

Addis-Ababa Agreement is bony fish worth chewing

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December 17, 2012 - Personal circumstances did not allow me to comment on the September 27th 2012 agreement between South Sudan and Sudan in the Ethiopian Capital, Addis-Ababa. That now the agreement is facing some tremendous challenges to implementation, especially with new "conditionalitie"s and interpretation being introduced by the government of Sudan; it is opportune time to revisit the agreement in order to re-examine its utility.

It is not the first time that South Sudan reaches an agreement with North Sudan in Ethiopia. In March 1972, a peace deal that was brokered by Emperor Haile Sellassie, in partnership with the Organisation of African Unity (AOU), and the World Council of Churches brought to an end a 17-year war that was waged by South Sudan Liberation Movement (popularly known as Anya Nya) against the central government in Khartoum. The Addis-Ababa agreement of 1972 gave the South an autonomous government and brought relative peace to the region that lasted for 10 years until 1983 when the hostilities resumed.

However, this last agreement is of a different sort. If implemented successfully, it would be a door to creating mutually beneficial relationships in the short and medium term, and even long term between two entities with long history of conflict, mistrust, broken-promises, and mutual prejudice behind them. Like any broken marriage, sorting and dividing the properties of the old house can be messy, painful, time-consuming, and stressful. It demands patience and wisdom from leaders and governments of the two countries concerned.

Therefore, to imply that the nine protocols of Addis-Ababa Agreement could be executed at single whoop is too optimistic an assumption and far removed from hard realities of life. The painful, and eventually, the partial implementation of Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement is a testimony to this fact. Like any agreement, some protocols are critical and others important in determining the success or failure of an agreement.

Thus, the partners to the agreement can do well in first pursuing the implementation of the most straight forward protocols while continue to work out the modalities for the implementation of the more thorny and protocols that are subject to different interpretations by the signing parties like Abyei, border demarcation, formation of demilitarized zone, and mutual accusations of harbouring or supporting the opposition and political dissidents from the other country.

This is because, like it or not, neither government of South Sudan nor that of Sudan can control what happens in Blue Nile, South Kordofan, and Darfur. Only political and negotiated settlement within countries concerned can restore true peace in those areas as opposed to purely military solutions as the government of Sudan would have the world believe.

Furthermore more, the idea of a peaceful demilitarized zone between the South and North Sudan in area where armed dissidents hold sway is not a few-day affair to clean it up, but would take years of protracted political and socio-economic efforts to combat. And in those situations, it is always illusive to bring hard evidence as to who is supporting who in such lawless zones.

It is therefore a serious strategic and diplomatic error for the government of Sudan to continue to block the resumption of export of South Sudan's oil through its territory as well as hindering border trade and economic cooperation between the two countries on the grounds of the alleged support of South Sudan to SPLM-North.

While the Juba government had earlier committed similar error of judgement when it decided to suddenly shut down oil production in January 2012, the revenue of which formed 98 percent of its income, it has since corrected its earlier unattractive offer by making substantial concession to Sudan that would amount to payment of an estimated (combined) USD 25 per barrel of crude in transit fees and direct money to be transferred to government of Sudan in the next three years. This was many orders of magnitude higher than the initial offering of 69 cents per barrel.

What's more, the resumption of oil production would allow the two countries to revive their battered economies (mostly the result of loss of oil revenue from their budgets) and ease economic pressures the two governments are currently facing at home-front. Border trade, and 4 freedoms also lend themselves to easy implementation, with potentially positive impacts on the relations between the two countries to follow suite.

It will also gives clear thinking to the leaderships of the two countries while they strive to use diplomatic means to sort out the problems of Abyei, border demarcation, and demilitarized zone; and address issues related to dissidents from each other's country using the most appropriate tools that will justly address the underlying causes, and not mere symptoms.

It is also worth mention that it is very accurate continuing to draw moral equivalence between what is happening in South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Darfur with the activities of tribal militants in South Sudan. They do not weigh on the same scale.

This is because problems in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile are as serious as those which were posed by South North war. The same could not be said about militia activities in South Sudan.

What is crucial to bringing lasting peace in South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Darfur is a radical shift in government of Sudan's view point, which at the moment, looks at these matters through a security prism. Instead, they require revitalization of Doha Agreement with Darfur groups and re-adoption of Nafi/Agar framework agreement of 28th July 2011 which was turned down by the National Congress Party leadership. And all this is going to take time to bear fruits.

Failing that, we do not need to dig too far into the past history that dissidents with a cause will continue to disturb peace in their mother countries no matter what the neighbouring countries try to do, and no amount of diplomatic or military efforts they can contain them. For example, the expulsion of Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) from Ethiopia in 1991 did not end its struggle. Palestinians were expelled from Jordan and Lebanon many times in 1970s and 80s and it did not end their struggle. The closing of Chadian borders in the face of Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) did not bring stability to North and Eastern Darfu. With one of the best armies in the world neither the Republic of Ireland nor government of Great Britain could stop IRA dissidents to smuggle weapons into mainland Britain, and so on and so forth.

Stopping of oil export, therefore, will do nothing to restore stability in these areas of Sudan. But quite the contrary, it would now give license to South Sudan to collaborate with these elements to liberate Abyei and other border areas occupied by Sudan.

And quite understandably, the Sudanese authorities are adamant about the disarming of its political dissidents in its conflict areas (which it claims are supported by South Sudan) as a prerequisite to resumption of oil export through its territory, fearing the fate of Soviet Union or former Yugoslavia could befall their country. This again, stopping or allowing the flow of oil will have zero effect in changing the course of events. Only the Sudanese themselves on both sides of the conflict hold the key as to whether such further break up of their country could be arrested; made as bloodless and painless as happened in Soviet Union; or allowed to become as bloody and painful as happened in former Yugoslavia.

If this later scenario comes to predominate the scene, South Sudan will in the meantime be challenged to stay homogeneous and harmonious in the face of rising economic difficulties and deteriorating security situation in and around its national capital, Juba.

Otherwise, Addis-Ababa Agreement is a bony fish that is worth chewing, while the thorny issues continue to be sorted and filtered out in the most diplomatic and amicable manner. This It will lay a solid foundation for sisterly coexistence between two Sudans.

This is the best and most desirable scenario. However, the way I see it, the ball is more or less in Sudan's government court.

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