Hello,
Welcome to this fortnightly roundup of news on justice and conflict in Sudan. Hyperlinks are underlined.
Friday 28 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.

Monday (17 Apr)
- As has since become a regular pattern, the SAF announced and conducted various early morning air strikes as part of an ‘RSF wipe out’. Strikes reported across Khartoum, including in Bahri, Khartoum 2, Khartoum 3, Riyadh, and Omdurman. Widespread electricity, mobile network, television and internet outages occurred across Khartoum.
- The SAF and RSF appeared to be deadlocked in Khartoum, with RSF and SAF reinforcements regularly arriving. Ongoing clashes in the area escalated, particularly around Khartoum Airport and the SAF’s Khartoum HQ. The SAF also targeted other residential areas around Khartoum where the RSF have bases, and SAF helicopters were spotted flying low over parts of Khartoum. Various reports emerged of RSF targeting hospitals, looting civilians, expelling civilians from their homes, and threatening civilians with rape.
- Elsewhere, the SAF and RSF continued to fight – and claim control – over key areas. For instance, after the RSF’s apparent retreat, the SAF claimed to control Merowe Airport. Just hours later, the RSF again claimed to control the area.
- Violent armed clashes, raids, and lootings took place outside of Khartoum, including in Nyala, South Darfur (reports of at least 50 people dead), Al-Fashir, North Darfur (at least 10 civilians killed), El-Obied, North Kordofan and El-Geneina, West Darfur. Kassala reportedly calm and under SAF control; Port Sudan also controlled by SAF.
- Al-Burhan spoke to Sky News, claiming his willingness to negotiate (including with foreign mediation) to bring stability. Hemedti ‘apologised’ to the Sudanese people, claiming that the RSF was “forced” to defend itself and blaming al-Burhan for the clashes. Hemedti also released a Twitter statement in English referring to al-Burhan as a “radical Islamist”. He is understood to have previously hired a Canadian lobbying firm to polish his image.
Both sides reportedly agreed another ceasefire which neither side complied with. The AU delegation’s visit to Sudan was also postponed indefinitely due to the closure of Khartoum airspace.

US Senator Jim Risch of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee released a statement calling on the US Government to “take immediate steps to sanction Generals Burhan and Hemdëti, and other senior security officials, [and] push the international community to do the same.” REDRESS previously submitted evidence to UK and US officials calling for both al-Burhan and Hemdëti to be sanctioned.

The EU Ambassador in Sudan was assaulted (but “unharmed”) in his own residency. The World Bank announced the death of four staff of the Blue Nile Mashreg Bank. The staff had been working on a WB-administered social safety net project.

Tuesday (18 Apr)

UN Secretary-General António Guterres described Sudan’s humanitarian situation as “catastrophic”, amidst widespread civilian targeting, electricity and mobile outages, shortages of water, food, and medical supplies, and most hospitals and healthcare facilities either closed or operating in dire conditions.

Further fighting concentrated in Khartoum and Merowe, including heavy conflict around the vicinity of the SAF’s Khartoum HQ and Khartoum Airport as both sides continued to contest control over most of Khartoum.

After a short period of relative stability in Al-Fashir, RSF reinforcements arrived (some reportedly from Libya and Chad), leading to escalating attacks on the SAF, including around the SAF’s Al-Fashir HQ. Again, civilian injuries and deaths occurred. More than 50 people were reported dead following further SAF-RSF fighting in El-Obeid. El-Geneina also saw continued fighting, with claims suggesting Arab militias were intending to carry out imminent looting. SAF understood to be making steady gains in Nyala. Red Sea State, Kassala and Gedarif thought to be relatively calm.

US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken called both Hemdëti and al-Burhan, apparently attempting to broker a ceasefire. Conflicting reports soon emerged – Shamseddin Kabbashi confirmed the SAF had agreed, whereas a SAF spokesperson issued a statement suggesting it might not go ahead and accusing the RSF of a large troop build-up near Merowe. In any event, as before, the ceasefire is seemingly not complied with by either side.

Speculation increased around international involvement in the conflict. The SAF claimed to have captured thermobaric shells apparently supplied by the UAE to the RSF. Around Merowe, reports suggested that the Egyptian Air Force destroyed fighter jets which had been captured by the RSF, as well as others ‘to avoid their use’. In a statement, the SAF raised concerns about “strong indications of the involvement of regional and local parties in the battles with the RSF”. Meanwhile, the US was thought to be “working the phones, trying to keep Egypt from extending its involvement”.

A senior EU official serving as humanitarian aid chief in Sudan was shot in Khartoum and received medical attention. Relatedly, Blinken confirmed that a US diplomatic convoy had been shot at on Monday 17 April, with nobody harmed, and Norway confirmed its ambassador’s residence in Khartoum was hit by a shell on Sunday 16 April.

Wednesday (19 Apr)

Khartoum again awoke to the sounds of jet fighters, anti-aircraft weapons, and heavy artillery, with widespread fires reported, including around the fuel storage at Khartoum.
Airport as well as residential buildings. At this stage, between 16 and 39 hospitals in Khartoum had been forced out of service. Families increasingly attempted to leave Khartoum, either to safer areas in Sudan or to neighbouring countries such as Egypt.

- Shortly after the RSF announced its intention to handover the Egyptian troops captured in Merowe, photos emerged of the first batch of troops returning to Cairo. The remainder of the troops were also returned. Speculation suggests that Egypt had given Hemedti a 72-hour ultimatum to return the troops. An hour or so later, the Egyptian Air Force allegedly carried out an airstrike on an RSF weapon depot in the north.

- Japan announced that it would send military aircrafts to evacuate Japanese citizens in Sudan. Meanwhile, the German army announced and then cancelled its initial evacuation mission for German nationals. Reports later in the day suggested that Saudi Arabia and the UAE were applying pressure on Hemedti and al-Burhan to consider a three-day ceasefire for Eid, and that the US were also looking at Eid as a possible opportunity to safely evacuate US nationals.

- Renewed conflict took place outside of Khartoum between the RSF and SAF, including in Al-Fashir – where large parts of town were caught in the firing line (including SAF shelling) between two RSF camps, and RSF forces again attacked police and civilian buildings. According to MSF, the majority of the wounded in Al-Fashir are civilians, including many children with extremely serious injuries. At least 60 deaths reported in El-Obied. Another ceasefire – this time for 24 hours – is agreed but not complied with.

- According to the Wall Street Journal’s unverified report, Libya’s Khalifa Haftar dispatched at least one plane to replenish the RSF’s military supplies. He denied this allegation. The same article corroborates unverified suggestions of Egypt’s involvement, including that Egypt had sent jet fighters and pilots to the SAF shortly prior to the conflict.

Thursday (20 Apr)

- Air strikes and heavy shelling resumed in Khartoum, with more civilians leaving the area by any means. 40 out of 59 hospitals out of service. The remaining hospitals understood to be in dire need of supplies. Reports continued of RSF forces targeting civilians.

- Elsewhere, RSF forces re-engaged in fighting across multiple fronts in El-Obied, with heavy gunfire heard across the city. Fighting thought to be most intense around the SAF HQ and El-Obied main market. While conflict briefly stopped in Nyala, reports continued of the RSF – apparently backed by smaller militias – targeting civilians and medical supply warehouses. Similar accounts continued to surface of RSF targeting in Al-Fashir, where clashes again intensified – though some attributed most deaths and injuries to date to SAF projectiles fired to disperse RSF forces. According to the UN OCHA, between 10,000 – 20,000 Sudanese refugees had now been displaced into neighbouring Chad.

- The US continued positioning a contingent of troops to bases in Djibouti in anticipation of an evacuation mission for embassy staff. Meanwhile, in a special ministerial session led Moussa Faki (AUC Chairperson), various African, Arab, and international leaders “agreed unanimously on the urgent need for an Eid al-Fitr ceasefire”. Antony Blinken noted in the meeting that he had spoken to al-Burhan and told him there would be a “collective voice” of world leaders “with [a] common expectation that the ceasefire would be extended through Eid”. Al-Burhan also apparently spoke with the chief of Egypt’s General Intelligence Service, though the outcome of this call is unclear.
The UAE’s Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan spoke to Egypt’s Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. The two leaders – who are perceived to support Hemedti and al-Burhan respectively – claimed to have ‘touched on’ the efforts made by both countries to mediate the conflict. CNN report evidence (unverified) of the Wagner Group supplying the RSF with missiles via Haftar’s airbases in Libya.

Friday (21 Apr)
- After a few hours of relative quiet, the SAF announced and then conducted another round of air strikes in Khartoum against RSF forces – many of which are set up in civilian neighbourhoods. The SAF also announced and deployed large numbers of ground troops, leading to heavy ground clashes in Omdurman and Khartoum.
- Seemingly in response to the SAF ground troops in Khartoum, groups of RSF officers redeployed along parts of Madani Road, which is ‘peppered’ with villages, and where there were soon further clashes. Many Khartoum residents had fled to Madani (Jezira State) via this route – which no longer appeared safe – just days prior. Others in the area had since sought to make their way to Egypt.
- The SAF reported that RSF forces had broken into and caused severe damage to Al-Huud Prison in Omdurman resulting in most prisoners being freed. This included Mohamed Adam (Tupac) who had previously been targeted by Sudanese authorities, detained, and falsely charged with killing a police brigadier general on the basis of a torture-obtained confession. Footage soon surfaced of Tupac with his mother. He spoke of his willingness to turn himself in to the court once it is safe to do so, and that he would demonstrate his innocence.
- Relatedly, the SAF also stated that they were repelling an attack by the RSF on Kober Prison in Khartoum North – increasing suspicions that Islamist remnants of the former regime, likely from within the SAF, were leveraging the current situation to release detained NCP officials from Kober Prison, possibly including al-Bashir (whose whereabouts had been regularly disputed).
- The SAF and RSF agreed a three-day ceasefire for Eid, brokered by the international community and civilian parties. The US – at least publicly – operated on the (flawed) basis that the ceasefire announced on Wednesday 19 April had “mostly held”.
- Al-Burhan gave his first public appearance since the conflict escalated, appearing somewhat fatigued and noting that the Sudanese people would emerge out of the conflict “more united and strong”. Meanwhile, Lt. Gen Yasser al-Atta – rumoured by some as a possible successor to al-Burhan – was seen publicly inspecting SAF forces in Khartoum.
- The US, UK, Japan, France, Germany, and South Korea continued to deploy aircraft in Djibouti ahead of a proposed joint-military operation to evacuate diplomats and foreign nationals in Sudan. The RSF declared their apparent readiness to partially open all airports, though Merowe Airport is thought to be under SAF control, and Khartoum Airport still disputed by both forces. The SAF reportedly agreed to evacuate US embassy staff within 72 hours – likely linked to the ceasefire above.

Saturday (22 Apr)
- Conflict declined somewhat in some areas of Khartoum as the SAF announced the proposed evacuation “in the coming hours” of foreign diplomats and aid workers from the US, UK, France and China. The SAF also explained that Saudi Arabian diplomats in Sudan had been evacuated from Khartoum to Port Sudan, and that Jordanian diplomats would be evacuated via the same route.
- Meanwhile, the US embassy stated that it was “not currently safe to undertake a US government-coordinated evacuation of private US citizens”, and that the US had “incomplete information” about multi-vehicle UN convoys departing Khartoum traveling towards Port Sudan.
- Sudan’s resistance committees continued to mobilise, providing vital support to communities including offering shelter, rehabilitating hospitals, coordinating evacuations, delivering vital supplies, and sharing safety information. Alongside being a vital source of aid (in the absence of international support), the resistance committees also maintain strong messaging “[urging] their communities not to side with either the RSF or the army.”
- Despite the Eid ceasefire, further clashes were reported around the Republican Palace and the SAF’s HQ, including indiscriminate shelling in civilian areas. Suggestions that conflict had further spilled over onto the roads linking Khartoum with other states.
- Conflict again intensified in El-Obied as the RSF attacked two police stations, killing 20 police officers and an unknown number of civilians. The humanitarian crisis in El-Obied also worsened with widespread shortages of basic supplies including water, food, medicine, and fuel. Meanwhile, though Nyala’s security situation improved, grave violations by SAF officers were still reported against civilians.

Sunday (23 Apr)
- A second relatively stable day in Khartoum (at least until the late evening) as preparations continued for various embassy and civilian evacuations. Meanwhile, the Governor of Khartoum State called on civilians to form committees to secure and protect residential neighbourhoods from ongoing looting. Those still in Khartoum faced the “impossible choice” – leave before the situation re-escalates (possibly to Port Sudan or Egypt) or stay.
- Footage emerged claiming to show detainees fleeing Kober Prison. Around this time, Sudans Post published an article suggesting that al-Bashir’s whereabouts were unknown after RSF forces attacked Kober Prison and freed “thousands of inmates”. Similar reports emerged of detainees released, including from Soba Prison and a women’s prison.
- Separate footage surfaced showing Hemedti and his brother Abdel Rahim appearing in Khartoum alongside RSF forces. Based on the surroundings, it appears the footage was likely filmed earlier during the conflict.
- Al-Fashir’s civilian committee negotiated a local ceasefire between the RSF and SAF. According to the General Director for the Ministry of Health in the area, 13 children had been killed during clashes between the two sides.
- Ethiopian border officials allegedly started demanding that Sudanese nationals must have a foreign visa or foreign passport for entry; a rule that had apparently only been implemented following the start of the conflict in Sudan. Various individuals also stranded in Sudan without their passports, having deposited them to (now closed) embassies when applying for visas.

Monday (24 Apr)
- The US presented a 2-page ceasefire plan, apparently paving the way for negotiations and settlement. After “intense negotiation over the past 48 hours”, Antony Blinken announced that both sides had agreed another 72-hour ceasefire starting at midnight.
- In the build-up to the apparent ceasefire, Khartoum residents reported that fighter jets were back in the sky, and that clashes had resumed around the SAF HQ and the RSF’s bases south and west of Omdurman.
According to unverified reports (corroborated by doctors), al-Bashir is in Alia Hospital, along with fellow ICC-indictee Abdel Rahim Mohammed Hussein and former PM Bakri Hassan Saleh. While some had reported that al-Bashir was among the prisoners freed from Kober Prison, CNN’s sources suggest that al-Bashir was transferred to Alia Hospital a year ago due to health problems. The SAF claim that he remains under their custody at a military hospital.

Heavy clashes take place in El-Geneina, with an apparent “complete displacement” of civilians from the southern neighbourhoods. Gunfire concentrated around the RSF’s HQ in Eljmark and in Eljbl.

Photos emerge showing the devastating aftermath of the SAF’s bombing of residential areas in Kalakla, south Khartoum. The bombing, which did not occur near any known RSF base, killed at least 6 people and left 1 in a critical condition.

Tuesday (25 Apr)

- After a brief period of relative calm in Khartoum during which many sought to leave, shelling resumed in residential areas of Khartoum, as well as armed clashes and anti-aircraft weaponry. The latest ceasefire – much like the previous ones – failed to hold-up.
- With fuel in short supply, bus journeys to Sudan’s land borders became even more difficult. Those able to travel to the border with Egypt faced another humanitarian crisis, with many Sudanese people stuck at the border with little or no supplies. Meanwhile, evacuations took place for various foreign nationals.
- Another ICC-indictee, Ahmed Haroun, escaped Kober Prison, along with various other former regime members. According to an unverified recording, Haroun claimed he and the others had stayed in Kober Prison until it was nearly empty, before “making our own decision to assume responsibility to protect ourselves”.
- Conflict further escalated in El-Geneina, with explosive armed confrontations occurring between the SAF and RSF. According to local reports, police also armed citizens in El-Geneina to fight against the RSF, and local Arab tribes had started fighting for the RSF. Meanwhile, the situation in Nyala appeared to further stabilise – with some markets reopening and civilians receiving aid.
- According to the World Health Organisation, there is an “extremely serious” situation and “huge biological risk” after the National Public Health Laboratory in Khartoum (which contained virus samples) fell into control of unknown armed forces in Sudan.

Wednesday (26 Apr)

- Conflict continued in Khartoum despite the latest ceasefire, with SAF airstrikes taking place in Bahri and anti-aircraft weapons being fired “indiscriminately”. According to a UN assessment, violence is expected to escalate in the coming 48 hours – with the SAF “highly likely to increase the use of remaining air assets to target positions, bases and supply lines for the RSF”. Despite this, the US welcomed the apparent “significant decrease” in violence.
- The RSF continued to maintain checkpoints around Khartoum, apparently harassing and threatening those seeking to leave. Those who made it to the border with Egypt still face extensive 24+ hour waits in extreme heat before being processed. Thousands of people are currently stuck at the border in dire conditions. With no way of securing food or clean water, some have resorted to drinking dirty water from communal supplies. Sick people are suffering from lack of access to much-needed medication, and elderly and disabled people have been in an “extremely
uncomfortable state”. Some – after the long and painful wait – have since been turned away due to a lack of visa or other documentation.

- The security situation in El-Geneina continued to deteriorate, with RSF officers attacking markets, hospitals, electricity generators and residential neighbourhoods; killing civilians and looting supplies. The Deputy Police Commissioner in West Darfur was also assassinated after citizens allegedly seized control of a police weapons depot. Al-Fashir continued to be relatively stable.

- Briefing the UN Security Council, Fatima K Mohammed (on behalf of Moussa Faki) emphasised the importance of the “central objective” – forming a “civilian-led” government. Meanwhile, IGAD led negotiations for another 72-hour ceasefire, with al-Burhan apparently “tentatively open to talks with the RSF” in Juba.

Thursday (27 Apr)

- In a dire situation, clashes further escalated in El-Geneina with armed individuals – seemingly members of local Arab tribes – targeting non-Arabs, burning government shelters and IDP camps. Vital infrastructure is badly damaged, and reports suggest that at least 96 civilians have been killed; 52 in a single neighbourhood alone. El-Geneina is said to have become a “battlefield”.

- After RSF reinforcements arrived in Khartoum on Monday 26 April, the SAF conducted another intense bombing campaign. Accounts emerge in Khartoum of three Ethiopian women raped by seven RSF officers.

- Following separate ceasefire proposals by IGAD and Saudi Arabia/the US, al-Burhan claimed the SAF agreed to the IGAD proposal whereas Shamseddin Kabbashi suggested that the Saudi-US initiative appeared promising.

- In the Zalingei area of Central Darfur (which has received very little public reporting), the Acting Director General of the Ministry of Health confirmed that at least 59 people had been killed and 80 injured.

- In total, estimates suggest that least 75,000 people have been displaced since the start of the conflict. Meanwhile, the Egyptian Government apparently granted humanitarian relief agencies access to the Egypt-Sudan border in response to the ongoing border crisis. Around 16,000 people have entered Egypt from Sudan, and approximately 20,000 into Chad, 4,000 into South Sudan, 3,500 into Ethiopia, and 3,000 into the Central African Republic according to UN figures.

Friday (28 Apr)

- The latest ‘ceasefire’ has been extended for an additional 72 hours, though reports again suggest it is not being complied with. Armed forces believed to be the RSF have also shot at a Turkish evacuation plane which was coming into land at Wadi Seidna. The plane landed safely.

- Sudan Doctors’ Union warns that Sudan faces the “imminent collapse” of its health system, with 59 hospitals now out of service in Khartoum and thousands of patients in desperate need of medical treatment.

- Clashes seem to have temporarily stopped in El-Geneina, with only the occasional sounds of gunfire being heard. While the local death toll is unclear, one neighbourhood alone reports almost 70 deaths. According to local human rights monitors, the conflict in El-Geneina has “nothing to do with the nature of the conflict in Khartoum” and is now mainly being waged between rival tribes.

- In what he purports to be peacekeeping move, Minni Minawi has offered the use of his forces to separate the fighting factions (believed to include local tribes as well as the RSF and SAF) with local authorities.
US and French intelligence services reportedly believe that the Wagner Group has sent light weapons and anti-aircraft guns to the RSF from the Central African Republic.

Interactive maps prepared by Beam Reports and War Mapper; NetBlocks’ tracking of internet connectivity; UN OCHA’s flash updates (w/maps regularly updated); Sudan Doctors’ Union’s updates on medical infrastructure; Human rights monitoring in Darfur; diaspora resources; and ‘Genocide: All Over Again in Darfur?’.

*Note:* Given the situation is quickly evolving, the maps linked above should be used for documentation purposes only and should not be used to identify possible safe routes.

Thanks for reading.
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