



Causes and Outbreak of Violence

British colonial rule greatly neglected southern Sudan, and marginalization extended into independence. The Second Sudanese Civil War, the longest civil war in Africa, raged from 1983 to 2005. In 2011, the South Sudanese people overwhelmingly voted to become an independent country, seceding from Sudan that year. South Sudan took 75% of Sudan's oil with it, triggering a number of related border conflicts in recent years.

Violence broke out in December 2013 as a result of longstanding problems within the ruling party, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). The six years between the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended the Second Sudanese War, and the referendum that ensured South Sudanese independence were meant to allow the SPLM to reconcile its differences with other rebel groups to create a more unified South Sudan. While the SPLM absorbed many groups during this time, its platform did not grow to reflect its new constituency. Instead, the SPLM focused on maintaining power and profit for elites, doing little to address the concerns of South Sudanese citizens.

Escalation of Violence

Following South Sudan's successful referendum for independence, tensions within the SPLM grew. In July 2013, President Salva Kiir dismissed Vice President Riek Machar and replaced most of his cabinet. In December, fighting broke out in the headquarters of the Presidential Guard. In the chaos that ensued, President Kiir arrested 11 members of the SPLM, accusing them and Machar of attempting a coup. While the fighting is based primarily on splits among political elites, Kiir, who is Dinka, and Machar, who is Nuer, have both mobilized on the basis of ethnicity. International Crisis Group estimates that nearly 10,000 people died in the first four weeks of fighting in 2013. According to UNHCR, over 2.3 million people have been displaced.

A number of ceasefires have emerged and failed, the latest signed in July 2016. However, fighting has not shown any sign of halting as the fragile agreement continues to face stressors such as Kiir's refusal to report ceasefire violations, and his executive order to create 28 additional states in South Sudan, an action that many believe will exacerbate unrest by arbitrarily redistributing land among tribes. A deep lack of trust between Kiir and Machar and competition over natural resources also contribute to tensions. Kiir and Machar have lost control over some of their troops, who pillage civilians and commit violence outside of the chain of command.

UN intervention has failed to halt the mass atrocities taking place in South Sudan. In February 2016, Kiir's army attacked a UN-run civilian protection site in Malakal, killing 24 people and wounding hundreds. In summer 2016 alone, at least 120 women were raped, and witnesses reported that UN peacekeepers looked on without providing help. Facing sharp criticism, the UN has promised to investigate allegations of its troops' failure to respond to such violence.



Key Terms

Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA):

Signed in 2005, the CPA ended the Second Sudanese Civil War and laid the groundwork for South Sudan's independence. The CPA was negotiated only between the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A, excluding other rebel groups and many civilians.

Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A): The main rebel opposition to the Sudanese government during Sudan's civil wars; now the ruling party of South Sudan, led by President Salva Kiir.

SPLM-IO: Former vice president Riek Machar's army began using the name SPLM-IO after they broke away from the SPLM in December 2013. "IO" stands for "in opposition."