

## SUDAN: A NATION ENGULFED IN CRISIS

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



In April 2023 violence broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the country's military and a paramilitary organisation known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti. The warring parties were previously allies in 2019 and worked together to topple the regime of Omar al-Bashir, who ruled for three decades. He was replaced by SAF's leader, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan as de facto head of state.<sup>1</sup> Later on, in a power-sharing agreement between civilian and military leaders, a transitional government was formed in August 2019, led by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan as the head of the Transitional Military Council (TMC).

However, in October 2021, the Sudanese military, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and supported by Hemdeti, staged a coup, dissolved the transitional government and detained civilian leaders, including Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. This move prompted widespread protests and international condemnation.<sup>2</sup> As a result, a deal was announced for the reinstatement of Hamdok as Prime Minister in November 2021 for a technocratic cabinet operating independently but under

1 "Gen. Abdel Al-Burhan Appoints Himself Chairman of Sudan's Ruling Sovereign Council." Aa.com.tr. 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/gen-abdel-al-burhan-appoints-himself-chairman-of-sudans-ruling-sovereign-council/2418502>

2 NPR. 2021. "Sudan Faces Mass Protests and Arrests after Military Dissolves Civilian Government." NPR.org. NPR. November 7, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/11/07/1053326456/sudan-faces-mass-protests-and-arrests-after-military-dissolves-civilian-governme>

military supervision. The pro-democracy movement in Sudan rejected the agreement, insisting that authority be transferred to a completely civilian government. In January 2022 PM Abdalla Hamdok resigned stating that “ despite all that was done to bring about the desired and necessary agreement to fulfil our promise to the citizen of security, peace, justice and an end to the bloodshed, this did not happen”.

On the other hand, SAF and RSF have been at odds over plans for a new transition and the integration of the RSF into the regular army and this triggered a violent revolt from Hemedti in mid-April 2023. Since then Sudan has been embroiled in a civil war, resulting in a death toll exceeding 14,000 individuals including children and women. The strife has predominantly centered in and around the capital city of Khartoum, as well as in the provinces of North and West Kordofan, and the western region of Darfur region.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the international community's efforts to achieve a ceasefire, there have been unsuccessful attempts to facilitate peace talks or establish an interim administration. These efforts have included unsuccessful peace plans put forth by the African Union and other regional blocs, along with negotiations supported by the United States and Saudi Arabia, resulting in at least sixteen unsuccessful ceasefire agreements. Humanitarian corridors were established and while a framework for political dialogue was formulated during a summit chaired by Egypt in July 2023, the conflict persists without resolution.<sup>4</sup>

On March 08, 2024, UNSC Resolution 2724 urged the warring factions in Sudan to effect an immediate cessation of hostilities during the month of Ramadan and to pursue a sustainable resolution to the conflict through dialogue.<sup>5</sup> The warring parties were also urged to adhere to international humanitarian law, which includes the responsibility to safeguard civilians and civilian infrastructure, as well as their obligations outlined in the Declaration of Commitment commonly referred to as the "Jeddah Declaration" – peace process initiated by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia signed by both RSF and SAF. Moreover, the Council encouraged the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy on Sudan, Ramtane Lamamra, to utilize his diplomatic influence with the involved parties and neighboring countries to support and coordinate regional peace efforts.

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<sup>3</sup> Sudan war threatens ‘world’s largest hunger crisis’: WFP, *ALJAZEERA*, March 06, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/6/sudan-war-could-trigger-worst-famine-in-world-wfp>

<sup>4</sup> Sudan Emergency Appeal, *Islamic Relief*, March 08, 2024. <https://islamic-relief.org/appeals/sudan-emergency-appeal/>

<sup>5</sup> Sudan’s war risks creating the world’s largest hunger crisis, warns WFP Chief, United Nations Sudan, March 08, 2024. <https://sudan.un.org/en/262488-sudan%E2%80%99s-war-risks-creating-world%E2%80%99s-largest-hunger-crisis-warns-wfp-chief>

The Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Hissein Brahim Taha, also endorsed UNSC Resolution 2724. Before this, he urged all conflicting parties in Sudan to halt hostilities and violence throughout Ramadan.<sup>6</sup> He advocated for dialogue within the Jeddah Platform framework for security, peace and stability in Sudan.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the East African regional bloc, also tried to broker talks between the country's warring parties. However, due to its outreach to RSF commander Hemedti, the Sudanese government has severed its relations with IGAD and suspended its membership. This resulted in a complete halt to the negotiations.

For over a decade, the UN Country Team (UNCT) (a coalition of agencies, funds, and programs referred to collectively as the UNCT) has been stationed in Sudan. From April 2023 to November 2023, the UNCT and its humanitarian partners extended life-saving support to approximately five million individuals including food, water, and medical aid. Additionally, various organisations like the International Committee of the Red Cross, CARE International, and Islamic relief organizations like the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) have been actively involved in delivering assistance.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately the ongoing conflict has compelled both the UN and other aid organizations to temporarily suspend or reduce their operations within the country. Notably, the UN declared the cessation of its political mission in Sudan in February 2024, citing an inability to fulfil its mandate for a peaceful political transition. Along with this the capture of Wad Madani city in Gezira state (a crucial aid center) by the RSF in late 2023, further complicated the distribution of aid.

The neighboring nations of Sudan, which encompass Libya, Egypt, Chad, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, are contending with significant hurdles in managing the influx of refugees amidst their respective internal conflicts, refugee crises, and food shortages. Initially shutting its border with Sudan, Chad continues to offer assistance to refugees who manage to cross over. Egypt kept its border open despite extended wait times and various hurdles for those seeking passage. The Central African Republic has appealed for enhanced aid, noting that its internal conflicts have strained its ability to accommodate incoming refugees. Moreover, nations in the Horn of Africa and Sahel regions, including Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Kenya, and South Sudan, have come together for peace talks to address these pressing issues.

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<sup>6</sup> OIC General Secretariat Welcomes Security Council Resolution to Stop Fighting in Sudan, *Organisation of Islamic Cooperation*, March 09, 2024.

<https://new.oic-oci.org/SitePages/NewsDetail.aspx?Item=4356>

<sup>7</sup> QRCS delivers 80 tons of food aid to Sudan, *Reliefweb*, September 25, 2023.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/qrcs-delivers-80-tons-food-aid-sudan>

The conflict in Sudan is “triggering the world’s largest hunger crisis,” affecting over 25 million and resulting in major food insecurity. <sup>8</sup> Due to civil war nine out of ten individuals are facing emergency levels of hunger as they are in areas that are extremely difficult to reach. According to Cindy McCain, Executive Director of the World Food Program (WFP), only 5% of Sudanese citizens can manage to afford a single square meal per day. <sup>9</sup>

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Sudan has escalated to calamitous levels, displacing millions, demolishing infrastructure, and making necessities out of reach. Hospitals, schools, and other vital facilities in densely populated residential areas have been targeted by air strikes and shelling. The looming threat of disease is particularly severe, with health authorities cautioning about the spread of cholera, dengue fever, and malaria across multiple states as health conditions rapidly worsen. Clean water remains inaccessible to millions while escalating prices of food and fuel worsen the already dire food insecurity affecting nearly eighteen million individuals. The WFP warns that certain regions of Sudan are on the brink of facing "catastrophic hunger conditions" unless additional food aid is provided. The UN estimates that almost twenty-five million people need urgent aid and protection.<sup>10</sup>

The WFP has also issued a warning, stating that the current humanitarian response is on the verge of collapse unless the violence ceases. According to the UN refugee agency, over 7.8 million individuals have been displaced since April 2023, with more than six million internally displaced and over one million seeking refuge in neighboring countries. By January 2024, the death toll had reached at least thirteen thousand, with over twenty-six thousand injured, although the actual numbers are likely to be higher. Martin Griffiths, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, describes the situation as "one of the most severe humanitarian crises in recent history."<sup>11</sup>

The refugees, largely composed of women and children, are dispersing across various destinations. Chad has received over 540,000 refugees, while more than 195,500 have resettled within Sudan itself. Additionally, around 425,000 South Sudanese refugees, previously sheltered in Sudan, have returned to their homeland due to the ongoing conflict. The remaining refugees have fled to the

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<sup>8</sup> Sudan’s war risks creating the world’s largest hunger crisis, warns WFP Chief, United Nations Sudan, March 08, 2024. <https://sudan.un.org/en/262488-sudan%E2%80%99s-war-risks-creating-world%E2%80%99s-largest-hunger-crisis-warns-wfp-chief>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Sudan war threatens ‘world’s largest hunger crisis’: WFP, ALJAZEERA, March 06, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/6/sudan-war-could-trigger-worst-famine-in-world-wfp>

<sup>11</sup> Sudan’s war risks creating the world’s largest hunger crisis, warns WFP Chief, United Nations Sudan, March 08, 2024. <https://sudan.un.org/en/262488-sudan%E2%80%99s-war-risks-creating-world%E2%80%99s-largest-hunger-crisis-warns-wfp-chief>

Central African Republic, Egypt, and Ethiopia, countries already grappling with substantial refugee and internally displaced populations.<sup>12</sup> Before the onset of the conflict, Sudan was already grappling with a severe humanitarian crisis. Over 15 million people faced food scarcity, and more than 3.7 million were displaced. Furthermore, before the outbreak of war, Sudan hosted approximately 1.3 million refugees, primarily from South Sudan.

However, there is still hope. On March 6, 2024, Sudan's government announced for the first time that they were ready to accept humanitarian aid through Chad and South Sudan. They also said that they would specify routes and airports in different parts of the country to receive the aid deliveries.

The situation in Sudan represents one of the most serious humanitarian crises of our time, necessitating immediate and concerted international action. Ultimately, a cessation of hostilities and lasting peace is the only way to reverse course and prevent catastrophe. Urgent action is imperative to avert further devastation and mitigate the suffering of millions caught in the crossfire. Only through concerted international efforts and a commitment to dialogue can Sudan chart a path towards peace, stability, and eventual recovery. Moreover, the continuation of the war will exacerbate instability throughout the entire region. As the conflict persists more severe the impact will be on Sudan and the entire region.

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<sup>12</sup> Sudan's war risks creating the world's largest hunger crisis, warns WFP Chief, United Nations Sudan, March 08, 2024. <https://sudan.un.org/en/262488-sudan%E2%80%99s-war-risks-creating-world%E2%80%99s-largest-hunger-crisis-warns-wfp-chief>