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It Is Time to Support South Sudan

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The civil war in South Sudan that began at the end of 2013 resulted in 2.2 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and 2 million international refugees; it became one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world. As Sudan became very fragile after the step-down of President Bashir in 2019, creating sustainable peace in South Sudan will be critical for regional stability. The government of South Sudan and its oppositions signed the latest peace agreement in September 2018; however, the implementation of the agreement has been extremely slow and delayed. I argue that there are three critical challenges: (1) How to realize the unification of different forces, (2) How to create the new transitional government based on the allocation of power defined by the agreement, and (3) How to create a transparent mechanism for the use of oil revenue, the biggest natural resource for South Sudan. While there are legitimate concerns regarding implementation, it is time to support peacebuilding in South Sudan to overcome these challenges.

Negotiation of the 2018 Peace Agreement

Salva Kiir, president of South Sudan; Riek Machar, the former first vice president of South Sudan; and other opposition leaders signed a comprehensive peace agreement on 12 September 2018. In order to examine the development of this peace negotiation and the challenges for its implementation, I was assigned by Mr. Taro Kono, Japanese Foreign Minister, to visit South Sudan and to make some contributions to its peacebuilding in February and March 2019. I had one-hour individual discussions with Mr. Taban Deng Gai, the current first vice president; Mr. Martin Lomuro, minister of cabinet affairs; Mr. Yien Tut, minister of higher education; Mr. Ismail Wais, IGAD special envoy for South Sudan; and several leaders of the opposition, civil society, AU, and UN.¹

It is important to remember that South Sudan catastrophically failed in the implementation of the peace agreement that was signed in August 2015 to stop the civil

¹ Author appreciates Amb. Seiji Okada who is the Japanese ambassador to South Sudan and his staff who coordinated the interviews in South Sudan and co-hosted the lecture, together with Juba University.

war.² Following the 2015 agreement, Riek Machar returned to Juba at the end of April 2016, and the transitional government of national unity was established with President Kiir and First Vice President Machar. But only two months later, the bodyguards of President Kiir and Vice President Machar clashed in the middle of their meeting on 8 July 2016; then the government force made a harsh military offensive against the cantonment of Machar's forces and expelled Mr. Machar and his soldiers from Juba. Then the government and Machar's factions, as well as other opposition military groups, started fighting across the country, resulting in millions of refugees and IDPs.

To restore peace, the peace negotiation was revitalized at the end of 2017, facilitated by IGAD, the regional organization of eastern African states, such as Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia.³ Reflecting the failure of the 2015 peace agreement, IGAD invited more than 20 groups including the representatives of the South Sudan government, Mr. Machar (SPLM-IO), other opposition groups, civil society, youth, and women to Addis Ababa to create an inclusive framework for the negotiation.

I assess that it was an important step that various groups representing political groups in South Sudan were involved in the negotiations and demonstrated their voices and demands. However, several meetings with broader participation failed to produce a peace agreement. Thus, Mr. Abiy Ahmed, prime minister of Ethiopia and the chair of IGAD, decided to request President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan to mediate a meeting between the two prominent leaders, President Kiir and Mr. Machar. President Bashir then requested Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda, to come to Khartoum and push President Kiir to make an agreement with Mr. Machar. President Bashir of Sudan has a long history of supporting Mr. Machar; President Museveni of Uganda has been the biggest supporter of President Kiir. Thus, collaborating with President Museveni, Bashir convinced both President Kiir and Mr. Machar to make an agreement with intensive

² Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Issued on 17 AUGUST 2015. You can see the agreement: <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/documents/IGAD-Compromise-Agreement-Aug-2015.pdf>

³ See the detail of IGAD: <https://igad.int/>

negotiations. After reaching a framework agreement, IGAD approached other groups and almost all factions signed the comprehensive agreement in September 2018.⁴

While some donors criticized this peace process in Khartoum, claiming that it was not inclusive enough, I argue that inclusivity during peace negotiations needs to be flexible, depending on its nature, as I responded in the interview by UN Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs; inclusivity is a critical factor in succeeding in peacebuilding, but mediation during military conflict often requires a flexible approach.⁵

Challenges of the Implementation

The key contents of the 2018 peace agreement are (1) all of the different forces of the government, SPLM-IO (Mr. Machar), and other military wings will be unified into one government force, creating over 40 cantonments in different parts of South Sudan. (2) The revitalized transitional government of national unity will be established with 35 cabinet members, with President Kiir, First Vice President Machar, and four other vice presidents. President Kiir will appoint 20 cabinet members, Mr. Machar will appoint 9 members, and the other 6 members will be appointed by other opposition groups. (3) The transitional government will hold national elections in three years.

There was a consensus that one of the biggest challenges for implementing the peace agreement is the “unification of different forces,” according to my discussions with the leaders in South Sudan. The background of this agreement is that the existence of two separate forces in Juba resulted in the military clash in 2016. However, creating an effective unified force requires the creation of numerous cantonments that have access to water, equipment, and necessary vetting of the government force. The South Sudan

⁴ Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), Issued on 12 September 2018. <https://igad.int/programs/115-south-sudan-office/1950-signed-revitalized-agreement-on-the-resolution-of-the-conflict-in-south-sudan>

⁵ See “Nothing About Us Without Us”, Interview with Prof Daisaku Higashi, by UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) for its online magazine, “Politically Speaking”, issued on 27 June 2019. <https://dppa-ps.atavist.com/nothing-about-us-without-us>

government estimated that this security sector reform requires 240 million USD for implementation, but no foreign country has offered the monetary contribution to this project as of today.

Martin Lomuro, minister of cabinet affairs, told me that “as long as we achieve the unification of forces, other projects can go smoothly, but this is the toughest and the most difficult task. Time is really behind us.”

At the same time, Taban Deng Gai, the current first vice president, claimed in my interview with him with him that “the government force and the force of SPLM-IO used to be the same force of SPLA (Sudan People Liberation Army) until country’s independence in 2011. Thus, top generals know each other and how to unify these forces. The question is the political leadership and support from the international community.” While the claim might be perceived as too optimistic, it is true that the lack of international support is one of the major reasons for the delay of unifying forces. Due to the delay, the establishment of the transitional government was postponed for 6 months, until November 2019.⁶



(Author’s meeting with Taban Deng Gai, First Vice President of South Sudan, 1 March

⁶ “South Sudan transitional period delayed for 6 months”, Sudan Tribune, 3 May 2019.
<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article67464>

2019, Juba.)



(Author's meeting with Martin Lomuro, Minister of Cabinet Affairs of South Sudan, with Amb. Seiji Okada, Japanese ambassador to South Sudan, 27 February 2019, Juba.)

At the same time, the security conditions in South Sudan have drastically improved since the peace agreement was signed last year; there were relatively safe and stable conditions across the country in 2019⁷. Once peace is established, South Sudan will be able to take advantage of its huge national resource. It used to pump about 350,000 barrels of oil a day before the breakout of the war⁸. Currently it produces about 180,000 barrels of oil per a day, but it could reach to 500,000 barrels if the security condition remains, according to Lual Deng, President of Ebony Center in Juba⁹. It implies that South Sudan can earn huge revenues, even after paying the commission for using the oil pipeline to Sudan. Thus, it is vital for South Sudan to create a transparent mechanism for the use of oil, with the support of international organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Once the transparent and fair mechanism is created, it can

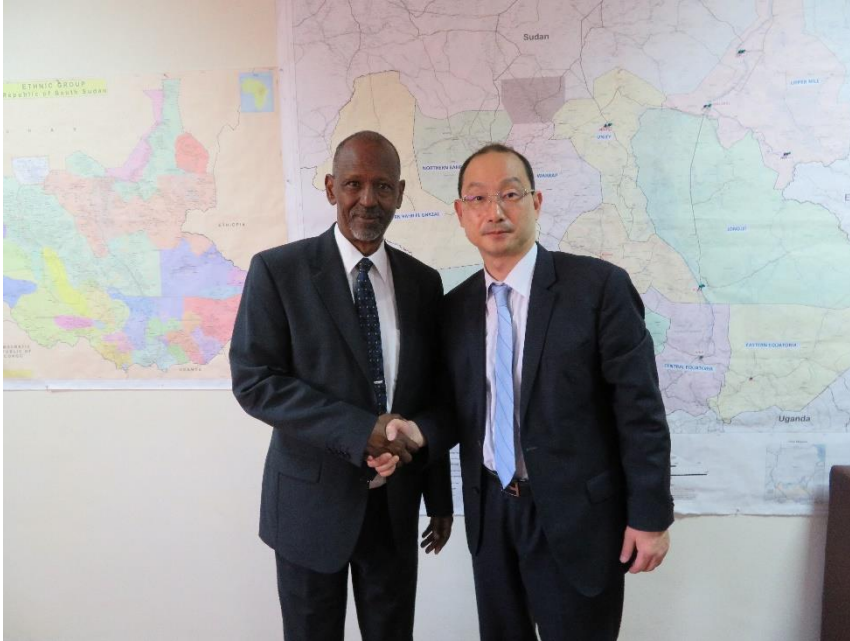
⁷ "Peace monitors see improvement in security situation in South Sudan," Xinhua News, 19 June 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-06/19/c_138154080.htm

⁸ "South Sudan suspends all pre-sales oil contracts," Reuter, 28 June 2019.

<https://www.euronews.com/2019/06/28/south-sudan-suspends-all-pre-sales-oil-contracts>

⁹ In terms of Ebony Center in South Sudan, you may see its website: <http://ebonycenter.org/>

provide necessary funds for people suffering from conflicts and soldiers who might belong to one unified force.



(Author's meeting with Ismail Wais, IGAD Special Envoy for South Sudan, 25 February 2019, Addis Ababa.)

It is time to support peacebuilding in South Sudan

While there are some foreign countries that keep supporting the 2018 peace agreement (for instance, the government of Japan provided the entire expenditure of IGAD for facilitating negotiations in 2018 and the implementation of the agreement: 3.8 million USD in total), major donors are still reluctant to provide big commitments in supporting the peace agreement. At the same time, there has been no alternative proposal to sustaining peace in South Sudan from the international community.

It is understandable that some donors are careful about supporting South Sudan, after the severe failure of implementing the 2015 peace agreement. At the same time, the international community cannot shoulder the burden to allow South Sudan to become a completely failed state. If the 2018 agreement is the option that the South Sudan people are hoping to be successful, it is time to support it.

Daisaku Higashi is professor at Sophia University in Tokyo, specializing in peacebuilding and mediation. He obtained Ph.D. in Political Science at University of British Columbia in Canada. He used to work for UNAMA as a team leader for reconciliation from 2009 to 2010; he also worked for the Japanese mission to the UN as Minister-Counsellor in charge of political affairs from 2012 to 2014.¹⁰ His publication includes, “Challenges of Constructing Legitimacy in Peacebuilding: Afghanistan, Iraq, Sierra Leone, and East Timor” (Routledge 2015), “Peacebuilding: Field Research in Afghanistan and East Timor” (Iwanami Press 2009).



(Author's lecture at Juba University, South Sudan, 1 March 2019)

¹⁰ The detail of Daisaku Higashi CV is seen as follows:

<https://researchmap.jp/higashi/?lang=english>