

Implementing the CPA

1. The implementation of the CPA is disappointing overall. Although there has been no serious breakdown—which is a remarkable achievement—there is little sign of the requisite spirit of goodwill and partnership from the NCP. President Bashir has made no attempt to sideline or remove some of the discredited security officers from the top echelons of power. Ali Osman Taha, having gambled on partnership with the SPLM within the CPA, is steadily losing influence.

2. Vice President Salva Kiir has openly criticized the low level of NCP-SPLM partnership. He said that the SPLM was not an active partner in the Abuja talks (somewhat unfairly given the helpful inputs of the Minister of State for Finance, Lual Deng). His main charge, that the NCP is doing far too little to make unity attractive, hit home. A more thorough assessment of the CPA implementation will follow in a later briefing.

The East

3. A militia loyal to Suleiman Ali Betai, aligned with the GoS, violated the permanent ceasefire on January 11 when it moved its forces into Hamush Koreb. Initial reports of an attack by heavy armor and helicopters proved unfounded. Nonetheless, this was a significant event.

4. The local politics of Hamush Koreb are as follows. The town was founded in the 1950s by the spiritual Sufi leader Ali Betai as a location where his followers could practice their austere and conservative form of Islam, while establishing cooperative farming and development projects. It was one of the first settlements in a predominantly nomadic pastoral area. Ali Betai was a largely non-political figure. His charismatic blend of spiritual authority (baraka) and management skill ensured that Hamush Koreb flourished and satellite settlements were established. In the late 1970s, he received government support as then-President Nimeiri sought to bring in a wide array of Islamic figures into his political constituency. Betai however tried to keep his neutral political stance, distancing himself also from the Khatmiyya sect (dominated by the Mirghani family and associated with the DUP) that has historically had political control over the area. Ali Betai died in the late 1970s and was succeeded by his sons, none of whom possessed his authority.

5. In the 1990s, Ali Betai's followers fell foul of the Islamist orthodoxy of the ruling National Islamic Front, which cut off government support to their mosques when they refused to join the ruling party and mobilize their young men for military service. Several mosques were destroyed and schools closed down (including Hamush Koreb). Suleiman Ali Betai began to openly support the Beja Congress, which in 1994 had opened training camps in Eritrea. Sheikh Omer of Hamush Koreb was chosen as Chairman of the Beja Congress. Alongside the more secular and progressive members of the BC, this made for an unlikely if effective alliance. However, by 1998/9, the GoS had managed to woo the more Islamist section of the BC back to Khartoum, including most of the followers of the

late Ali Betai. Khartoum did not, however, succeed in its promise to recapture Hamush Koreb for the man who considered himself its legitimate chief, Suleiman Betai, despite several offensives.

6. The CPA stipulated that SPLA forces should withdraw from Eastern Sudan by 9 January 2006, the first anniversary of the CPA. This did not occur. The SPLA blames logistical hold-ups. In purely technical terms the non-redeployment of the SPLA was a violation of the CPA. A gentleman's agreement to allow it to continue was apparently in place. The attack and occupation of Hamush Koreb can be seen, in local terms, as the return of the native, and as a bold move in an imminent struggle for political leadership of the Beja. Suleiman Betai would not, however, have taken his action without a green light from the GoS.

7. In the wider context, the Hamush Koreb incident highlights the following:

- a. This is the first significant ceasefire violation since the signature of the CPA. That is an impressive record of adherence to the ceasefire.
- b. The Eastern Front is militarily vulnerable with the imminent withdrawal of the SPLA.
- c. The GoS feels entitled to authorize decisive action on the basis of a non-threatening technical violation by the SPLA, whereas its own numerous delays and hold-ups have gone largely without criticism.
- d. The mechanisms for rapid reaction by UNAMIS to prevent escalation of a problem worked at their first test.

8. The planned Tripoli talks between the GoS and Eastern Front were postponed. It does not seem at all likely that Libya will be able to organize the kind of peace process that might satisfy the Eastern Front demands for a set of political, socio-economic and security measures that would address the long-standing problems of the East. All that Libya could deliver would be a handshake between GoS and Eastern Front leaders and some government posts and funds for the latter. The GoS no longer regards Libya as an honest broker. A mechanism for retrieving the derailed Eastern Front peace process will be required.

9. The conditions for major conflict do not exist at present in Eastern Sudan, but the situation remains a persistent danger. Military action serves the interests of none the parties (GoS, Eastern Front, Eritrea). Despite declarations of friendship between Asmara and Khartoum, Eritrea remains unpredictable. The Eritrean role in brokering the N'djamena accord between JEM and SLA-Minawi is an instance of Asmara's destabilizing role.