



## The Buildup of Forces and Arms in Blue Nile

Under the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) in Blue Nile state were required to downsize to the prewar level of two battalions (a battalion is, in theory, approximately 800 men, including four infantry companies of 105 men each). Almost six years later, on the eve of Southern Sudan's self-determination referendum, state Governor Malik Agar claims SAF still has 20,000 troops in Blue Nile. Another 3,000 SAF troops serve, with an equal number of SPLA fighters, in the Joint Integrated Units (which Western military observers agree are neither joint nor integrated). There are large, but unverifiable, numbers of Popular Defence Forces, said by the SPLA to be 'constantly shifting'.

As required by the CPA, the SPLA initially moved the bulk of its forces across the North-South border—to Guffa in Upper Nile, only 5 km south of the border. (Governor Agar claims the men under his command are 'possibly 17,000'.) In recent weeks, however, local observers have noted a marked increase in SPLA traffic—of tanks, trucks, and pick-ups—northwards towards the formerly SPLA-controlled Kurmuk area. Members of the UN Mission in Sudan were prevented from inspecting a plane that landed at Kurmuk airport amid reports that it was carrying SPLA arms sent from Abyei.

The SPLA forces are well armed, including with weapons captured from SAF during the civil war. Despite media reports of heavy troop movements, a Western military observer who visited Blue Nile in late October 2010 saw no signs of any movement of heavy equipment or reinforcement. All key infrastructure was well defended, but there were few obvious deployments outside town garrisons. Other observers said the former civil war enemies appeared to be regrouping on either side of the old front line south of Damazin, near the town of Dindiro.

In mid-2010, according to Governor Agar, 1,500 militiamen arrived in Damazin from Darfur and were given SAF identity cards. Agar said weapons sent from Khartoum a few days later included Toyota-mounted 12.77 machine guns and anti-tank guns. He said the command structure of the Darfurians was unclear, but that it appeared to be separate from that of SAF.

Vice-President Ali Osman Mohamed Taha told senior UN officials the Darfurians had been sent to Blue Nile for training. SPLA officers expressed concern that they were being moved outside Darfur to strengthen the North-South front line in advance of Southern Sudan's January 2011 referendum on self-determination, which some believe may result in renewed North-South hostilities—especially in the front-line Three Areas.

UN officials say Agar has also formed a militia from his own Ingessena tribe, originally estimated at a few hundred men.

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