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Sudan Needs Peace Now

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What is the reality on the ground in Sudan?

On 15 April 2023, war broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) – led by the head of the Transitional Military Council, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan – and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) – led by Lieutenant General Mohamed 'Hemedti' Hamdan Dagalo. Since then, backed by various governments from outside of Sudan, the two sides have fought a terrible war of attrition in which civilians are the main victims. It is impossible to say how many people have died, but clearly the death toll is significant. One estimate found that between April 2023 and June 2024 alone the number of casualties was as high as 150,000, and several crimes against humanity committed by both sides have already been documented by various human rights organisations. At least 14.5 million Sudanese of the population of 51 million have been displaced. The people who live in the belt between El Fasher, North Darfur, and Kadugli, South Kordofan, are struggling from acute hunger and famine. A recent analysis by the UN's Integrated Food Security Phase Classification found that around 21.2 million Sudanese – 45% of the population – face high levels of acute food insecurity, with 375,000 people across the country facing 'catastrophic' levels of hunger (i.e., on the brink of starvation).

Since the war began, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people sought refuge in El Fasher, then held largely by the SAF. Roughly 260,000 civilians were still there in October 2025 when the RSF broke the resistance, entered the city, and carried out a number of documented massacres. Among those killed were 460 patients and their companions at the Saudi Maternity Hospital. The city's fall has meant that the RSF is now largely in control of the vast province of Darfur, while the SAF holds much of eastern Sudan – including Port Sudan, the country's access to the sea and international trade – as well as the capital city of Khartoum.

There is no sign of de-escalation at present.

Why are the SAF and the RSF fighting?

No war of this scale has one simple cause. The political reason is straightforward: this is a counter-revolution against the 2019 popular uprising that succeeded in ousting President Omar al-Bashir, who governed from 1993 and whose last years in power were marked by rising inflation and social crisis.

The left and popular forces behind the 2019 uprising – which included the Sudanese Communist Party, the National Consensus Forces, the Sudanese Professional Association, the Sudan Revolutionary Front, the Women of Sudanese Civic and Political Groups, and many local resistance and neighbourhood committees – forced the military to agree to oversee the transition to a civilian government. With the assistance of the African Union, the Transitional Sovereignty Council was established, composed of five military and six civilian members. Abdalla Hamdok was appointed prime minister and judge Nemat Abdullah Khair chief justice, with al-Burhan and Hemedti on the council as well. The

military-civilian government wrecked the economy further by floating the currency and privatising the state, thereby making gold smuggling more lucrative and strengthening the RSF (this government also signed the Abraham Accords, which normalised relations with Israel). The policies of the military-civilian government exacerbated the conditions toward the showdown over power (control over the security state) and wealth (control over the gold trade).

Despite their roles on the council, al-Burhan and Hemedti attempted coups until succeeding in 2021. Having set aside the civilians, the two military leaders went after each other. The SAF officers sought to preserve their command over the state apparatus, which in 2019 absorbed 82% of the state's budgetary resources (as confirmed by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in 2020). They also moved to retain control of its enterprises, running more than 200 companies through entities such as the SAF-controlled Defence Industries System (estimated $2 billion in annual revenue) and capturing a significant share of Sudan's formal economy across mining, telecommunications, and import-export commodity trade. The RSF – rooted in the *Janja'wid* (devils on horseback) militia – tried to leverage the autonomous war economy centralised around the Al Junaid Multi-Activities Corporation, which controls major gold-producing areas in Darfur and about half a dozen mining sites, including Jebel Amer. Since 50–80% of Sudan's overall gold production is smuggled (as of 2022) – mainly to the UAE – rather than officially exported, and since the RSF dominates production in western Sudan's artisanal mining zones (which account for 80–85% of total production), the RSF captures huge sums from gold revenue every year (estimated at $860 million from Darfur mines alone in 2024).

Beneath these political and material contests lie ecological pressures that compound the crisis. Part of the reason for the long conflict in Darfur has been the desiccation of the Sahel. For decades, erratic rainfall and heatwaves due to the climate catastrophe have expanded the Sahara Desert southward, making water resources a cause of conflict and sparking clashes between nomads and settled farmers. Half of Sudan's population now lives with acute food insecurity. The failure to create an economic plan for a population wracked by rapid changes in weather patterns – alongside the theft of resources by a small elite – leaves Sudan vulnerable to long-term conflict. This is not just a war between two strong personalities, but a struggle over the transformation of resources and their plunder by outside powers. A ceasefire agreement is once more on the table, but the likelihood that it will be accepted or upheld is very low as long as resources remain the shining prize for the various armed groups.

What are the possibilities of peace in Sudan?

A path toward peace in Sudan would require six elements:

1. An immediate, monitored ceasefire that includes the creation of humanitarian corridors for the transit of food and medicines. These corridors would be under the leadership of the Resistance Committees, which have the democratic credibility and networks to deliver aid directly to those in need.
2. An end to the war economy, specifically shutting down the gold and weapons pipelines. This would include imposing strict sanctions on the sale of weapons to and the purchase of gold from the UAE until it severs all relations with the RSF. Export controls at Port Sudan must be implemented as well.

3. The safe return of political exiles and the start of a process to rebuild political institutions under a civilian government elected or supported by the popular forces – mainly the Resistance Committees. The SAF must be stripped of its political power and economic assets and subjugated to the government. The RSF must be disarmed and demobilised.
4. The immediate reconstruction of Sudan's higher judiciary to investigate and prosecute those responsible for atrocities.
5. The immediate creation of a process of accountability that includes the prosecution of warlords through a properly constituted court in Sudan.
6. The immediate reconstruction of Sudan's planning commission and its ministry of finance to shift surplus from export enclaves toward public goods and social protections.

These six points elaborate upon the three pillars of the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's AU-IGAD Joint Roadmap for the Resolution of the Conflict in Sudan (2023). The difficulty with this roadmap – as with similar proposals – is that it is dependent on donors, including actors that are implicated in the violence. For these six points to become a reality, outside powers must be pressured to end their backing of the SAF and the RSF. These include Egypt, the European Union, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the United States. Neither this roadmap nor the Jeddah channel – a Saudi-US mediation track launched in 2023 that focuses on short truces and humanitarian access – includes Sudanese civilian groups, least of all the Resistance Committees.

Though Sudan has produced its share of poets who sing of pain and suffering, let us end on a different note. In 1961, the communist poet Taj el-Sir el-Hassan (1935–2013) wrote 'An Afro-Asian Song', which begins

by commemorating the Kosti massacre at Joudeh in 1956, when 194 striking peasants were suffocated to death while in police custody. But it is to the end of the song that we turn, the voice of the poet ringing above the gunfire:

> In the heart of Africa I stand in the vanguard,
> and as far as Bandung my sky is spreading.
> The olive sapling is my shade and courtyard,
> O my comrades:
> O vanguard comrades, leading my people to glory,
> your candles are soaking my heart in green light.
> I'll sing the closing stanza,
> to my beloved land;
> to my fellows in Asia;
> to the Malaya,
> and the vibrant Bandung.

To the people of El Fasher, to those in Khartoum, to my comrades in Port Sudan: walk toward peace.

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