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2.5.2. Conflict dynamics and tactics

In late March 2024, the RSF, operating a drone-launching 'Special Task Battalion', reportedly targeted an army artillery unit in River Nile state's Shendi city,930 while other alleged RSF drones attacking the city were shot down in late April 2024 and three RSF drones targeting Merowe city in Northern state were also shot down by the SAF.931 Meanwhile, a drone strike on 2 April 2024 on SAF-controlled932 city of Atbara in River Nile state targeting an SAF-affiliated militia933 was described in a Middle East Eye (MEE) article as the first such attack on the Al-Bara bin Malik brigade outside Khartoum.934 While no group claimed responsibility for the attack935 and the RSF denied responsibility, speculations were made as to whether the targeted militia itself or dissident SAF elements were the perpetrator. However, Political Geography Now noted that 'in retrospect, it seemed plausible that the strike was indeed carried out by the RSF, as the first of what would become a surge in RSF drone attacks on cities behind enemy lines over the next two months'.936 The above-mentioned MEE article, however, noted that the attack 'highlighted divisions and tensions' within the SAF.937

According to ACLED data, several drone strikes and attempted but intercepted drone strikes have been carried out by the RSF since May 2024 in SAF-controlled states that were not frontlines as of August 2024, including on Shendi in River Nile state.938 In 2024, sources reported an increase in the use of remote violence by both sides,939 including the deployment of airstrikes, drones and artillery fire. An escalation of aerial attacks was also observed in River Nile, which had previously been untouched by such strikes.940 In a December 2024 article, Al Taghyeer, citing a military source, reported that a large number of drones had reached Atbara and Merowe regions, with Atbara being particularly exposed. While most drones attacking civilian areas were shot down according to the article, some have hit civilians.941

Between early December 2023942 and mid-January 2024, fighting between the SAF and the RSF reportedly extended to River Nile state.943 Clashes were reported in May and September 2024 around the border of Khartoum and River Nile states.944 The clashes in mid-May 2024 reportedly started inside Khartoum and extended into River Nile in an RSF attempt to push the SAF back.945 In early October 2024, River Nile state's Shendi city was reportedly attacked by a number of drones after an escalation of clashes in the border area between Khartoum and River Nile states, where the SAF was reportedly trying to regain control of the Al-Jalili oil refinery facilities from the RSF.946 Fighting was reported in mid-October 2024 around the Hajar al-Asal area of River Nile state close to the border with Khartoum state,947 reportedly resulting in civilian fatalities and injuries.948

The UN Human Rights Council noted in its October 2024 report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan that a number of states in the country had declared a state of

emergency since the outbreak of the conflict in April 2023, including in states in the north of Sudan, allowing 'joint security forces, including the SAF, its military intelligence and military police, and regular police forces' to enforce the law, including to arrest and detain individuals.[949] 'Widespread arrests and detention' were documented by the Fact-Finding Mission by both the RSF and the SAF in their respective areas of control since April 2023, including in River Nile state.[950]

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