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# The Military Dynamics of South Sudan's Civil War

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## Introduction

After seven months of war and several failed attempts at peace, South Sudan's civil war shows few signs of letting up. The negotiations, which concluded with an agreement to end the conflict on May 9, followed several difficult rounds of public and private diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> Reports subsequently emerged, however, of continued military operations and fighting in Upper Nile and Unity states.<sup>2</sup> President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar denounced each other for not respecting the May 9 agreement.<sup>3</sup> With international sanctions not perceived as deterring violence, with a credible commitment lacking on both sides, and with well-founded skepticism surrounding a lull in violence, it makes sense to examine the appeal of a military solution for both sides to the conflict and consider the military dynamics that could inform the peace process.

This paper takes stock of the evolving nature of the conflict in recent months. It examines ground-level campaigns and focuses on the numerous forms of violence and actors that have emerged. It describes the structure of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and the opposition military groups. It explores command and control issues within the two major warring sides, their use of proxy forces, and specific battlefield dynamics like defections, the conflict's protracted nature, and the financial costs associated with the war.

This paper finds loosely aligned forces on both sides of the conflict, with leaders relying on local and foreign proxy groups to bolster their fighting power. Each side faces difficulties controlling and commanding its forces. In this protracted conflict, both sides have engaged on multiple fronts simultaneously and also been unable to fully gauge the costs and duration of war, yet each remains committed to winning a military victory and inflicting punishing costs on its opponent. This paper finds

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both sides have used disproportionate violence against military opponents and civilians. Both sides have mobilized actors with records of human rights abuses who have gone on to commit further abuses. Prospects for peace are complicated by ethnic polarization in the armed sides and violence marked by hate speech and driven by acts of revenge and retribution. The involvement of non-South Sudanese fighters, including the Darfuri rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) from Sudan and the Ugandan army, exacerbates the existing communal and national conflict, threatens to further regionalize the war, and complicates the efforts to forge peace and promote reconciliation.

Because of the rapidly changing nature of the civil war this paper provides only a snapshot of the current situation as of July 2014.

## Background

Starting in mid-December 2013, violence erupted almost simultaneously across various fronts in South Sudan with infighting among several army divisions. The sharp and immediate breakdown of the national army along ethnic lines suggests advance planning among Nuer groups that support the opposition. It also suggests that presidential pardons from the past have failed to appropriately integrate South Sudan's militias into a single entity. The SPLA consequently remains a loose structure composed of fiefdoms rather than a cohesive army.<sup>4</sup>

SPLA divisions in Unity, Jonglei, and Upper Nile states all split along ethnic lines in the days after the fighting began in Juba. For Nuer fighters, the defections were in response to the targeting of Nuer civilians by security forces in Juba and the perceived complicity of the government of South Sudan. In Unity state, infighting broke out within SPLA 4th Division between forces loyal to Comdr. James Koang Chol, a Nuer from Upper Nile state, and forces loyal to President Salva Kiir, including the tank division commander, also from the Dinka ethnic community. Koang defected days later along with the majority of his men.

In Jonglei, SPLA 8th Division under the command of Gen. Peter Gadet, also a Nuer with a long history as a militia leader, quickly seized control of the state capitol of Bor, along with significant stockpiles of weapons and ammunition. The Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF) supported the South Sudanese government with a bombing campaign, which led to a tactical withdrawal by Gadet's forces.

In Upper Nile, the SPLA 7th Division split between the Nuer, Dinka, and Shilluk ethnic groups, with significant elements of the opposition remaining in and around the Doleib garrison outside the state capital of Malakal. The city of Malakal, like Bentiu and Bor, has changed hands numerous times, but all three strategic state capitols are currently controlled by government forces. The firepower provided by the UPDF in the early days of the conflict provided a lifeline for the SPLA as the government sought to regroup from massive defections of Nuer fighters across the greater Upper Nile region.

As time has passed, each side has remained committed to a military victory if it could manage to inflict enough costs (in the form of casualties and lost territory) upon its opponent to prompt a surrender. Both sides have justified their offensives in various ways—as necessary for survival,<sup>5</sup> for revenge,<sup>6</sup> to control natural resources<sup>7</sup> and to attain political power.<sup>8</sup> The strategy has internally displaced 1.1 million people and driven almost 400,000 people from South Sudan into neighboring countries.<sup>9</sup>

Revenge has been a key feature of the conflict, with military leaders from both sides, their foot soldiers, and civilians having regularly expressed a desire to punish their opponents.<sup>10</sup> In Nassir, Upper Nile state, a woman who lost three children as a result of conflict said she was determined to let violence continue, saying “the war will not be stopped until we kill all Dinka, including the children.”<sup>11</sup> In at least one instance, hundreds of people were massacred after rebels used radio to broadcast hate speech, war songs and stories to glorify conflict.<sup>12</sup> Both sides have used hate speech, and at least one governor told people “what we are doing today is eye for eye, you pinch me, I pinch you too, no forgiveness.”<sup>13</sup> Witnesses describe civilians being “killed like chicken,” and those on the ground report excessive shelling, house-to-house searches, organized slaughters *en masse*, sweep operations razing entire villages and towns to the ground using tanks, forced disappearances of entire communities, wanton violence within the barracks and in civilian populated areas, and “appalling levels of brutality.”<sup>14</sup> Despite multiple ceasefire agreements since December both sides remain committed to a military solution in order to achieve their political objectives.

## The Players

### Pro-government forces

The pro-government forces today are a diverse mix of the remnants of the government’s security forces such as the SPLA, South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS), wildlife and prisons services, troops from the Uganda People’s Defense Forces (UPDF), community-based Dinka militias, and Sudan-based supporters such as the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), from South Kordofan, and the Darfuri Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).

### SPLA

The SPLA, as it stands today, is no longer a national army. It is largely Dinka-led and Dinka-staffed, and has seen significant defections. Most of its Nuer troops have defected to the opposition. Because of the country’s ethnic map, the government forfeited most of the greater Upper Nile region within the first week of the conflict and then led a nationwide recruitment campaign that drew 20,000 new fighters in four months, some of which were children.<sup>15</sup>

In January 2014, Central Equatoria State Governor Maj. Gen. Clement Wani Konga called on all trained forces including the SPLA, the police, Wildlife Services, Prison forces, Fire Brigade and Air Defense Forces and other “downsized forces” to urgently report for duty in Juba to “defend the country against rebel aggression.”<sup>16</sup> Vice President James Wani Igga, echoing Konga’s words, stated that he was hoping to register and mobilize between 5,000 and 10,000 recruits from one state alone.<sup>17</sup> In February, the Nzara county commissioner in Western Equatoria state visited 200 new recruits in the SPLA 6th Division barracks to urge them to ignore misinformation and reminded them that “chance knocks once.”<sup>18</sup> Another 200 recruits were mobilized in Tombura county in Western Equatoria state in the same month, possibly in a misleading way because the county commissioner announced that they were being recruited as reserve forces rather than for the ongoing crisis.<sup>19</sup> On February 11, the Central Equatoria governor’s security advisor urged ex-combatants and young people to join the national army at a congregation at Christ the King Cathedral in Yei. He promised that they would undergo short and light training and receive salaries immediately afterward.<sup>20</sup> Similar stories of forced and voluntary adult and child recruitment exist within nearly all states of South Sudan.<sup>21</sup> In many such instances, recruits have been pushed onto the frontlines

without enough training, often resulting in desertions or badly organized military campaigns with large numbers of casualties.

### **Dinka Gelweng militias**

The government has also relied on community-level Dinka militias. One such group is the Gelweng<sup>22</sup> pastoralist youth cattle guards, who may have been recruited prior to the conflict and who were responsible for some of the early violence in Juba.<sup>23</sup> The Gelweng have historically functioned as Dinka paramilitary forces who have often aided (and also fought against) the SPLA, and have a history of alternating between participation in inter- and intra-community feuds.<sup>24</sup> The Gelweng are also known by other names including Doot Beny, Thiang Beny, and Koch Beny.

In late 2013, 15,000 Gelweng forces were allegedly covertly recruited to be part of President Kiir's guards. The conscription campaign for these additional forces was reportedly carried out in secret in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal and Warrap states at the behest of President Kiir and Paul Malong Awan, Northern Bahr el-Ghazal Governor and now the Chief of General Staff of the SPLA.<sup>25</sup> After initial training in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, the men were relocated to a cattle camp in Luri Mountain, west of Juba city, and kept there to receive personal directions from Kiir himself. After the initial set of massacres in Juba, the Gelweng were redeployed to various locations in Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei states to support beleaguered SPLA forces.<sup>26</sup>

### **Sudan-based armed groups**

The SPLA has also received support from Sudan-based non-state armed groups such as JEM and the SPLM-N. These groups have deployed in particular in northern South Sudan, in Upper Nile and Unity states. JEM's involvement in the conflict has been particularly salient given the casualties they have inflicted and suffered. In January, opposition spokesperson James Gatdet Dak accused the South Sudanese government of giving blanket authorization to their northern allies to conduct attacks in Malakal that were both "systematic" and "indiscriminate."<sup>27</sup> The opposition also claimed that JEM, among other pro-government forces, was responsible for human rights violations and destruction in Koch, Leer, and Manyandit counties in Unity state.<sup>28</sup> JEM forces allegedly attacked civilians in the internally displaced person camps under the protection of the U.N. Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in Bentiu/Rubkona on several occasions. The massacres that occurred in Bentiu on April 15 and 16 targeting Darfuri traders could have been led in retaliation for the role of JEM in the destruction of Koch, Leer, and Manyandit.

### **UPDF**

The UPDF, under the command of Col. Kayanja Muhanga,<sup>29</sup> has been deployed in South Sudan since December 2013, although its active participation in the conflict alongside the SPLA was only publicly acknowledged in mid-January 2014 in a speech by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni.<sup>30</sup> Ugandan authorities had previously claimed that their forces were there only to evacuate their citizens and protect the airport and presidential palace. There is considerable speculation about the size of the UPDF force in South Sudan. South Sudanese Defense Minister Kuol Manyang has said that the UPDF is at battalion strength<sup>31</sup> while UPDF officers have claimed that the UPDF has two brigades (typically composed of three to six battalions each) in South Sudan. UPDF spokesman Lt. Col. Paddy Ankunda has said that the UPDF has deployed two battalions, approximately 1,600 soldiers.<sup>32</sup> The UPDF military headquarters is located on the Bor-Pibor road near the UNMISS compound. A Status of Forces Agreement signed between the Ugandan and South Sudanese governments does not specify the duration of deployment, the scope of UPDF operations, or their rules of engagement.<sup>33</sup>

The UPDF has restricted its ground operations to the capital, Juba, and Jonglei state, and UPDF forces have been instrumental in re-taking opposition force positions in and around Bor—a strategic town on the road to Juba. On occasion, the UPDF has also carried out aerial missions in Upper Nile state. In April, the UPDF went beyond its original mandate and began offering protection to the UNMISS compound in Bor, as well as the nearby camp for internally displaced people.

James Mugume, the Permanent Secretary of the Ugandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has said that Uganda is willing to work with the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), to coordinate the talks between the parties, and the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises to quell international concern about its presence in South Sudan. Mugume expressed concern that a prolonged UPDF stay in South Sudan could encourage opposition forces to seek support from Eritrea, which could further regionalize the conflict.<sup>34</sup> However, it became apparent by April that the IGAD Protection and Deterrent Force would not soon materialize. David Muhoozi, the UPDF Land Forces commander, stated that the UPDF would only leave South Sudan if there was an alternative security arrangement.<sup>35</sup> The UPDF Chief of General Staff, General Katumba Wamala, said it was likely that conflict in South Sudan would continue unless a regional force was deployed. He did not rule out the possibility that Uganda would continue to maintain its presence in South Sudan as part of this regional arrangement.<sup>36</sup> The regional Protection and Deterrent Force is currently expected to be fully deployed by September, alleviating the need for the UPDF presence in South Sudan.

### **Command and control issues**

An abundance of unconnected armed actors on the side of the government has complicated command and control, leading to considerable battlefield disorientation. In one video showing an SPLA attack and subsequent failure at capturing Bor, regular troops joined with the police, new army recruits, various militias and a mix of armed Dinka civilians. Morale initially was high but this changed when the military convoy ran into an ambush. The ambush had been placed along a road on which the SPLA had been ambushed two days. A reporter described the scene as one of “utter chaos” with “very little coordination between the elements making up the convoy.” With no medical personnel on the team and no food or water, the convoy came to a total halt and became sitting ducks on the banks of the Nile River. A second attack from the rebels followed around dusk. After the second attack, the force fled, officers first and their men following on foot or in dilapidated, overcrowded vehicles.<sup>37</sup> Partly as a response to such ineffectiveness and partly for personal security, self-defense community militias have formed in various parts of the country and remain largely beyond the control of the national government.<sup>38</sup>

### **The opposition**

Riek Machar’s forces maintain a strong presence in the greater Upper Nile region, which is largely Nuer territory. Machar benefited early on from a series of mass defections from the SPLA to his side. Exact figures are difficult to verify, but estimates for the proportion of defected SPLA troops range between 30 and 70 percent.<sup>39</sup> As of May 2014, Maj. Gen. Peter Gadet was the commander of the opposition forces in Unity state, taking over from Gen. James Koang Chol. Gadet also doubles as commander of Jonglei state. In Upper Nile state, Maj. Gen. Gathoth Gatkuoth leads the opposition.

The opposition in many ways resembles the structure of the SPLA and is plagued by similar problems. Just as Kiir has depended on proxies as force multipliers, so too has Machar, who has relied on community groups such as the White Army, a militia with a Nuer ethnic base, to bolster his military campaigns.

## White Army

The reemergence of the White Army as a formidable threat to the SPLA has as much to do with internal shifts in power within the traditional structures of Nuer society as it does with the group's relationship with Machar within the context of the current conflict. The White Army in the current conflict includes Nuer youth across the greater Upper Nile region, including opposing clans from the Lou and the Jikany groups that have only formed a weak alliance in response to the perceived external threat posed by the SPLA.<sup>40</sup> The White Army of today is split organizationally along four territorial fronts: Gajak near the Ethiopian border, Nassir in Upper Nile, Bentiu in Unity state, and the greater Akobo region of Jonglei state. Each group in each area has a fair amount of operational autonomy. Precise leadership information is hard to determine, partly because of secrecy and partly because of a government campaign to specifically target Nuer community leaders, which has resulted in a high turnover of chiefs.<sup>41</sup> But, evidence exists of hierarchical lines starting from the sub-county payam level up to the county or regional level that have been used to mobilize Nuer youth when necessary.<sup>42</sup> There is infighting within the White Army, with members alleging fraud and accusing one another of taking advantage of the command and control vacuum to influence Nuer communities through spiritual beliefs.<sup>43</sup>

## Command and control issues

Machar has used the White Army youth in military campaigns on previous occasions, and he has noted that the youth are difficult to control because they have often pursued their own interests (for example, conducting cattle raids) rather than focusing on military objectives. The current conflict presents similar problems, where elements of the White Army have conducted attacks that do not align with the opposition's strategy or have simply refused to participate in certain operations.

Toward the end of February, Machar plotted an attack on Bor led by White Army fighters. When many youth rejected this plan, Machar issued a declaration saying that Nuer youth were not required to fight, but those who would not participate in the conflict would be taxed with cattle. The declaration did not sit well with many people who believed that they were being forced into fighting a pointless war that was not within their immediate interest.<sup>44</sup> On another occasion, when Machar tried to persuade Dak Kueth, a Nuer prophet with great influence over the White Army, to conduct "open" (indiscriminate) operations, Kueth refused and quoted an allegory about fighting being seasonal and depending on the visibility of the moon.<sup>45</sup> Such measures have led to a certain amount of distancing between Machar and White Army leaders.

Machar has also struggled to control his field commanders. In a prominent example of disobedience, Gen. Gathoth Gatkuoth, a former Nassir county commissioner who became a rebel commander in Upper Nile, unilaterally rejected the cessation of hostilities agreement signed between Machar and Kiir's representatives in Addis Ababa towards the end of January. Gatkuoth cited doubts over Kiir's sincerity as his reason for rejecting the agreement.<sup>46</sup> Evidence also suggests that Gen. Gatkuoth may seek financial gains from companies interested in investing in his region.<sup>47</sup> In another incident, Gen. Gatkuoth demonstrated little ability to control the White Army youth operating in the Upper Nile region, many of whom were driven by the prospect of looting or protecting their families rather than territorial control.<sup>48</sup> Military operations for the opposition are disorganized, often devolving into chaos. In at least one instance, opposition forces accidentally ambushed each other, causing several casualties.<sup>49</sup>

## Key military dynamics

### The protracted nature of the conflict

The two sides have been remarkably ineffective in predicting the duration of the war and the costs of achieving their military objectives. Strategic towns in Unity, Upper Nile, and Jonglei states have been taken and retaken by both sides,<sup>50</sup> demonstrating a resilience on the part of pro-government and rebel forces. The implications of this for the civilians affected by the fighting and the prospects for peace and reconciliation are significant.

The campaign to capture Bentiu, the capital of Unity state, shows costs and consequences of protracted clashes. At the end of January, the SPLA controlled most northern counties in Unity state. In February and March, fighting focused on the central and southern counties of Koch, Leer, and Panyijar which were rebel strongholds or contested territories. Bentiu town was captured and looted by pro-government forces when the rebels fled south between December and mid-January.<sup>51</sup> The loss of Bentiu frustrated some rebels, prompting them to defect back to the SPLA.<sup>52</sup> On April 15, rebel forces recaptured Bentiu after sustained fighting in Tor Abieth on the Mayom-Abiemnom border and clashes at Lalop near the oil fields.<sup>53</sup>

Despite defeat, the SPLA did not change its strategy. It tried to re-take Bentiu with the assistance of JEM, perhaps because of lack of ammunition<sup>54</sup> and perhaps to reinvigorate its military campaign. The approach worked temporarily, as the SPLA regained control over the state capital for a few days around mid-May before losing it again to the opposition.

As with Bentiu, territorial control for Bor, a strategic town linking the Nuer lands of northern Jonglei to Juba, alternated between control by pro-government and rebel forces several times during the first weeks of the conflict in December 2013. This may have been partly driven by strategy. Peter Gadet, the rebel commander formerly in charge of the SPLA 8th Division, used a double-pronged tactic. He wore down SPLA morale and resources by retreating from and then attacking Bor repeatedly. Some of his units then also used Bor as a launch pad from which to push south on the Bor-Juba highway.<sup>55</sup> It was then that the SPLA, having failed to advance, once again was forced to seek external help in the form of aerial bombardment and the use of cluster munitions by Ugandan forces. Overwhelmed by what many consider to be an excessively heavy assault, anti-government forces were compelled to retreat from Bor allowing pro-government forces to capture the town. Since mid-January 2014, Bor has been under government control.<sup>56</sup>

In Upper Nile state, both pro-government and dissident forces have used disproportionate violence against each other and civilians. Malakal, the state capital, exchanged hands on December 27, January 14, January 20, February 18, and March 19. Renk, a border town in northern Upper Nile state and home to SPLA's 1st Division, became a war zone by mid-April. Rebel forces, in an attempt to preempt the SPLA, sent text messages to colleagues in Renk telling them to mutiny. Since the end of April, most of Upper Nile state has been divided into SPLA or rebel fiefdoms, and both parties to the conflict have been engaged along multiple fronts simultaneously.<sup>57</sup>

### Economic repercussions

The war has had severe economic consequences for South Sudan in terms of lives lost, property damage, financial loss, and economic dislocation. Ongoing violence has hit the oil extraction sector, traditionally the South Sudanese government's lifeline. Chinese and Indian oil workers left at the start of the conflict

in December,<sup>58</sup> and oil production dropped 20 percent in the first month of the conflict alone,<sup>59</sup> a trend which continued through April.<sup>60</sup> The adverse effect of the conflict on the already fragile oil economy has had a direct impact on the government's ability to make salary payments.<sup>61</sup> Troop morale has suffered because they have not been paid. On February 9, Minister of Cabinet Affairs Martin Elia Lomuro announced that a government committee had been created to pay SPLA salaries across all states and would reportedly begin the next day and include a presidential bonus.<sup>62</sup> Yet, on March 5, a firefight broke out in the military barracks in Juba, allegedly due to soldiers protesting late salaries.<sup>63</sup> On March 24 and April 2, disabled and wounded SPLA soldiers protested outside Juba University against delays in salary payments.<sup>64</sup> They accused the government of preferential treatment for the Ugandan forces. Allegedly, the government, in trying to keep the SPLA active as a fighting force, has paid frontline soldiers first and support staff later.<sup>65</sup> Poor planning and repeated mistakes have put the government in a situation where it is "running a war with diminished resources threatening its ability to maintain critical salary commitments to the army."<sup>66</sup>

### **Increased militarization**

Both sides appear to be planning for the conflict to continue for an extended period of time. Opposition forces have been awaiting the rainy season because it affords them a strategic advantage over the UPDF's aerial attacks and diminishes the government's advantage in ground-based firepower. The opposition is composed of units with greater mobility, which offers advantages in the more difficult ground conditions during the rainy season. Opposition forces reportedly expect to expand the theater of battle into the Bahr el-Ghazal states and the greater Equatoria region.<sup>67</sup>

Defections from the national army have solidified the ethnic divide between the forces, leaving the government and the opposition with a degree of clarity about the loyalty and tenacity of those they command. The divisions could, however, make it more difficult to find the common ground necessary for peace.

Not all Nuer soldiers defected immediately, and many had chosen to remain neutral or side with the government. For example, SPLA divisions in the greater Bahr el-Ghazal area did not break into factions in the initial stages of the conflict, despite having many Nuer soldiers. These fighters were deployed further from the frontlines of major battles and less able to easily join the opposition without first suffering devastating losses.<sup>68</sup> However, the government has reportedly been worried that the remaining Nuer within SPLA ranks could be disloyal. These suspicions have had severe political and military repercussions particularly for those on the fence. In April, President Kiir removed both SPLA Chief of Staff, General James Hoth Mai, who is an ethnic Nuer, and military intelligence chief Gen. Mac Paul Kuol.<sup>69</sup> In another episode, several senior SPLA officers and about 400 soldiers based in Wau defected in late April after learning that SPLA forces had killed unarmed Nuer military trainees in Mapel. The incident prompted James Gatdet Dak, Riek Machar's spokesperson, to ask openly "President Kiir was bent on "[exterminating the] Nuer whether loyal to him or opposed to him."<sup>70</sup>

In January, almost 100 Nuer people, many of them families of defected soldiers, sought protection of the county commissioner in Lainya county in Central Equatoria state because they felt unsafe in their homes.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, in March, in Western Equatoria state, dozens of Nuer women and children from families of defected soldiers sought shelter in a government compound under the protection of the state governor.<sup>72</sup> In both cases, the government was unable to guarantee the security of the families from the threat of a Dinka-led attack.



The South Sudanese government's response to defections has been inconsistent. In some cases, officials have adopted a policy of clemency and allowed defected soldiers to return to their original units without punishment.<sup>73</sup> In other instances defectors have faced attacks.<sup>74</sup>

### **Regionalization of the conflict**

Involvement of the Ugandan forces and proxy militias operating in Sudan shows the extent to which South Sudan's civil war has taken on a regional dimension. No other neighbor is militarily involved in the conflict, though Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Sudan host significant refugee populations from South Sudan. The idea of a joint force to conduct patrols and secure the Sudan-South Sudan border and the oil installations was proposed by the government during President Bashir's visit to South Sudan, according to Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali Karti. However, within a day of returning to Khartoum, the Sudanese Foreign Ministry retracted the statement and denied that such a force would be immediately established. Instead, they said that they were open to the possibility of such patrols "at a later date and after the end of the current, exceptional circumstances."<sup>75</sup> On the same day, the U.S. government issued a statement saying that there was "no indication that Sudan is playing a negative role in the current political crisis in South Sudan."<sup>76</sup> Some analysts, however, speculate that Sudan has provided support to the opposition.<sup>77</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This paper provides a snapshot of the current military dynamics in South Sudan's civil war from the perspective of one observer to the conflict. At this juncture in the conflict, both sides remain committed to a military victory in order to achieve their political objectives. Strong feelings of revenge remain a driving force for Nuer militias that fight on behalf of former Vice President Riek Machar, but these militias remain difficult to control. Widespread defections had led the government to rely on proxy forces to supplement the main fighting force. The active presence of the UPDF in the conflict has both prevented opposition forces from making key strategic military gains and heightened concerns over the regionalization of the conflict. While the role of Sudan remains unclear, some analysts worry that Khartoum could be engaged in a double game to draw attention away from active military operations in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile.

The impact of the conflict on the militarization of ethnic communities across South Sudan (particularly the Nuer and Dinka), as well as the economic repercussions of the crisis on foreign investments and development, will only make peace and security more difficult to achieve. Finally, the protracted nature of the conflict and the willingness of both sides to continue fighting make a negotiated settlement seem all the less likely despite regional mediation and international pressure on the parties to end the conflict. In order to overcome these military dynamics, the international community will have to seek robust punitive measures to change the military calculus on both sides and support community-based efforts for reconciliation and development for those most directly affected by the conflict.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> In a public speech at Juba International Airport on May 11, President Kiir joked of overwhelmed and fatigued mediators shuttling back and forth between hotel rooms in the Sheraton in Addis Ababa, pushing Kiir and Machar to make any last minute changes and agree upon the agreement. Radio Tamazuj, "Ethiopian leader 'threatened to jail Riek and Kiir' to secure South Sudan ceasefire," May 12, 2014, available at <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/ethiopian-leader-%E2%80%98threatened-jail-riek-and-kiir%E2%80%99-secure-south-sudan-ceasefire>.

<sup>2</sup> Agence France-Presse, "South Sudan fighting resumes as ceasefire hopes dashed," *The Guardian*, May 12, 2014, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/12/south-sudan-fighting-ceasefire-kiir-machar>.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Mujuni, "Machar accuses Kiir of violating ceasefire pact" *New Vision*, May 13, 2014, available at <http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/655497-machar-accuses-kiir-of-violating-ceasefire-pact.html>; Sudan Tribune, "SPLA says ceasefire deal used as pretext to launch attacks on troops," May 14, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article51014>.

<sup>4</sup> Lesley Anne Warner, "Armed-Group Amnesty and Military Integration in South Sudan," *The Rusi Journal*, 158 (6) (2013): 40-47, available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03071847.2013.869722>.

<sup>5</sup> In an interview, former Vice President Riek Machar confessed that "there's a president who wants to wipe [the Nuer civilian fighters] out, so they fight to survive," thus making them "difficult to control." Jacey Fortin, "Civilians At War: White Army Mobilizes As Machar Aims For Oil Fields In South Sudan," *International Business Times*, March 31, 2014, available at <http://www.ibtimes.com/civilians-war-white-army-mobilizes-machar-aims-oil-fields-south-sudan-1565106>.

<sup>6</sup> A fighter on the ground echoed the sentiments of others when he said "We are fighting the government for killing [our] people." Jacey Fortin, "At Quiet Rebel Base, Plotting an Assault on South Sudan's Oil Fields," *The New York Times*, April 3, 2014, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/04/world/africa/from-a-quiet-rebel-base-plotting-an-assault-on-south-sudans-oil-fields.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Young Pelton, "The Park Ranger," *Vice*, June 4, 2014, available at <http://www.vice.com/read/the-park-ranger-0000297-v21n4>; William Davison, "South Sudan's rebel leader Machar vows to target key oil fields," *Bloomberg News*, May 30, 2014 available at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-03-30/south-sudan-s-rebel-leader-machar-vows-to-target-key-oil-fields.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Young Pelton, "I didn't even take my purse," *Vice*, June 5, 2014, available at <http://www.vice.com/read/i-didnt-even-take-my-purse-0000298-v21n4>; Robert Young Pelton, "A Grain of Truth," *Vice*, June 9, 2014, available at <http://www.vice.com/read/a-grain-of-truth-0000300-v21n4>.

<sup>9</sup> U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "South Sudan Crisis: Situation Report No. 44," July 10, 2014, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ea99fe03-8805-46ab-858f-89d0dd516ff0.pdf>. These figures do not include deaths.

<sup>10</sup> Some journalists have made a dire forecast for South Sudan, writing that "ethnic cleansing has been let rip" and that it is "hard now to imagine Kiir and Machar once again agreeing to cohabit." *The Economist*, "South Sudan: Destroying itself from within," January 4, 2014, available at <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21592637-despite-desperate-peacemaking-efforts-outlook-south-sudan>. Another news source quotes that despite hopes that the war is just an aberration, it "could make [South Sudan] a completely failed nation." David Smith, "South Sudan: the death of a dream," *The Guardian*, January 20, 2014, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/20/south-sudan-death-of-a-dream>.

<sup>11</sup> William Davison, "South Sudan Ethnic Hatred Drives Rebel Leader's White Army," *Bloomberg News*, April 1, 2014, available at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-03-31/south-sudan-ethnic-hatred-spurs-rebel-leader-machar-s-white-army.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Radio Tamazuj, "UN confirms massacres in South Sudan, says FM being used for hate messages," April 21, 2014, available at <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/un-confirms-massacres-south-sudan-says-fm-being-used-hate-messages>; David Smith, "Bentiu massacre is game-changer in South Sudan conflict, says UN official," *The Guardian*, April 22, 2014, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/22/bentiu-massacre-south-sudan-United-nations>.

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- <sup>13</sup> Sudan Tribune, “Lakes state governor rallies youths to join military” April 27, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50799>.
- <sup>14</sup> U.N. Mission in South Sudan, “Conflict in South Sudan: A Human Rights Report,” S/2014/5, May 8, 2014, available at <http://unmiss.unmissions.org/Portals/unmiss/Human%20Rights%20Reports/UNMISS%20Conflict%20in%20South%20Sudan%20-%20A%20Human%20Rights%20Report.pdf>; International Crisis Group, “South Sudan: A Civil War by Any Other Name” (Addis Ababa, Juba, Nairobi, Brussels: April 2014), available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/horn-of-africa/south-sudan/217-south-sudan-a-civil-war-by-any-other-name.aspx>.
- <sup>15</sup> Sudan Tribune, “S. Sudan admits mass defection of army troops to Machar rebels,” February 17, 2014, available at <http://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50004>; Sudan Tribune, “Lakes state governor rallies youths to join military,” April 27, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50799>. Some claim that this recruitment strategy may have predated and even perhaps resulted in the current crisis. Paul Malong Awan, a sacked governor of Northern Bahr el Ghazal state, may have brought young armed men to Juba in December 2013 under the cover of the Presidential Guards. South Sudan News Agency, “South Sudan Army Chief Sacked,” April 23, 2014, available at <http://www.southsudannewsagency.com/news/breaking-news/south-sudan-army-chief-sacked>.
- <sup>16</sup> Petia Suliman Loro, “Governor Orders Trained Forces To Urgently Report To Juba,” Gurtong, January 3, 2014, available at <http://www.gurtong.net/ECM/Editorial/tabid/124/ctl/ArticleView/mid/519/articleId/14400/Governor-Calls-Trained-Forces-To-Urgently-Report-To-Juba.aspx>.
- <sup>17</sup> Ijoo Bosco, “South Sudan VP calls for mass military mobilization,” *Sudan Tribune*, January 8, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article49491>.
- <sup>18</sup> Joseph Nashion, “New Recruits Urged To Be Brave,” Gurtong, February 9, 2014, available at <http://www.gurtong.net/ECM/Editorial/tabid/124/ctl/ArticleView/mid/519/articleId/14838/New-Recruits-Urged-To-Be-Brave.aspx>.
- <sup>19</sup> Joseph Nashion, “Tombura County Recruits 200 Into National Army,” Gurtong, February 6, 2014, available at <http://www.gurtong.net/ECM/Editorial/tabid/124/ctl/ArticleView/mid/519/articleId/14815/Tombura-County-Recruits-200-Into-National-Army.aspx>.
- <sup>20</sup> Catholic Radio Network, “Advisor urges ex-combatants to join the army,” February 11, 2014, available at <http://catholicradionetwork.org/?q=node/13295>.
- <sup>21</sup> Some children and adults living in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) have allegedly been forced into training. Interview with human rights workers, May 2014. [In person.]
- <sup>22</sup> Also spelled Gelwong or Gel-Weng.
- <sup>23</sup> Robert Young Pelton, “The Bog Barons,” *Vice*, May 21, 2014, available at <http://www.vice.com/read/the-bog-barons-0000287-v21n4>.
- <sup>24</sup> New Sudan Council of Churches and Pax-Christi Netherlands, “The Disarmament of the Gel-Weng of Bahr el-Ghazal and the Consolidation of the Nuer-Dinka Peace Agreement 1999,” January 2001.
- <sup>25</sup> Leo Rom-Yieri, “Let the World Know,” South Sudan News Agency, February 13, 2014, available at <http://www.southsudannewsagency.com/opinion/articles/let-the-world-know>.
- <sup>26</sup> Sudan Tribune, “South Sudan president admits forming private army,” February 17, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article49993>.
- <sup>27</sup> Sudan Tribune “S. Sudan army killing civilians in Malakal: rebel sources,” January 28, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article49746>.
- <sup>28</sup> According to some researchers, the JEM may be the biggest pro-government force on the ground in Leer. South Sudan News Agency, “South Sudan’s Rebels Say Government Troops and Their Foreign Allies Cause Gruesome Destruction,” February 3, 2014, available at <http://www.southsudannewsagency.com/news/top-stories/government-troops-and-their-foreign-allies>.
- <sup>29</sup> Col. Muhanga has also previously served as head of the Ugandan forces in Somalia.
- <sup>30</sup> Elias Biryabarema, “Uganda leader says helping South Sudan fight rebels,” Reuters, January 15, 2014, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/15/southsudan-unrest-idUSL5N0KP34B20140115>.

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<sup>31</sup> Uganda Goes Online (UGO), “Uganda Sends More Troops to South Sudan as Peace Talks are Stalled,” January 9, 2014, available at <http://news.ugo.co.ug/uganda-sends-troops-south-sudan-peace-talks-stalled/>; NBS TV Uganda, “UPDF fights against rebels in S.Sud,” available at

<http://www.nbs.ug/details.php?option=acat&a=2294#.U4Fej7F5c88>.

<sup>32</sup> BBC News, “Yoweri Museveni: Uganda troops fighting South Sudan rebels,” January 16, 2014, available at

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25759650>.

<sup>33</sup> “Status of Forces Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Government of the Republic of South Sudan,” January 10, 2014, available at

[http://www.sudantribune.com/IMG/pdf/status\\_of\\_forces\\_agreement-2.pdf](http://www.sudantribune.com/IMG/pdf/status_of_forces_agreement-2.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> The Africa Report, “Uganda to pull out of South Sudan gradually,” February 13, 2014, available at

<http://www.theafricareport.com/East-Horn-Africa/uganda-to-pull-out-of-south-sudan-gradually.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Christine W. Wanjala, “We will not leave South Sudan – UPDF,” *Sunday Monitor*, April 10, 2014, available at

<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/We-will-not-leave-South-Sudan---UPDF/-/688334/2274612/-/149rj48z/-/index.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Nicholas Bariyo, “Uganda Calls for Urgent Deployment of Troops in South Sudan,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 20, 2014, available at <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304198504579573493421255118>.

<sup>37</sup> Vice News, “Ambushed in South Sudan (Full Length),” [Video file], March 12, 2014, available at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmZBgZfGbhM>.

<sup>38</sup> A community armed group announced by the Warrap state Deputy Governor in February 2014 is one example of this. James Deng Dimo, “Warrap Beefs Up Security At Border With Unity state,” Gurtong, February 3, 2014, available at <http://www.gurtong.net/ECM/Editorial/tabid/124/ctl/ArticleView/mid/519/articleId/14788/Warrap-Beefs-Up-Security-At-Border-With-Unity-State.aspx>.

<sup>39</sup> Small Arms Survey Human Security Baseline Assessment, “The SPLM-in-Opposition,” May 2014, available at <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/facts-figures/south-sudan/HSBA-SPLM-IO-May-2014.pdf>.

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<sup>40</sup> Ingrid Marie Breidlid and Michael J. Arensen, “Anyone who can carry a gun can go: The role of the White Army in the current conflict in South Sudan,” (Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2014) available at

<http://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=7417>. See also, John Young, “The White Army: An Introduction

and Overview” (Geneva: Small Arms Survey Human Security Baseline Assessment, June 2007), available at

<http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/working-papers/HSBA-WP-05-White-Army.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Sudan Tribune, “Rebels accuse government of targeting Nuer traditional leaders,” March 9, 2014, available at

<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50237>.

<sup>42</sup> Representative from the Ngungden Historical Society, interview in May 2014. [In person].

<sup>43</sup> One example is that of Dak Kueth, a self-proclaimed prophet, who talks in parables and mobilized 13,000 Lou-Nuer youth to fight a rival Murle community in 2011. Another similar case is that of Wournyang, a Nuer known to have mobilized the youth to fight the Dinka in Bor in 1991. According to Gai Ngungdeng, a grandson of Ngungdeng Bong and widely considered to be the original Nuer prophet, people have misused his family’s name over the years to acquire legitimacy and create conflict. Sudan Tribune, “Self-proclaimed Lou-Nuer prophet declares his intention to work for peace,” May 31, 2013, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article46779>; Maker Mabor Marial, “South Sudan: Government Must Dialogue With Nuer Community’s Leaders,” Sudan Tribune, March 20, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50377>; U.N. Mission in South Sudan, “Conflict in South Sudan: A Human Rights Report.”

<sup>44</sup> Representative from the Ngungden Historical Society, interview in May 2014. [In person.] The government has also accused rebels of forcefully recruiting civilians to fight in the war. Mark Tran and David Smith, “South Sudan rebels ‘forcibly recruiting civilians’ amid humanitarian crisis,” *The Guardian*, January 2, 2014, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/02/south-sudan-rebels-recruiting-civilians-humanitarian-catastrophe>.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with representative from the Ngungden Historical Society, May 2014. [In person.]

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- <sup>46</sup> Sudan Tribune, "S. Sudan rebel commander in Upper Nile rejects ceasefire accord," February 5, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article49851>.
- <sup>47</sup> Vice, "Saving South Sudan – Full Length," [Video file], May 22, 2014, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDSu8wIQG6c>.
- <sup>48</sup> Vice, "Saving South Sudan – Full Length."
- <sup>49</sup> Interview with opposition commander in Unity state, May 2014. [In person.]
- <sup>50</sup> Relinquishing and recapturing territory may be partly by design. In February, for example, the SPLA admitted to a "tactical withdrawal" from Malakal. Sudan Tribune, "S. Sudan admits to tactical withdrawal in Malakal," February 21, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50041>. Furthermore, rebel commanders have suggested that they "don't believe in maintaining territorial control or establishing new military bases," unlike the government, because it slows them down. In other words, rebel forces perceived it as acceptable to lose and gain towns. Interview with military spokesperson for the rebel forces, April/May 2014. [In person.]
- <sup>51</sup> Small Arms Survey Human Security Baseline Assessment, "The Conflict in Unity State," May 2014, available at <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/facts-figures/south-sudan/conflict-of-2013-14/the-conflict-in-unity.html>.
- <sup>52</sup> According to state authorities, at least 250 members of the opposition surrendered to the SPLA. Radio Miraya, "Over 200 defected Soldiers to the opposition surrender," January 25, 2014, available at <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan-republic/over-200-defected-soldiers-opposition-surrender>.
- <sup>53</sup> Small Arms Survey Human Security Baseline Assessment, "The Conflict in Unity State." Interestingly, the SPLA faced the exact same problem of lack of reinforcements as the rebels did with defections upon losing Bentiu. Sudan Tribune, "S. Sudan admits losing Unity state's Bentiu to rebel forces," April 15, 2014, available at <http://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50662>.
- <sup>54</sup> Radio Tamazuj, "Unity State: 'Matthew Puljang did not defect'" April 15, 2014, available at <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/unity-state-%E2%80%98matthew-puljang-did-not-defect%E2%80%99>.
- <sup>55</sup> Small Arms Survey Human Security Baseline Assessment, "The Conflict in Jonglei State," May 2, 2014, available at <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/facts-figures/south-sudan/conflict-of-2013-14/the-conflict-in-jonglei.html>.
- <sup>56</sup> U.N. Mission in South Sudan, "Conflict in South Sudan: A Human Rights Report," para. 92.
- <sup>57</sup> Events reconstructed from Small Arms Survey Human Security Baseline Assessment, "The Conflict in Upper Nile State," Small Arms Survey Human Security Baseline Assessment, "The Conflict in Upper Nile State (18 March 2014 update)" (March 2014), available at [http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/facts-figures/south-sudan/HSBA-Conflict-in-Upper\\_Nile-March-2014.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/facts-figures/south-sudan/HSBA-Conflict-in-Upper_Nile-March-2014.pdf).
- <sup>58</sup> News24, "Bashir - talks only way forward," January 6, 2014, available at <http://www.news24.com.ng/Africa/News/Bashir-talks-only-way-forward-20140106>.
- <sup>59</sup> Yuwen Wu, "China's oil fears over South Sudan fighting," BBC News, January 8, 2014, available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25654155>. An estimated 4.8 million barrels of South Sudan's Dar Blend crude oil were expected to be exported in March, about 20 percent higher than in February (although this is likely because March is a longer calendar month than February). Monthly production levels remained stable in March, although overall production dropped since the start of the crisis, according to tenders released by South Sudan's Ministry of Petroleum and Mining. Production of the Nile Blend crude oil from South Sudan's Unity state remained shut. Platts, "South Sudan March Dar Blend crude exports seen higher at 4.8 mil barrels: sources," February 6, 2014, available at <http://www.platts.com/latest-news/oil/singapore/south-sudan-march-dar-blend-crude-exports-seen-27903898>.
- <sup>60</sup> Stratfor, "South Sudanese Rebel Attacks Delay Oil Production," April 24, 2014, available at <http://www.stratfor.com/sample/analysis/south-sudanese-rebel-attacks-delay-oil-production>.
- <sup>61</sup> The Minister of Finance and Economic Planning stated in a radio interview that the ongoing crisis had upset the "established order" and drained the country financially. Eye Radio, "Minister of Finance and Economic Planning says that the economy of the country is falling," January 23, 2014 available at <http://eyeradio.org/minister-finance-economic-planning-economy-country-falling/>. This sentiment was echoed by Stephen Dhieu Dau, South Sudan's Minister of Petroleum. Sudan Tribune, "S. Sudan acknowledges rebel threat to oilfields," February 16, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article49980>.

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- <sup>62</sup> Statement by Martin Elia Lomuro on Citizen TV, February 9, 2014.
- <sup>63</sup> Witnesses reported seeing 18 bodies outside the military headquarters. Sudan Tribune, “Salary dispute within S. Sudan army triggers heavy gunfire in Juba,” March 5, 2014, available at <http://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50190>.
- <sup>64</sup> Sudan Tribune, “Disabled South Sudanese soldiers stage protest over unpaid salaries,” March 24, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50411>.
- <sup>65</sup> Interview with SPLA representatives, Juba, April 2014. [In person.]
- <sup>66</sup> International Crisis Group, “South Sudan: A Civil War by Any Other Name” (April 2014), available at [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/south%20sudan/217-south-sudan-a-civil-war-by-any-other-name](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/south%20sudan/217-south-sudan-a-civil-war-by-any-other-name).
- <sup>67</sup> Interview with opposition spokesperson, May 2014. [In person.]
- <sup>68</sup> Small Arms Survey Human Security Baseline Assessment, “The SPLM-in-Opposition” (May 2014), available at <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/facts-figures/south-sudan/HSBA-SPLM-IO-May-2014.pdf>.
- <sup>69</sup> Sudan Tribune, “South Sudan denies sacking army chief over performance,” April 24, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50761>.
- <sup>70</sup> Sudan Tribune, “Another army general defects in N. Bahr el Ghazal state,” May 1, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50844>.
- <sup>71</sup> Interviews with government officials, Central Equatoria, May 2014. [In person.]
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>73</sup> In a press conference in Juba on January 20, President Kiir laid out a roadmap for peace that included presidential pardons and general amnesty. On some occasions, the SPLA has used an alternate sticks-and-carrots approach. On January 21, for example, the SPLA issued an ultimatum to several defected soldiers in Wadekona, Upper Nile state, to return or be prepared to be attacked. Some units then chose to reintegrate into the SPLA and were brought back without a shot fired. Interview with SPLA soldiers, Upper Nile state, May 2014. [In person.]
- <sup>74</sup> An overwhelming majority of the defected soldiers have faced firefights in the process of regrouping. Some of those fortunate enough to have run away without a fight have been threatened.
- <sup>75</sup> Reuters, “Sudan backs away from statement on South Sudan force,” January 7, 2014, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/07/southsudan-sudan-idUSL6N0KH26K20140107>.
- <sup>76</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Daily Press Briefing: Discussion on South Sudan,” Press briefing, January 29, 2014, available at <http://diplomacy.state.gov/documents/organization/219306.pdf>.
- <sup>77</sup> Abraham A. Awolich, “The Question of Ugandan Troops in South Sudan,” The Sudd Institute, March 4, 2014, available at <http://www.suddinstitute.org/publications/show/the-question-of-ugandan-troops-in-south-sudan/>.