

East Africa Report

The regionalisation of the South Sudanese crisis

Berouk Mesfin

Summary

The newest state in the Horn of Africa has become an arena where powerful neighbours manoeuvre for regional influence. The deteriorating security situation in oil-rich South Sudan took neighbouring states by surprise, but they have risen to the opportunities the situation offers. Uganda and South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Kenya and Egypt support different proxies and their competition could plunge the region into chaos. As South Sudan struggles with a military and political crisis, the Horn of Africa has turned into a region of burgeoning geopolitical significance with crucial military, diplomatic, energy and hydropolitical issues.

THE SECURITY SITUATION IN the Horn of Africa remains fragile, not least because of the ongoing crisis in its newest but fractious state. Since December 2013, government and opposition forces in South Sudan have been locked in a full-blown political and military crisis. Unfortunately, diplomatic efforts have thus far failed to secure a durable cease-fire, much less to lay the groundwork for a negotiated political settlement between two sides mobilising support based on ethnicity.

The crisis has drawn in neighbouring states as both sides continue to develop their military capabilities, stoking fears that a full-scale conflict will resume despite the likelihood of a heavy civilian death toll and the displacement of a large section of the population.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that geopolitical interests play a key role in the calculations of the warring sides in their attempt to secure stronger diplomatic and military support from their neighbours. The result is likely to prolong and deepen this dynamic and dangerous crisis which would, in turn, have an adverse effect on the already strained relations among the Horn of Africa's states.

Every day that the crisis continues, it puts pressures on regional states to support one side or the other, drawing them more deeply into South Sudan's internal political affairs.

A diplomat involved in ongoing diplomatic efforts points out that ‘the longer the conflict drags on, the possibility of fixing South Sudan fades.’ The diplomat adds that ‘the risk of a greater regional competition involving states eyeing up in cold geopolitical terms the gains and losses to competing interests likewise grows.’¹

This report will describe the geopolitical context and consequences of this underlying competition for direct political and economic influence in South Sudan. It will consider the practical military considerations preoccupying the vast array of players involved in the regional chess game. It will consider the main economic and strategic interests of the regional states and the methods that they are using in order to attain them, which could drastically transform the current power play in the region in decades to come.

Every day that the crisis continues, it puts pressures on regional states to support one side or the other, drawing them more deeply into South Sudan’s internal political affairs

The report is derived from field trips conducted by the author in July and August 2014. It also heavily draws on detailed interviews and numerous discussions since December 2013 with diplomats, military officers, foreign officials and leading analysts on regional security.

The report is divided into three parts. The first part looks into the divergence of interests between Sudan, whose internal stability is clearly tied to the security situation in South Sudan, and Uganda, which was willing to unilaterally undertake direct military intervention in South Sudan. The second part examines the greatest concerns of Ethiopia and Eritrea and their ability to position themselves in the competition to their advantage. The third and final part tries to assess the specific roles played by Kenya and Egypt, which are both far from insignificant in the regional balance of power.

Uganda and Sudan: positioning for power

Deep mistrust between Uganda and Sudan markedly drives the current South Sudanese crisis, which began in December 2014 and has since acquired deeply emotive overtones. Uganda has historical, security, political and economic interests which prompted it to intervene militarily in South Sudan in support of a poorly organised government fighting for survival and entirely dependent on oil revenues. Historically, Uganda provided substantial political and military support to the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) during its armed struggle against Sudan – which reciprocated by giving support to the Lord’s Resistance Army.

Uganda also sought to protect the lucrative bilateral relationship with the largest trading partner² that South Sudan had recently become, to the detriment of Sudan’s geopolitical and economic interests. And it sought, at least initially, to protect the thousands of Ugandans working and operating businesses in South Sudan.³

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has diligently cultivated close personal ties with South Sudanese President Salva Kiir. The scenario most feared by Uganda is an outright victory by the opposition forces led by former vice-president Riek Machar, with direct links to the Nuer ethnic group, which would lead to Kiir’s removal from power. The forcible removal of Kiir would be a strategic setback to Uganda, eroding its capacity to authoritatively influence future developments in South Sudan



THE CURRENT CRISIS BEGAN IN DECEMBER 2014, AND HAS SINCE TAKEN ON DEEPLY EMOTIVE UNDERTONES

Uganda is not playing a role in the talks spearheaded by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Uganda, says a close observer of South Sudanese affairs, seems to 'have the upper hand as its troops are physically present inside South Sudan and it is practically the only regional state which has real political leverage there.'⁴ But, it 'does not want to contribute constructively or work through the regional framework and it does not seem to have a precise plan for the conduct of the peace negotiations.'⁵ An indication of Uganda's lack of a plan is that it has allowed Machar to open an office in Kampala, even though it is still supporting Kiir.

It is no surprise, a Sudanese official points out, that Sudan still 'enjoys a special relationship with South Sudan because of inescapable and deep political, demographic, cultural and economic bonds.'⁶ This is manifested through several examples. Many members of the political and economic elites of South Sudan speak Arabic and have gone to school in Khartoum or served in Sudanese government institutions.⁷ Even after South Sudan's independence in July 2011, the economies of the two states have continued to depend heavily on each other, especially with respect to the energy sector. Indeed, for South Sudanese oil to reach its target markets, it is necessary that it passes through Sudan's pipelines and territory. Thus, Sudan controls South Sudan's oil exports and gets substantial transit fees.

Many members of the political and economic elites of South Sudan speak Arabic and have gone to school in Khartoum or served in Sudanese government institutions

Sudan is mainly interested in maintaining its status of dominant power in South Sudan and resisting Uganda's northward interference. The official says the country unequivocally fears that 'Ugandan active policy is to rob South Sudan of its oil wealth and also to weaken Sudanese influence in the region as well as to deprive Khartoum of any political or financial benefit in South Sudan.'⁸ In fact, 'Khartoum believes that the Ugandan presence in South Sudan is a source of instability par excellence'.⁹

This perception, an observer adds, has to do directly with the fact that 'the Sudanese military and security services have traditionally been anti-Ugandan and do not accept a weakening of Sudanese influence in its traditional zone of influence.'¹⁰ In geopolitical terms, they consider the growing Ugandan military presence, both land-based and aerial, in the Horn of Africa as a direct threat to Sudanese national security.¹¹

Moreover, the proximity of Ugandan forces to the oil fields in South Sudan's Unity and Upper Nile states has caused great anxiety in Sudan regarding Uganda's real intentions.¹² With lesser military capabilities, Sudan was deeply concerned by the possibility of the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), a coalition of armed groups opposed to Sudan, getting significant amounts of weapons from Uganda.

The visit of Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir to South Sudan in early January 2014 was supposed to symbolise his personal support for Kiir's government against Machar, who had been for so many years Sudan's key ally. Yet, there are genuine concerns that Sudan might have already reverted to its longstanding tactics of supporting South Sudan's disaffected opposition forces, which are undoubtedly on the lookout for foreign sponsors and conduits of military support in the region.

January
2014

SUDAN'S PRESIDENT OMAR
AL-BASHIR VISITS SOUTH SUDAN

An official of SPLM-in-opposition offers a further possibility: that Sudan may be supporting both sides ‘through the National Congress Party operatives deep into Juba’s current government and through direct military support to Machar.’¹³

Sudan’s former head of Military Intelligence, General Mohammed Ahmed Al-Dabi, is one of the three IGAD mediators.¹⁴ But Sudan’s position in South Sudan has not been entirely neutralised by making it part of the mediation process. Indeed, the South Sudanese government has repeatedly claimed that opposition forces have been allowed to make full use of Sudan’s territory to carry out military operations and attacks.

South Sudan’s crisis has enabled Sudan to represent itself to the international community as a force for stability. Despite its repeated denials,¹⁵ it is unlikely that Sudan can withstand the temptation of settling old scores with the greatly distracted and weakened South Sudan. Most beneficial to Sudan’s interests in the short to medium term would be a protracted civil war in South Sudan. Such a civil war would present the extraordinary opportunity of preventing the emergence of a stronger and oil-rich state allied to Uganda and it would allow Sudan to reestablish its traditional influence over South Sudanese politics characterised by increased polarisation.

South Sudan’s crisis has enabled Sudan to represent itself to the international community as a force for stability

Ethiopia and Eritrea: balance vs instability

Ethiopia is located at the core of the Horn of Africa. It is the region’s only state sharing borders with both Sudan and South Sudan. Thus, it seeks to promote and control friendly relations with all its direct neighbouring states and suffers more than these states from the results of the conflicts between and within Sudan and South Sudan.¹⁶ Ethiopia is also a natural close ally of South Sudan as the SPLM originated within Ethiopia in 1983.¹⁷ Ethiopia has avoided becoming directly embroiled in the South Sudanese crisis because of wider geopolitical and security considerations.

At the risk of being perceived as insincere, given its many such interventions in Somalia (regardless of the obvious fact that the South Sudanese and Somali situations are not comparable), Ethiopia believes that a large-scale, unilateral and partisan military intervention is counter-productive. It has thus strongly asked Uganda to pull out its troops, even if they entered South Sudan at the request of the South Sudanese government. Ethiopia further believes that the military intervention of Uganda has produced deleterious regional dynamics and endangers the mediation efforts of IGAD, of which Uganda is a member.

Ethiopia’s attempt to keep its neutrality has revealed the difficult position in which it found itself at the beginning of the crisis.¹⁸ Despite not holding high expectations and despite the fact that its capacity to ‘punish’ or ‘reward’ the two warring sides is smaller than that of Sudan or Uganda, Ethiopia has constantly sought to play a highly visible but balanced role in these mediation efforts.¹⁹ The crisis may have taken Ethiopia by surprise, but it has presented the country with a political opportunity to play such a role and to prove itself as a reliable partner of the international community which has struggled to exert direct influence over events in South Sudan.

Yet, Ethiopian strategic thinking over South Sudan’s crisis is driven by important security reasons.

First, the crisis has provoked an influx of large numbers of refugees into Ethiopia. It is currently struggling to accommodate nearly 250 000 South Sudanese who are mostly suffering Nuer women and children²⁰ and who have crossed into its territory since December 2013.

Second, Ethiopia feels that the crisis must be stopped before it transforms into an ethnic conflict beyond repair, complicating and even sharpening the political divide between the Nuer and Anuak ethnic groups that live in Ethiopia’s Gambella region. This border region, where a Nuer president (similar to a provincial governor) was appointed in April 2013, has experienced persistent struggles for power throughout the last two decades between segments of these two ethnic groups.²¹ Ethiopia’s main security concern is thus that the crisis could spill over its borders and could aggravate the already tense and largely unresolved situation in Gambella.

What’s more, writes eminent Ethiopian scholar Dereje Feyissa, ‘political actors in Gambella, especially among the Nuer populace and leadership who explicitly show solidarity with Machar’s Nuer faction, do not necessarily share Addis Ababa’s policy of neutrality.’²²

Third, the deteriorating security condition on Ethiopia’s long, porous and politically explosive borders with both Sudan and South Sudan poses a direct security threat to Ethiopia. More than any other state in the Horn of Africa region and in the longer term, Ethiopia is concerned about keeping the Dinka and Nuer balance in South Sudan. It seeks to prevent, at all costs, the total collapse of the South Sudanese government and a prolonged civil war.²³ That situation could, in turn, enable Eritrea to use the marginal areas of South Sudan to infiltrate Ethiopian rebel groups in order to conduct destabilising activities inside Ethiopia.²⁴

Ethiopia is also very concerned that a South Sudan-style crisis could materialise in Sudan and ultimately lead to a full-fledged war between the two states.²⁵ It has more than 4 000 troops in

the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei deployed to prevent a border war between Sudan and South Sudan. Ethiopia is also actively involved in efforts by the African Union to broker high-level peace talks between South Sudan and Sudan as well as between Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North, which is part of the SRF.

Finally, says an Ethiopian foreign ministry official, the 'Ethiopian political leadership perfectly understood the dilemma of Sudan's leaders preoccupied with serious internal problems. It has spent the last decade developing relations with a trusted set of interlocutors within political, military and intelligence elements of the Sudanese government.'²⁶

Credible sources affirm that Eritrean operatives may be covertly providing support to the South Sudanese opposition forces. This potentially inimical support is deeply unsettling to Ethiopia, which sees Eritrea as the principal source of instability in the Horn of Africa for as long as President Issayas Afeworki remains in power.²⁷ Such support will never be precisely investigated and corroborated since it is secretive as much as it is sensitive. The disclosure of its true extent would not only threaten its effectiveness but risk major embarrassment to Eritrea, which has officially denied these reports.²⁸

Credible sources affirm that Eritrean operatives may be covertly providing support to the South Sudanese opposition forces

Yet, considerably isolated from Horn of Africa politics and diplomacy, Eritrea is visibly not enthusiastic about the mediation undertaken by IGAD. It has also not reconciled to the obvious fact that Ethiopia is 'in the driver's seat,' the chief IGAD mediator, Seyoum Mesfin being Ethiopian, and that it is Ethiopia which might ultimately set the pace of finding a possible negotiated settlement of the crisis.

Eritrea views IGAD as a tool of Ethiopia's ever-increasing military and economic predominance in the region. Controlling extensive clandestine networks, Eritrea may have riskily reached out to the South Sudanese opposition forces in support of Sudan's interests. Eritrea might have tried to sabotage efforts to reach a solution to the crisis, in the hope that either fragmentation or a government change in South Sudan could, at a later stage, cause a spillover of the violence into Ethiopia.²⁹ This would be the simplest and cheapest way to keep Ethiopia entrapped in South Sudan for many years to come, as different armed factions sought free passage through Ethiopian territory to conduct military operations. As a result, Ethiopia would eventually lose the political capital that it has so carefully expended in the hopelessly uncertain course of mediating the crisis.

Most important to Eritrea is to strategically use the resultant dynamics to lift its shakier regional position, improve its own political vulnerability and solve its economic difficulties. Much to its discomfiture, Eritrea perceived from the outset that Ethiopia has more influence on South Sudan. Eritrea also accords the highest priority to solidifying its renewed strategic relationship with Sudan.

Both Eritrea and Sudan officially proclaimed their political support for the South Sudanese government during al-Bashir's three-day official visit to Eritrea in late January 2014. This visit did nothing to allay the apprehensions of their strongest rivals, Uganda and Ethiopia.



ETHIOPIA HAS MORE THAN 4 000 TROOPS IN THE UNITED NATIONS INTERIM SECURITY FORCE FOR ABYEI

On the contrary, it essentially confirmed that they have shared interests in curbing both separately and together the greater role played by Uganda and Ethiopia in South Sudan.

All this seems unlikely to many analysts and diplomats who hastily argue that the fear of a Sudan-Eritrea 'axis of evil' is misplaced, that there is no compelling evidence to date of Eritrean misdemeanor and that Eritrea is currently weakened to the extent that it can no longer partake in a competition of any kind with Ethiopia in South Sudan. Nonetheless, it fits perfectly and unsurprisingly into Eritrea's interests to make sure that the current South Sudanese crisis would produce far more losses than gains for Ethiopia and would minimise the latter's broader regional influence, especially owing to disagreements with Uganda and Sudan.

Kenya and Egypt: a clash of oil and water

Kenya has long been interested and involved in South Sudan, but it did not initially and unilaterally deploy its soldiers there. It provided one of the three IGAD mediators, General Lazaro Sumbeiywo, who has long been associated with South Sudan and reportedly has personal economic interests there. However even if Kenya is cooperating in greater measure with Ethiopia in the mediation process, says a Kenyan official, 'it feels somehow overshadowed by Ethiopia.'³⁰

Kenya retains strong ties with many South Sudan government and opposition officials who regard Nairobi as a second home and even as 'a sort of safe haven' for their ill-gotten gains

Kenya particularly fears the challenge of the implications of South Sudan's territorial disintegration. It fears that, the longer the crisis drags on, the harder it will become for Kenya to retain its neutrality and the easier it will be for it to be sucked into the crisis. The current crisis has fuelled insecurity along its common border with South Sudan. Kenya also served for decades as host to South Sudanese refugees fleeing the conflicts with Sudan and, to a lesser degree than Ethiopia, it is affected by the recent influx of refugees who fled as a result of the current crisis.

Moreover, Kenya played an important role as a mediator in the Sudanese peace process which resulted in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement regarding power and oil wealth sharing in 2005 (Sumbeiywo was the chief mediator during this process). Kenya retains strong ties with many South Sudan government and opposition officials who regard Nairobi as a second home and even as 'a sort of safe haven'³¹ for their ill-gotten gains. It should be noted here in passing that Kenya does not want to alienate either of the two warring sides.³²

Embroiled in serious internal security and political problems as well as its military involvement in Somalia, Kenya unquestionably wishes to preserve its economic and financial interests in South Sudan which were endangered by the current crisis.³³ Kenya had made significant investments in South Sudan's finance and banking sectors. Indeed, Kenyan banks, including Kenya Commercial Bank and Equity Bank, have dominated South Sudan's financial services.³⁴

Trade has steadily expanded since 2005 between Kenya and South Sudan, which has become one of Kenya's highest export destinations.

March
2014

EGYPT SIGNS A MILITARY
COOPERATION DEAL WITH
SOUTH SUDAN

The port of Mombasa is currently the main point of entry to South Sudan, accounting for nearly one-fourth of the port's transit traffic. Then, there is the Lamu Port South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (Lapsset) joint project which includes building a new port at Lamu and an oil pipeline from South Sudan which would provide the latter better access to the sea. The ambitious project is expected to attract greater regional trade, accelerate Kenyan economic development and transform Kenya's role in the Horn of Africa from a mere trading partner to a key facilitator of regional integration.³⁵

A Kenyan researcher notes that 'Kenya's interest is to divert the oil pipeline from the North to the South, knowing that it's going to be a very expensive investment.'³⁶ Kenya is also keen, along with Uganda, which has benefited from Kenya's post-2007 political fragility and leadership deficiencies, for South Sudan to join the East African Community³⁷ in order to further consolidate their bilateral economic relations.

Egypt is not a member of IGAD, but it is an inherent part of the shadowy world of Horn of Africa politics. The track record of Egypt's involvement in the region demonstrates that its focus is limited to ensuring a docile and friendly Sudan and encircling a potentially hostile Ethiopia. The assertive policies of Sudan over the last two decades or so and the growing power of Ethiopia have weakened Egypt's political influence in the Horn of Africa. Thus, Egypt is trying to compensate for the loss of its influence virtually from scratch.

'The endgame of Egypt,' says a Sudanese official, 'is to start focusing on and regain the upper hand in this region.'³⁸ In order to do so, Egypt signed in March 2014 a military cooperation deal with South Sudan, the Nile's newest and eleventh riparian state, which provides for cooperation 'on sharing expertise, training of Special Forces, joint exercises, participation in seminars and search and rescues issues.'³⁹ The landmark deal provided a further impetus for South Sudan to play the Egypt card in order to partially offset the diplomatic and political pressures from Ethiopia and Sudan.⁴⁰ It also provided Egypt a strategic opportunity to establish a formal security alliance with South Sudan which may determine the shape of their bilateral relations in the years ahead.

By all indications, Egypt's core concern over the crisis in South Sudan is tied to its interests in the Nile waters, including the need to 'maintain balanced relations with both Sudan and South Sudan.'⁴¹ To be sure, Egypt had to get involved in the South Sudanese crisis as it directly affects Sudan with which Egypt shares a border on its sensitive southern flank.

A general tacit assumption is that Egypt wishes to reduce Ethiopia's geopolitical standing, to counterbalance its growing influence and to hamper its diplomatic initiatives (even the

ones promoting regional integration) in the Horn of Africa by leveraging Eritrea and, if at all possible, South Sudan as useful counterweights.⁴²

Egyptian newspapers incessantly claim that Ethiopia wants to hurt Egypt by constructing the Grand Renaissance Dam on the Nile. This campaign seems to be sanctioned by the higher echelons of Egypt's government. Egypt is extremely worried about the construction of this dam which it perceives to be a major long-term threat to its security with regards to the Nile, Egypt's main source of water.

It is also important to underline that Egypt is displeased, or at least uncomfortable, with Sudan's rapprochement with Ethiopia and its support for the Ethiopian decision to construct the dam. Egypt truly worries that the dam would enable Sudan to follow suit and establish projects on the Nile, thereby diminishing Egypt's share of the river's waters, the most ominous scenario.

By all indications, Egypt's core concern over the crisis in South Sudan is tied to its interests in the Nile waters

As aptly pointed out by a keen observer of regional political and military affairs, 'Egyptian high-risk attempts to encircle Ethiopia and roll back its influence might end up destroying the entire region of the Horn of Africa with already complicated problems in Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia. In actual fact, Kiir's military cooperation with Egypt is another cause for concern for Ethiopia. It potentially threatens its position in the region at a time when it is engaged in an intense diplomatic confrontation with the Egyptians over the building of the Grand Renaissance Dam. And, the dam is geographically very close to both Sudan and South Sudan.'⁴³

Conclusion: playing a dangerous game

As clearly revealed in this report, many regional states are involved in South Sudan's ongoing crisis which has its roots in the unreparable institutional inadequacies of the ruling SPLM party and is regrettably in great danger of intensification. It is not far-fetched to assume that most of these unsuspecting states had not planned for the security vacuum created by this crisis. But, after the crisis erupted, they have aggressively pursued concrete geopolitical interests, competed for influence in South Sudan and repeatedly crossed each other's red lines.

These regional states have actually changed the complexion of the crisis that broke out in December 2013 by openly joining the crisis, by secretly making opportunistic alliances with the two militarily balanced sides or by separately and together trying to mediate the crisis.⁴⁴

It follows that the crisis has come to be partially defined by the actions and calculations of these regional states. This coincides with the fact that some of these states try to legitimise their actions through IGAD, the sole regional organisation. In a region where the use of violence is usually the only available option, IGAD has, unusually and along the years, helped the regional states to discuss, organise, restrain and balance their competing interests.⁴⁵

Backed financially and politically by the international community,⁴⁶ IGAD is leading the current mediation process. Nonetheless, IGAD does not seem to have acknowledged that its mediation was crippled from the get-go by the Ugandan military intervention.⁴⁷ It also does not seem to have acknowledged that it is dealing with an intractable and highly ethnicised crisis between two sides which stumbled into it unprepared, are not negotiating in good faith and are instead seeking military victory.

IGAD should face up to the fact that the real issues on the ground are driven by Uganda and Sudan

Consequently, its primary objectives should be to bring the two sides together to stop the warfare which can only exacerbate existing ethnic faultlines and to contain the conflict from engulfing all corners of South Sudan and setting the entire Horn of Africa region on fire.

Moreover, IGAD should face up to the fact that the real issues on the ground are driven by Uganda and Sudan. These two states are strategically and simultaneously acting as impartial mediators because of their membership of IGAD but at the same time as partisan parties supporting their proxies. What is unquestionably dangerous is that this undisguised and harmful Ugandan-Sudanese competition is basically a zero-sum game contributing to the military stalemate in South Sudan's crisis as well as the political stalemate in the peace talks.

Notes

- 1 Meeting with a European diplomat in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 23 April 2014.
- 2 A Awolich, *The question of Ugandan troops in South Sudan*, The Sudd Institute Weekly Review, 2014, 2.
- 3 AM Malou, Understanding Museveni's intervention in South Sudan, *Sudan Tribune*, 12 January 2014, 2.
- 4 Interview with a close observer of South Sudanese affairs and the IGAD mediation process in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 20 October 2014. This observer further said that, 'Retrospectively, Uganda chose the best option which was to pick the most compliant side, provide military aid and even put boots on the ground.' He added that 'it is difficult to determine the extent to which Uganda's leadership and military commanders profited from the intervention. It is difficult to know how the Ugandans obtain relevant intelligence and organise their supply operation. It is also difficult to estimate the true cost of the military operations and know who is bearing it.'
A quotation from A Awolich supports the observer's point: It is worth mentioning, however, that 'it was through the intervention of Ugandan troops that Juba was spared from the carnage and destruction, the like of what was witnessed in Bentiu, Bor and Malakal.' A Awolich, *The question of Ugandan troops in South Sudan*, The Sudd Institute Weekly Review, 2014, 2.
- 5 Interview with a close observer of South Sudanese affairs and the IGAD mediation process in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 20 October 2014.
- 6 Interview with a Sudanese official in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 3 August 2014.
- 7 Interview with a Sudanese official in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 3 August 2014.
- 8 Interview with a Sudanese official in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 3 August 2014. To be sure, an increase of Ugandan influence in South Sudan could only be made at the expense of a reduction of Sudanese influence or vice versa.
- 9 Interview with a Sudanese official in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 3 August 2014.
- 10 Interview with a close observer of South Sudanese affairs and of the IGAD mediation process in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 20 October 2014.
- 11 Interview with a Sudanese official in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 3 August 2014.
- 12 A Awolich, *The question of Ugandan troops in South Sudan*, The Sudd Institute Weekly Review, 2014, 4.
- 13 Interview with an official of SPLM-in-Opposition in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 27 October 2014.
- 14 Interview with an IGAD official in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 10 August 2014.
- 15 Khartoum maintains denials over support for South Sudan rebels, *Sudan Tribune*, 16 August 2014.
- 16 B Mesfin, Ethiopia's role and foreign policy in the Horn of Africa, *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 6 1–2, 2012; MT Maru and A Abate, The crisis in South Sudan and its implications for Ethiopia, *The Reporter*, 30 December 2013; O Ismael and A LaRocco, The two Sudans: a tour of the neighbourhood, *Enough*, 2012, 5.
- 17 B Belachew, Ethiopia's role in South Sudan's march to independence, *African Studies Quarterly*, 14: 1-2, 2013.
- 18 'Both sides are unhappy with Ethiopia at different times. This shows the impartiality of Ethiopia.' Interview with an official of the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 August 2014. No longer headed by the charismatic Meles Zenawi, who had the authority to personally set a foreign policy course, Ethiopia is facing a strategic dilemma. It had initially understood that it could only exert a determinant effect in South Sudan by making use of IGAD and not acting unilaterally like Uganda. Yet, its self-perceived even-handedness, which inadvertently impacts the existential interests of other states, is being undercut by regional perceptions that it is acting as a bully and that Ethiopian diplomats heavily dominate the mediation process despite their lack of international mediation experience.
- 19 V Angelo and K McGuinness, Security and stability: reflections on the impact of South Sudan on regional political dynamics, *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs Report*, 2012, 55.
- 20 Interviews with a medical doctor of Medecins sans Frontières and a public health officer of UNHCR in Gambella city, Ethiopia, 8 August 2014.
- 21 It is evident that 'Ethiopia has to be concerned with the interests and views of Ethiopian Nuers. Even if they are only the 26th ethnic group in Ethiopia, they represent the 2nd largest group in South Sudan where there is a lot of oil.' Interview with an Ethiopian security official in Gambella city, Ethiopia, 7 August 2014.
- 22 D Feyissa, The spillover effect of South Sudan in Gambella: refugee influx and ethnic conflicts, *Horn of Africa Bulletin*, 2014, 4.
- 23 'Ethiopian policymakers fear that some regional states see South Sudan's de facto balkanisation, the worst case scenario for Ethiopia, as a possible and even as a desirable outcome.' Interview with an official of the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 August 2014.
- 24 Interview with an Ethiopian security official in Gambella city, Ethiopia, 7 August 2014.
- 25 Interview with an official of the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 August 2014.
- 26 Interview with an official of the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 August 2014.
- 27 The official of the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs humorously said that 'Eritrea is a net exporter of instability to the region rather than a constructive contributor of stability.' Interview in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 August 2014.
- 28 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea, Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 March 2014.
- 29 During an email exchange on 24 April 2014, this was vigorously contested by an analyst who viewed allegations of Eritrea's possible involvement in South Sudan, which actually pre-dates the current crisis, as highly anecdotal and not based on concrete and even fairly strong circumstantial evidence. In two email exchanges on 16 December 2014, a former Ethiopian diplomat argued that 'Eritrea's importance and involvement vis-à-vis the crisis in South Sudan has been overstated as it does not have the appropriate military and financial means to turn its wish into action,' whereas a European seasoned analyst contended that 'it's easy to overstate the hand of Eritrea in the region and especially in South Sudan.'
- 30 Interview with a Kenyan official in Nairobi, Kenya, 18 July 2014. The official added that 'Ethiopia and Kenya generally agree on important regional issues and rely on each other to secure mutual objectives. In South Sudan, both share an interest in avoiding the crisis spilling over into their territories. And, intelligence cooperation continues between the two at the highest levels. Minor differences such as choosing the venue for peace talks are rarely aired publicly and they are hardly enough to sever this time-tested and productive relationship.'
- 31 V Angelo and K McGuinness, Security and stability: reflections on the impact of South Sudan on regional political dynamics, *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs Report*, 2012, 54-55.
- 32 Interview with a Kenyan official in Nairobi, Kenya, 18 July 2014. The official asserted that 'Kenya knows that the crisis is the result of a fundamental divergence of interests in Juba. Kenya knows that the gap between the two protagonists is simply too great and that the level of trust between them is too low. South Sudan's political elite also lacks a common view on how South Sudan should orient itself geopolitically.' Yet, it seems that Kenya would like to maintain good relations

with both sides and reap the benefits of each relationship without having to pick sides. It also seems that Kenya is playing a complex double game, publicly supporting Ethiopia's IGAD-sanctioned diplomatic facilitation while subtly endorsing the manoeuvres of like-minded Uganda. It should be noted here that, unlike Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda share contiguous borders with South Sudan only.

- 33 Kenyan investment in South Sudan is threatened, 24 January 2014, <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=611467245&Country=Kenya&topic=Politics>.
- 34 L Obala, South Sudan and Kenya: the relationships, Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2012, 4.
- 35 Interview with a Kenyan official in Nairobi, Kenya, 18 July 2014.
- 36 Interview with a Kenyan researcher in Nairobi, Kenya, 17 July 2014.
- 37 V Angelo and K McGuinness, Security and stability: reflections on the impact of South Sudan on regional political dynamics, *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs Report*, 2012, 57.
- 38 Interview with a Sudanese official in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 3 August 2014.
- 39 South Sudan signs military cooperation with Egypt, *Sudan Tribune*, 23 March 2014, 1.
- 40 An official of the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs contended that 'South Sudan sometimes forgets that it is a playing field rather than a player in regional politics. It also forgets that Ethiopia worries more about the region and about preventing regional tension and violence than Egypt that, driven by its geopolitical aims, believes that an unstable region is in its interest. This would not be conducive to the interest of South Sudan that should reorient itself on a more Ethiopian-focused course. Because, currently, Ethiopia's influence clearly outweighs Egyptian influence in the Horn of Africa, in a way that was inconceivable in prior decades.' Interview in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 August 2014.
- 41 V Angelo and K McGuinness, Security and stability: reflections on the impact of South Sudan on regional political dynamics, *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs Report*, 2012, 54.
- 42 An analyst asserted that 'Ethiopia conflates the geopolitical competition with Egypt with its own internal security. Because, in the eyes of many Ethiopian policymakers and strategic planners whose attention is overstretched by too many regional conflicts, powerful diplomatic, intelligence and military elements in Cairo not only want to compete for regional influence with Ethiopia, but they also strive to destabilise the Ethiopian government internally. This makes perfect sense to the Ethiopians as Egypt has been fighting Ethiopia in the shadows for decades and has tried to keep conflicts going in the Horn of Africa in order to tie Ethiopia down.' Meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 8 August 2014.
- 43 Meeting with an analyst in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 8 August 2014.
- 44 G Kigambo, Regional tensions complicate South Sudan crisis, 1 March 2014, www.gambellastarnews.com/index.php/news/latest/1258-regional-tensions-complicate-south-sudans-crisis.html#sthash.CSLNnEKU.dpuf.
- 45 Interview with an IGAD official in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 7 November 2014.
- 46 An EU official told the author of this report that 'Many in the international community were put out by the deliberate killings in South Sudan and the actions of some states of the Horn fanning the flames of violence behind the scenes. The international community so far supports the IGAD-led mediation process that has been ineffectual. But, it sees no other better way of ending the conflict that has aggravated the existing Dinka-Nuer divide. It also recognises that there is a need for discussions on long term political reforms in the SPLM and the political system in general, even if it understands that they may not erase all tensions. The financial burden is enormous, which is why the international community are putting pressure on the [IGAD] mediators to fast-track the process. Yet, if it transpires that the conflict cannot be sorted out or prospects of its escalation jeopardising regional security cannot be mitigated in a reasonable time, the international community will just kick it down the road.' Meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 22 October 2014.
- 47 'The negative side effect of the Ugandan intervention is that it may significantly weaken the credibility and cohesion of IGAD and transform the geopolitical realities of the Horn of Africa so that they are less stable than they were before South Sudan's independence.' Interview with an IGAD official in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 7 November 2014.

Subscribe to the ISS for the latest analysis, insight and news

We're improving human security in Africa with authoritative research, training and expert policy analysis

Step 1: **Go to www.issafrica.org**

Step 2: **Under 'Subscribe to the ISS,' click on 'Email subscriptions'**

Step 3: **Select the type of notices you would like to receive:**

Latest from the ISS

- ISS press releases
- ISS Weekly newsletter
- ISS Today
- ISS Spotlight

ISS event invitations

- Seminars, ISS Addis Ababa
- Seminars, ISS Dakar
- Seminars, ISS Nairobi
- Seminars, ISS Pretoria
- Training courses

ISS thematic reports

- Peace and Security Council Report
- Regional Report: Central Africa
- Regional Report: East Africa
- Regional Report: West Africa
- Regional Report: Southern Africa

Or, subscribe by topic of interest (to receive press releases, spotlights, event invitations, and reports that deal with your chosen topic):

- African Futures
- Arms control and disarmament
- Conflict prevention and analysis
- Corruption and governance
- Counter-terrorism
- Crime and criminal justice
- International criminal justice
- Organised crime
- Peacekeeping and conflict management



About the author

Berouk Mesfin is a senior researcher with the Conflict Prevention and Risk Analysis Division of the Institute for Security Studies. Prior to joining the ISS, he worked as a political adviser to the US Mission to the African Union (2007). Mesfin held several positions at the Addis Ababa University (2002–2005), including assistant dean of the College of Social Sciences and lecturer in political science and international relations. He was also a research associate at the Institute of Development Research. Before joining Addis Ababa University, he had served as an intelligence analyst at the Ethiopian Ministry of National Defence (1997–1999).

About the ISS

The Institute for Security Studies is an African organisation that aims to enhance human security on the continent. It does independent and authoritative research, provides expert policy analysis and advice, and delivers practical training and technical assistance.

Acknowledgements

This report has been made possible with support from the government of the Netherlands. The ISS is also grateful for support from the other members of the ISS Partnership Forum: the governments of Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Norway, Sweden and the USA.

ISS Pretoria

Block C, Brooklyn Court,
361 Veale Street
New Muckleneuk,
Pretoria, South Africa
Tel: +27 12 346 9500
Fax: +27 12 460 0998

ISS Addis Ababa

5th Floor, Get House
Building, Africa Avenue,
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel: +251 11 515 6320
Fax: +251 11 515 6449

ISS Dakar

4th Floor, Immeuble Atryum
Route de Ouakam,
Dakar, Senegal
Tel: +221 33 860 3304/42
Fax: +221 33 860 3343

ISS Nairobi

Braeside Gardens,
off Muthangari Road
Lavington, Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: +254 72 860 7642
Fax: +254 73 565 0300

www.issafrica.org

© 2015, Institute for Security Studies

Copyright in the volume as a whole is vested in the Institute for Security Studies and the authors and no part may be reproduced in whole or in part without the express permission, in writing, of both the authors and the publishers.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the ISS, its trustees, members of the Advisory Council or donors. Authors contribute to ISS publications in their personal capacity.

ISS East Africa Report
Issue 4

