

---

**A Victorious Anti-insurrection Strategy?  
The Insurrections of 2010  
in the Jonglei State of South Sudan**

---

**Marc-André Lagrange**

*March 2012*



Sub-Saharan Africa  
Program

The Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri) is a research center and a forum for debate on major international political and economic issues. Headed by Thierry de Montbrial since its founding in 1979, Ifri is a non-governmental and a non-profit organization. As an independent think tank, Ifri sets its own research agenda, publishing its findings regularly for a global audience. Using an interdisciplinary approach, Ifri brings together political and economic decision-makers, researchers and internationally renowned experts to animate its debate and research activities. With offices in Paris and Brussels, Ifri stands out as one of the rare French think tanks to have positioned itself at the very heart of European debate.

*The opinions expressed in this text  
are the responsibility of the author alone.*

The Sub-Saharan Africa Program is supported by:



Translated by Kathy Judelson

ISBN: 978-2-36567-007-4  
© All rights reserved, Ifri, 2012

Ifri  
27, rue de la Procession  
75740 Paris Cedex 15 – FRANCE  
Tel: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 00  
Fax: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 60  
Email: [accueil@ifri.org](mailto:accueil@ifri.org)

Ifri-Bruxelles  
Rue Marie-Thérèse, 21  
1000 – Bruxelles – BELGIQUE  
Tel: +32 (0)2 238 51 10  
Fax: +32 (0)2 238 51 15  
Email: [info.bruxelles@ifri.org](mailto:info.bruxelles@ifri.org)

Website: [ifri.org](http://ifri.org)

# Table of contents

---

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>THE ROOTS OF DISCONTENT.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>REBELLIONS IN JONGLEI.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>A MILITARY VICTORY? .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>A STABILIZING STRATEGY? .....</b>	<b>16</b>

# Introduction

---

On May 16 2010, a few weeks after its first elections, the government of the semi-autonomous province of South Sudan (GoSS) had to confront two rebellions in the Jonglei Province. General George Athor and David Yaw Yaw, who lost in that first democratic consultation, took up arms in the name of the people against the central government in Juba.

The 2010 elections in the Sudan were more than just a simple formality for the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and its armed branch, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). For both bodies, these elections were going to test their ability to transform themselves into a political party and a national army and thus to create the foundations of an independent South Sudan.

South Sudan may appear unified behind the banner of the SPLM/A, but in fact it is nothing of the kind. While a majority of the South Sudanese wishes to separate itself from the Khartoum regime, the Juba government is a long way from enjoying the support of all the diverse ethnic groups and the former rebel movements. The SPLA under John Garang is the signatory to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005<sup>1</sup>. Its main feature is that they have assembled and brought into the ranks of the SPLA all the armed groups fighting against Khartoum. Thus both the population and the armed forces of the South Sudan constitute a constellation of ethnic groups and small groups of rebels, which have nothing in common

---

*Marc-André Lagrange is an expert in African conflicts. He has been working for over 10 years in conflict zones and has been in post in South Sudan for the United Nations. He has a degree in International development (ISTOM) and a Master's Degree in Crisis Management.*

<sup>1</sup> The inclusive peace accords or Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which also goes by the name of "Naivasha Accords", were signed in Kenya on January 9, 2005 by John Garang for the SPLM and Ali Osman Taha, the Vice-President of Sudan for the National Congress Party. These accords anticipate the cessation of the fighting between the Khartoum regime and the SPLM/A as well as the autonomy of South Sudan during a 5-year transition period. The CPA also anticipates that democratic elections will be held within the whole of Sudan (North and South) one year before the end of the transition period, so that the South Sudanese can express their opinions on the independence of South Sudan. Finally these accords anticipate the integration of the rebel armed groups into the SPLA and also the setting up of Joint Integrated Units (SPLA/Sudanese Armed Forces) in South Sudan.

apart from their aversion to North Sudan. What further aggravates the situation is that most of the ethnic groups are rivals and caught up in perpetual conflict, while the political parties which have emerged from armed groups only have a very limited shared vision, if not rival ones, of an independent South Sudan.

Less than four years after the signing of the CPA, South Sudan was on the very verge of imploding. Tribal wars and the proliferation of small-calibre weapons (mainly AK47s) had generated a climate of virtual civil war in certain provinces like Jonglei. According to the United Nations in 2009, cattle raids had led to over 2,500 deaths in the space of a year, more than had resulted from the fighting in Darfur, the other war-torn province in the Sudan. The “cattle wars”, which are an integral part of the culture of most ethnic groups in South Sudan, constitute both social rituals and acts of banditry motivated by the economic stagnation, which the various populations have to confront in this unstable period of post-conflict and pre-independence. Furthermore, these inter-ethnic tensions have been aggravated by the composition and the management of security issues which have deliberately been lent an ethnic flavour by the SPLA both during and after the war.

In a context like this, characterized by instability both political and social, the two rebellions in Jonglei are bound to have consequences and they represent a major threat for the recently elected government of a South Sudan currently ‘under construction’. In fact these troubles can irrevocably discredit an armed movement, which is having problems persuading its population to avail itself of the benefits of peace and to establish itself as a credible political player in the eyes of the international community.

# The Roots of Discontent

---

While the 2010 elections were qualified as “fair by African standards” by the special envoy from Russia, the African Union and the League of Arab States<sup>2</sup>, that was far from the case for the international observers from the Carter Center and the European Union, the special American envoy<sup>3</sup> and the population of South Sudan.

Indeed, while in the North the opposition parties were subjected to considerable pressure, the opposition parties and the independent candidates in the South were not spared by the SPLM/A either. While in the North the electoral commission based in Khartoum did nothing to facilitate the conduct of the elections, in the South the SPLA did everything it could to prevent non-SPLM candidates from participating in the elections. The members of the rival faction – Sudan People’s Liberation – Democratic Change (SPLM-DC) – were systematically stopped from campaigning and from registering as candidates. The argument put forward by the SPLM was that the SPLM-DC was a resistance movement, which disqualified it from being a political party and therefore from taking part in the elections<sup>4</sup>. The independent candidates, most of whom had come from the ranks of the SPLA, were confronted by similar problems<sup>5</sup>.

Although the electoral law stipulates that candidates carrying out administrative and military functions have to resign from these during the campaign period and the elections as such, the President and candidate, Salva Kiir, refused initially to give up his post as head

---

<sup>2</sup> «African and Arab organisations praise the conduct of Sudanese elections», <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article34808>>; «Russia says Sudan elections fair by ‘African standards’», <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article34819>>; consulted on April 20, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> «US says Sudan elections not fair and free, shifts focus to 2011 referendum» <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article34817>>; consulted on April 20, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> «Should Dr. Lam be allowed to campaign in South Sudan?», <<http://www.sudantribune.com/Should-Dr-Lam-be-allowed-to,33804>>; consulted on January 17, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> «SPLM warns against contesting as independent candidates» <<http://www.sudantribune.com/SPLM-warns-against-contesting-as,33916>>; consulted on January 28, 2010.

of the armed forces of the SPLA<sup>6</sup>. It was only after long negotiations and threats from the national electoral commission that the elections would have been rendered invalid that Salva Kiir agreed to give up his office<sup>7</sup>.

In the provinces of South Sudan all the transitional governors or Caretakers appointed to those posts were active members of the SPLA. At Rumbek in Lake State – on advice from the Caretaker Governor – the five County Commissioners, two of whom were members of the “special security forces” (the SPLA’s intelligence service) were appointed by presidential decree<sup>8</sup>. There was a similar situation in numerous provinces such as Eastern Equatoria State, where the Caretaker Governor appointed an officer of the SPLA with special powers in Ikotos County<sup>9</sup>.

In Jonglei State, future epicenter of General G. Athor’s insurrection, the deputy from Bor elected to the legislative assembly of South Sudan was declared the winner, as there was no opposing candidate<sup>10</sup>.

It thus clearly emerges that, as far as the SPLM was concerned, the democratic and electoral game was only of interest if it enabled the SPLM to seize power legally. The vote granted to the people through elections was just a means of ratifying, in the South, the political victory granted through its status as CPA signatory, as opposed to the other armed liberation movements. Just as for the National Congress Party (NCP) in the North, so too for the SPLM in the South this did not in any way signify an opening for democracy but simply validated a sharing of power based on control of the political institutions and the army. These elections were not an opportunity for creating the foundations for a new Sudan, as John Garang and the civilian opposition in the North were hoping, but just a sharing of power by means of elections between two rival military regimes.

---

<sup>6</sup> «Kiir will not step down as army chief if nominated for presidential election», <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article33778>>: consulted on January 12, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> «Sudan electoral board warns Salva Kiir to resign from his military position», <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article33807>>: consulted on January 17, 2010;

«Gen. Salva Kiir should relinquish his military position – SPLM’s Amum», <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article33843>>: consulted on January 20, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> «Government reshuffle in Lakes brings two spy men into power»; <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article34516>>: consulted on March 23, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Conversations with international electoral observers and United Nations Mission in Sudan between January and May 2010.

<sup>10</sup> «27 MPs declared winners by default in Sudan elections», <<http://www.sudantribune.com/27-MPs-declared-winners-by-default,34785>>: consulted on April 18, 2010.

John Garang's SPLA was initially and still remains today a Dinka army. Although they constitute the largest ethnic group, the Dinka do not by any means represent the majority of the South Sudanese. In the North the Nuer provided significant support for the SPLA's war effort. In the South the Equatorians played host to the SPLA's HQ for more than a decade. This co-operation and co-habitation were not without their difficulties.

In 1999, exasperated by the preference shown to the Dinka in the ranks of the SPLA and by the impunity granted, the members of that ethnic group, the Didinka of Chukudum (where the SPLA had its HQ) rebelled and set up their own militia, which fought against both Khartoum and the SPLA<sup>11</sup>. At this point in time the presence of a group of more than 30,000 displaced Dinka from Jonglei State at Minule on the frontier with Uganda in the province of Eastern Equatoria is interpreted as the SPLA's intention of retaining control over trans-border trade and the various kinds of trafficking, which it had set up there during the civil war<sup>12</sup>. An equally likely hypothesis is that the State Caretaker of Eastern Equatoria during the election campaign was General Johnson Juma Okot, in charge of SPLA logistics in Juba. The latter sent one of his right-hand men, Major Hillary Oniama, to ensure a vote favourable to the SPLA in Ikotos County, another old supply route of the SPLA.

This rivalry for the leadership of the SPLA and its ethnic management was not confined to Great Equatoria. Indeed, during the 1990s, the Nuer led by Reik Machik, future Vice-President of the government of South Sudan, and Lam Akol, future President of the SPLM-DC, were the initiators of an attempt to overthrow John Garang.

This ethnically biased management of security is not, however, confined to the SPLA. In the South Sudan Defence Forces (SSSDF) armed by Khartoum, the ethnic majority was Nuer, 'traditionally' at war with the Dinka over the control of pasture zones and watering places. In addition, defiance towards the Nuer at the heart of the GoSS remains extremely strong, even at the present time, and despite their decisive contribution at the time of the offensives against the Nuba Mountains pipelines.

Among the numerous security challenges since the CPA, it is the proliferation of light weapons in the hands of the civilian population, which the GoSS regards as the priority issue. Indeed, in certain parts of South Sudan, some ethnic groups are better armed than the SPLA.

---

<sup>11</sup> A.Walraet, «Governance, Violence and the Struggle for Economic Regulation in South Sudan: The Case of Budi County (Eastern Equatoria)», *Afrika Focus*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 53-70.

<sup>12</sup> M.Schomerus, *Violent Legacies: Insecurity in Sudan's Central and Eastern Equatoria*, Small Arms Survey, 2008, «HSBA Working Paper», No. 13.

A first attempt to disarm the civilian population was made in 2005-2006. Still far from sure of its military hegemony, the SPLA had decided first and foremost to disarm those population groups which represented the greatest internal threats for it, in particular the White Army. Clashes between the SPLA and the young Lou Nuer of the White Army came to a head in May 2006 at Dolieb Hill – a territory of pasture-land contested by the Dinka from Jonglei State and the Nuer of the Upper Nile. This compulsory disarmament of civilian population groups led to at least 1,500 deaths<sup>13</sup> and the SPLA is considered to be the armed group responsible for the most acts of vandalism and cattle theft<sup>14</sup>. This operation left other ethnic groups like the Murule from Jonglei still in possession of their arms at a time when the South Sudanese authorities were not in a position to ensure the security of disarmed population groups.

In 2009 and 2010 another attempt to disarm civilians was undertaken. Given that this operation was ethnically targeted and not carried out in all areas at the same time, it led to an increase in inter-ethnic violence, mainly in Jonglei State.

Faced by an outcry from the international community and various population groups in South Sudan, the SPLA disengaged from security maintenance, arguing that this task fell to the South Sudan Police Section (SSPS). The members of the SSPS were for the most part from the ranks of the SPLA, had a very low level of education and were seriously under-equipped. The vast majority of them was not familiar either with the Penal Code or the Procedural Code. In addition, the SSPS, on account of its being under-equipped, was reluctant to intervene against armed gangs often better equipped than it was. This was further complicated by the praetorian perception of the role of the SSPS or other armed forces (Wildlife Guards, Fire Brigade etc.) in the minds of the civilian authorities, staffed almost entirely by men from the ranks of the SPLA. Those authorities consider that the key role of the SSPS, given the current lack of security, is to ensure their protection and each individual concerned surrounds himself with his own personal body-guard, usually consisting of people from his own village or ethnic group. The deployment of the SSPS in the Counties is only patchy or even non-existent at the level of the *bomas*, the smallest administrative unit in South Sudan. The members of the SSPS, who are paid little or nothing, abuse their position of authority so as to collect illegal taxes and assume a status of total impunity vis-à-vis the civilian population. Moreover the SSPS has no power over members of the SPLA. Thus, when the latter starts

---

<sup>13</sup> SPLA losses are estimated at between 400 and 500 and those of the White Army at approximately 1,000 men. The number of civilian victims is unknown but could be in the hundreds.

<sup>14</sup> J. Young, *The White Army: An Introduction and Overview*, Small Arms Survey, June 2007, «Working Paper»; *Jonglei 2010, another round of disarmament*, Institute for Security Studies, May 2010, «Situation Report».

extorting money, the SSPS is powerless and this undermines still further the confidence of the various population groups in the security apparatus – already hardly capable of protecting them.

As for the recruitment of new staff, this relies purely on political and ethnic support bases. In July 2010, in the province of Eastern Equatoria, after waiting for several weeks without accommodation and without appropriate food or instruction, police cadets decided to make a peaceful protest against the conditions of their training. This manifestation of discontent in relation to an incompetent hierarchy, which was violently suppressed by the provincial government, served to bring to light numerous dysfunctional practices at the very heart of the SSPS.

First of all it emerged that the provisioning of the SSPS by its suppliers had not been set out in a contract. The suppliers used to bring the provincial government their bill without needing to present any proof of delivery, thus justifying the cadets' grounds for protesting against their living conditions. The police cadets, left to their own devices in a field a considerable distance from the town, did not in fact receive any training apart from that guaranteed by the United Nations. Finally, more than half the cadets enrolled did not satisfy any of the minimal criteria and were all from the same ethnic group as the former provincial governor<sup>15</sup>. This situation is far from unique. For the SPLM what was important was not having available police forces, which were competent and properly integrated with the population, but to achieve numerical targets imposed by the international community so that the 2011 referendum could take place and to ensure that there was a 'heaven-sent' reserve of armed men which could be mobilised if war with the North were to break out.

It therefore became clear that the SSPS, as well as the SPLA, is still operating like an underground movement. The civilian population groups still provide an unexpected reserve, on which the SPLM, SPLA and SSPS can draw, to suit the political or mercantile objectives of officers and politicians. The separatist political agenda of the SPLM has made it forget its first objective, namely that of liberating the population groups of the South Sudan from oppression. As for the SPLA, its structural inability to separate political matters from military ones, prevents it from transforming itself into a national army.

---

<sup>15</sup> Conversation with members of the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) in the state of Eastern Equatoria in August 2010.

## Rebellions in Jonglei

---

Although George Athor and David Yaw Yaw both took up arms against the GoSS in the name of the people and so as to protest against SPLM “frauds” during the 2010 elections, the two rebellions were distinct and have little in common.

The movement of General Athor is rooted in support of both a popular and ethnic nature. While fighting from the moment the SPLA was set up after the CPA had been signed, George Athor was initially in command of the division based in the Upper Nile State, then commander of the division in the Jonglei State and Deputy chief of staff for the SPLA’s political and moral orientation. His career path in the post-CPA period is very typical for the SPLA. Various rumours have pointed to his being involved with efforts to trade in influence and to misappropriate funds allocated for his troops’ salaries in both the Upper Nile and Jonglei States. He is also sure to have been implicated in operations to disarm the White Army<sup>16</sup>.

General Athor is of Dinka origin and his home stronghold is in Kordofan County, one of the territories ravaged by the Nuer troops of Reik Machik during the 1990s and contested by Dinka and Nuer shepherds. It therefore becomes difficult to distinguish between the political support for George Athor and the part played by ethnic identification in his popularity. During his electoral campaign he made the most of this, exploiting the population’s sense of insecurity as well as the need to defend the interests of the “young” against the SPLM and the “old guard” rooted in the past<sup>17</sup>. It was therefore logical that the first step taken by his partisans was against the SPLA garrison at Dolieb Hill in 2010.

It was during the same period that the David Yaw Yaw rebellion took place in the Pibor County in the South of Jonglei State. On May 21, 2010 Yaw Yaw and his partisans attacked the town of Pibor before they were driven from their positions by the SPLA and had to withdraw further south into Boma National Park. David Yaw Yaw is a civilian belonging to the ethnic group of the Murule. Before taking up arms, he used to work for the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. He too was an independent candidate

---

<sup>16</sup> Small Arms Survey; HBSA armed groups George Athor, August 2010.

<sup>17</sup> «Jonglei’s independent governor candidate pledges a U-turn to SPLM» <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article34291>: consulted on May 2, 2010.

and regrouped under his banner no more than 50 men. His action was not on the same large scale as Athor's and was part of the tension between Murule groups aspiring to increase their influence so as to assume control of Pibor County<sup>18</sup>.

Just like that of General Athor, the Yaw Yaw rebellion can be traced back to SPLA extortion during the disarmament of Murule civilians in 2009-2010. In this sense, the rebellions were a product of the peace and the SPLM's inability to make that peace economically attractive. Indeed, in Jonglei State as elsewhere, for numerous men of the "old guard", or at least for those enjoying social and economic power within the tribes and clans of South Sudan, peace provided an opportunity to regain what they had lost during the war. Since the signing of the CPA, for instance, dowry prices have significantly increased, sometimes by more than 1000%<sup>19</sup>. This means that young people are unable to attain the social status which marriage would have conferred upon them. These revolts can thus be seen to stem from governments' incapacity to 'compensate' population groups for what the war cost them through effective social and security services. These insurrections are so to speak the natural result of the unequal transfer of the benefits of peace at the heart of these societies, an intrinsic feature of post-conflict transition periods.

Yet what does constitute a fundamental difference between these two insurrections is their political dimension. The Yaw Yaw movement is concerned with economic and ethnic problems of a purely local nature between members of the SPLA and SPLM in Pibor County. This is not the case with regard to General Athor's revolt, which is part of a national political game between those who support John Garang's ideology for the New Sudan and Kiir's and Machik's separatists. The real concerns of the Athor movement were the January 2011 referendum and the separation of the North and the South.

The first response from the GoSS was to negotiate with Athor in order to reintegrate him in the SPLM and in the new government. The United Nations even offered to serve as negotiator between the GoSS and Athor. It is difficult to say whether Athor refused or Kiir put a stop to the negotiations. It would, however, at the same time appear that it was the lack of support for Athor, who only succeeded in gaining the post of governor in one of the eleven Counties of Jonglei State, which had influenced the position of the GoSS<sup>20</sup>.

The GoSS did not embark upon negotiations with Yaw Yaw because of the local character of his action but it sought to cut him off

---

<sup>18</sup> Small Arms Survey; HSBA armed groups David Yaw Yaw, August 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Conversation with C. Pinaud, consultant for the HCR in June 2010.

<sup>20</sup> «Kiir casts doubts on negotiations with renegade general», <http://www.sudantribune.com/Kiir-casts-soubts-on-negotiations,35103>: consulted on May 18, 2010.

from his political support. The SPLA then carried out a series of arrests in the heart of Murule political and military communities from Pibor to Juba<sup>21</sup>.

After having cut off the political support on which these two insurrections had been relying, the SPLA embarked upon containing them, keeping General Athor in one of the most inaccessible parts of Jonglei State – Khorfulus County<sup>22</sup>, and Yaw Yaw in the Boma region at the frontier between Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria.

Yet the capacity of these two rebel groups to cause trouble had only been very slightly reduced. Yaw Yaw's partisans ensured that the conditions on the road between Bor and Pibor remained insecure, namely the road between the two largest towns in Jonglei State, cutting off all direct access to Pibor. At the same time, however, the political impact of Yaw Yaw and his followers was very limited, which enabled the SPLM to pass off his intrigues as acts of banditry. On the other hand, Athor soon found himself unable to carry out other forms of military action. Unlike Yaw Yaw, however, General Athor succeeded in keeping himself visible on the political horizon. Very soon Yaw Yaw tried to exploit Athor's reputation in his efforts to retain his political influence. Among other things he announced that he was in touch with Athor and that his actions were coordinated with those of the renegade general's partisans<sup>23</sup>. Yet while Athor did claim to have maintained links with another insurrection, led by a dissident colonel of the SPLA and confined to the neighbouring province of the Upper Nile, he only made a passing reference to direct links with Yaw Yaw. On the contrary, it was Yaw Yaw who had used the 'credit' provided by Athor to enhance the importance of his movement. Besides, after arrests in Murule groups within the SPLA and SPLM, Yaw Yaw's movement virtually disappeared from media coverage.

Conversely, General Athor and the SPLA very soon started engaging in a propaganda war. In order to influence the negotiations with the GoSS, the dissident general soon spread rumours to the effect that he was going to take the town of Bor and then he began issuing more and more press releases, in which he boasted that he had links with two other rebel movements which had appeared on the scene since the elections. Finally, Athor accused the SPLM of having

---

<sup>21</sup> "Leaders from Murule community arrested in Juba", <[http://www.sudantribune.com/Leaders-from Murule-community,35272](http://www.sudantribune.com/Leaders-from-Murule-community,35272)>: consulted on June 2, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> «South Sudan army ceases cordoning ex-SPLA General turned rebel», <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article35167>>: consulted on May 22, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> «Renegades coordinate attacks on South Sudan army», <http://www.africa-times-news.com/2010/06/renegades-coordinate-attacks-on-south-sudan-army/>: consulted on June 2, 2010.

rigged the elections and of therefore being capable of rigging the referendum as well<sup>24</sup>.

After having virtually annihilated the dissident group in the Upper Nile<sup>25</sup> and cut off Yaw Yaw's support in Juba, the SPLA embarked upon a military counter-offensive in order to crush Athor's group<sup>26</sup>. While the SPLA and the Athor group did confront each other in small skirmishes, the results of the encounter were not those expected<sup>27</sup>. The SPLA then unleashed a media offensive to discredit General Athor by implying that he had links with Khartoum and the SPLM-DC. Having been unable to defeat Athor's movements through military means, the SPLM shifted the confrontation to terrain far more appropriate to its own interests, that of the political variety. Indeed, the political agenda pursued by Athor is far from popular among the population groups of South Sudan because, while they are disunited, they remain at the same time very obedient to the SPLM and clearly in favour of the separatist agenda. Moreover, after having rendered the oil-rich Upper Nile State more or less secure, the SPLM embarked upon real negotiations with the potentially dissident General Nyuol in the Northern Bar El Ghazal State, which is also oil-rich and on the border with Darfur<sup>28</sup>. In this way it reduced the potential conflict with the Khartoum regime in the disputed Abyei State and waged a political and diplomatic offensive over the retention of the 2011 referendum calendar to impose the supremacy of the separatist agenda, although a number of crucial questions were not yet resolved, as for example the line of the frontier between the North and the South.

---

<sup>24</sup> «Athor says SPLM 'ruling clique' can rig referendum against people's choice», <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article35260>: consulted on June 2, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> «South Sudan army kills eight rebels in Unity State, pledges to crush them», <http://www.sudantribune.com/South-Sudan-army-kills-eight,35280>: consulted on June 3, 2010; «Southern Army clears post-election rebellion in Unity State», <http://www.sudantribune.com/Southern-Army-clears-post-election,35332>;: consulted on June 9, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> «South Sudan army and renegade general clash in Jonglei State» <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article35414>: consulted on June 16, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> «General Athor says none of his soldiers were captured by SPLA», <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article35430>: consulted on June 20, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> «SPLA chief calls on General Nyuol to bury election differences», <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article35447>>: consulted on June 18, 2010.

## A Military Victory?

---

On October 6, 2010, Salva Kiir, the President of South Sudan, issued a pardon for the rebel generals of the SPLM<sup>29</sup>. At the same moment the GoSS entered into peace talks with the Yaw Yaw group<sup>30</sup>. Thus the insurgents had succeeded in establishing themselves as political players and had proved able to profit from the strategy of attrition pursued by the SPLA as it gambled with the political stakes of the North-South conflict. For the SPLM and the GoSS, holding the referendum in January 2011 took precedence over everything else. It was imperative for the SPLM finally to achieve victory over the North. For the insurgents, this referendum was an opportunity to profit immediately from their political weight achieved thanks to their capacity for causing trouble. The best that could be said is that the anti-insurrection policy of the GoSS led to a Pyrrhic victory – with no loser but with no real winner either.

Indeed the rebel movements of Athor and Yaw Yaw are only held in check for the moment and still have major potential for destabilizing the situation. The withdrawal of certain NGOs from the insecure zone<sup>31</sup> and also reports and rumours about armed groups at the frontier between the Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria States<sup>32</sup> would appear to demonstrate that, although Yaw Yaw is cut off from his source of internal support, he has succeeded in preserving his group. The attacks carried out during the peace negotiations are blatant proof of this. By deciding for reasons of internal politics not to carry through its offensive against Yaw Yaw to its conclusion, the SPLM gave him the opportunity to go on counting as an individual political figure.

As for Athor, he started working for the expected political victory of Salva Kiir and Reik Machik in the 2011 referendum. It is that

---

<sup>29</sup> «South Sudan president pardons rebel army officers», <http://www.sudantribune.com/South-Sudan-president-pardons,36507>: consulted on October 7, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> «Peace talks in Jonglei's Pibor County stall after ambush kills 3 people», <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article36505>: consulted on October 7, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> «Attacks on staff force MSF to evacuate parts of Jonglei state», <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article35820>: consulted on July 30, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Conversations with members of international NGOs based in Boma in Jonglei State and members of the United Nations Mission in Sudan.

without doubt which has enabled him to benefit from the pre-referendum amnesty. Yet there is no doubt compensation in prospect for the rebel general, who will be able in the future to strike a hard bargain when he regains his rank<sup>33</sup>.

The amnesty for the rebel generals of the SPLA would therefore appear to have been aimed above all at undermining possible sources of support from Khartoum behind the front lines, if there were to be any open conflict in the future. At the same time it would also appear that we are witnessing an elitist steering of the insurrections, which only focuses on the leaders and pays little attention to the roots of these crises. This crisis management chooses to ignore the underlying factors which have enabled Athor and Yaw Yaw to take up arms and become involved in short-term political management of conflicts.

The political advantage stemming from the certainty of separation between North and South, already reached well before the 2010 elections, does not seem to be acquiring importance over against the need for foreign investment, particularly in the oil sector. Indeed, the ongoing instability in Jonglei State seems to have negative consequences for Juba. While South Sudan is trying to convince China to invest in the country, China would appear to prefer to line up behind the Khartoum regime using the lack of security as its excuse<sup>34</sup>. Or, according to the best possible scenario, China would let the historic allies of the GoSS stabilize the territories along the route of the future pipeline towards the port of Lamou in Kenya<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have released considerable sums to help stabilize the Unity, Northern Barel Gazal, Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria States. In 2010 the Sudan Recovery Fund (SRF), to which DFID was the principal contributor, financed the stabilization of these "hot spots" or "strategic States" to the tune of 70 million dollars.

As for the European oil companies, they are doing their best to acquire additional rights in the North. This separation, however, is also leaving an open field for the American companies, which will no

---

<sup>33</sup> «South Sudan's renegade General Athor sets conditions for his return», <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article36654>: consulted on October 20, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> «The Chinese government is keen on investing in the oil and agricultural sectors in South Sudan», <http://www.gurtong.net/ECM/Editorial/tabid/124/1D/3991/Default.aspx>: consulted on August 23, 2010;

«China must recognize referendum result to retain oil assets – South Sudan's minister», <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article36022>: consulted on August 21, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> «Chinese companies among bidders for Juba-Lamou oil pipeline: WSJ», <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article36683>: consulted on October 21, 2010.

longer be subject to restrictions laid down by law on investments in States supporting terrorism<sup>36</sup>. This would enable the United States to consolidate its position in the oil sector in Central Africa, particularly in view of the fact that Ethiopia, another important ally of the United States in the sub-region, has already announced its readiness to increase its imports of oil coming from the Sudan.

This shows how the purely political attitude adopted towards these insurrections has enabled GoSS to develop its propaganda in such a way as to attract international aid: the rebel movements are presented not as insurgents, but as puppets in the hands of Khartoum, which is intent on destabilizing the South. By demonizing the insurgent groups, the GoSS has imposed the results of the 2010 elections and ensured that the criticisms made by the United States and the European Union have been forgotten. Although the outcome of the referendum was already known, this enabled the GoSS to promote the separatist agenda, while at the same time retaining its role as guarantor of the quality of the consultative process. The SPLM was thus able to establish itself as a political party, not just as the political ex-branch of a rebel movement, just like the SPLA, which could thus reduce the insecurity inside South Sudan to a question of sharing out natural resources and resolving the inadequacy of the country's infrastructures<sup>37</sup>.

---

36 «Minister of Petroleum unveils a plan to lift the ban on US companies to drill for oil», <http://www.sudanvisiondaily.com/>: consulted on August 6, 2010.

37 «The security situation in South Sudan is under control, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) has said», <http://www.gurtong.net/ECM/Editorial/tabid/124/ctl/ArticleView/mid/519/articleid/4007/Security-Under-Check-SPLA.aspx>: consulted on August 27, 2010.

## A Stabilizing Strategy?

---

If viewed purely from the angle of the organisation of the 2011 referendum and the implementation of the CPA, the strategy of the GoSS for managing the insurrections in the Jonglei State would appear to have been a success. Indeed, it has enabled the GoSS to remove once and for all from the political arena those opposed to secession, both at home and abroad, and to establish the SPLM as the only credible political force in a South Sudan which is not yet used to a multi-party state or to the workings of democracy. The SPLA for its part has suddenly shifted from the status of an armed rebel movement to that of a national army.

Yet this strategy has been part of the short-term management for the construction of the state apparatus for South Sudan, where the 2011 referendum was an end in itself and not a stage in the building of independence. If it seems to have borne fruit by making rebel leaders disappear from the political landscape while the election was being held, there still remain a large number of unknown quantities both in the economic and security domains with regard to the ability of the GoSS to survive beyond the simple stage of the separation from Khartoum. That is precisely where the trouble begins. While the SPLM and the SPLA may have established themselves, none of the problems which may well undermine the future independent state of South Sudan have been resolved. The ethnic divisions and the resentment felt by certain population groups in the South with regard to the Dinka are still relevant and the split between the Dinka and the Nuer in the state apparatus is still there as before. As for the other ethnic groups, such as the Toposa from Eastern Equatoria<sup>38</sup>, existing divisions enable them to turn the question of their future allegiance to their advantage, as they paint a picture of their potential insurrection, if their local or national demands are not met.

While creating the illusion of a unified South Sudan so as to ensure final victory and separation, the GoSS is only deceiving its international partners – headed by the United States and Great Britain – and perhaps not even them. As far as national matters are

---

<sup>38</sup> The Toposa form the predominant ethnic group in Eastern Equatoria State. For a long time they were allied with Khartoum. They still possess considerable stocks of weapons. During the 2010 elections, they did not hesitate to threaten that they would align themselves with Khartoum again, in order to assure themselves a role at the centre of the SPLM.

concerned, the Juba government plays down these micro-insurrections. Far from promoting an open political space, its strategy of appeasement serves to entrench ethnic divisions within the political scene and perpetuates the practice of political dialogue based solely on violence. Political opposition thus becomes impossible within the heart of the SPLM. Besides the SPLA and the SPLM are finding it difficult to hide their predilection for an authoritarian regime with a single party, which is a carbon copy of that in Khartoum, but also one based on the political and economic models of their Rwandan and Ugandan allies<sup>39</sup>, in whose countries the army and ethnic factors play a decisive role.

*In fine*, while it may offer the conditions necessary for the construction of what looks like a state apparatus, this strategy in actual fact merely pushes into the background the essential problems which are undermining the creation of durable institutions. It has not in any way resulted in a decisive victory guaranteeing long-term stability.

The tensions between North and South, which followed on from the decision by the South Sudanese to opt for independence, show that this strategy has only enabled the SPLM/A to buy a temporary internal peace<sup>40</sup>. The serious crisis regarding oil revenues and the frontier lines causing friction between Juba and Khartoum<sup>41</sup> was an opportunity for the rebel groups to get their second wind and establish themselves as key military and political players in the foreground, if open conflict were to start up between North and South.

Nevertheless this strategy has for the time being consolidated the position of a regime which emerged from the civil war and is controlled by the leaders of the SPLA, but it has not made it possible to lay the foundations for an autonomous state administered by solid civilian and military institutions. Resembling skilful sleight of hand rather than a meaningful response to internal threats, this strategy aimed at quelling insurrection introduced by the SPLM/A does place tighter limits on the practice of 'soft counter-insurgency'<sup>42</sup>. The

---

<sup>39</sup> «South Sudan army accused of hindering humanitarian aid», <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article36140>>: consulted on September 1, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> In March 2011, when Khartoum and Juba were indulging in more and more provocations in the Abyei zone, the SPLA unleashed an offensive against the rebel groups in the Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity States. «Jonglei: SPLA clash with rebel group in Duk Padiet» <http://www.sudantribune.com/Jonglei-SPLA-clash-with-rebel,38327>, and «Clashes have left seventy dead in two days in South Sudan», [http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/03/18/les-affrontements-font-70-morts-en-deux-jours-au-sud-soudan\\_1495467\\_3212.html#ens\\_id=1067666](http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2011/03/18/les-affrontements-font-70-morts-en-deux-jours-au-sud-soudan_1495467_3212.html#ens_id=1067666): consulted on March 20, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> On May 25, 2011, after several provocations on both sides, the North Sudanese invaded the town of Abyei.

<sup>42</sup> This is a strategy which involves isolating insurgents within a given territory without responding to their demands. This isolation obliges the

strategy comes up with an easy response, or a soft one, which opens the way to future micro-rebellions mainly motivated by the hope of immediate profit for the principal instigators. All this will indicate, to the same extent as the insurrections, a loss of legitimacy for the SPLM/A in the minds of the population groups within the South Sudan. Indeed, if the latter have been supporting the SPLM in the quest for independence, this does not in any way diminish their resentment towards the SPLM/A and the critical view which several communities have of the SPLM/A and the way it governs.

In order to face up to its obligation to set in motion an internal political dialogue, the prospect of a North-South conflict is becoming attractive for the GoSS. Indeed, rather than having to face up to the necessity of transforming its practices, the SPLM can justify a take-over of power, using as a pretext the need to avoid the collapse of the state's institutions and the headlong rush towards civil war between ethnic groups. As for the Khartoum regime, it will find a reserve of opportunist allies who will enable it to render the process of building an independent South Sudan more fragile than ever.

Over and above the resumption of a conflict with the North, this episode has demonstrated that the main post-referendum threat to South Sudan remains the prospect of the collapse of its institutions and the downwards slope towards civil war between ethnic groups, as a result of the inability of the SPLM and SPLA to complete the liberation of the South Sudan by opening it up to democratic practices and by establishing civilian institutions of government.

---

central administration to give up a given space, but it enables that administration to maintain its control over the rest of the territory (NdE).