REPORT

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AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

# COLLATERAL CIRCUITS

## The impact of Sudan's war on arms markets and mercenary networks in Chad and Libya

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CENTRAL AFRICA OBSERVATORY
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# Acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **CCMSR** | Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic |
| **DDR** | Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration |
| **ECCAS** | Economic Community of Central African States |
| **ECOWAS** | Economic Community of West African States |
| **FACT** | Front pour l’Alternance et la Concorde au Tchad |
| **JFASM** | Joint Force of Armed Struggle Movements |
| **LAAF** | Libyan Arab Armed Forces |
| **MSA** | Mouvement pour le Salut de l’Azawad |
| **NISS** | National Intelligence and Security Service |
| **RSF** | Rapid Support Forces |
| **SAF** | Sudanese Armed Forces |
| **SLA/MM** | Sudan Liberation Army/Mini-Minnawi |
| **SONEMIC** | Société Nationale d’Exploitation Minière et de Contrôle |
| **SRAC** | Sudanese Revolutionary Awakening Council |
| **UAE** | United Arab Emirates |
| **UFDD** | Union des Forces pour la Démocratie et le Développement |
| **UFDD-F** | Union des Forces pour la Démocratie et le Développement-Fondamentale |
| **UNWG-M** | United Nations Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries |

# Executive summary

The war in Sudan has not only reshaped its own frontlines but also transformed the wider security economies of its neighbours. The proliferation of arms and the growing reliance on mercenaries are reshaping the security architecture of the Sahel and Sahara region, not as residual effects of war, but as persistent forces that rewire conflict economies and deepen structural fragility. Mercenary groups – often composed of rebel remnants or newly recruited fighters contracted as quasi-state auxiliary forces – now move fluidly between ideologically motivated conflict, organized crime and contract-based warfare. At the same time, the circulation of weapons has become increasingly regionalized, opportunistic and commercially oriented.

In weakly governed borderlands, the market for mercenary labour and the market for weapons interact to entrench a regionalized economy of insecurity. When they intersect, they create self-reinforcing circuits: networks in which weapons, fighters, fuel and communications technology move together. Weapons incentivize the mobilization of armed labour, and mercenaries, in turn, move to secure, transport or profit from weapons. It is the way each market sustains and depends on the other that defines them as 'collateral circuits', secondary but interlocking systems that derive momentum from one another.

The markets for weapons and mercenary labour generated by the Sudan conflict have become collateral circuits – logistical systems in which arms and combatants circulate together. *© Yasuyushi Chiba via Getty Images*

Few events have accelerated this process as dramatically as the war in Sudan, which erupted in April 2023, triggering both inbound and outbound flows of arms. The collapse of internal military control and the fragmentation of command structures enabled a rapid proliferation of arms outflows from both the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces' (SAF) stockpiles in Sudan into regional markets.[1] At the same time, significant transfers into Sudan by external state and non-state actors created new inflows,[2] some of which have already been diverted back out. Mercenary leaders have organized convoys, provided escort services, and negotiated access at checkpoints, binding manpower mobilization and weapons transfers into a single system. These dynamics clearly reflect the four proliferation pathways identified by the United Nations Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries (UNWG-M) its 2024 report:[3] state-enabled supply, diversion of state stockpiles, opaque brokering networks and illicit exchanges involving mercenary and auxiliary forces. Sudan's war has activated all four, embedding them in cross-border markets that extend to the broader Sahel. The destabilizing effects of this have radiated beyond Sudan itself. Neighbouring Chad and Libya have been drawn into the churn, emerging as zones of weapons proliferation, mercenary recruitment and logistical facilitation. The Sudan conflict has activated new supply nodes, expanded and reshaped trafficking infrastructures, embedded Sudanese-linked materiel into arms markets and created fresh incentives for cross-border mercenary mobilization. These patterns have illustrated in real time how the UNWG-M's proliferation pathways materialize in fragile borderlands, undermining disarmament efforts and complicating conflict resolution.[4]

Mercenaries have been central to every phase of the war and to the functioning of its different supply pipelines. They do not operate on the margins of trafficking but act as organizers and enablers of the circuits: escorting convoys, managing access and keeping flows moving across borders. Their involvement has ensured that arms continue to circulate, even when frontline demand shifts, making them integral to both the operationalization of resupply and the wider patterns of proliferation. Beyond arms, mercenary actors also intersect with other illicit economies, particularly gold, raising the risk that their influence will persist even if the intensity of the war in Sudan declines. This reinforces the durability of collateral circuits and their deep integration into conflict economies across the region.

This report focuses on northern Chad and southern Libya because their internal dynamics – post-ceasefire realignment in Libya and post-Doha fragmentation in Chad – have made them especially susceptible to these pressures. It traces how regional arms markets and mercenary networks have evolved in tandem, highlighting key actors, shifting routes and the ways Sudan-linked inflows have altered the circulation of weapons and labour.

The analysis proceeds in three parts. First, it traces key contextual developments in Libya and Chad in the lead-up to Sudan's war. Second, it examines how weapons have flowed into Sudan by way of state-enabled supply chains. And third, it assesses how weapons are proliferating back out into Chad and Libya, reshaping markets, pricing structures and security dynamics. A dedicated sub-section also considers the role of mercenaries as vectors of proliferation, drawing on the framework of the UNWG-M. The report concludes with a forward-looking assessment of what these dynamics could mean for the region once Sudan's conflict becomes less acute and offers recommendations for mitigating the twin risks of arms outflows and mercenary mobilization.

## Methodology

This report does not attempt to provide technical weapons tracing or a forensic breakdown of specific arms transactions. Instead, it homes in on how the circulation of weapons and the mobilization of armed labour – specifically, mercenaries – have interacted in the wake of Sudan's war, shaping local conflict economies, cross-border dynamics and instability.

The research for this report is primarily qualitative. It draws on substantial fieldwork conducted by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) between January and October 2025, including a combination of remote and in-person interviews in Chad and Libya. These were conducted with a range of relevant stakeholders, including arms traffickers, ex-combatants, convoy coordinators, freelance security providers, smugglers, checkpoint operators, goldfield miners and journalists.

Field and remote interviews were complemented by social media monitoring of arms and mercenary markets. The study also drew on secondary sources, including UN Panel of Experts reports, GI-TOC monitoring and security incident trackers covering developments between 2021 and 2025.

## Key findings and recommendations

The consolidation of collateral circuits carries four principal risks:

- Durability: Once established, these infrastructures do not dissolve with ceasefires but adapt and persist.
- Regionalization: Sudan's war has already spilled into Libya and Chad; onward flows into Niger and Mali show how far its impact extends.
- Escalation: Proliferation means local disputes now carry a greater risk of spiralling into armed confrontation.
- Politicization: Control of corridors and hubs has become a source of power in its own right, shaping rivalries in both Libya and Chad.

In light of these risks, the following recommendations are made:

- Account for mercenaries in disarmament planning. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and ceasefire frameworks must treat fighters moving between Libya, Chad and Sudan as a distinct caseload, integrated into wider security sector reform.
- Drain surplus weapons from local markets. Targeted buy-backs and destruction in key arms-trafficking hubs can reduce saturation before arms embed further.
- Use sanctions to disrupt brokerage networks. Targeted measures against mercenary leaders, convoy organizers and brokers can raise costs and reinforce local arms-control measures when paired with documentation of brokerage patterns.
- Tie arms control to a Sudanese political settlement. Any ceasefire or peace agreement must integrate arms management, mercenary demobilization and cross-border monitoring to be durable.
- Disrupt trafficking economies rather than borders. Instead of blanket closures, targeted actions and risk-based checks can raise the costs of convoy operations without punishing licit borderland trade on which key borderland communities rely.

# The quiet: The state of play in pre-war Libya and Chad

The eruption of conflict in Sudan in April 2023 marked an inflection point. The war catalyzed a dual surge in weapons circulation: one through formal, state-facilitated transfers – such as airlifts, convoys and stockpile redistribution – and another through informal networks involving smugglers, kinship-linked brokers and ad hoc transactions. In practice, the two often overlapped, as state-enabled consignments were handed off to informal actors who carried them forward across the borderlands. These streams traversed long-standing corridors through Darfur, eastern Chad and southern Libya, revitalizing arms trafficking routes and flooding markets with new stockpiles. In this environment, mercenary actors – once auxiliary – became central to logistics. Fighters across Chad and Libya reoriented to meet new demand: some contracted to secure convoys, others asserted themselves as autonomous organizers and facilitators, leveraging rebel networks and kinship ties.

Rather than treating arms flows as static or linear, this section examines how the period preceding the conflict reshaped the region's arms trafficking logistics architecture, showing how existing networks in Libya and Chad were reactivated and repurposed once Sudan's war began.

## State-enabled supply chains and historic reconfigurations

In Libya, the 2020 ceasefire reoriented the country away from sustained combat and toward negative peace. While northern frontlines stabilized, forces linked to the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) and their auxiliaries in the south, especially in the Fezzan and the south-east of the Cyrenaica, repurposed their networks. These included local militias, tribal intermediaries, and Sudanese and Chadian auxiliaries. Their roles shifted toward protection of convoys (securing arms shipments, fuel deliveries, commercial trucks and migrant caravans), control of infrastructure (notably border posts, desert highways and key junctions) and informal taxation. Infrastructure control was primarily a revenue-generating mechanism: holding a crossing or road enabled the extraction of fees from trade, smuggling flows and civilian movement.

## Definition of mercenary

For the purposes of this report, the term 'mercenary' follows the definition articulated by the UNWG-M. Drawing on international legal frameworks – particularly Article 47 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions and the 1989 International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries – a mercenary is understood as someone who is:

- Specially recruited to fight in an armed conflict
- Taking part in hostilities
- Motivated essentially by private gain (with promised or actual compensation substantially exceeding that of local armed forces)
- Neither a national nor resident of a party to the conflict
- Not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict
- Not officially sent by a state

For sub-Saharan mercenaries, who were largely Sudanese and Chadian, the adjustment was particularly sharp. No longer salaried by the LAAF and excluded from formal battlefields, many embedded themselves in informal or criminal economies.[5] Some turned to banditry, smuggling or freelance protection rackets; others assumed auxiliary roles in gold-mining logistics or convoy security. Along trans-Sahelian routes connecting Kufra, Sabha and the Chadian frontier, these fighters remained active, not as soldiers of war, but as transactional actors in a grey-zone economy. A subset of Darfurian groups, however, continued to receive external sponsorship. Commanders from movements such as the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi (SLA/MM), the Gathering of Sudan Liberation Forces, the Sudan Liberation Army/Transitional Council, the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdel Wahid and the Sudanese Revolutionary Awakening Council (SRAC) negotiated with United Arab Emirates (UAE) representatives in Libya, securing payments and logistical support that were channelled through the LAAF, which retained a cut.[6] These arrangements underpinned the continued presence of these groups at checkpoints and bases in southern Libya, even as others shifted into illicit markets.

In Chad, a parallel reconfiguration followed the 2022 Doha Peace Agreement, which sought to integrate rebel factions such as the Front pour l'Alternance et la Concorde au Tchad (FACT), the Union des Forces pour la Démocratie et le Développement-Fondamentale (UFDD-F) and the Conseil de Commandement Militaire pour le Salut de la République (CCMSR) into formal political processes.[7] Implementation, however, was partial and uneven. Various groups fragmented, and some combatants reintegrated into civilian life or were absorbed into state forces.[8] Others, most notably FACT, rejected the agreement entirely.[9] Even among signatories, demobilization remained largely nominal. Their fighters, often organized along ethnic or kinship lines, retained access to weapons, knowledge of the terrain and links to smuggling networks. In Chad's far north, especially in the Tibesti region where state oversight is weakest, such actors alternated between convoy security, arms brokerage and protection services, embedding themselves in local (and often illicit) economies.[10]


**The opening ceremony of the national inclusive dialogue in Chad, 20 August 2022. The meetings were preceded by a peace deal on 8 August 2022, which secured the participation of a number of rebel groups.** *© Aurelie Bazzara-Kibangula/AFP via Getty Images*

## Southern Libya: Post-conflict (re)consolidation

Between 2021 and early 2023, arms trafficking networks in southern Libya operated in a subdued but still significant fashion, with activity increasingly shaped by the LAAF. Sebha, long the primary hub of the Fezzan's arms economy, remained active, but came under closer scrutiny, as the LAAF moved to rein in quasi-autonomous networks. In the period before late 2021, Sebha's arms economy was dominated by Massoud Jeddi, the Awlad Suleiman commander who led the 116th Brigade. With a footprint at Tamanhint airbase, he managed cross-border flows of weapons and Chadian mercenaries on behalf of the LAAF,[11] operating with a high degree of autonomy despite this alignment.

This arrangement ended in September 2021, when Khalifa Haftar ordered the 116th disbanded as part of Saddam Haftar's wider push to centralize illicit economies in the Fezzan.[12] Jeddi's violent expulsion from Sebha later that year disrupted entrenched pipelines,[13] stripped him of his strongholds and opened space for other LAAF-aligned actors to impose a more centralized, vertically integrated chain of command.[14]

In the immediate aftermath, the Tariq Bin Ziyad Brigade consolidated its presence, imposing a vertically integrated command structure that placed arms movements firmly under LAAF supervision. From this point, flows north or south from Sebha had to pass through LAAF channels. Other trades (fuel, drugs, migrants) were tolerated but taxed through levies, giving the LAAF a steady revenue stream without the logistical or reputational burdens of direct management. This reassertion of control over Sebha meant that, by 2022, the LAAF had become the central gatekeeper of the Fezzan's trafficking economy. Subsequently, surrounding corridors adapted to this new landscape.

In Kufra, the Subul al-Salam Brigade, rooted in the Zway community, consolidated its grip on cross-border logistics. Its privileged ties with the Haftar leadership were reinforced by kinship links, including Khalifa Haftar's maternal Zway lineage. While Subul held sway over the main routes into Sudan,[15] Tebu traffickers displaced from Kufra after 2016 reactivated pathways further west, particularly around Rebiana. By 2021, some of these Tebu-linked routes began to see renewed activity, as the LAAF's concentration on Sebha afforded room for the Tebu to reactivate the corridor. Interestingly, mid-level RSF officers – some of Gorane background[16] – cooperated with Tebu traffickers on a commercial basis.[17] These arrangements, often grounded in shared ethnic ties between Gorane and Tebu communities, did not represent an RSF policy shift but rather localized efforts to capitalize on emerging revenue streams.

Subul al-Salam, for its part, also retained long-standing connections to Sudanese armed actors, including Darfuri rebels, RSF elements and former operatives of Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). These ties were forged during 2015–2018, when Subul coordinated with state security services to curb rebel activity and cross-border movements during Sudan's stabilization push.[18] At the time, Subul worked in parallel with RSF and NISS-linked actors around Kufra, operating in a quasi-official capacity as a border enforcement unit.[19] Although limited in scale, this earlier phase of coordination laid the foundations for discreet fuel trading and small arms consignments with Darfuri brokers during the pre-war period. Both the Tebu and Zway networks within the RSF – each built on distinct foundations – would later help underpin the region's rapid logistical pivot once Sudan's war erupted in 2023.

Further west, the Murzuq–Qatrun axis remained an important conduit for trafficking and rebel logistics. The corridor was historically dominated by Tebu intermediaries who coordinated the movement of light weapons, fuel and mixed cargo, often stored in concealed caches within family compounds, modified garages or fuel depots to avoid detection.[20] These flows were typically broken down into smaller consignments to minimize risk, reflecting both the opportunistic nature of the trade and the persistent threat of interception by non-Tebu LAAF units. Qatrun and, to a lesser extent, Tajarhi functioned as key staging and redistribution points where shipments were assembled, hidden and rerouted onward. From there, routes led directly into northern Chad, anchoring strong logistical ties to rebel fallback zones such as Kouri Bougoudi and the Kilinje mountains.

For Chadian armed groups, the corridor was strategically vital. FACT, CCMSR and UFDD all maintained an active presence around Murzuq and Qatrun, drawing on proximity to the Tebu to move both personnel and materiel across the Libyan–Chadian frontier.[21] The availability of informal storage sites and the ability to blend cargo with licit and illicit flows gave these groups flexibility and resilience. Kouri Bougoudi provided both an economic lifeline (through gold mining) and a consolidation point for fighters and equipment.[22] The Kilinje mountain range also served as a fallback zone with terrain advantages that made it difficult for Chadian state forces to dislodge entrenched rebel units.

LAAF oversight in this area remained limited. Relations with Tebu factions were marked by long-standing mistrust and fragmented lines of command, which restricted the LAAF's ability to impose the kind of centralized authority it exercised in Sebha.[23] While the LAAF asserted nominal control, in practice it relied on selective bargains with local actors, tolerating a degree of autonomy in exchange for tacit recognition of its supremacy. The result was a corridor that operated with relative independence but still within the broader shadow of Saddam Haftar's authority.

The Ubari–Ghat corridor also retained strategic relevance throughout the pre-war period, with Tuareg networks dominating this area and facilitating southbound movements around the Salvador Pass.[24] Tuareg groups, drawing on deep familiarity with desert terrain and long-standing familial and commercial ties stretching into northern Mali and Niger, operated with a relative degree of local autonomy. Arms and fuel convoys originating from the Cyrenaica or northern Libya were often directed to Sebha, where cargo was split – some was rerouted west through Ubari and Ghat towards the Salvador Pass through Tuareg networks, while smaller quotas were diverted south towards Murzuq through Tebu networks. While Tuareg intermediaries did not typically control stockpiles directly, they secured passage through checkpoints, organized convoy protection and brokered onward movement in coordination with local commanders and logistical brokers. Sebha, acting as the primary node for consolidation and dispatch under LAAF oversight, served as the logistical hub where shipments were bundled, routed and priced before branching to either corridor.

By early 2023, the picture that emerged was one of centralization in Sebha, selective autonomy in outlying corridors and growing points of contact with Sudanese actors. The LAAF had succeeded in tightening its grip on southern Libya's trafficking economy, extracting rents while retaining plausible deniability. But it also presided over a system in which Subul al-Salam's ties to Sudanese armed groups, Tebu cooperation with Chadian-linked intermediaries, and Tuareg networks' connections to the trans-Sahel kept the Fezzan's logistics tied to wider regional markets. These transactional links were not yet large-scale pipelines, but they established relationships and practices that would prove decisive when Sudan's conflict erupted.[25]

In this sense, the years 2021–2023 represented a historic reconfiguration of southern Libya's trafficking economy. Jeddi's ouster and the LAAF's takeover of Sebha marked the end of an era of fragmented autonomy. What replaced it was a more centralized architecture that gave the LAAF's command leverage over northward and southward flows, while still relying on local intermediaries in Kufra, Murzuq and Ubari. At the same time, opportunistic commercial relationships with RSF-linked actors and long-standing ties to Sudanese armed groups ensured that these corridors were already primed to pivot rapidly toward Sudan once new demand arose.

## Chad: Rebels, gold and arms networks

Between 2021 and early 2023, arms logistics in Chad were shaped by localized brokerage networks embedded in goldfields, market towns and remote border areas. Volumes were modest compared to later years, but this was a formative period, consolidating hubs and relationships that later fed into Sudan's war. The death of President Idriss Déby in April 2021 initially raised fears of a major rebel advance on N'Djamena, but instead ushered in a fragile equilibrium. The transitional government under Mahamat Idriss Déby responded with a dual strategy: political outreach to opposition groups combined with targeted coercion. In late 2021, Chadian forces coordinated with the LAAF to curb the presence of foreign auxiliaries in the Fezzan, notably FACT.[26] These pressures, alongside Qatari-brokered negotiations that produced the Doha Peace Agreement in August 2022, contained large-scale violence. Yet arms networks remained active beneath the surface, tying weapons circulation to gold-mining economies, kinship ties and mercenary structures.

In 2021, ex-combatants and auxiliaries displaced from Libya – notably CCMSR, FACT, UFDD and Toroboro fighters – redeployed to Kouri Bougoudi and surrounding gold zones,[27] seeking income as brokers, escorts and protection providers. The north became the natural anchor for these groups: the Tibesti's rugged terrain, porous borders and lucrative goldfields offered both sanctuary and opportunity. In contrast, eastern Chad, which is closer to Chadian state security oversight, was dominated by brokers from Zaghawa political and commercial networks aligned with the Déby regime,[28] rather than mercenary sub-clans like the Toroboro. Here, arms facilitation was tied to state-linked brokerage rather than itinerant fighters.

Arms activity during this period was structured around three overlapping geographic corridors. The first ran from Libya to the Tibesti, where small consignments entered through Murzuq or Qatrun, then moved south along desert tracks into the Tibesti. Weapons were usually broken into batches, concealed in family compounds, garages or fuel depots, and often bundled with fuel or drugs. Toroboro fighters, drawing on their reputation as hardened escorts, worked alongside Tebu intermediaries to provide protection, ensuring cargoes reached redistribution points such as Kouri Bougoudi and the Kilinje mountains in the Tibesti massif.

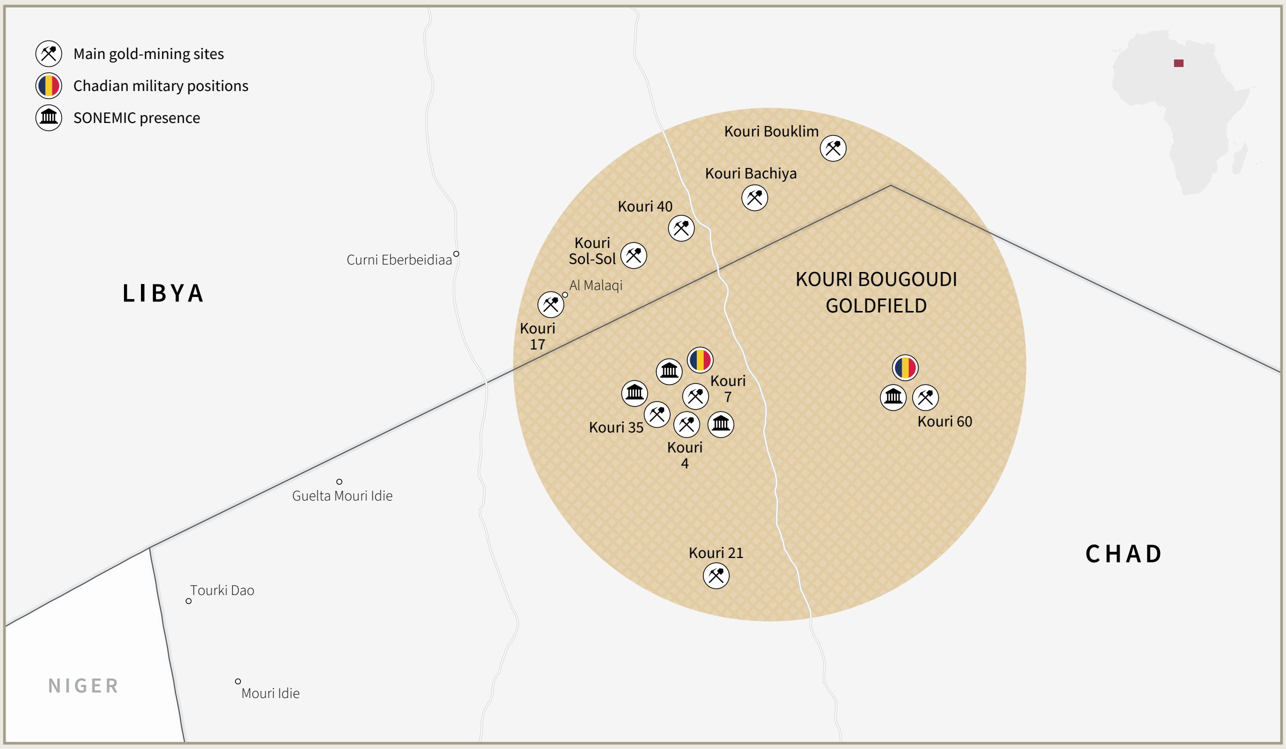


**FIGURE 1** Chad's Kouri Bougoudi goldfield straddles the border with Libya, and is divided into several gold-mining sites.

While the Tibesti dominated attention, the second corridor, from Sudan to eastern Chad, sustained its own small-scale flows throughout this period. Border towns such as Adré, Tiné and Bahay functioned as collection points for surplus weapons originating from Darfur. After the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement,[29] some Darfuri rebels returning to Sudan downsized and liquidated weapons for cash, selling them through these markets. Zaghawa intermediaries aggregated these arms and moved them west to Kalait, where they intersected with Tebu convoys heading north into the Tibesti or west towards Niger and Mali. As elsewhere in this region, arms rarely travelled alone; they were embedded in convoys transporting fuel, food or mining equipment, protected by kinship-based arrangements negotiated by intermediaries. Unlike the Tibesti, however, eastern Chad was not a hub for mercenaries: here, the trade was dominated by brokers and commercial actors, while ex-rebels remained peripheral.

A third strand centred directly on the gold economy itself, with mining convoys moving arms along with food and supplies, with Tibesti and the Kilinje mountains as the epicentre.

These networks were not rigid pipelines but flexible webs, adapting to shifting political conditions while maintaining continuity of trade. By late 2021, Kouri Bougoudi had become the central node in this system. Fighters from CCMSR and FACT, no longer paid by the LAAF as mercenaries, entrenched themselves firmly in the mines, collecting rents, facilitating arms flows and recruiting.[30] For many, mining provided a fallback livelihood at a time when survival as mercenaries or rebel fighters in Libya had become increasingly difficult, even as some cadres maintained the longer-term ambition of future incursions toward N'Djamena.[31] Their presence blurred the line between mercenary activity and commercial brokerage. Toroboro cadres, too, redeployed into the goldfields, offering protection services and embedding themselves in the same networks that tied arms circulation to mining rents. Still dominated by Tebu facilitators with strong kinship ties across the Libyan border, Kouri emerged as a zone where gold revenues, arms trafficking and mercenary recruitment converged.

The volatility of this environment was exposed in May 2022, when intercommunal violence erupted in Kouri Bougoudi. A dispute between Arab and Tama miners escalated into clashes that left more than 100 dead,[32] with credible evidence of rebel involvement.[33] Local grievances were compounded by transnational legacies of the Darfur conflict, where Tama and Arab communities had backed opposing factions. The presence of armed Chadian rebels, many only partially demobilized and seeking livelihoods through mining, amplified the scale of the killings.

The Chadian authorities responded by closing the goldfield, fearing further instability.[34] This measure disrupted arms trafficking temporarily but did not dismantle underlying networks, which shifted operations into surrounding areas in the Tibesti. At the same time, N'Djamena doubled down on its political approach, culminating in the Doha Peace Agreement in August 2022. But the most capable forces (FACT and CCMSR) refused to sign, retaining their logistical autonomy in the Tibesti. Their absence from the accord meant that the very actors with the strongest cross-border infrastructure remained outside Chadian state oversight.

The cemetery at Kouri 35, the Tibesti, Chad, where thousands of miners, traders and mercenary fighters are estimated to have been buried since 2013. Similar cemeteries exist at some 20 mining sites in the Tibesti and southern Libya, reflecting the heavy toll of local conflict on young Chadians. *Photo: Tous les Chadiens du monde, Facebook*

By October 2022, the government moved to reopen Kouri Bougoudi under a new framework, deploying armed forces and the state mining agency, Société Nationale d'Exploitation Minière et de Contrôle (SONEMIC), to regulate extraction.[35] This allowed N'Djamena to project authority over the site, but enforcement remained weak. In practice, hybrid control emerged: armed groups and Tebu intermediaries retained day-to-day power, while the state captured some revenues and claimed oversight. This arrangement reflected a calculated pragmatism. Full repression risked sparking rebellion in a zone the state could not fully pacify, while tolerating partial rebel control allowed authorities to monitor and co-opt select flows.[36] The outcome was a compromise whereby arms trafficking continued at a low volume in the shadow of state presence.

## The calm before the storm

By early 2023, Chad's arms economy had settled into a fragile equilibrium. In the north, Kouri Bougoudi anchored a hybrid system where the state coexisted uneasily with rebels in the Tibesti region. In the east, Zaghawa brokers sustained low-level inflows from Sudan, which converged at Kalait before linking to Tibesti routes. Across these zones, mercenaries displaced from Libya had become central actors, repositioning themselves as brokers and facilitators within gold economies. Despite the modest volumes circulating, the infrastructure was durable, shaped by mining revenues, mercenary mobilization and kinship-based brokerage.

What defined this quiet period was not the absence of activity but its localized, commercialized character. Arms trading was embedded in gold economies and sustained by rebel remnants who had adapted to new political realities. Mercenaries were not just vectors of logistics but destabilizing forces, compounding volatility wherever they embedded. There was no systematic involvement of the RSF or SAF, nor any large-scale militarized supply chain. Instead, Sudanese intermediaries and Darfuri brokers conducted discreet exchanges with Libyan actors in Kufra and Chadian facilitators in gold zones. These links remained low profile, but they foreshadowed the logistical corridors that would later be amplified by Sudan's war. By 2023, Chad's arms landscape was a fragile equilibrium – commercial, opportunistic and hybrid – primed for scaling when the conflict next door escalated.

# Mercenaries as vectors of proliferation and violence

The UNWG-M has identified four principal pathways by which mercenary actors shape the trafficking and proliferation of arms: state-enabled supply, diversion of stockpiles, illicit brokering, and circulation through mercenary networks themselves.[37] These pathways are not abstract categories — they map directly onto the dynamics observed in the Libya–Chad–Sudan corridor. Taken together, they explain why mercenaries are not marginal players but structural multipliers of insecurity: they fuse the flow of arms with the movement of fighters, ensuring that every transfer of materiel risks becoming a vehicle for further violence.

In Libya and Chad, each of these pathways has materialized in a distinct yet interconnected way, showing how the circuits sustaining Sudan's war have simultaneously embedded new risks of proliferation and violence across the wider region.

## State-enabled supplies of weapons

The UNWG-M stresses that arms flows facilitated by states, even when legally authorized, are often rerouted toward mercenary formations. In Libya, this logic has been visible for over a decade: embargo-busting transfers arriving in Benghazi or Kufra did not stop at LAAF command structures, but filtered downwards into Chadian auxiliaries, Darfuri militias and Sudanese fighters. The effect is to make arms part of the incentive structure of recruitment. Instead of weapons flowing to stabilize formal units, they function as the currency binding itinerant fighters to wartime patrons. This is precisely the 'grey zone' the UNWG-M flags, where nominally state-linked chains become indistinguishable from mercenary provisioning. The long-term risk is that once states normalize this rerouting, demobilization or disarmament becomes nearly impossible: fighters perceive weapons not as state assets, but as personal entitlements that travel with them.

## Diversion of stockpiles

Diversion stands out as a structural vulnerability in conflict theatres, especially when governance collapses or depots are poorly secured, let alone when third-party states use conflict theatres as battlegrounds for proxy competition and to transfer arms. In Sudan, RSF seizures of SAF stockpiles in Darfur confirmed this risk, with mercenary fighters acting as both consumers and resellers of captured materiel. Once weapons reached Chad, they rapidly filtered outwards (see the later section 'Outbound arms flows: Diversion, resale and spillovers'). The result was not scarcity-driven price hikes, but layered markets where costs reflected logistical risks and mercenary arbitrage. This pattern underscores a broader trend: mercenaries accelerate diversion not only by looting but by enabling the infrastructure of resale. Diversion is rarely episodic; it cascades. The longer the Sudanese conflict persists, the more diversion will become routine rather than exceptional.

## Brokering and facilitation

Mercenary-linked brokers blur legality by operating in the opaque space between licit transfers and criminal trafficking. Globally, this often involves shell companies or free-trade zones. In the Sahel, the same brokerage function is fulfilled through kinship networks and militia alliances – figures such as Saleh 'Anakazi' Abdelkarim Habré or Mohamed Bakhit Adjit exemplify this dynamic. To illustrate the point, they did not simply fight, but helped enable the circulation of convoys of ammunition, weapons, fuel and manpower, fusing protection with facilitation. This dual role – simultaneously violent actor and logistics broker – is central to understanding how proliferation manifests. It transforms trafficking from a hidden economy into an openly violent one, where convoy protection doubles as territorial contestation. Such brokerage embeds proliferation into the political economy of borderlands: it ceases to be a criminal deviation and becomes the default mechanism of war economies.

## Illicit mercenary exchanges

One of the most direct manifestations of the UNWG-M's concerns has been the integration of mercenaries themselves as conduits for weapons. Chadian rebels and Sudanese auxiliaries have not only been recipients of arms; they have become vehicles for resale and redistribution. Fighters contracted by the LAAF in earlier phases often retained access to weapons stockpiled in southern Libya, enabling their gradual seepage into commercial channels after redeployment. In 2024–2025, Colombian contractors recruited by UAE-linked private security companies were routed through Benghazi, Kufra and Amdjarass into Darfur (see the section ‘Damage control with new nodes, airbridges and manpower’). They arrived with their own kit, rifles and communications equipment, demonstrating how mercenary mobilization can directly introduce new weapon systems into the region’s markets.

## Cumulative effects

The movement of mercenaries is central to understanding how Sudan’s war has transformed regional trafficking. Arms inflows and manpower flows are not parallel phenomena but deeply entangled: fighters often arrive equipped, serve as convoy escorts, and act as brokers or gatekeepers at border chokepoints. Their itinerancy ensures that weapons travel with them across theatres, collapsing the boundary between the battlefield and the marketplace.

The four pathways through which mercenaries are understood to shape proliferation rarely appear in isolation. In the Libya–Chad–Sudan borderlands they have overlapped and reinforced one another: state-enabled deliveries provided the material basis for mercenary recruitment; the capture or leakage of stockpiles created incentives for resale and barter; and brokerage by figures embedded in local networks institutionalized convoy systems that combine arms, fuel and fighters. These dynamics have created supply chains that double as markets and conflict infrastructure.

The LAAF’s Subul al-Salam Brigade deploys to patrol the tri-border area between Libya, Sudan and Chad, September 2023. *Photo: Subul al-Salam official Facebook page*

The cumulative effect has been the consolidation of collateral circuits – logistical systems in which weapons and combatants circulate together, regardless of formal command structures. Even if the intensity of Sudan’s war diminishes, these circuits are likely to persist, as mercenary groups continue to redeploy with arms in hand and to monetize surplus stock through illicit economies. In this sense, mercenaries act as enduring vectors not only of proliferation but of violence itself, transmitting insecurity across borders long after the original conflict lines shift. ■

# Inbound arms flows: Regional reconfiguration in wartime

The outbreak of war in Sudan in April 2023 disrupted the logistical balance that had previously governed cross-border flows through Libya and Chad. As clashes spread from Khartoum to Darfur, pre-existing networks were activated and reconfigured, with Libya and Chad assuming distinct but complementary roles in the RSF's wartime supply chain.[38] Initially, eastern Libya – particularly Kufra – appeared poised to become the backbone of RSF resupply. Yet operational disruptions inside Sudan soon shifted the centre of gravity towards Chad, where Amdjarass emerged as a new hub, anchored by Emirati support and tacit Chadian state facilitation.

## Initial supplies through Kufra

In the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of war, the eruption of fighting did not create new supply lines so much as reactivate and repurpose channels that had been in place for years. In this respect, Kufra was well positioned to emerge as a critical node for RSF resupply precisely because its networks had persisted through the pre-war quiet period, underpinned by the LAAF's long-standing reliance on external backers and tolerance of embargo-busting logistics.[39]

In the months leading up to the conflict, Kufra's long-disused airport was quietly brought back into operation under the official guise of serving civilian traffic.[40] Although its soft reopening was framed as a civilian initiative, the runway received non-commercial flights originating from the UAE within days of the war starting.[41] There was also a heavy LAAF presence in and around the facility at this time, reinforcing suspicions that the airport was being repurposed as a hub for covert transfers with the group's complicity.

Key to these embargo-busting transfers was Hassan al-Zadma's 128th Brigade, a key LAAF unit long known to employ Sudanese mercenaries. In early April 2023, the brigade reinforced Kufra's airport, where military materiel was offloaded and secured before being organized into convoys. The onward transfer south towards the Ain Kaziyet crossing was facilitated by Sudanese fighters affiliated with the

128th, who moved the supplies to the border for collection by RSF units.[42] An RSF captain was redeployed from El Geneina to the Libyan frontier specifically to retrieve these shipments, indicating coordination at the command level.[43]

Alongside the 128th, the Kufra-based Subul al-Salam played a central role in shaping the town's early wartime function. Operating under nominal LAAF authority, Subul controlled key elements of local Kufra logistics – including fuel depots, desert roads and the Ain Kaziyet crossing – and in April 2023, it facilitated the formal handover of that border point to RSF.[44] The brigade was therefore instrumental to the movement of fuel,[45] cars and ammunition into Darfur,[46] drawing on its pre-war smuggling ties with RSF and leveraging its control of the triangle border zone.[47]

These activities illustrate how Kufra quickly consolidated into a wartime supply hub and why Khalifa Haftar was widely perceived as being supportive of one side in Sudan's conflict.[48] More importantly, they also demonstrate how pre-existing, state-enabled channels, nurtured through years of external sponsorship and local brokerage, were folded into the new wartime economy.

## Deep roots of the 128th Brigade

Originally established in 2016 by Hassan al-Zadma, a member of the prominent Arab Awlad Suleiman tribe that spans the Fezzan, the 128th Brigade grew over the years into a dominant LAAF formation[49] with a significant footprint across the south, including Sebha, Murzuq, Qatrun, Ubari and Ghat. Even before Sudan's war, the brigade had become a critical enabler of the LAAF's model of managed control over southern supply corridors. Following the ouster of Massoud Jeddi, also of the Awlad Suleiman, al-Zadma and his brigade effectively supplanted Jeddi's influence in the south – a shift that aligned with the LAAF's efforts to placate the tribe, consolidate territorial control and maintain social stability through managed tribal balancing. Al-Zadma's tribal affiliation and regional connections, which spanned Nigerien,[50] Sudanese and Chadian networks, made him an indispensable broker in maintaining tacit agreements with southern-based actors,[51] particularly Tebu and Darfurian intermediaries.[52] The 128th's roots in the Awlad Suleiman, its integration of Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries,[53] coupled with relative proximity to the Tebu, allowed it to operate with greater ease in cross-border zones. These dynamics paved the way for its emergence as a key network overseeing arms flows and convoy protection through routes leading to the Tibesti from eastern Chad, Amdjarass and N'Djamena.[54] According to interviews and UN reporting,[55] between 2023 and 2025, units under the brigade facilitated movements of weapons linked to the Sudan conflict, including through a subordinate entity (the 77th Battalion, headed by Mohamed Mezewghi) under the 128th's umbrella. Open-source reporting indicates that al-Zadma remained in command of the 128th Brigade until early 2025, when the armed group was disbanded and restructured by LAAF decree.[56]

Hassan al-Zadma, commander of the 128th Brigade of the LAAF. *Photo: Harawa al-Hadath Facebook page*

On the same day that Subul al-Salam handed control of the Ain Kaziyet crossing to the RSF, the corridor's utility was almost immediately compromised. On 20 April 2023, the SAF captured the RSF's 'Shafir Lit' base – better known locally as 'Chevrolet' – near Karab Toum.[57] The loss severed the RSF's line of supply through Ain Kaziyet and forced convoys to reroute through seldom-used desert tracks south of the triangle, where harsh terrain limited the viability of high-volume deliveries. More broadly, the RSF's concurrent push to seize the airbases at Merowe and El Obeid, alongside its offensive in Khartoum, was widely interpreted as an effort to open direct aerial supply routes into Sudan, including from eastern Libya. The almost simultaneous setbacks at Merowe and Chevrolet, however, foiled that strategy and further undercut Kufra's role as the most straightforward and reliable entry point into Darfur.

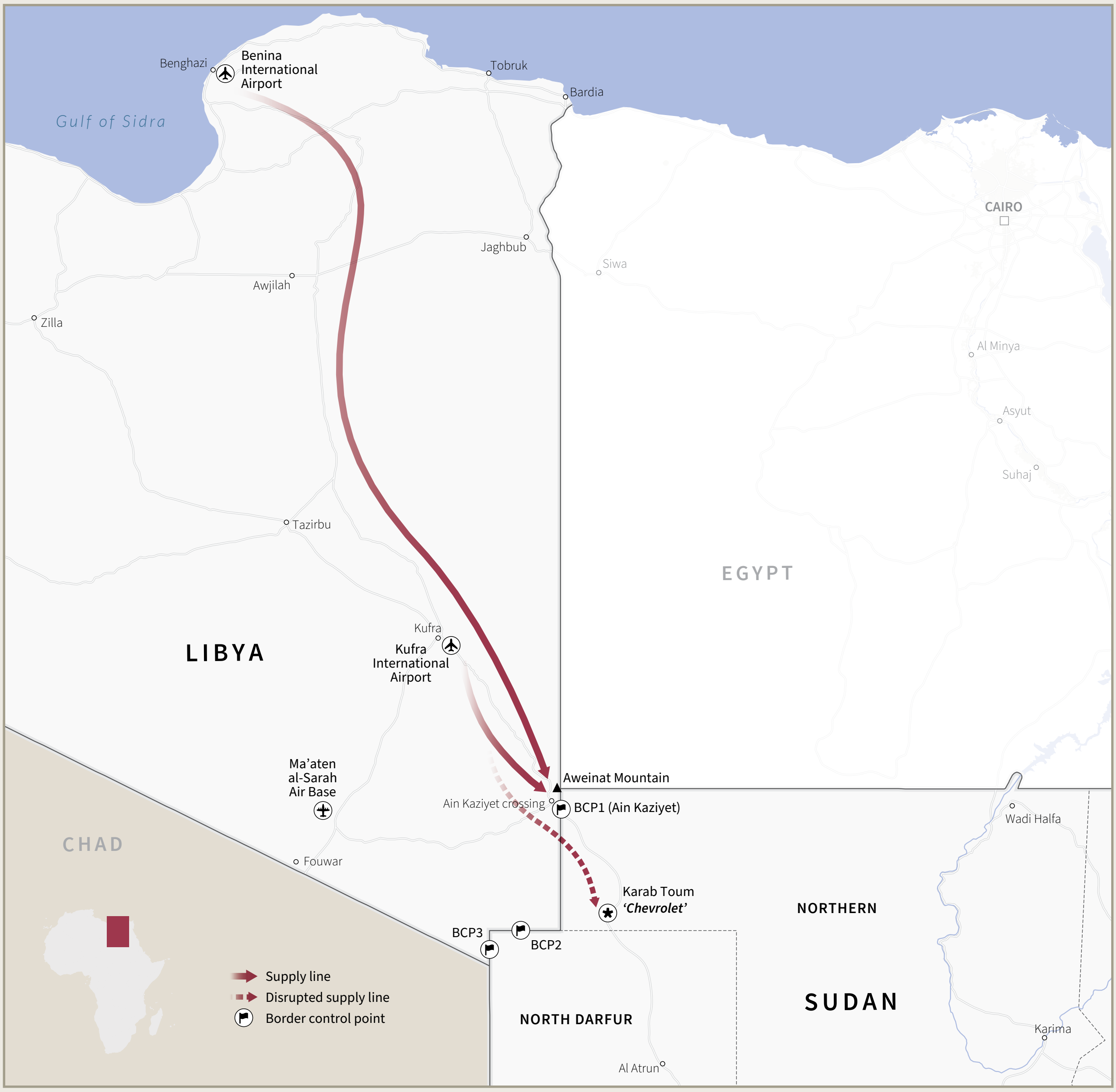


**FIGURE 2** The LAAF-facilitated supply line to the Rapid Support Forces at the advent of the Sudan war was disrupted by the Sudanese Armed Forces' capture of the Chevrolet base, April 2023.

Despite these setbacks, Kufra remained relevant as a staging ground for manpower, as signs of RSF outreach to Libya soon showed. On 27 April, a convoy of 15 vehicles departed Sebha carrying around 30 to 40 Chadian fighters from FACT, some of whom had previously served as auxiliaries under the LAAF's Tariq Bin Ziyad Brigade. Travelling south-east through Rebiana and then across the triangle border into Sudan, they reportedly joined RSF positions around Khartoum.[58] Over May and June, additional groups followed, bringing the estimated number of Chadian combatants joining the RSF to between 250 and 450.[59] Their mobilization was driven less by ideology than by expectations of wages, looted materiel and political leverage. Many had experience as convoy escorts and cross-border smugglers, which enabled them to integrate effectively into RSF-aligned logistical chains.[60]

By late summer 2023, Kufra's role had adapted to the protracted nature of RSF's war effort. With bulk arms consignments curtailed after the loss of Chevrolet, its function revolved around the discreet transit of personnel – particularly Chadian mercenaries moving into Darfur – alongside steady flows of fuel, cars and light materiel that RSF procured from southern Libya.[61] During this period, Subul al-Salam also re-established a presence around Ain Kaziyet, seeking above all to prevent Zaghawa-aligned rebel groups, particularly the SLA/MM, from using the same crossing to support SAF positions. Although the overall volume of arms moving through Kufra was limited, the infrastructure and networks reactivated in early 2023 persisted, ensuring that the town remained a staging ground for cross-border movement and laying the foundation for its later resurgence as a central wartime logistics hub once Chad-based routes faced mounting disruption in 2024.

**The Subul al-Salam faction at the Ain Kaziyet crossing between Libya and Sudan, September 2023.** *Photo: Subul al-Salam official Facebook page*

## Amdjarass as a logistical and political pivot

From August 2023 onwards, as the RSF lost ground in West Darfur and the Kufra axis faltered, RSF patrons increasingly turned to Chad. A new corridor emerged running from Amdjarass through Bao and Kariari into Darfur, operating unofficially but with growing regularity and serving as the backbone of the RSF's resupply system. Its viability rested on two pillars: tacit approval from Chadian state actors and a steady inflow of Emirati materiel.[62] The shift was facilitated by the UAE's establishment of a 'field hospital' in Amdjarass in July 2023, ostensibly to serve Sudanese refugees. Yet the site's infrastructure – aircraft shelters, hangars and fuel depots – suggested broader logistical ambitions.[63] Dozens of cargo flights arrived from the Emirates, some carrying military supplies such as weapons, drones, ammunition and fuel disguised as humanitarian assistance. Notably, many of these flights were operated by the same carriers that the UN had previously accused of ferrying Emirati weapons to the LAAF in Libya,[64] underscoring the continuity of supply networks across the two theatres.

**Maxar satellite imagery of Amdjarass airport in eastern Chad, near the Sudanese border. By October 2023, the base was being used for cross-border arms flows into Sudan.** *© Maxar via Getty Images*

By October 2023, Amdjarass had evolved into a full-service rear base that hosted RSF-linked brokers, served as a marshalling point for convoys, and anchored cross-border arms flows into Sudan through Bao, Kariari, and on to Zuruk,[65] the birthplace of General Mohamed 'Hemedti' Hamdan Dagalo, the head of the RSF. Vehicles, especially pick-up trucks, were a core component of RSF resupply, often transferred alongside weapons. Single-source reporting from Chad suggests that the arrangement benefited from the complicity of local Chadian stakeholders, incentivized by Emirati financing, though these claims remain unverified.[66] Taken together, these arrangements transformed Amdjarass into a critical logistics platform, supplanting Kufra as the RSF's principal corridor for resupply into Darfur during the latter half of 2023.

Mercenary mobilization also followed this realignment. Dozens of Chadian fighters – some aligned with the RSF, others operating independently – were also funnelled into Darfur through this corridor. Members of rebel groups that had remained outside the Doha peace process, such as splinters of FACT and CCMSR, entered transactional alignments with RSF units operating in southern and western Darfur and crossed through east Ennedi,[67] mirroring the flows that had moved through Kufra earlier in the war.[68]

Yet the Amdjarass corridor, while operationally efficient, soon triggered political friction. RSF atrocities against Masalit civilians, particularly in El Geneina,[69] drew sharp backlash from Zaghawa elites in both Sudan and Chad. A key turning point came with the RSF's campaign to seize El Fasher in late 2023,[70] as the group's decision to pursue full control of the city brought it into open conflict with Zaghawa-led factions previously ambivalent towards the war, including key Darfurian rebel groups. By early 2024, the SAF had successfully co-opted several of these factions – including the Gathering of Sudan Liberation Forces, the SLA/MM and the Justice and Equality Movement – into joint force configurations along the border triangle with Libya and Chad under the mantle of the Joint Force of Armed Struggle Movements (JFASM).[71] The JFASM, whose coalition comprised groups already operating close to the Chad–Libya–Sudan border, began targeting RSF convoys moving through well-established supply line corridors for arms. Three key transit points for RSF routes into Sudan from Eastern Chad (Sayah, Bir Mazza and Kulbus) became sites of repeated ambushes by Zaghawa-led mobile units from mid-2024 onwards.[72]

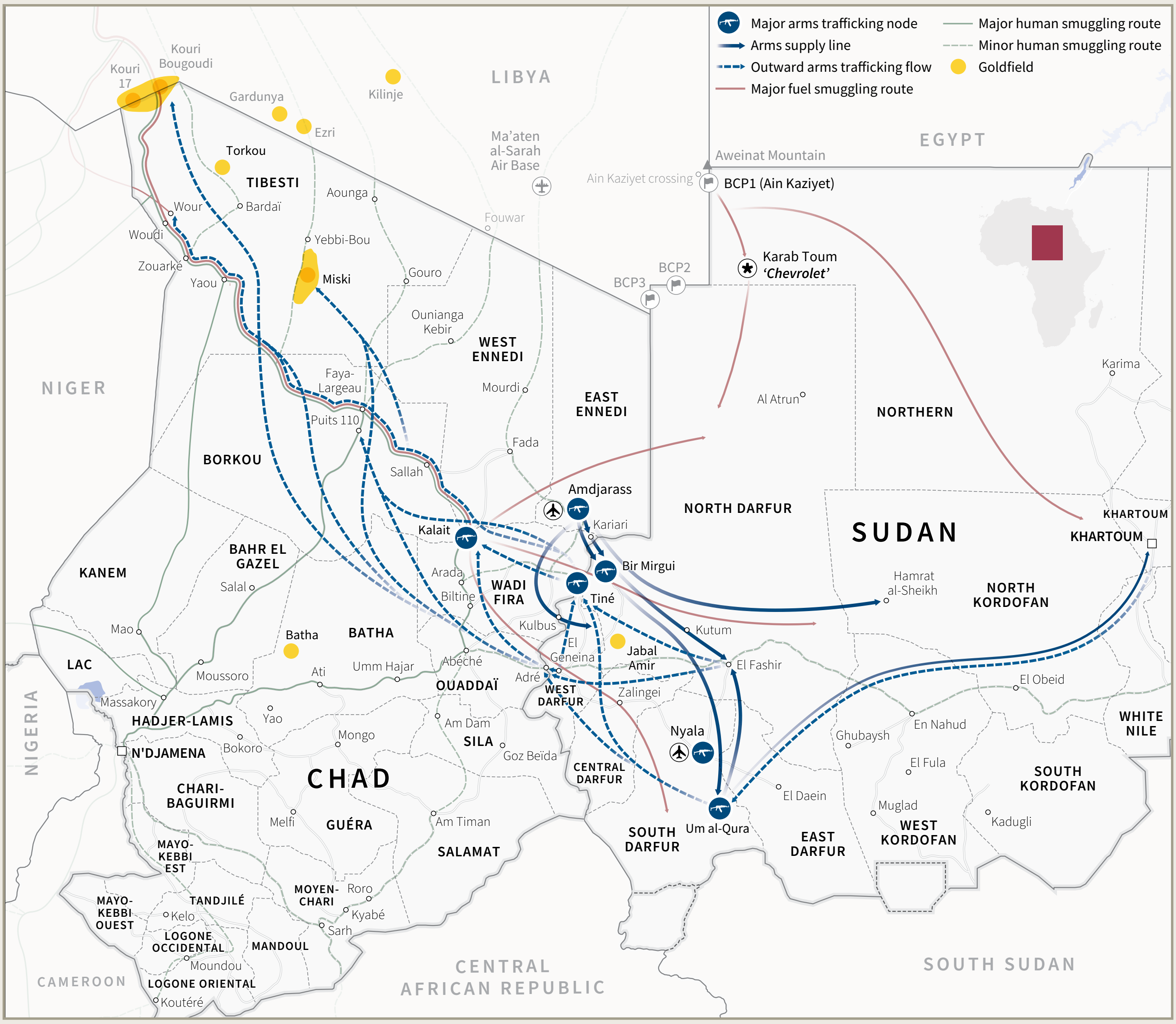


**FIGURE 3** Regional logistical and trafficking networks shaped by the Sudan conflict and extending into Chad and Libya, highlighting routes and cross-border smuggling hubs, August 2023 to June 2024.

As SAF-aligned forces intensified pressure on RSF convoys to choke Zuruk and the Amdjarass corridor – and with political scrutiny mounting on Déby's administration – the RSF was forced to recalibrate its logistics. By June 2024, it had established a new logistical hub in Bir Mirgui,[73] strategically located at the intersection of eastern Chad and North Darfur, closer to Libya. Rather than replacing Amdjarass, Bir Mirgui functioned as an additional aggregation point closer to the border zone. This allowed supplies to be consolidated and pushed forward with greater flexibility, as the new hub dispersed RSF storage and transfer points across a broader network and geographic area. The shorter leg also reduced exposure to the JFASM and Zaghawa ambushes that occurred along the extended Amdjarass–Zuruk route. Supplies that had previously moved through Amdjarass onto Zuruk were now intermittently redirected to Bir Mirgui, where they were reaggregated before being dispatched to frontline units in El Fasher and beyond. Bir Mirgui's proximity to Libya also reflected the mounting strain on Chadian routes, signalling the gradual resurgence of RSF supply lines through Libya.

Kufra in turn regained importance, while new emphasis was placed on the Tibesti-facing axis from southern Libya to supply the RSF through existing infrastructure in Chad. This realignment re-centred the Fezzan region, particularly its southern flank, where RSF logistics were reportedly once again facilitated by factions of the 128th Brigade under al-Zadma's command.[74]

## A new corridor established

From July to the end of 2024, an alternative RSF supply route began to take shape through southern Libya, bypassing the direct eastern Chadian route into Darfur. This pivot was partly a response to the growing insecurity and political costs of routing arms through eastern Chad, particularly as Zaghawa-aligned groups began targeting RSF supply lines. At the centre of this corridor was the gradual rehabilitation of Ma'aten al-Sarah, a disused airbase located near the tri-border area, which allowed the RSF to consolidate and forward supplies with shorter, less vulnerable transfer legs. Though more circuitous, this corridor through Libya reflected the urgency of sustaining RSF rear support in Darfur – even through less optimal terrain – and underscored the UAE's determination to maintain consistent logistical backing, regardless of shifting conditions on the Chadian front.

**Satellite image of the Ma'aten al-Sarah airbase in south-eastern Libya. The base allowed the RSF to route forward supplies directly through Libya.** © *Maxar via Getty Images*

### The refurbishment of Ma'aten al-Sarah and key players

Ma'aten al-Sarah was a disused Gaddafi-era military airbase that underwent gradual rehabilitation through the second half of 2024 and into 2025.[75] Over the course of its refurbishment, it became a key new aggregation point for weapons moved from Chad to al-Sarah, which were then transferred onwards to Darfur. This anchored a new corridor from north-east Chad to south-east Libya and on to Darfur. The purpose of this route was to offset interdictions by the JFASM in eastern Chad by providing a more direct pathway into Darfur.

The position of al-Sarah was relatively convenient, close to the border with Chad, and allowed weapons and vehicles to be stockpiled on site before being dispatched into Darfur through the southern portion of the border triangle.[76] The refurbishment was also intended to transform the base into an aerial node capable of receiving direct air transfers, not just an auxiliary aggregation point. Although media reports in late 2024 portrayed the base's revival as part of Russia's plan for a forward operating hub,[77] interviews in Libya with both diplomats and local military sources indicated that alleged Emirati financing was the real driver, with Africa Corps (formerly Wagner) providing a cover of deniability and perimeter security during refurbishment.[78] The RSF benefited directly from this build-up, as well as from the support of a key set of mercenary actors and Libyan stakeholders, to consolidate a new corridor for arms supplies into Darfur.

In the interim, while al-Sarah was still undergoing refurbishment and before any aerial transfers materialized, its proximity to northern Chad made it a natural aggregation point for overland shipments. These were routed into south-eastern Libya, stockpiled at the base, and then dispatched onwards into Darfur.

According to field interviews,[79] Saleh 'Anakazi' Abdelkarim Habré – a mercenary operating near the Salvador Pass and nephew of former President Hissène Habré – allegedly emerged as an intermediary in efforts to offset the disruptions to eastern Chadian supply routes. He reportedly leveraged his extensive influence within Tebu facilitation networks,[80] operational familiarity with trafficking corridors in southern Libya, and long-standing ties to the 128th Brigade (with whom he was affiliated under the mantle of the Shuhada al-Waw Martyrs battalion) and southern Libyan intermediaries.[81] Drawing on contacts on both sides of the border, Habré was allegedly instrumental in activating a transnational arms corridor linking northern Chad to south-eastern Libya through Ma'aten al-Sarah

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**Saleh 'Anakazi' Abdelkarim Habré.**
*Photo: Facebook*

Also reportedly involved was Mohamed Bakhit Adjit (also known as Ajab al-Dor or 'Doydoy'), leader of a splinter faction of the SRAC turned RSF ally,[82] who operated near Ma'aten al-Sarah.[83] According to the UN Panel of Experts on Sudan, Abdallah Tijani Chaghab, a former SLM/MM colonel who joined the RSF in 2017 and drew on his Zaghawa networks, played a pivotal role in coordinating supply movements through eastern Chad. Other RSF commanders, including Fadeil El Naji, alongside al-Dor, facilitated logistics between north/north-eastern Chad, southern Libya and Darfur.[84]

The route's Libyan leg was secured with support from the 128th Brigade's 77th Battalion,[85] commanded by Mohamed Mezewghi – then a rising figure within the LAAF closely aligned with Saddam Haftar, though nominally operating under al-Zadma's command.[86] While broader oversight over this corridor remained with al-Zadma, both he and Mezewghi reportedly taxed convoys transiting east of the Kilinje mountain range, which straddles the Chad–Libya border, and into al-Sarah.[87]

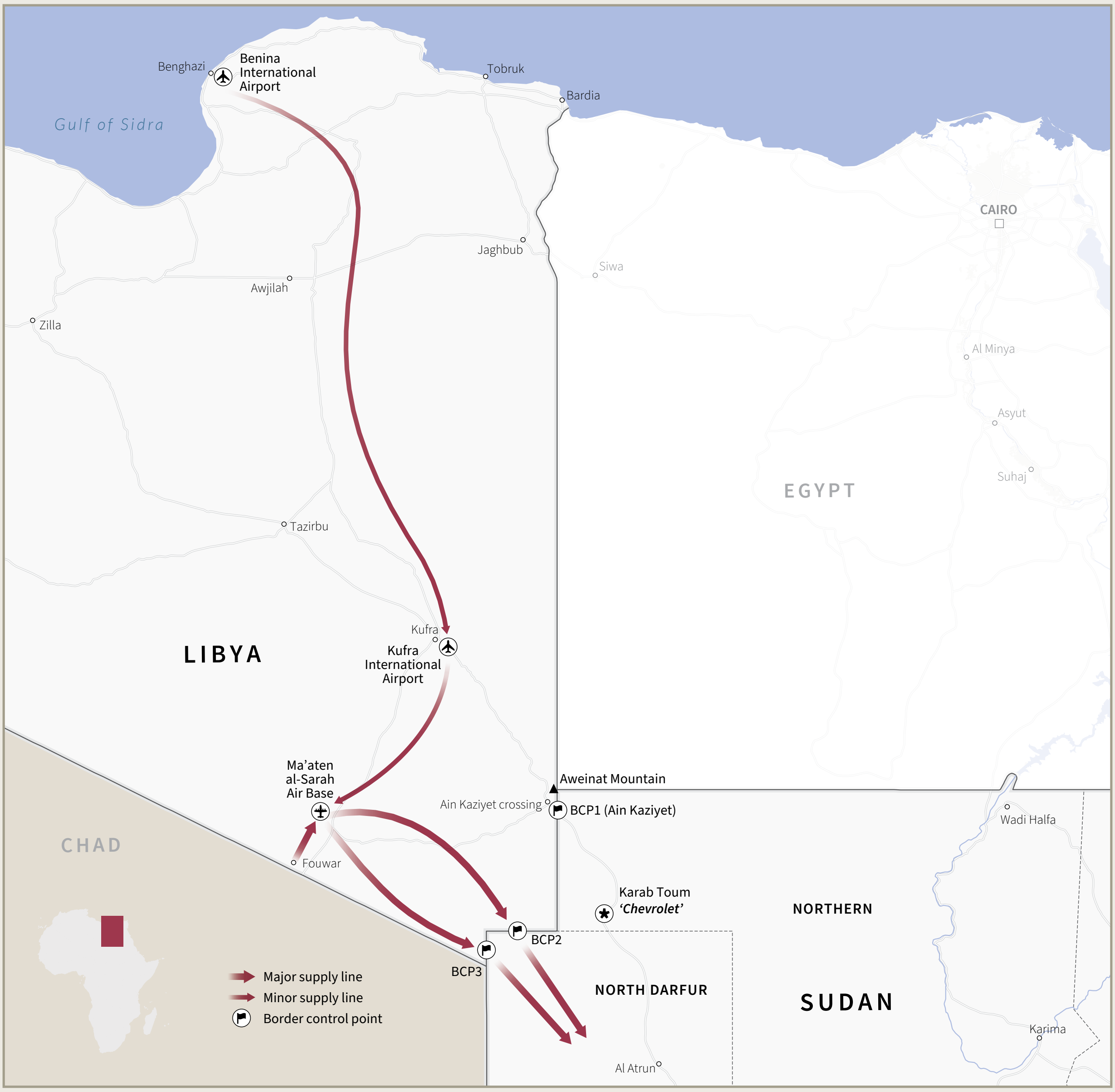



**FIGURE 4** The emergence of a transnational RSF supply route through Ma'aten al-Sarah, June 2024 to January 2025.

## Chad to Darfur through Libya: The emergence of a transnational supply route

This corridor, tightly aligned with RSF supply chains, ran from Kalait through Faya and crossed into Libya at Fouwar.[88] From there, SRAC elements under al-Dor escorted shipments to Ma'aten al-Sarah,[89] where materiel was staged or handed directly to RSF units before entering Sudan (typically south of the border triangle close to al-Sarah) en route to Zuruk and Bir Mirgui. By avoiding eastern Chad, this corridor reduced exposure and ensured more predictable supply continuity.

**Graduation ceremony of the tenth batch of Ajab al-Dor's SRAC splinter forces, mobilized in support of the RSF, 29 April 2024.** *Photo: Facebook*

Al-Dor's mobilization alongside the RSF had already been announced in April 2024.[90] From the RSF's perspective, co-opting him was also intended to disrupt the JFASM's mobilization through Libya – particularly the SLA/MM forces under Minni Arko Minnawi – by countering their ability to transit from Libya into Chad and Darfur.

The effects of al-Dor's mobilization materialized in late June 2024, when his faction engaged in a cross-border clash near the Kilinje mountains, repelling an incursion by other Sudanese mercenaries and SLA/MM forces led by SAF-aligned Musa Hilal inside Libyan territory.[91] The confrontation, which resulted in SLA/MM casualties and the capture of military vehicles by al-Dor's forces, further entrenched the SRAC splinter's position as an RSF-aligned force embedded in Libya.

Two months later, in August 2024, Mezewghi's 77th Battalion launched an offensive targeting purported Chadian rebels and smuggling networks across the Kilinje mountain range.[92] The operation culminated in clashes on 31 August and 1 September, when Mezewghi's forces seized a key checkpoint from the 129th Brigade – a Kufra-based Tebu unit under the 106th Brigade led by Khalid Haftar.[93]

Though publicly framed as a counter-gang and border security operation, it also served political objectives: weakening Chadian opposition groups while reinforcing Benghazi's burgeoning relationship with N'Djamena,[94] in line with a shared Emirati-backed interest in shielding RSF logistics. Crucially, the offensive enabled Mezewghi's 77th to consolidate control over the region between Kouri Bougoudi and Ma'aten al-Sarah, ensuring more predictable protection for SRAC /RSF convoys and greater reliability for Darfur-bound arms shipments routed through southern Libya.

**An offensive took place on the Kilinje mountains, straddling southern Libya and Chad, by the 128th Brigade's 77th Battalion under Mohamed Mezewghi's leadership in August 2024.** *Photo: Facebook*

# Outbound arms flows: Diversion, resale and spillovers

As the war in Sudan progressed, the corridors that supplied the RSF increasingly became channels for the outward movement of Sudan-linked materiel and fighters. These same routes, initially designed to sustain the RSF, began to generate secondary currents of circulation: captured or diverted stocks filtered into Libyan and Chadian markets were re-exported into Sahelian theatres, and moved in tandem with mercenary networks. In effect, what started as supply lines evolved into collateral circuits that spread insecurity beyond Darfur, creating new vulnerabilities across the borderlands. This section, which examines diversion into commercial chains, shifting resale dynamics visible in pricing, and the entanglement of arms with fighter mobility, traces how these channels deepened and extended regional instability as the war progressed.

## Diversion through Libya and local tensions

As Sudanese materiel entered Chad and Libya, not all of it remained tethered to the RSF's war effort. Increasingly, these stocks were diverted outward, absorbed into commercial trafficking chains, and repurposed for markets and conflicts far beyond Darfur.

Habré reportedly became central to this shift. Initially embedded in the RSF-linked corridor, sources say he began leveraging his position to build parallel supply lines geared towards profit rather than frontline resupply. In coordination with Chadian officials, he allegedly oversaw a more diffuse flow of arms that bypassed supplying the RSF entirely. Surplus weapons and ammunition in Chad – diverted from Sudan-bound consignments – were delivered by Chadian military personnel to handover points in Bardaï,[95] Emi Atrome, Wadi Marou and the Dirdé–Wouni zone of Kanem, among others.[96] At these dispatch points, Habré's network apparently organized transfers that moved north through Miski and Kouri Bougoudi, crossing into Libya through Gardunya, Kouri 17 and Kouri Bouklim.[97]

Once inside Libyan territory, these consignments were redirected toward hubs under 128th Brigade influence, notably Ma'aten al-Sarah, Zillah, Qatrun and Murzuq.[98] Whereas a portion of the materiel continued eastward to RSF-affiliated forces from al-Sarah, an expanding share was siphoned off into Libya's internal trafficking economy or resold to external clients. This marked the transformation of wartime supply lines into broader collateral circuits, where Sudanese-bound stock fed local markets and transnational re-exports.

Other brokers, particularly Tuareg networks, capitalized on the renewed activity around Kouri Bougoudi to expand operations along south-western corridors, especially through the Salvador Pass. As Kufra re-emerged as a central node in RSF-linked logistics, the Ubari–Ghat–Salvador axis was indirectly revitalized – not through weapons circulating back out of Sudan or older Libyan stockpiles, but through the diversion of consignments moving through Chad. These consignments, originally destined for the RSF, were instead rerouted westward through the Tibesti.

While arms flows remained primarily oriented eastward toward Darfur, a subset of Sudan-linked stockpiles – including DShKs, PKTs and RPGs routed through Kouri – was diverted westward by Tuareg intermediaries and rebel-linked traffickers based around Ubari, Ghat and the Salvador Pass.[99] Some of these figures, especially those linked to former rebel formations, sold weapons to buyers in Niger and Mali, including factions tied to Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and the Mouvement pour le Salut de l'Azawad[100] (MSA).[101] In several instances, Azawadi buyers reportedly travelled to Ubari or Kouri Bougoudi directly to procure arms from existing stockpiles, leveraging kinship ties for arms trafficking.[102] Though peripheral to the RSF's core resupply architecture, this Salvador-facing trade exemplified the war's proliferation effects: Darfur-bound materiel bleeding outward into Sahelian conflict economies and amplifying regional insecurity.

The outward diversion of Sudanese arms to Libyan markets also triggered tensions within Libya itself between local factions. Subul al-Salam, traditionally dominant in Kufra, resented being sidelined in favour of the 128th Brigade and SRAC-linked actors operating beyond its oversight between Fouwar and at Ma'aten al-Sarah.[103] The new convoluted route established by Habré to support the RSF through south-east Libya not only eroded Subul's historical grip on the convoy economy in the south-east of the Cyrenaica but also disrupted its long-standing escort and depot revenue streams.

The broader arrangements with Habré also deepened tensions between Mezewghi and al-Zadma. Though formally under the same brigade umbrella, both vied for control over southern Libya's lucrative political economy. This was not only about weapons convoys for the RSF, but also about taxing every form of movement toward Chad – commercial trucks, fuel, migrants and gold-mining supplies – as well as exerting influence over gold-rich zones themselves. Mezewghi, based closer to Kufra and Ma'aten al-Sarah, asserted growing autonomy, coordinating more directly with Saddam Haftar and bypassing al-Zadma's channels.[104] In response, al-Zadma sought to reroute convoys through the Tibesti and on to Murzuq, aiming to monopolize revenues and reassert control, while leveraging Habré's ties with Tebu facilitators. These rivalries produced temporary blockages in RSF supply runs, with SRAC intermediaries eventually favouring Mezewghi's corridor for offering more reliable protection and fewer '*douanes officieuses*' (informal tolls).[105] More importantly, they also paved the way for increased diversion of arms intended for Sudan.

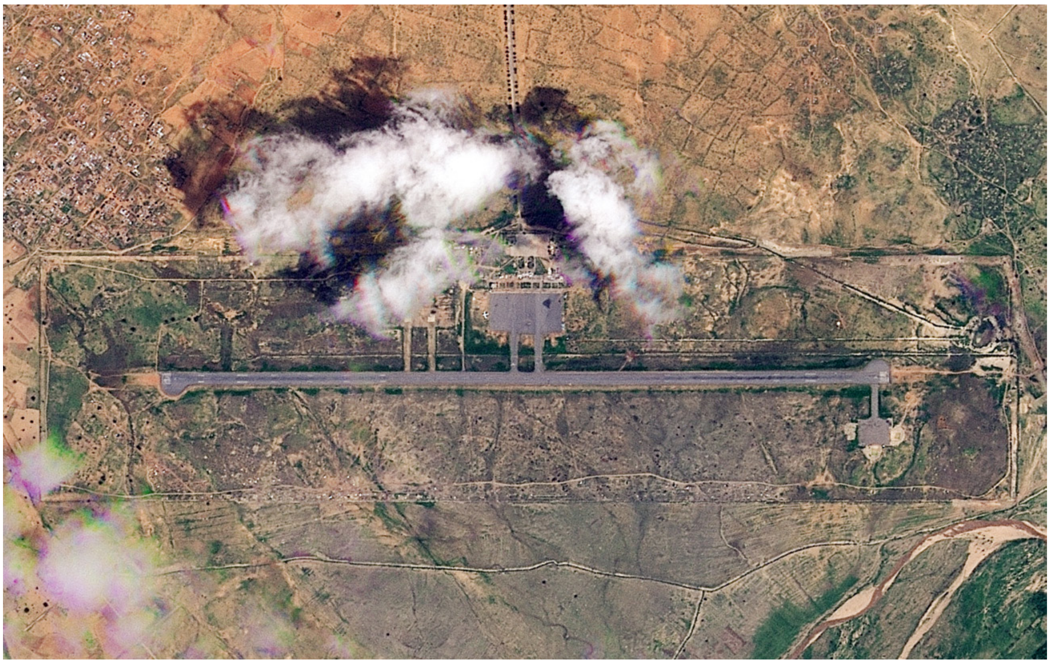
By the close of 2024, these outward-oriented corridors were no longer limited to sustaining the RSF's war effort. They were channels where diversion, resale and competition intersected, turning supply routes into contested marketplaces and proxy battlegrounds. Kufra became prominent not only as an intake point for RSF materiel but also as a hub of redistribution. Alongside conventional sales, barter persisted as a complementary mode of exchange, with arms swapped for fuel, vehicles or other commodities,[106] including drugs and gold. Mercenaries were not only end-users but also intermediaries: at exchange points like Fouwar, they channelled Sudanese-bound weapons into Libyan markets, diverting wartime stockpiles into regional arms economies.

## Damage control with new nodes, airbridges and manpower

The proliferation of outflows from Sudan was not limited to weapons. By late 2024, Libya's role in RSF logistics expanded to encompass the covert movement of foreign fighters. Open-source investigations and international reporting confirmed that ex-military personnel – Colombian nationals recruited by UAE-linked private security companies – were transited through the UAE and routed through Benghazi into Libya before moving overland through al-Jawf and Kufra toward Darfur in October–November 2024.[107] Abandoned documents, later displayed by the SAF-aligned JFASM after ambushing an RSF convoy near the tri-border region, provided rare evidence of this transit.[108] Although the operation appeared to be a one-off, it underscored how the pathways that had been established for materiel were being adapted for manpower, further blurring the line between arms supply chains and mercenary brokerage. The logistical setback following the ambush seems to have dissuaded further use of the Libyan route for Colombian fighters in the months that followed.[109]

At the same time, regional supply lines were recalibrated to reduce reliance on Amdjarass due to local tensions with the Zaghawa tribe. The hub did not shut down entirely, but its prominence diminished after mid-2024. Flights were increasingly routed into N'Djamena and Abéché,[110] both for mercenary transfers and discreet arms deliveries aboard smaller aircraft.[111] New air links emerged as part of this diversification, allowing consignments and personnel to move through less politically sensitive platforms. Parallel staging through East Africa and the Horn reinforced this dispersal: flights originating from the UAE and alleged to be carrying weapons increasingly transited through Nairobi, Mombasa, Entebbe, Kigali, Bosaso and Berbera,[112] illustrating how supply chains were spread across multiple nodes.

Within Sudanese airspace, the RSF also recalibrated its rear logistics. In September 2024, the previously dormant Nyala Airport was reactivated for covert nighttime cargo flights originating from the UAE.[113] These flights offloaded weapons, drones, ammunition and fuel in staggered consignments, which were then dispatched through Guellab and Wadaa into RSF-held areas of Darfur.[114] By 2025, Colombian fighters were again reported in El Fasher, though their movement increasingly relied on diversified air transfers through Ethiopia, Puntland or Chad into Nyala.[115]



**Satellite image dated 11 August 2025, showing a view of the airport in Nyala, capital of the South Darfur state.** *© Planet Labs via Getty Images*

These developments were not signs of strategic design so much as adaptations to constraint. The RSF's resort to Colombian contractors through Libya, the diversification of supply nodes through Chad and East Africa, and the reactivation of Nyala Airport for Emirati night flights all reflected the mounting logistical strain caused by the closure of direct supply routes through Chad; recurrent bottlenecks inside Libya; and the diversion in Chad and Libya of materiel intended for the RSF in Darfur. Mercenary transfers and the Nyala airbridge were, in effect, compensatory fixes to sustain manpower and materiel flows. These developments underscored how setbacks and diversions forced the RSF and its international backers to improvise. As overland routes increasingly bled materiel into Libya and Chad, new airbridges into Abéché, N'Djamena and Nyala were established to bring in weapons and foreign specialists to operate them – not as a demonstration of strength, but as damage-control measures aimed at sustaining the war effort within Darfur and beyond.

## Resale dynamics and price signals

By late 2024, the commercial aftershocks of Sudan's war were clearly visible in the arms markets of southern Libya and eastern Chad. While earlier phases of the conflict had been defined by bulk consignments flowing into Sudan, the diffusion of materiel outward created new commercial opportunities and embedded Sudanese-origin stock into local and transnational economies. Market data collected in April 2025 shows that availability remained steady across both contexts, with no systemic scarcity of small arms or crew-served weapons. Instead, price variations reflected logistics, risk exposure and local brokerage structures – a hallmark of how wartime supply lines had transformed into collateral circuits of redistribution. For Sudan's battlefronts, however, it was not the supply of weapons themselves but the steady provision of ammunition and, increasingly, fuel for sustaining long-distance supply lines that remained the most critical inputs. This dependence drove up costs and directly shaped the price dynamics that followed.[116]

In Kufra, small-calibre ammunition became progressively more expensive. AK-47 rounds rose from LYD3–7 (roughly US$0.43–1) per bullet in 2023 to LYD7–9 (US$1–1.30) by mid-2025. FN ammunition followed the same trend, climbing from LYD5–8 (US$0.71–1.14) in 2023 to LYD9–12 (US$1.29–1.71) in 2025. By contrast, weapons platforms remained comparatively stable. In Kufra itself, FN FAL rifles averaged LYD8 000–10 000 (US$1 143–1 429) in 2023 and around LYD14 000 (US$2 000) in 2025. In the Sabha–Qatrun belt, RPG launchers settled at roughly LYD6 000 (US$857) with grenades at about LYD300 (US$43), while PKT rounds were priced at LYD3.50 (US$0.50) each. AK variants across the south, notably in Ubari and Ghat, continued to circulate from LYD2 500–5 000 (US$357–714) for older models and up to LYD12 000 (US$1 714) for newer ones, depending on condition and origin. The inflationary pressures on ammunition, particularly calibres for the

DShKM machine guns offered for sale by an arms trafficker in Sebha, February 2025. *Photo supplied* smalls arms and light weapons popular in Sudan, pointed less to absolute scarcity than to sustained demand from the conflict and the difficulties of replenishment across long, insecure supply lines.

Heavier weapons carried sharper mark-ups as they moved westward. The DShKM, known locally as the 'al-Dushka al-Qatariya', traded in the Sabha–Qatrun belt for around LYD50 000 (US$7 143), rising to roughly LYD80 000 (US$11 400) in the Salvador triangle. This gradient reflected accumulated transport costs, protection payments and the profitability of westward re-export. In Chad, a similar pattern of spatial inflation was evident. In border towns near Darfur, such as Tiné and Adré, DShKs could be obtained for around FCFA3 million (US$5 000) when collected directly at the frontier, but the same units resold in Fouwar commanded prices of up to FCFA6 million (US$10 000). Kalashnikov rifles, available in Kalait at roughly FCFA300 000 (US$500), were resold for FCFA700 000–800 000 (US$1 167–1 333) in Kouri Bougoudi and adjacent Tibesti hubs. Hand grenades, Tokarevs and Makarovs were widely available, while PKTs and FN FALs circulated between Darfur, Kalait and Kouri Bougoudi.

**Small arms delivered to a consignee in Kilinje, northern Chad, after passing through Tiné and Kalait.**
*Photo supplied*

Barter transactions – in which weapons were traded for fuel, vehicles or other commodities with no fixed exchange rate – were also common in gold-mining hubs, underscoring the adaptable nature of arms trafficking. Gold-mining hubs such as Kouri Bougoudi and Miski reinforced these dynamics by serving as key sites of exchange. A parallel practice of short-term rentals – for example, Kalashnikovs hired out at approximately FCFA50 000 per day – persisted, though a source stressed this remained the exception rather than the norm.[117]

Alongside these price movements, traffickers themselves became central to embedding Sudanese materiel in regional markets. Sources in eastern Chad noted that traders maintained counterparts linked both to the RSF and SAF, enabling them to procure weapons and ammunition from either side of the conflict.[118] Purchasers were typically offered two options: to collect arms directly in border towns such as Tiné or Adré, or to pay a premium for delivery further north or north-west through transit points like Fouwar, Bouklim or Kouri Bougoudi, usually for double to triple the price. These price gradients reflected both the heightened demand for Sudanese-origin stock and the logistical risks of moving goods across remote, militarized terrain.

Technology is further amplifying the proliferation of Sudanese weapons. Interviewees with knowledge of trafficking practices in both Chad and southern Libya noted the spread of Starlink satellite terminals alongside weapons and fuel in convoys, allowing traffickers and mercenary escorts to coordinate movements across terrain that would otherwise be unmanageable. Starlink's integration into arms logistics

Screenshot of weapons advertised on the private Facebook account of a trafficker based in El Geneina, March 2025. *Photo supplied*

reinforced the transformation of supply lines into multipurpose packages,[119] moving not just guns and ammunition but also communications capacity, accelerating the regionalization of Sudan's war economy.

Taken together, these dynamics illustrate that Sudan's conflict did not produce a scarcity of arms but gradual and incremental proliferation. Weapons entered Chad and Libya in steady volumes, and their outward redistribution and diffusion slowly ramped up. Price shifts tracked risk and distance rather than availability, while the fusion of arms, mercenary mobility and communications technologies ensured that the spread of weapons extended well beyond Darfur. Outbound flows are in turn reshaping arms markets across Libya, Chad, Niger and Mali by embedding Sudanese stockpiles into them.

## Collateral circuits consolidated

By the end of 2024, the arms economy in the Chad–Libya–Sudan borderlands had been fundamentally reconfigured. What began as fragmented, low-volume flows during the 2021–2022 quiet period had been absorbed into a wartime logistics system driven by RSF demand and sustained diversion. Corridors that had previously operated in relative isolation – Kufra's Zway-dominated routes to Sudan, Tibesti-facing flows from Qatrun and Murzuq, and the Tuareg-managed Salvador Pass axis – became increasingly interconnected, drawn into a wider regional economy in which rebels and mercenary groups served as vital players. Kufra, after losing ground to Chadian nodes for much of 2024, re-emerged as a central staging point, offering both insulation from scrutiny and access to cross-border facilitation networks.

Libya's role also shifted: no longer just a supplier of materiel, it became a transit hub for Sudanese and Chadian fighters, embedding mercenary movements into the same logistical circuits. Arms and personnel now moved through discreet storage sites, mobile convoys and trafficking networks, forming a decentralized but adaptive infrastructure designed to minimize detection and guarantee continuity. Inbound weapons and outbound diversions converged, turning previously ad hoc exchanges into an integrated system that serviced both the Sudanese battlefield and regional markets.

The LAAF's 676th Brigade deploys to the Tibesti mountain range for military operations, July 2025. *Photo: Facebook*

## Consolidating arms trafficking as part of reshuffling leadership

By early 2025, the logistical architecture supporting RSF-linked arms flows entered a new phase of recalibration, this time driven by internal fallout and consolidation within the LAAF. On 13 January 2025, the LAAF's General Command formally reshuffled al-Zadma's 128th Brigade ahead of dismissing him.[120] The move reflected a broader attempt by Saddam Haftar's military leadership to rein in al-Zadma's growing autonomy. His brigade had morphed into a quasi-independent enterprise, managing cross-border logistics, fuel depots and trafficking routes across the Fezzan, with the ability to source its own weapon's arsenal. Al-Zadma's overlapping ties to Chadian, Sudanese and Emirati actors had also become untenable for the LAAF leadership, particularly against the backdrop of an ongoing hereditary transition within the LAAF and fears of his defection.[121]

The disbandment sidelined al-Zadma from his former territorial strongholds, reshaping the balance of power in Libya's south. It not only undercut his influence but also weakened the position of actors linked to the trafficking apparatus he had helped oversee. Chief among them was Habré, the Chadian mercenary who had played a central coordination role in establishing the south-eastern corridor and facilitating weapons diversion to regional markets. Habré, a key figure in late 2024 transits, was viewed in this context as expendable. His proximity to al-Zadma made him a liability, and the latter's removal gave Mezewghi a clear opening to consolidate control over southern routes without accommodating intermediaries tied to his former commander. Another commander elevated in this reshuffle was Mohamed Eljarh al-Obeidi, operating under Haftar's newly created Land Forces and leading the 676th Brigade, who likewise emerged as a key actor empowered by Haftar in the Fezzan.

In February 2025, this tension erupted into violence. Clashes broke out in Qatrun between Chadian mercenaries aligned with al-Zadma under Habré, and Mezewghi's 77th and Eljarh's 676th.[122] The confrontation was reportedly sparked by overlapping disputes over control of storage sites, drug shipments,[123] and the sequencing of convoy movements toward the Libya–Chad border.[124] Although the fighting was quickly contained, it resulted in Habré and his associates fleeing the area, effectively stripping them of territorial influence. Coming on the heels of the 128th Brigade's dissolution, these clashes precipitated the collapse of the arms trafficking route that had flourished in the second half of 2024 through the Kouri Bougoudi–Fouwar–Kufra axis. With the departure of Habré, the corridor's core coordination chain unravelled, severing what had become one of the RSF's main supply routes into Libya through the Tibesti and north-eastern Chad.

Mohamed Eljarh, commander of the LAAF's 676th Brigade under Saddam Haftar's Land Forces command, during operations to consolidate control over the Tibesti mountain range, July 2025. *Photo: Facebook/LAAF Media*

In May 2025, Habré briefly attempted a comeback, coordinating a surprise assault on the LAAF's 676th Brigade near the Fouwar crossing at the Chad–Libya border.[125] The attack was notable for targeting the same node Habré had long used to funnel weapons through northern Chad into south-eastern Libya and onwards towards al-Sarah. Although his offensive failed,[126] it signalled that the Tibesti–Libya corridor was likely compromised in the short to medium term. This mirrored a broader trend of interdictions across the tri-border area, with JFASM and Zaghawa-led ambushes targeting RSF supply convoys along the eastern Chad and southeastern Libya borders with Sudan. In response, al-Obeidi mobilized in July 2025 to consolidate control over the Libyan side of the Tibesti,[127] forcing some Chadian mercenaries (including Habré) to relocate westward towards the Salvador Pass.

Nevertheless, the simultaneous degradation of Chad's eastern corridor into Darfur and the disintegration of the Tibesti-linked supply chains formerly overseen by Habré, however tenuously, catalyzed the resurgence of Kufra as the central node in RSF-linked arms and mercenary logistics.

## Subul's renewed centrality and the seizure of Aweinat

The reconfiguration in the south-east of the Cyrenaica unfolded in parallel with the January 2025 dismissal of al-Zadma and the formal delegation of control over the al-Sarah airbase to Subul al-Salam. The January decision,[128] issued by Saddam Haftar, signalled an institutional pivot: a consolidation of the Libya–Sudan corridor, officially delegated to the Zway-dominated militia's stewardship.[129]

Though Subul had long exercised informal authority around the al-Sarah airbase, its consolidation of control in early 2025 marked a turning point. Activity at Kufra's airport resumed in parallel. The runway, previously dormant, was reportedly reactivated for discreet logistical deliveries, including nighttime landings by UAE-linked aircraft.[130] Some of these flights, originating through transit points in Ethiopia or Puntland, carried arms and ammunition. Additional materiel, including fuel and weapons, was routed overland through Benghazi,[131] which also saw military cargo flights landing in Benina. From Kufra, the shipments were staged either through al-Sarah directly or dispatched overland to triangle-border rendezvous points south of Ain Kaziyet. The RSF was also hosted by the LAAF in a base of its own in the greater Kufra area,[132] in part to enable these transfers.

Yet the Achilles' heel of the Kufra corridor persisted: the SAF had retained de facto control over the Chevrolet base near Karab Toum since April 2023, effectively denying the RSF access to the most direct and logistically favourable route into Darfur, through Ain Kaziyet in the Aweinat mountain range. The SAF also maintained forward operating points along border points adjacent to the mountain range, including its eastern and south-eastern flanks, making it significantly harder for RSF convoys to bypass the base without risk of interdiction. This chokepoint not only constrained the efficiency of flows from Libya but also forced the RSF to rely on longer, more circuitous smuggling routes through difficult terrain south of the border triangle for over two years.

The SAF publicly declared its full military control of Khartoum in May 2025,[133] signalling a decisive shift in the war's centre of gravity to Darfur and, by extension, intensifying the strategic imperative for the RSF to secure a viable, uninterrupted resupply corridor into Darfur.

In June 2025, Ain Kaziyet's centrality was made clear as the RSF moved to seize the crossing. The operation targeted both the triangle zone and the SAF's forward operating positions along the eastern edge of the Aweinat mountain range. RSF units, reportedly backed by Subul-facilitated logistical support, captured the area, securing for the first time a more direct and operationally efficient entry point into Darfur from southern Libya.[134] Just days before the assault, Subul had crossed into Sudanese territory during a failed incursion, followed by clashes with SAF units near the border triangle.[135] While the LAAF denied any formal involvement amid SAF accusations of conspiracy,[136] the SAF maintained that the RSF offensive was launched from Libyan territory, a claim supported by the chronological sequence of open-source evidence showing RSF elements capturing the Kusso mountain through Libya before closing in on the Aweinat mountain.[137] Shortly after, the RSF also seized control of the Chevrolet base and Karab Toum,[138] dismantling a key SAF chokepoint and consolidating full control of the Kufra–Aweinat corridor.

Following the RSF's seizure of the Libya–Sudan–Egypt tri-border area in June 2025, the Kufra corridor consolidated into the group's primary logistical artery into Darfur. With eastern Chad routes effectively severed and access through Amdjarass no longer reliable, Kufra emerged as the only corridor offering sustained supply continuity. Convoys departed regularly under armed escort, carrying arms destined for RSF units in central and western Darfur, with Emirati flights into Kufra and Benghazi sustaining the inflow of materiel then shuttled overland. Saddam Haftar personally oversaw an overhaul of Kufra's airport and, according to single-source reporting, Subul al-Salam quickly moved to monopolize control over the tri-border area and Ain Kaziyet.[139]

In parallel, work on rehabilitating Ma'aten al-Sarah slowed after June 2025.[140] With the RSF firmly in control of the tri-border area, and with the Kufra–Ain Kaziyet axis providing a shorter, more secure and logistically straightforward supply line into Darfur, the strategic rationale for investing further in al-Sarah diminished. The unfinished base was sidelined and the LAAF concentrated instead on refurbishing Kufra's International Airport as the main conduit – along with Benghazi's Benina – for RSF resupply by the UAE.[141]


**Kufra airport, after reported refurbishment by the LAAF's Land Forces, 2025.** *Photo: Facebook*

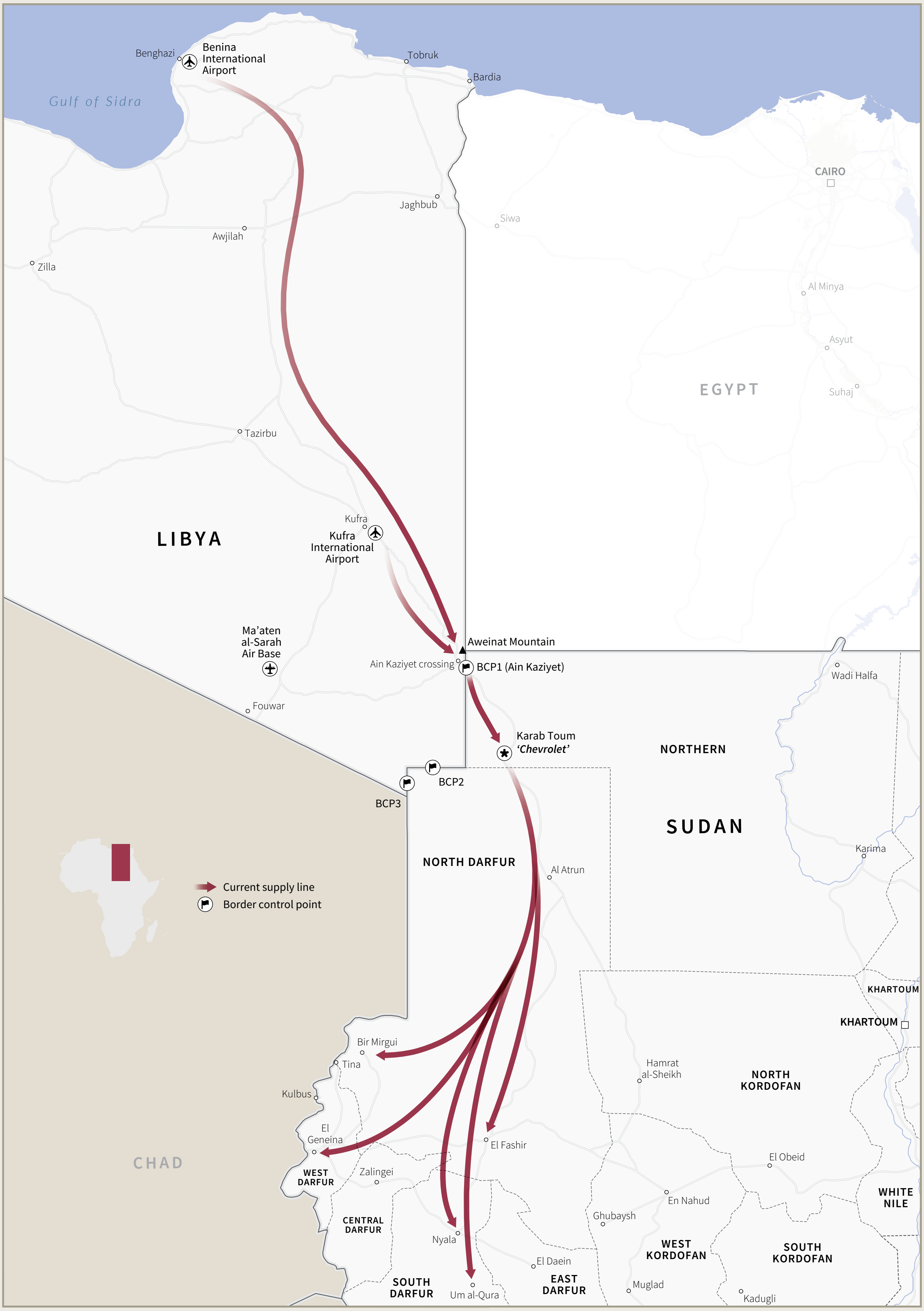



**FIGURE 5** Consolidated supply line from Libya to Darfur through Kufra, July 2025 to the present.

While this realignment reflected an urgent need to sustain RSF supply lines, it also raised questions as to why the RSF, with LAAF support, had not re-established control of the Ain Kaziyet corridor earlier in the war. For much of 2024, eastern Chad routes provided a viable alternative, reducing the incentive to press the issue. In early 2025, however, those routes fell into intermittent use as friction with Zaghawa elites around Amdjarass mounted. This prompted RSF patrons to pivot supplies towards other transfer hubs such as N'Djamena,[142] Abéché and directly into Nyala.[143]

Another factor limiting earlier RSF control over Ain Kaziyet was the political sensitivity of its geographic proximity to Egypt, an actor aligned with both the LAAF and the UAE, yet firmly backing the SAF. Cairo's opposition to the RSF likely constrained overt support of its consolidation of control right at the border.[144] Operationally, the shift was driven by battlefield needs: by mid-2025, mounting RSF losses and the collapse of eastern Chad supply routes had elevated the Kufra corridor's importance. The LAAF's move was further enabled by the assertiveness of Saddam Haftar and his growing control over southern-facing portfolios, managed in a way that aligned more closely with Emirati priorities.

**LAAF Deputy Chief Saddam Haftar (left) and Subul al-Salam commander Abdelrahman Hashim al-Zway meeting in Kufra.** *Photo: Facebook*

At the same time, Chadian authorities took visible steps to manage RSF-linked flows in ways calibrated primarily for regime protection and to preserve Zaghawa cohesion.[145] By mid-2024, Amdjarass had already been de-emphasized as a logistics hub. Later the same year, N'Djamena deployed military units to the Sudan–Libya–Chad border triangle and sanctioned periodic raids in the Tibesti,[146] aimed less at dismantling trafficking networks than at preventing Sudanese-origin weapons from reaching Chadian mercenaries hostile to the regime. On 15 April 2025, for example, Chadian customs units in Borkou and the Tibesti seized over 130 weapons traced to Sudan – an operation likely intended to telegraph Chad's efforts to contain the spillover of Sudan-linked stockpiles, but also to protect Déby's government against their circulation among anti-regime rebels and mercenaries.[147]

Taken together, these Libyan and Chadian measures further reduced the viability of older routes transiting through Chad, accelerating the shift toward the Kufra–Aweinat axis. By mid-2025, Kufra had firmly consolidated its role as the de facto centre of gravity for RSF rear logistics. A combination of broader regional shifts and deliberate LAAF centralization turned the town into both a secure node and a flexible staging ground. With Chad's eastern corridors de-emphasized and the Tibesti flows fractured, alternative supply lines had all but degraded, leaving behind a streamlined, highly securitized logistics architecture with Kufra at its epicentre.

# Forward-looking impacts of Sudan’s war

This report has mapped how Sudan’s war has reshaped arms trafficking and mercenary economies across Libya, Chad and their borderlands. The evidence shows that arms and manpower flows cannot be treated as parallel phenomena: they have become mutually reinforcing, embedded in logistical infrastructures that will likely outlive the frontlines that generated them. What began as fragmented routes and ad hoc exchanges have consolidated into collateral circuits – networks in which weapons and fighters circulate together, sustaining conflict and driving proliferation.

Crucially, mercenary actors are no longer peripheral to this arms trafficking infrastructure. They increasingly function as key brokers: escorting convoys, managing access to depots, negotiating informal clearance at checkpoints and, in some cases, diverting stock onwards to other militias and traffickers. Their role is structural, not incidental. The war in Sudan intensified this process, accelerating the integration of mercenary labour into arms circulation and rewiring the geography of trafficking across the Sahel. While state and quasi-state actors orchestrated many of the corridors mapped in this report, mercenary groups were often critical to their operationalization or collapse: providing escorts, managing toll points or embedding in mining areas that underpinned arms flows. Their role was less about battlefield deployment and more about enabling or disrupting logistics.

These dynamics will not disappear if a ceasefire or even a power-sharing deal is brokered in Sudan. Once corridors consolidate, they rarely completely dissolve; instead, they are disrupted or repurposed. Even if volumes of materiel decline, the networks of trusted brokers, escorts and facilitators will persist, extracting rents and reorienting flows toward new markets. The collateral circuits described in this report are therefore best understood not as wartime anomalies, but as infrastructures of insecurity that will endure long after the Darfur battlelines shift.

From a proliferation perspective, the outward diffusion of Sudanese materiel has added incrementally to already large stockpiles in Libya and Chad. Though both countries were already awash with arms, these additional flows nonetheless contribute to a steady rise in the baseline of firepower. This environment also undermines demobilization: fighters can disengage one week only to rearm the next, drawing on the same trafficking–mercenary circuits that sustain their livelihoods. These markets have proved highly adaptive. When wages dry up, combatants resell their weapons; when ammunition is scarce, brokers resort to barter or short-term rentals; when convoys are intercepted, satellite internet and other technologies are folded into the logistics chain to preserve coordination. The result is not a single, linear 'spillover war', but a patchwork of localized monopolies of violence, financed by arms rents and mercenary labour.

Mercenary mobilization will remain elastic, but its direction will be determined above all by politico-military developments in Sudan. Shifts in Darfur's frontlines, the control of cross-border crossings, airstrips and airbases, and even the emergence of a political process in Sudan will set the parameters for where fighters move, which corridors open or close, and how arms are embedded in circulation. Community anchors reinforce this elasticity by providing durable networks of trust and mobility that persist even when formal alliances shift. The transnational ties of mercenaries will allow both fighters and brokers to adjust rapidly to changing circumstances in Sudan, ensuring that when frontlines move or new opportunities arise, both recruitment and supply routes can be reoriented with ease.

Crucially, the current moment is perhaps deceptive. The intensity of fighting in Sudan has created a gravitational pull that channels weapons, ammunition and armed labour inwards, concentrating flows toward Darfur and Kordofan rather than dispersing them. This dynamic explains why, despite relatively steady outward leakage of weapons into Libya and Chad, markets there have not yet experienced outright saturation. Ammunition, particularly the calibres most relevant to Sudan's battlefields, continues to move steadily towards the RSF, while heavier and more sophisticated weapon systems are only diverted outwards occasionally, and to specific buyers. Mercenaries, too, have concentrated around Sudan's borders, acting as convoy escorts or logistical brokers because that is where wages and materiel are accessible.

Paradoxically, this wartime demand acts as a temporary containment mechanism on wider proliferation and leakage. The very fact that the RSF continues to consume vast volumes of ammunition, and to employ foreign fighters at scale, has limited the extent to which these supplies spill unchecked into peripheral markets. What appears today as manageable may therefore be masking a far larger stockpile effect: warehouses, caches and networks that will not dissolve with the conflict's de-escalation.

From a transnational organized crime perspective, this most dangerous phase is yet to come. When the Sudanese battlefield eventually contracts – whether through exhaustion, military stalemate or an externally brokered settlement – the same logistical infrastructure will remain in place, but the pull factor that currently absorbs weapons and fighters will weaken. At that point, three outcomes, though not mutually exclusive, become plausible:

- Rapid overspill: As demand from the RSF diminishes, surplus materiel is dumped into border markets, driving down unit prices and dramatically lowering barriers to armament for criminal groups, bandits and local militias.
- Mercenary re-pivoting: Foreign fighters, no longer tied to Sudanese patrons or funders, shift back to other cross-border economies, including gold mining, convoy racketeering and organized banditry. Their established role as escorts and brokers means they can quickly redeploy their services to whoever can pay – from traffickers to regional militia groups – creating a volatile and destabilizing supply of 'armed labour'.

- Hybrid criminal governance: Tribal gatekeepers and mercenary commanders consolidate their role as de facto regulators of trade. By controlling depots, checkpoints and convoy protection, they entrench themselves as indispensable intermediaries between state authorities and illicit economies, embedding trafficking rents into local governance structures in the borderlands.

The risk, then, is not necessarily a single, large-scale 'spillover war' radiating out of Sudan. Rather, it is the progressive criminalization of border economies, where multiple small-scale monopolies of violence proliferate. Each draw on saturated stocks of Sudanese-origin arms and repurposed mercenary labour risks feeding into drug smuggling, migration rackets and local conflicts. This slow diffusion is harder to detect, but ultimately more corrosive to governance: it locks border regions into cycles of predation, raises the cost of policing and reform, and undermines the viability of regional stabilization initiatives.

Regional instruments already exist to support a more deliberate response. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) Kinshasa Convention,[148] the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the African Union's security sector reform framework and DDR guidance all provide structures that Chad and Libya can draw on without inventing new institutions.[149] What matters is translating these standards into practice at the border level through dedicated ministerial focal teams – small, technical units within the interior, defence or justice ministries – and through discreet community-level stabilization and development initiatives in areas affected by illicit flows. By supporting locally driven livelihood and development projects, these mechanisms can strengthen municipal authorities and community leaders in the borderlands, creating practical incentives to prioritize stability and reduce dependence on revenues generated by conflict-linked economies.

## Recommendations

To mitigate the risks posed by the circulation of weapons and mercenaries across the Libya–Chad–Sudan borderlands, and to reduce the long-term destabilization of the wider Sahel region, the following actions are recommended:

- **Account for mercenaries in disarmament planning:** Disarmament or ceasefire frameworks that treat mercenaries as peripheral actors will fail to address the reality of how weapons and manpower circulate together. Fighters who move between Libya, Chad and Sudan should be treated as a distinct caseload in DDR efforts, and accounted for in broader security sector reform processes.
- **Drain surplus weapons from local markets:** Targeted collection or buy-back programmes in key arms trafficking hubs could reduce the saturation of arms before they embed more deeply in criminal and conflict economies. These initiatives should be accompanied by mobile marking and destruction teams, drawing on methodologies refined by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, Small Arms Survey and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, to ensure that collected materiel is permanently removed from circulation rather than recycled into resale.
- **Use sanctions to disrupt brokerage networks:** Mercenary leaders, convoy organizers and cross-border brokers are pivotal to sustaining both arms flows and manpower mobilization, yet the logistical and financial intermediaries that enable them often remain untouched by existing sanctions. The UN, EU, African Union or national sanctions authorities should therefore consistently apply measures against the shell companies, aviation operators, shipping agents and fuel suppliers that underpin these networks. Tracing beneficial ownership and financial flows through regional financial intelligence

units can help expose intermediaries that convert embargo violations into commercial gain. Pairing such enforcement with documentation and public disclosure of brokerage patterns would raise the costs of facilitation, reinforce local arms-control efforts and create meaningful deterrent effects across the supply chain.

- **Integrate sanctions implementation with embargo monitoring and DDR efforts:** Panels of Experts and peace operations already monitor embargo compliance, but their findings rarely translate into actual designations or coordinated enforcement. Regular follow-ups and exchanges between sanctions committees and authorities, DDR planners and field missions would ensure that embargo reporting further informs sanctions decisions and that evidence gathered on convoy routes, aviation links and financial conduits supports arms-control and demobilization efforts in the region.
- **Tie arms control to a Sudanese political settlement:** Any eventual political settlement in Sudan must be designed with regional proliferation risks in mind. Ceasefire clauses and disarmament provisions will be ineffective if they assume that weapons or mercenaries will remain confined within Sudan's borders. Integrating arms management, mercenary demobilization and cross-border monitoring into a peace framework would ensure that agreements address not only the immediate conflict but also the collateral circuits sustaining instability in Chad and Libya.
- **Disrupt logistical economies rather than borders:** Efforts to close borders wholesale have proven both unenforceable and counterproductive, often cutting off legitimate trade. A more effective strategy is to raise the operating costs of resupply convoys by focusing on the logistical systems that sustain them. This could include regulating bulk fuel storage in areas close to known staging points and introducing risk-based checks that make trafficking more costly, reputationally damaging and less predictable. These measures disrupt the facilitation networks that mercenary groups rely on, while minimizing the impact on borderland communities who depend on licit trade.

The forward picture is clear: weapons and mercenaries will drive proliferation from Sudan, reshaping regional economies and social contracts long after the immediate war recedes. The question for policymakers is not whether these flows can be stopped, but whether they can be slowed, managed and channelled in ways that prevent them from destabilizing the region even further.

# Notes

1 See Amesty International, New weapons fuelling the conflict in Sudan, July 2024, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2024/07/new-weapons-fuelling-the-sudan-conflict/.

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3 UN Working Group on Mercenaries, Role of mercenaries, mercenary-related actors and private military and security companies in the trafficking and proliferation of arms, UN Human Rights Council, September 2024, https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/57/45.

4 UN Panel of Experts reports of 2023, 2024 and 2025 on Libya and Sudan.

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7 FACT is a Gorane-led movement founded in southern Libya in 2016 that became one of the most militarily active Chadian rebel groups. Its fighters played roles both in Libya's conflicts and in the 2021 incursion that killed President Idriss Déby. The UFDD-F is an Anakaza-dominated splinter of Mahamat Nouri's UFDD, rooted in earlier Chadian–Sudanese proxy wars. The CCMSR, formed in 2016, draws mainly from Kreda Gorane and Arab communities in northern Chad, and has operated from bases in southern Libya and the Tibesti region. The Gorane (also known as Daza) are a branch of the larger Tebu ethnolinguistic family inhabiting northern Chad, southern Libya and parts of Niger. Within the Gorane, the Anakaza are one of the principal sub-clans, traditionally based around Faya-Largeau and the Borkou region, while the Kreda (or Kreda Gorane) constitute another major subgroup concentrated in Kanem and the Tibesti. Both have historically supplied commanders and fighters to Chadian rebel movements, often alongside Arab communities from northern Chad who share commercial and kinship ties across Libya and Sudan. For more information, see Jérôme Tubiana and Claudio Gramizzi, Tubu trouble: State and statelessness in the Chad–Sudan–Libya triangle, Small Arms Survey, July 2017, https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/tubu-trouble-state-and-statelessness-chad-sudan-libya-triangle-hsba-working-paper-43.

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12 UN Security Council, UN Secretary General report on Libya, January 2022, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2022/31.

13 Sarah Vernhes, Libya: A new power struggle is taking shape in Sebha, *The Africa Report*, December 2021, https://www.theafricareport.com/158880/libya-a-new-power-struggle-is-taking-shape-in-sebha/.

14 To avoid alienating the Awlad Suleiman, Tariq Bin Ziyad maintained close coordination with Hassan al-Zadma, commander of the 128th Brigade and another member of the Awlad Suleiman tribe. Al-Zadma's empowerment provided a political buffer for the LAAF after Jeddi's ouster, placating the influential tribe in Sebha.

15 Tim Eaton, Stability at what cost? Smuggling-driven development in the Libyan city of Kufra, Chatham House, February 2023, https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/02/stability-what-cost-smuggling-driven-development-libyan-city-kufra.

16 The Tebu (also spelled Toubou or Tibbu) are commonly divided into sub-clans or lineages, some of which are regionally differentiated and have distinct political orientations or historical ties. The Gorane are primarily located in central and northern Chad, historically tied to desert trade circuits and cross-border mobility into Libya, while the Kreda are more settled in Sahelian zones further south. Because of their positioning and networks, Gorane communities were comparatively better placed to cooperate with RSF elements operating through Libya, making their collaboration with Tebu intermediaries in Rebiana more likely.

17 Rupert Horsley and Jessica Gerken, Libya: Stability fuels rebound in human smuggling, GI-TOC, July 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Human-smuggling-and-trafficking-ecosystems-LIBYA.pdf.

18 The 'stabilization push' refers to Khartoum's 2015–2018 effort to consolidate control over Darfur and its borderlands. The Bashir regime formalized the RSF under NISS authority, tasked them with counterinsurgency and border policing, and coordinated with local militias to restrict rebel infiltration from Libya and Chad. While framed as stabilization, the campaign relied on hybrid arrangements that blurred state authority with militia and commercial actors. See Jérôme Tubiana, Remote-control breakdown: Sudanese paramilitary forces and pro-government militias, Small Arms Survey, April 2017, https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/remote-control-breakdown-sudanese-paramilitary-forces-and-pro-government-militias-hsba.

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23 France 24, Air strike on south Libyan town kills more than 40, August 2019, https://www.france24.com/en/20190805-air-strike-libya-haftar.

24 Hassane Koné, Arms trafficking from Libya to Niger is back in business, ISS Africa, July 2022, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/arms-trafficking-from-libya-to-niger-is-back-in-business.

25 The LAAF's progressive shedding of Sudanese auxiliaries between 2020 and 2023/2024 was a decisive backdrop to the RSF's recruitment strategies. After the Tripoli war, Haftar's forces had hosted an estimated 15 000 Sudanese fighters from Darfuri movements under the 128th Brigade and other units. As LAAF finances contracted and Saddam Haftar consolidated control, cash payments to these groups were suspended and gradually replaced with in-kind fuel allocations. By 2022–23, even these diminished, as LAAF units sought to monopolize smuggling profits. Many Sudanese fighters consequently demobilized, redeployed to goldfields in the Tibesti/Kouri Bougoudi belt, or re-entered Sudanese factions. This attrition eroded the LAAF's mercenary wing in southern Libya and helps explain why, when the Sudan war erupted, Darfuri auxiliaries flowed back to Darfur. It also provided the backdrop for the LAAF's cultivation of an almost exclusive affiliation with the RSF, and for its ability to sustain that affiliation and supply lines inside Libya.

26 Reuters, East Libyan forces and Chadian rebels clash in southern Libya, September 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/east-libyan-forces-chadian-rebels-clash-southern-libya-2021-09-15/.

27 The term 'Toroboro' appears to derive from the name 'Tora Bora', referencing the Afghan mountain caves where Osama bin Laden survived US bombardment. During the Darfur war in 2003–2004, Sudanese government forces used the term for Darfuri rebels who, like the Taliban at Tora Bora, sheltered in mountain terrain under aerial bombardment. The nickname was later adopted by rebels themselves, especially Sudanese Liberation Army fighters, and over time spread into Chad, where it became a catch-all label for Darfurian fighters irrespective of faction. In common usage, 'Toroboro' has since evolved into a broad designation for Darfur-linked armed groups and auxiliaries operating across Sudan, Chad and Libya, particularly (but not exclusively) of Zaghawa origin. While lacking a unified command, they are valued for their mobility, familiarity with desert terrain, and provision of armed escort services for convoys trafficking arms, fuel or gold. Since 2020, Toroboro elements have intermittently collaborated with Darfuri armed groups and RSF-linked brokers, serving as freelance facilitators in transborder smuggling and logistics networks. For background, see Jérôme Tubiana, The Chad–Sudan proxy war and the 'Darfurization' of Chad: Myths and reality, Small Arms Survey, April 2008, https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/HSBA-WP-12-Chad-Sudan-Proxy-War.pdf.

28 The Zaghawa are a transnational ethnic group inhabiting eastern Chad, western Sudan (particularly North Darfur) and parts of Libya. They have historically played prominent roles in politics, commerce and armed movements across the Chad–Sudan borderlands. In Chad, many Zaghawa elites have been closely tied to the Déby regime and state security structures (including President Mahamat Idriss Déby, who is himself of Zaghawa lineage though part Tebu Gorane maternally), while others have maintained involvement in opposition groups and cross-border trade. Zaghawa kinship networks straddle national boundaries, enabling them to act as key brokers in arms flows, commerce and migration.

29 The Juba Peace Agreement, signed in October 2020 between Sudan's transitional government and several armed movements – including factions of the Sudan Liberation Movement, Justice and Equality Movement and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North – triggered formal demobilization and security sector integration processes. While intended to stabilize Darfur and other peripheries, implementation delays and funding shortfalls left many ex-combatants without clear reintegration pathways. As a result, some demobilized fighters turned to arms trafficking and cross-border smuggling as alternative livelihoods.

30 Alice Fereday, Chad human smuggling picks up amid persisting instability and the Sudan conflict, GI-TOC, September 2024, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Alice-Fereday-Chad-Human-smuggling-picks-up-amid-persisting-instability-and-the-Sudan-conflict-GI-TOC-September-2024.pdf.

31 Ibid.

32 In the context of the Darfur conflict, Arab groups were generally aligned with the Sudanese government, including as part of or alongside the Janjaweed militias, which later evolved into the RSF. The Tama, on the other hand, have historically been more aligned with non-Arab rebel movements opposed to the Sudanese government, such as the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudan Liberation Movement factions.

33 Mohammed Yusuf, Over 100 gold miners killed in clashes, says Chad government, VOA News, May 2022, https://www.voanews.com/a/around-100-dead-in-clashes-between-chad-gold-miners-/6595299.html.

34 Josef Skrdlik, Chad: Disarmament ordered after deadly clashes among illegal miners, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, June 2022, https://www.occrp.org/en/news/chad-disarmament-ordered-after-deadly-clashes-among-illegal-miners.

35 Alwihda Info, *Tchad : la SONEMIC annonce la reprise de l'orpaillage à Kouri Bougoudi*, 19 September 2022, https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Tchad-la-SONEMIC-annonce-la-reprise-de-l-orpaillage-a-Kouri-Bougoudi_a117165.html.

36 Confidential documents alleged to be from Chad's Ministry of Mines obtained and published by TchadOne in August 2025 highlight the scale of such 'co-opted flows'. They show that 138 companies operated across 327 mining sites nationwide – 324 in gold, two in antimony, and one diamond exploration permit in Logone Oriental – with clandestine platinum extraction also confirmed. Much of this activity is controlled by networks linked to President Mahamat Déby through the state mining company SONEMIC and allied firms, such as GEMIA Mineral and GLGLI SARL, which channel production from the Tibesti and Batha into international markets in Türkiye and China. See: https://x.com/TchadOne/status/1836699493128876432.

37 UN Working Group on Mercenaries, Role of mercenaries, mercenary-related actors and private military and security companies in the trafficking and proliferation of arms, UN Human Rights Council, September 2024, https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/57/45.

38 This study set out to examine all documented and alleged arms flows through Libya, Chad and Sudan. While multiple sources corroborated supply lines benefiting the RSF through Libya and eastern Chad, no comparable evidence was found of sustained large-scale arms pipelines supporting the SAF through Libyan or Chadian territory, aside from the mobilization of Darfurian rebel groups

based in Libya or eastern Chad that aligned with the SAF in late 2023 and throughout 2024. These groups, which primarily mobilized under the Joint Forces for Armed Struggle Movements (JFASM), appear to have operated with their own weapon stocks rather than through external supply chains. Further research is needed to establish the scope, evolution and external enablers of SAF-linked supply channels that have emerged or may emerge over time.

39 As UN Panel of Experts reporting and open-source investigations had already shown since at least 2016, eastern Libya was a regular destination for Emirati flights and a hub for the delivery of materiel to Haftar's forces, in contravention of the UN arms embargo on Libya.

40 Alwasat, Kufra Airport resumes flight activity, November 2022, https://alwasat.ly/news/libya/379160.

41 UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts on Libya – 2023, 2023, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2023/673; Alaraby, Libyan Sources: Haftar transfers military equipment to Kufra near the border with Sudan, April 2023, https://bit.ly/48q45G1.

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43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

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47 UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts on Sudan – 2024, 2024, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/65.

48 Qantara, UN Special Envoy Volker Perthes on Sudan: 'We must make sure this war does not drag on', November 2023, https://qantara.de/en/article/un-special-envoy-volker-perthes-sudan-we-must-make-sure-war-does-not-drag.

49 Wolfram Lacher, A most irregular army – The rise of Khalifa Haftar's Libyan Arab Armed Forces, SWP Berlin, November 2020, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/arbeitspapiere/2020WP02_FG06_lac.pdf.

50 The Awlad Suleiman are an Arab tribal group present across southern Libya, northern Chad and eastern Niger. In Niger, communities identifying as Awlad Suleiman are concentrated around the Diffa and Zinder regions, and maintain long-standing kinship, trade and smuggling ties with their Libyan counterparts. Former Nigerien President Mohamed Bazoum also traces his lineage to the Awlad Suleiman, underscoring the tribe's transnational reach and political prominence across the central Sahara. For more on the Awlad Suleiman's transnational and political roles, see Jérôme Tubiana, Lost in trans-nation, Tubu and other armed groups and smugglers along Libya's southern border, Small Arms Survey, December 2018, https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-SANA-Report-Lost-in-Trans-nation.pdf.

51 UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts on Libya – 2023, 2023, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2023/673.

52 UN Security Council, Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Libya – 2021, 2021, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2021/229 and UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts on Sudan –2024, 2024, https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/005/64/pdf/n2400564.pdf.

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54 IntelBrief, Libyan warlord exploits Sudan crisis, The Soufan Center, May 2023, https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2023-may-23/; interview with Wolfram Lacher, *«En Libye, les milices sont l'État»*, 2025, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/medienbeitraege/072-077_LACHER_MO65.pdf.

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59 Ibid.

60 This steady outflow also marked a notable contraction in the presence of rebel fighters in southern Libya, as mobilization towards Sudan depleted the manpower base of groups like FACT and CCMSR within Libya.

61 UN Security Council, Final report of the Panel of Experts on Sudan – 2024, 2024, https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/65.

62 Declan Walsh, Christopher Koettl and Eric Schmitt, Talking peace in Sudan, the UAE secretly fuels the fight, *The New York Times*, 29 September 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/29/world/africa/sudan-war-united-arab-emirates-chad.html.

63 Declan Walsh and Christoph Koettl, How a US ally uses aid as a cover in war, *The New York Times*, September 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/21/world/africa/uae-sudan-civil-war.html.

64 Reade Levinson and David Lewis, Dozens of UAE flights head to airstrip UN says supplies arms to Sudan rebels, Reuters, September 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/uae-flights-flood-airstrip-un-says-supplies-weapons-sudan-rebels-2024-12-12/.

65 Zurq/Zurug/Zuruq/Zuruk (often pronounced Zūrūq) is a common toponym in Darfur and is also used as an ethnic reference for non-Arab African Darfuris. A key locality in the Sudan war, al-Zuruk lies in Northern Darfur, east of Bir Mirgui. Often referred to as Zuruk, it serves as an important waypoint for fuel smuggling and intermittent arms trafficking through Chad and Libya, and hosts a military base that changed hands during the conflict. The SAF captured the facility in January 2025 and the RSF regained it by mid-year. Zuruk is widely reported to be Hemedti's birthplace. Um al-Qura, Hemedti's hometown, lies in South Darfur, closer to the Central African Republic borderlands. It also functions as a waypoint for arms trafficking routed through Chad into southern Darfur and is in the broader area in which Hemedti is believed to have grown up. He spent much of his youth as a mobile camel herder, further blurring efforts to identify a single, fixed point of origin, but he is believed to have spent his childhood around Um al-Qura, Yara and Nyala.

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69 Eliott Brachet, 'What has happened is genocide': Massacres in the Sudanese city of El Geneina, *Le Monde*, January 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2024/01/29/what-has-happened-is-genocide-massacres-in-the-sudanese-city-of-el-geneina_6476140_124.html.

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73 Ibid.

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75 Ma'aten al-Sarah is a Gaddafi-era desert airbase/oasis complex in Libya's south-east (Kufra district), long positioned as the main southern Libyan military airbase (with several runways and large dispersal aprons). In the Libya–Chad Toyota War, Chadian forces conducted a surprise raid on the base on 5 September 1987, a decisive action that crippled Libyan airpower in the south and helped precipitate the ceasefire days later. It fell into disuse afterwards until it regained centrality in the aftermath of Sudan's 2023 civil war.

76 Alongside weapons, a significant proportion of transfers to the RSF consisted of vehicles – particularly four-wheel-drive vehicles – which the RSF consumed at a rapid pace. These were as strategically important as small arms or ammunition, given the RSF's reliance on mobility across different frontlines in Sudan.

77 Andrew McGregor, Russia increasing military presence in Africa by reviving desert airbase in the Libyan Sahara, The Jamestown Foundation, April 2025, https://jamestown.org/program/russia-increasing-military-presence-in-africa-by-reviving-desert-airbase-in-the-libyan-sahara/.

78 Remote interview with EU diplomat, December 2024; interview with senior US defense official, Washington DC, US, October 2024; interview with UK diplomat, London, UK, December 2024; remote interview with Kufra resident, November 2024; remote interview with senior Libyan defence official, December 2024.

79 Communication with Chadian expert on illicit economies, June 2025; interview with truck driver formerly operating under Habré's network, June 2025; interview with Tebu commander in south-eastern Libya, June 2025.

80 Interview with Chadian expert on illicit economies, February 2025; Saleh Abdelkerim Habré: *La chute de l'homme de Salvadorre*, Le N'Djam Post, February 2025, https://lendjampost.com/saleh-abdelkerim-habre-la-chute-de-lhomme-de-salvadorre/; communication with Chadian expert on illicit economies, June 2025; interview with truck driver formerly operating with Habré, June 2025.

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86 Remote interview with arms trafficker in northern Chad, June 2025; interview with truck driver formerly operating as part of Saleh Habré's network, June 2025.
87 Communication with Chadian expert on illicit economies, June 2025.
88 Communication with contacts in Kufra, April 2025; remote interview with arms trafficker in northern Chad, June 2025; interview with truck driver formerly operating as part of Saleh Habré's network, June 2025.
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90 Jedo Musa, SRAC splinter under al-Dor joins the RSF, April 2024, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vME8BDG_Z8g.
91 *Sudan Tribune*, Sources: Clashes between Darfurian factions on Libyan soil, June 2024, https://sudantribune.net/article287292/.
92 Salah Ahmed, Facebook, 21 August 2024, https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1G9Ly58DZs/.
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95 Communication with Chadian expert on arms trafficking, June 2025.
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97 Communication with Chadian expert on arms trafficking, April 2025; interview with truck driver formerly operating as part of Saleh Habré's network, June 2025.
98 Communication with former Chadian arms trafficker, June 2025; interview with Chadian arms trafficker, June 2025; interview with truck driver formerly operating as part of Saleh Habré's network, June 2025.
99 Communications with contacts in Ubari and Ghat, April 2025; communication with contacts in Ubari, April 2025.
100 The MSA emerged in 2016 as a splinter from the Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad, the main Tuareg separatist movement that had spearheaded the 2012 rebellion in northern Mali. The MSA drew much of its support from Tuareg subgroups such as the Chamanamas and Dahoussak. In 2019, it joined the Plateforme coalition, which itself merged into the broader Cadre Stratégique Permanent in 2021. As a distinct organization, the MSA has effectively ceased to exist, with most of its remaining combatants absorbed into other armed entities. Nevertheless, the label 'MSA' continues to surface in field reporting, often used as shorthand for the network of its chairman and co-founder, Moussa Ag Acharatoumane. His enduring role in cross-border Dahoussak networks helps explain why the MSA name retains currency, particularly in relation to smuggling operations moving through Libya and across the Salvador Pass towards Niger and Mali.
101 Communications with contacts in Ubari, April 2025.
102 Ibid.
103 Interview with Tebu military commander, June 2025.
104 Ibid.
105 More broadly, the split mirrored internal divisions within Haftar's military leadership. Some officers closer to the UAE saw the RSF as a valuable strategic partner. Others, aligned with Egypt, grew increasingly wary of Libya's entanglement in a war Cairo strongly opposed. These disagreements were sharpened by concerns over al-Zadma's expanding autonomy. By late 2024, his wealth, tribal networks and cross-border influence – underpinned by Emirati backing – made him appear less a subordinate than a potential challenger to the Haftar family's control.
106 Communications with Libyan contact in Sebha monitoring illicit economies, April 2025; interview with Chadian arms trafficker operating between east and north Chad, April 2025.
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