

Sudan: The Pearl of the Nile Ravaged by War The Army and the Janjaweed: Who Will Win the Battle?



It has been over 17 months since the outbreak of the ongoing military confrontations in Sudan between the army and the Rapid Support Forces. Questions are arising about how the two parties to the conflict compensate for their losses in the expanding battles.

War broke out between the two parties on April 15, 2023, following disagreements over the duration and method of integrating the Rapid Support Forces into the army. This was based on the framework agreement supported by the United Nations and Sudanese civilian forces.

The conflict that originated in the capital, Khartoum, has now extended to 14 Sudanese states, prompting concerns among military and security experts about the sources of weaponry for the involved parties.

There have been numerous reports indicating that the Rapid Support Forces are accused of receiving support from the United Arab Emirates. This was confirmed by the seizure of quantities of Emirati weapons in Khartoum at multiple military sites, which were under the control of the Rapid Support Forces. Until recently, these forces were part of the regular forces of Al-Bashir's regime and played a significant role in overthrowing him. However, they later attempted to overthrow the army leaders, led by Al-Burhan, in an effort to monopolize power in Sudan with the assistance of the UAE and some regional powers.

The American newspaper Wall Street Journal confirmed last August that "the UAE is sending weapons to the Rapid Support Forces" via Umm Jaras Airport, passing through Uganda Airport.

The UAE set up a field hospital in the Chadian city of Umm Jaras in July 2023. However, Sudanese officials claim that the hospital's purpose is to deliver weapons to the Rapid Support Forces.

The UAE officially denies providing weapons to the Rapid Support Forces and states that it "does not support any party in the current conflict and aims to bring it to an end."

To better comprehend the dire situation in war-torn Sudan, we will provide a summary of various reports and situation assessments that discuss the conflict in Sudan, including its key stages and the strengths and weaknesses of each party involved. We will start by highlighting the major attack launched by the Sudanese army on Khartoum, which is one of the most significant events in the war.

The major attack...

The Sudanese army conducted a large-scale military operation involving land, air, and naval forces in the three cities of Khartoum State (Khartoum, Omdurman, and Khartoum Bahri). They advanced across three bridges linking the capital cities toward the Rapid Support Forces' targets, and the Sudanese army took control of important sites in central Khartoum, a significant development in the battles that began 17 months ago.

On September 26, 2024, at 2:00 a.m., the Sudanese army launched a surprise strike against the Rapid Support Forces (Janjaweed) rebels. Reuters reported, citing Sudanese military sources, that the attack is the 'largest' operation by the army to reclaim territory there since the beginning of its 17-month-long war on the Rapid Support Forces.

Where are the battles heading?

Military theories establish specific standards for evaluating the progression of war battles, their trajectories, and their ultimate outcomes. While it is challenging to accurately predict the result of any war, certain indicators in the war's environment can help assess the balance of power and the circumstances for achieving victory.

Millions of Sudanese are hoping for an end to the current war between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces. The conflict began nearly a year and a half ago in the capital, Khartoum, and has affected large parts of the country including Darfur, as well as the agricultural-rich states of Al-Jazirah and Sennar.

The main concern for these people is the duration of the war and the resulting human suffering. Initially, many believed it was a short conflict between the army and a rebellious faction. However, as the true nature of the conspiracy became evident, it became clear that the country and its people were being targeted. This led to the occupation of homes, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the displacement of millions, all without any regard for international humanitarian and customary law.

Sudanese war agreements... ink on paper

Despite both parties signing the Jeddah Declaration in May 2023, which explicitly states the need to evacuate civilian areas and allow citizens to remain in their homes, the Rapid Support Forces, supported by their civilian allies in the "Progress" coalition, have refused to adhere to the declaration.

As the Sudanese people await a solution to end their suffering and return them to their homes and jobs, the urgent

question arises: What vision is available to end this war?

Sudan's history shows that no matter how long a war lasts and how far apart the parties are a negotiated solution is ultimately what will end the war and stop the fighting. However, with the current situation of strong military and political divisions, unproductive regional and international involvement, and the expansion of the Rapid Support Forces into new areas, it is unlikely that there will be any initiative to bring the parties closer together unless one side believes that the developments on the ground will not help achieve its political goals.

Sun Tzu's Criteria

Given both parties' conviction in their ability to win the war, we seek to apply the theory of the Chinese philosopher and general Sun Tzu. More than two thousand years ago, Sun Tzu authored the book "The Art of War," which has since become an important reference in military strategy.

Sun Tzu identified seven questions to evaluate any war and predict its results:

- Which party ruler is more committed to moral law (harmony between ruler and ruled)?
- Which of the two party leaders is more capable and resourceful?
- Which party benefits from geographical and climatic factors?
- Which of the two parties strictly follows the system?
- Which of the two armies is stronger in terms of morals, physical strength, and equipment?
- Which army has better-trained and prepared officers?
- Which of the two armies is more committed to the principle of reward and punishment?

By answering these questions, I can determine which party will achieve victory and which will be defeated. These questions will help us evaluate the positions of the two parties based on their calculations.

The position of the Sudanese army:

The Sudanese army has moral and political legitimacy in this war as it represents the national conscience and is key to preserving the country's unity. It also serves as the internationally recognized national government, representing the Sudanese people. The army possesses extensive experience in managing battles and is skilled in employing tactics that exhaust the enemy and drain its capabilities.

Even though modern military theories tend to favor irregular armies in urban warfare, the army was able to absorb the initial shock and developed a realistic tactic to deal with the Rapid Support Forces, who took pride in their vast numbers in the early months of the war. The army's strategy involved maintaining military positions and luring the enemy into what could be described as 'wall battles' around the army's general command and in the armored building. Through this approach, the military successfully repelled hundreds of successive attacks and inflicted heavy losses in both lives and equipment on the attackers.

The army followed the strategy of the Roman general Fabius Maximus (Fabian strategy), which was to avoid engaging in fierce battles or direct clashes with the enemy's front lines or even engaging in a decisive war with it. Instead, it continued to wear it down and evade it for the longest period in order to weaken it.

During the previous stage, the army was able to rebuild its armament system effectively both internally and externally, following the course of the battles and the weapons used in them. This was confirmed by the assistant commander of the army, Lieutenant General Yasser Al-Atta, after the army was subjected to a major shock in the first stage of the war.

The army is also fighting under a comfortable psychological and moral umbrella in light of the great popular support around it, which the Chinese philosopher calls "harmony between the ruler and the ruled." In an effort to garner public support, the army initiated a popular resistance campaign. Tens of thousands of young Sudanese individuals capable of bearing arms joined its ranks, allowing it to match the workforce of the Rapid Support Forces.

The combined forces of the movements that signed the Juba Peace Agreement joining the war have been a significant advantage for the army. It greatly disrupted the progress of the Rapid Support Forces in Darfur, especially in its capital, El Fasher. This also thwarted any plans by the Rapid Support Forces leadership to occupy El Fasher and establish a parallel government there.

Weaknesses of the Sudanese army:

Despite the mentioned positive indicators, there are essential points that should be considered.

The first is time. Sun Tzu said, "There is no historical precedent that mentions a country benefiting from entering long wars." The longer a war lasts, the more citizens who rely on the army to resolve the battle quickly suffer. This will also enable the Rapid Support Forces and their supporters to find paths for armament, military, and political support.

Secondly, despite the diversity of the political groups supporting the army, there is no cohesive political party participating in planning and managing the battle politically. The failure to form a government supported by political groups since the decisions of October 5, 2022, has affected the relationship between the army and the "political forces supporting it. These forces were waiting for more significant opportunities in the political decision making process.

Thirdly, The government's foreign relations were impacted by the uncertain stance of the United States towards the army after the October decision. While the United States did not consider these actions as a military coup, it adopted a hostile position towards the army, subsequently affecting the Sudanese government's relations with the European Union, the African Union, and some Arab countries.

Rapid Support Forces Assessment:

First, the Rapid Support Forces have occupied large parts of Sudan, with deployments in four out of five states in Darfur and in the state of Al-Jazeera, strategically located in the heart of Sudan next to the state of Sennar. While some military personnel view this deployment as unproductive and militarily demanding, the leadership of the Rapid Support Forces sees it as an important leverage in future negotiations or even in establishing a parallel

government in the areas under its control.

Second, the Rapid Support Forces have a tribal incubator in more than one African country with an innate readiness to fight fiercely in its ranks, enabling it to compensate for the human element no matter how great its losses are.

Third, the Western-backed "Progress" coalition's alignment puts it in a position to potentially improve its relations with Western countries. However, these countries still view it as a notorious force burdened with historical crimes in the Darfur region.

Fourth, It continues to receive unlimited military support, as documented by reports from both the United Nations and the Sudanese government.

Weaknesses of the Rapid Support Forces:

There is a significant problem that has greatly damaged the reputation of the Rapid Support Forces, which is the extent of the crimes committed against the Sudanese since the start of the war. The crimes of murder, rape, looting, plundering, and assault on public and private property have been beyond words. In every area it has taken control of, it has displaced citizens and looted their property, leading to growing widespread resentment towards it.

The lack of a clear goal for the war is a moral condemnation of the undisciplined forces that operate without a strong command and control system. The significant human losses have directly impacted the number and quality of fighters in the ranks, and have also led to the breakdown of the tribal system within the forces. These tribal differences, especially after the loss of influential historical leaders like Ali Yaqoub, who was killed near El Fasher, may reduce the effectiveness of military attacks.

Despite these challenges, the forces may be able to maintain the current security situation, but they will struggle to make considerable progress or retain control over the occupied areas.

Finally, despite the complex military and political calculations, the war between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces seems to persist due to each side's confidence in their ability to win. However, the ongoing conflict is worsening the plight of civilians and causing severe damage to the country's infrastructure.