



[Sudan's Removal of the UN Envoy has Made Peace More Difficult](#)

The situation in Sudan continues to degrade as pathways to peace become scarcer. Recently, the UN-appointed envoy and key mediator Volko Perthes was declared persona non grata by the Sudanese government. This means that Sudan will no longer welcome Perthes into the country to allow him to fulfill his role as a mediator between the two warring sides. The request to remove Perthes from his role was made in a letter from Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, the leader of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and de facto leader of Sudan, to U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. According to the UN charter, member states cannot be made persona non grata. Burhan request for removal comes just 2 weeks after he had previously criticized Perthes for allegedly stoking the conflict. The exclusion of the UN from the mediation efforts will harm chances for any comprehensive peace deal. Saudi and American personnel are still active in mediation efforts, but each side has personal stakes in this conflict, eliminating their ability to be impartial.

The civil war in Sudan began primarily due to a disagreement about the integration of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) into the regular Sudanese military. The leaders of the two factions are Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, the head of the army, and Commander Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo, the head of the RSF. The RSF is a paramilitary group that has roots in the infamous Janjaweed, another paramilitary group that was responsible for numerous human rights abuses during the conflict in Darfur from 2003 to 2020. The Janjaweed was utilized by Omar al-Bashir, the despot of Sudan at the time, to combat a separatist movement in Darfur while his army was combating a different separatist movement in the South. In 2016, Bashir folded portions of the Janjaweed into the government command under his direct control. He put Hemedti in charge. In 2019, Bashir was overthrown and a transitional government took over. Both Burhan and Hemedti were involved in this government. In 2021, Burhan and Hemedti overthrew the transitional government. This eventually led to the disagreement and subsequent conflict. There are also other contributing factors, such as the economic stakes that each leader has in the country.

Though this is a different situation, the similarities with the events that led up to Somalia being declared a failed state is cause for alarm. In 1991, clan warlords overthrew a dictator and then turned on one another leading to famine and a three-decade-long civil war. After the government collapsed, the country descended into chaos. According to reports on the ground, many parts of Khartoum are beginning to resemble Mogadishu. The recent ejection of the UN-appointed envoy also mirrors the 2019 decision by Somalia to do the same. A large population of each country also struggles with food insecurity, with more than a third of the country needing food aid before the war. This will only continue to worsen as the conflict continues. Aid agencies have had difficulties delivering much-needed supplies as many convoys have been attacked and warehouses looted. This is another similarity between what happened when Somalia collapsed and what is happening now in Sudan. These indicators paint a dark future for Sudan. There is also renewed violence in the Darfur region, where elements of the Janjaweed

are once again indiscriminately killing civilians. Many people have fled the areas of conflict into refugee camps away from conflict zones both in the country and in neighboring countries. These camps are often makeshift. The upcoming rainy season, which last year caused floods that killed hundreds, poses a threat to those sheltering in the camps, as they will have even less protection from the elements and natural disasters.

The various foreign actors involved in Sudan also complicate any prospects for peace. Sudan is rich in many natural resources including gold and oil. These natural resources make it a tempting target for outside powers and nonstate actors to exploit the instability for their own gain. Many non-Western, midsize powers are jockeying for influence as they continue to try and fill the power vacuum America left in the wake of its shift from the Middle East. The lack of leadership (as flawed as the US's was) allows more room for other nations to unilateral operate for their own gain. All of these different influences will further destabilize Sudan as regional powers work to secure their interests and stop rivals from advancing their own. Some powers choose to hedge their bets. Both Hemedti and Burhan have relationships with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Burhan received support from the Saudis and Emirates after the coup. Elements of Hemedti's RSF have fought for the Gulf powers in Yemen, which earned Hemedti significant wealth and power. Hemedti also has ties with powerful actors in Chad and the Central African Republic. Some Chadian rebel groups have shown interest in allying with Hemedti. He has so far abstained as this would harm his relationship with the Chadian leader General Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno. Hemedti also has links to the Wagner paramilitary group and Libyan war criminal Khalifa Haftar, who is supplying the RSF with weapons. Burhan and the SAF have a significantly shorter but more powerful list of allies which includes the backing of neighboring Egypt. All of these conflicting foreign interests involved in the region will lead to a longer and more deadly war.

One of the most important differences between the conflict in Sudan and the conflict in Somalia is that Sudan still has an active civil society with the potential to bring about change. The resistance committees, which were instrumental in the overthrow of Bashir, are still active and have influence. Other elements of Sudanese civil society are also active. Western governments made the mistake of allowing these groups to be pushed aside in the wake of the 2019 revolution. There is still time to correct this mistake and give these civil societies support, though it may be too little too late. No outcome is certain, but diplomatic solutions are the only option for this conflict to come to a quick end. Both sides militaries are evenly matched and neither shows interest in negotiating an end to this conflict. Though the SAF has more sophisticated weaponry, the RSF has greater numbers and better organization. Each side has hunkered down in preparation for the slugfest of attrition that will continue to cause the deaths of civilians and force the survivors from their homes. The conflict will make the restoration of civilian rule significantly more difficult, but not impossible. The United States and its allies must support these civil societies to create a path out of this conflict.