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2.5.1. Actors involved and territorial control

In the reference period,913 the SAF retained control over the country's north,914 including the border with Egypt.915

With the onset of the conflict in mid-April 2023, the RSF claimed to control strategic locations in Northern state's Merowe city,916 such as its airport and military base, after large numbers of RSF deployment there,917 a claim which was dismissed by the SAF.918 A mid-April 2023 article by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) described Merowe city as 'a key part […] of the SAF's home base' and Northern state as the 'heartland of Sudan's military'.919

In December 2023, the Sudan War Monitor reported that RSF forces had ventured into the countryside of River Nile state, without managing to establish a 'significant presence'920 in the state described as one of the SAF's strongholds in the country by the Sudan Conflict Monitor, published by the Ayin Network and other organisations, in March 2024.921 According to Political Geography Now, all the checkpoints on the unpaved routes through the desert connecting Mellit district in North Darfur with Al Dabbah city in Northern State, which had previously been controlled by a number of neutral and pro-SAF Joint Force groups, were taken over by the RSF in mid-April 2024.922 A Sudan Times article reported that RSF-affiliated forces entered the Hajar al-Asal areas of River Nile state, close to the border with Khartoum state, on 13 October 2024. 923 ACLED reported on 14 October 2024 that the SAF had regained control of these areas.924

Reports indicated a presence of the SAF-supporting925 Sudan Liberation Movement – Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM) forces in River Nile state's Shendi city.926

SAF-supporting Popular Resistance Forces, composed of civilians acting in self-defence, were reportedly present in most areas under SAF control, including Northern and River Nile states.927

In October 2024, the Africa Defense Forum (ADF) reported that many of the SAF's newly recruited fighters were from River Nile State928 and the UN Human Rights Council noted that additional SAF training camps had allegedly been set up in River Nile state 'with the participation of girls under 18'.929

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

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