

justice + conflict

UPDATES FROM SUDAN

REDRESS

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 Hemedti, 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 Hemedti to be sanctioned.
- The EU Ambassador in Sudan was [assaulted](#) (but "[unharm](#)ed") 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-Obied. 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 Hemedti 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 [re-deployed](#) 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, Sudan’s 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.
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weekend read

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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