

Sudan's Forgotten War: Understanding one of the World's Largest Humanitarian Crises

A comprehensive guide to the conflict tearing Sudan apart

Introduction

While the world's attention has been focused on other global conflicts, a devastating war has been raging in Sudan since April 2023. This conflict has created what some call the world's largest humanitarian crisis, yet it remains largely unspoken of by many people around the globe. This article explains what is happening in Sudan, why it matters, and the human cost of this "forgotten war."

What is Happening in Sudan?

Sudan, a large country in northeastern Africa, has been engulfed in a brutal civil war for over two and a half years. The fighting is between two powerful military groups that were once allies but turned against each other in a struggle for power.

The Two Sides

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) is Sudan's official national army, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. Think of them as the country's regular military, similar to what most nations have. They control most of the northern and eastern parts of Sudan.

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is a paramilitary group, which means they are like a military force but not part of the official army. They are led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as "Hemedti." The RSF has its roots in a notorious militia called the Janjaweed, which was responsible for atrocities in the Darfur region years ago. The RSF now controls most of western Sudan, including the Darfur region.

How Did This (latest) in a series of conflicts in Sudan Start?

To understand the current conflict, we need to go back a few years. In 2019, the people of Sudan successfully overthrew their long-time dictator, Omar al-Bashir, who had ruled the country for nearly 30 years. The people hoped this would bring democracy and a better life.

However, the military took control instead. General Burhan and General Dagalo worked together and staged a coup in October 2021, pushing aside civilian leaders who were trying to establish a democratic government.

For a while, these two generals were partners in power. But they soon began to disagree about the future of Sudan. The main issue was a plan to merge the RSF into the regular army. Both generals wanted to be in charge of this combined force, and neither was willing to give up their power and wealth.

Tensions grew throughout early 2023. On April 15, 2023, shooting broke out between the two sides in Khartoum, Sudan's capital city. What started as a power struggle between two generals has turned into a full-scale civil war that has devastated the entire country.

The Human Cost: A Catastrophe of Unimaginable Scale

The numbers tell a story of immense human suffering, but behind each statistic are real people whose lives have been destroyed.

Death Toll: 150,000 Lives Lost

Upto 150,000 people may have died in Sudan since the war began. To put this in perspective, that's roughly the population of a mid-sized city completely wiped out. This number includes people killed in combat, but also many who died from starvation, disease, and lack of medical care because of the war.

As with Gaza, the true death toll is likely much higher because many deaths go unreported in war zones where hospitals have been destroyed and record-keeping has broken down.

Displacement: 12 Million People Forced from Their Homes

Imagine if every single person in a country the size of Belgium had to flee their home. That's what has happened in Sudan. Over 12 million people have been displaced, making it the largest displacement crisis in the world.

This breaks down into: - **8 to 11 million internally displaced people**: These are Sudanese who have fled their homes but remain somewhere inside Sudan, often living in makeshift camps with little shelter, food, or clean water. - **3 to 4 million refugees**: These are people who have crossed international borders into neighboring countries like Chad, Egypt, and South Sudan, seeking safety.

Many of these displaced people have had to flee multiple times as the fighting spreads to new areas. Families have been separated, children have lost parents, and people have lost everything they owned.

Hunger: Half the Population Facing Starvation

Sudan's population is approximately 46 to 50 million people. Today, about 25 million people—half the entire population—are facing extreme hunger. This is not just being hungry for a meal; this is acute food insecurity, meaning people don't know where their next meal will come from and are at risk of starvation.

The situation is so dire that Sudan now has the world's largest hunger crisis. Famine has been officially confirmed in at least 10 locations across the country. In these areas, people are literally starving to death.

Why is this happening? The war has destroyed farms, disrupted food production, and made it impossible to transport food from one area to another. Both sides in the conflict have also deliberately blocked humanitarian aid from reaching people in need, using starvation as a weapon of war.

Children are particularly vulnerable. Over 5 million children and mothers are suffering from acute malnutrition. An estimated 522,000 children have died or are at risk of dying from malnutrition-related causes.

War Crimes and Atrocities: Horror on All Sides

One of the most disturbing aspects of Sudan's war is that both sides have committed terrible atrocities against civilians. International human rights organizations have documented horrific crimes that include executions, torture, rape, and ethnic cleansing.

Crimes Committed by the RSF

The Rapid Support Forces and their allied militias have been accused of some of the worst atrocities:

Ethnic Cleansing in Darfur: The RSF has carried out what many describe as a campaign of ethnic cleansing in the Darfur region, particularly targeting the Massalit people and other non-Arab communities. In cities like El Geneina, RSF fighters have systematically killed thousands of people, burned entire neighborhoods to the ground, and forced hundreds of thousands to flee to neighboring Chad.

Sexual Violence: Human rights organizations have documented widespread and systematic sexual violence by RSF fighters. Women and girls have been subjected to gang rape, sexual slavery, and other forms of brutal sexual violence. Survivors report that attackers specifically targeted them because of their ethnicity, often taunting them with racist slurs.

In one particularly horrific report, UNICEF documented cases of children as young as one year old being sexually assaulted. Some child survivors have attempted suicide because of the trauma.

Crimes Committed by the SAF

The Sudanese Armed Forces have also committed serious war crimes:

Torture and Executions: The SAF has been documented torturing prisoners to death. Human Rights Watch has found evidence of summary executions, where people are

killed without any trial or legal process.

Attacks on Civilians: The SAF has carried out airstrikes and artillery attacks on populated areas, killing hundreds of civilians. They have also attacked hospitals and healthcare facilities, which is a war crime under international law.

Blocking Humanitarian Aid: Like the RSF, the SAF has also prevented humanitarian organizations from delivering food and medical supplies to people in need.

Both Sides Are Guilty

International investigators have found that both the SAF and RSF have:

- Executed prisoners and mutilated bodies
- Attacked healthcare workers and facilities
- Deliberately blocked humanitarian aid
- Tortured and abused detainees

In at least 10 documented incidents, fighters from both sides have filmed themselves committing atrocities, including executions and torture, showing a complete disregard for human life and dignity.

Why Is This Called the "Forgotten War"?

Despite being the world's largest humanitarian crisis, Sudan's war receives remarkably little international attention compared to other conflicts. Several major news organizations and humanitarian groups have specifically called it the "forgotten war."

Limited Media Coverage

Major international news outlets provide far less coverage of Sudan compared to conflicts in other parts of the world. When Sudan is mentioned, it's usually brief and quickly forgotten.

Inadequate International Response

The international community's response has been widely criticized as insufficient:

- Peace talks in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have repeatedly failed, with both sides showing little willingness to negotiate, especially the SAF.

- The United Nations has called for more action but has struggled to get the warring parties to allow humanitarian access.
- International Crisis Group, a respected think tank, has called diplomatic efforts "lacklustre."
- Amnesty International has labeled the world's response "woefully inadequate."

The Role of Race

International health official Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has publicly stated that he believes **race plays a role in the lack of global attention to Sudan and other African conflicts. In his words, "I think race is in the play here."**

Reduced Aid

The humanitarian situation has been made worse by cuts in international aid.

The Impact on Daily Life

Beyond the statistics, the war has destroyed the fabric of daily life in Sudan.

Destroyed Infrastructure

Sudan's capital, Khartoum, once a bustling city, is now described as a "burnt-out shell." Government buildings, banks, and office towers have been blackened by fire and destroyed by fighting. The international airport is a graveyard of smashed planes. Roads, bridges, and other critical infrastructure have been damaged or destroyed.

Collapsed Healthcare System

Over 80% of hospitals in conflict zones are no longer operational. This means that people with treatable conditions are dying because they cannot access medical care. Pregnant women are giving birth without medical assistance, leading to a sharp increase in maternal deaths. Diseases that were once controlled are spreading unchecked.

Economic Collapse

Sudan was already one of the poorest countries in the world before the war. The conflict has made things dramatically worse. Sudan's finance minister reported that state revenues have shrunk by 80%. People who once had jobs and homes are now destitute refugees. The economy has essentially collapsed.

Education Disrupted

Millions of children have had their education interrupted. Schools have been destroyed, used as military bases, or turned into shelters for displaced people. An entire generation of Sudanese children is growing up without education, which will have long-term consequences for the country's future.

International Involvement: Who Is Supporting Whom?

While this is primarily a Sudanese conflict, several foreign countries have become involved, providing weapons and support to one side or the other.

Supporting the RSF

United Arab Emirates (UAE): Sudan's government has accused the UAE of providing weapons, funding, and even conducting drone strikes in support of the RSF. There are documented connections between RSF leader Hemedti and UAE officials, including allegations that Hemedti smuggles Sudanese gold to the UAE.

Libya's Khalifa Haftar: The eastern Libyan warlord has been accused of helping the RSF smuggle weapons into Sudan and providing fighters to support them.

Supporting the SAF

Egypt: Sudan's northern neighbor has strong ties to the SAF and has reportedly provided weapons and support. Egypt has strategic interests in Sudan, including shared control of Nile River waters.

Iran, Turkey, and Qatar: These countries have reportedly provided weapons to the SAF, including drones and other military equipment.

What Does the Future Hold?

As of October 2025, there is no end in sight to the conflict. Both sides continue to fight, and neither has shown a genuine willingness to negotiate a peace agreement.

Territorial Control

The conflict has shifted from a stalemate toward de facto partition:

- The SAF retains control of most of the north and east, including Port Sudan, where the internationally recognized government remains based.
- The RSF now dominates nearly all of Darfur and large parts of Kordofan, having seized El Fasher—the SAF's last major stronghold in Darfur—after months of siege.
- Fighting persists in parts of Kordofan and central Sudan, and humanitarian conditions continue to deteriorate.

Risk of Permanent Division

There are growing fears that Sudan could permanently split into two or more countries. The RSF has declared plans to form a rival government in the areas it controls. If this happens, it would be the second time Sudan has split—South Sudan became independent in 2011, taking most of Sudan's oil fields with it.

The Coming Rainy Season

Humanitarian workers are racing against time because the rainy season will soon make many roads impassable, making it even harder to deliver food and medical supplies to people in need.

Funding Crisis

Humanitarian organizations are running out of money. The World Food Programme needs an additional \$650 million to continue its operations over the next six months. Without this funding, they will be forced to either cut the number of people receiving assistance or reduce the amount of food each person receives.

What Needs to Happen?

Humanitarian organizations, the United Nations, and international observers have identified several urgent needs:

Immediate Ceasefire

Above all, the fighting needs to stop. A ceasefire would allow humanitarian organizations to reach people in need and give Sudanese civilians a chance to rebuild their lives.

Humanitarian Access

Both sides must allow humanitarian organizations to deliver food, medicine, and other essential supplies to people in need. Currently, both the SAF and RSF are deliberately blocking aid, which is a war crime.

International Pressure

The international community needs to put more pressure on both sides to negotiate. Countries that are providing weapons to the warring parties should stop fueling the conflict.

Funding

Humanitarian organizations need adequate funding to respond to the crisis. The international community must provide the resources needed to prevent mass starvation.

Accountability

Those responsible for war crimes, including ethnic cleansing, and sexual violence, must be held accountable. International justice mechanisms need to investigate and prosecute those responsible.

Why Should the World Care?

Humanitarian Imperative

At its most basic level, this is about human suffering on a massive scale. Twenty-five million people are facing starvation. Children are dying from preventable causes. Women are being systematically raped. These are human beings whose lives have value, regardless of where they live. This responsibility is accentuated by the demands of our faith, as Muslims.

Regional Stability

Sudan's conflict is already affecting neighboring countries. Millions of refugees are putting strain on countries like Chad, Egypt, and South Sudan, which are themselves poor and struggling. The conflict could destabilize the entire region.

Global Implications

Sudan sits in a strategically important location, bordering the Red Sea, which is a critical shipping route for global trade. Instability in Sudan could have wider implications for international security and commerce.

Precedent

How the international community responds to Sudan, just like Gaza, sets a precedent for how other humanitarian crises will be handled. If the world ignores Sudan, it sends a message that some lives matter less than others.

Conclusion

Sudan's war represents one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes of the 21st century. Upto 150,000 people have died, 12 million have been displaced, and 25 million are facing starvation. Both sides have committed horrific atrocities, including war crimes and genocide.

Yet this remains a "forgotten war," receiving far less international attention and support than it deserves. The people of Sudan are suffering not only from the brutality of the conflict but also from the world's indifference.

The situation is urgent. Without immediate action—a ceasefire, humanitarian access, and adequate funding—millions more will die. The international community has both the moral obligation and the practical means to help, but it requires political will and sustained attention.

The question is not whether we can help the people of Sudan, but whether we will choose to do so before it's too late.

Key Facts at 6 Glance

Aspect	Details
Conflict Start Date	April 15, 2023
Duration	Over 2.5 years (as of October 2025)
Main Parties	Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) vs. Rapid Support Forces (RSF)
Death Toll	Up to 150,000
Displaced People	12-14 million
Facing Hunger	25 million (half the population)
Famine Locations	Confirmed in at least 10 locations
Children at Risk	5 million suffering acute malnutrition; 522,000 at risk of death
Hospitals	Over 80% non-operational in conflict zones
Media Coverage	Widely described as a "forgotten war"

Sources: This article is based on information from a number of news agencies and humanitarian organisations.

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