

# Two years of war in Sudan: How the SAF is gaining the upper hand

---

Posted: 15 April 2025 | Region: Africa | Category: Analysis

Authors: Ali Mahmoud Ali; Jalale Getachew Birru; Nohad Eltayeb

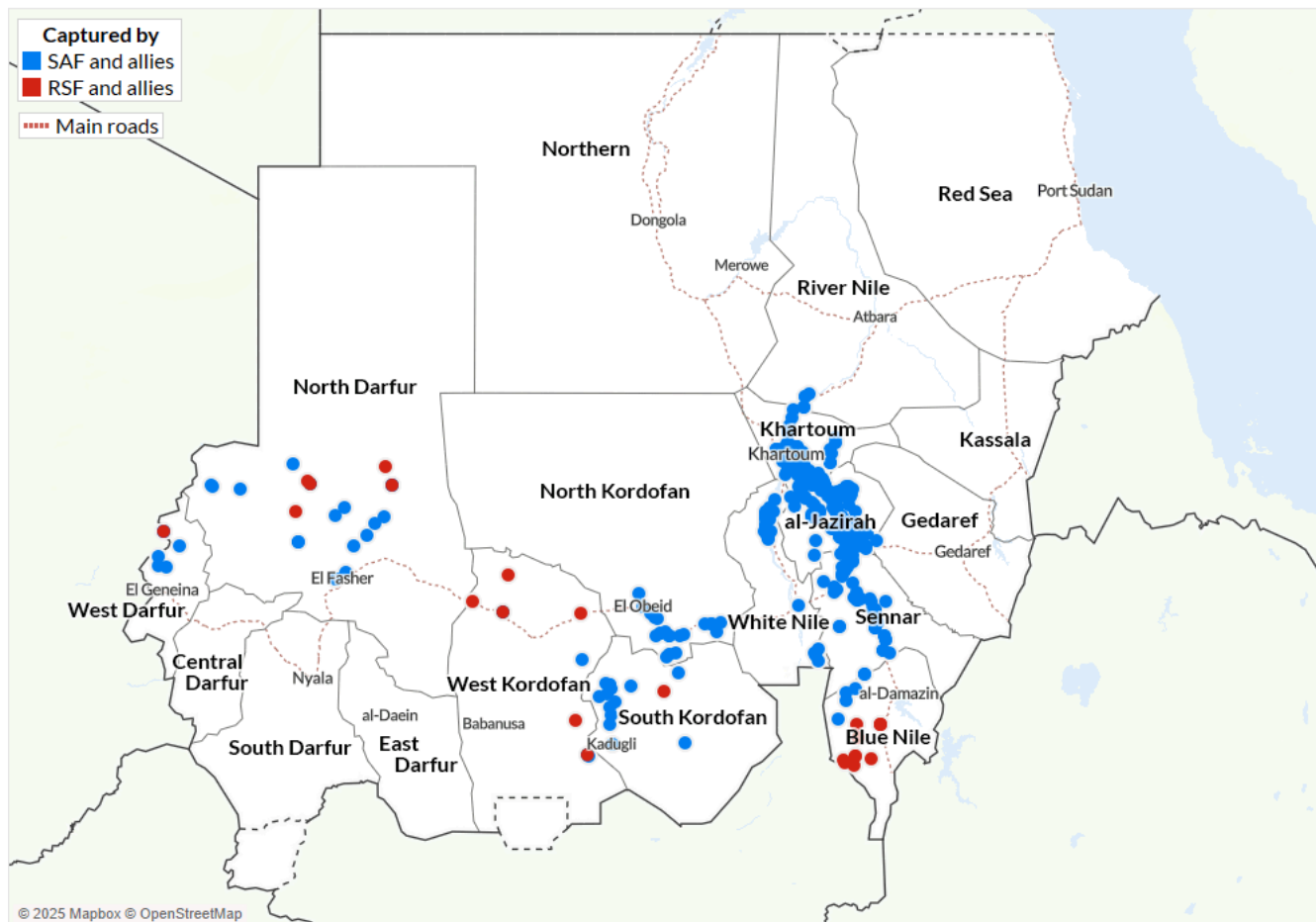
Watch the [recorded webinar](#) examining the important shifts leading to SAF's advances, and the impact this new phase of war will have on the dynamic of the conflict.

After 23 months of war, on 21 March, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and its allies regained control of the presidential palace in central Khartoum, along with all the ministries and government buildings surrounding it. As the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) troops withdrew from Khartoum city — a move the group called strategic — the SAF announced full control of Sudan's tri-city capital on 26 March.<sup>1</sup> The recapture of Khartoum city thus marks a watershed moment in the conflict: The SAF has now gained the upper hand, particularly in central Sudan.

Though Khartoum's fall may seem to have unfolded quickly to casual observers, it represents the culmination of an offensive that began at the end of September 2024 with [coordinated attacks](#) on RSF-held positions in the tri-cities of Khartoum state — Bahri, Omdurman, and Khartoum cities. The SAF also recaptured the capital cities of [Sennar](#) and [al-Jazirah](#) states, forcing the RSF into an increasingly defensive position in Khartoum. The SAF's campaign eventually ousted the RSF from central Sudan, breaking their siege on several SAF bases in Khartoum, Sennar, and North Kordofan states and cutting vital supply routes, leaving RSF troops surrounded by the SAF in central Khartoum. Overall, since the offensive began, the SAF and its allies have regained over 430 locations across central and southern Sudan (*see map below*).

# Territorial advances in Sudan

26 September 2024 - 31 March 2025



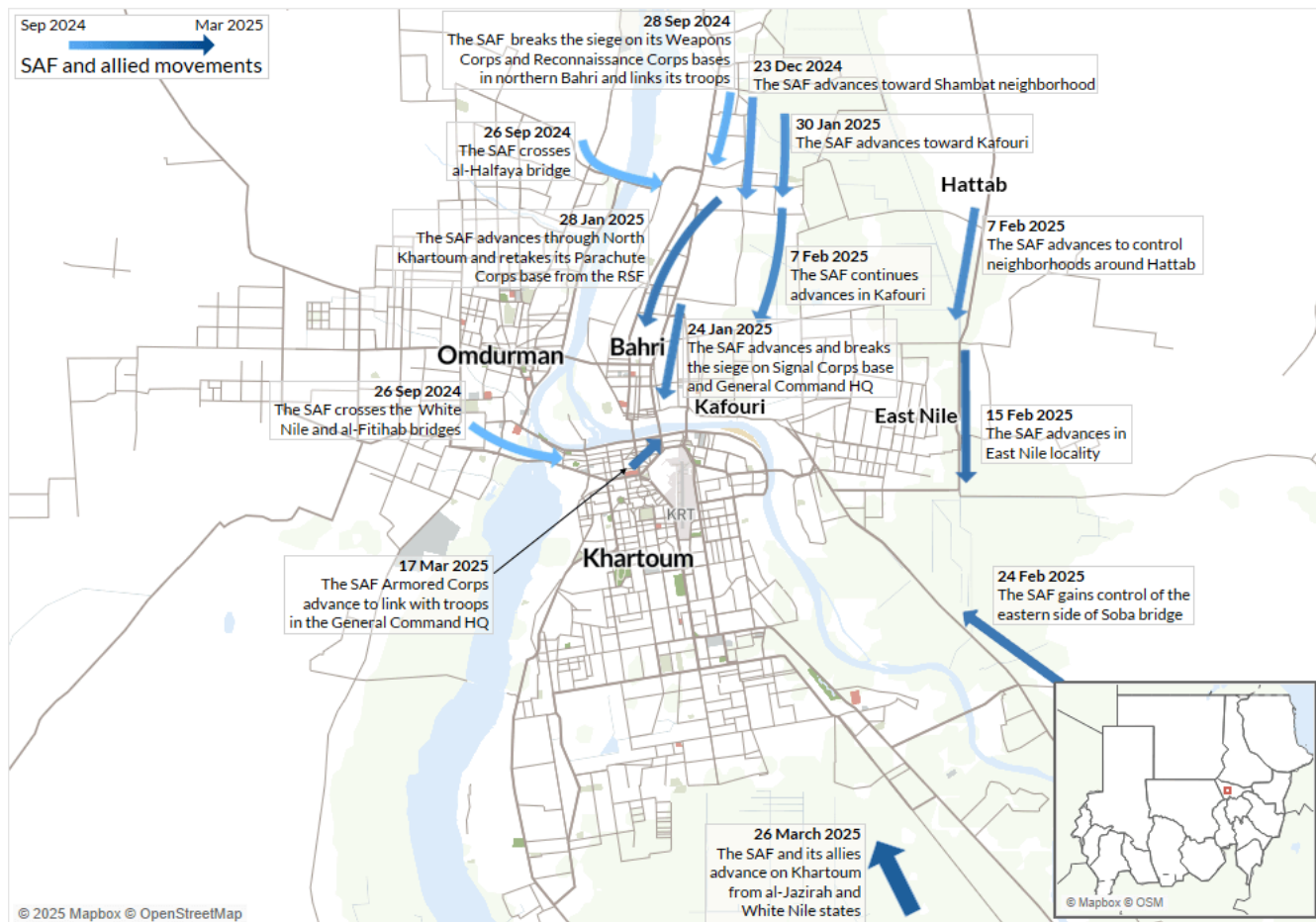
While foreign meddling has facilitated the SAF's advances,<sup>2</sup> three important shifts within Sudan's warring camps played a critical role in shifting the tide: the SAF's enhanced recruitment to address a chronic manpower shortage, the emergence of new alliances between armed groups, and the fragmentation of the RSF. While some areas of Khartoum state remain contested, especially in the west and south of Omdurman, the war in Sudan enters a new phase.

## From defense to offense: The SAF's military advances

When the SAF launched its offensive operation on 26 September, soldiers at every base in Khartoum moved on RSF positions in the tri-cities of Khartoum state (see map below). Supported by air cover and artillery fire, SAF infantry troops advanced eastward to oust the RSF from Khartoum. The SAF strategy to re-take Khartoum focused on three maneuvers: linking besieged troops in Khartoum, Sennar, and Kordofan; cutting off the RSF's supply lines; and encircling the RSF in central Khartoum by mobilizing from the neighboring White Nile and al-Jazirah states.

# SAF offensives in Khartoum

26 September 2024 - 31 March 2025

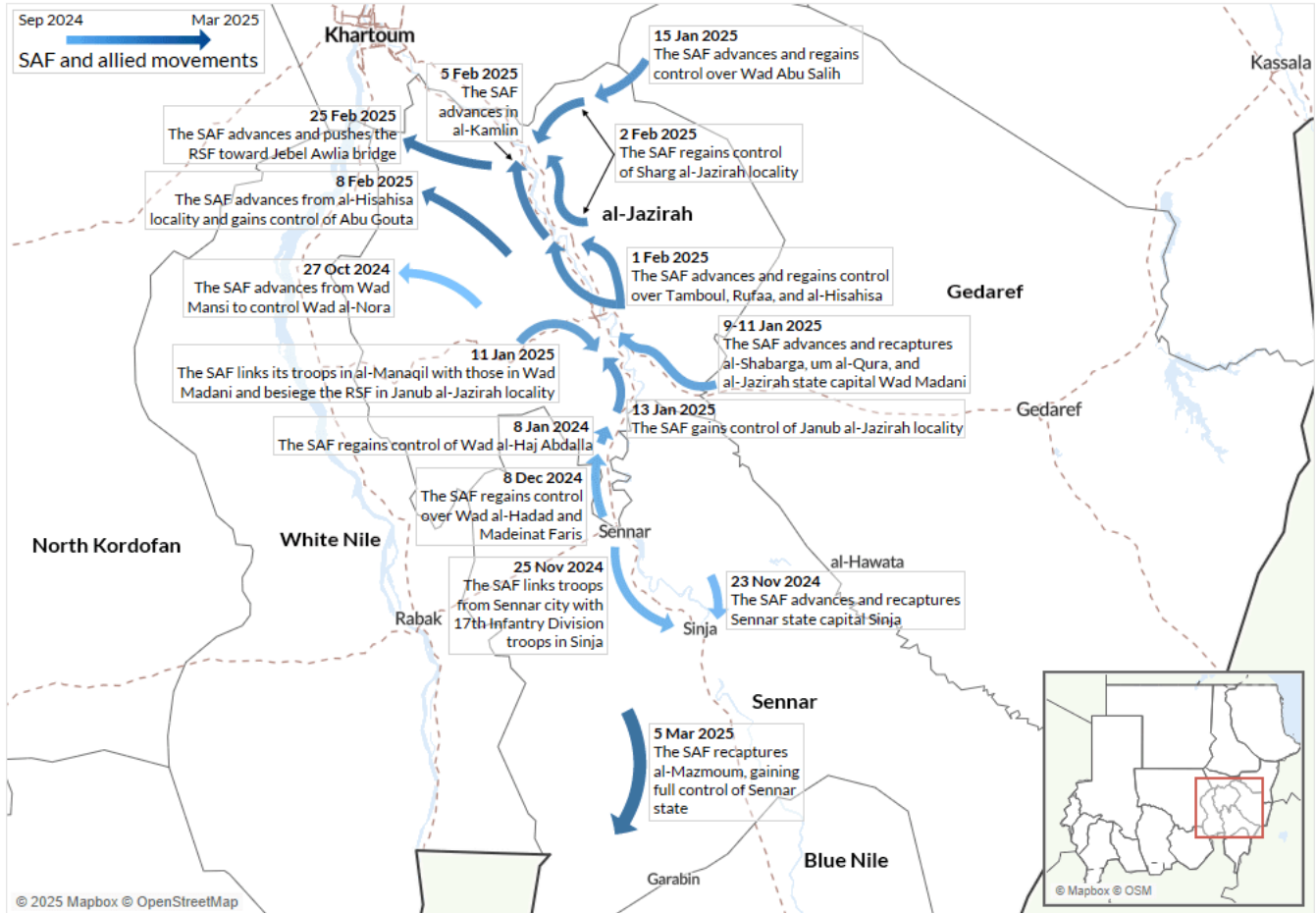


When the conflict broke out on 15 April 2023, the RSF besieged most of the SAF bases in Khartoum. This restrained the SAF from using the full capacity of its bases to fight the RSF. The first strategy of the SAF was to end the sieges on its bases in Khartoum. Accordingly, on 28 September, the third day of the offensive operation in Khartoum, the SAF broke the siege on the Weapons Corps and Reconnaissance Corps bases in northern Bahri. After lifting the siege on these bases, the troops joined other SAF units in the fight to oust the RSF from Khartoum and neighboring states. The process of breaking these sieges would take them several months to conclude, and the RSF's 21-month siege on the General Command Headquarters<sup>3</sup> in the heart of Khartoum was finally broken on 24 January. This freed up many SAF units and positioned them for the fight in downtown Khartoum.

Outside Khartoum, the SAF deployed a similar focus to Sennar and al-Jazirah states. On 5 October, the SAF [linked its forces in Sennar city](#) with those in White Nile state, and on 23 November, the SAF and its allies broke the siege on the capital Sinja (see map below). Most of Sennar eventually fell to the SAF by the beginning of 2025. By the end of March, the SAF also claimed full control of al-Jazirah state. Alongside each base launching an offensive operation, the SAF and its allies began advancing into Khartoum from the adjacent al-Jazirah and White Nile states, effectively encircling the RSF in downtown Khartoum. The SAF resorted to drone strikes and missiles targeting any RSF reinforcements in downtown Khartoum.

# SAF offensives in al-Jazirah and Sennar

26 September 2024 - 31 March 2025

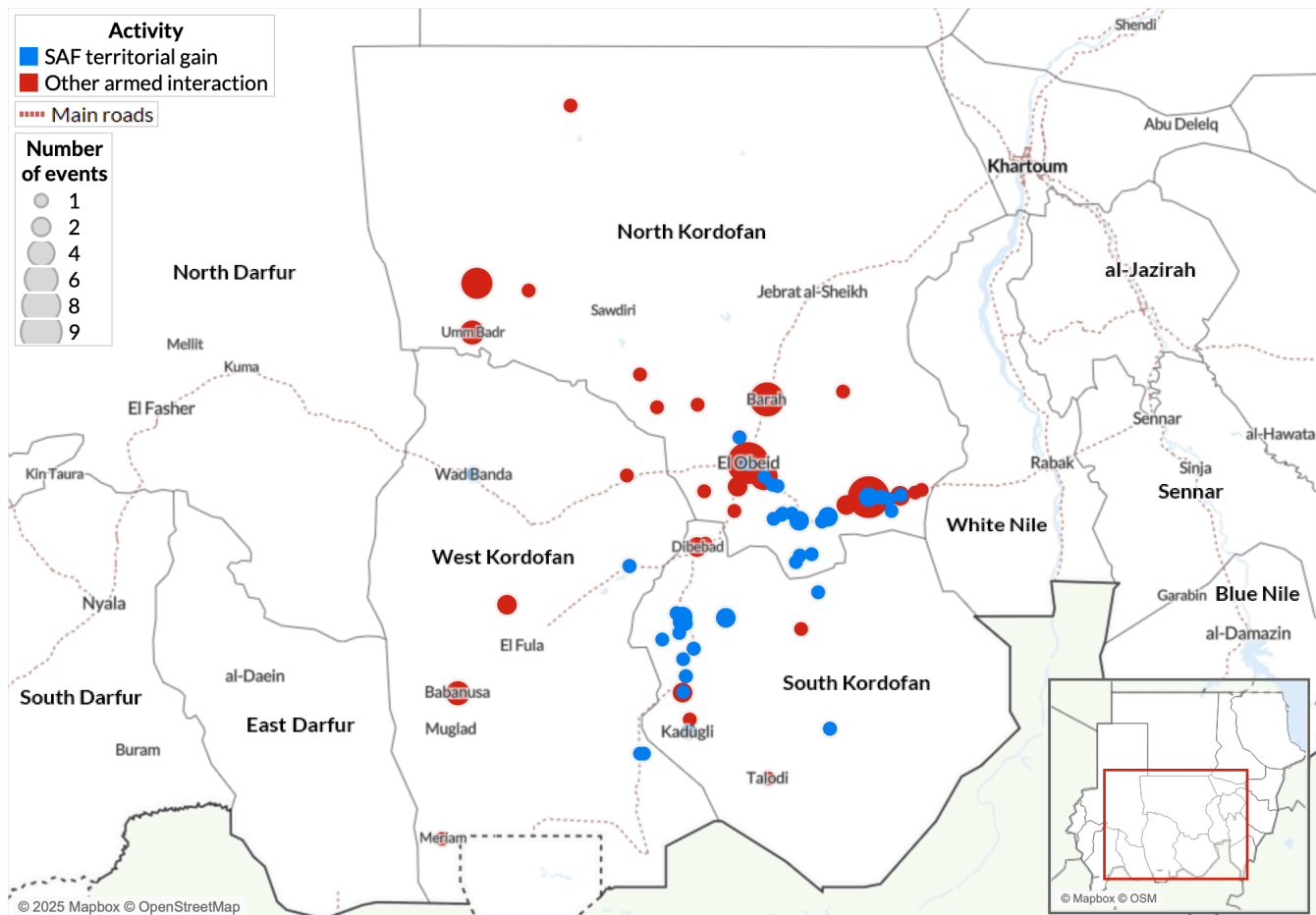


Correction | 17 April 2025: The first version of this map incorrectly labeled the dates for the 25 Nov 2024 and 23 Nov 2024 annotations as 2025.

The SAF's offensive operations expanded to Kordofan in late January, aiming to disrupt the RSF's military supply lines, like troops, from Darfur to central and southern Sudan (see map below). On 23 February, the SAF partially broke the siege on North Kordofan's capital city, El Obeid, which serves as the base for its Fifth Infantry Division. The next day, the SAF also partially broke the siege on Dilling city in South Kordofan from the south and managed to link its 54th Infantry Brigade with its forces in the capital, Kadugli city. Since June 2023, the city has been surrounded by the RSF troops in the east and north, while the Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) surrounded the city from the west and south.

# Armed activity involving the SAF and allies in Kordofan

26 September 2024 - 31 March 2025



The SAF's three-pronged strategy has largely proven effective. The RSF still controls parts of western and southern Omdurman but the SAF and its allies gained complete control of Bahri on 3 March and Khartoum city on 26 March. And while the SAF has so far been unable to wrest the west side of El Obeid from the RSF, partially breaking the siege of the city represents a significant milestone due to its strategic position linking Kordofan and Darfur states – the stronghold of the RSF – with Khartoum and other central states.

During the current offensive, the SAF disrupted the RSF's attempts at consolidating their rule in Darfur, a region that the RSF has largely controlled, save for North Darfur state, since November 2023. The SAF continued its airstrikes to the west of the country, targeting the RSF positions across all Darfur states. In March, the SAF targeted areas in Darfur where the RSF and its allies were believed to have been holding meetings. Since 22 February, the RSF and its allies have been laying the groundwork to establish a parallel government in the RSF-controlled territories to seize diplomatic legitimacy from the SAF-led government, which is currently based in the Red Sea state.<sup>4</sup> To disrupt this process, the SAF targeted various locations. In South Darfur's capital, Nyala, the SAF targeted the Nyala Airport on 13 and 14 March. The SAF claimed to have killed an unidentified number of RSF troops. The next day, on 15 March, drone strikes by the SAF targeted a hotel in Nyala, injuring 10 RSF-allied politicians. Similarly, the SAF airstrikes targeted the East Darfur government headquarters in al-Daein, East Darfur. There were no casualties. Reports indicated that both al-Daein and Nyala cities had hosted meetings between the RSF and its allies to discuss the formation of a parallel government in the RSF-controlled areas.<sup>5</sup>

## The SAF strengthens its manpower through recruitment

Since the start of the war, the SAF has prioritized keeping its manpower costs to a minimum, recognizing its troops as a core asset that is difficult to rebuild once lost. It has instead prioritized the use of remote violence, like [air and drone strikes](#), to inflict maximum damage to the RSF without suffering significant losses in its ranks. Overwhelmed by RSF

troops, the SAF battle tactics were largely defensive and aimed at depleting the RSF resources and inflicting heavy casualties. This strategy capitalized on the RSF's "meat grinder" tactics, relying heavily on large frontal assaults and troop density that left them vulnerable to significant losses.

However, the SAF's limited manpower posed a serious challenge, as the RSF formed a large part of the SAF's infantry forces before the start of the war. To address this weakness, the SAF turned to recruiting troops, including by offering a general amnesty for RSF defectors who joined the SAF. It also consolidated its forces by withdrawing small battalions and regrouping within major military bases to reinforce strategic positions. This move controversially included withdrawing two major infantry divisions from the cities of Wad Madani and [Sinja](#).

The fall of the al-Jazirah state capital, Wad Madani, to the RSF in December 2023 was a turning point. It pointed to the SAF's limited ability to contain the RSF because, in two months, five states — Central Darfur, East Darfur, South Darfur, West Darfur, and al-Jazirah — had fallen to the RSF. The SAF could have retained control of Wad Madani but withdrew without providing an explanation — leaving the city and the surrounding area to the RSF.<sup>6</sup> RSF troops were accused of looting and killing and raping residents and displaced citizens.<sup>7</sup> According to the United Nations, more than 500,000 people were displaced from Wad Madani and surrounding areas in the wake of the RSF's takeover.<sup>8</sup> This led to criticism of the SAF for failing to protect the city and triggered panic across the remaining SAF-controlled states. As a result, [ethnic and communal militias began a mass mobilization against the RSF](#), reflecting a loss of confidence in the SAF's ability to defend communities.

Simultaneously, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the SAF, made a call for a general mobilization against the RSF in January 2024.<sup>9</sup> Thousands of volunteers, alongside traditional leaders and members of native administrations, responded to the SAF's call to arms.<sup>10</sup> Following Burhan's call, training camps were established across northern and eastern Sudan.<sup>11</sup> Here, recruits were trained to deploy to the frontlines of Khartoum state, Darfur region, and al-Jazirah state.

The Darfur Joint Forces — a coalition of former Darfur-based rebel groups that signed the Juba Peace Agreement with the transitional government in 2020 — has played a key role in central Sudan and Darfur. When the [battle for the capital of North Darfur, El Fasher](#), erupted in April 2024, the SAF's Sixth Infantry Division found a strategic ally in the Darfur Joint Forces. Under its ranks, the Zaghawa native administration mobilized troops, declared war against the RSF, and offered a cut-off date for fellow Zaghawa members of the RSF to seek amnesty. The mobilization drive expanded recruitment, as it allowed the SAF to outsource the administrative overhead of training and additional recruitment to its allies, significantly increasing its manpower by integrating fighters with deep local geographical knowledge.

Moreover, after the SAF opened training camps for the Darfur Joint Forces in Kassala and Gedaref states in eastern Sudan,<sup>12</sup> recruits joined the military's fight to regain control of central Sudan. Various groups within the Darfur Joint Forces were deployed to the frontlines in Sennar and Gedaref states, from which they advanced into al-Jazirah state. This strategy was one of the reasons why the SAF was able to overpower the RSF.

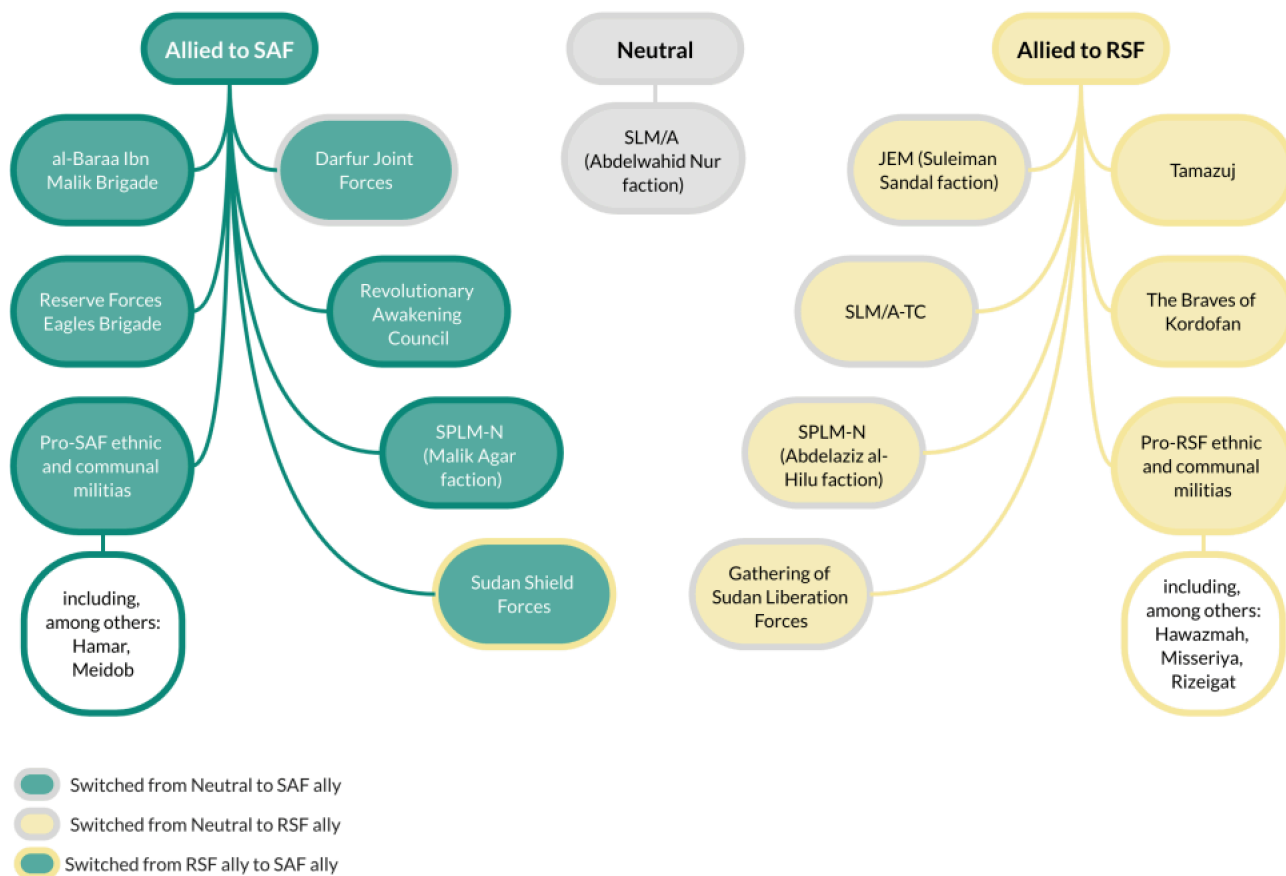
## Embracing RSF defectors and forging alliances

A second key factor that enabled the SAF's advances was an alliance-building effort aimed at rallying support among other armed groups. Building on its military intelligence and extensive counter-insurgency expertise, the SAF managed to stoke local rivalries to its advantage and mobilize opposition to the RSF across Sudan.

The SAF sought to forge alliances by attracting neutral armed groups or supporting paramilitary groups aligned with the RSF or former President Omar al-Bashir's regime for tactical and opportunistic reasons. In doing so, it aimed to enhance its indirect territorial control, strengthen its local presence, and ensure broader support for its military and political objectives. Among these groups were the Darfur Joint Forces and the Sudan Shield Forces. The SAF also revived previously dismantled SAF paramilitaries — like the Popular Defense Forces (PDF), al-Baraa Ibn Malik Brigade, and the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) combat troops (*see visual below*). Each of these allies has provided the SAF with unique expertise and geographical advantages.

# Alliances between armed groups in Sudan

As of 31 March 2025



## Darfur Joint Forces

The Darfur Joint Forces is a coalition of five former rebel groups – namely the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) led by Minni Minawi, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) led by Jibril Ibrahim, the Sudanese Alliance, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army – Transitional Council (SLM/A-TC), and the Gathering of Sudan Liberation Forces (GSLF) – that were active in Darfur between 2003 and 2020 and were appointed to the transitional government as a result of the Juba Peace Agreement in 2020. Four members of the coalition – JEM led by Jibril Ibrahim, the SLM/A Minni Minawi faction, the SLM/A Mustafa Tambour faction, and a faction of the GSLF – announced their support of the SAF in November 2023. This followed [the intense ethnic-based clashes](#) that took place in West Darfur in June 2023 and the RSF’s capture of four out of five Darfur states in October and November 2023 and mobilization to control El Fasher, the only Darfurian capital still in the hands of the SAF and its allies (*see timeline below*).

### Major developments involving the Darfur Joint Forces

**Apr. 2023** | Former rebel groups establish the Darfur Joint Forces as a neutral body to protect civilians in Darfur

**Jun. 2023** | The RSF kills the West Darfur governor and attacks Masalit civilians in West Darfur

**Oct. 2023** | The RSF takes over Nyala, the capital of South Darfur

**Oct. 2023** | The RSF gains control of Zalingei, the capital of Central Darfur

**Nov.** takes the Darfu Masal

In February 2024, the SAF began training recruited fighters from each armed group within the Darfur Joint Forces in eastern Sudan. As thousands graduated, they were deployed to fight with the SAF in the central regions of the country,

including Khartoum, Sennar, al-Jazirah, and White Nile states.<sup>13</sup> The Darfur Joint Forces' expertise in rural warfare and desert geography enabled them to support the SAF in launching offensive maneuvers against the RSF across multiple locations. This included initiating battles to "liberate" the [al-Gaili oil refinery](#) in rural Khartoum from the RSF. Additionally, they played a role in the fight to gain control of the Omdurman market, which allowed [the SAF to link its troops in northern and southern Omdurman](#) within Khartoum and contributed to the SAF's advances in regaining control over al-Jazirah state, the Fao area in Gedaref state, and [other key battlefronts in Sennar state](#).

The SAF's advances in the central and southern regions would not have been attainable if the RSF had not been distracted by battles in North Darfur. Without El Fasher — the last remaining Darfur bastion under SAF control — the RSF's strategic leverage over the entire Darfur region diminishes. The RSF has, therefore, fought persistently to capture the city, maintaining a siege for almost a year and continuously launching attacks. The Darfur Joint Forces has played a crucial role in enabling the SAF to hold El Fasher, launching various maneuvers to disrupt RSF supply routes. These operations have inflicted considerable losses on the RSF, forcing it to deploy thousands of troops to reinforce its frontlines in El Fasher, further weakening its ability to maintain control in other battlefronts.<sup>14</sup>

## Al-Baraa Ibn Malik Brigade

While the SAF sought alliances with various rebel groups, it also revived connections with former Islamist allies who had fought in earlier wars during the Bashir regime. The fall of Bashir led to the dismantling of the National Congress Party (NCP)'s ideological and paramilitary arms, such as the PDF and the NISS's combat units. The Al-Baraa Ibn Malik Brigade, named after a historical fighter in the early Islamic conquest, was initially a part of the PDF that was dissolved in 2020.<sup>15</sup> However, during the transitional period between 2019 and 2021, the SAF provided civic space for Islamists to reemerge.<sup>16</sup> Although the military had continuously cracked down on pro-democracy protests, Islamist groups were allowed to hold peaceful protests that opposed the civilian transitional government and the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC). These opposition groups — which the FFC sidelined — increased their support for the SAF to hinder the process of democratic transition and supported the military coup that ousted the civilian government in October 2021.<sup>17</sup>

It was within this context that the al-Baraa Ibn Malik Brigade initially regrouped as an Islamist political group that opposed the civilian government and the Framework Agreement that was signed in December 2022 to restore a power-sharing agreement between civilians and the military.<sup>18</sup> The group drew its core from former members of paramilitaries that supported Bashir's ousted NCP regime, such as the PDF and NISS, leveraging personal and institutional ties with SAF commanders to integrate into military ranks once the war began. Since then, the SAF has used the Brigade as both a force multiplier and a political proxy, helping to sustain ties with the NCP and broader Islamist networks. The group is estimated to have recruited around 20,000 fighters,<sup>19</sup> who have been deployed across various infantry divisions, with a notable presence in the Armored Corps bases and front lines in Khartoum, al-Jazirah, and Sennar.

## The Sudan Shield Forces and the defection of Abu Aqla Kaikal

In addition to recruiting and mobilizing allies, the SAF has successfully persuaded some groups that had initially allied with the RSF — often for tactical or opportunistic reasons — to switch sides.<sup>20</sup> These shifting local alliances have proven to be decisive in shaping the outcomes of battles, particularly following the defection of RSF commander Abu Aqla Kaikal. Kaikal led the Sudan Shield Forces, which was created by military intelligence in 2022 to counterbalance the signatories to the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement between Sudan's transitional government and some armed groups, and fought alongside the RSF since August 2023.<sup>21</sup> Kaikal's forces played a pivotal role in the RSF's victories in al-Jazirah and Sennar states. Their deep knowledge of central Sudan and ties with the communities of al-Butanah — an area spanning Khartoum, al-Jazirah, River Nile, and Gedaref states — made them an invaluable RSF asset.

However, after the SAF's advances in Sennar state, and encouraged by the SAF's amnesty policy, [Kaikal and his forces defected and joined the SAF](#) in October 2024. The Sudan Shield Forces' departure sent shockwaves through the RSF's ranks, particularly in central Sudan, where the Sudan Shield Forces had been orchestrating the RSF's defensive operations to maintain their territorial gains. It also marked the beginning of the RSF's collapse in the region.

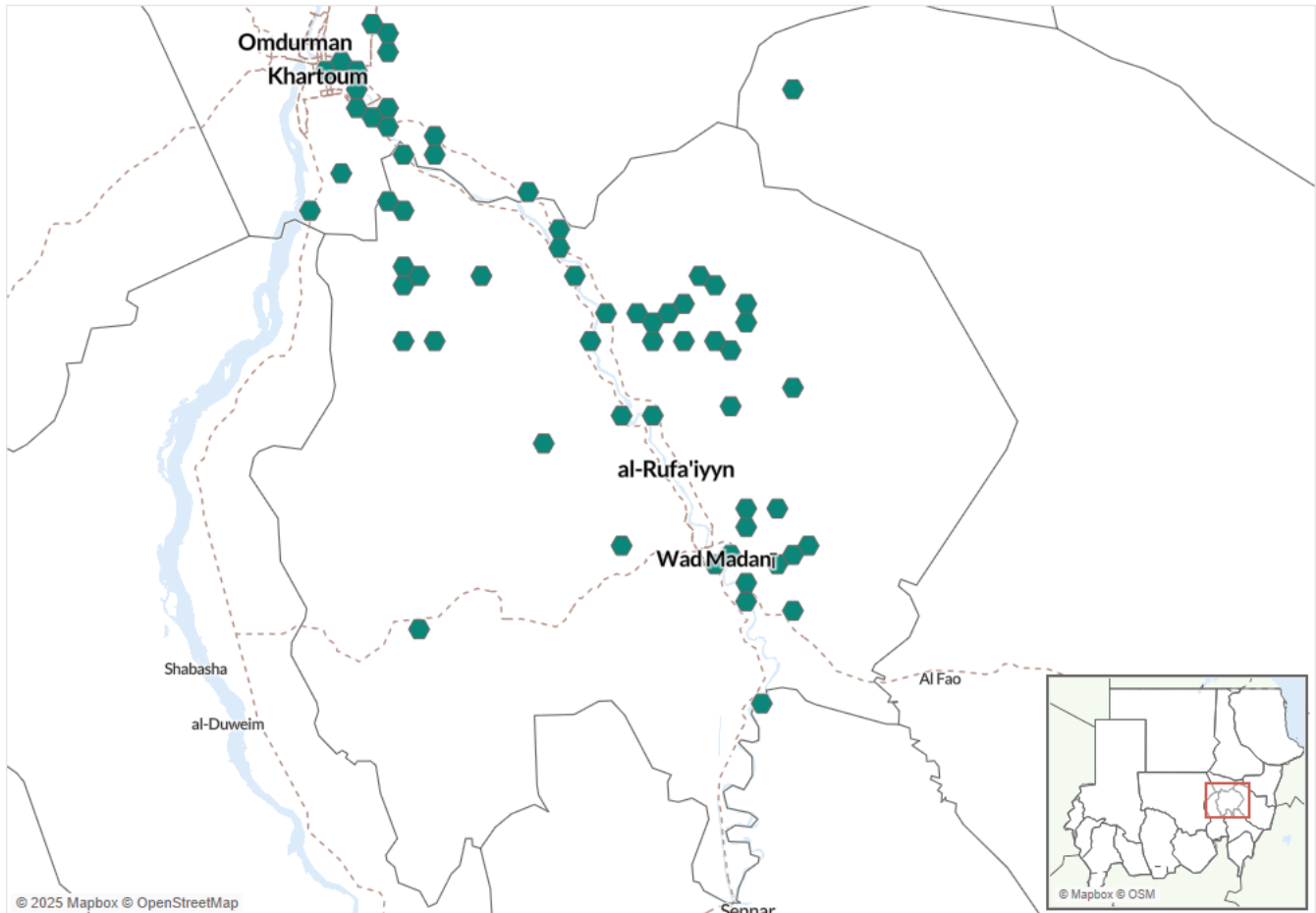
Furious over Kaikal's betrayal, the RSF [launched a brutal retaliatory campaign against his ethnic group, the Shukriya](#). However, the SAF capitalized on this retaliatory attack, as members of the Shukriya ethnic group joined the SAF under the Sudan Shield Forces.<sup>22</sup> The SAF struck back hard against the RSF, opening multiple frontlines in east al-Jazirah and Umm

al-Qura – where the SAF’s offensive operation in al-Jazirah started. The Sudan Shield Forces’ counteroffensive opened additional frontlines, distracting and overwhelming the RSF, which could not keep up. This paved the way for the SAF’s recapture of al-Jazirah state, a decisive victory that further destabilized the RSF. From al-Jazirah, the SAF and its allies began to mobilize to Khartoum state. The Sudan Shield Forces, in particular, played a major role in pushing the RSF out of Bahri and south Khartoum (see map below).

These carefully cultivated alliances have placed the SAF in a strong position to neutralize the RSF’s allies. By consolidating local rivalries against the RSF and embedding itself into native administration structures, the SAF has ensured that its influence extends beyond the battlefield, shaping the political and social fabric of the region.

## Areas of activity of the Sudan Shield Forces

October 2024 - March 2025



## The RSF fractures amid internal conflicts

The SAF’s strategic advances and territorial gains in central Sudan coincided with an increase in internecine turmoil within the RSF’s ranks that began in August 2024. Aided by RSF defections in October, the SAF eventually recaptured al-Jazirah, which in turn incited further divisions among the RSF’s ranks in the central region, enabling the SAF offensive on Khartoum. The RSF’s early expansion in Khartoum and al-Jazirah in 2023 was due to its decentralized approach to recruitment and governance, which allowed it to consolidate its control over key logistics and supply routes during the first 18 months of the conflict. But rather than functioning as a unified army with a coherent chain of command, the RSF operated more as a coalition of local militias bound by mutual interests. This loose structure ultimately created a fertile ground for internal competition among ambitious commanders.

The emergence of competing factions by the end of 2024 can be explained by the RSF’s recruitment methods, which relied heavily on ethnic and tribal narratives. Historically, communities in Darfur have a tradition known as “faza’a,” which

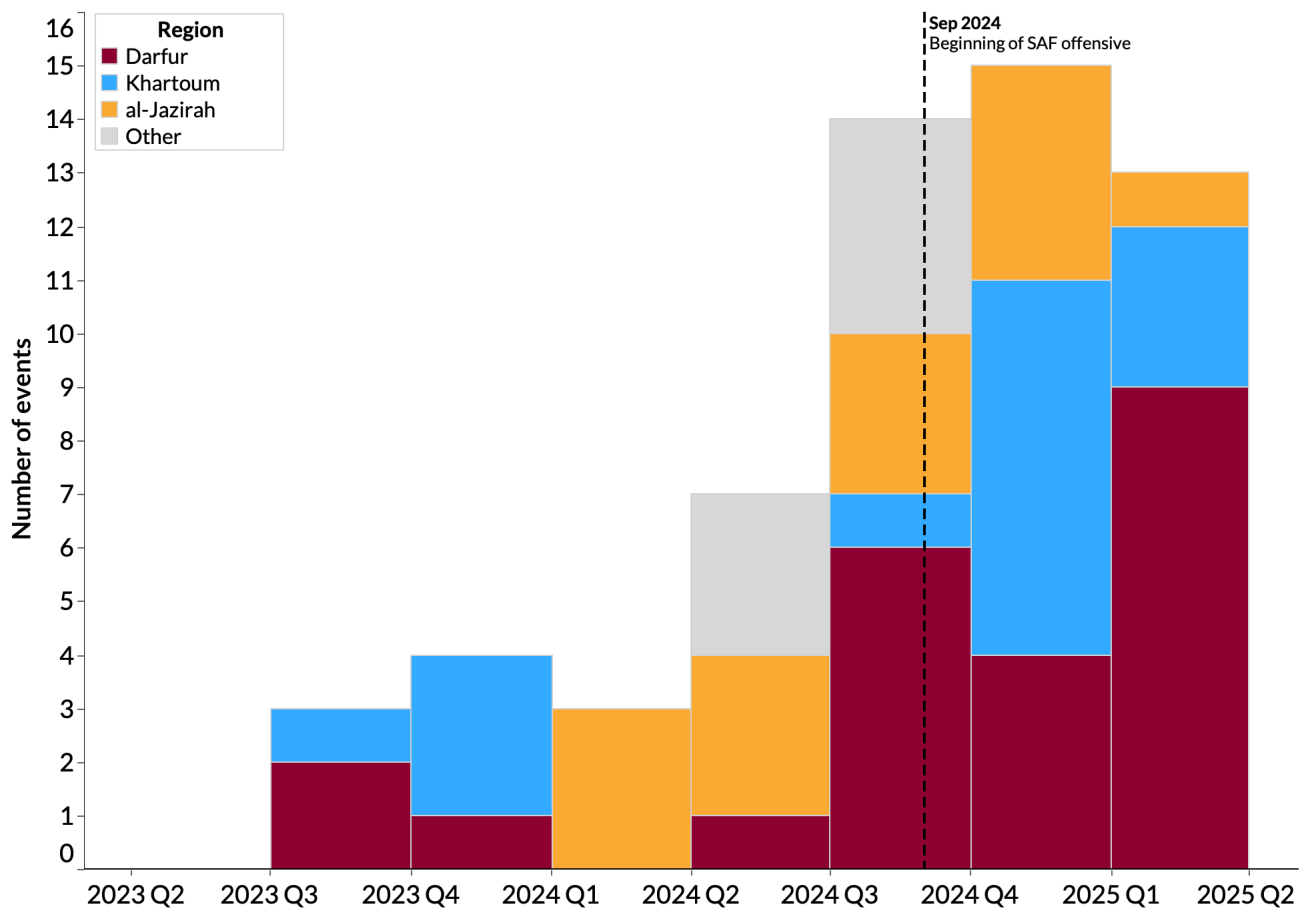
involves mobilizing fighters through tribal structures.<sup>23</sup> The RSF used existing communal networks for recruitment by targeting clans and tribes through their community leaders and tribal hierarchies.<sup>24</sup> The RSF's early alliance with ethnic militias, such as the Beni Halba, Salamat, Rizeigat, and Misseriya, supported its [rapid expansion](#) and enabled it to become the de facto ruling authority in the southern belt of Darfur and Kordofan by the end of 2023. Beyond Darfur, allying with Kaikal in the central region allowed the RSF to control al-Jazirah and Sennar, regions that would otherwise be unfamiliar to the RSF's core allies in Darfur. This approach resulted in a decentralized, horizontally organized force that fosters high loyalty between lower-ranking soldiers and their direct superiors.<sup>25</sup>

The RSF's ethnic/communal-based recruitment strategy resulted in autonomous, mid-level tribal militia commanders who controlled local economies and supply chains and led their own troops in clashes fueled by local agendas.<sup>26</sup> This decentralized structure does not guarantee a coherent chain of command, as was first illustrated by the [deadly clashes between RSF-allied Arab groups](#) over land and resources in South and Central Darfur in late 2023, which persisted for months despite mediation attempts by the RSF leadership.<sup>27</sup>

The trend of competition between RSF allies has expanded beyond the Darfur region, and ACLED records many such events in al-Jazirah and Khartoum (see *graph below*). Internal conflicts often relate to ethnic affiliation or refusal to adhere to top-level commands. On 11 September 2024, for instance, an RSF group consisting of unspecified ethnic groups shot and killed the RSF head of media in Meheiriba, al-Jazirah, after disputing his appointment as commander of that location.

## Instances of infighting in the RSF

April 2023 - March 2025



These incidents further eroded morale, culminating in Kaikal's defection on 20 October 2024 and the subsequent [revenge attacks](#) by the RSF on civilians in eastern al-Jazirah. Following his defection, the RSF arrested other members of the RSF and its civil administration who were appointed in Wad Madani in March 2024, accusing them of siding with the defectors. Despite its severe [crackdown on civilians](#), the RSF lost al-Jazirah state two months after Kaikal's defection, indicating that the event resulted in major losses to the RSF's troops in the state.

Infighting between RSF-allied militias continued in Khartoum. In December 2024, a group of RSF members from the Misseriya community led by the senior commander Rahmtalla al-Mahdi, better known as “Jalha,” clashed with other RSF members in Soba prison in Khartoum for three consecutive days. The clashes only ended after they destroyed the prison gates and broke out other RSF members who were arrested by the group’s Negative Phenomena Committee, an internal police force that was set up to combat misdemeanors in RSF-controlled regions.<sup>28</sup> Jalha — who was killed on 28 January 2025 — was a militia leader who fought in Libya and returned to join the RSF in September 2023.<sup>29</sup> Despite attempts by the RSF leadership to control its forces, allied militias still operate semi-independently, many of them under the command of mercenaries or local warlords who prioritize quick economic gains.

Although the RSF spread to many regions in Sudan, it failed to establish a reliable form of governance beyond localized taxation systems, permits, and checkpoints, which also played a role in the RSF’s fracturing in the central region. Despite having appointed its own civil administrations, the RSF was unable to maintain secure environments for residents within its territories. Over 68% of violence targeting civilians recorded by ACLED since the conflict began was committed by the RSF, indicating a higher tolerance for criminal activity in areas under its control.<sup>30</sup> Allowing its members autonomy in operating markets and taxation strategies enabled the RSF to dominate local economies and key access routes, isolating SAF-controlled regions and facilitating forced conscription and cooperation from local residents and informants.

However, this approach fostered a culture of pillaging and prioritizing wartime spoils among RSF-allied militias, ultimately exacerbating competition between RSF units and leading some factions to rebel against commands to secure economic gains. For instance, on 14 September 2024, RSF militias led by Ismail Hussein and Bashir Balnja clashed in Umm Rawaba, North Kordofan, over a dispute regarding looted cows, resulting in 13 fatalities. Five days later, further clashes occurred when a group of RSF fighters resisted an order banning motorbikes, vehicles commonly used by militias in civilian looting.

Moreover, the SAF’s advances in early 2025 significantly weakened the RSF’s remaining positions in central Sudan. The SAF’s control of al-Jazirah state was particularly impactful, as it strategically links several states and provides valuable economic advantages previously leveraged by the RSF through control over agricultural production and food supplies.<sup>31</sup> The subsequent SAF advances in Khartoum and North Kordofan in February 2025 further strained the RSF, limiting its operations and logistics network and leading to its loss of the majority of Khartoum by March 2025.

## Alliances remain critical to the SAF’s push south and west

As the SAF recaptures the majority of Khartoum state and seeks support for reconstruction, the conflict will likely shift westward and southward.<sup>32</sup> In Khartoum, the SAF has successfully pushed the RSF to retreat west toward southern Omdurman — its only remaining stronghold in the tri-city capital area — which links Khartoum with North Kordofan and White Nile states. Though the RSF still surrounds El Obeid from the west, the SAF partially lifted the siege on the city and connected it with the SAF-controlled southeastern region, indicating it will be used to bolster future SAF offensives in the western region.<sup>33</sup> To limit the SAF offensive in the west, the RSF started shelling the North Kordofan capital on 7 March and mobilized its forces to attack the SAF-controlled al-Nuhud in West Kordofan.

As the SAF’s offensive operation moves west to the RSF’s stronghold in Darfur, the RSF is escalating its efforts to capture El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur and the last state capital outside of the RSF’s control in Darfur. The RSF’s capture of the strategic town of al-Malha — located on the road linking North Darfur to the SAF-controlled Northern state — on 20 March demonstrates the group’s plan to disrupt the SAF’s reinforcements to El Fasher and to weaken the Darfur Joint Forces.<sup>34</sup> For both belligerents, alliances with local armed groups and foreign powers are critical to gaining the upper hand in the battle for Darfur. The SAF’s established alliances in Darfur facilitate mobilization for the SAF among non-Arab and Arab communities, disrupting the RSF’s network in the region. On the other hand, the RSF’s access to fighters from the region and neighboring countries like Libya, Chad, and South Sudan, alongside advanced military equipment, including drones, will make the battle for Darfur and the defeat of the RSF in its stronghold more challenging for the SAF and its allies.

In the south, the RSF’s recent alliance with the SPLM-N led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu extended a critical lifeline, enabling the RSF’s troops to regroup in SPLM-N-controlled areas in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states. This alliance facilitated access to resources smuggled through SPLM-N networks along the southern border with South Sudan.<sup>35</sup> For the first time since the beginning of the conflict, on 27 March, there was a drone attack on al-Damazin, the capital of the Blue Nile state, indicating a shift in the RSF’s offensives to the south, aided by its new alliance.<sup>36</sup> Across the southern border, the RSF

clashed with the South Sudanese opposition groups in Renk town on 15 March, seemingly aligning itself with the South Sudanese government.<sup>37</sup> The SAF generals have since threatened military action against Chad and South Sudan, accusing the neighboring countries of supporting the RSF.<sup>38</sup>

The unlikelihood of a realistic de-escalation or ceasefire and the SAF's increasing threats to Chad and South Sudan highlight the risk of a war that, far from subsiding, could escalate, wreaking ever more destruction to its population and pulling neighboring countries in. Both belligerents are acquiring advanced military equipment through external actors, further fueling the escalation of violence in several regions.<sup>39</sup> As the conflict drags on, the future of the war in Sudan will be determined by the warring parties' ability to maintain their alliances, mitigate fragmentation, and effectively manage allies and their competing agendas.

Visuals produced by **Christian Jaffe**

#### Ali Mahmoud Ali

Ali Mahmoud Ali is an Africa Researcher at ACLED and has been with the organization since April 2022. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics and Computer Sciences from the University of Khartoum Faculty of Mathematical Science and Informatics.

#### Jalale Getachew Birru

Dr.des. Jalale Getachew Birru is ACLED's East Africa Senior Analyst. In this capacity, she conducts and coordinates the analysis products of ACLED's Horn of Africa and Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO). She also serves as the main point of contact for partnerships and external engagement for the Horn Africa and EPO projects. She is an expert in conflict and peacebuilding with over eight years of experience in non-profit, government, and research institutions. Before joining ACLED, she worked as a public prosecutor, attaché, peacebuilding officer and researcher. Jalale started her career as a public prosecutor in her home country, Ethiopia. She holds L.L.B from Haramaya University, Ethiopia, and a Master of Public Policy (M.P.P) and a Doctor of Social Science (Dr.rer.pol) from the University of Erfurt, Germany. She is an expert in conflict, peacebuilding, democratization, and elections in post-conflict countries.

#### Nohad Eltayeb

Nohad Eltayeb is a Research Assistant with ACLED, where she supports the President and Executive Team with various research projects and publications. This includes data collection, cleaning, analysis and visualization to better explore existing or emerging patterns of political violence around the world.

Categories: Analysis , Horn of Africa 15 April 2025

Regions: Africa

Tags: Sudan



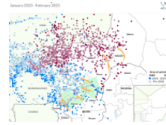
Share

## Related



### Rwanda in Mozambique: Limits to civilian protection

23 April 2025



### New frontlines: Jihadist expansion is reshaping the Benin, Niger, and Nigeria borderlands

27 March 2025



### Q&A: Who are the pro- and anti-Yoon groups leading demonstrations in South Korea?

5 March 2025

## More from:

Africa

## Recent Analysis



### Ukraine war situation update: 12-18 April 2025

30 April 2025



### The Raleigh Report – April 2025

30 April 2025



### Q&A: What fuels the violence at Papua New Guinea's Porgera Gold Mine, and what lies ahead?

25 April 2025

## SPECIAL PROJECTS

[Cabo Ligado](#)  
[Ethiopia Peace Observatory](#)  
[Horn of Africa](#)  
[Ukraine Conflict Monitor](#)  
[US Crisis Monitor](#)  
[Yemen Conflict Observatory](#)

## RESOURCES

[FAQs](#)  
[Knowledge Base](#)  
[Codebook](#)  
[API Guide](#)  
[Term of Use](#)  
[Cookie Policy](#)  
[Privacy Statement](#)

## CONNECT

[Careers](#)  
[Events](#)  
[About](#)  
[Contact](#)  
[Press & Media](#)

## STAY INFORMED

Sign up to our newsletter to get the latest updates delivered straight to your inbox.  
[Subscribe](#)

ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data) is an independent, impartial, international non-profit organization collecting data on violent conflict and protest in all countries and territories in the world. ACLED is a registered non-profit organization with 501(c)(3) status in the United States.

© 2025 ACLED. All Rights Reserved.