

Long Term Stabilization Versus Short Term Exclusionary Policies In Peace Process

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The idea to exclude Dr. Riek Machar from a future transition in South Sudan whether it is true or false, viable or unfeasible, endorsed by many or severely resisted, brings into question the viability of an agreement that may randomly exclude stakeholders from the perspective of strategic calculations of mediators, the region, external guarantors or even other political parties to the ARCISS agreement. An imperfect peace process in 2015, with flawed implementation struggling to maintain a momentum of peacebuilding was almost fatally wounded by the Juba July 2016 fighting.

SPLM-IO was outmaneuvered and outgunned by the SPLM-IG, leading to a splintering of the opposition movement and the implicit exclusion of Machar from a future political process by virtue of being confined and isolated in South Africa.

The current Revitalization Forum of the ARCISS Agreement has learnt in many ways from some of the problems of the previous process but there are still many areas that have not transformed the zero-sum calculations of the parties: to enforce the status quo and enact a decisive loss for SPLM-IO under Riek Machar or from the opposition's perspective reach a form of regime change and allow them an opening that they can gain traction from to push for an era of weakened Salva Kiir and Dinka hegemony. Neither of these is conducive to peace or possible if the objective is conflict transformation and devising pathways to sustainable peace.

Three perspectives exist that feed the impression that excluding Riek Machar will facilitate a greater opportunity for peace.

The first is the consistent fear that conflict will breakout yet again as implementation of a renewed ARCISS agreement is underway due to mutual mistrust among the leaders.

There is also the lack of willingness from the government's side to allow for an opening to reintroduce Riek Machar into the political transition given the many impasses and difficulties encountered one of which was the creation of a "parallel presidency" and maneuvers to undermine President Salva Kiir. This would lead to stagnation and non-implementation.

The last perception relates to the fact that Machar may seek to control elements of the army and monopoly Nuer support. All of these perspectives hold credence and should be addressed. But they should be addressed within the clauses, instruments and institutions envisaged in the Revitalized agreement.

Excluding Machar also establishes a very dangerous precedent that peace processes are venues to settle political scores and whichever side achieves greater lobby position and advancement may in fact achieve more on the sidelines of the process than in transforming relations with their "enemies" through dialogue and negotiation. This brings into question the entire process of trustbuilding and impartiality. But it also brings the legitimacy and credibility of the mediators and international guarantors into question.

Long term stabilization and peacebuilding cannot begin with short term exclusionary policies. Unaddressed grievances, feeding collective narratives of humiliation and disenfranchisement, real or perceived, will feed on such actions. Weakening the interlocutors with communities, armed groups and diaspora will naturally weaken any implementation prospects. Excluding leaders of certain communities sends a signal that they too are disenfranchised and left without a constructive role to play in the political and social future of their country. It also further widens the disengagement between state and society where avenues for dialogue are reserved for a few elites. Above all, power-sharing is required at the local levels to dilute the central control of finances, security and political favor; citizens and the different communities of South Sudan are yet to become the true beneficiaries of sovereignty that has so far been conferred to them by their leaders rather than the opposite.

Excluding Dr. Machar, or any other leader of a politico-military group, will close channels of communication with members of the group and communities they purport to represent.

Every peace agreement carries difficult compromises on all sides and the parties that sign onto these compromises and commit to see them through have to be able to deliver their constituencies to the table otherwise they are elite pacts without any traction on the ground and with numerous communities. All sides to an agreement need to be able to persuade their communities to accept the terms of the agreement and rechanneled grievances and concerns through established and monitored mechanisms. Failing to do this will once again create another flawed and dangerous agreement that will generate new conflict cycles, further fragment political and military groups, and allow the space for continued proxy, regional and international involvement to derail efforts.

The Revitalization Forum and the IGAD mediators would do well to try and reconceive any proposals to exclude stakeholders or determine participation based on eschewed and narrow political calculations on the basis that it will weaken their own process.

Even if in the short-term there is agreement across the board that certain individuals need to be sidelined, which may not be the case, in the longterm this will make the gains of implementation harder to sustain as fault lines will remain. The current proposals to have a President and three vice-presidents, as well as award

power sharing on the basis of 55% for the government and 45% for the opposition groups is in itself flawed. It concentrates too much power and attention to the protagonism of the SPLM-IO and SPLM-IG rather than reflecting the many other groups and communities that require political solutions. It all fails to alter political relationships and power configurations by maintaining an all-powerful Presidency and subdued subsidiary organs that are key to ensure accountability and provide counterpowers (namely the cabinet, Legislature, Judiciary and at the state government levels).

Stakeholders and different actors should rather be supported to exercise influence towards implementation and respecting the spirit and letter of the agreement.

The point of getting broader inclusion of different actors in the Revitalization process was presumably to reflect the evolved conflict dynamics but also the need to secure legitimacy, public buy-in and soften hardliner positions. Achieving peace in South Sudan and disentangling the many concerns, needs, fears and nonnegotiable positions from realpolitik calculations, narrow elite perspectives, regional expediency, and international saturation will be the hardest part of the process. Above all, if this process fails several more months, if not years, will pass with recurring cycles of famine, expanding conflicts that threaten to draw in neighboring countries, and a lost generation of leaders that bore the ultimate responsibility of not only delivering independence to the people of South Sudan but also peace, prosperity and dignity. New solutions should be considered to effectively ensure a lasting and transformational transitional period.