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# What Does the Fall of El-Fasher Mean for Sudan?

Unit for Political Studies

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### Unit for Political Studies

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On 26 October 2025, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia seized control of El-Fasher, the last stronghold of the Sudanese army in the Darfur region, after imposing a suffocating siege on the city since May 2024. The siege involved incessant artillery shelling, a near-total blockade of food and medical supplies,<sup>1</sup> and atrocities against civilians. The RSF's victory places the group in control of all five states of Darfur, and marks the latest major shift in the nearly two-and-a-half-year conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the UAE-backed RSF. The fall of El-Fasher has serious political and security implications for the future and territorial integrity of Sudan.

## Why El-Fasher Fell

Since the war broke out in April 2023, Sudan has seen dramatic changes in territorial control. The RSF, a paramilitary group refashioned from the older Janjaweed militias, initially took the upper hand, seizing swathes of the country during the first year of the conflict – notably in Khartoum. It also made gains in strategic states close to the capital, such as Al-Jazirah, Sennar, and parts of White Nile and Blue Nile states. However, over the following year, the situation shifted in the favour of the army, which recaptured the capital and a number of states, successfully lifted the siege of the capital of North Kordofan state, El-Obeid, and made advances in its surroundings.<sup>2</sup>

This progress gave a new boost to the army, which announced it would advance on Darfur to lift the siege on El-Fasher. In response, the RSF focused its operations on the Kordofan and Darfur regions in a bid to offset its losses of strategic positions in the capital and the central states. As the army's forces advanced westward, the RSF reinforced its positions in North Kordofan and launched counterattacks to hinder its rival's progress.<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously, the RSF intensified its attacks on El-Fasher, benefiting from logistical and field reinforcements crossing into Sudan from neighbouring Chad and Libya.<sup>4</sup>

As such, the fall of the city was not an isolated event, but rather the outcome of several intertwined military, political, and strategic factors that had been set in motion in May 2024 and evolved in stages to reshape the balance of power in the war. These factors include the following:

1. **Politically:** The alliances forged by the commander of the Rapid Support Forces, Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo –better known as Hemedti – played a significant role in shifting the balance of power, and directly contributed to the rapid fall of the El-Fasher. These alliances brought several local armed groups with tribal affiliations in Darfur into the fight on the side of the RSF, including the Justice and Equality Movement, the Suleiman Sandal faction, and the Sudan Liberation Movement-Transitional Council, led by Al-Hadi Idris, along with units from Abdel

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1 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Report of OHCHR Sudan Country Office on the Siege of El Fasher, North Darfur since May 2024* (20/12/2024), accessed on 3/11/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BOWy>.

2 "The Sudanese army lifts the siege of the city of El-Obeid," *Al-Hadath* (via YouTube), 23/2/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025 (in Arabic) at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPfx>.

3 "Why is the Battle of Kordofan crucial in the Sudanese war?" *BBC Arabic*, 16/8/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPv6>.

4 "The Libyan Supply Bridge: Controversy continues over Haftar's support for the Rapid Support Forces with mercenaries and weapons, to fuel the war in Sudan," *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 29/10/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BP4g>.

Aziz al-Hilu's faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (North), which is active in the Nuba Mountains of Kordofan. This alliance culminated in the declaration of an RSF-led parallel government in Nairobi in February 2025, headed by Hemedti, with al-Hilu as vice president,<sup>5</sup> Idris as governor of the Darfur region, and Sandal as minister of the interior.<sup>6</sup> This alliance provided the RSF with crucial logistical and intelligence support in the operational area around El-Fasher, contributing to its capture of the city in defiance of Arab, regional, and international resistance toward Hemedti's "Government of Peace and Unity" and the alliance it represents.<sup>7</sup>

**2. Militarily:** El-Fasher was the target of more than 250 offensive operations over a year and a half of siege,<sup>8</sup> ranging from heavy artillery shelling and drone attacks to ground incursions, as the SAF sought to breach its defensive lines.<sup>9</sup> The RSF's acquisition of modern air defence systems<sup>10</sup> allowed it to neutralize the Sudanese Air Force, especially after it shot down two of the latter's aircraft in early 2025,<sup>11</sup> leading to the near-total cessation of air support for the besieged army troops. In contrast to the shortage of ammunition and manpower among those forces, the RSF was reinforced by an influx of hundreds of experienced foreign mercenaries. As the siege dragged on, morale collapsed among SAF forces defending the city, especially following the fall of Bara in North Kordofan,<sup>12</sup> which had represented a key staging point for the army in its bid to break the siege of El-Fasher. The loss of Bara therefore constituted a severe blow that reinforced the defenders' sense of isolation and closed one of their most important resupply and support lines, deepening the siege and weakening their ability to mount a successful resistance.

**3. Strategically:** External support played a critical role in enabling the RSF to seize control of El-Fasher. Reports by the United Nations and credible press outlets indicate that the UAE has supplied them with advanced military equipment, including some of British origin, which was deployed in combat positions around the city. The UN Security Council revealed that this equipment included products made by the Emirati company Nimr and British companies such as Militec and Cummins

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5 "Hemedti as president and Al-Hilu as vice-president... the 'Founding' alliance announces the formation of a 31-member leadership body," *Radio Dabanga*, 7/1/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPY6>.

6 "Names revealed of candidates for ministerial positions in the transitional government and the new prime minister, with expectations of an announcement in the coming hours," *Sudan News*, 26/7/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BOTD>.

7 "Announcement of the formation of a government in Nyala sparks internal and regional reactions and warnings of state disintegration," *Radio Dabanga*, 28/7/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/imyut>.

8 "The army says it repels an attack on El-Fasher and announces the killing of a Justice and Equality Movement leader (Julius)," *Al-Rakoba*, 18/10/2025, accessed on 31/10/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/ei0m7>.

9 For example, on September 8, SAF anti-aircraft units shot down 30 drones belonging to the RSF. On September 14 and 16, the RSF again shelled El Fasher with artillery, firing more than 90 shells. See: "Turning The Tide: The SAF's Strategic Offensive in Khartoum and the RSF's Setbacks - Sudan October 2024," *ALCD*, 14/10/2024, accessed on 1/11/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/c53oe>.

10 "Sudanese army breaks air blockade on El-Fasher with successful paratrooper drop," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 29/9/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/giw880>.

11 "Sources: The Support Forces are deploying advanced air defence systems operated by foreign experts in El-Fasher and other cities," *Sudan News*, 6/5/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/rdyxy>.

12 "Sudan: Thousands flee the city of Bara in North Kordofan, fearing attacks from the Rapid Support Forces," *Al Jazeera* (via YouTube), 31/10/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BOZt>.



Inc.<sup>13</sup> This gave the RSF access to armoured vehicles and precision guidance systems, giving it a tactical advantage at crucial stages of the battle. This support was not limited to ammunition and equipment, but also included a continuous flow of both military supplies, across the borders from Chad and Libya,<sup>14</sup> and mercenaries from neighbouring countries and beyond.<sup>15</sup> At least 300 Colombian mercenaries, whose deployment in Sudan has been documented since November 2024,<sup>16</sup> have played a crucial role in combat operations, as well as training the RSF in the use of advanced weapons, including drones and field artillery. They have also actively participated in the fighting around El-Fasher, according to video footage.<sup>17</sup> This technical and operational support has enhanced the effectiveness of the RSF, and helped to shift the military balance of power in its favour, especially given the declining capabilities of the armed forces to offset and respond to its losses.

## The Implications of El-Fasher's Fall

Given El-Fasher's strategic location and proximity to several international borders, along with its large population, its fall could represent a turning point in the course of the war, reshaping the military and political balance of power – unless the government in Khartoum can contain the repercussions.

### 1. Military Implications

Complete control of the Darfur region, along with large parts of the Kordofan region, gives the RSF the upper hand on the ground and reshapes the military map of Sudan. This geographical expansion not only increases the operational area under their control; it also enhances their ability to manoeuvre and to conduct multi-pronged offensive operations, as well as exposing the western front of the SAF, especially with the disruption of the latter's supply lines. Risks of further violence are also rising in the northern and western regions, and will continue to escalate if the militia succeeds in securing the vital export route linking Bara to Omdurman and seizing control of Umm Badr and Sowdari, which contain airfields, making them potential staging points for the launch of a new offensive against the capital.

Control over North Darfur gives the RSF access to rear supply lines across the borders with Libya, Chad, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic, enhancing its ability to take delivery of military and logistical support, and opening the way for it to expand westward to consolidate its control over

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13 "UK Military Equipment used by Militia Accused of Genocide Found in Sudan, UN told," *The Guardian*, 28/10/2025, accessed on 1/11/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/t6f6yw>; "United Nations Report Discloses UAE's Role in Supplying Weapons for Sudan War," *The Globe and Mail*, 24/1/2024, accessed on 24/1/2024, at: <https://n9.cl/30eiv>.

14 "Dozens of UAE flights Head to airstrip UN Says Supplies Arms to Sudan Rebels," *Reuters*, 12/12/2024, accessed on 1/11/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/aetmd>.

15 "Sudanese accusation with documents: Thousands of mercenaries fighting alongside the Rapid Support Forces," *Al-Hadath* (via YouTube), 5/8/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/c2udi>.

16 "Colombian Mercenaries Join Rapid Support Forces Fighting in Sudan," *Le Monde*, 5/9/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/h369m>.

17 "They include engineers and snipers... The Sixth Division: Foreign fighters from Colombia and Ukraine killed in a carefully planned ambush in El Fasher," *Al-Hadath al-Sudani* (via Facebook), 1/10/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025, at: <https://n9.cl/2e4ph>.

the Kordofan region and advance towards Northern State, which is connected to a border triangle controlled by RSF forces near the Libyan border.<sup>18</sup> This would provide the RSF with a direct launchpad from which to invade the state, as well as increasing its ability to impose new realities on the ground.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Political Implications

RSF control over the Darfur region strengthens the de facto authority represented by Hemedti's parallel government, enabling it to impose its rule in areas beyond the control of the central government. The announcement from Nairobi of the formation of the parallel administration, despite international rejection, reflects a trend towards institutionalizing the evolving situation on the ground, while weakening the position of the SAF in any future political negotiations – especially since it has lost control of Darfur, which has reduced its ability to defend the unity of the state in light of growing separatist tendencies in various regions. Although Hemedti has emphasized his commitment to the unity of Sudan,<sup>20</sup> this rhetoric does not conceal his ambitions, nor how they are linked to wider regional and international agendas, particularly given rumours that the UAE wants to seize control of strategic ports along Sudan's Red Sea coastline.<sup>21</sup>

## 3. Humanitarian Implications

The fall of El-Fasher, a city with an estimated population of more than two million people in addition to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs),<sup>22</sup> threatens to spark a major humanitarian crisis. This risk has been heightened by the massacres and violations the RSF has committed against civilians, according to reports by the United Nations and its Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. These atrocities have included ethnically motivated mass executions, systematic rape, starvation, and attacks on health facilities, including the Saudi Hospital, where at least 500 patients and staff were killed. All of this has exacerbated growing waves of displacement.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "What does the Rapid Support Forces' control of the Al-Uwaynat border triangle mean?" *BBC Arabic*, 12/6/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPnq>.

<sup>19</sup> "The first speech by the commander of the Rapid Support Forces after they took control of El-Fasher," *Al Arabiya TV* (via YouTube), 29/10/2025, accessed on 3/11/2025 (in Arabic), at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BP4n>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> "UAE Taking Steps to Gain Control of Sudan's Main Port," *Aljazeera*, 25/4/2020, accessed on 3/11/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPLx>. This emphasis on Sudan's unity appears to be a tactical move aimed at reassuring international actors and assuaging their concerns that the country might disintegrate, thereby ensuring continued external support, particularly from powers whose economic and geopolitical interests are linked to maritime trade routes in the Red Sea. Accordingly, the political discourse of the RSF must not be solely interpreted within a domestic context, but rather understood as part of a network of regional interests seeking to reshape their influence in Sudan through intertwined military, political, and economic means.

<sup>22</sup> Humanitarian Research Lab, *Confirmation of Sudan Armed Forces Bombardment Consistent with Rapid Support Forces Present in El-Fasher*, (Yale: Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health, April 2024), p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Vibhu Mishra, "Blood on the Sand. Blood on the Hands': UN Decries World's Failure as Sudan's El Fasher Falls," *UN News*, 30/10/2025, accessed on 1/11/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BP9u>.

According to the International Organization for Migration, more than 26,000 people – mostly women, children, and the elderly – fled on foot to escape the massacres. Many were subjected to extortion and sexual violence during their journey, given the absence of safe corridors to leave the city.<sup>24</sup> The Executive Director of UNICEF has said that "the estimated 130,000 children in Al Fasher are at a high risk of grave rights violations, with reports of abduction, killing and maiming, and sexual violence."<sup>25</sup> The waves of mass displacement towards Chad, Libya, and South Sudan also raise serious concerns about the destabilization of already fragile border regions and the exacerbation of activity by cross-border armed groups, in a context in which more than four million people have fled to neighbouring countries.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

The fall of El-Fasher represents a major turning point for the civil war in Sudan, which has seen major shifts on the ground over the course of the conflict. While the development strengthens the de facto rulers of Darfur in the short term, and deepens the political and military divisions that have riven Sudan since the RSF launched its coup against the army and the Sudanese state, it remains possible that the military will regain the initiative and retake the region. However, in addition to a reorganization of military affairs, this will require the development of a comprehensive vision that balances political, security, and humanitarian needs, along with the rebuilding of state institutions on solid foundations to enable the country to move beyond the war and achieving a sustainable peace that restores Sudan's unity and stability. It also demands that world powers take a firm stance towards external actors supporting the RSF, whose interference threatens to spark a repetition of the humanitarian tragedy that ravaged Darfur nearly two decades ago – at the hands of the Janjaweed.

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<sup>24</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), "IOM Chief on the Escalating Violence in El Fasher," 28/10/2025, accessed on 1/11/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BPTx>.

<sup>25</sup> UNICEF, "No Child Safe in Al Fasher," 29/10/2025, accessed on 1/11/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9BP7V>.

<sup>26</sup> Mishra, "Blood on the Sand."