

NEWS

SUDAN

Year three of the war in one word: Drones

More organised and more dependent on tech and outside support, the war in Sudan is deadlier than ever for civilians.

KIRI RUPIAH

DRONE warfare escalated sharply in the third year of the Sudan war, driving a surge in combatant and civilian deaths.

The initial clashes in the war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which started in Khartoum in April 2023, were close-range urban battles to capture neighbourhoods, streets, and buildings.

As violence spread to Darfur and Kordofan, both sides deployed heavier weapons in strikes supported, in some cases, by cross-border supply lines.

Last year, however, the fighting saw rapid expansion of drone use. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (Acled), there were 515 drone strikes in Sudan last year. They caused at least 2,600 deaths among fighters and civilians. This was a nearly 600% rise in deaths from drone strikes

and an 81% increase in attacks compared to 2024. Both sides now use drones to track enemy positions, carry out strikes and support ground attacks. Acled describes drones as a “force multiplier”, enabling greater damage without large troop deployments.

Regional supply networks have fuelled the spread of drone warfare. The SAF has reportedly received support from Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye. The RSF is backed by the United Arab Emirates, with supply routes through Ethiopia, Chad, and Libya.

“The UAE, through its diplomatic muscle, continues to expand the RSF’s network of allies and collaborators across Africa,” investigative journalist Zecharias Zelalem told *The Continent*.

Zelalem co-authored a recent *Middle East Eye* investigation that reveals an Ethiopian army base supplying the RSF through a chain that extends to a UAE facility in Berbera port, Somaliland. ■



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War-drawn: A picture by a young Sudanese refugee at the Tine transit camp in Chad.