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IN FOCUS

Violence in Sudan

AFRICA IN BRIEF

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COMMENTARY

Sudan: Intensifying political rivalry and expanding violence

An unstable Sudan would bring issues including terrorism, civil war, economic woes and disruption of maritime. International involvement by a neutral actor is feasible, yet it will also necessitate open minds among the warring factions.

Trisha Roy



Image source: Ömer Erdem, Anadolu Agency

On 15 April, intense fighting erupted between two rival military factions, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) under the military leader General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, in Khartoum, the capital.

On 17 April, BBC reported that more than 200 people were killed and thousands injured in the fighting across Sudan. The same day, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called the situation "catastrophic" and highlighted that further escalation could be devastating for the country and the region.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an East African trade bloc, has asked Kenyan President Willan Ruto, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir, and Djibouti President Omar Guelleh to travel to Khartoum in an attempt to broker an immediate ceasefire.

On 18 April, UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to discuss the situation in Sudan after a reported assault on the European Union ambassador to Sudan and

an attack on a US embassy convoy. Blinken stated: "Indiscriminate military

operations have resulted in significant civilian deaths and injuries, and are recklessly endangering the Sudanese people and diplomats."

The crisis, actors and threats

1. Tensions between the two rival factions.

The SAF and RSF, together, toppled Omar al-Bashir's government in 2019, agreeing to a civilian transition. The RSF, an offshoot of Janjaweed (Arab militias) was formed by Bashir, to take down the Darfur rebellion in 2003. Both the army and the RSF fought against the Darfur rebels. However, tensions between the two had been escalating for the past few months after both sides clashed over the military leadership upon merging RSF with the army as part of the agreed civilian transition. The roots of the current crisis are embedded in Bashir's deliberate setting of one security force against another.

2. The role of regional actors and their differences.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, also a part of the "Quad" alongside the US and the UK, view this conflict as an opportunity to push back the Muslim Brotherhood, which they believe retains a strong influence over the Sudanese army. However, Abu Dhabi backs Hamdan Dagalo, popularly known as Hemedti. Egypt, which has the closest ties with Sudan, sees the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood less than the threat of

a democratic transition in the neighbourhood.

3. The concerns of international actors.

The US is betting on a more stable and secure Sudan, which is no longer subjected to its economic sanctions. Russia, which has recently built a relationship with Hemedti, is set to finalize an agreement with Sudan to set up a military base in Port Sudan on the Red Sea. In exchange, Russia agreed to support Sudan with military equipment.

4. The threat of a possible spillover.

Sudan's neighbours, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Chad, have been facing political upheavals. A possible spillover of this conflict to its neighbouring countries can have a devastating impact on the region. Sudan's insecurity raises the potential risk of the spread of terrorism and civil war.

Sudan is strategically positioned next to the Red Sea, a significant route for maritime commerce. A disturbance in the region will likely impact trade routes via the same. An unstable Sudan would bring issues including terrorism, civil war, economic woes and disruption of maritime. International involvement by a neutral actor is feasible, yet it will also necessitate open minds among the warring factions.

Note: The above commentary was originally published as a short note in the NIAS Conflict Weekly.

AFRICA IN BRIEF

19 April - 25 April

By Anu Maria Joseph

SUDAN

Russia's Wagner group denies involvement in the violence

On 19 April, the head of the Russian mercenary Wagner Group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, denied involvement in the Sudan crisis and added that the company doesn't have any presence in Sudan for more than two years. He said: "I can tell you with absolute certainty, with absolute accuracy, and you can enter my words in any protocols for any institution in the highest levels: as of today, there is not a single private military company (PMC) Wagner fighter, I stress - not a single one - in Sudan. And it has been this way for over two years." He was responding to a journalist who asked regarding the groups' support to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). ("[Russia's Wagner denies involvement in Sudan crisis](#)," *BBC*, 19 April 2023)

Chad detains 320 Sudanese soldiers fleeing from the violence

On 19 April, Kenyan President William Ruto said that he was deeply alarmed by the "misunderstanding" between the rival military factions in Sudan that caused the violence. He urged both sides to agree for an emergency ceasefire and to allow "unrestricted humanitarian access" to the affected. He added: "There is real danger that the escalation of hostilities in Sudan could implicate external, regional and international actors and degenerate into a security and humanitarian crisis on a disastrous scale." Meanwhile, the same day,, *BBC* reported that nearly 320 Sudanese troops were detained in Chad while trying to cross the Chad border through Darfur region. The AFP news agency quoted Chad's defence minister saying: "They arrived in our territory, were disarmed and detained." He added that

they fled Sudan fearing being killed by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). ("[Chad detains 320 fleeing Sudanese troops](#) [Kenyan leader urges Sudan rivals to ceasefire](#)," *BBC*, 19 April 2023)

Between 10,000 and 20,000 Sudanese left the country, says UN

On 20 April, the UN warned that between 10,000 and 20,000 have fled Sudan amid the political crisis. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) stated that it was "greatly alarmed by the escalating violence in Sudan." A statement by the agency read: "The initial, most pressing, needs are water, food, shelter, health care, child protection, and prevention of gender-based violence." ("[Between 10,000 to 20,000 flee Sudan for Chad - UN](#)," *BBC*, 20 April 2023)

A three-day volatile truce

On 21 April, Sudan's military released a statement agreeing for a three-day truce for the people to celebrate Eid. The statement read: "The armed forces hope that the rebels will abide by all the requirements of the truce and stop any military moves that would obstruct it." This comes following several failed ceasefires in the week. Previously, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) had agreed to an Eid ceasefire. However, the same day, *BBC* reported that the fighting continued in Sudan's capital Khartoum, despite the agreed ceasefire. ("[Heavy gunfire reported despite Sudan army Eid truce](#)," *BBC*, 21 April 2023; "[Sudan army tweets agreement to three-day Eid truce](#)," *BBC*, 21 April 2023)

US deploys additional troops in Djibouti for expected evacuation in Sudan

On 21 April, Al Jazeera reported on the US preparing to deploy additional troops in its military base in Djibouti for any emergency evacuation of its citizens needed from Sudan. The Pentagon stated: “We are deploying additional capabilities nearby in the region for contingency purposes related to securing and potentially facilitating the departure of US embassy personnel from Sudan, if circumstances require it.” (“[US deploys more troops to Djibouti for possible Sudan evacuation](#),” *Al Jazeera*, 21 April 2023)

EU evacuates 1000 citizens; US deploys disaster response team

On 24 April, BBC reported on the European Union foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell’s statement, which said that more than 1000 European Union citizens were evacuated from Sudan amid the fighting between the rival military factions. He added that the EU will continue to push for a peace deal to end the crisis. The same day, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) deployed a disaster response expert team to coordinate with the humanitarian response team in Sudan. The head of the agency Samantha Power stated: “The United States demands that the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces abide by the three-day Eid al-Fitr ceasefire to which they have agreed, end this reckless bloodshed, facilitate humanitarian access, comply with international humanitarian law.” (“[Over 1,000 EU citizens evacuated from Sudan, Sudan: US deploying disaster response team](#),” *BBC*, 24 April 2023)

WHO warns a “biological hazard”

On 25 April, the World Health Organization (WHO) said that there is a high risk of a “biological hazard” at a laboratory in Khartoum after one of the rival factions captured the same. On the same day, BBC reported that a 72 hours

agreed ceasefire in Sudan appears to be holding despite the reports of new gunfire and shelling. Currently, at least 459 people are reportedly killed and thousands have fled the country. Meanwhile, several European, Asian and African countries have evacuated hundreds of their citizens. (“[Sudan crisis: Gunfire heard but uneasy truce holds](#),” *BBC*, 25 April 2023)

UGANDA

President refuses to sign anti-LGBT bill

On 20 April, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni refused to sign the controversial anti-LGBT bill that prescribed death penalty for particular cases. A spokesperson to the presidency stated that Museveni was not against the bill, however, wanted the parliamentarians to consider “the issue of rehabilitation.” The meeting was dissolved returning the bill to the national assembly with demand for “improvement.” (“[Uganda’s President Museveni refuses to sign anti-LGBTQ bill](#),” *Al Jazeera*, 20 April 2023)

Uganda: Government agrees to reconsider anti-LGBT bill

On 20 April, the Ugandan government agreed on reconsidering the anti-gay bill, passed by the parliament the previous month. During a meeting, President Yoweri Museveni said that the MPs resolved on “proposals for improvement” of the bill. The bill prescribed life imprisonment for the LGBT community and the death penalty for what it referred to as aggravated homosexuality. The bill was passed with majority support in the parliament. However, the critics argued that the law will promote homophobia and that anyone suspected to be LGBT will be affected. (“[Uganda ruling party agrees to review anti-gay bill](#),” *BBC*, 20 April 2023)

ETHIOPIA

Prime Minister agrees to hold peace talks with OLA rebels

On 23 April, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed agreed to hold talks with the

Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), a rebel group in the Oromia region, in Tanzania this week. This is the first time the Ethiopian government is trying to hold peace talks with the group, which has been fighting the federal forces for years. Abiy stated: “A negotiation with Oneg Shene will start a day after tomorrow in Tanzania.” The OLA has not yet responded to the statement. The OLA is a formally banned opposition party and later termed as a terrorist group during the Tigray conflict. The grievances of the group are alleged marginalisation of the Oromo majority people and the ignorance of the government. (“[Ethiopia PM says negotiations with OLA set to begin this week](#),” *Al Jazeera*, 23 April 2023)

KENYA

At least 47 bodies belonging to a Christian cult exhumated

On 24 April, BBC reported on Kenyan police exhumating 47 bodies near the coastal town of Malindi. The bodies are said to belong to a Christian cult, the Good News International Church. Cult leader, Paul Makenxi Nthenge was arrested previously after being alleged of forcing his followers to starve themselves to death in order to “meet Jesus.” Kenyan Minister of Interior, Kithkure Kindiki said that nearly 800 acres of the forest had been sealed off and declared as a crime scene. (“[Kenya cult deaths: 47 bodies found in investigation into 'starvation cult'](#),” *BBC*, 24 April 2023)

SOUTH AFRICA

ANC calls for an exit from ICC

On 25 April, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said that the governing party African National Congress wanted the country to leave the International Criminal Court. Ramaphosa said: “Yes, the governing party ... has taken that decision that it is prudent that South Africa should pull out of the ICC; We would like this matter of unfair treatment to be properly discussed, but in the meantime, the

governing party has decided once again that there should be a pull-out.” This comes after the ICC issued an arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin for alleged war crimes in Ukraine. South Africa has been continuously criticised for its pro-Russia stance. The country is due to host the BRICS summit this year; being a member of ICC, it is obliged to arrest Putin on his arrival to attend the summit. (“[South Africa’s Ramaphosa says governing party wants ICC exit](#),” *Al Jazeera*, 25 April 2023)

NIGERIA

Eight school girls escapes from kidnappers

On 19 April, BBC reported that eight Nigerian schoolgirls who were abducted by gunmen previously in April, escaped from their abductors. The students were seized by an armed group while they were going home after school in Awon in the area of Kachia. Kaduna state security commissioner Samuel Aruwan said that the students escaped through the forest along the Niger border. (“[Eight Nigerian schoolgirls escape from kidnappers](#),” *BBC*, 19 April 2023)

MALI

President’s chief of staff and three others killed in armed men attack

On 20 April, Mali military junta stated that the chief of staff for interim President Oumar Traore and three others were killed in an attack in the rural area of Nara in Koulikoro region. The statement did not provide any further details on the attack or who was responsible for the attack. However, rebel groups linked to al-Qaeda and ISIL have captured vast regions of the country, killed thousands and displaced millions since 2012. (“[Malian president’s chief of staff, three others killed in ambush](#),” *Al Jazeera*, 20 April 2023)

BURKINA FASO

At least 60 civilians killed in armed men attack

On 24 April, Al Jazeera reported that at least 60 civilians were killed in an attack in the village of Karma in northern Burkina Faso. A Prosecutor, Lamine Kabore, citing information from the Ouahigouya police station said that the perpetrators were wearing the uniforms of the Burkinabe armed forces. He said: “The wounded have been evacuated and are currently being taken care of within our health facilities.” Several active armed groups are believed to control 40 per cent

of the country. In the beginning of April, the Burkinabe military government had announced a “general mobilisation” against the jihadist groups active in the country. (“Dozens killed in Burkina Faso attack near Mali border,” *Al Jazeera*, 24 April 2023)

About the author

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About NIAS Africa Studies

As a part of the area studies initiatives, the Institute started a focussed study on Pakistan in 2020. In 2021, it expanded the area studies to include Europe Studies, China Reader, and Maritime Studies. In 2022, the Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR) programme at the Institute is further expanding its area studies, to include Africa.

The primary focus of NIAS Africa studies would be on the following five verticals: contemporary political issues, colonial legacies, problems of governance, civil-military equations, and the rise of radical Islamic groups. The primary objective is to study Africa from an internal prism. ,

NIAS Africa Studies would include a series of expert lectures, workshops, publications and a weekly exclusively focussed on Africa. The initiative also aims to create a network of young scholars studying Africa and also African scholars studying in various Indian institutions.

About the team

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