Undercover Activities

INSIDE

NATIONAL SECURITY SERVICE'S

THE

PROFITABLE PLAYBOOK



Undercover Activities

Inside the National Security Service's Profitable Playbook

December 2022



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Executive Summary

In a country plagued by horrific violence and rampant corruption, South Sudan's National Security Service (NSS) stands out as particularly ruthless, secretive, and well-funded. Fear of the NSS is pervasive in South Sudan, and for good reason.¹ Its personnel have been involved in widespread, grave human rights abuses, including kidnapping, torture, and illegal detention,² and the organization operates without regard for basic human rights or the personal rights of civilians laid out in the South Sudanese constitution, including freedom of assembly, freedom from torture, and the rights to fair trial and litigation.³

The Sentry found that, to cement its control and power in South Sudan, the NSS has employed a twopronged strategy of state capture and repression. Corporate records reviewed by The Sentry reveal a vast network of companies with NSS shareholders, ranging from media and publishing to natural resources and logistics. The oil, finance, and media sectors particularly suffer from NSS involvement both in terms of economic capture and repression. NSS personnel have occupied key posts in state institutions, and the NSS itself has had a role in approving private company operations in the lucrative mining and security sectors. In this way, the NSS has been able to access off-budget finances and diverted revenues, all while sidestepping oversight and operational scrutiny.

In turn, the NSS has funded a campaign of surveillance, intimidation, and horrific violence against civilians, activists, and journalists. The NSS has interfered with civil society and the press, suppressed freedom of speech, and illegally detained and permanently silenced those who spoke out against the regime. In interviews with The Sentry, several South Sudanese in civil society organizations and in the media sector expressed concern that they might be targeted by the NSS if they spoke openly about corruption or other government issues.^{4,5}

Operating under the supervision of President Salva Kiir, the NSS and its activities have gone far beyond their original remit, largely unchecked. This has created a vicious cycle in which a highly militarized agency has gained ever more power and wielded it with increasing brutality.^{6, 7}

In order to end the NSS campaign of egregious human rights abuses and economic capture, decisive action must be taken to curb its powers of detention and arrest, cut off the sources of its off-budget revenue, and ensure civilian oversight mechanisms are established, empowered, and effectively implemented. Civil society and the media must be protected so that they can hold the NSS and the government accountable, and the government of South Sudan must enforce its own constitution,⁸ which demands that the NSS respect human rights, democracy, and civilian oversight—the very cornerstones of a promising future for the people of South Sudan.

Key recommendations

The government of South Sudan should immediately close all NSS detention centers and ensure that the NSS releases all detainees who have not been charged with a crime or given a fair trial. There should be an immediate, transparent, and impartial investigation into all allegations of NSS misconduct, including allegations of torture and sexual violence. The government should ensure that those NSS officials implicated in such crimes are appropriately prosecuted.



- The United States, United Kingdom, European Union, Canada, and Australia should urgently investigate and, if appropriate, impose coordinated and targeted network sanctions on the individuals and entities described in this report, particularly the NSS-owned or -controlled commercial enterprises, as well as Akol Koor Kuc, Jalpan Obyce, Akot Lual Arech, and their enablers and support networks, pursuant to their Global Magnitsky-style or South Sudan-specific sanctions authorities.
- Financial institutions should take measures to identify accounts held or beneficially owned by members of the NSS, other senior South Sudanese politically exposed persons (PEPs), and the 125 companies revealed by The Sentry to have NSS shareholders. They should carry out a comprehensive assessment to identify their broader international networks and determine the measures needed to mitigate the risks involved in such accounts and customer relationships. Financial institutions should also undertake enhanced screening, ongoing monitoring, and transaction reviews to identify, investigate, and report potentially suspicious financial activity related to South Sudan, especially with respect to international networks profiting from such activity.



An Omnipresent Threat*

In South Sudan, the state's absence is often more obvious than its presence. Infrastructure is dismal: schools and hospitals are crumbling,^{9, 10, 11} paved roads are scarce,¹² and access to running water and electricity is a luxury that few can afford.^{13, 14} But across the country, and even for many South Sudanese abroad, one element of the state is omnipresent: the watchful and intimidating eye of the National Security Service (NSS).

The NSS has infiltrated almost every aspect of life. It can eavesdrop on phone conversations and monitor movements throughout Juba via its network of surveillance cameras and informants.¹⁵ It is present in civil society meetings, influencing agendas and installing agents.¹⁶ It shuts down news outlets that print unfavorable stories,¹⁷ and, through a series of front companies, it controls its own newspaper.¹⁸ While the government fails to provide many of its citizens with basic necessities, the surveillance state thrives, intimidating, detaining, or disappearing those who dare to oppose it.¹⁹

Challenging the NSS, or those that it seeks to protect, is both difficult and dangerous. The NSS surveils the population; it has perpetrated human rights violations including illegal detention and torture, and it has orchestrated extrajudicial killings.^{20, 21} The agency has set up its own detention facilities, in which detainees are often held without trial for a prolonged period with limited access to food, clean water, medical care, legal representation, or communication with the outside world.²²

This repression and violence towards the civilian population, coupled with thoroughgoing media censorship,²³ enables the NSS to avoid scrutiny of and accountability for its politicization and its surreptitious capture of substantial chunks of the economy. With agents embedded in many corners of South Sudanese life overseeing a regime of violence and intimidation, and senior members in positions of significant political influence, the NSS is free to pursue its private sector interests unchallenged.

The NSS and its senior personnel are engaged in a range of commercial activities that provide both the incentives and the means to strengthen its position within the country's kleptocratic system. The agency's power and influence provide an inside track to off-budget wealth, while their revenue streams provide them with the resources needed to tighten their grip still further and fund campaigns of violence, all without having to answer to anyone.

The financial gains made under cover of this lack of transparency and accountability incentivize the kleptocratic system to maintain the status quo of corruption and oppression. But the commercial activities of the NSS, both inside and outside the country, are also pressure points vulnerable to action by international governments and organizations to curb the agency's abuses and hold its officers accountable.

^{*} Reports by The Sentry are based on interviews, documentary research, and, where relevant, financial forensic analysis. In some cases, sources speak to The Sentry on the condition that their names not be revealed, out of concern for their safety or other potential retaliatory action. The Sentry establishes the authoritativeness and credibility of information derived from those interviews through independent sources, such as expert commentary, financial data, original documentation, and press reports. The Sentry endeavors to contact the persons and entities discussed in its reports and afford them an opportunity to comment and provide further information.



Inside the System

The National Security Service's organizational structure includes two main branches: the Internal Security Bureau (ISB) and the General Intelligence Bureau (GIB). There are also multiple shared departments, such as training and corporate services. This was the structure of the NSS when it was constituted in 2013.



Political instrumentalization

The NSS was established in the wake of South Sudan's independence in 2011 as an advisory and intelligence gathering agency.²⁴ The NSS "shall respect the will of the people, the rule of law, civilian authority, democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms," says the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan, 2011, which is still in force.²⁵

In the decade since its creation, the NSS has gone far beyond its remit to advise and gather intelligence, having grown into a highly militarized force that now has some 10,000 agents and its own tanks, weapons, and training facilities.^{26, 27} "The NSS has taken over the role of the police," a South Sudanese civil society activist told The Sentry, continuing, "They also act as a combat force; they are heavily armed. They have partly taken over the role of the military."²⁸ The NSS is an "autonomous fighting force capable of influencing South Sudan's politics, society, and economy," and it is "better equipped and trained than regular SSPDF [South Sudan People's Defense Forces] forces," according to the United Nations Panel of Experts in 2019.²⁹

Operating under the direct supervision of the President Salva Kiir,³⁰ and with Kiir loyalist Akol Koor Kuc serving as director general of the Internal Security Bureau (ISB), the NSS has been repurposed as the president's own security force against internal threats to his rule.³¹ As early as 2013, the agency was expanded in response to concerns that the then-army chief of staff General Paul Malong, with whom Kiir and Kuc have had a long-running political rivalry, was becoming a threat to Kiir's power.³² Although Malong is no longer army chief of staff, he still holds significant influence, having command of rebel forces.³³



Repression

As a signatory to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, South Sudan has pledged to uphold human rights, including the rights to express and disseminate opinions, to receive information, to free association, and to freedom of movement.³⁴ Discrimination in recognizing these rights on the basis of ethnic group or "political or any other opinion" is expressly forbidden.³⁵

Yet the NSS operates in such a way that it threatens rather than protects the human rights of its citizens and restricts rather than promotes their fundamental freedoms. Its well-rehearsed playbook of repression includes illegal detention, politically motivated arrest, suppression of freedom of speech, interference in civil society and the press, censorship, and economic control.^{36, 37, 38}

These operations are a clear breach of international best practice on the constraints of power for intelligence agencies, with the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) advising that "intelligence services are explicitly prohibited from undertaking any action that contravenes the Constitution or international human rights law."³⁹ Intelligence services operating according to good practice "carry out their work in a manner that contributes to the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all individuals under the jurisdiction of the State," it says.⁴⁰ Security services and civil society organizations need to have a "mutual trust," according to the African Union.⁴¹

Illegal detention

The 2014 National Security Act gives the NSS the power to "arrest and detain suspects in accordance with the provisions of this Act in crimes related to National Security as provided for under section 7 of this Act."^{42,} ⁴³ This is a clear breach of international best practice. Intelligence services "are not given powers of arrest and detention if this duplicates powers held by law enforcement agencies that are mandated to address the same activities," according to the good practices identified by the UNHRC.⁴⁴

In cases where intelligence services do have powers of arrest and detention, well-functioning systems ensure that they are "subject to the same degree of oversight as applies to their use by law enforcement authorities, including judicial review of the lawfulness of any deprivation of liberty" and that they "comply with international human rights standards on rights to liberty and fair trial, as well as the prohibition of torture and inhuman and degrading treatment."⁴⁵

South Sudan's government has committed to abide by international norms on arbitrary arrest and detention. Article 6 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, of which South Sudan is a signatory, states that "no one may be arbitrarily arrested or detained."⁴⁶ "Every individual shall have the right to have his cause heard," states Article 7, which includes "the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty by a competent court or tribunal; the right to defense, including the right to be defended by counsel of his choice," and "the right to be tried within a reasonable time by an impartial court or tribunal."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the NSS has been found to routinely make arbitrary arrests and detain people without access to legal counsel or a timely trial.⁴⁸

It is also widely accepted that intelligence agencies should not "operate their own detention facilities" or "make use of any unacknowledged facilities operated by third parties."⁴⁹ These rules are "essential safeguards against arbitrary detention by intelligence services and/or the possible development of a parallel



detention regime in which individuals could be held in conditions that do not meet international standards of detention and due process," according to the UNHRC.⁵⁰

The NSS operates three known facilities in Juba: the notorious Blue House, Riverside, and Hai Jalaba.⁵¹ In these facilities, detainees are often held without trial for a prolonged period with limited access to food, clean water, medical care, or communication with the outside world, according to Human Rights Watch, which has interviewed dozens of former detainees and reported extensively on the human rights abuses committed by the NSS.⁵²



The NSS headquarters, known as the Blue House for its blue tinted windows, is where many detainees are held. Detainees at the Blue House are often held without access to family visits, a lawyer, adequate food, or healthcare. Illustration: The Sentry.

Silencing opposition

Despite the protections of free speech that South Sudan has signed on to,⁵³ the NSS is frequently used to arrest and detain political opponents and dissidents for no more than expressing an opinion or their political affiliations. James Gatdet Dak, a spokesperson for the then-leader of the rebel opposition, Riek Machar, was unlawfully transferred from Kenya to South Sudan in November 2016.^{54, 55} Dak claimed that he was deceived by Kenyan security forces, who told him he was being taken to a meeting in the office of the president of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, but who instead took him to a police station and informed him that he was being deported due to a Facebook post criticizing the South Sudanese government.⁵⁶

Dak was held in "poor detention conditions" at NSS headquarters, spending nearly seven months in solitary confinement.⁵⁷ International best practice is for security forces to require permits from other state organs, such as a court of law, for detention for more than two or three days.⁵⁸ On August 23, 2017, he was charged under South Sudan's 2008 Penal Code with inciting violence, "abetment," treason, publishing or communicating false statements prejudicial to Southern Sudan, and undermining the authority of or insulting the president.⁵⁹ Dak was sentenced to death after being found guilty of treason.⁶⁰ Over six months later, he received a presidential pardon and was released after two years of detention.⁶¹

Kuel Aguer Kuel, the former governor of Northern Bahr el Ghazal state, was arrested by the NSS in August 2021 and is still detained for co-founding and signing several declarations by the People's Coalition for Civil Action (PCCA), a group of reform activists.^{62, 63} After over a month in the Blue House, he was transferred to Juba Central Prison.⁶⁴ He has been in detention for over a year, and family members say his health is deteriorating.⁶⁵ Aguer's PCCA colleagues were also accused, and they fled the country after his arrest.⁶⁶



Kanybil Noon, a civil society activist, was detained by the NSS in May 2020 for a Facebook post criticizing Akol Koor Kuc.⁶⁷ Youth activist Michael Wetnhialic was arbitrarily arrested and detained by the NSS in May 2019, having previously been arrested twice on suspicion of using Facebook to criticize the NSS and senior NSS officials.⁶⁸ Joseph Bangasi Bakosoro, former governor of Western Equatoria state and leader of the South Sudan National Movement for Change, an opposition movement, was detained by the NSS in December 2015 without charges.^{69, 70} Bakosoro was held for several months without access to a lawyer or family visits.^{71, 72} According to his family, he was beaten during his detention.⁷³ Bakosoro left the country following his release in 2016 and was the subject of a thwarted kidnapping attempt by South Sudanese security agents in 2018.^{74, 75} He returned to South Sudan in 2020.⁷⁶

Controlling the narrative

Under international best practice, intelligence services "are prohibited from using their powers to target lawful political activity or other lawful manifestations of the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression."⁷⁷ Freedoms of expression, association, and assembly are "fundamental to the functioning of a free society, including political parties, the media and civil society,"⁷⁸ and should be given state protection from targeting by intelligence services.⁷⁹ Member states of the African Union should create an environment that "will enable civil society and the media to hold governments to the highest levels of transparency and accountability."⁸⁰

A free media is crucial for a functioning democracy, with journalists operating as a mechanism to ensure government accountability.⁸¹ A decline in press freedom can be both a "symptom of and a contributor to" a decline in democracy.⁸² South Sudan's Transitional Constitution enshrines the "right to freedom of the press and other media,"⁸³ while the Media Authority Act is supposed to provide for the development of a "free and pluralistic media."⁸⁴ In practice, the press is shackled, and journalists report harassment and censorship from the very agency created to protect them.⁸⁵

South Sudan ranks 128 out of 180 countries in terms of press freedom, according to Reporters Without Borders.⁸⁶ The government severely curtails the activity of the press, according to a 2021 press release from the UN Commission on Human Rights.⁸⁷ The head of the UN Mission in South Sudan has expressed concern to South Sudan's leaders over the "increasingly restricted civic space, characterized by the detention of journalists."⁸⁸ According to a 2019 report by the UN Panel of Experts, the NSS is responsible for this restricted civic space.⁸⁹ The NSS has taken the lead role in restricting the activities of anyone who is critical of the government, particularly journalists and civil society representatives, according to the report.⁹⁰ These efforts are often led by Deng Tong Kenjok, an active NSS agent who ran the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, said the report.⁹¹

Journalists in South Sudan are routinely threatened, harassed, and kidnapped by NSS agents, with impunity as "the rule in nearly all cases."⁹² This severely limits their ability to inform the public, a South Sudanese journalist told The Sentry.⁹³ Since South Sudan's independence in 2011, 11 journalists have been killed; 10 have been killed since 2014.^{94, 95} Soon after independence, senior government officials made it clear that journalists were not allowed to interview opposition leaders.⁹⁶ This is not confined to South Sudanese journalists; many international journalists are also harassed, intimidated, detained without cause, and expelled from the country.^{97, 98}



In the first half of 2022 alone, there have been numerous incidents of human rights violations against journalists by the NSS. Eight reporters covering a press conference were detained by the NSS in February and had their recording devices and phones confiscated.⁹⁹ Several of the journalists expressed concern that the NSS had extracted contacts and other information from their phones and that it was a threat to themselves and their families.¹⁰⁰ A similar incident occurred in June, when the NSS detained at least nine journalists covering a Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO) press conference.¹⁰¹ One detained journalist said the security officers "threatened to deal with some of them."¹⁰²

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News Corporation, with the business name Dawn Newspaper, is owned by Sudd Services and Investment and Emmanuel Monychol. Photo: South Sudan Ministry of Justice.

Such incidents have rippling consequences on the state of journalism in South Sudan. Given the dangers of the job and the extremely low pay,¹⁰³ many journalists leave the profession to pursue safer and more lucrative jobs elsewhere.^{104, 105} The result is that "journalism in South Sudan often fails to live up to ethical standards," according to the Ethical Journalism Network.¹⁰⁶

The NSS also poses a major barrier to the free operation of South Sudan's press. The agency distorts and disrupts the flow of news in South Sudan by censoring the media, infiltrating news outlets, and engaging in outright violence and intimidation of reporters and editors. NSS agents are posted at Universal Printers, Garnish Printers, and RAK Media so that they can censor articles that they don't approve of right before printing.¹⁰⁷ These three printing companies are responsible for the production of all the country's major newspapers.¹⁰⁸

In the first quarter of 2022, the NSS removed dozens of articles from the Juba Monitor, according to their editor-in-chief.¹⁰⁹ What's more, the NSS has started making efforts to disguise the censorship: Censors used to leave blank space where material had been removed, but more recently have begun to enlarge other articles and advertisements or otherwise redesign newspaper pages to cover up their censorship, a South Sudanese journalist told The Sentry.¹¹⁰

The NSS has infiltrated several news outlets, as well. According to corporate records, the News Corporation is majority owned by persons who internal government documents reviewed by The Sentry identify as NSS agents.^{111, 112} The News Corporation, meanwhile, owns and runs the Dawn Newspaper, one of the four print newspapers in Juba.^{113, 114} Several influential NSS officials are also shareholders in The Telegraph Media Company Limited, ^{115, 116} which ran a now-defunct newspaper directly tied to the Office of the President that was designed to "promote 'national sovereignty."^{117, 118} The editor-in-chief was Emmanuel Monychol Akop, a major with the NSS according to internal documents reviewed by The Sentry,¹¹⁹ who has been the editor-in-chief of the Dawn Newspaper since 2015.^{120, 121, 122, 123}



Crushing civil society

The NSS also represses civil society groups, and civil society activists view the NSS as the biggest obstacle to their job, a civil society activist told The Sentry.¹²⁴ The NSS infiltrates organizations, intimidates personnel, and creates obstacles to them doing their job.¹²⁵ NSS harassment of journalists and activists limits their ability to criticize the government without fear of reprisal, and pressure for government accountability from civic groups and a free press is key to a thriving democracy.^{126, 127} The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights describes both activists and journalists as human rights defenders, stating that the ability of human rights defenders to operate freely is crucial "for making development and peace sustainable."¹²⁸

Human Rights Watch has reported extensively on how the NSS installs spies within nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as a means of curbing dissent.¹²⁹ The NSS infiltrates civil society groups and installs agents within their staff, a source with knowledge of multiple civil society groups told The Sentry.¹³⁰ The NSS has also made it mandatory for civil society groups to request permission from the NSS prior to organizing events or meetings, and the agenda and participants of any such event must be approved by the NSS.¹³¹ The NSS has formed its own civil society groups to infiltrate the space, as well, and has recruited agents from existing civil society staff to spy on their colleagues.¹³² One civil society member was arrested by the NSS and detained without charge at the Blue House in order to intimidate other members of the organization, a colleague of the person arrested told The Sentry.¹³³

The NSS has also imposed operational barriers to civil society organizations. The UN Panel of Experts described the NSS as being involved in the "extortion of humanitarian actors."¹³⁴ Deng Tong Kenjok, the former registrar general of the governmental Relief and Rehabilitation Commission and an NSS agent, according to internal documents reviewed by The Sentry,¹³⁵ played a key role in pushing forward new and confusing policies on humanitarian activities and saw NGO fees raised in 2017.^{136, 137}

In July of 2021, the NSS instructed the Bank of South Sudan, the country's central bank, to order commercial banks in South Sudan to freeze the assets and bank accounts of civil society members carrying out work that the NSS did not agree with.¹³⁸ The accounts of civil society members have still not been reinstated, according to a human rights analyst familiar with the matter.¹³⁹



Economic Capture

Throughout South's Sudan's short history, public institutions, revenue streams, government contracts, and sometimes entire sectors have been captured by politically connected elites who seek to line their pockets at the expense of the public.^{140, 141, 142} The NSS plays a critical role in the capture of public institutions and revenue streams in South Sudan. Published reports, correspondence, eyewitness accounts, and corporate records indicate that the NSS has a broad set of tools and tactics for infiltrating and influencing public and private sector institutions for political and economic gain.

To map the extent of NSS commercial activities, The Sentry compiled a list of 684 members of the NSS, drawn from a roster of NSS officers included in a 2019 report by the UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan in 2019, as well as other official documents listing NSS personnel.^{143, 144, 145} The Sentry cross-referenced names on this list with corporate records filed with South Sudan's Ministry of Justice and found that 50 NSS officers on the list have, between them, held stakes in 125 companies operating across South Sudan's economy, including in oil, mining, agriculture, aviation, telecommunications, publishing, logistics, import and export, and procurement.

NSS personnel have occupied key posts in state institutions, including the National Revenue Authority (NRA) and the national oil company, Nile Petroleum Corporation (Nilepet).^{146, 147, 148, 149} The NSS also has a role in approving private company operations in the mining and security sectors, which in practice makes it a gatekeeper of these sectors.^{150, 151}

Security agents have been able to quietly embed themselves in various commercial institutions and business sectors, as the example of The Dawn Newspaper illustrates. These companies are often jointly owned or operated with other Kiir regime insiders, reinforcing a collective interest in maintaining the status quo. Taken together, these commercial operations provide the NSS with both the incentive and the means to resist oversight and regulation, as their commercial operations grant opportunities for enrichment and the revenue needed to operate autonomously, lessening the organization's dependence on budgetary funding.

While government officials are legally required to declare their assets,¹⁵² there is no such requirement for members of the NSS. NSS members have been able to sidestep, undermine, intimidate, or eliminate individuals and institutions seeking to scrutinize their activities, penalize personnel involved in misconduct, or otherwise challenge NSS authority.^{153, 154, 155} NSS access to off-budget finances and diverted revenues undermines any attempt at scrutiny or operational oversight. When one NRA official refused to grant favors to regime insiders or ignore blatant misconduct, NSS officers appeared in his office to harass and intimidate him, and he was summoned to the Blue House to explain his actions before the NSS Economic Committee.¹⁵⁶

Oil sector

Oil is the most profitable sector in South Sudan, and revenue from crude oil sales accounts for more than 90% of the government's operating budget.¹⁵⁷ Inadequate due diligence in the oil sector has allowed for politically connected elites, including the NSS,¹⁵⁸ to capture portions of the market and the means to make substantial profits.^{159, 160} The NSS benefits from oil revenue, has been involved in diverting revenue from



national oil company Nilepet,^{161, 162} and has received "in-kind donations" for providing security for oil fields that amount to "sizable non-monetary and off-budget forms of payment."^{163, 164}

This is just the tip of the iceberg. The NSS is involved in every decision made in the oil sector, a source with years of experience in the oil sector told The Sentry.¹⁶⁵ The NSS has an interest in hundreds of oil companies registered in the names of unaffiliated civilians to cover its tracks, said the source.¹⁶⁶ The vast majority of government contracts in the oil sector are awarded to these companies, the source further alleges.¹⁶⁷

The Sentry found that at least 10 private oil and petroleum companies registered in South Sudan have NSS shareholders.¹⁶⁸ Some of them have been involved in multimillion-dollar corruption scandals,¹⁶⁹ while others have influence in local supply chains relied on by airlines, NGOs, and the UN.¹⁷⁰ A source in the oil industry told The Sentry that the NSS is also involved in ensuring that all information regarding corruption and environmental damage within the sector is kept hidden.¹⁷¹

The NSS has "blatant control over the State-owned oil company Nilepet," according to the UNHRC.^{172, 173} The involvement of the NSS in Nilepet, a company integrated into the global oil market with annual revenues in the hundreds of millions, is of particular concern, as it gives the NSS the ability to rob the people of South Sudan by withdrawing money to fund its own projects. Akol Koor Kuc, director general of ISB, was appointed by Kiir to Nilepet's board in 2021.^{174, 175} Kuc had held a "secret seat" on the Nilepet board from 2014 to 2020,¹⁷⁶ and he was "highly influential in deciding how the company and its resources were deployed," according to the UNHRC.^{177, 178} For instance, in 2016, then-Minister of Petroleum and Mining Stephen Dhieu Dau wrote to Nilepet to ask for \$1.5 million to cover security expenses, including costs incurred by ISB personnel.¹⁷⁹ Dau's letter cites an earlier letter signed by Kuc, suggesting that Kuc had sway over Nilepet expenditures.^{180, 181}

In fact, millions of dollars of Nilepet's oil revenues have been diverted to the security services, who have used the money to fund militias and purchase weapons and other military equipment to pursue a devastating civil war.^{182, 183} In 2015, much of Nilepet's revenue was used to fund soldiers stationed in conflict areas near oil fields.^{184, 185} There were around 100,000 active soldiers in the field, but funds were reportedly claimed for over 200,000 personnel, with wages for the "ghost" soldiers allegedly diverted into the pockets of more than 700 generals.¹⁸⁶ The same year, Nilepet purchased small arms and ammunitions that were then transferred by Kuc's ISB to the Padang Dinka, one of the local militias recruited to fight alongside the government.¹⁸⁷ The United States Department of State described the fighting in 2015 as "some of the worst violence of the conflict" in South Sudan, with 300,000 people in Upper Nile driven from their homes and many subjected to "rape, extrajudicial killings … and denial of humanitarian access."^{188, 189, 190}

Nilepet is a shareholder in all three of the joint ventures responsible for oil production in South Sudan: Dar Petroleum Operating Company (DPOC), Greater Pioneer Operating Company (GPOC), and Sudd Petroleum Operating Company (SPOC), giving it influence throughout South Sudan's oil sector.¹⁹¹ It is also a shareholder in Eastpet Oil Services Limited, which provides field studies and technical services, and Nile Drilling Services Company Limited, which provides "drilling and associated integration services."^{192, 193, 194}

Manasa Machar Bol, an NSS officer and the Director of Oil Security in the Ministry of Petroleum,^{195, 196, 197} has been a beneficial owner of two oil companies: Transco Energy and Kush Petroleum.^{198, 199} Bol's ownership in Kush Petroleum was through Nile Investment Partners.²⁰⁰ Kush Petroleum supplies petroleum for numerous companies, airlines, and NGOs, including the UN World Food Programme.²⁰¹ In 2014, it received two letters of credit totalling over \$2 million to supply fuel and petroleum products.^{202, 203, 204} Oil export data reviewed



Profitable Connections

National Security Service officials hold stakes in a number of oil companies, and the director-general of the Internal Security Bureau of the National Security Service, Akol Koor Kuc, sits on the Nile Petroleum Corporation board.





by The Sentry could only account for approximately \$150,000 worth of fuel being imported by Luqman Oil, the company that Kush Petroleum contracted with for delivery.^{205, 206} Bol has denied having ownership in or knowledge of the activities of either company.²⁰⁷

The Sentry's investigation uncovered links between NSS involvement in the oil sector and Kiir himself. NSS Brigadier General Akot Lual Arech has been a shareholder in Conex Energy Company and South Gas Energy Company.²⁰⁸ Arech confirmed that he was a shareholder in Conex Energy for a few months but says it "fell apart" because he did not pay his "capital share."²⁰⁹ He also told The Sentry that he does not remember South Gas Energy Company.²¹⁰ Arech was Kiir's personal secretary,²¹¹ and he told The Sentry that the president calls him "uncle," an indication both of respect and of a community relationship.²¹² Arech's fellow shareholders in Conex Energy include Kiir's granddaughter, and until August 2014, the president's daughter, Adut Salva Kiir, owned shares in the company.²¹³

The NSS also performs a security function in the oil sector. An April 2020 report from a UN Panel of Experts noted that the NSS materially benefited from protecting oil fields.²¹⁴ Additionally, the NSS provides security staff for one of South Sudan's largest private oil companies, Trinity Energy, The Sentry found. Trinity Energy has numerous NSS officers on payroll listed as "security.²¹⁵ When asked about this, Ann Kathure Rutere, a former Trinity Energy director, told The Sentry that all companies in South Sudan have personnel from the NSS or "relevant institutions attached.²¹⁶

Financial sector

The NSS is also involved in critical aspects of the financial sector, from taxation and revenue collection to banking and foreign exchange. Its capture of revenue streams and government institutions allows the NSS to operate without concern for accountability and ensures a constant source of funding for their operations.

The NSS poses the biggest obstacle to government revenue collection, according to a source in South Sudan familiar with the process. Former NRA director Olympio Attipoe was often asked to grant powerful people favors or tax exemptions or to look the other way when taxes were not applied, he told The Sentry. If he refused, NSS officers were sent to his office to harass and intimidate him into action.²¹⁷ Despite Attipoe's efforts to improve transparency at the NRA, the NSS still managed to secure preferential treatment—tax exemptions on petroleum imports—during his tenure.²¹⁸

Attipoe was dismissed from his role at the NRA by the minister of finance in August 2019 for allegedly violating financial policies,²¹⁹ but some South Sudanese believed that it was due to his efforts to curb corruption.^{220, 221} After he was fired, the former head of finance for the NSS, Erjok Bullen Geu, was the acting NRA commissioner-general.²²² In 2020, the UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan reported that the transparency of non-oil revenue collection had declined since Attipoe's dismissal, noting that Geu had facilitated broad tax import exemptions and curtailed transparent reporting on revenue collection.²²³ Geu also made several suspicious bank transfers during his tenure as acting NRA head, according to reporting by Eye Radio, which cites bank documents showing that Geu approved the transfer of taxpayers' money from an NRA-affiliated bank account.²²⁴

The Sentry's review and analysis of corporate records found that NSS members have held shares in two foreign exchange bureaus: Alok Forex Bureau and Ayen Model Forex Bureau.^{225, 226} Foreign exchange bureaus can help facilitate quick access to central bank-distributed US dollars, an extremely valuable asset



in a country with a weak local currency and a gulf between the official dollar exchange rate and that of the black market. NSS Brigadier General and Kiir associate Akot Lual Arech has been a shareholder in Alok Forex Bureau alongside his wife, Mary Kuel Arech, as well as Emmanuel Akol Ayii Madut and Garang Deng Aguer. Arech told The Sentry that he was a shareholder in Alok Forex when it was established but that he now believes it to be defunct.²²⁷

The holdings in foreign exchange bureaus are not the only NSS connections to South Sudan's banking sector. NSS Brigadier General Napoleon Adok Gai is a shareholder in Harvest Trade and Development Bank.^{228,} ²²⁹ Gai is also currently the director-general of the National Communications Authority and has in the past been accused of "illegally" and "unlawfully" monitoring the phone communications of those suspected to be working against the government.^{230, 231}



International Connections

In South Sudan, international individuals and entities have been among the major facilitators in schemes to misappropriate government spending,²³² and The Sentry found that the NSS has significant international connections that may enable its operations in South Sudan and abroad. International enablers often provide access to global networks and connections, as well as to the international financial system to help corrupt individual and entities syphon their ill-gotten funds away from the eyes of the public.²³³ In the case of the NSS, those international entanglements include joint shareholdings, business relationships with international all private companies, connections with regional intelligence agencies, and even properties and citizenships in the US.



Nationality	Number of Shareholders	Nationality	Number of Shareholders
Kenya	10	United States	3
India	7	Ethiopia	2
Uganda	7	Egypt	1
Australia	5	Germany	1
China	4	Italy	1
Sudan	4	Somalia	1
United Kingdom	4	South Africa	1
Eritrea	3	Turkey	1

Source: The Sentry.



Of the 125 companies revealed by The Sentry to have NSS shareholders, 40 have also had international shareholders. Shareholders from Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda are the most common among those who have held shares in companies alongside NSS staff, but there are also shareholders from the US, Australia, Britain, China, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Germany, Italy, South Africa, and Turkey.²³⁴ This illustrates the extent to which international actors have been tied to or appeared to be complicit in the NSS's economic power.

The NSS has used its international connections, especially with neighboring countries, in support of the commission of egregious human rights abuses.²³⁵ In one case, the ISB reportedly worked with the Kenyan intelligence service to kidnap human rights lawyer Dong Samuel Luak and opposition official Aggrey Idri from



The Internal Security Bureau of the National Security Service wrote a letter to the South Sudan Ministry of Justice to incorporate Sudd Security Service and to clarify that it serves a different purpose than another company with a similar name that they incorporated. The letter states that both companies are managed by the National Security Service. Photo: South Sudan Ministry of Justice.



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Nairobi.^{236, 237} Colonel John Top Lam, a South Sudanese intelligence officer, claimed in a recorded phone call that he had direct knowledge of the abduction.²³⁸ Lam also solicited a \$10,000 bribe from a confidant of both men to secure his release, apparently implying that the money would be given to the head of Kenya's intelligence service, Major-General Philip Wachira Kameru.²³⁹ After being kidnapped from Kenya, Dong and Aggrey were reportedly both executed in an NSS facility.^{240, 241, 242} Lam was designated for sanctions by the US Department of the Treasury, along with several others, for his involvement in the kidnapping of the two men.^{243, 244}

The NSS has also formed partnerships with private international businesses. In late 2014, National Security Minister Obuto Mamur Mete, the minister in charge of the NSS who is answerable to the president, requested a South Sudan operating license for the South African company, Vukani Aviation, owned by South African Nhlanhla Dube, citing "strategic security programs."²⁴⁵ Vukani Aviation was incorporated in South Sudan in December 2014 with Mamur Mete as a shareholder.²⁴⁶ The agreement stated that Vukani would operate a charter plane and two helicopters in South Sudan.²⁴⁷ In the months following the formation of this partnership, Vukani became entangled in scandal in South Africa. Members of the South African Parliament and other critics claimed that the company was "putting lives at risk at a government-funded flight training program run at a flight school partially owned by Dube."²⁴⁸ Dube denied these claims, reportedly telling media outlets that the accusations were "engineered by people with an ulterior motive." ^{249, 250} The flight school, South Africa Training Academy, was shut down after the South African Civil Aviation Authority visited the site.²⁵¹

Through Sudd Security, a company owned by the NSS, the NSS formed partnerships with other private companies owned by non-South Sudanese individuals, according to corporate records reviewed by The Sentry. These include Deway Security, a partnership with a Chinese private security firm of the same name, and Pinnacle Security, a partnership with a Ugandan private security firm.^{252, 253, 254} Pinnacle Security responded to The Sentry's request for comment and denied that the company had provided services to or entered into a joint venture with Sudd Security.²⁵⁵ Another company based in Seychelles reportedly sold the NSS \$264 million worth of heavy weapons, small arms, and ammunition, according to a UN Panel of Experts report.²⁵⁶

In addition to the NSS's range of international shareholders and connections as an agency, two NSS officers also have US addresses, which likely provide them with access to the US financial system and subject them to US law.^{257, 258} Jalpan Obyce, the director of legal affairs of the ISB and an NSS brigadier general, ^{259, 260} has been a US citizen since at least 2012, when he was registered to vote, and has owned property in Texas since 2003.^{261, 262} Akot Lual Arech, a former secretary of Kiir and reportedly an NSS brigadier general, has been a US citizen since 2002 and has owned property in the US since at least 1995.^{263, 264, 265, 266, 267} Arech ran a nonprofit called JumpStart South Sudan registered in Kansas City, Missouri, that billed itself as collecting money for humanitarian aid for the Bahr al Ghazal region of South Sudan.^{268, 269} He was even received by officials at the White House in 2009.²⁷⁰ In a letter sent by Arech to The Sentry in response to our findings, he denied any involvement in the NSS and stated that he was added to the UN Panel of Experts list as a result of his proximity to the president.²⁷¹



The Consequences of an Unchecked Security Service

The unchecked activities of the NSS have devastating consequences for a country that has suffered close to a decade of civil war and an economic crisis from which there has been little respite. NSS repression ensures that the state's failings—and the self-serving actions of the elite—go unchallenged and thus perpetuate the cycle of oppression. The rights of citizens, the media, and political opponents are severely suppressed. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press have been brutally curtailed, while punishments for opposing the government are meted out without regard to constitutional rights, national law, or basic standards of due process. Civil society and political plurality have been forcefully or surreptitiously hollowed out, and those organizations that endure do so under persistent existential threat.

The NSS penetration into the economy makes these trends still more concerning. The NSS presence in the oil sector, key financial institutions, and commercial operations throughout the economy embeds the agency in South Sudan's wealth and power structures in a way that, if left unchecked, will perpetuate, if not deepen, its influence. If this happens, the human rights abuses and unconstitutional behaviors that already endanger the lives and freedoms of South Sudan's citizens and that have helped create a monolithic and kleptocratic political culture, will continue.

The often-intrusive powers of national security and intelligence operations require comprehensive oversight mechanisms to prevent their abuse. International best practice compiled by the UNHRC states that "an effective system of intelligence oversight includes at least one civilian institution that is independent of both the intelligence services and the executive" and that such oversight institutions should "have the power, resources and expertise to initiate and conduct their own investigations, as well as full and unhindered access to the information, officials and installations necessary to fulfil their mandates."²⁷²

Well-functioning systems also feature a role for oversight institutions in assessing the performance of intelligence services, including "examining whether intelligence services make efficient and effective use of the public funds allocated to them."²⁷³ South Sudan's legislation on NSS governance does little to ensure independent oversight of the organization. The National Security Service Act of 2014 states that the agency will be headed by the minister of national security service in the Office of the President,²⁷⁴ making the NSS directly responsible to the executive. The minister of national security service is "answerable to the President," the act stipulates.²⁷⁵

The National Security Service Act includes oversight mechanisms that are both weak and vague. The minister of national security service must submit an annual report to parliament "on matters related to the performance of the Service," it says,²⁷⁶ without providing any detail as to what this report should include, what basis on which the agency's performance should be assessed, or what recourse parliament might have when it deems that the NSS has failed to deliver an acceptable level of performance.

The act provides for the establishment of a Complaints Board to which "any person" aggrieved by the actions of an NSS staff member "may make a complaint in respect thereof to the Board in such a manner as may be prescribed."²⁷⁷ Eight years later, there is neither evidence of an operational Complaints Board, nor of any action having been taken to "prescribe" the manner in which complaints to the NSS might be made. Even if such a complaints body is constituted, the National Security Service Act fails to provide for its independence from the executive. International best practice suggests that complaints bodies should be "independent of



the intelligence services and the political executive,"²⁷⁸ but the National Security Service Act goes the opposite way, stipulating that those members of the Complaints Board "shall be appointed by the President."²⁷⁹

The cycle must be broken. The scope of the NSS must be confined to its constitutional role as a bulwark against genuine threats to the state. Institutions of state must be returned to their proper functions as guardians of citizen rights. The media and civil society must be allowed to function free from interference and fear. Due process must be restored to the legal system, and basic human rights must be upheld by the penal system. The private sector must be allowed to function free from state influence or control.

The NSS must undergo significant reforms to transform into an intelligence gathering agency that will protect the people of South Sudan, rather than oppress them.



Recommendations

Dismantling the National Security Service's hold over the South Sudanese economy is a prerequisite for securing any kind of peace and human rights in South Sudan. The Sentry makes the following recommendations for how governments and the private sector can disrupt the global financial networks that make it possible for the NSS to fund their human rights abuses through illicit revenue flows.

The United States, United Kingdom, European Union, Canada, and Australia

Impose targeted network sanctions. The US, UK, EU, Canada, and Australia should urgently investigate and, if appropriate, impose coordinated and targeted network actions on the individuals and entities described in this report, particularly the NSS owned or controlled commercial enterprises, as well as Akol Koor Kuc, Jalpan Obyce, Akot Lual Arech, and their enablers and support networks, pursuant to their Global Magnitsky-style or South Sudan-specific sanctions authorities.

Issue a public advisory to financial institutions warning about the money laundering risks associated with South Sudan. The EU, Canada, and Australia should mirror the US Financial Crimes Enforcement Network's (FinCEN) anti-money laundering advisories on political corruption risks in South Sudan and the UK's National Crime Agency Amber Alert on illicit finance risks related to South Sudan to warn financial institutions in their jurisdictions about these risks and issue guidance on taking risk-based steps to identify and limit any exposure they may have to funds and other assets associated with South Sudanese corruption and human rights abuses.^{280, 281} This will allow banks to allocate their resources toward identifying suspicious behavior emerging from South Sudan.

Pursue asset seizure orders on criminally derived assets. Dedicate law enforcement resources to investigating the proceeds of human rights abuses, state corruption, and violence in South Sudan and seeking asset seizures abroad where these perpetrators own property.

Investigate the parties and transactions revealed in this report and enforce relevant laws. The US Department of Justice, in particular the Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section, should investigate the US persons named in this report and pursue criminal measures under relevant laws.

Support journalists, activists, whistleblowers, and civil society organizations. Support, including financially when appropriate, South Sudanese and international journalists, activists, whistleblowers, and civil society organizations that seek to unveil perpetrators of human rights abuses and corruption in South Sudan. Think long-term and invest in the organizations and individuals that will contribute meaningfully to securing peace, human rights, and a transparent economy in South Sudan.

Kenya, Uganda, and other regional countries

Enact and enforce sanctions against South Sudanese profiteers and their international collaborators. Implement UN sanctions against UN-listed South Sudanese officials, including by enforcing travel bans and freezing physical property, such as homes that should be considered "financial assets" of the sanctioned person.



Issue warnings on the money laundering risks associated with South Sudanese corruption. Financial regulators, including the central bank and financial intelligence units in Kenya and Uganda, should issue circulars to the country's financial institutions warning of the risks of dealing with South Sudanese politically exposed persons (PEPs), especially those with connections to the NSS as identified in this report. South Sudanese corruption-related money flows have often found a home in or flowed through Kenya and Uganda, creating risks of money laundering. The illicit flows will continue to be a threat to the integrity of financial systems and need to be urgently disrupted. These steps are particularly pertinent given Kenya's recent Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group mutual evaluation of its anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) framework and Uganda's ongoing efforts to end the country's "grey listing" for shortcomings in its AML/CFT rules and regulations. This will also allow domestic banks to identify suspicious transactions and report these to their local financial intelligence units. The banking associations of the respective countries should similarly work with their member banks to assist in addressing these risks.

South Sudan

Strengthen the AML/CFT regime. South Sudan should fulfill its June 2021 political commitment to work with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to strengthen the effectiveness of its AML/CFT regime.²⁸² The FATF has recently noted that South Sudan has made limited progress on this front.²⁸³

Empower and resource oversight institutions. South Sudan has already developed much of the institutional infrastructure essential for accountability and good governance. However, a lack of independence and human and financial resources hamstrings key oversight institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Commission and the National Audit Chamber. The government should take steps to ensure the proper disbursement of funds promised to the Anti-Corruption Commission and other oversight institutions.²⁸⁴ The government should also pass laws penalizing officials who fail to comply with their obligation to declare their wealth under the Asset Declaration Management System. The government should implement measures to give the Anti-Corruption Commission the right to prosecute transgressors. Lastly, South Sudanese leaders should take steps to ensure that various government agencies comply with the auditor general's investigations, making cooperation mandatory, since a refusal to cooperate has long hampered probes.

Stop the NSS's illegal activities. South Sudan's government should immediately close all NSS detention centers and ensure that the NSS releases all detainees who have not been charged with a crime or given a fair trial.

End NSS access to off-budget revenue. The NSS's off-budget sources of funding enable impunity manifested in egregious human rights abuses and the undermining of the peace agreement. Immediate steps should be taken to stop off-budget sources of revenue for the NSS. The first step is to empower the Committee for Security and Public Order in the National Legislative Assembly, in conjunction with the Public Accounts Committee, to demand a regular and timely audit of the NSS budget and strengthen avenues for oversight on NSS expenditure. The National Legislative Assembly should enforce the Civil Service Act, especially the sections that deal with conflict of interest and that are designed to deter public officials from engaging in ventures that generate off-budget revenue for individuals, their business entities, and the government departments that employ them.



Clarify existing laws. Currently, South Sudan's constitution fails to clearly identify conflicts of interest. Section 120 requires "all executive and legislative constitutional office holders, Justices, and senior Civil Service officials at all levels of government ... (to) make confidential declaration of their assets and liabilities including those of their spouses and children in accordance with the law." In addition, these individuals are barred from engaging in private business.²⁸⁵ High-ranking NSS officials should face the same restrictions, with enforcement by an ombudsman with oversight powers. South Sudan should pass legislation clarifying which roles or types of roles fall under the term "constitutional office holder."²⁸⁶ The conflicts of interest provisions contained within the constitution should be clarified and expanded to include all senior NSS officials.

Ensure an investigation into allegations of NSS abuse. There should be an immediate, transparent, and impartial investigation into all allegations of NSS misconduct, including allegations of torture and sexual violence. The government should ensure that those NSS officials implicated in such crimes are appropriately prosecuted.

Amend the National Security Service Act. The National Security Service Act should be amended to limit the NSS's role in intelligence gathering and analysis and remove its powers of detention and its ability to collect personal communications data.

Create a public register disclosing shareholders and beneficial owners. Key company ownership information remains inaccessible to the public. This veil of secrecy has served to hide the extent of the NSS's commercial activities. A public online register—free to access, updated in real time, and with a verification mechanism—would serve as a vital tool to anti-corruption and human rights advocates, civil society, and political parties in demanding accountability from government officials. Moreover, it would demonstrate the government's commitment to building a more transparent system, a key step in inviting legitimate investors to do business in South Sudan.

Financial institutions

Conduct enhanced due diligence, monitoring, screening, and transaction reviews. Financial institutions should take measures to identify accounts held or beneficially owned by members of the NSS, other senior South Sudanese PEPs, and the 125 companies revealed by The Sentry to have NSS shareholders. They should carry out a comprehensive assessment to identify their broader international networks and determine the measures needed to mitigate the risks involved in such accounts and customer relationships. Financial institutions should also undertake enhanced screening, ongoing monitoring, and transaction reviews to identify, investigate, and report potentially suspicious financial activity related to South Sudan, especially with respect to international networks profiting from such activity. An effort should be made to avoid wholesale de-risking and ensure that legitimate economic resources and humanitarian funding continue to flow into the country.



Annex 1

South Sudan National Security Service Act, 2014, provisions on crimes and offences against the state²⁸⁷

7. Crimes and Offences against the State

For the purpose of this Act, the following shall constitute crimes and offences against the state:

(1) Crimes and offences against the state as provided in the Penal Code.

(2) Any activity:

(a) relating to espionage, sabotage, terrorism or subversion or intention of any such activity directed against or detrimental to the interest of South Sudan and includes any other activity performed in conjunction with any activity relating to espionage, sabotage, terrorism or subversion;

(b) directed at undermining or intended to bring about the destruction or overthrow of the constitutionally established system of the Government by unlawful means;

(c) any act or threat of violence or harm that is directed at or intended to achieve, bring about or promote any constitutional, political, industrial, social or economic objective or change in South Sudan, including any conspiracy, incitement or attempt to commit any such threat or act; and

(d) any foreign-influenced activity within or outside which is related to South Sudan that is:

(i) detrimental to the interests of South Sudan; and

(ii) clandestine or deceptive or involves any threat whatsoever to the State or its citizens or any other person resident in South Sudan;

(e) to bring about destruction to industrial installations and physical infrastructures in South Sudan and

(f) Any act of spying or attempting to spy against the State.



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