

# Briefing Paper

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## HOLLOW PROMISES

### The Risks of Military Integration in Western Equatoria

Flora McCrone



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## Cover photo

The Kassia Arrow Boys in Yambio, Western Equatoria, 2010. Source: Kate Geraghty/Sydney Morning Herald/Getty Images

## Overview

The 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) calls for the integration of combatants from South Sudan's three key warring parties into a new 'unified' army. The process, however, has led to new sources of insecurity. This Briefing Paper explores the ways in which the R-ARCSS risks producing a national military structure that is potentially both too large and too fractious to be a viable vehicle for peace. The paper presents the case of the Arrow Boys militia in Western Equatoria state, which has been drawn into the conflict as a result of unrealistic promises made to them to affiliate with opposition forces; their involvement demonstrates how the integration process is leading to a deterioration in local security, community cohesion, and stability.

## Key findings

- The implementation of the R-ARCSS transitional security arrangement has given rise to illegal recruitment drives of new combatants by warring parties across the country since September 2018.
- Cantonment and military integration processes have failed to invest adequate time and resources into reconciling, training, and fully 'integrating' opposing armed forces, recreating the conditions that previously proved explosive during South Sudan's civil wars in 2013 and 2016.
- In Western Equatoria state—as well as other parts of the country—the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO) has used the prospect of cantonment, military integration, and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) to attract new recruits. The rank and file, however, are unlikely to benefit from these measures; their disillusionment is a significant risk factor for renewed violence.
- Recruitment drives have caused considerable damage to community cohesion, resilience, and customary authority—already impaired by previous waves of recruitment following earlier South Sudanese peace agreements.

## Introduction

On 12 September 2018, the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GoSS)—whose armed forces are now known as the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF)<sup>1</sup>—the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO), and the South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA) signed the R-ARCSS, ending the latest phase of civil war in the country.<sup>2</sup> The R-ARCSS replaced the ARCSS—an agreement signed in August 2015 that broke down following the eruption of fighting in Juba in July 2016. Subsequent violence spread to the Greater Upper Nile and Equatoria regions, where armed community groups joined the civil war and fought for the first time on the side of the SPLA-IO. Factors that contributed to the breakdown of the earlier agreement included problems with the implementation of the security arrangements and disputes over the cantonment and future redeployment of forces.

Although the international community pushed for and celebrated the new peace agreement, the R-ARCSS's transitional security arrangements were largely identical to those of the 2015 agreement. Many of the underlying structural problems that led to the ARCSS's collapse remain unresolved. Furthermore, South Sudan now faces an economic crisis that will make it unable to sustain a large army over the long term, and donor commitments to security sector reform are far lower than previous levels of support.

## The R-ARCSS transitional security arrangements

### The vision on paper

Within a few months of the resumption of war in July 2016, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-led peace negotiations between the GoSS and the SPLA-IO were 'revitalized', with new impetus from Sudan's and Uganda's leaderships. Two years later, in September 2018, Salva Kiir and Riek Machar signed the R-ARCSS in Addis Ababa. By then, the agreement included a third party, the SSOA—a loose constellation of other opposing leaders, with minimal armed fighters, which emerged following the hostilities of July 2016.

Broadly speaking, the R-ARCSS replicates the approach used in South Sudan's previous peace agreements. This is sometimes referred to as a 'payroll peace': warring party leaders and their cadres are put on the state payroll as a reward for their cooperation and to incentivize participation (CRP, 2019, p. 2).<sup>3</sup>

The number of combatants on the payroll is uncertain, and there is no limit on the number of claimed combatants,<sup>4</sup> which makes this approach highly attractive to warring parties, because it allows them to utilize the peace process to buy the loyalty of disparate local armed groups. It also enables the parties to augment the forces available to them in the event of renewed conflict—an ‘insurance policy’<sup>5</sup> in case the peace process fails, particularly for the SPLA-IO. Commanders also benefit from the salaries of ‘ghost soldiers’—soldiers who are counted officially as part of the armed forces but who do not in fact exist.

In practice, the R-ARCSS’s transitional security process begins with the cantonment of all forces belonging to the three warring parties. The combatants are counted, registered, and assessed—according to a set of eligibility criteria<sup>6</sup>—for one of two destinations: to be trained, redeployed, and integrated into the new army—known as the Necessary Unified Forces (NUF)—and other national security forces; or to be enrolled in DDR programmes and returned to their home communities.

## Recruitment ahead of integration

Upon signing the R-ARCSS in September 2018, the parties were required to inform the CTSAMVM—an independent body established to oversee the implementation process—of the number of total forces that they commanded (see Box 1). The parties reported improbably high numbers—573,000 combatants in total. The ‘official’ figures provided by the parties are provided below, alongside CTSAMVM’s own internal estimates, based on their observations on the ground:<sup>7</sup>

- Number of combatants claimed by the SSPDF<sup>8</sup>: 120,000; number of combatants according to CTSAMVM internal estimates: fewer than 90,000
- Number of combatants claimed by the SPLA-IO: 227,000; number of combatants according to CTSAMVM internal estimates: approximately 35,000
- Number of combatants claimed by the SSOA: 126,000; number of combatants according to CTSAMVM internal estimates: between 1,000 and 5,000

Based on CTSAMVM estimates, the number of combined forces is closer to 130,000—approximately 343,000 fewer fighters than the estimates put forth by the parties. CTSAMVM, however, had to accept the figures provided by the parties as the ‘official’ numbers, thereby permitting the parties to inflate the number of eligible combatants for the transitional security processes—either by recruiting new combatants, or by adding ‘ghost’ combatants to their rosters (at a ratio of roughly four or five to every one legitimate fighter).

There are clear indications that the warring parties have taken advantage of the immense scope for force inflation across the country, in violation of the terms of the R-ARCSS, which stipulates that no new recruitment or force inflation should take place. The CTSAMVM found evidence of two illegal SSPDF training centres in Bor and Yei recruiting and training police in July 2019. Meanwhile, in Kiir’s home area of Warrap, plausible rumours of an SSPDF recruitment drive spearheaded by the president circulated in late 2018 and early 2019.<sup>9</sup> Written directives from a senior member of the SSPDF were allegedly issued to SSPDF ground



A training-of-trainers programme for South Sudan’s new unified army takes place at the Military Training Centre in Luri near Juba, October 2019. Source: Eric Kanalstein/UNMISS

### Box 1 South Sudan's transitional security mechanisms

Under the R-ARCSS, a number of transitional security mechanisms have been established.

- The **Ceasefire and Transitional Security Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (CTSAMVM)**, first established under the ARCSS and reconstituted under the R-ARCSS, is an IGAD-led mechanism that monitors compliance with and implementation of the R-ARCSS. R-ARCSS signatories, including the warring parties, report to the IGAD Council of Ministers and the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC).

In parallel, the R-ARCSS includes several national-level transitional security mechanisms, with various key bodies for integration:

- The **Joint Defence Board (JDB)** is an overarching national-level mechanism that is mandated to 'exercise command and control over all armed forces in the pre-transitional period'. Established under the R-ARCSS, the JDB comprises heads of the warring parties, as well as the National Security Service, police, and other organized forces.
- The **Joint Transitional Security Committee (JTSC)** is the second most senior national mechanism under the R-ARCSS. It is comprised of delegates from all warring parties and mandated to manage the process of military integration and unification. The JTSC reports to the JDB.
- The **Joint Military Ceasefire Commission (JMCC)** is responsible for overseeing and coordinating forces in cantonment and barracks. It reports to the heads of the respective warring parties.
- The **Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) Board** is mandated to develop a comprehensive assessment of South Sudan's defence requirements, to inform the country's defence and security policies, and to lead the process of security sector transformation.
- The **Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Commission** was created under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and initially received significant support from the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the international community. Under the R-ARCSS, it is responsible for overseeing the development of a national DDR programme, though it lacks external support.

commanders, as well as to local authorities, to mobilize youth across counties in the Warrap area.<sup>10</sup> The recruitment drive reportedly failed to reach the target of 11,000 new combatants—from across Western Bahr el Ghazal's (then) 55 counties—but succeeded in recruiting an estimated 7,000 new recruits.<sup>11</sup> The drive also undermined local leadership—namely that of the chiefs whose authority among local people was damaged because they were unable to prevent the recruitment.<sup>12</sup>

The SPLA-IO and SSOA are also believed to have attempted to inflate forces across the country. The SPLA-IO has reportedly tried to recruit fighters in southern Unity state and across the Greater Equatoria region,<sup>13</sup> while the SSOA is believed to have led recruitment drives around Terekeka and southern Jonglei, though with limited success.<sup>14</sup> Since September 2018, a new dynamic has seen previously undeclared or unknown units pledging allegiance to the SPLA-IO. In January 2019, for example, a new brigade—previously unknown to the CTSAMVM—declared itself part of the SPLA-IO.<sup>15</sup> A number of South Sudanese living in Ugandan refugee camps and UN protection of civilian sites reportedly relocated to Panyume,

near Yei, and declared their membership to the SPLA-IO in April 2019.<sup>16</sup>

The above cases demonstrate the appeal of an open-ended and limitless cantonment and integration (or DDR) process, and the ease with which new groups can affiliate with agreement signatories in the absence of maximum quotas or robust verification mechanisms.

### Cantonment and training

While cantonment is ostensibly a technical exercise to enable the counting, registering, and screening of combatants, the concept took on a life of its own when ARCSS negotiations began in 2015, and again during R-ARCSS negotiations in 2018. The SPLA and SPLA-IO leaders—and, latterly, the SSOA—offered cantonment and eventual military integration as an incentive to existing militia groups, or to aggrieved (but not necessarily armed) communities, to encourage them to align with their party. South Sudan's armed leaders kept the term 'cantonment' deliberately ambiguous—to be interpreted by each party and translated into whatever terms would appeal to potential recruits.<sup>17</sup>

The R-ARCSS stipulated 35 designated cantonment sites: 10 were existing SSPDF barracks; 25 were new sites identified for SPLA-IO and SSOA forces. The process was due to last 45 days; during this time, combatants from across the country were to assemble at the site designated for their unit, register their presence, and hand over their weapons.<sup>18</sup> A team comprised of members of each of the three groups (the SSPDF, the SPLA-IO, and the SSOA) was to carry out a screening process to assess each combatant's eligibility—using an agreed-upon criteria—for the NUF or other parts of the armed forces (army, the National Security Service, national or state police, wildlife service, prisons service, fire brigade), or for DDR.<sup>19</sup>

The launch of the cantonment process was delayed by several months, but it had begun in some locations by late September 2019. As of early June 2020, tens of thousands of combatants had gone through the cantonment process and been sent for NUF training; many combatants, however, still remained at the cantonment sites, waiting to be processed.<sup>20</sup> Describing the process during interviews in late 2019, members of the transitional security mechanisms and the SPLA-IO mentioned a number of entry points that could allow for combatant numbers (both real and 'ghost') to be grossly inflated, including the following:

- There is no limit on the number of combatants who can assemble at each cantonment site, nor is there a countrywide limit on the total number of combatants in cantonment sites.<sup>21</sup>
- Although each division in the three parties is supposed to have a list of the combatants in their units, party leadership members interviewed between August and September 2019 claimed to have 'no idea' of the number of combatants in their units—or of the number of combatants due to assemble at the designated cantonment sites.<sup>22</sup>
- When combatants arrive at the site, the registration process is undertaken on paper; there is no biometric data at this stage or digital record of each combatant.<sup>23</sup>

The cantonment sites are supposed to be located far away from civilian communities, but combatants' families often move to live within or near the sites, blurring the distinction between combatants and civilians, allowing additional people who may not have participated in the conflict to register.<sup>24</sup>

The process outlined for training and redeploying combatants does not specify a maximum number of trainees, and it is in the warring parties' interests to keep the process open-ended. Indeed, the lack of clarity and consensus over the eventual force size is striking. At IGAD-led negotiations in May 2019, the parties agreed to a maximum of 83,000 trainees—which was considered the final figure by UNMISS and other observers (UNSC, 2019, p. 3). According to GoSS and SPLA-IO representatives to the various transitional security mechanisms, however, this figure covers only the 'first batch of the first phase'; phase one will include two more 'batches', followed by a phase two, and potentially further phases.<sup>25</sup> One SPLA-IO representative said that batch two of phase one would include 94,000 individuals.<sup>26</sup> Another senior SPLA-IO representative in the JTSC said that phase two would include 153,000.<sup>27</sup> During a workshop in November 2019, participants noted that the JMCC had requested that 150,000 SSPDF be trained in phase two, along with 150,000 SPLA-IO and SSOA.<sup>28</sup> Senior members of the JTSC from both the SPLA-IO and SSPDF explained in an interview that, 'For the main unified force, there is currently no agreement on the final number. The SDRS will decide on that. But we will not leave anybody out'.<sup>29</sup>

The SDRS Board plays a key role in these decisions. Mandated to undertake a comprehensive assessment of South Sudan's defence requirements, it was supposed to undertake an assessment to determine the future command, function, size, composition, and budget of South Sudan's national army and security forces within 180 days of the signing of the R-ARCSS (IGAD, 2018). By April 2020, however, the Board had not yet determined the total number of combatants for the new unified army,<sup>30</sup> claiming that it lacked the necessary data from the cantonment registration and screening process, as well as the financial resources needed to develop a final plan for the NUF.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, the 12 November 2019 deadline for the completion of all cantonment and training of the first batch of NUF soldiers was not met—the third deadline missed by the parties in the transitional security process. The warring parties were granted an additional 100 days to complete the process by 22 February 2020, but this deadline was also missed. According to April 2020 figures provided by the JTSC, significant numbers of combatants from all three parties were undergoing registration and training as planned.<sup>32</sup> As of May 2020, the JMCC claimed that 48,039 SSPDF combatants had been registered; however, on 12 May 2020, the CTSAMVM received information that, in fact, 64,200

combatants had been registered—some 34 per cent more than the official reports. In the meantime, as of May 2020, there were 26,000 SSOA and SPLA-IO combatants at various training centres according to the CTSAMVM, while a further 35,000 SSOA and SPLA-IO forces were estimated to be awaiting registration at cantonment sites (see Map 1). If all of these units were trained and integrated, the NUF would vastly exceed the officially projected size—that is, 83,000 combatants—for phase one.<sup>33</sup>

Problematically too, many of the cantonment sites failed to carry out the intended screening process—apparently due to a lack of planning and financial resources. This suggests that combatants who have since moved on to NUF training sites may not have been screened for suitability.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the outbreak of Covid-19 in South Sudan in March 2020 limited the number of combatants being brought to the training sites, as well as the CTSAMVM's ability to visit and verify activities. According to the JTSC, however, training is still taking place in some sites with social-distancing measures in place.<sup>35</sup>

It seems likely that the full integration process, if it goes ahead, will be highly unstable given wider turbulence and delays in implementing the R-ARCSS (de Waal et al., 2019). According to the JTSC, however, training is only designed to last for six to eight weeks. The curriculum for the training process was finalized in late April 2020. From the documents reviewed by the author, the curriculum is purely technical; it does not include any components designed to reconcile the tens of thousands of trainees from different opposing forces and their ethnic communities.<sup>36</sup>

## Prospects for DDR

The development of a comprehensive DDR programme—initially expected to take 100 days from the signing of the R-ARCSS—has been slower than NUF training efforts; as of April 2020, the programme had yet to be developed. The DDR Commission has suggested that this is due to a lack of funding, logistical support, and time—though some in-kind external support is expected from the C5 countries (South Africa, Algeria, Chad, Nigeria, and Rwanda).<sup>37</sup> The overall concept of DDR—which necessitates a reduction in force strength—is arguably a more relevant factor in the delays as it goes against the entire orientation of the current security sector 'reform' process, which seeks to *expand* the number of real and claimed armed combatants. For this

reason alone, DDR lacks real political will within South Sudan.

In fact, the warring parties consider DDR suitable only for children, the disabled, and the elderly. During interviews with senior representatives of the parties in the transitional security mechanisms, the possibility of DDR for able-bodied combatants was never raised, not even as an afterthought.<sup>38</sup> It is therefore unlikely that DDR initiatives will be able to make any significant impact on reducing overall force size, or providing alternative opportunities to the large number of youth who took up arms.

Moreover, as with other aspects of the transitional security process, the R-ARCSS and oversight bodies have not imposed a limit on the number of people who can go through DDR.<sup>39</sup> As a result, the leaders of the warring parties can market DDR, along with the integrated forces, as a seemingly open-ended and unlimited means to a livelihood. There is scant evidence, however, to suggest that the resources and appetite to deliver comprehensive DDR actually exist.

## Case study: Western Equatoria's Arrow Boys-turned-SPLA-IO

### Arrow Boys to SPLA-IO

The Arrow Boys emerged in South Sudan's Western Equatoria state in 2005 as an ethnic Azande community defence force. The group was formed to protect villages from violent incursions by the Uganda-based Lords' Resistance Army (LRA) (Schomerus, 2010). The Arrow Boys were armed with bows and arrows and spears, and attached to the chiefs from their home areas, who organized their recruitment (Schomerus and Rigterink, 2016).<sup>40</sup> The Arrow Boys were deeply embedded within, and supported by, their communities—communities that had suffered decades of marginalization and violence under the SPLA and GoSS (Schomerus and Rigterink, 2016, p. 16). By around 2011, the threat from the LRA had passed, though encroachment on Azande land by Dinka cattle keepers and Fulani cattle herders from West Africa persisted, which the Arrow Boys worked to deflect. Between bouts of activity, the Arrow Boys largely resumed civilian life, returning to their families and tending crops (Schomerus and Rigterink, 2016, p. 21).

Following the outbreak of South Sudan's civil war in December 2013 and up until the signing of the ARCSS in August

**Map 1** Cantonment sites in South Sudan



Source: CTSAMVM (2019a)

2015, the Greater Equatoria region was largely unaffected by the violence that beset the rest of the country (ICG, 2016). By early 2015, however, several emerging dynamics in Western Equatoria affected community relationships: an uptick in incursions by Dinka cattle keepers into Azande land and subsequent clashes; an increase in the patterns of SPLA units deployed in the area to threaten or attack civilian communities; and the GoSS’s decision to sack and imprison Western Equatoria’s popular governor, Joseph Bakosoro, in September 2015 (Boswell, 2017; ICG, 2016). These developments in turn shifted Western Equatorian communities’ position in the civil war; local elites came to see the SPLA-IO as a vehicle for challenging the GoSS, triggering renewed momentum among the Arrow Boys.

The Arrow Boys began to remobilize across Western Equatoria. Under different leaders, groups formed as far west

as Nagero and as far east as Mundri; this paper, however, focuses on the Arrow Boys based in the counties of Yambio and Ezo. The movement of locals to the Arrow Boys’ bases in Ezo and Yambio counties began as a trickle but by August–September 2015 had grown to a large-scale recruitment drive. In November 2015, Riek Machar gave Alfred Futuyo,<sup>41</sup> who was and remains the Arrow Boys’ leader, the title of major-general of the SPLA-IO; the move signalled the formal integration of the Arrow Boys into the SPLA-IO coalition (Boswell, 2017, p. 10). They were then rebranded ‘SPLA-IO Sector 6’ (hereafter referred to as ‘Sector 6’)—though as of August 2019, locals in the Yambio area of Western Equatoria continued to refer to them as the ‘Arrow Boys’, the ‘rebels’, or simply ‘IO’.<sup>42</sup>

In June 2016, interviews with fighters at the Sector 6 bases revealed that the group at that time was made up of Arrow Boys from the period of self-defence

against the LRA, who had been remobilized, along with brand new recruits, hailing from the same communities.<sup>43</sup> Recruits alluded to ‘influential people’ who visited the communities and told them, ‘we need greater numbers [for the Arrow Boys] to gain recognition from the government’.<sup>44</sup> Community members interviewed in Ezo and Yambio counties asserted that many of their brothers and sons had ‘gone to the bush’, and school-teachers reported that most of the male secondary students in their classrooms had left.<sup>45</sup> While Futuyo claimed that there were more than 20,000 Sector 6 fighters in mid-2016,<sup>46</sup> visits to their bases suggested that there were perhaps several hundred recruits present.<sup>47</sup>

In 2017 and 2018, Sector 6’s ties with local communities suffered as they became increasingly predatory among locals to compensate for a lack of material support; Sector 6 attacks on civilians were

reported in Ezo and Yambio counties (CTSAMM, 2018). The signing of the R-ARCSS in September 2018 brought a degree of relative calm to Western Equatoria; community members interviewed in Yambio in August 2019 reported that both the SSPDF and Sector 6 had stopped attacking and looting civilians at that time.<sup>48</sup>

In early 2019, however, there were unconfirmed reports of renewed Sector 6 recruitment ahead of cantonment.<sup>49</sup> Local youths opportunistically approached the SPLA-IO's Rirangu base, hoping to be accepted as latecomers and eligible for the promised benefits of cantonment, military integration, and DDR.<sup>50</sup> In interviews, SPLA-IO representatives insisted that only existing members, not new recruits, would be able to participate in the cantonment process and subsequent arrangements.<sup>51</sup> Yet while the SPLA-IO representatives claimed to have lists of all of Sector 6 members, when asked how many people they expected to assemble at the site in Suwe and Sector 6 sites elsewhere, they claimed to have 'no idea' of the number of combatants who would assemble;<sup>52</sup> community members in the Yambio area gave the same response.<sup>53</sup> Both the SPLA-IO and community members stated that some early assemblers in the nearby Suwe cantonment site had brought their families with them and were cultivating the land. While this allowed families to support themselves, it also blurred the lines between military and community members, and had the potential to further augment force numbers during registration.<sup>54</sup>

Through late 2019, rumours of illegal recruitment by Sector 6 persisted. During a CTSAMVM investigation in October 2019, eyewitnesses claimed that 45 to 50 people had been abducted from across Ezo, Yambio, and nearby Nzara counties,<sup>55</sup> including civilians and former combatants who had deserted Sector 6. A Sector 6 deputy base commander from the area confirmed this account, which represents one instance of an R-ARCSS violation. At the same time, media reports of increased sexual violence, disappearances, and attacks by 'unknown gunmen' continued to surface through late 2019 and early 2020; another indication of the deterioration of community security associated with the presence of Sector 6 (Radio Tamazuj, 2020a; 2020b).

In March 2020, Yambio Divisional Commander Major-General James Nando resigned from Sector 6 and defected to the GoSS. Since his defection, rumours that Nando personally recruits from among NUF trainees based at the Maridi training camp persist. If accurate, this recruitment also constitutes an R-ARCSS violation.<sup>56</sup>

## Unfulfilled expectations: cantonment, military integration, and DDR

Since joining the SPLA-IO in early 2015, and following the ambiguously worded provisions of the ARCSS in late 2015, the Arrow Boys/Sector 6 leadership's apparent sole objective has been the cantonment of its forces. Even the political leadership of Sector 6 under the SPLA-IO failed to articulate a clear motivation for communities in Western Equatoria to join the rebel group beyond securing cantonment. As one SPLA-IO representative said:

The GoSS has been pleading with me to get people to leave Rirangu, but I say they will remain there until the Equatorians are allowed cantonment. If no cantonment is allowed, armed groups will return to communities with their arms. Arrow Boys should be given the same benefits as the rest of [SPLA-IO]. . . . If not, they will go back to the bush as a disgruntled group. It is their right as they kept the fire burning for SPLA-IO in Equatoria.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, for Futuyo, the concept of cantonment—regardless of the technical process—has allowed him to promise a wealth of benefits to the rank and file. The Sector 6 leaders claim to associate cantonment with other notions, such as 'getting their rights',<sup>58</sup> and describe cantonment as a means of achieving various goals: to obtain the SSP 5 million [roughly USD 2 million at the time] (HSBA, 2016, p. 5) that they claim was originally promised to the Arrow Boys by the GoSS in 2011 for pushing out the LRA;<sup>59</sup> to remedy decades of Azande marginalization within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A); to correct the lack of recognition of Azande participation within the second Sudanese civil war (1983–2005); and to protect local communities from GoSS-sponsored violence.<sup>60</sup> It is unclear how the ARCSS or R-ARCSS's provisions for cantonment would help them to obtain 'their rights', nor were the SPLA-IO or Arrow Boys/Sector 6 leaders interviewed in 2016 or 2019 able to articulate this.

Among the Sector 6 rank and file, a further misalignment exists between stated demands by the leadership for cantonment and actual grievances. In June 2016 at the Rirangu base, low-ranking recruits barely knew what cantonment was; some appeared to consider it as a potential base for the formation of a professional army.<sup>61</sup> For others, it represented a simpler opportunity: to obtain a gun to

counter the 'threat of robbers from CAR and DRC borders'.<sup>62</sup> As of August 2019, Sector 6's rank and file appeared to remain optimistic about their post-cantonment prospects, despite a lack of evidence to support these expectations. According to one community member in Yambio:

These armed youth are not educated or professionalized, so they believe every promise that they are told by the leadership and believe that they will become 'soldiers for Yambio'.<sup>63</sup>

In reality, if Sector 6 were to be integrated into the NUF, it is unlikely that they would be deployed to their home area. The case of the South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM)<sup>64</sup>—a local Arrow Boys splinter group—is telling. The group signed an agreement with the GoSS in 2016 to allow their members to be integrated into the then-SPLA; however, one community member estimated that of the SSNLM members absorbed into the government forces and deployed to Juba, 15 per cent defected and returned to Yambio, unhappy that they had been sent away from home.<sup>65</sup> The few SSNLM members deployed to the Yambio area are reportedly playing 'double agent' between the GoSS and Sector 6. Several community members described how these members, disappointed with their rank and role in government forces, are 'reporting to the police or the SSPDF on a Monday, and to [Sector 6 in] Rirangu on a Tuesday'.<sup>66</sup>

As for the prospect of DDR for Sector 6, the rank and file have been led to believe that DDR initiatives will be accessible to everybody; it is considered a way out for the region's many unemployed, idle youths who have taken up arms, as well as for those who have not been integrated into the military. A senior member of Sector 6, interviewed in Yambio in August 2019, claimed that a DDR package would provide 'whatever somebody wants'<sup>67</sup>—such as schooling, skills training, and the provision of tools or equipment—and that the international community would fund such packages. South Sudan's key international donors, however, have not committed to funding these packages, at least not publicly. At best, some initial in-kind support may be provided by the C5 countries.<sup>68</sup> Members are likely to feel disappointed, even angry, when expectations are not met—NUF integration poses the same risk.

Indeed, when Nando defected to the GoSS in March 2020, his letter of resignation from the SPLA-IO stated that in the abortive 2016 transitional security



process, the IO leadership ‘failed to recognize the participation of [his group] and exclude[d] them from the matrix of position allocations’, and that in 2020, they continued to experience ‘marginalization and ostracism from mainstream SPLA-IO political inclusion and participation’.<sup>69</sup> In other words, they have not been offered the military ranks and positions he had expected. There is some irony in the fact that these were the same reasons given by Sector 6 for rebelling against the GoSS in the first place, and now Nando is using the same language to defect to the GoSS. It is a further indication that the transitional security process is unlikely to address their grievances or encourage greater stability in Western Equatoria.

## Militarization and community breakdown

Between 2015 and 2019, the Arrow Boys/Sector 6 underwent a significant transition, shifting away from being a community-facing defence force to a civil war-oriented armed group. While there were legitimate grievances that encouraged the early mobilization of Western Equatoria’s armed groups, the ARCSS and R-ARCSS have only increased militarization, in large part because of the expectations surrounding cantonment and its outcomes.

The Arrow Boys/Sector 6 were historically subordinate to community chiefs according to their official command structure. By 2016, and through 2019, however, the relationship between Sector 6 and the chiefs had largely disintegrated, and the chiefs no longer openly claimed to be responsible for them.<sup>70</sup> Both sides appear to have distanced themselves from each other. A chief in Ezo county relayed an incident in the nearby town of Source Yubu in December 2015: he had approached the Arrow Boys but they rejected his authority, saying ‘No, you are [a] civilian, we are military’.<sup>71</sup>

In August 2019, community members explained that chiefs and community elders had lost their authority over Sector 6, and, by extension, over much of the local youth. As one said,

Now [the chiefs] have no voice. They fear the rebels so can’t stop the youth joining. They also fear government. They just have to comply with whichever authority is standing over them. The government threatened to kill the chiefs and elders whose sons joined the IO.<sup>72</sup>

In October 2019, following reports of abductions by Sector 6 from across Ezo, Nzara, and Yambio counties,<sup>73</sup> the CTSAMVM were told that Nando—then the Yambio Divisional Commander—had issued an order for any ‘community police’ appointed by local chiefs, and not approved by Sector 6, to be rounded up along with any Sector 6 deserters (CTSAMVM, 2019b).

The customary authority of the chiefs over Sector 6 has been displaced by a hybrid of local leadership and military authority. Recruits of all levels are preoccupied with military style ranks and organization. Fighters express immense pride at being promoted and given formal military titles within the group—stemming from a perceived lack of recognition, as discussed above.<sup>74</sup> Recruits who previously worked as farmers, housecleaners, or *boda* drivers, now have titles such as captain, colonel, and brigadier—and they expect to remain in the military.<sup>75</sup> This fixation with status has persisted among opportunistic newer recruits, who have reportedly put on their best clothes, found weapons, and approached the base in Rirangu, ‘hoping that the [SPLA-]IO would notice them, and then they would be upgraded’.<sup>76</sup>

Back in 2016, Sector 6 members claimed that they had joined the SPLA-IO when the SPLA started attacking their communities; in fact, in joining, the recruits retreated to bases in the bush. There is scant evidence that this served to protect their communities. Unlike the days of the LRA incursions in 2005–06, the community members interviewed no longer provided Sector 6 with food or other resources, and communication was limited. Looting and fighting by the Arrow Boys has reportedly instilled a genuine fear of ‘our own boys’ among community members.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, one interviewee said that a lot of members of the community disappeared between 2015 and 2019, and that ‘many of them used the name of IO as an excuse to loot and steal’. Sector 6’s presence, including their tactic of ‘making noise’ against the government and blocking road access, has served to shut down (already minimal) public services, including the local school and clinic in Rirangu.<sup>78</sup> Unlike the SPLA-IO in other areas of the country, however, as of August 2019, they had failed to maintain full control of the territory they supposedly control, or to establish their own alternative administration.<sup>79</sup>

There are some exceptions to this pattern of alienation. Since the signing of the R-ARCSS, some Sector 6 cadres have started sleeping at home with their families every night.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, their militarization remains incomplete. Visits by the

author to the Rirangu base in June 2016 indicated a limited supply of weapons—many of which were home-made rifles; many recruits were left unarmed, as well as untrained and under-resourced.<sup>81</sup> There is no evidence that Sector 6 has become significantly better armed since then. The ongoing contact between many Sector 6 members and their families and immediate communities implies that there is still scope for demobilization and reintegration in their communities *if* this path is made available, and appealing, to them.

## Conclusion

South Sudan is not the first post-conflict state to attempt military integration despite lacking the necessary resources and capacity, as well as a conducive political economy. The strategy seems especially high risk, however, given that such processes do not typically demonstrate a positive effect on durable peace (Krebs and Licklider, 2016). South Sudan’s civil wars have also been triggered by infighting within military units. In the current context, inflated force sizes suggest either endemic corruption (in the case of ‘ghost soldiers’) or unrealistically large, unwieldy, and unprofessional fighting forces—combined with an uncertain, and possibly non-existent, DDR process. Neither of these factors bodes well for military integration in South Sudan.

Meanwhile, commanders and elites have exploited the open-ended design of the transitional security process in Western Equatoria and elsewhere to manipulate communities and encourage them to join the armed forces en masse. The promises are unlikely to be kept, just as the communities are unlikely to benefit from these measures. The process is likely to generate deep resentment—and new spoilers—when new recruits awaken to the reality. This is particularly the case for those who are already marginalized and have few livelihood opportunities. Ironically, there are signs that Equatorian communities may turn against the SPLA-IO for some of the same reasons they joined the rebellion against the GoSS.

Some have argued that if peace agreements were to exclude promises around cantonment and DDR—and thus make them inaccessible to loosely affiliated community militias—such groups may naturally self-demobilize and self-reintegrate into their communities after the end of a conflict.<sup>82</sup> It is now a moot point to consider whether the R-ARCSS’s transitional security arrangements, along with the increasingly frayed but

nonetheless enduring relationship between Sector 6 and their home communities, would have led to this outcome in Western Equatoria. In any case, there is significant room to expand the scope of research and explorations on cantonment, military integration, and DDR in the South Sudanese context, and to develop alternatives to the existing technical templates.

Regrettably, the R-ARCSS's transitional security process has been implemented at the expense of cohesion and localized governance among the communities from which recruits have been drawn. As of mid-2020, the authority of the chiefs and customary leaders in Western Equatoria—which has historically proven crucial for community-level resilience to conflict—has been critically eroded and superseded by military ambition. ●

## Abbreviations and acronyms

**ARCSS** Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan

**CTSAMVM** Ceasefire and Transitional Security Monitoring and Verification Mechanism

**DDR** Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration

**GoSS** Government of the Republic of South Sudan

**IGAD** Intergovernmental Authority on Development

**JDB** Joint Defence Board

**JMCC** Joint Military Ceasefire Commission

**JTSC** Joint Transitional Security Committee

**LRA** Lords' Resistance Army

**NUF** Necessary Unified Forces

**R-ARCSS** Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan

**SDSR** Strategic Defence and Security Review Board

**SPLA** Sudan People's Liberation Army

**SPLA-IO** Sudan People's Liberation Army-in-Opposition

**SPLM** Sudan People's Liberation Movement

**SSNLM** South Sudan National Liberation Movement

**SSOA** South Sudan Opposition Alliance

**SSPDF** South Sudan People's Defence Forces

**UN** United Nations

**UNMISS** UN Mission in South Sudan

**USD** United States dollar

## Notes

- 1 Formerly the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).
- 2 The agreement was also signed by the 'Former Detainees' and other opposition parties; these parties are not considered here because they do not have armed forces.
- 3 The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement took the 'payroll peace' approach, as did the 2006 Juba Declaration and the 2015 ARCSS. This approach was particularly risky for the ARCSS as the government could not finance the agreement, largely because oil production had been shut down during the previous phase of the civil war. A requirement for the SPLA and the SPLA-IO to be deployed to Juba as part of a power-sharing deal also jeopardized the agreement (CRP, 2019, p. 6).
- 4 The Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) Board—the transitional security mechanism established by the R-ARCSS to undertake a comprehensive assessment of South Sudan's defence requirements—had, in April 2020, not yet determined the number of combatants who would form part of the new unified army.
- 5 Author interview with a key source from Warrap, Juba, August 2019.
- 6 Internal CTSAMVM documents seen by the author, August 2019.
- 7 The figures reported here and below are drawn from confidential CTSAMVM documents seen by the author, August 2019. Three estimates for each figure are provided; the middle estimates are reflected here as CTSAMVM deemed these most likely to be closest to the actual figures.
- 8 This includes all organized armed forces: army, national and state police, the National Security Service, prison service, fire brigade, wildlife, and civil defence.
- 9 Author interview with key source from Warrap, Juba, August 2019; see also ICG (2019).
- 10 Author interview with key source from Warrap, Juba, August 2019; see also ICG (2019).
- 11 Author interview with key source from Warrap, Juba, August 2019.
- 12 Author interview with key international analyst on South Sudan, Juba, August 2019; author interview with key source from Warrap, Juba, August 2019.
- 13 Author interview with key international analyst on South Sudan, Juba, August 2019.
- 14 Author interview with key international analyst on South Sudan, Juba, August 2019.
- 15 Internal CTSAMVM documents seen by the author, August 2019.
- 16 Internal CTSAMVM documents seen by the author, August 2019.
- 17 Author observations, Western Equatoria, South Sudan, 2016–19.
- 18 Author interviews with members of the transitional security mechanisms, Juba and Nairobi, August 2019.
- 19 Joint Military Ceasefire Commission documents seen by the author, August 2019.
- 20 Internal CTSAMVM documents seen by the author, June 2020.
- 21 Author interview with senior representatives at the JTSC, Juba, September 2019.
- 22 Author interviews with SPLA-IO representatives to the CTSAMVM, Juba and Nairobi, August 2019; author interview with senior representatives at the JTSC, Juba, September 2019; author interviews with SPLA-IO representatives to the CTSAMVM, Juba, Nairobi, and Yambio, August 2019.
- 23 Author interviews with SPLA-IO representatives to CTSAMVM, Nairobi and Juba, August 2019.
- 24 Author interviews with SPLA-IO representatives to CTSAMVM, Nairobi, Juba, and Yambio, August 2019.
- 25 Author interview with senior representatives at the JTSC, Juba, September 2019; author interviews with SPLA-IO representatives to CTSAMVM, Nairobi and Juba, August 2019.
- 26 Author interviews with SPLA-IO representatives to CTSAMVM, Juba, August 2019.
- 27 Author interview with senior representatives at the JTSC, Juba, September 2019.
- 28 Notes from transitional security mechanisms workshop seen by the author, Juba, 18 November 2019.
- 29 Author interview with senior representatives at the JTSC, Juba, September 2019.
- 30 Author correspondence with senior representative to JTSC, April 2020.
- 31 Notes from transitional security mechanisms workshop seen by the author, Juba, 18 November 2019.
- 32 Author correspondence with senior representative to JTSC, April 2020.
- 33 Internal CTSAMVM documents seen by the author, May 2020.
- 34 Notes from transitional security mechanisms workshop seen by the author, Juba, 18 November 2019.
- 35 Author correspondence with a senior JTSC representative, April 2020.
- 36 NUF training documents seen by the author, April 2020.
- 37 Notes from transitional security mechanisms workshop seen by the author, Juba, 18 November 2019.
- 38 Author interview with senior JTSC representatives, Juba, August 2019; author interviews with SPLA-IO representatives to CTSAMVM, Nairobi and Juba, August 2019.
- 39 Author interview with senior JTSC representatives, Juba, August 2019; author interviews with SPLA-IO representatives to CTSAMVM, Juba and Nairobi, August 2019.
- 40 Author interviews with community members, Ezo and Yambio counties, Western Equatoria, June 2016.
- 41 Futuyo's name is sometimes erroneously spelled Fatuyo.
- 42 Author interview with an SPLA-IO representative from Western Equatoria, Juba, May 2016.
- 43 Author observations, Rirangu base, Western Equatoria, June 2016.
- 44 Author interview with two members of the Arrow Boys, Ezo county, June 2016.
- 45 Author interviews with community members, Ezo and Yambio counties, Western Equatoria, August 2019.
- 46 Author co-interview with the Arrow Boys leader, Maj. Gen. Alfred Futuyo, Rirangu base, Western Equatoria, June 2016.

- 47 Author observations, Rirangu base, Western Equatoria, June 2016.
- 48 Author interviews with community members, Yambio, Western Equatoria, August 2019.
- 49 Author interviews with SPLA-IO representatives to CTSAMVM, Juba, Nairobi, and Yambio, August 2019; author interviews with CTSAMVM international representatives, Juba, August 2019.
- 50 Author interviews with community members, Yambio, Western Equatoria, August 2019.
- 51 Author interviews with SPLA-IO representatives to CTSAMVM, Juba, Nairobi, and Yambio, August 2019.
- 52 Author interviews with SPLA-IO representatives to CTSAMVM, Juba, Nairobi, and Yambio, August 2019.
- 53 Author interviews with community members, Yambio, Western Equatoria, August 2019.
- 54 Author interview with a Sector 6 representative to CTSAMVM, Yambio, Western Equatoria, August 2019; author interviews with community members, Yambio, Western Equatoria, August 2019.
- 55 On 2 October 2015, President Kiir created 28 new states in South Sudan, in place of the ten previously established states. Ezo, Nagero, Nzara, Tambura, Yambio, and other counties from Western Equatoria state were combined to form the new state of Gbudue. In 2017, Tambura and Nagero counties were transferred from Gbudue state to a new Tambura state. In February 2020, however, the states created in 2015 were dissolved, and the country returned to the previous ten-state system.
- 56 Internal CTSAMVM documents seen by the author, April 2020.
- 57 Author interview with an SPLA-IO representative from Western Equatoria, Juba, May 2016.
- 58 Author observations, Rirangu base, Western Equatoria, June 2016.
- 59 Author interviews with Arrow Boy senior leadership, Rirangu base, Western Equatoria, June 2016.
- 60 Author interviews with Arrow Boy senior leadership, Rirangu base, Western Equatoria, June 2016.
- 61 Author interview with members of the Arrow Boys, Rirangu base, Western Equatoria, June 2016.
- 62 Author interview with members of the Arrow Boys, Ezo, Western Equatoria, June 2016.
- 63 Author interviews, community members in Yambio, Western Equatoria, August 2019.
- 64 The SSNLM was originally a group of Arrow Boys based in Barisi, southeast of Yambio town, and led by SPLA defector, Second Lt. Victor Wanga. Members of the SSNLM came to view themselves as a distinct group around the same time that Futuyo officially aligned himself with the SPLA-IO. The SSNLM stayed in the bush until April 2016, while communications with the state government over a peace settlement proceeded. The grievances of SSNLM members that led to their mobilization were largely the same as those of the Arrow Boys—namely, the lack of recognition by the SPLM, an absence of sustainable livelihoods, and the direct threats to their safety posed by the SPLA.
- 65 Author interview with community members in Yambio, Western Equatoria, August 2019.
- 66 Author interview with community members in Yambio, Western Equatoria, August 2019.
- 67 Author interview with a Sector 6 representative to CTSAMVM, Yambio, August 2019.
- 68 Notes from transitional security mechanisms workshop, Juba, 18 November 2019.
- 69 Letter of resignation, Major General James Nando Mark, 26 March 2020, a copy of which is in the possession of the author.
- 70 Author interviews, Ezo and Yambio, Western Equatoria, June 2016; author interview with community members in Yambio, Western Equatoria, August 2019.
- 71 Author interview with community members, Ezo, Western Equatoria, June 2016.
- 72 Author interview with community members in Yambio, Western Equatoria, August 2019.
- 73 Formerly known as Gbudue state.
- 74 Author interview with members of the Arrow Boys, Rirangu base, Western Equatoria, June 2016.
- 75 Author interview with members of the Arrow Boys, Rirangu base, Western Equatoria, June 2016.
- 76 Author interview with community members, Yambio, Western Equatoria, August 2019.
- 77 Author interviews with community members, Ezo county, Western Equatoria, June 2016. The Arrow Boys broke into and looted a UNHCR compound housing refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic in November 2015.
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- 79 Author interviews with community members, Yambio, Western Equatoria, August 2019.
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- 82 Noted, for example, in CRP (2019, p. 4).
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