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Sudan

# The noose tightens in Sudan

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**The war which began last April between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the Transitional Sovereignty Council, set up following the coup d'état of 25 October 2021, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohamed Daglo, known as "Hemedti", former number 2 of the same Council, has known no respite. The humanitarian toll from this conflict is catastrophic.**

At the beginning of October, it was estimated 9,000 people had been killed and 16,000 wounded. [1] The figures, which are constantly changing, must be taken with caution. The figures given by the UN are usually those of the Sudanese Ministry of Health, which counts deaths recorded by hospitals, and are therefore lower than the figures mentioned above. It is estimated that, of Sudan's 45 million inhabitants, more than 7 million have been displaced, 4.3 million of them in the aftermath of the conflict. At the outbreak of the war, the country was also hosting one million displaced people from South Sudan, Eritrea, the Central African Republic (CAR) and Syria.

As of 9 October, 1,105,791 people had fled the country, the majority of them to Chad, but also to South Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia, CAR and Libya, 67% of whom were Sudanese, according to the International Organization for Migration. [2]

The uncounted victims of this conflict are women who have been gang-raped, kidnapped or disappeared. Prisons and secret detention centres count inmates in the thousands. Many schools are no longer functioning, with dozens of them serving as shelters for the displaced. 19 million children are out of school. [3]

Dozens of hospitals have been bombed and many health facilities are now functioning only on the voluntary basis of civilians, but there is a lack of clean water, medicine and trained personnel. Deadly epidemics of cholera, dengue fever and malaria are spreading, as well as childhood measles. [4]

It should be added that in this country, where the eastern regions are spared by conflict, the economy and agriculture have been devastated: these six months have seen episodes of drought, then floods, which have led humanitarian agencies to speak of the risk of famine for half of the country's inhabitants. To this must be added those who died of hunger, due to the military siege of localities. The recent floods in Nile State pose a health risk to the population, as the water carries the mercury used for gold mining. [5]

## Towards a de facto partition?

In mid-September, the UN special envoy for Sudan, Volker Perthes, resigned, warning of a risk of "civil war." While this resignation is not a great loss, as the envoy focused his efforts on negotiations that included counter-revolutionary forces and neglected the Resistance Committees that refused to negotiate with the forces that emerged from the 2021 coup, his warnings reflect a total blindness. "Civil war" is not a "risk" but a reality. In the west of the country, in Darfur, where the RSF is concentrated, the massacres of non-Arab populations, particularly the Masalit, began last June. And the call for the mobilization of the RSF has met with a positive echo among Arab tribes. When we know that the RSF are the heirs of the Janjaweed militias who have to their credit an ethnic cleansing that has left 300,000 dead (again not counting the rapes) and two million displaced in Darfur since 2003, this is not a hypothesis. In 2010, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for then President Omar al-Bashir, including charges of genocide. [6]

The evolution of the conflict is redrawing the map of the forces involved, which could suggest a partition of the country: Khartoum, the capital, is the object of fierce daily fighting: the RSF, which does not have an air force, has managed to conquer several areas and the capital is under bombardment by the SAF. In western Sudan, the RSF is hegemonic on ethnic grounds. The east of the country is controlled by the SAF. In the south, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) forces have taken advantage of the conflict to launch offensives since the summer in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. While the latter two regions have in turn experienced serious social problems (lack of schooling, health and rising prices) since the SPLM went to war against the SAF, this third actor has only a marginal role compared to the other two.

Indeed, the al-Burhan/Hemedti war is not only local: it would have already ended for lack of ammunition or weapons. The former is supported by Egypt, Qatar, Turkey and the latter by the forces of Marshal Haftar (eastern Libya) and the United Arab Emirates. The war has become internationalized, with the Wagner militias having always supported Hemedti, while in response, Volodymyr Zelensky, the Ukrainian president, met with Abdel Fattah al-Burhan in Ireland on September 23, implicitly confirming the rumours of attacks, filmed on social networks, by Ukrainian FPV (immersion piloting by ignited camera) drones against the RSF. Lavrov met with al-Burhan and Hemedti on 9 February. Sudan is, after Algeria, the second largest importer of Russian arms in Africa and there is talk of finally establishing a Russian naval base on the Red Sea in Port Sudan. Nor is it in Russia's interest to support one over the other too much, but rather to maintain good relations with both, in order to preserve, whoever wins, its access to the country's gold mining areas. Thus, the conflict will drag on, or lead to an East-West partition, completing ethnic cleansing in the West.

## Forgotten populations

In any case, if no political solution is possible, humanitarian interventions are in turn blocked by the fighting, or non-existent. Thus, at no time was there an airlift or evacuation envisaged, or even discussed to exfiltrate populations as was the case for Iraqis in 2015 or Afghans in 2021, although these latest initiatives were selective and limited.

Fleeing to neighbouring countries is not a solution: nearly half a million people live in Chad's camps with difficulties in accessing water, food and medical care. They are demonstrating for their rights, as they did in Iridimi on 30 September, to obtain unexpired food. [7] Egypt has set limits: only women and girls, and men under the age of 16 and over 50 can enter, but with valid passports. Other men have to apply for visas and are met with a lot of refusals. Ethiopia requires entry visas for African Union nationals. Only South Sudan does not require visas or resources, but there is little assistance at the crossing point and the region itself is unsafe. All that remains is escaping with smugglers. During the floods in Derna, Libya, 155 Sudanese died, not to mention the missing. [8]

France closed its diplomatic representation in Sudan in April, forcing those who can travel to neighbouring countries, such as Ethiopia, which requires an entry visa. The French embassy in Khartoum, before closing, destroyed all the passports of Sudanese in search of visas, in a decision it considers "inevitable," locking up those who had wanted to flee a country at war. The U.S. has reportedly done the same and many European and other embassies have not responded to passport holders. A Sudanese refugee in France had applied for family reunification for her two minor daughters. The latter were stranded in Sudan following the destruction of their passports by France and their mother did not succeed in getting the French authorities to issue them a pass, although they are supported by several associations, at the end of a legal marathon that ended last July.

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Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#)..

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[1] Sudan Situation Update: October 2023 | Ethnic Strife Amid Escalating Power Struggles (acleddata.com).

[2] According to the updated tally of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: situation in Sudan (unhcr.org).

[3] Dabanga Radio TV Online (dabangasudan.org).

[4] WHO scales up Sudan aid after cholera outbreak - Dabanga Radio TV Online (dabangasudan.org).

[5] Dabanga Radio TV Online (dabangasudan.org).

[6] Al Bashir | International Criminal Court (icc-cpi.int).

[7] alrakoba.net.

[8] skynewsarabia.com.