



Darfur's Armed Groups

This resource contains archive versions of documents on armed groups in Darfur.

The Darfur conflict features a dizzying array of armed opposition groups, factions, and alliances that are in constant flux. Many opposition groups have joined the government or endorsed peace agreements only to later rejoin the rebellion. Rebel groups are divided not only in terms of their ideological and political objectives, but according to tribal and geographical representation. In addition to native distinctions, foreign governments have sought to create or support coalitions of opposition forces for the purposes of pursuing peace talks. But these coalitions, and their constituent groups, have not always enjoyed popular support or legitimacy within Darfur.

On the other side of the conflict, the government has armed and supported counter-insurgency groups, in particular of Arab fighters, almost since the eruption of the war in 2003. These groups, too, have experienced significant internal upheaval, especially since the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement, which many Arabs perceived as a betrayal. Fighting between Abbala and Baggara Arab groups in 2010 led to a second distinct "phase" of the Darfur conflict. Some Arab armed groups have turned to the opposition.

Since 2006, the HSBA project has documented the ongoing evolution of armed groups--both state and non-state--and their roles in the Darfur conflict, and continues to report on new developments. HSBA fieldwork on armed groups in Darfur is document in Issue Briefs, Working Papers, and Facts and Figures reports, collected here.

Darfur's Armed Opposition Groups *Updated 8 October 2012*

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.

See below for information on the following specific groups and coalitions:

Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and splinters

- [Justice and Equality Movement \(JEM\)](#) (AKA JEM-Jibril) (01.08.2013)
- [Justice and Equality Movement-Mohamed Bashar \(JEM-Bashar\)](#) (also known as JEM-Sudan) (01.07.2013)
- [Justice and Equality Movement \(JEM\)](#) (17.10.2011)
- [Justice and Equality Movement \(JEM\)](#) (20.03.2011)
- [Sudan Liberation Movement-General Leadership \(SLM-General Leadership\)](#) (01.11.2010)
- [Union des Forces de Résistance \(UFR\)/Union of the Forces of Resistance](#) (30.07.2010)
- [Justice and Equality Movement \(JEM\)](#) (17.07.2010)
- [Democratic JEM \(DJEM\)](#) (01.07.2010)

Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW) and splinters

- [Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid \(SLA-AW\)](#) (06.09.2011)
- [Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid \(SLA-AW\)](#) (01.03.2011)
- [Sudan Liberation Army - Historical Leadership/Command \(SLA-Historical Leadership/Command\)](#) (01.10.2010)
- [Sudan Liberation Army-Juba \(1\) \[SLA-Juba \(1\)\]](#) (01.09.2010)
- [Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid \(SLA-AW\)](#) (16.07.2010)
- [Sudan Liberation Army-Khamis Abaker \(SLA-KA\)](#) (01.07.2010)
- [Sudan Liberation Army-Mainstream \(SLA-Mainstream\) \(also known as 'General Line'\)](#) (01.07.2010)

Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM) and splinters

- [The Democratic Sudan Liberation Movement \(DSLM\) \('SLA-Kerubino' or 'SLA-Justice'\)](#) (01.10.2012)
- [Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi \(SLA-MM\)](#) (06.09.2011)
- [Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi \(SLA-MM\)](#) (30.03.2011)
- [The Democratic Sudan Liberation Movement \(DSLM\) \('SLA-Carabino'\)](#) (01.03.2011)
- [Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi \(SLA-MM\)](#) (16.07.2010)
- [Sudan Liberation Army Unity \(1\) \[SLA Unity \(1\)\]](#) (01.07.2010)

Other

- [Liberation and Justice Movement](#) (08.10.2012)
- [Freedom and Reform Movement \(FRM\)](#) (30.10.2010)

Relevant Tables, Maps, and Summaries

- [Darfur-based Chadian Groups, September 2009](#) (from [HSBA Issue Brief 15](#))

Table of Chadian armed opposition groups operating in Darfur

- [Refugee and IDP Camps in Darfur and Eastern Chad](#) (from [HSBA Working Paper 15](#))
Map of camps circa 2008
- [Chadian Armed Groups, February 2008](#) (from [HSBA Issue Brief 9](#))
Table of Chadian armed opposition groups as of February 2008 and their recent histories
- [Darfur-based Militia-Rebel Agreements, 2005-07](#) (from [HSBA Working Paper 17](#))
Summary of peacemaking attempts by militias and rebels outside the official peace process
- [Hamdan's Areas of Control, Darfur, 2007-08](#) (from [HSBA Working Paper 17](#))
Map showing Mohamed Hamdan's ('Hemeti') areas of control in Darfur
- [Darfurian Rebel Groups, December 2006](#) (from [HSBA Issue Brief 4](#))
Table of SLA and JEM factions

Relevant HSBA Publications

- [Rhetoric and Reality: The Failure to Resolve the Darfur Conflict](#), by Julie Flint, January 2010 (in [Arabic](#))
- [Beyond 'Janjaweed': Understanding the Militias of Darfur](#), by Julie Flint, June 2009 (in [Arabic](#))
- [Conflict, Arms, and Militarization: The Dynamics of Darfur's IDP Camps](#), by Clea Khan, September 2008 (in [Arabic](#))
- [The Chad-Sudan Proxy War and the 'Darfurization' of Chad: Myths and Reality](#), by Jérôme Tubiana, April 2008 (in [Arabic](#); in [French](#))
- [Echo Effects: Chadian Instability and the Darfur Conflict](#), HSBA Issue Brief, February 2008 (in [Arabic](#); in [French](#))
- [Divided They Fall: The Fragmentation of Darfur's Rebel Groups](#), by Victor Tanner and Jérôme Tubiana, July 2007 (in [Arabic](#))
- [Arms, Oil, and Darfur: The Evolution of Relations between China and Sudan](#), HSBA Issue Brief, July 2007 (in [Arabic](#))
- [No Dialogue, No Commitment: The Perils of Deadline Diplomacy for Darfur](#), HSBA Issue Brief, December 2006 (in [Arabic](#))

Darfur's Arab Armed Groups *Updated November 2010*

Even though they themselves have suffered chronic neglect by the Sudanese state, Darfur's Arabs were not consulted by the insurgents who declared themselves in rebellion against the Sudanese Government in 2003. Excluded by the insurgents, and influenced by a strain of Arab supremacism imported from Libya, some answered a government call to fight the 'rebels' alongside the regular army. In exchange for their loyalty, they expected the government to improve their conditions of life, including with development along the marahil (stock routes) of the camel-herding Abbala, the core of the 'janjaweed' militias.

The Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) of May 2006 was perceived as a betrayal of Arab concerns. A rebel leader, Minni Minawi, became senior assistant to President Omar al Bashir. Thousands of his men were incorporated into the Sudan Armed Forces, and his nominee was given authority over the reform and downsizing of all Arab militias. On the question of land ownership, which lies at the heart of the Darfur conflict, the DPA also alienated Arabs. It recognized the traditional system of tribal land domains (hawakir), which the landless Abbala have the greatest interest in reforming. Pastoralism was mentioned in only one paragraph of the agreement, with a passing reference to the 'important problem' of competition for pasture and water. There was no recognition of the need for development and services along marahil that were mapped out before drought, desertification, and conflict changed the resource map of Darfur.

In the year following the signing of the DPA, rumblings of discontent grew into a storm. The first Arab armed opposition group was formed in December 2006. In October 2007 the strongest paramilitary leader of South Darfur, Mohamed Hamdan Dogolo, nicknamed 'Hemeti', defected from the government camp, along with thousands of heavily armed paramilitaries. Khartoum first attempted to crush the rebellion militarily, including with air power. When that failed, it ceded to most of Hemeti's demands, including for promotion and development. Smaller protests were snuffed out with sticks and carrots. Arabs who remained in armed opposition were unable to coalesce around a single programme, however.

Heavy inter-Arab fighting in 2010 between Abbala and cattle-herding Baggara led to a second surge of rebellion. Abbala and Baggara both accused the government of letting the fighting continue in order to weaken Arabs as it prepared to sign a second peace agreement, modelled on the DPA. It is not yet clear whether the new groups will have any military punch; whether they will be willing to end their protests for short-term financial gain rather than lasting benefit; or whether, like their non-Arab counterparts, they will survive only as small, isolated groups, often subsumed into the original movements.

Click below for information on specific groups:

- [Sudan Revolutionary Front \(SRF\)](#) (04.06.2013)
- [Sudan Revolutionary Front \(SRF\)](#) (08.10.2012)
- [Al Jundi al Mazlum](#) ('The Neglected Soldiers') (01.11.2010)
- [Nomads and Herders Movement](#) (01.11.2010)
- [National Revolutionary Front](#) (01.11.2010)
- [The Popular Forces Army](#) (01.11.2010)
- [The United Revolutionary Forces Front](#) (01.11.2010)

Relevant HSBA Publications

- [The Other War: Inter-Arab Conflict in Darfur](#), by Julie Flint, October 2010
- [Beyond 'Janjaweed': Understanding the Militias of Darfur](#), by Julie Flint, June 2009 (in Arabic)

SAF and Allied Forces *Updated November 2011*

Western military sources estimate that 40,000 regular troops from the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) are dedicated to the Darfur area, and probably the same number of Border Guard, police, security, and militia forces. Additional SAF units are based in Darfur but focused on the border between Northern and South Sudan. Capability is dependent on enabling assets, particularly air support, which vary depending on threat levels and other activities in Sudan.

Control over the SAF in Darfur was centralized in Khartoum in 2009 with the abolition of the Western Military Command in al Fasher, the capital of North Darfur State. Since the beginning of the insurgency in Darfur in 2003, the commander of the 6th Infantry Division in al Fasher had had overall command responsibility for all SAF forces operating in Darfur, including the air force. With the reform, all three sectors-in North Darfur, the 16th Infantry Division in Nyala in South Darfur, and the 22nd Brigade in al Geneina in West Darfur, reported to be a division in all but name-report directly to Khartoum.

Subordinate brigades are located in major towns in Darfur, which in turn deploy battalions in smaller towns, and so on down to the company level. An informed source cited by the [United Nations Panel](#)

[of Experts on Sudan](#), set up to monitor a Security Council ban on arms transfers to Darfur, has put the total number of garrisons in Darfur at 263 (for a population of more than six million, of whom 2.7 million are displaced in camps).

Russian Mi-17 and Mi-32 helicopter gunships, Sukhoi and MiG-29 fighter jets, and Chinese-made A-5 'Fantan' jets have all been sighted in Darfur, as well as white Antonov 26 transport aircraft used as crude bombers. The UN Panel has provided evidence that Antonovs have been painted white-the colour of many UN and relief agency planes flying in Darfur. One had 'UN' painted on a wing in a clear attempt to disguise its identity.

Morale among SAF soldiers in Darfur has been undermined by counterinsurgency operations- Sudan's regular forces proved unable to adapt to the mobile style of warfare imposed by the insurgents-and by collaboration with the government-supported 'janjaweed' militias, which many professional officers feel have undermined both standards and discipline within the force.

Indeed, Sudanese army troops have developed a reputation for being ineffective, poorly-motivated, and politically unreliable. Speaking privately, senior government officials have told Western diplomats in Khartoum they have used paramilitary forces and militias, including the 'janjaweed' in Darfur, because of the weakness of the regular army. After the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement in May 2006, Western military sources said the army was given 'one last chance', to crush the factions that had refused to sign the agreement. Large numbers of troops and amounts of ammunition were flown in to al Fasher. In the subsequent offensive against non-signatories in North Darfur, however, it suffered a series of crushing defeats.

For information on SAF-allied forces in Darfur, see below:

- [Popular Defence Forces \(al Difa'a al Shaabi\)](#) (01.03.2011)
- [Central Reserve Police \(al Ittihad al Merkazi\)](#) (01.01.2011)
- [Border Intelligence Brigade \(Al Istikhbarat al Hudud\) \(AKA Border Guards\)](#) (01.11.2010)

Relevant HSBA Publications

- [The Paramilitary Revolution: The Popular Defence Forces](#), by Jago Salmon (December 2007) (in [Arabic](#))