



The White Army: An Introduction and Overview

By John Young

Small Arms Survey

Graduate Institute of International Studies
47 Avenue Blanc, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland

Phone: +41 22 908 5777

Fax: +41 22 732 2738

Email: smallarm@hei.unige.ch

Web site: www.smallarmssurvey.org



The White Army: An Introduction and Overview

By John Young



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada



HM Government

Copyright

Published in Switzerland by the Small Arms Survey

© Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva 2007

First published in June 2007

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the Small Arms Survey, or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Publications Manager, Small Arms Survey, at the address below.

Small Arms Survey
Graduate Institute of International Studies
47 Avenue Blanc, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland

Copyedited by Andy Mash

Cartography by MAP*grafix*

Typeset in Optima and Palatino by Richard Jones, Exile: Design & Editorial Services (rick@studioexile.com)

Printed by nbmedia in Geneva, Switzerland

ISBN 2-8288-0082-2

The Small Arms Survey

The Small Arms Survey is an independent research project located at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. It serves as the principal source of public information on all aspects of small arms and as a resource centre for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and activists.

Established in 1999, the project is supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and by contributions from the Governments of Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK. The Survey is also grateful for past and current project-specific support received from Australia, Denmark, and New Zealand. Further funding has been provided by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the Geneva International Academic Network, and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. The Small Arms Survey collaborates with research institutes and NGOs in many countries, including Brazil, Canada, Georgia, Germany, India, Israel, Jordan, Norway, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Thailand, the UK, and the US.

Small Arms Survey
Graduate Institute of International Studies
47 Avenue Blanc, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland

Phone: +41 22 908 5777

Fax: +41 22 732 2738

Email: smallarm@hei.unige.ch

Web site: www.smallarmssurvey.org

The Human Security Baseline Assessment

The Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA) is a two-year research project (2005–07) administered by the Small Arms Survey. It has been developed in cooperation with the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the UN Mission in Sudan, the UN Development Programme, and a wide array of international and Sudanese NGO partners. Through the active generation and dissemination of timely empirical research, the HSBA project works to support disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), security sector reform (SSR), and arms control interventions to promote security.

The HSBA is being carried out by a multidisciplinary team of regional, security, and public health specialists. It reviews the spatial distribution of armed violence throughout Sudan and offers policy-relevant advice to redress insecurity.

HSBA Working Papers are timely and user-friendly reports on current research activities in English and Arabic. Future papers will focus on a variety of issues, including victimization and perceptions of security, armed groups, and local security arrangements. The project also generates a series of *Issue Briefs*.

The HSBA project is supported by Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada and the UK Government Global Conflict Prevention Pool.

For more information contact:

Claire Mc Evoy
HSBA Project Coordinator
Small Arms Survey, 47 Avenue Blanc
1202 Geneva, Switzerland

E-mail: mcevoy@hei.unige.ch

Web site: www.smallarmssurvey.org (click on Sudan)

HSBA Working Paper series editor: Emile LeBrun

Contents

Acronyms and abbreviations	6
About the author	7
Abstract	8
I. Introduction	9
II. Origins	11
III. Organization, leadership, and capacity	15
IV. Decline and collapse	19
V. Conclusion	23
Endnotes	25
Bibliography	26

Acronyms and abbreviations

CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
GoS	Government of Sudan
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
SPLM/A	Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement/Army
SSDF	South Sudan Defence Forces
SSLM	South Sudan Liberation Movement

About the author

John Young is a Canadian academic who first travelled to Sudan in 1986 to work as a journalist with the *Sudan Times* and stayed for three years. He then returned to Canada to complete a PhD in Political Science at Simon Fraser University, where he is currently a Research Associate with the Institute of Governance Studies.

Young spent most of the 1990s in Ethiopia as a professor at Addis Ababa University and doing field research in the areas of ethnic federalism, political parties, and the Ethiopian-Eritrean War. He then worked for the Canadian International Development Agency in Addis Ababa as an adviser on the Sudanese peace process. Leaving Addis, he moved to Nairobi and was assigned to work as an adviser to Ambassador Daniel Mboya, Special Envoy for Peace in Sudan for the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Secretariat. After working briefly, still in Nairobi, for the UN news agency IRIN as the head of information analysis, he took a position as a monitor with the Civilian Protection Monitoring Team (CPMT) working in South Sudan, and also briefly with the African Union Cease Fire Commission, for the next two years.

Since leaving the CPMT in October 2004 he has lived in Khartoum, working as an independent consultant and carrying out academic research in the areas of peace, security, and regional relations. Young has written *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia* (Cambridge University Press, 1997) and published widely in academic journals. His most recent publications are on the South Sudan Defense Forces (SSDF), an analysis of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), a consideration of the legacy of John Garang, and a review of the regional security implications of the conflict in eastern Sudan.

Abstract

The economy and culture of the Nilotic people of southern Sudan are based on cattle. Protecting that precious asset is a central concern, particularly among youth in the cattle camps. With the intensification of the southern civil war in the early 1990s, the youth of Nuerland began acquiring large numbers of modern small arms and light weapons, which allowed them to protect community property and obtain cattle and other goods from their neighbours. Another consequence of arms acquisition was the youth's increasing involvement in broader South-South and North-South conflicts. As a result, cattle camps were transformed into a 'white army' that was generally aligned with the Khartoum government via the forces of Dr Riek Machar, which had broken from Dr John Garang's mainline SPLM/A in 1991. This phenomenon was felt most strongly among the Lou Nuer of central Upper Nile, whose limited access to grazing lands forced them to regularly move their cattle into the lands of their neighbours. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on 9 January 2005, the SPLM/A's need to eliminate competing armed groups set the stage for a struggle for dominance in central Upper Nile from December 2005–May 2006. The result was the destruction of the white army resulting in the loss of many lives, the destitution of the community, and the break-down of civil order and traditional authority in Nuerland.

I. Introduction

Throughout southern Sudan local armed groups have emerged to protect their communities, cattle, and property. Typically these groups have been tribally based, defensive, transitory, and without ideologies or long-term objectives. The arrival of government armies to fight the southern rebellion also served as a stimulus for local armed group formation. In some instances cattle rustling such as practiced by armed groups among the Murle and Toposa has been of a predatory character, but in general local level groups in the South have been defensive rather than offensive. A striking exception was the Nuer 'white army' of central and eastern Upper Nile.¹ Like other local armed groups, the white army was primarily concerned with defending cattle and community property. But in contrast to similar groups in other areas its members became active participants in the civil war. Moreover, while most local armed groups remained under community control, the white army increasingly became an independent force that was at times highly destructive of the community from which it emerged.

The group thrived under the chaotic conditions of civil war in the South but the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 9 January 2005 put conditions in place that would bring its existence to an end.² Under the terms of the CPA the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) was granted a hegemonic position in the South and it could not permit competing armed groups. Some sections of the white army, typically those that were still under a measure of community influence, recognized the new reality and either joined the SPLA or disarmed, while other sections fought the SPLA and were slaughtered in fierce fighting that ended in May 2006 in the Lou Nuer lands of central and northern Jonglei state.

There is little doubt that the white army's capacity to challenge the SPLA has ended, but some of the conditions that produced this organization still exist. To stave off the re-emergence of a white army that is a threat to civil order, a number of important conditions need to be met. Of high importance is the

successful integration into the SPLA of former enemies like the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) supported South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF),³ as well as the establishment of viable systems of local government that respond to the needs of the disaffected and violent youth who made up the white army. Given previous SAF support of the white army and continuing assistance to some SSDF elements that remained aligned with Khartoum, there is reason to think that it would again assist armed groups that emerge to challenge the SPLM/A in the future.

The white army has not been the focus of widespread academic research. Apart from a handful of journalistic reports, the only substantive academic writing research on the group is a study by Arild Skedsmo on small arms in Nuer society (Skedsmo, 2003). That study, like the present one, relies on the foundational work of Sharon Hutchinson, the foremost contemporary authority on the Nuer.⁴ Given the lack of secondary literature, the current report is primarily based on field investigations conducted in Upper Nile during two visits in February–March and August–September 2006. 📄

II. Origins

Dating the original formation of the white army is not easy. Neither Evans-Pritchard in his classic study of the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard, 1940), nor Sharon Hutchinson, who conducted her research in the 1980s, refers to the white army by name (Hutchinson, 1996). But if its formation can only be dated to recent times, its roots can be understood through the central place that cattle have among the agro-pastoralist Nuer and the significance of the cattle camp in which boys spend a great part of their lives. It was in this environment that the widely-recognized martial values of the Nuer took form and found expression in boasts about bravery, cattle raiding, and the absorption of new lands and neighbouring peoples. Another factor in the emergence of the white army, at least in eastern Upper Nile, was the proximity of the Ethiopian frontier, which produced a high degree of lawlessness and banditry during the nineteenth century that neither the Mahdist regime (1881–1898), nor the imperial government Ethiopia, had the capacity to control.

The British colonial administration, which began with the defeat of the Mahdi's army on the plains of Omdurman in 1898, was slow to exert its power over the Nuer. Instability in the east increased in the early years of the twentieth century when the Anuak began acquiring modern weapons along the border and this encouraged demand among their neighbours, the Nuer (Hutchinson, 1996). This in turn explains the greater availability of weapons in eastern Upper Nile than in western Upper Nile where the white army did not develop. The gun trade was such that even the establishment of a British base in the Gambella province of Ethiopia, positioned to regulate the growing trade in ivory and cattle and bring order to the frontier, could not contain the cross-border traffic in weapons. Nevertheless, according to Skedsmo, traditional weapons were still more important in Nuer society than modern weapons as late as the onset of the second Sudanese civil war in 1983 (Skedsmo, 2003).

Banditry thrived where the central administration was non-existent. Unregulated areas also provided a suitable environment for the emergence and

operation of insurrectionary groups. While the Upper Nile region did not figure prominently in Sudan's first civil war (1955–1972), it was the location of first rebellions of the late 1970s that prefigured the second civil war.⁵ The proximity to Ethiopia and the support of the *Derg*, or military regime, for the SPLM/A meant ongoing in-flows of arms. As a result, at Itang and other refugee camps in Gambella, southern Sudanese were mobilized and recruited by the SPLM/A, which largely controlled these camps and provided weapons supplied by the Ethiopian army.

The major stimulus for conflict in eastern Upper Nile, and for the establishment of the white army, was the 1991 split within the SPLM/A. Dr Riek Machar, a Nuer from western Upper Nile, and Dr Lam Akol, a Shilluk from eastern Upper Nile, broke from the SPLM/A, which they considered to be dominated by the Dinka, suffering from the authoritarianism of Dr. John Garang, and not sufficiently committed to the popular demand for southern self-determination for the South (Young, 2003). Their response was to promise a new era of internal democracy and a clear commitment to southern self-determination. While there is reason to think that this programme more closely resembled the views of ordinary southern Sudanese than Garang's agenda, Riek and Lam did not have the same access to supplies and weapons as Garang, even after the latter lost his main supply base in Ethiopia upon the collapse of the *Derg*.

Risking military defeat, Riek and Lam increasingly turned for support to the SAF, which was eager to encourage the splinter group as a means of weakening the insurrection in the South. Although it was not until 1992 that a political agreement was signed between what became known as the Nasir Faction and the Government of Sudan (GoS), there is reason to believe that the SAF had begun to supply Riek's forces with large quantities of weapons before that date. The precise numbers of weapons provided is not known, but at least one authoritative source—Major-General Clement Wani, the current governor of Central Equatoria and an experienced military leader—claims that Riek received more than 10,000 weapons from SAF.⁶ Some of these weapons were given away and others sold, primarily to purchase food, but the exact proportions are not known. It is clear, however, that the primary recipients of the weapons among the civilian population were the youth of the cattle camps. In the first instance, these weapons were deemed necessary to protect community cattle from the

SPLA, which was increasingly moving into the area, and against traditional enemies such as Murle cattle rustlers. The weapons also fed intra-Nuer conflicts. In particular, the guns featured in the conflict between the Lou Nuer of central Upper Nile and the Jikaan Nuer from eastern Upper Nile, during the Lou's seasonal migration with their cattle to the grazing lands and water of the Sobat River.

It was during this period that the white army emerged as a distinct entity. The name appears to derive from the physical appearance of Nuer cattle camp youth who typically cover themselves with light-coloured ash as a protection against bugs.⁷ Skedsmo, however, claims that the term was meant to distinguish them from the SAF. Membership in the white army was never formalized but was simply based on being a civilian and owning a modern weapon—usually an assault rifle (Skedsmo, 2003).

But if the white army was largely concerned with protecting its cattle—and perhaps using their weapons to steal cows from its neighbours—Riek had larger political and military ambitions. With the defeat of John Garang's Torit Faction as his goal, he appears to have concluded that the most promising way was to harness the disparate forces of the white army to attack the Bor Dinka. Riek's strategy was to strike at the heartland of the SPLM/A and expose Garang's inability to defend his own community. While there is little reason to think that the youth of the white army would be impressed by such lofty objectives, they would well understand that such an attack on a largely civilian target offered the prospect of acquiring vast wealth in cattle. Hence, while Riek's regular armed forces under leaders such as Simon Gatwath led the assault,⁸ they were backed by large numbers from the newly formed white army, most of whom came from the Lou Nuer. These youth were neighbours to the Bor Dinka and traditionally grazed their cattle on the Bor Dinka lands during the dry season. In the two decades of the civil war, the attack on the Bor Dinka remains one of the two greatest humanitarian disasters to have taken place (the other disaster being the deliberately motivated or politically induced Wau famine of 1988). Many thousands of people may have been killed, almost all civilians and the majority of them Bor Dinka. Property was looted on a massive scale and hundreds of thousands of cattle were either killed or taken north by the victorious Nuer.

Garang suffered a major military reversal, but it was not enough to defeat the Torit Faction. In time it was recognised that Riek suffered an even greater loss. After the attack of such enormous proportions on the Bor Dinka, Riek forfeited any claims to serve as the leader of the South. As a result, the Nasir Faction became increasingly dependent on the GoS, losing its legitimacy in the process. Since the white army did not have any political ambitions and offered no sign of remorse for its role in the massacre, it can be surmised that it viewed the attack as a success. Certainly its fighters and the communities they came from were enriched by the loot and the cattle. The attack, however, poisoned relations between the neighbouring tribes, weakened the opposition to the North, and left a deep, unresolved legacy. 🗨️

III. Organization, leadership, and capacity

The white army was an almost exclusively Nuer organization made up of members of the Lou and Gawaar clans of central Upper Nile, the Jikan in eastern Upper Nile, and the small Duk clan of the Dinka, who are culturally close to the Nuer. All Nuer society is based on the central place of cattle and the cattle camp, and martial values are highly espoused by all Nuer. The question arises, then, why the white army only took form among these particular clans. This point requires further research, but it is possible to speculate on a number of likely factors.

Gun carrying among Nuer youth is most common in central and eastern Upper Nile, though it is by no means uncommon in other parts of Nuerland. The longer history of arms proliferation and the lawlessness of lands on the Ethiopian frontier are partly responsible for this disparity. Another probable reason, particularly in western Upper Nile, is the resistance of tribal leaders to youth acquiring weapons on a large scale. It would appear that the traditional authorities were strong enough to oppose the development of the white army in their lands.

It is also significant that although Riek's home is in Leer in western Upper Nile, he did not distribute weapons there on the same scale as in the east and to the southern Upper Nile. These latter lands were closer to the Bor Dinka heartland of the SPLM/A, and they therefore became the frontline between the Nasir and Torit factions—and possibly this, too, was a factor.

Another possible reason for the fact that the Lou, Gawaar, and Duk formed the vast majority of the white army is that they were forced to take their cattle further afield for grazing and watering, the stresses of which may have produced a more aggressive state of mind. Certainly, the Lou stand out among the Nuer for their lack of dry season grazing land and water.

Although Nuer society is highly decentralized, it is clear that the white army had the capacity to bring together large numbers of armed men, on occasion reaching far beyond their native villages for support. It is also known that

Nuer society, which Pritchard describes as ‘organized anarchy’, was able to absorb vast lands and peoples in the 19th century—it is believed that the Nuer ranked second only to the Zulus in their acquisition of land before the British colonial administration was able to contain them (Kelly, 1985). What is less understandable from the historical literature, or from the experience of the white army, is how the Nuer were able to overcome their tendency to engage in local conflicts to operate in local structures and produce strong organizations for self-defence and offensive purposes. There are, however, some clues. First, it would appear that most of the territory was captured as a result of local raids, and that there was a willingness to assimilate and respect the conquered people. Second, the larger attacks, such as occurred in Bor, were clearly the exception and were invariably followed by a return to local disputes. Third, the large scale attacks were always organised and led by other more conventional armed groups. It was Riek’s officers, and not the leaders of the white army, who directed the attack on Bor Dinka and provided the logistical support.⁹

Although this report refers to the white army (singular), it is clear that there were many white armies and that only in isolated instances were multiple components under one leadership. In the absence of any separate military structures, the cattle camp served as the nucleus of the army. Initially, the white army components were closely linked to the community and responsible to the traditional authorities who prized the youth’s role in protecting the community’s cattle. Over time, however, power passed from the chiefs to the white army youth. While initially acknowledging the authority of their paramount chiefs, the youth grew increasingly independent from them—and this seems due to their ability to acquire weapons without their sanction of the chiefs.¹⁰

Without tradition or education as a basis for leadership, and because so few of the white army soldiers had military training, leaders were selected according to their capacity to control the disorderly youth, for their proficiency as marksmen, and their bravery in battle. Under such a regime, and in the absence of a system of rank, leaders rarely held their positions for long. Because the white army depended on leadership drawn from the same class as its members, it could neither progress beyond the cattle camp nor develop a greater vision. It was never a standing force but rather came together for short

periods of time for defensive or offensive purposes, after which members returned to the cattle camps. While embracing martial values, which were in any case held by the broader community, the force never advanced beyond the status of a militia, except in its final days among the Lou Nuer, when the result was its complete destruction.

Nevertheless, the group’s leadership, organisation, and vision limitations also ensured its relative independence. It was loyal only to the values of the community and the desire of its members for wealth and status, seen largely in terms of guns, wives, and cattle. Although some individual members may have been motivated by broader ideologies, and some did join the SPLA, the white army developed only tactical—never strategic—relations with other armed groups. Even then it was only to gain short-term benefits. The white army stands in contrast to the militias of Equatoria which eventually developed subordinate relations with the SAF and became elements of the SSDF, an umbrella group of southern armed groups that had its origins in the Nasir Faction (Young, 2006). Thus, its inherent structural weaknesses, and the deeply held Nuer fears of falling under the control of other groups, protected the white army from being absorbed into larger and more dynamic groups.

The status of the white army improved because different armed groups competed for its support. As noted above, it was Riek’s Nasir faction that essentially established and then courted the white army. The SPLA also attempted at various times to develop local alliances with the group. The Nasir Faction evolved into the SSDF, which became the dominant force in eastern Upper Nile (Young, 2006). Both the SPLA and the SSDF distributed weapons to the white army, and individuals from their ranks also sold their personal weapons for enrichment or, more commonly, in exchange for food. There are many known cases of individual Nuer, and no doubt members of other tribes, joining armed groups in order to acquire weapons and military training and then deserting. Since these weapons were increasingly acquired without the sanction of the traditional authorities, this undermined these authorities and enhanced the status of the individual gun owners and the white army. The members of the white army did not operate entirely outside community influence, however, since it appears they were strongly influenced by prophets respected by the Nuer, such as Mun Deng, the great nineteenth century prophet, as well as contemporary seers.¹¹

Because the white army was never a standing force and its membership was in a state of constant flux, estimates of its numbers are not very useful. Numerous interviewees in eastern and central Upper Nile have however stated that at various times it could mobilize more armed men than either the SAF or the SPLA. This would have made it a formidable force, even if it lacked heavy weaponry, logistical support, or sometimes military training.¹² In the competition for support from the white army between the SSDF and the SPLA, the SSDF won out, in essence, because it provided more weapons. But while several SSDF leaders such as Chayout in Longochok, Gordon Kong in Nasir, Chol Gaga in Mading, the South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) military leader Timothy Taban Juch in Akobo, and Simon Gatwetch in Yuai were able to develop alliances with the white army, they were never enduring.

The most striking examples of the white army in action took place in Mading, about 60 kilometres north of Nasir, and in Akobo.¹³ Both of these villages changed hands roughly six times over the two to three years prior to the signing of the CPA, and it appears that the SPLA was briefly displaced from Akobo even after the advent of the peace agreement. In each instance the SSDF and the SPLA bargained for the support of the white army and in both cases these allegiances were cemented with promises to the armed youth that they could loot the towns once they had been captured. 📄

IV. Decline and collapse

The decline and collapse of the white army appears to have been caused by long-term changes within Nuer society as well as short-term political and military developments, notably the advent of the CPA, the Juba Declaration,¹⁴ and the SPLA's disarmament campaign of December 2005 to May 2006.

As noted above, the rise of the white army was a factor in the decline of traditional authority, and this produced growing resentment within the Nuer community. While Jikan Nuer elders along the Sobat River called the members of the white army 'our sons' when interviewed in February 2006, they also acknowledged that they had no control over the gun-bearing youth. They and others also complained about the increasing instability of daily life in which armed youth were rarely challenged when they stole cattle (often to pay dowries), killed one another and innocent bystanders in disputes, and committed rape. Those interviewed in villages along the river also said that with the end of the southern civil war that there was no reason for the continuing existence of the white army.¹⁵

During interviews carried out in Waat in central Upper Nile in 2002, Skedsmo found considerable ambivalence towards the white army: on the one hand they appreciated the accomplishment and bravery of the armed youth in protecting the community from Murle raiders and the SSDF, while on the other hand they complained about the youth's aggressive, disrespectful, foolish, and irresponsible behaviour (Skedsmo, 2003). Interviews carried out for this report in the Motot area, which is only about five kilometres from Waat, three months after the end of the SPLA's disarmament campaign,¹⁶ found even more negative attitudes to the white army. Also striking was how much more harshly the Lou spoke of the armed youth than their Jikan counterparts along the Sobat River. No one in the Motot area spoke of 'our sons' and instead complained bitterly of virtual anarchy under the white army. Indeed, the population supported the SPLA disarmament campaign in the area even though it resulted in hundreds of deaths among the armed youth, the loss of most of their cattle,

and left the community facing starvation because the fighting prevented the planting of crops. Societal stress—and even break-down—was thus a major reason for increasing disenchantment with the white army.

Changing attitudes to weapons also figure in the explanation for the decline of the white army. While Hutchinson writes that considerable prestige was attached to weapons at the time of her research in Nuerland in the 1980s, Skedsmo found increasingly negative attitudes to weapons when he conducted research in eastern Upper Nile in 2002. On the surface, the explanation might lie in the decline in the price of weapons from about twelve cows in 1981 to four cows in 2002, but Skedsmo notes that this is still a relatively high price given the drastic reduction in the size of herds over that time (Skedsmo, 2003). This suggests another reason for the decline in prestige associated with weapons: if they were acquired originally to protect the community's cattle, they had proven a failure.

Developments outside the community were taking place that would lead to the destruction of the white army, even if its members had scant knowledge of them. The first was the signing of the CPA on 9 January 2005. The white army had emerged and developed under conditions of war and the CPA heralded the end of that war. In particular, the CPA's security arrangements stipulated that only two armed groups—the SPLA and the SAF—would be allowed to remain in operation in South Sudan.¹⁷ This provision set the SSDF on the road to the Juba Declaration of 8 January 2006 and its absorption into the SPLA.¹⁸ The virtual collapse of the SSDF meant that the white army lost its principal backer in the field. Moreover, with the apparent success of the Juba Declaration, the SPLA was anxious to eliminate other armed groups in the South.¹⁹ Some groups that still had close relations with SAF—such as the rump SSDF, the Popular Defence Force, and northern tribal factions that transited the South—had to be dealt with less precipitously because rash action might disrupt the peace process. But the white army was a home-grown organization with no formal relations with the SAF, and disposing of it would not complicate relations with the GoS.

The SPLA thus targeted the white army for elimination and the method was to be civilian disarmament. SPLM/A rhetoric in late 2005, which was echoed in the countryside, held that 'we are killing ourselves', referring to a host of

internal southern conflicts but in particular to those involving the Lou Nuer fighting with their neighbours.²⁰ The fact that the white army of the Lou had a particularly close relationship with the SSDF through Simon Gatwich (a Lou Nuer from Yuai and a senior official in the SPLA) may have also figured in the calculations. Gatwich and many other SSDF leaders who joined the SPLA as a result of the Juba Declaration argued that revenge for the 1991 attack on the Bor Dinka was also involved in what turned out to be an extremely violent civilian disarmament campaign among the Lou Nuer.²¹

The relative ease with which disarmament was carried out among some Dinka groups can be explained by the limited number of weapons in their possession and the greater level of trust that they put in the SPLA. More difficult to explain is the contrast between the relatively peaceful disarmament carried out among the eastern Jikan Nuer and the extremely violent incidents among the Lou. Almost all of the Jikan interviewed in February 2006 for this report were very unhappy with the SPLA disarmament because they felt it exposed them to their tribal enemies, from whom the SPLA could offer no protection. Further, they complained that neighbouring tribes should have been disarmed at the same time. Nevertheless, most of them grudgingly turned over their weapons to the SPLA.

The reaction of the Lou branches of the white army was much different. A Pact-Sudan team investigating the disarmament in Jonglei attributed the greater violence in the area to isolation and a lack of knowledge among the Lou of the CPA (Pact-Sudan, 9 May 2006), but it is likely that the Lou were told repeatedly about the security provisions of the peace agreement during the course of the campaign. Before the disarmament campaign devolved into major fighting with the SPLA, a Lou killed Wutnyong, then a SPLA officer and a Gawaar Nuer prophet who had previously been highly influential among the white army and had even supplied them with weapons, according to Pact. Later, Riek Machar announced dissolution of the white army after many failed efforts to convince the armed youth to peacefully turn over their weapons to the SPLA. His words, just like those of Wutnyong, were ignored.

The Lou white army fought the SPLA until the bitter end, which for many members meant their own deaths and the destruction of their cattle herds. By mid-2006 the economy was in tatters and their society was in crisis. Indeed,

these last campaigns made clear that through trickery, surprise attacks, and considerable courage, the youth of the white army could pose a serious short-term challenge to the soldiers of the SPLA. In sustained warfare, however, the discipline, superior leadership, and better application of tactics and strategy won out. In the last significant battle in late May 2006, local sources in Motot reported that the SPLA lost one soldier against 113 white army members.²² With this defeat, the disillusioned youth again looted its own community before fleeing the area. 🗨️

V. Conclusion

The emergence and development of the white army was a product both of internal developments in Nuer society and external developments, in particular the impacts of the second southern civil war. The proliferation of small arms was a factor in the rise of the white army and the SPLA 2006 disarmament campaign in Jonglei state was premised on the need to eliminate their arms holdings. It is almost certain, however, that only a fraction of the weapons was actually seized by the SPLA. This has led to speculation—considered credible by the author—that the smashing of the white army, which had challenged the SPLA’s claim to a monopoly of weapons, was the real motivation for the disarmament campaign. In this context, the absorption of the SSDF into the SPLA was part of the same effort to eliminate any armed challengers to SPLM/A hegemony in the South. In both cases the SPLA was largely successful—at least in the short-term. The SPLA leadership is committed to the disarming the remaining armed civilians, ideally peacefully but, if not, then by force.

After the defeat of the white army and the absorption of most of the SSDF, the SPLA must now fully and satisfactorily integrate these groups and respond positively to their concerns. At the time of writing (March 2007) the continuing delays in integrating the SSDF are cause for concern. Should elements of the SSDF begin drifting back to the SAF camp, instability could again return to Upper Nile. Moreover, the pacification of South Sudan has brought the social crises within Lou and other peoples increasingly to the fore. Most urgently, the defeat of the white army has involved the virtual destruction of the local economy. The SPLM does not have the capacity to pick up the pieces and so that task will fall to the international community.

Even if the crisis can be managed, however, regenerating the Lou and other Nuer societies, which have been shaken to the core, will be a task of monumental proportions. Rehabilitating and educating the disaffected and violent youth of the former white army should be central to these efforts. But the extent of the crisis must be acknowledged and then dealt with holistically. It is doubtful that

the SPLM/A is up to this task. It is unlikely that key elements of the international community—in particular, the DDR unit of UNMIS which, although based in the South, largely sat on the sidelines during the violent disarmament campaign—fully appreciates the extent of the problem, or has the will or capacity to respond effectively. There is also the need to move beyond the SPLA’s military administration and establish viable and accountable systems of local civilian administration. To the extent that the white army is defined solely as a security problem there is a danger that its destruction will mean that attention is diverted elsewhere. A failure to confront effectively the disaffection, poverty, and lack of opportunities available to the Nuer and other groups that produced the white army could give rise to a new cycle of violence that the CPA was meant to end. 📄

Endnotes

- 1 Within the current administrative divisions of Sudan, ‘Upper Nile’ corresponds to the eastern lands roughly covering the states of Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Blue Nile.
- 2 The text of the CPA is available at <<http://www.unmis.org/English/documents/cpa-en.pdf>>.
- 3 For an account of the challenges facing the integration of the SSDF, see Young (2006).
- 4 Most importantly, Hutchinson (1996).
- 5 See Young (2006). The start of the second civil war is usually dated to 1983.
- 6 Author interview with Maj.-Gen. Clement Wani, governor of Central Equatoria, Juba, 16 August 2006.
- 7 Author interview with Simon Gatwitch, a Lou Nuer from Yuai and a former senior official in the SPLA, Juba, 12 August 2006.
- 8 Author interview with Simon Gatwitch, Juba, 12 August 2006.
- 9 Author interview with Simon Gatwitch, Juba, 12 August 2006.
- 10 Author interviews with unnamed members of the white army in Melut and Nasir, 21 and 24 February 2006.
- 11 Author interviews in Nuerland, February and August 2006.
- 12 Author interviews in Nuerland, February and August 2006.
- 13 See <<http://www.cpmtsudan>>.
- 14 The text of the Juba Declaration is available at <<http://www.iss.co.za/af/profiles/sudan/darfur/jubadecljan06.pdf>>.
- 15 Author interviews with villagers along the Sobat River, 14–15 February 2006.
- 16 See Small Arms Survey (2006) for a more detailed discussion of the SPLA’s disarmament campaign in Jonglei.
- 17 See the CPA’s Agreement on Security Arrangements, para 7(a).
- 18 See Young (2006).
- 19 A forthcoming HSBA study by the same author will address emerging border conflict in South Sudan.
- 20 With the signing of the CPA, SPLM/A began emphasizing the need for disarmament of the civilian population under the slogan that ‘we are killing ourselves’.
- 21 Author interview with Simon Gatwitch, Juba 12 August 2006. In a previous paper on the Jonglei disarmament by the same author, the claim that revenge for the 1991 massacre was the motivator for the harsh campaign is rejected. However, the possibility remains that once the disarmament campaign got underway, producing considerable resistance and the deaths of hundreds of SPLA soldiers, old wounds were opened and revenge became a factor in what followed. See Small Arms Survey (2006) and Young (2006).
- 22 Author interview with SPLM local administration, Motot, 25 August 2006.

Bibliography

- Evans-Pritchard, Edward. 1940. *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hutchinson, Sharon. 1996. *Nuer Dilemmas: Coping with Money, War, and the State*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kelly, Raymond. 1985. *The Nuer Conquest: The Structure and Development of an Expansionist System*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Pact-Sudan. 2006. *April Summary Situation Report on Upper Nile*. 9 May.
- Small Arms Survey. 2006. *Anatomy of civilian disarmament in Jonglei state: recent experiences and implications*. HSBA Issue Brief No. 3. Geneva: Small Arms Survey.
- Skedsmo, Arild. 2003. 'The Changing Meaning of Small Arms in Nuer Society.' *African Security Study Review*, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 57–68.
- Young, John. 2003. 'Sudan: Liberation Movements, Regional Armies, Ethnic Militias & Peace.' *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 30, No. 97, pp. 423–34.
- . 2006. *The South Sudan Defence Forces in the Wake of the Juba Declaration*. HSBA Working Paper No. 1. Geneva: Small Arms Survey.

HSBA publications

Sudan Issue Briefs

Number 1, September 2006

Persistent threats: widespread human insecurity in Lakes State, South Sudan, since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (also available in Arabic)

Number 2, October 2006

Armed groups in Sudan: the South Sudan Defence Forces in the aftermath of the Juba Declaration (also available in Arabic)

Number 3 (2nd edition), November 2006–February 2007

Anatomy of civilian disarmament in Jonglei State: recent experiences and implications (also available in Arabic)

Number 4, December 2006

No dialogue, no commitment: the perils of deadline diplomacy for Darfur (also available in Arabic)

Number 5, January 2007

A widening war around Sudan: the proliferation of armed groups in the Central African Republic (also available in Arabic and French)

Number 6, April 2007

The militarization of Sudan: a preliminary review of arms flows and holdings

Sudan Working Papers

Number 1, November 2006

The South Sudan Defence Forces in the Wake of the Juba Declaration,
by John Young

Number 2, February 2007

Violence and Victimization in South Sudan: Lakes State in the Post-CPA period,
by Richard Garfield

Number 3, May 2007

The Eastern Front and the Struggle against Marginalization, by John Young

Number 4, May 2007

Border in Name Only: Arms Trafficking and Armed Groups at the DRC–Sudan Border,
by Joshua Marks

Small Arms Survey Occasional Papers

- 1 *Re-Armament in Sierra Leone: One Year After the Lomé Peace Agreement*,
by Eric Berman, December 2000
- 2 *Removing Small Arms from Society: A Review of Weapons Collection and
Destruction Programmes*, by Sami Faltas, Glenn McDonald, and Camilla
Waszink, July 2001
- 3 *Legal Controls on Small Arms and Light Weapons in Southeast Asia*,
by Katherine Kramer (with Nonviolence International Southeast Asia),
July 2001
- 4 *Shining a Light on Small Arms Exports: The Record of State Transparency*,
by Maria Haug, Martin Langvandslien, Lora Lumpe, and Nic Marsh
(with NISAT), January 2002
- 5 *Stray Bullets: The Impact of Small Arms Misuse in Central America*, by William
Godnick, with Robert Muggah and Camilla Waszink, November 2002
- 6 *Politics from the Barrel of a Gun: Small Arms Proliferation and Conflict in the
Republic of Georgia*, by Spyros Demetriou, November 2002
- 7 *Making Global Public Policy: The Case of Small Arms and Light Weapons*,
by Edward Laurance and Rachel Stohl, December 2002
- 8 *Small Arms in the Pacific*, by Philip Alpers and Conor Twyford, March 2003
- 9 *Demand, Stockpiles, and Social Controls: Small Arms in Yemen*, by Derek B.
Miller, May 2003
- 10 *Beyond the Kalashnikov: Small Arms Production, Exports, and Stockpiles in the
Russian Federation*, by Maxim Pyadushkin, with Maria Haug and Anna
Matveeva, August 2003
- 11 *In the Shadow of a Cease-fire: The Impacts of Small Arms Availability and
Misuse in Sri Lanka*, by Chris Smith, October 2003
- 12 *Small Arms in Kyrgyzstan: Post-revolutionary Proliferation*, by S. Neil Mac-
Farlane and Stina Torjesen, March 2007, ISBN 2-8288-0076-8 (first printed as
Kyrgyzstan: A Small Arms Anomaly in Central Asia?, by S. Neil MacFarlane
and Stina Torjesen, February 2004)

- 13 *Small Arms and Light Weapons Production in Eastern, Central, and Southeast Europe*, by Yudit Kiss, October 2004, ISBN 2-8288-0057-1
- 14 *Securing Haiti's Transition: Reviewing Human Insecurity and the Prospects for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration*, by Robert Muggah, October 2005, updated, ISBN 2-8288-0066-0
- 15 *Silencing Guns: Local Perspectives on Small Arms and Armed Violence in Rural South Pacific Islands Communities*, edited by Emile LeBrun and Robert Muggah, June 2005, ISBN 2-8288-0064-4
- 16 *Behind a Veil of Secrecy: Military Small Arms and Light Weapons Production in Western Europe*, by Reinhilde Weidacher, November 2005, ISBN 2-8288-0065-2
- 17 *Tajikistan's Road to Stability: Reduction in Small Arms Proliferation and Remaining Challenges*, by Stina Torjesen, Christina Wille, and S. Neil MacFarlane, November 2005, ISBN 2-8288-0067-9
- 18 *Demanding Attention: Addressing the Dynamics of Small Arms Demand*, by David Atwood, Anne-Kathrin Glatz, and Robert Muggah, January 2006, ISBN 2-8288-0069-5
- 19 *A Guide to the US Small Arms Market, Industry, and Exports, 1998–2004*, by Tamar Gabelnick, Maria Haug, and Lora Lumpe, September 2006, ISBN 2-8288-0071-7

Small Arms Survey Special Reports

- 1 *Humanitarianism Under Threat: The Humanitarian Impact of Small Arms and Light Weapons*, by Robert Muggah and Eric Berman, commissioned by the Reference Group on Small Arms of the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee, July 2001
- 2 *Small Arms Availability, Trade, and Impacts in the Republic of Congo*, by Spyros Demetriou, Robert Muggah, and Ian Biddle, commissioned by the International Organisation for Migration and the UN Development Programme, April 2002
- 3 *Kosovo and the Gun: A Baseline Assessment of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Kosovo*, by Anna Khakee and Nicolas Florquin, commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme, June 2003
- 4 *A Fragile Peace: Guns and Security in Post-conflict Macedonia*, by Suzette R. Grillot, Wolf-Christian Paes, Hans Risser, and Shelly O. Stoneman, commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme, and co-published by the Bonn International Center for Conversion, SEESAC in Belgrade, and the Small Arms Survey, June 2004, ISBN 2-8288-0056-3
- 5 *Gun-running in Papua New Guinea: From Arrows to Assault Weapons in the Southern Highlands*, by Philip Alpers, June 2005, ISBN 2-8288-0062-8
- 6 *La République Centrafricaine: Une étude de cas sur les armes légères et les conflits*, by Eric G. Berman, published with financial support from UNDP, July 2006, ISBN 2-8288-0073-3
- 7 *Small Arms in Burundi: Disarming the Civilian Population in Peacetime*, by Stéphanie Pézard and Nicolas Florquin, co-published with Ligue Iteka with support from UNDP–Burundi and Oxfam–NOVIB, in English and French, ISBN 2-8288-0080-6

Small Arms Survey Book Series

Armed and Aimless: Armed Groups, Guns, and Human Security in the ECOWAS Region, edited by Nicolas Florquin and Eric G. Berman, May 2005, ISBN 2-8288-0063-6

Armés mais désœuvrés: Groupes armés, armes légères et sécurité humaine dans la région de la CEDEAO, edited by Nicolas Florquin and Eric Berman, co-published with GRIP, March 2006, ISBN 2-87291-023-9

Targeting Ammunition: A Primer, edited by Stéphanie Pézard and Holger Anders, co-published with CICS, GRIP, SEESAC, and Viva Rio, June 2006, ISBN 2-8288-0072-5

No Refuge: The Crisis of Refugee Militarization in Africa, edited by Robert Muggah, co-published with BICC, published by Zed Books, July 2006, ISBN 1-84277-789-0