ONE YEAR AT WAR

THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF SUDAN'S CIVIL WAR AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

TUNÇ DEMİRTAŞ

SETA | REPORT

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SUMMARY

The civil war in Sudan, a country that serves as a bridge connecting Africa and the Middle East, has now entered its second year. This conflict stands out as one of the most destructive in Sudan's history due to its devastating impact and ongoing threat to civilians and state institutions. The repercussions of the civil war extend far beyond Sudan, affecting the region and the international community. The conflict has threatened regional stability, displaced millions of people, and led to a severe humanitarian crisis. Moreover, the potential for the civil war to spill over into neighboring countries poses a significant risk of triggering a broader wave of instability in the region.

The developments in Sudan, located at a crucial crossroads, have economic, migratory, and security dimensions in addition to their humanitarian aspects. The instability and security problems caused by the civil war have led to the displacement of millions of people, exacerbating cross-border security risks in parallel with migration movements in the region. Additionally, the instability in the country has resulted in a decline in the Sudanese economy and rising inflation. While the security challenges in Sudan and East Africa are well known, these challenges are likely to trigger new crises in the near future, particularly in Darfur.

Sudan stands out as a critical battleground in Africa due to its strategic location and abundant natural resources. The crisis in the country involves both foreign powers and local actors, whose complex relationships contribute to the ongoing instability. The policies of some foreign actors, in conjunction with local

dynamics, are believed to perpetuate the instability in this country. Foreign actors are thought to exploit the uncontrolled situation created by the region's porous borders which facilitate the easy passage of weapons, equipment, and militia forces into Sudan, thereby sustain the crisis. Consequently, in the Sudanese context, the goals, objectives, and policies of foreign actors can diverge and significantly impact the ongoing conflict.

Despite such diverse initiatives as Jeddah Talks, the Neighboring Countries Initiative, proposals from the African Union (AU), the UN's Expanded Mechanism, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a short-term solution in Sudan remains unlikely. However, establishing a mechanism for sharing short, medium, and long-term problems and solution proposals in Sudan—which can be called the "Forum Market for Sudan"—through international cooperation could help mitigate the crisis initially. By focusing on collaborative solutions, there is potential to stabilize Sudan and the broader region to some extent. In summary, ending the civil war in Sudan through international cooperation and ensuring peace, tranquility, and stability for the country's reconstruction and development is crucial not only for the Sudanese people but also for the region, Africa, and the global system.

One year after the outbreak of the civil war on April 15, 2023, this report examines the current state of the crisis in Sudan, its costs, and the key actors involved. It explores the policies and goals of international powers in Sudan, the steps and initiatives taken to resolve the conflict, and the potential for a new Darfur crisis in the future. The report concludes with policy recommendations for resolving the crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Sudan, which shares land borders with Egypt, Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, also has a coastline along the Red Sea to the east. This strategic location places Sudan on a crucial transit route for global trade via the Red Sea. Additionally, Sudan holds significant importance for Saudi Arabia, located on the opposite shore of the Red Sea. Prior to the civil war, Sudan had a population of 51 million and was notable in the African continent for its vast land area and rich underground and aboveground resources. Furthermore, the flow of a significant portion of the Nile River through its territory further increases the geopolitical importance of Sudan.

Sudan stands out as an important battleground in Africa due to its strategic location and resources. The country has the potential to be significantly affected by regional conflicts, and conversely, the conflicts and issues within Sudan can also impact the broader region. For instance, Egypt's disputes with Ethiopia over transboundary waters in the context of the Nile River may lead to challenges in various regions across the continent. Developments in North Africa, the Gulf region with its Red Sea and Saudi Arabian dimensions, and particularly in East Africa and the Sahel Belt, expand the sphere of influence of the crisis. Consequently, all developments in and around Sudan make it a theater for regional and global power struggles.

Since the 1950s, Sudan has grappled with intermittent coups and internal conflicts. Presently, echoes of past challenges have resurfaced. In 2011, South Su-

dan seceded from Sudan and became a new sovereign state within the international community. Prior to this secession, Sudan held the distinction of being the largest country in Africa by land area.

In the ongoing civil war, over a year has elapsed since clashes began on April 15, 2023, in Sudan's capital, Khartoum and quickly spread to other major cities across the country. While Sudan has experienced civil conflicts in the past, the current environment distinguishes itself as the most devastating by posing significant threats to civilians and state institutions alike.

THE CIVIL WAR PROCESS

Following the thirty-year rule of Omar al-Bashir, which ended in April 2019,[1] instability in Sudan has escalated gradually. Despite the overthrow of al-Bashir's government, many of its established structures have persisted in the country. Among these, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), commanded by Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, have emerged as a prominent actor in the ongoing conflict. Originally formed as Janjaweed militia forces during the Darfur crisis in 2003, the RSF was transformed int RSF in 2013.[2]

Before its transformation, al-Bashir assembled a paramilitary force under Dagalo's leadership, uniting tribal militias involved in the 2003 civil war between Sudan's central government and Darfur. This paramilitary structure initially served to safeguard the al-Bashir administration. Subsequently, in 2013, al-Bashir formalized these militias into the RSF, with Dagalo appointed as its leader. In 2017, al-Bashir solidified their allegiance to himself by passing a law and as such effectively established a secondary military force in Sudan. Al-Bashir viewed the RSF as a bulwark against potential military coups by other security forces. Consequently, his pivotal role in shaping the RSF is regarded as a destructive legacy that continues to resonate in today's Sudan.[3]

1 Kaan Devecioğlu, "Türkiye-Sudan Relations in PostBashir Era", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol: 15, Issue: 3, (2023), p. 205.

2 Kim Searcy, "Tribal Militias in Sudan", Ohio State University, (June 2023), https://origins.osu.edu/read/tribal-militias-sudan?language_content_entity=en, (Accessed: 6 April 2024).

3 Areej Elhag, "RSF's Battle Successes in Sudan: The Consequences of Legitimizing Hemedti", Fikra Forum, 10 January 2024, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/rsfs-battle-successes-sudan-consequences-legitimizing-hemedti, (Accessed: 9 April 2024).

In the aftermath of al-Bashir's rule, the RSF persisted as a paramilitary force separate from the regular army yet possessing capabilities similar to those of the army. In fact, the RSF's arsenal could have been enhanced with air power had the requests from Russia for helicopters been fulfilled.[4] This way, a new armed force emerged under the auspices of intelligence units rather than the conventional army.[5]

Following the April 2019 coup against al-Bashir, the Transitional Sovereignty Council (TSC) was established in August 2019 by comprising eleven members—five military and six civilian. Although two prominent military figures came to the fore, the TSC also made efforts to prioritize domestic political balance. As a result, amidst expectations for a civilian-led government, the TSC appointed Abdalla Hamdok as prime minister on August 17, 2019. However, Hamdok faced significant pressures during his tenure. He was detained in October 2021 but released the following month to form a technocratic government.[6]

In October 2021, following a coup d'état in Sudan, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan dissolved the TSC. A month later, the TSC was reinstated, and Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, leader of the RSF, was appointed as its vice-president. Despite these changes, Sudan's political process remained unstable, and in December 2022, a Framework Agreement for forming a new government was signed, involving the United Nations representative in Sudan, the IGAD, and the AU.[7] However, this initiative did not yield a successful outcome. Essentially, since the termination of al-Bashir era, Sudan has continued to grapple with familiar issues, with many of the same actors involved in today's conflicts as were entrenched in the system under al-Bashir's rule.

Dagalo's journey from camel trader to militia leader and ultimately to a prominent political figure as the country's "second man" has been remarkable. However, his transition from military to political roles has significantly influenced Sudan's current trajectory. His outspoken criticism of Prime Minister Hamdok's dismissal in 2021 and his travels abroad in civilian attire instead of military uni-

4 Kaan Devecioğlu, "Sudan İç Savaşında Mevcut Durum ve Uluslararası Toplumun Sorumlulukları", ORSAM, 7 April 2024, https://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/sudan-ic-savasinda-mevcut-durum-ve-uluslararasi-toplumun-sorumluluklari, (Accessed: 9 April 2024).

5 Searcy, "Tribal Militias in Sudan".

6 Khalid Abdelaziz and Nafisa Eltahir, "Sudan's Army Chief, Paramilitary Head Ready to De-Escalate Tensions, Mediators Say", Reuters, 15 April 2023; "Sudan Timeline: From the Fall of Bashir to Street-Fighting in Khartoum", MEE Staff, 18 April 2023, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudan-turmoil-bashir-fall-fighting-khartoum-timeline, (Accessed: 6 April 2024).

7 "Will the Framework Agreement in Sudan Lead to Democracy?", Sudan in the News, 25 March 2023, https://www.sudaninthenews.com/framework-agreement/will-the-framework-agreement-in-sudan-lead-to-democracy, (Accessed: 6 April 2024).

form were viewed unfavorably by al-Burhan. In fact, al-Burhan's decision to delegate administrative authority to others rather than Dagalo during his international trips underscores this lack of trust toward Dagalo.[8]

Recent developments, such as al-Burhan's deployment of heavily armored troops to key locations in the city as a precaution against Dagalo's troop movements around Khartoum, the encirclement of the Presidential Palace, the construction of barriers around the army headquarters, and the fortification of Marowe Airport—the country's second largest international airport—indicate the inevitability of a conflict.[9] In essence, the disagreements and trust issues between al-Burhan, the leader of Sudan's army in the post-al-Bashir era, and Dagalo, the head of the RSF, form the foundation of the current civil war.

8 Ömer Erdem and Ahmed Satti, "Deve Ticaretinden İkinci Adamlığa: Sudan Hızlı Destek Kuvvetleri Lideri Dagalu", Anadolu Agency, 17 April 2023.

9 "Fighting between Sudan Military Rivals Enters a Second Day, with Dozens Dead", CNN, 17 April 2023.

DIMENSIONS AND THE COST OF THE CIVIL WAR

The conflict between the Sudanese army and the RSF extends beyond Khartoum. Overall, an alarming 24.8 million people in Sudan require assistance. Among them, 47.8 percent are children, 46.7 percent are adults (including 25.8 percent women), and 5.5 percent are elderly.[10] This underscores children as the most vulnerable group in Sudan. While the civil war in Sudan encompasses humanitarian, economic, and migration aspects, the humanitarian dimension stands as the most critical.

In Sudan, the conflict has severely impacted essential infrastructure, notably water and sanitation services, banking and financial systems, electricity, and communication networks. Specifically, 70 percent of hospitals in conflict-affected areas are non-operational, and those that remain functional are overwhelmed by the substantial demand for healthcare services.[11]

10 "Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024", Humanitarian Action, 20 December 2023, https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1188/document/sudan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024/article/glance-4, (Accessed: 6 April 2024).

11 "Regional Director Statement on the Health Crisis in Sudan", WHO, 21 November 2023, https://www.emro.who.int/media/news/regional-director-statement-on-the-health-crisis-in-sudan.html, (Accessed: 6 April 2024).

MAP 1. POLITICAL MAP OF SUDAN

Source: BBC

Humanitarian assistance is urgently required across all regions of Sudan. When considering the entire Sudanese population alongside those requiring aid, it becomes evident that one out of every two individuals in the country is in need. With each passing day, these needs escalate into a crisis situation. Disturbingly, women and girls in Sudan are particularly vulnerable, facing widespread incidents of sexual violence including abduction, rape, and enslavement, reportedly perpetrated by various parties involved in the conflict.[12]

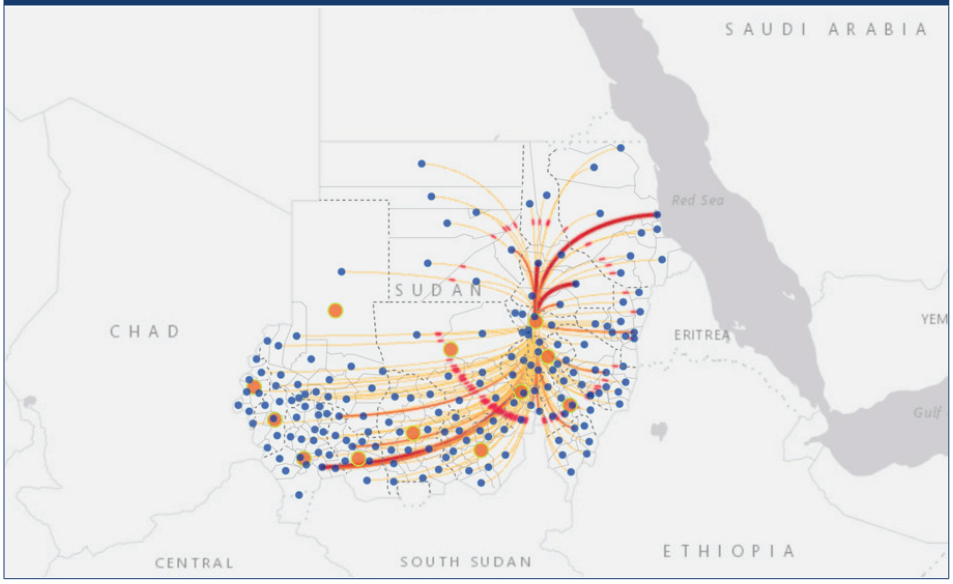
The conflicts in Sudan have extended beyond Khartoum into Kordofan and Darfur, leading to ethnic violence marked by mass killings and displacement in Darfur. Consequently, the rapid expansion of conflict zones has escalated the crisis to a critical level. Tragically, nearly 13,000 lives have been lost in Sudan due to these conflicts.[13] Within just one year since the civil war began, more than 7,000

12 "Sudan: Women and Girls Abducted, Held 'in Slave-Like Conditions' in Darfur", UN News, 6 November 2023, https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/november-2023/sudan-women-and-girls-abducted-held-%E2%80%98-slave-conditions%E2%80%99-darfur, (Accessed: 6 April 2024).

13 "Fighting in Sudan: What You Need to Know about the Crisis", International Rescue Committee, 4 January 2024, https://www.rescue.org/eu/article/fighting-sudan-what-you-need-know-about-crisis, (Accessed: 6 April 2024).

locations across Sudan's 18 states have experienced conflict and displacement.[14] During this period, over 6 million people out of Sudan's total population of 51 million have been internally displaced. Additionally, more than 2 million people have fled to neighboring countries such as Egypt, Chad, Libya, Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Ethiopia.[15] This means that at least 15 percent of Sudan's population is now displaced due to the ongoing crisis.

MAP 2. HUMAN MOVEMENT FROM SUDAN TO NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES



Source: Displacement Flow Map, https://dizayee.github.io/flow-map-dtm, (Accessed: 6 April 2024).

The most striking issue in this context is that half of the internally displaced individuals in Sudan are children. This situation deprives them of education, subjects them to trauma, and exposes them to physical harm during the conflict. This not only impacts the current generation but also jeopardizes the future of Sudan. The humanitarian cost of these events is extraordinarily high. Over the past year of civil war in Sudan, millions of children have been unable to attend school, with profound implications for future generations.[16] Currently, the UN has managed to provide education to only 87 thousand children, both inside and outside the country.[17]

14 "One Year of Conflict in Sudan: Visualizing the World's Largest Displacement Crisis", IOM UN Migration, (April 2023-April 2024), https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/9ab6d7999c434eaa8dbf1734d515de72, (Accessed: 6 April 2024).

15 "One Year of Conflict in Sudan".

16 "Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024".

17 "Sudan İç Savaşının Birinci Yıl Dönümünün Bilançosu", ORSAM, 15 April 2024, https://orsam.org.tr/tr/sudan-ic-savasinin-birinci-yil-donumunun-bilancosu, (Accessed: 6 April 2024).

Moreover, the psychological toll on children's mental health due to the civil war will have long-term negative consequences in addition to disrupting their education. As of the end of 2023, Sudan had close to 20 million school-age children.[18] Before the outbreak of civil war, 12.5 million children were enrolled in education, but since the conflict began, 6.5 million children—more than half of whom were girls—have been forced to stop their education.[19] Therefore, the primary concern at this juncture is the profound human cost of the crisis in Sudan.

The crisis in Sudan also has significant economic repercussions, both in the present and potentially into the future. While current economic costs can be estimated to a certain extent, forecasting future costs remains challenging. Last year, Sudan's economy contracted by 40 percent, with its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decreasing from $42 billion to $25 billion. The agricultural sector experienced an even steeper decline of 60 percent, and the unemployment rate rose by approximately 15 percent from 2022 to 2023. Also, inflation in the Sudanese economy declined slightly from 129 percent in 2022 to 127 percent in 2023, but it is projected to sharply increase to 256 percent in 2024. Additionally, since the onset of the conflict, the Sudanese currency has at least doubled in value against the dollar.

In Sudan, the pre-civil war period was already marked by rising food prices that led to a humanitarian crisis. However, since the onset of the civil war, the situation has significantly deteriorated. Currently, 7.7 million people in Sudan are grappling with food insecurity. The conflict's spread to al-Jazira, an important agricultural region known as Sudan's "granary of wheat" between the Blue Nile and the White Nile, has displaced hundreds of thousands of people to further exacerbate the food crisis in the country. The food crisis in Sudan has indeed worsened, exacerbated by the looting of humanitarian warehouses and businesses. Allegations have surfaced that the RSF blocked food supplies, particularly to al-Fashir in North Darfur, in April 2024. These actions risk further escalating the crisis in that region.

18 "Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024".

19 "Sudan: Seven Months of Conflict-Key Facts and Figures (15 November 2023)", UN OCHA, 19 November 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-seven-months-conflict-key-facts-and-figures-15-november-2023, (Accessed: 6 April 2024).

GOALS OF FOREIGN ACTORS IN SUDAN AND INITIATIVES TO RESOLVE THE CRISIS

Although there are two main actors in the civil war in Sudan and there are also significant local actors such as the Sudan Liberation Movement, led by figures like Mustafa Tambor, [20] Darfur Governor Minni Arko Minnawi,[21] Gibril Ibrahim of the Justice and Equality Movement,[22] the Tamazuj Movement,[23] and Abdelaziz al-Hilu the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army,[24] foreign powers are also involved in the Sudanese crisis, including the USA, Russia, China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Türkiye, Ethiopia, Chad, Israel, IGAD, AU, and other countries and organizations. These external actors have distinct goals and objectives in Sudan. The following discussion focuses on the goals and objectives of selected countries concerning Sudan, emphasizing foreign involvement rather than local actors.

20 "Former Darfur Rebel Leader Returns to Khartoum", Sudan Tribune, 3 April 2021, https://sudantribune.com/article67506, (Accessed: 7 April 2024).

21 "Minni Minawi to be Inaugurated Today as Governor of Darfur", Dabanga, 10 August 2021, https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/minni-minawi-to-be-inaugurated-as-governor-of-darfur, (Accessed: 7 April 2024).

22 "Justice and Equality Movement", UN Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, https://unterm.un.org/unterm2/en/view/unhq/f430d52d-2d94-49be-b2ff-4fc7b51080de, (Accessed: 7 April 2024).

23 "Panel of Experts on the Sudan Addressed to the President of the Security Council", S/2022/48, UN Security Council, 24 January 2022, p. 46.

24 "SPLM-N al-Hilu Extends Unilateral Ceasefire for Additional Three Months", ReliefWeb, 1 April 2020, splm-n-al-hilu-extends-unilateral-ceasefire-additional-three-months, (Accessed: 7 April 2020).

EGYPT

Due to its historical ties and shared border, Egypt emphasizes that all developments in Sudan have significant consequences and the potential to impact it directly. Given the close relationship between the two countries, Egypt cannot escape the effects of the civil war in Sudan. Egypt is also often one of the primary destinations for civilians fleeing the conflict in Sudan, owing to familial and cultural ties. However, accommodating refugees from Sudan places additional strain on the Egyptian economy, which is already grappling with economic challenges.

On October 8, 2023, the Israeli attacks on Gaza had a significant impact on the security of the Red Sea, thereby shaking the Egyptian economy. Subsequently, on October 19, 2023, the Houthis began targeting ships they claimed were affiliated with Israel, affecting maritime traffic in the Red Sea. This disruption also extended to transit through the Suez Canal, located north of the Red Sea, which is crucial for the Egyptian economy. In the fiscal year 2022-2023, three ships passing through the Suez Canal generated $1 million in revenue for Egypt, highlighting the canal's economic importance. During this period, 26 thousand ships utilized the Suez Canal. Despite occasional exceptions, Sudan and Egypt typically collaborate on regional issues such as the Nile River water dispute.[25]

In short, the civil war in Sudan has the potential to exert serious pressure on Egypt's economic, political, and security infrastructure. Egypt's objectives in Sudan include strengthening the Sudanese military leadership to align it with Egypt's interests, ensuring Sudan's cooperation on issues related to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and the Nile waters, and preventing Sudan from becoming a failed state to avoid further difficulties for Egypt's already distressed economy.

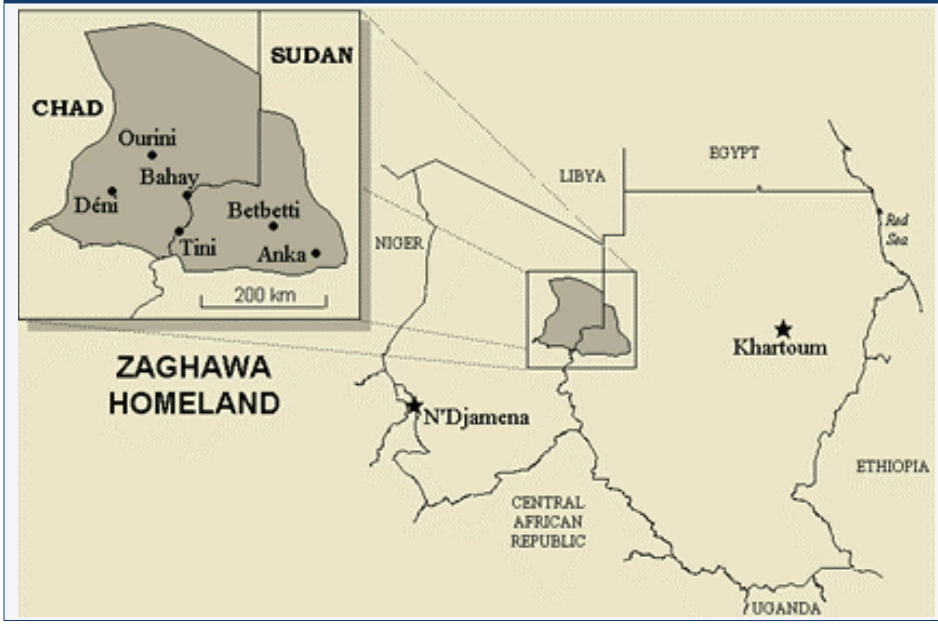
CHAD

Although the Chadian government appears aligned with al-Burhan, it is known to pursue a policy of neutrality in Sudan's civil war. However, the risk of the Sudanese crisis spilling over into the Sahel region, particularly Chad, remains high. The Zaghawa population, present in both Sudan and Chad, maintains

25 Tunç Demirtaş, "Kızıldeniz Güvenliği: Husi Saldırıları ve Artan Jeopolitik Riskler", *SETA Analiz*, Issue: 401, (January 2024), p. 18.

strong ties with Chadian President Idriss Deby Itno.[26] Similarly, Darfur Governor Minni Minnawi, who is of Zaghawa ethnicity, collaborates with al-Burhan in Sudan.[27] This situation has the potential to escalate conflict in the region and expand the area affected by the crisis.

MAP 3. THE POSITION OF ZAGHAWAS IN SUDAN AND CHAD



Source: Aberfoyle International Security

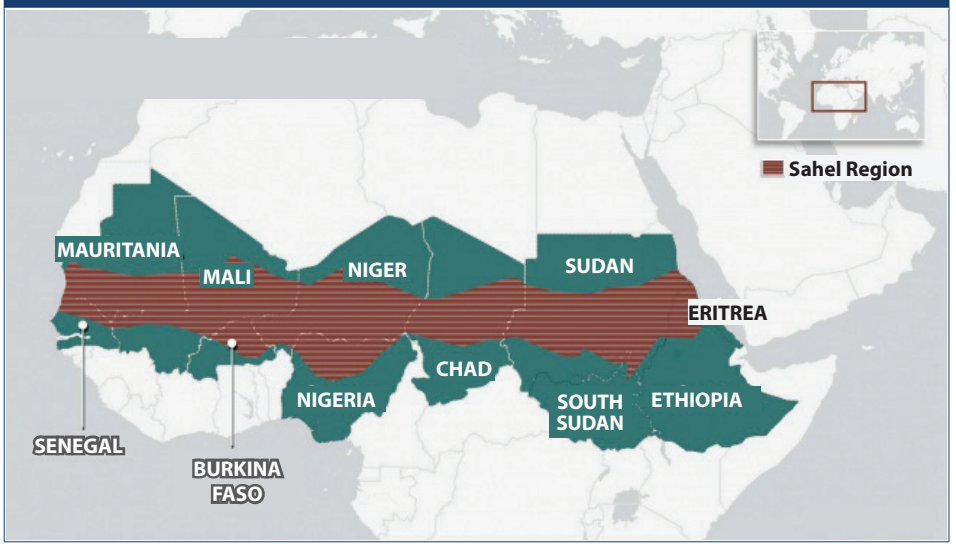
After military developments in Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali in recent years, junta governments have taken power. Subsequently, these three countries have pursued alternatives to Western influence, including calls for the withdrawal of French troops and rhetoric against France and the US. Following these events and particularly after the developments in Niger, French troops relocated to Chad,[28] positioning Chad as potentially the last "safe harbor" of Western influence in the Sahel Belt.

26 Alexandre Marc, "The Death of Chadian President Idris Déby Itno Threatens Stability in the Region", Brookings, 29 April 2021, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-death-of-chadian-president-idris-deby-itno-threatens-stability-in-the-region, (Accessed: 7 April 2024).

27 "The Fallout in Chad from the Fighting in Darfur", ReliefWeb, 10 August 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/fallout-chad-fighting-darfur, (Accessed: 7 April 2024).

28 "Military: First French Convoy Withdrawing from Niger Arrives in Chad", VOA, 19 October 2023, https://www.voanews.com/a/military-first-french-convoy-withdrawing-from-niger-arrives-in-chad/7317461.html, (Accessed: 7 April 2024).

MAP 4. SAHEL BELT COUNTRIES



Source: TRT Haber

In the context of Sudan, it is noteworthy that Dagalo hails from a Chadian family and has a cousin who serves as a general in the Chadian army. These familial connections suggest that Dagalo wields potential influence over Chadian politics.[29] Furthermore, Chad currently grapples with a fragile political landscape, exacerbated by the presidential election held on May 6, 2024.[30] Dagalo's potential inclusion of Chadian foreign fighters into the RSF could escalate the conflict, potentially involving Chad.

USA

The primary objective of the US in Sudan is to achieve a lasting ceasefire and establish a stable civilian government. Following the onset of unrest in Sudan, the US suspended its financial assistance. However, with the formation of a civilian government, there is optimism about reinstating this support. The US also believes to have a responsibility towards Sudan. It also believes that it can offer guidance to societies throughout Africa as they navigate their futures.[31]

29 "Sudan's Connections with CAR, Chad Could Cause Conflict to Spread", Africa Defense Forum, 30 May 2023, https://adf-magazine.com/2023/05/sudans-connections-with-car-chad-could-cause-conflict-to-spread, (Accessed: 7 April 2024).

30 Ruth Maclean, "Chad Election 2024: What to Know", *The New York Times*, 30 April 2024.

31 "The US and the Sudan Conflict: Motives and Ability to Influence Events", Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 27 June 2023, https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-us-and-the-sudan-conflict-motives-and-ability-to-influence-events, (Accessed: 7 April 2024).

As with its broader policy in Africa, the US approach in Sudan appears to contrast with those of Russia and China. However, Washington also prioritizes safeguarding its economic and geopolitical interests in Sudan. Additionally, combating terrorist organizations represents another key aspect of US policy in the region.[32]

Sudan holds strategic significance for the United States due to its geopolitical location and resources. It spans 60 percent of the Nile Valley and plays a crucial role in the conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia over the Renaissance Dam. Sudan also possesses valuable minerals such as gold, uranium, copper, and silver, and holds a key position along the Red Sea, a critical route for 15 percent of global trade.[33] Additionally, Sudan produces 80 percent of the world's gum arabic, essential in various industries including cola production, as well as in food, paint, cosmetics, and beverages and confectionery. [34]

Breaking Russian and Chinese influence, addressing migration-related terrorism, and preventing irrational alliances among regional allies are the three primary reasons for US interest in Sudan.[35] Firstly, the US aims to counter Russian and Chinese influence, particularly after Russia sought to mitigate sanctions from the Ukraine conflict through gold transactions in Sudan. In this context, there is a perception in the US that Russia circumvented the sanctions imposed on it through the M-Invest company.[36] Concurrently, China has been expanding its presence in Sudan through investments in infrastructure such as bridges, pipelines, textile factories, and railroads.[37] Consequently, Washington is devising strategies to uphold a political and economic equilibrium in response to the growing presence of Russia and China in Sudan.

The second reason is migration and terrorism. The current crisis in Sudan has the potential to affect neighboring countries, especially those in Africa and Europe. Of particular concern is the terrorist dimension of migration, which pos-

32 Buğra Sarı, "Amerikan Ulusal Çıkarları ve Afrika", *Ankara Üniversitesi Afrika Çalışmaları Dergisi*, Vol: 1, Issue: 2, (Spring 2012), p. 111.

33 Demirtaş, "Kızıldeniz Güvenliği", p. 10.

34 Richa Naidu and Jessica DiNapoli, "Sudan Conflict Threatens Supply of Key Soft Drink Ingredient Gum Arabic", Reuters, 28 April 2023.

35 "The US and the Sudan Conflict".

36 "Sanctions List Search", OFAC, https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/Details.aspx?id=29101, (Accessed: 7 April 2024).

37 Mohammed Alamin, "Sudan Plans $640 Million Railway Revamp as It Relinks with World", Bloomberg, 16 July 2021, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-07-16/sudan-plans-640-million-railway-revamp-as-it-relinks-with-world, (Accessed: 7 April 2024); "Chinese Companies to Grow One Million Feddans of Cotton in Sudan", Sudan Tribune, 17 August 2016, https://sudantribune.com/article58233, (Accessed: 7 April 2024).

es significant risks. The United States fears that if the Sudanese crisis prolongs, it could provide an opportunity for the expansion of the al-Shabaab terrorist organization,[38] currently active in Somalia, to establish a new sanctuary in Sudan.[39] There are concerns that al-Shabaab could potentially infiltrate Sudan through Ethiopia and South Sudan. While this scenario is unlikely due to al-Shabaab's specific operational objectives, Washington's perception of this risk underscores another dimension of its interest in Sudan.

The third reason is the concern over irrational alliances. Washington fears that the region could become increasingly complex and intertwined as US allies, particularly Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, as well as Chad and Ethiopia, develop intricate relationships among themselves. For instance, Saudi Arabia and Egypt support al-Burhan, while the UAE backs Dagalo. There is also a possibility that Egypt might align with al-Burhan, and Ethiopia with Dagalo, particularly concerning the Renaissance Dam crisis. Chad is also apprehensive about the potential destabilization of the Sahel Belt due to Dagalo's involvement in the Sudanese civil war, influenced by his familial connections and the recruitment of foreign troops into the RSF."

SAUDI ARABIA

Despite being geographically part of Africa, Sudan serves as a bridge connecting the Middle East to the continent. Since the era of al-Bashir, Sudan has received support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In 2015, Sudan even deployed troops to Yemen to combat the Houthis.[40] A significant turning point occurred in 2016 when Sudan severed ties with Iran.[41] Currently, Saudi Arabia is known to collaborate with al-Burhan in Sudan, driven by various underlying reasons."

38 Al-Shabaab, the most effective terrorist organization in the Horn of Africa, originated as a militia under the Union of Somali Islamic Courts, which gained control over much of southern Somalia in the latter half of 2006. Operating primarily in and around Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, al-Shabaab employs guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics against the Federal Government of Somalia and the African Union. The group recruits' militias from regional sub-clans and aims to establish temporary or permanent control over strategic locations across Somalia. Al-Shabaab pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2012, with its primary objectives being the overthrow of the Federal Government of Somalia, the expulsion of foreign forces from Somalia, and the establishment of a Sharia-based state. For further information see: Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of Al-Qaeda's Most Powerful Ally*, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington: 2018).

39 "The US and the Sudan Conflict: Motives".

40 Samy Magdy, "Sudan Drawing Down Troops in Yemen in Recent Months", AP, 30 October 2019.

41 "Sudan Severs Diplomatic Ties with Iran", Sudan Tribune, 4 January 2016, https://sudantribune.com/article55954, (Accessed: 7 April 2024).

Saudi Arabia is particularly motivated to safeguard its strategic interests in the Red Sea region against potential rivals like Türkiye, Iran, Russia, and the UAE. Additionally, Sudan's stability is crucial for Saudi Arabia's 'Vision 2030' agenda, aimed at reducing oil dependency, diversifying the economy, and developing sectors such as economy, tourism, health, and education. Challenges in Sudan could potentially impact Saudi Arabia's ambitious plans, including NEOM, a zero-carbon smart city project, and tourism initiatives along the Red Sea. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman aims to diversify Saudi Arabia's economy and enhance its role as a trade and tourism hub in the region. Therefore, Riyadh's policy in Sudan is driven by efforts to protect investments in various sectors like agriculture, telecommunications, energy, water, sanitation, and transportation, alongside Mohammed bin Salman's aspiration for regional leadership.[42]

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

In the Gulf region, unlike Saudi Arabia, the UAE aligns itself with Dagalo. While Saudi Arabia and the UAE have collaborated on numerous regional issues, they have also experienced periods of competitive relations. In Sudan, Abu Dhabi continues to support Dagalo which reflects its pursuit of independent interests. The UAE and Saudi Arabia primarily compete on three major economic fronts: mining, agricultural lands, and infrastructure projects.[43]

In this context, the UAE's Sudan policy aims to eliminate remnants of the al-Bashir administration from the country's politics, safeguard its strategic interests in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa, invest in Sudan's agriculture to bolster food security, and advance its partnership with Dagalo. Additionally, the UAE seeks to maintain control over Sudan's gold resources.

RUSSIA

Russia's influence and operations in Africa have notably expanded in recent years. Key activities of the Moscow administration on the continent include its engagements from Libya to the Central African Republic, and from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger to the Red Sea. Sudan, situated at the intersection of these strategic corridors, holds significant importance for Russia. Furthermore, Sudan's Red Sea

42 Giorgio Cafiero, "Saudi Arabia's Diplomatic Energy, Soft Power in Sudan", Aljazeera, 15 May 2023.
43 Talal Mohammad, "How Sudan Became a Saudi-UAE Proxy War", *Foreign Policy*, 12 July 2023.

coastline presents a crucial opportunity for Russia in terms of access to this vital maritime route.[44]

In addition to support from regional and global powers to the warring factions in Sudan, international actors also play a crucial role in the crisis. Sudan serves as a significant battleground for US-Russia influence in Africa. Unlike Washington, which suspended financial aid following the outbreak of civil war, Moscow allegedly supports the RSF with weapons through its mercenary group Wagner (African Corps).[45] Russia's Sudan policy focuses on securing a naval base in the Red Sea, engaging through the African Corps, and safeguarding its commercial interests, particularly in commodities and energy resources across the continent.

TÜRKİYE

Since the onset of the crisis in Sudan, Türkiye has been one of the few countries capable of negotiating with and earning respect from both sides involved.[46] Türkiye's policy of maintaining balance in Sudan has been effectively executed thus far. Türkiye's primary objective in Sudan is to stabilize the situation and facilitate increased trade volume. This contrasts with other actors who continue commercial activities in Sudan amidst instability or through illegitimate means. Additionally, Türkiye's approach of engaging with institutions rather than individuals distinguishes it from other actors in the country. In this context, Türkiye's experience in state-building and capacity-building, as seen in its efforts in Somalia and elsewhere in Africa, holds significant potential to contribute to resolving the crisis and achieving sustainable stability in Sudan. However, it is important to recognize that this process requires considerable time and effort.

One of the critical dimensions of the crisis in Sudan is the humanitarian situation. Türkiye's prioritization of intervention in the humanitarian crisis could prevent a new crisis arising from the impending drought expected with the onset of summer. Türkiye's successful track record in humanitarian diplomacy globally provides a significant advantage. Therefore, Türkiye's humanitarian efforts in Sudan have the potential to bring substantial benefits to Sudan and its people.

44 Leonardo Jacopo Maria Mazzucco, "Slow, but Persistent: Russia's Overseas Basing Strategy in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden", Gulf International Forum, https://gulfif.org/slow-but-persistent-russias-overseas-basing-strategy-in-the-red-sea-and-the-gulf-of-aden, (Accessed: 9 April 2024).

45 Nima Elbagir, Gianluca Mezzofiore, Tamara Qiblawi and Barbara Arvanitidis, "Evidence Emerges of Russia's Wagner Arming Militia Leader Battling Sudan's Army", CNN, 21 April 2023.

46 "President Erdoğan's Sudan' Diplomacy", TRT Haber, 20 April 2023.

STEPS TOWARDS RESOLUTION IN SUDAN

One year after the civil war in Sudan, the deadlock still continues. Various attempts were made last year involving regional and global actors to stop the civil war. In this context, although initiatives such as the Jeddah Meetings, Neighboring Countries Initiative, solution proposals by the AU, the UN's Expanded Mechanism, and IGAD's initiatives were discussed at different times, none of them achieved a successful result.

In this context, the Jeddah Meetings,[47] held between the USA, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, were unsuccessful due to a lack of political will. Moreover, the absence of Egypt and Chad, the two countries significantly impacted by refugee flows, from IGAD—an influential body in the East African sub-regional system—remains a key reason for the ineffectiveness of solution attempts.[48] Furthermore, the AU's online meeting faced challenges primarily due to limited participation.

On the other hand, the last meeting of the UN Extended Mechanism held on February 20, 2024, saw the participation of the AU Commission, IGAD, the UN, the Arab League, the European Union (EU), Mozambique, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, USA, UK, Norway, Türkiye, Qatar, and the UAE. Despite this wide participation, no concrete solution proposal has emerged from

47 "Sudan Peace Talks Continue in Jeddah: Saudi Arabia", TRT World, https://www.trtworld.com/africa/sudan-peace-talks-continue-in-jeddah-saudi-arabia-15556687, (Accessed: 9 April 2024).

48 "IGAD to Co-Facilitate the Sudan Humanitarian Ceasefire Talks in Jeddah", IGAD, 27 October 2023, https://igad.int/igad-to-co-facilitate-the-sudan-humanitarian-ceasefire-talks-in-jeddah, (Accessed: 9 April 2024).

the UN Extended Mechanism to date.[49] Consequently, the overall failure of efforts to resolve the crisis, coupled with the risk of renewed conflict in Darfur under current conditions, indicates that achieving peace in Sudan in the short term is unlikely.

49 "The Expanded Mechanism Meets the AU High-Level Panel for Sudan", ReliefWeb, 23 February 2024, https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/expanded-mechanism-meets-au-high-level-panel-sudan, (Accessed: 9 April 2024).

SUDAN AND DARFUR IN THE SECOND YEAR OF THE CIVIL WAR: QUO VADIS?

Darfur, situated in the western part of Sudan, is administratively divided into five federal regions: North, South, East, West, and Central. Specifically, North Darfur, with its capital at al-Fashir, is one of these regions.[50] Al-Fashir is located in the southern part of North Darfur and is in close proximity to the South Darfur region therefore to its capital Nyala. Additionally, al-Fashir holds significant cultural and historical importance as the symbolic capital of Darfur. This significance dates back to its role as the capital of the Darfur Sultanate from 1673 to 1874, before the colonial period.[51]

Al-Fashir holds significant strategic importance. Although North Darfur, with al-Fashir as its most important city, is mostly situated in desert terrain it covers nearly half of the Darfur' land area. While a large portion of North Darfur along the borders with Chad and Libya is controlled by the Sudanese army, there is a specific area where the RSF holds control over the Libyan border. This region in North Darfur controlled by the RSF is adjacent to areas controlled by Khalifa Haftar in Libya. Therefore, along with the UAE, Haftar is an ally of Dagalo in Libya. Reports indicate that Libyan militias associated with the African Corps, estimated to include 2,000 soldiers, supply the RSF with fuel, surface-to-air missiles,

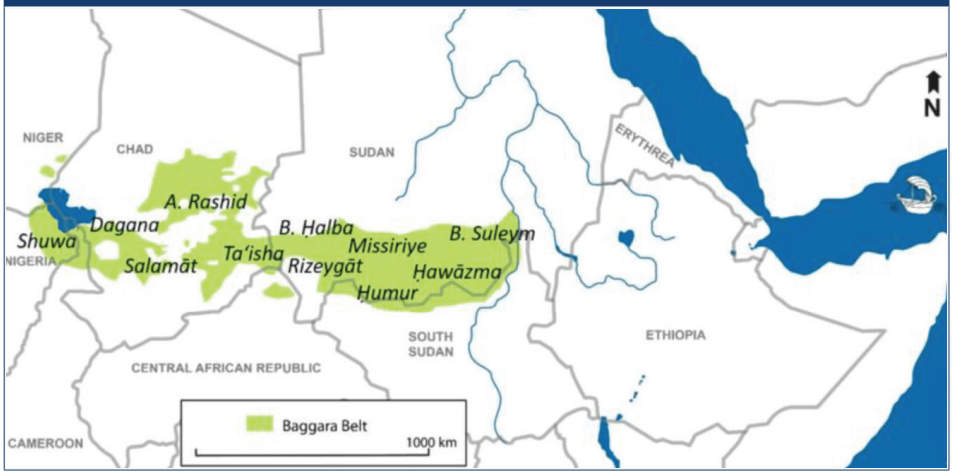
50 Camerun Hudson, "Preventing Another Darfur Genocide", CSIS, 25 April 2024, https://www.csis.org/analysis/preventing-another-darfur-genocide, (Accessed: 9 April 2024).

51 Yousuf Sulayman Saeed Takana, *Darfur Struggle of Power and Resources, 1650–2002 an Institutional Perspective*, (CHR Michelsen Institute, Norway: 1965), p. 142.

and anti-aircraft weapons. Additionally, before the conflict, the Russian private military company Wagner reportedly trained the RSF militias in Sudan.[52]

In addition to the Libyan border, Chad is considered an important transit center for the RSF, particularly in fuel smuggling. Reports occasionally highlight the presence of Chadian militias in North Darfur. It is alleged that weapons supplied to Dagalo by the African Corps, Libya, and the UAE are routed through Chad. Furthermore, the African Corps, said to have a force of about 1,000 in the Central African Republic, is also reported to be cooperating with the RSF in Sudan. In this context, South Sudan is similarly accused of providing fuel to RSF.[53]

MAP 5. BAGGARA BELT



Source: Manfredi and Roset, "Towards a Dialect History of the Baggara Belt".

Another strategic importance of North Darfur for the RSF is its role in recruiting members. North Darfur is situated just north of the so-called Baggara Arab Belt, a region where most of the RSF's support and recruitment come from.[54] Being largely controlled by the army forces under al-Burhan's administration, North Darfur remains a critical stronghold against the RSF, which has very limited support within its borders. Therefore, the Sudanese armed forces are acutely aware of al-Fashir's strategic importance and understand that they cannot afford to lose it.

52 Hager Ali, "The War in Sudan: How Weapons and Networks Shattered a Power Struggle", *German Institute for Global and Area Studies*, Issue: 2, (February 2024).

53 "The War in Sudan".

54 Stefano Manfredi and Caroline Roset, "Towards a Dialect History of the Baggara Belt", *Languages*, Vol: 6, Issue: 3, (2021), p. 4.

On the other hand, al-Fashir serves as the gateway to Darfur for all regions of Sudan outside Darfur. When traveling to any area within Darfur, al-Fashir is typically the first stop. Additionally, the airport in al-Fashir hosts close air support, helicopter, and transport fleets for the Sudanese army. Given the army's objective to expel the RSF forces from Khartoum and its surroundings since last April, the RSF militias are likely to focus more on Darfur. This further underscores the strategic importance of al-Fashir.

Recently, the Sudanese army has been transferring soldiers to the al-Fashir region from other areas.[55] Due to the strategic location of al-Fashir, the Sudanese army can, if necessary, dispatch troops to the other four regions of Darfur under the RSF control. This process naturally carries the risk of making a new war inevitable.

Considering that 1.9 million people live in West Darfur, 1.3 million in East Darfur, 1.8 million in Central Darfur, 4 million in South Darfur, and 2.8 million in North Darfur, the rising tension in al-Fashir poses significant risks. There is a danger of a massacre or an increase in ethnicity-based violence, reminiscent of past conflicts. Additionally, if such a war occurs, it will likely prompt the approximately 12 million people in Darfur to migrate, primarily to Chad, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan and will create a new migration crisis and, consequently, a major humanitarian crisis.

55 Rania Abu Shamala, "Sudan Slams US for Failure to Condemn Rapid Support Forces Attacks 'in a Clear, Unequivocal Manner'", Anadolu Agency, 26 April 2024.

IS THE SECOND DARFUR CRISIS AT THE DOOR?

The civil war in Sudan, ongoing for more than a year, has humanitarian, economic, migration, and security dimensions. A potential conflict in al-Fashir poses a danger not only to the Sudanese population but also to Chad, which held presidential elections on May 6, 2024. There are already more than 700,000 Sudanese refugees on the Chad-Sudan border.[56] The addition of new refugees to this number would likely destabilize post-election Chadian politics and create further challenges for the region.

South Sudan is home to the largest refugee crisis in Africa and frequently faces severe natural disasters. According to the UN, more than 7 million people in South Sudan are expected to face crisis-level food insecurity between April and July 2024.[57] Combined with the effects of global climate change, South Sudan may urgently need humanitarian assistance. In such an environment, South Sudan's exposure to a new wave of migration due to a war-induced crisis in Darfur carries the risk of exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the country.

In short, a war over al-Fashir would not only be a disaster for the millions of people living in al-Fashir, North Darfur, Darfur, and Sudan, but would also negatively affect the surrounding countries. Such a conflict could lead to a crisis

56 "Sudan İç Savaşının Birinci Yıl Dönümünün Bilançosu".

57 "The South Sudan Crisis, Explained", CONCERN Worldwide US, 6 February 2024, https://concernusa.org/news/south-sudan-crisis-explained, (Accessed: 11 April 2024).

similar to the Darfur Crisis of 2003, with a risk of ethnic violence in the region.[58] Therefore, it is crucial for the international community to act comprehensively to end the ongoing civil war in Sudan as soon as possible. Otherwise, Sudan and its environs will face severe humanitarian crises in the near future. There are concerns about how seriously the international community is addressing the crisis in Sudan. However, it is important to remember that taking the crisis in Sudan seriously is vital not only for the Sudanese people but also for regional stability and global peace and security.

58 "Q&A: Sudan's Darfur Conflict", BBC, 23 February 2010.

CONCLUSION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESOLVING THE CRISIS IN SUDAN

As the civil war in Sudan completes its first year, it has become clear that the current problem cannot be solved within the country or solely with neighboring countries. The multitude of actors within Sudan and their alliances with different countries, the fact that the migration problem caused by the crisis directly affects at least six neighboring countries, the intertwined and complex nature of ethnic conflicts in the region stemming from developments in the Sahel Belt, the constant influx of arms into Sudan due to porous borders, and the involvement of numerous international actors in Sudanese affairs complicate the resolution of the crisis. However, the people of Sudan and those in neighboring countries, who are already vulnerable due to economic problems and food insecurity, are the ones most fundamentally affected by this complex situation.

The first step towards a successful resolution in Sudan is to halt arms shipments to the country. Following this, international cooperation is essential to address the humanitarian crisis in the region and to facilitate the reconstruction of Sudan. However, no single country or small group of countries can alone overcome the devastation in Sudan. The effects of global systemic changes are evident across many regions. In this context, issues such as Israel's genocidal actions in Gaza, the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war, internal challenges within Europe, various regional crises in Africa, global counter-terrorism efforts, and the lack of effective global leadership and the ineffectiveness of the UN in addressing global issues contributes to the escalation of the Sudan crisis.

In this context, there is a critical need to establish an inclusive resolution mechanism in Sudan that addresses humanitarian and security concerns, develops a long-term vision for post-conflict civilian governance, and promotes good governance involving all stakeholders in the crisis. Initiating a mechanism which can be called "Sudan Forum Market" within the global system, focusing on sharing short-, medium-, and long-term challenges and solutions, could potentially stabilize Sudan and the region to some extent.

Türkiye's experience in global humanitarian aid is widely recognized. In this context, initiating humanitarian assistance in Sudan through collaborative efforts with other nations, followed by capacity building for state reconstruction, represents initial steps towards a short-term solution in the country. Supporting Sudan through proactive engagement with influential actors and structures is crucial. Türkiye is capable of engaging with figures like al-Burhan, Dagalo, and Sufi movements in Sudan to foster workable cooperation. However, it is essential to avoid making ad hoc decisions and to prioritize sustained engagement for long-term stability.

To prevent the Sudanese people from experiencing a new humanitarian crisis or ethnic violence, prioritizing the "responsibility to protect" (R2P) is essential. Additionally, providing humanitarian aid, ensuring security, promoting good governance, and fostering a long-term vision for Sudan through collaborative mechanisms established with various countries within the framework of the forum will contribute significantly to resolving the crisis. However, it is crucial that the implementation of such a mechanism does not exacerbate rivalries and challenges associated with the Sudanese situation.

Although global leadership is currently lacking, resolving the crisis in Sudan requires a dominant power with the capacity to garner consensus among the involved parties. In today's international system, achieving this only through the efforts of a single country is exceedingly challenging. However, establishing a "key mechanism" for decision-making, possibly through majority voting, could foster an environment conducive to peace, tranquility, and stability in Sudan.

The quest for a solution in Sudan must also prioritize the complex, multi-actor political landscape and the process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). With over twenty political actors involved in Sudan, both domestic and international, inclusive communication with all stakeholders is paramount. Excluding any actor from the process and seeking a solution could potentially lead to new challenges. Additionally, it is crucial

to accurately define the role that the RSF leader Dagalo will play in Sudanese domestic politics.

In short, convening an international forum to address the security, humanitarian, and political stability challenges in Sudan could present a new approach to solving the problem. Developing initiatives that are crucial for establishing lasting peace and stability in Sudan, a country in urgent need of intervention, and potentially serving as a new model for resolving regional crises in African countries, could prove effective.

SETA | REPORT

ONE YEAR AT WAR
THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF SUDAN'S CIVIL WAR AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

TUNÇ DEMİRTAŞ

One year after the outbreak of the civil war on April 15, 2023, this report examines the origins of the crisis in Sudan, its cost and key actors, the policies and objectives of international powers in the country, and the steps and initiatives taken to resolve the conflict. It also considers the potential for a new Darfur crisis in the future and offers policy recommendations for resolving the current crisis.

The ongoing civil war in Sudan, a strategic bridge between Africa and the Middle East with rich natural resources, is one of the most destructive conflicts in the country's history, with devastating impacts on civilians and state institutions. The cost and scale of the civil war have far-reaching implications not only for Sudan but also for the region and the international community at large. The conflict has, so far, threatened regional stability, displaced millions of people, and caused a severe humanitarian crisis. Additionally, the potential for the conflict to spread further poses a risk of wider instability which can potentially affect the neighboring countries.

Foreign powers, as well as local actors, are deeply involved in the Sudanese crisis. The policies and complex relationships of some foreign actors with local entities, along with their facilitation of the easy passage of weapons, equipment, and militia forces into Sudan, have contributed to the persistence of the crisis. Consequently, the goals, objectives, and policies of foreign actors can diverge and significantly impact the situation in Sudan. Therefore, ending the civil war in Sudan through international cooperation and ensuring peace, tranquility, and stability for the country's reconstruction and development are of critical significance for the Sudanese people, the region, Africa, and the global community.

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