

Two Fronts, One War: Evolution of the Two Areas Conflict, 2014–15

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First published in August 2015

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Small Arms Survey

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Printed by nbmedia in Geneva, Switzerland

ISBN 978-2-940548-12-5

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Abbreviations and acronyms

APC	Armoured personnel carrier
AUHIP	African Union High-Level Implementation Panel
AUPSC	African Union Peace and Security Council
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GoS	Government of Sudan
GRSS	Government of the Republic of South Sudan
IDP	Internally displaced person
INGO	International non-governmental organization
JEM	Justice and Equality Movement
JIU	Joint Integrated Unit
MDF	Maban Defence Forces
NCP	National Congress Party
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Services
NRDDO	Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Organization
PDF	Popular Defence Forces
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
SDG	Sudanese pound
SDP	Sudanese old pound
SLA-AW	Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid
SLA-MM	Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
SPLM/A-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition
SPLM/A-N	Sudan People's Liberation Army-North
SRF	Sudan Revolutionary Front
SRRA	Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Agency
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USD	United States dollar

I. Introduction and key findings

The conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile (the 'Two Areas') between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-North (SPLM/A-N) has entered its fourth year, characterized by continuous high-intensity military action and air attacks. While the front line has not substantially changed since the end of the first year of the conflict, the distance between the parties remains significant, and the seventh round of talks between the warring parties in Addis Ababa (12 November–8 December 2014) ended without major progress, with the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) unable to close the widening gap. The military components of the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) are pushing the 'one process, two tracks' approach established by the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) that asks for local arrangements, i.e. a cessation of hostilities in the Two Areas and Darfur, and political autonomy as a prerequisite for a National Dialogue. The government insists on a ceasefire before any political agreement. Meanwhile, new alliances took shape when the SRF signed the 'Sudan Call' with traditional political parties and civil society on 3 December 2014, which reiterates the previous SRF–Umma 'Paris Declaration' of 8 August 2014 (Sudan Call, 2014). The Sudan Call signatories agreed to boycott the national elections ahead of a National Dialogue. They reiterated this decision on 27 February 2015 in Berlin, and this contributed to the overall low turnout during the vote of 13–16 April 2015. The signatories of the Sudan Call contested both the decision of the National Congress Party (NCP) to hold the elections anyway and the ruling party's landslide victory, and the prospect of a National Dialogue is now more remote than ever.

The government's second 'decisive summer campaign', aimed at eradicating all rebellions and characterized by the use of locally recruited militias and heavy aerial bombing of civilians, began in South Kordofan on 1 December 2014. Fighting continued through mid-January 2015 and extended to Blue Nile in February, with the SPLA-N claiming substantial seizures of weapons and

defections from the government side. After a relatively calm few months a second phase of the government offensive began in the aftermath of the April national elections. However, the front line has not substantially changed. SPLA-N guerrilla operations against GoS positions in Geissan and the Ingessana Mountains in Blue Nile did not stop during the rainy season and throughout the reporting period, and the war has reached the outskirts of the state capital, Damazin. The last four years of conflict have worsened the humanitarian situation of at least 600,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Two Areas, while widespread, documented violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are ongoing features of the conflict.

The Darfur members of the SRF left South Kordofan at the end of the previous dry season for Darfur, with some troops reorganizing in the Raja area at the border between South Sudan and Sudan (South Darfur). Since December 2013, when the civil war erupted in South Sudan, Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) fighters have been seen fighting alongside the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in Unity state, South Sudan, while SPLA-In Opposition (SPLA-IO) troops are hosted in the Two Areas, from where they staged attacks into South Sudan. The presence of sponsored foreign troops, coupled with the proliferation of militias and armed groups along the border zone and with limited control from the respective governments, risks a direct confrontation between Sudan and South Sudan around the resource-rich border areas, including the Two Areas, and involving regional allies. Beyond the threat to regional stability, this would present a grave threat to the Sudanese refugees in Unity and Upper Nile states.

This *Working Paper* analyses the last two years of conflict in the Two Areas, based on fieldwork in late 2014 and early 2015, and significant additional communications and interviews in 2015. It examines the major conflict dynamics during the last dry season of fighting (late 2013–mid-2014) and describes the primary armed actors and their positions to shed light on the major conflict dynamics of the dry season offensive that started in December 2014. It also reviews the crisis in the Two Areas in terms of its devastating humanitarian and human rights impact on civilians. The paper situates the conflict in the context of broader political dynamics in Sudan and the region, and looks at the links between the conflict and the unfolding crisis between Sudan and South Sudan that are playing out around the Two Areas.

Among the paper's key findings:

- The GoS's fourth 'dry season offensive' started in South Kordofan before the last round of negotiations in Addis Ababa was adjourned, with GoS forces attacking SPLA-N positions in Buram and Kadugli counties on 1 December 2014 and continuing through mid-January 2015. The rebels claimed substantive victories, seizures of weapons, and GoS defections, but without significant changes in the front line. A second phase of the government offensive began in the aftermath of the April 2015 Sudanese elections, on parallel fronts.
- In Blue Nile guerrilla operations continued throughout the rainy season, and from February 2015 fighting concentrated in the Ingessana Mountains, reaching the outskirts of the Blue Nile capital, Damazin. In March and April 2015 the SPLA-N engaged in 'hit and run' operations in areas garrisoned by government forces, including the use of long-range shelling, a new tactic aimed at disrupting the national elections.
- Both the GoS and SPLA-N had recruited heavily ahead of this ongoing fighting season in the Two Areas. SPLA-N forces are mainly composed of indigenous tribes and total around 35,000 fighters. GoS forces are increasingly composed of seasonally recruited local militias organized under the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), which are expected to fight more effectively in their home areas, with an estimated 48,000–63,000 men in total, while the use of regular Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) troops has been reduced. In South Kordofan some 6,000–10,000 Nuba were recruited into the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).
- Darfur members of the SRF left South Kordofan during 2014 and the majority of their troops moved to Darfur and border areas in Bahr el Ghazal in South Sudan. The SPLM/A-N leadership asked the Darfur rebels to leave the area over reported abuses against civilians and the recruitment of Nuba and SPLA-N soldiers, mainly by JEM. This decision did not end the political and military cooperation of the groups constituting the SRF. Following the SPLA-N's withdrawal from Raja in February 2015, each rebel group is now fighting in its own area.
- After its departure from South Kordofan JEM maintained a presence in Unity state, South Sudan, and fought alongside the SPLA against the SPLM-IO. The latter has also operated from rear bases in the Two Areas since the internal

South Sudanese conflict erupted in December 2013, from where it staged attacks into South Sudan.

- The GoS's continued use of indiscriminate and targeted aerial bombing of civilians, including attacks on cultivated farms, food stocks, and clinics, has worsened the humanitarian situation for around 600,000 IDPs in rebel-held areas. The frequency of bombing in support of the government offensive in December 2014–February 2015 was higher than average, and cluster bombs were dropped on civilian areas. As a result of insecurity and consequent reduced production, local humanitarian actors were expecting severe food insecurity levels by May 2015 in part of the rebel-held areas.
- Reports of widespread, documented violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are an emerging feature of the conflict, with the vast majority reportedly committed by government or pro-government forces. This includes the recruitment of child soldiers, the mass rape of women and girls, the illegal detention of citizens in government-held areas, and abuses against Blue Nile refugees in Ethiopia (who total around 40,000) by Sudanese and Ethiopian security forces.
- Because the SRF is the driving force behind strategic alliances with traditional Sudanese opposition parties and civil society that are calling for the political transformation of the state and the immediate cessation of hostilities in the Two Areas and Darfur, the organization's minimal structural cohesion undermines the achievement of its political objectives.

The *Working Paper* is based on extensive first-hand qualitative interviews conducted in Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia during several field missions over the period November–December 2014 and in January 2015, when the author visited the SPLM/A-N-controlled areas in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, attended the Two Areas negotiations in Addis Ababa, held interviews in Juba, and visited the refugee camps in Unity and Upper Nile states. Interlocutors included political and military representatives of the governments of Sudan and South Sudan; SPLM/A-N officials; political representatives of JEM, the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM), and the SPLM/A-IO; members of refugee and displaced communities in the Two Areas; Sudanese and South Sudanese researchers; and international and local humanitarian workers. The information presented in the paper also reflects the available political, military,

and humanitarian reporting on the conflict by the UN, local and international NGOs, researchers, and analysts. While government-imposed travel restrictions limited the field research in the Two Areas to SPLM/A-N-controlled territories, the author was able to consult stakeholders in other parts of Sudan, allowing her to collect information through the end of May 2015. 📖

II. The conflict

Background: politics and war in the Two Areas

The conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile is largely a continuation of the Second Civil War (1983–2005) fought by the SPLM/A against the Sudanese government's centralization of power and wealth and increasing homogenization of the country's society. These issues were left largely unresolved by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).¹ The 'indigenous' people from the Nuba Mountains and southern Blue Nile joined the Southern-born rebellion as early as 1984 alongside other Northern intellectuals and marginalized peoples, with the aim of transforming the country into a 'New Sudan' (SPLM, 1983; 1998; see also De Alessi, 2013). The SPLM/A's vision attracted local young people, educated leaders such as Abdelaziz al Hilu and Yusif Kuwa in the Nuba Mountains, and Malik Agar in Blue Nile, who were instrumental in the SPLM/A's recruitment of thousands of civilians, making the SPLM/A a de facto national movement that straddled the North–South boundary.²

The 'Nuba', as some eighty tribes living in the Nuba Mountains scattered in the greater Kordofan area in the central part of Sudan are commonly called, and the indigenous tribes of Blue Nile, such as the Ingessana, the Jumjum, and the (Christian) Uduk, have been subject to oppressive policies imposed by the central government since the country's independence in 1956, in particular land grabbing and exploitation, environmental degradation, and forced labour (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2013; Gramizzi, 2013). These policies left the Two Areas, together with other peripheries in Sudan, extremely poor and underdeveloped and without representation at the centre.³ Despite their religious tolerance, embracing Islam or Christianity while maintaining traditional beliefs, the indigenous people were antagonized by local armed Muslim nomads who were given land and positions, a policy begun during Sadiq al Mahdi's government and exacerbated after the rise to power of the Islamist regime in 1989. After centuries of peaceful coexistence Arab pastoralists such as the Missiryia in western Kordofan and the Hawazma in the eastern part, as well as West African groups

such as the Hausa and Fellata in Blue Nile (also known as the Baggara, or cattle herders, and Abbala, or camel herders), were coopted by local leaders, given positions in the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), and used as paramilitaries.⁴ In turn, the SPLM/A became the catalyst of the demands of the indigenous 'African' tribes and the marginalized groups from southern Sudan.⁵ While the SPLM/A recruited successfully among indigenous tribes in the Two Areas, many local people followed local leaders and allied themselves with the government. After almost twenty years of civil war and little humanitarian support, the Nuba Mountains and southern Blue Nile were devastated and largely emptied of their populations: some 1.5 million displaced people returned to the Nuba Mountains when the first ceasefire was signed in 2002.⁶

The Nuba Mountains Ceasefire Agreement was signed on 19 February 2002 in Bürgenstock, Switzerland, after the intervention of US senator John Danforth, whom President George W. Bush sent in an effort to address the humanitarian crisis in the area. While the agreement suited the purpose of ending the conflict, notably through an effective Joint Monitoring Commission, it also isolated the problems faced by the region from a national solution, which ultimately contributed to shaping the CPA as a North–South agreement. Despite their crucial participation in the SPLM/A-led rebellion, the demands of the peoples of the two strategic areas on the North–South border were not properly addressed during the CPA negotiations. While the agreement included two protocols to resolve the local political, security, and economic dynamics at play in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, the CPA generally compromised the needs of the northern constituencies for a national solution to the problem of Sudan.⁷ While Southern Sudan and the contested region of Abyei were given the right to self-determination if the parties failed to make unity attractive after a six-year interim period, the Two Areas obtained only the right to a popular consultation, which was a vague process to ascertain the people's acceptance of the CPA's implementation during the interim period. The implementation of this consultation process was affected by slow and poor overall CPA implementation, triggered by the early death of John Garang, the SPLM leader, which ultimately shifted the SPLM's focus away from a national solution to Southern independence (De Alessi, 2013). This pushed the popular consultation processes to the end of the interim period and resulted in their clashing with the independence of

South Sudan. Isolated from their southern comrades and left with little support from the SPLM, the northern sector of the party struggled to find a position in the Sudanese political landscape. Meanwhile, the population of the Two Areas in peace time continued to suffer social, political, and economic marginalization.⁸

In this scenario elections became an important tool for the people of the Two Areas, and when the SPLM withdrew from the contest in the North, the local SPLM secretariats decided to contest the elections anyway, as legally part of the southern sector of the party. In April 2010 the SPLM won the gubernatorial race in Blue Nile, with the current SPLM/A-N chairman, Malik Agar, becoming the only non-NCP governor in Sudan. In South Kordofan, on the other hand, the 2011 state elections—held one year later after a census recount—ended with the victory of the incumbent, Ahmed Haroun of the NCP, over his SPLM deputy governor, Abdelaziz al Hilu, after a tough political contest.⁹ The SPLM did not accept the outcome and boycotted the new state government, setting up a political opposition outside government institutions. The tension in the two states was palpable, exacerbated by the high military presence of both SAF and SPLA troops who were not part of the CPA-mandated Joint Integrated Units (JIUs) throughout the interim period, which increased in the first half of 2011 (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2013, pp. 15–16; Gramizzi, 2013, pp. 18–19).

A crisis point was reached when the Sudanese government demanded that all SPLA forces in the Two Areas fully disarm by 1 June 2011, before the CPA deadline set for January 2012, and while negotiations between Sudan and South Sudan were ongoing, including over outstanding security arrangements in the Two Areas following the referendum. Long-standing grievances that had pushed the population to join the SPLA in their first war and expectations unmet by the CPA exacerbated by the independence of South Sudan came to the boil after a skirmish on 5 June between SAF and SPLA forces of the JIUs. The conflict quickly escalated throughout South Kordofan, with fighting among the forces comprising the JIUs in Buram, Dilling, Heiban, Julud, Khor Dileb, Talodi, and Troji, and much of the population actively joined the opposition side (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2013, pp. 15–18; ICG, 2013b, pp. 17–19).

Attempts to find a political solution collapsed when President Omar al Bashir refused to recognize the 28 June 2011 ‘Framework Agreement’ that had been signed between NCP deputy chairman Nafie Ali Nafie and Malik Agar.

On 1 September 2011 the war expanded to Blue Nile when the SPLA commander of the JIUs in Damazin was attacked, the house of the elected governor destroyed, and JIU component forces in various locations engaged in armed confrontations. Several SPLM representatives and their family members were killed in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, and dozens were arrested in Damazin, while others withdrew to reorganize in historical SPLM strongholds in Lueri, close to Kauda in South Kordofan, and Kurmuk, in southern Blue Nile.¹⁰ In response the GoS imposed emergency laws on the Two Areas and gave military powers to the new governors.¹¹ Fighting throughout the two states led to massive displacements, and many refugees fled to neighbouring countries.

The SPLM-N—the opposition party created by the northern cadres of the SPLM in the party’s political bureau in Juba in February 2012—was banned as a political party, but the leadership reinstated the SPLA-N, which claimed to be fighting for a secular, united, democratic Sudan.¹² The Two Areas provided the new party with its leadership and major constituencies. Following a seniority line, the third SPLM deputy chairman, Malik Agar, became the SPLM-N chairman and then commander-in-chief of the SPLA-N, with Abdelaziz, then chief of staff of the SPLA-N, as his deputy, while the SPLM northern sector secretary, Yasir Arman, became the new secretary general of the SPLM-N.

In both states the first year of fighting created the front lines that largely remain in place today, with rebels in South Kordofan seizing a considerable number of weapons and improving their initial military disadvantage vis-à-vis government forces.¹³ Most SPLA-N officers interviewed in the Two Areas acknowledged SAF as their major (unintentional) supplier of arms at the beginning of the war, although rebels in Blue Nile were much less successful in capturing government weapons (Gramizzi, 2013, p. 8). In South Kordofan the GoS remained in control of the lowlands and the main strategic towns such as Dallami, Dilling, Kadugli, and Talodi, while the SPLA-N secured Buram and Heiban, and the major mountains. The presence of the JIUs throughout the state gave the SPLA-N access to territory it never controlled during the previous war such as the south-eastern jebels (mountains) of Kao, Nyaro, and Warni; the eastern jebels of Abaiyissia and Rashad; and the western jebels of Dilling and Lagawa.¹⁴

In South Kordofan fighting escalated during the second dry season of the war (November 2012–June 2013), with heavy government aerial bombing as

the SPLA-N engaged in more offensives (SRRA, 2013b). The SPLA-N's attempts to enter historical garrison towns failed due to lack of local support, and its shelling of the capital, Kadugli, brought international condemnation (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2012, pp. 19–20). Attempts to capture Talodi in October 2012 and March 2013 in order to secure wider control of the border with Upper Nile also failed (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2012, pp. 17–20).¹⁵ The SPLA-N, however, took the strategic SAF positions of Jaw and Troji in February 2012, securing a vital corridor into South Sudan and freeing the passage of goods and people—routes that remain open today.

In Blue Nile, after the fighting started in the capital, Damazin, it quickly escalated throughout the state, followed by massive air attacks until the end of October 2011. The SPLA-N forces were probably caught by surprise and it took them a few weeks to reorganize (Gramizzi, 2013, p. 24). SAF fighters in the JIU barracks in Kurmuk and Dindiro interviewed in Blue Nile as prisoners of war admitted that they were not informed of the upcoming attacks, because the GoS kept the information confidential among a close circle of officers.¹⁶ On 3 November 2011 the government captured Kurmuk after an SPLA-N tactical withdrawal to save initially scarce ammunition and men. The loss of the historical capital of SPLA resistance in southern Blue Nile was a major blow for the rebels both logistically and psychologically, and led to significant defections. This, together with other losses in the Bau and Geissan areas, forced its withdrawal in the south-western part of the state along the border with South Sudan. The front-line towns of Deim Mansur, Malkan, Mayak, Surkum, and Ulu remain disputed today and are theatres of heavy fighting. The SPLA-N also suffered major losses in the Ingessana Mountains, a strategic location for both parties that is close to the capital and rich in natural resources, and also the land of the largest pro-SPLM-N tribe, the Ingessana, from which thousands were displaced into refugee camps in South Sudan (SRRA, 2013b; Gramizzi, 2013, pp. 25127).

The few SPLA-N troops north of the front line continued to engage in guerrilla operations in Bau, Geissan, and Kurmuk counties, managing to seize equipment and vehicles and reduce GoS military pressure (Gramizzi, 2013, pp. 19–24). These operations also disrupted the government's procurement and exploitation of natural resources.¹⁷

The third government dry season offensive

The GoS announced on 12 November 2013 the beginning of its third dry season offensive, followed by heavy shelling of civilian areas that displaced around 80,000 people from rebel-controlled areas during November alone (Radio Dabanga, 2013; SRRA, 2014a). Despite the massive fighting and displacement of the population, the third dry season ended with the overall military status quo largely unchanged. While the GoS claimed to have taken around 11 per cent of SPLA-N territory, some of these gains were outside traditional SPLA-N strongholds, including regained territories previously lost by government forces.¹⁸

South Kordofan

After the GoS's announcement of its first 'decisive offensive' against the rebels, six government convoys were reportedly moved into South Kordofan (to Dallami, Dilling, Kadugli, Kharasana, and Um Burumbita), followed by heavy fighting and air attacks. The major hostilities were recorded in the eastern part of Kadugli, in Buram county (Angolo, Jaw, and Troji), in Dallami county, and in Rashad in the eastern jebels, causing the displacement of almost 100,000 people according to the rebels (SRRA, 2014a). The SPLA-N claimed major seizures of weapons during these engagements, including anti-aircraft autocannons, recoilless rifles, AK-pattern assault rifles, artillery projectiles, several vehicles, and trucks (including a South Korean model). Since the beginning of the conflict the SPLA-N claimed to have captured 16 functioning tanks in South Kordofan (9 in Doldoko, 2 in al Hamra, 2 in al Ihemir, and 3 in Jaw), and to have destroyed more.¹⁹

In November 2013 fighting concentrated in the northern part of the state, in Abyssia and Rashad counties, with heavy government shelling. The areas are now mostly under government control, including the towns along the strategic road that links Kadugli to el Obeid in North Kordofan, while the SPLA-N defends the mountains, never attempting to capture towns. On 13 November SAF attacked Um Shakshaka, while air attacks targeted Higeir and Tere villages. On 21 November the SPLA-N attacked SAF forces in Kalling (Rashad county). During February–March 2014 the government tried several times to capture areas in western Rashad and Abyssia counties. As a result of the fighting some 70,000 people were reportedly displaced into the Dallami area, while 20,000

are believed to have crossed into government areas in Abu Khersola, Rashad, and Shamsheka.²⁰

On 22 November two SAF convoys moved into Dilling and attacked the villages of Karko, Manadil, and Wali (east Dilling) and Kandkera (west Dilling), and, according to the SPLM-N, around 3,700 people were displaced (SRRRA, 2013b). Overall, since 2011 the front line in the counties of As-Sunut, Dilling, and Lagawa has not changed, with an estimated population of around 370,000 people in the rebel-held western jebels, while the government remains in the rural areas.²¹ SPLA-N forces are in the area for the first time, and after the government's administrative separation of Greater Kordofan in 2013, now occupy parts of West Kordofan.²²

The government offensive also focused on the southern part of Dallami, using heavy shelling. In April 2014 government forces entered Abri, thanks to the critical support of the RSF. The militia attack caught the rebels by surprise. As the SPLA-N area commander stated:

*The SPLA-N was fighting in Dallami when the militias divided into two groups, one fighting us and another entered behind from Sarafai and we were caught in between.*²³

It was a major blow. In addition, in 2013 the SPLA-N had repeatedly failed to capture Jebel al Daira, Jebel As-Sitta, and Kortala in Dallami county, due to a lack of popular support in these areas.²⁴ But the battles there did result in some weapons captures. According to the SPLA-N area commander, for example, the rebels captured 8 vehicles, 2 trucks, 3 PKM machine guns, and 12 RPGs during the battle of Foya in December 2013. According to local authorities, between April and July 2014 around 24,100 people were displaced from the front line of Abri and Sarafai in the rebel areas, including IDPs who had moved there from Jumnesaia and Khor Deleb after 2011, who gathered en masse at the foot of the mountains, while others went into North Kordofan.²⁵

The SPLA-N was defeated as it tried to enter the northern area of Abu Jubeiha, which was populated by Hawazma Arabs allied with the government, especially the Assir clan.²⁶ The counties of Abu Jubeiha and Talodi remain mainly under GoS control, with the SPLA-N in the area of Kau Nyaro (Abu Jubeiha) and Warni (Talodi)—the so-called south-eastern jebels—with a reported population

of at least 50,000 becoming increasingly isolated from the rest of the SPLA-N-controlled areas as the conflict in South Sudan cut their supply routes into/from Upper Nile (SRRA, 2015, p. 12). On 14 May 2014 the SPLA-N, with the support of Darfur groups in the SRF, reportedly destroyed two government convoys moving towards the area, capturing one T-55 tank and three vehicles.

The GoS also focused its offensive on Buram and Kadugli counties. SAF bombed Buram bridge in September 2013 to cut access to Kadugli, and the loss of the bridge still affects people's movements and access to humanitarian assistance in the area.²⁷ On 5 January 2014 government forces tried to recapture the strategic locations of Angolo, Jaw, and Troji—which were lost in February 2012—but failed to cut the rebels' strategic corridor into South Sudan. Nuer and the RSF reportedly participated in the attacks.²⁸ In May 2014 SAF and RSF forces expelled the SPLA-N from al Atmur (45 km east of Kadugli) using similar tactics to those adopted in Abri and highlighting the weakness of the SPLA-N fighting tactics in the lowlands against mobile warfare.²⁹ On 27 May the SPLA-N was defeated in Daldako, outside Kadugli, and the town remained under SAF control until December 2014. On 8 June the SPLA-N attacked al Atmur and Kadugli with heavy shelling and claimed to have destroyed three tanks in the battle (SRRA, 2014b; Radio Dabanga, 2014b). Unsuccessful SPLA-N attacks took place again at the end of June.

Overall, the rebels retained control of the central part of the state in the counties of Buram, Heiban, and Um Dorein, south of Dallami county, and the western part of Kadugli (Jegeiba, Korongo, Kufa, and Lima).³⁰ This gave them a large secure territory stretching from the border with South Sudan up to close to the border with North Kordofan, with Kauda as its capital and an estimated population of around 800,000 (SRRA, 2015, pp. 12–14). Habila county, populated mainly by the Nuba Gholfan and divided between the conflicting parties, remained quiet overall, yet a considerable portion of the some 50,000 people living in the area had been displaced by previous government offensives.³¹

Blue Nile

During the 2013–14 dry season offensives the SPLA-N and the government engaged in key battles along the front line at Deim Mansur, Kurmuk, Malkan, Rum, and Surkum in Bau and Kurmuk counties, without much exchange of

territory. They also confronted each other in Geissan and the Ingessana Mountains, close to the capital, Damazin. While the government controls the key garrison towns of Bau, Damazin, Dindiro, and Kurmuk, the SPLA-N remains in the southern part of the state, but increased its presence in the Ingessana Mountains and increased the intensity of guerrilla operations in Geissan throughout 2014. The area of Bau county between the SPLA-N garrisons of al Fuj and Ulu and the SAF garrison of Bout is patrolled by both armies. The territory is particularly challenging, with few water sources, and its open landscape does not favour the SPLA-N's tactics.

In the third week of January 2014 the SPLA-N attacked SAF positions in Deim Mansur (losing two tanks), but was repulsed; this occurred again in February 2014. As of early 2015 the strategic town remained divided between the two forces, which were positioned close to each other north (SAF) and south (SPLA-N) of Khor Hassan, an area of frequent crossfire. The area south and west of Kurmuk remains a 'no man's land'. The SPLA-N is positioned around the airstrip, making it inaccessible to SAF forces. According to the SPLA-N front commander, its aim there is only to weaken the government, because 'the benefit of capturing the town is lower than the cost of holding it'.³² On 22 August 2014 the rebels captured Dakan.

On 8 January 2014 SAF attacked Malkan using heavy shelling and air attacks, but the SPLA-N recaptured it on 17 January. According to the rebels, 44 bombs were dropped in the area in January and February 2014 (SRRA, 2014a). In the battle the SPLA-N claims to have captured 18 trucks and 3 tanks in good condition, with 1 tank destroyed, while also capturing various types of ammunitions, shells, and missiles. According to a SAF prisoner who took part in the battle, around 500 PDF fighters from the Fellata, Hausa, and Silak tribes were directing the operation, but no RSF fighters were present.³³ Surkum was also the theatre of several confrontations, with SAF repulsing the SPLA-N, only to lose its position soon after. As of early 2015 the town remains divided. The SAF garrison has been relocated north of the town.

On 27 October 2013 the SPLA-N claimed a major victory in the Ingessana Mountains and re-established its forces in Kilo, Kukur, Goz Tilim, and Romelle, which had been lost in February 2012, and claimed full control of Gabanit, which had been lost in May 2012. The SPLA-N has one battalion (around 1,000

men) in the area, which is a significant reduction from the three battalions of 2011 (Gramizzi, 2013). SAF controls the capital, Bau, and the major villages, including the three garrison towns that link Damazin to Kurmuk, i.e. Buk, Deran, and Gabanit. In August 2014 the SPLA-N entered the area of the Agadit agricultural scheme (30 km south-west of Damazin), burning the garrison town and forcing mining companies to leave.³⁴ Around 1,500 people reportedly fled to Damazin as a result of the fighting.³⁵

The SPLA-N conducted operations in Keli and the surrounding areas, from Fanzigar (south-east) to Uffut Sheteyo (north), hindering the government's movements between Dindiro and Kurmuk. The SPLA-N claimed to have destroyed three southward-moving SAF convoys in Bau county in November and December 2013 (SRRA, 2013b).

Finally, the SPLA-N controls the Amora hills, north-east of Geissan, and the south-west and north of Geissan up to the Blue Nile River, with one battalion (around 700–1,000 men), and from there it has engaged in several skirmishes with government troops and local militias. The terrain in the Geissan area, with streams, mountains, and jungle, is favourable to the SPLA-N's tactics. On 26 August the SPLA-N claimed control of Shimba, after intense fighting that caused the displacement of around 5,000 people to the Ethiopian refugee camp at Shorgoli and 7,000 to border areas (SRRA, 2013b). 📍

III. Armed actors

Government forces

A striking feature of the conflict in the Two Areas is the decreasing presence of regular SAF forces, which are mostly stationed to defend the main garrison towns. The government increasingly favours the use of locally recruited paramilitaries, in particular the RSF, organized under the NISS under Mohammed Hamdan Dagolo, also known as ‘Hemetti’, and personally controlled by President Bashir, the use of which was legalized through January 2015 constitutional amendments.³⁶ The RSF, numbering around 10,000–15,000 in the whole of Sudan as of early 2015, developed from an initial group of 5,000–6,000 fighters recruited from the Abbala Rizeigat tribe of North Darfur, who were mobilized in Darfur; the RSF was then extended to the whole of Sudan.³⁷ As SLA-MM’s Ali Trayo put it,

*the RSF is the formalisation of the ‘janjaweed’, but with a formal structure and compensations and without Musa Hilal, but equally unsustainable.*³⁸

The RSF, used predominantly in South Kordofan and, since 2015, also in Blue Nile, has played the role previously occupied by the PDF in the state, but without Islamist overtones. The PDF is composed of Arab indigenous tribes with some foreign mercenaries, notably from South Sudan and Ethiopia (the latter are present in Blue Nile only), and used to stage attacks throughout the state, but is now mostly in support of the RSF. Militias are recruited on a seasonal basis and in some cases just before a new operation begins, making it more difficult to ascertain their numbers. In some cases the new recruits are sent to the area where they will operate in buses as civilians and armed at their destination.³⁹ More generally the multitude of names attributed to government-aligned militias makes it extremely difficult to ascertain accurate numbers and locations.

For the government, the use of paramilitaries responds to a pragmatic need: ‘when you fight too many wars and guard the borders, you need to recruit everyone, even civilians and reserves’, stated chief negotiator and NCP deputy chairman Ibrahim Gandhour.⁴⁰ The use of paramilitaries may also suggest the

weakness of the regular army and state institutions. This is the conclusion of Abdelaziz al Hilu, who considers the internal divisions within the ruling party, the economic problems facing the country, and regional and international isolation over the years to have weakened both the regime and its control over the armed forces.⁴¹ The reduction in the use of SAF forces to fight the SPLA-N and SRF coincides with a drop in morale within the army and defections from the main barracks (at Khartoum, Kosti, and el Obeid), because soldiers have seen the paramilitaries being better paid and given free rein to loot and misbehave. A private Sudanese mercenary who deserted from the RSF in the Rashad area claimed to have been paid SDG 1,500 (USD 255), while a SAF private is paid SDG 1,000 (USD 170). In fact, militias, unlike regular soldiers, are not perceived as a threat to the regime: they do not want power and they can be more effectively controlled by the leadership through money.⁴² Their loyalty and commitment, however, are difficult to buy.

South Kordofan

In 2015 the SPLA-N estimates the total government force in South Kordofan to be 30,000–45,000 fighters, but this is difficult to verify, given its flexible structure and the lack of information from SAF. The number of regular SAF troops in South Kordofan is thought to be 15,000–20,000, lower than in previous years and mainly stationed in the historical government garrison towns.⁴³ The RSF may have 6,000–10,000 fighters in South Kordofan, where some 5,000–10,000 PDF and other ad hoc forces are also operating.⁴⁴

Until the most recent fighting season the major paramilitaries were composed of RSF fighters from Darfur—perhaps some 10,000 in South Kordofan in 2014.⁴⁵ The RSF engaged in several battles throughout the state and were instrumental in the capturing of Abri (south of Dallami) and al Atmur (east of Kadugli), because their tactics caught the rebels by surprise. The SPLA-N had to adapt—and did, apparently—but terrain remained an important factor. In April 2014 the RSF fought the rebels in the eastern jebels, but without success. According to the SPLM/A-N and Western military experts, the Rizeigat were not well trained to fight in the Nuba Mountains and were generally not successful against the rebels. Their use of ‘tacticals’ (4×4 vehicles fitted with light weapons) is more effective in the desert areas of western Sudan. As such, the

majority of RSF forces decided to return to Darfur in January–February 2014, and only a few hundred are believed to have returned to South Kordofan in 2015, stationed in the areas of Abu Jubeiha, Kadugli, and Talodi.

Each RSF fighter is reportedly paid around SDG 10,000 (USD 1,700) per battle.⁴⁶ RSF fighters also actively loot food and properties and burn villages in the aftermath of a battle, although there are no reports of deliberate attacks against civilians outside a military confrontation, of the kind that occurred in Darfur (see Kumar and Ismail, 2014).

After the departure of the Darfur RSF fighters the GoS recruited mostly Nuba fighters to fight the rebels in their own challenging territory. Generally, since 2014 the government strategy has been to expand the recruitment of RSF fighters throughout Sudan and use them in their home areas, ‘so that they can better perform and behave’.⁴⁷ A total of around 6,000 Nuba were recruited in government areas in South and North Kordofan and Khartoum, which is fewer than in 2014, given that for the first time the GoS also sent RSF forces to Blue Nile.⁴⁸ According to local people interviewed, young Nuba, including some who were under age, were targeted for recruitment in exchange for as little as SDG 300–400 (USD 51–68) per month to join the fight, which was increased to SDG 1,000 (USD 170) if they were experienced.⁴⁹ They were trained and sent to different areas of Blue Nile in batches starting in September 2014. Around 4,000 new recruits were reportedly trained in Shendi and Khartoum for three months during the summer and deployed to el Obeid in September 2014, while around 5,000–6,000 were seen in the areas of Dallami, Kadugli, and Kharasana in preparation for the dry season offensive up to October 2014. Another group arrived in al Atmur on 11 November 2014.⁵⁰ The militias were armed only at their destinations and not given vehicles, which in the SPLA-N’s analysis shows a lack of trust by the government. In fact, the loyalty of the Nuba fighters is questionable, and many desertions were reported by various sources, even though numbers are difficult to verify, because in most cases defectors remain in government-held areas or go to Khartoum.⁵¹ While SPLA-N commanders interviewed on the ground report that they feel more confident fighting Nuba than Darfurians, Western experts note that the Nuba can be skilled and effective fighters.

The recruited Nuba mostly come from marginalized strata of society in government areas—the result of long-term policy of keeping the Nuba underdeveloped

and without opportunities, thus pushing unemployed young people in urban areas to embrace war. This recruitment strategy is aimed at all tribes, but especially the larger and pro-SPLA-N ones, such as the Angolo, Atoro, Kawalib, Moro (the largest tribe in the SPLA-N-controlled area), and Tira, and also the Katla, Gulfan, Nyumba, Tima, Temein, and Tulusiand. 'By arming every tribe the government also fulfils its long-term strategy to divide and rule', according to an SPLM-N official.⁵²

This strategy has continued since the Second Civil War and has created deep divisions within the Nuba population: today almost every tribe is divided in its support for the warring parties. Recruitment is highly politicized and conducted mostly through traditional chiefs, some of whom are prominent political leaders in Khartoum, who in some instances were forced to provide soldiers or were accused of supporting the SPLA-N and arrested.⁵³ The GoS reportedly uses what was described as 'tribes security', i.e. designated security personnel tasked with recruiting from each tribe.⁵⁴ According to several SPLA-N members interviewed, Daniel Kodi, the former SPLM state chairman and deputy governor (2005–08), is a key facilitator of the government's recruitment of Nuba in Khartoum. When interviewed, Kodi acknowledged the government practice of recruiting young Nuba, especially in Khartoum, but denied his involvement.⁵⁵

While the strength of the PDF has reduced over time, it continues to represent an important force of around 5,000–10,000 fighters, mainly composed of local Arab nomads, Hawazma, Missiriya, and, to a lesser extent, Nuba. While in Blue Nile the Fellata (West African nomads) represent the bulk of the state PDF, in South Kordofan they operate mainly as independent militias.⁵⁶ PDF forces in South Kordofan are used in most key government areas: Abu Jubeiha, Dallami, Dilling, Kadugli, Rashad, and Talodi. During the most recent dry season offensive PDF fighters were used to support RSF 'hit and run' tactics.⁵⁷

As a result of the CPA's poor peace dividends, including the abolition of West Kordofan state and the loss of its resources, more Missiriya tended to be attracted to the SPLM's advocacy of the marginalized during the CPA interim period. The tribe was also left without compensation for environmental degradation from oil extraction and related problems, especially in the areas of Balila, Fulah, Heglig, Muglad, and Sitten.⁵⁸ Even if they are not actually enrolled in the SPLA-N, many Missiriya are maintaining a neutral stance vis-à-vis the conflict.⁵⁹

More Missiriya have also refused to fight in their own areas, especially around Lagawa (which has been relatively stable in recent years), and were sent to other fronts, where on many occasions they deserted, including in South Sudan, while some joined JEM. The long-announced restoration of West Kordofan state in July 2013 did not placate the Missiriya. Instead they saw it as part of the government's divide-and-rule tactics along ethnic lines, which foments local tribal conflict (Radio Tamajuz, 2013a; 2013b; Reliefweb, 2014).⁶⁰ As a pro-SPLM-N Missiriya leader put it, 'They armed us and now we are killing each other'.⁶¹ Missiriya have also seen fighting in South Sudan alongside the SPLA-IO (UNSC, 2014, p. 6).

The Hawazma are nomadic cattle herders who live in the north-eastern counties of Abu Jubeiha, Dallami, Habila, Rashad, and Reif al Shargi, moving eastwards and westwards for grazing.⁶² Historically they benefit from trading and grazing cooperation with the Nuba, but the tribe allied with Khartoum during the previous war to fight against the SPLM/A, and reportedly committed abuses against civilians.⁶³ Unlike the Missiriya, the Hawazma remained close to Khartoum during the interim period and promptly took up arms against the rebels in 2011, including because the SPLA-N presence blocked their migration routes in the southern part of Dallami. Like the Missiriya, their recruitment follows chieftaincy lines, and powerful politicians influence relations at the grass-roots level, such as the *omda* (leader) of Abu Khershola, Ahmed Taur.⁶⁴

Despite the government's successful recruitment of Hawazma, its hold on the tribe is not complete. The Hawazma maintained positive trading relations with local Nuba Kawalib during the interim period, in particular with the Hayadga clan from Rashad and Um Burambita.⁶⁵ In mid-November 2014 SAF reportedly dismissed around 180 Hawazma and expelled them from Khartoum because they were no longer trusted.⁶⁶ Four Hawazma captured by the SPLA-N in 2014 claimed to have been forcibly recruited into the PDF.⁶⁷ The Hawazma fight on camels, but some of the strong pro-government clans such as the Assir from Abu Jubeiha and the Togia from the Um Burambita area in Dallami are given vehicles to fight more effectively.⁶⁸ The key Hawazma leaders are believed to be Mohamed Ibrahim, operational commander of the Hawazma PDF; Daoud Ahmed, coordinator for the Awlad Mahma sub-group; and Taour al Mamoun, coordinator for Kadugli county (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2013, p. 26).

During the previous dry seasons SAF also recruited about 400 foreign militias from the Central African Republic and Chad, but they were not successful in fighting against the Nuba in the latter's territory and are no longer part of the government forces. They were assembled and trained in Abu Jubeiha and Um Burambita, and were seen fighting in the battles of al Atmur (east of Kadugli), Khor Adaleb, Troji, and Um Burambita alongside the RSF.⁶⁹ According to South Kordofan's SPLM-N governor, in 2015 they refused to join the government forces.⁷⁰

While some Nuer militias were present in South Kordofan from the beginning of the conflict (their numbers could not be verified), SPLA-N and SPLA sources claim that around 7,000 SPLA-IO fighters have been hosted in South Kordofan since the beginning of 2014, with the Bul Nuer under Brig. Michael Makal in Heglig and Kharasana, and with Upper Nile clans in Abu Jubeiha, Jabalin (White Nile), and Blue Nile under the former SPLA 4th Division commander, Maj. Gen. James Koang (commander of SPLA-IO Special Division One).⁷¹ According to various sources, their number apparently reduced in early 2015 because fighting is concentrating in Upper Nile state (the author could not verify this information).⁷² While Nuer fighters have been seen in government attacks, there is no evidence that they were part of the SPLA-IO contingent in the area, because few Nuer fighters and militias are still allied with SAF (some of whom were recruited by the SPLA-IO).⁷³ Generally, according to the SPLA-N commanders interviewed, Nuer are not effective fighters in the Nuba Mountains: they are not properly equipped, they have been weakened by internal divisions, and hence are not perceived as a threat by the SPLA-N.

Blue Nile

According to the SPLA-N, the government has about 18,000 troops in Blue Nile, including SAF forces in the garrison towns and around 5,000 mobile paramilitaries and militias, i.e. PDF, RSF, and other militias from Sudan, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. Government forces are mainly trained in Bout, Dindiro, Disa, and Kurmuk. The number of forces in Blue Nile this year is greater than last year, due to the presence of Southern troops and the RSF. It is, however, difficult to ascertain the total number, since the government is increasingly using ad hoc recruitment ahead of battles, as it has in South Kordofan.⁷⁴ A retired SAF captain, a prisoner of war interviewed in Blue Nile, told the author that

he had been forcibly recruited in January 2014 along with other retired officers while they were serving as private guards for government agricultural schemes in Wadi Hadar, between Bout and Gali in the At-Tadamon locality (earning a salary of SDG 900/USD 153 per month) and sent to the ongoing battle of Malkan, which the government lost. Small local militias proliferate in Blue Nile, and some are composed of migrants to the state who came for its fertile land and mineral wealth. They operate in their own areas and either conduct independent operations or fight alongside GoS forces, often committing abuses against civilians.

The Fellata nomads, originally from West and Central Africa, constitute the bulk of the PDF forces in the state, with some Hausa also from West Africa and members of 'indigenous' tribes; some PDF also come from Gedaref and Sennar states.⁷⁵ PDF forces have been used alongside SAF since the beginning of the war on all fronts and are well armed with machine guns and armed vehicles. PDF cadres in the state answer to the Fellata Hussein Yasin, a top NCP leader, and ultimately the governor.⁷⁶ The total number of PDF fighters in Blue Nile remains difficult to ascertain due to the organization's flexible structure. Recruitment is often forced and includes under-age youths.⁷⁷ Some 200 non-PDF Fellata militias also operate in the state, and in November and December 2014 they engaged SPLA-N forces in Tibeleb (in the Geissan area).⁷⁸ According to local people interviewed, Fellata are responsible for massive abuses against the population, such as beatings, rape, and the burning of villages, notably the militia group of Ismeil Omer Kurra, which is active in the Ingessana Mountains.

Members of the Hausa tribe, who are farmers originally from West Africa, were also coopted into the PDF during this conflict. The Hausa settled in the area of Roseires, along the eastern Nile bank, and were forcibly moved into Ingessana areas in eastern Bau county as a result of the Blue Nile Dam's expansion, completed in 2011, when the land given to them was flooded. This created land issues with the local community, fuelling GoS recruitment and the provision of government-supplied arms to safeguard their new land.

The RSF forces were sent to Blue Nile ahead of this dry season, but as of May 2015 their fighting skills had not yet been tested against the SPLA-N on the ground, because fighting was mainly concentrated in the Ingessana Mountains and not in the front-line lowlands.⁷⁹ Unlike in South Kordofan, RSF recruitment was conducted mainly outside the state, throughout Sudan—including in Darfur—and abroad, given the lack of available fighters in Blue Nile.⁸⁰ According

to an SPLA-N Front commander, RSF forces are better paid than the PDF, with the amount depending on their mission.

Benishangul militias operate at the border with Ethiopia.⁸¹ Historically living between Sudan and the Ethiopian Benishangul-Gumuz state, the GoS has strategically used this Muslim tribe in the last three decades to strengthen the NCP in the state. The most prominent NCP leaders in Blue Nile, from the state governor downwards, come from this tribe, which is locally referred to as Wataweet (bats).⁸² The militias have been used for incursions against the rebels in Geissan, and against civilians and traders crossing the border from Ethiopia. Ethiopian forces are also believed to have been enrolled in SAF since 2011 and were instrumental in ensuring SAF control of Kurmuk in November 2011 and other areas along the border (Gramizzi, 2013, p. 31).

Southern Sudanese groups have been present in Blue Nile since the beginning of the conflict. According to the SPLA-N, about one battalion of SAF-allied Maban militias under Kamal Loma, which also includes elements of the former South Sudan Defence Forces-affiliated militia under Muntu Mutallah Abdallah, are training in Bout, an agricultural schemes area in At-Tadamon county (north-west of Blue Nile). Loma, a native of Maban from Gufa, was a member of the PDF who was known for allegedly killing three sheikhs from the local Jumjum tribe in the Wadaka area in 1991 and later joined the SAF 23rd Brigade in Damazin. In August 2011 Loma was promoted to brigadier general and created a Maban militia force, which was stationed in Bout town, from where it engaged in several attacks against the SPLA-N alongside SAF, particularly in the Rum area. Their forces also include indigenous tribes (Gramizzi, 2013, pp. 38–39).⁸³ The SPLA-N claims that some 5,000 SPLA-IO troops were also training in the area of Bout, organized under James Koang. A first group of 3,000 reportedly arrived in the area in July 2014 from Damazin, followed by two battalions in November 2014, which passed through the Kurmuk area in Blue Nile. The last group reached Kurmuk in mid-November with 31 vehicles and 2 tanks, adding to the existing government force of 2,000 SAF troops and weaponry.⁸⁴ According to the SPLA-N 2nd Front commander, they are trained and supported by SAF in Bout, but their position is between Jamam and Kilo 10 in South Sudan, and so far they have not been engaged in military operations against the SPLA-N in Blue Nile.⁸⁵ The SPLA-IO admitted to having a presence in Bout, but denied any support from Khartoum.⁸⁶

SPLM/A-N and SRF

South Kordofan

According to a variety of SPLA-N sources, the SPLA-N fighting force in South Kordofan totals approximately 25,000–40,000 men, with substantial recruitment conducted since 2011.⁸⁷

The SPLA-N is composed mainly of Nuba fighters from various tribes, including from small tribes historically allied to Khartoum, such as the Dilling and Kadugli.⁸⁸ The lack of CPA peace dividends for the people of South Kordofan pushed together previously opposing tribes in the state and also helped SPLA-N recruitment among Arab nomads. In this conflict the SPLA-N also gained the support of an increasing number of Missiriya, who are active mainly in the south-western part of Kordofan and are considered good fighters (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2013, p. 28). Reportedly, major support to the rebels comes from the areas of Babanusa, Fula, Keilak, and Lagawa.⁸⁹ Missiriya resentment against Khartoum did not, however, translate into substantial new recruitment to the SPLA-N. In some cases Missiriya took up arms independently, such as when they attacked RSF fighters in Keilak, after militia abuses and the raping of women in the area.⁹⁰ There is disagreement as to the actual number of Missiriya in the ranks of the SPLA-N, perhaps revealing contrasting feelings towards the former *mujahideen* in the movement. While pro-SPLM-N Missiriya leaders reported more than 2,000 recruits, who were remnants of the so-called Debab force allied with the SPLA since 2006, a high-ranking SPLA-N official said that only around 90–120 Missiriya, in particular 10–20 Zuruk and 80–100 Humur, are members of the SPLA-N. These forces are scattered in various areas and few Missiriya are in command structures. Habib Izzeidin, the commissioner of Keilak, is believed to be the leader of the pro-SPLM/A-N Missiriya Humur, while Mohamed Hamid Raduan and Siddiq Hamid lead the Missiriya Zuruk.⁹¹ Research conducted in 2012 suggested the number of Missiriya in the SPLA-N was closer to 1,000, organized under Brig. Gen. Yassin al Mullah and Lt. Col. Bokora Mohamed Fadel (Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2013, p. 28; ICG, 2013a, p. 9). But because some Missiriya moved from the SPLA-N to JEM, the actual number is probably lower.⁹²

Between 2011 and 2014 the Darfur members of the SRF, i.e. JEM and the two factions of the Sudan Liberation Army under Minni Minawi (SLA-MM) and Abdel Wahid al Nur (SLA-AW), provided military support to the SPLA-N in

South Kordofan, which became the epicentre of the Sudanese military opposition. The Darfur rebels arrived in the state during the 2011 dry season, following the leadership's decision to join the alliance, while continuing to conduct independent operations in their areas of control.⁹³ There were few SLA-MM fighters, with an estimated total of 120–130 with 20 vehicles, while their major area of activity remained Darfur. SLA-AW contributed some 210–220 fighters. JEM provided the majority of the fighters and vehicles—perhaps 200 vehicles that were often used in SRF joint operations, and around 400–500 men.⁹⁴ The JEM force increased after the substantial recruitment of Nuba in the area, including SPLA-N soldiers, with a total of around 1,000–1,500 Nuba, according to the SPLM-N chairman. While JEM considered this Nuba recruitment to be a cause of the Darfur groups' expulsion from the area, rather than the abuses they committed on the ground, Abdelaziz al Hilu denied it, asserting the right of JEM to recruit 'any Sudanese'.⁹⁵ According to JEM, Nuba had joined the organization since its formation and had reached leadership positions, including as JEM Legislative Council speaker. JEM also has strong ties with the Kordofan territory, and since its founding the movement has debated whether to be based in Darfur or the Kordofan area. Young Nuba were mainly attracted by JEM's fighting tactics, and according to the SPLA-N recruitment was also done in the name of the SRF and by promising military ranks to untrained individuals.⁹⁶ Reportedly, JEM also recruited among the ranks of the SPLA-N by capitalizing on a latent dissatisfaction in the movement because of its hierarchical structure and leaders' power struggle against Abdelaziz al Hilu, while it also attracted some SPLA-N Missiriya as a result of perceptions of anti-Arab sentiments in the SPLA-N.⁹⁷

Around 300–600 Missiriya have also reportedly joined JEM since 2011, attracted to its call for equality and justice for the marginalized, but also its tactics and a common Islamic background.⁹⁸ While JEM had Missiriya members before 2011, who fought in battles in South Sudan and Darfur, more have joined since 2013 and fought mainly in the West Kordofan area. After the death of Fadel Mohamed Rahoma, JEM's deputy commander and main commander in South Kordofan (he was also the nephew of Bokora Mohamed Fadel), more Missiriya joined in November 2013 during JEM operations in Abu Zabad in North Kordofan. Some Missiriya are also believed to have followed Bandar Abu-al-Balul, the former

commissioner of Keilak who defected from the NCP to JEM at the beginning of 2014.⁹⁹

The Darfur rebels, and JEM in particular, have successfully deployed fast 'hit and run' tactics using armed vehicles in support of the SPLA-N's guerrilla tactics (which JEM taught to the SPLA-N). These tactics were most recently used in March 2015 mobile attacks against government positions in both South Kordofan and Blue Nile. According to the SPLA-N, JEM and SLA-MM were instrumental in some key operations, from the first battle in Tess in July 2011 and the capture of al Ihemir in August 2011 to the conquest of Troji and Jaw in February 2012 and in the first—and last—SRF joint operation into Abu Khershola and Um Ruwaba in April 2014 (McCutchen, 2014, pp. 20–25). JEM was also increasingly involved in independent military operations under the SRF in South Kordofan, and in April 2014 managed to enter part of Abu Zabad (North Kordofan) and As-Sunut (West Jebel), both of which are areas that had never previously been under SPLA-N control.¹⁰⁰

At the same time JEM has been criticized for its loose command structure and internal divisions, which affected the conduct and discipline of fighters on the ground, and undefined strategic objectives.¹⁰¹ Reportedly, abuses committed during the battle of Abu Khershola and Um Ruwaba of April 2013, the first and last joint military operation of the SRF members, triggered the SPLA-N decision to ask the Darfur groups to leave South Kordofan, despite whatever negative effects it might have on further SRF military actions, including the possibility of attacking Khartoum. Abu Khershola and Um Ruwaba are on the main road that connects Kadugli to the national capital and are also major assembly centres for Sudan militias.¹⁰² The attack forced around 6,000 IDPs into the areas of Rashad and Um Dorein, and an unknown number into government areas (SRRA, 2013a). According to the NCP, the SRF completely destroyed and looted Abu Khershola.¹⁰³ The SPLA-N blamed the Darfur groups' loose chain of command, which allowed commanders to act with impunity and made the disciplining of soldiers impossible.¹⁰⁴ As the SPLA-N commander who took part in the Abu Khershola battle recounted:

*The Darfur rebels have a different type of warfare and that gave us many problems. When we fight, they want to go, we want to stay. Better for them to fight in their places. We depend on our civilians and lands; they do not.*¹⁰⁵

As the SRF chairman put it, 'Either we lose our people or we lose JEM and the SRF, and we decided for our people'.¹⁰⁶ The decision, which was discussed among the leadership of the SRF's constituent movements, did not break the SRF political-military alliance. As Abdelaziz reported, the SPLA-N is still considering joint operations that avoid the mistakes of the first experience.¹⁰⁷

From June 2013 until mid-2014 the Darfur groups gradually withdrew from South Kordofan, moving south from Dilling and Rashad counties between August and November 2013 and leaving the area by the end of the dry season.¹⁰⁸ The last platoon of SLA-AW (150–200 men) remaining in the Heiban area left in January 2015. The SPLA-N asked these men to leave after SLA-AW claimed strategic involvement in the battle of Daldako in December 2014.¹⁰⁹ While on the move JEM continued to engage in military operations while SLA-MM and SLA-AW were increasingly fighting in Darfur. On 24 July 2013 SRF forces attacked and captured Sidra, in Jebel Ad-Dair, North Kordofan. On 27 July SRF forces ambushed a SAF convoy moving from el Obeid to Dilling, capturing 12 prisoners. In retaliation, according to the SPLA-N, in August SAF heavily shelled Mandal and Subei from Dilling, causing around 2,000 IDPs to move southwards (SRRA, 2013b). On 4 January 2014 JEM supported the SPLA-N's defence of Troji. By May 2014 the last Darfur group had left their positions in al Dar and Nima (Boram county) and reached Unity state. As of August 2014 most troops had moved towards the Bahr el Ghazal region into areas closer to the border between Sudan and South Sudan, concentrating mainly in Raja, the contested border area between South Sudan and Sudan, to reorganize their forces against the government offensive in Darfur.¹¹⁰ Both JEM and SLA-MM denied any involvement in the civil war in South Sudan, while they admitted having bases along the Sudan–South Sudan border.¹¹¹

The SPLA-N was in Raja from 2011, ready to launch a third SRF front that never materialized. After JEM's arrival in the area the SPLA-N forces, with around 20 vehicles for around 315 men under Brig. Ahmed Balga, pulled out and reached South Kordofan on 16 February 2015. Since the beginning of the SRF enterprise the movement has aimed at opening a third front in Darfur, a fourth in the Missiriya area, and a fifth in Eastern Sudan (where JEM is said to already have some troops) (see Small Arms Survey, 2015b).¹¹² The SPLA-N organized an operation from South Kordofan to Darfur at the beginning of the

dry season, but was forced back—a situation that recalled the first infamous mission led by Abdelaziz during the Second Civil War, in which the majority of the fighters involved lost their lives.¹¹³

Blue Nile

As of 2015 the SPLA-N has some 7,000–10,000 fighters in Blue Nile, organized as the 2nd Front. In March 2015 a sub-division was formed for the Ingessana Mountains that would fight independently of the Front command and would be isolated during the rainy season. During the CPA interim period there were an estimated 11,000 SPLA forces in Blue Nile, split between the state JIUs and the 10th Division stationed in Guffa.¹¹⁴ The SPLA-N was able to recruit mainly among the Berta, Ingessana, Jumjum, and Uduk tribes, who were all receptive to the rebels' marginalization narrative.¹¹⁵ While the Ingessana provide the major manpower, with substantive recruitment from the Ingessana Mountains since 2011, the Uduk provide the military leadership. Both the 2nd Division commander, Gen. Joseph Tuka Ali, and the head of military intelligence, Brig. Gen. Steven Amad Dicko, are from this tribe.¹¹⁶ The departure of the former divisional commander, Gen. Ahmed el-Omda, an Ingessana, to study in Uganda in 2012 and the subsequent appointment of his deputy, Gen. Joseph, an Uduk, to replace him helped balance internal tribal relations and the Uduk's perception of marginalization in the state due to their lower levels of education.¹¹⁷ Since his return to Blue Nile in December 2014 Gen. el-Omda has been commanding the new sub-division in the Ingessana Mountains. The former JIU commander, Brig. Gen. Al-Jundi Suleyman, now deputy commander of the Front, is a Dawala.

Support for the SPLA-N among the indigenous tribes is not unanimous. The so-called Funj, who are considered to be the descendants of the Funj Sultanate, as well as the Berta and Burun—the name given to an umbrella of different tribes in southern Blue Nile—are divided in their support between the government and the rebels. According to a local analyst, these tribes have favoured the guarantees that allegiance to the GoS can provide, especially in the first years of the conflict, when the SPLA-N lost territories and strength.¹¹⁸ This also led to a large number of defections to SAF forces or civilian life (Gramizzi, 2013, p. 31). Reportedly, successful SPLA-N operations in 2014 triggered substantial

recruitment ahead of the current dry season and fostered more cohesion in the ranks.¹¹⁹ However, the movement's chain of command in Blue Nile is still perceived to be weak and many continue to refuse to join the rebellion.¹²⁰

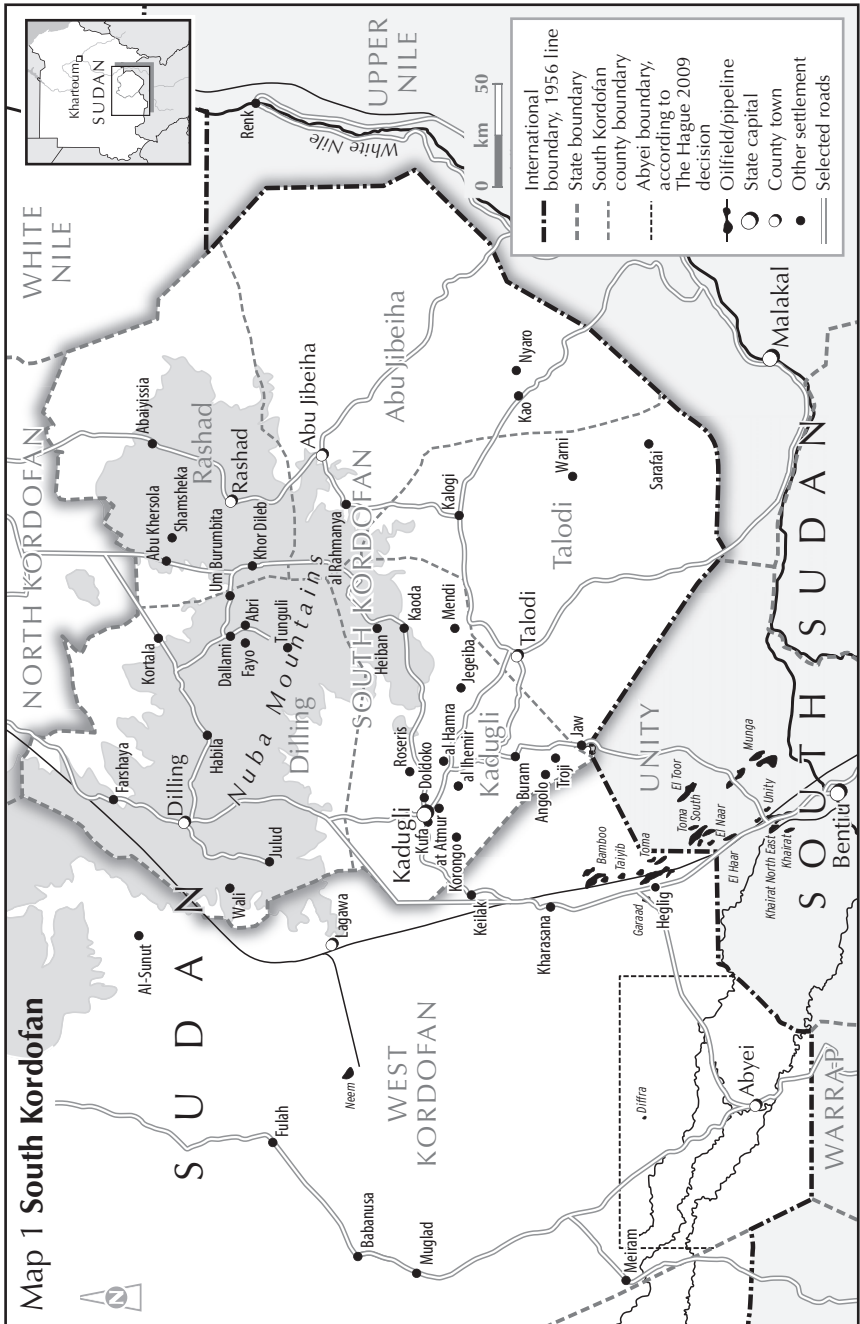
Unlike in South Kordofan, Blue Nile pastoralists are strong allies of Khartoum, and only a few elements of the Fellata have joined the SPLA-N, notably Abbas Abdalah Kara, head of the SPLM-N human rights court and member of the SPLM-N state leadership. Elements of the Rufa'a al-Hoi Arab tribe from the area of Roseires and Sinja have also joined the SPLA-N, with one senior officer being a member of the tribe. 🗨️

IV. Current dynamics

South Kordofan

Soon after the last round of talks in Addis Ababa was adjourned on 11 December 2014, the Sudanese minister of defence, Lt Gen. Abdelrahim Mohamed Hussein, while addressing the graduation ceremony of the 57th Infantry Brigade, 6th Division, in al Fashir, capital of North Darfur, launched the second GoS 'decisive summer campaign' to eradicate all rebellions. It would come to be characterized by a greater reliance than before on locally recruited militias and heavy indiscriminate bombing of civilians (Radio Dabanga, 2014d). Fighting in South Kordofan had already started in al Ithemir (Boram county) and Lofu (eastern Kadugli) on 1 December 2014, when GoS forces attacked SPLA-N positions. The two forces were engaged in parallel fighting through 15 January 2015 around Kadugli and north of Talodi. In February and March 2015 government ground attacks decreased, while heavy shelling continued on the front line. From the second half of March 2015 the SPLA-N engaged in several 'mobile' operations against SAF garrisons in the lowlands, for the first time attacking government strongholds such as Habila with 'hit and run' tactics learned from the Darfur rebels using vehicles mounted with machine guns, with the aim of disrupting national elections and increasing the security of the civilian population.¹²¹ In the aftermath of its electoral victory the NCP launched a new phase of its 'decisive campaign' to end the rebellion (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015c), followed by heavy shelling (using mainly Chinese-made long-range rocket launchers) and air attacks. As of the end of May 2015, however, the front line remains substantially unchanged, and both parties are allegedly already preparing for the fifth dry season campaign.¹²²

The GoS started mobilizing troops in the state in September 2014, from el Obeid, the Khartoum area (Karari and Jebel Awlia), and Kosti, as well as inside South Kordofan itself in the garrison towns of Difbabai, Khor Dileb, al Rahmánya, and Sarafai. Government troops, which included SAF forces and Arab, Nuba, and southern militias, are also stationed in Heglig and Kharasana to attack Jaw



and Troji and attack the rebels in Abaissiya town, Abu Jubeiha, the Dallami area, Rashad, and Talodi in the east, and in Dilling and Kadugli in the west, aiming ultimately to take the rebel capital, Kauda.¹²³

Since November 2014 a considerable build-up of forces has taken place in Mendi in the Talodi area, including SAF troops, Nuba and Arab militias, and Darfur RSF fighters. Talodi has been a key rebel target since the beginning of the conflict, in order to control the strategic south-eastern area and the border with Upper Nile. But according to the SPLA-N, the SAF component in Talodi is particularly strong, consisting of Nuba fighters of the Longan, Tasa, Tolod, and Tumtum tribes, which have been allied with Khartoum since the previous war and have never been defeated by the rebels. SAF shelled Talodi on 6 and 9 January 2015, while the SPLA-N attacked a paramilitary convoy of Darfur RSF forces moving towards Angarto, 18 km north-east of Talodi, in the first battle involving the militias in the current fighting season. SAF later managed to recapture Angarto, pushing the rebels to Mendi and fighting to within 20 km of Kauda, and causing about 5,000 IDPs (Nuba Reports, 2015a). Around one battalion of Nuer fighters and Nuba militias reportedly also supported GoS troops.¹²⁴ On 16 January the SPLA-N recaptured Angarto, and after a day of fighting GoS forces retreated to Talodi. This was followed by a reported mutiny on 28 January of RSF Darfur fighters from Talodi, with 80–100 vehicles, while SAF troops reportedly moved towards Abu Jubeiha and were unwilling to continue fighting in the area.¹²⁵ According to the SPLA-N, the RSF forces and around 300 Arab militias left Talodi and Kadugli for North Darfur.¹²⁶ The SPLA-N attacked the Kalogi and Tusi garrisons for a few hours in March 2015, and al Rahmany (Abu Jubeiha) for around six hours, capturing nine RPG-7s, AKM rifles, three 82 mm mortars, four 60 mm mortars, two DShKs and 45 boxes of ammunition, two PKM light machine guns, and a large quantity of shells (see also UNOCHA, 2015).¹²⁷

Nuer fighters were spotted among GoS troops in the Abu Jubeiha area. They are considered SPLA-IO forces aiming to attack the Kao–Nyaro areas, in order to proceed to Malakal in Upper Nile.¹²⁸ The SPLA-IO has denied the accusation.¹²⁹ The presence of Nuer troops in the area nonetheless causes fear among the refugees in Unity state.¹³⁰ At the beginning of this dry season five Land Cruisers were spotted close to Kosti in White Nile at the border with South Kordofan, manned by 150 Nuer.¹³¹

As of May 2015 a GoS force of around 5,000 men organized in three battalions was located in the Sarafai area in Dallami county, with the aim of entering SPLA-N territory in Dallami and Heiban. These troops arrived in November 2014 after being trained at el Obeid, with some vehicles being moved from Duem, Khartoum, and Shendi. A total of around 500 Land Cruisers mounted with light weapons were seen in the area in late November 2014, with around 3,000 men mounted on vehicles and 2,000 infantry.¹³² According to local observers and SPLA-N officers, the fighters were Nuba militias recruited mainly from the areas of Kordoleb and Um Burumbita, and local PDF. While an attack seemed imminent when the author visited the area—there were continuous air attacks and shelling, and the lowland fields in front of Tunguli had been set on fire by Arab PDF militias on camels—it did not occur. Local observers and military officers reported that the failure to recruit local militias, especially from the Hawazma tribe, is affecting the government's ability to mount attacks.

In mid-2015 government forces were stationed in Um Burumbita with the aim of entering Nyakuma, and one convoy was in Dilling, from where they were expected to head into Sallara.¹³³ According to the SPLA-N, GoS troops were positioned to attack the western and eastern jebels with the aim of isolating them from the rest of the SPLA-N-controlled areas. In May 2015 local humanitarian actors reported heavy shelling in the Dilling area and attacks against civilians in As-Sunut, affecting areas that had been relatively calm in the past. On 28 March the rebels claimed to have entered Habila town with a mobile force mounted on vehicles, and a few hours later returned to Um Heitan base after capturing five Land Cruisers, one Korean Akama jeep, four DShK machine guns, five 82 mm mortars, three 60 mm mortars, 22 AKM rifles, shells, and ammunition (unverified). For the SPLM/A-N the victory was symbolically important because it undermined the government mechanized agricultural schemes in the areas and pushed SPLA-N attacks further north.¹³⁴

The state capital, Kadugli, and its outskirts continue to be the major theatre of fighting and shelling for both sides. The GoS build-up of forces around Kadugli started on 11 November 2014 when SAF troops arrived in al Atmur (7 km south of Kadugli), followed in early December by around 1,500 troops who moved to Daldako (12 km east of Kadugli), where they joined the Nuba militias already in the area. On 10 December the SPLA-N claimed to have occupied

Daldako and Roseires (17 km east of Kadugli), while also taking control of the Jebel Nimir garrison (7 km west of Kadugli). The SPLA-N claimed successful attacks on GoS military convoys in Daloka (8 km south of Kadugli) on 8 January and in al Geneziya (15 km north of Um Sirdiba) on 11 January. GoS forces and RSF militias were reportedly attacking the Buram and Um Dorein areas.¹³⁵ On 14 January SPLA-N forces entered al Geneziya and some 1,500 GoS soldiers were forced to retreat to Daldoka (Nuba Reports, 2015b). On 23 February the rebels announced that they had entered the Kahliat garrison, 5 km west of Kadugli.¹³⁶ On 4 April 2015 the rebels claimed to have contained an attack on Kalga village in western Kadugli and pushed government forces back to the Keilak area.¹³⁷

The SPLA-N has provided the Small Arms Survey with photographs of weapons it claims to have captured in battles fought at the beginning of January 2015. These include two vehicles mounted with machine guns, two trucks, one T-55 tank (another was reportedly destroyed), one ZU-23-2 cannon, and other light weapons. An Iranian-made drone, supposedly shot down by the SPLA-N on 1 December 2014 in Um Dorein county, was visually verified (see photo). Also claimed, but not confirmed, is the SPLA-N's capture in these battles of a new T-72 main battle tank, six DShKM-pattern machine guns, and other materiel and ammunition.



Iranian-made drone, Kurchi, Um Dorein, South Kordofan, December 2014 © Benedetta de Alessi

Ground fighting intensified from March 2015, with the SPLA-N campaign to boycott the national elections, using mobile tactics learned from JEM ahead of its departure from the state, which proved to be effective in the lowlands. The towns of Dakar (north-west of Dilling), Farshaya, Habila, Kalogi, al Rahmanya (eastern jebels), and Tusi (around Kadugli) were captured for a few hours and polling stations in Habila were disrupted. The SPLA-N shelled the areas of Abyssia, Dilling, Gadil, Kadugli, and Rashad using BM-Grad single-barrel rocket launchers and targeting garrisons and election centres; reportedly ballots from constituencies 14, 16, and 17 were captured.¹³⁸ While civilians had been informed in advance of the attacks, the fighting caused considerable harm to the population, which was forced to temporarily relocate, and some civilians reportedly lost their lives.

According to the SPLA-N's Abdelaziz al Hilu, SAF pre-positioned around 10,000 men on 1,000 Land Cruisers mounted with machine guns ahead of the second phase of its campaign, which was characterized by heavy use of shelling.¹³⁹ On 5 May government forces attacked Hajar Dabib and Shatt Damam in Buram county; on 10 May Hadra village, the site of an important peace market in Dallami county, was shelled; and on the same day Agab village in Heiban was attacked. All these villages were reportedly looted and destroyed after the attack and civilians were targeted.¹⁴⁰ According to the SPLA-N, Nuba militias under Kafi Tayara were involved in these attacks.

Blue Nile

The government dry season offensive began in Blue Nile in February 2015, with heavy fighting in the Ingeessana Mountains between SPLA-N and GoS forces, and the SPLA-N claiming to have reached within 20 km of Damazin in the area of the Agadit agricultural scheme. Government troops prepared to advance into Mayak and Mofu on various fronts from late 2014, i.e. at Malkan and Ulu, and south and west of Kurmuk.¹⁴¹ Since February 2015 both parties have repositioned troops around the mountains, with the SPLA-N introducing two extra battalions and a large number of RSF reportedly within GoS lines.¹⁴² In April 2015 the SPLA-N created an independent division in the mountains, reportedly with sufficient equipment for the next fighting season.

Map 2 **Blue Nile**



SPLA-N guerrilla operations did not stop during the rainy season. The rebels attacked government garrisons in Bek (north of the Ingessana Mountains) and the Abu Garn area (30 km west of Damazin) on 18 and 21 November 2014, respectively, in retaliation for the bombing of civilians in the Chali and Yabus areas (SRRA, 2014b). These operations were conducted as negotiations continued in Addis Ababa. On 9 January the SPLA-N ambushed a military contingent in Khor Demer (30 km south of Damazin) and claimed to have captured one cannon, an RPG, five Kalashnikov-pattern assault rifles, and large quantities of ammunition (not verified by the Small Arms Survey).¹⁴³

On 8 February the SPLA-N ambushed a GoS military convoy moving northwards from Kurmuk, between Sita Kilo, south of Dindiro, and the Saali garrison on the main road to Damazin. The rebels claimed to have destroyed two MAN (German) military trucks and captured one in good condition. They also claimed to have captured five of the seven Toyota Land Cruisers mounted with 12.7 mm machine guns constituting the convoy, while the other two were destroyed; six prisoners were also captured.¹⁴⁴ The UN condemned the deaths of three aid workers from the Sudanese Red Crescent in the ambush. The rebels claimed that no NGO vehicle was part of the convoy and that the workers had possibly been travelling in the military vehicles.¹⁴⁵ On 28 February 2015 the SPLA-N claimed to have entered Jaam town and the Soda area in Bau county and captured two Land Cruisers mounted with 12.7 mm machine guns, three additional 12.7 mm machine guns, one water tanker, three heavy earth-moving machines, one 82 mm mortar, two fuel tankers, five PKM machine guns, five RPG-7 rocket launchers, 50 boxes of 12.7 mm ammunition, six boxes of RPG-7 shells, nine 60 mm mortars, one 120 mm mortar, and 22 AKM rifles, plus additional quantities of various types of ammunition.¹⁴⁶ In April 2015 the SPLA-N staged attacks on the Kurmuk area, forcing an estimated 6,000 people who still lived in the town to move closer to the border with Ethiopia. On 22–23 May 2015 the SPLA-N claimed to have ambushed three convoys in the Kulgu and Maganza areas moving from Damazin towards the mountains, but the author could not find information on the attacks. In April and May 2015 the government began the forced relocation of civilians in Bau county, which is the epicentre of the fighting, and burned their villages, allegedly to undermine support for the rebellion (see also UNRCO, 2015). 📍

V. Humanitarian impacts and human rights violations

IDPs in the Two Areas and refugees in South Sudan and Ethiopia

The conflict in the Two Areas has caused immense human suffering and the population lives in dire humanitarian conditions, while simultaneously being the victims of widespread human rights violations. According to local SPLM-N authorities, around one million people have been displaced due to intensive air and ground attacks in the two SPLM/A-N-controlled areas. In South Kordofan slightly less than half a million people are reportedly displaced from a population of about 1.3 million, and there are around 80,000 IDPs in Blue Nile rebel-held territories of a total population of about 100,000 (SRRRA, 2015, p. 14).¹⁴⁷ The Small Arms Survey could not independently verify these numbers, but noted a large number of people living in the caves in South Kordofan's northern areas or in displaced settlements throughout the SPLM/A-N-controlled territories, and there were many abandoned villages in Blue Nile, especially in the Bau, Chali, and Wadaka areas, where the population lives hiding in the bush.¹⁴⁸ Generally, four years of ground fighting and air attacks have pushed the population away from their home areas, disrupted food production, and reduced the availability of clean water and health facilities.¹⁴⁹ Due to targeted aerial bombing of cultivated farms and food stocks, coupled with late and then heavy rains in 2014, SPLM-N authorities in the Two Areas expect severe levels of food insecurity from March 2015 onwards.¹⁵⁰ According to a local observer, in the third week of March a weekly market in Wadaka county had 90 kg of sorghum for sale for around 3,000 people.¹⁵¹ The author observed agro-pastoralist Ingessana in Bau county living on roots and palm dates, because crop cultivation was disrupted by insecurity and late rains.

The interruption of youth education in the Two Areas is another dramatic effect of this conflict; more so because it has continued since the first war and

was not resolved in the interim period.¹⁵² Due to insecurity and the departure of teachers (many were hired by the international NGOs (INGOs) that provide assistance in refugee camps), the war has caused the closure of 172 of 418 primary schools in South Kordofan, according to figures provided by the SPLM-N Secretariat of Education, based on an October 2014 assessment. There is only one secondary school in the rebel-held areas, and one was recently opened in the new Adjong Thok refugee camp. According to a local social worker around one-third of school-age Nuba children are not receiving an education at the moment and drop-out levels are alarmingly high. In Blue Nile the situation is more critical: since 2012 there have been only five primary community schools and no secondary schools.

The reduced presence of credible humanitarian actors on the ground and the absence of IDP camps made it difficult to obtain accurate figures for IDPs from the Two Areas in the rest of Sudan.¹⁵³ The government refused to set up camps for the displaced, preferring to treat them as 'citizens'.¹⁵⁴ However, according to local humanitarian workers this suits the government's purpose of downplaying the crisis in the Two Areas while avoiding a new humanitarian operation like the one in Darfur.¹⁵⁵ In the Zaqt area eyewitnesses said that they saw a local NGO register IDPs and distribute money to them, and then ask them to go to areas where they had relatives. In January 2015 the Sudan Humanitarian and Aid Commission stated that some 145,000 people are expected to flee from the SPLA-N areas in South Kordofan into government areas in light of increased GoS offensives (Reliefweb, 2015). The humanitarian needs overview of the Sudan Strategic Response Plan estimates 240,000 people to be in need of humanitarian aid in Blue Nile, including 110,000 IDPs in government-controlled areas.¹⁵⁶ Eyewitnesses report that people on the outskirts of Damazin and Roseires in Blue Nile live in dire humanitarian conditions. According to local humanitarian workers, in May 2015 more than 10,000 people were forcibly displaced from the Bau area into Roseires and their villages burned down to undermine their support for the rebellion.¹⁵⁷

Since the beginning of the conflict around 270,000 refugees from the Two Areas have left for South Sudan (some 226,000) and Ethiopia (over 41,000) to seek security and food (UNHCR, n.d.).¹⁵⁸ In both areas, after a peak in arrivals in 2012, the number dropped in 2014, but there is still a regular flow of refugees

from SPLA-N areas in search of security, education, food, and health services. Few people left in 2014, thanks to a good rainy season in 2013 and the population developing better coping mechanisms, except for around 5,000–6,000 who arrived in Unity state to escape intense ground fighting in Troji. Since mid-January 2015, however, a steady additional influx of 500 refugees a week has arrived in Unity to escape recent fighting around Kadugli and Talodi (Radio Tamajuz, 2015b). The Refugee Council confirmed that more than 2,000 refugees arrived in the camps in February 2015, mostly from Buram and Um Dorain counties, with a few from Dallami and Heiban counties. More people arrived in April 2015, seeking food security ahead of the rainy season and exhausted by the conflict, while families with children moved to Adjong Thok seeking educational facilities.¹⁵⁹

In Blue Nile almost one-fifth of the total population (180,000 out of a population of around 850,000 documented in the 2009 census) sought refuge in Ethiopia and South Sudan, leaving the war zones mostly depopulated.¹⁶⁰ Unlike the Nuba, the majority of the people who were living in southern Blue Nile when the war started in 2011 had also just returned to areas that were the theatre of heavy fighting during the first war, and were quick to escape when the war started again.

The international community's dilemma

The GoS has not allowed any humanitarian assistance in the Two Areas since the beginning of the conflict, which has contributed to a massive flow of refugees, particularly from Blue Nile, into South Sudan. A 9 February 2012 tripartite proposal by the UN, the AU, and the League of Arab States for the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Two Areas, which was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2046 (UNSC, 2012), failed to be implemented due to government obstruction. Few INGOs are prepared to risk working in the SPLM/A-N territories. Those that have stayed have been increasingly subject to air attacks, leading to a substantial scaling down of their operations. In May 2014 the Mother of Mercy hospital in Gudele in South Kordofan was bombed for two consecutive days (Nuba Reports, 2014). On 6 June 2014 two bombs hit a Doctors Without Borders medical facility in Farandala, injuring two staff, despite the

fact that the INGO had communicated the facility's location to the government. On 20 January 2015 the clinic was bombed again (Doctors Without Borders, 2015). As the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Sudan noted:

UN agencies have not had access to SPLM-N areas for the past three years and are unable to verify the scale of the civilian displacement and the scope of humanitarian needs. . . . While INGOs are present in South Kordofan, there are restrictive regulations in terms of their ability to directly implement activities. In Blue Nile, access is more restricted and the Government has recently re-iterated its intention to complete the exclusion of all international staff from the State (Reliefweb, 2014).

Dialogue between the GoS and the UN was further reduced after the expulsion of two high-ranking UN officials from Sudan in December 2014 (*Sudan Tribune*, 2014d).

Another anomaly of the conflict is that almost four years after its establishment in July 2011, the camp in Yida is not recognized by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) while it remains a transitional site where people receive food, basic health assistance, and clean water. A major problem of this situation is the lack of proper education for the youths, with an estimated 25,000–30,000 children in the camp threatened with illiteracy.¹⁶¹ Since May 2013 new arrivals have been sent to a new camp at Adjong Thok, which hosts a population of over 20,000 people after a new batch of arrivals at the beginning of 2015. While everyone agrees that the status quo is no longer sustainable, the three stakeholders—the GRSS, UNHCR, and the refugees—could not find a solution that suited all those involved, amid a high degree of misunderstanding and conflicting political interests. UNHCR refused to recognize the camp because it is located less than 45 km from the border and is keen to halt the strong connection between the refugee population and the rebellion, while admitting that the military presence in the camp has dramatically reduced, particularly after JEM's departure from the area in August 2014.¹⁶² The residents of Yida were reluctant to move to Adjong Thok and were keen to remain close to the route into South Kordofan, which constitutes a secure haven should a new wave of fighting occur in Unity state, and only 2,500 initially agreed to be transferred.¹⁶³ According to UNHCR the rebels are influencing the refugees' decision in order to keep Yida camp

open and maintain easy access to supplies, thus sacrificing the right of the youths in the camp to an education for political reasons.¹⁶⁴

The GRSS has also been unwilling to recognize the camp.¹⁶⁵ While it considers Yida to be legal in terms of the dispute over the Sudan–South Sudan border, which places the camp about 65 km from the Heglig–Kharasana border, the GRSS benefits from an undefined situation. Yida airstrip has been increasingly used for SPLA rearmament since the South Sudan conflict erupted in December 2013, with daily flights during the fighting in Unity state and in late 2014. The airstrip was expanded to 2 km in length in September 2014, and local observers saw six armoured personnel carriers (APCs) offloaded in October 2014 and sent southwards to SPLA troops.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, the GRSS’s position is complicated by conflicting interests between Juba and Unity state officials. While Juba is keen to reduce Yida and split the Nuba into different camps, because it considers 80,000 refugees assembled in one place along the border to be a threat, local *payam* authorities cannot agree on the location of these alternative camps, because each wants to benefit from the blossoming local economy and ability to collect taxes, which since the crisis started in South Sudan is the only source of funds to pay the officials’ salaries, which Juba no longer provides. The refugees understand the GRSS’s solution (i.e. of splitting Yida up into several smaller camps), but it is not cost-effective for UNHCR.¹⁶⁷ Finally, in March 2015 the GRSS announced that Yida would be a military base and needed to be emptied of refugees. This seems to be motivated by a rapprochement with Khartoum and as a way to reduce allegations of Juba’s support to the SPLA-N. UNHCR agreed to relocate the refugees to Adjong Thok and a new camp in Pameer, but the refugees consider the new location to be unsafe.¹⁶⁸ Meanwhile, localized violence between the local Dinka community and the refugees began to emerge in April 2015, and a dozen Nuba were killed, including a woman who resisted a rape attempt.¹⁶⁹

The approximately 41,000 Blue Nile refugees in the four camps in Ethiopia (Bambasit, Kamsa, Kubri, and Tongo) are reportedly victims of abuses perpetrated both by the local Ethiopian Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs and Sudanese security forces, which contravene international refugee law. INGOs, the SPLM-N authorities, and the UN have no leverage over the Ethiopian authorities, even though negotiations on the Two Areas are being held

in the country. The refugees are mainly originally from Geissan and Kurmuk counties and arrived after 2011, while some have been there since the Second Civil War. Reportedly, refugees are not given the allocated amount of food, have no job opportunities, and are not allowed to leave the camps if they are suspected of wanting to go to SPLA-N areas. According to interviews conducted with young men from the camps who crossed the border at night in search of seasonal jobs in the gold mines in Blue Nile or Maban, refugees face increasing insecurity from Sudanese and Ethiopian security forces and Benishangul militias at the border.¹⁷⁰ In October 2014 Sudanese authorities stopped a group of refugees trying to enter Geissan county; seven people were killed, including a woman who was first raped, and 11 were arrested.¹⁷¹ In September–October 2014 militias prevented traders from entering Blue Nile from Ethiopia, blocking an important supply chain for the population living in the southern part of the state. In the camps the refugees' personal security is also constantly at risk, with many cases of abuses and arbitrary arrests reported.¹⁷² Ethiopian authorities arrested an 80-year-old *omda* from Keli on his way to Asosa market and jailed him in November–December 2014 without charges; he subsequently reported bad treatment in jail. The refugees interviewed also stated that it is unsafe to be in the market after 4 p.m., and people gathering are accused of conspiring and are arrested. According to humanitarian actors, in March 2015 Sudan security personnel arrested refugees in Bambasit camp.¹⁷³ Seven children reportedly died from malnutrition in January 2015 in Tango camp in the absence of humanitarian relief (Radio Tamajuz, 2015a). The raping of women by Ethiopian and Sudanese officials is also reportedly widespread.¹⁷⁴

Indiscriminate and targeted aerial bombing of civilians

The Small Arms Survey obtained photographic evidence of indiscriminate and targeted air attacks on the civilian population, villages, and farms located a few miles away from military positions in the Two Areas. International observers and local activists provided evidence of the use of cluster bombs between February and May 2015 in South Kordofan (see also HRW, 2015). On 27 May four Soviet-made RBK-500 cluster bombs were dropped on civilian locations, including the headquarters of the SPLM-N administration, but, according to

local testimony, the bombs did not deploy the AO-2.5 RT sub-munition, which usually leaves dangerous unexploded items on the ground.¹⁷⁵

Indiscriminate air attacks have been a feature of the conflict in the Two Areas, leaving a deep physical and psychological impact on civilians. In many cases bombing precedes a new wave of fighting to weaken support for the rebellion. An unprecedented number of bombs were reportedly dropped on civilians in the Two Areas between December 2014 and January 2015.¹⁷⁶ Air attacks are also used as a political tool ahead of a round of talks. On 6 November 2014, as negotiations were about to start, the GoS dropped 14 bombs on a civilian area around Tunguli, killing a prominent local activist, Neima Abiad.¹⁷⁷ In Blue Nile 25 bombs were dropped in Kurmuk county on 11 and 12 November 2014, killing one woman and injuring another (SRRA, 2015, p. 8).

An increasing use of reconnaissance drones has allowed for more targeted air attacks, and four drones have been shot down since the beginning of the conflict in South Kordofan, including an Iranian Zagil model near Kurchi (Um Dorein) on 1 December 2014.¹⁷⁸ Between May and June 2014 some 60 bombs were dropped in the Kauda area, targeting a local NGO and a clinic that were



Unexploded ordnance, Kauda area, South Kordofan, November 2014 © Benedetta De Alessi

miles from the front line. Two unexploded bombs were still visible in front of a local hospital (see photo). Nine bombs were reportedly dropped on Kauda on 27 January 2015, but without casualties. The area of Dallami, close to the front line, was particularly exposed to bombing and shelling in 2014, forcing around 24,000 IDPs to flee from Abri, Sarafai, and the eastern jebels into the caves and to the foot of the mountains.¹⁷⁹ People living in the caves in the Tunguli areas were increasingly targeted between February and April 2015, and two pregnant women were killed by bomb attacks on 6 February, while eight people died in bombing on 5 and 7 April, including two children, with ten seriously injured. Shelling in Um Serdiba (Um Dorein) on 3 February resulted in the deaths of five children.

In 2014 the government increasingly targeted farms and food stocks, as reported by local monitors and witnessed by the author. In December 2014 heavy air attacks in the Wadaka area in Blue Nile caused the loss of around 600 cultivated *feddans*. Since the beginning of the conflict, but more so in 2014, weekly markets have also frequently been targeted.¹⁸⁰ On 16 October four bombs were dropped on the Heiban market, killing six people.¹⁸¹ On 25–27 May 12 bombs from an Antonov and 4 cluster bombs targeted the local weekly market and residential areas, killing 2 children.¹⁸² According to local government officials in the Two Areas the pattern reveals the GoS's intention to starve the population and force people to flee.¹⁸³

Arbitrary arrests and rape as government tactics

The Small Arms Survey has found evidence of abuses committed by local authorities (PDF, SAF, and others) against civilians in government-held areas, particularly against groups of people suspected of supporting the SPLA-N. According to testimony collected from IDPs and in the refugee camps, repression is particularly acute in areas that voted for the SPLM in the 2010 elections, such as the Ingessana areas in Bau county, Blue Nile. IDPs who arrived in Bau from the countryside were asked by county executive director Eltom Abdel Rahim to pay SDP 250 to stay in the area and were forced to flee when they were unable to pay. An eyewitness interviewed in Maban said that IDPs from the Ingessana tribe in Dindiro did not receive any relief assistance, because

'sons of the rebellion did not deserve even a glass of water'.¹⁸⁴ According to a reportedly leaked memo (unverified) from GoS intelligence seen by the author, a force of dismissed SAF soldiers and officers and SPLA-N defectors 'led by 1st Lieutenant Shirra and 2nd Lieutenant Jafar Omer from Khor Adaar, under the auspices of Major General Yahya Mohamed Khair (the Blue Nile Governor after Malik Agar's removal in 2011) and Abdel Rah' were sent from Damazin 'to loot and kill the Ingessana cattle and terrorize the girls and the wives of their sons who joined the SPLA-N'.¹⁸⁵ The militia group of Ismeil Omer Kurra, a Fellata, is particularly active in the Ingessana Mountains against the local people, with several cases of abuses being reported.

The little information coming from government areas indicates that people from the Two Areas suspected of supporting the rebellion are arrested and kept in NISS facilities, in some cases tortured and raped, and their property looted. According to a local NGO following the cases of missing or detained people, at least 100 people have been held in jail since 2011 in Agadit, Kadugli, Khartoum, and Roseires. Some are believed to have died. Mahieddin Mahmud, who was arrested in 2014, with other Nuba accused of sympathizing with the SPLM-N managed to escape from Kadugli prison and reach Abu Jubeiha, and reported that people in prison were being killed.¹⁸⁶ Eighteen women who were relatives of refugees in Yida were arrested without charge in Kadugli over a year ago and their status is unknown.¹⁸⁷ The sentencing to death in absentia, by the special court in Sinja, Sinnar, of SPLM-N members, including the chairman and secretary general, and 45 people to life imprisonment is still in effect.

Women are particularly vulnerable to abuses.¹⁸⁸ In Blue Nile the raping of women has become a weapon of war used by government and paramilitary forces against the population (see HRW, 2014). The author interviewed 11 of a group of 400 women, including under-age girls, who arrived in Maban camps in November 2014 after having reportedly been raped in the government areas of Khor Maganza and Mosfa, and in Fadimia and Sam Sur barracks between December 2013 and September 2014.¹⁸⁹

According to information collected from a refugee association that supports women arriving in the camps from the Bau area, many more women were victims of abuses in 2012–13.¹⁹⁰ Some women who were married to SPLA-N fighters were abducted and forced to marry militia members.¹⁹¹ Another testimony

recounts that in April 2012 local militias from Ismaeil Omer Kurra and Kebja attacked a group of ten women collecting firewood in the area between Kamrek and Senja. Nine were raped and murdered, while Kak Eltom, who managed to escape, told the story to the authorities in Maban.¹⁹² Sheikh Adbael Majid Jor from Gabanit reported that masked gunmen, probably militias, attacked his area in 2012 and burned the blind and disabled elderly women.¹⁹³

Recruitment of child soldiers by the government and SRF

Together with women, children are major victims of the conflict in the Two Areas. According to information collected on the ground and supported by qualitative interviews in SPLM/A-N-controlled areas, the recruitment of child soldiers in government areas and Khartoum is common and is perpetrated by government forces and allied militias; but the rebels also use this practice (see below). This occurs thanks to the cooption of chiefs and local political leaders and for financial incentives, while defections are reportedly frequent.¹⁹⁴ Interviews with former child fighters and files captured by the SPLA-N in Daloka in January 2015 and reviewed by the Small Arms Survey suggest that under-age children have been recruited into SAF and PDF units in South Kordofan.¹⁹⁵

Several SPLA-N commanders interviewed in the Two Areas confirmed that children are fighting on the GoS side, and many of their bodies are found after battles. Seven children were found during a battle in Rum in 2014 and were released after their weapons had been confiscated: 'they were not even able to shoot and were shaking when we found them', claimed the local SPLA-N commander. The SPLM-N commissioner of Rashad reported that SAF went to the area to recruit 2,000–4,000 children from Alfel, Dallami, Tajwala, and Um Burumbita, but managed to recruit only half this number thanks to assertive action from the community. A 22-year-old man, Omar, a prisoner of war whom the SPLA-N captured in April 2014, was forcibly recruited from Damazin market in 2013 and sent to the Geissan PDF training centre in Blue Nile together with 43 other people, 13 of whom were under age (between 15 and 17 years old).¹⁹⁶ They were trained to fight and paid SDG 200 (USD 34) per month. A 14-year-old boy from Khor Maganza was captured while grazing cattle in the bush and taken to a PDF training centre in October 2014, from where he managed to

escape. The boy had never been to school and was offered money in exchange for fighting. Hassan, an eight-year-old, escaped from Khor Maganza without his family out of fear of being recruited, claiming that ‘many boys are disappearing’.¹⁹⁷

Previous research has also documented cases of child recruitment by the SPLA-N (Gramizzi, 2013, pp. 41–42). SPLA-N officers admitted that some children are employed in front-line areas outside their control—which was confirmed by local humanitarian actors—but when found are sent to school in the refugee camps.¹⁹⁸ The author could not independently verify this, but generally during her visit to the rebel-held areas she did not see any child soldiers or hear any complaints from the population about the forced recruitment of children. The movement has officially condemned the practice and invited international investigations on the ground during a February 2013 meeting with the UN Special Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in New York, in response to claims about the rebels’ use of child soldiers.¹⁹⁹

Consistent reports were collected of JEM’s recruitment of Nuba children in South Kordofan and Yida camp.²⁰⁰ It is reported that around 600 youths aged 12–17 were taken between 2012 and 2014, and around 200 between January and March 2014 (numbers could not be independently verified and JEM denies them).²⁰¹ Members of a child protection committee interviewed in Yida reported a total of 86 youths between 12 and 17 years of age and two aged 18 missing (the committee was composed of community police, social development council members, women’ council members, and community leaders). The committee also reported that many cases are not reported. According to families interviewed, JEM rebels started quiet political mobilization activities in Yida camp in 2012 and managed to recruit 20–30 youths who went to South Kordofan with them. When JEM rebels returned to South Sudan to take part in the conflict in Unity state they used the children who had already been recruited to convince their peers to join the organization. Youths were mainly recruited from Nuba tribes in Angolo (thanks partly to the work of Abdelbaghi Garfa), Doloko, and the Katcha area, and deserters also detected some from Chad in JEM ranks.²⁰² Reportedly, when the refugee community raised the case against JEM, the local commander stated that Nuba youths voluntarily joined his forces, but four children were released when their families insisted (the Small Arms Survey could

not verify this information because the commander had left the area at the time the research was conducted). Local communities in Yida reported that after fighting in Bentiu between February and April 2014, ten children managed to escape (although three were recaptured) and reported that one was killed in the fighting, while one of the survivors remained deaf after a battle. In August 2014 one child escaped from Raja and one more arrived in Yida in November 2014, confirming that many children are still serving with JEM in its new areas of operation in Raja. The children who managed to escape reported witnessing or being victims of abuses, including gang rape. According to the local community, JEM members are still roaming through the camp, often disguised as traders, and many families are afraid they might kidnap their sons again, because 'children are disappearing'.²⁰³ In February 2015 Darfur traders reportedly took three boys, but local authorities intercepted them, and in March 2015 Darfur traders took four girls, but they were found in Pariang and brought back.²⁰⁴ JEM officials denied the practice when interviewed in November 2014 and March 2015. 📍

VI. The Two Areas and Sudan–South Sudan border conflicts

The Two Areas and multiple crises between Sudan and South Sudan

The conflict in the Two Areas is a Sudanese conflict, but it is affected by dynamics at play between Sudan and South Sudan, particularly since the eruption of the conflict in South Sudan in December 2013. This is not only due to their strategic position along the border, but also to the historic ties that link the SPLM/A-N to the party in South Sudan after 20 years of fighting a war together.

When the war in the Two Areas began the GRSS was divided over providing support to the SPLM/A-N. Southern assistance to the SPLA-N mainly came from the military and security sectors and the leadership from the border states, while other leaders were hesitant to support the rebellion in Sudan, given the already fragile relations with that country in the aftermath of the CPA and the difficult political negotiations that were affecting the security and economic development of the new country.²⁰⁵ In fact, on several occasions the GoS asked Juba to stop supporting the SPLM/A-N as a precondition for substantive talks between the two countries. While officially denying any connection, the government in Juba reduced relations with the SPLM/A-N in 2012 after internal and international pressure, and its leaders were no longer hosted in Juba, and moved to Uganda and abroad.²⁰⁶ President Salva Kiir subsequently offered to mediate between the GoS and the SPLM/A-N, but Khartoum rejected the idea (*Sudan Tribune*, 2012). Uganda also stopped harbouring the SPLM/A-N in mid-2014, to facilitate the Sudan–South Sudan talks of December 2014, while the GRSS reiterated its commitment to implement the 2012 Cooperation Agreement with Sudan to stop supporting or harbouring rebel groups (*Sudan Tribune*, 2014c).²⁰⁷ However, mistrust remained high and both parties failed to implement the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone (Small Arms Survey, 2014b; Craze, 2014). Khartoum announced its intention to secure its southern borders from rebel incursions ahead of the April 2015 elections (Radio Tamazuj, 2015g).

The GoS continues to accuse South Sudan of supporting the SRF (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015a). Since the civil war started in South Sudan in December 2013 the SPLA-IO have joined Khartoum in accusing the Sudanese rebels of fighting alongside the SPLA in Unity and Upper Nile states (ICG, 2015, pp. 13–19). In several interviews with the author, high-ranking SPLA-IO officials said that ‘Nuba and Ingessana were spotted’ in South Sudan.²⁰⁸ The Small Arms Survey could not find any evidence of the provision of recent direct military and logistic support from the GRSS to the SPLM/A-N or of SPLA-N involvement in South Sudan in 2014, but it noted the free movement of goods and people from and to the refugee camps (see Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2013, pp. 48–49).²⁰⁹ The leadership of the SPLM/A-N reported that since December 2013 it had decided to maintain a neutral position with regard to the conflict among its former comrades in South Sudan due to ideological, logistical, and financial constraints, and tried without success to mediate between the SPLM/A and SPLM/A-IO.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, when the civil war started in South Sudan operational relations and similar strategic interests between the SPLA and SPLA-N increased.²¹¹ The SPLA-N presence along the Sudan–South Sudan border helps to contain SPLA-IO incursions into South Sudan,²¹² while SPLA and SPLA-N forces remain co-located in the contested border areas of Jaw between Unity state and South Kordofan (Small Arms Survey, 2015b, p. 2). According to international observers the SPLA-N has also helped the SPLA by proactively patrolling Maban and Pariang counties, and meetings between SPLA and SPLA-N commanders occur in the border areas of Pariang and Renk.²¹³

More evidence exists of Darfur rebels’ military involvement alongside the SPLA, which demonstrates SRF involvement in South Sudan, as Khartoum and the SPLM/A-IO claim but the SPLA denies. JEM and SLA-MM have been thought to receive logistical and financial assistance from the GRSS since before the independence of South Sudan; the Darfur groups deny these accusations.²¹⁴ JEM did support the SPLA in its attack on Heglig in March 2012 (Small Arms Survey, 2012; Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2013, pp. 18, 30). JEM also participated in attacks in Unity state alongside the SPLA in the first half of 2014, after it moved southwards from South Kordofan, which the other SRF members have never denied. Later JEM forces moved towards Bahr el Ghazal and were seen in Northern and Western Bahr el Ghazal in March 2015.²¹⁵ It is believed that JEM

and the SPLA-IO had already clashed in December 2013 (ICG, 2015, p. 15). JEM troops were seen in Unity state until December 2014,²¹⁶ and up to March 2015 residents of Adjong Thok and Yida denounced the presence of Darfur fighters disguised as traders in the camps.²¹⁷ According to a high-ranking SPLA-IO official, however, JEM and Nuba troops had not been seen close to SPLA-IO locations since June 2014.²¹⁸ The SPLA acknowledges JEM movements along the border, but denies any engagement with the SPLA.²¹⁹

JEM's connection with Unity state pre-dates the current South Sudanese conflict. Former governor Taban Deng Gai, who is currently an SPLA-IO negotiator, had hosted its troops in Unity state since 2011.²²⁰ According to the SPLM/A-N, but contested by JEM, Taban supported the recruitment of Nuba into JEM through the former SPLM commissioner of Buram county, Abdelbagi Garfa, a former NCP member who was dismissed from the party after recruiting around 400 Nuba mainly from his Angolo tribe, who were subsequently hosted in Bentiu.²²¹ In June 2013 Garfa moved to Khartoum and formed 'The Real People of Nuba Mountains' party, and is today a member of the GoS's delegation to the negotiations in Addis Ababa, representing the Two Areas. Hence, as a result of JEM recruitment of Nuba in South Kordofan and Yida between 2011 and 2014, discussed above, Nuba elements took part in the fighting in South Sudan alongside the SPLA, as the SPLA-IO have claimed. Some Nuba have still been enrolled within the SPLA since 2011, when they decided to remain in South Sudan (although the total number of South Kordofan and Blue Nile soldiers in the SPLA is reportedly small).²²² A top JEM official confirmed that some Nuba joined JEM in this period, as did people from all over Sudan, but he did not disclose any numbers.²²³ According to a high-ranking SPLA-N official, JEM was talking of an SPLA-N presence in Unity state alongside it to divert attention from the fact that it had previously recruited Nuba, including SPLA-N soldiers.²²⁴

Conversely, the SPLA and SPLA-N accused the SPLA-IO rebels of being hosted and trained by Sudan and having rear bases in the Two Areas, in what the SPLA considers to be 'the end result of Machar's rebellion'; the GoS and SPLA-IO denied these accusations (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015d).²²⁵ SPLA-IO attacks on the Renk area in September–December 2014 were probably staged from Blue Nile, White Nile, and eastern South Kordofan, while attacks on Bentiu, Mayom, and Rubkona were launched from Heglig/Panthou and Kharasana. According

to the SPLA around 15,000 SPLM/A-IO troops defected from the SPLA's Juba headquarters and the 1st, 4th, and 8th Divisions, while the forces that attacked Bentiu and Renk from the Two Areas in 2014 numbered around 7,000 and were trained in Khartoum.²²⁶ While the SPLM/A-IO's strategic objective remains South Sudan, especially oil facilities and the capitals of Unity and Upper Nile states, as well as holding territory to legitimize its political negotiation platform with the GRSS, the short-term intentions of the South Sudanese rebels in the Two Areas remain unclear, especially given the different interests of the factions on the ground due to a loose chain of command that might undermine decisions made at the top (Small Arms Survey, 2015b).²²⁷

High-ranking SPLM/A-IO officials said that they had no intention of fighting the SPLA-N.²²⁸ In November 2014 SPLA-IO forces on their way to Renk did not attack SPLA-N positions in Blue Nile, reportedly due to long-standing relations between the commanders, who had served together in Blue Nile in the previous war, among them Commander James Koang Chol. In July 2014 pro-Sudanese Nuer elements attacked an SPLA-N position in the Bau area, seizing one RPG-7 and one PKM machine gun, and capturing one man, but it was considered the result of individual actions.²²⁹ On 4 January 2015, 3,000 SPLA-IO troops and 900 allied militias with around 100 vehicles moved southwards from the Bout area in Blue Nile accompanied by GoS troops, reached the Jamam area on 9 January, and continued towards the south of the county without attacking SPLA-N positions (but causing fear among refugees).²³⁰

Reports from South Kordofan indicate that Nuer fighters were involved in battles against the SPLA-N alongside SAF in 2014 and January 2015 in areas close to the border with South Sudan, if not in substantial numbers. In particular, in the battle of Angarto in January 2015 one battalion of Nuer (around 600 men) was spotted with the GoS combined forces (*al quwat mushtaraga*).²³¹ SPLA-N commanders on the ground confirmed that during the last dry season Nuer were involved in the government's attack on the SPLA-N in Jaw and Troji (Boram county), in Abri and Lidmir (Dallami county), and in Mardes, alongside other militias, and a few were killed.²³² Local SPLA-N commanders, however, could not provide evidence that these fighters were part of the SPLA-IO, and Abdelaziz al Hilu confirmed this.²³³ According to a top SPLA-IO official, which the SPLA and SPLA-N confirmed, few Nuer militias allied with Khartoum since

the Second Civil War are still involved in fighting against the SPLA-N in the Heglig–Kharasana area, either as SAF members or militias.²³⁴ According to military experts, Nuer groups might decide to intervene independently if threatened with cooption by Khartoum.²³⁵ Some might also act in retaliation for—unverified—SPLA-N involvement in the Sudanese conflict, following a leadership propaganda campaign against the Nuba that caused fear of retaliatory attacks by Nuer within the refugee community, which would explain a major engagement in South Kordofan rather than in Blue Nile.²³⁶

The border between Sudan and South Sudan is increasingly volatile and efforts to achieve its demilitarization and demarcation have failed to date (*Sudan Tribune*, 2014b; Small Arms Survey, 2014b). The conflict in South Sudan has strengthened the government’s practice of arming militias, mirroring long-standing Sudanese tradition, and evidence reveals that Sudan and South Sudan support foreign forces whose interests may differ from their sponsors. While the SRF presents a clear political objective for the transformation of Sudan, its members demonstrate different interests on the ground, which seem to respond to short-term profit rather than the actual endorsement of the alliance’s ideology. These short-term strategies and propaganda affect long-term Nuer–Darfur and Nuer–Nuba relations. The SPLA-IO’s attack on Darfur people in Bentiu during the recapturing of the town in April 2014 must be seen in light of the long-standing broken relations between the two groups.²³⁷ The Nuer are also angry about JEM’s role in early 2014 attacks in southern Unity and repeated abuses against civilians, which involved looting, the destruction of villages, and rape; as a result the Nuer associate Darfur people with JEM (Small Arms Survey, 2015b; UNMISS, 2014b, p. 7). In the absence of a clear South Sudanese strategy for national security, moreover, it remains unclear whether South Sudan’s support to the SRF aims at provoking a reaction in Khartoum. Similarly, Khartoum’s support to the SPLA-IO and other South Sudanese militias seems dictated mainly by the short-term economic need to maintain its control of resources along the border, while it seems unlikely that GoS forces will pursue Sudanese rebels inside South Sudan.

The status quo, however, is extremely fragile and could escalate into a direct confrontation between Sudan and South Sudan that would be fought along the resource-rich locations along the border and would involve the Two Areas

and regional allies, and which—unlike the battle of Heglig in 2012—would not be easily reversible (see Gramizzi and Tubiana, 2013, pp. 49–53).²³⁸ New conditions apply: there are far more and better armed non-state groups in the border zone, making sponsor governments' control even more challenging than before (which is also due to their own internal weaknesses) (Craze, 2014). An SPLA spokesman defined Abyei as 'a frozen conflict', and the renewed tension between the Missiriya and Dinka Ngok is alarming (Small Arms Survey, 2015a).²³⁹ As the head of NISS, Mohamed Atta, recently warned: 'The time has come to pursue the rebels in any location' (al-Araby, 2014). On 8 April 2015 the GRSS accused Khartoum of bombing civilian locations in Raja and Northern Bahr el Ghazal (Aweil North) close to the border areas; however, these are areas where JEM fighters were recently spotted (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015b; Radio Tamazuj, 2015f). On 28 April 2015, after his forces defeated JEM in South Darfur, President Bashir stated that the rebels had entered from South Sudan and warned the GRSS that RSF forces are ready to finish off the rebels inside South Sudanese territory (*Sudan Tribune*, 2015d).

Humanitarian impacts: refugees caught in the crossfire

The conflict in South Sudan has direct effects on the lives of refugees from the Two Areas, with a reduction in personal security and humanitarian assistance; the situation is especially critical in the Maban area.²⁴⁰ According to humanitarian actors in Blue Nile the South Sudanese conflict has led to a significant drop in the influx of refugees, while the number of IDPs has increased. Reduced food distribution forced around 3,000 refugees to return to Blue Nile between February and April 2014, putting further pressure on the limited availability of food and water in the war-affected areas. Ingessana groups have already moved their cattle into the Bau area, and Ingessana refugees are ready to follow.²⁴¹ 'We prefer freedom inside [Blue Nile], even under aerial bombardment, than the situation in the camps', said one returnee to Blue Nile. 'The conflict in South Sudan has dramatically changed the alternatives for the population, including the possibilities of working and obtaining an education in South Sudan', commented a humanitarian worker in Maban. Schools in the refugee camps are also less effective, due to the departure of teachers.²⁴² In March 2015 the World

Food Programme's efforts to drop food by air to refugees were reduced due to financial constraints, while insecurity continues to impede road supplies.

In both the Maban and Pariang areas refugees feel threatened by the presence of the SPLA-IO across the border and are afraid of being caught in crossfire between the SPLA and SPLA-N.²⁴³ The feeling of insecurity is high in Adjong Thok, given its proximity to the Jebel Liri area in South Kordofan, where SPLA-IO fighters were spotted, and which provides a corridor for South Sudanese rebels into South Sudan.²⁴⁴ Increased SPLA military activity in Yida poses a threat to the refugees, which is one of the reasons for their imminent relocation. The SPLA-IO has stated that it will not attack the refugees, but admitted that their locations are critical, given the insecurity in the area.²⁴⁵

Refugees in Maban suffered from a higher degree of insecurity in 2014 as a result of existing tensions with the host communities, mainly over the scarcity of natural resources; these tensions were exacerbated by the conflict in South Sudan.²⁴⁶ The refugees do not feel protected by the GRSS, which is arming civilians that represent a direct threat to the refugees' security. Generally, the SPLA's policy of arming local militias to protect land and strategic assets, such as the oil fields, is extremely worrisome.²⁴⁷ Unlike in Pariang, the population in Maban is divided over its support to SPLA and SPLA-IO. In January 2013 a militia of some 3,000 men organized as the Maban Defence Forces (MDF) was formed on the initiative of the Maban representative in the Upper Nile State Assembly, Moon Fan. On 3 August 2014 the MDF clashed with Nuer SPLA soldiers, and in the following days militias killed Nuer civilians employed by an INGO in the refugee camps, leading other Nuer workers to leave the camps, while only a few remained in the SPLA 1st Division (Small Arms Survey, 2014a, pp. 2–3). After few months of tranquility, in December 2014 the MDF set up checkpoints that harassed refugees and reduced their ability to move after dark.²⁴⁸ The paramount chief of the Ingessana stated, 'The militias have no recognized leaders and received a lot of weapons, and that is very dangerous for us'. The widespread presence of arms, including among the refugee community as a result of SPLA-N defections from the 2nd Front, makes the situation even more tenuous, and any conflict could quickly escalate.²⁴⁹ On 30 January 2015 clashes erupted between refugees and host communities in Gendrasa camp when a group of four refugees killed a local farmer, prompting the family of the victim to kill a refugee in retaliation (Radio Tamazuj, 2015c).

On 2 January 2015 the commander of the SPLA 1st Division, Stephen Buoy (a Nuer), arrived in Bunj, bringing two APCs and ten armed vehicles, which were sent northwards to the border with Sudan. By 5 January 2015 he claimed to have reintegrated the MDF into the SPLA 101st Battalion, but the situation remained fragile and increasing insecurity was reported in the camps in March 2015, which affected INGOs' work.²⁵⁰ On 4 January 2015, according to SPLA intelligence (but not verified), around 3,000 SPLA-IO troops and around 900 Maban militias from Luma moved from Bout to Jamaam (70 km west of Bunj and 36 km from Kaya camp), heading towards the Adar Yiel oil fields and creating fear of retaliatory attacks against the MDF that would involve the local and refugee populations, given the widespread presence of arms in the area. On 9 January the SPLA attacked the SPLA-IO in Jamaam and retook control of the area, claiming to have captured heavy weapons, including anti-APC rockets and rifles with serial numbers removed to hide the source.²⁵¹ On returning from a visit to the area a convoy including the Maban commissioner and the military commander in Bunj was attacked by a group of rebels in Kiwa village, 4 km from Jamaam, who then dispersed. Reports from the ground in the third week of January indicated that rebel forces stationed in Beneshowa (45 km south of Bunj) had successfully recruited Maban civilians with the support of the former Maban commissioner, John Jumaa, who had joined the SPLM/A-IO in the first half of 2013. According to local sources, in the early morning of 12 February 2015 the SPLA attacked the SPLA-IO in Beneshowa after receiving reinforcements from Melut and Paloich, and regained control of the area. SPLA-IO forces then moved towards the south of the county, creating fear among refugees. According to humanitarian workers tensions between the host community and refugees are at their highest levels. 🗨

VII. The political situation

GoS–SRF negotiations

After almost four years of fighting and an overall military stalemate, both parties have publicly admitted that they cannot defeat the other on the battlefield. ‘You cannot defeat a guerrilla movement through war; we learnt this from the Second Civil War’, stated the NCP’s chief negotiator.²⁵² Yet, when the time seemed ripe for a political settlement, partly due to the high cost of the war in a time of economic recession and threats of regional instability, neither party would make any concessions. The seventh round of AUHIP-sponsored talks between the rebels and the GoS began on 12 November 2014 in Addis Ababa, but were adjourned on 8 December 2014 without any progress. Military tactics continued to play a major role at the talks. On 18 November the SPLA-N attacked a government garrison in Bek (north of the Ingeessana Mountains) and on 21 November it attacked the Abu Garn area, reaching 30 km west of the Blue Nile capital, Damazin. These operations were conducted in retaliation for the bombing of civilians in the Yabus area ahead of the talks, in which one woman died.²⁵³ On 23 November a new wave of bombing in Yabus killed one child (SRRA, 2015, pp. 8–9). On 1 December 2014, before the final adjournment of the talks, fighting started again in South Kordofan.

After two rounds of ineffective talks in February and April 2014, AUPSC Communiqué 456 was signed on 15 September 2014 and became central to the further development of the talks (AUPSC, 2014). The AUPSC established the ‘two tracks’ process advocated by the SRF for an immediate and simultaneous cessation of hostilities in the Two Areas and Darfur, while calling for the effective implementation of the National Dialogue (see McCutchen, 2014, p. 36). Simultaneously it endorsed the 28 June 2011 Framework Agreement that had been the basis of the rebels’ approach since the beginning of the conflict, especially because of its recognition of the democratic rights that the CPA gave to the Two Areas. By endorsing AUPSC Communiqué 456 the AUHIP recognized the need to include the establishment of peace in the Two Areas as part of a

national solution advocated by the SPLM-N. As a result the National Dialogue has come to define the new political environment in Sudan. According to the AUHIP, thus, negotiating with the SRF umbrella seemed the most convenient approach, but the two agreements needed to remain limited (not national) in nature.²⁵⁴ The fact that the National Dialogue would replace the post-agreement transition period in the conventional sense could lead to a more inclusive implementation process not detached from the wider political and civil developments in Sudan.

Talks were expanded to include the Darfur members of the SRF, i.e. JEM and SLA-MM, on a joint track in the period 23 November–4 December, but they failed due to lack of agreement on the agenda (SLA-AW, while remaining a member of the SRF, refused to participate because it remained opposed to negotiations with the government).²⁵⁵ The head of the NCP delegation, Amin Hassan Omer, had been authorized to discuss only a ceasefire with the Darfur groups. According to the NCP chief negotiator,

*We can only talk of the Two Areas in Addis Ababa, while the Darfur basis should be the Doha Agreement. We accepted the idea of two tracks synchronized for a ceasefire and having the rebel movements at the National Dialogue, and were hoping that an agreement with the SPLM-N would help in Darfur, but the SRF alliance is instead hampering a solution for the Two Areas.*²⁵⁶

The January 2015 constitutional arrangements that incorporated the Doha agreement into law gave Khartoum more grounds to oppose the Addis Ababa ‘two tracks’ approach.

The SRF regarded Khartoum’s idea of a National Dialogue as a quick-fix solution in order to legitimize the April 2015 elections. The SPLM-N called for a broader representation of Sudanese political and civil society in the preparatory discussions and definition of a road map beyond the 7+7 parties that endorsed the National Dialogue, which they do not consider genuine.²⁵⁷ Generally, the rebels want to address local political and security dynamics in direct talks with Khartoum, including a cessation of hostilities for humanitarian purposes, before joining the government’s comprehensive National Dialogue process, while the GoS demands a ceasefire (with immediate rebel disarmament) ahead of any possible political agreement.²⁵⁸ The SPLM-N’s demand for a local

political arrangement includes the political and socioeconomic autonomy of the Two Areas, based ‘on the kind of the Addis Ababa Agreement concessions to the southern region in 1972’, with the integration of the SPLA-N into a reformed national army (through a proper security sector reform programme).²⁵⁹ Failing that, self-determination remains an option.²⁶⁰

While the Darfur talks were adjourned indefinitely, talks on the Two Areas were rescheduled for mid-January 2015, but were postponed by the mediator because of the parties’ lack of commitment, and have not resumed through May 2015.²⁶¹ In mid-January 2015 AUHIP chief negotiator Thabo Mbeki sent a letter to the parties emphasizing seven strategic issues that needed to be resolved and testing their commitment. Among other issues, he proposed security arrangements, i.e. a ‘Cessation of Hostilities agreement leading to Comprehensive Security Arrangements,’²⁶² ahead of a political solution that would be discussed at the National Dialogue. The months of February and March were devoted to consultations. Mbeki visited Khartoum and met the SPLM/A-N in Addis Ababa in February 2015, but without results.²⁶³ Gandhour visited the United States, while the SPLM/A-N leadership went to Europe. Critics believe that Khartoum, having invested heavily in the current military offensive, wants to gain a military advantage over the rebels before entering a new round of talks, which are thus unlikely to resume before the end of the current dry season.²⁶⁴

Implications of the ‘Sudan Call’

While the AUHIP talks drift on, the SRF’s call for the democratic transformation of Sudan has gained political momentum. On 3 December 2014 members of the armed and political opposition joined in the ‘Sudan Call’ (labelled ‘a political declaration on the establishment of a state of citizenship and democracy’), which was released in Addis Ababa outside of the talks. Signatories included Minni Minawi on behalf of the SRF, Farouk Abu Essa on behalf of the National Consensus Forces coalition of Sudanese political (unarmed) opposition parties, and Amin Mekki Medani on behalf of the Civil Society Initiative. The Sudan Call reiterates the previous SRF–Umma ‘Paris Declaration’ of 8 August 2014 signed by chairmen Sadiq al-Mahdi and Malik Agar. The Sudan Call is the most recent SPLM-N effort to reunite the opposition in Sudan in a process that began

with the Kauda Declaration, which led to the formation of the SRF (McCutchen, 2014, pp. 28–33).

The significance of the Sudan Call was demonstrated by Khartoum's reaction to it. On 6 December, on their return to Khartoum, two of the signatories—Amin Mekki Medani (aged 76) and Farouk Abu Issa (aged 82)—were arrested, together with Farah Agar, the former NCP political leader in Blue Nile. They were held in Kober Prison under charges that carry the death penalty, but were unexpectedly released on 9 April 2015 ahead of the elections while their trial was in progress. On 11 December 2014 the GoS launched its new 'decisive summer campaign' to end all rebellions in Sudan, which was followed by an unprecedented wave of aerial bombing attacks. The Sudan Call constituted the first occasion on which major political forces and military opposition from the peripheries committed themselves to a national political programme and a comprehensive settlement to end war in the country. The opposition ultimately realized that any real change in Sudan cannot be achieved through military conflict.²⁶⁵ According to an SPLM-N negotiator, the Sudan Call 'is a qualitative step forward that seemed unattainable only few months ago'.²⁶⁶ According to the chairman of the SRF, 85 per cent of the opposition in Sudan is behind the Sudan Call, which helped to reduce the distance from NCP splinters, such as the Islamic As-Saihun party, Musa Hilal (who had already signed a memorandum of understanding with the SPLA-N in July 2014), and Ghazi Salaheddin, after he dropped out of the National Dialogue on 21 January 2015 (Al-Jazeera, 2015; Al-Tareeq, 2015).²⁶⁷ Civil society, which in Sudan is generally polarized, played a major role in the initiative.²⁶⁸ The international community and the AUHIP have endorsed the process.

On 27 February 2015 the signatories of the Sudan Call reunited in Germany and agreed to sign a position paper, referred to as the 'Berlin Declaration', on conditions for the National Dialogue to take place, including the postponement of the elections until a conducive environment is created, the cessation of hostility in the Two Areas and Darfur, the release of political prisoners, and the promulgation of new security laws. However, the government refused to attend the preparatory meeting for the National Dialogue that the AUHIP arranged in Addis Ababa on 29–30 March 2015, which marked the death of the process for the SRF.²⁶⁹ The elections were held as scheduled on 13–16 April 2015, but the Sudan Call signatories boycotted them and the rebels attacked electoral centres

and government garrisons in the Two Areas (Radio Tamazuj, 2015e). Members of the international community, such as Canada, the European Union, and the Troika (Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States), called the landslide results not credible and described them as not reflecting the will of the people, since the vote was not held in a conducive environment (FCO, 2015; European Council, 2015).

The fate of the Sudan Call is, however, threatened by the strength of the SRF coalition and the latter's relations with the other signatories, due to internal divisions, diverging interests, and the power struggle among historical political leaders in the country. As the SRF chairman put it, 'No one can win the war. We are providing leadership to the opposition; they trust us because of the de facto situation; they trust us for now'.²⁷⁰ According to a Sudanese analyst, Sadiq al Mahdi's decision to join the SRF is tactical, and, if cornered, he will rejoin the NCP. Moreover, the Umma party, like the Democratic Unionist Party, is divided, and these divisions are significant.²⁷¹ It will be more difficult and expensive, however, for the GoS to take him back than in the past.²⁷²

Fundamentally, the political opposition in Sudan remains weak. The inability of political parties to meet is a major impediment to their development, and this situation has worsened since the January 2015 constitutional amendments that enhanced the mandate of the security organs and extended President Bashir's powers (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 2015). According to a political opposition leader, 'lack of means, a strong security system and the difficulty of meeting are major factors for a weak opposition in Sudan, but the lack of young and active leaders is also crucial'.²⁷³ The lack of new ideas and leaders able to reflect the current needs of the Sudanese population is an issue that several interlocutors highlighted during the conduct of this research. As a Sudanese analyst noted,

*recent Sudanese politics has been dominated by the same political elites that do not reflect the more recent realities on the ground, including the last ten years of war in Darfur, the war along the border and the secession of Southern Sudan.*²⁷⁴

However, as another Sudanese analyst pointed out,

*unlike the 1964 and 1985 revolutions, which changed the government but did not end the war in Sudan, the elite in Khartoum realized that only by including the marginalized can a solution to the problem of Sudan finally be achieved.*²⁷⁵

The political development of the SRF's members thus becomes crucial for the continuation of the ongoing political process in Sudan and for promoting new voices from marginalized areas. The SRF has achieved significant political goals and its members have revealed an unexpected cohesion since 2011, despite setbacks in their military strategy. But while the movement has united many constituencies and has revamped John Garang's New Sudan vision—at least within intellectual circles—it is not been able to organize outside the territories it holds in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, partly due to the government's ban on its activities.²⁷⁶ The SPLM/A-N has recently started reorganizing itself in the areas it controls, following the adoption of the 2013 party constitution, with SPLM-N structures officially separated from the SPLA-N, which is recognized as a major achievement (even by the GoS) and a step forward for the likelihood of any agreement being implemented.²⁷⁷ The SPLM-N's political structures are emerging through elections held at the village (*boma*) level. The movement's National Liberation Council of 202 members (101 from each area) has not yet met.²⁷⁸ SPLA-N officers recognize the supreme importance of the political wing of the movement, as one of them explained, 'While Bashir says that the soldiers gave him power, we were given power by the people'.²⁷⁹ The system is based on the SPLM/A's experience during the Second Civil War and is aimed at creating a New Sudan in the liberated territories of Blue Nile, South Kordofan, and South Sudan, while at the same time fighting the war and engaging in negotiations with Khartoum (De Alessi, 2013).

On 19 November 2013 SPLM-N government institutions—an executive, legislature, and judiciary, including a police force—were formed in South Kordofan under governor and SPLM-N regional chairman Simon Kalo (who governs with two deputies and ten secretaries). Abdelaziz al Hilu gave up his regional powers while remaining SPLM-N deputy chairman and chief of staff of the SRF.²⁸⁰ The structures in Blue Nile were set up later, on 18 June 2014, under Zeid Issa, the former state minister of agriculture, as the new regional governor and SPLM-N chairman, with 13 secretaries.²⁸¹ Malik Agar remains the chairman of both the SPLM-N and SRF (the latter because of the inability of the SRF's members to agree on his successor). The development of a civil administration in South Kordofan is more advanced than in Blue Nile, based on a temporary civil administration under SPLM/A-N leadership that was established in 2011

to secure basic services for citizens (such as water, health care, and education). But this did not happen in Blue Nile, partly because some key SPLM-N officials remained isolated in Damazin when the war erupted. There are also historical reasons: the civil administration in the Nuba Mountains was considered among the most effective during the so-called 'first war', a situation that helped the SPLM in the state to develop to a greater extent during the interim period than in any other state of Sudan (African Rights, 1995). Today the local authorities admit that efforts are hampered by the war, the difficulty of arranging meetings, and the compelling demands of war-affected civilians.²⁸² When they were in South Kordofan the Darfur movements were encouraged to develop effective organizations, but they have had little success.²⁸³ While recognizing the importance of a political structure, the Darfur movements' leadership admitted that their organs have rarely met since their formation over a decade ago and they have no civilian structures on the ground.²⁸⁴ Yet a wide range of interlocutors feel that the need for SLA and JEM to develop as political organizations was crucial for the success of any political process in Sudan and the ending of the conflict.²⁸⁵

Finally, the fate of Sudan still depends on the fortunes of the ruling party and its leadership. While several Sudanese and international analysts interviewed considered the NCP to be increasingly weak, its leadership remains strongly attached to power, as became apparent at the last party convention in April 2014. The crisis of the NCP is a crisis of the state and its institutions, and as long as the president and the security apparatus control the state the possibility of a genuine political process in the country is remote. The party's convention, during which Omar al Bashir was reconfirmed as chairman of the party and therefore as the presidential candidate for the 2015 elections, which ensured a much-needed status quo within the party, covered up an enduring internal power struggle among various groups that had gradually become isolated since 2011.²⁸⁶ The increasing power of the militias vis-à-vis the army and recent constitutional amendments confirm Bashir's aim to maintain his grip on power against current trends.

While the NCP has stated that the economic situation in the country is improving thanks to a good rainy season and increased agricultural exports, after a 75 per cent loss of oil revenues following South Sudan's independence, the Sudanese

people feel increasingly impoverished and many blame Khartoum for not diversifying the economy in past decades.²⁸⁷ At the same time, some members of the international community, particularly in Africa and Asia, but also Western countries concerned about the terrorist threat, praised Bashir's re-election as a guarantee of stability and of the likelihood of the National Dialogue taking place at a time of regional turmoil and instability.²⁸⁸ ■

VIII. Conclusion

After four years the conflict in the Two Areas is in an overall state of military stalemate, with almost no changes in the front line since 2012. For the SPLM/A-N, which claims to have been forced into the conflict, the fighting is not over territory, but constitutes a tool for an ideological war in the name of a revived national New Sudan vision. As such, the movement has begun to develop a civil administration in the areas it controls in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, and has engaged in political alliances with the opposition—both armed and unarmed—in Sudan. This resulted in the formation of the SRF in 2011 and subsequent alliances that led to the ‘Sudan Call’ signed in December 2014 with traditional political parties and civil society. While the declaration of the need for a democratic transformation of Sudan bridged the gap between political parties from the centre and military opposition groupings from the peripheries, it remains reliant on the strength of its signatories and their relations. The GoS’s reaction to the Sudan Call, i.e. a renewed dry season offensive fought increasingly through locally recruited militias and targeted air attacks, the arrest of some of the Call’s signatories, and constitutional amendments that increase the powers of the president and security organs, suggests that the ruling party finds itself in an increasingly difficult situation. Internal power struggles and a serious economic recession affect the NCP’s strength, while the president is securing powers for himself in a climate of deep mistrust. The weakness of the party is reflected in the weakness of civilian opposition, as a result of their inability to meet and develop in Sudan, which could affect the fortunes of the SRF and its alliances.

In the absence of an effective political process in Sudan, an increasingly militarized war continues to be a major political tool for the government and the SPLM/A-N. Both armies have rearmed ahead of the fighting season. The second ‘decisive’ dry season government offensive started in South Kordofan and Blue Nile in December 2014, while SPLA-N guerrilla operations in Blue Nile had continued throughout the previous rainy season. The last fighting season had

created an estimated 100,000 new IDPs in Sudan, bringing to 600,000 the number of displaced in the rebel-held areas and more than 270,000 the number of refugees in neighbouring countries. During 2014 the GoS's increased bombing of civilian targets, including clinics, markets, and farms, has terrorized the population and dramatically reduced the availability of food stocks for the upcoming season. Humanitarian organizations have not been allowed to operate in the Two Areas since the beginning of the conflict. Moreover, increasing evidence is emerging of abuses against civilians, the raping of women, and the recruitment of child soldiers by government forces and allied militias. The local population has also accused JEM of recruiting child soldiers in South Kordofan and Yida during the period 2011–14.

While the SPLM-N is leading the new political alliances in Sudan, it has cut military cooperation with Darfur groups in South Kordofan, especially JEM, after repeated and documented abuses against civilians. In 2014 JEM gradually moved towards Unity state and is now mostly located in Raja in Western Bahr el Ghazal (South Sudan), while SLA-MM and SLA-AW are in Darfur to counter government offensives in the area. While South Sudan denies giving support to the SRF, evidence on the ground reveals close ties between the SPLA and the Darfur groups. In particular, JEM fought alongside the SPLA in its struggle in Unity state against the SPLA-IO rebels. At the same time the southern rebels are hosted in the Sudanese parts of the Two Areas, from where they have staged attacks on the SPLA in South Sudan. Since the civil war in South Sudan began in December 2013 a new panorama is opening up, with increasing movements across the border between Sudan and South Sudan of allied opposition forces that could escalate into a direct confrontation played out in resource-rich areas, including the Two Areas, given the proliferation of armed groups throughout the region. This would represent a major threat to the security of refugees from the Two Areas, whose security and the level of assistance they receive have already been reduced since the eruption of internal armed conflict in South Sudan. 🗨️

Endnotes

- 1 For general background, see African Rights (1995); James (2007); Komey (2010); Gramizzi and Tubiana (2013); Gramizzi (2013); ICG (2013a; 2013b).
- 2 A brief account of the history of political and military action in the Two Areas must leave much out, e.g. the central importance of Yusuf Kuwa in laying the groundwork for the SPLM/A in South Kordofan, and the early roles of Malik Agar and Abdelaziz al Hilu. For a discussion of Kuwa in particular, see De Alessi (2013) and African Rights (1995).
- 3 According to a UN study conducted in Blue Nile in 2010, the level of illiteracy in the state was 74.2 per cent (UNDP, 2010, p. 15). Up to 1984 there were only three university graduates from southern Blue Nile, one of whom is the current chairman of the SPLM/A-North, Malik Agar (author interview, Blue Nile, December 2014).
- 4 Author interviews with local analysts and intellectuals, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, November and December 2014. See also ICG (2013a, pp. 3–6); African Rights (1995, pp. 288–92).
- 5 Author interviews with local analysts and intellectuals, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, November and December 2014. See also Komey (2010); ICG (2013a, pp. 4–5; 2013b, pp. 3–4).
- 6 Author interviews, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, 2014; see also ICG (2013a, p. 6).
- 7 Author interviews with Malik Agar and other northern SPLM cadres, locations withheld, November and December 2014.
- 8 The education policy continued to undermine the development of the people of the Two Areas, their presence in the civil service did not fill the CPA quota, and the National Reconstruction and Development Fund for the war-affected areas and the Land Commission never functioned. According to a study conducted by the state Ministry of Education in the interim period, Kadugli town alone had more schools than the other 18 localities put together. Around 25 per cent of students who sat the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education in 2014 were over 20 years old (author interview with Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development Organisation (NRRDO) director, South Kordofan, December 2014).
- 9 While the AUHIP and the only international observation mission considered the result credible (Carter Center, 2011), subsequent analysis revealed a different picture; see ICG (2013b, pp. 13–14); Gramizzi and Tubiana (2013, pp. 14–15).
- 10 Author interviews with local political leaders and intellectuals, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, November and December 2014; see also Gramizzi and Tubiana (2013, p. 16); Gramizzi (2013, pp. 18–19).
- 11 Ahmed Haroun was reconfirmed in South Kordofan, but with the restructuring of Greater Kordofan in 2013 he was appointed governor of North Kordofan and replaced by Adam Elfaki, not without controversy (Radio Tamajuz, 2013a). The SAF 4th Division commander in Blue Nile and current state defence minister, Maj. Gen. Yahya Mohamed Khair, became the new interim military commander in Blue Nile, while Hussein Yasin, from the Islamic Wataweet tribe at the border with Ethiopia, became governor (author interviews with intellectuals and politicians, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, November–December 2014 and January 2015).

- 12 Author interview with Abdelaziz al Hilu, location withheld, April 2015.
- 13 See also Gramizzi and Tubiana (2013, pp. 33–39); Gramizzi (2013, pp. 31, 45–53).
- 14 The JIUs established by the CPA were located in Heiban, Um Serdiba, Kadugli, Julud, Lagawa, Dilling, Talodi, and Buram, and comprised around 3,000 soldiers from each side.
- 15 Author interview with high-ranking SPLA-N officer, South Kordofan, December 2014.
- 16 Author interviews with SAF and NISS prisoners of war held by the SPLA-N, in custody since 2011, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 17 Author interview with Gen. Ahmed el-Omda, former SPLA-N 2nd Front commander and chief negotiator, current commander of SPLA-N troops in the Ingessana Mountains, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 18 Author interviews with Western military experts, location withheld, November 2014.
- 19 Author interview with Brig. Gen. Nimeiri Mourad of the SPLA-N, South Kordofan, December 2014.
- 20 Author interview with SPLM-N commissioner of Rashad, South Kordofan, December 2014; see also SRRA (2015, p. 13).
- 21 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials, November and December 2014; see also SRRA (2015, pp. 12–13).
- 22 Author interview with SPLM-N negotiator, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 23 Author interview with Brig. Kuku Jash Kuwa, SPLA-N Dallami area commander, South Kordofan, November 2014.
- 24 Author interview with deputy governor, South Kordofan, December 2014.
- 25 Author interview with SPLM-N commissioner, South Kordofan, December 2014.
- 26 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials and SPLM-N commissioner of Rashad, South Kordofan, November and December 2014.
- 27 Author interview with local humanitarian worker, South Kordofan, December 2014.
- 28 Author interviews with SPLA-N area commander and SPLA-N soldiers, South Kordofan, November and December 2014.
- 29 Author interviews with SPLA-N officers, South Kordofan, November and December 2014.
- 30 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials and commissioners of Dallami and Rashad, South Kordofan, November 2014.
- 31 Author interview with SPLM-N deputy governor and former commissioner of Habila (2011–13), South Kordofan, December 2014; see also SRRA (2015, p. 14).
- 32 Author interview with SPLA-N 2nd Front commander, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 33 Author interview with SAF prisoner of war, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 34 Author interview with Malik Agar, Blue Nile, December 2015.
- 35 Author phone interview with humanitarian worker, February 2015.
- 36 From a document leaked in November 2014 it appears that NISS director Mohamed Atta planned to re-create the Iranian model of parallel forces to the police and army that were loyal exclusively to the regime (Alrakoba.net, 2014). According to Ahmed el-Omda, SPLA-N negotiator, the RSF are trained by foreigners, mainly Iranians (author interview with Ahmed el-Omda, Addis Ababa, November 2014).
- 37 Author interviews with Malik Agar, Blue Nile, January 2015; see also Kumar and Ismail (2014, pp. 2–3); Tubiana (2014).
- 38 Author interview with Ali Trayo, SLA-MM negotiator and SRF secretary for humanitarian affairs, Addis Ababa, November 2014.

- 39 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials and Sudanese analysts, South Kordofan and other withheld locations, November and December 2014 and February 2015.
- 40 Author interview with Ibrahim Gandhour, NCP deputy chairman and chief negotiator, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 41 Author interview with Abdelaziz al Hilu, location withheld, April 2015.
- 42 Author interviews with commissioner of Rashad, private SAF deserter, and SPLA and SPLA-N officers, South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Juba, December 2014.
- 43 SAF had three divisions during the CPA interim period, each of around 8,000–9,000 men, for a total of 25,000–30,000 soldiers (author interview with SPLM/A-N officials, November and December 2014; see also Small Arms Survey, 2011a; 2011b).
- 44 Author interviews with SPLA-N officers and international analysts, November and December 2014.
- 45 Author interview with SPLM/A-N and military experts, November and December 2014.
- 46 Author interviews with SPLA-N officers, South Kordofan, and Sudanese analysts, locations withheld, December 2014 and January 2015; see also Radio Dabanga (2014c; 2014e); Nuba Reports (2014).
- 47 Author interview with Ibrahim Gandhour, NCP deputy chairman and chief negotiator, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 48 Author interviews with Malik Agar, Brig. Kuku Jash Kuwa (SPLA-N Dallami area commander), SPLA-N officials, and Western military experts, various locations, November–December 2014.
- 49 Author interviews with Simon Kalo (governor of South Kordofan) and SPLA-N officers, December 2014.
- 50 Author interviews with local observers, Sudanese analysts, and SPLA-N officers, South Kordofan and withheld locations, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 51 Author interviews with SPLA-N officers, refugees, local humanitarian workers, and the SPLM-N commissioner of Rashad, South Kordofan and Yida, November and December 2014.
- 52 Author interview with deputy SPLM-N state secretary, South Kordofan, November 2014.
- 53 Author interviews with local chiefs, humanitarian workers, and SPLM-N authorities, South Kordofan, November and December 2014.
- 54 Author interview with high-ranking SPLM-N official, location withheld, January 2015.
- 55 Kodi, a Hebal from Heiban county, left the mainstream of the party in 2009 to found the Peoples’ Party in Khartoum amid disagreement with the leadership, and later became a member of the GoS delegation in Addis Ababa (author interview with Daniel Kodi, Addis Ababa, November 2014).
- 56 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLM/A-N officials and military experts, November and December 2014.
- 57 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials, local researchers, and Missiriya leader, November and December 2014.
- 58 Author interview with Adam Korshoun, Missiriya former deputy chairman of the SPLM in South Kordofan and member of the SPLM-N delegation at the peace talks, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 59 Soon after the conflict started, Governor Haroun sent 600 brand new Kalashnikov-pattern rifles to Missiriya in Lagawa to encourage them ‘to join the fight and defend their cows’, but they dispersed with the weapons instead. Following that, in August 2011, the governor sat with Missiriya traditional leaders, asking for the recruitment of 250 men within seven days,

- but none responded (author interview with former commissioner of Lagawa, South Kordofan, November 2014). More recently, in October 2014, the government sent 50 vehicles to Missiriya areas to bring recruits to Dallami, but once more they refused to participate (author interviews with commissioner of Dallami, Brig. Gen. Kuku Jash Kuwa (SPLA-N Dallami area commander), former commissioner of Lagawa, and Missiriya leader, South Kordofan, November and December 2014).
- 60 Author interviews with SPLA-N officers, humanitarian workers, Sudanese analysts, and Missiriya intellectuals, November and December 2014 and February 2015.
- 61 Author interview with Adam Korshoun, pro-SPLM-N Missiriya leader, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 62 Numbers are unknown, but around 3,000–4,000 Hawazma live in the areas of Abu Khershola, Alfayed, Khor Dale, and Um Burumbita (author interview with local authorities, South Kordofan, November 2014).
- 63 Author interviews with local analysts and civilians, South Kordofan, November 2014.
- 64 Author interview with commissioner of Rashad, November 2014.
- 65 Author interviews with SPLM-N commissioners of Rashad and Dallami, and local humanitarian actors, South Kordofan, November and December 2014.
- 66 Author interview with commissioner of Dallami, South Kordofan, November 2014.
- 67 Author interview with SPLM-N commissioner of Rashad, who facilitated the release of the prisoners, South Kordofan, November 2014.
- 68 The Halafa clan is divided into the Awlad Gabush, Awlad Mumi, Hayadga, and Togia. The Hawazma Hayadga and Shehabla use camels to fight (author interview with former commissioner of Lagawa and local humanitarian actors, South Kordofan, November and December 2014).
- 69 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials, South Kordofan, November and December 2014.
- 70 Author interview with Simon Kalo, SPLM-N governor of South Kordofan, December 2014.
- 71 Author interviews with local and international analysts and SPLA-N commanders, South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and withheld locations, December 2014, January and March 2015.
- 72 Author interviews with local and international analysts, May 2015.
- 73 Author interviews with Abdelaziz al Hilu and SPLA-N commanders, South Kordofan, December 2014, and SPLA-IO official and international analyst, location withheld, March 2015.
- 74 Author interviews with Malik Agar and head of SPLA-N military intelligence, Blue Nile and Maban, December 2014.
- 75 Author interviews with SPLA-N former 2nd Front commander and head of SPLA-N state military intelligence, locations withheld, November 2014.
- 76 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials and Blue Nile intellectual, Blue Nile, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 77 Author interviews with PDF prisoner of war, SPLA-N privates, a child who escaped from a PDF camp, and local chief, Blue Nile and Maban, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 78 Author interview with SPLA-N area commander, Blue Nile, December 2014.
- 79 A few elements were spotted in the battle of Mofu in 2014, but this was considered a trial run (author interview with SPLA-N officer, Blue Nile, January 2015).
- 80 Author interview with high-ranking SPLA-N officer, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 81 Author interviews with local authorities, civilians, and SPLA-N officers, Blue Nile, January 2015; see also ICG (2013b, p. 40).

- 82 Author interview with Blue Nile intellectual, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 83 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials and local researcher, Blue Nile, December 2014.
- 84 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLM/A-N officials, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, November and December 2014. For an estimate of the size of the forces at the beginning of the conflict, see Gramizzi and Tubiana (2013, pp. 15–16, 27–28).
- 85 Author interview with SPLA-N 2nd Front commander, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 86 Author interviews with SPLA-IO officials, locations withheld, November and December 2014.
- 87 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLA-N commanders, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, November and December 2014.
- 88 In As-Sunut the Nuba Kasha and Nuba Ashfir are divided, and so is the Shatt tribe due to Nuba NCP leader Kafi Tayara (author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials, SPLM deputy secretary, and Nuba intellectual, South Kordofan, December 2014).
- 89 The Missiriya are divided into two sub-groups: the Zuruq from the north-western areas, mostly from Lagawa county and the Zabun area between Dallami and Habila counties, have established good relations with the SPLM; the Humur from Keilak county in the south-western part of the state remain closer to Khartoum, even if some discontent is emerging (author interviews with Ahmed Karshom, former SPLM deputy state chairman (2008–13) and member of the SPLM-N delegation in Addis Ababa; the former commissioner of Lagawa; and local intellectuals, November 2014).
- 90 Author interview with Missiriya leader, location withheld, December 2014.
- 91 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N official and former commissioner of Lagawa, South Kordofan, November 2014.
- 92 Author interview with Missiriya leader, South Kordofan, November 2014.
- 93 Author interviews with Ahmed Tugud (JEM chief negotiator) and Minni Minawi, Addis Ababa, November 2014, and SPLM/A-N officials, South Kordofan, November and December 2014.
- 94 The numbers are the result of interviews conducted with local military experts, while the Darfur movements did not disclose their numbers.
- 95 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLM/A-N officials, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, November and December 2014. Phone conversation with international analyst, February 2015; JEM top official, March 2015; and Abdelaziz al Hilu, location withheld, April 2015; see also Gramizzi and Tubiana (2012, pp. 74–75).
- 96 Author interviews with top JEM official, location withheld, and SPLA-N commanders and former commissioner of Lagawa, South Kordofan, November and December 2014.
- 97 Email conversation with Sudanese analyst, February 2015; see also Issam (2013, p. 95); ICG (2013a, pp. 9–10; 2015, p. 5).
- 98 Author interviews with Missiriya analyst and international researcher, locations withheld, January 2015.
- 99 Author interview with SPLM-N official; see also ICG (2015, p. 3).
- 100 Author interview with high-ranking SPLM/A-N official, South Kordofan, December 2014.
- 101 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials, local humanitarian workers, and Darfur researcher, South Kordofan, November and December 2014; see also ICG (2015, p. 4).
- 102 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials, South Kordofan and Addis Ababa, November and December 2014.
- 103 Author interview with Ibrahim Gandhour, NCP deputy chairman and chief negotiator, Addis Ababa, November 2014.

- 104 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N and JEM officials, Addis Ababa, November and December 2014.
- 105 Author interview with Brig. Nimeiri, SPLA-N Heban area commander, South Kordofan, December 2014.
- 106 Author interview with Malik Agar, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 107 Author interview with Abdelaziz al Hilu, location withheld, April 2015.
- 108 Author interview with commissioner of Rashad, November 2014.
- 109 Author interview with high-ranking SPLM/A-N official, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 110 Reportedly the local authorities in Pariang asked them to leave due to their misconduct (author interview with UNHCR official, Yida, December 2014).
- 111 Author interviews with JEM chief negotiator Ahmed Tugud and SLA-MM chairman Minni Minawi, Addis Ababa, November 2014 and March 2015.
- 112 Author interview with Ahmed Tugud, JEM chief negotiator, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 113 Author interview with high-ranking SPLM/A-N officer, location withheld, February 2015.
- 114 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLA-N officers, Blue Nile, December 2014 and January 2015; see also Gramizzi (2013, p. 19); SRRA (2013a).
- 115 Author interviews with local civil and political actors, Blue Nile, December 2014.
- 116 Author interviews with Sila Musa, commissioner of Kurmuk county, Maban, December 2014; and SPLM/A-N officials and local researcher, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 117 Author interview with Sila Musa, commissioner of Kurmuk county and an Uduk, Maban, December 2014.
- 118 Author interview with local analyst, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 119 Author interviews with SPLA-N 2nd Front commander and SPLA-N officers, Blue Nile, December and January 2014.
- 120 Author interviews with SPLA-N officers and civilians, Blue Nile, December and January 2015.
- 121 Author interviews with local humanitarian actors, April 2015.
- 122 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLA-N officer, and local and international analysts, locations withheld, May 2015.
- 123 Author interviews with local analysts and SPLA-N officers, South Kordofan, and phone conversations with SPLA-N officers, March 2015.
- 124 Author phone interviews with high-ranking SPLM/A-N officers and local monitors, January 2015; see also Nuba Reports (2015).
- 125 Author phone interviews with high-ranking SPLA-N officers and email conversation with international analyst, January 2015; see also Radio Dabanga (2015).
- 126 Author phone interview with high-ranking SPLA-N officer, February 2015.
- 127 Author phone interview with SPLA-N spokesman, March 2015. The claims are unverified by the Small Arms Survey.
- 128 Author interviews with local military experts and SPLM/A-N officials, South Kordofan, December 2014.
- 129 Author interview with high-ranking SPLA-IO official, location withheld, March 2015.
- 130 Author interview with Refugee Council chairman, Yida, December 2014.
- 131 Author interview with local analyst, South Kordofan, November 2014.
- 132 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials, commissioner of Rashad, and local observers, South Kordofan, December 2014.
- 133 Author interviews with SPLA-N officers, South Kordofan, November 2014.

- 134 SPLM/A-N spokesman statement received by the author, and phone interviews with SPLM/A-N official and local analyst, March 2015.
- 135 SPLM/A-N spokesman statement received by the Small Arms Survey, 14 January 2015.
- 136 Author phone conversation with high-ranking SPLA-N officer, March 2015.
- 137 SPLA-N spokesman communiqué received by the author, 18 April 2015.
- 138 Author email conversation with high-ranking SPLA-N officer, May 2015.
- 139 Author interview with Abdelaziz al Hilu, location withheld, April 2015.
- 140 SPLA-N spokesman communiqué received by the author, 12 May 2015.
- 141 Author interviews with Malik Agar, SPLA-N 2nd Front commander, and SPLA-N area commanders, Blue Nile, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 142 Author phone interview with high-ranking SPLA-N officer, February 2015.
- 143 SPLM/A-N spokesman statement received by the author; claims not verified by the Small Arms Survey.
- 144 Author phone interview with high-ranking SPLA-N officer, February 2015.
- 145 Reliefweb (2015b); author phone interview with SPLM/A-N official, February 2015.
- 146 SPLM/A-N official statement received by the author, March 2015; claims not verified by the Small Arms Survey.
- 147 Figures from South Kordofan were also given to the author by the SPLM-N authorities in South Kordofan on 4 December 2014.
- 148 Author's personal observation and interviews with local communities, December 2014.
- 149 During the author's visit to the Tamfona area women would walk up to six hours to reach a water point, beginning the journey at dawn. During the dry season rivers dry up and water is shared with animals, exposing the population to higher risk of illness. The author also visited a clinic in Bau county run by a volunteer doctor who had received four months of training in 1997. Few medicines were available and serious cases had to be referred to Maban clinic, which is a day's walk away, and most people were incapable of making the journey.
- 150 Author interviews with SPLM-N governor and commissioner of Dallami, South Kordofan; deputy governor, Bau; and Kurmuk commissioners, Blue Nile, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 151 Author email conversation with local humanitarian worker, March 2015.
- 152 Author interviews with NRRDO executive director and SPLM-N government officials, Blue Nile, Maban, South Kordofan, and Yida, December 2014 and January 2015; see also Nuba Reports (2014).
- 153 Author email conversation with Blue Nile researcher, January 2015.
- 154 Author interviews with Ibrahim Gandhour, NCP deputy chairman and chief negotiator, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 155 Author phone and email conversations with international and Sudanese humanitarian actors, January and February 2015.
- 156 Paper seen by the author and available for consultation.
- 157 Author interviews with local humanitarian actor, location withheld, January 2015 and May 2015.
- 158 Author interviews with Refugee Council chairman, Yida, and humanitarian actors, Maban, Upper Nile, December 2014.
- 159 Author email conversation with Refugee Council chairman, March 2015.
- 160 Author interviews with SPLM-N commissioners of Bau and Kurmuk, deputy governor, and humanitarian actors, December 2014; see also SRRA (2015, pp. 14–15).

- 161 The camp now has 6 primary schools with 92 volunteer teachers and 1 secondary school with 278 students and 12 professional teachers from Kenya, in crowded classes (author interviews with Refugee Council member, teachers, and refugees, Yida, December 2014).
- 162 Author interview with UNHCR field office coordinator, Yida, December 2014.
- 163 Author interviews with refugees, Yida, December 2014.
- 164 Author interview with UNHCR field office coordinator, Yida, December 2014.
- 165 Author interviews with UNHCR and Refugee Council, Yida, December 2014.
- 166 Author interviews with UNHCR, and international and local analysts, Juba and Yida, December 2014.
- 167 There is a proposal from the commissioner of Pariang to keep 30,000 refugees in Yida and to move 25,000 to Gerbum (between Adjong Thok and Yida) and 15,000 to a new location west of Yida in Pariang county (author interviews with refugee community and UNHCR officials, Yida, December 2014).
- 168 Author email conversation with Refugee Council chairman, March 2015.
- 169 Author email conversation with local humanitarian workers, May 2015.
- 170 Author interviews with deputy Kurmuk county commissioner and refugees working in Yabus area, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 171 The abuses were witnessed by two people who managed to escape (author interviews with refugees and a sheik of the Keli area, Blue Nile, January 2015).
- 172 Author interviews with refugees from the camps, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 173 Author email conversation with international humanitarian worker, March 2015.
- 174 The misbehaviour of security personnel has set a poor example: reportedly, a four-year-old baby girl was raped by a drunk 18-year-old boy, both from Blue Nile; he was arrested by local authorities in December 2014.
- 175 Author phone conversations with international and local witnesses, May 2015.
- 176 Author phone conversation with local observers; see also Nuba Reports (2015c); Amnesty International (2014).
- 177 The author visited the site a few days later and could verify this.
- 178 Photographs of the reportedly downed drones on file with the Small Arms Survey.
- 179 Author's observations, and interviews with SPLM-N commissioner of Dallami and IDPs, South Kordofan, November 2014. Only a few of them undertake the journey to the refugee camps, mainly to receive a proper education. The author visited a community primary school close to the caves with 950 students in 8 classes and 13 volunteer teachers.
- 180 Eleven people were killed in Balatuma market and are buried in a mass grave. Seven people were killed in the Mayas market bombing (author interview with Sila Musa, commissioner of Kurmuk, December 2014).
- 181 The author visited the area soon after the bombing and verified the incident.
- 182 Author email conversations with local humanitarian actors, May 2015.
- 183 See also Reeves (2014), but the Small Arms Survey could not independently verify the veracity of this information.
- 184 Author interviews with refugees; local humanitarian workers; the Bau commissioner; and Ali Marti, paramount chief (*nazir*) of the Ingessana tribe, Maban, December 2014.
- 185 Document viewed by author, Maban, South Sudan, January 2015.
- 186 Author interview with Mahieddin Mahmud, Yida camp, December 2014.
- 187 Author interview with Shadia Ibril, deputy chairman of the Refugee Council, Yida, December 2014.

- 188 The practice of raping women is becoming normalized in the recent history of the war in Sudan; 'zabaya' is the woman of the enemy who is punished to punish the enemy (author interview with Sudanese intellectual, Blue Nile, January 2015; see also Radio Tamazuj, 2015d; HRW, 2014).
- 189 The author collected reports of multiple additional specific incidents.
- 190 The information in this section was collected through the SPLM-N secretary of local government and the commissioner of Bau county in Maban, and could not be independently verified by the author.
- 191 Sorra Goran, the wife of SPLA-N fighter Assadiq al Fakki, was taken by the Fellata tribe and forcibly married to a Hausa militiaman in Damazin. Marria Jaklu, who was married to SPLA-N fighter Sadiq Fatehel Rahman, was forcibly married to militia commander Badri Abdalla in the Khor Megenza area.
- 192 The nine women who were killed were Bit Abtous, Gasan Anyel, Nadia Bashir, Ammuna Eid, Ammuna Telian Gor, Ejsar Kendi Guffa, Bar Hamdan, Jalalla Jakuar (13 years old), and Kubri Nyjo.
- 193 The women were Dalam Aahid, Alti Ander, Anni, Bab, Halima Khamis, Dam Munjiib, Jeil Yassin, and Yielm. Aisha Al Mac, a police inspector in Gabanit, confirmed the incident.
- 194 When a child manages to escape he rarely returns to his community out of fear of public shame, and many end up 'in the streets of Khartoum' (author interview with social worker, South Kordofan, December 2014).
- 195 The author saw pictures of children in SAF uniforms and carrying Kalashnikovs.
- 196 The SPLM/A-N is keeping more than 200 prisoners of war in South Kordofan, among whom are Arabs, Nuer, and Nuba. Twenty-six prisoners are held in Blue Nile and 11 could be interviewed by the author. They were kept in good conditions, and were able to farm and fish to sustain themselves. In December 2014 the SPLM/A-N offered to release 20 prisoners, ten from each area, through the International Committee of the Red Cross, but the names have not yet been decided. The move was facilitated by As-Saihun, an Islamist party in Sudan that has recently split from the government and begun talks with SPLM-N, and was strategically used to lead the operation as a way of mobilizing Islamist groups in the country against the government. The government's refusal was also a reaction to the new As-Saihun-SPLM-N 'alliance' (author interviews with Sudanese political analysts, locations withheld, January 2015).
- 197 Author interview with Hassan, Maban, December 2014.
- 198 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLA-N officers, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, December 2014.
- 199 The SPLM-N has also appointed a commissioner for the protection of civilians, women, and children to investigate cases of abuse committed by the rebels (author interview with acting chairman of the commission, location withheld, January 2015).
- 200 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLA-N officers, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, and refugees, Yida, December 2014.
- 201 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLM/A-N officials, civilians, refugees, and social workers, South Kordofan and Yida, December 2014 and January 2015. The author could not talk to any of the children involved because they had all been taken to a secure location outside the camps.
- 202 Author interview with social worker who assisted the children to return to the camp, Yida, January 2015.
- 203 Author interviews with community members, Yida, December 2014.
- 204 Author email conversation with Refugee Council chairman, March 2015.

- 205 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLA, SPLM/A-N, and SPLM/A-IO officials, Juba, South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and locations withheld, November–December 2014 and March 2015.
- 206 Author interviews with SPLA and SPLA-N officers, Juba, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile, December 2014; see also *Sudan Tribune* (2013).
- 207 Author interviews with Sudanese and international analysts, locations withheld, December 2014.
- 208 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLM/A-IO officials, locations withheld, November 2014 and March 2015.
- 209 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLA and SPLA-N military officials, SRF officials, UN representatives, and communities on the ground, Blue Nile, Juba, South Kordofan, and Yida, November and December 2014.
- 210 Author interviews with top SPLM/A-N officials, Blue Nile and South Kordofan, November and December 2014.
- 211 Author interviews with SPLA spokesman, Juba, December 2014, and Sudanese and international analysts, locations withheld, November 2014, January and February 2015.
- 212 Author interviews with Malik Agar and 1st and 2nd Front commanders, Blue Nile and Addis Ababa, and international analysts, locations withheld, November and December 2014 and March 2015.
- 213 Author email conversations with international military experts and humanitarian actors, December 2014 and March 2015.
- 214 Author interviews with UN and Western military experts, location withheld, December and January 2015; see also McCutchen (2014, pp. 38–41); and author interviews with SLA-MM and JEM, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 215 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N and international observers, November and December 2014 and March 2015, and phone conversation with JEM official, March 2015.
- 216 Small Arms Survey (2015b, p. 3); ICG (2015, p. 11); UNSC (2014, p. 6); UNMISS (2014a; 2014b).
- 217 Author email conversation with chairman of Refugee Council, March 2015.
- 218 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLA-IO official and international analyst, locations withheld, March 2015.
- 219 Author interview with Philip Aguer, SPLA spokesman, Juba, December 2014.
- 220 Author interviews with Sudanese analysts and South Sudanese military experts, South Kordofan and Juba, November and December 2014.
- 221 Author interviews with SPLM/A-N officials and refugees, South Kordofan and Yida, December 2014. Garfa was not available for comments and a JEM official interviewed in March 2015 was not aware of the story.
- 222 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLA and SPLA-N officials, Blue Nile, Juba, and South Kordofan, November and December 2014.
- 223 Author interviews with Ahmed Tugud, JEM chief negotiator, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 224 Author interview with high-ranking SPLM/A-N officials, South Kordofan, November 2014.
- 225 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLA-N and SPLA officers, Blue Nile, Juba, and South Kordofan, December 2014; see also ICG (2015, pp. 22–23).
- 226 Author interview with Philip Aguer, SPLA spokesman, Juba, December 2014; see also Small Arms Survey (2015a); *Sudan Tribune* (2014a).
- 227 Author interviews with Riek Machar and other senior SPLM/A-IO officials, SPLA-N, and international and local analysts, location withheld, December 2014, February and March 2015.

- 228 Various SPLM/A-IO representatives repeated the statement to the author and the decision was reportedly reiterated during the Pagak conference (author interviews with SPLM/A-IO officials and military experts, location withheld, November 2014 and March 2015).
- 229 Author interviews with SPLA-N 2nd Front commander and SPLA-N Ulu area commander, Blue Nile, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 230 Author interview with SPLA-N 2nd Front commander, Blue Nile, and local military intelligence, January 2015.
- 231 Author interviews with high-ranking SPLM/A-N officials and local observers, January 2015.
- 232 Author interviews with Brig. Kuku Jash, SPLA-N Dallami area commander, and Brig. Nimeiri, SPLA-N Heiban area commander, South Kordofan, December 2014.
- 233 Author interviews with SPLA-N commanders, South Kordofan, November and December 2014, and Abdelaziz al Hilu, location withheld, April 2015.
- 234 Author interviews with senior SPLM/A-IO, SPLA, and SPLA-N officials, locations withheld, January 2014.
- 235 Author interviews with Western military experts, Sudanese analysts, and SPLA and SPLA-N officers, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 236 Author interviews with SPLA-N, SPLA-IO, refugees, and local analysts, South Kordofan, Yida, and other locations withheld, December 2014, January and February 2015.
- 237 Author interviews with SPLM/A-IO, SPLM/A-N, SPLA, and refugees, November and December 2014; see also Small Arms Survey (2015b); ICG (2015, pp. 16–18).
- 238 In several interviews high-ranking SPLA and SPLA-N officials considered the withdrawal of the troops to be a tactical mistake influenced by the dictates of the international community.
- 239 Author interview with Philip Aguer, SPLA spokesman, Juba, December 2014.
- 240 According to UNHCR, around 115,000 South Sudanese sought refuge in Sudan after December 2013, with around 3,700 in Blue Nile and 5,600 in South Kordofan (UNHCR, 2015).
- 241 Author's observation and interviews in Bau county and interviews with refugees in Maban, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 242 Author interview with Sila Musa, commissioner of Kurmuk, Maban, December 2014.
- 243 Author interviews with refugee communities, Yida and Maban, December 2014.
- 244 Author interviews with refugees and humanitarian workers, November and December 2015.
- 245 Author interview with Riek Machar, SPLM/A-IO chairman, location withheld, March 2015.
- 246 A survey conducted by INGOs in Maban shows that the regeneration rate in the area is high and tension can be contained, but effective policies are undermined by the repeated changes of Maban commissioner (author interviews with local humanitarian workers and refugees, Maban, December 2014).
- 247 The SPLA has also armed militias in Pariang, Raja, Renk, and the Shilluk area to create enclaves of pro-SPLA population and to defend state assets such as oil facilities; see also Small Arms Survey (2015b).
- 248 At the beginning of December a child grazing goats was killed by militias on the outskirts of Bunj. The militias also control the major water facility in Kaya, threatening the refugees (author interviews with refugees and humanitarian workers, Maban, December 2014 and January 2015).
- 249 On the night of 30 December 2014, while the author was in the area, an SPLA-N defector in Gendrasa threw a hand grenade into the house of his neighbours for personal reasons while they were asleep. Two children were killed and the parents were badly injured.

- 250 Author email conversations with local and international humanitarian workers, March 2015.
- 251 Author phone conversation with local military intelligence source, January 2015.
- 252 Author interview with Ibrahim Gandhour, NCP deputy chairman and chief negotiator, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 253 Author interview with Ahmed el-Omda, SPLM-N negotiator and former SPLA-N 2nd Front commander, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 254 The SRF, with the support of the international community, established a coordination council led by Minni Minawi to effectively link the two tracks (author interview with Abdul Mohamed, senior adviser to the AUHIP, Addis Ababa, November 2014).
- 255 Author interviews with SLA-MM's Ali Trayo, Addis Ababa, November 2014; email conversation with SPLM-N negotiator, February 2015; phone interview with Sudanese analyst, March 2015.
- 256 Author interview with Ibrahim Gandhour, NCP deputy chairman and chief negotiator, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 257 Author interviews with SPLM-N negotiators; see also McCutchen (2014, pp. 36–37).
- 258 Two territorial issues might delay a final agreement, i.e. Greater Lagawa and Jebel Ad-Dair. The area of greater Lagawa was divided into the three localities of As-Sunut, Keilak, and Lagawa, and annexed to the Nuba Mountains in the 2002 ceasefire agreement. As-Sunut and Lagawa, however, were incorporated into West Kordofan in 2013 together with Abyei. Nuba and Missiriya Zuruq populate the areas. Jebel Ad-Dair was annexed to North Kordofan in 1974 and the SPLM-N claims it. During the Naivasha talks the issue was not raised because it was 'simply forgotten' (author interview with SPLM-N negotiator in the Naivasha talks and current talks, Addis Ababa, November 2014).
- 259 Author interviews with members of the SPLM-N delegation, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 260 Author interviews with SPLM-N cadres and members of the state secretariat, South Kordofan, November 2014.
- 261 The SPLM-N proposed a four-point agenda to be agreed upon before discussing the draft Framework Agreement, which included ways to achieve a simultaneous cessation of hostilities in the Three Areas, ways to address the humanitarian situation, the preparatory meeting of the National Dialogue called for by the AUPSC, and the timing of elections, given a political and security situation in Sudan that was not conducive to free and fair elections. Reportedly, when the panel incorporated the SPLM-N demands the government became hostile and the panel withdrew the changes, proposing to discuss the draft agreement and isolate the four issues for further discussion (author interviews with NCP and SPLM-N delegations, November and December 2014).
- 262 Letter seen by the author.
- 263 Author interviews with Sudanese analysts, locations withheld, February and March 2015.
- 264 Author interview with Sudanese, South Sudanese, and international analysts, locations withheld, April 2015.
- 265 Author interviews with Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), JEM, SLA-MM, SPLM-N, and civil society, November 2014 and December 2014.
- 266 Author phone interview with SPLM-N negotiator, December 2014.
- 267 Author interview with Malik Agar, SRF chairman, Blue Nile, January 2015.
- 268 Author phone interviews with Sudanese analysts, March 2015.
- 269 Author phone conversation with SRF political representative, May 2015.
- 270 Author interview with Malik Agar, SRF chairman, Blue Nile, December 2014.

- 271 Author interview with Mekki Elmograbi, Mekki Centre chairman, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 272 Author interviews with Sudanese analyst and SPLM-N official, November 2014 and March 2015.
- 273 During the September 2013 demonstrations in Khartoum that were violently suppressed by RSF militias, none of the traditional leaders was in the streets with the population (author interview with DUP member, Addis Ababa, November 2014; see also Kumar and Ismail, 2014, p. 7; HRW, 2013).
- 274 Author interview with Mekki Elmograbi, Mekki Centre chairman, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 275 Author interview with Sudanese analyst, location withheld, March 2015.
- 276 Author interviews with SPLM-N officials and civilians, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, November and December 2014, and phone conversations with Sudanese intellectuals, January 2015.
- 277 Author interview with Ibrahim Gandhour, NCP vice president and chief negotiator, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 278 Author interviews with SPLM-N acting secretary general, governor, and deputy governor in South Kordofan and deputy governor in Blue Nile, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 279 Author interview with Brig. Nimeiri, SPLA-N Heiban area commander, South Kordofan, December 2014.
- 280 Author interviews with South Kordofan governor and officials, South Kordofan, November and December 2014.
- 281 Author interviews with director of political training in South Kordofan and Blue Nile deputy governor, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 282 Author interviews with SPLM-N South Kordofan governor and Blue Nile deputy governor, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, December 2014 and January 2015.
- 283 Author interview with director of political training, South Kordofan, November 2014.
- 284 Author interviews with Ali Trayo, SLA/A-MM secretary for foreign affairs, and Ahmed Tugud, JEM chief negotiator, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 285 Author interviews with DUP, JEM, NCP, SLA-MM, SPLM-N, and Sudanese and international analysts, November and December 2014.
- 286 Author interviews with Sudanese analysts, location withheld, November and December 2014.
- 287 Author interview with Ibrahim Gandhour, NCP deputy chairman and chief negotiator, Addis Ababa, November 2014.
- 288 Author interviews and phone conversations with Sudanese and international analysts, January and April 2015.

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Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express her gratitude to the people of the Two Areas who welcomed her, facilitated her safe travels, and shared with her their knowledge and understanding of the dynamics on the ground. Their courage and resilience beggar description. She is also grateful to the numerous interlocutors in Sudan and the region—members of the military, political party and civil society representatives, government and rebel officials, humanitarian workers, and researchers—many of whom cannot be named. Finally, she wishes to express her gratitude for the assistance received from the Small Arms Survey and for the comments of the reviewers who helped to focus this report.

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