



South Kordofan (Nuba Mountains) Briefing

Escalating Conflict and Humanitarian Crisis in South Kordofan

12 February 2026

1. Background

Since the start of the current war in Sudan—and following the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement–North (SPLM-N) under Abdel Aziz al-Hilu ending its six-year unilateral ceasefire— South Kordofan has become one of the most volatile and militarized regions in the country. Fighting between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and SPLM-N has intensified across multiple fronts, dramatically worsening humanitarian conditions.

2. Collapse of Sieges and Shifting Military Dynamics

El Dilling

Two weeks ago, SAF announced it had broken the two-year siege of El Dilling, which had been encircled by SPLM-N from the south and RSF from the north. The siege resulted in:

- A fivefold increase in prices of essential goods
- Severe shortages of food and medicine
- The displacement of nearly half the town’s population
- Widespread looting and mistreatment of civilians by both SPLM-N and RSF as people fled in search of safety

Kadugli

On 4 February 2026, SAF declared it had entered Kadugli, the capital of South Kordofan, ending another prolonged SPLM-N siege. Thousands of civilians fled the city, taking extremely dangerous routes through:

- **Eida (South Sudan)**
- **Talodi**
- **Abu Gibeha**

Journeys often took up to a month and required significant financial resources. Civilians reported looting, extortion, and abuses along the way.

Risk of a Renewed Siege in Kadugli

Despite SAF's breakthrough, concerns remain that the victory may be temporary. Kadugli is surrounded by mountainous terrain, much of which remains under SPLM-N control. SPLM-N forces possess deep knowledge of the landscape and extensive experience in mountain warfare.

RSF elements also maintain a presence around the city, giving them opportunities to disrupt supply routes. Both SPLM-N and RSF are well-positioned to re-establish roadblocks, potentially isolating Kadugli again. The risk of renewed siege conditions remains high.

Drone Warfare: Kamikaze Drones — Tactics, Technology, and Impact

SAF and RSF have begun deploying new types of kamikaze attack drones in the Kordofan region, targeting fuel depots, markets, and convoys in each other's rear areas. While intended to disrupt supply lines, these attacks have caused significant civilian casualties, striking markets, residential buildings, hospitals, and schools. Some of the attacks included:

SAF Drone Attacks on Civilian Areas

1. December 2025 – A strike on a school in Koma Hyban locality killed around 25 people, most of them children.
2. El Khowia, West Kordofan – A drone strike killed several tribal leaders and elders from the Hamar community during a meeting.
3. February 2026 – A strike on Amiet Market (Souq Al-Na'am/Ostrich Market) in the Abyei Special Administrative Area killed civilians and destroyed the main supply hub for southern Nuba Mountains communities during road closures.

RSF Drone Attacks on Civilian Areas

1. December 2025 – A strike on Kidney Garden in Kadugli killed seven children.
2. Kalogi, Gadir locality – A strike on a school killed more than ten people.

Scale of Displacement

Since October, the conflict has displaced over 500,000 people, deepening an already catastrophic humanitarian crisis.

3. SPLM-N and RSF Alliance: A Strategic Miscalculation

The unexpected alliance between SPLM-N (al-Hilu) and the RSF has shocked many observers. Historically, relations between Nuba communities and the Baggara tribes—who form a major component of RSF forces—have been marked by deep hostility. Baggara militias under the Popular Defence Forces fought SPLM-N for decades, beginning with the Marahil forces in 1985.

Internal Backlash

The alliance appears to have been decided by SPLM-N leadership without broad consultation. It has triggered:

- **Discontent among SPLM-N fighters**
- **Rejection from many civilian supporters**
- **A collapse in voluntary recruitment**
- **Forced conscription of young men, many of whom have escaped training camps**

RSF Abuses in SPLM-N Areas

RSF units entering SPLM-N-controlled areas have committed human rights violations, further alienating local communities. Civilians celebrated SAF's breaking of the sieges in El Dilling and Kadugli, with many volunteering to fight against SPLM-N and RSF.

Loss of Territory

SPLM-N has lost ground in parts of eastern South Kordofan, including Al Abbasiyya, Tagali, and Rashad localities, such as the village of Al Morib. These areas had been under SPLM-N control since 2011. Local communities reported abuses after RSF elements joined SPLM-N forces, indicating declining discipline within the movement.

Decline in Popular Support

SPLM-N's once strong popular base in the Nuba Mountains—reflected in the 2011 elections—has eroded significantly due to:

- **The alliance with RSF**
- **Forced recruitment**
- **Human rights violations**
- **Failure to protect civilians**

4. Humanitarian Situation

4.1 Severe Shortages

Civilians face:

- Continuous shelling
- Acute shortages of food, medicine, and fuel
- Record-high prices due to closed supply routes
- A collapse of cash availability, forcing barter systems

4.2 Population in Need

South Kordofan's population was 2.3 million in the 2010 census, with tens of thousands more arriving after fleeing Khartoum in April 2023. Today:

- **60% of the population requires humanitarian assistance**
- **Most hospitals lack basic supplies, including malaria and dengue fever medication**

4.3 Market Disruptions

Before the war, SPLM-N-controlled areas relied heavily on goods from government-controlled towns. That flow stopped after the conflict escalated. The Al Namm market—a critical supply hub—was struck by SAF drones on 4 February 2026, forcing its closure. This will severely affect both SPLM-N and government-controlled areas.

4.4 Agricultural Collapse

The conflict has devastated agriculture:

- Insecurity prevented farmers from cultivating their land
- Fuel, pesticide, and fertilizer shortages reduced yields
- Even harvested crops cannot reach major markets such as El Obeid, Kosti, or Khartoum

4.5 IDPs in SPLM-N Areas

Some displaced people fled into SPLM-N territory despite SPLM-N declaring famine in those areas two years ago and requesting UN assistance. With supply routes cut and markets closed, conditions are deteriorating rapidly.

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