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General Assembly 4

Resolving border disputes between South Sudan and Sudan



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Introduction

South Sudan's declaration of independence from Sudan on July 9, 2011, marked the formation of the world's newest nation. However, the delineation of the international border between the two countries, established at the time of Sudan's independence from the United Kingdom in 1956, has been a persistent source of conflict. This border spans approximately 1,240 miles and encompasses eight contentious areas, prominently including the Abyei Area.

The delineation of this border in 1956 disregarded the complex tribal and religious affiliations that exist between the populations of North and South Sudan.

Consequently, numerous disputes emerged along the border due to the lack of consideration for these cultural and ethnic ties.

Over a decade since South Sudan gained independence, the border region continues to be plagued by recurring violence and clashes, forcing inhabitants to abandon their homes in the face of escalating insecurity. Various factors contribute to these disputes, notably the presence of valuable natural resources, such as hydrocarbon reserves, located in the border region. Competition for control and access to these resources exacerbates tensions, amplifying the conflict between the two nations.

The border disputes quickly rose international attention and cooperation. Various countries and organisations joined the United Nations-led effort over time, with the goal of achieving rapid peace and unity in the region.

Definition of Key Terms

Border dispute

a disagreement between countries about where the border should be drawn, and thus which region belongs to whom.

Clash

a clash is a violent confrontation between opposing parties, these could for instance be countries or ethnical groups.

Socio-economic status

is the sociological and economic standing of a country or group.

Ethnic group

a community of people who share common cultural, linguistic, or ancestral characteristics that distinguish them from others within a larger society.



Referendum

a referendum is a direct vote in which the entire electorate is invited to either accept or reject a particular proposal, law, or constitutional amendment.

Civil War

a violent conflict within a country where opposing groups engage in warfare, often driven by ideological, political, ethnic, or socioeconomic differences, seeking control or independence.

Secession

an act of territory or region separating from an existing nation to become an independent state.

CPA

Stands for Comprehensive Peace Agreement and was implemented to end the Civil War in Sudan.

JBVMM

Stands for Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and was established to monitor and verify compliance with the CPA, specifically concerning the demilitarisation of the Abyei Area and the withdrawal of armed forces from the region. It comprised military personnel from both the Sudanese government and the Sudanese Peoples's Liberation Movement (SPLM), as well as observers from the United Nations and the African Union.

AAA

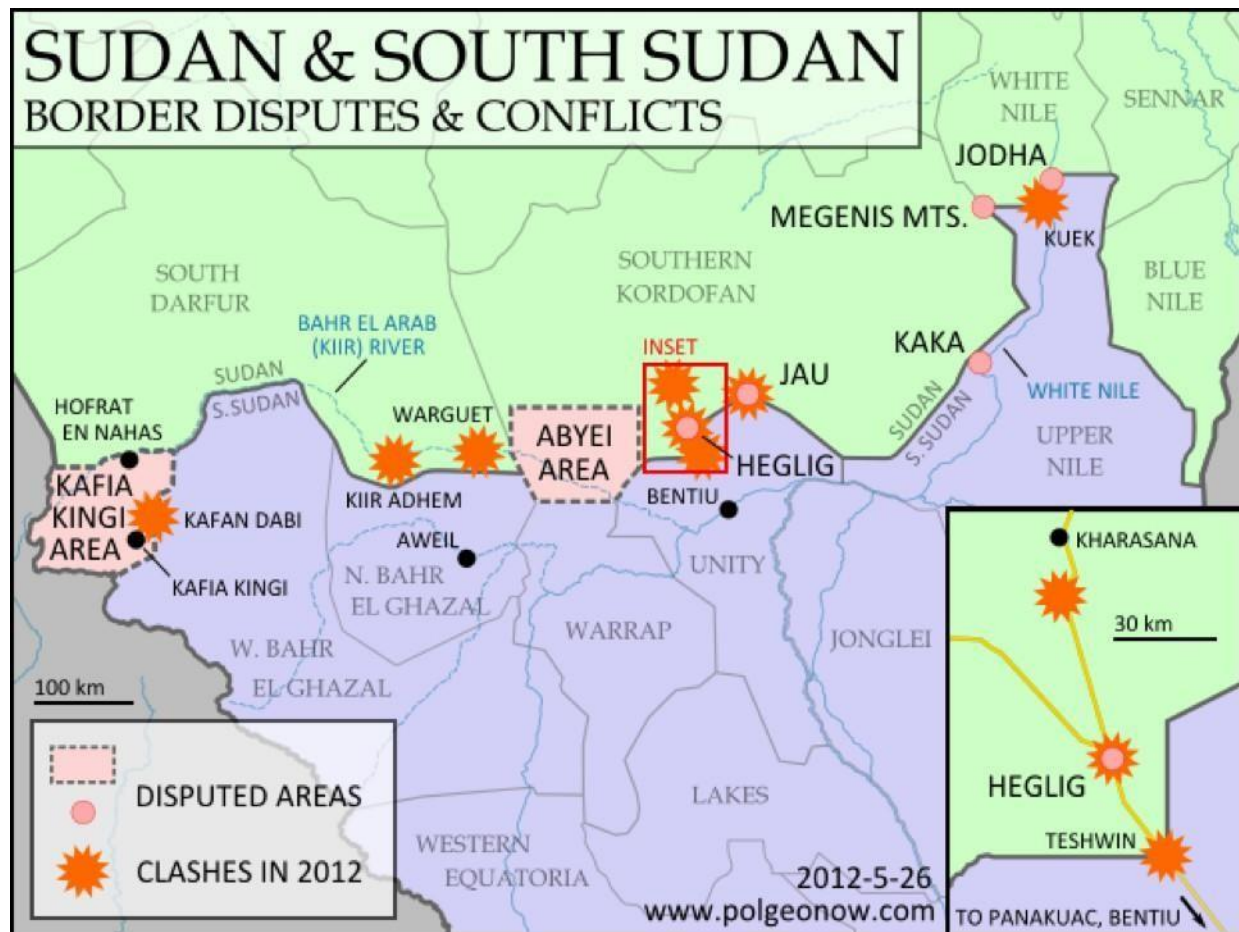
Stands for Abyei Administrative Area which is the most important region regarding the border conflict.

RSF

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan is a paramilitary force. Initially formed from elements of the Janjaweed militia, the RSF is known for its involvement in various internal conflicts, border security, and has been accused of human rights abuses in Sudan. It is considered a powerful and influential force within the country.



General Overview



Since South Sudan gained independence, the border region has experienced clashes between different groups in various locations. This report will focus on the two most significant disputes, with particular attention given to the Abyei Administrative Area.

To understand the border disputes in more detail, one must first familiarise oneself with the socio-economic status of the region. Before South Sudan's independence, Sudan was the largest country on the African continent. Many different ethnic groups were at home here and lived mostly from livestock farming. Due to the abundance of oil, Sudan's economy was secure both regionally and internationally. The valuable oil fields were mainly located in the south of Sudan and were linked to the companies in the north via pipelines.

When South Sudan became independent, various conflicts arose.

On the one hand, Sudan now lacked a large part of the oil fields and South Sudan pipelines to transport the oil and thus was not engaged in international trade.

The region of Abyei and around Heglig were now centres of conflict, as both states wanted to claim these regions with valuable oil reserves for themselves.

The clashes were fueled by the various ethnic groups. The Ngok Dinka community predominates in Abyei, but the Misseriya pastoralists are spreading in the part north

of the Bahr El Arab River. Especially in the dry season, the two communities meet in search of pastures and water.

The first conflict between the two states occurred from March to September 2012 when South Sudan invaded Heglig, an oil town in the border region. When South Sudan became independent, Sudan took control of Heglig. Because of a disagreement over oil sites, the states decided not to share them. South Sudan defended its invasion by claiming it was responding to earlier attacks by Sudan. Nevertheless, the UN and Sudan denounced it as an act of aggression. After seven months of violent clashes, Sudan regained total control over Heglig and disrupted many towns deep within South Sudanese territory.

After decades of civil war in Sudan, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was introduced in 2005 to guarantee friendly negotiations between the divided north and south of the country. In it, the Abyei region was granted a special status which allowed for a referendum in which the inhabitants living there were allowed to decide independently which region they wanted to belong to, regardless of the referendum in 2011 which ultimately led to the secession of South Sudan. It was planned that the two referendums would take place simultaneously, but as the two parties, the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, could not agree on Abyei residency requirements, an official referendum has not taken place to this day.

This led to the Sudanese army occupying the region on 1 June 2011.

Supported by Misseriya Militias, the SAF launched a full-scale military assault on Abyei against Abyei's police force aligned with the SPLA on 20 May 2011. Due to better equipped armed forces, it was easy for the SAF to occupy the entire region in a short time. However, this was followed by many back-clashes.

Within a short time, the UN immediately called on Sudan to leave the region immediately and created the peacekeeper organization UNISFA for this purpose.

The state was also criticised regionally, especially by the Ngok Dinka clan.

Negotiations in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa were supposed to help, but they did not get very far here either, as the two states accused each other of attacking each other. It was impossible to determine who was right in this case due to the blurred borderline.

The first steps in response to the UN calls were taken by South Sudan, who withdrew its police force. After further criticism, dedicated to Sudan, the state also withdrew its armed forces in Abyei on 30 May.

Over the years, there have been repeated clashes between the various groups in Abyei. In 2013, an unofficial referendum was held in which it became clear that most of the population living there wanted to belong to South Sudan. This has not yet happened due to the opposing Misseriya community.

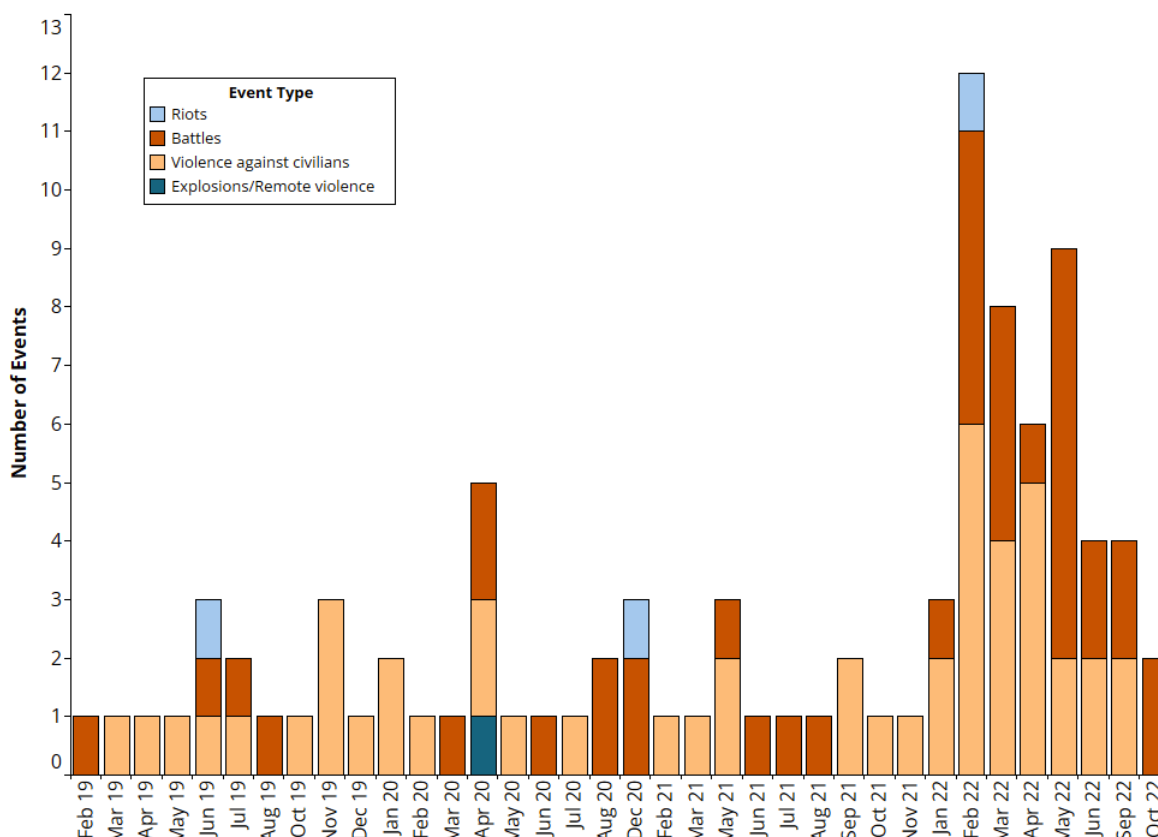
The AAA is still a disputed territory and has seen more and more unrest, especially in recent years. Since April 2023 and thus the outbreak of the civil war in Sudan, the conflict situation has naturally shifted to the interior of Sudan itself. "The Sudan crisis has 'effectively put on hold' political dispute over Abyei", according to UN News in November 2023. Although this is a positive aspect, new problems are also emerging. The RSF is now for example getting closer to Abyei, controlling parts of



the border. There are growing concerns that new groups will soon claim the Abyei area for themselves, making peace negotiations even more difficult in the future. Additionally, surveys prove the increased violence in Abyei in recent years. Even though UNISFA is still present in the region, the number of violent events has never been so high as in 2022.

Political Violence in Abyei

2019 - 2022



So, although negotiations are still taking place and UNISFA is on the ground to keep the situation under control, these measures are not reflected in clashes. Explanations for this may include the arrival of new stakeholders such as the RSF or the more frequent clashes between the various groups due to the disappearance of grazing land. The absence of a functional administration in Abyei complicates peaceful livestock movement and further leads to political stalemates between Sudan and South Sudan. Despite attempts to establish interim administrations, disputes over nominees and delayed meetings stalled progress. Clashes between Ngok Dinka and Misseriya further highlight the deep-seated animosity between the communities, complicating peace efforts.



Timeline

2005

January 9: Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed, ending the Second Sudanese Civil War. The agreement establishes a framework for South Sudan's independence but leaves border demarcation issues unresolved.

2011

June 27: UN Interim Security Force in Abyei (UNISFA) established by the Security Council (SC).

July 9: South Sudan gains independence from Sudan following a referendum in which the majority voted for secession.

July 30: Agreement between Sudan and South Sudan for a border-monitoring support mechanism in Abyei.

2012

January 22: South Sudan halts oil production due to disputes with Sudan. *March 26:* Clashes erupt over the Heglig oil fields (Panthou in South Sudan), leading to military confrontations between Sudan and South Sudan.

September 27: Sudan and South Sudan sign agreements on various issues, including oil and border security.

October 24: AU and Security Council urges resolution of Abyei status within six weeks

November 16: UNISFA mandate renewed (this has happened many times over the years), urging the activation of monitoring mechanisms and establishing a demilitarised zone.

2013

Tensions persist in the Abyei region, leading to sporadic clashes between communities aligned with either Sudan or South Sudan, particularly involving ethnic groups like the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya.

2015

Sudan rejects the validity of a unilateral referendum held by the Ngok Dinka ethnic group in Abyei, where an overwhelming majority votes to join South Sudan.

2016

March 21: Roadmap Agreement signed between Sudan and South Sudan.

2017

May 15: UNISFA mandate renewed for another year with reduced troop numbers.



2019

Sudanese transitional authorities' express willingness to resolve outstanding issues with South Sudan, signalling renewed commitment to peaceful negotiations.

2021

November 15: UNISFA's mandate extended due to a military coup in Sudan, despite intermittent discussions and commitments to resolve border disputes, no significant breakthroughs are achieved.

2023

November 6: Sudan crisis has 'effectively put on hold' political dispute over Abyei, according to UN News.

Major Parties involved

Sudan with NCP

Sudan, ruled by the National Congress Party, is evidently one of the two conflict partners. The country is still the largest in Africa in terms of area and wants to maintain the borders implemented in 1956. Time and again, it claims disputed regions on the border, driven by the fear of losing its important oil reserves. The NCP is mainly sustained by Misseriya militias and the SAF. The NCP proposed two options for Abyei's future: involving the Misseriya in a future referendum, likely rejected by the SPLM, or creating an 'integrated area,' also anticipated to be refused by the SPLM. The term "integrated area" hereby refers to a proposed arrangement where Abyei would have a distinct administrative structure with joint administration that integrates with both Sudan and South Sudan.

SAF

The Sudanese Armed Forces are the military of Sudan since its independence in 1956. As the military arm of the Sudanese government, SAF holds control over these contested areas, defending Sudan's territorial integrity and strategic interests. It engages in military operations in these regions, enforcing government policies and contributing to tensions and conflicts with forces from South Sudan or local rebel groups.

Misseriya

The Misseriya, a nomadic Arab tribe, have traditionally used the Abyei region for grazing their livestock. They have historical ties to Sudan and often resist attempts to integrate Abyei into South Sudan. Misseriya claims to exclusive possess Abyei, for instance and threaten the possibility of cohabitation with the Ngok Dinka, fearing lack of pastureland.

Over time, Misseriya militias were formed and came to Sudan's aid in the clashes. They carried out assassinations, for example.



South Sudan and SPLM

In South Sudan, the government's structure suggests a multiparty political system, yet the reality diverges significantly due to the prolonged civil war and the historical absence of democratic practices. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), a former rebel movement, continues to wield immense influence, maintaining a strong grip on the country's political landscape. Despite the theoretical existence of multiple parties, the SPLM remains the predominant force, controlling all branches of government, including the army, SPLA.

For the future of Abyei the SPLM wants it to belong to South Sudan, considering the unofficial referendum in 2013.

SPLA

The South Sudan People's Defence Forces (formerly, the Sudan People's Liberation Army) is the army of South Sudan. Being the army, it fought mainly against the SAF and Misseriya militias. It is hereby sustained by ethnic groups, such as Ngok Dinka.

Ngok Dinka

The people of Nook Dinka form the largest ethnic group inhabitants in the Abyei region. They have historical ties to South Sudan and often express a desire to be part of South Sudan. The Ngok Dinka tribe's primary competitors are the Misseriya. They fear that the Misseriya will encroach on their grazing land.

AU and UN

The African Union and United Nations play an important part in facilitating communication between the two states. Since conflict rose both have worked together to promote dialogue and peacekeeping.

UNISFA

The United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei was established by the UN Security Council in 2011 to oversee the security and stability in the Abyei region, which is a disputed area along the border between South Sudan and Sudan.

UNISFA's mandate includes tasks such as monitoring the withdrawal of forces, ensuring security, facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid, and supporting the demilitarisation of the Abyei area.

UNISFA's mandate has been repeatedly renewed over the years due to the ongoing conflicts.

Russia and China

These global powers have influenced the UN Security Council, impeding decisive action to address the escalating tensions.

Russia's vested interest in Sudan stems from robust economic and military ties. Moscow maintains a strategic partnership with Sudan, involving arms sales, infrastructure development, and energy cooperation. Sudan presents economic opportunities through oil investments and access to African markets, aligning with Russia's expansionist agenda.

On the other hand, China holds extensive economic interests in both Sudan and South Sudan. Beijing has substantial investments in Sudan's oil sector and infrastructure projects. Ensuring stability in the region is crucial for China to safeguard its economic ventures and resource access. Hence, China prioritizes regional stability to protect its investments and maintain favourable economic ties with both nations.

Their vested interests underscore the complexity of the conflict, hindering swift international intervention to resolve the border dispute between Sudan and South Sudan.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

The situation, which quickly gained international attention, is complex and difficult to resolve.

Even though international organisations, such as the UN, and states, such as Ethiopia continually attempt to find solutions to promote safety, little results are made.

During 2011 Sudan and South Sudan agreed to establish a border-monitoring support mechanism in Abyei, pursuant to the agreement establishing the "Safe Demilitarised Border Zone" and the "Joint Political and Security Mechanism." Furthermore, the Security Council, by its resolution 1990 of 27 June 2011, responded to the urgent situation in Sudan's Abyei region by establishing the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). The Security Council was concerned by the escalating tensions and population displacement. UNISFA has been tasked with monitoring the border between Sudan and South Sudan and ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid and is authorized to use force to protect civilians and humanitarian workers in Abyei.

In April 2012 the Peace and Security Council adopted a communication that included a "roadmap," which, inter-alia, called for an end to hostilities between all the parties in the border area, including aerial bombardments, within 48 hours. Subsequently Peacekeeping groups were launched, peace negotiations started, and reports were increasingly published.

Further agreements have been signed over the years, mostly concerning the safety of civilians and the safe promotion of humanitarian aid. One of those contracts is for example the Roadmap Agreement signed on 21st March 2016.



In the past, it was not possible to intervene clearly to help contain the conflict. Attempts to actively solve issues, such as the 2013 referendum in Abyei, were often blocked by opposing groups. The international focus was thus on protecting and supporting the civilian population in the area, for example through UNISFA.

Possible solutions

Resolving the intricate border dispute between Sudan and South Sudan, particularly concerning the highly contested Abyei region, demands a multifaceted approach considering the complexities and competing interests of both nations.

Possible solutions to address the Abyei issue and broader border disputes involve:

Firstly, conducting a fair and internationally supervised referendum in the Abyei region could offer its inhabitants the opportunity to determine their political future. This approach respects the principle of self-determination and could provide a democratic path for residents to choose their sovereignty or affiliation with either Sudan or South Sudan.

Secondly, sustained and inclusive dialogue mediated by international bodies such as the African Union or the United Nations is vital. This dialogue should focus on fostering mutual understanding, compromise, and negotiation between the governments of Sudan and South Sudan to find a mutually acceptable resolution regarding the Abyei region.

Thirdly, establishing a clear and mutually agreed-upon demarcation of the border, including the Abyei area, can alleviate uncertainties and disputes over territorial claims. Definitive boundaries through joint efforts would help in mitigating tensions.

Addressing economic concerns is crucial. Negotiating fair and equitable arrangements for resource exploitation and revenue sharing, particularly the oil reserves in the Abyei region, can significantly reduce economic-based tensions.

Developing robust security arrangements and implementing measures to ensure peace and stability in the Abyei region is imperative. Creating demilitarised zones and deploying neutral peacekeeping forces could mitigate security concerns and prevent conflicts.

In summary, resolving the Abyei area's status and broader border disputes necessitates a combination of diplomatic negotiations, legal frameworks,

international mediation, and inclusive approaches. The focus should be on addressing historical, political, economic, and security concerns while prioritising the interests and wishes of the local population and fostering mutual trust and cooperation between Sudan and South Sudan.

Biography

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