



Extremism, Violent Extremism and Terrorism (EVET) in South Sudan

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Question

What evidence and learning is there on i) the incidence of extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism in South Sudan; and ii) activity and lessons learned on work prevent violent extremism in South Sudan?

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1. Summary

In 2011, at the time of South Sudan's independence, there were fears that the country would become a home to violent extremists.¹ However, there is consensus in the literature that levels of violent extremism (VE) in the country are low at present. It is however noteworthy that there are many definitions of extremism and violent extremism. For the purposes of this report, emphasis is placed on extremism and terrorism in the context of the global threat of extremism and terrorism, rather than on ethnic extremism in South Sudan. This is due to the difficulty of distinguishing genuine political grievances from extremist ideology, as the lines between the two are often blurred in South Sudan.

The key findings from the literature are:

- South Sudan appears to have become a place of transit for Islamists travelling from East Africa to North Africa. However, the extent to which this is the case is unclear.
- South Sudan is on the ivory smuggling route used by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency (Van de Merwe, 2017).
- Support for faith-based violence in South Sudan appears to be higher among Muslim religious leaders than among Christian religious leaders. This is attributed to the fact that these Muslim religious leaders are likely to have received their training in Sudan (the north) before South Sudan seceded (Romaniuk et al, 2018).
- There are a limited number of initiatives and programmes to prevent violent extremism in South Sudan. To date these have included capacity building in the education sector and teaching anti-money laundering and counterterrorist financing techniques.

There is a very limited body of literature on violent extremism and terrorism in South Sudan, especially in the context of the global threat of violent extremism. The literature does not mainstream gender.

2. Extremism, Violent Extremism, and Terrorism (EVET)

A peer-reviewed journal article on violent extremism in East Africa finds that violent extremism in South Sudan 'is almost entirely absent' (Romaniuk et al, 2018: 170). The study finds only one statement by President Salva Kiir mentioning violent extremism. The statement was reportedly made in response to perceptions that there was an increase in interreligious tension over land disputes (Romaniuk et al, 2018: 170). The original news article states that President Salva Kiir ordered the return of properties taken from Muslims.² It is however not clear from the article who is responsible for having appropriated these properties. The article also mentions the return of church lands that have been unlawfully appropriated.³

The University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database lists 225 terrorist incidents in South Sudan since January 2012.⁴ The majority of entries list the perpetrator as the Sudan People's

¹ <https://www.suddinstitute.org/news-and-events/news/show/NewsItem-031>

² <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article51831>

³ <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article51831>

⁴

https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?chart=country&casualties_type=b&casualties_max=&dtp2=all&country=1004

Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO). However, the SPLM-IO is not a designated terrorist organisation, and under the terms of the 2015 peace agreement, was part of the government, with its leader Riek Machar serving as First Vice President until fighting broke out between the SPLA (the armed wing of the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement or SPLM), and the SPLA-IO (the armed wing of the SPLM-IO) in July 2016. Subsequently, the SPLM-IO split into two factions with the government now only recognising the faction led by current First Vice President Taban Deng Gai (US Department of State, 2017: 24).

In 2016, the Islamic Movement for the Liberation of Raja may have carried out two terrorist attacks in the city of Wau in northwestern South Sudan. The attacks reportedly resulted in 84 deaths. There is very little information available about the group, and sources vary on whether the movement is confirmed as being the perpetrator of the attacks.^{5 6}

South Sudan as a place of transit for violent extremists and terrorists

The US Department of State describes the threat of terrorism in South Sudan as 'medium.' This assessment is reportedly based on the fact South Sudan has porous borders with neighboring countries that have 'indigenous terrorist organisations.'⁷ It states that there is no evidence to suggest that there are operational terrorist cells in South Sudan, but that weak border controls could allow terrorist groups to seek refuge in the country. Al-Shabaab, for example, is believed to transit the country, and possibly also to use it as a safe haven.⁸

There have been a number of arrests of suspected Islamists in South Sudan since 2017. For example, the Government of South Sudan reportedly arrested 76 suspected members of Al-Shabaab attempting to cross into Sudan through Northern Bahr el Ghazal state.⁹ Moreover, in May 2017, three Kenyans and a Somali were reportedly arrested in South Sudan on their way to join the Islamic State in Libya. The four men stated that they had been 'assisted' by the Magafe Network, which is a group of people smugglers operating from Libya that has recruiters in several countries in East Africa (European Institute of Peace, 2018, p. 41). The Magafe Network is primarily a criminal organisation that holds migrants captive en route and then extorts money from their families. However, the Kenyan authorities also state that the Magafe Network is a key facilitator for Kenyans who wish to join the Islamic State (European Institute of Peace, 2018: 41).

Smuggling

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), led by Joseph Kony, aims to overthrow the Ugandan government and 'establish a multiparty democracy characterised by Acholi nationalism and the strict rule of the Ten Commandments' (Van de Merwe, 2017: 7). The LRA is heavily reliant on the illegal ivory trade for funds. The map below shows the route used by ivory smugglers, starting in DRC and passing through South Sudan on their way to other destinations.

See: Van de Merwe (2017: 8) https://www.saiia.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/saia_spi_44_van-der-merwe_20170509.pdf

⁵ <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=201606150025>

⁶ <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=201606250035>

⁷ <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=16898>

⁸ <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=16898>

⁹ <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article56825>

According to the US Department of State, the LRA had a 'fairly constant presence' in South Sudan in the past, but has in recent years been operating largely in northern DRC and eastern Central Africa Republic. However, they note that LRA incursions into South Sudan have increased.¹⁰ It is not clear whether the incursions they refer to are related to ivory smuggling.

The literature search conducted for this report did not uncover any evidence of drug smuggling linked to violent extremism or terrorism in South Sudan.

Support for faith-based violence

A quantitative study published in a peer-reviewed journal finds that in terms of support for faith-based violence among religious leaders in South Sudan, those who embrace secularism and are tolerant of other faiths reject faith-based violence, with the opposite also holding true (Basedau & Koos, 2015: 10-11). However, interreligious activities do not decrease support for faith-based violence, but they do increase understanding for others engaging in peaceful protest. The study also finds that Muslim religious leaders seem more inclined to support faith-based violence. The paper hypothesises that this is probably due to two factors:

- Radical Islamism is prominent in Sudan, and most of the clerics have a Northern background.
- Muslims constitute a minority in South Sudan, and minority status often leads to threat perceptions, which can in turn foster radical attitudes.

The study emphasises that this finding is not due to Islam being 'inherently violent.' Broadly, the study finds that pro-violence attitudes among religious leaders are largely dependent upon personal convictions (Basedau & Koos, 2015: 10-11).

Violent extremism among South Sudanese refugee communities

A study of violent extremism among South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia finds that the threat of violent extremism is low, as there is no real prevalence of violent extremism in South Sudan (Mbyiozo, 2018).

3. Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE)

This section provides examples of PVE programmes and projects in South Sudan. The literature search conducted for this report uncovered very little evidence of such initiatives.

International

UNESCO: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's approach to Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) is in line with UN Secretary General's PVE Plan of Action. Broadly, UNESCO 'will adopt a practical approach, and work with national stakeholders to strengthen capacities for PVE, encourage dialogue and messaging for PVE through its activities, engage communities to combat violent extremism, and empower youth and facilitate socio-economic development to ensure PVE.'

¹⁰ <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=16898>

PVE Initiatives to date include a 'National Follow-up Capacity-building Workshop on the Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education (PVE-E)' in October 2018, organised by UNESCO-International Centre for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) and the Hedayah Centre. Attendees were 31 Education Ministry personnel, teacher educators from two teacher-training colleges, and teachers from five secondary schools in South Sudan. The aim of the workshop was to build the capacities of policy makers, teacher educators, and teachers 'to develop and implement educational interventions and approaches that contribute, effectively and appropriately to the prevention of violent extremism through resilience building and the promotion of global citizenship in South Sudan.'¹¹

According to UNESCO's 2019-2021 Country Strategy document for South Sudan, further planned PVE activities include:

- Working towards raising awareness on media ethics, and challenges and opportunities posed by online media, including countering fake news and disinformation (UNESCO, 2018: 22).
- Providing technical assistance to enable policies that strengthen PVE through youth empowerment (UNESCO, 2018: 23).

Government of Denmark: The Danish government has a programme focused on countering money laundering and terrorist financing in East Africa and Yemen. Denmark is continuing its efforts to build partnerships that teach anti-money laundering and counterterrorist finance techniques to a number of East African governments, including South Sudan (US Department of State, 2017).

National

The Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare ran a transition centre in Yambio, Gbudue State, with support from an international organisation. It is not clear which international organisation this is, nor over which time period the centre was operational. The centre provided interim care and support to children and mothers rescued from violent extremist organisations, including potential trafficking victims. However, the report does not specify which violent extremist organisations, so it is not clear which definition of violent extremism is being applied here.¹²

4. References

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¹¹ <http://www.iicba.unesco.org/?q=node/322>

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