

Human Security Warning: Sudan Army Poised for Offensive in South Kordofan or Abyei

Satellite Sentinel Project

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The Satellite Sentinel Project is issuing a human security warning for civilians living in Buram, Tess, and other areas to the south of Kadugli in Sudan's South Kordofan state. Re-positioned aerial assets also place the highly contested Abyei area within range of the Sudanese army's arsenal. DigitalGlobe satellites will continue to monitor the Abyei area and watch for increased activity near Buram and Kadugli. We will issue additional alerts on signs of the Sudanese army's southbound movement.

The threat of renewed attacks on Sudanese civilians in South Kordofan, which could cause further displacement, is particularly worrying as [food insecurity increases](#) for hundreds of thousands of [vulnerable people](#) with the advent of the dry season. The people of South Kordofan have faced over two and a half years of [aerial bombardment](#), and the deliberate destruction of homes and farmland, which amount to [war crimes and crimes against humanity](#).

Humanitarians have been [denied access](#) to help those in need. Those in Abyei have [been displaced](#) twice by Sudan Armed Forces, or SAF, attacks in the past five years: first in 2008 and then in 2011. Another offensive will deepen the humanitarian crisis in the region and poses a serious threat to human security.

Earlier Than Expected

DigitalGlobe imagery confirms increased troop movements and a significant buildup of ground and air materiel at several military installations. Following what many analysts describe as a [deeply embarrassing](#) rebel siege of Abu Kershola earlier this year, the Sudanese government has increased military [spending](#), with the acquisition of new aircraft, including [Fencer Su-24](#) from Belarus. To close its yawning budget gap, allow for these military expenditures and comply

with the

[IMF's](#)

economic directives, the Sudanese government recently committed itself to

[removing subsidies](#)

on fuel and other commodities.

All of these indicators together point to a potential military campaign threatening vulnerable communities in the region. When considered along with the

[recent destruction of Buram Bridge in South Kordofan](#)

, this buildup suggests a possible new offensive, even before the rain waters subside. Since the strategic advantage from destroying the Buram bridge would be limited once the river dries, the Satellite Sentinel Project's analysts warn that an offensive might come earlier than expected.

Increased aerial assets could also play a role in an offensive against the disputed Abyei region, where the Ngok Dinka community is planning a

[unilateral referendum](#)

The effects of the recent heavy rains are expected to last for at least another month, limiting mobility and clashes between the Sudanese army and the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army-North, or SPLA-N. Military engagements between the SAF and the rebel SPLA-N, have traditionally

[slowed](#)

during the rainy season due to increased mobility constraints. However, the significant troop increases observed in October 2013 DigitalGlobe imagery, along with increased SAF military activity and bombardment around Um Shuran, Buram and Teith El Taice, or Tess, all south of Kadugli, signal a possible resurgence in activity, even before rain waters fully recede. Following the

[Abena protests](#)

at the end of September 2013, the SPLA-N rebels ended their

[month-long unilateral ceasefire](#)

and announced that they would be returning to the battlefield to "

[enhance](#)

" the prospects of the peaceful uprising in Sudan's northern cities. Already Médecins Sans Frontières has reported that at least 2,500 Sudanese fled their homes due to fighting in the Warni and Kau-Nyaro areas in the southeast of South Kordofan. These new refugees have arrived in the towns of Kodok and Lelo, in South Sudan's Upper Nile State. Evidence of the Sudanese army's recent buildup suggests that more civilians might be at risk.

Satellite Imagery Reveals Heightened Activity

Satellite images reviewed by DigitalGlobe Analytics show unusually high levels of activity in several military installations in Sudan's North and South Kordofan states and at both the El Obeid and Kadugli Air Bases. The military buildup at El Obeid, which is centrally located, could

facilitate deployments south toward Kadugli, Abu Kershola, Al Abbasiyah or a combination of those locations.

DigitalGlobe images of military locations show that El Obeid Air Base in North Kordofan's normal contingent of bomber jets was augmented with attack helicopters, a close-air-support aircraft, and a transport aircraft. The number of aircraft at Kadugli Air Base in South Kordofan has almost tripled, with the usual three to four attack helicopters now supplemented by three additional helicopters and two transport aircraft. A probable Motorized Infantry Battalion at Kordofan Garrison staging base has increased in size to levels last observed in April 2013, during the height of the rebel incursions in

[Abu Kershola](#)

DigitalGlobe imagery indicates that the Motorized Infantry Battalion now includes tanks, cargo trucks, and probable truck-mounted heavy machine guns ("technicals"). The number of tanks has more than tripled at El Obeid Headquarters Garrison, and the number of heavy equipment transporters and armored personnel carriers has grown, signaling a level of activity that has not been observed in the past year. A sequence of DigitalGlobe images collected between October 2 and 12, 2013 at El Obeid West show the massing and departure of a military convey. On October 15, 2013, more than a dozen new vehicles appeared at El Obeid Garrison South. Images from the same day showed new tents, personnel, and vehicles positioned at El Obeid Garrison South

(...)

Threat to the Most Vulnerable

The dispatch of military engineers to destroy the Buram bridge, the increased troop buildup, and the appearance of new ground and air materiel at several military installations in North and South Kordofan collectively point to a possible new campaign, even in advance of the end of the coming dry season offensive. This buildup directly threatens vulnerable Sudanese civilians in South Kordofan. The re-positioned aerial assets at El Obeid and Kadugli potentially also signal a threat to Abyei, where tensions are running high ahead of a planned Ngok Dinka unilateral referendum.

Read the [full article](#).