



Rashaida Free Lions (inactive)

Origins/composition

Established with strong Eritrean support in 1999, at a time when relations between Khartoum and Asmara were strained. The decision to take up arms divided the Rashaida, Bedouin pastoralists who migrated from the northern Arabian peninsula in the 19th century, and who nomadize across huge distances and in eastern Sudan and live on the outskirts of Kassala town and along the Eritrean border. The Free Lions' political agenda was similar to that of the Beja Congress—opposing, especially, the expansion of mechanized farming at the expense of the community's animal migration routes. Although Rashaida youth supported military mobilization, many tribal and community leaders, wealthy by the standards of Sudanese pastoralists, were unconvinced of the need for rebellion, citing land and services given to the community by the Sudan government.

Leadership

The Free Lions' leader, Mabrouk Mubarak Salim, is a tribal leader and wealthy merchant. When the Free Lions formed the Eastern Front with the Beja Congress and other opposition groups, he co-led the coalition. He had been part of the National Assembly for the Democratic Unionist Party, historically the most prominent political party in eastern Sudan, in the elected government of Sadeq al-Mahdi (1986–89).

Areas of control/activity

The Free Lions' were active in the area south of Kassala, although not in coordination with National Democratic Alliance (an Eritrean-backed opposition coalition formed in 1989) forces. Although few in number, they were renowned as marksmen, with prized knowledge of the Red Sea hills and smuggling routes across the border.

Sources of financing/support

Like the Beja Congress, with whom they formed the Eastern Front coalition, the Free Lions had a small force of a few hundred fighters only, reliant mainly on Eritrea for training and small arms. In July 2004, the group signed a political and military cooperation agreement with the Darfurian Justice and Equality Movement rebels. Private financing has also come from close economic connections with Gulf countries and cross-border smuggling.

Status

The Free Lions became part of the Eastern Front coalition, formed in February 2005. Their combined insurgency formally ended with the signing of the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) in October 2006. The ESPA left many easterners dissatisfied and raised fears that other ethnic groups in the east might resort to armed conflict to demand power-sharing.

Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA)

Small Arms Survey * 47 Avenue Blanc * 1202 Geneva * Switzerland
<http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org>