progressively reduced the space for political competition, within and outside the ruling party, and for independent media and civil society voices to be heard.

Rivalry among political elites in the top echelon on ethnic line, their undemocratic nature of dealing with political problems, and paucity of development partly due to rampant corruption and (ethnic and tribal clientelism (Lacher, 2012)) laid the foundation to conflict to ferment and awaiting triggering incidence of the clash between presidential guards on 15th December 2013 that fall persisted long before in the liberation period in the history of SPLA/M and the alleged coup attempt engineered by Dr. Riek Machar to become violent. The political dispute that later assumed ethnic dimension sparked ethnic killings and counter-killings in South Sudan (Blanchard, 2014; Crisis Group, 2014). As a result of the conflict, over 10, 000 people were killed, 1,000,000 civilians have been displaced including 70,000 who have sought refuge inside UNMISS bases, 200,000 people have fled to neighboring states, and more than half of South Sudan's population will need assistance in the coming months (Crisis Group, ibid). In response to the conflict, state, regional and international actors have exerted efforts to soothe the conflict though they could not be able to bring peace solving the conflict that is causing human suffering. The sub-topic below briefly examines mediation efforts undertaken by various actors and their successes and challenges.

2.3. THE IGAD-LED MEDIATION EFFORTS: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

In response to the conflict and the ethnic killings that it causes: (a) the UNSC unanimously voted for an increase in its troops number in United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) from 7000-12,500 including 1323 police meant to protect civilian on December 24,2013 (UNSC, 2013); (b) international key players such as the UN, US, AU, UK and Norway pressurized the parties in conflict to find political solutions for the conflict; (Adam and Beny, 2014); and (c) the Horn of Africa states under Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) quickly sent to Juba three envoys led by Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin (Ethiopia) including General Lazarus Sumbeiywo (Kenya) and General Mohammed Ahmed Mustafa al-Dhabi (Sudan) meant to create spaces for peace talks and the mediation process to take place between the protagonists-President Salva Kiir and Dr. Riek Machar (Crisis Group, 2014). And what comes out of the international pressure and the IGAD-led mediation efforts is that: (a) a cessation of hostilities

agreement was signed between parties who promised to cease the war and hostile propaganda to each other and to form a Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVM) under the leadership of IGAD (IGAD, 2014a); (b) agreement on the status of detainees was also signed between parties who committed to effort to expedite the release of the political detainees, an all-inclusive dialogue and National Reconciliation Process to provide lasting solution for the conflict (IGAD, 2014b); and (c) Salva Kiir and Riek Machar also signed a peace agreement on 9 May 2014 and agreed to stop all hostile activities within 24 hours and on the prospect of a transitional government of national unity within sixty (60) days that provide best chance to the people of South Sudan (Daily Monitor, 2014).

The IGAD-led mediation efforts have born some successes that include: (a) the release of seven of the eleven political detainees and permitted them to join the peace talks in Addis Ababa in February (Crisis Group, 2014); (b) the IGAD-led an inclusive symposium comprised over 250 South Sudanese representing the government, the opposition, political parties, faith-based groups and civil society organizations meant to initiate the inclusive phase of the mediation process was held in Addis from 6-7 June 2014 (IGAD, 2014e); (c) the deployment of IGAD Monitoring and Verification Team like in Bor, Jonglei and Bentiu regions intended to monitor the implementation of Cessation of Hostilities (COH) signed between conflict parties and the authorization of IGAD a Protection and Deterrent Force (PDF) from the region as its part (IGAD, 2014d,c); and (d) the relative (negative) peace despite low intensity violent conflicts often seen against the subsequent peace deals signed between parties of the conflict to refrain from violent actions (IGAD, 2014f).

Despite such successes, the IGAD-led mediation efforts to create conducive spaces for an inclusive political dialogues to take place among stakeholders and then contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict has seriously been challenged by the multiplicity and divergent interests of conflict actors. Salva Kiir and Riek Machar personal desire to stay in power or maintain status quo and to replace it in reverse, respectively, seem to be irreconcilable (Ajak, 2014). Besides, the desire of the seven released political detainees (called the 'SPLM7') to form a separate but multi-ethnic negotiating group adds challenge (Crisis Group, 2014). Multiple armed opposition groups representing ethnic minorities that have long been suspicious of the Dinka and Nuer leaders such as South Sudan Democratic-Cobra Faction (SSDM) of Murle ethnic group also demands separate regional autonomous status (ibid). The need to embrace the multiple and often competing interests of internal conflict actors hence makes the IGAD-led mediation process challenging. The IGAD-led mediation process also lacks not only capacity and leverage but impartiality as some of IGAD members either sided with one of the parties or directly take part in the conflict (Adam and Beny, 2014; Jok, 2014).Though Ethiopia remains relatively impartial, Uganda has engaged in militarily sided with Salva Kiir and Sudan, Kenya and Egypt (not an IGAD member) also seems to provide political support to Salva Kiir (Crisis Group, ibid). Such states involvement dictated by divergent interests' ranges from regional stability, border security, and economic and political gains makes the regional approach mediation process difficult to cause peace.

3. PROBLEMS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF SOLVING SOUTH SUDAN CONFLICT

3.1 THE PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

There are many problems and/or challenges that militate against efforts solving the South Sudan conflict. These include: first, Dinka and Nuer political elites' ambition for power that traced its origin long before but intensified in the early 1990s and the ensuing ethnic horse they used in mobilizing support that often caused atrocities in both sides (Ajak, 2014). In the SPLM/A split of 1991 where Riek Machar & Lam Akol then senior deputies of John Garang attempted to oust the latter, Riek Machar ordered Nuer massacres against Dinka that consumed the latter's over 2000 lives in Jonglei state and that gave rise to the subsequent protracted Dinka-Nuer conflict (Awolich, 2014; Jok, 2014). This has shaped the Dinka-Nuer relations that have long been characterized by hostility, enmities and hatred and thus "frictions between these two tribes have always raised the emotional potency of conflicts, disposition to arouse deep-seated anxieties to revenge, fears and insecurity and the ready degree of aggressiveness" (Angoma, 2014:4). What has been seen in the recent conflict that causes ethnic based killings and counter-killings is thus the symptom of this long held animosity between Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups. Despite efforts made to reunify them for their common cause of the quest for self-determination and the ensuing wars waged to realize it with Khartoum, no one was held accountable though Riek Machar himself confessed as he ordered the Dinka massacres or any action that the government has taken to recompense affected citizens after independence (Jok, 2011, 2014). In the recent conflict, though the government has already arrested alleged Dinka soldiers who targeted and killed Nuer in Juba that could not convinced and restrained many Nuer from embarked on shocking revenge attacks on the Dinka in Bor, Bentiu, Akobo and Malakal regions (Jok, 2014).

Beside the Dinka-Nuer deep-seated hostility characterized by rivalry for power and violence that make difficult bringing about social cohesion and national unity across ethnic line, problems underlying the structure of the society

are also hindering factors to set the pace for sustainable peace to take root in South Sudan that include: (a) Dinka-Nuer dominance of the political spaces, military and public services and of the state's economic sources lessen inclusiveness in its public service, active institutional and plural governance development (Angoma, ibid); (b) the resultant exclusion and marginalization of ethnic minorities from politics and economic fruits of the state that resulted in the existence of multiple armed opposition groups representing minorities' grievances (Crisis Group, 2014; Lacher, 2012); (c) the autocratic nature of President Salva Kiir as it is seen in his dismissal of the entire cabinet and publicly elected state governors, elites' lack of democratic culture in solving their political differences often arise in the ruling party/SPLM, and inability to transform SPLM and SPLA to an effective civilian ruling party and professional army, respectively (Ajak, 2014; Awolich, 2014; Mehari, 2013); (d) Riek Machar's initial claims for power-sharing if accepted to bribe him back would entail serious challenge for efforts trying to solve the root causes of the conflict since it " risks of encouraging the trend whereby failed politicians have to revolt against the state, kill people, destroy property, and then get rewarded with power and resources for their deadly actions" (Jok, 2014: 19); (e) the inability of the government either disarming and integrating the various armed militias into the society or incorporating to the national army through providing trainings for making them professional and enable it to command authority and provide security/protection to the citizens in its territory than just incorporated these forces to the national army without the necessary trainings with higher ranks for their leaders meant to co-opted them allowing the state resources (Jok, 2013, 2014); and (f) lack of accountability of officials, nepotism and rampant corruption in government institutions (Mores, 2013; Lacher, ibid; Raghavan, 2013). All of these jeopardize the state-building endeavors and the much anticipated peace dividends of the independence such as peace and security, and infrastructural/ institutional development meant to provide public services in education and health care to the people of South Sudan.

In addition, despite agreements were signed between Salva Kiir and Riek Machar to halt the violent conflict, find solution for the conflict through an all-inclusive political dialogue, and establish transitional government of national unity purportedly to provide best chance for the people, challenges remain to undermine the efforts of solving the conflict that include: (a) the reluctance of the two protagonist of the conflict to respect what they have promised & signed for in the peace deals as it was seen in their frequent relapse to conflict and Salva Kiir's claim that he signed the 9th May 2014 Cessation of Hostilities Treaty under duress and threat of arrest from Ethiopian Primer, Hailemariam (Daily Nation, 2014; Sudan Tribune, 2014a); (b) though seven of the eleven political detainees were released and finally allowed to join the peace talks in Addis, the rest four are remained in custody and are under trial of treason, which is inimical for solving the conflict given that the release of all detainees puts as a condition by Riek Machar for meaningful political dialogue to take place (Ajak, 2014; Crisis Group 2014); and (c) the existence of multiple armed opposition groups (than the two main protagonists of the conflict) often with competing interests and the need to accommodate their interests in the mediation agenda so as to effect an all-inclusive lasting solution for the conflict makes the mediation efforts challenging (Crisis Group, ibid); (e) the fear of being accountable for the ethnic carnage leaders in the top echelon caused in their past and present rivalry for power might constrain their genuine commitment to find solution for the conflict; (f) though IGAD's proposed transitional government sets to run the country for 3 years governed by a neutral body preferably from the 'SPLM7'of the former detainees rejected by conflict parties as the latter not part of the conflict (The Upper Nile Times, 2014a), challenges remain on how the interim transitional government will be structured and the two armies amalgamated, and who will lead the government (The Upper Nile Times, 2014b); and (g) whether the EU and European Troika countries that financed IGAD-led costly mediation peace that reached about $17 million could sustain is a serious constraint (Sudan Tribune, 2014b).

Moreover, the regional approach pursed to solve the South Sudan conflict through IGAD is challenged by many factors. The first is lack of capacity and leverage of IGAD-led mediation process to finance and exert power to influence the conflict parties to reach a lasting settlement for the conflict without backed by economic capacity and the political and diplomatic leverages of external powers such as the UN, UK, Troika countries, and China (Adam and Beny, 2014). Besides, competing interests and divergent routes the IGAD member states pursued beyond the IGAD-led mediation process counters the efforts to solve the conflict. Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda desire for South Sudan and of regional stability and the political and military (mainly of Uganda) routes they pursued as viable solutions for the conflict is driven by their interests in: (a) border security as it relates to the mass influx of refugees and the easiness with which the conflict spill over to these states owing to cross-border settlement of ethnic groups having similar identity markers and the mutual intervention of regional states (Crisis Group, 2014; Weber, 2014); (b) the oil industry that is the main source of revenue for Sudan and also concerns for Kenya and Uganda as far as the Lamu pipeline is concerned beside Kenya's worry of the massive investment of its banks in South Sudan (Weber, ibid); and (c) regional power aspiration especially of Ethiopia and Uganda that preferred opposite routes of solution to the conflict, political and military, and plays impartial and partial roles, respectively, as the latter is a neutral mediator (under the IGAD-led mediation process) and as the same time a warring party in the conflict sided with the government of South Sudan that is clearly a double standard (ibid; Adam and Beny, 2014; Crisis Group, 2014). Each of these state's specific interests thus makes difficult to solve the conflict on regional base.

In addition, the Horn regional security complex characterized by the mutual intervention of states in each

other's affairs that often creates spaces for external power intervention (Berouk, 2011; Cliffe, 1999) adds another challenge. Uganda has provided support for and intervened with Sudanese armed groups notably the Justice and Equality Movement/JEM in support to Juba that risks pushing Khartoum to side with Machar and thus would let the two states to play out their differences through proxy war in South Sudan (Crisis Group, 2014). Likewise, Egypt promised to send troops to South Sudan in the time of its dispute with Ethiopia over Nile water, the claims that Eritrea may be siding with Machar to weaken Ethiopia's peacemaking effort, and the tension between Ethiopia and Uganda created over the former's calling of the latter's force withdraw from South Sudan predicts that regional powers rivalries could find outlet in South Sudan (ibid). The desire of Rwanda and Burundi to contribute troops to IGAD Protection and Deterrence Force (PDF) coupled with the risk of South Sudan factions to ally with regional patrons' highlights the wide regionalization of the conflict that would open a Pandora box of possible proxy conflicts (ibid) and militates against efforts to solve the current South Sudan conflict.

3.2. WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR SOLVING THE SOUTH SUDAN CONFLICT

Despite the above problems and/or challenges, there are some windows of opportunity to work with in solving the current South Sudan conflict. These include, first, the various peace deals the conflict parties signed though now not fully respected by the signatories would serve as a catalyst for further peace talks and negotiations. Besides, the all-inclusive political dialogue as part of the IGAD-led mediation process comprising all concerned bodies that sets in motion in the Addis Ababa conference held 6-7 June 2014 is a step forward to find out durable solution for the conflict. The release of 7 of 11 political detainees and making them part of the peace talks shows the government tendency to find political solution for the conflict that also creates spaces for further political dialogue and to searching out ways to sidestep the conflict trap though the four detainees case under trial of treason overshadows the optimism. In addition, the position of 'SPLM7'of former detainees that falls in between initially polarized positions of the Salva kiir and Riek Machar is an opportunity to bridging the gap (ibid).

Furthermore, the recent deployment of over thousands of Ethiopia force under the IGAD-PDF is essential to curtail ethnic atrocities and reinforces peace initiatives such as national conversations on truth, justice and accountability to take place, which is critical for mending relations between communities. Museveni's decided to withdraw Ugandan military force after the Cessation of Hostility Treaty signed on 9th May 2014 between the conflict parties (The Upper Nile Times, 2014b) is also another opportunity to further work on political solutions to solve the conflict. Moreover, the possible U.S and AU threat of sanctions on those who incite ethnic carnage against civilians and are responsible for human rights violations and obstruct the peace process (Crisis Group, 2014) coupled with the external pressure such as the UN, U.S, UK, and China backed by their economic, political and diplomatic leverages and the efforts of Ethiopia and South Africa (ANC) to create internal harmony within the SPLM ruling party (ibid) are powerful impetus to break the deadlock and to set the pace of searching out viable solution for the current conflict in South Sudan.

Despite such opportunities on the ground, their empirical strength to bring about peace downplaying the ongoing conflict seem to be weak reason to that: (1) there is still lack of commitment from the main protagonists of the conflict to cause peace respecting the peace deals they signed; (2) the 'SPLM7' as middle ground could not bridge Salva kiir and Riek Machar due to their lack of clear agenda, stance and social base to exert influence sufficiently on them; (3) the all-inclusive political dialogue of all concerned bodies planned to conduct frequently bringing about lasting peace could not borne fruit as anticipated mainly due to the unwillingness of conflict parties to give remedy for the conflict in such way; and (4) the multiplicity of actors within and without South Sudan with different and sometime divergent interests make the search for viable formula to cause durable peace difficult. It goes without saying that if all these challenges are adequately dealt with then the conflict would have been solved.

4. CONCLUSION

The current conflict in South Sudan traces its underlying causes in: (a) Dinka-Nuer ethnic groups elites' rivalry for power using ethnicity as a mobilizing force and the resultant animosity that has characterized the two ethnic groups relations and often caused ethnic atrocities in all sides; (b) paucity of the much expected peace dividends of the independence such as the provisions of security for citizens and public services in education and heath, and infrastructure and institutional development partly due to rampant corruption and ethnic and tribal clientelism; (c) the dominance of the two ethnic groups, the politics and the state economic sources and the attendant exclusion and marginalization of ethnic minorities and the surfacing of various armed groups representing such grievances; and (d) the inability of the government to transform the SPLM/A to an effective ruling party and professional army, disarm and integrate or incorporate the armed militias to the society or the national army (providing the necessary training), respectively, and conduct national conversations on truth, justice and accountability on issues of past injustice and ethnic atrocities.

Beside the above stated structural problems underlying the current South Sudan conflict, challenges such as:

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(a) strong desire of Salva Kiir and Riek Machar to stay in power and change the status quo, respectively, and hence their lack of political will to end the violence; (b) the case of the four political detainees who are now under trial of treason; (c) the competing and divergent interests entertained by the government, SPLM (In) Opposition, 'SPLM7' former detainee and the various armed opposition groups representing the grievances of ethnic minorities; (d) lack of capacity and leverage in the IGAD-led mediation process and the divergent interests and routes IGAD member states pursued; and (e) regional security complex where states are keen to exploit fissure of neighbors for their proxy war. All of these militate against efforts of solving the South Sudan conflict despite existing and implemented solutions that lie on the various peace deals signed; the all-inclusive conference held in Addis, the release of 7 detainees (the 'SPLM7'), Uganda's promised to withdraw its troops from South Sudan, and the pressures, efforts and threat of sanctions of external forces.

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