

When Kleptocracy Becomes Insolvent: Brute Causes of the Civil War in South Sudan

In a new [article](#) published in *African Affairs*, Alex de Waal argues that South Sudan obtained independence in July 2011 as a kleptocracy – a militarized, corrupt neo-patrimonial system of governance. By the time of independence, the South Sudanese ‘political marketplace’ was so expensive that the country’s comparatively copious revenue was consumed by the military-political patronage system, with almost nothing left for public services, development or institution building. The efforts of national technocrats and foreign donors produced bubbles of institutional integrity but the system as a whole was entirely resistant to reform. The January 2012 shutdown of oil production bankrupted the system. Even an experienced and talented political business manager would have struggled, and President Salva Kiir did not display the required skills. No sooner had shots been fired than the compact holding the SPLA together fell apart and civil war ensued. Drawing upon long-term observation of elite politics in South Sudan, this [article](#) explains both the roots of kleptocratic government and its dire consequences.

July 30th, 2014 | [Alex de Waal](#), [Resources](#), [South Sudan](#) | [1 Comment](#)

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