

CSG PAPERS

Making Sense of the White Army's Return in South Sudan

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 2013, political differences between two rival factions in the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the ruling party in South Sudan, degenerated into a full-scale civil war. While the primary causes were political in nature, the conflict acquired ethnic overtones that pitted two of South Sudan's largest ethnic groups, the Dinka and the Nuer, against each other. A Nuer civilian self-defence formation called the White Army entered the conflict, further exacerbating the ethnic divide in the country. As a peaceful solution is being pursued in Ethiopia, the challenge of addressing the ethnic dimensions of the conflict remains daunting. This paper includes a number of recommendations to mitigate the potential for conflict, including a comprehensive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program, improved service delivery, the exploration of alternative sources of livelihood, and the introduction of meritocratic principles to the government of South Sudan's hiring processes.

INTRODUCTION

Hopes for peace and stability in South Sudan faded drastically on December 15, 2013, following an armed confrontation between members of the country's elite Presidential Guard units. What initially started as a mutiny in the capital Juba spread rapidly to other sections of the army in the states of Jongolei, Unity, and Upper Nile in the country's northeast. By year's end, a full-fledged rebellion, albeit regional in character, was in progress. Defections from the army, amidst rapid rebel advances, prompted the government to request military aid from Uganda. As Ugandan troops arrived to shore up fledgling defences by providing air support and other logistics, rebel ranks swelled with the entry of a new actor in the conflict – the Nuer White Army. The fighting has displaced at least 1.4 million people, the bulk of whom are internally displaced. Nearly half a million are refugees in neighbouring countries.¹ This massive displacement meant that the 2014 farming season was largely lost. Significant aid helped to avert immediate disaster, but with the start of the dry season, aid groups fear that a return to renewed fighting puts 2.2 million people at risk of starvation.²

Like other non-state armed groups in South Sudan, the White Army's primary purpose is to protect the community against external threats and to defend property and livestock. Groups performing this role are very common among pastoralist communities. For example, among the Dinka, this first-line defence formation is called *Gulweng*. Among the Otuho of Eastern Equatoria State, this youth defence entity is called the *Monyimiji*. However, in response to the state's inability to provide security, new groups have emerged. For instance, the *Arrow Boys* among the Azande was created as a response to the activities of the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army in Western Equatoria State. Among the Bor Dinka, an armed group called the *Bor Youth* has emerged and was implicated in the killing of Nuer internally displaced people (IDPs) under UN protection in April 2014. In early August, a previously unknown group called the *Maban Defence Force* made headlines when it killed six Nuer aid workers, forcing aid organizations to halt activities in Maban County in Upper Nile. Elsewhere, a similar youth vigilante group was created among the *Shilluk* in Upper Nile.

These groups are typically transitory in nature, tribally based, and defensive, and lack an ideology or long-term objectives. The Nuer White Army in the Greater Upper Nile region, however, is an exception. It was an active participant in Sudan's second civil war in 1983-2005. While similar armed groups remained under community control, the White Army became an independent entity that was sometimes destructive to the community it originated from.³

The emergence of the White Army as an active participant in the current conflict marks the second time that the group has been embroiled in political violence in South Sudan. The group's participation exacerbates the already fragile relationship between the Nuer and the

Dinka, in particular in communities that share a border. It has a potentially devastating impact on security in the Greater Upper Nile region, including fuelling the proliferation of small arms and light weapons as various communities race to arm themselves.

There has been little primary research on the second emergence of the White Army as an armed actor in the conflict in South Sudan as a result of ongoing hostilities. Using secondary sources, this paper examines the factors behind the second emergence, sheds light on its long-term implications, and draws relevant policy directives.

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS THE WHITE ARMY?

The White Army is a predominantly Nuer youth outfit. The agro-pastoralist Nuer live in the Greater Upper Nile region.⁴ Three sections of the Nuer have been identified: the Lou in the south, the Jikany and the Gawaar in the east and the Bul in the north. They live primarily in the states of Unity in the north, Upper Nile, and Jongolei. The Nuer tribe is the second-largest ethnic group in South Sudan, after the Dinka. In the Greater Upper Nile region, Nuer land is a large stretch of territory that extends from the River Nile in the west up to the Ethiopian escarpment in the east.

The Nuer came into possession of this vast territory in the early nineteenth century when small bands of Nuer migrated out of their original homelands on the west bank of the Nile into territory belonging to the Dinka and Anyuak. Aggressive cattle raiding and violent intimidation and conquest were fundamental aspects of this territorial expansion. But the Nuer also employed non-violent means of assimilation – adoption and marriage – to absorb neighbouring tribes into their nation.⁵ The rapid Nuer expansion into Dinka and Anyuak territory ended with the conquest of the Lou Nuer in 1929-1930 by the Anglo-Egyptian colonial administration of Sudan. However, through the purchase of land rights using cattle payments, the Lou and Jikany Nuer continued this eastward movement to settle specific areas belonging to the Anyuak and the Murle.⁶

Three factors are crucial to understanding the context in which the White Army emerged.⁷ First, cattle play an extremely important role in the life of the agro-pastoralist Nuer. The majority of Nuer are rural dwellers and cattle are essential to their way of life. Cattle ownership is a source of status, fertility, health, and general prosperity. Cattle are also the principal medium through which social ties are created and a conduit through which new alliances with outsiders are forged.⁸ A man must own cattle to procreate in Nuer society. Without cattle, a Nuer man has no status and lineage. Violent conflicts are also resolved with cattle. In order to protect this vital source of life and social status, young Nuer men in the cattle camps are trained to deter external threats from other rival cattle-keeping communities that share borders with the Nuer, such as the Anyuak, Dinka, and Murle. The Nuer socio-political mindset, which emphasizes martial values such as bravery, fighting,

cattle raiding, and absorption of new lands and peoples, is formed within the cattle camp environment.⁹

Second, the advent of modern firearms in the Upper Nile region was key to the emergence of the White Army. In the late 1880s, Nuer expansionist expeditions resulted in the conquest of lands belonging to the Anyuak in the east. Around the same time, the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik was busy organizing a military campaign to fend off an invasion by the Italians. The Anyuak gradually succeeded in acquiring modern firearms, albeit muzzleloaders that the Ethiopian army no longer needed. Gradually, as their weapons stocks increased, the Anyuak became better armed than their Nuer counterparts.¹⁰ This technological advantage coincided with a political reorganization among Anyuak leaders, a feat that enabled them to expand their authority over several villages. This political reorganization provided the Anyuak with the necessary discipline required to transform them into a formidable military force, able to challenge Nuer advances.¹¹ As guns became widely available, the eastern Upper Nile region became an area of increased lawlessness and banditry, over which British colonial authorities were unable to exert full control.¹² After 1956, the post-colonial state was largely absent in many areas in Upper Nile. The absence of government authority fostered banditry, unregulated ownership of small arms, and the emergence of non-state actors that challenged the authority of the state. Subsequently, the Upper Nile region became the birthplace of several insurrections, including the Akobo mutiny in 1975 and the Ayod mutiny in 1983, although the most significant was the Bor mutiny that gave birth to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)/Movement in 1983.

Third, the single most striking factor behind the birth of the White Army can be traced to the August 1991 split in the SPLA. As already mentioned, prior to 1991, young Nuer men in the cattle camps formed bands of armed groups to protect livestock from cattle raiders. But the 1991 split changed the dynamics of these groups, as they became politicized and active combatants in the conflict.¹³ The split was rooted in administrative and ideological disagreements within the polity of the SPLA. Riek Machar, a Nuer, and Lam Akol, a Shilluk, spearheaded the resultant schism. Both men accused SPLA leader John Garang, a Dinka, of dictatorship and failing to embrace the democratization of the rebel movement, as well as a lack of commitment to the ideological objective of self-determination for South Sudan.¹⁴

FEEDING ON ETHNIC RIVALRIES

After the split, it became apparent that Machar and Akol weren't able to garner significant support in other regions of South Sudan – Equatoria and Bahr El Ghazel – that would enable them to dispose of John Garang as leader.¹⁵ The splinter group, which later became known as the Nassir faction, therefore remained regional in nature and confined to specific

areas in Upper Nile. Also, unlike Garang, the Nassir putschists were unable to solicit military support from external sources.¹⁶ As the prospect of military defeat by the Garang faction loomed, the putschists turned to the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) for support in early 1992. The SAF obliged in order to weaken the rebellion in the south. This collaboration rolled back the military gains of the SPLA on the ground, as several “liberated” towns were recaptured by the SAF. The Nassir faction may have formalized relations with the SAF in 1992, but evidence suggests that it started receiving help from the Sudan government even earlier.¹⁷ It is estimated that the Nassir faction received 10,000 guns from the SAF.¹⁸

Although the primary grievances behind the split were political in nature, they fed on the ethnic cleavages within the southern Sudan body polity in the SPLA. In particular, the split reinforced ethnic rivalries between the Nuer and the Dinka. The fact that the leaders of the rival factions led by Machar and Garang were from the Nuer and Dinka ethnicities served to reinforce this feud. The ethnic dimension of the conflict revolved primarily around age-old rivalries over cattle, the primary source of livelihood for both communities, although other factors, including cultural prejudices, have also been well documented by scholars.

Regarding Nuer prejudices toward the Dinka, Edward Evans-Pritchard, an English anthropologist who first studied the Nuer in the 1930s, described the Nuer as having a “proper contempt for Dinka and are derisive of their fighting qualities.” For the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard noted, fighting with the Dinka was considered a trivial matter and Nuer boys eagerly waited for the time when they would become men in order to join raiding expeditions to “enrich themselves and to establish their reputation as warriors.”¹⁹

There is a similar sense of self-worth and cultural superiority to the Nuer and to other ethnic groups among the Dinka. These prejudices are conveyed in the Dinka sense of self, which ultimately defines their view of others. The Dinka call themselves *mony-jang*, a term that can also be interpreted to mean “men of men.”²⁰ The South Sudanese historian Francis Deng (himself a Dinka) has noted that in their worldview, the Dinka “represent the standard of what is ideally human and therefore best.” Deng wrote that “others may have superior technology or great wealth in monetary terms, but all things considered, Dinkaland is the most beautiful, the Dinka race the perfect example of creation, Dinka cattle the ideal wealth, and Dinka ways the best models of dignity.”²¹

THE ARMS WINDFALL FROM SAF

The first beneficiaries of the SAF weapons were Nuer youth in the cattle camps. They were ostensibly armed against cattle raiders from traditional rivals such as the Dinka and the Murle and, secondly, to defend themselves against the Garang faction of the SPLA.²² But, in November 1991, these self-defence roles changed when the armed youth groups were encouraged to fight on behalf of the Nassir faction. This move marked the official birth of

the White Army and its involvement in political violence. An estimated 30,000 Nuer youth were mobilized and ordered to attack the Dinka in Bor, the area from which Garang hailed. The specific aim of the attack was to expose Garang as a weak leader who could not protect his home turf.

To achieve this mobilization, the Nassir faction tapped into the age-old reservoir of Nuer cultural prejudices against the Dinka.²³ The mobilization occurred among the Lou Nuer, who share borders with the Dinka in Bor, and the Jikany Nuer in the east. The Nassir faction leaders also used Nuer religion to give the expedition legitimacy. At the end of the nineteenth century, a series of prophets appeared among the Nuer, with powers of healing and prophecy.²⁴ These prophets were revered for their role in blessing barren women, healing, and settling disputes. While preaching peace, the “main social function of the leading prophets in the past was to direct cattle raids on the Dinka and fighting against the various foreigners who troubled the Nuer.”²⁵ Evans-Pritchard described the prophets as individuals possessed by spirits and having charismatic powers. When these prophets spoke, they spoke in the name of the divinities that possessed them. As such, “what the prophet says and what the spirit says are all mixed up together, the two being interspersed together in such a manner that they can not be separated.”²⁶

Notable among the prophets was Ngundeng Bong, who lived between 1830 and 1906 and prophesized a fierce battle between the Nuer and the Dinka, in which the latter would be annihilated. According to the prophecy, drums would sound, spears would be sharpened, and the Nuer would be mobilized for battle by a messiah from the village of Nassir.²⁷ Other accounts of the prophecy describe the messiah as being left-handed and unmarked,²⁸ and that he would marry a white woman.

With his headquarters in Nassir, Riek Machar fit the profile of the messiah – he was left-handed and unmarked, and at the time, he was also married to a British aid worker, Emma McCune, who was Caucasian. Although Machar denies the messiah label, he did nothing to dispel the ancient fable.²⁹ His officials retold the tale countless times and ultimately about 30,000 Nuer youth answered the call for battle. A prophet called Wut Nyang, who prepared and blessed the Jiech Mabor, or White Army, for battle, buttressed the use of Nuer religious symbolism.

The attack on Bor was devastating in scope and ferocity. Villages were razed; male captives were disemboweled and women were raped, shot, or burned alive. Human rights organizations estimated that 2,000 people were massacred. About 100,000 were displaced. This fratricide cost Machar his credibility among South Sudanese, in addition to cementing the reputation of the White Army as merciless killers.

EFFECT OF THE 1991 WAR ON NUER TRADITIONAL CATTLE HERDING COMMUNITIES

Between 1992 and 1994, in the aftermath of the split, both factions of the SPLA conducted numerous cross-border raids into each other's territory. In 1995, Garang's forces raided Nuer territories around the Ganyliel area in western Upper Nile, destroying several villages at night. Machar's forces retaliated in kind, raiding Dinka regions in Tonj and Yirol in Bahr El Ghazel.

The hostilities resulted in the increased polarization and militarization of both communities, and in a breakdown of time-tested traditional conflict-solving mechanisms. In response to the White Army, Garang's SPLA faction formed a similar civilian armed group called Titweng (or cattle guards) among the Dinka in Bahr El Ghazel. This group has been accused of rape, plunder, and other human rights abuses in Nuer territory. The politicization of the conflict caused both civilian armed groups to act outside the authority of traditional leaders, such as chiefs, and even undermined the authority of the military leaders who formed them.³⁰

The widespread availability of arms among the youth led to an increased subculture of violence in the region, which was exacerbated by the economic degradation resulting from the war-induced annihilation of cattle herds in both communities. By the time the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in 2005, this was the prevalent situation among the Nuer in the Greater Upper Nile region. The White Army had also returned to its traditional role of guarding cattle from external raiders. Although dormant on the political scene, the group retained its arsenal of small arms. The government identified this possession as a threat. Initial disarmament efforts launched by the government targeted the Nuer youth. The Nuer complained that they were left vulnerable to attacks from other communities, notably the Murle, who were not disarmed.

REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF THE WHITE ARMY IN DECEMBER 2013

In 2002, Machar reconciled with Garang and was accepted back into the SPLA. Following the signing of the CPA that ended the Sudanese civil war in 2005, South Sudan became an autonomous region. After Garang's death in a helicopter crash in July 2005, Salva Kiir, a Dinka from the Bahr El Ghazel region, was installed as president of an autonomous South Sudan, with Machar as deputy. At the onset of South Sudan's secession in 2011, both men held these roles in the newly created state's political hierarchy.³¹

Soon after independence, differences between Kiir and Machar began to surface when the former appointed a committee to draft an interim constitution for the country. The bone of contention rested in the fact that the transitional constitution consolidated immense

powers in the hands of the president. For instance, the constitution grants the president powers to fire elected governors ostensibly on vaguely defined “national security” grounds.³² Of particular concern was the fact that the interim constitution was ambiguous in spelling out the president’s term limits. Machar, who favoured a decentralized system and term limits, objected to this ambiguity and soon found himself at loggerheads with Kiir, who had expressed interest in representing the party in the 2015 elections.

Elsewhere on the service delivery front, the Kiir administration was plagued by rampant corruption, inexperience, overt nepotism and tribalism, inefficiency, and indifference to the plight of ordinary citizens. Primary school enrollment increased, however, this positive step was not matched by the performance of other development indicators. Nearly every baseline human development indicator continued to register at abysmal levels. For example, the country has the worst maternal mortality rate in the world – 2,054 per 100,000 live births. The UN says this is an “astronomical” figure that translates into a “1 in 7 chance” that a South Sudanese woman will die from pregnancy-related complications.³³

Amidst public outcry, the SPLM commissioned a survey to establish what South Sudanese thought about the government. In 2012, the SPLM sent senior members on a countrywide performance assessment, which showed that the party had “lost its sense of direction and vision,” according to media reports.³⁴ Subsequently, the party’s highest decision-making organ, the Politburo, met to discuss the general direction of the party (including the leadership question) in March 2013. The majority of the 21-member Politburo expressed dissatisfaction with how the government was being run and led. Machar, Pagan Amum (the SPLM secretary general), and Garang’s widow, Rebecca Garang, expressed interest in the position of SPLM chair, which automatically grants the incumbent the ticket to lead the party in the 2015 elections.³⁵ This move was a direct affront to Kiir, who by this time had lost significant support within the Politburo.

To put an end to efforts to challenge his leadership, Kiir refused to convene a Politburo meeting to discuss the leadership question within the SPLM, despite repeated calls to do so. He also dismantled the party organs from the grassroots to the top, and ruled by decree. In April 2013, Kiir removed “delegated powers” issued to the vice president.³⁶ Finally, in July 2013, he dismissed the whole cabinet, including Machar, in a move he said was designed to pave the way for a leaner cabinet.³⁷ Other rivals, including Pagan Amum, were placed under house arrest and barred from travelling within South Sudan and internationally. However, the real objective of the move was to fire Machar. The collective dismissal of the cabinet was designed to mask this intention and to mitigate any ramifications that might stoke ethnic passions between the Nuer and Dinka.

By the fall of 2013, it was apparent that the SPLM was split into two camps, led by Kiir and Machar. On December 6, Machar and his supporters called a press conference in which they accused Kiir of dictatorship and of recruiting a parallel army. Machar and

his supporters, many of whom were drawn from an array of ethnic communities from South Sudan, called for a public rally on December 14.³⁸ Kiir, however, hurriedly called a National Liberation Council (NLC) meeting of the SPLM on the same date. Machar's group postponed their scheduled meeting in response. Both camps attended the NLC meeting but there was little space to accommodate the differences between them amidst a palpable growth of visible tensions. The Machar camp walked out of the meeting.

On the night of December 15, heavy gunfire erupted within a barracks housing the elite Presidential Guard in Juba. The fighting spread to another military facility north of the city and engulfed some residential areas in Juba. The following day, President Kiir announced that the army had quelled a coup mounted by Machar and his supporters. Thirteen high-ranking SPLM members, most of them former government ministers, were detained in the ensuing roundup.³⁹ However, Machar, Taban Deng Gai, the governor of Unity State who was removed by Kiir, and Alfred Ladu Gore, a former minister, escaped from Juba. Hundreds of Nuer residents of the city were subsequently rounded up and arbitrarily shot, in what human rights organizations say was an ethnically motivated pogrom. Many Nuer sought refuge at UN facilities in the city.

Once praised as a beacon of diversity, the Presidential Guard was largely composed of Dinka and Nuer soldiers. On that fateful night, the commander of the Guard, a Dinka, reportedly called a parade and ordered the soldiers to disarm. In view of the tensions following Machar and his supporters' boycott of the NLC, the commander was responding to an order to disarm the Guard. After the disarmament was completed, Nuer soldiers realized that the armory was opened and that Dinka soldiers were being rearmed. Nuer soldiers stormed the armory and a firefight broke out, which escalated and took on tribal overtones, and culminated in the killing of about 600⁴⁰ Nuer in Juba.⁴¹

News of the massacre spread rapidly via mobile phone communication to many Nuer in various parts of South Sudan. Within a few days, a full-scale civil war was in progress in South Sudan. Nuer soldiers, who formed 60 percent of the army, defected en masse and rapidly captured the town of Bor, displacing and killing hundreds. The rebels were quickly dislodged, but a week later, they received a boost when a force of 20,000 Nuer youth was assembled that soon captured Bor, in the process leaving about 2,000 dead and razing the town to the ground. It is worth noting that the White Army (mostly from the Lou Nuer) had previously been activated to fight the Murle, who were accused of robbing the Nuer of cattle. However, this was a fight that wasn't linked to politics.⁴²

The White Army's involvement in the attack on Bor had political overtones connected to the fallout between Machar and Kiir in Juba. This marked the second time the White Army was embroiled in a political conflict in South Sudan. In mid-February 2014, the White Army attacked and destroyed Malakal, the capital of Upper Nile State. In its operations, the White Army has been fingered for excessive brutality, lack of respect for international

symbols, such as the Red Cross, and using media to incite hatred, which was evident when the rebels captured the town of Bentiu in April 2014.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WHITE ARMY IN ACTION

As in 1991, the primary reason behind the second emergence of the White Army in armed political conflict in South Sudan is rooted in the internal squabbles of the SPLM. However, it would be inaccurate to assume that the White Army had been disbanded prior to December 2013. In the absence of all-out political conflict, the White Army simply reverted to its traditional role of cattle rustling and protecting the Nuer community from reciprocal cattle raids by other rival communities. This role was evident early in 2012, when a White Army force of 8,000 from the Lou Nuer marched to Pibor to avenge repeated cattle raids from the Murle. Outnumbering both the UN and the SPLA, the force marched unimpeded and looted an estimated 80,000 heads of cattle. The White Army accused the government of failing to offer them protection from the Murle raiders.⁴³

The conflict has also taken on an ethnic dimension. Since the conflict started, numerous journalists have visited areas controlled by Machar's rebels, the SPLM in Opposition. In several interviews with journalists, White Army soldiers expressed that they view the war as one between the Nuer and Dinka. The Associated Press quoted 15-year-old Matt Thor: "I want to go and kill," he said, holding a gun too big for his small frame. "I want to go to the place of war, because I want to fight with Dinka."⁴⁴ When the White Army captured Malakal in February, eyewitnesses reported that it conducted a house-to-house hunt for people of Dinka origin.⁴⁵

There is also evidence to suggest that the scale of White Army involvement may be much larger than in 1991. The current strength is estimated to be between 60,000 and 80,000, compared to 30,000 in 1991.⁴⁶ Riek Machar has overall command over the White Army, which is led by regular SPLA troops that defected from the government army. Media interviews with White Army soldiers indicate that many are motivated to fight to avenge the killing of their kinsmen in Juba.

In addition, journalists have identified that many of the White Army soldiers are children, some as young as 12, who have been seen in combat theatres in several locations. The UN has expressed concern about the presence of child soldiers, an issue that White Army commanders have acknowledged exists. The UN says the government is also guilty of recruiting child soldiers. According to the UN, more than 9,000 children are fighting for both sides in the conflict.⁴⁷

In 1991, Nuer religion was used to recruit youth into the White Army. The same practice has ensued in the current conflict. At the start of the conflict, a *Vice* television documentary

titled “Saving South Sudan,”⁴⁸ reported that Nuer religious symbols and prophecies were used as motivating factors for rallying the White Army for battle. Subsequent reports from researchers report that a young prophet called Dak Kueth was instrumental in rallying the White Army for war.⁴⁹

The rapid mobilization of the White Army in this conflict points to the wide availability of small arms and light weapons among the Nuer and, by extension, most of the communities in the Greater Upper Nile region. It is also an affirmation of the deep-seated ethnic animosities between the Nuer and the Dinka. The proliferation itself is a testimony of the government’s failed disarmament campaigns in the region starting from 2006. As well, it is an indication of the overall failure to reform the security sector, manifested in the inability to trim the size of the SPLA, professionalize the army, and form a truly national force devoid of ethnic loyalties. To give some context to this, it is worth noting that the Sudan government and the SPLA were the two signatories of the CPA. In essence, this meant that several armed groups, offshoots of the 1991 split, were left out of the deal. These militia groups were armed by Khartoum as part of a counter-insurgency policy against the SPLA. In 2006, Salva Kiir issued the Juba Declaration, which was a general amnesty and a call for these armed groups to join the SPLA.⁵⁰ Concessions were offered and the armed groups, a majority of whose soldiers were Nuer, responded to the call and were absorbed into the SPLA.

While this policy was instrumental in neutralizing the immediate military threat posed by the armed groups, it also complicated security sector reforms in South Sudan.⁵¹ First, it undermined the SPLA’s Objective Force 2017 policy aimed at professionalizing the former guerilla army by turning it into a modern conventional army. Objective Force 2017’s key stipulation is reducing the number of troops from 210,000 to 120,000. Absorbing more troops meant that the SPLA’s salary expenditure increased significantly, with estimates indicating that about 80 percent of the defence budget was earmarked for salaries. This undermined expenditure on training, logistics, military professionalism, and mobility, which compromised the SPLA’s capacity to effectively deploy in various areas afflicted by communal violence. Second, and perhaps most significantly, it also compromised the government’s monopoly on the legitimate use of force in South Sudan and added to perpetuating the cycle of violence in the country by encouraging the possession and proliferation of small arms among communities.⁵² The amnesty to the armed groups also rearranged the ethnic composition of the SPLA. Whereas the number of Nuer soldiers in the SPLA was previously miniscule, subsequently more than 60 percent of the army was composed of Nuer, albeit with an upper echelon that was predominantly Dinka. Various ethnic groups in South Sudan accuse Dinka leaders of tribalism and argue that the Dinka are overrepresented in the public service.⁵³ Some South Sudanese commentators online have coined a term for this phenomenon – Dinkocracy.⁵⁴

Viewed in the general context of the perception that the Dinka are overrepresented in public office, coupled with the Nuer-Dinka tension in the wake of Machar's boycott of the NLC proceedings, the large number of Nuer foot soldiers in the SPLA had a devastating effect when hostilities broke out in December 2013. The majority of Nuer soldiers defected to the rebel side, forcing Kiir to accept the entry of Ugandan troops to shore up the SPLA's dwindling capacity to quell the rebellion

CONCLUSION

The emergence of the White Army in the current conflict is a direct result of the fallout between the protagonist factions in the SPLM. The conflict is primarily political, but it has now taken on ethnic overtones pitting the Dinka and Nuer ethnicities. Both sides in the conflict have signed a cessation of hostilities agreement but neither side has respected the terms of the agreement. Both sides are talking peace in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, a regional body of eight countries in East Africa and the Horn. Several rounds of peace talks have taken place so far, but no significant progress was made toward a permanent settlement of the conflict by the end of 2014. The peace process has been slow and the signed cessation of hostilities agreement between the two warring parties is yet to be meaningfully observed, as violations have occurred. A parallel effort led by Tanzania to reunify the leaders of the SPLM, those in the armed opposition and those in the government, yielded some success when a deal was struck for the party to put its house in order and complement these efforts with the peace talks in Addis Ababa.⁵⁵ Ultimately, the solution to the conflict lies in ongoing political dialogue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Initiate a peace conference for the Dinka and the Nuer

When a political settlement is achieved, it is imperative that a robust DDR campaign is implemented and a Dinka-Nuer people-to-people peace and reconciliation effort is pursued at the grassroots level. The animosities between the Nuer and Dinka are ancient.⁵⁶ Although this conflict is primarily political in nature, its ethnic overtones require that cultural imperatives associated with cattle raiding and retaliatory attacks – including high levels of small arms ownership – are addressed using traditional peacemaking efforts. Such measures have precedents in both communities. In 1999, the well-publicized Wunlit Peace Conference succeeded in reducing Nuer-Dinka tensions and hostilities. It is time to convene a similar conference and ensure that peacemaking efforts are sustained and consistently applied to build confidence and bridges between the two communities.

Implement comprehensive disarmament in the Greater Upper Nile

The legacy of the civil war, the advent of militias, and the proliferation of arms have ensured that the Upper Nile region is steeped in violence. Previous disarmament efforts have selectively targeted specific communities seen to pose a threat to the SPLA. To ensure that the region is rid of small arms, it is imperative that all communities are disarmed at the same time.

Create a realistic disarmament and reintegration program

The government and international donors must pay special focus to this program to ensure that adequate funding is sustained in an efficient manner that is cognizant of past mishaps in South Sudan, which included a half-hearted commitment to DDR by SPLA leaders, a limited DDR process, selective and discriminatory DDR policies that emphasized demobilization based on ethnicity (certain groups were deemed eligible, while others were not) and previous military service (new recruits were likely to be demobilized), and vague objectives in terms of human security and stabilization.⁵⁷ More importantly, a separate program to cater for child soldiers should be implemented. The government and donors must work jointly to ensure that there is the political will to complete the program.

Explore economic alternatives to cattle ownership

Cattle ownership is central to the livelihoods of the Nuer and other Nilotic communities in the greater Upper Nile region. Youth from these communities should be exposed to economic livelihoods that shift the focus from cattle ownership as the sole economic and cultural activity.

Improve service delivery and security in the Greater Upper Nile

Like other community self-defence groups in South Sudan, the White Army is primarily retained for the purpose of protection. This role is testimony to the lack of faith in the government's ability to provide security for the pastoralists of the region. The government should work to ensure social and economic service delivery, such as providing education, including vocational training, as well as extending state authority and rule of law enforcement in the rural areas. Infrastructure development, such as building roads and hospitals, is imperative for the state to exert its authority in this way as well as provide vocational training. Ensuring that the government is able to deliver services and security and reassert its monopoly of legitimate violence will go a long way in improving security in the region.

Reform the army and implement meritocracy in public appointments

At present, the politics of exclusion – encapsulated in the pervasive view in South Sudan that the Dinka dominate public office, including the army – is a recipe for animosity and conflict. Pre-existing cultural prejudices, such as those between the Nuer and the Dinka, feed on these exclusionist policies at the national political level and eventually result in confrontation at the grassroots level. For example, even though the majority of the SPLA's foot soldiers were Nuer, the fact that decision making in the army rests in the hands of one community is a contentious factor. An egalitarian approach to reforming the army and the public service, which ensures equitable regional representation based on meritocracy among all ethnic groups, will be helpful in mitigating conflict.

NOTES

1. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "South Sudan Crisis Situation Report No. 59 (as of 23 October 2014)," October 24, 2014, <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-crisis-situation-report-no-59-23-october-2014>.
2. Kieran Guilbert, "Famine Threatens South Sudan if Conflict Deepens - Report," Reuters, October 5, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/05/us-foundation-southsudan-famine-idUSKCN0HU0YP20141005>. The dry season (January to April) is traditionally a season of heavy fighting in South Sudan because armies can move armaments and vehicles on the roads, which are impassable in the rainy season.
3. John Young, "The White Army: An Introduction and Overview," Working Paper of the Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment Project, Small Arms Survey (2007), 9. According to Young, the group's name is derived from the ash the White Army soldiers smear on their bodies as protection against bugs.
4. There are three states in the Greater Upper Nile region: Unity, Jongolei, and Upper Nile. Upper Nile was the collective administrative name for the region before it was divided up into three states. The various sections of the Nuer ethnic group are distributed across all three states. Recently, the Greater Pibor Administrative Area was created from a section of Jongolei State.
5. Sharon Hutchinson, "A Guide to the Nuer of Jongolei State" University of Wisconsin-Madison, (2012), p. 3.
6. Ibid, 1-4.
7. Young, "The White Army," 11-12.
8. Hutchinson, "A Guide to the Nuer of Jongolei State," 18.
9. Young, "The White Army," 11.
10. The Anyuak were estimated to have a stockpile of 10,000 guns. Robert O. Collins, *Shadows in the Grass: Britain in Southern Sudan, 1918-1956* (Yale University Press: 1983), 21.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid, 22.
13. Young, "The White Army," 11-12. .
14. Lam Akol, *SPLM/SPLA: The Nassir Declaration* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2003), 2, 223.
15. Officers in these regions were more disposed to reforms in the movement rather than a violent overthrow of the status quo.
16. This was despite the fact that Garang had lost his major military source, the Derg regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia, which was overthrown in May 1991.
17. Deborah Scroggins, *Emma's War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 257. Also see Scott Peterson, *Me Against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 223.
18. Young, "The White Army," 12.
19. Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 126.
20. Peterson, *Me Against My Brother*, 221
21. Francis Deng, *Africans of Two Worlds: The Dinka in Afro-Arab Sudan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 70
22. Young, "The White Army," 12.
23. In this cultural context, the Nuer perceive themselves to be better fighters than the Dinka. See Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 126.
24. Lester Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages* (Trinity Press International, 1995), 95.
25. John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Publishers, 1990), 185.
26. Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (London: Clarendon Press, 1956), 45.
27. Peterson, *Me Against My Brother*, 217.
28. Scroggins, *Emma's War*, 199. This refers to the horizontal markings on the foreheads of adult Nuer men, which symbolizes their initiation into manhood.
29. Peterson, *Me Against My Brother*, 220.
30. Madut Jok and Sharon Hutchinson, "Sudan's Prolonged Second Civil War and the Militarization

- of Nuer and Dinka Ethnic Identities," *Africa Studies Review* 42 (September 1999), 134.
31. The CPA stipulated that the people of South Sudan should decide whether or not they wanted to be part of a united Sudan through a referendum. The referendum was held in January 2011, with South Sudanese voting overwhelmingly in favour of having their own country.
 32. See Section 101 of the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan.
 33. United Nations Development Programme, "Improve Maternal Health: Tracking Progress," http://www.ss.undp.org/content/south_sudan/en/home/mdgoverview/overview/mdg5/.
 34. See Sudan Tribune, "SPLM Deputy Says the Party is in Trouble," May 19, 2013, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article46630>.
 35. James Copnall, *A Poisonous Thorn in Our Hearts: Sudan and South Sudan's Bitter and Incomplete Divorce* (London: Hurst and Company, 2014), 71.
 36. Republican Order No. 2/2013 for the "Withdrawal of all duly Delegated Duties Assigned to the Vice President by the President of the Republic," 15 April 2013.
 37. Aljazeera, "South Sudan President Fires Cabinet," 24 April 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/07/201372318388499663.html>.
 38. Sudan Tribune, "SPLM Leaders Postpone Planned Public Rally," 13 December 2014, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article49172>.
 39. Brian Adeba, "The 'Coup' and Implications for Security Sector Reform in South Sudan," *Security Sector Resource Centre's The Hub* (18 December 2013), <http://www.ssresourcecentre.org/2013/12/18/the-coup-and-implications-for-security-sector-reform-in-south-sudan/>.
 40. Figure from the South Sudan Human Rights Commission's *Interim Report on South Sudan Internal Conflict*, 15 December 2013–14 March 2014.
 41. Peter Adwok Nyaba, "Sorry Sir, It Was Not a Coup," *SouthSudanNation.com*, 17 December 2013, <http://www.southsudannation.com/from-dr-adwok-sorry-sir-it-was-not-a-coup/>.
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 44. Jenny Vaughan, "Child Soldiers Battle in Worsening South Sudan War," *AFP*, 17 April 2014, <http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/654638-child-soldiers-battle-in-worsening-south-sudan-war.html>.
 45. "An Eyewitness Account from Malakal of Events Since Christmas Eve 2013," 26 January 2014, http://bishopgwynne.juba.anglican.org/docstore/malakal_diary_jan2.pdf.
 46. Jacey Fortin, "Civilians at War: White Army Mobilizes As Machar Aims for Oil Fields in South Sudan," *International Business Times*, 31 March 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.com/civilians-war-white-army-mobilizes-machar-aims-oil-fields-south-sudan-1565106>.
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 48. Youtube, "Saving South Sudan Part 2/3," 20 May 2014, 6:32, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lgs60-UefGE>.
 49. In January 2014, Brigadier General Malaak Ayuen – who presents a program for boosting morale for the SPLA on national television – was the first to allege that a prophet called Dak Kueth was involved in recruiting the White Army. Also see Small Arms Survey, "Protective Measures: Local Security Arrangements in Upper Nile," HSBA Issue Brief 23 (July 2014), <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/issue-briefs/HSBA-IB23-Local-security-arrangements-in-Greater-Upper-Nile.pdf>.
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 56. This is not to suggest that the Nuer and Dinka are in a perpetual state of conflict. Rather, ethnically motivated conflict is the end sum of the politicization of ethnicity and politicians' manipulation of ethnic differences.
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