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What next for Sudan's peace process?

Political and security dynamics in the east

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

Key points

- A complex and interrelated set of historical and communal grievances involving issues of identity, livelihood, and political exclusion are driving the current instability in eastern Sudan, which has received markedly less attention than other conflict-affected areas (see Rapid Response briefings on Darfur and the Two Areas).
- In eastern Sudan, the transitional government's peace process, which resulted in the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA), ended up exacerbating rather than resolving intercommunal tensions. The primary point of contention in the east was that it did not include representation from all of its communities, and the JPA apportioned a significant amount of the region's political representation to its signatories.
- As such, the transitional government and the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) created a new set of political and ethnic grievances that they were never able to address, and which the Mil-TG (military component of the transitional government) could then exploit to their benefit.
- In the run-up to the October 2021 coup, the Mil-TG looked to exploit communal differences in eastern Sudan by securing the allegiance of the Beja community, which was at odds with the Civ-TG (civilian component of the transitional government) over the JPA, with a promise to renegotiate the JPA's Eastern Track.
- Since the coup, the Mil-TG has been unable to follow through on its promise to the Beja community or address broader grievances. These community grievances continue to fester, and the prospect for increased social harmony in the near future is limited.

Introduction

Eastern Sudan – Red Sea, Kassala and Gedaref states – is populated by a diverse group of people. The largest group is the Beja, a collection of communities that have a non-Arab identity. Historically, the broader Beja community included the Hadendawa, Amara, Bishariyyan, and Halanga communities, all which speak the Cushitic language of Tu-Bedawi, and the Bani Amer community, which speaks the Semitic Tigre language.¹ Most of these communities historically hail from Red

Sea and Kassala states, with the exception being the Bani Amer who originally straddled the border between Sudan and what is now Eritrea.² Beja identity and community interests are strongly tied to landownership. Since the 1990s, tensions have increased between the Bani Amer and other Beja communities – a trend that continued after 2019. As a result, people of eastern Sudan increasingly consider the Bani Amer as a distinct community separate from those considered Beja. It is a highly charged dynamic with many in the Bani Amer

¹ Historically some Bani Amer also spoke Tu-Bedawi. See Catherine Miller, 'Power, Land and Ethnicity in the Kassala-Gedaref States: an Introduction', in *Land, ethnicity and political legitimacy in Eastern Sudan*, ed. C. Miller, Le Caire: Cedej, 2005, 15.

² Prior to the 1970s about two-thirds of the total Bani Amer population lived in what is now Eritrea. See Miller, 'Power, Land and Ethnicity', 15.

community feeling that they are Beja and should be considered as such. For the sake of clarity, this paper refers to Beja and Bani Amer separately.

Other non-Arab inhabitants of eastern Sudan include those of western Sudanese descent (Fur, Masalit, etc.) living in Gedaref,³ Nuba living largely in Kassala and Port Sudan towns,⁴ and Fellata and Hausa. Arab communities include the Shukriyya, which have lived in the Butana area of Gedaref since the fourteenth century⁵ and constitute the state's majority.⁶ Other Arab communities began arriving during Turco-Egyptian rule, especially from the Nile valley, including from the Jaaliyin, Shagaiya, and Danagla communities that have long dominated Sudan's political and economic arenas (including eastern Sudan), especially under the NCP regime.⁷ Finally, members of the Rashaida community immigrated to eastern Sudan from the Arab peninsula since the 1800s and settled along the Sudan-Eritrea border in Kassala and Red Sea states.⁸

Historical tensions

Historical tensions existed between these communities, but it was the political divisions that started in the 1950s and came to a head under the NCP regime that are most pertinent today. After independence, traditional and intellectual leaders formed the Beja Congress political party in an attempt to increase their political representation and address the Beja community's

ongoing political and economic marginalization.

At the same time, the onset of the Eritrean war for independence in 1961 precipitated significant demographic change in eastern Sudan, as large numbers of refugees – among them many from the Bani Amer community – came from what was then Ethiopia.

Following the NIF's coup in the 1989, the new regime began to build alliances across Sudan to expand its support base; in eastern Sudan, it began to support the Bani Amer and related communities as its primary ally.⁹ The alliance was partly based on the Bani Amer's generally socially conservative Islamic culture, but it was also a response to the Beja's escalation to armed rebellion in the 1995, when the Beja

Congress organized training camps in Eritrea as part of the umbrella armed opposition, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).¹⁰ It was during this time that divisions between the Bani Amer and others over whether or not the Bani Amer were to be considered 'Beja' really began.¹¹ As more and more Beja began to support the NDA's war effort,¹² Khartoum's support for the Bani Amer grew as part of a plan to divide communities and prevent them from uniting against it. Some Bani Amer did join the Beja Congress, but the NCP regime still supported them in the hope of building their social base.¹³

By the late 1990s, the Khartoum-Bani Amer relationship strengthened to the point that the regime actively encouraged Bani Amer (and similar communities) to

³ Large numbers of Darfuris traveled to what is now Gedaref during the Mahdist period as part of the clashes with the Abyssinian empire at the end of the 1800s. Many settled in the area after the conflict and their descendants are still there, while other Darfuris arrived during periods of stress (drought in the 1980s, conflict after 2003) looking for work.

⁴ Many Nuba traveled to eastern Sudan looking for employment, especially during times of conflict in South Kordofan.

⁵ Miller, 'Power, Land and Ethnicity', 16.

⁶ 'Sudan: Saving Peace in the East', International Crisis Group, 2006, 2.

⁷ 'Sudan: Saving Peace in the East', 2.

⁸ Miller, 'Power, Land and Ethnicity', 16.

⁹ Related communities include the Tigre-speaking Habab, and others culturally similar such as the Kunama and Bilen, all of whom initially settled in Sudan as part of the Bani Amer Native Administration. The Habab eventually got their own Nazara in 2006. See Jean-Baptiste Galopin, Edward Thomas, Sarah Detzner and Alex de Waal, 'Sudan's political marketplace in 2021: public and political finance, the Juba agreement and contests', Conflict Research Programme, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2021, 29.

¹⁰ The NDA was formed in 1995 and included political parties, such as the Democratic Unionist, the National Umma, and armed groups, such as the South Sudanese SPLM/A. It was supported by Eritrea and Ethiopia.

¹¹ Eastern Sudan Beja communities share a complex history with occasional divisions over who is or is not truly 'Beja'. For instance, beyond the division in language there are other differences between Bani Amer and the others related to variations in their social structures, with the Bani Amer structure based on a caste system rather than a segmentary structure of the other Beja communities. See Sara Pantuliano, 'Comprehensive Peace? Causes and Consequences of Underdevelopment and Instability in Eastern Sudan', *Save the Children*, 2005, 12.

¹² Many of eastern Sudan's Nuba communities also joined the Beja in supporting the NDA.

¹³ Dr. Amna Dirar was the leader of the Bani Amer wing within the Beja Congress. She is now closely associated with the Bani Amer Coordination Body. The NCP regime's interaction with eastern Sudan's communities was multifaceted and not monolithic, but rather sought to cultivate allies among all communities as best it could, especially through the manipulation of local grievances and local leaders. Thus, while many Beja supported the armed opposition struggle, the NCP still cultivated ties with the Beja Native Administration. See ICG, 'Sudan: Saving Peace in the East', 11 and 12.

immigrate to Sudan and offered citizenship in exchange for electoral support. This also prompted many to move away from the Bani Amer's traditional areas near the border – in Kassala, Hamashkoreb, and South Tokar localities – and settle further inside Kassala and Red Sea. Furthermore, especially in Kassala, the Bani Amer were rewarded with increased political representation in the state, which increased competition over land and resources with Beja communities who grew increasingly resentful at what they felt was the Bani Amer's privileged political position.¹⁴

The Juba Peace Agreement in eastern Sudan

After the NCP regime's demise, the people of eastern Sudan had expectations that the new government would work to address their grievances and right the wrongs that occurred under the regime. For some Beja communities, this included a desire that the transitional government would rectify the balance of political power they felt favoured the Bani Amer and stem the expansion of the Bani Amer community into traditional Beja lands. The dispute over rightful ownership of land is a central rallying point. Some Beja have become increasingly vocal in their belief that Bani Amer and others living under its Native Administration had spread well beyond their traditional area prior to their expansions after the 1970s, and that there was a need for the transitional government to demarcate ethnic boundaries so as to clarify the ownership and use of land and resources.

Rising tensions and violence

By late 2019, eastern Sudan had become a tinder box of communal grievances and tensions. The launch of the peace process only served to amplify these. The Beja community's frustrations centered on what they felt was their exclusion from the peace process, as the transitional government empowered the SRF to represent all of eastern Sudan despite the fact that the rebel coalition does not have a relationship with the majority of the Beja

community.¹⁵ Initially, the SRF's representatives in the Eastern Track were Osama Saeed, a leader of the Beja Congress Opposition, and al-Amin Daoud of the United Peoples Front for Liberation and Justice (UPFLJ). Osama is a longtime opposition politician associated with the original Beja Congress and is from the Ababda community;¹⁶ despite this, he does not have a relationship with many of the community and traditional leaders from Beja communities. Al-Amin, from the Habab community with family origins in Eritrea and with close links to the Bani Amer Native Administration, would prove to be a divisive figure.

Without representation in the peace process, many in the Beja community feared that their grievances were unlikely to be addressed. They became especially concerned once it became clearer that part of the peace process would result in the apportionment of political representation to those party to the process, with no clear understanding as to how those outside the process would be included.¹⁷ These concerns were compounded by the fact that al-Amin Daoud's close relationship with the Bani Amer Native Administration would mean that its political power might be expanded and at the expense of other communities. It is not clear just how much the Civ-TG knew about the Beja's concerns at the time, or if it was aware of the fact that the peace process itself was increasing tensions among communities in eastern Sudan. The same is true for the SRF, as it appears they chose their Eastern Track representatives based on their personal relationships with individuals and not because of any ethnic preference.¹⁸ Regardless of their understanding, however, the fact that neither body recognized or rectified the situation after repeated appeals from the Beja would lead to both eventually losing the capacity to influence the process or implement the JPA.

In November 2019, rallies in Port Sudan held by al-Amin Daoud in support of the process quickly led to violence between members of the Bani Amer and Beja – largely

¹⁴ The NCP regime appointed a Bani Amer governor to Kassala on several occasions, including security elite Ibrahim Mahmoud Hamid twice (1997-2001 and 2005-08) while never appointing someone from the Beja.

¹⁵ The process was broken up into six geographical tracks, with one encompassing eastern Sudan.

¹⁶ The Ababda are generally considered to be part of the broader Beja collective. Osama Saeed had been a member of the Beja Congress before joining the Beja Congress-Corrective splinter and then splitting from this to lead the Beja Congress Opposition.

¹⁷ The JPA granted the SRF's Eastern Track representatives 30 per cent of the political appointments in eastern Sudan, though it did not specify exactly what this meant, how they would be appointed, or how the remaining 70 per cent would be decided.

¹⁸ At the start of the peace process al-Amin Daoud, an Islamist, was close to JEM and its leader Jibril Ibrahim (al-Amin would also align with Minni Minnawi when the latter sought to create his own SRF wing in 2020 and 2021). Additionally, since the other prominent eastern Sudan opposition politician, Zeinab Kabbashi, is close to Abdelaziz al-Hilu, she was unacceptable to Malik Agar and Yasir Arman to represent the SRF in eastern Sudan. She is closer to the Beja community and intellectual leaders that helped form the Beja High Council.

Hadendawa – in Port Sudan. The rallies were interpreted by some Beja community members as a call for increased Bani Amer political representation. At least six people were killed before a Civ-TG sponsored agreement temporarily halted the violence. The agreement, locally referred to as a *gallad*,¹⁹ contained two key provisions: First, the Civ-TG would lead a process to demarcate areas of local administration between the Bani Amer and Beja communities based on ‘original’ territories, which would mean that Bani Amer and others under their Native Administration would lose any land rights granted under the NCP regime outside of their three traditional areas along the Eritrean border. Second, the Eastern Track would be suspended to allow for a ‘comprehensive conference’ to be held to discuss the peace process and attendance of that conference would be based on community representation; this would mean a greatly increased Beja presence in the peace process, as it is the majority population in Red Sea and Kassala. It quickly became apparent that the Civ-TG neither wanted, or was able to, implement the *gallad*, and it remains unclear as to why it agreed to it.

As the peace process continued in late 2019 and early 2020, Beja frustrations mounted as they felt that the transitional government, and especially the Civ-TG, was not taking their concerns seriously and nor finding ways to include their views in the process. The broader Beja community responded by organizing a group to represent its views, both to the transitional government and to its own leaders. This led to the formation of the High Council of the Beja *Nazarat* and Independent *Umoodiyat* (the Beja High Council, for short). The Nazir Saeed Tirik of the Hadendawa was chosen to lead the group, as the Hadendawa is the largest Beja subgroup. Around the same time, members of the Bani Amer community created the All Bani Amer Umoodiyat Coordination Body (Coordination Body, for short), led by Nazir Ibrahim Diglal, to hold their leaders accountable to their interests.

Both of these bodies emerged out of an environment of popular discontent with the performance of traditional and political leaders under the NCP regime. Many people felt let down by their leaders and wanted a mechanism to ensure this did not happen again.²⁰ The initial leaders of both bodies were local intellectual and cultural leaders, and they formed the two bodies as a means to pressure their respective traditional and political leaders and hold them accountable to the communities’ objectives. By joining these bodies, both political leaders and Native Administration were able to regain some legitimacy lost during their association with the NCP regime.

As the peace process continued unchanged through mid-2020, intercommunal tensions increased and led to a greater frequency of violence. Two events in July and August caused the situation to explode. First, on 3 July, the Civ-TG appointed individuals from the Bani Amer community to be the new civilian governors of both Kassala and Gedaref. Many in the Beja community saw the appointments as reminiscent of NCP actions in support of Bani Amer land claims in Kassala.²¹ Second, the SRF and the transitional government signed the initial peace agreement for the Eastern Track in late August 2020, after the Civ-TG failed to act on an agreement with in the Beja in early July to form a committee to ‘re-discuss’²² the Eastern Track. It is not clear why the Civ-TG agreed to do this and then did not follow through, but the Beja community took it as a further sign of support for the Bani Amer community. Violence peaked in August, and the transitional government was forced to declare a state of emergency and deploy security forces to separate communities.

At the end of September, the Beja High Council organized a multi-day conference in Sinkat, near Port Sudan. At the end of the conference it endorsed a number of positions: Nazir Tirik should represent the broader Beja community in its affairs, the Civ-TG should cancel the Eastern Track and restart the peace process

¹⁹ *Gallad* means ‘word of honour’ and is a verbal non-aggression agreement made by all elders of a victim’s community, meant to prevent acts of revenge directed towards the perpetrator, and is binding for all members of a victim’s group.

²⁰ 2006’s Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) provided a number of power sharing and development elements. Much of the latter was not implemented. This is seen by many in eastern Sudan as a failure of their political leaders who were included in national and local governance as part of the power sharing, and they wanted to prevent the new transitional government from being another wasted opportunity to advance their interests. On the ESPA’s failures see ‘Sudan: Preserving Peace in the East’, International Crisis Group, 2013.

²¹ The choice for Kassala governor was Salih Ammar, a former journalist and selected as part of the Civil Society Initiative organization within the FFC. Following Beja protests, the Civ-TG removed him in October 2020. The choice for Gedaref governor was Suleiman Ali, a member of the Unionist Gathering. Suleiman was removed in August 2021 after a video surfaced of him leading a rally in support of the NCP during a recent election prior to the NCP regime’s collapse.

²² ‘Sudan peace talks close to agreement – eastern track to be rediscussed’, *Dabanga*, 6 July 2020.

(<https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-peace-talks-close-to-agreement-eastern-track-reopened>)

through a ‘comprehensive conference’ with attendance based on ethnic proportions, and that any peace process that allocates political representation should do so based on the idea that the community with a majority in an area should then hold the majority of the political representation.

Peace process in limbo

Despite concern from many segments of the broader Beja community, in October 2020 the transitional government and the SRF signed the JPA. Implementation of the agreement never began in eastern Sudan, however, due to fears that it would re-ignite intercommunal violence. Tensions between the Beja High Council and the Civ-TG remained high throughout 2021. The popularity of the Beja High Council grew during this time and some community leaders from the Bisharin, Amarat, and Halanga who initially did not support the High Council²³ were forced to reassess their position. In mid-2021 the Halanga nazir then agreed to join the High Council. As the Beja High Council’s support grew among many Bisharin and Amarat youth who accused their leaders of working against their own people and in service of national elites, these leaders were forced to either seek alignment with the High Council or not speak against it.²⁴ The High Council is now broadly seen by Beja communities as the entity best placed to seek redress for their grievances.

As tensions rose in 2021 between the transitional government’s military and civilian wings, the Mil-TG began searching for supporters. At the same time, the transitional government was unable to make decisions regarding the JPA’s Eastern Track, leaving the process in limbo and continuing to frustrate the Beja. The Mil-TG used this opportunity to seek support from the Beja, consistently telling the Beja High Council that it supported the Beja’s views while also insisted that it was the Civ-TG that was responsible for supporting the peace process – effectively absolving the Mil-TG

of responsibility for a process over which it had a significant degree of control.²⁵ The Civ-TG was thus made responsible for solving the JPA’s outstanding issues despite the fact that it never had that much power over the peace process. The end result of these dynamics was that the Beja High Council came to the conclusion that it was the Civ-TG that stood in the way of resolving its grievances, and that it was the Mil-TG that could help, at least in the short-term. By September 2021, both the Beja High Council and the Mil-TG favoured the same stance towards the Civ-TG, which was one of increased pressure and the call to change some of its members.²⁶

Blockade in eastern Sudan

In late September 2021, the Beja High Council and its allies attempted to increase pressure on the Civ-TG by organizing a blockade of the main ports in eastern Sudan and of the road linking Khartoum and Port Sudan town. These actions were essentially a form of unpermitted protest (normally violently suppressed), which the Mil-TG did not attempt to stop, suggesting a degree of permission and collusion. While there were discussions between the Beja High Council and the Mil-TG, especially about the Eastern Track, it is not clear what the Mil-TG knew about the blockades or if they encouraged the High Council in their endeavour. Furthermore, interviews with those close to the Beja High Council’s leadership indicate that there was an understanding by its leaders that actions like the port closure would help the Mil-TG’s rivalry with the Civ-TG, but that it was not done with the express intent to help the Mil-TG pursue its objectives vis-à-vis the Civ-TG, but rather as a way to pressure the Civ-TG to respond to the Beja’s demands.

These actions, as well as past relationships between leaders of the Beja High Council and the NCP regime, raised accusations that there was a coordinated effort by the former NCP regime, the Mil-TG, and the Beja High Council to weaken the Civ-TG and pave the way

²³ ‘Sudan’s Political Marketplace in 2021’, 30.

²⁴ In mid-2021 Prime Minister Hamdok invited the Amarat nazir for talks in Khartoum that was widely seen by many in the Amarat and Hadendawa communities as a move against Tirik’s leadership and an attempt to drive a wedge between their communities to weaken them. Regardless of Hamdok’s intention, the move had the effect of pushing many Amarat towards Tirik and the High Council. Additionally, the High Council’s secretary general and deputy are both from the Amarat.

²⁵ For more on the large role the Mil-TG played in the peace process see ‘What next for the Juba Peace Agreement?’, Rift Valley Institute, December 2021. (<https://riftvalley.net/publication/what-next-juba-peace-agreement-after-coup-sudan>)

²⁶ See ‘Controversy over govt delegation visit as protests in eastern Sudan continue’, *Dabanga*, 20 September 2021. (<https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/controversy-over-govt-delegation-visit-as-beja-protests-in-eastern-sudan-continue>) The Beja High Council announced on 20 September that in addition to cancelling the JPA’s Eastern Track they wanted the Civ-TG to be dissolved and replaced with a ‘government of technocrats’. Discussions with individuals close to the High Council indicates that they did not want to replace Prime Minister Hamdok, but rather replace some of those in the Council of Ministers they felt were working against their interests.

for the return of the NCP to political power. There is indeed cause for concern, and both Beja and Bani Amer leadership includes a number of individuals with past links to the NCP regime, and/or those who could be considered committed political Islamists and thus open to influence from the former NCP regime. On the Beja side, those most accused of having these links are Abdallah Obshar, the High Council's Secretary General, who had been an NCP county commissioner in Red Sea, and Saeed Abu Amna, the High Council's spokesman. On the Bani Amer side, original UPFLJ leader, al-Amin Daoud, has longstanding links to NCP security elites and was a member of the Eritrean armed opposition – which is itself linked to Islamist groups. Al-Amin's replacement after the 2019 Port Sudan violence, Khalid Idriss Shawish, was a youth mobilizer for the Islamic Movement in Kassala and has links to NCP security elites.²⁷ Despite these relationships, research for this report strongly indicates that the actions taken by individuals involved are much more strongly directed by their community interests than in support of the NCP.

Uneasy truce

In early November 2021, about a week after the Mil-TG's coup, the Beja High Council agreed to remove the blockades following the Mil-TG's promise that it would address their demands.²⁸ Since then the Mil-TG formed the Higher Committee of Effective Solutions to the Situation in Eastern Sudan, chaired by Hemedti (leader of the Rapid Support Forces), to resolve the situation surrounding the JPA's Eastern Track. After several months of consultations and deliberations, the committee produced a 'goodwill document' signed by nazirs of the

Hadendawa, Bani Amer, Amara, Bisharin, and Habab. The document mentions implementing the demarcation provision of the November 2019 gallad, but only in the sense of governmental administrative boundaries and not that of ethnic communities (the latter linked to the Native Administration). In this distinction, Hemedti's committee sought to find a compromise between the Beja and Bani Amer and avoid the government getting involved in ethnic land disputes. While the five nazirs signed the document, in the days following it none appeared interested in implementing it. The Beja High Council released a statement criticizing the document, stating that the first step should be the full implementation of the gallad, while Nazir Ibrahim Diglal of the Bani Amer criticized the document a day before signing it.²⁹

The dynamics surrounding the gallad specifically, as well as the relationship between communities more broadly, is becoming increasingly intractable. For the Mil-TG, the problem is that a gallad's cultural importance means that it cannot easily be abandoned without further downstream repercussions, and at the same time supporting a conclusion to the issue means that one or the other risks alienating communities in eastern Sudan. Nazir Diglal is in an increasingly complicated position as the Bani Amer community is divided and feels that it has more to lose than the Beja. This is especially true for Bani Amer and other communities that arrived from Eritrea and then settled, with NCP encouragement, in areas outside of where the community had lived before, such as in Red Sea state.³⁰ Some within the Bani Amer community, including those who control the Bani Amer Coordination Body (now renamed the United Beni Amer Independent Nazara), have grown increasingly

²⁷ Furthermore, the UPFLJ secretary-general, Abdel-Wahab Jamil, is almost certainly a former NISS officer.

²⁸ 'Condemnation, civil disobedience actions against Sudan military coup continue', *Dabanga*, 28 October 2021. (<https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/condemnations-civil-disobedience-actions-against-sudan-military-coup-continue>) The removal proved harder to execute than anticipated as the largely Amara youth manning the blockades did not trust the Mil-TG and were in favour of keeping the blockades until they cancelled the Eastern Track. Tirik and the Beja High Council had to work through several Amara omdas to convince the youth to stop the blockade.

²⁹ It is not unusual in Sudan for leaders to sign agreements and then criticize them later, especially if they are under pressure from stronger forces, such as Hemedti in this case.

³⁰ As part of the rationale for granting the Bani Amer increased positions (at the omda level) in Red Sea the NCP added information to the state educational curriculum that claimed there was a historical Bani Amer kingdom in that part of Sudan. However, there is no historical record to support this, no ruins or oral history, etc., but it shows the steps that the NCP regime went through to support their preferred social base in eastern Sudan. Protests calling for the removal of this curriculum occurred almost immediately after the NCP regime's demise and helped to set in motion a Beja cultural and political awakening that eventually led to the formation of the Beja High Council. Several leaders of the Coordination Body are known hardliners within the Bani Amer community and are privately critical of Nazir Diglal.

critical of Nazir Diglal and what they see as his failure to protect their interests in eastern Sudan.³¹ Nazir Diglal is stuck between trying to find a way to reconcile with the Beja, while at the same time not wanting to lose too much support from the broader Bani Amer community. In early June cracks within the Beja High Council, which had stayed fairly united since its formation, started to show. On 7 June Nazir Tirik announced the resignation of his leadership of the High Council, exposing divisions between him and the High Council's Deputy and Secretary General. These divisions are due to the latter's concerns that Tirik is not taking a strong enough stance against the Mil-TG, especially related to Hemedti's desire to obtain land along the Red Sea coast that the local community rejects.³² After further consultations Tirik 'froze' his resignation and the High Council agreed to meet by the end of June to settle their differences.

Finally, differing views among current Sovereign Council members on the best approach to tensions in eastern Sudan is another complicating factor for the current post-coup government. For instance, both Chairman Burhan and General Shams al-Deen al-Kabbashi supported the Beja recently and will likely favour them in a future solution. At the same time, these SAF members are uneasy about having to support Beja interests if it means they have to confront Hemedti over his Red Sea land desires. Malik Agar, however, is expected to side with South Sudan, which is interested in avoiding any future blockades that would imperil the secure passage and export of its oil. Taher Hajer and al-Hadi Idriss are likely to side with the SRF's Eastern Track signatories, as a renegotiation of one JPA track could set a precedent that could endanger the Darfur Track.

Conclusion: Tensions unresolved

As of early June, political and social divisions in eastern Sudan remain unresolved. Furthermore, since the start of the transitional government's peace process these divisions have become highly intertwined and viewed in starkly zero-sum terms. Thus, all communities in eastern Sudan now view the peace process as the means through which political representation is to be apportioned, and that without representation they fear that their rivals will benefit politically at their expense. The transitional government had struggled to understand the depth of this polarization, and so far the Mil-TG has shown no signs of being able to address the situation since the coup. As a result, these community grievances continue to fester and the prospect for increased social harmony in the near future is limited. Finally, as divisions within communities grow, as seen with the creation of the United Beni Amer Independent Nazara and the divisions within the Beja High Council, it will make it more difficult for their leaders to reach agreement with other communities.

³¹ This group has sought to exert pressure on Diglal in several ways. For instance, in March 2021 all the Bani Amer omdas in Red Sea released a statement critical of Nazir Diglal. Most of these omdas represent people who traveled from Eritrea after the 1970s and were given land and representation in the Native Administration through the Bani Amer's nazara and are now at risk of losing these positions if the gallad is implemented. Furthermore, in approximately April 2022 the Bani Amer Coordination Body was reformed as the "United Beni Amer Independent Nazara." Most of its leaders are the same, and it includes support from the Red Sea omdas mentioned in the previous paragraph. It has been organized as a nazara to explicitly compete with Bani Amer Nazir Diglal as its leaders feel that Diglal does not represent their views. This intra-Bani Amer competition is likely to further complicate dynamics in eastern Sudan.

³² As both the Deputy (Hamid Abu Zainab) and the Secretary General (Abdallah Obshar) are Amarar, whose traditional land is along the Red Sea coast, they consider the land Hemedti wants as theirs and they want Tirik to lead the High Council against Hemedti's actions. The situation is worsened as the Red Sea Governor is Hadendawa (like Tirik) and the Amarar are starting to feel that the Hadendawa are not adequately supporting their grievances. Some Amarar have started a sit-in style protest outside the Governor's office and Hamid Abu Zainab and Abdallah Obshar want the High Council to support this.



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