

Tackling insecurity of paramount importance to avoid disunity in South Sudan

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December 10, 2012 - South Sudan fought two bitter wars (1955 to 1972 and 1983 to 2005) against what was perceived as gross marginalization by successive governments of the old Sudan which perpetrated insecurity as a strategic mechanism to cow and silence people. In major southern cities such as Juba, Malakal and Wau people lived in constant fear for their security during the two bitter wars. Finally, as though the southern ancestral spirits had heard more than enough of the lamentation of the people, South Sudan achieved what it had set itself to achieve, total independence.

With independence expectation was very high for better security to people than under the successive discriminatory and oppressive governments of the old Sudan. South Sudan had lost many precious lives during the struggle for independence. Nonetheless, it was understandable that the precious lives lost were a price to pay for freedom. As people had suffered so much independence was seen as the ultimate solution to the long suffering. Insecurity in particular was to be seen as a thing of the past as it was associated with the brutality of the successive northern dominated governments of the old Sudan when people in South Sudan were massacred, for example, in Juba and Wau and also in villages with impunity.

SECURITY SITUATION IN JUBA

When South Sudan attained independence Juba became the capital though the government now has the prerogative of relocating the capital. As the capital and the seat of the national government, Juba was expected to be provided with adequate security for its residents. However, insecurity in Juba has become so rampant that life is becoming almost unbearable. Regrettably more often people in uniform are accused of insecurity in Juba. Night robberies and killings are blamed on the people in uniform who carry guns and terrorize neighborhoods where innocent lives are unnecessarily lost.

Due to rampant insecurity people in Juba are wondering what is precisely going on. Some are even questioning whether it was right to vote for independence in the referendum in 2011. This is because on the ground insecurity is so frightening that people are panicking and preoccupied with the fear of the unknown for their lives. One citizen full of fear said it is God that is protecting people in Juba. The faith in government to provide the needed security to people seems to be waning. The implication is that the government is not sufficiently doing enough to curb the rampant insecurity in Juba. This is a challenge to the government.

One high profile case of rampant insecurity in Juba is the murder in cold blood of a prolific writer and commentator well known to readers as Isaiah Abraham. According to his biography the late Isaiah Abraham was a soldier with the rank of a major in the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and had fought battles for the independence of South Sudan. At the time of his death Isaiah Abraham was the Director of Finance and Administration in The Employees Justice Chamber, a senior government position. For such a high profile individual and a senior government official to be murdered in cold blood with impunity, how secure would the ordinary folks feel? There is an assumption that Isaiah Abraham lost his life because of his critical views.

Arguably, the government couldn't have officially ordered the execution of Isaiah Abraham Mafia style. Most probably Isaiah's critical views were a threat to those who were not secure, lacking in confidence. A system that does not tolerate and weather storms of criticism may become very unpopular, losing a vital support where it needs most. No one is divine and so mistakes in a system and outside the system will always be made. The one criticizing is not divine and the other one being criticized is not divine either. Why then murder somebody for criticism if all are not divine in the first place but are only human?

Something somewhere may not be right. This brings us to what is known as post traumatic stress disorder.

EFFECT OF POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Mr. Nhial Bol, a brilliant commentator and the Editor-in-Chief of the Citizen Newspaper in his column in one of the paper's editions, was the first to talk about South Sudanese being traumatized. In addressing the launching of a conference on agriculture and food security at Nyakuron Culture Centre in Juba, the President of Republic of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit, also told the conference that the population including leaders is traumatized by decades of war and are in need of counseling in order to progress (Sudan Tribune, November 28, 2012).

According to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan government soldiers committed murder, torture and rape in the largest and troubled South Sudanese State of Jonglei (Sudan Tribune, August 24, 2012). Could this have been caused by

people traumatized? Hopefully this may be a problem identified which is a problem half solved.

To begin with let's look at what trauma is. According to a dictionary trauma is emotional shock. Let's then look at what is post traumatic stress disorder with the acronym of PTSD. PTSD is an anxiety disorder that can occur after a person has experience a traumatic event such as combat or military experience, sexual or physical abuse or assault or a serious accident. It is an anxiety disorder in which an individual's ability to function is impaired by emotional responses to memories of a traumatic event. PTSD often leaves one feeling vulnerable, out of control and as if one is in constant danger. These feelings are persistent, are strong and do not disappear over time on their own. Everyday life, work and relationship can be negatively affected.

From the definition of PTSD it can be deduced that an explanation is offered of the poor relationship between people in uniform and the civilian population in Juba and indeed in South Sudan. This may also explain the night robberies and land grabbing by suspected men in uniform. However, some people develop PTSD in response to traumatic events while others do not. This brings us to consider insecurity as the product of organized crime or crime committed by those who do not develop PTSD. Organise crime should therefore be a focus of enquiry to establish the extent to which it is the cause of insecurity in Juba and other towns, and also to establish who are the perpetrators.

ORGANISED CRIME IN RELATION TO SECURITY

Organised crime can be a serious security problem. Independence to South Sudan has made it a home to the various nationalities in Africa. Citizens of the neighbouring countries are in South Sudan seeking greener pastures. Included may be hardened criminals who can go to any length to kill and rob people of their valuables. The problem is compounded with the help of local accomplices. With the greed for quick and big money in the shortest possible time, it is not difficult to understand why and how organised crime may exacerbate insecurity.

Organised crime is an enormous challenge to security and intelligence agencies. It is a test of the resolve of the agencies.

The suggestion that there may be organized crime should be of interest. It is the work of the security and intelligence agencies to develop and test theories of why and how crimes are on the rise, for example, in Juba. This is to create lines of enquiry for evidence of organized crime and how to combat it. The public also have a role to play in combating organised crime.

TACKLING INSECURITY IN JUBA PARAMOUNT

On the untimely death of Isaiah Abraham murdered in cold blood by what appeared to be the work of professional contract killers, the President of Republic has ordered a thorough investigation to uncover the deadly criminals to face justice for their heinous crime. This is encouraging and should be the precedent for any heinous crime committed in Juba and in South Sudan in general.

Any life of South Sudanese is precious and, security and intelligence agencies should be well prepared to investigate crimes to the logical end. A criminal investigation should not be allowed to stop short of the final outcome of such an investigation and PTSD should not be used as an excuse to absolve criminals. It should be left to doctors (psychiatrists and psychologists) to determine that somebody has clinically developed PTSD. Even so the traumatized should be accountable for their actions or be detained in a mental hospital so that they are neither a danger to the public nor to themselves.

Quite often a criminal investigation is hardly completed and when the suspect is under arrest he or she may be released to the street the following day probably without charge. Law enforcement agencies need to have trained personnel who have investigating skills and also understand the law. South Sudanese who had served in the North may be well versed in investigation of crimes and the law. It is important that the experience, knowledge and skills of such people should be tapped to benefit the public in South Sudan. The negative attitude of looking at people who had served in the North as Jallaba agents should be a thing of the past. South Sudan is now an independent country and so people should move forward with confidence in each other to solidify unity for national cohesion.

Tackling insecurity in Juba needs every effort of law abiding citizens. It is natural that among people in uniform there are criminals as there are also criminals in plain clothes. No one therefore should be seen as above the law. It should not only be the manner in which Isaiah Abraham died to prompt a thorough criminal investigation. Any murder of a citizen or a crime committed should equally be thoroughly investigated and the culprit must face the law. Preemptive action is also needed to tackle insecurity. This is how insecurity can be tackled successively in Juba and indeed in South Sudan in general.

Tackling insecurity in Juba in particular and in South Sudan in general is of paramount importance to avoid disunity which may ultimately lead to the disintegration of South Sudan. Corruption and tribalism or nepotism are already a worry and to add insecurity as another big worry will be too much and unwanted burden in sustaining national unity and cohesion. It is now recognized that what is negatively going on in South Sudan may be because people are traumatized. There is already a suggestion that traumatized people need counseling. This is an appropriate suggestion and should be pursued further.

Counseling facilities should be made available for the traumatised to get help. Such facilities should have expert counselors

to handle cases of trauma. Special focus should be on the people in uniform who might have borne the brand of the two wars of liberation leading to the independence of South Sudan. The people in uniform could have been the most traumatised.

In combating insecurity there is a need to streamline security and intelligence agencies. It is possible that some of the agencies may have inexperienced personnel who are below standard and are partly the cause of the problem. In Juba it is evident that some security and intelligence agents are out to harass and intimidate people instead of being helpful as ears and eyes to detect dangerous elements and situations that may be detrimental to national interest and security.

For example, in opening the Juba City Council new block of offices, the City Mayor complained openly of the interference with his workers by the security and national intelligence agents. The agents often arrested the City Council workers for unknown reason thereby affecting the workers' performance in their daily routine. How were the workers a threat or a danger to national security that they had to be arrested is an open question. If there was something serious the workers were committing shouldn't that have been brought to the attention of the Mayor?

Another incident was the detention and beating up of journalists by the police who were themselves detained for further questioning, obviously for the crude and primitive way of manhandling the journalists (Sudan Tribune, December 07, 2012).

This should be a signal to streamline the security and intelligence agencies for a better relationship between the men in uniform and the civilians in promoting mutual understanding and unity.

The order for a thorough investigation into the death of Isaiah Abraham should be strongly supported by the public. How to show the strong support is by a massive peaceful demonstration organised by civil society organizations as a show of solidarity against crimes and insecurity in Juba and also to send a clear message to the criminals that the South Sudanese nation will not tolerate heinous crimes committed on its soil. It is also for the President to appreciate that the public is totally behind him in the perpetual dark hours of insecurity in Juba. If an SPLA soldier and a major can be murdered in cold blood the way Isaiah Abraham was murdered who is safe in Juba. The security and intelligence agencies obviously have a huge responsibility to assure people of their security in Juba.

Lastly, but not the least it is important for the public to consider neighborhoods watch. The principle is that neighbours keep watch of each other's welfare and property. Any suspicious movement either by day or night by individuals or groups should immediately be spied on or confronted by the people in the neighbourhood. As a sign of solidarity in combating crime, when there are screams or loud noises, neighbours must all pour out from their houses with whatever resources they have to confront what may be a crime to be committed. Neighbours may make a citizen arrest to hand over the suspected criminal to the police.

One advantage of a neighbourhood watch is that it promotes unity in fighting crime. In this way insecurity in the neighbourhood may be reduced. This in turn will ensure people's safety with a credit to all for being so vigilant.

In conclusion, may God the Almighty rest the soul of Isaiah Abraham in eternal peace. Isaiah's brilliant writing and commentating will always continue to inspire old and young generations of writers and journalists in his native South Sudan and beyond.

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