

SUDAN: CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE

Briefing (March 2022)

1. This briefing provides (a) background on the Central Reserve Police (CRP); (b) information on the CRP's current leadership and organisational structure; and (c) a summary of ongoing violations committed by the CRP, in combination with other Sudanese military and security forces. The information in this briefing is drawn from open-source research (see footnotes for more information) and reliable insider accounts. Each statement was verified with two independent sources. For security reasons, it is not possible to provide the identity of any sources.
2. On paper, the CRP is a militarised police unit falling under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior. In practice, the CRP, under the command of General Al-Shami Abdallah Mohamed Abdoun, reports directly to General Intelligence Service (GIS) leadership, in a continuation of Bashir-era practices. Since the 25 October 2021 coup, CRP forces have played a prominent role in the violent crackdown on protestors which has left at least 85 people dead¹ and hundreds of others injured. CRP forces have also played a role in the ongoing campaign of arbitrary arrests and detentions across Sudan, which has involved the custodial torture and ill-treatment of hundreds of protestors, activists, and human rights defenders.

BACKGROUND

3. The CRP is a militarised police unit which officially falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior and operates under the mandate of the 1992 Police Force Law (sometimes referred to as the Popular Police Forces Act).² Practically, though, the CRP operated as an auxiliary force to the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) under former president Omar al-Bashir, and this arrangement survived NISS's transition to the GIS in 2019, following al-Bashir's ouster from office.
4. The CRP is sometimes referred to as "Abu Tira" – Arabic for "of the bird" – because the CRP's insignia depicts a black bird. The exact date of the CRP's creation is unknown, though some experts place it at some time in the 1970s. However, the CRP was largely unheard of until 2004, when large numbers of *Janjaweed*³ militia members were incorporated into its ranks. Most of these were Baggara Arab *Janjaweed* members, but some Abbala Rizeigat⁴ were also incorporated into the CRP.
5. During al-Bashir's regime, the CRP served to augment the counterinsurgencies in Darfur and South Kordofan, as well as the operations of the security service more generally. From 2004 – 2010, the CRP fought primarily in Darfur. However, at the start of the conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states in June 2011, the CRP participated in government offensives

¹ Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, Twitter, 28 February 2022, available at:

https://twitter.com/SD_DOCTORS/status/1498402632980996097?s=20&t=gfHb-qvCfcZcSFmsoTYmzg.

² The 1992 Popular Police Forces Act can be found here: <https://redress.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Popular-Police-Forces-Act-1992-ARABIC.pdf>.

³ Under al-Bashir, Sudan's government recruited Arab militia groups from the largely nomadic Arab tribes which had previously coexisted alongside predominantly black Muslim tribes in Darfur (the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa). These militia groups were known as the *Janjaweed* and were a critical component of the government's targeting of the civilian population in Darfur. In 2013, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) was formally established from the *Janjaweed*, under the command of the NISS. In 2017, the RSF was recognised as a special force within the Sudanese Armed Forces, reporting directly to then-president Omar al-Bashir.

⁴ Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as "Hemedti," hails from the Abbala Rizeigat tribal confederation.

against the Sudan People’s Liberation Army – North (SPLA-N) in both states. Human rights organisations documented CRP’s involvement in serious human rights violations and possible crimes against humanity, including the shelling and bombing of residential neighbourhoods in Kadugli (the capital of South Kordofan), looting and burning of homes and churches, and extrajudicial killing and arbitrary arrests and detentions of scores of civilians.⁵

6. Sources with knowledge of the conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile say that the CRP did not fare well against the well-armed SPLA-N and subsequently returned to Darfur. Insiders in 2017 estimated that there were about 20,000 CRP members in Darfur, 40,000 in Khartoum, and another 20,000 assigned to the CRP headquarters outside of Khartoum. Current numbers are unknown.
7. The most well-known CRP commander is former *Janjaweed* leader Ali Mohamed Ali Abd-Al-Rahman (“Kushayb”) from the Ta’aisha tribe of Central Darfur. Kushayb is currently in the custody of the International Criminal Court (ICC); his trial, on 31 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity in relation to the conflict in Darfur, is scheduled to open on 5 April 2022.⁶ Ahmed Haroun, the former governor of South Kordofan who is subject to an ICC arrest warrant for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, has also been linked to the CRP.

CURRENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

8. The current commander of the CRP is General Al-Shami Abdallah Mohamed Abdoun. Abdoun was brought in as the new CRP commander after the 25 October 2021 coup, in either late November or early December 2021. Prior to being made commander of the CRP, Abdoun worked in the Police Headquarters; his precise position is unknown. Relatively little is known about Abdoun. One source reported that he is not known to be an Islamist or particularly close to the Islamists. A second source stated that he “has been part of the police department for several years without standing out too much.”
9. As indicated above in para. 3, on paper the CRP officially falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior and—one step below the Ministry—the Director-General of Police (see Annex A for a full organisational chart). In reality, the Bashir-era command-and-control practices remain in place. Consequently, the CRP answers directly to the GIS.
10. More specifically, Abdoun, as commander of the CRP, appears to be receiving direct orders from and reporting to the deputy head of the GIS, General Husham Hussein. Hussein is understood to be taking the lead on the CRP’s operational plans. General Husham Hussein is a known Islamist security elite who came up through the Islamist student movement and was identified early on as a dedicated Islamist. Hussein was Mohamed Atta’s office manager when Atta served as the director of NISS.⁷ Knowledgeable sources report that General Husham

⁵ See, for e.g., Human Rights Watch, “Under Siege,” 11 December 2012, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/12/11/under-siege/indiscriminate-bombing-and-abuses-sudans-southern-kordofan-and-blue>. See also UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Thirteenth periodic report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Sudan: Preliminary report on violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Southern Kordofan from 5 to 30 June 2011,” August 2011, available at: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/13thSouth_Kordofan_report.doc (stating that the “violations described in this report, allegedly perpetrated by the [Sudan Armed Forces], [Popular Defence Forces], Central Reserve Police Forces and the Government Police in Southern Kordofan, and SPLA-N, if substantiated, may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity under the Armed Forces Act (2007) of Sudan, and the Sudan Criminal Act of 1991, amended 2009”).

⁶ See International Criminal Court, Abd-Al-Rahman Case, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/darfur/abd-al-rahman>.

⁷ Mohamed Atta served as deputy NISS director from 2004-2009; in 2009, Atta was appointed director of NISS, in which capacity he served until 2018, when he was replaced by former NISS director and close al-Bashir associate Salah Gosh (2004-2009; 2018-2019). Under Atta’s leadership, NISS continued to systematically repress opposition in Sudan, targeting journalists and the media, human rights activists, civil society, humanitarian workers, students, and political opponents. In addition to carrying out arbitrary arrests and participating in brutal crackdowns on protestors, NISS conducted widespread custodial torture, sexual- and gender-based violence, and enforced disappearance.

Hussein is likely one of the leading individuals when it comes to the operational design of suppressing the post-coup protests across Sudan.

11. Hussein's direct operational links to active elements of the now-dissolved National Congress Party are unknown, though are understood to be likely based on other similar figures within Sudan's military and security apparatus.
12. The command relationship, if any, between the current police leadership, Ministry of Interior, and the CRP is not yet clear. However, CRP forces have on occasion participated in joint Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) operations, indicating some level of coordination. For example, following the January 2021 El Geneina massacre in which at least 163 people were killed, a joint security force comprised of the CRP, SAF, and RSF arrived in West Darfur; at the time, Sudanese media reported that the joint forces "will take instructions and directives from the army based in West Darfur."⁸

INVOLVEMENT IN ONGOING VIOLATIONS

13. CRP forces are, in theory, identifiable by light brown camouflage uniforms with a bird insignia; CRP vehicles are also marked by the same bird insignia. In practice, identifying CRP forces with certainty can be challenging, because the use of uniforms is inconsistent across CRP and other auxiliary and paramilitary forces. For example, during the al-Bashir era, NISS Security Operations Forces⁹ were known to have used the CRP uniform, in addition to others. This practice continues to the present day, with various paramilitary and auxiliary forces adopting the uniforms of other forces.
14. Nonetheless, human rights organisations have identified CRP forces as playing a critical role in the violent crackdown on protestors since the 25 October 2021 coup. Human Rights Watch noted in a 29 October 2021 dispatch that "[m]ilitary forces, including the country's notorious Rapid Response Forces (RSF), Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), and Central Reserve Police (CRP), a militarized police unit, were deployed throughout Khartoum . . . these forces rapidly resorted to excessive and lethal force against the peaceful protestors."¹⁰ CRP forces were also identified as participating in violent crackdowns on protestors on 30 October 2021 by Sudanese Archive, an independent human rights documentation organisation.¹¹ Sudanese Archive noted that at least three people were killed and many others injured on 30 October 2021 by joint forces, including the Riot Control Police, CRP, SAF and RSF, who "appeared to be well-coordinated and cooperating."¹²
15. On the deadliest single day of protests, 17 November 2021, human rights organisations again confirmed that "security forces in SAF, RSF, CRP, and regular police uniforms" used live ammunition against protestors, killing at least 16 people.¹³

⁸ See Dabanga, "Joint Sudanese military force begins tasks in El Geneina following massacre," 23 January 2021, available at: <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/joint-sudanese-military-force-begins-tasks-in-el-geneina-following-massacre>.

⁹ Security Operations was a paramilitary force of approximately 14,000 highly trained and ideologically motivated soldiers, originally created under NISS's Operations Directorate and designed to protect al-Bashir's National Congress Party regime from internal security threats.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Sudanese Forces Should Stop Abuses Against Protestors," 29 October 2021, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/29/sudanese-forces-should-stop-abuses-against-protesters>.

¹¹ Sudanese Archive, "Shot in the Streets: Violence against Protestors in Sudan on October 30, 2021," available at: <https://sudanearchive.org/investigations/oct30>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Human Rights Watch, "Sudan: Security Forces Use Lethal Force on Protestors," 23 November 2021, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/23/sudan-security-forces-use-lethal-force-protesters>. For discussion of SAF abuses during other mass protests, see also Sudanese Archive, "Shot in the streets: Violence against protestors in Sudan on October 30, 2021," 1 December 2021, available at: <https://sudanearchive.org/investigations/oct30>.

16. In January 2022, highlighting the continued involvement of CRP forces in ongoing violations, Human Rights Watch noted that the “anti-riot police and Central Reserve Police . . . led the lethal response on January 17,” killing 7 protestors by live ammunition and severely injuring many others.¹⁴ Sudanese media also reported the participation of CRP forces, in addition to RSF and GIS personnel, in confronting protestors with “excessive violence, heavy use of tear gas, and stun grenades” and conducting arbitrary detentions during protests on 6 January 2022.¹⁵

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Sudan: Ongoing Clampdown on Peaceful Protestors,” 3 February 2022, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/03/sudan-ongoing-clampdown-peaceful-protesters>.

¹⁵ Dabanga, “Three protestors killed in Khartoum as Marches of the Millions sweep Sudan,” 7 January 2022, available at: <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/at-least-three-protesters-killed-in-khartoum-as-marches-of-the-millions-sweep-the-country>.