







In general, the growing insecurity in Bahr el Ghazal has very different dynamics from the conflict in the Greater Upper Nile region. In addition to the economic crisis in the SPLA that is leading to desertions—a problem for South Sudan in general—the South Sudanese conflict has caused a number of latent tensions in both NBeG and WBeG to resurface. On 30 May Dau Aturjong, a former major general in the SPLA, became the highest ranking Dinka officer to join the SPLA-IO. In a press conference in Nairobi he announced that he was joining the rebels in order to ‘liberate my people from Salva Kiir’s regime’.

In reality, Aturjong’s rebellion is likely to have much more prosaic motivations. A native of Aweil North county, Aturjong was a field commander with the SPLA during the second civil war and was active in WBeG and NBeG states. In 2010 he unsuccessfully competed against Paul Malong for the governorship of NBeG and alleged that the vote was rigged. He was removed from active service in the army in January 2013. Following the 2010 elections a number of disgruntled military leaders who unsuccessfully contested gubernatorial elections sought to use military revolt as a tool to leverage more important positions for themselves in state administrations. In a sense Aturjong’s recent decision to join the SPLA-IO is the last of the 2010 rebellions. Unlike in fractious Unity state, NBeG under Paul Malong’s control was too unified for a revolt to take hold. Aturjong lacks any natural constituency with the other SPLA-IO leaders and is both physically and ideologically remote from them. Aturjong will leverage his rebellion against the SPLA as a means to obtain greater control of resources in the state.

However, while Aturjong’s rebellion seems opportunistic and personally motivated, Paul Malong is gone and Kuel Aguer Kuel is unlikely to be able to keep Aturjong in check as his predecessor did. Kuel must also address opposition to Malong’s administration, which has been suppressed since 2005, and the economic crisis in the SPLA—both of which make a successful rebellion in Bahr el Ghazal more likely.

Thus far Aturjong has not attacked the SPLA in any serious way. There were minor clashes in June in the area around Baggari, and the SPLA has reinforced its positions in WBeG with forces from Lakes state. In July Aturjong’s troops were bolstered after 300 armed youths from NBeG under the command of Chief Deng Geng—who had been removed from his position in the NBeG administration earlier in the year—declared that they were joining the SPLA-IO. These forces were made up of SPLA soldiers who had recently returned from Jonglei and members of the *gulweng*—armed Dinka youth who are traditionally cattle guards for livestock. On 3 August Aturjong claimed that his forces numbered 5,000; this has not been confirmed. On 10 September sporadic clashes occurred between Aturjong’s forces and the SPLA’s 3rd Division at Warguit as some of his forces moved north to their main base at Abu Matareq in East Darfur.

The extent of Aturjong’s relationship with the Government of Sudan is not known at this time. It seems likely that the deserters from Mapel have joined Aturjong, and with the coming end of the rainy season there is a strong possibility that his forces will attack SPLA positions in NBeG.

### **Political tensions**

Insecurity in Bahr el Ghazal has led to growing political tension in both states. On 30 June the Bahr el Ghazal Student Union issued a call for Salva Kiir to step down. Following the desertion of 300 youths from Aweil North county in July, the NBeG state government arrested a number of

government officials and other civilians believed to have supported Aturjong's candidacy in the 2010 elections. The state government has also imposed censorship and threatened to arrest journalists who report critically on security in the state. Disquiet with Kuel Aguer Kuel's governorship is already increasing. In September it was rumoured that nearly half the state ministers were going to resign over Kuel's reliance on his own family and his marginalization of several key political actors in the state. While the resignations did not occur, the rumour is indicative of the governor's precarious hold on power in the state.

On 11 August, in an attempt to staunch a series of desertions in Bahr el Ghazal, the police commissioners for NBeG and WBeG states were swapped, with Peter Mading Duor transferred to Wau and Akot Deng Akot reappointed to his previous position as NBeG police commissioner. Akot Deng comes from Aweil North, the same area as Aturjong, and was felt by the administration to be a stronger political figure with greater local appeal.

In WBeG, just as in NBeG, there is a great deal of dissatisfaction with the state governor. On 16 September the legislature presented a petition to South Sudanese president Salva Kiir that detailed Rizig Zachariah Hassan's alleged abuses of power and corruption, claims the governor later dismissed as being without basis.

The military and political dynamics in Bahr el Ghazal are distinct from those of the Greater Upper Nile region. However, they represent a more general trend in South Sudan towards fragmentation as each region looks to its own interests, and the dynamics of both are increasingly distinct from those of the country as a whole. With the economic crisis in the SPLA set to continue and the coming dry season likely to bring intensified clashes in NBeG, it is likely that the region is set for a prolonged period of political and military instability.

Updated 16 October