



Armed Groups in South Kordofan

The Sudan Armed Forces (SAF)

Under the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended 21 years of civil war, SAF was required to reduce its troops in South Kordofan to pre-war levels—one battalion, or 800–900 men. Today SAF acknowledges three divisions of approximately 13,000 men each—the 5th Division in Kadugli, the 14th in Dilling, and the 10th in what was West Kordofan¹—for a total of approximately 40,000 troops, according to an estimate of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA). SAF divisions are composed of four brigades; each brigade includes four battalions of four companies of approximately 200 men.

The SPLA reports a fourth ‘ghost’ division deployed in South Kordofan in 2008–09 and composed of four scattered brigades—one in Abu Gibeha, another in Toroji, and two at Kharasana, a locality close to the oilfields of Unity State and traversed by the Heglig–Port Sudan oil pipeline. They also report an ‘independent’ brigade at Liri, south of the capital, Kadugli, with an additional 2,000–3,000 men. They say SAF’s total force in South Kordofan is greater than needed to control the region—greater even than at the height of the jihad against the Nuba in the early 1990s—and speculate that it is to be used ‘to attack the oilfields (across the border in Unity State) in the event of a unilateral decision on secession’ by Southern Sudan.

Among the documents the Small Arms Survey has acquired is an order, dated 7 January 2009, that confirms this increase in SAF forces (in violation of the CPA). The order approves the immediate recruitment, by the 5th Division, of 6,000 new troops ‘to target SPLA personnel in the Nuba Mountains’. A second document of the same date says these ‘national forces’ will target ‘armed movements such as the [Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLM)] so as to discipline them and make nationalism grow in them to defend the country and the legitimate ruling authority’, an apparent reference to the National Congress Party (NCP) of President Omar al Bashir, at the time the SPLM’s partner in a national unity government.

SPLA sources claim that the SAF forces, reportedly divided among more than 100 garrisons, are armed with artillery, 120 mm and 130 mm mortars, D-30s (122 mm howitzers), T-55 tanks, anti-tank guns mounted on Land Cruisers, and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). A document dated 15 January 2009 suggests that SAF has even heavier weaponry. Marked ‘Strictly Confidential’, it requests the following items for the 5th 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)
- 50 SAM-7 shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles.



A separate document, of the same date, confirms dispatch of the seven items. Accompanying ammunition includes 4,000 12.7 mm rounds, 2,000 RPG shells, and 400 hand grenades.

Joint Integrated Units (JIUs)

The JIUs were established under the terms of the CPA as a force that could provide the core of a new national army should the South's self-determination referendum indicate a desire for unity. In the meantime it was envisaged that they would act as a source of stability deployed, in large part, in former areas of conflict. They were also given the role of oilfield security. During the six-year interim period between the CPA and the South's referendum, the JIUs were to be created with equal numbers from SAF and the SPLA—in South Kordofan, 6,000 men from the two forces.

The JIUs in South Kordofan are headquartered in Kadugli, with battalions in Buram, Dilling, Heiban, Kadugli, Karkaria, Kurchi, Talodi, and Um Sirdiba, according to the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). UNMIS monitors have had difficulty accessing the JIUs to verify the size and weaponry but believe that SAF forces in the JIUs have access to all SAF arms—including artillery—while their SPLA counterparts do not. SPLA officers say SAF has double the permitted number of JIU troops, the vast majority of them not integrated with the SPLA.

Popular Defence Forces (PDF)

Since the signing of the CPA, the future of the PDF, and its relationship with SAF, has been contested. Still described as a force of *mujahideen* (holy warriors), the PDF has continued to exist as a military and civilian network to mobilize militia auxiliaries throughout Sudan, in contravention of the CPA. It was a main vehicle of the jihad in the Nuba Mountains and today has active units in Darfur and the Transitional Areas—especially in South Kordofan (formerly known as Nuba Mountains).

Estimates of PDF strength in South Kordofan range up to 20,000. SPLA officers say the strength is impossible to determine but, critically, the force, once mixed, is today almost exclusively Arab. Many Nuba who fought for the PDF² in the civil war put out feelers to the SPLA after the CPA was signed, prompting SAF to collect weapons from non-Arab tribes (primarily Nuba, Hausa, and Fellata). SPLA sources say many of the weapons were re-assigned to the Arab Hawazma tribe, cattle herders competing for land with the indigenous Nuba. Since 2005, the PDF has been re-organized and expanded, given SAF trucks, motorcycles, and weapons including G3 and AK-47 assault rifles, 60 mm and 82 mm mortars, RPGs, and 12.7 mm heavy machine guns. The SPLA believes some PDF barracks also have artillery.

The documents obtained by the Small Arms Survey show large arms transfers to the PDF in South Kordofan. A November 2008 order from the chief of the Joint Staff, Lt.-Gen. Mohamed Abdul-Gadir Nasruddin, authorizes a shipment of 'weapons, ammunition and other military equipment' to PDF command posts. A second shipment followed two months later, on 29 January, upon approval of a request from 'the Maj. Gen. Commander of the PDF' for almost 200,000 guns—100,000 AKM



assault rifles, 50,000 G3 assault rifles and 30,000 PKM light machine guns. Lt.-Gen. Nasruddin stresses the need for ‘precautions as to the confidentiality of the information and documents’.

SPLA officers list the most important PDF barracks in South Kordofan as:

- Kadugli, the headquarters of the force in the region.
- Abu Gibeha
- Talodi
- Abu Kershola
- Um Burumbita
- Al Fayd
- Lagawa
- Hamra
- Abu Safifa
- Dilling
- Habila
- Kalogi
- Rashad

and in the former West Kordofan, the oldest and biggest PDF recruitment bases among the Missiriya, the second main cattle-herding tribe in the state:

- Fula
- Babanusa
- Muglad.

Several of the documents obtained by the Small Arms Survey convey government concern over morale in the PDF. One, signed by Defence Minister Abdul Rahim Mohamed Hussein, dated 10 January 2009 and headed ‘Appeal’, ‘instructs’ the ‘PDF commander in the western sector’ to ‘get back all those who joined the SPLM [...] whether in the south, Nuba Mountains or elsewhere [...] to defend their religion and their Arabism’. A second, dated 2 February 2009, refers specifically to the Abu Jebha barracks and ‘intentions by the PDF to join the SPLA with all their weapons under the leadership of 35 commanders’. It says the reason is ‘low morale since some commanders have not been given the officer salaries of those who graduated recently’.

Tribal militias

The SPLA leadership in South Kordofan says tribal militias are today strongest in the western part of South Kordofan—especially in the areas of Abu Junuk, Karko, Mandal, and Sebai—where Nuba and Missiriya Zuruq live in close proximity and compete for resources, including land.

In addition to Arab militias, South Kordofan is home to a small number of Nuba militias, including in the following areas:

- Shatt Dammam, where more than 1,200 men are led by Kafi Tayyara, a longtime collaborator of Sudanese Military Intelligence.
- Tegali, in the east of the state, where a similar number are active.



An offensive in May 2009 by the NCP–SPLA partnership of South Kordofan Governor Ahmad Haroun (indicted by the International Criminal Court in May 2007 for war crimes allegedly committed in Darfur) and Deputy Governor Abdel Aziz Adam al Hilu has reportedly removed the armed threat posed in South Kordofan by the Shanabla, landless camel nomads from North Kordofan accused of looting and kidnapping children on their migrations across South Kordofan. Al Hilu claims the joint offensive against the Shanabla ‘destroyed’ a ‘criminal tribal mafia’ that had gone as far as to enlist women in coffee shops to inform on the movements of cars and trucks.

Central Reserve Police (CRP)

A gendarmerie under the Interior Ministry originally set up for riot control, the Central Reserve Police has expanded hugely in South Kordofan since the CPA was signed, increasing from a few dozen men in Kadugli, armed only with pistols and AK-47s, to more than 7,000 in 2009, according to a government document dated 21 February 2009. (In 2007, SPLA officers estimated the force’s size at 2,000 men, an apparent under-estimate.) Nuba monitors assigned to UNMIS say the CRP receives military training and weapons in SAF barracks. They say the weapons include 82 mm mortars, RPGs, 12.7 mm heavy machine guns, light machine guns, Fagot (also known as Spigot and AT-4) anti-tank guided missiles, and artillery up to and including 120 mm. Weapons including 130 mm mortars and 105 mm anti-tank guns can reportedly be obtained from SAF.

SPLA officers say key locations are Abbasiya and Khor Dilib.

The Sudan Police Force

Before the CPA was signed, the police force in the Nuba Mountains region was armed only with AK-47 assault rifles. Since the CPA, Khartoum’s police have acquired a range of weapons, including grenades, 60 mm and 120 mm mortars, and heavy machine guns. Documents issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 3 February 2009 authorize the issue of:

- 5,000 12.7 mm heavy machine guns and 100,000 boxes of ammunition
- 2,000 PKM light machine guns and 50,000 boxes of ammunition
- 500 rocket-propelled grenades and 30,000 boxes of shells
- 40,000 AK-47 assault rifles and 100,000 boxes of ammunition
- 2,000 G3 assault rifles and 50,000 boxes of ammunition
- 1,000 82 mm mortars and 20,000 boxes of shells
- 1,000 60 mm and 75 mm mortars and 20,000 boxes of shells

In an interview conducted in 2007, the SPLM police chief, Lt.-Col. Abdel Hafiz Hussein, told the Small Arms Survey that senior police officers answering to Khartoum had refused joint training with the SPLA, in violation of the CPA. His claim is confirmed in a document dated 18 December 2008 and headed ‘Police Integration Process’. Sent by Defence Minister Hussein to the director general of police, it says:



In case of integration of SPLA personnel as officers, NCOs or men, the following must be observed:

1. Do not put integrated forces in decision-making positions.
2. The process of integration must be slow and cumbersome [...] in order to avoid (inculcating) destructive secular ideas into our forces.
3. Training should be carried out in isolation, avoiding mixing them with other new forces.

The Popular Police

A paramilitary reserve force composed largely of Islamist volunteers, the Popular Police decreased in size after the CPA was signed but by 2007 was expanding again. Before the CPA, the Popular Police had no means of transport; after the CPA, it had bicycles and Land Cruisers. The volunteers get training from SAF, for a period up to 28 days.

The Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA)

The CPA required the SPLA in South Kordofan to move across the (still unconfirmed) 1956 North–South border into South Sudan. UNMIS maintains that only 27 per cent of SPLA fighters have left the state, a claim the SPLA deputy governor of South Kordofan, Abdel Aziz Adam al Hilu, vigorously disputes. He says the UNMIS percentage was calculated using the highest of several figures given by the SPLA and was based on a single visit to the main relocation site at Lake Abiad—ignoring the fact that ‘the SPLA is one army and one command and anyone can be transferred anywhere’. Al Hilu says two Nuba brigades have joined the SPLA’s 4th Division in Bentiu, in oil-rich Unity State, and several thousand others have been transferred to the SPLA chairman’s headquarters in Equatoria. He claims that the remainder—approximately 10,000 men—are at Lake Abiad.

UNMIS officers in South Kordofan at the time of the main redeployment in 2007 said they believed ‘the main backbone’ of the SPLA had moved to Lake Abiad. (One UNMIS commander said there had not, to his knowledge, been any corresponding SAF withdrawal from his team site.) A confidential report from the commander of the 5th Division in Kadugli two years later, in February 2009, estimated the size of the force at Lake Abiad then at 8,000, armed only with AK-47 and G3 assault rifles. The report said morale was ‘low’: the men were poorly supplied by the SPLA in the South and received ‘irregular donations’ in place of salaries.

There is continual movement across the 1956 line as isolated Nuba at the inhospitable Lake Abiad site visit their home villages and, distrusting the JIUs, move to be able to respond to perceived threats. A letter from the general director of police to the head of Khartoum’s Military Intelligence, also dated February 2009, claimed that SPLA troops were causing ‘security instability’ in South Kordofan with ‘weapons and hand grenades and other weapons’.



The SPLA Police

The SPLA Police in South Kordofan suffer both from a lack of support from the Government of Southern Sudan and from the refusal of the Khartoum government to permit joint training. The force is understaffed, underequipped, undertrained, and, in many places, even lacks uniforms.

Darfur militias (North Kordofan)

In mid-2010, more than 2,000 Darfurians arrived in el Obeid in North Kordofan (and Damazin in Blue Nile). When challenged, Defence Minister Hussein said the Darfurians, mostly members of the northern Rizeigat tribes that form the core of the government-supported ‘janjaweed’ militias, had been sent ‘for training’ and would return to Darfur ‘in time’. Senior SPLA officers say the Darfurians were moved to Kordofan to counter a perceived threat from the Darfur Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), which they say has recruited Kordofan youths ‘in big numbers’. Government documents repeatedly speak of fears that JEM has attempted ‘to transfer its conflict to South Kordofan’.

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¹ West Kordofan was merged into South Kordofan under the CPA.
² For example, in the PDF garrisons in Mendi and Meiram.