

The Politics of Numbers:

On Security Sector Reform in South Sudan,
2005-2020

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1. Executive Summary

‘There will not be Oye, there will not be Viva, there will be South Sudan Victory, and we will dissolve all our identities.’¹

– Major General Abraham Gum Makwac, SSPDF 5th Division Commander, 3 March 2020

In the quote that begins this report, Makwac articulates a hopeful vision of the security sector reform (SSR) process of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Unfortunately, this process has repeated many of the same errors as the SSR process that took place during the period of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) from 2005-2011. Most strikingly, the R-ARCSS sets out a processual, model-based approach to SSR in South Sudan that fails to engage with the real political economy of armed groups in South Sudan and is instead premised on the normative assumptions of liberal internationalism. Under such assumptions, an army should be structured to defend a country against external threats, and its size and distribution of ranks should be a question of military rather than political judgment; the number of generals in an army, for instance, should be a question of the size of the army, not the number of military figures with access to weaponry that need to be placated with positions, lest they rebel. In contrast, the reality of South Sudan means that the armed forces are part of the dominant political economy of the country, based on predation and the reallocation of resources from the government to commanders, who often

¹ Oye was the historical chant of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) during the second civil war (1983-2005), and is the chant of the South Sudan People’s Defence Force (SSPDF) during the current civil war; Viva is the chant of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO) during the current civil war.

organize their forces on the basis of communitarian loyalties, rather than a putative national interest.

The overly formal, model-based SSR of the R-ARCSS is wilfully unrealistic in the deadlines set for each stage of the process and is vague in its definition of the final form of the armed forces. In the end, rather than producing a national army, the SSR process has been instrumentalized by all of the belligerent parties as a continuous part of South Sudan's extractive and redistributive political economy, which took on its current form during Sudan's second civil war (1983-2005). This present-day instrumentalization echoes the way the South Sudanese government used SSR during the CPA period.

Both the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO) have instrumentalized the SSR process of the R-ARCSS:

- The GRSS has inserted itself into contentions over resources at SPLA-IO cantonment sites as a means to fragment the opposition. In addition, the focus of the SSR process on the formation of a national army has allowed the government to misdirect in the manner of a three-card-monte, building up its forces as part of a greatly expanded National Security Service (NSS) that is not substantively included within the SSR process while international attention has been focused on cantonment and other Potemkin manifestations of the South Sudanese security sector.

- The SPLA-IO has used the SSR process to attempt to reconstitute its authority over a series of disparate armed elements, nominally known as the opposition, while also recruiting and attempting to reconstruct its forces following a set of comprehensive GRSS military victories from 2016-2018. The SSR process, with its promises of wages and ranks, has been effectively leveraged by the SPLA-IO into a set of promises made to entice forces back within its fold, an approach similar to that of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) during the CPA period.

However, there are fundamental differences between the CPA period and the present era that make the current SSR process of the R-ARCSS likely to fail in ways potentially even more destructive than the failures of 2013:

- Whereas CPA-era SSR was a process of extraversion in which external resources derived from oil revenue and international donors were reallocated to mollify competing military commanders, R-ARCSS-era SSR does not have an equivalent external resource basis. Instead, the SPLA-IO has sold potential futures to its forces in the form of promised wages and rank inflation. This process is effectively a pyramid scheme, and if, as seems probable, there remains little donor appetite to fund the SSR process, it is likely to collapse under the weight of broken promises and unfulfilled expectations, creating aggrieved groups of armed actors throughout the country. The collapse of the process is all the more likely given that oil revenue in South Sudan has diminished markedly over the last five years, beginning even before the current global oil crisis; reported revenues are well above actual revenues and current funds cannot sustain the South Sudanese armed forces as they currently exist. The impending funding crisis will create a situation

much like the rents crisis that led to the 2013 civil war. Indeed, from this perspective, the way that the government has strengthened the NSS at the expense of the army must be understood as an austerity tactic: faced with the politically catastrophic prospect of shrinking the army in line with current revenues, the presidency has chosen to let it atrophy while building a leaner military force that is more powerful, mono-ethnic, and directly answerable to the presidency.

- The SSR process of the R-ARCSS is constrained by a normative vision of the South Sudanese armed forces that understands the South Sudan People's Defence Force (SSPDF) and associated national armed forces (police, wildlife, etc.) to be the sole executors of legitimate violence in the country – a vision that fails to take into account the changes in the South Sudanese security sector that have occurred since the beginning of the current conflict, which include the following:
 - The SSR process of the R-ARCSS envisages the reconstitution of an army along exactly the same lines as the SPLA that split apart in 2013. The SSR process is thus predicated on the perverse contention that the government is willing to recreate the conditions that led to the army's implosion at the beginning of the civil war. However, the government's conduct since the signing of the R-ARCSS clearly shows that this is not the case. The crisis that occurred inside the SPLA in December 2013 was a direct result of the Juba Declaration of 2006 and the incorporation of the Nuer militias of Paulino Matiep into the national army. This crisis, in which much of the SPLA joined the SPLA-IO at the beginning of the conflict, lessened the government's confidence in the army as an institution and

led it to create a new map of military actors in South Sudan. Since 2013, military power has increasingly been held not by the army, but by a series of ethnically organized militias, including the Mathiang Anyoor and the Bul Nuer militias of Matthew Puljang, funded directly by the Office of the President. While such ethnic organization was always part of the structure of the SPLA, its newly explicit role in the security sector poses questions that the current SSR process is unable to address.

- Since 2013, the government has increasingly used the NSS to organize ethnically structured militias, and it is in these militias that it has vested its resources and power, rather than in the official army. Thus, the SSPDF has been consistently weakened as an institution while the NSS has been strengthened, to the point that the latter institution is now the most important military force in the country. Yet, the army is the focal point of SSR, while the NSS remains outside the process.
- Since 2013, in response to predatory military activity by both the SPLA/SSPDF and the SPLA-IO, many communities have constituted ethnically organized militias. While some have been directly instrumentalized by the government (the Padang Dinka militias of Upper Nile), and others now have nominal agreements with the SPLA-IO (the Agwelek), many of these militias are not simply proxy forces for the government or the opposition, but emerge as genuine community responses to military predation. The SSR process of the R-ARCSS does not address the emergence of these forces. The (re)constitution of a national army will not address the concerns of militia groups that have emerged precisely because of the predatory behaviour of the national army.

The SSR process of the R-ARCSS is not able to deal with any of these developments in South Sudan. In 2020, most powerful military actor is a metastasized NSS that often pursues the personal goals of the kleptocratic elite around South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and the head of the Internal Security Bureau (ISB) of the NSS, Akol Koor Kuc, while the security sector in the rest of the country is composed of communitarian militias, predated upon or instrumentalized by the government in Juba and the opposition in both Khartoum and Juba. The SSR process of the R-ARCSS overlays these substantive processes with a formalized, bureaucratic model designed to produce a unitary army. As this paper will show, far from healing the divisions of the war and creating a single army, SSR has intensified ethnic and political divisions, and increased the fragmentation of the security sector landscape in South Sudan. Rather than preparing the ground for peace, the SSR process of the R-ARCSS has set the stage for the next round of conflict.

Prior to the agreement on the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) on 22 February 2020, the two most serious stumbling blocks to the agreement appeared to be the issue of the 32 states and SSR, in particular the question of the VIP protection force for Riek Machar, the leader of the SPLA-IO. These stumbling blocks are seemingly resolved, on the one hand by Kiir's declaration that South Sudan would return to ten states, and on the other by Machar's acceptance of Kiir's protection in Juba. What this report will emphasize is that not only are these issues not resolved, they are both essentially instances of the same general problem. Kiir's January 2017, 32-states decree, was the product of a weak central authority attempting to placate diverse local constituencies under conditions of austerity. An attempt to centralize power produced a fragmentation and pluralization of forms of power on the ground. Likewise, since 2013, the security sector has seen Kiir attempt to maintain control in

Juba by backing myriad different ethnic militias and thereby fragmenting power-bases on the ground. In South Sudan at present, centralization and fragmentation are thus not opposed processes, but are rather complementary and dialectically related. What is eliminated by this intensifying logic of centralization and fragmentation are any mediating institutions in which Kiir's regime might be resisted: thus, both the army and the SPLM as a party have lost importance during the current civil war. In the space left by these institutions, there is a series of thin, unstable lines that directly link local military elites to the Office of the President and the political elite in Juba.

This process of centralization and fragmentation has set up two of the crises that South Sudan will now likely face:

- The R-ARCSS maintains the political imagination of the CPA, which sees power-sharing between Kiir, Machar, and other elite actors as the limit of the possible. Its logic reaches a culmination in the current RTGoNU in Juba, dependent on oil revenues and external funds, and lacking almost all legitimacy in the broader country – a statement as true of the SPLA-IO as it is of the SPLA-IG (in government). The inclusion of the political elite of the SPLA-IO within government while the opposition's substantive concerns are not addressed creates marginal groups around the country that are likely to rise up in opposition once again. Most notably, the Fertit opposition in Western Bahr el Ghazal and the Shilluk on the western bank of the White Nile are fragments of South Sudan only precariously included in the process of centralization at work in Juba. From the perspective of the edges of the country, the new regime currently establishing itself between the ministries and Pyramid Hotel resembles a new Khartoum: a unified

predatory centre alternately marginalizing and incorporating a whole raft of competing constituencies around the country as it keeps up a delicate balancing act, trying to remain in power under conditions of austerity. The security sector crisis created by a predatory regime and a series of resistant margins cannot be solved by yet another elite-level power-sharing agreement that has Juba as its means and ends, for it is Juba itself that will produce these crises.

- The progressive underfunding of the army and its marginalization from positions of power in Juba are the prehistory of the current SSR process of the R-ARCSS. The return of the SPLA-IO to government reveals the latent opposition of South Sudanese politics, which will shortly become its primary contradiction: that between the unpaid and underfed ground forces of the national army, and the militarized political elite and their militia forces. Given current, minimal levels of oil income and donor funding, the political elite will be unable to keep the South Sudanese military fed and happy within a 'big tent' policy, leading to army riots and protests, and a further fragmentation of the security sector. South Sudan's security sector will be effectively composed of fragments of the remnants of the national army, a centralized armed force (the NSS) under the control of the government elite, and a series of resistant margins. This is a recipe for permanent civil war.

The international community has taken some solace in the fact that it did not fund the SSR process of the R-ARCSS. However, not only is the current SSR process indebted to the formulations of the international community in general and the Troika (Norway, USA, UK) in particular, but the absence of funding is not in itself a policy. Neither the international diplomatic

world nor the humanitarian world in South Sudan have managed to think seriously about SSR and its relationship to a sustainable peace in the country outside the narrowly normative frameworks of liberal internationalism that underwrite the R-ARCSS. There is an urgent need to do so if we are ever to imagine a real political settlement in South Sudan. Just as vitally, the announcement of the formation of the RTGoNU already brought with it renewed calls for internationally funded state-building and SSR within South Sudan. If such state-building occurs, it is likely to be instrumentalized by the political-economic actors in South Sudan in ways that this paper sets out. Absent a better understanding of how the R-ARCSS has repeated and deepened the errors of the CPA-period, it is likely that the international community will make the same set of mistakes, and if the first round of donor-driven SSR in South Sudan was simply farcical, the second is likely to be deeply tragic.

2. Introduction

‘To put it another way, we have to interpret the war that is going on beneath peace; peace itself is a coded war.’²

– Michel Foucault

The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) was initially supposed to result in the formation of a Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU) on 12 May 2019, marking the end of the eight-month pre-transitional period. An initial extension was agreed until 12 November 2019, a deadline that, despite international pressure, was extended by another 100 days, until 22 February 2020. It was then that an agreement on the formation of the TGoNU was finally made, following the decision of Riek Machar, the leader of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO), to go to Juba without a personal protection force, and the apparent concession of South Sudanese President Salva Kiir in drawing down from 32 states to ten states.³

² Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France: 1975-76*, Picador, New York, 2003, pp. 50-51.

³ While some international observers have claimed that the reduction in the number of South Sudanese states marks a concession by Kiir (International Crisis Group, ‘A Major Step Towards Ending South Sudan’s Civil War’, 25 February 2020), it is not clear that this is the case. Certainly, his decision was intended to appear to be a concession offered to the SPLA-IO, and as such forced Machar into accepting the TGoNU at the risk of international opprobrium. Machar’s acceptance in turn led to the current situation, as of May 2020, where he is effectively under house arrest at his residence close to J1 (after having had to leave the Pyramid Hotel due to his positive test for Covid-19), just as the few opposition forces that stay at training sites as part of the SSR process are effectively imprisoned by their guards, who are almost all derived from recently recruited Dinka forces from Gogrial. Meanwhile, the government retains substantive political-economic control of the country, regardless of the number of states and the number of governors. While, to be sure, the reduction in the number of states came at an internal cost to the government (who then had to appease the dismissed governors to the tune of USD 40 million), it did not benefit the opposition but did benefit the government by forcing the hand of the opposition. (Interviews with SPLA-IO commanders, Juba, March 2020; interview with SSPDF military intelligence, Juba, March 2020).

In the run-up to each of these deadlines, the questions posed by the humanitarian and diplomatic communities were very similar. In meetings in New York, Washington, D.C., Oslo, London, Brussels, Juba, and Nairobi in 2017-2020, the author of this paper heard the same refrains: Are there any signs of political will? Can the belligerent parties keep to the timetable? Are we moving towards peace? These questions established the peace process as the temporal limit of the political imagination. Put more prosaically: the peace process became the only game in town, and all actions were understood as either advancing towards or moving away from peace, which was considered as equivalent to the peace process.⁴ Not returning to all-out-war was the *sine qua non* of the diplomatic imagination.

The problem with these questions is that they refuse to think through the political logics at play in South Sudan in favour of a formalist analysis that moves the belligerent parties either towards or further away from a notional state called ‘peace.’ Such questions blinker the inquirers to the continuous forms of political-economic struggle in South Sudan that persist in periods of ‘peace’ and ‘war,’ and that prove both more durable and more consequential than whether a given period is identified as part of a process of peace or of war. In order to understand decisions about, for instance, the location of a cantonment site, which troops go there, under what conditions, and with what expectations, one must consider this political economy rather than the formal criteria of the peace process.

This is the task that this paper sets itself.

⁴This occludes the fact that many of the measures taken in line with the peace agreement are actually preparations for war, such as the cantonment process through which the SPLA-IO recruited with expectations of future conflict.

Following the suggestion from Michel Foucault cited at the opening of this introduction, this paper will not consider war and peace as absolutely distinct periods. Rather, it will investigate the war underlying the peace: the continuities of interest and struggle that make peace processes in South Sudan a particular form (often an intensification) of the war economy rather than a rupture with it. In order to carry out this investigation, this paper will begin with a very schematic analysis of the distinctive political economy of predation and reallocation that emerged in South Sudan during the second civil war (1983-2005).⁵ The broad contours of this political economy have remained the distinctive characteristic of the South Sudanese political space. This paper will then begin its full analysis of this form of political economy by analyzing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) period from 2005-2011, during which control of aid resources and rents from Khartoum (the external resources of the second civil war) were replaced by oil revenues and donor largesse.⁶ It will analyze how the security sector reform (SSR) process that took place during this period was instrumentalized by the factions within the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).⁷

The SSR process that occurred during the CPA period is widely seen as a failure. Indeed, considered on its own terms, relative to its aims and goals, SSR was a manifest failure, as demonstrated by the farcical disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process, or

⁵ Some of the most detailed and supple accounts of this period remain those which analyze the relationship between conflict and aid, and in particular, the two canonical studies by David Keen and Alex de Waal, et. al.: David Keen, *The Benefits of Famine: A political economy of famine and relief in southwestern Sudan, 1983–1989*, 2nd edition, James Currey, Oxford, 2008; Alex de Waal et al., *Food and power in Sudan: a critique of humanitarianism*, African Rights, London, 1997.

⁶ The author is indebted to Miklos Gosztonyi for the initial formulation of this research question and its historical framing.

⁷ For the broad context of such an analysis, albeit from an extremely schematic position, see Alex de Waal, 'When kleptocracy becomes insolvent: Brute causes of the civil war in South Sudan', *African Affairs* 113, no. 452 (July 2014): 347–369.

more viscerally, by the troops who went door to door in December 2013, killing Nuer civilians.⁸ However, what an emphasis on SSR's failure occludes is just how productive the SSR process was for its participants, who instrumentalized it for their own ends. SSR was a very productive failure, and this paper will consider SSR in its productivity: rather than faulting it for failing in its formal goals, this paper will consider the world that SSR built. The failures of the SSR process during the CPA were not contingent or accidental, not due to a lack of political will or a lack of resources; they were rather structural and necessary. A process whose formal aim was the creation of a unitary, bureaucratic army was instrumentalized, and actually intensified the ethnic and class cleavages of the South Sudanese armed forces, despite taking on the appearance of state-building.⁹

This paper will then turn to the SSR process of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) and the R-ARCSS to analyze the similarities and dissimilarities with the CPA period. It will analyze the way that these SSR processes retain the formal character of CPA-era SSR, and the way that they have also been instrumentalized by the parties to the agreements. The way that R-ARCSS has been instrumentalized has created two worlds in South Sudan: in one, documents were signed, Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (R-JMEC) meetings occurred, and the Strategic Defence and Security Review Board (SDSRB) planned for a national army equipped to face foreign challenges; in the other, real, world, which occurred under the table and away from the representatives of the

⁸ A DDR process that should have processed 90,000 troops according to the CPA, processed well under 10,000 (Richard Rands, 'In Need of Review: SPLA Transformation in 2006-10 and beyond', Small Arms Survey, Geneva, 2010, p. 42).

⁹ There is thus something deeply perverse in some of the literature on Security Sector Reform in South Sudan, which, upon surveying the mess that was SSR during the CPA period, largely brought about and sanctified by international consultants, prescribes as a solution to this mess yet more international consultants. See Rands, 2010.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Troika, cantonment sites split as commanders feuded over resources, the government recruited militia forces at the very moment it was supposed to be cantoning its forces in their barracks, and every dollar of international support to the SSR process found its way into the networks of South Sudan's military aristocracy.¹⁰ At this, the international community shrugged and held up its hands, as if to say: what can we do?

This paper will outline the ways in which these two worlds – the formal world of paper agreements and the real world of South Sudan's political economy – are related. Indeed, it is the insistence on the existence of that world of paper that enables the growth and secrecy of the world of South Sudan's political economy. Without the fiction of bureaucracy, there cannot be the silence of power, and that is a reality that the international community must confront before it enters yet another round of SSR.

Research for *The Politics of Numbers* was done in October and November 2019, and supplemented by further field research in March 2020, in what are now, once again: Unity, Jonglei, Western Bahr el Ghazal, and Central Equatoria states.¹¹ The author wishes to thank the donors and organizations that made this research possible. He also wishes to thank those comrades whose conversations with him have prompted the best of this work: at its best, a good report is part of a continuous conversation, and the author is honoured to be in dialogue with such a productive

¹⁰ For the second-civil-war (1983-2005) origins of the military aristocracy see Clémence Pinaud's seminal article, 'South Sudan: Civil war, predation and the making of a military aristocracy', *African Affairs* 113, no. 451 (April 2014): 192–211.

¹¹ In a presidential decree on 14 January 2017, Salva Kiir created 32 states in South Sudan. On 20 February 2020, he announced his intention to return to ten states in South Sudan. For ease of reference, this paper will refer to the ten states for general locations, but will refer to the 32 states (and the prior 28 states) when historically appropriate and accurate (e.g. when referencing disagreements about the nature of those very states).

group. Many cannot be named, but of those that can: Lam Akol, Miklos Goztonyi, Charles Machieng Kuol, Clémence Pinaud, Carol Berger, Zoe Cormack, Ferenc Dávid Markó, Matthew Pritchard, the recently departed Peter Gadet, Alan Boswell, Naomi Pendle, Jérôme Tubiana, Wesley Welebe, the 'Analysts,' and Eddie Thomas (the greatest analyst of them all): I owe you all far too much.

3. The Limits of Payroll Peace: On CPA-era Security Sector Reform

The Revenge of the Jobbists

In 1983, the first SPLM manifesto articulated a critique of the Anyanya I movement that had fought against the government in Khartoum during the first Sudanese civil war (1955-1972).¹²

The 1972 Addis Ababa agreement had brought an end to that war, and twenty thousand Anyanya rebels had been absorbed into the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), following promises of wages and ranks. Anyanya I, the manifesto held, had been solely concerned with rectifying the problem of southern exclusion from positions of power in the Sudanese government, and this accounted for the ‘jobbist’ character of the movement. The SPLM’s critique was that what Anyanya wanted was merely its piece of the pie (ranks and titles to address northern Sudanese political dominance), rather than the creation of a new form of political organization in Sudan. The point was not to eat your fill, the SPLM declared, but to bake a new pie.

In February 2020, in the run-up to the formation of the new cabinet and the announcements of the South Sudanese vice presidents, there was another struggle for ranks and titles. The ‘jobbists’ had returned to Juba, except this time they were the SPLM. Rather than create a new Sudan, the SPLM has recreated its basic political logic, one that has been in place throughout southern Sudan’s violent entanglement with the rest of the world.¹³ In an overly schematic way, one could say that government has always been an external imposition on southern Sudan: the source of

¹² See the SPLM Manifesto, 1987, pp. 7-8, cited in Edward Thomas, *South Sudan: A Slow Liberation*, Zed Books, London, February 2015.

¹³ This report shall refer to ‘southern Sudan’ when it refers to the area of Sudan that, following its secession on 9 July 2011, became South Sudan, and South Sudan when it refers to the sovereign country formed by its secession from Sudan on 9 July 2011.

predatory power *over* the region, and the giver of titles *to* the region. While different southern Sudanese communities have long had extensive and sophisticated forms of internal organization and power, power in relation to external forces (the British condominium government, the Mahdiyya) comes from elsewhere: power is a thing of God, as it is sometimes described in Dinka, that disposes of fate without being constrained by a social contract. It comes from without, not within.¹⁴

Governmental and military power, in other words, tends to be inflicted on people, rather than being generated by people internally.¹⁵ At best, government resources are something people acquire from elsewhere as if they were blessings. More often, people are the object of power, rather than subjects that constitute it. Said otherwise, the state form (including the army) has always been autonomous from society, and what has shifted historically is not this fact, but the economic basis of this autonomy.¹⁶ For the people of South Sudan, government and military power is a force from elsewhere from which one suffers, and which occasionally bestows gifts in exchange for loyalty.

This basic political logic is one of extraversion, in which externally accessed resources are not predicated on internal sources of legitimacy, but are used to reward and mollify political actors, in the hope of creating a coalition to enable continued access to military force and external

¹⁴ The most sophisticated reflection on power and government in South Sudan remains Cherry Leonard's *Dealing with Government in South Sudan: Histories of Chiefship, Community and State*, James Currey, Oxford, 2013.

¹⁵ It is thus a classic example of what Richard A. Joseph will term 'prebendal politics,' in which ranks and political offices are allocated as something of a political reward, rather than with the expectation that the office will actually be carried out by the incumbent. See *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The rise and fall of the second republic*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.

¹⁶ I owe to Eddie Thomas the formulation of the state's autonomy from society. See Thomas, 2015.

resources.¹⁷ After Anyanya I, the government in Khartoum paid off the largely Nuer rebel fighters with positions and salaries in the national army. During the second civil war, wages and cash from Khartoum paid to Nuer militia forces were not payment for work done, but rather a means of maintaining loyalty that enabled the northern government to create divisions within the south, and enabled southern fighters to access both capital and weaponry. This logic of extraversion entrenched itself during the second civil war across almost all of southern Sudan and set the stage for the CPA period and security sector ‘reform.’

The Creation of a Military Aristocracy

The military and political elite that came to power in southern Sudan in 2005 with the signing of the CPA had spent the prior two decades of the second civil war entrenching their positions at the top of a political economy based on extraversion and predation.¹⁸ The parties to that war were focused on the capture of resources. For the Sudanese government, central priorities included using militia forces to capture oil resources and using population displacement to generate an uprooted labour force for agricultural projects in the north of the country.¹⁹

Southern Sudanese actors used both practices of predation and practices of extraversion. The

¹⁷ For a short version of the concept of extraversion, see the paper by Jean-François Bayart, ‘Preface to the second English edition. Africa in the world: a history of extraversion’ in *The State in Africa: The politics of the belly*, 2nd edition, Polity, London, 2009. The concept of extraversion also precisely describes the relationship of NGOs to their donors. Rather than legitimacy coming from the communities that NGOs deign to help, NGOs’ fundamental loyalty and accountability are to the donors that furnish their funds. It is in this sense that NGOs are, by their very nature, detached from the communities they purport to help. See James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994.

¹⁸ The most elegant formulation of the emergence of this class during the second civil war remains Pinaud, 2014.

¹⁹ On displacement and control of the oil fields in what is now Unity state, see Georgette Gagnon and John Ryle, ‘Report of an Investigation into Oil Development, Conflict, and Displacement in Western Upper Nile’, Sudan, October 2001; for the seminal account of the relationship of conflict to aid and labour during the second civil war, see Keen, 2008.

latter involved acquiring resources from foreign governments, while the former involved the violent acquisition of cattle, women, and aid resources. These practices were common to the SPLA and a variety of other militia forces, like Paulino Matiep's Bul Nuer militias, the South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF), which were paid with both weapons and capital for securing the oil fields of what is now Unity state, at great human cost.²⁰

From the beginning, John Garang, the leader of the SPLM, had intended the rebel movement to be structured along the lines of the SAF, and to constitute a military force rather than a political movement.²¹ The SPLM did not attempt to form a distinctive political practice of governance. Rather, it was conservative and revisionist as a governing force, if it governed at all. More often, it simply treated the areas under its control as a resource base for coercive tax regimes.²² In effect, it became an agent of plunder and pillage. In Peter Adwok Nyaba's words, '[It] became like an agent of occupation in areas it controlled.'²³

The logic of the SPLA, like the other militias active in the country, was not one of absolute hierarchy determined by a centralized command. Rather, commanders acted relatively autonomously over large expanses of territory, which enabled them to recruit soldiers, tax civilians, and enrich themselves through trade and predation. SPLA commanders in Northern Bahr el Ghazal profited from looted cattle and access to northern cattle markets, while Paulino

²⁰ For details of the Bul Nuer forces in Unity state, see Joshua Craze and Jérôme Tubiana, with Claudio Gramizzi, 'A State of Disunity: Conflict Dynamics in Unity State, South Sudan, 2013-15', Small Arms Survey, December 2016; for details on the predation on aid during the second civil war see Joshua Craze, 'Displacement, Access, and Conflict in South Sudan: A Longitudinal Perspective', Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility, 2018.

²¹ See Peter Adwok Nyaba, *Politics of Liberation in South Sudan: An Insider's View*, Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 1997.

²² See Arop Madut-Arop, *Sudan's Painful Road to Peace: A full story of the founding and development of SPLM/SPLA*, Booksurge, Charleston, 2005.

²³ Nyaba, 1997, p. 51.

Matiep dealt in sorghum and cattle, including with northern merchants, and used tactical marriages to cement his control of Mayom county, Unity state.²⁴ The fracturing of the SPLM/A in the 1990s only increased the relative autonomy of these commanders, who used their military dominance to engage in practices of predation that effectively amounted to wealth transfers from South Sudanese civilians to these commanders, creating a dominant militarized class.²⁵

More than the opposition between the SPLM/A and Matiep's SSDF, or between Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, the enduring legacy of the second civil war is the class opposition between a newly emergent South Sudanese militarized elite, reliant on raiding and extraversion, and the rest of the population, which was both reliant on that elite for protection and access to external resources, ranks, and wages, and also predated upon by that elite for cattle, women, and labour. It is this opposition that intensified during the CPA period, as a ruling military aristocracy reaped the benefits of oil revenues and donor largesse.

The CPA Period

²⁴ Inter alia, interviews with Bul Nuer politicians, Juba, November 2019; interview with Bul Nuer politicians, Mayom town, June 2012.

²⁵ It cannot be emphasized enough that the enrichment of a dominant class of elite military leaders was also the result of the immiseration and displacement of South Sudanese civilians, and the hollowing out of many forms of communitarian organization. For the unravelling of communitarian ethics, see Jok Madut Jok and Sharon Hutchinson, 'Sudan's Prolonged Second Civil War and The Militarization of Nuer and Dinka Ethnic Identities', *African Studies Review* 42, no. 2 (September 1999): 125-145; for an understanding of the dominance of the military class as a process of wealth transfer and immiseration, see Craze, 2018; and Joshua Craze, 'Displaced and Immiserated: The Shilluk of Upper Nile in South Sudan's civil war, 2014-19', Small Arms Survey, Geneva, 2019. During the current conflict (2013-20), there has also been a massive wealth transfer from the poorest South Sudanese to the richest, and that has also fundamentally shaped the size and type of herds that one finds in South Sudan. As Andy Catley notes, this war has witnessed the emergence of a 'a class of "super-rich" elites with massive livestock herds, acquired through oil wealth and livestock purchases (up to late 2013), and then, large-scale commercial and politically-driven raiding.' See Andy Catley, 'Livestock and livelihoods in South Sudan', DFID Help Desk Report, 5 December 2018, p. 8.

After the announcement of South Sudanese independence on 9 July 2011, the World Bank was among many to announce that South Sudan was a blank slate. The nation may have been formed, or so the story went, but the state would have to be built.²⁶ Salva Kiir, the president of South Sudan, echoed the wisdom of the international community in a speech shortly after independence: ‘The Republic of South Sudan is like a white paper – *tabula rasa!*’²⁷ This attitude to South Sudan had been in place since 2005 – indeed, it was definitional of the CPA period from 2005-2011, as if – simultaneously – the international community was building a state that somehow perpetually remained unbuilt.

While it may have been true that the new country of South Sudan did not have the formal institutions of an established European state, the story of a *tabula rasa*, as Eddie Thomas has argued, was also an attractive narrative for the international community: it meant that there was nothing that needed be to learnt about the political history of southern Sudan (because there is nothing to learn about place that has nothing in it), and thus the international community’s state-building schemes could be generated from international templates and normative fantasies of statecraft.²⁸ This narrative occluded many of the continuities between the second civil war era and the CPA period. As we have seen in the prior two sections, the South Sudan that emerged in 2011 was far from a blank slate. Twenty years of war had built up an enduring political-economic system that was also consonant with a long history of state-society relations in southern Sudan. It is this political economy of military aristocracy, predation, and extraversion that would come to be dominant in the CPA period.²⁹ Indeed, it is the fiction of the *tabula rasa* that enabled the

²⁶ Interviews with international consultants and UN personnel, Aweil, Juba, Bentiu, and Malakal, 2010-2012.

²⁷ Salva Kiir, speech on Martyr’s Day, Juba, 30 July 2011. Cited in Thomas, 2015.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ For a very schematic account of this period that goes into more detail than I can do here, see de Waal, 2014.

military aristocracy to dominate CPA-period southern Sudan so spectacularly. On the surface: international state-building. *Sub mensa*: the real politics. As the following sections will make clear, it was the wilful blindness of the international community that enabled the kleptocracy that followed 2005.

The CPA period began with the signing of the agreement in 2005. Among the Lou Nuer, 2006 is referred to as the year of eating grass.³⁰ This means that those who fought in the second civil war then reaped the rewards of their victory, and ate, so to speak, the time they had spent in the bush.³¹ Rather than looted cattle and women, the rewards of 2005 were to be found in oil contracts and, to a lesser extent, NGO per diems. The exterior resources of the second civil war were funds from foreign governments and aid, while in the CPA period, the principal resources were oil revenues and donor funds.³² In the concise phrasing of the Conflict Research Programme of the London School of Economics, '[T]he political production function of the GoSS [Government of Southern Sudan] and SPLM/A was, at its core, to turn oil revenues into political payoffs.'³³ Within the SPLM, donor funds and oil revenues were turned into the means of buying off opponents and creating elite coalitions, intensifying the class structure of the second civil war.

³⁰ Interviews with Lou Nuer civilians, Akobo, November 2019.

³¹ Eating is a common locution in the Horn of Africa and Central Africa for the exercise of power: one eats (consumes) the resources of the office which one has been assigned. See Bayart, 2009; Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001.

³² By 2008, the first World Bank GDP estimate for South Sudan was USD 15 billion, larger than Uganda. Donor funds in the CPA period have a homologous role to aid resources during the second civil war: rather than resources being legitimately produced from within the fabric of South Sudanese society, they are acquired independently from foreign sources, thus once again creating an autonomous state structure, relatively independent of society.

³³ Alan Boswell et al., 'The Security Arena in South Sudan: A Political Marketplace Study', Conflict Research Programme at the LSE and World Peace Foundation at The Fletcher School, December 2019, p. 6.

The Big Tent

The CPA was a bilateral agreement between two warring parties: the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A. This was the normative and formal frame of the peace agreement. On the ground, however, the majority of the forces fighting the SPLA in southern Sudan had been southern militia forces, rather than the core battalions of the SAF. These militias included various splinter groups from the SPLA, Matiep's SSDF, and other local security forces. Thus, the security sector in southern Sudan, as of 2005, was a patchwork of military forces, which post-CPA would have to be shoe-horned into a bilateral agreement in which, as per Article 7(a) of the CPA, 'No armed group allied to either party shall be allowed to operate outside the two [SPLA and SAF] forces.'³⁴

For the SPLM/A, the priority was ensuring that the referendum on secession would occur in 2011. The risk posed by what the CPA called OAG (other armed groups) was that Khartoum could support them with weapons and cash, create insecurity, and threaten the feasibility of the referendum. The SPLM/A's strategy was to effectively buy up the opposition with ranks and wages, absorbing them into the SPLA, much as SAF had absorbed Anyanya I in 1972. This process was formalized by the Juba Declaration of 2006.³⁵

In 2005, at the signing of the CPA, there were an estimated 40,000 soldiers in the SPLA.³⁶ The SSDF numbered between 10,000 and 30,000.³⁷ The formal SSR process of the CPA did not

³⁴ The Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People/s Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army, 25 September 2003, p. 89.

³⁵ See the excellent paper by John Young, 'The South Sudan Defence Forces in the Wake of the Juba Declaration', HSBA Working Paper, November 2006.

³⁶ See John Snowden, 'Work in progress: security force development in South Sudan through February 2012, Small Arms Survey', HSBA Working Paper 27, Small Arms Survey, Geneva, 2012, p. 19.

³⁷ Young, 2006. Estimates vary for the total size of the SPLA and the OAG in 2005: see, inter alia, Rands, 2010, and CRP 2019 – see footnote 33.

dictate a final size for the SPLA. Thus, when the SPLA began the process of absorbing the South Sudan People's Defence Force (SSPDF), the politics of numbers meant that military commanders had a vested interest in maximizing the number of troops under their command, and thus the number of wages they could control and the number ranks that they could distribute as tokens of loyalty. By 2011, these incentives led to an army, bankrolled by oil revenue, of an estimated 240,000 soldiers, as many as half of whom were 'ghosts' who artificially inflated the payroll and whose wages went straight to their presumptive commanders.³⁸ In the CPA period, a technocratic politics of numbers that treated troop numbers quantitatively without considering their political import was instrumentalized by commanders who exploited the very rules of the peace agreement to maximize their own appearance of strength, and thus their access to external resources and power.

The absorption of the OAG into the SPLA was not substantive; it did not lead to a unified force. Rather, under the cover of the fiction of a unitary army, local and organizational differences between the groups persisted. What unified the SPLA of the CPA era, after the Juba Declaration, was not a sense of identity or shared command structure, but rather a common investment in a political economy based on ranks, wages, and the redistribution of resources, primarily from oil revenue. Within this economy, the assignment of ranks took on a particularly vexed character.

³⁸ It should be noted that the R-ARCSS process does not set final numbers for the size of the army, similarly to the CPA, but a final limit to the size of the army (29,000 soldiers) for 'Phase I' of chapter II of the R-ARCSS (the chapter of the peace agreement concerned with security arrangements) was agreed upon. This limit setting, however, did not prevent the inflation of forces during the initial cantonment process, and indeed may have paradoxically inflated the initial numbers of troops claimed by commanders: given that the force would in theory have to be reduced to 29,000, commanders tried to maximize the number of soldiers they cantoned and give them as high a set of ranks as possible, so they could in turn maximize their claim on numbers and ranks in the face of future reductions that would enable a final overall force in the country to be composed of only 29,000 men. Equally, irrespective of final numbers, the priorities of the commanders were short-term maximizations of forces. A peace process, as they say, is a long time in politics. Interviews with SPLA-IO commanders, Mayom, Akobo, Juba, October-November 2019, March 2020.

Many of the SSDF commanders had been formally integrated into the SAF, often with high ranks, and would not accept lesser positions. The SPLA had to offer these commanders ranks at least equivalent to those they had had in SAF in order to buy their loyalty, but doing so led to resentment in the SPLA.³⁹ In order to offset this resentment, there was an accompanying promotion of SPLA officers, leading to an explosion in the number of high-ranking officers. This process was named by de Waal et al. as ‘payroll peace,’ in which, in an echo of the jobbist character of the 1972 agreement, ranks and wages were used to buy troops.⁴⁰ Ranks bought the loyalty of higher-ranked officers, wages that of soldiers: as de Waal notes, following the Juba Declaration, the South Sudan Legislative Assembly voted to double the pay of private soldiers to USD 150/month, twice that of their counterparts in the Sudan Armed Forces.⁴¹

However, this remunerative process had its limits. If the potential threat of violence was rewarded, then violence itself became a potent tool for leveraging one’s place in the SPLA. Throughout the CPA period, there was a series of revolts against the South Sudanese government. While many of these revolts had roots in substantive communitarian disagreements with the existing order in South Sudan (such as the Shilluk revolts against their marginalization in the politics of Upper Nile), many commanders used such revolts to acquire greater ranks.⁴² Peter Gadet, for instance, rebelled and then rejoined the SPLA during this period, after his rebellion was effectively bought off with the promise of a higher rank in the army.⁴³ Such rebellions and subsequent absorptions of rebel forces into the SPLA further bloated the national army. By

³⁹ Young, 2006, p. 26.

⁴⁰ Ranks and wages are here also a shorthand for a variety of other perks, including cash, vehicles, and political positions.

⁴¹ De Waal, 2014, p. 355

⁴² For more general accounts of these revolts see Small Arms Survey, ‘Pendulum Swings: The Rise and Fall of Insurgent Militias in South Sudan’ HSBA Issue Brief No. 22, Small Arms Survey, Geneva, November 2013. For a detailed account of the Shilluk revolts see Craze, 2019.

⁴³ Interview with Peter Gadet, Addis Ababa, June 2016.

2011, the SPLA constituted 80% of total government employees in southern Sudan, and defence was by far the largest expenditure in the southern Sudanese budget.

The SSR process of the CPA was characterized by a weak centralized regime that attempted to maintain its power by proliferating rentier relationships in which resources were reallocated to potential violent forces on the ground, undermining the army as a coherent institution.⁴⁴ During the CPA period, Juba's attempt to maintain nominal control of South Sudan in the run-up to the referendum led to a fragmentation of the country's central institution, the SPLA, which, with its increasingly bloated and divided membership, was not fit for purpose as an army. The national elite then transferred its military sponsorship to ethnic militias organized outside of the framework of the SPLA that could better assure its dominance of violent means within the country.

Make Believe

Parallel to the international community's commitment to the idea that South Sudan was a *tabula rasa* ran its commitment to an idea of the South Sudanese army as a potentially professional, bureaucratically organized military force. According to the international community, the SPLA, like the South Sudanese state, remained to be made, and its substantive ordering logic – extant since the second civil war – was effectively invisible to the international community. During the CPA period, the military produced a panoply of official documents about SPLA reform, often

⁴⁴ In political science, rentier states are those that derive their income from exterior sources (classically oil), and redeploy those revenues to placate internal political constituencies. For a comparative view of rentier relationships, see the essays in the edited volume by Joshua Craze and Mark Huband (eds.), *The Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Challenge of the Twenty-first Century*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2009.

with advice or oversight from the USA and/or the UK, including the SPLA White Paper on Defence (2008) and the SPLA Chief of General Staff's Strategic guidance (2008).⁴⁵ All of these papers sketched out a path to a professional army, organized into divisions, conventionally structured according to international standards. These documents betray no reflection on the actual logic of organization of the security forces in South Sudan. All of these documents existed in the world of paper and bureaucracy where the army was composed of divisions within a hierarchical command structure – and which enabled the real and substantive world of the actual South Sudanese security sector.

From 2006, there was a substantial investment of international funds into the SPLA. Richard Rands gives a range of estimates for the US engagement in 'transformation initiatives' that varies from USD 150 million to USD 300 million for the period 2006-2010.⁴⁶ These projects included training troops, assisting in security sector design and reform, and carrying out construction programs (e.g. the construction of barracks). The UK was more circumspect, focusing on policy-level initiatives, and committed much less money; Rands estimates that its investment in SSR in South Sudan did not exceed USD 10 million from 2006-2012.

Some of these investments in South Sudan were merely fanciful: a window dressing of reform atop a fragmenting SPLA. Others, however, had real and baleful consequences. From 2007-2008, America trained SPLA commandoes and special forces to 'deal with internal security threats.'⁴⁷ In other words, while the SPLA was becoming more unwieldy and more partisan, the normative fantasy of a unitary army enabled international backers to justify training troops who would then

⁴⁵ See Leslie Warner's edifying Ph.D. dissertation, 'The Role of Military Integrations in War-to-Peace Transitions: The Case of South Sudan (2006-13)', King's College London.

⁴⁶ Richard Rands, 2010, p. 32.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 38.

go on to participate in the South Sudanese civil war as part of partisan forces working for Salva Kiir.⁴⁸ Training schemes for the SPLA and the attempted restructuring of the army along formal bureaucratic lines were absolute failures. As Claudia Breitung et al. have argued:

Despite their formal integration, the different factions within the SPLA remained just that – factions. Ethnic integration and mixing of units did take place to a certain extent, and there were attempts to relocate former militia leaders to parts of the country other than those where they would come from, but to little avail. Soldiers would show limited respect for central command as they continued to take orders given by their own leaders, who were also the ones paying out their salaries.⁴⁹

It is important to underline that this SSR process did not fail contingently. It was not, as the author once heard, a case of ‘the plan was good; it’s the actors that were the problem.’⁵⁰ The plan, insofar as it was dictated by international fantasies of organization and did not address the actual political economy of the country, was precisely the problem: it enabled exactly what the international community bemoaned. For instance, the proliferation of offices and positions within the SPLA was heralded as a success story, part of the professionalization of the army

⁴⁸ It cannot be proved absolutely that any of these troops participated in war crimes in Juba and elsewhere, for the names of the troops that were trained are not known and cannot be traced against those that have participated in war crimes. It nevertheless remains true that the international community actively trained an army that, according to the UN Mission in South Sudan, Human Right Watch, and the UN Commission on Human Rights, has actively committed war crimes during the current conflict. See UNMISS, ‘A Report on Violations and Abuses of International Human Rights Law and Violations of International Humanitarian Law in the Context of the Fighting in Juba, South Sudan, in July 2016’, January 2017; Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, ‘Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan’, 13 March 2018; Human Rights Watch, ‘South Sudan: Government Forces Abusing Civilians’, 4 June 2019.

⁴⁹ Claudia Breitung et al., ‘In Need of a Critical Rethink: Security Sector Reform in South Sudan’, BICC Working Paper, 2016, p. 14

⁵⁰ Meeting with international expert on security sector reform, Juba, November 2019.

contributing to the strengthening power of a central state. In reality, this proliferation of positions was actually the result of weak centralization and the weakening of state control leading to a fragmentation of political power. Thus, in one of South Sudanese history's many ironies, what the international community saw as a process of the strengthening of the SPLA as a state-institution was actually the fragmentation of the sole genuinely national institution in the country.

A failure to understand the political economy of the security sector in South Sudan meant that the international community failed to take seriously the real reasons that the SPLA would resist the implementation of international schemes of SSR, or else subvert them to their own ends. For instance, training schemes, with their free lunches, per diems, and the veneer of legitimacy they brought, were welcomed. On the other hand, a centralized roster of all of the soldiers in the army was resisted by the SPLA, for it would have interfered with the delicate politics of numbers and ghost troops that enabled commanders to maximize their claim on oil revenues, manifest as wages. As Boswell et al. argue, the fact that there was not a central registry of SPLA personnel also disguised the actual ethnic basis of SPLA organization, and as 'a consequence, the ethnic basis of military mobilization, which had been a persistent feature of the war years, was sustained during the peacetime expansion of the SPLA.'⁵¹

Rather than SSR moulding the army, it would be more accurate to speak of the SPLA moulding SSR. In a situation in which the army was constituted by powerful personal patronage networks, SSR simply offered opportunities to those networks to dispense favours to favoured personnel in the form of training sessions and newly available positions. To actually reform the army along

⁵¹ Boswell et. al., 2019, p. 16.

the lines intended by the Americans, British, and the rest of the international security experts would have exposed those networks to considerable risk, as such reform would have shortcut their own capacity to acquire resources and reallocate them to followers. It is thus no surprise that CPA-era SSR was a dream that was, so to speak, dead on arrival.⁵²

The Limits of Payroll Peace

There has been much recent valuable work on ‘payroll peace’ by the team around Alex de Waal. They describe a turbulent system predicated on the distribution of material incentives by political actors to purchase the loyalty of militarized groups internal to South Sudan.⁵³ Some of these studies have tried to show the changing nature of the ‘political marketplace’ in South Sudan from the 1970s to the present; in this sense, these studies are historical: they test their model against data over time. However, what is distinctly unhistorical about such studies is their assumption of the unvarying nature of the political marketplace itself. There might be different market effects, different actors, and different prices, but the marketplace itself remains curiously ahistorical (it is

⁵² The same logic is true of the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program, which was, by December 2010, thought by one report to be merely a limited and ‘expensive livelihoods support program,’ conducted at a cost of USD 55 million (see Lydia Stone, ‘Failures and Opportunities: Rethinking DDR in South Sudan’, Issue Brief 17, Small Arms Survey, Geneva, May 2011, p. 7). Commanders had no real interest in removing soldiers from payroll (given that they constituted a source of income), so those who went through DDR were largely the sick, women who had never been in the SPLA in the first place, and soldiers out of favour with their commanding officers. While the CPA stipulated that 90,000 combatants were to go through DDR, by 2010, fewer than 10,000 were estimated to have completed the program (Rands, 2010, p. 42). DDR in the CPA era was a program conceived without any sense of the actual political economy of southern Sudan, nor how the war economy linked into the broader economy. See also Julie Brethfeld, ‘Unrealistic Expectations: Current Challenges to Reintegration in Southern Sudan’, Working Paper 21, Small Arms Survey, Geneva, June 2010.

⁵³ See, for a summary, Alan Boswell and Alex de Waal, ‘South Sudan: The Perils of Payroll Peace’, Payroll Peace Memo, Conflict Research Programme, 4 March 2019.

presumed to simply be the given of politics in southern Sudan), with little attention paid to the historical constitution of the marketplace itself.

The ahistoricity of such economism is particularly problematic in South Sudan, which has seen intense contestations of the moral and practical limits of the marketplace.⁵⁴ These contestations are about both what sort of things can be sold, and the moral and ethical limits of selling as such. The canonical example is from Sharon Hutchinson's *Nuer Dilemmas*, where she argues that one of the central conflicts characterizing the Nuer during the second half of the twentieth century was one between market and non-market exchange. Cattle were both part of market relations, and part of continuous bridewealth payments that linked together communities in social ties, and there were constant debates – and the inventions of new practices – around cattle, as their market-nature was discussed.⁵⁵

In reference to the current civil war, Naomi Pendle has done excellent work on the limits of the political marketplace, analyzing the extent to which the buying of loyalty from commanders clashes with communitarian and other forms of belonging in ways that cannot be easily subsumed into a marketplace framework.⁵⁶ Indeed, the political marketplace framework side-lines many other forms of motivation for armed actors in South Sudan, and does not take seriously the nature of religious institutions or communitarian mobilization. For the political marketplace approach, in short, everything is comprehensible insofar as everything has a price, in

⁵⁴ See, for the classic study, Sharon Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas: Coping with Money, War, and the State*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996.

⁵⁵ See Hutchinson, 1996, pp. 88-101.

⁵⁶ Naomi Pendle, 'The Nuer of Dinka Money: Politics of the SPLA-IO in South Sudan,' *Conflict, Security, and Development*, Forthcoming.

a region in which price legibility (the idea that things have prices in a market) is itself the historical product of violence.⁵⁷

A proper interrogation of these motivations and the sketching out an alternative reading of conflict in South Sudan are beyond the scope of this paper. What is crucial to understanding SSR in the CPA period and during the R-ARCSS, however, and what is occluded by the political marketplace framework, is the way in which the market is not homeostatic: it does not magically maintain its own conditions of functionality.

After the Juba Declaration, the absorption of the SSDF and other forces transformed and finally destroyed the conditions of the marketplace: these absorptions produced an internal contradiction within the SPLA, which no longer functioned as an institution and fell apart. The Juba Declaration – along with the possibility of payroll peace – was predicated on the possibility of the further absorption of forces within the SPLA. As the SPLA absorbed more forces, it simply became the totality of the security sector in South Sudan, as it had been in 2005: a warring set of militia forces now enclosed within the army, rather than standing in opposition to it. In other words, it could no longer perform the function of a national army.

As Edward Lino, a former leading member of the SPLM, commented:⁵⁸

SPLA has never been a robust united force since we started to incorporate militia into it in appalling numbers. Each formation taken was not fully absorbed, in reality. But was

⁵⁷ For a much more nuanced look at conflict in South Sudan, see Naomi Pendle, 'Politics, prophets, and armed mobilizations: competition and continuity over registers of authority in South Sudan's conflicts', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14, no. 1 (2020): 43-62.

⁵⁸ Edward Lino died in April 2020.

left to wonder [sic] in uniform commanded by their previous untrained jihadist officers. Each soldier was almost free to take whoever to choose to be commander! ... In reality, there was nothing called 'SPLA'! It was divided and shredded into tribal formations adhering to individual commanders, based on localized tribal understanding.⁵⁹

It was this process of absorption that led to the institutional weakening of the SPLA, creating an army that was top-heavy, divided, and shredded, to use Lino's term. It was during the same period that the South Sudanese political elite, despairing of the reliability of the army, divested from it, and began building up alternative, ethnically organized military forces outside of the structure of the SPLA.⁶⁰ Many of these military forces initially emerged precisely because of the predations of the army and in resistance to them, before being instrumentalized by the political elite. That the SPLA turned into the arena for a bidding war destroyed any minimal sense of coherency it had had as an organized fighting force during the second civil war, and thus hastened the development of an ethnically organized set of military forces in South Sudan, most of which cannot be subsumed within a political marketplace framework precisely because they emerged as a consequence of (and as a means of fighting) the forces engendered by that very framework.

In the political marketplace literature, it is the 2012 oil shutoff and the resultant crash in external funding to the political marketplace that led to the South Sudanese civil war.⁶¹ This chapter, however, suggests that regardless of the oil shutoff, the fact that the SPLA was effectively treated

⁵⁹ Cited in de Waal, 2014, p. 357.

⁶⁰ See, inter alia, Alan Boswell, 'Insecure Power and Violence: The Rise and Fall of Paul Malong and the Mathiang Anyoor', HSBA Briefing Paper, October 2019.

⁶¹ In January 2012, during a stand-off in negotiations with Sudan over oil transit fees and other aspects of oil exportation, South Sudan turned off its oil, in what was described as a 'doomsday machine' for both countries.

as the arena for a political marketplace meant that it would necessarily have self-destructed, as it became bloated to such an extent that it was no longer manageable as an institution. Key actors then began creating armed groups outside of the SPLA, and communities that no longer felt represented by increasingly autonomous military commanders within the SPLA, grown fat on oil revenues, also began organizing their own militias. Seen from this perspective, payroll peace is a description less of the very mode of South Sudanese politics than of a particular historical moment in a long history of extraversion, which required the particular ground of CPA-era politics to be workable, and which, following the outbreak of the South Sudanese civil war, no longer makes sense as an explanatory framework for South Sudanese political economy.

4. The ARCSS: An Engine Not a Camera

In August 2015, under heavy pressure from the East African region, which was in turn under pressure from the American government, Salva Kiir and Riek Machar signed the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS), formally concluding the first stage of the South Sudanese civil war that had begun in December 2013.⁶² The military end of the conflict had come earlier in the year. By July 2015, the SPLA had wrested back control of Bentiu and Malakal, and had completed successful campaigns in southern Unity state and on the east bank of the White Nile in Upper Nile state. It had thus militarily vanquished the SPLA-IO in most of the Greater Upper Nile region that had, up to that point, seen the brunt of the fighting in the civil war and that was the site of the greatest concentration of SPLA-IO forces.⁶³ Kiir agreed to the ARCSS only under heavy pressure, announcing his hesitations about the agreement just days after signing it; Kiir felt that he was militarily triumphant, and yet was being forced to sign an agreement that gave an excessive amount of power to the SPLA-IO.⁶⁴

The ARCSS was an agreement modelled on the framework of the CPA. It was a bilateral agreement between two belligerent parties, which in the agreement were imagined to constitute the veritable totality of military forces in South Sudan, despite the fact that many of the most

⁶² For accounts of the collapse of the political coalitions inside the SPLM that led to the war, see Joshua Craze, 'Legitimacy, Exclusion, and Power: Taban Deng Gai and the future of the South Sudan peace process', HSBA Issue Brief 25, Small Arms Survey, Geneva, 15 December 2016; for an account of the subsequent violence in Juba, see, inter alia, the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, 'Final Report', Addis Ababa, 15 October 2014.

⁶³ For the campaign in Unity state, see Craze, Tubiana, and Gramizzi, 2016, pp. 81-94; for the campaign in Upper Nile see Craze, 2019, pp. 49-56.

⁶⁴ For accounts of the diplomatic history of this agreement, see International Crisis Group, 'Salvaging South Sudan's Fragile Peace Deal', Africa Report Number 270, 13 March 2019, pp. 1-2; Zach Vertin, *A Rope from the Sky, The Making and Unmaking of the World's Newest State*, Pegasus, New York, 2019; John Young, *South Sudan's Civil War: Violence, Insurgency, and Failed Peacemaking*, Zed Books, London, 2019.

influential SPLA-IO commanders had left the movement only a month earlier, in July 2015.⁶⁵

The ARCSS thus created a formal space of equality between the two sides despite the massive political and military asymmetries between them, and allowed the SPLA-IO to attempt to reconstitute itself as if it were the entity to which the ARCSS referred (an army actually in control of most of the opposition forces in the country), in preparation for the creation of the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU), as mandated by the ARCSS.⁶⁶ Just as with the CPA before it, the ARCSS restricted the legitimate military actors in the country to two, in this case the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) and what the agreement termed the ‘South Sudan Armed Opposition.’⁶⁷ This created a framework in which other parties to the conflict had to be pushed into the SPLA-IO or SPLA, and thus led either to alliance-building or further violence, as the government, in particular, felt emboldened to attack actors not within the peace agreement, whilst other opposition actors were pressured into short-term alliances with the government or the opposition in order to gain political visibility and a place at the negotiating table. The parallel of the CPA-era ghost soldier during the ARCSS and R-ARCSS processes is the brief-case rebel, as Alan Boswell has named him, who artificially increases the number of troops under his command and credibly threatens violence, so as to gain access to the negotiating table and to funds that will allow his ghosts, so to speak, to come to life, following his inclusion in the lucrative process of political negotiations.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ See Craze, Tubiana, and Gramizzi, 2016, pp. 95-98.

⁶⁶ Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan, 17 August 2015, Chapter I, Clause 1.1.

⁶⁷ Ibid, Chapter II, Clause 1.1.

⁶⁸ Much attention has been paid to the consequences of the Juba Declaration for the schisms that occurred in the SPLA in 2013, when most of the SSPDF forces broke off, following the violence in Juba in December 2013, to constitute the SPLA-IO. Less attention has been given to the lasting grievances caused by the partiality of the ‘big tent’ policy. In Western Bahr el Ghazal, for instance, many of the SAF officers who formed part of the Fertit resistance movement, the Qwat Salem, were not integrated into the SPLA, despite a meeting in 2005 between many of the leading SAF officers and the SPLA in Mapel. Many of these officers went on to constitute the leading members of the Fertit resistance during the current civil war. This indicates the degree to which the short-term calculations of ‘payroll peace,’ predicated on who poses an immediate threat, also lead to long-term grievances that can undermine the very terms of

These are some of the repeated consequences of the bilateral architecture of the security sector chapters of Sudanese and South Sudanese peace agreements. By creating an inside, as it were, of properly political actors bound by the ceasefire provisions of the agreement, the agreements also create an outside of actors who can be attacked as ‘bandits’ and considered not properly political. Such attacks can take place without the belligerent party being found to be breaking the terms of the ceasefire. This is precisely what happened after the ARCSS fell apart.

After Machar returned to Juba – as he was mandated to do in the peace agreement – in April 2016, altercations between the SPLA and SPLA-IO led to his flight from the capital in July, and the government plunged into a wider war in the Equatorias, including against entities such as Thomas Cirillo’s National Salvation Front (NAS), which were not signatories of the ARCSS.⁶⁹ The GRSS repeatedly referred to these forces as ‘bandits’ and rebels, outside the scope of the ceasefire and effectively invisible from the perspective of the peace agreement.⁷⁰ Once again, the security sector provisions of a peace agreement offered up a particular formal framework for the intensification of war rather than the establishment of peace.

The language of the ARCSS is extremely formal, and sets out a roadmap for a Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) board to constitute a technocratic and formal plan for a national army. The role of the SDSR is retained in the R-ARCSS, and the existence of this plan, and its

payroll peace. Interviews with Ashab Khamis, SPLA-IO commander, Juba, March 2020; Abraham Gum Makwec, Commander of SSPDF Division 5, Wau, March 2020.

⁶⁹ See Small Arms Survey, ‘Spreading Fallout: The collapse of the ARCSS and the new conflict along the Equatorias-DRC border’, HSBA Issue Brief No. 28, Small Arms Survey, Geneva, May 2017.

⁷⁰ For instance, in March 2016, the government contended that there could be no cantonment sites for the opposition in Western Equatoria, because there was no opposition there, only bandits and criminals not protected by the ceasefire provisions of the peace agreement. See, inter alia, Radio Tamazuj, ‘Sudan Parties in dispute over cantonment sites in Equatoria and Bahr el Ghazal’, 9 March 2016.

formal language, is an indication of the double world of SSR in South Sudan that was presented in the introduction to this paper. In one world, there is a highly technocratic formal process that constitutes (or is supposed to constitute) an army according to criteria like inclusivity and transparency, which mean precisely nothing in this context. The second, real world exists *sub mensa*, and is where one finds the actual arguments over the military political economy of South Sudan. In this context, it is unsurprising that the only elements of the ARCSS SSR infrastructure that were even partially implemented (and the only part that was thus controversial) were the transitional security arrangements for Juba, which were the only part of the process that would impact the political situation in the country. The rest of the SSR infrastructure remained a formal set of aspirations delinked from the country's actual political economy.

The particular way that the ARCSS fell apart was determined by the agreement itself, specifically its security sector architecture. In April 2016, accompanied by heavily armed bodyguards, Machar returned to a capital that the government had not demilitarized, as per Clause 5.1 of Chapter II of the agreement, and that was instead full of fighters loyal to the GRSS, many of them pretending to be civilians.⁷¹ After Ugandan President Museveni had blocked the possibility of a demilitarized Juba protected by a third-party force, the ARCSS envisaged a capital protected by forces of comparable size from the SPLA and the SPLA-IO.⁷² Juba, however, was overwhelmingly dominated by government forces, and the provision of a protection force for Machar, irrespective of its size, would not alter the military balance in the capital. Indeed, the international push to get Machar to Juba offered the government an opportunity to try to remove him from the picture: his entry into a capital overwhelmingly dominated by government forces set the groundwork for a military assault that sent Machar fleeing for the border with the

⁷¹ Interviews with SPLA officers, names withheld, Juba, December 2018.

⁷² See International Crisis Group, 2019, p. 2.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and allowed a Potemkin opposition leader to be installed in his place.

Said otherwise, the ARCSS constituted a bilateral fiction in a unilateral world in which the government had an overwhelming military advantage. The collapse of the agreement occurred when its fictionality was revealed, and the impossibility of a genuinely bilateral security sector became apparent.

The regional and international insistence on a bilateral agreement in an increasingly fragmented political space also offered the government its next opportunity. After Machar fled for the DRC, the GRSS effectively backed an internal coup within the SPLA-IO, and Taban Deng Gai was appointed First Vice-President, despite his total lack of an internal constituency inside South Sudan and support within the opposition. The Americans, Susan Rice first amongst them, jumped at the chance to marginalize Machar, and pushed the region to deny him residency and push him out of the process.⁷³ The government thus consecrated a Potemkin opposition and denied the real opposition any legitimacy; a process celebrated by the region and the Americans, who later had Samantha Power (then US ambassador to the UN) welcome Taban Deng Gai to New York, sanctifying the coup d'état.⁷⁴

By September 2016, the bilateral framework of the ARCSS led to a situation in which a fake opposition participated in a unity government with the GRSS: When the real opposition was found wanting, a fake one was invented instead. Such are the unilateral workings of a bilateral

⁷³ Interviews with State Department officials, Washington, D.C., July 2017.

⁷⁴ See Craze, 2016. It is thus of course redolent with irony that on 8 January 2020, the US State Department will announce sanctions against Taban Deng Gai, the very man that its own actions did so much to legitimize.

agreement. Meanwhile, South Sudan's substantive opposition, primarily in the Equatorias, could be attacked by government forces as mere 'bandits' excluded from the ceasefire, while the international community celebrated the ARCSS. Once again, the SSR architecture of the peace agreement allowed for war to be waged while peace was 'achieved.' All too often, the international community thinks of the security sector chapters of peace agreements as cameras that accurately capture the situation on the ground. However, the Chapter II security provisions of both the ARCSS and – as we shall see – the R-ARCSS have been, to use Donald Mackenzie's phrase, an engine, not a camera: they have shaped the belligerent parties rather than represented them, and have been an important motor in the war economy rather than remaining apart from it.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ See Donald MacKenzie, *An Engine, Not a Camera: How Financial Models Shape Markets*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006.

5. The R-ARCSS

The R-ARCSS was signed in September 2018 and was effectively a negotiated surrender.⁷⁶ From 2016-2018, as the war spread to the Equatorias and Western Bahr el Ghazal, the government waged military campaigns against the SPLA-IO and other opposition groups, all of which suffered from an absence of external support and thus a correlative lack of ammunition and supplies.⁷⁷ By the time that Kiir and Machar signed the Khartoum Declaration on 27 June 2018, preparing the groundwork for the R-ARCSS, Machar's forces were fragmented and weakened, and Kiir even more militarily dominant than he had been at the time of the signing of the ARCSS. Despite this shift, the R-ARCSS repeats all of the errors of the SSR architecture of the ARCSS based on a false assumption of parity between the two leading belligerent parties, and in many respects deepens those earlier errors. The R-ARCSS is effectively a peace agreement 'designed in accordance with an international standard template,' which placed a processual model based on power sharing onto a South Sudanese political reality shaped by a militarily dominant government exercising power via militia forces, rather than the army.⁷⁸

What has enabled the R-ARCSS to not entirely break down, and thus its relative success thus far in comparison to the prior agreement is not the security sector arrangements that will be the focus of the rest of this paper, but the regional alignments that make the deal possible.⁷⁹

Khartoum led the deal-making process, leaning on Machar and the other opposition leaders who stayed in Sudan. The interests of Kiir and Sudanese President Omar Bashir were relatively

⁷⁶ The author first heard the term used by Matthew Pritchard in Washington, D.C. in February 2020; however, it had previously been used in SPLA-IO press releases to bemoan the GRSS position on SSR in the R-ARCSS.

⁷⁷ Interviews with SPLA-IO commanders, Unity and Upper Nile states, 2016-17; Addis Ababa, 2016.

⁷⁸ For the quoted text see de Waal et al., 2019, p. 4.

⁷⁹ For details of the negotiation of the agreement, see International Crisis Group, 2019, pp. 6-10.

aligned: both were focused on securing the oil fields and the vital oil revenues that could once again flow if production were restarted.⁸⁰ This R-ARCSS has resulted in a TGoNU because of the increasingly shared economic interests between Kiir, Bashir, and – crucially – Museveni, all of which require a workable government in Juba, rather than because of the actual provisions of the agreement itself, which have in fact hampered the elite-level power-sharing pact underwriting the R-ARCSS.

The R-ARCSS broadens the number of parties to the agreement, to include the South Sudanese Opposition Alliance (SSOIA) and others, without shifting the basic logic of participation: armed actors are the dominant forces in the agreement, and the telos of the R-ARCSS is once again to constitute a power-sharing government, with the vague and surely unworkable prospect of elections to follow in three years.⁸¹ Many aspects of the agreement were once again left vague or underspecified, precisely so negotiations could continue, with the difficult decisions to be taken later. A decision on the number of states in South Sudan was deferred to a series of technocratic

⁸⁰ Since the beginning of the South Sudanese civil war, there has been a further marginalization of the ‘Garangists’ – those politicians and military leaders who rose to prominence under the former SPLM/A commander John Garang before his death in 2005, and who were committed to a continuing struggle against Sudan. (It is one of the ‘Garangists,’ Pagan Amum, who was largely responsible for turning off the oil in 2012, causing a massive plunge in South Sudan’s income, and precipitating the current civil war). Simultaneously, Salva Kiir brought many former-National Congress Party (NCP) figures who were close to Bashir inside the SPLM, including Bona Malwal and Telar Ring Deng. The shared interests of the military elite in Khartoum and the military elite in the ‘New Khartoum’ of Juba are condensed in the figure of Tut Kew Gatluak. Now Salva Kiir’s Security Advisor and head of the National Transitional Committee (NTC, Previously the National Pre-Transitional Committee, or NP/TC, until the formation of the national transitional government in March 2020), Gatluak spent the second civil war as a security advisor to Omar Bashir, responsible for co-ordinating between SAF and the Bul Nuer militias that protected the Unity oil fields for the NCP. At present, Gatluak’s imbrication in the business interests of Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo in Darfur and Western Bahr el Ghazal, along with his central role in the political economy in Juba, including in gold mining and timber logging, ensures the coherence of the business interests of military elites in Khartoum and Juba. Interviews with Bul Nuer politicians, Juba and Mankien, October-November 2019, February-March 2020.

⁸¹ The parties to the agreement are the government (referred to in the agreement as The Transitional Government of National Unity of the Republic of South Sudan), the SPLM/A-IO, as well as the South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA), the Former Detainees (FDs), and Other Political Parties (OPP). Several opposition groups remained outside the agreement, including NAS.

committees, each of which shunted the decision on the number of states down the road, while the security sector architecture of the deal, to which this report will now turn, was left deliberately unclear. While this lack of clarity might have had the advantage of creating the political space in which a deal could be signed, it also led to the instrumentalization of the SSR process of the R-ARCSS and the creation of the current, untenable organization of the security sector inside South Sudan.

Building a 'real' army

Like the CPA and ARCSS, the R-ARCSS sets out a processual, model-based approach to SSR in South Sudan, based on the normative assumptions of liberal internationalism. Under these assumptions, an army should be sized 'appropriately' to the size of a country's population, and should be equipped and organized relative to the threats a nation-state would face from external actors.⁸² It is such a vision of the army that the reconstituted SDSR board, now named the Revitalized Strategic Defence and Security Review Board (RSDSRB) would implement, under the co-chairpersonship of Malek Ruben (GRSS) and Angelina Teny (SPLA-IO). During the first eighteen months of the agreement, the RSDSRB supposedly finished an external threat assessment with the help of the Ethiopian general Tsadkan Gebretensae, former chief of staff for the Ethiopian Defence Forces (EDF), who has long had good relations with the

⁸² Interviews with international consultants involved in the SSR process, Juba, October-November 2019. This is of course not a model that reflects the way that the security sector is organized in South Sudan, which is fundamentally based on organizing a set of internal oppositions between groups using external resources. Equally, it should be emphasized that the constitution of an army in such a fashion has not occurred anywhere, and it is a fantasy born of normativity, rather than being reflective of practice: in both the UK and the USA, decisions about military funding are, like in South Sudan, part of a very important political economy of war. The SSR processes of such peace agreements are products of liberal fantasy, rather than the enactment of the practice of states like the USA and the UK.

SPLA/SSPDF.⁸³ This assessment had no relation to what actually happened to the security sector in South Sudan during the same period, and will have no relevance to what happens to the security sector in the future.

Alongside the long-term work of the RSDSRB, the R-ARCSS asks all the belligerent parties to maintain the permanent ceasefire of the Khartoum Declaration of 27 June 2018 throughout the country.⁸⁴ From September 2018-June 2020, all parties violated the ceasefire multiple times.⁸⁵ All parties should also refrain from recruiting (R-ARCSS, Chapter II, Clause 2.1.8). However, not only did all parties recruit during this period, but the agreement itself is also constituted in such a way as to reward recruitment.

The R-ARCSS, following the ARCSS, envisions each of the belligerent parties declaring their troop numbers, establishing cantonment sites for those troops, assembling them, screening them, and then training them for the ‘Necessary Unified Force’ (R-ARCSS, Chapter II, Clause 2.2.1), otherwise known as a new national army. All of these processes were given wilfully

⁸³ Shortly after the signing of the R-ARCSS, Salva Kiir renamed the SPLA as the as the South Sudan People’s Defence Force (SSPDF). This report will refer to the South Sudanese army as the SPLA in reference to actions carried out before October 2018, and the SSPDF for actions carried out subsequent to that point.

⁸⁴ In recent statements by both the ICG and the CRP group at LSE, the maintenance of ceasefire is held up as the signal achievement of this peace agreement. Sometimes, commentators, including the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General, David Shearer, claim that there has been a decrease in ‘political violence,’ a claim that relies, in turn, on a dubious claim about what violence is ‘political.’ The ceasefire has been breached multiple times, including in Western Equatoria and in southern Unity, in Maiwut, by signatories. Much violence that is supposedly ‘traditional’ – as in clashes in Jonglei from February-June 2020 – is deeply political and marked by instability in the capital. Additionally, in some places, the number of gunshot wounds increased after the signing of the R-ARCSS. As this paper will set out later, the R-ARCSS did not reduce the amount of violence in South Sudan; rather, it recoded it as non-political, and thus not a problem in the same manner at SPLA-IO-SSPDF clashes, necessitating international concern. For statistics on gunshot wounds see International Committee of the Red Cross, ‘South Sudan: Gunshot injuries remain high despite peace deal’, 8 July 2019.

⁸⁵ Here, and throughout the rest of the paper, the author relies upon a tranche of documents from CTSAMVM and from the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), which are all on file with the author.

unrealistic deadlines: for example, cantonment of forces within 45 days (it took 18 for even partial cantonment of forces to occur such that training could proceed), and the beginning of training in 60 days (it took approximately 450).⁸⁶ As this paper will go on to show, each of these processes was instrumentalized by all of the parties to the conflict, such that the SSR process did not create a national unified army, but rather fragmented the security sector itself, leaving it more intensely divided than before the process began.

The Politics of Numbers

At the beginning of the pre-transitional period, which was supposed to take place after the signing of the agreement and continue until the Necessary Unified Force was redeployed around the country, there were two fundamental calculations that would shape the logic of the SSR process during the R-ARCSS.⁸⁷ The first concerned the extant strength of the belligerent parties. Both the South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA), an unwieldy opposition grouping of disparate armed actors from around the country, and the SPLA-IO had a vested interest in overstating the strength of their forces in order to cover up military weakness, maximize their claims to later participation in the Necessary Unified Force, and lay the formal ground for the *de jure* expansion of their forces, while the SSPDF had a vested interest in obscuring the disposition of its forces and covering up its own relative weakness.⁸⁸ The initial claims about force size were improbably large, with the SSPDF claiming it had 120,000 troops, the SPLA-IO claiming it had 227,000 troops, and the SSOA claiming that it had 126,000 troops.⁸⁹ The Ceasefire &

⁸⁶ See R-ARCSS, Annex D: Revitalized ARCSS Implementation Matrix 2018.

⁸⁷ Training was supposed to be completed within eight months of the signing of the agreement (R-ARCSS, Chapter II, Clause 2.2.1).

⁸⁸ A biometric registration exercise begun by the army was quickly abandoned when they realized that it would make the SSPDF's relative weakness apparent.

⁸⁹ Interviews with international participants in the SSR process, Juba, November 2019.

Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring & Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM), responsible for monitoring the parties' compliance with the agreement, estimated that the SSPDF had only 90,000 troops, the SPLA-IO had around 35,000 and SSOA had 1-5,000.⁹⁰ Despite these much more moderate (and more reasonable) estimates of force strength, the numbers given by the parties constituted the official numbers of each force, and effectively functioned as both masks and promissory notes. The inflated numbers masked the true size of each force, and allowed each side to make the maximal possible case about its strength in any future negotiations over what proportion of a future army should be made up of its forces. At the same time, the effectively empty soldiers claimed by these inflated numbers also functioned as promissory notes to future recruits, who were told that there was already a place in the army waiting for them, complete with a uniform, wages, and food.

The R-ARCSS SSR process was predicated on an accurate accounting of the size of each of the armed groups in the country, such that the totality of armed groups and actors in the country would be visible, and thus enable the RSDSRB to make a rational ordering of the future national army. However, according to the peace agreement, the rewards for each of the armed groups were maximized by misrepresenting the actual size of their armed forces and making maximal claims about their strength. Once these claims were made and registered, each side was then incentivized to make their claims into reality via the mechanism of recruitment. Thus, while the R-ARCSS asks each of the belligerent parties to commit to not recruiting, it also incentivizes recruitment.

⁹⁰ UNMISS and CTSAMM documents, on file with the author.

The R-ARCSS makes recruitment even more central thanks to the second fundamental calculation inherent to the SSR process. The ‘first stage’ of this process was to lead to the training of the Necessary Unified Force that would constitute the national army. There were widespread disagreements about how large this force would be before the belligerent parties came to an agreement in August 2019 that the total force (including all branches of the armed forces, the police force, etc.) would be 83,000, and that 29,000 of those men would compose the national army.⁹¹ In a country in which the belligerent parties had claimed to have 473,000 soldiers and innumerable generals and other ranked officers, and in which both the SSPDF and the SPLA-IO have ten or more divisions, it was agreed that the combined army would be just two divisions and four brigades, with only fourteen senior staff officers.⁹² This slimming down of the army will never be attempted, for it would be politically disastrous and inevitably cause further conflict, as tens of thousands of troops and many ranked officers would be left outside of such an army and would use the tried-and-tested CPA strategy of rebellion in order to force their way back in.

However, even if a final army of 29,000 troops were inconceivable, the very anticipation of a slimmed-down army put even further pressure on the belligerent parties to maximize their numbers and ranks in the short term.⁹³ For instance, the best possible argument for maximum inclusion in any future army from the SPLA-IO would be to have the most officers and the most troops in cantonment. Thus, what seems like an SSR process that creates a modernized, slimmed

⁹¹ Interviews with Martin Abucha, Wesley Welebe, and others on the JDB, JTSC, and on other security boards, Juba, November 2019. Also see IGAD, ‘Communiqué of the IGAD Council of Ministers on the Consultation Meeting of the Parties to the R-ARCSS’, IGAD, 21 August 2019.

⁹² Interviews with Charles Machieng Kuol, Joint Defence Board, Juba, October-November 2019.

⁹³ Many participants in the SSR process expressed fear that they will lose their rank or even their position in any future reorganization of the army. Interviews with participants in the SSR process, Juba, November 2019.

down, minimal army actually constitutes, on the ground, a series of very rational reasons for the parties to maximize the perceived number of troops and ranked officers under their command, and to resist any attempt to streamline the army or discover the ‘true’ number of soldiers.⁹⁴ This resistance to the R-ARCSS SSR model is to be found in every aspect of the process. For instance, the creation of a minimal, streamlined force was supposed to be accompanied by screening and vetting, such that ‘there will be no more illiterate commanders’ and only educated soldiers.⁹⁵ However, because of the pressure all of the commanders felt to maximize their troop numbers, any attempt to screen the soldiers entering cantonment (and subsequently screen those entering training) and apply any selection criteria at all were resisted by the commanders involved.⁹⁶ Instrumentalization then, was coupled with resistance.

The Politics of Time

To make matters even more confusing, the constitution of the 83,000-strong security force in the country was latterly taken by all the belligerent parties to be only ‘stage one’ in the process of SSR. While that figure had been agreed during the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) negotiations in August 2019, and many in the international community assumed it was the final figure, the SPLA-IO and SSPDF insisted that it represented only a first

⁹⁴ Amongst international participants in the SSR process, there was widespread recognition that being a soldier in South Sudan was not a full-time occupation and that troop numbers fluctuated wildly with the seasons and the demands of agriculture, as well as due to recruitment campaigns. Despite this awareness, there was nonetheless an ideological insistence that there was a ‘true number’ of troops that could be discovered, and that the belligerent parties were hiding from the international participants in the process. Interviews with international participants in the SSR process, Juba, October-November 2019.

⁹⁵ Quote from Charles Machieng Kuol, SSOA, Joint Defence Board, Juba, 26 October, 2019.

⁹⁶ Interviews at cantonment sites and training sites, Unity and Western Bahr el Ghazal states, November 2019 and February 2020.

stage.⁹⁷ There is no ground for such a claim in a close reading of Chapter II of the R-ARCSS. However, this equivocation is entirely in keeping with the productivity of the ambiguity of the SSR process, or what was described in the introduction to this paper as the productivity of its failure. The pressure of the first round and the small size of the army it dictates are offset by the promise of future rounds, thus both justifying why people were not turned away from cantonment (for they will be incorporated in later rounds) and assuaging the fears of commanders and ranked officers who worried about being excluded from or demoted within the new army. Of course, the very existence of these supplementary rounds undermines the supposedly modernizing aims of the R-ARCSS and its streamlined army, creating a contradictory SSR process that unsurprisingly ends up recreating the quantitative logic of the political economy of the bloated SPLA of the CPA era.

As of May 2020, there is still no agreement about the precise shape of these later phases. One SSOA representative in the SSR process claimed that there would be some 100,000 in the second phase, while a SPLA-IO representative claimed that there would be ‘even more’ people in the second phase.⁹⁸ Indeed, one SPLA-IO representative, Martin Abucha, said that in phase two, ‘We will incorporate everyone, no one will be turned away,’ as if the army were an enormous social safety net.⁹⁹ Amongst the SPLA-IO commanders, there is a hope that the opposition forces will be numerically greater if they are all incorporated into the Necessary Unified Force, and this will afford them a political advantage in the future. It is due to this hope that the

⁹⁷ See Flora McCrone, *Hollow Promises: The Risks of Military Integration in Western Equatoria*, Small Arms Survey Briefing Paper, June 2020.

⁹⁸ Interviews with SSOA and SPLA-IO participants in the JDB and other SSR mechanisms, Juba, November 2020.

⁹⁹ Interview with Martin Abucha, Juba, 25 November 2019. In our interview, Abucha also claimed that during the Khartoum agreement negotiations, the second phase had already been determined at 94,000 people.

SPLA-IO were so insistent during the SSR process that future stages remain open and incorporate everyone who was cantoned.

In relation to the number of states, the R-ARCSS attempted to defer the issue and depoliticize it by giving it over to a number of technocratic committees, such as the Independent Boundary Commission (IBC). These committees were not able to resolve what was clearly a political issue with reference to the historical record. An analogous process has occurred during SSR. The final determination of the size and shape of the South Sudanese army has been indefinitely deferred. Multiple SPLA-IO and SSPDF officers have stated that any final determinations must wait for the judgment of the RSDSRB and their technocratic evaluation of the threats facing South Sudan.¹⁰⁰ This deferment might, as the team around Alex de Waal has made clear, have allowed negotiations to continue in the short term; it might be a form of creative unsettlement. In the long term, however, such deferment upholds the pretence that there can be a technocratic solution to a fundamentally political question and, under the cover of streamlining the military, allows for its expansion and for a massively ramped-up recruitment campaign by all sides. The technocratic deferral of the R-ARCSS avoids the disagreement about ranks that characterized the CPA-period and its rebellions, but only because it defers these structural disagreements, rather than offering a space in which they might be resolved.

Deferral itself is thought to be a sufficient justification by many in the international community. During interviews for this report, several diplomats and UN personnel stated that the goal was simply to ‘get through one more dry-season,’ and that the priority had to be averting a return to all-out war, at any cost. However, this politics of catastrophe constructs too narrow a binary: one

¹⁰⁰ Interviews with Martin Abucha, Charles Mathieng Kuol, and others, Juba, October-November 2019.

either defers now or else faces an all-out war. The reality, in contrast, is that without actively thinking about how SSR might produce legitimate security forces and not reproduce the problems of the CPA-period, the R-ARCSS process risks encountering all of the problems it defers at a later date, one dry season further down the road. What makes this all the more problematic is that, as the SSR process unfolds, it causes the security sector to fragment even further, as this paper will go on to show, and this means that the catastrophes of coming dry seasons are even worse than the ones we face in the present.

The R-ARCSS creates a formal framework that seems to set out the basis for a streamlined, slimmed-down, modernized, South Sudanese army. That very framework creates the rewards and anxieties that paradoxically push the belligerent parties to maximize the size of their respective forces while abandoning all screening criteria. This process risks returning us to the disposition of military forces as it was in December 2013. At the beginning of the civil war in December 2013, we must remember, 30% of the SPLA deserted to join the nascent opposition force, the SPLA-IO. Much of this rebellious force was constituted by the Nuer troops that were part of Matiep's SSDF, and which only joined the SPLA after the Juba Declaration of 2006 and were never meaningfully integrated.¹⁰¹ The GRSS does not want this crisis to reoccur, but the SSR process of the R-ARCSS seems designed to recreate it by reincorporating the SPLA-IO within the SSPDF. In other words, the SSR process takes as its goal exactly the security sector situation that led to the current civil war.

¹⁰¹ The centrality of the SSDF to the SPLM-IO in 2013-2014 can be seen from the fact that all but one of its initial leading generals were once members of the SSDF, including SSDF Generals Peter Gadet (who initially led the SPLA-IO in Jonglei), Gabriel Tang (Tanginye), Thomas Mabior, Simon Gatwich Dual, Chayot Manyang, and Garouth Gatkuoth. For more on the SSDF roots of the SPLA-IO, see John Young, 'A Fractious Rebellion: Inside the SPLM-IO', Small Arms Survey, Geneva, September 2015, pp. 17-19.

Some SPLA-IO commanders held out the possibility that after maximal cantoning of the opposition forces and subsequent training, the RSDSRB would make a final determination of the size of the army, and troops in excess of this number would be sent into Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR). Indeed, without a credible DDR program, the entire SSR process is likely to collapse. In the R-ARCSS, it is explicitly stated (Chapter II, Clause 2.4.10) that the DDR process should have been started immediately and continued in parallel with the army unification process, to absorb those denied a place in the army during initial cantonment, so those troops do not become alienated and angry young men in a highly militarized environment. However, from the very beginning of the SSR process, DDR was starved of funds. By December 2019, DDR had received just USD 2 million, and the DDR committee had only had meetings with 'key stakeholders' and identified future sites for the DDR process.

In relation to DDR, the R-ARCSS echoes the problematic logic of CPA-era SSR. There is every rational reason for commanders to want to maximize the size of their forces under the conditions of R-ARCSS, as we have seen. Equally, within a militarized economy such as South Sudan's, in which the acquisition of resources turns on access to violence, it makes absolute sense for young men to wish to be in an armed group.¹⁰² Equally, just as during the CPA, there is no incentive for commanders to want to send their forces into DDR and thereby diminish the size of their forces and their capacity to acquire wages and political power. Indeed, quite the contrary: the SPLA-IO brought former soldiers back from refugee camps in Uganda so that they could be counted as part of cantonment. There is also no extant economy in South Sudan into

¹⁰² Remote interviews with SPLA-IO members, Unity state, November-December 2019.

which young soldiers could be reintegrated; the cattle of the core SPLA-IO areas have been stolen or killed, and a return to an agro-pastoralist existence is increasingly difficult to envision for many. The phrasing of the DDR portion of the R-ARCSS betrays the problem of the model, for it imagines a world outside of the political economy of armed groups into which one could be reintegrated, whereas in South Sudan, after almost thirty years of continuous war, there is no economy outside the war economy and no world upon which violence has not left an imprint.

In this situation, it is thus no surprise that there is no DDR process and no incentive for one to be set up in future. To the extent that there will be a DDR process, it is likely to echo the process during the CPA: a means of directing donor funds to women, children, the disabled, and the elderly, who can then be 'reintegrated' into society. No commander that the author spoke to during fieldwork for this paper took seriously the idea that able-bodied soldiers would go through DDR. What marks this process as different to the CPA, however, is that there is little donor appetite to fund another failed DDR process, and so the process as a whole is likely to be even less active than the spectacular failure of DDR that occurred during the CPA period.

R-ARCSS DDR is a low-level non-event, rather than a catastrophe.

6. Cantonment

According to the R-ARCSS, the belligerent parties were to assemble at cantonment sites (SSOA and the SPLA-IO) or barracks (the SSPDF) prior to joining training sites for the new national army. Just as with the overall SSR architecture of the R-ARCSS, the cantonment process itself was cloaked in productive ambiguity. In line with the ambiguity about the maximum numbers of troops who could be integrated into the army as outlined in the prior chapter, there was no maximum limit on the number of fighters who would be able to canton at each cantonment site, and no overall maximum number of fighters who would be able to canton.

The cantonment process itself was a X-ray in which one could see the respective investments of the belligerent parties. The GRSS had little interest in removing its forces from urban centres (a key commitment of the R-ARCSS) or in unifying the armed forces, which the GRSS feared would once again open up the possibility of the split that had caused such chaos in December 2013. Thus, by mid-December 2019, of the 71,600 cantoned soldiers that CTSAMVM had registered, 60,000 were SPLA-IO and SSOA forces registered in cantonment sites, while only 16,000 were SSPDF registered in barracks. The vast majority of the SSPDF forces remained – and remain – in frontline positions, not to mention the fact that, as this paper will explore later, the most important parts of the GRSS’s military machine, such as the NSS, were and are kept entirely outside the SSR process. Indeed, the GRSS’s approach to the SSR process in general was twofold:

- (1) To the extent that there was to be cantonment and training, this process was understood not as a process of unification, but as a process of integration, with the

opposition forces having to become part of the SSPDF. From this perspective, the R-ARCSS is a winner's peace, and the losers (the opposition signatories) have to accept the winner's terms.

(2) While the SPLA-IO invested a lot in the cantonment process, it was tactically useful for the GRSS to let the SSR process, and particularly the cantonment process, fail. Thus, the National Pre-Transitional Committee (NPTC) only received a slow drip of money from the government, which the author was assured by SSPDF officers had no interest in paying for rations and medical equipment for opposition soldiers. Rather, the government saw the failures of the SSR process as opportunities to intervene and split off disgruntled SPLA-IO troops from Riek Machar with offers of money, weapons, and food, just at the moment these forces felt let down by an SPLA-IO that had promised them these very things as part of the cantonment process. Once again, the failure of the SSR process was productive and allowed the government to achieve its political aims.

While the GRSS was invested in the failure of the cantonment process, the SPLA-IO, in contrast, sought to use it as an occasion to reconstruct its forces in preparation for the next phase of the conflict; the peace process thus functioned, as it so often does in South Sudan, as a particular way of preparing for war. This preparation involved the SPLA-IO trying to reassert its authority over an increasingly fragmented set of opposition actors, many of which were organized in communitarian fashion and not wedded to a national mission of overthrowing Kiir's regime. The SPLA-IO also recruited new troops and so attempted to reconstruct its military capacity, which was much reduced following a string of military losses in 2017-18.

Cantonment sites became crucibles for an experiment in the political economy of war. As Flora McCrone has shown in her work on Western Equatoria, for opposition fighters such as the Arrow Boys, these sites took on an almost talismanic status. For young fighters, they represented the promise of wages and status. For groups that are only nominally, or contestably, part of the SPLA-IO, fighting for participation in the cantonment sites became a way of articulating demands made to both the opposition and to the state.¹⁰³

Thus, in some locations, participation in cantonment became a sought-after symbolic prize, despite the fact that government support to cantonment sites was slow in coming, as indicated above, and there was little provision of adequate food, water, and medical supplies to the sites.¹⁰⁴

In other cantonment site locations, such as Eastern Equatoria, the absence of food and medical supplies led to the SPLA-IO deserting such sites in large numbers, and some of those fighters joining NAS.¹⁰⁵ While the government had pledged USD 100 million to the security mechanisms of the R-ARCSS in mid-2019, by November 2019, only USD 33 million had been disbursed. Of that, only five million went to the Joint Transitional Security Committee (JTSC), out of a budget that should have been USD 39.9 million, and the majority of that money did not find its way out of Juba to the cantonment sites, but was rather taken by members of the JTSC.¹⁰⁶

What constituted 'being at' a cantonment site also differed across South Sudan. In some places, such as in Upper Nile, the opposition registered at the sites but then returned to frontline

¹⁰³ There were parallel struggles for participation at cantonment sites in Western Bahr el Ghazal and in Unity states. For Western Equatoria see McCrone, June 2020.

¹⁰⁴ See, inter alia, the R-JMEC report, 'On The Status of [the] Implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, for the period 1 October-31 December 2019'.

¹⁰⁵ UNMISS documents, on file with the author.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with international experts participating in the SSR process of the R-ARCSS, Juba, November 2019.

positions, indicating that they would not leave the frontline because the government had not left its positions.¹⁰⁷ At other cantonment sites, the population swelled as a result of forced or voluntary recruitment. In every case, cantonment was not a passive process of force registration, but an active frame that shaped the movements of security actors in South Sudan during 2019-20.

The where of cantonment

One should note the basic inequality of the cantonment process. While the SSPDF was supposed to withdraw to extant barracks, the SSOA and SPLA were supposed to go to new sites. According to the R-ARCSS (Chapter II, Clauses 2.2.11.1-2.2.11.5) these sites should have been determined according to a series of objective technocratic criteria including the availability of water and the distance from civilian populations. In reality, the GRSS pushed for these sites to be as remote as possible; the victors tried to determine the terms of the surrender.

The 25 cantonment sites were the subject of contention between the belligerent parties from the outset.¹⁰⁸ Initially, for instance, the SPLA-IO wanted one cantonment site to be in Leer town itself, and thus be an effective base for controlling the urban environment and contesting the SSPDF presence in the town. Joint teams composed of all the belligerent parties were deployed to select the cantonment sites, and in this case, the SSPDF vetoed the suggestion of Leer; Mir-Mir, just outside of Leer, was the compromise solution.¹⁰⁹ For the SPLA-IO, in the best-cases, the cantonment sites were close enough to urban centres to be able to benefit from

¹⁰⁷ Interviews with SPLA-IO forces active in Upper Nile, location withheld, November 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Interviews with SSOA and SPLA-IO members in Unity state; international participants in the SSR process of the R-ARCSS, Juba, Mankien, Mayom town, October-November 2019.

¹⁰⁹ Interviews with Charles Machieng Kuol, Juba, 26 and 28 October 2019.

their resources and also exert some military control over the civilian populace. Those cantonment sites were, in other words, barracks, playing a classic role in the political economy of South Sudan's civil war. In other cases, though, such as Pulturuk in Nyirol county, Jonglei, there was no sanitation, only one borehole, and very little housing or access to a civilian population.¹¹⁰

From the perspective of an international community that from early in the R-ARCSS implementation process decided not to back SSR, a debilitating lack of resources at the cantonment sites prevents an effective SSR process from occurring.¹¹¹ The government has invested little of the funds that it promised for the security mechanisms, and such funds as have arrived from the NPTC have largely disappeared into the mechanisms themselves, rather than arriving to the troops on the ground in the cantonment process.¹¹² However, for those troops, the cantonment sites nevertheless represented the promise of future wages and resources, and so were valuable, in and of themselves, as supposed future sites for the reallocation of external resources. For many soldiers, getting by with less and less as the civil war has progressed, and in difficult conditions of immiseration, in which food and wages had not been supplied by the SPLA-IO for many months, if not years, the minimal international support given to these sites made them very attractive.¹¹³

The who of cantonment

¹¹⁰ Confidential UNMISS and CTSAMM documents, on file with the author.

¹¹¹ Interviews with international diplomats, Washington, D.C., Juba, and elsewhere, September 2019-March 2020.

¹¹² Interviews with members of the JDB and JTSC, Juba, November 2019.

¹¹³ In 2019, approximately USD 10 million in foreign aid was received by the government that flowed directly to the cantonment sites, including uniforms and tents from Egypt, rice and blankets from China, and sorghum and beans from Egypt. UNMISS and CTSAMVM documents, on file with the author.

In initial discussions about cantonment, there had been talk of doing a biometric registration to avoid both double registration and the problem of ghost soldiers that haunted SSR during the CPA period.¹¹⁴ The SSPDF resisted biometric registration, as it did not want to reveal the actual strength of its force; the SPLA-IO also resisted biometric registration, as it wanted to inflate its force numbers as much as possible. (One force wished to remain obscure; the other appear as large as possible). Instead, all registration was done on paper forms by the Joint Military Ceasefire Commission (JMCC).¹¹⁵ From the perspective of the international participants, this process was so chaotic and unwieldy that ‘they might as well rip it all up and start again.’¹¹⁶ However, rather than understand the errors and ambiguities of this process as failures, this paper suggests that we should understand their productivity and how they enable the continuity of the South Sudanese war economy.

For instance, the absence of biometric registration meant that the SPLA-IO could double register some of its forces, as it did at Mir-Mir and Ding-Ding in Unity state, inflating the size of its force.¹¹⁷ At the cantonment sites themselves, the JMCC did not turn anyone away, thus avoiding problems of selectivity and allowing the SPLA-IO and SSOA to maximize their claims about force sizes.¹¹⁸ Confusion over the registration forms themselves only accentuated the ambiguity over the exact size of the forces that were assembled. Initially, there were to be 3,750 registration forms for each of the cantonment sites. However, an insufficient number of forms

¹¹⁴ Interviews with international participants in the SSR process, SPLA-IO members of the JTSC, Juba, October-November 2019.

¹¹⁵ The JMCC was responsible for monitoring and verification at the national level, the Area Joint Military Ceasefire Committee (AJMCC) was responsible for the same duties at the state level, and the Joint Military Ceasefire Teams (JMCTs), were responsible at the county and payam level.

¹¹⁶ Interview with an international participant in the SSR process, Juba, November 2019.

¹¹⁷ Remote interviews with SPLA-IO participants in the SSR process, Unity state, November 2019.

¹¹⁸ According to the R-ARCSS (Chapter II, Clause 2.2.3.5.), the troops should have been screened according to ‘known military criteria.’ This did not occur.

were printed, and when there were initially not enough soldiers at many of the cantonment sites, excess registration forms were also taken back to Juba, leading to widely reported shortfalls in registration forms across the country.¹¹⁹ At Wunlit, for instance, there were 7,842 troops present in November 2019, but only 2,000 forms.¹²⁰ This meant that many of the people who were present at the cantonment sites were not registered.¹²¹ Conversely, many of the people who had registered at the cantonment sites were not present, as they had returned to frontline positions.

As this paper will go onto explore, those who did not register or could not register were still eligible for access to training. The cantonment process in no way provided a screened and disciplined force.¹²² The cantonment process as a whole failed, in terms of what the R-ARCSS set out for it to do: it did not allow for a transparent rendering of the status of the forces in South Sudan. It was not a step on the way to building a unified army. For instance, while the SPLA-IO cantoned many new recruits, it did not canton a significant number of its weapons, which remained with troops in frontline positions across the country. No heavy weapons of any sort were registered as part of the cantonment process.¹²³ Rather, the process was instrumentalized by the SPLA-IO and SSOA to try and maximize the minimal resource flows going into the cantonment process, and get these resources to its own soldiers. Said otherwise, cantonment was yet another process of extraversion, of reallocating external resources to placate

¹¹⁹ Interviews with SSOA and SPLA-IO personnel, Mayom and Akobo, October-November 2019. There is no legal reason that the forms should have been returned to Juba; there is, in the R-ARCSS, no deadline for cantonment other than the eight-month overall deadline for the entire SSR process that had already been exceeded by the time cantonment had begun.

¹²⁰ Interview with Wesley Welebe, JTSC Co-Chair for the SPLA-IO, 12 November 2019.

¹²¹ Interview with international participant in the SSR process, Juba, 23 November 2019.

¹²² In November 2019, the international participants in the SSR process hoped that as screening had not occurred during cantonment, it would occur during training; it did not. Once again, there is no rational, self-interested reason for a commander to turn away any troops under their command; it runs counter to the entire political economy of war in South Sudan.

¹²³ Interview with Wesley Welebe, JTSC Co-Chair for the SPLA-IO, 12 November 2019; interview with SPLA-IO and SSPDF trainers, Mapel, Western Bahr el Ghazal, March 2020.

internally divided constituencies. One of the characteristics of this process, as during the CPA period, was rank inflation. At some sites, out of 3,000 SSOA soldiers, the CTSAMVM teams reported that up to 60% of the troops were officers. This rank inflation allowed the opposition forces to make maximal claims in any future army.

This maximization of force capacity did not happen in a vacuum. While in sites with strong political actors on the ground, CTSAMVM verification was often faulty or lacking, in some sites, the political constituencies were weak enough that they could not overcome the objections of CTSAMVM verification. For instance, SSOA claimed to have 5,000 troops in Eastern Equatoria ready to open a cantonment site, and the verification team found nobody; the SPLA-IO claimed to have a force of 1500 in South Kordofan ready to register in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, but in September, only 216 troops actually arrived. Other cantonment sites were close enough to important frontline positions that needed to be maintained that only women, children, and fresh recruits were sent into cantonment; at yet others, as the case studies below will explore, cantonment functioned as a prize to be given to favoured fighters, and some of the best troops went into cantonment, at least to register, and thus be eligible for supplies, tents, and medicine.¹²⁴

For the international community members involved in the process, there was a deep and entirely ideological fear of ‘fake soldiers’ or not-real members of SSOA or the SPLA-IO joining the cantonment process.¹²⁵ Thus, the despairing attempts at verifying the ‘true’ nature of the troops

¹²⁴ As of January 2020, the actual registration forms from cantonment were scattered across multiple sites, with no overall electronic record of cantonment information. In the database as it then existed, of some 1,600 of the troops who were cantoned, there were an unusually high number of female soldiers. In general, registering for cantonment is structurally homologous to registering at Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites. People try to maximize access to external resources by registering, but also retain the flexibility to move elsewhere (to the frontlines, or to farm) and so avail themselves of alternative resources.

¹²⁵ Interviews with international participants in the SSR process, Juba, November 2019.

joining the process, and the anguish at the variety of ways that the participants in the SSR process shortcut these attempts at verification.

This fear betrays a misunderstanding of the logic of the security sector in South Sudan. After thirty years of war, there are not soldiers and civilians; everyone's life has been touched by war, and for most Nuer young men, for instance, it is not a question of being an opposition soldier, but rather of occupying a continuity of roles (including potentially being a government soldier, an opposition soldier, and a member of the White Army) as one attempts to survive and maintain life in South Sudan.¹²⁶ Said otherwise, it is not that people are either SPLA-IO soldiers *or* farmers, but rather that they are soldiers *and* farmers, cattle guards *and* militia members. The metier of arms is one that occurs as part of a life; it is not a defining feature of that life.¹²⁷

Far from the cantonment process distinguishing the 'true' soldiers from the 'fake' soldiers, it rather pushed many young men into the role of soldier, insofar as it attempted to formalize their participation in the SPLA-IO and SSOA, and pushed them together in cantonment sites. Indeed, rather than slimming out the security sector in South Sudan, the R-ARCSS SSR process inflated it, attempted to formalize it, and in so doing, created dangerous pressure cookers around the country in the form of cantonment sites full of young men promised wages and ranks by a process that was fundamentally unable to realize those promises. While attempting to create a smaller army, SSR massively increased the number of armed actors on the ground; while attempting to order those armed actors, it created, instead, chaos.

¹²⁶ See Nicki Kindersley and Øystein H. Rolandsen, 'Who are the civilians in the wars of South Sudan?', *Security Dialogue* 50, no. 5 (2019): 383–397.

¹²⁷ The best articulation of the relationship between life and arms in recent scholarship is Marielle Deb's book on Chad, *Living By the Gun in Chad: Combatants, Impunity, and State Formation*, Zed Books, London, 2016.

7. Cantonment Case Studies

In order to show the ways in which the cantonment process was instrumentalized by extant actors within South Sudan's political economy, this paper will now develop a number of case studies of cantonment sites. These case studies do not provide a thorough history of cantonment during the R-ARCSS. Rather, they are thematic, designed to elucidate some of the ways in which cantonment has been instrumentalized. They are intended to offer casuistic and conceptual toolboxes for understanding how cantonment played a part in a broader political economy.

Several broad structural themes determined how cantonment sites were used during 2019:

- **The history of the CPA period.** In places where CPA-era SSR had resulted in wages and ranks, such as Unity state, R-ARCSS SSR was greeted with much more confidence and expectation.¹²⁸ When talking to SPLA-IO recruits, the author was met with repeated queries about when international donors would fund this process.¹²⁹ In Western Equatoria, in contrast, the absence of supplies and food was met not with hope and expectation, but with widespread desertions, such that in the second half of 2019, cantonment sites like Nigiri, south of Mundri town, went from 3,000 to 590 cantoned soldiers.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ For instance, at Ding-Ding, just outside Bentiu, where the SPLA-IO were able to sell ranks to hopeful young men in the PoC in Rubkona. Interviews with SPLA-IO recruits, Bentiu, Unity state, November 2019.

¹²⁹ It is thus worth underlining that although the Troika has been emphatic that it has not funded the current SSR process, the way that actors on the ground interact with this process is inexorably tied to memories of donor funding for the previous wave of SSR during the CPA period. Thus, current donor-funding refusals, on the back of a history of such generous funding of SSR, are almost as destabilizing as SSR funding itself.

¹³⁰ Interview with international participant in the SSR process, Juba, November 2019; UNMISS and CTSAMVM documents, on file with the author.

- **Current contestations within the SPLA-IO.** At sites like Sue (Western Equatoria) and Ngo Alimah (Western Bahr el Ghazal), cantonment became a crucible for disagreements within the SPLA-IO, and control of the cantonment site stood in metonymically for control of the opposition in the area. Cantonment effectively became a way to ‘brand’ oneself with the mark of the official opposition, and it is for that reason that some sites became active sites of contention even though they contained no real resources.
- **The relationship between cantonment sites and host communities.** At some cantonment sites, such as Bong in Mayom, Unity state, the cantoned forces (in this case from SSOA) were stationed in an area that contained their families. Before Bong was flooded out in November 2019, pushing the SSOA forces south to Mayom town, the cantonment site was relatively self-sufficient, relying on familial labour and the troops’ positive relationship with the surrounding community, which comes from the same Bul Nuer subsection as the much of the SSOA force. CTSAMVM and R-JMEC have frequently raised concerns about the presence of civilians in the cantonment sites and the imbrication of the local community in these sites. However, for the last twenty years, the political economy of war in South Sudan has seen civilians accompanying troops and collectively constituting what Janet Roitman calls, in a different context, *l’entrepôt-garrison*: a military-commercial nexus that remains a privileged centre for a form of life.¹³¹ While one might bemoan the presence of civilians at cantonment sites (or, today, as of June 2020, at training sites), their presence is part of the political economy of sustainable war in South Sudan. It also remains the case that at those cantonment sites were SPLA-IO forces were stationed outside of their home areas and without their families, the

¹³¹ Janet Roitman, ‘L’entrepôt-garrison’, *Cahiers D’Études Africaines* 38, nos. 150-152, pp. 297-329.

cantoned forces have looted and pillaged in the surrounding area (as in Wunyiik, Aweil county).¹³² Under conditions of impoverishment at cantonment sites, in which it is not feasible for troops to receive adequate rations, troops outside of a communitarian context are the truly destabilizing force.

¹³² Interviews with international humanitarian actors, Juba, November 2019.

Case study I: Failed Cantonment in Akobo

Denay Jok Chagor is now the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology in the new TGoNU announced by Salva Kiir in March 2020. A Lou Nuer from Akobo (Dengjok payam), Chagor was educated in Gambella, Ethiopia, before traveling to America to study, thanks to the influence of one of his aunts, who had married the Bul Nuer SSDF commander Peter Gadet.¹³³ After studying in the States, Chagor became one of Gadet's more influential followers, effectively functioning as his secretary. Following Gadet's death, Chagor became involved in internecine scrapping for power amongst the minor opposition groups, inheriting the title of the head of the South Sudan United Movement (SSUM) from Peter Gadet, and then leading one of the factions within SSOA after Gabriel Changson Chang (who had backed Gadet after he left the SPLA-IO) agreed to support him. In the run-up to the deadline for the formation of a new government in November 2019, Chagor was trying to position himself for power.

One of his strategies was to try to 'open' a cantonment site for his forces; Chagor was aware that the faction around himself and Changson Chang did not have any real military forces to speak of and aimed to use cantonment to transform his fortunes.¹³⁴ Though Chagor is from Akobo, he has no constituency there, and on the author's visit to his home payam of Dengjok, people there spoke disparagingly of him.¹³⁵ He had refused to participate in internal elections within SSOA for leadership roles and was thought by many inside SSOA to have sold out to the government, thus the hostility afforded him in his home area.¹³⁶ His attempt to begin a cantonment site as a base

¹³³ Conversations with Denay Chagor, Addis Ababa, June 2015; Nairobi, July 2016; Juba, November 2019.

¹³⁴ The suggestive phrase 'open a cantonment site' was used by SPLA-IO members in Juba, November 2019.

¹³⁵ Interviews with Lou Nuer civilians in Dengjok payam and Akobo town, November 2019.

¹³⁶ Interviews with SSOA members, Juba, November 2019.

for recruitment thus quickly ran aground. He first attempted to send followers by plane from Juba to Akobo, where they were immediately arrested.¹³⁷ He then, once again, attempted to send followers to open a cantonment site, this time from Gambella, Ethiopia, and they were once again arrested.¹³⁸

Chagor's strategy and his resulting military failure are not exceptional. For instance, Jokino Fidele, the former commissioner of Fashoda and once the right-hand man of the Shilluk commander Johnson Olonyi, also attempted to 'open' a cantonment site on the west bank of the White Nile in a bid for relevance in considerations over the future governorship of Upper Nile state.¹³⁹ His forces proceeded north of Kodok in November 2019, but were immediately shut down by the Agwelek forces of Johnson Olonyi, which perceived, not incorrectly, Fidele's attempt to open a cantonment site as a government-sponsored attempt to split the Shilluk opposition. Fidele's forces later went by barge from Kodok to Malakal and joined the government forces there.

The stories of Chagor and Fidele are exemplary of the sort of situation that cantonment provokes. The SSR process of the R-ARCSS assumes that there are three legible armed forces (SSPDF, SSOA, and SPLA-IO) whose membership is fixed. In actuality, all of these groups have fluctuating memberships, varying massively on the political and military demands and opportunities of the moment. The cantonment sites function both as recruiting grounds, as we

¹³⁷ Interviews in Akobo town with local officials, November 2019.

¹³⁸ Chagor claims that these men were subsequently tortured, though there is no evidence to suggest that was the case. Interview with Denay Chagor, 21 November 2019, Juba. Some of these men subsequently escaped by digging their way out of the container that serves as a prison in Akobo. Interviews with individuals from Akobo, Juba, November 2019.

¹³⁹ Interview with Shilluk intellectuals, Juba, 13 November 2019; interview with Jokino Fidele, Juba, 11 November.

have seen, and also as marks of legitimacy: to open a cantonment site is to play a role within the political economy and to confer recognition on one's place in the game. The visibility of Chagor and Fidele emerges in their failure, but their story is true for any number of commanders who succeeded in 'opening' their own cantonment sites.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ The respective fortunes of the two men since November 2019 are an indication that the game of military power is not the only way to manoeuvre within the South Sudanese political world. While Jokino Fidele remains in Juba, without a position, with his men deserting him, and Oyay Deng Ajak, his major sponsor, unwilling to back him further, Denay Chagor has successfully ridden the waves of SSOA intrigues to become a minister in the R-TGoNU.

Case Study II: Splitting the Opposition

Cantonment sites can also function as crucibles for extant tensions within opposition forces. Such is the case at the cantonment site of Ngo Alimah, in Western Bahr el Ghazal.¹⁴¹ During the civil war, there had been long-standing tensions between Ashab Khamis, who was the head of SPLA-IO's Division 6A for Wau until he was appointed to the Joint Defence Board (JDB) in Juba, and Abdallah Ujang, another SPLA-IO commander who wishes to be the commander of Division 6A. A variety of reasons have been suggested for the tension: Sarah Vuylsteke, for instance, suggests that the problem is partly that Ujang and Khamis, while both Fertit and Balanda, hail from different parts of the state, and that the Balanda of Baggari feel they have suffered more during the struggle and thus should be in charge.¹⁴² Khamis himself, however, offered a more prosaic explanation: Ujang had had effective control of a separate area around Wau since the beginning of the organized Fertit opposition, and as a graduate of military academy in Sudan and a higher ranking SAF officer, could not accept being under the command of Khamis, who had only been a clerk in a SAF signals unit.¹⁴³ Functionally, they were separate commanders, with their own areas of military and economic control, even if, in theory, Khamis was in charge and Ujang his deputy, in another case of ranks and hierarchy concealing the actual relationship between forces on the ground.

The cantonment process brought this issue to a head by pushing the two forces together into one cantonment site. After Khamis was called to Juba, he appointed his deputy, Joseph Dongo,

¹⁴¹ One could also have chosen Irube and Nyara in Eastern Equatoria, where the SPLA-IO effectively split, and formed two cantonment sites (Nyara was in theory designated for SSOA forces).

¹⁴² See Sarah Vuylsteke, 'Identity and Self-Determination: The Fertit Opposition in South Sudan', Briefing Paper, December 2018, p. 12.

¹⁴³ Interview with Ashab Khamis, Juba, 10 March 2020.

to replace him, in a move that was not recognized by Ujang.¹⁴⁴ In theory, this situation was resolved when Dongo accepted a position as deputy under Ujang, however, this reordering of the ranks of the officers involved did not resolve the tensions at the cantonment site, or the disposition of the forces: Khamis' forces remained under Dongo's command, Ujang maintained control of his own men.

Despite the frequent intervention of the SPLA-IO leadership and repeated trips by both Ujang and Dongo to Pagak and Khartoum, the issue was not resolved. Both sides fought at and around the cantonment site, as they contested the site as both a source of economic activity and a sign of legitimacy. In September 2019, in a move that combined both of these practices, Dongo sold registration forms to young men he thought could be loyal to him, in an effort to control the membership of the cantonment site (and thus effectively determine who would count as IO in Western Bahr el Ghazal) and simultaneously make money from the site. In the second half of 2019, to counter Dongo, Ujang removed some registration forms and rewrote others.¹⁴⁵

The organization of the SPLA-IO during the current civil war, much like that of the SPLA during the second civil war, has always been a set of relatively autonomous commanders with broadly independent control of their own territories. It is, paradoxically, the SSR process of the R-ARCSS, intended to create a unified force, that has led to fractures within the SPLA-IO as it pushed commanders into cantonment sites who have previously been functionally separate; the SSR process of the R-ARCSS has thus revealed and intensified extant fragmentation.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Interviews with SSPDF and SPLA-IO officers from Western Bahr el Ghazal, November 2019. Confidential UNMISS and CTSAMVM documents, on file with the author.

Insofar as the SSR process of the R-ARCSS creates these fractures within the opposition, it offers opportunities for the GRSS to further splinter the SPLA-IO. In Western Bahr el Ghazal, Joseph Dongo's discontent over the situation in Ngo Alimah and Wau more generally led him to take his troops and desert to the SSPDF on 27 January 2020, at precisely the moment that a national army was supposed to be being trained and deployed.¹⁴⁶ There are many good reasons for Dongo's desertion:

- (1) While SPLA-IO troops are in training, they do not receive salaries, while Division 5 forces based in Mapel have been receiving minimal salaries;¹⁴⁷
- (2) now that training is underway, there is nothing to be materially gained by contesting the cantonment site, which is in any event now largely empty, and there are more resources to be gained by joining the government;
- (3) the process of unifying the army will, as during CPA-era SSR, leave the substantive divisions of the prior war intact, and thus the incentives that would make desertion appealing before the SSR process (ranks and funds from the winning party) remain appealing during the current process.

The GRSS' manipulation of this process is homologous to its interference, on a larger scale, in the situation in Maiwut in July 2019.¹⁴⁸ Maiwut was riven with tensions between two SPLA-IO commanders, James Khor Chol and James Ochan Puot. After Ochan secured an important military victory in 2017, he gained control of relatively lucrative economic resources, including

¹⁴⁶ Interview with, inter alia, Abraham Gum Makwac, commander of the SSPDF 5th Division, Wau, 10 March 2020.

¹⁴⁷ Interviews in Mapel training center, Western Bahr el Ghazal, 11 March 2020.

¹⁴⁸ The following sentences draw from the excellent report by the UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan, 'Letter dated 20 November 2019 from the Panel of Experts on South Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council', 22 November 2019, pp. 25-27.

taxes from the cross-border trade with Ethiopia. These resources had previously benefited Chol, and tensions between the two commanders mounted and were paralleled by tensions on the ground between different Gajaak Nuer subsections. In July 2019, an alliance between Chol and the governor of the SPLA-IO Adar state, Stephen Pal Kuon, led to Ochan's forces being pushed out of Maiwut. It is then that government forces aligned with Taban Deng Gai agreed to support Ochan with weaponry and ammunition. With the support of several government-aligned generals, Ochan attacked and retook Maiwut at the beginning of August 2019. This was a rhetorical victory for the GRSS, and one of the generals who supported Ochan, the Jikany Nuer Gathoth Gatkuoth, was subsequently appointed the governor of Latjor state on 21 November 2019, in recognition of his service. However, whilst Maiwut was a rhetorical victory for the government, it was not a substantive one. Ochan's formal decision to defect to the government on 22 September 2019 was received with deep anxiety by the local community and their elders; the elders did not intend for a local, communitarian battle about community interests to play out on a national stage. It is unlikely that the GRSS has secured anything other than the temporary loyalty of Ochan, and for local rather than national reasons, in the context of a state in which tensions between Gajaak subsections are currently more important than general Nuer support for the SPLA-IO.

Equally, in Western Bahr el Ghazal, Joseph Dongo's decision to desert is a short-term decision designed to escape Abdallah Ujang's control of the SPLA-IO, and does not change the basic calculus in Western Bahr el Ghazal: the Fertit feel they have long been oppressed by Dinka forces within what was the SPLA as well as from Gogrial and Tonj, and feel that Division 5 is effectively an occupying army. This is to say that these shifts from the SPLA-IO to the SSPDF are not the result of genuine support for the SSPDF, nor are they reflective of a resolution of the

actual local conflict that gave rise to such fragmentation in the first place; rather, such shifts intensify this fragmentation.

Case Study III: Not the Opposition

The R-ARCSS produces a falsely unitary picture of the security sector in South Sudan; in so doing, it does not paper over the cracks, but rather it intensifies them. This intensification occurs as forces fragment and contest the SPLA-IO nomenclature. In relation to the SPLA-IO, one of the central lines of fragmentation has been between the shell of forces left from December 2013 that retain a nationalist orientation, and the more tellurically organized Nuer communitarian forces that prize self-defence and control of their own territory.¹⁴⁹ Over the course of the civil war, the SPLA-IO became more reliant on the White Army – temporary youth mobilizations, originally for community defence.¹⁵⁰ The White Army, or *dec in boor*, has had a fraught relationship with the SPLA-IO: nominally independent and responsive to its own military hierarchy and its relationship with Nuer elders and community leaders, it has also fought with the SPLA-IO and on occasion followed orders from SPLA-IO commanders in battle situations.¹⁵¹ However, among the Lou Nuer, for instance, there was considerable disquiet about both the SPLA-IO's national position and the considerable losses that the White Army suffered during the fighting at Waat in 2017. Thus, when the R-ARCSS was signed in September 2018, members of the white army and Gojam youth militia forces were reluctant to join the SPLA-IO.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ For the telluric organization of partisan fighters see Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan: Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political*, Telos Press, New York, 2007.

¹⁵⁰ See John Young, 'Popular Struggles and Elite Co-optation: The Nuer White Army in South Sudan's Civil War', Working Paper 41, Small Arms Survey, Geneva, July 2016.

¹⁵¹ Interviews with White Army fighters, Akobo town, October 2019.

¹⁵² Gojam emerged as a term during the current civil war. Its origins are much debated. It now roughly refers to precisely the same sectional divisions of youth militia forces that are also referred to as the *dec in boor*. See Joshua Craze and Ferenc Dávid Markó, 'Nuer militias and the limits of the political marketplace', Forthcoming.

The cantonment process was an opportunity for the mainline SPLA-IO to both reconstruct its forces via recruitment and reassert its control over Gojam youth forces and the White Army. In the second half of 2019, Simon Gatwich Dual, the SPLA-IO chief of staff, went on a morale-boosting recruitment tour through the SPLA-IO heartlands in Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile states. Gatwich Dual, who is from Uror county, had remarkably little success in Akobo East, despite his previous history as a community leader before the second civil war, and his role in as a commander of the Lou Nuer during that war. Gojam military leaders in Akobo indicated that while they would be willing to fight alongside the SPLA-IO if the Lou Nuer were threatened as a group, they would not subordinate their essentially communitarian agenda to the national priorities of the SPLA-IO.¹⁵³ The position taken by these Lou Nuer fighters should not be taken as reflective of the White Army position overall. Rather, Akobo East is a position of relative strength: it has never been occupied by the GRSS, has a relatively strong economy thanks to its position next to Ethiopia, and is thus able to operate relatively distinctly from the main SPLA-IO command.¹⁵⁴

Relatively weak communities, in contrast, were vulnerable to forced recruitment during the cantonment process, such as in Old Fangak, where, following Gatwich Dual's visit, IO troops went compound to compound, demanding either one able-bodied man or five cows.¹⁵⁵

Elsewhere, for instance at Ding-Ding in central Unity, people anticipated the fruits of cantonment sufficiently to be willing to pay to enter cantonment sites. These varying

¹⁵³ Interviews with White Army fighters, Akobo town, October 2019.

¹⁵⁴ For Akobo's relationship to Ethiopia, see Freddie Carver and Duol Ruach Guok, "No one can stay without someone": Transnational networks amongst the Nuer-speaking peoples of Gambella and South Sudan', Rift Valley Institute Report, August 2019.

¹⁵⁵ Interviews with international humanitarian actors, Juba, November 2019.

expectations of cantonment are indicative of differing histories of SSR under the CPA, and the relative strength of the SPLA-IO in the areas under its control.

Case Study IV: The Fiction of Unity

In stark contrast to Akobo, where Nuer militia forces refused Gatwich Dual's entreaties to join the SPLA-IO and go into cantonment, in Mir-Mir, Koch county, in Unity state, there was a stand-off between the Gojam and the mainline SPLA-IO over who would get to go into cantonment. This led to the militia forces being redeployed to Padeah, outside the cantonment site, while their position in the SPLA-IO was the subject of negotiations.¹⁵⁶ The Gojam had fought alongside the SPLA-IO in a round of clashes in southern Unity in 2018 and 2019-20 against Taban Deng Gai's loosely organized Koch-based militia, Tahrir. While they remained organizationally distinct from the SPLA-IO, the Gojam fighters had been rewarded by the opposition with ranks and positions for fighting alongside them in southern Unity.

Gatwich Dual arrived in Payinjar in September 2019, and came north to Leer and Mir-Mir in October 2019.¹⁵⁷ At the cantonment site, he gave a variant of the speech he had been giving all through his recruitment tour of SPLA-IO territory.¹⁵⁸ He stated that the SPLA-IO must remain vigilant and be on a war footing, and further that Gojam should no longer exist, and that all Gojam must be subsumed into the SPLA-IO and report to cantonment sites. As a means of trying to convince the Gojam to join the SPLA-IO, Gatwich Dual handed out ranks, promoting twenty-one members of Gojam to Brigadier-General.¹⁵⁹ This immediately caused friction with the remaining SPLA-IO commanders, who felt they had been side-lined by Gatwich Dual and

¹⁵⁶ Interview with SPLA-IO officers, location withheld, November 2019; UNMISS documents, on file with the author.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with SPLA-IO member, location withheld, November 2019.

¹⁵⁸ Interviews with individuals present at Gatwich Dual rallies, Unity and Jonglei states, October-November 2019.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with SPLA-IO member, Juba, 13 November 2019.

then demanded their own promotions.¹⁶⁰ The stand-off at Mir-Mir resembles a smaller version of the situation inside the SPLA after the 2006 Juba Declaration, in which a delicate calculus of ranks and pride had to be worked out to ensure that the SSDF remained inside the SPLA without the SPLA generals rebelling. Just as after the Juba Declaration, the incorporation of the Gojam into the SPLA-IO is not a substantive action: the Gojam in Unity state, as in Jonglei, retain their own military command structure fundamentally organized at the *cieng* or sectional level, and thus retain an independence from a nationally organized opposition force that cannot be overcome.¹⁶¹ So while the leaders of the Gojam might receive positions, and while, from the perspective of CTSAMVM and the international community, the forces in Padeah (which eventually returned to Mir-Mir and registered for cantonment) might be counted as part of the SPLA-IO as a fiction of the R-ARCSS SSR process, their forces remain substantively distinct from the opposition.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Charles Machieng Kuol, SSOA JDB member, Juba, 9 November.

¹⁶¹ For instance, the organizational structure of the Gojam functions in terms of *cieng* and age-sets, rather than in terms of military-style recruitment to units and divisions; the Gojam fighting style differs from that of the SPLA-IO, as John Young has set out (2016, pp. 43-48); Gojam's priorities (cattle and territorial defence) differ markedly from those of the SPLA-IO, etc.

¹⁶² Amongst the figures receiving new ranks from Gatwich Dual in October 2019 were Majak Kueth (the leader of Gojam in Mayendit), Koang Kueth Puok (the leader in Leer), and Koang Malual (the leader in Panyijar).

Case Study V: The Unity of the Fiction

North of Mir-Mir, at the cantonment site at Ding-Ding in Rubkona county, the situation was perhaps the prototypical form of cantonment. The SPLA-IO, under the sector commander Simon Maguek Gai, was struggling to fill up the cantonment site with the number of troops that the opposition had claimed would be cantoned at Ding-Ding.¹⁶³ Having inflated its force strength, the SPLA-IO then went out to actively recruit to bring the force up to its claimed strength. On his national tour in April-October 2019, Gatwich Dual addressed prospective members of the SPLA-IO in Rubkona county and encouraged them into cantonment, with the promise of wages and rations. These speeches were so successful that in some cases young men purchased registration forms (as at Ngo Alimah) in anticipation of future ranks and wages; in other cases, young men speculated and bought ranks with the hope of converting those ranks into wages once absorbed into a national army. Some 150-250 of these recruits came directly from the Bentiu Protection of Civilians site, in an attempt to maximize their sources of revenue.

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Ding-Ding makes clear how markedly different R-ARCSS is to the 'payroll peace' of the CPA period. First, rather than wages being used to bring opposition forces into a precarious military compact (the SPLA), wages, or rather the promise of wages, were instead used to attempt to reconstruct a ruined opposition military force (the SPLA-IO) and bring dissident and heterogenous elements (like Gojam) under one command structure. Then, crucially, rather than actual wages and resources being used, the SPLA-IO effectively created a futures market based

¹⁶³ The SPLA-IO had claimed that 4,000 troops would canton there; by 5 November 2019, there were no more than 1,700 troops, and that included a platoon of SSOA forces. (Confidential UNMISS and CTSAMVM documents, on file with the author.)

¹⁶⁴ Remote interviews with PoC residents, November 2019.

on memories of the SSDF's treatment during the Juba Declaration, in which young men agreed to join/re-enter the SPLA-IO in the hope of future resources. Thus, cantonment during the R-ARCSS cannot be truly understood as 'payroll peace', for there is no payroll to speak of, and the danger is that once that fact is discovered, there will be no peace, either.

In Juba in November 2019 and March 2020, the author frequently heard experts deride the SSR process as a cynical exercise in power politics. For politicians and commanders, that is largely the case, as this paper has set out: the SSR process has been instrumentalized as part of a political economy based on predation and extraversion. However, on the ground, the problem is precisely the converse: young men who have purchased registration forms or ranks have taken the process too seriously, and the risk is that once the creation of the national army fails and no wages are paid, the R-ARCSS process has once again gathered together young men who will then break off from the army, fragment, and set the country back on the path to full-scale conflict.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Indeed, drawing from a point made in Boswell and de Waal (2019, p. 34): South Sudan is a country full of armed young men, and a given quantity of armed young men is not necessarily a problem. Rather, it is the organization of young men in militarized fashion and the deceitful promises of a future that are more problematic for South Sudan's future, and in that respect, the R-ARCSS creates more problems than it solves.

Case Study VI: The Appearance of Difference

The prior two case studies showed the SPLA-IO attempting to maximize the force nominally under its control, even if the groups that constitute this force (such as Gojam) remain organizationally and substantively separate. However, the R-ARCSS can also create the reverse situation, in which it is profitable for a relatively unified political block to appear to be many different actors. The R-ARCSS, like all Sudanese peace agreements, formalizes political differences into organizational blocs and thus reifies the distinctions between actors at the cost of understanding the actual political economy underlying these often-artificial distinctions. Such is the case in what is now, once again, Mayom county, following the return to ten states.

In January-March 2020, Mayom was characterized by a particularly complicated security sector arrangement.¹⁶⁶ A small force that was loyal to the late Peter Gadet was stationed near Riak, and numbered no more than 250-300 soldiers.¹⁶⁷ The SSPDF had almost no presence at all in the county, aside from a few tanks and their operators, on loan from Division 3 in Aweil, present in Mayom town.¹⁶⁸ The government instead relied on the troops of Matthew Puljang, the Bul Nuer militia leader. These forces had not been substantively absorbed into the SSPDF and were paid directly from the Office of the President.¹⁶⁹ They showed no indication that they would go into

¹⁶⁶ In April 2020, Puljang Tap was relieved of his command of the Division IV special forces and his deputy, Joseph Manuat, was also asked to stand down. As of June 2020, there is considerable uncertainty about the military leadership in Mayom county.

¹⁶⁷ These are the forces that brought his body back from Khartoum, where he died of Hepatitis B on 15 April 2019.

¹⁶⁸ Author observation, Mayom town, November 2019; interviews with Bul Nuer intellectuals, remotely and in person, Juba and elsewhere, January-March 2020.

¹⁶⁹ An attempt to unseat Matthew Puljang from his position of military dominance in Mayom went awry in January 2020, when Tut Kew Gatluak, Kiir's security advisor, conspired with the governor of what was then Northern Liech state, Nguen Monytil, to unseat Puljang. Once Puljang got wind of the conspiracy, a clash occurred in Mayom town between officers loyal to him and those loyal to Monytil. Kiir is wary of allowing Gatluak to build up too great a power bloc, and for this reason, Puljang's slight independence

the barracks as part of the cantonment process and remained in their frontline positions. This was also the case with the SPLA-IO forces in Mayom, which were under the command of Tito Biel Matek, stationed in Tamor and at frontline positions facing the forces of Puljang (at Waah, Loth, and elsewhere). The SSOA forces of Bapiny Monytil were supposed to be cantoned at Bong, though some of them remained in Kharasana, in Sudan. In November 2019, the force that was cantoned in Bong moved south to Mayom town due to widespread flooding in Mayom, as elsewhere in South Sudan.¹⁷⁰

Tito Biel Matek, Bapiny Monytil, and Matthew Puljang are all Bul Nuer commanders who fought together under Paulino Matiep in the SSDF during the second civil war.¹⁷¹ Bapiny Monytil supposedly split from his brother, the governor of Northern Liech state, Nguen Monytil, over the creation of the 28 states and the alleged Padang Dinka land grab this would involve, alienating Bul Nuer land to Ruweng state. He left the SPLA in October 2016, though he remained independent and did not join the SPLA-IO. It is true that the Bul Nuer, as a whole, felt deeply unhappy about the 28- and then the 32-states declarations, and feel equally unhappy about the creation of Ruweng as an administrative area in 2020, which they feel consolidates a Padang Dinka land grab. However, this is a general feeling shared amongst the Bul Nuer, rather than the reason for Bapiny Monytil's 'split' from his brother.¹⁷² Initial disagreements between

from Monytil and Gatluak was useful for the president. He called the clashing officers to Juba and temporarily suspended the situation without resolving it; another example of what Popisil calls 'creative unsettlement.' Interviews, Bul Nuer intellectuals, Juba, March 2020. In April 2020, Nguen Monytil took advantage of Puljang's place in Juba, and thus his distance from his troops, to pressure Kiir into unseating him, in an attempt to consolidate the Monytil brothers' control of Mayom county. However, when Nguen Monytil arrived in Mayom town in June 2020, to raise troops and consolidate his control of Puljang's men, he was treated with outright hostility by the civilian population and by Puljang's troops.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Matik Yidit Malieth, SSOA commanding officer for Mayom, Mayom town, 16 November 2020.

¹⁷¹ In addition, Puljang and both Monytil brothers are all from the Nyang Maloh subsection of the Kwach section of the Bul Nuer.

¹⁷² For more on Bapiny's background, see Craze, Tubiana, and Gramizzi, 2016, pp. 110-111.

the brothers centred on a payment from the Office of the President for the Terschoung, the Bul Nuer variant of the Gojam militias of southern Unity and Jonglei. The Terschoung was raised by John Bul, when he was commissioner of Mayom, at the behest of Kiir and the Monyтуil brothers, and then was the main force in the SPLA's assault on southern Unity in 2015. Nguen Monyтуil took the majority of the payment for this militia (the soldiers were largely paid from the cattle they looted in southern Unity), leading to a temporary stand-off with Bapiny. That stand-off ended up being, for the Bul Nuer, a valuable negotiating position.

The Bul Nuer forces in the SSPDF, SPLA-IO, and SSOA all maintain friendly relations, and were all present in Mayom town together at the time of the author's last visit. They can maintain such friendly relations because they are all on the same side. Bapiny continues to be a part of SSOA because that allows the Bul Nuer military aristocracy centred on the Monyтуil brothers to have influence in SSOA and a voice when determining which SSOA positions go to which politicians, in addition to Tito Biel's voice in the SPLA-IO, and Nguen Monyтуil's voice in the GRSS. All of these commanders are relatively autonomous, with their own business interests, as conflicts in January 2020 made clear. However, they are all relatively unified as Bul Nuer actors, and their communitarian identity and motivations are far more important than the incidental nomenclature produced by the very form of the R-ARCSS.

8. The Government's Position

The SPLA-IO used the cantonment process as a means to try to reconstitute its authority and reallocate the scarce resources involved in the SSR process to mollify competing local constituencies. Sometimes, the cantonment sites functioned as crucibles that intensified differences, rather than uniting divided actors. As the previous case studies also show, a variety of other forces – such as the Bul Nuer political elites – also instrumentalized the cantonment process.

The strategy of the GRSS, as briefly set out in chapter five, was to undermine the SSR process as much as possible.¹⁷³ SSPDF officers were frank that the government had little inclination to pay funds to security mechanisms if those funds would end up paying for food for the SPLA-IO.¹⁷⁴ Instead, the GRSS only funded the security mechanisms in piecemeal fashion and ensured that the funds that did arrive in the mechanisms largely went to paying off the political and military figures involved in them. This enabled the GRSS both to mollify important figures, such as Tut Kew Gatluak, who chaired the NPTC responsible for disbursing the funds for the security mechanisms, and to undermine the SPLA-IO by shorting, as it were, their futures market: as food and medical supplies failed to turn up in the cantonment sites from August-December 2019, the new recruits left in droves from sites such as Ngo Alimah and Nyara; such sites were additionally hampered because they did not have sufficient bore holes for the cantoned population.¹⁷⁵ From the NPTC, more money was apportioned to new vehicles for the

¹⁷³ Interviews with international observers participating in the SSR process, Juba, November 2019.

¹⁷⁴ Interviews with SSPDF officers, names withheld, Juba, November 2019.

¹⁷⁵ In November 2019, the NPTC reported that it had received USD 36 million of the USD 100 million that the TGoNU had promised to disburse to the security mechanisms, and apportioned this 36 million to the mechanisms – well under what was budgeted and what would enable an even minimally satisfying SSR process. The JTSC, for instance, received only USD 5 million of its budgeted USD 40 million. Of the

participants in the security mechanisms and to conferences for the SDSRB than was given to the cantonment sites. These sites ended up partly relying on food aid from China and Sudan, while the SPLA-IO was forced to bring in food to the sites from Khartoum, delivering it via barge to select, entirely Nuer IO forces.¹⁷⁶

The GRSS used strategic incompetence to hollow out the SSR process and undermine local populations' faith in the SPLA-IO's promises. It then inserted itself into the cantonment process (see case study II, above) in order to fracture the opposition. There are those within the diplomatic community in Juba who claim that the SSR process failed because of a lack of funding, as if this lack was accidental and unfortunate. The lack of funding was both (a) intentional and politically productive for the government and (b) targeted at mechanisms that the government wished to undermine. More funding would not change these political equations. There is no technocratic SSR solution to what is fundamentally a political problem.

The GRSS' strategic incompetence was not just financial. SSPDF members of the security organs failed to turn up to meetings or ratify proposals.¹⁷⁷ The GRSS also failed, absolutely, in its commitments under the R-ARCSS: it did not demilitarize the cities, and it largely failed to canton its troops in their barracks. Finally, and most importantly, the GRSS has effectively considered the most powerful military force in the country (the NSS) exempt from the SSR process, and indeed has continued to recruit massively into that service.

USD 36 million that was received, over USD 6 million was spent on vehicles for the participants in the security mechanisms, vehicles that, it should be added, were purchased from companies linked to Salva Kiir. However, neither of these things was the true scandal. The real scandal was that as of November 2019, the NPTC had received all of the USD 100 million; it is simply that USD 64 million vanished. (CTSAMVM documents on file with the author, interviews with international participants in the SSR process, NPTC, JTSC, and JDB board members, Juba, November 2019).

¹⁷⁶ Interviews with international observers participating in the SSR process, Juba, November 2019.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

One of the principal problems with the SSR framework of the R-ARCSS is that it is modelled too rigidly on the CPA and does not account for the fundamental shifts in the South Sudanese security sector that have occurred since the beginning of the civil war. The focus of the R-ARCSS, like the CPA before it, is on the army as a problem (insofar as it is divided) and an institution (that must be unified). However, since the beginning of the civil war, the SPLA/SSPDF has become less relevant as a military actor in South Sudan, as the GRSS has steadily underfunded it while backing other forms of military organization.

During the civil war, the SPLA collapsed, as described earlier in this paper, with up to 30% of the force joining the resistance. But even before the collapse of the government in December 2013, government-aligned commanders increasingly relied on forces recruited in their home areas and responsive to their leadership; foremost among these, at the beginning of the war, was Paul Malong's Mathiang Anyoor. It is true, as Alan Boswell argued last year, that these forces were formally incorporated into the SPLA early in the war, and in that sense, it is a misnomer to describe them as militias.¹⁷⁸ However, in many senses, the Mathiang Anyoor were importantly distinct from SPLA units, and can be meaningfully called militias. They were mono-ethnically Dinka; their origins lay in Gelweng cattle guards, and it was to the Gelweng, who have a largely communitarian function, that Malong returned to replenish the ranks of the Mathiang Anyoor. Rather than being commanded from Bilpam, they were directly answerable to elite politicians and military figures in a personal rather than a bureaucratic role. Indeed, as Boswell notes, the Mathiang Anyoor grew precisely at the expenses of the army in the years after independence because Kiir 'did not trust the military leadership – populated with Garangists – or its rank and

¹⁷⁸ Alan Boswell, 2019, p. 3.

file soldiers, the majority of whom were believed to be Nuer.¹⁷⁹ From the perspective of the elites around Kiir, what was problematic about the army was precisely its nationalist, multi-ethnic character. While during the CPA period the army had not transformed itself into a genuinely national force, the fact that the army remained multi-ethnic was a problem to this coterie.

While the Mathiang Anyoor slipped from the stage with Paul Malong's fall from grace in May 2017, the organization represents a prefiguration of the future of the security sector in South Sudan. Local communities have increasingly formed themselves into self-defence groups during the current conflict, as a reaction to political instability created by the state. Some of those groups (such as the Agwelek in Upper Nile and the Fertit militias in Western Bahr el Ghazal) have resisted the state, while others (such as the Mathiang Anyoor) have been instrumentalized by it. These groups did not precede state violence, though there is a long history in southern Sudan of such groups; rather, the ethnic intensifications of this war are a direct product of state violence. Ethnically organized violence in South Sudan is not an atavistic remnant of older forms of life; in its current form, such violence represents South Sudan's modernity and its future.

Since the signing of the R-ARCSS, the GRSS has only intensified its strategy of ethnicized recruitment of militia forces outside the structure of the SSPDF. Since August 2019, it has recruited a new force of at least 10,000 fighters (again in contravention of its commitment in the peace agreement to cease recruitment) in Warrap state (Gogrial, Tonj, and Twic). While the Mathiang Anyoor was recruited in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, exclusively Malual Dinka, and loyal to Paul Malong, this new force reflects the position of Akol Koor Kuc, head of the Internal Security Bureau of the NSS, as the dominant military and political actor in South Sudan: these

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 7.

new recruits are from his home area, and placed under the control of the NSS.¹⁸⁰ This division-sized force was reportedly recruited with the agreement of Warrap community elders, because ‘President Kiir and Kuc allegedly affirmed that the [only] units they could rely upon were those in the SSPDF headquarters, namely the Tiger Division and the NSS Division for Operations.’¹⁸¹ Just as with the rise of the Mathiang Anyoor, the army is once again undermined in favour of units that are mono-ethnically recruited. This recruitment allegedly began in late 2018, just after the signing of the R-ARCSS; that is to say that just as the plan for a unified army was being established, the government was planning the establishment of its own army, separately organized, trained, and armed, outside of the R-ARCSS.

Since the war began, NSS and, to a lesser extent, Military Intelligence, have metastasized. Both organizations are now successful businesses fully imbricated in the political economy of the nation-state, with companies and investments in both raw material extraction and in Juba, in the service and construction industries. Both now have large fighting divisions, and are, taken collectively, the two best-armed, best-equipped fighting forces in South Sudan. NSS is also almost entirely mono-ethnically Dinka, at least in the constitution of its fighting forces, and effectively constitutes a private force, answerable only to Akol Koor Kuc. The R-ARCSS, which is predicated on the creation of a multi-ethnic army as its organizing telos, cannot reform the NSS-dominated, fragmented security sector of mono-ethnic militias which this war has created, in which the government has strategically under-invested in the army and massively invested in its own militia forces, because it is as a response to a multi-ethnic force that these militias have been created.

¹⁸⁰ See UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan, 2019, p. 28.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

9. The training of the Necessary Unified Force

In principle, cantonment should have lasted for no more than 45 days, by which time the combatants from all across the country should have assembled, registered, and handed over their weapons. The only troops to assemble were those who hoped to gain wages, food, and ranks, and almost no one handed over their weapons. These troops were then to be screened, and assessed for training and their capacity to be integrated into the new national army, the R-ARCSS' Necessary Unified Force.

This training process finally began in 2020. According to CTSAMVM, as of 1 March 2020, there were 47,000 troops in training, while 35,000 remained in cantonment.¹⁸² However, as with cantonment, there has been no screening of forces, to weed out the ill and unfit. On the contrary, for some ill recruits, the training sites provided useful medical supplies after the privations of cantonment. In addition, there are reasons to doubt the verity of the CTSAMVM numbers, or at least to suspect that they might not be telling the entire story of the training process.

At Mapel in Western Bahr el Ghazal, there should have been 3,000 troops being trained in March 2020. When the author visited the training site, there were only 1,207 SSPDF fighters and 1,257 SPLA-IO troops.¹⁸³ By far the majority of the SSPDF remained in barracks and in offensive positions, while the vast majority of the SPLA-IO, under the command of Abdallah Ujang (in Wau) and Mussa Dakumi (in Raja), has refused to participate in the training process at

¹⁸² The training-of-trainers (ToT) training began on 23 October 2019. In general, the number of SSPDF trainers far outweighed the number of SPLA-IO trainers, though there was some regional variation, with more SPLA-IO trainers at the ToT sites in Upper Nile. (CTSAMVM documents, on file with the author.)

¹⁸³ Interviews with the trainers at Mapel training site, Western Bahr el Ghazal, 4 March 2020.

all. There are reasons to think that Ujang and Dakumi's positions are not without merit. While in theory the recruits should receive 500g of rice and beans each day, the trainers at Mapel acknowledged that the forces actually receive around 200-300g.¹⁸⁴ No one at the training site looked like they were in good physical condition; indeed, it is reasonable to assume that these are dregs of both forces, going through a Potemkin SSR process.

The Fertit opposition fighters went into training at Mapel without weapons. The training site itself, however, was patrolled by armed Dinka soldiers recently recruited from Gogrial. The opposition fighters were effectively prisoners within the training site. They ate and organized themselves entirely separately from the SSPDF forces there.

All of the opposition soldiers at the Mapel training site as of March 2020 were part of the forces of Joseph Dongo. That is to say that the opposition forces being trained to constitute the national army had already defected to the SSPDF before they entered training. All of the *actual* opposition forces did not enter training, and remained outside the process of forming a new national army.

Questions about what happens after training are not openly discussed in the training site. The trainers insist that such matters, including the size of a future army and the number of divisions that will exist, are 'political questions' exterior to the peace process. That presumptively military questions (such as the size of the army) are already considered political is indicative of the

¹⁸⁴ Absent salt and oil, this would represent less than 50% of the calorific needs of such soldiers, even in an ideal setting. With no other food sources, such soldiers would be severely, if not extremely, food insecure. Phone interview with an international humanitarian, June 2020.

impossibility of finding a technocratic solution to the question of the security sector in South Sudan.

Having underfunded and marginalized both the army and the SSR process of the R-ARCSS, the GRSS is now on the verge of having its trophy: a new national army, malnourished and imprisoned, entirely under its control. It will have at once constructed a new real army outside the structure of the SSPDF, the NSS, *and* have satisfied the formal requirements of the peace process by creating a national army out of the shell of the SSPDF and the opposition that has deserted to it. The substantive, real opposition, on the other hand, finds itself forced out of the peace process, and not included within the new national army. The opposition will thus be once again depoliticized – by the peace agreement – and rhetorically reduced to the level of spoilers and bandits, while the government formally looks like it is complying with the peace agreement.

10. Conclusion

Two processes have characterized the South Sudanese political scene in the first three months of 2020, and they must be thought together.

The first is the creation of the unity government and the announcement of the cabinet of the R-TGoNU on 12 March. Even more than in 2016, this government was formed from a position of overwhelming GRSS strength and SPLA-IO weakness. Machar conceded on the one issue with which he has always been obsessed: his own safety. He agreed to return to Juba without a protection force, and thus under the protection of Kiir – effectively a prisoner in Juba.¹⁸⁵ That Machar returned was due to the weakness of his own position. Increasingly remote from the constituencies that support him in the country, and under serious pressure from his last supporters in Khartoum to concede to the agreement, he accepted the pseudo-concession made by Kiir (the reduction from 32 to ten states) whilst knowing that he would not benefit from it, because to do otherwise would be to be seen as a spoiler unwilling to compromise on peace, and would lose him whatever remaining good will he had in the region and elsewhere in the international community.

The cabinet positions that Machar has named for the SPLA-IO are exceptionally insular and inward-looking, and include his wife and two sons-in-law, reflecting a tightening circle of loyalty

¹⁸⁵ Notwithstanding the amount of diplomatic attention given to the issue, the question of Machar's V.I.P. protection force was always something of a red herring. In 2016, his protection force did not change the military balance in Juba. Absent a serious third-party force (vetoed by Museveni in discussions over the R-ARCSS), there is no way that Machar could achieve military parity in Juba. Even with a third-party force, it is unlikely that Machar could actually achieve security in Juba, such is the density of NSS personnel disguised as civilians (and more recently as members of the wildlife service). The substantive reality in the capital is that all security is at the grace of Akol Koor.

and trust around Machar. Almost immediately following the naming of the cabinet, there was a raft of resignations from the SPLA-IO, many of them long rumoured to be in the making. Those resignations included the Deputy Chief of Staff for Administration, James Koang Chuol, and the Deputy Director of IO-NSS, James Wang Chany. In an official letter of resignation, the four commanders accuse the SPLA-IO of becoming a ‘family affair,’ and accuse Machar of nepotism. That the unity government produces a wave of defections, while seemingly paradoxical, is extremely rational. With the declaration of the cabinet, it is already clear who has been given positions of power, and in the absence of any strong reasons to stay in the SPLA-IO, it makes sense to move, so to speak, to the victor’s ship.

Equally, the insularity of Machar’s picks for ministers speak to his extreme weakness and another reason to leave the SPLA-IO. While the SPLA-IO have gained ministries, and no doubt enough funds will circulate to those ministries for the incumbents to satisfy their immediate circles, we are no longer in the CPA period. There is less money. There are almost no donor funds going into the country and oil revenues were massively less than those reported by the government, even before the beginning of the current global oil-production crisis. Equally, the way the oil revenues are managed has also changed: these funds are moved into Juba in cash and go directly to the office of the president.¹⁸⁶ Thus, the substantive political economy of the country turns around the NSS and the Office of the President, and the possession of ministries (including the oil ministry) will not change that political economy. Machar is effectively the political double of the defected SPLA-IO troops imprisoned in the training program in Mapel: barely able to support himself, dependent on the government for largesse and legitimacy, a prisoner kept in the luxurious confines of the Pyramid Hotel. In his growing estrangement from the substantive

¹⁸⁶ Interview with NSS officer, name withheld, location withheld, November 2019.

opposition (commanders like Simon Gatwich Dual, Johnson Olonyi, and Abdallah Ujang, all gathered in Khartoum) and his dependence on the formal position guaranteed him by the RTGoNU, he resembles no one so much as Taban Deng Gai, his erstwhile ally, now also dependent on Kiir's largesse. In such a situation, in which the leader of the opposition is effectively already within government, it makes sense for opposition commanders to join that very government. There is no little historical irony in the fact that, at the moment of a unity government, waves of defections might enable an actually unified army in a fashion that the SSR process of the R-ARCSS could not.

In the run-up to the formation of the new government, there was also a wave of rank-and-file defections from the SPLA-IO. Again, it was at the moment that there was actually training for a unified army that the desertions occurred. Whilst training was ongoing, the SPLA-IO forces were not being paid, and some of the government forces were.¹⁸⁷ Defections were a way for SPLA-IO forces increasing their chances of being paid. In addition, defections brought with them improved ranks (and thus the promise of increased wages and status); both Charlie Muong, a Luo SPLA-IO officer, and Joseph Dongo, who was discussed in an earlier case study, were given higher ranks when they defected to the SSPDF, following the intercession of Akol Koor Kuc.¹⁸⁸ Such defections are also based on a hope that, now that the government has been formed and the national unified army created, donor funds will again flow in South Sudan like they did during the CPA period, and those who are with the government will once again experience a year of eating grass.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ This varies by area, depending on the importance of the SSPDF in a given place.

¹⁸⁸ Interviews with Charlie Muong, Juba, 9 March 2020; Abraham Gum Makwac, Wau, 3 March 2020.

¹⁸⁹ A constant refrain from all the participants in the SSR process was that if the international community were to support it fully, everything would be a success, or as Wesley Welebe, the SPLA-IO Co-Chair of the JTSC, put it to the author 'Help us, like in 2005, and then everything will proceed beautifully.' Interview with Wesley Welebe, Juba, 12 November 2019.

What opposition will exist in South Sudan outside a series of Potemkin oppositions, constructed by the government and bent to its will? The central achievement of the R-ARCSS was to align the interests of the political-economic elites of Sudan (Hemeti), South Sudan (Gatluak, Koor, Kiir), and Uganda (Museveni) through a series of shared economic interests, from oil revenues to Hemeti's gold operations in Darfur, which are processed in Uganda. In such a context, it is unlikely there is any scope for opposition forces in South Sudan receiving any external funding or arms in the near future.¹⁹⁰ In this context, Juba does indeed resemble the Khartoum of the 1990s. Centrally administered through the intelligence services, which control both oil contracts and other central political-economic ventures, the new Khartoum (Juba) ensures that any opposition is either bought off (Machar), or else deprived of external backing.

Juba will then either instrumentalize or predate upon the various communitarian military forces that have emerged in reaction to its avaricious behaviour. The state will constitute a weak centralized power with little legitimacy in the rest of the country, but with the capacity to insert itself into local conflicts and instrumentalize the actors involved as it did in Maiwut and Western Bahr el Gazal in 2019. It is important to remember that the SPLA-IO leadership in Juba will now be involved in exactly the same practices of predation and prestation, and it is in these practices, above all else, that the opposition will resemble the government, much as Taban Deng Gai utilized the same practices to create forces loyal to him after he entered the government in July 2016.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ It is the absence of serious external backing, and a correlative lack of arms, that centrally explains the SPLA-IO's military defeats from 2013-2016, and also explains the logic of the war: the central SPLA-IO military objective was consistently just to capture enough weapons to keep the war going (Craze, Tubiana, and Gramizzi, 2016).

¹⁹¹ Prestation refers in the work of Marcel Mauss to the circulation of gifts and prestige. See Pinaud, 2014.

Somewhat outside of this logic, there remains a real opposition to the government in Juba. Such opposition is partly constituted by actors that did not participate in the R-ARCSS (such as Cirillo's NAS), and partly by elements of the SPLA-IO that are not included in the power-sharing deal in Juba or else have actual concerns that are not answered by a ministerial position, such as the Fertit and Shilluk objections to Dinka land grabs. The danger of the structure of the R-ARCSS is that these forces are now constituted as 'outside' the peace deal (which is the government and its friends in the opposition) and so are treated as bandits without any political legitimacy. For the international community, the advantage of such an approach is that real substantive issues can be dismissed as non-political, extreme violence can be considered as mere instability, and the focus can remain on the pseudo-government that now exists in Juba.

At some point in the future, when it becomes apparent that an elite-level power-sharing deal cannot answer the needs of the substantive opposition, the question for the international community will once again be whether they want to insist (*à la Rome*) on a simply expanded set of power-sharing negotiations with perhaps eight, or even ten, vice-presidents, or whether they are willing to think more expansively about what might constitute legitimacy in South Sudan.

One of the limits of 'payroll peace' is that it understands communities like the Fertit and Shilluk as simply pricing themselves out of the market. Once their (expensive) price has been met, or so the argument of de Waal et. al. goes, then they will be included within the logic of the political marketplace; they are holdouts, this position would argue, simply because the price isn't right.

The problem with such a position is that it does not take seriously the substantive issues of political exclusion and territorial marginalization that underlie the militarization of communities

like the Fertit and Shilluk, and their creation of militia forces. These are not issues that can be solved by the state, for they were issues created by the very logic of the state's existence. It is a state whose primary functions are extraversion and predation that created the need for these militias in the first place; it is the state that formalized land claims in such a way as to allow for the displacement of minority communities throughout South Sudan. To be sure, as this report has set out, many of these militias have then been instrumentalized by the state. That does not, however, blunt the reality of these community's objections to state-based logics of predation in South Sudan.

These concerns cannot be addressed within the logic of the SSR process of the R-ARCSS, because this process fundamentally reinforces the very state structure that predated upon these communities. Indeed, it is these very peace agreements that push local militia forces (largely defensive and territorial in origin) into a national conflict via mechanisms like cantonment, and it is thus the SSR processes themselves that lead to the build-up of war. The creation of a national army does not resolve these problems; it exacerbates them.

In a country which has such a strong legacy of innovative and legitimate non-state-based forms of organization, the international community has time and again chosen to back the one form of political organization that is malevolent and predatory: the state. As the new unity government announces the completion of 'training' for the national army and demands further donor funding and the lifting of sanctions in South Sudan, it is to be expected that the international community will once again bless the GRSS with the patina of legitimacy. Of course, this is not 2006, and the same donor funds will not flow. We are under conditions of austerity, in South Sudan as elsewhere. Nevertheless, the international community will offer its support to an effectively

mono-ethnic government reliant on a repressive national security apparatus that has shoe-horned a beaten opposition into its ranks, on the condition that it can find low-cost and low-impact ways to build on the SSR process of the R-ARCSS.

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