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Military Massacres in Sudan's Breadbasket Are Fueling an Unprecedented Famine



Photograph Source: Sudan Envoy – [CC BY 2.0](#)

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in war-torn Sudan has unleashed yet another depopulation campaign in the towns and villages of al-Gezira state, killing hundreds, looting, raping, and burning crops in the country's breadbasket amid a famine that has engulfed over half the population.

"Never in modern history have so many people faced starvation and famine as in Sudan today," [said UN experts](#). "Severe levels of hunger" affect more than 25 million people, said the experts, including 97 percent of the over 11 million internally displaced people

(IDPs). [Thirty percent of Sudan's population has been displaced](#) along with the over 3 million others who have fled to neighboring countries.

Adding to the [largest displacement crisis in the world](#), the wave of attacks since October 20 has forced another 135,000 people to flee from the eastern region of al-Gezira, the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) [reported](#) on November 1.

The RSF, a paramilitary organization that has been at war with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) for over a year and a half, [invaded al-Gezira in December 2023](#). Attacking [more than 2,000 villages](#) this February, it brought agriculture to a near halt in this state whose Nile-watered fields were producing over half of all Sudan's wheat.

Most of these 2,000 villages in the western vicinity of the Hasahisa, one of the main towns in the central part of al-Gezira, remain deserted, said Jamal (name changed) spokesperson of Hasahisa's Resistance Committee (RC).

A network of RCs across Sudan was spearheading the mass protests against the military junta jointly led by the SAF and the RSF before the allies turned on each other, hurling the country into a civil war in April 2023. Since then, the RCs have been organizing and coordinating relief and rescue efforts for civilians caught in the war. The conflict has claimed [well over 62,000 lives](#), according to a conservative estimate.

Crucial Market Towns Attacked

Until the RSF's invasion late last year, al-Gezira was a safe haven for those fleeing the fighting in the capital region of Khartoum. Following the attacks in February 2024, the eastern area became the only safe region, Jamal said. Its market towns of Rufaa and Tambul were "serving as the main suppliers of food for the entire state."

But not anymore. Abu Aqla Kakil, the RSF's former commander in al-Gezira is [reported](#) to have spared the eastern part of the state due to social ties with the communities in the area. However, he [defected to SAF](#) on October 20 and the RSF began reprisals on civilians the very next day, attacking Rufaa and Tambul multiple times since.

When the RSF reached the village of Safita al-Ghanoubab on October 23, residents resisted the RSF. But the small weapons the army had distributed to them were no match for the RSF, which killed at least 14 before overrunning the village. On October 25, the RSF besieged the village of al-Sireha and ordered the residents to hand over their weapons. Refusing, the "residents told the RSF that there were no army units, only women and children sheltering in their village, and they would not allow the RSF to enter and harm them," Jamal told Peoples Dispatch.

In the massacre that followed, the RSF [killed at least 124 people and wounded 200](#) others, before taking another 150 civilians as prisoners. A local monitoring group, the Al Jazirah Conference, reported later that at least three of them, including a baby, were “slaughtered,” after finding two bodies in the fields and another dumped in an irrigation canal. The fate of other captives remains uncertain amid fears that they also may have been executed.

In total, the RSF has attacked over 60 villages centered around Tambul and Rufaa in October and November 2024. Most residents there have fled. Villages in the vicinity that did not come under attack are also deserted because, Jamal explained, their residents have no means to survive without the markets in Tambul and Rufaa.

Only those unable to flee remain. With artillery fire and road closures, the RSF is [reportedly](#) preventing the residents from leaving Rufaa to use them as human shields against SAF airstrikes.

Those left behind are short of food supply, most of which was looted by the RSF from the markets and the homes they invaded. Water and electricity have been cut off, along with telephone lines.

“We are not able to contact any of them,” Jamal said. The RSF has confiscated the Starlink devices that RC members in the villages were using to communicate via the internet.

Attacks Expanding to Other Areas

The areas under attack in al-Gezira are expanding. On October 31, the RSF invaded homes, seized vehicles, looted gold and money, and gave residents a [24-hour ultimatum to desert the village of Mustafa Al-Qureshi](#) in al-Halawin.

The UN’s Secretary-General António Guterres was “appalled by reports of large numbers of civilians being killed, detained and displaced, acts of sexual violence against women and girls, the looting of homes and markets and the burning of farms,” his spokesperson [said](#) on November 1.

That day, RSF [depopulated another village](#) in al-Halawin, before launching attacks on other localities including al-Kamlin and Hasahisa to the west and northwest of Tambul. Across al-Gezira, a total of 120 villages have been affected by RSF attacks since October 20, according to a joint [statement](#) by the RCs of Hasahisa and Rufaa on November 1.

In the meantime, after welcoming into its ranks the defected RSF commander Kakil, “whose hands are stained with the blood of the people of Gezira,” the army has withdrawn from the state. This, said the RCs, has left civilians “to face death alone,” making no

attempts to protect them, the statement added. It called on junior officers and soldiers “to take a clear stance against the failure of your leaders, who... are sacrificing our people for political gain.”

This article was produced by [Peoples Dispatch](#)/[Globetrotter News Service](#). Pavan Kulkarni is a journalist with Peoples Dispatch.

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