

Summary

South Sudan remains an unstable country plagued by violence. Interethnic conflict engulfs the north of the country, particularly Abyei, Warrap, and Unity provinces. Attacks on aid convoys and workers have also been increasing and the situation is worsening due to acute food shortages. A large influx of refugees in the Upper Nile exacerbates food insecurity in the country, which might become a potential source of conflict. An additional source of conflict might be the uncertainty and disagreement regarding the general elections in December 2024.

Recent events and developments

Unrest and instability in South Sudan persist. The disputed border region of Abyei has seen persistent interethnic conflict between the Twic Dinka and Ngok Dinka communities between December 2023 and February 2024 with no end in sight. In South Sudan, the attack into Abyei originated from Warrap and Unity provinces with little government response to deescalate the situation. At least 55 people have been kidnapped and 136 have been killed in the ensuing violence between December and February, including 2 UNISFA peacekeepers. Further attacks on UN peacekeepers were reported in February in Bor South County of Jonglei State, where a group of armed men opened fire on a UNMISS aid convoy. The situation is further deteriorating due to a recent influx of refugees into the country in the Upper Nile Province, primarily through the Joda border point. Globally, South Sudan remains one of the most food-insecure places with 7.1 million people being predicted to suffer from acute food insecurity. The deteriorating situation in South Sudan is further exacerbated by uncertainty regarding the general elections in December 2024. The main opposition party (SPLM-IO) has boycotted the elections, citing among others the lack of fairness and transparency as reasons for the boycott. The situation regarding the general elections has caused uncertainty in parts of the South Sudanese population, as fears of political violence between the ruling SPLM and SPLM-IO grow.

Impact assessment

Several months of unopposed ethnic conflict in the north of South Sudan highlight the country's instability. The government has failed to bolster security in the Warrap and Unity provinces. Instead, authorities have authorized individuals to use lethal force against criminals in the Warrap province in order to combat communal violence, suggesting that stability in these provinces is unlikely in the foreseeable future. Another concern is the large influx of refugees into the Upper Nile state, which currently lacks adequate infrastructure and resources. The current food crisis, combined with the influx of refugees might exacerbate the situation, potentially leading to violent riots that could affect aid workers. In 2022 South Sudanese communities resorted to looting emergency food supplies and convoys as well as attacking aid workers due to unprecedented food shortages. Consequently, South Sudan has been identified as one of the most dangerous countries for aid workers in 2023. It is not likely that the situation will not improve in 2024 as violence against aid workers has already been reported in Abyei and Jonglei, and due to food insecurity, might spread to the Upper Nile region. Political instability is further worsened by uncertainty surrounding the credibility of the general elections. The current environment results in elevated tensions and political infighting between the SPLM and SPLM-IO are a potential source of political violence. No violence has been reported in Juba, but this might change as political infighting in 2013 escalated into violent conflict.

Advice from Forth Global

- Ensure that all employees travelling to South Sudan receive a three-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Advise staff to avoid traveling to Warrap, Unity, Jonglei, and Upper Nile provinces due to the potential for escalating violence.
- Closely monitor the local and international media for updates on election postponement and its impact on the security situation. Particular attention should be paid to the security situation in Juba.
- Ensure that contingency and security plans are up-to-date and that staff are aware of them.

Customized advice

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