

Remote-control breakdown

Sudanese paramilitary forces and pro-government militias

Introduction

Since the 1980s successive governments in Khartoum have fought wars in the peripheries of Sudan by using irregular or paramilitary forces. These locally recruited militias have increasingly become more prominent than the regular Sudan Armed Forces (SAF).¹ Over the years this strategy of using militias—which has been described as ‘counter-insurgency on the cheap’²—has had several aims and advantages for Khartoum, as well as obvious limitations. Initially, these militias’ ability to feed themselves off the land and reward themselves for their services with the booty they plundered may have appeared less costly to the government than using the regular army. Yet over time they have proved to be increasingly expensive, with militia leaders demanding more and more financial and political rewards for their services. Furthermore, their ‘costs’ extend far beyond immediate financial expenditures. Militias have frequently changed their loyalties, sometimes fighting against and often antagonizing other paramilitary forces and government allies. Indeed, their abuses have at times proved to be counterproductive for Khartoum, leading to increased support and recruits for local insurgent groups, and generally more protracted conflicts.

For many years government hardliners have embraced the myth that militias are militarily more efficient than SAF. This stems from these politicians’ lack of trust in SAF’s ability to win civil wars and in army units that appear either too distant politically from Khartoum or too ethnically close

to insurgents. Yet paramilitaries have not always proved to be either more efficient militarily, or more loyal or committed to the government. Indeed, in Darfur they have fought much more against civilians than insurgents, with the effect of turning whole communities into recruits for and supporters of what were initially very small rebel factions. The practice continues today: the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project estimates that 46 per cent of conflicts in Sudan in 2015 involved the targeting of civilians by ‘political militias’, especially pro-government ones.³

The ability to deny abuses has been part of Khartoum’s rationale for relying on militias. However, this approach

has had clear limitations, in particular since prominent militia leaders such as Musa Hilal have unambiguously declared that they have acted on government orders and asked for their status to be made increasingly official. More recently, however, distancing itself from the crimes committed by militias has seemed less important for Khartoum. National Umma Party leader Sadiq al-Mahdi was arrested in May 2014 after criticizing abuses committed by Rapid Support Forces (RSF) commander Mohammed Hamdan Dagolo ‘Hemmeti’.

This *Issue Brief* examines the history of Sudan’s militia strategy and the role of militias in the country’s armed



Musa Hilal (L.) salutes his followers upon arriving in Nyala, South Darfur on 7 December 2013. © AFP/Getty Images

conflicts, notably in Darfur and the Two Areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile. It discusses the use of paramilitary forces and militias in Sudan from the 1980s until the present day, including their alleged roles in resource exploitation. It then examines the long-term economic, political, and social costs of the militia strategy for the Sudanese state and society. Finally, it discusses the implications of the militia strategy for any future security sector reform (SSR) process in Sudan, noting that the maintenance of a paramilitary marketplace in Sudan is an impediment to peacebuilding there and in the wider region. Among others, its key findings are as follows:

- Khartoum has increasingly relied on paramilitary forces and militias, in particular from the Arab tribes of Darfur and Kordofan, to fight successive wars in Sudan's peripheries. In spite of the high costs of its militias, the country's economic crisis, and internal disagreements on the issue, Khartoum has continued to develop militias, most recently with the formation of the RSF in 2013.
- This militia strategy has come at a high price: militias have often attacked civilians rather than fought insurgent forces, attacked regular forces and government allies, and committed abuses, thus contributing to protracted armed conflicts.
- Allegations that natural resources such as gold and ivory are funding Sudanese militias appear to be largely unfounded. The available evidence suggests that core government paramilitary forces remain highly dependent on government funding.
- Sudanese militias include members with cross-border identities in neighbouring countries who have fought in Chad, the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya, and South Sudan. With or without Khartoum's consent, Sudanese militias' willingness to fight in neighbouring countries risks contributing to further regional instability.
- Any future SSR efforts will need to ensure political representation for communities from which the

militias originate in the government, local administrations, and peace processes; sources of alternative income for militia members; guarantees and incentives to disarm; and militia members' engagement in peacebuilding efforts.

Background to the use of paramilitary forces and militias

Sudan's militia war strategy pre-dates the current government. Most current paramilitary forces have their roots in Sudan's second civil war, which began in 1983. They were used extensively

after 1987, during the country's second brief 'democratic' period under Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi, when Khartoum mobilized *murahilin* (literally 'those of the livestock migratory route') to fight in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. Combatants were in particular recruited among *baggara* (cattle-herding) pastoralists from the Rizeigat and Missiriya Arab communities, both of whom lived in the areas neighbouring Southern Sudan (the Missiriya also lived close to the Nuba Mountains). As Southern rebels rapidly divided along ethnic lines, the militia strategy was completed by the co-optation of Southern rebels and militias, in particular from the Nuer tribe.⁴



RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan speaks to the press in Omdourman after an action to capture Somali and Ethiopian migrants on the Libya-Sudan border, on 8 January 2017. © ASHRAF SHAZLY/AFP/Getty Images

An attempt was made to use the baggara Arabs as a buffer against Southern non-Arabs, who were mostly Christian. This prolonged the colonial policy of drawing a clear racial and religious boundary across Sudan dividing Southern Sudan from the North. Religion had become more important in Sudanese politics in the 1980s, largely as a reaction by successive governments to the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. This played a role in mobilizing militias for what was labelled a *jihad*. The *murahilin* were at times also called *mujahidin* (holy warriors).⁵

This religious dimension became even more important after the Muslim Brotherhood's National Islamic Front (NIF) took power in 1989. One of the main early acts of the regime was the creation of the Popular Defence Forces (PDF). This 'officialized' the *murahilin* and expanded the recruitment of paramilitary forces to both Arab and non-Arab Muslims, notably from Darfur.⁶ Typical of the Muslim Brotherhood's approach, the mobilization of militias mixed a populist ideology (that is, a people's army that could protect the new regime from the regular armed forces) and a religious one. Khartoum also initially enlisted *mujahidin* as PDF. Recruited among the Islamist movement's youths, students, and activists, notably from central and northern Sudan, they were willing to take part in a *jihad* against non-Muslims and 'apostates' (as Muslim rebels in South Kordofan and Blue Nile were commonly labelled). The initial aim was to militarize the Islamist movement's youths as a counterweight to SAF, but *mujahidin* were also gradually inducted into SAF.⁷ By 2011 the remaining *mujahidin* were reportedly better equipped than the PDF, but they were said not to receive salaries and not to be properly integrated into SAF structures. They did, however, operate under SAF command.

Some, but not all, *mujahidin* fought as PDF, and PDF and even SAF troops could generically and loosely be labelled *mujahidin*. This confusion still seems to exist in the Two Areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, where *mujahidin* were reportedly

mobilized together with PDF when the war resumed there in 2011. At the time, government officials still referred to some kinds of paramilitary forces as *mujahidin*. The confusion is increased by the fact that early *mujahidin* included students, and that students were forcibly conscripted during the latest conflicts in the Two Areas. Yet in recent years there seems to have been little appetite for *jihad*, and the militias have clearly been motivated by a desire for secular booty.⁸ In addition, the original *mujahidin* have become increasingly critical of the government, in particular through the group called *sachoun* (wanderers) composed of former *mujahidin*.⁹

The recruitment of the PDF and other militias took place on an ethnic basis, particularly in Sudan's peripheries, based on tribal structures. Tribal chiefs—who were de facto government employees as members of the 'native administration' and often National Congress Party (NCP) members—were tasked with mobilizing their youths.¹⁰ Some recruited from among existing traditional structures, organized armed youths, pastoralists' livestock guards led by traditional *agid* or war chiefs, or even their own bodyguards. Local tribal and war chiefs and PDF coordinators were supposed to work in close coordination with zonal SAF commanders, but the decision-making process often depended on complex local relationships. The decisions of SAF commanders could easily be overturned by strong local war chiefs and their militias. These militias also developed their own chains of command, reporting directly to governors and high-ranking SAF or National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) staff in state capitals and Khartoum.

The PDF mostly used infantry tactics, rode horses and camels (depending on the area and terrain), and were sometimes transported in SAF vehicles. With the appearance of armed opposition groups in Darfur that relied heavily on vehicles, militias formed in Darfur from 2003 were gradually also equipped with vehicles. Estimates of the numbers in the various forces are uncertain and subject to rapid changes. Before 2011 (that is, before the resumption of

the war in the Two Areas), the PDF were estimated to number roughly 100,000 throughout Sudan, but this included a large number of fighters considered to be reserves who were only mobilized on an ad hoc basis.¹¹

It should be noted that the militias in Darfur and elsewhere were not formed by a monolithic central government, but by various power bases within the government. Some key figures may have had an interest in pushing for the recruitment of militias in general, or in arming particular tribes. Historically, the militia strategy has always been a way to counter SAF influence, including by the Islamic movement and more recently by the NISS and the presidency. It has resulted from rivalries between strongmen in Khartoum, for instance between security chiefs Salah 'Gosh' (who reputedly has links with Musa Hilal) and Nafie Ali Nafie. Local power brokers such as former North Darfur governor Osman Kibir (who was dismissed in 2015) also recruited tribal militias to strengthen their power locally.¹²

Furthermore, since the early years of the first decade of the 21st century the regime has increasingly viewed itself as being besieged by enemies, not only in Sudan's peripheries, but also in the centre, among both the general population and rival power bases. This rationale has been used to justify the use of violent militias both in the peripheries and, since September 2013, in the capital.¹³ The map shows the wide spread of communities from which the government has recruited militias.

War in Darfur and the Two Areas

The unexpected eruption of a rebellion in 2003 in what was until then loyal Darfur resulted in Khartoum rapidly forming new militias with the aim of creating a massive counter-insurgency force. Like the regular armed forces, existing PDF units from Darfur were partly composed of local non-Arabs who were thought to be sympathetic to the insurgents and therefore not to be trusted. New militias were recruited among Arab



populations, in particular among the *abbala* (camel-herding) Rizeigat of North Darfur, who had already been in conflict over land with non-Arab communities accused of supporting the rebels. In contrast, the *baggara* Rizeigat of South Darfur, who had already been involved as PDF in Southern Sudan, were less keen to be used by Khartoum, in particular against fellow Darfur Muslims.

The new militias were soon known both locally and internationally by the nickname of *'janjawid'* (literally the 'horsemen with G3 rifles'), which was originally given to highwaymen, among whom some militia members were recruited. Many *janjawid* were officially integrated into the PDF, as well as other new paramilitary forces. However, the negotiations with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) leading to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) highlighted the problem Khartoum faced with the PDF. The CPA considered all irregular forces to be 'Other Armed Groups' that were required to go through a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process.¹⁴ The government kept reassuring its new Arab allies in Darfur that this clause did not apply to them, while confusing international players by creating new paramilitary forces with new names.

The first such force was formed as early as 2003. It was known as the

Border Guards, into which *abbala* Rizeigat from North Darfur in particular were integrated. It seems that SAF initially genuinely intended to create a force to protect Sudan's borders, most notably with Chad. However, the Border Guards became the main militia used in attacks against Darfur's non-Arab communities from 2003 through 2005. Again, as a means of shielding forces whose names were associated with crimes, another new force with a new name appeared not long afterwards: the Central Reserve Police (CRP), which was often better known by its nickname 'Abu Tera' ('those with a bird', due to its members' bird insignia). In theory, the CRP was a police force falling under the Ministry of the Interior rather than SAF. Its members were better trained, better paid, less dependent on booty, and less prone to abuses than other militia members. The CRP integrated more *abbala* militias, however, and was soon known as one of the *janjawid* militias responsible for attacks against civilian communities, in particular during the period 2006–12. Before 2011 the Border Guards were thought to number approximately 20,000 and the CRP around 100,000.¹⁵ A few other paramilitary forces also appeared during this period, including the Popular Police and Nomadic Police, although they

were smaller and less involved in violence in Darfur.

During roughly the same period (2005–10), SPLM/A leaders (now members of the government in South Sudan) successfully recruited among Rizeigat and Missiriya PDF in southern Darfur and western Kordofan. Feeling that Khartoum was abandoning them and fearing that their units would be downsized because of the CPA, several thousand joined the SPLA. They hoped it would give them a better chance of maintaining an income and possibly being integrated into regular forces. The Missiriya formed the *Quwat* (forces) *ad-Dibab* and the Rizeigat the *Liwa* (brigade) *Abu Matareq*, both of which were later integrated into the SPLA's fourth and third divisions, based respectively in Unity and Northern Bahr al Ghazal states.¹⁶

While South Sudan's secession led many of these recruits to return to civilian life, some Rizeigat and Missiriya fighters subsequently joined Sudanese opposition movements in Darfur and the Two Areas. They continued to play a role in neutralizing and demobilizing Arab militias in Darfur and Kordofan after the war resumed in 2011. Meanwhile, in spite of the requirements of the CPA, the Sudanese government managed to increase the PDF's numbers in South Kordofan from 12,000 to 20,000.¹⁷

Establishment of the Rapid Support Forces, 2013

By 2013 the government's militia strategy was at a crossroads and was facing new and unexpected challenges. Nationally, the government was experiencing its most vulnerable period since South Sudan's secession in 2011. Unrest inspired by the so-called 'Arab Spring' was threatening to break out in Khartoum and dissent was emerging from significant figures such as Ghazi Salaheddin al-Attabani. Arabs from Kordofan and Darfur were increasingly reluctant to mobilize militias to fight insurgencies. At the same time, existing militias were slipping from government control and mostly fighting each other. Most of the violence in Darfur in 2013 was due to conflicts among Arab communities who all relied on paramilitary forces that were acting autonomously.¹⁸ All sides in these conflicts accused Khartoum of being against them—or at least of failing to take their side—with an increasing risk of their becoming insurgents.

Since 2006 there had been several episodes of disloyalty or actual fighting among militias and regular forces,

in particular in Darfur. This, coupled with the abuses committed by the militias, led some SAF elements to be increasingly critical of the government's militia strategy, fuelled by frustration about Khartoum's continuous lack of confidence in its regular forces. This lack of trust grew in 2008, when a spectacular Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) raid managed to reach Khartoum without being intercepted by SAF, and was finally stopped in the capital by the intervention of special forces.¹⁹ These factors encouraged the creation in mid-2013 of an enhanced paramilitary force called the Rapid Support Forces (Quwat al-Da'm al-Seri'). The first RSF recruits came from already formed forces, mostly the Border Guards. Like the Border Guards' creation ten years before, the RSF was partly formed in response to a new need and a fresh demand from the militias themselves to be officially recognized.

From the government's perspective there was a particular need to retake control of increasingly disloyal Darfur Arab militias. Thus, Darfur Arab Border Guards who constituted the first RSF forces were chosen from among the most disloyal troops. They were

retrained in central Sudan and then deployed to South Kordofan, in the belief that they could be better controlled outside their home areas. But this did not prevent them from committing abuses, including some that appeared to be counter to government policy.²⁰ Abuses in Kordofan obliged Khartoum to redeploy most of the RSF forces (5,000–6,000 men) back to Darfur in 2014.²¹ The RSF subsequently led government counter-insurgency operations between 2014 and 2016, including the two dry season offensives in Jebel Marra; it proved to be just as troublesome as other former militia groups.²²

While the creation of the RSF was largely a continuation of the government's traditional militia strategy, the force first fell under NISS control, giving the security organ its own paramilitary force.²³ The RSF was initially under the command of NISS major general Abbas Abdelaziz, with former Border Guards commander Hemmeti as operations commander. The latter appears to have gradually become more prominent, with some saying that the two men have authority over different parts of the force.²⁴

Born around 1973, Hemmeti is the nephew of Juma' Dagolo, the chief of an Awlad Mansour Mahariya Rizeigat community that was originally from Chad. He moved to North Darfur before settling in South Darfur in 1987.²⁵ In 2003 he was appointed *amir* (war chief without a specific rank) of the Border Guards, then in 2008, after a six-month rebellion, security adviser to South Darfur's governor.²⁶ When the RSF was formed, Hemmeti was appointed a brigadier general, and several Rizeigat kinsmen, reputedly with closer links to him than to his rival, Musa Hilal, were given government posts.²⁷

In April 2016 a presidential decree reportedly placed the RSF directly under the presidency's control.²⁸ In January 2017, with SAF support but against Hemmeti's wishes, the Sudanese Parliament tried to pass an 'RSF Act' putting the RSF under SAF control. The proposed law was reportedly worded so that the RSF was ambiguously labelled an 'autonomous' force



SAF and RSF celebrate after recapturing the Daldako area, near Kadugli, South Kordofan, on 20 May 2014.
© STR/AFP/Getty Images

under the control of both SAF and the 'supreme commander' of the armed forces, that is, the president himself. Some members of Parliament (MPs) and SAF officers criticized this 'ambiguity', but Hemmeti welcomed the continuing 'autonomy' of the force.²⁹ In the future, with the presidency becoming increasingly worried about losing control over key forces, the RSF may turn into a praetorian guard, protecting the president from a possible SAF coup and constituting a third pillar of military power distinct from both SAF and the NISS.³⁰

Since 2013 army officials have warned that the RSF, like other paramilitary forces in the past, may turn against Khartoum. In a June 2015 parliamentary debate SAF general Adam Hamid Musa, although once considered a supporter of the militia strategy in Darfur, reportedly stated that 'the use of militias comes at a high cost'.³¹ Another MP warned that Arab tribes in Darfur and Kordofan were better armed than state forces.³² The UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan found that 15 per cent of militia attacks in Darfur in 2015 targeted the government (UNSC, 2016, p. 13). By mid-2016 SAF forces operating in Jebel Marra with the RSF reportedly asked for the latter's removal, accusing its members of committing abuses against civilians.³³ In November 2016 RSF and SAF elements reportedly fought each other south of Khartoum.³⁴ Also, the army was said to be reluctant to be deployed in Yemen as part of the Saudi-led 'Islamic military alliance to fight terrorism' (of which Sudan is a member) because this would imply abandoning some war theatres to the RSF. By early 2017 several thousand RSF troops had reportedly been sent to Yemen.³⁵

Despite the warnings and abuses, it seems that Khartoum will continue to integrate former militias or recruit civilians into the RSF in various parts of Sudan, while expanding RSF operations to all conflict areas. The fact that Khartoum has been unusually aggressive towards those criticizing the new force encourages existing paramilitary forces to demand to be integrated into it. In fact, in addition to permanent RSF

forces, the 'RSF' name seems to have become a new title for autonomous, government-linked militias that have been mobilized for 'missions' on an ad hoc basis. This applies particularly in Darfur, where the names PDF, Border Guards, and CRP are reportedly all being abandoned by Arab militias in favour of 'RSF'.

By late 2016 the RSF was estimated to consist of 10,000–20,000 men, which remains a comparatively small force, although these numbers may continue to rise.³⁶ Since early 2014 the RSF has been operating in South Darfur, North Darfur, Central Darfur, West Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile, Northern State, and Khartoum. Indeed, it appears to be the most mobile of all Sudan's paramilitary forces.³⁷

Distribution of paramilitary forces and militias as of 2016

Darfur

Darfur has long been one of the main recruitment areas for both paramilitary and regular forces. In 2003 an estimated 20,000 militia members were in the region.³⁸ By 2013 this number seemed to have increased tenfold, although this estimate may include not only official PDF, Border Guards, CRP, and others, but also other tribal militias and armed nomads.³⁹ This contrasts with the official figure of 30,000 troops operating as part of SAF in Darfur between 2011 and 2013.⁴⁰

North Darfur

North Darfur is the main area of control and operations for Sudanese militias, and is the state from which many of them originated. Their main (and most famous) historical leader is *sheikh* Musa Hilal Abdallah, the head of North Darfur's Mahamid Rizeigat Arabs. In 2003–04 he reportedly had 12,000 combatants under his command. Today this figure could be as low as 6,000,⁴¹ yet it is said that he could mobilize many more inactive forces from among the Mahamid in both North and West Darfur, in particular if a threat arose against his person.⁴² The bulk of his

supporters remain his own Jalul clan.⁴³ He has also maintained links with small autonomous Mahamid militias around Jebel Marra who left the government side to broker non-aggression pacts with Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) rebels under Abdul Wahid Mohamed al Nur (SLA-AW).⁴⁴ His main area of control is around Kabkabiya (and his stronghold of Misteriha) and Kutum. Initially part of the Border Guards, his forces partly stopped receiving regular government salaries and may be funded through the extortion of taxes at road checkpoints.⁴⁵

Since 2005 Hilal has gradually been distancing himself from Khartoum, and his troops have occasionally turned against SAF forces and rival militias.⁴⁶ The government has reacted by supporting both splinter and rival group leaders, mainly Hemmeti, and offering Hilal various positions, including as a federal government adviser and an MP in Khartoum. Since 2014 Hilal has reportedly asked for Rizeigat men who were loyal to him to be integrated into the regular armed forces and the RSF, with limited success. In January 2015 the Sudanese government reportedly promised Hilal the rank of SAF major general and a large sum of money in exchange for recruiting some 10,000 Mahamid men, possibly as RSF forces.⁴⁷ It is unclear whether this happened. By late 2016, despite continuous attempts at rapprochement, Hilal's relations with Khartoum seemed to remain distrustful.⁴⁸

Jalul militia leader An-Nur Ahmad, who is considered to have broken away from Hilal in North Darfur,⁴⁹ is based in Gubba, near Kutum (and is thus better known as An-Nur Gubba). One of the first militia leaders to broker a deal with the SLA-AW in 2006, he returned to the government fold and was given a base in Gubba in 2008–09. His forces number 600 men recruited among various Mahamid clans; they have about 100 vehicles and are mostly active around Kutum. They include abbala Arabs from the Jalul, Eteifat (from Um Sayala, which was the main militia base in the Hashaba area before An-Nur settled in Gubba), and Eregat clans. Initially from the Border Guards

and CRP, they were at least partly integrated into SAF and now reportedly use the name RSF. However, they do not seem to have been formally integrated into the NISS-controlled RSF and may be directly under the command of the Ministry of Defence. They have systematically fought alongside SAF, including with air support.⁵⁰ Like all those who have broken away from Hilal, An-Nur used to have close links to former North Darfur governor Osman Kibir and his Mahamid (Awlad Yasin) deputy Adam an-Nahla 'Mawazin', who brought An-Nur back to the government fold. An-Nur's forces are considered to be the most loyal government militia in North Darfur.⁵¹

Other militias who have broken away from Hilal are based in the Kabkabiya area. They notably include Mahamid militias from the Awlad Tako and Awlad Jonub clans under Himeda Abbas. They are mostly active in Saraf Umra and are under SAF command in the Kabkabiya area. In Kabkabiya itself local SAF units back another abala militia under 'Gamartallah' Mohammed Musa from the local Zabalat clan, who is involved in the Jebel Amir gold mine. Gamartallah's troops also reportedly call themselves RSF.

In North Darfur Hemmeti's RSF encountered opposition notably from Hilal, but also from Hemmeti's own Mahariya Rizeigat paramount chief *nazir* Mohammedin ad-Dud, who was reportedly arrested for a month in early 2017 after rejecting an offer of integrating 2,000 youths into the RSF. This conflict goes back to the 1980s, when Hemmeti's Awlad Mansour clan migrated from North to South Darfur to escape Mohammedin's leadership.⁵²

In Sireif Beni Hussein, Beni Hussein Arab Border Guards who fought and were defeated by various Rizeigat militias in 2013 have since reformed. They are reportedly under the command of retired SAF major general al-Hadi Adam Hamid, a Beni Hussein, who intermittently commanded the Border Guards between 2003 and 2010. In the Al Kuma and Mellit areas, Zeyadiya Arab Border Guards and CRP forces are establishing closer links with Musa Hilal since engaging in a new

conflict with the Berti since 2015. They were initially formed at the instigation of SAF general Adam Hamid Musa, who is a Zeyadiya Arab and was one of the principal instigators of the mobilization of Darfur Arabs in 2003.

Starting in 2011, former North Darfur governor Osman Kibir, whose power base lay mostly among non-Arab tribes of north-eastern Darfur, actively mobilized militias among these communities, which were known as *milishiyat Kibir* or 'Kibir's militias'.⁵³ Among the communities that were mobilized were the Berti, Tunjur, Mima, and Bergid. These militias targeted the Zaghawa, who were accused of supporting local insurgents and seen as newcomers in this part of Darfur. More recently, some of Kibir's militias were also involved in fighting the Zeyadiya Arabs, who are also seen as newcomers. After Kibir lost his governor's position in 2015, these militias risked losing government backing.

Further north, the Malha area has been largely controlled by local Meidob militias since the beginning of the conflict. Initially called the 'Meidob police', they were integrated into the CRP and managed to maintain security in their area by negotiating non-aggression pacts with local insurgents and refusing to participate in government operations. Since 2014 they have occasionally clashed with both Rizeigat and Zeyadiya Arabs, which led them to a rapprochement with former governor Kibir in spite of the long-standing enmity between the Meidob and Berti.

West Darfur

The situation in West Darfur is more confused than in North Darfur, because militias were traditionally clan aligned, rather than organized under a strongman such as Musa Hilal. Most of West Darfur's Arab chiefs are politicians and/or war leaders, many of whom arrived from Chad between the 1960s and 1980s. In the 1990s their early loyalty to the NIF regime was rewarded by the granting of newly created amir positions in West Darfur's 'native administration'.⁵⁴ The main militias were recruited among various Rizeigat clans, in particular the Mahamid. These

include the Awlad Zeid, Awlad Id, Awlad Kileb, and Naja. The Mahariya, Eregat, Awlad Rashid, Beni Halba, and Mahadi also have important militias. Since 2003 all of these have been integrated into the Border Guards.⁵⁵

Hilal has influence over Mahamid kinsmen in West Darfur. West Darfur militias have repeatedly intervened in North Darfur, either in tribal wars (such as the Rizeigat-Beni Hussein conflict in 2013), or on behalf of the government. By mid-2016 the RSF were said to be recruiting men in Al Geneina to fight the SLA-AW in Jebel Marra.⁵⁶

South Darfur

In South Darfur the main paramilitary force currently appears to be the RSF's first batch of recruits under Hemmeti. He reportedly controls at least 6,000 men who were recruited among Awlad Mansour and other Mahariya clans, as well as some Mahamid (in particular Awlad Zeid under a former Chadian rebel commander), Eregat, Awlad Rashid, other Arabs, and a growing number of non-Arabs such as Bergid and Tama.⁵⁷

The RSF was created at the time when Arab militias and NISS forces were fighting in the centre of Nyala in mid-2013, after disputes related to the sharing of spoils from the war economy and the killing by NISS forces of Awlad Zeid militia leader Abdallah Sharara 'Dakrom'.⁵⁸ Initially it seems that Hemmeti and his forces were chosen as the RSF's first recruits because they were the most loyal among the Darfur militias and had not joined the fighting in Nyala. Indeed, they seem to have remained more loyal to the government than many other paramilitary forces. Yet the government's initial aim was to reassert control over this group, including by retraining its members and deploying them outside their home areas. Since early 2014 the RSF has been operating in South Darfur, where it defeated a JEM column entering the state from South Sudan in April 2015.⁵⁹

East Darfur

The new state of East Darfur is largely controlled by local baggara Rizeigat PDF, Border Guards, and the CRP. In

addition, another newer Rizeigat paramilitary force under former SLA-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM) rebel Ali Rizeigallah 'Savannah' has been particularly active since 2013. Since then, Rizeigat militias have resumed their conflict with the Ma'aliya tribe, which has similarly mobilized its PDF against the Rizeigat. The third main community in the state, the non-Arab Bergid, also has PDF forces under former SLA commander Ibrahim Suleiman 'Abu Dur' and its tribal *nazir*, Musa Jalis. These forces have close links to the non-Arab militias of Osman Kibir in neighbouring North Darfur. Since 2013 East Darfur militias have largely been engaged in inter-tribal conflict and have not been under government control. In April 2016 Savannah's forces were ambushed by rival militias, which allegedly included Hemmeti's Mahariya tribe.⁶⁰ In retaliation, Savannah's forces ransacked the house of East Darfur governor Anna'as Omar, who is a NISS colonel, killing two NISS agents. This incident is said to have increased tensions both between the Mahamid and Mahariya and, more generally, between militias and NISS forces in East Darfur.⁶¹

Central Darfur

In the other new state of Central Darfur inter-tribal conflict is similarly prominent. Since 2013 the main conflict has involved three Arab tribes: the Salamat against the Missiriya and Ta'aisha. All of them have mobilized their government-linked militias, including the Ta'aisha CRP forces under Ali Mohammed Ali 'Kosheib', and Salamat and Missiriya Border Guard units, including Missiriya forces from Nateiqa, South Darfur. (Kosheib is the only militia leader who has been indicted by the International Criminal Court).⁶²

South and West Kordofan

Paramilitary forces in South and West Kordofan have mostly been remobilized since 2011, when the war resumed. These forces appear to fall mostly under the PDF banner and largely recruit among local Arab pastoralists. By 2012 numbers for paramilitary forces in what was then South Kordofan (including what is now West Kordofan) ranged

between 20,000 and 40,000, constituting roughly half of the SAF troops deployed in the state.⁶³

There appears to be separate tribal PDF units for the two main sections of the Missiriya (the Humur and Zurug, with some Humur sections also reportedly more autonomous than others) and for Hawazma sections. In West Kordofan the PDF coordinator (who recruits mostly among the Missiriya) is currently reported to be Issa Abdelmula from the Missiriya Ajayra Awlad Kamil. Another key figure responsible for the mobilization of irregular forces is the state's security committee chairperson, Ali Ismail Hamoda, who is a Missiriya Falayta. Native administrators and politicians from the Missiriya and Hawazma tribes reportedly play a key role in mobilization at both the local and the national levels, as do SAF and military intelligence officers. Nuba paramilitary forces are also present, including an estimated 1,000 men under Nuba leader Kafi Tayara. Initially PDF, they are now said to be part of the RSF.⁶⁴

Similar trends to those recently observed in Darfur have been reported in South and West Kordofan, including an upgrading of some PDF to RSF. In addition to the Darfur Rizeigat RSF who fought in South Kordofan in 2013–14, local RSF fighters have been recruited since 2014. An initial group of Missiriya, Nuba, and Darfur fighters was reportedly equipped with 60 vehicles under the command of former PDF leader at-Taj at-Tijani from the Missiriya Ajayra Awlad Kamil. This group falls under the joint command of the NISS, Hemmeti, and the West Kordofan state government.

With some groups reassigned to the RSF, other PDF fighters may simply demobilize. Missiriya PDF fighters in particular have long complained of unpaid salaries and lack of compensation for their 'martyrs'. Some are increasingly refusing to mobilize and have even joined JEM and the SPLM-North (SPLM-N), as well as engaging in inter-tribal fighting. This has particularly been the case since 2013 as part of an underreported but vicious land dispute between the Awlad Umran and

Zioud sections of the Missiriya. This dispute mirrors similar intra-Arab conflicts in Darfur and has triggered similar accusations against Khartoum of fuelling the conflict.

Relations between the Missiriya and Khartoum have also suffered due to abuses against Missiriya civilians perpetrated by Hemmeti's Rizeigat troops in the Kharasana area of West Kordofan in January 2014, in addition to clashes between Rizeigat RSF and Missiriya PDF during the same period. As a result, key Missiriya militia mobilizers and leaders, such as Issa al-Bashari, now seem less active. Many other long-standing Missiriya PDF leaders seem to have been rewarded with positions in the local administration and are currently less directly involved in mobilization. Once a key mobilizer, former SAF major general, Keilak commissioner, and chairperson of the South Kordofan security committee Bandar Ibrahim Abu-al-Balul (of the Missiriya Falayta) even joined JEM in 2014 in protest against RSF abuses against Missiriya civilians. In sharp contrast with the growing Rizeigat representation in the government since the 2015 general elections, the Missiriya seem to be losing influence.

Khartoum-backed Nuer militias have been hosted in South and West Kordofan for a long time and are active against both South Sudan and the SPLM-N in the Nuba Mountains. Some of these militias are said to have been reactivated since 2013 after the start of the new civil war in South Sudan, and have been partly integrated into the SPLM in Opposition (SPLM-IO).⁶⁵

Blue Nile

Similar to South Kordofan, paramilitary forces in Blue Nile currently number at least 5,000 men. They are recruited among communities originally from West Africa such as Fellata (Pula) and Hausa, with members of each community reportedly fighting in distinct paramilitary forces.⁶⁶ The Fellata PDF forces are reportedly under the command of Abderahman Hassan 'Jirewa'. Their main force is the Katiba Mabinom ('sleepless battalion').

Box 1 Natural resources and militia activity

Gold. Recent reports have indicated that gold is a major resource for Sudanese militias, in particular in Darfur.⁶⁷ In the last five years gold discoveries have multiplied in Darfur and elsewhere in the Sahelo-Saharan belt, notably because of the growing availability of metal detectors.⁶⁸ The gold rush in Sudan started in 2011 and was fuelled by high global and Sudanese prices, after the Central Bank started to buy gold at slightly above global market prices to compensate for Sudan's lack of hard currency.⁶⁹

In Darfur the first important discoveries of gold reportedly took place in Central and South Darfur in 2011.⁷⁰ In 2012 An-Nur Ahmad took control of a gold-producing area in rebel-controlled Hashaba in North Darfur. In the same year a gold rush estimated to have involved 100,000 people took place in Jebel Amir, North Darfur.⁷¹ The area indisputably belonged to the Beni Hussein Arab tribe, but in January 2013 competition over a mine provoked a conflict between Beni Hussein and Abbala Rizeigat militias. The latter won, killing at least 840 Beni Hussein and displacing 150,000 civilians.⁷² Although some of his followers had taken part in the conflict, Musa Hilal managed to play a peacemaking role. The conflict paralleled his own dispute with Khartoum and North Darfur governor Osman Kibir: he accused both of trying to introduce industrial mining, including by companies belonging to Kibir and other government officials, to the detriment of artisanal miners.⁷³

Since then, gold production has resumed in Jebel Amir, but seems to have remained essentially small scale and artisanal (or semi-mechanized). It was said to involve 40,000–70,000 miners in 2015–16.⁷⁴ Since December 2014 the site has reportedly been managed by a 24-member civilian committee or 'management council' and a 12-member security sub-committee, both financed by local taxation on gold. Both committees appear to be largely dominated by representatives of the Mahamid war chiefs, including Musa Hilal.⁷⁵

The UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan has argued that more than half of Sudan's gold production occurs in Darfur.⁷⁶ Given that more mechanized or industrial mining is taking place in safer areas, notably in Nile state, where 70 per cent of Sudan's production was officially mined in 2015,⁷⁷ this seems unlikely. Officially, Sudan produced 80 tons of gold in 2015⁷⁸ and planned to produce 100 tons in 2016.⁷⁹ Yet this does not include smuggled gold, which is reported to be three times the official production figure.⁸⁰ Most of Jebel Amir's gold is reportedly smuggled abroad, making it impossible to estimate the production value.⁸¹ Given that the Jebel Amir field was only discovered in 2012 and that its production has varied since, depending on the security situation, the panel's estimate of 48 tons being smuggled from Darfur to the United Arab Emirates between 2010 and 2014 appears to be questionable.⁸²

The Panel of Experts also reported that revenues of USD 54 million a year from gold and related taxes are reaching the 'Abbala Armed Group', which is what the panel calls Hilal's militias.⁸³ However, this assertion is based on its belief that Hilal chairs the Jebel Amir 'management council' and that his Abbala Armed Group controls the security sub-committee.⁸⁴ Because not all militias in Jebel Amir and not all Abbala militias are under Hilal's control, the estimate appears unlikely. Taxes are indeed going to the management council, but it is reportedly chaired by Juma' Ismail, an Awlad Zeid Mahamid chief who is independent of Hilal. Hilal himself is said to control only a minority of the militias deployed on the site under the security sub-committee and to receive only limited revenues from miners who are loyal to him.⁸⁵

Further, the panel's estimate of smuggled gold bringing revenues of USD 123 million to 'armed groups in Darfur'⁸⁶ fails to take into account that not only militias, but also civilians are benefiting from Darfur's gold. This explains the high number of small-scale artisanal miners operating in the area, who strongly oppose both state control and industrialization attempts.⁸⁷ Gold has also given militias a welcome opportunity to earn an alternative income without having to fight the government's wars.

In conclusion, if gold—whether from conflict areas or not—is contributing to conflict in Darfur, it is less due to the fact that militias are involved in its exploitation than because it contributes to the relative wealth of a government still spending an estimated 76 per cent of its budget on the security sector, including paramilitary forces.⁸⁸

Ivory. It is a well-established fact that Sudan is a transit point for ivory poached in Central and East Africa. The ivory is bought in particular by some of the Chinese and Korean workers in Sudan who can easily ship it to Asia.⁸⁹ Arab traders from southern Darfur with kin in Chad and CAR are said to be instrumental in transporting ivory from these two countries to Khartoum. There have also been allegations that Darfur Arab janjawid militias have been responsible for slaughtering elephants in both countries, in addition to South Sudan, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁹⁰

The Chadian and Central African authorities, international donors, nature conservation organizations, and the media have been quick to identify poachers in Chad and CAR as armed men coming from war-torn Darfur, more specifically janjawid. This was reportedly the main reason for the decline of elephant populations in Zakouma National Park in Chad's south-east corner, where elephant numbers fell from 4,000 in 2005 to only 500 in 2010.⁹¹ Elephant populations in nearby CAR suffered a similar decline.⁹² Central African ivory has also been described as a resource funding the janjawid.⁹³

Research indicates that for local populations it has been easier to blame 'foreigners' for poaching than to look closer to home.⁹⁴ Similarly, linking known war criminals to an environmental crime was also a good way to mobilize both the media and activists. There is, however, little evidence of this Darfur connection. In one particular case in 2012 captured documents and uniforms indicated that poachers were SAF or CRP members from Gubba in North Darfur (where militias had been integrated into SAF), who had used their leave to poach in Chad.⁹⁵ Yet nothing indicated that these men were not originally Chadian, or that they were part of a planned poaching effort to finance a Sudanese armed group. Another poaching raid that occurred in 2008 may have originated in Sudan (an assertion mostly based on the types of camels and horses the poachers were riding).⁹⁶ However, in other cases the few poachers who were arrested or killed in Chad have all been clearly Chadian, including some former Chadian army soldiers and former rebels. While it is true that many wore uniforms, these can easily be bought in local markets, in the same way as the weapons they were using. Cartridges bearing Arabic inscriptions found in 2007 should not be judged as sufficient evidence of a link to Darfur.⁹⁷ A limited sample of ammunition captured from poachers in Chad showed that, while many appeared to be manufactured in Sudan, they were of types and dates that may have been circulating widely in the region.⁹⁸ Furthermore, they were certainly too old to suggest that they had been supplied by the Sudanese government. Other bullets were of a type used by the Chadian army.⁹⁹

To conclude, poachers active in Chad (and possibly CAR) likely belong predominantly to nomadic Chadian Arab communities, in particular the Missiriya. The Darfur conflict and the concomitant insecurity in south-east Chad and north-east CAR certainly created a vacuum allowing poachers from various backgrounds to operate and smuggle ivory across borders, in particular between 2005 and 2010, at the time of the Chadian–Sudanese proxy war.¹⁰⁰ But current elephant populations in Chad and CAR appear far too small to constitute an important revenue resource for Sudanese government militias whose loyalty has to be rewarded with considerable payments, food, and other supplies from the central government, and who have access to more profitable resources, including gold. This does not mean that disgruntled or weakened Chadian or Darfur armed groups could not poach ivory in the future, however.

Arabs (including the Rufa'a al-Hoy) have also been recruited into militias. In addition, labourers working in agricultural schemes north of Blue Nile state, who were originally from various parts of Sudan, including Darfur, were also conscripted, and sometimes forced to join on an ad hoc basis. While militias in Blue Nile seem to be mostly recruiting among 'newcomers' to the state, members of communities considered as 'indigenous' or old settlers¹⁰¹ have also joined up, in particular since disputed elections in 2010, notably in a militia called 'Kobaji'. Even some Ingessana (SPLM-N chairman Malik Agar's tribe) are said to have been enlisted into a small local PDF force, while the Jumjum and the Christian Uduk of southern Blue Nile have continued to support the insurgency.¹⁰²

Other paramilitary forces are recruiting among the Christian Maban community from South Sudan immediately south of Blue Nile under SAF brigadier generals Kamal Loma and Muntu Mutallah Abdallah, both of whom are Maban. It is unclear whether their agenda is to fight for their community in Upper Nile or to fight the SPLM-N in Blue Nile, or both. These forces, notably the 'Maban Heroes' militia, continuously threaten the Blue Nile refugee camps in Maban county.¹⁰³

Darfur Arab militias, including from the Border Guards and RSF, were reportedly deployed in Blue Nile in 2016, triggering opposition among local NCP branches.¹⁰⁴ There are reports of local RSF fighters being recruited and trained in Disa (which historically is a base for militia training at the national level) close to Roseires since early 2015.¹⁰⁵

Sudanese militias in the wider region

Sudanese militias, in particular those operating in Darfur, have always had international or cross-border dimensions. When the war in Darfur began in 2003 the first janjawid came from among Chadian Arabs and some non-Arab groups (Tama), including former Chadian rebels, who had fled wars and drought in Chad, and had arrived in Darfur between the 1960s and 1980s.

All of the significant Darfur Arab leaders, such as Musa Hilal, Hemmeti, and many West Darfur amirs, have roots among Chadian Arabs.¹⁰⁶

These cross-border dynamics were a major factor in the violence that displaced some 200,000 non-Arab Chadian civilians in Dar Sila, south-east Chad, between 2003 and 2008.¹⁰⁷ During this period many Dar Sila Arabs also fled, but to Darfur. They were welcomed by kinsmen who had arrived before them, some of whom had become powerful traditional chiefs and militia leaders in Darfur, often with the title of amir. These kinsmen offered Chadian Arabs access to Sudanese citizenship, land abandoned by displaced non-Arabs, and sometimes to similar positions, often in return for joining or recruiting for militias. In addition, from 2004 onwards some Chadian Arab and non-Arab youths—including both early arrivals and latecomers in Darfur—in addition to Sudanese janjawid joined newly formed Chadian rebel groups.¹⁰⁸ Some of the Chadian rebel incursions from Darfur into Chad were accompanied by raids by Sudanese janjawid.

The Chadian authorities' response at both the national and local levels was to try to attract the Chadian Arabs back to Chad, a policy that continued after the 2010 Chadian–Sudanese rapprochement.¹⁰⁹ The Arabs who decided to return to Chad had found fewer opportunities in Sudan or were themselves affected by the insecurity there. They were also afraid that they might lose their land in Chad.

These cross-border dynamics are still important. Since 2003, conflicts between Masalit farmers and Arab pastoralists in West Darfur have regularly spread into the part of Chad immediately bordering Sudan. Chadian authorities have complained of incursions by RSF or other Sudanese militias.¹¹⁰ More recently, in particular since 2014, hundreds of Arab youths from Dar Sila have reportedly crossed the border into Darfur in order to join Sudanese militias, usually the RSF fighting in Jebel Marra. This is negatively impacting community relations in Dar Sila, where many non-Arabs believe that the janjawid still pose a threat. Former

Chadian Arab rebels, including from the former *Front pour le salut de la république* (FSR) and *Union des forces pour la démocratie et le développement-fondamentale* (UFDD-F), but also non-Arabs (Tama and Waddayans) from the former *Front uni pour le changement*, have also reportedly joined the RSF. According to a former UFDD-F member, some 1,000 former Chadian insurgents may have joined, including as commanders. Others are prospecting for gold in Jebel Amir together with Sudanese militias. In early 2017 Interior Minister Ismat Abderrahman publicly criticized the presence of armed foreigners in Jebel Amir, provoking Hemmeti's anger. The ensuing polemic ended with the minister's resignation in February.¹¹¹

At the national level it is feared that should a power vacuum emerge in Chad, Sudanese militias of Chadian origin could return to wreak havoc in the borderlands (as some did in 2003–08), or support an Arab takeover in Chad. Adding to fears of this possible 'Chadian agenda', Hemmeti and other militia leaders in Sudan do not hide their contacts with relatives in Chad. These contacts include prominent Arab politicians such as Bichara Issa Jadallah (a Mahariya and the Chadian defence minister), Mahamat Saleh Annadif (a Mahariya and former foreign affairs minister who is currently heading the UN Mission to Mali), and Ahmat Hassaballah Soubiane (a Mahamid Awlad Zeid, former ambassador to the United States, and former FSR leader).¹¹² These politicians are also said to have influence over Darfur Arab leaders and militias from their kin. Those who are loyal to the Chadian regime once used this influence to turn Darfur Arabs against Khartoum. Whether the Chadian Arab elite can contribute to reining in Sudanese militias for the sake of regional peace remains to be seen.

Similar, although less important, cross-border dynamics can be seen in CAR and Libya. In CAR, Arab militias from southern Darfur, in particular 700 men under Moussa As-Simeh Abulqasim (a Mahamid with Chadian roots and a former militia commander under Musa Hilal) joined the CAR Séléka insurgency

in 2012–14, although not necessarily at Khartoum’s behest.¹¹³ Most of his men seem to have since returned to the CAR–Darfur border area and to Darfur itself. Yet it is clear that they will not hesitate to return to CAR if opportunities, notably for pillage, arise again.¹¹⁴

In the 1970s and 1980s many Arabs fled drought and war in both Chad and Darfur to look for work opportunities in Libya. Many joined Libyan paramilitary forces or Chadian rebel movements backed by then-Libyan president Muammar Qaddafi. Since the Libyan revolution in 2011 some of their children, as well as Sudanese militia members and former Chadian Arab rebels, have fought on different sides of Libya’s civil conflicts.¹¹⁵

By mid-2016 Libyan Islamist forces, backed by Khartoum and involved in fighting in support of the Tripoli authorities against both the so-called Islamic State and rival forces under Khalifa Haftar, were reportedly attempting to recruit more Darfur Arab combatants drawn from among Sudanese militias. Shaban Hadiya ‘Abu Obeyda az-Zawi’¹¹⁶ then travelled to Sudan and met Musa Hilal. He allegedly gave Hilal USD 6 million to send 5,000 combatants to Libya. It remains unclear, however, whether Hilal will deliver on this deal and whether Khartoum condoned it.¹¹⁷

In 2016 movements of Darfur combatants across the Sudanese–Libyan border took place in both directions. Some Arab fighters in Libya, including former Chadian rebels, returned to Darfur to join the RSF.¹¹⁸ Combatants from Darfur Arab militias, notably the Mahamid, also took part in the gold rush in the Sahelo-Saharan belt, including in Chad, Niger, Libya, and Algeria, although there is no evidence that their earnings helped to finance Sudanese militias. Some were arrested in Algeria and joined the RSF after being sent back to Sudan.¹¹⁹

Finally, since 2013 Missiriya PDF forces from West Kordofan have occasionally intervened in South Sudan’s civil war, fighting in Unity state on the side of the SPLM-IO, to which they have also reportedly supplied arms. Their direct interventions on South Sudanese territory appear to be mostly motivated by pillage and are linked to local alliances with Nuer groups that host Missiriya cattle during the dry season, rather than being organized by Khartoum.¹²⁰

The militias’ enduring allure

Many long-term economic, political, and social costs have resulted from the militia strategy, for both the Sudanese state and society. Recently, the process

of establishing patronage networks and alliances with communities by recruiting among them and rewarding them seems to have become more costly. The communities targeted by this process are becoming increasingly aware of being used by Khartoum, dissatisfied with ‘cheap’ rewards, and worried about the long-term risks of antagonizing other communities. However, a number of factors contribute to membership of paramilitary forces and militias remaining a rational choice: the main ones are socio-economic interest and the need for self-protection or self-preservation.

The chronic lack of education and economic opportunities across the entire region (Sudan, Chad, and South Sudan) is key to understanding the militias’ continued appeal among young men. Their need for money or livestock in order to marry has always been a key reason for raiding livestock. Over time, traditional raiding (which pastoralist communities saw as heroic) became more professional, including through the formation of raiding gangs. Old raiding rules and codes of honour—such as avoiding being seen, spilling blood, and touching women (even their jewels)—were gradually broken by the rustlers when they turned into militias, and were replaced by the new objectives of so-called ‘purification’ or eliminating communities perceived as the ‘enemy’.¹²⁵ Paramilitary forces and rebel groups alike first recruited among those civilians who were already armed or experienced in fighting, such as cattle raiders and cattle guards or the protectors of other natural resources (for example, water, wood, wild plants, and wildlife).

The erosion of the values that regulated the tradition of livestock rustling and relations between communities, and the destruction of the social fabric in conflict areas all over Sudan, are the main social consequences of the massive recruitment of civilians into militias. A new generation of young men has emerged for whom war is a normal activity, a profession, or a way of life, and a source of potentially significant earnings. In some parts of Sudan, living by the gun is virtually the only way

Box 2 The European Union and the RSF

By mid-2016, when the rainy season was limiting government operations against insurgents in Darfur and the Two Areas, Khartoum announced a unilateral truce. It then redeployed 400 RSF vehicles under Hemmeti’s command, as well as Border Guards, to Daba, south of Dongola, in Northern State. From there these forces made incursions westward toward the Libyan border and allegedly arrested more than 1,500 ‘illegal migrants’ (including Eritrean and Sudanese nationals) and ‘human traffickers’.¹²¹ This coincided with a European Union (EU) grant of EUR 45 million (USD 51 million) to Sudan as part of the EU’s ‘Khartoum Process’,¹²² which is designed to stop the movement of migrants from the Horn of Africa to Europe. Even if the funds were not given directly to the RSF, Hemmeti publicly presented himself as an enforcer of EU policy against human trafficking, and provocatively threatened to open the Sudanese–Libyan border if the EU did not sufficiently reward him for his efforts.¹²³

It is clear that Khartoum is attempting to benefit from the EU’s strategy of preventing migrants from reaching the Mediterranean coast, in order to improve Sudan’s relations with Europe. But the government is also placing the EU in the problematic position of being seen to legitimize a paramilitary force, namely the RSF, that is known for committing serious human rights violations. Meanwhile, the real objective behind the RSF deployment at the Libyan border remains unclear. It may be to fight SLA-MM rebels operating in the area and reportedly to receive money from migrants or various smugglers, as Hemmeti himself has alleged, rather than to stop the flow of migrants.¹²⁴

for the poorest to rise socially in what is a very unequal society. Some of the main communities from which paramilitary forces have been recruited en masse have now become dependent on the salaries paid to militias.¹²⁶ When salaries are not paid, war booty and the extortion of various taxes have become major sources of income. Indeed, when Khartoum has cut payments to paramilitary forces, either due to lack of funds or to punish disloyal militias, or when leaders have failed to distribute payments made to them fairly or at all, militias have often increased their pillaging and extortion activities—as happened with disgruntled RSF fighters in central Sudan and North Kordofan (see above).

Communities from which young men are recruited also fear attacks from insurgent groups, including revenge attacks from victimized communities. This fear increases when militias and the communities from which they come are not involved in ceasefire or peace talks. Attacks from regular government forces or other irregular forces are also a source of fear. Militias and militia communities do not generally trust Khartoum, believing that their weapons are their only value to the government—but are also needed to protect them from the government.¹²⁷ Attacks from rival militia communities that are encouraged by the government have also become more prominent since the spread of intra-Arab conflicts in Darfur in 2013. These clashes have been particularly lethal because Arab militias have no longer been under government control, while simultaneously using government-supplied weapons to fight one other.

Conclusion

From Khartoum's perspective, two main preconditions might justify giving up its militia strategy. The first would be a change in the political context, in particular a shift towards a peaceful resolution of Sudan's conflicts—but at the time of writing this seems particularly remote. The second could find momentum even if war continues, because it is linked to

an intrinsic market-related rationale: even if they partially manage to fund themselves through booty and illegal taxation, the militias are becoming increasingly expensive and the benefits they provide seem questionable, if not counterproductive.

SSR generally takes place in a context where regular forces exercise control over less numerous and weaker paramilitary forces. However, in Sudan paramilitary forces are greater in number than and only loosely controlled by SAF (or other government bodies, including the NISS), or largely autonomous from government control. This makes any attempt at instituting SSR and sustainable peacebuilding in the country particularly complex.

A much-needed first step would be for both national and international actors committed to peace in Sudan to engage with the communities from which the militias hail, most notably the Rizeigat and Missiriya Arabs, as well as the Fellata. The divisions between and within these communities will require engagement with militia leaders, the native administration, and community members in both government- and opposition-controlled areas. It is also necessary to engage with non-Sudanese actors who are able to exercise influence over militia communities, in particular Chadian Arab political and traditional leaders.

An agreement to gradually downsize militia forces and institute a disarmament process is crucial. A priority should be the formation of truly national regular armed forces by integrating forces from a variety of backgrounds (for example, SAF, militias, and insurgents) at all levels of rank. The integration of militias and rebel movements would have to be managed very carefully. While the ultimate aim would be to place militias and rebels under state control, they would also need to receive guarantees that their grievances would be addressed. Among the most important grievances for both militias and insurgents in the peripheries is their lack of representation in the regular Sudanese forces, particularly in their higher echelons. Affirmative action would likely be required to resolve

this issue, criteria for which would need to be well defined during political negotiations rather than being left to easily manipulated commissions of national 'experts'.

Crucially, if reforms imply sharp cuts to militias' income, this will affect whole communities and likely encourage them to engage in more attacks to obtain booty. This would effectively turn them into 'spoilers' of any peace agreement that they consider not to be in their interests, and encourage them to spread violence into neighbouring countries such as CAR, Chad, and Libya. To prevent this, militia communities need to be provided with alternative sources of income, services, and development. The provision of services and development would need to be managed carefully so as not to validate some militias' illegal occupation of land. It would have to be done in peaceful agreement with local communities, and possibly in exchange for disarmament.

Disarmament would entail the loss of militias' only asset in the marketplace, giving them nothing to bargain with in their dealings with the current government, armed opposition groups, and neighbouring communities alike. Communities that find themselves in this position are unlikely to disarm without guarantees from all of these actors. At the moment they also feel justifiably vulnerable both economically and politically in light of the possible disappearance of the 'militias marketplace'. As guarantees and incentives to disarm they would need political representation in government and local administrations, but also in peace processes at all levels, ranging from a national dialogue to local talks, including inter-community talks.

The inclusion of militia communities in peace processes is unlikely to be easy for international mediators, and would be resisted by both the government and armed opposition groups. But whether or not inclusive talks take place, direct engagement should be supported between rebel movements and militias, as well as between communities linked to both groups. Civil society groups, including members of

these various communities, would have a crucial role to play in supporting such engagement. Transitional justice processes that include the provision of compensation to victims and long-term reconciliation processes would also be important. Indeed, for an inclusive peace process to be successful some kind of amnesty will probably have to be discussed.

The potential for and likely outcomes of an inclusive SSR process should involve all political and armed actors at the national level. The chances of success will partly depend on the timing and on the presence of the required political will among all affected groups. The context is one where all communities increasingly believe in arming themselves for their own protection rather than trusting the national army to ensure their safety, and this will need to be dealt with, possibly as part of a national dialogue framework.

In the Sudanese context at the time of writing all this seems to be impossible without concerted political will to achieve both a negotiated peace with armed opposition groups and a process of democratic transition. Even if this were to happen, militias would not easily accept change and some would rebel and resist disarmament. More than providing guarantees to the communities from which militias originate, Khartoum needs to give a clear signal that change is under way, that the central government will stop supporting militias and giving them incentives to fight, and that militias and their communities will risk increasing losses (including of lives, wealth, and political capital) if they continue with their current activities. ■

List of abbreviations

CAR
Central African Republic

CPA
Comprehensive Peace Agreement

CRP
Central Reserve Police

EU
European Union

FSR
Front pour le salut de la république

JEM
Justice and Equality Movement

MP
Member of parliament

NCP
National Congress Party

NIF
National Islamic Front

NISS
National Intelligence and Security Service

PDF
Popular Defence Forces

RSF
Rapid Support Forces

SAF
Sudan Armed Forces

SLA
Sudan Liberation Army

SLA-MM
Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi

SLA-AW
Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid Mohamed al Nur

SPLM/A
Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army

SPLM-IO
Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition

SPLM-N
Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North

SSR
Security sector reform

UFDD-F
Union des forces pour la démocratie et le développement-fondamentale

Notes

This Issue Brief was written by Jérôme Tubiana and is based on interviews conducted in 2015–16, including with Sudanese militia members and chiefs, in eastern Chad, and in other locations outside Sudan. It also draws on the author's earlier research in Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and outside Sudan. The author wishes to thank Suliman Baldo for his constant support and the Conflict Armament Research analysts for their help in identifying ammunition captured from ivory poachers.

- 1 A militia, which is one kind of irregular force, can be pro-government or oppositional/rebel, whereas a paramilitary force implies some level of integration into government strategic control structures, although this can change over time. Yet in the Sudanese context the word 'militia' has mostly been used for pro-government, more-or-less controlled paramilitary forces.
- 2 See De Waal (2004) for the use of this expression.
- 3 See ACLED (2015); UNSC (2016, pp. 88–95).
- 4 This practice began under President Jafaar Nimeri and earlier, during the first civil war.

- 5 De Waal (1994); Salih and Harir (1994).
- 6 See Salmon (2007) for background on the PDF.
- 7 Burr and Collins (2003, p. 193).
- 8 El Gizouli (2015).
- 9 This group is considered to be linked to former National Congress Party and Islamist reformist Ghazi Salaheddin al-Attabani.
- 10 Tubiana, Tanner, and Abdul-Jalil (2012, pp. 31–34). The mobilization system continues to the present day. From the outset it proved to be a useful tool to reinforce control over local communities, permanently test and reward their loyalty, and ultimately undermine their old political networks, which were generally dominated by the traditional sectarian parties that were hostile to the Muslim Brotherhood.
- 11 Various author interviews, including in Khartoum, Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile, 2011–16.
- 12 Osman Mohammed Yusuf Kibir, a non-Arab Berti from north-eastern Darfur, served as North Darfur governor for ten years (an unusually long period), before he was replaced, notably after strong pressure from Musa Hilal to have him removed. Kibir remains an influential NCP power broker in Khartoum.
- 13 In September 2013 newly formed RSF militias training in Khartoum were reportedly used to repress demonstrations against high prices in the capital, during which more than 200 civilians were reportedly killed.
- 14 CPA (2005, pp. 100–02).
- 15 Various author interviews, including in Khartoum, Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile, 2011–16.
- 16 Gramizzi and Tubiana (2012, pp. 57–58); ICG (2013a, p. 9).
- 17 HSBA (2011, p. 7).
- 18 Tubiana (2014).
- 19 See ICG (2011, p. 14).
- 20 These include abuses against Missiriya Arabs in South Kordofan and civilians in the El Obeid area, and RSF forces' blocking of a highway and robbing car passengers and shops in 2014 and 2015 in central Sudan; see *Sudan Tribune* (2015).
- 21 HRW (2015, p. 29).
- 22 AI (2016, p. 12); author interview with a Sudanese government official, location withheld, September 2016.
- 23 A January 2015 constitutional amendment is supposed to have legalized the NISS's command of the RSF; see UNSC (2015, p. 17).
- 24 Author interviews with a Sudanese government official and Darfur Arab politician, locations withheld, September 2016; see UNSC (2015, p. 14).
- 25 Tubiana (2010, p. 212).
- 26 Author interview with Mohammed Hamdan Dagolo 'Hemmeti', Nyala, South Darfur, December 2009.
- 27 This includes Hemmeti's cousin, Adil Hamid Dagolo, who was appointed state minister of tourism; see SDFG (2015). By 2016 Hemmeti had reportedly asked to be appointed state minister of defence.

- 28 Demands by the late Hassan al-Tourabi's Popular Congress Party, the main opposition participant in the 'National Dialogue' initiated by President Omar al Bashir, to limit the NISS's powers—in particular its control over armed forces—underpinned this move.
- 29 Author interview with a Sudanese official, location withheld, March 2017; *Sudan Tribune* (2017).
- 30 Author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician, locations withheld, July and September 2016, and a Sudanese government official, location withheld, September 2016.
- 31 Radio Dabanga (2015).
- 32 Radio Dabanga (2015).
- 33 Author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician, locations withheld, July and September 2016, and a Sudanese government official, location withheld, September 2016.
- 34 There have been a number of reports of RSF forces fighting against government regular forces. In January 2015 they fought against SAF forces in Golo, in West Jebel Marra (Central Darfur). RSF members reportedly killed six regular soldiers as SAF forces were trying to protect local civilians from abuses perpetrated by RSF members in retaliation for a defeat inflicted on them by Sudan Liberation Army rebels in Jebel Marra; see HRW (2015, pp. 30, 65).
- 35 Author interview with a Sudanese journalist, location withheld, November 2016.
- 36 A more conservative estimate is 6,000, while others are as high as 30,000 (author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician, locations withheld, July and September 2016, and a Sudanese government official, location withheld, September 2016).
- 37 Author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician, location withheld, July 2016, and a Sudanese government official, location withheld, September 2016.
- 38 Author interviews, Darfur and Khartoum, 2004.
- 39 ICG (2015, p. 10).
- 40 ICG (2014, p. 14).
- 41 Hilal lost dissident members who transferred their loyalty to Khartoum as he became more independent of the government, including because they were worried they would lose government salaries or were frustrated with his authoritarianism.
- 42 Author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician and Sudanese journalist, locations withheld, July–November 2016.
- 43 Other Mahamid clans and allied (non-Rizeigat) Awlad Rashid Arabs were the first to distance themselves from Hilal.
- 44 Tubiana (2010, pp. 207–10).
- 45 Author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician and Sudanese journalist, locations withheld, July–November 2016.
- 46 Tubiana (2012).
- 47 Confidential January 2015 report by a Darfur rebel commander, in the author's possession.
- 48 Author interviews with Darfur Arab politicians, locations withheld, August 2015 and July 2016, and a Sudanese government official, location withheld, September 2016.
- 49 Tubiana, Tanner, and Abdul-Jalil (2012, pp. 72, 97).
- 50 UNAMID (2012).
- 51 Recently, An-Nur's deputy, Hafiz Daud, who had in the past reportedly been appointed a NISS colonel, rejoined Musa Hilal with some 35 vehicles and forces from Jalul, Mahariya, and Awlad Rashid abbala. This group reportedly uses the name RSF.
- 52 Author interview with a Darfur Arab politician, location withheld, January 2017.
- 53 Gramizzi and Tubiana (2012, pp. 16–37).
- 54 The government reorganized these positions to undermine the Masalit sultanate, which was a traditional supporter of the rival Umma Party.
- 55 Author interview with a traditional leader, south-east Chad, June 2016.
- 56 Author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician, location withheld, July 2016, and a traditional leader, south-east Chad, June 2016.
- 57 Author interview with a Darfur Arab politician, location withheld, September 2016.
- 58 ICG (2015, p. 13).
- 59 Less information is available on the current status of other Arab paramilitary forces that were once active in South Darfur, including autonomous forces once under Dakrom and militias under Abdallah Mustafa Abu Noba, another Mahariya war chief who came from North Darfur and played a crucial role in the government counter-insurgency campaign south of Nyala in 2003–04.
- 60 Savannah is from the Mahamid, and reputedly has a closer relationship with Musa Hilal than Hemmeti.
- 61 Author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician, locations withheld, July and September 2016, and a Sudanese government official, location withheld, September 2016.
- 62 Kosheib's arrest warrant lists 50 counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including murder, deportation, torture, rape, and pillaging.
- 63 Gramizzi and Tubiana (2013, pp. 25–27).
- 64 Author interview with a Sudanese government official, location withheld, September 2016.
- 65 Craze, Tubiana, and Gramizzi (2016, p. 192).
- 66 ICG (2013b, p. 21); Gramizzi (2013, pp. 34–35).
- 67 UNSC (2016, pp. 4–5).
- 68 Tubiana (2016).
- 69 This was due to the loss of 75 per cent of Sudan's oil revenues after South Sudan's independence in 2011 (Chevrillon-Guibert, forthcoming).
- 70 Radio Dabanga (2011); author interviews with gold miners, south-east Chad, June 2016.
- 71 UNSC (2016, p. 159).
- 72 Tubiana (2014); ICG (2015, pp. 8–9).
- 73 Author interviews with an Arab militia leader, location withheld, August 2015, gold miners, south-east Chad, June 2016, and a Darfur Arab politician, location withheld, July 2016; see also Tubiana (2014); ICG (2015, pp. 8–9).
- 74 UNSC (2016, pp. 158–59).
- 75 Author interviews with an Arab militia leader, location withheld, August 2015, and gold miners, north-east Chad, January 2016, and location withheld, September 2016; see UNSC (2016, p. 158).
- 76 UNSC (2016, p. 36).
- 77 *Sudan Tribune* (2016a).
- 78 Chevrillon-Guibert (forthcoming).
- 79 *Sudan Tribune* (2016a).
- 80 *Sudan Tribune* (2014).
- 81 Author interviews with researchers, locations withheld, May and September 2016, and a Darfur Arab politician, location withheld, July 2016.
- 82 UNSC (2016, p. 5).
- 83 UNSC (2016, pp. 38, 41).
- 84 UNSC (2016, pp. 38, 41).
- 85 Author interviews with a gold miner, location withheld, September 2016, and a Darfur Arab politician, location withheld, July 2016.
- 86 UNSC (2016, p. 5).
- 87 Ille (2016, p. 200).
- 88 Baldo (2016, p. 8).
- 89 UNEP (2007, p. 269); National Geographic (n.d.).
- 90 Wright, Carlson, and Dönges (2015, p. 17); Vira and Ewing (2014, p. 24).
- 91 Vira and Ewing (2014, p. 26).
- 92 Vira and Ewing (2014, p. 26).
- 93 Vira and Ewing (2014, pp. 24–26).
- 94 For instance, in eastern CAR an April 2009 study found that, among 51 villages who claimed to be 'victims of poaching', 50 blamed foreigners, of which 45 specifically blamed Sudanese (as well as other nationalities, such as Chadians and Libyans) (Comité sectoriel de la RSS, 2009, p. 38).
- 95 Documents seen by the Small Arms Survey; see also National Geographic (2015).
- 96 Documents seen by the Small Arms Survey.
- 97 Ammunition seen by the Small Arms Survey.
- 98 Ammunition seen by the Small Arms Survey.
- 99 Ammunition seen by the Small Arms Survey.
- 100 See Tubiana (2008) for background information.
- 101 In particular some Berta and Burun sub-groups.
- 102 ICG (2013b, pp. 5, 20–21); SDFG (2017).
- 103 ICG (2013b, pp. 22–23); SDFG (2017).

104 Author interview with a Darfur Arab politician, location withheld, July 2016.

105 Author interview with a Sudanese government official, location withheld, September 2016.

106 Author interviews with an Arab traditional chief recently returned from Darfur and a non-Arab traditional chief from the borderlands, south-east Chad, June 2016.

107 Tubiana (2011, p. 65).

108 Author interview with a Chadian rebel, location withheld, September 2016.

109 Tubiana (2011, p. 15).

110 Author interviews with Chadian officials and traditional leaders, south-east Chad, June 2016.

111 Author interviews with a traditional leader, south-east Chad, June 2016, a Darfur Arab politician, location withheld, July 2016, Chadian rebels, including from the UFDD-F, locations withheld, September and November 2016, and a Sudanese official, location withheld, March 2017; Radio Tamazuj (2017).

112 Author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician, locations withheld, January and July 2016, and a Chadian Arab rebel, location withheld, November 2016.

113 HSBA (2016, p. 9).

114 Author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician, location withheld, July 2016, and a Chadian Arab rebel, location withheld, November 2016.

115 Author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician, location withheld, July 2016, and a Chadian rebel, location withheld, September 2016.

116 Abu Obeyda reportedly presented himself as an associate of Islamist leader Abdelhakim Belhaj, once the leader of the now-defunct, al-Qaeda-affiliated Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. Belhaj was notably in exile in Sudan when Qaddafi ruled Libya (De Waal, 2013, p. 72).

117 Author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician, locations withheld, July and September 2016, and a Sudanese government official, location withheld, September 2016.

118 Author interviews with a Darfur Arab politician, locations withheld, July and September 2016, and a former Chadian rebel, location withheld, February 2017.

119 Author interviews with a gold miner, location withheld, August 2015, and a Chadian rebel and Darfur Arab politician, locations withheld, September 2016.

120 Craze, Tubiana, and Gramizzi (2016, pp. 197–99).

121 GoS (2016); AfricaNews (2017).

122 See EU/Horn of African Migration Route Initiative (2016).

123 *Sudan Tribune* (2016b); Al-Intibaha (2016).

124 *Sudan Tribune* (2016b).

125 Author interview with Acheikh Ibn-Omar Saïd, Paris, May 2016.

126 Young et al. (2009, p. 76).

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HSBA project summary

The Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA) for Sudan and South Sudan is a multi-year project administered by the Small Arms Survey, a global centre of excellence located at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. It was developed in cooperation with the Canadian government, the United Nations Mission in Sudan, the United Nations Development Programme, and a wide array of international and Sudanese partners. Through the active generation and dissemination of timely, empirical research, the project supports violence reduction initiatives, including disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programmes, incentive schemes for civilian arms collection, and security sector reform and arms control interventions across Sudan and South Sudan. The HSBA also offers policy-relevant advice on redressing insecurity.

Issue Briefs are designed to provide timely periodic snapshots of baseline information in a reader-friendly format. The HSBA also generates a series of longer and more detailed Working Papers. All publications are available in English and Arabic at www.smallarmssurveysudan.org. ‘Facts and Figures’ reports on key security issues can be accessed at www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/facts-figures.php.

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