



CrisisWatch

January 2024 Alerts & December 2023 Trends

Our monthly conflict tracker highlights **five conflict risks** and **one resolution opportunity** in January.

- The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces captured Wad Madani city in its first major offensive in the east, raising fears the group could try and conquer all of **Sudan** by force, with destabilising effects for the region (see this month's Conflict in Focus).
- **Israel's** relentless attacks on Gaza – which have killed more than 23,000 people in three months – continue in the territory's south, leaving the vast majority of the 2.3 million inhabitants struggling to survive amid food insecurity and diseases.
- Meanwhile, hostilities between Israel and Hizbollah continued to expand, underscoring the risk of a wider conflagration engulfing **Lebanon** and the region.
- Following a months-long government crackdown on the opposition, initial election results indicated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won her fifth term in **Bangladesh**; disputed polls could fuel further protests and violence in the coming weeks.
- Political volatility remained high in **Guatemala** amid relentless attempts to discredit election winner Bernardo Arévalo, who is due to take office on 14 January. The president-

elect's ability to assume office will be a test case for the country's stability.

CrisisWatch identified **nine deteriorations** in December. Notably:

- Tensions escalated in the Red Sea as the U.S. took its first military action in response to threats by **Yemen's** Houthis against commercial shipping, killing ten Houthi militants attempting to board a vessel.
- Security forces in **Jordan** resisted cross-border armed raids by smugglers and militants from Syria, as the military reportedly launched retaliatory airstrikes.
- Opposition candidates in **DR Congo** rejected presidential election results giving victory to President Tshisekedi. The former election commission chief launched a political-military alliance with M23 rebels, vowing to oust Tshisekedi.
- In **Guinea-Bissau**, fighting broke out between security forces units aligned with rival political factions. President Embaló described the incident as an attempted coup.
- Cross-strait tensions heightened ahead of **Taiwan's** tight January election planned for 13 January, as China maintained its military activity around the island and described reunification as an "inevitability".

TRENDS IN DECEMBER



Deteriorated Situations

Guinea-Bissau, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan, Taiwan Strait, Sudan, Israel/Palestine, Jordan, Yemen



Improved Situations

Türkiye, Somalia

ALERTS FOR JANUARY



Conflict Risk Alerts

Guatemala, Bangladesh, Sudan, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon



Resolution Opportunities

Guatemala

CrisisWatch also assessed **two improved situations** in December. In **Somalia**, Puntland President Said Deni agreed to revert to the clan-based voting system, reducing the prospect of conflict between the government and opposition-aligned forces. **Türkiye's** President Erdoğan visited Greece and signed numerous agreements with Greek Prime Minister

Kyriakos Mitsotakis, marking a significant improvement in bilateral ties.

Aside from the scores of conflict situations we regularly assess, we tracked significant developments in **Guyana, Madagascar, Nile Waters, Senegal** and **Sierra Leone**.

Conflict in Focus

SUDAN

DECEMBER 2023/JANUARY 2024

What happened in December? The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) continued to make major military gains. After having captured most of the west, including Darfur's major cities as well as much of the capital Khartoum and its surrounding areas, the RSF launched fresh offensives south east of the capital. It quickly captured El Gezira's capital Wad Medani almost without a fight, dealing a blow to the Sudanese army's morale.

Why does it matter? The fighting between the army and the RSF since April 2023 has left thousands dead, displaced millions more and brought Sudan to the brink of collapse. As the spectre of mass killing again haunts the western region of Darfur and the RSF pushes east, the war threatens to engulf the whole country, with devastating effects.

What to watch in the coming weeks and months? Absent a political settlement to stabilise the situation, Sudan risks plunging into a fragmented free for all with only the thinnest veneer of governance and rival militias and warlords of various stripes proliferating.

Disintegration of the country's security forces could also spell even more arms spilling out into a region already awash in guns.

This in turn could radiate instability into the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, North Africa and the Red Sea basin, while pushing migrants into over-taxed neighbouring states and on perilous journeys further afield.

What should be done? The situation requires a major, coordinated, high-level diplomatic effort involving those outside powers that wield the greatest influence in the region.

Making inroads with the parties will be a very tall order. Still, with the army on the backfoot, and the RSF both struggling to consolidate control over its conquests and risking greater international censure should it keep advancing, both sides could have some reason to halt the fighting.

Stepped-up senior-level diplomacy by the United States in concert with regional powers offers the best prospect for halting Sudan's nightmarish downward spiral.