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2.6.1. Actors involved and territorial control

During the reference period,966 the SAF maintained control over the eastern states of the country,967 including the Red Sea coast and Port Sudan,968 where the SAF ministries have relocated to in 2023.969 In December 2023, the Sudan War Monitor reported that RSF forces had ventured into the countryside of Gedaref state but had failed to establish a 'significant presence' there.970 In July 2024, the Sudan Tribune reported that RSF forces were present at the borders of the state with Al Jazirah and Sennar states.971 In October 2024, ACLED reported that the SAF managed to hold the last remaining route connecting Sennar city with Gedaref state.972

A number of armed groups, namely, SLM-MM, SLM-Tambour, and JEM, which originated as rebels in Darfur, have reportedly deployed forces and established SAF-supported training camps in the east,973 namely in Gedaref and Kassala states.974 Some Pro-SAF groups have reportedly provided fighters for mobile forces supporting the SAF in southeastern Sudanese states, including in Gedaref.975 In late March 2024, more than a thousand new SLM-MM fighters graduated in Gedaref state and were preparing to enter the war. In early April 2024, SLM-MM fighters were deployed to the El Fau (or Al-Fau, El Fao) frontline in Gedaref, where SLM-Tambour fighters were also present. In March 2024, new JEM fighters were trained in Kassala state.976 The group had so far limited its activities to training and support operations in Omdurman. However, in March 2024, JEM troops were present in the outskirts of Kassala and planning to head to western Gedaref. According to the Sudan War Monitor, a visit to Kassala by a Sudanese commander-in-chief in February 2024 and the graduation of more than thousand new JEM forces indicated 'its forthcoming deployment to the frontline'.977 In October 2024, ACLED reported the presence of training camps for the allied Joint Force of Armed Struggle Movements (JFASM) in Gedaref and Kassala states, noting that 'thousands of recruits' had been trained there in the previous months.978

Popular resistance forces supporting the SAF made up of civilians acting in self-defence, were reportedly present in most areas under SAF control, including in Gedaref and Kassala states.979 The SAF has also been reported to arm and pay Popular Defence Forces (PDF)980 in Gedaref and Kassala, likely to fight against the RSF.981

In late October 2024, the two Eritrea-backed pro-SAF militias National Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) forces and the Eastern Corps, the military wing of the United Popular Front for Liberation and Justice (UPFLJ),982 were deployed across rural and a few urban areas of

Kassala state, which according to a Sudan War Monitor article had been ‘relatively unaffected by the ongoing conflict’.983

In addition, a presence of members of an armed tribal group composed of members of the Beja community was reported during the reference period in eastern Sudan.984 The armed group ‘considers itself as the rightful possessor of the lands of eastern Sudan’, is led by Dirar Ahmed Dirar, also known as ‘Shaiba Dirar’ and was reportedly headquartered in Port Sudan.985

A report published by the UN Human Rights Council in October 2024 noted that additional SAF training camps had allegedly been set up in Port Sudan ‘with the participation of girls under 18’.

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  The reference period for the East is between 15 April 2023 and 30 November 2024.

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  A pro-government militia established in 1989 shortly after the military coup by al-Bashir to fight Sudanese rebel groups. In early June 2020, the PDF was disbanded and integrated into the SAF as the 'Reserve Department'; ACLED, Sudan: Conflict Intensifies Following the Breakdown of Jeddah Talks, 23 June 2023, url

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