



Africa Study Group | Groupe de réflexion sur l'Afrique

The Africa Study Group Presents a Panel Discussion: "South Sudan: What went wrong? Can it be fixed?"

DATE: Wednesday, Nov. 26, 2014

TIME: 17:00 pm - 19:00 pm

LOCATION: St. Paul's university, Alumni amphitheater, Guigues Hall, 223 Main street, Ottawa

ASG website: www.africastudygroup.ca

Twitter: @AfricStudyGroup

Individuals present: 23

Constant Mudek, Paul Dole, Joseph Coppolino, Lalith Gunaratne, Paul Maillet, Ron Rose, Yves Morneau, Kendal Rust, John Cartwright, Tag Elkhazin, Louis Guay, George Jacoby, Ian Ferguson, Richard Weeks, Ronnie Bates, Don Stephenson, Gwen Temmel (3 more missed the list)

Panelists:

Hüstin Laku, Laurent Charette, and moderator Aubrey Morantz

Main topic:

The current crisis in South Sudan, starting in December 2013 and continuing at this time despite gaining independence from Sudan in 2011 and attempts at solidifying a peaceful resolution within the country.

Overview:

To introduce the discussion, the moderator presented a brief history of Sudan and South Sudan covering the region before and after the independence of South Sudan in 2011 as well as the most recent outbreak of violence of the past year between supporters of the President and ex-Vice President in South Sudan.

Next, an abbreviated version of the VICE video documentary on South Sudan was shown, presenting images and ongoing stories of the current conflict (see link below).

The panel discussion was then opened with a review of the video (showing atrocities and violence) while addressing the possibility for peace talks to succeed in the country. The panelists agreed that the video was an accurate portrayal of the conflict, with tens of thousands of South Sudanese already killed in the violence and some two million displaced. However, there was no consensus on

whether the conflict was chiefly a power struggle between the two principal South Sudanese leaders, or an ethnic conflict between the two principal tribal groups. One participant stated that the people in power may want to maintain at least a low level of conflict until the next elections in order to bolster their prospect of winning a majority.

In an analysis of the constitution of South Sudan, participants in the audience and on the panel highlighted the fact that the constitution which was drafted with outside advice concentrated power in the hands of a strong executive president, which was bound to be contentious.

Given the rivalries among African member states of the regional organization IGAD which is conducting the mediation efforts, African Union leaders may not have peace in South Sudan as their overriding concern - thus disabling peace talks as they are being conducted. One extreme view expressed was that the AU is a group of dictators, that tribalism is a major factor in the region, and that self interest and bias continually affect the process of inter-state relations in Africa (and the rest of the world). Another participant noted that without a credible peace process conducted by professional and impartial mediators, there can be no credible peace agreement in the region.

Due to the large oil reserves in South Sudan and the dependence of both South Sudan and the Republic of Sudan on oil revenues, the discussion could not be complete without addressing the issues of who is benefiting and what effect the conflict is having on the economy in the region. Due to the conflict, both countries are experiencing severe economic hardship: oil revenues for South Sudan and transit fees for Sudan have been reduced to a trickle. It was noted in passing that the Canadian company which in the 1990s had initially developed the major oilfield and established the multinational consortium to pump the oil out, had sold its last 25% interest in 2002, leaving three state-owned Asian companies (from China, India, and Malaysia) as the principal partners in the consortium.

Looking forward, participants and panelists discussed the possibility of a federal state in South Sudan. One audience member with a great deal of experience related to federalism presented a strong case that federalism would be the only viable solution to make South Sudan a stable state. However; the kind of federalism has yet to be defined by South Sudanese themselves. How to develop and to create a stable form of federalism has yet to be seen. Are there strong leaders within South Sudan who can forge a nation made of many different groups? Some contend that there is a lack of civil leadership, or that South Sudan lacks many of the indicators that seem to have been present in other states in Africa which have prospered since independence.

Whatever the solution, the somewhat optimistic view of participants was that national reconciliation is still an option and hopefully, that this last year's conflict will soon come to an end.

Links for more information:

Youtube video link, full version of VICE documentary:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lDSu8wlQG6c>

BBC link :

http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30209472?mkt_tok=3RkMMJWWff9wsRokv6%2FKde%2FhmjTEU5z17%2BkqUaK%2FhIkz2EFye%2BLIHETpodcMTcRiNrnYDBceEJhgyQJxPr3DJNUN0ddxRhbkDQ%3D%3D