

Policy BRIEF

CONFERENCE EDITION

From Crisis to Resolution

Envisioning Sudan's National, Geopolitical and Security Pathways for Effective Intervention

September 27-28, 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The armed conflict in the Republic of Sudan which broke out on April 15, 2023 has pushed Sudan to the brink of collapse. The fighting between the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by General Mohammed Hamdan and the regular army, Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) led by General Fattah Al Burhan has had significant humanitarian impact while populations flee as refugees or Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The conflict is a major set-back to transition efforts aimed at reversion to democratic civilian government in Khartoum. In fact, the current conflict is a function of the transition crisis and subsequent fall-out between SAF and RSF over the implementation of security sector reforms, specifically the integration of forces timeframe and modality, as enshrined in the Juba Agreement of 2022.

The violence is mainly concentrated in Khartoum and spreading into other population centres across the country. In response to the escalations in the conflict, multiple actors have fronted numerous and parallel peace processes including the Quarter Process by Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), QUAD by United States of America (USA), United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Norway, the United Kingdom (UK), Troika by USA, UK and Norway, Saudi Arabia by Jeddah Process, and Egypt. However, no meaningful progress has been made in the peace processes to secure permanent ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, humanitarian access and a comprehensive peace agreement five months later.

There are three potential scenarios for how the situation in Sudan is likely to evolve in the coming weeks and months: Scenario 1: Military victory for either RSF or SAF; Scenario 2: Military stalemate and diplomatic triumph (peace agreement) and Scenario 3: Protracted conflict without decisive military and diplomatic outcomes.

This policy brief concludes with recommendations to relevant stakeholders including civil society organizations, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), United Nations (UN), and Kenya. Key among the recommendations are: diplomatic efforts should push for a ceasefire and access to humanitarian emergency assistance; the peace talks should be unified under an African-led process; the peace process should be made more inclusive and comprehensive to allow for civilians to participate and to address root causes of the conflict; and civilian protection and humanitarian intervention be prioritised if human rights violations escalate to outrageous proportions.

BACKGROUND

This Policy Brief is based on the proceedings of the conference themed *From Crisis to Resolution: Envisioning Sudan's National, Geopolitical and Security Pathways for Effective Intervention*, organized by the HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa between September 27 – 28,

The conflict in Sudan has further displaced a total of 5.4 million people with 4.3 million people internally displaced and 1.1 million others as refugees mostly in neighbouring Ethiopia, Chad and South Sudan

2023. The conference aimed at analysing the conflict in Sudan, generating ideas and options for resolving the conflict, and recommending actionable steps to stakeholders in the resolution of the conflict. The rationale of the Conference is effective response to a worsening armed conflict, peaceful resolution of the conflict, strategic leadership to resolve the security, political, humanitarian, economic and social crises facing Sudan, and reversion to democratic transition roadmap for Sudan. The popular revolution which overthrew long-ruling President Omar al Bashir in April 2019 and the robust civilian protests against military rule, lay the foundation for a political transition to civilian democratic government. However,

the military–civilian power sharing transitional government 2019 – 2021 crumbled due to internal instability and dysfunction, military coup attempts and eventually the military coup in November 2021. This was just when the full control of the Sovereign Council was to fall to civilian leaders. The coup disrupted critical reform process in the security sector and important democratic reforms including preparation for elections. The conflict in Sudan has further displaced a total of 5.4 million people with 4.3 million people internally displaced and 1.1 million others as refugees mostly in neighbouring Ethiopia, Chad and South Sudan (OCHA, 2023). Over 24 million people are in urgent need of emergency assistance in Sudan (UN, 2023). As the fall-out between SAF and RSF, the military partners in the transitional government, has dissolved into armed conflict. This policy brief responds to the major causes of the conflict and challenges in its resolution, analyses options for overcoming the challenges and proceeds to proffer actionable recommendations to the UN, (AU), and (IGAD).

KEY FINDINGS

Key Finding 1: The Transition Crisis over integration of forces; The fall-out between SAF and RSF over the modality and timeframes for the integration of the RSF into SAF played into the power struggle between the two military factions and led to armed confrontations. SAF preferred rapid integration paced with other political reforms ahead of elections and fuller transition to civilian democratic government, while RSF preferred gradual integration carried out in 10 years.

Key Finding 2: Ideological Crisis; RSF and SAF are partly in dispute over the ideological future of Sudan. The conflict was thus triggered by twin ideological fears that (a) there is a high prospect for Bashir-era Islamists now Al Burhan's allies, to win the elections and form the next civilian government and (b) SAF's Al Burhan's is exploiting the fear of Islamists returning to power to stay in power himself.

Key Finding 3: Geopolitical Interests; The power struggle between SAF and RSF is further deepened by geopolitical forces especially from the Middle East and North Africa region (Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey) as well as the USA and Russia, which have varying levels of financial, diplomatic, ideological and military support for the military factions. Ensuring the consequential geopolitical players are involved in the peace process not only addresses the potential for external interests undermining progress, but also creates unity of purpose among all actors. Excluding geopolitical actors may risk undermining progress and perpetuating destabilizing competition among external interests and parties.

Key Finding 4: The militarization of the state and economy; military factions being major players in Sudanese politics and economy make it difficult for rapid reforms aimed at democratization.

Key Finding 5: The Centre–Periphery Relations; The historical and vicious competition for resources and power held by the centre (the Hamdi Triangle) at the expense of the peripheral regions and ethnic groups made conflict inherent in Sudanese society. The secession of South Sudan, the unstable Darfur and South Kordofan, and the political association between RSF with the peripheries and SAF with the centre are manifestations of the centre-periphery struggles in Sudan.

Key Finding 6: Prospect of Disintegration; RSF now controls most of the peripheries and southern territories while SAF controls the northern territories after retreating to Port Sudan. There is a risk of Sudan further fragmenting along these military-territorial lines.

Key Finding 7: Breakdown of ceasefires; serial break-down of ceasefire agreements has sustained hostilities and have intermittently closed the window for peaceful resolution of the conflict, as warring factions pursue the military solution or policy. Credible diplomatic actors may successfully push for ceasefire by exploiting their leverage on the conflict parties and demonstrating the opportunity cost of peaceful resolution of the conflict. Ceasefire agreements open the humanitarian corridors for urgent humanitarian response and window for diplomatic efforts to push for peaceful resolution of conflicts. A hurting stalemate may take time to be achieved with continued military supplies and intricacies of urban warfare and counter-insurgency operations and the prospect of long-drawn out civil war. Further, the humanitarian crisis is likely to worsen before such time in terms of forced displacement, hunger and starvation, human rights violations and other atrocities.

Key Finding 8: Fragmented Peace Processes; there lacks a unified diplomatic approach to the conflict in Sudan as peace processes continue to proliferate with different actors pushing own interests and narrow sets of objectives. The multiplicity of peace processes has further encouraged forum shopping on the part of the conflict parties and disincentivized commitment to the peaceful resolution of the conflict. There is the Quartet Process led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Jeddah Process led by Saudi Arabia, the QUAD Process led by USA, UK, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Norway, Troika led by USA, UK and Norway and another process led by Egypt. Regionally, AU and IGAD adopted different Roadmaps for Peace in Sudan. A unified diplomatic approach thus limits forum shopping, enriches the peace process with the diverse repertoire of peace actors, aggregates resources, builds significant leverage on conflict actors, addresses spoiler and proxy interests, and provides credible incentives and guarantors of peace. Essentially, harmonization of peace processes helps establish points of convergence and coherence. An African-led peace process secures local solutions for local issues of the conflict, and guards against external interests and forces making the conflict intractable. Active efforts to harmonize and unify diplomatic approach through the *Expanded Mechanism* can be strengthened to realize this goal. Creation of linkages between peace processes will encourage complementarity and division of labour (military, civilian and humanitarian aspects). Linkages alone and processes remaining parallel is expensive and time consuming despite the urgency of peace, and difficult to coordinate given the diversity of actors and interests in each forum.

The power struggle between SAF and RSF is further deepened by geopolitical forces especially from the Middle East and North Africa region (Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey) as well as the USA and Russia, which have varying levels of financial, diplomatic, ideological and military support for the military factions

Key Finding 9: Exclusionary Peace Processes; the participation and representation in the peace processes is mainly comprised of the military and political elites of Sudan due to the lack of inclusion of civilians and Civil Society Organizations in the formal negotiations. Inclusion of civilians and Civil Society Organisations enriches the peace process and quality of peace agreements, by expanding the scope of issues and range of transformative solutions to the conflict, as well as ensures the durability of peace. Elite pacts are easier to achieve given the narrow scope of issues hence convenient for conflict management. Elite driven and focussed peace processes and agreements are not reflective or representative of all underlying causes and drivers of conflict. Such processes also run the risk of excluding critical stakeholders in conflict resolution.

Key Finding 10: Humanitarian Access and Funding Challenges; limited access for humanitarian or aid agencies and lack of adequate funding for humanitarian and refugee response plans, have slowed and undercut the capacity for humanitarian emergency assistance to affected populations. Of the USD 2.57 billion Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), only 26 per cent of the budget has been financed so far leaving a deficit of 74 per cent in the estimated HRP budget. Floods and heavy rains, active hostilities, delays in permit issuance, attacks on health facilities, violations of international human rights law, blockades of access especially to RSF controlled areas, and partial funding of humanitarian response budget are critical challenges in Sudan. A humanitarian intervention mission is however complex in planning, operational design, and approving. It may further take time for the deployment to happen and it is expensive to maintain a regional protection force, which adds to the cost of actual humanitarian response.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations lay out the actionable strategies and measures, which AU, IGAD and UN may follow to resolve the crisis in Sudan:

Civil Society Organizations:

- Coalesce around common vision and common objectives.
- Push for wider inclusion of Sudanese civilians and civil society organizations in the formal peace process.
- Establish collaboration and coordination mechanisms for effective humanitarian response and optimal utilization of resources.
- Support the calls for permanent ceasefire or cessation of hostilities and access to humanitarian assistance.

Kenya:

- Ensure utmost neutrality and impartiality in its efforts to mediate the resolution of the conflict in Sudan.
- Build support from regional and international partners and actors including development agencies for African-led mediation process.
- Actively engage the regional mechanisms and international efforts to ensure cooperation among diverse diplomatic efforts for effective mediation.
- Increase the sensitivity of the humanitarian and security impact of the conflict in Sudan, to the international community.

African Union and Intergovernmental Authority on Development:

- Push for a permanent ceasefire agreement and humanitarian access.
- Advocate for a unified African-led formal Peace Process under the *Expanded Mechanism*. Other actors and international partners to support the process.
- Harmonize the AU and IGAD Roadmaps for Peace in Sudan to provide a common regional approach for the resolution of the conflict in Sudan.
- Lobby for an inclusive and comprehensive Peace Process, with larger participation of civilians and Civil Society Organizations.
- Consider humanitarian intervention through the deployment of a regional protection force if a ceasefire agreement proves to be difficult to achieve or sustain.

United Nations and other International Actors

- Support the push for a permanent ceasefire agreement and humanitarian access.
- Support new arms embargo and sanctions regime targeting spoilers. Such measures will limit the violent capabilities of the warring parties, secure a hurting stalemate and promote peaceful resolution of the conflict.
- Support a unified African-led formal Peace Process under the *Expanded Mechanism*.
- Lobby for increased funding towards humanitarian emergency response.
- Support humanitarian intervention through the deployment of a regional protection force if a ceasefire agreement proves to be difficult to achieve or sustain.

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