Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)

Origins/Composition
Established early in 2003 by a group of educated, politically experienced Darfurians, many of them former members of the Popular Congress Party (PCP) of Hassan Turabi, architect of Sudan’s Islamic revolution. Most of its leaders and membership initially came from the Kobe tribe, a Zaghawa sub-group more numerous in Chad than in Darfur. Since 2007, JEM has worked actively to recruit Darfurian Arabs, including from government-supported militias or ‘janjaweed’.

Leadership
JEM’s chairman is Dr. Khalil Ibrahim, a Dutch-trained doctor, devout Islamist and superb organizer feared by the government because of his inside knowledge of the regime, in which he held a number of important posts before 2003, including as an organizer of the paramilitary Popular Defense Forces (PDF). From the outset, JEM had a strategy for nationwide reform and regime change, using the atrocities in Darfur to delegitimize the Khartoum government internationally. It refused to sign the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in May 2006, and two years later won new popular support in Darfur after attacking Khartoum’s twin city, Omdurman. Despite a broadening of its base, real political and military power remains with a Kobe inner circle.

Areas of control/activity
JEM suffered two major reversals early in 2010. In February, rapprochement between Chad and Sudan forced it to move its logistics and rear base out of Chad. In April, a sustained government offensive drove JEM out of its main base in the Jebel Mun mountains, near the Chad border. Scattering its forces and commanders as it grew, JEM established two main areas of activity and control—south-west and east of the Jebel Marra mountains, and along the Darfur/Kordofan border east of Adila. A UN report in June said JEM had succeeded in moving ‘from Jebel Mun to locations including El Daein, Adila, Umm Sauna, Abu Darmilla (in South Darfur) and Babanosa in South Kordofan, possibly a current headquarters.’

After a subsequent reversal, in which both JEM and the government sustained heavy losses, Khalil Ibrahim reportedly told a group of his fighters in the Libyan town of Sirte on 18 July that some fighters who had received training in Israel would deploy to a new strategic, fortified location in Darfur within a month.

JEM is estimated to have more than 5,000 men armed with mounted anti-aircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenades, heavy machine guns, AK-47s, several hundred vehicles (and possibly as many as 1,000, according to one informed source), and at least two tanks confiscated from the government in the fighting in South Darfur.

Government authorities in South Kordofan say JEM is stepping up its activities there, recruiting among Missiriya Arabs, and is believed to have a training camp between Muglad and Abyei.
Sources of financing/support
Chad, JEM’s main backer early in the insurgency, reportedly re-armed the group before expelling it into Darfur in February 2010. In addition to its Chadian ‘severance package’, JEM has been generously financed by supporters in the Zaghawa and Islamist diaspora—especially by Arab Islamists sympathetic to the PCP who were expelled from Sudan, and lost many of their assets there, after Sudan’s Islamist movement split in 1999 and Turabi was stripped of all his power. It claims to have seized significant amounts of weaponry, including a tank and dozens of vehicles, from government forces in May–June fighting in South Darfur.

Status
In May 2010, the Sudan government asked Interpol to arrest Ibrahim and simultaneously attacked JEM forces in Darfur, accusing them of moving out of agreed locations. Chad refused to allow Ibrahim to transit to Darfur and sent him to Libya. The Sudan government requested Ibrahim's expulsion from Libya, and says Col. Muammar Quaddafi agreed—but quickly reneged. JEM withdrew from peace talks in Doha, accusing Khartoum of not seeking peace. It is by far the most powerful, organized force in Darfur, and Khartoum may have miscalculated in seeking to humble it on the battlefield. The African Union/United Nations Hybrid operation in Darfur (UNAMID) predicts increasing attacks on commercial vehicles and UNAMID supply convoys in Darfur as JEM, on the run, seeks fuel and other provisions.

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