



# MILITANT LEADERSHIP MONITOR

## Personalities Behind the Insurgency

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SMM Leader Nasser al-Nuba

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### YEMENI TRIBAL CHIEF READY FOR “WAR” AGAINST PRESIDENT SALEH

On May 23, forces loyal to Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh mounted an assault on the home of Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar, the leader of the Banu Hashid tribe. Sheikh al-Ahmar has sided with Yemen’s growing protest movement in calling for the ouster of President Saleh, 65, who has been in power continuously since 1978, first as the president of the Yemen Arab Republic and then as the president of the unified Republic of Yemen. The assault on Ahmar’s compound succeeded Saleh’s ominous warning that the country was on the brink of civil war if prominent opposition members refused to come to the presidential palace and sign onto a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-sponsored negotiation that would create a framework for his transition from power (AFP, May 22). Loyalist forces reportedly hit al-Ahmar’s residence with tanks and heavy artillery in an effort to break the will of Hashid tribesman that ended in failure (Yemen Times, May 24). The tribal reaction to the Saleh-ordered actions temporarily closed the US Embassy as tribesmen blockaded its entrance. Al-Ahmar made a statement that “these attacks will not dissuade them from their national roles and continued advocacy of the people’s peaceful revolution until its objectives are achieved” (News Yemen, May 24). Between six and nine people were killed in the clashes, which wounded dozens. Al-Ahmar issued a statement slamming Saleh for his actions. Saleh was attempting to “ignite discord and civil war between Yemenis” said al-Ahmar (al-Jazeera, May 26).

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As the GCC-led deal that included a future amnesty for President Saleh collapsed—a condition that was an anathema to many in the opposition camp—an opposition statement described the incident as “a symptom of the hysteria experienced by President Saleh and his entourage and their insistence on engulfing the country in a civil war” (Reuters, May 24). While the fighting escalated, parts of downtown Sana’a took on the air of a war zone, with plumes of black smoke billowing from government buildings occupied by tribesmen. The notion that al-Ahmar, 54, and other Hashid leaders have abandoned Saleh, a Hashid himself, may sound the death knell for the regime. The backlash of the violence may well reverberate beyond an inter-Hashid feud. As a leader of the northern Bakeel tribe called Faisal Manaa stated in reaction to events in the Yemeni capital: “We will not remain silent. We are warning the regime if it doesn’t withdraw its troops, we will be launching a comprehensive and fierce war against them” (AP, May 24).

Before the clashes erupted, talk circulated in Sana’a of weapons being suspiciously stored ahead of time in schools and government buildings in the city’s al-Hasaba district where Sheikh al-Ahmar’s villa is located, indicating that Saleh may have been preparing for the GCC negotiations to fall apart, thereby quickly engulfing the area in crossfire (al-Sahwa, May 24). A group of men arrived on the scene to try and mediate between Saleh’s forces and al-Ahmar’s armed guards. The situation quickly devolved into chaos as al-Ahmar’s villa was struck by ordinance with the mediators still inside. A spokesman defiantly bashed Saleh after his colleagues suffered in the attack: “The mediation committee blames Saleh for the attacks and killings; no one else will be held accountable. For this, we step aside from our mediation and stand on the side of Sadeq [al-] Ahmar against Ali Abdullah Saleh” (Yemen Post, May 24). After days of bloody battles, which left scores dead on the streets of the Yemeni capital, Saleh and al-Ahmar reached a shaky truce. Yet, al-Ahmar emphasized he would not personally guarantee that the lull would last, stating: “If the Saleh regime wants a peaceful revolution, we are ready for that. If he chooses war, we will fight him” (al-Arabiya, May 27).

#### HEZBOLLAH LEADER BACKS TOTTERING SYRIAN REGIME

In a grandiose speech commemorating the withdrawal of the Israel Defence Forces from South Lebanon in May

of 2000, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah implored the people of Lebanon and Syria to unequivocally back the regime of Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad, which has been slaughtering protestors in the hundreds in recent weeks. Nasrallah told his intended audience that the besieged Syrian populace should be patient with al-Assad’s planned fixes for Syria’s massive human and economic deficits. “We call on all Syrians to preserve their country as well as the ruling regime, a regime of resistance, and to give their leaders a chance to cooperate with all of Syria’s communities in order to implement the necessary reforms” (AFP, May 25). Nasrallah, not wanting to appear completely deaf to reality in light of events in Syria, had this to say: “No one denies that Syria has committed mistakes, but no one can deny the historic achievement of Syria toward Lebanon, also Syria’s stance on Israel and the Palestinian resistance” (The National [Abu Dhabi], May 26). Hezbollah’s leader appears deathly afraid of a significant change coming to Syria, which would greatly alter the security calculus of the entire Levant region. If Alawite minority-ruled Syria were to suddenly transform into a Sunni majority-ruled state, creating a massive geographic wedge between the Shia areas of South Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley where the group has free reign to run its own affairs, Hezbollah would be cut off from its logistical bridgehead next door. If the al-Assad government falls, Nasrallah may indeed be the biggest loser following over a decade of on-again, off-again military successes against Israeli forces.

In his televised address broadcast on Hezbollah’s al-Manar channel, Hassan Nasrallah cobbled together a convoluted logical argument to invoke support for his long time allies in Damascus: “Overthrowing the regime in Syria is in the American and Israeli interest... They want to overthrow the regime and replace it with a moderate regime” (AP, May 26). A Sunni-run government, with Sunnis making up the overwhelming majority of religiously heterogeneous Syria, [1] may have little interest in supporting a heavily armed Shia militia steeped in a philosophy of permanent warfare on its border. A Sunni Syria may prefer to prop up a Sunni proxy force, creating a natural internal rival for Hezbollah, instead. Turning his trepidation and fear outward on the perennial ‘other’ in the Levant rather than dare adjust to changing sectarian power dynamics in the region, Nasrallah comes off as laughably hypocritical. While championing the protestors in Tunis and Cairo at 2011’s dramatic outset, Nasrallah has been forced to do a transparent volte-face to garner support for Bashar al-Assad who has supported him since he came to power concomitantly with the 2000 withdrawal of

Israeli forces from Lebanon. Rather than as less pliable state, Nasrallah insists that a new power in Syria would be more amenable to American and Jewish interests. Nasrallah frets that a new Damascene power structure would be “ready to sign any peace, meaning surrender, with Israel” (Reuters, May 26).

Undoubtedly, Nasrallah’s words were met with rage from Syrian protestors, who view the Hezbollah Secretary-General as an unwelcome interloper in their desperate revolution. In Deir ez-Zor Governorate, protestors burned images of Nasrallah in the town of al-Bukamal, which borders Iraq’s al-Anbar Governorate (Reuters, May 27). President al-Assad appears to be following a two-track policy of promising reforms that cannot materialize quickly enough while ordering his security forces to repeatedly gun down hordes of demonstrators in a wide array of cities across the Syrian Arab Republic. Al-Assad stated that there was “no going back” on reforms but did not explain how, even as reports surfaced that eight more protestors had been shot dead (as-Safir, May 27). As the Syrian President continues to speak in vague terms about reform, his Lebanese stalwart speaks with little more specificity on his behalf, unconvincing to either the Lebanese or the Syrian people. Syrian state media quoted Nasrallah as saying: “President al-Assad believes in reform, he is serious, determined and ready to go on with greater reform measures, but with responsibility and careful steps” (Syrian Arab News Agency, May 25). Hassan Nasrallah is a proponent of the global Arab revolution currently in vogue, but not when it threatens his movement or his stature in Lebanese society. He continues to insist that the fall of the al-Assad regime is entirely different from other recent and ongoing revolutions. Nasrallah argues that rather than bring about an Arab liberation movement, the Syrian uprising would end up eventually expanding Israeli military hegemony in the region if it engendered a weak transitional regime that would not be able to ‘resist’ the Israelis as well as Bashar al-Assad’s regime had.

Note:

1. The US Central Intelligence Agency estimates that Sunnis comprise 74% of Syria’s population. See: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>.

## A Profile of Tarkhan Gaziev: The Third Man in Chechnya’s Rebel Troika

By Mairbek Vatchagaeu

**T**arkhan Gaziev is one of the most notable field commanders in Chechnya’s interminable rebellion against the Russian state. At various times during the second military campaign since 1999, he held a number of top military positions within the Chechen armed underground resistance. Gaziev commanded a squad numbering several dozens of militants during the second Chechen campaign. For the most part he operated in the Achkhoy-Martan district, which is home to concentrated numbers of natives from the mountainous part of Chechnya. The terrain allows Chechens to find both shelter and food here on the plains close to the Ingush border. Time after time, his active operations spurred the authorities to conduct special operations to liquidate him and destroy the combat efficiency of his squad. This was the case in the beginning of 2004, when attempts were made in Chechnya’s Shatoi district to eliminate him and Doku Umarov. Yet, Russia’s intelligence services and their proxies in the North Caucasus have been unable to capture or kill Gaziev for virtually 12 years.

Tarkhan Gaziev, known in North Caucasian militant circles by his *nom de guerre* Emir Tarkhan, was born on November 11, 1965 in the small village of Pozh-Poroy in the mountainous Itum-Kale district in what was then the Chechen–Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Officially, he has been wanted by federal authorities since May 14, 2004, when Itum-Kale’s local division of the Chechen Republic’s Ministry of Internal Affairs indicted Tarkhan Gaziev on the following charges:

- Article 317: Endangering the life of a law enforcement officer.
- Article 222, part 2: Illegal acquisition, transfer, sale, storage, transport or bearing of a weapon, its basic parts, ammunition, explosive substances and explosive devices, carried out by a group of persons.
- Article 208, part 2: Participation in armed formations, not permitted under Russian federal law.



Based on these charges, Gaziev cumulatively faces anywhere between 17 years in prison to the death penalty (though the Russian Federation currently has a moratorium on capital punishment). [1] It should be noted, however, that Gaziev is not listed in Interpol's open records.

Because of the ineffectiveness of their operations, the Russian security services attempted to discredit him in the eyes of his fellow travelers by exploiting Russian-language media. Thus, in the spring of 2008, on the dubious sounding tip of an analyst called Ruslan Saidov, Gaziev was said to be a Federal Security Service (Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnost- FSB) operative. According to Saidov: "Tarkhan Gaziev, a.k.a. Emir Tarkhan, is a secret FSB officer. In this capacity he organized two notorious killings of high-ranking police chiefs in the North Caucasus, which was a reflection of the internecine feuds between rivaling intelligence services in Moscow. Now, Lubyanka [the FSB] has tasked Gaziev to eliminate [rebel Prime Minister] Akhmed Zakaev who is residing in London." [2]

Upon closer inspection, Saidov's seemingly absurd claim does not stand up to scrutiny. Russia's FSB would do a lot to get Zakaev, if not alive, then dead at the very least. This claim appears to be an attempt to sow discord within the ranks of Chechnya's already divided militants. The trading back and forth of accusations of collaborating with the FSB between Islamists and relative moderates leading the Chechen resistance is nothing new (see *North Caucasus Analysis*, January 9, 2009). Yet, even the Russian media did not pick up on Saidov's accusation regardless of his wealth of connections both in Moscow and the Middle East. [3]

Despite Gaziev's militant credentials, he is threatened with assassination, his name appearing on a "gun down list"—a notorious hit list feared in Chechen emigrant circles—targeting local pro-Moscow authorities in Chechnya. [4] This suggests an overlap of interests regarding the fate of Gaziev, both among Russian intelligence services operating at the federal level and local Chechen law enforcement forces controlled by ruthless pro-Kremlin strongman Ramzan Kadyrov.

Tarkhan Gaziev gained his storied reputation as a hardcore rebel fighter by carrying out, along with his squad, an array of successful attacks against Russian military servicemen:

- The murder of the Chairman of the Council of Elders of the Itum-Kale district in the village of Abugoroi.
- Attack on a school building and the house of the school's head of administration in the village of Gukhoy in the Itum-Kale district. The administration head's nephew was killed and four policemen were wounded in the course of the attack.
- In an assault on the Chechen village of Alkhazurovo, which utilized more than 20 militants, four policemen and one soldier died on March 19, 2008 (AP, March 20, 2008).
- Armed raids in several villages of Chechnya's Achkhoy-Martan and Urus-Martan districts occurring on April 20 – 21, 2008.
- Virtually all operations conducted in the Itum-Kale district from 2002 – 2011, and all operations undertaken in the Achkhoy-Martan district since 2007 – 2011, should be attributed to Gaziev. Altogether, there have been dozens of insurgent actions carried out by the subunits led by Gaziev in the last decade.
- In early Fall 2006, Doku Umarov led reassignments in the highest quarters of the North Caucasus rebels. He did this almost right after his appointment as President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI), following the killing of Abdul-Halim Sadulaev by Russian intelligence agencies on June 17, 2006. Gaziev was appointed the commander of the Southwest Front of the Armed Forces of the ChRI by Doka Umarov's decree #121 on September 24, 2006. By the beginning of March 2007, Gaziev's own decree appointed him as Head of the National Security Service. [5]

Following the rendering of Ichkeria into a constituent of the Caucasus Emirate, this entity was renamed "Raisa Mukhabarat" (Security Service). Umarov's alliance with Gaziev helped him to become one of the most prominent rebel commanders. Tarkhan Gaziev, Umarov's friend and comrade, provided for his protection because Umarov, while leader of the overall insurgency, no longer commanded his own mujahideen. Therefore, those who opposed the proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate—the replacement of the idea of building a secular state of

Ichkeria with the idea of building an Islamic state across the wider North Caucasus region—had to assess Doku Umarov’s real power in light of his alliance with Gaziev.

In September 2010, Tarkhan Gaziev issued a video alongside Aslanbek Vadalov and Hussein Gakaev. In the clip, the emirs proclaimed their own leadership, choosing Gakaev as the leader of the reorganized Chechen resistance movement. [6] They called upon all Chechen fighters to heed their decision. In the dispute over the precise vision of a future separatist state in the North Caucasus, Gaziev opted for moderate radicals with views closer to traditional Chechen nationalists. In the divide between transnational Islamism and more localized, traditional anti-Russian Chechen irredentism, Gaziev is distinctly in the latter camp. Despite the unstable dynamics of the Chechen rebel movement at present, Gaziev is likely to remain a key figure in the Chechen rebellion for the foreseeable future.

Umarov’s demarche directed at Vadalov and Gakaev who now stridently opposed him was thus all the more incomprehensible to many. Tarkahn Gaziev’s siding with those in the Chechen nationalist camp rendered a huge blow to Umarov’s power to effectively command this insurgent movement. Scores of middle and lower ranking commanders departed with the three commanders, leaving Doku Umarov alone with his bodyguards, backing the non-Chechen elements of the broader North Caucasian resistance movement. In response to this demarche, on September 20, 2010 Umarov revoked Gaziev’s title and appointment along with those of Vadalov and Gakaev. [7] In spite of Umarov’s decree, the consequences of this infighting do not seem to have affected the veracity of the North Caucasus insurgency markedly. Recently sanctioned by the US State Department under Presidential Executive Order 13224, Umarov appears to be increasingly isolated both at home and abroad (see *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, May 27).

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Notes:

1. To view elements of the Russian legal code pertinent to the charges leveled against Gaziev, see (Russian): [www.consultant.ru/popular/ukrf/10\\_43.html#p5083](http://www.consultant.ru/popular/ukrf/10_43.html#p5083).
2. See “Russian security services have changed the tactics of Kremlin opponents abroad,” (Russian) <http://forum-msk.org/material/lenty/471973.html>.

3. To view information on Saidov’s Moscow connections, see (Russian) [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/11/27/69405.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/11/27/69405.shtml).

To view information on Saidov’s Middle Eastern connections, see (Russian): [www.anticompromat.org/surikov/saidovbio.html](http://www.anticompromat.org/surikov/saidovbio.html).

4. To view this purported ‘target’ list, see (Russian): <http://www.chechen.org/forums/showthread.php?t=302&pagenumber=>.

5. To view Umarov’s decree, see: <http://chechenpress.org/events/2007/03/31/11.shtml>.

6. To view the video statement by Chechen rebel leaders titled “Changes in the management of the wilayat of Nokhchicho (Chechnya)”, see: [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xf3137\\_yyyyyyyyyy-yyyyyyyyyyyy-yyyyyyyy-yyyyy\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xf3137_yyyyyyyyyy-yyyyyyyyyyyy-yyyyyyyy-yyyyy_news).

7. To view the video response by Doku Umarov titled “Amir Dokka Abu Usman (Doku Umarov) orders the demotion of emirs who violate the bayt (oath)”, see : <http://abror.info/?p=9482>.

## Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi: The Leader of Jordan’s Jihadi Protestors

*By Murad Batal al-Shishani*

Since the emergence of Salafi-jihadis in post-2003 Iraq, the role of jihadis in the Jordanian city of Irbid, the country’s third largest, increased exponentially. While several failed terror attacks were attempted in the city during this period, more importantly, Irbid emerged as a transit point for Salafi-jihadis heading to Iraq or Lebanon between the years 2004 – 2007, owing to its proximity to the Jordanian-Syrian border.

One of the most notable Jordanian court cases at the time was that of the “group of al-Tahawi,” which

refers to Abdul Qader Shahadeh al-Tahawi (a.k.a. Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi) who was the group's leader and chief inspirer.

Al-Tahawi, who would later become known as "the leader of the Salafi-jihadi trend in northern Jordan," was sentenced in 2005 to three years in Qafqafa prison for his role in a plot that aimed to kill Israeli and American tourists in Irbid, blow up the Irbid office of the Jordanian General Intelligence Department (*al-Mukhabarat*) and attack a tourist festival in the ancient town of Jerash (AP, January 9, 2005). Another 11 individuals have also been convicted in the same case (al-Ghad, September 12, 2005).

When appearing in court, al-Tahawi improvised a poem praising the success of 9/11 and hailed al-Qaeda leaders such as Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. Al-Tahawi lived in Saudi Arabia from 1979 until his repatriation to Jordan in 1990. During his time in Saudi Arabia, he reportedly visited Afghanistan where, according to Jordanian authorities, he trained in the use of weapons. Since returning to Jordan, he held religious lesson groups there and fostered a support network.

After the state execution of two jihadis led to riots at Qafqafa prison in April 2006, al-Tahawi spoke to al-Jazeera on behalf of the rioting prisoners via a smuggled mobile phone. The fact that he was their spokesman indicates that he enjoyed a high status among them. One of the men executed was Khaled al-Bishtawi, a fellow jihadi who was imprisoned because of his involvement in the "group of al-Tahawi" [1]. Al-Tahawi continued to broadcast his rhetoric years later.

In a video broadcast on al-Arabiya in 2009, al-Tahawi appeared at his son's wedding party calling for the restoration of an Islamic caliphate through jihad. In January 2010, Jordan's State Security Court sentenced al-Tahawi, 56, along with another prominent jihadi, Imad Obeidat, to 18 months in prison for "fanning sectarian and racial strife" (Jordan Times, January 5, 2010).

By the time al-Tahawi was jailed for the second time, he already supported the well-known jihadi thinker, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. Thus, when young jihadis who presented themselves as inheritors of al-Zarqawi's legacy in Jordan openly rejected al-Maqdisi's methods, it was also a repudiation of al-Tahawi to a degree, as he and al-Maqdisi are ideological allies. The neo-Zarqawists

challenged al-Maqdisi, accusing him of taking a soft approach to jihad, and accused him of "revising" his jihadi ideology (see *Terrorism Monitor*, November 19, 2008).

The 2011 uprisings sweeping the Middle East and North Africa pose a genuine challenge to jihadis. In toppling two of the ossified, secularist autocrats of the Arab world and genuinely threatening four others, these internet-enabled, tech savvy Arab youth movements have succeeded in doing peacefully what jihadis failed to do over the course of several decades with violence. The revolts, led in part by rising food prices and dire employment prospects rather than obscurantist theocratic musings, have vexed hard-line jihadis who would wish these revolutions to be based on religious motivation as opposed to their more mundane economic and social roots.

Inspired by the popular revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, Jordan's jihadi leaders who sided with al-Maqdisi as opposed to the neo-Zarqawists, brought jihadis into the streets in Jordan in a bid to stay relevant. The jihadi faction of the protestors, led in part by al-Tahawi, demand the release of their jailed brethren and the implementation of sharia law in Jordan.

Not to be left behind, some neo-Zarqawists took part in demonstrations that jihadis organized in several Jordanian cities as well. A recent protest ended bloodily in Zarqa, causing injuries to more than 80 policemen (see *Terrorism Monitor*, May 5). This incident led partly by al-Tahawi landed him in prison again. (Ammannet.net, April 17).

Unlike the more erudite al-Maqdisi, al-Tahawi has no record of sophisticated theorizing for jihadist movements nor has he a list of publications. Despite this, he seems to have some degree of influence on young jihadis in the Kingdom through his lessons and speeches. His influence increased markedly since he helped orchestrate these jihadi-oriented demonstrations. In mid-April, the well-known online jihadi forum *Ansar al-Islam* released a recorded tape of al-Tahawi, produced by "al-Ma'sada Media Productions," discussing the "legitimacy" and "feasibility" of demonstrations and protests [2].

Al-Tahawi, in an interview with Jordanian daily *al-Sabeel*, said that peaceful protest is a means to an end and the question for jihadis is "whether it is legitimate or not? And it is [legitimate] as long as there is no forbidding for it in [the Quran or Hadith]" (*al-Sabeel*,

April 24) [3]. Yet, al-Tahawi has not abandoned violent jihad as he stressed in another interview: “all options are still open for jihadis until the governments meet their demands” (Albosala.com, April 17).

Obviously jihadis in Jordan are at a crossroads. Swinging between violent and peaceful methods of political change, this new path being treaded by al-Tahawi could become a way to defuse violent trends among jihadis. This does not necessarily mean that those adhering to this currently more quiescent trend do not believe in violent jihad, but they are less radicalized in the wake of the Arab revolts, which have greatly influenced them. Hence, if the former trend is properly engaged in the political debate in countries like Jordan, it could turn outspoken individuals like al-Tahawi into models to follow in order to reduce incidents of violence. The alarming alternative would be the neo-Zarqawists becoming the accepted norm of dissidence for politically frustrated jihadis if relatively peaceful (even if Islamist in nature) protests are quashed.

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Notes:

1. To view the clip, see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BtczVdcVso>.
2. To view al-Tahawi's comments on Jordan's demonstrations, see <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=36355>.
3. Though the interview was published on April 24 it was conducted previously.

## **General Gabriel Tang: South Sudan's Prodigal Son or Khartoum's Agent of Chaos?**

*By Andrew McGregor*

In the months following January's successful vote for secession from the Republic of Sudan, South Sudan's inherently weak government is already threatened by rebel militias, tribal violence, and clashes between gunmen in its oil-rich Jonglei state, South Sudan's largest. Prominent among the insurgent generals imperiling the unity of South Sudan as it approaches full independence in July is Major General Gabriel Tang (a.k.a. Gabriel Gatwich Chan Tanginya, i.e. “Long Pipe”). Though Tang, a Nuer tribesman from Jonglei's Fangak County, began his career as a separatist rebel, he has long been counted as a Khartoum loyalist. Today, General Tang is a Southern warlord of uncertain loyalties following a recent series of professions of loyalty to the Government of South Sudan (GoSS), interspersed with a spate of armed revolts carried out by his followers known as the Tangginyang. General Tang's future direction will play a crucial role in the development of South Sudan's massive oil potential—its only important source of revenue and the key to the embryonic nation's transition from autonomous region to internationally recognized state.

### **Gabriel Tang Joins the Anyanya I Rebellion**

Gabriel Tang began his career by taking up arms as a youth in the Anyanya separatist rebellion (1955 – 1972) that broke out in South Sudan after a number of Southern garrisons mutinied in the lead-up to Sudanese independence in 1956[1]. Under the terms of the 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement, most of the Anyanya rebels were absorbed into the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF). However, some of the Anyanya fighters rejected integration into the SAF, with a part finding a home in the Ugandan Army of Idi Amin. Tang was in the camp of those who rejected the attempt at SAF integration. He remained in the Upper Nile district until he joined one of a number of dissident militias operating in the South under the umbrella term “Anyanya II.”

### **The SPLA and Anyanya II**

Tang's differences with the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) and its late leader Colonel John Garang date back to 1983 – 84. During that period,



the Anyanya II movement came into conflict with the Garang's then-nascent SPLA, which had renewed the rebellion against Sudan's central government. Many in the ethnic-Nuer militias of Anyanya II rejected what they viewed as ethnic-Dinka domination of the SPLA's leadership.

By 1984, Khartoum began to exploit these divisions, providing arms and funds to a more formally organized "Anyanya II" under the leadership of Nuer leaders such as William Abdullah Chuol and Paulino Matip Nhial. The hope was that this pliant militia would help secure the oil fields of Jonglei; but as the Anyanya II enjoyed only limited support amongst the Nuer, the result was a bitter conflict between Nuer militia members and Nuer forces under the SPLA banner [2]. The pro-Khartoum Anyanya II were successful in disrupting SPLA supply routes and attacking columns of SPLA recruits headed to Ethiopia for training. By 1988, however, most of the movement had decided to join the SPLA. Those remaining hostile to the SPLA, including Gabriel Tang, began to be more closely intertwined with Sudan's military intelligence and regular army.

#### Rivalry within the SPLA during the Second Civil War

The SPLA suffered a devastating split in 1991 when three senior commanders, Riek Machar, Gordon Kong Chuol and Lam Akol, announced the overthrow of John Garang as the movement's leader. In practice, however, Garang remained in the field with substantial forces under his command. The following decade witnessed a brutal civil war within a civil war between Garang's SPLA-Mainstream (a.k.a. SPLA-Torit) and Riek Machar's SPLA-Nasir faction. As Riek Machar's pro-Khartoum tendencies became clearer (they were eventually sealed in a 1998 agreement with Khartoum), SPLA-Nasir began to splinter and once again there were numerous clashes between different Nuer factions.

Following Riek Machar's 1998 agreement with Khartoum, his SPLA-Nasir forces were renamed the United Democratic Salvation Front/South Sudan Defense Force (UDSF/SSDF). A clear Khartoum loyalist by now, Tang became a leading commander in the SSDF with a close association to the SAF. After the 1998 agreement, SSDF figures such as Riek Machar and Gabriel Tang were commonly seen about in Khartoum. Even after Machar's 2002 reconciliation with John Garang and SPLA-Mainstream, Tang remained a pro-government militia leader. The SSDF became so closely identified with Northern interests that it was not allowed to be

an independent party to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) talks on the grounds the movement had become synonymous with Khartoum.

#### 2004 Campaign Against the Shilluk People in the Upper Nile

General Tang's most notorious campaign took place in the Shilluk tribal lands of the Upper Nile in 2004. The origin of the violence dated back to 1991, when Shilluk leader Dr. Lam Akol broke away from the SPLA to form the ironically named SPLA-United. Fighting between the SPLA and the breakaway 'United' faction continued until the Fashoda Peace Agreement of 1997 landed Lam Akol's movement firmly in the pro-Khartoum camp. When Akol rejoined the mainstream SPLA in August 2003, Khartoum took steps to bring the Shilluk country in Upper Nile back under government control. Pro-Khartoum Shilluk militias were joined by SAF gunboats and pro-Khartoum Nuer militias under the leadership of General Tang, General Paulino Matip and Tang's lieutenant, Thomas Mabor Dhol in an offensive along the west banks of the Nile and Bahr al-Ghazal rivers. They attacked the village of the Shilluk king, among others. Shilluk communities were devastated, suffering large losses of civilian life and tens of thousands displaced (Sudan Vision, March 13; IRIN, March 13, 2004). Tang's efforts were rewarded with a promotion to Major General in the SAF.

#### A Three-Day Battle in Malakal

When many Nuer leaders of pro-Khartoum militias went over to the SPLA in 2006 after signing onto the Juba Declaration, Tang remained firmly in the Khartoum camp, unwilling to associate with the Dinka commanders in the SPLA who he believed intended the subjugation of the Nuer. After a dispute between the SPLA and the Tangginiya, shooting broke out in the Upper Nile State capital of Malakal, with both sides claiming the other had fired first. The SSDF accused GoSS president Salva Kiir (see *Militant Leadership Monitor*, November 2010) and Riek Machar of engineering an "assassination attempt" on "SSDF Chief of Operations, Major General Tang" that began with an assault on Tang's Malakal residence (SSUDA-SSDF Press Release, March 29, 2009). The dispute turned into a pitched battle, with Tang's force falling back on a barracks close to the Malakal airport (Reuters, December 2, 2006).

After three days of fighting and looting that had scattered bodies in the streets and left Malakal without a water



supply, Salva Kiir cut short an official visit to Uganda to return to South Sudan (New Vision [Kampala], December 1). Malakal residents began to draw water directly from the Nile, which was contaminated with dead bodies, exacerbating an outbreak of cholera in the area (Reuters, December 2, 2006). Leaving thousands of local residents displaced or in mourning, General Tang returned to the security of Khartoum.

## Collapse of the Joint Integrated Units in Malakal

Under the terms of the 2005 CPA, Tang had the option of aligning his men with either Khartoum's SAF or the Southern SPLA. After opting for the former, Khartoum decided to send Tang's fighters south as part of the Northern component of the newly formed Joint Integrated Units (JIU). Given Tang's history in the region, Khartoum's decision to deploy Tang in his regional home capital of Malakal could be described as somewhere between mischievous and provocative.

The Joint Integrated Units were created by the CPA as a means of providing security in the South and various border regions in the run-up to the 2011 Southern independence referendum. The units were envisioned as a cooperative mix of regular army and SPLA troops that could, in the event of a vote against independence, serve as the basis for an integrated Sudanese army. In practice, however, the northern and southern elements of the JIUs remained segregated, typically living in separate barracks and running separate patrols. Khartoum's practice of sending pro-Khartoum Southern militias who were at odds with locals and the SPLA rather than elements of the regular army in many cases only aggravated the security situation.

General Tang's surprise return to the southern city of Malakal in February 2009, resulted in new clashes involving tanks and artillery between the JIU's Tangginya and the SPLA, which left 60 dead before Tang's men withdrew (New Sudan Vision, February 25, 2009; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, March 13, 2009). Tang found his militia fighting on its own when the commander of the remaining JIU/SAF unit of 200 men decided to leave Tang to his own devices. Tang's commander handed himself and his unit over to the SPLA (UN Integrated Regional Information Network, February 28, 2009).

In the context of the 2005 CPA and Tang's decision to align his militia with the SAF rather than the SPLA, SPLA deputy chief-of-staff Major General James Hoth described Tang as "a spoiler... He has never been in the

SPLA. He has been with the government militia" (UN Integrated Regional Information Network, February 28, 2009). Reflecting the urgency of the situation, SPLM Information Minister Gabriel Changson Chang said at the time: "We think Tangginyang have been used to unleash another civil war in South Sudan (AFP, February 25).

Tang claimed in a local radio interview that he was oblivious to his status as a wanted criminal in South Sudan. He went on to state that he had no desire for people to die because of his presence, though he finished the appearance on an ominous note: "This is a time for peace, not for war. I thought what happened in Malakal in 2006 was not my fault. If I knew that I am the one [responsible for the violence], I would not come to Malakal again. I know the time when I will fight my war in Southern Sudan." Tang claimed the purpose of his return was to prepare the funeral of a daughter and to begin renovation of his house, "which collapsed a long time ago." (Sudan Radio Service, February 27, 2009).

## Tang Accepts the Amnesty, October 2010

Under an amnesty declared by SPLM President Salva Kiir, Tang arrived in the South Sudanese capital of Juba in October 2010 to meet with Kiir and the now Vice President of the GoSS, Riek Machar, pledging his full allegiance to the SPLA/M leadership. The militia leader promised he would not be returning to Khartoum and would oversee the assimilation of his troops into the SPLA [3]. Surprisingly, Tang announced that he had been set ahead to prepare for the arrival of rebel generals George Athor and Gordon Kong Chuol, who Tang said were ready to rejoin the Southern government (Sudan Tribune, October 15, 2010).

## General Tang and the Jarch Management Group

Only days after joining the SPLA, Tang also joined the advisory board of New York-based investment firm, Jarch Management Group Ltd (JMG), which had leased an enormous area of 4,000 square kilometers of farmland in Jonglei in 2009 [4]. Nearly all the oil-rich land covered by the leases is inhabited by members of the Nuer tribe, who complain the formula for local shares of oil revenues are not being followed by the GoSS. In doing so, Tang joined fellow Nuer SSDF commanders Paulino Matip, Peter Gadet Yakah, Gordon Kong Chuol and a number of others who had found roles with JMG. According to a statement from JMG, Tang's presence on the board "further strengthens us. He expands the

company's knowledge base as he hails from Jonglei state and will give the company much needed expertise in Jonglei and expand its expertise in Greater Upper Nile" (*Sudan Tribune*, October 23, 2010). JMG's lease of farmland surprised many, particularly as the company had always shown an interest in energy development rather than agriculture (agricultural investment in South Sudan was exempt from sanctions).

A 2006 SSDF press release noted: "with the production and sharing agreements that we have signed with JMG over the past few years, this company is set to become the largest producer of oil and gas in South Sudan" (SSUDA/SSDF Press Release September 20, 2006). The GoSS hopes that proper development of the huge Jonglei reserves will allow Southern oil production to increase to 2,000,000 barrels of petroleum per day (bpd) from the current 450,000 (*Sudan Tribune*, January 13).

Yet, JMG did not receive a unanimous welcome in the Nuer lands. The Nuer Congress described JMG as "a destructive oil business company; if left unchecked, it will cause unprecedented destructions in the great Upper Nile region, particularly in areas inhabited by the Nuer and the Dinka where it finances rogue groups" (*Gurtong.net*, October 19, 2006).

JMG claims that numerous contracts for oil and gas exploration in Jonglei were signed by JMG and the SSDF in 2003 and 2004, prior to the formation of the GoSS. A clause in the contracts said they would remain in force should the SSDF join forces with other groups to create a GoSS. The SSDF reaffirmed the oil contracts in 2006 (SSUDA/SSDF Press Release September 20, 2006).

## New Clashes in Malakal

Fighting again broke out in Malakal, once more in early February, when Tangganiya in the JIU refused to give up their weapons, including tanks and artillery, which were scheduled to be returned to Khartoum along with the Northern troops in the JIU. Tang's troops also rejected plans to redeploy them to Juba and wanted to retain their (inflated) ranks and keep their units intact during integration with the SPLA. The SPLA was also alarmed that Tang continued to recruit new fighters at the assembly area even as his forces supposedly awaited integration. The view among many SPLA commanders was that Tang continued to be paid by Khartoum and was deliberately disrupting the peace process in South Sudan (*Sudan Radio Service*, February 7; *Sudan Tribune*, April 25).

The disputed artillery was brought into action in the fighting that followed (*Anyuak Media*, February 4). At least 50 people were killed in the resulting clashes before SPLA and United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) troops were able to restore order (*AFP*, February 5; February 6). According to an SPLM minister, Tang "was personally involved in the fighting but narrowly survived because he ran away to Kolnyang after our forces overran his headquarters" (*Sudan Tribune*, April 25). Eventually the SPLA helped return the weaponry to the North. Before the fighting erupted, Tang was scheduled to become one of South Sudan's many Lieutenant Generals, a rank generously doled out to various warlords and militia leaders who supposedly agreed to bring their troops under the SPLA's force umbrella.

## General Tang Surrenders

Fifty-seven of Tang's militiamen were killed in a battle with SPLA forces in northern Jonglei on April 23. The fighting was reported to have broken out after a senior officer of the Tangganiya was killed for refusing to participate in integration operations (*Sudan Tribune*, April 25). Two days later, Tang surrendered along with his two top commanders, Mabor and Gatwech, as well as 1,300 of his men. An SPLA spokesman claimed efforts to integrate Tang's men into the SPLA would continue (*Sudan Radio Service*, April 26; *AFP*, April 25). It was uncertain whether the amnesty would continue to apply to Tang, but the General claimed he still wished to pursue integration, describing the February battle in Malakal as "unexpected" (*Sudan Tribune*, April 25).

The latest information states General Tang is under house arrest while it is being determined what to do with him. An SPLA spokesman said a court martial would not necessarily follow: "The next step is for the government of southern Sudan, because it is a political issue. It is not a pure military scenario. Because we are in the army, we don't manage the law. It is the government of southern Sudan that will decide upon it" (*Sudan Radio Service*, May 4).

## Conclusion

General Tang has been a resolute opponent of the SPLA and what he perceives as its agenda for Dinka domination of the South. As such, his assertions of loyalty to the SPLA appear strategic rather than heartfelt. The extraordinary patience of the GoSS with Tang is explained by the government's need to pacify the Nuer

community living above Jonglei State's oil-soaked Bloc B held by French oil giant, Total (AFP, January 13). To be taken seriously as a viable nation-state, South Sudan cannot be seen to enter full independence in July while fighting half a dozen bush wars on its own territory. With ongoing fighting in the oil-producing border region of Abyei (still disputed between Khartoum and Juba) fostering the possibility of a fresh round of North-South military confrontations, it is also essential for Juba to present a unified military front. However, given General Tang's record of duplicity and taunts, it seems unlikely that he can be counted on to become a pillar of Southern unity in the difficult days of consolidation and state-building that lie ahead for South Sudan.

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Notes:

1. Anyanya is defined as "Snake Poison" in the Madi language of South Sudan.
2. Douglas H. Johnson, "The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars," International African Institute, Oxford, 2003, pp. 68-69.
3. Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment – Small Arms Survey, March 2011, <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/pdfs/facts-figures/armed-groups/southern-sudan/emerging/HSBA-Armed-Groups-Tang.pdf>.
4. The Jarch Management Group Ltd—headed by a former AIG executive called Philippe Heilberg--lists its contact address on its website as being in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region while a Google search lists it as being registered on the island of Tortola in the British Virgin Islands. See: <http://www.jarchcapital.com/contact.php>; [http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?iframe&page=imprimable&id\\_article=17469](http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?iframe&page=imprimable&id_article=17469).

## South Yemen's Pacifist General: A Portrait of Brigadier Nasser al-Nuba

*By Michael Horton*

### Background

While international attention is currently focused on anti-government protests and factional fighting in Yemen, since 2007 south Yemen has been the scene of large and often efficiently organized anti-government demonstrations. The Yemenis involved in the protests, strikes, and sit-ins in south Yemen are demonstrating against what they regard as the north's unfair treatment of the south and south Yemenis. With the outbreak of country wide anti-government protests in February of this year, southerners have taken to the streets in ever increasing numbers and their demands for secession from the north are growing louder and increasing in popularity among southerners.

Brigadier General Nasser al-Nuba is one of the key figures and leaders within what can be termed the "southern revolt". Brigadier al-Nuba helped found the Southern Mobility Movement (SMM) in 2008 and remains one of its most influential leaders. He also established and heads the Military Consultative Association (MCA), which is an organization that represents officers and soldiers who were forcibly "retired" from the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) Army. [1] Brigadier al-Nuba also chairs the National Council for Independence of the South. Through organizations like the MCA and SMM, Brigadier al-Nuba has helped shape and define the southern revolt. He has played a key role in identifying and articulating the demands of southerners and the demand for the reestablishment of an independent south Yemen.

Despite escalating violence both on the part of the Yemeni government and some southern protesters, Brigadier al-Nuba has maintained his view that non-violent protests, sit-ins, and strikes are the only methods capable of achieving southern independence. Brigadier al-Nuba's consistent calls for peaceful protests and his resistance to calls for armed revolt have lost him support within the SMM. However, his early support for secession, his persecution by the Yemeni government, and his position in the generally well respected former PDRY Army, have enhanced his role as a senior statesman within the south.

As current factional fighting within north Yemen grows, calls for secession of the south will only grow louder. Brigadier al-Nuba will be one of the figures with whom a post-Saleh Yemeni government will have no choice but to engage.

A General in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen Army

Nasser al-Nuba was born in 1943 and grew up during the British occupation and administration of south Yemen. The Nuba family is native to Shabwa Governorate where Brigadier al-Nuba and his family continue to live. Following the withdrawal of British forces and administrators in 1967, the Marxist-inspired National Liberation Front (NLF) gained the advantage over its political and military rival, the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY). Nasser al-Nuba and much of the population of Shabwa at least nominally backed the NLF. In 1969, after much political infighting within the NLF, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) was declared. The PDRY government pursued a Marxist/socialist agenda that included radical policies like 'de-tribalization'. On some levels these policies, particularly de-tribalization, were successful. The comparatively egalitarian PDRY Army—in contrast to the army of north Yemen and what became the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR)—was not organized along tribal lines and promotions were generally based on ability and performance rather than tribal connections.

Nasser al-Nuba excelled in the PDRY Army and quickly moved up through the ranks. His expertise was in artillery and he was chosen to attend courses in the former Soviet Union with which the PDRY had close ties. The PDRY Army enjoyed the respect of many south Yemenis due to its relatively apolitical status. While party loyalty was necessary for success in the PDRY Army, ability and professionalism remained the most important factors governing movement through the ranks. With the beginning of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in early 1990, the PDRY lost its primary financial backer and was forced to expedite its long discussed unification with the north. Due to outstanding political issues and the inherent difference in their structures, the armed forces of the PDRY and the YAR were never successfully integrated. Following unification in 1990, Brigadier al-Nuba – like most other PDRY generals – retained his command. In May 1994, the south seceded from what was now a unified Republic of Yemen (ROY). The short-lived Democratic Republic of Yemen

(DRC) was declared. Brigadier al-Nuba, like most of the former PDRY armed forces, pledged loyalty to the DRC and chose to fight against ROY forces. The armed forces of ROY were successful and the south was occupied thus ending the south's brief stint of emancipation from Sana'a. Nasser al-Nuba, along with much of the DRC's political and military leadership, went into exile. Al-Nuba's exile was brief and he returned after an amnesty offer from the government of the ROY. However, al-Nuba along with thousands of southerners within the armed forces and extensive southern bureaucracy were forcibly retired – many without pensions.

### Organizing the Southern Military Retirees

After the 1994 civil war, the northerner dominated government of ROY pursued punitive policies in the south. The defeat of the southern armed forces resulted in widespread looting and many southerner-owned homes, businesses, and lands were occupied or seized by tribesmen and officials loyal to the government of ROY president Ali Abdullah Saleh. The government of Ali Abdullah Saleh promised to address the issues of property seizures, and the forcibly retired officers and bureaucrats. The ROY government also promised a policy of federalization as part of its efforts to address the grievances of southerners. Rather than addressing these problems and implementing needed reforms, President Saleh attempted to control the south by employing a two pronged approach that worked in the north: exerting control through a patronage network and military occupation. The approach worked but only in the short term. The ailing Yemeni economy forced a curtailment of both the patronage network and limited government services. The results of this are now evident throughout Yemen but the south, which was not regarded by the Saleh government as being as central to the maintenance of power as the north, began experiencing high levels of unrest in 2007.

Some of the first widespread protests and strikes were organized by Brigadier al-Nuba as the leader of the Council for Southern Military Retirees. The deleterious effects of the faltering Yemeni economy were acutely felt by the forcibly retired soldiers and bureaucrats whose pensions had long since been rendered worthless due to both inflation and the devaluation of the Yemeni rial. In addition to being well read in military history, al-Nuba is an avid student of the non-violent methodology of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Brigadier al-Nuba and other former PDRY Army officers began organizing and conducting peaceful sit-ins and protests



in Mukalla, Ataq, and Aden in May 2007. The Saleh government ordered the arrest of Brigadier al-Nuba and other leading military retirees. Al-Nuba was extracted from his Aden home on September 2, 2007 by security forces and put on trial in a military court in Sana'a (*Yemen Times*, December 18, 2008).

In response to this indignation, the number of protesters grew into the thousands, reaching the tens of thousands by October 14, the holiday that commemorates the beginning of South Yemen's revolt against the British who once administered that region. The central government responded to the protests by killing four demonstrators. Those calling for al-Nuba's release described the Saleh regime's actions as "state terrorism" (*Yemen Observer*, October 6, 2007). The protests continued until Nasser al-Nuba was released in November 2007. The protests and the government's response led to the creation of the Southern Mobility Movement in 2008.

## Rise of the Southern Mobility Movement (SMM)

Brigadier al-Nuba and the other military retirees formed the nucleus of what would become the Southern Mobility Movement (SMM). The retired officers, al-Nuba in particular, benefited from the respect that southerners had historically accorded to the PDRY Army. They also benefited from the fact that they and the many civil servants that joined them are the last representatives of a sovereign southern state. The SMM was organized as an umbrella organization under which the activities of a number of groups like Brigadier al-Nuba's Military Consultative Association (MCA) could be coordinated. The SMM's diffuse structure and shifting, poorly defined leadership structure have impaired its ability to speak with one voice. However, the SMM's diffuse structure has also impeded the Saleh government's efforts to crack down on its leaders and infiltrate its member groups.

Since its founding in 2008, Nasser al-Nuba's role as a leader in the SMM has been weakened. The government's often violent crackdowns on southern protesters have caused many of the SMM's member groups and leadership to question Brigadier al-Nuba's insistence that protests remain non-violent. Tariq al-Fadhli, a former mujahid and head of the influential Abyan Governorate-based al-Fadhli family, has called for violence against the Saleh government (*Yemen Post*, April 2010). Al-Nuba rejected al-Fadhli's calls for armed revolt, reiterating the need for peaceful protests and the need for legal answers to the question of southern independence.

Brigadier al-Nuba's importance to the SMM and the southern revolt remains significant. In April 2010 he was the target of a car bombing that instead killed a former PDRY colonel (Aden Press, April 2010). Al-Nuba accused the government of the attempted assassination. While military retirees, and Brigadier Nuba in particular, continue to act as an important force within the SMM and in southern politics in general, a shift to younger leaders — many with no associations with the former PDRY — is underway.

## Brigadier General Nuba and the Revolution in Yemen

The ongoing anti-government demonstrations in Yemen and the factional and tribal fighting in Yemen have done little to change the opinion of most southerners who continue to demand secession. The SMM has consistently supported what it has termed its "northern brothers" but has been discordant in whether or not it would support or take part in a unity or opposition-led government. Brigadier al-Nuba has remained consistent in his calls for an independent south Yemen while supporting the efforts of the people of the "Yemen Arab Republic" (north Yemen before 1990) in their efforts to overthrow the Saleh government (MCA press release, April). The policy of federalization — promising greater autonomy for the southern governorates — has also been wholly rejected by al-Nuba as a possible solution to the north and south's poisonous relations.

## Conclusion

As a founder of the SMM and a leading figure in south Yemeni politics, Brigadier al-Nuba will likely have a role in future north-south negotiations. Though not without critics — even among the cadre of PDRY general officers — al-Nuba enjoys considerable popularity and respect among members of the old regime and southern youth. This fact was clearly evidenced by the thousands that took to the streets after his arrest in 2007. While al-Nuba, like a growing number of southerners, is seemingly intransigent on the issue of secession, his advocacy of non-violence and his respect for legalistic approaches to resolving deeply divisive north-south issues means that any future Sana'a-based opposition or unity government would be unwise to ignore him.

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Note:

1. Reflective of the PDRY bureaucracy, there are a profusion of councils and groups in south Yemen—many operating with multiple names in both Arabic and in their English translations. The MCA is also called the Consultative Council of Retired Military and Civilian Associations, an outgrowth of the Council for Southern Military Retirees.