

## Unifying Darfur's Rebels: A Prerequisite for Peace

### I. OVERVIEW

Insecurity in Darfur remains pervasive despite a decline in direct, large-scale fighting between the government and the two main rebel movements, the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Maintaining the present uneasy status quo is not the answer. The Khartoum government continues to flout its numerous commitments to neutralise its allied proxy militia, the Janjaweed, and more than two million civilians displaced by the conflict will not return home without a comprehensive political settlement including security guarantees. But the problem is not just on the government side: discord within and between the rebel movements also needs to be resolved if there is to be a chance for lasting peace.

The SLA, the dominant rebel force on the ground, is increasingly an obstacle to peace. Internal divisions, particularly among its political leadership, attacks against humanitarian convoys, and armed clashes with JEM have undermined the peace talks and raised questions about its legitimacy. JEM, while less important militarily and suspect among many Darfurians for its more national and Islamist agenda, has similar problems.

As long as the rebels, the SLA in particular, remain divided and the fighting in Darfur continues, there is little hope for real success at the African Union (AU)-sponsored peace talks in Abuja, since the government is likely to exploit and exacerbate rebel weaknesses at the table. SLA and JEM fragmentation may contribute to a limited settlement in which the government regains a semblance of authority in Darfur through local deals with tribal leaders and insurgent factions, while the rebel movements find themselves increasingly isolated and irrelevant. Frustrated as it is, the international community would, nevertheless, make a mistake if it chose an appearance of stability over a comprehensive solution since that would leave the root causes of the conflict untouched, despite hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of displacements.

A lasting political solution is still within reach but the AU, Sudan's neighbours, the UN, the U.S. and the European Union (EU) need to press for four steps to resolve rebel disunity:

- the political leaderships of the SLA, especially, but also the JEM should return to Darfur as soon as possible and organise broad-based conferences of their memberships;
- the SLA conference must be inclusive in representation and participation (including women) and provide a forum for the rebels to solve their leadership problems, forge a consensus on the movement's structure, restore command and control and end banditry, and define a negotiating position for its delegation at the Abuja peace talks;
- the SLA and JEM must continue their efforts in Abuja to unify their negotiating positions, both to facilitate the political talks and to help solidify the ceasefire agreement between the two movements; and
- the international community must better coordinate messages to prevent the rebel movements and factions from playing external actors against each other and should support the conferences of the two movements by helping with transport, food aid and security.

### II. REBEL DIVISIONS

#### A. THE SLA

A group of young men coming primarily from the Fur, Zaghawa and Massaleit tribes launched the SLA in February 2003.<sup>1</sup> Fighting against economic and political marginalisation by the central government, it achieved early military successes against government installations, which helped it bring in thousands of recruits and rapidly

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<sup>1</sup> The SLA was launched as the Darfur Liberation Front but changed its name to the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement in March 2003. For more on the early stages of the Darfur rebellion, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°14, *Sudan's Other Wars*, 23 June 2003; Crisis Group Africa Report N°73, *Towards an Incomplete Peace*, 11 December 2003; and Crisis Group Africa Report N°76, *Darfur Rising: Sudan's New Crisis*, 25 March 2004.

expand its support base throughout Darfur.<sup>2</sup> Also contributing to its popularity was the scorched earth response, in which government forces and government-supported Janjaweed militias burned hundreds of villages and displaced more than a third of the population. Yet, the SLA has become paralysed by a debilitating leadership dispute, which has made progress in the negotiations impossible. Its weak political structures have been unable to cope with the movement's rapid expansion, and personal disputes within the leadership have degenerated into divisions along tribal lines. Efforts to unify the movement have been unsuccessful, though they are ongoing. Until the internal disputes can be overcome and the SLA leadership returns to Darfur, there is little hope for substantial progress in the AU-led political negotiations.

## 1. Roots of the movement

An underlying cause of the rebellion was the government's consistent alignment with nomadic groups of Arab origin against the Fur, Zaghawa and Massaleit in their frequent disputes over natural resources. The Fur had fought in the mountainous fertile belt of Jebel Marra for more than a decade against marauding Arab militias attracted by the area's rich natural resources. By July 2000, when attacks resumed on Fur villages, the tribe's ragtag youth self-defence groups merged to form a broader movement. In the mid-1990s self-defence militias formed in western Darfur among the Massaleit people in response to raids by Arab nomadic groups.<sup>3</sup> The Arab-Massaleit conflict received little international notice at the time but was a precursor of the 2003/2004 massive ethnic cleansing campaign. A series of conflicts between the Zaghawa Tuer and Awalad Zeid from late 1999 through May 2001 in the Kornoï area of Dar Gala, and the subsequent breakdown of traditional conflict resolution processes spurred some Zaghawa Tuer to take up arms.<sup>4</sup>

In August 2001, a small group of Zaghawa travelled from North Darfur to Jebel Marra to help train Fur recruits against the Arab raiders.<sup>5</sup> Many Zaghawa had acquired professional military training in the Chadian or Sudanese armies, a fact that has caused them to predominate in the

upper ranks of the insurgency to this day. The visitors were initially welcomed by the Fur, and the training went on until May 2002. When it became clear that the movement was evolving into an armed rebellion against the central government, however, many grew uneasy with the rebels' presence, fearing reprisals.

Nevertheless, a conference of 42 people in Butke, Jebel Marra in March 2002 created the new movement, giving the position of chairman to a Fur, the military command to a Zaghawa, and the deputy chairmanship to the Massaleit, with each tribe to pick its representative. The Zaghawa chose Abdallah Abakar as military commander, the Fur Abdel Wahid Mohamed el-Nur as chairman, and the Massaleit Mansour Arbab as deputy chairman, though he was soon replaced by the current deputy, Khamees Abdallah. Minni Arko Minawi, the current secretary general of the movement<sup>6</sup> and the chief rival to Abdel Wahid, succeeded Abdallah Abakar after the latter's death in January 2004.<sup>7</sup> This structure remains the basis of the SLA leadership.

In August 2002, the then governor of North Darfur, General Ibrahim Suleiman, met with Fur tribal leaders in Nyertete and urged them to convince the Zaghawa armed youths to leave Jebel Marra, in return for which he promised an end to impunity for Arab raids. Meanwhile, prominent Zaghawa politicians in Khartoum were sent to persuade the Zaghawa to negotiate with the government. The Zaghawa did leave Jebel Marra for North Darfur in October 2002 and start talks with the government with a view to disbanding the armed elements. Abdel Wahid and most of his Fur soldiers were left behind. However, the negotiations were likely tactical for the rebels, an effort to buy time while preparing for battle.

Minni's Zaghawa branch grew quickly, receiving substantial support from Zaghawa in the Chadian army, and soon began its remarkable string of successes against the government throughout North Darfur. As the military prowess of the Zaghawa-wing grew, the Fur continued to operate in the Jebel Marra area, while the Massaleit, under former SPLM<sup>8</sup> Commander Adam "Bazooka", conducted operations in their tribal areas of West Darfur.

The movement was publicly launched as the Darfur Liberation Front following an attack on a government

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<sup>2</sup> SLA popularity also extended to elements of the region's Arab tribes, who sent recruits to the rebel movement.

<sup>3</sup> The March 1995 decision by the Governor of West Darfur to divide the traditional Massaleit homeland into thirteen *amarat* (emirates), of which five were allocated to Chadian "Arab" groups and one to the Gimr tribe, exacerbated the tensions.

<sup>4</sup> The initial Zaghawa armed movement also included some elements of the Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA) of former Darfur Governor Ibrahim Ahmed Deraige and Dr. Sharif Harir, and some elements with earlier Islamist connections.

<sup>5</sup> Crisis Group interview, 26 July 2005. There had been an earlier visit by a Fur delegation to the Zaghawa in North Darfur.

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<sup>6</sup> The origins of Minni's title are unclear. Some in the SLA claim that he gave himself the secretary general title, but in itself it does not bestow additional formal authority.

<sup>7</sup> Crisis Group interviews, 25 June 2005 and 26 July 2005.

<sup>8</sup> The Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M, henceforth SPLM) conducted a 21-year insurgency against the Khartoum government before signing a peace agreement and joining a government of national unity in 2005.

outpost in Golo, Jebel Marra, in mid-February 2003. Early the next month, the late John Garang arranged for Abdallah Abakar, Minni Arko Minawi, and two Fur representatives to visit his SPLM headquarters at Rumbek, in Sudan's south, for consultations. What emerged was the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (henceforth SLA), complete with a charter clearly inspired by the SPLM's manifesto and "New Sudan" ideology, emphasising unity, democracy, secularism and the equality of all citizens regardless of origin, creed or culture. Garang provided weapons and training to the SLA but this ultimately proved to be one of the movement's most divisive issues.<sup>9</sup>

## **2. The struggle for leadership**

Rebel success caused the government to recruit the Janjaweed militias to bolster its forces in the region and to manipulate the ethnic divide in Darfur for political gain. Khartoum also aimed to isolate the three branches of the SLA by exploiting their geographical and ethnic differences. Forced to operate relatively independently from each other, with limited interaction between Abdel Wahid's wing in Jebel Marra and the Zaghawa military juggernaut under Abdallah Abakar and Minni in North Darfur, divisions soon emerged. Adding to the tension was the perception that although the Zaghawa provided the bulk of SLA military strength, Fur and Massaleit civilians bore the brunt of the government's scorched earth counter-insurgency campaign since the remote and difficult terrain in Dar Zaghawa and the high mobility of Zaghawa rebels made such attacks riskier there. As it herded hundreds of thousands of Fur and Massaleit into makeshift camps, the government intensified its propaganda in Darfur and the country at large about an alleged design to build a "Greater Zaghawa State" stretching across other tribal areas in Sudan and Chad.

The massive government offensive in December 2003-February 2004 forced most of the Zaghawa branch of the SLA from their stronghold in North Darfur to safer areas in South Darfur. In the summer of 2004, a group of several hundred Zaghawa SLA troops from Hamaraya invaded Jebel Marra, reportedly on Minni's orders, in an attempt to wrest political control of the movement from Abdel Wahid's followers.<sup>10</sup> The attack ended prematurely,

reportedly due to Eritrean pressure on Minni,<sup>11</sup> but the episode soured relations between Fur and Zaghawa politicians in the diaspora, with the former accusing the latter of having encouraged Minni.<sup>12</sup>

The rapid expansion and intensification of the conflict overwhelmed the leaders and their nascent structures. Over time, the animosity between Minni and Abdel Wahid grew as they jostled for primacy. Whereas Minni considers that Zaghawa military strength should be reflected in the leadership, Abdel Wahid and other non-Zaghawa insist on the original tribal allocations of positions, including a Fur as chairman. Despite the plight of their people, the SLA leaders have been unable to resolve these divisions, creating further openings for Khartoum to manipulate and divide their movement.

The March/April 2004 N'djamena ceasefire negotiations and subsequent internationally-brokered talks led to an intensification of the power struggle. Shortly after the N'djamena negotiations, most SLA leaders travelled to Asmara and Nairobi where they received support from the Eritrean government and the SPLM, respectively. When Minni returned to Darfur in May 2005, it had been over a year since he had visited his troops in the field. Abdel Wahid has not returned to Darfur since March 2004. As the divisions grew between the leaders in exile, a gulf predictably emerged between them and the field commanders. This has led to the emergence of new leaders in the field, a gradual breakdown in military command and control, including a sharp rise in banditry, and the loss of legitimacy for the external leadership in the eyes of the international community as well as some elements of the SLA.

The AU-led political negotiations, which resumed in Abuja in August 2004 following an aborted round the previous month in Addis Ababa, have been a mixed blessing for the SLA. Because the leadership has been abroad for so long, the talks have at times offered a welcome venue for it to meet and consult with the field commanders.<sup>13</sup> However, more often than not, the rivalry between the two factions has crippled the SLA's negotiating efforts, undermining its ability to offer a credible and united front. For example, Minni and Abdel Wahid routinely submit separate lists of delegates to the AU for accreditation. The divisions were most evident in the June/July 2005 round, when a small group loyal to Minni led by spokesman Mahjoub Hussein and Abdul Jabbar Dousa tried to remove

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<sup>9</sup> Garang was seen as taking sides in the SLA dispute and worsening the split, as discussed below. One root cause of the division between Abdel Wahid and Minni is the accusation that shortly after the conflict began, Minni diverted a shipment of SPLM weapons designated for the Fur in Jebel Marra that had been delivered to the Zaghawa areas of North Darfur for security reasons. Minni reportedly kept the arms for his forces. Crisis Group interview, 17 August 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Crisis Group interviews, 2004-2005.

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<sup>11</sup> Crisis Group interviews, August 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Crisis Group interview, London, July 2004.

<sup>13</sup> For example, on the final day of the October/November 2004 negotiations, the SLA delegation met all night to clear the air about the Zaghawa attack on Jebel Marra that summer. Crisis Group interview, 25 June 2005.

Abdel Wahid as the head of delegation mid-way through the talks.<sup>14</sup>

Despite high-level reconciliation efforts from regional leaders, the chasm between Abdel Wahid and Minni continues to widen. As international pressure has forced Khartoum to scale back military operations, cracks in the SLA have become more apparent, aggravating the fault line between the two main ethnic groups, the Fur and the Zaghawa.<sup>15</sup> Elements within the factions have exploited tribal differences and animosity, especially toward the Zaghawa. The irony of the political paralysis is that there is agreement on the political agenda. The division stems mainly from personal animosity but the stakes are high. The SLA needs to put aside personal differences and take responsibility for the plight of the civilians it claims to represent.

### 3. Unifying the movement

The danger of these divisions has been recognised by many Darfurians and foreign observers alike, who are trying to help the SLA work through them. In a late January/early February 2005 leadership meeting in Asmara, those present (including Minni and Abdel Wahid) agreed on the need for a general SLA field conference to help overcome the split and build structures. A small committee tasked to organise it immediately ran into trouble as Abdel Wahid and Minni jostled for control over the size, attendance and venue of the conference.

Following the June-July 2005 Abuja negotiations, most SLA leaders travelled to Libya, where unsuccessful attempts were made to organise an ad hoc leadership meeting in Kufra.<sup>16</sup> Counting on the support of the bulk of the Zaghawa troops, Minni pushed for a field conference with the military leadership. Knowing that the Fur are poorly represented in the military leadership, Abdel Wahid supports a more inclusive conference as a step toward

building the SLA politically, an area in which it is lacking. He argues that a conference should include all elements of the movement -- among which he counts student groups, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and women -- as well as all Darfur tribes. He fears that a military-only conference would reinforce the primacy of the military mentality in the movement, which he claims to oppose.<sup>17</sup>

With the two top leaders locked in a stalemate, efforts are underway to find a compromise. While Minni's recent return to Darfur initially appeared to strengthen his support on the ground, there are reports of serious abuses of the civilian population in the areas east of Jebel Marra controlled by, or exposed to, the operations of his faction.<sup>18</sup> Minni has been working to organise a political-military conference in Darfur and is pressing Abdel Wahid to attend.<sup>19</sup> Abdel Wahid has resisted and tried to undercut Minni by pushing for the AU talks to resume on 15 September (Minni wanted a postponement in order to convene the field conference) and using his attendance at the talks to strengthen his hand.<sup>20</sup>

The regional actors reacted in different ways. Chad hosted a preparatory meeting for the field conference in N'Djamena and agreed to allow many Darfurians in the diaspora to enter its territory for the first time in months. Libya reportedly supported the Chadian effort financially, while Eritrea seems to have strengthened its contacts with Abdel Wahid and facilitated a series of meetings in Asmara between him and the JEM leaders, with a view to countering Minni's perceived strength. Dr Sharif Harir, a prominent Darfur academic and former SLA negotiator, is also trying to mobilise military support for a conference and reorganisation of the movement.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, the

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<sup>14</sup> See Estelle Shirbon, "Rebel infighting undermines Darfur peace talks", Reuters, 28 June 2005.

<sup>15</sup> The two groups were largely separated during Sultanic times. The establishment by the British of a closed district in parts of Dar Zaghawa limited the movements of Zaghawa pastoralists, minimising interaction with the Fur. Some animosity emerged as far back as the early 1970s, when the Zaghawa started moving south, due to drought, to fertile Fur land. Localised conflict over resources in Darfur had never degenerated into an inter-tribal war before the Fur-Arab conflict in 1987-1989. Only large-scale Zaghawa migration into South Darfur throughout the 1990s and the current SLA leadership crisis have created an opportunity for the government to exploit and manipulate the mistrust between the Fur and Zaghawa.

<sup>16</sup> Minni refused to attend, demanding instead that a leadership conference be held inside Darfur. Crisis Group interviews, July 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Crisis Group interviews, July-August 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Crisis Group interviews, September 2005.

<sup>19</sup> A series of smaller military conferences have taken place over the past three months but confusion has developed since mid-August around Minni's proposed field conference, which seems to have lost momentum because it was not sufficiently inclusive. Abdel Wahid now claims he will return to Darfur immediately after the current round of Abuja negotiations to organise an all-inclusive field conference. Crisis Group interviews, September 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Nearly two weeks of workshops were organised by the AU before the substantive negotiations began, to allow Minni's faction to hold its field conference and arrive in Abuja. Although the field conference did not take place, representatives from Minni's wing arrived on 26 September.

<sup>21</sup> Although Sharif headed the SLA's negotiation team on several occasions, his status within the movement was always somewhat ambiguous because he maintained his position as the deputy chairman of the SFDA. Popular with the international community, he had little support in the field. Under Eritrean pressure, Abdel Wahid signed an agreement with him in the spring of 2004 to merge the SFDA with the SLA. Although a

preparatory meetings in N'Djamena failed to yield any concrete result, and Sharif's attempt may have backfired. Some representatives of the field commanders did fly to Abuja but have made it clear they oppose any substantive talks until the field conference is held.<sup>22</sup>

An outbreak of fighting in early and mid-September also can be traced back to the SLA division. The looting at the beginning of that month of several thousand cattle from Arab nomads near Malam was committed by SLA soldiers connected with Minni.<sup>23</sup> The camels were taken to Jebel Marra, leading to retaliatory attacks by Arab tribes.<sup>24</sup> In mid-September, the SLA attacked at least three towns in South Darfur, briefly capturing Sheiria.<sup>25</sup>

The ongoing fighting seriously undermines the Abuja negotiations, and a divided and paralysed SLA virtually guarantees continued conflict and is a disaster for the people of Darfur. A divided movement will not be able to extract a sustainable, negotiated political settlement from the government, one which addresses the root causes of the rebellion.

It is not realistic for the international community to delay the Abuja peace talks every time one faction requests it. The onus is on the SLA leadership to avoid further meltdown, and the international community must insist that it take decisive action to unify the movement. The first and most important step is for the political leaders to return to Darfur as soon as possible. Minni's return was a positive step, and pressure should be put on Abdel Wahid to

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small number of SFDA troops travelled to Darfur from their bases in eastern Sudan, the merger never took place, and both Abdel Wahid and Minni continue to view Sharif as a potential threat to their leadership. Many Fur resent the possibility of another Zaghawa taking a leadership position alongside Minni and Commander-in-Chief Juma Hagggar. Sharif's standing in Darfur has been undermined by his close relationship with Chadian President Idris Deby, who is perceived by many as an ally of the Sudanese government, as discussed below. His attempt to return to Darfur to build support for restructuring the SLA through a comprehensive field conference was blocked at the Chadian border by Minni's forces in July and early August 2005. Sharif is an experienced politician and academic with much to offer the SLA, but it remains to be seen whether he can re-establish himself as a key player. Crisis Group interviews, June-August 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Crisis Group interviews, September 2005.

<sup>23</sup> See "AU denounces Sudan rebel group for in compliance with ceasefire", Sudan Tribune, 3 September 2005, at [http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php?id\\_article=11457](http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php?id_article=11457).

<sup>24</sup> An SLA leader claimed that the camels were purposely brought by Minni's faction to Jebel Marra in order to give the impression that the Fur were behind the attack. Crisis Group interview, 19 September 2005.

<sup>25</sup> See: "Rebel SLA captures town in Sudan's Darfur", Reuters, 20 September 2005.

follow. The second step is to complete the field conference, which should have three main tasks:

- ❑ to review and revise the leadership and develop more broad-based structures as necessary;
- ❑ to agree on political demands for the Abuja negotiations and give the delegation a mandate.<sup>26</sup> It is crucial for the future of the movement that it begin to formulate its positions on power and wealth sharing in an open and inclusive manner, as these are issues on which it is well positioned to capture the support of broader Darfurian constituencies; and
- ❑ to take steps to restore command and control over the troops and put an end to the banditry that has become commonplace among certain elements.

Paradoxically, international pressure on the rebels is unlikely to be effective so long as the movement remains splintered. To assist the SLA in achieving greater unity, particularly the AU, UN, U.S., EU, UK, neighbouring countries and bilateral donors need to take the following two steps:

- ❑ coordinate messages and actions, as the SLA's factions are presently playing the international community against itself, with each drawing support from its own external backers;<sup>27</sup> and
- ❑ give necessary support to an all-inclusive field conference, including travel assistance, food aid and security guarantees. However, this should be conditioned on the conference being sufficiently inclusive and non-partisan, including the participation of women, not a gathering of elites designed to advance one faction over the other.

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<sup>26</sup> This has not happened. The June/July 2005 round saw the SLA delegation disagree over inclusion of the traditional *Hawakeer* land system. The Fur and Massaleit favoured this, as it would restore the status quo of land ownership in Darfur in which they control the bulk of fertile land. The Zaghawa contingent, a small minority on the SLA delegation, was opposed as it would restrict them to their increasingly infertile lands in North Darfur and so not resolve the underlying economic conditions brought on by drought and desertification which helped spark the rebellion in the North.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Minni used the August 2005 visits by Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General Jan Pronk, and AU Force Commander Okonkwo to North Darfur to support his push for a field conference, arguing that his efforts had international backing. At nearly the same time, members of Abdel Wahid's faction met with AU Special Envoy Dr Salim Salim in Dar es Salaam and urged that the talks be reconvened on 15 September. Abdel Wahid seeks to bolster his position by attending the Abuja talks, while Minni maintains his refusal to attend.

If unification continues to be unachievable, then the international community should be prepared to recognise that the SLA is in fact two separate factions, representing different interests and with different bases of support, and treat these as distinct movements. This would be dangerous, since it would likely cause a split along tribal lines and could lead to more conflict. However it might break the stalemate. Negotiations could proceed, although probably in a piecemeal fashion, undermining the chances for a comprehensive political solution in Darfur akin to what the SPLM negotiated with the government, but allowing separate political solutions that might contribute to greater stability on the ground in the short term.

## B. THE JEM

Weaker militarily but possibly more cohesive politically, the JEM has three distinguishing characteristics:

- its national political agenda, including alleged links to Islamist ideologue Dr Hassan el-Turabi's Popular Congress (PC) and to armed groups in Eastern Sudan;
- its usually antagonistic relationship with the Chadian government; and
- its small but divided military wing.

Although its military presence in Darfur is much smaller than the SLA's, JEM's political ideology is more strongly articulated. Unlike the SLA, whose political vision is focused primarily on Darfur (though the SPLM's influence has led over time to an increased emphasis on national themes), JEM's elaborate political positions call for a restructuring of the entire nation, with a return to the six original regions and rotating presidents from each region.<sup>28</sup> As part of its national campaign, it has established strong links with the eastern rebels and has joined the new Eastern Front together with the Rashaida Free Lions and the Beja Congress.<sup>29</sup> The JEM also boasts of support in Kordofan, the Northern Nile Valley and Southern Sudan.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The six original regions of Sudan were the South, Darfur, Kordofan, Eastern Sudan, the Central Region and the Northern Region, with Khartoum as a capital province. Most JEM political documents are available on its website: [www.sudanjem.com](http://www.sudanjem.com).

<sup>29</sup> There are several Beja representatives in the JEM delegation at the Abuja negotiations. For more on the formation of the Eastern Front, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°24, *A New Sudan Action Plan*, 26 April 2005.

<sup>30</sup> JEM claims to have a full operational structure in all six regions of Sudan, a 50-man council with representatives from all over the country and six deputy chairpersons, one for each region. This is meant to reduce the initial perception of it as a Zaghawa-dominated movement. Crisis Group interview, May 2005.

JEM's origins date back to the early 1990s, and it has been controversial since its inception because of its alleged links with Turabi and the PC.<sup>31</sup> Some authors of the now famous Black Book, which gives statistical evidence for the "marginalisation" of the country's peripheral regions by three riverain tribes (the Danaqla, the Shaiqiyya and the Ja'aliyiin) became leaders of the JEM.<sup>32</sup>

The suspicion surrounding JEM's links with Turabi's Islamist faction attaches mostly to the movement's leader, Dr Khalil Ibrahim, a high ranking member of the Islamist government throughout the 1990s. He and the rest of the JEM leadership claim to have broken completely with Turabi, despite government accusations that the movement is Turabi's tool.<sup>33</sup> Darfurians also frequently complain that Khalil is not truly interested in their region and is using the situation as a stepping-stone to power in Khartoum. There are increasing indications that ties remain between the PC and the JEM leadership. One clue is the seemingly inexhaustible funding available to JEM, relative to other opposition movements in Sudan, including the SLA. It is alleged that this money is channelled from the PC through former Turabi bagman Dr Ali al-Haj, who, like Khalil, previously resided in Germany.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Turabi's Islamist project in Sudan has pursued multiple strategies. Most recently he has built his political base among the marginalised periphery of the country. By demanding their right to participate equally in the national government and the national wealth -- in accordance with the Koranic principles of justice and equality that feature in the name of the movement -- he maintains steady influence over numerous armed groups. For more background on Turabi, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°39, *God, Oil, and Country: Changing the Logic of War in Sudan*, 10 January 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Khalil has claimed that the SLA is a splinter of JEM supporters, including Abdalla Abakar and Minni, who were lured out of the movement by Garang's promises of support. He has also accused Garang of failing to honor his commitment, made in Brussels in August 2002, to support JEM. Crisis Group interview, July 2005. The Black Book, which argued that the ruling party was systematically blocking people from Darfur and other regions from leadership positions within the civil service, was anonymously produced and distributed by Turabi followers after the ruling National Islamic Front (NIF) split in 2000 between the National Congress Party and Turabi's dissident PC. Khalil later claimed he had been one of the authors. "Khalil Ibrahim, 'We published the 'Black Book' to unmask the hegemony of a minority group over the country'", *Al-Hayat* (in Arabic), 6 March 2003.

<sup>33</sup> An important though subtle feature that JEM shares with Turabi is an anti-Communist sentiment and fear that the SPLM and SLA, which some JEM officials claim are one and the same, are working for the spread of Marxist and secular ideas across Sudan, Crisis Group interviews, April-July 2005.

<sup>34</sup> When the NIF split between Turabi's PC and the ruling National Congress Party in 1999-2000, Turabi's faction

The failed September 2004 coup in Khartoum seemed to expose a close connection between JEM and the PC. The regime pre-emptively arrested many PC members, and Khalil admitted that JEM helped organise the attempt.<sup>35</sup> A frank interview with the head of the Rashaida Free Lions,<sup>36</sup> Mabruk Mubarak Salim, also confirmed JEM's involvement in the affair, which Salim claimed to have helped plan and organise.<sup>37</sup> If JEM was involved and the government had good reason to arrest PC cadres, then there can be little doubt of at least a close tactical alliance between the two movements, despite Khalil's denials. The questions have proven increasingly divisive among the JEM military leadership and rank and file.

Unlike the SLM, JEM's political leadership has been based outside Darfur since the beginning of the conflict. Much of it, including Khalil, comes from the Kube sub-clan of the Zaghawa, where JEM enjoys support in both Darfur and Chad.<sup>38</sup> The movement reportedly recruits extensively in Chad, including from within the army, thereby strengthening the impression that its foot soldiers may be little more than mercenaries, whose political naiveté is exploited by diaspora politicians hoping to advance their ambitions in Khartoum.

JEM has a particularly antagonistic relationship with the Chadian government and President Idriss Deby. Intra-Zaghawa tension between Deby's Bideyat sub-clan and Khalil's Kube is compounded by personal animosity

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reportedly maintained control over a significant portion of the movement's financial resources outside the country. Crisis Group interviews, July 2005. Anecdotal evidence from discussions with Asmara-based National Democratic Alliance (NDA) members indicates that when Khalil arrived in Asmara to establish the JEM office in the spring of the 2004, he had far greater resources at his disposal than any other Asmara-based opposition group. Crisis Group has confirmed that there was at least some initial cooperation between Ali al-Haj and Khalil in Germany, although it is unknown whether this continues. Crisis Group interviews, 2004-2005.

<sup>35</sup> Crisis Group interview, 9 April 2005.

<sup>36</sup> The Raishaida Free Lions are an armed group in Eastern Sudan and a member of the NDA. In late February 2005, the Free Lions and the Beja Congress joined to form the Eastern Front (see Section III D below). Crisis Group will examine the dynamics of conflict in the East in a forthcoming briefing.

<sup>37</sup> "Sudanese rebel group claims involvement in alleged coup plot", *Al-Quds*, 29 November 2004. Reprinted in English at [www.sudantribune.com](http://www.sudantribune.com) on 2 December 2005. However, Mabruk goes on to conclude that JEM is independent and distinct from the PC.

<sup>38</sup> The Zaghawa have three main sub-clans: the Kube, who straddle the border with Chad and Darfur and tend to support the JEM; the Bideyat, the sub-clan of Chadian President Idriss Deby, who reside mostly in Chad; and the Tuer/Wagi, who reside mostly in Darfur and largely support the SLA.

between the two.<sup>39</sup> Chad is essentially a Zaghawa-dominated police state, and Deby relies heavily on the loyalty of the Zaghawa in the security services. Many, including Khalil, explain Deby's hatred of JEM as stemming from the fear that should a Zaghawa-Kube-led movement succeed in Sudan, it would draw away large numbers of Deby's Zaghawa support base. By contrast, the SLA is largely supported by the Tuer Zaghawa, who reside almost entirely in Darfur and do not pose the same threat to Deby because they are not a cross-border clan like the Kube and the Bideyat. Chadian officials have a long list of additional complaints against JEM which help explain the poisoned relationship, including fear that its political aspirations may extend into the country.<sup>40</sup> JEM's attitude is no less hostile; its delegation refused to allow the Chadian government to be included in the AU's mediation team at the June-July 2005 Abuja negotiations.<sup>41</sup>

Two major battlefield splits have severely weakened the JEM. The first occurred just prior to the opening of the N'djamena negotiations. At a meeting of field commanders in Jebel Karo on 23 March 2004, the military chief of staff, a former Chadian officer named Gibril Abdel-Karim Bari, defected taking many of the top officers with him. Gibril and his group claim to have split in rejection of Khalil's continued links with Turabi and pursuit of a national Islamist agenda that did not focus strongly on Darfur

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<sup>39</sup> Part of Deby's wariness of the Kube stems from a falling out with Maldom Abbas Koty, a Zaghawa Kube and his former chief of staff. Abbas Koty, then the minister of interior, launched a failed coup in June 1992. After fleeing the country for more than a year, he returned to Chad and formed a political party, the Committee for the National Recovery of Chad (CRNT), to oppose Deby. He was assassinated on 22 October 1993, a week after its legalisation.

<sup>40</sup> A senior Chadian government official voiced several other complaints against Khalil: first and foremost, that the JEM preys on the Chadian army for troops and weapons, buying both equipment and soldiers as necessary. He claimed that up to 85 per cent of JEM was Chadian, a widely shared belief among Darfurians as well. Secondly, the Chadians blame JEM for the May 2004 coup attempt against Deby from within the army, asserting that JEM bought the officers. The final complaint is that Khalil is a tool of Turabi whose ultimate interest is power in Khartoum, so JEM will obstruct a political solution for Darfur in order to maximise its leverage at the centre. Crisis Group interview with a senior Chadian official, 27 June 2005. However, many Sudanese Zaghawa feel that the average Zaghawa does not recognise a border between Zaghawa areas in Chad and Sudan and that the Chadian officers are keen to join JEM because they are poorly paid and equipped. Crisis Group interviews, August 2005.

<sup>41</sup> A compromise was eventually reached whereby the Chadians would participate at the request of the AU mediation team, but not as full members of the team. This is a stark departure from Chad's prior role as co-chair with the AU for the Darfur negotiations. Crisis Group interview, 26 August 2005.



issues.<sup>42</sup> On 17 April, they formed the National Movement for Reform and Development (NMRD) and established a stronghold in the Jebel Moon area of West Darfur. Sensing an opportunity to weaken Khalil and divide the JEM, the Chadian government, reportedly with Khartoum's backing, immediately began providing military and financial support<sup>43</sup> and attempted to include its delegation in the August 2004 Abuja talks. The AU mediation team refused, and NMRD signed its own ceasefire with Khartoum in December 2004, although there were renewed clashes with the government in Jebel Moon three months later.

NMRD now appears a largely spent force, politically and militarily, facing widespread allegations of corruption and misappropriation of financial assets.<sup>44</sup> It resurfaced in the news in mid-September 2005, however, with a statement that it was abandoning the December ceasefire and preparing to resume hostilities in response to repeated government attacks and its exclusion from the Abuja negotiations.<sup>45</sup>

The second split occurred in April 2005, when former senior field commander Mohamed Salih Harba attempted to remove Khalil as chairman. A senior member of JEM's negotiating team in Abuja, he had been kicked out of the movement in mid-February for attending the meeting of the AU Joint Commission in N'djamena, against Khalil's wishes.<sup>46</sup> On 10 April, Mohamed Salih and some 60 field commanders issued a statement establishing a Revolutionary Field Command of JEM and purporting to remove Khalil from his positions. The statement detailed a number of criticisms, including allegations of corruption and use of JEM as a front for international terrorism and fundamental Islam. The dissidents cited as justification for their action Khalil's continued ties to Turabi's PC and extended absence from the field, as well as obstruction of efforts by field commanders to improve relations with neighbouring countries and collaborate with the SLA.<sup>47</sup>

The breakaway group established a Provisional Revolutionary Collective Leadership Council of twenty

members led by Mohamed Salih, which described its guiding principles as a united, genuinely federal and egalitarian Sudan based on respect for the rule of law and internationally recognised fundamental rights, and commitment to obtaining a negotiated settlement of the Darfur conflict through the Abuja process.<sup>48</sup> Politically in line with the SLA, even in earlier rounds of negotiations, Mohamed Salih and some of his followers went to Abuja for the June-July talks but the AU mediation team denied them entry.

Khalil accused Chad of orchestrating this split and of having unsuccessfully attempted to incite another by field commanders in East Darfur in early April.<sup>49</sup> There are wildly divergent reports concerning Mohamed Salih's popularity among JEM troops: some Darfuri leaders estimate that he initially controlled as much as 75 per cent of them, while others suggest he has fewer than 100 soldiers.<sup>50</sup>

Mohamed Salih's challenge and Chadian opposition have clearly increased Khalil's receptivity to negotiations with Khartoum. Shortly after Mohamed Salih released his statement, Khalil began making more positive overtures toward the peace process. JEM opened a secret negotiating channel with Khartoum and held at least one clandestine meeting with high-ranking government officials in Europe in late April 2005. Although JEM splinter groups tend to be dismissed by Sudanese Zaghawa as Chadian puppets, the splits indicate that the political leadership has limited control over its military wing, which raises doubts about its ability to enforce a peace settlement. Rumours that Khalil has accepted massive Libyan payouts in the past few months, discussed below, have further damaged the movement's credibility.

Relations between the Chadians and JEM have improved thanks to an AU-facilitated meeting between President Deby and a small JEM delegation in N'djamena on 24 September, soon after the official opening of the negotiating session in Abuja. The parties agreed that Chad would cease hostilities towards JEM, as well as efforts for the time being to push for an SLA field conference, in exchange for JEM welcoming Chad's return as a co-mediator in Abuja. Time will tell if this détente will last. For the moment, it has drastically downgraded the status of the two JEM splinter factions, neither of which has

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<sup>42</sup> Crisis Group interview, 26 October 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Although JEM dismisses NMRD as a Chadian creation, Chadian officials are quick to point out that the split was caused by Khalil's leadership. This led to a situation Chad could manipulate but that was not of its creation. Crisis Group interviews with JEM officials and Chadian government officials, October 2004-July 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Crisis Group interview, August 2005.

<sup>45</sup> "Darfur rebel NMRD abandons ceasefire", Reuters, 15 September 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Crisis Group interview, 5 July 2005.

<sup>47</sup> "Statement by the Revolutionary Field Command of the Justice and Equality Movement" (in Arabic), 10 April 2005, at [www.sudaneseonline.com](http://www.sudaneseonline.com).

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<sup>48</sup> "Statement No. 3 of the Revolutionary Field Command of JEM", 28 April 2005, posted at [www.sudaneseonline.com](http://www.sudaneseonline.com) (in Arabic).

<sup>49</sup> Crisis Group interview, 9 April 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Crisis Group interviews, April-August 2005.



attempted to gain admittance to the current round of peace talks.<sup>51</sup>

Although the JEM is not as critical to a solution on the ground as the SLA, the international community should take the same line: pressing its leadership to return to Darfur and supporting a movement-wide conference to test its much-claimed commitment to democracy.

### C. SLA/JEM CLASHES

The SLA has always been suspicious of JEM's links to Turabi and the PC and dismissive of its military prowess, while JEM often considers the larger insurgency inexperienced and unsophisticated. Nevertheless, the two movements fought side-by-side against their common enemy during the early months of the insurrection.<sup>52</sup> They also coordinated negotiations through joint delegations until the October-November 2004 Abuja round.

Their differences boiled over in early 2005, however. JEM, weakened by defections, sought to buy SLA commanders to boost its forces. Open conflict broke out in late May over control of the strategic town of Muhajeria, ahead of the AU's Verification Mission to establish lines of territorial control. A respected SLA commander and a relative of Minni, Abdullah Doume, was killed by JEM forces. The SLA pursued JEM fighters to Graidia, a town with a small AU troop presence, and attacked them there, resulting in eleven civilians killed, seventeen wounded, and several houses damaged or destroyed.<sup>53</sup> Overmatched on the battlefield, some JEM fighters fled to their home base in North Darfur, and others surrendered to the AU.<sup>54</sup>

Using well-armed forces from as far away as El-Fasher, the SLA attacked JEM again three weeks later in Bamina,

near the border town of Tine in North Darfur.<sup>55</sup> Chad sealed the border to prevent JEM from crossing it.<sup>56</sup> JEM survived the offensive but the ferocity of fighting showed how far apart the movements have drifted.

There are two explanations. Some claim the SLA, at Chad's urging, decided to destroy JEM before the Abuja talks resumed. JEM's Khartoum-focused agenda complicates the negotiations for the SLA, and it may have wished to conduct them as Darfur's sole representative. Others believe the fighting has a strong clan-dimension because it seems to fall along Zaghawa-Tuer (SLA)/Zaghawa-Kube (JEM) lines.<sup>57</sup> Irrespective of motivation, suspicions of Chad's involvement undermined Minni with Darfurian politicians, while JEM may benefit from consistently resisting that government's perceived meddling.

### D. THE SLA-JEM RECONCILIATION PROCESS IN LIBYA

Libya likely thwarted further SLA attacks against JEM. Minni and Khalil are reportedly close to President Khaddafi and his intelligence apparatus,<sup>58</sup> and the Libyan leader recognised the potentially devastating consequences of the internecine fighting.

In mid-July, Libya initiated reconciliation talks under the auspices of prominent leaders of the Darfur Forum.<sup>59</sup> It

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<sup>51</sup> Crisis Group interview, 29 September 2005. See also "Darfur rebel JEM and Chad agree to cooperate", Reuters, 25 September 2005.

<sup>52</sup> The JEM attack on Tine in July 2003 illustrates the level of cooperation and mutual support. The JEM forces were nearly wiped out by the government and had to call on the SLA for help. The SLA rescued them at heavy cost in men and equipment but there was resentment in its ranks after the incident. Crisis Group interview, 5 October 2003.

<sup>53</sup> The AU reported that the SLA attack "killed eleven persons, wounded seventeen, and burnt several houses", press statement from AU Mission (AMIS) Spokesman Nouredine Mezni, "AMIS -- Press Release on the deteriorating security situation in Darfur", Khartoum, 6 June 2005, at: [http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id\\_article=9989](http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id_article=9989).

<sup>54</sup> JEM fighters taken by the AU to al-Fasher were subsequently interrogated by the government's security services.

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<sup>55</sup> According to the UN, an estimated five JEM soldiers were killed and eleven wounded on the first day of the SLA attack in Bamina. United Nations, "Sudan situation report", 23 June 2005.

<sup>56</sup> JEM soldiers who had fled to Tine, Chad, claimed the Chadian authorities were rounding up and arresting their fellow fighters. Crisis Group interview, 30 June 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Many Bideyat of eastern Chad, President Deby's clan, fought beside the Kube, seriously threatening his Bideyat support.

<sup>58</sup> JEM foreign relations officer Abu Bakr Hamid studied in Libya, while Minni and Osman al-Bushra, the SLA representative in Tripoli, as well as other current SLA troops, fought with the Libyan irregular forces in Chad in the late 1980s and were later instrumental in bringing Deby to power. Crisis Group interviews, 2004-2005.

<sup>59</sup> Also known as the Darfur Platform, this umbrella organisation emerged around prominent Darfurians in the National Assembly and other dignitaries. The two rounds of consultations -- in Tripoli in October 2004 and January 2005 -- between the "Darfurians of the interior" and the rebel movements helped forge a common political agenda among the Khartoum-based politicians, the rebels, and many tribal leaders opposed to the government's policies. The Forum claims to be inter-party and inter-tribal and that negotiations to formalise the platform carefully balanced ethnic and party concerns. Crisis Group interviews, May-August 2005.

established a mediation committee made up of that organisation's chief figures, including General Ibrahim Suleiman and General Siddiq Mohamed Ismael. Two groups of Darfurian elders, one chaired by a Fur, the other by a Massaleit, were formed to investigate the cause of the intra-Zaghawa fighting and arrange compensation for civilians. These efforts produced a public ceasefire agreement between Khalil and Abdel Wahid on 18 July 2005, and an uneasy calm has held since.<sup>60</sup> The two leaders also agreed to unify their negotiating positions just prior to the resumption of the September Abuja talks.<sup>61</sup>

While this might re-establish tribal harmony in areas under rebel control, there are several reasons to be cautious. Support for the initiative is decidedly lukewarm. Enthusiasm for the Darfur Forum is on the decline. The most consistently secular rebel leaders, including Abdel Wahid, have long mistrusted the Islamist background and political ambitions of many of its members.<sup>62</sup> Others are uneasy about the presence in the Forum of members of the National Congress Party (NCP), Sudan's long-time ruling party,<sup>63</sup> including its chair, General Ibrahim Suleiman, which they believe has caused the Forum to soften its positions on the crisis.<sup>64</sup> In recent weeks the Forum has also come under harsh criticism from some of its own members, who also fear that it has been co-opted by the government.<sup>65</sup>

However, the government has by no means favoured the Forum, which it prevented from being invited to the third

round of all-Darfur consultations in Tripoli in May 2005.<sup>66</sup> It also created a parallel forum -- mainly composed of Arab tribes and chaired by Adam Hamid, the former governor of West Darfur -- and sought unsuccessfully to unify the entities. Nonetheless, the Forum still counts individuals who enjoy the confidence of the rebels and can be instrumental in assisting them to overcome their disputes.

Implementation of the ceasefire will be difficult, and a political agreement reached in Tripoli could further fuel discord in Darfur among military commanders.<sup>67</sup> Further, while the Libyan agreement includes the leaders' pledge to unify their vision for the Abuja negotiations, it has yet to translate into a formal joint negotiating position, and divisions could easily re-emerge in the talks. Moreover, it is unclear to what extent even Abdel Wahid's own group, let alone JEM and wider Darfurian constituencies, have been involved in any meaningful consultation with the movement's chairman on the political and economic agenda of the peace talks. Finally, there is poor communication between the Libyan peace initiative in Darfur and the Abuja process.

### III. THE EXTERNAL ACTORS

#### A. KHARTOUM

For sixteen years, the Sudanese government's primary counter-insurgency strategy has been to displace and kill civilians to weaken a rebellion's support base, while actively dividing and coopting the rebels.<sup>68</sup> It has followed this blueprint steadfastly in Darfur. The architects of the ethnic cleansing there have retained significant power in the new government of national unity, which thus far remains unwilling to take the military and political steps needed to resolve the conflict: neutralising the Janjaweed militias and establishing genuine power and wealth sharing between Darfur and Khartoum.

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<sup>60</sup> "Sudan's Darfur rebel leaders sign reconciliation deal", Associated Press, 18 July 2005. The government-run Sudan Media Centre has reported clashes between SLA and JEM on at least two occasions since the ceasefire (15 August and 11 September) but the rebels deny new fighting. Crisis Group interviews, August-September 2005.

<sup>61</sup> Crisis Group interview, 18 September 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Members of the Forum have themselves expressed concerns that it has become a "trendy" opportunity to be seen as talking about Darfur, especially in international circles, that its lobbying, both within and outside the ruling party, has not been aggressive enough and that a few individuals are using it to advance themselves politically by media exposure. Crisis Group interviews, May-August 2005.

<sup>63</sup> Sudan's ruling political party since coming to power in a coup in 1989 as the NIF, the NCP became in September 2005 the majority partner in the new government of national unity resulting from the peace agreement signed earlier in the year with the SPLM. See Crisis Group Africa Report N°96, *The Khartoum-SPLM Agreement: Sudan's Uncertain Peace*, 25 July 2005; and Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°30, *Garang's Death: Implications for Peace in Sudan*, 9 August 2005.

<sup>64</sup> The appointment of National Congress members to the new National Assembly established as a result of the Khartoum/SPLM peace agreement will be a litmus test of the party's orientation towards a Darfur solution.

<sup>65</sup> Crisis Group interview, 17 August 2005.

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<sup>66</sup> The Libyans have held several rounds of broadly inclusive consultations for Darfurian leaders since October 2004, as discussed below. The government had also tried to prevent Forum members from attending the January 2005 session but eventually granted exit visas after Libyan intervention.

<sup>67</sup> Implementation has reportedly been delayed by uncertainties over funding, with some rejecting the Libyan offer to sponsor it and seeking alternative support in Europe. Crisis Group interview, August 2005.

<sup>68</sup> For an historical overview and analysis of the Bashir government's counter-insurgency tactics in Southern Sudan and throughout the country, see Crisis Group Report, *God, Oil, and Country*, op. cit.

Moving against the Janjaweed poses many risks for the government. The militias could turn on it militarily. If it arrests Janjaweed leaders and hands them over to the International Criminal Court (ICC), the militia leaders could expose the details of the counter-insurgency campaign against civilians. Darfurians want a share of national power and wealth that is commensurate with their numbers, but this is anathema to the ruling party. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Khartoum and the SPLM reduced the ruling party's former monopoly of power to 52 per cent, and it is adamant against shrinking this further, especially in the North and in the central government.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, the government recognises the enormous external costs of the war in Darfur. Key officials face potential indictment by the ICC, the UN Security Council has authorised sanctions (though it has been painfully slow to implement them), and relations with the U.S., which had appeared on the mend, have been set back badly, including the hope that its sanctions would be lifted, allowing increased competition in the oil sector.<sup>70</sup> To buy breathing room, the government has made cosmetic improvements. Although it retains a close alliance with the Janjaweed and militia activity remains high, steps like the grounding of flights by the Antonov bombers and helicopter gunships have won Khartoum some international respite at a time when the rebel movements appear to be imploding.

Simultaneously, the government continues to exploit and exacerbate rebel divisions, improving its position at the negotiating table. It has exploited resource-based conflict between the Zaghawa and Fur, thus widening the gap between the largest SLA supporters. Government officials and state-owned media, playing on an old theme,<sup>71</sup> claim the Zaghawa plan a Greater Zaghawa State (*Dulla al-Zaghawa al-Kubra*) in Sudan and Chad.<sup>72</sup> The

government media also advances the claim that Zaghawa seek to steal Fur land in Jebel Marra and elsewhere,<sup>73</sup> an idea that some Fur accept due to Zaghawa migration from North Darfur and resettlement in South Darfur over the past 40 years. One ruling party official admitted that the government had established a special unit to sow divisions among the rebels.<sup>74</sup>

According to government officials in Darfur, support by the Fur and Massaleit for the armed rebellion is waning.<sup>75</sup> Officials calculate that these devastated communities are inclined to support tribal reconciliation so as to curtail the violence directed towards them.<sup>76</sup> To deepen the wedge between the Fur and Zaghawa and regain control, the government initiated a series of tribal reconciliation meetings in the first half of 2005.<sup>77</sup> It is also trying to entice IDPs to return home with cash payoffs,<sup>78</sup> using a

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overthrew him. Some rebel leaders believe the converse is true: Arabs are set on establishing a Greater Arab State in Chad, Sudan, Libya, Mali, and Mauritania. These diametrically opposed conspiratorial views and discourses, where the existence of the other means the complete subjugation, if not annihilation, of oneself, fuel the zero-sum aspect of the conflict. See Sharif Harir, "'Arab belt' versus 'African belt': ethno-political conflict in Darfur and the regional cultural factors", in Sharif Harir and Terje Tvedt (eds.), *Short-Cut to Decay: The Case of the Sudan* (Uppsala), p. 167.

<sup>69</sup> Crisis Group interviews with government officials, April and May 2005.

<sup>70</sup> In May 2005, the government reportedly attempted to secure the moral backing for its tribal reconciliation initiatives of senior Fur politician Ibrahim Ahmed Diraige and Sharif Salih, the leader of the Tijaniyya, the religious sect to which most Fur adhere. The government sought support for the agreement between the Fur and the Arabs of South Darfur (the Bani Halba and Rizeigat in particular), and for the high-profile Fur-Arab agreement of April 2005 involving Musa Hilal and Fur intellectual Yusif Bakhit. While such initiatives may have enjoyed some support in rural areas, it would appear that IDPs in the camps have been consistently opposed, and intellectuals and student organisations dismiss them as perpetuating an outdated, paternalistic "tribal" image of Darfur. Crisis Group interview, May 2005.

<sup>71</sup> Crisis Group interviews, April and May 2005.

<sup>72</sup> The government continues its close relationship with Fur leaders, Yusef Bakheit and Domingaway Fadul Sese, as key intermediaries in the Arab-Fur reconciliation process. It is reportedly investing considerable money in the effort. Crisis Group interviews, March-August 2005.

<sup>73</sup> As discussed in Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°28, *The AU's Mission in Darfur: Bridging the Gaps*, 6 July 2005.

<sup>74</sup> In May 2005, Musa Hilal, a tribal sheikh of the northern Rizeigat and suspected Janjaweed leader, returned to North Darfur to lead a government-initiated program that encourages IDPs to return home in exchange for financial compensation and the promise of security. Ophera McDoom, "Tribal leaders preach peace in war-torn Darfur", Reuters, 9 May 2005. According to community leaders in northern Darfur, however,

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<sup>69</sup> For more on the CPA and its implementation challenges, see Crisis Group Report, *The Khartoum-SPLM Agreement*, op. cit.

<sup>70</sup> One of Khartoum's goals in a peace agreement with the SPLM was restoration of full diplomatic relations with the U.S. and the lifting of U.S. sanctions. However, the U.S. is unlikely to send an ambassador to Khartoum and remove sanctions until substantial progress is made on ending the Darfur crisis. Crisis Group interviews, Washington, August 2005.

<sup>71</sup> The NIF government in the early 1990s published a pamphlet for graduating high school students describing its vision for the future of the Sudan state and potential threats. Along with Garang's SPLM, the Greater Zaghawa State was one of the primary threats identified. Crisis Group interviews, August 2005.

<sup>72</sup> The idea of a "Greater Zaghawa State" was floated for the first time in the late 1980s by Hissein Habre's regime in Chad, which was responsible for the killing of many Zaghawa civilians in eastern Chad and even in the Kutum area of North Darfur. Habre felt threatened by the Zaghawa, who indeed eventually

weakened and sometimes complicit native administration as intermediary and thereby driving a further wedge between the traditional authorities and the population and fuelling corruption and improper use of international relief.

The government calculates that these reconciliation processes and compensation schemes will weaken support for the rebels, reduce local calls for international trials, pacify and stabilise southern, western, and central Darfur, and contain the SLA (primarily the Zaghawa-wing) in northern Darfur.<sup>79</sup> Unlike a genuine political solution with provisions for security arrangements and wealth and power sharing, none of these initiatives threatens NCP power in Khartoum. Many Darfurians see through the government's tactics and dismiss the reconciliation meetings as a sham. IDPs are wary of returning to their villages, especially since those who do are often attacked.

Most Darfurians do not trust the government, but rebel divisions and the prospect of protracted local conflicts could increase Khartoum's success in buying some small level of support among them. Khartoum's promises of compensation, returns and tribal reconciliation may start to seem more attractive than the divided rebellion's promises of eventual security and power and wealth-sharing.

## B. THE SPLM

The recent death of its chairman John Garang, will undoubtedly have an impact on internal SPLM dynamics. His successor, Salva Kiir, has said he wants to end the Darfur conflict, and contacts have been re-established with the SLA. However he is unlikely to be as involved with Darfur as Garang was, largely because of the other challenges he faces as he attempts to fill his predecessor's shoes in implementing the CPA.<sup>80</sup>

The SPLM gave military and political aid to the SLA during its formation, and Garang retained close ties with its leaders. He is reported to have favoured Minni initially but to have shifted to Abdel Wahid when it became clear that the former's military strength was a threat to his own ambition to control the rebels' agenda.<sup>81</sup> In view of Garang's enormous prestige, his perceived support gave Abdel Wahid great additional clout inside the SLA.

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most IDPs distrust Hilal. One displaced person asked, "just last year you came and killed us. Have you returned to give us our lives back?" Crisis Group interviews, Darfur, May 2005.

<sup>79</sup> The government's December 2004 offensive should be seen in this light, as designed to drive the SLA out of South Darfur.

<sup>80</sup> See Crisis Group Briefing, *Garang's Death*, op. cit.

<sup>81</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Khartoum and Nairobi, June 2004-May 2005.

Although the perception of this support was almost certainly greater than the reality, there were persistent rumours that the SPLM gave military support specifically to Abdel Wahid's contingent in Jebel Marra. Regardless of the validity of these rumours, Garang's death weakens Abdel Wahid in dealing with Minni's faction.

The growing perception among Darfurians, and northerners more broadly, that Garang's death diminishes the likelihood the South will vote to keep Sudan together in the southern self-determination referendum six years hence strengthens those who believe Darfur must seek its own solution, regardless of national alliances. This development should be watched closely: it could lead to a rebel negotiating agenda divorced from the new Sudanese realities produced by the Khartoum-SPLM peace. The Government of National Unity announced on 20 September in Khartoum, with its limited representation of Northern opposition forces and of Darfur and other marginalised regions of the North and exclusion of the SPLM from the revenue (energy and finance) and security (interior and defence) ministries, has dashed most domestic and international hopes that the National Congress Party is really willing to share power in the spirit of the CPA.

The SPLM is engaging, although more slowly than expected, on the Darfur file. A high-level delegation is expected to travel to Abuja in the coming days to hear the views of the rebel movements and then submit to the Council of Ministers a draft proposal for a political solution to the conflict.

## C. CHAD

From its onset, the conflict in Darfur has threatened the Deby regime. First, there was the cost of hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees and the risk that fighting, spurred by the incursions of Janjaweed -- some of them Chadian Arabs -- would spread across the border and produce parallel African-Arab troubles. That risk increased as Deby's tight grip on power provoked strong opposition to the government and its Zaghawa supporters. Secondly, the conflict pitted Deby's Zaghawa kinsmen -- his most important domestic constituency -- against his more powerful neighbour, Sudan.<sup>82</sup> To choose sides would mean political suicide.

Deby acted along four lines to contain the conflict and minimise its impact: first, mediation between the Sudanese government and the rebels to secure a ceasefire; secondly, more border security, including French troops, to limit the

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<sup>82</sup> The Sudanese government engineered Deby's rise to power and has maintained a firm grip on Chadian security forces through Sudanese Zaghawa in senior command positions.

flow of arms into Darfur;<sup>83</sup> thirdly, deployment of officials into eastern Chad to quell tribal tensions;<sup>84</sup> and fourthly, interference with the internal politics of the rebellion, in collaboration with intelligence circles in Khartoum and independently. His strategy has contained the immediate risks but the attempts to appease both the Zaghawa and Khartoum have been more problematic.

Zaghawa from Darfur were instrumental in Deby's campaign to overthrow former President Hissein Habre. Many Sudanese Zaghawa who fought for Deby were incorporated into his security apparatus. At the onset of the insurgency, the SLA lobbied Deby to return the favour but he held back.

According to many observers, Deby feared that if he supported the SLA and it succeeded in Sudan, Chadian security forces who joined the rebels might eventually threaten his regime. This fear was reinforced when JEM joined the fray since it was able to pay Chadian volunteers and even army officers more and more regularly than Deby's government. JEM has likewise bought weapons and ammunition from entrepreneurial elements of the Chadian military.<sup>85</sup>

Deby also feared a backlash from Khartoum due to the strong ties between the Sudanese and Chadian Zaghawa. At the start of the insurgency, Sudan perceived that the rebels were benefiting from cross-border Zaghawa support, especially that of kinsmen in the military and security apparatus. It pressured Deby to deny official support to the rebels and to crack down on the cross-border traffic of people and weapons. As the insurgency gained momentum in early 2003, Sudan's then Minister of Interior, Abdel-Rahim Mohammed Hussein, flew to N'djamena to urge Chadian officials to close the border to the rebels

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<sup>83</sup> "In early January the Chadian authorities intercepted an arms shipment with an undetermined destination, raising suspicions that Sudanese rebels may be receiving continued support from members of Mr Deby's ethnic group, the Zaghawa, who live in the northern regions", Economist Intelligence Unit, "Country Report: Chad", February 2005, p. 15. This report also illustrates that Deby is making a public effort to keep weapons out of Darfur.

<sup>84</sup> Government officials in Chad seem to recognise that a primary reason the Darfur conflict has been so devastating is the inflammatory role played by Khartoum through incitement of tribal violence and support for tribal militias to counter the rebels. N'djamena pledges not to be complicit in this type of violence in eastern Chad and has sent officials there to improve relations between Arab and African tribes. While this is important, Deby's concentration of power and heavy reliance on his Zaghawa ethnic group at the expense of others ensures that conditions for violent conflict remain. Crisis Group interview, 27 July 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Crisis Group interviews, June-September 2005.

and work more closely with Khartoum.<sup>86</sup> Shortly after, Deby reciprocated the trip, and by April 2003 he had sent 800 troops into Darfur to fight beside the Sudanese army.<sup>87</sup>

Direct threats caused the regime initially to try to accommodate Khartoum's demands at any costs. Chad was the lead mediator between the government of Sudan and the rebels from August to December 2003. However, the ceasefire it brokered between the SLA and the government in September 2003 met none of the rebels' political demands and was routinely violated by the government, its militias, JEM (not a signatory), and non-Zaghawa elements of the SLA.<sup>88</sup>

In addition to diplomatic pressure, Khartoum has tried to keep N'djamena on its side by supporting Chadian rebels in Darfur and allowing cross-border Janjaweed raids.<sup>89</sup> In January 2004 it bombed the Chadian half of the border town of Tine.<sup>90</sup> Although the Janjaweed incursions have tapered off, due in part to bolstered Chadian army/French border patrols, Khartoum maintains close ties to the Chadian rebels.<sup>91</sup> However, a cross-border Janjaweed attack on a Chadian village in late September 2005, in which as many as 75 people were killed, again heightened tensions between the two neighbours.<sup>92</sup>

In April 2005, Chad officially objected to Sudanese support for some 3,000 Chadian rebels near the border and threatened to withdraw as a mediator.<sup>93</sup> Khartoum quickly

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<sup>86</sup> "Chad reportedly closes borders with Sudan to stop rebels' infiltration", BBC Monitoring, 1 April 2003.

<sup>87</sup> Crisis Group interview, 27 June 2005.

<sup>88</sup> The original negotiations were hastily organised by Chad through tribal connections, which resulted in an all-Zaghawa SLA negotiating team. For more on Chad's earlier mediation efforts, see Crisis Group Report, *Towards an Incomplete Peace*, op. cit.; Crisis Group Report, *Darfur Rising*, op. cit.; Crisis Group Africa Report N°80, *Sudan: Now or Never in Darfur*, 23 May 2004; and Crisis Group Africa Report N°83, *Darfur Deadline: A New International Action Plan*, 23 August 2004.

<sup>89</sup> "Deby's dilemma", *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 45, No. 18, 10 September 2004.

<sup>90</sup> "Chad-Sudan: Sudanese bombs dropped on Chadian town, three killed", IRIN, 30 January 2004.

<sup>91</sup> At the end of July 2004, France agreed to deploy 200 soldiers, which at the time was around one fifth of its total presence in Chad, to help patrol the border and prevent incursions from Sudan. "French army moves to Sudan border", BBC News, 31 July 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3943137.stm>.

<sup>92</sup> President Deby has publicly said Janjaweed from Darfur carried out the attack, though he has stopped short of accusing Khartoum of responsibility. "Sudan Janjaweed militia accused of deadly attack in Chad", Agence France-Presse/Sudan Tribune, 29 September 2005, [http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id\\_article=11851](http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id_article=11851).

<sup>93</sup> "New spat over Chadian rebels in Darfur highlights difficult relations", IRIN, 20 April 2005.

appeased Deby, however, and averted a crisis, sending a team to N'djamena, reportedly with money, and allowing Chad to arrest a few particularly threatening rebel leaders based in Darfur. It also agreed to re-deploy the Chadian rebels deeper inside Darfur.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, those elements remain in Darfur, and the Sudanese army is alleged to have opened training sites for them in Um Tajok and other parts of West Darfur.<sup>95</sup> The clear message is, if you support our rebels, we will support yours.

The uneasy alliance with Khartoum has had consequences for Deby. He is under enormous pressure from Chadian Zaghawa -- most importantly those within the military -- who perceive that he will sacrifice members of his own ethnic group to curry Sudanese favour.<sup>96</sup> Zaghawa officers warned Chadian soldiers sent to fight the SLA in April 2003 not to attack, and threatened Deby with retaliation if they moved against Darfur rebels.<sup>97</sup> Many officers in the army and security services have defied the president to support the rebels.

On 16 May 2004, while Deby visited France, a part of his army prepared an attack on N'djamena from the forests in Gasi. Zaghawa Bideyat officers angry at Deby's cooperation with Khartoum and discontented with their share of government patronage reportedly led the coup attempt. Upon hearing of the threat, Deby returned, and the plotters were talked down through the mediation of a top general. "We chose not to announce the coup because the Zaghawa could lose control of the country", explained a participant. "So we covered it up and tried to keep it inside the Zaghawa, until the international community found out".<sup>98</sup>

Over time, JEM has become a growing concern for Deby. While it has tried to create a diverse movement with national representation, most of its rank-and-file and key commanders are Zaghawa-Kube, attracted by Khalil, one of the tribe's prominent leaders, who appointed kinsmen to important positions. As mentioned above, it is too early to tell whether the recent JEM-Chad rapprochement will last.

While Deby has sought to destroy JEM, his policies toward the SLA are more difficult to classify. At first, it seemed he was suspicious that the SLA also sought to capture power in N'djamena. These suspicions coupled with strong pressure forced him to side with Khartoum. There are, however, high-ranking members of the Chadian government who recognise the value of supporting SLA

unity so the movement can negotiate a comprehensive political solution. This group is motivated particularly by concern for the implications of the large refugee population in eastern Chad. Their argument appears to be gaining credence in N'djamena. In early September 2005, Chad sponsored a leadership meeting of the SLA in the capital to try to resolve the dispute between Minni and Abdel Wahid and the confusion around Minni's efforts to hold a field conference. Although Minni, Abdel Wahid and Deputy Chairman Khamees failed to attend, the conference marked a drastic shift in official Chadian policy and has raised hope Chad can become a force for unity instead of division.

#### D. LIBYA

President Khadafi's involvement in Sudan dates back to the early 1970s, though it has taken different and sometimes conflicting directions. Direct Libyan and Egyptian interventions were decisive in foiling the 19 July 1971 communist-led coup against the Arab nationalist government of President Nimeiri.<sup>99</sup> In the early 1980s, Khadafi's policy was driven by his hostility towards the Nimeiri government and his use of Darfur as a staging ground for intervention in Chad's civil wars. The former included logistical and military support to the SPLM for the war in the South, while the latter involved support for the Arab Gathering (*al-tajammu al-arabi*), which was a part of his early efforts to assist populations of Arab origin to take power in sub-Saharan Central and West Africa.<sup>100</sup> In the aftermath of the 1986 Sudanese elections, in which Sadiq al-Mahdi's victory was attributed in part to Khadafi's financial support, Khartoum allowed the Libyans to recruit Darfuri Arabians for the war in Chad

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<sup>99</sup> Khadafi's decision to intercept a civilian airliner and arrest two coup leaders returning to Khartoum caused the collapse of the short-lived regime. In the backlash, Nimeiri's government hastily executed several members of the central committee of the Sudanese Communist Party, considered at the time the largest and best organised such party in Africa and the Middle East, and jailed thousands of members. The Communist Party was banned for fourteen years and has never fully recovered. Shortly thereafter, relations deteriorated between Khadafi and Nimeiri over the pace of unification of the two states.

<sup>100</sup> Khadafi sought to extend the "Arab belt" (*al-hizam al-arabi*) through use of his Islamic Brigade (*al-failag al-islami*), a multinational armed force based in Darfur, led by Acheikh Ibn Omer, made up of migrant workers and nomadic pastoralists from Western and Central Africa, and including Chadian opposition groups, mainly Arab tribes marginalised by N'Djamena's power-sharing arrangements. Increasingly, the "Arab belt" ideology provoked the emergence of a parallel "African belt" (*al-hizam al-zanj* or *al-hizam al-zurga*) ideology among the settled tribes of Darfur, particularly the Fur, whose livelihood was threatened by the spill-over of Chadian instability.

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<sup>94</sup> Crisis Group interviews, 18 May 2005, 25 June 2005.

<sup>95</sup> Crisis Group interviews, April-July 2005.

<sup>96</sup> Crisis Group interviews; "New spat", IRIN, op. cit.

<sup>97</sup> Crisis Group interview with Chadian officer, 27 June 2005.

<sup>98</sup> Crisis Group interview, 27 June 2005.

and tolerated a de facto Libyan occupation of parts of Darfur. Libyan arms supplied to Chadian and Sudanese Arab tribes across the lax borders are among the root causes of the current conflict in Darfur, as the migration of Chadian Arabs into North and West Darfur led to increasingly lethal fighting between pastoralists and farmers and between Arab and Zaghawa pastoralists.

The humiliating defeat of Khadafi's Islamic Brigade in Chad in the first half of 1987 may have inspired the Arab Gathering's plan to take over Darfur and later the rest of Sudan by people of Arab origin and Islamic faith. The "Arab belt" ideology provided support for the presence of Chadian Arab opposition groups in Darfur, who, assisted by their Sudanese ethnic kin, staged guerrilla attacks in eastern Chad. This racist ideology also provided legitimacy for the escalation of resource-based conflicts between nomadic Arab pastoralists and settled farmers, such as the Arab-Fur conflict in 1987-1989, and the Arab-Masaleit conflict in 1996-1998. Although the "Arab belt" project may be supported today by elites who have co-opted some traditional leaders, it is doubtful that it has any real grassroots constituency among populations of Arab origin in Darfur.<sup>101</sup>

The Zaghawa, who share the same nomadic lifestyle as the Arab tribes of North Darfur, did not identify at that time with the camp of the "Africans". Though the Chadian Zaghawa were part of the coalition that brought Hussein Habre to power in N'djamena, their marginalisation by the dominant Goraan soured their relations with the regime and made rapprochement with Libya possible. This is when relations were established with the future Zaghawa leadership of the SLA and the JEM, as the Zaghawa, both Sudanese and Chadian, were instrumental in replacing Habre in December 1990 with Deby, in a coup discreetly supported by Tripoli and Khartoum.<sup>102</sup> The Fur, the main targets of the Arab Gathering in Sudan, particularly during the 1987-1989 Arab-Fur war, tended instead to ally with the Chadian government during the 1980s and so viewed Libya with deep suspicion.

This history explains why Khadafi's recent attempts to mediate the Darfur crisis have generally been better accepted by the Zaghawa leaders, Minni and Khalil, than by the Fur and Massaleit elements under Abdel Wahid and Khamees. Khadafi convened two rounds of all-Darfur consultations in October 2004 and January 2005, with the intention of providing a forum for prominent Darfurians to search for lasting solutions and helping to restore the

region's social fabric. Since the rebels were also invited,<sup>103</sup> these consultations proved vital in the process of fine-tuning the armed opposition's political agenda and facilitating its broader understanding by Darfurian leaders from inside Sudan. To Khartoum's dismay, these discussions also helped build consensus behind a common agenda among a broader Darfurian constituency and have been central to the emergence of the Darfur Forum mentioned above.

A May 2005 session of Libya's all-Darfur consultations was less successful due to Khartoum's refusal to allow Darfurian leaders in the Sudanese capital to attend. There is also growing fear among Darfurians that Tripoli's real agenda is to bring the rebel movements to reject a role for the International Criminal Court (ICC) and discourage Western intervention in Darfur. Though both signed a ceasefire declaration in May, which does not mention either point,<sup>104</sup> Abdel Wahid and the Darfur Forum quickly disassociated themselves from it.<sup>105</sup>

Libya's influence over some key elements within Minni's faction of the SLA and within JEM, links with several members of the Darfur Forum, and seemingly inexhaustible financial capacity make it an important player. Many observers believe Khadafi is primarily motivated by fear of international intervention in his backyard; he has repeatedly stated opposition to the referral of Sudanese cases to the ICC and the involvement of NATO and other Western troops in Darfur. His relations with Sudan are mixed: he acknowledges Khartoum as a preferred ally, while trying to contain the destabilising effect of its policies in the region.<sup>106</sup> Khadafi, who in recent years has made major efforts to improve his relations with the West, has toned down his former pan-Arabist rhetoric and seeks international acceptance as an African peace-maker, willing to make humanitarian concessions<sup>107</sup> in return for a Western commitment not to intervene directly in Darfur.

It remains unclear whether Darfur's mineral potential plays a significant role in Libya's engagement, although

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<sup>103</sup> The SLA did not attend the original October meeting in Tripoli.

<sup>104</sup> See: "Sudan gov't, Darfur rebels sign Tripoli declaration on cease-fire", *Sudan Tribune*, 11 May 2005, at [http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id\\_article=9517](http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id_article=9517).

<sup>105</sup> Crisis Group interviews, May 2005.

<sup>106</sup> There may be two tendencies at work in the Libyan leadership, one inspired by foreign policy specialists and more favourable to Khartoum in the name of Arab solidarity, the other dictated by security circles and more concerned about the dangers Khartoum's policies represent for Sudan's viability and regional stability. Crisis Group interviews, May-June 2005.

<sup>107</sup> Libya has allowed some World Food Programme cargos to cross its territory for Darfur, including rebel-controlled areas.

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<sup>101</sup> Harir, op. cit., p. 167. For background on the Arab Gathering, see also Crisis Group Report, *Darfur Rising*, op. cit.

<sup>102</sup> See fn. 73 above.



this seems unlikely given the country's own oil wealth. Many Darfurians live in Libya, most often as illegal labourers in the oil sector, in addition to the indigenous Zaghawa on the edge of the south-eastern desert.<sup>108</sup> Remittances to Darfur have been severely curtailed by the war, and the unprecedented, widespread impoverishment makes further migration a distinct possibility. Control of migrant labour is likely a component of the Libyan negotiating strategy, as the threat of sending workers back to the Sudan could be a bargaining chip with the Darfurian community in Libya, Khartoum, the rebels and the international community alike.

Khadaffi's recent interventions, however, are increasingly difficult to understand. Stories of substantial payments to Khalil, Minni, and Abdel Wahid began to circulate following the January 2005 all-Darfur meeting. By early May, it was widely repeated in Darfurian circles that Khadaffi had given millions of dollars to both Khalil and Minni and a much smaller sum to Abdel Wahid.<sup>109</sup> The plane carrying the SLA delegation to the June-July Abuja talks passed through Tripoli from Asmara, and the bulk of the SLA and JEM delegations went directly there after that round.<sup>110</sup> Khadaffi organised a televised ceremony in which Minni, Abdel Wahid and Khalil handed him the recently signed Declaration of Principles, giving the impression that he controlled the rebels. In July, stories re-emerged of massive pay-outs to the JEM and SLA in exchange for agreement to a Libyan proposal. However, the rebels refused to sign the draft Libya presented.<sup>111</sup>

While Khadaffi's Darfur policy is complex and ambiguous, he has provided the people of Darfur, within and outside Sudan, with invaluable opportunities to meet together. However, his financial support for individual rebel factions

may have inadvertently fuelled their divisions. His mediation efforts outside the formal AU talks in Abuja should be closely monitored and better integrated into the wider diplomatic process of negotiating a political settlement.

## **E. ERITREA**

Relations with Sudan have been tense since Eritrea's 1994 complaint to the UN Security Council about Khartoum's support to Eritrean Islamic Jihad, an extremist group bent on replacing President Isaias Afewerki's regime with an Islamic state. In response, Eritrea hosted the Sudanese opposition umbrella National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the former Sudanese embassy in Asmara, allowed NDA factions to set up recruitment and training camps along the border, and gave NDA fighters arms and logistical support. In 1996/1997, it began to support the establishment of the armed wing of the Darfurian SFDA of Governor Diraiqe and Sharif Harir.<sup>112</sup>

The outbreak of their border war in 1998 caused Ethiopia and Eritrea to seek Sudan's support or at least neutrality. Khartoum used the opportunity to press both to scale back support for its armed opposition.<sup>113</sup> As a result, the rebels of eastern Sudan and their SPLM allies under the NDA's unified military command relocated their camps inside Sudan. Low intensity warfare followed, with the rebels engaging in hit-and-run operations and the government launching air raids. Serious Khartoum/SPLM peace talks as of 2002 quieted the eastern front except for occasional flare ups, as all components of the NDA scaled down military activities.

However, the Darfur conflict brought new tensions to the East. The SLA joined the NDA and established bases in Asmara, and both Darfurian armed movements struck alliances with the rebel groups of eastern Sudan. In February 2004, out of frustration with the power and wealth sharing provisions for northern Sudan in the peace agreement being worked out by Khartoum and the SPLM and anger that the NDA had not been allowed to represent the East's concerns in the negotiations, the Beja Congress and the Rashaida Lions formed a new alliance -- the Eastern Front.<sup>114</sup> The JEM later joined, and in June 2005 an Asmara-based spokesman claimed it had the largest

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<sup>108</sup> Estimates of Darfurian migrant labourers in Libya are as high as 500,000, Crisis Group interviews, 2004-2005.

<sup>109</sup> Crisis Group interviews, May 2005. Minni reportedly used this money to curry favour with commanders on the ground when he returned to Darfur in May.

<sup>110</sup> Minni had left Abuja for Libya early in the June-July negotiations. When the Declaration of Principles was close to being finalised in early July, the Libyan representative pressed the rebels to travel to Sirte, Libya for the signing ceremony. Crisis Group interview with a member of the SLA delegation to Abuja, 12 September 2005.

<sup>111</sup> While unconfirmed, it is rumoured that Khalil accepted between \$8 million and \$40 million in July in return for agreeing to a Libyan-backed political deal with Khartoum. It is also rumoured that Minni accepted several million dollars, although there are contradictory reports that he was essentially under house arrest in Libya for weeks. Crisis Group interviews, July-September 2005. The proposal included provisions for power and wealth sharing for Darfur, as well as six Sudanese vice presidents -- one from each region. The latter idea has appeared in JEM's political discourse. Crisis Group interview, 29 July 2005.

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<sup>112</sup> See fns. 4 and 21 above. The SFDA was then a member of the NDA. Crisis Group interviews, 22 October 2004, 11 April 2005.

<sup>113</sup> Ethiopia was allowing the SPLM to supply troops in Southern Blue Nile from its territory.

<sup>114</sup> "Two eastern Sudanese rebel groups merge", Agence France-Presse, 23 February 2005.

force in the East.<sup>115</sup> JEM demands that negotiations between the Eastern Front and the government be merged with the Abuja process on Darfur.<sup>116</sup> Following the last minute agreement between the government and the NDA in June, which allowed the latter to participate in the National Constitutional Review Commission -- a key part of the Khartoum-SPLM peace -- the Eastern Front launched high-profile raids on government targets in the East to demonstrate the limitations of that NDA concession.<sup>117</sup> Sudan blamed the military escalation on Eritrea, exacerbating mistrust between the two.<sup>118</sup>

Since mid-2004, Eritrea has given discreet support -- passports, small amounts of weapons and ammunition, and training facilities -- to the Darfur rebels, the reason why both Minni and Abdel Wahid reside part-time in Asmara and Khalil has been a frequent visitor.<sup>119</sup> It has also tried, unsuccessfully, to mediate between the two SLA factions and in September 2005 facilitated meetings between Abdel Wahid and Khalil that resulted in the joint document described above.

In the June-July 2005 round of Abuja negotiations, the SLA pushed for Eritrea's inclusion on the AU mediation team. The Khartoum delegation refused, which -- along with disagreement over Chad's role -- delayed commencement of the talks. A compromise was finally reached, which allowed the Eritreans to join the plenary sessions but not as formal mediators.<sup>120</sup>

Eritrea wants to remain relevant in the determination of its neighbour's political future. It would like to see power shift in Khartoum from its long time adversary, the NCP, to its NDA allies and will likely continue to support both the Darfurian and Eastern Sudanese rebel movements until a comprehensive political solution can be found.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Unless reversed, the slow implosion of the rebel movements threatens to extend the tragic situation in Darfur indefinitely. The growing divide within the movements, particularly the SLA, has opened the door for Khartoum and various regional actors to pursue their own agendas and further weaken the rebels. Rather than ending the rebellion, splintering of the SLA and JEM would likely lead to the prevalence of warlordism throughout Darfur and make a political solution to the crisis impossible. SLA and JEM leaders must begin to put the needs of the people they claim to represent ahead of petty political calculations and return to Darfur immediately to conduct inclusive field conferences for the purpose of unifying their respective movements. The international community should support such field conferences as a vital step towards achieving a negotiated peace in Darfur.

**Nairobi/Brussels, 6 October 2005**

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<sup>115</sup> Ed Harris, "Darfur rebels boast strength in East Sudan too", Reuters, 22 June 2005.

<sup>116</sup> Crisis Group interview, 9 April 2004.

<sup>117</sup> See Crisis Group Report, *The Khartoum-SPLM Agreement*, op. cit. The attacks received considerable international media coverage relative to previous offensives in the East, courtesy of JEM's political machine. See "Eastern Sudan rebels launch major Red Sea offensive", Agence France-Presse, 20 June 2005.

<sup>118</sup> "Sudan accuses Eritrea of planning attack on East -- SMC", *Sudan Tribune*, 21 June 2005, at: [http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php?id\\_article=10284](http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php?id_article=10284).

<sup>119</sup> Crisis Group interviews with SLA and NDA officials, 2004-2005.

<sup>120</sup> "Darfur talks -- Sudan accepts Eritrean participation in plenary sessions", *Sudan Tribune*, 12 June 2005.

## APPENDIX A

### MAP OF SUDAN

