**Link: http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/de/facts-figures/south-sudan/armed-groups/southern-dissident-militias/ssdma-cobra-faction.html**

**SSDM/A-Cobra faction**

The name ‘Cobra faction’ emerged in mid-2013 to differentiate Yau Yau’s second rebellion from the wider South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army (SSDM/A). Yau Yau, a Murle civilian from the Ngarotti clan and a leader in the Bothonya age set, first rebelled after the 2010 elections, when he failed to gain a seat in the state legislature. He later claimed his main motivation to rebel was the underdevelopment and marginalization of Pibor county, and the lack of local power-sharing with the Bor government. In his first rebellion, Yau Yau had comparatively few troops, with about 200 receiving presidential amnesty when he surrendered in 2011. After the amnesty, Yau Yau and his commanders were given accommodation in Juba as they awaited their integration package from the SPLA, while the main body of his troops were taken to Ngacigak Military College in Eastern Equatoria, and later to Mapel in Western Bahr el Ghazal for training.

In April 2012, Yau Yau requested medical leave and went to Nairobi for treatment. From there he proceeded to Khartoum where he remained until July 2012. It is unclear whether it was his intention to defect to Khartoum when he left Juba, or whether he only made contact with Khartoum in Nairobi. Some of Athor’s contacts in Khartoum currently support Yau Yau’s Cobra faction, indicating there may have been prior contact. Many in the Murle community, including one of Yau Yau’s former commanders, James Kuburin, stated that his defection caught them all by surprise. The only person who seemed aware that Yau Yau was intending to re-defect was his current second in command, James Arezen Kong Kong. While Yau Yau was in Nairobi, Kong Kong sold the vehicles given by the GRSS to the surrendered Yau Yau delegation and travelled to Kampala, where he liaised with the Sudanese embassy and was transported to Khartoum to join Yau Yau. In July 2012, Yau Yau, along with about 41 others, including Kong Kong and a number of SAF commanders who had previously been affiliated with Sultan Ismail Konyi’s (Murle) Pibor Defence Forces during the civil war, returned to Pibor county by foot through Blue Nile state. Pibor county remains the group’s home base.

Yau Yau’s motivations for his second defection were both personal and political. According to the SPLA, he was dissatisfied with his integration package, including his rank. SPLA Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. James Hoth Mai stated that while the issue of his rank had not been settled at the time of his re-defection, there were indications that he was not going to be offered the rank of Major General, his rank within Athor’s rebellion, and that Yau Yau saw this as a ‘demotion.’ The political reasons offered for his second defection include the SPLA’s abuses during the March–October 2012 disarmament campaign in Jonglei, particularly in Pibor county, the political marginalization of the Murle community at the state level, and the prevalence of corruption and poor governance in the new nation. He has also claimed to be fighting for a separate state for the Murle.

In April 2013, a new spokesman for the faction, Col. Peter Konyi Kubrin, released a manifesto stating that their main objective was ‘the establishment of a free, just, democratic and decentralized system of governance and a social contract based on the free will and popular participation of all the people of South Sudan.’ The so-called Jebel Boma Declaration that followed the manifesto outlined the grievances for their insurgency: ethnic inequality, corruption, impunity, and the lack of access to justice. It called for the dissolution of the current government and the establishment of a Transitional Revolutionary Government, to govern until elections in 2015, and the federalization of the nation. After the announcement of the presidential amnesty later the same month, and the subsequent peace deal between the SSLM/A and the GRSS, Kubrin circulated an email stating that not all the SSDM/A were involved in negotiations and that, ‘There is no peace with the regime in Juba unless it is dissolved. Any peace that is acceptable to us is the one mediated by the AU, UN, and USA.’

**Command structure and military assets.** Yau Yau’s command structure includes his deputy, Kong Kong, plus three former SAF commanders—Adoch Agul, Gayin Ngarubin Torokon, and Longaben Wayah—who came with him from Khartoum. James Kuburin, who was also in his command structure, surrendered to the SPLA with 280 soldiers on 4 December 2012. In Khartoum, Yau Yau has liaised with the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), which has reportedly coordinated airdrops of weapons to the Cobra forces in Pibor. There are also unconfirmed reports of an Eritrean connection for arms, but the Small Arms Survey has not confirmed a link. It is difficult to estimate Yau Yau’s current troop strength, as much of it is made up of Murle youths who do not stay with the troops consistently; their primary motivation is accessing weapons for their own needs. While there are estimates that he can command a force of 3,000–6,000 youths and rebels, observers who have been in his camp have estimated a core of 500–1,000 men. Initial support from the Murle community waned in late 2012, as Yau Yau’s new commanders were more violent with local community members they found insufficiently supportive of the rebellion. In addition, there were reports that a large number of the Lango age set had dropped out of the rebellion on 30 September because of conflict with the Bothonya age set, of which Yau Yau is a member. Adoch Agul, in particular, had been reported to lead violent attacks on the Gumuruk area because of the lack of support from the community. However, overall, Yau Yau’s forces have directed relatively limited violence against Murle civilians, other than the fighting between the age sets and those caught in the crossfire.

Few of Yau Yau’s initial troops went with him in the second defection. Of his commanders, only Kong Kong joined him in Khartoum. The remainder of his command structure in Juba, including James Kuburin, were arrested shortly after Yau Yau’s second defection and put in prison in Yei in June 2012. On 16 August 2012, fourteen of them escaped and travelled to Pibor, but seven were killed and one recaptured en route. While in Khartoum, Yau Yau was joined by 41 former SAF/Ismael Konyi militiamen who travelled with him in July–August 2012 back to Pibor. One was killed en route. There have been a number of reports of Toposa, Anyuak, Shilluk, and Nuer fighting alongside Yau Yau’s forces, although this has not been confirmed. In October 2012 a Lou Nuer SPLA commander, Maj. Gen. Simon Gatwech Dual, was arrested because of alleged connections

**Areas of operation.** Yau Yau’s area of operation is primarily within Pibor county, although his group does move into other counties of Jonglei, particularly those neighbouring Pibor, and there have been reports of activities across the border in Ethiopia. Most informants report that Yau Yau does not actively control any area, but moves around key locations. He began his second insurgency on the Nanaam river around Kariak, then moved opposite Likuangole to Tiyara, in November 2012, and finally to around Kelo. He was briefly displaced from Kelo during the March–April 2013 SPLA offensive, but then returned in May. While attacks on bordering counties, particularly Akobo county, and into Ethiopia, are frequently blamed on Yau Yau’s troops or youth aligned with him, they remain unconfirmed.

Pibor was reportedly initially divided up under different commands with Adoch Agul in Gumuruk, Yau Yau in Likuangole area, James Kong Kong in Nanaam, and Kuburin around Pibor and Verteth. In January 2013, however, it was reported that the Cobra troops were converging on Kelo, in Pochalla. The migration appears to have been motivated by an anticipated arms drop from Khartoum, which allegedly happened on 3–4 February, and the annual migration to this area to access the grazing around Jom.

In March 2013, Yau Yau’s troops were again splintering into smaller groups and moving throughout Pibor county, mainly because of a new SPLA offensive, although much of the fighting was a result of the SPLA targeting Murle cattle camps. Yau Yau’s forces were focused mainly on the east part of the county—around Boma town and Maruwa Hills—and on the border with Pochalla, although there were reports of activity in other parts of the county including around Pibor and Gumuruk towns. In April there was an increase of activity, particularly around Gumuruk. Throughout the county, clashes between the SPLA and Yau Yau’s troops rose abruptly, with high SPLA casualties and reports of a breakdown of discipline among rank and file. An unknown number of SPLA reportedly deserted, and violations against civilians increased in number. In Kapoeta alone, there were 700–800 SPLA desertions, and other deserting SPLA units have been blamed for violent robberies in Bor South and Eastern Equatoria state.

On 9 April, armed and uniformed men ambushed a UN convoy travelling to Pibor on the Bor–Gumuruk road; 12 deaths and 9 injuries resulted, and UN peacekeeping military equipment was looted. The SPLA blamed Yau Yau’s militia, but an SSDM/A press statement denied responsibility and called on the UN to conduct a thorough investigation,which is underway.

On 2 May 2013, Kubrin released a statement urging NGOs and civilians to leave Kapoeta and Pibor because the SSDM/A was about to attack them. In the last days of April, Yau Yau’s troops captured the Maruwa Hills, and on 6 May he announced the capture of Boma town, which the SPLA initially denied but later acknowledged. On 13 May a second press release stated that the militia was about to enter and capture Pibor town, and that two battalions were on their way to attack Bor town, the state capital. After the SPLA announced that it had re-captured Boma town on 18 May, Kubrin responded by circulating an email stating that they had only captured Iti town, 15 km away from Boma. Both NGOs and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) visited Boma, confirming that it was recaptured by two battalions of SPLA commandos. There have been reports of a number of extrajudicial killings of Murle in Boma town, including the killing of Murle SPLA Brig. Gen. Peeno. The payam administration in Boma has since been removed from the line of reporting to the Pibor commissioner, and the payam administrator and deputy administrator positions have been given to members of the Lou Nuer community, leaving the Murle community feeling that they are being pushed out of Boma payam.

In June, it was reported that Yau Yau’s troops split, with some troops heading towards Kelo (south-west Pochalla) and others to Opot (north-west Pochalla). The Pibor county commissioner also reported that Yau Yau had set up a new headquarters 50 km east of Pibor in Lelilim along the Kong Kong river. As of late October 2013, however, Yau Yau and his inner circle were believed to be in Manyading, about three hours walk from Likuangole. James Azeren Kong Kong heads up the operations around Fertait. Other forces are based in Labarab (see [map](http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/facts-figures/south-sudan/armed-groups/southern-dissident-militias/HSBA-Cobra-faction-positions-late-2013.jpg)).

**Weapons and ammunition.** Yau Yau’s first insurgency was supported with weapons supplied from Sudan to George Athor, and there is strong evidence that his second insurgency has profited from military hardware supplies direct from Sudan. The Small Arms Survey’s analysis of weapons in the hands of defecting SSDM/A members and those captured by the SPLA found that they are identical to those in the stocks of SAF and other SOuthern militias. Defecting commanders also detailed numerous airdrops of military equipment into Pibor county since August 2012.

Small Arms Survey tracing reports in April and July 2013 described weapons from Yau Yau’s militia:60 Chinese Type 56 and Type 56-1 assault rifles with ammunition, Chinese CQ (M16-pattern) assault rifles with Chinese 5.56 × 45 mm ammunition, Sudanese RPG-7 pattern rocket launchers manufactured at the A30 Yarmouk Industrial Complex in Khartoum, Chinese Type 80 7.62 × 54R mm general-purpose machine guns with ammunition, including Sudanese 7.62 x 54R mm ammunition.There have been reports that additional arms were dropped as recently as 8 August 2013.

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