



## The 14-Mile Area

In 2011-12, the 14-Mile Area—a strategically important strip of territory just south of the River Kiir, on the border between Northern Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan and East Darfur, Sudan—was the scene of intermittent military clashes between the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) and the Government of Sudan (GoS). Since 2005, the security situation in the area has tracked, with relatively high degrees of accuracy, the state of negotiations between the two countries. As of March 2014, with both countries attention focused on internal conflicts, and discussions over a Safe Demilitarized Border Zone (SDBZ) at an impasse, the 14-Mile Area is peaceful, even if its demilitarization—a commitment made again by the GoS and GRSS in January 2014—remains highly unlikely in the near future.

The SDBZ is supposed to stretch 10 km on either side of a nominal centre-line, from which its extent can be measured. This temporary demilitarized zone is supposed to be in place until a final determination of the border between the two countries is made, and its location has no bearing on this final border. The single exception to the 10 km rule is the 14-Mile Area. A 22 October 2013 summit meeting between Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and South Sudanese President Salva Kiir led to both countries committing to demilitarize the 14-Mile Area, but as of 15 March 2014, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) maintain military forces within the area. The SPLA presence within the 14-Mile Area led to the suspension of the Joint Border and Verification Monitoring Mission (JBVMM), the force mandated to verify the demilitarization of the SDBZ. From March through November 2013, in the absence of force protection for JBVMM ground patrols, the mission conducted aerial reconnaissance flights in an attempt to monitor the zone.

The effectiveness of the fly-overs has been questioned, with the head of United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) acknowledging, on 22-23 April 2013, that such flights are unable to definitively assess the situation on the ground. On 27 October, the JBVMM conducted an aerial reconnaissance patrol in the east of the 14-Mile Area without finding any military forces. On 3 November, however, an aerial patrol observed SPLA troops in the east of the 14-Mile Area, around Warguit—a finding consistent with previous Small Arms Survey reports on SPLA positions in the 14-Mile Area. Though a report was written and signed by the UNISFA, and the Sudanese monitors on the JBVMM, the South Sudanese members of the patrol refused to sign the report. They disagreed about the presence of SPLA troops within the SDBZ. Their argument turns on ongoing disagreement about the centre-line of the demilitarized zone. Without an agreement about this line, the SDBZ is effectively unworkable, as both sides can claim their forces are outside of it, while decrying the other side for violating it. At present, the SDBZ does not exist—not even on a map.



On 22 November, UNSIFA received a letter from the SPLA, stating that South Sudan was suspending its participation in JBVMM patrols pending an agreement on the centre-line of the SDBZ. Both countries have strategically important military forces within the SDBZ—most notably SPLA forces in the 14-Mile Area and Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) around Hejlilj, South Kordofan—that makes such an agreement unlikely. The remoteness of such an agreement is only exacerbated by both countries' current focus on internal security concerns. Following South Sudan's withdrawal from the JBVMM, patrols were suspended, and the deployment of additional UNISFA troops, which were authorized by United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2014 to provide force protection for JBVMM patrols, was halted, pending an agreement on the centre-line.

Work on a JBVMM base in Gokk Machar, Northern Bahr el Ghazal is still ongoing a year after the 8 March implementation matrix was signed, mandating its creation by 8 June 2013. At present, preparatory work has been concluded, and the UNISFA have moved prefabricated buildings from Kadugli, South Kordofan—the main JBVMM headquarters—to Gokk Machar, in readiness for the resumption of the JBVMM. The Gokk Machar base is currently staffed by two UNISFA observers, and two South Sudanese observers, though no observation missions are likely in the near future.

The annual Rizeigat migration into the 14-Mile Area is proceeding peacefully. Rizeigat leaders have not followed up on their threats of August and September 2013, when they claimed they would go to war if the SPLA did not withdraw from the 14-Mile Area. A meeting on 11 November, at which a scheme of tax standardization was agreed for Rizeigat migrants in Malual Dinka territory, was followed up by a grazing conference on 18 November, held in Wanjok, between the Malual Dinka and the Missiriya. The success of grazing in Northern Bahr el Ghazal contrasts sharply with the almost total breakdown in the relationship between northern pastoralists and southern host communities elsewhere along the Sudan-South Sudan border. Its success is partly based on a continuity of administration and community ties between the groups that continued throughout the second civil war, and is also reliant on an awareness, on the part of the Missiriya, the Rizeigat, and the Malual Dinka, that the continuation of their forms of life depends on co-operation, and not antagonism. On 23 January 2014, a grazing conference between the Rizeigat and the Malual Dinka began in Gokk Machar, with some 300 members of Sudanese and South Sudanese border communities participating. On 3 February, following the conference, the two groups established a committee to mediate in cases of infractions that occurred through the grazing season.

While the annual migration is proceeding apace, trade links between Sudan and South Sudan continue to be blocked. The 22 October presidential summit led to a commitment to open a series of border crossing-points, including between Babanusa-Aweil (South



Kordofan-Northern Bahr el Ghazal). However, as of March 2014, the border remains closed, pending the stabilization of the security situation. Nevertheless, trade continues apace, semi-legally, and ensures supplies get into Northern Bahr el Ghazal—which has long been reliant on commerce with what is now Sudan, rather than Juba and the Equatorial states—and provides an important flow of income via taxes, to the administration in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, and to the SPLA and SAF, which levy further taxes at checkpoints on the Sudanese side of the border. On 4 March 2014, the local administration in West Kordofan state announced that it would open official border checkpoints between the two states, and on 9 March, the Interior Ministry of South Sudan announced that it would open its own custom and migration office in the Majong area. Both of these moves create new income sources for two governments that, with oil revenue dipping and war costs spiraling, are increasingly under economic pressure.

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