

Armed Groups Around Abyei

The Popular Defence Forces

As political parties and tribes become increasingly polarized around the upcoming referendum, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) is claiming that the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) has launched a 'massive recruitment drive' to the Popular Defence Forces (PDF) 'so the Missiriya can occupy the land' in advance of the referendum. The SPLM spokesman in Abyei, Wor Majak, has alleged that some 2,000 PDF have been mobilized outside Abyei to settle in the north of the area ahead of the referendum. On a visit to Abyei in July 2010, the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel headed by Thabo Mbeki heard that 'PDF elements that attack Abyei pass through SAF bases and checkpoints without being stopped'.

National Congress Party (NCP) officials in Abyei say they too are concerned by the increasing insecurity in the area, but deny that the NCP/SAF is sponsoring it. They attribute it to militias working on their, own without sponsorship.

The Abyei Liberation Front

The Abyei Liberation Front (ALF) emerged in February 2008 after Edward Lino was appointed as the SPLM chairman for an Abyei Administration and unofficial 'governor' of the area. Its leader, Mohammed Omar al Ansari, an aircraft engineer and NCP member, was based in Khartoum as the government-appointed Missiriya representative of the Committee for the Eradication of Abduction of Woman and Children, but moved to Muglad as tensions rose in Abyei.

The ALF rejected the report of the Abyei Border Commission, which identified areas like Meiram, Heglig, and Keilak as Dinka Ngok areas, and accused the SPLA of being 'a professional army using weapons of mass destruction... the pawn of international imperialism's interests in oil'. It drew its support largely from Missiriya who defected from SAF and PDF.

A member of the small Dar Omshaiba clan, a sub-clan of the Awlad Kamil branch of the Humr Ajaira, al Ansari lacked a natural tribal constituency, did not have the support of the traditional Missiriya leadership and was widely perceived as promoting a personal rather than tribal agenda. But his strong personality and undeniable charisma made him a potentially attractive figure to largely uneducated Misseriya youths disenchanted with other armed forces and political parties.

Shahama

Shahama ('valiant' in Arabic) appeared in 2004, vowing to fight for the 'neglected rights' of the Misseriya. It operated in the vicinity of oil companies and installations, which it targeted, and its violent tactics were rejected by a majority of Missiriya including traditional leaders of the tribe. The group's founder, Musa Ali Hamadein, also of the Ajaira sub-clan of the Humr, was a member of the Popular Congress



Party of Hassan Turabi and a former PDF leader. The government portrayed Shahama as part of a Turabist strategy of destabilization and accused the Darfur rebels of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) of being behind it.

Hamadein's supporters were, for the most part, former members of the PDF. After his death in 2004, the group split. One faction, led by his nephew Musa Ali Hamadein, lent its support to JEM. The other, led by Babo Adam Joda, continued attacking oil installations and oil company employees to dramatize the damaging impact of oil on pastoralist livelihoods and the absence of development from oil revenues.

A number of Missiriya leaders critical of Shahama, and fearing that the Missiriya area might become a second Darfur, created **Shamam**, 'The Sons of the Missiriya Area', a non-militant civil group that rejected violence. Shamam demanded development for Missiriya territories irrespective of political orientation. It was led by Dr. Suleiman Dibello, of the Zuruq section of the Missiriya and reportedly a member of the Umma party. Shamam appealed to a large number of Misseriya youth, but at the local level Shahama remained the strongest and most popular group until it faded from the headlines with Musa Ali Hamadein's capture by the SAF during JEM's abortive attack on Omdurman in May 2008.

Kordofan Alliance for Development

Formed in April 2006 by educated Kordofanians in the diaspora, the Kordofan Alliance for Development (KAD) held a well-attended conference in Antwerp, Belgium, which endorsed an agenda focused on more local development and peaceful advocacy for 'Greater Kordofan'—without ruling out the use of force if the civil approach failed. The movement was said to include representatives from several tribes, including Missiriya, to be present in the areas of Muglad, Babanusa, and Meiram. It reportedly had a strong link with the United Revolutionary Forces Front in Darfur.

Updated August 2010