

South Sudan epic rivalry heating up: Dr Riek Machar and Dr Lam Akol Duel

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By Steve Paterno

October 11, 2012 - The most ambitious and yet controversial South Sudanese leaders, Dr Riek Machar and Dr Lam Akol are building up the stage as each one of them believe to be inching closer to their ultimate goals: the presidency of South Sudan. In a recent spat, the duo set their tones, renewing their long fought battle and political ambition.

On his recent visit to the USA, Dr Riek took the opportunity to jab at his arch rival, Dr Akol, accusing him at a public rally for being a treasonous militia leader supported from Khartoum to overthrow the government in Juba. Dr Akol responded with a sharpest tongue, calling Dr Riek as being ignorant, hallucinating and "suffering from complexes engendered by his total isolation and helplessness in SPLM hierarchy, despite his glittering titles."

Evidently, the two are no strangers to each other. They have been here before. They both engineered the infamous 1991, Split, where they defected from most populous South Sudanese movement, the SPLM/A, with the aim of overtaking the leadership of the movement. But before long, the two also split as their egos got their best parts.

Even though both ended up serving Khartoum as proxy militias, fighting agaings South Sudanese in the South, they also both ended up rejoining the people's movement at their separate opportune time, when they realized peace agreement was about to be signed between the regime in Khartoum and the South Sudanese movement.

Although still carrying the stigma of being the stooge of Khartoum, Dr Riek is only a heart beat away from the seat of presidency of the country, given that he is the vice president and also the deputy chair of South Sudanese ruling party, the SPLM.

However, the ride to the top for Dr Reik Machar is a stiff climp. Dr Riek faces considerable challenges. For one, he is not trusted by the majority of the members of the political party that he suppose to lead and despite his position within the party, the structure is established such that he may not become the leader of the party. Even more troubling, Dr Machar has no power base as compared to the one he used to enjoy among his Nuer ethnicity.

As for Dr Akol, he is presented with two oppotunities in reaching up his final goal of becoming the president of South Sudan.

Dr Lam leads a political party, where he can contest election on his party ticket to challenge the incumbent president. Secondly, with Dr Lam's strong ties to Khartoum, he gains chance to be propelled into South Sudanese leadership through Khartoum's strategic effort in effecting regime change in South Sudan.

Nevertheless, Dr Lam Akol challenges are equally daunting. For example, he is considered by majority of South Sudanese as a puppet of Khartoum and an untruthworthy individual, and as a result, he lacks constituency within South Sudan.

Despite all the hurdles against these two gentlemen, they keep their hopes and ambitions alive, and with any slight chance, either one of them can ascend on top. Nonetheless, they are yet to overcome the main obstacles, working against them. As for now, their duel, which is reignited in USA, is left among their staunch supporters to battle it out, while the duo only add fuel in the rhetoric, accusations and counter attacks. The duel is on.

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