



The 14-Mile Area

On 5 April, at a meeting in Khartoum, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir committed once again to the establishment of a Safe Demilitarized Border Zone (SDBZ), which is to stretch 10 km on either side of a—currently contested—centre-line, along the entire 2,010 km border, with the sole exception of the 14-Mile Area. Located on the border between Northern Bahr el Ghazal and East Darfur, the 14-Mile Area is a strategically important strip of land below the river Kiir that contains important grazing territory for both the Malual Dinka, the area's principal occupants, and the Rizeigat, the largest cattle-owning group in East Darfur, which annually migrates into the territory. As of May 2014, while the 14-Mile Area remains militarized, political tension in the area is relatively low: the Rizeigat migration is proceeding peacefully, and trade between Sudan and South Sudan has lowered the cost of commodities in the important trade towns of Warrawa and Gokk Machar, Northern Bahr el Ghazal.

The relative calm in the 14-Mile Area is largely reflective of the fact that both governments are primarily concerned with ongoing internal struggles in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, Sudan, and Unity, Jonglei, and Upper Nile, South Sudan. Up until the end of April, Northern Bahr el Ghazal state was relatively peaceful, with the Sudan People's Liberation Army's (SPLA) 3rd Division largely involved in fighting elsewhere in the country. The calm in Northern Bahr el Ghazal in 2014 contrasts with the intermittent military clashes the area witnessed in 2011–12. Since 2005, the security situation in the territory has corresponded—with relatively high degrees of accuracy—to relations between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS); military clashes over the SPLA-held garrisons of Warguit and Kiir Adem in 2012 were part of a jockeying for position between the two governments during (still unfinished) negotiations over the final delimitation of the border between the two countries.

The SDBZ is supposed to be a temporary measure, put in place until a there is final agreement over the border. On the Northern Bahr el Ghazal–East Darfur border, the SDBZ is to run 14 miles south of the Kiir river, an area that corresponds to what is known as the Munro–Wheatley line, named after a zone of Rizeigat grazing that was created during negotiations in 1918 between Patrick Munro, the colonial governor of Darfur, and Mervyn Wheatley, the governor of Bahr el Ghazal. It is this 14-Mile Area that the SPLA has repeatedly committed to demilitarize, most recently at a meeting of the Joint Security Council (JSC) on 22 March 2014. However, these statements are less substantive policy commitments than part of a diplomatic game being played by both governments for international audiences.

As of May 2014, the SPLA maintain troops within the 14-Mile Area, at Kiir Adem, Warguit, and Sumayah. The strategic value of these targets is considerable, as they control valuable transport routes across the Kiir and into East Darfur. The GoS believes they also allow the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) to move supplies into Sudan from South Sudan. While JEM



maintains a presence in the border region, there is no evidence that the GRSS is supplying weapons to JEM via Kiir Adem. JEM's focus of operations is now in South Kordofan, rather than East Darfur.

It was the SPLA troops present within the 14-Mile Area that led to the suspension of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mission (JBVMM): the body that is supposed to ensure the demilitarization of the SDBZ. On 3 November, a JBVMM aerial patrol observed SPLA troops in the east of the 14-Mile Area, around Warguit. Though a report was written and signed by the United Nations Interim Stabilization Force for Abyei (UNISFA), and the Sudanese monitors on the JBVMM, the South Sudanese members of the mission refused to sign it, and refused to testify to the presence of SPLA troops within the SDBZ. Their argument turned on an ongoing disagreement about the centre-line of the demilitarized zone, from which its precise extent could be measured. Repeated attempts to agree on this centre-line have failed. Without an agreement, the SDBZ is effectively unworkable, as both sides can claim their forces are outside of it, while decrying the other side for violating it.

Following this disagreement, on 22 November UNISFA received a letter from the SPLA, stating that South Sudan was suspending its participation in the JBVMM until an agreement could be reached on the centre-line of the SDBZ. Following the GRSS' withdrawal from the JBVMM, patrols were suspended, and the deployment of additional UNISFA troops, authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 2014 to provide force protection for the JBVMM, was halted, pending an agreement on the centre-line. At a meeting of the JSC on 22 March, the GRSS committed to reactivating the JBVMM, though there were no substantive developments.

Work on a JBVMM base in Gokk Machar, Northern Bahr el Ghazal is still ongoing, eleven months after it was supposed to be completed, according to the 8 March implementation matrix. As of May 2014, preparatory construction work has been concluded, and UNISFA has set up prefabricated buildings, 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 in the absence of force protection for the observers, the deployment of which is currently suspended.

The annual Rizeigat migration into the 14-Mile Area is largely proceeding peacefully. A peace conference between the Rizeigat and the Malual Dinka on 18 March 2014 emphasized the long history of coexistence between the two groups. This meeting, and the current peaceful migration, was prepared for by a series of conferences in 2013 and 2014, including a meeting on 11 November—at which a scheme of tax standardization was agreed for Rizeigat migrants in Malual Dinka territory—and 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 the parties' awareness that the continuation of their forms of life depends on cooperation.

Absent a resurgence of hostilities between the GoS and the GRSS, the situation in the 14-Mile Area is likely remain relatively peaceful, though the area will continue to remain militarized, given the strong incentives the SPLA has to retain troops along the River Kiir.

16 May 2014