



# **Sudan's War of Attrition: The Battle Between the Army and Rapid Support Forces**

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## Summary

Following the failed strategic surprise attack by Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in April 2023, Sudan descended into an urban war of attrition.

This Insight analyzes the tactical miscalculations, structural weaknesses, and broader strategic dynamics driving the prolonged conflict between the RSF and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF).

## Strategic Intelligence Insight

### I. Strategic Surprise and RSF's Initial Failure

- **Failed Strategic Shock:**

RSF's early offensive targeting army headquarters and key state institutions in Khartoum faltered due to poor intelligence, limited operational precision, and stronger-than-expected resistance from the Sudanese Armed Forces.

- **Loss of Momentum:**

Despite initial advances, RSF's inability to decisively capture strategic targets eroded the effectiveness of its surprise attack.

- **Local Hostility:**

RSF lacked deep-rooted support in urban areas like Khartoum, where historical

accusations of war crimes against civilians during the Bashir era undermined its legitimacy.

## **II. Challenges of Urban Warfare**

- **Mismatch of Tactics and Terrain:**

RSF's strengths lie in open-field guerrilla warfare, not in dense urban environments. Their weaponry—including heavy vehicles and anti-aircraft systems—is ill-suited for civilian-populated urban zones.

- **Urban Attrition:**

Street warfare in Khartoum has evolved into a protracted war of attrition, favouring defence and gradually depleting both sides' resources and morale.

- **War Crime Risks:**

The use of heavy weaponry in urban civilian areas raises substantial risks of violations under the Geneva and Rome Conventions.

## **III. Air Power and Intelligence Limitations**

- **RSF Airpower Deficit:**

RSF's complete lack of air capabilities severely hampers its operational flexibility and strategic depth.

- **SAF's Air Superiority – Limited Advantage:**

While the Sudanese Armed Forces possess airpower, poor real-time intelligence and technological deficiencies limit its full exploitation against mobile RSF targets.

#### **IV. External Dynamics and Military Supply Chains**

- **Arms Smuggling Threat:**

RSF's ability to sustain operations relies heavily on external arms smuggling networks, complicating SAF's efforts to cut off supply lines.

- **Regional Interests:**

External actors with vested interests in Sudan's internal dynamics may prolong the conflict through covert support to one or both factions.

#### **V. Endgame Scenarios**

- **War of Existence:**

The confrontation between General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan (SAF) and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo ("Hemedti," RSF) represents a battle for existential dominance, not merely political supremacy.

- **Diplomatic Impasse:**

Neither regional organizations (Arab League, African Union) nor informal mediation initiatives appear capable of halting the fighting.

Only enforced intervention by the UN Security Council stands as a plausible path toward de-escalation.

## **Indicators to Monitor**

- Shifts in military momentum between RSF and SAF across key urban zones.
- Patterns of cross-border arms smuggling and external support.
- UN Security Council deliberations or resolutions regarding Sudan.

## **Analyst Reflection**

Sudan's evolving battlefield reflects the convergence of tactical miscalculations, urban warfare complexities, and entrenched personal rivalries.

Without decisive international intervention, the country risks spiraling into an even deeper, self-perpetuating cycle of urban destruction and humanitarian collapse.