

BRIEFING

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE AND THE UN REGIONAL PROTECTION FORCE IN SOUTH SUDAN

NICKI KINDERSLEY AND ØYSTEIN H. ROLANDSEN*

ON 7 JULY 2016, A DEADLY CLASH between the guards of the president and vice-president of South Sudan sparked days of skirmishes, purges, looting and abuse of civilians across the capital city of Juba. At least 300 people were killed, including 2 Chinese UN soldiers,¹ as soldiers under President Salva Kiir's command used combat helicopters, tanks and other heavy weaponry in the city suburbs.² Next to a UN peacekeeping base, soldiers raped civilians; in a much-publicized attack on the Terrain Hotel, foreign humanitarian workers were gang raped and beaten.³ Overall, violence displaced about 36,000 people, many thousands of whom are still sheltering inside UN compounds. A contingent of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) that had arrived in April was killed or driven out of town, and Riek Machar, the first vice president, escaped over land to the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the days following, Uganda evacuated a large number of its citizens in military convoys. The fighting and atrocities in Juba triggered further retaliation and clashes in towns across the country.

*Nicki Kindersley (nickikindersley@gmail.com) is a post-doctoral associate at Durham University, UK, and research advisor to the EU-British Council South Sudan 'Access to Justice' project. Øystein H. Rolandsen (oeystein@prio.no) is a Senior Researcher at the Peace Research Institute Oslo. The authors gratefully acknowledge funding from the Research Council of Norway under the project Dynamic of State Failure and Violence (grant 214349/F10) and from the Section for Peace and Reconciliation under the Norwegian MFA. We take full responsibility for the text, but would like to thank Professor Will Reno and the anonymous reviewer for their helpful suggestions and, for comments on the original draft, the participants at the workshop 'Do military interventions in Africa bring peace and stability?' 29–30 August 2016, at the Peace Research Institute Oslo.

1. *Times LIVE*, 'African leaders moot South Sudan protection force', 19 July 2016 available at <<http://www.timeslive.co.za/africa/2016/07/19/African-leaders-moot-South-Sudan-protection-force>> (13 September 2016).

2. *Yahoo News*, 'South Sudan soldiers accused of rape near UN base', 19 July 2016 available at <<https://www.yahoo.com/news/south-sudan-soldiers-accused-rape-near-un-182400458.html>> (15 September 2016).

3. Jason Patinkin, 'Rampaging South Sudan troops raped foreigners, killed local', *The Big Story*, 15 August 2016 available at <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/237fa4c447d74698804be210512c3ed1/rampaging-south-sudan-troops-raped-foreigners-killed-local>> (15 September 2016).

This violence has derailed implementation of the power sharing and security provisions in the August 2015 peace agreement between the SPLM/A-IO and the Government of South Sudan (i.e. the SPLM/A faction led by President Salva Kiir). Analysts and activists are now pressing for sanctions, an arms embargo and military intervention—and even once again mooted the idea of submitting South Sudan to international trusteeship.⁴ Responding to the July violence, in August the UN Security Council raised the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) troop ceiling from 12,000 to 17,000, with an additional 4,000 soldiers as a Regional Protection Force.⁵ This force has been in the offing since early 2014. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the UN Security Council have indicated that they are looking to a model of intervention similar to that of the UN Force Intervention Brigade against the M23 rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2013, specifically mandated to track down and disarm armed groups. African leaders and international observers have proposed grander ambitions for what is apparently perceived as a ‘peace enforcement mission’: to demilitarize South Sudan’s cities, protect civilians in Juba and elsewhere, create a buffer between combatants, and establish conditions necessary for social and political reconstruction as well as a hybrid court to try war criminals.⁶

At the time of writing, several issues concerning the Regional Protection Force need clarification: *inter alia*, the manning of the force, the military

4. Mahmood Mamdani, ‘Who’s to blame in South Sudan?’ *Boston Review*, 28 June 2016 available at <<https://bostonreview.net/world/mahmood-mamdani-south-sudan-failed-transition>> (29 September 2016); ‘The African Union Can and Must Intervene to Prevent Atrocities in South Sudan’, 13 July 2016 available at <<http://africanarguments.org/2016/07/13/the-african-union-can-and-must-intervene-to-prevent-atrocities-in-south-sudan/>> (15 September 2016); see also Kathrine Noel, ‘Understanding the roots of conflict in South Sudan [interview with Alex de Waal]’, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 14 September 2016 available at <<http://www.cfr.org/south-sudan/understanding-roots-conflict-south-sudan/p38298>> (21 September 2016).

5. *What’s in Blue*, ‘Vote on resolution strengthening UN mission in South Sudan mandate’, 12 August 2016.

6. *Times LIVE*, ‘African leaders’; ‘The African Union Wants to Send Soldiers to South Sudan’, *Newsweek*, 19 July 2016 available at <<http://europa.newsweek.com/south-sudan-african-union-backs-intervention-force-says-un-troops-inadequate-481732>> (26 September 2016); ‘The unheard voices of South Sudan: How the international community can help bring peace’, *Enough Project*, 28 July 2016 available at <<http://www.enoughproject.org/blogs/unheard-voices-south-sudan-how-international-community-can-help-bring-peace>> (29 September 2016); *Newsweek*, ‘Why South Sudan is no longer able to save itself’, 30 July 2016 available at <<http://europa.newsweek.com/how-foreign-intervention-can-save-south-sudan-itself-484922>> (29 September 2016); Mulugeta Gebrehiwot and Alex de Waal, ‘The African Union can and must intervene to prevent atrocities in South Sudan’, *African Arguments*, 13 July 2016 available at <<http://africanarguments.org/2016/07/13/the-african-union-can-and-must-intervene-to-prevent-atrocities-in-south-sudan/>> (26 September 2016); *OpenCanada*, ‘Six urgent ways to give peace a better chance in South Sudan’, 26 August 2016 available at <<https://www.opencanada.org/features/six-urgent-ways-give-peace-better-chance-south-sudan/>> (21 September 2016); *VOA*, ‘analysts laud plan for regional force deployment in S. Sudan’, 8 August 2016 available at <<http://www.voanews.com/a/analysts-laud-plan-regional-force-deployment-south-sudan/3456231.html>> (21 September 2016).

capacity of the troops and liaison with the existing UNMISS force. The creation of the Regional Protection Force also raises questions concerning the context in which soldiers are to be deployed and the problems they are supposed to solve. Put differently, whom are they protecting, and against whom are they providing protection?

The Regional Protection Force mandate and current peace diplomacy rest on several key assumptions. One is that the current peace process can be salvaged. Another is that Juba needs to be ‘stabilized’.⁷ Finally, that there are two coherent ‘sides’ to the conflict whose leaders can enforce a negotiated settlement. In this Briefing, we argue that these assumptions do not reflect the political situation on the ground. The major changes to South Sudan’s political terrain before and after the violence in July 2016 mean that the current peace process has collapsed. Juba is already ‘stabilized’ because of the shift in the balance of power in the city since July; this stability, however, does not protect civilians. The real question is what the Regional Protection Force will do when confronted with abuses perpetrated by government soldiers or government-allied militias. Finally, we argue that the ‘government/rebel’ dichotomy is misleading, and that soldiers and security forces use this rhetorical dichotomy to justify systematic looting and violence against civilians. Against this background, we believe that South Sudan is on a path towards disintegration, and that a small-scale effort like the Regional Protection Force will either make no difference or make matters worse.

The peace process at a dead end

The Agreement on Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan, signed in August 2015, was set out as a power-sharing compromise between the formally recognized parties in a civil war. There were provisions for composition of a transitional government, for elections and for reintegration of armies. It was signed in bad faith, which was most blatantly demonstrated when President Salva Kiir declared at the signing ceremony in Juba that he had been literally forced to sign the agreement and questioned its legitimacy.⁸ Later he unilaterally divided South Sudan’s 10 states into 28, in violation of the agreement. Both parties delayed implementation of the various provisions. To Riek Machar’s faction, a main concern was security for SPLM/A-IO politicians in Juba, which resulted in prolonged negotiations over the ‘demilitarization’ of Juba. Limits were agreed of 3,420 pro-Kiir SPLA soldiers, and 1,410

7. In the words of the UN Security Council, to create ‘a secure environment in and around Juba’, Security Resolution 2304, 12 August 2016 available at <<http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/2016.shtml>> (29 September 2016).

8. ‘Authors’ field notes’, Juba, 26 August 2015; *BBC News*, ‘South Sudan president Salva Kiir signs peace deal’, 26 August 2015, <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-34066511>> (26 September 2016).

SPLA-IO soldiers, with an additional 1,500 men from each party committed to a joint police force.

A third faction, the SPLM Former Detainees, also signed the peace agreement. This faction consisted of politicians who had not resorted to the use of arms and who have subsequently been pushed to the margins of the militarized political landscape.

After several months of hesitation, Riek Machar returned to Juba in April 2016 with his prescribed contribution of troops. There were then two hostile military forces in the city, but these were not equally matched. While the soldiers of the SPLM/A-IO were flown in from rebel territories and carefully counted, the international Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism provided little scope for overseeing the movements and encampments pro-Salva Kiir troops around Juba.⁹ In addition, the SPLM/A-IO was armed mostly with light weapons, while the government army had access to a range of heavy weapons stationed in Juba, including tanks and gunships. After a short period of optimism, relations between the two parties soured, and Riek Machar and the SPLA-IO contingent became virtual hostages in the capital. Movement of both SPLM/A-IO politicians and soldiers was restricted, and friction and violence occurred at the many checkpoints around the city. This was the immediate background for the violence in the early days of July 2016.

Riek Machar's flight from Juba provided the opportunity for Salva Kiir on 23 July 2016 to make Taban Deng Gai acting first vice president. He heads a Juba-centred SPLM/A-IO faction, and his promotion resulted in a split among the political elite of the IO faction. The diplomatic community issued contradictory statements over the legality of this appointment. Some moved to recognize Taban Deng, despite the fact that he controls only a small share of the militias in the SPLM/A-IO. Festus Mogae, chairman of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, said on 28 August 2016 that diplomats must work with Taban Deng because they 'don't have an option'.¹⁰ In September 2016, the UN Security Council visited Juba, and Taban Deng participated in the meetings as first vice president. Later in the same month, he travelled to the UN General Assembly on behalf of Salva Kiir. Meanwhile, the SPLM/A-IO leadership under Riek Machar operated under close supervision by the government in Khartoum and to the consternation of Juba.¹¹

9. Ali Verjee, 'After Juba, July 2016', *Thoughtsonthesudans*, 13 July 2016 available at <<https://thoughtsonthesudans.wordpress.com/2016/07/13/after-juba-july-2016/>> (26 September 2016).

10. *The New York Times*, 'Top diplomat backs new South Sudan vice president', 28 August 2016, available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2016/08/28/world/africa/ap-af-south-sudan-peace-deal.html>> (26 September 2016).

11. *Radio Tamazuj*, 'South Sudan govt. protests over Machar's political activities in Khartoum', 28 September 2016 available at <<https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/south-sudan-govt-protests-over-machar%E2%80%99s-political-activities-khartoum>> (29 September 2016).

These recent events have left the peace process in stasis. The mandate of the Regional Protection Force is predicated on a specific reading of the current situation that considers the violence in July 2016 as clashes between undisciplined opposing fighters and other ‘spoilers’, but which did not fundamentally change the nature of the August 2015 political settlement. By aiming to reunite the factions of President Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the IGAD Plus communiqué of 5 August called for ‘returning to the *status quo ante* in line with the ARCSS [the August 2015 agreement]’ so that they could recommit themselves to implementing the peace agreement.¹²

It is, however, hard to see how the IGAD could fit the current political circumstances back into a negotiation structure resembling that which brought about the August 2015 peace agreement. It is very difficult to imagine that Riek Machar and the SPLM/A-IO can return to Juba under conditions similar to those outlined in the agreement. It is equally difficult to see how Salva Kiir’s faction will agree to an actual demilitarization of Juba or allow the SPLM/A-IO to enter the city in force. Finally, it is also improbable that Taban Deng can fully consolidate the SPLM/A-IO under his leadership or that a comprehensive transitional political process can be initiated without the participation of Riek Machar and the coalition of rebel commanders he leads. For the process to move forward, the IGAD and other regional and international parties must find an alternative formula for a ‘transitional government’. Meanwhile, as we discuss further below, these developments raise a fundamental question: what peace is the Regional Protection Force going to uphold, and exactly how is it to contribute towards stabilizing Juba?

What is a stable Juba?

All parties appear to agree on the need for immediate stability.¹³ The IGAD Plus communiqué of 5 August was explicit that South Sudan has become ‘a serious threat to regional peace, security and stability’, owing to massive population displacements and destabilization of surrounding border regions, the economic crisis (also affecting Uganda’s trade balance and export industry), and the risk of militarization across borders. For Sudan, ‘stability’ entails an end to South Sudan’s accommodation of

12. ‘Communiqué of the second IGAD plus extraordinary summit on the situation in the republic of South Sudan’, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, <http://igad.int/attachments/1408_AGREED%20FINAL%20COMMUNIQUE%20-%20IGAD%20Plus%20on%20South%20Sudan%20in%20Addis.pdf> (29 September 2016); see also James Okuk, ‘Implications of regional protection force for South Sudan’, *Sudan Tribune*, 8 August 2016 available at <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article59859>> (29 September 2016).

13. Wudu, ‘Analysts laud plan’.

regional insurgent groups in Blue Nile, Southern Kordofan and Darfur, a demand which was part of the August 2015 agreement. Sudan also has economic interests and wants a favourable agreement on oil revenues and other transitional financial arrangements. Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya need to secure their borders and investments (see below). The otherwise antagonistic Government of South Sudan announced that it also supports stability, but it walks a fine line between receiving support that keeps the regime in power and ceding control over territory and sovereignty.¹⁴

Maintaining order in Juba is high on this 'stabilization' agenda. The UN Security Council Resolution 2304 authorized a Regional Protection Force specifically to 'facilitate the conditions for safe and free movement into, and out of, and around Juba'; to protect the airport and 'key facilities'; and 'promptly and effectively engage any actor that is credibly found to be preparing attacks, or engages in attacks, against [UN] protection of civilians sites, other United Nations premises, personnel, international and national humanitarian actors, or civilians'. However, both the August 2015 agreement and the Security Council resolution for the Regional Protection Force assume a particular military landscape in Juba that no longer exists (if it ever did). Firstly, the Regional Protection Force's stabilization of Juba is predicated on a notion of the city's becoming a demilitarized zone. The peace deal in August 2015 set out the Permanent Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements. These were based on the idea that Juba contained specific garrisons encamped at demarcated sites; the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Committee was to monitor the withdrawal of these forces to cantonment sites well outside the city limits.

This understanding bears little relation to the military topography of Juba over the last five years. This evolved with the politics of the reconstitution of the Sudan People's Liberation Army and allied militias after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 and the Juba Agreement of 2006.¹⁵ The process brought most militias, who had during the civil war been fighting among themselves and against the SPLM/A, into an umbrella army. This alliance, based on Salva Kiir and his advisors' capacity to manage the various patronage networks, saw the settlement of SPLA and militia families and a plethora of generals and commanders into new Juba suburbs. These, together with the formal battalions and command structures of the SPLA, make up a substantial part of the

14. *Sudan Tribune*, 'South Sudan says protection force does not undermine sovereignty', 5 September 2016 available at <<http://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article60138>> (26 September 2016).

15. As a part of the implementation of the 2005 peace agreement, the rebel organization SPLM/A was officially divided into a political party, the SPLM, and a government army, the SPLA.

informal judicial, policing and administrative systems for suburban Juba's 'squatter' residents.¹⁶

In 2013, the competition for power between the factions led by Salva Kiir and Riek Machar increased.¹⁷ Since mid-2013, regular SPLA forces and battalions under the personal command of Salva Kiir have been placed across Juba at key sites, including the main radio station tower in Gumbo, the Juba bridge, on the connecting roads to Yei and Nimule highway, and most recently across the large area of the Amarat and Tong Piny neighbourhoods around the airport.

Furthermore, following the 2015 peace agreement, the Salva Kiir faction reshaped the politico-military situation in Juba. There were massive and highly visible movements in and around Juba of military and paramilitary forces loyal to Salva Kiir.¹⁸ SPLA compounds at Luri and elsewhere served as training camps and cantonments for this build-up of forces, some of which were transferred onwards into Western and Central Equatoria. Some of these new battalions were drawn from large-scale recruitment projects, including cycles of training targeted at young unemployed recruits at Mapel in Western Bahr el Ghazal.¹⁹ These have been run since 2010 by various regional sections of the SPLA and by certain generals. Such recruitment increased the army, security, police and 'reserve' forces and also contributed towards increased factionalization of these institutions.

After the violent clashes in July, Juba's politico-military landscape again fundamentally changed. Government forces targeted SPLM/A-IO fighters across Juba. Surviving IO combatants fled the town, while Riek Machar escaped with UN support via the Western Equatoria State to the Democratic Republic of Congo and then Khartoum.²⁰ The violent expulsion of the SPLM/A-IO left Juba essentially a garrison town for pro-government SPLA battalions and allied militia forces. If the Regional Protection Force defines a hostile combatant as any actor engaged in violence against civilians, this sets its soldiers on a confrontational path not

16. Nicki Kindersley, 'Justice in South Sudan' (London: British Council South Sudan, 2016).

17. Douglas H. Johnson, 'Briefing: The crisis in South Sudan', *African Affairs* 113, 451 (2014), pp. 300–309; Alex de Waal, 'When kleptocracy becomes insolvent: Brute causes of the civil war in South Sudan', *African Affairs* 113, 452 (2014), pp. 347–69; Øystein H. Rolandsen, 'Another civil war in South Sudan: The failure of guerrilla government?' *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9, 1 (2015), pp. 163–74.

18. Kindersley, 'Justice in South Sudan'.

19. Nicki Kindersley, *The fifth column? South Sudanese political organisation in Khartoum, 1969–2015* (Durham University, unpublished PhD dissertation, 2016).

20. *Reuters*, 'South Sudan opposition leader machar seeks safety in neighboring DRC', 18 August 2016 available at <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-southsudan-security-idUSKCN10T0N3>> (26 September 2016).

only with raiding parties and local ethnicized protection militias, but also with President Salva Kiir's government itself.

Moreover, it will be difficult for the Regional Protection Force to draw a distinction between civilians and military personnel. The distinction between political and criminal violence against civilians is blurred by a proliferation of road blocks, armed robberies, rapes and murders that are perpetrated for economic gain, private retribution or over land disputes. Besides the impossibility of the Regional Protection Force's protecting all civilians in the city, Juba's residents themselves bridge the UN's categories of combatant and at-risk civilians. Particularly since the December 2013 massacres and displacement across Juba, neighbourhoods and communities have organized patrols and self-protection militias, often armed with guns and ammunition from hidden, privately owned caches accumulated during the two previous civil wars. These community self-defence groups were arming themselves not only against army abuses, but also against the rising tide of violent crime across Juba.²¹

The government-rebel dichotomy and its consequences

Top-down analyses of the current conflict tend to overlook the impact of the economic crisis, caused by a dearth of crucial oil revenues, on maintaining a coherent military force in South Sudan.²² Contrary to claims made in the recent Sentry report—which, *inter alia*, suggests that senior political-military figures were funding the war effort from internationally-held assets—these political-military elites appear to have a loose hold on their army constituencies and the political factions that they supposedly lead.²³ Not only is there a lack of cohesiveness on the so-called rebel side, the degree of central command and control of the government army is also questionable. The recent history of the military in Juba outlined above demonstrates the blurred lines between SPLA and militia combatants. The SPLM/A-IO and SPLA are both characterized by factionalism, and there are not two clear 'sides' fighting each other in the current conflict. Salva Kiir, Taban Deng and Riek Machar belong to a wider elite of political-military actors, many of whom rose to prominence through competition over national elections in 2010 and over state and cabinet positions since.

Some armed groups operating in Central and Western Equatoria and in Western Bahr el Ghazal are in fact independent of either party. A major

21. Kindersley, 'Justice in South Sudan'.

22. Alex de Waal is a notable exception, 'When kleptocracy becomes insolvent'; 'Understanding the roots'.

23. *The Sentry*, 'War crimes shouldn't pay', 16 September 2016 available at <https://cdn.thesentry.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Sentry_WCSP_Finalx.pdf> (26 September 2016).

cross-border raid in Gambella in April by South Sudanese ‘unknown gunmen’, killing 187 people, demonstrates the difficulty of drawing lines between ‘tribal violence’ and ‘government forces’. SPLA soldiers were directly implicated in supporting or organizing the attack alongside non-army fighters.²⁴ This is a line blurred by successive armed actors during the second civil war in the 1980s and 1990s, and by groups such as the White Army in Jonglei in the 2000s.²⁵ Command over these factions is not the preserve of the ‘kleptocratic military elites’: units and militias are led primarily by local commanders, with recruitment, supplies and support mobilized on local terms.

But regardless of this reality, the August 2015 agreement’s rhetoric as a peace settlement between two distinct warring parties is also a useful wartime discourse for Salva Kiir’s government. This language reinforces a rebel-government dichotomy of ‘with us or against us’. In the Yei area, for example, security and SPLA forces currently exhibit a zero-sum understanding of these two ‘sides’. All civilians are under suspicion of collaborating with or even inadvertently assisting the SPLM/A-IO. In June alone, security and military forces around Yei town arrested dozens of motorbike taxi drivers and other young men. Some were suspected of transporting men accused by security of ‘being IO’; many of the detainees have since disappeared. In practice, these often trumped-up allegations are used to justify the seizing of crops, money and other supplies by impoverished army contingents and agents of the security apparatus stationed in the area.²⁶

Similarly, the peace agreement’s roadmap perpetuates a political logic of militia insurgency and ‘cantonment’ that supports the continued military mobilization of South Sudanese society by political–military actors. This is in part because of the extensive and widespread economic collapse, with inflation running at around 600 percent at the time of writing. Since mid-2015, this has narrowed people’s immediate options, particularly for unemployed young men. Many are facing the choice between flight abroad or to displaced camps, and a form of ‘starvation recruitment’ whereby the main motivation for joining an armed group is to get access to food and to avoid harassment.²⁷

24. *Radio Tamazuj*, ‘7 questions about the Gambella Raid in Ethiopia’, 20 April 2016 available at <<https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/7-questions-about-gambella-raid-ethiopia>> (26 September 2016).

25. Michael J. Arensen and Ingrid Marie Breidliid, “‘Anyone who can carry a gun can go’”: The role of the white army in the current conflict in South Sudan’ (Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2014); Mareike Schomerus and Anouk S. Rigterink, ‘Non-State security providers and political formation in South Sudan: The case of Western Equatoria’s arrow boys’, CSG Papers (Centre for Security Governance, April 2016).

26. ‘Authors’ field observations’, 2015 and June 2016.

27. ‘Authors’ field observations in Aweil’, mid-2015.

In this dispiriting climate, the international economy of peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction encourage opportunistic rebellions and recruitment to armed groups. The IGAD Plus August communiqué stated that all combatants in all states must be ‘cantoné’, in other words barracked in specific, separate locations. The recent history of South Sudan demonstrates a political economy of disarmament by which recruitment to armed groups is at times driven by prospects for being part of armies being cantoned. Subsequently, these recruits may be merged into a future government army or benefit from disarmament and demobilization programs. Such prospects appear to be part of the reason that groups around Yei and in Northern and Western Bahr el Ghazal have rebelled.²⁸ For example, in late August this year, Salva Kiir and the Governor of Western Bahr el Ghazal State announced negotiations with armed groups around Wau for their cantonment and disarmament.²⁹ In this sense, the international apparatus of peace negotiations is perpetuating a rebel/government dichotomy that is not only misleading, but which is actively instrumentalized by armed parties to shape and justify political oppression and further recruitment.

Doing something: what can the Regional Protection Force change?

South Sudan is heavily armed and lawless. Key military actors do not want to see a peaceful settlement, and an African intervention force will need to enter South Sudan prepared to face down the warmongers.³⁰

With South Sudanese people subject to growing violence and predation from armed groups and struggling to survive in a major economic crisis, international and regional observers and activists feel the imperative to ‘do something’. In this sense, the UN Regional Protection Force is supposed to contribute towards two overall goals. The immediate pragmatic aim is to secure and stabilize Juba for diplomatic, humanitarian and migrant workers to continue their activities as well as maintaining still-lucrative regional trade networks. Juba would then become some kind of ‘green zone’ where diplomats and NGOs can work under relative safety, and at the same time act to deter centrifugal forces and hinder mass atrocities against civilians, at least within the capital.

UNMISS and its predecessor UNMIS have, however, been repeatedly criticized for inaction in the face of successive violent crises over the years.

28. ‘Authors’ discussions with youth associations, headmen and women’s associations in Yei’, June 2016.

29. ‘Kiir approves negotiation with armed opposition in Wau’, *Sudan Tribune*, 21 August 2016 available at <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article59996>> (26 September 2016).

30. Gebrehiwot and de Waal, ‘The African Union’.

The recent atrocities in Juba as described above, in particular the attack on humanitarian workers at the Terrain Hotel, is only the latest instance in a consistent pattern of obstruction and direct attacks on the UN and humanitarian personnel by the government, including shooting down two UNMISS helicopters. UNMISS has also been forced to clear its logistical operations with the government. Despite the joint UN-Transitional Government communiqué on 4 September agreeing that national control over UN troop movements would be loosened, this was immediately contradicted by government officials, and the government continued to deny flight clearance and entry permits to UN personnel.³¹ Can the deployment of the Regional Protection Force result in any radical change in *modus operandi* of UNMISS and its interaction with the regime in Juba?

A grim reading of the situation is that the Regional Protection Force, while motivated by a genuine and legitimate desire to stop atrocities perpetrated against civilians, is also a useful means through which its foreign backers can appear to address the crisis, despite the minimal prospects of success. Previous high-profile measures can be interpreted along similar lines, such as the UNAMID intervention in Darfur and the International Criminal Court's investigation that resulted in the warrant against President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan. Regardless of the actual intention with the Regional Protection Force, it is unlikely that it will have sufficient operational capacity and political backing to become a deterrent to armed antagonists in Juba or elsewhere. Engaging in what would ultimately be symbolic operations to save selected groups of civilians is likely to further antagonize the government army and its various allied militias. The result will be that the Regional Protection Force, and potentially the UN and other foreign and multi-lateral organizations, are seen as party to the conflict and regarded by the armed groups as legitimate targets.

In conclusion, it remains to be seen if the additional 4,000 soldiers end up being bunkered inside fortified camps, or if, as a part of fulfilling their mandate, they will be ordered into violent confrontation with armed actors. Even if the Regional Protection Force manages to fulfil its short-term goal of maintaining order in Juba, there is no immediate and durable political solution to the civil war. Most likely, the Regional Protection Force will serve only to buttress whatever faction is in power in Juba. The duration of the operation is likely to be decided by Western countries' willingness to pay for it, unless the security situation in Juba deteriorates significantly and the city is evacuated. At a more basic level, there is a mismatch between the international apparatus for facilitating peace processes

31. 'UN Security Council team conclude S. Sudan visit', *Sudan Tribune*, 5 September 2016 available at <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article60148>> (26 September 2016).

and South Sudan's context. The third civil war is so factional and its leaders so weak that there are no distinct parties to bring to a table. In this context of a weak and now collapsing state, the many dilemmas facing the Regional Protection Force and the international community illustrate the need for a radically different approach to both peacekeeping and peacebuilding.