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[The future of South Sudan lies with the Arabs](http://www.arabnews.com/node/1267696)

When it emerged last week that the Arab League had refused a membership request by South Sudan — followed by a denial of such an application by a South Sudanese official, who said it had only asked to become an “observer” — I recalled an interview I carried out before secession with Salva Kiir Mayardit, who is now the country’s prime minister.
His mastery of Arabic was not any less than any other Sudanese person. It was a long interview, in which he said that he welcomed any Arab or Muslim in South Sudan, but he spoke as well about the sense of injustice and neglect felt among Southerners toward the people of the North. When I moved on to record a TV interview, Kiir asked to do it in English. I asked him to speak in Arabic, which he speaks fluently, because the interview would be broadcast on Egyptian TV to an Arabic-speaking audience, but he insisted on English.
It is another missed opportunity for the Arab League that the Arab foreign ministers did not give due diligence to the request of South Sudan to join. And it is really sad for some to consider the Arabic language as a mere element, rather than part of our culture and language.
I remember that, in July 2016, Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul-Gheit announced from Khartoum that he would work hard to convince the Arab states to give South Sudan “special observer” status, to stop Israel’s infiltration of African countries. I considered Aboul-Gheit’s initiative an unconventional and courageous one. Had it succeeded, it would have been a huge breakthrough.
Some members say that South Sudan cannot be given full membership as this contradicts the Arab League’s charter, which states members must be Arab and independent, and that membership should be approved by the existing members. South Sudan is not an Arab state, but there were similar debates when Somalia and Djibouti joined the Arab League after independence, even though some members did not consider them eligible because Arabic is not their most common language.
The concept of Arabism might need to be clarified. The South Sudanese speak perfect Arabic and, if not for the policies of imposing Islam and Arabization carried out by consecutive Sudanese governments following independence and the end of British colonialism, South Sudan would have become an important and vital extension of Arab culture.

**The rejection of an application from the country to join the Arab League is a missed opportunity for all sides.**

*Abdellatif El-Menawy*

This was the ideal moment for integration, as the new generation of Southerners is more open and has overcome historic complexes toward Arab culture. Nowadays there are books, newspapers and other creative content in Arabic, in spite of marginalization attempts.
The request by South Sudan was submitted to the Arab League during its 149th meeting, held at its headquarters in Cairo on March 7. It was refused without any justification, other than in some leaks to the media. Adding to the mystery was the denial by South Sudan’s Foreign Minister Deng Alor Kuol that it had asked for full membership, saying the country only wanted to join as an observer.
The Arab League had already announced in 2011, after the secession of South Sudan, that the emerging state would have the right to join the Arab League as soon as it fulfilled the necessary requirements: Mainly that it abide by the Arab League’s pact stating that the constitutions of member states must explicitly declare that Arabic is an official language. This condition was a response to the refusal by the government in Juba to add Arabic as a second official language in its constitution, under the pretext that South Sudan does not have any direct ties with the Arab world.
This issue sparked a wide debate in South Sudan’s Parliament and among the people, a good percentage of whom speak Arabic. The media also uses spoken Arabic as one of the most common languages for communication.
The rift between the Arab League and South Sudan, which has been widening day after day, year after year, led Kiir to say during a TV interview that Arabs think South Sudan lacks the will to be an Arab state because of the secession from Sudan. He added that his country was not considering joining the Arab League, saying: “What if we think of joining the Arab League, will they accept us? I doubt that, and we don’t want that.”
The recent change in Juba’s attitude might be triggered by a direct benefit it is seeking, as the country is about to slide into civil war. Joining the Arab League might offer some relative stability at the political and economic levels. South Sudan also might have reason to hide behind the Arab bloc at the UN Security Council, so that it could gain a positive vote on decisions pertaining to peace and avoiding sanctions.
Maybe the aim of this motion was to get loans and financial aid from the Arab Monetary Fund, in addition to attracting Arab investors. Or maybe it was to control closely some vital issues, especially that of the Nile Waters Agreement.
South Sudan has its own calculations when it comes to dealing with the Arab world, especially Egypt, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, in recognition of their prominent role in supporting the Southerners. On the other hand, Arabs would benefit a lot from South Sudan becoming a member of the Arab League, especially in countering the movement of Israelis inside Africa and the economic benefits and investment opportunities in this huge oil-producing country.
During my visit to Juba a few years ago, I noticed the secession indicators were not limited to the English language used by Kiir in spite of his mastery of the Arabic language, but were as bright as the burning sun, as clear as the Nile waters that cross the country in route to Egypt. Those indicators might need an inclusive Arab mind, starting from the principle of interest — which is almost entirely absent from the minds of Arab politicians.