



Gatluak Gai Rebellion, Unity State

Gatluak's rebellion is linked to the complex and high-stakes politics of oil-rich Unity State. The site of horrific violence and significant casualties during the civil war, Unity is home to political dynamics that mirror tensions at the highest levels of the Southern government. These rifts are unlikely to be resolved following the referendum on Southern self-determination scheduled for January 2011. Although Gatluak was not a major player in state politics prior to the April 2010 elections, the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS)'s belief that he was linked to Angelina Teny—wife of Vice-President Riek Machar who ran as an independent candidate for the Unity governorship—led GoSS leaders to take the threat seriously and respond with increased Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) deployment in the state. While Gatluak and his forces have not launched fresh attacks in Unity since June 2010, the area of the state where he initially operated continues to be insecure and the situation will likely remain unstable in the run-up to the referendum. It is unknown how many forces Gatluak had under his control at the height of his insurgency, but like George Athor, he has proven successful in manipulating local grievances and insecurity to further his own aims. Now that he has seemingly gone into hiding, however, it is unclear whether he will attempt another bid at destabilizing Unity State in advance of the referendum.

A Nuer from Koch County, Gatluak was not a high-ranking SPLA officer before he launched his insurgency in late May 2010 by attacking an SPLA base at Awarping, Abiemnom County. The SPLA claims that he was actually on the payroll of the Unity State Prisons Guard. Gatluak reportedly had aspirations to be Koch County commissioner prior to Governor Taban Deng's appointment as governor following the 2008 Sudan People's Liberation Movement convention. After Taban rejected this bid, Gatluak apparently grew resentful and eventually became one of the campaign managers for independent candidate Angelina Teny's bid against the incumbent governor, perhaps with the hope of gaining the county commissionership if Taban was replaced.

Gatluak and his forces have attacked SPLA installations and engaged in fighting in the restive counties of Mayom and Abiemnom, which border South Kordofan State in Northern Sudan. These counties are strategically significant, partly because (particularly in the case of Mayom, home of the former warlord Paulino Matiep) they have histories of anti-SPLA sentiment and are frontline border areas. Misseriya populations move through Abiemnom en route to an important cattle market in the state capital, Bentiu, and SPLA officials in Unity claim that Gatluak recruited Misseriya in both South Kordofan and Unity. The SPLA claimed that, following its last fight with Gatluak's forces in June 2010, Gatluak fled towards the North-South border, in the direction of the oil fields of Heglig, where northern military forces are present.

Many rumours circulate in Unity as to where Gatluak received the ample forces and weapons to launch attacks on significant SPLA installations, such as the Awarping attack. Some Khartoum press reports suggested that SPLA forces were defecting to



join him, while SPLA officials in Bentiu and other Southern government officials alleged that the National Congress Party had sent civilians, namely armed Misseriya tribesmen, from neighbouring South Kordofan, to fight in the rebellion. The SPLA has also alleged that former Southern militia leaders who are part of the Sudanese Army Forces (SAF), such as Maj.-Gen. Gabriel Tang Gatwich Chan (also known as Gabriel Tang-Ginye), are backing him. However, discontent is widespread in Unity under Governor Taban Deng's leadership, and areas such as Abiemnom and Mayom counties are logical areas for individuals who, like Gatluak, aim to find support among local, well-armed civilians.

On 8 June 2010, the SPLA announced that Gatluak's rebellion had been defeated and that Gatluak had escaped to the Heglig area (the SPLA said that its forces could not pursue him into this area because it is controlled by the SAF). The army claimed it had captured more than 50 of his forces, several of whom were defected SPLA soldiers. While the rebellion was short-lived—clashes occurred over a period of several weeks in late May and June—the precarious military and political situation in the state suggests that further rebellions could arise in the aftermath of the referendum if the Government of Southern Sudan does not swiftly address the expectations of local populations.

Updated August 2010