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2.8.2. Conflict dynamics and tactics

After the SAF had driven the RSF out of Khartoum in May 2025[893] and the RSF had taken control of El Fasher in Darfur in October of that same year, the focus of the fighting shifted to Kordofan,[894] being the region a strategic crossroads for both conflict parties[895] linking Darfur and central Sudan.[896] As of February 2026, the NRC described South Kordofan as the 'epicentre of the war in Sudan' featuring the country's 'most dangerous and neglected frontline'.[897]

In May 2025, clashes were reported in the Al-Qouz locality on the northwestern edge of the state,[898] with the RSF advancing into the 'Taiba Triangle',[899] a strategic crossroads linking all three Kordofan states.[900] In December 2025, RSF together with SPLM-N-Al-Hilu troops cut the road between Dilling and the state capital Kadugli, imposing sieges on both SAF-controlled towns[901] and intensifying artillery and drones strikes on both.[902] In late January 2026, the SAF, in a counter-offensive from the east, managed to break the siege of Dilling and advance further south towards Kadugli.[903] The SAF and allied forces reached Kadugli at the beginning of February 2026, breaking a siege that had lasted for over two years,[904] similarly to Dilling.[905] However, fighting in the area continued,[906] as the RSF cut off the main supply lines for relief operations into Dilling at the beginning of March 2026.[907]

Conflict dynamics involved clashes between the SAF and the RSF.[908] In the wake of the formation of an alliance between the RSF and SPLM-N-Al-Hilu,[909] the SAF further engaged in fighting against SPLM-N-Al-Hilu troops along the road between Dilling and Kadugli[910] and in areas under SPLM-N-Al-Hilu control.[911] They further launched airstrikes on the SPLM-N-controlled Nuba mountains.[912] According to ACLED, between December 2025 and January 2026 air and drone strikes in South Kordofan quadrupled.[913] The SAF resumed airstrikes in April 2026 after halting air operations for several months due to the loss of several fighter planes.[914] Drone strikes were reported throughout the reference period, targeting contested areas and hitting civilian targets and infrastructure.[915]

Furthermore, there were reports of tribal clashes within the area controlled by the SPLM-N-Al-Hilu in May and June 2026,[916] even leading to a rival group from the Otoro tribe seizing parts of SPLM-N-Al-Hilu stronghold Kaoda at the end of June 2026.[917] Renewed clashes in Kaoda between SPLM-N-Al-Hilu and members of the Otoro tribe were reported in August 2026.[918]

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