



## Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA) for Sudan and South Sudan

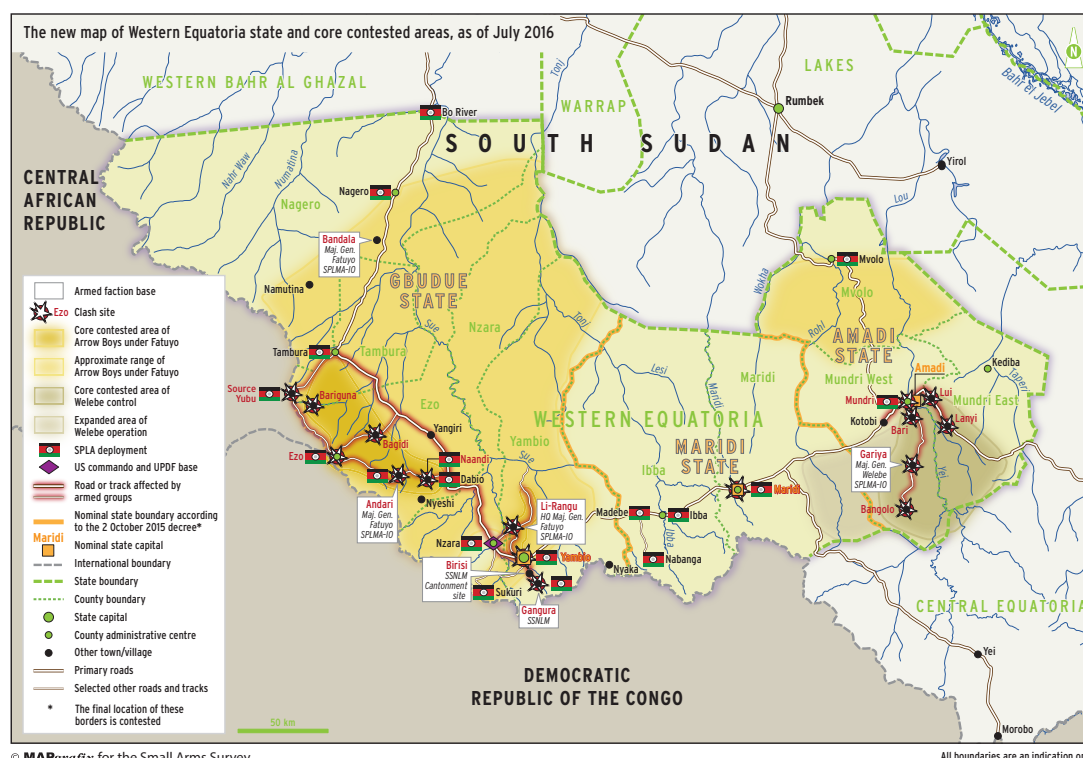
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# Conflict in Western Equatoria

Describing events through 17 July 2016

## Overview

Political tensions in former Western Equatoria state rose steadily throughout South Sudan's 2013–15 civil war, culminating in clashes during the months and weeks leading up to the August 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) between President Salva Kiir and the opposition leader, Vice President Riek Machar. During the war, Western Equatoria's populist governor, and frequent Juba critic, Joseph Bakosoro, flirted with defection from Kiir's Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) but remained in his governor post until Kiir sacked him in the run-up to the accord. In the months following the peace deal, full conflict erupted across the state (see map).



The Western Equatoria war theatre consists of three primary armed groups with independent command and control. All of the groups share some origins in the Arrow Boys, a network of community defence militias mobilized to combat the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and



unwanted cattle herders. Two factions—one in Mundri under Wesley Welebe, the other, more dispersed, under Alfred Fatuyo—have declared their allegiance to the SPLM-in-Opposition (SPLM–IO). After the peace accord, Machar appointed both Welebe and Fatuyo major generals. A third group, led by defected security officers, rejected the SPLM–IO and signed a peace deal aimed at reintegration into the armed forces in April 2016.

The ambiguous and unresolved inclusion of the armed groups in the ARCSS—or their exclusion from it—continues drive the conflict. Both Fatuyo and Welebe maintained links to the SPLM–IO throughout the war. Whereas Fatuyo clearly did not join the opposition movement until after the peace accord, Welebe’s ties to the group were stronger.

Anti-government grievances are widespread and often expressed as opposition to the Dinka ethnic group, and its political elite, specifically. While partially rooted in longstanding animosities, such sentiment has intensified since independence, with accusations that the SPLM’s Bahr al Ghazal Dinka elite promised shared power but then championed tribal interest. Equatorians primarily cite redirected national revenue, impunity for incursions by armed cattle herders, land-grabbing, and political marginalization. (According to the paramount chief of the Azande, Wilson Hassan Peni, the Azande did not have an officer at the rank of major general at the beginning of 2015. The Azande are one of several ethnic groups claiming to be the third-largest in South Sudan behind the Dinka and Nuer.)

Western Equatoria is an opposition stronghold, but the armed groups are poorly supplied and often retreat in the face of government counter-insurgency. Some early community support for the armed leaders has waned even as government military abuses amplify resentments. Community elites are divided on the wisdom and feasibility of seeking an armed solution or aligning politically with Machar. Humanitarian consequences in the war theatres have been devastating, since the counter-insurgency strategy of security hardliners seeks to punish entire communities and depopulate rebel strongholds. Armed-group withdrawals from government attack have left civilian populations vulnerable.

In the aftermath of the peace deal, Western Equatoria in particular turned into a stage for contesting the new disposition of power in the country; the conflict must be understood in the context of the new power framework created by the ARCSS.

### *The politics of peace*

As the sequence of events suggests, the conflict in Western Equatoria did not openly erupt in spite of the ARCSS but, in part, because of its political dynamics, which left unresolved the military balance of power in the country leading up to envisioned elections.

The ARCSS clearly prescribed political power-sharing for the pre-election period—with percentage allotments for each party at the national and state levels—but did not finalize the division of militarized power. Its security arrangements did not cap the size of Machar’s force, nor did they explicitly narrow down the location of Machar’s forces to the



acknowledged ‘conflict-affected’ states of Greater Upper Nile. Instead, the ARCSS arrangements speak of the ‘cantonment’ of forces in that region ‘and any other forces related to the conflict in other areas’.

This ambiguity allows for a wide range of interpretations regarding what military concessions were granted to Machar within the new national government, and, in practice, it has endorsed an even wider set of actions. Machar seized the ‘any other forces’ clause as a window in time to mobilize forces and offer more ranks into an expanding national opposition army.

The SPLM–IO asked for 19 cantonment sites outside of Greater Upper Nile: 11 in Equatoria and 8 in Bahr al Ghazal, along with at least 2 in every state except Warrap, Kiir’s home state, where it requested 1 cantonment site near Abyei.

The government rejects the notion that groups outside Greater Upper Nile are ‘related to the conflict’. The chief of staff of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), Paul Malong, has not extended the ceasefire to the Equatoria or Bahr al Ghazal zones, nor has he allowed the rebels to gather at designated cantonment sites. (The government has not maintained a uniformly consistent position: in official complaints to ceasefire monitors, the SPLA blames the SPLM–IO for violations in the Greater Mundri area.)

Maj. Gen. Patrick Zamoi, Bakosoro’s replacement and now governor of ‘Gbudue’ state, also flatly rejects an ARCSS cantonment for Fatuyo’s group, a position he described as a matter of ‘principle’ in an HSBA interview in June 2016. He argued that if Machar had had forces in the state before the peace deal, ‘we would have fought with them’. (Zamoi arrested and expelled a team of ceasefire monitors in Yambio in March; as a result, the ceasefire monitoring replacement team did not leave the UN compound through mid-June under the real or perceived threat of arrest. By July, Zamoi had reassured the monitors of support and promised freedom of movement.)

### *Breakdown of the ARCSS security arrangements*

This dispute exposes an internal tension in the ARCSS: an imposed state-building roadmap that is meant to double, at times almost perfunctorily, as a bilateral political agreement. From a state-building perspective, some actors viewed the nationwide cantonment sites as a useful means to promote the ethnic and regional diversification of a future national army. Political concessions made after the peace deal would defy the basis of most bilateral peace negotiations, however, and the dispute carries high political stakes for Machar and Kiir.

For Machar, the ARCSS represented a new roadmap to power following a failed rebellion. More directly, Machar hoped that the terms of the peace accord would give him space to train, resource, and formalize a national opposition army that he had failed to construct—politically, logistically, and operationally—during two years of civil war. This would increase Machar’s political base and political leverage ahead of planned elections, while he prepared for further war as an alternative.



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Military and political hardliners who argued against the provision of Machar's separate force in the ARCSS are intensely opposed to letting it expand nationally. Kiir publicly objected to the security provisions of the ARCSS, even as he signed the accord under international threats and pressure. The intensity of that internal opposition from Malong and other hardliners has not abated.

The hardliner opposition to the peace accord, in general, and the disputed interpretations of the specific scope of Machar's opposition force, in particular, impeded implementation of the accord from the beginning. Machar continued to promise the aligned armed groups in Western Equatoria cantonment even as Malong repeatedly attacked their positions. Amid strong international and internal pressure, Machar returned to Juba as vice president in April 2016. Fighting in Western Equatoria and elsewhere continued.

The clashes that broke out in Juba on 7–11 July 2016 pushed Machar's outgunned forces out of the city and reasserted Malong's relevance and power. Machar fled into hiding. Armed groups remained mobilized across Equatoria, with those aligned to Machar especially underequipped. Allegiance to Machar remains a point of division among Equatorian armed actors, while the communities that are closest to Juba are the most cautious to act as they risk triggering ethnic violence from Malong and the SPLA.

## **Background**

When the political crisis in Juba disintegrated into an ethnic war between the Dinka and Nuer in December 2013, Equatorians remained divided. While some Equatorian elites immediately joined Machar's rebellion, most did not—although they did not necessarily stay loyal to Kiir. The late shift of the war to Western Equatoria is a product of the politics of wider Equatoria, which played out as the region's elites struggled to find a role in the nation's crisis.

### *Equatoria in South Sudanese politics*

Equatoria is significantly more diverse than the rest of the country, as is reflected in its complex internal politics. A stronger, more united Equatoria that can play a 'kingmaker' role is something of a holy grail in South Sudanese politics: much discussed but highly elusive.

No government can sit comfortably in power in Equatoria's Juba while facing robust, coordinated Equatorian opposition. Equatoria is strategically vital as South Sudan's link to East Africa, from where South Sudan imports most goods.

Kiir's brain trust is deeply distrustful of Equatorian ambitions. Justice Ambrose Riiny Thiik, chairman of the influential Jieng Council of Elders and a key backer of Malong, cites his involvement in the Council of Unity for Southern Sudan, formed to oppose former president of Sudan Jafaar Nimeri's 'Kokora' division of South Sudan into three greater regions in the early 1980s, as politically formative. (Bona Malwal, an informal adviser to the Jieng Council of Elders, was also active in the Council of Unity for Southern Sudan.) Equatorians strongly



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supported Kokora as a means of checking electoral Dinka dominance, but Nimeri used the division primarily to re-centralize power over the South in Khartoum instead of Juba. The SPLM struggled to mobilize in Equatoria in the 1980s amid the bitter Kokora politics, which still linger. When Equatorian leaders began calling for federalism in 2014 as a solution to the nation's crisis, Kiir accused them of seeking a new Kokora.

Kiir especially distrusted Bakosoro, a former SPLA commander who, having failed to secure the SPLM gubernatorial nomination in 2010, ran as a populist independent and won. Bakosoro was South Sudan's only independent governor. According to Zamoi, Kiir has not visited Western Equatoria since then, and Bakosoro was not reappointed as an SPLM member until 2012.

After the crisis began, Machar wanted Bakosoro to defect from the SPLM, but their national ambitions clashed. Moreover, many Western Equatorians loathed Machar for bringing the LRA to their area. (Machar is responsible for linking Khartoum to LRA leader Joseph Kony in the 1990s, which helped the group gain footing as a proxy force. Later, Machar relocated the LRA to Western Equatoria, while he served as a mediator of the disastrous 2005 Juba peace talks.)

### *Fatuyo and the Arrow Boys*

Kiir's suspicion—and Machar's courtship—of Bakosoro had much to do with the statewide Arrow Boys network, which was under central control in Yambio.

The Arrow Boys started as voluntary community defence militias against the LRA and unwanted pastoralists, including Dinka and foreign Fulani (known locally as 'Mbororo'). As governor, Zamoi, one of the highest-ranked Azande in the SPLA, supported Fatuyo and the Arrow Boys in 2005–06. Clashes broke out between Dinka cattle keepers and the Arrow Boys in Yambio and Mundri. Suspicion in Juba over Zamoi's role in Dinka–Azande tensions led to his 2006 dismissal.

Fatuyo, a charismatic, uneducated civilian with no formal security experience, coordinated operations under the Azande's strong traditional chiefdom. (Fatuyo's father is a member of the Balanda, a group that lives predominantly in Nagero county, in the north-western part of the state.) Each county had a sub-commander, who reported to local chiefs and the county commissioner.

The volunteer Arrow Boys fought off the LRA for years with little assistance from the SPLA, which viewed the network with suspicion. Prior to independence, Southern Sudan's regional parliament approved an allocation of SDG 5 million (then officially more than USD 2 million) to assist the Arrow Boys, but the network never received the money. The resulting frustrations fed into wider community grievances that the Azande were excluded from national wealth distribution.





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As the political crisis and civil war spread in early 2014, the resentful Arrow Boys faced harassment from security forces across the state. The Uganda People's Defence Force and US



commandos, based in Nzara for counter-LRA operations, cut off communications. (Fatuyo proudly shows off an October 2013 certificate of appreciation from the US 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 10<sup>th</sup> Special Forces (Airborne) for 'overall mission success of Team Nzara and the Arrow Boys'; see image, left) In spring 2014, Fatuyo went to the bush and established a base in Nyaka, east of Yambio, near the Congolese border. Contact was established with Machar.

An internal document of the Arrow Boys network lists commanders across Western Equatoria under the name United Arrow Force, led by Alfred Malis Sika, a supposed nom de guerre, with Welebe as his deputy commanding Greater Mundri, with a total reported force of 17,652. (In 2008, the ten counties in Western Equatoria each officially maintained 2,000 Arrow Boys, according to a UN official in Yambio.)

### *Equatoria, disunited*

In late 2014, Equatoria nearly entered the war when Bakosoro facilitated the arrival to Fatuyo's base of two young defectors, both previously top aides to SPLA leadership inside Bilpam headquarters: Matata Frank, of Kajo Keji, and Losuba Lodura, of Yei. Frank had defected early in the conflict and personally accompanied Machar in Upper Nile during the early stages of the war. Both arrived at Fatuyo's base to train and mobilize the launch of a new front in Equatoria. They arrived to shifting political winds as Juba caught wind of the plot; amid accusations of pay-offs by Juba, the initiative was quickly aborted.

Frank returned to Pagak and briefed Machar on Bakosoro's duplicity, according to an official who was at Pagak at the time and had knowledge of the briefing. Disillusioned, Lodura formed a separate group, the Revolutionary Movement for National Salvation of South Sudan (REMNAS), which never truly got off the ground but did attract the support of Martin Cleto, an early rebel organizer, in Maridi. (REMNAS merged into the SPLM-IO after the



peace deal.) The situation cost the ‘Equatoria Front’ movement its biggest catch: Gen. Martin Kenyi, the former Equatoria Defence Forces commander of Eastern Equatoria, defected, but hearing of Lodura’s ordeal, rebuffed other political overtures and joined the SPLM–IO.

Pressured to reconcile with the government, Fatuyo made a verbal deal to become community youth representative to the National Security Service (NSS), based in Yambio. Fatuyo agreed to register all the Arrow Boys by name with a promise of future training as community police. (Fatuyo claims he maintained direct contact with Machar from 2014 onwards. He said that it was during this period that several hundred Arrow Boys from Nagero county, mostly Balanda, joined the Balanda-heavy SPLM–IO forces in Western Bahr al Ghazal, where they remain.) According to several SPLM–IO officials, the rebel organization viewed Fatuyo as a proxy for Bakosoro and, after the events of 2014, untrustworthy.

Equatoria’s attempts to play a larger role in the crisis continued. In April 2015, a meeting took place in Nairobi between the three Equatoria governors and the Equatorian SPLM–IO leaders. Mediated by Bishop Paul Yugusuk, these talks produced a joint document signed by Equatorian representatives of the government and the SPLM–IO, calling for a new constitution based on devolved federalism, thorough reform of the military, the resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their places of origin, and regulated movement of cattle. (Officially, Henry Odwar headed the SPLM–IO delegation, and Lawrence Korbandy the ‘in-government’ delegation.)

As the Addis Ababa talks neared a peace deal, Equatorian elites considered themselves cut out of the accord and continued posturing. Central to these manoeuvres, besides Bakasoro, was strongman Clement Wani Konga, then governor of Central Equatoria and formerly Equatoria Defence Forces commander. Terekeka, a capital of Konga’s Mundari people, sits just north, down the Nile from Juba. Bakosoro, Konga, and others hoped that a united political and military alliance across Equatoria, if backed by Uganda, could demand inclusion and threaten an Equatorian war—independent of SPLM–IO. The Equatoria governors pressured the Equatoria SPLM–IO leaders to use their joint document as a founding basis for the independent Equatoria alliance. Deep mistrust pervaded the talks as the groups suspected each other of operating with false motives, informants, and bribery. (During the Nairobi talks, Konga admitted giving longtime political rival SPLM–IO Deputy Chairman Alfred Ladu Gore a large sum of money as a gift. Gore opposed Konga for governor in 2010 as an independent candidate and decried his defeat as rigged.)

This intrigue led to a bitter public rift among the SPLM–IO Equatorians, a group of whom publicly called for Machar to discipline three senior officials, including Gore, who allegedly led covert talks with the three governors and travelled to Kampala in May 2015 to meet with Salim Saleh, a brother of President Yoweri Museveni. One Equatoria SPLM–IO official who expressed neutrality with reference to internal disputes said that Saleh informed the three SPLM–IO officials in Kampala that Konga had arranged for their defection. Whether any of the SPLM–IO officials ever agreed to such an Equatoria alliance, or merely considered it, is much disputed. (It is widely believed, if unverified, by SPLM–IO leaders in Juba and



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Western Equatoria that Bakosoro and Konga sought Ugandan support partially through the payment of a substantial sum of money.)

Juba maintained a watchful eye, and, during 2015, up to his dismissal, Bakosoro firmly kept the lid on rebellion in areas under his control—no small feat, given the anti-Juba political mood, which he continued to stoke. A viable opposition movement in Western Equatoria likely requires a foreign patron or a wider Equatorian alliance, if not both, and Bakosoro failed to secure either. Equatoria was unable to unite. The final ARCSS left Equatoria in the firm control of President Kiir, who sacked Bakosoro and Konga.

By then, the armed rebellion in the Greater Mundri area under Wesley Welebe was well under way.

### *Conflict in Mundri*

Greater Mundri sits just south of Bahr al Ghazal's Lakes state, where cattle raids are rampant. Senior government officials in Juba are reportedly among those who regularly graze their cattle on Mundri's lush grounds. The local Moru, who are farmers, bitterly complain that general impunity is granted to Dinka herders whose cows trample crops, the Moru's primary livelihood. In addition, the cattle keepers frequently carry arms, which stirs accusations of occupation.

Welebe, a former Juba police captain, served as SPLM secretary for Mundri West county and then as a member of the state parliament, until he lost his seat in 2010. He led the Arrow Boys in Mundri against the LRA and then against Dinka cattle herders in 2005.

In early 2014, two members of the Mundri elite—Aggrey Idri, a former top executive of the Nile Commercial Bank, and Richard Mula, a former member of parliament—were among the earliest senior defectors from Equatoria to Machar's SPLM–IO. Welebe was quickly connected to the opposition group, as Idri, one of his key backers, had been appointed deputy of finance and resource mobilization of the SPLM–IO. Idri owns a farm in Gariya, which Welebe also used as grounds.

In an effort to widen the movement, Adel Sanderi, from Maridi, convened meetings in Nairobi in early 2014. Both Welebe and Idri attended, as did Cleto, according to SPLM–IO officials involved. Welebe's ties to the SPLM–IO wavered amid the Equatorian politics in later 2014, but he remained on the periphery of Bakosoro's control and operated fairly autonomously.

In mid-2014, clashes between cattle keepers and armed locals erupted in Welebe's Mundri West county and spread to wider Greater Mundri. According to local church estimates, the clashes had resulted in the deaths of 47 civilians, 46 burnt houses, and 7,000 displaced people by February 2015.





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A peace conference in January 2015 was attended by chiefs and political leaders from Western Equatoria, Lakes, the Mundari of Central Equatoria, and the Bor Dinka of Jonglei. The conference ended with an ultimatum for all cattle to return to their land of origin by 9 February 2015, but it failed to restore order.

In April 2015, facing growing and more brazen Equatorian opposition, President Kiir issued a decree ordering all cattle in Central and Western Equatoria to return to their lands of origin. In late May 2015, clashes broke out in Mundri town between the SPLA and armed locals, who expelled the army from the town; 6th Division reinforcements from Maridi were sent up and immediately also started clashing with townspeople and destroying shops. Nearly 40,000 people fled the town to nearby areas.

In July, the SPLA clashed with armed locals in Lanyi, Mundri East, and subsequently engaged in retaliatory looting and attacks. Fighting broke out in Mundri town again in August, then in September, and then in October 2015, followed each time by the army's retaliatory attacks on civilians and the town. By this time, Mundri town was largely abandoned, as many civilians had fled deep into the bush behind rebel lines. The October clashes represented an escalation in the conflict, beginning with a Welebe attack on the army garrison on 1 October and continuing with back-and-forth retaliatory attacks that lasted for one week. The SPLA responded with a helicopter gunship attack on Gariya and sent reinforcements south from Mvolo; the destruction of civilian property and abuse of non-combatants by these troops embittered local officials.

The Welebe-led group started to identify as Nyarango, a Moru word for sorghum, to distinguish themselves from the Arrow Boys. Following the May clashes, Welebe publicly denied that he was a rebel, refuting SPLM–IO claims that he belonged to its movement and insisting that he was just a citizen trying to protect Mundri farmland from the outside cattle keepers. The SPLM–IO claims that Welebe's denial in early 2015 was a military tactic to maintain a lower profile, due to the rebel movement's failure to arm him properly. (According to several SPLM–IO officials, Welebe's was the only Equatorian armed group to receive direct armaments by early 2016, and the late 2015 support to Welebe was described as minimal.) Machar officially appointed Welebe major general in September 2015.

A November ceasefire deal brokered by a group of Juba-based bishops, including Bishop Yugusuk, failed to hold. The ceasefire, signed between a local SPLA commander and local Mundri representatives (but not Welebe) on 15 November 2015, called for the safe return of civilians to Mundri to allow them access to humanitarian services. When civilians returned, security forces detained and tortured youths for information on the rebellion, leading civilians to flee again. Aides to Governor Joseph Ngere Paciko complained that troops directly answerable to Malong had not consulted the governor and actively sabotaged reconciliation efforts mediated by the church.

In February 2016, SPLA forces swept down through the Bari checkpoint south of Mundri town and drove Welebe's forces out of his Gariya base, continuing south over the course of



several days through Welebe's rebel corridor all the way to Bangolo. The government forces torched thatched homes and grain stores as they advanced the dry-season attack. Welebe later returned to Gariya, after government soldiers headed back to their bases.

### *Fatuyo's late revolt*

Signs of tensions mounted publicly in the run-up to Bakosoro's removal, as the outbreak in Mundri spread southward. In June 2015, locals attacked a Dinka cattle camp in Maridi, resulting in retaliatory clashes, the burning of homes, and widespread displacement. In early July, Bakosoro publicly condemned the arrest and disappearance of 36 Maridi youths.

Fighting between armed locals and the SPLA erupted in late July and continued into early August in Yambio town, forcing thousands to flee. Bakosoro and then state minister of information Charles Barnaba Kisanga grew increasingly vocal in chastising the SPLA for inflaming the situation with abusive behaviour. Fatuyo remained based in Yambio throughout 2015, until the clashes erupted, at which point he fled town.

Zamoi, appointed by Kiir with a mandate to rein in the Arrow Boys, called in Fatuyo upon his arrival in Yambio. Fatuyo demanded the SSP 5 million (USD 100,000 on the black market as of June 2016, but considerably more before 2016 inflation). Zamoi said that money was gone and promised to sell teak to raise the same sum, according to Fatuyo's account. Fatuyo also demanded more local political autonomy from Juba, similar to that of the former Greater Pibor Administrative Area, but Zamoi told him such goals were unattainable.

After Zamoi sacked Bakosoro's county commissioners, local authorities lost remaining control of the Arrow Boys, according to one former county commissioner. Fatuyo merged his fighters from the Yambio area with those from Ezo at a base on the border of the two counties, near Nyeshi.

Heavy fighting broke out in November 2015 around Ezo, Source Yubu, and Yambio. In Ezo, Fatuyo's men looted a food storehouse of the UN Refugee Agency. The SPLA company garrisoned in Ezo went to investigate and was ambushed on the return. A week of fighting ensued in Ezo town, leading to widespread looting and destruction, and clashes spread into five of the county's six *payams* (districts). Most of the police and local organized forces defected from their positions. Aid workers in Ezo were evacuated under escort of the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS). The Arrow Boys detained the Ezo county commissioner, who had been driving to Yambio for Christmas, stripped his bodyguards of weapons, and stole his car. The commissioner did not return until the end of February 2016, leaving Ezo under martial law of the local SPLA commander. Movement was restricted, schools and health services shut down.

After the fighting broke out, Fatuyo moved his headquarters to Li-Rangu, a short drive northwest of Yambio, leaving the Ezo group under the command of John Umee, an Arrow Boy leader and former SPLA soldier, and James Nando, a defected SPLA soldier. Fatuyo



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launched an attack on Yambio in early December, capturing part of the town before being driven out to the outskirts.

The government then launched heavy offensives against Fatuyo's positions in January, forcing him out of Li-Rangu for several weeks. Fatuyo's Ezo forces continued to clash with the SPLA and move around before settling down a few kilometres outside Andari centre.

Machar officially appointed Fatuyo major general in December 2015, granting him command of a separate 2nd Division in Western Equatoria. As violence heated up in Western Equatoria, Bakosoro, who had been detained for four days after his August dismissal and then remained in Juba, was arrested again on 22 December and held without charge. He was released after Machar's return to Juba in April 2016 and took refuge in the United States.

Relations between Zamoï and Fatuyo have turned bitter and personal. Zamoï, who was not promoted to major general until right before his re-appointment as governor in 2015, derides Fatuyo as an uneducated wild meat hunter: 'Can he become a general, for God's sake? A butcher?' Fatuyo lobs his own insults: Zamoï left Yambio in 2006 a Zande and returned in 2015 a Dinka, he says.

*Are they Arrow Boys?*

Fatuyo has struggled to transform the Arrow Boy network into a cohesive force across a wide region, and to maintain command and control of his area of operation. Reports of lawlessness, unchecked banditry, and stolen vehicles abandoned without fuel damaged his relations with the community. Fatuyo's logistical and command challenges do not portray a rebellion that was imminent, planned, or resourced.

It is unclear how much of the original Arrow Boys network remains mobilized. Many Arrow Boys returned to family, waiting for cantonment and complaining of food shortages in the bush. Defected security officers, rather than Arrow Boys, make up a sizable portion of Fatuyo's leadership. At the base in Andari, near Ezo, the defectors outnumbered civilian Arrow Boys in a show of hands, comprising most of its leadership. Defectors complain mainly of a lack of promotions compared to Dinka colleagues. (Nando, whom Fatuyo promoted to brigadier, rose only to a line corporal rank—after 23 years in the SPLA.)

While Fatuyo, like Welebe, has rejected church mediation on the principle that he is under Machar, some local chapters have welcomed mediation efforts, which resulted in an early ceasefire in Tambura county. Some Arrow Boys chapters, whose rebellion consisted mostly of a hostile stand-off with local garrisoned SPLA troops, left interlocutors unsure of actual demands. At least twice in 2016, Fatuyo warned mediators to close communication channels opened up by Ezo factions that had sought advice. Fatuyo still claims that sizable forces are based in rural spots that remain free from clashes, as the SPLA does not maintain much of a presence there. (On paper, Fatuyo's number two is Sapana Ajuli in Mvolo, part of the new 'Amadi' state.)



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Fatuyo's revolt did not attract significant political defections, the lack of which is probably influenced by the final peace terms (which granted Kiir continued political control of Equatoria). After Bakosoro's arrest, Kisanga, the former Western Equatoria state minister of information, publicly claimed political leadership of Fatuyo under the banner of the South Sudan People's Patriotic Front (SSPPF), but Fatuyo rejected him in favour of Machar, and Kisanga fled the country. (To outsiders, the government refers to Fatuyo's force as SSPPF to undermine his SPLM–IO allegiance.)

Even though the government has pulled out of many rural payams, Fatuyo has not attempted to replace them with parallel administrators. Fatuyo's troops complain they are short of food and admit to looting on the road, especially from Darfur traders, as a means of feeding themselves. Community support for the Arrow Boys was previously high; a survey on the Arrow Boys, conducted before the war in 2013 and published in 2016 by the Centre for Security Governance, shows that more than 80 per cent of Ezo and Tambura respondents reported giving food to Arrow Boys in the previous year.

#### *The South Sudan National Liberation Movement*

After the crisis began, a group of connected disgruntled officers began defecting and congregating south of Yambio, in Gangura, led by former 2nd Lt. Victor Wanga, and supported by the local Arrow Boys.

SPLM–IO officials tried but failed to bridge divisions between Fatuyo and Wanga after Bakosoro's dismissal. Wanga subsequently declared his own group, the South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM), and entered into negotiations with Zamoi. (Wanga expressed strong antipathy towards Machar, according to a foreign journalist who visited Wanga in November 2015.)

Those negotiations, mediated by an interfaith group of Yambio clergy, led to a ceasefire agreement in November. A list of grievances by Wanga accused a tribal clique of controlling the government for its own benefit through a tribal army. The ceasefire broke down, but the interfaith mediators brokered a draft peace deal scheduled for January 2016. Governor Zamoi lobbied President Kiir for approval through the National Security Service and assumed he had presidential support.

On 21 January, while waiting for Juba's signing delegation, the SPLA launched a surprise attack on SSNLM positions, which led to a counter-attack on Yambio that fatally wounded Wanga. Zamoi privately accused Malong of bypassing official command and control in launching the attack and intentionally sabotaging NSS-backed peace efforts, according to local and UN sources in Yambio involved in the peace process.

The SPLA launched another attack on the SSNLM's Gangura base on 5 February. Zamoi spent weeks in Juba in February and March, personally lobbying Malong to accept the peace arrangement. A peace agreement was finally signed in early April in Yambio between



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presidential adviser Tut Gatluak, representing the government, and an Arrow Boy commander, Mbereke John Faustino, for the SSNLM, even though James Kabila, a defected intelligence officer from Maridi, was by then leading the SSNLM.

The peace deal includes no political concessions. The SSNLM is to be trained and reintegrated into the army and organized forces, which are to be deployed within Zamoï's 'Gbudue' state. (These aligned interests have some people referring to the SSNLM, with irony, as 'Zamoï's Boys'.) Exact ranks were not promised but were to be determined by the numbers accepted by the armed forces, which has encouraged extended recruitment efforts.

One local government official reported that at the time of the peace accord, the SSNLM could only claim 300 fighters. In June 2016, no more than a few hundred were present at the Birisi cantonment site, including nursing mothers, orphans, and widows. SSNLM leaders claimed that more than 3,000 were present, but that they were in the forest gathering building materials or awaiting transport elsewhere. Some had arrived from Tambura.

The governor initially attempted to locate the SSNLM cantonment in Li-Rangu, Fatuyo's base. The SSNLM considered this an attempt to force them to fight Fatuyo's men. Interfaith mediators intervened, and Zamoï consented to establish the base in Birisi, south of Yambio, towards the SSNLM's Gangura stronghold.

### *The war on civilians*

Civilians, not combatants, suffer the brunt of the violence. Government forces repeatedly deploy counter-insurgency tactics that collectively punish civilian communities to depopulate areas with rebel activity, demoralize the community, and discourage community support for rebellion. Government forces do not hold positions, but drive insurgents and civilians into the bush, inflict heavy damage on civilian assets, and—in days or weeks—withdraw back to their original garrisons, allowing a slow return of opposition forces. This pattern appeared in all government offensives analysed. The opposition rarely engages in open combat with government troops, so that few combatant casualties occur.

Interagency aid assessments reported 117 houses burnt on 21 May 2015 in Mundri; 196 houses destroyed and a hospital vandalized on 7 June in Maridi; and 200 homes destroyed on 7–11 December in Yambio. An aid assessment following the February offensive through Gariya found crops, homes, schools, and health care centres damaged, looted, or destroyed, while multiple families were sharing a single jerry can as the lone remaining possession. The blocking of humanitarian access has not only made use of food as a weapon of war, but has also been utilized to discourage civilian defections to rebel areas.

Detentions and disappearances of young men, without charge, are another prominent feature of the conflict. Young men from Ezo, Kotobi, Maridi, Mundri, Source Yubu, and Yambio reported being continually harassed and detained, and community members stated that young men had been disappeared and were believed killed.





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The government resents UN ‘protection of civilian’ sites, which primarily protect civilians from government forces. Despite a mandate to protect civilians, the United Nations has also expressed strong reservations about the ad hoc sites, whose residents have ballooned into tens of thousands in Juba, Bentiu, and Malakal. Notably, no significant protection sites formed in Western Equatoria despite extensive civilian displacement. In early August 2015, hundreds, and in December and January 2016, thousands of IDPs fled to the outside perimeter of the UNMISS compound in Yambio for protection. In January, more than 6,000 IDPs arrived and were crowded into the compound of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, squeezed in between the UNMISS and UNICEF compounds. In response, the UN led efforts to provide clean water and sanitation for the refugees, but no food was distributed, and the IDPs were encouraged to leave. Over the next week the IDPs dispersed, and many fled into the bush.

### **Machar’s return to Juba**

When Machar returned to Juba as vice president in April 2016, his political coalition demanded two quick achievements. Bahr al Ghazal and Equatoria demanded cantonment rights. The Shilluk militia of Johnson Olony in (former) Upper Nile state demanded a reversal of the borders of the 28 new states. These groups are essentially add-ons to what was structured as a Kiir–Machar peace deal.

The politics of cantonment remain fluid. Despite some reports in May 2016 that Kiir agreed to cantonment in Equatoria, others in Kiir’s coalition maintain he only agreed to allow cantonment for forces that had previously fought in Juba and Greater Upper Nile, or defectors. Malong continued to resist the formation of a national opposition force.

Given the government’s position, local community leaders have expressed increasing concerns regarding the purported advantages of cantonment—that is, armed encampments across the region, in declared opposition to the national, state, and local governments. Cantonment would not grant any more political control locally, but it would probably attract significantly more government hostility.

The push for a wider opposition force under the ARCSS has fuelled mobilization across Equatoria since the signing of the accord. If Malong continues to block cantonment, the armed groups—which remain poorly resourced—face limited, unappealing options. Cantonment-related promises have raised expectations beyond what Zamoï or other government officials can broker locally. Machar gave Fatuyo 2,200 officer positions; Fatuyo knows the SPLA cannot match that.

Some perceive less stringent opposition to cantonment rights in Mundri, where the SPLA was surely aware of Welebe’s SPLM–IO links during clashes prior to the peace deal. The SPLA has formally complained of SPLM–IO breaches to the ceasefire in Mundri, inviting ceasefire monitors to investigate.



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In mid-June 2016, Fatuyo expressed impatience with the cantonment delays. The rainy season provides temporary advantages to insurgents; road movement is difficult, and thick tropical brush diminishes conventional and aerial advantages. The government attacked Fatuyo's positions in Li-Rangu and Andari on 24 June 2016, displacing large numbers of civilians, some of whom fled to Yambio. Fatuyo withdrew to the surrounding jungle until the army returned to its bases. His men blocked all traffic on the road to Ezo with logs, deepening the humanitarian crisis there, and his forces are accused by local community members of disrupting movement and trade on the road to Tambura with banditry against civilians.

The June attack against Fatuyo's forces was instigated by Zamoi, who is hoping military pressure will force Fatuyo to negotiate with him directly outside the ARCSS framework. Poorly resourced but possessing prime insurgency terrain, Fatuyo considers the closing of roads his main tool of leverage against Zamoi. The strategy of each treats civilian welfare as a pressure point against the other within the insular Zande community.

In Mundri, Welebe and government forces started clashing again on 11 July, following the hostilities of 7–11 July in Juba.

## **Conclusion**

The shift of the conflict to Western Equatoria in 2015 did not present the final throes of national crisis, but its expansion.

Both Kiir and Machar face potential internal schism in compromise. Given the uncertainty of cantonment and the wider peace implementation, political alliances remain unstable. In Equatoria, Machar continues to be buttressed as opposition leader, primarily through the ARCSS, not grassroots popularity or the loyalty of elites. The inability to convince disaffected Bakosoro and other Equatorian strongmen, such as Wani Konga, to join him illustrates these limitations.

Western Equatoria offers fitting case studies. In Fatuyo's case, an armed group caught outside the ARCSS wants in; in Welebe's case, a group with stronger ties to the SPLM–IO did not publicly ally itself until after the peace deal. Such divergences can be found in similar forms across the country, muddying who 'deserves' cantonment and who does not. The peace deal contains no mechanism to clarify or verify such disputes.

In the lead-up to the clashes of 7–11 July in Juba, Kiir found himself in a familiar position: facing mounting international pressure, an economic crisis, public frustration, and fierce hardliner resistance to the implementation of the ARCSS. The fact that Zamoi personally lobbied for Malong to accept the SSNLM peace deal illustrates the militarization of Kiir's political base and the internal contradictions of his coalition. From Zamoi and Ngere's perspective, Malong actively undermined peace efforts that were presumably backed by Kiir.



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Throughout the national crises, Kiir and his allies relentlessly stoked the fires of Dinka nationalism to preserve hold on power. This tactic achieved some success militarily, but at great cost. Political opposition is now expressed predominantly in ethnic terms against the Dinka ‘occupiers’, rather than the government. Equatorian and opposition leaders also share blame for stoking the ethnic flames.

Equatorians view neighbouring Uganda, an ally of Kiir’s, with suspicion but also with continued hope, calculating that Museveni’s long-term interests lie with Equatorians as allies, not enemies. Hostility towards the nation’s Dinka leadership has deepened to crisis levels, but fear—essentially, of slaughter—remains a poignant factor. Opposition weakness continues to stem from want of external support, political divisions, and leadership vacuums.