STUDENT HANDOUT

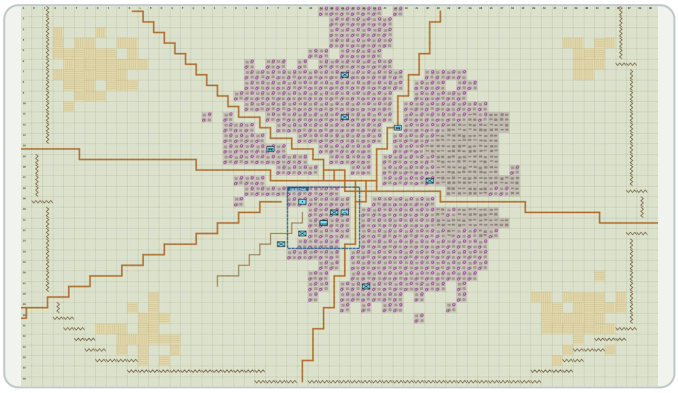
The Siege of El Fasher

El Fasher, North Darfur, Sudan · 10 May 2024 to 26 October 2025

Information as of September 2026



Scenario illustration · AI generated



Student map · own side only · Simulation situation map · reconstructed terrain and estimated deployments; not verified historical positions.

Learning objectives

- Compare the modeled encirclement with Yale's documented community destruction and berm observations, keeping each report's date and geographic coverage distinct.
- Analyse how a defender with few drones and one air defence unit decides what to watch and what to strike when the attacker can approach from every side over several stages.
- Evaluate the obligations of both sides toward the civilians inside a besieged city, using the findings of the WHO, UNICEF, the UN human rights office and the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab.

Run time and a good result

Default run clock: 9 minutes 10 seconds at 1×, excluding pauses, briefing and discussion. Time controls change elapsed play time.

Objective: Hold the 6th Infantry Division headquarters zone through all five stages of the siege, from May 2024 to the final assault of October 2025. Use your few drones to find and strike RSF artillery and assault groups before they reach the zone, and avoid strikes in the built up areas where civilians remain.

The Siege of El Fasher: Hold the 6th Infantry Division headquarters zone through all five stages of the siege, from May 2024 to the final assault of October 2025. Use your few drones to find and strike RSF artillery and assault groups before they reach the zone, and avoid strikes in the built up areas where civilians remain. Prevent an unopposed enemy occupation of the marked zone lasting 8 continuous simulation seconds; retain a fighting force until the episode ends. The authored limit is 550 simulation seconds across 5 stages. Compare objective progress, time, losses, drone expenditure and recorded civilian harm with a second run. A strong classroom result also explains the source evidence and reconstruction estimates; it does not verify a historical casualty count.

Atrocity notice

On 7 January 2025, the U.S. Secretary of State determined that RSF members and allied militias committed genocide in Sudan. On 19 February 2026, the UN Fact-Finding Mission reported that RSF atrocities in El Fasher bore the hallmarks of genocide.

The January 2025 U.S. determination concerned Sudan-wide RSF and allied-militia conduct; it preceded the October 2025 capture. The February 2026 UN report retrospectively examines El Fasher's siege and capture, including events after this scenario's 26 October endpoint. Those massacres are historical context, never playable operations.

Studying or commanding a side does not endorse its conduct. Drone Front never lets players target civilians, hospitals, schools or places of worship. Civilian harm from simulated strikes is counted and shown in the debrief, including nonzero harm. Civilian massacres are never playable operations. Designated terrorist forces and Wagner remain computer controlled; Gaza war events remain excluded from play.

▼ Dated reports and findings

- 2025-01-07 · U.S. Secretary of State: Genocide Determination in Sudan
- 2026-02-19 · UN Fact-Finding Mission: Sudan: Hallmarks of Genocide in El-Fasher (A/HRC/61/77)
- 2025-09-05 · UN Fact-Finding Mission: A war of atrocities

Learn more: the laws of war

- ICRC: Geneva Conventions and commentaries
- ICRC: Customary IHL database
- UN: Genocide Convention (9 December 1948)
- UN: Rome Statute (17 July 1998), articles 6–8

Historical source notes

A siege that lasted 18 months was decided on the ground, but drones changed what it was like on both sides. The SAF said it shot down dozens of RSF drones in late 2024, the UN's 27 January 2025 statement reported at least 70 patients and relatives killed in the hospital attack without identifying its attacker or weapon, and the SAF still counterattacked with air force drones in August 2025 (Wikipedia). Drones extended each side's reach, but they could not break the encirclement or prevent the fall of the headquarters.

Yale HRL's March 2026 remote-sensing study assesses damage to at least 41 farming communities during March–June 2024 and reduced agricultural activity afterwards. Its August 2025 alert separately assesses berms restricting movement and escape. These studies address different periods; later measurements and famine findings require separate evidence.

OHCHR documented at least 1,013 civilians killed during the 11–13 April 2025 RSF offensive in Zamzam camp, surrounding areas and along escape routes, including at least 319 summary executions within that total (report, paragraphs 5 and 16). Its report records at least 406,265 people displaced from Zamzam as of 27 April 2025. These figures have different counting dates and scopes; the killings involved multiple means and are not a drone-only toll. UN News later reported OHCHR's figure of 6,000 people killed during three days of the October takeover of El Fasher. The UN Fact Finding Mission describes conduct at El Fasher displaying hallmarks of genocide (OHCHR; UN News; A/HRC/63/23). A run's civilian harm estimate cannot substitute for those documented findings.

Civilian harm

The Yale Humanitarian Research Lab found that the RSF attacked 41 farming communities in North Darfur, some more than once, destroying communities and livestock enclosures that were an important food source for El Fasher.

The secondary account attributes civilian deaths and injuries at Abu Shouk camp in June 2024 to RSF shelling. The underlying Sudan Tribune body was inaccessible; this lesson does not certify an exact toll from that inaccessible article.

The UN Secretary-General's statement of 27 January 2025 reported at least 70 patients and relatives killed and dozens wounded in the 24 January attack on the Saudi Teaching Hospital. The statement does not identify the attacker or weapon used.

OHCHR's December 2025 report documented at least 1,013 civilians killed during the 11–13 April RSF offensive in Zamzam camp, surrounding areas and along escape routes, including at least 319 summary executions within that total (paragraph 16). At least 406,265 people had been displaced from Zamzam as of 27 April (paragraph 5). Killing and displacement have separate counting scopes and dates; the 319 are not classified as a group killed while fleeing, and these are not drone-only deaths.

Yale HRL documents mosque damage consistent with an air-delivered munition and cites at least 78 reported deaths. It describes an apparent drone strike and calls for investigation. Evidence that RSF had suitable drones does not alone independently identify the operator of this strike.

UNICEF reported at least 17 children killed, including a seven-day-old infant, and 21 injured in an attack on the displacement centre early on 11 October. The release describes these as reports received by UNICEF; it does not establish a 60-person total or the specific attacker.

Yale HRL identified more than 31 km of berms and assessed that they restricted movement and escape; construction was ongoing. This is a dated assessment, not verification of a later circumference.

WHO condemned reports that more than 460 patients and companions were shot and killed at the Saudi Maternity Hospital on 28 October, and that six health workers were abducted that day. The agency described reported killings; this statement does not independently verify the full toll.

The Yale Humanitarian Research Lab reported satellite imagery evidence consistent with mass killing in and around El Fasher after the RSF took the city.

OHCHR's 13 February 2026 report documented more than 6,000 people killed between 25 and 27 October 2025, including at least 4,400 within El Fasher and 1,600 along escape routes (paragraph 40). The estimate draws on survivor and witness testimony consistent with imagery and video analysis; the full toll was higher. These are killings across the offensive, not a drone-only casualty count.

WHO reported about 28,000 departures in recent days: 26,000 to rural areas of El Fasher and up to 2,000 to Tawila. These are the agency's dated estimates. They do not support saying that most of the 26,000 went to Tawila.

Al Jazeera, using ACLED data, counted at least 1,003 drone strikes in Sudan; SAF drone strikes killed more than 1,800 people and RSF drone strikes more than 780.

Evidence for learning objectives

The SAF said it shot down dozens of RSF drones in late 2024 and counterattacked with air force drones in August 2025, yet the RSF captured the 6th Infantry Division headquarters on 26 October 2025 (Wikipedia).

Yale HRL's March 2026 remote-sensing study assesses damage to at least 41 farming communities during March–June 2024 and reduced agricultural activity afterwards. Its August 2025 alert separately assesses berms restricting movement and escape. These studies address different periods; later measurements and famine findings require separate evidence.

OHCHR documented at least 1,013 civilian deaths during the 11–13 April 2025 RSF offensive in Zamzam camp, surrounding areas and on escape routes; at least 319 summary executions were included in that total. It recorded at least 406,265 displaced as of 27 April. UN News separately reported OHCHR's figure of 6,000 killed during three days of the October takeover of El Fasher. These are distinct geographic and temporal scopes, not drone-only death totals.

Timings

For 60 minutes, brief for 10, run it once with a pause at each new stage for 30 and review for 20; for 90 minutes, run it again with a different choice of which approach to watch and compare when the headquarters zone came under attack; for 180 minutes, have half the syndicates command the RSF, compare how each side used its drones and how many civilian harm events each run caused, and close with a reading of the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab alert on the berm and the UN human rights office findings on Zamzam camp.

Session	Plan
45 minutes	Brief: 10 min; Run: 15 min; Collect: 5 min; Review: 15 min
60 minutes	Before questions: 5 min; Brief: 10 min; Run: 20 min; Collect: 5 min; Debrief and after questions: 15 min; Discussion: 5 min
90 minutes	Before questions: 5 min; Brief: 10 min; Run 1: with drones: 20 min; Run 2: without drones: 15 min; Collect: 5 min; Compare and discuss: 25 min; After questions: 10 min
180 minutes	Before questions: 10 min; Brief and staff roles: 15 min; Run 1: with drones: 25 min; Run 2: without drones: 20 min; Break: 10 min; Run 3: syndicates: 30 min; Collect: 10 min; Seminar replay and debrief: 40 min; After questions: 10 min; Close: 10 min

Staff roles

commander
Set the pre-run posture and available standing orders, allocate drone flights across the modeled approaches, and report each sector and the headquarters hold zone at stage changes. Ground-unit movement is automatic.

intelligence
Track RSF groups and artillery by direction and stage, and keep SAF and RSF claims apart from what independent investigators such as the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab confirmed.

fires
Observe artillery engagements, recommend the available artillery and rules-of-engagement standing orders, and flag civilian risk before a drone launch. Individual gun-target assignment and ground-unit positioning are automatic.

droneOps
Plan Mohajer-6, TB2 and quadcopter flights so that the main approaches are watched at each stage, and report how many drones remain before each new stage.

Opposing staff objective

Take the 6th Infantry Division headquarters zone by the end of the final assault in October 2025, with no defender left in it. Your drones and artillery must clear the way for the ground assault groups closing in from the north, east and south.

Decision points

- In this authored scenario stage, at the start, May 2024: RSF groups gather on every side, with their artillery to the east. Do you spend your few quadcopter flights watching the east, where the strength is, or the north and south roads, where the camps are?
- In the authored stage that adds TB2 drones, compare spending their available strikes now with retaining them for later scripted waves. What does the run record about observation, losses and unused stocks?
- In the authored final stage, compare drone allocation and standing orders as the headquarters hold zone comes under pressure. Which approach receives less observation, and what civilian risk do the launches create? Ground units move automatically.

Before and after questions

1. **What limitation on drone effects does the lesson’s siege account emphasise?**

   A. Aerial damage establishes that the encirclement has weakened sufficiently
   B. Aircraft totals identify control over each ground supply route
   C. Greater aerial reach did not itself restore ground supply access or end the encirclement
   D. Greater strike reach compensates for reduced ground supply access

2. **Why did RSF attacks on 41 farming communities around El Fasher matter to the siege?**

   A. They supplied food on which the city depended
   B. They provided the city’s principal air-defence positions
   C. They housed the city’s principal drone maintenance facilities
   D. They controlled river crossings used for military reinforcement

3. **Why does the briefing tell you to avoid strikes in the built up areas of El Fasher?**

   A. Military presence permits treating nearby civilian exposure as secondary
   B. Building cover supports lowering the assumed civilian harm probability
   C. Reported departures establish low civilian presence without renewed checks
   D. Residents and civilian facilities remained exposed to strikes

4. **How should a staff officer handle party claims alongside independent investigative findings?**

   A. Treat the latest spokesman’s account as conclusive
   B. Distinguish party claims from independent investigative findings
   C. Treat government-side reporting as sufficient independent corroboration
   D. Discount satellite evidence without direct ground confirmation

5. **What did the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab say the RSF's earthen berm around El Fasher did?**

   A. It primarily reduced exposure to observation from approaching ground forces
   B. It primarily separated civilian traffic from the principal military approaches
   C. Restricted the population’s ability to escape the siege
   D. It primarily secured food distribution routes serving the displacement camps

Discussion

- Yale HRL assessed that at least 41 farming communities were razed between 31 March and 12 June 2024. Its August 2025 berm report assessed restrictions on movement and escape. Distinguish those dated findings from legal conclusions, then discuss civilian access to food, water and safe departure during a siege.

- The UN reported at least 70 patients and relatives killed in the 24 January 2025 hospital attack. Yale's September mosque report analysed damage and cited 78 reported deaths. Neither casualty total alone identifies the attacker. How should a review separate observed damage, casualty reports, operator attribution and responsibility for protecting civilians?
- Compare Amnesty's survivor and open-source investigation with the OHCHR findings reported by UN News. What does each method establish, what remains uncertain, and how should evidence about an incident be distinguished from evidence identifying a commander's responsibility?
- Compare the defenders' drone use, remaining ground units and hold-zone result across the authored stages. Which historical claims about the siege can the run test, and which require evidence outside the model?

Debrief rubric

Strong
Meets the objective or explains why it was not met; uses the published sources and run evidence, separates known facts from assumptions, compares both sides' losses and cost exchange, and evaluates precautions against civilian harm.

Adequate
Describes the objective and main decisions, identifies at least one source and model limitation, reports losses and harm, and gives a reasoned change for a second run.

Weak
Reports only victory or points, treats teaching settings as real performance, gives unsupported historical claims, or omits uncertainty and civilian harm.

Published readings

1. OHCHR: Three days of terror with no safe refuge: RSF offensive on Zamzam IDP camp, El Fasher (11–13 April 2025; December 2025 report, paragraphs 5 and 16)
2. OHCHR: Three days of terror with no safe refuge: RSF offensive on Zamzam IDP camp, El Fasher (11–13 April 2025; December 2025 report, paragraphs 5 and 16) — readable ecoi.net copy
3. Yale Humanitarian Research Lab: Human Security Alert, RSF walls in El Fasher's population to prevent escape (2025)

Complete source list

Wikipedia: Siege of El Fasher
Wikipedia: El Fasher massacre
Wikipedia: Zamzam camp
Wikipedia: Zamzam and Abu Shouk refugee camp massacres
Wikipedia: Darfur Joint Protection Force
Wikipedia: El Fasher
Wikipedia: El Fasher Airport
Wikipedia: Timeline of the Sudanese civil war (2024)
Wikipedia: Timeline of the Sudanese civil war (2025)
Wikipedia: Rapid Support Forces

Wikipedia: Qods Mohajer-6
OHCHR: Three days of terror with no safe refuge: RSF offensive on Zamzam IDP camp, El Fasher (11–13 April 2025; December 2025 report, paragraphs 5 and 16)
OHCHR: Three days of terror with no safe refuge: RSF offensive on Zamzam IDP camp, El Fasher (11–13 April 2025; December 2025 report, paragraphs 5 and 16) — readable ecoi.net copy
Yale Humanitarian Research Lab: Human Security Alert, RSF walls in El Fasher's population to prevent escape (2025)
OHCHR: Hundreds killed in RSF attacks in Sudan's North Darfur (April 2025)
OHCHR: UN report details horrific patterns of violations committed during RSF takeover of Zamzam IDP camp (December 2025)
Amnesty International: A refuge destroyed, RSF violations in Darfur's Zamzam camp for internally displaced persons (December 2025)
ACAPS: Sudan, displacement from Zamzam camp (2025)
CBS News: Satellite images reveal mass killing is continuing in Sudan, Yale researchers say (2025)
CBS News: Sudan civil war escalates as RSF forces reportedly push into beleaguered army stronghold of El Fasher (2025)
ABC News: Blood visible from space in Sudan shows evidence of Darfur genocide, analysts say (2025)
EUAA: Sudan, security situation 2025, Darfur, actors involved and territorial control
AllAfrica: Sudan, 'Colombian commander slain' as RSF attack on North Darfur capital repelled (August 2025)
Al Jazeera: The drones being used in Sudan, 1,000 attacks since April 2023 (3 February 2026, using ACLED data)
Euronews: Turkish defence firm accused of violating sanctions with Sudan weapons supplies | Euronews
Dabanga: Yale HRL report, Chinese UAVs identified at RSF controlled South Darfur airport (17 January 2025)
Amnesty International: Advanced Chinese weaponry provided by UAE identified in breach of arms embargo (7 May 2025)
UN Independent International Fact Finding Mission for the Sudan, report A/HRC/63/23 (1 September 2026)
ACLED: How has Sudan's drone war adapted to shifting supply lines? (4 June 2026)
Federal Register: Foreign Terrorist Organization designation of Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood (16 March 2026)
GOV.UK: Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations (updated 7 July 2026)
GovInfo: H.R. 8301, RSF Terrorist Designation Act (introduced 15 April 2026)
UN News: Sudan’s people subject to relentless drone strikes in El Obeid (3 July 2026), citing OHCHR findings on El Fasher
Yale HRL/NASA Harvest/Arizona State University: Impact of Systematic Razing of Agricultural Communities Around El-Fasher (10 March 2026)
Yale HRL: RSF Walls-In El-Fasher’s Population to Prevent Escape (28 August 2025)
Yale HRL: Confirmed, 19 September Strike on Al-Safiya Mosque (22 September 2025)
UNICEF: At least 17 children reportedly killed in attack on Dar al-Arqam displacement centre (12 October 2025)
Amnesty International: RSF atrocities in El Fasher, new investigation (1 July 2026)
WHO: WHO condemns killings of patients and civilians amid escalating violence in El Fasher, Sudan (29 October 2025)
United Nations: Secretary-General spokesperson statement on Saudi Teaching Hospital (27 January 2025; reported toll)
OHCHR: RSF final offensive and capture of besieged El Fasher, 24–30 October 2025 (13 February 2026 report, paragraph 40)