

# Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis

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## Special Report

### South Sudan Pres. Kiir Moves to Stop Arab-Backed Initiative by Vice-Pres. Machar to Polarize and Split the New State

**Analysis. By GIS/Defense & Foreign Affairs Staff in Juba.** South Sudan Pres. Salva Kiir has continued to maneuver the delicate ethnic balance in his country to ensure that the democratization process avoids being overtaken by the personal ambitions of Vice-Pres. Riek Machar, which could result in a polarized polity along ethnic lines. The process has not been helped by the tense situation over the management of national oil assets and the prospect of ongoing Sudanese pressure; not by the insinuation — supported by the US White House — that Pres. Kiir was deviating from South Sudan's democratic origins.

See "South Sudan: A Case of Misunderstanding Juba", in *Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis*, [April 22, 2013](#).

On April 22, 2013, Pres. Kiir issued a Republican Order for the Formation of the National Reconciliation Committee for Healing, Peace, and Reconciliation Conference. Given the recent experience — that is, the politicization attempt by Vice-Pres. Machar — Pres. Kiir stressed the national, objective, and apolitical character of the new reconciliation council.

The presidential mandate stipulated that "The Committee shall be an independent body which shall not be subject to control and direction from anybody or any institution; the rôle of the Government shall be facilitative and provide support, where necessary and when called upon."

The new reconciliation council will be led by the country's most prominent religious leaders rather than politicians. The council will include representatives from all parts of the country and segments of society. The chairman is His Grace Archbishop Dr Daniel Deng Bul, the leader of the Episcopal Church of Sudan. His Lordship Bishop Paride Taban, the South Sudanese Emeritus Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church and co-founder of the New Sudan Council of Churches, will serve as the deputy chairman.

Three prominent leaders of the Church have already been nominated to serve on the new reconciliation council: His Lordship Bishop Rudolf Deng Majak of Wau (president of the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference), His Lordship Bishop Enock Tombe (the leader of the Episcopal Diocese of Rejaf), and The Reverend Peter Lual Gai (the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan).

As well, Pres. Kiir invited and nominated a yet-to-be-named leader of the Muslim community to serve as a council member. In addition, the council will include 10 members: one from each of the 10 states of South Sudan. As well, the council will include a representative of the Women Organizations, a representative of the Youth Organizations, and a representative of the Civil Society Organizations.

The presidential mandate defines the "Terms of Reference" for the committee as follows:

- (a) to develop objectives of National Peace and Reconciliation;
- (b) to determine short term and medium term activities;
- (c) to research modern and traditional conflict resolution;
- (d) to liaise with the Government to provide security, financial support and mobility;

- (e) to solicit funding from local and international bodies and to seek their expertise; and
- (f) to form consultative body comprising of South Sudanese elders as advisory body.

The prominent rôle of religious leaders in the committee should be viewed in the context of the traditions of South Sudan. For several decades, church leaders served as guides and guardians of morality and values, as well as anchors of stability for a society devastated by war. They have been an integral part of Sudan's diverse and multi-religious population. Indeed, church-affiliated charities were the primary source of food, medical services, education, etc. during the war years.

In early February 2013, the Reverend Peter Lual Gai clarified the rôle of the Church in South Sudan. He explained that "the [original] idea of 'separating the state from religion' was based on the fear that Khar-toum wanted to make Islam the religion of the state as well as make shariah law the basis for legislation in the whole country." However, presently, with South Sudan an independent state, the unique rôle of the church — essentially all of the Christian churches represented in South Sudan — as purveyor of vital social-economic services to the country's diverse society should be recognized in pertinent constitutional provision. Rev. Peter Lual Gai stressed that while the church "acknowledges that 'there is no state religion' [in South Sudan], to 'separate the state from religion' is not the best policy." The prominence of church leaders in the committee thus reflects the inherent character of society in South Sudan.

Meanwhile, Vice-Pres. Riek Machar and his supporters have intensified their attempts to undermine the Presidency in order to have Machar elected the head of SPLM and its candidate for the presidency in 2015. The April 15, 2013, presidential decree removing some of Machar's executive powers and dissolving the original National Reconciliation Committee also removed whatever self-restraint and responsibility left the Machar camp. Machar and his camp — largely his Nuer parochial supporters — are now ready and willing to sacrifice nation building and reconciliation on the altar of short-term political interests and aspirations.

It is increasingly apparent that Machar has been preparing for a major confrontation with President Kiir long before the mid-April 2013 decree. At the core of the Machar political machine is an organization called "Initiative for Change" established by Machar's wife, Angelina Jany, in order to raise funds for his political campaigns. In March 2013, Mrs Jany and Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth (the former head of the Southern Sudan office in Washington who presently works in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) went to Dubai to raise funds from "Arab friends". They raised \$5-million. Significantly, some of these generous "Arab friends" are businessmen with close ties with the Bashir Government in Khartoum. They would not have contributed in order to reinforce a viable state in South Sudan, but rather in order to further the interests of Bashir's Sudan. It is therefore noteworthy that they consider supporting Machar's campaign to remove Kiir from the SPLM Chairmanship an undertaking which would serve Bashir's interests.

By early April 2013, the Machar camp was abusing the national reconciliation process as an instrument for removing Kiir in the SPLM convention by stocking internal rifts and tribal-based tensions. The Machar camp has argued that leadership should be transferred from the Dinka to the Nuer because, in the words of a Machar key supporter, "it's our turn to eat". SPLM political leaders are not oblivious. However, they trust the common desire of all South Sudanese, irrespective of their tribal roots, to consolidate and build their independent state. "The Nuer in the SPLM will not vote for Riek Machar," these leaders opined. "We are working very hard to save our country from him [Machar] because his campaign for tribal war will not benefit anybody at all. ... South Sudan cannot be a country if it is a turn of each tribe to eat."

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