

David Yau Yau's Rebellion

David Yau Yau's re-emergence in 2012 poses a significant threat to the stability of South Sudan. Previously active as a rebel leader between May 2010 and June 2011, Yau Yau rejoined the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in June 2011 but re-defected in April 2012, resuming operations in Jonglei state in August 2012. His forces and mobilized Murle youths have attacked SPLA installations in the major centers of Likuangole, Pibor, Gumuruk, Manyabol, and Koth Char in Pibor county. He has also recently captured Boma town, although the SPLA has reportedly recaptured the town. Besides Murle youths, Yau Yau's allied forces may now include members of other communities such as the Shilluk, Dinka, Boya, Toposa, and others. According to the UN, the conflict between the Yau Yau and the SPLA has led to the displacement of some 23,000 Jonglei residents to Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda.ⁱ

Background and initial rebellion

Yau Yau is from the Murle tribe, a minority that lives almost exclusively in Pibor county, bordering Ethiopia, and covering the south-east corner of Jonglei state. Unlike other former insurrection leaders such as George Athor and Gatluak Gai, Yau Yau was a civilian before launching his armed revolt following the April 2010 elections. He studied theology in South Sudan and Kenya and then served as the Pibor county secretary of the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. He subsequently ran as an independent candidate in the parliamentary election for the Gumuruk–Boma constituency seat, representing Pibor county in the Jonglei State Assembly. He was defeated by Judy Jokongole, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) candidate, who reportedly won the seat by a wide margin. A man in his thirties, Yau Yau was viewed by Murle elders and the tribe's elite as having support only among local youths, particularly his age-set—the Bothonya—and was resented for not having sought the consent of Murle leaders before running in the elections.

Yau Yau launched his first revolt in May 2010, operating primarily in Pibor county. His armed engagements with the SPLA resembled minor banditry attacks rather than full military operations and resulted in relatively low death tolls. Athor, who enjoyed direct military support from Khartoum, served as a conduit of arms to Yau Yau during his first rebellion. Yau Yau also reportedly distributed arms among Murle youths who attacked Uror county in August 2011, though the Small Arms Survey has been unable to independently verify this.ⁱⁱ Some cited internal Murle politics rather than election-related tensions as the driving factor behind Yau Yau's first revolt.

Negotiations between the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) and Yau Yau began in September 2010 but were put on hold when he was accused of an attack the following month. A second round of negotiations began in April 2011 through 8th Division SPLA commander Bol Kong and then Pibor county commissioner Akot Maze. In June 2011 Yau Yau told the media he had signed a ceasefire agreement with the government. His forces, numbering around 200, were transferred by the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) from Pibor to Owinykibol village in Eastern Equatoria to await integration. In November 2011, these fighters were taken to Mapel in Northern Bahr el Ghazal where integration was completed in January and February 2012. Yau Yau was offered the rank of major. However, it is unclear if he was ever integrated.

Dynamics of the current rebellion

In April 2012, Yau Yau travelled to Kenya for medical leave. Shortly thereafter the SPLA announced that Yau Yau had again defected. He travelled to Khartoum, where he linked up with a number of Murle from the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), returning to Pibor with 41 fighters in August 2012. Since then, it is estimated that 4,000–6,000 largely Murle youths have either directly joined Yau Yau’s ranks, received arms and ammunition from him, are exploiting the current chaos to independently attack the SPLA or other Murle, or a combination of the above. In addition, in April and May 2013 he was reportedly adding members of other communities to his ranks.

Unlike in his first rebellion, where Yau Yau accessed weapons through George Athor, his second insurgency has profited from direct links and contacts with Khartoum. The SPLA have captured a wide array of small arms and light weapons, including various types of assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and machine guns. Reports suggest that they have used large quantities of mortars as well. Yau Yau appears to be operating with a number of deputies with specific assigned areas of operation. Reportedly, Toposa Brig. Gen. Justin Lokudu and Maj. Gen. James Kongkong, formerly associated with Murle leader Ismail Konyi, a senior figure in the Khartoum-aligned South Sudan Defence Forces during the civil war, were at one point part of the command. In addition, a number of Murle who joined SAF after the Juba Declaration in 2006 joined Yau Yau in Khartoum and are part of his command structure. These include Adoch Agul, Gayin Ngarubin Torokon, and Longaben Wayah. In Khartoum, he is reportedly supported by Khalid Boutros Lomodini.ⁱⁱⁱ

The GoSS alleges that the Sudanese government provides material support to Yau Yau’s rebellion, as it had supported George Athor.^{iv} On 22 September 2012, UNMISS witnessed an unmarked fixed-wing aircraft dropping seven or eight packages a few kilometers from its base in Likuangole. The GoSS alleged that the airdrops came from Sudan. In February 2013, the Small Arms Survey found that the weapons and ammunition possessed by Capt. James Kuburin and his followers—who defected from Yau Yau in December 2012—were identical to those used by SAF and other Khartoum-backed Southern insurgent groups.^v In addition, interviews with Kuburin provided specifics about the alleged airdrops of weapons from Khartoum. The scale of mobilization of youths by Yau Yau suggests that the rebellion has access to significant resources and that it has successfully capitalized on the feelings of resentment, distrust, and marginalization among the Murle population toward the Southern army, most recently exacerbated by an abusive SPLA disarmament campaign.

Launched throughout Jonglei in March 2012, the disarmament campaign was associated with widespread documented SPLA abuses in Murle areas. From mid-March to 31 August 2012, Médecins Sans Frontières’ (MSF) treated 96 patients in clinics in Pibor, Likuangole, and Gumuruk with violent trauma or sexual violence injuries, all of whom attributed their injuries to the disarmament campaign. Among these patients, three died from their injuries, 17 were survivors of rape, and eight were victims of attempted rape. Though the SPLA says that 31 soldiers have been dismissed for misconduct during the campaign, local perception is that the military has acted with impunity against the civilian population, who feel that they are being punished for Yau Yau’s rebellion. At the end of October 2012, the SPLA suspended its campaign to focus its efforts on eliminating Yau Yau’s forces.

The relationship between Yau Yau's core force and the Murle youths who have participated in the fighting is unclear, but it is unlikely that Yau Yau and his senior leadership have command and control over them. The Murle youths involved with the escalation of violence in Pibor county (see below) are believed to come from the youngest Bothonya and Lango age-sets. Murle society, which lacks a traditional hierarchy, is instead organized around age-based male groups. The youngest age-sets are the most active and aggressive, assume the responsibility of defending the tribe from outsiders, and prove themselves through cattle raids. They have a vested interest in acquiring weapons and ammunition from an external source for purposes of age-set struggles, cattle-raiding, and personal grievances against the SPLA.

Major attacks and events

The first clash between SPLA and Yau Yau's forces took place on 22 August 2012 when a convoy of SPLA soldiers sent to investigate reports of rebel activity was ambushed near the Nanam River, resulting in more than 100 SPLA deaths. On 30 August, Yau Yau forces attacked the SPLA garrison in Likuangole, killing an unconfirmed number of soldiers. In early September, rebel forces shot RPGs at an SPLA helicopter landing at the Likuangole garrison, puncturing the fuel tank.

In mid-September, Yau Yau's forces delivered an ultimatum to UNMISS in Likuangole, ordering the mission to evacuate Likuangole and Pibor or be considered hostile forces. Despite this demand, Yau Yau's men have not taken action against UNMISS, but on 30 September they attacked an SPLA garrison in Likuangole. According to the SPLA, 35 rebel fighters were killed and a number of weapons captured. Five SPLA were killed and 13 wounded.

Insurgent attacks spread westward to Gumuruk payam (district) by late September. Heavy fighting took place in Gumuruk on 23 and 24 September following which Yau Yau's forces reportedly occupied the payam headquarters, the airport, school, and market. Between 6 and 7 October rebel forces again attacked the SPLA installation in Gumuruk. On 8 October, the SPLA sent reinforcements from Pibor to Gumuruk, launching an attack the following day that dislodged the forces and recaptured the area. Attacks also spread further west to the areas of Manyabol and Kothchar. On 10 October, the surrounding areas of Manyabol came under rebel attack, forcing SPLA forces to pull back to the town.

On 25 October, rebel forces fired RPGs across Pibor town from Lukurnyang village on the town's eastern outskirts. The ensuing crossfire left one civilian dead. Following the engagement, the SPLA placed a company of soldiers in Lukurnyang. Regular attacks took place on the SPLA Likuangole garrison in November. On 18 November, UNMISS received a second letter from Yau Yau's forces ordering the mission to evacuate. Because the forces set up defensive positions behind the UNMISS base in Likuangole, the mission was caught between heavy fighting between SPLA and rebels on 19 November. According to the SPLA, three soldiers were killed and six rebel fighters' bodies were found.

Cattle raiding in the state escalated in November, exacerbated during the dry season by the presence of Yau Yau's militia and the accompanying influx of arms and ammunition into the area, underlining the way in which militia activity in Jonglei

intersects with inter-communal violence. While many neighboring counties reported a decrease in cattle raiding between May and October 2012, most reported a marked increase in raids since November 2012, which they primarily blame upon Yau Yau and affiliated youths, but their claims are difficult to verify.

On 2 December one of Yau Yau's commanders, Capt. Duag Kuburin, defected to the SPLA with 183 of his followers. His troops remained stationed just outside of Pibor town until 26 January 2013 when Kuburin and his bodyguards attempted to enter the market area with weapons. A drunk SPLA soldier attempted to throw a hand grenade and it exploded, killing the soldier. The SPLA began shooting indiscriminately and burned 158 tukuls in the town, reportedly killing at least eight people and causing 2,500 civilians to flee Pibor town. Kuburin escaped and reportedly went to Kelo, in eastern Pibor near the border with Pochalla county, to meet Yau Yau, but was chased back to Pibor, where he surrendered to the Pibor Commissioner. As of May 2013, he and his troops remain at the commissioner's compound in Pibor town while they await integration into the SPLA.

In mid-January 2013, Yau Yau and his various allied groups began moving towards Kelo. One reason for the regrouping in Kelo was an expected weapons drop in the vicinity, which reportedly occurred in early February. Then an attack on Walgak, Akobo county on 8 February that resulted in a large number of civilian casualties, including women and children, was blamed on Yau Yau elements and Murle youths. The Lou Nuer youths, under the leadership of the prophet Dak Kueth, began to mobilize for a revenge attack. On 17 February there was a clash between Yau Yau troops and the SPLA near Nantaloch (north of Pibor towards Lekwongole), with two SPLA casualties, one fatal.

In mid-February 2013, the SPLA began to bring additional troops into Pibor for a counter-insurgency operation; they launched a formal military operation on 4 March with heavy fighting in Komkom. But the SPLA has been unable to make headway against the insurgents and have suffered heavy casualties. In late March it was reported that the Yau Yau elements were moving away from Kelo and were regrouping around the Nanaam area. In early April, a new spokesperson for the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army (SSDM/A), Col. Peter Konyi Kubrin, released the groups' Jebel Boma Declaration and Manifesto, identifying Yau Yau as chairman and commander-in-charge of the re-formed SSDM/A, once under the leadership of the late George Athor.

On 9 April a UN convoy en route from Gumuruk to Pibor town was attacked by approximately 200 armed men, killing five UN peacekeepers and seven civilians. The SPLA accused Yau Yau elements for the attack, while the SSDM/A released a statement denying responsibility. An investigation has been launched; eyewitnesses reported that attackers were very young, heavily armed, and some wore uniforms.

Suspected Yau Yau elements have also reportedly stepped up food raiding, suggesting their supply chain has been disrupted. The group also seems to have split up again after regrouping in Kelo in February, with suspected activity along the Ethiopian border near Pochalla, in Nanaam, and around Pibor and Gumuruk towns.

In early May, Yau Yau's spokesman, Kubrin, claimed that the main Pibor-based unit of the SSDA had captured Boma town. The SPLA initially denied the claim but later acknowledged that Yau Yau's troops had captured lower Boma. Yau Yau's troops appeared also close to capturing Pibor town. Civilians were evacuated from the town and there were reports of looting of UN, NGO, and civilian homes by the SPLA.

On 10 May a group of senior Murle chiefs, as well as the payam administrator, were taken by an unknown armed group from Lekwongole town. The chiefs included Barchoch Lual, the senior Red Chief of the Tangajong clan. The whereabouts of these senior Murle figures remains unknown. The county commissioner and Pibor payam administrator and their families have been evacuated out of Pibor for their security.

South Sudan government response and civilian impacts

Civilians in Pibor county and wider Jonglei have been caught in the crossfire between the SPLA and Yau Yau. Following the group's initial successes against the SPLA, the army had largely bunkered down in the major urban areas, not venturing out to the rural bush where they are disadvantaged against the more mobile guerilla force during the rainy season. In addition, there have been over 1,000 SPLA desertions over the past months, some allegedly recruited into Yau Yau's forces along with some Wildlife and South Sudan Police Service (SSPS) soldiers. At the political level, the GoSS and SPLA had pursued a political strategy of both isolating Yau Yau's rebellion from popular, grassroots support, and extending amnesty.

To that effect, Deputy Defense Minister Majak D'Agoot and SPLA Deputy Chief of Staff of Political and Moral Orientation Maj. Gen. Obuto Mamur Mete, as well as national-level Murle leaders, traveled to Pibor to convince the population to resist mobilization and rearming. Chiefs and youths have disseminated the same message at conferences throughout the state. The Pibor county commissioner delivered a message to Yau Yau's men in early October 2012. The letter stated that the presidential amnesty offered in July 2011 continues to extend to Yau Yau.

In January 2013, President Salva Kirr commissioned the Murle state and national political leaders to organize peace talks with David Yau Yau. They travelled to Pibor on 26 January, and a smaller delegation was sent to meet Yau Yau in Kelo, where he had regrouped and allegedly been rearmed by Khartoum sources. The delegation failed to meet with Yau Yau, meeting only with his deputy Arzane Kong Kong. In February, Sultan Ismael Konyi reported that Yau Yau had requested UN involvement in the peace talks. After the Murle delegation failed to talk with Yau Yau in February and March, the SPLA went on the offensive in mid-March.

Maj. Gen. Stephen Marshall, a Murle SPLA veteran, was initially placed in charge of operations against Yau Yau, but was granted study leave before the counter-insurgency began in March. Maj. Gen. Peter Gadet succeeded him.

A key challenge for the SPLA has been distinguishing between civilians, armed civilians, and Yau Yau's forces. County-level Murle officials continue to disseminate messages encouraging civilians to physically separate from Yau Yau's forces so that they are not caught in between the military counter-insurgency activities and the rebellion. Pibor county officials told the media that Yau Yau's forces have killed and

raped civilians, looted property, and slaughtered the livestock of those who will not join the rebellion. Yau Yau forces reportedly killed one Murle sub-chief in late September 2012 because he was encouraging his community to resist recruitment.

Since late August, Likuangole town has been emptied of its residents and local government. In Gumuruk, fighting in late September prompted most of the population from Gumuruk to flee; it has only slowly begun to return. In mid-November, UN OCHA reported that 10,000 people were displaced by fighting in Pibor town. A further 2,500 were displaced in late January 2013 when the SPLA clashed with Kuburin and his men.

Local officials say that the SPLA shot 13 people near Gumuruk on 4 December, with one official claiming that they were all civilians and not members of Yau Yau's forces. Since March 2013, there have been a number of reports of the arrest and harassment of civilians by the SPLA as part of the counter-insurgency measures. In early April 2013, a number of SPLA, SSPS, and civilians were arrested by the SPLA and taken to an unknown location in Bor county. INGOs also reported increased harassment and the UN being blocked from going to areas where the SPLA and Yau Yau elements are engaging, making it difficult to monitor incidents. There have been reports of the SPLA raiding cattle from Murle bomas and taking them towards Bor.

As of late May 2013, Yau Yau's forces continued launching attacks against the SPLA in various locations within Pibor county, resulting in hundreds of SPLA deaths since the start of the rebellion. On 25 April 2013 a presidential order granted pardon to South Sudanese insurgents, including Yau Yau and his forces, which was accepted by a number of South Sudan Liberation Army militia leaders. According to the SSDM/A spokesman, however, Yau Yau has not surrendered, and the SSDM/A will only respond to mediation from the AU, UN, and US. Meanwhile, Murle leaders continue to push for talks between Yau Yau and the GoSS and have renewed their commitment to bring him to the negotiating table.

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Notes

ⁱ See <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/23k-refugees-flee-south-sudan-conflict-19296168#.Uaw9nGTK_WY>.
ⁱⁱ See *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Inter-tribal Violence in Jonglei*, HSBA Issue Brief 21, Geneva: Small Arms Survey, October 2011. <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/issuebriefs/HSBA-IB21-Inter-tribal_violence_in_Jonglei.pdf>.
ⁱⁱⁱ Khalid Boutross was the SSDM/A contact for Athor in Khartoum, and allegedly is currently Yau Yau's contact.
^{iv} See *Fighting for spoils: Armed insurgencies in Greater Upper Nile*, HSBA Issue Brief 18, Geneva: Small Arms Survey, November 2011. <<http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/issuebriefs/HSBA-IB-18-Armed-insurgencies-Greater-Upper-Nile.pdf>>.
^v See *Weapons in Service with David Yau Yau's Militia, Jonglei State, February 2013*. HSBA Arms and Ammunition Tracing Desk Report. February 2013. <<http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/facts-figures/arms-ammunition-tracing-desk/HSBA-Tracing-Desk-Yau-Yau-April-2013.pdf>>.