

justice + conflict

UPDATES FROM SUDAN

REDRESS

Hello,

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

Friday 19 Jan 2024

BIG STORIES FIRST

- Since our last update on 8 December 2023, the RSF has significantly expanded its territorial reach, violently taking “[full control](#)” of Gezira State, and making incursions into [While Nile](#) and [Sennar](#) States. The RSF’s attacks – which (yet again) faced an alarming lack of resistance by the SAF – have had catastrophic consequences for civilians, including [forcibly displacing more than half a million people](#), many of whom were already displaced from Khartoum earlier in the conflict. The RSF began advancing on Gezira State on [14 December](#), resulting in [intense armed clashes with the SAF near Wad Madani](#). While the [SAF briefly pushed the RSF back](#), the [RSF soon captured much of the State](#) as SAF fighters withdrew. In contrast to the SAF’s collapse in Darfur, SAF leadership [publicly acknowledged](#) the withdrawal from Wad Madani and [launched an investigation](#) “to scrutinize the reasons and circumstances behind [it]”. The conditions in Sudan’s breadbasket State are currently [dire](#). As has been the case in Darfur and Khartoum, RSF fighters in Gezira have – since gaining control – [trapped civilians](#) and committed flagrant targeted abuses, particularly [sexual violence](#), [assault](#), and [looting](#) (see also [here](#)). In response to the RSF’s growing reach and fears that further attacks are imminent: (i) Sudan’s de-facto authorities have [ramped up efforts to mobilise civilians](#) and led another round of [targeted arrests/abuses](#), and [‘emergency’ restrictions](#) – though these have mostly affected civil society, activist, and community actors; and (ii) the SAF launched a series of airstrikes attempting to weaken the RSF’s positions in [Khartoum](#), [Gezira](#), [While Nile](#), [Sennar](#), [South Kordofan](#), and [South](#) and [North](#) Darfur, killing or injuring hundreds of civilians in the process. See below for further context on each of these issues.
- At present, all signs point to continued (and likely more intense) armed conflict – e.g., heightened [civilian mobilisation](#) (including on [ethnic lines](#)), the rapid spread of conflict into [Eastern Sudan](#), gradual fracturing of military and security institutions (e.g., [here](#)), and [increasing fears](#) that neighbouring States will become [directly embroiled](#) in the fighting. Meanwhile, no viable forum has yet emerged that can feasibly broker a ceasefire agreement or the establishment of new humanitarian corridors. At the 41st Extraordinary Session of the IGAD Assembly in Djibouti on 9 December 2023, IGAD [announced](#) that al-Burhan (participated in-person) and Hemedti (telephone conversation in the margins) had both committed to an unconditional ceasefire as well as a one-to-one meeting. While the meeting between al-Burhan and Hemedti was [reportedly scheduled](#) for late December (and later, early January),

the [Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected](#) IGAD's claim that al-Burhan had approved the meeting and insisted that any such meeting would be conditional on (amongst other things) the withdrawal of RSF forces from Khartoum. This was later [echoed by al-Burhan](#) himself. Around this time, Hemedti appeared publicly outside of Sudan for the first time in the conflict, meeting with various Heads of State, Abdalla Hamdok (in his [Tagaddum-capacity](#)), and [international actors](#). Amongst others (see below), [Hemedti met with IGAD chair and President of Djibouti, Ismail Omar Guelleh](#) and was [invited to attend](#) the (then-upcoming) IGAD Emergency Session in Uganda. In response, Sudan's de-facto authorities [withdrew from the Summit](#) and [suspended engagement with IGAD](#), citing IGAD's interference in Sudan's internal affairs. The Session took place yesterday (with [Hemedti](#) and [Hamdok](#) in attendance, but no representative from the de-facto authorities). The [resulting Communiqué](#) called on Hemedti and al-Burhan to meet face-to-face within two weeks, though this appears highly unlikely.

ACCOUNTABILITY FFM, AIRSTRIKES, CIVILIAN MOBILISATION

FFM appoints members, issues call for submissions

The [UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan](#) ('FFM') has [appointed three experts](#) and – this week – [began its work with an initial mission to Geneva](#). The FFM is chaired by Mohamed Chande Othman (former Chief Justice of Tanzania and ex-Independent Expert on Sudan), working alongside Joy Ezeilo (Law Professor and Senior Advocate of Nigeria, ex-UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons) and Mona Rishmawi (former senior official at the UN and ex-Executive Director of the Secretariat of the UN International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur). The FFM has issued a [call for submissions](#), including on: (i) facts and circumstances (particularly first-hand information) related to human rights and IHL violations; (ii) identifying those responsible (perpetrators as well as those enabling the violations); (iii) recommended measures of prevention, protection, and reparation; and (iv) recommended measures to be taken by third States and others to increase human rights protections/promote equality, truth, justice and reparations. Submissions should be made before the deadline of 31 July 2024. The FFM will present an oral update on its work at the 56th session of the UN Human Rights Council ('HRC') (June/July 2024) and present a comprehensive report on its findings during the 57th session (September/October 2024) – at which point HRC members will consider whether to extend the FFM beyond its initial term (one year). Some Sudanese and international CSOs have [already started sharing information](#) with the FFM. Meanwhile, a [coalition of CSOs has reiterated calls to establish a Sudan-dedicated international court/tribunal to hear criminal complaints](#) (the FFM is not itself a judicial body, though it is empowered to identify perpetrators and make recommendations on accountability measures).

Civilian casualties following rounds of SAF airstrikes

The SAF has launched further rounds of attacks to weaken the RSF's positions across various States. Much of its focus has been on Khartoum though see also below on other States. In December alone, [at least 116 civilians in Khartoum were killed](#) by artillery shelling between both sides. Recently, fighting has concentrated around [Omdurman](#) – where some of the [most violent clashes in a while](#) have been reported, and those civilians still trapped in the area are [dying due to a complete blackout](#) of water and a severe shortage of food and [medicine/medical services](#). Heavy clashes have also been reported in [Khartoum North](#) and [southern Khartoum](#). Meanwhile, the SAF has conducted airstrikes against RSF positions in [While Nile, south of Wad Madani](#), and near [Sennar](#). See also below in 'Humanitarian situation' on SAF airstrikes in South and North Darfur.

Civilian mobilisation led by SAF

Following the RSF's attacks in Gezira, White Nile, and Sennar States, the SAF is preparing for the likelihood of further attacks – including in the [other two Nile States](#), as well as [Gedaref](#), [Northern](#), [Kassala](#), and [Red Sea](#) States. A key development has been the expedited training and arming of civilians in these areas (the so-called [popular resistance](#)). While this has been ongoing since the early stages of the conflict, [popular resistance rallies](#) have now [grown substantially](#) in size/frequency and armed civilian groups are [increasingly being reported publicly](#). For its part, the RSF has continued attempts to recruit civilians by force – including [now pressurising young civilians in Gezira State villages to join the RSF as a condition for the RSF's 'protection'](#) (presumably protection from the violence of its own fighters).

Authorities target civilians, emergency decrees issued

Sudan's de-facto authorities are once again heavily targeting civilians – ostensibly due to their supposed affiliation with the RSF (so-called sleeper cells), though military intelligence continues to target individuals on the basis of [ethnicity](#), [activism](#), [political opposition](#) (including [opposing the conflict](#)), or [role in aid delivery](#). Targeting has mostly taken the form of arbitrary detention – see e.g., in [Northern State](#), [Sennar](#) (also [here](#)), [White Nile](#) (also on RSF arrest), and [Gedaref](#). There are also numerous reports of [torture \(including fatal torture\) in detention](#) as well as [extrajudicial executions](#) (also [here](#)). Meanwhile, various States have issued emergency decrees restricting freedom of expression/association. The acting *wali* of River Nile State [issued a decree](#) purportedly dissolving resistance and neighbourhood service committees, as well as committees of the FFC. This decision, which was widely criticised (see e.g., [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)), has been replicated in [Northern State](#). Relatedly, authorities in [Red Sea State](#) and [Gedaref](#) have both implemented restrictions on publishing information deemed detrimental to public security as well as information on military activities. The *wali* of North Kordofan has [reportedly implemented restrictions similar to all those above](#). Finally, young people in White Nile have [reported been prevented by military intelligence without justification from travelling](#) to Kosti/elsewhere in Sudan.

GOVERNMENT HEMEDTI, AL-BURHAN, STATE RELATIONS

Hemedti meets with Heads of State

Having appeared publicly outside of Sudan for the first time since the conflict (dispelling rumours that he had been killed or gravely injured), Hemedti was received by Heads of State in [Uganda](#), [Djibouti](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Kenya](#), [South Africa](#) ([he was briefly erroneously referred to as the President of Sudan](#)), and [Rwanda](#) – ostensibly to discuss efforts to broker a ceasefire. He also discussed with the [UN Secretary-General](#) (via telephone) and met with the Secretary-General's (recently appointed) [Personal Envoy for Sudan](#), and the [EU Envoy to the Horn of Africa](#). As noted elsewhere, he also [met with IGAD members during – and in the margins of – the Emergency Session in Uganda](#), as well as with [Hamdok](#) (with whom he signed the so-called Addis Ababa Declaration, on which see below). In totality, Hemedti's recent actions serve to bolster his intended image as a statesman (as opposed to a paramilitary leader) and (re-)signal his long-term political aspirations. Beyond the optics, his engagement with Heads of State is dovetailed by the RSF's attack strategy and wider messaging. As the RSF gains ground in Sudan, Hemedti continues to justify the RSF's attacks as [necessary for democratic transition](#) in the face of Islamist spoilers, while emphasising the SAF's own responsibility for human rights abuses. Collectively, this has insulated Hemedti against being singled out for criticism and allowed him to build relationships with Heads of State under the guise of securing a ceasefire. See also [here](#) on the RSF establishing 'federal police forces' in Darfur and soon Khartoum, as well as [here](#) on the reopening of courts.

Crisis of confidence in al-Burhan

In contrast to Hemedti, al-Burhan and the SAF increasingly appear isolated, having withdrawn from the Jeddah and now IGAD processes (likely influenced by senior Islamists in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and appearing stubborn for their [continued insistence](#) that the RSF withdraw from Khartoum prior to engaging in any negotiations. With the SAF's bargaining power having significantly weakened since the conflict began, it is increasingly likely that other States may eventually engage with Hemedti as Sudan's de-facto Head of State. In this context, and having lost further ground to the RSF, al-Burhan's position in the SAF is precarious at best. Amidst [speculation of a possible coup within the SAF](#), analysts expect that it is not a case of whether al-Burhan will be removed, but rather when.

Strained Sudan-State relations

Sudan's de-facto authorities' relationships with various States have become increasingly strained since we last wrote. Following [Yasir al-Atta's speech in late November publicly criticising the UAE and Chad](#) (amongst others) for supporting the RSF: (i) the [UAE](#) and [Sudan](#) have ordered the expulsion of each other's respective diplomats; and (ii) Chad ([unsuccessfully](#)) [requested an apology](#) from Sudan's de-facto authorities and [expelled four Sudanese diplomats](#). The respective Foreign Ministers of Sudan and Chad since [held a meeting yesterday](#) to discuss their strained bilateral relations and efforts to end the conflict. [Sudan also recalled its ambassador in Nairobi](#) in protest at Kenya's hosting of Hemedti. Finally, Finance Minister Jibril Ibrahim has [visited Moscow](#) to discuss opportunities for Russian investment in Sudan.

Hamdok to meet with al-Burhan following Addis Declaration

The Coordination of Civilian Democratic Forces (Taqaddum) led by former Prime Minister, Abdalla Hamdok, has [apparently received approvals from al-Burhan and Malik Agar](#) to organise a meeting discussing methods to end the current conflict. Prior to this, Hamdok [met](#) – [controversially](#) – with Hemedti in Addis Ababa. The pair signed the so-called [Addis Ababa Declaration](#) in which the RSF expressed its supposed commitment to (amongst other things) cease hostilities through direct negotiations with the SAF, establish safe corridors, release 451 prisoners of war, and cooperate with the FFM. Much like the [Jeddah Declaration](#), it has been received dubiously and there is no indication that it will be complied with. The [Jeddah%20Declaration]Communist Party of Sudan has since rejected an invitation by Taqaddum to participate in talks regarding the conflict.

Calls for strengthened EU/US engagement on Sudan, AU Panel members appointed

The EU Parliament has [adopted a resolution](#) calling for the EU to sanction those responsible for human rights violations under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, as well as the UN Security Council to sanction violations of the UN arms embargo on Darfur and expand the embargo throughout Sudan. The [EU Foreign Affairs Council will convene on 22 January 2024](#), though it is not yet clear whether Sudan sanctions will be discussed. Meanwhile: (i) the Biden administration remains under pressure to [take a more forceful approach to the Sudan conflict](#) and appoint a [Special Envoy for Sudan](#); and (ii) the African Union Commission has [appointed three members to form its High-Level Panel on the Resolution of the Conflict in Sudan](#) - Mohamed Ibn Chambas (AU High Representative for Silencing the Guns) as chair, alongside Speciosa Wandira-Kazibwe (former Vice President of Uganda) and Francisco Madeira (former Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission to Somalia, Head of the AU Commission in Somalia, and member of the AU Transition Mission in Somalia).

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION FUNDING GAP, CONFLICT, RECONCILIATION

Sudan crisis exacerbated by latest fighting

The humanitarian situation in Sudan remains bleak entering into 2024. By conservative estimates, at

least [13,000 people](#) have been killed and more than [7.7 million people](#) have been forcibly displaced. The [2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan has been launched](#) – aiming to provide assistance and support to 14.7 million of the most vulnerable people at a cost of \$2.7 billion (though presently, the humanitarian response remains [woefully underfunded](#)). The UN World Food Programme has [warned](#) that Sudan is at grave risk of slipping into a catastrophic hunger crisis, with nearly 18 million people facing acute hunger. Relatedly, see [here](#) for the Executive Technical Report following the Sudan Humanitarian Crisis Conference in mid-November. According to [Africa Intelligence](#), the organisers are hoping to set up a new mechanism this month to better coordinate the humanitarian response to the conflict.

Conflict continues in Darfur and South Kordofan

Conflict has continued in both Darfur and South Kordofan. In Darfur, the SAF conducted various airstrikes in Nyala (e.g., [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) and [areas in North Darfur](#), in each case killing numerous civilians. [Emergency Lawyers](#) also reported more than 50 new cases of rape in South Darfur. Dozens of people were [killed and wounded](#) in Nierteti, Jebel Marra (Central Darfur) following clashes between the RSF and the SLM-AW led by Abdelwahid al-Nur. Meanwhile, [efforts are ongoing to organise a reconciliation conference](#) between the Habbaniya and Salamat tribes, following months of armed conflict between the two. In South Kordofan, clashes have occurred regularly between the SPLM-N al-Hilu/SAF and the RSF, though the situation is now [cautiously calm in Delling](#). Much of the attention is now on Babanousa in West Kordofan, following [rumours of a possible RSF attack](#). The prospect of an attack has emphasised [developing divisions among Misseriya leaders](#).

weekend read

Setting the stage for a [long war](#); where does the conflict stand after [eight months?](#); a chance to [draw back from the abyss](#) (and a [way forward](#)); Kushayb trial at the ICC (episodes [7](#), [8](#), and [9](#)); [Q&A](#) on Sudan's forgotten war; and [is an RSF victory in sight?](#)

Thanks for reading, and see you in two weeks (updates will now resume at their usual biweekly frequency).

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