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Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM)

Origins/composition

SLA-MM evolved from a Fur–Zaghawa split in the SLA and is led by members of the Zaghawa tribe who took up arms less to oppose the government in Khartoum than to fight the ‘janjaweed’, their rivals in the lucrative camel trade in North Darfur. The split between Minawi and the Fur leader Abdul Wahid Mohamed al Nur was the first in a series of divisions along tribal lines that fatally weakened the SLA insurgency. It led to personal power struggles that undercut the credibility of the two groups among their own grassroots supporters. By 2011 SLA-MM and SLA-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW)—both much weakened and both under attack by government troops and aircraft—were reportedly considering a new era of cooperation fuelled by the new conflict between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-Northern Sector (SPLM-North) and the Government of Sudan. This culminated in the signing of a formal alliance between SLA-MM, SLA-AW, and SPLM-North on 7 August 2011 under the banner of the Sudan Revolutionary Front Alliance. The parties pledge to join military and political forces to overthrow the National Congress Party and establish a secular, liberal state. The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) was poised to join this agreement as well, but withdrew at the last moment over the issue of a secular state.

Leadership

Before the split in the SLA, Minawi, formerly a primary school teacher, succeeded in controlling the movement’s main military forces despite having no military experience. In May 2006 he signed the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) with the government, becoming senior assistant to President Omar al Bashir and chairman of the Transitional Darfur Regional Authority (TDRA). The positions were nominal and his power negligible. Minawi’s position as senior assistant to the president was not renewed after the general elections of April 2010, and at the end of 2010 he moved from Khartoum to Juba, declaring himself in rebellion again and the DPA dead.

Areas of control/activity

After signing the DPA Minawi had no access to rebel-controlled areas of Darfur, but was able to move freely in government-controlled areas. Most of his forces were divided into companies (approximately 100 men) and stationed in the Zaghawa homeland in North Darfur—around the state capital, al Fasher, and the town of Um Berro—and in a pocket south-east of Nyala, the capital of South Darfur state. In the April elections, which were boycotted by DPA non-signatories, SLA-MM won parliamentary seats in North Darfur (Kutum) and South Darfur (Gereida).

On 3 December 2010, after Minawi’s move to Juba, a Sudanese army spokesman declared that his forces had become a ‘legitimate target’. SLA-MM immediately came under heavy attack in North and South Darfur. Some of Minawi’s men moved into the northern fringe of South Sudan, reportedly after defecting from SLA-MM to JEM.

Minawi’s initial return to rebellion in December 2010 divided his movement into three main groups: one that stayed in Khartoum, negotiating disarmament terms with the government; a second in North Darfur, composed of 70–75 men and 12 vehicles, negotiating an alliance with JEM; and a third, still aligned with Minawi, led by his

Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA)

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longtime chief of staff, Juma Mohamed Hagar, and Mohamadein Osman ‘Aurgajo’, a field commander reputed to have been a *nahab* (highwayman) before the insurgency. With time, a fourth division occurred in Minawi’s ranks. Currently these forces are spread across Wadi Howar; the North Darfur/Chad border; eastern Jebel Marra; and South Kordofan; while there are political liaison units in Juba, South Sudan, and Kampala, Uganda. The factions are currently delineated as follows:

- 1) Mohamadein Osman, last active in Aweinat on the Sudan/Libya border;
- 2) Mohammed Hari Sardogo, based in eastern Jebel Marra;
- 3) Juma Hagar, currently in a camp in Northern Bahr al Ghazal; and
- 4) Abdallah Ahmed Abdiya, active throughout North Darfur.

Sources of financing/support

Until Minawi moved to Juba, many of his men enjoyed government salaries and other benefits stemming from the DPA, including vehicles. The SLA-MM office in Khartoum was subsidized to the tune of USD 1 million per month and SLA-MM fighters received logistical support from the government. In December 2010, however, all support to SLA-MM ceased. Offices, financial assets, and vehicles were seized and Minawi himself was removed as head of the TDRA. Many former loyalists declared themselves against him and made overtures to JEM.

Status

In returning to the armed opposition, SLA-MM has sought to build bridges with other groups to its narrow ethnic Zaghawa base and remain relevant militarily. The blossoming alliance with SLA-AW and SPLM-North is useful step in this direction. But SLA-MM is still seriously divided over the Doha agreement and more generally the national versus Darfur-specific agendas. Some SLA-MM cadres may elect to join the Liberation and Justice Movement rather than continue fighting. Its military command also remains very loose, and is better characterized as four separate commands.

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