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## Popular Defence Forces (al Difa'a al Shaabi)

Until the emergence of the Border Intelligence Brigade, the Popular Defence Force (PDF), formed in 1989 as a dedicated Islamist militia, was the main instrument for mobilization in Darfur, sending tens of thousands of Darfurians to fight against southern rebels.

In most parts of Sudan today, the PDF is an inactive reserve force to the regular army. It remains operational in areas of active conflict like Darfur and Southern Kordofan. In addition—especially in Kordofan, but also in Darfur—it plays a major role in the distribution of weapons to, and military training for, tribal militias.

When rebellion was declared in Darfur in 2003, the PDF was the first paramilitary force to be mobilized. A United Nations report made public in January 2004 said army headquarters asked local government officials to mobilize and recruit PDF forces through tribal leaders and sheikhs. One tribal leader told an International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur that ‘in July 2003 the State called on tribal leaders for help. We called on our people to join PDF. They responded by joining, and started taking orders from the Government as part of the State military apparatus.’<sup>1</sup>

The UN Panel of Experts on Sudan has reported that PDF recruits come under regular army command once integrated into the regular army for operations, and normally wear the same uniform as the unit into which they are inducted.

In March 2011, in an address at Omdurman Islamic University, the governor of Khartoum state, Abdel Rahman al Khidir, said the PDF continued to play a key role in deterring security threats from internal opponents of the regime. In a practical demonstration of that claim, according to rebel leaders in Darfur, three battalions of PDF were dispatched to North and South Darfur early in 2011 to spearhead an offensive against the armed movements east of Jebel Marra. The PDF units were said to be answerable to the governor of North Darfur, Osman Kibr.

In his address, Al Khidir set the number of the paramilitary force at 37,000, considerably lower than many independent estimates. It is impossible to confirm the size of the PDF in Darfur today—not least because the line with other forces is blurred: at the start of the Darfur insurgency, for example, PDF and the Border Guards both received training at the Misteriha barracks in North Darfur and went on operations together. The Borders Guards were the elite, with military identity cards and (in theory) monthly salaries. The PDF received uniforms, guns, ammunition, and food, but no salaries. At the height of the war they received SDG 100 (approximately USD 40) per operation.

Documents received and authenticated by the Small Arms Survey show that weapons sent to the PDF in 2009 included 12- and 40-barrel rocket launchers, Howitzer shells, D-30 shells, 100 mm and 130 mm artillery shells and portable, shoulder-fired SA-7 surface-to-air missiles (several of which have found their way into the hands of the armed opposition movements in Darfur).

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<sup>1</sup> See <[http://www.un.org/News/dh/sudan/com\\_inq\\_darfur.pdf](http://www.un.org/News/dh/sudan/com_inq_darfur.pdf)>.