



## **Militarization in and around Abyei**

This document focuses on the military build-up in and around Abyei prior to the invasion of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in May 2011, and the present distribution of forces. For a detailed report on the invasion and subsequent occupation of Abyei, please see ‘The Crisis in Abyei’, available on the HSBA website.<sup>1</sup>

### **Current forces in Abyei**

According to the Abyei roadmap, signed by both parties in 2008, the only armed troops allowed to be in Abyei are the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) components of the Joint Integrated Units (JIUs), the Abyei police force, and United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) peacekeepers.<sup>2</sup>

As of 2 June 2011, there are approximately 5,000 SAF troops inside Abyei, having advanced up to the River Kiir (Bahr el Arab), which, according to the 1956 border between the southern and northern states, marks Abyei’s southernmost boundary.<sup>3</sup> There are almost no civilians left in Abyei, though attacks continue on the few Ngok Dinka villagers remaining in the area.<sup>4</sup> The absence of observers, combined with restrictions on the movement of UNMIS forces inside Abyei, means it is difficult to verify the extent of the SAF military presence in the territory. Satellite imagery produced by the Satellite Sentinel Project (SSP) shows at least ten SAF battle tanks consistent with T-55’s or T-64’s, mobile artillery pieces, heavy trucks, and infantry fighting vehicles.<sup>5</sup>

The planes involved in the bombing of Abyei are not based in the territory of Abyei itself, but in South Kordofan. SSP satellite imagery shows that, as of 25 May 2011, there are also six aircraft at el Obeid, the state capital of North Kordofan, including what appear to be Antonov transport planes and two Nanchang Q-5 ground attack aircraft.<sup>6</sup> On 7 April, SSP also reported the presence of two helicopters consistent with Mi-24 Hind Gunships at Muglad north-west of Abyei.<sup>7</sup> While Abyei is within the attack range of such helicopters, there is no evidence they were used in the assault.

### **Military build-up 2010-11**

Prior to the current occupation, there is some evidence for SAF military build-up within the territory of Abyei, especially at Diffra, Abyei’s sole remaining oil field.

Following an agreement signed by the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) and National Congress Party (NCP) on 6 December 2010, all oil fields should in theory be protected by JIU troops. In Abyei, this agreement was not implemented, and Diffra continues to be defended by the North Sudanese ‘oil police.’ Officially, there should only be 100 oil police, but independent observers place their numbers much higher, and in late 2010, SPLM officials claimed that four battalions had been deployed in and around Diffra. At the beginning of 2011, meetings of the Joint Defence Board, responsible for monitoring military deployment, broke down over SAF’s refusal to withdraw the oil police.



On 22 March 2011, SSP published satellite imagery they claimed showed ‘fortified compounds consistent with a military installation capable of accommodating a company to battalion strength unit’ about 15 km of Diffra.<sup>8</sup> This is consistent with SPLM allegations that SAF was building up forces around the oil field.

Other than at Diffra, evidence of military build-up within the territory of Abyei itself is more difficult to assess. On 10 March, SSP released satellite imagery they claimed identified fortified camps consistent with Missiriya militia or SAF installations near Alal. Their 22 March report further claimed that ‘this camp appears to have grown by approximately 25 per cent.’ The Abyei Administration made similar claims. On 20 March, Deng Arop, the chief administrator of Abyei, claimed that SAF was positioning 1,500 troops near Goli and Alal. On 30 March, Major General Moses Obi, the force commander of the UN peace-keeping force in Sudan, confirmed that there was military build-up on both sides. ‘We have evidence that both sides have militarised Abyei,’ he told the press. ‘We've seen all sorts of armed elements in Abyei that ordinarily are not supposed to be there.’ He further stated that SAF (and the SPLA) were bringing in ‘technicals,’<sup>9</sup> rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and multi-barrelled rocket launchers.

In the run-up to the 20–21 May occupation of Abyei, SAF moved troops into Diffra, and Missiriya militia fighters built up their positions within the territory of Abyei. It is impossible at present to give precise numbers of troops or armaments. Militia militarization is addressed at greater length in the section on militias below.

**Forces and equipment in South Kordofan**

The evidence for military build-up in South Kordofan is much clearer. In 2009, there was a reorganization of the military in South Kordofan, and a reduction of the number of divisions active in the state to just the 14<sup>th</sup> SAF Division in Kadugli, and the 15<sup>th</sup> Division in Muglad. SAF also has the 53<sup>rd</sup> Brigade in Abu Jebaha, the 54<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Dilling, the 55<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Babanusa, and the 56<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Heglig. In total, officially there are some 20,000 troops in South Kordofan. The SPLA claims that the numbers are much higher—more than 55,000.

SPLA sources claim that SAF troops are armed with artillery, 120mm mortars, D-30s (122 mm howitzers), T-55 tanks, anti-tank guns mounted on Land Cruisers, and RPGs. UNMIS sources report that there was considerable military movement along the South Kordofan–Abyei border in the months preceding the May invasion.

Around Heglig, the oil field that used to be included within the territory of Abyei before the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) decision, there were improvements in fortifications in March, and what SSP reported to be the ‘recent appearance of positions containing what appears to be artillery.’<sup>10</sup> In May the 56<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Heglig was reinforced with armoured vehicles and heavy trucks, which may have been used in the assault on Abyei.



In Muglad, a new fuel storage facility was completed by the end of March, and from 19–28 March, SSP reported that satellite imagery showed the off-loading and presence of nine tanks that appeared to be T-55 battle tanks, as well as light trucks and heavy vehicles that were consistent with the vehicles SAF normally uses to support tanks. SSP also reported on satellite imagery that seemed to show transportation of armoured vehicles consistent with tanks to Nyama and Kharasana.

In addition to this recent build-up of heavy weapons, SAF forces in South Kordofan have been receiving shipments of heavy weapons. The Small Arms Survey acquired a document, dated 15 January 2009, which suggests that SAF in South Kordofan has heavy artillery. Marked ‘Strictly Confidential’, it requests the following items for the Kadugli division: 2,000 40-barrel rocket launchers; 1,000 12-barrel rocket launchers; 1,000 howitzer shells; 1,000 D-30 shells; 1,000 artillery shells (100 mm); 600 artillery shells (130 mm); and 50 SA-7 shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles. A separate document of the same date confirms dispatch of the seven types of weapons and ammunition. Other accompanying ammunition includes 4,000 12.7mm rounds, 2,000 RPG shells, and 400 hand grenades.

**Militias**

Shortly after SAF occupied Abyei, Missiriya militias were reported to be moving into Abyei town from the north. SSP satellite imagery indicates that as of 24 May 2011, the suspected Missiriya militia encampment at Goli was disbanded, which is consistent with militia movements into the south of the territory. There are no exact numbers for the number of Missiriya militia fighters present in Abyei, though much about their organization and armament can be understood by analysing the militia attacks of the first three months of the year.

Achuil Akol, secretary for finance in the Abyei Administration, claimed that during the attacks of February and March the militias were using 12.7 mm machine guns mounted on Land Cruisers, 60mm mortars, RPGs, and small arms; these claims corresponded with what the Small Arms Survey was told by civilian and military witnesses to the attacks. Spent ammunition for both small arms and heavy machine guns was found at Maker, one of the villages attacked, by the Small Arms Survey.

The Abyei Administration claims that 1,500 people were involved in the attacks overall, with 700 involved in the attacks on Maker. Witnesses and fighters in the attacks were not able to give estimates of how many militia fighters were involved. While the numbers given by the Abyei Administration for the attack on Maker are not inconsistent with records of previous arms shipments to Missiriya militias, the total figure given is probably too high. If previous arms shipments are any indication of the total number of Missiriya in the militias, the numbers given by the Abyei Administration would suggest an almost total mobilization of the Missiriya militias.

The membership of the militias is extremely difficult to clarify. Following the signing of the CPA in 2005, a number of armed groups emerged among the Missiriya. The emergence of these groups was an indication of continuing tension between the NCP, which has co-opted most of the Missiriya leadership, and the former paramilitary



Popular Defence Forces (PDF) rank and file, who feel that they have been neglected by the NCP. Several of these groups were from the sub-sections of the ‘Ajaira,<sup>11</sup> and none of them were able to gain a mass following. By 2010, the Abyei Liberation Front, and Shahama, two of the most organized of the new paramilitary forces, were defunct. In the absence of organized groups among the Missiriya, the line between PDF fighters<sup>12</sup> and armed irregular forces is very thin.<sup>13</sup> Acuil Akol, secretary of finance in the Abyei Administration, claimed that Ahmed Dudu, the leader of the Mezaghna section of the ‘Ajaira, ordered herders to pull their cattle back from their most southerly positions, and then led heavily armed militia forces in the attack on Todac on 27 February, the first of the clashes in February and March. Hasan Musa, a Missiriya leader, confirmed that the Mezaghna were involved in the attack on Todac, though he gave a very different account of what happened: ‘Yes, I have just been told by Amir Ahmed Dudu now that armed Dinka Ngok supported by the SPLA camouflaged [as] police in... Goli, Todac, Di[f]fra and in the surrounding areas have since last week started putting unnecessary check points and stopping herders from taking their cattle further south.’<sup>14</sup>

His account of the clashes is inconsistent with eyewitness reports, but it does indirectly confirm the participation of Mezaghna section, one of the main Missiriya groups that pass through Abyei. The Mezaghna have historically taken a central route through the territory, and have done their dry season grazing in Abyei itself, some twelve miles east of Abyei Town. Ian Cunnison, the noted ethnographer of the Missiriya, testified at the PCA that ‘the Mezaghna ‘omodiyya [section] spent more time, and more continuous time, in the Bahr (142 days) than in any other of the four main areas of Dar Humr [The traditional grazing areas of the Humr].’<sup>15</sup> They have the most to lose if the Missiriya are blocked from grazing in Abyei, and seem to have taken a leading role in the current militias. Acuil Akol also claimed that Awlad Umran, another section of the ‘Ajaira centrally concerned with Abyei, led by Hasan Musa, also played a role in the attacks. Awlad Umran's historic grazing route takes them from Muglad through Abyei to Mayom and Abiemnom counties in Unity state.

Earlier last year, SPLM officers in South Kordofan claimed that the NCP was arming the Missiriya, channelling 12.7mm anti-aircraft guns and anti-tank weapons through a leader of the Awlad Umran. There have, however, been no conclusive reports linking Awlad Umran with the attacks.

Since mid-2010, Missiriya leaders claim that NCP officials have been actively recruiting among their nomadic communities. In July 2010 the NCP reportedly opened two training camps above Abyei Town, in Dedab and Meiram. As was noted in a previous Small Arms Survey publication,<sup>16</sup> ‘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 elders claim that Khartoum is motivating the new recruits by telling them that Abyei is Missiriya territory.



Since the CPA, the SPLM claim the PDF have been reorganized and equipped with SAF trucks, motorcycles, 12.7mm machine guns, 82mm mortars, and small arms: reports that are consistent with what witnesses report being used during the February–March clashes. The Small Arms Survey has also obtained confidential military documents that confirm that Missiriya militias are receiving weapons from the central government. One document, dated October–November 2008, lists the following weapons delivered to the Missiriya Humr: 600 AK-47s, 27 7.62mm machine guns, and six 66mm and 75mm mortars<sup>17</sup> to Muhammad Omar al Ansari, a member of the small Dar Omashaiba section, a sub-section of Awlad Kamil, and then-leader of the now-defunct Abyei Liberation Front.<sup>18</sup> These armaments are similar in type to what was used in the February–March clashes in Abyei.

In sum: since 2010, the NCP has been supplying the Missiriya militias with weapons, reorganizing and training them. They then used these weapons in the attacks carried out in Abyei in the first three months of 2011, while receiving SAF support. They are now supporting SAF in the occupation of Abyei.

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<sup>1</sup> See <<http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/pdfs/facts-figures/abyei/HSBA-Abyei.pdf>>.  
<sup>2</sup> Section 1.4 of the Abyei Road Map states: ‘With the deployment of the new JIU battalion and police force in the area, and resumption of their duties, SAF and SPLA troops shall be redeployed beyond the Abyei administrative area as per the attached map.’  
<sup>3</sup> According to the CPA, the 1956 border between the northern and provinces of Sudan should provide the basis for the border between the two states everywhere *except* in Abyei, whose borders were to be determined by the Abyei Boundaries Commission. Recent NCP insistence that the 1956 border means that Abyei belongs to the north is not supported by prior agreements between the SPLM and NCP.  
<sup>4</sup> The Abyei Administration reports that three civilians were killed in the village of Majak in the east of Abyei on 1 June as they returned to collect their belongings.  
<sup>5</sup> Satellite Sentinel Project. 2011. *Burned to the Ground: Evidence of Potential War Crimes and the intentional Destruction of Abyei Town by the Government of Sudan*. 28 May.  
<sup>6</sup> Satellite Sentinel Project. 2011. *Flashpoint: Abyei*. 4 March.  
<sup>7</sup> Satellite Sentinel Project. 2011. *Range of Attack: Deployment of SAF Attack Helicopters, Tanks Near Abyei*. 7 April.  
<sup>8</sup> Satellite Sentinel Project. 2011. *Abyei Incursion: Evidence of Northern-Aligned Forces Deployed to Abyei Region*, Sudan. 22 March.  
<sup>9</sup> A technical is an improvised military vehicle; in Abyei, technicals are normally pick-up trucks or Land Cruisers fitted with a 12.7mm machine gun.  
<sup>10</sup> Satellite Sentinel Project. 2011. *Flashpoint: Abyei*. 4 March.  
<sup>11</sup> The Missiriya are divided into two main sections, the Humr and the Zuruq. It is the Humr who are centrally concerned with Abyei. The Humr are divided into two main sections, known as *gabily*: the ‘Ajaira and Felaita. These sections are divided further into sub-sections. These sub-sections are also referred to as *gabily*, but they are also called ‘*omodiyya*, an administrative term referring to the group under one ‘*omda*, or leader. The ‘Ajaira are composed of the Fayyarin, Awlad Kamil, Mezaghna, Fadhliya, and Awlad Umran ‘*omodiyya*. The leadership of the Abyei Liberation Front, which emerged in 2008 after Edward Lino was elected SPLM Chairman for the Abyei Administration, is from a subsection of Awlad Kamil. The Abyei Liberation Front, and Shahama, which emerged in 2004, were two of the most stridently military of the organizations to emerge post-war. Both are now defunct.  
<sup>12</sup> The PDF began as militia forces during the second civil war, and were used with devastating effect in Abyei, where they depopulated the northern part of the territory, targeting civilians and property. They were formalized as a legal entity called the PDF in November 1989, however membership lapsed,

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and at present it is uncertain how many of the militia fighters active in Abyei are actually PDF fighters, and how many are armed irregulars. For further details on the PDF see

<<http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/pdfs/HSBA-SWP-10-Paramilitary-Revolution.pdf>>.

<sup>13</sup> During a security meeting in 2009, figures for the whole of South Kordofan varied between 27,000 and 47,000 PDF. Wour Majake, a spokesman for the SPLM in Abyei, claims that in the run-up to the referendum over 2,000 PDF fighters were mobilized to settle in the north of Abyei.

<sup>14</sup> Sudan Tribune. 2011. 'Abyei Clashes Leave 10 Dead.' 27 February.

<sup>15</sup> Government of Sudan Memorial, PCA. 2008. Witness Statement of Professor Ian Cunnison. 3 December 2008. p. 190. *Dar Humr* literally means the land of the Humr.

<sup>16</sup> See <<http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/pdfs/facts-figures/armed-groups/three-areas/HSBA-Armed-Groups-Abyei.pdf>>.

<sup>17</sup> The Small Arms Survey is unaware of any mortars of this caliber.

<sup>18</sup> Military activity among the Missiriya now seems to have bifurcated into fighters connected to the PDF, and anti-government movements now connected to JEM.