

# UNTANGLING SUDAN'S DISCORD: DECRYPTING THE INTRICATE THREADS OF TURMOIL

*Frederick Appiah Afriyie, Research Center for Analysis and Security Studies,  
Ghana*

## **Abstract**

The conflict in Sudan between its military forces and a rival paramilitary group, exacerbated by allied militias, has escalated into a dire humanitarian crisis, reminiscent of past civil wars where hundreds of thousands perished. This ongoing struggle, marked by thousands of casualties and millions displaced, centers on a power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), with global powers seeking to influence the outcome. Despite initial hopes for democracy following the ousting of former dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019, political turmoil ensued, culminating in a failed transitional government and the assumption of power by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. Despite agreements aimed at civilian-led transition, missed deadlines and the contentious integration of the RSF into the national armed forces perpetuate the conflict. Amidst this turmoil, international sanctions target entities funding the conflict, such as Alkhaleej Bank, Al-Fakher Advanced Works, and Zadna International, among others, reflecting broader efforts to disrupt funding sources and facilitate a democratic transition. In this context, this research delves into the underlying factors driving the conflict in Sudan.

**Keywords:** Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Conflict, Power struggle, Humanitarian crisis, Displacement

## Introduction

The continuing conflict in Sudan between the nation's military forces and a rival paramilitary group, along with allied militias, has escalated into a devastating humanitarian crisis after eight months of fighting. This situation has raised concerns about a potential repeat of previous civil wars in the North African country, where around 300,000 people lost their lives. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) are embroiled in a power struggle that has resulted in thousands of casualties and the displacement of millions of civilians from their homes (Aderinto & Olatunji, 2023; Outlook Web Desk, 2023). As of January 2024, Sudan was facing the world's largest displacement crisis, with over 10.7 million people forced to flee their homes. The current conflict has resulted in 12,000 to 15,000 casualties (Agenzia Fides, 2024). The power struggle between the two main military factions, the armed forces loyal to General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces loyal to General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), has intensified, particularly after the 2019 uprising that overthrew former dictator Omar al-Bashir. This internal conflict among Sudan's military regime has implications beyond the country's borders, as global powers like Russia, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates seek to exert influence in the region (Aderinto & Olatunji, 2023; Outlook Web Desk, 2023). Conversely, Sudan has a long history of conflicts and wars. Although the current unrest erupted in April 2023, tensions had been building since 2019 when the major power centers in Sudan, including the armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces, united in backing the popular uprising that toppled the longtime dictator Omar al-Bashir from power (Aderinto & Olatunji, 2023).

Contrarily, following Al-Bashir's ousting through a coup d'état in April 2019, Sudan embarked on a journey towards democracy. This transition saw the establishment of a transitional government, helmed by civilian Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, alongside a Sovereign Council led by Lieutenant General Abdel-Fattah Al Burhan and General Muhammad Hamdan 'Hemedti' Dagolo, effectively sharing power. These two military figures represented different factions within Al Bashir's regime: Al Burhan, a former commander in the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), had served notably in Central Darfur State and Yemen, while Hemedti led the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group with significant influence over the mining sector, particularly gold in Darfur. In November 2021, the military forces in Sudan took apart the Sovereign Council, leading to the breakdown of the transitional government that was in place. After several weeks of large-scale protests by the public, Hamdok was reinstated as

Prime Minister. However, he ended up resigning from that position in January 2022 because of a political impasse where opposing groups could not come to an agreement (BBC, 2022). Al Burhan assumed power in Sudan, establishing a new governing council and rebuffing mediation attempts by the African Union, European Union, Norway, United Kingdom, and United States aimed at resolving the nation's political turmoil. Following extensive negotiations and peace dialogues, prominent political figures, military authorities, and civilians endorsed a framework agreement in December 2022. This accord delineated the elimination of military influence from governmental affairs and the economy, alongside the implementation of a two-year transition period overseen by a civilian administration preceding electoral processes (International Crisis Group, 2016). By March 2023, these same stakeholders reached a consensus to adopt a fresh constitution and transfer governance to a civilian-led administration in the subsequent month (Berhané, 2023). The enduring power struggle persisted, leading to the failure to meet the specified deadlines. A significant point of contention between the opposing military factions revolves around the incorporation of the RSF into the national armed forces. Hemedti advocates for a delay of ten years in this process, whereas Al Burhan seeks to merge the two military forces within a span of two years.

However, the endless conflict has prompted various entities to impose sanctions on those funding it. The United States Department of State, for instance, sanctioned three entities for their role in undermining security and stability in Sudan (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2024). Notably, Alkhaleej Bank and Al-Fakher Advanced Works, both controlled by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), were among the targets. Additionally, Zadna International, associated with the Sudanese army, faces sanctions, according to the U.S. Treasury Department (2024). Similarly, the European Council has taken action by imposing sanctions on six entities involved in the conflict (Reuters, 2024). This includes companies such as Defense Industries System and SMT Engineering, which are involved in manufacturing weapons and vehicles for the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and Zadna International Company for Investment Limited, controlled by the SAF, along with three companies procuring military equipment for the RSF: Al Junaid Multi Activities Co Ltd, Tradive General Trading, and GSK Advance Company Ltd. These actions are part of a broader effort to target key individuals and entities financing the conflict, aiming to disrupt significant funding sources and promote a democratic transition (Council of the European Union, 2024).

Nevertheless, to fully comprehend the conflict in Sudan, the research methodology employed a literature review approach, consulting existing research conflict, internet sources, books, and reports from international bodies on Sudan conflict. The study did not utilize any primary data sources. The data gathered was qualitatively analyzed in an objective manner to investigate the underlying factors of the conflict in Sudan. As Morris (2009) noted, drawing from an extensive range of diverse sources enables rich qualitative analysis, allowing for a broad, thorough examination of a phenomenon. It provides a comprehensive, in-depth exploration of the topic under study. Against this backdrop, the present research seeks to answer the underlying factors of the conflict in Sudan.

### **Conceptual Underpinning: Structural Violence Theory**

The Theory of Structural Violence posits that violence extends beyond physical harm, encompassing social structures or systems that hinder individuals from fulfilling their fundamental needs (Weigert, 2008). Galtung contends that structural violence lacks a definitive starting point and does not necessarily involve an identifiable perpetrator (Maleševi, 2016; Dilts et al. 2012). Examples of structural violence include classism, tribalism, hate crimes, and police brutality, all stemming from the unequal distribution of power and resources within societal and governmental frameworks. Galtung categorized structural violence into four groups, the first revolving around poverty conditioned by social structures and the second focusing on poverty and factors obstructing access to essential human necessities (Weigert, 2008). The third classification of structural violence encompasses repression, leading to the infringement of human rights, while the fourth category involves alienation, resulting in the deprivation of higher-level needs. Utilizing the structural theory to analyze the Sudan conflict reveals the presence of all four categories of structural violence, which persistently define the current warfare. Within this context, the initial category involves poverty conditioned by social structures. In the Sudan conflict, there is a pervasive state of poverty influenced by factors such as limited access to essential services, infrastructure, and basic necessities like healthcare, shelter, education, and crucial agricultural resources (Suliman, 1997). This conflict has engendered a systematic, concealed form of violence, resulting in precarious and tragically abbreviated lives for many residing on the outskirts of society. The Sudanese government stands accused of employing political dominance and deliberate negligence to deny people access to vital necessities, rendering them susceptible to severe adversity and exploitation. Moreover, the conflict has led to the erosion of higher-level needs such as feelings of security, dignity, and self-determination (Pape et al., 2018). These forms of structural violence have been

prominently observable throughout Sudan's history, notably in the Darfur conflict, marked by ethnic cleansing, extensive killings, and profound displacement (Pape et al., 2018; Rothbart et al., 2012). The second classification encompasses poverty and factors that hinder individuals from obtaining fundamental human necessities amidst the Sudan conflict. This conflict has led to impoverishment and the denial of basic human needs access, constituting a structural form of poverty marked by a widespread absence of essential services, infrastructure, and necessities like healthcare, shelter, education, and crucial agricultural resources (Pape et al., 2018; Sawyer, 2023). The conflict has engendered a methodical, veiled form of aggression that has rendered life precarious and tragically brief for many individuals residing on the fringes. Accusations have been leveled against the Sudanese government for employing political dominance and deliberate negligence to strip people of their basic necessities, rendering them susceptible to severe adversity and exploitation. Furthermore, the conflict has led to a deprivation of elevated needs such as a sense of security, dignity, and autonomy. Various factors, including conflicts, instability, displacement, economic sanctions, agricultural underdevelopment, limited diversification, restricted access to education, and healthcare obstacles have exacerbated the conflict. These elements have significantly contributed to the heightened levels of poverty in Sudan, particularly in rural regions (Suliman, 1997; Sawyer, 2023).

The third classification involves repression, contributing to the infringement of human rights within the Sudan conflict. Repression has been a hallmark of the Sudan conflict, resulting in the violation of human rights. Sudan's track record regarding human rights has received widespread condemnation, with numerous human rights organizations documenting various instances of abuse and atrocities committed by the government (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Achudume, 2017). The Sudanese government stands accused of employing political domination and deliberate negligence to deprive individuals of basic necessities, leaving them susceptible to severe hardship and exploitation (Achudume, 2017). Furthermore, the government has been implicated in the unlawful detention of numerous protesters and the enforced disappearance of many others who remain unaccounted for. Sudan's security forces have resorted to disproportionate force against demonstrators, resulting in the death of dozens and the injury of thousands more. The government has additionally limited freedom of speech, with female demonstrators encountering instances of sexual assault and harassment. The continuing conflict has led to gender-based violence, encompassing conflict-induced sexual violence against women and young girls (Rothbart et al., 2012). These suppressive actions have played a part in the

prevalent poverty in Sudan, notably in rural regions. This poverty manifests structurally, marked by widespread deprivation of services, infrastructure, and fundamental necessities. The Sudanese government stands accused of employing political dominance and deliberate negligence to strip people of fundamental necessities, rendering them susceptible to severe adversity and exploitation. This conflict has led to the erosion of crucial needs such as a sense of security, dignity, and autonomy. Furthermore, several contributing factors such as conflicts, instability, displacement, economic sanctions, agricultural underdevelopment, lack of diversification, insufficient access to education, and healthcare challenges have intensified the conflict (Rothbart et al., 2012). These elements have played a significant role in driving elevated levels of poverty in Sudan, particularly in rural regions (Suliman, 1997).

### **Who are the Rapid Support Forces and Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)?**

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) serve as the military forces of the Republic of Sudan. Initially formed as the Sudan Defence Force (SDF) in 1925, they became the SAF following Sudan's independence in 1956. In 2024, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) comprise the Sudanese Army, Navy, Air Force, and Republican Guard. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) represents Sudan's principal military body, comprising approximately 300,000 soldiers. General al-Burhan, its military leader, is a veteran soldier who ascended through the ranks during President al-Bashir's era (Lodhi, 2024; ACLED, 2024).

In contrast, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, often referred to as Hemedti, leads the RSF as mentioned above. Before the commencement of the war, the force was estimated to comprise around 100,000 personnel stationed in various bases and deployed across the nation. Originating from the Janjaweed militias, the RSF traces its roots to the conflict in the 2000s in Darfur, during which the government utilized them under President Omar al-Bashir to suppress a rebellion. This conflict resulted in over 2 million people being displaced and an estimated death toll of up to 300,000 between 2003 and 2008. Prosecutors from the International Criminal Court charged government officials and Janjaweed commanders with genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity in Darfur. As time passed, these forces expanded and were deployed as border guards to suppress irregular migration. Concurrently, Hemedti's business ventures flourished, and Bashir aided his family in acquiring interests in gold mining, livestock, and infrastructure. Since 2015, the RSF, in collaboration with Sudan's army, commenced deploying troops to engage in the Yemeni conflict alongside Saudi and Emirati forces, facilitating Hemedti's establishment of connections

with the Gulf powers. In 2017, legislation was enacted to grant legitimacy to the RSF as an autonomous security force. Military sources have indicated longstanding apprehension within the army's leadership regarding the expansion of Hemedti's forces. In April 2019, the RSF played a role in a military coup that removed Bashir from power. In the subsequent months, Hemedti entered into a power-sharing deal where he became the deputy of a governing body led by military leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. Prior to this agreement in 2019, activists had leveled accusations against the RSF for their alleged involvement in the deaths of numerous pro-democracy demonstrators. Additionally, rights organizations had accused RSF troops of engaging in tribal conflicts. Hemedti took action by revoking immunity from certain individuals, thereby enabling their legal prosecution. The previous year, he offered apologies for the state's offenses against the Sudanese populace, though he didn't provide further details. In October 2021, the RSF was involved in a coup that disrupted the progress toward elections. Subsequently, Hemedti expressed remorse for the coup and endorsed an internationally supported agreement for transitioning to elections under civilian governance. Both Sudan's military and pro-democracy factions called for the integration of the RSF into the standard armed forces, intensifying tensions regarding the transition strategy leading to violent confrontations in Khartoum on April 15th. Since the onset of the conflict, inhabitants, human rights organizations, and conflict observers have alleged that the RSF and its affiliated militias have carried out ethnically motivated assaults in Darfur. Furthermore, they have accused the RSF of employing sexual assault and engaging in widespread looting in Khartoum. The RSF has refuted claims of being responsible for the violence in Darfur and has dismissed accusations of rape as propaganda spread by its adversaries. The RSF asserts that it will take disciplinary action against any personnel found to be implicated in violations (Reuters, 2023).

### **The Origin and Intensification of the Dispute**

Sudan underwent brief periods of democratic governance shortly after gaining independence, with similar attempts made in the mid-1960s and mid-1980s, although these were fleeting episodes amidst a longstanding pattern of dictatorial rule characterized by recurrent coup d'états. Consequently, throughout its nearly seventy years of independence, Sudanese politics has predominantly been under authoritarian control, with the military consistently playing a central role. Of note, the coup d'état of 1989, orchestrated by General Omar al-Bashir, laid the groundwork for the present-day crisis, as it received backing from factions advocating for a radical Islamic religious agenda. The downfall of the previous

regime began immediately after the secession of South Sudan in 2011 due to the heavy reliance on oil revenue. By 2013, the country was grappling with severe economic challenges. These issues reached a tipping point in December 2018 when widespread protests erupted, demanding change. The demonstrations spread across major cities in the nation, ultimately resulting in the collapse of the regime in 2019. Subsequently, a military council, primarily comprising members of the security committee from the al-Bashir regime, took control. Negotiations ensued between the military and civilians, facilitated by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU), leading to a power-sharing agreement and the establishment of a civilian government by the conclusion of August 2019. However, despite these developments, the military, which played a role in the transitional setup, maintained significant control. Notably, the military retained veto power concerning the appointment of specific cabinet members, such as the ministers of interior and defense. Given its historical presence and influence in Sudanese politics, the military was unwilling to cede authority from the outset. Conversely, civilian factions encountered internal challenges. The Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), consisting of political parties, labor unions, and civil society groups, faced their own internal divisions. Nevertheless, they viewed the constitutional declaration as a baseline for consensus, believing it could facilitate a smoother transition, given the populace's fatigue with the existing circumstances (Good Governance Africa, 2023).

According to the terms of the agreement, the military assumed control for the initial two years of the four-year transition phase. However, during this time, the military undermined the transition process and hindered the functioning of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok's government. Subsequently, the civilian government was dissolved in October 2022, and the prime minister was arrested. Although he was later reinstated, he resigned after two months due to the military's lack of sincerity in honoring the agreement. Since then, for nearly two years until the outbreak of the war, the military has been unable to establish a functioning government. Efforts by the United Nations (UN), AU, and IGAD through a trilateral mechanism aimed to restore the transition process. By the end of 2022, a framework agreement was reached between the military and civilians. This agreement outlines a transition period during which a civilian transitional government will be formed, the military will return to its barracks, and elections will be held after two years. Key components of this agreement encompass the dismantling of structures from previous regimes and the necessity for transitional justice. There are also unresolved matters concerning eastern Sudan, the Juba peace agreement, and security sector reform. While progress has been observed



in various areas, security sector reform has become contentious due to objections from the military. Specifically, disagreements have arisen regarding the integration timeline of the RSF into the military and issues pertaining to the chain of command. The military advocated for a complete integration within a two-year timeframe, contrasting with the RSF's insistence on extending the process over 10 years. Regarding the chain of command, the RSF favored civilian government oversight, while the military preferred subordination to the Sudanese armed forces. These differences sparked disagreement: Both parties were signatories to the agreement, but as the establishment of a civilian government approached, supporters of the former regime obstructed progress, leading to the outbreak of war. They are now fighting alongside the army. Additionally, the conflict acquired a regional dimension as it persisted, with actors beyond Sudan's borders becoming involved to varying extents. In the past, the Sudanese armed forces have had close ties with Egypt. Conversely, the RSF has been engaged in combat alongside Saudi and UAE forces in Yemen, with allegations of economic interests in the UAE. The role of Saudi Arabia in this context is less transparent compared to others, particularly given its mediation efforts between the conflicting parties. Additionally, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Chad are all involved in the issue to varying degrees.

### **Ramifications of the Sudanese Conflict**

As a matter of fact, before the conflict erupted, Sudan was grappling with widespread inflation and shortages of vital goods, triggering protests throughout the nation. However, the conflict has deepened the economic crisis. Presently, nearly half of Sudan's populace is without employment, and the value of the Sudanese pound has plummeted by a minimum of 50 percent. In Khartoum, various establishments such as factories, banks, shops, and markets have been looted or damaged, further impeding people's access to necessities, services, and cash (International Rescue Committee, 2023). Also, inflation is expected to persist unabated in 2024, even in the improbable event of a lasting ceasefire. Children in Sudan are especially vulnerable, with at least 10,400 schools in conflict-affected regions closed, leaving approximately 19 million children devoid of education and exposed to the risks of abuse or exploitation. This unceasing conflict in Sudan has devastated countless lives and led to the most extensive displacement crisis globally. Now, there's an additional threat looming: the potential escalation of the world's largest hunger crisis. Cindy McCain, Executive Director of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), issued a warning following her visit to South Sudan, where she witnessed firsthand the dire situation faced by families fleeing violence and worsening food

shortages in Sudan. McCain emphasized the urgent need to halt the fighting, stating that the ongoing war in Sudan could spark the largest hunger crisis the world has ever seen. She highlighted the contrast with the Darfur crisis 20 years ago, which prompted a significant global response while underscoring the current neglect facing the people of Sudan. With millions of lives and the stability of an entire region hanging in the balance, urgent action is imperative.

On top of that, Sudan is confronted severe food insecurity, with 17.7 million individuals—amounting to 37% of the population—facing crisis levels (IPC 3) or worse. At these crisis levels, families resort to negative coping mechanisms such as selling assets or arranging early marriages for their children in order to obtain enough food to sustain themselves. At more severe levels of food insecurity, hunger and starvation become daily realities. The displacement resulting from Sudan's continuous conflict is causing labor shortages across the nation. Increasing fuel costs are impacting agricultural productivity, and elevated food prices coupled with diminished purchasing power are driving up humanitarian needs. Any shortcomings in Sudan's harvest season could further exacerbate the rise in food prices (International Rescue Committee, 2023). Over and above that, more than 25 million individuals in Sudan, South Sudan, and Chad are experiencing escalating food insecurity. The World Food Programme (WFP) encounters obstacles in providing adequate emergency food aid to Sudanese communities due to enduring conflict and interference from competing factions. At present, 90 percent of those facing severe hunger in Sudan reside in regions largely inaccessible to the WFP because of unending violence (World Food Programme, 2024). The disruption in humanitarian relief operations occurred when authorities withdrew permissions for cross-border truck convoys, forcing the World Food Programme (WFP) to suspend its operations from Chad to Darfur. This route had been essential, aiding over one million people in West and Central Darfur since August. The WFP had been working to expand its assistance efforts to reach the same number monthly, given the worsening hunger and malnutrition levels in Darfur. Meanwhile, an increasing number of people are fleeing to South Sudan and Chad, straining humanitarian responses. Executive Director Cindy McCain visited Renk in eastern South Sudan, where nearly 600,000 individuals have crossed from Sudan in the past ten months. During her visit, she toured congested transit camps where arriving families face severe hunger. Recent refugees in South Sudan, representing 35 percent of severely hungry individuals, suffer the most despite comprising less than three percent of the total population. Additionally, one in every five children at the primary border crossing transit centers suffers from malnutrition.

The WFP is struggling to meet the substantial demand with its current resources. As stated by the Executive Director, “I met mothers and children who have fled danger repeatedly, only to face the looming threat of hunger” (World Food Programme, 2024). According to Cindy Macain, the repercussions of inaction extend well beyond a mother’s inability to nourish her child and will profoundly influence the region for years to come. Macain urgently appeals for an end to the conflict and emphasizes the necessity for all humanitarian organizations to be granted unrestricted access to carry out life-saving interventions. She stresses that WFP critically requires unhampered entry into Sudan to address the escalating food insecurity, which is poised to have enduring effects on the region. She highlights the urgent need for increased funding to respond to the humanitarian crisis spreading to neighboring countries. Macain asserts that only by halting hostilities and establishing lasting peace can the current trajectory be altered and catastrophe averted (World Food Programme, 2024).

Conversely, the conflict in Sudan has severely devastated the nation’s public infrastructure, notably the healthcare system. This sector is experiencing a dire shortage of personnel, funding, and medical provisions, compounded by repeated assaults, pillaging, and occupation of medical facilities and hospitals. Over 70 percent of healthcare facilities in conflict-affected areas of Sudan are either non-operational or shuttered. The displacement of civilians has further strained healthcare resources, as well as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. A measles outbreak has resulted in the deaths of over 1,000 children across Sudan. The country is confronting a severe cholera epidemic, with suspected cases exceeding 8,500 as of December 2023, marking a 94% surge in the past month alone. With elevated levels of malnutrition, a weakened healthcare infrastructure, and limited immunization coverage, disease outbreaks will continue to exact catastrophic tolls, particularly among children (International Rescue Committee, 2023). The conflict has worsened the pre-existing vulnerability of the health system mentioned earlier. This has led to the destruction and overburdening of existing health facilities, hindering individuals’ access to crucial healthcare services. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recorded 11 instances of attacks on healthcare facilities and has urged an end to such violence (World Health Organization, 2024). Reports from UNICEF (2024) show that nine children have lost their lives, and over fifty have been injured, posing an increased threat to the lives of vulnerable Sudanese children already grappling with malnutrition. According to a report by Reuters (2023), the continuation of the conflict has caused severe disruptions in the provision of care for around 50,000 severely malnourished children, posing a significant risk to their survival. Consequently, WHO has called for the establishment of a

humanitarian corridor to facilitate the access of health workers, patients, and ambulances to essential care for those in need. Additionally, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has recently documented intense clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces in Khartoum and other parts of Sudan, resulting in numerous civilian casualties (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2023). The South Hospital in El Fasher, North Darfur, which receives support from MSF, has admitted 279 injured individuals since the commencement of the conflict, resulting in 44 deaths. The majority of the casualties were civilians, among them children struck by stray bullets. Presently, the hospital confronts scarcities of medical provisions, compounded by the incapacity of its staff to operate amid the ongoing hostilities. Additionally, neighboring hospitals have shuttered due to either the escalating violence or their close proximity to the conflict zones. Compounding the situation, airport closures throughout the country have hindered MSF's ability to transport essential supplies to North Darfur. The circumstances are critical, with MSF cautioning that without humanitarian access, the loss of life will escalate. Presently, medical provisions at the hospital can only sustain operations for three weeks, and the medical personnel are laboring relentlessly, contending with the influx of patients. MSF is actively seeking avenues to deliver supplies and deploy seasoned trauma surgeons to the country once conditions allow. It is imperative to grant MSF access to all healthcare facilities nationwide and for conflicting parties to safeguard civilian lives. The humanitarian emergency in Sudan necessitates swift intervention to preserve lives and alleviate additional distress.

On top of that, the armed conflict has breached humanitarian corridors established by the United Nations, endangering the safety and welfare of both civilians and aid personnel. These corridors were designed to offer secure pathways for civilians to receive vital assistance, yet intense clashes have made them perilous. Consequently, civilians are vulnerable to becoming trapped in areas of conflict or encountering difficulties in seeking refuge, while aid workers may encounter obstacles in providing essential aid, resulting in shortages of crucial resources and heightened distress among vulnerable populations. The breach of humanitarian corridors undermines the endeavors of humanitarian entities and the fundamental tenets of international humanitarian law, which hinge on principles such as neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Parties involved in the conflict are duty-bound to uphold these corridors. However, when such pathways are violated, it undermines the confidence of both aid workers and organizations, leading to heightened apprehension and diminishing their capacity to assist effectively. This erosion of trust undermines the credibility of humanitarian endeavors, imperiling the safety and welfare of those reliant on aid.

To ensure the delivery of crucial aid to those most in need, it is crucial for parties of the conflict to prioritize the safety of civilians and aid workers and adhere unwaveringly to the principles of international humanitarian law. The preservation of humanitarian corridors is indispensable in safeguarding vulnerable populations and sustaining the legitimacy of humanitarian initiatives. (Aderinto & Olatunji, 2023).

Furthermore, the ramifications of armed conflicts on mental well-being and the prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) are significant global concerns. These issues are particularly pertinent in the context of the military conflict in Sudan, where both the direct and indirect consequences of conflict can result in severe and enduring impacts on mental health and instances of sexual violence. The direct effects of armed conflict on mental health are profound and encompass conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. The trauma associated with witnessing or experiencing violence, injury, or loss can have enduring repercussions on individuals. Indirect consequences such as displacement, the loss of homes and livelihoods, and the disintegration of social networks can further contribute to feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety. The effects of these occurrences may endure well beyond the conclusion of the conflict, emphasizing the crucial necessity for mental health services and community-based support systems. Moreover, the armed conflict in Sudan also heightens the risk of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), encompassing acts such as sexual assault, rape, forced marriage, and prostitution directly linked to armed conflict. Women and girls are especially susceptible to such forms of violence during conflicts; the widespread prevalence of sexual violence in Sudan can result in significant medical, psychological, and social consequences. Survivors of sexual violence may experience physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, and enduring psychological disorders like depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Additionally, there are social repercussions, including stigma, ostracization, and the breakdown of social connections. The ramifications of sexual violence extend far beyond the individual survivor, impacting their families, communities, and potentially future generations as well (Aderinto & Olatunji, 2023).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, the analysis through the lens of Structural Violence Theory sheds light on the multifaceted nature of the conflict in Sudan. The conceptual framework delineates how violence extends beyond physical harm, encompassing systemic and institutional barriers that prevent individuals from

accessing their fundamental needs. The Sudan conflict epitomizes structural violence across four categories identified by Galtung: poverty conditioned by social structures, denial of fundamental human necessities, repression leading to human rights violations, and alienation resulting in the deprivation of higher-level needs. Throughout Sudan's history, structural violence has been pervasive, notably in the Darfur conflict, characterized by ethnic cleansing, killings, and displacement. The Sudanese government, particularly through the actions of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), has been implicated in perpetuating this violence, employing tactics such as political domination, deliberate negligence, repression, and human rights violations. The origins of the conflict trace back to Sudan's history of authoritarian rule, with the 1989 coup laying the groundwork for subsequent crises. The secession of South Sudan in 2011 exacerbated economic challenges, leading to widespread protests in 2018 and ultimately the collapse of the regime in 2019. However, power struggles between the military and civilian factions hindered the transition process, culminating in the outbreak of war.

The ramifications of the conflict are dire, exacerbating an already severe economic crisis and leading to widespread food insecurity, displacement, and devastation of public infrastructure, notably the healthcare system. Children are especially vulnerable, facing risks of malnutrition, exploitation, and a lack of access to education.

Given the aforementioned factors, it is advisable for all parties engaged in the conflict to immediately halt hostilities and allow humanitarian organizations unrestricted access to provide vital aid to affected populations. This entails ensuring the safety of humanitarian routes and personnel. Furthermore, it is imperative to establish a comprehensive transitional justice framework to tackle past grievances, hold those responsible for violence and human rights violations accountable, and foster reconciliation among Sudanese communities. On top of that, expediting the transition to civilian governance is crucial, with a civilian-led transitional government tasked with restoring stability, delivering essential services, and preparing for fair elections. Urgent reforms within the security sector are necessary to ensure accountability, professionalism, and civilian oversight, including integrating the RSF into the regular armed forces, upholding international humanitarian law, and safeguarding civilian rights.

What's more, the international community, including regional and multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and African Union, should intensify diplomatic efforts to mediate the conflict, provide humanitarian aid, and support

long-term peacebuilding and development endeavors in Sudan. Further, special emphasis should be placed on addressing the mental health needs of those affected by the conflict, especially survivors of violence, and combating gender-based violence through comprehensive support services and preventive measures. Rebuilding Sudan's economy and infrastructure should prioritize sustainable development, job creation, and fair resource distribution to tackle the underlying causes of poverty and inequality that contribute to conflict. Ultimately, resolving the Sudanese conflict demands a comprehensive approach that addresses structural injustices, power disparities, and historical grievances at the heart of the violence. Only through concerted domestic and international efforts can lasting peace, stability, and prosperity be attained for the people of Sudan.

## References

- ACLED. (2024, February 16). *The SAF Breaks the Siege*. Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. <https://acleddata.com/2024/02/16/sudan-situation-update-february-2024-sudan-the-saf-breaks-the-siege/>
- Achudume, C. (2017). Sudan: The North-South Conflict from a Grievance Perspective. *The Journal of International Relations, Peace Studies, and Development*, 3(1), 10.
- Aderinto, N., & Olatunji, D. (2023). The consequences of Sudan's armed conflict on public health: a closer look at the devastating impact. *International Journal of Surgery: Global Health*, 6(4). <https://doi.org/10.1097/GH9.0000000000000179>
- Agenzia Fides. (2024). AFRICA/SUDAN - The ten-month war has devastated the country. In *Agenzia Fides*. [https://www.fides.org/en/news/74752-AFRICA\\_SUDAN\\_The\\_ten\\_month\\_war\\_has\\_devastated\\_the\\_country](https://www.fides.org/en/news/74752-AFRICA_SUDAN_The_ten_month_war_has_devastated_the_country)
- BBC. (2022, January 2). Sudan coup: Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok resigns after mass protests. *BBC*. [https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-59855246#\\_blank](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-59855246#_blank)
- Council of the European Union. (2024, January 24). *Sudan: Council adds six entities to EU sanctions list*. Council of the European Union. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/01/22/sudan-council-adds-six-entities-to-eu-sanctions-list/>
- Dilts, A., Winter, Y., Biebricher, T., Johnson, E. V., Vázquez-Arroyo, A. Y., & Cocks, J. (2012). Revisiting Johan Galtung's concept of structural violence. *New political science*, 34(2), e191-e227.
- Etefa, T. (2023, April 19). *Sudan created a paramilitary force to destroy government threats – but it became a major threat itself*. The Conversation. [https://theconversation.com/sudan-created-a-paramilitary-force-to-destroy-government-threats-but-it-became-a-major-threat-itself-203974#\\_blank](https://theconversation.com/sudan-created-a-paramilitary-force-to-destroy-government-threats-but-it-became-a-major-threat-itself-203974#_blank)



- Good Governance Africa. (2023, September 10). *The Sudanese crisis and implications for the Horn of Africa*. Good Governance Africa. <https://gga.org/the-sudanese-crisis-and-its-implications-to-the-horn-of-africa-takeaways-from-a-webinar/>
- Human Rights Watch. (2022, December 16). *Sudan: Events of 2022*. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/sudan>
- International Crisis Group. (2016, July 7). *Preventing War. Shaping Peace*. International Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/who-we-are>
- International Rescue Committee. (2023, April 17). *Crisis in Sudan: What is happening and how to help*. International Rescue Committee. <https://www.rescue.org/article/fighting-sudan-what-you-need-know-about-crisis>
- Lodhi, A. (2024, April 11). *After a year of war in Sudan, what is the situation now?* Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/11/why-did-war-break-out-in-sudan-a-year-ago-where-does-it-currently-stand>
- Maleševi, S. (2016). How Old is Human Brutality? On the Structural Origins of Violence. *Common Knowledge*, 22(1), 81–104. <https://doi.org/10.1215/0961754X-3322894>
- Médecins Sans Frontières. (2023, April 21). *Patients and staff in difficult conditions in hospital amid Sudan conflict*. Médecins sans Frontières (MSF). <https://www.msf.org/patients-and-staff-difficult-conditions-hospital-amid-sudan-conflict>
- Morris, Z. S. (2009). The truth about interviewing elites. *Politics*, 29(3), 209–217. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9256.2009.01357.x>
- Outlook Web Desk. (2023, November 23). *Sudan War Explained: What Is Paramilitary Group RSF, Why Is It Fighting Sudanese Military?* Outlook. <https://www.outlookindia.com/international/sudan-war-explained-what-is-paramilitary-group-rsf-why-is-it-fighting-sudanese-military-news-332372>

- Pape, U. J., Parisotto, L., Phipps-Ebeler, V., Mueller, A. J. M., Ralston, L. R., Nezam, T., & Sharma, A. (2018). *Impact of Conflict and Shocks on Poverty: South Sudan Poverty Assessment 2017 (English)*. World Bank Group.  
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/953201537854160003/Impact-of-Conflict-and-Shocks-on-Poverty-South-Sudan-Poverty-Assessment-2017>
- Ramani, S. (2023, May 3). *As fighting in Sudan rages, Russia's primary goal is to ensure authoritarian rule*. Middle East Institute.  
<https://www.mei.edu/publications/fighting-sudan-rages-russias-primary-goal-ensure-authoritarian-rule>
- Reuters. (2023a, April 15). Who is fighting in Sudan? *Reuters*.  
<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/who-are-sudans-rapid-support-forces-2023-04-13/>
- Reuters. (2023b, April 21). Sudan death toll rises to 413, World Health Organization says. *Reuters*.  
<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sudan-death-toll-rises-413-world-health-organization-says-2023-04-21/#:~:text=GENEVA%2C%20April%2021%20>
- Reuters. (2024, January 24). EU adopts sanctions against six entities involved in Sudan war. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-adopts-sanctions-against-six-entities-involved-sudan-war-2024-01-22/>
- Rothbart, D., Brosché, J., & Yousif, A. (2012). Darfur: The Crisis Continues. In *Beyond Intractability*.  
<https://www.beyondintractability.org/casestudy/rothbart-brosche-yousif-darfur>
- Sawyer, A. (2023). Civil Unrest Will Escalate to Civil War in Sudan. *Global Risk Series*. <https://bipr.jhu.edu/BlogArticles/articleprofile/12-Civil-Unrest-Will-Escalate-to-Civil-War-in-Sudan.cfm>
- Suliman, M. (1997). Civil War in Sudan: The Impact of Ecological Degradation. *Contributions in Black Science*, 15(7).  
<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cibs/vol15/iss1/7>

U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2024, January 31). *Treasury Targets Entities Funding the Conflict in Sudan*. U.S. Department of the Treasury. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2066>

UNICEF Sudan. (2024). *Sudan*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/sudan/>

Weigert, K. (2008). Structural Violence. In *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict* (pp. 2004–2011). Springer.

World Food Programme. (2024, March 6). *Sudan's war risks creating the world's largest hunger crisis, warns WFP Chief*. World Food Programme. [https://www.wfp.org/news/sudans-war-risks-creating-worlds-largest-hunger-crisis-warns-wfp-chief?utm\\_source=miragenews&utm\\_medium=miragenews&utm\\_campaign=news](https://www.wfp.org/news/sudans-war-risks-creating-worlds-largest-hunger-crisis-warns-wfp-chief?utm_source=miragenews&utm_medium=miragenews&utm_campaign=news)

World Health Organization. (2024, May 8). *Thanks to the European Union, WHO donates medical equipment to Sudan's health system*. World Health Organization - Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. <https://www.emro.who.int/countries/sdn/index.html>

Berhané, Y. (2023). Latest developments in the transition to a civilian government in Sudan. ACCORD. [https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/latest-developments-in-the-transition-to-a-civilian-government-in-sudan/#\\_blank](https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/latest-developments-in-the-transition-to-a-civilian-government-in-sudan/#_blank)



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

© (FREDERICK APPIAH AFRIYIE, 2024)

Published by the Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare and Simon Fraser University

Available from: <https://jicw.org/>

The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare  
Volume 7, Issue 1

