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UPDATES FROM SUDAN

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Hyperlinks are underlined.

Sunday 16 Apr 2023

DEADLY ARMED CONFLICT BETWEEN SAF AND RSF

This special edition of the Justice + Conflict newsletter provides a picture of key events in the recent escalation of conflict between the SAF and RSF. This is not comprehensive and relies heavily on eyewitness accounts.

Saturday (15 Apr)

- 9 – 10AM:
 - Residents of central Khartoum [report](#) hearing nearby gunfire and explosions. Concurrently, a source [claims](#) RSF's Soba camp south of Khartoum "appears to be under attack". Gunfire is [heard](#) in Soba and military officers are deployed to nearby roads.
 - Armed men wearing [RSF uniforms](#) are [spotted](#) entering Khartoum Airport.
- 10 – 11AM:
 - The RSF release a [statement](#) claiming RSF officers were ambushed in their Soba camp by a large number of SAF personnel.
 - Exchanges of fire are [heard](#) between SAF and RSF officers in central and south Khartoum, including [near](#) the Republican Palace and the SAF's HQ. Heavy gunfire is also [heard](#) around north Khartoum. [Reports](#) suggest that the conflict initially spread from the central market and Sports City area in south Khartoum towards the northern part of the city.
 - A convoy of 40 RSF vehicles is [spotted](#) approaching Khartoum Airport. [Videos](#) are then circulated showing RSF officers on the runway.
 - A further SAF-RSF clash [takes place](#) in Merowe (Northern State), where the two forces had been locked in a [stalemate](#) over the RSF's recent [deployment](#) of forces on 12 April.
- 11AM – 12PM:
 - Clashes extend to [Bahri, the White Nile Bridge, Port Sudan, and the Blue Nile](#). Bridges in Khartoum are closed, and eyewitnesses in Sudan post [videos](#) of tanks being deployed on the streets of Khartoum.

- Armed clashes [continue](#) in and around Khartoum Airport, the SAF HQ, and various civilian locations. Images are shared of civilians killed after having been caught in the crossfire. Civilians are also [seen](#) shielding from gunfire in the departure hall of Khartoum Airport, and children are photographed taking cover in schools.
- The SAF [declares](#) the RSF to be a ‘rebel militia.’
- The RSF released a series of [statements](#) on Twitter claiming that SAF forces attacked the RSF in various locations including Khartoum and Merowe – in other words, picked a fight – and announcing that RSF forces now controlled the [Republican Palace](#) and airports in Khartoum, Merowe and [El-Obeid](#).
- [Footage](#) also emerges of RSF officers at Merowe Airport claiming to have captured members of the Egyptian military, who were known to be stationed in Merowe prior to the day’s events.
- A plane is [seen](#) on fire on the runway of Khartoum Airport. A passenger [relates](#) that a shell fell on her and other passengers while inside a plane and that two individuals were killed.
- 12 – 1PM:
 - The SAF issues a [statement](#) claiming that al-Burhan is in a safe location, that the SAF is facing a takeover attempt by the RSF, and that the RSF had not seized any critical infrastructure from the SAF.
 - Fighter jets are [seen](#) carrying out airstrikes from the skies of Khartoum. The jets are [reported](#) to be attacking key RSF locations, [including](#) in the Khartoum Airport/SAF HQ area. The RSF tower (across from the SAF’s HQ in Khartoum) is [set ablaze](#). Gunfire [continues](#) around the Republican Palace and across Khartoum. Fighting also [continues](#) near El-Obeid airfield.
 - An exchange of fire is [heard](#) between the army and RSF in El Fashir, North Darfur.
- 1 – 3PM:
 - Heavy gunfire is [heard](#) around the National Radio & TV Corporation in Omdurman. During [a live broadcast](#) in the afternoon, loud bangs are heard in the background and the telecast is abruptly cut off.
 - Hemedti (who is also [said](#) to be in a safe location) gives an [interview](#) to Al-Jazeera where he refers to al-Burhan as a criminal and [claims](#) that he will be captured or “die like a dog”. Hemedti [accuses](#) al-Burhan of running a scheme for remnants of the defunct al-Bashir regime, and claims the RSF “will not stop fighting until we capture all the army bases and the honourable members of the armed forces join us.” Meanwhile, Al-Jazeera shows [footage](#) of al-Burhan and Shamseddin Kabbashi apparently monitoring the situation from an operations room.
 - SAF fighter fighters are [seen](#) firing at RSF ground targets near Khartoum Airport. Shortly after, Army Special Forces are [seen](#) in Khartoum Airport and [announce](#) their control of the area. [Footage](#) emerges of the arrivals terminal in Khartoum Airport which has been very significantly damaged.
 - Violent clashes are [reported](#) at Nyala Airport in South Darfur. Cannons and other weapons are also [heard](#) in Nyala.

- RSF officers [are seen](#) extending their presence within most civilian neighbourhoods, including occupying civilian homes.
- 3 – 5PM –
 - Increased conflict takes place [around](#) the residences of al-Burhan and Hemedti, and in [Khartoum North](#) (where electricity has [gone down](#)). Clashes also continue in central Khartoum [around](#) the SAF HQ and Republican Palace.
 - Clashes are [escalating](#) in El-Obeid, Port Sudan, and Merowe.
 - Violence is reported in Al-Fashir (where the RSF [claim](#) to have extended their control), including at least two civilians [killed](#). Armed confrontations also [take place](#) in Zalingei, Central Darfur. Large numbers of civilian injuries are [reported](#) in Nyala.
 - [Footage](#) circulates of the Egyptian soldiers [supposedly](#) held by RSF forces in Merowe Airport. The RSF [reportedly](#) also capture a division of SAF troops.
 - The RSF [attack](#) an aviation academy in Khartoum, holding the students hostage and killing one student. Officers in RSF uniform are also [seen](#) opening fire randomly in civilian neighbourhoods and [occupying](#) (and firing from) civilian roofs.
- 5 – 8PM:
 - Heavy artillery [resumes](#) in Khartoum Central. Armed conflict [continues](#), including around an Infantry Brigade in Omdurman. Further deaths and injuries are [documented](#) as clashes continue in Al-Fashir. [Chad](#) shuts its border with Sudan.
 - Heavy clashes continue to [occur](#) in Nyala. [Reports](#) suggest the RSF controls the SAF Nyala HQ. The RSF also [claim](#) to control El-Geneina Airport in West Darfur. Meanwhile, the SAF [claim](#) that the RSF leader in White Nile State has surrendered and will fight for the SAF.
 - Three UN World Food Programme staff are [killed](#) by RSF officers in Kabkabiya District, North Darfur. In a separate incident, a WFP-managed aircraft is also significantly damaged at Khartoum Airport. The WFP has now [temporarily halted](#) all operations in Sudan.
 - The Egyptian Army [suggests](#) that it is coordinating with Sudanese authorities to ensure the security of Egyptian soldiers present in Sudan to conduct joint military exercises.
 - Hemedti [says](#) that the current situation is a coup led by al-Burhan and remnants of al-Bashir’s regime (including Kabbashi and recently re-emerged Ali Karti), and that the only exit is for them to surrender. Hemedti also [notes](#) the RSF’s willingness to “negotiate” with Egypt for the return of the captured Egyptian military officers in Merowe. Musa Hilal [declares](#) his support for the SAF.
- 8PM – 12AM:
 - According to [Al Jazeera](#), the SAF has taken the decision to “dissolve” the RSF. Given that the RSF was created under the Rapid Support Forces Act 2017, under the authority of the president, it is not clear that the SAF has the authority to do so (or whether this announcement has any legal or practical effect).
 - The [SAF](#) and [RSF](#) claim to be taking steps to arrest Hemedti and al-Burhan/Kabbashi respectively.

- The RSF [announces](#) that it is closing in on the central SAF HQ (where al-Burhan is thought to be), has captured snipers (purportedly under NCP leadership), and is taking control of the SAF general command in multiple states, as well as media buildings and Sudan's airspace. The SAF [denies](#) this.
- The SAF [issues](#) an evacuation order for west Merowe ahead of airstrikes.
- [Al-Arabiya](#) claims that, according to unnamed sources, "European states" have informed Egypt that they will impose sanctions on those who escalate the situation.

Situation as of Sunday (16 Apr)

- [Air strikes](#) took place throughout the night with the SAF thought to be again targeting key RSF locations. During the overnight battle, the army HQ in Khartoum was set [ablaze](#).
- Armed conflict [continues](#), including in Merowe, Port Sudan, Kassala, El-Geneina, El-Obied, [Al-Fashir](#), and Khartoum (particularly around the central SAF HQ, Omdurman, and media buildings).
- As of 5AM, the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors announces that at least [56](#) civilians have been killed and 595 injured.
- Both parties continue to make contradicting claims over their respective forces' control of key areas. [Suggestions](#) indicate that the SAF has taken control over various areas, including West and South Kordofan, Gezira, Sennar, Qadarif, and White Nile, as well as taking back [parts](#) of the Republican Palace and [RSF bases](#) in Port Sudan and Kassala. The SAF also [claims](#) to be back in control of Merowe Airport, and [suggests](#) that the RSF fled, taking the Egyptian soldiers as captives (with potentially grave consequences for regional involvement in the conflict). [Unconfirmed reports](#) suggest that the RSF have also seized at least six Egyptian Sukhoi warplanes from the Merowe airfield.
- Al-Burhan has [reportedly](#) decided to freeze the RSF's bank accounts and confiscate its assets held in Sudan.
- [Unconfirmed reports](#) suggest that Kober Prison (where al-Bashir is understood to be held) came under heavy fire earlier today. [Rumours](#) spread around this time that Islamists detained at Kober Prison would be released.
- The Arab League held an [emergency meeting](#) today to discuss the ongoing clashes. Sudan's representative suggested that the RSF had initiated the fighting and called on Arab states to mediate for a calm and peaceful settlement "away from international interventions." The Arab League then released a [statement](#) calling for an end to the fighting, but did not outline any specific measures. The AU Political Affairs Peace and Security Council also [convened](#) an emergency session, noting that it "[strongly rejects](#) any external interference that could complicate the situation in Sudan". AU Commission Head Moussa Faki Mahamat is now planning to "[immediately](#)" go to Sudan on a ceasefire mission.
- Following an [emergency session](#) of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, leaders [agreed](#) that Salva Kiir of South Sudan, William Ruto of Kenya, and Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti will soon travel to Khartoum. Leaders of Egypt and South Sudan have separately [offered](#) to mediate

between the SAF and RSF, calling on both sides to “choose the voice of reason” and to pursue “peaceful dialogue”.

- While there is an apparent [divergence](#) of opinions within Egypt on how to address the situation (including the Egyptian soldiers held by the RSF), representatives of the US, UAE and Saudi Arabia recently [discussed](#) and “agreed it was essential for the parties to immediately end hostilities without pre-condition”. It has been suggested that the three countries threatened Egypt with sanctions if the country were to escalate. In this context, the RSF has [claimed](#) that foreign jets (including a Sukhoi warplane) are bombing their positions in Port Sudan.
- Former Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok recently held a [press conference](#) calling for calm and noting that he has been in talks with officials from the UK, US, Europe, AU, and IGAD. He stated his belief that “a peaceful solution exists” and remarked that “the UAE and Saudi Arabia have been providing excellent support since the beginning of the crisis”.
- Despite both the SAF and RSF [agreeing](#) to a [UN-proposed](#) three-hour safe passage for humanitarian purposes, jet fighter activity and gunfire [continue](#). Reports indicate that forces from both sides [failed to comply](#) with the agreement, perhaps due to communication challenges with forces.
- The UN Security Council has released a [statement](#) expressing “deep concern over the military clashes”, and will discuss the situation further tomorrow in a [closed session](#). UN Secretary-General António Guterres has also made [phone calls](#) to Hemedti, al-Burhan and Egypt’s Sisi, although the outcome of these calls is unclear.
- The Russian Foreign Ministry has [called](#) for an immediate ceasefire and negotiations, though the SAF [rejected](#) the prospect of negotiations with the RSF unless the force dissolves.
- In the United States, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has issued a [statement](#) noting that the current conflict “undermines efforts to restore Sudan’s democratic transition” and calling for a return to negotiations as “[t]he only way forward”. Representatives of the US [Senate](#) and [House](#) Foreign Relations Committees also released statements. While there is now some renewed momentum, it remains to be seen whether the US will impose sanctions on those who disrupt Sudan’s democratic transition.
- Western diplomats in Khartoum are still actively monitoring the current situation, and the US Embassy has [announced](#) that “there are [currently] no plans for US government-coordinated evacuation”. There has been talk of a possible UN-led security assessment to determine the feasibility of an evacuation.

Thanks for reading.

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