Geopolitical Aspects of South Sudan

There is a total of 32 states in the Republic of South Sudan. These states are divided further by the three regions of South Sudan: Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria and Greater Upper Nile. Recently though, almost all the states in the Greater Upper Nile region have come under the control of former Vice-President Riek Machar, leader of the SPLM-IO army and movement, within the South Sudanese civil war. The civil war is primarily a power struggle between Salva Kiir, the President of South Sudan, and Kiir’s former VP Riek Machar, as both desire control of South Sudan. This struggle has forced the states of South Sudan to side with either leader. The states of South Sudan are mainly divided by ethnic groups. As a result of President Kiir being Dinka, the Dinka have sided with Kiir. The Nuer have sided with Machar due to him being Nuer. The following three point will explain the geopolitics of the three main regions of South Sudan, their states and how the present civil war is affecting the land and people of South Sudan.

Bahr el Gahzal is the north western region of South Sudan; it is also South Sudan’s most fertile region. Consequently, most of the populous in this region survives by farming or cattle herding. Bahr el Gahzal is where most of South Sudan food output comes from, unfortunately, due to the present civil war starvation has overcome the region due to years of fighting and raiding. The states of Bahr el Gahzal include; Gogrial, Twic, Tonj, Gok, Western Lake, Eastern Lake, Aweil East, Lol, Aweil and Wau. The main ethnic groups of Bahr el Gahzal are the Dinka and a small portion of the Luo people. Due the strong Dinka population in Bahr el Gahzal, the region has become a hotbed for government troops and activity loyal to Salva Kiir. As I stated earlier, Salva Kiir is ethnically Dinka who was born in the Gogrial state of Bahr el Ghazal and ethnic ties run deep in South Sudan. It is also important to take note that there are two types of Dinka; Dinka Bahr el Gahzal and Dinka Bohr. The latter comes from the Jonglei state in the Greater Upper Nile region of South Sudan.

Equatoria is the southern region of South Sudan and has a variety of natural resources. Gold, diamonds, platinum and copper are only some of dozens of materials that come from this region. There is some agricultural presence in this region, but it’s mostly used for mining and extracting natural resources. The states in this region include; Jubeck, Terekeka, Yei River, Tambura, Gbudwe, Amadi, Maridi, Imatong, and Kapoeta. The main ethnic groups of Equatoria are Toposa, Otuho, Didinga, Tennet, Acholi, Azande, Moru and Bari. These groups are loyal to neither Kiir nor Machar due to neither of them being part of these ethnic groups. As a result of Juba, South Sudan’s capital being in Equatoria, most residents have chosen to stay loyal to Kiir, but a few have sided with Machar.

The north eastern region of South Sudan is the Greater Upper Nile. It is known for its vast oil fields and extensive use of agriculture. The states of this region include; Jonglei, Fangak, Bieh, Akobo, Maiwut, Latjor, Boma, Central Upper Nile, Northern Upper Nile, Fashoda, Ruweng, Southern Liech and Northern Liech. The Nuer are the main ethnic group of this region and Riek Machar, the leader of SPLM-IO, is part of this ethnic group. Hence, Greater Upper Nile is where most of the rebel activity occurs and also hosts Machar’s base of operations. It also means that most of the violence occurs in this area, and unfortunately this region is where most of the South Sudanese are being killed (including innocent civilians) because of the violence. For example, nearly all of the residents of Malakal, formerly an important city on the Nile, were killed in what has been alleged as genocide.

In conclusion, the states and ethnicities are as close together as anything can be, and some experts think that the only way to stop the civil war and violence is to separate the states according to their main ethnicity. This way there will be less of a chance for fighting and war to break out. Luckily, this has already occurred, and South Sudan is seeing improvement. On May 12, 2019, a power sharing deal was made between Machar and Kiir. This shows enormous improvement between rival ethnicities of South Sudan and gives rise to optimism.