

Airstrikes Damage Nyala International Airport

30 September 2024

Yale SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Humanitarian Research Lab

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I. Key Findings

The Yale School of Public Health's Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL) confirms airstrikes at Nyala International Airport in Nyala, South Darfur through satellite imagery analysis. These airstrikes are consistent with an effort to interdict Rapid Support Forces (RSF) operations at the airport. SAF has not yet taken responsibility for the airstrikes, and Yale HRL cannot positively attribute the airstrikes to SAF at present.

Yale HRL has identified as many as a dozen munitions impacts consistent with aerial bombardment at the airport between 13 and 28 September 2024. Damage is visible on the eastern and western edges of the runway, one of the taxiways, and one building at the airport.

Open sources stated that the SAF conducted airstrikes on the airport on 24 September 2024, damaging the runway, control towers, administrative offices, main terminal, and VIP halls.¹ These strikes followed reports that RSF had landed an IL-76 cargo plane at Nyala International Airport on 21 September 2024.² Open sources claim that this flight was the first to land at Nyala International Airport since the outbreak of the conflict on 15 April 2023.³ While Yale HRL itself does not assess whether the airport is currently functioning, a report from *Darfur24* says that RSF landed a large cargo aircraft the night of 25-26 September 2024, after the airstrikes were reported to have happened.⁴

Nyala has been under the control of RSF since they captured the city from SAF in October 2023. No air operations appear visible at the airport in available satellite imagery since RSF captured Nyala in October 2023.⁵ This airport has critical value for potential humanitarian operations.

Methodology

Yale HRL utilizes data fusion methodologies of open source and public and commercially available remote sensing data. Yale HRL produced this report through the cross-corroboration of open source and remote sensing data, including satellite imagery and thermal sensor data.

Specific coordinates have been provided to support the further identification and disambiguation of specific place names and community locations. Human security concerns were accounted for as part of the decision to release specific coordinates; potential civilian risk was rated minimal because these communities have already been visibly attacked, and in the case of combat activity and coordinates are released, it is assessed that the combatants are aware of this situation.

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.

¹ Sudan War Monitor, "Nyala airport destroyed in airstrike," September 26, 2024, <https://sudanwarmonitor.com/p/nyala-airport-destroyed-in-airstrike>, archived at <https://perma.cc/DG8Y-93RY>; Sudan Tribune, "الطيران الحربي يقصف مطار نيالا ومقر الفرقة 16مشاة بجنوب دارفور" September 24, 2024,

² Sudan Tribune, "الطيران الحربي يقصف مطار نيالا ومقر الفرقة 16مشاة بجنوب دارفور," September 24, 2024, <https://sudantribune.net/article291303/>, archived at <https://perma.cc/P26F-9FG7>;

Radio Dabanga, "الطيران الحربي يقصف مدرج مطار نيالا بجنوب دارفور" September 24, 2024, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/ar/all-news/article/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b7%d9%8a%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d8%b1%d8%a8%d9%8a-%d9%8a%d9%82%d8%b5%d9%81-%d9%85%d8%af%d8%b1%d8%ac-%d9%85%d8%b7%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7-%d8%a8%d8%ac>, archived at <https://perma.cc/D388-5GH8>; Sudan War Monitor, "Nyala airport destroyed in airstrike," September 26, 2024, <https://sudanwarmonitor.com/p/nyala-airport-destroyed-in-airstrike>, archived at <https://perma.cc/DG8Y-93RY>

³ Darfur24, "New Details about Cargo Plane Landing at Nyala Airport," 23 September 2024, <https://www.darfur24.com/en/2024/09/23/new-details-about-cargo-plane-landing-at-nyala-airport/>, archived at <https://perma.cc/5KMC-9KME>

⁴ Darfur24, "هبوط طائرة مجهولة في مطار "نيالا" للمرة الثانية خلال اسبوع" September 26, 2024, <https://www.darfur24.com/2024/09/26/%d9%87%d8%a8%d9%88%d8%b7-%d8%b7%d8%a7%d8%a6%d8%b1%d8%a9-%d9%85%d8%ac%d9%87%d9%88%d9%84%d8%a9-%d9%84%d9%84%d9%85%d8%b1%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ab%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d9%85%d8%b7%d8%a7/>, archived at <https://perma.cc/9W8M-FBFA>

⁵ Reuters, "Paramilitary RSF say they have seized Sudan's second city", October 26, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/paramilitary-rsf-say-they-have-seized-sudans-second-city-2023-10-26/>, archived at <https://archive.ph/QIxVY>

Nyala International Airport, Nyala, South Darfur

Analysis of satellite imagery of the airport in Nyala, South Darfur, shows at least 12 munitions impacts consistent with that of aerial bombardment affecting the airport infrastructure, including a building, the runway and one of the taxiways, between 13 and 28 September 2024.



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