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MANAGING THE INTERESTS OF THE UNITED STATES, CHINA AND RUSSIA IN SOUTH SUDAN

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OIL, MINERALS AND POLITICAL CAPITAL

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

On 9 July 2011, South Sudan gained independence from Sudan after nearly 50 years of protracted armed conflict.¹ At the heart of the conflict was natural resources: especially after the discovery of commercial deposit of hydrocarbon by the American oil giant Chevron in 1981 in Western Upper Nile Province (Unity State). Throughout the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005), the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) had shifted alliances and solicited support from both the Eastern and Western Blocs, headed by former Communist Soviet Union and the Capitalist-Democratic United States, respectively. From the onset, the SPLM was oriented as a socialist-communist liberation movement supported by the former Soviet Union and facilitated mainly by Ethiopia and Cuba. The movement published a quasi-Marxist manifesto to attract support from the Eastern Bloc as well as to guide the SPLM/A itself.² In the then Sudan, the regime of former President Ja'afar Nimeiri was supported by the United States as Chevron was expanding its oil exploration in the southern part of Sudan (now South Sudan).³ Thus, the southern liberation movement and regime in Khartoum were trapped in the jaws of the two belligerent superpowers battling it out in proxy wars during the height of the Cold War. However, the collapse of

- 1). First Sudanese Civil War started 18 August 1955 (few months before independence of Sudan from Anglo-Egyptian Condominium Rule on 1st January 1956) to 1972, while Second Civil War was 16 May 1983-2005.
- 2). Øystein H. Rolandsen, *Guerrilla Government: Political Changes in the Southern Sudan during the 1990s*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet 2005, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/104915/Guerrilla-Government.pdf>
- 3). Andrew McGregor, *Russia's Arms Sales to Sudan a First Step in Return to Africa*, 12 February 2009, James Town, <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-arms-sales-to-sudan-a-first-step-in-return-to-africa-part-two/>

the former Soviet Union and subsequent fall of Mengistu Haile Marriam's regime in Ethiopia forced the SPLM/A leadership to quickly reorientated the movement towards the West.

Under Western support, led by the United States, the SPLM/A and the government of Sudan signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) including a landmark clause of a referendum that led to the birth of the Republic of South Sudan. This key support made the U.S. a strategic and political ally to South Sudan. Upon independence, other powers, China and Russia, to some extent, showed keen interest in the young nation given its richness in natural resources. Since Deng Xiaoping ascended to the leadership and pursued its open-up and going-out policy, China became increasingly an influential player in global politics with key geopolitical interests in Africa.⁴ China's rapid socio-economic development and rising power status have placed Africa at the top of its foreign policy. Its huge oil investment in South Sudan coupled with political support to this fledgling state, speaks volumes of China as key economic partner to the young nation. Russia with its renewed engagement with the African continent, has been politically and economically important emerging partner to South Sudan, particularly at international arena, such as the UN Security Council.

With competing interests of the three major powers, South Sudan must formulate strategies and approaches to manage their interests as well as to leverage its oil, minerals and political capital/support (three capitals) to its advantage. Thus, in the light of burgeoning interests by global powers namely the U.S., China and Russia, how South Sudan should manage them as well as harness its abundant 'three capitals' to its advantage? This article does not aim to extensively cover South Sudan's relations with each of the three countries, but to provide an overview of state of affairs of the relations. Thus, the article is more concerned with the way forward on how South Sudan should manage the competing interests of the three powers and utilize the three capitals to its advantage. The article examines the three capitals of South Sudan and explores the competing interests of the three powers. Finally, it discusses the possible way forward on how South Sudan should manage three powers as well as harness its three capitals for the achievement of its own national interests.

4). Laura Berber, Chinese Foreign Policy in the 'Going Out' Era: Confronting Challenges and 'Adaptive Learning' in the Case of China Sudan and South Sudan Relations, 2014, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London.

2.0 LEVERAGING THE THREE CAPITALS⁵

“IS THE CONFLICT TEARING THIS NEW NATION APART ACTUALLY A PROXY FIGHT BETWEEN THE WORLD’S TWO TOP ECONOMIC AND MILITARY POWERS?”⁶

South Sudan is endowed with an abundance natural resources like oil, minerals (gold, diamond, etc.). The young nation has also amassed considerable political capital in terms of political will and support, particularly from the three major powers: United States, China and Russia. With abundant natural resources (oil and minerals) and political capital - the three capitals, South Sudan is well placed to leverage them to achieve its national interests of peace, stability and socio-economic development. These national objectives cannot not be achieved in isolation, but it needs to be in cooperation with other countries such as the U.S., China and Russia. Peace and stability remain as key prerequisites to achieving socio-economic development, which must be accorded priority by South Sudan.

The search for hydrocarbon in the then Sudan started in 1959, three years after independence from the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium Rule. The quest for petroleum was pioneered by an Italian oil firm, AGIP followed by Oceanic Oil Company, France’s Total, Texas Eastern and Union Texas along the Red Sea area, but in vain.⁷ In 1972, George H. W. Bush, then the US Ambassador to the UN (later the 43rd US President from 1989-93), visited Sudan and met President Ja’afar Nimeiri. Bush relayed to Nimeiri that according to the seismic images obtained by National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) indicated a concentration of hydrocarbon in the southern part of Sudan.⁸ He further told Nimeiri that the U.S. will recommend an American oil company to explore the oil in the country. In 1975, Chevron was granted a concession area of 516,000km of blocks in Muglad and Maluth basins on both banks of the Nile.⁹ In 1979, the American giant discovered its first oil in Abu Jabra No.1, West of Muglad town. In 1981, Chevron discovered further large and commercial deposits in Western Upper Nile Province (before Nimeiri renamed it Unity Province), which constitutes current Blocks 1, 2, 4 and 5A.¹⁰ Chevron continued its discoveries on the Eastern bank of the Nile and discovered more oil in Maluth basin, constituting the current Blocks 3 and 7.¹¹ Quickly Chevron erected a camp in Rubkona near the capital of Western Upper Nile, Bentiu, to house its oil workers and engineers. Soon Chevron embarked on the process of constructing the pipeline and ordered pipes from California before it quit the oil field.

In 1984, an affiliate of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army, the Anya Nya II, attacked the Chevron camp in Rubkona, Unity State, which resulted into the death of number of Chevron engineers and other staff.¹² In response, Chevron suspended its operation indefinitely.¹³ The attack was intended to deny the regime in Khartoum the much-needed oil revenues, which could tilt the balance of military power in the

- 5). The three capitals: oil, minerals and political capitals where political capital is in form of political support South Sudan has been receiving from the three powers with varying degrees and times.
- 6). Turse, China, America, and New Cold War in Africa?
- 7). Sudan Update, Chevron and Nimeiri, <http://www.sudanupdate.org/REPORTS/Oil/08cn.html#~:text=Exploration%20for%20oil%20in%20southern,in%201977%2C%20which%20was%20dry>
- 8). Luke Patey, *The New Kings of Crude: China, India and Global Struggle for Oil in Sudan and South Sudan*, London: Hurst & Company, 2014: 25.
- 9). Sudan Update, Chevron and Nimeiri.
- 10). Ibid.
- 11). Ibid.
- 12). The attack was led by an Anya Nya II Officer called Bol Nyawan, in February 1984, who later joined the SPLM/A. The SPLM/A was an amalgamation of Anyanya II, SAF Officers and NCOs, students, politicians, government officials, civil population, etc.
- 13). This attack, which lasted for three minutes, was a turning point for Chevron management after three expatriates were killed (George McFee, British; Jackson Wythaka, Kenyan; and Rudy Miguilino, Filipino) with seven others injured. The news of the SPLA attack reached George Mathew Keller, Chairman of the Standard Oil Company, the parent company of Chevron, in San Francisco, California and decided the suspension of oil operation.

Not many countries are lucky to have such key capitals at their disposal and they must not be squandered. With three capitals, South Sudan should leverage them to achieve its key national interests of peace and stability along with socio-economic development.

theater of war in favor of Sudan Armed Forces (SAF).¹⁴ Under the Government of Sudan's (GoS) pressures, Chevron sold its stake cheaply to a pro-government firm called ConCorp International and in turn the GoS bought it from the former and auctioned it mainly to a number of Western oil firms: Talisman (Canada), Lundin (Swedish), etc.¹⁵ During the oil exploration and extractions, the SAF committed heinous human rights violations, which attracted sustained condemnation from international human rights organizations.¹⁶ The SAF pursued the creation of a cordon sanitaire, which is '*a place devoid of civilian life*' in areas around the oilfields in the Western Upper Nile. Against the backdrop of the international human rights outcry, almost all Western oil firms sold their stakes to the Chinese, Malaysian and Indian national oil companies. China with the majority of shares in the Sudanese oil (40%) opted to support the Government of Sudan against the SPLM and international isolation of the regime due to human rights violations.¹⁷

South Sudan is also believed to be endowed with many different types of minerals, which remain unexplored. Based on previous geological surveys and prospecting, it is believed that the young nation "has considerable deposits of various mineral ferrous and non-ferrous deposits, such as gold, iron, uranium, copper, limestone, marble, granite, chromium, zinc, tungsten, mica and magnetite; as well as gemstones, petroleum and other chemicals."¹⁸ Thus, the young nation has abundance of different types of minerals enough to whet the appetites of global powers seeking to empower their huge economies, particularly industries that require rare minerals. The outbreak of conflict in South Sudan in 2013 has generated more international political capital (political support) from other unexpected global powers: China and Russia. The two powers stepped in to fill the gap left by the United States after the latter fell out with South Sudan, mainly due to the outbreak of violent conflict. However, the three powers, to some extent, support the restoration of peace and security, which still form an important political capital for South Sudan.

Since gaining independence in 2011, South Sudan has not crafted its vision and national development plan for achieving socio-economic development of this new country. The Vision 2040 has been floated but it has never seen light. South Sudan is well placed not to replicate the mistakes made by many African countries at their independence. Instead, it should learn from their experiences and craft the best possible national strategic development plan to leapfrog the young nation from its current

14). Interview, Senior Military Officer, Juba 2015.

15). Patey, *The New Kings of Crudes*, 2012:77.

16). European Coalition on Oil in Sudan, *Sudan's Oil Industry: Facts and Analysis*, April 2008: 31.

17). *Ibid.*

18). Republic of South Sudan Investor Guide, 2011:11, Ministry of Trade and Commerce.

abysmal situation to an economically prosperous country.¹⁹ It is through such strategic plan with clear priorities that the three powers and any other actors could meaningfully engage South Sudan, otherwise it risks being exploited.²⁰ The achievement of key interests of peace, stability and socio-economic development represent the aspirations of the people of South Sudan's struggles and hard-won freedom. These aspirations should be the guiding principles of South Sudan's engagement with its allies, partners and friends.

19). Radio Miraya, UNDP: A National Development Strategy is critical for South Sudan, 2 March 2021, https://audioboom.com/posts/7813487-undp-a-national-development-strategy-is-critical-for-south-sudan?fbclid=IwAR0hz5TDAAlw0YOe3PHq0Vgp6q4Oq_zlk6a2ABmSLP5oV-WbhYMuk26CwI0

20). Interview, Dr Lam Akol, Chairman, Sudan People's Liberation Movement for Democratic Change, Juba, 2016.

3.0 THE COMPETING INTERESTS: NATURAL RESOURCES AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE

A. MIDWIFE AND CHILD: THE STRATEGIC AND POLITICAL ALLIANCE

A peace process led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) with sustained pressure from the United States through the Sudan Peace Act²¹, facilitated the subsequent delivery of independent South Sudan. During the signing of the CPA, Colin Powell, the then U.S. Secretary of State signed on behalf of the United States as one of the guarantors of the Agreement to ensure its implementation.²² Thus, some observers likened the independence of South Sudan to '*a child midwifed*'²³ by the United States given the critical role played by the USA throughout many processes that led to the independence of the newest country in the world.²⁴ The United States quickly initiated number of initiatives geared towards building and empowering its ally, South Sudan. During the CPA, the Bush Administration funded the construction of the Juba-Nimule Road (the first ever tarmacked highway) at a cost of \$225 million.²⁵ The road is the main link between the new country with Uganda and the East Africa region, including the Kenyan sea port of Mombasa.

Bush and Obama administrations provided military assistance to South Sudan throughout the CPA interim period to independence and beyond. The military assistance reached its height with considerable number of SPLA officers sent to various U.S. military bases for training.²⁶ Before the breakout of the conflict in 2013, the Obama administration oversaw a major effort to transform the South Sudanese military as the "U.S. Government had been providing the South Sudanese Government with \$40-60 million in military assistance every year."²⁷ Moreover, Washington dispatched military advisors from the U.S. Africa Command (AFRCOM), based in Stuttgart, Germany, to Bilpam, the SPLA Headquarters in Juba to support the SPLA's transformation from a guerrilla to a conventional army. When the vessel loaded with weapons destined to South Sudan was released by Somali pirates, it was "the American destroyer Mason and Ocean tug Catawba which provided the ship with fuel, water and humanitarian assistance as it proceeded to Mombasa, a transit point for arms shipments to South Sudan."²⁸ Since December 2013 when the war broke out, the

21). The Sudan Peace Act was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives on October 7, 2002 by a vote of 359-8. The Senate passed the same language by unanimous consent on October 9, 2002. The Act: Seeks to facilitate a comprehensive solution to the war in Sudan based on the Declaration of Principles of July 20, 1994 and the Machakos Protocol of July 2002.

22). The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 9 January 2005, Nairobi.

23). 'Midwife' was the word then-chair of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee; John Kerry, chose to describe the process that led to the birth of South Sudan.

24). Ibid.

25). Interview, Jeremiah Turic Bairiak, Director General for Roads and Bridges, Ministry of Transport, Roads and Bridges, Juba, 28 January 2016.

26). Interview, SPLM senior leader, 2017, Juba.

27). Edward Hunt, How the United States Kept Arms Flowing into South Sudan, Foreign Policy in Focus, 12 December 2018, <https://fpif.org/how-the-united-states-kept-arms-flowing-into-south-sudan/>

28). McGregor, Russia's Arms Sales to Sudan a First Step in Return to Africa.

As the 2013 war raged on without a peace agreement in sight, Obama was deeply unimpressed with the leadership of the warring parties. He deployed his National Security Advisor, Susan Rice, who delivered a salvo of warnings to the leaders to put the country's interests first.

relationship went soured as analysts described it that, “for the moment, the champagne is being kept on ice.”²⁹ The U.S. suspended military cooperation with South Sudan and turned its attention to the resolution of the conflict, good governance and humanitarian affairs.

29). Karen Allen, Why does South Sudan matter so much to the US? 30 August 2015. Access: 10 February 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34083964>

She stated that the U.S. is not only disturbed by the violent conflict and its impact, but also the “lack of democratic process since independence, lack of good governance where human rights are violated with impunity and rampant corruption at the center.”³⁰ BBC reporter, Karen Allen, summed up the American feeling that, “the US in general and President Obama in particular, have been looking for a “success story” in Africa.”³¹ She added, “There are of course millions of individual success stories but collectively, like so many other global leaders, they thought they had it when on 9 July 2011 South Sudan became the world’s newest state.” The issues of democratic process, good governance and human rights are at the heart of U.S. foreign policy towards Africa in general and South Sudan in particular. According to David H. Shinn, the U.S. strategic interests in Africa are defined here as “stability; democratic and constitution-based governance; judicial and human rights improvements; African economic growth; increased trade and access to African markets; defeating transnational terrorist [.....] and access to military operating locations and overflight rights when needed.”³² Despite its disappointment and frustration, it is clear that the U.S. has no plan to simply walk away from South Sudan that it has invested heavily, both politically and financially at the tune of \$14 billion since 2005 (mostly in humanitarian support).³³

In international relations there is no free lunch, but shared and mutual interests are the norms. The United States expected South Sudan to be a highly successful and stable new country, through the provision of public goods, instilling democracy, and respect for human rights. Instead, the leadership of South Sudan plunged their country into unnecessary violence conflict in 2013. The conflict resulted into the loss of thousands of lives of innocent civilians and set back the semblance of stability, provision of social services, democratic process and respect for human rights and rule of law. According to the U.S. Department of State, “restoring stability in South Sudan will require ending conflicts and addressing the grievances behind them, strengthening core institutions and improving [the] governance transparency processes to make them more inclusive, fighting corruption, and responding to the expectations of the population

30). OAllen, Why does South Sudan matter so much to the US?

31). Ibid.

32). David H. Shinn, “China’s Growing Role in Africa: Implications for U.S. Policy,” testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, November 1, 2011b.

33). Amir Idris, Why the US must not ignore the struggle for South Sudan’s soul, 5 December 2018, The Hill, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/419422-why-the-us-must-not-ignore-the-struggle-for-south-sudans-soul>

During the war of liberation of Southern Sudan, China supported the government of Sudan's war against the SPLM/A. The support was informed by Chinese huge oil interests as it had the majority of stake in the Sudanese oil.

for essential services and improved livelihoods.”³⁴ The newly midwifed child has disappointed the United States immensely and changed its favorable supportive and cooperative policies to a more confrontational stance from Barack Obama's to Donald Trump's administrations.

Previous U.S. administrations have imposed a number of unilateral sanctions as well as sponsoring a number of resolutions that sanctioned South Sudan at the UN Security Council, including Resolution 2471 on arms embargo. Given the nature of the U.S. foreign policy, it is arguably possible that President Joe Biden's administration will follow Obama's footsteps in dealing with South Sudan. Thus, it is prudent that South Sudan choose the path of engagement with the United States in areas of concern. As such, Ambassador Ezekiel Lol, stated that, “we the leaders and the people of South Sudan must retrace our path and regain our allies around the world to help with the restoration of peace, stability, reconciliation and healing.”³⁵ He continued: “this will allow us [to] advance the agenda of the development of South Sudan.” In its first decade, the newest nation did not achieve much in the area of socioeconomic development, which is the cornerstone of the social contract between the people and its leadership. The socioeconomic development of South Sudan should have been enough to keep the leadership awake at night, instead of engaging in a senseless war that caused greater instability and hampered possibilities of socioeconomic development.

B. ENEMIES TURNED INTO PARTNERS

The investment was the first of its kind overseas and served as a show case for Chinese ambition to invest further in the global oil industry, particularly in Africa.³⁶ Upon the signing of the CPA, South Sudan strategically and skillfully opted for engagement with China. As such, the SPLM's approach towards China after the CPA was predicated upon “turning enemies into friends”.³⁷ The decision was necessitated by the SPLM/A leadership's quest to either neutralize China's support to Khartoum or gain its support and in turn to deploy such political capital for the peaceful implementation of the CPA.³⁸ Daniel Large emphasized that: “the Government of South Sudan sought to

34). U.S. Department of State, U.S. Relations with South Sudan, 31 August 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-south-sudan/>

35). Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth, Retracing the Alliances of the Republic of South Sudan, 22 February 2021, AfricaNews, <https://www.africanews.com/2021/02/22/retracing-the-alliances-of-the-republic-of-south-sudan-by-ezekiel-lol-gatkuoth/>

36). Patey, The New Kings of Crude:

37). Daniel Large, South Sudan Looks East: Between the CPA and Independence, Association of Concerned Africa Scholars Bulletin, N°86 – November 2011, p. 30.

38). Interview, Dr Ann Itto, former Acting Secretary General of the SPLM, Juba 2016.

In 2011, the two parties, the SPLM and the Communist Party of China (CPC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding for sharing experiences based on “independence, complete equality, mutual respect and non-interference in each other’s internal affairs.” However, the SPLM appeared to have not learned much from the CPC’s wealth of experience in party transformation and construction.

secure Beijing’s support for an independent South Sudan ahead of its referendum.”³⁹ Thus, China’s was expected to prevail over Islamist leaders in Khartoum not to abrogate or obstruct the implementation of the CPA, while South Sudan would guarantee Chinese oil interests post CPA.⁴⁰ Both sides honored their expected roles. The tradeoff paid off spectacularly, particularly for South Sudan as China played an instrumental role in persuading Khartoum to abide by the agreement, including the landmark clause of conduct of the referendum.⁴¹ Moreover, China took further step and paid \$500,000 to help form the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission as well as deploying its observers during the plebiscite voting.⁴²

The rapprochement continued throughout the CPA’s interim period to independence, with a two-pronged approach: government-to-government and party-to-party⁴³.

On government-to-government, both countries attempted to expand their engagement from political to socioeconomic sphere centered around oil industry. China, as the only major power that was backing the ousted Bashir’s regime in Khartoum, was forthcoming in stabilizing the contentious relations between the two Sudans over post-independence outstanding issues: the status of the Abyei area, border demarcation, and oil transit, to say the least. When the conflict started in 2013, Beijing opted for the continuation of oil operations in Blocks 3 and 7 in the face of violent conflict in the oil producing areas. During the conflict, China also took another commendable step with its key role as one of the friends of IGAD in the peace process that culminated in the signing of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCISS) in 2015 and Reconstituted ARCISS (R-ARCISS) in 2018.⁴⁴ Furthermore, China continues to shelter the government of South Sudan from the U.S.-sponsored sanctions at the UN Security Council.

On economic cooperation, not much has been achieved in the area of socioeconomic development. It could be argued that it was and has not been possible due to lack of understanding of how to deal with China, lack of a strategic development plan through which to engage China and instability caused by the

39). Large, *South Sudan Looks East*: p. 31.

40). Daniel Large, *China & the Contradictions of ‘Non-Interference’ in Sudan*, *Review of African Political Economy*, Mar., 2008, Vol. 35, No. 115, The ‘New’ Face of

42). Large, *South Sudan Looks East*: p. 31.

43). Akok Manyat Madut, *South Sudan’s Engagement with China Foreign Policy of a Liberation Movement in Government*, 2018 [PhD Thesis], SOAS, University of London.

44). Sudan People’s Liberation Movement and Communist Party of China.

47). Shannon Tiezzi, *In South Sudan conflict, China tests its mediation skills*, *The Diplomat*, 6 June 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/in-southsudan-conflict-china-tests-its-mediation-skills/>

China's interest in South Sudan is not confined to natural resources as perceived by many African analysts. The Asian power has "political interests in form of stability, influence [.....] and peace and security in form of responding to emerging challenges such as conflict resolution".

outbreak of the conflict in 2013.¹ The renovation of Juba International Airport at the cost of \$150 million and expansion of Juba Teaching Hospital (grant) and the ongoing construction of Juba-Rumbek road (on the basis of crude oil for infrastructure development), are the only few key projects China funded since independence. With the implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement and as stability slowly returns, the two sides could reengage on socioeconomic development. Thus, the importance of stability was summed up by Zhang Yi of Chinese embassy in Juba, that development and peace are like twins, and hence "if there is no peace, you can hardly start development, but if there is no development, peace cannot be sustained."

The role of Chinese contingents of 1068 troops (as of 2020) in United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and other UN peace operations in the continent are testaments to how stability is China's vital interest in South Sudan in particular and for Africa in general.⁴⁵ In the UN Security Council resolution 2155 which allows for an increase in UNMISS forces with a protection of civilians mandate, China pushed for the inclusion of protection of critical economic installations (oil fields and workers including Chinese). Moreover, Beijing offered to contribute 700 combat troops, which was a rare move by the Asian power that has prided itself in a non-interference doctrine.⁴⁶ The stability that could propel sustainable socio-economic development is a key interest shared by China and South Sudan as well as other two powers (U.S. and Russia).

C. PLAYING THE CATCH UP

Russia, prior to becoming part of the former Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR)⁴⁷, was a prominent power in its own right, known as the Russian Empire. Long after the end of the Cold War, the Russian Federation remains on course in reasserting itself as a global competitor in the current scramble for African resources.⁴⁸

51). Elor Nkereqem, *Nontraditional Actors: China and Russia in African Peace Operation*, 2017, Stimson Center. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep10882.10>

52). Interview, Senior Minister, 2016, Juba; Colum Lynch, "U.N. Peacekeepers to Protect China's Oil Interests in South Sudan.", *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 14 June 2014. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/16/u-n-peacekeepers-to-protect-chinas-oil-interests-in-south-sudan/>

53). On December 29, 1922, a conference of plenipotentiary delegations from the Russian SFSR, the Transcaucasian SFSR, the Ukrainian SSR, and the Byelorussian SSR approved the Treaty on the Creation of the USSR and the Declaration of the Creation of the USSR, forming the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

54). Deutsche Welle, *Russian arms exports to Africa: Moscow's long-term strategy*, 29 May 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/russian-arms-exports-to-africa-moscows-long-term-strategy/a-53596471>

However, Russia's growing interests in Africa are defined by not only economic, but also political and strategic reasons as "Russia sees Africa as a key potential partner in the vision for a multipolar world order."² But unlike the United States and China, Russia is somewhat playing a catch-up role, not only in South Sudan, but across the African continent more generally.

As some observers argue that "Russia's clout in Africa remains tied to a handful of client states with relatively limited strategic significance."⁴⁹ Since the end of the Cold War in 1991, Moscow was deeply entrenched in managing its internal affairs. Despite playing a catch up, Russia is building its path to gain a foothold in Africa and broadening its export map for arms on the continent, making it the biggest arms supplier across Africa.⁵⁰

The formal relations started with the declaration of independence of South Sudan when Russian Envoy, Mikhail Margelov, delivered a message of congratulations from the Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev.⁵¹ On 11th July 2011, Medvedev issued an Ukaz⁵² by formally recognizing the independence of South Sudan, followed by the establishment of diplomatic relations.⁵³ At the independence declaration, Margelov indicated that Russia intended to pursue economic ties with the young nation. Since then, Russian investment in South Sudan, like many other prospective investors, remains minimal largely due to instability that ensued shortly after independence. South Sudan's national oil firm, Nilepet, in a joint venture with Russia's Safinat (with 30%-70% share respectively), it commenced the construction of a small size refinery in Yaar, Ruweng Administrative Area (about 45 miles north of Bentiu), at a cost of \$100 million.⁵⁴ It was set to be operational in early 2014, but the refinery was not commissioned as it was partially destroyed before completion during the conflict in 2013.⁵⁵ At the capacity of 5000bpd, the mini refinery was expected to cater for 80% of South Sudan's fuel consumption that stands at 40 million liters per month at that time. However, this refinery was finally opened in March 2021 with a capacity of 10,000 bpd mainly heavy oil, but in the future, it is expected to produce diesel and a small quantity of petrol for local consumption.⁵⁶

56). BBC, Russia in Africa: What's behind Moscow's push into the continent? 7 May 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-45035889>

57). Aishwarya Rakesh, Russian Arms Sales Growing in Africa, 4 March 2020, Defense World, https://www.defenseworld.net/news/26576/Russian_Arms_Sales_Growing_in_Africa#YEpMoWhKiap

58). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Statement by Mikhail Bogdanov, Russia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the Formal UN Security Council Meeting on Sudan, New York, July 13, 2011, https://www.mid.ru/en/maps/ss/-/asset_publisher/YwkaVOIHjBiE/content/id/200134

59). Ukaz is a decree in Russian legal system.

60). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Statement by Mikhail Bogdanov, Russia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the Formal UN Security Council Meeting on Sudan, New York.

61). Hydrocarbon Processing, South Sudan nears fuel independence with launch of two oil refineries, April 2018, access 14 February 2021 <https://www.constructionboxscore.com/project-news/south-sudan-nears-fuel-independence-with-launch-of-two-oil-refineries.aspx>

62). Interview, Awow Daniel, Director General of Petroleum, Ministry of Petroleum, 2016, Juba.

63). Radio Tamazuj, Bentiu's oil refinery starts operations, 7 March 2021, <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/bentiu-s-oil-refinery-starts-operations>

In October 2019, during the first Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi, South Sudan and Russia signed a Memorandum of Consultations between their Foreign Ministries.³ The Memorandum would be guiding their cooperation, particularly in the international arena given Russia's support to South Sudan at the UN Security Council.

During her visit to Moscow in 2020, Awut Deng Acuil, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, met with her counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, and discussed economic and development cooperation. She invited Russian investors to the country emphasizing that South Sudan is endowed with natural resources, such as oil and gold. Awut added that "South Sudan is interested in enhancing economic cooperation with Russia and wants Russian investors to do business in mining and energy sectors."⁵⁷

4.0 WAY FORWARD: DEALING WITH AND MANAGING THE GIANTS

"THE ROLE AND PLACE OF STATE LEADERS HAS BEEN KEY IN DEFINING AND ARTICULATING STATE PREFERENCES IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT."⁵⁸

The Government of South Sudan has a challenging and historic task in order to craft an optimal approach to deal with and manage the rivalling interests of the three world major powers. Lack of clearly directed policy of how to manage and deal with the three giants could result in unintended consequences. No small and nascent country like South Sudan should allow such powers to battle out their rivalries over its resources and political influence. According to some observers, the African continent is at risk of becoming a theatre of a 'New Cold War' between the United States and China on one hand and United States and Russia on the other, over African vast natural resources and political influence in particular.⁵⁹ The scramble for African resources is always obvious, but political influence, particularly at the international stage, the UN in particular, is the key source of competition among major powers. The U.S., China and Russia policies of countering each other's influence in Africa, which is a *policy of containment of influences*, is rising with possible adverse effect, at least, in the long run. There is no other country other than South Sudan that this scenario could be more evident. The U.S. has heavily invested politically in the young nation, while the Chinese multibillion investment in South Sudan's oil industry speaks volumes about competition among these powers. This could turn ugly if not managed smartly.

65). Muhammad Irfan, South Sudan Seeks Russian Investment In Mining, Oil Sector - Foreign Minister, 28 January 2020, access 14 February 2021. <https://www.urdupoint.com/en/business/south-sudan-seeks-russian-investment-in-minin-821354.html>

66). Stacey Links, Ascertaining Agency Africa and the Belt and Road Initiative, 2021: 128. Amsterdam University Press, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1dc9k7j.8>

67). Turse, China, America, and New Cold War in Africa? Is the conflict in South Sudan the opening salvo in the battle for a continent?

Such expanding competition among the three powers could be fueled by misperception. It is an open knowledge in international politics that a rising power like China is always suspected of challenging and overtaking the hegemonic status of a reigning power like the U.S., which could lead to a conflict between them, directly or by proxy. However, China as a rising power is cognizant of the tragic end of Japan and Germany during the World War I and II, which resulted in a competition in Europe and Asia for power, influence and resources. This led to the two egregious wars of the 20th century and ultimately ended the rise of Japan and Germany. According to the Chinese policy makers, China aspires to glide into a peaceful rise by not upsetting the existing powers and making friends with everybody.⁶⁰ Russia's renewed involvement in the African continent constitutes a tripartite competition. Adibe argued that "if Russia's renewed interest in Africa awakens America's waning interest in the continent, it could offer both threats and opportunities to the continent."⁶¹ Thus, South Sudan must turn the tripartite rivalry into its advantage through a clear vision and a shrewd management of their interests.

South Sudan must do what it takes to avoid a scenario of igniting big powers conflict, though there is nothing specific now to be alarmed about. But what is imminent is further instability and lack of socio-economic development of a young nation. Thus, South Sudan needs better management of the competing powers' interests. The RAND study found that the U.S. is concerned with China's growing influence on the African continent, which undermines U.S.'s long term influence.⁶² The study further states that as the U.S. is losing the game, it recommends the countering of Chinese efforts by expanding and deepening its engagement with a wider selection of African countries. Conversely, China thinks that the U.S. is intentionally working to hamper its rise as well as its interests in Africa. According to 2013 report by the China Academy for Social Sciences (CASS), "the strengthening of the West's influence in Africa means that China will face more difficulties in achieving its strategic interests in Africa."⁶³ The report goes on to point out that "the West's current campaign to deepen their influence presents more strategic competition to China [and as such] China should focus more on a competitive strategy in Africa."

It is apparent that the competition over the three resources applies to South Sudan and should be managed in a manner to realize the national interest of the young nation. South Sudan's abundance of untapped natural resources should be a source of worry. The fate of the current Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a case in point. The DRC's vast natural resource was and is at the heart of its current state of affairs, which South Sudan must guard against at all costs by managing the giants to its advantage and to their satisfaction to a certain extent. The DRC was, if not still, trapped between the competing interests of Eastern and Western blocs during the height of the Cold War.⁶⁴ The competition over Congo riches ignited black Africa's first Cold War battleground. It led to the demise of former Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, and advent of former despot of Zaire (DRC), Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku wa za Banga⁶⁵, which eventually plunged the continent's richest country into perpetual chaos.⁶⁶

68). Lee Kuan Yew, *One Man's View of the World*, 2019:25, Singapore, Straits Times Press.

69). Jidefor Adibe, *What Does Russia Really Wants from Africa?* 14 November 2019, Brookings Institution.

70). Thrall, *China's Expanding African Relations*, 2015, Rand Corporation.

71). Yun Sun, *The Limits of U.S.-China Cooperation in Africa*, 6 April 2014, Brookings Institution, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2015/04/06/the-limits-of-u-s-china-cooperation-in-africa/>

72). Omajuwa Igho Natufe, *The Cold War and the Congo Crisis, 1960-1961*, *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente*, Anno 39, No. 3 (September 1984), pp. 353-374, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40759745>

73). His real name is Joseph Deséré Mobutu before changing his it into many names appeared in the text above.

74). Bill Berkeley, *Zaire: An African Horror Story*, August 1993, *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1993/08/zaire-an-african-horror-story/305496/>

To guard from such a fate, South Sudan should demarcate clearly the boundaries between the three powers in terms of their interests to avoid any misperception among them. After identifying and understanding the interests of the United States, China and Russia, South Sudan should constructively engage them based on mutual respect and benefit.

If mismanaged, it could send South Sudan into perpetual instability and socioeconomic impoverishment. The natural resources and political capital are advantages that should be leveraged for achieving core national interests of a stable and socioeconomically prosperous South Sudan. South Sudan needs to craft and quickly define its vision⁶⁷ and create a strategic development plan designed to achieve such vision. Such a strategic development plan will guide South Sudan's engagement with the three powers.

In international politics, major powers play dominant roles and carve out their spheres of influence, which they all recognized, though they do not necessarily respect sometimes. Thus, it is an open knowledge that South Sudan falls within the sphere of influence of the United States. The key role the U.S. played in the process that led to the independence of South Sudan is self-explanatory and evident as well as it is known to other major powers. Despite increasingly soured relations and its marked decline in influence, the United States remains an important factor in the affairs of the young nation. Such critical role qualifies the U.S. as a strategic and political ally to South Sudan. China and Russia have been supporting South Sudan, particularly at the UN Security Council against American punitive measures.⁶⁸ This key political influence that is being pulled from under the United States by China and Russia could lead to unintended consequences, if not optimally managed by South Sudan.

This fact is known to South Sudan too, but its leadership complains that U.S. has overstepped the redline that infringes its sovereign right to run the affairs of their own country.⁶⁹ Sovereignty is about maintenance of stability and achievement of socio-economic development of a country, which is hardly possible in a violent conflict environment.⁷⁰ In the light of the current state of affairs in the young nation, responsible allies and partners would not keep quiet. This is why the U.S., China and Russia, though in different forms and approaches, are encouraging all sides of the conflict in South Sudan to restore peace and stability to allow for meaningful socioeconomic development. Stability is a key interest for all the three powers as well as South Sudan, but it has been illusive for the young nation. Thus, South Sudan should seize this considerable political capital from the three powers for the maintenance of peace and stability as well as socio-economic development.

75). Vision 2040 has been touted, but never see light. It should be revisited as a starting point in crafting a vision to guide a young nation and move away from ad hoc approach to running a country.

76). Ibid.

77). Interview, Senior GoSS official, 2015, Juba.

78). Interview, Senior Minister, 2016, Juba.

South Sudan ought to recognize this fact and opt for the engagement with the U.S sooner rather than later. The engagement will be a give and take, but will bear fruits. For lack of engagement breeds misunderstandings that can lead to misperceptions on important matters, which could exacerbate the already soured relations.

The U.S. concerns are about the ending of violence and good governance in terms of combating corruption, facilitating democratic process and adhering to respect for human rights. A democratic South Sudan should be a single vital objective to be pursued by the leadership of a young nation, which U.S. will be ready to generously support.⁷¹ Given its diverse ethnic make-up, democracy would be the most plausible political system for South Sudan, which will secure stability and consequently provide the foundation for sustainable socioeconomic development.⁷² What is required is political will to do just that, which would enable the soured relations between South Sudan and United States return to the height of its normalcy before the breakout of violence in 2013.

Moreover, there has been suspicion in South Sudan that the United States' unfavorable policies towards this young nation is mainly due to Chinese oil investment in South Sudan. There has been no concrete evidence supporting these claims. Analysts, however, agree that the U.S. has interests in getting a foothold in exploring the natural resources of South Sudan, not necessarily oil, as the U.S. is heading towards energy independence with considerable sources of renewable energy. Thus, the standing of oil (petroleum) in Africa for the U.S. and China should not be worrisome as explained by Lloyd Thrall that:

There is little credible potential for a Sino-American conflict over resources in Africa. Contrary to popular and perennial assumptions about resource wars, industry and energy analysis sources project adequate supply of conventional hydrocarbons beyond 2035[...]. African sources do not constitute a majority of this supply chain [...]. In sum, the potential for either China or the United States to be willing to enter war with a nuclear adversary over African oil, let alone other, less valuable resources, is extraordinarily small.⁷³

The U.S. might be envious of influence the oil investment has given China over such a young nation, which has challenged the American position and influence over South Sudan.⁷⁴ When South Sudan shutdown oil production over its dispute with Sudan, it was the U.S. that persuaded South Sudan to reopened oil production.⁷⁵ In 2012, President Barack Obama dispatched Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, to Juba and persuaded President Salva Kiir to reopen the production, saying that, "a percentage of something is better than nothing."⁷⁶ Indeed President Salva ordered the reopening of the oil production. Moreover, when South Sudan discovered that Chinese oil companies were complacent in the confiscation of its oil by Sudan, Juba had wanted to revoked Chinese oil contracts, but the United States advised against such a move.⁴ However, the U.S. may have interest in

79). Interview, Western diplomat, 2016, Juba.

80). Interview, Presidential Advisor, 2016, Juba.

81). Thrall, *China's Expanding African Relations*, 2015, p. 78-79.

82). Joshua Meservey, *China's Strategic Aims in Africa*, The Heritage Foundation, 26 March 2021, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Meservey_Testimony.pdf

83). Interview, Minister of Information, 2016, Juba.

84). Hilary Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 2015:54.

One analyst indicated that, “the nation has become something of a test of diplomacy between the United States and China, raising the question: can Washington and Beijing turn their mutual interests in South Sudan into a shared strategy to stop the bloodshed?”

exploring minerals rather than oil given dwindling reserves due to lack of investment in oil exploration. Strategic minerals, such as uranium could be what the U.S. government will keep an eye on with great interest. If the U. S. has interests in any of South Sudan’s natural resources, even though it has not openly declared it yet, it should be a subject of discussion in the engagement between the two countries to clear any misconceptions.

The United States might not be content with the increasing influence China is wielding in the Republic of South Sudan, a state that the US helped to independence. The political stance China has taken since the outbreak of civil war in 2013 to date, particularly at the UN Security Council in shielding South Sudan against U.S. sponsored sanctions, may partially help explain the discontent of the U.S. with Beijing.⁵ Certainly, South Sudan has a sovereign right to do business and engage with any country it chooses, but it requires meticulous planning and management. There are number of areas where the U.S. and China could cooperate in the interest of South Sudan as both countries have a strong political will (political capital for South Sudan), particularly in peace, stability and socio-economic development. Many analysts argue that the U.S. and China have more in common when it comes to South Sudan and have cooperated before.

The fundamental cause that could hamper U.S. and China cooperation in South Sudan would be “an underlying sense of zero-sum competition between the two powers.”⁷⁷ A fear that South Sudan should help remove with assurances that all stand to gain by preserving their separate interests.

Since the outbreak of the conflict in 2013, there have been calls in South Sudan for swapping the United States with the Russian Federation as their new strategic and political ally. The calls were informed by what some circles in South Sudan perceived as the U.S. negative stance towards the young nation, particularly at the UN Security Council.⁷⁸ Shifting alliance is not new to the leadership of South Sudan as the SPLM/A shifted alliances during the war of liberation from the Eastern to Western Blocs. However, in the light of current unipolar world, it is more prudent for South Sudan to stay in the core alliance with the United States despite its current uneasy relationship. It is apparent that Russia does not have tangible economic interests beyond a prospective status, which cannot push it into conflict with the United States over South Sudan. Thus, the support that Russia currently rendered to South Sudan at the Security Council falls within the context of a wider Russian reemerging as a competitor against the U.S. for influence across Africa. As Russia reemerges, it is pursuing policies of countering the American and Chinese political influence in Africa.

88). Ibid.

89). Interview, Senior GoSS Minister, 2015, Juba.

Some analysts argue that the U.S. isn't the only power threatened by Russia's influence in Africa, "it seems Russia is looking to muscle in on some of China's influence on the continent as well."

Russia is still exploring opportunities to engage, which would consolidate the emerging political cooperation with South Sudan. Russia, like other western investors, will not risk to invest in a volatile environment. South Sudan must take all the necessary steps to maintain peace and stability, which would invite various Russian as well as other investors from across the globe. The December 2013 investment conference in Juba that attracted over 900 potential investors, showed the significance of peace and security in the country to bring in investors.⁹¹ In the context of political cooperation, Russia has potential role in helping South Sudan restore peace and stability, a goal that three powers share in their support to the young nation.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The Republic of South Sudan is endowed with abundance natural resources and political capital (three capitals) that could shape a trajectory towards a peaceful, stable and socio-economically prosperous nation. It ultimately depends on the leadership of this young nation to skillfully leverage the three capitals to achieve its national objective of building a socio-economically developed South Sudan. Equally, it is vital that South Sudan professionally manages its engagement with the three major powers: the United States, China and Russia. Understanding and addressing their diplomatic considerations will be considerably key to achieving South Sudan's national interests. No country pursues monolithic foreign policy. It would be a grave mistake for South Sudan to adopt such approach and instead it should have an open foreign policy of engaging all countries based on mutual benefits and respect. The later would require delineation of policies towards various states that it engages with (including three major powers) to ensure that there is no perception or intention of a zero-sum game, but with all to gain.

Peace and stability should open a flood-gate for American, Chinese and Russian investors to contribute toward socio-economic development of South Sudan. It is in the interest of all the three major powers and South Sudan to have peace and stability. It is, therefore, in their national interests that they (three powers) should cooperate to achieve and maintain peace and stability in South Sudan. This is a level playing field for all. It is important for South Sudan to note that it is nearly impossible for three powers to go to

91). Charlton Foki, South Sudan Woos Investors at Conference, 5 December 2013, Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/south-sudan-woos-investors-conference>

As alluded to above, South Sudan must delineate the place of each power in its foreign policy to avoid any suspicion among the superpowers. The United States is a key strategic and political ally. There are no current or future differences that cannot be resolved through constructive diplomatic engagements. One of the areas of engagement is peace and stability where South Sudan is already taking important steps with the implementation of the R-ARCCISS agreement.

war over South Sudan per se. It has to be viewed at from a wider geopolitical perspective of control over Africa's resources: oil, minerals and political influence, particularly. China and Russia know and understand that South Sudan is a key sphere of influence of the United States. Their move is to fill the void left by the United States and facilitated by the willingness of South Sudan to have their political support, which should be understood within the context of scramble over Africa.⁶ The level of interests among these three powers are far higher than with South Sudan. For instance, the Chinese oil interest in South Sudan alone, which is just 5% of its consumption, is not comparable to the interests between Beijing and Washington.⁷

The United States too needs to recognize the sovereignty of South Sudan, which entails the responsibility of identifying its national interests as well as foreign policy options.

China remains as key economic partner that has been tested as a reliable partner. China has almost unmatched capability in accelerating the socio-economic development of South Sudan, particularly in areas of physical infrastructure development. This includes encouraging and supporting its companies to venture into a volatile country, such as South Sudan. No American or Russian companies would currently match that. This is because their companies are privately owned and would not take such risk. South Sudan cannot wait for Western companies to invest once stability returns to the country. South Sudan is in a hurry to develop socio-economically. China is critical in maintaining stability along the fiercely contested borderlines between the two Sudans. China's role is key in engaging the two Sudans for the continued flow of oil, which is a vital economic viability for South Sudan, with over 90% of its budget coming from oil revenues.

Russia is an emerging economic partner with no significant economic interest in South Sudan. However, South Sudan represents a huge economic interest in the form of future investment opportunities for Russia. South Sudan is a new country that basically needs almost everything from potential investors. Like China, Russia is filling a political gap left by the U.S. and its allies. Without significant economic interest in play, Russia would not be a strong partner and may be limited in its defense of South Sudan at the international arena. The fact that Russia does not have an embassy in Juba is indicative that

South Sudan is less important or not high in Russian foreign policy priorities. South Sudan must attract Russian investors to allow Moscow to anchor its support to Juba.

The United States, China and Russia have vested interests in South Sudan. They would want to see the young nation stabilized and governed well. Thus, with these shared interests, the three powers should help restore stability and kickstart the socioeconomic development of this young nation. It is the sovereign responsibility of South Sudan to leverage such considerable capitals (oil, minerals and political capitals) to its advantage by strategically engaging the U.S., China and Russia. Without South Sudan's role in managing its engagement with the three powers, misperception would be the order of the day and would adversely affect the world's newest country. The three powers must be assured by South Sudan that they stand to benefit in cooperating rather than competing over this fledgling African nation.

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