

How Are European Weapons Reaching Sudan's Rapid Support Forces?

Despite an international arms embargo on Sudan, recent images and videos from the battlefield show the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) using German- and British-made weapons, including rifles and military equipment.

The appearance of these weapons has raised pressing questions about their origin and the routes through which they reached the RSF, which has been fighting the Sudanese army since April 2023. Analysts suggest the arms may have reached the militia through smuggling networks or re-export channels, underscoring the lack of effective international oversight of the arms trade.

What field evidence has been documented?

In June 2024 and March 2025, the UN Security Council received two dossiers containing images of weapons recovered from conflict zones in Sudan.

The images showed mechanical engines used in Emirati-manufactured Nimr Ajbán armored vehicles, fueling speculation that Abu Dhabi may be behind the supply.

Targeting systems produced by the UK-based company Militec were also found in areas under RSF control in Khartoum and Omdurman, according to The Guardian.

Photographs emerged of RSF fighters wielding G36 rifles manufactured by the German arms company Heckler & Koch. The company responded, noting the rifle in the images resembled the G36 model but said it could not confirm the weapon's origin without serial numbers.

How are the weapons reaching the RSF?

According to the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Global Initiative (a research and field investigation network), the RSF receives weapons through smuggling routes from:

The Central African Republic

Chad and Libya, where small airstrips are used to fly in equipment

South Sudan

Uganda

Kenya

The two organizations reported that the RSF has built temporary airstrips near

gold mining sites to facilitate the simultaneous smuggling of gold and weapon shipments. They added that the UAE plays a pivotal role in funding these operations through secretive air cargo deliveries.

While there is no evidence of direct arms exports from the UK or Germany to Sudan, most investigations agree that the UAE acts as a hub for re-exporting these shipments.

The Guardian reported that the images submitted to the UN Security Council came from the Sudanese army and provided “detailed evidence” of the UAE supplying British-made equipment to the RSF.

The report also revealed that the British government continued to issue open export licenses to the UAE, which allow for the unrestricted export of military equipment without tracking the end user.

UK government data showed that between April and June 2025, military equipment worth £172 million was licensed for export to the UAE.

The UK-based Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) accused the government of knowingly selling arms to the UAE despite being aware that Abu Dhabi was redirecting the equipment to the RSF.

What is the legal status of these arms transfers?

A Breachable Ban: Sudan has been under an international arms embargo since the 1990s, and the UN Security Council has imposed additional restrictions on Darfur, prohibiting the supply of weapons to non-state actors. Despite this clear legal framework, enforcement has been lax, allowing weapons to flow to various sides of the conflict.

UN Reports: In January 2024, the United Nations described reports of the UAE supplying arms to the RSF as credible. This marked the first time the UN officially spotlighted the UAE's role in fueling the conflict. As the war escalated and the city of El Fasher in Darfur fell, the Security Council held an emergency session on October 30, 2025, condemning atrocities committed in the city and calling for accountability.

German Parliament Pressure: The appearance of the G36 rifle in Sudan triggered demands in the German Bundestag for an investigation into how the weapons got there. Germany's Ministry for Economic Affairs said it had not reached any conclusive findings, and the federal government has yet to launch an official inquiry.

What does international law say?

The Guardian report emphasized that international law obliges arms-exporting

countries to refrain from issuing licenses if there is a clear risk the equipment could be diverted to illicit actors. Former UN investigator Mike Lewis noted that issuing export licenses in the face of such evidence constitutes a clear violation of international law.

What are the humanitarian and political consequences of arming the RSF?

The discussion over European arms comes amid a deepening humanitarian catastrophe in Sudan, particularly following the RSF's recent takeover of El Fasher in Darfur.

According to UN estimates and humanitarian organizations, Sudan is currently facing "the world's worst humanitarian crisis":

Over 150,000 killed since the outbreak of war

More than 12 million displaced inside and outside the country

Around 25 million people facing acute hunger and on the brink of famine

The continued flow of arms to the RSF has prolonged the conflict and obstructed political resolution efforts.

Volker Perthes, the former UN Special Representative to Sudan, warned that the conflict has evolved into a regional proxy war, fueled by external support, making a ceasefire increasingly elusive.

In a statement on November 20, the European Union echoed this concern, declaring that the cycle of violence in Sudan will not end unless foreign support to warring factions ceases, and a humanitarian truce is implemented to allow relief operations and pave the way for a political solution.