Evidence of an Airstrike in South Sudan

The Satellite Sentinel Project has secured independent confirmation of the aerial bombardment of a Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) military installation in Jau town in South Sudan’s Unity State (Figure 1). The South Sudanese army’s continued occupation of Jau, which is located within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone (SDBZ) straddling the two countries’ contested border, is a violation of the two countries’ recent recommitment to abide by security arrangements. Jau has been the subject of territorial dispute and the site of previous clashes between the two countries’ armed forces in December 2011 and February 2012. Notwithstanding South Sudan’s current non-compliance with its agreement to demilitarize its border areas, the Sudanese government’s aerial bombardment of Jau, now confirmed by the Satellite Sentinel Project, is an illegal use of force under international law.

Digital Globe panchromatic imagery of the fortified village of Jau from September 8, 2013 shows a crater, approximately 7 meters in diameter, consistent with aerial bombardment (Figure 2). According to DigitalGlobe Analytics, at least two tent structures were destroyed by the bomb blast. At least one more bomb crater was noted north of the village (Figure 3).

Neither crater is visible in July 12, 2013 imagery of the same area. Sources on the ground corroborate reports that a Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) jet dropped a bomb in Jau on September 7, 2013. Major Gen. James Koang Chuol, Commander of the Fourth division of the SPLA reported that a soldier and his wife died, and six people were injured, as a result of bombardment.

By targeting a historic flash point for violence at a sensitive moment, the attack has heightened bilateral tensions between the two Sudans.

The South Sudanese armed forces maintain three separately secured military installations in the Jau region, all within 4 kilometers of the center line and all within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone (SDBZ). Continuing to maintain armed forces at these facilities is a clear violation of the two countries’ bilateral agreement to maintain a 20 kilometer-wide demilitarized zone along their border. Each observed installation has a line of tents surrounded by a perimeter of foxholes, which DigitalGlobe Analytics believe protects family structures near the center of the installations.

The September 7, 2013 SAF attack occurred three days after South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and Sudanese President Omar Al Bashir recommitted themselves to peaceful relations and enforcing the nine bilateral cooperation agreements they signed on September 27, 2012. 6

The two countries’ Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mission team was in Unity State at the time of the attack and traveled to the bomb site to investigate. According to Major Gen. Chuol, the team “even talked to the injured persons.”7 At the time of publication, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism had not made any public statements about attack. Jau has reportedly already been bombed by the SAF on two previous occasions this year: July 3, 20138 and February 14, 2013.9

Village of Jau, Unity State, South Sudan

Figure 1

Crater 1.6km north of village

Bomb Crater

Intermittent perimeter of foxholes

Market

Jau, Unity State, South Sudan
DigitalGlobe Panchromatic Image, September 8, 2013
Figure 2

Before/After:
Evidence of airstrike outside Jau

Destroyed tent

Probable bomb blast radius

Jau, Unity State, South Sudan

DigitalGlobe Natural Color Image, July 12, 2013

DigitalGlobe Panchromatic Image, September 8, 2013
Figure 3

Before/After:
Evidence of airstrike outside Jau

Jau, Unity State, South Sudan

DigitalGlobe Natural Color Image, July 12, 2013

DigitalGlobe Panchromatic Image, September 8, 2013

Probable bomb blast radius