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Beja Congress (inactive)

Origins/Composition

Established in 1958 by a group of educated Beja, the largest tribe in eastern Sudan, to draw attention to the underdevelopment and marginalization of Beja areas and to seek more administrative and political autonomy. It began an armed struggle in 1994, joining the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), an Eritrean-backed opposition coalition formed in 1989.

Leadership

The Beja Congress has always suffered from both weak leadership and a confusion of ideologies that have made it vulnerable to manipulation and division by the Sudan Government. In 2005, one such split led to the selection of Musa Mohamed Ahmed as its leader, a former Beja Congress security chief from the Hadendowa, one of four major Beja sub-groups with close connections to Eritrean intelligence. His deputy was Dr. Amna Derar, a professor at Omdurman's Ahfad University, from the Beni Amer. Beja Congress military operations were controlled by General Abraha Kassa, Eritrea's chief of security and national intelligence, and Abdel Aziz Adam al Hilu, commander of the eastern-based New Sudan Brigade of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Musa Mohamed became Assistant to the President under the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA), signed in Asmara in October 2006. The Beni Amer were left out at the national level. In September 2007, a presidential decree appointed Amna Dirar a federal state minister.

Areas of control/activity

Beja Congress fighters, numbering in the low hundreds at their most active, succeeded in capturing only a minuscule amount of territory in the three states of eastern Sudan—Gedaref, Red Sea, and Kassala—and even that only with direct support from the Eritrean army and the SPLA. NDA control extended along the border with Eritrea, from and including the towns of Hameshkoreb in the north to Teluk in the south. The ESPA ended the insurgency and provided for the reintegration and rehabilitation of ex-combatants.

Sources of financing/support

The main backer of the Beja Congress and other armed opposition groups in the East was Eritrea, which has had troubled relations with Sudan for most of the past twelve years and in 1994 severed relations because of support allegedly provided by Khartoum to Islamist factions in Eritrea. Although the Beja Congress enjoyed a widespread political following in rural areas and among the Beja in Port Sudan—especially the youth and intellectuals—its lightly-armed military wing was tightly controlled by the Eritrean army. Until the SPLA signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the National Congress Party (NCP) in 2005, committing to withdraw its forces from the East, the SPLA had provided logistical support to a second front in the east. Beginning in 2003, the Darfur rebels of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) also moved into eastern Sudan, courtesy of Eritrea, and trained Beja recruited in camps along the border. JEM was initially well received but relations soon strained, with the Beja accusing JEM of riding roughshod over the local population.

Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA)

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Status

In general elections in April 2010, the Beja Congress, formally allied with the ruling NCP since 2006, won only one seat in a local assembly in Red Sea State and none in the National Assembly in Khartoum. Anger at perceived manipulation of the elections has compounded frustration over the slow implementation of the ESPA.