



South Sudan

Nuers and Dinkas: Instruments of a fratricidal war

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Acronyms

AU – African Union
COH – Cessation of Hostilities
CPA – Comprehensive Peace Agreement
GoC – Government of Canada
GoS – Government of Sudan
GoSS – Government of South Sudan
ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP – Internally Displaced Person
IOM – International Organization for Migration
IGAD – Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
LRA – Lord’s Resistance Army
MSF – Médecins Sans Frontières
NLC – National Liberation Council
OCHA – Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PDF – Protection and Deterrence Force
SPLM/A – Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
SPDF – Sudan People’s Democratic Front/Defense Forces
SSHRC – South Sudan Human Rights Commission
START – The Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force
UNHAS – United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMISS – United Nations Mission in South Sudan
WFP – World Food Programme

Executive Summary

December 15, 2013, marked the beginning of a civil war opposing government forces loyal to President Salva Kiir, a member of the Dinka ethnic group, to the self-proclaimed official opposition forces loyal to former Vice-President Riek Machar, a Nuer. The conflict has displaced over 1,000,000 people and has claimed the lives of more than 10,000 people.¹ Nuer and Dinka civilians are being killed on the sole basis of their ethnic identity, and radio communications are being used to promote ethnic violence, thus raising concerns of genocide. While leaders have agreed on the terms of a ceasefire, its implementation has thus far been a failure. Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation—which already affects more than half of the population—is expected to deteriorate during the ongoing rainy season. Immediate action is needed to protect civilians, implement the ceasefire agreement, and improve aid delivery.

Chief characteristics; Nuers and Dinkas

Demographic and historical factors: South Sudan is comprised of over 60 ethnic groups. Its two largest groups, the Dinkas and the Nuers, represent 35.8% and 15.6%² respectively of the total population of 11,562,695.³ Most Nuers and Dinkas are Christians and members of both groups rely extensively on cattle-herding for subsistence.⁴ Given the scarcity of resources and their nomadic lifestyle, these groups have been involved in sporadic episodes of violent competition over property and access rights throughout history. These conflicts, however, were fought with rudimentary weapons which limited their lethality and were successfully being mediated.⁵

Impact of the secessionist war: Beginning in 1983, following breaches by Khartoum of the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, this war consisted of over two decades of fighting between the southerners and the GoS, and resulted in the independence of South Sudan on July 9th, 2011. Originally unified, the main opposition group called the SPLA split in two factions largely divided along ethnic lines. On one side, John Garang formed the Dinka-dominated SPLA-*Mainstream*, and on the other, Riek Machar led the Nuer-dominated SPLA-*Nasir*. This internal division resulted in the perpetration of atrocities by both sides including the 1991 Bor Massacre where 2,000 Dinkas were killed by the White Army, a rebel group associated with Machar.⁶ The SPLA was re-unified in 2005 following the signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). While pausing the violence, this arrangement did not prevent the recent recurrence of conflicts between the Nuers and the Dinkas.

Capabilities: At the onset of the current conflict, over 60,000 fighters defected from the SPLA to form a new group once again led by Machar called the SPLA *in Opposition*.⁷ Although a large portion of the deserters are Nuer, the current SPLA army chief James Hoth Mai, himself a Nuer, indicated that as many as 30,000 Nuer SPLA fighters remained loyal to the government.⁸ Various ‘unofficial’ armed groups have also been taking part in the violence. The White Army for example, which Machar claims is acting under his command, has been active in the Upper Nile and Jonglei states. Other groups such as the Murle, whose interests don’t necessarily align with those of Machar, took advantage of the crisis to negotiate greater representation in the Government.⁹ Finally, both the SPLA and the SPLA *in Opposition* have been recruiting from disenfranchised communities, distributing arms to civilians.¹⁰ The Government has been receiving direct military support from Uganda, notably in Juba and Jonglei.¹¹ Uganda and Ethiopia have also been providing bases to the SPLA.¹² Although this hasn’t been officially confirmed, many speculate that Machar is receiving support from the GoS given the rivalry between Sudan and Uganda.

Current Conflict & Timeline

While inter-communal conflicts have occurred throughout South Sudan’s history, it is debatable to what degree historical antecedents have impacted the unfolding situation between the Dinka and the Nuer. There is a perception in the international community that this current conflict is due largely to ‘ancient ethnic hatreds,’ however the escalation of tensions between the Dinka and Nuer groups to this level of violence is relatively recent, occurring after almost ten years of relative peace.¹³ Many have, in fact, underscored the role of a personal power struggle between Machar and Kiir, wherein ethnicity is being used predominantly as a divisive technique versus being the primary, underlying cause.¹⁴

- *July 2011* – South Sudan gains independence on July 9, 2011.¹⁵ Salva Kiir, of the Dinka tribe, eventually takes over government leadership as President, with Riek Machar, of the Nuer tribe, taking the role of Vice-President. Both men claim allegiance to the ruling SPLM, South Sudan’s most powerful political party.¹⁶
- *March 2013* – Vice-President Machar discloses his ambition to replace President Kiir as Chairman of the party.¹⁷ Although at one point the two men fought side-by-side in Sudan’s civil war, their rivalry is well noted among experts and analysts. Machar often vilifies Kiir as being autocratic with dictatorial tendencies.¹⁸
- *July 23, 2013* – President Kiir dismisses Machar and other elected officials in a cabinet purge.¹⁹
- *December 14, 2013* – A two-day meeting of the SPLM NLC is convened to review and approve the party’s draft basic documents ahead of the expected 2015 general elections.²⁰ Following a purportedly “hostile” speech by Kiir, a faction of SPLM senior party leaders, reportedly 14 of 124 Council members, declared their opposition and “their intention to challenge [Kiir] in the expected 2014 National Convention.”²¹
- *December 15, 2013* – Machar and his allies boycott the last day of the NLC meeting. Violence among soldiers of the President’s Guard erupts at around 10:00pm that night in South Sudan’s capital, Juba. The violence takes an ethnic turn, with Dinka and Nuer soldiers dividing their loyalties to either President Kiir or Machar, respectively.²² Dinka members of the Presidential Guard and other security forces target and kill Nuer soldiers and civilians, conducting house-to-house searches, killing many Nuer in or near their homes.²³ Though he denies the allegations, Kiir eventually accuses Machar of masterminding a (failed) coup d’état.²⁴
- *December 16-23, 2013* – According to the SSHRC, more than 600 people are killed and 800 injured in Juba and its suburbs between 16 and 18 December.²⁵ Violence spreads quickly to the other parts of the country, bringing heavy violence to seven of South Sudan’s ten states.²⁶
- *December 18, 2013* – Opposition forces loyal to Machar seize Bor, the capital of the Jonglei state. Rebels indicate to reporters that they are planning to head north to gain control over strategic oil hubs.²⁷
- *December 19, 2013* – Around 2,000 armed youths attack the UNMISS base in Akobo, Jonglei, firing on South Sudanese civilians of Dinka ethnic origin seeking shelter inside the compound. Two UN peacekeepers and approximately 20 civilians are killed.²⁸
- *February 18, 2014* – At least 150 wound people are treated following a new wave of violence in Malakal.²⁹
- *April 15, 2013* – Opposition forces reportedly kill 200 civilians in Kali-Ballee Mosque on the basis of their ethnicity in Bentiu. Other killings take place in a hospital, a vacated WFP compound and a local church in Bentiu. Members of the ethnic Nuer group who did not support the rebels, South Sudanese people from other ethnic groups and Darfuris from Sudan are also targeted and killed.³⁰ Radio Bentiu FM diffuses messages from public officials inviting the population to commit violence against Dinkas.³¹
- *April 17, 2013* – Over 300 armed Dinka youths attack the UN camp in Bor, where approximately 5,000 civilians, most of them ethnic Nuer, are seeking refuge. Although UNMISS peacekeepers successfully repel the attack, at least 50 civilians are killed.³²

Conflict Management and Peace Process

- *December 20, 2013* – Ugandan troops are deployed in Juba to help secure the city following a request by the country’s government.³³
- *December 24, 2013* – The UNSC unanimously adopts Resolution 2132, doubling the size of UNMISS with an increase of 7,000 to 12,500 soldiers and 900 to 1,300 police.³⁴
- *December 27, 2013* – President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya and Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn meet for talks with President Kiir to find a solution to the crisis. Though the talks are deemed constructive, the discussed plans for formal discussions between the two sides don’t materialize.³⁵
- *January 6, 2014* – The first round of formal IGAD peace talks takes place in Ethiopia.
- *January 23, 2014* – After more than a month of fighting, representatives of the opposing Kiir-Machar factions accept and sign a COH, negotiated by IGAD. While deal terms mandate implementation within 24 hours, both the Government of South Sudan and anti-government forces violate the COH and the agreement fails to come into effect.³⁶⁻³⁷

- *February 10, 2014* – Phase II of IGAD-led peace talks begin. Negotiations failed to make progress and are suspended until March.³⁸
- *March 13, 2014* – IGAD authorizes quick deployment of a military unit named the PDF to help restore peace and stability in South Sudan.³⁹ Machar rejects the proposal and warns that he will boycott the peace talks unless the decision is reversed.⁴⁰
- *March 25, 2014* – Phase II of the negotiations that began mid-February resume, but quickly reach a deadlock. By March 31, the talks are again adjourned and will not resume again until 28 April.⁴¹
- *May 2014* – The ongoing and vicious revenge killings perpetrated by the Dinka and the Nuer cause international alarm. Top officials from around the world fly to Juba to encourage resolution, including US Secretary of State John Kerry. The United States also sanctions two individuals on opposing sides of the conflict considered responsible for perpetrating violence against civilians.⁴² Despite its traditionally reserved diplomacy, China also begins to take a more hands-on approach to help resolve the crisis.⁴³
- *May 2, 2014* – President Kiir tells Secretary of State Kerry during a bilateral meeting that he is prepared to hold direct peace talks with Machar.⁴⁴
- *May 9, 2014* – Machar and Kiir sign a second ceasefire agreement. They have not met face to face since the crisis began in December.
- *May 11, 2014* – Despite the newly signed ceasefire, violence resumes just two days later in South Sudan, with President Kiir’s spokesman releasing a statement that the Machar-led rebels have attacked the government.⁴⁵
- *May 20, 2014* – Uganda calls for urgent deployment of regional IGAD troops to enforce the ceasefire.
- *May 27, 2014* - The UN Security Council adopts Resolution 2155 condemning the human rights violations by both sides, and authorizing measures to improve UNMISS’s capacity to protect civilians, report human rights abuses, deliver humanitarian assistance, and support the implementation of the ceasefire. While the authorized UN military presence was increased to 12,500, additional troops have yet to be deployed.⁴⁶
- *June 2, 2014* – Talks are scheduled to resume but are delayed for an undisclosed reason.⁴⁷
- *June 11, 2014* – Kiir and Machar meet and agree to fully commit themselves to the previously signed agreements, as well as to complete all negotiations within the coming 60 days and establish a transitional government of national unity. IGAD mediators threaten the two sides with sanctions if they don’t stop all military operations in the conflict.⁴⁸

Humanitarian Situation

Due to the chaotic nature of the conflict, an exact number of casualties is not readily available. Since mid-December, over one million people have been internally displaced by violence, and over 300,000 have fled to neighboring countries.⁴⁹ A growing cholera outbreak was declared on May 15, 2015, and as of June 4, 2014, 1,306 suspected cases have been reported, including 29 cholera-related deaths.⁵⁰ The violence has greatly affected food stores, with looters and soldiers ransacking thousands of pounds of sustenance. Although international aid organizations have convoys on the ground and are attempting to restock them, they are being repeatedly stopped and attacked.⁵¹ Furthermore, the three states that produce the most of South Sudan’s food—Unity, Upper Nile, and Jonglei—are also where fighting has been the heaviest. The fighting has prevented farmers from planting crops before the start of rainy season and the flooding of the river, making a famine very likely.

Canadian Contribution to Humanitarian Assistance⁵²

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| • WFP – \$11 million | • UNHCR - \$3 million |
| • ICRC – \$2.5 million | • IOM – \$2 million |
| • UNHAS – \$2 million | • OCHA – \$500,000 |
| • MSF Canada – \$1 million | • World Relief Canada – \$1.5 million |
| • World Vision Canada – \$1.35 million | |

Key Regional Implications

Sudan: Most of South Sudan's oil is transferred to Sudan to be commercialized.⁵³ Security of South Sudan's oil infrastructure is thus of crucial economic importance to Sudan. So far Sudan has not been actively involved in the conflict, as threats to the oil infrastructure have not materialized. A civil war in South Sudan would inevitably involve Sudan, however, and Machar has already intimidated that he may seek some kind of alliance with Sudan.⁵⁴ This could potentially trigger a new North-South conflict.

Uganda: Since South Sudan gained its independence in 2011, Uganda has moved to be an influential investor in the country by integrating infrastructure (road, rail, energy) with South Sudan.⁵⁵ Uganda has its own oil reserves, however they are located within 200 miles of the South Sudanese border and instability in the region could drive away potential investors. Uganda is straining under the influx of thousands of South Sudanese refugees that have crossed the Nile River. Uganda has already sent troops and air support for South Sudan's government in attempts to help stabilize the country.⁵⁶ There are no Dinkas in Uganda, which suggests that Uganda's support to the SPLA so far is driven by economic interests.⁵⁷

IGAD: IGAD is an eight-country trading block, comprised of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Somalia and Uganda. While it was originally created to allow for regional cooperation on issues affecting multiple nations in the region (e.g. drought, famine, natural disasters), its mandate has expanded over the years. Among its numerous objectives, IGAD works to promote peace and stability in the region, creating mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of inter-state and intra-state conflicts through dialogue.⁵⁸ Many question the neutrality of IGAD member states, wondering if an IGAD force is really feasible or if it is simply a guise for national armies to pursue divergent interests.⁵⁹

Oil: South Sudan is a very oil rich country, and where an estimated 75% of all of Sudan's oil reserves were located pre-South Sudan's independence.⁶⁰ Although the crude oil is pumped mainly by China National Petroleum Corp., India's Oil & Natural Gas Corp., and Malaysia's Petroliam Nasional Bhd., South Sudan remains highly dependent on Sudan as it must use Sudan's export pipelines and processing facilities.⁶¹ South Sudan's economy is the world's most oil-dependent, accounting for almost the totality of exports and for approximately 80% of gross domestic product.⁶² Since the conflict erupted, South Sudan's oil regions have seen some of the heaviest fighting and crude oil production has since dropped more than 30%, to approximately 160,000 barrels a day, bringing a severe blow to the country's economy.⁶³ With the exception of Somalia, all IGAD member states have significant financial interests in South Sudan's oil export pipeline system.⁶⁴

Analysis of causes and dynamics

Divide and rule tactics such as those used by Khartoum against the SPLA are, according to Ted Gurr, often used by central governments to fractionalize ethnonationalist movements.⁶⁵ In the case of South Sudan, the strategy, which consisted mainly in providing military support to both Nuer and Dinka SPLA leaders, was highly successful. New resources, coupled with incomplete information regarding the other side's capacities, led both groups to turn on each other in the hope of becoming the regional hegemon. The result was instead an intractable and extremely bloody fratricidal war which lasted almost two decades and left both groups highly militarized, polarized, and fearful of being attacked by the other group⁶⁶, conditions which according to Downes reduce the cost of returning to war.⁶⁷ Despite the low cost of violence, Dinkas and Nuers did enjoy a period of relative peace after the signature of the CPA thanks to Kiir's strategy of promoting former warlords to high-level government positions.

Once Machar and most of his cabinet were fired in 2013, it became clear that Kiir was attempting to capture the state. From that point on, Machar had various incentives to generate mobilization against the government. First, since the adoption of the 2011 transitional constitution, a high level of powers including the distribution of revenues to the sub-national states and the dismissal of state governors were concentrated in the central government which created a system of "winner-take-all" politics.⁶⁸ Second, by taking control of

the oil rich regions of Blue Nile and Unity, one could exert significant leverage over the central government which draws 98% of its revenue from oil production.⁶⁹ Third, as Jok & Hutchinson have observed, Machar and other warlords have been benefiting from war and instability to increase their support base and personal wealth by resorting to looting.⁷⁰

Additional factors are believed to have fueled popular resentment towards the central government and encouraged anti-Dinka rhetoric.⁷¹ These include the heavy economic sanctions imposed by Sudan⁷², the high inflation and unemployment⁷³, the inflow of over 200,000 people returning from neighbouring countries since 2011, and the fact that over 40% of the population were in need of humanitarian assistance prior to the December 2013.⁷⁴

Negotiations in such a climate of instability is extremely difficult, as both side constantly fear attacks and may have strategic incentives to strike first in order to minimize the chances of being attacked when they are most vulnerable. Such security dilemmas, in the eyes of authors like Collier et al., create commitment problems which can only be overcome by credible third party enforcement of ceasefire agreements.⁷⁵ Two factors undermine the credibility of the current UNMISS and PDF forces monitoring the crisis; their limited capabilities, and the participation of neighbouring countries perceived as biased towards the GoS.

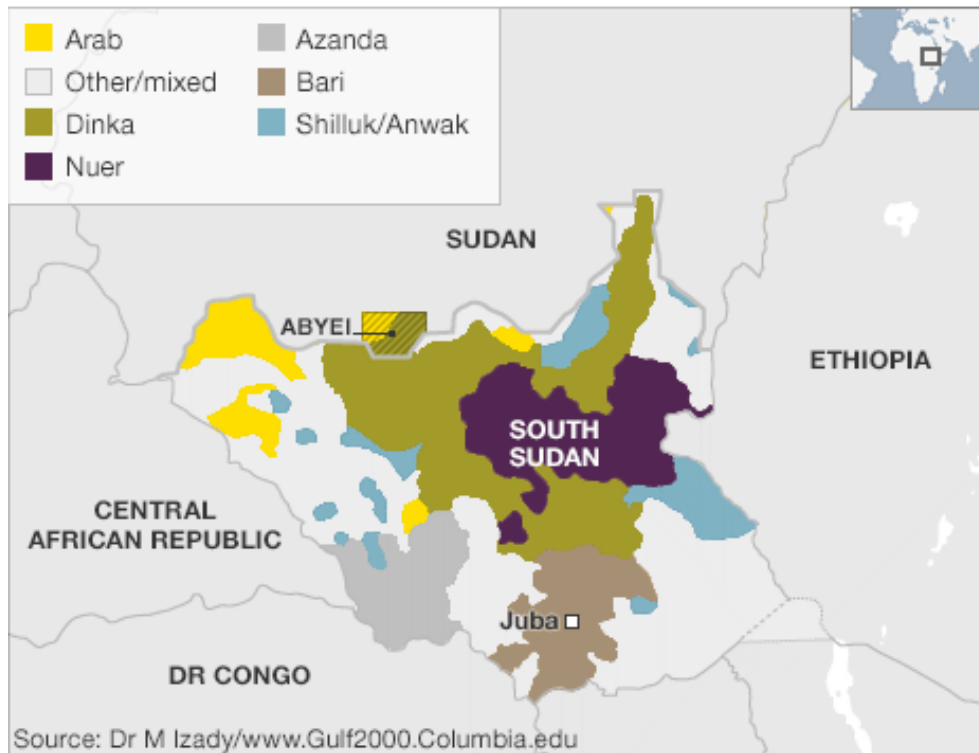
Finally, the risk of re-escalation remains pretty high as most of the above mentioned causes have yet to be addressed.

Policy Recommendations

- Lobby the GoC to contribute the remaining and needed troops to the UNMISS mission. Although the Canadian Armed Forces is participating in UNMISS through Operation SOPRANO, at this time it consists of only 12 troops. While putting Canadian soldiers at risk, increasing participation may prevent the perpetration of crimes against humanity and genocide.
- Encourage a Canadian contribution of mediation/nation-building expertise and resources to IGAD. IGAD faces meagre funding and dire understaffing. As they are the entity leading the peace talks, it is vital that they are able to effectively and efficiently mediate resolution of the conflict and address its root causes. Canada has many of the resources and personnel with such needed expertise, and could greatly contribute to the process. Without credible coercive capabilities on the ground, negotiation is unlikely to yield positive long-lasting results.
- Encourage Canadian-South Sudanese dialogue and collaboration between legal authorities and/or transitional justice experts to invest/support rule of law development and institution building. While this may also not have immediate, short-term benefits, creating adequate institutions to support rule of law and governance are vital to ensuring that the society can function during the reconciliation period and into the future.
- Encourage GoC to condemn any rebel support and to apply targeted economic sanctions in the event that parties are not able to finalize the agreement/transitional government within the 60-day time period.
- Continue to monitor the situation and gather data, increasing the flow of information and analysis to appropriate GoC channels (e.g. START). This would allow for continued, timely exchange of information, ensuring that the GoC has the most current data.

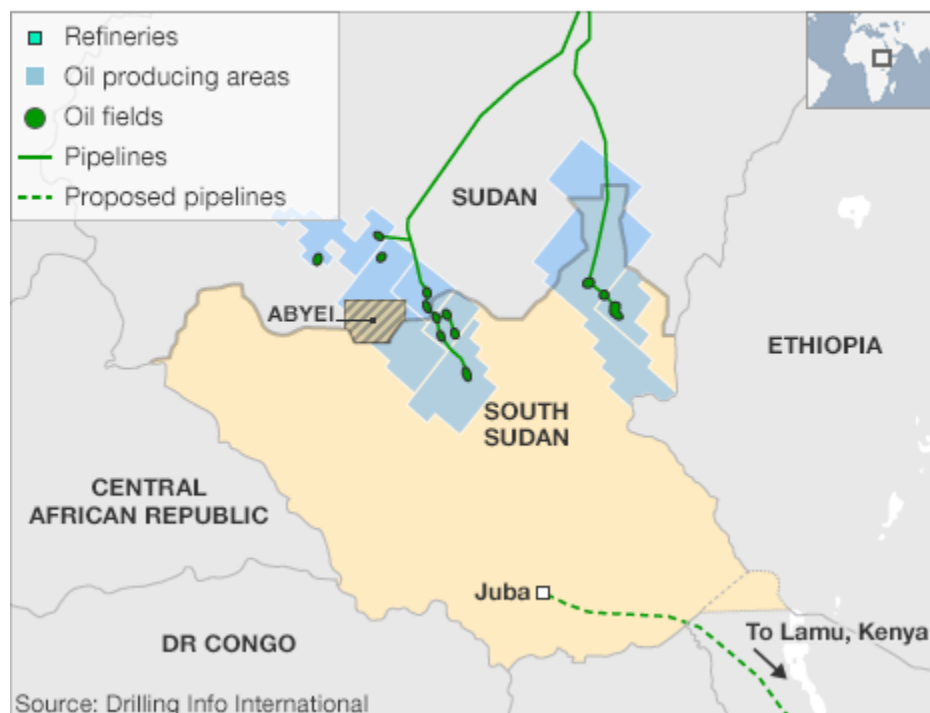
Appendix 1: Distribution of ethnic groups in South Sudan

Distribution of ethnic groups

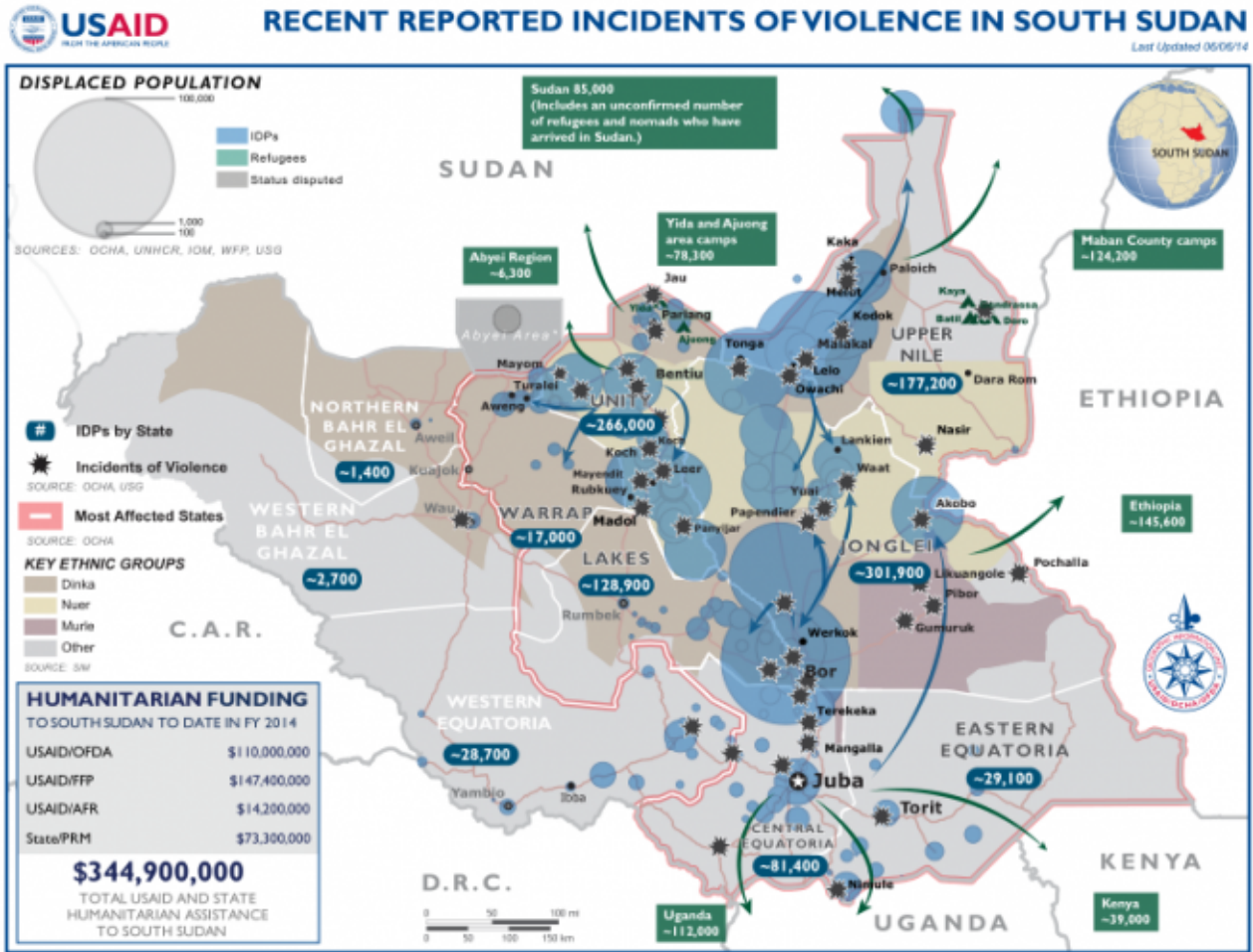


Appendix 2: Oil in South Sudan

Oil



Appendix 3: Incidents of Violence in South Sudan



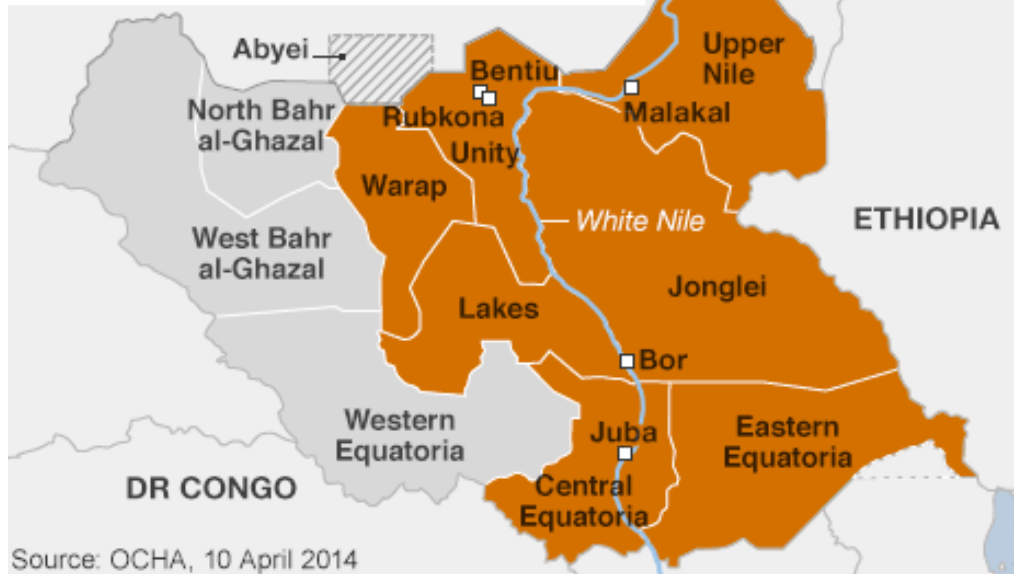
Appendix 4: States in South Sudan affected by violence

South Sudan conflict

■ States affected by violence

817,700* Internally displaced people

*Estimated, total likely to be higher



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