



Peter Gadet's Rebellion

Peter Gadet Yak,¹ a key Khartoum-backed Southern militia leader who fought the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) during the civil war but was integrated into the Southern army as a major general following the 2006 Juba Declaration, is the latest SPLA official to abandon his post and declare an armed revolt against the SPLM/A. In the past month, Peter has proved that his new militia is capable of posing a direct threat to security and stability in already volatile Unity state. Because of his strong record as a field commander and the popular support he enjoys in parts of Unity, he has also effectively challenged the SPLA's monopoly on violence there and in neighbouring states.

Wartime background

Peter, from Mayom county, played a leading role in the South Sudan Unity Movement/Army (SSUM/A), a militia founded and led by Paulino Matiep in Bentiu that merged with the Khartoum-supported South Sudan Defense Forces (SSDF) following the Khartoum Peace Agreement of 1997. Though it became highly fragmented, with rival militia commanders attacking each other's forces in the swamps and oil fields of what are now Unity and Upper Nile states, the SSUM was the most powerful Southern militia opposed to the SPLA during the war. It was also involved in the brutal clearing of vast tracks of Unity for oil exploration, in which Peter participated. But Peter defected from the SSUM in 1999 with a large number of troops previously loyal to Paulino, splintering that movement and temporarily severing ties with his former commander.

After the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, the 2006 Juba Declaration provided the chance for Peter to integrate into the SPLA with a high-ranking post and thousands of his men. Since then, Peter has served in senior positions in Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile states. Paulino also integrated into the SPLA and became its deputy chief of staff after the war, and relations between him and Peter reportedly improved since 2005. Both serve on the 'board' of Jarch Capital, a company run by a US investor who has acquired leases from Paulino's son of some 400,000 hectares of land in Unity for exploitation after Southern independence.²

Initial insurrection

On 28 March rumours began to circulate that Peter, while on leave in Nairobi, had defected from the SPLA and was either in negotiations to join the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) or was forming his own militia. Both the SPLA and SAF swiftly denied these rumours, while Peter himself was unavailable for comment. George Athor immediately claimed that Gadet was 'on his way' into the bush to join the South Sudan Democratic Movement, the new umbrella rebel movement George and other anti-SPLM/A militants had declared earlier in the month. Peter's spokesman, Bol Gatkouth Kol, later confirmed that Peter is coordinating with George.

Gadet's whereabouts remained unknown for nearly two weeks, until 'The Mayom Declaration' was issued on 11 April. Like the other current insurrection leaders, Peter accuses the SPLM/A of corruption and tribalism, and in his declaration, published on the *Sudan Tribune* website,³ Peter indicates his intention to bring down the SPLM-led Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA)



Southern government and to replace it with ‘national broad-based government agreed upon by all the South Sudan political parties.’ Peter criticized the SPLM's undemocratic leadership and the state of the Southern security forces, including the bloated army and the poorly trained police, and said that security ‘has broken down due to tribal and sectional fights gripping the South as the traditional leaders are deprived of their traditional authority.’ This document was also signed by a former deputy commander of the Joint Integrated Units, Brigadier General Carlo Kol, and by Peter’s spokesman Bol, himself a former member of the South Sudan Legislative Assembly, who has wartime ties to the SSDF.

Attacks and clashes, April–May 2011

On 19 April, Bol distributed a press release declaring that Peter’s new movement, called the South Sudan Liberation Army (SSLA), had taken the village of Boang in Mayom county. The same day, land mines blew up a convoy of SPLA trucks in Unity state, on the road between Mayom and Abiemnhom counties. After this attack, the SSLA stormed an army outpost in Mayom and at least 20 soldiers were killed, according to an Agence France-Press (AFP) report.

Fighting between the SPLA and Peter's new group continued in northwestern Unity between 19 and 21 April, with Peter reportedly capturing the towns of Guong and Mankien, though the SPLA denies that the latter town fell. The spokesman told AFP on 21 April that the group is already ‘in control of large areas, including the oil fields,’ while denying any links to the Missiriya, who have also clashed with the SPLA in recent days.

The next significant attack came on May 8 and 9, when local media reported that Peter’s forces had attacked in and around the village of Nyadiet in Mayom county. The Unity government’s information minister Gideon Gatpan Thoar told the *Sudan Tribune* that 38 people were killed on Sunday and another 48 on Monday during the fighting, of which 38 militiamen ‘loyal to SAF’ were killed on Sunday.⁴

Peter’s forces then became embroiled in cattle-raiding between Nuer and Dinka groups on the Warrap-Unity border in the second week of May. Warrap state authorities said that more than 30 people were killed in two separate attacks on 14 and 15 May, with Gadet loyalist militiamen raiding cattle camps across the border in Warrap from their base in Unity. The commissioner of Gogrial East county, in Warrap, told journalists that that Peter’s men attacked ‘in search for food.’⁵

Internal UN security reports from the fourth week of May raised the spectre of Peter’s militia expanding into neighbouring Warrap and Lakes states. The reports noted the warnings and outright panic of top state officials, including the governors of both states. The Warrap state governor told the UN on 26 May that she was ‘concerned about the defencelessness’ of her state to Peter’s forces, especially given the influx of displaced persons from Abyei who entered Twic County, which borders Mayom. The governor reportedly travelled to Juba on 28 May to ‘plead for GoSS [Government of South Sudan] assistance’ in defending her state.

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Fighting intensified between Peter's forces and the SPLA in the latter half of May, with civilian caught in the crossfire, further fracturing military and political loyalties in Unity. On 20 May, heavy fighting erupted in the village of Mankien, 20 km north of the town of Mayom, when Peter's forces attacked from his home village of Ruadnyibol, north of Mankien. A journalist who visited the town of Mayom on 20 May counted 25 wounded SPLA soldiers and Southern police officers in the local health clinic by midday, while fighting continued. The majority of wounds were from gunshots and mines. In the aftermath of the fighting, the Mayom county commissioner told the *Sudan Tribune* that some 7,800 huts had been burned.

SPLA response

According to a UN report dated 27 May, the SPLA initiated a new campaign against Peter's forces on 24 May along two different axes in Mayom county. Amid the insecurity, the SPLA has begun conscripting men in Unity, reportedly to make up for men lost to Peter and to prevent further young men from joining him. Morale among SPLA soldiers involved in the clashes is extremely low, with some troops attempting to refuse to participate. According to internal UN correspondence from May seen by the Small Arms Survey, the Mankien payam administrator told UN officials in Unity that the SPLA Division 4 commander gave soldiers freedom to loot all material goods and property in the areas where they were engaged, as a means of encouraging the men to fight.

The Bul Nuer community has written to top international officials, including the UN secretary-general, complaining that the SPLA extensively burned and looted homes, stole property including livestock, and shot at civilians—including children, women, and elderly people—attempting to escape the fighting in the Mankien area. The letter notes that Peter's rebellion was launched due to the mistreatment of the Bul Nuer community by the GoSS and the Unity state governments, and that the SPLA's attacks against the Bul Nuer while engaging Peter's forces is retributive. Aid groups attempting to treat wounded civilians from these attacks told the Small Arms Survey that there is intense fear among this population, some of whom refused to evacuate to the state hospital in Bentiu for fear of being attacked by government-aligned forces.

Landmine use

One of the most devastating impacts of the resurgence of violence in Unity is the re-mining of roads cleared of wartime mines by UN and international de-mining groups since 2005. The Mayom county commissioner told journalists that four police officers on the road from Mayom north to Mankien had died when they drove over landmines in May. Although both the SPLA and Peter's forces are believed to be actively laying landmines in Unity, it is more likely that Peter's forces mined this route because it is one that the SPLA had been using to reinforce its troops in Mankien. The SPLA had sent troops from a contingent in Mayom to participate in skirmishes and the all-out battle on 20 May with Peter's men in Mankien.

It is most certainly not only combatants who have been injured by the new mines. In late April, the UN declared a key road between the private airstrip of Tharjath, where



many oil companies land their planes, and the state capital a no-go route due to re-mining. According to UN sources who spoke on the condition of anonymity, UN Mine Action is reluctant to participate in further de-mining for fear that either side will follow their tracks and re-mine. On 2 June, a private truck rented by an international aid group hit a landmine on the road from Abiemnom county to Mayom; three were killed and two injured, according to an internal UN security report.

Longer-term impacts

While his stated goal is the overthrow of the GoSS, Peter’s specific other long-term ambitions are not clear. He may now be seeking to unify various armed elements opposed to the SPLA under his command. According to unconfirmed SPLA allegations, the Heglig oil fields, which border Mayom, have previously served as the hideout for other Khartoum-backed militias. According to Peter’s spokesman Bol, Gatluak Gai—who like George Athor, launched an insurrection a year ago after the disputed national elections—is now fighting under Peter’s command in Unity.

The violence has already led to the displacement of 3,800 civilians and the airlifting of some 200, though these figures do not include the impacts of the May violence. Aid and humanitarian workers worry that the violence, looting, mining of roads, and the Khartoum-imposed blockade on the South Kordofan–Abyei–Unity road in early May will combine to increase food insecurity and malnutrition in the rainy season.

At a high-level government and international community forum in mid-May to discuss the development plan for South Sudan for the coming years, Unity state governor Taban Deng said that his state, and the other states in the Greater Upper Nile region, were effectively ‘at war internally.’ The consequences of the ongoing rebellions in these areas will be far-reaching, and the ability of the GoSS and SPLA to quell Peter’s militia has already been damaged by the abusive campaigns they are conducting against the civilian populations from his ethnic group. The proximity of Peter’s forces to the tens of thousands of displaced Abyei residents now in Warrap state as well as to the disputed Heglig oil fields are further causes for concern. In the last month, Peter’s rebellion and its impacts have expanded significantly.

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¹ Peter’s name is sometimes spelled Gatdet.
² See Mc Evoy, Claire and Emile LeBrun (2009). *Uncertain Future: Armed Violence in Southern Sudan*. HSBA Working Paper 20, April, p. 36. <<http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/pdfs/HSBA-SWP-20-Armed-Violence-Southern-Sudan.pdf>>.
³ See <<http://www.sudantribune.com/The-Mayom-Declaration,38605>>.
⁴ See <<http://www.sudantribune.com/SPLA-kill-84-in-attacks-on-Gatdet,38854>>.
⁵ See <http://www.mirayafm.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5933:another-attack-in-warrap-state-&catid=85:85&Itemid=278>.