

Intelligence brief | 11 October 2012

The security situation for UN and INGO staff in South Sudan

The security environment

An inconsistent but semi-active conflict with Sudan over oil, border demarcation and citizenship dominates the security situation of South Sudan. Intercommunal violence and the activities of rebel militia groups are further destabilising the country.

Over the last three months, there has been a steady increase in incidents of criminality, including people being attacked after withdrawing money from the bank, vehicles being stopped and money demanded from the occupants, homes being broken into and items stolen, and villages being raided in search of food, with women being raped during such raids. Foreign workers and locals in paid employment (including those working for NGOs) have also become targets of violence.

These trends can be linked to the austerity measures the government is putting in place to cope up with the deteriorating economic situation. Another key factor is the weak South Sudanese security apparatus: soldiers have not been paid for four months and the loyalty of law enforcement personnel is questionable and assessed to be tribal in nature.

South Sudan has a highly militarised society because of the many years of conflict between north and south Sudan and the ongoing conflict between Sudan and South Sudan. The civilian population holds a large number of weapons, which many use to secure their daily survival (through, for example, cattle rustling in rural areas or armed robbery in urban centres) since the border with Sudan was closed and food supplies and other common goods have been in short supply.

There are strong indicators that attempts to address these security issues are rapidly consuming the young country's resources. Over the medium term, this could contribute to a breakdown of the government's authority in ensuring law and order. Such a development would impact on the safety and security of foreign humanitarian staff and exacerbate the current humanitarian crisis in the country.

The local population vaguely understands the mandate of the United Nations, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and other foreign organisations operating in South Sudan. As such, the population has very high and sometimes unrealistic expectations, which, if unmet, could result in disappointment with and even violence against the personnel and property of these organisations.



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Summary of situation by state

South Sudan is made up of 10 states, each with its own local government and security apparatus. What follows is a brief summary of the current security situation in each state.

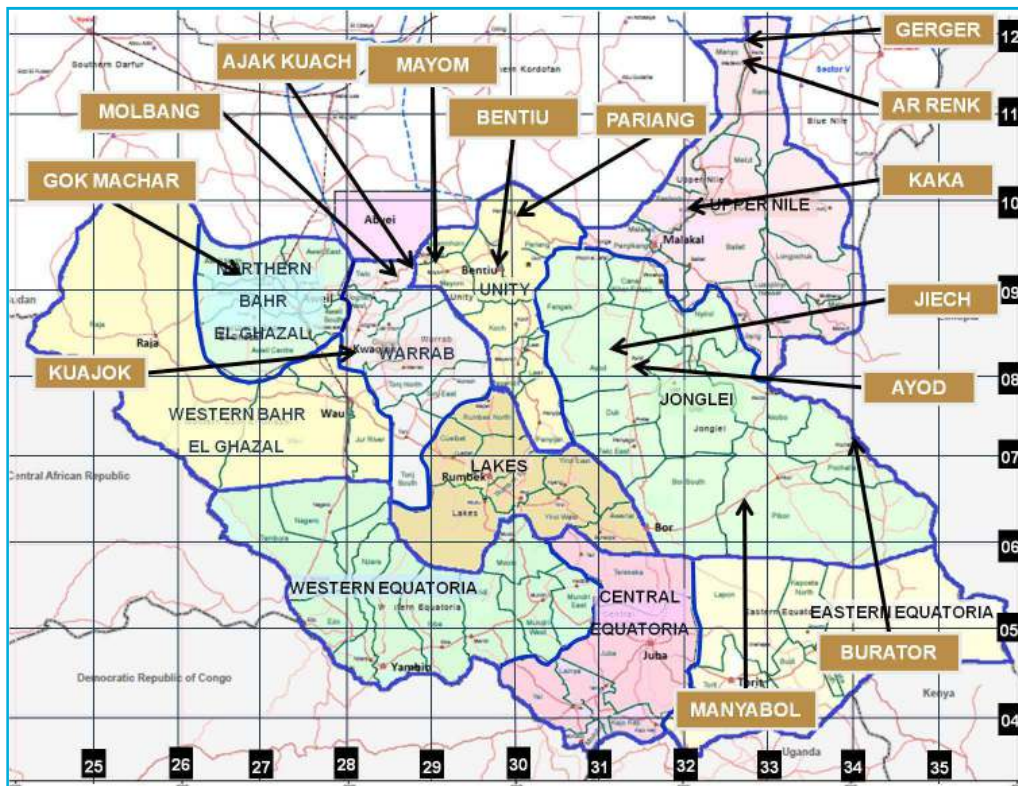


Fig 1. Map of South Sudan.

Central Equatoria State

Central Equatoria State is home to Juba, the capital city of South Sudan. It is a densely populated area with a high level of criminal activity, including the targeting of UN and INGO personnel and other foreigners. Elements of the local security apparatus are doing their best to crackdown on crime but with little effect, in part due to lack of capacity and proper training. It is worth noting that the police were recently transferred from the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and therefore are not au fait with proper police procedures. UN/INGO staff and foreign workers are advised to strictly adhere to curfew hours and only walk around the city during daylight.

Western Equatoria State

Western Equatoria State has been quiet since the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) shifted operations to Western Bahr el Gazal State. The state is currently calm, though isolated incidents of criminality do still occur.

Eastern Equatoria State

Cases of criminal activity have reduced in Eastern Equatoria State but isolated incidents have occurred in the recent past. Cattle raiding has not been reported in the last few weeks. The situation is assessed as normal.

Jonglei State

Traditional systems and state negotiations appear to have brought the Murle-Nuer and Dinka conflicts in Jonglei State under control through the reported return of abductees and stolen animals to their communities of origin. While the tribal issues are headed towards normalcy, David Yau Yau, a rebel militia group commander, continues to take up arms against the government. He is opposed to the government-led civilian disarmament in the state. Criminal groups are taking advantage of the situation to conduct their activities. This is currently considered the most volatile state in South Sudan.

Unity State

Unity State remains unpredictable. It is reported that the armies of both Sudan and South Sudan continue to build up their strength along the border areas. The recent peace deal, which requires a demilitarisation of the border up to 10km on both sides, could be a major boost to security in Unity State. UN and INGO staff continue to be wary of the situation following the aerial bombing of the state capital, Bentiu, and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Country Support Base in Mayom in April. Except for an incident when locals invaded a World Food Programme compound and made away with food supplies, Unity State has been otherwise calm in the last month.

Upper Nile State

The wet season has contributed to a lull in Upper Nile State and the armies of South Sudan and Sudan are using this to build up their forces. However, security forces aiming to conduct ground operations in the marshland of Upper Nile are being hindered by current rainy season. It is generally believed that Yau Yau operations are gradually reaching parts of Upper Nile State and criminals recently targeted UN and NGO facilities.

Northern Bahr el Ghazal State

The border area along the corridor between Kiir River and the so called 1/1/56 line (the north/south border as it stood on Sudan's independence on 1 January 1956) has been quiet in the last few months. This is because the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) has reduced military activities in Darfur and joined forces with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLA-N) in the Kordofan areas. The main concern in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State is environmental: rain and flooding have caused many to be voluntarily relocated to higher ground, while some have moved to the Apada returnee camp.

Western Bahr el Ghazal State

General Tom Nur, the only known rebel militia group commander in Western Bahr el Ghazal State, is said to have joined forces with the SPLA with about 200 of his men. The LRA have moved their operations from Western Equatoria to the Raja area of Western Bahr el Ghazal State and have been reportedly moving between Raja and South Darfur. We expect to see Ugandan forces operating together with SPLA in Western Bahr el Ghazal State against the LRA. Otherwise, the state is currently stable.

Lakes State

Some isolated criminal incidents have occurred in Lakes State in the last few weeks; the most significant of which was an attack on a UN military liaison officer as he arrived at his accommodation. Cross-state border attacks and cattle raids, mostly from Unity and Jonglei, are common, though the last reported incident occurred in late August. This recent lull may be due to the negotiated solution in Jonglei (mentioned above) or the current bad weather.

Warrap State

The security situation in Warrap State has been normal lately but remains unpredictable. Warrap State used to suffer from cattle raiding by Unity State criminals. Tribal conflict has not been reported for some time. Criminals have targeted the UN headquarters in the state capital, Kuajok, in the recent past. Local security elements have been known to harass UN or INGO personnel or commandeer UN/INGO vehicles in the past and this may recur if there is further border conflict.

Security outlook

On 26 September 2012, Sudan and South Sudan signed an agreement on eight protocols on border security, oil, economic and trade issues, and four freedom agreements, allowing the citizens of both countries freedom of movement, property ownership, work and residence in the other country. The security situation in South Sudan should significantly improve if these are implemented as per the plan.

However, even if successful, it will take some time for the effects of the agreements to be felt at the grassroots. Therefore, the security threats to UN/INGO personnel and other foreigners outlined in this briefing will remain active for some time to come, currently assessed at between six and 12 months.

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