

Security Advisory: Sudan (17 April 2023)

Security Advisory

As of 17 April 2023, MS Risk advises **against all travel** to Sudan due to the armed conflict, civil unrest and the volatile security situation. On 15 April 2023, fighting broke out in the capital, Khartoum, between the army and paramilitary forces. Explosions and heavy gunfire have occurred in the city centre as well as in various locations across the country, including at airports of major cities, with the violence resulting in nearly 100 casualties. Most major airlines have cancelled their flights to Khartoum International Airport, while neighbouring Chad has announced the closure of its border with Sudan.

There is a potential for the violence in Sudan to turn into a civil war if a ceasefire is not agreed to and discussions between the army and the RSF are not launched. Fighting is likely to continue over the coming days; access to essential services could be disrupted without notice, including access to telecommunication networks.

MS RISK ADVISORY: Clashes are likely to continue in the coming days and the situation could deteriorate quickly. All travel to Sudan should be avoided at this time. Anyone currently in the country is advised to shelter in place; should stay away from windows; should ensure that they have essential supplies, including food, water and fuel; should keep phone charged at all times; should monitor the local media to remain abreast of the evolving situation; should contact airline to find out the status of their flight; and should follow the advice of the local authorities.



Background

The fighting that erupted in Khartoum on 15 April is the direct result of an ongoing power struggle within the country's military leadership, with clashes occurring between the army and the paramilitary force, known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Over the past several months, tensions have been building between Sudanese army units loyal to General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of Sudan's transitional governing Sovereign Council, and the RSF, which is led by General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, who is deputy head of the council. This is the first such outbreak of violence to take place since both men joined forces and toppled veteran autocrat Omar al-Bashir in 2019. The latest tensions come in the wake of an internationally-backed plan to launch a new transition with civilian parties. A final agreement had been due to be signed earlier this month, with both the army and the RSF being required to cede power under the plan. However two issues have emerged – the first is the timetable for the RSF to be integrated into the regular armed forces, the second is when the army would be formally placed under civilian oversight. As fighting broke out on 15 April, the army and the RSF blamed the other for provoking the violence, with the army accusing the RSF of illegal mobilisation in the preceding days, while the RSF, as it moved on key strategic sites in Khartoum, stating that the army had tried to seize full power in a plot with loyalists of former president Omar al-Bashir.

Current Situation

On 16 April, the Sudanese army appeared to be gaining the upper hand as it targeted RSF bases with airstrikes. Reports indicate that at least 97 civilians have been killed and a further 365 have been injured since the fighting began, though casualty figures are likely to increase in the coming days. While Burhan and Hemedti agreed to a three-hour pause in fighting from 4 PM local time (1400 – 1700 GMT) in order to allow humanitarian evacuations proposed by the UN, that deal was widely ignored after a brief period of relative calm. On Sunday night, residents reported hearing artillery and warplanes in the Kafouri district of Bahri, which is an RSF base located across the Nile river from Khartoum. Reports also indicated that the army was renewing air strikes on RSF bases in Omdurman, and the Kafouri and Sharg El-Nil districts of adjacent Bahri. Clashes have also been occurring in the capital in the vicinity of military headquarters.

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As of Monday 17 April, intense fighting has continued for a third day in Sudan. Gen al-Burhan has said that his troops will defeat the RSF, though they are open to talks. The Sudanese army has also dismissed claims by the RSF that it has captured key sites in Khartoum. Explosions and smoke have been reported at Khartoum airport. While Sudanese state television was off air for several hours it was later reinstated. Hospitals have said that they are running short of medicine, and residents are reporting that they are running out of food and water. Some neighbourhoods in Khartoum are reporting that water and power supplies have been cut. The international community meanwhile has condemned the violence, with the leaders of Uganda, South Africa and Kenya calling for peace.