

IN A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH, SOUTH SUDAN RIVALS SEAL SECURITY PACT

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In what has been hailed as a major breakthrough, South Sudan's rival leaders sealed an agreement on Sunday on a key military provision of their stuttering peace deal.

President Salva Kiir and his rival, Vice President Riek Machar, agreed on the creation of a unified armed forces command, one of several crucial unresolved issues holding up implementation of the 2018 deal to end the country's bloody five-year civil war.

"Peace is about security and today we have (achieved) a milestone," said Martin Abucha, who signed the agreement on behalf of Machar's Opposition SPLM/A-IO.

Minister of presidential affairs Barnaba Marial Benjamin hailed the deal — signed following mediation by neighbouring Sudan — as a "necessary step... that opens a route for the stable government of the Republic of South Sudan".

Tensions between forces loyal to Mr. Kiir and Mr. Machar have spiralled recently, triggering fears in the international community of a return to full-blown conflict in the world's youngest nation.

Both men were at the ceremony in the capital Juba for the signing of the accord, which stipulates a 60-40 distribution in favour of Mr. Kiir's side of key leadership posts in the Army, police and national security forces.

Landlocked South Sudan has suffered from chronic instability since it declared independence from Sudan in 2011.

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