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Beyond The Liberal Peace Approach: Rethinking The Limits Of Liberal Peacebuilding Through The DDR Process In South Sudan

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Abstract
Recent literature on post-war peacebuilding has increasingly examined the intricate socio-political dynamics within war-affected states, highlighting the critical need for context-specific understanding. However, a significant gap remains in comprehending how local contexts shape the effectiveness of peacebuilding outcomes, particularly in Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programs. This article critiques the limitations of externally imposed peacebuilding frameworks, with a specific focus on South Sudan. In many instances, the approach taken by international actors emphasises security and stability at the expense of addressing the underlying socio-cultural intricacies that define the local landscape. This reliance on a one-size-fits-all model often leads to misguided efforts, as evidenced by the current situation in South Sudan. Here, the failure to recognise and integrate crucial contextual factors—such as tribal affiliations, historical grievances, and socio-economic disparities—has significantly undermined the overall effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives. Moreover, the existing DDR programs in South Sudan have faced substantial resistance from former combatants and the broader community, which feels excluded from the peacebuilding process. This situation underscores the pressing need for international peacebuilders to engage more deeply with local conflict dynamics. By fostering a more inclusive DDR process that considers the voices and needs of all stakeholders, the potential for reducing resistance and enhancing the sustainability of peace efforts in South Sudan—and similar contexts—can be improved. This calls for a re-evaluation of current strategies to ensure they are adaptable and reflective of the realities on the ground.

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I. Introduction

Scholars widely regarded the fall of the Berlin Wall in the early 1990s as a pivotal victory for Western democratic ideology, which subsequently embraced a moral obligation to intervene in global crises (Fukuyama, 2004; Chandler, 1999, 2006, 2010). The prevalence of civil wars in much of the Global South has posed a considerable challenge to the anticipated emergence of liberal democratic governance. This situation has sparked a series of initiatives aimed at resolving civil wars, which span the globe. These efforts have been ongoing, yielding noteworthy successes and catastrophic failures. A notable example is Sudan's 2005 negotiated peace agreement, which aligned with the liberal democratic principle of eradicating war (Kuperman, 2013). Immanuel Kant's exploration of "*Perpetual Peace*" encapsulates the essence of political liberalism as a crucial criterion for achieving lasting peace (Pugh, 2005). The prevailing argument asserts that interactions among republican states cultivate peaceful relations, as governments founded on republican principles tend to demonstrate greater accountability to their citizens (Bindi and Tufekci, 2018).

Such accountability, derived from electoral consent, ostensibly reduces the probability of engaging in warfare. This conceptual framework critiques authoritarian regimes, suggesting that they are inherently predisposed to conflict, operating under constant aggression toward their citizens due to the absence of necessary approval for their actions. Kant's thesis posits that political structures are critical determinants of war. Accordingly, the sustainability of peace is imagined to hinge upon the collective commitment of nations to adhere to the principles of liberal governance (Doyle, 2005; Paris, 2004). The prevailing view has led to a series of Western-led interventions aimed at resolving civil conflicts and reconstructing war-torn states. However, these initiatives have often failed to establish lasting peace and security in regions where the principles of democracy and free-market economics have been imposed.

A notable example is the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed on January 9, 2005, which, although backed by Western powers, brought an end to decades of civil strife in Sudan. While the CPA formally ended hostilities, subsequent violence, exacerbated by South Sudan's secession in 2011, raised critical questions about the haste with which the accord was formulated and its implementation, which was primarily governed by liberal democratic norms. This exclusive focus may have contributed to the state's fragility and the subsequent

resurgence of conflict in South Sudan. Notwithstanding its limitations, the CPA's execution garnered substantial international endorsement in South Sudan, emphasising the objective of achieving sustainable peace through comprehensive state-building initiatives (Dobbins et al., 2003; Berger, 2010). One of the fundamental aspects of peace and state-building in South Sudan was the disarmament of ex-combatants. However, rather than achieving stability, the country has devolved into renewed conflict and consistently ranked at the top of the Fragile States Index.

It now finds itself alongside a cohort of protracted non-functional and failing states, with civil strife among various factions resulting in thousands of casualties and millions of displaced persons (Richard, 2015). This raises a pertinent query: how did South Sudan descend into this predicament? While the international community's emphasis on post-conflict security was appropriate in principle, there was a critical misjudgment among the architects of state-building regarding South Sudanese's capability to establish a state that could effectively monopolise the legitimate use of violence. Given that the notion of monopolising violence is inherently state-centric, it is crucial to underscore that the Republic of South Sudan did not exist as a sovereign state before 2011. Hence, the issue of authority—specifically, who holds and exercises control over the use of violence—was inadequately addressed or purposefully overlooked in the security reform process outlined in the CPA.

Before the CPA, Southern Sudan was effectively a war zone, with the government of Sudan lacking any substantial control over the territory, leading to what some described as the decentralisation of violence and authority (Kydd and Walter, 2006). The decentralisation of violence and authority in fragile states is often evident among various Non-State Actors (NSAs) as these entities seek to assert political control and gain military advantages. NSAs are defined as "organised armed entities involved in armed conflict, motivated by political goals and operating outside state control" (Barreau, 2016, p. 9). This category encompasses a spectrum of militias that vary significantly in size, capabilities, and underlying motivations. The pursuit of political objectives is pivotal to their operations, yet this aspect is frequently overlooked in DDR processes. It is essential to note that while armed factions may reach an agreement to share power, the success of cooperation in DDR efforts is contingent upon divergent interests.

This lack of compliance aligns with Vince's (2008, p. 300) assertion that "armed groups are principally focused on maintaining their autonomy, which is the root of their power." Given the variable capacities of armed groups, the essence of this autonomy becomes increasingly fragmented. For instance, smaller guerrilla cells often rely on state structures for survival. Larger factions, exemplified by the SPLM/A, established authority and legitimacy over extensive territories and populations during the conflict with the North. These entities effectively exercise sovereign power regarding governance, security, and military engagement. Such unregulated conduct has contributed to the "outsourcing of state functions," as highlighted by the persistent erosion of the state's monopoly on organised violence (Small, 2006, p. 4). While existing literature on peacebuilding often underscores state collapse as a byproduct of civil war, it inadequately addresses the intricate political dynamics that have exacerbated the conflict.

This perspective suggests that the armed struggle by South Sudanese against various Sudanese governments, as well as among themselves, has engendered a fragmented politico-military environment that significantly obstructs prospects for peace, presenting a critical lens that transcends the conventional institutional frameworks employed by international organisations (Arjona, 2009, 2016). In post-conflict scenarios, one of the pivotal objectives is to "mitigate the sources of insecurity" (Muggah et al., 2009); however, the DDR efforts in South Sudan have not materialised as a viable prerequisite for realising this aim. The failure of the liberal peace approach, as argued in line with liberal theories, can be attributed to the absence of institutional traditions that could mitigate violence (Mac Ginty, 2006). Although this liberal perspective holds validity, it overlooks the fundamental dynamics of political organisations that have shaped the violent actions of various groups in South Sudan.

I contend that the liberal peace framework inadequately characterises South Sudan as a context dominated by multiple armed actors with overlapping influences over the use of force. Instead of addressing these complexities, international interventions have concentrated on state-building and reinforcing the ruler's authority over the security apparatus. This focus neglects the micro-level consequences of violence on societal structures (Justino, 2013; 2016). For an extended period, liberal scholars have engaged with the security-development nexus without adequately considering its alignment with the dilemmas faced by armed actors. Jok Madut notably pointed out that the security imperatives of these groups often diverge from the intended objectives of DDR (Jok, 2017). He illustrated how this incongruence stems from the inherent weakness of the South Sudanese state, which struggles to establish itself as the sole legitimate provider of security. Deriving from this argument, this paper aims to illuminate the intrinsic limitations of the liberal peace framework by critically examining the foundational ideas underlying DDR processes.

Such an examination is crucial for assessing DDR initiatives to ensure they are responsive to the real needs of ex-combatants and the broader political and economic environments of the respective states. Despite the influx of international support, DDR efforts in South Sudan have not prevented a relapse into civil war. Two

decades after secession, it has effectively disintegrated, failing to fulfil the minimal responsibilities of a functioning state. Factional wars have engendered uncertainties, exacerbating the strategic dilemmas of intergroup relations. While the idea of a strategic dilemma is prevalent in the discourse of international relations, the fraught political landscape in South Sudan has prompted individuals designated for the DDR to question the motives of the disarmament authorities, leading to resistance against enlistment. One could posit that armed factions operate akin to competing firms within a market framework. This competitive dynamic emerges from the perceived incentives or intentions of the disarmament authorities.

In this context, the resistance to DDR is fundamentally centred on the clash between the interests of armed groups and the state's prerogative to exercise dominance over these entities. Although such an assumption aligns with normative theories in international politics, its applicability becomes tenuous in South Sudan, where both the concept and practice of security and authority are characterised by ambiguity. To evaluate the flaws of liberal peacebuilding, one must interrogate whether the term "national" is applied to the state and its institutions. In the South Sudanese context, notions of nationhood are often articulated through ethnic lenses, such as those of the Dinka or Nuer, each reflecting a deeply rooted sense of identity that can be best understood as an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983). The Dinka, for example, assert a claim to self-governance; however, this assertion does not equate to forming an independent state.

A standard belief system or language defines a nation. If we consider the first dimension, enhancing national security through DDR aligns with the defence of particularistic interests. In contrast, if we adopt the latter interpretation, complex questions arise regarding the legitimacy of using force, concerning the nation's identity and the nature of security that should be afforded to its diverse groups. While South Sudan possesses sovereign status as a state, it lacks coherent organising principles and demonstrates a diminished capacity to deliver public services (Wight, 2017). This premise will underpin various sections of the paper, highlighting the South Sudanese government's ineffectiveness in compelling belligerents to adhere to the DDR process. Besides, significant scholarly discourse surrounding the liberal peace framework has focused on the state's fragility and acute dysfunction, which in turn erodes the state's monopoly on legitimate violence.

This paper examines the complexities of liberal peacebuilding in the context of the multiple armed conflicts that have emerged in post-war and secessionist South Sudan. I contend that the aspiration for security institutionalisation has not materialised, as security governance has manifested in a hybrid form characterised by persistent violence. This argument highlights the importance of critically evaluating the role of armed actors and the complex political dynamics surrounding DDR processes. This paper utilises a hybrid peacebuilding framework to analyse the outcomes of DDR in South Sudan. Instead of solely critiquing liberal peacebuilding approaches for their limitations, this analysis emphasises the crucial role of the competing factions within the country in influencing these outcomes. The hybrid model allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in the peacebuilding process in this context.

De Waal (2017, p. 182) highlights this complexity, noting that the conflict landscape in South Sudan has never conformed to a binary model of "two readily identifiable, internally coherent parties." He further connects the challenges associated with DDR to the difficulty in establishing a clear governance structure over the use of force. The observed inadquacy stems from mediators' inflated perceptions of the new system's capabilities in South Sudan, neglecting the historical context that "the SPLM had never succeeded in developing a national ethos" (Young, 2012, p. 323). It is essential to explore the correlation between the state's absence and the emergence of self-organised violent entities that exhibit complexity beyond their components. Notably, no framework of state governance that imposes costs on citizens is available in South Sudan. Hence, adopting a hybrid analytical framework offers valuable insights into how unconventional warfare methods and the inherent contradictions in exercising public authority have influenced the DDR processes.

Paris aptly notes that contemporary peacebuilding initiatives reflect an evolved iteration of the mission civilisatrice, encapsulating the colonial-era conviction that European imperial powers are responsible for "civilising'' colonised populations and territories (Paris, 2002, p. 637). Critiques of the peacebuilding process in South Sudan highlight significant shortcomings, prompting international agencies involved in post-war reconstruction under UN auspices to implement mechanisms to enhance collaboration and participation between international peacebuilders and local stakeholders. This shift aims to bolster the legitimacy of external interventions (Wilen and Chapaux, 2011). However, this approach alone remains insufficient.

Hoffmann (2014) calls for a critical examination of power-based methodologies in contexts where the state is enmeshed in self-reinforcing systems that uphold its perceived centrality. Before Hoffmann's insights, Reno characterised the DRC as a "paradigmatic case of state failure," whereby the political apparatus operates beyond the norms of state sovereignty (Reno, 2014, p. 147). He posits that resistance to DDR efforts, or the ascendancy of a single ethno-political faction, can become imperative when self-preservation takes precedence over other considerations. This critique complicates the liberal-oriented DDR framework, suggesting it may inadvertently contribute to a narrow focus on post-conflict statebuilding. Consequently, the following section will

explore the liberal peace context and contend that attaining "peace" is not inherently guaranteed by adopting a liberal framework.

Understanding the Concept of Liberal Peace

Scholars employing the concept of liberal peace analyse the processes involved in establishing and sustaining post-war stability through negotiated settlements that address armed conflicts. This theory emphasises the promotion of democratic governance, market-oriented economic reforms, and the establishment of institutions typical of contemporary state structures, including robust security apparatuses (Waldorf et al., 2020). In this framework, peace is reconceptualised beyond the mere absence of warfare, posited by realist and structuralist theories. Instead, it represents an order that dismantles and transcends the underlying socio-political conditions that foster civil wars. Furthermore, the cessation of significant armed violence is deemed insufficient for achieving lasting peace; instead, it must be recognised as indicative of broader moral failures within the social contract (Moro et al., 2017). This understanding paves the way for liberal peacebuilders to engage in intervention strategies aimed at addressing and resolving these deeper systemic issues. In concept, liberal peacebuilding is fundamentally a state-building framework designed to create governance systems that are both representative and accountable, prioritising the public interest over the self-serving agendas of elites or specific interest groups.

This approach emphasises the necessity of minimising state intervention in markets, particularly labour and land, to curtail governmental opportunism and mitigate the underlying grievances that fuel demands for systemic change. By addressing these grievances, individuals can be empowered to pursue self-betterment, fostering peaceful coexistence globally. Additionally, liberal peace is characterised by a normative construction governing interstate relations, which incorporates various institutions such as the UN Security Council. This body possesses the authority to intervene and endorse political resolutions in cases of civil war. Moreover, regional organisations are crucial in managing affairs within their jurisdictions. States are expected to adhere to international legal norms regarding the treatment of their citizens, which include compliance with laws promulgated and enforced by global or regional judicial systems and agencies to which they are accountable. The effectiveness of this order hinges on the assumption that states will refrain from exercising their discretionary powers in a manner that contravenes these laws.

Based on this theory, the discourse surrounding liberal peacebuilding has ignited substantial debate among policymakers regarding its effectiveness and the requisite components for (re)constructing post-war states (Richmond, 2012). Central to this dialogue are issues of peace ownership, the role of local agencies, and the broader implications of peacebuilding strategies. These considerations are salient in DDR, given scholarly critiques of externally imposed strategies that often fail to transcend a limited institutional framework (Doyle and Sambanis, 2000). Advocates of liberal peacebuilding argue that peace and security emerge as ancillary outcomes of an open political and economic system (Fukuyama, 2004). The narrative suggests that the West's trajectory toward prosperity can be replicated in fragile states by implementing these liberal strategies, ultimately leading to sustainable peace via democratic governance (Messner et al., 2016).

The framework outlined above serves as the foundation for the assessments detailed in the various Fragile States Index reports, which emphasise liberal peace strategies as a potential solution to the issues faced by failing states. However, this model encounters significant challenges in the context of South Sudan. Following the end of the Civil War between the North and South, the CPA facilitated a shift from a state-imposed political, economic, and social order to a more decentralised, regionally oriented governance system (Ylönen, 2012, p. 28). This power-sharing arrangement was predicated on a territorial framework featuring policies designed to impose institutional constraints on state centralisation through a constitutionally mandated multi-tiered governance system. Rather than fostering enduring peace, the CPA effectively solidified South Sudan's status as a one-party state (Wight, 2017, p. 3).

In this context, the CPA inadequately addressed the intrinsic dynamics of the SPLM/A as a battleground for various factions vying for control over resources and clientelist networks entrenched in state power. While some commentators have attributed the crises plaguing South Sudan to the events of the 2010 election (Kisiangani, 2011), it can be posited that the historical power struggles within the SPLM/A significantly influenced the DDR process. The entrenched animosities between diverse political actors in South Sudan have fostered a complex landscape of political and security hybridisation, exacerbating the risks of violent opportunism and creating a pervasive sense of insecurity and instability in socio-political interactions. Theoretically, liberal peacebuilding is anchored in liberal principles (Zaum, 2012). Proponents of liberalism suggest that political liberalism represents the ultimate evolutionary stage of governance, establishing a robust foundation conducive to sustainable peace (Annan, 1999; 2000).

They contend that fostering a consensual political discourse serves as a potential remedy for conflict, suggesting that states with consensual political frameworks are less likely to engage in warfare with one another (Paris, 2004). Duffield (2001, p. 11) articulates how the principles underpinning liberal political and economic systems can guide policy preferences aimed at ending hostilities and facilitating societal reconstruction in war-

affected societies. His arguments resonate with a broad consensus that addresses armed conflict and violence in fragile states through a lens of political and economic transformation. However, Duffield's perspective has also become a foundational rationale for post-war interventions in conflict-affected regions, often without a rigorous analysis of the underlying political dynamics and the conditions that precipitate civil wars. These intervention strategies have faltered, primarily due to a shift in the locus of power from centralised state mechanisms to other armed groups (OAGs).

Based on the above arguments, I argue that the expectation that a liberal agenda will yield "long-term peace" (Paris and Sisk, 2009, p. 1) is largely illusory, as the conventional security frameworks utilised in DDR initiatives demonstrate limited effectiveness in South Sudan, as well as in similar contexts. Munive (2013, p. 6) contends that the security situation in South Sudan hinges on "serious engagement with the following twofold task: to comprehend and ultimately transform the fundamental structures and mechanisms of armed mobilisation that are prevalent, and to understand and adapt SSR to a political environment characterised by the potential for violence and threats of destabilisation." Munive's analysis suggests that the universal aspirations of liberal solutions overlook the rising assertiveness of violent political factions. It is due to these complexities that I intend to critically examine the liberal-driven DDR processes, with a focus on their political dimensions related to reintegration.

Although the goals of reintegration have broadened in recent years, it remains a significantly under-theorised area: "reintegration is singularly under-conceptualised in policy, research, and practice" (Muggah, 2009, p. 6). The emphasis on a coherent understanding of reintegration processes is underscored by the assertion that "there have been few attempts to generate a coherent understanding of what reintegration means, how it might be implemented and appropriate indicators and means of monitoring them over time" (Muggah and Baaré, 2009, p. 228). Interviewees I have contacted commonly expressed the need to reevaluate DDR frameworks. This critique stems from a perceived lack of actor-oriented analysis in existing methodologies. Liberal peace paradigms have predominantly adopted an institutionalist lens, as evidenced by Boutros-Ghali's (1992, p. 104) articulation of peacebuilding as "action to identify and support structures that will tend to strengthen and solidify peace, thereby avoiding a relapse into conflict".

Within this framework, DDR encompasses not only the reconstruction of institutions and infrastructures within nations recovering from civil war and violence but also the cultivation of peaceful, mutually beneficial relationships among previously adversarial groups. Furthermore, Boutros-Ghali argues that effective peacebuilding necessitates the disarmament of previously conflicting factions, the restoration of order, and the management, potentially including the destruction of weaponry, alongside providing advisory and training support for security personnel and strengthening governmental institutions. Since his assertion, the focus on consolidating peace has evolved towards a "new paradigm for international engagement in warfare" predicated on principles such as peace, democratisation, and human rights (Richmond and Frank, 2009, p. 138). This paradigm shift has led to a more bureaucratically oriented emphasis on institutional frameworks to ensure that post-conflict states maintain control over the legitimate use of force.

In South Sudan, however, the Weberian conception of the state as a sovereign entity with a monopoly on violence necessitates certain levels of functionality and legitimacy within state institutions—conditions that are frequently undermined in environments where armed groups challenge the state's authority as the prevailing organisational structure. Such prevailing circumstances generated a legitimacy crisis for the central authority, which led to a political system characterised by violent patron-client dynamics (Richards, 2005). Despite these challenges, some scholars continue to advocate for top-down peace and statebuilding methodologies (Evens et al., 1985). However, those efforts ineffectively address the necessity of engaging with OAGs and the complexities of their politico-economic interests in DDR. Recognising OAGs as rational actors driven by political and economic objectives allows for a dialogue regarding their expectations for the emerging state. Such engagement is crucial for mitigating the risk of reverting to war.

Advocates of the "bring the state back" approach (Evens et al., 1985, p. 3) maintain a state-centric paradigm that positions the state as the overarching authority within a designated territory. However, this perspective tends to underestimate the complexities associated with post-conflict scenarios, particularly when state sovereignty has effectively disintegrated. This is especially pronounced in contexts where non-state actors (NSAs) leverage internal violence to challenge governmental authority. The ongoing conflict in South Sudan exemplifies the state's inability to assert control over such actors. In these contexts, the execution of peacebuilding and statebuilding initiatives, such as DDR, requires a comprehensive understanding of the motivations and dynamics at play within these armed groups. This discourse aims to dissect the intricate dimensions of this issue, advocating for a critical reassessment of traditional state capacity frameworks. The intent is to illuminate the inherent limitations of the conventional monopoly of violence model while offering insights into the reorganisation processes essential for the restoration of fragile states.

Definition and Objectives of DDR

The DDR process is a vital component of peacebuilding efforts in post-war environments. The primary aim of these programs is to foster recovery and development by tackling the security challenges that arise as former combatants shift from armed groups to civilian life. The pace of this transition varies significantly across regions, influenced by the development of political agreements and the existing security conditions. This process is intrinsically linked to a broader political framework that encompasses humanitarian, socio-economic, and military dimensions. Since its establishment in the early 1990s, DDR programs have evolved into broad initiatives that extend beyond the basic goals of disarmament. Modern DDR frameworks incorporate a range of components that address the multifaceted aspects of reintegration and community stabilisation, reflecting the diverse challenges present in specific post-conflict situations.

The complexity of these programs necessitates tailored approaches that account for the unique circumstances of each environment. Critical operational factors such as reinsertion and socio-economic reintegration play a vital role, specifically addressing the challenges faced by former combatants transitioning out of armed groups. From both political and humanitarian perspectives, it is crucial to acknowledge that ex-combatants and individuals receiving assistance remain, at least structurally, dependent on the armed groups with which they were once associated and from which they seek support. Therefore, the interplay of military, humanitarian, and socio-economic factors within the security sector reform, of which the DDR process is a part, must be understood within a developmental framework, highlighting the interconnectedness of these dimensions in fostering sustainable peace and stability.

On the one hand, DDR initiatives can yield significant benefits by reducing societal tension and uncertainty, creating employment opportunities for ex-combatants, and facilitating social connections that enable them to earn a living outside of their armed affiliations. Alternatively, these initiatives present substantial challenges, as they involve complex transformations within a multifaceted web of political, humanitarian, and socio-economic issues that reflect the existing power structures within society. Additionally, the adjustment process associated with DDR requires careful negotiation and transformation, often spanning a lengthy period. Consequently, while DDR processes are delicate undertakings, they are deemed essential for achieving lasting peace and stability. States emerging from conflict face a critical security challenge: managing the large military forces and weaponry amassed during hostilities.

The standard response from post-war governments and the international community is the implementation of DDR programs. Scholars assert that for peace to falter, a dissident group must possess the capability to challenge the legitimacy of the post-conflict regime militarily (Mason et al., 2011, p. 172). Thus, DDR aims to dismantle the potential for armed factions to disrupt peace processes. However, the successful execution of DDR extends beyond mere symbolic gestures or ideologically motivated initiatives centred on arms collection and the disbandment of military organisations. Its efficacy is significantly amplified by the integration of comprehensive national and subnational policies targeted at eradicating clandestine armed groups (Scheye and Peake, 2005). Nevertheless, while DDR is often regarded as crucial, it does not serve as an exhaustive solution to the complexities of post-conflict challenges. In the case of South Sudan, the persistent capability of armed factions to instigate renewed conflicts has impeded the effectiveness of DDR initiatives, as pervasive violence continued to plague the country.

Resistance to DDR often stems from factionalism and the inherent motivations of armed groups to engage in rebellion. This impetus for insurrection can lead to the emergence of multiple sovereign entities, as articulated by Tilly (1969; 1975). Multiple sovereignty manifests when informal military factions organise against state authority and gain substantial legitimacy in their actions. Tilly (1978, p. 200) posits that these armed formations arise from fundamental socio-political ailments that predispose societies to relapse into conflict. Such groups typically reject the overarching goal of disarmament, which seeks to restore legitimate state control over the means of violence. It is within the context of politics and violence in South Sudan that the current model of DDR fails to account for, especially political motivations held by the NSA. This dynamic can be conceptualised as a decision-making process among the leaders of armed groups, balancing the trade-offs between the prospects of continued warfare versus the benefits of peace.

Additionally, as noted by Banholzer (2014, p. 2), the challenges associated with reintegrating ex-combatants into civilian life can serve as significant catalysts for rearmament, potentially prompting former fighters to revert to violence. Before Baholzer's insights, Schauer and Elbert (2010) highlighted the considerable risk of re-recruitment among ex-combatants who struggle to achieve effective economic and social reintegration. This failure can lead to profound economic development challenges and an inevitable resurgence of violence. Such dynamics complicate the DDR process, especially when dealing with complex military structures. Hence, the following section will delineate the DDR framework, emphasising its role in improving the livelihoods of ex-combatants. This analysis aims to demonstrate that inadequate support for the integration of ex-fighters poses a threat to peace in post-conflict states. A nuanced understanding of DDR and its critiques is essential in this context. The core objective of DDR is to mitigate the risk of relapse into civil conflict by facilitating the

transformation of combatants into non-combatant citizens. This transformative process is articulated in the following definition of DDR.

(a) Disarmament is the collection of small arms and light and heavy weapons within a conflict zone. It frequently entails the assembly and cantonment of combatants; it should also comprise the development of arms management programmes, including their safe storage and final disposition, which may involve their destruction. Demining may also be part of this process.

(b) Demobilisation refers to the process by which parties to a conflict begin to disband their military structures and combatants transition into civilian life. It generally entails the registration of ex-combatants, some form of assistance to enable them to meet their immediate basic needs, discharge, and transportation to their home communities. It may be followed by recruitment into a new military force.

(c) Reintegration refers to the process that allows ex-combatants and their families to adapt, economically and socially, to productive civilian life. It entails providing a package of cash or in-kind compensation, training, and job- and income-generating projects. These measures often depend on their effectiveness in relation to other, broader undertakings, such as assistance to returning refugees and internally displaced persons, economic development at the community and national levels, infrastructure rehabilitation, truth and reconciliation efforts, and institutional reform. (UNPKO, 2005)

Despite the stated objectives in the definition, the DDR cannot achieve its aims solely through the processes of "collection, documentation, control, and disposal" of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and various categories of weaponry (UNPKO, 2012, p. 13). DDR initiatives must contextualise their strategies within the framework of ongoing conflict, addressing the multifaceted needs of all stakeholders, particularly child soldiers and the communities impacted by warfare. A child soldier is defined as an individual "under 18 years of age who forms part of an armed force in any capacity, including those who accompany such groups, except purely as family members, as well as girls recruited for sexual exploitation and forced marriages" (The UNSGR, 2000, p. 3). It is crucial to acknowledge the contextual factors that led to the militarisation of these children, especially in environments where state authority is weak, contested, or non-existent.

Such circumstances can precipitate various insecurities and lead to the proliferation of diverse security providers. The absence of well-defined criteria for distinguishing combatants may render the DDR process susceptible to corruption. In the context of the CPA in 2005, the management of DDR procedures within the SPLA, the SAF, and OAGs presented significant coordination challenges under conventional DDR frameworks. It is crucial to recognise that DDR can only be effective in contributing to sustainable peace if it is aligned with an extensive array of security promotion initiatives. I contend that the shortcomings of the DDR process can only be effectively addressed by prioritising its relationship to community security mechanisms. Successful demobilisation does not inherently lead to lasting peace simply by dismantling armed structures (Specht, 2000). Peace can only prevail when the reasons why groups resorted to war are addressed through an effective reintegration programme.

Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open timeframe, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of a country's overall development and a national responsibility (IDDRS, 2006, p. 1).

Reintegration packages typically include financial assistance and some household items; however, the ability of these packages to offset the losses experienced by ex-combatants, particularly in the absence of viable employment opportunities, remains an open question. Lamb (2011) posits that the objective of reintegration is to prevent a relapse into civil conflict, but achieving this goal is not a straightforward process. Central to this effort is the creation of sustainable employment, which constitutes the essence of socio-economic reintegration and is contingent upon the labour market's absorptive capacity within the respective states. In the Small Arms Survey (SAS) report, Stone raises concerns about the South Sudanese DDR board's comprehension of the DDR process, highlighting that some senior officials perceive the primary aim of DDR as merely replenishing military personnel (Stone, 2011, p. 8).

An ex-fighter interviewed during my research expressed a distressing frustration regarding the DDR programme: "I risked my life to surrender my gun. I have been unemployed for over four years now, and I cannot feed my family" (P21/21/07/2017). This statement underscores the limited absorptive capacity of the state's labour market. Warner (2016) argues that the efficacy of reintegration depends upon a robust political settlement and the genuine willingness of the parties involved in the conflict. A notable deficiency in Warner's analysis is her failure to specify the combatants in South Sudan, which undermines the strength of her argument. In contexts where state structures are fractured, it is imperative to transcend the binary of formal and informal mechanisms, steering clear of structuring DDR solely around international security frameworks.

Instead, the focus should be on devising incentives that foster compliance among former combatants. In contrast, scholars like Nichols (2011) prioritise the economic implications of DDR, particularly the design of reintegration packages. While such economic considerations are undeniably important, successful reintegration

in isolation is insufficient for a comprehensive DDR process. The reintegration phase must enhance local and national ownership rather than fostering dependency, promote reconciliation, and facilitate societal acceptance of ex-combatants, thereby enabling long-term benefits for the entire community (Rands, 2012). Such a trust enhanced a state's legitimate monopoly of violence.

The Notion of Monopoly of Violence

Security experts have defined DDR as integral activities within broader peacebuilding strategies (Verkoren et al., 2010). The nexus between DDR initiatives and the monopolistic frameworks of state governance centres on enhancing national security (Coletta and Muggah, 2009). This perspective aligns with Max Weber's characterisation of the state as the ultimate authority possessing the monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a specified territory (Weber, 1978). Scholars expanding on Weber's thesis highlight the heterogeneity of state capacities and the varying degrees to which violence is monopolised across different contexts (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). While the state's monopoly on force is critical to fostering peace, this discourse suggests that such a view presents a simplistic and perhaps naïve understanding of post-conflict states. The argument critiques conventional post-war intervention methodologies for overlooking the historical and institutional dynamics of local governance.

It does not dismiss the state's importance; instead, it aims to critique the persistent implementation of a liberal agenda that often manifests as a securitised endeavour to establish a state characterised by the rule of law, market economies, and democratic governance (Barnett, 2011). The persistence of violence in South Sudan, despite substantial investment in peacebuilding initiatives, necessitates a closer examination of the dynamics surrounding the monopolisation of violence, particularly within the context of contested state legitimacy. The presence of competing authorities complicates the DDR process. When security at the grassroots level is primarily provided by OAGs, communities may be reluctant to dissociate from the very structures that offer them protection. As noted by Buzan et al. (1998, p. 24), "security is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics." In this light, the political impetus behind the DDR process becomes increasingly pronounced, shifting from a purely security-focused approach to one significantly influenced by the prevailing political landscape.

The participants I interviewed noted that the conflicts and resistance to DDR in South Sudan are subject to securitisation as the involved groups perceive their threats as necessitating responses beyond conventional political mechanisms. Despite these critical issues, most DDR programs tend to be predominantly externally administered, exhibiting biases, short-sightedness, and a tendency to operate in isolation from one another (Dudouet, 2011). Thus, while DDR may mitigate the risk of large-scale armed conflict, it fails to adequately address the local political, economic, and security demands of affected communities. When a particular ethno-political group prioritises local security, it raises significant questions about the suitability of traditional DDR frameworks. Ultimately, DDR might be most effective when integrated into a broader peacebuilding strategy that encompasses the roles of informal authorities.

Annan (1998) presents a developmental framework designed to foster peace through enhanced accountability within public administration. He articulates a state-centric political philosophy that emphasises the primacy of state survival. While the dynamics of domestic politics vary across contexts and involve diverse actors, they are fundamentally characterised by inter-group self-interests and pervasive fears—echoing the principles seen in the international system of states (Jackson, 2015). The effectiveness of a state monopoly over force in fragile contexts, such as South Sudan, hinges on the willingness of armed groups to engage with DDR processes without perceiving a compromise to their security. This inclination for self-preservation reflects a behavioural alignment with statehood among these groups. As one participant articulated, "Bandits attacked us. They came at night and raided our cattle and [were] killing anyone. Now we acquired arms, and we will not give them up" (P2/07/07/2017).

This perspective highlights the complexities surrounding DDR initiatives in South Sudan, where violent negotiations among various actors significantly shape the country's political landscape. Consequently, standard DDR incentives may prove ineffective in addressing the entrenched fears that characterise these groups. To successfully disarm such factions, it is imperative to acknowledge the pervasive "abiding fear, strategies, and local social practices that have developed during the conflict" (Arnold and Alden, 2007). Ultimately, it is crucial to recognise that violent actors often resist DDR efforts as a means of maintaining or augmenting their power. Power, in its abstract sense, refers to "the ability to exercise one's will over others" (Nordstrom, 2004, p. 72). This exercise inherently involves control, aligning with the fundamental definition of power. Typically, ethno-political elites maintain dominance over the mechanisms of power; however, informal armed groups project their conception of power through their operational activities.

As articulated by one participant, informal armies, in conjunction with formal state institutions, "run everything." The assertion that "We protect ourselves, collect the taxes to buy ammunition and feed the youths in charge of our security" (P3/24/07/2017) highlights the ongoing struggle for power among various actors.

Nonetheless, this paper suggests that the contestation of power is more intricate than this participant acknowledges. When a significant gap exists between state institutions and the actual exercise of power, it reveals an inherent irony in the dynamics of power. I argue that "power is not a monolithic construct" in the context of South Sudan, as it is "continuously challenged, subverted, negotiated, and renegotiated over time, space, and interaction" (Nordstrom, 2004, p. 72). Analysing power dynamics through this lens reveals the intricate and fluid interactions characteristic of the region.

In South Sudan, the pursuit of a stable political order poses significant challenges. The South Sudanese state has diminished to merely one among a constellation of competing actors; all are engaged in a web of political, economic, and security interactions that reflect each entity's strategic imperatives. In a political landscape marked by violent competition, the state's claimed legitimacy to monopolise the use of force is undermined, giving rise to multiple competing power sources. Groups perceive their security needs through a lens akin to realist perspectives, where decisions to enhance military capabilities fundamentally shape their perceptions of the environment. This raises the question: What alternatives exist for peacebuilding in South Sudan? This research transcends liberal frameworks, engaging with the underlying factors that perpetuate conflict and hinder DDR processes. The 2017 World Bank report highlights that South Sudan is host to over 40 armed groups, with the underlying violence stemming from a diffusion of power.

This fragmentation can be attributed to the lack of centralised socio-political and security frameworks necessary for citizen protection. This analysis suggests that the informality of authority structures is not an anomaly; instead, the concept of decentralised violence aptly describes the disconnect between DDR initiatives and those who oppose them. Empirical data gathered for this paper underscore the importance of comprehending the disjuncture between state authority and the application of force in assessing the failures associated with DDR efforts. Numerous studies (Laudati, 2011; Young, 2003; Jok, 2012) corroborate the assertion that armed groups have a significant influence on the political landscape of South Sudan. This context enables an in-depth examination of the factors contributing to the emergence of these armed factions and their implications for the DDR process. Besides, a nuanced theoretical framework that aligns with the evolving dynamics of organised violence (Sedra, 2013) is vital for understanding the complexities of the issues at hand.

A significant factor contributing to the conflict in South Sudan is encapsulated in the critique of the re-implementation of a violent pyramidal SPLM/A hierarchy (P3/24/07/2017). This participant highlighted the detrimental impact of the existing relational dynamics between the government and various factions, as well as the intricate interconnections among all conflict actors. As South Sudan experiences violent fragmentation, it becomes imperative to scrutinise these relational structures to understand their influence on the complex coalitions and conflicts underlying the failure of DDR initiatives. This analysis undertakes a critical examination of the bureaucratic tendencies inherent in the liberal peacebuilding paradigm. By examining the purported advantages of liberal democratic peace and evaluating the effectiveness of peace agreements, it challenges the assumptions that underpin traditional post-conflict recovery models.

This level of scrutiny is crucial for formulating an alternative conceptual framework that more accurately reflects the internal divisions and factions within South Sudan—entities that wield considerable power and influence, often overshadowing the authority of the post-secession state. In light of the ongoing violent fragmentation in South Sudan, it is imperative to rigorously analyse the relational dynamics that define the complex coalitions and conflicts undermining the effectiveness of DDR initiatives. This examination critically assesses the bureaucratic tendencies embedded within the liberal peacebuilding paradigm, scrutinising the alleged advantages of liberal democratic peace while evaluating the real-world effectiveness of existing peace agreements. By doing so, it interrogates the foundational assumptions underlying conventional post-war recovery frameworks. Such a comprehensive analysis is necessary to formulate an alternative conceptual model that accurately reflects the profound internal divisions and the influential factions within South Sudan—entities that often supersede the authority of the post-secession state.

The argument presented here stems from the observation that the CPA and subsequent DDR initiatives primarily aimed to enhance the SPLM's capacity to disarm competing factions, thereby facilitating its consolidation of power within the domestic arena. However, this perspective neglects the historical context that Southern Sudan lacked the status of a recognised state before its independence in 2011. Even in a hypothetical statehood context, liberal practitioners often overlook the inherent tensions ex-rebel rulers face when engaging with an institutionalised bureaucratic governance framework. Clapham (2012) articulates these complexities through the notion of the "curse of liberation," which encapsulates how former liberators often carry the ideological imperatives of their struggles into governance structures. The SPLM's ascent to power was complicated by more than just these ideological remnants; the leadership was compelled to navigate the intricate challenges of state formation and nation-building.

Despite the formal recognition of sovereignty, the state of South Sudan has been beleaguered by persistent factional wars. The trajectory of conflict might have been mitigated had political elites prioritised national interests over parochial loyalties. Thus, while equipped with sovereign attributes, the South Sudanese

state remains a battleground of violent factionalism. The shifting power dynamics among armed factions in South Sudan reflect their fluctuating ability to establish order, as noted by Hoffmann (2016). The assertion that liberal approaches are inadequate in addressing the complexities of these conflicts does not seek to evaluate South Sudan against normative benchmarks typical of DDR implementations. Instead, it emphasises a process-oriented perspective, underscoring that the intricate nature of political interactions extends beyond mere deficiencies in state institutions. The resurgence of conflict in 2013 prompts a critical inquiry among proponents of liberal interventions: How can this phenomenon persist?

This inquiry is often inadequately addressed in existing analyses of post-war states. I propose that the conflict dynamics in South Sudan diverge from the linear trajectories posited by liberal peacebuilding paradigms, as the armed factions are entrenched in a political milieu defined by ongoing conflict, where the imperatives of survival and the protection of family and property dominate (Jok, 2005). This perspective highlights the limitations inherent in liberal peace frameworks and the constrained imagination of liberal scholars regarding the evolving causes of violence, which may fundamentally alter the landscape of peace and stability. To address the scepticism surrounding critiques of the liberal peace approach, some scholars advocate for a "good enough" framework. This approach shifts focus from the unrealistic expectation of achieving an ideal Weberian state towards the more attainable goal of establishing a "mediated good enough state" that fulfils the essential criteria of statehood (James and Oplatka, 2014).

Proponents of this concept suggest fostering a positive state that accommodates the varying demands of armed actors and state authorities (Wallis, 2017). This perspective resonates with the English School's middle-ground theory, which navigates a path between liberalism and absolute realism. It integrates the realist perspective on the state's primacy with a more conciliatory liberal outlook. However, this framework does not adequately account for scenarios where the domestic political landscape is deeply fragmented and marked by violence. The unpredictability inherent in such contexts has led some scholars to advocate for a strategy that avoids extensive long-term strategic planning. Instead, they emphasise incremental, iterative programming that prioritises short- and medium-term interventions to create momentum for broader reform initiatives (Sedra, 2013).

This analysis does not address the ramifications stemming from the prolonged absence of state authority and the involvement of informal militias entrenched in local communities, particularly in the context of power dynamics. Suppose the interplay among armed factions in South Sudan is predominantly characterised by fear and competition. In that case, it is imperative to assert that both liberal peace initiatives and statebuilding efforts are likely to falter. No peacebuilding initiative operates in isolation; thus, post-conflict DDR processes require a conducive environment for constructive engagement among discrete violent entities—an environment that is notably lacking in South Sudan (Ylönen, 2012). While the liberal approach may be well-intentioned, it fails to confront violence that is rooted in specific socio-political contexts adequately. The core challenge lies in the rise of legitimised ethno-political factions acting as security providers, independent of the state apparatus.

Crisis of Liberal Peace Approach: Analysis in the Context of South Sudan

Despite a significant prevalence of ethno-political violence in Africa in recent decades, existing scholarship often overlooks the contextual factors driving these conflicts (Shaw and Mbabazi, 2007; Castaneda, 2009). Abrahamsen (2001, p. 80) argues that post-war policies have propagated a somewhat nebulous framework that equates "democracy and peace," wherein development is framed as contingent upon democratic governance, which in turn is posited to foster peace and stability, thereby catalysing further development. However, Abrahamsen contends that this nexus remains problematic in the African context, as it fails to account for essential elements of violent and fragmented power dynamics endemic to African states, effectively undermining existing power relations and sources of legitimacy held by non-state actors.

Rather than that, scholars have noted that the imposition of liberal democratic frameworks in contexts lacking such preconditions has frequently exacerbated violence (Williams, 2004). A pertinent example can be observed in Kenya, where the transition to democracy in 1992 has been marked by pervasive violence during election cycles (Rasmussen, 2018). Describing efforts to establish democratic governance as merely "the legalisation of oppositions" (Barkan, 1993, p. 90) is an oversimplification; however, it is crucial to acknowledge the complexities inherent in fostering democracy in contexts where "nationalities are organised into quasi-states with traditional leadership and quasi-armies" (Zambakari, 2013). The term "quasi-states" often refers to entities that possess the formal characteristics of sovereign states but lack the requisite institutional frameworks and governance structures to function effectively as true states (Jackson, 1990). South Sudan exemplifies this concept, having emerged as a quasi-state following its secession from Sudan.

The South Sudanese state lays claim to both the territory and its population but lacks comprehensive control over the sovereign territory and a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. The focus on the challenges associated with liberal peace should not be misconstrued as a justification for tyranny or complacency in the face of rampant violence. Instead, this perspective advocates for a nuanced approach that recognises the complexities of peacebuilding in contexts where ethno-political factions have become salient power players. The concept of

liberal peace, particularly with the promotion of democracy in fragile states, has faced significant criticism for fostering what some scholars refer to as the "politicisation and instrumentalisation of ethnic identities" (Mueller, 2000). This politicisation has been a fundamental driver of conflict in South Sudan. Deng (2005) posits that both the former Sudanese state and post-independence South Sudan face a shared challenge: constructing a cohesive nation-state.

Regardless of whether the DDR processes succeeded, Deng argues that South Sudan is inherently burdened by the struggle to establish what some have described as "a more inclusive political community that upholds unity in diversity, maintains the rule of law, and practices democracy in governance" (Zambakari, 2015, p. 75). He emphasises the profound influence of ethno-political factions intricately woven into the fabric of both warfare and governance. These armed groups have thus become a pivotal element of the national power dynamics, shaping the trajectory of both local and national politics. This is why it is essential to highlight the militarisation of fragmented public spaces and societal structures as a direct consequence of the erosion of cohesive state authority. Without a unified political framework, political interactions devolve into mechanisms of deception, with factions engaging in a competition that prioritises undermining rivals for individual or collective advantage.

This dynamic was observable during the crisis in South Sudan, where the principles of territorial sovereignty that traditionally safeguarded the rights of political communities were dismantled. As state structures collapsed, those tasked with upholding state legitimacy pivoted towards the defence of ethno-political identities and localised political rights. So, the state lost its status as the preeminent authority, as ethno-political groups assumed control over local military forces. This shift in governance undermined the foundational principle of state sovereignty, leading to a scenario wherein ordinary citizens rejected state-provided security. As a result, the state's claim to a monopoly on violence diminished, yielding to a complex interplay of militarisation driven by localised power dynamics. The escalation of arms proliferation is directly correlated with heightened stakes in political competition and group security. Implementing peace through DDR initiatives becomes unfeasible when factions perceive existential threats to their existence.

This scenario notably stymies the nascent state of South Sudan, which emerged as one of Africa's weakest states. The fledgling institutions have struggled to exert control over the legitimate use of force, failing to project sovereign authority beyond Juba and other critical administrative hubs. Some analysts have characterised the outbreak of war in 2013 as indicative of a disintegration of central authority (Zambakari, 2015, p.71). In this context, effective peacebuilding requires a thorough empirical evaluation of the operational environment and a strategic re-engagement approach. Historically, United Nations interventions have often deviated from this framework. Current post-war securitisation strategies are based on misconceptions about the motivations driving conflict. Moreover, the belief that a degree of political liberalisation can effectively deter violence is fundamentally misguided. Evidence suggests that rapid democratisation carries significant potential for conflict. Taylor (2007) contends that the framework of liberal peacebuilding, which reflects an internationalised neoliberal hegemony, is contingent upon the establishment of a domestic hegemony—a phenomenon largely absent in South Sudan.

Hegemony, as defined by Mittelman and Chin (2005), refers to a dynamic process wherein social identities, organisations, and structures formed by asymmetric distributions of power and influence are shaped by dominant groups. In the context of liberal ideology, hegemony is typically vested in the state, which influences how DDR initiatives are conceptualised. However, in South Sudan, the lack of meaningful hegemony underscores a broader issue; as noted, hegemony can only materialise within civil society, providing the structure and meaning that diminishes reliance on coercive force (Mittelman and Chin, 2005). Thus, South Sudan's lack of both a cohesive state and a functioning civil society compounds the difficulty of achieving a sustainable political order. For a state to establish domestic hegemony, it is essential to secure the consent of key stakeholders, predominantly comprising armed factions.

The lack of domestic domination in South Sudan compelled the dominant group to resort to coercive measures to exert control over the state apparatus. Taylor (2007) critiques liberal peace scholars for their overly simplistic interpretations of political dynamics and structures within the African context. This perspective challenges the notion that Western state institutions can be transplanted into non-Western contexts in their original forms without a nuanced understanding of local political landscapes. My thesis contends that while South Sudan's inception as a state was facilitated through a combination of civil conflict and diplomatic endeavours, it emerged fundamentally incapacitated, lacking the essential sovereign attributes necessary for effective statehood.

Consequently, despite its existence as a recognised state, South Sudan's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence has disintegrated, underscoring its fragile status in terms of sovereignty. This critique challenges the prevailing political economy framework, which depicts the liberal peace strategy as the predominant blueprint guiding interventions, as termed by Simangan (2017, p. 36) as "the software that drives the hardware of intervening actors." My opposition to liberal peace paradigms rests on two principal arguments: the inherently biased conceptualisation of liberal peace and the shortcomings in its practical implementation. Firstly, the entrenched adoption of liberal peace solutions often bypasses essential dialogues concerning the necessity for

sustainable peace grounded in local perceptions of legitimacy and security. Secondly, I assert that South Sudan's reliance on international legitimacy has overshadowed the establishment of a robust internal framework characterised by strong institutions and the rule of law.

This sentiment is reinforced by Richmond (2009a, p. 324), who states that "corridors of power have so far failed to deliver on their promise of a liberal peace for all citizens of the states that have been recipients of peace operations." The liberal peace framework at both policy and implementation levels has inadequately addressed the intricate political dynamics inherent in post-war contexts. The DDR process is fundamentally aimed at either reintegrating former combatants into society or dissolving their armed identities. However, evidence suggests that states, where this reactive security strategy is deemed successful, have devolved into mere facades of liberal governance devoid of genuine emancipatory capacity (Simangan, 2017, p. 37). Taking Eritrea as a case study, the DDR program has been characterised as "one of the best-planned programmes of its kind" (UNDP, 2006b, p. 1). Nonetheless, scholarly assessments indicate a significant disparity between the intended objectives and the actual outcomes of the initiative. Notably, those demobilised included disabled individuals and women with caregiving responsibilities.

In a paradoxical response, the Eritrean military subsequently recruited an almost equivalent number of youths to replenish its ranks (Mehreteab, 2007, p. 34). This phenomenon underscores the imperative of political will; Eritrea's commitment to maintaining a substantial military presence has been heavily contingent on the prevailing political landscape. Consequently, this analysis attributes the enduring challenges in peacebuilding to the institutional legacy rooted in colonial statecraft and the rigid structures that have emerged in its aftermath. Despite ongoing efforts to mitigate conflict and establish a stable political framework, South Sudan continues to grapple with multiple insurgencies, indicating a significant disintegration of state authority. This phenomenon offers a foundational perspective for exploring the role of various non-state armed groups in the escalation of arms proliferation.

This analysis underscores how informal military factions institutionalise governance and exert force through three primary lenses: coercive violence, social legitimation, and economic security, as articulated by Mamdani (2017). The underlying dynamics that fuel conflict in South Sudan remain essentially unchanged, reflecting a lack of transformative change within the domestic political landscape in recent years. Consequently, the challenge confronting DDR initiatives is the emergence of diverse power structures with overlapping influences on security and warfare. This study illustrates how theoretical frameworks related to state-building and peacebuilding are translated into operational practices. However, such practices often occur with insufficient awareness of how South Sudanese populations can strategically adapt and leverage these discourses for their purposes (Aeberli, 2012).

Scholars attribute the shortcomings of the DDR process in the region to the uncertainties introduced by these complex power dynamics (Knopf, 2016). Despite existing analyses, there is a significant oversight regarding how these uncertainties propel the pursuit of military advantages. It is crucial to acknowledge the established norms that govern the use of force, particularly in scenarios where state authority lacks effective "command-and-control'' (Kettl, 2000). Consequently, all armed factions in South Sudan must be viewed as relational entities operating within this complex context. The hybrid framework underscores the absence of historical continuity in centralising institutions, making it essential for a nuanced exploration of South Sudanese politics. This approach provides a conceptual basis for understanding the dynamics of violent competition and the consequent proliferation of arms in the region.

Conceptual Framework: Hybrid Approach

The challenges confronting DDR have intensified as the use of force becomes increasingly complex in fragile states. Kalyvas (2006, p. 146) emphasises that armed conflicts foster environments characterised by fear, misinformation, coercion, intense emotional responses, incentives, and the low cost of resorting to violence. This legacy of uncertainty and suspicion lingers long after the cessation of hostilities, amplifying the security dilemma at the individual level. As a result, former combatants often fear and distrust the intentions of others. Such mistrust can obstruct participation in DDR programs, and the levels of satisfaction among participants are likely influenced by their perceptions of the security environment upon exiting the program. In the context of South Sudan, the ongoing power struggles among armed herders and violent elites, as they negotiate political settlements and distribute resources, are primarily responsible for the country's persistent political and security paralysis. This situation has effectively partitioned South Sudan into regions controlled by ethno-political elites, each mobilising their forces and exerting influence through the coercive appointment of individuals to government positions in Juba.

Understanding these factors necessitates an exploration of the socio-political, economic, and security interactions among the various actors involved. My goal is not to propose a new theory but to leverage the emerging causes of war and security challenges to gain insights into the complexities faced by South Sudan. I will evaluate these in light of the principles of liberal peacebuilding that the international community has sought to implement in such contexts. The concept of security and its provision is deeply contested. State-centric perspectives view peace and security as initiatives centred around the state, reliant on the existence of a

"functioning central government" (Weber, 1958; 1979). In this thesis, I will demonstrate that this approach does not sufficiently accommodate the evolving nature of violence, the diverse actors involved, their security perceptions, and the ways security is provided.

Furthermore, the liberal peace framework has not been rigorously critiqued in environments where various actors vie for control over definitions of power, authority, and legitimacy—concepts that are often regarded as the exclusive domain of existing states. Current peacebuilding operations are taking place in post-war contexts where states are too fragile, and the incentives for armed groups to align with these weakened governments are lacking. In contrast, the hybrid approach aims to integrate and align the objectives of external actors with those of local agencies, exploring new avenues for establishing security and governance. Hybrid approaches recognise that security and authority are complex issues that go beyond simple formal/informal distinctions (Molloy, 2011). For instance, in South Sudan, politics is defined by the presence of multiple armed authorities (Engel and Olsen, 2010).

Consequently, this thesis investigates why ethno-political groups are more inclined to support informal authorities and institutions rather than the state. Gaining insight into this motivation is essential for addressing the overarching research question regarding the factors influencing the operationalisation of DDR in South Sudan. The hybrid model provides a valuable conceptual framework for analysing the factors contributing to the unsuccessful DDR process in South Sudan. One of the primary challenges stems from the violent clientelistic nature of security and governance in the country, which has facilitated the emergence of sub-state identities as central to group rights (Tar, 2004, p. 142). Hybrid groups throughout South Sudan have engaged violently with the state to pursue their aspirations. It is noteworthy that anti-state armed actors are prevalent in emerging societies, although their origins and political objectives vary significantly. Therefore, the hybrid framework offers an organic approach to understanding the diverse actors and their respective challenges regarding DDR, particularly in light of the new security issues facing war-affected states. Given the prevalence of complex political emergencies in South Sudan, a simplistic approach to DDR proves inadequate.

The hybrid framework aligns well with my research as it integrates traditional analytical elements, such as the state's role, alongside the influence of non-state actors. The essence of the hybrid argument is rooted in its context-specific nature, highlighting the complexities of reality (Tar, 2005, p. 143). Political or ethnic armed groups often emerge from the civilian population. While they may sometimes operate in conjunction with the state, they frequently exist in opposition to it, arising from unaddressed grievances that leave them feeling they have few options (Francis, 2005). This thesis will demonstrate that the hybrid approach underscores the "taken-for-granted power of the sovereign state in monopolising, to a greater or lesser extent, the means of force within its territory" (Tar, 2005, p. 143). However, in the context of a fragile state that lacks control, informal and untrained forces mobilised by ethno-political factions have garnered the military capacity to contest the legitimacy of the South Sudanese government.

Their significant role necessitates their inclusion in discussions about DDR in South Sudan, thereby justifying the engagement of non-state actors as respondents in this thesis. As a framework for analysis, the concept of hybridity is not a novel theory. What is more recent is the hybridisation occurring within peace support programs. Thus, countries like South Sudan have become testing grounds for the liberal peace approaches introduced by external actors who claim these experiments aim to find a solution to the unique challenges faced by the nation (Tom, 2011, p. 7). Despite these external assurances, states such as South Sudan are asserting their agency through acts of resistance, self-determination, will, purposefulness, and choice (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). This focus is critical as it does not limit agency to individuals alone.

The liberal peace approach has played a significant role in international interventions; however, there remains a lack of empirical research that examines the interactions with various forms of agency, their manifestations in these contexts, and the hybrid conditions of peace or violence that stem from these interactions. The post-war experience underscores that the expectation for the liberal agenda to produce sustainable long-term peace is largely illusory (Paris and Sisk, 2009, p. 20). Similarly, the belief in the potential for achieving absolute peace in South Sudan may also be misguided. I advocate for the concept of hybridity as a means to transcend a simplistic toolkit approach to liberal peace. I propose that meaningful change within a system can emerge when appropriate methods are employed (Körppen, 2011, p. 78). By focusing on suitable methods, we emphasise the importance of achieving visible and stable outcomes, which can range from peacekeeping missions to political reforms. The empirical research presented in this piece investigates how hybridity can be cultivated ''from below'' and expressed through various forms of agency, including the selective acceptance and internalisation of liberal peace elements perceived as beneficial by local actors (Tom, 2011, p. 7).

South Sudanese individuals may leverage elements of liberal peace to advocate for reforms from a government they frequently distrust and criticise for its failure to ensure their protection. Additionally, it highlights that competition among actors and the disconnection between central authority and local politics can hinder the establishment of sustainable peace. Therefore, it is essential to adopt hybrid DDR processes that do not perpetuate marginalisation. This study posits that the hybrid model presents a viable alternative to the traditional

liberal peace framework for two reasons. First, its focus on context specificity could facilitate a practical understanding of the volatile conditions in South Sudan, which are marked by cycles of civil war and ethnic violence—each stemming from an interconnected set of political, economic, and security issues. Secondly, by emphasising the organic context of the factors above, hybridity enables this study to encapsulate both state and OAG interests, thereby elucidating the emergence of militias and the inevitable interplay between warfare and the proliferation of arms.

These arguments aim to establish a more introspective and analytical framework. However, critics caution against an uncritical romanticisation of localised strategies, arguing that such narratives may overlook the entrenched despotic tendencies present in specific local contexts (Hughes et al., 2015). While Mac Ginty (2012, 2014) concurs with Hughes, he argues that liberal approaches fail to address the socio-psychological repercussions of conflict in post-war states adequately. Consequently, the hybrid model advocates for the integration of hybrid intellectualism, which has often been marginalised due to the dominance of material power held by mainstream perspectives. Understanding these impasses requires more than merely revisiting the foundational traditions of state-centric approaches and identifying where they have faltered.

De Waal (2017) underscores that South Sudanese actors frequently engage in both collaboration and conflict over public authority. According to Mac Ginty (2011, p. 78), these issues necessitate a framework that is "duty-bound" to comprehend the negotiations of opposing forces, where the compliance and incentivising capabilities of an international organisation encounter local resistance. This perspective asserts that effective security sector reform (SSR) must be grounded in a realistic evaluation of how security and justice are currently delivered at the local level rather than relying on a normative vision of how these services ought to be provided (Andersen, 2011, p. 444). In 2011, Cubitt questioned why normative ideas lead to unsustainable peace in Africa. She challenged state approaches that suggest peace should be founded on some form of socio-political proximity between the state and OAGs. As previously noted, state-based strategies often overlook the reality that many post-war states have lost their exclusive right to legitimate rule and are experiencing a regulative redrawing of their stateness. This concept of regulative redrawing indicates that the hierarchical power of the state may have diminished (Jabri, 2007).

At the close of the 20th century, Foucault (1980, p. 52) introduced the notion of "governmentality," referring to the procedures through which the state exercises control over its populace. Foucault's argument is grounded in two distinct projects: his exploration of political rationale and the "genealogy of the state." He examines the ethical dimensions of state actions in conjunction with the historical development of the subject. The connection between the state and the genealogy of subjects is encapsulated in the complexity of government. This issue is a focal point for Foucault as he contrasts what he terms "technologies of the self" with "technologies of domination" (Foucault, 1997b, p. 67). This perspective diminishes the state's position as a singular institution responsible for governing people within societies characterised by various forms of authority. In response to this perspective, Baker and Scheye (2007, p. 505) highlight that the concept of SSR is typically based on two fallacies stemming from its state-centric approach.

The first fallacy suggests that the characteristics and resources of post-war and fragile states can effectively implement the proposed reforms. The second fallacy posits that the post-conflict state is, in practice, the primary actor in matters of security and justice. This latter fallacy is particularly relevant to South Sudan, as noted by one participant who remarked: "Somebody feels [more] strongly about being a Dinka than being a South Sudanese" (P3/04/09/2017). The structures in question fail to recognise that South Sudan cannot be the sole mechanism for defining legitimacy. Non-state groups often revert to their identity-based confines and are unwilling to relinquish arms for an abstract entity (Jütting, 2003). Influenced by liberal idealism, DDR designers frequently overlook these informal security providers, whose appeal lies in their "physical, linguistic and cultural accessibility; legitimacy; efficacy; and restorative justice" (Baker and Scheye, 2007, p. 512).

This thesis critiques the liberal peace argument, which often addresses the challenges of DDR from an international perspective, neglecting the domestic challenges and the impact of local responses to the global security environment on DDR implementation. The analysis draws on Goetze and Guzina's (2008) critique of liberal peace as a process where one type of construction is assumed to lead inevitably to another. A critical issue to highlight is the failure of the peace and state-building process to persuade many armed actors to adhere to state systems. However, advocating for a hybrid approach to understanding disarmament challenges does not undermine the importance of the state as a provider of security. Instead, examining these challenges through the lens of hybridity aims to enhance the legitimacy of the state by incorporating all actors within the post-war society. It is crucial to explore peace and conflict issues that offer alternatives to the prevailing post-war frameworks centred on state capacity.

By emphasising the agency of individuals and groups, this study moves beyond viewing these actors as mere objects or victims unable to navigate constraining structural forces. This understanding requires a methodology that positions this thesis within the context of agency. The reality that South Sudan is characterised as a violent state, devoid of a political framework that embraces democratic procedures and social justice, serves

as an initial setback for peace and security; however, it also renders the country a compelling case study. Presently, South Sudan stands as a failed state. Various factors contributed to its decline, with some arguing that "at independence, South Sudan's system lacked negotiated norms to ensure that those outside of power had an incentive to believe in the new state rather than rebel against it.

As the SPLM ruling elites vied for control of oil revenues, they also experienced internal conflicts. The outcome was the collapse of the state" (ICG, 2021, p. 10). The peacebuilding efforts and other reform processes carried out with the assistance of the international community have proven inadequate, as they failed to prevent a relapse into conflict. I argue that DDR represent a fundamental threshold for peacebuilding. However, this threshold, while necessary, is ultimately insufficient unless it is tailored to address the multifaceted dimensions of conflicts and their underlying needs. Yet, many of the primary causes of civil war remain inadequately explored in terms of their impact on the outcomes of DDR.

In terms of research methodology, I prefer to adhere to the notion that we cannot fully evaluate the motivations of armed groups through models derived solely from their actions; assumptions based on socialisation cannot replace the in-depth insights gained from individual life narratives. Therefore, I employ a qualitative research methodology to investigate and analyse the challenges of DDR within the context of the existing socio-political dynamics and the institutions that facilitate violent resistance in South Sudan. The conventional, development-oriented research approach is particularly inadequate in South Sudan, where armed conflict poses significant challenges.

The Challenges of Multi-Layered Violence Actors on DDR in South Sudan

Contemporary political analysis suggests that the traditional primacy of the state as the principal actor in global governance has diminished, giving rise to a complex framework of multi-layered political, economic, and security interactions that appears resistant to reversal (Fahey, 2013). Jessica Mathews posits that we are witnessing an unprecedented redistribution of power among states, markets, and civil society (Mathews, 1997, p. 50), attributing this shift largely to globalisation. However, her focus tends to overlook the post-war challenges states face, particularly from informal militarised groups that contest state authority.

Building on this premise, I contend that South Sudan exemplifies a landscape where the state's functional presence is starkly limited, rendering it nearly absent in effective governance. In this context, power dynamics are characterised by an ongoing, violent negotiation among various actors. The locus of coercive power is not centralised but is instead dispersed vertically among different tiers of informal entities while also operating horizontally across a multitude of political interests and spheres of influence. This system fosters a continuous cycle of conflict as violent actors compete for dominance over resources and authority within a fractured sociopolitical landscape. The erosion of state authority, resulting from the inability to fulfil sovereign obligations, exacerbates the challenges in regulating the rise of multi-factional armed groups that seek access to corrupt resources and power. In the context of South Sudan, the widespread unprofessionalism within security forces has considerably intensified community-led initiatives to acquire small arms and light machine guns for self-defence purposes.

Documentation reveals that South Sudanese police forces are implicated in numerous human rights violations, while the South Sudan National Security (NSS) is perceived as an extension of presidential power, frequently linked to extrajudicial killings and the forced disappearances of political dissidents (Kuol, 2018, p. 2). In a climate where citizens exhibit profound distrust and apprehension towards their government, the disarmament of non-state armed groups formed for ethno-political self-defence poses a significant and escalating challenge. The interplay of a weakened state, the anxiety of OAGs regarding state authority, and mutual apprehensiveness among these groups illustrates the multifaceted nature of authority, governance, and violence in fragmented states. In the context of South Sudan's current political landscape, it is reasonable to assert that the state's authority is receding; effectively, the nominal sovereign government is rendered irrelevant across various territories where ethno-political elites assert control and dictate the dynamics of armed conflict.

This phenomenon underscores a prevailing narrative that characterises South Sudan as a conduit for extortion, wherein rival factions leverage their positions for both protection and personal enrichment. Scholars have framed the situation in South Sudan within the concept of a "business of violence," aligning it with rationalist theories concerning the war that emphasise economic incentives (Johnson, 2016; Powell, 1999, 2004, 2006). This perspective highlights a paradox of violent transition: as armed groups coalesce in opposition to both the state and each other, individuals simultaneously cultivate alliances with elites entrenched in state power, revealing a complex web of interests and influences. While South Sudan may seem to embody a chaotic state, it is more accurately characterised by the absence of anarchy.

Instead of having a robust formal authority, the landscape is dominated by fluid networks of distrustful and often violent actors. This perspective may challenge prevailing state-centric assumptions, yet it highlights the crucial link between the failures of DDR processes and the motivations of armed groups within the context of conflict. The informal arms structures that permeate South Sudan's governance are intricately connected to formal

authority dynamics (Jok, 2017). This relationship illustrates how leaders of armed factions can instigate violence with minimal oversight or constraint from the central government. Consequently, this diffusion of power and the propensity for the use of force necessitate a reevaluation of traditional top-down frameworks for peacebuilding and security reform. It raises significant questions regarding the legitimacy of South Sudan's claimed sovereign monopoly on the use of force, particularly in light of its evident inability to effectively fulfil foundational governance functions.

While the atrocities committed by informal militias like the Janjaweed frequently dominate public discourse, the proliferation of these non-state structures has had a more profound effect on DDR efforts. These entities thrive on the elite's capacity to forge grassroots loyalty and largely depend on informal armed groups for their political longevity. As observed by a participant, "throughout much of the nation, everyday security increasingly rests with ethnic militias, which have become an omnipresent aspect of daily life" (P27/21/12/2017). This assertion underscores that the governance of force is not solely the purview of the state or non-state actors (NSAs) in South Sudan. Interestingly, critiques of the state-centric model suggest a reevaluation of the post-war state characterised by a lack of consensus (Fritz and Menocal, 2006; 2007).

This analysis invites consideration of Goetze and Guzina's (2008) critique of liberal peace as a linear progression from one form of political construction to another. The primary concern articulated in this article is the inadequacy of the conventional peacebuilding framework in Africa, which predominantly focuses on the stabilisation of post-conflict states. This approach has not yielded significant advancements, as both peace and state-building initiatives struggle to persuade ex-combatants and ethnic militias to adhere to the formal governance structures and to uphold the political and security principles outlined in post-war constitutions. A nuanced understanding of the repercussions of this cyclical violence necessitates a research methodology that enables scholars and practitioners to investigate the roles of armed groups, agency, and the processes associated with armed conflicts. Such an exploration is critical for comprehending how these elements contribute to the ongoing proliferation of small arms and the emergence of armed factions.

II. Conclusion

A hybrid approach critiques the focus on reconstructing post-war states as outdated, advocating for localised strategies tailored to specific contexts (Steele, 2005). This perspective argues that DDR embodies a liberal peacebuilding framework that oversimplifies historical complexities, overlooks imposed international constraints, and attributes democratic characteristics to fragmented states without acknowledging underlying realities. In South Sudan, the erosion of central authority has resulted in a failure to provide citizens with essential services and maintain a semblance of social order. Consequently, resistance to DDR can be attributed to insufficient collective security and the political-economic incentives driving armed groups. Despite decades of peacebuilding efforts, there remains scant evidence to suggest that DDR effectively facilitates transitions from conflict to peaceful governance, as noted by Colletta and Muggah (2009, p. 446).

The effectiveness of DDR initiatives can be significantly hindered in contexts where claims to legitimacy and the monopoly on the use of force are fragmented. In South Sudan, the dominance of violent non-state actors has exacerbated a contentious environment, leading many DDR participants to dismiss the political and economic incentives proffered by international donors (Ball and van de Goor, 2011). Current theoretical frameworks often offer radical critiques and solutions to the challenges encountered in DDR processes. While DDR remains a critical component of peacebuilding, a hybrid approach challenges the conventional SSR model, which is frequently criticised for being overly state-centric and prescriptive. Rather than attempting to impose a singular institutional framework in contexts marked by fragmented sources of legitimacy, it is suggested that DDR efforts should engage with a range of authorities to leverage their respective strengths and address weaknesses (Baker and Scheye, 2007, p. 217).

Ultimately, the prospects for DDR in South Sudan hinge on two crucial factors: the state's accountability and the ability of external actors to facilitate substantive change aligned with liberal peace principles. A persistent and contentious question arises: What is the outcome when the state does not assume the predominant role in ensuring stability, security, and governance? This inquiry remains unresolved and provocative. Jackson (2011, p. 1818) argues that critics of the liberal peace framework, and consequently the conventional approach to security sector reform (SSR), recognise the necessity for a realignment of external intervention and internal agency, potentially leading to a state that is genuinely accountable to its populace. However, there remains significant contention regarding the role of violent factions in this rebalancing process. It has become increasingly clear over the past decade that the international community, particularly through Western donors, possesses limited ability to transform post-conflict states into liberal democracies.

The inaction during the atrocities in Rwanda and Darfur, coupled with the disastrous outcomes of interventions in Iraq and Libya, starkly highlight this limitation and contradict the intended objective of reconstituting authoritarian regimes into democratic entities. South Sudan exemplifies these challenges. The fledgling state stands in stark contrast to Annan's (2006, p. 685) assertion that states should serve their citizens,

not the other way around. Instead, South Sudan persists as a quasi-state where the security and freedoms guaranteed by the UN Charter remain largely unactualised. This weak and predatory state structure undermines Francis Deng's claim that "legitimate sovereignty requires a demonstration of responsibility" (Deng et al. 1996, p. 1). The growing scepticism toward Western peacebuilding initiatives has transcended academic debate, gaining traction within mainstream policy circles and dampening enthusiasm in Western capitals for prolonged international engagements.

Ignatieff's observations regarding contemporary international state-building efforts highlight an unprecedented impatience among imperial actors for rapid outcomes (2003, p. 115; 1996). This reflects a growing Western frustration coupled with an aversion to the costs and risks associated with intervention, particularly amidst ongoing socio-political challenges. This article applies a hybrid model to underscore the emergence of a "fend-for-yourself" security paradigm among South Sudanese communities, which has redefined security beyond the purview of public authority. As state structures fail, the ramifications of violence extend beyond mere resource plunder; they fundamentally erode the rule-based application of force. To argue that the violent upheaval in South Sudan stems from the collapse of political institutions, I employ a qualitative methodology to examine conflict dynamics and extract insights into the underlying causes of conflict and their implications for DDR processes.

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