



David Yau Yau's Rebellion

David Yau Yau's re-emergence has posed 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 defected again in April 2012, resuming operations in restive Jonglei state in August 2012. His forces and mobilized Murle youth have recently attacked SPLA installations in the major centers of Likuangole, Pibor, Gumuruk, Manyabol, and Koth Char in Pibor county. At least 100 SPLA soldiers have been killed thus far.

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, key insurrection leaders, such as George Athor and Gatluak Gai, David 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 in Jonglei. He subsequently ran as an independent candidate in the state's parliamentary election for the Gumuruk-Boma constituency seat, representing Pibor county in the Jonglei State Assembly. He was defeated by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) candidate, Judy Jokongole, who reportedly won by a wide margin. A man in his thirties, Yau Yau is viewed by Murle elders and the tribe's elite as having support only among local youth, and is 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 in the Pibor county area. 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 youth who attacked Uror county in August 2011 but the Small Arms Survey has been unable to independently verify this.¹ 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 initially in September 2010, but were put on hold when he was accused of an attack in October 2010. 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 despite rumors that he would be integrated as a Major General. Yet it is unclear if he was ever integrated after accepting the government's amnesty offer.



Dynamics of the current rebellion

In April 2012, the SPLA announced that Yau Yau had again defected. An estimated 20-30 fighters suspected to be linked to Yau Yau were initially sighted in Pibor county in August 2012. Since then, it is estimated that 4,000–6,000 largely Murle youth 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. The SPLA have captured AK-47s and RPG-7s from the rebel forces, but reports suggest that they are equipped with machine guns and mortars as well. Yau Yau appears to be operating with a number of deputies with specific assigned areas of operation. Reportedly, Toposa Brigadier General Justin Lokudu and Major General James Kongkong, formerly associated with Murle leader Ismail Konyi, a senior figure in the Khartoum-aligned South Sudan Defence Forces during the civil war, are part of the command.

The GoSS alleges that the Sudanese government provides material support to Yau Yau’s rebellion, as it has supported George Athor.² On 22 September, 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. However, the Small Arms Survey has yet to verify the origin of Yau Yau’s arsenal. The scale of mobilization of youth by Yau Yau suggests that the rebellion has access to significant resources and that the rebellion has successfully capitalized on the feelings of resentment, distrust, and marginalization among the Murle population toward the army, most recently exacerbated by an abusive SPLA disarmament campaign.

An SPLA-led disarmament campaign has exacerbated relations between the army, Yau Yau’s cause, and the local Murle population. Launched across Jonglei in March 2012, the campaign was associated with a widespread, documented abuses in Murle areas. From mid-March to 31 August 2012, Medecins Sans Frontières’ (MSF) standard data reporting from clinics in Pibor, Likuangole, and Gumuruk showed that MSF treated 96 patients 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, the perception at the local level is that the military has acted with impunity against the civilian population, who feel that they are being punished on account of 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 youth 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 youth involved with the escalation of violence in Pibor county (see below) are believed to come from the youngest Bototnya 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 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 rocket-propelled grenades (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, but on 30 September they attacked an SPLA garrison in Likuangole, resulting in a battle that lasted several hours. 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 forces reportedly occupied the payam headquarters, the airport, school, and market. Between 6-7 October Yau Yau forces again attacked the SPLA installation in Gumuruk. On 8 October, the SPLA sent reinforcements from Pibor to Gumuruk, launching an attack on rebel forces 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 between rebels and SPLA 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 forces ordering the mission to evacuate. Because Yau Yau 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 and may be exacerbated this 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. Local officials have accused Yau Yau affiliated youth for conducting these raids, 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. This is the first large defection since Yau Yau's re-emergence, and may reflect a growing inability to supply his forces with food and ammunition.



South Sudan government response and civilian impact

Following the group's initial successes against the SPLA, the army has 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. The SPLA says that it will go on the offensive when the dry season arrives in late December or January. SPLA reinforcements have already arrived in Manyabol. Maj. Gen. Stephen Marshall, a Murle SPLA veteran, has been placed in charge of operations against Yau Yau.

The GoSS and SPLA have also pursued a political strategy of both isolating Yau Yau's rebellion from popular, grassroots support and extending an offer of 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, have traveled to Pibor to convince the population to resist mobilization and re-arming. 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. The letter states that the presidential amnesty offered in July 2011 continues to extend to Yau Yau. The government has not received a response.

A key challenge for the SPLA will be to distinguish between civilians, armed civilians, and Yau Yau forces if and when the military begins its counter-insurgency. An indiscriminant campaign that targets the Murle population as a whole may undercut the political work in play since August and may exacerbate the rebellion and its after effects. County-level Murle officials have disseminated messages encouraging civilians to physically separate from Yau Yau's forces so that they are not caught in between the military and the rebellion during the dry season.

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 because he was encouraging his community to resist recruitment. 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. In mid-November, UN OCHA reported that there were 10,000 people displaced by fighting in Pibor town. 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 as well; recently it has slowly begun to return. Civilian properties and the market have been destroyed in Gumuruk town. As of early December, Yau Yau's forces continued launching attacks against the SPLA in Gumuruk and Likuangole.

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¹ 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/issue-briefs/HSBA-IB21-Inter-tribal_violence_in_Jonglei.pdf>

² 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/issue-briefs/HSBA-IB-18-Armed-insurgencies-Greater-Upper-Nile.pdf>>