

Darfur Armed Opposition Groups

At the military level in the field, all the Darfur rebel factions are cooperating, exhibiting a pragmatic survival instinct that is rallying the disparate militias against their common enemies. The Sudanese government has stepped up hostilities since early 2011, focusing on the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW) stronghold of Jebel Marra and the Zaghawa-held areas of North and South Darfur such as Shangal Tobay, where SLA-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM) draws strength. All rebel parties, including the Zaghawa dominant movements, agree on the protection of the Fur stronghold of Jebel Marra—a rare point of unanimous agreement among the groups.

The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and SLA-MM continue to dominate militarily. Already highly organized, JEM had been able to channel Libyan aid due to its former presence in Tripoli. SLA-MM has stockpiled supplies from its time in the Sudanese government but continues to be plagued by internal divisions. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and Uganda have stepped up support for the opposition in recent months, but not at the level of Libyan (or formerly Chadian) support to JEM. SLA-AW's area of control has been diminished by the GoS offensives of the last year. Both SLA-MM and SLA-AW derived inadvertent benefit from the GoS attacks, however, as the government's strategy of targeting civilians created new rebel recruits from among the displaced. Rebels have also captured Sudanese military material.

The current phase of the conflict began with Minni Minawi's about-face and rejection of the Abuja Agreement in December 2010, which pushed him back into rebellion, triggering a new cycle of violence as the government pursued his forces and their affiliated ethnic populations. Beginning in December, North Darfur Governor Osman Kibbir launched an offensive against towns where SLA-MM had a presence. First the rebels were targeted, but then the focus shifted to the Zaghawa population. The Government of Sudan (GoS) armed and encouraged non-Zaghawa ethnic groups living with the Zaghawa to expel them, with exhortations to reclaim their land from 'the new settlers'. Much of the new displacement in Darfur from March to June 2011 was a result of this purge and the indiscriminate aerial bombardment of Jebel Marra. A particularly egregious case of anti-Zaghawa killing occurred in Abu Zerega, close to the North Darfur capital of El Fasher. The perpetrators, as in other attacks on Zaghawa, were non-Arab militias, specifically Tunjur and some Birgid. These fighters even attacked Zaghawa members of a government investigative committee on a fact-finding mission to the area. Both SLA-MM and SLA-AW fought against government forces around these towns, capturing vehicles, arms, and ammunition. Among the displaced, many of those of fighting age joined the SLA-MM rather than move to IDP camps.

On 13 November 2011, SLA-MM, SLA-AW, JEM, and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) formed a coalition named the [Sudan Revolutionary Front \(SRF\)](#). While aspiring to be a unified political structure, the SRF is, at this stage, more a coalition of military forces with broad agreement on a political vision, which loses cohesion when individual members are probed. Its main platform is the need for a geographically comprehensive peace process and the further unification of all Sudanese opposition forces. SRF's longer-term goal seems to be recreating an umbrella group, reminiscent of John Garang's National Democratic Alliance (NDA) under its leadership.



Negotiations over alliances with various Northern opposition political parties are ongoing. The Communist Party is historically and ideologically closest to SPLM-N, and thus its most reliable ally. Splinters from the Popular Congress Party and Umma National Party have also signed agreements with the SRF.

The Darfurian components of the SRF have pledged not to enter into armed hostilities with the LJM, a signatory of the [Doha Document for Peace in Darfur \(DDPD\)](#), allaying fears of a repeat of the intra-Darfurian fighting that characterized the period following the partial signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement in 2006.

On 20 February 2012, the SRF announced its new leadership structure. Malik Agar and Abdul Aziz al Hilu, both SPLM-N leaders, were named chairman and deputy chairman respectively. The leaders of the three constituent Darfur movements—JEM, SLA-MM, and SLA-AW—were each given a vice-presidency. The Darfur movements contested Agar’s leadership but with the backing of the Government of South Sudan, now crucial to the Darfur movements and the SRF, his mandate was secured.

The activity of Darfurian components of the SRF outside Darfur in coordination with SPLM-N is varied. JEM is by far the most active and has managed to significantly increase its troop numbers through local recruitment in Blue Nile and South Kordofan. JEM essentially has two separate commands; one based out of Kauda, South Kordofan, the other geographically far removed in its traditional north Darfur bastion of Wadi Howar. SLA-MM claims to have participated in some attacks against SAF forces in Northern Kordofan but is far less active than JEM. SLA-AW remains limited in its operations to Darfur, specifically around the environs of Jebel Marra.

Other Darfur armed movements are entering SRF’s orbit. The smaller SLA-Unity, led by Abdalla Yahya, has also been active in some of the SRF’s military operations although Yahya has not agreed to a full integration into the SRF. Frustrated by this, some lower level commanders have left SLA-Unity, either to join SRF or JEM. SLA-Justice (now known as the Democratic Sudan Liberation Movement, DSLM), a splinter of LJM led by Ali Kerubino, has joined JEM and, by extension, SRF. JEM’s Ahmed Hussein disclosed this when he announced that SLM-Unity and DSLM took part in the 19 April attack on Kharasan, near Heglig.

Ahmed Abdel Shafi (recently defected from LJM), and Mohamed Bahr Hamadein (from a JEM splinter group) have both signalled their interest in joining the alliance. Hamadein’s decision depends on prospects for an agreement for his movement in Doha. Should progress continue to be stalled, the SRF will become a more appealing option, although his quarrel with JEM remains an obstacle.

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