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Article 7 on South Sudan

Developments in South Sudan Conflict: Unity and Upper Nile and possibility of additional 60,000 White Army

Our Articles 1 to 3 and 5 & 6 were situation analysis of the conflict in South Sudan. Our article 4 (A) and (B) were the first of our series on “Who is Who”. This article (7) deals with analysis of the military landscape in Unity and Upper Nile and analysis the situation in Jonglei State if the 6 generals who escaped Juba can make it to Fangak.

The account below will demonstrate that the SPLA/Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) were in continuous war within South Sudan since 2005 to date. The war depleted and fatigues the SPLA. The absorbed unruly and ill-trained rebels in peace agreements further deteriorated the quality of army and police cadre.

Please be patient and read through to the end.

Unity State

Background

We wish to take you back to 2006 and Juba Declaration with Paulino Matip Nhial (Bul Nuer from Unity). The following officers/Generals in his forces disagreed with President Kiir and Paulino Matip on the military and political positions offered by the SPLM/A to SSDF. The terms of Juba Declaration were mostly negotiated by Paulino Matip and Salva Kiir without the involvement of the below mentioned officers of SSDF.

- 1- Gen Gordon Koang Chuol (Jikany Nuer, Ulang County in Upper Nile-born in Ethiopia)
- 2- Gen Gabriel Tanginye
- 3- Gen Thomas Mabor Dhol
- 4- General John Duiet Yiech
- 5- Brigadier General (then in 2011) Bapiny Monytuel Wijang
- 6- Brig. General (Then 2011) James Gai Yoach.

Matip had confidence in Kiir’s fairness on the integration of forces which the others did not share. They left the South Sudan Defence Force (SSDF). They assembled after being heavily armed by Khartoum in Riak Payam south of Mayom in February, 2011.

In February, 2011, Gabriel Tanginye went to Fangak with a force of 1,200. Gen Gordon Kong remained in Khartoum but was the one who sent Gabriel Tanginye to negotiate with the Government of South Sudan. Some officers and their forces went to Maban.

The SPLA under Taban Deng (Governor of Unity) attacked the SSDF forces of Bapiny Monytil and James Gai Yoach who were at Riak, near Mayom. But the SPLA in Upper Nile did not attack Gabriel Tanginye at the time the SSDF forces in Unity State were attacked.

General Peter Gadet (Bul Nuer from Mankien, Unity State) left Juba on 28th March 2011 with Brig. General Karlo Kuol Ruach (formerly part of SPLA JIU division but now promoted to a rank of a General after the SSLA reached a deal with Kiir in November, 2013) and Col. Bol Gatkuoth and headed to Khartoum. They called for a meeting of unity of the opposition against the Dinka Domination of South Sudan. They resolved that the only solution to achieve ethnic equality in South Sudan was via military solution. Hence the South Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SSLM/A) was formed and they all moved to Mayom for the declaration. The declaration was released on April 11th, 2011. That declaration was drafted by Gordon Buay, the “Political Representative for External Affairs” for SSLM/A.

However, Gordon Koang did not join the rest who went to Mayom arguing that Gabriel Tanginye was negotiating with Juba.

The “Political Leaders” were not announced; but the military leaders were agreed and announced. Peter Gadet was the head and James Gai Yoach was his deputy.

Gadet started fighting and put immense pressure on the SPLA. There are no fighters in South Sudan who are fiercer than the Bul Nuers.

On April 25th 2011, the SPLA attacked Gabriel Tanginye at the village called Kaldak in Khur Fulus, captured him and took him to Juba. This prompted Gordon Koang to declare war on South Sudan ruling clan. General David Yau Yau was now in the military opposition and was given Jonglei to fight the GRSS together with George Athor. Johnson Olony was given the area of Shuluk as part of George Athor forces. It has to be noted that George Athor, Johnson Olony and David Yau Yau were not part of SSLM/A but formed their own Movement called South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army SSDM/A.

Maj. General Gordon Koang, who began to refer to his forces as SSDF, sent his forces to Maban area. Maban was given to Muntu Muntalla Abdallah, a Brun ethnic group from Maban.

On August 5th 2011, Peter Gatdet went to Nairobi and met with GRSS delegation. The reason Peter Gatdet gave for taking a decision for returning to the government was that the Nuer generals like Paulino Matip deceived him. Gatdet said he had a deal with Nuer officers of the SPLA to start a rebellion to topple the Dinka’s regime. Earlier Matip had agreement with Gadet as that Gadet should start the war in the North of South Sudan and Matip would start it in Juba. Matip agreed there was an agreement but denied that he agreed to any timing for the rebellion. Paulino Matip was not interested to create a conflict that would derail the independence of South Sudan.

After Peter Gatdet went to Juba, the rest of SSLA refused to follow him and only 300 soldiers went with him to Mayom after he surrendered to GRSS. Hence James Gai took over the military leadership with Bapiny as his deputy.

After the April election of April 2010, Col. Gatluak Gai rebelled. He is Nuer from Jagei section of Koch County. Peter Gadet is married to one of his daughters. He caused considerable deaths in Koch County. He signed an agreement with the SPLA on July 20th 2011 and was promoted to Lt. General but he was shot a few days later by his deputy Marko Chuol Ruei. Fingers also pointed to Taban Gai as responsible for his death.

In September 2011 a meeting was called for in Khartoum. It was attended by:

George Athor Deng Dut, SSDM/A

Gordon Koang Chuol, SSDF

James Gai Yoach, SSLM/A

Again the meeting was to discuss unification. At that time Yau Yau had signed an agreement with the GRSS. It was brokered by General Ismail Koni-Sultan of the Murle. It was agreed that unification will take place in October 2011.

However, George Athor flew to Nairobi for a meeting with GRSS in November, 2011. The initiative collapsed and Athor returned to Khartoum. Upon his return a meeting was held to appoint the leadership of the unified movement. Athor wanted to be the leader-both military and political. Being a Dinka and the fight is against Dinka domination, Gadet and Koang refused. The unification talks collapsed.

Athor then decided to fly to Uganda against all the advices he was given and claimed that he knew what he was doing. He flew to Kigali and drove to Uganda by road with Duoth Makwach who was also an American Citizen. On arrival in Kampala they were put in a hotel. The same night they were both killed by Ugandan Intelligence and their bodies taken to Yei region and dumped in the grass.

Ugandans are meddling heavily into South Sudan as of December 2011!!

Brigadier Peter Kuol Chol took over in December, 2011. He signed a peace agreement in December 2011 and went to Juba with his group and they were absorbed in the SPLA that has now swelled to 210,000 according to the IISS-London.

January 2012 came the oil shut down and Khartoum was furious. The heavily armed the SSLA of James Gai Yoach and SSDF of Gordon Koang and other rebel movements including Johnson Olong (Shuluk) who took over the leadership of SSDM/A. They started fighting and gave the SPLA a hard time. In April, David Yau Yau went back to the bush and was also armed by Khartoum. He walked from Maban to Murle land on foot!

By June 2012, all the groups were fighting.

In December 2012, General James Hoth Mai (Ulang County-Nuer, Upper Nile, he comes from Chieng-Lang subsection of Gajiok) and Chief of General Staff phoned Gordon Buay in Canada and asked for peace talks. Hoth mother is Buay's aunt. Buay agreed and persuaded Bapiny

Monytuil, but Gordon Koang refused. Jonson Olony agreed and abandoned SSDM/A to become the Deputy of Bapiny Monytuil of SSLM/A. However, Yau Yau refused and declared himself as the leader of SSDM/A. James Gai refused and was imprisoned in Kobar Prison in Khartoum North. Bapiny took over, deputized by Johnson Olony.

In January, 2013, Maj. General John Duit Yiech and Brig. General Thomas Duoth Lam, abandoned their leader Gordon Koang and surrendered to the SPLA at Melut with 300 soldiers and fifteen cars.

In April, 2013, Maj. General Bapiny said he was going for treatment in Egypt as a way to deceive Sudan Military Intelligence. He ordered Maj. General Karlo Kuol Ruach and Maj. Gen. Mathews Puljang Top to cross back to South Sudan. On April 25th, 2013, they announced they were talking to the GRSS.

On May 1st 2013, Bapiny and others went to Nairobi to meet GRSS delegation headed by Tilar Deng. They reached agreement in principle but power-sharing and security issues were to be discussed in Juba. On July 22nd 2013, Gordon Buay arrived in Juba. Machar was removed on 23 July 2013. The GRSS set up the “Armed Groups Integration Committee” under Lt. General Thomas Cirilo Swaka, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Training and Political Orientation”. On July 29th meetings and negotiations started and were led from the rebels’ side by Johnson Olony.

There were immediate differences in the positions to be allocated to the rebels. The rebels suggested:

- 2 Lt Generals
- 10 Major Generals
- 12 Brigadier Generals
- 15 Colonels

Lt. General Thomas Cirilo refused and the matter was referred to Kiir for arbitration who ruled that the rebels get:

- 1 Lt. General
- 5 Major Generals
- 6 Brigadier Generals
- 1 Presidential advisor position
- 2 Ambassadors
- 2 Ministries and one advisor in Unity State
- One Advisors in Upper Nile State Government
- Ranks from Colonel and below will depend on the absorption in the SPLA.

In July, 2013, President Kiir agreed to remove Taban and appoint Dr. (Medical) Nguen Monytuel as Governor of Unity as a precondition because the SSLA argued that Taban Deng was a threat to peace. Dr. Nguen is the elder brother of Bapiny Monytuil.

After the rebels accepted President Kiir’s decree on November, 25, 2013, the war broke out on 15/12/2013 before the other ranks could be arranged.

War in Unity State and the retake of Bentiu and clearance of Machar's forces out of Unity State.

As of 6/12/2013, the SLA had 3000 strong force in Malakal and 5000 strong force in Mayom County.

Upon the defection of Division Four Commander Maj. Gen. James Koang, Gen Mathews Puljang Top was made commander of the 4th division. He became the Unity State commander with the blessing of President Kiir and James Hoth. In Unity State only about 30% of the SPLA forces did not join the rebellion with Gen James Koang Chol and they ran to Parieng County. Added to the 5000 SSLA in Mayom, reinforcements came from Aweil Division 3 Bahr El Ghazal led by Maj. Gen. Santino Deng.

It became a massive force but the backbone was the SSLA and in particular the Bul Nuer. They retook:

Mayom
Tumur
Manga
Rubkona
Bentiu
Leer (The hometown of Machar)

They liberated all the oil fields and according to them: Unity State is now "Clean" of Machar forces.

The Nuers of Unity have the following sub-clans:

- 1- Bul who are the largest, strongest and fiercest. (Paulino Matip, Peter Gatdet, Mathews Puljang, James Gatduel and Bapiny Monytuil are Bul)
- 2- Dok (Riek Machar's clan)
- 3- Jagei (of Col. Gatluak Gai)
- 4- Jikany (Western Jikany of Taban Deng Gai)
- 5- Leek (of James Gai Yoach)
- 6- Nyuong (of Kuong Doaner, current Minister of Roads and bridges).

One of the tragic conflicts in Unity is that Taban Deng killed or had someone kill Gatluak Gai (Jagei Nuer from Koch County). As such they did not accept Taban as Governor after the signing of the 1997 agreement between Machar and Khartoum and he became the President of the Coordinating Council (Government of South Sudan before the CPA) but Machar shoved him down their throat. Here is the story:

In 1998 elections were held to elect the Governor of Unity State. Paul Lili from Bul Nuer who was nominated by Paulino Matip won the elections. Taban Deng (brother-in-law of Riek Machar) lost. Machar insisted on seating Taban as Governor.

Paulino Matip went on the rampage through Peter Gadet and killed 5 ministers of Taban in one day. Taban ran away for his life. It is strongly rumored that Gadet ransacked Leer, and destroyed the cement grave of the late Emma McCune (the British wife of Riek Machar) with the big cement cross who died in a road accident in Nairobi in 1993. He exhumed her remains and crushed them. But we have no solid confirmation of that.

To close on Unity State, we need to know why James Koang Chol (From Nasir and has nothing to do with Unity) rebelled:

It is the sad events of Juba when Dinka Tiger Brigade went on the rampage killing Nuers. They killed several of Gen James Koang's direct relatives. When he declared his rebellion, Kiir called him on the phone. James told him the reason that he will no longer be able to live with his people if he stayed with Kiir after Juba killings. There was no political or military reason. James was loyal to Garang and was part of the "Bright Star Campaign" commanded by Kuol Manyang.

After 1991 he remained with Garang and later liberated Western Equatoria.

Governor Nguen Monytuel is now back as Governor of Bentiu or whatever is left of it.

The conflict did not start on December 15th 2013. You may agree if you are able to follow the narration above!

Upper Nile and Jonglei States: To be reader friendly, we shall deal with Upper Nile and Unity States in the next article 8.

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