Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW)

Origins/Composition
The SLA, initially composed largely of members of the Fur and Zaghawa tribes, has split into a dozen factions, initially along tribal lines, and continues to fragment. In taking up arms, the Fur, the near-totality of SLA-AW adherents today, were motivated largely by Arab attacks on the fertile Jebel Marra mountains and surrounding valleys. The founders of the SLA supported the democratic, decentralized ‘New Sudan’ advocated by the southern Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA).

Leadership
Abdul Wahid Mohamed al Nur, the original chairman of the SLA, is a Khartoum-educated lawyer. His erratic, micromanaging style of leadership, combined with his failure to establish institutions and since 2006 his self-exile in Paris, has encouraged splits and desertions—even among his closest collaborators—and early in 2010 led to factional fighting in and around Jebel Marra. Abdul Wahid has denied the claims of Fur elders and formerly loyal commanders that he ordered the killing of dissidents.

Areas of control/activity
SLA-AW’s control of the periphery of its Jebel Marra stronghold has been tenuous since factional fighting erupted in January 2010 and the group enlisted the support of government-backed Arab tribes with which it had earlier negotiated grazing and other rights. (One source claims Abdul Wahid paid the militia of the Nuwaiba tribe more than USD 1.5 million.) A government offensive against Jebel Marra beginning in March 2010 was contained thanks to support from the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). SLA-AW has little armed presence outside Jebel Marra, with the exception of a pocket in the Korma area to the north, but Abdul Wahid is still an iconic figure for many displaced Fur in camps in Darfur and Chad.

Sources of financing/support
Although the SLA was initially supported by the SPLA and Eritrea, SLA-AW has no foreign backer today. It solicits contributions from Fur in the diaspora and the displaced camps (through a tireless stream of videos, tapes and telephone calls from Abdul Wahid in Paris) and obtains ammunition from two main sources: government soldiers and ‘janjaweed’ and, more recently, JEM.

Status
SLA-AW has refused to participate in any peace talks, anywhere, since rejecting the Darfur Peace Agreement in 2006. On 8 July 2010, however, following the government offensive against Jebel Marra, Abdul Wahid met for the first time with the Qatari State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Ahmed bin Abdalla al Mahmoud, who handles the Darfur file for the peace talks currently hosted by Qatar. After the meeting Abdul Wahid said he had agreed to continue ‘consultations’ with mediators, but not to go to Doha.
The ability of SLA-AW to mount a military offensive is limited by its isolation in Jebel Marra, its deep divisions, and lack of leadership and logistical capacity. Government attacks on Jebel Marra are expected to continue, solidifying the emerging alliance between SLA-AW and JEM.

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