



## **Gabriel Tang Gatwich Chan ('Tang-Ginye')**

Gabriel Tang Gatwich Chan (often referred to as 'Tang-Ginye', a nickname meaning 'long pipe'), a Nuer from Fangak county in Jonglei state, is synonymous with a brutal chapter of the history of Sudan's 1983–2005 North–South civil war that many South Sudanese would like to forget. Deadly 'South–South' violence resulted in some of the worst atrocities committed during the war and deepened internal rifts among Southerners that have not been resolved in the six-year interim period that began with the 2005 signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

Tang-Ginye played a key role as one of the multiple southern militia leaders that the Khartoum government employed as part of its devastatingly effective divide-and-rule strategy to weaken the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), its principal and most powerful enemy in the South. The policy resulted in massive internal intra-southern conflict in the 1990s, mainly along Nuer–Dinka and Nuer–Nuer lines in Greater Upper Nile (now known as Unity and Upper Nile states). Although many of the strongest pro-Khartoum Southern militiamen—including Tang-Ginye's fellow Nuer Paulino Matiep—signed the 2006 Juba Declaration and integrated into the SPLA at high ranks, Tang-Ginye has maintained his allegiance to Khartoum throughout the CPA's interim period.

Considered a hardliner within the South Sudan Defense Forces (SSDF), a Khartoum-sponsored umbrella of militias active throughout most of the war, he was roundly condemned for his commanding role in a brutal campaign in the Shilluk Kingdom on the western bank of the White Nile in 2004. The campaign of ethnic cleansing, which took place after Lam Akol's re-defection from the government to the SPLA in late 2003, was designed to rid the area of remaining SPLA support. Tens of thousands of civilians were displaced in a campaign of burning and looting villages and hundreds killed.

Since the signing of the CPA, Tang-Ginye has largely remained in Khartoum as a major general in the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF)—a post he was granted in 2004, some say as a prize for his consistent loyalty—only occasionally visiting the South. Two of these visits, in November 2006 and February 2009, caused the most serious violations of the CPA-mandated ceasefire and illustrated the fragile relationship between the SAF and SPLA components of the Joint Integrated Units (JIUs).

On both occasions, fighting between the different JIU contingents broke out in Malakal, leading to significant casualties and looting carried out primarily by SAF members of the JIU. The 2006 clash left an estimated 150 dead, while the 2009 took more than 60 lives. Human Rights Watch investigated the 2009 clashes, stating that the violence 'underscore[d] abiding concerns about the ability of the JIUs to remain integrated and exercise command and control, particularly over its members who are former militia'. In reality, the SAF and SPLA contingents in Malakal were never integrated; they were merely co-located, at opposite ends of the town, with only a few officers from both sides present in a so-called 'joint headquarters'. In both instances, the violence reportedly broke out over anxiety that surfaced within the SPLA JIU

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contingent after Tang-Ginye's arrival in Malakal. In the 2009 clashes, Human Rights Watch reported that only SAF JIU members who were former members of Tang-Ginye's militia had participated. Both incidents clearly illustrate the destabilizing role that he continues to play in South Sudan, including his ability to rapidly alter the security situation in his areas of influence.

In September 2010, Tang-Ginye was included in the amnesty offer made by Southern president Salva Kiir, although he was not involved in the post-election insurrections. The following month he visited Juba and Bentiu, the capital of Unity state, and reportedly agreed to rejoin the SPLA, holding meetings with senior Nuer members of the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), including Government of South Sudan (GoSS) vice-president Riek Machar and Unity state governor Taban Deng Gai. After this conciliatory visit, Tang-Ginye returned to Khartoum, however, remaining quiet for several months while the GoSS struggled to negotiate a ceasefire with Lt. Gen. George Athor, former SPLA deputy chief of staff (as head of Political and Moral Orientation) and the most powerful of the insurrection leaders who launched revolts after the April 2010 polls in Sudan. There were no subsequent public announcements from either Tang-Ginye or the SPLM/A, and in late 2010 some of the Southern Sudanese officers within the SAF contingent of the JIU in Malakal who remained loyal to him became increasingly concerned about their uncertain future after South Sudan's independence in July 2011.

In early February 2011, several different SAF JIU contingents stationed throughout Upper Nile fought among themselves, leaving more than 50 dead. The deadly dispute began in Malakal, when fighting broke out between Southern Sudanese in the SAF JIU contingent, some of whom opposed Tang-Ginye's rumoured integration into the SPLA. The fighting then spread to other towns in Upper Nile, including near oil fields in Paloich. These armed disputes remained limited to the SAF JIU contingents and did not involve SPLA members, unlike in 2006 and 2009.

It is unclear what caused the breakdown of relations between Tang-Ginye and the SPLM/A following their October 2010 agreement. Even before the South's 9-15 January 2011 self-determination referendum, rumours began to circulate that he was not going to keep his promise to join the SPLA. A clear indication that he was not fully committed to the amnesty offer was his failure to assemble his troops in a SPLA-held Dinka area on the eastern bank of the Nile. Internal UN security reports have since confirmed his movement with a group of armed men from White Nile state across the North-South border into Upper Nile and down the western bank of the Nile toward Panyikang county. In mid-February 2011, the secretary-general of the SPLM and GoSS minister for peace and CPA implementation, Pagan Amum, broke the silence on the issue, telling reporters in Juba that in mid-January 2011 that Tang-Ginye had returned to the South accompanied by around 300 men armed with firearms and driving trucks with mounted machine guns. Pagan said he had received the weapons and equipment from Khartoum and suggested that he was on the move to Fangak county in north-west Jonglei state, which borders Upper Nile, to join George Athor's rebellion.

As of early March it is safe to say that Tang-Ginye and some armed men loyal to him are currently in the same general area of operations as George, but details surrounding his precise position and intentions remain unclear. Furthermore, UN sources indicate that Tang-Ginye's forces may be spread across a large area, with some of his well-armed troops stationed in South Kordofan state. Rumours regarding the number of SAF troops who travelled with him also vary widely. The SPLA does not consider him to be an SPLA-friendly presence in this contested corner of Jonglei.

However, given that George has resolutely denied any backing from Khartoum throughout his rebellion, it is unlikely that he would publicly ally himself with Tang-Ginye, even if the two were cooperating secretly.

### **Background: Tang-Ginye's role during the war**

Considered one of the first generation of Southern guerrillas, Tang-Ginye began his military career in a faction of the Anyanya movement during the first civil war (1956-1972). Suspicious of the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, he quickly rebelled again, joining one of the mainly Nuer militias known as Anyanya II. In 1984, together with other Anyanya II leaders such as Paulino Matiep and Gordon Kong, he formed an alliance with the government in Khartoum led at the time by Jaafar Nimeiri, hoping to create a Nuer army to fight the 'Dinka' SPLA. He and his Jebel forces remained allied to Khartoum in 1988, when a large number of Anyanya II defected to the SPLA, under the leadership of the late John Garang. His forces were aligned with Riek Machar's Khartoum-backed Nasir faction following the SPLA split in 1991, and then became part of the SSDF as part of the 1997 Khartoum Agreement, with direct links to Military Intelligence in Khartoum.

He remained a formidable foe of the SPLM/SPLA throughout the civil war and remains outspoken regarding perceived 'Dinka domination' in the South in the post-CPA period.

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