

Making a Killing

South Sudanese Military Leaders' Wealth,
Explained

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SUMMARY

“Making a Killing,” the Sentry’s latest investigative report in its Taking of South Sudan series, raises numerous red flags for corruption and money laundering at the top echelons of military and armed opposition leadership. The report details the unexplained wealth, corporate holdings, and connections to violence of army chiefs of staff Gabriel Jok Riak, James Hoth Mai, Paul Malong Awan, and Oyay Deng Ajak. According to documents reviewed by The Sentry, each one of these military leaders has moved unexplained wealth through international banks and purchased luxury real estate abroad valued at far more than their modest public servant salaries would allow. Not one has faced domestic legal accountability for his military or personal conduct, though some have been sanctioned or have had assets seized by foreign governments.

These individuals profited from South Sudan’s corrupt system of patronage both before and after commanding forces that committed mass atrocities.

The report also profiles four top-ranking military leaders who commanded troops conducting mass killings in Juba in December 2013—Salva Mathok Gengdit, Bol Akot Bol, Garang Mabil, and Marial Chanuong—as well as Gathoth Gatkuoth Hothnyang, Johnson Olony, and David Yau Yau, militia and opposition leaders involved in major instances of violence both before and during the civil war. Many of their business interests overlap with one another and with other government officials, as well as with international investors. Some have close personal or business ties to Salva Kiir and his broader network. Their posts have provided easy access to government funds that, in some instances, appear to have financed luxurious lifestyles for relatives overseas, rather than desperately needed infrastructure, economic development, education, or healthcare at home.

The formation of a power-sharing government in February 2020 provides a key opportunity for improved transparency and accountability, but corruption at the highest levels remains a threat to peace and stability. Without major reforms aimed at dismantling the country’s kleptocratic structure, peace will remain fragile.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- The international community should continue to apply network sanctions, anti-money laundering measures, asset seizure and recovery, and domestic and international investigations to stem the flow of the proceeds of corruption out of South Sudan, provide accountability, and promote peace.
- The SPLA Act of 2009 should be amended to include guidance on procurement processes and independent and empowered oversight bodies within the Ministry of Defense and in the National Legislative Assembly.
- The transitional government should establish and empower a hybrid anti-corruption commission to prosecute the crimes committed during the course of the civil war, as stipulated by the peace agreement; this court should also be able to prosecute economic crimes.

Read the report: <https://thesentry.org/reports/taking-south-sudan/>

