

Security Developments in South Sudan's Peripheries – Mundri, Buseri and Raja

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The GIGA-IAA research project on security governance, carried out within the German Science Foundation's SFB700 programme, set out to understand the relations between actors and institutions involved in maintaining security and stability in areas away from the capital city. The project thereby seeks to decipher actions and structures that contribute to or undermine stability. The project researches both South Sudan and the Central African Republic. This research brief presents key findings of five weeks of fieldwork in South Sudan in late 2014.

We, Dr. Lotje de Vries and Tim Glawion, visited three localities: Buseri and Raja in Western Bahr el Ghazal State and Mundri in Western Equatoria State. In each locality, we spoke to official authorities, as well as key actors like the chiefs, traders and church leaders. We also organised focus group discussions with elders, youth and women.

In December 2013, **South Sudan became embroiled in a civil war that**, among other actors, pitted the president and former vice-president against one another. Fighting has been concentrated on the three north-eastern states. This research, however, focused explicitly on **those areas where people continued living together relatively peacefully**. Nonetheless, in the three visited research sites, **the relations between the people of South Sudan and the government were marked by tensions**. Two of these sites experienced armed conflict and the government impacted local security in all three areas, often in a hostile manner. Local actors reacted either by accommodation, withdrawal or resistance. Independent of the chosen strategy, **local actors** in all three localities – both non-state and state actors – **bemoaned the impact of national dynamics on everyday life** and their incapacity to influence national decisions. There was an all-pervading belief that key problems were caused by people in the national government and military. Thus, for local security and livelihood to improve, positive changes at the national level would have to take place.

Buseri, Western Bahr el Ghazal State, 14 kilometres from state capital Wau:

Buseri is a peaceful village of around 7000 people where the Bongo tribe make up the dominant group. The proximity of South Sudan's second largest city, accessible the year round with daily public transport, provides opportunities to this rural area, for instance for selling agricultural surpluses. The village also relies on Wau for solving serious matters of crime, the hospital and secondary education. **Locally, the Bongo chief seemed to exert clear and accepted authority**. New groups entering were integrated into society and recognized the authority of the chief. The representative of the local government, a payam administrator, was not mentioned by any of the respondents as a relevant authority. We failed to meet him as he was absent from the office during our stay. People had **two main concerns regarding security**. First of all, **armed cattle keepers seasonally entered the area** and there were numerous reports of destruction of crops and of threats against local farmers. Secondly, **the occasional stationing of special police forces or SPLA** in the village was perceived as a cause of insecurity. Examples cited were drunken soldiers putting up fights in the market, girls disappearing and returning pregnant as well as theft. Both sources of insecurity are attributed to "the Dinka" tribe, because they are dominant in the organised forces and are the ones herding cattle. This impression was confirmed in other (group) meetings in Wau and nearby Bagari. In **the overall region, the violent conflict in Wau of December 2012 put a lasting dent in people's trust in the state government**; they accused it of pursuing Dinka interests and of being dominated by Dinka members, a minority tribe in the state.



Raja, Western Bahr el Ghazal State, 220 Kilometres from state capital Wau:

Raja town is the administrative centre of South Sudan's largest and least-densely populated county. It borders the contested Kafia Kingi region, the Central African Republic and Sudan. It takes a full day to drive to the state capital in Wau and for about four months per year the town is inaccessible due to the rains. **Raja is calm, but the town hosts a variety of Darfuri rebel groups that are allowed to operate from this peripheral land.** These **Tora Bora**, as they were locally dubbed, fought against the government in Sudan but were also involved in fighting the southern rebellion of the SPLA-In Opposition forces. They were said to be under direct control of the President and the SPLA Military Intelligence. **It became very clear that the local authorities had no say over their movements, activities and operations.** Citizens were not necessarily opposed to the presence of the Darfuri rebels. Rather, they feared **the possibility of retaliation by the Sudan Armed Forces** (Raja County has been bombed twice in the past 3 months), and they feared talking about the issue because of the direct linkages between the Tora Bora and the government in Juba. **One of the possible counter forces** to these national and regional dynamics was the presence of the **UN Mission in South Sudan**. However, **due to the change of their mandate, UNMISS decided to prioritize and closed down the camp in Raja.** As locals have told us, the UN's monitoring and reporting had been key to the relative discipline of the large forces in the area. Without international presence, both attacks by Sudan and abuses by Tora Bora and SPLA forces could increase and go unnoticed.

Mundri, Western Equatoria State, 150 kilometres from Yambio and 180 Kilometres from Juba:

Mundri connects Juba with the western part of the country. The Moro inhabitants mostly rely on a mixture of farming, gathering, and some animal keeping for their livelihood. In the town of about 35000 inhabitants, wholesale and retail is dominated by the Somali and Ethiopian business community, which is a source of frustration to local citizens. Yet, **the sole topic on everyone's mind during our stay in December 2014 was the movement of armed cattle keepers from Jonglei and Lakes states onto the local Moro's farmland, intimidating and threatening people.** There were numerous incidents in which farmers and cattle keepers clashed, resulting in about ten to fifteen dead in a few weeks time, several abductions and the complete destruction of one village in Amadi payam in August 2014. There were **rumours that Moro youth were training and arming themselves** to take matters into their own hands. **While we did not find any evidence for a structured self-defence group, many people were, as they voiced, "fed-up" with the central government** and some mentioned that they would indeed defend themselves. Citizens assumed a link between the cattle keepers and the people in central government and army because of the new semi-automatic weapons that many of the herders carried. **Local chiefs stated, they were "confused about the whole situation", suggesting that the people in the national government had an agenda when allowing these herders to move freely.** Community leaders criticised the county commissioner for being too cooperative with the cattle keepers (he was on sick leave while we were there), while at the same time acknowledging that even the governor was incapable of solving the problem, despite his efforts. The local tensions were brought to another level, when an SPLA military intelligence officer was found missing. The SPLA headquarters in Juba subsequently deployed an officer who hailed from Mundri, a major, as the deputy of the local SPLA contingent in an attempt to facilitate relations with the local people. In late December, the head of Mundri's National Security Service was killed.