

Sudan: Preserving Peace in the East

Africa Report N°209 | 26 November 2013

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Executive Summary

The situation in Sudan's forgotten East – without deadly conflict since the 2006 Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) – stands in contrast to the fighting besetting the country's other peripheries. But this peace is increasingly fragile. Seven years after the ESPA's signing, the conflict's root causes remain and in some respects are more acute, due to the failure to implement many of the agreement's core provisions. Mirroring elsewhere in the country, with no sign of genuine efforts by Khartoum to address the situation, conflict could erupt in the East again and lead to further national fragmentation. All ESPA stakeholders urgently need to reconvene and address the deteriorating situation; the leading signatories need publicly to concede that the promises of the original agreement have not met expectations and reach a consensus on remedial measures.

The ESPA's failure is another example of Khartoum's piecemeal approach to resolving conflicts and the divide-and-rule default politics of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP). Post-2006, attention and resources rapidly shifted to Darfur and now Blue Nile and South Kordofan. The failure to implement the ESPA, together with NCP machinations, has hopelessly divided – mostly along tribal lines – the Eastern Front (EF), the alliance of armed groups that signed the agreement.

At the same time, continued exploitation of the region's resources by a centre that shares little is fuelling a secessionist agenda even among the eastern branches of the NCP. Various eastern factions now call for toppling the regime and joining the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), an alliance of essentially southern and Darfur-based rebel groups. Renewed armed conflict is more likely, especially given the spreading war in South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur.

Meanwhile, the government is allowing local tribal militias to arm, as communal relations deteriorate. Residents worry that eastern Sudan will become the next Darfur, with conflicts developing between local actors over claims to land and resources, some backed by the state. The trafficking of arms and people attests to a creeping criminalisation of local state structures. Finally, the unpredictable relationship between Sudan and Eritrea and the growing Israeli-Iranian competition around the Red Sea could lead to national, regional and other international actors using aggrieved eastern factions as their military proxies.

Ultimately, the East's grievances are due to elites' decades-long failure to achieve national consensus on how the country should be governed and to build an inclusive and peaceful state. As Sudan prepares to write a new constitution, a truly comprehensive national mechanism – as Crisis Group has recommended in its last three Sudan reports: *Sudan: Major Reform or More War*; *Sudan's Spreading Conflict (I): War in South Kordofan*; and *Sudan's Spreading Conflict (II): War in Blue Nile* – is needed that addresses the core questions of its identity, governance, wealth and power sharing.

Recommendations

To address increasing communal tensions and growing insecurity

To the government of Sudan, the NCP and the Eastern Front (EF):

1. Convene the Consultative Conference on the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (CCESPA) to provide a forum for all stakeholders to discuss the failure to implement the ESPA and propose recommendations to correct this.
2. Establish an independent review process to address perceived shortcomings in the original program of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of EF combatants.
3. Establish the Panel of Experts under the National Civil Service Commission (NCSC) to determine the representation of eastern Sudanese people in the National Civil Service, identify imbalances and recommend practical measures to redress them.
4. Fulfil financial obligations to the Eastern Sudan Reconstruction and Development Fund (ESRDF); establish effective anti-corruption mechanisms to ensure a transparent and accountable disbursement of development funds; include local stakeholders in decision-making, management and monitoring of projects; establish development priorities; and improve basic services, especially in war affected areas.
5. Allow immediate international access to South Tokar to assess the humanitarian situation.

To the UN, European Union and neighbouring states:

6. Support the convening of CCESPA; promote local efforts for tribal reconciliation in all eastern states; and encourage the engagement of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's (IGAD) national Governmental Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) with state and tribal authorities.
7. Support the national and local authorities in undertaking an independent review to address perceived shortcomings of the original program for DDR of EF combatants.
8. Call on the government to allow immediate humanitarian access to South Tokar.
9. Support credible national and regional efforts, in line with international standards, to combat arms and human trafficking.

To initiate a meaningful national dialogue and transition

To the government of Sudan:

10. Bring the NCP, the SRF, other opposition forces and civil society groups, as well as the EF and other Eastern parties, together in an arrangement to govern for a limited period with well-defined parameters (based on agreed principles reiterated in previous agreements) that is intended to lead first to a comprehensive ceasefire and humanitarian access to conflict areas; and allow the political forces to flesh out a roadmap for a durable peace process, perhaps taking the 28 June 2011 framework agreement and the 24 April 2013 Africa Union High-Level Im-

plementation Panel draft Declaration of Common Intent as a basis for discussion of a national transition that includes:

- a) debate and agreement on a system of governance that can end the conflicts between the “centre-Khartoum” and Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, as well as the growing grievances in the East and North; and
- b) drafting of a permanent constitution.

**To the UN Security Council, AU Peace and Security Council,
Council of the League of Arab States, Intergovernmental Authority on
Development (IGAD) and the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea:**

11. Demand and work for a single, comprehensive solution to Sudan’s multiple crises in a process that runs in parallel with the negotiations between Sudan and South Sudan but is not conditioned on them; and coordinate the two tracks so as to prevent obstacles in one delaying or derailing the other.

Nairobi/Brussels, 26 November 2013

Sudan: Preserving Peace in the East

I. Introduction

In October 2006, the insurgent Eastern Front (EF) and the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) signed the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) in Asmara, the culmination of five months of talks. It provided for power- and wealth-sharing arrangements aimed at ending decades of economic and political marginalisation. Since then, Sudan's East, divided into Red Sea, Kassala and Gedaref states, has not yet erupted into fresh conflict, but social and economic conditions are gradually deteriorating, communal relations are fraying, and the prospects of preserving the fragile peace are fading fast.

The ESPA was arguably an emergency adjunct to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) that ignored Darfur and the East. A deal was urgently needed, since the CPA required the SPLM to withdraw from the East, leaving its former allies in the Beja Congress (BC) and Rashayda Free Lions (RFL) – combined into the EF in 2005 – either to continue their insurgency or sue for peace. Fortunately, wider regional concerns, specifically involving Sudan and the EF's ally, Eritrea, encouraged a peace process, though not without cost to the integrity of the East's cause.

At the time, Crisis Group argued against another piecemeal approach,¹ and the EF itself demanded a national framework. The ESPA was clearly a sub-national deal, however, but – pushed by Eritrea – it was “the best deal available” at the time.² In fact, it was not a bad agreement, but implementation of its three major provisions – allocation of 60 legislative and executive positions to the EF in federal and state institutions, establishment of the Eastern Sudan Reconstruction and Development Fund (ESRDF) and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of EF forces – was partial and flawed. Other provisions remained wholly unfulfilled. The result is a fragmented BC and a hollowed-out EF, frustrated local constituencies and continued marginalisation, with most easterners still living in poverty and without access to basic services.³

This report assesses the current situation in the East seven years after the signing of the ESPA. It provides a brief background to the EF, as well as the national and regional context for the agreement and its partial implementation. Finally, it assesses the current drivers for renewed conflict and what are needed as remedial measures. It is based on field research in Port Sudan, Kassala and Khartoum and reflects the views of both local stakeholders and the parties to the agreement.

¹ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°102, *Saving Peace in the East*, 5 January 2006.

² Crisis Group interview, former Beja Congress (BC) leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

³ For another recent study of the background and impact of the ESPA, see Munzoul Assal, “Six Years after the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement: An Assessment”, in Gunnar M. Sørbo and Abdel Ghaffar (eds.), *Sudan Divided: Continuing Conflict in a Contested State* (New York, 2013), pp. 141-160.

II. The Road to the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement

A. *Sudan's Forgotten East: People and Politics*⁴

Eastern Sudan's population is approximately six million, at least half Beja, a confederation of non-Arab peoples.⁵ The Beja include the Hadendowa, the largest tribe (approximately 600,000, some of whom also live in Eritrea); the Amar'ar, primarily in the Red Sea State; the Beni Amer, divided between Sudan and Eritrea; and the Bishariyyin, divided between Sudan and Egypt. All speak TuBedawiye (from the Cushitic linguistic group) except the Beni Amer, who speak Tigre, a Semitic language, and are often considered a distinct ethnic group.⁶

Several Arab(ised) tribes also reside in the East: the Shukriyya, predominant in Gedaref; the Shaigiyya and Ja'aliyin, from the Nile valley; and the Rashayda, Bedouin nomads who migrated from Saudi Arabia in the mid-nineteenth century and live on the outskirts of Kassala and along the Eritrean border.⁷ Additionally, up to 40 per cent of Gedaref's population is descendant of West or Central African migrants from the Hausa (Niger and Nigeria), Zabarma (or Zarma from Niger) and Borgo (Chad) tribes. Many Darfurians also live in the East, especially in Port Sudan and Kassala, as well as a large group of Halfawiyyin (Nubians), who were forcefully moved from their lands in Wadi Halfa (North Sudan) flooded by the construction of Egypt's High Dam in the 1960s and resettled in Khashm al-Qirba/Halfa al-Gedida (New Halfa), west of Kassala.⁸

Despite high poverty levels, the East is one of Sudan's richer regions, with Port Sudan the gateway to most foreign trade (including oil) and a number of large-scale, irrigated agricultural schemes. However, trade and farming revenue has not benefited the region's majority of herdsman and subsistence farmers. For two decades, recurrent drought and famine has decimated rural livelihoods. The highly centralised government, with a near monopoly on the collection and redistribution of revenues, has returned only meagre allocations for education, health and other services in the East.⁹

⁴ For general background, see Crisis Group Report, *Saving Peace in the East*, op. cit.; John Young, "The Eastern Front and the Struggle against Marginalisation", Small Arms Survey, 2007. For detailed background on two of the eastern states, see Catherine Miller, "Power, Land and Ethnicity in the Kassala-Gedaref States: an Introduction", pp. 3-58, in Catherine Miller (ed.), *Land, Ethnicity and Political Legitimacy in Eastern Sudan (Kassala and Gedaref States)* (Cairo, 2005).

⁵ According to the April 2008 census that many deemed inaccurate. Salih Amaar, "Ringling the Final Bells", www.grifna.com, April 2012. For earlier figures that exclude Red Sea state see Francois Ireton, "A Demographic Profile for Kassala and Gedaref States", in Miller (ed.), op. cit., pp. 59-98.

⁶ Other smaller tribes include al-Habab, al-Halanga, al-Kamalab, al-Sigolab, al-Ashraf, al-Kimilab, al-Irtiga, al-Shailab and al-Hassanab, culturally similar to the larger Beja sections. Ireton, "A Demographic Profile", op. cit.

⁷ The Nile valley "riverine" tribes have held privileged positions throughout the colonial and post-colonial period and greater access to state resources, especially higher education, and formed the East's administrative and business class. Einas Ahmed, "Political Dynamics and the Search for Legitimacy at the Local Level: the Case of Kassala State", in *ibid.*, pp. 101-118.

⁸ Ireton, "A Demographic Profile", op. cit., pp. 61-64.

⁹ Einas Ahmed, "Political Dynamics", op. cit., p. 105. See also, Sara Pantuliano, "Comprehensive Peace? Causes and Consequences of Underdevelopment in Eastern Sudan", Institute of Development Studies, University of Dar es Salam (2005), p. 14.

B. *The Beja Congress*

Local political history has been shaped by the Beja peoples' struggle to preserve their non-Arab identity and livelihoods and for better resource management. The Beja Congress (BC), formed in 1958 and registered as a political party in 1965, called for a fairer distribution of resources and the devolution of power for all regions through a truly federal government. For most educated Beja, the BC was also an alternative to the traditionally dominant Nationalist Unionist Party, later renamed the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which they held had not sufficiently represented local, especially Beja interests.¹⁰

General Jaafar Nimeiri banned all parties when he came to power in Khartoum in the May 1969 coup and later established a one-party system led by his own Sudan Socialist Union. The Beja were initially well represented in the one-party system, at one point controlling nine of eleven ministerial positions in the regional government. However, Nimeiri's promised devolution was not realised, and he was forced from power by a popular uprising that reintroduced multi-party politics in 1985. At the same time, famine struck much of the Horn of Africa. With their rural livelihoods devastated and competing with waves of outsiders for jobs and services in the East's cities and towns, a new generation of Beja turned to a revived BC to advocate for their plight.¹¹

In 1989 the National Islamic Front (NIF) seized power in the centre and sought to co-opt the Beja by appealing to deeply held Islamic values and reviving tribal administration. However, the Beja governor, Mohamed Osman Karrar, was replaced and later executed,¹² the most fertile land was expropriated, and young easterners were forced to join the Popular Defence Forces (PDF).¹³ Finally, the NIF centralised power and wealth in the hands of its ruling elite (predominantly riverine Arabs) and banned all political organisations, including the BC.¹⁴

The BC subsequently declared its armed struggle, on 10 April 1995, and two months later its leaders attended a National Democratic Alliance (NDA) meeting in Asmara, Eritrea.¹⁵ NDA membership offered it a common national platform to push for greater autonomy for the East and Eritrean assistance for its nascent armed

¹⁰ The DUP was formed in the mid-1940s and draws support from the Khatmiya Sufi order. Both are led by the Mirghani family. For many years eastern Sudan was a DUP stronghold; the party is currently led by Mohammed Osman al-Mirghani. Miller, "Power, Land and Ethnicity", op. cit., p. 10.

¹¹ Pantuliano, op. cit., p. 14. Also see Munzoul A. M. Assal and Samia A. M. Ali, "Eastern Sudan: Challenges facing the implementation of the peace agreement in Gedaref State", Institute for Security Studies, November 2007, p. 2.

¹² He was executed in April 1990, together with dozens of army officers, for taking part in an April 1990 coup attempt.

¹³ The Popular Defence Forces (PDF) was established to instil combat skills and NIF ideology and to fight with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in the "jihad" in the South. As tension worsened with Eritrea in the mid-1990s, the government intensified PDF recruitment and training, opening hundreds of camps in Gedaref state alone. Crisis Group Report, *Saving Peace in the East*, op. cit., p. 5; Young, op. cit., p. 43.

¹⁴ Ahmed, "Political Dynamics", op. cit., p. 102; Pantuliano, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁵ Formed in 1989, the NDA's peak influence was in the mid-1990s. It comprised the NUP, DUP, Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), Communist Party of Sudan (CPS), Sudanese Alliance Forces, Union of Sudan African Parties (USAP), General Council of Trade Union Federations, Legitimate Command of the Sudanese Armed Forces, Beja Congress (BC), Federal Democratic Alliance, Rashayda Free Lions (RFL, joined 1999), national figures and other smaller parties.

wing.¹⁶ By mid-1997 the NDA, including Beja units, controlled a 114-sq km area with 29 towns and villages along the Red Sea coast and threatened strategic transportation and communication links between Port Sudan and Khartoum.¹⁷

C. *The Eastern Front's Emergence*

1. The National Democratic Alliance's collapse

By 1999, the NDA began to crack. Divisions centred on the rivalry between National Umma Party (NUP) leader al-Sadig al-Mahdi and DUP leader, Mohammed Osman al-Mirghani (then NDA chairman). Al-Mahdi was first to abandon the alliance, when he signed an agreement with the NCP in November 1999.¹⁸ The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), the largest military force operating in the East (under the NDA umbrella), signed the Machakos Protocol with the NCP, in July 2002.¹⁹ Aware that changing political dynamics would undermine his influence, al-Mirghani also sued for peace with the government – controversially as NDA chairman – and signed a framework agreement in Jeddah, in December 2003.²⁰ That paved the way for talks between the NDA and the NCP that led to the June 2005 Cairo Agreement.²¹

But other NDA partners, the BC and RFL in particular, were unhappy with the DUP's lead role and had withdrawn from the Cairo talks in October 2004, demanding a regional solution for the "East's problem" premised on the CPA, and that they be the official NDA representatives for negotiations on eastern Sudan.²² The putative NDA chair, al-Mirghani, objected, claiming the DUP had always been the "sole" representative of the eastern Sudanese people. The NDA also faced declining support from Asmara. In the aftermath of its costly war (1998-2000) and continued tense relations with Ethiopia, Eritrea was eager to improve relations with Sudan.²³ Faced

¹⁶ BC relations with Eritrea pre-dated the NDA. Asmara began training its combatants in 1993. Chairman al-Mirghani objected to the BC's inclusion in the June 1995 NDA conference but ultimately relented under Eritrean pressure. Crisis Group Report, *Saving Peace in the East*, op. cit.; Young, op. cit.

¹⁷ See Crisis Group Report, *Saving Peace in the East*, op. cit. For more detail on the development of the BC-Armed Struggle (as well as the RFL), see Saskia Baas, "Low-intensity conflict in Eastern Sudan: A comparative approach to the development of rebel groups", *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, vol. 24, no.3 (2013), pp. 518-535.

¹⁸ The NUP was established in the mid-1940s. It draws support from the Ansar sect (followers of the Mahdi) and is currently led by former Prime Minister al-Sadig al-Mahdi.

¹⁹ The talks were facilitated by the regional body, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and hosted by Kenya. Continuing the negotiations, the SPLM/A then signed the CPA on 9 January 2005 and joined the NCP in a government of national unity.

²⁰ Mirghani was not mandated by the NDA to sign a framework agreement with Vice President Ali Osman Taha, the government's chief negotiator. The move further divided the NDA leadership. Crisis Group interview, former NDA leader, Khartoum, May 2012.

²¹ The Cairo Agreement granted the NDA a 14 per cent share in power, including legislative and executive positions. All its factions joined the National Assembly. The decision to accept executive posts was made by individual parties. Ibid.

²² The BC and RFL praised the CPA for its equitable distribution of wealth and power, especially South Sudan's greater autonomy. Crisis Group interview, former BC leader, Red Sea, March 2012. See also Crisis Group Report, *Saving Peace in the East*, op. cit., p. 8.

²³ The U.S. supported Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda in the early 1990s, including with \$20 million in military aid, as "front-line" states to contain the ruling NIF's regional Islamist agenda. Sudan backed Islamic jihadi armed opposition groups in Eritrea and Ethiopia; both responded by aiding the Sudanese armed opposition. These alliances changed following the Ethiopia-Eritrea war, as first Ethiopia, then Eritrea, re-built ties with Khartoum. Young, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

with a post war economic crisis, Asmara could ill afford to support the NDA.²⁴ In any case, since most of the NDA had returned to “their historical regional alliances”, the BC and RFL were Asmara’s sole bargaining chip with Khartoum.²⁵

It thus put pressure on the BC and RFL to come together in a proposed “Eastern Front” alliance, in early 2005, that would “protect Eritrea’s security and economic interests” in talks with Khartoum.²⁶ Official visits between Asmara and Khartoum resumed in May 2005.²⁷ These led to the establishment of a joint committee to discuss bilateral relations that agreed to raise diplomatic representation to ambassadorial level and facilitate official and public outreach between the two countries.²⁸

2. Forging the Eastern Front (EF)

Asmara’s main challenge in facilitating the EF’s formation was the lack of structural unity between the civilian and armed wings of the BC movement, which at times took on a factional aspect. In particular, Asmara had limited contact and influence with the civilian arm of the BC – the “Beja Congress-Internal” (BC-Internal) – which was still legally operating inside Sudan but had become increasingly distant from the leadership of the armed wing, The latter, based in and closely mentored by Asmara, was known as the Beja Congress-Armed Struggle (BC-Armed Struggle).²⁹ Nevertheless, leaders of the BC-Armed Struggle and RFL, joined by representatives from BC-Internal and local groups, met in the Eritrean border town of Ribda and announced the EF alliance, in March 2005. Ribda also began the structural “reunification” of the BC-Internal and BC-Armed Struggle wings.³⁰

²⁴ Since late 1996, Asmara had deployed a number of brigades to train, arm and provide logistical support, especially rear bases, to NDA forces, but this declined because of the Eritrea-Ethiopia War. Crisis Group interview, former Eritrean official, Khartoum, May 2012.

²⁵ The SPLM/A went to IGAD and Kenya, and the other NDA factions except the Beja Congress and Rashayda Free Lions to Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The Sudanese Alliance Forces of Abdel Aziz Khalid – Asmara’s strong ally – subsequently fragmented. Crisis Group interview, Beja Congress negotiating team member, Red Sea, March 2012.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Official visits culminated with an Eritrean delegation in Khartoum in October 2005, followed by separate visits to Asmara by Vice President Ali Osman Taha and 1st Vice President Salva Kiir in November and December respectively. Abdel Monaiem Abu Idriss, “Altatawrat alrahina fi Sharq alSudan [Current developments in eastern Sudan], in Sudan’s eighth strategic report (2006-2007)”, Sudan Studies Centre (Cairo, 2007), p. 91.

²⁸ Ibid; Crisis Group Report, *Saving Peace in the East*, op. cit., p. 23.

²⁹ In 1985, Asmara trained some BC members in Marafeet (South Tokar), including Abdellah Kuna, Tal’at al-Sayed, Omar Abu Amna, Abdel Rahman Qulam, Mohammed Osman Bamkar and others. A larger group began training in 1993, led first by Mohammed Tahir Abu Bakr, then Sheikh Omar Mohammed Tahir, and subsequently Musa Mohammed Ahmed. It became the BC-Armed Struggle. Crisis Group interview, former Eritrean official, Khartoum, May 2012. The BC-Internal resumed overt political activity in 2002 after notifying the parties’ registrar in Khartoum, as required by the law. It was led by Captain Ahmed Mohammed Mokhtar, an Amar’ar seaman, chairman; Amna Dirar, secretary general; Mohammed Din, deputy chairman; and Abdellah Musa, deputy secretary general. BC-Internal had no formal organisational relationship with BC-Armed Struggle. Crisis Group interview, former BC leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

³⁰ Local groups included Kayan al-Shamal (the Northern Entity), which represents northerners living in the East; Halfawiyyin (Nubians); the originally West African Dar Bakur; and Darfurian Arab tribes like the Rizeigat Mahamid. Ribda was the site of a large SPLA military base. Crisis Group interview, former BC leader, Red Sea, March 2012; Abdel Monaiem Abu Idriss, op. cit., p. 88.

The founding conference elected BC-Armed Struggle leader Musa Mohammed Ahmed (Hadendowa Beja) chairman, RFL leader Mabrouk Mubarak Saleem (Rashayda Arab) secretary general and BC-Internal Secretary General Amna Dirar (Beni Amer, Beja) deputy chairman.³¹ Though the new leadership claimed it would establish structures and tour the country to mobilise people behind its program, it remained an isolated and loose entity dependent on the individual influence of the *al-Qiyada al-Thulathiya* (triumvirate leadership).³²

The EF was not an alliance of equals: the two BC wings constituted the core, politically and militarily, while the RFL contribution was nominal, reflecting its limited political and military clout. The fighters' integration was theoretical – in practice military coordination between the two factions had only been possible through the NDA's joint military command, under John Garang's leadership. Only a tiny fraction of RFL fighters was active in opposition-controlled areas.³³ Some Congress leaders claimed "no Eastern Front existed; rather there was nothing but the Beja Congress".³⁴ Divisions subsequently emerged between those who sought to dissolve the BC structures and replace them with (a fully integrated) Eastern Front; and those who sought to maintain and strengthen the BC – especially BC-Internal – elements.

D. *Signing the ESPA*

1. NCP calculations

As with Eritrea's ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), so Khartoum's ruling NCP saw a number of reasons to mend bilateral relations. An important driver was the East's strategic location, vital for oil export and food and raw materials import. Another was that with the NDA fragmented through individual agreements with its main factions, the NCP felt it could now settle the East's dossier and pay attention to other important issues.

For example, under the CPA terms, general elections were scheduled for 2009. Given the SPLA's political grip in the autonomous South, the NCP wanted to "present a gift of a formal agreement" to the eastern Sudanese people in order to help secure their vote and so consolidate control over the North.³⁵ An even more pressing

³¹ Though Sudan prevented Dirar and others inside the country from attending, she was elected deputy chairman. Crisis Group Report, *Saving Peace in the East*, p. 14.

³² "In spite of the attempts we had made to tour all eastern states to mobilise the people behind the Eastern Front, we failed to build constituencies for the new body, because people saw it as a formal body created by the Eritreans, and also because the Rashayda lacked political and organisational experience. In effect, it was [only] the Beja Congress cadres that were politically and organisationally active. Because of this, the Eastern Front lacked structures and, hence, we referred to the leadership as the 'triumvirate' because it was the only existing body, which included Musa Mohammed Ahmed, Mabrouk Mubarak Saleem and Amna Dirar". Crisis Group interview, BC negotiating team member, Red Sea, March 2012.

³³ Crisis Group interview, former BC combatant, Red Sea, October 2012; Crisis Group Report, *Saving Peace in the East*, op. cit., p. 18.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, former BC leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

³⁵ "The NCP was very concerned about the East at the time, and decided to close that file with any deal that ensures its dominance [there]". Crisis Group interview, Islamist journalist, Khartoum, May 2012. "The NCP wanted to close the door for opposition in the East and pay attention to the elections"; Abdel Monaiem Abu Idriss, op. cit., p. 87.

concern was the movement of some Darfur rebels – including former NDA members – to western Eritrea to launch a military campaign against Khartoum.³⁶

The presence of the SPLM – which had fought side by side with the BC and RFL in the East – in the Government of National Unity was also an important element both for the Asmara-Khartoum rapprochement and for facilitating talks between the EF and the government.³⁷

2. Libyan machinations

The SPLM also favoured Asmara as a venue for talks, as opposed to the other contender, Libya, which had facilitated an agreement between the government and the RFL in December 2005. Asmara initially tolerated Libyan involvement, since Tripoli was trying to help it improve relations with Khartoum. However, the Libyan initiative on eastern Sudan struggled to take off. Key international players, such as the U.S. and UK, doubted Libya's will and ability to address the conflict within a CPA framework. Moreover, the BC had lost all trust in Libya over the secret deal it brokered between the RFL and Khartoum, just three weeks before official talks between Khartoum and the EF were to start in Tripoli in January 2006.³⁸ As the Libyan initiative foundered, Asmara assumed the role of sole mediator and expressed a clear commitment to address the conflict within a CPA framework, a core EF demand.³⁹

3. Talks and signing of the ESPA

In anticipation of talks, the EF began to articulate its demands and formulate its negotiating position. It stressed that piecemeal processes to resolve "Sudan's problem" only served NCP divide-and-rule tactics, and argued that if the root causes of conflict were to be addressed, a restructuring of the state on a new basis was necessary to guarantee lasting national peace. In particular, it called for a federal system based on the old six regions (South, North, West, East, Central and Khartoum), a rotating Presidency Council representing the six regions and redistribution of wealth and power based on population size. To address human rights violations, especially the January 2005 Port Sudan massacre, it called for an independent investigation.⁴⁰ It

³⁶ Darfur rebels from both the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) started moving into eastern Sudan as early as mid-2003. Both factions attended the EF founding conference in Ribda in 2005. On 15 July 2004, JEM announced an agreement for political and military cooperation with the RFL. Crisis Group Report, *Saving Peace in the East*, op. cit., p. 21; Young, op. cit., pp. 30-31.

³⁷ Crisis Group Report, *Saving Peace in the East*, op. cit.; Abdel Monaiem Abu Idriss, op. cit., p. 91.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, BC negotiating team member, Red Sea, March 2012.

⁴⁰ On 26 January 2005, a group believed to be from BC-Internal organised a peaceful demonstration in Port Sudan. It presented a list of demands to the Red Sea state governor, including that the government recognise BC-Armed Struggle, based in Asmara, as the legitimate representative of the Beja people; negotiate with it directly on power and wealth sharing; and provide Beja jobs in the port and throughout the East. It demanded an answer within 72 hours, and on 29 January, a crowd gathered in Diem al-Arab and other Beja neighbourhoods and started to march toward the governor's office. The police and Special Forces from Khartoum fired indiscriminately into Beja homes and at anyone wearing traditional Beja dress. 22 were killed and hundreds injured. Security forces arrested over 150 BC-Internal members, including Abdallah Musa, the Red Sea state secretary general. Crisis Group Report, *Saving Peace in the East*, op. cit., p. 9.

also stressed agreement should be reached on these issues (with international observers present), before security arrangements.⁴¹

Asmara was typically cool toward international involvement and pushed its allies to talk directly with Khartoum.⁴² These officially began on 15 May 2006 in Asmara. The parties signed an agreement on procedural issues ten days later, quickly followed by a declaration of principles (DOP) on 19 June that recognised “political, economic, social and cultural marginalisation constitutes the core problem of Eastern Sudan”; and “respect for diversity, protection of fundamental freedoms and rights of citizens, devolution of powers within a federal system, and equitable distribution of national wealth are essential foundations for a united, peaceful, just and prosperous Sudan”.⁴³

Eritrea assigned Yemane Gebreab, a top PFDJ official and presidential adviser, as chief mediator, an indication of its national security interests in the talks.⁴⁴ Negotiations continued behind closed doors on three issues: power-sharing, wealth-sharing and security arrangements.⁴⁵ Four leading Eritrean officials, Yemane Gebreab, Osman Saleh, Abdalla Jaber and Tekle Kifle (Manjus) attended most sessions.⁴⁶ Moreover, they ensured that their closest Front associates, especially Musa Mohammed Ahmed, led the negotiations on security arrangements, leaving the rest of the EF (especially BC-Internal members) to deal with the remaining issues.⁴⁷

However, by October there was deadlock. The Front’s delegation submitted a position paper to Yemane Gebrab, who suspended the talks, requesting the wider delega-

⁴¹ Ibid; “Important Joined Declaration of Beja Congress and Free Lions”, February 2005. Crisis Group interview, former BC leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

⁴² Most of the BC-Internal delegation, including Abdallah Musa, wanted regional (Arab League), other international and civil society involvement, but BC-Armed Struggle, RFL and BC-Internal Secretary General Dirar sided with Asmara. Khartoum rejected international supervision outright. Crisis Group interview, BC negotiating team member, Red Sea, March 2012.

⁴³ “Declaration of Principles for the Resolution of the Conflict in Eastern Sudan”, Asmara, 19 June 2006.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, BC negotiating team member, Red Sea, March 2012. “Asmara surprised all observers by appointing Gebreab as chief mediator. Formerly, the Sudan’s file was in the hands of Abdalla Jaber, head of PFDJ organisational affairs; Yemane Gebreab, head of PFDJ political affairs is known for his intelligence links”. Abdel Monaiem Abu Idriss, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

⁴⁵ Though the EF stressed in the “Important Joined Declaration of Beja Congress and Free Lions” that it would not discuss security arrangements unless agreement was reached on wealth and power sharing, it quickly abandoned this under Eritrean pressure. Crisis Group interview, BC negotiating team member, Red Sea, March 2012. On 19 June 2006, the EF signed with Khartoum an “Agreement to Create Conducive Atmosphere for Peace”, which included an immediate ceasefire.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, BC negotiating team member, Red Sea, March 2012. Osman Saleh is foreign minister, Tekle Manjus a powerful army general. Abdalla Jaber was imprisoned in January 2013 after an army mutiny in Asmara. Crisis Group Africa Report N°200, *Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, 28 March 2013, p. 5.

⁴⁷ The RFL contribution remained nominal. Some 30 of 200 people, mostly from BC-Internal, were selected to take part in the negotiations after attending an October 2005 capacity-building workshop in Asmara. Seven were selected to take part in direct talks; the rest assisted. Crisis Group interview, former BC negotiating team member, Red Sea, March 2012. The government delegation was chaired by then presidential adviser, Mustafa Osman Ismail (now investment minister); then finance state-minister, Ali Mahmoud (now finance minister); former Kassala Governor Salah Ali Adam; then Investment Minister Malik Agar (now SRF chairman); and many security officers presenting themselves as presidential officials. The BC/EF delegation for power and wealth sharing included Abdallah Musa, Dr Mohammed al-Mutasim Musa, Dr Mahmoud Ibrahim Osman, Dr Majda Mohammed Ahmed Ali, Mohammed Zain and Hashim Kunna; Amna Dirar had overall supervision. BC-Armed Struggle and the RFL took over the security arrangements file; negotiations were led by the late Musa Mohammed Ahmed, Salah Barkwin and others. Ibid.

tion to leave Asmara until a new round could resume, but that senior officials remain. To ensure a common position, the wider delegation met with the three senior officials, who promised no agreement would be signed without prior consultation (essentially with BC-Internal) and unless it contained all the position paper's demands.⁴⁸ But a mere week after the delegation left, the "triumvirate" (Ahmed, Saleem and Dirar) signed the ESPA in its current form.

The agreement did not meet the demands of the Front's position paper. On power sharing, that had insisted the East be governed as one region, but all that was obtained was the Eastern Sudan States' Coordination Council. On wealth sharing, the original demand was a \$4 billion allocation to the Eastern Sudan Reconstruction and Development Fund (ESRDF), but the agreement obtained a government commitment to only \$600 million over five years.⁴⁹ Finally, instead of half the revenues generated by national institutions in the region, the East was to receive 15 per cent.⁵⁰

On security arrangements, the EF wanted to keep its troops mobilised for the duration of the agreement, but the triumvirate accepted a DDR program.⁵¹ Other demands were ignored, including international arbitration of the border dispute with Egypt over the Halayeb triangle; an end to the armed Ethiopian presence in al-Fashaga;⁵² and an internationally-backed investigation of the 2005 Port Sudan massacre.⁵³ Yet, many in the Front settled for what they thought was less than what was achievable under the circumstances.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ The officials, all close to Asmara, were Amna Dirar, EF deputy chairman and BC-Internal secretary-general; Mabrouk Mubarak Saleem, EF secretary general and RFL chairman; and Abdellah Kunna, a leading BC-Armed Struggle official. The delegation also met separately with Musa Mohammed Ahmed and agreed to launch a campaign to pressure the NCP and improve the Front's negotiating position. *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ The position paper was drafted in consultation with the wider EF delegation, including those not in the direct talks. "Our demand for allocating \$4 billion to the eastern Sudan reconstruction and development fund was not an arbitrary one; it was based on studies conducted by the government itself". *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Abdel Monaïem Abu Idriss, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*; Baas, "Low-intensity conflict in Eastern Sudan", *op. cit.*, p. 527.

⁵² The 20,580 sq km Halayeb Triangle is located along the Sudanese-Egyptian border at the Red Sea coast and includes Halayeb, Abu Ramad and Shalateen. During condominium rule, it was part of Sudan. The dispute dates to 1958, when Egyptian President Jamal Abdel Nasir occupied it, then withdrew due to Sudan's furious reaction. It recurred in the early 1990s, after Egypt denied Sudan access for oil exploration; Egypt has occupied it since the mid-1990s. Al-Fashaga, 6,070 sq km and some of Sudan's most fertile land, is along the Sudanese-Ethiopian border. In the mid-1990s, armed Ethiopian farmers forced Sudanese farmers from their lands and now occupy 500,000 acres. Ethiopia does not claim al-Fashaga, but the armed Ethiopian farmers are the main source of insecurity in the area; Sudanese authorities are unable to provide security. Crisis Group interviews, BC leader, eastern Sudan activists, Red Sea, March 2013; Ammar, "Ringling the Final Bells", *op. cit.*

⁵³ Crisis group interview, BC negotiating team member, Red Sea, March 2012.

⁵⁴ "We were not satisfied with the agreement at all, but we had to accept it as a fact and try to get the best out of its implementation. I was convinced of this as well as many others in the Beja Congress". Crisis Group interview, former BC leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

III. The (Partial) ESPA Implementation

In spite of the compromises, the ESPA had an encouraging start.⁵⁵ A week after it was signed, President Omar al-Bashir lifted – ostensibly at least – the state of emergency from all eastern states, released all political detainees and prisoners of war, allocated 60 legislative and executive positions in federal and local state institutions to the EF, established the ESRDF, and began disarmament, demobilisation and re-integration of EF forces.⁵⁶ But progress slowed, some provisions were partially implemented and others not at all.⁵⁷

Two important forums that could have helped were never stood up: the Consultative Conference on the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (CCESPA), which should have convened within 30 days of the agreement’s signing with the aim of mobilising support for the ESPA and providing a forum for all stakeholders; and the Eastern Sudan States’ Coordination Council (ESSCC), which was meant to “enhance coordination and cooperation” among the three eastern states and should have been established by the end of 2007.⁵⁸

A. Power Sharing

To fulfil demands for greater participation in governance structures, the ESPA required 60 legislative and executive positions for EF representatives at federal and state levels. President Bashir appointed Chairman Musa Mohammed Ahmed as assistant to the president; Deputy-Chairman Amna Dirar as adviser to the president; and Secretary General Mabrouk Mubarak Saleem as state minister for transport and roads. Eight seats were allocated in the National Assembly and ten in the legislatures of each of the three eastern states, in addition to deputy governors for Kassala and Gadaref states, one ministerial position in Red Sea state, an adviser to each of the three eastern states governors and representation in local government.⁵⁹ However, when the 2010 general election was held, the terms officially ended; only the “trium-

⁵⁵ The more ethnically diverse population of Gedaref state was warier of the ESPA, whose provisions seemed weighted to Red Sea and Kassala states. Assal and Ali, “Eastern Sudan”, op. cit.

⁵⁶ Abdel Monaïem Abu Idriss, op. cit., p. 94. The state of emergency was lifted, but in effect continues, especially in rural Kassala and South Tokar. Crisis Group interview, eastern Sudanese journalist, Khartoum, May 2013.

⁵⁷ Key provisions partially or not implemented included: incorporation of the agreement into the 2005 Interim National Constitution (Chapter Six, General Provisions, Article 35/147); registration with the UN Secretary-General (Article 35/152); a Consultative Conference on the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (CCESPA), (Chapter Four, Article 33); establishment of the Eastern Sudan States’ Coordination Council (ESSCC), (Chapter One, Article 5/11); convening of the Nationwide Conference Regarding the Administrative Structure of Northern Sudan (Article 5/12); and effective participation of eastern Sudanese in all institutions and levels of government (the power-sharing agreement). Crisis Group interviews, BC leader, Red Sea, March 2013; eastern Sudan journalist, Khartoum, May 2013.

⁵⁸ The ESSCC was a NCP tactical response to the Eastern Front demand that eastern Sudan be governed as one region, part of a return to a federal system based on the old six regions. Ibid.

⁵⁹ After the Ribda conference, the two BC wings united their structures, with Musa Mohammed Ahmed as BC chairman and Amna Dirar secretary general. See Section IV below. All appointments were made on 29 May 2007. Crisis Group interview, Beja Congress leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

virate” and a few others maintained their positions through presidential and state government appointments.⁶⁰

Although formal participation was almost fully implemented, many in the BC saw the positions held by their representatives as nominal at best.⁶¹ They maintain that the agreement only appeased the individual interests of the “triumvirate”, so was part of the NCP’s familiar divide-and-rule tactics.⁶² The allocation of positions also divided the Front on tribal lines; the BC obtained only eighteen of the 60 positions, while the RFL and other local groups took the rest. The BC rank and file believed that since they were the EF’s political and military core and had struggled for Beja rights since 1958, their members deserved a majority of the positions.⁶³

Full eastern Sudanese participation in the Judiciary and Civil Service was completely ignored. Moreover, Khartoum did not create the promised panel of experts under the National Civil Service Commission that was to determine the “representation of people of Eastern Sudan in the NCS”, identify imbalances and recommend practical measure to redress discrepancies. Eastern Sudanese representation in the civil service remains the lowest in the country.⁶⁴

B. *Wealth Sharing*

Under the ESPA, Khartoum pledged to allocate approximately \$600 million over five years (beginning in 2007) to the ESRDF for social services, including health, education and water, and the reconstruction and development of the East, especially rehabilitation of war-affected areas in rural Kassala and South Tokar.⁶⁵ According to an official, it contributed only \$75 million in the first year, and by the end of 2012, much less than a quarter of the total pledged had been paid into the ESRDF.⁶⁶ ESRDF officials

⁶⁰ Though there was no mention in the ESPA of duration, it was widely believed that, except for the ESRDF, it ended with the 2010 elections. A presidential decree reappointed Musa Mohammed Ahmed presidential adviser, Amna Dirar labour state-minister and Mabrouk Mubarak Saleem animal resources state-minister. Re-appointments were through individual bargains with the NCP. Saleem kept his appointees in state governments, particularly in Kassala, as part of his deal with the NCP. Crisis Group interviews, former BC leader, Red Sea, March, 2012; eastern Sudan Journalist, Khartoum, May 2013.

⁶¹ Except for full participation in the judiciary, including: the Constitutional Court, the National Supreme Court, other national courts and the National Judicial Service Commission (Chapter One, Article 10); and participation in the National Civil Service (NCS), including senior and middle levels (Chapter One, Article 11).

⁶² Crisis Group interviews, former BC leader, eastern Sudan journalist, activists, Red Sea and Kassala, October 2012. In his address to the BC conference’s opening session in Khartoum’s Friendship Hall in August 2012, Musa Mohammed Ahmed acknowledged that most of their government positions lacked real powers, so failed to influence decision-making affecting eastern Sudan. “Opening Address of Chairman Musa Mohammed Ahmed”, 28 August 2012. Copy on file with Crisis Group.

⁶³ “All tribes wanted to take their piece from a very small cake, and this led to divisions between the TuBedawiye-speaking [predominantly Hadendowa] and Tigre-speaking [predominantly] Beni Amer) Beja and also between them and the Arab tribes”. Crisis Group interview, former BC leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

⁶⁴ “Mufaraqat wa faraqat fi tanfeez ittifaqyat alsharaq [Ironies and gaps in the implementation of the East Peace Agreement]”, *al-Sahafa*, part one, 24 January 2013, part two, 7 February 2013.

⁶⁵ The ESRDF was established by Presidential Decree no. (1), 2007; in 2012, its mandate was extended for another five years.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, ESRDF official, Khartoum, May 2013. An additional \$100 million Chinese loan was allocated to the Sitit dam in the East. However, critics said the dam is a national project implemented by the central government and should not be included as part of the East’s develop-

said they were able to implement nearly 600 development projects: 302 in Kassala, 172 in Gadaref and 124 in Red Sea states.⁶⁷ They, as well as regional parliamentarians, tribal leaders, activists and locals claimed, however, that most were flawed – either undertaken in areas of little need or under-resourced and mismanaged.⁶⁸ The EF representatives also argued that they (and other local stakeholders) were excluded from ESRDF decision-making and that it was corrupt.⁶⁹

Six years after the fund's launch, services as basic as safe drinking water remain a major problem in the East, even though over 100 water projects were implemented.⁷⁰ Water prices have meanwhile increased dramatically, leading to sporadic protests.⁷¹ Access to education and health services remains among the lowest in the country, while school dropout, infant and maternal mortality and HIV prevalence rates are among the highest.⁷² Over 90 per cent of ESRDF implemented health projects since 2008 never opened their doors, because they lacked qualified personnel, necessary equipment and drugs.⁷³

Rehabilitation of war-affected areas in South Tokar and rural Kassala has also seen little progress. Landmines continue to exact an economic and humanitarian toll. The legacy of war has pushed many away from their traditional lands to peri-urban settlement in Sawakin, Port Sudan and elsewhere.⁷⁴ Expulsion of international hu-

ment. They also said the ESRDF implemented projects in River Nile state, which is not part of the region. Crisis Group interview, eastern Sudan journalist, Khartoum, May 2013.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, ESRDF official, Khartoum, May 2013.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Kassala and Red Sea, October 2012; Khartoum, May 2013.

⁶⁹ In early February 2013, EF representatives in ESRDF accused their counterparts of corruption, and complained they (and local stakeholders) were excluded from decisions. They raised the issues in memos sent through Presidential Assistant Musa Mohammed Ahmed to 1st Vice-President Taha seeking his intervention. Statement of EF representatives in ESRDF, 20 February 2013 (hard copy on file with Crisis Group); see "Sudan's Eastern Front warn government on implementation of peace deal", *Sudan Tribune*, 13 February 2013.

⁷⁰ In Gedaref, Kassala and Red Sea states respectively, 37, 61 and 67 per cent of the population lack access to safe drinking water. Crisis Group interviews, tribal leaders, eastern Sudan activists, Red Sea and Kassala, October 2012; "MDG [Millennium Development Goals] Profile of Eastern Sudan-2010", www.undp.org. In April 2013, Ageeg's Red Sea legislature representative, Hamid Idriss, told local media that areas like Marafeet, Ageeg and Agetay (South Tokar) had no access to safe drinking water for more than nine months, and due to spreading water-related diseases, many fled to other parts of Red Sea state, including Port Sudan. "Tokar tahtatir ben muqalatat jabhat alsharq wa alhukuma [Tokar is dying between the fallacy of the Eastern Front and the government]", *al-Hurra Arabic daily*, 23 May 2013. Even in capitals like Port Sudan, drinking water remains a problem; in May 2013, Red Sea state authorities closed down all schools because of a severe water crisis. "al-na-tiq bi ism houkomat wilayat al-bahr alahmr: almiyah almawjuda alan tomathil 10% min hajaj al-madina [Red Sea government's Spokesman: water currently available represents 10% of the city's need]", www.hurriyatsudan.com, 30 May 2013. Seven of eight wells supplying water to parts of Port Sudan, Sawakin and Tokar are not working. Crisis Group interviews, tribal leaders, eastern Sudan activists, Red Sea, March 2013. ESRDF officials say operating and maintaining water projects was not in their mandate and blame state authorities for not taking responsibility for projects implemented by the fund. Crisis Group interview, ESRDF official, Khartoum, May 2013.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, Kassala and Red Sea, October 2012; Khartoum, May 2013. For two years, local press has been reporting on sporadic protests because of the water crisis.

⁷² "MDG Profile of Eastern Sudan-2010", UN Development Programme (UNDP) Sudan.

⁷³ 274 projects in education and 100 in health were implemented by the ESRDF in the three eastern states. Crisis Group interviews, ESRDF official, eastern Sudan journalist, Khartoum, May 2013.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, South Tokar activist, Red Sea, March 2012.

manitarian organisations, including de-mining groups, has further exacerbated the situation.⁷⁵

In December 2010, a donors and investors conference for eastern Sudan reconstruction and development, held in Kuwait, pledged over \$3 billion, but the ESRDF received only a \$500 million Kuwaiti grant. Critics said even this was directed not toward basic post-war recovery and development priorities but instead toward commercial investment opportunities.⁷⁶ There was also the perception that many projects served the narrow interests of the NCP elites and their favoured contractors, as much as they did the intended local beneficiaries.⁷⁷

C. Security Arrangements

The ESPA established a high joint military committee and a joint integration committee to implement the “Comprehensive Ceasefire and Final Security Arrangements” until EF forces were fully integrated into the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and other security units (eg, police and civil defence) or reintegrated into civilian life. The two committees began their work with approximately 2,000 combatants assembled at designated points (al-Meluya, Telkuk, al-Gerbah, Dulabyay and Awrma). By 2013, only a small fraction had been integrated into the SAF and other security forces; reintegration of demobilised combatants was also extremely limited.⁷⁸

As a result, frustrated former combatants established, in 2011, the High Committee for Demobilised Combatants (HCDC), and petitioned President Bashir for a final settlement to all outstanding cases and an investigation into the implementation of ESPA security provisions.⁷⁹ In late 2011 1st Vice-President Ali Osman Taha instructed the competent bodies to settle all outstanding cases by offering job opportunities. In April 2013, the EF chairman and now presidential assistant, Musa Mohammed Ahmed, said all such cases had been settled after 1,500 job opportunities were provided.⁸⁰ However, the HCDC insisted over 250 cases in Kassala and 400 in Red Sea

⁷⁵ In June 2012, Sudanese authorities expelled seven international NGOs, including Plan Sudan, Care and World Vision, that had been working on landmines, education, health and refugee issues. “Al-Sahafa takshif asbab tard saba’a munazamat ajnabiya min alsharq [Al-Sahafa reveals reasons for expelling seven foreign organisations from the East]”, *al-Sahafa*, 2 June 2012.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, ESRDF official, Khartoum, May 2013. Mohammed Ali Aonor, “Ironies and gaps”, op. cit. For further background on the Kuwaiti donors conference see Assal, “Six Years after the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement”, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interviews, tribal leaders and eastern Sudan activists, Red Sea and Kassala, October 2012. Also, Mohammed Ali Aonor, “Tanfeez mashrou’ sarf sihi bi sharq alSudan: istijaba li raqbat almwatn am almugawil [Implementing a sewage project in eastern Sudan: A response to citizen’s desire or contractor?!]”, *al-Sahafa*, 12 February 2013.

⁷⁸ It is very hard to establish a credible estimate for former EF combatants, as different BC and NDA officials give conflicting numbers. However, it was probably about 2,000 (from a peak of 5,000 at the height of military operations) when the ESPA was signed, as many combatants returned to Sudan of their own volition, feeling there was no point staying in the camps. Crisis Group interviews, former Beja Congress leader, former combatants, Red Sea and Kassala, October 2012. Demobilised combatants registered by an official committee chaired by the late Beja Congress political secretary, Salah Barkwin (died September 2013) stand at 5,000, including families of martyrs. Crisis Group interview, senior Beja Congress official, Khartoum, May 2013.

⁷⁹ “HCDC’s memo to president al-Bashir”, 4 August 2011. Demands also included suspending the BC faction led by Musa Mohammed Ahmed. The HCDC is chaired by Omar Hashim al-Khalifa.

⁸⁰ “Infaz Itifaq al-Sharaq Fi Mizan Majlis al-Wilayat [Implementation of Eastern Sudan Agreement in the States’ Council Criterion]”, *al-Sahafa Arabic daily*, 1 May 2013. For more detail on the shortcomings of the DDR program, see Baas, “Low-intensity conflict in Eastern Sudan”, op. cit., p. 528.

were not settled, and even those who were absorbed into the civil service did not receive salaries for months. Moreover, it accused the NCP and demobilisation officials of registering non-combatants for patronage purposes.⁸¹

Many demobilised combatants threatened that they would adopt “other means” to obtain their ESPA concessions.⁸² One noted: “Unless all outstanding cases are fully settled, demobilised combatants may well join any group calling for resumption of armed struggle”.⁸³ This may already have happened, as calls grow from some BC factions to join the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), and Sudanese opposition units are reported in western Eritrea.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Crisis Group interviews, HCDC members, Red Sea and Kassala, October 2012; eastern Sudan journalist, Khartoum, May 2013.

⁸² On 7 July 2013, hundreds of former combatants demonstrated at the Red Sea state DDR commission. “Musarahou al-Beja alMutasimoun Fi Port Sudan Yomhiloun al-Hakouma Isbouan li Tanfeez Matalibahum [Beja Demobilised Combatants give government one-week ultimatum to meet their demands]”, www.midan.net, 11 July 2013. In early August, Red Sea state Governor Mohammed Tahir Eila issued a decree establishing a committee to resolve all cases of former EF combatant demobilisation. However, former BC leader Abdellah Musa said, “it was a mistake to transfer the issue to the state government; it should have remained at the federal level and been resolved by the committee headed by the first vice president”. Sudan Radio Service, 6 August 2013.

⁸³ Crisis Group interview, HCDC member, Kassala, October 2012.

⁸⁴ See Section VI below.

IV. Rebel Fragmentation

The ESPA's partial implementation has not been helped by divisions – primarily tribal – within the Eastern Front. The first post-agreement EF conference, scheduled for 1 November 2006, in Tesseney, Eritrea, was postponed due to disputes over allocation of delegates and positions. The Beni Amer Shura demanded a number of EF posts, including assistant to the president. The Hadendowa also demanded representation more in line with their size. Facing mounting tribal pressure, EF leadership allocated sixteen of 120 posts to the Rashayda, the rest to the Beja and other local groups. But faced with Beja division, Musa Mohammed Ahmed, EF as well as BC chairman, announced a BC-only “briefing” on the ESPA for Ribda in late October.⁸⁵ That “briefing” became a full BC conference, during which many members criticised the leadership for signing the agreement, but the biggest challenge was the longstanding structural divide between the armed and internal BC factions.⁸⁶

After intense debate, delegates expanded the central committee from ten to twenty seats – half for each faction. But the committee was further divided between those who wanted to preserve the distinct “Beja” identity of the BC, and those like the EF chair Musa Mohammed Ahmed, who argued for the full incorporation of the BC into the EF as a “democratic alliance”, arguing that “we are the Eastern Front, and he who wants the Beja Congress should look [elsewhere] for it”.⁸⁷

Some delegates not unreasonably saw Ahmed's call to dissolve the BC into the EF as further evidence of Asmara's continuing influence, since the implicit model for the EF was the Eritrean PFDJ. A BC leader noted: “For Asmara, a united Beja Congress means a dominant Beja Congress-Internal ... more politically conscious than the Beja Congress-Armed Struggle and not [as] easy to control”. Because the relationship between the BC and the Front was not settled in Ribda, many members, as well as Asmara and its loyalists, pushed for another conference.⁸⁸

Unlike the purely Sudanese affair in Ribda, the subsequent conference in Adarsah, a border-town just inside Eritrea, saw Asmara reassert itself. PFDJ officials sat on the main stage with the BC leaders, while Eritrean troops provided security. Asmara presented discussion papers, including the case for transforming the EF into a party speaking for all eastern Sudanese.⁸⁹ Many members were unhappy with the heavy Eritrean presence and demanded it leave. If Asmara had its way, a leader asserted,

⁸⁵ Abdel Monaiem Abu Idriss, *op. cit.*, pp. 95, 97. Abdellah Musa proposed holding a conference to resolve organisational problems between the two factions and brief members on the ESPA. Crisis Group interview, former BC leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

⁸⁶ A Beni Amer faction from Gedaref boycotted on the grounds that the conference was not called in line with the BC constitution. *Ibid.*; Abdel Monaiem Abu Idriss, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* Many eastern entities saw the Congress as an exclusively Beja organisation, while the EF (theoretically) is founded on a more plural and democratic basis. Crisis Group interview, former BC negotiating team member, Red Sea, March 2012.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, former BC leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

⁸⁹ Another argument was that transforming the EF into a political party would violate the ESPA, which considered the EF an alliance between the BC, RFL and other local groups. Musa Mohammed Ahmed, Amna Dirar, Salih Hassab Allah and al-Amin al-Haj backed the Eritrean line as well. However, Abdellah Musa and others from BC-Internal opposed it. Crisis Group interview, former BC negotiating team member, Red Sea, March 2012.

the EF would have been only a PFDJ extension.⁹⁰ In the end, delegates reaffirmed a commitment to maintain an independent BC, as well as a more democratic EF. Most returned to Sudan, but Asmara delayed the return of its loyalists for almost a year, as wrangling continued over government posts allocated by the ESPA.⁹¹

Almost a year after returning to Khartoum, and facing growing internal divisions and rising discontent over the ESPA, BC leaders held a general conference in Arkawet, Red Sea state, from 15 to 17 August 2008, to put their house in order. Described as the “second founding conference”, it adopted a number of resolutions regarding the BC’s constitution. The critical outcome was Ahmed’s concession that the BC would remain an independent organisation and the Front an alliance between different forces.⁹² His climb-down was driven by mounting dissatisfaction with the ESPA and concessions made to other tribes, like the Rashayda, at the expense of Beja.

An open power struggle emerged between Ahmed and his deputy, Amna Dirar, who dismissed the BC as a “tribal throwback” and accused Ahmed of favouring his Hadendowa supporters in the distribution of posts.⁹³ Ahmed proposed a resolution to expel Dirar and her supporters (who were mostly Beni Amer).⁹⁴ Dirar countered by pushing for the EF’s registration as a party, but lacked support from the RFL leader, Saleem. She then created her own Eastern Democratic Party (EDP), based largely on Beni Amer support.⁹⁵ The always shaky EF alliance was now thoroughly fragmented. Yet, the BC too, especially after it backed the NCP in the 2010 general elections, split along tribal and personal lines, leaving little unified eastern political pressure to implement the ESPA.⁹⁶

In March 2012, a prominent BC leader, Abdellah Musa, and others wrote to the central committee demanding reform. They criticised Ahmed for concentrating power, appointing his supporters to key positions and establishing “suspicious” relations with the NCP that undermined the BC’s aims and unity.⁹⁷ Amid discontent and factionalism, another conference was held, 28-30 August 2012 at the Friendship Hall in Khartoum, to review ESPA implementation, six years after its signature.

Unlike Arkawet, which had kept the BC “partnership” with the NCP to ensure ESPA implementation, this conference vehemently criticised the ruling party for its unwillingness to implement important provisions. It adopted a resolution mandat-

⁹⁰ Abdellah Musa proposed that the Eritreans leave. “If it wasn’t for Gebreab’s wisdom, who at some point asked the Eritreans to leave, the situation would have slid into violence. Gebreab then left and said to us it is up to you”. Crisis Group interview, former BC leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

⁹¹ Asmara wanted to ensure its loyalists were united before returning to Sudan as there were tensions within the triumvirate, especially between Musa (Hadendowa) and Dirar (Beni Amer) over some issues, including distribution of posts. Crisis Group interview, eastern Sudan journalist, Red Sea, October 2012.

⁹² Musa Mohammed Ahmed’s address to the opening session, 15 August 2008.

⁹³ “East Sudan leaders in damaging internal power struggle”, Agence France-Presse, 24 August 2008.

⁹⁴ Salih Hassab Allah and Idriss Noor were also expelled. “Final Declaration of the BC conference in Arkawet”, 17 August 2008.

⁹⁵ Since 2010, many members defected from Dirar’s camp, contending the BC leadership is only concerned with personal interests. Crisis Group interview, former EDP youth member, Khartoum, May 2013.

⁹⁶ Musa Mohammed Ahmed agreed to back the NCP in the elections and was appointed head of the national committee to support President Bashir’s nomination.

⁹⁷ “Internal BC organisational memo”, 17 March 2012. Some seven central committee members from the Red Sea, including Abdellah Musa, resigned after this meeting.

ing the central committee to push for full implementation on all outstanding issues or “withdraw immediately from the government”. It also demanded the government take all “legitimate measures” to protect Sudan’s sovereignty in Halayeb and al-Fashaga and appoint a national prosecutor to investigate the Port Sudan massacre.⁹⁸ Yet, many considered such resolutions merely “rhetoric” meant to mitigate popular pressure, shore up Ahmed’s popularity amid rising calls for resumed armed opposition, and extract concessions from the NCP.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ “BC Friendship Hall Conference Final Declaration”, 30 August 2012.

⁹⁹ “The NCP has long bought off Ahmed. He can’t challenge the NCP, because he relies heavily on its financial support to run his party”. Crisis Group interview, BC leader, Red Sea, October 2012. “Ahmed is very worried about the rising calls for resumption of armed opposition that can pave the way for new leaders, so he wants to extract concessions from the NCP by saying either make some concessions or face a new conflict”. Crisis Group interview, eastern Sudan journalist, Red Sea, March 2013. “Ahmed, as well as other eastern leaders like Amna Dirar, has long lost popularity in the East. He can only address public meetings in the East when accompanying senior Khartoum officials. He tends to raise issues of Halayeb, al-Fashaga and the [Port Sudan] massacre just to mitigate pressure and improve his image”. Crisis Group interview, eastern Sudan journalist, Khartoum, May 2013.

V. Mounting Pressures in the East

More than seven years after its signing, the ESPA has delivered no substantive peace dividend to most eastern Sudanese. Instead, a number of factors, many related to failed implementation, continue to pose a threat to peace and stability in the East.

A. Demographic Shifts and Rising Tribalism

To maintain dominance, the NCP has bought off tribal leaders, pursued divide-and-rule tactics and established tribal militias.¹⁰⁰ In recent years, it has increased support to Arab tribes, including giving them land. Under government protection, Rashayda have settled in Beja territory, especially in predominantly Beni Amer localities such as Khasm al-Gerbah (Kassala state), and Tokar, al-Ganab and al-Awlaib (Red Sea state). In early 2012, the Beni Amer came close to clashes with Rashayda who had begun artisanal gold mining in South Tokar. The intervention of elders from both tribes calmed the situation, but tensions remain and could easily escalate if security deteriorates in the region.¹⁰¹

Tribal leaders and activists see the increasing numbers of Rashayda in Beja lands as part of a deliberate NCP policy aimed at “Arabising” their region and warn of the “Darfurisation of eastern Sudan”.¹⁰² Beja allege the NCP is indirectly forcing their migration from South Tokar (see below), through expropriation of land for, among other things, “development” projects like the Setit and Atbara dams, at the same time as it encourages outsiders to come in.¹⁰³ Some of this land is believed to contain gold and other valuable resources.¹⁰⁴ There are also claims that the government has promised the Rashayda and the Shukriyya their own state, or some form of territori-

¹⁰⁰ See Einas Ahmed, “Political Dynamics and the Search for Legitimacy at the Local Level: The case of Kassala State”, in Miller (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 101-118; Crisis Group Report, *Saving Peace in the East*, *op. cit.*, p. 11. To divide the tribes, in 1998 the government granted the al-Habab, formerly under the Beni Amer, its own *nazir* (traditional leader). In 1999, it failed to protect the Red Sea representative (*wakil*) of the Beni Amer *nazir*, who was killed by an al-Nourab member. The *wakil* was known for his anti-regime stance; the government took advantage and appointed a pro-NCP *wakil*. In 2011, the government stopped salary payments to the al-Nourab *omda* (a local chief), because he was not “cooperating”. Crisis Group interview, Communist Party of Sudan leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interviews, BC leader, tribal leaders, activists, Red Sea and Kassala, October 2012.

¹⁰² According to some sources, senior NCP officials have been supporting Arab tribes like the Rashayda, Shukriyya and Lahawyeen. Critics argue that they are trying to change state government compositions in Kassala and Gedaref and contend that they influenced the appointment of Mohammed Yousif Adam (Shukriyya) as Kassala governor, a post previously reserved for the Beni Amer (ex-Governor Ali Mahmoud is Beni Amer), and the placement of various Arab allies in key posts in Gedaref. *Ibid*; Crisis Group interview, eastern Sudan journalist, May 2013.

¹⁰³ About 150,000 are expected to migrate from Wad al-Hilaiw, Kassala state, to other parts of the East. Work on the dams began on 15 May 2010 and is expected to be completed by September 2015. The cost, about \$150 million, is funded by China, Algeria and Saudi Arabia. Locals are concerned about four main issues: the suitability of the locations to which they will be settling; their rights to irrigate their new lands from the dams; the fate of pastoralists and their livestock; and fair compensation for the land acquired by the government”. Salih Ammar, “Musalsal alsudod mustamer: daha-ya almashad alqadam 150,000 [Dams episode continues: victims of the next scene 150,000 people]”, *al Taghyeer*, 4-5 May 2013. The cumulative effects of conflict, drought, floods and out-migration from rural areas has reduced many Beja to labourers for NCP-affiliated riverine Arabs and allied Beja entrepreneurs. Crisis Group interview, South Tokar leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interviews, CPS leader, Islamist journalist, Red Sea, Khartoum, March, May 2013.

al rights in the East.¹⁰⁵ All this risks deepening resource conflicts, both between ethnic groups and between the centre and periphery.¹⁰⁶

The NCP has continued its longstanding policies of co-optation and strengthening its loyalist networks, including so-called tribal brigades.¹⁰⁷ In November 2012, the federal state interior minister, Babikir Digna, said it was time to arm tribes in the East, especially in rural Kassala, to protect the population from armed smugglers.¹⁰⁸ Late that year the NCP reportedly allowed the Hadendowa *nazir* (traditional leader) in Kassala to add some 1,000 fighters to his militia.¹⁰⁹ Other tribes, like the Beni Amer, threatened by weapons proliferation, have also armed.¹¹⁰ This greatly risks increased conflict, and in March 2013 fifteen eastern leaders called on the authorities to “immediately” disarm tribal brigades.¹¹¹

B. South Tokar’s Humanitarian Crisis

South Tokar, 205km south of Port Sudan, is one of the most war-affected areas in eastern Sudan. During the fighting, hundreds were killed, thousands were severely injured, and over 50,000 of the 151,000 inhabitants fled to Tokar, Sawakin and Port Sudan, where many are still living in urban slums.¹¹²

South Tokar is an area where the NCP did not lift the state of emergency and consequently denied humanitarian and media access. Security and military intelligence agencies’ permission is required to move to and from it. Landmines continue to claim lives, and most residents lack safe drinking water and basic health services. Valuable farmland was allocated to a marine base, despite local objections.¹¹³ The Tokar delta agricultural scheme, once the main source of jobs, collapsed. Recurrent drought has

¹⁰⁵ The Rashayda demanded their own *nazir* and the Shukriyya a state (al-Butana). Crisis Group interview, eastern Sudan journalist, Khartoum, May 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Following the CPA’s signing, the NCP held a convention in September 2005, at which the prominent Islamist economist and former finance minister Abdel Rahim Hamdi proposed a strategy for the NCP (subsequently pursued) to focus investment and development in the triangle of Dongola-Sinnar-al-Obaid (the “Hamdi Triangle”), its core riverine constituency, in anticipation of South Sudan secession. Crisis Group Africa Report N°194, *Sudan: Major Reform or More War*, 29 November 2012, p. 14.

¹⁰⁷ Tribal brigades are government-supported militias.

¹⁰⁸ “Wazarat aldakhiliya alsudaniya taqoum bitasleeh alqura alhudoudiya bi wilayat Kassala li muharabat isabat alitjar belbashar [Sudanese interior ministry arms border tribes in Kassala to fight human trafficking gangs]”, www.adoulis.com, 2 November 2012. “Under the pretext of fighting human trafficking, the authorities arm tribes loyal to it. This is very serious given the tribal context in eastern Sudan, because other tribes will feel threatened and may well resort to arming themselves”. Crisis Group interview, eastern Sudan journalist, Khartoum, May 2013.

¹⁰⁹ The original number was about 2,000 combatants. Crisis Group interview, former BC leader, Red Sea, March 2013. In the mid-1990s, to exploit the tribal system and co-opt leaders, Khartoum replaced Mohammed al-Amin Mohammed Tirik, the openly critical Hadendowa *nazir*, with his son, Sayed Tirik. Crisis Group Report. *Saving Peace in the East*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, a Beni Amer BC leader, activists, Red Sea, March 2013. “Beni Amer youtaliboun hokoumat Kassala bitsleehihm li mwajahat isabat alitjar belbashar [The Beni Amer call on Kassala government to arm them to confront human trafficking gangs]”, www.alrakoba.net, 12 February 2013.

¹¹¹ “Eastern Sudan leaders’ statement”, www.alrakoba.net, 27 March 2013.

¹¹² The government changed the name from South Tokar to Ageeg locality. NDA operations between 1997 and 2005 were carried out in border areas in South Tokar and rural Kassala. Crisis Group interview, South Tokar leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

¹¹³ Ibid.

also decimated rural livelihoods. In May 2013, former BC leader Abdellah Musa said the area “should be declared a famine and crisis area”. However, authorities deny there is a humanitarian crisis.¹¹⁴

C. *The 2005 Port Sudan Massacre and Impunity*

Though the ESPA reaffirmed commitments to “respect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms as detailed in the post-CPA Interim National Constitution and in international human rights covenants ratified by the Government of Sudan”,¹¹⁵ violations have continued unabated. Throughout the three eastern states, student, youth, civil society and political activists are reportedly subject to detention, ill-treatment and torture. Public meetings are banned, and any attempt to organise peaceful demonstrations is met with excessive force by security forces that still enjoy almost absolute impunity.¹¹⁶

Moreover, those allegedly responsible for the 29 January 2005 Port Sudan massacre, which claimed 22 lives, mainly Beja, are yet to be held to account.¹¹⁷ On 30 March 2011, the Red Sea state general prosecutor decided there were no legal grounds for criminal charges against the “regular forces” and dismissed an appeal lodged by victims’ families. Members of victims’ families and their legal representatives were subjected to repeated harassment, including dismissal from work.¹¹⁸

In 2009, victims’ families established the “High Committee for the 29th January Martyrs”, to commemorate the massacre and challenge impunity. Since then, an annual commemoration has been one of the most effective tools in mobilising people against the regime. Students, youth and political activists all take part, calling for

¹¹⁴ “Tokar tahtatir ben muqalatat jabhat alsharq wa alhukuma [Tokar is dying between the fallacy of the Eastern Front and the government]”, *al-Hurra*, 23 May 2013.

¹¹⁵ ESPA, Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Article 6/13.

¹¹⁶ There are also reports of extrajudicial killing. In September 2011, police opened fire at shepherds in al-Gedaref who refused to abide by a local deportation order. In October 2011, six girls drowned in Atbara river after the police chased them for unlawfully cutting trees. Salih Ammar, “Ringing the Final Bells”, *op. cit.* International human rights organisations and local activists also documented many human rights violations in the East. See, “Human Rights Violations in the Republic of Sudan: A Shadow Report to Sudan’s Fourth and Fifth Periodic Report to the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights”, African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, Defend & Fédération Internationale des ligues des droits de l’Homme, April 2012.

¹¹⁷ Suspects are not known by name, but victims’ families seek to press charges against the special security force brought from Khartoum that they allege committed the massacre. Their efforts have met with NCP machination and security service suppression. On 17 February 2005, Abdel Rahim Mohammed Hussein, then interior minister, formed a pro-NCP committee to probe the incident. With carrot-and-stick tactics, the committee quickly cut a deal with most of the families. Sixteen accepted and received “traditional” compensation in the form of *diyya* (Arabic term for “blood money”; six are still struggling to press charges for the killing of Ibrahim Abu Fatma Bahsir, Tahir Hussein Hassan, Hamad Ali Mohammed, Mohammed Mohammed Tahir, Mohammed Din Omar and Omar Abdallah Mohammed. Crisis Group interview, member of deceased’s family, Red Sea, March 2012.

¹¹⁸ Red Sea state general prosecutor letter/decision, 30 March 2011; advocates appeal, 28 March 2011. A source close to the High Committee for 29th January Martyrs said, “police records in Red Sea don’t have any killing cases registered on 29th January 2005, yet authorities issued death certificates and burial permissions that cannot be issued without a police case under Article 130 of the criminal law”. At least three family members were fired, arrested and threatened because they refused to accept traditional compensation (*diyya*), the leader added. Crisis Group interview, Red Sea, March 2012.

justice and regime change.¹¹⁹ The committee's members are subjected to security persecution, including detention and alleged torture.¹²⁰ Moreover, to further weaken it and sever its links with other political forces, security agencies have allegedly infiltrated the committee and deepened existing divisions between pro- and anti-BC factions.¹²¹ Despite this, the committee remains influential and still attracts thousands to its campaign, especially in Red Sea state.

D. *Arms and Human Trafficking*

While not directly related to renewed conflict, the increase in arms and human trafficking operations in the region poses a serious threat to security and stability. A number of state and non-state actors are reportedly involved in various aspects of these activities.¹²² The area is held to be a major transshipment point for military support from Iran through Sudan and the Sinai to the Palestinian group Hamas in the Gaza Strip.¹²³ The East is also associated with the growing problem of human trafficking. It is a brutal enterprise, and there have been numerous reports of the kidnap, torture and, in some cases, rape of informal migrants by traffickers, both in eastern Sudan and Sinai.¹²⁴ The incidents, especially rape of young Eritrean Christian girls, have increased tensions among eastern groups that have strong kinship

¹¹⁹ The committee comprises three main groups: victims' families, BC youth and BC students' central committee. Because of the youth and student components it has been able to attract thousands of supporters. Crisis Group interview, CPS leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, source close to the High Committee for 29th January Martyrs, Red Sea, March 2012.

¹²¹ Because Congress leaders shelved the issue of the massacre in the ESPA, they lost popularity. "Musa works for the NCP, and he doesn't care about our dead. On one occasion, he offered to pay us just to let a representative address the fifth anniversary of our martyrs". Ibid.

¹²² Crisis Group interviews, BC leader, tribal leaders, Red Sea and Kassala, October 2012; for example, allegations have been made by the UN Somali Eritrea Monitoring Group that senior Eritrean officials are involved in smuggling arms with the help of Rashayda and Sinai Bedouins to the Palestinian territories. "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2002 (2011)", S/2012/545, 13 July 2012, pp. 6, 16, 20-21, 50-52. The Eritrean government strongly rejected these allegations. See "Statement by Ambassador Araya Desta, Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations, during an informal consultation with Security Council committee established pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somali and Eritrea", Eritrean UN mission, 17 July 2012. Khartoum also denies involvement and often publishes media reports showing efforts to combat human trafficking. However, there have been allegations that many whom Khartoum says it arrested were released after intervention by special security branches. Crisis Group interviews, eastern Sudan journalist, Red Sea, March 2013, Islamist journalist, Khartoum, May 2013.

¹²³ Sudan and Iran have allegedly increased military support through eastern Sudan and Egyptian Sinai to Hamas. Since January 2009, Israel has reportedly bombed six targets inside Sudan – five in Red Sea state (January and February 2009, April 2011, May 2012), one in Khartoum (October 2012) – allegedly linked to arms trafficking to the Gaza Strip. Crisis Group interviews, former security officer, Islamist journalist, Khartoum, May 2013; Tim Lister and Mohamed Fadel Fahmy, "Smuggling weapons to Gaza – the long way", CNN "Security Clearance blog" (www.security.blogs.cnn.com), 19 November 2012.

¹²⁴ The deteriorating political and economic situation has led thousands of young Eritreans to flee to eastern Sudan; they hope to go to Europe or Israel but are vulnerable to kidnapping and human trafficking. Crisis Group interview, UNHCR, Khartoum, May 2013; Rachel Humphris, "Refugees and Rashida: Human smuggling and trafficking from Eritrea to Sudan and Egypt", *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Research Paper no. 254, UNHCR, March 2013, p. 5.

links with Eritrea, particularly the Rashayda and the Beni Amer.¹²⁵ As a refugee expert noted, “in eastern Sudan’s tribal context, ultimately human trafficking means tribal conflict”.¹²⁶

Khartoum has adopted anti-trafficking legislation, but it will be difficult to implement, even with assistance sought from the European Union (EU).¹²⁷ One reason is the government lacks control over large parts of the border. Moreover, many of the military, security and police officers who are meant to protect the border reportedly cooperate with trafficking networks.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Incidents of kidnapping involving young Beni Amer by traffickers (mainly Rashayda) have increased tension between the tribes. A Beni Amer leader warned: “We, the Beni Amer, will never allow such practices in our lands and border”. “Huroub ithneen min abnaa albeni amer min Sinai ba’ad ikhtitafihim bewasitat isabat alitjar belbashar [two Beni Amer sons escape from Sinai after they were kidnapped by human trafficking gangs]”, *Akhar al-Yom*, 26 February 2013. “Either the Rashayda will finish us or we will finish them”. Crisis Group interview, Beni Amer tribal leader, Red Sea, October 2012.

¹²⁶ “There is a growing tension between the Beni Amer and the Rashayda because of incidents of kidnapping of Beni Amer’s youngsters. This could further escalate if, for example, there are incidents of rape involving young Beni Amer girls”. Crisis Group interview, UNHCR, Khartoum, May 2013; “Bisabab jara’em ikhtitaf albashar: ra’ees almajlis altashreey youhazir min indlila’ fitna qabaliya bi Kassala [Because of crimes of kidnapping: speaker of Kassala legislature warns of tribal strife in Kassala]”, www.alrakoba.net, 24 January 2013.

¹²⁷ The Council of Ministers adopted the anti-trafficking law in July 2013. It includes creation of a national committee to combat human trafficking. “Majlis alwozaraa yojeez qanoon alitjar belbashar [Council of Ministers passes human trafficking law]”, Sudan News Agency, 11 July 2013. The government requested help from the EU, “Sudan officials seek EU help on trafficking”, Agence France-Presse, 6 November 2013; “EU Pledges Cooperation to Combat Human Trafficking”, Sudan Vision, 21 November 2013.

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interview, former security officer, Khartoum, May 2013.

VI. The Risk of Armed Conflict and its Prevention

Calls for resumption of armed opposition have been growing, driven by the failure of the ESPA, continued marginalisation and an unpopular and divided Beja Congress/Eastern Front leadership. A number of eastern political groupings, including BC splinter groups, are allying with the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF).

In November 2011, the London-based BC faction of Abu Mohammed Abu Amna announced it was joining the then new SRF.¹²⁹ In May 2013, the newly established United People's Front for Liberation and Justice (UPFLJ) announced it wanted to overthrow the regime in cooperation with the SRF.¹³⁰ One of the SRF member organisations, the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement-North, is reportedly in close contact with eastern armed groups because of the East's importance in bringing about change in Sudan. The UPFLJ formally joined the SRF on 1 October 2013.¹³¹

The UPFLJ, which comprises some seventeen small eastern factions, is said to be part of a unification effort. But it is unclear whether it and Abu Mohammed Abu Amna's BC faction have much impact on the ground, since both are based outside the region. However, a former BC chairman, Sheikh Omar Mohammed Tahir, reportedly has about 2,000 combatants stationed along the Sudan-Eritrea border and is said to be coordinating with the UPFLJ and SRF to resume his insurgency.¹³²

¹²⁹ "Mu'tamar albeja yo'lin indimamahi li tahaluf aljabha althawriya [Beja Congress announces joining the revolutionary front alliance]", www.sudanjem.com, 16 November 2011. See above on the historical presence of Darfuri rebels, including leading SRF member JEM, in the East. However it is unlikely there was significant JEM capacity there after 2007. See Victor Tanner and Jérôme Tubiana, "Divided They Fall: The Fragmentation of Darfur's Rebel Groups", *Small Arms Survey*, 2007.

¹³⁰ "Jabhat sharq alSudan leltahrir wa aladala tuqarir raf' alsilah wa alta'awon ma'a aljabha lathawriya li isqat alnizam [ESFLJ decide to raise arms and cooperate with the SRF to topple the regime]", *Radio Dabanga*, 27 May 2013. "والعدالة للتحريير المتحدة الشعبية الجبهة من بيان" [Statement from the United Popular Front for Liberation and Justice]", *Sudan Nile*, 22 July 2013. The UPFLJ, founded in Cairo, has no specific base; its leaders are scattered through the UK, Canada, U.S., Europe and Egypt, as well as Khartoum and the East. Red Sea state Governor Mohammed Tahir Eila warned of "war lords" igniting a new rebellion in the East. "Eila yohazir min altrweej li tamarud jaded fi sharq alSudan [Eila warns of promoting new rebellion in eastern Sudan]", *Al-Qarar*, 23 May 2013.

¹³¹ SPLM-N Secretary General Yasir Arman held meetings in London and the U.S. in late 2012 with a number of BC leaders, including Musa Mohammed Ahmed and Mohammed Tahir Abu Bakr, reportedly asking for unity as a prerequisite for joining the SRF. Crisis Group interviews, BC leader, Red Sea, March; Sudanese journalist, Khartoum, May 2013. "Eastern Sudan Group Joins SRF Rebels", *Sudan Tribune*, 2 October 2013.

¹³² Crisis group interviews, eastern Sudan journalist, former Eritrean official, Khartoum, May 2013. *Al-Midan* reported that some combatants were assembling in South Tokar and Hameshkoreb. "Tahzirat min brouz bawadir li a'ml musallah bel wilayat alsharqiya [signs of armed work in eastern states]", www.midan.net, 18 June 2013. Sheikh Omar Mohammed Tahir (Hadendowa) was one of the religious leaders of Ali Betai's Quranic schools in Hameshkoreb and the BC-Armed Struggle chairman until 2003 when, after an agreement with Khartoum facilitated by Suliman Ali Betai, he defected and returned to Sudan with some 120 fighters. Khartoum appointed him the Hameshkoreb *muhafiz* (local administrator), but he quickly returned to Eritrea. Asmara appointed him to resolve tribal disputes along its Sudan border. He also created a small charitable organisation to aid border tribes and is said to be involved in cross-border trade. In 2009, he established the Popular Front for Eastern Sudan Liberation and recruited and trained more fighters in 2011. He commands an estimated 2,000 fighters reportedly stationed in Ribda and Hadesh Muaskar in western Eritrea. Crisis Group interview, ex-Eritrean official, Khartoum, May 2013. It is believed his force would be the core of any attempt to resume armed opposition in the East, as the factions lack an armed presence in western Eritrea. Crisis Group interview, eastern Sudan journalist, Khartoum, May 2013.

A. *Increasing Calls for Self Determination*

Within the East, calls for outright self-determination are rising; many, including NCP members and allies, barely hide their anger at Khartoum's marginalisation policy and call for an independent eastern Sudan.¹³³ An eastern Sudan leader said, "I believe in unity not separation, yet I am unable to convince the people that separation is not good for them, simply because they are fed up with Khartoum".¹³⁴ In September 2012, some activists for separation distributed a statement in Port Sudan, announcing establishment of the "Democratic Revolutionary Front for Eastern Sudan's Liberation". They called for separation from Khartoum and creation of the "Democratic Republic of Eastern Sudan".¹³⁵

On 29 May 2013, Ali Belaid, an NCP representative in the Red Sea legislature, called on eastern officials to collectively resign from all central government institutions and push for the East's separation. He stressed: "In the past, we called for taking up arms, but now we are calling for separating eastern Sudan".¹³⁶ There are also growing calls for restoring the Greater Beja Kingdom, within the old borders that extended from the Blue Nile state border to the south, to that of Egypt to the north. An activist said, "we don't [just] want to separate the East only, but also to restore our identity as Beja".¹³⁷

B. *Regional Security*

Sustainable armed conflict is also dependent on Eritrea's stance, since it could constitute a strategic rear base for Eastern rebels, as it did in the past. Though Asmara-Khartoum relations were normalised after the ESPA, they remain unpredictable. The rumoured Islamic dimension to an apparent military mutiny in Asmara in January 2013 – the "Forto incident"¹³⁸ – and reports of Sudanese armed opposition groups along the Eritrea border prompted intense bilateral engagement. President Bashir and senior government and security officials visited Eritrea a number of times in 2013, reportedly to renew Khartoum's commitment to a 2006 security agreement that was part of ESPA arrangements and to assure Asmara of continued vital economic support (though Sudan, with its own crisis, can ill afford to give aid).¹³⁹

¹³³ They are joined by other marginalised regions as well. See Crisis Group Africa Reports N°204, *Sudan's Spreading Conflict (II): War in Blue Nile*, 18 June 2013, p. 34; and N°198, *Sudan's Spreading Conflict (I): War in South Kordofan*, 14 February 2013, p. 43.

¹³⁴ Crisis Group interview, South Tokar leader, Red Sea, March 2012.

¹³⁵ Crisis Group interview, Democratic Revolutionary Front for Eastern Sudan's Liberation activist, Port Sudan, October 2012.

¹³⁶ The statement came in a state legislature emergency session to address the severe water crisis after the federal electricity and dams minister cancelled a project for carrying Nile water by pipeline to Red Sea state as "economically unfeasible" (www.altaghyeer.info), 8 May 2013. To contain the situation, Vice President Taha visited Port Sudan with the federal finance minister in June and reportedly gave the governor a \$1 million cheque, plus two million Sudanese pounds (approximately \$500,000) and a contract for purchase of ten water tankers. "Taha concludes visit to Port Sudan city", www.suna-sd.net, 12 June 2013.

¹³⁷ Crisis group interview, youth activist for eastern Sudan's separation, Red Sea, October 2012.

¹³⁸ There were rumours of external involvement in "Forto", and high-profile Muslim Eritrean officials were arrested, including Abdella Jaber, head of PFDJ organisational affairs and previously a key actor in Eritrean-Sudanese ties. Crisis Group Report, *Eritrea: Scenarios*, op. cit., pp. 4-6.

¹³⁹ In February 2013, President Bashir visited Asmara briefly for a closed meeting with President Isaias Afwerki. Bashir, accompanied by security chief Mohammed Atta and Presidential Affairs

However, Asmara would be reluctant to spoil its ESPA achievements. It is in its interests to bring the fractured parties together, not least because conflict in the East could spread into its own western borderlands, an area where Eritrean Islamist armed groups have historically operated and which continues to be a top security concern for the government. Moreover, given the fragile no war/no peace stalemate with its other militarily powerful neighbour, Ethiopia, Eritrea will be wary of risking the détente with Sudan that was part of its original calculations for the ESPA.¹⁴⁰

C. *Local and National Dialogue*

The eastern Sudan conflict's root causes have become more acute. Moreover, since the ESPA heavily depended on the Asmara-Khartoum bilateral relationship and rewards to political clients, local stakeholders were marginalised and the foundations of peace consequently very shallow. To remedy this, genuine implementation of ESPA core provisions, especially those aimed at inclusive local dialogue, is immediately needed. One rapid peacebuilding measure would be to hold the Consultative Conference on the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (CCESPA) that should have convened in October 2006.¹⁴¹ It would be an important opportunity for the eastern Sudanese to come together, subordinating their tribal and personal ambitions, and formulate a common regional vision that might serve as a united eastern political platform.

Minister Bakri Hassan Salih, reportedly denied any involvement in "Forto" and reassured Afwerki of continued support. In June, he returned for three days to discuss security issues. In July, Electricity Minister Osama Abdellah held talks on developing Eritrea's electricity sector. Khartoum also cracked down on Eritrean opposition elements in Sudan and reportedly handed some foes over to Asmara. Provision of wheat, corn and much needed basic commodities will continue. Crisis Group interviews, eastern Sudanese journalist, former Eritrean PFDJ official, Khartoum, July 2013.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group Report, *Eritrea: Scenarios*, op. cit., pp. 25-27; Young, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

¹⁴¹ The agreement stipulates: "All the stakeholders, including community and traditional leaders, political parties, civil society organisations, trade unions, professionals, religious leaders, business leaders, and members of the diaspora shall participate in the CCESPA. There shall be an adequate and effective representation of women and youth. Issues of land shall also be adequately addressed so as to avoid tribal conflict over resources. The conference should also adopt mechanisms for tribal reconciliation and peaceful coexistence at local level". ESPA, Chapter Four, Article 33/140.

VII. Conclusion

Unless the East's marginalisation is adequately addressed, renewed war is a growing possibility. This time, however, instead of influence at the centre, the demand could well rise to self-determination. For many, separation must happen, whether by evolution or revolution. The East's problems cannot be resolved without addressing governance at the centre.

To truly resolve conflict in Sudan, however, a comprehensive national mechanism is necessary. Piecemeal negotiations that deal with the country's interlocking conflicts in isolation play into the hands of the NCP and fail to address the root causes of chronic insurgency. As happened with the ESPA, once a regional deal is struck, attention invariably shifts to other conflicts, and the agreement, especially promised "democratic transformation", tends never to be fully implemented.

As Sudan prepares to write a new permanent constitution, it needs to identify and make use of a forum that is genuinely comprehensive and national and so can address the core questions of its identity and system of rule, as well as wealth and power sharing. Otherwise, the spreading civil war in the peripheries may well lead to further fragmentation of the country.

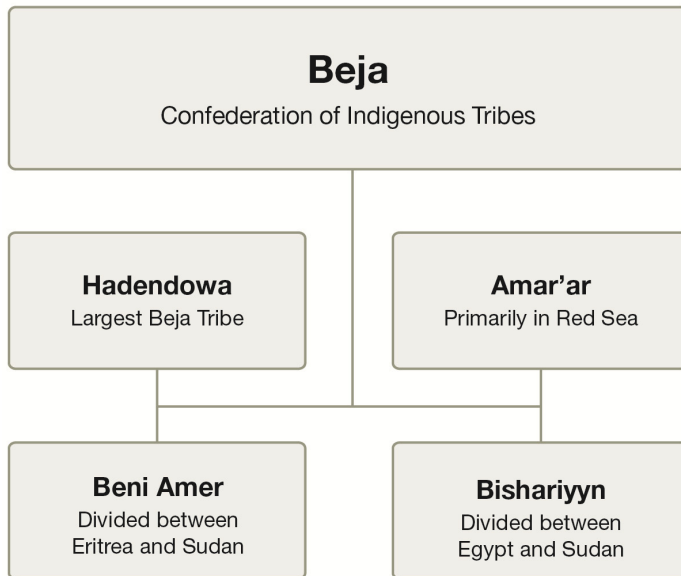
Nairobi/Brussels, 26 November 2013

Appendix A: Map of Eastern Sudan



Appendix B: Tribal Structure of Eastern Sudan

Non-Arab



Others

Western and central African Migrants

From Hausa, Zabarma and Borgo tribes comprise 30%-40% of the Gedaref population

Darfurians, Halfawiyyin (Nubians)

Numerous in Port Sudan and Kassala

Arab

Rashayda

Nomadic pastoralists; came from the Arab Peninsula in the 19th century; live at outskirts of Kassala and along the Eritrean border

Shukriyya

Farmers and pastoralists who are the largest group in present-day Gedaref

Shaiqiyya & Ja'aliyin

Main Arab or Arabised tribes of the northern Nile Valley; top economic and administrative class in the East

Appendix C: Glossary of Political Parties, Agreements and Movements

Beja Congress (BC) – The Beja Congress is a political party founded in 1958, though enduring periods of prohibition. It is most prominent in the eastern states of Sudan, where the Beja tribe – which constitutes the bulk of support for the BC – is settled. It suffered splits after the signature of the 2006 ESPA.

Beja Congress-Armed Struggle – In 1993, a group of Beja Congress members went to Eritrea for military training and established the armed wing of the Beja Congress, known as Beja Congress-Armed Struggle. It was first led by Mohammed Tahir Abu Bakr, then by Omar Mohammed Tahir and later Musa Mohammed Ahmed. It had no formal organisational link with the Beja Congress-Internal (see below) between 1993 and 2005. The two factions became structurally united at the Ribda conference in October 2006.

Beja Congress-Internal – The main “civilian” Beja Congress faction that remained inside Sudan. In 2002, it gained (renewed) legal status, first led by Captain Ahmed Mohammed Mukhtar. After uniting with the armed Beja Congress wing at the Ribda conference (October 2006), Musa Mohammed Ahmed was elected chairman of the unified Beja Congress and Amna Dirar secretary general.

CCESPA – The Consultative Conference on the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement was supposed to be a forum for all involved stakeholders to discuss the ESPA and its implementation, but it was never established.

CPA – The Comprehensive Peace Agreement is a collection of agreements signed in January 2005 to end the second Sudan civil war. In it, the insurgent SPLM/A agreed with the Khartoum government on permanent ceasefire and security arrangements, as well as implementation modalities. It was meant to end the second Sudan Civil War.

DUP – The Democratic Unionist Party, one of Sudan’s two main “traditional” parties, has been in coalition in Khartoum with the ruling NCP since 2011 (after South Sudan’s independence). The DUP is also a member of the opposition alliance, the National Consensus Force and signed a memorandum of understanding with the Sudan Revolutionary Front (see below) in 2012.

Eastern Front (EF) – A coalition of the Beja Congress, the Rashayda Free Lions and local eastern groups, established in 2005. It has enjoyed vital support from Eritrea since its inception. The EF’s main demands are greater participation in national government and a greater say in the management of the region’s resources.

ESPA – The East Sudan Peace Agreement signed in 2006 between the Eastern Front and the Sudanese Government, mediated and guaranteed by Eritrea.

ESRDF – The aim of the Eastern Sudan Reconstruction and Development Fund is wealth sharing between the central government and the eastern states of Sudan.

HCDC – High Committee for Demobilised Combatants, chaired by Omar Hashim al-Khalifa.

JEM – Justice and Equality Movement, a Darfur rebel group founded by the late Dr Khalil Ibrahim Mohammed. In 2011, it joined the SRF and is currently led by Dr Jibril Ibrahim.

NCP – National Congress Party, the ruling party in Sudan, headed by President Omar al-Bashir and the successor party to the National Islamic Front (NIF) that seized power in the 1989 coup.

NCSC – The National Civil Service Commission was established to oversee the fair representation of all Sudanese people in the National Civil Service of Sudan.

NDA – The National Democratic Alliance was a group of Sudanese opposition parties established in 1989 to challenge the military takeover by current President Bashir.

PFDJ – The People’s Front for Democracy and Justice is Eritrea’s ruling party, led by President Isaias Afwerki.

PDF – Popular Defence Forces, founded in 1989 and expanded in January 1991 by the Islamists' revolutionary council to help fight the war in the South. The PDF was to have been dismantled under the CPA but still plays a major military role in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile.

RFL – The Rashayda Free Lions are an armed group of the Rashayda people in eastern Sudan and part of the Eastern Front with the Beja Congress. It is led by Mabrouk Mubarak Saleem.

SAF – Sudan Armed Forces – the national army. The majority of senior staff are committed Islamists, but with limited representation from non-Arab groups in the peripheries. The current defence minister, Abderahim Mohammed Hussein, is a close ally of President Bashir.

SLA – The Sudan Liberation Army, originally the main Darfur rebel group, splintered into a number of factions; including the SLA-MM led by Minni Minawi and SLA-AW led by Abdelwahid Mohammed Nur.

SPLM/A – Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army, the Juba-based Southern rebel movement turned into a political party (SPLM) that signed the CPA in 2005. The SPLM is now the ruling party in South Sudan chaired by President Salva Kiir.

SPLM-N – Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North, formerly the northern branch of the SPLM/A, is currently active against Sudanese armed forces in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. In 2011, the SPLM-N joined with JEM and other rebel groups in the umbrella organisation, the SRF. The SPLM-N is currently led by Malik Agar.

SRF – Sudan Revolutionary Front, an alliance created in November 2011 between the SPLM-N, JEM, SLA-MM and SLA-AW to pressure for regime change in Sudan, through both armed insurrection and political action.

UPFLJ – United People's Front for Liberation and Justice comprised of some seventeen small eastern factions, founded in Cairo in May 2013. It has no specific territorial base, and its leaders are scattered between the UK, Canada, U.S., Europe, Egypt, Khartoum and eastern Sudan. It is led by Zeinab Kabbashi.

Appendix D: Glossary of Personalities

Ali Osman Mohammed Taha

Member of the National Congress Party (NCP), chief negotiator for the Sudanese government and a vice president since 1998. He is considered a co-architect of the CPA that ended the civil war in 2005. From that year until 2011, he was second vice president; he currently is first vice president.

Al-Sadig al-Mahdi

Leader of the National Umma Party (NUP) and the official imam of the Ansar, a Sufi religious movement in Sudan, since 1970.

Dr Amna Dirar

Deputy chairman of the Eastern Front (EF) and secretary general of the Beja Congress-Internal. Appointed adviser to the president and labour state minister. Dirar abandoned the Beja Congress after a power struggle with Musa Mohammed Ahmed, and established the Eastern Democratic Party.

Captain Ahmed Mohammed Mokhtar

An Amar'ar seaman and first chairman of the Beja Congress-Internal.

Mabrouk Mubarak Saleem

Founding member and chair of the Rashayda Free Lions (RFL) as well as secretary general of the Eastern Front and state minister for animal resources in the current government.

Mirghani family

The leading family in East Sudan, dominating both the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the religious Khatmiya Sufi order. Currently, **Mohammed Osman al-Mirghani** is head of the DUP.

Musa Mohammed Ahmed

Leader of the Beja Congress-Armed Struggle and chairman of the EF; later appointed assistant to the president.

Nafie Ali Nafie

Adviser to the Sudanese president. He was chief of the internal security organisation (NISS) but was dismissed in 1995 after the failed assassination attempt on the former Egyptian president, Mohammed Hosni Mubarak.

Salva Kiir Mayardit

First vice president in the Government of National Unity between 2005 and 2011, now president of the Government of South Sudan and chairman of the SPLM.

Sheikh Omar Mohammed Tahir

Beja Congress-Armed Struggle chairman until 2003, he claims to have 2,000 combatants stationed along the Sudan-Eritrea border and is said to be coordinating with the United People's Front for Liberation and Justice (UPFLJ) and the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) to resume his insurgency. In 2009, he established the Popular Front for Eastern Sudan Liberation. It is believed his force would constitute the core of any renewed armed opposition attempt in the East.