

The Eastern Front (inactive)

Origins/composition

The Eastern Front, a coalition of the Beja Congress and Rashaida Free Lions, plus representatives of small groups belonging to the pastoralist Shukriya and Dabaina, was formed in February 2005 to seek a separate negotiating track with Khartoum after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) left easterners without support from the Sudan People's Liberation Army. It represented principally the Hadendowa and the Rashaida. The Beja dominated the military wing of the Front, which held that eastern Sudan, like the south and west, lacked development, basic services and employment primarily because of the concentration of power in the hands of a northern elite.

Leadership

The Eastern Front was headed by a triumvirate of Musa Mohamed and Amna Derar of the Beja Congress and Mabrouk Mubarak of the Free Lions. Internal tensions (between the Beni Amer and Rashaida on one hand and Hadendowa on the other) erupted in 2008, with the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) mediating. Both Amna and Mabrouk have been given positions in the government formed after the April 2010 elections after supporting President Omar al Bashir's presidential campaign.

Areas of control/activity

The Eastern Front operated primarily in Kassala and Red Sea states until the 2006 Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) halted the insurgency with the promise of national positions for Eastern Front leaders and development aid and reconstruction funds for the region.

Sources of financing/support

The Eastern Front had a surge of recruits after security forces fired on demonstrators in Port Sudan in January 2005, killing 22 people and wounding more than 400. The demonstrators were demanding a share in power and equal opportunities for easterners not consulted in the CPA negotiations. Young men flocked to rebel camps in Eritrea, which supported the Front as payback for Sudanese support to Eritrean Islamist factions. The January 2005 killings are still an open wound: in May 2009, the Beja Congress requested an international group of lawyers to seek a referral to the International Criminal Court by the United Nations Security Council.

Status:

The Eastern Front's insurgency ended formally with the signing of the ESPA in October 2006 and the alliance's transformation into a political party. But the Front, which negotiated for a perfunctory five months, was not strong—or skilled—enough to defend its interests in talks dominated by Asmara and Khartoum. The agreement's power-sharing provisions were especially weak. It lacked clear mechanisms and modalities for implementation, and had no international or regional powers as guarantors. It left many easterners dissatisfied and raised fears that other ethnic groups in the east might resort to armed conflict to demand power-sharing. It also

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created new ethnic tensions as the members of the Front vied with each other for political power. In general elections in April 2010, the Front won no seats in the National Assembly and only two in state assemblies—a huge drop from the eight national seats and 30 state seats allocated under the ESPA. With Eritrea and Sudan no longer at loggerheads, Asmara under heavy international pressure, the NCP's security services omnipresent, and poor organizational capacity and a lack of resources afflicting easterners already frustrated with political parties, there is little prospect of a serious challenge to Khartoum from the east in the foreseeable future. But with humanitarian access still limited by government-imposed travel restrictions, and unresolved disaffection with the ESPA, the region remains populated with large numbers of unemployed, frustrated, and angry youth.