

Containing and Combating Instability in South Sudan

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Class of 2017

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved--OMB No. 0704-0188		
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 01-04-2017		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Containing and Combating Instability in South Sudan			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) Mr. Thomas J. Casker United States Federal Government			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Colonel Brian R. Foster			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited. To the best of my knowledge this SRP accurately depicts USG and/or DoD policy & contains no classified information or aggregation of information that poses an operations security risk. Author: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PA: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 8,531					
14. ABSTRACT South Sudan—despite a seemingly remote location, limited critical resources, and nearly four years of Civil War—will remain a crucial and complicated foreign policy problem for the Trump Administration. South Sudan's latest outbreak of fighting has sparked famine, refugee flows, and cross-border fighting that threaten to distract key U.S. regional counterterrorism partners, most notably Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. Washington can help to contain South Sudan's instability through supporting a UN-backed Regional Protection Force (RPF) to deter and repel government and rebel attacks against civilians, diplomats, and humanitarian workers. The RPF, however, will require significant U.S. assistance to achieve its mission based on similar peace enforcement missions in sub-Saharan Africa. The RPF will require U.S. diplomatic and military assistance in preventing meddling by the South Sudanese government, in securing troops from regional governments, in equipping the RPF with the capabilities necessary for force projection, and in finding an experienced commander to lead the RPF. The RPF should reduce the spread of fighting and would provide a signal to the belligerents that the U.S. and regional governments are deeply committed to finding a lasting political solution to roots behind the conflict.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Peace Operations, R2P, Juba, IGAD					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 42	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (w/ area code)

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(8,531 words)

Abstract

South Sudan—despite a seemingly remote location, limited critical resources, and nearly four years of Civil War—will remain a crucial and complicated foreign policy problem for the Trump Administration. South Sudan's latest outbreak of fighting has sparked famine, refugee flows, and cross-border fighting that threaten to distract key U.S. regional counterterrorism partners, most notably Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. Washington can help to contain South Sudan's instability through supporting a UN-backed Regional Protection Force (RPF) to deter and repel government and rebel attacks against civilians, diplomats, and humanitarian workers. The RPF, however, will require significant U.S. assistance to achieve its mission based on similar peace enforcement missions in sub-Saharan Africa. The RPF will require U.S. diplomatic and military assistance in preventing meddling by the South Sudanese government, in securing troops from regional governments, in equipping the RPF with the capabilities necessary for force projection, and in finding an experienced commander to lead the RPF. The RPF should reduce the spread of fighting and would provide a signal to the belligerents that the U.S. and regional governments are deeply committed to finding a lasting political solution to roots behind the conflict.

Containing and Combating Instability in South Sudan

The grim reality is that South Sudan is on the edge of the abyss.

—UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon¹

In July 2016, a tenuous one year peace agreement in South Sudan foundered, and UN and international diplomats soon found themselves in the crossfire between opposition and government forces vying for control of the capital city, Juba. These fights signaled a resumption of a civil war that has ensnared this land-locked African nation since its independence in 2011. The persistent unwillingness of evenly-matched rivals to actively embrace peace raises the question of whether the United States should spend further limited resources to create a stability that neither side seems to want in a nation where the U.S. has few direct vital or critical economic or political interests. However, South Sudan's problems rarely stay within its largely uncontrolled borders, and the U.S. will need to continue to take a leadership role to prevent Juba's unrest from metastasizing and spreading into critical regional counterterrorism (CT) partners Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda or into the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and its supply of strategic minerals. South Sudan also remains an international lodestone for the principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P),² and the failure of the international community to protect South Sudan's civilians from indiscriminate and targeted violence may embolden similar efforts by U.S. adversaries in more strategically critical areas such as Eastern Europe and the Middle East. As complicated a task as it poses, the U.S. has a critical need to contain South Sudan's instability to prevent it from eroding key regional allies as well to uphold the concept of R2P worldwide.

The U.S. answer to this vexing problem, however, does not necessarily require deployment of U.S. forces. Instead, a minor commitment of diplomatic, economic, and

military aid will help a newly forming Regional Protection Force (RPF) to overcome the most likely hurdles it will face in restoring order to Juba. The RPF is an imperfect way to restore stability, but is beneficial because it utilizes local militaries and the option of separate staffing, mission, and logistics from the already extant UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). The RPF offers an option outside of normal UN auspices for peace enforcement,³ providing necessary separation from and protection for UNMISS's traditional peacekeeping mission. Moreover, the RPF signals a regional investment in both short-term civilian protection and the longer-term peace process, reducing over time the need for prolonged U.S. leadership and resources. However, based on past and ongoing peace enforcement missions, the U.S. will need to provide assistance and expertise on multiple fronts to prepare the RPF for success. This would include securing key equipment to execute the mandate, maintaining pressure on the South Sudanese government to allow the RPF to execute its mission, and finding adequate senior leadership for the young force. These steps, provided either directly by the U.S. or secured through U.S. partners, will at the very least help to secure U.S. and international diplomats and aid workers in Juba from further violence, stem the spread and expansion of the conflict, and ideally provide the space necessary to secure a long-term political solution in South Sudan.

Defining the Problem

The fighting that erupted in the capital of Juba in July 2016 is the latest phase of a years-long civil war, mainly over government power-sharing between the majority Dinka tribe and the next largest tribe, the Nuer. In July 2013, President Salva Kiir—a hero from South Sudan's war for independence and Dinka leader—fired several Nuer cabinet members. Kiir decided to fire the officials after Vice President Riek Machar, the

most prominent Nuer leader, announced he would challenge Kiir in the next election.⁴ The political crisis escalated into violence in December 2013 after Dinka presidential guard and security units systematically killed Nuer civilians and officials in Juba, sparking retaliation by Nuer against Dinka populations throughout the rest of country.⁵ These mass killings polarized moderate members of both of the majority ethnic groups and prompted many of South Sudan's multiple, smaller ethnicities into either pro-Nuer and pro-Dinka camps. Additionally, some Dinka, Nuer, and other ethnic leaders used the civil war as an excuse to use violence to resolve several unrelated, but long-simmering, local grievances.⁶ Uganda intervened quickly in late December 2013 to halt internecine killing in the capital, which helped to shore up government forces and subsequently shifted fighting to population centers and oil fields in the less-developed Upper Nile and Unity states in northern South Sudan.⁷



Figure 1. South Sudan's Provinces Prior to October 2015⁸

Uganda's intervention and the shift of fighting northward showed the potential of the conflict to cross poorly delineated and controlled borders. First, the fighting in South Sudan's Upper Nile and Unity States put at risk oil supplies that both South Sudan and its former ruler Sudan relied upon for government revenue, creating an enduring interest by Khartoum in resolution of its neighbor's internal conflict. Secondly, a poorly defined and protected Sudan-South Sudan border created an environment for both South Sudanese and Sudanese rebels to operate freely, and both Khartoum and Juba exacerbated cross-border violence by using these rebel groups as proxy forces.⁹ This initial round of fighting continued from 2013 until August 2015, when both Dinka and Nuer forces accepted a provisional peace agreement¹⁰ brokered by the

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) regional group, prompting Uganda to withdraw its intervention force.¹¹ The peace agreement created a new Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU), which placed Machar in a newly created First Vice President position and divided government positions and powers between the Dinka and Nuer factions.¹² The agreement also allowed Machar to return to Juba with a 1200 personal guard force,¹³ a move that would foreshadow the return to violence in the capital a year later. Following two years of intense fighting and the intervention of two neighbors, the negotiated peace ultimately did little but returned both sides to the pre-war status quo.

The TGoNU quickly devolved and the 2016 fighting placed U.S. and international diplomats, humanitarian workers, and civilians at direct risk. The specific spark of the clashes remains unclear, but the subsequent fighting between Machar's guard force and government factions occurred throughout the city, with the government employing helicopter gunships, artillery, and tanks in and around population centers and UN Protection of Civilian sites.¹⁴ A UN special investigation of UNMISS—a force of around 15,000 peacekeepers—found the mission was underprepared and slow to respond to attacks against civilian protection sites and NGO quarters, leading to sexual assaults against both civilians and aid workers, the death of two Chinese peacekeepers, and looting of stockpiled, critically-needed food aid.¹⁵ In response to the violence, the U.S. Embassy withdrew non-essential personnel, warned U.S. citizens to shelter-in-place, and deployed an additional 40 U.S. service members to ensure security.¹⁶ Fighting in Juba subsided with comparatively small casualties, but the event signaled the end of the temporary peace in a way that directly threatened U.S. interests.



Figure 2. South Sudan in Relation to its Neighbors¹⁷

The renewed conflict evolved in new ways that make the entanglement of even more of South Sudan's neighbors more likely. First, both rebels and government forces have expanded fighting and sought new allies in South Sudan's Equatoria states, a previously relatively stable, multiethnic area around Juba that was relatively untouched by the earlier phase of the civil war. This new theater of operations threatens to create massive refugee flows—nearly 325,000 between July and December 2016 by UN estimates—as civilians flee sexual assault, property destruction, and targeting of noncombatants.¹⁸ In a December 2016 resolution, the UN noted that South Sudan had over a million refugees, the fourth highest in the world,¹⁹ as well as 2.9 million internally-displaced persons.²⁰ Moreover, in February 2017 the UN Food and Agriculture Organization declared that 100,000 South Sudanese faced starvation, with an additional 1 million on the brink of starvation and another 5.5 million food insecure expected to rise

in the July 2017 lean season,²¹ increasing the likelihood of mass migrations into South Sudan's more stable neighbors. Secondly, an already poorly contained civil war is increasingly spilling across more of South Sudan's international borders than previous stages of the conflict. Machar was able to elude capture in Juba by retreating with his forces through South Sudan's porous border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC),²² flaring tensions between Kinshasa and Juba.²³ Moreover, refugees are increasingly settling in Ethiopia and Kenya,²⁴ providing these countries more immediate interests in intervening in South Sudan's internal conflict. Unlike their role in the first stage of the civil war, Sudan and Uganda have, at least for the moment, avoided becoming involved in this stage of fighting and deny any claims that they are supporting either side.²⁵ Nevertheless, the expansion of fighting into the Equatorias threatens new second-order effects as greater refugee-flows invite intervention by more of South Sudan's neighbors.

U.S. Interest: Beyond Just Reputation?

The resumption of the South Sudanese civil war comes at a natural inflection point for the U.S., as a new administration begins to consider how to prioritize U.S. interests in the region. The Obama Administration's South Sudan policy prioritized preventing mass atrocities²⁶ and protecting aid workers and diplomats,²⁷ mainly through a combination of proposed international arms embargoes, targeted sanctions, and the creation of the RPF. President Trump has yet to announce his Africa plan, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies notes that the Trump administration probably has little preconceived notions on South Sudan, providing a blank slate for any future U.S. strategy. Kiir and Machar at least see an opportunity to use this openness to influence future U.S. policy to support their position. Kiir congratulated President Trump

on his victory and hoped the new administration would see “respect for non-intervention in internal affairs.”²⁸ Machar is similarly optimistic, believing that the new administration will be more willing to take a side in the conflict and will prefer Machar as an outsider candidate.²⁹

Despite the dangers of continued involvement in a seemingly intractable conflict, a broad analysis that includes the regional and international context of South Sudan’s civil war reveals several deep and abiding interests for Washington. Specifically, the country’s location and the spreading nature of its conflict indirectly shapes more central U.S. CT and humanitarian interests in the region.

The expanding conflict in South Sudan is likely to directly impact U.S. economic interests as continued fighting keeps South Sudan’s oil production offline and as refugees and rebels increasingly find shelter in eastern DRC, home to a vast amount of the world market in strategic minerals. South Sudan’s oil production dropped from a high of 360,000 barrels per day prior to the start of the civil war to a low of between 130,000 to 160,000 barrels per day.³⁰ Moreover, experts estimate that eastern Congo has some \$24 trillion worth of rare earth minerals such as wolfram, coltan, and tantalum that are crucial to low-cost, advanced electronics.³¹ Most of these mines have returned to production following the return of stability to eastern DRC starting in late 2013;³² however, this stability and supply is likely to be increasingly at risk as more refugees join the nearly 60,000 refugees that have already fled to eastern DRC from the Equatorias,³³ including over 100 of Machar-aligned rebel soldiers.³⁴ These refugees and fighters add a new source of instability in a region of DRC already populated by a range of anti-Kampala, anti-Kigali, and anti-Bujumbura rebels and refugees that have

challenged Kinshasa's control of eastern DRC for nearly 20 years. Further refugee movements or opposition retreats into DRC will create local competition for food, security, and employment that are likely to upset Kinshasa's tenuous hold of the region, threatening not just regional instability but also the supply of key rare earth minerals.

Beyond immediate economic interests, the regional nature of South Sudan's civil war is likely to increase pressures on its immediate neighbors to intervene, distracting some from assisting U.S. CT operations in Somalia and the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda provide the bulk of experienced forces to fight against the Al-Shabaab terror group throughout Somalia. These three countries provide over 14,000 of the 22,000 troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM),³⁵ who in addition to hunting Al-Shabaab, provide the security necessary for Somalia's transitional government to form and train its own security services. However, these same three countries all have deep political and economic links to South Sudan, which, when combined with limited resources, may tempt them to shift focus and forces to South Sudan at the cost of the AMISOM mission. Most notably, both Addis Ababa and Kampala were active supporters of the multiple rebel factions that emerged during Juba's war for independence from Sudan, creating alliances and rivalries that have persisted since Juba's independence in 2011.³⁶ To date, Ethiopia and Uganda have been measured in their responses to the latest round of fighting; however, a history of taking sides in South Sudan's crises and concerns that chaos there will erode their own internal security increases the chance that both will choose to intervene in South Sudan.

Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda also have made long-term economic plans that make Juba's stability key to their national interests. Between 2005 and 2013, Uganda

became a major investor in South Sudan and Juba was a major export market for Ugandan goods.³⁷ Since 2013, Uganda has lost nearly 60% of its exports,³⁸ and when the ceasefire collapsed in July 2016 the Government of Uganda conservatively estimated it was losing an estimated \$1 million a day from lost economic activity.³⁹ Additionally, South Sudan's reduced oil production has quashed Uganda's economic plans to become the regional refiner for South Sudanese crude.⁴⁰ Finally, Uganda is one of the most accepting nations for refugees in sub-Saharan Africa; however, the surge of South Sudanese refugees has overtaxed its domestic resources and Uganda will require more economic aid to accommodate even more refugees.⁴¹ The ever-increasing domestic costs of its neighbor's civil war is likely to test Kampala's temperance in unilaterally intervening again in South Sudan.

Ethiopia and Kenya have economic links to South Sudan that are threatened by the ongoing instability as well. Kenyan businesses are heavily invested in multiple South Sudanese sectors—from banking to telecommunications to aviation—and Juba was Nairobi's fourth largest export partner prior to the start of the civil war.⁴² Ethiopia is less deeply invested in South Sudan, but Addis Ababa has long shown interest in increasing its trade with Juba,⁴³ and the two countries in October 2016 signed a memorandum of understanding to increase trade, road infrastructure, and access to South Sudanese oil.⁴⁴ Finally, like Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia already host large numbers of regional refugees and the renewed flow of South Sudanese refugees is likely to drain already scarce resources without further international aid.⁴⁵ Thus, like Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia are likely to feel compelled to respond to the South Sudanese civil war, drawing resources from other areas, such as U.S. supported CT operations.

Finally, the U.S. still maintains a moral interest in protecting civilians who currently are not protected by their own government from ethnic or targeted violence, often referred to as R2P. Former U.S. Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power, a long-time and vocal proponent of the R2P principle, notes that not only is protecting human rights an inherent American moral interest, but also that mass atrocities can destabilize whole regions and, if left unchecked, can create a normalization of mass killings in future conflicts.⁴⁶ Since adopting the R2P as a guiding principle in 2005, the UN has added R2P language in multiple UN Security Council resolutions and peacekeeping mandates.⁴⁷ As a result, experts note that the consistent international support for the R2P principle has helped overcome resistance by some world leaders to humanitarian intervention in their borders,⁴⁸ and Francis Deng, South Sudan's first Ambassador to the UN and former UN Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, has stated that "the logic of the transcendent importance of human rights as a legitimate area of concern for the international community . . . would tend to make inaction quite indefensible."⁴⁹

Between economic interests in the Congo, concerns over the distraction of key allies in Somalia, and the moral and global leadership of R2P, the U.S. has an interest in helping to stabilize South Sudan. The government and opposition may not be closer to resolving their power-sharing issues, but the expansion of fighting to South Sudan's southern border regions threatens to turn an internal conflict into an increasingly regional matter. Moreover, reports of sexual assault, looting, and targeting of civilians based on ethnicity makes South Sudan yet another test of the U.S.-championed concept of R2P. Each of these factors individually would probably not meet the threshold for U.S. action; the AU could find other partners for AMISOM, and the US

could find other resources for oil or strategic minerals, and could find other ways to uphold R2P in other conflicts. However, taken together, these elements broadly threaten regional stability and U.S. mores, requiring action by Washington to help stabilize South Sudan.

Evaluating the Regional Protection Force (RPF)

Simply put, the U.S. and international community have few tools to rapidly stabilize South Sudan. At least two tracks of President Obama's plan to push South Sudan to peace appear to be off the table. In December 2016 the UN Security Council did not adopt a U.S.-backed proposals for targeted leadership sanctions or an arms embargo, with China and Russia vehemently arguing that such moves did not support inclusiveness between the belligerents and worked at cross-purposes to a negotiated peace.⁵⁰ That leaves the RPF as the only current viable option to secure Juba and show broader international resolve to improve stability in South Sudan. Encouragingly, the RPF continues to receive support from the UN Security Council (UNSC), the African Union (AU), and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), as well as at least notional support from South Sudan's opposition, and its popularity makes it the most viable international option to contain and control South Sudan's instability.

The UNSC officially called for the creation of the RPF in August 2016, requesting a 4,000 member force to protect entry and departure from Juba and to proactively engage any group that seeks to attack UN facilities, civilian protection sites, humanitarian workers, or civilians.⁵¹ The RPF's mandate also includes a unique clause allowing it to respond to civilian crises *in extremis* outside of Juba,⁵² providing in theory the mandate to protect citizens countrywide if necessary. The force has been slow to organize; the original mandate called for an immediate deployment from late summer

2016 until mid-December 2016, a schedule that has proven too optimistic as the force has yet to deploy. Kiir has caused part of this delay with his unwillingness to authorize access for the force until late November 2016, ostensibly because of his fears that the RPF's more robust mandate would violate South Sudan's sovereignty.⁵³ Additionally, the RPF has found few reliable troop contributing countries (TCCs), and the negotiations for Rwanda and Ethiopia to provide forces were ongoing as late as mid-November 2016.⁵⁴ While the RPF continues to enjoy wide support in the international community, its lethargic organization to date has made it more of a theoretical than actual force.

From the U.S. perspective, the RPF has several attractive features beyond its popularity in international fora. Perhaps foremost, the RPF requires minimal U.S. assets or investment in an international security environment characterized by multiple concurrent threats and limited fiscal resources. With the RPF, the U.S. would not have to commit troops, and local TCCs are ideal because they can predominately rely on their own logistics and transport resources to deploy and sustain operations in South Sudan. Moreover, Rwanda and Ethiopia, two TCCs currently under consideration for staffing the RPF are skilled at such missions, with both having participated in other stability operations and both having received U.S.-backed peacekeeping training under the US Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program. Finally, the RPF, as a regionally-backed force working with UNMISS, is neither fully a UN force nor fully an AU or IGAD force, a diplomatic gray zone that can be useful for allowing the U.S. to concurrently pursue both UN reforms⁵⁵ and South Sudanese stability. Ultimately, the RPF is an effective way for the U.S. to quickly improve South

Sudanese stability without requiring major resource commitment or overcommitting to a UN that Washington may seek to reform.

The RPF's diplomatic gray zone is also an elegant solution to a vexing, broader problem in international intervention; how to cleanly delineate humanitarian-focused peacekeeping operations from potentially sovereign-threatening peace enforcement operations. Part of the peacekeeping vs. peace enforcement debate revolves around the tools that both missions share. Modern peacekeeping increasingly uses tools and methods more consistent with traditional warfare, from intelligence gathering to information operations to even joint combat operations with host government forces.⁵⁶ Critics note that these methods threaten the very principles of impartiality and limited use-of-force that are the “oxygen” of peacekeeping operations.⁵⁷ For these critics, this evolution of tactics, combined with a broader trend to increasingly authorize the use of force in peacekeeping operations, increase the chance that future belligerents—from governments to rebels to civilians—will target UN forces, workers, and humanitarian workers because they no longer see the UN as a neutral arbiter.⁵⁸ This is not a purely academic or entirely recent concern; one review of the UN's robust peacekeeping operations in Congo in the 1960s concluded that the transition of mission from peacekeeping to peace enforcement made the UN a target and led to sustained fighting between peacekeepers and rebels.⁵⁹ Alternatively, the early stages of international operations in Mali avoided this blending of missions by first allowing regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and French forces to take a role in offensive operations after which the UN eventually took the lead on traditional peacekeeping and humanitarian missions.⁶⁰ The RPF thus builds on the lessons of the

Mali intervention; as a regional force the RPF helps to maintain the neutrality and legitimacy of UNMISS, while still creating an option to enforce the peace separately if necessary.

A final benefit of the RPF is that it can serve to stave off multiple, competing unilateral interventions by uniting South Sudan's neighbors under a common flag. As mentioned previously Ethiopia and Kenya both have interests in preventing the spillover of instability for different reasons, and the RPF provides an opportunity of them to work in unison to establish stability. It also allows Sudan and Uganda, two nations that South Sudan's belligerents do not see as neutral, to continue to achieve their goals of containing instability without resorting to unilateral intervention and use of force.⁶¹ Moreover, the RPF also acts as a signal by South Sudan's neighbors to Juba of their commitment to resolution of the conflict by committing lives and resources. Finally, the South Sudan mission is likely to require several years to find peace, and leveraging South Sudan's neighbors to staff the RPF creates a vested interest by Ethiopia, Rwanda, and other TCCs to what will prove to be a years-long peace process.

Predicting Future Frictions: RPF's Likely Challenges from Similar Missions

Similar peace enforcement missions throughout sub-Saharan Africa provide a framework to predict what policymakers and RPF commanders are likely to face when operating in South Sudan. In particular, the RPF is likely to encounter an uncooperative host country that will attempt to harr, harass, and block the RPF from achieving its mission. Additionally, the RPF will face key resource-constraints, such as troops, funding, airlift, and intelligence support that would prove critical for mission success. Finally, the RPF will likely need help in establishing a command structure that would both effectively manage the force and set operating procedures, both of which will prove

necessary to avoid violence that could erode the RPF's or UNMISS' legitimacy with South Sudanese civilians and political leaders. If the international community can prepare the RPF to face these predictable challenges, the RPF will be better prepared to contain instability, to halt violence, and to respond to other, unpredictable contingencies.

Dealing with an Uncooperative Juba

Unlike other recent regional interventions, South Sudan's Government is likely to resist the RPF deployment for as long as possible because of Juba's belief that it can achieve a unilateral victory over the opposition. A central tenet behind international support for the RPF is how similar peace enforcement missions—especially the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in the DRC—have found success in quelling armed groups, protecting civilians, and creating the stability necessary for reconciliation.⁶² However the critical difference between the RPF and the FIB (as well as other, similar peace enforcement missions) is that the latter mission worked with government forces to augment domestic security capabilities rather than working as an independent, neutral party. In eastern DRC the Congolese military conducted the bulk of fighting against M23 rebels, with the FIB primarily providing supporting operations such as aerial surveillance, close air support, enabling command and control, planning, and logistics.⁶³ This alignment of regional forces with the government also allows host-country capitals to dictate the operational tempos of international intervention forces, and peace enforcement operations in Congo⁶⁴ and Mali⁶⁵ have stalled because of either host-country foot-dragging host-country lack of resources and effective planning. While the UNSC views the RPF as building on past successes of similar missions, those same

missions come with a very stark lesson on how the host government can ultimately control the nature and success of any intervention force.

There are signs that Kiir is already following such a model of resistance. Since the outbreak of fighting in July 2016, Kiir has been successful in politically sidelining the opposition, increasing the likelihood that he will either resist or restrain the RPF from taking any action that may impede his gains. In July 2016 Kiir appointed Taban Deng Gai, an ethnic Nuer rival to Machar, as First Vice President, reinforcing Kiir's characterization of Machar as an illegitimate leader and prompting some defections from the rebel camp back to the government.⁶⁶ Moreover, Kiir's spokesman in early January 2017 stated that the RPF deployment was unnecessary because security in Juba had improved, and stated that that Juba would require a new UN resolution since the RPF missed its original deployment timeline.⁶⁷ Ultimately, Kiir probably sees the RPF as a challenge to his authority, since, as one critic of the RPF notes, the mission's mandate is predicated on the concept that Kiir and Machar will adhere to the August 2015 power-sharing agreement,⁶⁸ something that Kiir does not want or need.

Kiir could take several other measures to delay or hamper the RPF mission. For example, South Sudan could replicate Khartoum's delaying tactics against the deployment of the UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), where Khartoum withheld staff visas, prevented imports, imposed curfews on UNAMID troops, and expelled individuals Khartoum saw as key to the mission's success.⁶⁹ Alternatively, Kiir could relent on the RPF but almost immediately use any increased stability as an excuse to call for a drawdown or reduction in forces, similar to how Kinshasa has resisted and forced reductions in UN forces in Congo since 2010.⁷⁰ Finally, South Sudan could continue to

vacillate on RPF deployment to keep the UNSC divided on more intrusive arms embargoes or targeted sanctions, ultimately keeping the RPF in limbo until regional or international will evaporates. Kiir, even if pressed by the international community to accept the RPF, still has a playbook on how to hamstring the force so he can achieve unilateral victory.

Resource Restraints

The RPF is also likely to fall prey to systemic resource challenges, especially in securing troop contributions, acquiring key equipment and aerial support, and obtaining actionable intelligence. These resources have been key to other missions' successes and failures, and without the force-multiplying benefits these resources provide the RPF will be unable to respond to violence without significantly more troops and funds. Specifically, without additional troops, monitoring, and force projection capabilities, the RPF will be unable to fulfill its quick-reaction and deterrent role, and instead risks becoming an unnecessary supplemental guard force copying the mission of UNMISS forces already in Juba.

The most immediate resource challenge to the RPF is finding the 4000 troops necessary after some original TCCs have since balked at troop commitments. Most notably, Kenya removed its troops from UNMISS⁷¹ following a critical report by the UN against the Kenyan UNMISS commander's leadership during the July 2016 fighting in Juba,⁷²⁷³ raising doubts on whether Nairobi remains willing to provide troops to the RPF. While the UN's commitment to accountability is admirable, the sacking of the Kenyan commander did not take into account the key role that Kenya would play in future South Sudanese stability efforts. Since October 2016 Ethiopia started to drawdown troops supporting—but not formally integrated with—AMISOM, possibly out

of a combination of reduced EU AMISOM funding and Addis Ababa's own pressing domestic security needs.⁷⁴ In either case, the drawdown suggests that Addis Ababa may be unwilling to deploy additional troops to South Sudan without at least more international pledges for support. Without Ethiopia, the Rwandan Defense Force would be the sole troop contributor, an undesirable option because it would erode the strategic messaging of the RPF as a multilateral, regional commitment, risking even greater pushback from Kiir. Indeed, it is unlikely that Rwanda could solely staff the RPF since it would require Kigali to deploy approximately 1/8th of its ground forces.⁷⁵ Thus the RPF's deployment delays have complicated TCC contributions, leaving the RPF a paper force without further TCC agreements.

Given the vast size of South Sudan and its poor infrastructure, the RPF will require significant air assets to achieve its mission. South Sudan's sole paved road, connecting Juba to Uganda, is a critical supply route for supplying the capital and providing humanitarian aid; however, the road also runs through the heart of the now-restive Equatorias region. Securing the capital will require a rapid deployment capability to quickly deter rebels, government forces, or bandits from disrupting or severing this critical lifeline. RPF-assigned helicopters can achieve such monitoring and active response, replicating the success of Indian-provided Mi-35 helicopters in eastern DRC, which the UN used to effectively surveil rebel positions and quickly reinforce key areas.⁷⁶ Moreover, as the RPF looks to increasingly respond to areas outside of Juba, it will need to rapidly ferry forces to areas where civilians are being targeted. In similar terrain, the Africa Mission in Sudan (AMIS)—the predecessor to the current UNAMID mission—used helicopters and aircraft to monitor remote areas and pre-emptively

deploy troops to counter potential attacks on civilians in an area roughly the size of Spain.⁷⁷ With only 4,000 troops to prevent atrocities in an area slightly smaller than Texas, the RPF will need an ability to rapidly assess and respond to threats against civilians both in Juba and countrywide.

Moreover, helicopters have proven critical to both multiplying the offensive capabilities of stability missions and increasing their deterrent capabilities by providing direct close air support. In 2013 South African *Rooivalk* attack helicopters were able to surprise and disperse M23 rebels in a mountainous area of eastern DRC,⁷⁸ breaking their hold on key terrain that they were using to threaten the regional capital of Goma. Similarly, MINUSMA used Dutch-provided AH-64 *Apache* helicopter gunships in 2015 to provide fire support against Taureg rebels,⁷⁹ and the subsequent drawdown of the *Apaches* in 2016 left MINUSMA with critical air support gaps.⁸⁰ MINUSMA's struggles to find replacements for Dutch airframes shows a problem for many UN missions; rotary and close-air support aircraft provide a range of critical roles—fire support, surveillance, air maneuver, supply, and medevac—but there are few countries with enough excess air assets to support the sheer number of UN missions operating in inhospitable, under-developed, and vast terrain.

Beyond helicopters, another key element that the RPF will require is an intelligence unit that can provide timely analysis and act as a liaison to national-level intelligence elements of partner countries. Despite critics' concerns about using intelligence in peacekeeping operations, tactical intelligence has been present since the first African UN peacekeeping operations, a signal of their utility to peacekeeping. During the 1960-63 UN Operation in Congo (ONUC), several Scandinavian countries

provided intelligence officers to provide ONUC with situational updates and actionable intelligence by coordinating tactical air reconnaissance, analyzing signals intercepts, conducting detainee interviews, and meeting with informants.⁸¹ Today in Mali approximately 400 Norwegian, Dutch, and Swedish intelligence personnel—as well as 200 Swedish reconnaissance officers—provide tactical intelligence to support MINUSMA’s operations as part of the All Source Information Fusion Unit.⁸² After action reviews of France’s Operation Serval in Mali linked the mission’s success to its ability to quickly synthesize this tactical intelligence and develop tailored information operations.⁸³ With the RPF’s relatively small size, intelligence can serve as a crucial force multiplier by supplying intelligence experts who could help in deciphering South Sudan’s continually shifting political environment and in rapidly detecting threats against the UN mission or civilians.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the RPF will require adequate funding for a sustained period, based on the costs of similar missions. For example, in addition to resistance from Bamako, ECOWAS’ attempts to lead a regional intervention in Mali stalled in the face of a mission cost approaching \$230 million, well beyond ECOWAS funding capabilities.⁸⁴ AMISOM as of 2014 reportedly cost \$22.02 million per month,⁸⁵ and delays in funding have led Burundi, the second largest AMISOM TCC, to threaten to remove its troops and sue the AU for non-payment.⁸⁶ While peacekeeping funding is a perennial challenge of almost all peacekeeping missions, finding a dedicated, long-term funding mechanism—from the US, EU, or other multinational partners— prior to deployment will be critical for the RPF as both a means to entice TCCs and to convey a message all parties in South Sudan about the international commitment to stability.

Leadership, Command, and Control

The final challenge the RPF will face will be to create a command structure that is both durable and sets a successful tone for what is likely to be a long-term deployment. As currently organized, the only mention of the organization and structure of the RPF command lies in the broad UNSC August resolution, which proposes that the RPF report to the UNMISS force commander, but with little further guidance of how these 4,000 troops will be organized and structured. Based on similar missions, a dedicated RPF commander—though organizationally subordinate to the UNMISS commander—will be critical to manage relationships both above with the UN Secretariat as well as laterally with the host government. UN Secretary Generals are sensitive to the political ramifications of use-of-force Chapter VII mandates,⁸⁷ and since the 1960s UN Secretary Generals have been active in monitoring, and intervening, in tactical operation planning out of fear that unnecessary violence will damage the UN's reputation or invite retaliation against UN officers.⁸⁸ A dedicated RPF commander can act as a direct interlocutor with an engaged UN Secretariat, communicating plans upward while providing subordinates space necessary for operation planning and execution. Moreover, a dedicated RPF commander can provide a separate face from the UNMISS force commander in liaising with South Sudanese counterparts, helping to both reinforce the message of separate UNMISS and RPF mandates and to create the more tailored relationships necessary to conduct the specific RPF protection mission.

With UNMISS commander guidance and input, a dedicated RPF commander will be necessary to create rules of engagement (ROE) and other operating procedures that minimize accidental use of force, which might otherwise reduce local and international support for the greater UNMISS mission. Peace enforcement missions are inherently

messy affairs, and a dedicated commander is necessary to help subordinate commanders determine when and what constitutes an attack against civilians, appropriate and proportionate response, and how to communicate with host country counterparts. Moreover, a dedicated force commander can help translate conflicting guidance from the UNSC, who historically at times has advocated more aggressive ROEs, and those from the UN Secretariat, who traditionally at times has urged more caution to preserve longer-term relations with the host country.⁸⁹ Finally, an RPF commander can serve as an advisor to the UNMISS force commander on when the RPF and its tailored mandate can help achieve UNMISS' greater goals, or, if necessary, when the RPF will need additional resources from elsewhere in UNMISS to achieve its mission. Thus, a separate RPF commander is necessary to establish a clear ROE and monitor its execution, maintain mission command in the face of rapidly evolving events, and advocate for the RPF's capabilities under the greater UNMISS mission.

Mitigating Risks in Advance of RPF Deployment

Assessing the risk to any mission before its initial formation, let alone deployment, is difficult, but the above lessons suggest the RPF will face some similar, predictable hurdles. The U.S., through the Africa Command (AFRICOM), the Department of Defense (DOD), and State Department could enact measures now that would exponentially help the RPF overcome these predictable challenges. In particular, the U.S. can help to entice TCCs, find suppliers of technology to aid the RPF mission, and lead the search for an RPF commander with the abilities, reputation, and experience to lead the force. The U.S. will also need to play a critical role in monitoring Juba's reaction to the force to ensure that the RPF is allowed to fulfill its mandate. Such

advanced groundwork will not just help to hasten the deployment of the RPF but also prepare it for success in stabilizing South Sudan.

Equipping and Maintaining the Force

Military liaison engagement and State Department diplomacy will play a key role in plugging the immediate troop gap brought about by Kenya's wounded pride and Ethiopia's potential competing need for its security forces. Neither Addis Ababa nor Nairobi has spoken out completely against the RPF, and an obvious first step would be for AFRICOM and State to engage both capitals with inducements to commit or recommit their forces. One method to secure their agreement would be to increase the availability of U.S. ACOTA training or Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) funds for both countries to train and pay deploying RPF soldiers, removing some of the financial pressures for both nations in supplying forces.

Should Ethiopia or Kenya still be unconvinced, the U.S. can turn to other partners in the ACOTA, African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership (APRRP), or GPOI programs to find new TCCs for the RPF. The ACOTA⁹⁰ program has equipped and trained over a quarter million African peacekeepers⁹¹ in a range of peacekeeping and peace enforcement skills⁹² and any ACOTA-trained peacekeepers should be able to effectively contribute to the RPF. Alternatively, the APRRP has invested in creating a fast-reaction force by providing select African partners—including Ghana, Senegal, and Tanzania—with critical equipment, equipment, and specific skills to rapidly deploy to crises like that ongoing in South Sudan.⁹³ Finally, since 2005, the State Department's broader GPOI program has provided a range of assistance to enable a range of countries become self-sufficient in peace operations, and some of the GPOI's 53 partner countries may be able to fill the gaps left by Ethiopia and Kenya.⁹⁴ Turning to

these other partners provides a range of TCCs capable of quickly taking on the RPF mission, and Burundi, Djibouti, Ghana, Senegal, and Tanzania in particular could prove beneficial given their experience in other peace operations and their relative neutrality in past South Sudanese conflicts. Moreover, expanding the budget or partnerships in ACOTA, APRRP, and GPOI may entice other capable African nations outside of these programs to assist the RPF mission.

AFRICOM can help extend the RPF's reach and capabilities both within Juba and greater South Sudan by equipping it with dedicated tactical airpower and advanced monitoring technologies. Securing aerial support other than helicopters could prove difficult; there are few TCCs in Africa that have large helicopter fleets and even fewer experienced in resolving the logistical hurdles of expeditionary deployment. One option is for AFRICOM, State, and the DOD's Defense Security Cooperation Agency to prioritize transferring excess US rotary airlift to TCCs under the Excess Defense Article (EDA) program. The EDA program provides a range of retired-but-operable military equipment, including helicopters, to US allies and partners to help them in force modernization or to provide critical capabilities in U.S. supported missions.⁹⁵ An EDA transfer option has drawbacks; large equipment transfers appear to take at least two years to complete, have rarely been provided to African partners, and would represent a grant worth several millions of dollars, according to a cursory analysis of past EDA sales.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, if capable of being expedited, such an option would fulfill the need for rotary wing assets, while also providing another enticement for TCCs to join the RPF mission.

A separate, probably more rapid option to provide airlift would be to approach China to provide this capability under its announced increased commitment to worldwide peacekeeping operations. Beijing committed 700 infantry troops to UNMISS in November 2016, even after losing peacekeepers in fighting in Juba just months before,⁹⁷ and Beijing in 2015 pledged to create an 8000 person standby peacekeeping force.⁹⁸ Moreover having such air units from China, rather than Europe or the U.S., could alleviate concerns by South Sudan over sovereignty. This strategy also carries some risk; Beijing could limit the RPF's mission if it was effectively lobbied by Kiir's government. However, there are few other suppliers of the air assets necessary for success of the RPF mission. These efforts could be reinforced through State Department exchanges and annual conferences that the U.S. Army War College's Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI) conducts with its Chinese peacekeeping partners.

AFRICOM, DOD, and State under both ACOTA and GPOI could provide RPF TCCs funds to purchase low-cost remote closed-circuit television cameras (CCTVs), motion sensors, and night vision technologies to assist the force in monitoring violence and attacks against civilians and in other key areas both in Juba and elsewhere. As these technologies have found more commercial use their costs have dropped significantly, providing a cost effective option of increasing a peacekeeping or peace enforcement capability without a required surge in troops. Indeed, one expert notes that the benefit of this approach is that it allows for constant monitoring without intrusiveness, and can record actions that can be reviewed later,⁹⁹ an especially useful tool to deter attacks against civilians. Additionally, such tools would be useful for the

RPF commander to build credibility by quickly being able to refute reports of peacekeeper abuse of civilians or punish guilty parties. Such technologies are not commonly used in current peacekeeping or peace enforcement operations, and TCC forces would probably require more training on their effective use, potentially extending deployment times. Nevertheless, employing these or similar technologies would expand the scope of RPF's operational reach without significantly more troops.

Another key area the US could aid the RPF is in establishing a dedicated intelligence center to acquire, coordinate, and distribute tactical information. In addition to rapidly providing intelligence about threats to the mission, such a center could also act to monitor different feeds from the advanced sensors mentioned above. Moreover, a fusion center would provide a means to take in public reports about potential atrocities—from phone calls to social media—creating another way to provide early warning, rapidly assess, and respond to threats against civilians or the UN. Such a center need not necessarily require U.S. personnel or expertise; the U.S. can lobby Scandinavian countries to serve such a role given their willingness to provide intelligence support to African peace enforcement operations. Norway especially could take the lead on such a center given its long involvement in South Sudan and its peace process. Nevertheless, any RPF intelligence center would need to be prepared to coordinate with both UNMISS Joint Mission Analysis Center and Joint Operations Center to ensure that both UNMISS and RPF leadership are aware of all threats to Juba, civilians, and UNMISS personnel.

It is difficult to mitigate the risks from an RPF commander without knowing the full complement of TCCs for the RPF, but AFRICOM and State could start developing a list

of potential experienced commanders who would be acceptable to the UN and possibly South Sudan. The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) may be a particular potential area to begin a search for RPF commanders; MINUSTAH commanders have led large, regional, multinational forces in providing stability in the grey zone between peace enforcement and peacekeeping for nearly a decade. MINUSTAH commanders are also experienced in managing UN and host nation relationships, and MINUSTAH's long duration provides a large complement of predominantly South American commanders who are likely to be seen as neutral by South Sudan and African TCCs. There are other current and former African UN missions that could provide a skilled RPF leadership, such as former UNAMID, UN Mission in Liberia, and UN Mission in Sierra Leone commanders—all of which share similar features of civilian protection, civil strife, and an at times uncooperative host government. AFRICOM and State will probably have to conduct some outreach to the national leaders of TCCs to secure agreement for an outside commander who may be seen as usurping a desirable role for a regional leader. Additionally PKSOI can work with its partners in the Challenges Forum to push for UN leader reform and education and the Challenges Forum, with over 22 nations and 47 partner organizations,¹⁰⁰ can reduce the U.S.'s footprint and ensure that lingering biases against Washington do not distract from any reform initiatives. Nevertheless, finding an experienced UN leader, at least for the early period for the RPF's establishment, increases the chances of a strong ROE, operating procedures, and ultimately success of the RPF's mission.

Ensuring Juba's Compliance

The final area where AFRICOM, State, DOD, and Treasury can act to secure the RPF's success is to ensure Kiir's government's continued support to the RPF mission

and apply pressure if Kiir attempts to restrict RPF personnel, supplies, or freedom of movement. Probably one of the strongest tools in the U.S. arsenal is the continued threat of an arms embargo or targeted sanctions. Even though U.S. efforts to enact such measures to date have failed, public announcements linking targeted sanctions or an arms embargo to Juba's resistance to the RPF could help deter Kiir from finding ways to restrict the RPF mission. Moreover, the DOD should consider providing a small advisory unit to join the RPF, at the very least in helping to establish the RPF's command structure and craft its ROE. Beyond the expertise U.S. military officers could provide, these units would play a visible observer role, helping to deter any attempt by Kiir to limit the RPF. Such efforts could, of course, be strengthened by other key multilateral partners supplying their own observers, such as China, Norway, and the UK, all of whom have a standing interest in the South Sudanese peace process. Finally, the U.S. may want to publicly declare preparations for unilateral peace operations in Juba should the RPF not deploy. Such a move may prove unpopular in the U.S. and would likely be wielded by Kiir as an example of neo-colonialism, at least initially. At the same time, such a message would underscore the U.S. commitment to resolution of the South Sudan crisis and present Kiir with a stark choice between an RPF mission he knows versus a U.S. presence he does not.

Conclusion

The U.S. continues to have an enduring interest in the stability of a remote, young country nearly 8,000 miles away. The U.S. interest; however, has little to do with just its role in helping to secure the country's independence, nor South Sudan's limited petroleum reserves in a world increasingly awash in crude. Instead, the expansion of the conflict inside South Sudan is now threatening to metastasize, distracting the very

same neighbors the U.S. increasingly relies upon to combat terror in the Horn of Africa and supply critical materials to U.S. markets. The term “distraction” is the most mild that can be used as well; most conflicts in central Africa have deep social, ethnic, tribal, and economic drivers, and the instability that South Sudan threatens to export can readily tip currently stable situations into pronounced regional rivalries for decades. Finally, South Sudan matters to the U.S.’s worldwide reputation as an upholder of human rights. An apparent unwillingness by the U.S. to uphold the R2P principle, especially in a country in which the U.S. had a strong role in securing its independence, will erode a principle that has helped deter ethnic cleansing in other conflicts. South Sudan’s leaders may not want peace, but the U.S. requires it for its national interests.

The RPF is the last standing leg of a three-tiered U.S. policy to bring stability, if only temporarily, back to Juba and ideally greater South Sudan. There are plenty of merits to this strategy; it forces its neighbors to cooperate rather than compete, it maintains a separation between the UNMISS peacekeeping mission and more aggressive Chapter VII peace enforcement, and it allows for a commitment to-stability from the U.S. while still allowing for UN reform elsewhere. The RPF is also cost-efficient, requiring few U.S. resources that could be better used in other, more-pressing parts of the world. At the same time, the RPF is following in the footsteps of other recent, and historic, African stability missions, allowing some predictions on the risks it faces. It will face resistance from a government in Juba that sees more to gain from RPF’s absence than its presence. It will need key resources; quick new commitments of regional forces, air support, intelligence gathering, and dedicated funding. It will need a skilled commander capable of navigating in international politics, local governance,

socio-ethnic spaces, and finally the military domain. The RPF can be a success, but it will need skill, art, and some luck.

The U.S. can tip the scales to success for the RPF both now and into the future with just a minimum of diplomatic and military resources. A threat to Kiir on the resumption of an arms embargo and targeted sanctions could help to keep Juba acquiescent to the RPF, and could be reinforced by Western and Chinese military observers as part of the RPF. The U.S. can also use its funding leverage to help convince Ethiopia and Kenya to staff the RPF, or find new regional partners acceptable to South Sudan and IGAD. China could supply tactical airpower that would expand the RPF's reach and response time, while funding to buy more affordable monitoring technologies could provide for more constant monitoring and civilian protection. Finally, the U.S. can help to find a savvy commander with proven success in similar environments, increasing the odds that the RPF is set on a good foundation for what is likely to be a very long-term commitment. South Sudan needs to transition from a state that threatens regional security into one that is on the path to resolving the issues that have fractured it since 2013, and the RPF can help ensure the stability for real political dialogue. But the RPF will only be successful if the U.S. is willing to head off the foreseeable challenges, providing the RPF the space to deal with the myriad of other, unforeseeable problems it will almost certainly face once it deploys.

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R2P also calls on the international community to take collective action, including intervention, if countries are unable to provide such protection to their citizens. R2P has its origins in the 1994 Rwandan Genocide and was formally adopted by the UN as a guiding principle during the 2005 World Summit. Since then, R2P has been part of the justification for resolutions in the Central African Republic, Libya, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. For further information on R2P, see the UN Outreach on the Rwandan Genocide and the United Nations, available at <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/about/bgresponsibility.shtml> (accessed February 21, 2017)

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