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## The SPLM-in-Opposition

*Describes events through 1 April 2014*

### Background

Opposition to the Government of the Republic of South Sudan President Salva Kiir Mayardit has its immediate origins in the interim period between the 2005 signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and secession from Sudan in 2011. Kiir was elevated to the presidency following the death of Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) leader John Garang in July 2005. Garang had established a decisive and ruthless style of leadership to overcome the near-irresistible centrifugal forces at work in Southern Sudan. By contrast, Kiir adopted a 'big tent' policy to establish a broader political and ethnic basis for leadership. This was most readily illustrated by the 2006 Juba Declaration, in which the forces of Paulino Matiep's Nuer-dominated South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF) were integrated into the SPLA, following years of internecine fighting. Kiir was hailed as a conciliator, the antidote to Garang's divisive, dictatorial rule. Over time, however, many within the leadership grew critical of Kiir's inability to articulate a direction for national development. Kiir, they believed, had ushered everyone into the big tent at the cost of cohesion and vision. This was most apparent in the SPLA, which likely more than doubled in size to absorb the SSDF, historically its bitter enemy. Military standards dropped, enrolment rose, and cash became the principal factor for maintaining military cohesion, rather than ideology or shared history.

Many in the party, including vice-president Riek Machar, came to believe that they would be better able to lead the SPLM and the country. Machar made clear his intention to stand for the SPLM chairmanship in preparations for the 2008 national convention, before an awkward truce was concluded to preserve the status quo until independence had been achieved. In the lead-up to national independence in July 2011, rumours reached a crescendo regarding a plot to oust the president so that he would not lead the country into sovereignty. At national independence, Kiir found himself increasingly focused on managing fratricidal tension within the expanded SPLM/A and began to change tack: he decisively wrested control of the country's new National Security Services (NSS), placing loyalists in key positions, and relied on a narrower coterie of political advisors to assert authoritarian control as he grew increasingly and justifiably suspicious of the intentions of other senior figures in the wider party. He was accused of ethnic bias in favour of fellow Bahr el-Ghazal Dinka.

As elite disaffection at Kiir's leadership proliferated in the post-independence period, Machar worked to build a political coalition combining an ethnic Nuer support base with new political allies in the SPLM. This was illustrated most readily by his strenuous efforts to reconcile with the Bor Dinka community for the 1991 Bor massacre, perpetrated by forces then under Machar's command. Being the tribe of the late SPLM leader John Garang, the Bor Dinka is a politically significant constituency. The Garangists had remained influential in the command positions of the security sector, as well as in the SPLM leadership. In 2011, Machar made a speech at the house of Rebecca Nyandeng, widow of Garang, apologising for the Bor massacre. In government, he worked to establish himself as a credible and more able alternative to

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Kiir. As frustration with Kiir grew, senior SPLM/A figures came to see Machar’s historical perfidy as a lesser concern than Kiir’s leadership.

In a meeting of the SPLM’s political bureau in March 2013, with the party’s 3rd extraordinary national convention imminent, Machar again declared his intention to challenge Kiir for the leadership of the SPLM—the key step in becoming president—initiating a year of tense political manoeuvring. Kiir rapidly responded by weeding out from positions of power those who he suspected of colluding against him, including the vice-president, whose delegated powers he withdrew in April. Kiir proceeded to remove the governors of Lakes and Unity states in January and July, respectively, then suspended his ministers of cabinet affairs and finance on corruption charges in June, as well as the SPLM secretary-general in July. In July he dismissed the entire cabinet, and SPLM stalwarts were replaced in favour of politicians less threatening to Kiir. The new government controversially included a number of figures seen to be close to Khartoum, such as Riek Gai, the former southern chairman of the National Congress Party, and Abdullah Deng, the Popular Congress Party’s 2010 presidential candidate. Battle lines were drawn in an increasingly stark political confrontation. These actions to emasculate perceived political foes ironically contributed to the hardening of an organized opposition to Kiir.

**The 6 December political coalition**

Following their removal from government in July, a coalition under Machar held a press conference on 6 December in the headquarters of the SPLM, outlining a political platform to challenge Kiir’s increasingly authoritarian grip on the party. The group contained various senior figures historically associated with Garang, indicating that Machar had succeeded in broadening his political support base and overcoming ethnic divides. The presence of Rebecca Nyandeng and Mabior Garang—the eldest son of John Garang and an outspoken critic of Kiir—were symbolic in this regard. Arguably more significant were the presence of some of the most senior Garangists in the SPLM, notably Pagan Amum Okiech and Deng Alor Kuol. The presence of Deng Alor, also a senior figure among the Ngok Dinka of Abyei, was made more significant by the collective disappointment of the Ngok at Kiir’s lack of clear support for Abyei’s unilateral referendum on self-determination in October 2013.

Also present were Oyay Deng Ajak, a key wartime disciple of Garang and the former SPLA chief of general staff; Majak D’Agoot Atem, a precocious trusted commander of Garang and former deputy minister of defence; and Gier Chuang Aluong, former minister of interior and another senior SPLA figure, suggesting that the coalition had military influence. Alfred Ladu Gore, an Equatorian Bari and political mobilizer who many believed to have been robbed of the 2010 gubernatorial election in Central Equatoria, also participated, in a bid to demonstrate meaningful Equatorian representation. Madut Biar, former governor of Northern Bahr El Ghazal, provided representation from the Kiir’s Bahr el-Ghazal Dinka heartland. John Luk Jok, the former minister of justice and the architect of the 2011 transitional constitution that had bestowed so much power on Kiir, was present, as was Peter Adwok Nyaba, a veteran political dissident and former minister of education, who regularly expressed in writing his dismay at the failures of leadership in the SPLM.

It was a formidable political alliance, representative of diverse political and ethnic allegiances, united under Machar not by long-forged bonds so much as a collective

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opposition to Kiir’s rule and their marginalization from the centre of power. Kiir had removed in the preceding year each of the politicians present at the conference. However, it was testament to the strength of the opposition that such senior figures were able to agree to unite—at least temporarily—under Machar, a man with whom many had historical grievances. This also hinted at the limits of the group to govern if it ever achieved power. However, with an ostensibly coherent political agenda focused on the democratization of the SPLM, the group represented the greatest challenge to Kiir as both chairman of the party and president of the republic since he inherited power.

**The post-December opposition**

Reflecting the scale of the threat posed by the 6 December coalition, Kiir instructed that the Nuer presidential guard of Machar and the late Paulino Matiep be disarmed, and the coalition leaders arrested. Since the outbreak of violence in Juba on 15 December 2013, the political and military opposition to the government has grown increasingly amorphous, taking on radically new forms from the initial coalition. What remains the defining, unifying feature is a shared opposition to the rule of Kiir. The recognized shorthand for the rebels is ‘anti-government forces’ (AGF), SPLM-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO), or simply ‘the opposition’. The motivations that underpin this opposition have diversified, creating various strata of resistance to the government. The catalyst for this diversification was the outbreak of violence in Juba in which an unknown number of Nuer were killed by government security forces, many Nuer believe in an orchestrated campaign. This undermined previous efforts to establish an opposition platform that transcended ethnicity.

The broad opposition can be categorized into a number of inter-connected groups, namely:

- the political SPLM-IO under the leadership of Riek Machar;
- the wider Nuer political class in exile;
- the military commanders of Greater Upper Nile who have declared allegiance to Machar and the military forces they command;
- the Nuer ‘white army’ community forces of Greater Upper Nile; and
- the senior members of the SPLM who were or are detained by the government on suspicion of plotting a coup.

Perhaps the most ominous opposition for Kiir, however, is the large proportion of the elite that remains in South Sudan, not openly disloyal to the government but no longer ready to act faithfully on its behalf. This demographic has evidently been recognised by Kiir’s cohort, which has progressively tightened the political and military decision-making circle around him while attempting to stem the tide of political and military defections.

### Political leadership

The SPLM-IO is far from a well-organized political group, a fact that defies accusations of coup plotting in advance of 15 December. It does not have discernible structures or membership, even four months into the conflict. Its goals are not well articulated: in interviews, Machar has referred to liberating South Sudan from Salva Kiir in order to achieve democratization and equality in the SPLM and in South Sudan, while denying that he is motivated by personal political interest. In reality, the politicians associated with the opposition are motivated by a combination of a desire for political reform, securing of political positions, and—critically among the majority Nuer contingent—revenge or justice for the December killings in Juba.

Machar operates as a political leader and military commander in Greater Upper Nile, which includes the states of Unity, Upper Nile, and Jonglei. He has appointed two civilian governors for Upper Nile and Jonglei. In Upper Nile, the governor is Garhoth Gatkouth, who at various moments—particularly early in the conflict—has been a military commander in the state and a key mobilizer of the Gajok Nuer white army. He illustrates the fluid relationships between political, formal military, and informal military aspects of the opposition. Like almost all senior military figures associated with the opposition, Gatkouth is a former member of the SSDF, who joined the SPLM in 2006 and became the commissioner of Nasir county. In Jonglei, the opposition's governor is Gabriel Duop Lam, the former state minister of law enforcement. The SPLM-IO has not appointed a civilian governor in Unity, instead retaining the defected SPLA Division 4 Commander Major General James Koang as both political and military head. In areas where the opposition has a stable presence and community support, it has appointed its own county commissioners, largely the pre-December commissioners who simply switched allegiance to Machar.

The political SPLM-IO is perhaps most readily identified as the group of negotiators delegated by Machar to represent the movement in the ongoing IGAD-mediated Addis Ababa peace talks. The membership of the delegation has altered between the talks in January that led to the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement and those since February focused on a longer-term peace process. However, the key members of the current 16-member delegation are:

- Taban Deng Gai, the former governor of Unity state and head of the delegation;
- Hussein Mar Nyuot, the former deputy governor of Jonglei state and the delegation's spokesman;
- Alfred Ladu Gore, a Bari former minister of environment, a late entrant to the talks in late February;
- Angelina Teny, the first wife of Riek Machar and a former Unity state gubernatorial candidate in the 2010 elections who entered the talks at the same time as Ladu Gore;
- Mabior Garang, the eldest son of John Garang and Rebecca Nyandeng;

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- Gabriel Changson Chang, the chairman of the United Democratic Salvation Front party and former holder of various national ministerial posts;
- Dak Duop, the former NCP governor of Upper Nile state immediately before and after the CPA;
- Hatim Shuai Deng, an Abilyang Dinka married to a sister of Angelina who formally worked in the office of Machar;
- Stephen Par Kuol, former Jonglei state minister of education and delegation drafter;
- Bangot Amum Okiech, MP for Pibor, former SPLM chief whip in the national legislative assembly, and sister of Pagan Amum;
- Sophia Pal Gai, MP for Nassir;
- Aggrey Ezbon Idri, a former managing director of the Nile Commercial Bank from Mundri, Western Equatoria; and
- Puot Kang Chol, now secretary of the SPLM-IO youth league.

Even this small group highlights some of the contradictions and tensions within the SPLM-IO. It is not well configured to assert itself as the ‘true SPLM’ – a key element of the 6 December coalition platform from which it derives – since it no longer includes the 11 former and current detainees who are SPLM party heavyweights. Macher, Teny, Deng Gai, and Ladu Gore all broke away from the SPLM/A in the 1990s, while Changson and Dak Duop represent other parties. There has in the recent past been strong animosity between Deng Gai, Machar, and Teny. Many believe that Teny was robbed of the 2010 gubernatorial election in Unity by Taban. It is not an enduringly cohesive group, either politically or personally.

Besides the delegation, a purported 21-member Machar cabinet was circulated in early March 2014, blending members of the opposition delegation, SPLM detainees, and current members of the government. Deng Gai later dismissed the list as a fabrication of the government.

Outside of these limited emergent political structures of the SPLM-IO, there is a wide network of politicians and elites in exile who identify politically with the opposition and orbit the delegation. They are largely but not exclusively Nuer, and many are members of the government or parliament who fled abroad to neighbouring East African countries or took sanctuary in UNMISS compounds across South Sudan. They have varying degrees of influence in the politics of the opposition and most have not openly declared themselves as opposition supporters, though their political sentiments reflect those of the opposition. They are an amorphous threat to the government and a significant, unspoken component of the SPLM-IO.

### **Military leadership and resources**

The military wing of Machar's SPLM-IO reflects the primacy of the military theatre in the conflict. It is almost entirely Nuer and commanded by veterans of the SSDF that have been marginalized by the post-Juba Declaration government. The opposition forces are concentrated in the Greater Upper Nile Nuer heartlands, reflecting the profound ethnicization of the conflict since it broke out. In Jonglei, opposition forces control Lou and Gawaar Nuer counties of Fangak, Ayod, Uror, Nyirol and Akobo and also the Padang Dinka Pigi county, while Duk is contested. In Upper Nile, on the east bank, the opposition controls the Jikany Nuer strongholds of Maiwut, Longuchok, Nassir and Ulang counties, with Baliet, Akoka and Makal counties contested. On the west bank, the opposition has had a consistent presence in Manyo county while Fashoda and Panyikang have been contested.

In Unity State, the opposition has been weaker for a number of reasons: the state is stranded for purposes of resupply; it is exposed through its western border to Kiir's Bahr el-Ghazal heartland, from where pro-government forces have been mobilized to capture and hold areas initially taken by the opposition; the defecting Division 4 forces lost significant military assets when they were destroyed during the retreat from Bentiu in January; and Nuer soldiers are split in Unity as a result of the decision of the South Sudan Liberation Movement/Army's (SSLM/A) decision to ally with the government. The opposition's military presence is therefore currently restricted to Mayendit, western Koch and western Mayom counties. However, Nuer rural areas are overwhelmingly supportive of the opposition and many of them are armed, but they are not organized and mobilized as they are in Jonglei and Upper Nile. It appears that opposition forces are organising in Kharasana, South Kordofan (Sudan), for a wet season campaign in Unity. However, as of 31 March, the principal military objective for the opposition forces appears to be to secure the oil fields of Upper Nile, with the main assault from the Greater Nassir heartland into the eastern field of Adar. Machar has acknowledged that the capture of these fields would allow the opposition to strangle the government economically, particularly with the (less productive) Unity oil fields closed down due to damage caused by fighting in January.

The composition of the anti-government forces is not straightforward to discern. A large number of almost entirely Nuer soldiers have defected from the SPLA and other organized forces, mainly in December 2013, although small numbers continue to defect. Precise numbers of defections are not known, but informed estimates suggest that about 30 per cent of the SPLA's fighting forces has defected, amounting to perhaps 35,000 fighters. The largest defections came from Divisions 8 (Jonglei), 4 (Unity), and 7 (southern Upper Nile) because they were predominantly Nuer and based in Greater Upper Nile, meaning they could readily defect into friendly, anti-government areas. Nuer elements of Divisions 1 (northern Upper Nile), 2 (Central Equatoria) and 6 (Western Equatoria) also defected, in lesser numbers. Divisions 3 (Northern Bahr el-Ghazal) and 5 (Western Bahr el-Ghazal) have largely stayed intact, despite having significant Nuer components. This is most likely because they are physically isolated in Bahr el-Ghazal and would have a near impossible task to fight their way to anti-government areas. An unknown number of Nuer police have also joined the opposition, but if the proportion of defections was roughly similar to the SPLA, they may amount to around 10,000.

It is to some degree a false dichotomy to separate the defecting SPLA from white army forces, since they are from the same Nuer areas of Greater Upper Nile and fight for the same reasons, namely revenge for the perceived government campaign to kill Nuer civilians in Juba in December 2013. A white army (*Jiech Mabor*) is an informal, temporary armed community mobilization in Nuer lands in times of crisis, as opposed to the formal armed forces. Entire communities of men, generally with experience of fighting, have been armed and mobilized in Nuer lands under this system since December, and those who have spent time in the SPLA—often with little training or discipline—are generally not immediately distinguishable. The ex-SSDF officers have a long history of mobilizing white armies in the 1990s, and it was they that largely populated the SSDF integrating into the SPLA post-Juba Declaration. The white armies of Lou and Gawaar in Jonglei and Gajok and Gajaak (Jikany) in Upper Nile have been key to the major battles of the war so far, in towns such as Malakal and Bor, though their numbers are unknown because they mobilize temporarily and then return to their communities. Most estimates put these mobilizations in the multiple tens of thousands, which resonates with the pervasive sense of grievance in Nuer communities. The Lou have been focused on the government-held areas of Jonglei around Bor, while the Gawaar have been split between north Bor and northward excursions to Canal and into Malakal. The Gajaak and Gajok have focused on the oil fields, Sobat, Malakal and west bank in Upper Nile.

Opposition force commanders must combine military command with community mobilization. In the first month of the conflict, key defecting officers, who had a long history of fighting together under the SSDF banner, found themselves outside of their natural areas of operation. They fled Juba for opposition-affiliated territory in Panyijar, southern Unity, in January 2014, along with around 3-4,000 troops who had defected from Equatoria. In late February, efforts were made to return officers to their home areas, where they would be most effective in mobilizing and motivating white armies. Simon Gatwich Dual returned to Akobo in Jonglei, while Gabriel Tang-Ginye, Thomas Mabor Dhol, John Both Teng, and James Othong Riek travelled to Phom El Zeraf and then Malakal with the troops that had fought their way from Equatoria. All are former SSDF generals who either chose to join the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) or the SPLA after the CPA.

Peter Gadet Yaak is the overall military commander of the forces loyal to Machar. A highly capable field commander and SAF-trained paratrooper, Gadet is infamous in South Sudan for his history of serial defections. He was a senior deputy to the now deceased Paulino Matiep in the SSDF. In the year before his latest defection, he was commander of Division 8 in Jonglei, responsible for operations in Pibor. In 2013, it was widely rumoured that he would be used as a scapegoat by the government, along with James Othong, for human rights abuses committed in the Pibor operations, while there were also rumours of his attempted assassination at the hands of the government in April 2013. Gadet was therefore primed for insurrection by December 2013, like many other marginalized and disaffected former SSDF officers. Simon Gatwich, for example, was arrested in October 2012 on a spurious coup plot charge. Tang-Ginye and Mabor Dhol had attempted to integrate their forces into the SPLA in April 2011 but the process ended in their arrest following a shootout with SPLA in Kaldak, Jonglei. All three were pardoned in October 2013 in a bid to secure their loyalty. The experience of marginalization since the expectation of the Juba Declaration helps to

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explain the motivation of the opposition force commanders, along with the desire to avenge the death of relatives and tribesmen in Juba.

As of 31 March, Pater Gadet's whereabouts is the subject of speculation. He was in Bor at the time of his mutiny in December 2013 and subsequently commanded operations in Jonglei in the early stages of the conflict. Tensions developed with the Lou Nuer community over Gadet's demands for military discipline and forcible recruitment among the Lou white army. He was thought to have travelled to Upper Nile to take overall command of opposition forces. However, he may now be in Western Kordofan of Sudan, organizing the training of Nuer forces to recapture Bentiu.

The key area commanders for the opposition are now:

**In Upper Nile:**

Major-General **Gabriel Tang-Ginye** is overall commander and his deputy is Major-General Thomas Mabor Dhol. Under them:

- Major-General James Duit Yiech commands Gajaak in Maiwut, with Brigadier-General Gatiek Diar;
- Major-General Saddam Shayot is in the Sobat area; and
- Brigadiers-General Peter Puok Koang and Gatluak Riek Jack command Gajaak Nuer forces in the area of Guel Guk and Adar oil field; and
- Brigadiers-General Joseph Chegai Gatluak and Simon Diang Duoth are on the west bank of the Nile.

**In Jonglei:**

Major-General **Simon Gatwich** is overall commander. Under him:

- Major-General Peter Dor Monyjur is commanding operations around Gadiang and Bor

**In Unity:**

Major-General **James Koang** is overall commander. Under him:

- Brigadiers-General Wang Chuk and Makal Kuol, whose forces are more scattered.

Every one of these commanders bar James Koang has a history of wartime resistance to the SPLA, mostly as part of the SSDF under Paulino Matiep.

Command-and-control of the opposition forces is complex, since white armies do not mobilize around a single hierarchy. Their current motivation to fight is a combination of the powerful sense of anger at the 'Dinka government' as well as opportunities to loot cattle and other bounty during attacks. Once fighting is no longer desirable, the white armies simply return to their communities, as is reported to have happened when a Lou white army came under air attack from Ugandan aircraft in the battles for Bor. In order to keep them mobilized, commanders are capitalizing on and directing ethnic hatreds towards the government. It appears that Machar has the loyalty of almost all opposition forces, with a general consensus among the Nuer that he is their political representative. However, it is not so much the case that the Nuer fighters associate with Machar's political ambitions as he has associated himself with the



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Nuer's desire for revenge and an end to Kiir's government. Key commanders voice their allegiance to Machar, reflecting a current common interest among the Nuer.

**The SPLM detainees**

The name SPLM-IO, conceived at the time of the 6 December press conference, is already an anachronism due to the decision of the majority of the dissident SPLM leaders to distance themselves from the armed Nuer insurrection in Greater Upper Nile. On the outbreak of violence on 15 December, the government ordered the arrest of the politicians present at the press conference. While Machar, Taban Deng, and Alfred Ladu Gore managed to flee Juba before their capture by the government, the other SPLM members remained, having been informed in advance of their impending arrest. In all, eleven senior SPLM officials were taken into the custody of the National Security Services. They were: Deng Alor, Gier Chuang, Cirino Hiteng, John Luk, Chol Tong, Kosti Manibe, Madut Biar, Majak D'Agot, Oyay Deng, Pagan Amum, and Ezekiel Gatkuoth. Peter Adwok was placed under house arrest as a result of his poor health. The eleven are ethnically diverse, sharing a long association with the SPLM/A. In a deal brokered by the Kenyan government, seven of the 11 detainees were relinquished to Kenyan custody on 29 January, from where they joined the peace talks in Addis Ababa, to the on-going annoyance of the South Sudanese government.

On joining the Addis talks on 8 February, the former detainees, calling themselves the SPLM Leaders-Former Detainees, decided to present themselves as a third entity, rather than joining with the opposition. The decision highlighted a fault line that had existed in Machar's coalition from the outset, between the cruder, ethnic politics of his implied popular Nuer constituency and the more sophisticated, multi-ethnic party politics of the disaffected SPLM leaders, many of whom had fought against Nuer anti-SPLM groups in the civil war. Once violence broke out in Juba on 15 December, the motives for opposition of the armed Nuer and the SPLM politicians diverged: while the Nuer people saw themselves in a war of survival against a government campaign of ethnic cleansing, the SPLM detainees remained focused on a political agenda relating to the management of the party and their marginalization at the hands of Kiir. This has undermined Machar's hard-fought, multi-ethnic coalition of political reform and exposed him to the accusation that he has repeated his 1991 move and split the South along ethnic lines.

The former detainees have acknowledged that they share a common political platform with the opposition, based ostensibly on political reform but most importantly for most on the removal of Kiir. Some within the detainees group are probably more prepared to countenance working under Kiir in future than others, though the consensus appears to be with the latter. However, they have distinguished themselves from the opposition's use of force. The government continues to reject the presence of the seven at the talks. The opposition, which lobbied for the detainees' release as a condition of the January cessation of hostilities agreement, is privately bitter at the decision of the seven to stand apart. They have been careful, however, not to encourage the separation, asserting that the former detainees have an important role to play in brokering peace and are free to determine their political stance.

The four SPLM detainees who remain in custody and on trial for treason and a host of other charges in Juba are: Pagan Amum, Oyay Deng, Majak D'Agot and Ezekiel

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Gatkouth. Calls for their release have come from the released detainees as well as regional and international parties, who argue that they should play a role in negotiating a sustainable settlement to the conflict. The trial against them has offered no credible evidence of a coup plot.

**The opposition within**

Opposition to the government of Salva Kiir is potent because it is pervasive, reaching beyond the militarised Nuer communities who are motivated by justice and revenge, and the SPLM detainees who are motivated by political reform and power politics. Most institutions of the state are characterized by an underlying, unspoken rejection of Kiir’s leadership, which has crystallized in the wake of the December 2013 crisis and the descent into more blatant ethnic politics. The majority who are not openly in opposition to the government, generally out of fear or material benefit, are nonetheless not committed supporters of the government. This has created a sense of political insecurity and paranoia within the government and a corresponding tightening of the reigns of power.

Efforts are underway by the opposition to convince constituencies into open resistance, either politically or militarily. Three examples of this are the Equatorians, the Murle, and Shilluk communities. The Equatorians are arguably now the most courted constituency. While the three Equatorian governors remain behind the government, anger is growing within communities at the perception that the region is being mobilized by the government to fight the Nuer. Equally, the Shilluk have historical grievances with the government and local Dinka communities in Upper Nile, based on land issues, as well the detention of their politicians who, particularly in the case of Oyay Deng, are allies of the Shilluk king. They are also aggrieved, however, by their targeting at the hands of opposition forces in the repeated occupations of Malakal. The Murle of Jonglei also have profound grievances at their treatment at the hands of the government, though the SPLM is now attempting to accommodate their demands for a state in peace negotiations with David Yau Yau. The threat of widening support for the opposition among such communities gives the SPLM-in-opposition its true potency and has resulted in a tug-of-war for the affections of swing communities.

**Regional support**

Little is currently known about the support extended to anti-government forces by regional countries. The opposition denies any external support, insisting that it sustains operations through the capture of government ammunition and weapons stocks. However, speculation has mounted about possible support from neighbours, particularly Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. SAF Military Intelligence has long-forged relationships with many of the former SSDF commanders and a history of supporting southern proxies. With the current relative *rapprochement* between Khartoum and Juba, Khartoum is careful to disassociate itself from support to the opposition. However, Juba’s military alliance with Northern rebel groups, the Justice and Equality Movement and the SPLM-North, has clearly angered Khartoum, as has the encroachment of the Ugandan Army in South Sudan. The reported presence of opposition forces undergoing training in Kharasana, South Kordofan, would indicate at least tacit support for the opposition, potentially as leverage over the Southern government. As early as January, the SPLA claimed it intercepted six trucks of

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foreign-supplied material destined to the anti-government forces en route to Bentiu as the SPLA re-entered Unity. Geographically, the implication was that the trucks came from Sudan.

Ethiopia has stated that it has ‘circumstantial evidence’ of Eritrea’s involvement in the South Sudan crisis. Eritrea, a close ally of Sudan, could be motivated by destabilizing Ethiopia’s western border, where there is a large Nuer population centred around the border town of Gambella. Eritrea has long been suspected of arming rebel groups in Jonglei associated with the late George Athor, including David Yau Yau. However, there are some suspicions that Ethiopia may also be giving tacit support to the opposition. Two South Sudanese government agents were reportedly arrested in Gambella in February for seeking to counter Nuer mobilization. Gambella is a permissive route into rebel held areas and a lifeline for the opposition. Ethiopia has apparently done little to prevent the movement of opposition fighters into South Sudan.

Published 2 May 2014