



Armed Entities around Abyei

The Popular Defence Forces

As political parties and tribes become increasingly polarized around the upcoming referendum on independence for Southern Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) is claiming that the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) have launched a 'massive recruitment drive' to the Popular Defence Forces (PDF) 'so the Missiriya can occupy the land'. The SPLM spokesman in Abyei, Wor Majak, has alleged that some 2,000 PDF have been mobilized outside Abyei to settle in the north of the area ahead of the referendum. On a visit to Abyei in July 2010, the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel headed by Thabo Mbeki heard allegations that 'PDF elements that attack Abyei pass through SAF bases and checkpoints without being stopped'.

National Congress Party (NCP) officials in Abyei say they are concerned by increasing insecurity in the area but deny that the NCP or SAF is sponsoring it. They attribute it to militias working on their own, without sponsorship.

Missiriya leaders, however, say NCP officials are recruiting energetically among the Missiriya—offering weapons, cars, and cash—and in July 2010 opened two training camps north of Abyei, in Debab and Meiram. In charge of the recruitment campaign, with a budget claimed to be SDG 1 million (USD 840,000), is the PDF chief in Muglad, identified by Missiriya sources as Issa Abdul Mola. A Western observer reports almost a dozen militia camps now established along Abyei's northern border, with new recruits reportedly receiving around SDG 50 (USD 21) per month. Missiriya leaders claim many of the recruits decamped when it became clear that the promise that lured them in—SDG 280 (USD 120) per month—would not be honoured.

The recruits are also said to have received around 2,000 light weapons sent from Khartoum through a minister in the central government. Elders of the Missiriya tribe say Khartoum is mobilizing the Missiriya by playing on their conviction that 'Abyei is Missiriya'—and that the SPLM/Army is denying their rights there.

The elders say the Darfur rebels of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) are now the only active anti-government group in the Abyei area, exploiting Missiriya grievances with Khartoum to build a power base in a new region after months of attack on their forces all across Darfur. JEM is reportedly recruiting north of Abyei, with some success. This success is attributed to two main factors: anger over the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which the Missiriya believe has had a devastating impact on their pastoral economy by restricting their mobility to Southern Sudan, and dissatisfaction with the PDF and broken government promises.

The first armed groups to emerge in the Abyei area after the CPA—the Abyei Liberation Front, Shahama, and the Kordofan Alliance for Development—are inactive today, apparently superseded by JEM.

Brief descriptions of the groups follow:

The Abyei Liberation Front

The Abyei Liberation Front (ALF) emerged in February 2008 after Edward Lino was appointed as the SPLM chairman for the Abyei Administration and unofficial ‘governor’ of the area. Its leader, Mohammed Omar al Ansari, an aircraft engineer and NCP member, was based in Khartoum as the government-appointed Missiriya representative of the Committee for the Eradication of Abduction of Women and Children, but moved to Muglad as tensions rose in Abyei.

The ALF rejected the report of the Abyei Border Commission, which identifies areas such as Heglig, Keilak, and Meiram as Dinka Ngok areas, and accuses the SPLA of being ‘a professional army using weapons of mass destruction [...] the pawn of international imperialism’s interests in oil’. It drew its support largely from Missiriya who defected from SAF and PDF.

A member of the small Dar Omshaiba clan, a sub-clan of the Awlad Kamil branch of the Humr Ajaira, al Ansari lacked a natural tribal constituency, did not have the support of the traditional Missiriya leadership, and was widely perceived as promoting a personal rather than tribal agenda. But his strong personality and charisma make him a potentially attractive figure to largely uneducated Missiriya youths who are disenchanted with other armed forces and political parties.

Shahama

Shahama (‘valiant’ in Arabic) appeared in 2004, vowing to fight for the ‘neglected rights’ of the Missiriya. It operated in the vicinity of oil companies and installations, which it targeted, and its violent tactics were rejected by a majority of Missiriya, including traditional leaders of the tribe. The group’s founder, Musa Ali Hamadein, of the Ajaira sub-clan of the Humr like the ALF’s al Ansari, was a member of the Popular Congress Party of Hassan Turabi and a former PDF leader. The government portrayed Shahama as part of a Turabist strategy of destabilization and accused the Darfur rebels of JEM of being behind it.

Hamadein’s supporters were, for the most part, former members of the PDF. After his death in 2004, the group split. One faction, led by his nephew Musa Ali Hamadein, lent its support to JEM. The other, led by Babo Adam Joda, continued attacking oil installations and oil company employees to dramatize the damaging impact of oil on pastoralist livelihoods and the absence of development from oil revenues.

A number of Missiriya leaders critical of Shahama, and fearing that the Missiriya area might become a second Darfur, created Shamam, ‘The Sons of the Missiriya Area’, a non-militant civil group that rejected violence. Shamam demanded development for Missiriya territories irrespective of political orientation. It was led by Dr. Suleiman Dibello, of the Zuruq section of the Missiriya and reportedly a member of the Umma party. Shamam appealed to a large number of Missiriya youths, but at the local level Shahama remained the strongest and most popular group until it faded from the headlines with Musa Ali Hamadein’s capture by the SAF during JEM’s abortive attack on Omdurman in May 2008.

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Kordofan Alliance for Development

Formed in April 2006 by educated Kordofanians in the diaspora, the Kordofan Alliance for Development held a well-attended conference in Antwerp, Belgium, which endorsed an agenda focused on more local development and peaceful advocacy for ‘Greater Kordofan’—without ruling out the use of force if the civil approach failed. The movement was said to include representatives from several tribes, including the Missiriya, and to be present in the areas of Babanusa, Meiram, and Muglad. It reportedly had a strong link with the United Revolutionary Forces Front in Darfur.

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