

facto border. While it is true that the African Union Border Programme Technical Team, which unsuccessfully attempted to demarcate the centre line in 2013, was also responsible for deciding on border-crossing points, these points would not in themselves have created a border, and in any event the GRSS had undertaken in the 27 September 2012 borders agreement to create just such crossing points. It is further unclear in the explanation given by the GRSS what prompted it to rejoin the JBVMM. The more likely motivating factor for its exit from and return to the JBVMM is given by developments in the security situation. Its initial withdrawal from the mission occurred just after aerial patrols had detected an SPLA presence in the SDBZ and thus prevented further patrols finding more SPLA forces in the demilitarized area. The GRSS's May announcement that it would participate in the JBVMM came just after SPLA-IO troops launched a successful assault on Bentiu in April 2014 after—the GRSS alleges—having been based in South Kordofan. The GRSS's decision to rejoin the JBVMM was thus likely motivated by a desire to draw attention to the presence of SPLA-IO troops in the SDBZ and to connections between SAF and the rebel forces. The peregrinations of the GRSS indicate the degree to which the implementation of the SDBZ is secondary to internal security concerns.

Since 16 June and the resumption of the JBVMM there has been minimal aerial reconnaissance of the SDBZ, with helicopter patrols taking off from the main headquarters of the mission in Kadugli, South Kordofan. These flights have found no evidence of military activity in the demilitarized zone. However, as the head of UNISFA indicated in April 2013 to the Joint Political and Security Mechanism—which is composed of Sudanese and South Sudanese representatives and addresses security concerns in the border zone—aerial reconnaissance is unable to reach definitive conclusions about the militarization of the SDBZ. This is because the patrols do not fly low enough to be able to truly verify the situation on the ground, and due to the fact that both sides take steps to disguise their deployments in the SDBZ, with satellite imagery from May and September 2013, for example, showing the SPLA attempting to conceal tanks in the demilitarized zone by hiding them under trees.

While the JBVMM is now operational, there is still no agreement on the centre line. On 20 August 2014 the Sudanese defence minister, Abdel Rahim Hussein, complained to the AUHIP that the GRSS was not implementing the 27 September 2012 security agreement. Without an agreement on the centre line, even if JBVMM aerial reconnaissance patrols were to find military forces in the SDBZ, either side could claim these troops were actually outside it, depending on the location of the centre line.

The JBVMM would require ground patrols in order to verify aerial reconnaissance; however, currently no troops are available to protect such patrols. To overcome this problem UN Security Council Resolution 2104 of 29 May 2013 expanded UNISFA's force from 4,200 to 5,326 members, with the additional 1,126 troops supposed to give force protection to JBVMM patrols. These troops are to be split into four company-sized forces of 267 soldiers each and deploy to four JBVMM bases. Thus far, only 117 troops have deployed to the JBVMM headquarters in Kadugli, and such a small group is not sufficient to provide force protection. The remainder of the UNISFA force was supposed to deploy in November–December 2013. Ten months later it has still not deployed.

Part of the reason that this deployment is so delayed is due to problems with the construction of bases for this force. As of mid-September 2014 only two of the four JBVMM bases are

operational. According to the 8 March 2013 implementation matrix the GRSS and GoS were to give UNISFA land for these bases by 10 April and the bases were to be established by 8 June.

UNISFA had already established the Kadugli headquarters in 2011 as a base for its peacekeepers in Abyei. This base has been adversely affected by clashes between the SRF and SAF, which have disrupted the delivery of rations and supplies. In 2014 work continued on the Kadugli base so that it can support a company-sized force. As of 1 September 2014 there are 25 UNISFA, 34 SAF, and 30 SPLA JBVMM monitors at the base, in addition to 79 of the 117 force protection troops mandated by Resolution 2104.

The JBVMM base at Gokk Machar, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, is also operational to some extent, although it is still not conducting ground patrols. Land for the base was provided on 26 March 2013 and an advance party of UNISFA monitors arrived on 17 April. On 25–27 June 2014 UNISFA moved 38 troops from Kadugli to Gokk Machar. Work on the base continues, however, and it is unable to house a company-sized force. A call for tenders for construction work announced on 5 August 2014 asks that ‘the contractor shall prepare the site clean [*sic*], cut trees, roots, any hard materials, rocks and level to start the work’, indicating that the base is far from being completed.

Work has not begun on either of the other two JBVMM bases. The GoS only gave UNISFA permission to build a base at Buram, Darfur, on 30 June 2013. As of September 2014, while an area of land for the base—next to an existing UN/African Union Mission in Darfur base—has been selected, work has yet to begin and no monitors or UNISFA troops have deployed to Darfur. In Malakal UNISFA only agreed on a site for the JBVMM base in December 2013. With clashes breaking out in Upper Nile shortly after this, work has not begun on the base. As of September 2014 Malakal is deserted and conflict continues in the state. It thus seems unlikely there will be a JBVMM presence in Upper Nile state in the foreseeable future.

Without bases, UNISFA will be unable to deploy its four companies. Without force protection, there can be no ground patrols and the JBVMM will be reliant on aerial patrols that cannot verify the situation on the ground. Thus, the establishment of an effective JBVMM is contingent on the resolution of the internal security situation in both countries, which would allow bases to be constructed. This is not a likely development in the foreseeable future.

Even if the bases are constructed, however, and the UNISFA force deploys, it is unlikely that the JBVMM will be able to effectively monitor the SDBZ. The Sudan–South Sudan border is 2,010 km long and four companies of 267 soldiers, together with 90 UNISFA military observers, will struggle to patrol regularly enough and cover sufficient territory to ensure that the SDBZ is demilitarized.

But it is highly unlikely that the JBVMM will be able to verify that the SDBZ is demilitarized even with the protection mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 2104. This is not only a question of coverage of a vast border zone. The border zone is often extremely difficult to access, and—given the absence of border checkpoints and uncertain state control over the border zone—is extremely porous.

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As of September 2014 there is little incentive for either country to implement the SDBZ. Most fundamentally, both sides maintain military positions in the SDBZ that are important for internal struggles, i.e. against the SRF in the case of the GoS and in South Sudan's internal conflict. With internal security currently taking precedence over all other concerns, neither side is likely to demilitarize.

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