

# Civil War in Sudan: The Return of Islamist Control?

by [Lt. Gen. Abakar M. Abdallah](#) and [Jerry Gordon](#)  
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The failed December 3, 2022 Sudan Framework for transition to Civilian Government



## Rivals in Sudan Civil War: General Fattah Abdel Fattah al- Burhan vs. RSF Commander General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo “Hemeti”

The Sudan military junta's grip on power, lack of a functional government, continuing atrocities caused rapid deterioration of economic conditions and security instability that led to the Sudan Coup partners outbreak of civil war during Ramadan on April 15, 2023. The flashpoint was the failure to appoint a civilian government under the [framework](#) for transition to a civilian Government signed with fractious political groups on December 5, 2022. It was rejected by so-called “resistance committees. Moreover, it brought into question the [Juba Peace Agreement](#) of October 3, 2020 negotiated with rebel groups. The deadline for completion of the Phase II negotiations and formation of a civilian government was April 11, 2023. That failed to come to fruition. Instead, there was a demarche by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan that the Rapid Support Force (RSF) commanded by his coup partner, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as “Hemeti”, be integrated with the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) command structure. That triggered the war between the Sudan Armed Forces and RSF.

Note these [comments](#) about the rival commanders' actions:

*Both [Hemeti] and Burhan have calculated that the leadership contest is now a zero-sum game and thus have moved on each other, and unfortunately, the Sudanese people must stand on the sidelines as both military leaders fight it out till the bitter end,” said Adel Abdel Ghafar, the director of the Foreign Policy and Security Program at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs.*

*I have long believed that [Hemeti] is an existential threat not only to Sudan's democratic transition but to its very viability as a state," said Ahmed T el-Gaili, a Sudanese lawyer.*



Khartoum after Airstrikes

## **The Civil War Toll and Humanitarian Crisis in Sudan**

The resulting chaos of the fierce conflict in eleven days between the forces of the two junta partners, Generals al-Burhan and Dagalo, have [caused](#) the deaths of over 512 and injuries to more than 4,200 Sudanese civilians in the capital district of Khartoum and the conflict regions of Darfur and Kordofan. Hospitals in Khartoum and sister city Omdurman were destroyed or those that survived were jammed with casualties. There were [reports](#) of dead lining the streets unattended. Millions are hunkering down in what passes for their homes without access to food, water and communications.



UNTAIM SRSR Volker Perthes

UNTAIM Special Representative for the Security General, Volker Perthes in his [briefing](#) on April 26, 2023 to the Security Council drew attention to the situation on the ground:

*A 72-hour ceasefire was brokered by the United States on 24 April. It seems to be holding in some parts, so far. However, we also hear continuing reports of fighting and movement of troops. The Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces have both accused one another of violating the ceasefire.*

*In Khartoum, fighting around the Republican Palace, Khartoum international airport, the Army headquarters, RSF bases, and other strategic locations have largely continued or in some cases intensified. Airstrikes and heavy shelling have also continued, particularly in Bahri and Omdurman—the two partner cities around Khartoum. The Khartoum airport is reportedly now operational, but its aprons are damaged.*

*Residential areas near the headquarters of the Army, RSF installations, and the airport have come under persistent attacks. Homes, shops, schools, water and electricity installations, mosques, hospitals, and other health facilities have been damaged or are now fully destroyed. Reports of home invasions, looting of homes and shops and cars at checkpoints have been rampant. These have included the homes and the cars of Sudanese citizens, United Nations*

*staff, humanitarian workers, and the diplomatic community.*

*We have also received disturbing reports of attempted sexual assaults. With supply lines running out and destroyed, fear of increased criminality is mounting. Reports of prisoners being released from detention centers across Khartoum have compounded these fears.*

The World Health Organization staff in country [declared](#) that the breakdown in public health services would cause a humanitarian disaster causing more deaths. It cautioned that the capture by the RSF of the Sudan National Public Health Laboratory represented an extreme threat because of the possible release of deadly pathogens.



Sudanese Fleeing Khartoum

Tens of thousands sought refuge by fleeing across the national frontiers of neighboring Chad, Egypt, South Sudan and Ethiopia. Virtually, all foreign embassies closed, emergency flights have evacuated diplomatic and security personnel and

thousands of foreign nationals. The US Embassy staff and personnel made a dramatic late night heliborne departure aided by US Special Forces to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa. The US State Department announced that it could not remove to safety 16,000 US nationals.

Multiple cease-fires have failed to stop bombings of the Sudan Armed Forces and artillery barrages of the renegade Rapid Support Force (PSF). Calls by the UN, US, UK, France, South Sudan, Djibouti and Saudi Arabia for cease fires were disrupted by periodic gunfire, air attacks and artillery fire by forces of the SAF of Generals al-Burhan and RSF's commander Dagalo, with each side calling for "surrender" of their opposing forces.



Ex-President Omar al Bashir in Kober Prison Khartoum

## **Release of Former Bashir Regime Islamist Leaders Raises Concerns**

On April 24, an [attack](#) by the RSF on the Kober Prison caused

the release of more than 5,000 prisoners and the transfer of 79 year-old long term dictator, Al -Bashir to a military hospital. Concern was raised over the [release](#) of Islamist members of his former National Congress Party regime: Former Presidential Assistant Nafi Ali Nafi , Vice-President Ali Osman Taha and Minister of Defense Abdelrahim Hussein and Ahmed Harun. The International Criminal Court in the Hague sought transfer of Bashir and these henchmen who were indicted for their involvement in the genocidal war in Darfur in 2003 and 2004. *Radio Dabanga* [reported](#) a political adviser to the RSF accusing General al- Burhan 's SAF of "Removing the symbols of the former regime from prison is part of the army's plan to return the Islamists to power."



Former Bashir Presidential Assistant Nafi Ali Nafi (L), former Vice-President Ali Osman Taha (C), and former Minister of Defense Abdelrahim Hussein

## **The Sudan Civil War and the Return to Islamist Elite Control**

What we are now witnessing in Sudan is the possible return of the old system of authoritarian Islamist rule. The system had split into small, fragmented groups each trying to survive under the guise of revolution and assume control of the state. The Khartoum Nile Arab elite system of government that was formed at time of the country's Independence in 1956 without

the consent of the Sudanese people had fallen apart. It resulted in more than 17 military coups since the country's independence. The Arab tribal regime that was led by a coterie of people with Jihadist forbearers who imposed their identity by force on a majority black African indigenous population with multi-cultural background has disintegrated. The strategy to implement their vision was whoever tried to resist this idea was to be exterminated.

With Islamist doctrinal objectives in mind, they fomented genocidal civil wars against Southern Sudanese in 1955. South Sudan seceded but surprisingly the policy of extermination of the indigenous population of Sudan continued in Darfur, Blue Nile, Beja (Red Sea Province) and the Nuba mountains. Successive Arab Nile valley elite regimes who ruled the country claimed the lives of some 2 million Southern Sudanese prior to their independence in 2011. An estimated 2 million more have been killed in the four indigenous conflict regions and the central region of the country. The policies formulated by tribal and religiously jihad-obsessed sheiks dominating the country's indigenous population have brought Sudan to its current condition. A country rich in natural resources and diverse population is a failed state dependent on international relief aid for its survival.

## **Failure of International Community Approach to Resolve Sudan Crisis**

The reality is that the Middle East oil-rich Arab states, especially the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UN, African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) failed to resolve the Sudan crisis by returning to the period prior to the October 25, 2021 Junta coup. The hope of such return in the failed transition to form a civilian government was dashed on April 15, 2023 when open warfare broke out between the former Junta partners.

Furthermore, they mistakenly thought they could maintain the military junta that possesses similar views of Arab supremacist ideology to remain dominant in power. The now collapsed junta continually committed genocidal war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sudan, notably in Darfur. These perpetrators of genocide were never the solution because they were the principal actors causing instability. Furthermore, the solution to Sudan's crisis cannot come through Sudanese fractious political parties. They constitute a weak coalition motivated through personal family and tribal interests with allegiance to foreign Islamist religious sects and autocratic Arab Middle East oil-rich sheikdoms. Because of such behaviors, these Sudanese Nile Valley elitist parties never agreed on anything. Notwithstanding, the genocidal security apparatus controlled by the military junta, remnants of the former Bashir-led Muslim Brotherhood regime, were by their nature subversive agencies who disrupted domestic peace and tranquility. Since the country's founding and independence, Sudanese have never seen peace and stability under the regimes of these Islamist groups.

The political parties under the umbrella Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) who joined hands with the Transitional Military Council (TMC) that killed hundreds of protesters and dispersed the protest-sit-in in Khartoum in December 2019. Members of FFC who represented the protesters during the negotiations did not protest the killings that occurred before the army headquarters. All while they quietly shared the government with the TMC. This and the October 25, 2021, coup by the junta leaders, caused the Sudan resistance forces to lose confidence in the military, rejecting sharing any government with them. They denounced Sudan's old political parties and the FCC participation in any future government.

Instead of supporting this dysfunctional and pernicious system in Sudan, the international community never reached out to Sudanese resistance groups that espoused possible regime

change. The International Community failed to establish a transitional system of government under the rule of law accountable to a civilian authority to prepare the country for international supervised transparent democratic elections.

Through the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS); the international community witnessed ongoing atrocities. The UNITAMS, operating under Chapter Six of the UN mandate, had no powers to prevent the ongoing killings. Thus, the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) had no authority to stop the RSF commanders from committing atrocities and causing political and social unrest disrupting the pastoral and economic livelihoods of people in Sudan. The SRSG, Mr. Volker Perthes,' report to the UN Security Council on March 28, 2022, provided details on the deteriorating security situation and living conditions in Sudan under the October Coup junta. Similar to imprisoned former Sudan autocratic President Omar Bashir, the Chairman of Sudan's Transitional Military Council, General al Burhan protested the report findings accusing the UNITAMS SRSG of intervening in Sudan's internal affairs. He called Perthes a liar and threatened to expel him from Sudan. This wasn't the first time Sudan's oligarchic rulers expelled a UN official. President Bashir expelled the UN Envoy Mr. Jan Pronk in October 2006, when he spoke about the government security forces committing brutal atrocities in Darfur. By threatening to expel a UN official, General al-Burhan defied the international community by disregarding and dismissing the world order. Burhan brazenly reiterated that he would hand over power to anyone, except to an elected civilian government. A transition to a civil government that he dismantled and overthrew that effectively ceased to exist. The December 2022 Framework perpetrated by the former Junta partners was a delusional charade perpetrated on the resistance movements who signed on to a folly – the eruption of a chaotic civil war on March 15, 2023 between the Sudan Armed Forces led by General al-Burhan versus his former TMC

“partner” Rapid Support Force/Janjaweed commander General Dagolo, “Hemeti.”

The regional and global organizations including UN, AU, as well as IGAD, categorically failed to correctly address the root causes of Sudan’s crisis and find lasting solutions. Moreover, autocratic Middle East states in addition to Egypt have perpetuated Sudan’s dysfunctional regimes as reflective of their national interests. They fostered and supported successive failed autocratic regimes in Sudan since its independence. This policy was dramatically reflected in the overthrow of the Transition Sovereignty Council by the military junta in October 2021 that led to the chaos of savage civil war between the former Junta partners during Ramadan on April 15, 2023.

These international groups wanted to solve the crisis by maintaining junta leaders Generals al Burhan and Dagalo in power to be part of the solution, which in retrospect was fraught with dangerous rival aspirations by both for complete autocracy. Their mediators presented proposals that did not answer the demands of Sudanese resistance groups for removal of the genocidal regime generals barring Sudan’s corrupt political parties from participating in any future government. This is the main reason their efforts failed to develop lasting solutions. All Sudanese resistance groups, whether politicians, ordinary people, activists, social media, non-signatory armed resistance movements, including the Sudan United Movement, demanded the military cede power to civilian authority. Today’s Sudanese are wiser. They are aware of the tricks and deceptions played by the military generals and the political parties during the period of Sudan’s previous uprisings, especially during the December 2018 revolution.

Arab states have continually supported successive oppressive regimes in Sudan. They backed Bashir and the current military junta regime that fell to pieces erupting in civil war near the end of Ramadan in the Islamic calendar between General al-

Burhan commander of the Sudan Armed Forces, backed by Egypt and former colleague General Dagalo “Hemeti” Commander of the oppressive RSF purportedly backed by the UAE. The UAE and other Arab League members at a conference in Amman, Jordan in March 2017 provided billions for a major commercial agricultural development program in Sudan to supply the Middle East region. Ironically, the current civil puts food security of this 3<sup>rd</sup> largest African country at risk for 45 million Sudanese and millions of others in surrounding countries. The World Food Program has shut down operations in Sudan after facilities were looted and personnel killed.



Rapid Support Force Commander Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo

**The Opportunistic RSF Commander General Dagalo,**

## **“Hemeti” and Russia Connections**

General Dagalo’s sobriquet “Hemeti” in Arabic means “little Mohammed.” His career is quite an accomplishment for a secondary school dropout and former camel herder steeped in Islamic doctrine from the Arab Mahariya Reziegat tribe that lay bestride the Chad-Border. He is a cunning opportunist. Hemeti established his leadership of the RSF/Janjaweed during the 2003-2005 genocidal war in Darfur. He led a rebellion against Bashir in 2007-2008 and yet negotiated a peace deal that made him a general and brigade commander of the RSF/Janjaweed. In the process he became a major enforcer for the former Islamist NCP regime of deposed President Al-Bashir. In 2015, following the end of the Bashir regime military and industrial relations with Iran, Hemeti enhanced his warlord prowess entering through a lucrative contract with the Saudi – UAE collation to supply RSF fighters in the war against rebel Houthi Shia forces in Yemen. When in April 2019 it became apparent that Bashir was losing control, Dagalo joined forces with al-Burhan to overthrow the regime that led to TMC partnership and subsequently to the October 25, 2021 Junta and current civil war with his former partner. The Dagalo family is perhaps the wealthiest in Sudan after Hemeti seized ownership from a rival tribal leader of several gold mines in Darfur.

In 2017, former Sudan President Omar Bashir went to Moscow for a meeting with President Putin. As a result, the Bashir regime entered a deal with Russia’s Wagner group to provide security, training and equipment for the RSF. In compensation, the Wagner Group under Yevgeny Prigozhin received a concession, established Meroe Gold, later sanctioned by the US, to exploit Sudan’s gold potential. Dagalo’s RSF has provided protection to Wagner’s gold mining interests in Sudan. Dagalo was in Moscow on February 24, 2022 to support a 25 year lease on a Russian naval facility based on the country’s strategic Red Sea coast giving Russia strategic access to the Arabian Sea

and India Ocean through the Bab Al Mandab on the Horn of Africa. It is alleged in a *New York Times* [report](#) that Hemeti's plane was carrying gold bullion that may have been payment for supply of military equipment. It was alleged in a *CNN* [report](#) that 32.7 tons of gold worth \$1.9 Billion was unaccounted for. An indication that the Junta was engaged in a corrupt scheme supervised by Hemeti to by-pass the Sudan treasury to garner "political and military support" of Putin. A recent *CNN* [report](#) cited imagery from open-source intelligence "All Eyes on Wagner" of Russian transport flights between air bases of Libya's National Army commander Field Marshall Hifter allegedly suppling anti-air missiles for possible use by the RSF against the SAF in the civil war. On the brink of the current civil war with Hemeti's RSF, General al-Burhan forces arrested Wagner personnel for alleged gold smuggling. The Wagner connection to Hemeti is murky at best.



Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen with Sudan General al-Burhan in Khartoum, February 2, 2023

## The Bizarre Israel Connection

When Israel signed a [normalization agreement](#) with the Sudan TMC on October 23, 2020, it thought it was a prelude to another Abraham Accord, giving it a watching brief on dealing with both Generals Al-Burhan and Hemeti. In reality, there were objections by so-called civil society groups in Khartoum to the agreement.

Surprisingly, Israel condoned this through secret exchanges over three years between Jerusalem and Khartoum. All while ignoring the military junta killings of Khartoum protesters and RSF committing genocidal jihad against villages in Darfur. The Abraham Accords with majority Sunni Muslim Emirates and Kingdoms are vital to Israel as a bulwark against the hegemonic nuclear ambitions of the Shiite extremist Islamic Republic of Iran.

On February 2, 2023, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen [met](#) with General Al-Burhan in Khartoum to sign the normalization agreement at a ceremony following transition to a civilian government. That never happened. Note these observations from Ben Cohen in *The Cleveland Jewish News*, [wrote](#):

*When Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen visited Khartoum in February, the People's Conference Party and the Islamic Bloc, which comprises 10 different Islamic parties, issued statements warning al-Burhan that he had no mandate to make peace with Israel. For numerous reasons, then, it would be foolish to present the peace between Israel and Sudan—more accurately, between Israel and Sudan's quarreling military leaders—as permanent.*

Hence, the bizarre but earnest [offer](#) by Israel Foreign Minister Eli Cohen on April 25, 2023 of a venue to mediate between the warring parties in this civil war, Generals al-Burhan and Dagalo, to achieve a hoped-for an end to the conflict. This has dim prospects at best given the animus against surrender to each other by these warring former Junta partners.

Ben Cohen, continued to explain why Israel's offer is folly:

*While in Khartoum, Cohen paid tribute to a "historic peace agreement with a strategic Arab and Muslim country," asserting that the "peace agreement between Israel and Sudan will promote regional stability and contribute to the national security of the State of Israel."*

*Such sentiments are misplaced in a country where power still comes from the barrel of a gun rather than the ballot box. The issue in Sudan is not which of al-Burhan or Hemeti should rule, but whether either of them can even be considered a legitimate leader. Among al-Burhan's abuses is the June 2019 massacre of peaceful protesters in Khartoum, with hundreds murdered, tortured and raped, and reports of corpses thrown into the Nile River. For his part, Hemeti emerged from one of the most monstrous paramilitaries seen during this century—the Arab Janjaweed who engaged in a genocidal reign of terror in the Darfur region from 2003 until 2020. High-minded notions like the national interest or national reconciliation are utterly foreign to both men, for whom political power is primarily an opportunity to consolidate their personal wealth and eliminate their rivals.*

## Conclusion

This conflict could end in the complete breakdown of Sudan with vast undeveloped natural resources and a restive population desperately seeking surcease from the wretched legacy of 68 years of Islamist military coups and the iron heel of suppression of aspirations for freedom under the rule of law and civilian government. If anything, it could end in return of the hated Islamist military regime, supposedly toppled in 2019.

Meanwhile, we have concern for the survival of one of the co-authors, Lt. General Abakar M. Abdallah, a native Darfuri, and US Trained and former commander of the Chadian Pan-Sahel Counterterrorism Force. He returned from the US in January 2023 with a manifesto for establishing a civilian government under the rule of law as a masthead to lead his men of the Sudan United Movement resistance force engaging in mortal combat in his home region against the forces of the RSF. Small hopes in trying times during this chaotic sectarian war, once again targeting the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous people of Sudan. As Ha Shem instructed Joshua and Caleb before entering ancient Israel on a spying mission, we wish our colleague "Be Strong and of Good Courage."

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