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Audience: Members of the European Parliament | EEAS | EU Policy Advisors on Sudan

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# The Defection of RSF Brigadier General Al-Nour Ahmed Adam (Al-Qoba) to the Sudanese Armed Forces: Accountability Risks, Reprisal Patterns, and the Urgent Need for an EU Special Envoy for Sudan

## Executive Summary

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On 19 April 2026, Brigadier General Al-Nour Ahmed Adam known as 'Al-Qoba' (القبة) arrived in Dongola, Northern State, completing a dramatic ten-day desert escape from RSF-controlled North Darfur. He was received by SAF Commander-in-Chief General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and granted a blanket amnesty under SAF's standing defector policy. He is the second senior RSF commander to cross to the SAF, following Abu Aqla Kaikal in October 2024.

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This briefing alerts EU policymakers to three interconnected and urgent risks:

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- The near-certain erasure of criminal accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity in which Al-Qoba bears command responsibility atrocities committed during and after the 18-month RSF siege of El Fasher, which the UN Fact-Finding Mission characterised in February 2026 as bearing the hallmarks of genocide.
- A predictable cycle of RSF collective punishment against Al-Qoba's tribal community already underway in Kutum, directly replicating the reprisal pattern following Abu Aqla Kaikal's defection in October 2024, when RSF attacks killed hundreds of civilians across al-Gezira State.
- A widening EU diplomatic vacuum: the European Parliament explicitly called for the appointment of a dedicated EU Special Envoy for Sudan in its resolution of 27 November 2025 (P10\_TA(2025)0310). Nearly five months later, that position remains vacant, as the world's worst humanitarian crisis intensifies.

This briefing recommends: (1) inclusion of Al-Nour Ahmed Adam in the next EU Sudan sanctions package; (2) urgent implementation of the EP's November 2025 call for a dedicated EU Special Envoy for Sudan; and (3) a clear EU policy position that SAF's blanket amnesty mechanism is incompatible with EU commitments on accountability for atrocity crimes.

## I. A War the World Is Not Watching

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### The Attention Deficit and Its Consequences

Sudan's civil war, entering its fourth year since April 2023, constitutes the world's worst active humanitarian catastrophe: over 25 million people face acute food insecurity; more than 12 million are internally displaced; tens of thousands were killed in Darfur alone in the months following October 2025. The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator described post-fall El Fasher as 'basically a crime scene.' The UN Fact-Finding Mission has documented acts meeting the material elements of genocide.

And yet Sudan remains largely absent from international headlines. Ongoing coverage of the Gaza conflict and Iran-related tensions continues to dominate EU foreign policy bandwidth

and global news cycles. This attention deficit is not incidental it is a condition that perpetuates the conflict. When warlords calculate that their actions will attract no international consequence, they act accordingly. The defection of Al-Qoba and the immediate immunity it has attracted is unfolding almost entirely out of the public eye. This briefing is, in part, an effort to correct that.

### **Kordofan: The Contested Corridor**

Since the fall of El Fasher completed RSF dominance over all five Darfur states, Kordofan has become the primary military battleground. The SAF has made significant advances: it broke the RSF's siege of al-Obeid in North Kordofan (February 2025), retook Kadugli and Dilling in South Kordofan, and recaptured Bara in March 2026. RSF forces retain scattered positions and continue to contest South Kordofan around Dalang, where renewed clashes erupted in March 2026.

UN Human Rights High Commissioner Volker Türk has explicitly warned that atrocity crimes mirroring El Fasher risk replication in Kordofan. RSF drone campaigns have targeted markets, hospitals, and the University of Kordofan in al-Obeid systematic civilian terror. Al-Qoba's expertise in RSF operations and tribal networks in Darfur makes him militarily valuable to the SAF as it plans further Kordofan advances. It also makes his accountability exposure acute.

### **Blue Nile: A Dangerous New Front**

Blue Nile State has become a critical and escalating theatre since January 2026. RSF forces aligned with SPLM-N al-Hilu have crossed from Ethiopia and South Sudan, opening a new front aimed at re-establishing RSF supply corridors toward central Sudan. The SAF recaptured the locality of Maqja on 20 April 2026. RSF drone campaigns displaced nearly 2,000 civilians in Kurmuk over three days. ACLED analysts assess the strategic aim is to reopen a gateway to central Sudan. The risk of regional spillover into Ethiopia and South Sudan is real and growing.

### **Darfur: Occupied, Under Siege, Beyond the Headlines**

The RSF now controls all five Darfur states. Since El Fasher's fall on 26 October 2025, the city has been described by UN personnel as 'a crime scene' and 'an open graveyard.' Satellite imagery confirmed mass graves. A communications blackout suppressed early reporting. The UN Fact-Finding Mission's February 2026 report found the RSF's campaign bore the defining characteristics of genocide coordinated, planned, and endorsed at senior leadership level. Over 100,000 people fled El Fasher after its fall; tens of thousands remain missing.

## **II. Who Is Al-Nour Ahmed Adam 'Al-Qoba'?**

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### **Founding Commander, RSF Peace Shield Force**

Al-Nour Ahmed Adam known as 'Al-Qoba,' from his home locality near Kutum in North Darfur is among the founding generation of the Rapid Support Forces. The RSF was formalised in 2013 from Janjaweed militias responsible for the Darfur genocide of 2003–2005, in which the UN estimates at least 180,000 people were killed. Al-Qoba rose through this institutional lineage to command the 'Peace Shield' (درع السلام) mobile force, established in January 2021 ostensibly to protect civilians in Darfur following the withdrawal of the UNAMID peacekeeping mission.

He belongs to the Mahameed clan the same tribe as powerful militia leader Musa Hilal, who played a significant role in facilitating his escape. This tribal network, and the intelligence and territorial knowledge it carries, is central to his military value to the SAF.

## **El Fasher: 18 Months of Siege, the Final Assault, and Command Responsibility**

Al-Qoba was one of the most prominent RSF field commanders throughout the 18-month siege of El Fasher. He commanded forces alongside Ali Yaqoub (killed in urban combat) and Gedo Abunshouk (a relative of RSF commander Hemedti), who was subsequently appointed military commander of North Darfur a promotion Al-Qoba bitterly contested, and which ultimately drove his defection.

### **The crimes committed in the El Fasher offensive and its aftermath in which Al-Qoba's forces participated include:**

- Systematic execution-style killings of Zaghawa and Fur civilians selected on ethnic identity, with RSF fighters explicitly stating intent to 'eliminate anything black from Darfur';
- Widespread, coordinated gang rape and sexual enslavement of non-Arab women and girls, deployed as a weapon of war with discriminatory and genocidal intent, per the UN FFM;
- Mass detention of civilians for ransom, with execution of those unable to pay; several thousand reportedly detained this way;
- Deliberate destruction of evidence: burning and mass burial of victims' bodies, confirmed by satellite imagery from Yale Humanitarian Research Lab;
- An 18-month siege deliberately denying food and humanitarian access to approximately 260,000 trapped civilians, creating conditions of famine and disease calculated to weaken the population prior to the final assault;
- Systematic looting and destruction of civilian infrastructure, homes, markets, hospitals, and places of worship.

**UN FFM, February 2026:** *"The scale, coordination, and public endorsement of the operation by senior RSF leadership demonstrate that the crimes committed in and around El-Fasher were not random excesses of war. They formed part of a planned and organized operation that bears the defining characteristics of genocide."*

### **Motivation: Personal Grievance, Not Principle**

Al-Qoba's defection was not ideologically motivated. After playing a central role in the capture of El Fasher on 26 October 2025, he expected appointment as military commander of North Darfur. The RSF leadership instead appointed Gedo Abunshouk a relative of Hemedti. Al-Qoba's forces were subsequently neglected and denied basic supplies for months. RSF field commander Ali Rizqallah confirmed in an audio recording that Al-Qoba had been left to beg supplies from junior officers connected to the RSF top command.

On 9 April 2026, the RSF dispatched a force from El Fasher specifically to arrest him. He fled with approximately 46 combat vehicles, escorted through the desert by SAF drones that destroyed RSF checkpoints along his route. He arrived in Dongola on 19 April, where he was personally received by General al-Burhan. Al-Qoba's defection is an act of self-preservation and ambition. It brings no accountability for the civilians killed under his command.

## **III. The Abu Aqla Kaikal Precedent A Warning We Must Heed**

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## **Kaikal: Amnesty as a Model and a Warning**

Abu Aqla Kaikal RSF commander and de facto governor of al-Gezira State defected to the SAF in October 2024. During his tenure in al-Gezira, he oversaw mass atrocities and the displacement of more than 500,000 people; his soldiers filmed and posted evidence of their crimes online. When he crossed to the SAF, al-Burhan welcomed him as a hero and confirmed a presidential amnesty. Kaikal has faced no criminal investigation, no sanction review, and no accountability process of any kind.

**TIMEP, May 2025:** *"Kaikal was the main RSF commander in Gezira State for over a year, overseeing mass atrocities and the displacement of more than 500,000 people, with his soldiers bragging about their crimes in videos they posted online. Yet, when Kaikal defected to the army... it seemed like all his sins were forgiven and he was given a hero's welcome. This episode laid bare both the RSF and SAF's blatant disregard for accountability, justice, and civilian protection."*

In February 2025, Human Rights Watch verified that forces under Kaikal's command killed at least 26 civilians in Taiba, Gezira State after his defection to the SAF. The SAF called it an 'individual transgression' and conducted no investigation. Al-Qoba has now been received with the same ceremony, the same amnesty, and will almost certainly follow the same trajectory.

## **The Reprisal Cycle: From al-Gezira to Kutum**

After Kaikal's defection in October 2024, the RSF launched a systematic campaign of collective punishment against his ethnic community, the Shukriya. Attacks were documented in at least 70 villages. At least 316 civilians were killed between 20 October and 8 November 2024. In al-Sireha alone, between 50 and 500 men were killed in a single assault; 200 were injured; 150 were abducted; widespread sexual violence was committed; an estimated 135,400 people were displaced. RSF fighters filmed captives and told them: 'Kaikal look, these are your people.'

The pattern is already repeating following Al-Qoba's departure. Within days of his exit from Kutum, RSF forces launched retaliatory operations against the Mahameed community arresting civilians, looting homes, and conducting punitive raids against those perceived as connected to the defector. This is RSF doctrine: defectors are punished through their tribes. Every defection-with-immunity that the SAF orchestrates creates a predictable wave of RSF collective punishment against civilians who had no role in the commander's decision to cross sides.

## **Post-Defection Crimes: The Risk of Escalating Violence Under SAF Cover**

There is a further, concrete risk that Al-Qoba seeking to prove his value to the SAF and settle scores with former RSF colleagues may escalate his own military conduct after his integration, committing further IHL violations in Kordofan or Darfur operations, now under SAF rather than RSF cover. The Kaikal precedent again illustrates this. The SAF's failure to investigate or sanction Kaikal's post-defection crimes in Taiba provides the template for what impunity looks like after the flag changes. Without accountability or conditionality, there is no mechanism to prevent recurrence.

## **IV. The Accountability Crisis**

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### **SAF's Amnesty Policy Functionally Shields War Criminals**

The SAF's blanket amnesty for defecting RSF commanders is framed as a military strategy to weaken the RSF. Whatever its tactical logic, the consequences for accountability are severe. Both Kaikal and Al-Qoba bear command responsibility for serious international crimes. Both have been absorbed into SAF structures without any screening, condition, or accountability process. Both were personally welcomed by General al-Burhan himself the subject of US Treasury sanctions for the SAF's own conduct in the war.

The international legal framework is clear. Command responsibility under the Rome Statute and customary international law means that senior commanders who knew or should have known of crimes by forces under their command, and failed to prevent or punish them, bear individual criminal liability. The SAF's domestic amnesty cannot extinguish this liability under international law. It can, however, create the conditions in which these commanders will never face justice in any domestic forum and in which political will for international accountability will erode as their operational integration deepens.

Sudan has a documented history of impunity-fuelled recurrence. The failure to hold perpetrators of the 2003–2005 Darfur genocide accountable enabled the actors now driving the current conflict. As the Tahrir Institute noted in May 2025: 'Fueled by such impunity, the atrocities committed during the current war are a continuation of Bashir's crimes.' The same cycle is turning again.

### **Al-Qoba Must Be in the Next Sanctions Package**

Al-Nour Ahmed Adam was not peripheral to the El Fasher campaign. He was among its principal field commanders. His co-commanders Gedo Abunshouk and Tijani Ibrahim Moussa ('Al Zeir Salem') were sanctioned by the US Treasury in February 2026 for their roles in the same operation. The US Treasury's designation of Gedo specifically identifies his tenure as RSF commander of North Darfur the same role Al-Qoba was denied, and which directly prompted his defection. Al-Qoba belongs in the same designation category.

His defection and the SAF amnesty do not extinguish his accountability exposure or his eligibility for EU designation. Designating him now before further operational integration preserves EU credibility on accountability, signals to other RSF commanders that the EU sanctions net follows the individual regardless of flag, and maintains leverage for future accountability processes.

## **V. The EU Diplomatic Gap and Parliament's Unanswered Call**

### **No Dedicated EU Focal Point Since August 2024**

Annette Weber served as EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa from July 2021 until her mandate expired in August 2024. During that period, she provided active EU diplomatic presence on Sudan. Since August 2024, no replacement has been appointed. The EU Delegation to Sudan, relocated to Cairo since the outbreak of war in April 2023, is headed by a chargé d'affaires. Sudan hosts the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with genocide documented on its territory, entering its fourth year of war and the EU has no senior diplomatic focal point with a dedicated Sudan mandate.

### **The European Parliament Called for an EU Special Envoy for Sudan in November 2025**

In its resolution of 27 November 2025 on the escalation of the war and the humanitarian catastrophe in Sudan (P10\_TA(2025)0310), the European Parliament adopted paragraph 28, which explicitly called for:

**EP Resolution P10\_TA(2025)0310, §28 27 November 2025:** *"deeper and sustained diplomatic engagement, notably through the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, Annette Weber, together with concrete accountability measures targeting both the perpetrators and their accomplices around the world; calls, in addition, for the appointment of an EU Special Envoy for Sudan, with a robust mandate to coordinate [EU diplomatic engagement]"*

That call was adopted nearly five months ago. The position has not been filled. In the intervening period: the UN Fact-Finding Mission published its genocide findings; the US Treasury sanctioned additional RSF commanders; two senior RSF warlords have been absorbed into the SAF with full immunity; RSF drone campaigns have intensified in Kordofan and Blue Nile; and the Al-Qoba defection has unfolded with zero EU engagement. The cost of the vacancy is visible in real time.

## **What a Sudan Special Envoy Must Be Empowered to Do**

**A dedicated EU Special Envoy for Sudan with a Sudan-specific rather than Horn of Africa mandate would be empowered to:**

- Engage the SAF directly on the accountability implications of its amnesty policy, and convey that the EU sanctions framework applies to commanders regardless of which side they are currently fighting on;
- Coordinate with the ICC Prosecutor's office and the UN Fact-Finding Mission to ensure that defection to the SAF does not functionally shield individuals from international accountability processes;
- Engage Sudanese civilian actors, women's organisations, and resistance committees the EU's most important long-term partners in any political settlement who have consistently demanded accountability;
- Participate in AU-led and regional mediation tracks to ensure the EU is present when peace frameworks are constructed and accountability provisions are negotiated;
- Monitor and escalate the RSF reprisal pattern now underway in Kutum and North Darfur, activating EU early warning mechanisms for potential mass atrocity situations.

The current structure a chargé d'affaires in Cairo and a lapsed Horn of Africa remit cannot perform these functions. The EP said so in November 2025. The case has only grown stronger.

## **VI. Recommendations**

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### **1. Designate Al-Nour Ahmed Adam in the Next EU Sudan Sanctions Package**

Al-Nour Ahmed Adam meets the designation criteria under the EU Sudan sanctions framework. He commanded RSF forces during the El Fasher siege and massacre acts the UN FFM characterised as genocide. His co-commanders have already been sanctioned by the US Treasury. We recommend that EU Member States and the EEAS initiate the formal designation process for Al-Nour Ahmed Adam as a matter of priority, coordinating with US Treasury and UK FCDO counterparts. Designation should proceed regardless of his current affiliation with the SAF.

### **2. Appoint a Dedicated EU Special Envoy for Sudan Implement the EP's November 2025 Call**

The European Parliament called for this appointment five months ago. It has not happened. The situation has deteriorated substantially since. The EU must honour its own Parliament's mandate. The Special Envoy should carry a dedicated Sudan mandate not a broader Horn of Africa remit. The mandate must include an explicit accountability component, authorising

engagement with ICC processes, the UN Fact-Finding Mission, and the EU's own sanctions authorities on individual accountability questions. The Envoy must have direct access to Sudanese civilian actors and be empowered to engage both warring parties and regional mediators.

### **3. Establish a Clear EU Policy Position on the SAF Amnesty Mechanism**

The EU should communicate directly to the SAF that blanket amnesty for defecting RSF commanders bearing command responsibility for atrocity crimes is incompatible with the EU's stated commitment to accountability in Sudan. EU support for any future political settlement and any future normalisation of relations should be conditioned on Sudan's cooperation with international accountability mechanisms, including the ICC. This position should be reflected in the next EU Council conclusions on Sudan and conveyed directly by HR/VP Kallas to General al-Burhan.

### **4. Monitor and Respond to RSF Reprisals in Kutum and North Darfur**

RSF retaliatory operations against the Mahameed community in Kutum have already begun. The EU Delegation and the forthcoming Special Envoy should treat this as an immediate civilian protection concern, escalating through UN humanitarian channels and activating EU early warning mechanisms for potential mass atrocity escalation in North Darfur.

### **5. Sustain and Expand the EU Sudan Sanctions Framework**

As the largest humanitarian donor to Sudan, the EU has leverage it has not yet fully deployed. The EU should push for an extension and strengthening of the UN Fact-Finding Mission's mandate, support the expansion of ICC jurisdiction beyond Darfur to cover the entire conflict, and ensure that successive EU sanctions packages comprehensively cover commanders on both sides bearing responsibility for atrocity crimes not only RSF commanders but also SAF-affiliated figures where evidence supports designation.

## **Conclusion**

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The defection of Al-Nour Ahmed Adam to the SAF is, on the surface, a military event. In substance, it is an accountability crisis and a test of whether the international community has learned anything from four years of documented atrocities in Sudan.

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Abu Aqla Kaikal was received as a hero. He committed further crimes after his defection. He walks free. Al-Qoba is now following the same path, received with the same ceremony, granted the same immunity. The victims of El Fasher the Zaghawa and Fur communities who survived eighteen months of siege and three days of genocidal violence are watching. So are the civilians of Kutum's Mahameed community, already facing RSF reprisals they did not choose and cannot escape.

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The European Parliament, in November 2025, called for deeper engagement and a dedicated Special Envoy. That call has not been answered. The ground developments in Kordofan, Darfur, and Blue Nile and the impunity cycle embodied by the Al-Qoba defection make that unanswered call more urgent with every passing day.

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The EU has the tools: sanctions, diplomatic leverage, institutional mandates, and the moral authority of being Sudan's largest humanitarian donor. What is required now is the political will to use them.

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## **Key Sources**

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**EEAS 'The European Union and Sudan' ([eeas.europa.eu/sudan](https://eeas.europa.eu/sudan))**

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