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1.1.2. Main conflict dynamics

The conflict in Sudan has been characterised as complex,40 ‘devastating’41 and highly volatile, with clashes reported in multiple regions throughout the reference period.42 For information on the main dynamics of this conflict prior to February 2024, see section 1.1.3 Security situation of the EUAA report Sudan - Country Focus (April 2024).

Compared to the first twelve months of the war, the conflict was growing more complicated and involved a larger share of the population as both the SAF and RSF resorted to recruiting civilians into their ranks – frequently along ethnic lines. Moreover, both sides now employed armed drones43 whose long reach has ‘shattered the sense of security in regions far from conflict zones’, rendering previously safe areas vulnerable to devastating attacks.44

Since the RSF captured Wad Madani, the capital of Al Jazirah state, in December 2023, the momentum of its military successes stalled, with their resources and supply lines strained from fighting multiple fronts45and their forces stretched thin after expanding into Al Jazirah state.46 However, the group continued to maintain substantial combat capabilities, as the International Crisis Group reported.47

The SAF, which had hitherto been adopting a strategy of retreating from territories and focusing on bolstering its numbers, switched to an offensive strategy48 with the tri-city area of Khartoum, Bahri, and Omdurman as its primary military objective.49 The SAF launched its first large-scale counteroffensives in January 202450 and has retaken large portions of Omdurman. 51Following these victories, the SAF attracted support from a variety of rebel militias and ethnic armed groups, with groups like the Sudan Liberation Movement – Minni Minnawi faction (SLM-MM) and the Justice and Equality Movement – Jibril Ibrahim faction (JEM, also JEM-Jibril) deploying their fighters against the RSF.52 For more information on these groups, see section 1.1.3 Security situation of the EUAA report Sudan - Country Focus (April 2024).

While its operations slowed down, the RSF nevertheless launched an offensive against the oil-rich town of Babanusa (West Kordofan state)53 in early 2024, with the city becoming a hotspot of clashes in that state.54 In a series of further offensives following the killing of its Central Darfur Area commander in June 2024, the RSF took over the West Kordofan capital of Al-Fula55 and the strategic town of Al-Meiram (also in West Kordofan) and captured most major cities in

Sennar state,[56] including its capital Sinja[57]and the town of Dindar but not Sennar city.[58] However, later advances by the SAF resulted in the RSF-held cities of Sinja and Karkoj being cut off from its supply lines.[59]

An ongoing armed conflict around El Fasher (North Darfur),[60] the only state capital in Darfur still under SAF control,[61] intensified[62] following the takeover of the North Darfuri town of Mellit by the RSF in April 2024.[63] The RSF and allied militias started a siege of El Fasher in May[64] and had made several advances towards the city by September 2024.[65] These hostilities took a heavy toll on civilians[66] and gave rise to concerns about an ethnic conflict between Arabs and Zaghawa[67] as the RSF targeted Zaghawa communities[68] and SAF-backed Zaghawa armed groups pursued their fight against the RSF.[69]At the same time, the Joint Force of Armed Struggle Movements (JFASM), a group of SAF-backed former rebels and militias, opened new fronts against the RSF in Mellit, Kutum and Kulbus.[70] As of December 2024, the SAF was carrying out widespread and frequently indiscriminate bombardment of civilian areas of El Fasher, while the RSF conducted indiscriminate artillery strikes on Zamzam IDP camp and attacks on individual civilian sites in El Fasher, which appeared to be ethnically motivated.[71]

Some fighting also continued in southern and eastern parts of the country, including around Gedaref, Sennar, Blue Nile, and parts of White Nile states, although the RSF's ambitions to expand its territorial gains appeared to have diminished.[72] In South Kordofan, hostilities between the SAF and RFS were tied to 'complex networks of alliances between the Sudanese militaries, rebel groups, and local clans'.[73] Clashes were reported between the RSF and the militant Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North-al-Hilu (SPLM-N-al-Hilu), with some speculation about the existence of an alliance between the SPLM-N and the SAF, claimed by the latter but denied by the former.[74] For more information on the SPLM-N-al-Hilu, see section 1.1.3 Security situation of the previous EUAA report Sudan - Country Focus (April 2024).

In late September 2024, the SAF launched a large-scale offensive to reconquer areas of Greater Khartoum controlled by the RSF,[75] reportedly seizing roads and bridges linking Omdurman with Khartoum city[76] and retaking areas in the capital[77] and in Khartoum Bahri.[78] Late October 2024 saw an intensification of fighting between SAF and RSF across multiple locations,[79] including in the states of Khartoum, Al Jazirah, Blue Nile, West and North Darfur, and Gedaref.[80] The SAF advanced from Omdurman into central sections of Khartoum state.[81] Multiple Civilians continued to be killed in heavy artillery shelling in the tri-city area of Khartoum, Bahri, and Omdurman. SAF fighter planes and drones routinely targeted buildings in residential zones where RSF fighters were hiding, while some bombardments of RSF-controlled towns were of an indiscriminate nature.[82]

Meanwhile, the SAF and the JFASM were making inroads into Al Jazirah state with the aim of recapturing Wad Madani and the rest of the region but were progressing at a slower pace there.[83] Armed hostilities resulted in significant civilian casualties and displacement.[84] Following the defection of Abu Agla Keikel, commander of an RSF ally force in Al Jazirah, in October 2024,[85]

the state witnessed heavy fighting between RSF and SAF.86 It was alleged that the SAF had orchestrated the defection of Keikel and his forces to weaken the RSF's grip on Al Jazirah state while launching its coordinated military offensives from Sennar and Gedaref states into Al Jazirah state, resulting in setbacks for the RSF. It was noted that Keikel's defection allowed the SAF to temporarily advance into Tamboul town before being forced to retreat.87 These military clashes were followed by RSF attacks on multiple towns and villages, including Tamboul, Al-Sireha, Rufaa, Azrag,88 and Al-Hilaliya.89 The attackers targeted members of Keikel's Shukria tribe in retaliation for the defection, as well as other communities suspected of having welcomed the SAF's advances in the region.90 The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that these attacks by RSF ground forces left hundreds of people dead and pointed to multiple cases of sexual violence, abductions of women and girls, and the reported displacement of thousands of families into neighbouring states.91Local villagers faced plundering RSF fighters92 who were robbing and killing civilians.93 According to ACLED, at least 500 people may have died during a siege imposed by the RSF on the town of Al-Hilaliya, including dozens from an outbreak of diarrhea that was attributed to the RSF poisoning food supplies.94

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