Fighting in Abu Shouk IDP Camp, El-Fasher North Darfur, 20-23 May 2024

23 May 2024

Yale SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Humanitarian Research Lab

Maps utilize the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Field Information Services Section subnational administrative boundary data. Data sources: Esri, HERE, LSIB, UN OCHA, GADM.org, Esri data, © OpenStreetMap contributors, HERE, Garmin, Foursquare, METI/NASA, USGS

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I. Key Findings

The Yale School of Public Health's Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL) identifies conflict-related damage in Abu Shouk Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp inside northwest El-Fasher as of 23 May 2024 consistent with reports of fighting between Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and their-aligned forces in the area. This damage indicates RSF presence in additional civilian areas of El-Fasher and the opening of a northwestern front in RSF's multidirectional assault on the city. The fighting in the northwest follows recent attacks on the northeast, east, and southeast neighborhoods of El-Fasher.[i] Audio consistent with artillery bombardment, small arms, and ground fighting in multiple directions across several neighborhoods throughout the city is audible in open sources in El-Fasher at time of publication on 23 May 2024.[ii]

Yale HRL identifies conflict-related thermal scarring within northern and western areas of Abu Shouk IDP camp between 22 and 23 May 2024. The damage in these locations is consistent with an expansion of the fighting in El-Fasher, including RSF ground penetration into Abu Shouk IDP Camp on or around 23 May 2024.[iii] The current presence of RSF forces in Abu Shouk IDP camp cannot be confirmed.

Open sources have reported that there is fighting between RSF and SAF-aligned forces near the Mellit Gate area with bombardments and small arms the morning of 22 May 2024.[iv] Open sources have also claimed that RSF has allegedly beaten, tortured, and extrajudicially detained displaced persons and civilians and looted their belongings in Abu Shouk Camp.[v]

Additionally, Yale HRL finds two locations of conflict-related damage in the Tijaniya Extension neighborhood inside the northeast of El-Fasher city between 20 and 22 May 2024. This damage likely occurred on 21 May 2024 based on Yale HRL analysis of VIIRS thermal anomaly data.[vi] One location is next to Al Nakheel Girls Primary School. It is not clear in satellite imagery at this time if the primary school has sustained damage.

Finally, Yale HRL identified thermal scarring and conflict-related damage to the Mahata Kharaba El-Fasher (El-Fasher Power Station) between 20-22 May 2024. Attribution is currently unclear: RSF released a statement stating that SAF conducted aerial bombardment on El-Fasher Power Station on 20 May 2024, after RSF gained control of the power station.[vii] Other open sources reported that RSF's artillery fire in the eastern neighborhoods, near the El-Fasher Power Station, caused a fire.[viii] Open sources report power outages and communication network outages across El-Fasher.[ix]

II. Human Security Analysis

RSF and SAF combat in and around Abu Shouk represents a major deterioration in the human security situation inside and around El-Fasher. The events documented by Yale HRL in and around Abu Shouk in recent days are the first confirmed incidents of an IDP camp near El-Fasher being directly affected on a large scale by RSF's current offensive operations in El-Fasher. While sporadic incidents have been reported involving RSF and SAF as early as December 2023 in Abu Shouk, the damage to civilian structures,

combined with open source reporting of RSF engaging in alleged human rights abuses of civilians, is a critical development. Unchecked, more damage and casualties inside Abu Shouk camp should be expected in the immediate future.

As of 23 May 2024, RSF is now confirmed by Yale HRL to be advancing steadily from at least three directions of attack – north, east, and southeast – into El-Fasher city, moving towards its interior. Yale HRL assesses that the potential for a western flank to open at any time, adding a fourth direction of attack to the previously documented three fronts, is possible. Given significant levels of arson attacks to civilian communities west and southwest of El-Fasher, it can be reasonably assumed that other RSF forces that have not yet joined the fight in El-Fasher are in the city's vicinity at unknown locations.

As of this report Yale HRL now assesses that 30 communities within at least the past two months have been allegedly attacked by RSF around the city of El-Fasher within 21-100 km.[x] This total is three more than the total number of communities that Yale HRL documented in the first four months of the current war. Thus, RSF's current apparent tempo of village destruction since March 2024 around El-Fasher is at least equal or higher than their tempo of arson attacks appeared to be in the initial phase of the war that began in April 2023.

The fighting in Abu Shouk has led to multiple casualties, including deaths, and an estimated 60% of the population has fled Abu Shouk.[xi]

Abu Shouk is an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp that is home to the survivors of the 2003-5 Darfur Genocide. The community is almost entirely composed of non-Arab populations, predominantly Fur with significant Zaghawa, Tunjur, and Berti populations as of 2013.[xii] The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) last estimated the population of Abu Shouk to be approximately 105,000 people as of November 2022.[xiii] Within Abu Shouk camp, there are approximately 12 shelter camps hosting IDPs.[xiv]

Power outages in El-Fasher create significant human security threats, including disruptions to telecommunications and interference with essential services such as the functioning of hospitals, and may also negatively affect water and sanitation services at a critical moment in which the risk of waterborne disease is already high.

On 21 May 2024, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) began evacuating management and administrative staff members from El-Fasher "due to ongoing heavy fighting in the city" but will continue operational work in El-Fasher including Zamzam camp.[xv]

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.

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 source of information was then verified and informed through open source analysis by Yale HRL's analysts with relevant cultural and linguistic skills. In some cases, communities may have names similar to other communities or may be known by multiple names.

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.

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[i] Caitlin N. Howarth, Kaveh Khoshnood, Nathaniel A. Raymond et al. "RSF Advances in El-Fasher as Conflict-Related Damage Intensifies, 14-20 May 2024" 21 May 2024. Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health: New Haven. https://medicine.yale.edu/lab/khoshnood/publications/hrl-report-21-05-2024_479697_284_26865_v1.pdf, archived at https://perma.cc/Z3YN-DFCE

[ii] HRL_MMC_0017; HRL_MMC_0018

[iii] Ayin Network, "قتلى وجرحى مدنيين جراء قصف للدعم السريع في الفاشر," May 20, 2024, https://3ayin.com/alfashir/, https://perma.cc/LU6S-PE62; Radio Dabanga, "قتلى وجرحى في قصف للدعم السريع على معسكر أبو شوك ومناطق أخرى في الفاشر," May 20, 2024, https://www.dabangasudan.org/ar/all-news/article/%d9%82%d8%aa%d9%84%d9%89-%d9%88%d8%ac%d8%b1%d8%ad%d9%89-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d9%82%d8%b5%d9%81-%d9%84%d9%84%d8%af%d8%b9%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b9-%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%89-%d9%85%d8%b9%d8%b3%d9%83, https://perma.cc/3EZP-AS8B ; HRL_MMC_0013 ; HRL_MMC_0014 ; Darfur Victims Support (@dvs2030), " قزات الدعم السر" May 20, 2024, https://x.com/dvs2030/status/1792553054518002009, archived at https://perma.cc/AAN4-QM8H; https://www.ycon-sudan.org/post/a-year-of-war-in-sudan, archived at https://perma.cc/56HK-KMJ3

[iv] Sudan Tribune, "RSF accused of atrocities in fresh attack on El Fasher camp," May 22, 2024, https://sudantribune.com/article285982/, https://archive.ph/S9zfi.

[v] Sudan Tribune, " RSF accused of atrocities in fresh attack on El Fasher camp," May 22, 2024, https://sudantribune.com/article285982/, https://archive.ph/S9zfi; Sudan War Updates (@sudan_war), "مليشيا الدعم السريع تستبيح معسكر ابو شوك" X (formerly known as Twitter), May 22, 2024, HYPERLINK "https://x.com/sudan_war/status/1793264879823995102"https://x.com/sudan_war/status/1793264879823995102, https://archive.ph/QxzTy.

[vi] NRT VIIRS 375 m Active Fire product VJ214IMGGTDL_NRT distributed from NASA FIRMS. Available on-line https://earthdata.nasa.gov/firms. doi:10.5067/VIIRS/VJ214IMG_NRT.002, https://firms.modaps.eosdis.nasa.gov/

[vii] Rapid Support Forces - قوات الدعم السريع (@RSFSudan) (X formerly known as Twitter) " في مشهد إجرامي جديد " May 20, 2024 , https://x.com/RSFSudan/status/1792650308130148426, archived at https://perma.cc/5YVW-SJUC ;

[viii] Sudan War Monitor " ,مقتل واصابة عشرات المدنيين وتدمير البنية التحتية بواسطة مدفعية الدعم السريع" May 21, 2024, https://sudanwarmonitor.com/p/214"https://sudanwarmonitor.com/p/214, archived at https://perma.cc/Q8FU-GY6R

[ix] Rapid Support Forces - قوات الدعم السريع (@RSFSudan) (X formerly known as Twitter) " في مشهد إجرامي جديد ومسلك خطير", May 20, 2024, https://x.com/RSFSudan/status/1792650308130148426, archived at https://perma.cc/5YVW-SJUC ;
HRL_MMC_0016

[x] Caitlin N. Howarth, Kaveh Khoshnood, Nathaniel A. Raymond et al. “EVIDENCE OF ALLEGED WIDESPREAD, SYSTEMATIC, AND TARGETED MASS ATROCITIES IN DARFUR, 15 APRIL – 10 JULY 2023” 14 July 2023. Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health: New Haven. https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/sudan/pages/darfur-1. Caitlin N. Howarth, Kaveh Khoshnood, Nathaniel A. Raymond et al. “EVIDENCE OF ALLEGED WIDESPREAD, SYSTEMATIC, AND TARGETED MASS ATROCITIES IN DARFUR, 15 APRIL – 10 JULY 2023” 14 July 2023. Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health: New Haven. https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/sudan/pages/darfur-1.; Howarth, Caitlin N., Kaveh Khoshnood, Andrew Marx, Nathaniel A. Raymond, et al. “TITLE: Sirba, West Darfur, 24 July– 30 July, 2023” Report 008 02 Aug 2023, Sudan Conflict Observatory: Washington, DC. Available at https://sudan.conflictobservatory.org., https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/sudan/documents/33bda16ddba444a395627050ffa85119/explore ; Caitlin N. Howarth, Kaveh Khoshnood, Nathaniel A. Raymond et al. “RSF Advances in El-Fasher as Conflict-Related Damage Intensifies, 14-20 May 2024” 21 May 2024. Humanitarian Research Lab at Yale School of Public Health: New Haven. https://medicine.yale.edu/lab/khoshnood/publications/hrl-report-21-05-2024_479697_284_26865_v1.pdf, archived at https://perma.cc/Z3YN-DFCE

[xi] HRL_MMC_0015

[xii] CHR Michelsen Institute, “From a Temporary Emergency Shelter to an Urbanized Neighborhood: The Abu Shoak IDP camp in North Darfur”, 2016, https://www.cmi.no/publications/5928-the-abu-shoak-idp-camp-in-north-darfur, archived at https://perma.cc/4ZKU-VQ7Q

[xiii] Norwegian Refugee Council, ”Abu Shouk Camp Profile -Al Fasher, North Darfur State, Sudan October 2022”, January 25, 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/abu-shouk-camp-profile-al-fasher-north-darfur-state-sudan-october-2022, archived at https://perma.cc/W3UU-5DQG

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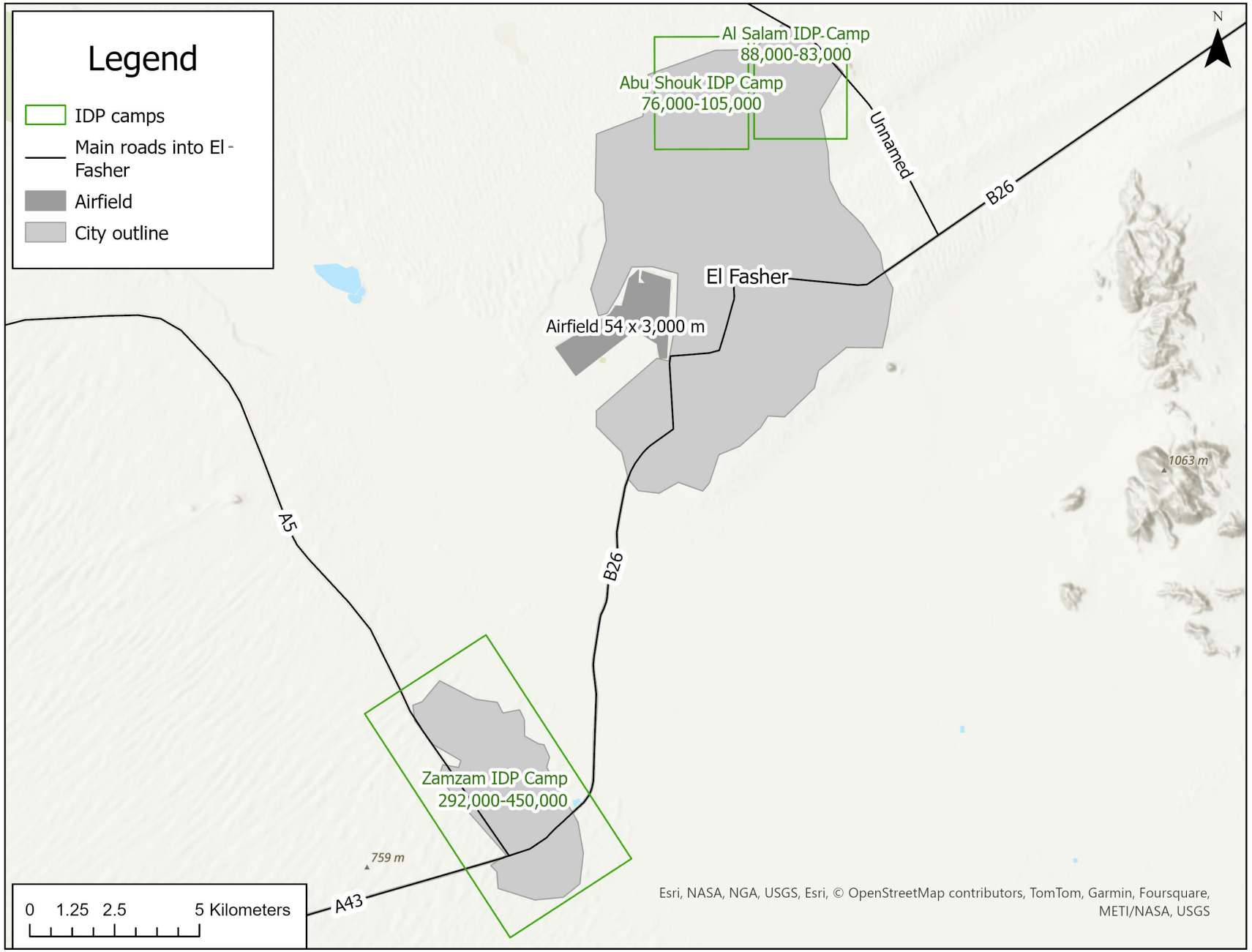
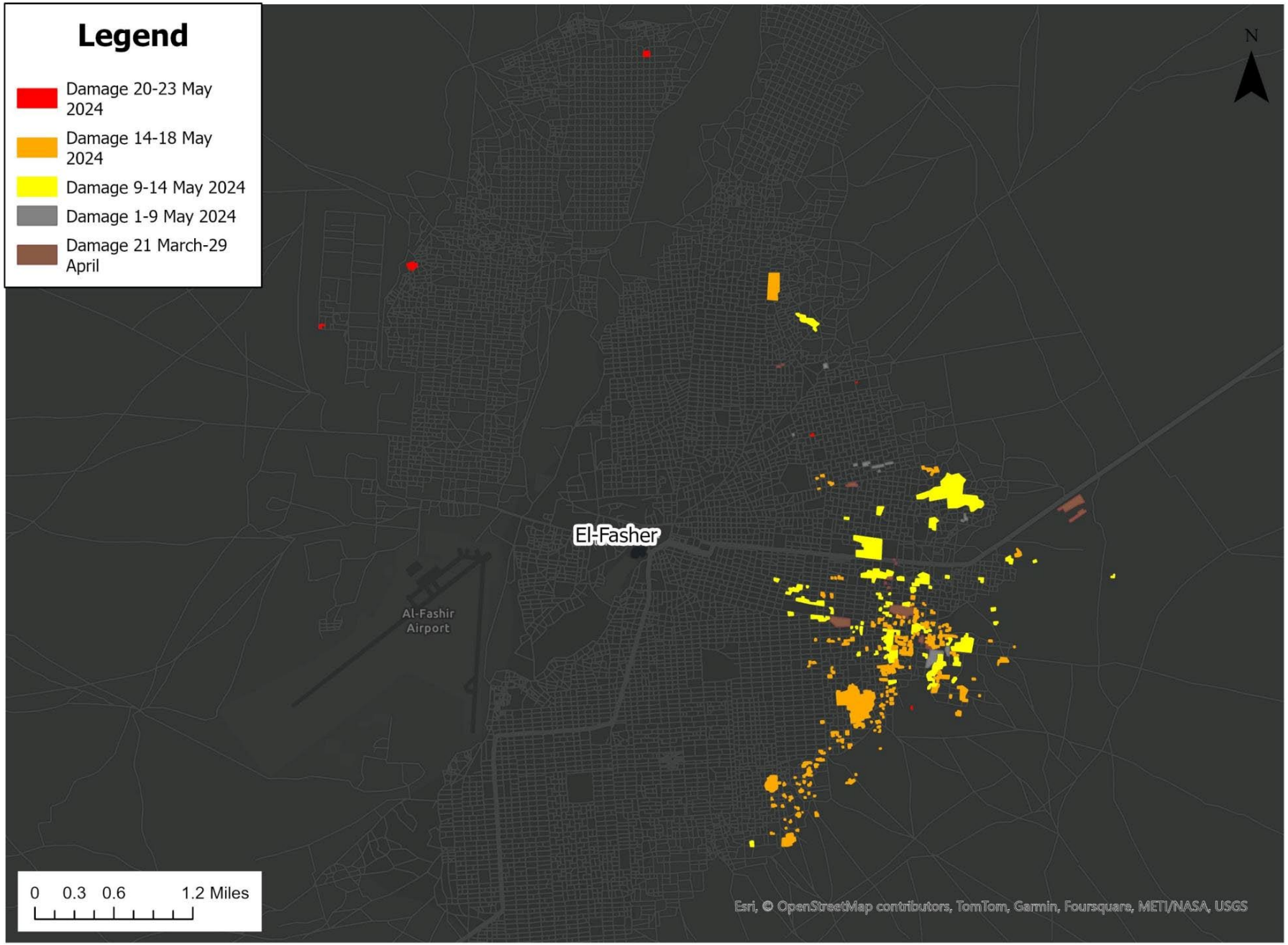
[xv] MSF Sudan (@MSF_Sudan) (Formerly known as Twitter) ” في يوم الثلاثاء الموافق 21 مايو ، ” May 22, 2024 https://x.com/MSF_Sudan/status/1793356601635545300, https://perma.cc/7AEQ-CN8E ; MSF Sudan (@MSF_Sudan) (Formerly known as Twitter ” ولضمان سلامة فريقنا” , May 22, 2024, https://x.com/MSF_Sudan/status/1793356604894544366, archived at ; SF Sudan (@MSF_Sudan) (Formerly known as Twitter) “,حيث ندعم أقسام الجراحة” May 22, 2024 https://x.com/MSF_Sudan/status/1793356608044491112, archived at https://perma.cc/DU3H-H6NG

IDP camps in El-Fasher



Map produced 10 May 2024.

Thermal Scarring Observed at El-Fasher Between 21 March and 23 May 2024



Map produced 23 May 2024.

Abu Shouk IDP Camp, El-Fasher

CONFLICT-RELATED DAMAGE TO CAMP BETWEEN 22 - 23 MAY 2024

According to imagery analysis, thermal scarring was observed inside Abu Shouk IDP camp between 22 and 23 May 2024.

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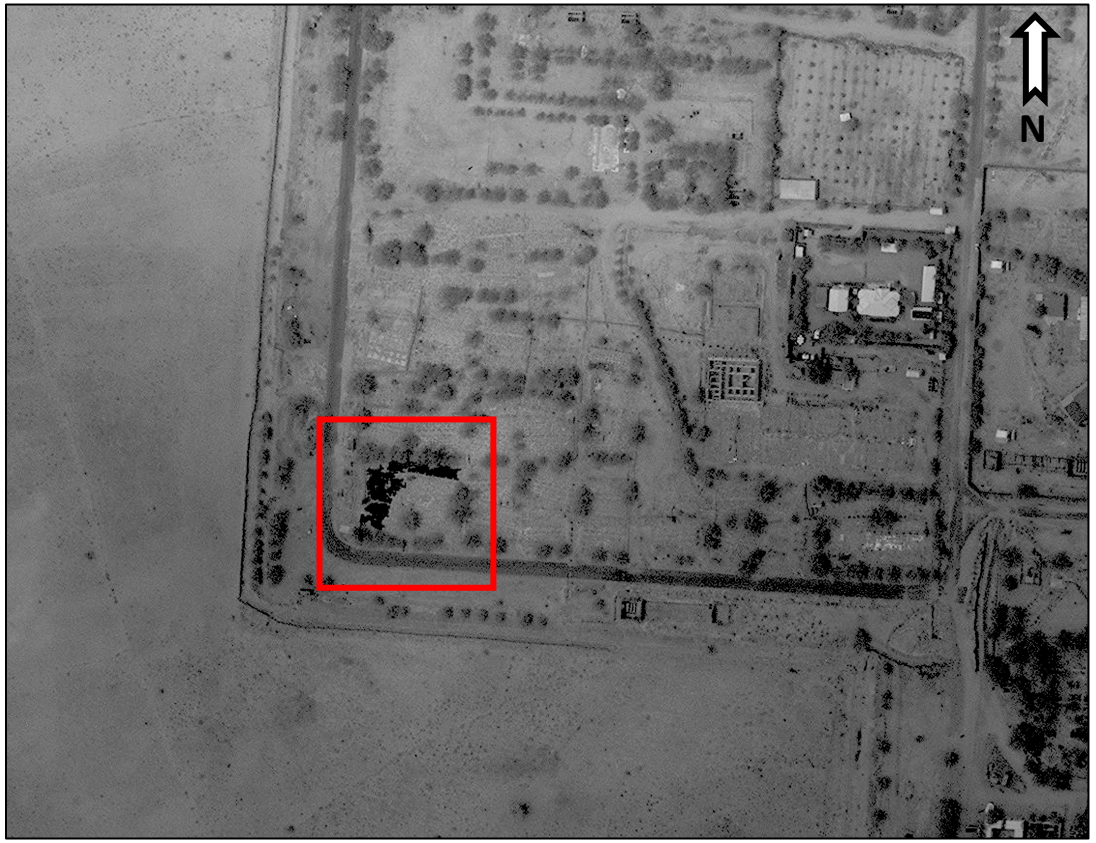
Abu Shouk Camp Compound, El-Fasher

CONFLICT-RELATED DAMAGE TO CAMP COMPOUND BETWEEN 22 - 23 MAY 2024

According to imagery analysis, thermal scarring was observed at the southeast corner within the compound inside the Abu Shouk IDP Camp between 22 and 23 May 2024.

22 May 2024 © 2024 Planet Labs



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Mahata Kharaba El-Fasher (El-Fasher Power Station), El-Fasher

CONFLICT-RELATED DAMAGE TO THERMAL POWER STATION 20 - 22 MAY 2024

Analysis of satellite imagery shows thermal scarring and damage to the transformers at the Mahata Khara El-Fasher (El-Fasher Power Station) in El-Fasher between 20 and 22 May 2024.

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Tijaniya Extension neighborhood, El-Fasher

CONFLICT-RELATED DAMAGE OBSERVED BETWEEN 20 - 22 MAY 2024

According to imagery analysis, thermal scarring was observed at the Tijaniya Extension neighborhood, inside the northeast of El-Fasher city, between 20 and 22 May 2024.

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Tijaniya Extension neighborhood, El-Fasher

CONFLICT-RELATED DAMAGE OBSERVED BETWEEN 20 - 22 MAY 2024

According to imagery analysis, thermal scarring was observed at the Tijaniya Extension neighborhood, next to Al Nakheel Girls Primary School, inside the northeast neighborhood of El-Fasher city, between 20 and 22 May 2024. According to analysis of VIIRS data, the time of new thermal scarring can be narrowed down to 21 May 2024.

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