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2.13.2. Conflict dynamics and tactics

Blue Nile state, described by ACLED as previously having been ‘peripheral’ to the trajectory of the war in Sudan, reportedly became a key battleground in January 2026, following the buildup of troops on both sides in the State in December 2025. On 11 January 2026, the SAF carried out airstrikes in Yabous on what it labelled a convoy carrying foreign mercenaries, while the SPLM-N-Al-Hilu claimed that they struck civilians.1117 In late January 2026, the SPLM-N-Al-Hilu and the RSF reportedly launched a joint offensive on SAF positions in the state, while RSF troops advanced northward from Baw district towards Damazin.1118 Clashes were reported in Baw district,1119 where the SPLM-N briefly seized Silk (Silak, Salk).1120 Further violent clashes between the warring parties happened in February and March 2026, as thousands of RSF fighters reportedly advanced from Ethiopian territory1121 and the area around the southern town of Kurmuk on the border with Ethiopia became the focal point of the confrontations.1122 The rebel alliance finally took over Kurmuk1123 while the SPLM-N was mobilising forces in Geisan (Qaysan) district.1124 By mid-April sources close to the RSF reported to have reached Al-Keili area about 145 kilometres south of Damazin, with clashes occurring around Sali town on a main highway towards Damazin.1125

The months from May to July 2026 saw a reversal of some of the gains made by the rebel alliance, as the SAF reported heavy fighting with the RSF in Al-Kaili,1126 seized the border town Khor Hassan from the RSF,1127 advanced south recapturing the strategic areas of Magia (Mugaja) and Surkum (Sirkum)1128 and finally seized Kurmuk at the start of July 2026.1129 The London-based Centre for Information Resilience (CIR) with its war monitoring project Sudan Witness identified Blue Nile state as the area with most conflict-related activity in 2026 together with North Kordofan and West Darfur.1130 Both conflict sides in 2026 reportedly increased their reliance on drone strikes, also in Blue Nile,1131 with ACLED recording an uptick in February with 19 strikes compared to just 3 in January, the majority of them conducted by the SAF.1132

In mid-August 2026, the Taasis alliance in turn managed to reverse the recent gains made by the SAF by taking control of Kurmuk town once again1133 while starting a fresh offensive from across the Ethiopian border capturing Geisan town in Geisan district.1134 In September 2026, the RSF made further gains by capturing a SAF garrison in the Jebel Kadam area east of Kurmuk. 1135

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