FOI Studies in African Security

Civil war in Sudan
A struggle for political power and economic interests

Karolina Lindén

Sudan's civil war is tearing the country apart. A year and a half after the outbreak of war, 25 million people are in need of humanitarian aid, more than 11 million have been displaced, and an estimated 150,000 people have died due to war-related causes. The UN has described the crisis as both the world's largest humanitarian crisis and largest displacement crisis. But how did this happen, given that just five years ago, Sudan was on a path towards democracy? This memo explores how Sudan's political history—marked by military coups and the military's political and economic influence—set the stage for the civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). It also examines how the economic and political interests of both domestic and external actors continue to fuel the conflict and what this means for regional stability.

When the two generals, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as "Hemedti," turned their guns on each other in Khartoum in April 2023, the world was shocked. The preceding years of democratic aspirations, which had drawn significant international support, came to a brutal end, replaced by a devastating war.

This memo outlines some of the underlying factors behind the intractable conflict we see today: the military's dominance in politics, former dictator Omar al-Bashir's attempts to protect himself from coups, civilian efforts to wrest and regain economic control from the military, the power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the militia, Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and the large number of external actors using Sudan as an arena for their own agendas.

The memo also highlights how the ongoing war is primarily driven by political power and economic interests, in contrast to Sudan's previous two civil wars, which were predominantly rooted in ethnicity, religion, ideology, and South Sudan's fight for independence.

The memo is divided into four sections. Understanding the current war requires an appreciation of Sudan's political history. Accordingly, the first section offers a brief overview of Sudan's cycles of coups, revolutions, and wars. The second section outlines the path to civil war, while the third details the ongoing conflict and the extensive external involvement. The fourth and final section examines the political consequences of the war: the risk of total state collapse and the resulting escalation of instability in the Horn of Africa.

War, peace agreements, and military coups have shaped Sudan's political landscape

Sudan's modern history has been shaped by civil wars, peace processes, and cycles of revolution, military coups, and dictatorship.

Continuous civil wars

Sudan has been embroiled in civil wars for nearly its entire existence since gaining independence from the United Kingdom and Egypt in 1956. The first two civil wars (1955–1972 and 1983–2005) were driven by issues of ethnicity, religion, resource distribution, and the quest for self-determination in southern Sudan. These conflicts ultimately culminated in South Sudan's independence from Sudan in 2011. The armed conflict

SUDAN

Area: 1,861,484 km2 (world's 16th largest)

Population: approximately 50 million

Capital: Khartoum, but the de facto government has been located in Port Sudan since the outbreak of the war

Independence: 1956, from the United Kingdom and Egypt

Neighbours: Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Chad , Libya

Major bodies of water: Nile, Red Sea

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in Darfur (2003–2020), meanwhile, revolved around ethnicity and resource distribution. This conflict pitted Sudan's government—dominated by Arab Muslims—against various rebel groups, primarily non-Arab/African factions. The violence in Darfur drew major international attention due to the brutal attacks by Arab tribes on non-Arab populations. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued an arrest warrant for Sudan's then-president, Omar al-Bashir, who was indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity during this conflict.[1]

Peace agreements shape politics

The prolonged wars and their associated peace processes, often involving international mediators, have profoundly shaped Sudan's political landscape. The Addis Ababa Agreement, which ended the first civil war in 1972, granted extensive self-determination to southern Sudan and led to constitutional changes. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which concluded the second civil war in 2005, paved the way for South Sudan's independence in 2011. The Juba Peace Agreement, which ended the Darfur conflict in 2020, awarded ministerial positions in the transitional government to several leaders of armed groups. However, this move alienated the civilian political movement that had been leading the government following the revolution.

Cycles of revolution, coups, and dictatorship

Beyond wars and peace agreements, Sudan's political life has been shaped by recurring cycles of revolutions and military coups, punctuated by brief periods of civilian rule.

General Ibrahim Abboud, the dictator who seized power in a military coup in 1958, was ousted during the October Revolution of 1964. A democratically elected government then held power until 1969, when General Jaafar al-Nimeiry took control in another military coup. al-Nimeiry himself was overthrown during the April Revolution of 1985, leading to the election of a new government in 1986. Omar al-Bashir later came to power through a military coup in 1989, ruling the country until the December Revolution of 2019. In total, Sudan has had at least 17 coup attempts, six of which succeeded.[2]

The military as a dominant force in politics

These cycles of military coups and extended periods of military dictatorship would not have been possible without the Sudanese Armed Forces being such a dominant force in the country's political life. The Sudanese army participated in all of the aforementioned coups and, in modern times, has overthrown three civilian governments.[3] The developments of 2019 to 2023 would come to represent yet another iteration of this cycle.

The road to civil war in 2023

The seeds of the ongoing civil war were sown by former dictator al-Bashir's attempt to protect himself from military coups by elevating one of the militias in Darfur to the status of his personal guard. This "guard force," the RSF, is now one of the two main factions in the current conflict, fighting against Sudan's armed forces.

The paramilitary force that al-Bashir turned to originated from the Janjaweed movement in Darfur, led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, widely known as Hemedti, or "Little Mohamed". The Janjaweed, comprised primarily of Arab tribes from Darfur, was deployed by al-Bashir's regime to suppress non-Arab rebel movements during the Darfur war of 2003. The practice of recruiting paramilitary groups to fight in peripheral regions, where the SAF lacked the mobility required, has been employed by several regimes in Sudan.[4] The Janjaweed,

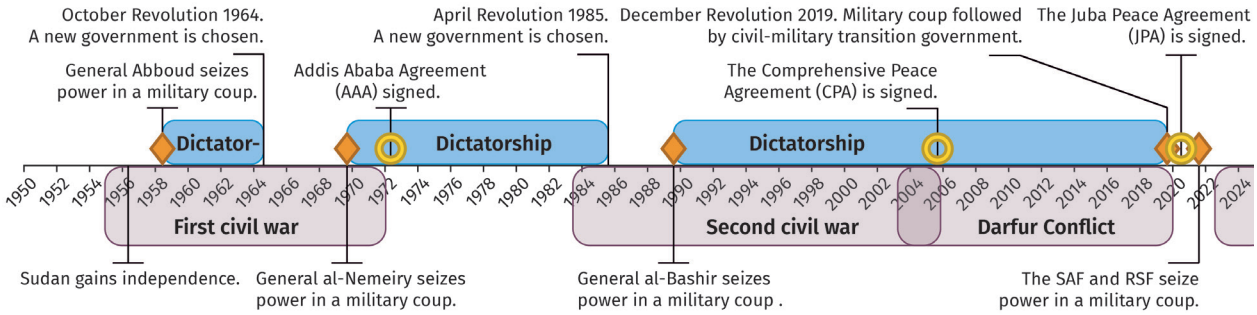


Figure 1. Sudan's modern history consists of long wars and recurring cycles of revolutions and military coups, punctuated by brief periods of civilian rule. A rhombus indicates a military coup, a ring indicates a peace agreement.

Note: Timeline by Karolina Lindén, FOI.

KEY PERSONS:

- Omar al-Bashir — Dictator who ruled Sudan 1989–2019
- General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan — Leader of the Sudan Armed Forces **(SAF)**, Sudan's de facto president since the coup in 2021
- General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as "Hemedti" — Leader of the Rapid Support Forces **(RSF)**
- Abdallah Hamdok — Civilian prime minister of the transitional government (2019–2021), leader of the civilian movement Forces for Freedom **(FFC)** and Change and later Tagaddum
- Abdelaziz al-Hilu — Leader of the armed movement Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North **(SPLM-N al-Hilu)**, active in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan states
- Abdul Wahid al-Nur — Leader of the armed movement Sudan Liberation Movement **(SLM al-Nur)**, active in Darfur

alongside al-Bashir, faced accusations of crimes against humanity and genocide for their actions in Darfur during the war.[5] In 2013, al-Bashir designated the force as his personal guard and officially named it the Rapid Support Forces.[6]

However, al-Bashir did not stop at pitting the Sudanese Armed Forces against another military faction. Within his regime, he elevated four actors, playing them against one another to ensure that none could consolidate power and overthrow him: al-Bashir's own party, the National Congress Party (NCP); the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS); the SAF; and the RSF. To enrich himself and keep his loyalists satisfied, al-Bashir began, as early as the 1990s, to privatise state-owned enterprises or place them under the management of trusted individuals within his inner circle. As a result, significant wealth, industries, and natural resources came under his control. He also distributed ownership and influence among the party, the army, the intelligence service, and the RSF. This arrangement turned the NCP, NISS, SAF, and RSF into powerful actors within the state, controlling substantial portions of the country's economy.[7] The SAF controlled approximately 200 companies and industries, operating across a wide range of sectors, including telecommunications, banking, water distribution, construction, real estate, aviation, trucking, limousine services, park management, and tourism. It also handled the export of gold, oil, gum arabic, and weapons, as well as the import of vehicles and basic goods such as fuel and wheat.[8] The RSF, meanwhile, dominated Sudan's gold market and held assets in construction and contracting. It also owned agricultural land and real estate.[9]

For al-Bashir and his regime, however, Sudan's oil revenues were the most important source of income, with three-quarters of production coming from what is now South Sudan.[10] From the early 2000s, state revenues from oil exports increased significantly, and Sudan quickly became one of Africa's wealthiest countries.[11] al-Bashir's regime was awash with money, enabling it to keep its supporters and large parts of the population, mainly in Khartoum, content. A substantial portion of the oil revenues was used to modernise SAF and NISS in their fight against the rebel group Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in the civil war in southern Sudan.[12] South Sudan's independence in 2011 dealt a severe blow to Sudan's economy. The state's primary source of revenue vanished, making it increasingly difficult for al-Bashir to appease his allies.[13] In 2018, al-Bashir attempted to address part of the economic crisis by removing subsidies on bread, wheat, fuel, and other basic goods. This led to widespread discontent among the population, which was already suffering under a struggling economy and limited rights in al-Bashir's strict Islamist dictatorship, and by now had had enough.[14]

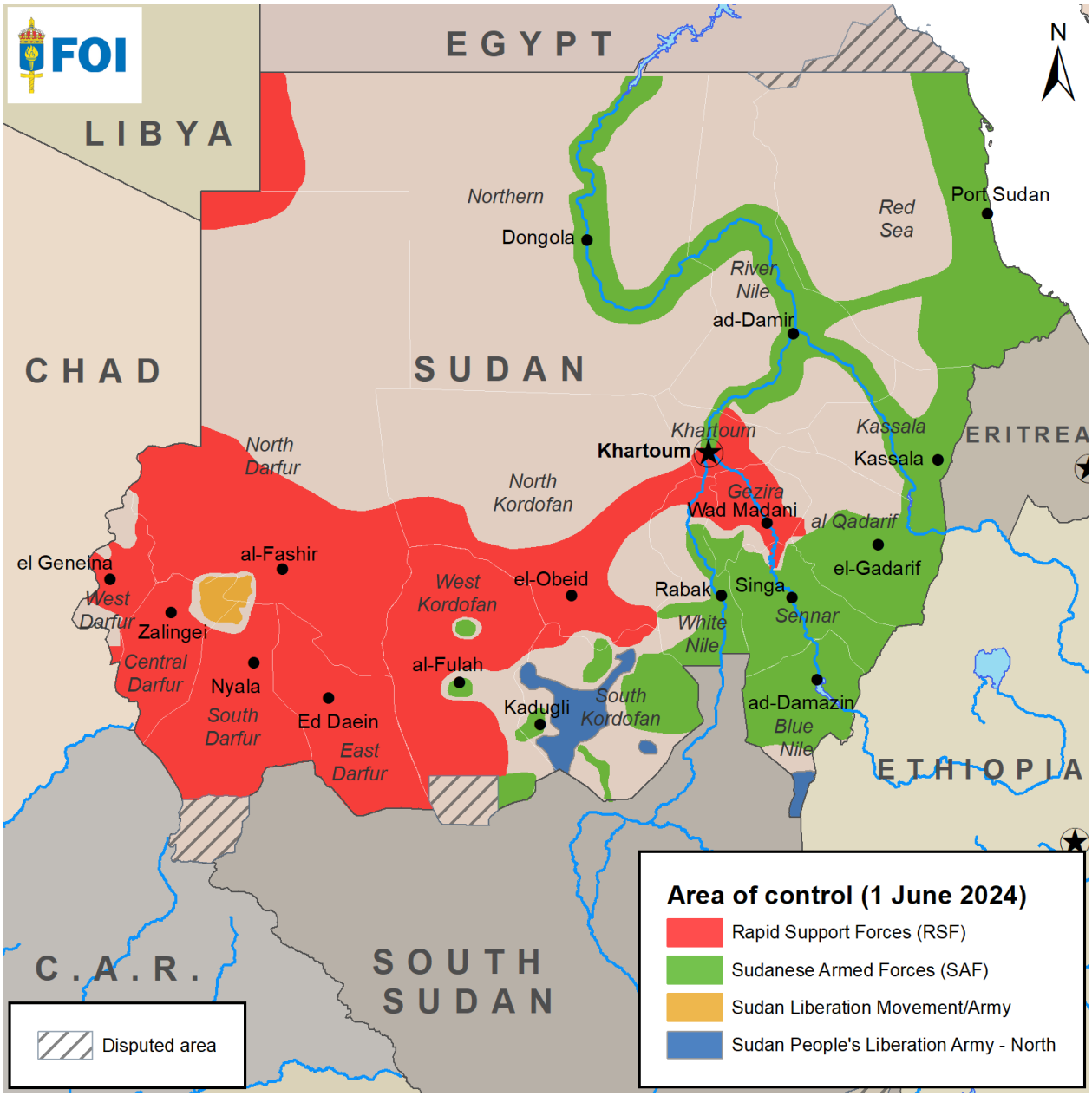
al-Bashir is ousted, and RSF steps into the heart of politics

Widespread protests erupted in Sudan in December 2018, triggered by rising costs of basic goods, but soon shifted focus to demanding al-Bashir's resignation.[15] That same month, the protest movement adopted a declaration and took the name Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC).[16] al-Bashir called on the RSF to protect him from a coup, a miscalculation that would prove costly. On April 11, 2019, the SAF, with the RSF's support, staged a coup that ousted al-Bashir after 30 years in power.[17] Through this, the RSF made a dramatic entry into Sudanese politics.

The protest movement, where women and youth played prominent roles, refused to accept another military-led regime and continued their nationwide demonstrations.[18] The Transitional Military Council, which had assumed power after al-Bashir's ousting, deployed the RSF to suppress the protests. On June 3, 2019, hundreds of peaceful demonstrators were killed or injured.[19]

The violence became a turning point. Following mediation by the African Union and Ethiopia, an agreement was reached in August 2019 between the military and the civilian protest movement. The agreement,

known as the Constitutional Declaration, stipulated a transitional government in which civilians and the military would share power.[20] A civilian government was formed, and a "Sovereign Council" was established to act as a collective head of state during the transitional period. The transition to democracy was to last 39 months and culminate in general elections in 2022. After 21 months, the civilians were to assume the chairmanship of the council from the military.[21] The SAF's commander-in-chief, Abdel Fattah al-Burman, became chairman of the Sovereign Council, while RSF leader Hemedti was appointed vice-chairman. The civilian movement selected UN official Abdallah Hamdok as their leader, and he became prime minister.[22] Through this arrangement, the RSF secured a position at the very top of Sudan's power structure. Once again, SAF had ousted a president and positioned itself at the helm of power, this time with a civilian partner.[23]



Map 1. Areas controlled by the SAF, RSF, and other groups as of June 1, 2024.

Source: Sudan War Monitor and Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) Sudan.

Note: Map by Per Wikström, FOI.

The transitional government threatens the military's interests

The civilian-led government faced a daunting list of challenges when it took office. Among its priorities were initiating peace talks, stabilising the economy, promoting human rights, ensuring accountability, and alleviating poverty.[24] Between 2019 and 2021, it achieved significant progress in these areas. One of its greatest successes was the Juba Peace Agreement in October 2020, which formally ended the Darfur conflict that had persisted since 2003.[25]

Despite these achievements, the transitional government's position remained precarious. The country's economy was in crisis, and the SAF and RSF maintained a firm grip on power, resources, and businesses.[26] Both parties continued to enrich themselves during the transitional period. Following the 2019 coup, the SAF seized control of businesses previously held by former dictator al-Bashir's party and family.[27] The RSF, for its part, took over companies that had been under the control of the national intelligence and security services.[28]

Returning the military's vast holdings in non-defence-related sectors to civilian state control was not only one of the transitional government's top priorities, but also one of its most difficult tasks. Prime minister Hamdok swiftly established the Empowerment Removal Committee in late 2019. This anti-corruption mechanism was tasked with dismantling the remnants of al-Bashir's regime, investigating crimes and abuses committed under his rule, and recovering public funds for the state treasury.[29] In May 2021, Finance Minister Ibrahim al-Badawi publicly announced that the government had begun reviewing military-owned businesses.[30] By the fall of 2021, the Empowerment Removal Committee also turned its attention to the military's economic interests.[31]

The military deposes the transitional government in a coup

On October 25, 2021, General al-Burhan and General Hemedti staged a joint military coup.[32] The progress and reforms achieved during the transitional period, such as those related to accountability, were reversed, and members of the Empowerment Removal Committee were imprisoned.[33]

The power grab sparked mass protests across Sudan.[34] Multiple mediation attempts were undertaken by various individuals and groups to break the deadlock and restore a transitional path toward democracy between the military and civilian parties.[35] In December 2022, the mediation effort bore fruit with the signing of the Political Framework Agreement. The outcome was that nationwide workshops, or stakeholder conferences, were planned to address central political issues. Once consensus was reached, a prime minister would be appointed, and a new transitional period leading to general elections would commence.[36] The so-called "Trilateral Mechanism," comprising the UN, the African Union (AU), and the regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), hosted these conferences.[37]

The conference on security-sector reform became a flashpoint of tension between the SAF and RSF, ultimately leading to war. The goal of the conference was to discuss unifying the national army and integrating the RSF into the SAF as stipulated by the Juba Peace Agreement's security arrangements, as well as to agree on a timeline. The SAF proposed a two-year integration period, while the RSF insisted on ten years. The most contentious issue concerned the RSF's chain of command: the SAF wanted the RSF to fall under SAF leadership, whereas RSF demanded to remain directly under the civilian head of state. The conference collapsed without an agreement, leading to heightened tensions between the SAF and RSF and further efforts at mediating between them.[38] On April 15, 2023, the two parties turned against each other, plunging Sudan into civil war.[39]

The civil war has split the country into (at least) two parts

Both the SAF and RSF claimed the other side fired the first shots, but both had been preparing for war. The RSF, however, was better prepared than the SAF.[40] Fighting broke out simultaneously in the capital Khartoum and in Darfur, western Sudan.[41] The RSF quickly took the initiative in the conflict, gaining control over parts of Khartoum and areas in western Sudan. The SAF retreated to Port Sudan and has governed the country from there ever since. The fighting later spread to the southeastern parts of the country.[42] Human Rights Watch has reported war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity in western Darfur.[43]

The conflict has divided Sudan into two parts. Broadly speaking, the RSF controls southern and western Sudan and large parts of the capital Khartoum, while the SAF controls northern and eastern Sudan, albeit with some exceptions. During the summer of 2024, the RSF also seized territories in southeastern Sudan.[44] Some smaller rebel groups also control some

areas, such as the al-Hilu faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North (SPLM-N al-Hilu) in Darfur and the al-Nur faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA al-Nur) in southern Sudan.[45] In the state of South Kordofan, which borders South Sudan, the SAF, RSF, and SPLM-N are fighting against one another.[46]

Extensive external involvement in the conflict

The conflict is further complicated by the involvement of numerous foreign actors, all with vested interests. This extensive array of stakeholders has made coordinated mediation efforts and peace negotiations significantly more challenging. For example, when the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Sudan, Ramtane Lamamra, convened a meeting to coordinate various mediation initiatives, representatives from 32 states and international organisations participated. These included neighbouring countries, Gulf States, members of the UN Security Council, the AU, IGAD, the Arab League, EU, and the UN, among others.[47]

The high level of external involvement is tied to Sudan's strategic location and its resources. Positioned at the crossroads of sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with a coastline along the Red Sea, a deep-water port in Port Sudan, access to the Nile, and deposits of gold and other minerals, Sudan has long attracted interest from neighbouring states, middle powers, and global superpowers alike.[48] For instance, both Russia and Iran have courted Sudan to secure access to a port on the Red Sea, while the United Arab Emirates' involvement in the war is linked to Sudan's gold, which is traded on Emirati markets.[49] There are also political motivations behind foreign involvement, with countries such as Egypt and several Gulf states having sought for years to counter the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan.[50]

These foreign actors support the conflicting parties to varying degrees. Some provide military and financial backing, others supply limited quantities of weapons, while still others contribute to legitimising either side through their actions. The support offered by external actors is shrouded in secrecy. None of the states backing either side have done so openly, and many have denied their involvement outright. Nevertheless, there is a wealth of credible evidence confirming the support that these states provide the warring factions.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the most influential external actor in the war, providing support to the RSF in the form of financial aid, weaponry, and Chinese-made Wing Loong 2 drones.[51] In parallel to this assistance, according to the *New York Times*, the UAE has established a field hospital in Amdjarass, Chad, to treat injured RSF fighters.[52] A leaked report from the UN sanctions committee on Sudan, cited by various media outlets, deemed it credible that the UAE has provided military support to the RSF and that this has greatly impacted the conflict's balance of power.[53] Shortly afterward, the UN Security Council issued a resolution condemning external interference and urging adherence to the arms embargo, though it refrained from naming specific countries.[54] The UAE has denied providing military aid, claiming its involvement is solely humanitarian.[55]

EXTERNAL ACTORS (selected)

Support for the SAF: Egypt. Also, to a lesser extent, Iran, Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, Qatar.

Support for the RSF: United Arab Emirates. To a lesser extent, Russia.

Other key actors: USA, Saudi Arabia, UN, AU, IGAD, Arab League, EU.

Other involved states: Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda, among others.

Egypt, as a key supporter of the SAF in the conflict, is another important actor. As reported by the Wall Street Journal, it is supplying the SAF with Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones and providing intelligence and tactical assistance.[56] Several of Sudan's neighbours have also positioned themselves in the conflict. Ethiopia, which aligns closely with the United Arab Emirates and counts Egypt as a rival, partly due to the controversy surrounding Ethiopia's construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Nile, supports the RSF. Eritrea, on the other hand, has a strained relationship with Ethiopia and seeks to prevent the RSF from nearing its borders, thereby supporting the SAF.[57]

Other states have also provided military support to the warring parties, albeit on a smaller scale. According to several media reports, Iran has supplied the SAF with Quds Mohajer-6 drones. Sudan restored diplomatic ties with Iran in 2023 after a seven-year freeze.[58] Russia, which via the Wagner Group has been close to the RSF and has had an interest in its gold mining, has reportedly supported the group with arms deliveries during the early stages of the war. In May 2024, Russia also signalled a willingness to supply arms to the SAF.[59] Ukraine, as reported by both Ukrainian and

international media, has supported the SAF with special forces and participated in the SAF's counteroffensive against the RSF in Khartoum in early 2024. There have also been reports of Wagner fighters being captured and interrogated in Darfur by Ukrainian special units.[60] Additionally, Turkey and Qatar have allegedly supported the SAF, with Turkey providing small arms and light weapons and Qatar offering financial backing.[61]

Various heads of state have received al-Burhan and Hemedti in their respective countries, effectively contributing to legitimising each side. In late August and early September 2023, al-Burhan conducted official visits to Egypt, South Sudan, and Qatar.[62] Around the turn of the year 2023/2024, Hemedti embarked on a tour of South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya, where he was warmly received by the respective national leaders. al-Burhan described Hemedti's cordial reception as "acts of hostility."[63] This hospitality hindered IGAD's efforts to mediate the crisis, as the SAF refused to participate in meetings with IGAD's crisis committee, viewing member states Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia as biased in the conflict.[64]

Numerous attempts at mediation and peace negotiations have been undertaken, but none have been fruitful so far. Negotiations under the so-called Jeddah Platform, hosted by the United States as well as Saudi Arabia, were held in Saudi Arabia in May and October 2023.[65] Egypt hosted a summit with Sudan's neighbours in July 2023.[66] In January 2024, high-level representatives from both the SAF and RSF met in Bahrain for peace talks.[67] Efforts by the AU and IGAD to host peace talks have also failed to yield results. Also in January 2024, al-Burhan announced Sudan's withdrawal from IGAD after the organisation invited General Hemedti to a high-level meeting.[68] The AU convened several meetings, including with representatives of the civilian movement, but these too proved unsuccessful.[69] In August 2024, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Switzerland called for peace negotiations in Geneva. However, the SAF refused to participate, objecting to RSF being recognised as an equal party.[70]

The consequences of war—a state in collapse

Beyond the extensive humanitarian consequences, the war in Sudan carries profound political and security implications for the country and its surrounding region.

Sudan has long been one of the world's most fragile states, but it has never been closer to outright state collapse. In the 2024 Fund for Peace Fragile States Index, Sudan ranked as the second most fragile state globally, following Somalia. This dismal ranking is attributed to widespread violence, deep fragmentation among groups within the country, the state's low legitimacy with its population, and its inability to provide basic public services.[71]

It is not only Sudan's state apparatus that has disintegrated; much of its civil society and political parties have also been devastated. The civilian Resistance Committees, which played a central role in the 2019 revolution, have transformed into emergency groups focused on humanitarian aid. Other committees, however, have formed armed groups for self-protection.[72] Since the outbreak of the war, there have been fears that Sudan might fragment into two main power centres, aligned with the territories controlled by the RSF and SAF, respectively, a scenario often referred to as a "Libya scenario".[73] This ongoing disintegration raises concerns that Sudan could once again become a haven for Islamist extremists, as it was in the 1990s.[74] In its 2024 Annual Threat Assessment, the US National Intelligence Director warned that Sudan, given its strategic position between the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, and North Africa, could become an ideal environment for terrorists and criminal networks.[75]

Sudan's continued disintegration poses significant regional risks, including massive refugee flows and humanitarian crises. The conflict has already triggered the world's largest current displacement crisis, with approximately 8 million people internally displaced and 3 million refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries.[76] This threatens to further destabilise regions such as the Horn of Africa and the Sahel and could act as a catalyst for additional conflicts in the area.[77] South Sudan faces economic collapse and a resurgence of violence due to Sudan's civil war, as the fighting disrupts the maintenance of the oil pipeline that traverses Sudan. Similarly, Chad risks destabilisation if the conflict in Darfur spills across its borders.[78]

Conclusions

This memo highlights how Sudan's ongoing civil war originates in the military's dominant role in Sudan's political life, the country's long history of coups, and former President Omar al-Bashir's attempts to protect himself against them. His strategy of empowering the RSF to counterbalance the SAF and playing the two against each other laid the groundwork for the 2019 coup. Both the SAF and RSF gained strength when they became part of the transitional government, which

was meant to lead Sudan toward democracy. Both the SAF and RSF accepted the civilian-led transitional government as long as it did not threaten their economic interests. When the civilian-led government was about to reclaim industries, natural resources, and enterprises controlled by the SAF and RSF, the two factions joined forces to overthrow it and seize power. Tensions escalated between the SAF and RSF over the integration of the RSF into a unified Sudanese army, as stipulated in the Juba Peace Agreement, and whether the RSF would come under SAF command, culminating in open warfare. Now, the factions are fighting for control over political power and economic resources.

The war has devastated Sudan, creating the world's largest humanitarian and displacement crisis. The conflict has also turned Sudan into an arena for foreign actors providing materiel, financing, and the legitimacy of the warring parties. These numerous and major foreign interventions, especially the UAE's support for the RSF, sustain the conflict by significantly influencing the balance of power. Similarly, arms supplies from other external actors likely enable both sides to continue fighting. Mediation efforts have been uncoordinated and have failed to exert sufficient pressure on the factions to end the war.

Even if the SAF and RSF were to meet at the negotiating table, the core issue, control over political and economic power, remains unresolved and has only deepened during the conflict. Both parties believe they can achieve victory. Power-sharing models, such as those attempted in South Sudan, have proven unsustainable. Proposing a division of power between the military factions would also overlook the civilian movement's tireless push for democratic governance. However, it is conceivable that a peace agreement could emerge between the SAF and RSF, excluding civilian participation.

Historically, Sudan's peace processes have suppressed civilian political life. Ending the war cannot be achieved solely through negotiations with armed groups, as this would only strengthen those factions. Civilian actors must be empowered to break the cycle of military dominance and recurrent coups. Recent years have shown that the military factions adhere to agreements only when they serve their interests. The external actors are crucial to ensuring that the warring parties honour any agreements.

A sustainable political solution must address Sudan's deep-rooted ethnic, religious, and identity-based tensions; ensure accountability for human rights violations; implement security-sector reform; resolve the conflicts in Darfur and eastern Sudan; rebuild the heavily damaged economy; and loosen the military's grip on Sudan's businesses and natural resources. This is an immense challenge.

Innovative approaches are needed to navigate this complex situation. More research and effort are required to chart a path forward that ends the fighting and establishes stable, democratic governance in Sudan, free from cycles of coups and military dominance. However, for now, the war shows no signs of ending any time soon. ■

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