

justice + conflict

UPDATES FROM SUDAN

REDRESS

Hello,

Welcome to this fortnightly roundup of news on justice and conflict in Sudan.

Hyperlinks are underlined.

Friday 12 May 2023

BIG STORIES FIRST

- Following the commencement of pre-negotiation [talks](#) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, the SAF and RSF have signed a declaration ([English/Arabic](#)) outlining their supposed commitment to basic international humanitarian law principles, including allowing safe passage for civilians, withdrawing forces from vital civilian infrastructure and paving the way for a possible short-term ceasefire to enable the delivery of humanitarian aid. It is unclear whether these commitments will be complied with and the consequences of non-compliance – [apparently](#) a monitoring mechanism has been developed. Both sides have “[trampled international humanitarian law](#)” to date and previously agreed ceasefires have been largely unsuccessful. The negotiations – brokered by Saudi Arabia and the US – had been framed around securing a humanitarian truce prior to starting any substantive discussions around a permanent ceasefire. Now, the two sides have agreed to future permanent ceasefire talks, though a date, agenda, and forum are seemingly yet to be set and, by all accounts, [significant differences](#) remain between the two sides. While the contents of the Jeddah talks have been mostly kept private, the SAF – [led](#) in negotiations by General Abu Bakr Faqiri – [claim](#) to prioritise a permanent ceasefire in Khartoum. Yassir al-Atta recently [outlined](#) a broader set of SAF objectives for the talks, including prosecuting Hemedti for treason and integrating the ‘good elements’ of the RSF within two years. He also reiterated the SAF’s desire to involve more political forces in the Framework Agreement discussions, claiming that without an “inclusive agreement”, the SAF would appoint a caretaker government for two years and call for public elections. The RSF [reportedly](#) prioritise ending SAF airstrikes, ensuring that RSF salaries continue to be paid by the Ministry of Finance, and preserving their troop positions in Khartoum.
- With most major international evacuation efforts now completed and despite numerous additional ceasefires, fighting has re-escalated in Khartoum with fierce clashes and air strikes [continuing](#) to be reported. Consistent with the pattern of recent weeks, RSF officers remain deeply embedded in large residential areas and strategic sites, with many civilians still caught in the

crossfire of air strikes, shelling, and heavy artillery, particularly in Bahri and Omdurman. According to recent [WHO data](#), at least 604 people have now been killed and more than 5,000 injured. At least 190 people have been [reported](#) as missing. In each case, the true numbers are undoubtedly higher, as the doctors, CSOs, and resistance committees engaged in documentation efforts are doing so in incredibly difficult circumstances and cannot safely access certain areas due to the ongoing fighting. Water supplies have been completely cut in many parts of Khartoum, and large-scale online banking outages have again been [reported](#). The notorious [Central Reserve Police](#) have now been [deployed](#), apparently to “maintain security” in Khartoum after weeks of armed fighters looting and occupying civilian homes. [Footage](#) has circulated showing damage to the façade of the new Republican Palace following recent clashes. Though the RSF reported that the old Republican Palace had been “[destroyed](#)” after a series of SAF [airstrikes](#) (attempting to dislodge the RSF officers occupying it), recent drone footage [verified by Reuters](#) appeared to show the building relatively intact.

ACCOUNTABILITY TARGETING, HRC, SANCTIONS

Sudanese doctors targeted

Sudan’s Doctors for Human Rights have [strongly condemned](#) targeted threats and false accusations made online against Sudanese medical staff. A number of doctors – particularly those perceived as supporting a democratic transition – have been accused of being traitors for apparently treating wounded RSF fighters, and face pressure ([possibly](#) from al-Bashir-era loyalists) to attribute ongoing IHL violations to the RSF. There have also been [reports](#) of RSF forces coercing/kidnapping doctors to work for them. Sudan’s doctors – who are conducting vital life-saving work and propping up a healthcare system on the verge of [total collapse](#) – now face heightened risks to their personal safety, with the IHL protections afforded to medical personnel being blatantly disregarded. Relatedly, an estimated [67%](#) of hospitals in clash zones are currently out of service, including 59 in Khartoum alone.

Journalists and activists also targeted

The Sudanese Journalists Syndicate has [denounced](#) threats made against journalists, including the emergence of lists targeting journalists for supposedly supporting certain sides in the ongoing conflict. At least one journalist has been subjected to physical and psychological [torture](#) – apparently by the RSF. The Syndicate [warns](#) that this could soon lead to journalists being assassinated. Similarly, two Bahri resistance committee members – who, at the time, were transporting injured people to a local hospital – were [arrested](#) by the SAF and accused of supporting the RSF. While they have since been [released](#) and the allegations apparently retracted, a clear pattern is emerging of the RSF, SAF, and their affiliates haphazardly targeting non-combatants with unsubstantiated allegations that they support a particular side.

UN Human Rights Council votes to expand monitoring and documentation efforts

Yesterday, in a [special session](#) on Sudan, the UN Human Rights Council narrowly passed a resolution expanding the mandate of the UN’s expert on human rights in Sudan to include “detailed monitoring and documentation” of alleged human rights

violations since the October 2021 coup, including those arising from the current conflict. The resolution falls short of establishing a fully-fledged independent investigative mechanism, which over 100 CSOs, including REDRESS, recently [called](#) for (and which REDRESS has been calling for [since](#) the October 2021 coup). No African country voted in favour of the motion, amidst [reports](#) of strong Saudi Arabian lobbying efforts to oppose the motion on the basis that it could jeopardise the ongoing talks in Jeddah. Sudan's UN ambassador [criticised](#) the special session, querying why it was being held shortly prior to the next HRC session ([scheduled](#) for 19 June – 14 July 2023) and “without the support of any African or Arab countries”. He also [described](#) the conflict as an “internal affair” and the SAF's actions as “a constitutional duty”. At the next HRC session, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights will [deliver](#) a comprehensive report on the human rights situation in Sudan.

US threaten targeted sanctions

US President Biden has issued an [Executive Order](#) authorising targeted sanctions designations on those responsible for actions or policies that (amongst other things) “threaten the peace, security, or stability of Sudan” or “obstruct, undermine, delay, or impede [...] Sudan's transition to democracy”. The Executive Order establishes a broad (and relatively novel) legal basis for designations linked to national instability/obstructing the democratic transition and brings the US closer to the [UK's Sudan sanctions regime](#). Its strategic value is probably symbolic. In particular, while US Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland recently claimed that the Executive Order “played a good role” in bringing the parties to Jeddah, many of the designations being contemplated by the US (presumably senior members of RSF/SAF leadership) could likely have been made under the existing sanctions infrastructure (e.g., in February 2022, [REDRESS submitted evidence](#) to the US Government requesting that 11 Sudanese individuals – including Hemedti and al-Burhan – be designated for sanctions based on their involvement in serious human rights violations since the October 2021 coup). No designations have yet been made, but Nuland [threatened](#) that the US is looking at appropriate targets for sanctions, “particularly” depending on the outcome of the Jeddah talks. Currently, the US has only sanctioned one Sudanese security force for serious human rights violations – the recently deployed [Central Reserve Police](#).

GOVERNMENT IGAD, JEDDAH TALKS, DARFUR

Regional summit ahead of anticipated IGAD talks

A summit will be held in Egypt on the Sudan crisis with regional leaders, [including](#) Salva Kiir of South Sudan and Mohamat Déby of Chad. Though the exact agenda is unclear, the talks (which Tut Gatluak Manime, South Sudan's presidential advisor, claims will result in “specific outcomes”) are presumably a precursor to possible IGAD-brokered peace talks. Al-Burhan has [appointed](#) Dafallah al-Haq (Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a prominent Islamist/ex-senior NCP official) as his special envoy ahead of any discussions. Al-Haq – who al-Burhan [sent](#) to Juba to meet Kiir – [emphasised](#) the Jeddah talks as “solely humanitarian in nature” and petitioned for IGAD-led peace negotiations to take place in Juba. Kiir, IGAD's Team Leader on the conflict, has [urged](#) Hemedti to send his own envoy to Juba. The parallel US/Saudi and IGAD tracks add an additional layer of complexity to the current situation – particularly with the parties agreeing to future

ceasefire talks while in Jeddah. Alongside the regional and international power dynamics at play, al-Burhan and Hemedti could conceivably forum shop around the two tracks for their preferred negotiation setting, all the while buying time under the guise of ‘negotiating’ and advancing their respective military positions.

Jeddah talks face widespread criticism

Many Sudanese activists have [rejected](#) the ongoing negotiations in Jeddah, which have been held in relative secrecy and without civilian participation. Despite a [recent US Foreign Relations Committee session](#) in which its [myriad Sudan policy failures](#) were again laid bare, the US is being accused of many of the same mistakes – legitimising the Generals as ordinary political actors, believing that the SAF and RSF will actually comply with ceasefires, brokering deals that stifle genuine civilian participation, and operating without proper advice on the nuances of the Sudanese context. Relatedly, those who fled Sudan to Jeddah are seemingly facing [repercussions](#) for making critical remarks on social media; just a couple of months after Hisham Abbas was [sentenced](#) in Saudi Arabia to six months in prison for posting anti-coup material online.

Minnawi re-deploys troops to Darfur

Minni Minnawi has [withdrawn](#) his forces from Khartoum following unsuccessful efforts to mediate the conflict. Minnawi had [previously offered](#) the use of his forces (which had been stationed in northern Omdurman to protect SLM-MM leaders after signing the JPA) to separate the fighting factions with support from local authorities. While this re-deployment comes at a time of significant instability across Darfur, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about Minnawi’s intentions at this point. SLM-MM forces are understood to have deployed across Darfur but are not believed to have engaged in the conflict, perhaps indicating that Minnawi is ‘hedging his bets’ for now. Meanwhile, Volker Perthes has [acknowledged](#) a “not insignificant” flow of mercenaries from the likes of Mali, Chad, and Niger travelling to support the RSF in Sudan. It is [thought](#) that the CAR is serving as the gathering point RSF-aligned fighters, with Chad’s Sudan borders currently closed. Minnawi is [reportedly](#) attempting to re-open the Chad border for trade amidst widespread supply shortages.

Continued speculation regarding outset of conflict

According to [Reuters’ sources](#), RSF forces stormed al-Burhan’s residence in the early hours of the armed conflict, killing more than 30 of al-Burhan’s guards before retreating. According to one of his guards, al-Burhan himself picked up an AK-47 rifle and opened fire before being pulled to safety by his security. Relatedly, there is (unverified) speculation that, during the recent [Abyei meetings](#), Hemedti gave advanced notice to Gatluak that the RSF would start a war against the SAF on 15 April, and that Gatluak’s relatives in Khartoum subsequently left the area just days prior to the conflict. Gatluak – who has previously been [speculatively tied](#) to the RSF and its model – [recently met](#) with Egypt’s Sisi ahead of the proposed summit in Egypt on Sudan.

Grave humanitarian situation worsens, though some aid now arriving

Some humanitarian aid has finally started to arrive in [Sudan](#) and at the [Egyptian border](#), though millions still face [critical food and water shortages](#), and Darfur is on the verge of [imminent catastrophe](#). An ICRC shipment of medical material has been [delivered](#) at Port Sudan, and the World Food Programme has now [resumed](#) its operations in Sudan following the [death](#) of three WFP workers on 15 April. In addition, an [EU Humanitarian Air Bridge flight](#) has transported relief items to Port Sudan, with the [Qatar Charity](#) and [Saudi Arabia](#) reportedly also delivering supplies. Prior to this, Sudanese communities had relied solely on urgent grassroots aid [delivered](#) by local resistance committees. Martin Griffiths, the UN's humanitarian affairs chief, recently [arrived](#) in Port Sudan and called for face-to-face meetings with the SAF/RSF as part of a "[public, accountable moment](#)" to secure emergency relief routes. Even if the recent Jeddah declaration facilitates wider aid delivery, addressing the ongoing supply shortages/severe strain on hospitals will undoubtedly prove challenging. Nearly [25%](#) of the WFP's food has been stolen and its offices have been looted. More than [1 million](#) polio vaccines have been destroyed as a result of looting. The SAMIL factory in Khartoum – previously producing 60% of the ready-to-use therapeutic food to treat children with severe malnutrition – has also been [burned down](#). More than 730,000 people are currently internally displaced, with [crises still reported](#) in [Port Sudan](#) and on the borders with [Egypt](#) and [Ethiopia](#). While the UNHRC has [urged](#) countries to allow civilians fleeing Sudan non-discriminatory access to their territories, Egypt continues to require [visas](#) for entry, contributing to [8+ day waits](#) at the border and some (particularly males younger than 50) being turned away.

Renewed clashes in Darfur

While a [patchwork](#) of grassroots ceasefires [initially appeared](#) to hold up in Darfur, there has now been renewed conflict – particularly [in El Geneina](#), West Darfur, where at least [450](#) people have been killed during clashes since the outset of the conflict. Following the recent spate of violence, all hospitals and health facilities were [suspended](#) in El Geneina, exacerbating the [ongoing medical crisis](#) in the area. Residents report that the latest attacks are by [armed Arab](#) militias and the [RSF using heavy artillery](#). The Dar Masalit Union also attributed [prior](#) attacks to the RSF, suggesting that the attacks "[are not tribal conflicts](#)". Elsewhere, clashes partially resumed between the SAF and RSF in Nyala, South Darfur. There is currently thought to be "[cautious calm](#)" in Nyala, though sounds of gunfire continue from time to time and the city's crop market has been [destroyed](#) by fire. Outside of Darfur, a truce has reportedly been reached in Kostj, White Nile, after more than 25 people [reportedly died](#) across five days of [fierce fighting](#) between Nuba and Hausa tribesmen.

weekend read

The RSF's [initial attack](#) on al-Burhan; [targeting](#) the Generals' war chests; the UAE's [shadowy networks](#) in Sudan; how [years of impunity](#) (and [failed responses](#) to structural violence) gave the Generals a licence to destroy Sudan; [what next](#) after NCP loyalists freed; how the US [fumbled](#) Sudan's hopes for [democracy](#); why ceasefires are being [constantly broken](#); could [Musa Hilal](#) undercut Hemedti; [explosive weapons](#) harming civilians; and the [revolution](#) no one wanted.

Thanks for reading, and see you in two weeks.

If this was forwarded to you, please email caitlan@redress.org to sign up.
