

Sudan's Forgotten War: Addressing One of the Greatest Humanitarian Crises of Our Time.

On April 15th, 2023, armed conflict broke out in Khartoum between the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti, and the military Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, in a power struggle. This conflict is the latest chapter in the long history of coups and civil wars that have increasingly come to define Sudan's political identity. What initially began as a conflict between two armed groups in Sudan's capital has resulted in one of the greatest humanitarian crises of our time, where mass violence, starvation, and displacement have become daily realities for millions of Sudanese people living in the country. (Amnesty International, 2023). Yet, despite the overwhelming scale of the crisis, both the response of the international community and coverage from mainstream media have been insufficient. This essay argues for a change in the approach to resolving conflict in Sudan and the need for greater intervention to end civilian suffering.

Both leaders and their factions have a history of human rights abuses spanning decades. General al-Burhan (Burhan) and General Dagalo (Hemedti) were appointed to positions of power in Omar al-Bashir's regime; they collaborated to direct their respective SAF and RSF forces in a counterinsurgency response to rebel groups in Darfur in 2003. Both were criticised for their role in committing and facilitating masses of human rights abuses against the Darfur population by the International Court of Justice. In 2019, widespread pro-democracy protests erupted seeking the ousting of Bashir; the SAF and RSF collaborated and overthrew him; a transitional government followed; but in 2021, both forces overthrew this government. (Dahir, Walsh, 2024) Burhan became de facto ruler of Sudan and echoed popular civilian demands for the integration of the rogue RSF into the SAF, resulting in backlash from SAF forces who sought to maintain their autonomy. Violence erupted on the 15th of April 2023 when both groups engaged in conflict with both Burhan and Hemedti engaged in a power struggle by way of civil war for Sudan. The conflict has since given rise to a humanitarian crisis that has affected millions of people living in Sudan. (Global conflict tracker, 2024).

The consequences of this conflict have been widespread and disastrous, with human rights organisations like the UN and Human Rights Watch warning about the severe human rights conditions. (Human rights watch, 2023). The conflict has resulted in widespread displacement and food insecurity. More than 8.8 million people have fled their homes since mid-April 2023, making it the greatest displacement crisis in the world (OCHA, 2024, p.1). Additionally, according to the (IPC) 17.7 million people in Sudan are acutely food insecure, and 4.9 million people are in "emergency levels of acute food insecurity" (OCHA, 2024, p.1). This illustrates the severity of the crisis as masses face acute starvation and displaced people become vulnerable to violence, abuse, and a lack of necessities, leading to an increased risk of developing mental health conditions, like PTSD (WHO, 2021). The loss of life and the application of mass violence have been substantial; 15,550 fatalities in Sudan have been reported by ACLED since the 15th of April 2023, and a minimum of 1,400 violent events targeting civilians have been documented (OCHA, 2024). This reality is devastating for families and communities, increasing the risks of psychological trauma and further financial debilitation. Evidently, this conflict has created a severe humanitarian situation where conditions are dire, and despite some nations accepting displaced people and the efforts of human rights groups, the current masses of vulnerable people require greater assistance from the international community. The current lack of intervention in this conflict perpetuates

a legacy of human rights abuses not being accounted for in Sudan for decades.

Despite the overwhelming scope of this crisis, a consensus has formed amongst human rights defenders and NGOs that the response from the international community and mainstream media outlets has been insufficient. Adlan Ahmed Abdelaziz, who works as a coordinator for the Sudan Human Rights Network, stated that the crisis "has not received enough attention from the international community despite the horrifying reports on the humanitarian situation published by United Nations bodies such as, UNICEF, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)" (Asare, 2024). Insufficient media coverage for humanitarian crises can result in less awareness of suffering, leading to less aid being directed to support the victims of that crisis. Numerous reports affirm that the conflict has become a proxy war for rivals Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who have respectively backed the SAF and the RSF in the hopes that their side's victory will represent a win against their rival. This military and financial support for both groups has prolonged the conflict and exacerbated the crisis (Muhammad, 2023). A greater international response is required; mainstream media outlets must increasingly cover the crisis, and entities that seek to exacerbate the conflict must be discouraged by a diplomatic response.

A robust plan for peace must be formed to end the conflict and the perpetual cycle of war in Sudan. A multifaceted approach that prioritises supporting a ceasefire, international peacemaking efforts, promoting accountability, and national unity are key. A ceasefire must be implemented to allow humanitarian aid to safely reach civilian casualties who desperately need it. It must be supported by international actors, and the pressure of sanctions should be utilised to prevent any entities who would want to obstruct its realisation (Assal, 2023, p. 38). There must be a greater peacemaking effort from the international community, especially the African Union, to encourage the end of hostilities between both parties. The international community's weak response to the 2021 coup empowered the military to ignore important legal standards; this must be addressed, and accountability must be prioritised as a deterrence (Assal, 2023, p. 38).

Breaking the cycle of violence in Sudan requires addressing deep-rooted issues; the majority of Sudan's conflicts link to the marginalisation of non-Arabised Sudanese people and the ethnic divide between both Arab and non-Arab groups. It's imperative that community initiatives dedicated to promoting coexistence are introduced to promote reconciliation and prevent further conflict between different groups (Assal, 2023, p. 39). This roadmap should serve as a guide for ending hostilities and laying a foundation for permanent peace in the region.

This conflict has given rise to a severe humanitarian crisis, resulting in the grossest possible violation of human rights for its people. The realities of violence, displacement, and starvation are staggering. The recommendations of human rights defenders must be adhered to, and mainstream media outlets should be encouraged to provide more coverage of the crisis. The war's severity requires the prompt cooperation of the international community to help end the current civil war and to foster a climate that prevents the emergence of similar conflicts. The ultimate goal of these initiatives must be to help secure lasting peace in Sudan.

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