

Civilian Killings Rise in South Sudan

A hospital bombing in South Sudan killed at least seven people and injured 20 on Saturday, raising fears of a return to civil war as the country's military, led by President Salva Kiir, clashes with forces loyal to First Vice President Riek Machar.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan said on Tuesday that the bombing was a "deliberate" attack that could amount to a war crime. No one has claimed responsibility for the strike, which led to "significant damage" to the only hospital in the area, Doctors Without Borders said in a statement.

The attack took place in Old Fangak, a town in the northeastern Greater Upper Nile region—a key hot spot in the recent political infighting. A 2018 power-sharing arrangement between the two leaders, which ended South Sudan's five-year civil war, broke down in March, when Kiir's government arrested Machar on charges of attempting to stir a rebellion.

Kiir accuses Machar's party, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-In Opposition (SPLM-IO), and its military wing of colluding with the White Army, an armed youth group that Kiir's army has been fighting since February in Upper Nile state, which borders Sudan.

"The regime in Juba is increasingly unstable—threatening the president's grip on power and prompting attempts to restore control," Clémence Pinaud wrote in *Foreign Policy* in April.

There are fears that South Sudan's conflict is merging with the two-year civil war in Sudan, from which the former gained independence in 2011. In February, Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) formed a rival Sudanese government with the SPLM-North—an offshoot of Kiir's party, the SPLM, which spearheaded South Sudan's independence push.

Sudan's army, which believes that Kiir is quietly backing the new RSF alliance, has reportedly reignited its historical ties to militias in the Upper Nile.

On April 30, the U.N. Security Council extended the mandate for the U.N. Mission in South Sudan by just nine days to give it more time to assess the escalating conflict. Last month, the United States withdrew its military personnel from the U.N. mission—a move that critics warned sent a "dangerous message."

The decision came a day after the Trump administration revoked visas for all South Sudanese nationals in response to Juba's refusal to accept a Congolese man deported from the United States. South Sudan later agreed to receive the man "in the spirit of friendly relations," but the United States has yet to reverse its decision.

Amid the violence, the World Food Program has warned that South Sudan is at a "critical tipping point" as nearly 7.7 million people—more than half the country's population—face hunger as fighting has displaced more than 100,000 people and disrupted food deliveries.