

**The SAF and RSF Conflict in Sudan:
An Analysis of Impacts and Responses**

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Enoch Ndem Okon

Department of Political Science, University of Calabar, Nigeria.

Email: enochokon@gmail.com



Victor Ojakorotu

Department of Politics and International Relations,

North West University, Mafikeng, South Africa.

Abstract

This study analyses the impacts of the SAF and RSF conflict in Sudan within the first 14 months. It also outlined and discussed the responses of global actors to the conflict. Grounded on power theory (PT), the study adopted the documentary research method, which involved a rigorous review and extraction of data from extant literature in libraries, archives, and the internet. These data were presented qualitatively and analysed with relational content analysis techniques. The study revealed that the SAF and RSF conflict in Sudan has enormous negative impacts on the human security of the Sudanese and the wider world. Besides, the initial responses to the conflict were slow and chaotic, given Sudan's involvement in multiple regionalisms. The anchorage of mediation in the Trilateral Mechanism is commendable. But the mechanism needs to harmonise the interests of various forces within Sudan. Above all, inter-Sudanese dialogue is key to the shaping of a peaceful and prosperous future for the country.

Keywords: *Sudan, SAF, RSF, Conflict, Africa, Sabel*

Introduction

Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, is on fire, and this is spreading to other parts of the country. The impacts of the conflict have spread to the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and other parts of the continent. The conflict is an existential threat to the fragile security in the Sahel, where climate change-induced droughts have increased poverty and underdevelopment, as well as promoted forced migration across national boundaries. The common challenge of drought across the Horn of Africa led to the formation of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the 1990s to coordinate a common response to the transnational nature of environmental insecurity. Besides, the sharing of Nile River resources with Uganda, Egypt, and other countries outside IGAD has expanded the regional reach of Sudan into North Africa and the Mediterranean. Similarly, Sudan is a member of the Moribund Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD), a 29-member organisation formed at the instance of Muammar Gaddafi of Libya as a free trade region. More so, Sudan is a member of the League of Arab States (LAS), which comprises Arab states in Africa and those in the Middle East. On the other hand, Sudan has a lean relationship with the European Union (EU), but its strategic location, the securitisation of the Sahel by the EU arising from the twins' existential threat of irregular migration through the Sahel to Europe, and the incubation of violent extremist groups with global reach brought the EU into the security complex of the Sahel. Sudan is a pivotal Sahelian transit route to Europe for irregular migrants, drug traffickers, and human from Africa. Hence, the ongoing conflict has enormous security impacts and implications for many regions across the continent and the world at large. It is against these realities that the escalation of the conflict by the belligerents on the battle field remains a source of concern to many scholars and diplomats across the globe. The growing security interdependence among states and regions and the expansion of security complexes beyond geographical regions make the study desirable to unearth the impacts of the conflict and the corresponding responses to it. The central objective of this study is therefore to: (a) highlight the impacts of the SAF and RSF conflict in Sudan; and (b) outline the responses of global actors towards the resolution of the conflict. The study is designed to answer the question: What are the impacts and responses to the SAF and RSF conflict in Sudan? It is divided into the introduction, literature review, theoretical

framework, methodology, anatomy of the conflict, discussion of findings, and conclusion.

Literature Review

Sudan is located on the eastern flank of the Sahel. It shares boundaries with other African states, which cover three regions. This makes Sudan a centre of migration, as it intersects states in the Horn of Africa, and East Africa, as well as North Africa and the Central Mediterranean (IOM, 2023:6). Its geostrategic location in the heart of the Sahel makes it a transit point for many irregular migrants who sought transit routes to Europe. Besides, the routes are also used for human, drug, and weapon trafficking across national boundaries by criminal entrepreneurs across the continent. More so, the free flow of human traffic along the route makes it a veritable transit point for arms trafficking between the North, Central, and Horn of Africa. This is complemented by the existence of Port Sudan on the Red Sea. This facilitates the flow of exchange between Sudan and other states in the Mediterranean. Indeed, Port Sudan has served as the terminal for the export of Sudanese crude oil. It has also facilitated the export of newly independent South Sudan crude oil, and other items of international maritime trade since South Sudan is a landlocked state (International Crisis Group, 2015; Ottaway & El-Sadany, 2012).

Another feature of the Sudanese state is the brunt of climate change. This affects all the countries in the Sahel belt. The average rainfall in Sudan, like others in the Sahel region, is low. This leads to drought and crop failure in the country. The net impact of these, among others, is the environmental insecurity-induced migration to other regions. Such migration by herders promotes herders/farmers conflict in the Sahel and generates a bunch of internally displaced persons across the region. Besides, both droughts induced famine and internal displacement of people in Sudan increased the number of families who depend on donor agencies for food and shelter in the country. Persons in need were estimated at 24.7 million people before the outbreak of the current conflicts in April 2023. The figure has increased exponentially due to the escalation of the conflict (IOM, 2023:3). Also worth considering is the impact of climate change on the living standards of Sudanese. This is negative due to the low productivity of the population, which is traced to incessant droughts. As a peripheral state in the world economy, agriculture remains the pillar of the economy, and whenever the rain fall

is too low to support agricultural production, the income and livelihood of the population are threatened (Ottaway & El-Sadany, 2012; Cobham, 2005). Therefore, more than 65% of the Sudanese population was living below the poverty line before the conflict (EPRS, 2023; 2).

The population of Sudan is estimated at about 50 million people, with an average annual growth rate of 2.75%. About a third of the population lives in Khartoum, the capital of the country, and about 80% of the population is employed in the agricultural subsector of the economy (Mahgoub, 2014; Verhoeven, 2017). Apart from nature induced socio-economic crises, anthropogenic factors such as incessant conflicts have promoted the continuous displacement of Sudanese. This reduced their capacities to lead a productive life and the annual GDP of the country to an insignificant figure (Siddig, 2012; Young, 2017). The economy is further challenged by the secession of South Sudan, with about 75% of the oil well, which massively accounted for about 49,000 bpd crude oil exports of the Sudanese between 1999 and 2011. Revenue from the export of crude was very supportive of the state economy (Cobham, 2005; Ottaway & El-Sadany, 2012; International Crisis Group, 2015).

The impact of these socioeconomic challenges manifested itself in food, health, and environmental insecurity. Sudan is among the countries with the highest rate of child malnutrition in the world. It has about 3 million children (under 5 years of age) who are malnourished, and about 20% of these children are suffering from wasting, a severe form of malnutrition that may lead to death. The conflict arising from the ousting of al-Bashir in 2019 has further disrupted food production and distribution in Sudan. This has led to an acute shortage of food in the country and, indeed, hyperinflation, whereby the local food basket was experiencing more than 18% price increases every quarter before the outbreak of the ongoing conflict (OCHA, 2023; UNICEF, 2023; Care International, 2023).

Similarly, health facilities in the country lacked adequate and trained manpower needed for optimum operations. There is a scarcity of essential drugs in the available health facilities in the country. Since 2019, many health facilities have been attacked and looted by armed men. About 11 million Sudanese need urgent access to medical treatment, but depletion of medical supplies and the closure of health facilities (due to armed attacks) have denied them access to their medical needs. This dire situation is compounded by the collapse of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in many parts of the country. This has denied about 17

million Sudanese access to good drinking water and 24 million access to standard sanitary facilities. Besides, about 10 million Sudanese are still practicing open defecation (Care International, 2023; 2-3; OCHA, 2023; 3; IOM, 2023: 2)

Political history affirmed the Ottoman empire's rule over the territory before it came under the condominium of Anglo-Egyptian rule in 1899. By 1956, Sudan had become an independent state and, eventually, the largest territorial entity on the continent before the 2011 secession of South Sudan (Collins, 2008; Natsios, 2012). However, the political process and structure of the colonial state continue to remain the sources of its backwardness. The secession is traced to the 'divide and rule' policy of the colonialists, who concentrated development in the northern part, dominated by Muslims. The colonialists neglected the south, which was dominated by traditionalists without infrastructural facilities or social amenities. The colonialists saw the Arabic north as an asset, while the south was seen as a liability fit for redemption by Christian missionaries (Pinaud, 2014; Johnson, 2021). The policy led to the outbreak of the first civil war immediately after independence, as the south, dominated by Bantus and other Africans, sorted to liberate themselves from the shackles of the Muslim-dominated rulers (Hamed, 2020; Dean, 2000). Several negotiations led to the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972. The agreement provided for the creation of a federal secular state, whereby the south had the autonomy to elect their state assembly and enjoy appointment and election into federal institutions in Khartoum. (Warburg, 2003; Niblock, 1987).

Barely a decade after the Addis Ababa Agreement, the Sudanese government reneged on the agreement. The Jafara Neimiri government abolished the state assembly in the south and balkanised the south into three states in a manner that ought to weaken the collectivity of the south to respond to the new policy. The central government in Khartoum introduced the Sharia legal system across the country and ended state secularism, which had hitherto guaranteed freedom of religion (Kosteyanets, 2021; Young, 2019). The south responded robustly and formed the Sudanese People Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). The armed wing went into the Second Civil War against the Sudanese state. The protracted conflict ended in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) by both Khartoum and the SPLM/A. The agreement provides for six-year peace-building government in Khartoum under a confederal model. It also provided for the conduct of a referendum in the south in 2011. The outcome of the

referendum favoured the secessionists in the south and, thus, the birth of South Sudan as a breakaway state from Sudan (Sorbo, 2013; McCauley, 2017).

In terms of governance, governments in Sudan have been rooted in strong men and an authoritarian model. This may be linked to its history. The Ottoman Empire and Turkish rule were Islamic and total. There was no room for opposition, and decisions were made primarily by the supreme leaders with little consultation with the subjects. Successive Sudanese leaders continued with the authoritarian model. Jafaar Neimiri staged a military coup in 1969 and continued to rule the country as a strong man until he was ousted by Sadiqal-Mahdi in 1985. Many blamed Neimiri's ousting on the reversal of the Addis Ababa Agreement and the consequent resumption of the civil war in the south. However, the ceasefire brokered by al-Mahdi's government in 1998 was not implemented, as at the time he was forced out of power by the National Islamic Front (NIF), anchored by Hassan al-Turabi in 1989 (Kostelyanets, 2021; Sidahmed, 1997; Young, 2019).

Omar-al-Bashir, who became the de facto ruler of Sudan in the post-Cold War era, was not better than his predecessors. He fell out with Islamists, including al-Turabi, yet he held onto power by all means. Bashir ran the Sudanese state with an iron hand and failed to reform the Sudanese state in a manner that would have convinced the southern part to remain in one Sudan. Besides, his poor handling of the Darfur conflict since 2003 and his promotion of ethnic Arab militias against non-Arabs in the region were very convincing factors for the SPLM/A on the need to break away from the central government in Sudan (Khalid, 2003; McCauley, 2017). Accused of genocide and crimes against humanity, al-Bashir still remains wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) even after he was ousted during a popular uprising in 2019 (Khalid, 2003; McCauley, 2017; Wyk, 2007; United Nations, 2011).

The current de facto president and leader of the Sudanese Armed Forces has shown dictatorial tendencies. First, by truncating the civilian led transition government in 2021 with a military coup. Secondly, by insisting that all the decisions with respect to the transition programme should be in accordance with his wish; and thirdly, by declaring the RSF illegal and disbanded at the onset of the current conflict. His ambition to transmute into a civilian president or prolong military rule is responsible for the current conflict, which is tearing the country apart (International Crisis Group, 2023; IOM, 2023; IAGCI, 2023).

Sudan is the land of many wars. In its contemporary history, the country faced the threat of secession from the southern part of the country. At independence, the SAF had to contend with the Anya-Nya movement formed by the rebellious south, which sought a separate state from the northern-dominated central government. Many regarded the First Civil War as part of the teething problem, of the new state. But the demands of the south had merit. Firstly, the southern parts were mostly animists. Secondly, many of them were converted to Christianity with different values and worldviews, when compared to the northern-dominated Muslims. Thirdly, the southern people consisted of ethnic Bantus and others who were distinctively different from the population of the north. Fourthly, the lopsided development of the north by the colonialists and the ill treatment of the south created two countries in one state, which was a recipe for discontentment and conflict. Indeed, at independence, a caste system was tacitly created, which made the southern people regarded as inferior and slaves to the northern people and their elites. (Hamed, 2020; Magnolia Dais, 2017; Harir & Tvedt, 1994). Hence, the rebellion had the objective of redressing these anomalies and, in the best-case scenario, leading to a separate state where all southern Sudanese people could be at peace with themselves and work towards the development of their people and homeland. The Ethiopia-led mediation in Addis Ababa produced the agreement that successfully ended the conflict in 1972 (Khalid, 2003; Elnur, 2009).

However, revisionist elements within the northern ruling elites were not comfortable with the Addis Ababa agreement. Some of them felt that the south could be subdued. Subsequently, in 1983, all the provisions of the Addis Ababa Agreement were suspended, and the south was balkanized into three states for easy manipulation by Khartoum. The unilateral foisting of a unitary and Islamic rule were direct insults on southern Christians and animists; a return to the conditions at independence was the very root cause of the first Civil War. The south was more agitated and consequently resumed its arms struggle against Khartoum. Arguably, the second civil war was the continuation of the first, as it was a reaction against northerly dominance and Islamisation of the south. The resilience of the Sudan People Liberation Army (SPLA) and the vibrancy of the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM) in diplomacy led to the end of the war in 2005 with a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The agreement provides for six years of confederation and a referendum to determine the future of the south in the Sudan confederation. However, the majority of southerners

voted for independence in the 2011 Referendum, and this marked the independence of South Sudan as a sovereign state (International Crisis Group, 2015; Ottaway & El-Sadany, 2012). Yet that was not the end of inter-Sudanese conflict.

Barely had South Sudan gained independence, another round of conflict started between the two Sudans over oilfields located at the blurred borderlines of both states. Like most of the colonial boundaries in Africa, the boundaries between Sudan and South Sudan were not clearly demarcated before the independence of South Sudan. These territories included Abyei and Heglig, areas rich in crude oil deposit. The battle over these resource-rich territories was very important to Sudanese economy, since she lost about 75% of her oil field and revenue to South Sudan through the independence of the latter (Sorbo & Ahmed, 2013; Patey, 2014).

Besides, the Sudanese government imposed a huge transit fee on South Sudan crude oil transported through a pipeline to Port Sudan for export. The economic war reached its climax in April 2012, when both sides lost revenue from the pipeline transaction as South Sudan refused to transport its crude oil through Port Sudan in order to deny Sudan the transit fee earned from such a transaction (Ottaway & El-Sadany, 2012:6). More so, there was a territorial dispute over the ownership of South Kordofan and Blue Nile State on the border of the two countries. The conflict was intractable and complicated when both states sponsored belligerent armed groups and ethnic militias in each other's territories. These dynamics led to a full-blown civil war in South Sudan, while the simmering conflicts in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan were reactivated (International Crisis Group, 2015; Pinaud, 2014).

The Darfur conflict itself started in 2003, when Darfuri groups made demands on Khartoum over political and economic marginalisation. According to 'the Black Book' published by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in Sudan, there has been a wide gap in appointments to public offices and the provision of public goods between the northern province and the rest of the country (Anonymous, 2004). The agitation of JEM and other similar groups was a genuine demand on the northern-dominated Khartoum to reverse the trend and increase political inclusion of other provinces in a fair and equitable manner. However, al-Bashir decided to ethnicise the crisis by arming Janjaweed militias and deploying the SAF against non-Arab Dafuris. The designation of the agitation as a conflict between Arabs and non-Arabs was a strategy to promote ethnic division and weaken the collectivity of the Darfuri people. The narrative

was successful as it turned Arab militias against non-Arabs in Darfur. It also led to the genocide against non-Arabs in the province. Regrettably, about 98% of the Darfuri are Muslims (Cobham, 2005:3; International Crisis Group, 2015; Natsios, 2012).

The Janjaweed in the Darfur region and other elite pro-government militias were joined together to form the Rapid Support Force led by General Dagolo in 2013. Initially, the RSF was designed as a praetorian guard for al-Bashir's government. It was formed to counter a possible SAF coup against the government. However, the RSF's participation in conflicts across Sudan and its battle experiences in the Yemeni War sharpened its strategic and tactical skills in military operations. Consequently, the seeming parity between RSF and SAF in military capabilities set the stage for the ongoing conflict of supremacy between the two military leaders in Sudan (International Crisis Group, 2015; International Crisis Group, 2023; AIGCI, 2023; UNSC, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Power Theory (PT) is adopted in this study. The theory is postulated by Joseph Frankel (1973), Hans Morgenthau (1967), and Arnold Wolfers (1962). There is a consensus among these scholars that power is a relational phenomenon whereby the stronger influences the behaviour of the weaker in accordance with the former's will. Dahl (1969: 80) summarised PT thus: 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do'. Power is exercised by the use of force or the threat of deprivation. Adherence to superior moral value and persuasion with superior argument are also sources and deployments of power (soft power) (Nye, 2004), while a creative combination of physical (military) force and superior moral suasion (diplomacy) is accepted as 'smart power' (Wilson, 2008). This theory is used in this study to explain how the deployment of military force by the SAF and RSF has negative impacts on the human security of Sudanese and the wider world. It also explains the strength of the mediators in resolving the conflict, as well as the responses of the humanitarian actors in the conflict.

Methodology

The study adopts a documentary research design method. This involves an extensive search and review of extensive literature from libraries,

websites, and the internet. It relies on secondary data, accepted as a means of reducing cost, time, and energy, if the data are reliable and valid in any research (Kothari, 2004). These data were presented qualitatively, and a relational content analysis technique was used to analyse the data.

The Anatomy of the SAF and RSF Conflict in Sudan

Profile of the Conflict
Central to this conflict is the issue of power, influence, and leadership in Sudan's sociopolitical and economic future. It is a struggle for power and influence between General al-Burhan of the SAF and General Dagolo of the RSF.
Locations of the Conflict
The conflict broke out in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. It is an urban warfare. However, it has spread to Darfur, Blue Nile State, Kordofan, and other locations in Sudan.
Causes of the conflict
The arm struggle is rooted in the disagreement over the timeline for the integration of RSF into the SAF as part of the Security Sector Reform of post-al-Bashir's era. It is also a product of differences on the transition to a democratic rule roadmap. While the SAF favours delayed transition, the RSF prefers immediate transfer of power to civilians. Indeed, General Al-Burhan and General Dagolo are trying to outwit each other in the race for political and military leadership in the country.
Belligerents in the conflict
The Sudanese Armed Forces fight on the side of General Al-Burhan, while the Rapid Support Force fights for General Dagolo. However, latent ethnic militias have been reactivated across the country by both sides of the conflict. Such militias include: Arab Reizigat, Masalit militias, SPLM/N and Sudan Liberation Army/Mimi Minawi (SLA/MM)
Mediators in the conflict
The UN, AU, and IGAD are at the vanguard of mediation in the conflict and are known as the Trilateral Mechanism. However, the US, UK, UAE, and Saudi Arabia formed the Quad Team, which also mediated in the conflict. The EU, LAS, and the neighbouring countries in Sudan are working with the key mediators to resolve the conflict.
Spoilers in the conflict
Egypt is tacitly supporting the SAF and prolonging military rule in Sudan. Cairo is opposed to the growing influence of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in its neighborhood. Hence its hatred of the RSF, which is close to the Gulf states. Saudi Arabia is said to support the SAF in an attempt to eliminate the influence of the UAE in the country since the RSF was closer to the UAE during the

Yemeni War. Indeed, inter-Arab competition in Sudan is a major spoiler in the resolution of the conflict. On the other hand, the UAE, Wagner Group- Russia proxy, and Khalifa Haftar in Libya are supporting the RSF with weapons and training.

Dynamics of the conflict

Internally, there is a stalemate on the battlefield, as both sides are almost equal in tactics and progress made. The civil society sector in the country is opposed to both the war and prolonging military rule. In the worst-case scenario, Sudan may degenerate into a civil war, with both sides running a parallel government in their areas of control. That may not work since civil society looks good enough to reject such impositions by the belligerents. Besides, such an outcome would be disastrous in terms of the humanitarian burden on the global community. In addition, a failed Sudanese state may become a safe haven for extremist groups in the Sahel. More so, the continuous flow of weapons to Sudan may increase instability in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. It may also increase the activities of criminal entrepreneurs in the region. The impacts of these realities include the export of extremists' attacks to the West as well as the explosion of irregular migration to Europe. It is therefore desirable for all stakeholders to sacrifice their immediate interests and work for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. A constructive inter-Sudanese dialogue is important in shaping the future of the country.

Source: Compiled by the authors

Discussion of findings

This section discusses the findings of the study. This includes the impacts of the SAF and RSF conflict within the continent and beyond, as well as responses from Africa and beyond in attempts to resolve the conflict.

1. The impacts of the conflict within the continent.

As expected, the conflict has enormous negative impacts on the continent. There are conflicting figures on the actual casualty figure in the conflict, but consensus remains that both Sudanese and non-Sudanese lost their lives in the conflict. As of May 12, 2024, the fatalities figure was put at 16,650, in about 6,050 recorded violent confrontations between the belligerents (Acled, 2024:3). The figure should be higher going into continuous fighting after the Acled report cited above. Besides, so many public institutions have been looted and destroyed by combatants from both sides, which has led to the destruction of records

vital to the maintenance of the Sudanese state (International Crisis Group, 2023:3).

Apart from the destruction of lives and property, the emergence of ethnic dimensions in the conflict has weakened social cohesion in the country and disrupted the fragile group harmony in Sudan. There were reports of fighting in El Fasher in North Darfur, El Obeid in North Kordofan, Nyala in South Darfur, and Kasala in Kasala State (UNSC, 2023:3). The spread of the conflict to Darfur in ethnic coloration turned Arabs against non-Arabs in the region, as Masalit and Arabs in Western Darfur, Bani Hussein groups in North Darfur, and yet Masalit and Reizigat Arabs in Ag Geneina engaged themselves in fierce battle. Most unfortunate was the abduction and murder of Mr Khamis Abakar – the Governor of West Darfur, by elements believed to be Reizigat Arabs, since Mr Akabar was a Masalit by tribe (Acaps, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2023:6). Giving the conflict ethnic narratives and reactivating latent militias across the country is tearing Sudan apart. This is reminiscent of the Darfur genocide some twenty years ago. This may lead to another civil war, or better yet, increase ethnic political discourse in the post-conflict era (International Crisis Group, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2015; Natsios, 2012).

Within fourteen months of the conflict, about 7.3 million people were internally displaced in Sudan. This raised the number of IDPs in the country to about 11 million, the highest in the world. Besides, about 2 million people have crossed the Sudanese border to other countries as refugees. Of this figure, about 615,000 persons were refugees, asylum seekers, and returnee refugees from neighbouring countries (Care International, 2023:1; OCHA, 2024:3). Indeed, Sudan was the host of the second-highest number of refugees on the continent as of September 2022. The refugees numbered about 1.4 million (5% elders, 52% adults, and 37% children). These people are facing uncertainty arising from the ongoing conflict. Some are forced to return to their home country or seek a third country for safety (Care International, 2023:2).

The conflict has also affected healthcare delivery in the country. Airstrikes by the SAF and shootings by the RSF have destroyed so many hospitals and other healthcare facilities in the country. Besides, many more facilities are looted by the belligerents. The fear of further attacks has forced health workers to close their facilities. The net import of these, among others, is the denial of medical care to millions of Sudanese. Of the 11 million Sudanese who need urgent medical attention, more than 2.6 million are women and girls within the

reproductive age bracket. About 262,880 of them are pregnant and more than 90,000 of them were expected to have their babies within the next 100 days. These realities require urgent measures to safeguard the lives of these Sudanese (OCHA, 2023:3).

Related here is the poor state of water supply arising from this conflict in Khartoum, Darfur, and the Blue Nile. About 18 million Sudanese are facing a shortage of drinking water since the conflict has destroyed some water supply facilities. It has also disrupted the operation of the public water service because staff of these establishments are staying away from work for fear of armed attacks. Similarly, food supplies to the conflict zones have been disrupted. This has led to an increase in food insecurity in Sudan, where the economic recession and the war in Ukraine have affected the food supply. The price of basic food items is on the rise (IAGCI, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2023; IOM, 2023). Indeed, the deterioration in food and water supply to conflict theatres is compounding the challenges of malnutrition among children under 5 years old in the country. More children may be affected by the ‘waste syndrome’, as the conflict persists, and the number of people with access to WASH is depleting due to the conflict. Thus, food and water scarcity are compounding the health insecurity associated with the conflict in Sudan (Care International, 2023; UNICEF, 2023; OCHA, 2023).

2. External impacts of the conflict

The immediate impact of the conflict is felt by the immediate neighbours of Sudan: Libya, Egypt, Chad, the CAR, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. The most perceivable impact is the flow of Sudanese refugees to these countries. It is estimated that more than 1 million Sudanese have fled the country since the outbreak of the ongoing conflict (IOM, 2023:2). Incidentally, Sudan was a home for millions of refugees from Chad, CAR, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen, and Syria. The reversal of the movement of refugees to their home and third countries affects the demographic dynamics of these locations as well as the allocation of resources within these neighbouring states. Indeed, the flow of refugees to neighbouring countries increases the number of people in need and, therefore, becomes a humanitarian burden for the host countries (Care International, 2023:2).

The violent outburst between the belligerents was a shock to IGAD, and other entities across the continent. Sahel has become very unstable

in recent years. The instability is orchestrated by insurgency, terrorism, and military coups (Okon, 2021). The AU and other global partners have been working with recalcitrant states to ensure a timely return to civil rule and good governance as a measure to contain the spread of instability in the region. The outbreak of violence was therefore a setback to the AU's efforts at silencing guns on the continent. It also raises a fundamental question about the effectiveness of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) of the AU. It further exposed Africans inability to solve Africans' problems timeously (International Crisis Group, 2023). IGAD, on the other hand, is overloaded with conflict resolution in its domain. It is deeply involved in the resolution of the conflict surrounding the Civil War in South Sudan as well as the Ethiopia-Tigray conflict. The ongoing conflict in Sudan is another layer of burden on the eight-member sub-regional body. Some IGAD members were overburdened with refugees' challenges before the SAF and RSF conflict. The current realities demand that these countries do more to secure their countries from threats emanating from the chaotic immigration of unvetted and unverified individuals pouring into their countries (IAGCI, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2023). Expectedly, the current conflict in Sudan has depleted human security in the Sahel and Horn of Africa; therefore, it demands more investment in conflict resolution and prevention projects in the Sahel (AUPSC, 2023; AU, 2023).

Beyond Africa, the instability in Sudan increases the security concerns of Western entities. According to Sour (2015:1), the Sahel region is closer to the US and Europe geographically, and there is a sufficient transportation link between Western destinations and the region. Such linkages account for the flow of both documented and undocumented migrants to the West. These linkages mandated the securitisation of the Sahel by the EU for violent extremism, trafficking in humans, illicit drugs, and irregular migration. The securitisation policy was also designed to stymie other transnational organised crimes (AU & EU, 2021:3). The EU Sahel Strategy has focused on the security-migration-development nexus as measures to contain the threats emanating from the region. Unfortunately, the EU has focused on the G-5 countries, namely: Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger, in the implementation of its Sahel Strategy (Venturi, 2017:6). The spread of violent contestation between the SAF and RSF may therefore force the EU to spread the implementation of its strategy to Sudan, since al-Bashir, who hitherto held Sudan together in 'Iron grip' is no longer in charge.

This must be done in a manner that checks the excesses of Russia's proxy, the Wagner Group, without outright confrontation with the military mercenary (EPRS, 2023:2). Unfortunately, Sudan is more fragile now than ever.

Related here are the lessons learned by the US in peacebuilding in the Sahel after the outbreak of conflict. According to Sany and Stigant (2023:1-3), US engagement with troubled countries in the region and global south must emphasised: (1) addressing poor governance as the root cause of the problem; (2) working with African partners to reverse democratic setbacks; (3) overhauling security assistance to improve the governance of Sahel security; (4) building post-coup transitions around better governance, not just speed; and (5) promoting national dialogue and inclusion. Similarly, the violent outburst in Khartoum has had negative impacts on the efforts of the UN to support the peaceful transition to democracy in the country. The UN had established the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), immediately al-Bashir was forced out of the presidency. The objective of UNITAMS was to support the Sovereign Council formed by the Sudanese to stabilise the polity as well as conduct credible elections for the country. However, the ongoing conflict has reversed the gains made in peacebuilding towards peaceful transition through the conduct of the elections by UNITAMS (UNSC, 2023).

3. Africans' response to the conflict in Sudan

The ongoing conflict in Sudan has generated various responses from entities within Africa. Women and youth civil society groups in Sudan have rejected the conflict. So many of them are providing humanitarian support to those in need within their purview. Some opinion leaders are working hard to deescalate the tension within their localities. Many more are appealing for a cessation of hostility from the belligerents. The vibrant civil society sector that brought down al-Bashir's authoritarian rule is supporting the return to negotiation by all parties in the conflict; to facilitate quick resolution to the conflict and timely transition to democratic governance in the country (UNSC, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2023; IAGCI, 2023).

Expectedly, IGAD responded by setting up a 3-member high-level-committee led by President Salva Kiir of South Sudan. Other members of the committee are President William Ruto of Kenya and President Bol Mei of Djibouti. The committee was saddled with the responsibility of

coordinating mediation for the resolution of the conflict on behalf of IGAD. However, during the 14th Ordinary Session of the IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government of IGAD in Djibouti, the assembly ratified the decision to add the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Dr. Ably Ahmed, to the High-Level Committee; hence, the body was christened 'IGAD Quartet'. The communiqué issued at the end of the meeting demanded that the Quartet work closely with the AU Commission. It also outlined a 3-point mandate for the Quartet as follows: (1) organising a face-to-face meeting between General Al-Burhan and General Dagolo within 10 days; (2) facilitating the establishment of a humanitarian corridor by the SAF and RSF within 14 days; and (3) initiating an inclusive process towards a political settlement of the conflict within 21 days. The Quartet has since held their first meeting in Ethiopia on July 10, 2023, where they reviewed the progress made towards the resolution of the conflict (IGAD, 2023a:4; IGAD, 2023b). The IGAD Quartet has negotiated a ceasefire with belligerents, as well as proposed the deployment of Peace Support Operations (PSOs) to Sudan, though without success. IGAD is also a member of the Trilateral Mechanism designed by the UN as the coordinator of conflict resolution processes in Sudan. IGAD has again appealed to its members to support refugees fleeing Sudan in their domain (International Crisis Group, IAGCI, 2023).

The AU had earlier suspended Sudan, immediately after the coup against Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in October 2021. However, the commission convened 'an urgent high-level global- ministerial meeting chaired by the Chairperson of the AU Commission – H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat. The meeting took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on April 20, 2023. Attendance at the meeting included the UN Secretary General, the Executive Secretary of IGAD, a representative of LAS, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Permanent Members (P5) of the UNSC, the African members of the UNSC (A3), Sudan's neighbouring countries, Comoros, the Chair of the AU, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar. A communiqué issued at the end of the meeting condemned the eruption of violence in Sudan, and appreciated the efforts of all the stakeholders to resolve the conflict. The communiqué also demanded a ceasefire to celebrate Eid al-Fitr as a preliminary step towards a permanent ceasefire. Other demands include the establishment of humanitarian corridors by the belligerents, the resumption of negotiations towards an inclusive democratic transitional government, respect for international humanitarian and human rights

laws, and the rejection of negative foreign intervention in the conflict. The meeting appealed for the commitment of all stakeholders in collaboration with the Trilateral Mechanism for urgent de-escalation of violence and resolution of the conflict (AU, 2023a: 1-2; AU, 2023b:1).

By the end of May 2023, the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) met at the level of heads of state and government. The meeting called for an all-inclusive mechanism for mediation in the conflict since the multiplicity of mediation platforms can be counterproductive. The AUPSC subsequently outlined its Roadmap for the resolution of the conflict with 6 focal points as follows: (1) the establishment of a coordinating mechanism to ensure that all efforts by stakeholders are harmonised and impactful; (2) an immediate, permanent, inclusive, and comprehensive cessation of hostilities; (3) effective humanitarian response; (4) protection of civilians and civil infrastructure; (5) strategic role of neighboring states and region; and (6) resumption of a credible and inclusive political transition process that take into account the contributory role of all Sudanese political and social actors, as well as the signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement towards a democratic civilian led government (AUPSC, 2023:1-2). The AU is the second pillar of the Trilateral Mechanism for the resolution of the conflict.

4. Responses to the conflict beyond Africa

The UN response to the violence in Khartoum was a continuation of its engagement with Sudan after the ousting of al-Bashir. The UN established UNITAMS in June 2020 as a frontline mechanism to support Sudan's peaceful transition to democratic rule. The 36-man mission has been working in Sudan for the past 3 years and was part of the team that facilitated the Juba Peace agreement in December, 2022 (UNSC, 2023). All the entities of the UN have been assiduously giving succor to the victims of the conflict. The Red Crescent, UNICEF, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the UN OCHA have been supporting IDPs and those cut off from supply lines by the conflict. Their efforts are complemented by many International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO). These humanitarian institutions are also working with Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries, as well as with third-countries nationals (TCN) affected by the conflict (IOM, 2023; UNICEF, 2023; OCHA, 2023; Care International, 2023). More so, the UN is the third pillar of the Trilateral Mechanism and,

therefore, plays a central role in the mediation and resolution of the conflict.

Worthy of note is the response of the 'Quad Team'. This is made up of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the UK, and the US. The Quad succeeded in organising the Jeddah Peace Talk between the belligerents in May, although the mediation failed. Their efforts momentarily doused tension in the conflict zones (UNSC, 2023). On the other hand, while the EU High Representative in the Horn of Africa has been participating in discussions with IGAD, AU, and other mediators in the conflict, the EU Foreign Affairs Council discussed and effected the evacuation of about 1,700 citizens and other nationals from the country. The EU is also involved in the provision and distribution of humanitarian packs to those in need within Sudan and its neighbours (EPRS, 2023). LAS has been consistent in participating in mediation processes towards the cessation of hostilities and resolution of the conflict (AUPSC, 2023; UNSC, 2023).

Conclusion

The paper highlighted the impacts of the SAF and RSF conflicts in Sudan. It also discussed the responses to the conflict. From the data presentation and the discussion of the findings, it is obvious that the conflict is an existential threat to human security within and beyond Sudan. It has also increased concern for human security in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the entire continent. This is partially due to the dearth of humanitarian materials and funding from humanitarian agencies in the region since the conflict broke out in April 2023. The responses to the conflict have been slow and chaotic because of the intersection of Sudan in the Middle East and Africa. This led to the multiplicity of interests in the conflict. However, the anchorage of the mediation on the Trilateral Mechanism is commendable. This should be sustained in a manner that outwits the spoilers in the conflict. The Trilateral Mechanism needs to invent an all-inclusive platform for the resolution of the conflict. Such a platform should harmonise the interests of various forces within Sudan. Moreso, more funding and materials are needed to contain the deepening humanitarian crisis arising from this unwarranted violent outburst. Above all, inter-Sudanese dialogue is key to the shaping of a peaceful and prosperous Sudan.

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