# **A background to Darfur’s security landscape in 2008-2009**

In late 2002, two Darfurian rebel movements – the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) – took up arms against the Sudanese government seeking radical reform of the national government (Flint and de Waal, 2008; Brosché and Duursma, 2017). The high intensity of the conflict led to calls for the deployment of peacekeepers and following the conclusion of the N’Djamena Ceasefire Agreement on 8 April 2004, the AU started the deployment of a small peacekeeping mission, which was subsequently expanded several times.

A long, drawn-out process of quiet diplomatic activity to get UN boots on the ground in Darfur eventually led to the compromise of UNAMID: a hybrid AU-UN mission to be deployed under UN command, but with a principally African character (De Waal, 2013: 293; Duursma, 2017). UNAMID started to unfold in January 2008.

Alex de Waal’s description of Darfur in December 2008 underlines that conflict management efforts need to go beyond only clashes involving the government. He describes the conflict as a “low intensity conflict” in which numerous fragmented groups vie for local prominence (De Waal, December 2008). Indeed, the JMAC data records 199 armed clashes, between conflict parties of which the identities could be established, in Darfur between January 2008 and August 2009. Figure A-I shows the relative frequency of armed clashes between different types of pairs of armed actors.

*Figure A-I. Distribution of different types of armed clashes in Darfur, January 2008 and August 2009*

Around 21 percent of the armed clashes involved tribal militias fighting rival tribal militias. A great deal of fighting took place between Arab tribes and Arab militias, which was a type of violence particularly prevalent between 2007 and 2009 in Darfur (De Waal, 2015: 58; Flint, 2010). Militias have also been involved in armed clashes with rebel movements and government forces. The JMAC data also clearly shows how the relatively high degree of intra-rebel fighting in Darfur (on intra-rebel fighting in Darfur, see: Tanner and Tubiana, 2007). Strikingly, various armed actors within Sudan’s government apparatus have clashed on 19 occasions between January 2008 and August 2009. The JMAC data includes observations on clashes between the Central Reserve Force and the Border Police, but also between the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF).

Table A-I disaggregates each *type* of armed actor into the various armed actors that are identified in the JMAC data as being involved in armed clashes in Darfur between January 2008 and August 2009. In total, 43 different armed actors have been involved in armed clashes.

*Table A-I. Armed actors involved in armed fighting in Darfur, January 2008 and August 2009*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Government** | **Militias / Tribes** |
| Border Guard | Arab militia (Janjaweed) |
| Border Police | Awlad Tako |
| Central Reserve Police (CRP) | Beni Halba |
| National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) | Benni Hussein |
| Popular Defense Forces (PDF) | Birgid |
| Police | El Mahari |
| Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) | Fallata |
|  | Gimir |
| **Rebel Groups** | Habaniya |
| Darfur Sons | Ma’aliya |
| Forgotten Soldiers | Massalits |
| Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) | Mima |
| Justice and Equality Movement Collective Leadership (JEM CL) | Misseriyah |
| Justice and Equality Movement Khalil (JEM Khalil) | Reizegat |
| Justice and Equality Movement National Unity (JEM NU) | Salamat |
| National Liberation Front (NLF) | Tarjam |
| Mutinous SAF unit | Umda |
| National Movement for People’s Rights & Democracy (NMPRD) | Zaghawa |
| National Redemption Front (NRF) |  |
| Oppressed Soldiers |  |
| Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) |  |
| Sudan Liberation Army Abdul Wahid (SLA AW) |  |
| Sudan Liberation Army Free Will (SLA FW) |  |
| Sudan Liberation Army Khamis (SLA Khamis) |  |
| Sudan Liberation Army Minni Minnawi (SLA MM) |  |
| Sudan Liberation Army Unity (SLA Unity) |  |
| United Resistance Front (URF) |  |

Figure A-II shows the spatial distribution of armed clashes across Darfur. The boundaries of the localities are also shown. Armed violence in Darfur displays a high degree of spatial clustering (see also: De Waal et al., 2014; Duursma and Read, 2017).

*Figure A-II. The spatial distribution of armed clashes across Darfur, January 2008 and August 2009*



Figure A-III shows the temporal trend of armed clashes in Darfur between January 2008 and August 2009. One can clearly observe that armed violence peaked in September 2009 in the studied time period. Most strikingly, April, June, and July experienced no armed clashes between armed actors of which the identity of both actors could be established. To check whether this finding is not a data issue, I looked at the armed clashes reported by the Armed Conflict Location Event Data (ACLED) project in April, June, July, and August (Raleigh et al., 2010). ACLED identifies one armed clash in June and two in August, but all these clashes involved an unidentified armed group. Furthermore, the sudden drop in armed violence in Darfur is in line with an observation made by General Martin Agawi, the former Force Commander of UNAMID, who controversially declared on stepping down on 26 August 2009, that the war in Darfur had effectively ended (De Waal, September 2009). Empirically speaking, General Agwai was indeed not far from the truth. Figure A-III show that armed violence in Darfur reached a low ebb in April 2009.[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Figure A-III: Temporal trend of armed clashes in Darfur, January 2008 and August 2009*

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1. It should, however, be noted that there was a JEM attack on Khartoum’s twin city, Omdurman, in May 2008, as well as a Chadian rebel attack on Chad’s capital, N’djamena, in February 2008 in which JEM helped defend the Chadian government. See: Tubiana J. (2011) Renouncing the Rebels: Local and Regional Dimensions of Chad–Sudan Rapprochement. *Small Arms Survey* HSBA Working Paper 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)