



THE SUDD INSTITUTE

RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

P. O. Box 34, Juba, South Sudan • Tel: +211 (0)956 305 780
Email: thesudd.institute@gmail.com • www.suddinstitute.org

Weekly Review

April 30, 2013

Sorting out the Mayhem in Jonglei State: A Classic Security Dilemma

Jok Madut Jok

The classic security dilemma that has faced the government of South Sudan for some time now has glaringly and more strongly demonstrated itself in recent years in Jonglei, the country's largest and most populous state, and the most wrecked by violence. The dilemma is about the use of force to stabilize the security situation in the area versus continuing with the peace initiatives that have failed over the years. Since 2008, the dire security situation in Jonglei, which is characterized by the many violent confrontations among ethnic nationalities residing there and the rebellions against the government, has all surfaced, as a circumstance that is beyond readily understood insecurity matter that the local authorities can easily resolve. Instead, it is a situation that needs to be looked at from every angle, including the division of resources and power, delivery of services such as education, infrastructure such as roads, investment in the youth, control of firearms and restructuring of the state's monopoly of force so as to prevent the actions of some soldiers from further inflaming the situation. Above all, the areas of the state most affected by violence need a rehabilitation and development package, so that a more meaningful change is brought to the lives of the people, instead of relying on perceptions that view some ethnic groups as a problem that needs to be tackled. The Late John Garang, in his profound transitional economic vision, referred to these as peace through development. More appropriately, both the military and political leadership should not allow the situation to frustrate them into temptation to use an axe to kill a fly sitting on someone's forehead.

As is always the case with South Sudan's many mini wars, the recent renewed fighting in Jonglei has once again resulted in unthinkable civilian casualties, mainly among the Murle, one of the ethnic groups of the area that has been part of a communal violence cycle, usually involving the Nuer, the Jie and the Dinka. In the last two weeks, shocking reports have come out of the state about Lou Nuer's attacks on the Murle, attacks by a rebel movement led by a certain David Yau Yau, himself a Murle. Similarly, the Yau Yau's rebels have carried out related atrocities against the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in Gumruk, killing scores of people, including five from the Indian unit of UNMISS, seven civilians and contractors. Equally alarming are reports of government campaigns to disarm the Murle by force, using excessive power. The efforts to disarm have not been closely monitored by SPLA superiors, getting out of hand in terms of violence. So far, these efforts have taken a serious toll on life and livelihood in the area. They have also stifled the efforts by NGOs, UN and government to bring meaningful services to the area. The last fatal

confrontation in March led to 123 deaths in these clashes, with scores of those wounded now receiving treatment in many hospitals in Pibor, Bor, and Juba. There are reports that the confrontations between the SPLA and Murle youth have perhaps resulted in the desertions from the SPLA. The Murle district is now one of the South Sudanese areas for which travel advisories by the country's development partners have warned their staff, asking them to never travel there before strict security measures are enlisted and to travel in convoys.

The insecurity in Jonglei—caused by ethnic wars, David Yau Yau's rebel movement, and the state's resultant efforts to assert its force indiscriminately, now called the "secret war"—has led to human suffering and destruction of property. Ordinary people in the Murle area have made statements to the press and independent researchers about how the government's onslaught has reached an alarming level and that the world needs to be informed about an imminent crisis. The most important factor fueling this situation is reportedly the large number of Murle youth who have joined Yau Yau in response to a violent disarmament campaign conducted by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) that began in 2012. Anecdotal sources suggest that nearly all Murle youth have either joined Yau Yau, moved away further south with their cattle, moved to Juba or are on their way to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya.

The state of South Sudan, like any country worth its weight, has the right to attempt to monopolize the use of force, hence the dilemma. To assert its force over the rebellions and ethnic feuds in Jonglei is to risk an all out war between the government and the citizens; but to seek peaceful settlement is to appear weak and unable to monopolize power. Another dilemma is between sending a police force to maintain everyday security or continuing to send the SPLA to break up the fights. To do the former, the police gets crushed by the Murle civilians or Yau Yau's rebels. But to do the latter, i.e., putting the army in charge of everyday security is to risk remilitarization of the whole society, enabling the continuation of a culture of violence, as the omnipresence of the army means more weapons in the area. Whichever approach the government opts for, one thing is unquestionably clear, that counter-insurgency tactics have never been known to succeed, not any time in the history of humanity and that they almost always lead to long and protracted wars whose consequences far outweigh the benefits of seeking peaceful solutions. South Sudan's own history attests to this, as Khartoum government's counter-insurgency tactics, destructive to civilian lives as they were, only made more South Sudanese youth join the SPLA en mass, and eventually frustrating the whole southern population to opt for separation. Why do we think such tactics can work in the case of our own rebellions? Not all the Murle are Yau Yau's rebels and faulting an entire ethnic nation as renegades can only lead to one thing, and that is more and more of them viewing the state as their enemy, not their protector.

A letter written by a Murle eyewitness on April 12th and sent to his family in Juba, which the Sudd Institute has seen, spoke of armed Nuer youth moving on one side toward Murle's grazing land, where there was large dry season cattle concentration, while the SPLA was moving in on the other, so that the Murle would be encircled, apparently aimed at finishing the tribe once and for all. The letter used the word genocide, stating "No one will survive if

the SPLA attacks from one side while Lou Nuer youth do from the other.” Another letter recently sent by some Murle individuals to a church group spoke of how “the Murle community has become frustrated with the continuation of wars, which have terrorized the community every year since the 2005 CPA,” calling for mediation and indicating that some community leaders had met, suggesting the church and any peace-loving leaders from the world community to press for peace and reconciliation in Jonglei.

These pleas underscore two important developments that the country’s leadership can use to do intervene in Jongeli. The first is that the country’s defense force needs to be controlled in the way they are managing the conflict in the state, that it should be more measured in dealing with the Murle populations, and not to stigmatize every Murle as part of the rebellion by David Yau Yau. It would be a mistake to allow the country to be so cornered by the small rebel militia into a mindset of indiscriminate attacks on an entire ethnic nation.

The second thing is the recent presidential order to form a new committee to start a national reconciliation exercise, which should commence in Jonglei state before extending it to the rest of the nation. But whatever this country does about the current level of conflict, it must not focus on the use of violence to combat violence, but instead put an emphasis on the exercise of buying stability with some basic services. As a sovereign state that views itself as tasked with protecting its people, the desire to use a measured force to fight the militias is understandable, but can only succeed if it does so while winning the civilians onto its side through peaceful means and delivery of basic services. Disarming the Murle can only contribute to stability if it is done professionally, where the individuals who agree to hand over their guns are not then roughed up, and where such an exercise is preceded with a kind of consultation, as the citizen needs to buy the idea of disarmament as being aimed at their welfare. As things stand, disarmament is being seen throughout the severely conflict affected communities as exposing them to slaughter by their traditional enemies.

Though the accuracy of the reports from the Murle area in describing the situation in that territory has not been verified by independent sources, the truth is that they depict a climate in which many citizens have come to perceive the state very negatively, and that has serious implications on the ability of the two sides to resolve the crisis. It also speaks very negatively about the image of the country, particularly if the United States Department of State’s 2013 annual human rights report is read from this perspective.

In conclusion, the use of force by any state is a sovereign right, but only if it is legal and grounded in even-handedness. While it is a constitutional right of the government to protect one citizen against other violent citizens, such a right needs to be understood and internalized by all citizens. Failing this understanding among the very public the state needs to protect can and has already resulted in two undesirable outcomes in South Sudan. The first is the dilemma that the government faces between the use of force to combat ethnic warfare or a more peaceful approach to violence. The second is that approaching the situation in Jonglei poorly leads to a confrontation with an entire ethnic group, as is now becoming evident with the Murle. To deal with this bind, the government needs to carry out a more even-handed disarmament, emphasize peaceful resolution of conflicts, support

a honest reconciliation effort, invest in a comprehensive rebuilding program that engages the youth beyond their traditional livelihoods, and above all, instruct the SPLA commands to be more proactive in the control of soldiers who use excessive force in their endeavor to collect arms from the civilians. Issuing amnesty and asking rebel movements to rejoin the national army are great steps toward peace, but insufficient, especially in South Sudan, a country where these conflicts have become as much matters of male pride as they relate to political disagreements and resource competition.

About Sudd Institute

The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute's intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.

About the Author

Jok Madut Jok is the Executive Director and a co-founder of the Sudd Institute. He is the author of three books and numerous articles covering gender, sexuality and reproductive health, humanitarian aid, ethnography of political violence, gender-based violence, war and slavery, and the politics of identity in Sudan.