

## MAAPSS Update

16 June 2020

### The new South Sudanese Cabinet: Ministerial appointments in the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity—SPLM, SPLA-IO, and SSOA

#### Introduction

With the announcement in March 2020 of the new South Sudanese cabinet in the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU), several new faces entered the government. Some of them are hold-overs from the CPA-period, while others are relatively inexperienced. This update on the new South Sudanese cabinet will help the international community identify its future partners and understand the import of these personnel decisions.

#### Business as usual: Kiir's regime continues

South Sudanese President [Salva Kiir](#) has retained people who have guaranteed his control of national security. These include [Obuto Mamur Mete](#), a Torit-born Lotuko and the Minister of National Security, and [Malek Reuben Riak Rengu](#), a Yirol Dinka and the Deputy Minister of Defense and Veteran Affairs. He has also retained or rewarded with new positions those involved in his investments in the country. This includes [Salvatore Garang Mabiordit](#), a Rek Dinka and the incumbent Minister of Finance. [Albino Bol Dhieu](#), a Maluai Dinka and the former leader of the South Sudan Youth Union, is the new Minister of Youth and Sports. [Kuol Athian Mawien](#), a Malual Dinka, is the new Minister of Trade.

Kiir's cabinet appointments also saw familiar faces remaining in government. [Michael Makuei Lueth](#), a Bor Dinka, retained his position as Minister of Information, as did [Martin Elia Lomuro](#), the Minister of Cabinet Affairs from Lainya county in Central Equatoria. Even seemingly less well-known appointments have long held major positions inside the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). For example, [Jemma Nunu Kumba](#), a Zande, was the governor of Western Equatoria (2008-2010) before holding several ministerial positions since 2011. She is now the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

The [SPLM-In Government](#) (IG) has also succeeded in effectively controlling some positions designated for the opposition by exploiting a split within the [South Sudan Opposition Alliance](#) (SSOA), a coalition of nine opposition parties. Disagreements between SSOA factions began over the chairpersonship of the alliance and intensified in the run-up to the party's selection of a vice-president (VP) to fill the last of five such positions. Unable to agree, two leading members of the SSOA, [Josephine Lagu](#) and [Denay Chagor](#), asked Kiir to choose the fifth vice-president from amongst a list of SSOA nominated members. Kiir chose [Hussein Abdelbagi](#), a Malual Dinka. This selection rewarded Abdelbagi's ties to Sudan and further marginalized former SPLA Chief of General

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Staff [Paul Malong](#) by giving such a prominent position to another politician from his native Northern Bahr el Ghazal. Abdelbagi's selection was subsequently rejected by SSOA member and [National Democratic Movement](#) (NDM [LA]) chairman [Lam Akol](#) on grounds that the selection process [violated the R-ARCSS](#). The other four VP appointments were to [Riek Machar](#), [James Wani Igga](#), [Taban Deng Gai](#), and [Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior](#).

On 12 March, Lagu and Chagor provided Cabinet Affairs Minister [Martin Elia Lomuro](#) a list of names to fill three SSOA-designated cabinet positions. Lagu and Chagor—both among the names nominated—were subsequently appointed as Minister of Agriculture and Food Security and Minister of Higher Education, respectively. Although Chagor, a Lou Nuer from Dengjok payam (Jonglei), seemingly lacks any meaningful political constituency, he successfully played the game of Juba politics to secure his appointment.

The third SSOA appointee to a ministerial position was [Joseph Bakosoro](#), a central Zande politician and former governor of Western Equatoria, named Minister of Public Service and Human Resource Development. Many inside Western Equatoria were disappointed with this appointment because they were hoping for a vice-presidency position or governorship. Nevertheless, in Bakosoro's case, as with other appointments, too much importance should not be placed on titles of ministerial positions. There is ample precedent to suggest that some positions are simply prebendal politics—stipends furnished to political allies (or rivals) rather than

appointments tethered to expectations to fulfil ministerial duties.

While [Taban Deng Gai](#) retained his position as a VP, he gained less than others in the new government. Gai's utility, from Kiir's perspective, is lessened now that Machar has returned to government. Some of Gai's chief supporters, such as [Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth](#), a Jikany Nuer and the former Minister of Petroleum, were not given positions, while others, such as [Richard K. Mula](#), the Muru former Minister of Federal Affairs, lost their positions (in his case to the Kakwa SPLA-IO politician [Lasuba Ladoru Wango](#)). However, Taban Deng Gai still has a role to play in Kiir's organization of politics in South Sudan. He has extensive financial networks abroad, as well as enduring loyalty among some armed forces in Unity state, including the [Tahrir militias](#) in Koch county. [Michael Chiengjiek Geay](#), Taban Deng's former security advisor, retains a government position as the new Minister of Land, Housing, and Urban Development ([Paul Mayom Akech](#) replaced Geay as Minister of the Interior). Geay and his Bul Nuer-kinsman, [Tut Kew Gatluak](#), remain highly influential in Unity state.

Gatluak, an [associate of the Sudanese former President](#) Omar al-Bashir during the second civil war (1983-2005), organized the relationship between the Sudanese government and the Bul Nuer militias under the command of Paulino Matiep that ravaged the territory around [Unity state's oil fields](#) from late 2013 to 2015. In the current government, Gatluak is the chief South Sudanese mediator in negotiations between Sudan and rebel groups and a presidential advisor on security affairs. Importantly, Gatluak's central role in South Sudanese politics—a role consecrated in the current

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cabinet—speaks to a wholesale reversal in South Sudanese politics over the last decade. Those figures close to former SPLM leader John Garang, and hostile to the former-National Congress Party (NCP) regime in Khartoum, have been marginalized or excluded from Kiir's SPLM. Now the South Sudanese State is dominated by those close to (or former members of) the now-dissolved NCP. Gatluak is foremost among this group.

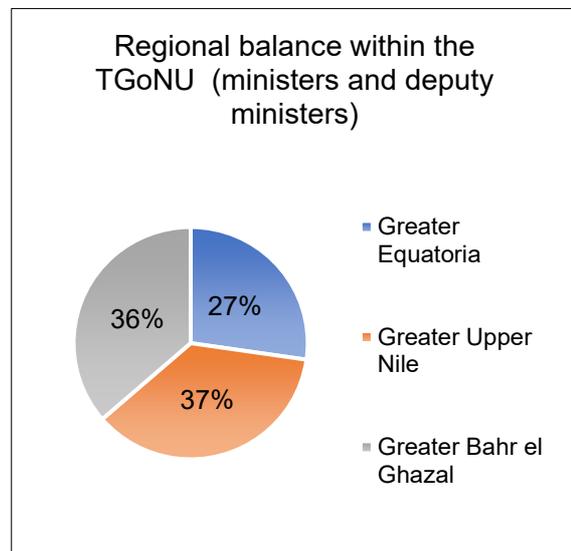
This regional realignment is the most important development in South Sudanese politics in the last decade. At an internal level, the delicate ethnic balance of cabinet positions continues. The Bor Dinka, among the main Dinka constituencies within the SPLM-IG, continue to have a strong presence in the cabinet with [Michael Makuei](#) and [Deng Dau Deng Malek](#) as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Initially, there was surprise in Bor that there was no position for [Kuol Manyang Juuk](#), the former Minister of Defense. However, his appointment as Senior Presidential Advisor mollified those anxious about the Bor Dinka power-base in government.

Kiir also appointed a number of Rek Dinka from Gogrial, including [Awut Deng Achuil](#) as the Minister of General Education and Instruction and [Joseph Malek Arop](#) as the Deputy Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs. Gogrial is also the home of [Akol Koor Kuc](#), the Director of Internal Security within the [National Security Service](#) (NSS). Koor is the most important political and military leader in South Sudan, and his forces have effective command of the capital.

The principal losers among the Dinka are the Padang, whose marginalization from

government continues. [Nadia Arop Dudi](#), the Minister of Culture, Museums, and National Heritage, and [Simon Mijok Mijak](#), the Minister of Roads and Bridges, are the only Padang Dinka given ministerial posts. However, Padang disappointment is to a degree offset by the formal creation of the Ruweng Administrative Area (RAA) as part of Kiir's apparent compromise in returning to ten states. The RAA answers long-held Padang desires to have a political space separated from the majority-Nuer Unity state.

The previously powerful Ngok Dinka of Abyei have no ministerial representation at all in the new cabinet. This reflects the waning importance of the [once central issue](#) of the Sudan-South Sudan border.



The ethnic calculations underlying the creation of the cabinet form only part of a broader calculus of political and economic alliances. Indeed, cabinet positions themselves constitute a relatively unimportant part of the political equation in South Sudan. Cabinet positions have neither the finances nor the autonomy that

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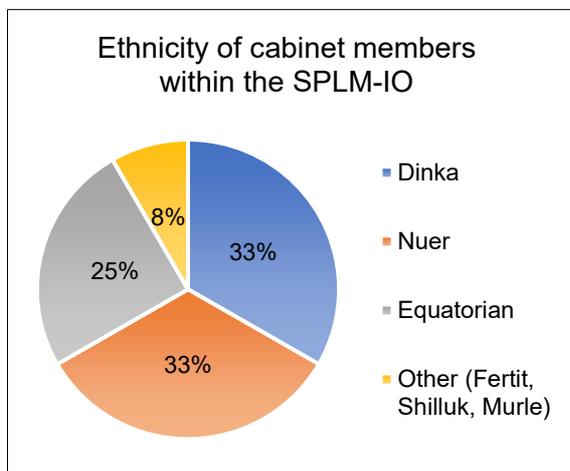
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would enable ministers to exercise any authority or independence from the Office of the President. Many of these political positions, such as [Denay Chagor's](#), are arguably financial rewards for loyalty. Others, such as [Baba Medan Konyi's](#) position as Deputy Minister of Information or [Khalid Boutrous'](#) appointment as Deputy Minister of Public Service and Human Resource Development, are mollifying gifts to make up for [David Yau Yau](#) retaining control the Greater Pibor Special Administrative Area (GPSAA). In all cases, power is concentrated in the two men at the top of the hierarchy: President Salva Kiir and Akol Koor Kuc.

## It's a family affair: Machar's SPLA-IO

The formation of the TGoNU and Machar's choices for the cabinet have set in motion a wave of desertions from the [SPLM/A-IO \[RM\]](#) that likely presages the fragmentation of the opposition. Superficially, the cabinet appears to reflect that the SPLA-IO is a broad coalition: only a third of appointments are Nuer, and many of Machar's choices are from important Equatorian and Dinka constituencies. Underlying this apparent balance, however, is the central story of the SPLA-IO cabinet.



Machar's choices for the cabinet are reflective of his extremely weak position in South Sudan; he is almost as little a leader of the opposition today [as Taban Deng Gai was](#) after Machar [fled Juba in July 2016](#). His choices to fill SPLA-IO cabinet minister and deputy minister positions reflect these straitened circumstances. Among the relatively important positions that the SPLA-IO was allowed to choose—including the Ministries of Defense and Veterans' Affairs, Petroleum, Mining, and Health—Machar has chosen either family members (including his wife, and son's mother-in-law), or close allies, such as [Henry Dilang Odwar](#) as the Minister of Mining. Odwar, an elderly Lango politician, is also the Deputy Chairman of the SPLA-IO, and one of the few men that Machar trusts.

Machar also picked relatively young and/or inexperienced politicians who he can easily control, such as newly appointed Minister of Petroleum [Puot Kang Kuol](#), the former Chairman of SPLM-IO Youth Union.

Machar's appointment of his wife, [Angelina Teny](#), as Minister of Defense, was also controversial. Many in the SPLA-IO see this as a self-serving appointment, designed to draw power (and wages and cash) narrowly around Machar's family and to the exclusion of other important figures inside the SPLA-IO. Her appointment is not without some merit, however. Teny previously served in Khartoum as Deputy Minister of Petroleum in the Sudanese cabinet. More recently, she was the co-chair of the Strategic Defense and Security Review Board (SDSRB), which was designed to plot the future of South Sudan's army. Machar also appointed his son's mother-in-law, the Dinka [Elisabeth Acuei Yol](#), as Minister of Health.

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Since July 2015, the leading military commanders of the SPLA-IO have expressed disquiet with the political leadership around Machar, which they consider self-centered and more interested in gaining power in Juba than in obtaining justice for the Nuer civilians killed in December 2013 in the capital. Sometimes, this has resulted in commanders abandoning the movement. Following Machar's announcements of SPLA-IO cabinet appointments, important defections occurred almost immediately. These may begin an inexorable cascade of desertions that will leave Machar, effectively, without a military power-base.

On 17 March, [James Koang Chuol](#), the co-chair of the Joint Defense Board (JDB), announced that he would join the [South Sudan People's Defense Force](#) (SSPDF) under Kiir. Koang, a Jikany Nuer and the former Chief of General Staff for the SPLA-IO, is a commander widely respected in South Sudan. He was joined by [Gathkor Gatluak Koryom](#), co-chair of the Joint Military Ceasefire Commission (JMCC), [Wang Chany](#), a member of the JDB Technical Team, and [Joseph Albiros Yata](#), the SPLA-IO commander of [Division 2B](#) in Central Equatoria. In their joint [resignation letter](#), the commanders complained that Machar's appointments were made without consulting the SPLA-IO military command, and they turn the opposition group into a "family Affairs [sic] or business enterprise." Their resignations are indicative of a new reality in which core members of the SPLA-IO have been marginalized by Machar's appointments and political maneuvering. This reveals that Machar has become increasingly alienated from the real opposition on the ground.

These resignations were soon followed by others. [James Nando Mark](#), an important SPLA-IO [Division 9B](#) Commander in Western Equatoria, defected to the government on 26 March 2020, again [blaming SPLA-IO leadership](#). On 16 April, a number of principally Jikany Nuer SPLA-IO politicians [also defected](#). This group was led by [Dak Duop Bichiok](#), a Nasir-born member of the SPLA-IO political bureau. He had hoped to be appointed Minister of Petroleum and was angered by the choice of Angelina Teny's supporter, [Puot Kang Kuol](#), for the position. In the letter announcing their defection, the group again accused Machar of using his position to enrich himself and his family.

There are signs that the joint military operation of SPLA-IO and SSPDF against Thomas Cirillo's National Salvation Front ([NAS \[TC\]](#)) in former Yei River state has led to a growing dissatisfaction with Riek Machar among Equatorian members of SPLA-IO. If left unresolved, the issue could further erode the movement in Equatoria. For Machar, the danger is that these defections become a cascade. Further defections would make him a weaker opposition figure and could eventually leave him powerless militarily and politically.

There are SPLA-IO commanders, however, who are unlikely to defect to the SSPDF. The two most powerful that remain loyal to the SPLA-IO are currently in Khartoum: the Shilluk general [Johnson Olonyi](#) and the current SPLA-IO chief-of-staff [Simon Gatwech Dual](#), a Lou Nuer.

Among their respective home communities, opposition to the government is strong and substantive. Their loyalty to Machar now rests on the government's choices for state

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governorships (Upper Nile in Olonyi's case, and Jonglei for Dual). Unlike cabinet positions, the governorships are active positions that come with real political power and responsibility. If Machar concedes too much to the government, and the governorships in Greater Upper Nile are not taken by figures palatable to Olonyi and Dual, then the possibility is strong that both men will leave the SPLA-IO. Subsequently, the 'opposition' in Juba will effectively be controlled by the government, while the substantive opposition (consisting of the National Salvation Front in Equatoria, Olonyi's [Agwelek](#) in Upper Nile, and Dual's [Lou Nuer forces](#) in the Bieh/Akobo regions of Jonglei) will be elsewhere. In this scenario, the 'real' opposition will not be included within the peace agreement at all.

## List of ministers and deputy ministers of the Transitional Government of National Unity nominating party

(as of 15 June 2020)

[Martin Elia Lomuro](#) – Minister of Cabinet Affairs – SPLM-IG

[Nhial Deng Nhial](#) – Minister of Presidential Affairs – SPLM-IG

[Beatrice Khamis Wani](#) – Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation – SPLM-IG

[Angelina Jany Teny](#) – Minister of Defense and Veterans' Affairs – SPLM-IO

[Paul Mayom Akech](#) – Minister of Interior – SPLM-IG

[Stephen Par Kuol](#) – Minister of Peace Building – SPLM-IO

[Reuben Madol Arol](#) – Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs – SPLM-IG

[Obuto Mamur Mete](#) – Minister of National Security – SPLM-IG

[Jemma Nunu Kumba](#) – Minister of Parliamentary Affairs – SPLM-IG

[Michael Makuei Lueth](#) – Minister of Information – SPLM-IG

[Lasuba Ladoru Wango](#) – Minister of Federal Affairs – SPLM-IO

[John Luk Jok](#) – Minister of East African Community Affairs – SPLM-FD (Died: 2 June 2020)

[Salvatore Garang Mabiordit](#) – Minister of Finance and Planning – SPLM-IG

[Puot Kang Chuol](#) – Minister of Petroleum – SPLM-IO

[Henry Dilang Odwar](#) – Minister of Mining – SPLM-IO

[Josephine Lagu Yanga](#) – Minister of Agriculture and Food Security – SSOA (PDM-P)

[Onyoti Adigo Nyikwec](#) – Minister of Livestock and Fisheries – SPLM-IG (SPLM-DC)

[Kuol Athian Mawien](#) – Minister of Trade and Industry – SPLM-IG

[Josephine Napwon Cosmos](#) – Minister of Environment and Forestry – SPLM-IG

[Manawa Peter Gatkuoth](#) – Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation – SPLM-IO

[Michael Chiengjiek Geay](#) – Minister of Land, Housing, and Urban Development – SPLM-IG (SPLA-IO [TDG])

[Rizik Zachariah Hassan](#) – Minister of Wildlife, Conservation, and Tourism – SPLM-IG

[Dhieu Mathok Diing](#) – Minister of Investment – SPLM-IG (SPLA-IO [TDG])

[Denay Jok Chagor](#) – Minister of Higher Education – SSOA (SSUM)

[Awut Deng Achuil](#) – Minister of General Education and Instruction – SPLM-IG

[Elisabeth Acuei Yol](#) – Minister of Health – SPLM-IO

[Bangasi Joseph Bakosoro](#) – Minister of Public Service and Human Resource Development – SSOA (NMC)

[James Hoth Mai](#) – Minister of Labour – SPLM-IG



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[Peter Marcello Nasir](#) – Minister of Energy and Dams – SPLM-IO  
[Madut Biar Yel](#) – Minister of Transport – SPLM-FD  
[Simon Mijok Mijak](#) – Minister of Roads and Bridges – SPLM-IG  
[Ayaa Benjamin Warille](#) – Minister of Gender and Social Welfare – SPLM-IO  
[Peter Mayen Majongdit](#) – Minister of Humanitarian Affairs – OPP  
[Nadia Arop Dudi](#) – Minister of Culture, Museums, and National Heritage – SPLM-IG  
[Albino Bol Dhieu](#) – Minister of Youth and Sports – SPLM-IG  
[Deng Deng Akon](#) – Deputy Minister of Cabinet Affairs – SPLM-IO  
[Deng Dau Deng](#) – Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation – SPLM-IG  
[Malek Reuben Riak](#) – Deputy Minister of Defense – SPLM-IG  
[Joseph Malek Arop](#) – Deputy Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs – SPLM-IG  
[Agok Makur Kur](#) – Deputy Minister of Finance and Planning – SPLM-IO  
[Lily Albino Akol](#) – Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Food Security – SPLM-IG  
[Martin Tako Moyi](#) – Deputy Minister of General Education and Instruction – SPLM-IG  
[Khalid Boutrous Bora](#) – Deputy Minister of Public Service and Human Resource Development – SPLM-IG (NAS [KB])  
[Baba Medan Konyi](#) – Deputy Minister of Information – SPLM-IG

**NAS [KB]** National Salvation Front [Khalid Boutrous]  
**NCP** National Congress Party  
**NDM** National Democratic Movement  
**NDM [LA]** National Democratic Movement – Lam Akol  
**NMC** National Movement for Change  
**NSS** National Security Service  
**OPP** Other Opposition Parties Alliance  
**RAA** Ruweng Administrative Area  
**SPLA** Sudanese People's Liberation Army  
**SPLA-IO** Sudanese People's Liberation Army - in Opposition  
**SPLM** Sudanese People's Liberation Movement  
**SPLM-FD** Sudan People's Liberation Movement – Former Detainees  
**SPLM-IG** Sudanese People's Liberation Army – in Government  
**SPLM/A-IO [RM]** Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army – in Opposition [Riek Machar]  
**SPLM/A-IO [TDG]** Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army – in Opposition [Taban Deng Gai]  
**SSOA** South Sudan Opposition Alliance  
**SSUM** South Sudan United Movement  
**TGoNU** Transitional Government of National Unity  
**VP** Vice President

## Disclaimer

Information provided in this Update is sourced from field research conducted by Small Arms Survey and HSBA experts, including interviews with officials from the SPLM, SSPDF, SPLA-IO, local and state leaders, and other prominent officials both in and outside of South Sudan. Where appropriate, in-text links are provided for secondary source material.

## Acronyms and abbreviations

**GPSAA** Greater Pibor Special Administrative Area  
**JDB** Joint Defense Board  
**JMCC** Joint Military Ceasefire Commission  
**NAS** National Salvation Front