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2.2.2. Conflict dynamics and tactics

Initially, the RSF attempted to capture El Fasher through direct ground assaults that were repulsed by the SAF and its allied forces. By mid-2025, the RSF shifted to a war of attrition, completely encircling the city and cutting off supply lines,561 while reportedly building an earthen wall around the city.562 The RSF included fighters from allied groups into its ranks563 and used foreign mercenaries564 operating drones to intensify bombardments.565 In April 2025, the RSF took control of Zamzam camp,566 after three days of fighting, fires, and 'extreme violence'.567 Further attacks were reported in Abu Shouk camp568 and Um Kadada.569 On 26 October 2025, the RSF seized control of the capital El Fasher following a siege that had lasted 533 days.570 The RSF subsequently advanced westward, attacking Joint Forces-held areas controlled by predominantly Zaghawa army-aligned groups.571 In December 2025, following brief armed clashes, the RSF established near-complete control of Um Baru and Kornoy.572

Regarding the SAF and allied forces, in May 2025, the SAF reportedly gained control over Al-Atrun airbase.573 As of April 2026, Al-Tina area was reportedly controlled by Joint Forces and the SAF, but intermittent clashes and repeated RSF attacks continued,574 including in July 2026. 575 There was growing concern that the conflict could develop into a tribal war amid rising ethnic tensions, as the area lies within the Zaghawa tribal sultanate.576 In late June 2026, Joint Forces reportedly recaptured the town of Abu Qamra after heavy fighting with the RSF.577

Allegations of abuses against Zaghawa civilians had been reported following the RSF's capture of Abu Qamra in late 2025, after the Joint Forces' withdrawal to Al-Tina.578 In July 2026, RSF troops reportedly carried out ethnically motivated attacks on six villages near Al-Tina, resulting in several civilians being killed and dozens injured.579

Clashes between herders and farmers occurred across Darfur from October to December 2025, during the harvest period, with Kutum, Kabkabiya, and Dar es Salaam among the particularly affected areas. Reportedly, four people were killed in an incident in Al-Sayyah area in December 2025.580

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