



Conflict and insecurity in southern Sudan

Briefing for Baroness Cox's Sudan debate in the House of Lords, 7 January 2010

Summary

The Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) continues to be driven by the belief that a renewed confrontation with the north is likely: this perception dominates its security thinking. However GoSS has yet to establish security throughout the south or to address internal conflicts and challenges to its authority – yet escalating violence and insecurity in the south is a risk to overall peace in Sudan. A GoSS pre-occupation with civilian disarmament in the current context is unlikely to contribute to the broader goals of peace and security. The UK needs to appreciate GoSS's security dilemmas and priorities and use these to inform its support for the development of security and conflict prevention policies and institutions (1).

Summary recommendations

- 1) A sequenced approach is needed that takes human security, rather than disarmament, as the necessary starting point.
- 2) The UK should promote a renewed focus on south–south dialogue and reconciliation.
- 3) The UK should encourage and support the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) to more effectively put into action its core mandate of monitoring Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) security arrangements.
- 4) The UK should upgrade the political level of diplomatic efforts and push to immediately convene a meeting of the 'Troika-plus' in an effort to prevent the collapse of the CPA.

Conflict and security in the south

Despite efforts to adhere to the terms of the 2005 CPA, the GoSS's security decision-making continues to be driven by its perceptions of an unresolved conflict with the north. As a result, security continues to be understood in terms of the need to prepare for a possible future war. GoSS concerns include: the role of northern aligned militia within the CPA mandated 'Joint Integrated Units', as well as in communities across southern Sudan; troop and armament build-ups along the north-south border; dispute over the results of the 2008 census; and suspicions that the north is manipulating GoSS oil revenues.

However, Saferworld believes that an exclusive focus on these issues ignores critical internal pressures and conflicts that the GoSS faces in addition to perceived threat from the north.

In south Sudan, 2009 was the most violent year since the CPA was signed, with perhaps over 2,500 killed and 350,000 displaced. Sudan is a complex country situation and in many cases 'local' southern violence and insecurity may contribute to the 'national' level conflict – escalating violence in the south is a risk to overall peace in Sudan and the CPA.

However, the basic infrastructure and enforcement capacity necessary for the provision of civil security services are embryonic and the involvement of civil institutions in security policy and decision-making remains limited. Without these, and in the absence of locally visible peace-building and development, the GoSS will be unable to meet the south's greatest challenge: unifying its people. The GoSS needs to build cohesion among a mix of ethnic groups and political interests (for whom the common fight against the north has been perhaps the only unifying factor) as well as southern factions that allied with the north during the war.

Human security, then disarmament

Disarmament has been understood as an important component of the peace- and security-building process. However, given the current state of other peace-building and security sector transformation processes, it is unlikely to contribute to these goals. The 2008 GoSS disarmament campaign, and previous campaigns in 2005–06, had limited positive impacts on the critical security conditions facing the GoSS and, in some cases, had a negative effect.

This may in part be ascribed to reports of misconduct by soldiers acting under the auspices of the disarmament campaign. However, two more fundamental issues are also apparent. Firstly, some communities have perceived disarmament as being targeted along ethnic lines, which has exacerbated inter-communal divisions. Secondly, against a backdrop of inter-ethnic violence (see text box below), the GoSS has been unable to provide adequate protection to communities – who consequently see maintaining weapons as crucial to their defence.

And so, whilst recent political discourse in southern Sudan has been dominated by claims of ‘interference from outsiders’ and the need for enforced disarmament of civilian communities, in the lead up to the April 2010 elections in south Sudan, it is unrealistic to push for outright civilian disarmament.

Inter-ethnic fighting in Jonglei State

Jonglei State often sees resource competition and cattle raiding between ethnic groups (among them the Lou, Jikany, and Gawaar Nuer, Murle, Bor Dinka, and Anuak). But since 2009 the nature of inter-communal violence has shifted from the targeting of armed youth involved in cattle raiding, to attacks on communities.

For example, tensions between Lou Nuer and Murle rose considerably following a series of raids in January and February last year. In one of these attacks, in January 2009, 29 people were reportedly killed, 15 injured and 3,000 cattle stolen from the Lou Nuer.

A large group of Nuer youth then retaliated in a series of attacks during March, starting with cattle camps in Gumuruk payam, Pibor County, and moving to the town of Lekwangole. Up to 1,000 people were reportedly killed in the fighting and the aftermath, many of them women, children, and the elderly. The Nuer also abducted children, apparently in retaliation for their own children being abducted in previous attacks. Schools, clinics, NGO compounds and churches were looted and destroyed.

Murle survivors described the Nuer as being heavily armed with AK-47s, PKM machine guns, RPGs and hand grenades. There were reports that weapons were redistributed to Lou Nuer from SPLA stores in the period before the attacks.

Southern Sudan Police Service and SPLA uniforms were found on some bodies, suggesting that ethnic Lou Nuer within the SPLA were deserting to join their kin in the violence (and so pointing to problems of disaffection and command and control). The SPLA, which had battalions in both Gumuruk and Pibor Counties and a smaller contingent about 1 km from Lekwangole town, did nothing to stop the attacks. There were similar accusations that the Murle, frequently allies of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) during the war, were receiving ammunition from the SAF.

Recommendations for the UK

- 1) A sequenced approach is needed that takes human security, rather than disarmament, as the necessary starting point.

An integrated approach needs to be taken by decision-makers at a political level and those involved in sectoral and community-based initiatives. It is critical to develop the infrastructure for state security: particularly the police, law, and justice institutions, and their links to customary security and legal systems.

At the same time, it is important to enhance the peace building capacity of the Southern Sudan Peace Commission, local authorities, civil society and relevant Assembly members (state and Juba levels) to work with communities and authorities to mediate disputes in their constituencies.

It is also critical to support mechanisms that provide effective oversight of the security agencies to promote accountability and transparency in decision-making and operational law enforcement. This needs to take place at official levels (including the Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly) as well as through the growth and capacity civil society groups.

The focus should be on achieving internal security within the framework of civilian protection and a gradual approach to arms control that is carried out alongside other aspects of security sector transformation and conflict prevention – all of which needs to deliver tangible security improvements and peace dividends at the community-level.

- 2) The UK should promote a renewed focus on south–south dialogue and reconciliation if the south is to remain unified.

Mediation of internal divisions and conflicts would not only support effective and stable governance but also foster greater southern unity and build popular support for the CPA. The kind of grassroots peace-building work that played such a decisive role in securing the CPA in 2005 needs to be re-invigorated.

- 3) The UK should encourage and support the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) to more effectively put into action its core mandate of monitoring CPA security arrangements.

The UK should propose that the UN Security Council strengthen the civilian protection mandate of UNMIS by increasing its operational presence, establishing a comprehensive civilian protection and conflict monitoring system and creating rapid response capabilities for conflict-prone areas.

- 4) The UK should upgrade the political level of diplomatic efforts and push to immediately convene a meeting of the 'Troika-plus' in an effort to prevent the collapse of the CPA.

A meeting of the 'Troika-plus', or the E6, should establish a coherent international structure and agenda for engaging all parties in Sudan, followed by regular progress meetings and monitoring of the CPA Assessment and Evaluation Commission. Common benchmarks expected of the parties should be included within the international agenda, including explicit (dis)incentives to promote parties' adherence to these benchmarks. Constructive pressure should be maintained on the parties in Sudan through joint statements by foreign ministers and heads of state/government.

Saferworld in Sudan

Saferworld is an international NGO working to prevent violent conflict and promote cooperative approaches to security in the Horn of Africa, South Asia and Eastern Europe.

Saferworld has worked in southern Sudan to strengthen responses to insecurity, conflict and small arms since 2006 – supported in part by funding from the UK government. Our work is founded on partnerships between civil society, communities and government to ensure a participatory approach to conflict prevention that is based on the real needs of local people and bolsters local capacity to resolve local issues. It also aims to help GoSS build a legitimate and responsive state that is resilient against fragility.

(1) This briefing is adapted and updated from a longer Small Arms Survey and Saferworld issue briefing from May 2009. Read *Conflicting priorities: Government of Southern Sudan security challenges and recent responses* at www.saferworld.org.uk/images/pubdocs/SIB-14-conflicting-priorities.pdf