

Future Scenarios for the Abyei Dispute Between Sudan and South Sudan: Permanent Solutions or the Continuation of the Conflict?

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Abstract

This study examines the border conflicts between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan, which seceded in 2011. The introduction provides a general overview of ongoing border disputes across Africa. Later, a detailed framework is developed around the specific territorial disputes between the two countries. The study discusses the historical background and root causes of the conflict, followed by an analysis of the efforts made to resolve it, including national and regional dimensions. Furthermore, the impact of the dispute on national, regional, and international security is evaluated from a security perspective. Predictions regarding the future relationship between the two countries are also provided, along with recommendations for conflict resolution. In conclusion, the study explores the potential role of the Republic of Türkiye in facilitating a settlement, given its successful diplomatic relations with both Sudan and South Sudan, as well as in the region.

Keywords: Africa, Sudan, South Sudan, Türkiye, Border Disputes, Abyei Region.

Introduction

Border conflicts between African countries are among the most prominent manifestations of political and security instability on the continent and fuel ongoing civil wars and regional conflicts. The main causes of these conflicts are several interconnected factors, including historical, economic, ethnic, and geopolitical factors. Foremost among these are the borders inherited from colonialism. Most of the current borders were imposed by European colonial powers (particularly Britain, France and Belgium) during the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, without considering ethnic or geographical realities. This led to the division of peoples and tribes across different states or the integration of warring groups into a single state. This situation can be described as a failure to establish

proper borders. Colonial borders were not accurately drawn on the ground; instead, they were often based on superficial maps or vague agreements, leading to subsequent conflicts over border areas. In addition, political and geopolitical reasons, economic reasons, ethnic and cultural reasons, and weak state institutions are also among the factors involved.

However, the presence of natural resources such as oil, gold, diamonds or water in border regions makes control of these areas a direct source of conflict. Indeed, the dispute over the Abyei Region between Sudan and South Sudan, which is the subject of our article, is one of the most prominent examples in Africa. Sudan gained independence from the British in 1956 as Africa's largest country in terms of area. However, immediately after independence, tensions between the north (predominantly Muslim and Arab) and the south (predominantly Christian and adhering to traditional African religions) began to escalate rapidly.

The war, which began in 1955, a year before independence, erupted over the south's demands for autonomy and the exclusion of the region, and ended with the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, which granted regional autonomy to the south. After the abolition of southern autonomy and the implementation of Islamic law throughout the country, the conflict resumed in 1983. To end the war, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed between the parties in 2005. This agreement was signed in Naivasha between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (South). The agreement stipulated that the region would have the right to self-determination after a transition period for the south. Accordingly, in 2011, southern Sudanese were granted the right to a Self-Determination Referendum, and in January 2011, an overwhelming majority of South Sudanese voted for secession. Subsequently, on 9 July 2011, the Republic of South Sudan officially declared its independence from Sudan, becoming an independent country. Thus, Africa's longest civil war, which had caused millions of deaths and large-scale displacement, came to an end.

However, despite mutual recognition, relations between Sudan and South Sudan have remained tense at times. These disagreements mainly concern disputed border issues (such as Abyei), the sharing of oil wealth, and security matters. Unresolved issues between the two countries, such as border demarcation, the status of the disputed Abyei region, and resource distribution, have caused tensions to continue.

Based on the above, this article discusses the Abyei region, which is the subject of tension between the two countries. In this context, the strategic importance and structure of the region are explained, followed by an examination of the historical background of the dispute. Subsequently, the reasons for the dispute and the regional and international efforts to resolve it are discussed. Furthermore, the regional and international dimensions of the dispute are addressed, discussing its impact on national, regional, and international security. The article also considers how the dispute may shape relations between the two countries. Finally, predictions are made about the future of the dispute, discussing the role that the Republic of Türkiye, which has constructive relations with both countries, could play in resolving it.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical case study design, addressing the Abyei issue as a contemporary phenomenon within its natural context. The methodology employed is a systematic documentary research approach, where the analysis relies primarily on collecting and analyzing secondary sources to construct a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the conflict.

This study aims to answer the following questions:

Question 1: Will the Abyei issue pose a threat to the stability of bilateral relations between the two countries in the future?

Question 2: What are the expected future scenarios for the Abyei issue given the ongoing dispute between Sudan and South Sudan?

Question 3: What Can Türkiye Do to Resolve the Dispute?

The main methodological components are as follows:

Historical-Tracing Analysis: Tracing the roots of the conflict from the colonial era, through successive civil wars, to the post-secession period and its accompanying challenges.

Policy and Agreement Analysis: Examining the legal and political framework governing the conflict, including the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005), the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling (2009), and the role of UN resolutions and regional initiatives.

Descriptive-Interpretive Analysis: Describing the geographical, demographic, and economic characteristics of the region, and interpreting the underlying causes of the conflict and its multi-layered repercussions.

Prospective Analysis: This section presents future scenarios and recommendations for conflict resolution, while also considering the potential role of regional actors such as Türkiye.

Therefore, the methodology is qualitatively analytical, aiming to synthesize knowledge from a wide range of literature and documents, rather than relying solely on collecting primary field data. This makes it a theoretical-applied study focused on contextual and policy analysis.

The study also relied on the concept of national and regional security and their overlap in addressing the issue.

The Theoretical Framework Related to the Concept of Security

The article adopts a comprehensive, multi-level approach to security analysis, moving beyond the narrow, traditional view that focuses solely on military state security. This approach can be categorized under the framework of "multi-level security analysis," where threats and challenges are examined at interacting levels:

State Security (National Level): This section analyzes how the conflict threatens the internal stability of both states (Sudan &South Sudan) by exacerbating ethnic conflicts, triggering internal displacement, and fueling competition for strategic economic resources (oil and land).

Regional Security: This section assesses the potential for the conflict to escalate and its impact on the stability of the wider Horn of Africa region. It also examines the practical challenges of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and the role of regional organizations such as the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in crisis management.

International (Systemic) Security: This approach is based on the classification adopted by the UN Security Review, which considers conflict a threat to international peace and security. The analysis expands this concept to include the burden on global humanitarian resources, potential risks to energy supplies, and challenges to international law and peacekeeping operations.

Human Security: This approach integrates elements of the human security concept by focusing on the hu-

manitarian dimensions of the crisis, such as the protection of civilians, mass displacement, and food and livelihood insecurity for local communities (such as the Misseriya and Dinka Ngok). This integrated, multi-layered analysis reflects a contemporary understanding of complex border conflicts, which cannot be isolated from interactions at the local, national, regional, and international levels. It demonstrates how a conflict over border resources can escalate into a comprehensive security issue that affects the stability of an entire regional system and threatens the well-being of the population.

1 - Subject of the Dispute: The Abyei Region

Abyei is considered a disputed and oil-rich region between Sudan and South Sudan. Historically, Abyei was one of Sudan's most important oil-producing regions before South Sudan's secession. Some sources indicate that the Abyei field is the largest field in Sudan in terms of production. After South Sudan's secession, Sudan lost 75% of its oil reserves to South Sudan (Ibrahim, 2005, p.106). Consequently, control of this oil-rich region has remained a significant point of contention between Sudan and South Sudan.

Generally speaking, Abyei holds significant strategic importance due to its geographical location, natural resources (particularly oil), and the complex tribal and administrative disputes surrounding it. It is a crucial region in terms of the stability or instability of relations between Sudan and South Sudan. The Abyei region is a disputed area between Sudan and South Sudan and has a complex and diverse demographic structure (Musa, 2009, p. 218). The region's population consists of a mixture of Arab and African tribes. As mentioned, the Abyei region, which is a subject of dispute between Sudan and South Sudan, is rich in natural resources, demonstrating its economic importance.

Abyei is a region rich in oil and is considered one of Sudan's largest fields (before secession). Oil is the region's most important economic resource, and part of the extracted oil is exported to Khartoum and Port Sudan via pipelines. Oil resources have long been a major point of contention in the dispute over the region's ownership (Ishaq, 2014, p. 24). On the other hand, the Abyei region, covering an area of 10,546 square kilometres (4,072 square miles), has rich water resources, including two rivers that can be used for irrigation to support agricultural activities. These water resources contribute to the fertility of the soil and the potential for developing large-scale agricultural projects. Although sources do not provide definitive information about the forests in Abyei, Sudan as a whole has significant forest resources (Qili, 2006, p. 89). It is assumed that Abyei, a former part of Sudan, is home to some of these forest resources, making Abyei a region of critical strategic and economic importance for both Sudan and South Sudan. Although stability and development in the region are thought to contribute to the effective use of these resources for the benefit of the population, they have been a subject of dispute between Sudan and South Sudan.

Although the region was granted special administrative status under the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, its final status remains a matter of dispute between the two countries. The Abyei issue is one of the most complex and sensitive issues between Sudan and South Sudan, and it remains a significant point of contention that has not been fully resolved even after South Sudan's secession in 2011. The strategic importance of the Abyei region stems from several key factors that have made it a sensitive point of contention between Sudan and South Sudan. The first is its geographical and geopolitical location. Abyei serves as a bridge between North and South Sudan, forming an important transit route and connection between the two regions, thus holding strategic importance (Musharaf, 2018, p. 98). The second is that it is an important grazing area. The region is characterised by rich pastures that are essential for

the movement of herders from the Arab Misseriya tribes in the north and the Ngok Dinka tribes in the south, making it a vital area for traditional economic activities and livelihood security (Musa, 2021, p. 47).

The third fundamental point is that it is a region rich in natural resources. As mentioned above, Abyei is located in the oil-rich Maglad Basin and has historically contributed significantly to Sudan's crude oil production. Although some reports indicate that reserves are nearing depletion, the presence of a major oil pipeline (the Great Nile Pipeline) passing through Abyei makes the region vital for exporting oil to other areas, thereby increasing its economic importance (Craze, 2011, p. 59). Views on the region's identity differ between the Arab Misseriya tribe (seen by the North as a tribe settled in Abyei) and the Ngok Dinka tribe (seen by the South as the region's permanent indigenous inhabitants) (Deng, 2011, p. 402). Therefore, an important detail that needs to be stated here is that this disagreement over the identity of the population and the right to vote in any future referendum further complicates the situation. Abyei is inhabited by the Ngok Dinka (South Sudanese) and the Arab Misseriya (Sudanese), each of whom has a different vision of the region's allegiance and rights. Historically, the region has been a shared living space between these tribes.

The Ngok Dinka are a South African ethnic group recognised as the indigenous people of the region. This group views the Misseriya as temporary herders. The Misseriya, however, are a nomadic Arab herding tribe who regard Abyei as part of their traditional grazing lands. The Misseriya view the Dinka as guests in the region. The Abyei region has witnessed occasional clashes, usually over land and grazing disputes, between the Ngok Dinka tribe and Twic Dinka militias from South Sudan, and between the Misseriya and the Ngok Dinka. These clashes have worsened recently due to the ongoing war in Sudan.

Due to its strategic location and oil wealth, the region has witnessed repeated conflicts and disputes that have significantly affected its demographics,

including large population displacements. For example, in 2011, approximately 50,000 residents of Abyei, mostly Dinka, fled to the south (Bashir, 1971, p. 219). Consequently, there have been mutual accusations between the warring parties of attempting to settle specific population groups in order to alter the demographic structure and influence the outcome of any future referendum on the region's allegiance. This is because, following the peace agreements, large parts of the region were rebuilt, and attempts were made to return some displaced persons.

The two countries appealed to the International Court of Justice to resolve the dispute. In 2009, the Hague Court ruled on Abyei, returning significant oil rights in the region to the North and awarding most of the land to the South. Specifically, the Court awarded two large fields in the Abyei region (Heglig and Bamboo) to the North and one small field to the South (Al-Nour, 2012, p. 63). It could be argued that this ruling not only failed to resolve the dispute but also caused the situation to escalate further. Consequently, the Abyei region remains a diverse area in terms of ethnicity and culture, still facing significant challenges related to conflicts over land and resources. This situation directly affects the stability and structure of the population and continues to be a pending dispute between Sudan and South Sudan.

2 - Historical Background of the Dispute

The dispute between Sudan and South Sudan has deep historical roots dating back to the British colonial period, which was marked by decades of armed conflict and ultimately led to the secession of South Sudan. The history of this dispute can be summarised in the following key points.

2.1. The British Colonial Period

Britain divided Sudan into two separate regions, north and south, and administered it in this manner. This situation can be interpreted as the well-known British strategy of "divide and rule." Indeed, it declared the south a closed region and prohibited those without permission from travelling from the north to the south or vice versa. Furthermore, northerners were prohibited from taking up positions in the south, and missionary work was encouraged in the south to prevent the spread of Islam. It is important to note here that while the north was predominantly inhabited by Muslim Arabs, the south was predominantly inhabited by Christian and animist Africans (Artin, 1911, p. 189). In 1946, Britain implemented the North's pressure to unite the two regions. However, this decision angered the southern elite, who had been educated in English and felt marginalised after Arabic became the administrative language in the South (Farhati, 2016, p. 79).

2.2. The First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972)

Before Sudan gained full independence in 1956, officers in the southern army rebelled in 1955. The reasons for this rebellion included the southerners feeling marginalised, demands for regional autonomy, and ethnic and religious differences between the north and south. The war ended with the signing of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement in 1972, which granted the south a degree of autonomy (Hamamci, 2020, p. 140).

2.3. Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005)

In 1983, a new rebellion broke out in the south under the leadership of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and its armed wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Army. The reasons for this were stated as the Sudanese government's termination of the Addis Ababa Agreement and its division of the south into three states. Furthermore, one of the most important factors driving southerners to revolt was the declaration of Islamic law by the ruling power at the time. This war ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. This agreement granted the

south a six-year period of autonomy, followed by a referendum on self-determination in the region (Idris, 2011, p. 13).

2.4. The Secession of South Sudan (2011)

In accordance with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, a referendum was held in January 2011, in which the majority of South Sudanese voted overwhelmingly in favour of secession from the north. Subsequently, on 9 July 2011, the Republic of South Sudan declared its independence and became a separate country (Young, 2014, p. 30).

2.5. Post-Secession Challenges

Despite the secession, tensions and disagreements between Sudan and South Sudan have persisted for various reasons. This is because there are still unresolved border issues between the two countries. For example, there are still disputed border areas such as the oil-rich Abyei region. In addition, there are disagreements over the sharing of oil. Disagreements over transit fees for southern oil passing through Sudanese territory have led to economic disputes. On the other hand, mutual accusations of supporting rebels on each other's territory have also been raised from time to time.

Two years after independence, a devastating civil war broke out between rival groups within South Sudan (forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and the opposition led by Riek Machar) (Agha, 2011, p. 89). This war caused the loss of thousands of lives in South Sudan and forced millions of people to flee to neighbouring countries, including Sudan.

As can be seen, the history of the dispute between Sudan and South Sudan is a long and multifaceted conflict story, the roots of which date back to the colonial era and which continues to create difficulties even after the South's secession. The conflict in South Sudan dates back decades before its independence in 2011 and is intertwined with complex historical, political, social and economic factors.

This has been one of the main reasons behind the

subsequent emergence of the dispute between the two countries. Indeed, Abyei has remained a disputed area claimed by both countries. A brief war broke out over the region in 2012, and the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) was established to maintain peace. Furthermore, in 2013, the Ngok Dinka clan, who identify as South Sudanese, held a unilateral referendum in which an overwhelming majority voted to join South Sudan, but the African Union and the United Nations did not recognise the results. Finally, looking at the current situation in the region, despite the presence of an international peacekeeping force (), the status of Abyei has not yet been finalised. South Sudan largely controls the region (Al-Ladawi, 2005, p.142).

3 - Reasons for the Dispute

The dispute between Sudan and South Sudan over the Abyei region is complex and multifaceted, and its main causes can be summarised as follows.

3.1. Contested Status and Geographical Location

Abyei is located on the uncertain border between Sudan and South Sudan and acts as a bridge between the north and south. This strategic location makes the region a constant point of tension. Furthermore, the region is rich in oil, making it economically important for both

Sudan and South Sudan. On the other hand, two main tribes live in Abyei: the Arab Misseriya, who lean towards the north, and the Ngok Dinka, who lean towards the south. The Misseriya are a semi-nomadic pastoralist tribe that moves seasonally through the region to graze their livestock. Sudan believes that the Misseriya tribe should have the right to vote in any referendum that will determine Abyei's fate (Juwayda, 2025).

The Ngok Dinka, as a settled tribe, view Abyei as their historical homeland and demand integration into South Sudan. South Sudan regards the Misseriya as temporary residents and therefore argues that they are not eligible to vote. Consequently, this disagreement over who is eligible to vote in the referendum to determine the region's fate lies at the heart of the problem. Furthermore, despite the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the civil war, the issue of border demarcation has not been definitively resolved, particularly in the Abyei region (Mikhail, 2019, p. 24).

This has left the region vulnerable to renewed tensions. Furthermore, in addition to the conflict between the two states, Abyei is also experiencing internal conflicts between different tribes. For example, conflicts between various Dinka groups and Misseriyas and Dinka, which are usually caused by disputes over resources such as land and water, are exacerbated by climate change (Mikhail, 2019, p. 98).

3.2. Failure to Implement Agreements and Lack of Trust

Despite international efforts to reach agreements and a solution (such as the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague), these have not been fully implemented, and the Abyei referendum has been suspended due to disagreement over the definition of "settled" in the region (Kamal, 2016, p. 79). This situation has led to a lack of trust between the parties, increased frustration, and contributed to ongoing violence. In short, the dispute over Abyei stems from a combination of historical claims, the region's economic importance (particularly oil), demographic and tribal complexities, and the failure to reach a lasting and effective political solution.

3.3. Colonial Legacy

During the Anglo-Egyptian administration, Sudan was treated separately as north and south. The north was predominantly Arab and Muslim, while the south was predominantly African, Christian and animist. This division led to uneven development and different poli-

cies. Furthermore, the north was the focus of the administration, while the south was neglected. This led to the marginalisation of southerners and made them feel excluded. During the

colonial period, the region's borders were drawn without regard to ethnic and cultural affiliations, which led to internal tensions (Kumm, 1910, p. 258).

3.4. Political and Economic Marginalisation

After gaining independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956, Sudan concentrated most of its power in northern Khartoum, increasing the southerners' sense of political and economic marginalisation. The demands of southerners began as simple requests for increased participation in public services, but later evolved into political demands for power sharing and federalism (Muhammad, 2023, p. 204). Subsequently, the discovery of oil in Sudan, particularly in the southern regions, exacerbated the conflict by increasing competition for control of resources.

3.5. Long Civil Wars

The first civil war in the country took place between 1955 and 1972. This war began just before Sudan's independence and lasted 17 years between the Sudanese government and the southern Anya Nya movement. It ended with the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, which granted autonomy to the south. The second civil war then took place between 1983 and 2005. This time, the civil war resumed after President Jaafar Nimeiri revoked the Addis Ababa Agreement and imposed Islamic law on the entire country, including the predominantly non-Muslim south. This war was led by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and its armed forces (SPLA), under the leadership of John Garang. It is considered one of the longest and bloodiest wars in Africa and witnessed major human rights violations. It ended in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which paved the way for a self-determination referendum (Yeoh, 2014, p. 49).

3.6. Independence and After

In January 2011, the majority of South Sudan's population (nearly 99%) voted to secede from Sudan, and on 9 July 2011, it officially declared its independence, becoming the world's newest country. Just two years after independence, in December 2013, a civil war broke out between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir (from the Dinka tribe) and his former deputy Riek Machar (from the Nuer tribe). The conflict quickly turned into an ethnic conflict between the Dinka and Nuer tribes, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths and the displacement of millions of people. Despite the signing of several peace agreements, the fighting continued intermittently, causing a catastrophic humanitarian crisis (Mohammed, 2014, p. 36).

Tribal tensions and conflicts, particularly between the Dinka and Nuer, have remained the main factors fueling the violence. The newly born state suffers from high levels of corruption and poor governance, which hinder development and contribute to instability. Therefore, control over land and resources, including oil, has remained a source of conflict (Yeoh & Jadin, p. 114). In short, the war in Sudan and South Sudan is the result of centuries of marginalisation, flawed colonial policies, conflicts over power and resources, and ethnic tensions that worsened after independence. 2016

4 - Efforts to Resolve the Dispute

The Abyei issue is one of the most prominent and complex problems in relations between Sudan and South Sudan and has been addressed in various agreements and resolution efforts. The most prominent of these agreements are as follows.

4.1. 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)

This agreement is a fundamental element in finding a solution to the Abyei issue and contains a special protocol for Abyei. The protocol envisaged granting Abyei a "special administrative status" under the control of

the Presidency of Sudan and holding a referendum to determine whether the region would remain part of Sudan or join South Sudan. The agreement stipulates that the Ngok Dinka and other Sudanese residing in Abyei shall be eligible to vote in this referendum (Al-Tawil, 2018, p. 63). However, despite these provisions, many issues remain unresolved, including border demarcation, resource sharing, and security arrangements.

4.2. 2009 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) Decision

Due to ongoing disputes over the demarcation of Abyei's borders, both parties resorted to international arbitration. The court ruled on the borders of Abyei, confirming the grazing rights of all tribes in the region and emphasising the need for peaceful coexistence. Although the decision was binding on both parties, some tribes, particularly the Misseriya, rejected it, claiming that they had not been sufficiently consulted (Bahij, 2014, p. 118).

4.3. Kadugli Agreements (January 2011)

These agreements were made with the aim of calming tensions and achieving reconciliation in the region, particularly after the violent incidents that occurred in early 2011 (Al-Sharbiny, 2011, p. 195).

4.4. Interim Security and Administrative Arrangements Agreement for Abyei (2011)

Following the escalation of violence and the Sudanese army's occupation of Abyei in May 2011, an agreement was reached to establish the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) to prevent violence and ensure stability. The agreement contained provisions on security arrangements, the return of displaced persons, and the establishment of a temporary joint administration for the region (Biaba, 2021, p. 78).

4.5. African Union and UN Proposals (2012)

In October 2013, the African Union proposed a referendum in Abyei without the participation of the Misseriya tribe. However, Sudan rejected this proposal.

This situation made it difficult to resolve the dispute through regional means and led to the issue being taken to the international level. In this context, the Security Council issued several resolutions concerning Abyei, most of which focused on extending the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and encouraging both parties to continue dialogue on the final status of the region. These resolutions (2024, 2075, 2550, and others) expanded UNISFA's mandate and emphasised the importance of facilitating the implementation of agreements and dialogue (Musa, 2013, p22).

Consequently, despite all these efforts and agreements, the final status of Abyei remains unresolved. Disagreements persist over voting rights in the proposed referendum, the region's definitive borders, resource sharing, and security arrangements. The recent conflict in Sudan (since April 2023) has significantly affected progress on this issue, and Abyei-, and border- related political issues have been suspended until further notice. However, efforts continue at the community level to reach local agreements, particularly to prevent tensions between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya tribes during the annual migration season.

5 - Regional and International Dimensions of the Dispute

The Abyei issue is one of the most complex and sensitive issues in relations between Sudan and South Sudan and has intertwined international and regional dimensions that affect the stability of the region as a whole. As stated, Abyei is a region with a "special administrative status" under the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that led to the secession of South Sudan. Nevertheless, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) has been operating in

the region since 2011 to maintain peace and facilitate dialogue between the parties. On the other hand, the UN Security Council has shown particular interest in the Abyei issue and, viewing the conflict as a threat to international peace and security, has issued periodic resolutions on the matter (Osama, 2015, p. 142).

There is international sympathy towards South Sudan on this issue. This sympathy arose particularly after the Ngok Dinka tribe organised a unilateral referendum in 2013 to join South Sudan, which was rejected by the international community (Musa, 2021, p. 79). Abyei is considered an oil-rich region that has attracted the attention of international powers seeking to secure energy resources, thereby increasing its strategic importance. The struggle for control over these resources adds another layer of complexity to the issue.

The dispute is inherently international in nature and poses challenges to international law in resolving border disputes and resource allocation (Mikhail, 2019, p. 24). Indeed, the ongoing conflict in Abyei has led to waves of displacement and refuge, placing a burden on international humanitarian organisations and necessitating international humanitarian intervention. It can therefore be stated that the conflict in the Abyei region, located on the border between Sudan and South Sudan, is a complex and strategically important issue that is significantly affected by regional and international developments.

Indeed, the establishment of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) is the most obvious indicator of this. This mission was established in 2011 after Sudanese forces occupied Abyei. Its primary mission is to protect civilians and monitor the demilitarised zone. The UN Security Council continues to renew UNISFA's mandate (the latest renewal was until 15 November 2025, pursuant to Resolution 2760 of 2024), emphasising the importance of maintaining peace and stability (Juwayda, 2025).

Furthermore, the United Nations has consistently called on Sudan and South Sudan to engage in con-

structive dialogue to determine the final status of Abyei and resolve outstanding border issues. UN officials have expressed concern that the ongoing civil war in Sudan (between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces) has hampered progress in these talks. The United Nations stresses the need to respect Abyei's demilitarised zone status and calls on both sides to withdraw their forces from the region. Consequently, concerns about the humanitarian situation in Abyei are mounting. Chief among these concerns are the influx of large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons fleeing the conflict in Sudan and tensions within local communities (Juwayda, 2025).

The United States is the author of the Security Council resolution on Abyei and supports the UN's efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region. It has expressed concern about the continued presence of armed groups from South Sudan and Sudan in Abyei, stating that this situation threatens Abyei's status as a demilitarised zone. Most Security Council members, including China, Russia and African countries (such as Mozambique, Algeria, Guyana and Sierra Leone), have called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict through dialogue and respect for Abyei's demilitarised status (Al-Kaabi, 2014, p216).

While this is the situation at the international level, at the regional level, a proposal has been put forward by the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP). The African Union supported this proposal, presented by the High-Level Implementation Panel in 2012, which called for a referendum to determine the final status of Abyei. The African Union condemned the unilateral "referendums" held in Abyei as unacceptable, irresponsible, and contrary to the decisions of the African Union Peace and Security Council (Al-Madini, 2012, p. 98). The African Union called on the Abyei communities to cooperate with UNISFA to maintain maximum peace and stability. It has also sought to find a lasting solution to the conflict by cooperating with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), but these efforts have encountered difficulties (Al-Baksh, 2021).

In general, the international and regional community has called for a peaceful resolution of the Abyei conflict through dialogue between Sudan and South Sudan, emphasising the importance of ensuring security and stability in the region and protecting civilians. However, the conflict in Sudan and ongoing tensions on the ground have prevented concrete progress in this regard. Consequently, Abyei remains a disputed region between Sudan and South Sudan, but no significant progress has been made in negotiations regarding its final status. Furthermore, it is difficult to say that a solution will be reached in the near future. The ongoing civil war in Sudan has negatively affected potential negotiations regarding Abyei, creating unfavourable conditions for political dialogue.

6 - Impact of the Dispute on National, Regional and International Security

When considered from a security perspective, it is possible to state that the conflict in the Abyei region, located on the border between Sudan and South Sudan, poses a serious threat to the national security of both countries. This is because Abyei has witnessed repeated violence between the Ngok Dinka (affiliated with South Sudan) and Misseriya (affiliated with Sudan) tribes, leading to loss of life and mass displacement. Abyei is of significant economic importance due to its oil reserves and fertile agricultural land. Competition for these resources fuels the conflict and further complicates the situation. On the other hand, the influx of large numbers of displaced persons and refugees from Sudan into Abyei has increased pressure on resources, leading to rising crime rates and a deteriorating humanitarian situation.

Moreover, the conflict over Abyei deepens ethnic and tribal divisions in both Sudan and South Sudan, weakening the concept of a unified national identity and threatening long-term stability. Indeed, elites in both countries are complicating the issue and causing instability in national security by politicising ethnic origins to serve their personal interests. In short, the ongoing conflict in the Abyei region is a major source of instability and violence that negatively affects the national security of both Sudan and South Sudan by intensifying disputes, worsening humanitarian conditions, fuelling ethnic tensions, and hindering efforts to reach a sustainable political solution. In addition, violent incidents still occur frequently between herders and farmers along the border, in addition to illegal activities and organised crime.

At the regional level, there is a risk that the conflict in Abyei could spread to neighbouring African countries, particularly given the region's long history of war and conflict, and therefore any escalation in Abyei could destabilise the region. On the other hand, African Union peacekeeping forces in Abyei also face challenges such as attacks on their positions in the region and equipment shortages (Al-Hamdani, 2019, p. 408). This is because any escalation in Abyei could lead to direct armed clashes between Sudanese and South Sudanese forces, threaten existing peace agreements, and further destabilise the region. In addition, the ongoing conflict is leading to the proliferation of weapons in the region and increasing the risk of tribal conflicts turning into violent clashes.

In this context, the conflict in the Abyei region poses a threat not only to national and regional security but also to international security. Indeed, Abyei is a sensitive and important region in terms of international security because any escalation there increases the risk of destabilising the Greater Horn of Africa region, which is of strategic importance. On the other hand, the conflict in Abyei has created significant challenges for the United Nations and peacekeeping forces (UNISFA) (Al-Amin, 2014). The ongoing violence increases the need for military and humanitarian assistance,

placing a burden on international resources. The conflict hinders humanitarian access to the affected population, worsens the humanitarian situation, and impacts the efforts of international organisations to provide aid.

Furthermore, the Abyei region is rich in oil, and any disruption there could affect oil production and supply. This could potentially have repercussions on global oil prices and the global economy. In short, the conflict in Abyei represents a series of interconnected security, humanitarian and economic challenges whose impact is not limited to local or regional borders but also affects security and stability at the international level.

7 - The Future of Relations Between the Two Countries in the Context of the Dispute

Relations between Sudan and South Sudan have historically been complex and tense. Periods of cooperation have been followed by periods of tension and conflict. Despite South Sudan's independence in 2011, many unresolved issues from the pre-secession period and new challenges continue to affect the future of these relations. Both countries accuse each other of supporting rebel groups on each other's territory, increasing instability and undermining all peace efforts. However, Sudan and South Sudan share the longest land border in Africa and there are still disputed areas, such as the Abyei region, where a self-determination referendum, delayed due to conflict, is still pending (Al-Adhari, 2014, p. 43).

The Abyei issue has been a significant point of contention and a thorn in the side of relations between Khartoum and Juba since the secession of the south. The failure to resolve this issue has prevented the full

normalisation of relations between the two countries and has affected cooperation on other issues such as oil, borders, citizenship and international debt (Abu Saada, 2011, p. 193). South Sudan's secession from Sudan in 2011 has had profound and far-reaching repercussions for both countries and the entire region. This is because oil constituted the majority of Sudan's revenues prior to secession, and most oil fields are located in the south. This secession led to a significant loss of revenue for North Sudan, significantly affecting its economy and causing a terrible deterioration, including a decline in public revenues, weak export revenues, and payment imbalances (Abu Majida, 2019, p. 17). On the other hand, oil accounts for 98% of the South Sudanese government's revenues (Al-Amin, 2014, p. 20). This extreme dependence has made the southern economy vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices and has also led to problems associated with corruption and mismanagement in this sector.

South Sudan relies on North Sudan to export its oil through pipelines crossing Sudanese territory, which has led to tensions and disputes over transit fees (Ahmed, 2015, p. 148). South Sudan relies heavily on oil revenues exported through pipelines via Sudan. Disagreements over transit fees and disruptions to oil flows due to the conflict negatively affect the economies of both countries (Abu Shouk, 2009). On the other hand, both countries suffer from ongoing internal conflicts. The civil war in South Sudan and the ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces directly affect stability and further complicate bilateral cooperation. Meanwhile, some regional and international countries are attempting to expand their influence by supporting one side at the expense of the other, further complicating the situation (Abdel Rahim, 2015, p. 112).

Consequently, the future of relations between Sudan and South Sudan largely depends on the political will of both countries, their ability to overcome historical differences, and their capacity to identify common interests. Given the current internal conflicts in both countries, the focus now appears to be on crisis management and avoiding direct escalation. However, it

is becoming increasingly apparent that stability in one country directly affects the other. Therefore, any progress towards internal peace and stability in both Sudan and South Sudan will have a positive impact on bilateral relations. This may require formulating new mechanisms for border cooperation, addressing unresolved issues such as Abyei, ensuring stable oil flows, and preventing support for rebel groups. In the long term, building trust among the people and encouraging open dialogue are key to achieving stable and productive relations.

8 - Future Vision for Resolving the Dispute

The Abyei region is a chronic point of conflict between Sudan and South Sudan and requires a comprehensive and sustainable solution that addresses the roots of the conflict and protects the rights and interests of all parties. With the problem persisting, it is almost impossible to speak of complete stability in relations between the two countries. Therefore, important steps must be taken to achieve sustainable stability in bilateral relations between the two countries. Foremost among these is resolving a disputed area such as the Abyei region, ensuring peaceful coexistence between Sudan and South Sudan, and developing a model that can serve economic cooperation.

Furthermore, the focus should be on developing the region economically and socially, providing opportunities for all, and reducing the economic drivers of conflict. The importance and necessity of implementing the Abyei Protocol, which envisages a referendum to determine the status of the region, should be reaffirmed within the framework of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Furthermore, based on the 2009 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling defining the Ngok Dinka region, agreement must be reached on clearly defining Abyei's northern borders.

The Misseriya community should be granted special guarantees regarding grazing and movement rights throughout Abyei, even if it joins South Sudan, and their traditional livelihoods should not be jeopardised. These guarantees should include agreed security corridors and shared grazing areas. A permanent joint mechanism should be established between the two countries to address any future border-related, social or economic disputes that may arise in Abyei.

Subsequently, community reconciliation programmes between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya tribes should be supported through dialogue and joint cultural events to build trust and overcome the past. Indeed, the peoples of the two countries have deep and historical ties, including marriage and social cohesion, particularly in the border areas (Al-Beheiry, 2010, p. 145). This social structure is considered to be the foundation for establishing better relations. To support this, local and national media organisations should be encouraged to play a positive role in addressing the issue in a balanced manner, highlighting success stories of coexistence, and promoting a culture of peace rather than hate speech.

In addition, local communities and civil society organisations should be provided with training in conflict resolution, negotiation and peacebuilding skills and in leading local peace initiatives. Large-scale awareness campaigns should be launched in Abyei, Sudan and South Sudan on the importance of resolving the issue peacefully and the danger that the ongoing conflict poses to the stability of the entire region.

Internationally, continuous diplomatic pressure should be exerted on Khartoum and Juba to adhere to a peaceful solution and implement the agreements. Meanwhile, periodic reports should be submitted on the monitoring of the implementation of agreements and protocols related to Abyei, the degree of compliance with them, and the difficulties encountered in their implementation. Serious and intensive negotiations must be restarted under the auspices of the African Union and the United Nations to reach an agreement between the governments of Sudan and

South Sudan on the final status of Abyei. Free, fair and transparent negotiations should be conducted under full international supervision (African Union, United Nations and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)) to ensure the credibility and acceptance of the region's status by all parties. In addition, comprehensive disarmament, demobilisation and re-integration programmes should be implemented to reduce the proliferation of weapons and violence.

In short, the future of the conflict in Abyei largely depends on developments in the political and security situations in both Sudan and South Sudan, the ability of the parties to reach agreement on the final status of the region, and peace-building efforts at the community level. Without a lasting political solution and without addressing the root causes of violence, Abyei will remain a flashpoint for tension and instability, and thus relations between the two countries will always be destabilised.

9 - What Can Türkiye Do to Resolve the Dispute?

Türkiye can play a constructive and contributory role in resolving the dispute between Sudan and South Sudan over the Abyei region by utilising the following factors.

9.1. Türkiye's Position as a Reliable Mediator

Türkiye has an increasingly strong reputation as a reliable mediator in various regions, including Africa. This reputation has been demonstrated in its mediation efforts in regional and international conflicts (such as the Black Sea Grain Initiative between Russia and Ukraine), enhancing its impartiality and ability to bring conflicting parties together.

9.2. Relations with Sudan and South Sudan

Türkiye has established good relations with both Sudan and South Sudan (Ali, 2013, p. 17). It was one of the first countries to recognise South Sudan's independence. Türkiye has an embassy in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, and maintains its historical and commercial ties with Sudan. These balanced relations grant it a "privileged position" and make it an acceptable mediator for both sides.

9.3. Expertise in Preventive Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution

Türkiye actively participates in peace mediation initiatives and seeks to promote solutions to regional conflicts (Bong, 2015, p. 13). It uses its expertise to facilitate dialogue and identify mutually acceptable solutions, moving away from a rigid legal approach that does not take into account all the political and social dimensions of the conflict.

9.4. Providing Technical and Financial Support

Türkiye can provide technical and material support to conflict resolution mechanisms related to Abyei; for example, it can support the work of joint committees, provide capacity-building assistance to local institutions in Abyei, or even contribute to development projects that could help stabilise the region. Indeed, Türkiye also provides humanitarian and development assistance to South Sudan through the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) (Christopher, 2021, p. 29).

9.5. Promoting Dialogue Among Local Communities

The conflict in Abyei is not only a political conflict between two governments but also encompasses tensions between local communities (particularly the Dinka Ngok and Misseriya tribes) (Hassanein, 2010, 149). Türkiye can facilitate dialogue between these communities and encourage grassroots reconciliation, which is essential for achieving sustainable peace in the region.

9.6. Focusing on Common Interests

Türkiye can help Sudan and South Sudan focus on their common interests, such as economic development and regional stability, rather than on points of contention in Abyei. Abyei's natural resources, particularly oil, could be used as a source of trilateral cooperation rather than conflict. However, despite this potential, resolving the Abyei dispute is extremely complex for a number of reasons. Chief among these reasons is the region's economic value in terms of oil.

Furthermore, disagreements over who can vote in the promised self-determination referendum are also a sensitive issue. On the other hand, tensions between local tribes must also be addressed with the utmost care. Another challenging factor is the failure to implement many provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement concerning Abyei. Therefore, any role for Türkiye will require considerable patience, a comprehensive approach that takes all these dimensions into account, and coordination with other international efforts to resolve the conflict.

Conclusion

South Sudan seceded from Sudan in 2011 after decades of civil war that caused millions of deaths and displacements. The main reasons for the secession were the political and economic marginalisation of the South, cultural and religious differences, and conflicts over natural resources (especially oil). Since secession, both Sudan and South Sudan have been working to build their own independent national identities. The disputed Abyei region between North and South remains a significant unresolved point of tension, further complicating relations.

Overall, the Abyei issue is not a simple border dispute; rather, it is a mixture of historical, economic, ethnic, religious, and political factors. Its resolution requires integrated efforts at the international and regional levels, focusing on building trust between local parties and relevant governments. This issue remains a thorny and complex matter, requiring comprehensive solutions that address the political, economic and social dimensions of the dispute and respect the rights of all parties.

In summary, the shared history of Sudan and South Sudan is a mixture of forced unification under foreign rule, decades of violent conflict, and subsequent secession based on the right to self-determination. Unfortunately, numerous challenges still stand in the way of establishing stable and productive relations between the two countries. Under current

conditions, the political situation in Abyei is likely to remain uncertain and ambiguous. The ongoing conflict and violence, combined with the influx of displaced persons and refugees, will worsen the humanitarian crisis in the region, leading to shortages in healthcare, water, and other basic resources. Without a comprehensive political solution, the potential for inter-communal violence to escalate among the different tribes in Abyei remains high, particularly due to

the proliferation of weapons and the erosion of government authority.

The country's division in 2011 weakened national will in both countries and led to a further deterioration of the political and economic situation in both. Furthermore, South Sudan's secession has affected regional stability as it could encourage other separatist movements in neighbouring countries. The conflicts in South Sudan have caused millions of people to be displaced within the country and across borders, triggering a major humanitarian crisis with food and healthcare shortages. As a result, the majority of South Sudan's population today suffers from harsh living conditions and is deprived of basic services such as education and healthcare. Overall, secession has not brought the stability and prosperity that many in both countries had hoped for; instead, it has led to immense economic, political, and social challenges and further fuelled internal and regional conflicts.

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