

Situation Report

A second El Fasher? Increased risk in El Obeid

Region: MENA

Date: 12 January 2026

Location: El Obeid, North Kordofan, Sudan

Analysis by Brandon Rochester



The Situation:

Context

After 18 months of siege, on 26 October 2025, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) overwhelmed the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Darfur Joint Protection Force (DJPF), capturing the capital city of North Darfur, El Fasher. This campaign, which began in April 2024, saw the RSF [“assaulting the means necessary for the sustainment of life”](#) in both El Fasher, its neighbouring communities, and surrounding Internal Displacement Camps (IDCs).

These attacks included, but were not limited to, the [razing of surrounding non-arab communities](#), the [repeated assaults on the Zamzam and Abu Shouk IDCs](#), continuous drone strikes, [campaigns of sexual violence](#), and the [“deliberate targeting”](#) and [destruction of health care facilities](#) via artillery shelling and other means. These intensifying attacks, combined with the [establishment of a 57km berm](#) – which escalated the blockade on humanitarian aid and contributed to the [declaration of famine in September 2025](#) – enabled the RSF’s capture of El Fasher, resulting in [large-scale civilian killings](#), including the [massacre of at least 460 healthcare professionals and patients at the Saudi Maternity Hospital on 28 October](#). As one survivor told, [“the RSF were killing people as if they were flies”](#). Amnesty International’s Secretary General, [Agnès Callamard](#), said that “this persistent, widespread violence against civilians constitutes war crimes and may also constitute other crimes under international law”.

Unfortunately, similar patterns are being recorded further east in Kordofan. In particular, researchers are concerned about a possible El Fasher-like scenario occurring in El Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan and a key resourceful and strategic city. El Obeid is a critical commercial hub for Sudan’s gum arabic industry and boasts key supply routes connecting oil-producing regions to Khartoum and Port Sudan. In addition, it has its own airport and transport infrastructure connecting Khartoum to major cities such as El Fasher.

El Obeid was previously besieged by the RSF for almost two years, until its recapture by the [SAF in February 2025](#). However, the civilians there are facing increasing risk. On 28 October, the reported that it was [“concerned about a possible siege of the town of El Obeid, hosting tens of thousands of internally displaced Sudanese, which would further exacerbate humanitarian needs in the region”](#).

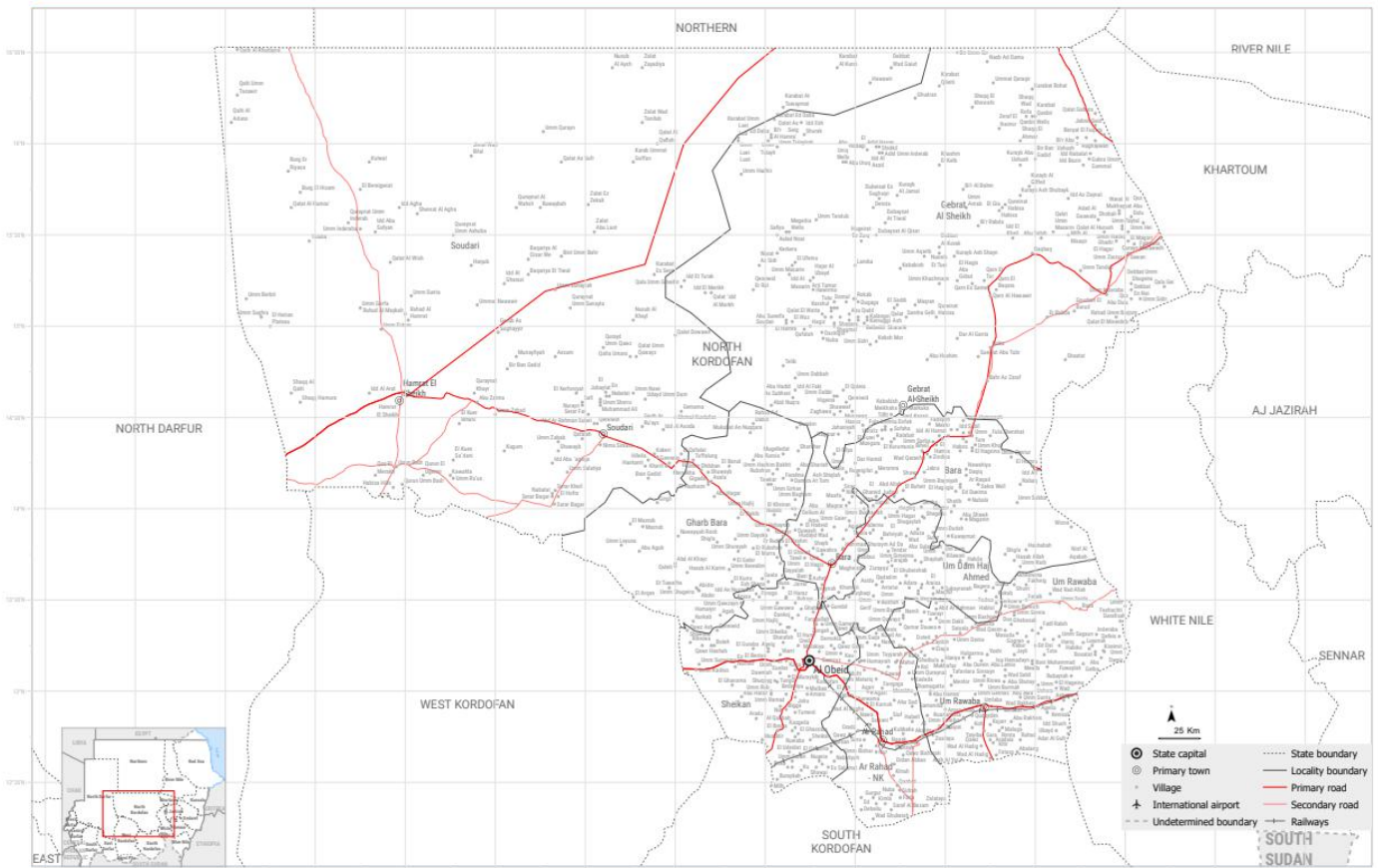
The Event

In recent months, there has been an intensification of RSF activity in and around El Obeid. On 25 October 2025, the [RSF seized the strategic town of Bara](#), approximately 60km north of El Obeid. On 3 November, approximately [45 people attending a funeral outside of El Obeid were killed by a reported RSF drone strike](#). On 13 December, [a drone strike reportedly killed at least three civilians in the Tayba neighbourhood](#) within the city. More broadly, on 16 December, the UN Human Rights Chief, [Volker Türk](#), reported that “at least 104 civilians have been killed in numerous drone attacks across the Kordofan region” since 4 December. On 17 December, [a local bulletin suggested that the siege around El Obeid was tightening](#), leaving only a single eastern corridor reportedly remaining open.

Furthermore, [local reporting and social media footage indicate increased RSF troop movements toward the city](#). On 6 January 2026, another 13 were reportedly killed in another drone strike on the “[densely populated Al-Jallabiya residential neighbourhood](#)”. This attack followed another drone attack that same week, [targeting the city's power station](#), causing widespread power outages. This increase in violence and RSF strategic presence has caused many to fear that a future full-scale siege, followed by a severe massacre, like those which occurred in El Geneina and El Fasher, could occur in the coming months in El Obeid.

 **SUDAN**
North Kordofan State Reference Map

January 2025



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
 Creation date: 06 January 2025 Sources: Boundaries (CBS, NIC, the Ministry of Federal Governance and the Sudanese Survey Authority), airfield, road, river Nile and railways (WFP), settlement (OCHA) Feedback: ocha@sudan_feedback@unocha.org, www.unocha.org/sudan, www.reliefweb.int

Analysis

The recent escalation around El Obeid reflects a pattern consistent with RSF preparatory operations observed before the fall of El Fasher. In North Darfur, the RSF first consolidated control over surrounding towns and rural areas before escalating to sustained drone and artillery strikes, restricting civilian movement, cutting off humanitarian aid, and ultimately encircling the city.

A similar trajectory now appears to be emerging in North Kordofan and its capital. The subjugation of Bara, [“a crucial strategic link between Darfur and central Sudan”](#), was significant, since it removed a key northern buffer protecting El Obeid. Additionally, as the [Sudan Tribune](#) reported, the seizure of Bara has led to the severing of pipelines, which supply approximately 40% of El Obeid’s water, triggering severe shortages and forcing residents to consume unsafe water, with reports of disease potentially spreading as a result.

Moreover, Bara’s capture has been mirrored by a shift from peripheral pressure to direct urban intimidation, with increased drone strikes and attacks within and surrounding the city. Approximately an hour’s drive away, Bara offers a strategic springboard for further reinforcements and resupplies for an increasingly tight siege. Dilling in South Kordofan – a two-and-a-half hours’ drive from El-Obeid – [is also being besieged by the RSF](#), with increasing intensity. In addition, Dilling is concomitantly [facing a potential famine](#), and as such, its defensive resilience is likely diminishing. As such, the choke on the North Kordofan capital is likely to increase if the surrounding areas fall.

Furthermore, the humanitarian strain in El Fasher was exacerbated by the absorption of thousands of displaced civilians fleeing from RSF attacks. [El Obeid has also reportedly taken in tens of thousands of displaced persons in recent months](#), which could potentially result in further strain on the city’s resources as the encirclement compresses. As such, with increased military pressure and humanitarian strain, the risks posed to civilians within El Obeid are likely increasing.

Outlook

In mid-November, the executive director of the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab, Nathaniel Raymond, warned that the SAF and the DJPF ought to [“curl up and prepare for siege mode”](#) in El Obeid, as the RSF’s acquisition of man-portable air-defence systems (MANPADS) had eroded the air supremacy previously enjoyed by the SAF. Furthermore, on 19 December, Mohamed Refaat, the IOM’s Chief of Mission in Port Sudan, suggested that El Obeid is [“one or two steps from being the next city under attack”](#), reporting that approximately half a million people will be impacted if such an attack were to occur. With the increasing pressure from multiple axes, a full-scale siege of El Obeid is increasingly likely to occur, confirming Raymond’s previous predictions.

Nonetheless, the [Sudan Tribune](#) claimed that the SAF have pushed the RSF out of the Allouba area, south of El Obeid, which was previously used by the RSF to stage drone attacks on commercial traffic heading to the North Kordofan capital. In addition, there are reports that the [SAF are renewing efforts to retake parts of](#)

[the Kordofan region](#). With this recently reported victory and the potential increase of SAF presence, there may be some hope of increased support and aid making its way to those currently trapped in El Obeid, Dilling, and other areas facing hostilities in Kordofan.

To conclude, El Obeid is an important gateway between Khartoum and the country's southern and western regions, such as Darfur and the White Nile, and is a key economic and logistical hub for Sudan's gum arabic and oil trades. An RSF seizure of El Obeid could have devastating consequences for the safety of those in the wider Kordofan region and further east. As one journalist put it, [“if El-Obeid were to fall, the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces \(RSF\) would once again be at the gates of Khartoum”](#).

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