The Current Political Situation of South Sudan

**Political Situation:** Since 2013, South Sudan has been engulfed in civil war between the government and opposing factions trying to overthrow the government. Although, this civil war is not South Sudan’s first civil war. From 1955 to 1972 South Sudan fought for its independence from Sudan, South Sudan’s neighboring country to the north. A peace agreement occurred in 1972, fighting then resumed in 1983 until 2005 when a transitional government was formed while South Sudan began to organize itself for independence. In 2012 South Sudan was finally freed from Sudan and given its independence. This means that South Sudan has been through 50 years of violence, pain, suffering and war. The present civil war is a power struggle between Salva Kiir, the president of South Sudan and Riek Machar, the former vice-president of South Sudan under Salva Kiir and leader of the opposing forces. This civil war has resulted in several peace agreements, all of which have been broken and reigniting the war mostly due to Kiir and Machar’s mutual distrust and hatred of each other, but also due to each one being corrupt and wanting the most power.

Economically, the war has been devastating, since 2013 the annual income has become halved, with inflation skyrocketing at 300% per annum. Socially, the war has left the people of South Sudan in a horrific state: Over 4 million people have been displaced, with 1.8 million internally displaced, and 2.5 million people have fled to the neighboring countries of Uganda, Chad and Sudan for safety. The deaths from the war are incomprehensible: 190,000 dead from violent deaths and 193,000 deaths from famine, disease and other non-violent deaths. However, the total amount of people that have been killed since 1955 is devastating, over 2,900,000 people have died over the course of the First and second Sudanese civil wars and the South Sudanese civil war.

 **Causes:** There are many causes to the civil war in South Sudan. However, it arose over one main issue that had plagued the political climate of South Sudan since before and after South Sudan was given independence in 2012: Ethnic conflicts. There are over 60 different indigenous ethnic groups of South Sudan, but the two largest and most conflicted ethnic groups are the Dinka and the Nuer. The Dinka are the largest ethnic group in South Sudan accounting for 36% of the total population of South Sudan. The Dinka mostly reside in Bahr el Gahzal and the Upper Nile regions of South Sudan. The Nuer are the second largest ethnic group in South Sudan, accounting for 16% of the total population of South Sudan. The Nuer mostly reside in the Nile Valley, which is in the North-Central portion of South Sudan.

Most of the main leaders of South Sudan’s independence movement and acclaimed government officials come from these same two groups. For example, Dr. John Garang de Mabior and is from the Bahr el Gahzal region, *the father of South Sudan*, was a Dinka. President Salva Kiir Mayardit is also a Dinka, Riek Machar the former Vice President of South Sudan is a Nuer, and so is former general Joseph Lagu a mentor to Dr. Garang.

Even though many famous statesman and military leaders of South Sudan come from these two groups, they are also the most conflicted. Even before colonization the Dinka and Nuer went to war over cattle, during the Second Sudanese civil war, a mini civil war (the Nasir Revolt, 1990-1991). This conflict between the two groups almost cost them victory in the larger civil war against the government of Sudan. John Garang stepped in and was able to resolve the conflict.

It was because of this same ethnic rivalry that civil war erupted in 2013. Starting in late 2012 the Nuer people backed up by other ethnic groups accused President Salva Kiir and the government of South Sudan of monopolizing power in favor of the Dinka people due to president Kiir being Dinka. They also accused the government of corruption. Riek Machar, the Vice President of South Sudan and an ethnic Nuer, was accused of a planned Coup d'état in response to the tensions between Kiir’s administration (the Dinka) and the Nuer due to Riek Machar’s loyalty to his own ethnic group, the Nuer. Kiir then attempted to arrest Machar and execute him. Naturally, Machar fled with his entire cabinet and any troops loyal to him from Juba the capital of South Sudan, to Bahr el Gahzal, the Nuer region. Here, Machar called upon the Nuer White Army, the Nuer Militia to fight for him. This final act ignited the South Sudanese civil war.

In conclusion, the war in South Sudan was caused most directly by the ethnic rivalry and power struggle of the Dinka and the Nuer.