

A stylized map of Sudan is depicted in the background, composed of a network of yellow lines connecting various points, creating a geometric, wireframe-like representation of the country's borders and internal regions.

Sudan's Power Struggle: The Army–RSF Conflict and the Risk of Prolonged Civil War

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Summary

The outbreak of fighting between Sudan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) marks a power struggle between former allies turned rivals.

This Insight examines the military dynamics of the conflict, the risks of urban warfare escalation, and the potential for Sudan's descent into protracted civil war.

Strategic Intelligence Insight

I. Power Struggle Between Rival Generals

- **Background:**

Tensions exploded between General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan (SAF leader) and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo ("Hemedti," RSF leader), who once cooperated to depose Omar al-Bashir in 2019 and orchestrate the 2021 coup.

- **Struggle for Dominance:**

The clash reflects not merely a political dispute but a fundamental struggle for control over Sudan's future governance, military structure, and resource distribution.

II. Military Dynamics and Battlefield Analysis

- **Army Superiority:**

The Sudanese Armed Forces possess superior conventional military assets, particularly air power, giving them significant tactical advantages over the RSF.

- **RSF Limitations:**

RSF forces, lacking substantial air capabilities, must rely heavily on guerrilla tactics, tribal alliances (such as the Janjaweed), and urban warfare survival strategies.

- **Urban Warfare Escalation:**

As fighting intensifies inside cities, the conflict risks transforming into fragmented, gang-like street battles, exacerbating civilian casualties and infrastructure destruction.

III. War Crimes and the Use of Heavy Weapons

- **Urban Combat Violations:**

Both sides have employed heavy weaponry — including tanks, aircraft, and anti-aircraft systems — within civilian-populated urban areas, constituting clear violations of the Geneva and Rome Conventions.

- **Humanitarian Crisis:**

The misuse of military-grade weapons in densely populated cities threatens catastrophic civilian harm, underlining the urgent need for international humanitarian intervention.

IV. External Actors and the Risk of Prolongation

- **Foreign Involvement:**

External actors — regional and international — have reportedly provided support to both sides, complicating prospects for a quick resolution.

- **Wagner Group Speculation:**

While Wagner Group direct intervention is unlikely, logistical and material support to RSF elements cannot be ruled out.

- **Resource Dependency:**

The RSF's ability to sustain operations hinges on continued access to weapons, financing, and tribal militia reinforcements.

V. Strategic Outlook

- **Army's Likely Advantage:**

Given superior resources and organizational structure, the SAF is likely to prevail militarily over time, although prolonged urban combat could significantly delay a decisive victory.

- **Protracted Conflict Risk:**

If the RSF transitions to sustained guerrilla warfare and secures external supply chains, Sudan faces a high probability of degenerating into a long-term civil war.

- **International Intervention Imperative:**

The UN Security Council must play a leading role in diplomatic and humanitarian

efforts; regional bodies such as the Arab League lack the capacity to mediate effectively under current conditions.

Indicators to Monitor

- Shifts in RSF resource access and tribal mobilization patterns.
- Sudanese army siege operations and urban clearance tactics.
- Evidence of external military or logistical support flows to either faction.
- UN Security Council initiatives or resolutions regarding Sudan's conflict.

Analyst Reflection

Sudan's conflict reflects not only a battle between rival generals but a broader systemic collapse of political transition efforts.

Absent decisive international action and effective pressure on external enablers, Sudan risks following the path of failed states consumed by internecine warfare and humanitarian disaster.