



# One year after the coup

## *What Next for Sudan's Juba Peace Agreement?*

SUDAN RAPID RESPONSE UPDATE 5 · NOVEMBER 2022

This briefing considers the changing political situation in Sudan with a particular focus on the future of the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA). It is the fifth, and final, paper in a series of rapid response updates on the aftermath of the JPA by the Rift Valley Institute for the UK government's XCEPT (Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends) programme.

### Key points

- Contrary to what many in Sudan's civilian political movement had hoped, the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) did not lead to a consolidation of political power between the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) and the agreement's signatories – mostly a collection of Sudan's armed groups. Instead, divisions between the two groups resulted in an alignment between the JPA signatories and the transitional government's military component (Mil-TG).
- The relationship between these two groups has complicated the ongoing discussions around the formation a new political arrangement in Sudan. Crucially, it has provided a means through which the Mil-TG can either spoil a new political arrangement with the FFC or potentially weaken them after one has been made.
- The relationship also makes the JPA signatories dependent on the Mil-TG for their political legitimacy and survival. This has meant, in practice, that any part of the JPA that the Mil-TG disagrees with or feels threatened by is then not implemented. It has also bound the JPA signatories to the post-coup, military dominated version of the transitional government.
- At the local level, the JPA became an overtly political process mainly concerned with apportioning political representation to its signatories. It has provided little opportunity for groups not involved in the peace process to determine their own local governance arrangements. This has led to a backlash from communities who feel that their interests are threatened by the new political dispensation.
- Tensions related to the peace process and JPA implementation have led to violence in Darfur, the Two Areas and eastern Sudan (see previous briefings). In recent months, this has been particularly severe in Blue Nile where hundreds of people have been killed and thousands displaced in inter-communal conflict driven in-part by political shifts related to the JPA.
- Sudan's political future, and thus the JPA, remain in doubt as the agreement's signatories continue to see their future as closely linked to the Mil-TG and not the FFC or other civilian parties. This will likely lead to the continued non-implementation of the agreement and associated local conflicts.

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## Introduction

Sudan's political crisis, which stems from the October 2021 coup carried out by the military component of the transitional government (Mil-TG), continues. Despite some attempts to craft a new political arrangement in which civilian political forces would re-form a transitional government, at the time of writing this had not yet occurred. A complicating factor is a divided civilian political movement, with splits between the original Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC-Central Committee), an FFC splinter called National Accord<sup>1</sup> – now the Consensus Forces – as well as groups not previously part of the FFC.<sup>2</sup> The former remains the core of those most interested in democratic transformation, while the latter two, which include most Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) signatories, remain closer to the Mil-TG.

The Mil-TG has sought to form a civilian coalition that supports them and could rival the FFC-Central Committee's legitimacy. So far, they have been unsuccessful, but its actions are another reason as to why the formation of a new political arrangement remains elusive. This dynamic is further complicated by divisions within it between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemedti's' Rapid Support Forces (RSF), with both sides attempting to gain the upper hand over the other. This has weakened both sides and made them more reluctant to give up power to civilian forces that they do not fully trust and whose past reform agenda was a threat to their interests.

The bulk of Sudan's pro-democracy protest movement remain deeply opposed to Mil-TG involvement in governance. Thus, the Mil-TG's refusal to cede power to democratic institutions makes it difficult for the FFC-Central Committee to agree to a deal as they could then lose the support of the protest movement. While negotiations between all parties continue, the prospect of an agreement that is acceptable to the FFC and the Mil-TG, and is viable for the protest movement, is slim.

## How the JPA buttressed military power in Sudan

Sudan's peace process and the JPA provided an opportunity to begin addressing the root causes of political marginalization, poor governance and under-development that has plagued the country for decades. The best-case scenario for Sudan's peace process was that it would expand civilian political power to include representatives of historically marginalized and under-developed areas who could then begin this process. So far this has not been the case, and with most of the JPA signatories still backing the Mil-TG's continued rule, this is an unlikely prospect.

Even prior to the Mil-TG coup in October 2021, it was apparent that at the national level the JPA had not led to a consolidation of political power between the FFC and the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF). This was due in part to a dispute between the FFC and some SRF leaders dating to June 2019.<sup>3</sup> It was also due to a belief amongst SRF leaders that their interests would be better served through an alignment with the Mil-TG over the FFC. This eventually resulted in their support for the latter's coup. Instead of setting the stage for the consolidation of political power away from the Mil-TG, the JPA provided an opening for the Mil-TG's the strengthen its own position.

The relationship between the JPA signatories and the Mil-TG has complicated the ongoing discussions on a new political arrangement in Sudan. Unresolved divisions between the SRF and what is now the FFC-Central Committee have meant that there was no united front between national political opposition forces and rebel groups against the Mil-TG's co-option of political force. The bitterness between some of the SRF leaders, especially Minni Minnawi and some FFC leaders, has led them to conclude that by holding the balance of political power vis-à-vis the FFC they are in a position to displace those they accuse of working only for a narrow Riverine elite.

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1 The core of the FFC-Central Committee is the Sudan Congress Party, Unionist Gathering, National Umma Party, the Baathist Party of Ali al-Sanhuri, part of the Sudan Professionals Association, and Yasir Arman's new SPLM splinter. The FFC-National Accord is the umbrella group organized by some JPA signatories (Minni Minnawi and Jibril Ibrahim especially) in September 2021 who supported the Mil-TG's coup. Other JPA signatories like Malik Agar, Taher Hajer, and al-Hadi Idriss are now part of this group. Their new name, Consensus Forces (Al-Tawafuq al-Wattani) is not to be confused with a previous opposition coalition formed in 2008 called the National Consensus Force (Al-Ima'a Wattani in Arabic).

2 Such as the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and the National Umma Party (NUP) Reform and Renewal of Mubarak al-Fadil.

3 This dispute is related to divisions over the FFC's internal decision-making process and SRF desires to increase their influence in this process. Part of the SRF's desire for this increased influence is that they were concerned the FFC was too focused on central Sudanese issues and not sufficiently focused on issues in the peripheries (Darfur, Two Areas and eastern Sudan). The FFC, on the other hand, was worried that the SRF lacked the political skills to adequately negotiate with the TMC, and also did not fully trust the SRF.

Furthermore, this relationship allows the Mil-TG to use SRF grievances against the FFC for their own interests. SAF mostly see the SRF in a spoiler role, while Hemedti and the RSF actively court the SRF to build a block of support to use not only as part of their strategic competition with the SAF, but also against the FFC if there was a new political arrangement.

Support from JPA signatories for the Mil-TG has done two things: 1) It has split what otherwise might be an anti-Mil-TG alliance with the FFC; 2) It has made JPA signatories dependent on Mil-TG for their political legitimacy and survival. This has meant in practice that any part of the JPA that the Mil-TG disagrees with or feels threatened by is then not implemented. This includes the provisions on land reform in the Darfur track, which threaten the interests of Hemedti's social base, as well as more broadly provisions on political and economic reform. The JPA is thus in danger of being reduced to a document that facilitates its signatories' hold over political power, but not the means through which the root causes of violence in Sudan are addressed.

At the local level, the JPA became an overtly political process mainly concerned with apportioning political representation to its signatories while excluding others from involvement in determining local governance arrangements. This led to a backlash from communities who felt their interests could be threatened in an environment in which they were not able to influence how they would be governed. Tensions then led to violence as documented in Darfur, the Two Areas and eastern Sudan in previous RVI papers.<sup>4</sup> This violence then gave the Mil-TG an opening to exploit local tensions to their benefit and reduced support in some areas towards the Civ-TG.<sup>5</sup> The violence also made

JPA implementation difficult even before the October 2021 coup – provisions that could benefit people in marginalized communities were never implemented.<sup>6</sup>

### Blue Nile: exemplifying post-JPA divisions

The JPA's flaws can be seen in the recent violence in Blue Nile in July. Violence broke out between various communities in mid-July that lasted for several days and saw hundreds of casualties and tens of thousands of people displaced. After a pause, they resumed in early September.<sup>7</sup> The violence stems from political and identity disputes pitting various communities against each other. On the one side are the Hausa – a community of West African origin who began settling in Blue Nile about a hundred years ago.<sup>8</sup> On the other are members of Blue Nile's Funj communities,<sup>9</sup> who also refer to themselves as the indigenous inhabitants of Blue Nile, and include most prominently in the current conflict the Hamaj, Berta and Kadalo.<sup>10</sup>

The violence stems from competition over land and identity. Unlike the Funj communities in Blue Nile, the Hausa do not have their own Native Administration and thus live among other communities' land. In 1993 the NCP regime granted the Hausa a Native Administration due to the NCP's desire to increase its social base in Blue Nile following increased support for the SPLM/A from its Funj communities. The NCP regime's decision, however, quickly led to violence between the Hausa and its Funj neighbours and they had to rescind the offer.<sup>11</sup> After Malik Agar's rise to the governorship of Blue Nile in 2008, the Hausa sought his support for a Native Administration. Agar initially appeared receptive but was ultimately unable to follow through due to pressure from Funj communities.

<sup>4</sup> See 'What Next for the Juba Peace Agreement? Evolving political and security dynamics in Darfur', Sudan Rapid Response 2, Rift Valley Institute, January 2022; 'What Next for Sudan's Peace Process? Evolving political and security dynamics in the Two Areas', Sudan Rapid Response 3, Rift Valley Institute, March 2022; 'What Next for Sudan's Peace Process? Evolving political and security dynamics in the East', Sudan Rapid Response 4, Rift Valley Institute, June 2022.

<sup>5</sup> This was especially true in eastern Sudan, see Rapid Response 4.

<sup>6</sup> These include provisions to address grievances stemming from competition over land and resource control, as well as revenue sharing for local governments.

<sup>7</sup> As this report was being finalized violence spiked in late October with both sides carrying out targeted killings, including a well-armed Hausa militias that killed more than 100 Funj civilians. Funj protests against these killings that blamed the SPLM/A-N and the JPA more broadly saw several government buildings in Damazin burned and the temporary overrunning of the local SAF garrison.

<sup>8</sup> Gunnar M., Sørnbø and Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed, *Sudan Divided: continuing conflict in a contested state*, Springer, 2013, 226.

<sup>9</sup> Funj is a reference to both the Funj Sultanate that existed in what is now northwestern Sudan and neighbouring Ethiopia from 1504-1821, and the Funj Native Administration that oversees the two dozen indigenous communities of Blue Nile.

<sup>10</sup> For a breakdown of Blue Nile's social groups see 'What next for Sudan's peace process? Evolving political and security dynamics in the Two Areas.'

<sup>11</sup> Gunnar M., Sørnbø and Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed, *Sudan Divided: continuing conflict in a contested state*, Springer, 2013, 228-9.

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The violence also stems more generally from political differences related to the SPLM/A-N's approach to governance in Blue Nile. In the aftermath of the JPA as they prepared to enter government, the SPLM/A-N's leaders realized that their support in Blue Nile was weaker than they had thought. Malik Agar and other SPLM/A-N leaders were very reliant on backing from their own Ingessana communities, with limited support from others, and they worried that this might weaken their political legitimacy. To address this, they made efforts to build support from among the Fellata community, another community of West African origin, and later the Hausa.

In both cases the SPLM/A-N (SRF) was willing to indulge certain requests from their Fellata and Hausa allies that then alienated others in Blue Nile, especially Funj communities. For instance, shortly after the JPA was signed, the SPLM/A-N (SRF) began to recruit militarily from the Fellata, some of whom eventually joined SAF during a security sector reform process.<sup>12</sup> Some however, stayed outside the formal security force structure, and with at least tacit SPLM/A-N (SRF) support have acted as a Fellata militia and came into conflict over access to land with other communities, including Funj in Roseires, Wad al-Mahi, and Geissan, as well as Arab pastoralists living here.<sup>13</sup> The Hausa, as part of its alignment with the SPLM/A-N publicly raised the issue of their own Native Administration after the SPLM/A-N started to run the Blue Nile government in June 2021. This increased tensions with neighbouring Funj communities who felt they would lose land at the Hausa's expense.

Blue Nile's political dynamics, and the SPLM/A-N's relationship with communities there, is complicated by the 2017 split in the SPLM/A-N, when large numbers of supporters from Blue Nile joined with Abdelaziz al-Hilu's SPLM/A-N faction. These supporters, led by Joseph Tuka in Blue Nile, draw support from Funj communities, initially from southern Blue Nile (with the Uduk and Berta being the two largest), but more recently from northern Blue Nile, including the Hamaj and Kadalo, as well as additional Berta living in northern parts of Geissan locality. By mid 2022 it was becoming apparent that the SPLM/A-N (SRF)'s base of support was largely from the Ingessana, Fellata, and Hausa, while the SPLM/

A-N (al-Hilu) was increasingly supported by northern Funj communities and their allies among the Arab pastoralist communities. This meant that as tensions increased between the Hausa and Funj communities, they were not only communal but political as well, with the Hausa seen as aligned with the SPLM/A-N (SRF) and the Funj with the SPLM/A-N (al-Hilu).

As the Hausa voiced their desire for a Native Administration, concerns among Funj communities stemming from fears over loss of land increased. While resistance from Funj communities might be expected, what made the situation worse is that details on any arrangement that the Hausa thought they had with the SPLM/A-N were lacking and the SPLM/A-N government in Damazin made no public announcement. In this information and political vacuum rumours and paranoia spread, which quickly turned to violence. Small scale tit-for-tat killings occurred in early July in small towns and rural areas before flaring up into large-scale violence as some members of Funj communities decided to address the issue themselves through a campaign of targeted violence meant to dissuade the Hausa from pursuing their objectives. This led to the displacement of tens of thousands of Hausa in communities from Geissan to Roseires.

## Conclusion

The political nature of the conflict in Blue Nile has remained even after the violence reduced, with Funj leaders publicly claiming that it was the SPLM/A-N's governance that caused the conflict and that it could only be resolved through the removal of its governor in Damazin and the suspension of the JPA. In other areas of Sudan, the JPA remains virtually unimplemented. In eastern Sudan, the JPA remains effectively suspended as the Mil-TG government has been unable to resolve communal and political concerns. Darfur has also seen very little JPA implementation beyond some political appointments. Provisions designed to address political and economic imbalances remain unimplemented.

Sudan's political future, and thus the JPA, remains in doubt. In the continued political negotiations, many SRF leaders remained opposed to the FFC and are

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<sup>12</sup> The JPA included security sector reform processes designed to integrate the SPLM/A-N into Sudan's formal security forces, primarily the SAF, Police, and the GIS (other SRF parties had similar security sector reform processes). The SPLM/A-N's process started in September 2021 when their soldiers gathered in Ulu (southern Blue Nile) near the South Sudan border. Eventually several hundred SPLM/A-N soldiers were integrated into SAF, with smaller numbers joining the Police and the GIS.

<sup>13</sup> Some parts of the Hausa community were also armed around this time, though it is not clear if this was done by the SPLM/A-N or SAF Military Intelligence.

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concerned about where they might fit into a new political arrangement dominated by the civilian group. In this respect, SRF leaders remain largely aligned with the Mil-TG, with some going as far as to seek to replace the FFC, which they see as nothing more than a collection of central Riverine political elites. Additionally, SRF leaders – especially from Darfur – took advantage of their legalized presence in Sudan after signing the JPA to carry out significant military recruitment. This will complicate any future security sector reform and has contributed to an increased militarization in Sudan since the 2019 revolution. The SRF will likely want to protect both their political and military power and are wary of what might happen to both under a civilian run government.



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