PRIO

Independent • International • Interdisciplinary | PRIO PAPER | 2014

"Anyone who can carry a gun can go"

The role of the White Army in the current conflict in South Sudan

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Summary

Based on extensive field research in the Greater Upper Nile and Gambella regions,[1] this report focuses on Nuer civilians who are fighting on the side of the SPLM/A-in-Opposition in the current civil war, popularly known as the White Army. Although it features in a few reports,[2] there are many misconceptions about the White Army; its origins, leadership structure, composition, and role in society are poorly understood.

FINDINGS
• Politicized ethnic rhetoric has promoted the targeting of civilians and contributed to a cycle of revenge attacks. However, the warring parties and international community's overemphasis on historical grievances between the Dinka and Nuer disguises the complex relations within and between these groups.
• The White Army is not a single cohesive force, but comprises defense groups representing Nuer rural communities at various levels. While these mobilization structures have existed among Nuer communities for generations, the political economy of the civil wars and large scale violence in the past decades have altered leadership structures and fighting tactics.
• Mobilization for the current conflict is broader than usual, from uninitiated boys below ten years of age to men in their fifties. Significant pressure and negative social sanctions make it difficult for able-bodied males to stay behind.
• The continuing influence of traditional spiritual leaders within Nuer society has been used by political and military leaders to mobilize popular support.
• Atrocities against civilians are not unprecedented and must be seen in relation to the militarization of civilians during decades of war and the continued justice and security vacuum in the period after the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The ability of warring parties to control violence against civilians is often assumed, but the current dynamics prove otherwise.

Background

Less than three years after gaining independence South Sudan faces a new civil war. Since December 2013 over a million people have been displaced and more than ten thousand killed in fighting between the government and SPLM/A-in-Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), led by former Vice President Riek Machar.[3] Political divisions within the ruling party, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), quickly devolved into violence in the capital Juba, prompting army defections and civilian mobilization in several parts of the country. Brutal targeting of civilians along ethnic lines has resulted in condemnation by the international community. The involvement of armed civilians in carrying out such atrocities, and their relations with the rebel forces and conventional army, are poorly understood. This has major implications for the international community's efforts to mitigate the cycle of violence.

The role of ethnicity: Dinka – Nuer warfare?

Fluid identities

Atrocities committed by government forces against Nuer civilians in Juba in December 2013 triggered a mass mobilization of Nuer in Greater Upper Nile and revenge killings of Dinkas in areas captured by the SPLM/A-IO.[4] Both sides have since committed further atrocities along ethnic lines. The media and international community have consequently tended to describe the involvement of civilians as ethnically motivated, often in reference to historical grievances. Despite mixed alliances at the political level,[5] the Dinka are perceived to support President Salva Kiir against the Nuer, who are seen as allies of Riek Machar. This characterization oversimplifies and disguises complex historical relations within and between these groups. Furthermore, some alliances across ethnic lines have continued despite ethnically targeted violence.

Nuer and Dinka in rural areas identify more strongly with kinship groups and clans than with ethnicity, and inter-communal conflicts usually take place between groups at these lower levels. Although the most well-known and documented 'South-South' violence during the second civil war (1983-2005) was between members of Dinka and Nuer communities following the 1991 split of SPLM/A,[6] most of the internal fighting took in fact place within these ethnic groups, particularly between various Nuer military factions and communities.[7]

Moreover, ethnic categories can disguise more than they reveal. Some communities have closer relations with other ethnic communities than with members of their own overall group. Dinka from Duk [Nyareweng and Hol] may identify more closely with Lou Nuer of Uror and Gaawar Nuer of Ayod than with Dinka communities in Bahr al Ghazal and Abyei or even Bor. Dinka from Duk are often bilingual, intermarry with Lou Nuer, consult Nuer prophets and, until recently, carried out joint military operations.[8] But close relations do not preclude such conflicts as occurred over resources and borders in 2009 and 2013.

Manipulation of ethnicity

The current conflict has at the same time assumed ethnic dimensions owing to both politicized ethnic discourses and the targeting of civilians along ethnic lines.[9] Ethnically targeted killings must be seen in relation to the conscious manipulation of ethnicity by politicians and military leaders in an effort to mobilize support and ensure continuous motivation for their fighters. This is further reinforced by the use of derogative language and victimization narratives by both sides, including references to traumatic historical events. In his first television speech after the outbreak of violence in Juba, President Salva Kiir alluded to the "Bor Massacre" of 1991-92 carried out by Riek Machar's SPLA-Nassir faction against Dinka civilians. Meanwhile, Nuer politicians refer to 'Dinka domination',[10] and recall atrocities committed by the SPLA against Eastern Nuer during the SPLA-Anya-Nya II conflict and to the killing of the Anya-Nya II leader Samuel Gai Tut in 1984.[11]

Ethnic rhetoric and subsequent targeting of civilians contribute to a self-perpetuating cycle of revenge attacks. They also make it difficult and even

dangerous to continue cooperation across ethnic boundaries (some Bul Nuer in Unity [Mayom] have been supportive of the Governor (aligned with President Kiir), and some Dinka [Duk] in Jonglei initially sympathized with the opposition). Importantly, ethnic rhetoric masks the grievances many civilians hold against political elites on both sides in terms of corruption and insecurity.

Ethnically targeted killings are not limited to the Nuer and Dinka, but have also been directed against anyone perceived as loyal to opponents, as seen in the killings of members of the Shilluk and Sudanese Darfuri communities in Malakal and Bentiu respectively. The peace agreement between the Murle and Lou and Jikany Nuer early in 2014, after years of inter-communal violence, also illustrates how pragmatism can take precedence over historical grievances in the current fluid political context. The Nuer do not want to risk attacks from the Murle when they leave their areas defenseless in order to fight the government. Meanwhile a neutral position by Murle leaders keeps their community safe from potential attacks by both parties, and provided David Yau Yau's South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army Cobra with leverage in negotiations with the government.

What is the "White Army"?

While the term White Army, or *dec bor* in Nuer, has been used for the past twenty years, there is still a lack of understanding regarding its history, structure, leadership and role in the community. The White Army is not a single cohesive force, but comprises Nuer defense groups at various levels in the Greater Upper Nile region. These are organized according to clan and section, and members, primarily cattle camp youth, are given responsibility to defend the community. Any youth initiated into manhood is expected to participate. Although comprising various age-sets, these initiated boys and men are locally defined as "youth", with a specific set of privileges and responsibilities in the community.[12]

Insecurity and a need for fighters during the second civil war and post-CPA period have contributed to broaden the age range of youth among Nuer and other rural communities. The many privileges attached to membership of the youth category also encourage many Nuer boys to go through initiation prematurely. Boys as young as ten are initiated in some areas, while men in their late forties continue to constitute part of the White Army.[13] Large-scale revenge attacks, often accompanied by cattle raiding, killings and abductions, as seen during the Murle - Lou Nuer, and Jikany Nuer - Lou Nuer conflicts, constitute part of this role.

The White Army continues the traditional mobilization structures of Nuer communities described by Evans Pritchard in the 1930s. In line with his principles of segmentation and opposition between segments, mobilization usually takes place at clan and section levels within larger tribal segments, such as the Lou Nuer and Jikany Nuer.[14] For example, *Mor* and *Gun* (Lou Nuer primary sections) often fight each other, but they also unite against an external enemy, as during large-scale mobilizations against the Jikany Nuer and lowland Murle. On rare occasions, larger tribal segments unite to face a common enemy, as the Jikany and Lou have done in the current conflict. These alliances are extremely fragile and could easily falter in response to the dynamic environment. Importantly, the Nuer youth of Upper Nile, Jonglei and Unity do not fight under one command structure but are mobilized and organized under separate leaders.

While these mobilization structures have existed for generations, the political economy of the second civil war and large scale violence in recent decades have altered leadership structures and tactics. In the course of the previous war, Nuer faction leaders armed White Army members from their own communities. They manipulated clan and section identity to mobilize support, which also contributed to increased militarization and fragmentation of Nuer communities. Moreover, participation in large scale attacks is no longer confined to cattle camp youth, but also includes educated town youth and members of government security forces. Uninitiated boys are also brought along to observe older age-sets. While revenge and compensation for looted livestock remain primary motivations, other economic and social incentives, such as respect in

Lou Nuer youth in a cattle camp in Pathai payam, Uror county, Jonglei, February 2013. Photo: Ingrid Marie Breidlid/PRIO

the community and accumulation of cattle, also play significant roles.[15]

The use of the term *dec bor,* or White Army, to describe Nuer youth or warriors seems to have originated sporadically during the civil war. The name is commonly thought to derive from the ash youths cover their bodies with against mosquitos. However, current and former White Army members claim the term is rather based on its opposition to the Black Army, or *dec char,* a Nuer term for trained and uniformed soldiers.

Community defense forces are not unique to Nuer society. In response to threats by rival communities and armed elements many rural communities formed defense forces during the previous civil wars. The government's failure to provide the rule of law and security in the post-CPA period necessitated the continuation and re-establishment of community defense forces, as has civilian targeting in the current crisis. Multiple attempts by the government to disarm civilians have been largely unsuccessful and in some cases even exacerbated

violence and negative state-society relations. The government's establishment of village policing throughout Jonglei in February 2013 reinforced a perception that responsibility for security had been delegated to traditional community defense structures.[16]

Leadership structures within the White Army
Each unit of organization within the White Army is represented by its own leader (*kuaar burnam*), selected by the members. For instance, each clan selects its leader and the representatives of the different clans then select a common leader for the next level. This process occurs at every level - from clan, section, *payam*, up to county. The role of a *kuaar burnam* is to mobilize, organize and lead the men they represent in war as well as to mediate internal disputes. The *kuaar burnam* therefore holds the dual role of peacemaker as well as war leader. As the chain of command is very clear from the clan level to the top, communication, mobilization and coordination within the White Army is very efficient.

If a conflict requires mobilization across counties, an overall leader will be selected from the leaders of the counties involved. In the post-CPA period the Lou Nuer selected a *kuaar burnam* for Greater Akobo for each major revenge attack against the Murle, and the Jikany and Lou Nuer have selected respective *kuaar burnam* for Upper Nile and Jonglei to lead them in the current war. If leaders are perceived to perform poorly they can be, and often are, voted out and replaced.

Cooperation between the White Army and SPLM/A-in-Opposition

Many soldiers have gone to dec bor. This is because among the rebels they are left behind if they are wounded. No one cares about you, so you better fight together with your section in dec bor.
Interview with Jikany Nuer (Gajook) elder/former SPLA soldier from Nassir, Matar, Gambella, 2014.

Distinct from the White Army, Nuer who have defected from the SPLA to the opposition are known as the Black Army. While they cooperate militarily against the government in the current conflict, they have fought in parallel and under different command structures. Members of the White Army claim that they (not professional soldiers), under the command of the overall *kuaar burnam* in Upper Nile, were responsible for capturing Malakal in December 2013. Not only do most youth have their own weapons, and extensive experience of warfare during the second civil war and post-CPA period, their sophisticated mobilization and leadership structures enable them to organize and coordinate a large number of fighters very quickly.

To ensure greater control and command, the SPLM/A-IO claims to have been attempting to integrate the White Army into professional military units through training. As during the second civil war, some White Army leaders are given ranks in order to integrate them further, and overall command is now in the hands of professionals. However, many youths feel more comfortable fighting in traditional structures with people they know, and even some defected soldiers prefer to fight alongside their clan members. This should be seen in relation to the tendency among many Nuer commanders to mobilize youth from their own sections in the factional fighting during the previous civil war, and the largely unsuccessful integration of many militias (under the umbrella of the South Sudan Defense Forces) into the SPLA following the 2006 Juba declaration. Bound by kinship and patrimonial networks, many soldiers owe primary loyalty to their previous commanders.

It remains to be seen whether the youth will be further integrated into the opposition forces or if they will continue to fight in parallel. Even if the White Army should be integrated fully in the military command structure (which is unlikely), officers ability to exercise greater control or discipline is questionable. Indeed, the poor human rights record of the SPLA raises the question of whether discipline among professionally trained soldiers is far greater than among civilian fighters. Many SPLA soldiers themselves never received proper training; many atrocities during the current conflict have been committed by professional soldiers on both sides. The distinction between armed civilians and rebels can also become blurred, and will likely become even more so if the conflict is prolonged.

Participation and social support

We are very angry because our relatives have been killed. Anyone who can carry a gun can go. It does not matter if they have a gar [scarring] or what is their age. There is no time to be initiated now. … If a man wants to stay at home [not go to war] we cannot trust him. We can even encourage him to go. … For us women to send our brothers to war makes us unhappy. But we need to keep fighting with the Dinka. There is no other way.
Interview with Jikany Nuer (Gajook) woman from Nassir, Matar, Gambella, 2014

Although participation in inter-communal warfare and large-scale attacks in the post-CPA era has been extensive, mobilization and social support for the current conflict appears even more widespread than usual. While participation in the White Army is primarily voluntary, every able-bodied male is expected to take part. Even some women, mainly from police and prison services, have joined the fighters. Various segments have different roles, from fighting on the front line to carrying food and water and taking care of the wounded.

In past inter-ethnic conflicts many older women expressed discontent with participation of their own youth because they feared revenge attacks. This time, however, social pressure is stronger and it is difficult for men to stay behind. In some communities social sanctions include insulting songs performed by young women. Despite this, some men have held back, while others have fled to neighboring countries with their families. Social pressure may also dissipate owing to war fatigue as the conflict is prolonged. Importantly, while support for the conflict appears widespread in many rural areas, civil society voices across South Sudan have been calling for peace since the outset.

Role and influence of Nuer spiritual leaders

He [Dak Kueth] will remain with us until the war is over. Because of his powers, four bombs from gunships did not go off. He predicted this. And we were all saved. He can influence all Nuer youth. They come to him for advice.
Interview with Jikany Nuer (Gajaak) and SPLA-IO soldier, Lare, Gambella, 2014.

Spiritual leaders play a significant role in Nuer culture. The most significant example is Ngundeng, whose nineteenth-century prophecies continue to influence the Nuer; many perceive the current crisis as fulfillment of his prophecies. Other Nuer prophets and spiritual leaders played significant roles during the civil war and post-CPA period, and a few are important actors in the current conflict. While the international community primarily engages with political and military leaders in times of crisis, spiritual leaders are too often ignored.

The most influential spiritual leaders are relied on for blessings, through the sacrifice of bulls, and are perceived to protect and direct youth during fighting through visions of the future. They also act in resolving internal disputes, and have on some occasions been instrumental in unifying rival Nuer sections in the face of a common enemy. Because of their powers they often enjoy close relations with White Army leaders and youth in general. As elsewhere, the influence of these spiritual leaders waxes and wanes in accordance with the efficacy of their pronouncements.

The most powerful contemporary prophet is Dak Kueth, who gained recognition during the Lou Nuer and Murle conflict in the post-CPA period. According to many Lou Nuer youth, Dak Kueth protected them during fighting as well as warned them about Murle attacks before they occurred. Because of widespread belief in his powers and ability he also plays a significant role in the current crisis.

Ngundeng's original prophecies are constantly reinterpreted to explain historical events as well as to meet current circumstances. Some recent inter-

communal wars are commonly seen as direct outcomes of Ngundeng's prophesies and curses (e.g. the Jikany-Lou Nuer and Lou Nuer-Murle conflicts), and many Nuer believe that Ngundeng predicted the second civil war as well as the current conflict. According to popular interpretation of one of his songs, which is believed to prophesy the current conflict, a new leader will rise and the Nuer will ultimately defeat the Dinka. Not surprisingly Riek Machar has tried to present himself and his rebellion as the fulfillment of these prophecies.

Already in 2009, in an effort to increase his prestige, he brought back to South Sudan the original rod of Ngundeng from the UK. The continued importance and influence of spiritual leaders has also been exploited by political elites and military leaders during and since the second civil war. In the current conflict, Riek Machar has invoked Dak Kueth and other Nuer spiritual leaders in order to consolidate power and ensure the continued motivation and participation of youth.

Changing dynamics in warfare

The younger ones [with no experience] are taught by the elders. When they see the enemy they just shoot and run. They don't even care about if they get killed or not. They think they are playing.
Interview with Jikany Nuer (Gajook) student from Malakal, Matar, Gambella, 2014.

Since the outbreak of the conflict in Juba in December 2013, both parties have committed gruesome atrocities against civilians.[17] The brutal violence that followed the capture of Bentiu by opposition forces in April 2014 has been labeled a "game changer" by the UN.[18] But such extreme violence against civilians is sadly not unprecedented. The second civil war saw a similar targeting of civilians, including murders and rapes of women and children.[19] Around two million people lost their lives and four million were displaced. Atrocities against civilians continued to take place after the CPA in 2005. This has been witnessed in multiple inter-communal conflicts, such as the large-scale violence between Lou Nuer and Murle communities in the period between 2009 and 2013. Armed rebellions and counter-insurgency operations have also seen brutal targeting of civilians, including the SPLA military operations against George Athor in Pigi in 2010, Peter Gatdet in Mayom in 2011 and David Yau Yau in Pibor in 2013. Grave human rights abuses have occurred during SPLA disarmament campaigns as well, for instance during the forceful disarmaments of the White Army in 2006 and the Murle in 2012.

The brutality must be considered in the context of decades of civil war and large scale violence, as well as the militarization of civilians and a gradual erosion of fighting ethics. The breakdown of security and the rule of law during the post-CPA era, especially in rural areas, has necessitated continued militarization of youth and the use of revenge to provide a sense of justice, including compensation for the loss of lives and property. Civilians have therefore been able to commit atrocities with full impunity, in the name of justice and security, which further entrenches the cycle of violence and undermines community relations for future generations. Limited trauma-healing programs and the lack of a national reconciliation process until recently have contributed to the transfer of the culture of violence and historical grievances to younger generations. But importantly, there are individual differences: some youth kill and loot while others try to protect the vulnerable.

The ability of political elites to control and limit violence against civilians is often assumed, but the current dynamics prove otherwise. Some political leaders and military commanders have reportedly advised the White Army to refrain from looting and committing atrocities against civilians. However, as long as impunity exists for the perpetrators, such appeals are likely to meet deaf ears. At the same time, although Dak Kueth created specific rules of warfare and prophesied various curses upon those who violate them, many youth who are actively involved in battles and capturing towns admit to ignoring these rules.Failure to adhere to his rules may also be related to inconsistencies of various prophetic messages: some encourage revenge. Not surprisingly, youth have tended to adhere to those messages they find best suited for their immediate interests.

> *We all violated the rules of Dak Kueth [laughing]. When we are fighting we have to take cattle. That is normal for all dec bor.*
> Interview with kuaar burnam from Nassir, Matar, Gambella, 2014.

For Riek Machar, cooperation with the White Army is a double-edged sword. While he likely recognizes the risk of youths' committing abuses in his name, he also depends on the youth to fight on his behalf; their primary motivations are revenge, looting, and other grievances of their kin - not his political cause. Moreover, while the use of ethnic rhetoric increases motivation, it also increases the likelihood of ethnic targeting against civilians. This of course has serious implications for any attempt to prevent further atrocities. SPLM/A-IO military commanders and soldiers are not a homogeneous group and their grievances and motives may also differ from those of Riek Machar. Control and command over the soldiers lies primarily with the individual commanders, not with him. Therefore the international community's pressure on Machar to end atrocities may not have the desired effect.

Furthermore, forcing Riek Machar's hand in a political settlement without the consensus of the White Army and individual commanders is likely to lead to fragmentation of his forces and to complicate any political solution.

Judging from history the current alliances are extremely fragile and fluid. As new political and economic opportunities arise, these alliances are likely to falter or change due to power struggles and competition for resources. The risk of an intractable conflict due to fragmentation within the warring parties' increases as the conflict is prolonged. The brutal fighting between Nuer factions in Greater Upper Nile during the second civil war illustrates the danger of such a scenario. This could have grave consequences for the overall conflict picture and likelihood of a durable peace agreement.

Policy implications

- **Crisis of Governance:** While the conflict erupted as a result of division within the SPLM, the mass mobilization in opposition areas illustrates this is not only a political dispute but also a crisis of governance. Ethnic rhetoric masks the grievances many civilians hold towards the government and political elites. Even if a political compromise is reached in Addis Ababa between the political elites, violence is likely to break out again unless rural populations perceive any future government as inclusive and see immediate and concrete improvements on the ground in terms of security, justice and development.

- **State-Society Relations**: A durable solution to the conflict would address local grievances and re-build relations and trust between the state and society. Atrocities carried out by both sides in the current conflict also necessitate changes in the political leadership at the top to regain legitimacy and confidence in government.

- **Widespread Mobilization:** In the current conflict a wider range of age-sets are involved than usual and even some women have joined the fighters. Participation in the war on behalf of the White Army is largely voluntary, but prospects of forced recruitment of children and men increase as the conflict is prolonged.

- **Fragile Alliances:** Judging from history, the current alliances within the SPLM/A-IO are extremely fragile and could easily change according to the fluid political and economic context. The grievances and political goals among the various actors within the opposition are not homogenous. The risk of an intractable conflict owing to fragmentation within the warring parties increases as the conflict is prolonged.

- **Engagement:** The involvement of the White Army has major implications for the dynamics of warfare. Engagement with political leaders alone to end atrocities may not have the desired effect. The international community must have a wider engagement with all the actors on both sides, not just the political elites, in order to engage more effectively with the warring parties.

- **Reconciliation Process:** A long term commitment from donors and NGOs to support and engage with the national reconciliation process is needed, even after a peace deal is reached. Too often language switches immediately to "post-conflict" and the international community does not help South Sudanese break the cycle of violence or end long term grievances through proper reconciliation processes. Support should be provided for communities to explore culpability, and under these circumstances come to terms with these crimes. This type of long-term engagement is the only way to create a sustainable and durable peace in South Sudan after decades of war.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] The authors conducted separate field studies of Nuer youth/White Army structures in Greater Upper Nile (Jonglei, Unity, Upper Nile) before the current conflict. Michael J. Arensen conducted research (on behalf of AECOM, funded by USAID) between October 2011 and February 2012 and Ingrid Marie Breidlid conducted research (for the PRIO project "Youth and violence in South Sudan", funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and her PhD, under the PRIO project «Dynamics of State Failure and Violence», funded by the Norwegian Research Council) in November 2012-December 2013. After the conflict broke out in December 2013, she conducted interviews with Nuer opposition leaders in Nairobi and with Jikany Nuer (from Nassir and Maiwut) and Lou Nuer (from Akobo) in the Gambella region (January - March 2014).

[2] John Young, *The White Army: An Introduction and Overview*, Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2007.

[3] International Crisis Group. *South Sudan: A Civil War by Any Other Name*, Africa Report 217, 10 April 2014.

[4] Amnesty International. *Nowhere Safe: Civilians under Attack in South Sudan,* May 2014.

[5] A third group of politicians, commonly referred to as the third block, are anti-government but do not support necessarily the armed opposition movement.

[6] Sharon Hutchinson and Jok Madut Jok, "Sudan's Prolonged Second Civil War and the Militarization of Nuer and Dinka Ethnic Identities." *African Studies Review*, 42, 2, 1999, 125-45.

[7] Douglas H. Johnson, "The Nuer Civil Wars", in Gunther Schlee and Elizabeth E. Watson, eds., *Changing Identifications and Alliances in North East Africa: Sudan, Uganda, and the Ethiopia-Sudan Borderlands*, vol. 2, New York and Oxford Berghahn Books, 2013.

[8] In 2011 and 2013, Lou Nuer of Greater Akobo and Dinka of Greater Pajual and Padiet (Duk county) organized joint offensives against the Murle of Pibor.

[9] International Crisis Group. *South Sudan: A Civil War by Any Other Name.*

[10] Douglas Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars,* Oxford, James Currey, 2003.

[11] Interviews in Nairobi and Gambella (January-March 2014)

[12] Øystein H. Rolandsen and Ingrid Marie Breidlid, "What is Youth Violence in Jonglei", *PRIO Paper*, Oslo, PRIO, 2013.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard,. *The Nuer.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1940.

[15] Øystein H. Rolandsen and Ingrid Marie Breidlid, "What is Youth Violence in Jonglei".

[16] *Sudan Tribune*, 26 Feb 2013: http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article45664

[17] Amnesty International, *Nowhere Safe: Civilians under attack in South Sudan.*

[18] http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27237316

[19] See, for instance, Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Civilian Devastation: Abuses by all parties in the war in Southern Sudan*, New York, Human Rights Watch, 1994.

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Less than three years after gaining independence South Sudan faces a new civil war. Since December 2013 over a million people have been displaced and more than ten thousand killed in fighting between the government and SPLM/A-in-Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), led by former Vice President Riek Machar. Brutal targeting of civilians along ethnic lines has resulted in condemnation by the international community. The involvement of armed civilians in carrying out such atrocities, and their relations with the rebel forces and conventional army, are poorly understood. This has major implications for the international community's efforts to mitigate the cycle of violence. Based on extensive field research, this report focuses on Nuer civilians who are fighting on the side of the SPLM/A-in-Opposition in the current civil war, popularly known as the White Army.

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