



Armed Entities in South Kordofan

With just weeks left before South Sudan declares its independence, there has been an intensification of Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) activity in South Kordofan. Increased militarization comes at a time when relations between the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) are approaching breaking point, following the SAF invasion of Abyei on 20–21 May 2011. A detailed account of the current military standoff in Abyei can be found in a separate Small Arms Survey report, 'Militarization in Abyei'.¹

The situation in South Kordofan is also tense, with SAF giving the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) an ultimatum of 1 June to remove all their troops from Blue Nile and South Kordofan states. As of the end of May, Malik Agar, the governor of Blue Nile, said that Northern forces had moved dangerously close to the bases of Southern aligned fighters. Observers worry that one incident could set off a much wider conflagration.

Sudan Armed Forces (SAF)

The number of SAF troops in South Kordofan is highly contested. As a result of an adjustment of forces in 2009, there are officially just two SAF divisions in the state: the 14th Division in Kadugli (formerly the site of the 5th Division, now in el Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan state), and the 15th Division in Muglad, in former Western Kordofan (which merged into South Kordofan in 2005). In addition, there are four brigades present in the state: the 53rd Brigade in Abu Jebeha, the 54th Brigade in Dilling, the 55th Brigade in Babanua, and the 56th Brigade in Heglig. In total, there are officially approximately 20,000 troops in South Kordofan.

SPLA officials claim that all four brigades have the strength of divisions and report a fifth 'independent' brigade in Liri, for a total of nearly 55,000 troops in the state—more than is needed to control the state, SPLM officials say, and more than there were at the height of the war in South Kordofan in the early 1990s.²

One of the guiding principles in the debate on security arrangements during Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) negotiations was that the downsizing of all forces to acceptable peacetime levels should begin at the start of the interim period. In line with this, the SPLM believes that SAF must reduce its presence in South Kordofan to pre-war levels—one battalion of approximately 800 men.³ The Sudanese government refutes this argument, citing a clause in the CPA that allows it to deploy forces in the North 'as it sees fit'.

In the six years since the signing of the CPA, the SPLM/A claims that government forces in South Kordofan have been increased rather than downsized—including, since late 2010, the presence of tanks around Abyei and in the oil fields of Unity state. A senior SPLA representative on the Joint Defence Board, which has been surveying the border forces, claims that Khartoum is 'preparing for war all the way along the border' and has deployed tanks, 40-barrel Katyusha rocket launchers, B-10 anti-tank recoilless rifles, and 120mm mortars. The reported build-up is said to have begun in the final months of 2010.



In the run-up to SAF's occupation of Abyei in May, independent observers had reported unexplained military movements in Kadugli and north of Abyei in the former Western Kordofan, another location where the SPLM claimed SAF forces were gathering. Satellite images showed transport trucks depositing four tanks at Kharasana, due east of Abyei, early in March, and a dozen more tanks on flatbeds south on the road to Dilling some days later. They also showed a new fortified camp near Abyei.

The last three months has also seen an increased presence of armoured vehicles at Muglad, the base of the 15th division, where a new fuel storage facility was completed by the end of March. Satellite imagery from 28 March, published by the Satellite Sentinel Project (SSP), showed heavy equipment transporters and nine tanks consonant with T-55's. The same satellite imagery also showed the presence of two helicopters consistent with Mi-24 Hind Gunships.

There have been improvements in the SAF base at Heglig. Satellite imagery taken in mid-February showed a new firebase with two artillery pieces a few miles south of the oilfield. The guns were positioned around the base, pointing south. In May the SAF forces at Heglig were reinforced with armoured vehicles and heavy trucks.

Imagery from Kharasana shows one base in the centre of the town with about 20–25 military-style tents, eight other structures, an encircling fortification wall believed to be a dirt berm,⁴ and two howitzer-type artillery guns. Comparison with images from 2006 suggests little overall change, despite the SPLA's claims that the forces in Kharasana have doubled in size. Satellite imagery from May shows four tanks consistent with T-55's, which were first identified by the SSP in March.

Analysts are not suggesting that the satellite photographs necessarily show the full extent of SAF forces in South Kordofan. The imagery confirms the Small Arms Survey's finding (first reported in December 2010) that some SAF units in the central Nuba Mountains area are breaking down into smaller units, increasing the difficulty of head counts. In addition, the SSP itself has covered only about 20 per cent of the state. The publicity that accompanied the launch of the project makes it likely that armies on both sides of the border will have taken steps to hide their capabilities.

In some areas, garrisons have been run down (most frequently from companies to platoons) and troops concentrated in fewer, more strategic locations outside towns. In other areas, small garrisons are being reactivated and strengthened. Troops have occupied schools and health clinics in a number of Nuba villages.

These troops are heavily armed. SPLA sources claim that SAF troops, reportedly divided among more than 100 garrisons, are armed with artillery, 120 mm mortars, D-30s (122 mm howitzers), T-55 tanks, anti-tank guns mounted on Land Cruisers, and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). A document dated 15 January 2009 suggests that SAF has even heavier weaponry. Marked 'Strictly Confidential', it requests the following items for the Kadugli division:



- 2,000 40-barrel rocket launchers;
- 1,000 12-barrel rocket launchers;
- 1,000 howitzer shells;
- 1,000 D-30 shells;
- 1,000 artillery shells (100 mm);
- 600 artillery shells (130 mm); and
- 50 SA-7 shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles.

A separate document of the same date confirms the dispatch of the seven types of weapons and ammunition. Other accompanying ammunition includes 4,000 12.7 mm rounds, 2,000 RPG shells, and 400 hand grenades.

Joint Integrated Units

The CPA established the Joint Integrated Units (JIUs) to provide the core of a new national army in the event that Southerners voted to remain in a unified Sudan in January 2011. Until then, the JIUs were intended to act as a source of stability, equally divided in terms of personnel between SAF and SPLA and deployed close to the cantonments controlled by the SPLA in the civil war—the so-called ‘goose eggs’ around Julud in the west and Kauda in the east.

There are no JIUs in the two areas where government-supported Arab paramilitaries and militias are especially strong—the former Western Kordofan, incorporated into South Kordofan against the wishes of its predominantly Missiriya Arab population, and eastern areas of the state, where there is chronic conflict between farmers and pastoralists.

The total strength of the JIUs in South Kordofan is 6,000 men—far fewer than the paramilitary and militia forces in the region. Force headquarters are in Kadugli, with units deployed in eight locations—Arit (near Lagawa), Buram, Dilling (Karkaraya village), Heiban, Julud, Kadugli, Talodi, and Um Sirdiba.

Six years after the CPA was signed, the JIUs are neither joint nor integrated. The joint assembly, training, and distribution of arms required by the CPA have not taken place. In most locations, the former enemies are not only in separate barracks, but, with a shortage of vehicles, are separated by as much as a 30-minute walk (in Buram and Talodi, for example). Although all elements within the JIUs are supposed to be funded centrally by the Government of National Unity, there is a disparity in salaries. Senior SAF officers receive benefits not made available to their SPLA counterparts. Some SPLA units (such as in Heiban) say only SAF components receive salaries from the central government.

Monitors have had difficulty accessing the JIUs to verify their size and weaponry, but believe that SAF troops in the JIUs have access to all SAF arms—including artillery.

As tensions rose in South Kordofan in the countdown to the referendum, SAF was reported to be using regular army forces in preference to the JIUs, mistrusting even the SAF components of the JIUs because of their contact with the SPLA. The SAF commander in the Julud unit was replaced and many of his men discharged in 2010



after at least half the SAF contingent voted for the SPLM in the April 2010 general elections. UN and SPLA sources say weapons were removed from some SAF units.

Popular Defence Forces

Since the signing of the CPA, the future of the Popular Defence Forces (PDF) has been contested, as has its relationship with SAF. Still described as a force of mujahideen (holy warriors), the PDF has continued to exist as a military and civilian network to mobilize militia auxiliaries throughout Sudan, in contravention of the CPA. It was a main vehicle of the jihad in the Nuba Mountains, the heart of South Kordofan state, and today has active units in Darfur and the Transitional Areas—especially in South Kordofan.

The size and strength of the PDF in South Kordofan are impossible to ascertain, with much confusion between the paramilitary PDF force formed as a legal entity by decree in November 1989 and pastoralists armed as irregular militias. Force strength figures ranging from 27,000 to 47,000 were cited at a state security meeting in South Kordofan in 2009.

Critically, the PDF, while ethnically mixed during the war years, is today almost exclusively Arab. Many Nuba who fought in the PDF⁵ in the war joined the SPLA after the CPA was signed, prompting SAF to collect weapons from non-Arab tribes (primarily Fellata, Hausa, and Nuba). SPLA sources say that many of the weapons were reassigned to the Arab Hawazma tribe, who are cattle herders competing for land with the indigenous Nuba. The SPLA claims that the PDF has been reorganized and expanded since 2005 and has been given SAF trucks, motorcycles, and weapons, including G3 and AK-47 rifles, 60 mm and 82 mm mortars, RPGs, and 12.7 mm heavy machine guns.

PDF informants say that the force has ‘changed tactics’ in the Nuba region, with fighters melting into their villages wearing civilian clothes. SPLA officers in the Dilling area say the militia is ‘changing policy’ there and distributing weapons to Hawazma Arabs inside Dilling town, apparently in anticipation of a fight for control of urban centres if the Nuba Mountains ceasefire agreed in 2002 collapses.

Documents purporting to come from PDF headquarters in Khartoum, and circulated by the SPLM in January 2011, appear to show the delivery of more than 10,000 sub-machine guns, RPGs, and mortars to the PDF in Kadugli at the end of 2010. Dated 29 December and marked ‘Top Secret’, the documents appear to contain a discrepancy that may cast doubt on their authenticity: two order forms both marked ‘no. 47’ order different consignments—13,250 weapons in one case and 7,500 in the other.

Earlier documents obtained by the Small Arms Survey show large arms transfers to the PDF in South Kordofan in 2008–09, during the militia’s reorganization period. Government officials publicly denounced these documents as fake, but privately acknowledged that arms were distributed. They claimed it was because of information that the Darfur rebels of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) were preparing an offensive in South Kordofan. In October and November 2010, fighting between JEM



and government forces claimed more than 200 lives in the west of the state, providing one explanation for further armament if the most recent documents are proved to be genuine.

In the first batch of such documents, a November 2008 order from the chief of the joint staff, Lt Gen. Mohamed Abdul-Gadir Nasruddin, authorized a shipment of ‘weapons, ammunition and other military equipment’ to PDF command posts. A second shipment followed two months later, on 29 January 2009, upon approval of a request from ‘the Maj. Gen. Commander of the PDF’ for 180,000 firearms—100,000 AKM assault rifles, 50,000 G3 automatic rifles, and 30,000 PKM general-purpose machine guns. Lt Gen. Nasruddin stressed the need for ‘precautions as to the confidentiality of the information and documents’.

Several of the documents express concern over morale in the PDF. One, signed by Defence Minister Hussein, dated 10 January 2009 and headed ‘Appeal’, ‘instructs’ the ‘PDF commander in the western sector’ to ‘get back all those who joined the SPLM ... whether in the south, Nuba Mountains or elsewhere ... to defend their religion and their Arabism’. A second, dated 2 February 2009, refers specifically to the Abu Jebaha barracks and ‘intentions by the PDF to join the SPLA with all their weapons under the leadership of 35 commanders’. It identifies the reason as ‘low morale since some commanders have not been given the officer salaries of those who graduated recently’.

Tribal Militias

Evidence is emerging that weapons have been sent from Khartoum through the eastern part of South Kordofan to government-supported militias in South Sudan. According to sources who have proved reliable in the past, 1,000 AK-47s, 20 Goryunov machine guns, 20 general-purpose PKM machine guns, and 20 Degtyaryov machine guns concealed in lorries carrying onions transited through the Abu Jebaha area to a militia led by Lam Akol in October 2010. The sources said Arabs from South Kordofan had been recruited to serve in the militia and were receiving training in White Nile state.

The SPLA leadership in South Kordofan says tribal militias in South Kordofan itself are strongest in the western part of the state—especially in the areas of Abu Junuk, Karko, Mandal, and Sebai—where Nuba and Missiriya live in close proximity and compete for resources, including land.

In the east of the mountains, armed Arabs from White Nile state are reportedly crossing the state border into South Kordofan and occupying the gum arabic-rich lands east of Abu Jebaha. In addition to Arab militias, South Kordofan is home to a small number of militias led by dissident former SPLA commanders who are exploiting anger over the failure to implement the CPA in the Nuba area, especially as regards development.

- Veteran SPLA commander Telefon Kuku, from Buram, reportedly has more than 1,000 men under arms. At the height of the jihad in the Nuba Mountains in the



1990s, Kuku disagreed with the decision not to surrender and argued for making peace with the Khartoum government. A decade later, after the death of the Nuba leader, Yousif Kuwa, he sought the leadership of the SPLA in South Kordofan and became a fierce critic of Kuwa's eventual successor, Abdel Aziz Adam al Hilu. Kuku is currently under arrest in Juba, accused of mobilizing SPLA troops to fight against the CPA.

- Kafi Tayyara, a longtime collaborator of Sudanese Military Intelligence, has a militia estimated at close to 1,000 men who are blamed for the destruction of 50 churches in the south-west of the Nuba Mountains. Kafi Tayyara left his home town of Shatt Dammam and moved to the regional capital, Kadugli, after local people burned down his house and killed his bodyguard and 200 of his cows in 2009. An estimated 500 of his men equipped with new firearms and uniforms marched through the streets of Kadugli in 2009 after the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted President Bashir, shouting 'Omar Bashir, oyee!' In November 2010, three trucks loaded with ammunition arrived at the army garrison that supports the militia in Shatt Dammam. The SPLA responded by launching a recruitment drive in the area.
- Al Balola Hamid Abdel Bagi, a Hawazma Arab and former army sergeant, has posed as an SPLA commander since 2008 (and promoted himself to brigadier in 2010), recruiting Nuba and Arabs to an armed group named SPLA-2. The group, which has offices in Khartoum, is accused by the SPLA of being supported by the National Intelligence and Security Service to divide and discredit the SPLA—including by ambushing lorries in the east of the Nuba Mountains, Al Balola's home area. Al Balola is currently attempting to organize a force in the far east of South Kordofan, in the predominantly Missiriya Arab area bordering on Darfur.

An offensive in May 2009 by the National Congress Party–SPLA partnership of South Kordofan governor Ahmad Haroun (indicted by the ICC in May 2007 for war crimes allegedly committed in Darfur) and his deputy, Abdel Aziz al Hilu, has reportedly removed the armed threat posed in South Kordofan by the Shanabla, landless camel nomads from North Kordofan accused of kidnapping children and looting on their migrations across South Kordofan. Al Hilu claims that the joint offensive against the Shanabla 'destroyed' a 'criminal tribal mafia' that had gone as far as to enlist women in coffee shops to inform on the movements of cars and trucks.

Central Reserve Police

The Central Reserve Police (CRP), a gendarmerie under the Interior Ministry originally set up for riot control, has expanded hugely in South Kordofan since the CPA was signed, increasing from a few dozen men in Kadugli armed only with pistols and AK-47s to more than 7,000 in 2009, according to a government document dated 21 February 2009. (In 2007 SPLA officers estimated the force's size at 2,000 men, an apparent underestimate.) SPLA monitors assigned to UNMIS say the CRP receives military training and weapons in SAF barracks. They say the weapons include 82 mm mortars, RPGs, 12.7 mm heavy machine guns, light machine guns, Fagot (also known as Spigot and AT-4) anti-tank guided missiles, and artillery up to and including 120 mm. Weapons including 120 mm mortars and 105 mm anti-tank



guns can reportedly be obtained from SAF. SPLA officers say key locations are Abbassiya and Khor Dilib.

Sudan Police Force

Before the CPA was signed, the police force in the Nuba Mountains region was armed only with AK-47 assault rifles. Since the CPA, Khartoum's police have acquired a range of weapons, including grenades, 60 mm and 120 mm mortars, and heavy machine guns. Documents issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 3 February 2009 authorized the issue of:

- 5,000 12.7 mm heavy machine guns and 100,000 boxes of ammunition;
- 2,000 PKM general-purpose machine guns and 50,000 boxes of ammunition;
- 500 RPGs and 30,000 boxes of shells;
- 40,000 AK-47 assault rifles and 100,000 boxes of ammunition;
- 2,000 G3 automatic rifles and 50,000 boxes of ammunition;
- 1,000 82 mm mortars and 20,000 boxes of shells; and
- 1,000 60 mm and 75 mm mortars⁶ and 20,000 boxes of shells.

In an interview conducted in 2007, the SPLM police chief, Lt Col. Abdel Hafiz Hussein, told the Small Arms Survey that senior police officers answering to Khartoum had refused to allow joint training with the SPLA, in violation of the CPA. His claim is confirmed in a document dated 18 December 2008 and headed 'Police Integration Process'. Sent by Defence Minister Hussein to the director general of police, it says:

In case of integration of SPLA personnel as officers, [non-commissioned officers] or men, the following must be observed:

1. *Do not put integrated forces in decision-making positions.*
2. *The process of integration must be slow and cumbersome ... in order to avoid (inculcating) destructive secular ideas into our forces.*
3. *Training should be carried out in isolation, avoiding mixing them with other new forces.*

By the end of 2010 privates and non-commissioned officers from the SPLA police force had been integrated into the national force in South Kordofan, but not a single SPLA officer. The SPLA officers, according to SPLA sources, were sent to Khartoum for training, stripped of a rank, and then distributed among other parts of Northern Sudan.

Popular Police

A paramilitary reserve force composed largely of Islamist volunteers, the Popular Police decreased in size after the CPA was signed, but by 2007 was expanding again. Before the CPA, the Popular Police had no means of transport; since the CPA, it has had bicycles and Land Cruisers. The volunteers get training from SAF for a period of up to 28 days.



SPLA

The CPA requires the SPLA in South Kordofan to move across the (disputed) 1956 North–South border into South Sudan. UNMIS maintains that only 27 per cent of SPLA fighters have left the state, a claim Abdel Aziz al Hilu vigorously disputes. He says the UNMIS figure was calculated using the highest of several figures given by the SPLA and was based on a single visit to the main relocation site at Jao—ignoring the fact that ‘the SPLA is one army and one command and anyone can be transferred anywhere’. Al Hilu says two Nuba brigades have joined the SPLA’s 4th Division in Bentiu, in oil-rich Unity state, and several thousand others have been transferred to SPLA headquarters in Juba. He claims that the remainder—approximately 10,000 men—are at Lake Abiad.

Following South Sudan’s vote for secession, SAF has been increasingly insistent that the SPLA move across the border to South Sudan. This pressure culminated in SAF giving a deadline of 1 June for all forces to be withdrawn from South Kordofan. On 31 May, the SPLA responded that they have no forces in South Kordofan, with the SPLA spokesman Philip Aguer Panyang telling the *Sudan Tribune* that ‘there are no forces to be withdrawn from South Kordofan or Nuba, because the forces that are there in South Kordofan and Blue [Nile] are sons and daughters of Nuba and Blue Nile, so we have no right to withdraw them to South Sudan.’ During the war, many people from both Northern states fought with the SPLA, and will not abandon their homelands to move across the border.

UNMIS officers in South Kordofan at the time of the main redeployment in 2007 said they believed ‘the main backbone’ of the SPLA had moved to Lake Abiad. (One UNMIS commander said that there had not, to his knowledge, been any corresponding SAF withdrawal from his team site.) A confidential report from the commander of the 5th Division in Kadugli two years later, in February 2009, estimated the size of the force then at Lake Abiad at 8,000, armed only with AK-47s and G3s. The report said morale was ‘low’; the men were poorly supplied by the SPLA in the South and received ‘irregular donations’ in place of salaries.

By the end of 2010 morale was much improved. Salaries were being paid, albeit sometimes late, and services were improved, with clean water available for most of the men most of the time.

Denied access to Jao recently, UNMIS has been unable to confirm the size of the force there. But reliable sources say it grew significantly in the countdown to the referendum, with many Southern officers present, including from Military Intelligence, and Southern soldiers. This expansion of the forces at Jao is confirmed by the latest satellite imagery.

There has always been movement across the 1956 line as SPLA soldiers visit their families and respond to perceived threats. A letter from the general director of police to Military Intelligence headquarters in Khartoum, also dated February 2009, claims that SPLA troops were causing ‘security instability’ in South Kordofan with ‘weapons and hand grenades and other weapons’. Their movement reportedly increased in the



countdown to the referendum, in response to SAF troop movements and reinforcements.

SPLA Police

The SPLA Police in South Kordofan suffer both from a lack of support from the Government of South Sudan and from the refusal of the Sudanese government to permit joint training. The force is understaffed, underequipped, undertrained, and in many places even lacks uniforms.

Darfur Militias (North Kordofan)

In mid-2010 more than 2,000 Darfurians arrived in el Obeid in North Kordofan (and Damazin in Blue Nile). When challenged, Defence Minister Hussein said the Darfurians, mostly members of the Northern Rizeigat tribes that form the core of the government-supported ‘janjaweed’ militias, had been sent ‘for training’ and would return to Darfur ‘in time’. Senior SPLA officers say that the Darfurians were moved to Kordofan to counter a perceived threat from JEM, which they say has recruited Kordofan youths ‘in big numbers’. Government documents repeatedly speak of fears that JEM has attempted ‘to transfer its conflict to South Kordofan’.

In the last few months, JEM has been increasing its activity along the northern half of the border between South Kordofan and Darfur, recruiting energetically among Missiriya youths who feel marginalized by international relief organizations and cheated of their rights in Abyei. In an apparent attempt to emphasize its claimed commitment to the rights of all marginalized peoples, JEM appointed a Missiriya to lead a delegation to the Darfur peace talks in Doha in November 2010.

Missiriya elders say that those who are joining JEM are moved by ‘anger’ rather than by any vision or ideology, and that they could be deterred from taking up arms if their perception of being marginalized were addressed.

Updated 4 June 2011

¹ See <<http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/pdfs/facts-figures/armed-groups/three-areas/HSBA-Armed-Groups-Militarization-Abyei.pdf>>.

² A 27 January 2011 report by the Satellite Sentinel Project (Enough, Harvard, UNOSAT, Google, and DigitalGlobe) and an accompanying press release from Enough incorrectly reported that the Small Arms Survey—not the SPLM/A—found that there were 55,000 SAF troops in the state. The press release also erroneously stated that these troops were positioned ‘along the border of South Kordofan’.

³ A SAF battalion comprises four infantry companies of 105 men each, plus one administrative company and one ‘support’ company equipped with heavier weapons such as mortars.

⁴ A common defensive earth wall/ditch fortification.

⁵ For example, in the PDF garrisons in Mendi and Meiram.

⁶ The Small Arms Survey is not aware of the presence of any 75 mm mortars.