



Peter Gadet's Rebellion

Peter Gadet Yak,¹ a key Khartoum-backed southern militia leader who fought the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) during the war but was integrated into the southern army as a major-general following the 2006 Juba Declaration, is the latest SPLA official to abandon his post and declare an armed revolt against the SPLM/A.

Peter, from Mayom county, played a leading role in the South Sudan Unity Movement/Army (SSUM/A), a militia founded and led by Paulino Matiep in Bentiu that merged with the Khartoum-supported South Sudan Defense Forces (SSDF) following the Khartoum Peace Agreement of 1997. Though it became highly fragmented, with rival militia commanders attacking each other's forces in the swamps and oil fields of what are now Unity and Upper Nile states, the SSUM was the most powerful southern militia opposed to the SPLA during the war. It was also involved in the brutal clearing of vast tracks of Unity for oil exploration, in which Peter participated. But Peter defected from the SSUM in 1999 with a large number of troops previously loyal to Paulino, splintering that movement and temporarily severing ties with his former commander.

After the war ended in 2005, the 2006 Juba Declaration provided the chance for Peter to integrate into the SPLA with a high-ranking post and thousands of his men. Since then, Peter has served in senior positions in Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile states. Matiep also integrated into the SPLA and became its deputy chief of staff after the war, and relations between him and Peter had reportedly improved since 2005. Both serve on the 'board' of Jarch Capital, a company run by a US investor who has acquired leases from Paulino's son of some 400,000 hectares of land in Unity for exploitation after southern independence.²

On 28 March rumors began to circulate that Peter, while on leave in Nairobi, had defected from the SPLA and was either in negotiations to join the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) or was forming his own rebel group. The SPLA swiftly denied these rumors, as did SAF, while Peter himself was unavailable for comment. George Athor immediately claimed that Gadet was 'on his way' into the bush to join the South Sudan Democratic Movement, the new umbrella rebel movement George and other anti-SPLM/A militants had declared earlier in the month. Peter's spokesman, Bol Gatkouth Kol, later confirmed that Peter is coordinating with George.

Gadet's whereabouts remained unknown for nearly two weeks, until 'The Mayom Declaration' was issued on 11 April. Like the other current insurrection leaders, Peter accuses the SPLM/A of corruption and tribalism, and in his declaration, published on the *Sudan Tribune* website,³ Peter indicates his intention to bring down the SPLM-led southern government and to replace it with 'national broad-based government agreed upon by all the South Sudan political parties.' Peter criticized the SPLM's undemocratic leadership and the state of the southern security forces, including the bloated army from which he had recently defected and the poorly-trained police, and said that security 'has broken down due to tribal and sectional fights gripping the South as the traditional leaders are deprived of their traditional authority.'



This document was also signed by a former deputy commander of the Joint Integrated Units, Brigadier General Carlo Kol, and by Peter's spokesman Bol, a former member of the South Sudan Legislative Assembly.

On 19 April, Bol distributed a press release declaring that the new Peter-led movement, called the South Sudan Liberation Army, had taken the village of Boang in Mayom County. The same day, land mines blew up a convoy of SPLA trucks in Unity state, on the road between Mayom and Abiemnhom counties. After this attack, the SSLA stormed an army outpost in Mayom and at least 20 soldiers were killed, according to an Agence France Press report.

Peter, who was one of the SPLA's most capable field commanders, may now be seeking to unify various armed elements opposed to the SPLA under his command in tense and oil-rich Unity state. According to unconfirmed SPLA allegations, the Heglig oil fields, which border Mayom, have previously served as the hideout for other Khartoum-backed militias. And according to Peter's spokesman Bol, Gatluak Gai—who like George, launched an insurrection a year ago after the disputed national elections—is now fighting under Peter's command in Unity.

Fighting between the SPLA and Peter's new group continued in northwestern Unity state between 19 and 21 April, with Peter reportedly capturing the towns of Guong and Mankien, though the SPLA denies that the latter town fell. The spokesman told AFP on 21 April that the group is already 'in control of large areas, including the oil fields,' while denying any links to the Misseriya, who have also clashed with the SPLA in recent days.

Amidst the insecurity the SPLA has begun conscripting men in Unity, reportedly to make up for men lost to Gadet and to prevent further young men from joining him. The latest violence has also led to the displacement of some 3,800 civilians from and the evacuation of some 200 northern oil installation workers back to the North.

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¹ Peter's name is sometimes spelled Gatdet.

² See Mc Evoy, Claire and Emile LeBrun (2009). *Uncertain Future: Armed Violence in Southern Sudan*. HSBA Working Paper 20, April, p. 36. <<http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/pdfs/HSBA-SWP-20-Armed-Violence-Southern-Sudan.pdf>>

³ See <<http://www.sudantribune.com/The-Mayom-Declaration,38605>>.