

# The Perils of Pro-Government Militias in African Transition Democracy: Case of RSF in the Sudan's Conflict

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## ABSTRACT

Sudan has never experienced peace since it attained its independence from Britain in 1956. Most of the causes of the conflicts in Sudan are related to political domination, economic deprivation, and Islamization. The regime of former President Omar al Bashir since it took power from 1989-2019, it adopted a counter-insurgency strategy of using militias in the peripheral areas to confront alongside its army on the rebellious activities. The review literature on pro-government militias in the context of the unstable Sudan provides debates pertains violent atrocities committed by militias against innocent civilians in the name of counterinsurgency. The 2003 crisis in Darfur region clearly outlines the state strategy of employing the Janjaweed militia who later metamorphosed into Rapid Support Force, a paramilitary group who committed genocide and crime against humanity in the name of fighting the two rebel groups: the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The RSF has grown a powerful paramilitary force that are now battling the State Army for the takeover of the government militarily. The militia group which was once built up by the state now turning a real danger to the transitional democracy. This paper argues that the RSF are the direct beneficiary of the state and are closely linked to its structures, its people, its wealth, and foreign partners. This paper draws a conclusion that amicable solution ought to be sought for the benefit of the marginalized peripheral areas of Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile or Sudan with this unstoppable conflict risks to fragment into different autonomous states.

**Keywords:** Militia, Conflict, Sudan, Army, RSF, Transition Democracy

## INTRODUCTION

Sudan has never experienced peace since it gained independence from Britain in 1956. The history of marginalization in the South by the political regime in Khartoum caused a civil war for decades which culminated into the secession of the South from the north. The "Arab" north and its political elites attempted to assimilate the "African" south and control its resources (Viliani, 2017, p.4). Like the South, the Darfur region experienced its marginalization first in 1916 when the British forces integrated Darfur into Sudan (Viliani, 2017, p.4). They maintained to invest heavily into the central Northern regions surrounding the capital by simultaneously neglecting the peripheral areas, such as Southern Sudan and Darfur in the Western part of the country both economically and politically (Fedorchenko, 2017, p.9). The economic disparity compounded with the mistreatment of the people of Darfur under Bashir's regime flared up regional differences that culminated into the formation of the Two rebel groups in 2003, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA), formed by members of the African Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa which felt marginalized and were ready to fight the regime in Khartoum who oppressed them because of their identity as non-Arab Sudanese (Fedorchenko, 2017, p.10; Grigsby, 2013, p.8). Because Arabs dominated the government, it became crystal clear how any dispute between Arabs and Africans would be decided through barrel of the gun (Essoh, 2021, p.43)

The rebellious activities in Darfur shook the regime of the former President Omar al Bashir who feared that Darfur would follow the footsteps of the South to demand their separate autonomy. Consequently, the government carried out a counter-insurgency campaign through the Janjaweed militia (Viliani, 2017, p. 4). The pro-government militia the Janjaweed under the full support of the government, bombed, pillaged, and destroyed villages consisting of ethnic communities of Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa tribe members due to

their association with the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army and Justice and Equality Movement (Viliani, 2017, p. 5). The pro-government militia committed numerous atrocities including elimination of all means of survival of the targeted civilians but also to “kill the will, the spirit, and life itself” through the coordination of mass rape, among other abuses which culminated into war crimes, crimes against humanity, and even genocide that resulted to the former President to be indicted by the ICC for the crimes against humanity and genocide (Viliani, 2017, p. 5). Despite the evidence of the eyewitnesses on the atrocities committed by the pro-militia group, finger of blame was directed to the government for having recruited, armed and deployed the Janjaweed militia, later Rapid Support Force (RSF) in its counter-insurgency strategy (Tar, 2005, p.4)

In April 2019, popular protests successfully toppled Omar al-Bashir from power. The popular uprising was a culmination of over six months of protests that included Sudanese across the social and regional divide. In August 2020, the Sudanese transitional government signed the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan with key rebel groups, which provided for transitional security arrangements in Darfur. These included a permanent ceasefire, the reintegration of rebel forces into national security forces, disarmament, and military and security reforms (Acled, 2023). However, the Juba Agreement failed to halt as deadly clashes were witnessed in the region. In April and June 2022, a spate of clashes broke out between Rizeigat militias and Masalit and Gimir ethnic militias in West Darfur, which reportedly led to the killings of hundreds. It was mentioned that the attack in late April 2022 was conducted by a Rizeigat ethnic militia on al-Kereinik village with a full support by the RSF (Acled, 2023). Deadly clashes were also reported between the RSF and Sudanese military forces in el-Geneina, the capital of West Darfur state (Acled, 2023)

In 2021, the Sudan witnessed a military coup that toppled the civilian government of Prime Minister Hamdok and it threatened the path toward a transition to democracy. In addition to the popular unrest, armed conflict involving state and non-state armed groups across the country increased magnificently. Following the military coup, political violence intensified purportedly involving militias. Ongoing turmoil in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, has contributed to the escalation of the conflict, after a military coup d'état in October 2021 put the country on an uncertain path. Against this backdrop, the December 2022 signing of a political framework agreement was hoped to end the political stalemate and move Sudan toward a civilian government. The power vacuum as a result of the military coup, led to the build-up of parallel military forces of the Sudanese Armed Forces, the semi-autonomous RSF, and rebel groups – in periphery states, particularly Blue Nile, West Kordofan, and West Darfur which has not only contributed to an escalation of inter-communal violence but also facilitated the rapid increase in the number of ethnic militias (Acled, 2023)

The main drivers of the current conflict include ongoing competition between communities affiliated with General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti – who became the Deputy President of the Transitional Council after the coup of 2021 after commanding the original Janjaweed and creating the notorious Rapid Support Forces (RSF) – and those of Sudan Armed Forces under the command of the President of the Transitional Council, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan (Acled, 2023)

This paper seeks to investigate the causes of the current conflict between the Army and the RSF. Beyond tackling the root causes of the current conflict between the two equal generals, the paper analyzes the strength of Gen. Hemedti and his Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in the conflict. In addition to unpacking the current destruction of the state, its infrastructures and its system, the paper evaluates the Sudan's conflict and its threat to democratic transition.

## **PRO-GOVERNMENT MILITIA: DEFINITIONS -DEBATES AND ITS RELEVANCE TO SUDAN**

### **Definitions of pro-government militias**

The literature of civil war and militia postulates two main definitions of pro-government militias (PGMs).

The first definition according to Carey et al 2013, defines pro-government militias (PGMs) according to the following four criteria: (1) being “identified as pro-government or sponsored by the government (national or subnational),” (2) being “identified as not being part of the regular security forces,” (3) being “armed,” and (4) having “some level of organization.” The second definition by authors who refute the above categorization conceive the term militias as “armed groups that operate alongside state security forces or independently of the state, aiming to shield local populations from rebel demands or depredations and seeking to acquire its loyalty or collaboration” (Jentzsch, et al. 2015).

In the context of Africa and especially in the unstable Sudan, Francis (2005) raises the following questions on civil militia: “How do we define and conceptualise civil militia? Is it primarily an African phenomenon? Why and how civil militias emerge in weak, failed and collapsed states[like Sudan], or why do they proliferate in situations of complex political emergencies[such as the one in Darfur]?”

The term civil militia as introduced by Francis (2005) like other concepts in the social sciences receives criticism. The point of contention arose because of the three sets of perspectives as put forward by Tar, 2005, p.5:

1. *State-centric perspectives* which see civil militias as state-centred projects or para military units of the state armed forces. These perspectives emphasise the structural foundations of civil militias, at the expense of its agency.
2. *Society-centred perspectives* which see civil militias as non-state projects comprised of actors and interests that are either at ‘war’ with the state or, conversely, in alliance with it. Specifically, these perspectives consider the role of non-state variables (for instance sub-nationalist tendencies like ethnicity and racism) in responding to (in) adequacies of the state sector.
3. *Hybrid perspectives* which see civil militias as complex phenomena that transcend simplistic formal/informal and state/state dichotomies – as demonstrated by the experience of weak or failing states, specifically conflict prone, war-torn, post-conflict and transition societies.

The first perspective, the state-centric perspectives, equates the term civil militia with “warfare, military service and soldier”. Recent debates depict the term as ancillary units of the state’s armed forces with the examples of state-centric conceptions of civil militias to include: “Military organization composed of citizens enrolled and trained for service in times of national emergency. Its ranks may be filled either by enlistment or conscription” (Tar, 2005, p.7). In the above connotation, “a citizen army made up of free men between the ages of sixteen and sixty who performed occasional mandatory military service to protect their country, colony, or state. Also armed and trained bands of locals who could arm themselves on short notice for their own defence”( Tar, 2005, p.7).

The key assumptions that underlie the state-centric conception of civil militia are that it is: (1)organised either voluntarily or by means of compulsory conscription; (2)maintained, serviced, and remunerated by the state sector; and (3) structured along regular military tradition and values system”(Tar, 2005, p.8). These assumptions are reinforced by the following classification of civil militias:

1. An army composed of ordinary citizens rather than professional soldiers.
2. A military force that is not part of a regular army and is subject to calls to service in an emergency.
3. The whole body of physically fit civilians eligible by law for military Service (Tar, 2005, p.8).

The second perspective, Society-centred perspectives conjures militia in the metaphors of divisive and anti-state tendencies that permeate groups in a state. It emerged against the backdrop of what Said Adejumbi as quoted by Tar (2005) calls “denationalization of the state on a global scale” which has resulted in “the rise of sub state identities being the fulcrum of group rights and citizenship claims”. These militia group is

common in both developed and developing countries in their engagement with the state and rival actors to fulfil their objectives” ( Tar, 2005, p.8)

The third perspective, hybrid perspective combines the elements of traditional interpretation – such as the role of the state – with the role of non-state interests and factors. This perspective is descriptive in nature, and it is applied to a weak, unstable, and complex situation as that of Sudan. In the hybrid perspective, civil militias as observed by Tar 2005 are seen as: marginalised and dissatisfied with the pre bendal state [who]...are organised by a diverse group of interest and stakeholders, including governments or regimes in power, mostly with no constitutional provision or legislation legalising their existence... Other diverse interests include non-state and sub-national group militias (sometimes referred to as ethnic militias), and ... ‘civil security forces. In mobilising a reserve force, the state has more privileges and resources than any non-state actor or interest within its territory. However, in as ituation where the state is weak, collapsing or ‘does not have control or monopoly of the threat or the use of force”

There are three reasons why the hybrid perspective provides a better alternative to the Sudanese context. First, its emphasis on *context specificity* could facilitate a proper understanding of the volatile nature of Sudan’s political instability, characterised, inter alia, by chains of civil war – each caused by a related set of factors. Secondly, by emphasising an organic framework, it promises to capture both state and non-state interests which define the emergence of civil militias. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, while sharing the views held by structuralist theorists on the capacity of the state to use civil militia for public security, it is very cautious, even reluctant, to generalise it: “in the situation of weak states, underwritten by prebendal governance, the normative ethos for the establishment of civil militia is often subverted and privatised to serve particular vested interests”(Tar, 2005, p.10)

### **An overview of the militia strategy in Sudan**

Sudan military elites have been using the militia strategy to terrorize some parts of the country. This strategy pre-dates the regime of the former President Omar al Bashir from 1989-2019. The militia strategy was first employed in 1985 by the government of Gen. Abdel Rahman Suwar al Dahab as a systematic fashion to counterattack the rebellion in the Southern Sudan. This strategy continued to other conflicts in Nuba Mountains and in Darfur region (Flint, 2019, p.16). Given the huge financial cost of mobilizing the regular army to fight the southern rebels of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army(SPLA), the Bashir’s regime recruited a militia group popularly known as *Murahaliin* which was comprised of the two-armed Arab tribes in South Darfur and South Kordofan, the Missiriya and Southern Rizeigat respectively. The *M urahaliin* militia, were volunteers who were not under government paid list but were given full permission and protection from the state to own loots including cattle, household possessions, and even women and children (Flint, 2019, p.16). This counterinsurgency strategy comprised ethnically targeted killing, and with total impunity (Flint, 2019, p.16)

In Darfur, in 1989 after the seizure of power, the government of Omar al Bashir used a combined force of army and *Fursan*, a militia drawn from the Beni Halba Arabs, to counter an SPLA incursion into South Darfur in 1991. In the South Darfur, entire villages were torched by the *Fursan* militia on suspicion of them for having harbored the rebels. From the West Darfur, the government armed ethnic militia after administrative reform shifted the balance of power in favour of Arab tribes and tipped Dar Masalit into war. In January 1999, when the ethnic militia killed over 700 civilians and burned the villages, President Bashir ordered Gen. Mohamed Ahmad al Dabi, to go and ‘restore calm’ in the area (Flint, 2019, p.16). Genal Dabi upon his arrival to the west Darfur, he established a militia group from Southern Sudan known as, the *Quwatas Salaam* (Peace Forces) sponsored by the government to protect the administration of the newly appointed Arab chiefs. In fact, the government used the militia group in Darfur as proxy armies for their strategy of counterinsurgency (Social and Political Review, 2012, p.108)

Another notorious militia was established by the government in Darfur as a counterinsurgency force known as *Janjaweed* under their leader, the Arab supremacist Musa Hilal who revived ancestral myths in Darfur within the militia's camps. The *Janjaweed* militia since 2003 burnt villages and committed genocide and crime against humanity. They were described by the natives as "the demons on horse back" (Social and Political Review, 2012, p.108). Since their establishment in Darfur, reports on rampant bombings, killings, abduction, rape, and destruction of villages by the *Janjaweed* intensified. The attacks wittingly targeted the civilian population of Darfur instead of attacking the armed rebel groups (Fedorchenko, 2017, p.11). The composition of the *Janjaweed* militia is majorly drawn from the nomadic Arab tribes of Darfur and were targeting the African population in Darfur (Fedorchenko, 2017, p.12). The *Janjaweed* rammed non-Arabmen with their pickup trucks and raped women in the name of jihad (de waal, 2019, p.1).

Finally, the *Janjaweed* militia metamorphosed into *Rapid Support Force* (RSF), a paramilitary led by Darfurian Arabs with their leader known as General Hemedti which are now fighting the Sudan Armed Forces inside the capital city Khartoum. When the RSF became part of the government, Hemedti's troops constituted a brigade of the "*Border Guards*" headed by Musa Hilal, the leader of the *Janjaweed*. Gen. Hemedti rivalled with his immediate *Janjaweed's* commander Musa Hilal. When the tension escalated, the former President Omar al Bashir in 2013 constituted the forces of RSF under Gen. Hemedti to fight the rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Army-North in the Nuba Mountains. The RSF were well equipped with new pickup trucks with heavy machine guns and became a powerful and fighting a key battle against Darfurian rebels in April 2015 (de Waal, 2019, p.3). Consequently, Hemedti was picked to lead the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), paramilitary force that turned out to be uncontrollable and engaged in looting, killing, and rape in Darfur, as well as in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States (Tubiana, 2019, p.5)

## METHODOLOGY

The research is based on Secondary source of information. Data collected from opinion and writings of experts on the current conflict in Sudan. The Sudanese conflict is as a result of historical marginalization of the peripheral areas far away from the central region. Experts on conflict in Sudan highlighted the causes as a result of building up militia group which poses threat to the nation building and democracy.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT CONFLICT

### **The root causes of the conflict.**

"Sudan will never be the same again". This was the prophetic statement of the late leader Dr. John Garang de Mabior of Sudan People Liberation Army/SPLM who foresaw the unfolding events in Sudan prior his demise in 2005 and prior witnessing the Secession of the Southern part of the country, now the Republic of South Sudan. In fact, things fall apart as the most developed city Khartoum is being destroyed, infrastructures destroyed, hospitals destroyed, airport destroyed and many innocent civilians lost their lives and there seems to be no end of the conflict between the two Generals who wrangled for power i.e. General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the army and leader of Sudan's ruling council since 2019, and his deputy on the council, RSF leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti. Until their dog fights in the capital city, these two leaders of two separate armies were allies who masterminded the overthrow of the longest Sudan's brutal dictator Omar al- Bashir who ruled the country for three decades through the popular uprising in 2019. When the relationship soared up because of the plan for a new transition, Hemedti aligned himself more closely with civilian parties from a coalition, the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), that shared power with the military between Bashir's overthrow and the 2021 coup. Gen Dagalo claims that Gen Burhan's government were "radical Islamists" and that he and the RSF were "fighting for the people of Sudan to ensure the democratic progress for which they have so long yearned" (Lewis, 2023).

The violence was triggered because of the following built up contentious issues:

**Plan to launch a new transition with civilian parties:** The two generals of the transitional council developed tension after they toppled a civilian government in an October 2021 coup. This tension was brought by an internationally backed plan to launch a new transition with civilian parties which was to be signed in early April 2023, on the fourth anniversary of the overthrow of the longest dictator Omar al-Bashir in a popular uprising in 2019. In this new transition, both the Sudan's army and the RSF were required to cede power and two contentious issues cropped in. One was the timetable for the RSF to be integrated into the regular armed forces. A second was the chain of command between the army and RSF leaders and the question of civilian oversight. When the conflict broke out, both sides traded accusations for the start of the fight. The RSF leader Gen. Hamdan Dagalo accused his immediate Boss Gen. Abdel Fattah of SAF to try to seize full power in a plot with Bashir loyalists, while Gen. Abdel Fattah accused the RSF of illegal mobilization in preceding days as they RSF had moved in the city and occupied key strategic sites in Khartoum (Lewis, 2023, Elbagir, 2023).

**Re-appointment of politicians/members of the former regime:** After October 2021 coup, General Burhan started a process of initiating and re-appointing politicians/members and individuals who were previously associated with the former regime of Omar Al Bashir that included Islamists to their former positions. This made Gen. Dagalo suspicious and full of doubts because as he helped Gen. Burhan to overthrow the dictator Bashir, he cast doubt that he might be betrayed in the future. Since Gen. Dagalo and his RSF were being used by Al Bashir as counter insurgent force alongside the army and now that they were being reinstated, Gen. Dagalo doubted that the loyalists of former regime Al Bashir will never be trusted (Sengupta, 2023). The RSF is committed strongly to not allowing al-Burhan and his band of former al-Bashir supporters to steer the country back to the horrors of the past as they are fighting to eradicate them from the government and leadership permanently. The RSF is working to create a more inclusive political system that represents all Sudanese and ensures that everyone has a voice in the decisions affecting their lives (RSF, 2023, p.2). The SAF's repeated brutal violations of international law and humanitarian norms over the past month show that al-Burhan and his treacherous circle of extremists with/around the SAF are the true enemies of democracy and progress in Sudan. Their return to power would be a dangerous signal to the world (RSF, 2023, p.2). Now, al-Burhan and the former regime are working to restore the former government. Their campaign to do so did not begin today. It has been an ongoing effort since the moment of al-Bashir's deposal. It was clearly evidenced by the coup orchestrated by the SAF in October 2021 and it continues to this day (RSF, 2023, p.2).

**Ethnicity and Regional Differences:** Looking at the Sudanese politics, it always being dominated by the elite group of people who come from ethnic groups of Khartoum and the river Nile. Gen. Dagalo and the RSF come from the Darfur region in the western Sudan. The Sudanese political elite often talked about him and his soldiers i.e the RSF in derogatory terms like "country bumpkins" unfit to rule the state" (Sengupta, 2023). After the 2021 coup, Dagalo has been trying to position himself as a national figure. Basically, he started acting like a real politician, he started calling himself as a representative of the marginalized section of the society. He even started forming alliances of the rebel groups including in Darfur region and Southern Korfofan. This is because in 2013 he conducted an operation in these regions against Darfur. The two generals started a mistrust and began fighting each other, SAF against RSF (Sengupta, 2023). During the peaceful democracy protests in Khartoum, demonstrators chanted "we are all Darfur" as a rebuttal to regime propaganda, trying to portray them as rebels from the far periphery. During the crackdown of June 3, 2022 in which well over 100 protesters were killed, armed men wearing RSF uniforms chanted "You used to chant the whole country is Darfur. Now we brought Darfur to you, to Khartoum" (de waal, 2019, p.2)

**Fear of losing accumulated wealth during reintegration:** Over the past years, Gen. Dagalo had built a vast business empire including many sectors in agriculture, mining, investment, car rentals. He has

resources as well as power. Consequently, Gen. Dagalo doesn't want the RSF to be under the control of the Sudanese army. RSF has over 1000 members and on the other hand, Gen. Burhan declared the RSF as rebel groups and dissolved them (Sengupta, 2023). Though Gen. Dagalo presents himself and his Rapid Support Force (RSF), as being on the side of the people and gets support from Darfur and Southern Kordofan regime but there are people who don't believe in him because he first conducted insurgency operations against the innocent people in Darfur (Sengupta, 2023)

### Hemedti's, RSF Strength in the Conflict

General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti" s background of building up his forces and grasped any advantage to his side from the regime he served made him be viewed as a strategist.

Hemedti's career of violence is one of the main legacies of Bashir's 30- year rule of mercenarised politics. When the ethnic conflict erupted in Darfur region in 2003, Bashir was convinced by Darfuri Arab hard-liners that turning their youths to militias would allow him to win. But by creating the *janjaweed* and relentlessly empowering them under Hemedti, the Sudanese regime has created a monster it cannot control and who represents a security threat not only for Sudan but also for its neighbours (Tubiana, 2019, p.2). Hemedti's *Rapid Support Force* (RSF), a para military led by Darfurian Arabs—and commonly decried as "Janjaweed"—grew up rapidly in military strength and become dominant power in Khartoum (de Waal, 2019, p.1). In 2006, his *Janjaweed*, the militias were spotted armed with new equipment and raided villages across the rebel-held area of North Darfur. The *Janjaweed* rammed non-Arabmen with their pickup trucks and raped women in the name of jihad (Tubiana, 2019, p.7)

Though Gen. Hemedti never attended any formal education or military staff college, he got awarded with the title of "General" because of his military Genuity and bargaining approaches. He was a commander in the *Janjaweed* brigade in Southern Darfur at the height of the 2003-05 war, proving his mettle on the battle field. In 2007-08—the year of a widespread but inchoate rebellion by many of the *Janjaweed* against their patrons, Hemedti was a prominent mutineer. He led his forces into the bush, promising to fight Khartoum "until Judgment Day," shot down an army helicopter, negotiated for an alliance with the Darfurian rebels, and threatened to storm the city of Nyala. Hemedti then cut a deal with the government, settling for a price that included payment of his troops' unpaid salaries, compensation to the wounded and to the families of those killed, promotion to general, and a handsome cash payment. A television documentary captures his parallel negotiations with the Darfur rebels and his own government, his charm and concern for his troops—and the fact that he enlisted Arabs and non-Arabs alike in his ranks (de Waal, 2019, p.3). When Hemedti returned to Khartoum, President Bashir proved him as his loyalist and sometimes treated him like his dearest son whom he made fond of him, called him "Hamayti"—my protector (de Waal, 2019, p.4). Hemedti used his military acumen, military prowess to build his militia into a force more powerful than the waning Sudanese state at their watch.

When fully became part of the government fold, Hemedti's troops constituted a brigade of the "Border Guards" headed by Musa Hilal, the leader of the *Janjaweed*. But he soon became a rival to his commander, and al-Bashir constituted his forces as a separate force in 2013, initially to fight the rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Army-North in the Nuba Mountains. The new *Rapid Support Forces* (RSF) came off second best. But, with a foot of new pickup trucks with heavy machine guns, the RSF became a force to be reckoned with, fighting a key battle against Darfurian rebels in April 2015 (de Waal, 2019, p.3). After successful operations against the rebels in Darfur region, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), grew up stronger and uncontrollable as they engaged in looting, killing and raping civilians (Tubiana, 2019, p.5)

Hemedti's RSF foreign mission to Yemen provided confidence and experience in the battle including monetary benefits. Following the March 2015 Saudi Emirati military intervention in Yemen, the director of al-Bashir's office, Taha Hussein, cut a deal with Riyadh to deploy Sudanese troops in Yemen. One of the

commanders of the operation was Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan the current President and leader of the Sudan Armed Forces fighting RSF. In that operation, most of the fighters were Hemedti's RSF which in turn brought in financial benefit to Hemedti to motivate his forces. This brought hard cash direct into Hemedti's pocket( Tubiana, 2019, p.6). Apart from the benefit of the routine deployment of the RSF abroad, Hemedti's controls the artisanal gold mines in Jebel Amer in Darfur—Sudan's single largest source of export revenues. Hemedti adopted a model of state mercenarism of deploying his paramilitary forces abroad as a counterinsurgencies to give him a source of hard currency to fund his war( de Waal, 2019, p.4)

Hemedti's RSF brought his Janjaweed methods to Khartoum. His forces rampaged through the city and terrorised Khartoum. Since revolution day, unlike the army generals who have been cautious, even timid, and the leaders of the democracy protests, who have been painstakingly consultative, Hemedti remained bold and confident to win the war through the gun. He saw the vacuum of the state power and he ought to seize it. Hemedti realised that after decades of eviscerating political institutions, power in the capital functioned no differently to in lawless Darfur where he committed so many atrocities against civilians( de Waal, 2019, p.5)

The other side Hemedti's strength depends on the fact that he negotiated with other armed rebels in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains. Despite the grievances against Hemedti's paramilitaries, the Darfur rebels still recognise that he is a Darfuri, and they have something in common with this outsider to the Sudanese establishment and they must fight and defeat the ruling class who have marginalized the other peripheries for ages( de Waal, 2019, p.5). Hemedti is also backed by some of the same Darfuri Arab politicians who created the Janjaweed 16 years ago(Tubiana, 2019, p.6)

In summary, other factors are identified by Madeni (2022, p.265) to include: First, Hemedti's strength is influenced largely on patronage received from external patrons in the Gulf region. Second, Hemedti's financial power is largely a result of weak central authority, and the less than robust regulatory environment that has enabled him to build his financial wealth from illicit and informal channels. Finally, the rise of Hemedti and his paramilitary RSF has been due to the fact that they have been able to deftly exploit a national army gravely weakened by the concerted efforts of the previous regime and the related emergence of various paramilitary forces over the last three decades.

### **Sudan's Conflicts and the Threat to Transitional Democracy**

The current conflict poses a big challenge to Sudan Transitional Democracy to civilian rule. The key challenge for democracy in Sudan is the nature of protracted conflicts in the marginalized regions far from the capital city. These challenges include resolving long-standing civil conflicts, addressing the grievances of insurgent militias within a national framework, securing funding for state-building and reconstruction, and minimizing the adverse effects of external intervention by regional powers(Madeni, 2022, p.267).

The risk of the fragmentation of the country into separate autonomous regions is high and poses a big challenge to transitional democracy. The regions of the South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur work harder to build their autonomous political and civilian organizations. The clear division among the people of Nuba Mountains are openly demanding their own autonomous government. The Beja ethnic group have also formed a new group in opposition to the regime in Khartoum (Madeni, 2022, p.268).

The outlined above factors have greater risk of accelerating a large-scale full-scale war across the country due to the proliferation of weapons and the distortions of social networks due to displacement continue to create a new context for endemic conflicts overland, water, pasture, and, of course, political power. Even though the central authorities during the 30 years rule exploited communities through the divide and rule tactic, the absence of a comprehensive peace agreement that addresses inter-communal conflicts in these regions, the prospect for a peaceful transition to a consolidated multi-party democracy in will remain a daunting challenge (Madeni, 2022, p.268).

## CONCLUSION REMARKS

The analysis of the conflict in Sudan manifests a legacy of state strategy of instrumentalizing ethnicity to mobilize the Arab population to fight against the black African, a tactic like the colonial practice of divide-and-rule. The state deliberate recruitment of the militia group, *Janjaweed* and now *Rapid Support Force* since the inception of the conflict in 2003 in the Darfur region to be a separate guarding force that throughout the three decades grew up more powerful militarily and turns out to be a serious threat to the statehood and to the transitional democracy; it's a lesson to African dictators. The RSF who were mentored by the former regime of Omar al Bashir as militia group to paramilitary group are now in full control of key strategic areas in the current conflict as there is no clear diagnosis of who truly would be the winner of the current conflict. By all indications, the Sudanese government will live with regret for having played a role in recruiting, arming, protecting, and sustaining the RSF as it's counterinsurgent force. The reality therefore is that, while being recruited as a tool for counter insurgency, the Rapid Support Force, also double as a force for ethnically motivated violence.

The empirical findings from this paper suggest that the hybrid perspective, which emphasises context and a complex state-society dynamics and power relations, provides a useful theoretical framework for the situation in the conflict in unstable Sudan. In terms of militia's connection to the authoritarian regime, the Rapid Support Force, a state paramilitary, and in terms of the dynamic web of non-state actors and interests (tribal leaders, ethnicity etc) involved, it seemingly falls into non-state sphere, albeit with state connections by default. All in all, the conflict in Sudan speaks volume, on how power relations are played out in weak, plural and unstable societies.

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