



Border Intelligence Brigade (Al Istikhbarat al Hudud) (AKA Border Guards)

The Border Intelligence Brigade, whose members are popularly referred to as Border Guards, is a part of Sudanese Military Intelligence, funded by the army and headquartered in Khartoum. As criticism of the government's counterinsurgency operations in Darfur mounted, the Border Intelligence Brigade became the main vehicle for the incorporation of irregulars into the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), who were given military identity cards and salaries. Sudanese military sources portrayed the shift as an attempt to 'control' the irregulars; human rights organizations said it was to 'hide' them and keep them armed.

There is no official data on the strength of the Border Intelligence Brigade. One source close to the brigade command claims the number of fully registered guards was 11,000 in October 2010, not counting the unregistered tribal militias that often operate alongside them. Of these, 4,000 were reportedly sent outside Darfur in mid-year: 2,000 to Omdurman—for 're-training' and thereafter to guard the capital, attacked by insurgents in May 2008—and 2,000 new recruits, all under Musa Hilal, to a number of locations in Northern Sudan including Damazin in front-line Blue Nile state.

The Borders Guards carry AK-47s and G-3s, rocket-propelled grenades and doshkas (machine guns mounted on jeeps). Border Guard commanders say they also receive heavier weapons for operations, but are required (in theory) to return these to SAF stores after usage.

The vehicle of choice for paramilitaries before the Darfur conflict was the Islamist Popular Defence Forces (PDF). Two explanations have been advanced for the sudden prominence of the Border Guards, virtually unheard of before 2003 with just small mounted units (*al wahda al ragba*) in Sudan's peripheries: first, the dislike among Darfur's Arabs of Islamism; second, the promise of a salary rather than loot, very often the only recompense for the PDF.

Headed by Military Intelligence General al Hadi Hamid al Tayeed, who has coordinated the integration of tribal militias into SAF operations when necessary, the Border Intelligence Brigade was given arms and logistical help by the army and could call for air and armed support when needed. The brigade commander, based in Misteriha in North Darfur, was Lt. Col. Abdul Wahid Saeed Ali Saeed. A rapid intervention group called 'The Quick and Horrible Forces' was controlled by Musa Hilal, the paramount leader of the Mahamid branch of the Northern Rizeigat group of tribes.

In recent years, since the armed opposition movements shifted the focus of their operations to South Darfur, the most active, and best-armed, section of the Border Guards has been the South Darfur-based Fut 8 (battalion in English, and called



‘Katiba’ by the SAF) led by Mohamed Hamdan Dogolo, nicknamed ‘Hemeti’, from the Mahariya branch of the Northern Rizeigat group of tribes. Hemeti led several thousand Border Guards into opposition to the government late in 2007 to protest SAF’s failure to pay salaries. His rebellion ended early in 2008 after he threatened to storm the state capital, Nyala, and Khartoum promised salaries and development aid for his Mahariya stronghold north of Nyala. Mainly-Mahamid Border Guards in West and North Darfur also began to rebel, but in smaller groups and without the leadership of a charismatic commander like Hemeti.

Since 2007, Hemeti’s men have been the spearhead of government operations against insurgents in South Darfur. They have also been heavily involved in inter-Arab conflict in South and West Darfur, using SAF vehicles, and light and medium weapons, with impunity.

In 2010 there are signs of new stirrings among the Border Guards—especially in North Darfur. Many lost money in a collapsed Ponzi scheme in al Fasher. Their leaders—including Musa Hilal and his nephew, Hafiz Daoud—believe their original counterinsurgency forces now constitute an embarrassment that the government wants to forget or even discard. Musa Hilal has told associates he believes Khartoum wants him dead; other leaders say they are ‘boiling’ over the government’s failure to support them, including with fuel for their vehicles. Rank and file recruits complain that they are discriminated against within SAF, and are seldom given access to the Military Academy in Khartoum.

The unrest encompasses a portion of the Brigade in Nyala, where the mainly-Mahamid Fut 7 complains of preferential treatment in weaponry and vehicles given to the younger, mainly-Mahariya Fut 8. In addition, Fut 7 is accountable to the SAF in Nyala—Hemeti only to Khartoum.

The locations, and strength, of the Border Guards are, according to two separate sources close to the fighters:

1. North Darfur—al Fasher (3,000 men) and Misteriha (2,000), headed by Musa Hilal (Mahamid/Um Jalul).
2. West Darfur—Geneina (3,000), headed by Idriss Hassan (Mahamid/Awlad Zeid).
3. South Darfur (3,000)—Nyala, under no single leader. With a reported 2,000 men under him, Hemeti is the single most powerful leader.

Updated November 2010