

# From the Region to the Grassroots: Political Dynamics in South Sudan

By David Deng, with contributions from the Conflict Research Programme South Sudan Panel: Tong Deng Anei, 0 D D M N ¶ \$ J R R X D ' X D Q \ - R N Madut Jok, Luka Biong Deng Kuol, Kuyang Harriet Logo, Alfred Lokuji, Leben Moro, James Ninrew, Martin Ochaya, Matthew Pagan and Angelina Daniel Seeka.'

## Introduction

At this writing, the peace process in South Sudan remains at a critical juncture. The transitional government of national unity was due to be formed by the end of the extended pre-transitional period on 12 November 2019. Instead, the signatories to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) agreed, at the 7

1 R Y H P E V X U P P I K R V W E H C J D Q G B ¶ V L G R Q W O X V H Y H V Q S Q P E u D V G • D D " U ` € U L

team, including Rachel



institution has been plagued by many of the same divisions that have affected society as a whole and tends to soften its messaging for fear of being seen as too political.

While a Khartoum-style civilian uprising may not be possible or even desirable in South Sudan in the short-term, this should not discount other more targeted and strategic forms of nonviolent resistance. One key consideration is how social movements frame their objectives. Rather than a more technical approach that addresses elite politics and developments in the peace process, civic groups could start by mobilizing around basic necessities, such as the price of food, the availability of medicines in the market, and the failure to pay salaries to public employees. To the extent that social movements are able to rally around basic standards of social and economic justice, it could help to catalyse efforts that could later be channelled towards more political objectives. Nor should civic groups shy away from their international networks. While it is important to be aware of the drawbacks of external financing, partnerships with international actors also provide opportunities to leverage international political and diplomatic support around campaign objectives.

Moving forward, civic groups should find ways of tapping into South Sudanese cultures and experiences more directly to enhance their legitimacy and counteract narratives that portray them as proxies of foreign interests. Among some Nuer groups, for example, when women mobilise and go to places where men are fighting, the men are traditionally required to disperse. , Q G H H G Z R P H have been at the forefront of civilian calls for peace, as seen in several peace marches that women have organized in South Sudan over the years.<sup>5</sup> The Wunlit process of the mid-1990s and other people-to-people peace processes also provide insights into organizational strategies that have been successful in the South Sudanese context. The Wunlit process, for example, took years of painstaking work by faith leaders and politicians on both sides of the divide to build a diverse base of support for the initiative that spanned the conflict divide.

As social movements continue to mature in the years to come, the ultimate determinant of success will be their ability to create inclusive platforms that are accessible to South Sudanese from all walks of life and resistant to the divisive and politicised rhetoric that currently permeates these spaces. This will require an entrepreneurial approach on the part of civic leaders, to draw on how nonviolent resistance has been organised, and the strategies and tactics in other contexts, while also being responsive to local norms, circumstances and security threats in South Sudan.

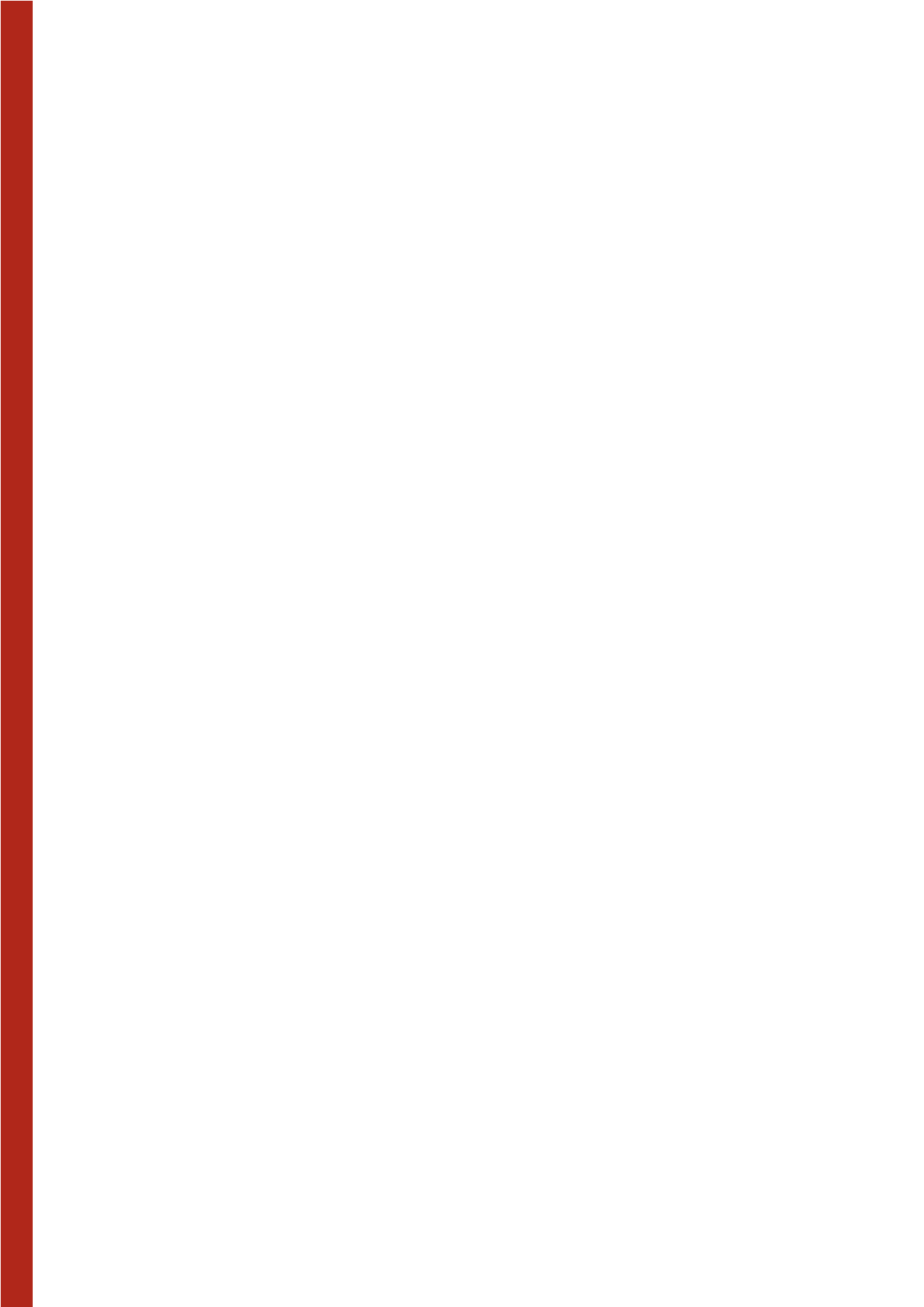
## Two Countries, One System? The Interdependent Politics of the Two Sudans

The dramatic political ousting of Sudanese President, Omar el-Bashir, through sustained and widespread civilian protests in Sudan in mid-2019 had implications for the peace process in South Sudan. Under Bashir, Sudan exerted pressure on the warring parties in South Sudan and was credited for helping to steer the High-Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) process towards the signing of the R-ARCSS. Concerns lingered over the sustainability of the agreements reached in Khartoum and whether Sudan had finally decided to prioritize an end to the conflict or was merely pursuing bilateral interests under the guise of a peace process.

New leadership in Sudan presents both opportunities and threats. So far, the direction appears to be positive, but the changes in Sudan have provoked reflections on the broader relationship between the Sudans. Is crisis in Sudan necessarily opportunity for South Sudan and vice versa? Are the Sudans destined to be bound by conflict, or is there potential for them to support one another on a joint path to sustainable peace?

Historically, political elites in the two countries have tended to view their interactions as zero-sum: a benefit for one side was necessarily interpreted to mean a loss for the other. This is the logic that contributed

two regions progress along distinct but mutually reinforcing development paths, and the rise of  
WKH μWZR FRXQWULHV RQH V\ VWHP¶ PRGHO LQ ZKLFK VLPL  
entrenched themselves in both countries and waged wars against their opponents with  
devastating consequences for civilian V



One way in which the GCC States may be emboldening the political leadership in South Sudan is through direct financial assistance. As South Sudan assumes more and more financial risk through the future sale of oil, countries such as Qatar and UAE have proved willing to step in and provide financial support when money runs out. It is difficult to determine the terms of loans, due to a lack of transparency. However, it has available to it. These deals will likely handicap the country economically for many years to come. Support from the Gulf states enables the government to secure enough income to procure weapons and sustain its patronage networks. This in turn makes the political leadership less willing to compromise in the context of the political process. The support of the Arab world also emboldens the political leadership in South Sudan to thwart justice, as can be seen in the case of the 2011 referendum. South Sudan during its time as

The influence that Middle Eastern states have in South Sudan and the broader Horn of Africa region should be of concern to the AU. The main players in the Middle East are dominated by the logic of the political marketplace and the principles of multilateralism. If the AU allows its member states to deal with the Middle East in a piecemeal fashion that does not prioritize the collective interests of African states, it could provoke a race to the bottom with unpredictable consequences. South Sudan is especially vulnerable in bargains with Middle Eastern actors. As panel members observed, there is good reason for concern that the Government of South Sudan is under pressure on civic actors as a result of the Middle East has only elevated the chance of the military intervention. To counteract this influence, the AU should work proactively to develop an external action policy that provides a framework for more coordinated and constructive engagement between the Horn of Africa and GCC states.

### Concluding Remarks

As the conflict in South Sudan drags on into its seventh year, policymakers must be attentive to the political influences and interests of neighbouring and Middle Eastern states and their implications for efforts to protect civilians and secure a lasting political settlement. Political instability in Sudan and Ethiopia has made the region more unpredictable, but the political flux has also created opportunities for democratic reform and transition away from authoritarian rule that could have a positive impact on South Sudan. Amplifying the voices of civilians at the grassroots promoting more institutionalized responses and prioritizing the collective good over narrow self-interest will be critical if the region is to chart a path towards consolidated peace.

6. VXSSRUW WKILWV DJVQGD 6WKWK&5XGDQ 3DQHO LQGLFDWHV IXUWKHU UHVHDFK LQWR

- v +LVWFDULGUDFWRIGRO YLRLOHFXFKGDIQQFOXHSORZKRWKHU DQG KSDUWLVFKIDDUXFWDERRUYHPHQVWLWDXZDRQV FRQFHSWEIRQLFRHLLMOWPULW RU FDQ IDFDLWLRQH QRQ YLRO
- v 7KHLQWHURHQMLWJKEFHUVWKHURUBDFHGRXVKGDWRI[DPLQH WKH VLPLODULWLHV DQG GLIIHUHQFHV EHWZHHQ H[LVWLQJ HOLWHV LQ. BODDGD KLRSDG XGDQQFOXBRQXHVWIRRWV DGH UHIXJHHWHDFGLW\
- v 7KHDP ELJXRVIRXVKGDOHVDWLZLQWKLHSGG(DHVRVWKRFLDO DQG SRDLHYHFDZGRWKHQWHURHOLVGG(DHWHDFWRVWRZGR 6RXWK 6XGDDQVHUSUGLSEBESSOHUFWLKRHSRUWQDQWLVIV HQJDDJH ZH QWKHLGG (DHW"RZGRKLVWRDQDFRQWHP SRUDU H[SHULHQRIJDFGLDFULPLQDWLRQ VKDSH WKHLUDSHHUFLHSGVLR (DVWHUQDFWRUV DWWHQWLYH WR WKHVH H[SHULHQFHV

<sup>6</sup> Comments from individual panel members, 2 July 2019.

Sponsored by:



Find out more about the  
Conflict Research Programme

Connaught House  
The London School of Economics  
and Political Science  
Houghton Street  
London WC2A 2AE\* >> BDC q 77.52!