

CTSAMM CONFIDENTIAL
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TO: The Chairman, IGAD Council of Ministers
The Chairman, JMEC

FROM: The Chairman, CTSAMM

DATE: 20 April 2018

SUBJECT: **CTSAMM REPORT 2018/13 – CLASHES IN NASSIR 25 MARCH 2018**

Your Excellencies,

Please find attached a report on violations of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access (21 December 2017), specifically incidents that took place on and about 25 March 2018 at Nassir.

Major General Ibrahim Abduljellil
Chairman



Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism

CTSAMM REPORT 2018/13

CLASHES IN NASSIR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NASSIR is held by the Government, but the surrounding areas are under control of the SPLA-IO (RM). It has been a flashpoint throughout the current conflict. Tensions are high in the area, and this has led to many clashes.

Tensions have been particularly high in recent months as a result of the SPLA attack against NYATOT on 12 February 2018, since which no apparent action has been taken by the responsible institutions under the ACOH, namely JMEC and the IGAD Council of Ministers, to address the issues which drive conflict in the area.

There was a clash on the Sobat River by NASSIR on 25 March 2018. The SPLA claimed soldiers fishing on the river were attacked by SPLA-IO (RM) forces; the SPLA-IO (RM) claimed SPLA forces had crossed the river to attack settlements in their area of control. One SPLA soldier was wounded in the incident and there were no casualties on the other side.

Without any neutral witnesses or other evidence CTSAMM is unable to conclude which of the Parties was responsible for starting the incident, but recommends urgent action by JMEC and the IGAD Council of Ministers in order to prevent further escalation.

CLASHES IN NASSIR

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background:

- NASSIR has been a flashpoint throughout the current conflict. NASSIR is held by the Government: there is an SPLA garrison to the west of the town, but the surrounding area is under the control of SPLA-IO (RM) forces. There have been a number of clashes, attacks and counter-attacks over the past three and a half years.
- The latest incident was an attack by the SPLA against the SPLA-IO (RM) village of NYATOT, which resulted in the killing of over 20 civilians and which was assessed by CTSAMM to be a blatant violation of the ACOH by the SPLA (CTSAMM report 2018/07). This incident has resulted in a ramping up of tension in the area.
- SPLA soldiers based at the garrison in NASSIR regularly fish along the banks of the SOBAT RIVER in order to supplement their rations. This makes them vulnerable to harassment and attack by SPLA-IO (RM) forces; there have been several incidents of this in the past.
- Allegation: On 26 March 2018 CTSAMM received an allegation from Major General Majier Deng Kur, SPLA Co-Chair of JMCC, alleging that SPLA-IO (RM) forces had attacked their positions at Nassir on 25 March.

1.2 Aim: The aim of this report is to describe the incidents which took place in NASSIR on and around 25 March 2018 and attribute responsibility for violations of the ACOH where appropriate.

1.3 Methodology:

- On 28 March 2018 CTSAMM deployed an MVT's to investigate the allegation: one team went to NASSIR on and the other to MANDENG in order to speak with the SPLA-IO (RM).

- At NASSIR the MVT met with the Acting Governor of what is known as Latjor State, the local SPLA commander and several officers, and SPLA private soldier injured in the incidents and the UNMISS base commander.
- In MANDENG the team met with senior SPLA-IO (RM) commanders.

2.0 Findings

- 2.1 It was difficult for the CTSAMM MVT to get to the bottom of what happened. This was because of contradictory statements by the Parties involved, and a lack of neutral witnesses.
- 2.2 Both the SPLA and SPLA-IO (RM) accused each other of preparing for offensive operations to expand their areas of control.
- 2.3 The SPLA accused the SPLA-IO (RM) of unprovoked attacks on SPLA soldiers fishing in the river, and that the first of these attacks was on 21 March. One of their soldiers was injured in a clash – which the SPLA claimed was started by the SPLA-IO (RM) - on 25 March.
- 2.4 The SPLA-IO (RM) accused the SPLA of crossing the Sobat River and attacking civilians in areas controlled by the SPLA-IO (RM). They also accused the SPLA of attempting to ambush the Ulang County Commissioner on 18 March when he was returning to MANDENG after a meeting.

3.0 Assessment

- 3.1 There was a clash between the SPLA and SPLA-IO (RM) on 25 March on the Sobat River and one SPLA soldier was wounded. However, CTSAMM was unable to conclude which Party initiated the engagement as they were unable to identify any neutral witnesses.
- 3.2 Tensions in the area have been high for a long time, but are especially so following the SPLA attack at NYATOT on 12 February 2018. No action has been taken following the NYATOT attack to address the issues in the area which drive conflict.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 CTSAMM concludes that violations of the ACOH did occur at the Sobat River by NASSIR on 25 March 2018. There were clashes between SPLA and SPLA-IO (RM) forces.

4.2 However, CTSAMM is unable to conclude which of the Parties was responsible for firing the first shot.

5.0 Observations and Recommendations

5.1 Clashes such as those which occurred on 25 March will continue, with the very real risk of escalation, unless something is done to address the underlying issues in the NASSIR area. This needs to be done at the political level. Both Parties must be made to understand and implement their obligations to freeze forces in place and refrain from any sort of provocative or offensive actions.

5.2 CTSAMM calls on JMEC and the IGAD Council of Ministers to take positive steps to stabilise the situation in the NASSIR area. This must include taking appropriate action following the NYATOT incident of 12 February 2018.