

A State of Disunity: Conflict Dynamics in Unity State, South Sudan, 2013–15

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with Claudio Gramizzi*



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First published in December 2016

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Small Arms Survey

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Printed by nbmedia in Geneva, Switzerland

ISBN 978-2-940548-32-3

Contents

List of boxes, maps, and tables	5
List of abbreviations	6
I. Introduction and key findings	8
II. A brief history of Unity state	17
Divisions in an ill-named state	17
Background	18
Unity state during the second civil war	22
The CPA period	28
Militia activity in 2005–13	33
III. The conflict in Unity state, 2013–15	38
The beginning of the conflict (December 2013–January 2014)	38
The SPLA advance on the south (February–April 2014)	52
The SPLM–IO retakes Bentiu (April 2014)	62
The SPLA recapture of Bentiu and rainy-season conflict (April–November 2014)	67
Preparations for war (December 2014–March 2015)	72
The second government offensive on the south (April–August 2015)	81
The peace agreement and further clashes (July–October 2015)	99

The new map of South Sudan	107
The military dimension of the conflict in Unity	113
IV. Political and military tensions in Unity state	127
Pariang county and the Dinka of Unity state	127
The Unity oil fields	131
The Bul Nuer	134
The politics of humanitarianism	142
The protection of civilians site in Rubkona	145
V. Life across the border: Sudan–South Sudan relations during the civil war	152
The SRF’s relations with South Sudan until December 2013	152
The Sudanese rebels’ role in South Sudan	157
Sudan’s roles	186
Missiriya roles	197
A new conflict across a disputed border	199
Conclusion	203
Endnotes	207
Bibliography	234
About the authors	242
Acknowledgements	244
The Small Arms Survey	245
The Human Security Baseline Assessment	246
Conflict Armament Research	248
HSBA publications	249
Online resources	255

List of boxes, maps, and tables

Box

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | UN weapons transfer to the SPLM-IO | 45 |
|---|------------------------------------|----|

Maps

- | | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 1 | Unity state | 9 |
| 2 | Ethnic divides in Unity state | 19 |
| 3 | The 2014 SPLA offensive | 53 |
| 4 | The 2015 SPLA offensive | 82 |
| 5 | Post-peace-agreement clashes, August–September 2015 | 105 |
| 6 | Sudan–South Sudan border relations during the new civil war, 2013–15 | 153 |

Tables

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | Principal sections in Unity | 20 |
| 2 | Selected allegations levelled at Juba by Khartoum | 154 |

List of abbreviations

APC	Armoured personnel carrier
CoH	Cessation of hostilities
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DPKO	United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
FDP	Federal Democratic Party
GoS	Government of Sudan
GoSS	Government of Southern Sudan
GPOC	Greater Pioneer Operating Company
GRSS	Government of the Republic of South Sudan
IDP	Internally displaced person
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
JBVMM	Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mission
JEM	Justice and Equality Movement
MoU	Memorandum of understanding
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MVM	Monitoring and Verification Mechanism
NCP	National Congress Party
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Services
Norinco	China North Industries Corporation
NSS	National Security Service
PCTSA	Permanent Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements
PDF	Popular Defence Forces
PoC	Protection of civilians
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade (launcher)
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
SDBZ	Safe Demilitarized Border Zone
SLA–AW	Sudan Liberation Army–Abdul Wahid Mohamed al Nur
SLA–MM	Sudan Liberation Army–Minni Minawi

SPLM/A	Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/ Army
SPLM-IO	Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-in-Opposition
SPLM-N	Sudan People’s Liberation Movement–North
SPLM–Nasir	Sudan People’s Liberation Movement–Nasir
SRF	Sudan Revolutionary Front
SRG	Southern Regional Government
SSAF	South Sudan Armed Forces
SSDF	South Sudan Defence Forces
SSDM/A	South Sudan Defence Movement/Army
SSIM/A	South Sudan Independence Movement/Army
SSLM/A	South Sudan Liberation Movement/Army
SSP	South Sudanese pound
SSUM/A	South Sudan Unity Movement/Army
TGoNU	Transitional Government of National Unity
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UPDF	Ugandan People’s Defence Force
WFP	World Food Programme

I. Introduction and key findings

Since the beginning of South Sudan's civil war in December 2013, Unity has experienced more violence and upheaval than any other state in the fledgling nation.¹ By the end of 2015, the number of people accommodated in the protection of civilians (PoC) site of inside the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in Rubkona had swelled to 140,000. This population was by far the largest in any single UNMISS base, representing more than two-thirds of 220,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were taking shelter in UNMISS bases (IOM, 2015b). If the deserted streets of Bentiu, the ruined capital of Unity, are any indication, the peace agreement—signed by the South Sudanese president, Salva Kiir Mayardit, and the head of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO),² Riek Machar Teny, and ratified on 10 September 2015—has had little effect on conflict dynamics in the state. Indeed, it is sobering to note that the ratification of the agreement, and subsequent negotiations over the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU), resulted in no noticeable shift in the way the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) has conducted the war in Unity state.

This Working Paper surveys the first two years of the South Sudanese civil war in Unity and analyses its underlying conflict dynamics. With only minor variations, the front lines remained relatively fixed during this period. The two Padang Dinka counties of Abiemnom and Pariang have remained under the control of the SPLA, reflecting the loyalty of the riverine Dinka to the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) and their difficulty in finding a place in the country's only majority-Nuer state (see Map 1).³ The front line between the belligerent parties has largely run west to east, south of the state capital, through Guit and Rubkona counties. Most of Mayom, home to the Bul Nuer, the only Nuer section that has largely supported Juba throughout this conflict, has generally been under government control.

The worst abuses of the civil war have been carried out in the southern counties of Unity—Koch, Leer, Mayendit, and Panyijar. Leer, Machar's home town,



has been attacked repeatedly, as government-aligned forces have twice undertaken dry-season offensives (in January–February 2014 and May–June 2015) against the Nuer south, the wellspring of SPLM–IO support in the state. UN sources estimate that more than 10,000 civilians died in Unity between late 2014 and late 2015, a period covering the government’s 2015 campaign but not its 2014 offensive (UNDHCCS, 2016, pp. 6, 22). During the 2015 offensive, the SPLA and aligned groups swept south, razing villages, raping women, and leaving more than 100,000 displaced. By November 2015, following the offensive, the total number of IDPs had risen to nearly 560,000, or 90 per cent of the state’s population. Unity thus became the South Sudanese state with both the highest number and the highest proportion of IDPs (OCHA, 2015a; 2016). In addition, people who sought refuge in Sudan may number in the tens of thousands, including Sudanese refugees who chose to return to conflict areas in South Kordofan and Darfur. In October 2016, approximately 100,000 refugees from South Kordofan were still living in Unity state, trapped between two war zones.

In addition to being one of the military centres of the war, Unity is the fulcrum of many of the political questions that underlie the current conflict. As the only majority-Nuer state in the country, it has taken on the role of bellwether in the struggle to define the South Sudanese national identity. Regardless of the outcome of the current peace process, ongoing grievances among the Nuer population of Unity revolve around a sense of alienation from the GRSS—as well as from the state-level administration in Bentiu—and deep-seated anger about events that shook Juba in December 2013, when Dinka militias went door-to-door and killed Nuer civilians.⁴

The state itself is of relatively recent design. The name ‘Unity’ was proposed in 1980, for a state that would encompass the oil-producing regions of what is now the Sudan–South Sudan border. The redrawing of the map was not only aimed at removing control of the oil fields from the Southern Regional Government (SRG), but also at fracturing southern unity by creating a series of smaller states.⁵ Thus, from the very beginning of its history, Unity state was intended to create disunity. And so it proved. During the latter part of Sudan’s second civil war (1983–2005), Unity was the site of a ‘Nuer civil war’, as Bul Nuer forces, backed by Khartoum and under the control of Paulino Matiep, fought against Machar’s dissident SPLA forces, also backed by Khartoum.⁶

One of the primary reasons for these clashes was a dispute over the governorship of Unity state that occurred in 1997, just after Paulino Matiep merged his South Sudan Unity Movement/Army (SSUM/A) into the South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF), an umbrella group of Khartoum-backed forces in southern Sudan, including those of Machar.⁷ The National Congress Party (NCP) backed fellow Bul Nuer Joseph Nguen Monyтуil Wejang for the governorship, while Machar backed Taban Deng Gai, a Jikany Nuer from Guit, and Paulino Matiep backed yet another candidate. Taban Deng got the governorship, and the dispute led Matiep to leave the SSDF and caused a conflict between the Bul Nuer around Matiep and Machar's South Sudan Independence Movement/Army (SSIM/A).

This dispute continues to be one of the fundamental tensions underlying the conflict in Unity. After Nguen Monyтуil and Taban Deng vied for the governorship once more, from 2008 to 2010, Taban Deng again emerged victorious—this time because he had sided with Kiir against Machar.⁸ Following his success in the 2010 gubernatorial elections, however, he lost support in Unity and moved back towards Machar, in part because he was perceived as backing SPLA offensives against the Bul Nuer in 2011.⁹ In the run-up to the outbreak of conflict in December 2013, Kiir dismissed Taban Deng, replacing him with Nguen Monyтуil, who brought with him the support of the South Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SSLM/A), which had fought the SPLA only a year before.

At the root of these sometimes dizzying shifts of loyalty is a basic opposition between the Bul Nuer commanders around Matiep and the politicians around Machar and Taban Deng. These two groups contest power in Unity, and while their alliances with external actors—be it Khartoum or Juba—are largely conditional, the rivalry is enduring. One of the central reasons why Nguen Monyтуil did not join the opposition at the beginning of the current conflict is his longstanding dislike of Taban Deng.¹⁰

In many respects, the elite-level dynamics of the war in Unity state are in continuity with second civil war-era practice. Paulino Matiep effectively treated Mayom county like a personal fiefdom during the war; he used his military control of much of northern Unity to build an economic powerbase, trading in sorghum and cattle, and cementing his political position through tactical marriages. Matiep negotiated an alliance with President Omar al Bashir not

due to any particular loyalty to Khartoum, but rather to acquire power in Unity state. He never evinced any particular interest in forming a government, or in determining the future of southern Sudan.

Matthew Puljang Top, the former SSLA commander who is currently fighting for the GRSS, is talked about as Matiep's successor—and he has behaved similarly, notably by taxing cattle and income in Mayom, and by using raids on the south of Unity to supplement his herds.¹¹ Like the second civil war, the current war has allowed elite commanders to pursue a form of power that is delinked from negotiations in Juba, and from a vision of the future South Sudanese state. What distinguishes Puljang from Matiep is that while the latter man received his backing from the Government of Sudan (GoS), Puljang receives his from the GRSS. However, the relationship between the Bul Nuer commanders currently in control of Unity and Juba is no less contingent and uncertain than that which used to exist between Matiep and Khartoum; seen from the perspective of Bentiu, both Khartoum and Juba are external backers, useful in an internal war.

In many respects, the relationship between Nguen Monytil and Juba is one of mutual exploitation. In December 2013, most of the SPLA 4th Division either joined the nascent SPLM-IO rebellion, or else disbanded. The GRSS was totally reliant on the former SSLA forces loyal to Nguen Monytil and his brother, Bapiny Monytil, a former Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) logistics officer who had previously served as Puljang's superior. Together with Tayeb Gatluak, the head of the 4th Division during the 2014–15 military campaign in Unity, and a former deputy to Paulino Matiep, Nguen Monytil and Matthew Puljang currently constitute the political and military elite of Unity state.¹²

This Working Paper analyses the continuities of the second civil war in the current conflict, as well as new social and military dynamics that have emerged since December 2013. The authors conducted joint and separate fieldwork for the paper in April–June 2014, December 2014–January 2015, and March–July 2015; in addition, they carried out telephone and online interviews with key informants throughout this period and up to June 2016. The authors' fieldwork covered all counties of Unity state, including government- and opposition-controlled areas, with the exception of Panyijar county, which was only covered through interviews in neighbouring Leer county and elsewhere. This Working

Paper builds on the authors' multiple previous visits to Unity state in 2010–13. Supplementary interviews were conducted in 2014, 2015, and 2016 in others parts of South Sudan (in particular in Juba and Northern Bahr el Ghazal), Addis Ababa, Kampala, Nairobi, Brussels, and Paris.

This paper also presents the results of analyses of military equipment by the Small Arms Survey and Conflict Armament Research. The research teams inspected the materiel on both sides of the front line in May and June 2014.

Among the paper's key findings are the following:

Military dynamics and weapons

- The SPLM–IO has been almost totally militarily defeated in Unity state, for two primary reasons: a lack of arms and ammunition, and a lack of rebel recruits in the state.
- The rebels were reliant on capturing ammunition and weaponry from the SPLA, largely because they did not receive sufficient supplies from the GoS, their principal external backer. At times, they were not able to move supplies provided by the GoS from the border area to the fighting area, as was the case with ammunition held in Panakuach just prior to the 2015 government offensive. Arms and ammunition shortages also dictated the rebels' strategic targets during the war, leading them to hold towns and garrisons just long enough to capture SPLA weapons.
- The SPLM–IO was unable to attract a sufficient number of recruits in what should have been the heartland of rebel support, due to a lack of enthusiasm for the struggle. Peter Gatdet's failure to win over the Bul Nuer during his tenure as SPLM–IO commander in Unity state left the group without sufficient troops to fight an effective war against the SPLA (see pp. 77–80).
- Most of the weapons used on both sides of the Unity conflict in 2013–15 were consistent with previously known SPLA materiel. But the SPLA obtained and used additional weapons that were imported into the country after the conflict began or shortly beforehand, including from China, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates. These weapons provided a concrete advantage to the SPLA in the conflict in Unity state (see pp. 113–26).
- The Unity conflict was shaped by the parties' failure to access supplies, which led both sides to raid and attack civilian settlements to sustain themselves and acquire resources for the next attack. Largely delinked from discussions in

Addis Ababa, this form of warfare was self-sustaining rather than directed at definite political ends (see pp. 85–94 and 113–26).

- The SPLA has repeatedly blocked the delivery of humanitarian aid into rebel-held areas. In general, both belligerent parties have manipulated humanitarian assistance as part of a strategy to control the movement of people and resources in the state, very much like during the second civil war (see pp. 142–44).

Political dynamics

- Although the SPLM–IO has been defeated militarily in Unity, there is widespread anger among the state’s Nuer over the government’s 2015 southern offensive. Resentment also grew in response to the peace agreement signed by the SPLM–IO in September 2015, which was seen as a capitulation to many conditions—such as Kiir’s continued presidency—that were considered red lines. The SPLM–IO in Unity only grudgingly accepted the peace agreement because of the difficulty of continuing a military struggle in the state. With the peace agreement now in ruins, the only thing preventing Unity from returning to war is the rainy season and the absence of weaponry (see pp. 100–104).
- Machar dismissed Peter Gatdet and Gathoth Gatkuoth in mid-2015, in part because of their criticism of the leadership’s handling of the Unity campaign. Both had called Machar and Taban Deng’s political goals short-sighted, self-serving, and useless to the Nuer community.
- Sudan and South Sudan’s pattern of supporting each other’s rebels in a variety of conflicts, including in Unity state, represents a risk to any South Sudanese peace agreement, particularly if Khartoum attempts to satisfy its short-term interests by supporting rebels inside the state.
- Peter Gatdet, who was previously one of the most important Nuer commanders in Unity state, was dismissed in mid-2015 because of his criticism of Machar’s leadership. Currently in Khartoum, Gatdet is one among many commanders who can become spoilers in the future if Sudan resurrects its strategy of supporting rebels inside South Sudan (see pp. 100–104).

Ethnic dynamics

- Far more damaging than the raiding that often occurs between transhumant pastoralist groups were the government’s repeated offensives into southern Unity, in which the Bul Nuer were centrally involved. The raiding forces

abducted women, stole cattle, and displaced pro-SPLM–IO communities, deeply damaging Nuer relations in the process. In the Rubkona PoC site, Leek and Dok Nuer, who have been displaced from southern and central Unity, openly call the Bul Nuer ‘Dinka’ and talk about taking revenge once the political situation has changed. They blame the Bul Nuer for siding with the government, abandoning the Nuer, and raiding the south. This hostility is likely to endure and presents a risk of further violence even if peace were to come to Unity state (see pp. 145–51 (PoC) and 134–41 (Bul Nuer)).


- Given the other Nuer’s hatred of the Bul in Unity, Nguen Monytil and his Bul Nuer commanders are unlikely to give up any power in the state, as it would leave their community vulnerable to retaliatory attacks. This situation makes a sustainable political settlement in Unity hard to envisage. Since the SPLM–IO is slated to select the governor of Unity or the three states into which it is to be divided, a political confrontation between the GRSS-backed Bul Nuer and the SPLM–IO seems inevitable (see pp. 134–41 (Bul Nuer)).
- While the Dinka communities appear delighted that Kiir’s decree grants them their own state, a tripartite division of Unity is unlikely to solve the state’s problems. The various ethnic communities of Unity have long lived together and need each other; separation may be a recipe for the intensification of ethnic hatred (see pp. 127–31). In many respects, Kiir’s decree echoes the original discussion of Unity state by Sudanese president Jaafar Nimeiri’s government in 1980: under a plan for unity and federalism, what is created is disunity and division.

UNMISS actions

- UNMISS was taken by surprise by the outbreak of hostilities in December 2013. Shortly after the SPLA’s 4th Division rebelled and took control of Bentiu, non-Nuer soldiers fled into the UNMISS base in Rubkona, giving up their weapons to the peacekeepers. On at least two occasions in December 2013, UNMISS gave these weapons to the SPLM–IO, reportedly because they had had good relations with James Koang Chuol—who had just declared himself military governor of the state—before the outbreak of the conflict. UN headquarters in New York blocked later UNMISS leadership in Juba from transferring weapons seized in their bases to the government, for the sake of preserving an appearance of neutrality (see Box 1).



SPLM-IO soldiers on the front line near Guit, June 2014. © Jérôme Tubiana

- Since December 2013, UNMISS has been in a 'holding pattern', to quote a UN official. Having spent three years with a double mandate of 'state-building' and 'civilian protection', it has struggled to adapt to a situation in which the state that it helped build has turned on its own citizens (see pp. 145–51). 

II. A brief history of Unity state

Divisions in an ill-named state

In November 1980, the Sudanese National Parliament first proposed the name 'Unity' (*Al Wahida* in Arabic) to designate a territorial area. It suggested that a new administrative region should be created to encompass Abyei, parts of West Kordofan, and some of what was then called Western Upper Nile.¹³ The justification for the establishment of Unity state was the creation of a region that would cut across the 1956 border between the northern and southern provinces of Sudan, and thus encourage, precisely, unity.¹⁴ Northern Sudanese politicians argued that it would also simplify the equitable distribution of oil revenue, as all the oil-producing areas would then be in one state.¹⁵ Indeed, before the state existed, 'Unity' was the name of an oil field, which is still in existence, in the north-west of what is currently Unity state.¹⁶

Khartoum's proposal for 'unity' actually had two goals. It was part of a long history of efforts by successive Sudanese governments to redraw southern Sudan's internal boundaries in order to weaken the SRG's political power by dividing it, and it also aimed to ensure that resources—in this case oil—remained under Khartoum's control.¹⁷ The initial plan in Khartoum was for the presidency to administer the new region directly, as a 'special province'. The strongest advocates of the division of the southern region were precisely those northern politicians who had argued against its creation in the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement.¹⁸

The SRG was strongly opposed to the division of the South, and there was regional pressure on Jaafar Nimeiri, then president of Sudan, from neighbouring countries that feared that such a process of division, so fiercely opposed by southern Sudan, would lead to a return to war.¹⁹ In Khartoum, members of parliament from Western Upper Nile who were against the bill, together with young, educated Nuer, including Charles Kuot, who would become the first commissioner of Unity state in 1984, and Riek Machar, formed a committee and received the support of southern ministers in Khartoum, including Bona Malwal

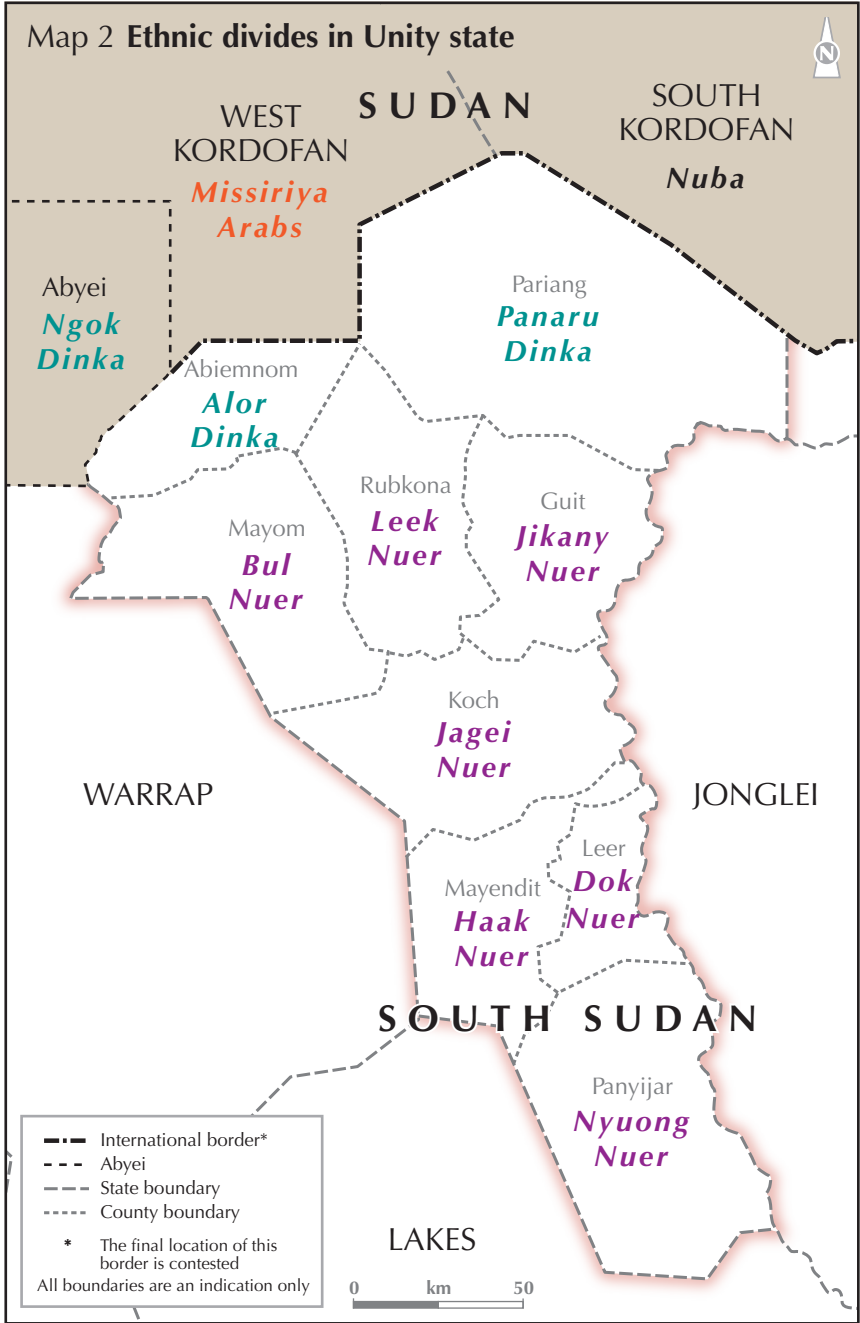
(the minister of culture) and Francis Deng (the state minister of foreign affairs), in their efforts to overturn the division of the south (ICG, 2011, p. 2).²⁰ The protests of the SRG scuppered the bill.

Unity was only formalized as a state in 1983, when the GoS split the southern region into three zones: Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria, and Upper Nile. Upper Nile was subsequently carved into three areas, one of which—Western Upper Nile—was then renamed Unity state by Nimeiri.²¹ From the beginning, Unity state was an attempt to augment Khartoum’s controls over the oil fields of the north–south border zone. What it failed to achieve administratively in the early 1980s, it then attempted militarily during the second civil war.

Background

Unity state is traversed by a series of waterways that provide grazing resources for the Dinka and Nuer transhumant pastoralists who populate the state, and for groups of northern pastoralists who take their livestock south every dry season in search of viable pastures. The Bahr el Jebel branch of the White Nile delimits much of the eastern Unity–Jonglei state border, before turning east into Upper Nile. The river forms something of a natural wall for South Sudan’s western Nuer, while the Dinka populations of Warrap and Lakes states to the west and south of these populations form another type of boundary.²² During the two GRSS-backed offensives into southern Unity in 2014 and 2015, that latter boundary deprived the Nuer of a proximate territory into which they could flee.

The Bahr el Ghazal (Nam in Nuer) river runs west to east through the heart of the state, before joining the Bahr el Jebel; together, these rivers form the White Nile (Phow in Nuer) as it proceeds out of Unity state and into Upper Nile. The Bahr el Ghazal is joined by the Bahr el Arab, which descends south-east from Abyei, through Mayom county.²³ Both rivers provide vital grazing grounds for the transhumant peoples of Unity state. Come the rainy season—roughly May to October—flooding is common, and much of the state is transformed into swamp. If political and military conditions permit entry into South Sudan, northern pastoralist groups tend to remain in the northernmost section of the southern clay plain, which cuts northwards from the Bahr el Arab to the base of the Nuba Mountains.



Unity state accounts for approximately 270 km of the contested Sudan–South Sudan border and was the scene of fighting in 2012 over the contested oil production site of Hejlj, or Panthou, as the GRSS claims it should be known.²⁴ The state itself contains significant oil reserves in the counties of Guit, Koch, Mayom, Pariang, and Rubkona. An area of conflict during the second civil war, these fields were quickly taken off line with the outbreak of hostilities in South Sudan in December 2013, and they have been inoperative since October 2015. If there is a sustained reduction in fighting in Unity, and a peace agreement in Juba, the reopening of the oil production sites may be possible. However, this eventuality would also rekindle difficult questions about the distribution of oil revenue, which proved extremely contentious in the period of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005–11.

Part of the difficulty of these questions is that they touch on the relationship between state and local government on the one hand, and the GRSS on the other, and thus what place Unity—a predominately Nuer state—has in the political landscape of South Sudan. The only non-Nuer counties in Unity are Abiemnom and Pariang, in the north of the state. Branches of the Padang Dinka inhabit both of these counties (see Map 2 and Table 1). Much of the rest of the state suffered extensively, as successive Sudanese governments—first under Sadiq al Mahdi (1986–89) and then under Omar al Bashir (since 1989)—used

Table 1 Principal sections in Unity

County (roughly north to south)	Section
Pariang	Panaru Dinka
Abiemnom	Alor Dinka
Mayom	Bul Nuer
Rubkona	Leek Nuer
Guit	Jikany Nuer
Koch	Jagei Nuer
Mayendit	Haak Nuer
Leer	Dok Nuer
Panyijar	Nyuong Nuer

principally Nuer militias to control the Unity oil fields and create divisions inside both the SPLM/A and among the Nuer. Khartoum presented these conflicts as autochthonous developments, for which it denied any responsibility. Pariang, in contrast, remained loyal to the SPLA during the entire second civil war and has continued to support the GRSS during the current conflict.

Unlike elsewhere in South Sudan, where political divisions have pitted communities against each other since the second civil war, clashes in majority-Nuer Unity state—which has a far less substantial Dinka presence than Upper Nile state and no Shilluk presence at all—have tended to occur within the Nuer community.²⁵ One of the most problematic questions facing Unity state, both in the second civil war and in the present conflict, has been how to relate the priorities of the Nuer community to the more general project of the SPLM.

In 1991, during the second civil war, Riek Machar's splinter faction, SPLM–Nasir, renamed Unity 'Lich state'. The name refers to a sacred tree called Lich in what is now Koch county, from which all Nuer are believed to be descended; its initial use dates back to 1985–86, when it served as the name for the local SPLA division led by Machar.²⁶ During the CPA period, members of parliament from Unity state thought of changing the name to get rid of its Sudanese connotation, and Lich was one of the main options.²⁷ The current civil war saw the SPLM–IO again rename Unity 'Lich state', as part of its proposed division of South Sudan into 21 states. This change in nomenclature asserts the particularly Nuer character of the state, partly in response to Nuer grievances about being marginalized within the GRSS since 2011. Some Nuer, however, criticized the name as excluding the Dinka minority.²⁸

It is important to underline that the Nuer of Unity state are in no way unified. By the end of the second civil war, in 2005, GoS sponsorship of rival Nuer forces and, above all, the power struggles between Nuer leaders and clans had sown internal division between those who had fought with Matiep's SSUM/A, especially the Bul Nuer of Mayom county, and those who had sided with Machar's forces.²⁹ Strikingly, the newly formed SPLM–IO's ground presence was largely dominated by commanders who had been active in the SSDF, which the GoS sponsored during the second civil war.³⁰ In many senses, the current conflict is a reopening of the unsettled scores of the second civil war.

Unity state during the second civil war

This section identifies some of the features of the second civil war that are key to an understanding of the dynamics of the current conflict in Unity state.³¹ It also introduces some of the important military and political figures that dominated the period, many of whom continue to play important roles in the current conflict.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the GoS began using militia forces, recruited from among the pastoralist Arab groups of Kordofan, to attack southern communities in the border zone. These brutal raids were not simply military attacks on enemy positions—their targets were often villages and *luak* (cowsheds). The intention of the raids was not to destroy the SPLA militarily, but rather to attack the southern population, displacing it so as to allow the GoS to control coveted territory in the border zone, including the oil-producing areas of Unity state.³² This policy was expanded during the second civil war, as successive GoS regimes recruited Nuer militias to cement their control of oil-producing areas, and to sow discord in the south.³³ Many of the commanders of these militias changed sides multiple times, as the number of organizations and factions proliferated during the 1980s and 1990s.³⁴ An analysis of this period reveals two major factors that underlie the dynamics of the conflict in Unity state: GoS sponsorship and power politics.

GoS sponsorship

One of the constants of conflict in southern Sudan over the past 30 years has been Sudanese sponsorship of militia forces. These forces have served multiple functions for the GoS. They have allowed it to hold sway over contested areas, and thus to control important resources, including oil and grazing land. During Sudan's second civil war, when Unity state was harshly fought over between the SPLA and the government, the latter relied on various local Nuer dissident rebel factions and militias. Since 2011, and South Sudanese independence, militias have also allowed it to press its territorial claims in the border zone. Such sponsorship of militia groups, including that of the SPLM-IO, has also been used to pressure the GRSS in negotiations, and to try and compel the South Sudanese government to cease supporting Sudanese rebels.

The pact goes both ways. GoS sponsorship has also been a resource for southern commanders, who were either marginalized by the SPLA, or hoping to turn discord into financial opportunity and the possibility of later reabsorption by the SPLA, often at a higher rank (de Waal, 2014). Indeed, the ready availability of such sponsorship is one of the prime reasons for the fractionalization of the conflict in southern Sudan, especially during the second civil war, as it offered a ready source of armament and financing to dissident groups.

The career of Paulino Matiep is a case in point. A Bul Nuer from Mayom county, like most of the strongest military leaders in Unity state, Matiep had fought as part of the Anyanya I secessionist struggle in the 1960s. During the early days of the SPLA, there were tensions between the rebel movement's leader, John Garang, who pushed an agenda for a New Sudan, and the principally Nuer Anyanya I fighters, who favoured independence for southern Sudan. Matiep had founded his own militia in Ethiopia, at Bilpam, in 1978, and went on to clash with Garang's forces in 1983–84. Matiep's force was one of a number of loosely aligned groups fighting under the name Anyanya II. By the end of 1984, Garang had succeeded in driving Anyanya II combatants out of Ethiopia and had largely cemented control of the rebel forces in southern Sudan, while many Anyanya forces fought alongside the SPLA.

During this period, the SPLA sent three battalions under Paul Dor (a Leek Nuer) to Unity. In the areas around Bentiu that were largely controlled by Anyanya II forces, Nuer groups began to join the SPLA against Khartoum. However, personal rivalries developed between leaders, in particular between Matiep, who wanted to be appointed as the SPLA's overall commander for the state but was only given a rank of captain, and Bul Nyawan, who was supported by SPLA commander Taban Deng, a Jikany Nuer like him. Matiep decided to leave the SPLA and continue fighting as Anyanya II. The enmity between Matiep and Taban has been one of the factors in the difficult relations between the Bul and other Nuer up to this day.³⁵

The GoS became aware of the tensions between the nascent SPLA and Anyanya II. In 1984, President Nimeiri initiated contact with a number of Nuer leaders within Anyanya II in Upper Nile, including Matiep. Shortly beforehand, development of the oil fields in what is now Unity state had been suspended following an attack on Chevron by Anyanya II forces, and the GoS

wanted to find a way to secure the oil fields. Cut off from supplies in Ethiopia, and thus in need of external sponsorship from elsewhere, Matiep went on to command his own force with GoS backing. His dependence on support from the Sudanese government deepened after 1988–89, when the bulk of the Anyanya II forces joined the SPLA; meanwhile, Matiep concentrated on building up a personal fiefdom from his base in Mayom county, largely by trading in commodities, cattle raiding, and taxing the population under his control.

GoS support, however, was inconstant. While Matiep personally knew Omar al Bashir—who became Sudan’s president in 1989—from the latter’s time as SAF commander in Mayom in the late 1980s, the GoS occasionally tried to tap Matiep’s deputy, Tayeb Gatluak, as a more reliable figure for GoS sponsorship. Matiep died in 2012, but he has left a strong legacy in Unity state, both as an example—for Bul Nuer commanders—of the potential profits of war, and simply in terms of personnel: many of the figures contesting the war in Unity are his commanders. Tayeb Gatluak was the 4th Division commander in Bentiu in 2014 and 2015. Another of his deputies, Peter Gatdet, changed sides multiple times during the war and is currently among the generals who have split from Machar’s SPLM–IO and formed a new organization, the SSAF, which is opposed to the peace process.³⁶

GoS support to militias inside Unity state thus triggered ethnic fragmentation. In part due to Mayom’s proximity to Sudan, it was Bul Nuer commanders—and thus Bul Nuer soldiers—who received more weapons and financing from the GoS than any other group in Unity state.³⁷ Matiep and his generals established a wartime economy, trading in cows and sorghum, and using strategic marriages and clientelist networks to further entrench their power base.³⁸ After the signing of the CPA, and with absorption of the SSDF into the SPLA, it was largely Bul Nuer generals who were in strong military positions inside Unity state.³⁹ When the conflict broke out in December 2013, it was again Bul Nuer generals who were to play the pivotal role in determining the pattern of the war. Today, in both the SPLM–IO and the SPLA, it is largely Bul Nuer commanders who are dominant in Unity state, and this is a direct legacy of the second civil war.

However, just as the Nuer of Unity state are themselves divided, so are the Bul Nuer. One side comprises the commanders who had served under Paulino

Matiep (or who vied with Matiep for power), such as Tayeb Gatluak; they form part of a series of Bul Nuer figures, including Nguen Monytil and Matthew Puljang, who now have effective command of Unity state. The opposing side is composed of Bul Nuer who are more closely aligned with Riek Machar and who began the current conflict in the SPLM–IO. Whereas the Monytails once looked to the GoS for external support, they now derive their external support from the SPLA in Juba.⁴⁰

One of the ironies of South Sudanese history is that 20 years of GoS sponsorship of Bul Nuer militia leaders has enabled these very commanders to guarantee GRSS control of the state today.

Power politics

It is difficult to make sense of the constantly shifting sets of alliances that occurred during the second civil war. Among the Bul Nuer, conflicts between various leaders cut across sectional differences. While Nguen Monytil, currently the governor of Unity state, and Gatdet, the former SPLM–IO commander, come from different Kwach subsections of the Bul Nuer, their families are extensively intermarried.⁴¹ Conflict between different leaders cannot be reduced to an ideological opposition between those who favoured Garang's New Sudan and those who wished for an independent South Sudan. Rather, a variety of factors—opportunism, short-term tactics, personal grudges, prospects for external support, and the need to placate a large clientelist base dependent on the largesse of its leader—underlies most of the bewildering changes in alliances during this period.

Exemplary of these changes is Matiep's tense relationship with Riek Machar. In 1985, soon after Matiep left the SPLA, Machar took over the command of the movement in Unity state as operations commander—precisely the position Matiep wanted to have, but Taban Deng and Paul Dor had supported Machar against Matiep. Machar chose to have his headquarters in the south of Mayom county. At the time, SAF controlled most of Mayom, the home county and base of Matiep, who had recently allied with Khartoum's forces. Machar then sent forces to attack Mayom town, where they reportedly engaged in looting, rape, and killings; they allegedly chopped off the head of Maleny Kaway, one of Matiep's officers, and left it hanging in a tree.

Since the attackers were part of the SPLA's 'Eagle Force', the Bul Nuer remember the period from 1985 to 1986 as *Ruon Eagle* (Eagle year). In 1987, a year known by the Bul as *Ruon Riek Machar* or *nangkuich* ('go to the river'), Machar's forces took most of Mayom county, causing Bul civilians to flee to swamps in southern Mayom as well as to Abyei and Sudan. During this period, Peter Gatdet was fighting with the SPLA, and the Bul Nuer were divided.

In 1991, when Machar and Lam Akol split from the SPLM/A following the Nasir declaration, Matiep joined them as area commander for Unity, and soon the entire state, aside from Pariang, was under the control of the SPLM–Nasir.⁴² From July 1991, SPLM–Nasir had contact with Khartoum via Taban Deng, a Jikany Nuer from Guit county who is Riek Machar's brother-in-law. Although Matiep remained with Machar while SPLM–Nasir teetered on the edge of disintegration, he still received separate arms deliveries from Khartoum and retained a personal fiefdom in the area around Mayom.⁴³

Following the Khartoum Peace Agreement in 1997, Matiep joined the SSDF, which had been founded as a way to merge the political and military groups opposed to the SPLA. He fell out with Machar almost immediately afterwards, however, owing to a disagreement over the governorship of Bentiu, where Matiep's forces were in effective control. Machar backed Taban Deng, while Matiep wanted to be governor himself, and the NCP sought to have Nguen Monytuul appointed; Taban and Monytuul would go on to become the two main governors that Unity state has had since 2005. While Taban Deng was appointed governor in 1997 and served until 2000, Paulino Matiep split from Riek Machar and left the SSDF. What has been called the 'Nuer civil war' then shifted from what is now Upper Nile and Jonglei states to Unity state.⁴⁴

In 1997, Machar's forces, under Bul commander Tito Biel Chuol, attacked Matiep in Mayom, displacing many Bul Nuer into Dinka areas—Warrap and, from there, Bahr el Ghazal—where many reportedly died from hunger, according to Peter Gatdet, who was then Matiep's deputy and fled to Warrap. Gatdet says this attack is the main reason Matiep subsequently remained on Khartoum's side. The Bul Nuer remember this year as *Ruon Ji Sim*, the 'year of the men of the South Sudan Independence Movement' or SSIM, as Machar's movement was then called.⁴⁵

Ironically, until 1999, when Machar fell out with Khartoum while Matiep remained with it, both sides of the western ‘Nuer civil war’ were backed by the Sudanese regime, which had difficulty managing Unity state’s rival commanders, according to a Sudanese official then closely involved in the file. In the words of the official:

Taban was supported by the Parliament because he had joined us with Riek, thanks to a peace agreement. Matiep was already on our side. We didn’t want to lose any of them and wanted to use all [of them] against Garang, but Matiep was very difficult with Taban and Riek.⁴⁶

In spite of this, Matiep, as a SAF major general with control of the oil fields, was by far the more trusted individual. Ultimately, the fact that both factions fought as much against each other as they did against the SPLA also served Khartoum: their infighting kept southern Sudanese military forces weak and dependent on SAF support, and they did not interfere with GoS control of the oil fields. By 1997, these fields were again operational, and there would be an intensification of oil production from 1998 to 1999.

Put schematically, Unity witnessed a series of tensions among Bul Nuer commanders who vied for resources and access to external support from Khartoum during the second civil war. Importantly for the current civil war, such tensions separated Taban Deng and Riek Machar, both of whom rejoined the SPLM/A in 2001–02, from Matiep and many of the Bul Nuer leaders, who remained with Khartoum until the Juba Declaration in 2006. This opposition continues to inflect the dynamics of the conflict in Unity state, where the SPLM–IO has been militarily hamstrung, partly by its inability to contain tensions between Taban Deng, its chief negotiator, and many of its leading commanders. These Bul Nuer leaders do not trust Taban Deng, in part due to intra-Nuer conflict during the second civil war.

On several occasions, these types of power struggles echoed each other. In 1998, for instance, Matiep’s forces, led by Gatdet, moved south from their positions around the oil fields and sacked Riek Machar’s hometown of Leer. Seventeen years later, in 2015, Bul Nuer forces under the command of Gatluak, Matiep’s former deputy and then the commander of the SPLA’s 4th Division, moved south from Bentiu and also sacked Machar’s hometown. Both of these

attacks were part of a concerted attempt to erode Machar's powerbase in Unity and to assert control over the state. For the Nuer of southern Unity, the current conflict is partly a repetition of the violence they experienced during the 1990s, with the government of Juba in the role of the government of Khartoum, and Bul Nuer leader Matthew Puljang in the role of his predecessor, Paulino Matiep.⁴⁷ Juba plays the role of sponsor and provider of arms in the second example, just as Khartoum does in the first.

The internal struggle of the Nuer in Western Upper Nile (Unity state) is rather one between two powerful groups of military and political figures who have some ethnic basis—Bul vs. Dok, Jikany, and Leek Nuer—but who are largely clustered around a series of powerful figures and their networks. The frequent changes of alliance that characterize both the second civil war and the current conflict reflect political calculations by a few powerful political figures, rather than an entrenched ideological or ethnic conflict.

The CPA period

The conflict did not end with the signing of the CPA in 2005, although it did become more complicated. Following the Juba Declaration, Paulino Matiep went to Juba as deputy chief of staff of the SPLA, second only to Salva Kiir in the hierarchy. However, from this moment forth he was steadily marginalized from power and became increasingly ill until his death in 2012. In Bentiu, Taban Deng split from Riek Machar and was rewarded with the governorship of Unity state, which he retained from 2005 until 2013. During this period he was resolutely hostile to the Bul Nuer, frequently ordering violent disarmament campaigns in Mayom county, and marginalizing the powerful SSDF and SSUM/A commanders who remained in the state.⁴⁸

For the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS), Taban Deng fulfilled two useful functions. Following his rift with Machar, he kept Kiir's central competitor out of power in the state, while also marginalizing the Bul Nuer.⁴⁹ Thus, in the period immediately following the end of the second civil war, which had seen Khartoum dividing the Nuer community, Kiir effectively deployed the same strategy, splitting the Nuer, in order to control Unity and weaken Machar.

Yet while Taban Deng had support from Juba, he was a resolutely unpopular governor; indeed, the people of Unity frequently claimed that Kiir had imposed him on the state.⁵⁰ Recurring allegations of corruption further exposed him to public opprobrium. The South Sudanese Transitional Constitution and the proposed Petroleum Revenue Management Act of 2012 both stipulate that 2 per cent of all oil revenues should go to the oil-producing states and that local communities in oil-producing areas should see substantial investment (GoSS, 2011, s. 176(1); GRSS, 2012, s. 28(1)).⁵¹ However, there was little accountability regarding revenue intended for Unity state, and communities in Pariang county affected by oil production claimed they had seen none of the oil revenue accumulated during Taban Deng's tenure as governor.⁵² In Bentiu in 2012, state officials acknowledged that even they had no idea where the 2 per cent of oil revenue had gone; in the state capital, that 2 per cent was widely thought to be Taban Deng's personal account, allegedly shared with Kiir.⁵³

In the years following Taban Deng's appointment, discontent with his rule intensified among the general public as well as the elite. In 2008, Paulino Matiep allied with his former opponent, Riek Machar, to support Nguen Monyтуил as a candidate for the SPLM chairmanship in the state. Machar explained: 'We all went for Nguen. People were unhappy with Taban. The main cry was mismanagement, all felt oil resources ended in Juba.'⁵⁴ Nguen Monyтуил was elected at the SPLM state party congress in April 2008.

In the states of southern Sudan, it was a tacit rule that the party chairman would stand for the SPLM in the gubernatorial elections in 2010. But Taban Deng refused the implication of Nguen Monyтуил's election, and the two leaders began to compete for power in Bentiu. Juba then intervened on Taban Deng's side. Nguen Monyтуил was called to Juba and appointed minister of health. While he retained his chairmanship of the SPLM in Bentiu, his deputy took over his duties in his absence. Taban Deng then co-opted the deputy by offering him a position in the state government. Nguen Monyтуил sought to replace his deputy, but Taban Deng blocked the move, convening a meeting of the SPLM's State Liberation Council in Nguen Monyтуил's absence to affirm the deputy's position. He then sent state security personnel to occupy the SPLM party offices and arrest Monyтуил's supporters.

While Taban Deng remained governor, his relationship with Nguen Monyтуил's associates was extremely hostile; it flared up again just before the 2010 national elections. During the SPLM's candidate selection process, the State Liberation Council announced that Nguen Monyтуил was the party's nominee for the gubernatorial race. Shortly afterwards, however, parts of the SPLM rejected Nguen Monyтуил's nomination. The SPLM's national secretariat then relocated the nominating process to Juba, and the party's political bureau selected Taban Deng, to the anger of much of the state-level SPLM. The political bureau also asked, informally, that the two sides split the nominations for state legislative positions between them, in a bid to reduce tensions.⁵⁵

Nguen Monyтуил chose not to run as an independent gubernatorial candidate due to pressure from Juba, where members of the SPLM were claiming that he was loyal to the GoS as a result of his previous tenure as governor of the state under Khartoum during the second civil war. In Nuer, 2010 is known as *Ruon Nyakwech kene Taban* (the year of Nyakwech vs. Taban) as the group against Taban Deng's governorship then put their weight behind Angelina Nyakwech Teny, Machar's wife. Running as an independent candidate, Teny received the votes of many of Nguen Monyтуил's supporters in what was the most contested gubernatorial election in southern Sudan. The 2010 elections were marred not only by Taban Deng's interference in Teny's campaign, but also by Taban Deng's use of assets of the state and of the SPLA in his own campaign. Taban Deng's election as governor was announced on state radio before the National Election Commission had declared the result. Three people died in the subsequent protests. Machar and Teny claimed she had won in all counties—including Mayom—except Pariang and Guit, where the counted ballots allegedly outnumbered registered voters. Despite widespread allegations of vote rigging, his election was upheld.⁵⁶

Taban Deng's victory proved the high-water mark of his tenure as governor. The tensions of the election campaign had caused problems inside the SPLM at the state level. Many party members felt that Juba had pushed Taban Deng on Unity and lost confidence in the GoSS and the SPLM's political bureau. Anger about Taban Deng's re-election extended beyond the political elite that had backed Nguen Monyтуил or Teny, reaching into much of the state.

In the months preceding the January 2011 referendum on South Sudan's status, there were also sharp SPLM divisions at the national level. According to Machar, Kiir was already planning a reshuffle in the party, including bringing Taban Deng in as secretary-general to oppose Machar's ambitions. Politicians from Abyei and the 'northern sector' (the future SPLM-North) were also reportedly in favour of bringing Taban Deng to Juba, and more generally of getting rid of Machar and Pagan Amum Okiech and replacing them with James Wani Igga and Taban Deng, whom they then considered more anti-Khartoum.⁵⁷ In the meantime, Machar himself was favourable to giving Taban Deng a position 'at the national level so to extract him from the state'.⁵⁸

From a weakened, largely isolated position in Unity, Taban Deng began moving back towards Machar. In late 2010, ahead of the referendum, SPLM political leaders from Unity state had a successful reconciliation conference, during which Taban Deng reconciled with Machar and even with Nguen Monyтуil, although more temporarily. Machar said he then persuaded Taban Deng not to run for another term as governor. Teny said the reconciliation improved Taban Deng's popularity and helped to mobilize Unity voters for the referendum, but that it was also the beginning of the 'fall-out between Taban and Salva, [the latter] afraid of a Unity front' against him.⁵⁹

The danger for Kiir's government, which was increasingly marginalizing Machar, was that without a loyal Taban Deng, there was effectively no one left in the state who could stand up against the vice president. Taban Deng and Machar's rapprochement alienated the last remaining supporters of the governor, who were loyal to the SPLM in Juba. The powerful commissioner of Pariang county, Stephen Mabek Lang Bilkuey, was dismissed from his position in November 2012, reportedly at the demand of the community of Pariang, and subsequently went to Juba to petition Kiir to remove Taban Deng.⁶⁰ The reason was not too difficult to find: the governor had been travelling abroad with dissident Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth (who later became one of the 11 SPLM detainees), indicating to the South Sudanese diaspora in the United States and Australia that Kiir should not run for a second term. At the same time, Bul Nuer forces in Sudan, led by Bapiny Monyтуil, were also renegotiating their return and asking for Taban Deng's head.⁶¹

Kiir finally dismissed Taban Deng in July 2013, as part of a raft of dismissals designed to reinforce his powerbase against Machar's challenge.⁶² According to Angelina Teny, 'Nguen's mouth then started to water.'⁶³ Indeed, the new caretaker governor of Unity was to be none other than Nguen Monyтуил, with Mabek Lang as deputy.⁶⁴ The appointment was not as surprising as it might seem. Nguen Monyтуил's hostility to Machar dates back to the second civil war, and to the struggle for control of Unity state, as well as resentment over the gubernatorial competition in 1997, when Machar backed Taban Deng. Seen from a longer perspective, Taban Deng's alliance with Kiir was temporary; it was a way for Taban Deng to acquire the governorship, and for Kiir to block Machar, but not one that had any sustainable basis, especially when Unity state turned against the alliance following the 2010 elections, rendering Taban Deng's position untenable.

During the second civil war, Nguen Monyтуил and Paulino Matiep had used Khartoum's patronage as a tool to dominate Unity state; in the current crisis, Nguen Monyтуил and his supporters have used Juba's support to much the same effect. Just as Kiir used first Taban Deng, and then Nguen Monyтуил, to retain control of Unity state against Machar's encroachment, so too did Nguen Monyтуил first use Khartoum, and then Juba, to control the state internally. Nguen Monyтуил's strategic objective was power within Unity state, rather than national domination; at least for a while, he was thus able to work alongside anyone who could help him advance such a project.

With Nguen Monyтуил's return came Mabek Lang, newly installed as deputy governor. Earlier, in April 2013, the largely Bul Nuer rebel organization, the SSLM/A, which constituted the main militia forces supported by Khartoum in the period 2005–13, had accepted Kiir's amnesty offer, and a group of officers, including Bapiny Monyтуил, a former SAF brigadier general and the brother of Nguen Monyтуил, met Kiir in Juba to begin the integration of their troops. Bapiny Monyтуил, who was made an SPLA lieutenant general in November 2013, became a deputy chief of staff for moral orientation in October 2015 (he resigned a year later). It was the former SSLA troops, almost all of whom were Bul Nuer, who would fight for the GRSS following the defection of almost all of the SPLA's 4th Division in Bentiu and Rubkona in December 2013.⁶⁵ By acquiring Monyтуил's support, Kiir had also acquired an army far more reliable than the Nuer troops in the 4th Division, and one that would prove militarily central to the conflict in Unity as it played out from 2013 to 2015.

Militia activity in 2005–13

Following the Juba Declaration of 2006, most of the SSDF forces were absorbed into the SPLA. Some SSDF forces, however, remained with SAF, in a process encouraged by the Sudanese intelligence services (Young, 2006, p. 28). While some of these forces joined the SAF sections of the Joint Integrated Units that the CPA mandated to keep the peace in South Sudan during the period from 2005 to 2011, others remained in Sudan, under the command of Bapiny Monytil.⁶⁶ This arrangement suited Khartoum, as it meant that the GoS had a potential proxy force with which to pressure or disrupt the southern Sudanese government. Moreover, having a force that remained external to the SPLA suited Paulino Matiep, as it formed a type of insurance, in case his forces were attacked inside southern Sudan.⁶⁷

At the beginning of 2007, the situation in Mayom county was tense. The county had never been under the control of the SPLA, and the Bul Nuer's highest-ranking officer, Paulino Matiep, was now in Juba. The Bul Nuer feared that they might be marginalized in the new politics of Unity state, especially since Taban Deng, who had a long history of conflict with Mayom, had become governor. Tension mounted in 2005–10, as the county received no development funds from Bentiu. Following Taban Deng's re-election in 2010, a disarmament campaign was undertaken in Unity state, putatively in preparation for the January 2011 referendum on secession. In reality, the disarmament campaign targeted groups that Taban Deng felt were a threat, including the Bul Nuer; the process was frequently violent, creating further grievances against the SPLM/A in Mayom county.

Taban Deng's contested election proved the tipping point for a number of SPLA commanders, including Matthew Puljang, Kolchara Nyang, and James Gai Yoach, who found common cause with commanders who had remained loyal to SAF following the Juba declaration, such as Bapiny Monytil and Carlo Kuol, both of whom were in Khartoum when the rebellion broke out.⁶⁸ Many of these commanders were Bul Nuer; others, such as Carlo Kuol—a Jikany Nuer whose wife is Bul Nuer—and James Gai Yoach, a Leek Nuer, had fought with Peter Gatdet or Paulino Matiep during the war.⁶⁹

Matthew Puljang is a Bul Nuer from the Nyang Maloh subsection of the Kwach, like Bapiny and Nguen Monytil. Prior to joining the rebellion against

the SPLA in 2010, he had operated under the successive commands of Paulino Matiep and Peter Gatdet, his uncle, with whom he had joined the SPLA in 1999. In 2010, he was commanding an SPLA centre for disabled heroes in Buoth, in the south of Mayom county. At the time, non-Bul SPLA forces were attempting to disarm Bul Nuer cattle camps; they opened fire in a cattle camp belonging to Prophet Gatdeang, or Mut Turoah Nyaweah Nhial Luom, the most famous spiritual leader in Unity state, injuring one of his sons and leaving the prophet for dead. Yet the spiritual leader, who had eight bullet holes in his *jellabiya* (traditional garment), was not even injured, which was attributed to his magical powers.

Hearing the news, and probably trying to avoid being disarmed himself, Puljang, who is Gatdeang's nephew, reportedly moved with loyal troops from Buoth to the prophet's cattle camp without orders. The SPLA's 4th Division commander, James Gadwell, the main Bul leader allied to Taban Deng, sent forces under Michael Makal Kuol, another Bul, to arrest Puljang.⁷⁰ Following a brief fight, Puljang 'ran to Bapiny for safety', with many soldiers.⁷¹ After those initial skirmishes with the SPLA, Puljang opened negotiations with John Madeng Gatduel, then the commissioner of Mayom county, to reintegrate into the SPLA. He assembled his forces in the *payam* (district) of Riek to await reintegration.

What happened next is disputed. It is clear that Puljang's forces clashed again with the SPLA, and that integration plans were abandoned. According to Gatdet, Taban Deng was threatened by the possibility that Puljang's forces might be absorbed into the SPLA—which would have strengthened the position of Nguen Monytil—and so launched an attack on Puljang's forces.⁷²

Regardless of the reason for the clashes, they galvanized Bul Nuer support for the rebel commanders. Taban Deng attempted to disarm the Bul Nuer in Mayom county; at the same time, his forces (including tanks) attacked Paulino Matiep's house in Bentiu, killing some of his relatives and causing his armed guards to flee to Sudan. According to Peter Gatdet, 'this is why Paulino became sick until his death'.⁷³ Angry about what had happened to Matiep and about the SPLA's treatment of the Bul Nuer, Gatdet defected from the SPLA in April 2011 and announced the creation of the SSLM/A. He appointed himself leader of the organization, into which he incorporated the forces of Bapiny Monytil, Matthew Puljang, Kolchara Nyang, James Gai Yoach, and Carlo Kuol.

Gatdet is a Bul Nuer from Mayom county who was a powerful commander during the second civil war, initially in Matiep's SSUM/A.⁷⁴ Having begun his military career in a Sudanese contingent deployed in Iraq to support the 'Arab brother' regime against Iran between 1981 and 1983, he evinced a notable ability to change sides and fought both with and against Khartoum. Most notably, he defected from the SSUM/A in 1999—a year known in Nuer as *Ruon Gatdet kene Matiep* (the year of Gatdet vs. Matiep)—and attacked Paulino Matiep's forces around the oil fields that he had protected only a short time prior. Gatdet's swift changes in support are frequently tactical, rather than strategic. An eminent South Sudanese politician described Gatdet as 'a butterfly, going from tree to tree, and branch to branch, but always flying higher'.⁷⁵ Put more plainly, Gatdet had a reputation for switching sides in a given conflict in order to effectively ransom his own desertion and parlay a better rank, or more resources, from the side that he had just left. Despite his frequent realignments, however, Gatdet was—and remains—renowned as both a fearsome and talented military commander.

The SSLM/A found ready support from the GoS. Gatdet had travelled from Nairobi to Khartoum and organized weapons and ammunition for the nascent rebel movement before announcing its formation.⁷⁶ For Khartoum, it was a return to old habits: the SSLM/A could be used as a spoiler to pressure the GoSS in the run-up to the formal declaration of independence in July 2011. The rebels would also ensure that the threat of increased hostilities in South Sudan was foremost on Kiir's mind. This was especially important for the GoS, which invaded Abyei just a month after the SSLM/A's formation and needed to ensure that the SPLA would not retaliate.⁷⁷ When the war resumed in South Kordofan, the SSLM/A was also reportedly deployed there and fought the SPLM-N alongside SAF, notably in crucial battles in Kurungo south of Kadugli and in Jaw on the border between Unity and South Kordofan.⁷⁸

Shortly after forming the SSLM/A, Peter Gatdet, Carlo Kuol, and Bol Gatkuoth issued the Mayom Declaration. It accused the SPLA of tribalism and rampant corruption, and called for the dissolution of the government (SSLM/A, 2011). State officials dismissed Gatdet as a serial defector, motivated by personal greed.⁷⁹ Subsequent events increased the level of antagonism between the state administration and the people of Mayom. Gatdet's forces began recruiting in

Abiemnom and Mayom, before launching a series of attacks on SPLA positions, notably at Mankien and Mayom town at the end of April. In a move that would prefigure the tactics of the SPLA during the current conflict, humanitarian actors were denied access to Mayom, despite the evident needs of thousands of displaced people; this tactic created a space in which those held to be supporting Gatdet were 'punished' through the deliberate denial of aid.

Fighting continued throughout the end of April and into May 2011, principally along the Mayom–Mankien road. The SPLA had moved the 3rd and 5th Divisions from Bahr el Ghazal into Mayom to counter Gatdet, as well as 4th Division troops from Koch. The government's forces engaged in collective punishment of the Bul Nuer. The then commissioner of Mayom county, Charles Machieng Kuol, accused the SPLA of burning down more than 7,000 houses in the county (*Sudan Tribune*, 2011a). He was swiftly summoned to Bentiu, where Taban Deng asked him to retract his claim. Shortly after refusing, he was dismissed from his position. Multiple witness statements confirm that the SPLA burned down houses and looted both compounds of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and houses.⁸⁰

While the intensity of the clashes would prove short-lived, their consequences for the rift between the Bul Nuer and Taban Deng's government would be long-lasting. In July 2011, Gatdet travelled to Jordan, putatively for medical treatment. In reality, he met emissaries sent by Salva Kiir and went to Nairobi, where he negotiated the terms of his re-entry into the SPLA. On 3 August, he signed a peace agreement with the GRSS in Juba, returning to the SPLA with the rank of major general (*Sudan Tribune*, 2011b).⁸¹

Gatdet had negotiated only his own re-entry to the SPLA; the other commanders in the SSLM/A remained behind, retaining the SSLM/A moniker. There was some anger about Gatdet's sudden about-face, especially given the SPLA's treatment of the Bul Nuer of Mayom. Following Gatdet's abandonment of the movement, Gai Yoach took command with Bapiny Monyтуil (Gatdet's brother-in-law) as deputy. While the force remained relatively well armed, thanks to Bapiny Monyтуil's close connections to SAF, it was fairly quiet for the rest of 2011.⁸² However, there were clashes between these fighters and the SPLA in Mayom county in October 2011, and elsewhere in Unity in April 2012, when the tension between SAF and the SPLA was at its height,

owing to the SPLA's occupation of Hejlj, a Sudanese oil production site in Kordofan near the border with Unity.⁸³

The second half of 2012 saw improving relations between Sudan and South Sudan, and SAF became less forthcoming about supplying the SSLM/A. Meanwhile, there were disagreements over the leadership between the remaining commanders in the movement; indeed, fighting between Kolchara Nyang and Matthew Puljang, reportedly triggered by rivalry between Gai Yoach (a Leek Nuer, like Kolchara) and Bapiny Monytuil, led to the death of Kolchara Nyang. Gai Yoach was arrested in Khartoum in September 2012, and Bapiny Monytuil took over command of the force.⁸⁴

In April 2013, as Taban Deng's influence in Unity state was weakening, and the border conflicts between Sudan and South Sudan became less intense than they had been during the previous year, Bapiny Monytuil accepted an amnesty offer that Kiir had made earlier in the month. According to Bapiny Monytuil, the GoS had asked for their 'heavy guns and big trucks' back, in exchange for money, but the SSLM/A refused the trade, threatened to fight, asked for a last chance to attack Bentiu, and ultimately deceived their Sudanese backers. They returned to Mayom peacefully but fully armed, with 100 vehicles mounted with PKM machine guns and at least 1,200 men, under the command of Matthew Puljang.⁸⁵ The SSLM/A claimed to have a total of 3,700 troops—including those recruited after they had returned to Mayom—ready to be integrated into the SPLA.

The leaders of the movement were reintegrated early: Bapiny Monytuil became a lieutenant general, while Matthew Puljang and Carlo Kuol became major generals and five other officers became brigadier generals (some of whom were later promoted to major generals). The integration of the SSLA troops took much longer; they were about to be integrated just before the SPLM-IO took Bentiu in April 2014. The process did not resume until the SPLA regained control of the state capital the following month; it was completed in February 2015, for 5,000 troops (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015).⁸⁶

Nevertheless, the presence of the SSLM/A forces would prove to be vital to the GRSS war effort in Unity state. Concurrently, the events of December 2013 gave Nguen Monytuil and the SSLM/A the opportunity to entrench their control of the state and further marginalize Taban Deng and Riek Machar, their enemies from the second civil war. 🇸🇩

III. The conflict in Unity state, 2013–15

The beginning of the conflict (December 2013–January 2014)

The fragmentation of the 4th Division

On 15 December 2013, following a tense meeting of the SPLM's National Liberation Council, fighting broke out among the presidential guard in Juba. The SPLA split: some forces backed the South Sudanese president, Salva Kiir, while others supported Riek Machar, the former vice president who was soon to be leader of the rebel movement. The fighting quickly spiralled out of control and, by the next morning, following the defeat of Machar's forces, government-aligned forces were moving into Nuer neighbourhoods in Juba, going from



A government tank abandoned in the swamps near the Thar Jath oil fields, June 2014. © Jérôme Tubiana

house to house, and abducting and killing Nuer civilians.⁸⁷ News of the killings spread rapidly around the country and a nascent opposition to the government formed, in protest at the events in Juba.⁸⁸

On 17 December 2013, just two days after the beginning of the killings in the capital, the commander of the SPLA's 4th Division in Unity state, James Koang Chuol, along with many of the other SPLA officers in Bentiu—all Nuer—took the decision to join the opposition so that they would 'not betray our community', as one of the officers stated. This decision was a direct reaction to what had happened in Juba, where many Nuer from Unity state 'had kin killed', Riek Machar said. 'What happened in Juba compelled everyone with a conscience to react,' commented Angelina Teny.⁸⁹ A Dinka official from Unity state acknowledged that the spreading of the conflict to Unity was a reaction to the killings in Juba: 'What escalated this war is the telephone. You're in Bentiu and receive calls that your family was killed in Juba. What can be your response?'⁹⁰

Various informants singled out this reactive pattern and the unusual rapidity with which news (and rumours) were spreading as principal differences with the last civil war: the speed of communication and the intensity of feelings about Juba make local peace building efforts difficult. As a Nuer intellectual said, 'Today is not like the last civil war: this war is compulsory since our relatives were killed in Juba.'⁹¹

Gatdet was in Bor, Jonglei state, as the commander of the SPLA's 8th Division when the killing began in Juba. He said:

*when clashes took place in Juba, seven of my kids were killed, including Maj. Steven Riek, who was in air defence and was killed by [the] Tigers [members of the Presidential Guard], and Lt. Peter Garjam, who was in security. Taban [Deng] and Riek [Machar] were running. We had no plan, no coordination, but we ended up together because we were all angry about the killings. I thought that if we kept quiet, us Nuer would be finished.*⁹²

Gatdet began a rebellion against the government on 18 December, taking almost all the 8th Division with him, and quickly took control of Bor.

Machar claims that the Nuer reaction in Unity to the killings in Juba was somewhat slower and more moderate than in Jonglei, where 'Gatdet took action without even knowing where we [Machar and Teny] were'. He attributes this

to the fact that James Koang was among the few Nuer officers—along with the chief of staff at that time, James Hoth Mai—who remained loyal to the SPLA during the second civil war; others point out that Koang married a Dinka woman. As James Hoth observed, ‘[James] Koang was forced to rebel. It was not his choice. He could have been killed by either the Dinka or the Nuer soldiers if he didn’t take a side.’ Multiple SPLM–IO leaders have confirmed this account; as one of them noted, ‘Koang joined us by force. He was compelled to do so by his own officers, or they would have killed him.’ Wang Chok, James Koang’s own deputy, reported saying to his boss: ‘Declare yourself opposition, or we will kill you.’ According to Wang Chok, Koang was ‘about to go to Juba, and didn’t want to leave Salva Kiir, but we compelled him to join [the opposition]’.⁹³

At the time the events in Juba occurred, the 4th Division numbered 11,000 men, of which 4,000, all Nuer, reportedly joined the nascent rebel force. Others dispersed, unwilling to fight, while Dinka troops—along with Dinka civilians—left Bentiu for Abiemnom or Pariang (the state’s-majority Dinka counties), or took refuge at the UNMISS base in Rubkona.⁹⁴

Initially, some fraternal relations within the SPLA persisted. Following the government’s targeted killing of Nuer civilians in Juba, many Dinka in Unity state began to fear that they would become the target of retaliatory attacks; as early as 17 December, Dinka UNMISS employees requested evacuation. Nuer SPLA officers often helped evacuate their colleagues. On 20 December, Nuer 4th Division officers in Bentiu provided their Dinka and Equatorian counterparts with eight cars and an escort composed of Nuer members of the military police, so that they could be driven to Northern Bahr el Ghazal.⁹⁵ Some junior Dinka officers refused to leave.

Those who did leave had a difficult passage. One of the Dinka officers in the convoy reportedly opened fire on Mayom market, killing two Nuer civilians. In retaliation, armed Nuer youths destroyed one of the convoy’s cars in Mayom, killing some of the Dinka who fled from the vehicle. Some of the Nuer escorting the convoy were then reportedly killed when it reached Abiemnom. Displaying a sense of fraternity similar to that of the Nuer officers in Bentiu, Dinka officers in Abiemnom then also evacuated some Nuer soldiers, transferring them back to the state capital.

As a result of the large number of defections at the very beginning of the conflict, the 4th Division no longer represented an effective fighting force for the GRSS. This was to have long-term consequences for Unity state. Throughout the current conflict, the GRSS has been militarily dependent on the former SSLA Bul Nuer troops of Matthew Puljang and Bapiny Monyтуil, 3rd and 5th Division troops from Bahr el Ghazal, and Sudanese rebels.⁹⁶ As analysed below, the reliance on the former SSLA has entrenched Bul Nuer commanders at the top of the power structure in Unity.

As tensions mounted in Bentiu, much of the Nuer leadership tried to prevent inter-ethnic killing. While James Koang joined the opposition, he also helped evacuate Dinka soldiers and joined Nguen Monyтуil, the governor of Unity state, in trying to prevent the spread of Dinka–Nuer violence. The governor was in Juba during the events of 15–17 December, when eight of his own bodyguards were killed, along with an unknown number of other Bul Nuer. Given the ambivalent history of the Bul Nuer in the SPLA, and their history of support for and participation in rebel groups operating in South Sudan since 2010, many SPLM–IO supporters hoped that Nguen Monyтуil, along with Matthew Puljang and Bapiny Monyтуil, might join the opposition. In doing so, they could have placed the SSLM/A's forces, which had still not been integrated into the SPLA, at the service of the nascent rebel movement, ensuring its military dominance in Unity state. The opposition movement that was haphazardly being built would be led by Machar and have Taban Deng as its chief negotiator in Addis Ababa.

Nguen Monyтуil flew from Juba to Bentiu on 18 December and publicly asked the Nuer community not to engage in retaliatory killings (AUCISS, 2014, p. 170). According to people in attendance, he said: 'Our [Nuer] people have been killed, including my own guards. What can we do? Don't take revenge!' Reportedly, James Koang wanted Nguen Monyтуil to join the opposition. However, the governor did not want to ally with his predecessor, who was one of his chief rivals for power in Unity. As Taban Deng was now in the SPLM–IO, the conflict offered Nguen Monyтуil a chance to consolidate his power in the state, and with the 4th Division destroyed by desertions, Juba was dependent on him and on the support of the SSLM/A. Since Peter Gatdet—who had been the most powerful Bul Nuer commander in the state up to that

point—joined the opposition in Jonglei, and was thus temporarily out of Unity, the political crisis also afforded Nguen Monytil and the former SSLM/A leaders the possibility of cementing their political supremacy among the Bul Nuer.

Rather unsurprisingly, the governor refused to meet with the defecting officers. At the same time, the most radical Nuer officers, led by Wang Chok, prevented James Koang from meeting with Nguen Monytil, as they feared he might subsequently change his mind and return to the SPLA. Given that the governor and the 4th Division commander were on opposing sides, and that both were present in Bentiu, the situation in the state capital rapidly became untenable.⁹⁷

Despite the efforts of James Koang and Nguen Monytil, tensions in Bentiu escalated. As elsewhere in South Sudan, the first clashes emerged due to rumours and mounting suspicion, and then spiralled out of control. On 16 December 2013, according to a local government official, Makal Kuol, the 4th Division operations commander, ordered the execution of two Dinka soldiers he accused of attempting to defect, and in the evening local Nuer youths killed five Dinka civilians in Bentiu. The next day, Nuer soldiers killed six non-Nuer soldiers (AUCISS, 2014, p. 170). On the evening of 18 December, a Nuer soldier was informed that Dinka soldiers had killed his brother, and so he went looking for them. He opened fire on a group of soldiers from Bahr el Ghazal—the bodyguards of a colonel of the 4th Division—at the football stadium in Rubkona, near the market. They returned fire, and eight people were killed. This attack sparked others, and tensions intensified, despite Nguen Monytil's appeals for calm.⁹⁸ That same evening, soldiers reportedly began to loot shops and some civilians—allegedly traders from Darfur and a Nuer woman—were killed (AUCISS, 2014, p. 171). Nuer and non-Nuer soldiers at the Rubkona barracks began to disgregate along ethnic lines, in anticipation of intensifying hostilities.

During the evenings of 19 and 20 December 2013, shooting occurred between armed Dinka and Nuer in Bentiu, including within the 4th Division barracks, where an officer lost his life. During those two days, Nuer soldiers also reportedly captured and executed some of their Dinka colleagues (AUCISS, 2014, p. 171). On 20 December, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that the Bentiu Ministry of Health Hospital had received 42 wounded.⁹⁹ Both soldiers and civilians looted Bentiu town and market and raped women. Dinka and Nuer policemen fought each other and shot randomly in the air.

According to several witnesses, there was a shift in hostilities as the situation deteriorated. Initially, Nuer participants in the clashes targeted Dinka civilians from elsewhere in the country, and not those from Abiemnom and Pariang. This distinction between the Dinka of Unity and those from elsewhere did not endure, as clashes in Pariang, and the targeting of Nuer civilians in the north of the state, soon gave the conflict a more absolute ethnic dimension.¹⁰⁰ Around 20 December, six Dinka policemen who were travelling home to Pariang from



SPLM-IO soldiers head to the front line after hearing shelling coming from there, June 2014. © Jérôme Tubiana

Thar Jath were killed on their way there, while two Nuer policemen from Yida were killed by armed Dinka on their way to Pariang.¹⁰¹ Over the next few days, there were clashes in Bentiu, Pariang, Rubkona, Thar Jath, and elsewhere in Unity state. What was initially an atmosphere of anxiety, with the population separating itself along ethnic lines, soon gave way to full-scale clashes.

On 20 December, a group of Nuer officers declared themselves ‘opposition’ and sent some of their remaining Dinka colleagues to UNMISS (see Box 1). That evening, the 4th Division armoured unit, which was almost exclusively composed of Dinka soldiers, refused to abandon the 48 tanks that they had under their command to the Nuer defectors, and 11 tanks began shooting into the garrison. By the end of the evening, the tanks—and most of the 4th Division’s artillery—were under the control of the opposition, and the remaining Dinka tank drivers had fled. James Koang subsequently accused Nguen Monyтуil—who reportedly left for Juba that evening—of trying to kill him, though there is no evidence that he gave the armoured unit orders to fire on the barracks. The exact motivation of the armoured battalion is unclear. Some Nuer defectors claim that it had received orders from Juba before opening fire. UNMISS argues that the unit was simply trying to fight its way out of Rubkona.

After these clashes, on the night of 21 December, James Koang named himself Unity state’s military governor and officially joined the SPLM–IO.¹⁰² By 22 December, the rebels had taken Bentiu and Rubkona, and James Koang named an interim administration. On 24 December, the South Sudanese Red Cross reported that they had collected 34 bodies in Bentiu and 82 in Rubkona.¹⁰³ The local radio station played a part in increasing the levels of tension in the state. Shortly after James Koang named himself military governor, Bentiu FM began broadcasting in Nuer, inciting Nuer civilians to kill Dinka men and rape Dinka women (AUCISS, 2014, p. 135).¹⁰⁴

Final death tolls from these early clashes in the state capital are not known.

The situation in the rest of the state

Fighting broke out in multiple other locations in Unity, as anger about the killings in Juba boiled over. In Pariang county, in the north of the state, inter-ethnic clashes erupted on 17 December in the SPLA barracks at Hofra and Toma

Box 1 UN weapons transfer to the SPLM-IO

Shortly after the Nuer elements of the SPLA's 4th Division rebelled and took control of Bentiu, non-Nuer soldiers from Rubkona took refuge in the neighbouring UNMISS base, and UN peacekeepers collected their weapons and ammunition as they entered. Multiple UNMISS and SPLM-IO sources concur that UNMISS gave some of these weapons to the SPLM-IO on two occasions in December 2013.

A variety of reasons were given for this decision. An UNMISS official explained: 'There was some confusion and we made some mistakes.' According to another: 'James Koang asked us to give him back the weapons we had confiscated and we accepted. We never thought the government would be back.' A further official stated: 'We had asked Juba for guidance on the issue but received no instructions, so we gave them the weapons. We didn't want to keep them around in such a tense situation.' James Koang, the former 4th Division commander, had just proclaimed himself the SPLM-IO military governor of the state; he had previously had a good relationship with UNMISS as the division commander, in part due to his command of the English language. As one UNMISS official stated, 'that is why we gave him the weapons. He was our friend.'¹⁰⁵ Another confirmed the account and specified:

When [James] Koang took power, we all knew him. He was our interlocutor; he was in charge. You have to understand that the eruption of the crisis was a surprise for all of us. The majority of the opposition leaders in Bentiu had been our usual interlocutors. We had even trained them. To us, they were simply our legitimate counterparts in town. Anyway, we didn't hand over that many weapons, and they wouldn't have changed the balance between the forces.¹⁰⁶

UNMISS sources claim that around 80 AK-type rifles were handed over, together with five machine guns, hand grenades, and ammunition. UNMISS in Bentiu had first reported to the mission leadership in Juba about a single transfer of only 40 rifles, but, as an UNMISS Juba officer reported, 'they may have minimized the whole thing. I believe it may well have happened twice and for a larger number.'¹⁰⁷ An SPLM-IO member who witnessed the transfer said that there were almost 500 rifles—'lots of guns, good guns'. 'When we were in control of Bentiu', he noted, 'our relations with UNMISS were excellent. They are [our] good friends.'¹⁰⁸

After government forces retook Bentiu and Rubkona on 10 January 2014, the SPLA also requested that UNMISS hand over weapons surrendered by soldiers who had taken refuge at the base. As one UNMISS official stated:

There was daily pressure and threats from the SPLA. We pushed the mission leadership in Juba and the UN in New York to allow us to give the SPLA weapons as well, so that we could do the same thing for them that we had done for the SPLM-IO, and so things could be balanced, and we could have good relationships with the government, but they refused.¹⁰⁹

Subsequently, SPLA forces in Bentiu accused UNMISS of being biased towards the SPLM-IO.¹¹⁰

When the SPLM–IO retook Bentiu in April 2014, James Koang again asked UNMISS for weapons, but, as one UNMISS official said, ‘this time we refused’.¹¹¹ An SPLM–IO officer who took part in the April 2014 attack confirmed this account: ‘In April, they failed to give us weapons. They told us they had received instructions from Juba telling them to keep all weapons under their control.’¹¹²

However, it is unclear whether the mission leadership in Juba and New York were aware of the ‘mistake’ or issued clarifying orders afterwards. Several officials in UNMISS Bentiu allege that they had asked Juba for instructions when James Koang first asked for weapons, but that Juba had pushed the issue to New York without providing any clarification, until it was too late. Even if this were true, it still does not explain why UNMISS Bentiu gave Koang the weapons, rather than holding them until orders had been received. One former UNMISS official said that the mission in Bentiu had reported the issue to an UNMISS official from Juba, who had travelled to Bentiu on 12 January 2014—after ‘people in Bentiu realized it was a mistake’—and, critically, just after government forces had retaken Bentiu. This official then reported the story to the leadership in Juba, and it remains unclear whether it was reported before that. A few days after being informed, UNMISS Chief of Staff Paul Egunsola reportedly convened a meeting for senior staff and others to discuss this and further weapons issues. The head of UNMISS, Hilde Johnson, was not present but was briefed afterwards. As the same former UNMISS official observed: ‘Everybody in Juba thought what happened in Bentiu was a mistake and shouldn’t be repeated.’

Yet another former UNMISS official said that the weapons transfer story ‘was never reported to the MLT [mission leadership team]’, even after 12 January.¹¹³ On hearing the story about a year later, a number of UNMISS officials in Juba claimed it was the first that they had heard of it.¹¹⁴ According to one former mission official, the issue was not documented on a code cable to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in New York, although it may have been reported to headquarters in other ways.¹¹⁵

The extent to which the government was aware of the transfer also remains unclear. On the ground in Bentiu, SPLA forces that retook the capital on 10 January 2014 criticized UNMISS for the transfer.¹¹⁶ According to a former UNMISS staff member, ‘the issue created a lot of polemics with the government’, yet Juba never complained publicly.¹¹⁷ ‘The government knew about it’, echoed another former UNMISS official, adding: ‘I thought they would have made more noise.’¹¹⁸ What makes this even more surprising is that the local authorities frequently accused UNMISS–Bentiu of bias, and that they tried to expel the UNMISS state coordinator in July 2015, yet did not mention the weapons transfer (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015s).

The GRSS continued to press UNMISS to give the government all the weapons that had been surrendered by those entering the PoC sites. In November 2014, Kiir accused UNMISS of hosting people with firearms inside the PoC sites; indeed, throughout the conflict, the GRSS has specifically claimed that the sites have harboured rebels. Instead of handing over the weapons, in December 2014 UNMISS destroyed 15 AK-47s, ten pistols, knives, and sticks at the Juba PoC site; that was the first in a series of such destructions that took place at PoC sites all over South Sudan that month (*Sudan Tribune*, 2014h).

It thus seems likely that the UNMISS weapons transfer to James Koang was not endorsed at a higher level than the state coordinator for UNMISS–Bentiu, and that it emerged in an

atmosphere of confusion, in which personal ties to the SPLM–IO military governor overrode the responsibility of the mission to be impartial and to avoid abetting the conflict. In the words of a former UNMISS official:

The decision was taken by the state coordinator. State coordinators in UNMISS were always very autonomous. The Unity state coordinator, and UNMISS Bentiu in general, had a very good, very constructive relation with James Koang. When the conflict began, the state coordinator seemed very biased towards SPLM–IO. Stress, and the change of circumstances, also played a role.¹¹⁹

The issue of the weapons transfer to the SPLM–IO in Bentiu was part of a broader question of what should be done with confiscated weapons all over South Sudan, notably in Malakal, in the same period. Unlike in Bentiu, several UNMISS officials in Malakal and Juba, including Hilde Johnson, reportedly thought the weapons should be handed over to the government, claiming that they were government property and that the mission would violate South Sudanese law in proceeding otherwise. Opponents within UNMISS argued that the weapons should be destroyed and alerted DPKO.

It seems that Salva Kiir was aware of the UN dilemma regarding the issue at the time; during a press conference on 20 January 2014, he said he had asked UNMISS ‘to give us back our guns’.¹²⁰ But on 23 January, DPKO wrote a code cable to Johnson, directing her unequivocally to hold the weapons indefinitely or destroy them. Johnson reportedly remained reluctant, arguing that DPKO did not understand the context and the need for the mission to maintain good relations with the government, but she now had her hands tied. On 27 January, she wrote to the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, stating that ‘the UN acknowledges the Government’s ownership of the confiscated weapons’ but that UNMISS would hold the weapons until ‘the crisis is resolved’. She did not mention the option of destroying the weapons—except for ammunition and explosive ordnance, ‘which are risky to store safely’—and there is no evidence weapons were destroyed by UNMISS during Johnson’s tenure.¹²¹

Johnson’s successor, Ellen Loj, who was appointed in July 2014, decided to destroy weapons confiscated in the PoCs, yet very few were destroyed in Bentiu. According to a former UNMISS official:

those weapons were insignificant and in bad shape, but it was all about our impartiality, and suggesting, or not, the government had full legitimacy [in spite of the violence]. UNMISS just didn’t know how to take a neutral stance.¹²²

Indeed, both the issue of the weapons actually transferred to SPLM–IO by UNMISS in Bentiu, and the temptation elsewhere in the mission to transfer weapons to the government, show that, in December 2013, UNMISS failed to adapt quickly enough to the changed circumstances provoked by the conflict, and that it lacked neutrality. Both issues also show that the conflict triggered divisions within UNMISS, notably between a Juba-based leadership that was partly pro-government, and officers in bases such as Bentiu, who were pro-SPLM–IO, and relatively autonomous from Juba’s control.

South.¹²³ On 18 December, the SPLA forces at Panakuach, which guard the Sudanese border just south of the disputed oil fields at Hejlij, almost entirely defected to the SPLM–IO and briefly took control of Tor Abyod.¹²⁴ That evening, Nuer oil workers killed several of their Dinka and Equatorian colleagues at an operating base of the Greater Pioneer Operating Company (GPOC) near the Unity oil field.¹²⁵ On the evening of 19 December, there were clashes at Thar Jath oil field in Leer county. Mabek Lang, a Panaru Dinka from Pariang and the deputy governor of Unity state, claimed that 16 people died in targeted attacks on Dinka employees.¹²⁶ Makal Kuol, the 4th Division operations commander—who would later join the SPLM–IO at the same rank and in the same position—then went to the Unity oil field and evacuated non-Nuer workers to UNMISS.

Oil production reportedly stopped all over Unity state on 18–19 December.¹²⁷ Workers were subsequently evacuated to Hejlij, South Kordofan, and to Juba. The speed with which the conflict developed in Unity meant that at least four of the oil-producing facilities had to undertake emergency shutdowns, which damaged the pipes. In January 2015, oil company officials estimated that it would take approximately a year to repair the damage.¹²⁸ As of October 2016, the Unity oil fields still were not online, nor had repairs started.¹²⁹

On 20 December, fighting broke out at the SPLA garrisons in the north of the state, including at Pariang, as well as at Jaw, the SPLA's northernmost operating base, where the SPLA brigade split in two. By 21 December, clashes had occurred at 11 different barracks across Unity state (UNMISS, 2014b, p. 41). For a week after these clashes, Pariang county was contested. On 20 December, the SPLA barracks in Pariang, just east of the town, split and the commander joined the opposition. The defectors then controlled the town for much of the day, and the market was looted. While Darfurian and other Sudanese traders' shops were targeted, the raids were not related to the later participation of parts of the Sudan Revolutionary Front in the SPLA's campaign in southern Unity; rather, the looting soldiers sought out shops that were not owned by their relatives.¹³⁰

The remnants of the 4th Division, along with Dinka youths from the area, attacked the rebel force, which withdrew north, and then joined up with the SPLM–IO force that had divided from the SPLA brigade at Jaw, before heading

towards the bulwark of the opposition forces in Bentiu.¹³¹ An estimated 700 defectors moved south, under Steven Bol Puk, the Nuer commander of SPLA Brigade 20 at Jaw.¹³² This force attacked the villages of Biem Alony and Dien Koich before clashing with SPLA loyalist forces in the village of Panyang just north of Pariang on 23 December.¹³³ Parts of the village were razed, and some Nuba soldiers from the SPLM–North (SPLM–N) who were stationed there joined the local Dinka youths to repel the rebels. The rebels then moved south, attacking Pariang town on 25 December—although failing to take it—and villages in Agrek payam on 27 December. The deserters then moved farther south, towards James Koang’s forces in Bentiu, looting and razing a number of villages in the south of Pariang county. The rebel force finally arrived in Bentiu, repelling the SPLA forces that were in hot pursuit.

Throughout January 2014, Pariang was quiet and remained in the hands of the SPLA. Civilians in Pariang fled north, abandoning villages near rebel lines in the south of the county, such as Kalin and Nyel. They also moved west, away from Wunkor payam on the border with Upper Nile state, after Nuer soldiers who were moving east into Upper Nile had attacked them early on in the conflict.¹³⁴ The civilian population of Pariang thus contracted into the centre of the county, around Jam Jam, Pariang, and Yida, stretching the food resources of these areas.¹³⁵ As of May 2016, the south of Pariang remained deserted, although the local government was planning to resettle these areas in the near future.

The clashes in Pariang badly affected the humanitarian situation, as they led international staff to be evacuated from two of the largest refugee camps in South Sudan, Ajuong Thok and Yida, on 22 December. In Yida, Dinka SPLA soldiers murdered several Nuer on 21 December, and there was tension in the camp (ICG, 2015, p. 10).¹³⁶ The conflict also threatened SRF supply lines, which run through northern Unity state to Bentiu. On 28 December, James Koang accused the Darfuriian Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) of supporting the SPLA and moving into Pariang county—allegations that would be repeated frequently over the next few months, as the SPLM–IO sought to discredit the GRSS by emphasizing its reliance on foreign forces.

Mayom, in the west of Unity, saw some of the most intensive early clashes in the state. A strategically central county, Mayom lies along the supply road from Warrap. Since most of the 4th Division fighters were either joining the

rebellion or disbanding, the SPLA was reliant on getting reinforcements from the Bahr el Ghazal region through Warrap. Fighting in the county in December 2013 pitted Nuer forces that had decided to join the rebellion against the troops of Matthew Puljang and Bapiny Monytil, who had decided to follow Nguen Monytil and remain loyal to the government.

As early as 17 December 2013, some Bul Nuer civilians who were living in Rubkona county had chosen to evacuate to Mayom. While travelling from Bentiu to Mayom, around 50 civilians were reportedly killed by Nuer from other sections, who accused the Bul Nuer of siding with the government and called them 'Dinka'.¹³⁷ This incident reportedly motivated many Bul Nuer leaders to remain on the government's side.

During the last week of December, Mayom was the scene of bitter fighting between the SPLM-IO and Matthew Puljang's troops—including an attack by SPLM-IO forces and Bul Nuer youths from Buoth against an SPLA training centre in Thuarkel, in the south of the county. On 27 December, Puljang's forces clashed with the SPLM-IO in Mayom town, leading to extensive devastation, including the torching of the main market. This destruction disrupted the capacity of Mayom to sustain itself; the town had been an important hub for Sudanese traders who brought vital supplies into the county, and then into the wider state. Following the clashes, more than 280 Sudanese traders fled to Abiemnom county, and the trade networks that sustain Unity shifted westwards, as markets and traders moved to the more tranquil confines of Agok, to the south of Abyei, and to Abiemnom county.¹³⁸

Following the battle for Mayom town, the SPLA reinforced Puljang's forces with 3rd Division troops, who moved east from Northern Bahr el Ghazal, through Warrap, and retook Mayom on 1 January 2014.¹³⁹ The government took Panakuach from the rebels on 4 January. By 9 January, the front lines had moved east, towards Tumur, and the SPLA advanced on Bentiu. The impending attack caused consternation in the capital, and thousands fled town on 8–9 January; meanwhile, a series of disagreements occurred among the rebels over how best to defend the city, and whether to destroy the bridge linking Rubkona and Bentiu.¹⁴⁰

The SPLA, supported by Darfurian rebels, entered the capital on 10 January, leading many Nuer civilians to join Dinka civilians in the UNMISS base at Rubkona. Others were killed by Dinka SPLA forces, some reportedly after a



A boy returns to a burnt family house in Leer, June 2014. © Jérôme Tubiana

language test ‘proved’ that they were Nuer. The SPLM–IO withdrew to Guit.¹⁴¹ As they left the state capital, the rebels blew up the ammunition dump and many of the weapons stored at the 4th Division headquarters in Rubkona.¹⁴² As it withdrew southward, the SPLM–IO looted abandoned homes and stores, as well as the World Food Programme (WFP) premises.

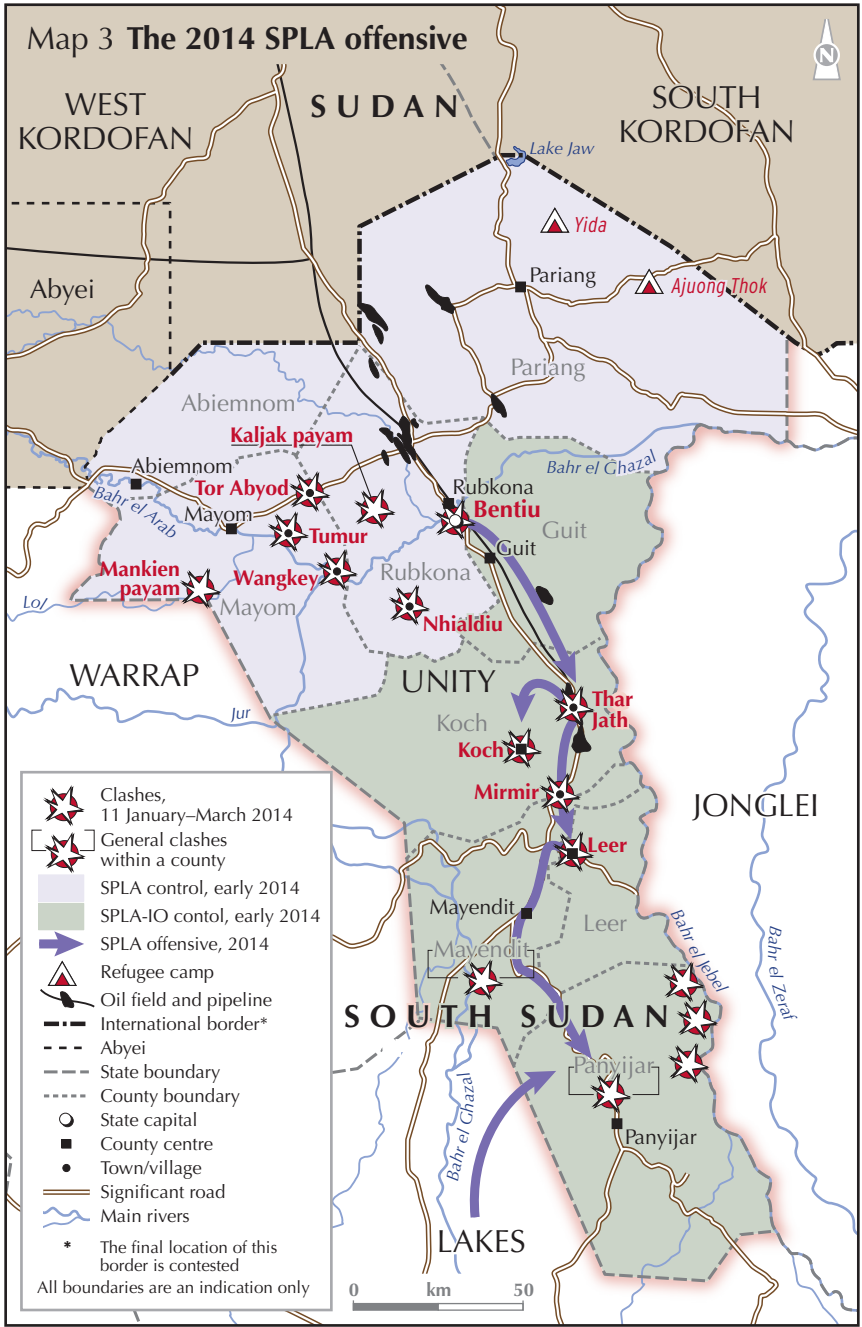
By the end of January 2014, the SPLA was in firm control of Abiemnom, Bentiu, Pariang, and Rubkona, as well as most of Mayom county in the west, and was advancing on SPLM–IO positions in southern Unity, the wellspring of rebel support in the state.¹⁴³ By 4 February, UNMISS reported that more than half the people seeking shelter in its compound had returned to town, and by 10 March, the Bentiu market had reopened. This return to a modicum of normality would prove short-lived.

The SPLA advance on the south (February–April 2014)

At the beginning of the conflict in Unity, in December 2013 and January 2014, clashes were concentrated in the north and west of the state (see Map 3). As of February 2014, however, the main conflict vectors stabilized into a pattern that remained in place until December 2015, when the conflict in Unity abated for the next eight months. The principal front line ran south of Bentiu, and the majority of the clashes between the SPLA and the SPLM–IO took place in Rubkona, Guit, and Koch counties, either when the SPLA began an offensive into southern Unity or attempted to expand its defensive positions around Bentiu, or when the SPLM–IO symmetrically attempted to dislodge SPLA positions around Bentiu, in preparation for an assault on the state capital. As of January 2014, Pariang, Abiemnom, and much of Mayom remained relatively stable, and largely under government control, while southern Unity was the site of the worst violence in the state, as the SPLA and associated forces pushed south, attacking SPLM–IO positions as well as civilians.¹⁴⁴ This pattern was established after government forces retook Bentiu on 10 January 2014. They then began pushing southward, causing Nuer civilians from Bentiu and elsewhere to flee ahead of them. The government force, accompanied by Darfurian rebels, burned down towns and villages as it passed.¹⁴⁵

On 23 January 2014, the SPLA and SPLM–IO signed a cessation of hostilities (CoH) agreement, which mandated that both sides immediately cease all military activity in South Sudan.¹⁴⁶ This agreement, signed under international pressure, would prove to be little more than a diplomatic measure; neither side had any intention of implementing it. Instead, the agreement became a tool in a diplomatic war in which each side denounced the other for violating the CoH, while continuing to press militarily and attack its opponents. Members of the leadership on both sides were convinced that a military solution to the conflict was possible.

On 24 January, just a day after the CoH was signed, the SPLA continued its advance into southern Unity, attacking rebel positions at Dan Dok, 50 km south of Bentiu. On 31 January, government forces retook Thar Jath, the oil field run by the Sudd Petroleum Operating Company, where clashes first occurred on 20 December.



A government force reportedly 10,000 strong, composed of men from various divisions, retook Leer on 1 February, after clashing with SPLM–IO forces in Koch and Mirmir. As the force moved south, its fighters executed Nuer civilians. News of the killings travelled to Leer, and people—including those who had already fled Bentiu—began fleeing into the bush, a week before the town would be retaken; the SPLM–IO force followed them a few days later. MSF evacuated the town on 31 January, just before the clashes began. On its return in May, MSF discovered that Leer hospital was largely destroyed, leaving southern Unity’s population of more than 250,000 without a single operative hospital.



Burnt walls in Leer, June 2014. Local people believe the town was destroyed because it is the birthplace of SPLM–IO leader Riek Machar. © Jérôme Tubiana

Prior to the assault, however, the rebel-held local radio station was confident about the situation and advised civilians not to leave town. As Gideon Bading, the paramount chief of the Dok Nuer (the main Nuer section in Leer county), recalled:

*We were surprised when the government forces reached Leer. They burned our houses, looted cattle, and dug out the food that people had buried in the ground. We all ran to the bush. It was a miserable life. Government forces were searching for us to kill us. We've been punished because Dr. Riek [Machar] was born here.*¹⁴⁷

As troops headed south from Bentiu, SPLA forces and *galweng* (armed Dinka cattle guards) moved north from Lakes state into Panyijar county, killing more than 50 civilians and raiding cattle.¹⁴⁸

Government forces remained in southern Unity until mid-April, in what was effectively a military occupation. During this period, many Nuer civilians lived in remote villages or in the bush, under trees, and found safety in the swamps bordering the Nile. Many SPLM–IO soldiers also remained scattered in the bush, often staying with civilians. As one witness said, ‘The rebels came to eat our food and be protected by us. We didn’t like it. Soldiers should not stay with civilians.’ The same witness suggested that this behaviour led government forces to assume that ‘all civilians were rebels’, and to attack areas where civilians—and sometimes SPLM–IO forces—were gathered.¹⁴⁹ The SPLA’s unwillingness to distinguish between civilians and soldiers also reflected the simple fact that the SPLM–IO in southern Unity was to a large extent made up of civilians who were taking up arms. As elsewhere in South Sudan, the line between combatants and non-combatants was not clear.

However, in many cases, the SPLA knowingly and intentionally attacked civilian settlements where SPLM–IO troops were not present, burning down houses, raping women, and stealing livestock (UNMISS, 2015c, pp. 9–10). The February–April campaign in southern Unity was the beginning of a sustained demographic war on the Nuer south, intended to disrupt the population’s ability to sustain itself, notably by displacing thousands of people, abducting women, and garnering resources such as aid, vehicles, and cattle, which were to be brought to the north and west of the state.



A Nuer chief in Leer, June 2014. Chiefs say their people were tracked down, and some of them killed, by government forces. © Jérôme Tubiana

Government forces attacked the Nyagi–Kuth area close to the White Nile at least three times. It was here that many civilians from Leer, including Paramount Chief Gideon Bading, had taken refuge. Earlier, on 29 February, government forces came to Bur, along the Nile, where civilians and some 150 SPLM–IO soldiers had taken refuge. After being ambushed by the SPLM–IO, the government forces counter-attacked and subsequently burned down some of the village. The population of Bur, civilian and SPLM–IO alike, then ran together to an even more remote location, called Kartok, where they were shelled by government tanks. On 10 March, tanks also reportedly shelled Nyat, a village close to Kuth, where SPLM–IO troops were staying with civilians, killing three.¹⁵⁰ This game of cat and mouse was repeated in much of southern Unity, pushing civilians and rebels alike into ever-remoter locations, and making it even harder to survive.¹⁵¹

During the period between February and April, government forces also attacked Ganyel, extensively looting the village, and raiding the herds of its inhabitants. Government forces killed Chief Kerubino Myong Nhial and 68 others. The government also attacked a series of other villages that did not have a substantial SPLM–IO presence: Nguek (7 km from Leer) as well as Gap, Piliny, Rubkway, and Tuochriek (in Mayendit county). The SPLA also held Leer during this period, although the SPLM–IO made repeated attempts to dislodge it, attacking on 10 and 14 March.¹⁵² In both cases, the SPLA maintained control of the deserted village.

During this period, civilians survived by foraging wild foods, including fish, wild meat, and plants such as grass, leaves, and the seeds and roots of water lilies. Some risked the walk to Leer and other government-held towns to get food. When they came to town, civilians would often discover that the food stocks—including food aid—that they had previously buried, had been discovered, and they were then forced to buy their own food back from the occupying SPLA forces.

These walks from the bush into town were risky: men might be suspected of being rebels, and then killed. Women, who were sometimes sent instead of men for this reason, were often raped.¹⁵³ People were also forced to eat their livestock, and thus reduce their herds, disrupting Nuer social structure. A vital symbolic currency for marriage among the Nuer, cattle represent the centre of

Nuer social and cosmological life.¹⁵⁴ The number of cows slaughtered in Leer market increased from 4–6 per day before the crisis to 25–40 in May, as civilians came back to the devastated town after the government left; it decreased to 17 per day in late May, after the International Committee of the Red Cross airdropped food.¹⁵⁵

Since government forces were holding Bentiu, one of the few ways that food could enter southern Unity was through Lakes state. Some Dinka traders in Lakes and to a lesser extent Jonglei maintained good relations with the Nuer of Panyijar and Mayendit, and brought food to the rebel areas along difficult river routes, to be exchanged for cattle; to a limited extent, trade continued. One of the important ports for this trade was Tayer, where Dinka and Nuer traders worked side by side, recalling the second civil war's 'peace markets' between Missiriya Arabs and southerners (Fraser et al., 2004).¹⁵⁶ While Dinka traders did come from Lakes state, and some Nuer found refuge in Lakes, the 2014 dry-season offensive would also see SPLA forces from Lakes attack Panyijar county at the beginning of February. On 7 February, attacks on a series of villages in the county claimed the lives of 29 people and forced IDPs to flee once again, into the wetlands around the White Nile.

Throughout this period, government forces were accused of having committed abuses against Nuer civilians. According to SPLM–IO authorities who returned to Leer in April 2014, around 46 civilians were killed in the town between February and March. Some were executed, including around ten whose skeletons were still visible in June 2014, and around 15 who were thrown into a well. In addition, another 40 civilians were reportedly killed in Leer county—outside Leer itself—and a further six in Mayendit county. In Leer county, the government offensive particularly affected the village of Ger. Forces aligned with the GRSS reportedly executed 7 civilians, including 2 chiefs, on 1 March, and some 30 other civilians on 25 March.¹⁵⁷ A precise tally of the number of people killed during the government offensive is not available; SPLM–IO authorities do not have an exhaustive count of the deaths that occurred in remote villages or in the bush. Throughout the SPLA's campaign in the south of Unity state, the government's forces intentionally targeted traditional leaders—killing six in Leer and two in Ger—as a way of destroying the social structure of the southern Nuer.¹⁵⁸



The skull of one of several civilians reportedly executed by government forces in Leer. June 2014.
© Jérôme Tubiana

Gender-based violence, including rapes and abductions, occurred both in and outside of government-controlled towns. SPLM–IO authorities estimate that government forces abducted approximately 85 women and girls from Leer; they were reportedly forced or convinced to leave town together with the SPLA troops in April. The same authorities say that government forces raped 15 women in Leer and six in Rubkway. These numbers are not indicative of the extent of gender-based violence experienced in southern Unity. Some women died after being raped, others committed suicide. Some reportedly ran away rather than face the shame associated with rape. According to witnesses, abuse against women took diverse forms. In addition to rape and abduction, there was pressure to ‘marry’ in exchange for food, which especially affected women who were sent to town from the bush to look for supplies. In particular, Dinka women married to Nuer men were pressured to leave their husbands, marry Dinka soldiers, and follow them to Dinka areas.¹⁵⁹

According to witnesses, Dinka militias, SPLA soldiers, Bul Nuer troops under the command of Matthew Puljang, and Sudanese rebels fighting with the GRSS all perpetrated violence against civilians. Witness accounts differ, however, on the degree of culpability each of these groups carries for the abuses. They report that Bul Nuer forces were abusive towards Nuer civilians from other sections, although a few witnesses also claim that the Bul Nuer sometimes intervened to prevent abuses by Dinka members of the SPLA.¹⁶⁰ According to a confidential June 2014 UN document seen by the authors, Nuer displaced from southern Unity to the UNMISS compound in Bentiu stated that most of the abuses against them were committed by Nuer fighters.

Opposition sources reported that Dinka militia forces were predominantly responsible for violence against women, and in particular a group known by the nickname 'Lil John' (ICG, 2015, p. 11). In 2012 and 2013, Dinka leaders—including Salva Kiir—were active in mobilizing militia forces known as *galweng* or *titweng* (armed Dinka cattle guards), some of whom are generally known as *titbeny* (chief's guard or, in this case, presidential guard) and report directly to Kiir and his close circle (UNPoE, 2016, p. 15). Lil John was apparently part of the *titbeny*. According to a witness, Lil John members 'were younger [than other fighting youths], 15–17, and did not fight much. They would leave at 3 pm and we wouldn't know where they would go at night.'¹⁶¹

Witnesses also mention a series of local Nuer leaders who chose to remain loyal to the government, and who were active in many abuses. In Leer, the government reappointed a local Dok Nuer trader, Taker Riek, as commissioner; he reportedly played a crucial role in leading government attacks against local SPLM–IO forces as well as civilians.¹⁶² Taker Riek and, under him, Nuer captains Ruay Koanga and Gai Chuol, reportedly led the attacks on Bur and Nyat described above. Taker Riek is also accused of burning down most of Leer, except the south of the town, which is inhabited by his relatives.

Taker mobilized and armed a 200-strong militia force from among his own Barpur subsection of the Dok Nuer, as well as from among some of the subsections closest to him. Many refused to join, however. According to a youth leader related to Taker: 'He sent messengers three times to the bush in Kom, where we were hiding, to mobilize us, but none of us joined [him].' Still, according to a local chief, Taker managed to take advantage of the strained circumstances



SPLM-IO soldiers in Guit county, June 2014. © Jérôme Tubiana

of the youths of Leer county. He recruited ‘young boys, coming from the bush; they were hungry, and it was a way to get food for themselves and their parents’. These young boys were reportedly tasked with locating SPLM-IO forces and stealing livestock with which to feed the SPLA. In June 2014, following the SPLA’s withdrawal from the south, the SPLM-IO tried to disarm those local militias or persuade them to join the opposition.¹⁶³

Witness accounts suggest that outside of Leer, other local government officials, SPLA officers, and Sudanese rebels were relatively compassionate. Some civilians who were displaced from Leer mentioned that they would try to look for food in remoter towns, such as Mirmir and Koch, where pro-government authorities would provide them with supplies (sometimes for free, sometimes in exchange for money), protection, and occasionally transport to the UNMISS base in Rubkona.¹⁶⁴

In general, however, the SPLA offensive in southern Unity echoed the displacements endured by the people of Unity state during the second civil war. A national army, supported by militia groups, was again displacing civilians, razing villages, and fomenting factional antagonism within the Nuer community.

The SPLM–IO retakes Bentiu (April 2014)

April would see a brief transformation in the course of the war. During the SPLA's offensive in southern Unity, the SPLM–IO had been reassembling its forces on the Sudanese border, in preparation for an offensive on Bentiu and Rubkona. In mid-April, the rebel organization launched a three-pronged assault on the northern part of the state. The first thrust targeted Tor Abyod, 60 km north-west of Bentiu; the second thrust targeted Mayom junction—and thus attempted to cut off the SPLA's resupply line through Warrap state—and the oil fields in Rubkona county; and a third went through Guit county.

The SPLM–IO campaign began on 13–14 April at two different locations. Rebel forces attacked a military barracks at Tor Abyod, on the Abiemnom–Mayom county border, north-west of Bentiu, where they defeated Puljang's forces. The SPLM–IO simultaneously attacked government positions at Lalob, at the edge of the Unity oil field, wounding five Russian oil workers who were employed by the Safinat Caspian Oil Refining Company and who were working on a refinery to enable the production of diesel for the local market. UNMISS later evacuated these workers to Juba. Fighting during April also damaged the Thar Jath oil field.

The SPLM–IO's assault was extremely successful. On 14 April, opposition forces reportedly took control of Tor Jak, Tor Abyod, the Unity oil field, and Mayom junction.¹⁶⁵ On 15 April, an SPLM–IO force under the command of James Koang, estimated to number 2,000–4,000 fighters (including very recently recruited Nuer), reoccupied Bentiu with very little resistance. By the afternoon of 15 April, the local radio station named James Koang the governor of Unity state.

SPLA–SSLA tension

The absence of government resistance raised questions in Juba. The defeated force that was responsible for the protection of Bentiu and Rubkona was largely composed of former SSLA Bul Nuer troops under the command of Bapiny Monytil and Matthew Puljang, whose integration into the SPLA was to be made official during the very days on which the SPLM–IO attack took place. The leading SSLA officers had already been integrated into the SPLA in November 2013, after they had accepted Kiir's amnesty offer. In March 2014, Puljang was

reportedly appointed SPLA operations commander for Unity state (ICG, 2015, p. 9).¹⁶⁶ His troops' integration into the SPLA was delayed, partly due to suspicions about the SSLA's loyalty to the GRSS.¹⁶⁷

From early 2014, however, Puljang's force began receiving monthly 'incentives' that were slightly inferior to SPLA salaries, but that—according to the UN—'increased their morale'.¹⁶⁸ That these payments were only received after lengthy delays had been a cause of tension between Puljang's forces and the SPLA. Bapiny Monytil noted that at the time of the SPLM-IO's attack on Bentiu, the former SSLA forces were not only awaiting integration, but also back pay due since June 2013.¹⁶⁹

There has been intermittent friction between the SPLA in Juba and the former SSLA fighters during the current conflict. In December 2014, late payments to Puljang's forces again created tensions in Bentiu, amid accusations that the former militia fighters were being discriminated against, and the regular SPLA were receiving more timely salary payments and better weapons.¹⁷⁰ While Bapiny Monytil and Puljang are strongly supported by the governor, some older SPLA officers still distrust the former militia fighters, creating tension between the two forces.¹⁷¹

When the SPLM-IO retook Bentiu, internal SPLA discussions centred on how the state capital could have been lost so fast. Following the SPLM-IO assault, rumours swirled that Puljang had defected to the opposition—a move that would have been disastrous for the SPLA.¹⁷² In fact, the reasons for the government's sudden defeat in Bentiu were more prosaic.

In early April 2014, Puljang's forces, along with the 3rd Division in Unity and the rest of the regular SPLA, were not concentrated in Bentiu or Rubkona, but instead spread thinly around the state: stationed in and around Mayom, in southern Unity, and at the oil fields. Heavy rains made troop movement difficult.¹⁷³ According to an officer who joined the SPLM-IO during the April assault on Bentiu, Puljang's forces comprised only 2,000 men, 1,000 of whom were in Tarwang Yelle—between Mayom and the state capital—and only 300 of whom were in Bentiu itself, while the others were spread thinly around the abovementioned locations.

The force defending Bentiu also suffered from a lack of ammunition. As an officer in Puljang's forces confirmed:

*All our [the government's] forces were outside Bentiu. I was in Koch and some of the [SPLA] 3rd Division forces [were] in Leer, and [there were] a few troops at the Unity oil field. In Bentiu, we had new recruits from the surrounding area, which were not well prepared. [In addition], our troops were not yet integrated, and lacked ammunition. Our supplies had been delayed on the road due to a lack of transport. Just before the attack, Bapiny [Monytuil] sent us 50 cars with ammunition from Juba, but they were still on the road.*¹⁷⁴

In Juba, SPLA sources claimed that supplies had not been flown into Bentiu in time for the battle, due to a delay in the release of funds for such transportation (*Sudan Tribune*, 2014a).

The assault on Bentiu

Before the SPLM–IO assault on Bentiu and Rubkona, reports circulated among the civilian population that the rebels were about to attack. At the PoC site, civilians with contacts inside the SPLM–IO were instructed to join the attack when it came.¹⁷⁵ The prospect of such an attack caused consternation in the population at large. Hundreds of civilians from different communities and countries headed to the UNMISS base in Rubkona, only for government forces and officials to turn them back, sometimes using force, while telling them that the GRSS had everything under control. UNMISS was prepared to accept these civilians but did not ask the government for them to be allowed onto the base.

Despite the paucity of its defences, the government may have been overconfident about its capacity to defend Bentiu. However, given that some of the roadblocks at which civilians were turned back from the UNMISS base had been established a week before the assault—indicating a premeditated plan—it seems just as likely that the government simply wanted to prevent the PoC site from growing. The site had become an embarrassment to a state administration that, as became increasingly evident, could not protect its own population and, in many cases, was actively attacking it.¹⁷⁶

On 14 April, the SPLM–IO attacked SPLA positions in the south-east of Bentiu, overrunning them, and then moved towards the state capital (HSBA, 2014c). The assault palpably increased tensions in the PoC site. Some Nuer civilians jumped the fence and joined in the attack; others discussed the fate of the Darfurian traders in the PoC. Some Nuer PoC site residents argued that the

traders should be left alone because they were civilians, while others blamed them for the role played by Darfurian forces in the assault on southern Unity—from where many of the PoC site residents had come—and expressed a desire to kill them.¹⁷⁷ These sentiments were exacerbated by the local radio station, which, after the SPLM–IO had taken control of it, broadcast individuals who called on people to kill and commit acts of sexual violence against non-Nuer and foreigners (UNSG, 2014d, p. 10).

The fears of the civilians who had attempted to flee to the UNMISS PoC site proved justified. On 15 April, SPLM–IO fighters entered the town and killed hundreds of civilians. Foreigners who were thought to harbour pro-government sentiments were targeted. Sudanese traders, in particular those from Darfur, were accused of being part of the Sudanese rebel forces that had taken part in the SPLA's assault on southern Unity.¹⁷⁸ Dinka civilians and government officials—including Nuer—were also targeted. There was also considerable destruction and looting, including in the hospital.¹⁷⁹

Prior to the attack, Carlo Kuol, a Jikany Nuer allied to Bapiny Monytil and a former SSLA commander, was reportedly mobilizing Nuer forces within the SPLA to fight with the opposition when the assault came.¹⁸⁰ He was imprisoned shortly before the attack, due to fears he would join the opposition. During the assault on Bentiu, Carlo Kuol escaped and then defected to the SPLM–IO with a few Nuer supporters.¹⁸¹

The successful occupation of Bentiu marked the beginning of a period of relative military success for the SPLM–IO. After the assault on Bentiu, SPLA forces fled west, towards Mayom county, and south, into southern Unity, where they clashed with rebel forces. On 17 April, the SPLA attacked a rebel base at Kuth, only to be pushed back to Leer. Rebel forces in hot pursuit of the retreating government forces forced the SPLA out of Koch and the Thar Jath oil field, which had been retaken by the government in February. SPLM–IO forces under the command of Wang Chok subsequently reoccupied Leer, which the government forces had abandoned. The SPLA then made an attempt to move south from Pariang, and SPLM–IO forces repulsed government forces moving towards Bentiu on 18 April. Following this failure, the SPLA redeployed forces from Jaw to the border with Rubkona county, to consolidate government control of the north of the state.¹⁸²



SPLM-IO soldiers near the Thar Jath oil fields, June 2014. © Jérôme Tubiana

The reorganization of the SPLM-IO

After the successful SPLM-IO assault on Bentiu, Gatdet arrived with reinforcements. According to Gatdet, the force he arrived with numbered around 8,000, and was composed of Nuer soldiers from Unity who had been based in Jonglei and Upper Nile.¹⁸³ At the same time, Wang Chok moved north to Bentiu from Mayendit, his temporary operational headquarters, with recruits from southern Unity.¹⁸⁴ The arrival of these reinforcements coincided with a shift in the SPLM-IO's operational command. The rebel movement wanted to ensure that both its commanders and the rank and file were fighting in their own areas.¹⁸⁵ Accordingly, James Koang handed over command of Unity state to Gatdet and moved to Upper Nile. In each county under SPLM-IO command, officers from that county's dominant Nuer section were appointed as commanders: James Tut in Leer county, Peter Tap Gatdet in Koch, and Carlo Kuol in Guit county.

The fall of Bentiu also coincided with changes inside the SPLA. In particular, Paul Malong Awan, previously the governor of Northern Bahr el Ghazal, replaced James Hoth as SPLA chief of staff. While Paul Malong is widely revered as an

excellent commander, his appointment was a cause for concern for many Nuer, who associate him with the December 2013 massacres of Nuer civilians in Juba. Furthermore, his appointment, which came at the expense of James Hoth—previously the highest-ranking Nuer member of the Kiir administration—was seen by many in the opposition as the removal of the last pretence to national unity in the SPLM/A, and an attempt by Kiir to further ethnicize the conflict.

After the arrival of Gatdet's reinforcements, the SPLM-IO expanded its campaign against the SPLA, moving north from Bentiu and attacking Kilo 30 (30 km north-west of the state capital) and Tor Abyod. It also managed to recapture Panakuach, which it had lost in mid-January 2014, after an SPLA withdrawal, as well as Kwi-Nam, the southern part of Mayom county.¹⁸⁶ Finally, the SPLM-IO also managed to hold Mayom town for four days.¹⁸⁷ Overall, however, despite these successes, the SPLM-IO offensive in April was less successful than the rebel organization had anticipated.

The SPLA recapture of Bentiu and rainy-season conflict (April–November 2014)

The upswing in the fortunes of the SPLM-IO proved to be short-lived; the SPLA soon overturned most of the rebel gains. By 16 April 2014, government forces had already fought back to Kilo 30. In Mayom, pro-government Bul Nuer forces quickly re-established control of the county. By late April, having been reinforced by troops coming through Mayom from Warrap state, approximately 4,000 SPLA fighters with more than 100 vehicles assembled to retake Bentiu. They entered the capital on 28 April, assisted by Darfurian rebels, who had moved south from Pariang county to support the attack.¹⁸⁸ For the next week, Bentiu was contested; on 5 May, an SPLM-IO counter-attack recaptured it,¹⁸⁹ prompting jubilation among the Nuer population of the PoC site. The Nuer population of the site, however, attacked Darfurian co-residents and accused them of being in the pay of the GRSS.¹⁹⁰ As discussed in Section IV, PoC sites are often crucibles, set alight by external events.

These clashes drew widespread international condemnation. The US government, for one, criticized the SPLA's violation of the CoH agreement signed in January 2014. On the same day that the SPLM-IO retook Bentiu, 15 April 2014,

the United States announced sanctions against Marial Chanuong—the commander of Kiir’s presidential guard—and Peter Gatdet, as a means to pressure the two sides to end the conflict. The sanctions had little immediate effect.¹⁹¹ Government forces attacked SPLM–IO fighters in Bentiu the day after sanctions were announced and, by 7 May, they largely had control of the state capital.

The two parties had agreed that there would be a month of tranquillity from 7 May to 7 June 2014. This did not materialize. Following the SPLA’s recapture of Bentiu on 7 May, there were sporadic clashes around the state capital, and SPLM–IO leaders claimed that some of their soldiers were still fighting in the city on 10 May. During the next month, the two sides broke not only their commitment to a month of tranquillity, but also a recommitment to January’s CoH agreement that they had signed in Addis Ababa on 9 May (UNSG, 2014b).

Nevertheless, over the next few months, the pace of the conflict slowed, not due to the peace agreements, but thanks to the onset of the rainy season, which rapidly rendered much of the state impassable. In May, the government reinforced its defensive positions in Unity, relying on Puljang’s forces, whose reintegration into the SPLA resumed. The SPLA also reorganized the command of its forces. In June, Paulino Matiep’s former deputy, a Bul Nuer named Tayeb Gatluak, was appointed as the commander of the 4th Division, further entrenching the Bul Nuer’s position as the militarily most significant Nuer section in Unity state. To some extent, this move echoed the earlier SPLM–IO reorganization of its command structure, which also placed figures from Unity state in central positions of power (HSBA, 2015a). Just as fundamentally, it pitted Paulino Matiep’s deputy against Peter Gatdet, who had been one of his leading generals, as the Bul Nuer contestation for Unity state continued.

The SPLA dug in for the rainy season, in anticipation of SPLM–IO attacks. Government forces dug foxholes and trenches around the Unity oil field and Pakur, among other locations.¹⁹² In Unity, as in Upper Nile, the first rainy season of the conflict brought with it an expectation that the South Sudanese civil war would return to an older conflict dynamic. During the second civil war, SAF largely controlled the urban areas of southern Sudan, thanks to its superior firepower, while the SPLA controlled the countryside. The SPLA would launch guerrilla attacks on SAF positions during the rainy season, while SAF would foray out from their urban redoubts at the onset of the dry season, taking

advantage of their superior military equipment. During the current conflict in Unity state, especially in the south, the SPLA has uncomfortably found itself playing SAF's former role, while the SPLM-IO has largely controlled the rural areas in the south of the state.

In 2014, the SPLM-IO was unable to wage a successful rainy-season guerilla war. It repeatedly attempted to take Bentiu and Rubkona, notably in August and October (ICG, 2015, p. 13). These assaults were largely abortive. On 25–28 October, the SPLM-IO moved south from around Hejlij, Sudan, attacking SPLA positions near the Unity oil field and elsewhere in Rubkona county. On 29 October, SPLM-IO forces surrounded Bentiu, moving in from the north of the state capital, under the command of Makal Kuol, as well as from their bases in Guit in the south-east and from Rubkona in the south-west.¹⁹³ Peter Gatdet had overall command of the operation. The SPLA chose to withdraw from Bentiu that afternoon, and later that day, the SPLM-IO entered the city.

The rebels did not hold the capital, however; after four hours, as the SPLA prepared to re-enter, the SPLM-IO withdrew in turn, surrendering Bentiu to the government forces. It seems likely that the rebel force withdrew from Bentiu because it did not think it could hold the capital. The rebels' brief period of control over the city was thus rather a reminder—to the government and the population—of the SPLM-IO's continued ability to take the war to the enemy, rather than a substantive attempt to wrest the state capital from the government.

During the rainy season, some fighting also occurred in Mayom, focused on the border between Mayom and Rubkona counties, and thus on the path to Bentiu. At the beginning of June 2014, more than 20 civilians were reportedly killed in clashes at Wangkey, where there were further clashes on 4–5 July. The SPLM-IO reportedly attacked Wangkey six times during the rainy season, once crossing the Bahr el Arab and destroying part of the town. At the beginning of July, Peter Dak Khan, formerly the member of parliament for Mayom and currently a member of the SPLM-IO, accused the SPLA of killing 37 civilians in Mankien payam and burning down more than 400 houses (*Sudan Tribune*, 2014c). There were further clashes in Wangkey, Mankien, and Rier, on the border with Warrap state, from 11 to 16 July. Fighting in Mayom broke out again on 17 November, at Buoth, when Puljang's forces and associated Bul Nuer youths attacked SPLM-IO positions, leaving approximately 40 dead.

Government-aligned Bul Nuer forces reportedly suffered losses during these clashes (*Sudan Tribune*, 2014d). Hostilities between the government and the opposition in Mayom county were aggravated by competition to recruit Bul Nuer youths. The rainy season saw both sides actively recruiting. In September, the SPLM–IO also reportedly increased recruitment among youths in southern Unity, including through forced conscription.¹⁹⁴ In Mayom, Puljang was recruiting extensively. According to the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVM) of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)—which was responsible for monitoring the CoH agreement—those he recruited included child soldiers; MVM monitors reported the active recruitment of what seemed to be underage soldiers on at least three occasions in September 2014 (IGAD, 2014b). The SPLA was reportedly uneasy with this recruitment, although it has used child soldiers extensively during the current conflict. Its unease was largely a show for international actors, in view of the attention IGAD had drawn to Puljang’s recruitment campaign.¹⁹⁵

Although there were clashes in Mayom, most of the fighting from May to November 2014 was concentrated in the areas west and south-west of Bentiu, where the SPLA attempted to break up rebel positions close to the capital; conversely, the SPLM–IO attempted to overrun government defensive positions. In mid-July, the SPLA attacked rebel positions in Guit and Rubkona. On 11 August, there were clashes in Kaljak payam, Rubkona county, and on 13 August, in Nhialdiu, when the SPLM–IO attacked SPLA positions to the south-west of Bentiu. Fighting continued around Bentiu from 13 to 16 August.

It is difficult to determine who initiated these clashes (UNSG, 2014c). In a familiar pattern, both sides accused each other of violating the CoH agreement.¹⁹⁶ MVM monitors found both sides responsible for repeated violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement between May and August 2014. The monitors were also targeted by the SPLA. Such attacks formed part of a strategy, designed to prevent government violations of the CoH from becoming visible to IGAD. Both sides have carried out such a strategy during the current conflict.

Pressure on the MVM intensified during the rainy season, and the monitors often found their investigations blocked. The SPLM–IO accused IGAD of supporting the GRSS and of infiltrating the MVM team with GRSS spies. The rebel organization levelled these accusations shortly after six members of the MVM

team were detained in Mayom county on 23 August 2014. One of the ceasefire monitors died of a heart attack during the detention. The SPLM–IO claimed that the UNMISS helicopter carrying the monitors landed without permission, and without the rebel contingent of the MVM. The SPLM–IO component of the MVM had filed a petition in July, asking IGAD to relocate the main MVM base to a neutral country, as its monitors were being harassed in Juba. In such conditions, the MVM’s findings are necessarily incomplete, as they are often denied access to the areas in which many of the clashes occur.

During the rainy season, government forces also targeted humanitarian operations.¹⁹⁷ Such attacks are a way of disrupting supplies to civilians who are considered rebel sympathizers, and thus of controlling the distribution of people in the state; civilians are funnelled towards government-held ‘safe areas’, where humanitarian operations are allowed to function without disruption.¹⁹⁸

These attacks formed part of a growing war economy. Echoing developments from the second Sudanese civil war, the funnelling of aid supplies and the raiding of civilian communities during the current conflict has increasingly become an economic activity, designed to sustain the lives of the soldiers who participate in the war. To a certain extent, the war’s logic thus becomes autonomous from developments in political negotiations over the country’s future, as soldiers’ livelihoods depend on its continuation, and attacks on civilian settlements can be as much about soldiers’ livelihoods as about tactical objectives. In July 2014, former SSLA forces aligned with the government raided the cattle camps of communities they believed were loyal to the SPLM–IO. On 19–21 August, SPLM–IO forces from Guit and Rubkona raided livestock from communities they held to be government-aligned in Mayom county. In both cases, suspected political allegiances were mobilized as a justification for raiding.

The 2014 rainy season saw intermittent clashes, with neither side able to substantively increase its territorial control of the state. The SPLA remained in Abiemnom, Mayom, Pariang, and Rubkona, yet the Rubkona and Mayom county capitals were under the control of the SPLM–IO, while much of the rest of the state was contested. Meanwhile, the war’s continuation caused an increasing burden for a civilian population that had become prey to military forces reliant on raiding and theft for their livelihoods.

Preparations for war (December 2014–March 2015)

The period from December 2014 through March 2015 saw both sides preparing for dry-season conflict, although neither side engaged the enemy in any meaningful way; clashes were largely restricted to intermittent exchanges at the Unity oil field, the south of Bentiu, and on the Mayom–Rubkona border. The central reason for the delayed onset of hostilities was that the rains were unusually heavy in 2014; by April 2015 many of the roads had yet to dry out completely, including the strategically crucial road from Turalei to Bentiu, which runs through Mayom, and on which the SPLA relies to move troops and supplies from Warrap into Unity state.

The transformations of the seasons play a crucial role in the war in South Sudan. As previously impassable, deserted roads dry out, they become central zones of conflict, and transport junctions become important strategic targets. Civilians and cattle also move: the former attempt to return to their fields for the planting season, and the latter are moved to dry-season pastures, altering the dynamics of the war, and the important targets for the two armies.¹⁹⁹

As preparations for dry-season conflict continued apace, so did peace negotiations, although they did not make any substantial progress. Intra-SPLM dialogue took place in Arusha and resulted in an agreement signed on 21 January; however, the agreement only contained a further commitment to the CoH that both sides had repeatedly violated since it was signed in January 2013, and a vague series of commitments related to the reform of the SPLM. As has frequently been the case during the current civil war, both sides would make a formal commitment to negotiations—in part to satisfy the international community and avoid opprobrium—while preparing for a military offensive on the ground.

The SPLA moved troops into Abiemnom from Warrap at the beginning of December, and then transferred them farther into the state, into Mayom, at the beginning of January.²⁰⁰ SPLA forces that were stationed in Abiemnom for the rainy season also headed into Mayom county. SPLA positions around the Unity oil field were reinforced with tanks and heavy weaponry in November and December 2014, and convoys of Darfurian rebels were seen moving south through Pariang during the same period.²⁰¹ By the end of 2014, major efforts were

made to extend Yida refugee camp's airstrip, considered safer than Rubkona's, so that larger planes carrying armoured personnel carriers (APCs) could land.

The SPLM-IO was also preparing for hostilities, albeit with the limited resources available to it. In December 2014, following a June 2014 call from Gatdet to recruit youths in southern Unity, the SPLM-IO moved recruits north from Panyijar and Mayendit, often on foot, and often without weapons.²⁰² In February 2015, the SPLM-IO conducted a further recruitment drive in southern Unity, in anticipation of intensifying hostilities.²⁰³ Recruitment also occurred in Guit and Koch counties, close to Bentiu. More controversially, in November–December 2014, the SPLM-IO also recruited inside the UNMISS PoC site.²⁰⁴ Under the control of Makal Kuol, these recruits moved north along a corridor, which ran from the rebels' positions around Bentiu to Panakuach, and from there to Hejlj in West Kordofan, Sudan, where the SPLM-IO had training bases.

While the SPLM-IO was struggling with limited resources, the GRSS faced increasingly straitened financial circumstances during this period. The government had, prior to the conflict, derived almost its entire income from oil revenue, and by December 2014 it had spent a year relying on the income from only one field—Paloich in Upper Nile—since the rest had been turned off due to the current conflict.²⁰⁵ This led to tensions in the SPLA, and the GRSS in general, over payments. The SPLA began paying its troops selectively, which increased friction between different parts of the government forces. In December, rumours again swirled that Matthew Puljang would rebel. In fact, the tension between Puljang and the SPLA was due to the non-payment of his forces, and once that was rectified, in mid-December, the rumours died away.²⁰⁶ The SPLA was effectively forced to pay Puljang's troops, as they constituted a vital part of the government forces defending the state. As a result of Juba's provision of money and arms, Puljang recruited and armed more Bul Nuer youths (UNPoE, 2016, p. 19).

Elsewhere, SPLA troops were not so fortunate. While some of the forces around the Unity oil field, on the front line with the SPLM-IO, had been paid and equipped by December 2014, after months of non-payment, the soldiers guarding the northern oil fields in Pariang, such as Tor, had not been paid since June 2014, were eating pumpkin leaves, and barely had enough ammunition

to defend the sites.²⁰⁷ The SPLA's lack of concern for these troops reflected not only the army's straitened circumstances, but also the seemingly secure nature of the site: the front lines were to the south, around the Unity oil field, and the troops who were guarding these oil fields had priority with respect to ammunition and salaries.

The question of how to fund the defence of Pariang and Rubkona's other oil fields was resolved by looking for alternate sources of funding. While there is a 4th Division presence at these oil fields, there is also a 700-strong militia force that is organized by South Sudan's National Security Service (NSS) and recruited from among the Panaru Dinka of Pariang county.²⁰⁸ As with the SPLA (and the SPLM-IO) elsewhere in the country, locally organized militias are generally thought more reliable, more responsible to the area from which they come, and less likely to commit abuses. The oil defence force in Pariang does not answer to the SPLA in Juba, although it coordinates with it.²⁰⁹ Rather, it is organized and controlled by the NSS and funded by GPOC, the consortium that runs the oil fields in Pariang and Rubkona, in which the China National Petroleum Company has the largest stake.²¹⁰ The salary offered to Pariang's youths for taking part in these militia forces is almost double that of an SPLA private.²¹¹

This development mirrors the defence structure of the Paloich oil field in Upper Nile, which is also guarded by Padang Dinka militias, administered by the NSS, and funded directly by oil companies.²¹² It points to a growing split in the military organization of the GRSS, in which the SPLA is no longer trusted to guard the oil fields, whose defence is now handed to a separate branch of the state. Internal Dinka politics are affected in turn: almost all the South Sudanese oil fields are now controlled by militias composed of the riverine Padang Dinka, long the least powerful of the main Dinka groups in the country. In 2013–15, these militias answered to the then minister of petroleum, Stephen Dhieu Dau, himself a Padang Dinka.²¹³

Clashes in January 2015

It was at the oil fields that the first clashes of 2015 occurred. On 5 January, the SPLM-IO shelled SPLA positions at the Unity oil field, having moved into South Sudan from their positions on the Sudanese border. Clashes continued

throughout January; the SPLM–IO took possession of the Toma South oil field on 21–23 January and reportedly attacked an oil facility in Panakuach on 21 January. This defeat caused much embarrassment in Juba. The Unity state administration accused the rebels of setting fire to the oil facilities, and thereby damaging the wells and the production sites (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015e). The SPLM–IO denies these claims (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015f). The GRSS had made the same accusations when the rebels attacked the oil fields in Pariang earlier in the conflict.

In January 2015, however, the oil facilities were in good condition, even if their wiring had been stolen to be sold elsewhere.²¹⁴ Given the importance of the oil fields as the only source of prospective income for any future South Sudanese government that is to include the rebels, the SPLM–IO is unlikely to destroy them.

During the clashes at the Toma South oil field, the SPLA had withdrawn in the face of heavy artillery fire from Dar Kuach. The SPLM–IO seized two tanks after the SPLA's withdrawal. At the end of January, the commanding officer of the SPLA forces at Toma South, Achuil Mathiang Kiirnaar, was summoned to Juba by Paul Malong and accused of having abandoned his position (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015g). This move turned a military defeat into a narrative about the failings of a particular officer, in an attempt to hide the more substantive reasons for the SPLA's loss. The troops at Toma South had not been paid for six months, were eating badly, and had insufficient ammunition to defend their positions. As the civil war in South Sudan continued, and the financial state of the GRSS grew increasingly perilous, troop morale would become an important factor in the conduct of the war.

January also saw clashes around Bentiu, as the SPLA began preparing for its dry-season push into southern Unity. On 6 January, the SPLA shelled SPLM–IO positions on the roads from Bentiu to Guit and Nhialdiu. Clashes continued for the rest of the month, as the SPLA intermittently shelled rebel positions to the south and west of the state capital, simultaneously striking at SPLM–IO bases in Buoth and Wichok, in Mayom county. Given the difficulties of access, IGAD's MVM was noticeably silent about who was responsible for these clashes, other than assigning blame to the SPLM–IO for shelling Bentiu on 1 February.

Conflict around Bentiu, February–March 2015

Clashes continued throughout the month of February. They tended to involve altercations between SPLA forces, stationed in Bentiu and Rubkona, and SPLM–IO forces to the south and east of the state capital, notably at Guit, Thaon, and Thow Mangor. Such clashes were not part of a concerted military push by either side. Rather, they were often the result of tactical ambushes or patrols that accidentally encountered each other. For the government forces, these clashes were an attempt to assess the strength of the SPLM–IO.

In late February 2015, both sides retained largely the same territory that they had occupied in May 2014, at the beginning of the rainy season; the SPLA was still in control of Abiemnom, Mayom, Pariang, and Rubkona counties, and the SPLM–IO retained much of southern Unity. Such a divide corresponds to the ethnic splits that largely correlate to the political division between the SPLA and the SPLM–IO: the Bul Nuer and Dinka areas supporting the SPLA, and the southern Nuer supporting the rebel movement. Only Rubkona county, the site of the fiercest clashes between the two sides, does not fit this pattern; its population is largely sympathetic to the SPLM–IO, but for most of this conflict, Rubkona and Bentiu towns remained occupied by the SPLA, and the Bul Nuer who had previously served as SSLA fighters.²¹⁵

The character of the intermittent clashes of January and February changed in the months that followed, as the terrain began to dry out. On 23 March, SPLA forces moved out from Bentiu, attacking SPLM–IO positions to the south and the east of the state capital, and making headway against the rebels. Clashes continued the next day, as SPLA forces moved south towards the SPLM–IO base at Nhialdiu, in an effort to consolidate their hold on the area immediately south of the capital. SPLA forces also advanced east out of the capital towards Guit, clashing with the SPLM–IO at Kuergeny, some 20 km away from Bentiu. In these clashes, 12 SPLA soldiers and three SPLM–IO soldiers were reportedly killed (HSBA, 2015c).

Both sides made competing claims over which force began the clashes. The SPLA contended that the rebels were shelling south-east Bentiu and advancing on the state capital from Guit, forcing troops to respond. The SPLM–IO argued that the SPLA was attacking its positions outside Bentiu. These allegations omit a multitude of events. The SPLM–IO was indeed responsible for

shelling Bentiu and Rubkona in the first three months of 2015.²¹⁶ The SPLA, however, was not simply defending against these attacks, but beginning a push into southern Unity.

The assault of the government forces was prefigured in a series of increasingly bellicose speeches that Kiir gave at the end of March, when he told audiences that the best way to deal with Machar is to destroy his forces and make him come home, just like in 2002. The invocation of this date refers to a split in the SPLM/A that ended when Machar rejoined the rebel movement; it indicates the degree to which—for many of the participants in this war—the splits and grudges of the second civil war have bled into the current conflict, and the extent to which strategies from the last war are still being applied today.

Tension in the SPLM-IO

At the end of the rainy season, the SPLM-IO made political changes to its organizational structure that were to have reverberations in Unity state during the months to come. At stuttering peace talks in Addis Ababa, IGAD was proposing a government of national unity, with Machar as vice president and Kiir continuing as president. In response, Machar convened a conference of the SPLM-IO in Pagak, Upper Nile, on the Ethiopian border.²¹⁷ Tensions emerged over a number of issues; during one meeting, many of the leaders of Upper Nile indicated that they would not accept Kiir staying in power and refused to participate in any future government of national unity that involved the sitting president.

Thus emerged one of the central fault lines in the rebel organization. The focus of Machar and Taban Deng was on a future political settlement—and their place in it; they didn't want to rule out a future government that included Kiir, especially since that was the core of Juba's position in negotiations. Many of the SPLM-IO's Nuer commanders, however, were much more focused on achieving justice for the killings of Nuer civilians in Juba in December 2013. While these commanders are widely reviled and sanctioned in the Global North, it is ironic that their position is actually much closer to that of international NGOs which insist there cannot be a peace settlement without a judicial mechanism and justice for the victims of the conflict.²¹⁸ These commanders, including Peter Gatdet and Gathoth Gatkuoth, also have a much more narrowly

focused ethnic agenda, including overturning what is perceived as Dinka dominance of the GRSS, and control of Upper Nile.²¹⁹ These differences between the SPLM–IO’s political elite and its principal Nuer commanders feed into a basic structural tension in the rebel organization, which simultaneously attempts to be the voice of the Nuer people of South Sudan and a broader multi-ethnic coalition opposed to Kiir’s government.

The SPLM–IO also obtained something of a formal military structure during the first meeting in Pagak, Upper Nile, following complaints from leading generals that they lacked the resources and organization to wage a successful war against the SPLA. In Unity state, Gatdet was promoted to deputy chief of staff for military operations, one of eight deputies under Simon Gatwich Dual, the Lou Nuer chief of general staff.²²⁰ Gatwich went from Juba to Bentiu in January 2014, then to Jonglei in March–April; at the same time, Gatdet had moved from Jonglei to Bentiu, through Upper Nile. To the dismay of many of the Bul Nuer commanders in the SPLM–IO, Simon Maguek Gai Majak became chief of the SPLM–IO’s 4th Division, called the Lich Division.²²¹

Gatdet’s tenure as military leader of the SPLM–IO in Unity had not been as successful as many in the SPLM–IO had anticipated. Contrary to expectations, the period after the SPLM–IO took Bentiu in April 2014 had not led to a string of military victories across the state. Just as damagingly, he had not won over the Bul Nuer to the SPLM–IO, as he had promised to do; if anything, the Bul Nuer had increasingly backed Puljang and Nguen Monyтуil during Gatdet’s time as commander of the SPLM–IO forces in the state. By becoming deputy chief of staff, Gatdet was removed from direct military command of forces in Unity.

Gatdet’s replacement, Maguek Gai, had previously been his deputy in the rebel movement. Prior to the conflict, Maguek Gai had been an unpopular speaker of the Unity state legislature under Taban Deng, who appointed him, until his removal by Nguen Monyтуil in September 2013.²²² Many SPLM–IO members claimed that Maguek Gai was unsuited to his new position as head of Lich Division, as he had primarily been a politician, rather than a soldier. Gatdet alleges that Maguek Gai only obtained his position because he is a Dok Nuer and a relative of Riek Machar.²²³

At the Pagak conference, Machar also proclaimed that the SPLM–IO would divide South Sudan into 21 states, applying a federal model that would follow the old British districts of the colonial period. On this map, Unity state would

retain its current borders but would be renamed Lich state—indicating that it would be principally a Nuer state, with a Nuer name that refers to a Nuer story about the origin of man.²²⁴ The role of non-Nuer in government in Lich state was not addressed at the conference.

To replace Peter Gatdet as SPLM–IO military governor of Unity state, Machar also appointed Robert Ruai Kuol Jal ‘governor of Lich state’. A Leek Nuer, Ruai Kuol had been an Anyanya fighter, and then an SPLA commander under Machar. He was later the commissioner of Rubkona county and then Rubkona representative in the parliament in Juba, where he was said to be close to governor Taban Deng.²²⁵ Gatdet initially indicated that he was happy with the change: ‘I didn’t want to be a governor. We don’t need a governor. A governor is doing politics and dealing with the civilians. I command militarily, I don’t do politics.’ He added that in his new role as deputy chief of staff he was still in de facto command of SPLM–IO forces in Unity and claimed they numbered 50,000 men.²²⁶ Yet both division commander and governor appointments in Unity pointed to a lessening of Gatdet’s influence, and the increasing strength of Taban Deng in the SPLM–IO, at least with respect to Unity state.

Many of the field commanders for the SPLM–IO in Unity in 2013–15 were either Bul Nuer (such as Makal Kuol) or men who served under Gatdet in some capacity during the second civil war or in the SSLA (such as Carlo Kuol). However, despite the Bul Nuer’s role in the SPLM–IO, by mid-2015 anger was growing among the majority of the Nuer in Unity and directed at the Bul Nuer, due to their role in supporting the government and the Juba-led abuses that many Dok, Jagei, and Jikany Nuer suffered in southern Unity. Given the section’s unpopularity and that most of the Bul Nuer so steadfastly supported the government, there was little incentive for Machar to keep Bul Nuer commanders in top positions within the SPLM–IO.

Yet strong divisions persist between the SPLM–IO political elite and the Nuer population of the state, as evidenced by the appointments of two politicians who were closely linked to Taban Deng and extremely unpopular in Unity before the outbreak of the conflict. The Nuer are generally hostile to a possible return of Taban Deng to a central position of power in Unity, such as the governorship.²²⁷

Thus, the beginning of April 2015 saw the SPLM–IO with a new command structure, but riven by internal differences. Just as problematically for its position

in Unity, its main military base, where the new ‘governor’, Ruai Kuol, and division commander Maguek Gai were based, was at Panakuach, close to the Sudanese border, and far from the southern counties, which would soon come under attack from government forces.



Some of the 100,000 people displaced by the May 2015 government offensive in Unity state. © Jérôme Tubiana

The second government offensive on the south (April–August 2015)

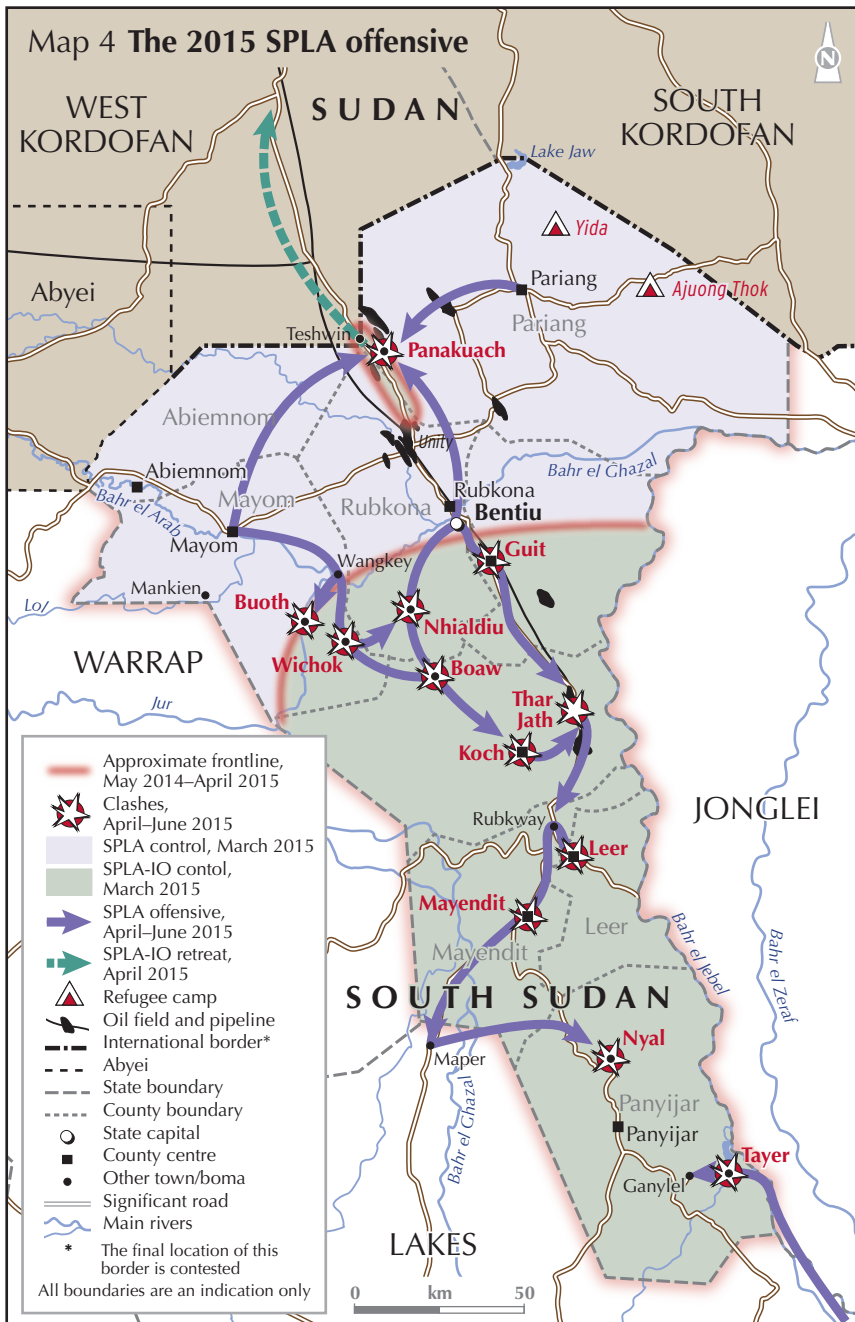
From April to June 2015, government forces mounted a well-coordinated assault on the SPLM–IO in Unity state (see Map 4).²²⁸ The assault had four principal axes. A first wave moved north from Bentiu and Mayom, and south from Pariang, pinning down SPLM–IO forces in Panakuach.²²⁹ SPLA forces marched from Wangkey and Mayom town, and attacked SPLM–IO forces in the south of Mayom, consolidating their hold on the county. A third wave moved south from Bentiu to Nhialdiu—the main SPLM–IO base in Rubkona county—and then on to Guit and Koch, before attacking southern Unity. A fourth wave would later advance in vehicles and on foot from Maper, in Lakes state, as well as on barges along the White Nile from Lakes and Jonglei states, to attack Mayendit and Panyijar counties (UNPoE, 2016, pp. 18–19; UNHRC, 2016, pp. 43–44).

In June and July, the assault continued, as Bul Nuer youths from Mayom moved into the devastated southern regions and raided the cattle that remained after the first assault (UNPoE, 2015, p. 34). The SPLA force was composed of 4th Division fighters from Pariang and Bentiu, 3rd and 5th Division troops, former SSLA fighters under Puljang, and Bul Nuer youths from Mayom county, as well as forces from Lakes state.

The fall of Panakuach

The SPLM–IO began using Panakuach, just inside Rubkona county, north of the Unity oil field, to launch attacks on SPLA positions in western Unity state in early 2015. It achieved notable successes in January, and clashes continued intermittently during the first four months of the year. Panakuach was also central to the SPLM–IO strategy in Unity state because it provided access to rear bases in Sudan, as well as to weaponry provided by Khartoum, although the SPLM–IO complained that the amount of weaponry provided was never adequate to conduct a successful campaign against the SPLA.²³⁰ That most of the rebels' ammunition was in Panakuach meant that the SPLM–IO's forces in the south of the state lacked the resources with which to fend off the forthcoming SPLA assault. The main SPLM–IO leaders—including Maguek Gai, Ruai Kuol, and Makal Kuol—were also in Panakuach. It was the centre of SPLM–IO

Map 4 The 2015 SPLA offensive



activity in the state. The SPLM–IO’s use of Panakuach evokes Khartoum’s support of the SSDF as a way of weakening the SPLA during the second civil war, and the way the South Sudan Defence Movement/Army (SSDM/A) used Sudan for training and recruitment in the post-CPA era.

The SPLA attacked Panakuach at the end of April 2015. Its initial assaults were repulsed, perhaps as a result of some hesitancy on the part of the government forces, due to the area’s proximity to the Sudanese border, and thus the fear that ‘fighting close to the border could trigger another war with Sudan’, as one government official stated.²³¹ Even though the SPLA’s initial assaults were unsuccessful, they played an important strategic role in its dry-season campaign, pinning down the SPLM–IO in northern Unity, and preventing it from moving south to assist against the principal thrust of the government assault into southern Unity.

In May, following the conclusion of the SPLA’s main southern offensive, much of its force withdrew to Bentiu from Leer and Nhialdiu. On 2 June, these forces launched a coordinated assault on Panakuach: Puljang’s forces moved north from Mayom and 4th Division forces attacked from both Bentiu and Pariang county.²³² This combined force overran SPLM–IO positions at Rot Riak and Lalob before attacking Panakuach itself, and forcing the rebels to flee into Sudan, along with an estimated 9,000–15,000 South Sudanese civilians, who took refuge in Kharasana, across the border in West Kordofan. Having immobilized the bulk of the SPLM–IO forces in Panakuach for the duration of the southern offensive, the SPLA regrouped in Bentiu and then routed the rebels.

Fighting continued for the first ten days of June, as the SPLA pursued the SPLM–IO into Sudan, causing a diplomatic incident when SAF had to withdraw from three of its own bases in the Sudanese portion of the border zone.²³³ To prevent a wider confrontation between the two countries, the SPLA then withdrew from SAF’s bases.²³⁴

The southern offensive

The government offensive began in Mayom county on 25–26 April 2015, when its forces moved out from Wangkey and Mayom town, as well as Bentiu, and attacked SPLM–IO forces in Wichok and Buoth. The majority of the SPLA’s force was reportedly made of recently integrated Bul Nuer troops, 3,000–5,000

strong. These forces also moved to attack the SPLM–IO to the south and east of Bentiu.

The government forces carried out their assault in the first week of May, taking control of Nhialdiu and overrunning SPLM–IO positions at Boaw, in the north of Koch county. On 5 May, troops from Bentiu captured and partially burned Guit, while the Bul Nuer youths who had captured Boaw raided for cattle in the north of Koch county. On 8–9 May, Bul Nuer youths attacked Koch itself, as part of the government’s concerted attempt to destroy resources that were used by civilians who had allegedly sided with the rebels. Government forces from Mayom and Bentiu then joined up at the Thar Jath oil field. In anticipation of the advancing fighters, humanitarian organizations evacuated Leer on 9 May.²³⁵ Government forces then moved south towards Leer in mid-May.²³⁶ The SPLA finally took Leer between 15 and 18 May, in a pincer operation that involved troops moving from the north and the south.²³⁷

Almost simultaneously, Dinka SPLA forces and associated militias had moved north from Lakes state, attacking Mayendit on 12 May; they then advanced towards Rubkway, while other SPLA troops moved up the Nile from Lakes and Jonglei states on barges, landing in the port of Tayer. Humanitarian organizations evacuated from Ganylel on 13 May, amid clashes in Panyijar county.²³⁸ Having razed part of the port of Tayer, the SPLA came under attack from SPLM–IO forces and withdrew to the port of Adok. The next day, it returned to Tayer and once again took control of the port. Tayer had been an important trading hub for communities in Jonglei, Lakes, and Unity states. It was one of the few places in southern Unity where Nuer communities could obtain supplies from Lakes state; Dinka traders were present in the port, alongside Nuer civilians.²³⁹

The SPLA did not hold Tayer, but withdrew after razing the port and subsequently launched attacks in Panyijar county, including at Nyal, on 20 May, before withdrawing north. The SPLA offensive from Lakes, together with cattle raiding by Dinka youths from Lakes in Panyijar county, broke down the tacit non-aggression pact, and the trade, between the Dinka from Lakes state and the Nuer in Panyijar.

As elsewhere in Panyijar county, witnesses report that the SPLA burned parts of Nyal and killed civilians before it left, following an SPLM–IO attack. Panyijar



An exhausted family takes a break on the way back home after months surviving in the bush. Guit county, June 2014. © Jérôme Tubiana

county, in which the SPLA could only move with difficulty, given the extremely swampy conditions, was the only county in which the SPLM–IO immediately retook control; elsewhere in the state, the SPLA was ascendant.

A war on the people

By the beginning of June 2015, it seemed as if the SPLA had won a consummate military victory against the SPLM–IO. However, other than in a few places—such as Nhialdiu—the southern offensive was noticeable for its lack of actual military battles. The SPLM–IO troops tended to withdraw into the bush before the advance of the SPLA. Maguek Gai reportedly also restrained the Nuer youths of southern Unity, possibly because he was unsure that the SPLM–IO could win a military victory, and thus decided to conserve his forces.²⁴⁰ Where the Nuer youths of southern Unity did fight against the SPLA, it is noticeable that they fought on their own, rather than as a part of the SPLM–IO.

With the SPLM–IO in hiding, the SPLA offensive was largely directed against civilians, or—wherever locals managed to slip into the bush—almost-deserted villages. During this campaign, UNMISS had no access to the southern part of Unity until November 2015 (UNHRC, 2016, p. 7), which limited the capacity of humanitarian actors to provide support on the ground and prevented the mission from having a detailed understanding of the conflict as it unfolded.

In many places, civilians were only just beginning to rebuild following the last government offensive. In Leer, civilians were rebuilding their houses and *luak*, and also beginning to farm. The UN had even chosen Leer as one of three areas to which they could relocate Nuer civilians who had taken shelter at the UNMISS base.²⁴¹ Despite the UN’s hopes, Leer, along with other villages in southern Unity, was again partly razed. In particular, Bul Nuer troops, including armed youths, and armed Haak, Jagei, and Leek Nuer youths, were blamed for abuses during the 2015 campaign (AFP, 2015; Amnesty International, 2015; UNHRC, 2016, pp. 43–44, 48, 54–55).

The government forces systematically destroyed the villages through which they moved in Guit, Koch, and Rubkona counties. In Panyijar, the SPLA razed Tayer port and the surrounding villages. At least 28 villages were attacked; many were razed to the ground and some were partially burned down. This created a huge amount of displacement, as an estimated 100,000 had to leave their homes, bringing the total number of displaced in Unity to 450,000—75 per cent of the state’s population. Of those, more than 90,000 were sheltering in the UNMISS base in Rubkona as of August 2015, at the end of the dry-season offensive. By late October, the figure had topped 120,000 (IOM, 2015b).²⁴²

During the offensive, untold numbers of livestock were stolen, countless food supplies were pillaged or burned, numerous children were killed, and many women as well as young boys and girls were abducted. Humanitarian sources estimate that in April–September 2015 ‘at least 1,000 civilians were killed, 1,300 women and girls were raped, and 1,600 women and children were abducted in Leer, Mayendit and Koch counties’ (PCSS, 2015). The UN estimates that from the beginning of the 2014 dry season to the end of the 2015 rainy season (approximately November 2014–November 2015), more than 10,000 civilians were killed, including more than 7,000 by violence, and nearly 900 abducted (UNDHCSS, 2016, pp. 6, 22).

Humanitarian resources were also targeted. Some local government officials claim that such actions were aimed at humanitarian organizations that had supported rebel-held areas to the detriment of government-held areas. In the words of then Mayom commissioner John Bol Mayik, 'Humanitarians supported SPLM-IO areas, especially in Nhialdiu. This is why we needed to wash them away.'²⁴³ While humanitarian aid workers in South Sudan insist on their neutrality vis-à-vis the conflict, the warring parties perceive humanitarian work quite differently. In a war in which control of people and resources is paramount, food and medical supplies constitute important means of sustenance for a population; such supplies thus became active military targets in a war that is focused on people, rather than armies.

The SPLA, and Bul Nuer militia forces under the command of Matthew Puljang, targeted Nuer civilians and committed widespread acts of sexual violence against Nuer women. In many cases, women and children were forced by Bul Nuer fighters to herd their families' livestock back to the soldiers' home areas. The SPLA and associated Bul Nuer militias burned down food stores that could not be taken back to Bentiu, and looted aid supplies. The conflict also meant that humanitarian agencies could not deliver food supplies to southern Unity.

The effect of these attacks on the civilian population of southern Unity was exacerbated by the timing of the assault, which came as planting season arrived; this disruption of the agricultural cycle has already had knock-on effects beyond 2015. In June 2015, the US-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network warned of the risk of famine should 'insecurity [continue] to prevent food assistance delivery to southern Unity' (FEWS NET, 2015). MSF estimates that the rate of acute malnutrition in Leer county was around 28–34 per cent in August–September 2015 (MSF, 2015).

Taken together, these factors add up to a concerted campaign to displace the population of southern Unity, one that aims to empty out what had been the wellspring of SPLM-IO support in the state by forcing people into the bush, to government-controlled areas, or to the UNMISS PoC site. Partly, this campaign was achieved simply through the razing of villages and homes. It has also destroyed the means by which the population of southern Unity could sustain itself.

A war over cattle

The use of cattle raiding has fuelled and been fuelled by the recruitment of youths or cattle guards, including seasoned cattle raiders, on all sides of the conflict. Among the Nilotic pastoralist communities of South Sudan, groups of young cattle guards can be mobilized to raid cattle or recuperate it, or for community defence or retaliatory raiding. These are typically temporary militias, created due to pressing circumstances, and disbanded after the reason for their creation has been resolved.

During the second civil war, eastern Nuer youths (more so than the western Nuer) mobilized forces generally known as ‘white army’ or ‘white armies’ (*jeish in bor* in Nuer or *jeish al abyod* in Arabic); the term can also be used to designate an individual member of such a force. During the civil war, white armies were distinguished from the SPLA, or black army, and from child soldiers, the ‘red army’.



A young Nuer cattle guard in Mayom county, May 2015. All sides of the conflict have competed to recruit among cattle-camp youths. © Jérôme Tubiana

More recently, pro-SPLM-IO areas in southern Unity rejected the name ‘white army’, which was considered both dated and limited to eastern Nuer. Instead, the youths adopted the name ‘Gojam’, which was already used as a nickname for the bodyguards of Nuer SPLA leader William Nyuong, who had borrowed it from Ethiopia’s Gojam province, home of some of the Ethiopian SPLA trainers, who were renowned for their bravery. During this conflict in Unity, Gojam was sometimes turned into Gokjamb (from *gok* for ‘knock’ in Nuer, and *jamb* for ‘near’ in Arabic) and then into Gokjieng (‘knock the Dinka’).²⁴⁴

The Gojam mobilized by themselves at the beginning of the conflict; they fought government forces and were defeated between Bentiu and Leer in January 2014. Since then, they have generally been reluctant to integrate into the SPLM-IO, but some of them—including boys under 18—have reportedly been recruited by force in both cattle camps and schools in the Nuer counties. SPLM-IO authorities reportedly requested 1,200 conscripts in each Nuer county in 2014, or one man or boy from every household in 2015 (UNHRC, 2016, p. 40).²⁴⁵

In April 2014, around Bentiu, the SPLM-IO reportedly armed 300 Leek Nuer civilians, who participated in the town’s recapture but then refused to fight again and were asked to give back the weapons. In May 2014, similar opposition attempts to take control of and disarm Jagei Nuer youths in Koch county provoked clashes between them and SPLM-IO forces. The Gojam agenda remains to protect their own territory and cattle rather than to fight far away; as a consequence, they prefer to remain in small groups that loosely coordinate with the SPLM-IO, while retaining independence from the rebel forces.²⁴⁶ They have regularly pursued SPLM-IO forces—regardless of whether they were victorious or defeated—in order to raid poorly protected cattle as civilians fled. Since the SPLM-IO only armed those they integrated, the Gojam, who wanted to remain autonomous, were also looking for abandoned weapons.

On the government side, Bul Nuer youths reject the name Gojam and sometimes use *jeish in bor*, and more often ‘youth’ (either the Nuer *nguetni* for ‘young men’ who have been scarified, or the Arabic *shebab*) or *marale* (from the Arabic *murahilin*, the name given to the Arab nomads whom Khartoum armed as militias and alongside whom Bul Nuer militias also fought).

Since this conflict erupted, several thousand Bul Nuer youths—including cattle raiders—have been integrated into Puljang’s forces and subsequently

into the SPLA. In its campaign in southern Unity, the SPLA received aid from such fighters, who had been promised a share in the spoils of war.²⁴⁷ On 19 June 2015, a force of approximately 8,000 Bul Nuer youths marched past the Rubkona PoC site on its way south.²⁴⁸ This force raided Guit and Koch on 20–25 June and then moved farther south, to Leer. Other cattle guards did not join Puljang's forces but followed them in order to raid cattle from other Nuer, although it is unclear how much this was encouraged or even approved by Puljang, who was said to favour integrating fighters into his forces.²⁴⁹

Government and opposition forces have competed to recruit Nuer cattle keepers in Unity, in particular among the divided Bul Nuer, but also, to a lesser extent, in all the Nuer counties of Unity. Already in 2014, the government trained and armed loyal Dinka and Nuer civilians—who reportedly numbered 2,000—as 'community police', in addition to small Nuer militias such as the one mobilized by Taker Riek in Leer, as mentioned above.²⁵⁰ In 2015, the state government invited the youths of Guit, Koch, and Rubkona—whose own cattle had been stolen by the SPLA—to join in this raiding. Nguen Monytil then made a number of local government appointments to appease these three counties, following the raids on their cattle in June 2015—and to encourage their elders to allow the youths to join in the Bul Nuer raiding.²⁵¹ The government's strategy here is reminiscent of GoS tactics during the 'Nuer civil war'; setting Nuer sections that are putatively aligned with the SPLM–IO against each other sows discord and division among the Nuer population.

In addition, the southern offensive saw intra-sectional raiding, which was a rarity before the current conflict and not only set Nuer sections against each other, but also created tensions within sections themselves. Following the April–May 2015 government offensive, Bul government forces and Bul youths raided cattle belonging to Bul living in the formerly SPLM–IO-controlled parts of Mayom county. To a lesser extent, Haak, Jagei, Jikany, and Leek government forces recruited among the local youths did the same in the counties of Rubkona and Guit; some youth groups were also said to operate on their own (UNPoE, 2016, pp. 14, 19; UNHRC, 2016, pp. 43–44, 48, 54–55).²⁵²

The extensive raiding and looting that characterized the government offensive had two interrelated goals. It destroyed the resources of the southern Nuer,

‘punishing’ them for supporting the SPLM–IO, and it also offered a means by which the raiders could accumulate resources in a war economy.²⁵³ Central to this strategy was the acquisition of livestock. In mid-June, state officials announced on the radio that the people of Unity should bring all their livestock to Bentiu, warning that the cattle would otherwise be considered ‘rebel cows’, and thus at risk of being stolen (HRW, 2015, p. 16; HSBA, 2015e). By early July, there were more than 100,000 heads of livestock in Bentiu and Rubkona, while other livestock were brought to Mayom county, and some to the towns of Koch and Leer (UNHRC, 2016, p. 52). Some of these cows belonged to relatives or friends of members of the government forces. Yet others had been raided by Bul Nuer in southern Unity and brought to the state capital for safekeeping.

It remains unclear whether the stolen livestock was designated as the property of the government. Certainly, the government’s radio-relayed instructions and the subsequent movement of cattle to Bentiu allowed its forces to control the movement of livestock and oversee its ownership. Several sources claim that the cattle stolen during the initial southern offensive was designated as government property and that subsequent Bul Nuer raiding, which began at the end of June, was the youths’ reward for their loyalty, after the government promised them they could get ‘their share’.²⁵⁴

For the southern Nuer counties of Unity, livestock is not principally a food resource. As noted in relation to the 2014 SPLA assault, cattle are symbolically and metaphysically central to Nuer life; they become a source of food only in times of duress.²⁵⁵ One requires cattle to get married and the maintenance of complicated relationships of material reciprocity among kin groups calls for a constant circulation of livestock.²⁵⁶ The destruction and theft of the herds of southern Unity disrupts the social and cultural fabric through which the Nuer communities of this region make sense of their lives.

Simultaneously, such raiding allows the Bul Nuer to increase their herds.²⁵⁷ Raiding is not atypical in South Sudan. Bul Nuer raids on other Nuer communities are not exceptional and have often occurred outside of a war setting. Such attacks can start cycles of revenge attacks, which often end with the payment of compensation for those who have died and the restitution of cattle that have been stolen.

In some respects, however, the raids that characterized the SPLA's assault on southern Unity are atypical, because rather than being a simple question of augmenting herds, raiding also had a marked political dimension. One of the issues frequently raised by international organizations such as Human Rights Watch concerns the extent to which the SPLA command in Unity, in particular Matthew Puljang and Tayeb Gatluak—then head of the 4th Division—gave orders to raid and pillage in the south.²⁵⁸ In May 2015, Puljang arrested about 100 youths who had followed his forces and raided cattle in Koch county, indicating that not all the raiding was approved by the SPLA command. Yet such arrests account for only a small part of the youths who followed government forces to loot in May and June 2015. Bul youths explained that during the 2015 offensive, government authorities saw civilians who fled along with the rebels *as rebels themselves*, and thus taking their property, including their livestock, was allowed. At present, it is unclear whether abuses committed by Bul Nuer youths were fully backed by Bul Nuer SPLA commanders.²⁵⁹ This question remains unanswered, and important. However, in some respects, the question might also be somewhat misconceived.

Although it has a marked political dimension, raiding has its own particular goals. Its aim is to augment herds, and the resolution of raids can occur within a sectional framework, as different Nuer sections pay blood compensation (*diya* in Arabic) for those killed, and negotiate a settlement for livestock losses. The political aims of the SPLA's military campaign were rather different: to defeat the SPLM-IO in Unity state, destroy their main base at Panakuach, and displace their supporters. During the southern offensive, the two logics intersected. The SPLA allowed the Bul Nuer to raid, which enabled the government to accomplish one of its objectives—the destruction of southern Unity. It may be the case that no command was given to the Bul Nuer to destroy villages and rape women, because no command was necessary: it was understood that this is what raiding would entail. As multiple testimonies gathered for this study as well as by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch make clear, destruction and abuses are simply realities of the contemporary practice of raiding during the civil war in South Sudan.²⁶⁰

As much as the government's political goals were achieved through politics, raiding was enabled by politics. While raiding may have been undertaken for

a distinct purpose—the accumulation of cattle—it was only possible because of the current political situation. In turn, this intersection of raiding and politics transformed the actual practice of raiding, with the result that the SPLA's assault on southern Unity was characterized by atypical forms of raiding.

The prior military offensive in southern Unity led subsequent Bul Nuer raids to be much more intensive, and the targeted communities far less able to defend themselves. Consequently, the number of livestock seized was much greater than in a typical raiding campaign. This has knock-on effects for any subsequent settlements between Nuer sections. Given the extremely high numbers of captured livestock, the ambiguity regarding who actually took what livestock, and the fact that the raiding occurred as part of a political campaign, the Bul Nuer have been blamed for the raiding as a group, rendering customary reconciliation and restitutory payments between Nuer sections difficult.

The southern offensive thus has the capacity to create a serious intra-ethnic conflict between the Nuer of southern Unity and the Bul Nuer of Mayom. In June and July, the PoC was full of Nuer civilians talking about revenge attacks, once the current situation—and Bul Nuer domination of the state apparatus—had changed.²⁶¹ For many Dok, Haak, Jikany, Jagei, and Nyuong Nuer, the last offensive is only the latest episode in a story of desertion and treachery on the part of the Bul Nuer, who are held to have deserted their Nuer kinsmen by siding with the government in December 2013 and taking part in the attacks on southern Unity. Many refer to the Bul as 'Dinka' or 'Bul Dinka'.²⁶²

While it is important to recognize the challenges faced by the Nuer communities of Unity, the depths of the enmity felt towards the Bul should not be overstated. Both during and after the second civil war, the Nuer managed to resolve antagonisms produced by unrelenting conflict, and their ability to do so using traditional mechanisms puts many an international peace-making effort to shame. Importantly, victims from other Nuer sections tend to understand the Bul Nuer's actions against them as *raiding*, to which the appropriate response is reciprocal raiding, rather than as part of a broader political project. Anger about the Bul Nuer is inter-sectional, but it is not essentially political. The huge amount of anger felt about the events that occurred in Juba in December 2013 is rather different: these events, it is held, constitute a unique episode, which changed the political landscape of South Sudan. Bul Nuer raiding, in

contrast, is par for the course, even if it has taken on singular dimensions within the current conflict.

Seen from another perspective, the raiding of the 2015 southern offensive merely represents an intensification of the most recent dry-season offensive. With each offensive, more and more resources are taken from southern Unity, and redistributed to northern Unity. In February–March 2014, the SPLA and Darfuri­an rebel groups took livestock, fuel, and food. The Darfuri­an groups, in particular, were interested in acquiring vehicles and fuel.²⁶³ The 2015 offensive repeated many features of the previous year’s campaign. Just as in 2014, the SPLA and its associated militia forces knew that they would be unable to hold the areas through which they rampaged; the local population is loyal to the SPLM–IO, and increasingly so with each offensive. Thus, the assault combined the features of a military occupation with those of a raiding mission; in 2015, however, the targets were livestock and women, rather than vehicles and fuel.



A Nuer cattle guard gives a police officer PKM bullets captured from Dinka raiders from Warrap state, Mayom county, May 2015. The raiders were allegedly armed by the government before this conflict erupted. Cattle raiding, which predates the current war, has continued, intensified, and sometimes become a key motivation and tactic of opposing forces. © Jérôme Tubiana

The SPLM–IO divides

Discontent over Machar's leadership among the lead rebel commanders had been growing since the first two conferences in Pagak. Simultaneously, in Unity state, the role played by the Bul Nuer in the government offensive in southern Unity had led to a growing gap between the other sections of the Nuer and the Bul, and a concomitant marginalization of several Bul Nuer commanders, such as Peter Gatdet.

This discontent came to a head after the southern offensive. The SPLM–IO put up little resistance to the SPLA's attacks, and the movement's local leadership, whose superiors were constantly being changed at the county level, were often blamed for the defeat.²⁶⁴ Maguek Gai, in particular, was held responsible and denounced as a nepotistic appointment unable to organize his forces.²⁶⁵ The lead commanders of the SPLM–IO were also angry that they had not received sufficient weapons to fight the war against the SPLA.²⁶⁶ Taban Deng was responsible for acquiring and distributing weapons from Khartoum, and commanders complained that these arms were not distributed quickly enough (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015m).

Disapproval of the way Machar was organizing the war militarily paralleled growing frustration with his overall leadership. A cleavage had formed between the SPLM–IO's political elite, which coalesced around Riek Machar and Taban Deng, and commanders such as Peter Gatdet and Gathoth Gatkuoth. The former were focused on a future political settlement with the GRSS, and their place within it. The latter thought Machar and Taban Deng were self-interested; they were much more interested in obtaining justice for the killing of Nuer civilians in Juba in December 2013, and they opposed any peace deal that would see Kiir remain in power.²⁶⁷

At the end of June, numerous commanders came together in a meeting to discuss what could be done. While they were opposed to Machar's leadership, there was no one among them—a group of hardened generals—who had Machar's political legitimacy, and so they struggled to know what the next move should be for the nascent opposition within the opposition.²⁶⁸

On 20 June 2015, Simon Gatwich signed a letter to Omar al Bashir, requesting that weapons shipments to the opposition bypass Taban Deng and go directly to the field commanders. The letter was signed by the generals who attended

the June meeting; along with Simon Gatwich, the signatories included Peter Gatdet, Gatkuoth, and Gabriel Gatwich Chany (Tanginye), representing much of the SPLM–IO’s upper level Nuer military command, with the exception of James Koang.

Machar’s initial position was to support reconciliation with the generals, while attempting to cover up the splits in the SPLM–IO.²⁶⁹ However, the generals retained a hard-line position in relation to negotiations, arguing that Machar and Kiir were both failed leaders, and that future negotiations should exclude both. In July 2015, Gatkuoth gave a speech indicating that he no longer recognized Machar as his commander. On 21 July, Machar relieved Gatdet and Gatkuoth from their positions, appointing James Koang as deputy chief of staff for operations—Gatdet’s old position—and placing Johnson Olonyi, who had recently joined the SPLM–IO, as head of the 1st Division (Upper Nile), James Koang’s previous position (Gatdet, 2015; Radio Tamazuj, 2015k). Nevertheless, the SPLM–IO initially attempted to downplay the split, claiming that the two men had not been discharged, but that they were waiting for new postings; Mabior Garang, one of John Garang’s sons, even declared that the two commanders would receive new postings at the appropriate time.²⁷⁰

In reality, however, the two commanders were placed under the rather loose control of the Ethiopian federal police. Gatdet immediately fled to Khartoum. He made his first official statement on the situation in a letter to the SPLM–IO and the international community, dated 10 August 2015 and stamped using a seal with ‘SPLA–IO Deputy Chief of General Staff for Operations’ on it, his previous position. In the letter he:

- rejects any peace agreement that includes Kiir and Machar, contending that they polarized the country and are an obstacle to peace;
- rejects the SPLM reunification process that took place in Arusha, Tanzania, in January 2015, claiming that this process would return the SPLM to the unsustainable position it was in before the December 2013 massacres; and
- accuses Machar of nepotism and asserts that Machar and Taban Deng used the conflict for personal advancement (Gatdet, 2015).

In this letter, Gatdet professes to speak for the ‘Generals of the SPLM/A in Opposition’, even though he is the only signatory of the letter. The following day,

in what was clearly a prearranged move, a series of SPLM–IO political leaders released a letter supporting his position (Changson et al., 2015). The signatories included Gabriel Changson and Timothy Tot Chol, two Naivasha-based dissident Nuer politicians whom Machar had formally removed from the SPLM–IO leadership on 7 August.²⁷¹ Both figures are part of the Nuer council of elders, whose chairman, Gabriel Yoal Dok, joined the dissident political leaders.²⁷²

Two organizations then emerged out of the SPLM–IO split. Shortly after their first letter, the group around Gabriel Changson issued a position paper on the IGAD process under the name of the Federal Democratic Party (FDP) (FDP, 2015). The FDP positions itself as the political wing of the dissident generals, who have taken the moniker ‘South Sudan Armed Forces’ (SSAF). The FDP is composed of Nuer intellectuals who live in Kenya; it is uncertain how much substantive support they have inside South Sudan, although many Nuer in Unity state appear to support the stance they take in relation to the peace process.

In its position paper, the FDP criticizes the ‘IGAD Compromise Peace Agreement’ as unworkable. It makes the following points: that the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission will be impossible given the government’s refusal to be held accountable for its actions; that the government will continue to violate the ceasefire; that the reunification of the SPLM merely rewards those who perpetuated the crisis; and that an agreement that excludes the FDP/SSAF will not be sustainable. It threatens that ‘those currently being despised as spoilers or splinter groups [such as the FDP/SSAF] will turn into formidable guerrilla movements that will destabilize South Sudan’ (FDP, 2015, p. 3).

It is unclear how coordinated the SSAF and the FDP actually are, and the composition of the SSAF is also shrouded in mystery. While Simon Gatwich was among the generals who were unhappy with Machar’s leadership, he has not joined the rebel faction, due to pressure from the Lou Nuer community in his home state.²⁷³ The three confirmed generals who are part of the SSAF are Tanginye, Gatdet, and Gatkuoth. Gatdet remains in Khartoum, however, and the actual military strength of the SSAF is unclear, as claims and counterclaims about which officers have remained loyal to the SPLM–IO have been made continuously since the split.

A number of local groups have come out to denounce the dissident generals, and community organizations of the Jikany, Bul, and other Nuer sections

have rejected the FDP/SSAF and invoked Gatdet's previous history of changing sides to suggest that they were not surprised by the development.²⁷⁴ However, many of these statements seem to have been prearranged by the SPLM-IO and are not necessarily indicative of a lack of support for the dissident generals on the ground. Yet the generals' critique of Machar and the IGAD-led peace process is certainly shared more generally among the Nuer community.

As of July 2016, there was little indication that the SSAF had much military strength on the ground. On 1 October, Gatkuoth falsely claimed that he had taken control of Mandeng, in Upper Nile.²⁷⁵ Similarly, no evidence has been found to confirm Gatdet's earlier contention, namely that the SSAF had destroyed government barges in Tonga, in western Upper Nile. It seems more likely these are propaganda claims, designed to give the impression that the generals have forces on the ground, and thus some legitimate support within South Sudan.

In the last two months of 2015, rumours circulated that Gabriel Changson was seeking an alliance with Paul Malong, in an effort to undermine both Kiir and Machar.²⁷⁶ The brazen instrumentality of this attempt indicates that it is extremely unlikely; the rumours were probably intended to discredit Paul Malong, who increasingly dissociated himself from Kiir in December 2015 and January 2016.²⁷⁷ The threat of the FDP/SSAF uniting with Paul Malong, and so splitting the government forces, was part of the motivation behind a memorandum of understanding (MoU) negotiated between the FDP and the SPLM/A on 24 December 2015 in Nairobi. Rather than stipulating what steps should be taken to integrate the rebel forces, the MoU signatories simply agreed to 'engage positively' with the GRSS. Peter Gatdet, in Khartoum, immediately distanced himself from the group's Nairobi commitment.

Much is likely to turn on Khartoum's role. Gatdet repeatedly claimed he was hamstrung by a lack of weaponry and ammunition during his time in the SPLM-IO. If the GoS were to use the renegade generals as spoilers—either during the current peace process, or during continual negotiations with South Sudan over the Sudanese rebels hosted in the south—it would provide the rebels weaponry, aware that Gatdet and his associated generals could disrupt a political settlement in South Sudan, as was the case during the second civil war and the CPA period.

The peace agreement and further clashes (July–October 2015)

Immediately after the southern offensive, the SPLM–IO appeared to have been destroyed as an organized military force in Unity state. Yet once the SPLA had withdrawn from the rural areas of southern Unity following the offensive, the SPLM–IO rapidly retook territory that it had conceded. As the Bul Nuer were raiding in the south and the SPLA maintained control of several important transport nexus and towns, the scene was set for four months of intermittent clashes, which took place despite the signing of a peace agreement in Addis Ababa.

Clashes in July and August 2015

Initial clashes during this period occurred in the south of Unity. In a continuation of the dynamics of the southern offensive, government forces razed villages, stole cattle, and abducted women and children. On 6 July 2015, government forces attacked villages in Leer county. Five days later, armed youths—both Bul Nuer and Jagei Nuer from Koch county—moved into Leer, attacking villages and taking livestock.²⁷⁸ Raiding in Leer county continued to the end of July. By this time, government forces had moved out from their positions in Leer county and attacked villages in Mayendit county; they also pushed east and assailed the villages of Dindin and Piliny in Leer county, while moving towards Adok. These raids also focused on acquiring livestock and women; they were accompanied by the burning of houses and *luak*, and by the killing of civilians. At the end of the month, raids hit Rubkway and Kumagap, near Adok (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015x).²⁷⁹

On 30 July, in the village of Dablual in Mayendit, Bul Nuer militia forces and SPLA troops from Warrap raided all the livestock of the local population, as well as the 270 metric tonnes of food aid that WFP had air-dropped into the village (Patinkin, 2015). The civilians in the village were displaced into the bush. Unlike during the dry-season offensive, the wave of raids that occurred in July–August 2015 was characterized by actual clashes with the SPLM–IO. On 9–11 August, the SPLM–IO attacked Leer town, reportedly with more weaponry and ammunition than during the May–July offensive. Clashes occurred in

Dindin, Gandor, and Piliny, but the SPLA retained control of Leer. The SPLA also remained in control of the ports of Adok and Tayer, the central urban settlements and ports of southern Unity. From these bases, government militia forces engaged in sorties, raiding and razing Nuer villages.

Meanwhile, in Pariang, there were clashes during this period in Wunkor, in the north-east of the county. The SPLA—and Panaru Dinka civilians—had withdrawn from the area at the very start of the conflict, as rebel Nuer soldiers were moving through the territory and into Upper Nile. Since Johnson Olonyi's defection to the SPLM-IO, the area had been under the control of the rebel forces. On 22 July, SPLA 4th Division forces attacked SPLM-IO positions at Wunkor, forcing them to retreat to Tonja, Panyikang county, Upper Nile.²⁸⁰ There were further skirmishes on 9 August, when Agwelek forces under the command of Johnson Olonyi attacked the SPLA's 4th Division positions in the area. Wunkor is a strategically important area at the north-eastern edge of Unity, close to the White Nile, and if the SPLA were to advance on the Agwelek forces on the west bank of the Nile in Upper Nile, Wunkor would be one of the main possible avenues of attack.

The peace agreement

While clashes continued in Unity state, the GRSS and the SPLM-IO finally signed a peace agreement during the month of August 2015, albeit under duress. International pressure on the two sides had mounted during the previous six months and, on 24 July, IGAD delivered a 'compromise agreement' to the belligerent parties, demanding that negotiations begin on 4 August and that an agreement be signed by 17 August. The agreement had been written by IGAD, with input from a variety of other parties, including the Ethiopian government and a series of US and British actors.²⁸¹ Structurally, it was very similar to the agreement that the two sides had already rejected back in March; it included provisions for a demilitarized Juba, a commitment that the SPLM-IO would be able to choose the three governors of the states of Greater Upper Nile—Unity, Jonglei, and Upper Nile—and provisions for a Transitional Government of National Unity (IGAD, 2015b).

Initial comments from the GRSS suggested that it found the agreement totally unacceptable. In a speech on 30 July, Kiir implied that giving the SPLM-IO the

governorship of the three Greater Upper Nile states was a redline he could not cross (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015u). On 2 August in Pagak, the SPLM–IO convened a conference to discuss the proposal. While Machar attacked the agreement, the majority of the delegates approved it and also called for 33 per cent SPLM–IO representation in the seven South Sudanese states that lie outside of the Greater Upper Nile region, in addition to several supplementary provisions.²⁸²

Thus, over the course of more than two and a half years of conflict, the opposition had shifted away from making a clarion call that Kiir must leave office, which constituted the basic plank of the opposition’s political position, to accepting a TGoNU in which Kiir retained the presidency. This might have been Machar and Taban Deng’s plan all along. After denouncing the Kiir regime, the SPLM–IO’s political negotiators had accepted IGAD’s basic formula of a government of national unity, at whose centre they placed the two figures whose disagreements had largely precipitated the political crisis that had led to this conflict: Kiir and Machar. However, for the rest of the SPLM–IO, acceptance of the proposed agreement can only constitute a monumental climbdown, given the wreckage of Unity state and the dwindling possibility of an effective military struggle against the GRSS.

The fate of the negotiations became uncertain at the beginning of August, as both sides repeatedly pulled away from the table and Kiir warned the Ethiopian president, Hailemariam Desalegn, that signing the agreement would lead to the ‘total disintegration of the country’ (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015v). In view of the impending collapse of the peace deal, Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni suggested a modified compromise peace agreement, with an extended deadline, and no power sharing in Jonglei, Unity, or Upper Nile states. Machar dismissed this proposal out of hand, and tensions ran high within the so-called ‘front-line states’ of Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda, as Ethiopians challenged the Ugandans, claiming that their support for Kiir was undermining the possibility of a peace deal (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015y).

Finally, a third proposal was made. It offered the SPLM–IO the governorships of Unity and Upper Nile, but not Jonglei, which was to go to the GRSS; it also featured a 46–40 split for the GRSS and SPLM–IO in the representation on the council of ministers for those three states, and 15 per cent SPLM–IO representation on the council of ministers in South Sudan’s other states (IGAD,

2015c, ch. I.15.1–15.2.2). The latter representation was a key demand for Machar, who wanted to show that the SPLM–IO was not simply a Nuer affair, centred in the three states of Greater Upper Nile, but that it represented a genuinely national movement.

Despite the modified proposal, it came as a surprise to many that Kiir and Machar accepted an outline of the proposal on 16 August. In Juba, there was a significant lobby against the proposal, most visibly by Michael Makuei Lueth, the minister of information, who told the media, ‘We strongly believe such a peace cannot serve the people of South Sudan. It is a sell-out and we will not accept that’ (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015z). Kiir demanded two weeks to deliberate before signing the accord.

On 26 August, Kiir signed the agreement. Only the day before, the minister of foreign affairs, Barnaba Marial Benjamin Bil, had told the media that there was only ‘a possibility’ that a peace deal would be signed. Although Kiir signed the agreement, he immediately made a number of objections that called into question whether the peace deal could be actualized, and he claimed that he was only signing the agreement under international pressure.²⁸³ Nevertheless, two days later, on 28 August, Kiir signed an order for the declaration of a permanent ceasefire across South Sudan. On 10 September, the peace agreement was simultaneously ratified by the SPLM–IO’s National Liberation Council in Pagak and by the South Sudanese parliament in Juba.

Even though the agreement has been ratified, a number of issues were left open, to be agreed upon by the two belligerent parties in subsequent workshops. These same issues have since divided the two sides. The compromise agreement states that the two parties agree to ‘a Permanent Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements (PCTSA) workshop [. . .] which should be completed within 14 days of the signing of this agreement’ (IGAD, 2015c, ch. II.1.8). This meeting was due to take place in Addis Ababa at the beginning of September 2015, but it was delayed, as neither side had ratified the agreement. The workshop subsequently took place at the end of September but ended in disagreement.

One of the fundamental sticking points is the demilitarization of Juba. Based on the original 24 July IGAD proposal, Juba was to be demilitarized except for a presidential guard of 260 soldiers, a vice-presidential guard of 195 soldiers, forces required to protect military barracks, and a third-party security force—

from either the African Union, IGAD, or UNMISS (IGAD, 2015b, ch. II.5.3). In contrast, the signed agreement contains no mention of any international protection force, naming only a joint integrated police force, guard forces, and presidential guards, without specifying their respective troop numbers (IGAD, 2015c, ch. II.5.1). At the workshop in Addis Ababa, the GRSS proposed that an army division of between 10,000 and 18,000 officers be deployed in the state capital. The SPLM–IO was trenchantly opposed to such a large force and suggested that the total number of shared presidential guards be 2,000–3,000.

On 26 October, at a further meeting of the PCTSA, in Addis Ababa, minutes for a permanent ceasefire and transitional security arrangement were finally signed, although both sides expressed reservations and emphasized that this would not be the final agreement and that negotiations would have to continue. The 26 October agreement sketches out the demilitarization of Juba; there is to be a police force of 3,000 personnel, with 1,500 officers from each side, and the command of the force is to rotate every nine months. This arrangement looks remarkably like the Joint Integrated Units constituted by the CPA, which repeatedly fought each other, being neither joint, nor integrated.²⁸⁴ Given the ease with which the presidential guard disaggregated in December 2013, the danger—proved all too real in July 2016—was that the troops present in Juba could do the same, leading to further clashes.

The rest of the agreement detailed an SPLA force of 5,000 in the capital, with an additional 1,000 troops as Kiir’s presidential guard (and another 250 troops to compose the ceremonial band), as well as 300 troops in Machar’s personal guard. Both sides also committed to withdrawing their troops to the agreed areas of cantonment, but the ‘GRSS stated that they do not know the whereabouts of any non-state security actors, and, as a result, have no control over them’ (IGAD, 2015d, p. 2). This statement unmistakably undermines the agreement, allowing the GRSS to use informal troops to wage war while denying any responsibility for their actions—a likely scenario given that much of the war in Unity state was waged by government-aligned forces that were not formally integrated into the SPLA, and that the killings in Juba were carried out by militias that were not integrated into the SPLA either.²⁸⁵

The initial proposal demanded the withdrawal of ‘all foreign forces/militias allied to either party’ within 45 days (IGAD, 2015b, ch. II.1.5). The final agreement

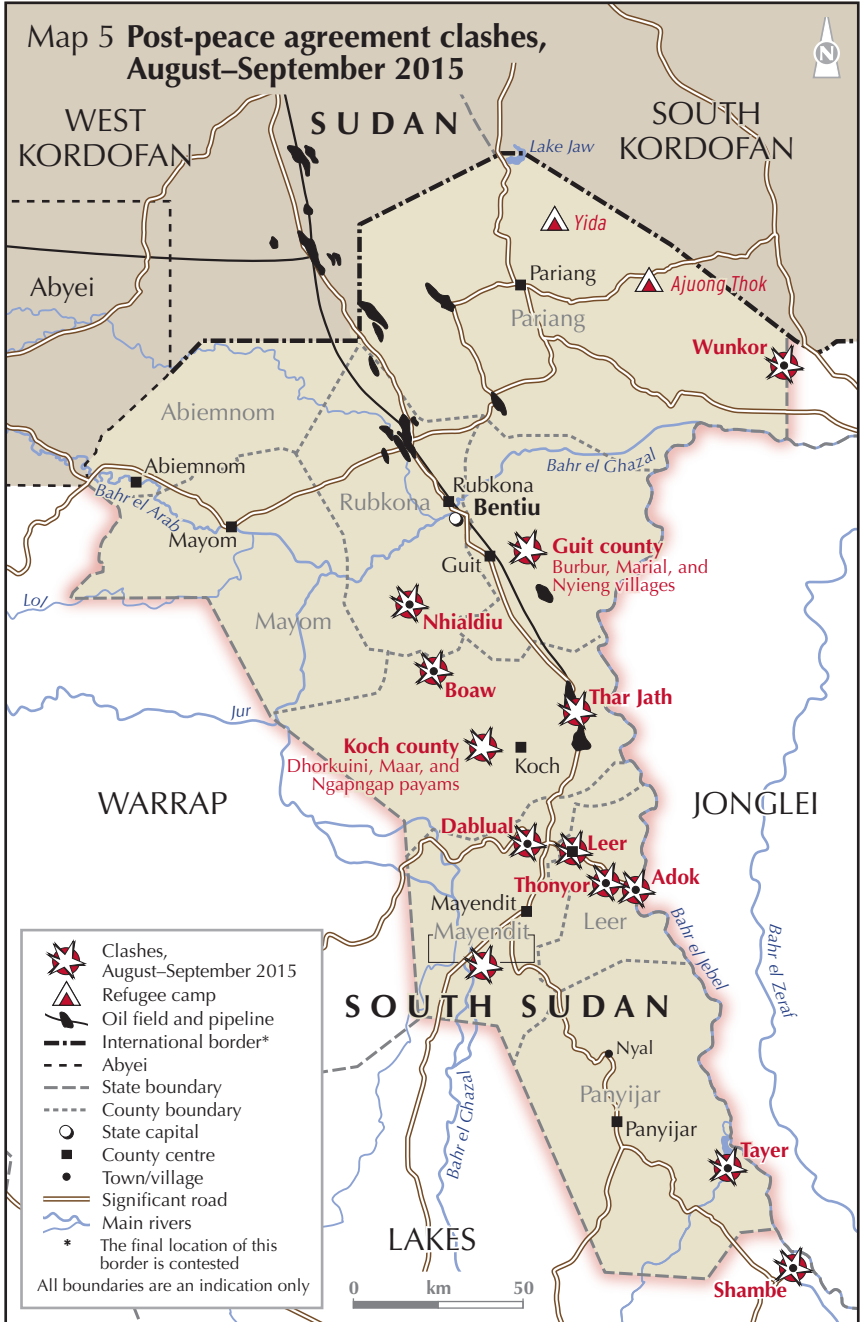
contains more ambivalent wording and commits both sides to the withdrawal of 'state security actors allied to the warring parties from the territory of South Sudan, with the exception of Western Equatoria state' (IGAD, 2015c, ch. II.1.5). That exception relates to Ugandan troops who are purportedly fighting the Lord's Resistance Army in Western Equatoria, although international observers question whether the rebel group is actually present in the state.²⁸⁶

At the time of the deadline stated in the agreement (45 days after signing), on 11 October, the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) had still not withdrawn from Jonglei state (Radio Tamazuj, 2015o). The following day, the Ugandan military announced that it would withdraw from South Sudan, but the SPLA subsequently claimed that the withdrawal of the Ugandan forces was contingent upon the signing of the security agreement that resulted from the PCTSA workshop in Addis Ababa (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015jj). This condition is not contained in the peace agreement; the SPLA's claim is reminiscent of the Sudan–South Sudan border negotiations, in which post-negotiations conditions were linked to the implementation of measures that had already been agreed, bringing the implementation process to a standstill. Yet, in late October, the UPDF pulled out from Bor, although international actors remained sceptical of their real commitment to withdrawal. US government sources claimed that Ugandan troops had been spotted wearing SPLA uniforms.²⁸⁷

Finally, the agreement calls for the cantonment of the two forces within 30 days of the signing of the agreement. Far from separating and assembling for cantonment, the two sides have instead ushered in an upsurge in clashes in Unity state since the peace agreement. Indeed, despite the multiple commitments made by the GRSS, there was no noticeable shift in the conduct of the government's war in southern Unity immediately following the signing of the peace agreement.

Subsequent CoH violations

On 20 August, Bul Nuer youths attacked villages in the Leer area, killing ten people (see Map 5).²⁸⁸ Three days later, SPLA and SPLM–IO forces clashed in Nhialdiu, when the SPLM–IO attacked SPLA positions in the area, which had regrouped the previous week at a village south of Nhialdiu.²⁸⁹ Fighting continued in Panyijar and Mayendit counties; the SPLA attacked rebel positions



near Tayer on 27 August.²⁹⁰ On 29 August, as Kiir's order for a ceasefire all over South Sudan came into effect, the SPLA attacked villages in Leer county. These attacks led to further displacements in Unity state: nearly 78,000 people took refuge in Nyal and others in Panyijar county swamps. About 18,000 of them arrived in the first two weeks of September, including people who had left Leer and villages in Leer county as early as May 2015 and who had been hiding and walking in the bush and the swamps since then.²⁹¹ Dok Nuer paramount chief Gideon Bading took refuge in the swamps in Leer county before being airlifted in November to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, where he died in May 2016 (Radio Tamazuj, 2016).

Following the ceasefire declaration, the frequency of attacks by government forces in southern Unity increased. On 30 August, government forces travelled in boats from Tayer and attacked Adok, leading to 56 civilian casualties, as reported by SPLM-IO officials.²⁹² Clashes continued along the Nile throughout September, as SPLA forces used barges and gunboats to attack villages and ports near Adok and Tayer.²⁹³ In Leer county, government attacks continued into October. In Leer town, government forces detained at least 62 civilians—men and boys who were accused of being rebels—in a container, in which they died of suffocation; the cattle that they had brought to town to comply with government directives (see above) were reportedly confiscated by government forces (Amnesty International, 2016).

Meanwhile, the area south of Bentiu became the site of renewed hostilities as SPLM-IO fighters moved closer to the state capital, attacking government positions at Burbur, Marial, and Nyieng in Guit county from 10 to 14 September. At the beginning of October, clashes also flared in Koch county, where the SPLA attacked SPLM-IO forces that had approached the state capital during the rainy season. In response to the SPLM-IO movement towards the capital, Nguen Monytil warned that unless the rebels respected the peace agreement, the SPLA would respond with a full-scale war (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015ee).

In the beginning of 2015, it was impossible to draw a firm front line between the two forces in Unity as the two forces were dispersed throughout the southern part of the state. The SPLA had firm control of Abiemnom, Mayom, and Pariang, as well as of Bentiu and Rubkona. In southern Unity, it managed to maintain control over Leer town for the longest period since the beginning of

the conflict, but was less successful in rural areas. Amphibious forces also patrolled and intermittently occupied the ports of Adok and Tayer, in addition to raiding in Leer and Mayendit counties. On 10 October, government-affiliated forces also attacked Boaw, an SPLM–IO stronghold in Koch county. Government troops left the following day.

In early 2015, SPLM–IO moved forces into Koch and Guit counties, where it engaged the SPLA in intermittent clashes. It also had forces in Mayendit and Leer counties—with a main base in Thonyor, east of Leer—where it also engaged the SPLA (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015dd). Panyijar county remained an SPLM–IO stronghold and the only county fully controlled by the rebel forces.²⁹⁴ Despite the peace agreement, both sides continued to violate the CoH agreement; the logic of the war had become one of raiding and revenge, largely delinked from political negotiations in Addis Ababa and Juba.

The new map of South Sudan

On 2 October, on South Sudan Television, Salva Kiir promulgated an administrative order designed to divide South Sudan's ten states into 28 new states, thereby plunging the peace process into uncertainty (Radio Tamazuj, 2015m). While the international community reacted with shock, some of the communities affected by the changes celebrated and others immediately rejected the move.²⁹⁵ Kiir's administrative order falls in line with the well-established GoS and GRSS practice of redrawing administrative boundaries as a political tool.²⁹⁶

Michael Makuei insisted that the decree was a presidential order, that it would not need to go to parliament to be approved, and that the changes would take place in 30 days' time. Subsequently, after opposition voiced throughout the country, Kiir relented, stating that the decree would have to be approved by parliament.²⁹⁷ It is unclear whether the decree is constitutional. While the South Sudanese constitution allows for the modification of state borders, it does not authorize the creation of new states or the elimination of existing ones (GoSS, 2011).²⁹⁸ It is also unclear how the establishment of new states would affect the peace process. The compromise peace agreement grants the SPLM–IO 40 per cent of the representation on the council of ministers in Unity and Upper Nile states, as well as the choice of governor. According to Kiir's

decree, these two states are to be turned into six, as each is to be divided into three states.

The SPLM–IO’s immediate response was to claim that the creation of 28 states was a violation of the August compromise peace agreement, and to decry it as land-grabbing by the GRSS, which was unmistakably seeking to limit the rebels’ control of the country under the terms of the peace agreement.²⁹⁹ To be sure, the peace agreement calls for a discussion of federalism in South Sudan during negotiations over the constitution in the 30-month transitional period, not before the formation of the TGoNU.

The GRSS insisted that the creation of the new states would not affect the peace agreement. Michael Makuei argued that once Upper Nile and Unity became six states, the SPLM–IO would be able to select six governors, and that the situation would retain fidelity to the division of power agreed upon in the peace agreement. The power-sharing ratio thus would not be altered (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015ff).

This assurance did not placate the SPLM–IO, which continued to demand that the bill be withdrawn. The international community also condemned the move; the ‘Troika’ countries of Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States criticized the unilateral declaration and insisted that any restructuring of the states must occur inside the TGoNU (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015gg). IGAD also condemned the decree, asked for it to be put on hold, and claimed that it violated the terms of the peace agreement (VOA News, 2015b).

Yet Kiir was not dissuaded and, on 13 October, the South Sudanese cabinet adopted the order, which came into effect at the beginning of November, after its approval by parliament. It is unclear what substantive changes will occur, however, other than at the level of political negotiations with the SPLM–IO; Machar warned that negotiations may have to begin again given the changed administrative situation. On the ground, the GRSS has perilously little funds, and at the state level there are even fewer resources to effect these changes. For the foreseeable future, modifications will be nominal rather than profound, as there are no resources available to create new administrations and institutions.

In November and December 2015, the GRSS prevaricated over the creation of the 28 states. On 24 December, Kiir announced the governors of the 28 states. In Unity, Nguen Monytil became governor of Northern Lich state, effectively

retaining his position as governor of a now much-reduced Unity state. Mayol Kur Akwei, a member of parliament from Pariang, was appointed governor of Ruweng state, while Taker Riek, the massively unpopular former commissioner for Leer, was appointed governor of Southern Lich state.³⁰⁰ Except for Nguen Monyтуil, these appointments are effectively figureheads and have not produced actual administrative changes in any of the three new states. Machar immediately condemned the appointments, and the GRSS and Jieng (Dinka) Council of Elders' insistence on the existence of the 28 states has led to a series of delays in negotiations, as the SPLM-IO still contends that Kiir's decree undermines the August peace agreement.

The decree has provoked a mixed reaction among the communities of South Sudan, some of which have complained of what they claim are government land grabs. In the protests over Kiir's decree, it was revealed that the GRSS had been investigating the possibility of a new state structure for South Sudan from at least 2014. An earlier version of Kiir's proposal, from November 2014, includes only 18 states, rather than 28. Another version made by the Jieng Council of Elders contained 23 states, rather than 28, with an additional state added once the proposal reached Kiir's office (Radio Tamazuj, 2015s). The involvement of the Jieng Council of Elders is unlikely to improve the chances that the Nuer population of South Sudan will accept Kiir's decree. The Council has been accused of being involved in creating the paramilitary force that was largely responsible for the Juba massacres of Nuer civilians in December 2013 (AUCISS, 2014; Radio Tamazuj, 2015f).

The differences between the final decree and the November 2014 proposal are instructive. In the final decree, the unified Nuer states of the earlier proposal have been fragmented into several states, while majority-Dinka states have acquired extra territory, normally composed of areas inhabited by numerically smaller tribes. The overall logic of the new map appears to favour mono-ethnic Nuer states so as to concentrate opposition support into a few states that contain almost none of South Sudan's oil fields. The majority-Dinka states, on the other hand, tend to be multi-ethnic, absorbing numerically and politically weaker ethnicities and effectively expanding the area of Dinka control.

The new proposal has Unity state divided into three. In the north and west, Abiemnom and Pariang counties compose a mono-ethnic Dinka Ruweng state.³⁰¹

The decree, and the IGAD-produced map of the new South Sudanese states, is not detailed enough to determine whether this new state includes simply Abiemnom and Pariang—and thus the oil fields of Tor and Toma South, but not that of the Unity oil field, which is currently in Rubkona—or whether it also involves a redrawing of these two counties’ southern boundaries. If continuity is to be ensured between Pariang and Abiemnom counties, Rubkona county will have to be deprived of its strategic frontier with Sudan, causing former Unity state’s Nuer communities to lose their access to the international border.

The decree creates a ‘Northern Lich state’ of Guit, Koch, Mayom, and Rubkona counties, with Bentiu as its state capital, and a ‘Southern Lich state’ composed of Leer, Mayendit, and Panyijar counties, with Leer as the state capital (GRSS, 2015). The 2014 version of the federal map featured only a single Lich state, comprising all the majority-Nuer counties, not unlike the ‘Lich state’ proposed by Machar in his earlier suggestion of a South Sudan of 21 districts, with the exception that his proposal just renamed Unity state (including Abiemnom and Pariang) ‘Lich state’.

The division of the Nuer counties into two states seems designed to weaken the power of a single Nuer lobby. This division will also split the principal SPLM–IO supporting areas of southern Unity from the Bul Nuer, and from the oil fields in Rubkona and Koch counties, which are now part of a Northern Lich state. Given their current political domination of Unity state, the Bul Nuer in Northern Lich state will surely expect some representation in government, lessening the likelihood that it will be a strongly pro-SPLM–IO state, and leaving only ‘Southern Lich state’ as the stronghold of the opposition. In view of their demographic importance, the Bul Nuer may even expect to dominate a Northern Lich state.

The communities of Unity state had widely varying reactions to Kiir’s decree. In Pariang, the announcement of the measure on South Sudan Television was met by celebratory shooting. The Panaru Dinka have long felt embattled in a majority-Nuer state and cut off from other Dinka communities since the war began.³⁰² It is in relation to ‘Ruweng state’ that Michael Makuei’s insistence that the decree will not affect the peace agreement seems most dubious. If the power-sharing ratios of the compromise peace agreement were to be kept, Ruweng state would receive an SPLM–IO governor. Even if this were possible,

given the anti-SPLM–IO sentiment of the Panaru and Alor Dinka, the governor would effectively be powerless in a state where he did not have any local support base; he would be a figurehead, without teeth.

The reaction of the Bul Nuer was more mixed. Officially, Nguen Monytil welcomed the decree and held that it echoed John Garang’s original vision of the decentralization of power in Sudan, while opening up opportunities for rural southern Sudan by ‘taking the towns to the people’ (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015hh). The Bul Nuer community was more hesitant (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015ii). Its community organization in Juba welcomed the decree but also warned that isolating Unity’s Dinka counties as a new state would create tension, especially if it involved border demarcations that crossed territory contested by the Bul Nuer. James Lily Kuol, the chairman of the association in Juba, suggested that Unity instead be divided into two, with a northern ‘Ghazal state’ (named after the river), composed of Rubkona, Pariang, Mayom, and Abiemnom counties. Since the current crisis erupted, parts of the Bul Nuer community have also variously suggested that Mayom form its own state, or join a state with Abiemnom and Pariang counties, so as to carve Unity into a pro-GRSS state and a pro-SPLM–IO state (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015aa).

These varying suggestions reflect the anxiety that the Bul Nuer feel about the other Nuer sections in the state and their own position in a future, post-conflict Unity, in which the SPLM–IO is entitled to choose the governor, challenging the power that the Bul have accumulated since the beginning of the conflict. The Bul Nuer are also worried about the prospect of revenge attacks from other Nuer sections if they were to relinquish their military and political hold on the state.

The division of the Nuer counties was aimed at reassuring the Bul that they would not become a minority within a pro-SPLM–IO Nuer state. Yet, more locally, the Bul were also concerned about likely conflicts between them and Abiemnom’s Dinka community. Abiemnom’s borders were partly carved from Mayom county in 2006; since then, the Bul have continued to dispute the boundaries of the new county, which deprived them of their border with Sudan (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015aa). Bapiny Monytil mentioned the redrawing of boundaries as a reason for his resignation from the SPLA in October 2016 (Monytil, 2016).³⁰³



SPLM-IO soldiers in Thar Jath, June 2014. © Jérôme Tubiana

As discussed in the next section, these tensions make it difficult to envision what a peaceful settlement of the political situation in Unity would look like. The issues that are thrown up by Kiir's decree indicate the degree to which what is at stake in South Sudan is not simply a peace process between two belligerent parties, but the future shape of the nation state, following more than 30 months of bitter conflict. Nowhere do these questions resonate more powerfully than in Unity, as Kiir's decree threatens to plunge the state back into violence (*Sudan Tribune*, 2016a).

A GoS creation designed to arrogate southern oil fields to Khartoum, the state has been the arena for a politics of ethnicity that is particularly complicated because of the Bul Nuer's loyalty to the government. As elsewhere in South Sudan, ethnic ties align with political allegiances only imperfectly. In Machar's vision of a Nuer-dominated Lich state, the place of the Dinka communities of Abiemnom and Pariang is ambiguous. Given the political divisions in the Nuer community, however, it also remains uncertain how one could

even articulate a Nuer identity for the state, let alone how that might connect to a broader South Sudanese nation. At present, the calls for federalization all over the country seem like a recipe for further factionalization, as, under the cover of a claim of unity, ethnic differences are accentuated.

The military dimension of the conflict in Unity

A single source for both sides: SPLA stockpiles

When the conflict erupted in Juba and almost immediately expanded to Unity state, both sides primarily relied on the military equipment that was readily available in the country: materiel from existing SPLA stockpiles—a mixture of pre-independence stockpiles, more recent captures from SAF,³⁰⁴ and recent acquisitions. Benefitting from the fact that most of the troops based in the 4th Division headquarters in Rubkona joined the SPLM–IO, the opposition forces were not only able to establish control over the capital of Unity state, but also to gain control of the army’s equipment.

While in control of Bentiu and Rubkona between 15 December 2013 and 10 January 2014, the SPLM–IO forces under James Koang’s command had access to a significant amount of military equipment, ranging from individual weapons and ammunition to artillery systems, vehicles, and main battle tanks. The loss of the equipment stored in Rubkona had a detrimental effect on the SPLA’s initial capacity to fight the insurrection in Unity state, since it significantly weakened the military capacity of the government side in the state,³⁰⁵ forcing the SPLA to deploy units that were serving in other divisions (primarily the 3rd Division based in Northern Bahr el Ghazal) and to set up a new logistical support chain.³⁰⁶

Over time, the SPLA has progressively managed to reorganize its troops; to build a new logistical web—enlarging its fleet of ground vehicles³⁰⁷ and securing transportation services provided by private air companies;³⁰⁸ to strengthen its tactical capacity, in particular by acquiring attack helicopters and amphibious vehicles; and to maintain, from the end of 2014 onwards, continued military pressure on opposition-controlled areas, even during most of the 2015 rainy season (UNPoE, 2015, paras. 67–83).

This section focuses on military equipment that could be physically inspected on both sides of the front line in May and June 2014. Although the documented sample of weapons and ammunition does not allow for a precise extrapolation of trends or for conclusive proof of weapons flows or vectors, it provides a range of significant indications. The central points are:

- Most of the military equipment used in Unity state appears to be consistent with stockpiles known to have been in SPLA custody prior to December 2013. Given the diversity of the origins of the stockpiles built up by the SPLA over time, the age of most of the observed items, and the use of identical types of ammunition and weapons (Warsaw Pact-calibre infantry and light artillery) in the whole region, it is not possible to determine the precise chain of custody of the majority of the captured weapons and ammunition observed.
- A part, although not the majority, of the equipment used in Unity state was imported into South Sudan recently, shortly before the eruption of the crisis or immediately thereafter, from exporting states including China, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates.
- The need to secure supply mechanisms for ammunition in particular represents a major concern for the opposition forces, which do not have sufficient logistical capacity to transport them and can only rely on limited external support.
- While most of the weapons in the SPLM–IO’s custody appear to have originated from SPLA stockpiles, external sources have supplied ammunition since 2014, in particular Sudan. These transfers confirm the fact that opposition captures of ammunition from SPLA stockpiles during the early stages of the conflict were insufficient to maintain a high tempo of military operations.
- Both sides have been able to capture only limited volumes of weapons and ammunition in armed confrontations, probably because belligerents repeatedly avoid direct military confrontations, instead choosing tactical withdrawal to preserve both manpower and weapons.
- The equipment captured by SPLM–IO forces in some localities of Unity state confirm the direct involvement, alongside the SPLA, of Sudanese rebel groups, particularly JEM.

Equipment observed in Bentiu and SPLM–IO-controlled southern Unity state

The Small Arms Survey inspected and documented some of the equipment used by the two sides in Unity state; the materiel was either captured by the belligerent forces from their respective enemies, or observed abandoned at sites of major military confrontations.

SPLA captures from opposition forces. The materiel captured by the SPLA 4th Division and inspected in Rubkona on 24 May 2014 mainly consists of small-calibre infantry weapons and ammunition.³⁰⁹ Although they belong to the same category of weaponry used by the SPLA (relatively old Warsaw Pact-calibre equipment), the small arms and ammunition were of specific makes and bore marks that were not consistent with those of the weapons available in South Sudan's security and military agencies' stockpiles at the time of the inspection; they also differed from those the rebels could have obtained from government stockpiles in Unity, according to high-ranking SPLA officers.³¹⁰

The Small Arms Survey documented:

- two ZPU-4 four-barrel anti-aircraft systems with four KPV-type 14.5 mm machine guns, serial numbers 360 011³¹¹ and 360034,³¹² and corresponding 14.5 × 114 mm ammunition;³¹³
- one rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launcher with erased markings;³¹⁴
- seven identical 7.62 mm Type 56-1 assault rifles with bayonets, all with erased serial numbers;³¹⁵
- several dozen rounds of ammunition of calibre 7.62 × 39 mm;³¹⁶
- one unexploded 9M115 anti-tank wire-guided missile;³¹⁷ and
- four US-manufactured 37/38 mm smoke grenades (manufactured by Combined Tactical Systems).³¹⁸



A close-up of the grip of the RPG launcher inspected at SPLA 4th Division headquarters, Rubkona, 24 May 2014. © Claudio Gramizzi

Due to the widespread availability and circulation of most of these types of weapons and ammunition in the region and to the absence of serial numbers on some of the items, it is impossible for the Small Arms Survey to confirm the allegations of the SPLA commanders present during the inspection that the Government of Sudan had deliberately supplied the equipment to the opposition forces.³¹⁹ It is noteworthy that the Small Arms Survey previously documented the presence of similarly unmarked Type 56-1 assault rifles in use among other South Sudanese insurgent groups that joined the SPLA between 2011 and 2013, and that were formerly supported by the Sudanese security agencies.³²⁰

SPLM-IO captures from government forces. The Small Arms Survey also inspected several items that the SPLM-IO had captured from government forces and were holding in various localities of southern Unity state, including in Guit, Koch, Leer, and Rier, as well as in the Guit area.³²¹ The majority of this materiel consisted of small-calibre infantry weapons, comprising mostly single individual weapons and their ammunition.

In addition to the information provided by the items documented, observations gathered in the SPLM-IO-controlled areas confirm that:

- when the crisis erupted in December 2013, the majority of SPLA stockpiles were composed of relatively old equipment that was probably supplied to the SPLA before South Sudan's independence;
- the SPLA acquired some new equipment between independence in 2011 and the beginning of the present conflict;
- the majority of the individual weapons used by SPLM-IO elements is consistent with those in service within the SPLA and other government security agencies—according to testimonies from SPLM-IO soldiers, some of these weapons were moved to Unity state from other states of South Sudan with defecting SPLA troops;³²² and
- the government forces that were deployed and took part in the military campaign in Unity state included, in addition to SPLA regular forces, other allied groups such as the Sudanese rebel group JEM.

Documented materiel includes:

- three 40 mm RPG launchers: one Bulgarian-manufactured RPG-7V model,³²³ one Soviet-manufactured RPG-7V model, produced in 1965,³²⁴ and one of undetermined origin, manufactured in 1985;³²⁵

- two DShK-type 12.7 mm machine guns;³²⁶
- two 7.62 mm PKM-pattern machine guns of Sudanese and Chinese manufacture;³²⁷
- approximately 100 rounds of 7.62 × 54R mm ammunition, possibly of Chinese³²⁸ and Iranian³²⁹ manufacture;
- seven CQ 5.56 mm assault rifles (Chinese replicas of the M16 model)³³⁰ with 26 related 5.56 × 45 mm rounds of recent Chinese manufacture (2008, 2012, and 2013);³³¹
- one Israeli-manufactured, relatively new 7.62 mm Galil ACE 32 assault rifle³³² with eight rounds of ammunition;³³³
- one Land Cruiser technical vehicle³³⁴ with JEM written on the doors, a cut cabin roof, one mounted 12.7 mm S80-type machine gun,³³⁵ and corresponding rounds of ammunition (manufactured in China in 2010 and 2013);³³⁶ and
- two AK-pattern assault rifles of Soviet³³⁷ and Chinese³³⁸ manufacture with corresponding ammunition.³³⁹

Equipment abandoned at fighting locations. In addition to the hardware in the SPLA and SPLM-IO's custody, a variety of items, from spent ammunition



A 7.62 × 39 mm Galil ACE 32 assault rifle, documented in Rier on 1 June 2014. The rifle was reportedly captured by SPLM-IO elements in Juba in December 2013. © Claudio Gramizzi

to vehicles, unserviceable main battle tanks, and crates for materiel, could be observed in a number of locations in Unity state where military operations had previously occurred—including the Bentiu mosque, Leer and surrounding areas, the abandoned GPOC oil facilities in Thar Jath, the road axis between Koch and Rier, and the road axis leading to Guit. In the majority of cases, it is impossible to determine the exact chain of custody of the items, and which force brought and used them in Unity state. This applies, in particular, to a significant number of crates (for mortar fuses or RPG rockets) and boxes of ammunition of different calibres (7.62 × 39 mm, 7.62 × 54R mm, and 12.7 × 108 mm) and origins (Bulgaria, China, and Sudan).

Nevertheless, the analysis of the inspected equipment appears to provide concrete evidence of the presence of some specific consignments of weapons in South Sudan; it also confirms some of the most recent deliveries to the SPLA. Some of the most informative cases of abandoned military items observed during research undertaken in May–June 2014 are discussed below.



A burnt government Cougar APC on the front line near Guit, June 2014. © Jérôme Tubiana

Cougar 4×4 armoured personnel carriers. Soon after the beginning of the crisis, several reports referring to the use of recently imported APCs by SPLA units circulated in South Sudan; while conducting research in Unity, the Small Arms Survey was able to verify these allegations and confirm the presence of two types of armoured vehicles not previously documented in South Sudan: 4×4 Typhoons³⁴⁰ and 4×4 Cougars.³⁴¹

Two Typhoon vehicles, left unserviceable after the fight for Bentiu, were seen in Rubkona, while one Cougar, reportedly abandoned by SPLA elements and set on fire by opposition forces, was observed in the rebel-controlled town of Guit.³⁴²

Both types are known to be manufactured by Streit Group, originally a Canadian company with its main manufacturing plant in Ras al-Khaimah (United Arab Emirates) and more than a dozen manufacturing facilities in different regions.³⁴³

Although Streit Group has not responded to requests for further information for this study, it nevertheless appears that the vehicles were most likely manufactured and exported from the company's facilities in the United Arab



An SPLA Typhoon APC patrols the streets of Juba, December 2014. Identical models (painted sand-colour) have been used by government forces in Unity state. © Claudio Gramizzi

Emirates soon after the procurement contract—for approximately 100 APCs of both models—was signed with Streit Group in mid-January 2014.³⁴⁴

Post-independence deliveries to South Sudan

The most significant quantity of military hardware delivered to South Sudan since independence was imported from China, under the terms of two different contracts, numbered MoD/001/2011 and MoDVA/01/2013, both signed between the SPLA and China North Industries Corporation (Norinco). The first contract was signed in 2011, the second in early April 2013, long before the start of the crisis.

The delivery and deployment of items under the 2011 contract was confirmed by the observation of an empty large-calibre munitions crate in the Thar Jath oil field on 1 June 2014. Additional items procured under the same agreement—including 1,200 HJ-73D-type anti-tank missiles and more than three million rounds of 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition—were subsequently delivered to the SPLA in July 2014, after they were offloaded from the *Feng Huang Song* (a Hong Kong-registered vessel) in Mombasa, Kenya, in transit to Juba. According



An empty ammunition box bearing the reference number of the MOD/001/2011 contract between the SPLA and Norinco, observed in Thar Jath, 1 June 2014. © Claudio Gramizzi

to documents published by the UN Panel of Experts, these weapons were uploaded in the Chinese port of Dalian on 8 May 2014 (UNPoE, 2015, annexe XII).

The same vessel, *Feng Huang Song*, delivered two other consignments to the SPLA through the same transfer operation, under the terms of the 2013 contract. The list of delivered goods—worth a commercial value of some USD 35 million and loaded onto the vessel in the ports of Dalian and Zhangjiang on 8 May and 12 May 2014, respectively—included:

- 319 sets of Type 69-1 40 mm rocket launchers;³⁴⁵
- more than 9,500 Type 56 rifles;
- more than 2,000 sets of add-on 40 mm rocket launchers;
- two million rounds of 7.62 × 54 mm ammunition;
- two million rounds of 9 × 19 mm ammunition;
- 319 Type 80 general-purpose machine guns;
- 660 NP42 pistols;
- 20 million rounds of 7.62 × 39 mm ammunition;
- 20,000 40 mm Type BGL2 anti-personnel grenades; and
- 40,000 Type 69 high-explosive anti-tank rockets (40 mm calibre).³⁴⁶

Soon after the delivery from China, the government also imported a dozen tracked amphibious vehicles (type GAZ-34039) and deployed them in operation areas of Upper Nile and Unity states. The presence and use of these vehicles, reportedly mounted with DShK-type machine guns, was confirmed by South Sudanese officials³⁴⁷ as well as by the UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan (UNPoE, 2015, para. 72).

The origin and chain of supply of these vehicles may remain undocumented, but their availability to the SPLA in Upper Nile and Unity states in 2014 and 2015 represented a certain tactical advantage for the government forces in the fluvial zones.

Other deliveries were documented in 2014, including the importation of 380 light machine guns and 62 heavy machine guns from Ukraine, although few details are known about this transaction (UNPoE, 2016, para. 69).

During 2015, the SPLA further consolidated its tactical capacity and aerial means by procuring at least four Mi-24-type air-to-ground attack helicopters with B8V20 launch pods for 80 mm S-8 unguided air-to-ground rockets.

According to information obtained by the UN Panel of Experts, these gunships were acquired from Motor Sich, a Ukrainian company, for more than USD 40 million and through a payment scheme that directly involves, at least for half of the overall value of the contract, the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining (UNPoE, 2016, para. 75). The Ukrainian export agency, Promoboronexport, confirmed having been granted export licences for the procurement of additional Mi-35 helicopters, which were to be delivered to South Sudan through the intermediation of a private company, Bosasy Logistics, registered in Kampala, Uganda. According to the UN Panel of Experts, the cost of this second acquisition is more than USD 35 million (UNPoE, 2016, para. 77).

Ammunition in the attack on the Bentiu mosque, 15 April 2014

A joint inspection team of the Small Arms Survey and Conflict Armament Research also examined a sample of 185 small-calibre ammunition cartridges (7.62 × 39 mm and 7.62 × 54R mm) used on 15 April 2014 during the killings in the mosque of the Kalibalak neighbourhood in Bentiu.³⁴⁸

Despite the diversity of the sample and the difficulty in determining the exact chain of custody of the ammunition simply from its headstamp codes, some noteworthy indications emerged from the analysis:

- Ammunition with the headstamp code 945_10—denoting production in 2010, and consistent with Chinese manufacture—accounts for just under 30 per cent of the sample of 7.62 × 54R mm cartridge cases observed at the mosque site. Such ammunition has been observed extensively since 2011 in the holdings of SAF and allied militias in conflict-affected areas of Sudan, including Darfur and South Kordofan, where significant quantities were captured from SAF by the SRF and affiliated groups. Identical ammunition was handed over during disarmament in 2012 and 2013 by the SSDM/A under the command of Kuol Chol Awan, militias in Jonglei state under the command of David Yau Yau, and SSLM/A forces under the command of Bapiny Monyтуil—all groups that have openly recognized receiving military support from Sudan.³⁴⁹
- Of the 34 cartridges with markings indicating manufacture from 2009 onwards, 29 had markings consistent with manufacture in China, and 5 had markings consistent with manufacture in Sudan (including all those with post-2012 manufacture markings) (HSBA, 2014d).

- Of the sample of 7.62×39 mm cartridges observed at the mosque, 52 per cent correspond to the types of ammunition contained in the magazines of the Type 56-1 assault rifles inspected on 24 May at SPLA 4th Division headquarters (see above).
- The 7.62×39 mm ammunition bearing the headstamp code most commonly found at the mosque site (101_79) was also observed in the magazine of an SPLM-IO soldier in Guit county, Unity state, on 2 June 2014.
- Two 7.62×39 mm cartridge cases found within the mosque itself appear to have been manufactured as recently as 2014. They mirror the known material and marking features of Sudanese-manufactured small-calibre ammunition. Considering its year of manufacture, this ammunition cannot have formed



Cartridges scattered in front of the Bentiu mosque entrance, 24 May 2014. © Claudio Gramizzi

part of the supplies the defecting SPLM-IO forces took from the available SPLA stockpiles in late 2013. It is therefore more likely that an external source supplied the cartridges to the user—either the SPLM-IO or an allied armed group—after the start of the conflict. The facts that they cannot have been supplied earlier than January 2014, after the defection of SPLM-IO forces from the SPLA in mid-December 2013, and that they were used in April 2014 are indicative of recent supply and a comparatively direct supply chain.

The existence of direct supply mechanisms to the SPLM-IO forces from neighbouring Sudan may be further confirmed by the presence of one crate of 7.62×39 mm ammunition bearing a 2014 lot number and labelling consistent with previously identified Sudanese-manufactured ammunition crates, which were also documented at the GPOC oil company compound at Thar Jath, where government and opposition forces reportedly clashed in April 2014. SPLA representatives interviewed in May and June 2014 refused to acknowledge the possibility that this ammunition was imported from Sudan for use by the SPLA.³⁵⁰

Separate inspections conducted by Conflict Armament Research yielded a similar conclusion, based on both a May 2016 inspection of a large stockpile of ammunition reportedly recovered by the SPLA upon the capture of Panakuach, in June 2015, and a November 2014 review of ammunition captured by the SPLA in Pigi county, in Jonglei state, which borders the southern part of Upper Nile state.

The stockpile inspected in May 2016, in the custody of the SPLA 4th Division command in Rubkona, included a large proportion of Chinese-manufactured ammunition ($7.62 \times 54R$ mm, 12.7×108 mm, 14.5×114 mm, and 23×152 mm) and a dozen boxes of Sudanese-manufactured 60 mm mortar bombs. The majority of the boxes containing the Chinese-produced small-calibre ammunition, inspected while still sealed, were covered by black paint that concealed the identity of the first consignee; on a few of the boxes, inscriptions suggesting that the first delivery was made to Sudan's NISS (National Intelligence and Security Services) were still visible.³⁵¹

More than two-thirds of the Pigi sample—68 per cent of the 243 rounds—consists of both types of 7.62×39 mm ammunition produced by Sudan in 2014 and observed at the Bentiu mosque; moreover, its condition confirms supply to the South Sudanese opposition forces through air-drop operations.³⁵²

Additional reports confirm the existence of direct supplies of equipment from Sudan, in particular concerning small- and medium-calibre artillery weapons and ammunition, such as PKM-type machine guns, 12.7 × 109 mm ammunition, and RPGs (Fleischner, 2015).

Main trends

The research conducted on both sides of the front line in Unity state, as outlined above, should not be considered comprehensive, nor should its findings be generalized to the rest of the South Sudanese conflict without proper confirmation. The picture that emerges in Unity, however, provides relevant indications on some aspects of the crisis that has driven South Sudan back to war since December 2013.

First, it shows that despite the country's limited resources and the lack of means to manufacture military items domestically, most of the weapons used to trigger the conflict were readily available and entirely procured by both camps from the SPLA's existing stockpiles. Since the eruption of the conflict, significant volumes of military hardware have been imported through direct acquisition or on the basis of an agreement signed with Kampala in October 2014, which allows Uganda to procure military goods and technology on behalf of South Sudan (*Sudan Tribune*, 2014g; UNPoE, 2016, paras. 80–82).

As in other conflicts, ammunition supplies have represented one of the major operational challenges for both belligerent parties. Government forces have been able to rely on better logistics—which have improved progressively, including through the sustained use of air assets—and on procurements delivered from early 2014 onwards. Although some of these acquisitions resulted from procurement contracts signed several months before the crisis erupted in December 2013, others appear to be more recent and to respond to the government's need to reverse the initial negative military trend.

All these SPLA procurements—in particular attack helicopters, amphibious vehicles, and, to a smaller extent, armoured personnel carriers and military trucks—certainly contributed to the government forces' tactical capacity and logistics, enabling the SPLA to maintain a visible presence and to deploy troops even during the rainy season, a period of the year previously favourable to the rebels.

In contrast, the difficulty of ensuring supply lines from outside South Sudan severely affected the operational capacity of the opposition forces, which consequently sought to capture as much materiel as possible while temporarily controlling major towns and SPLA garrisons. They also managed to secure some external, although not decisive, support from Sudan. The weapons and ammunition captured from rebel forces and inspected in Unity and Upper Nile states, in particular with respect to their diversity and compatibility with the SPLM-IO equipment,³⁵³ suggest that Sudan may not have aimed to bolster the rebellion by providing supplies; rather, Khartoum may have sought to maintain low-level instability. Moreover, the examined materiel does not indicate that any long-standing agreements have existed between the GoS and the rebels' leadership.³⁵⁴

Since the conflict erupted in December 2013, the South Sudanese government has made considerable efforts—and invested substantial financial resources—to be able to withstand the burden imposed by the widespread armed insurgency. The GRSS secured extensive military supplies and significantly improved the SPLA's equipment, operational support, and logistical capacities.³⁵⁵

Although it is impossible to ascertain whether repeated calls for international sanctions may have accelerated such military procurement efforts, it is clear that the threat of a possible arms embargo has not incited the parties to change their approach. It thus seems likely that if an exclusively military response to the South Sudanese crisis cannot represent a sustainable solution, a sanctions-based international diplomatic strategy might not be a fully effective alternative. 🇺🇸

IV. Political and military tensions in Unity state

This section focuses on some of the key political, economic, and military tensions that have developed since the current conflict broke out in December 2013—and that will need to be addressed if Unity state is to enjoy a sustainable peace.

Pariang county and the Dinka of Unity state

In many senses, Pariang county is something of an outlier in Unity. One of only two Dinka counties in the state, it experienced the second civil war in a distinct way. While much of the rest of the state was riven by clashes between GoS-aligned militias and the SPLA, Pariang remained an SPLA stronghold throughout the conflict.³⁵⁶ During much of this time, Mabek Lang was in control of the state. A leading commander of the SPLA, Mabek Lang is from the family of one of Pariang's spiritual leaders.³⁵⁷ He remained the head of the SPLM in Pariang until the end of 2015 and, despite repeated changes of commissioners and public disapproval of his authority, he retained something of an iron grip on the county until Mayol Kur Akuei was appointed governor of Ruweng state in December 2015.³⁵⁸

Immediately following the signing of the CPA, Mabek Lang was appointed commissioner of Pariang county; he was extremely close to Taban Deng, then the governor of Unity state. When Taban Deng reconciled with Riek Machar, his relationship with Mabek Lang soured. The Pariang commissioner wanted to remain loyal to Juba, and this tension eventually led to Mabek Lang's sacking in November 2012.³⁵⁹ Taban Deng mobilized existing tensions in Pariang between those loyal to Mabek Lang on the one hand, and leaders who were unhappy with his domination of both the county and the local SPLM party mechanism on the other.³⁶⁰

Mabek Lang went to Juba, where he began to lobby Kiir to replace Taban Deng.³⁶¹ His replacement as Pariang commissioner was Angelo Majok Gadet, who belongs to the faction of the Pariang Dinka that has been consistently critical of Mabek Lang.³⁶² Majok Gadet's tenure as commissioner was relatively

successful. He supported the development of Ajuong Thok, a camp for Sudanese refugees, which the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNMISS had been pushing for, as they considered Yida—the principal refugee camp in the county—too close to the area controlled by the SPLM–N within Sudan. Sudanese refugees in Yida had opposed the move, as the camp’s close connection to Sudan allowed for frequent movement back into the Nuba Mountains.³⁶³

Majok Gadet’s interest in the camp was partly due to the hope that it would improve conditions for Panaru Dinka communities in the Ajuong Thok area, through the disbursement of international funds and the establishment of a market.³⁶⁴ However, local Panaru Dinka in Ajuong Thok have repeatedly voiced discontent over what they see as international NGOs supporting Sudanese refugees rather than local communities.³⁶⁵ Majok Gadet claims that he was then dismissed due to his opposition to Taban Deng’s governorship; he was replaced—albeit briefly—by William Deng Ayii, whose brief reign as commissioner was characterized by an extremely hostile relationship with the international NGOs working in Pariang county, after he commandeered a fleet of UNHCR vehicles for his own use.³⁶⁶

When Nguen Monytil returned to power as governor of Unity state, Deng Ayii and the anti-Mabek Lang faction of the Panaru Dinka, who had sided with Taban Deng, were marginalized: Monyluang Manyiel Thoul became the commissioner of Pariang and Mabek Lang was appointed deputy governor of the state. Monyluang Manyiel has traditionally been close to Mabek Lang and, since taking office, has supported the deputy governor politically, while marginalizing his opponents.³⁶⁷ Anti-Mabek Lang politicians also advocated the replacement of governor Nguen Monytil with Stephen Buoy, also a Bul Nuer, and then the commander of the SPLA’s 1st Division, stationed in Renk, Upper Nile; unlike the Monytil family, Buoy had shown loyalty to the SPLA during the second civil war.³⁶⁸

The logic of the changing political situation in Pariang county can only be understood in terms of the politics of the state as a whole. Over the past ten years, at the state level, power in Unity has been characterized by an intra-Nuer alternation between Taban Deng and Nguen Monytil, and, more abstractly, between the Jikany and Bul Nuer. This intra-Nuer split has corresponded to

a split in the Panaru Dinka of Pariang county. In Pariang, both Mabek Lang and his opponents have opportunistically sided with much more powerful Nuer constituencies at the state level—in order to obtain power at the county level. This segmentary logic mirrors that of the Nuer leaders of Unity state in the context of broader power struggles that occur at a national level in Juba, and that have led Nguen Monytil to support the GRSS in Juba.

Political changes in Pariang thus echo, in a minor key, developments in Bentiu. Complicating this power struggle is the sentiment of the people in the county. Despite political alliances between Nuer and Panaru Dinka politicians, county residents began the civil war extremely concerned about their prospects; cut off from Warrap, they felt isolated and worried that they would bear the brunt of Nuer revenge for the massacres in Juba in December 2013.³⁶⁹ In 2015, before the announcement of the 28-state plan, including the new 'Ruweng state', Pariang politicians were already calling for 'Pariang to be out of Unity'. They used the following argument:

*Is [former rebel leader David] Yau Yau [who had obtained the creation of an autonomous Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) in 2014] stronger than Pariang people? We will do something like the GPAA.*³⁷⁰

Anxiety regarding Nuer domination of politics in the state also stems from Pariang's experience since the signing of the CPA in 2005. As elsewhere in the state, there was widespread discontent that the county did not receive any of the oil money that was supposed to be devoted to state improvement. In Pariang, this sentiment takes on a particularly ethnic bent. In the Nuer-populated parts of Unity, the Nuer tended to feel that Taban Deng was simply using the money for personal advancement; in Pariang, it was a question of development being withheld from Unity's *Dinka* counties—a sentiment accentuated by the fact that several of the state's oil fields are in Pariang. Taban Deng is also blamed—somewhat unfairly—for acquiescing to the Sudanese control of Kharasana and Hejljij—or Aliny and Pan Thou, to give those areas their *Dinka* names—which the Panaru Dinka claim as their territory.³⁷¹

Antagonism in the county towards Taban Deng, despite Mabek Lang's initially close relationship with him, is also rooted in a series of land grabs made by the then governor, who owns fields in the south of Pariang and has a residence

at Manga, which the Panaru Dinka claim is their land.³⁷² These land issues make the demarcation of the border of a future Ruweng state, as postulated by Kiir's decree of October 2015, extremely contentious. While the carving out of a new mono-ethnic state for the Dinka of Unity reflects Kiir's more general plan of consolidating Dinka territorial control, it also indicates the increasing power of the Padang Dinka at the national level.

The Dinka of Pariang and Abiemnom are both part of the broader Padang Dinka, a riverine group of Dinka that can be found along the waterways of the contested Sudan–South Sudan border, including in Renk and Melut, Upper Nile, and in Abyei. Since 2005, the Padang have had far less influence on national politics than the Bor Dinka of Jonglei and the Malual Dinka of Northern Bahr el Ghazal, to name only two of the most prominent groups. Indeed, from 2005 to 2012, before Kiir sacked much of his cabinet, the most prominent Padang Dinka politicians, such as Deng Alor Kuol—the former minister of foreign affairs—were all from Abyei.

That situation has changed, partly due to the increasing power of Stephen Dhieu Dau, then minister of petroleum, a Padang Dinka from Melut, Upper Nile.³⁷³ During the second civil war, Dhieu Dau was not involved in politics; he was a low-level banker in Khartoum, while his wife was involved in the SPLM.³⁷⁴ After she passed away in 2005, Pagan Amum supported Dhieu Dau, who initially attempted to contest the governorship of Upper Nile in 2010. In the face of widespread opposition, and given Kiir's fear that his candidature would ignite larger political tensions in the state, Dhieu Dau was withdrawn. After serving as Kiir's campaign officer in Malakal, he was appointed minister of petroleum in July 2013, in what may represent the quickest rise through the SPLM of any individual since 2005.³⁷⁵

Since the current civil war began in December 2013, the GRSS has found itself increasingly reliant on the Padang Dinka of Upper Nile, whose militias control Paloich, the sole oil field that is still in production, and thus the country's financial lifeline. Johnson Olonyi's defection to the SPLM–IO further entrenched the power of Dhieu Dau and of the Padang Dinka, especially in Upper Nile. The dismissal of Simon Kun Puoch, the former governor of Upper Nile, and the appointment of Chol Thon, a Melut Dinka close to Dhieu Dau, are also reflective of this shift.³⁷⁶

Thus the close of 2015 brought with it a strange situation for Pariang and Abiemnom. The Padang Dinka's increasing importance in Upper Nile had led to more power for the community at the national level. People in both Renk and Pariang talked of Dhieu Dau as a leader of the Padang Dinka. The increasing prominence of the Padang Dinka ushered in increasing financial resources, via the Ministry of Petroleum, and weaponry, through the 700-strong Padang Dinka militias that guarded the oil fields of Pariang and Melut counties.³⁷⁷ When Kiir announced his decree and the creation of Ruweng state, effectively granting the Padang Dinka control of their own government, Pariang erupted in jubilation—civilians and soldiers alike fired into the air in celebration.³⁷⁸

Even if it were to be carried out, however, the creation of a new state would not resolve the problems of the Padang Dinka in Unity. Just as with the creation of the Sudan–South Sudan border, administrative changes belie substantive interconnections among groups. Other than a small land bridge to what is now Warrap, and destined to be Twic state under the terms of Kiir's decree, Ruweng state will be surrounded on all sides by Nuer communities. These are the communities with which the Padang Dinka must trade, and whose land they must traverse to reach the state capital and to maintain vital trading links for both counties. Abiemnom, in particular, has a long history of co-habitation and generally good relations with the Bul Nuer of Mayom and with Nuer communities to the south.³⁷⁹ The danger posed by the creation of new states is that ethnic discord may be created; Padang self-government comes at the cost of intercommunal ties that are necessary to sustain life in what was called Unity state.

The Unity oil fields

Unlike in Upper Nile state, all the oil fields in Unity are currently offline. Indeed, while many international experts have argued that the oil fields are central strategic targets in the current civil war, the past two and a half years of war have not borne out this assertion.³⁸⁰ As the oil production sites were turned off at the very beginning of the war, there was little that the SPLM–IO could hope to obtain by contesting them. In contrast, the domination of both cattle and women have emerged as central objectives in a war that is focused on controlling people and the resources central to Nilotic life in South Sudan.



A well and electric poles of the Thar Jath oil fields. All of Unity state's oil installations were shut down days after the new war started in South Sudan, in December 2013. © Jérôme Tubiana

At the beginning of the conflict, the SPLM-IO repeatedly claimed that it would seize control of the oil fields and divert oil revenue to the rebels.³⁸¹ This claim has proven to be bombast. Khartoum relies on the oil transit fees that it gains from the GRSS for moving oil through the pipelines that connect the South Sudanese oil fields to Port Sudan. Unlike during the second civil war, when Sudan and South Sudan were still one country, any attempt by Khartoum to use the SPLM-IO to control Juba's oil fields—as it used the SSSDF—would be seen as a violation of South Sudanese national sovereignty and lead to widespread international condemnation. It is unclear whether oil acquired in such a manner could even be sold.

With respect to the oil fields, the SPLM-IO's objective was achieved almost immediately: to shut down oil production, thereby massively reducing GRSS income and thus the amount that it could spend on the war effort. Military strategy in relation to the oil fields during the first two years of the conflict, as

exemplified by SPLM–IO activity at the beginning of 2015, was to ensure that the area around the oil fields would be insecure enough that the oil companies would not return and attempt to repair the pipelines.

Another reason to doubt the SPLM–IO’s claim that it would divert oil revenue is that the pipelines were damaged during the emergency shutdown. The oil production sites at the northern Unity oil fields—which comprise Unity, Toma South, and Tor—are in relatively good shape, with only copper wiring taken from them, and some minor structural damage.³⁸² It should also be noted that the SPLA’s repeated allegations that the SPLM–IO intentionally damaged the oil production sites have not been proven and remain doubtful; the SPLM–IO gains nothing from destroying machinery and sites from which it stands to prosper if it one day gains power in Unity state.³⁸³

Shortly after the SPLA dislodged the SPLM–IO from Panakuach in June 2015, Dhieu Dau announced that the oil fields of the north-west of Unity state—excluding Thar Jath—would soon recommence production, as long as the area could be kept secure. This claim was also bombast. In private, oil company workers say that they will need to see a much more sustained period of calm in the state before work can begin on the pipelines.³⁸⁴ The pipes had already been damaged by the emergency shutdown in 2012, and then they were further damaged by the shutdown of December 2013.³⁸⁵ Given how long it will take to put the oil fields back online, the SPLA does not consider them to be of short-term strategic importance either. During the 1990s, Khartoum managed to secure the oil fields using Paulino Matiep’s Bul Nuer militias; at this writing, however, Khartoum was sheltering SPLM–IO members and the GRSS Bul Nuer militias had yet to evince the same quality of control of Unity state as that demonstrated by Matiep. Due to the unstable security situation, troops at the oil fields are paid infrequently, and the fields themselves have changed hands multiple times.³⁸⁶

In stark contrast to Thar Jath, which Juba controls only tentatively and whose prospects for coming back online remain distant, the oil fields at Paloich, Upper Nile, have been under constant government control since October 2015 and retain their strategic significance. That Thar Jath has changed hands so many times is in part indicative of its lack of strategic importance, and thus the absence of a substantive SPLA defensive force. While Unity’s oil fields will surely be a



Both sides have been accused of recruiting child soldiers, in particular the Bul Nuer forces led by Matthew Puljang, which were recently integrated into the SPLA. © Jérôme Tubiana

somewhat important source of income for a future South Sudanese government, they have only marginal importance in the current conflict. As of July 2016, oil executives estimated that even in conditions of peace and security, the pipeline would require another six months, at a minimum, to become operational.³⁸⁷

The Bul Nuer

One of the central problems that must be resolved if Unity is to have a sustainable peaceful future is the place of the Bul Nuer in any future state government, whether that is in a unified Unity state, or in a Northern Lich state, as per Kiir's decree. As of October 2015, the Bul Nuer were internally divided and had attracted the resentment of other Nuer communities; since they largely sided with the government, their role in a future state that is to have an interim SPLM-IO governor remains opaque.

The reasons that led to divisions within the Bul Nuer community are far from simple. There are sectional differences between some of the leaders of the Bul Nuer.³⁸⁸ For instance, Nguen and Bapiny Monytil are from the Nyang section, Maloh (or Barpoh) subsection of the Kwach, from western Mayom, as is Matthew Puljang; Peter Gatdet is from the Cieng Duok subsection of the Cieng Bol section of the Kwach; and James Gadwell and Paulino Matiep are from the Gok section of western Mayom.³⁸⁹ However, these sectional differences are not determinative of the GRSS vs. SPLM–IO split in the Bul Nuer; one finds members of the Kwach and the Gok on both sides of the conflict.

Further complicating matters is that there is a thick web of affinal relations that joins up all the major commanders on both sides. As an indication: Gatdeang, the principal Bul Nuer prophet, has children who are married to high-ranking members of both the SPLA and the SPLM–IO.³⁹⁰ Peter Gatdet married Nguen Monytil's sister, while Matthew Puljang is Gatdet's sister's son.³⁹¹ These family ties do not prevent political divisions, nor direct violence committed by one leader against another. On 12 July 2015, for instance, one of Peter Gatdet's sons, Yak Gatdet Yak, left the UNMISS PoC in Bor with five companions and attempted to travel to the Lou Nuer areas of Jonglei. Officially, the SPLM–IO claimed that the SPLA intercepted the unarmed group, turned back the five companions, and killed Gatdet's son.³⁹² The attack, however, was carefully staged. Bul Nuer present in the PoC had lured Gatdet's son with the promise of safe passage, and then promptly killed him. The operation was reportedly planned and ordered by a group of high-level Bul Nuer commanders, including Matthew Puljang and James Gadwell.³⁹³

Neither sectional loyalty nor family ties can explain the divisions among the Bul Nuer. A partial explanation involves the weakness of the SPLA in Unity state in December 2013 and the animosity felt towards Taban Deng by Nguen Monytil and the former SSLM/A, as a result of which there was much to be gained by siding with the government against the nascent rebel movement. At this writing, the Bul Nuer elite around Nguen and Bapiny Monytil, Tayeb Gatluak, and Matthew Puljang were the most militarily powerful actors in Unity state.³⁹⁴ In addition to Puljang and Bapiny Monytil, other former members of the SSLA have done extremely well by siding with the GRSS. Gordon Buay Malek, for example—the former SSLA spokesperson and an SSDF commander before that—was made an ambassador in September 2014.³⁹⁵

Personal enrichment during the current conflict has followed well-trodden paths. In the areas of Mayom county that are under government control, Matthew Puljang has been accused of confiscating livestock from Bul Nuer who have joined the SPLM-IO, as well as from defectors from his own forces; he is also suspected of confiscating the cattle that these men had given as bridewealth, thus effectively divorcing them from their wives. Bul Nuer elders recall that such tactics were practised during the second civil war. Puljang is an exemplary case of someone who has personally profited from the conflict, not by accumulating money, but in ways meaningful to a cattle-based Nilotic economy; he has leveraged his military and political strength to augment the livestock in his herd, marry additional wives, and displace or attack other Bul Nuer commanders who were vying for his position.

In so doing, Puljang is following the example of Paulino Matiep, who effectively treated parts of Unity state as his personal fiefdom during the second civil war. Matiep occupies a prominent place in the collective Bul Nuer imagination. In a June 2015 interview, Peter Gatdet asserted that ‘there is only one Bul who has the power. After Matiep, it is Gatdet.’³⁹⁶ By mid-2015, however, Gatdet had already been marginalized within the SPLM-IO in Unity state, and the Bul Nuer had largely decided to side with the GRSS; it is Puljang, and not Gatdet, who has taken Matiep’s place, at least for now. SPLM-IO leaders recognized this and blamed Gatdet and Makal Kuol for failing to mobilize the Bul Nuer on the opposition side.³⁹⁷ Riek Machar, for instance, noted, ‘Puljang is really influential, the only asset for mobilizing the Bul.’³⁹⁸ Puljang’s former comrade Carlo Kuol observed that ‘without Puljang, the government would have lost Unity’—and possibly more.³⁹⁹

The GRSS in Juba used the animosity felt by Nguen Monytil and Matthew Puljang towards Taban Deng to split the presumptive opposition, and to bring over the Bul Nuer from what many considered their proper place at the heart of the broader Nuer rebellion in the state. Meanwhile, the GRSS’s weakness in Unity in December 2013, after the 4th Division had defected, offered a possibility to the SSLA and Nguen Monytil to consolidate their hold on Mayom county and the state as a whole. As much as the government utilized militia forces, the militia commanders used the government for their own ends.

In view of the chequered past of Nguen Monytil and Puljang, it may be assumed that their loyalty to the GRSS relies on a calculus of benefit. However,

Taban Deng's appointment as vice president in July 2016, which contributed to Bapiny Monytil's resignation in October 2016, may make the calculus more fragile, and major political shifts might take place. Members of the Bul Nuer elite on both sides of the war insist that if the Bul Nuer were under threat as a group, then both government-aligned and SPLM-IO members of the community would join together to defend the group.⁴⁰⁰ Such a situation could arise if the SPLM-IO governor of a future Northern Lich state were not drawn from the Bul Nuer, and other Nuer sections secured tacit support for retaliatory raiding on Mayom. Recent intra-Bul Nuer raiding might have damaged sectional loyalty and created further divisions within the Bul Nuer, but loyalty to the government remains a low priority for all the Bul Nuer leaders in the current conflict. A Bul Nuer leader for Northern Lich state, even if drawn from the SPLM-IO, would not necessarily be an impossible proposition for Puljang and Nguen Monytil.

Indeed, despite the dominance of their leaders, the Bul Nuer community as a whole has not seen its situation substantively improve during the conflict. Moreover, Khartoum could recruit Bul Nuer as spoilers—perhaps under Gatdet—should a future settlement in Unity state seem unsatisfactory to the community. The conflict has had some deleterious consequences for the Bul Nuer: their relations with other Nuer deteriorated considerably, and those with their Dinka neighbours from Warrap did not improve. Dinka cattle raiders from Warrap have continued to raid in Mayom county, despite the Bul Nuer's putative alignment with the government. By August 2015, 45,000 people from Mayom had been displaced to Warrap and Central Equatoria, if they had not fled to Sudan due to the absence of supplies, given that trade routes into Kordofan were blocked (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015w).

Raiding has also continued, regardless of political loyalties. Dinka from Warrap raided the Bul Nuer in January–February, April, and June 2014, as well as in February and May 2015, taking at least 3,800 cows and leaving many dead.⁴⁰¹ These raids indicate the degree to which this war has opened up a space for raiding, even if it is not approved by the government and although it has an ethnic rather than a political logic, at least on the Unity–Warrap border. Indeed, the Dinka raiders often appear to be government-aligned troops; Bul Nuer reported that these raids included SPLA soldiers and government militia forces

in uniform and equipped with RPGs and PKMs. Some Bul Nuer accused SPLA soldiers in Mayenjur, on the Warrap side of the border, of arming the raiders. One Bul Nuer who was involved in retaliatory raiding said: 'We think the government is encouraging them to raid us. Puljang is not supporting us. Since he came back [to the government], nothing good has come to us. Raiding continues.'⁴⁰² Bul Nuer cattle guards also say that Puljang will only arm them if they integrate into his forces or participate in operations on an ad hoc basis.⁴⁰³

This pattern of raiding predates the current conflict. Interviewed Bul Nuer mentioned that raiders from Warrap included SPLA soldiers with RPGs as early as 2011.⁴⁰⁴ At that time, the Bul Nuer were thought of as supporters of the SSLM/A, and thus a legitimate target; again, political developments provided a cover for raiding. This was also the case during the second civil war, when the SPLA raided the Bul Nuer, who were largely aligned with Matiep's SSDF or one of the other pro-Khartoum militias. Antagonism between the Bul Nuer and the Dinka of Warrap thus has political and ethnic roots, but appears to be set in motion whenever political opportunities arise; raids can be carried out either with a political justification or in the context of conflict and insecurity, in which raiding can flourish.

Since the signing of the CPA, the Bul Nuer have felt systematically marginalized by successive governments in Bentiu; in addition, their ability to respond to raiding has suffered because they have been repeatedly targeted by disarmament campaigns since 2006.⁴⁰⁵ While Taban Deng tried to disarm the Bul Nuer in 2005–13, no attempt was made to disarm the Dinka of Warrap, who were later armed as pro-government militias.⁴⁰⁶ Disarmament in Mayom county generated something of a negative feedback loop: disarmament was part of the reason for the SSLM/A rebellion, and the rebellion invited further disarmament campaigns. Surprisingly, disarmament also continued after Nguen Monytil took power—an indication of the latent ethnic oppositions and suspicions that often prove more enduring in South Sudan than do changes in the elite-level leadership.

Yet despite the continuation of pre-war raiding patterns and the massive levels of hunger and displacement in Mayom county, the war has also offered opportunities to the Bul Nuer. Raiding can now take place alongside military operations, as Bul Nuer raiders move into southern Unity either as government forces, or accompanying them. One Bul Nuer raider explained that while he had

suffered losses due to disease in Mayom county, these were balanced out by the livestock he had gained while raiding.⁴⁰⁷ For Puljang and Nguen Monytil, siding with the government has brought certain benefits. This is only partly true for the Bul Nuer as a whole. This political alignment is less a question of loyalty than it is an ongoing evaluation of benefits and duties, as the calculus can change in a very short time period.

This leaves the Bul Nuer in an uncertain position in the state. At the elite level, there has been widespread discontent with Nguen Monytil's rule, in part due to the difficult position of the Bul Nuer in Mayom county, as outlined above. Numerous interviewees have reported on plans to unseat him.⁴⁰⁸ Meanwhile, Nguen Monytil has been assiduous in dismissing those he suspects of plotting against him. In October 2014, he discharged his powerful state security adviser, John Malok Matai, who then alleged that Nguen Monytil had tried to have him killed.⁴⁰⁹ In February 2015, one of Nguen Monytil's advisers, Tungwar Gatluak—the brother of Kiir's adviser, Tut Gatluak—defected to the opposition.

Despite this discontent, it is not clear who might replace Nguen Monytil, nor what sense such a replacement would have if, as seems to be the case, the SPLM-IO is to nominate the governor of Northern Lich state. Critics of Nguen Monytil mentioned Stephen Buay, a Bul Nuer who had headed the SPLA's 1st Division in Upper Nile, as a possible replacement; he was appointed 4th Division commander in Bentiu in December 2015. Yet, in February 2016, he was arrested together with fellow Bul Joseph Manyuat, allegedly at the instigation of Nguen; this move further aggravated the divisions within the Bul community, including between Nguen and his own brother Bapiny (*Sudan Tribune*, 2016c).⁴¹⁰

If the SPLM-IO selects the governor, it is uncertain what Nguen Monytil and Puljang's reactions will be. Thus far they have endorsed Kiir's decree establishing 28 states; however, they are not likely to surrender the power they have gained in Unity state since the beginning of the conflict. Passionate discontent could lead the SSLM/A—whose support was critical to the government during the last campaign—to change sides again, or to become its own side, disrupting the peace process. Some of the same calculations must be made with regard to Peter Gatdet. Currently in Khartoum, the general has little military power in



Kerubino Ruay, a Bul Nuer brigadier general in the SPLA, was wounded in Panakuach in April 2015.
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Unity state. Yet, in view of widespread discontent over the peace agreement among the Bul Nuer, Khartoum could also equip Gatdet to be a spoiler.⁴¹¹

Both of these possibilities will turn on the reaction of the Bul Nuer to the imposition of Kiir's 28 states. Many Bul Nuer civilians talk about having 'always been at war, stuck between the Dinka and other enemies'.⁴¹² Current levels of hostility towards the Bul Nuer from the other Nuer sections of Unity are very high. Retaliatory raiding and recriminatory attacks would push the Bul Nuer away from the government. The fear of such attacks is among the reasons why it seems unlikely that the government-aligned Bul Nuer elite would concede much power. On 23 August 2015, the commissioner of Mayom county, John Bol, appealed to Salva Kiir to save the Bul Nuer by separating them from the rest of the Nuer:

Already every Nuer from Unity state hates us [Bul Nuer] because we have stood with you as president of republic of South Sudan. And again you want to hand us [over] to our enemies, this is unacceptable. You should have separated us from the rest (Sudan Tribune, 2015aa).

However, as in Pariang, a formal separation may cause as much conflict as it resolves. The reality is that the Bul Nuer rely on interconnections with other Nuer communities in the state, and a formal separation—even a formal state—will not stop retaliatory raiding if there is a broader change in the power structure of the Upper Nile region. The only possibility for a sustainable peace would be a large peace conference, of the sort actualized by Nuer communities after the 'Nuer civil war' of the second civil war. That remains difficult to envision given the continuing tension over the political leadership of the state.

In view of the tension between Taban Deng and Nguen Monytil, and also between the Bul Nuer and other Nuer sections—with whom they would have to share a state, according to Kiir's decree—the creation of Northern Lich state may cause as many problems as it solves; indeed, it may lead to an intensification of the intra-Nuer conflict in Unity. If the Bul Nuer and Nguen Monytil feel unable to prevent an SPLM–IO Nuer leader who is hostile to the Bul from coming to power in the new state, that might present reason enough for the Bul Nuer to continue the war and try to disrupt the peace process. For the Bul Nuer, it remains a serious possibility that peace will bring with it a worse war.

The politics of humanitarianism

As outlined in Section III, one of the principal reasons that the SPLM–IO’s campaign in Unity state has been unsuccessful is its inability to obtain sufficient ammunition. Logistics has proved a central problem for both sides in this conflict, as well as for the civilians involved. To a great extent, efforts to get enough food, medical resources, and ammunition have not only proved the central problematic of the civil war, but have also dictated the course of the conflict itself. Military movements have been as much about acquiring the resources necessary to live and fight as they have been about inflicting losses on the enemy.

In times of relative security, the population of southern Unity moved between villages, and to the Rubkona PoC—to collect food—and the MSF hospital in Leer for medical treatment. Increasingly, the war has seen a shift away from pastoralist transhumance—which involves the movement of people with their cattle from dry- to rainy-season pastures—to a sort of humanitarian transhumance, which entails the movement of civilian populations from one mobile aid point to another in a desperate effort to sustain lives. Both parties to this conflict have actively sought to shape and control such movement, whether by displacing people, or by urging them to head into a given area and then encouraging the provision of humanitarian aid.

For the GRSS, such strategies have a double function: they force civilians to move into areas under government control, and they allow its troops to sustain themselves by taking food and relief supplies from the civilian population.⁴¹³ These strategies echo SPLA and SPLA–Nasir manipulation of aid supplies during the second civil war.⁴¹⁴ In southern Unity, the government pursued a strategy whereby certain areas were declared safe zones for civilians, while the rest of a given county would be subject to raiding from government-aligned militias. Civilians would thus be forced into government-controlled areas, while allowing government-aligned militias to take the livestock from wild zones in the rest of the state. Simultaneously, the SPLA would try to block the distribution of relief supplies in rebel-held areas, accentuating the plight of civilians that government forces held to be rebels, and trying to force them into government-held areas. Once aid organizations had delivered aid to civilians, the SPLA could then either raid the distribution, as it did in Dablual, Mayendit county, or else tax or otherwise acquire the aid that was distributed.⁴¹⁵

While such looting is part of a broader government strategy, the soldiers on the ground have little choice in the matter. Given that the SPLA is not adequately supplying its troops with either food or salaries, looting and living off the civilians in conflict-affected areas has become the modus operandi of the SPLA in the current civil war. Soldiers are explicitly expected to survive on their own, and this requires predatory relations with the civilian population, as was the case during the second civil war. Similarly, given the absence of ammunition and weapons for the SPLM-IO, rebel forces are expected to acquire their own guns, leading to a further pattern characteristic of the war in general: the SPLM-IO raids SPLA positions not to achieve military victory, but to acquire ammunition and weapons.

The SPLM-IO has also been attempting to control humanitarian actors, albeit with less success. On 11 March 2015, the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Agency—the branch of the SPLM-IO that oversees humanitarian activities—announced that it would charge a 5 per cent income tax on the salaries of South Sudanese employees of aid agencies working in areas under its control. It was the agency's fifth such attempt in as many months. It was unsuccessful—as were its previous attempts—since the SPLM-IO lacks the capacity to systematically collect taxes and needs the aid agencies far more than they need it. The SPLM-IO has extensive experience manipulating aid flows from the second civil war, when control over such flows was an essential part of the war effort. By December 2013, the SPLM-IO had already begun to coordinate relief efforts.⁴¹⁶

The politics of humanitarianism poses a problem for the politics of humanitarian actors. As elsewhere in the world, impartiality, independence, and a commitment to the humanitarian imperative are central planks of the humanitarian commitment in South Sudan. Too frequently, however, these very principles can be exploited by the belligerent parties; access to rebel-held areas of the country can be denied, for example, and civilians pushed into government-held areas, either by force or by enticement with—precisely—aid. Although these civilians may indeed be in need of food aid—as in Dabluat—such humanitarian assistance has the effect of creating an asymmetry of distribution that doubly punishes those who live in rebel-held areas: they are not only attacked by the government, but also denied food aid after their own food stores have been looted. The army has frequently taken at least part of the food and non-food items



Leer villagers walk back to their shelters in the bush after having received food aid in June 2014.
© Jérôme Tubiana

distributed to government-held areas, accentuating the asymmetry between the forces and sustaining the fighters in the conflict.⁴¹⁷

Combatants in the conflict in South Sudan see the aid that humanitarian actors provide as a resource. In this context, aid workers struggle to apply humanitarian principles, as these are predicated on a division between civilians and armed belligerents that is not meaningful to most of the combatants in this conflict. Collective punishment, and the control of cattle and other resources—civilian populations in general and women in particular—constitute important parts of the conflict dynamics in Unity state. A failure to understand such a world among the humanitarian aid workers, together with a tendency to normatively reprimand combatants for failing to abide by this distinction, also blinds humanitarian actors to the way their aid is exploited in the conflict.⁴¹⁸

The protection of civilians site in Rubkona

The prior paragraph points to an intellectual failure on the part of the humanitarian community, but it does not indict humanitarian organizations at work in South Sudan, which are trying to do a difficult job in very trying circumstances. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the UNMISS PoC sites in South Sudan. UN peacekeeping missions have rarely employed hardened safe havens for civilians since the Srebrenica massacre in July 1995, when Bosnian Serb forces attacked an area that United Nations Security Council Resolution 819 had declared a safe haven freed from armed troops, and mandated UN peacekeepers to protect the site. When the Serb forces attacked, the Dutch army units protecting the site were ordered not to intervene, and a weeklong systematic slaughter of more than 7,000 Bosnian Muslims took place.⁴¹⁹

Unlike the safe haven of Srebrenica, however, the PoC sites in South Sudan were not pre-planned spaces. Every UNMISS base had contingency plans for what to do if civilians sought protection in the event of conflict. These plans were for temporary accommodations, with the expected IDP numbers far below the tens of thousands currently living in the PoC sites. The Rubkona contingency plan, for instance, was for 5,000 people.⁴²⁰ UNMISS was largely unprepared for what was to happen in December 2013. Up to that point, its twin mandate had primarily been focused on state-building and the protection of civilians (UNSC, 2011). With the beginning of the conflict, UNMISS found itself in the uncomfortable position of having assisted in the building of the state and, in many cases, the training of soldiers and policemen who subsequently attacked the civilians they were meant to protect. The two prongs of the UNMISS mandate were at cross purposes. In reformulations of the UNMISS mandate, state-building was dropped and the focus was placed squarely on the protection of civilians (UNSC, 2013; 2014; UNSG, 2014a).

This has left large parts of UNMISS, such as civil affairs, in what several of the mission's officials called a 'holding pattern', which has seen questions of security replace stymied plans to assist in the development of the country.⁴²¹ It has also placed greater focus on UNMISS capacity to carry out what is now its primary mandate: the protection of civilians. UN Security Council Resolution 2155 stipulates that UNMISS will 'protect civilians under threat of physical

violence, irrespective of the source of such violence, within its capacity and areas of deployment' (UNSC, 2014, para. 4(a)(i)).

'The problem', one UNMISS official said, 'is that the mission does not have the capacity to protect civilians outside of the PoCs'.⁴²² Surrounded by hardened defences, PoC sites have the appearance of being controllable, which has led the mission to focus all its energy on protecting the civilians within their walls; yet there is no UNMISS base in southern Unity, such that people there are exposed to the worst excesses of the war. This is not to criticize UNMISS. As multiple officials confirmed: the mission lacks the military capacity and the political will to prevent violence against civilians outside of the PoC sites.⁴²³ As a consequence, however, the mission's objective has become myopic and technocratic, focused on securing the PoC sites and providing goods and services within them. 'In a way', one humanitarian aid worker commented, 'the only people who took the UNMISS mandate seriously were the civilians themselves—by fleeing to the UNMISS base, they forced the UN to actually protect them'.⁴²⁴

UNMISS is struggling with a mission whose scope is national, whereas its effective range of operations outside of Juba—barring patrols and escorts—is restricted to the UN bases themselves. Meanwhile, the PoC sites, which were designed to be temporary, seem increasingly likely to endure.⁴²⁵ In Unity state, the PoC site at Rubkona is somewhat protected from the conflict dynamics outside its hardened exterior; at the same time, it is a microcosm of that outside world.

Conditions in the camp were initially very poor: the contingency site was on swampy land, and there were no facilities. The first site to be created is now known as PoC 1. It was first settled by Dinka civilians and Dinka military officers who gave up their arms on entering the base, fearing that the Nuer might retaliate against them in response to events in Juba.⁴²⁶

The demographics of the PoC site have since tracked the unfolding conflict. After the GRSS retook Bentiu on 10 January 2014, the camp was roughly divided in thirds among the Dinka who had fled the initial violence, Nuer who had escaped during the government assault, and foreign traders. Since then, however, the population has become increasingly Nuer, as people have fled from the SPLA's advance on southern Unity. POC 1 continues to shelter non-southern Nuer, whose relationships with the other camp residents have been tense. As of late 2015, the camp's 140,000 residents lived in dire conditions: severe

malnutrition, poor hygiene, and a significantly elevated incidence of malaria. In August and September 2015, MSF was treating 4,000 patients per week.⁴²⁷

The PoC residents at Rubkona have split into ethnic blocks. Indeed, if there were a model for Kiir's ethnic division of South Sudan into 28 states, it would be the balkanization of the South Sudanese population in the PoCs. In Rubkona, the Bul Nuer, along with some remaining foreign traders, dwell in PoC 1, surrounded by a buffer zone that separates it from the other parts of the PoC site. As the loyalties of the various armed factions outside the site's walls have not transformed as radically as in Upper Nile, there have not been as many realignments within the PoC site itself. However, the wall protecting the PoC from the rest of Unity state is extremely vulnerable.

On 10 January 2014, as government-aligned forces entered Rubkona along a road that runs next to the UNMISS base, approximately 2,000 Dinka civilians who were sheltering in the camp jumped over the fence and joined the attacking forces. Witnesses report that these men were given weapons by the government forces and that they beat civilians around the base, burning their dwellings (HRW, 2014, p. 60). During the April 2014 SPLM-IO assault on Bentiu, some Nuer civilians jumped the fence to participate in the rebel attack.⁴²⁸

Such activities have helped to fuel the GRSS's hostility towards the Rubkona PoC site. Juba sees the site as a reserve of potential rebel fighters, who could be summoned if the SPLM-IO attempts to recapture the state capital; it is also aware that the SPLM-IO recruited combatants in the camp and sent them north to Panakuach in 2014.⁴²⁹ It is certainly true that there are former soldiers from both sides staying in the PoC site. Humanitarian aid workers insist that these men have just as much of a right to protection as anyone else. For both sides, however, the PoC site, which is supposed to be a neutral safe zone outside of the war, constitutes a potential reserve of fighters *for* the war.

Clashes outside the camp have also produced ripples within it. In May 2014, as the SPLA, assisted by Sudanese rebel forces, retook the capital, there was a spike in attacks on those who were perceived to be aligned with the government. SPLA soldiers who entered the PoC site dressed as civilians, to visit family members or purchase goods, were beaten up by Nuer civilians who were dismayed by the events occurring outside the camp. There was also a great deal of hostility towards the Sudanese traders who were staying in the PoC site; in

response to attacks on Darfurian civilians who were held responsible for the government's southern assault on Unity in 2014, large numbers of Darfurians left that May, as JEM moved west towards Bahr el Ghazal. Before leaving, the Darfurian community in the PoC site had demanded their own PoC site.⁴³⁰ This claim represents the logical end point of the PoC system. Since the PoC site cannot be fully isolated from the outside world, the division between civilians and belligerents breaks down, and the PoC site becomes a particular zone of combat, in which each side requires further isolation, to be protected from the other groups within.

Since the 2015 government assault on southern Unity, the principal tension in the PoC has been between the Bul Nuer and Nuer from other sections, who were affected by the dry-season attacks. More recently, in October 2015, there was tension between Nuer from Leer and Guit, due to the participation of Nuer youths from the latter county in raiding in the former.⁴³¹ Put simply: clashes outside the camp are reflected inside it and constantly threaten the demilitarized nature of the PoC.

Since the SPLA retook Bentiu and Rubkona in May 2014, the capital has been under its control; with the GRSS militarily ascendant in the state, the PoC site has increasingly taken in civilians whom the government suspects of being rebels, or rebel sympathizers. Thus, while there are conflicts within the camp, the main danger to the camp itself comes from the SPLA troops stationed in Bentiu. On 5 February 2015, the UN assistant secretary-general for human rights, Ivan Šimonović, following a visit to the PoC site, stated that the civilians were well protected. In practice, the SPLA has often prevented civilians from reaching the PoC, and even within the PoC, it is unclear how safe civilians actually are.

At various times during the conflict—including in April 2014 and during the shelling of Bentiu on 23–24 March 2015—the SPLA has prevented civilians from reaching the camp, turning on and off access to the camp in tempo with the rhythm of the conflict. Furthermore, just three days after Ivan Šimonović's statement, UNMISS personnel reported an increase in SPLA harassment of the civilian population.

The SPLA is also known to have entered the camp. One such entry occurred on 17 March 2015, after an SPLA patrol was ambushed at Nyabol Kubur, some 10 km north of the PoC site, where 13 soldiers were killed and another nine

injured. The SPLA, which contended that the SPLM-IO had sought shelter in the camp, entered the PoC, killing one civilian and abducting another. UNMISS did not prevent the SPLA's entry into the camp, although it did condemn it after the fact.⁴³²

While the camp is hardened and protected by peacekeepers, it is unclear just how secure the IDPs in the camp actually are. For much of 2015, a disagreement over financing between UNMISS and the International Organization for Migration meant that a large portion of the PoC site did not have a protective fence around it.⁴³³ Armed actors have repeatedly accessed the PoC, and civilians have frequently left the camp to join groups of armed actors. In private, UNMISS officials confirm that the PoC site would not be able to withstand an intensive military assault, if one came; the UNMISS mission in Rubkona neither has the military resources nor the will, among the peacekeepers, to engage the SPLA or the SPLM-IO.⁴³⁴

Rather, the UNMISS peacekeepers offer symbolic protection; attacking the PoC site would provoke international condemnation, and any deaths of non-South Sudanese peacekeepers would alienate the government or the rebels from the international community. While it has not been deemed necessary to launch interventions in an effort to save the lives of the civilians of southern Unity, the value attached to peacekeepers' lives has indeed saved many thousands.

Many of the peacekeepers at the Rubkona PoC site have exhibited bravery and the PoC site has undoubtedly saved many lives. It is also the case that neither side has much incentive to attack the PoC. Rather than being a safe space beyond the reach of the war, the site has become part of a conflict in which both sides attempt to control movements of people and resources.

Prior to the 2015 southern offensive, people moved south from the PoC with food, some of which was acquired by the SPLM-IO.⁴³⁵ That humanitarian organizations are distributing food inside the PoC, rather than in Bentiu, has opened the PoC up to accusations of partiality. In principle, the humanitarian aid workers cannot be blamed for this situation. Neither side has much of an appreciation of impartiality; if, for example, food or supplies are distributed in SPLM-IO-controlled areas, then the government—which makes no distinction between soldiers and civilians—will necessarily consider that aid biased. In a war fought over logistics and supplies, spaces such as a PoC site—or humanitarian

food drops—are seen as reservoirs of potential support or as links in a potential supply chain.

Tensions have emerged between the government and the humanitarian aid organizations in relation to the Rubkona PoC site. In 2014, the state authorities repeatedly made calls for food distributions in Bentiu town itself. In October of that year, aid organizations made an assessment of humanitarian needs. An NGO worker who was present at that assessment reported that there was a substantial military presence, and that military personnel were telling civilians who had assembled for the assessment what to say. Since the principle of impartiality had been undermined, many humanitarian organizations pulled out, while UN agencies organized a one-off food drop.⁴³⁶ The government insisted that equal amounts of food be supplied to Bentiu and to the PoC site; at this time, however, Bentiu did not house any civilians, but rather soldiers and some of their families (while other military families were in the PoC site).

The government has also put a significant amount of pressure on the UN to close the PoC sites. On 9 March 2015, Nguen Monyтуil asked the people of Unity state to return from the PoC site in Juba, and he also asked civilians to leave the Rubkona PoC site. Kiir has repeatedly called on civilians to leave the PoC sites.⁴³⁷ The GRSS has several motivations for asking people to leave the PoC. It is something of a public relations disaster for the government that more than 200,000 people are seeking protection from the state that is supposed to be defending them. The PoC sites also centralize aid distribution, and if people were to leave a site, it would be easier to control flows of aid, as the government attempted to do in Bentiu in October 2014. Finally, the GRSS is convinced that many of the people inside the PoCs are rebels, and that UNMISS is protecting them.

Within UNMISS, there is a reluctance to recognize that the PoCs are themselves constituent spaces of the war, or to think about their long-term future. In Juba, Bentiu, and Malakal, UNMISS personnel interviewed by the Small Arms Survey talked about the PoC sites as risks to UN staff; they feared that an attack on the PoC could lead to violence against UNMISS personnel.⁴³⁸ Since UNMISS insists that the camps are temporary, it has prioritized urgent medical access but has not planned for ways of making the camps sustainable places to live, such as by creating work or farming opportunities.⁴³⁹

It is unclear, however, whether the PoC sites will be temporary constructions. Since the signing of the peace agreement on 26 August 2015, the number of individuals who fled to the Rubkona PoC site has increased massively, due to government-aligned militia attacks in the south; more than 1,000 individuals arrived in the second week of October 2015 alone. Even if the active military hostilities were to stop, it remains unclear whether there would be sufficient security for a wholesale movement out of the camp. The level of animosity felt between a variety of different groups in the state is such that the security situation will remain extremely tense for the foreseeable future.

Furthermore, the longer the IDPs remain in the camp, the more populated it becomes, and the more trade and commercial activities are concentrated there. Yida is a salutary example. Although UNHCR had initially aimed to move people from Yida to Ajuong Thok for security reasons, Yida is now a bustling market and without question the largest commercial centre in Unity state. The formerly vibrant town of Bentiu is empty, and largely demolished. IDPs often refer to the PoC site in which they live as 'New Bentiu'.⁴⁴⁰

Despite the UNMISS penchant for planning, it is noticeable that in terms of the Bentiu PoC site, the mission has been largely reactive. From its inception, the camp was forced on the UN by movements of civilians. Since then, IDPs have increasingly made the camps their home—a miniature Bentiu in the middle of a militarized Bentiu, protected by UNMISS. So while the PoC site has been a constituent part of conflict dynamics in Unity state since the war erupted, it may yet be a part of the peace. 🍷

V. Life across the border: Sudan–South Sudan relations during the civil war

The SRF's relations with South Sudan until December 2013

Since November 2011, the Sudan Revolutionary Front has unified the SPLM–N, which is fighting in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, with the three main Darfurian rebel groups; as such, it represents an unprecedented achievement in the long history of Sudan's fragmented rebellion. In spite of persistent internal divisions, in terms of both politics and military strategy, the SRF has increasingly succeeded in championing a national agenda. That accomplishment was largely made possible due to a series of regional events that, while in principle marking an improvement in regional stability, actually often provoked the renewal or spreading of conflicts.

The most important of these events was the independence of South Sudan in 2011. While Khartoum would not oppose the separation, it was not ready to concede power or make territorial concessions in the 'Three Areas' of Abyei, South Kordofan, or Blue Nile, where the CPA provisions remained largely unimplemented; nor would it relent with respect to Darfur, where the CPA's promises for a 'comprehensive peace' were stillborn. War first resumed in Abyei and South Kordofan, just weeks before the separation—in May and June 2011, respectively; in Blue Nile, it erupted again shortly thereafter, in September 2011.

South Sudan's independence and the concomitant resumption of the war in South Kordofan and Blue Nile were also a major opportunity—and possibly a matter of survival—for the Darfurian rebel groups, who had sought new rear bases and foreign support since the 2010 Chad–Sudan rapprochement that had brought about their expulsion from Chad. Libya had remained a supporter, but not a rear base, and then only until Qaddafi's fall in 2011. Yet at the time South Sudan had become the best place to find asylum, in particular since Juba's confidence was growing that Khartoum would not dare to oppose secession backed by the international community. As the war resumed in the Two Areas—

Map 6 Sudan–South Sudan border relations: South Kordofan–Unity, 2013–15

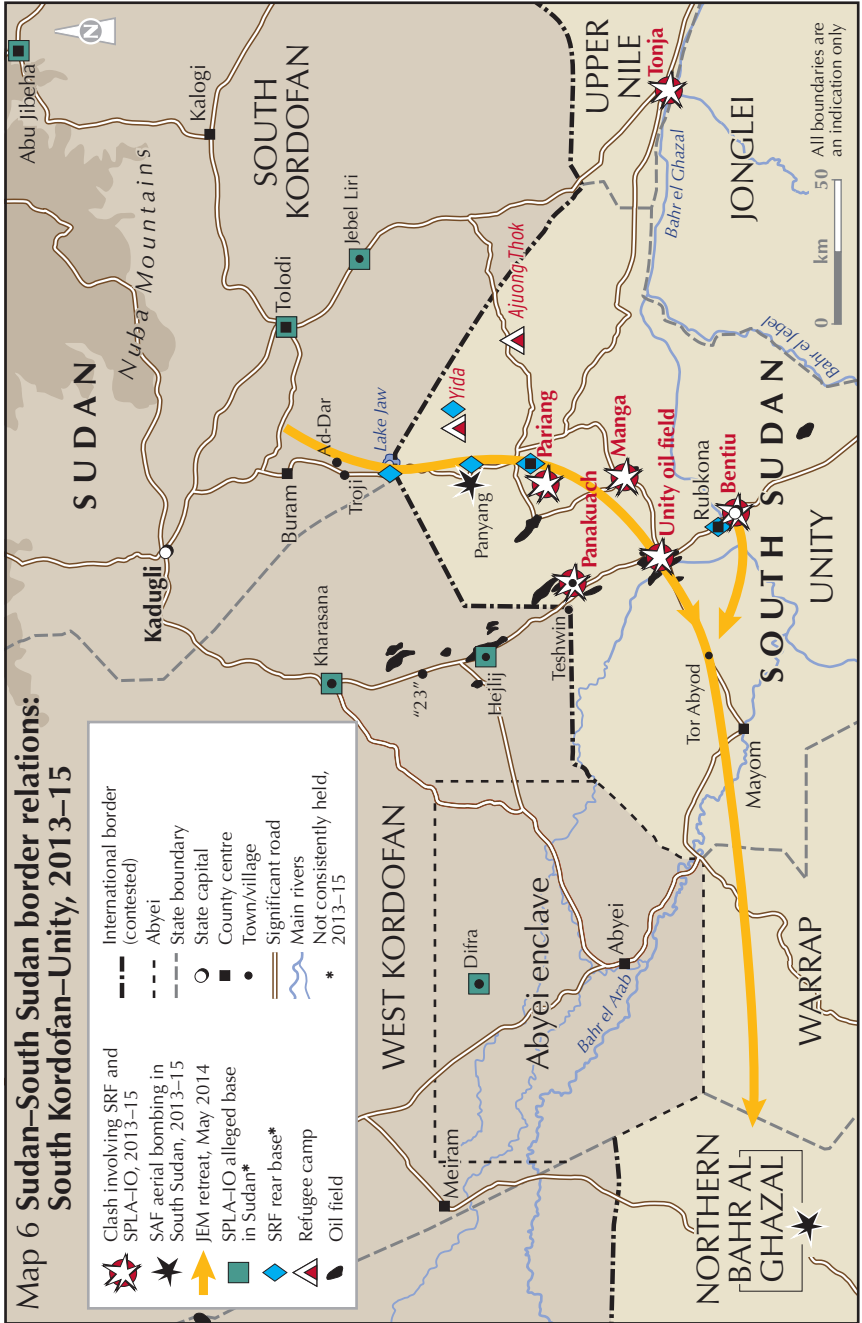


Table 2 Selected allegations levelled at Juba by Khartoum

Accusation	Context
Harbouring political leaders and troops of the Sudanese armed opposition on South Sudanese soil	This activity has taken place.
Healing wounded Sudanese rebels	Juba can argue, as Addis Ababa did when South Sudan levelled similar allegations regarding the presence of South Sudanese rebels in Ethiopia, that this is a humanitarian obligation.
Keeping northern soldiers, including SPLM–N troops, on the SPLA payroll in South Sudan	At the time of South Sudan’s independence, there were both northern soldiers in South Sudan’s SPLA and southern troops in South Kordofan and Blue Nile when the war resumed there. This situation gave rise to the thorny issue of the ‘disengagement’ of southern and northern SPLA troops, which reportedly allowed Juba to provide ‘semi-legal’ support to the SPLM–N. South Sudan encouraged northern SPLA troops to join Sudanese rebels’ ranks while conserving their weapons. Juba reportedly transferred money based on a former payroll, although not necessarily to soldiers; rather, lump sums were apparently transferred to leaders and not necessarily to soldiers. In addition, Juba may have supplied military equipment, including during the key June 2011 period when the 9th Division in South Kordofan was still part of the SPLA but had already resumed fighting.
Providing fuel to Sudanese rebel movements	The provision of fuel seems to have been the most crucial support for the SRF’s raids in the lowlands north of the Nuba Mountains.
Providing military training and equipment as well as food to the SRF, and acting as a conduit for Ugandan support to the SRF	Evidence regarding this point is limited, perhaps because the rebels captured important quantities of vehicles, weapons, and ammunition from Khartoum in South Kordofan, decreasing their need for external support.
Joining forces with the SRF in military operations at the border, including in Sudanese territory	Such activities took place, particularly in Jaw and Hejljij in 2012.
Arresting SRF dissidents	Arrests were made, notably of SPLM–N dissident Telefon Kuku and a group of JEM dissidents led by Ali al-Wafi.

Sources: Gramizzi (2013, pp. 61–66); Gramizzi and Tubiana (2012; 2013, pp. 46–49); ICG (2013; 2015); McCutchen (2014, p. 41)

South Kordofan and Blue Nile—the SPLM–N had become an additional intermediary between Darfuriian rebels and Juba, as much as Juba was also a cement between the SPLM–N and Darfuriian rebels, pushing the latter to join the SRF. Finally, Juba was also an intermediary between the SRF and Uganda, which increasingly became the host of SRF leaders and other Sudanese opponents in exile.

In turn, these dynamics became a major cause of tensions between Khartoum and Juba. Even before South Sudan’s independence and the formation of the SRF, Sudan had accused the southern authorities of providing support to Darfuriian rebels and of violating the CPA by maintaining and equipping more troops than allowed on northern territory. Table 2 lists selected accusations that Khartoum has made against Juba.

Rubkona, as well as Pariang, Panyang, and the Yida refugee camp farther north, and Jaw on the border have acted as rear bases and hubs for support from Juba to Sudanese rebels. An SPLA officer who was in charge of vehicles and weapons stores at the 4th Division headquarters in Rubkona until December 2013 indicated that there were monthly consignments. These shipments—sometimes of food, sometimes of fuel—could arrive in 100 barrels on a big truck; other deliveries might come in the form of 100 pick-ups and trucks, perhaps loaded with uniforms, ammunition, and weapons. He mentioned that even the chief of the SRF ‘joint force’, Abdelaziz al-Hilu, came from the Nuba Mountains to Rubkona, and that JEM commanders occasionally accompanied him, if they did not come on their own.⁴⁴¹

The SPLM–N was reportedly receiving direct deliveries of fuel, weapons, and ammunition aimed at all SRF components. JEM leaders say that after the successful attacks on Um Ruwaba in North Kordofan and Abu Karshola in South Kordofan in May 2013, the SPLM–N did not give them the support they would have needed to continue fighting towards North Kordofan’s capital El Obeid. Abdelaziz al-Hilu disagreed with JEM’s plans of moving farther away in the lowlands north of the Nuba Mountains; he thus prevented JEM from fighting there on their own, which ultimately caused a rift between the movements. Consequently, the SRF ‘joint force’—which had only fought in Um Ruwaba and Abu Karshola—never fought again, and JEM was asked to redeploy outside the Nuba Mountains.⁴⁴²



A JEM combatant from Kordofan at the border between Unity state and South Kordofan, 2012. © Jérôme Tubiana

In August 2013, Khartoum and Juba engaged in a rapprochement—as Juba agreed once again, but reportedly with more good will than usually, to sever ties with the SRF. Yet support from South Sudan to the SRF seems to have continued in the second part of 2013; it is unclear whether President Kiir was willing to pursue this support or unable to control local SPLA commanders and civilian authorities, including in Unity state. According to a main SPLA commander in Unity state, the SPLA there gave the SPLM–N 60 Land Cruisers on 13 December 2013, and 500 barrels of fuel on 14 December 2013. These resources were supposed to be shared with the Darfurian movements, and JEM reportedly received 20 vehicles. After the war began in South Sudan on 15 December, the SPLA leadership in Unity, which largely defected to the opposition shortly thereafter, regretted not having kept the vehicles and fuel. On 17 December, SPLM–N emissaries in Bentiu were reportedly rebuffed. In the following months, all parties in the South Sudan war had good reasons to keep supplies that in the past could have been shared with the Sudanese rebels (Craze, 2014, p. 21).⁴⁴³

Yet ties endured and the SRF arguably saw in the new conflict in South Sudan an opportunity to preserve its relations with Juba. As a result, the Juba–Khartoum rapprochement was short-lived; in late 2014, Khartoum publicly reiterated its accusations that Juba was supporting the SRF, claiming to have ‘documented evidence’—although it did not provide any (*Sudan Tribune*, 2014j).

The Sudanese rebels’ role in South Sudan

The SRF and South Sudan’s new war

When the new war began in South Sudan, the SRF and SPLM–IO were not prepared to fight each other. Some even thought the two rebellions could ally against both governments, since the mid-2013 government reshuffle in Juba had allowed some reputedly pro-Khartoum politicians to replace anti-Khartoum figures. Some of the latter had joined the opposition camp and had become members of the SPLM–IO. Eleven senior SPLM figures who had been critical of Salva Kiir had been arrested at the outbreak of the conflict in December 2013 and became known as the ‘11 detainees’. In addition, former Unity governor Taban Deng, who had become a main SPLM–IO leader, had played a key role in hosting JEM in his state. According to Riek Machar:

*Taban and myself had good relations with the SRF but they stood with Kiir, because the government has money and Uganda behind. We don't have anything to offer [the Sudanese rebels]. I asked Taban to speak with them, but to no avail.*⁴⁴⁴

SRF leaders acknowledged speaking with Taban Deng to try to prevent inter-rebel fighting, also in vain.⁴⁴⁵ Said one Darfurian politician, who later met Taban in Khartoum: 'He thought because he had hosted JEM in Bentiu, JEM had to support SPLM-IO, and he was very disappointed.'⁴⁴⁶ Echoing Machar's analysis, Peter Gatdet said, 'SRF is with Kiir because we have no money.'⁴⁴⁷

Relatively small incidents, notably in Unity, pushed the SRF to engage in South Sudan's conflict and quickly escalated into violence that would claim the lives of numerous civilians who were suspected or accused of being loyal to one side.

In December 2013, the SPLM-N and JEM were largely busy fighting Khartoum's now usual dry-season offensive in South Kordofan. As every year since 2011, a major goal of the offensive was to cut the road between rebel strongholds in the Nuba Mountains and Jaw at the northern tip of Unity state. As a consequence of its differences with the SPLM-N following the Um Ruwaba and Abu Karshola battles, JEM had left the Nuba Mountains and had then established its main base on this road, in the lowlands. Its mobile fighting tactics, which relied on the availability of cars, had proven essential to defend that base. SPLM-N bases were farther from South Sudan; the Nuba rebels, less mobile and dependent on cars, were less in need of regular fuel supplies from South Sudan. Nevertheless, both groups regularly entered South Sudan, including for fuel supplies.

In late 2013, both the SPLM-N and JEM had some presence in northern Unity, albeit a limited one. In Bentiu, JEM had only one car when the conflict started; it was then reportedly seized by SPLM-IO, without fighting. It is also said that at the beginning of the conflict, Salva Kiir called Abdelaziz al-Hilu for help but that the SPLM-N leader, closer to the SPLM detainees, did not reply for some ten days before showing a relatively weak inclination to support Juba. JEM was more receptive and set as a condition that it would establish direct links with Juba rather than going through SPLM-N intermediaries.⁴⁴⁸

When the conflict began in December 2013, the 20th brigade of the SPLA's 4th Division in Jaw, neighbouring SPLM-N and JEM rear bases, divided in the

same way as the troops in the division's headquarters in Rubkona. As noted above, the Nuer brigade commander, Steven Bol Puk, defected while his deputy, Peter Badeng, remained loyal to the government, took control of the tanks and artillery, and pushed the defectors away. On their way to Rubkona, they moved to Panyang, north of Pariang, where the SPLM-N and JEM had a small presence. The Nuer defectors fought against Sudanese rebels and armed Nuba refugees, reportedly killing some SPLM-N soldiers and obliging them to evacuate the place. JEM later came back to the base and was still using it, although to a limited extent, in May 2015. Then local Dinka *nguet* (youths), although recently mobilized and not trained prior to the conflict like Warrap State's *galweng* (armed Dinka cattle guards), pushed the Jaw defectors from Pariang county to Bentiu.⁴⁴⁹

Shortly thereafter, in late December 2013, JEM sent 15–20 cars from South Kordofan to secure fuel from the government of South Sudan at a usual location close to Pariang. Unaware that JEM was around, the SPLM-IO—reportedly several hundred foot soldiers equipped with only a few cars—attacked the area and for the first time fought JEM, and were repelled (ICG, 2015, pp. 14–15). A few days later, in early January 2014, the SPLM-IO attacked a strategic location near the Unity oil field, where both SPLA and JEM forces happened to be (see Map 6). The same JEM vehicles again helped the SPLA to repel the SPLM-IO, and then accompanied government forces in their retake of Bentiu on 10 January (HSBA, 2014a; ICG, 2015, p. 15). A local government official acknowledged that JEM also fought alongside the SPLA in Panakuach on 21 January, pushing the SPLM-IO forces under Makal Kuol farther west to Luony Luony. An SPLM-IO officer said that SPLM-N troops were present as well.⁴⁵⁰

According to a JEM leader, in the January retake of Bentiu, as in all their moves together with government forces, JEM had to abide by the SPLA order of battle, which was to send the foot soldiers, rather than the vehicles, in front, followed by the tanks, the artillery, other foot soldiers protecting them, and then mobile headquarters, including officers and vehicles, and finally more foot soldiers, who would protect the back of the column. As the leader pointed out, JEM's role during the Bentiu operation stood in stark contrast to the group's usual tactic of sending vehicles first, with officers on board; in joining forces with the SPLA, JEM played a part that was limited to 'covering' the advance using artillery mounted on their vehicles, partly to show solidarity with the SPLA.⁴⁵¹

Other SRF forces, including the SPLM–N, and the two Sudan Liberation Army factions led by Minni Minawi (SLA–MM) and Abdul Wahid Mohamed al Nur (SLA–AW), were present in Bentiu shortly after the January retake. On 10 January 2014, eight SPLM–N cars reportedly drove to Rubkona to loot cars and fuel, with the permission of the SPLM–N commander-in-chief for the Nuba Mountains, Jagod Mukuar Marada, but without permission of Abdelaziz al-Hilu. The operation took place in the context of a growing competition for command between Abdelaziz, who had been repeatedly criticized for not being a Nuba and fighting for a national rather than local agenda, and his younger, Nuba commander-in-chief.⁴⁵² In August 2015, Jagod Mukuar Marada was appointed SPLM–N chief of staff, replacing Abdelaziz al-Hilu, who became ‘deputy commander in chief of the SPLA in Sudan’ (SPLM–N, 2015).

In January after the retake of Bentiu, some SRF forces—JEM and a few SLA–AW and possibly SPLM–N vehicles—reportedly accompanied the SPLA in its move southward to retake southern Unity up to Leer. JEM called in some 30 vehicles from the north to reinforce the 20 already present in Bentiu and moved south with 50 cars. According to SPLM–IO officials and civilians, 40 JEM cars and some SPLM–N trucks carrying troops entered Leer town with the SPLA on 1 February 2014.⁴⁵³ An SSLA officer explained that JEM cars were useful to transport their troops quickly: ‘We called JEM because we lacked trucks to move south.’⁴⁵⁴ Witnesses also mentioned that JEM used vehicles to bump into soldiers or civilians at high speed while on their way. According to a witness in Leer, JEM fighters were also shooting intensively—‘not targeting people, but shooting everywhere’.⁴⁵⁵

Darfurian rebels are known for their trademark *blitz* raids on board of Toyota pick-up cars mounted with heavy weapons. As one JEM leader observed, ‘We’re a mobile force and need an open area. Speed is one of our weapons, together with dust and extensive shooting.’ In contrast, South Sudanese belligerents, like the old SPLM/A and the SPLM–N, rely on more classical infantry and artillery tactics, since cars are largely limited to transporting some of the many foot soldiers, mirroring SAF tactics. While such tactical differences allowed JEM to complement SPLM–N infantry in South Kordofan, they also caused tensions within the SRF. In the words of a JEM leader:

*When we formed the SRF joint force [to attack Um Ruwaba and Abu Karshola in 2013], SPLM–N was afraid they would lose the heavy weapons if they put them on the vehicles, but we managed to convince them. We’re trying to change SPLM–N, but it’s not progressing much.*⁴⁵⁶

SPLA officers attribute their reliance on JEM to the group’s mobile tactics and rapidity, and to their gradual redeployment in the lowlands between the Nuba Mountains and the South Sudanese border since mid-2013, notably because of tensions between them and SPLM–N troops.⁴⁵⁷

Witnesses and survivors of SPLA attacks in southern Unity between January and April 2014 reported that Sudanese combatants were present at the time, alongside Dinka and Nuer government forces, although they were unable to identify the specific groups. One witness mentioned that in April, in Leer, three Sudanese combatants executed seven Nuer civilians who had come to town to get food and were suspected of being ‘rebels’.⁴⁵⁸ Witnesses from southern Unity who were interviewed by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and UNMISS in Bentiu mentioned acts of destruction, looting, executions of civilians, and rapes involving JEM, generally together with government forces (Amnesty International, 2014, pp. 22, 28; HRW, 2014; UNMISS, 2014b, pp. 45, 50).⁴⁵⁹ More cautiously than UNMISS, Human Rights Watch refers to JEM as ‘Darfuri rebels usually described as JEM’ or as ‘torabora’—a nickname commonly used for Darfurian rebels; Amnesty International identifies JEM, ‘Darfuri forces’, or ‘Darfuris’.⁴⁶⁰ JEM acknowledged a case of rape by one of their combatants, allegedly a new recruit whom they claimed to have beaten, jailed, and subsequently excluded from the movement. JEM also asserted on one occasion that its forces had fought with Dinka SPLA troops to prevent them from raping Nuer women in Leer in 2014.⁴⁶¹

There are discrepancies in accounts of wrongdoing by Sudanese combatants. Some witnesses say that Dinka and Darfurian combatants committed most of the abuses, specifying that only Dinka abducted women. Others remark that Darfurians focused on the looting of cars and fuel—which elicited angry reactions from some SPLA officers and pro-government Nuer forces. Some state that pro-government Nuer soldiers were also involved in abuses and that they played a key role in guiding other forces. Many say the different forces were always operating together.⁴⁶² For instance, JEM and SPLM–N soldiers reportedly

took part alongside the SPLA and Puljang's forces in the 29 February attack on Bur, during which government forces set fire to civilian houses and killed a civilian.⁴⁶³ Bapiny Monytuil acknowledged that 'JEM wasn't alone but always in company of our troops'.⁴⁶⁴ SRF soldiers were at least partly under SPLA command.

UNMISS officers, who were not able to investigate in southern Unity before June 2014, said they registered consistent accusations of looting by Darfurian combatants but 'no clear evidence of raping'.⁴⁶⁵ Testimonies gathered by Amnesty International suggest that 'Darfuri' combatants were particularly focused on looting cars, generally together with SPLA troops (Amnesty International, 2014). Local witnesses also report that, like the SPLA, some 'Sudanese' forces were abusive while others were helpful, notably by transporting some displaced Nuer towards Bentiu in their cars.⁴⁶⁶

In March 2014, JEM provided more indirect support to Juba's efforts in Upper Nile: it supplied three anti-aircraft guns that it had mounted on cars to the SPLA in Rubkona, from where they were flown to the Paloich oil fields in Upper Nile.⁴⁶⁷

In late March, JEM had some 20 cars in Bentiu and 30 in Pariang. In the first week of April, by which time the first rains had fallen, those in Bentiu left for Pariang, leaving only five cars behind, for injured combatants treated in Bentiu. SPLM-IO and other sources report that the SPLM-IO was aware of JEM's departure as well as of the delay in the reinforcements and resupply of government forces defending the town, and thus chose precisely this time to attack the town again. On 7 April, Sudanese aircraft bombed JEM troops in the Pan-yang area north of Pariang, as they were on their way to South Kordofan; one Antonov and three or four jet fighters reportedly destroyed a truck loaded with ammunition.⁴⁶⁸

On 10 April, JEM forces in Pariang were informed of SPLM-IO movements from the Sudanese border towards Bentiu and prepared to fight them in Pariang, but SPLM-IO troops moved south-west of Pariang, avoiding JEM's positions. On 15 April, when the SPLM-IO attacked Bentiu-Rubkona, the JEM forces still in town managed to force their way to Pariang, taking some 60 Darfurian and Dinka civilians on board of their vehicles.⁴⁶⁹ The next day, UNMISS reported the presence of JEM and SLA forces (without specifying which factions). This marked the first time that UNMISS spotted the SLA in Unity, although it had

been present before. The SPLM–IO says that both JEM and the SPLM–N quickly returned to the Bentiu area to help the government to retake the town.⁴⁷⁰

As Riek Machar noted, ‘initially the Darfurians were successful, then [beginning in April 2014] our troops had some success at ambushing their cars’.⁴⁷¹ Peter Gatdet observed that ‘JEM don’t walk and they’re very dangerous’. He added: ‘We brought more RPGs to destroy and capture more of their cars.’⁴⁷² On 23 April, an important JEM car fleet under Abderrahman Juma’, a Missiriya commander, returned from Pariang towards Bentiu but was ambushed by the SPLM–IO in Manga. Some JEM combatants were killed, including Juma’, and some cars were captured (HSBA, 2014c). On 27 April, the SPLM–IO reportedly repelled an attack by JEM and Missiriya combatants—although it is unclear whether the latter belonged to JEM, the SPLM–N, or the SPLA—and captured at least ten prisoners.⁴⁷³

In a communiqué, the SPLM–IO published pictures of dead bodies and prisoners, which it presented as ‘JEM rebels captured in various battles’, along with photos of cars it claimed to have captured from JEM. The SPLM–IO claimed to have killed seven Darfuriyan combatants, including a commander, together with two Bul Nuer, in Boaw in March. The rebels were not able to identify the group to which the dead commander belonged; some of the dead or prisoners may have belonged to SRF components other than JEM. JEM recognized just one of the photographed corpses and argued that the SPLM–IO had only taken three to four prisoners from them between Bentiu and Thar Jath. JEM and the Sudanese community in Juba asked for more photographs and signs of life, and they gave money to the SPLM–IO to release the prisoners, but to no avail. All in all, the SPLM–IO claimed to have captured ten JEM prisoners, yet an SPLM–IO officer maintained that ‘we don’t take prisoners, especially from JEM—we kill them’.⁴⁷⁴

According to another officer, however, ten Sudanese combatants captured in Toma South on 27 April were handed over to the Sudanese government in Teshwin, the first Sudanese position on the border north of Panakuach; they included six Missiriya and four Nuba, yet whether they belonged to JEM, the SPLM–N, or the SPLA is unclear. As further evidence of JEM’s presence, the SPLM–IO published the picture of a document it labelled as a JEM ID, which appears to have been given to a participant at a 2012 JEM conference. The SPLM–IO also claimed to have captured 14 to 17 cars from JEM in the Unity

oil field, and to have burned some three others between Thar Jath and Guit; in a communiqué, it only published pictures of seven vehicles, two of which appear not to be from JEM, yet JEM officers recognized that the others had been captured from them. Small Arms Survey investigators observed two other cars that had probably belonged to JEM for some time; all had been captured or abandoned in southern Unity, and some bore JEM markings. Peter Gatdet claimed that his forces captured six cars from JEM in Tonja in Upper Nile in March 2014, as he was on his way from Upper Nile to Unity; later in May, between Wangkey and Tumur in Mayom county, they destroyed another 40 cars that belonged to a joint force of JEM and Puljang.⁴⁷⁵

In early 2016, JEM acknowledged having lost more than 80 men in South Sudan since December 2013, as well as some vehicles.⁴⁷⁶

In late April 2014, the SPLM–N, which seems to have been minimally involved hitherto, reportedly sent forces south to help the government retake control of the Mayom–Bentiu road. Forces from all SRF components then came back to Bentiu for a short period. On 8–9 May, UNMISS in Bentiu noted the presence of four trucks transporting SPLM–N soldiers; they identified at least 15 cars as belonging to JEM, and two as the SLA’s—without specifying the faction. SPLA officers acknowledged that SPLM–N and JEM forces were both present in Bentiu at the time.⁴⁷⁷

It seems that since May 2014, Darfurian movements have largely withdrawn their forces from Unity towards the Bahr el Ghazal region, in particular to Khor Shamam near Raja in Western Bahr el Ghazal. The retreat was largely related to the fact that the SPLM–N was increasingly less welcoming towards JEM troops in the Nuba Mountains. Beyond the tactical differences, the gap increased because of JEM’s continuous ability to recruit several hundred Nuba, notably thanks to their relations with Abdelbagi Garfa, the SPLM–N commissioner for Buram county in South Kordofan. A Nuba Islamist politician who had headed a JEM secret cell for South Kordofan since 2002, Garfa was evicted from the movement because of his ongoing ties to JEM; he joined Khartoum in 2012. According to the SPLM–N, Taban Deng supported both JEM and Garfa while he was Unity governor (De Alessi, 2015, p. 58).⁴⁷⁸

On 12 May, after the first rains had fallen, JEM withdrew from Bentiu towards Tor Abyod, and then Mayom, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, and Western Bahr el Ghazal. Riek Machar and Peter Gatdet said that Darfurian rebels fought SPLM–IO

troops—defectors from Wau—in the Raja area. In February 2015, according to UNMISS, there was also a shooting incident between the SPLA and JEM in Raja town. Sudanese aerial bombings targeted JEM on 2 November and 31 December in Khor Shamam.⁴⁷⁹ Khartoum aviation also continued targeting SRF rebels in Western and Northern Bahr el Ghazal in April 2015, and SPLM–N rear bases in Maban county, near the border with Blue Nile, including in November 2014 (Gurtong, 2014; *Sudan Tribune*, 2015k).

In January 2015, as Khartoum forces were approaching Kaoda, the SPLM–N’s symbolic ‘capital’ in the Nuba Mountains, the SPLM–N asked for support from JEM, which obliged by sending some troops from Bahr el Ghazal, but the SPLM–N managed to repel the attackers before JEM’s arrival. JEM forces then reportedly moved back to Pariang and Mayom county, ready to help Juba at a time when the SPLM–IO again attempted to take Unity oil field and threatened to retake Bentiu (HSBA, 2015a).⁴⁸⁰ A South Sudanese government official then informed UNMISS that on 21 January JEM’s artillery had helped the SPLA to repel an SPLM–IO attack on Unity oil field.⁴⁸¹

According to Peter Gatdet, the SPLM–IO successfully fought JEM north and west of Bentiu in May 2014: ‘both JEM and SPLM–N left Unity in June and didn’t come back’ for a year. Indeed, Gatdet claimed that JEM had helped the SPLA to retake Panakuach in June 2015. Other SPLM–IO sources, including Riek Machar, said that both JEM and the SPLM–N were still present in Unity after June 2014. Some SPLM–IO officials even argued that both JEM and the SPLM–N had fought against their forces in April–May 2015 in Buoth, Nhialdiu, and Wichok, but this assertion is not backed by any evidence.⁴⁸²

The UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan ‘witnessed undisguised movement of the JEM fighters around’ Bentiu during a two-day visit in July 2015, but, according to a UN official, could ‘not state categorically’ that the group had fought alongside the government in 2015, in contrast to accusations made by UNMISS (UNPoE, 2015).⁴⁸³ JEM chairman Jibril Ibrahim denied having forces in Bentiu between May and July 2015, and fighting alongside government forces during the 2015 offensive in Unity. According to him, JEM was absent from the state until late in 2015, when five vehicles with roughly 100 men were sent back to Pariang county. They were indeed spotted again in Bentiu by a credible UN source in November 2015.⁴⁸⁴

The 17 August 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic in South Sudan, signed by Kiir and Machar under IGAD mediation, specified that by 24 November 2015:

all non-state security actors including, but not limited to Sudanese Revolutionary Forces (SPLM–North, JEM, SLA–Minawi, SLA–Abdulwahid) shall be disarmed, demobilized and repatriated by the state actors with whom they have been supporting within the Pre-Transitional Period (sic) (IGAD, 2015c, para. II.1.6).

This would be very good news for Sudan, but the Sudanese rebels are not likely to let themselves be peacefully disarmed and handed over to Sudan. As a JEM leader said in October 2015:

Nobody can hand us over or disarm us and the Government of South Sudan did not ask us to leave. But we already prepared to leave. Even if the agreement collapses, we should be ready to exit. The best alternative for us is to go back to Sudan or the Central African Republic. We only need to have a small contingent in South Sudan and an evacuation route to South Sudan.⁴⁸⁵

By April 2015, JEM had already sent a large force from Northern Bahr el Ghazal to Darfur, where it was defeated. According to a JEM leader, the aim of the operation had been to establish new bases in the mountains of central and northern Darfur—which only a small number of forces managed to reach, while other combatants fled to Chad. In early 2016, as international pressure on Juba to implement the peace deal increased, so too did international and Sudanese demands on Juba to expel Sudanese rebels, in particular JEM. As a result, the GRSS pressured JEM to leave, and Darfurian rebels increasingly felt disappointed by their choice of South Sudan as a main rear base, considering it contributed to their loss of ground within Darfur. In the words of a JEM leader:

We're trying to get out, not only because of the pressure: we need to recruit continuously and South Sudan is not the best place for this. Other obstacles to stay in South Sudan are moral: we're hosted by forces who commit atrocities, and it is not good for our image.⁴⁸⁶

He added that, given the difficulties of returning to Darfur, an option for JEM would be to return to the Nuba Mountains, 'if we reach again an agreement with the SPLM–N—not that they love us, but if they need us'. He continued:

Even better, the Government of South Sudan might also ask the SPLM–N to take us back. It would allow them to get rid of us while keeping us nearby, rather than in North Darfur, in case they need us again. SPLM–N can't refuse Juba anything.⁴⁸⁷

In view of the SRF's increasing internal divisions, and SPLM–N resistance to Khartoum's 2015–16 dry-season offensive, for the first time without JEM's help, this option looks unlikely.

Sudanese traders trapped in conflict

Long before South Sudan seceded, northern Sudanese traders were active in southern Sudan, in particular at the borders between the north and the south. Among them were many Darfurians, whose number in the south increased with the conflict in Darfur; more recently, their networks in South Sudan helped Darfurian rebel movements to find support in South Sudan.⁴⁸⁸ When the conflict erupted in December 2013, many Darfurian traders were present in Unity state, mostly in Bentiu–Rubkona but also in southern Unity markets—including Adok, Koch, Mirmir, and Leer, where, according to the local paramount chief, some 200 Darfurian traders were working in the town market.⁴⁸⁹

There are reports that Khartoum has consistently tried to suffocate Darfurian trade within and outside Sudan, including in independent South Sudan. According to one account:

Following the onset of the Darfur problem, in an effort to starve Darfur rebels of finance, the government of Khartoum launched into a vicious diplomatic campaign to prevent Zaghawa traders and other Darfur business people operating in other countries. [. . .] At the time of writing these notes (May 2013), North Sudan is exerting tremendous pressure on South Sudan to expel all Darfur traders, including the Zaghawa, out of the country (El-Tom, 2014, p. 17).⁴⁹⁰

When the new civil war erupted in South Sudan, both sides undoubtedly knew that maintaining or establishing good relations with Khartoum and Sudanese rebels in South Sudan would be difficult. At the same time, the SPLM–IO leadership certainly appreciated that a show of hostility towards Sudanese rebels, residents, and refugees—in particular those from Darfur—in South Sudan could help to convince Khartoum to be on its side.

Several Nuer and Darfurian witnesses mentioned that hostility between the two groups started only a few days after the crisis erupted in Juba on 15 December 2013.⁴⁹¹ From 18 December until January 2014, the SPLM-IO issued a variety of radio directives regarding Darfurians who were present in Bentiu and Rubkona. SPLM-IO supporters who took over the local radio station reportedly first asked the Darfurian rebels to leave Unity state, and later enjoined listeners to target Darfurians and kill them. It is uncertain to what extent these instructions reflected the policy of the SPLM-IO command.⁴⁹² According to the African Union, 'some Darfuris' were killed in Bentiu as early as 18 December (AUCISS, 2014, p. 171). JEM announced that five Darfurian traders had been killed in Bentiu and 11 in Leer between 15 and 20 December.⁴⁹³ Another Darfurian individual was reportedly killed in Leer in January 2014, by local armed youths who looted non-Nuer (mostly Darfurian) shops on the market after hearing that JEM was about to attack the town.⁴⁹⁴

By January 2014, several hundred Darfurian traders appeared to be trapped in different opposition-controlled locations in southern Unity. While some seemed to be blocked there by the surrounding insecurity and lack of transport, others were apparently prevented from moving by SPLM-IO forces and thus called the Darfurian community in Juba to help them. It seems that starting in late December, civilian and military opposition leaders had decided to gather the traders to protect them from some of their own soldiers, as well as from Nuer civilians, who wanted to kill the Darfurians in retaliation for Darfurian rebels' involvement in the war. Traditional chiefs and local politicians say they tried to convince their community members not to kill the Darfurians.⁴⁹⁵

In late January, SPLM-IO authorities brought some 200 Darfurian traders from Leer and other locations in southern Unity, as well as many of Leer's Nuer inhabitants, to Kuth, east of Leer and close to the White Nile—where both SPLM-IO and Nuer civilians had hidden from government attacks. A Nuer civilian who had taken refuge nearby observed that 'those traders were under control, no one could get away', while an SPLM-IO leader noted that the SPLM-IO 'wanted to use them as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the government'.⁴⁹⁶ Opposition soldiers sometimes used the Darfurians as porters. The Darfurians also had to pay for their protection. Yet SPLM-IO forces reportedly threatened to kill them all on several occasions, and nine were reportedly

killed.⁴⁹⁷ Government officials also said that the SPLM–IO wanted to use the Darfurians as ‘human shields’.⁴⁹⁸

SRF leaders indicated that ‘rescuing’ the traders was the main reason why JEM and SLA–AW sent some cars alongside the SPLA towards Leer. It is unclear whether SRF commander Abdelaziz al-Hilu gave his green light to the operation, but it seems that Darfurian leaders approved it. In any case, Darfurian commanders who were informed that some of their relatives were among the traders reportedly took the decision to move without informing the leadership. Darfurian rebels say that when they arrived in their cars and opened fire, SPLM–IO forces that were guarding the traders ran away and let the traders go. In the meantime, Darfurian rebels phoned SPLM–IO commanders to ask them to release the traders peacefully. Some traders reportedly paid Nuer soldiers to be released. Some of the Darfurian traders then reportedly acted as guides for Darfurian rebels and government forces by showing them the way to SPLM–IO bases.⁴⁹⁹

The practice of keeping foreigners as hostages seems to have continued. Humanitarian aid workers reported that in June 2014, about 150 foreign traders remained in SPLM–IO custody in Old and New Fangak in Jonglei state, including mostly Darfurians and some Ugandans, who were also considered enemies because of Kampala’s support to Juba. Members of the Darfurian community in Juba said they were aware of 28 detained individuals, for whom they paid ransoms to the SPLM–IO and for whose release they were prepared to pay more.⁵⁰⁰ All were reportedly released for a ransom of some SSP 150,000 (USD 30,000) and satellite phone airtime.⁵⁰¹

When the SPLM–IO retook Bentiu–Rubkona on 15 April 2014, hundreds of Darfurian traders were present in the twin towns; some had been trading there for years, others had fled from southern Unity, and newcomers had arrived from Northern and Western Bahr el Ghazal, attracted by high prices in Unity. Several days—reportedly about a week—before the attack, news spread in Bentiu that SPLM–IO troops were about to enter town, and hundreds of foreign as well as local residents from all communities headed for the UNMISS base, only to be repeatedly turned back by government forces (UNMISS, 2015a, pp. 7–8). The soldiers told them not to panic and that they were in control. Observers wondered whether the government was overconfident, or whether

it wanted to use the civilian population as ‘human shields’. UNMISS did not attempt to bring the civilians to its base (ICG, 2015, p. 17).

Darfurian traders said they worried of a possible attack when Nuer civilians in town started to threaten them: ‘Wait for the rains to come, you Darfurians will suffer!’ Nuer civilians also wanted to leave town, but those who tried to go to the bush were blocked as well. According to a witness, even on the morning of 15 April, after shooting had started in town, officials who were about to leave town were still telling the civilians to stay.⁵⁰²

One day before, on 14 April, many Sudanese and some Ugandans and Ethiopians who had been turned back went to sleep in the Bentiu mosque. Hundreds of civilians (up to 500 according to some sources) were in the building at dawn on 15 April, when SPLM–IO forces and local armed Nuer reportedly entered town. A Darfurian trader who had taken refuge in the mosque reported:

As we heard shooting, all lay down. There was shooting outside the mosque and some bullets came in. A group of 20 Nuer soldiers came and asked for our money and mobile phones. Then a second group came, including a soldier with a machine gun and a chain of hundreds of bullets, who positioned himself at the main door. Other soldiers with kalash stood behind the windows and the back door. I understood they would shoot, covered myself with my blankets and rolled myself in the mosque carpet. They started shooting from all sides. A machine-gun bullet crossed my two thighs.⁵⁰³

According to the same and other witnesses, survivors were asked to leave the building. At least 20—or between 15 and 40, according to witnesses interviewed by UNMISS—were then executed outside while others, including Ethiopians, were selected to be spared (UNMISS, 2015a, p. 12). Another survivor said:

A Nuer soldier disagreed with the killings and tried to close the doors and windows. He then tried to call leaders to come stop this. After two or three hours, an old chief came and told us: ‘All stand! All stand!’ I said: ‘All the people died!’ When those alive stood up, we found about 200 standing, including maybe half injured. Maybe 400 had been killed inside and around the mosque. The old chief brought two soldiers to protect the survivors. One was a Nuer lieutenant, he asked us for money in exchange for protection. We collected the money we still had, about 5,000 South Sudanese pounds [USD 1,000], but they finally refused to take it because it was too little.⁵⁰⁴

In the evening, SPLM–IO forces brought a truck to evacuate survivors, including injured people, to the hospital. Then nine survivors were asked to load the corpses on the truck and drive them outside town (UNMISS, 2015a, p. 13). One of them counted and said they had carried more than 200 bodies, but that another 70 still remained when they stopped working at dawn (Tubiana, 2015a). As UNMISS affirmed: ‘That evening, over 200 bodies were reportedly loaded into military trucks and taken to a location about a two hour drive from Bentiu, in the direction of Kaljak [west]’ (UNMISS, 2015a, p. 13). UNMISS later estimated that ‘over 250 bodies’ were taken outside town and that ‘approximately 287 civilians were killed in the mosque’; the mission compiled a list of 273 Sudanese, from all parts of Sudan, who had been killed at the mosque (UNMISS, 2015a, p. 13). Another international report mentioned at least 230 civilian deaths.⁵⁰⁵

Killings at the mosque appear to have been largely random; only after the first wave of shootings were some non-Darfurian people (including other Sudanese and Ethiopians) selected to be spared. In the hospital, however, Darfurians, Dinka, and Nuba were selected to be killed. Some 30 people, mostly Darfurians, were dragged outside the hospital and executed. Some Nuer soldiers argued that those who survived the massacre in the mosque should be killed (‘finish killing those Tora-Bora!’), others beat them and stole their remaining belongings, but again some Nuer officers and doctors protected them.⁵⁰⁶ Some Nuer were reportedly killed as well—apparently government staff and Bul Nuer, all considered ‘pro-government’. UNMISS reported that the SPLM–IO ‘killed four Nuer who did not join celebrations for the recapturing of Bentiu as well as five Darfurians’ and ‘a number of Dinka’.⁵⁰⁷ Some of the dead were reportedly evacuated from the hospital, but on the evening of 16 April, 30 corpses remained; of those, UNMISS estimated that ‘at least 19’ had been civilians—the number of civilians killed in the hospital based on the UNMISS investigation, although the figure seems to be a conservative estimate (UNMISS, 2015a, p. 1). Survivors and witnesses provided UNMISS with 23 names of Sudanese who were allegedly killed in the hospital.⁵⁰⁸

In addition, 50 civilians were reportedly executed in the market. Other Sudanese traders who fled to the bush were killed west of Rubkona.⁵⁰⁹ Only on the afternoon of 16 April did UNMISS vehicles drive to town to start burying the remaining bodies and bring survivors to their base. Most were evacuated towards

Northern and Western Bahr el Ghazal after government forces retook Bentiu in May (HRW, 2014, p. 67; UNMISS, 2014b, p. 48).⁵¹⁰

UNMISS buried 148 bodies in Bentiu and estimated that at least 350, not all Sudanese, were killed during the attack, not taking into account people who were killed outside town while trying to escape. UNMISS compiled a list of 333 names of people from all parts of Sudan—including about 200 of Darfurian origin, 55 from Kordofan, and 45 from central Sudan—and presented these numbers as ‘roughly consistent with numbers obtained by [UNMISS] Human Rights Officers through interviews’ (UNMISS, 2015a, p. 13). The mission estimated that at least 500 civilians from South Sudan, Sudan, and other countries had been killed. The Darfurian community in South Sudan listed 537 names of foreign civilians killed, including 455 Darfurians. The others are Ethiopians, Ugandans, and Sudanese from other parts of the country, including Kordofan and central and northern Sudan. The Zaghawa community in Sudan listed 612 Sudanese victims, mostly from Darfur.⁵¹¹

During the attack, the UN and the media repeatedly called attention to the use of propaganda against both Dinka and Darfurians, citing aggressive statements by SPLM–IO leaders on the local station Radio Bentiu FM. Then SPLM–IO military commander James Koang also spoke on the radio, announcing that he was leading the forces that were in control of the town. The United States sanctioned Koang as responsible for the killings, while the European Union sanctioned Peter Gatdet, although it appears he had just arrived in Unity from Jonglei state—where he was the SPLA division commander before joining the SPLM–IO—and did not participate in the attack on Bentiu. The United States had already sanctioned Gatdet for killings in Bor, in Jonglei state. Later, on 1 July 2015, the UN Security Council also sanctioned both Gatdet and Koang, erroneously arguing that both had led the attack on Bentiu; remarkably, the sanctions were imposed before the first Panel of Experts on South Sudan had submitted its report.⁵¹²

Gatdet said he had arrived in Bentiu three or four days after the attack (on 18 or 19 April) and ‘was still in the swamps’ when the town was taken by SPLM–IO forces under James Koang’s command. Gatdet claims that after two days, Koang handed the command over to him and was flown to Nasir, Upper Nile state. Wang Chok, who was present in Bentiu during the attack, confirmed

this version. Riek Machar also said that ‘Gatdet was not leading the attack’, yet during a visit to Khartoum, he reportedly told representatives of the Zaghawa community that Gatdet was responsible for the killings. This issue may prove another divisive factor between Machar and Gatdet. Machar avoided blaming James Koang, declaring instead that ‘James did very well to contain the violence’.⁵¹³

Machar charged that the killings were not perpetrated by SPLM–IO forces but by a ‘squad of nine men from the white army’.⁵¹⁴ SPLM–IO visitors to Khartoum also reportedly indicated that uncontrolled militias had carried out the massacre. Moreover, witnesses and survivors mention the presence of armed Nuer civilians who were not necessarily under full control of the SPLM–IO (UNMISS, 2014b, p. 47). Some also indicated that while the Nuer combatants who had looted their properties and killed a limited number of people had worn a combination of civilian clothes and military uniforms, those who were responsible for the massacre had worn complete uniforms.⁵¹⁵ Gatdet contradicted Machar’s claims: ‘The killers were not from the white army. When I arrived in Bentiu I didn’t see white army [members]. [The problem was] Koang didn’t control his forces, they were few and scattered.’⁵¹⁶

It seems that even if Koang led the attack in theory, he was indeed far from fully in control of his troops; several SPLM–IO officers, as well as witnesses and survivors of the killings, mentioned the lack of command. As a Nuer witness said, ‘When a commander was around, the soldiers refrained from killing. But as soon as they saw he was not around, they killed.’⁵¹⁷ An SPLM–IO leader pointed out that his troops ‘could not control themselves. The command was far and the officers around were not able to control the soldiers.’⁵¹⁸

The SPLM–IO provided different and conflicting justifications for the killings in Bentiu, publicly and privately, including in discussions with UNMISS in Bentiu starting the day after the massacre. Initially, the rebels pretended that government forces had perpetrated the killings just before leaving town (AFP, 2014a). Subsequently, some argued that the victims, notably in the mosque, were not civilians but JEM and SPLM–N combatants or former combatants who were unarmed or had hidden their guns. This version was consistently defended by James Koang until after the publication of an UNMISS investigation in January 2015 (Radio Tamazuj, 2015e; *Sudan Tribune*, 2015d). It was also backed by some UNMISS officers, in contradiction of their own investigations, which

concluded that ‘no evidence has been offered in support of these claims’ (UNMISS, 2015a, p. 14).

In defiance of James Koang’s position, main SPLM–IO leaders, including Riek Machar and Taban Deng, acknowledged the killing of unarmed people and some SPLM–IO responsibility (HRW, 2014, p. 67; UNMISS, 2015a, p. 14). Specifically, Machar stated, ‘there’s no excuse for [the killings], however bitter [the perpetrators] were. You don’t shoot unarmed people. Even if they were armed, as soon as they surrendered and left their guns, you don’t shoot them.’ Others who were more directly involved disapproved of Machar’s position; one SPLM–IO politician from Leer, for example, posited that ‘Riek must have been sleeping when he apologized for the killings’.⁵¹⁹

While no one had been held to account for the killing of the Darfurians, UNMISS provided an unconfirmed status report on an investigation related to the killing of Nuer civilians:

On 25 April 2014, a senior-level SPLA/IO commander informed Human Rights Officers that a SPLA/IO fighter had been detained and was under investigation for the killing of four Nuer civilians at the Bentiu Civil Hospital. The Human Rights Division has not been able to verify this claim and the outcome of the investigation is unknown (UNMISS, 2015a, p. 14).

In interviews conducted in May 2014 and August 2014, Riek Machar claimed that the SPLM–IO was also investigating the massacre of the Darfurians and had identified ‘a squad of ten people’ who were responsible; among them, ‘one person who had a machine gun’—as survivors indeed mentioned—was to be considered the main perpetrator (AFP, 2014b; *Africa Report*, 2014).⁵²⁰ Around the same time, Machar told the African Union Commission of Inquiry that:

he did not know what had happened there [in Bentiu] until the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] came to him with a report, detailing the atrocities there. He stated that what had happened there was the work of 10 men carrying machine guns, and that his people are still in the process of tracking them down (AUCISS, 2014, p. 228).

The Commission concludes that, ‘by his own account to the Commission, Riek Machar commands the White Army [and] thus accepts responsibility for the forces’ that committed the killings (AUCISS, 2014, p. 228).

In January 2015, UNMISS found that ‘no one has yet been held accountable’ for the crimes committed during the 15 April attack on Bentiu (UNMISS, 2015a, p. 4). James Koang slammed the report and reiterated his version that ‘his soldiers killed unarmed ex-combatants, not civilians’ (Radio Tamazuj, 2015e; *Sudan Tribune*, 2015d). Another SPLM–IO official announced that the movement had formed an investigation committee (Radio Tamazuj, 2015e). In March 2015, Machar said: ‘We partially located the individuals responsible, traced them and apprehended the leader, a local from Nhialdiu.’⁵²¹ Given the conflicting versions, attempts to seek justice further up in the chain of command may aggravate existing tensions within the SPLM–IO.



Mass graves in Bentiu, after the April 2014 opposition attack. © Jérôme Tubiana



Victims' clothes and belongings outside the Bentiu mosque, where some 200 Darfurian civilians were shot by SPLM-IO forces in April 2014. © Jérôme Tubiana

The issue was also divisive in Khartoum, where SPLM–IO representatives reportedly told the government that the victims were JEM combatants; later on, they acknowledged that they were Sudanese civilians and apologized for the killings. Some Sudanese officials publicly condemned the killings, while others, in particular representatives of the National Intelligence and Security Services, reportedly asked the SPLM–IO not to apologize and to withdraw the letter of apology the South Sudanese rebels had addressed to the Zaghawa community.⁵²²

Guesswork regarding Sudanese fighters

While the presence of Sudanese combatants in the war in South Sudan has been well documented, information on the identities and affiliations of those involved has remained scarce. The SPLM–IO has made frequent references to JEM and, more recently, to the SPLM–N and SLA–MM (SSNA, 2014; *Sudan Tribune*, 2015d; *Sudan Vision*, 2014).

UN reporting seems to have focused on the JEM presence even before the current crisis, starting with incidents in the Yida refugee camp, where, according to one aid worker, ‘every meeting with the UN is JEM, JEM, JEM [. . .]. UNMISS exaggerates incidents with JEM and doesn’t mention SPLM–N, who are much more involved.’⁵²³ According to NGOs operating in Yida, UN security assessments have been biased since 2011, long before the crisis, as the UN has been trying to relocate the refugees farther from the border—without success. NGOs say that, as a result, the UN has exaggerated the security incidents in Yida while minimizing those in the preferred Ajuong Thok camp, which is arguably more exposed to possible attacks from both Sudan and SPLM–IO-held areas in Upper Nile. For instance, UNMISS reported incidents that took place in Ajuong Thok as having occurred in Yida.⁵²⁴

By April 2014, UNHCR was estimating the Yida population at up to 70,000, while the Médecins Sans Frontières count on the ground was of 88,552. More than 18,000 Sudanese refugees had been encouraged to move to Ajuong Thok to be registered. Some would make the 50-km journey there on foot to get relief and then travel back to Yida.⁵²⁵ This situation must be understood in the particular context of the Yida camp: as soon as the war resumed in South Kordofan in June 2011, Nuba refugees walked towards Jaw, the closest part of the future border with a soon-to-be-independent South Sudan, and established the Yida

camp nearby. NGOs and the UN arrived later; some worried about the proximity to the border and the potential for aerial bombings from Sudan—Yida was indeed targeted in late 2011.

Aid workers were also concerned about the increasing ‘militarization’ of Yida, given the regular presence of both SPLM–N fighters and, to a lesser extent, JEM troops, who came to the camp to visit families, seek medical treatment or other types of relief or supplies, and to recruit. Tensions also increased between the SPLM–N and JEM (and within the SPLM–N) over JEM’s successes in recruiting Nuba civilians, both within and outside the camp. The SPLM–N claims that JEM has recruited more than 1,000 Nuba combatants since 2011, although not all have remained in the movement (De Alessi, 2015, p. 31).

While JEM fighters in the camp and the Nuba Mountains remained largely dependent on SPLM–N ‘hosts’—who forced JEM to relocate to the lowlands, south of the mountains and closer to Yida, in mid-2013—local SPLM–N leaders repeatedly blamed JEM exclusively for insecurity in Yida and abuses against Nuba civilians, both within and outside the camp. Many international players believed this version of events, although some disputed it. These ground tensions between the SPLM–N and JEM have continued since the new war erupted in South Sudan, yet both movements worried that the camps at Yida and especially Ajuong Thok could be targeted by SPLM–IO troops coming from South Kordofan or Upper Nile. As a result, they mobilized to block SPLM–IO attempts to move from Tonja in Upper Nile towards northern Unity in March–April 2014. JEM is also said to have had a base in Wunkor, north of Tonja, at the border between Unity and Upper Nile.⁵²⁶

UN and NGO literature has also been focusing on JEM’s presence in the rest of Unity state, while largely failing to mention the SPLM–N or other Sudanese groups. Nevertheless, international observers, in particular from UNMISS, acknowledge that they have had virtually no contact with JEM—even in Rubkona, where the JEM base stood at a few hundred metres from the UNMISS compound until April 2014. Meanwhile, IGAD seems to have refrained from reporting publicly on the Sudanese rebel presence, even though its Monitoring and Verification Mission team is supposed to monitor the presence of foreign forces as a violation of the cessation of hostilities to which the parties recommitted themselves multiple times.

Although international observers have recognized that they have had virtually no knowledge of or engagement with JEM, they have blamed the movement for a number of incidents, without much evidence that the group was involved or that other groups were not. In Bentiu, UNMISS officials blamed JEM for shooting rockets into the mission's compound on 17 April 2014; however, the type of rocket identified has been used by both parties in Unity state, which calls the officials' accusations into question. Some other reported incidents involved violence against civilians in southern Unity and in the Yida camp. Yet until June 2014, UNMISS had not been able to travel to southern Unity to investigate crimes, and thus acknowledged that 'information on crimes in southern Unity, including by JEM, was based on second-hand information'.⁵²⁷

This lack of access probably explains why the UNMISS human rights report of May 2014 provides many more details on violations committed in Bentiu than outside the capital, notably in southern Unity. In fact, the report does not mention any Sudanese armed group but JEM (UNMISS, 2014b). The UN Secretary-General's report that was released two months later discusses JEM as well as the SLA—albeit without identifying the faction—but it does not refer to the SPLM–N (UNSG, 2014b, p. 6). Meanwhile, the relevant reports of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International mention only JEM (Amnesty International, 2014; HRW, 2014).

One reason for the general focus on JEM is that its presence has been significant in terms of numbers, locations, and duration—as the SPLA and JEM itself admit. SLA–AW and SLA–MM had fewer troops in the borderlands between Unity and South Kordofan, and the SPLM–N, in particular during the first months of South Sudan's new conflict, was busy containing the Sudanese army in the Nuba Mountains, and is also known as less mobile. As an SPLA officer pointed out, 'We selected JEM because they are mobile. Those of SPLM–N, if we call them, maybe the Government of Sudan can take their positions.'⁵²⁸

As Riek Machar noted: 'JEM was more noticed because of their style of fighting and the devastation they do—they looted more than 200 cars in Unity.' Yet JEM also stand out visually, while SPLM–N soldiers wear the same uniforms as and thus resemble southern SPLA forces. In the words of an SRF commander who is not a member of JEM:

*The UN speak only about JEM because they sometimes see them, as they don't wear SPLA uniforms, and don't try to hide. SPLM-N are there but UN don't see them—they have SPLA uniforms and operate more secretly. It's better to operate like SPLM-N.*⁵²⁹

Thus international observers, as well as local witnesses, generally identified 'JEM' on the basis of visible signs that they took to be typical of the group, including pick-ups mounted with machine guns, with markings on the sides (which sometimes read 'JEM'); turbans and dreadlocks; communication in Arabic; and, sometimes, lighter skin colour.⁵³⁰ With reference to vehicles, Peter Gatdet has said: 'We recognize SPLM-N because they use big lorries, while JEM has only small cars, with "JEM" written on some.'⁵³¹

In the Sudanese context, it is often misleading to classify individuals based on their skin colour, their language, or their appearance. Indeed, Sudanese rebel factions are ethnically diverse and Arabic is widely spoken in the borderlands. The 'Darfurian' rebel groups, for instance, comprise many members from other parts of Sudan, including Nuba and Arabs from Kordofan, and even some South Sudanese; meanwhile, the SPLM-N also counts Darfurian and South Sudanese among its members. Some SPLM-IO leaders have thus mentioned fighting against JEM Nuba combatants (De Alessi, 2015, p. 58). One JEM leader acknowledged that the movement's force that was defeated in South Darfur in April 2015 included, in addition to Darfurians from various tribes, 'a lot of Nuba troops and a small number of South Sudanese'.⁵³² Turbans and dreadlocks are not specific to JEM either; they can be seen in various groups, even in the SPLA.

Identifications based on fighting strategies are also unreliable, not least because Darfurian tactics have been spreading to other groups, including the SPLM-N and the SPLA. JEM reportedly provided tactical training to SPLA soldiers. And Darfurian 'experts' who have 'cut' vehicle cabins for Darfurian rebels are said to have done the same for both the SPLM-N and the SPLA. Among SPLA troops, demand for this service has grown since the current crisis erupted, with 200–300 cars cut in the first half of 2014; in particular, SPLA fighters have reportedly increased their use of cut cars since 2012, when they fought alongside JEM in Hejlj.⁵³³ Moreover, Bapiny Monyтуil's forces say that they were trained in the same tactics by the Sudanese army when they were on their side,

so that half the hundred vehicles in which they returned to South Sudan were cut cars.⁵³⁴ In addition, both Bapiny Monytil's fighters and regular SPLA officers say some of their soldiers adopted a *kadmul* (turban).⁵³⁵

Another problem stems from the fact that South Sudanese are not particularly aware of the various Sudanese rebel factions. As one SPLM–IO leader highlighted, 'We don't know the difference between JEM and SLA, but both might have been involved [in South Sudan].'⁵³⁶ Rather than 'JEM' or 'SLA', South Sudanese generally mention more generic names, in particular 'Tora-Bora'. Peter Gatdet summarized the issue as follows: 'We call all Tora-Bora, but we don't know if they are from JEM of other movements, although some are also with SPLM–N.'⁵³⁷

Tora-Bora, initially the name of an early SLA camp in central Darfur, became the most common nickname of various Darfurian rebels in Darfur itself and in other countries where they were present, including Chad and South Sudan (Tubiana, 2010, p. 67). South Sudanese players say they would use the term with reference to any Darfurian rebel and even any Sudanese combatant, including Nuba and SPLM–N fighters. UNMISS officers in Unity acknowledged that their local interlocutors used mostly 'Tora-Bora' to identify combatants—and that they translated the term as 'JEM'.

UNMISS officers also reported that their interlocutors used the term *jellaba*, which originally signified 'trader' in Sudanese Arabic. Historically, in Sudan's peripheries, the word designated Arab or arabized traders who came from the northern Nile Valley; later, it was used to refer to administrators of the same origin. During the civil war in southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, *jellaba* was used to label anyone from the Government of Sudan or the Sudanese army. Translating the term as 'Darfurian rebels' is thus highly problematic. In referring to Nuba combatants, Nuer witnesses also used the Nuer term 'Dhong'—but it is unclear whether those troops belong to the SPLM–N or JEM.⁵³⁸

To add to the complexity, the regular SPLA reportedly still has Sudanese soldiers in its ranks, including Nuba soldiers as well as some from Blue Nile, although figures are disputed and there is no evidence that such troops were deployed against the SPLM–IO (De Alessi, 2015, p. 58). Northern soldiers within the SPLA also include Rizeigat Arabs from Darfur and Missiriya Arabs from Kordofan, in various locations in South Sudan. Beginning in 2008, Unity

state's 4th Division included a Missiriya brigade that was based in Duar, in Koch county; after the January 2011 separation referendum, these fighters pulled out of Duar and reportedly returned to Sudan as civilians. At independence, the SPLA included about 1,500 Rizeigat and as many Missiriya.

In order to fulfil its promises to Khartoum to 'disengage' these fighters, while in the meantime supporting the Sudanese rebels, Juba encouraged the northern soldiers to join the SPLM-N or at least Darfurian rebel movements. Yet some reportedly preferred to return to Sudan as civilians, and others were reluctant to leave South Sudan. By December 2011, there were 418 Rizeigat in SPLA's 3rd Division in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, but they were not deployed in operations, so as to avoid Khartoum's accusations (others were reportedly part of the 5th Division). Some came back to civilian life in 2012, but about 500 Rizeigat, as well as some Sudanese from other communities, reportedly remained on the SPLA payroll (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2012, pp. 57–58). Similarly, Unity's 4th Division still included a 'brigade' of some 500 Missiriya, under the command of Bokora Mohammed Fadel.⁵³⁹ They officially joined the SPLM-N in May 2012 and, according to an officer from the 4th Division, were then on a separate payroll, with money coming directly from Juba: 'one foot in the SPLA, and the other in the SPLM-N'.⁵⁴⁰ The presence of Sudanese troops in the regular SPLA is acknowledged by SPLM-IO officers.⁵⁴¹

In addition, some of the fighters who had left the SPLA were reportedly given the opportunity to rejoin when the current crisis erupted. According to an SPLA officer, 500 combatants, most of whom were Rizeigat, did so, although there is no evidence that they took part in the fighting. Yet it is possible that some Darfurian Arabs and other Sudanese, who had either remained part of the SPLA or rejoined, took part in the fighting in Unity, especially since the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Divisions—which had Sudanese soldiers before independence—fought in Unity.

An SPLM-IO officer confirmed that his troops fought Missiriya from the 4th Division in January 2014 in Panakuach and in April 2014 in Toma South, where some were captured—although whether they were still part of the division is unclear. The same officer said they did not fight in 2015 because the SPLA stopped paying their salaries. Yet Peter Gatdet noted that some Missiriya Awlad Umran combatants were still present in early 2015 in Kaykang area between

Mayom and Abiemnom, where Missiriya nomads spent the dry season, and that they took part in SPLA attacks against the SPLM–IO. Complicating matters is the confusion among SPLM–IO officers regarding what to call Missiriya combatants, such that Missiriya forces that are known to be affiliated with the SPLA or the SPLM–N are often labelled ‘JEM’.⁵⁴²

Beyond JEM’s visibility, another reason why UNMISS and other international observers have blamed JEM while rarely or never mentioning other groups—such as other ‘Darfurian’ movements, or Sudanese fighters in the SPLM–N or the SPLA—seems to be JEM’s ‘Islamist’ reputation. In more than ten years of existence, JEM has fostered considerable diversity in its leadership, troops, and popular base; it has also accepted the secular views espoused by the SRF’s other factions in order to join the alliance. Nevertheless, JEM has struggled to liberate itself from its main founders’ Islamist background. In a long account that blamed JEM for abuses in southern Unity, for instance, the Comboni Catholic mission in Leer called attention to the group’s purported religious identity:

*we received information [. . .] saying that in the front line of the troops there were the Darfurians rebels who allied to the government troops. They would not respect the church as the army soldiers might do (Comboni Missionaries, 2014).*⁵⁴³

There seems to be more international sympathy for the SPLM–N, and several UNMISS officials mentioned that the mission did not ‘see SPLM–N as foreign proxy fighters’, whereas that association was applied to JEM.⁵⁴⁴

The SRF’s friends and enemies divided

In addition to historical ties, political calculations played a role in explaining SRF choices in South Sudan. The July 2013 government reshuffle in Juba replaced some avowed opponents of the Sudanese regime, notably from Abyei, such as former foreign affairs minister Deng Alor. Politicians who were purportedly close to Khartoum were appointed instead, including former members of the Sudanese ruling National Congress Party, such as health minister Riek Gai. Parliament rejected the appointment of Telar Deng, famous for his pro-Khartoum stance, as justice minister; he later became an influential adviser to the president and then, in 2014, ambassador to the Russian Federation.⁵⁴⁵ Sudan’s ambassador to Juba, Mutref Siddiq, and Sudan’s NISS director, Mohammed Atta, reportedly influenced the reshuffle.

Sudan apparently expressed satisfaction with the results, which brought up the possibility of a rapprochement between Khartoum and Juba, on the model of the 2010 Chad–Sudan rapprochement (Tubiana, 2011). That type of reconciliation would have made access to South Sudan more difficult for Sudanese rebels. In an attempt to spearhead the opposition to Kiir, Riek Machar then took a particularly vituperative approach in his speeches on Sudan and South Sudan disputes, notably over Abyei; however, he was not able to sway the southern and northern SPLM figures who had been close to his long-time adversary John Garang.⁵⁴⁶

The new war relegated the Sudan issue to the sidelines. In the government, once pro-Khartoum Dinka leaders such as Telar Deng seemed to follow a tribal agenda rather than their historical pro-Khartoum stance. They cohabited with historically anti-Khartoum SPLA figures such as Northern Bahr el Ghazal governor Paul Malong, who became increasingly influential and was appointed SPLA chief of staff in April 2014, or Nhial Deng Nhial, who headed the government delegation in the peace talks.⁵⁴⁷

As a result, both Khartoum and the SRF were initially destabilized by the new war, in which their historical friends and enemies found each other on opposing sides. Salva Kiir had replaced the late John Garang, but he did not count himself among the ‘Garang boys’, who saw support to the SPLM–N as a duty, since so many soldiers from the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile had fought alongside the southerners during the second civil war. As a result, the South Sudanese president was not a close friend of Abdelaziz al-Hilu; instead, he favoured his Nuba rivals—former South Kordofan SPLM deputy governor Daniel Kodi, now on Khartoum’s side, former governor Ismail Khamis Jallab, and SPLM dissident Telefon Kuku, who had been imprisoned in Juba and released by Kiir in April 2013, and who then aligned with Jallab.⁵⁴⁸

Similarly, SPLM–IO leader Riek Machar has always been ambiguous regarding South Sudan’s relations with the SRF. In 2011, before the SPLM–N resumed war, Darfurian rebels counted Machar as a main ally, yet the then vice president in Juba said, ‘Darfur rebels are just one of the tools we can use to put pressure on Khartoum in bilateral negotiations.’⁵⁴⁹ Taban Deng, who had supported the SRF when he was the governor of Unity, had been removed—reportedly at Khartoum’s demand—and was now again allied with his rival Machar in the SPLM–IO. According to a government delegate at the peace talks in Addis

Ababa in May 2014, Taban Deng, who headed the SPLM–IO delegation, emphasized the issue of JEM’s presence in South Sudan. IGAD’s Sudanese envoy, Mohammed al-Dhabi, then blamed him for being ‘the one who brought JEM to South Sudan’.⁵⁵⁰

Nowadays, the ‘Garang boys’, who used to be among the SRF’s closest allies, are not active in any of the ‘armed’ camps of the South Sudanese conflicts. They are among the former ‘political detainees’ who present themselves as a third party—including ‘Abyei boy’ Deng Alor, former deputy minister of defence Majak D’Agoot, and former SPLM secretary general Pagan Amum. SRF leaders have claimed a similar neutrality, and the SPLM–N even raised the idea of mediating the SPLM’s internal talks in South Sudan. This mediation proposal echoed South Sudan’s previous offers to mediate talks between Khartoum and the SPLM–N.⁵⁵¹

As one South Sudanese analyst observed, ‘the detainees are enemies of both Kampala and Khartoum’, which further reinforces their neutral image.⁵⁵² Yet, precisely because of this and in spite of old ties, they do not constitute an alternative for the SRF, which needs access to a country that borders Sudan and friendly relations with Sudan’s main regional foe, Uganda. When the new war erupted in South Sudan and Uganda quickly intervened, it appeared the SRF had little choice but to align with the Juba–Kampala axis.

In the short term, the crisis in South Sudan meant that the SRF would receive less support from Juba, which increasingly lacked funds and needed to provide arms to its regular forces (Craze, 2014, p. 21). The SPLM–N thus reportedly stopped receiving lump sums.⁵⁵³ Nevertheless, SRF forces continued to fuel their vehicles in South Sudan. In February 2014, SPLM–N troops who were bringing back fuel from Bentiu to South Kordofan were reportedly attacked by armed Nuer on their way.

Once again, Khartoum accused South Sudan of providing support to the SRF. Officials in Juba denied doing so and claimed the SPLM–IO was at the origin of the accusations, exaggerating JEM’s role in order to curry Sudanese favour, but also inciting Khartoum to fight the SRF.⁵⁵⁴

A shared dilemma of both Sudanese and South Sudanese armed oppositions is how to balance the need for external support with the disadvantages of fighting on behalf of backing states. As some of these groups have already

experienced, they tend to be portrayed as proxy forces and mercenaries, rather than as rebels with a cause. JEM's image underwent such a transformation when it fought for the Chadian government against Khartoum-backed Chadian rebels, before being brutally expelled from Chad when N'Djaména finally reconciled with Khartoum in 2010 (Tubiana, 2011). Some JEM leaders said that this experience had taught them the risks involved in fighting for Kiir. As one of them said after the Bentiu massacre, 'This is not our cause, we should not fight Machar forces anymore.'⁵⁵⁵ Former JEM spokesman Ahmed Hussein Adam has advised that 'outside forces, including regional state actors and non-state actors, should not engage in South Sudan's conflict under any form or justification' (Adam, 2014).

Sudanese rebels' involvement in South Sudan triggered debate—not so much among the different SRF components, but rather within each of them, given that they were involved as separate factions rather than as a unified SRF. One SPLM–N officer argued that 'the SPLM–N should not side with the Dinka. If anyone else takes power, we will suffer.' Meanwhile, some government officers in Unity also disapproved of being helped by Sudanese rebels. A case in point were Bul Nuer who were loyal to the government and complained about JEM looting in Unity state, contending that the Sudanese rebels should leave. Regular SPLA officers supported this view, saying: 'We can protect oil fields ourselves instead of bringing in a body with another agenda.'⁵⁵⁶ Similarly, a humanitarian organization close to the SPLM–N condemned the 'visible involvement of JEM forces aligned with the Republic of South Sudan SPLA in the military struggle for control of Bentiu and Rubkona' (SKBN Coordination Unit, 2014, p. 2).

Sudan's roles

Switching policies

Both the Sudanese government and Sudanese rebels saw the new crisis in South Sudan as a possible threat and, to a lesser extent, an opportunity. The SRF's involvement undermined Khartoum's role as co-mediator, alongside Ethiopia and Kenya, in the regional IGAD peace process on South Sudan. Yet beyond the SRF issue, Sudan's officially neutral position was questioned from the start, largely because its commitment to the rapprochement with Juba gave the initial

impression that Khartoum would be rather supportive of Kiir, politically and even militarily. Newly appointed government officials who had been close to Khartoum—presidential advisers Tut Gatluak and Telar Deng, a former SSLM member—lobbied the Sudanese government on behalf of Juba.

In March 2014, when South Sudanese defence minister Kuol Manyang was visiting Khartoum, Sudan offered to train SPLA officers. Juba had also hoped to buy military vehicles and ammunition from Khartoum; while officials in Juba and Khartoum said that only the latter, in limited quantities, had been sold, members of the Sudanese official opposition claimed larger quantities of ammunition had been delivered freely. Kuol Manyang had wished to buy armoured vehicles but was told that Sudan had stopped producing them; instead, Khartoum proposed cars, which were of less interest to Juba. Manyang later went to Egypt, again looking for armour, only to be offered officer training as well as a military cooperation deal that would involve an Egyptian airbase in South Sudan. Few concrete results emerged from the two visits.⁵⁵⁷

While still attached to the rapprochement and involved in the mediation, Khartoum has shown increasing willingness to consider supporting the SPLM–IO, which sends a clear signal regarding its disapproval of the persistent links between Juba and the SRF. In December 2014, Sudan’s NISS director, Mohammed Atta, threatened to pursue SRF rebels into South Sudan (*Sudan Tribune*, 2014i). Juba continued to host the SRF but prevented the group from launching direct attacks from South Sudan on Sudanese territory. In particular, in April 2015, as JEM was planning a main raid from Northern Bahr el Ghazal to West Kordofan, Juba reportedly asked the Darfurian rebels not to enter Sudan that way. In order for Juba to be able to pretend the attack was not originating in its soil but in SPLM–N-held territory, JEM then planned to move back to South Kordofan, but was not welcomed by the SPLM–N. JEM troops then moved back to Western Bahr el Ghazal to enter Darfur; the group subsequently considered the rerouting a main cause of their defeat by the Rapid Support Forces in South Darfur.⁵⁵⁸

According to an SPLM–IO leader, ‘SAF officers felt they had been betrayed [by Kiir] and betrayed their [historical] allies’, namely the many SPLM–IO members hailing from armed groups once backed by Khartoum, such as the SSDF. He added that ‘initially Khartoum was pro-Kiir but the SRF’s and Uganda’s involvement turned the Sudanese against Kiir’.⁵⁵⁹

Khartoum's threat of direct intervention in South Sudan may be less of a reaction to the continuous SRF presence than to Uganda's own intervention in favour of Juba. According to a Sudanese official:

*The key to SRF's presence [in South Sudan] is Museveni. When you're a rebel hosted by another country and this country wants you to do something, somehow you can't refuse. JEM was compelled to intervene by Museveni. Some in JEM don't agree but were forced to enter this war.*⁵⁶⁰

SRF leaders deny that Uganda put pressure on them, although doubts persist since many were hosted by Kampala—until, in early 2015, Khartoum's insistence finally forced Uganda to ask the main leaders to leave.⁵⁶¹ In the words of an international observer, Khartoum also understood that 'Salva was compelled to ally with Uganda'.⁵⁶² Some IGAD officials and international observers partly attribute the August 2015 peace agreement to a better understanding between Khartoum and Kampala and predict a lasting rapprochement similar to the one between Chad and Sudan since 2010. Yet others, including Sudanese observers, are sceptical, arguing that Khartoum is not liable to abandon a proxy war that, unlike the one with Chad, does not constitute a major threat.⁵⁶³

Beyond links between Uganda and the SRF, Khartoum also sees the presence of Ugandan troops in South Sudan as a direct threat. IGAD's initial idea of replacing those troops with a regional 'protection and deterrence force' was never implemented; instead, countries in the region supplied simple reinforcements to assist UNMISS.⁵⁶⁴ On 9 November 2014, the South Sudanese parties signed a new agreement, recommitting themselves to the January cessation of hostilities and insisting on a gradual withdrawal of foreign forces. On 17 August 2015, they agreed to a retreat of Ugandan forces within 45 days (except from Western Equatoria) and to a complete withdrawal of the SRF (IGAD, 2015c, p. 20). The presence of Ugandan forces arguably emboldened military hardliners in Juba.

Khartoum's hesitations regarding which policy was most appropriate might also have been due to internal divisions on the issue. Minutes of an August 2014 meeting of high-level security officials, which were allegedly leaked, suggest that some officials were in favour of a Sudanese disengagement from South Sudan's affairs. Among them was the director general of the police, Hashim

Osman, who was quoted saying: 'What business do we have with the South? Let them solve their own problems and again, the problem of South Sudan is not one that can be solved.' Yet some SAF generals, such as Imad-ad-Din Adawi—the former lead negotiator with South Sudan following independence, who was appointed SAF chief of staff in 2015 and who is known to be close to the NISS and the president—recommended 'huge support' to the SPLM–IO, while Hashim Abdallah suggested that 'any autonomy for the Greater Upper Nile [as advocated by the SPLM–IO] is good for us in terms of border security, oil resources and trade'.⁵⁶⁵

Beyond individual differences, it appears that the NISS, in contrast to SAF and civilian leaders, is in favour of supporting the SPLM–IO, and that it has been pivotal in providing weapons to the South Sudanese rebels—as evidenced by the ammunition boxes found in Panakuach. Sudan's military intelligence appears to have been opposed to the support, although its good relations with Taban Deng are said to be key to the SPLM–IO's links with Khartoum. The Panel of Experts on South Sudan described Taban Deng, who frequently travelled to Khartoum after December 2013, as 'in charge of procurement' together with Carlo Kuol, who became deputy chief of staff in charge of logistics in 2014 and, working out of Machar's Khartoum office, acted as 'focal point' between the SPLM–IO and the Government of Sudan. Another former SSLM/A leader, James Gai Yoach, played a similar role before he joined Juba (UNPoE, 2016, pp. 31–32). President Bashir was reportedly hesitant but, since 2015, NISS influence has been growing to the detriment of SAF's role (SDFG, 2015).⁵⁶⁶

Sudan also tried to benefit from the new divisions within South Sudan, and the need of both warring parties to secure Sudan's support, or at least its neutrality, to obtain new concessions on contentious issues between the two countries, such as oil or the Abyei enclave. In order to divide the pro-Juba Dinka camp with reference to Abyei, the SPLM–IO officially positioned itself as championing the local Ngok Dinka cause, as did Riek Machar even before the war began; in this way, the rebels presented themselves as John Garang's real heirs and denounced the government as too close to Khartoum. In January 2015, it went so far as to declare Abyei a new state of South Sudan, on the basis of the unilateral October 2013 local referendum that Juba had cautiously refused to endorse (Radio Tamazuj, 2015a).

Yet, in their discussions with Khartoum, SPLM–IO leaders have reportedly been more willing to compromise. In particular, the SPLM–IO allegedly offered Khartoum a fifty–fifty share of South Sudan’s oil revenues, in effect a return to the CPA-period formula, and a promise Machar had made in order to win Khartoum’s support in the 1990s (ICG, 2015, p. 20). Peter Gatdet said he was in favour of this approach: ‘If we make an oil deal with Khartoum, they should help us.’ Officials in Juba also indicated that Khartoum may be interested in greater autonomy for oil-rich Greater Upper Nile, either de facto, with large swathes of territory escaping Juba’s control, or de jure, along the federalist line advocated by the SPLM–IO.⁵⁶⁷

As Riek Machar summarized in March 2015: ‘We’re trying to persuade Sudan to support us but we haven’t had too much success so far.’⁵⁶⁸ Another SPLM–IO official complained that ‘Khartoum is only giving us little ammunition and this is not enough’.⁵⁶⁹ Yet, it appears that, beyond insufficient quantities, the SPLM–IO suffered from being unable to distribute Sudanese supplies to southern Unity. Further the importance of Khartoum’s support for the SPLM–IO should not only be measured quantitatively: it is crucial, as recalled by a Sudanese opposition official, ‘because Sudan is the only state to support SPLM–IO with logistics and ammunition’.⁵⁷⁰

SPLM–IO cross-border activities

South Sudanese government and SRF sources have accused the SPLM–IO of having benefitted from bases in Sudan, notably in West and South Kordofan, from where its attacks on Bentiu were largely launched (HSBA, 2015a). They identified major Sudanese army garrisons, including West Kordofan’s Hejlj and Kharasana, which served as main bases for the SSLM/A when it was supported by Sudan, as well as Difra, north of Abyei, and South Kordofan’s Abu Jibeha, Jebel Liri, Rashad, and Tolodi. The SPLM–N claims that some 7,000 SPLM–IO troops have been based in West and South Kordofan since the SPLA’s retake of Bentiu in January 2014. They also argue that Nuer troops fought alongside SAF in the Nuba Mountains in January 2015 and March 2016, yet the troops were not necessarily SPLM–IO—they could have been more classical Khartoum-backed militias (De Alessi, 2015, p. 59; HSBA, 2015b; ICG, 2015, p. 23).

In March 2016, SPLM–IO defectors, notably led by Peter Gatdet, were accused of fighting the SPLM–N in South Kordofan (*Sudan Tribune*, 2016b).

It seems that Khartoum prefers to have the SPLM–IO based in the borderlands, in particular in the Panakuach–Teshwin area, rather than deep in Sudan. After first losing Panakuach in January 2014, SPLM–IO forces settled west of it in the border area, as confirmed by both Sudanese government and local Missiriya sources. Later, after losing Panakuach a second time in June 2015, SPLM–IO forces took refuge in West Kordofan.⁵⁷¹

A Sudanese government official confirmed that the SPLM–IO was present in Hejlj and Difra, but not in South Kordofan’s garrisons. In Difra, NISS agents, who are officially part of the police force, have reportedly been providing weapons to the SPLM–IO.⁵⁷²

In the West Kordofan garrisons, according to local Missiriya sources as well as officials in Juba, SPLM–IO forces began to obtain weapons before the April 2014 attack on Bentiu. They gathered at least 20 cars, mortars, machine guns (including anti-aircraft, multiple-barrel ones and several hundred PKMs, DShKs, and Goryunov machine guns), anti-tank weapons (including recoilless rifles and RPG launchers), 3,000 AK-type rifles, and ammunition loaded on four trucks. A Khartoum official observed that some SPLM–IO soldiers were trained to drive armoured vehicles; Juba officials said that SPLM–IO forces had obtained spare vehicle parts and maintenance, and that they had exchanged tanks for cars at the border between Upper Nile and Sudan’s White Nile. In May, Juba also received unconfirmed information that a convoy of 80 cars destined for the SPLM–IO was on its way from central Sudan to South Sudan through Kosti.⁵⁷³

There are indeed accounts of SPLM–IO cross-border activities beyond the Unity–Kordofan border. With respect to the area west of Unity state, there are unconfirmed reports that several hundred Dinka SPLA defectors from Northern Bahr el Ghazal, under Dau Aturjong, have been hosted in the area between West Kordofan and East Darfur. Aturjong himself left Northern Bahr el Ghazal through this area to join the SPLM–IO in Nairobi. Yet East Darfur Rizeigat are rather hostile to the SPLM–IO and were keen to maintain good relations with authorities in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, a state to which their cattle migrate every year. Rizeigat militias attacked Aturjong’s forces in East Darfur in October 2014. Together with Nuer defectors from Western Bahr el Ghazal, they may

have joined SPLM–IO troops from Unity at a camp in West Kordofan—where Missiriya Arabs are said to be more welcoming (HSBA, 2014h; 2014i).

That said, a JEM member remarked that, by April 2015, Aturjong’s forces were based in East Darfur’s Abu Matareq locality, from where they were expected to launch attacks on JEM bases in Northern or Western Bahr el Ghazal.⁵⁷⁴ Other reports suggest that Aturjong’s base was actually in the disputed ‘14 Mile’ area between Northern Bahr el Ghazal and East Darfur. Even though the area is north of the 1956 line, it has been under SPLA control since 2010, and Khartoum cannot be said to be ‘hosting’ SPLM–IO troops there.⁵⁷⁵

Peter Gatdet asserted that by March 2015, Aturjong’s forces—which had been joined by Fertit troops from Western Bahr el Ghazal—were based in another disputed area, the Kafia Kingi enclave, which is well under Sudan’s control. A JEM official confirmed this statement, saying that JEM forces found an SPLM–IO base when crossing the enclave on their way to Western Bahr el Ghazal from South Darfur, where they had been defeated in April. While the two groups fought each other in Western Bahr el Ghazal, as recounted by Gatdet, they avoided doing so in Kafia Kingi.⁵⁷⁶

There are also reports that South Sudanese militias—which had remained in Khartoum after Bapiny Monytil’s return to Juba in 2013—joined the SPLM–IO. Among them was former SSLM/A leader James Gai Yoach, a Leek Nuer from Rubkona county, who had been jailed in Khartoum immediately after the September 2012 agreement as a sign of good will towards Juba. He was released shortly before the crisis—reportedly at the request of former governor Taban Deng, who was eager to find a Leek ally as a counterweight to the rising Bul Nuer Monytil family. Observers in Juba said that in April 2014, Gai Yoach’s troops, based in Renk area north of Upper Nile, had coalesced with SPLM–IO troops from Upper Nile to attack Kaka town, one of the disputed areas between Sudan and South Sudan, farther south.⁵⁷⁷

Some old-time, Khartoum-backed combatants from Anyanya II are also said to have joined forces with the SPLM–IO, in particular Gordon Kong, a Nuer from Nasir. In April 2014, Kong reportedly had forces in Bud in Blue Nile, at the border with Upper Nile, from where he could also launch attacks towards Renk and Kaka (HSBA, 2014e).⁵⁷⁸ Like Hejlj and Kharasana in West Kordofan, Bud has long been known as a base for southern militias; the SPLM–N has claimed

that 5,000 SPLM–IO troops have been hosted there since late 2014 (HSBA, 2015b). In September 2014, SPLM–IO forces that attacked Renk were said to have come from Blue Nile and Sennar states in Sudan, before withdrawing to Jabalein, over the border from Renk in Sudan’s White Nile state (HSBA, 2014g).

The border between South Sudan’s Upper Nile and Sudan has long been an area of operations for various non-Nuer, Khartoum-backed militias, which are said to have joined forces with the SPLM–IO. Among them are militias that are composed solely of Maban, a small ethnic group based in Maban county in Upper Nile; also based in Bud, they are led by Kamal Loma and Muntu Mutallah Abdallah (HSBA, 2015b). Since 2011, they fought for Khartoum against the SPLM–N in Blue Nile, but their agenda was unclear, as it also seemed to be directed against Juba and to aim at reunifying Maban county with Sudan. The SPLM–N’s involvement in South Sudan’s conflict may give them a justification to fight in both Blue Nile and Upper Nile (HSBA, 2013d, p. 7; ICG, 2013, pp. 22–23).⁵⁷⁹ There have also been reports that a group called ‘Maban Heroes’ targeted refugees from Blue Nile in Maban county, allegedly with the support of the SPLM–IO. Yet the Maban tribe is not united, and there are also Juba-backed Maban militias that targeted Nuer in Maban county.⁵⁸⁰

Another Khartoum-backed militia that is reportedly based in Bud is led by Mohammed Chol al-Ahmar, an Islamized Abialang Dinka from Renk area. It is unclear whether this force has joined the SPLM–IO. Farther west, another Dinka officer, Thomas Thiel, who hails from Warrap state, is believed to lead two or three battalions composed of Dinka from Warrap and Missiriya Arabs from West Kordofan; they appear to be based in Mujlad in West Kordofan. He fought alongside the Sudanese army in Abyei in 2008 and allegedly took part in the April 2014 SPLM–IO attack on Bentiu, although this latter claim is disputed.⁵⁸¹

Riek Machar confirmed that ‘militias who were still in Sudan joined SPLM–IO’, but only since May 2014 and in small numbers, including ‘118 men for Gai Yoach, 105 for Gordon Kong, 35 for the Maban group of Kamal Loma and Muntu Abdallah’. Machar added that:

*Mohammed Chol didn’t join formally yet. Khartoum demobilized them before the crisis. When they heard we wanted recruits, their commanders remobilized them. They came without guns, we had to arm them.*⁵⁸²

Peter Gatdet confirmed that ‘Nuer forces in Sudan were disarmed by Khartoum and Gai Yoach joined us without weapons’. Yet he added that ‘Khartoum asked him to join’ the SPLM–IO. He claimed that Gordon Kong ‘has no forces’ and that, in March 2015, Gai Yoach had ‘only a few troops in Wadakona’, close to Renk in northern Upper Nile, although these were ‘not active’. Gatdet said that Gai Yoach was ‘upset with Riek Machar’ and wanted to join Juba.⁵⁸³ In June 2015, an SPLM–IO leader mused that ‘Gai Yoach is one of us but not really one of us’.⁵⁸⁴ Later that month, he defected to the government side and, in September, Gai Yoach was appointed lieutenant general (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015r; 2015cc).

Most of the southern Sudanese militias that remain in Sudan have been integrated into the Sudanese army or the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), and their leaders may have kept Sudanese citizenship. This may explain why, in September 2014, after clashes between the SPLA and the SPLM–IO in Renk, Juba claimed to have captured three opposition soldiers in Sudanese uniforms.⁵⁸⁵ Southern Sudanese militias have allegedly been reactivated and re-armed since the current crisis started. The SPLM–IO and the Khartoum-backed Nuer militias led by Gordon Kong and James Gai Yoach are said to have recruited among Nuer civilians in Sudan, including Nuer who remained in the North and refugees who crossed the border since the new war erupted.

According to the SPLM–N, SPLM–IO forces or ‘pro-Sudanese Nuer elements’ fought them within Blue Nile on limited occasions, in Baw in July 2014 and in Rum later in the year and in early 2015 (HSBA, 2015b). Yet SPLM–N (and SRF) chairman Malik Agar said that confrontations remained limited and that the SPLM–IO was generally avoiding contact with the SPLM–N.⁵⁸⁶ The fighters’ affiliations are as blurry as they are among Sudanese members of the SPLA who remained in South Sudan after independence. Some of South Sudan’s Nuer—but also Dinka and Maban—who had fought in Khartoum-backed militias were subsequently given Sudanese citizenship and integrated into paramilitary forces, such as the PDF, or into the regular army. Some of them have fought against the SPLM–N in this capacity and may continue to do so; in the meantime, they may ally with the SPLM–IO, possibly with Khartoum’s encouragement. Yet, according to an international observer, Machar demanded more than weapons of Khartoum, namely the secondment to the SPLM–IO of SAF Nuer officers who could enhance the rebel force’s organizational capacity; Khartoum

reportedly refused.⁵⁸⁷ After the August 2015 peace agreement signed by Machar and Kiir, the non-signatory Peter Gatdet, based in Khartoum, began to receive (limited) support from Sudan.⁵⁸⁸ Since Machar left Juba for Khartoum in mid-2016, Sudan may try to reconcile him with Gatdet. According to a Sudanese official, the US government's lack of support to Machar and readiness to work with Taban Deng convinced Khartoum to support Machar once again.⁵⁸⁹

Sudan has repeatedly denied that it provided support to the SPLM-IO, including when South Sudanese government officials asked their Sudanese counterparts about it.⁵⁹⁰ As one South Sudanese official related, 'the Government of Sudan is divided over the issue'; another specified that army and intelligence chiefs, as well as local officers in border areas, 'may be supporting [the SPLM-IO] without the consent of President Bashir'.⁵⁹¹ A Sudanese official qualified, confidentially, this notion of a Sudanese president ignorant of his security apparatus's policy regarding South Sudan as a 'myth' created by Khartoum.⁵⁹² After the April 2014 attack on Bentiu, some officials in Juba began to complain that Khartoum was 'playing a double game', as Bashir was publicly supporting Kiir, but the NISS was supporting the SPLM-IO—and selling ammunition to the government in Juba while giving arms to the opposition.⁵⁹³

Unlike in 2011–12, Juba refrained from overreacting to Khartoum's alleged involvement and tried to 'maintain good relations'. An official in Juba said:

*In Unity, SPLM-IO supplies come from Khartoum, but we don't make too much noise about it, as we don't want conflict with Khartoum. But if Sudan continues, we'll stop tolerating that and may reject [Sudan's envoy] Dhabi's participation [in the IGAD-mediated talks].*⁵⁹⁴

In May 2015, in stark contrast to this prediction, IGAD asked president Bashir 'to be more involved' in the South Sudan peace process (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015o).

Both Juba and the international community have been relatively cautious regarding Khartoum's links with the SPLM-IO. An international observer noted that 'what's keeping everyone silent is it could have been much more. Khartoum itself is cautious because it wants both sides to be dependent on Sudan.'⁵⁹⁵ Indeed, in comparison with its long history of proxy intervention in southern Sudan, which continued after independence, Khartoum also seems to have refrained from engaging in heavier intervention. Rather, the GoS appears

to be sending messages to the different parties in South Sudan in order to promote its own agenda—notably against the SRF’s renewed ties with Juba and against Kampala’s regional ambitions.⁵⁹⁶

So far, since the beginning of the most recent conflict, only one main incident directly implicated the Sudanese and South Sudanese armies. In June 2015, as the SPLA retook Panakuach and chased away SPLM–IO forces towards Sudan, they overran three Sudanese army barracks in neighbouring Teshwin. Theoretically, that location should have been demilitarized since it is within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone (SDBZ), as agreed by Khartoum and Juba. Gatdet claimed the attack on SAF was ‘deliberate’ and also involved JEM. Yet, concerned that the incident might trigger a violent response from Khartoum, the SPLA quickly withdrew from SAF bases and returned the heavy weaponry, including two tanks, that they had acquired there; moreover, Matthew Puljang met Mohammed Ahmed of SAF on 10 June 2015 to assure the Sudanese army that the SPLA’s encroachment into Sudan was not part of a broader offensive against Khartoum (HSBA, 2015e; *Sudan Tribune*, 2015q).⁵⁹⁷

This series of events reveals obvious contradictions. While the GoS and GRSS are supposedly committed to an SDBZ, and Mohammed Ahmed affirmed that no members of the SPLM–IO would be allowed to remain on Sudanese territory, it is evident that the rebels have at least tacit approval to do exactly that.

Various South Sudanese and Sudanese players from different sides argue that Khartoum is not interested in seeing the SPLM–IO win, but rather just to survive, in order for the war to last and for South Sudan to remain weak. According to former SPLA chief of staff James Hoth Mai, ‘Khartoum doesn’t want the rebels to defeat the government, they just want fighting to continue.’ In this context, Peter Gatdet observed: ‘Khartoum sees every South Sudanese as their enemy, and they will not give substantial military equipment to their enemy.’⁵⁹⁸ As noted by the Panel of Experts on South Sudan:

former opposition members speculated that the Sudan intended to supply sufficient ammunition to keep the opposition fighting, while not providing it with either sufficient materiel or the kind of equipment (in particular surface-to-air missiles) required to defeat the Government (UNPoE, 2016, p. 32).

Overall, it appears that Khartoum has been using primarily the SPLM–IO to pressure Juba to stop supporting and hosting the SRF.

Missiriya roles

Riek Machar acknowledged that the SPLM–IO received some weapons from Sudan, but only from ‘Missiriya’.⁵⁹⁹ The hypothesis that the South Sudanese rebels may have obtained support in West Kordofan from local Arab militias is given credit by witnesses of the April 2014 attack on Bentiu: all mention the presence of Missiriya Arabs fighting alongside SPLM–IO troops (ICG, 2015, p. 13).⁶⁰⁰ As one witness reported: ‘Missiriya under Hamdein Issa came on 200 motorbikes, mostly for looting.’ Some of them were said to be PDF members, but nothing indicates they were acting on behalf of Khartoum; they appeared to be on their own, mostly motivated by the booty. Survivors of the killings at the mosque described how an Arab militia chief came to the mosque, introduced himself as Hamdein, and said: ‘We came with those Nuer from Mujlad in Sudan. We will protect you, heal you, and bring you to UNMISS. No one will kill you now.’ He then called Missiriya survivors to be able to evacuate them as a priority.⁶⁰¹ Prior to this, Nuer combatants had also attempted to spare Missiriya, but only after the first wave of shootings in which Missiriya civilians had already been killed (UNMISS, 2015a, p. 12). Missiriya civilians said both Hamdein and fellow Missiriya leader Abderrahman Bakhit came to Bentiu to protect Missiriya civilians.⁶⁰²

The Missiriya combatants were not present during the massacre, and prior to Hamdein’s arrival, some Missiriya, including a close relative of Hamdein, had been killed in the mosque together with other civilians. According to Peter Gatdet, Hamdein visited James Koang in Panakuach in April 2015, shortly before the SPLM–IO raid, and then moved to Bentiu behind SPLM–IO troops but ‘didn’t help to take the town’.⁶⁰³ The SPLA’s 3rd Division commander, Santino Deng, who led the government’s recapture of Bentiu in April–May, said that UNMISS transferred two of those Missiriya combatants to him; they had pretended to be survivors of the killings and were hiding in the UN base.⁶⁰⁴

The UNMISS list of Sudanese killed in Bentiu includes 28 names from West Kordofan. Mourning ceremonies for 38 were reported in Mujlad and ad-Dibab in West Kordofan. Missiriya were increasingly divided on how to view the SPLM–IO. In retaliation, according to Peter Gatdet, Awlad Umran combatants ambushed SPLM–IO forces in Tor Abyod and killed seven, after which Hamdein Issa visited Gatdet in Tor Abyod to discuss options for reconciliation.⁶⁰⁵

Well known in both Unity and West Kordofan, Hamdein Issa al-Nur, from the Awlad Umran clan of the Missiriya, had been an SPLA colonel beginning in the 1990s and a cross-border trader with good relations with Nuer in Unity state, including with Riek Machar himself. Abderrahman Bakhit, also an Awlad Umran, was part of the SPLA during the CPA period. In 2011, at South Sudan's independence, Hamdein reportedly attempted to join fellow Missiriya members of the SPLA's 4th Division in Bentiu, but he was arrested by Sudan's NISS and jailed for a year. Peter Gatdet claimed that after his release, Hamdein became a PDF commander.⁶⁰⁶

Gatdet also said that when Hamdein visited him in Tor Abyod after the Bentiu killings, his aim was to reconcile with Gatdet and secure his permission for Awlad Umran cattle to migrate into SPLM-IO territory. In Gatdet's words: 'I told him OK but don't come with guns. We made an agreement and they came with many cows.'⁶⁰⁷

After Sudan's second civil war, migration of both Missiriya and Rizeigat towards southern Sudan began to fluctuate in concert with their relations with local SPLM/A leaders. In 1986, a year remembered by the Nuer as *Ruon Karegni* (year of the Arabs), Missiriya militias raided Mayom county, but relations improved as Nuer leaders joined Khartoum and as Missiriya leaders became autonomous from Khartoum. The migrations were accompanied with clandestine 'peace markets' (*suq al-salam* in Arabic) at which Arabs were selling victuals and weapons to southern rebels and civilians. The first such market reportedly opened in 1987–88 in Rup Nyagay, in Rubkona county, but was burnt to the ground by pro-Khartoum forces led by Matiep in 1997. It was replaced by other markets, beginning with one in Jezira Baytong, a bit farther away from Rubkona in the Jezira swamplands.⁶⁰⁸

Migrations and trade have long been facilitated through regular conferences and agreements between northern nomads and southern community leaders; it is clear, however, that those processes were heavily politicized from the start, and that they were led by, on the Arab side, leaders who had turned against Khartoum, and who often ended up joining the SPLM/A. In the 2013–14 dry season, the migration was particularly successful in South Sudan's Northern Bahr el Ghazal state, notably because roads towards Abyei and Unity were virtually closed, the latter due to fighting in the recent war (Craze, 2014, p. 58).⁶⁰⁹

In February 2015, reciprocal accusations of cattle-rustling pitted Missiriya against Bul Nuer at the border between West Kordofan and Unity (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015j).

Migration to Unity was always less important, which explains why many Missiriya prefer to align with the Dinka rather than the Nuer, although it seems that the Awlad Umran clan of the Missiriya favours migration to Unity and has more relations with local Nuer, many of whom joined the SPLM–IO. The Awlad Umran, most of whom migrate to Mayom county, are closer to the Bul Nuer—including, on the SPLM–IO side, leaders such as Makal Kuol. Yet many of the Bul Nuer side with Juba, weakening the links between the Awlad Umran and the SPLM–IO. Main Missiriya members of the Sudanese rebellion also belong to the Awlad Umran, beginning with the SPLM–N’s Bokora Mohammed Fadel; these ties have favoured relations between the Awlad Umran and both the Sudanese rebellion and the SPLA, rather than with the Sudanese government.⁶¹⁰

In June 2014 in West Kordofan, fighting over land rights erupted between the Awlad Umran and tribesmen of the rival Zyoud clan of the Falayta Missiriya, and Khartoum reportedly sided with the Zyoud. Armed Nuer fought on the Awlad Umran side (*Sudan Tribune*, 2014b). Hamdein Issa was killed during this fighting, together with more than 150 combatants from both sides. The conflict resumed in March 2015 (Radio Tamazuj, 2015g).⁶¹¹

A new conflict across a disputed border

Since the new war erupted in South Sudan in mid-December 2013, Unity state has witnessed the merging of Sudanese and South Sudanese internal conflicts (ICG, 2015). The process was not unpredictable: South Sudan’s separation from Sudan had left various disputes unresolved between the countries, fuelling internal conflicts, encouraging each to support its neighbour’s armed opposition, and, in some instances, driving a degeneration into direct fighting. Among the hot spots are the blurry and disputed physical border as well as the symbolic boundaries between various armed players, whose ethnic identities alone cannot explain their fluid or multiple affiliations and loyalties.

To be sure, the crisis in South Kordofan, Sudan’s main war theatre since 2011, had already spread over the border. The SRF’s control over part of the border has not only exacerbated the dispute between Sudan and South Sudan, but has

also made it practically impossible to resolve the border dispute. The new presence of another armed opposition, namely the SPLM–IO, in the same borderlands complicates the issue further. Officially, Khartoum and Juba continue to commit to a Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mission (JBVMM), but disputes persist regarding the locations of the border and the SDBZ, the ongoing militarization of the SDBZ, and each country’s role in harbouring and supporting the other’s rebels—including within the SDBZ. South Sudan withdrew from the JBVMM in November 2013 and only rejoined in May 2014, reportedly in the hopes that the mechanism would bring attention to the SPLM–IO presence in Kordofan (Craze, 2014, p. 30).

In March 2016, after accusing Juba once again of supporting the SRF, Khartoum closed four official border crossing points that had just been reopened a few weeks earlier, after having been closed since 2011. This move shattered recent international hopes that bilateral relations were warming thanks to the South Sudan peace process. Current dynamics are impeding both sides’ ability to resolve their border dispute, while also representing a direct threat to the 100,000 refugees from South Kordofan who are still living on the Unity side of the border, trapped between two war zones.

In spite of the new state’s separation from Sudan, both the Sudanese government and the armed opposition have continued to intervene in South Sudan, although less aggressively than ever before. As soon as the new war started in South Sudan, the GoS and the Sudanese opposition began sending messages to the different South Sudanese parties to garner support for their own agenda in Sudan. SRF rebels have taken sides and fought alongside the South Sudanese government, against the SPLM–IO, notably to contain the risk of losing their rear bases in Unity. Khartoum reacted by providing some support to South Sudanese rebels; although that backing may be less generous than before the separation, it is no less threatening to the region’s stability.

International players, and even key local players, long displayed an inability to address the former Sudan’s interconnected conflicts in a comprehensive manner. The CPA was a case in point: many international and local stakeholders—from both the North and the South—exhibited limited faith in the viability of unity. Not all the supporters of South Sudan’s independence were genuine supporters of marginalized Muslims in the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile,



Leer market in June 2014, after it was looted by both sides. © Jérôme Tubiana

or Darfur. Divisions in Sudan's peripheries—in the South, the Two Areas, and Darfur—worked in the secessionists' favour; in 2003–04, those who still believed in Sudan's unity regretted that 'Darfur's plane was taking off while the Southern plane was landing'.⁶¹²

Today, Sudan's conflict and armed opposition seem to be taking on an increasingly national and political character, while the tenor of South Sudan's war and armed opposition appears ever more local and ethnic.

If South Sudan's peace process is to succeed, lessons must be learned from the former Sudan's peace processes—not only the CPA, but also the parallel piecemeal processes, in particular in Darfur. Recipes that failed in Darfur—such as uncoordinated, fragmentary solutions for peacemaking, peacekeeping, inclusivity, accountability, and sanctions, orchestrated by separate players that were more often competing than working together—are not more likely to succeed in South Sudan than in Sudan.

Interconnections make it difficult to solve South Sudan's crisis in isolation from Sudan. International focus has shifted from bilateral relations to solving South Sudan's new crisis, rather than Sudan's protracted conflict, to which the

international community has responded with increasing fatigue, as acknowledged by foreign players (Craze, 2014, p. 39). Yet, if good relations are to be established between Sudan and South Sudan and if the new country's conflict is to be resolved, then it will also be critical to bring an end to Sudan's internal crisis. 🇸🇩

Conclusion

This Working Paper has surveyed the conflict in Unity state from the outbreak of hostilities in December 2013 to the end of 2015, when, despite a peace agreement signed by Kiir and Machar in August 2015, government militia forces continued to carry out attacks in southern Unity. These attacks suggest that the unfolding dynamics of the conflict are to a certain extent delinked from the overall political objectives of either side, and this poses problems for how one might achieve a sustainable peace in the state.

In July 2016, violence erupted again between forces of the SPLA and the SPLM-IO. The rebels had been deployed to Juba to protect their leaders, who had recently joined the new unity government, formed following the August 2015 agreement. Fearing for his safety, Riek Machar then left Juba, and Salva Kiir took advantage of his absence to appoint Taban Deng vice president. With this move, Kiir seriously endangered the IGAD peace process, which was largely based on a renewed power-sharing deal between Kiir and Machar. By co-opting a less threatening—and less popular—Nuer partner than Machar, the president also managed to further divide the already fragmented opposition. He seems to be renewing the alliance he had made with Taban Deng when the latter was governor of Unity state in 2005–15, once again counter to Machar’s ambitions. Even though the rivalry between Machar and Taban has now taken on a national dimension, the power struggle between the two main Nuer leaders—and their followers—will probably play out in Unity state once again, possibly with lethal consequences for local civilians. By October 2016, the SPLA was said to be preparing a third offensive for the looming dry season.

Ever since 1 January 1956, when Sudan gained its independence from the British, peace in the south has been the exception to the rule: 43 of those 60 years have been years of conflict. The logic of the conflict in southern Unity is one deeply informed by patterns that were instituted during the second civil war. It was during that period that commanders built clientelistic networks, redistributed the spoils of war, and made strategic marriages, enshrining their position within

the state. It was also when warring factions in Unity began to take advantage of external support from Khartoum to gain vital supplies and ammunition, and it was when the war economy was created, and warfare became a form of life.

For not only have many actors of the same elite cast continued to dominate politics in Unity state, but the structure of the war has also remained unchanged in many senses. Relatively quickly, the current conflict became untethered from Machar and Taban Deng's objectives for a future GRSS; instead, it became focused on raiding and resource accumulation. Far from being a new development in the areas that today constitute South Sudan, raiding has long been a part of Nilotic life. It was transformed during the second civil war, when soldiers began raiding with automatic weapons, and the amount of livestock taken, and lives claimed, almost exceeded the capacity of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, leaving deep scars across the region. The lethal combination of war and raiding has returned to Unity state. Bul Nuer youths, among others, are raiding in southern Unity without much heed to the consequences. A new generation of southern Nuer will not have any cattle, and thus be blocked from marriage, unless they retaliate and also go raiding, setting in motion an internecine conflict among the Nuer of Unity state.

The GRSS deployment of Nuer militias has created deep divisions that echo the Nuer civil war, which emerged during the second civil war. Since the current conflict erupted, much has been made of the role of external regional actors, in particular Darfuri rebel groups and Uganda's UPDF. From the perspective of Unity state, however, the most important external actor in Nuer politics has been the GRSS, along with the SPLA's 3rd and 5th Divisions from Bahr el Ghazal. During the second civil war, it was Khartoum that provided sponsorship to the SSUM/A and the SSDF, splitting the Nuer by selectively supporting armed groups with supplies, and strategically weakening southern Sudan. In the current conflict, it is the GRSS that has split the Nuer, and its use of the Bul Nuer—to which the Bul Nuer elite enthusiastically acquiesce—has allowed it to maintain control of the only Nuer-majority state in the country, despite the community's rage about the events in Juba in December 2013 and about perceived 'Dinka domination' of the South Sudanese government.

The Bul Nuer elite around Nguen Monytil has profited from the alliance with Juba, turning parts of Unity into personal fiefdoms, and other parts into

wild zones in which it is acceptable to raze and pillage. In contrast, the SPLM–IO found itself hamstrung because Khartoum had little interest in fully supporting the rebellion, which thus struggled to secure supplies and recruits. Furthermore, the SPLM–IO’s national objective actually limited it at the state level. The pragmatic need to accept a government that contained Kiir, which was never going to be popular with the SPLM–IO rank and file, led the rebel organization to adopt a split purpose. On the one hand, the rebels sought to reach a political settlement with those hated by the more stridently pro-Nuer commanders and the rank and file; on the other, they fought a military campaign in Unity state. The political settlement that had been tenuously achieved came at the cost of damaging the movement’s legitimacy among the Nuer people of Unity state. Paradoxically, as he left Juba for the second time in July 2016, Riek Machar regained legitimacy in Unity state.

That the SPLM–IO seems to have been relatively successful at the national level, but an almost total failure at the state level, has baleful consequence for the future of Unity. During the second civil war, Unity was never an SPLA heartland. In the 1990s, it was dominated by Matiep’s SSUM/A, other Bul Nuer militias, and Machar’s faction of the SPLA. From 2005 to 2013, it was politically dominated by the feud between Nguen Monytil and Taban Deng, a reiteration of the SSUM/A vs. SPLM–Nasir division. Taban Deng now has even less legitimacy than he did as an unpopular governor. It is thus extremely difficult to envision how a sustainable political settlement might work inside Unity state. The SPLM–IO fought for Greater Upper Nile and, according to the August 2015 peace agreement, should be able to select the governor of Unity state. However, there are few people left inside the SPLM–IO with sufficient legitimacy to be governor. It is even less credible that Nguen Monytil and Puljang will accept a radical reduction of their power, whether in a united Unity state or in a Northern Lich state. In October 2016, Bapiny Monytil resigned as SPLA deputy chief of staff, citing among his reasons the cropping of parts of Mayom county by the 28-state decree and his disapproval of his brother’s continuous collaboration with Kiir (Monytil, 2016).

Unity is thus left with two unresolved conflicts. On the ground, there is a huge divide between the Bul Nuer and the other Nuer factions, which could possibly lead to unrelenting, low-level conflict between them. Among the elite,

the governor of Unity is to be chosen from a movement that has lost most of its popular legitimacy, raising the risk of another iteration of the 20-year power struggle among Riek Machar, Taban Deng, and Nguen Monyтуil. Seen from this perspective, there is no unity in Unity. 🇸🇩

Endnotes

- 1 At this writing, in May 2016, negotiations between the SPLM and the SPLM–IO were being held over the status of Kiir’s suggested division of South Sudan into 28 states—and Unity into three separate states. See Section III of this Working Paper.
- 2 There is no universally accepted term for the opposition, which comprises sometimes poorly distinguishable military and political components. This report uses ‘SPLM–IO’ to refer to the opposition movement and associated forces.
- 3 The Padang Dinka are a riverine Dinka section found in much of the Sudan–South Sudan borderlands. They are composed of, among others groups, the Ngok Dinka of Abyei, and the Melut and Abialang Dinka of Upper Nile. In Unity, the Alor Dinka of Abiemnom, and the Awet and Kwil Dinka of Pariang county are collectively known as the Ruweng Dinka. Thus, in Kiir’s proposed 28 states, the area of Abiemnom and Pariang is known as ‘Ruweng state’. The Awet and Kwil Dinka of Pariang are also known as the Panaru Dinka.
- 4 See AUCISS (2014).
- 5 See the Section II of this Working Paper.
- 6 Strategically, this allowed Khartoum both to retain control of the oil fields, and to keep the southern rebel forces weak and divided. For a discussion of the term ‘Nuer civil war’, see Jok and Hutchinson (1999).
- 7 See, for example, Madut-Arop (2006, pp. 329–54).
- 8 See Section II of this Working Paper for a detailed account of this contest.
- 9 See Section II of this Working Paper.
- 10 For a full exploration of this rivalry, see Section III of this Working Paper. While it is true that some of Matiep’s deputies, such as Peter Gatdet, have joined the SPLM–IO, the Bul Nuer as a whole have largely supported Nguen Monytil, and the vast majority of the commanders who formed the bulk of the initial military command of the SPLM–IO were SSDF fighters under Machar, rather than members of the SSUM/A under Matiep. If anything, the conflict in Unity state reconstructs the tensions between the two groups after Matiep withdrew from the SSDF.
- 11 See Section IV of this Working Paper.
- 12 On 2 December 2015, Salva Kiir replaced Tayeb Gatluak with Stephen Buay, also a Bul Nuer, and formerly the commander of the SPLA’s 1st Division, stationed in Renk, Upper Nile. The SPLA also shifted its chain of command, such that Matthew Puljang would report directly to Paul Malong Awan, the SPLA chief of general staff, rather than through the 4th Division commander.
- 13 The proposal for the creation of Unity state was part of a campaign in northern Sudan to ‘regionalize’ the south by dividing it into smaller areas, thus weakening its ability to resist the dictates of Khartoum. This divide-and-rule strategy is the institutional analogue of the Government of Sudan’s more successful military attempt to divide the south, which took shape during the second civil war and involved supporting rebel factions of the SPLA against the main movement. See, among others, Badal (1986, p. 144).

- 14 The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) stipulates that the border that divided the southern and northern provinces of Sudan on 1 January 1956, the date of Sudan's independence, is to be the border between Sudan and South Sudan, should the latter region elect to secede, as indeed it did. See Craze (2013).
- 15 Chevron was granted a licence to prospect for oil during the 1970s. Oil was first discovered in the late 1970s, in the Muglad basin close to Bentiu, the current capital of Unity state. The discovery of oil greatly increased the Sudanese government's desire to control the border zone between the northern and southern regions of Sudan, where most of the oil resources were situated. Displacement due to oil development and struggles over the rightful ownership of the oil were among the factors that led to the outbreak the second civil war. See Moro (2009) and Patey (2007).
- 16 Douglas Johnson asserts that the first oil fields in Sudan were given abstract names in order to disguise their location (Johnson, 2012b, p. 565).
- 17 The proposals also intended to arrogate the uranium- and copper-rich areas of Kafia Kingi (now a contested territory on the border between Western Bahr el Ghazal in South Sudan and South Darfur in Sudan) and the productive agricultural lands around Renk (now in northern Upper Nile) to Sudanese regions.
- 18 See Johnson (2011, p. 53).
- 19 In this Working Paper, the term the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) refers to the independent country that seceded from Sudan on 9 July 2011. Southern Sudan refers to the southern part of Sudan prior to the secession.
- 20 Author interview with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 21 Unity state was formalized with the introduction of the federal system in Sudan in 1994, and the borders of the state that were delimited then remained its borders up until Kiir's October 2015 declaration of 28 new states in South Sudan.
- 22 Anthropologists usually differentiate between the western Nuer, who live on the left bank of the Nile, and the Nuer who live east of it and constitute the majority of the group. The Jikany section, part of which migrated from the west to the east of the Nile, is also commonly divided into western and eastern Jikany.
- 23 The Bahr el Arab is known as the Kiir in Dinka, and Chuol Fi in Nuer. For ease of reference, this Working Paper refers to the river by its Arabic name.
- 24 See HSBA (2012a).
- 25 See, for example, HSBA (2015d).
- 26 Author interviews with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015, and with Leer SPLM-IO commissioner Peter Keah Jal, Leer, May 2015. See Johnson (1994, pp. 45, 312).
- 27 Author interviews with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015, and with a member of parliament from Unity state, Juba, May 2015.
- 28 Author interviews with Nuer members of parliament, Juba, May 2015.
- 29 Many Nuer fought on both sides during the second civil war, and many commanders also changed allegiances. Paulino Matiep's career indicates the complex interplay of loyalties that characterized Unity state during this period. Matiep was part of Anyanya II forces that attacked Chevron's oil wells in 1984, causing the company to suspend operations in southern Sudan. After the movement's defeat by the SPLA, his forces received backing from Khartoum. He formally joined SAF in 1998 as a major general; in 2006, he finally joined the SPLA as a deputy-in-chief, a rank that indicated his central military importance in southern Sudan. He was

subsequently marginalized in the SPLA, and his role became increasingly ceremonial. He died in 2012.

30 See Young (2015, p. 17).

31 For important accounts of the complicated, broader history of Unity state during the civil war, to which the analysis in this Working Paper is indebted, see, for example: CIJ (2006); Gagnon and Kyle (2001); HRW (2003). The 1991 split in the SPLM/A has been covered by several writers, notably by those who participated in the southern struggle; see Akol (2003) and Nyaba (1997), among others.

32 See de Waal (1993). Many of these techniques were developed in Abyei; in the post-CPA period, they continued to be used there to create facts on the ground—de facto occupation—and to claim the territory for the exclusive use of the GoS and its supporters. See Craze (2011).

33 Ironically, many of these Nuer militia forces initially took up arms to protect themselves from attacks from Arab militias working for Khartoum.

34 The canonical guide to what are often bewildering shifts of allegiance and nomenclature is Johnson (2011).

35 Author interviews with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015; with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015; and with Bul Nuer civilians, Mankien, May 2015.

36 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015, and with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015.

37 Additional factors help to explain why the Bul Nuer are reputed to be ‘warriors’ in Unity state and are militarily dominant. While the centrality of Mayom to the GoS attempt to destabilize the SPLM/A certainly created a military economy among the Bul Nuer, for whom being a soldier was one of the surest ways to advance in society, the group was also hampered by a lack of schools in the county from 1950 to 2000. Among the leading political figures in Unity, the most powerful voices come from Guit, Koch, Leer, and Rubkona, where there were schools, and not from Mayom, which provides the bulk of the commanders in the state.

38 For a good analysis of the logic of the war economy, see Pinaud (2014).

39 On the consequences of the 2006 Juba Declaration for the SPLA, see Young (2006).

40 See Section IV of this Working Paper.

41 Gatdet is married to Nguen and Bapiny Monyтуil’s sister, for example. See Section IV of this Working Paper.

42 With the Nasir Declaration of August 1991, the SPLA–Nasir split from the SPLA; the group was the first in a series of factions that fought the SPLA during the 1990s, often with GoS support. The initial Nasir Declaration was signed by Riek Machar and Lam Akol, then one of the leading Shilluk SPLA commanders.

43 Author interviews with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015; with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015; and with Bul civilians, Mayom, May 2015. Organizations led by Riek Machar with some of the same personnel as SPLA–Nasir changed their name repeatedly during this period, becoming SPLA–United and then the South Sudan Independence Movement/Army.

44 Author interview with Matthew Puljang, Mayom, May 2015, and with a former Sudanese official, location withheld, June 2015. The ‘Nuer civil war’ refers to a period of intra-Nuer conflict during which Khartoum backed a variety of Nuer groups to weaken the SPLA, a tactic that led to internecine conflict. See Jok and Hutchinson (1999).

45 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015, and with Bul civilians, Mayom and Mankien, May 2015.

46 Author interview with a former Sudanese official, location withheld, June 2015.
47 Author interviews with Dok Nuer civilians, Leer, May 2015, and with SPLM–IO leader Bol
Gatkuoth, Addis Ababa, June 2015.
48 See Section IV of this Working Paper, which looks in greater detail at the Bul Nuer’s experi-
ence of the CPA period.
49 See ICG (2011, p. 4).
50 Author interviews with local government officials and civilians, Rubkona and Pariang coun-
ties, Unity state, June–July 2012.
51 The Petroleum Revenue Management Act was passed by the legislative assembly in 2013; at
this writing, it had not yet been signed by President Kiir. See also Savage (2012).
52 Author interview with Pariang county residents, close to the Tor field, December 2014.
53 Author interviews with state ministers, Bentiu, July 2012, and with Riek Machar, his wife,
Angelina Teny, and fellow SPLM–IO leader Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
54 Author interview with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
55 Author interviews with state legislative members, Bentiu, July 2012. See also ICG (2011).
56 Author interviews with Riek Machar and Angelina Teny, Addis Ababa, March 2015; with Peter
Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015; with a member of parliament and a former official,
Leer, May 2015; and with Bul Nuer civilians, Mankien, May 2015.
57 Pagan Amum Okiech was the leading Shilluk politician in South Sudan and the former
secretary general of the SPLM. He was one of the 11 ‘SPLM detainees’ arrested in December
2013 after Kiir accused them of fomenting a coup in Juba. While the detainees were a some-
what separate negotiating unit in Addis Ababa in 2014, their paths have since diverged.
James Wani Igga is a leading Equatorian politician and the current second vice president of
South Sudan.
58 Author interviews with Riek Machar and Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
59 Author interview with Angelina Teny and Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
60 Author interviews with Mabek Lang, Juba and Yida, December 2014; with another Pariang
official, Juba, May 2015; and with Riek Machar and Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth, Addis Ababa, March
2015. For further details on the impact of state-level politics on Pariang county during this
period, see Section IV of this Working Paper.
61 Author interviews with Angelina Teny and Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth, Addis Ababa, March 2015,
and with Bol Gatkuoth, Addis Ababa, June 2015.
62 See HSBA (2014b). Kiir’s appointments included a number of figures that were extremely con-
troversial due to their proximity to the National Congress Party, such as Riek Gai and Telar Deng.
63 Author interview with Angelina Teny, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
64 See *Sudan Tribune* (2013b).
65 In December 2013, the head of the 4th Division was James Koang Chuol. He had replaced James
Gadwell—a Bul Nuer commander who was close to Taban Deng—at around the same time
as Nguen Monytil replaced Taban Deng, indicating the degree to which the intricacies of
power politics in Unity state cannot be reduced to a question of sectional loyalty.
66 These forces were integrated into SAF and reportedly fought in Darfur in 2005.
67 Author interviews with Bul Nuer civilians, Mayom county, May 2015.
68 See HSBA (2013d).
69 See HSBA (2011).
70 Makal Kuol subsequently became a main commander in the SPLM–IO, in Unity state.

- 71 Author interviews with Matthew Puljang and Bul Nuer civilians, Mayom, May 2015; with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015; and with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015. On Gatdeang, see Tubiana (2015b) and Hutchinson and Pendle (2015).
- 72 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, locations withheld, March and June 2015.
- 73 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, locations withheld, March and June 2015, and with Bol Gatkuoth, Addis Ababa, June 2015.
- 74 For more on Peter Gatdet's family background, see Sections IV and V of this Working Paper. The SSUM/A later merged with the SSDF, following the Khartoum Peace Agreement of 1997.
- 75 Author interview with Chol Deng Alaak, chief administrator of Abyei and former South Sudanese ambassador to the Russian Federation, Juba, December 2014.
- 76 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
- 77 See Craze (2011).
- 78 Author interview with an SPLM-N representative, Juba, May 2015.
- 79 Author interviews with Unity state officials, Juba, April 2011.
- 80 Author interviews with officials of international NGOs, Juba, April 2011. See also Amnesty International (2012).
- 81 Author interview with Bol Gatkuoth, Addis Ababa, June 2015.
- 82 Evidence that the SSLM/A's materiel is of SAF origin emerged during the rebel group's incursion into Abyei on 26 May 2012, when 700–800 men moved into the territory with 60 vehicles, heavy machine guns, rocket launchers, and anti-aircraft guns. The United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) negotiated the SSLM/A's withdrawal directly with SAF—another indication of how directly the SSLM/A was sponsored by the GoS (author telephone interviews with Abyei area officials, May 2012).
- 83 See HSBA (2012a).
- 84 Author interviews with Bul Nuer civilians, Mayom county, May 2015, and with Bol Gatkuoth, Addis Ababa, June 2015. In 2014, Khartoum released Gai Yoach, who subsequently joined the SPLM-IO in Upper Nile. The reasons for his initial imprisonment remain unclear. Some SPLA and SPLM-IO officers have claimed that Bapiny Monytuul instigated the arrest by bringing to SAF's attention Gai Yoach's prior killing of a SAF colonel in Kordofan, leaving the way clear for Bapiny to take command of the organization. By June 2015, Gai Yoach had defected from the rebel side and joined the SPLM in Juba, after the intercession of Nguen Monytuul (author interviews with SPLA officers, Juba, July 2015, and with Bol Gatkuoth, location withheld, July 2015). On 23 September, Gai Yoach was appointed lieutenant general in the SPLA, without a designated role. See UNPoE (2016, p. 14).
- 85 Author interviews with Bapiny Monytuul, Juba, April and June 2014, and with Matthew Puljang, Mayom, May 2015.
- 86 Author interviews with Bul Nuer leaders, including Matthew Puljang, and civilians, Mayom county, May 2015.
- 87 For extensive accounts of the events of December 2013, see AUCISS (2014); HRW (2014); and UNMISS (2014b).
- 88 For an account of the beginning of the opposition, see Young (2015).
- 89 Author interviews with Riek Machar and Angelina Teny, Addis Ababa, March 2015; with Wang Chok, SPLM-IO (former 4th Division), Leer, May 2014 and May 2015; with other SPLM-IO members, location withheld, May 2014, Leer, May 2015, and Addis Ababa, June 2015; and with former SPLA chief of staff James Hoth Mai, Juba, May 2015.

90 Author interview with a Dinka official, Juba, May 2015.
91 Author interview with a Nuer intellectual, Juba, April 2015.
92 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
93 Author interviews with Riek Machar and other SPLM–IO commanders, Addis Ababa, March 2015; with James Hoth, Juba, May 2015; and with Wang Chok, Leer, May 2015.
94 Author interviews with SPLM–IO members, locations withheld, May 2014.
95 Author interview with Wang Chok, Leer, May 2015. The most senior officer in this company was Dinka Brig. Gen. Michael Major Alier. See AUCISS (2014, p. 171) and ICG (2015, p. 10).
96 These rebels come from a number of different Sudanese rebel groups that operate across the border in Sudan, which supported the GRSS during the current civil war, especially during clashes in 2014. The details of this support, and the difficulty of identifying which group was actually active in a given period, are explored in Section V of this Working Paper.
97 Author interviews with SPLM–IO members, including Riek Machar and Peter Gatdet, Unity state, May–June 2014, and Addis Ababa, March 2015; with UNMISS officers, Juba and Bentiu, May 2014; with international observers, Juba and Bentiu, March–April 2014; with Mabek Lang, Bentiu, April 2014; and with leaders of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), locations withheld, May–June 2014.
98 Author interviews with displaced Bentiu residents, Juba, December 2014.
99 Author telephone interview with an official from an international NGO, December 2013.
100 It should also be noted that this distinction between the Dinka of Unity and those from elsewhere was not observed systematically. Several sources in Pariang report that Nuer soldiers killed around 40 Dinka civilians in Lele in mid-December, shortly after the killings in Juba (author interviews with Dinka civilians in Pariang county, various locations, December 2014, and with displaced Dinka and Nuer residents of Bentiu, Juba, December 2014).
101 Author interviews with an oil company official and a local journalist, Juba, May 2015.
102 Author interviews with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015, and with Wang Chok and other SPLM–IO leaders, Leer, May 2015. See ICG (2015, p. 10).
103 Author telephone interview with an NGO official, December 2013.
104 Author interviews with displaced Bentiu residents, Juba, December 2014.
105 Author interviews with UNMISS officials, locations withheld, May and December 2014, and January and June 2015.
106 Author interview with an UNMISS official, location withheld, May 2014.
107 Author interviews with UNMISS officials and former officials, withheld locations and online, May 2014 and February 2016, and with an SPLM–IO officer, location withheld, June 2014.
108 Author interview with an SPLM–IO officer, location withheld, June 2014.
109 Author interviews with UNMISS officials, locations withheld, May 2014.
110 Author interview with a former UNMISS official, Juba, December 2014.
111 Author interview with an UNMISS official, location withheld, May 2014.
112 Author interview with an SPLM–IO officer, location withheld, June 2014.
113 Author interviews with former UNMISS officials, withheld locations and online, June 2015 and February 2016.
114 Author interviews with UNMISS officials, Juba, December 2014–January 2015.
115 Online author interview with an UNMISS official, February 2016.
116 Author interview with a former UNMISS official, Juba, December 2014.
117 Author correspondence with a former UNMISS staff member, May 2015.

- 118 Online author interview with an UNMISS official, February 2016.
- 119 Online author interview with a former UNMISS official, February 2016.
- 120 Online author interview with a former UNMISS official, February 2016. See Ngethi (2014) for the press conference video.
- 121 Confidential code cable seen by the authors.
- 122 Online author interview with a former UNMISS official, February 2016.
- 123 Author interviews with Wang Chok and other former 4th Division officers, Leer, May 2015. See also UNMISS (2014b, pp. 41–42).
- 124 Author interview with Nelson Chuol, 4th Division commander, Pariang, December 2014.
- 125 The GPOC is a joint operating company with overall responsibility for oil extraction in Unity state. Nuer workers apparently organized themselves and then called on Nuer civilians from the surrounding villages to join the attacks on Dinka oil workers (author interviews with civilians, near Toma South oil field, December 2014).
- 126 Author interview with Mabek Lang, Juba, December 2014.
- 127 Author interview with an oil company official, Juba, May 2015.
- 128 Author interviews with oil company officials, locations withheld, December 2014–January 2015 and June–July 2015. South Sudanese oil production was 60,000 barrels per day before the beginning of the crisis, a significant drop since the GRSS decided to shut down oil production in January 2012 in response to a dispute with the GoS. Unity state produced approximately 35 per cent of South Sudan’s total oil output before the shutdown.
- 129 Author telephone interview with a GPOC officer, May 2016.
- 130 Author interviews with traders, Pariang, December 2014.
- 131 Author interviews with SPLA soldiers, Toma South, Pariang, December 2014.
- 132 Despite ongoing rhetoric about ethnicity, the underlying causes of this war cannot be reduced to ethnicity, as evidenced by the fact that Peter Badeng, Steven Bol’s Nuer deputy, chose to remain with the government. He stayed at Jaw with the principally Dinka soldiers who remained loyal to the SPLA, maintaining control of the tanks and artillery.
- 133 Author interviews with Nelson Chuol, 4th Division commander, Pariang, December 2014, and with a Dinka official from Pariang, Juba, May 2015. The loyalist forces were the remains of the 4th Division unit in Pariang, along with local *nguet* (youths), loosely organized after the eruption of the crisis; the *nguet* accounted for the majority of the participants in the clashes.
- 134 Author interview with the Pariang county commissioner, Pariang, December 2014.
- 135 Author interviews with IDPs, near Pariang, December 2014.
- 136 Author interviews with SPLA officers, Pariang, December 2014, and with a local journalist, Juba, May 2015. Dinka civilians also reportedly killed a Nuba woman who was married to a Nuer, along with her five children.
- 137 That the word ‘Dinka’ was used as an insult for the Bul Nuer is an indication of the early ethnicization of the conflict, and the extent to which the line between political allegiances and ethnic categories has become blurred during the war.
- 138 Author interviews with international NGO workers, Juba, January 2015, and with various witnesses of the fighting in Mayom county, Mayom and Wangkey, May 2015.
- 139 The SPLM–IO moved back into Mayom town on 6–7 January and attempted to take control, but the SPLA firmly established control over the town on 7 January.
- 140 Author interviews with SPLM–IO members, locations withheld, December 2014.
- 141 Author interviews with displaced residents of Bentiu, Juba, December 2014; with Wang Chok and other SPLM–IO leaders, Leer, May 2015; and with Matthew Puljang, Mayom, May 2015.

- 142 Author interviews with SPLM-IO members, locations withheld, December 2014.
- 143 By the end of January, the SPLA had succeeded in retaking around 40 tanks from the former 4th Division (author interview with an SPLM-IO commander, Addis Ababa, March 2015).
- 144 The exception to the stability of Abiemnom, Mayom, and Pariang is southern Mayom, around Mankien, which was under SPLM-IO control until mid-2014.
- 145 See, for example, HRW (2014, p. 63) and UNMISS (2014a). Something of a snowball effect was set in motion: civilians from Bentiu fled farther south as the SPLA advanced, joined by the inhabitants of the towns and villages that had been razed by the government forces.
- 146 See IGAD (2014a, p. 2).
- 147 Author interview with the Dok Nuer paramount chief, Leer, June 2014. By January 2014, opposition forces had already looted Leer market, which was largely run by Sudanese traders. See Tubiana (2015a). After the signing of the CPA, Gideon Bading had reportedly been appointed 'paramount chief of Greater Leer, including Panyijar, Mayendit, Leer and Koch counties', yet he used to introduce himself as Dok Nuer paramount chief. See Radio Tamazuj (2016).
- 148 Author interview with a Panyijar intellectual, Juba, April 2015.
- 149 Author interview with a witness, Bentiu, May 2014. See Tubiana (2015a).
- 150 Author interviews with witnesses, Bentiu and Leer, May-June 2014. See Tubiana (2015a).
- 151 Author interviews with displaced civilians from southern Unity, Juba, December 2014 and July 2015.
- 152 Author interviews with displaced civilians from Leer and its surroundings, Juba, December 2014 and July 2015.
- 153 Author interviews with civilians from Leer, Leer and Bentiu, May-June 2014. See Tubiana (2015a).
- 154 See, for example, Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Hutchinson (1996).
- 155 Authors' observations made in Leer, June 2014 and May 2015; author interviews with humanitarian aid workers, Rumbek, June 2014, and Juba, April 2015. See MSF (2014).
- 156 The port would be razed by the SPLA during its 2015 offensive.
- 157 Authors' observations made in Leer, May-June 2014. Author interviews with an SPLM-IO humanitarian officer and other authorities, Leer, June 2014; with Nuer and Dinka survivors and witnesses of killings, Bentiu and Leer, May-June 2014; and with a humanitarian aid worker, Leer, May 2014. See Tubiana (2015a) and AUCISS (2014, p. 175).
- 158 The two chiefs taken from Ger, Gou payam, were Nhial Chakuoth Malek and Machek Ninrew Lieh. These attacks echoed targeted executions of traditional chiefs that had occurred in Panyijar county in February of the same year. Author interviews with SPLM-IO members from Leer, Leer, June 2014, and withheld location, December 2014.
- 159 Author interviews with a Dinka woman married with a Nuer, Leer, June 2014; with Nuer civilians, Bentiu and Leer, May-June 2014; and with SPLM-IO humanitarian aid officers and other authorities, Koch and Leer, May-June 2014.
- 160 Author interviews with witnesses, Leer and Bentiu, May-June 2014.
- 161 Author interviews with a pro-SPLM-IO parliamentarian, Leer, June 2014; with a Dinka woman, Leer, June 2014; with SPLM-IO administrators, Leer and Koch, June 2014; with SPLM-IO spokesperson Lul Ruai Kong, Nairobi, June 2014; and with a witness from Leer, location withheld, December 2014. Author correspondence with South Sudan expert John Ryle, October 2014. See Young (2007). There is no record of any other Lil John involvement in the 2015 offensive.
- 162 Taker Riek had been a commissioner of Leer in 2009-10, until Taban Deng, following local protests against his rule, dismissed him. He is also known as Stephen Taker Riek and mentioned

- mistakenly as ‘Stephen Thiak Riek’ in AUCISS (2014, p. 175). In May 2015, he was appointed Unity state’s minister for local government (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015n).
- 163 Author interviews with witnesses, a chief, and youth leaders, Leer, Bentiu, and Juba, May–June 2014 and April–May 2015, and with SPLM–IO authorities, Leer and Koch, June 2014. Taker Riek also reportedly used women to gather information about SPLM–IO positions and to collect food (author interviews with displaced residents of Leer, Juba, December 2014).
- 164 Author interviews with displaced civilians from Bentiu, Leer, May 2014, and Juba, April 2015, as well as with an SPLM–IO administrator, Koch, June 2014.
- 165 See UNMISS (2015a).
- 166 Author interviews with SPLA officers, Bentiu and Juba, April–May 2014, and with a Bul Nuer SPLM member, Juba, July 2015.
- 167 Author interviews with government officials, Bentiu, April 2014, and with 4th Division SPLA officers, locations withheld, December 2014.
- 168 Author interviews with an UNMISS official, Bentiu, April 2014, and with Bul Nuer leaders, including Matthew Puljang, and civilians, Mayom, May 2015.
- 169 Author interviews with Bapiny Monyтуil, Juba, April and June 2014; with SSLA officer Joseph Manyuat, Bentiu, May 2014; with Carlo Kuol, Guit county, June 2014; and with Bul Nuer leaders, including Matthew Puljang, and civilians, Mayom, May 2015. The integration process resumed after Bentiu was retaken by government forces and was completed in February 2015 (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015i).
- 170 Author interviews with UNMISS officials, Juba, December 2014, and with SPLA officers, Pariang, December 2014.
- 171 Author interviews with SPLA officers, Juba and Pariang, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 172 Author correspondence and Skype exchanges with Bentiu residents, April 2014.
- 173 Authors’ observations in Bentiu, April 2014. By 18 April, early heavy rains had made conditions on the Bentiu–Mayom road difficult, according to WFP.
- 174 Author interview with SSLA officer Joseph Manyuat, Bentiu, May 2014.
- 175 Author interviews with civilians who were residing in Bentiu at the time of the attack, Juba, December 2014 and July 2015.
- 176 Author interviews with Unity state officials, Juba and Pariang county, December 2014.
- 177 Author interviews with PoC site residents, Bentiu, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 178 The targeting of the Darfurian community in Bentiu is discussed in more detail in Section V of this Working Paper.
- 179 SPLA forces also targeted the hospital and looted Bentiu when they retook the city on 28 April 2014.
- 180 At the beginning of the South Sudanese civil war, Carlo Kuol was in Juba; on 5 March 2014, following fighting within the SPLA, Nguen Monyтуil deployed him to Unity state.
- 181 Author interviews with Carlo Kuol, Guit county, June 2014; with civilian witnesses, location withheld, May 2014; with an SPLA officer, Bentiu, May 2014; with Mabek Lang, Juba, April 2014; with Bapiny Monyтуil, Juba, April 2014; with Joseph Manyuat, Bentiu, May 2014; and with Nuer politicians, Juba, April–May 2014, and Mankien, May 2015. See Tubiana (2015a).
- 182 Author interviews with SPLA officers, Pariang county, December 2014.
- 183 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
- 184 Author interview with an international NGO official, location withheld, December 2014.
- 185 During the second civil war, it was customary for SPLA officers to be assigned outside their areas of birth, partly in order to limit any commander’s capacity to create a local powerbase,

- and partly to give the rebel movement a genuinely national character. The SSDF forces, particularly in Unity, exhibited a much more local dynamic: commanders fought in the areas of their birth, and their troops benefited from a more intimate knowledge of the landscape, support from civilians tied to them by kinship and sectional loyalty, and better morale—one was always fighting for one’s area. During the current civil war, in contrast, Dinka militia forces that were sent elsewhere by the GRSS—to Upper Nile, in particular—have been plagued by low morale, and the absence of a clear sense of why they are fighting (author interviews with Dinka militia fighters, Renk, July 2015).
- 186 In Nuer, Kwi-Nam means ‘close to the Nam river’ (Bahr el Ghazal river in Arabic) and is the name given to the southern part of Mayom county, while the north is called Kwi-Bul, or ‘close to the Bul’.
- 187 Author interviews with Wang Chok, Leer, May 2015, and a Bul Nuer intellectual, Mankien, May 2015.
- 188 Author interviews with Darfurian forces, Pariang county, December 2014.
- 189 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015; with Carlo Kuol, Guit county, June 2014; with SPLA officers, Juba and Bentiu, May 2014; and with humanitarian aid workers, Bentiu, May 2014. See HSBA (2014f).
- 190 Author interviews with international NGO workers from Bentiu and PoC residents, Juba, December 2014.
- 191 Indeed, the US and UN sanctions regimes have had little discernable impact on the conduct of the current conflict. All the commanders targeted by sanctions have limited assets abroad, and what foreign travel they do undertake—such as to Ethiopia—cannot be prevented by sanctions regimes.
- 192 Author telephone interviews with UNMISS officials, June–July 2014.
- 193 Author interviews with Bentiu residents, Juba, December 2014. Makal Kuol, like Gatdet, is from the Kwach section, and the Cieng Bol subsection, of the Bul Nuer.
- 194 Authors’ observations, southern Unity, June 2014, and author correspondence with humanitarian aid workers, September 2014.
- 195 Author interviews with UNMISS officials, Juba, December 2014.
- 196 Author interviews with an aid worker, Wangkey, May 2015, and with other Bul Nuer civilians, Wangkey, Mankien, and Juba, April–May 2015.
- 197 See, for example, Radio Tamazuj (2014a).
- 198 See Section IV of this Working Paper.
- 199 The conflict also affects these routes. Since the outbreak of the current conflict, many dry-season pastures have been rendered inaccessible for the Nuer, as many of these areas are on the borders of Warrap and Lakes, where there is an increased risk of cattle raiding by the Dinka communities of those states.
- 200 Author telephone interviews with international NGO officials, November 2014, and interviews with SPLA officers, Pariang, December 2014.
- 201 Author interviews with Panaru Dinka civilians, Pariang county, December 2014.
- 202 Author interviews with international NGO officials, Juba, December 2014.
- 203 Author telephone interview with an SPLM–IO supporter, location withheld, February 2015.
- 204 Author interviews with Bentiu PoC residents, Juba, December 2014.
- 205 Even the field at Paloich was no longer as lucrative as it once had been. From 2013 to 2014, plummeting global oil prices slashed the rate for South Sudanese crude by nearly 50 per cent.

The drop was particularly damaging because the GRSS pays the GoS constant transit fees to transport the oil through its pipelines—USD 884 million in 2014; the Sudanese government is not likely to renegotiate the rate.

- 206 Author interviews with UNMISS officials, Juba, December 2014.
- 207 Author interviews with SPLA forces, Tor oil production site, Pariang, December 2014.
- 208 Author interviews with oil protection force members, Pariang county, December 2014.
- 209 Author interviews with SPLA 4th Division officials, Pariang oil fields, December 2014.
- 210 Author interviews with GPOC officials, Juba, December 2014; with NSS officers, Pariang and Juba, December 2014 and January 2015; and with oil protection force troops, Pariang county, December 2014.
- 211 Author interviews with Pariang youths, Pariang county, December 2014.
- 212 Author interview with a Renk oil defence force officer, Renk, July 2015.
- 213 For more analysis of these political changes, see Craze (forthcoming).
- 214 Authors' observations, Pariang oil fields, December 2014–January 2015.
- 215 For much of the conflict, Nhialdiu has been under SPLM–IO control, as have many small villages outside Rubkona town, such as Jezira.
- 216 Author interviews with Bentiu PoC residents, Juba, July 2015.
- 217 For a full account of this conference, see Young (2015, pp. 43–47).
- 218 See, for example, ICG (2015).
- 219 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, locations withheld, March and June 2015.
- 220 Machar's appointment of eight deputy chiefs of staff indicates what pains he took to ensure the SPLM–IO would be—or at least take on the appearance of—a multi-ethnic coalition. He appointed both Malual Dinka (Dau Aturjong) and Equatorian commanders (Martin Kenyi, among others), despite the absence of a strong SPLM–IO force in either Equatoria or Northern Bahr el Ghazal, and even though the SPLM–IO elite harboured an abiding sense that the movement was primarily a Nuer endeavour (author interviews with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015, and with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, May 2015).
- 221 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, locations withheld, March and June 2015. See *Sudan Tribune* (2015b; 2015c). For details of the implications of renaming Unity Lich state (and calling Unity's military division Lich Division), see p. 21 of this Working Paper.
- 222 Author interviews with Unity state officials, Juba, April 2015. See, for example, *Sudan Tribune* (2013a).
- 223 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015.
- 224 See p. 21 of this Working Paper.
- 225 Author interviews with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015, and with a Leek Nuer politician, Juba, April 2015. See *Sudan Tribune* (2015a).
- 226 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
- 227 Author interviews with Nuer intellectuals, Juba, December 2014 and July 2015.
- 228 This account of the 2015 government assault on southern Unity builds on, and partly modifies, reports such as HRW (2015); IGAD (2015a); and UNMISS (2015b).
- 229 The forces in Pariang were aided by significant levels of SPLA resupplies, which were flown into Yida in April (author telephone interviews with community leaders in Yida, July 2015).
- 230 Author interviews with SPLM–IO commanders, locations withheld, March–July 2015.
- 231 Author interviews with a government official, Juba, April 2015; with Wang Chok, Michael Thot Jany of the SPLM–IO, and a youth leader, Leer, May 2015; and with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015.

- 232 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015, and with Bul Nuer SPLA officers, Juba, July 2015.
- 233 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015. See *Sudan Tribune* (2015p).
- 234 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015, and an SPLM–IO officer, name and location withheld, July 2015.
- 235 Authors’ observations, Leer, May 2015, and author interviews with SPLM–IO officials, Leer, May 2015; with government officials, including Mayom commissioner John Bol, Mayom and Wangkey, May 2015; with displaced civilians from SPLM–IO areas, Wangkey, May 2015; and with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015. See HSBA (2015e).
- 236 See, for example, HRW (2015, p. 19).
- 237 Author interviews with Matthew Puljang and John Bol, Mayom, May 2015, and with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015.
- 238 Author interviews with NGO workers, Juba, July 2015.
- 239 Author interview with an NGO worker, Juba, December 2014.
- 240 Author interviews with Nuer youths, location withheld, July 2015.
- 241 According to *Africa Confidential*, the UN still considered this relocation ‘feasible’ in May 2015, when the government attacks on the south were at their height, indicating ‘a worrying lack of up-to-date intelligence on the ground, a shortcoming that has constantly hamstrung the UN Mission in South Sudan’s operations’ (*Africa Confidential*, 2015). See also Radio Tamazuj (2015h).
- 242 Author correspondence with a humanitarian aid source, March 2016.
- 243 Author interviews with John Bol, Mayom, and with SPLM–IO officials, Leer, May 2015. Bol is currently security adviser of Northern Lich state. See also *Sudan Tribune* (2015aa).
- 244 Author interviews with Gojam leaders and SPLM–IO Leer commissioner Peter Keah, Leer, May 2015; with a Nyuong Nuer intellectual, location withheld, April 2015; and with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015.
- 245 Author interviews with a Nyuong Nuer intellectual, location withheld, April 2015, and with an aid worker, Juba, April 2015.
- 246 Author interviews with Peter Keah, Michael Thot, SPLM–IO officer in charge of mobilization for Unity state, and Gojam leaders, Leer, May 2015.
- 247 Author interviews with cattle keepers, Leer and Mayom counties, May 2015.
- 248 Author interviews with PoC residents, Juba, July 2015.
- 249 Author interviews with Bul Nuer civilians, Mayom county, May 2015.
- 250 Author interviews with SPLA officers, Bentiu, May 2014.
- 251 Author correspondence with an UNMISS official, August 2015.
- 252 Author correspondence with a Nuer intellectual, July 2015.
- 253 Author interviews with SPLA Bul Nuer officers, Juba, July 2015.
- 254 Author interviews with Rubkona PoC residents, Juba, July 2015, and with Bul Nuer SPLA officers, Juba, July 2015.
- 255 See, for example, Evans-Pritchard (1940).
- 256 For an analysis of how the second civil war affected these forms of circulation, see Hutchinson (1996).
- 257 The Bul Nuer were not the only section involved in the raiding. Bul Nuer civilians in SPLM–IO areas or in the UNMISS base in Rubkona also said they were victims of abuses by other Nuer armed civilians and then took revenge against them. Indeed, while Bul youths were raiding other Nuer sections, Jagei and Leek youths, allegedly together with some scattered SPLM–IO

- troops, raided Bul areas that the rebels had just lost to government forces (author interviews with Bul Nuer civilians, Mayom county, May 2015).
- 258 See HRW (2015).
- 259 Author interviews with Bul Nuer civilians, Mayom county, May 2015, and with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015.
- 260 See Amnesty International (2015) and HRW (2015).
- 261 Author interviews with PoC residents, Juba, June–July 2015.
- 262 Author interviews with Nuer civilians, Leer and Wangkey, May 2015, and with PoC residents, Juba, June–July 2015. See Tubiana (2015b).
- 263 Author interviews with Darfurian forces, Pariang county, December 2014.
- 264 Author interviews with Wang Chok, Leer, May 2015, and with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015.
- 265 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015.
- 266 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015, and with SPLM–IO personnel, location withheld, July 2015. For a longer discussion of the initial division of the SPLM–IO, to which this account is indebted, see Young (2015, pp. 59–65).
- 267 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015.
- 268 Authors’ observations, location withheld, June 2015.
- 269 The letter was purportedly leaked and circulated online by Juba and government sympathizers; its authenticity was questioned, notably by the SPLM–IO. See Gatwich (2015).
- 270 See, for example, *Insider* (2015).
- 271 The full list of signatories is Gabriel Changson Chang, Gabriel Yoal Dok, Thomson Thoan Teny, Michael Mario Dhuor, and Timothy Tot Chol.
- 272 The Nuer Council of Elders had had a fiery meeting with Machar on 30 July, when they asked him to reinstate the generals, which he refused to do.
- 273 See Young (2015, p. 59).
- 274 See, for example, *Sudan Tribune* (2015bb).
- 275 Author telephone interviews with UNMISS officers, September and October 2015.
- 276 Author telephone interviews with an SPLM officer, Juba, December 2015, and an international NGO expert, January 2016.
- 277 Author telephone interviews with SPLM officials in Aweil, December 2015 and January 2016.
- 278 Author telephone interviews with international NGO workers in Juba, August 2015.
- 279 Online author interview with a PoC resident in Rubkona, August 2015.
- 280 Online author interview with a Pariang county official, July 2015.
- 281 Confidential author interview, location and date withheld.
- 282 See Young (2015, p. 61). In the initial proposed compromise agreement, the opposition would have had 53 per cent of the representation in the three states of Greater Upper Nile, but none in South Sudan’s other states.
- 283 See Kiir (2015).
- 284 See HSBA (2008).
- 285 See IGAD (2015d).
- 286 Author correspondence with international observers, December 2015.
- 287 Author interviews with US officials, locations withheld, December 2015.
- 288 Online author interview with an SPLM–IO member, August 2015.
- 289 Author telephone interview with an international NGO official, August 2015.

290 Author satellite telephone interview with a Tayer resident, August 2015.
291 Author correspondence with a civilian from Leer displaced in Nyal, October 2015. See OCHA (2015b) and UNHRC (2016, p. 53).
292 See, for example, Radio Tamazuj (2015l).
293 Author telephone interview with an international NGO official in Juba, September 2015.
294 Author telephone interview with an international NGO official in Juba, March 2016.
295 Online author interviews with youths in Pariang and Juba, and with international NGO workers in Juba, 2 October.
296 See, for instance, Thomas (2015).
297 See Radio Tamazuj (2015r).
298 For provisions in relation to the states of South Sudan, see GoSS (2011, pp. 57–59).
299 See, for example, VOA News (2015a).
300 See *Sudan Tribune* (2015ll).
301 Ruweng is a name of the Dinka subgroup that gathers both the Panaru Dinka of Pariang county and the Alor Dinka of Abiemnom county, although not all agree with this classification.
302 Author interviews with Panaru Dinka, Pariang county, July 2012 and December 2014.
303 Author interviews with Bul Nuer leaders, Mayom county, May 2015. See also *Sudan Tribune* (2015kk).
304 A quantity of materiel in the 4th Division’s custody in early December 2013 had been procured during the military confrontations between the SPLA and SAF in Hejlj, between late March and early April 2012 (author interview with Gabriel Jok Riak, SPLA Sector I commander, Juba, May 2014). In addition, the SPLA 4th Division commander confirmed that the newly integrated SSLM/A units had joined the ranks with Sudan-supplied equipment already in their custody (author interview with the 4th Division commander, Rubkona, May 2014).
305 Of the 48 main battle tanks (T-55 and T-74 types) deployed at the 4th Division in early December 2013, for instance, the SPLA could rely on fewer than five functional tanks when Bentiu was attacked by the opposition forces in mid-April 2014 (interview with the 4th Division military intelligence officer, Rubkona, May 2014).
306 The difficulty of securing the supply chain to Rubkona and Bentiu in early April 2014, for instance, directly weakened the defensive force of the city and contributed to its temporary loss (author interviews with 4th Division officers, Rubkona, 24 May 2014).
307 In late 2014, several dozen military trucks were observed in the SPLA headquarters of Bilpam, outside Juba, showing the progressive reinforcement of the government forces’ tactical capacities and their intention to build up the support chain needed to supply and maintain troops in the operation theatres. Pictures that document the presence of new military tracks and direct testimonies were provided to the Small Arms Survey in December 2014.
308 Since the early stages of the conflict, several privately owned cargo aircraft have operated out of the Juba airport and inside the country. According to direct testimonies and flight records provided by UNMISS, some of these aircraft (registered in Armenia, Belarus, Kenya, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sudan, and Ukraine) were used to transport cargo, although not necessarily military equipment, for the SPLA.
309 The equipment was reportedly seized during the fighting that led to the re-establishment of the SPLA’s control over the Bentiu–Rubkona area during the first week of May 2014.
310 Author interviews with 4th Division commanders, Rubkona, 24 May 2014.
311 The machine guns carry Chinese company code 46 (inside a triangle), with serial numbers 331899 and 331866 (on the left-hand side), and 331777 and 101315 (on the right-hand side).

- 312 On the left-hand side, the machine guns bear the Chinese company code 46 and serial numbers 331914 and 331638. On the right-hand side, they bear the Chinese company code 46 and serial number 331796 (on the upper barrel) and the company code 4609 (in a rectangle), with the serial number 250100 (on the lower barrel).
- 313 Both were reportedly captured on 18 April 2014 in Guit.
- 314 This launcher presents features similar to the Sinnar RPG-7 light anti-tank model manufactured by the Military Industry Corporation of Sudan. The Small Arms Survey previously documented matching launchers, including several with erased markings, in both Sudan and South Sudan. For additional information, see Leff and LeBrun (2014, pp. 80–85).
- 315 These rifles present features consistent with the Chinese-manufactured T56-1 model.
- 316 The sample includes copper-clad steel rounds bearing the headstamps 101_79 and 811_11, green lacquered steel rounds with the headstamp 10_79, and unmarked brass rounds.
- 317 The missile bears a marking in Cyrillic characters, indicating manufacture in 1987.
- 318 Marking codes on the canisters indicate that they were all manufactured in April 2007, in the United States.
- 319 The SPLA 4th Division commanders referred to a large supply operation to the opposition forces (including 5,000 individual weapons) that was allegedly conducted in early April 2014 and originated in Hejlj, West Kordofan.
- 320 See Gramizzi (2013) and HSBA (2012b; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c).
- 321 These locations were visited in May and June 2014.
- 322 Author interviews with SPLM–IO elements, southern Unity, May–June 2014.
- 323 Marked (in Cyrillic characters) with the Arsenal company code and the serial number KT-25-822.
- 324 Marked (in Cyrillic characters) with the distinctive logo used by the former Soviet Tula plant and the serial number BG-732.
- 325 Bearing marking codes (in Latin characters) 96 and N°11171.
- 326 One machine gun was marked with the serial number 200237 and the distinctive Chinese W-85 code, while the second had no visible serial number.
- 327 One machine gun was of the type A80 (Sudanese-manufactured), bearing the serial number 01-0157, and one was of the type M80 (Chinese-manufactured), with the serial number 181107.
- 328 These copper-clad steel rounds bear the headstamp 9611_78.
- 329 These brass rounds bear the headstamp 7.62×54_00.
- 330 These rifles bear the serial numbers 07001051 (marked with A-80 and no CQ logo), 24002119, 24004404, 24004693, and 24006182 (all bearing the CQ logo inside a triangle). The two remaining rifles, inspected in Guit county, had scratched marking codes.
- 331 All brass rounds bore headstamps: 71_08 (with green primer annulus), 811_12, and 811_13. Identical 71_08-marked ammunition was observed in the stockpiles handed over by South Sudanese rebel factions in 2013, including Yau Yau forces (February 2013), SSLA forces in Mayom (May 2013), and Johnson Olonyi's units in Lul, Upper Nile (July 2013). See HSBA (2013a).
- 332 The assault rifle bore the serial number 43106066 on the frame and the marks IWI (Israel Weapon Industries), ISB, and NSS in the rear part of the frame (on the left-hand side of the weapon) and the IWI logo on the stock, probably indicating supply to, or possession by, the Internal Security Bureau of South Sudan's National Security Service. This rifle undoubtedly was part of an official state-to-state consignment (for several hundred identical rifles) undertaken prior to December 2013.
- 333 Four of the eight rounds bore the headstamp bxn_82 (manufactured in Czechoslovakia in 1982), three bore the headstamp 711_72 (manufactured in China in 1972), and one had the

- headstamp 270_70 (manufactured at the Lugansk plant, in the former Soviet Republic of Ukraine, in 1970).
- 334 The vehicle's chassis number was JTFLB71J2A8024561.
- 335 The machine gun's serial number was 1518.
- 336 The 2010 rounds were lacquered brown with the headstamp 41_10 and the 2013 rounds were lacquered green with the headstamp 41_13.
- 337 This AKM-type rifle was manufactured in Izhmash, Russia, in 1973, and bore the serial number 554320. It was previously in the custody of the South Sudan Police Service in Unity state, as indicated by the secondary marking code visible on the arm's frame (SSPSUS with dot matrix code), consistent with those marked during the marking programme of the police-owned firearms supported by the Regional Centre on Small Arms in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States (RECSA) in 2011.
- 338 This Type 56-1 model bore the Chinese state company 26 logo and the serial number 58030951. The five last digits of the serial number (30951) were also marked on the extractor of the weapon.
- 339 These rounds were manufactured in China in 1972 with copper-steel cases, a red primer annulus, and the headstamp 711_72.
- 340 Details on the vehicle can be obtained from Streit Group (n.d.).
- 341 For technical details on this model, see, for instance, Army Recognition (n.d.).
- 342 A photo published on Nyamilepedia (2015) suggests that the SPLA may have lost custody of at least one additional Typhoon. In the December 2014 picture, John Mabieh and Thomas Tut Riek, both SPLM-IO field commanders, stand in front of a Typhoon that bears the number 166 and camouflage identical to the one seen on other SPLA-operated vehicles of this type in Juba.
- 343 See, for instance, Army Recognition (2014a).
- 344 Confidential source.
- 345 The Small Arms Survey checked this information against details listed in Norinco's commercial invoice D140501 (8 May 2014) and in the bill of lading of the transporting company, Cosco Shipping Co Ltd, number 0026391.
- 346 The Small Arms Survey checked this information against details listed in Norinco's commercial invoice ZH040512 (12 May 2014)—under whose terms all the items listed above, with the exception of the Type 69-1 40 mm rocket launchers, were delivered—and in the bill of lading of the transporting company, Cosco Shipping Co Ltd, number 0004290 (16 May 2014).
- 347 Author interview with a national security officer, Juba, 8 December 2014.
- 348 For the full analysis and data set, see HSBA (2014d). See pp. 122–25 of this Working Paper for details on the Bentiu mosque massacre.
- 349 See Gramizzi, Lewis, and Tubiana (2012); HSBA (2012b; 2013a; 2013b); and Leff and LeBrun (2014, pp. 40–41).
- 350 A similar statement was provided by South Sudanese defence minister Kuol Manyang (author interview, Juba, May 2014).
- 351 Inspection conducted by Conflict Armament Research in Rubkona on 17 May 2016.
- 352 The ammunition was reportedly captured in early November 2014 (Conflict Armament Research, 2015).
- 353 Conflict Armament Research inspected 57 mm rounds for recoilless rifles—a type of weapon that is not available to South Sudanese rebels—among the materiel captured from the SPLM-IO forces in late 2014. See Conflict Armament Research (2015, pp. 15–18).
- 354 The presence of diverse makes and models in the seized materiel suggests that supplies are not coordinated, nor sourced from a single stockpile. According to South Sudanese security

- officers interviewed in Juba in December 2014, the relationship between Khartoum and the military wing of the SPLM–IO is maintained through several Sudanese liaison officers, each of whom is in contact with a different rebel commander.
- 355 Some of the figures provided in the interim report of the UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan regarding the cost and the financing of the conflict well reflect the impact of the conflict—and of the management of the different security agencies—on public expenditures and the national budget. See, for instance, UNPoE (2015, paras. 58–61, 74–75).
- 356 Pariang’s isolation stands in contrast to the position of Abiemnom county, which was occupied by SAF-aligned forces for much of the second civil war and has always had a closer relationship to Nuer communities, in particular the Bul Nuer of Mayom. Trade routes linking the two counties remain important in the current civil war (author interviews with international NGO workers active in Abiemnom, Juba, December 2014).
- 357 Author interviews with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, May 2015, and with Mabek Lang, Pariang county, July 2012, and Juba and Yida, December 2014.
- 358 Author interviews with Panaru Dinka intellectuals, location withheld, December 2014.
- 359 The official reason for the dismissal was that Mabek Lang arrested people who had criticized him and created divisions within the SPLM in the county. See *Sudan Tribune* (2012).
- 360 These tensions are still evident in the current politics of Pariang county. In February 2015, Nguen Monytil was forced to reappoint a series of local Pariang Dinka leaders who had been dismissed by the commissioner, Monyluang Manyiel Thoul, in the continuing argument between the supporters of Mabek Lang and those marginalized within the county’s power structures (author interviews with Pariang county youths and Pariang county local politicians, Juba, July 2015). See also Radio Tamazuj (2015d).
- 361 Author interview with Mabek Lang, Juba, December 2014.
- 362 Author interviews with Angelo Majok Gadet, Juba, December 2014 and June 2015, and with Pariang politicians, Pariang county, June 2012.
- 363 Author interviews with Sudanese refugees, Yida and Ajuong Thok, December 2014. See also Craze (2013, pp. 120–23).
- 364 Author interview with Majok Gadet, Juba, December 2014.
- 365 Author interviews with Panaru Dinka residents, around Ajuong Thok, December 2014.
- 366 Author interviews with international NGO officials, Yida, December 2014, and with Majok Gadet, Juba, December 2014. Deng Ayii now lives in reduced circumstances, working as a traffic policeman just outside of Juba.
- 367 Author interviews with Monyluang Manyiel and other Pariang county officials, Pariang, Yida, and elsewhere in the county, December 2014.
- 368 Author interview with a Pariang politician, Juba, May 2015.
- 369 Author interviews with civilians, Pariang county, December 2014.
- 370 Author interview with a Pariang politician, Juba, May 2015.
- 371 For more information on the conflict over Hejljij, see HSBA (2012a) and Johnson (2012a).
- 372 Author interviews with residents in Nyal, Pariang county, June 2012, and in several locations in Pariang county, December 2014.
- 373 Stephen Dhieu Dau was replaced as minister of petroleum on 28 April 2016, when Kiir announced the members of the new TGoNU cabinet.
- 374 Author interviews with an official from Abyei, Juba, June 2015, and with Upper Nile state-level officials, Renk, July 2015.

- 375 Author interviews with Simon Kun Puoch, former governor of Upper Nile state, Renk, July 2015.
- 376 Author interviews with a Dinka militia commander, Renk, July 2015, and telephone interviews with the same, September and October 2015.
- 377 See p. 74 of this Working Paper. For more details on the Dinka militias at the Unity oil fields, see HSBA (2015a).
- 378 Online author interview with Pariang county officials, October 2015.
- 379 Indicative of these relations is that Bul Nuer IDPs are currently sheltering in Abiemnom and that most of the Dinka–Nuer raiding occurs between Unity and Warrap, rather than between Abiemnom and Mayom inside Unity state.
- 380 Author interviews with experts and with UNMISS officials, Juba, December 2014 and July 2015. Over the course of the conflict, international military experts involved in analysing South Sudan would insist that southern Unity was of no strategic importance. With respect to conventional ground war, this is no doubt true; however, such an assertion misconstrues both the symbolic importance of Leer and the central role cattle and women play in a conflict that is focused on controlling people, rather than territory.
- 381 See, for example, *Sudan Tribune* (2013c).
- 382 Authors' observations, Pariang county, December 2014. Author interviews with 4th Division troops stationed at the oil fields, Pariang county, December 2014; with GPOC executives, Juba, December 2014 and July 2015; and with an oil company security officer, Juba, June and July 2015.
- 383 For details on the SPLA claim, see, for example, Radio Tamazuj (2015c). No evidence is forthcoming for such a claim (author telephone interview with a 4th Division commander at the Toma South oil field, February 2015).
- 384 Author interview with an oil company executive, Juba, July 2015.
- 385 Author interview with a GPOC security officer, location withheld, July 2015.
- 386 See Section III.
- 387 Author telephone interview with an oil company security officer, July 2016.
- 388 The standout work on the logic of Nuer sections remains Evans-Pritchard (1940). See also Hutchinson (1996).
- 389 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2014, and with various Bul Nuer civilians and leaders, including Matthew Puljang, Mayom county, May 2015.
- 390 See Hutchinson and Pendle (2015) and Tubiana (2015b).
- 391 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015.
- 392 See *Sudan Tribune* (2015t).
- 393 Author interviews with relatives of James Gadwell, Juba, July 2015.
- 394 One should not overestimate the cohesion in this group, however. During the 2015 dry-season southern offensive, tensions emerged between Tayeb Gatluak and Puljang over who was in overall military control of the state. Nguen Monytil was unable to resolve this conflict; the situation escalated in mid-July, when both men were summoned to Juba, where Kiir adjudicated the dispute (interviews with a Bul Nuer SPLA officer, Juba, July 2015).
- 395 See *Sudan Tribune* (2014e).
- 396 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015.
- 397 Author interview with SPLM–IO officers, including Wang Chok, Leer, May 2015.
- 398 Author interview with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 399 Author interview with Carlo Kuol, Guit county, June 2014.

400 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015, and with Bul Nuer SPLM-
IO officers, Juba, July 2015.

401 Author interviews with Bul cattle keepers, Mayom county, May 2015. See Tubiana (2015b).

402 Author interview with a Bul Nuer cattle keeper, Mayom county, May 2015.

403 A cattle guard who loses his weapon risks a five-year jail sentence and a 51-cow fine; for those
who have joined Puljang's forces, the punishment can be execution.

404 Author interviews with Bul cattle keepers, Mayom county, May 2015.

405 See Brewer (2009).

406 For details on the politics of disarmament during this period, see Pendle (2014).

407 Author interview with a Bul Nuer raider, Mayom county, May 2015.

408 Author interviews with Bul Nuer and other intellectuals, Juba, December 2014 and May-
July 2015.

409 See, for example, Radio Tamazuj (2014b; 2015b).

410 Author interviews with Unity state politicians, Juba, April 2015.

411 Author interview with a Sudanese official, location withheld, July 2016.

412 Author interviews with Bul Nuer civilians, Mayom county, May 2015.

413 Author interviews with international NGO workers operating in Unity state, Juba, July 2015,
and with Unity state officials, Juba, July 2015. See also Radio Tamazuj (2015j).

414 For a vivid description of SPLA-Nasir's employment of such strategies, see Scroggins (2004).

415 See Patinkin (2015). For details on the Dablual raid, see pp. 99-100.

416 See Gatdet (2013).

417 Author interviews with UNMISS officials, Juba, July 2015.

418 Author interviews with humanitarian aid workers, Juba, December 2010-May 2011, and Unity
state, June-July 2012 and December 2014-January 2015.

419 See, for instance, Li (2000).

420 Author interview with a former UNMISS official, Juba, December 2014.

421 Author interviews with UNMISS officials, Juba, July 2015.

422 Author interview with an UNMISS official, Juba, June 2015.

423 Author interviews with UNMISS officials, Juba, December 2014 and June-July 2015.

424 Author interview with a humanitarian aid worker, Juba, December 2014.

425 Throughout the conflict, UN patrols have been blocked, transport convoys attacked, and the
UN intimidated (author interviews with UNMISS officials, Renk and Malakal, June-July 2015).

426 Author interviews with a former UNMISS official and international NGO workers, Juba,
December 2014.

427 Population statistics are available from IOM (2015a; 2015b).

428 Author interviews with Bentiu PoC site residents, December 2014 and January 2015.

429 See p. 73 of this Working Paper.

430 Author interviews with international NGO workers of the Rubkona PoC site, Juba, December
2014-January 2015.

431 Author telephone interview with an international NGO security official, Juba, October 2015.

432 Author interviews with UNMISS personnel, Juba, June 2015.

433 Author interviews with international NGO staff, Juba, June 2015. See also Radio Tamazuj (2015i).

434 Author interviews with UNMISS personnel, Juba, December 2014 and June 2015.

435 Author interviews with international NGO workers from the Rubkona PoC, Juba, December 2014.

436 Author interviews with international NGO workers from the Rubkona PoC, Juba, December 2014.

- 437 See, for example, Radio Tamazuj (2014c).
- 438 Author interviews with UNMISS personnel in Juba and Malakal, December 2014 and June–July 2015. See also Craze (2015).
- 439 Author interview with a former UNMISS official, Juba, December 2014, and with UNMISS officials, Juba, June 2015.
- 440 Author interviews with NGO workers from the Rubkona PoC, Juba, December 2014 and June 2015.
- 441 Author interview with an SPLA officer, location withheld, June 2014 and May 2015.
- 442 Author interviews with Wang Chok, Leer, May 2015, and with a JEM leader, location withheld, April 2015.
- 443 Author interviews with Wang Chok, Leer, May 2015, and with JEM members, locations withheld, March and May 2014; author telephone interviews with UNMISS officials, September 2013.
- 444 Author interview with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 445 Author correspondence with SRF leaders, April 2014.
- 446 Author interview with a Darfurian politician, location withheld, June 2015.
- 447 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
- 448 Author interview with a JEM leader, location withheld, April 2015.
- 449 Author interviews with Dinka officials from Pariang county, Juba, April 2015.
- 450 Author interviews with a government official, Juba, April 2015; with an SPLM–IO officer, Leer, May 2015; and with a Nuba intellectual, location withheld, May 2015.
- 451 Author interviews with a Nuba intellectual, location withheld, May 2015, and with an SRF leader, location withheld, September 2015.
- 452 Author interview with a Nuba intellectual, location withheld, May 2015, and with an SRF leader, location withheld, September 2015.
- 453 Author interviews with SPLM–IO officials and civilians, Leer, June 2014 and May 2015, and with a Nuba intellectual, location withheld, May 2015.
- 454 Author interview with an SSLA officer, Juba, April 2014.
- 455 Darfurian rebels also say that the initial plan, in May 2013, was to move from Um Ruwaba to El Obeid and then to the Nile valley, but that the joint force commander, Abdelaziz al-Hilu, was reluctant to undertake such a risky raid (author interviews with Darfurian rebels, Unity state, April–June 2014 and May 2015). See McCutchen (2014, p. 21); Gramizzi and Tubiana (2013, pp. 29–30).
- 456 Author interviews with Darfurian rebels, various locations, March 2014–March 2015.
- 457 Author interviews with SPLA officers, various locations, May–June 2014.
- 458 Author interview with a witness, Leer, June 2014.
- 459 Author interview with an UNMISS officer, Bentiu, April 2014.
- 460 The problem of the identification of Sudanese combatants and their various groups is discussed on p. 161.
- 461 Author interviews with JEM leaders, locations withheld, August 2014 and April 2016.
- 462 Author interviews with witnesses, Unity state, March–June 2014.
- 463 Author interviews with witnesses, Unity State, March–June 2014. See Amnesty International (2014, pp. 22, 28, 30, 32, 35); HRW (2014, pp. 63–65); UNMISS (2014b, pp. 45, 50). On Bur, see pp. 177–83 of this Working Paper.
- 464 Author interview with Bapiny Monytil, Juba, June 2014.
- 465 Author interviews with UNMISS officers, Bentiu, April–May 2014.

- 466 Author interviews with witnesses, Unity state, March–June 2014.
- 467 Author interview with a JEM official, location withheld, April 2015.
- 468 Authors' observations in Yida, April 2014.
- 469 Author interviews with Wang Chok, Leer, May 2015; with Mabek Lang, Juba, April 2014; with SPLA officers, Bentiu and Yida, April 2014; with SPLM–N members, Juba and Yida, April–May 2014; and with JEM leaders, locations withheld, April–June 2014.
- 470 Author interview with an SPLM–IO officer, location withheld, March 2015.
- 471 Author interview with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 472 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
- 473 Author interview with an SPLM–IO officer, Leer, May 2015.
- 474 Authors' observations in southern Unity, June 2014. Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015; with SPLM–IO officers, Unity state, May 2015; and with a JEM leader, location withheld, May 2015. See SPLM–IO (2014).
- 475 Authors' observations in southern Unity, June 2014. Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015; with SPLM–IO officers, Unity state, May 2015; and with a JEM leader, location withheld, May 2015. See SPLM–IO (2014).
- 476 Author interview with JEM chairman Jibril Ibrahim, location withheld, April 2016.
- 477 Author interviews with an SPLA officer and an UNMISS officer, Bentiu, May 2014, and with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015. See Craze (2014, p. 32).
- 478 Author interview with an SPLM–N leader, location withheld, May 2015, and with JEM Nuba members, Yida, May 2012.
- 479 Author interviews with a Sudanese official, location withheld, November 2014; with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015; with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015; and with a JEM leader, location withheld, April 2015. See *Sudan Tribune* (2014k); *World Bulletin* (2014).
- 480 Author interview with a JEM leader, location withheld, April 2015.
- 481 Confidential UNMISS report seen by the authors.
- 482 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, locations withheld, March and June 2015; with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015; and with SPLM–IO authorities, Leer, May 2015.
- 483 Online author interview with a UN official, May 2016.
- 484 Author interview with Jibril Ibrahim, location withheld, April 2016; online author interview with a UN official, May 2016.
- 485 Author interview with a JEM leader, location withheld, October 2015.
- 486 Author interview with a JEM leader, location withheld, April 2016.
- 487 Author interview with a JEM leader, location withheld, April 2016.
- 488 Chevrillon-Guibert (2013a; 2013b); de Waal (2005, pp. 91–104); El-Tom (2014, pp. 10–17); Tubiana (2008).
- 489 Author interview with Gideon Bading, Leer, May 2015.
- 490 Abdullahi Osman El-Tom, a prolific Darfurian anthropologist, is also a JEM member.
- 491 Author interviews with an UNMISS officer, Bentiu, May 2014; with Darfurian traders, locations withheld, May 2014; with SPLM–IO officials, locations withheld, June 2014; with Darfurian SRF members, locations withheld, May 2014; and with a JEM leader, location withheld, March 2014. See HRW (2014, p. 35).
- 492 Author interviews with a Darfurian trader, Juba, May 2014, and with displaced Bentiu residents, Juba, December 2014.
- 493 See Copnall (2014). See the comments made by JEM chairman Jibril Ibrahim, writing as Gebreil Fediel, at the end of the piece.

- 494 Author interviews with Nuer witnesses, Leer and Juba, April–May 2015.
- 495 Author interviews with traditional chiefs and politicians, Unity state, May–June 2014. See UNMISS (2014b, p. 46).
- 496 Author interviews with a witness from Leer, Bentiu, May 2014, and an SPLM–IO official, Leer, June 2014.
- 497 Author interviews with witnesses from Leer, Leer and Bentiu, May–June 2014, and Juba, June 2015; with SPLM–IO officials, Leer, June 2014; with Darfurian traders, Juba, May–June 2014; with government officials, Bentiu and Juba, April 2014; with SRF officers, locations withheld, March–June 2014; and with a Darfurian survivor, location withheld, May 2014. See UNMISS (2014b, p. 46).
- 498 Author interviews with Mabek Lang and other government officials, Juba, May 2014.
- 499 Author interviews with a witness from Leer, Juba, June 2015, and with representatives of the Darfurian community in South Sudan and Darfurian traders, Juba, May–June 2014.
- 500 Author interviews with representatives of the Darfurian community in South Sudan, Juba, May–June 2014; with Darfurian traders, location withheld, May 2014; with humanitarian aid workers, Bentiu and Rumbek, May–June 2014; and with SRF officers, location withheld, March–June 2014.
- 501 Author interview with a representative of the Darfurian community in South Sudan, Juba, April 2015.
- 502 Author interviews with witnesses, locations withheld, May–June 2014.
- 503 Author interview with a Darfurian trader who survived, location withheld, May 2014; confidential international report seen by the authors. Some witnesses reported that more than one group (up to three groups) of soldiers looted their properties before the killers came.
- 504 Author interview with a survivor, location withheld, May 2014; confidential international report seen by the authors.
- 505 Author interviews with civilians, Bentiu, April 2014; with Darfurian survivors, locations withheld, May 2014; with Abdallah Hammat Osman, chief of the Darfurian community in South Sudan, Juba, May 2014; with an SLA–MM officer, location withheld, May 2014; and with UNMISS officers, Bentiu, May 2014. UNMISS document and other confidential international document seen by the authors. See UNMISS (2014b, p. 48).
- 506 Author interviews with Nuer and Darfurian witnesses, locations withheld, May 2014, and with UNMISS officers, Bentiu, May 2014.
- 507 UNMISS document seen by the authors.
- 508 UNMISS document seen by the authors.
- 509 Author interviews with a humanitarian aid worker, Bentiu, May 2014, and with an SPLA officer, Juba, April 2014.
- 510 Author interviews with Sudanese survivors, Bentiu and Juba, May 2014; with UNMISS officers, Bentiu, May 2014; and with Abdallah Hammat Osman, Juba, May 2014. Confidential international report seen by the authors.
- 511 Author interviews with an SPLA officer, Juba, April 2014; with Darfurian and Missiriya community representatives, Juba, April–May 2014; with a Darfurian survivor, May 2014; with UNMISS officers and international observers, Bentiu and Juba, April–May 2014; and with a Zaghawa community representative in Khartoum, location withheld, June 2015. UNMISS document seen by the authors.
- 512 Author correspondence with an UNMISS officer, March 2015. See EU (2014); UNSC (2015a); and US Treasury (2014a; 2014b). See also UNSC (2015b).

- 513 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, locations withheld, March and June 2015; with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015; with Wang Chok, Leer, May 2015; and with a Zaghawa community leader in Sudan, location withheld, March 2015. For Gatdet's reaction to the sanctions, see Tubiana (2015b).
- 514 Author interview with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 515 Author interviews with Nuer and Darfurian witnesses and survivors, locations withheld, May 2014, and with an UNMISS officer, Bentiu, May 2014. Confidential international report seen by the authors. See also AUCISS (2014, p. 228).
- 516 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
- 517 Author interview with a Nuer witness, location withheld, May 2014.
- 518 Author interview with an SPLM-IO leader, location withheld, May 2014.
- 519 Author interviews with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015; with other SPLM-IO leaders, Leer and other locations, May-June 2014 and May 2015; and with a Zaghawa community representative in Khartoum, location withheld, June 2015.
- 520 On the evidence regarding the presence of a machine gun, see HSBA (2014d).
- 521 Author interview with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 522 Author interviews with Sudanese officials, including from the NISS, locations withheld, July 2014 and June 2015, and with a Zaghawa community representative in Khartoum, location withheld, June 2015.
- 523 Author interviews with humanitarian aid workers, Yida, April 2014, and with UNMISS officers, Bentiu, May 2014.
- 524 Confidential UNMISS and NGO documents seen by the authors; author interviews with humanitarian aid workers, Yida, April 2014.
- 525 Author interviews with Nuba refugees, Yida, April 2014, and with humanitarian aid workers, Yida, April 2014. See Nuba Reports (2013).
- 526 Authors' observations in Yida and author interviews with humanitarian aid workers, Yida, April 2014.
- 527 Author interviews with UNMISS officers, Bentiu, April-May 2014. See UNMISS (2014b, p. 47).
- 528 Author interviews with an SPLA officer, Juba, April 2014; with JEM leaders, locations withheld, May 2014 and April 2016; and with an SPLM-IO official, location withheld, May 2014.
- 529 Author interviews with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015, and with an SRF commander, location withheld, June 2014.
- 530 One witness also mentioned badges featuring a photograph of late JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim, which are indeed commonly worn by JEM fighters; an UNMISS officer indicated that their informants on crimes in southern Unity identified Darfurians based on skin colour (author interviews with local witnesses and international observers, Unity state, May-June 2014).
- 531 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
- 532 Author interview with a JEM leader, location withheld, October 2015.
- 533 Author interviews with Peter Tap Gatdet, Rier, June 2014; with an SPLM-IO official, Leer, June 2014; with SPLA officers, Bentiu, April-May 2014; with SPLM-N officers, Juba, April 2014; with JEM leaders, locations withheld, May-June 2014 and October 2015; and with Nuer civilians, Leer and Bentiu, May-June 2014.
- 534 Author interview with Carlo Kuol, SPLM-IO officer and formerly with the SSLM, Guit county, June 2014.
- 535 Author interviews with Bapiny Monytil and SPLA officers, Juba and Unity state, April-May 2015.

- 536 Author interview with an SPLM–IO officer, location withheld, May 2015.
- 537 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015. See HRW (2014, pp. 63–64).
- 538 Author interviews with SPLM–IO leaders and UNMISS officers, Unity state, May–June 2014. Author correspondence with an UNMISS officer, March 2015, and with South Sudan specialist Douglas Johnson, September 2014. See Kiggen (1948, p. 92, art. Dhong; Nubian).
- 539 Author interviews with SPLA Rizeigat officers, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, April 2014; with SPLM–N members, including Missiriya (such as Bokora Mohammed Fadel), Bentiu, Juba, and South Kordofan, May 2012 and April 2015; with an international observer, Juba, April 2014; and with an UNMISS official, Juba, May 2014. Authors’ observations in Rubkona and South Kordofan, May 2012. See Gramizzi and Tubiana (2013, p. 52).
- 540 Author interview with an SPLM–IO officer, Leer, May 2015.
- 541 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015; with an SPLM–IO officer, Leer, May 2015; and with a former Unity official, Juba, May 2015.
- 542 In addition, since 2013, some Sudanese Arab—including Hawazma, Missiriya, and Rizeigat—and Darfurian non-Arab members of the SPLA, SPLM–N, JEM, and SLA–MM formed a new Sudanese rebel movement called the Popular Front, which has been active in West Kordofan, where they attacked oil fields in Hejlj area in April 2014. They reportedly remained close to the SPLA and may have fought on its side in Unity state as well. In early 2015, having suffered losses from government forces, they joined the SPLM–N and were hoping to receive training in the Nuba Mountains (interviews with SPLM–N Missiriya officer, location withheld, April 2015; with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015; and with an SPLM–IO officer, Leer, May 2015). See Radio Dabanga (2014) and *Sudan Tribune* (2015l).
- 543 The initial report accused JEM of having pillaged the Catholic mission on the basis of testimony given by a humanitarian aid worker from an NGO, but the statement was withdrawn after the worker denied having any evidence of JEM’s role in the pillage. A representative of the NGO said that Comboni had ‘an anti-Muslim bias’ and that they did not have ‘anything much consistent on what JEM would have done in Leer’ (author interviews with a humanitarian aid worker, Juba, March 2014). UNMISS top officials in Juba said that some of the reporting they were receiving from the field seemed to be influenced by the reporters’ religious affiliations: ‘A Christian officer will sometimes be more aggressive toward JEM than a Muslim officer’ (author interviews with an UNMISS official, Juba, April 2014).
- 544 Author interviews with UNMISS officers, Bentiu and Juba, April 2014.
- 545 Military intelligence chief Mac Paul and chief of staff James Hoth—both of whom had been seen as key SRF supporters, most notably by the Sudanese NISS—were replaced in April 2014 (author interviews with a NISS officer, location withheld, June 2015, and with an SPLM–IO leader, Addis Ababa, June 2015).
- 546 Author interview with an SPLM–IO leader, Addis Ababa, June 2015.
- 547 Author interview with a Sudanese official who was in charge of the South Sudan file during the second civil war, location withheld, June 2015. Nhial Deng Nhial is considered a Garang loyalist, especially in Khartoum.
- 548 Author interviews with a Nuba intellectual, a southern ‘Garang boy’, and an SRF leader, locations withheld, April–May 2015, and with Telefon Kuku and Ismail Khamis Jallab, Juba, June 2015.
- 549 Author interview with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, April 2011.
- 550 Author interviews with a South Sudanese official, Juba, May 2014, and with an SPLM–IO leader, Addis Ababa, June 2015.

- 551 Author interviews with an SPLM–IO official, location withheld, May 2014; with an SPLM–N officer, location withheld, May 2014; and with a Sudanese official who was in charge of the South Sudan file during the second civil war, location withheld, June 2015.
- 552 Author interview with a South Sudanese analyst, location withheld, March 2015.
- 553 Author interviews with an SPLM–N officer, location withheld, May 2014, and with international observers, Juba, April 2014.
- 554 Author interviews with South Sudan government officials, Juba, March–May 2014, and with Sudanese officials, location withheld, July 2014.
- 555 Author interviews with JEM leaders, locations withheld, April–May 2014.
- 556 Author interviews with SRF members and South Sudanese government officers, locations withheld, April–May 2014.
- 557 Author interviews with South Sudanese and Sudanese government officials, and with a Sudanese opposition politician, Juba and withheld locations, April–May 2014 and June 2015.
- 558 JEM also accused some Juba officials of having provided Khartoum with intelligence on their movements, and blamed the SPLM–N for its continuous refusal to allow them to carry out operations into North Kordofan from a base in the Nuba Mountains, rather than in remote Darfur (author interviews with JEM officials, locations withheld, April–May 2015 and October 2015).
- 559 Author interview with an SPLM–IO leader, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 560 Author interview with a Sudanese official, location withheld, July 2014.
- 561 Author interviews with SRF leaders, location withheld, March 2015, and with Sudanese officials, location withheld, July 2014.
- 562 Author interview with an international observer, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 563 Author interviews with various observers, locations withheld, April–May 2016.
- 564 Many long-time Sudan observers laughed at the ill-chosen acronym of the force (PDF), which is identical to that of the Sudanese militias that had fought the SPLA during the second civil war (author interview with a Sudanese official, location withheld, July 2014).
- 565 See Gallopin (2015) and Reeves (2014). On Adawi, see SDFG (2016).
- 566 Author interview with a Sudanese government official, location withheld, June 2015.
- 567 Author interviews with Peter Gatdet and a South Sudan expert, locations withheld, February–March 2015, and with a South Sudanese government official, Juba, May 2015.
- 568 Author interview with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 569 Author interview with an SPLM–IO official, location withheld, June 2015.
- 570 Author interview with Sudanese opposition and government officials, locations withheld, June 2015.
- 571 Author interviews with a Sudanese government official and Peter Gatdet, locations withheld, June 2015, and with Missiriya civilians, Mayom, May 2015. See UNPoE (2016, p. 32).
- 572 Author interview with a Sudanese government official, location withheld, June 2015 and September 2016.
- 573 Author interviews with South Sudanese officials, Juba and Bentiu, April–May 2014; with a Missiriya politician, location withheld, May 2014; and with a Sudanese official, location withheld, April 2015. See UNPoE (2016, p. 32).
- 574 Author interview with a JEM official, location withheld, April 2015.
- 575 For background, see Craze (2014, pp. 51–58).
- 576 Author interview with Peter Gatdet and JEM officials, locations withheld, March and May 2015. See *Sudan Tribune* (2015h).

- 577 Author interviews with Kuol Manyang, SPLA director of operations Samson Mabior, and SPLA spokesman Philip Aguer, Juba, May 2014; with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015; and with an SPLM–IO leader, Addis Ababa, June 2015. See HSBA (2013d, pp. 8–9).
- 578 Author interviews with Kuol Manyang, Samson Mabior, and Philip Aguer, Juba, May 2014; with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015; and with an SPLM–IO leader, Addis Ababa, June 2015. See HSBA (2013d, pp. 8–9).
- 579 Author interviews with SPLA officials, Juba, May–June 2014, and with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, May 2015.
- 580 See SKBN Coordination Unit (2014).
- 581 Author interviews with SPLA officers, Juba, March–May 2014; with SRF Missiriya officers, location withheld, April–May 2014; and with an UNMISS official, Juba, April 2014. See HSBA (2013d, p. 7).
- 582 Author interview with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 583 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
- 584 Author interview with an SPLM–IO leader, Addis Ababa, June 2015.
- 585 Two Sudanese soldiers were also arrested in Unity oil field, but it seems they had only come to loot cables (*Sudan Tribune*, 2014f).
- 586 Author interviews with SPLM–N leaders Malik Agar and Yasir Arman, locations withheld, March–April 2015.
- 587 Author interview with an international observer, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 588 Author interview with a Sudanese official, location withheld, July 2016.
- 589 Author interview with a Sudanese official, location withheld, September 2016.
- 590 Author interviews with Kuol Manyang, Juba, May 2014, and with an SPLA officer, Juba, May 2014.
- 591 Author interviews with South Sudan government officials, Juba and Bentiu, April–May 2014, and with a Missiriya politician, location withheld, May 2014.
- 592 Author interview with a Sudanese official, location withheld, July 2016.
- 593 Author interviews with South Sudanese officials, Juba, May 2014, and with a Sudanese opposition official, location withheld, June 2015.
- 594 Author interviews with South Sudanese officials, Juba, May 2014.
- 595 Author interview with an international observer, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 596 Author interviews with JEM leaders, locations withheld, May–June 2014, and with SPLM–IO leaders, locations withheld, May–June 2014.
- 597 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, June 2015.
- 598 Author interviews with James Hoth, Peter Gatdet, and a Sudanese opposition official, Juba and withheld locations, May–June 2015.
- 599 Author interview with Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, March 2015.
- 600 See also AUCISS (2014, p. 120).
- 601 Author interviews with Darfurian and Nuer survivors and witnesses, Bentiu and Juba, May–June 2014; with a Missiriya politician, location withheld, May 2014; with SPLA officers, Bentiu and Juba, April–May 2014; and with an UNMISS official, Juba, April 2014. See UNSG (2014b, p. 6).
- 602 Author interviews with Missiriya civilians, Mayom, May 2015.
- 603 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
- 604 Author telephone interview with Santino Deng, May 2014.
- 605 Author interviews with SRF Missiriya officers and Peter Gatdet, locations withheld, March–May 2015.

- 606 Author interviews with Missiriya civilians, SRF Missiriya officers, and Peter Gatdet, Mayom and withheld locations, March–May 2015.
- 607 Author interview with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
- 608 Author interview with a Leek Nuer politician, Juba, May 2015.
- 609 Authors’ observations and interviews with a Missiriya chief, Majok (Northern Bahr el Ghazal), April 2014; with Rizeigat civilians, Mayom Angok (Northern Bahr el Ghazal), April 2014; with Missiriya SAF defector Bandar Abu-al-Balul and a JEM leader, location withheld, May 2014; with SPLM–N Missiriya members, Juba, April 2015; and with Nuer traders, Leer, May 2015. Author correspondence with South Sudan expert John Ryle, who visited Rup Nyagay in 1994, June 2015.
- 610 Author interviews with Bokora Mohammed Fadel, Bentiu, May 2012; with Missiriya traditional chiefs, Majok (Northern Bahr el Ghazal), April 2014; with peace coordinator James Kolang, Aweil, April 2014; with SRF Missiriya officers, Juba, April 2015; and with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
- 611 Author interviews with an SPLM–N Missiriya officer and Missiriya civilians, Juba and Mayom, April–May 2015, and with Peter Gatdet, location withheld, March 2015.
- 612 Quote attributed to SPLM–N politician Yasir Arman (author interview with an SPLM/A member, Khartoum, 2011).

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Acknowledgements

The authors express their gratitude to the three anonymous reviewers, whose comments helped to focus this report. They also wish to thank Sharon Hutchinson, Douglas Johnson, Naomi Pendle, and John Ryle, whose immense knowledge of South Sudan served to shed light on Unity state's ethnic dynamics and historical context.

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