Human Security Alert: RSF Walls-In El-Fasher's Population to Prevent Escape

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Yale SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Humanitarian Research Lab

This report was independently produced by the Yale School of Public Health's Humanitarian Research Lab. Learn more at https://medicine.yale.edu/lab/khoshnood/.

The Faculty Director of the Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL) at the Yale School of Public Health is Dr. Kaveh Khoshnood. The analysis and production of this report was overseen by HRL Executive Director Nathaniel Raymond and Caitlin Howarth. Analysis and report production was conducted by the Humanitarian Research Lab's Conflict Analytics team.

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I. Key Findings

The Yale School of Public Health's Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL) has identified over 31 km of earthen walls ("berms") that have steadily walled-in the city of El-Fasher, North Darfur since May 2025. Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has completed these berms, which are in areas they control. Additionally, Yale HRL identifies munitions impact damage at the El-Fasher Water Provision Authority in Awlad Al-Rif neighborhood in western El-Fasher.

RSF's Berms Blocks Escape of Population from El-Fasher

RSF's 31 kilometers of berms around El-Fasher have been built in segments since 9 May 2025 and construction is ongoing as of 27 August 2025. So far, RSF has built an approximately 22 km berm forming a semicircle from the west to the north of the city, built in segments between 9 May and 19 August 2025. Between 19 and 27 August 2025, RSF built approximately 9 km of berms encircling much of the east side of El-Fasher, extending both north and south of where the major road (B-26) exits the east side of El-Fasher. Construction on that berm is ongoing in both directions in satellite imagery captured on 27 August 2025.

The areas not currently enclosed include both the southwest and south side and the northeast side of El-Fasher around Al-Salaam IDP Camp. RSF has maintained fundamental control of the area south of the city since capturing Zamzam IDP Camp and has maintained control of the northeast areas of El-Fasher since the beginning of their siege in 2024.

RSF has controls population flow from all directions to and from El-Fasher. In the event of an attempted escape by SAF 6th division and Joint Forces, RSF has set the terms of the end of the siege for military forces. RSF can now determine who from El-Fasher is able to leave and who will be trapped inside. RSF has also determined the tactical conditions necessary for the SAF 6th Division's defeat.

With these berms, RSF is creating a literal kill box around El-Fasher. These berms will create physical boundaries to prevent smuggling goods like food and medicine into El-Fasher or people out of El-Fasher. They further deepen the siege conditions that have existed for almost 17 months around El-Fasher. In the event of mass civilian exodus, including scaling in desperation, RSF can easily kill civilians. RSF's pattern of limiting who can escape, including harassment, robbery, abductions and in some cases extrajudicial execution continues.[1]

Damage to El-Fasher Water Provision Authority

Yale HRL identifies munitions impacts and damage to a building at the El-Fasher Water Provision Authority located in Awlad Al-Rif neighborhood west of the wadi in El-Fasher. This water treatment facility is believed to still be operational and critical in supplying El-Fasher with fresh drinking water. This water treatment facility is located in a strategic position less than 1 kilometer from the edge of the airport and west of the wadi that bisects El-Fasher.

II. Methodology

Yale HRL utilizes data fusion methodologies of open source and remote sensing data analysis. Yale HRL produced this report through the cross-corroboration of open source data, including social media, local news reporting, multimedia, and other reports, and remote sensing data, including satellite imagery and thermal sensor data. Researchers analyzed open source data across social media, news reports, and other publicly available sources to identify, chrono- and geolocate, and verify incidents. Analysts assess the credibility and reliability of open source data based on a source's level of detail, past credibility, and the corroboration of other independent sources. Remote sensing and satellite imagery analysis relies on multi-temporal change detection, which involves the comparison of two or more satellite images of the same area captured at different times to detect differences in coloration, visual properties, and presence, absence, or positional change of objects across the images.

Place names were identified using UN P-codes obtained via the United Nations Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX) and International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Sudan. This baseline was then verified and informed through open source analysis by Yale HRL's analysts with relevant cultural and linguistic skills.

Limitations

There are significant limitations to the data fusion methodology. The information environment in Sudan does not have the breadth of data available in other locations and there is likely a significant reporting bias for those who provide open source reporting. The tools and techniques present significant challenges to assess activities such as extrajudicial detention, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), and conflict-related casualties, particularly in environments with limited data. Satellite imagery analysis is limited by available imagery over time and space. Available nadir angles of satellite imagery can produce challenges to assess structural damage, until multiple angles and ground-level photographic and video materials emerge to help inform the analysis. Image resolution level can also limit the analyst's ability to perceive the full extent of damage present. Furthermore, the increase in vegetation caused by seasonal rains can affect the ability to make high confidence change detection.

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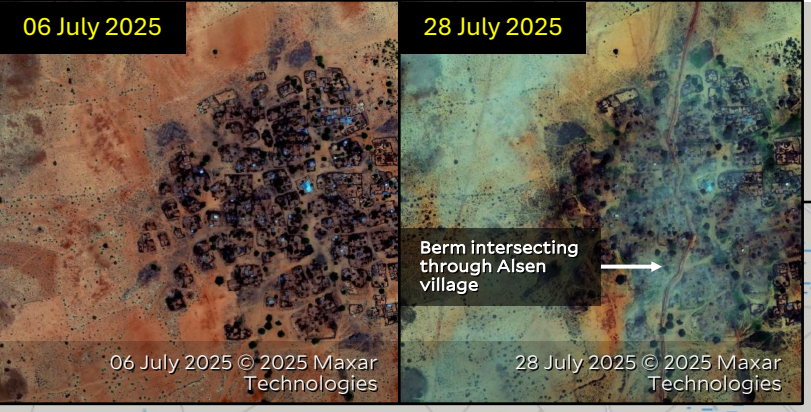
[1] "ارتفاع المختطفين في الفاشر إلى 50 شخصًا غالبيتهم نساء وأطفال", *Darfur24*, 25 August 2025, https://www.darfur24.com/2025/08/25/%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-50-%D8%B4%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%8B%D8%A7/, archived at https://perma.cc/VB8H-PPW6; "Sudan's RSF accused of fresh atrocities, ethnic cleansing in El Fasher", *Sudan Tribune*, 24 August 2025, https://sudantribune.com/article304314/, archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20250825111754/https://sudantribune.com/article304314/; HRL_MMC_114, redacted for security concerns;



El-Fasher | 27 August 2025

Ongoing berm construction surrounding the city

Analysis of several satellite images from different sensors shows what is apparently a berm being constructed around the city of El-Fasher.

The construction began with the first berm segment (blue line) which, from its eastern end, connects from the wadi bisecting El-Fasher, then follows westward intersecting the northern access route out of El-Fasher, and ends at the Kutum-to-El-Fasher road. This 7 km berm segment was completed between 05 May and 12 July 2025.

The construction on the next segment of the berm (green line) began from the Golo Reservoir and extended north past the village of Umm Dalil. This 9 km segment was completed between 14 and 24 July 2025. Additionally, this segment of berm was constructed through the village of Alsen. This majority of this village was apparently razed between 20 May and 06 July 2025.

This berm was extended 6 km further (yellow line) between 03 and 19 August 2025 and connects to the first constructed berm (blue line) at the Kutum-to-El-Fasher road, controlling the northwestern access from the city.

The final berm segment (red line) is currently under construction as of 27 August 2025. Construction on this berm was first observed between 13 and 19 August extending both northwestwards southwards from RSF's checkpoint on the B26 road, which controls the eastern access point to the city. Two excavators are observed at the northern and southern ends of the berm in satellite imagery from 27 August 2025. It currently measures at 9 km in length.

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