South Sudan Macro-Conflict Analysis:
Informing Operating Assumptions of Humanitarian Action
Workshop Outcome Paper: July 2015
**Foreword**

With divergent analyses of the current context, oscillating between what people think may happen, what we hope may happen and what we fear may happen; much of the current thinking on the ‘crisis’ in South Sudan remains either detached from or inaccessible to the humanitarian community.

The current humanitarian response in South Sudan is offering a vital lifeline to almost 5 million people across South Sudan but as such is a player that can also bring harm to the people of South Sudan if not appropriately informed by the larger political context. Whether the humanitarian community is or should be informed by political machinations will always be a source of debate but it is clear that an improved understanding of context and how this may play out can only improve operations on the ground, including staff safety and welfare.

This paper, a generous product of time of the participants who wish to share their outcomes and attempts to close the gap between the macro-conflict and the humanitarian operation within it. Divided into two parts, the paper explores the wider conflict at the international, national and state level as well as explores the consequences on the humanitarian situation.

This report ultimately asks more questions than it answers but neatly describes some of the more complex relationship dynamics within South Sudan and probes the reader to think about where this shall lead to for the people of South Sudan, and the humanitarian response within this.

*South Sudan Humanitarian Project*

**Role of South Sudan Humanitarian Project**

The South Sudan Humanitarian Project is an online platform for the humanitarian community South Sudan to share information and analysis. The platform allows for the publication of materials that are written by prominent researchers and practitioners all with the goal of increasing awareness of the voices of South Sudanese affected by the current crisis. The South Sudan Humanitarian Project offers publishing opportunities to field research and analysis for independent analysis, while also sharing material published by NGO’s, Agencies, Think Tanks and other established platforms. Recognising the sensitivity of publishing information while maintaining operational space, the South Sudan Humanitarian Project offers a vehicle to ensure information is spread among the humanitarian community to improve debate. Any other organisation etc who wish to share information can contact us at southsudanhumanitarianproject@gmail.com.
Acronyms

FD  Former Detainees: a group of 10 senior SPLM party figures arrested by the Government of South Sudan in December 2014 and accused of coup-plotting. Later acquitted, these individuals have played a prominent role in the mediation process as a third block of negotiators to solve the political and military crisis.

G10  Group of 10: synonymous and interchangeable term with “Former Detainees”

GRSS  Government of the Republic of South Sudan

IGAD  Inter Governmental Authority on Development: the mediators of the South Sudan peace process

IDP  Internal Displaced Persons

PoCs  Protection of Civilian sites: in this document refers to sites within the legal boundary of UNMISS sites reserved for civilians seeking refuge/flight from violence

SPLA  Sudan People’s Liberation Army: national South Sudan army and former liberation group

SPLM  Sudan People’s Liberation Movement: dominant and governing political party in South Sudan

SPLM-Juba  Term used to signify members of the SPLM party loyal to the government in the context of the Arusha Process

SPLM/A-IO  Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition: political and military opposition to the government of South Sudan led by Dr. Riek Machar Teny and other senior SPLM/A officials

UNMISS  United Nations Mission in South Sudan: followed the mission in Sudan (UNMISS) and was mandated in 2011 to support South Sudan peace consolidation and state building functions but with a Chapter VII mandate to protect civilians. Following the Dec ’13 crisis, protection of civilians has become the primary responsibility and focus of the mission.
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PART I:
MACRO-POLITICAL CONTEXT
1. Introduction and Background

As the conflict in South Sudan continues and expands and international mediation efforts fail to produce a peace agreement between conflicting parties, the humanitarian crisis deepens and civilians - especially children - continue to face horrific human rights abuse. Estimates put the total number of IDPs at over 1.5 million and refugees at more than half-million. Recent fighting has put another 650,000 at heightened risk.

The capacity of the humanitarian community to provide much needed aid and protection is being stretched to the limit, as populations grow desperate in a context of serious food insecurity, shrinking aid budgets and increasingly complex and difficult operational realities. The allocation of only US $270 million to humanitarian action in the June High Level Conference on South Sudan is a reflection of the increasingly limited financial and political attention being given to the South Sudan crisis.

In addition, humanitarians perceive and experience a negative trend in their own safety and security in remote field environments, as well as the capital and humanitarian country headquarters, Juba. This - coupled with an increasingly restrictive NGO regulatory landscape and a spiraling economy - deepens the concerns of humanitarians regarding their ability to effectively and efficiently deliver life-saving aid until the end of 2015 and into 2016.

On 13-14 May 2015, a group of humanitarian and protection actors held a workshop on context and conflict analysis in South Sudan focused on key critical issues currently facing the humanitarian and protection community, the changing dynamics over the past six months, key assumptions for the next 3-6 months, and implications on the work of humanitarian and protection actors.

The purposes of the workshop were to update previous analyses for the use of NGOs and other actors in South Sudan and to ensure that issues critical to the humanitarian and protection community could be articulated for engagement.


3 Over 20 persons participated in this exercise, facilitated by Andy Shaver. This included participants from UN, NGO and civil society. This process ran parallel to a discussion between development oriented actors. The opinions contained within this report reflect the diversity of the dialogue and do not necessarily reflect the institutional opinions of the organizations participating in.

4 Macro Analysis of Conflict in South Sudan, Protection Cluster, August 2014.
This paper is an excellent primer for humanitarians operating in South Sudan and for those who wish to increase their contextual knowledge including of key historical events. Our current effort in some ways builds on the Macro Analysis paper which can be found here: http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Macro%20Analysis%20of%20Conflict%20in%20South%20Sudan%20SSPC%20August%202014.pdf
with various similar processes being carried out by donor countries’ offices, the UN, etc.

This report is the outcome of this discussion. While not offering a definitive analysis of the context in South Sudan, this discussion paper offers reflections on context, politically and operationally, which can be used by the broader humanitarian community to consider when conducting strategic planning exercises. To facilitate an open fluid discussion on sensitive topics, the workshop employed a Chatham House approach. The participants generously agreed to make a summary of this discussion and analysis publicly available.

This report briefly reviews key contextual highlights in section 2, follows with operational assumptions based on the group’s discussion of context (section 3), and concludes with the implications for humanitarian and protection actors (section 4).
2. Highlights of the Current Context

While the international humanitarian community overall has a tendency to adopt a neutral analysis the political/military dynamics within South Sudan, the dynamics discussed below have implications for the humanitarian operational environment and the operations themselves. As the conflict becomes more protracted, the humanitarian community becomes more intricately woven into the complex set of local, national and international dynamics.

This section highlights key political and military developments that broadly shape the thinking and planning of humanitarian and protection actors (see detail in sections 3 and 4 below). While not an exhaustive context analysis, the below overview generally points toward a likelihood of protracted conflict and ongoing political instability. It should also be noted that events are fluid and dynamic and context is always shifting.

A great deal has been written about the causes and underlying dynamics of the current conflict in South Sudan and we assume the readers’ basic knowledge these. Further reading can be found here:

http://southsudanhumanitarianproject.com/reports/

A. Political
IGAD Mediation Efforts

Mediation efforts by the regional body IGAD, led by three mediators (one each from Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan), to end the conflict have thus far not succeeded. A deadline agreed by President Salva Kiir and Dr. Riek Machar (5 March 2015) to negotiate outstanding political and security issues and end the conflict elapsed and the conflict escalated. Initial consultations for the next round of talks began on 8 June with senior members of the three key delegations: The Government of South Sudan (GRSS), the SPLM/A-in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) and the ‘Former Detainees’ (FD).  

IGAD proposed a power sharing arrangement during the 8 June consultations, which was quickly rejected by both the GRSS and the SPLA-IO. These consultations are also reported to have discussed a new mediation mechanism.

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5 The “Former Detainees” (FD) otherwise known as Group of 10 (G10) are a group of very senior SPLM party officials who were accused of participating with Dr. Riek Machar and others in a coup plot, and were arrested and put on trial at the outset of violence in December 2013. Later acquitted by the South Sudan courts and exiled to Kenya, these individuals were invited by IGAD to participate in the political mediation in Addis Ababa as a ‘third block’ in recognition of their particular (albeit non-violent) involvement in the crisis, their senior status as party officials and the potential positive role they can play for peace. “Former Detainees” and “G10” have been used interchangeably as a reference for them.
and the potential for another IGAD “Heads of State Summit”\textsuperscript{6} in the near term to kick-start the beleaguered process.

The new mediation effort, known as IGAD+, may include the African Union, the Troika (USA, Norway, UK), the EU and China. However, there have been negative reactions by the GRSS to the inclusion of the Troika beyond observer status, an indicator of a political tension between the GRSS and the Troika and the limitations of ‘western influence’ on the process. Ostensibly this round of mediation - should it ever commence - will aim to finalize a political peace deal and form a “transitional government of national unity” prior to 9 July 2015, which is South Sudan’s Independence Day and the end of the current government’s original mandate\textsuperscript{7}.

There are reasons to be skeptical of the peace process and its prospects for success in ending the conflict, despite efforts to expand the mediation platform to include more powerful actors in IGAD+. (See more in 3.2 below). These include:

a) The actual will of the parties to negotiate in good faith to end the war;

b) That IGAD+ promises to be a complicated platform, and coordinating an amalgamation of mediators with such diverse interests (i.e., AU, EU, Troika, China) will be extraordinarily challenging;

c) The divergence of interests within individual IGAD states over regional power generally and influence over South Sudan in particular\textsuperscript{8};

d) That the IGAD process is not directly inclusive of arguably the most important actors within the parties to the conflict: the military leaders of both sides.

However, given the dramatic increase in conflict and civilian suffering that has occurred during the suspension of IGAD’s mediation (5 March - present) a resumption of dialogue, no matter how challenging or unpromising, may be accompanied by a reduction in conflict.

\textsuperscript{6} These high-level summits have in the past lead to signed ‘agreements’ between President Kiir and Dr. Riek Machar, though they are rarely upheld.

\textsuperscript{7} Recently parliament voted to amend the constitution and extend the term of national elected officials, including the president until 2017.

\textsuperscript{8} The idea that IGAD, a collective of regional states, could be a neutral mediator has challenged the peace process from the beginning, recognizing for instance that: Kenya and Ethiopia vie for regional economic and diplomatic dominance and are often at odds on the peace-process’ direction; that Uganda is actually party to the conflict in support of the GRSS, and Sudan is reportedly so, by proxy, to the SPLA-IO; that Uganda and Sudan have a history of actively arming rebellions to undermine the other, which is arguably linked to competition over the benefits of South Sudan’s economy.
Challenges within the SPLM/A-IO
The SPLM/A-IO draws political power from several senior SPLM figures of old, primarily from the pan-Nuer community in South Sudan with a spate of recent ‘defections’ from some less senior Dinka and Shilluk political and military figures. Despite early and ongoing efforts to articulate a national vision, the SPLM/A-IO ambition to create a truly national opposition movement has not materialized, nor have efforts to create instability and significant military confrontation in the Equatoria states through sympathetic Equatorian politico-military defectors. Thus, despite the popularity of some of the SPLM/A-IO political vision (e.g., a national vision of federalism), the movement faces severe political limitations within South Sudan.

Another political challenge of the SPLM/A-IO is that much of the SPLA-IO military leadership (and some of the political leadership) was never a part of - and remains highly skeptical of - the SPLM political party, which is a key identity of the SPLM/A-IO movement. Thus, a natural political tension exists within the SPLM/A-IO writ-large. A tradition of mistrust persists between those military commanders and the political ‘home’ of the SPLM/A-IO political leadership, related to past peace processes and exercises of political and military accommodation, in which many of the current SPLA-IO military leadership felt neglected or that their interests were undermined.

Further, reports indicate that a divide continues between the SPLM/A-IO political and military leadership over political compromise with the GRSS. The military leaders, rank/file soldier and many armed youth associated with the movement continue to call for the end of the President’s term in power and punitive justice for Nuer killings in December 2013; but the political leadership generally views this position as unrealistic. This divergence has put strain on the political leadership of the SPLM/A-IO, yet Dr. Riek Machar remains in leadership, and his influence unmatched within the SPLM/A-IO.

How - and if - these challenges to the SPLM/A-IO’s integrity can be managed by the SPLM/A-IO leadership will have direct implications on the peace-process and the conflict in South Sudan. Critical to any effective mediation is that the negotiating parties are unified entities, which ensures that peace agreements can be kept and enforced by the parties’ leadership. Strains on unification and the specter of factionalization and proliferation of unaligned political and

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9 The key political leadership of the SPLM/A-IO includes: former Vice President Dr. Riek Machar Teny, the Chairperson and Commander in Chief of the SPLM/A-IO; former Minister of Environment, Alfred Lado Gore, Deputy Chairperson and Deputy Commander in Chief of the SPLM/A-IO; former Unity State Governor, Taban Deng Gai, the lead political negotiator at the IGAD peace process; Dhio Mathok an intellectual and Dinka from Northern Bar el Ghazal serving as SPLM-IO Foreign Secretary; former South Sudan Ambassador to the USA, Ezekial Lol; Peter Adwok, a former Minister and regarded elder intellectual; wife of Dr. Riek Machar, Angelina Teny; former Deputy Governor of Jonglei State, Hussein Mar.

10 There are notable Equatorian leaders and intellectuals within the SPLM/A-IO, but they are not seen to command large constituents of supporters, nor troops on the ground. There have been several defections and new ‘movements’ but thus far these lack any significant traction in the three Equatoria states.
armed groups are significant concerns within the SPLM/A-IO. Bringing his constituency around to ‘compromise’ is perhaps the biggest challenge for Dr. Riek Machar.

**GRSS, Accommodation, and Resolving the SPLM Party Crisis**

A critical trigger to the current conflict can be traced to a political confrontation within the SPLM party that had been building for years\(^\text{11}\). In an effort to address this “SPLM party crisis”, members of the ruling parties of Tanzania and South Africa have convened a separate mediation effort (i.e., “the Arusha Process”) predicated on the idea that reunification of the SPLM party is a critical pre-condition to solving the wider conflict in South Sudan\(^\text{12}\). And whilst many agree to the importance of the Arusha Process, there is a concern that it can detract from the IGAD mediation\(^\text{13}\).

The three ‘factions’ of the SPLM involved in the Arusha Process are the same three involved in the IGAD mediation: SPLM officials loyal to the GRSS (SPLM-Juba), those loyal to the SPLM-IO, and the G10. Whilst the SPLM/A-I0 remains nominally committed but perhaps skeptical of the Arusha Process (boycotting the last round of talks in May), relations between the SPLM-Juba and the G10 have increasingly warmed. Recently, President Kiir, as Chairman of the SPLM, revoked his earlier expulsion of the G10 and SPLM-IO from the party (including Dr. Riek Machar, and bank accounts linked to those previously expelled), a necessary move for party reunification. As a result, a delegation of the G10 has arrived in Juba in a clear sign of progress between those two factions of the party\(^\text{14}\), and significantly, Pagan Amum has been reinstated as the SPLM Secretary General\(^\text{15}\). Reconciliation with the G10 is a positive development for

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\(^{11}\)Political tensions rooted in historic and ethnic divisions between key power brokers threatened the stability of South Sudan prior to the current conflict. In the year preceding the current conflict, strife within the governing SPLM party and competition for the party leadership in advance of planned 2015 elections exacerbated a deep rivalry between the country’s two most powerful men and their allies: the President, Salva Kiir and the Vice President, Dr. Riek Machar. A variety of aggressive political tactics from both sides throughout 2013 finally resulted in the sacking of the Vice President and a cabinet reshuffle, which ousted many key senior members of the ruling party. This dramatic move simultaneously consolidated the powers of the President with a new cabinet of loyal appointees, but also created a powerful multi-ethnic political opposition within the SPLM that publicly expressed intention toward a political takeover in 2015. By mid December tensions within SPLM boiled over with the convening of a contentious SPLM leadership meeting (i.e., the National Liberation Council) and within days a ‘coup attempt’ had been declared and the current conflict had begun.

\(^{12}\)However, the intra-SPLM party dialogue cannot address the military realities of the current crisis. See more about the SPLM party crisis, and an argument for its centrality in peace-making in South Sudan: http://www.issafrica.org/acpst/policy-brief/reforming-the-splm-a-requisite-for-peace-and-nation-building; http://southsudanhumanitarianproject.com/audio/02a-15/

\(^{13}\)On 27 June, the Kenyan president hosted President Kiir and Dr. Machar in an apparently futile attempt to discuss outstanding issues. They discussed both the Arusha Process and the IGAD process. Some reports suggest that the President highlighted the Arusha Process and stepped back from commitment to the IGAD/IGAD+ process.

\(^{14}\)Meanwhile, the SPLM/A-IO has been both welcoming and skeptical of the recent rapprochement between the SPLM-Juba (GRSS) and the G10.

\(^{15}\)Pagan Amum, a senior SPLM member and former SPLM Secretary General is among the key figures in the G10/FD.
the GRSS as this multi-ethnic group of senior individuals holds significant political and diplomatic assets, including strong external relationships.

However, if the President chooses to accommodate the G10 into senior government positions, it could displace existing ministers/appointees and disrupt the current wartime patronage system and alter the political landscape in Juba. Significant political realignment or removal of wartime allies from government could push spurned political elites toward the opposition or otherwise contribute to political instability in Juba. (Though it is possible that the opposite proves true.) Perhaps the worst-case scenario for the GRSS is that Equatorian leaders would exit the government and lend political (or military) strength to the SPLM/A-IO or its agenda, though this is an unlikely event. A cabinet reshuffle is anticipated ahead of President Kiir’s new term in office, and these new ministerial (and other) appointments will bring into view the current dispensation of loyalties and indicate how the President seeks to address the myriad governance challenges facing his regime.

**Other Political Influences: Emergence of the Jieng Council of Elders**
The increasing prominence of the Jieng Council of Elders - a pan-Dinka group consisting of key Dinka politicians and elders - demonstrates an additional political unit that has significant influence on the President and underscores the entrenchment of ethno-politics at the highest levels of government. Among the most influential within the Jeing Council are the former Chief Justice and a key elder from the President’s community in Warrap. The President’s decision to reject an IGAD peace agreement proposal in April 2015 was reportedly influenced by the Jeing Council. The post-2013 prominence of the Jeing Council demonstrates how decisions for peace and politics are influenced by ethnicity, and reveals an additional power-group whose interests must be accommodated by the President, despite that this group’s interests are arguably pertaining to the nation’s Dinka rather than the nation writ-large.

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16 The usual projection is that a cabinet reshuffle could disproportionately affect Equatorian elite politicians and create fissures in the precarious alliance between them and the President/GRSS.

17 The President’s term was extended by constitutional amendment (rather than election) earlier this year.

18 For example, an expansion of appointments to figures from the President’s home state, Warrap, or other long time allies might indicate an attempt of power consolidation; whereas appointment of the G10 and prominent Equatorian – or even Nuer – individuals might demonstrate efforts toward inclusion and at least a nominal gesture toward reform.


20 At time of writing former Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi has convened the Jeing Council of Elders and their Nuer counterparts, the Nuer Council of Elders, to urge a common effort aimed at peace building in the country. Potentially a very positive development, yet the risks of politicized failure is high.
B. Military

There are several key dynamic shifts in the military landscape over the last months as the breakdown of mediation and the oncoming wet-season saw a significant conflict escalation. Given the military advances of the GRSS/SPLA in the first quarter of 2015, especially in Unity State where military campaigns have targeted civilians, there is a sense that the GRSS/SPLA was pushing to ‘win’ the war militarily and relegate the SPLM/A-IO to the margins of South Sudan near Sudan and Ethiopia and thus gain an upper hand in the political negotiations. There were also reports of complaints within the SPLA-IO regarding the military strategy from the SPLM/A-IO leadership, related to logistics and supply of weapons, which indicated a sense of instability within the SPLM/A-IO. The upper hand seemed to be tipping toward the GRSS.

However, the defection in Malakal of the long time Shilluk militia leader Johnson Olony and his forces away from the GRSS/SPLA in May 2015 has altered battlefield dynamics. Olony’s military strength, after a significant hardware investment by the GRSS/SPLA since 2013, had pushed the GRSS/SPLA out of the Upper Nile capital and enabled an advance on Paloich, the remaining oil producing area of Upper Nile (though Malakal changed hands again soon thereafter). Rather than join the SPLA-IO, and recognize the leadership of Dr. Riek Machar, Olony’s militia (the ‘Agwele Forces’) has remained an independent opposition to the GRSS fighting in “coordination” with the SPLA-IO. This coalition significantly bolsters opposition military power in Upper Nile State, and enables a credible threat to the GRSS/SPLA controlled Paloich oil fields - one of the only remaining revenue streams for the GRSS - an event that would have deep consequences for the GRSS/SPLA, the South Sudan economy, and could lead to a recalculcation of alliances for GRSS/SPLA military commanders in Upper Nile State.

The events in Malakal and surrounding area highlight the precarious ‘commitment’ of GRSS/SPLA’s recently integrated militias (e.g., Olony’s forces) and the link between the formal political/military conflict and local dynamics, ambitions and grievances21. For instance, rising tensions between the Dinka Padang community of Akoka County and Olony’s Shilluk community of Fashoda County, which have a history of violence related to land and county borders, gave rise to open confrontation between the Dinka Padang militia and Olony’s (Shilluk) forces though they were both aligned with the GRSS/SPLA. This confrontation led directly to Olony’s defection from the GRSS/SPLA22. Thus, this confrontation can be seen through the lens of localized conflict dynamics

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22 This militia is rumored to be linked to the Minister of Petroleum.

23 The killing of a key Deputy to Olony was also killed during the rising tensions.
as much as national politics, but has had significant impact on the larger war, and opens wide an ethno-political cleavage in Upper Nile State that had seen a period of relative stability.

This is indicative of a dynamic that is not unique to the counties and communities around Malakal, and could be repeated in other parts of South Sudan where existing inter-ethnic fault lines and “Community Defense Forces” (CDF) are easily mobilized for political purposes. Both parties have continued to rely heavily on CDF often with atrocious outcomes (see more below). Some of the worst atrocities against civilians reported in recent months occurred in Unity State as armed youth from the Bul-Nuer community were mobilized and utilized by the GRSS/SPLA against the SPLA-IO in the home areas of other Nuer sections within the controlled territory of the SPLM/A-IO24.

These developments indicate the likelihood of a deepening complexity to an expanding, protracted conflict fueled by proliferation of armed militia/actors, as ethnic grievances are exploited and communities continue to be mobilized for war making. The long-term implications for inter-communal conflict are disheartening, as an IGAD peace process aimed at national power sharing cannot address the depth of conflict being witnessed25.

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24 Interethnic conflict between various sections of the Nuer is not a new phenomenon, nor is the exploitation of these inter-Nuer histories of violence for political conflict. See among others: https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/sv/sai/SOSANT1200/h11/Hutchinson%20sosant%201200.pdf

25 There do exist some national peace-building and reconciliation efforts that offer some hope at beginning the long work of addressing the torn fabric of South Sudan’s society. In the current context however, these too have faced significant challenges in gaining traction both on the ground and at high levels.
3. State Level Summaries

A. Greater Upper Nile

Jonglei State

Jonglei State is home to large numbers of Dinka, Nuer, Murle (and several smaller ethnic communities) and witnessed significant conflict in the early stages of the current war. The GRSS governor, John Kong Nyuon a Nuer and former South Sudan Minister of Defense was instated as caretaker governor one month preceding the current civil war. The SPLM/A-IO have ‘declared’ Jonglei to be four states according to the old British district boundaries of Greater Fangak, Akobo, Pibor and Bor. Bor town was devastated as it changed hands several times between the GRSS/SPLA (with support from the Ugandan Army) and the nascent SPLA-IO led by Peter Gadet (a leading military commander) pushing tens of thousands of primarily Dinka IDPs across the Nile to Minkaman in Lakes State.

The majority Nuer areas in Uror, Nyirol and Akobo counties unequivocally support the SPLM/A-IO. Dr. Riek Machar’s first operational base was in Jonglei and these Nuer regions were among the first mobilized for the movement by Dr. Machar himself. These three counties currently remain military and political strongholds of the movement, and include the support of a sizeable White Army contingent of Nuer youth. Intermittent attempts of the GRSS/SPLA via garrison towns and outposts in Ayod and Bor counties to penetrate these SPLA-IO strongholds have thus far failed. Due to early support of the SPLM/A-IO from Rebecca Garang, the wife of liberating icon the late Dr John Garang, some Dinka areas of Twic and Duk counties were relatively accommodating to the SPLM/A-IO giving passage to support early attacks on Bor, the state’s capital.

A peace agreement between the GRSS and a Murle military and political movement led by David Yau Yau (the SSDA/Cobra Faction) in May 2014 ended an earlier unrelated conflict, and propelled Jonglei’s largest county, Pibor, into a strategic military position. Through this peace deal, the GRSS/SPLA ostensibly acquired thousands of fighters encamped on the borders of SPLM/A-IO strongholds, but David Yau Yau and the Cobra Faction have managed to remain out of the conflict and have not given logistical or military support to the GRSS/SPLA to advance on Akobo County. As the strategic advantage of the Cobra Faction has been made moot to the GRSS/SPLA, and SPLM/A-IO threats to oil facilities in other parts of South Sudan have increased, the GRSS/SPLA seems to have taken a strategic decision to abandon efforts to route the SPLM/A-IO from their Jonglei strongholds. Meanwhile the northwestern edge of Jonglei State (Fangak, Pigi counties) have been absorbed into conflict dynamics around Malakal and Upper Nile State displacing thousands, as both forces vie for control of Dolieb Hills, a strategic high-ground less than 20kms from Malakal Town.
Upper Nile State

Upper Nile State (UNS), a key oil producing state and relatively diverse multi-ethnic state (Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Mabanese), has seen some of the most intense fighting during the current civil war. The state governor, Simon Kun, has recently ‘declared’ relocation of the state capital from Malakal to Renk town, but not without significant opposition. (The SPLM/A-IO have divided UNS into several separate states as they attempt to craft an alternative federalist vision for South Sudan.) Malakal has been devastated by the conflict, changing hands between GRSS/SPLA forces and SPLA-IO/Johnson Olony forces multiple times, and has witnessed alarming atrocities and recruitment of children for the war-effort. The UNMISS PoC site in Malakal provides refuge for more than 30,000 individuals, but the political allegiances and ethnic divisions have led to increasing tensions between the civilians within the site, leading to a dangerous scenario for civilians and humanitarians.

Renk town, a key transport hub between Sudan/South Sudan, oil pipeline route, and agriculture producing area, is also a main theatre of the current war. South and eastern UNS is a rural stronghold of the SPLM/A-IO, home to the movement’s HQ in Pagak and traditionally important Nuer homelands, including Nasir Town, the base of Riek Machar’s rebellion from the SPLA during the 1990s. Whilst still mainly controlled by the SPLM/A-IO, the GRSS/SPLA have taken Nasir Town as a garrison. The SPLM/A-IO has utilized the porous borders of Upper Nile State to create a rear-base and training for its soldiers within Sudan. Meanwhile, Maban County, which is home to the ethnic Mabanese and 130,000 refugees from Sudan’s Blue Nile State (Sudan), is entangled in both countries’ civil wars and has seen the rise of community defense forces and organized militias in support of both the GRSS/SPLA and the SPLA/IO.

Unity State

Unity State, as with Upper Nile State, is an oil producing state although the damage to Heiglig oil field is an issue of significant concern. Unity has a mixed populations namely Dinka and Nuer. Unity has witnessed extreme levels of conflict between the SPLA and SPLA/IO but with JEM and other foreign armed groups playing a pivotal role in the violence. With a complex set of alliances, the Bul Nuer have remained in alliance with the central SPLA. Previously belonging to an armed group called the SSLA, the SSLA is a fully integrated part of the SPLA. Many of the extreme atrocities committed against the civilian population in Unity State has been attributed to the Bul Nuer forces.

The civil authorities of the administrative capital of Bentiu were temporarily moved to Mayom county due to insecurity making Bentiu itself little more than a garrison town. The return marks the significant level of confidence that the SPLA forces appear to have. While the SPLA/IO continues to be present in Unity...
State, the civilian structures such as the RRA are reportedly scattered and it may prove difficult to regroup in the remainder of the dry season. The capture of Panakuach follows a pattern of disruption of RRA presence also seen in Koch and Leer. There are significant accusations of scorched earth tactics being used against civilian populations, which echo violence in 2014 while escalating it significantly.

B. Greater Upper Bar el Ghazel

Northern Bar el Ghazel

Northern Bar el Ghazal (NBEG) is a relatively homogenous state with 90% Dinka (Malual) population, but an inter-county clan division exists and impacts on both politics and security. The singularly most dominant political and military force in the state is the former governor and current SPLA Chief of Staff, Paul Malong. He has managed to maintain his high army position and the state chairmanship of the SPLM party contrary to the prescriptions of the SPLM constitution. He influences nearly every aspect of NBEG political life despite now residing in Juba. His initial replacement, care-taker governor Kuel Aguer, rattled the stability of NBEG by challenging Malong’s hold on political and economic power through attempts at state-level tax reform and SPLM party reform among other things, reportedly with the tacit support of President Kiir. This attempted disruption to the Malong-orchestrated and managed patronage system resulted in Aguer’s impeachment and subsequent removal from power by President Kiir in a seeming victory for Malong and an affirmation of his deep hold on the NBEG state. The current governor is Salva Chol Ayot, the former deputy governor and Paul Malong loyalist.

Another challenger to Paul Malong’s power is the current SPLA-IO deputy chief of staff and commander of SPLA-IO forces in NBEG, General Dau Aturjong. Himself a failed gubernatorial challenger to Malong in the 2010 elections, Aturjong has struggled to mount a substantive opposition campaign in the state, despite reportedly having a strong level of popular support from his (political/clan) constituents who claim that Malong rigged the 2010 elections. In many ways, the SPLA-IO contingent in NBEG is better seen as an Aturjong militia that opposes Paul Malong than an armed force in support of the SPLM/A-IO movement or the political vision of Dr. Riek Machar. Aturjong’s military force finds its genesis in mid-2014 when the GRSS/SPLA failed to pay soldiers, which led to numerous defections, though at the time not necessarily to the cause of the SPLM/A-IO. Clashes ensued, as did a massacre of many Nuer soldiers at a military training site.

Dry season 2015 witnessed a seeming consolidation of SPLA-IO efforts in the state, and some renewed clashes in NBEG, but these have reduced as the GRSS/SPLA have cut supply lines to the Aturjong led SPLA-IO forces. The SPLA-IO reportedly have a rear base inside the Republic of Sudan and have been
granted some support of the Sudan Armed Forces as a counter to the GRSS/SPLA support to the long time Sudan opposition armed group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) which has been hosted in NBEG. The next dry season could see renewed violence and more defections in NBEG if the South Sudan economy continues to fall and army payments are stalled. However, given his consolidated power in NBEG, Malong will clearly work against such developments.

**Warrap**

Warrap is primarily comprised of members of the Dinka ethnic grouping. Governor Nyandeng Malek Deliech of Warrap State, the only female Governor in South Sudan, has faced growing unpopularity and challenges, with the formation of the People’s Liberation Party (PLP) and almost 1/3 of the state parliament voting against the extension of Deliech’s term by three more years. The creation of the PLP Peter Mayen Majongdit is indicative of the growing democratic opposition to the current SPLM/A leadership in Warrap but also growing tensions between the Dinka sub-clans of the Kuac Ayok and other groups. The arrest of Majongdit resulted in protests by Kuac Ayok demanding his release, which occurred 7 days after his arrest. Senior politicians such as Bona Bhang Dhol have been dissatisfied with the reincorporation of the G-10 back into Government structures in South Sudan, considering them to be traitors.

**Lakes**

Lakes is primary comprised of members of the Dinka ethnic grouping, which is made up of different sections and clans, except Wulu County that is predominated by Jur-Bel and Bongo people. Through 2014 and 2015, inter and intra- Dinka clan violence has spiraled out of control into revenge style (tit for tat) killings; deliberate attacks against women and children (including widespread rape) has been commonplace, and the destruction and looting of critical community livelihoods assets a means to exact maximum damage on rival communities. The recent assassination of Chief Apareer Chut, an elder relative of the Governor, has sparked a renewed cycle of violence against civilians with rival Dinka clans (Gony and Thiyic) inciting sexual violence and attacks on women and children. An open conflict between Governor Matur Chol Dhoul, the state SPLM apparatus, and citizens has also led to a spate of arbitrary arrests of local chiefs, the violent repression of a highly mobilized youth and reprisal communal attacks. Significant concentration of violence has taken place around the counties of Cueibet, Rumbek North, Rumbek Centre, Rumbek East and Yirol West including in the capital Rumbek. The violence to date has resulted in several hundreds of people killed. In 5 of the 8 counties in Lakes State over 11 sub-clan conflicts have been identified, with more people being killed per month than in the conflict-affected states in early 2015.
Western Bahr El Ghazal
While relatively stable in comparison to many other States in South Sudan, Western Bahr El Ghazal (WBeG) has reportedly been active recruiting ground for both the SPLA and SPLA-IO. Throughout 2014 and 2015 there have been reports of the SPLA-IO and other armed actors engaging in attacks in Raja County, with dynamics in WBeG also contingent upon dynamics with Sudan and Darfur in particular. WBeG serves as a forward base and training ground for non-state armed actors fighting in Darfur. The Dinka, Fertit and Jur continue to have significant political and resource tensions. Governor Rizig Zachariah Hassan has openly opposed federalism, considering it overly beneficial to the Equatorian region. As with other Kiir appointed Governors, there is deep dissatisfaction with the state Governor that point to frustrations at ongoing claims of corruption and nepotism of Kiir’s inner circle as well as the fracturing of political structures within the Dinka community. On 16 September 2014, the legislature of WBeG petitioned the President to remove Governor Hassan.

C. Greater Equatoria

Central Equatoria State
Home to the nation’s capital, Juba, Central Equatoria State (CES) is the site of the initial violence that sparked the current conflict. Juba is dominated by the affairs of the central government, the SPLA and external financial investment in South Sudan. Juba is also home to large numbers of IDPs within several UNMISS PoC sites, a source of contention for the GRSS. In addition to an unwillingness to return, many of the Nuer IDPs within UNMISS sites have had homes occupied since fleeing in late 2013. Insecurity has been rising in the town, and humanitarian actors have at times been targeted. The CES governor, former Mundari militia leader Clement Wani, has recently testified to the GRSS Council of States that rising insecurity in Juba and the CES writ-large is attributable to both the ill-paid SPLA soldiers and the large numbers of irregular forces known as Mathiang Anyoor, a militia reportedly recruited from NBEG for purposes particular to the president. Further, there have been regular incidents of conflict related to cattle in CES, a phenomenon that was largely absent from CES prior to the eruption of the 2013 conflict. There is reportedly a small armed opposition group under Elias Lako Jada, though their impact has been negligible.

Eastern Equatoria
Eastern Equatoria State (EES) is the least developed of the Equatorian states, has a large population of pastoralist communities (including the Taposa) and has had persistent challenges with cattle-raiding and violence with small-arms. The state’s governor, a former Brigadier General, Louis Labong, has in the wake of the current conflict openly called for Federalism, putting him at odds with
the central government, though he remains an ally of the SPLM and the GRSS. Martin Kenyi, a former general in the SPLA defected in late 2014 and announced his allegiance to the SPLM/A-IO, though his defection has not gained momentum or a strong number of followers in the state - thus deflating one of the key ambitions of the SPLM/A-IO. Since the current conflict began, a number of security operations have been undertaken in the state by the GRSS/SPLA officially designed to dismantle reported ‘training camps for rebels’. Some observers suggest that there has been an active mobilization of community defense forces (CDF) within EES, not aligned with the SPLM/A-IO but rather as a community security contingency in the context of the civil war, and that these were the targets of GRSS/SPLA security operations. Others suggest that the CDF mobilization is in fact connected to Martin Kenyi in an effort to create a non-aligned Equatorian front. Further, growing tensions between the Madi community of Nimule County and the IDP Dinka community (many having settled during the war with Sudan) around land use and cattle grazing lands may also be connected to the armament of the EES youth. Thus, while a clear anti-GRSS military opposition has not materialized, there has been instability and ongoing security stress on EES rooted in both political and inter-ethnic tension. The GRSS has exerted considerable efforts to ensure against the spread of instability in the area, in large part due to the proximity of this tension with the main economic corridor to Uganda: the Juba - Nimule road.

Western Equatoria State

Western Equatoria (WES), home to the Azande community (one of the largest tribes in South Sudan) has seen increasing insecurity in recent months. In early 2015 defectors from the SPLA announced a new rebellion (separate from the SPLA-IO) called the Revolutionary Movement for National Salvation (REMNASA). There have also been persistent reports of SPLA-IO training facilities in the rural areas of WES. A spate of small attacks have occurred but with relatively minor impact. The central government has been quick to affirm a rebellion in WES, whilst the state government, including the Governor Bakosoro, has denied it. The divergence in official statements indicates tension between the strong WES governor and some leading actors within the GRSS who question his loyalty. WES officials cast the blame for insecurity on migrating Dinka pastoralists from greater Bar el Gazhal whom have increasingly pressured WES farmers in Mundri West County, often with the tacit or explicit support of the organized security forces. The governor has reportedly ordered the removal of all migrating cattle from the state. This has all contributed to tension and insecurity around Mundri, a key town 200km from Juba on a transport route to greater Bar el Ghazal, and has resulted in the mobilization of a WES community defense force (the Arrow Boys), the killing of local government officials, violence between citizens of Mundri West County and the SPLA, and displacement of civilians.
Part II: Humanitarian Implications
4. Operational Assumptions

Previous analyses and mid-term projections from the humanitarian and protection community particularly with regard to the negative trend of conflict and impact on civilians have largely been accurate. Revised projections and assumptions unfortunately reflect a deepening negative trend, with some key developments.

While many of the challenges raised here may be self-apparent the consequences of these on an operational environment can often be elusive to non-humanitarian actors. While not a comprehensive list, six core assumptions were raised with discussions on their attendant implications discussed in section 4.

A. Deepening Economic Crisis

The economic situation in South Sudan has reached a crisis level and analysts in South Sudan do not see a reversal in the near term. With government expenditures, primarily on security budgets, outstripping revenues by significant proportions, a lack of foreign exchange has put South Sudan on course for a possible economic collapse. Such an event could have disastrous implications for the central government leading to a variety of unknown political and military outcomes. International lenders are reticent to support the GRSS under existing policies and in the context of civil war. As such, a deepening of the crisis with significant negative reverberating effects on South Sudan society and on humanitarian aid is likely. With less cash distributed from government salaries to ‘trickle down’ to social dependants, and a generalized reduced purchasing power of the South Sudanese Pound (SSP), already struggling urbanites will be thrust deeper into poverty and food insecurity. There will also likely be significant rural migration as some urbanites seek a cash-free existence with kinship networks, thus increasing numbers of those dependent on humanitarian aid in hard to reach conflict affected areas and increased intra-familial strain. Despite that much of South Sudan’s rural economy is not completely dependent on cash transactions, trade in cattle and household commodities from rural markets will also be significantly strained, including due to issues related to cattle disease, thus undermining factors in rural household resilience and increasing demand for humanitarian aid.

B. Protracted Conflict, Ongoing Displacement and Violence Against Civilians

The recent uptrend in military confrontation and violence against civilians has been significant but predictable in the months and weeks approaching the wet-season as parties vie for territory. Humanitarian and protection actors

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26 See Macro Analysis of South Sudan, Protection Cluster, August 2014.
anticipate a long protracted conflict beyond seasonal realities for several reasons.

First, the parties to the conflict appear intent to pursue direct military action for battlefield and political advantage for the foreseeable future. Whilst there may be variables to reduce this momentum (poor financing, rain/floods), the polarization of the parties and the will for a military solution seems apparent. The absence of a credible peace process further conduces the parties in this line. Second, the two primary warring parties can be seen as amalgamations of actors and groups with various (and at times divergent) interests and precarious loyalties. If the interests of powerful commanders are not assured and maintained, or if cash payments for troops dwindle, or divergent interests become pronounced a disintegration or factionalization of the parties and armies becomes more likely. The emergence of this scenario could deeply complicate mediation efforts and could proliferate the conflict into ‘many wars’ as military and political agendas are multiplied and factional leaders seek power through kinship networks and potentially ignite localized grievances and conflicts. Finally, a signed peace agreement cannot be palatable for all the armed actors engaged in this conflict. Assuming an agreement is reached, the likelihood of military spoilers after the signature is very high.

Historically South Sudanese civilians are direct targets and suffer tremendous atrocities in war. Recent events demonstrate the willingness of the parties and their proxies to target unarmed civilians including women and children, to ‘trap’ civilian populations in pockets of territory with no humanitarian aid, and even to violate the sanctity of UNMISS PoC sites, engaging in active and proxy conflict with the population living inside the PoC sites. With severe limitations on the international community to provide physical protection, the wide rural disbursement of many civilians, the dangers of physical movement in dynamic conflict zones, and the tendency of moving or retreating forces to kill and loot civilian populations for retribution or sustenance, South Sudanese civilians will continue to face extreme violence, and internal and external displacement will continue.

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27 The resumption of the IGAD process could dampen the level of conflict currently being witnessed.

28 A focus on the ‘two parties’ (GRSS and SPLM/A-IO) whose banners are most visible at the negotiating table and on the battlefield masks the myriad interests behind those parties. Whilst beyond the scope of this paper (and impossible in any case) to deconstruct those myriad interests, it is recognized that a signed IGAD agreement in no way guarantees an end to conflict, or peace. Behind both banners, both politically and militarily, individuals and groups have risen in the ranks, become influential, taken high responsibilities and in some cases gained control of budgets and land. These various individuals and groups may not always yield loyalty to their current alliance if the peace process does not benefit them. Johnson Olony’s defection is a recent example, and differences between Dr. Riek Machar and his military commanders over strategy and outcomes are well known and could lead to complete breakage of command and control. The impossible task of political and military accommodation within the mediation process for such an array of actors will inevitably yield a plethora of potential spoilers.

29 This has included but not limited to, directly firing upon POC sites with small arms, abduction of individuals from around and within the POC sites and the rape of women moving to and from the POC sites. These issues have been consistently flagged with UNMISS at the state and national level.
C. Political Instability

The economic crisis places extreme pressures on the stability of the central government, and associated patronage networks in South Sudan, as less cash is available for political allegiance and basic functioning of government. Financing the military and security sector will remain the highest priority at the expense of other government functions (and paycheques) and could lead to the exodus of bureaucrats, civil servants and political allies thus incapacitating the government. At the same time, by prioritizing the military, key leadership in the SPLA grows stronger (particularly the Chief of General Staff, Paul Malong) in power and influence vis-à-vis the President. The prospect of a much more politically powerful SPLA leadership could have many ramifications on political life in South Sudan where security sector reform and the realization of a ‘national army’ have been elusive. Meanwhile, there are signs of opposition to the President within the Council of Ministers, traditionally seen as an assured group of allies, and a variety of powerful political and military actors remain on the periphery (including the G10), whose fates are unclear but whose reengagement in government (or army) could contribute to greater political uncertainty.

Further, despite a constitutional amendment extending the President’s term of office to 2017, the suspension of elections in 2015 has raised questions about the legitimacy of the state governors beyond 9 July. A legal ‘solution’ will certainly be created to solve this constitutional challenge, but as the conflict continues to preoccupy the central government and presidency, the powers of state governors are likely to rise: consolidation of state-level power giving rise to a defacto decentralization process. Indeed, a number of governors already openly challenge policies of the President and central government and an ongoing trend in this direction could lead to unpredictability of organized forces within the various states among other outcomes. Conversely, states with weak or politically opposed governors may not find easy solutions to the question of legitimacy, which could increase instability.

To avoid collapse, the President and central government must maintain a tremendous balancing act on a decimated budget: accommodating a variety of

30 Much more on patronage in South Sudan here: http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/content/113/452/347.abstract


32 This is related to recent conflicting postures around the expulsion of the Humanitarian Coordinator, Toby Lanzer, and decision making and cooperation with UNMISS on planning for the IDP populations within UNMISS PoC sites.

33 Warrap State, whose governor is at time of writing in ‘limbo’ without a legal mandate, is facing such a dilemma: http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article55357
competing interests and allies to maintain a functioning government, not lose the war, and not become completely beholden to SPLA leadership or state governments. Recent concessions to the Equatorian State governments regarding border tax revenue collection and land use favoring indigenous farming communities over migrant (Dinka) pastoralists indicate this balancing act in play\(^{34}\).

**D. Increased Presence and Mobilization of “Community Defense Forces”**

Much has been written regarding the history and use of ethnically associated community defense forces (CDF)\(^{35}\). In the current conflict there is a perceived increase in recruitment and mobilization of CDF in various parts of South Sudan, at times with high-level backing and support, and usually with an assumption of political allegiance. Historically these groups tend to prioritize community protection but have been effectively mobilized for political purposes, fighting along side or on behalf of, a formal standing army. These groups have varying degrees of organization, discipline and loyalty (to either of the two prominent parties to the conflict). As the conflict continues, front lines shift and ethnic fragmentation deepens, the role of these groups is likely to become more pronounced and could contribute to the spread and exacerbation of the war\(^{36}\).

With the primary organizing principal being ethnicity in an increasingly ethnically fragmented society, these groups may direct violence accordingly. An increasing employment and arming of CDF mechanisms will give rise to localized centers of armed power, in the short term proliferating the number of actors with which humanitarians must negotiate access, and in the long term sew the seeds of very problematic disarmament.

**E. Threats to Humanitarian Protection, Safety and Independence**

Humanitarian and Protection actors have been operating in an increasingly challenging environment that will likely worsen. There is an alarming trend of insecurity of humanitarian and protection actors in Juba and beyond. A steady increase in car-jacking incidents in Juba has occurred, with very little recourse for victim NGOs, and in the field numerous NGO workers have been detained.

\(^{34}\) Equatorian leaders are precarious allies of the President’s central government, and many months of illegal grazing of Dinka cattle into Equatorian farms contributed to a strain on that alliance. The destruction of these farms exemplified to some Equatorians a sense and fear of a Presidential endorsement of Dinka dominance and impunity. Whether the decree will be followed in practice remains to be seen, and as such, does the precarious alliance between the current central government and the Equatorian states. [https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/maridi-commissioner%E2%80%99s-house-attacked-after-herders-ordered-out](https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/maridi-commissioner%E2%80%99s-house-attacked-after-herders-ordered-out)

\(^{35}\) See *Macro-Analysis of the Conflict in South Sudan*, Protection Cluster, August 2014, pp 12.

\(^{36}\) For example, recent fighting around Malakal between the GRSS/SPLA and Johnson Olony/SPLA-IO utilized ethnic militias (or CDF) from Shilluk and Dinka Padang communities and was in some ways precipitated inter-community disputes.
and mistreated. Most alarmingly, there are clear incidents of killing of South Sudanese national staff. Measures need to be taken and efforts redoubled to advocate for and ensure the safety of humanitarians and ensure their safe access to populations in need.

All sides in the conflict have adopted an increasingly hostile posture to humanitarian presence. The pressure to provide 'balanced' assistance, (i.e., to all communities or in both government and opposition controlled areas) has remained a challenge with both parties to the conflict readily accusing the humanitarian community of bias and calling for more assistance to ‘their’ own communities, whilst at the same time, humanitarian access is routinely blocked by both government and opposition aligned forces.

There are suggestions that NGOs are perceived by the GRSS as aligned to the UNMISS/Troika/EU and other political actors, and therefore have become soft-targets in the larger political and diplomatic engagement with the international community. Exacerbating the long established pressures from government on the independence of NGOs both local and international, the passage of the “NGO bill” threatens to seriously undermine the ability of humanitarians to provide services to increasing numbers of needy populations as it potentially formalizes an unclear relationship between government and NGOs and gives broad scope for ad hoc implementation.

The tensions between local systems of governance and national political actors has been evident throughout 2015 with all parties to the conflict at local levels behaving contrary to commitments made at more senior levels on issues relating to access, coordination and taxation. With changing power dynamics, emboldened localized armed actors and the emergence of new power alignments that may seek to exert authority on the humanitarian community, it will be more difficult to balance appropriate engagement with the various ‘authorities’ to ensure integrity of humanitarian action and continuity of operational presence. Potential break downs in the core-periphery relationship between the central and state/local governments in GRSS areas will be an issue to increasingly navigate as needs emerge in areas that had previously been considered less affected in the conflict.

The expulsion of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator Toby Lanzer on 1 June 2015 for reportedly raising the prospect of economic collapse in South Sudan leaves the humanitarian community in an all too familiar dilemma. While the consequences of the expulsion have not been fully realized, the classic debate continues: whether or not to engage in advocacy that may be considered sensitive to the government but essential to raising awareness for funding, good humanitarian programming and accountability? Many feel that conservatism or risk adverse behavior from the humanitarian community to engage in advocacy may be a critical blow to the protection response and ability to raise resources.
F. Humanitarian and Protection Needs: Deeper and Wider

There is a rapidly deteriorating food security crisis in South Sudan. The number of people in Crisis and Emergency level food security increased from 2.5 million in January-March 2015, to 3.8 million in April. From May - July 2015 the number is anticipated to reach 4.6 million, which is must worse than earlier projections. Whilst some improvement will be seen during the onset of the “green season” as food consumption increases with wild food and harvest where planting is possible, 2.8 million will still remain food insecure in September and an additional 4.3 million will remain under ‘stress’ levels. The 80% of counties in conflict states facing emergency levels of malnutrition will not see improvement in the near term.37

The current crisis is continually compounding pre-crisis acute poverty and poor humanitarian indicators, depleting family and community resources for resilience. Further, as noted above, urban populations in need of aid are likely to increase: more than 610,000 urban poor estimated to be severely impacted by high prices and dysfunctional markets in the near term.38 These populations are likely to be highly prioritized by the GRSS over needy rural populations in Greater Upper Nile (also anticipated to increase).

Whilst an immediate peace and end to conflict would dramatically assist in supporting a trend reversal, deep humanitarian needs would persist. Unfortunately, a protracted conflict is anticipated, as are deepening and widening of acute humanitarian needs amongst a population depleted of resources. The ongoing conflict and accompanying economic crisis continue to disrupt and destroy agricultural prospects, markets, cattle markets and migration in rural areas, even on the periphery of conflict zones.


38 Ibid
5. What to do? Implications on the Response

There is a mistaken operational tendency that assumes the current situation reflects a status quo of the previous year in South Sudan: that the present is simply an extension of the pre-existing conflict dynamic and accompanying human misery, and that the humanitarian action continues with the customary challenges. In reality, humanitarian and protection professionals experience a deteriorating situation in the present, and have serious apprehension for the near and medium term. They experience a reality where they must do more with less funding, in a more dangerous and restrictive environment. The central concern remains for the civilian population who will endure a second calendar cycle of violence with fewer resources, lower levels of resilience and potentially lower levels of assistance should the parties to the conflict continue to challenge the integrity and safety of humanitarian operations.

There are significant implications of the above analysis on humanitarian and protection actors in South Sudan. Whilst the below points do not necessarily articulate ‘answers’ to the problems posed by the current context’s negative spiral, they do raise critical questions with which the humanitarian and protection community have begun to grapple. It is clear that new solutions and new ways of operating must be sought if life-saving assistance is to continue effectively.

A. Will humanitarians be able to continue operating out of Juba?

The specter of economic collapse has given rise to serious discussions regarding the future of Juba based humanitarian action. Departure from Juba (or steep reduction in operations) as the humanitarian hub would have immediate negative impacts on the already strained humanitarian operation, and further strain relations with the GRSS. Presently, the prospect of dry fuel tanks, no electricity, a lack of potable water and functioning sanitation facilities in NGO compounds seems entirely plausible. If inflation and high commodity prices continue, the vast majority of NGO staff will receive salaries that do not meet their families’ basic needs. Conversion of SSP salaries to USD also presents challenges, not least due to the prospect of USD cash flow regulation (or control) by the GRSS via the “NGO Bill”. Further, a trend of increased banditry and crime against NGOs is already in evidence, and is a growing concern. Such a trend would likely increase in the context of economic collapse. Some NGOs are already exploring alternative options and discussing contingency plans that would ensure a continuation of assistance.

What are the mitigating measures that the international community can employ to ensure against this eventuality? What contingency planning should be ongoing, not only at the individual organization level, but within the wider humanitarian community?
B. Responding to less resilient rural and urban communities

Civilians in rural conflict affected areas - and on the periphery of the conflict - are much less resilient than in the previous year as livelihood options and social support has deteriorated in a context of a worsening rural economy, food insecurity, displacement, and a deterioration of all forms of capital. The essential issue to note is that while the conflict patterns may mirror those from 2014 and new communities are affected, for the main part the issues of violence and insecurities are being experienced by the same communities whose capacities to weather a further round of conflict and associated issues is dramatically reduced and increasingly dependent upon life-saving assistance.

New communities are being drawn into pockets of vulnerability due to the erosion and creep of the conflict into other states, while the economic situation is being felt at the household level and food insecurity increases throughout the community. Within this, the international community will be increasingly challenged to determine where to provide assistance with categories of vulnerability such as displacement or household configuration (e.g. female headed being a useful indicator, but not necessarily the determinant of vulnerability).

The emergence of an urban population in need will pose significant challenges. As evident with the POC sites, there is often a large pressure to respond in areas with visibly distressed populations verses populations known to be in more remote less visible locations. It is a significant concern that gains made in 2014 will be undone by any challenges in accessing communities, either due to bureaucratic/security constraints or a drop in funding and mounting pressures to provide assistance to new communities to demonstrate a ‘balance’ in the response.

C. How to do “more with less”?

Aid budgets for South Sudan are being reduced as other global crises vie for a finite amount of funding for emergencies. In the near term, it is highly likely that the humanitarian operation will begin the impossible task of prioritizing certain operations over others even as the crises deepens and more civilians are at risk of displacement. Our analysis indicates that increasingly humanitarian and protection actors will need to ‘do more with less’ in a dynamically changing context. Ensuring life-saving aid reaches vulnerable populations in the most efficient manner is a perennial challenge in South Sudan already. Maintaining even current levels of aid delivery over the medium term may require some fundamental adjustments to current modus operandi.

Doing “more with less” raises questions regarding community level networks and organizations. In the past, local authorities, traditional leaders and the church played key roles in aid provision in South Sudan - and many still do - due to their persistent presence throughout conflict in difficult to reach areas and
their relative influence in the community. But such partnerships with international partners have also in the past had some negative consequences. Are their viable ways to engage ‘community based’ structures (local NGOs, community leaders, the churches, etc.) more robustly to maintain service delivery and save money, whilst not jeopardizing humanitarian principles (or being perceived as such to the detriment of access elsewhere) or creating or contributing to problematic power structures?

What does a more efficient aid operation, one that still seeks to ‘Do No Harm’, look like in this context? What specific changes need to be made in the near term to ensure against dramatic interruptions to service delivery in a context of less funding and widening needs?

It is also recognized that there is no replacement for strong field presence of international humanitarian and protection actors. Maintaining quality service delivery as well as strong analysis to inform response in such a dynamic context will only be served by ensuring field level presence of qualified, neutral, credible actors on the ground. Mitigating measures must be sought to address threats to funding and access for these personnel.

D. Informing the most appropriate aid response

With each wave of displacement, patterns of population movement are changing. Much was learned in 2014 about displacement in the current context related to populations moving into the bush, swamp and other areas considered remote from armed actors; repeated destruction of civilian infrastructure and separation of families means that populations are being pushed in many different directions. These dynamics present clear challenges in a humanitarian community that is being squeezed to consolidate its response at a time when people are displacing into deeper areas.

The ability of actors to operate with geographical and temporal consistency will be critical to well-informed ‘Do No Harm’ humanitarian response. Pressure will mount on operational actors to consolidate responses to population catchment areas for the sake of efficiency, due to the high expense of the current operation dependent upon air assets (e.g., air-drops for food aid and use of helicopters for transport). Given that assistance is an inevitable pull-factor to communities in desperate need, and such scenarios present certain risks, the consolidation of responses (to catchment areas, etc.) must ensure that maximum consideration is given to the safety and security of populations on the move. In order to ‘Do No Harm’ time on the ground for consistent humanitarian actors with communities to assess such a volatile and fluid context is essential to facilitate safe community-led decision-making.

39 See more analysis on displacement dynamics here: http://southsudanhumanitarianproject.com/reports/docr-453/
A key element in adapting will be ensuring improved flow from information management-to-response. The current structure and flow of information-to-response is not sufficient to meet existing needs fast or efficiently enough, and at times credible information is not adequately recognized by decision-makers to inform response, or differing information is used by a variety of actors. Increasingly, organizations are opting out of coordination mechanisms.

Better information, more quickly disseminated for the consumption and action of the humanitarian community will be imperative for more efficient and effective service delivery. Quicker responses and saved lives may hinge on - among other things - wider recognition, acceptance, and utilization of *reasonable qualitative data from well-informed field-based actors in situ* over precise quantitative data. Insistence on the latter will (and does) result in stalled actions in time-sensitive responses that could otherwise save lives.

Further, current humanitarian coordination (and hence information flow) is bound by the administrative boundaries of states and counties. However, this does not mirror the reality of the conflict and its impact on populations, including displacement, ‘return’ migration and etc. Loosening coordination mechanisms to better reflect the dynamics of crises and displacement that sprawl across administrative boundaries, whilst still ensuring the necessary engagement with authorities at state and county level, could significantly improve quality of information and efficiency of response.

Recognizing that earlier attempts to make systematic change to the system have been difficult, a variety of suggestions for improvement have been discussed. For example, *an independent context analysis unit* (e.g., housed within the NGO Forum) could helpfully supplement existing systems and contribute to the critical task of capturing and sharing learning, and support institutionalized learning over time, which is critical to effective aid delivery in South Sudan where the aid community continues to be characterized by “high staff turnover and the need for good collaboration and coordination”⁴⁰.

**E. What unintended consequences does humanitarian assistance have on the conflict and civilian populations?**

Historically in South Sudan humanitarian aid has had unintended and at times negative consequences on populations it means to serve. Even very recent events have shown a pattern of immediate armed attacks on locations that were recently served with food aid. From distribution centers creating pull-factors for hungry armed groups, to unintentionally supporting (or creating) maladaptive power structures, to being manipulated as powerful groups compete for resources to control populations, the risks of unintended consequences are very high. In some ways the manipulation of aid may be

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inevitable, but humanitarian and protection actors must actively seek strategies to minimize these risks and their impacts.

F. Managing a multiplicity of humanitarian access points?

Increasing pressures from government authorities and non-state actors such as the SPLM/A-IO “Relief Organization of South Sudan” with attendant *ad hoc* and often arbitrary (or nefarious) demands for cooperation are adding to the access challenges and independence of humanitarian and protection actors. A proliferation of armed actors and CDF also contribute to the trend of challenging and time-consuming humanitarian access. Aid actors must redouble efforts to mitigate the risks associated with these challenges and increased measures of high-level support may be required to ensure timely humanitarian response. Negotiated access is increasingly difficult as military hierarchies and command and control in some regions have fragmented. The politicization of ethnicity in the current context jeopardizes the safety of many humanitarians moving between different command structures, the vast majority of which are South Sudanese.

G. UNMISS PoC sites: protracted dilemma, are the POC sites safe?

The current situation within UNMISS PoC sites is both untenable and yet seemingly intractable and recent trends indicate that we are likely to see increased numbers as cities and towns are taken and lost, and retaken, in the conflict cycle. One South Sudanese academic and expert made a sobering prediction for “the international community to *build* more PoC sites”. Whilst there is consensus that humanitarian and protection actors must increase and maintain presence and action in rural areas and in areas proximate but outside the PoC sites, such efforts are likely to have limited effect on PoC numbers. Questions remain regarding the feasibility of “voluntary relocation” of civilians from the site, and deep challenges persist in the ever-crowded PoC sites. Recognizing the highly risky scenario that the sites represent for IDPs, the strain on humanitarian and UNMISS relations, and the seemingly intractable policy dilemma the condition presents, all actors must redouble efforts to seek solutions in the best interest of IDPs given the circumstances.

A clear concern is that UNMISS POC sites are not necessarily safe for IDPs or humanitarians due to the infringement upon the sites by armed forces, an accumulation of illegal weapons, and increasingly politicized dynamics within the sites. The situation is more volatile than in the previous year. The moves by the SPLA to enter POC sites such as Bentiu are described by humanitarians as increasingly provocative and audacious, the potential of an attack on a POC site should continue to be a concern. Pushing populations outside of POC sites to avoid this scenario is not a clearly valid option given the insecurity of the situation outside the POC sites, which is often more insecure and removed from sustained assistance due to the dangers of access. A robust and proactive engagement by UNMISS to prevent such visible encroachment and heavy
militarization in the immediate proximity of the POC sites is a necessary measure to deter and mitigate against such a risk. Violent incidents in and around the POC sites by persons affiliated to armed groups has become increasingly normalized by the international community and has not received the same level of intense scrutiny that was received at the outset of the conflict.
5. Conclusion

South Sudan is facing its deepest crisis yet, and it is deepening. The challenges to the humanitarian and protection community are extraordinary, and though beleaguered, this community continues to offer a thin barrier between life and death for many civilians. In order to simply maintain in the face of the above pressures, this community must robustly grapple with the implications noted in section 4, among others, and strive to adapt.

Adaptation, and ongoing analysis and anticipation of new challenges, is required. This can be realized - not simply through financial means - but primarily through the will of organizations, institutions and systems to a) honestly assess their shortcomings in the specific context and b) to commit to the adaptation necessary to best serve the most vulnerable populations in South Sudan.

It is our hope that this document provides some avenues for discussion - and action - to do precisely that.


**Additional Resources**

For humanitarian response data and information see:  
www.humanitarianinfo.org

Protection cluster information can be found here: https://southsudan.humanitarianresponse.info/clusters/protection

In-depth analysis and regular reporting on South Sudan conflict and political issues can be found here:

- http://blogs.prio.org/MonitoringSouthSudan/
- http://www.enoughproject.org/conflicts/sudans
- https://www.hrw.org/africa/south-sudan
- http://africanarguments.org/category/making-sense-of-sudan/

A library of books, policy and academic papers have been written on South Sudan, many of which are good and can be found easily online. A recent and very good addition is: “South Sudan: a Slow Liberation”, by Eddie Thomas. It can be found here: http://zedbooks.co.uk/node/20209