

Fighting Continues in Sudan as Humanitarian Crisis Worsens

Potential for foreign intervention exists as 2 million are displaced with hundreds of thousands fleeing across several borders

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In a recent report published by the South African-based Institute for Security Studies (ISS), an argument was made for the mobilization and deployment of an African Union (AU) peacekeeping force in the Republic of Sudan.

Since April 15, the two dominant military structures, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), have engaged in clashes aimed at eliminating each other as formidable fighting units.

Hundreds have been killed in direct combat while civilians caught up in the crossfire are perishing as well. Most of the municipal hospitals in the capital of Khartoum have been closed due to the dangerous atmosphere prevailing in the commercial and residential areas.

Government offices and foreign embassies are unable to function properly. Primary, secondary and higher educational institutions have been forced to shutter their doors.

Efforts aimed at brokering a permanent ceasefire in order to pave the way for talks on the future of the oil and resource-rich country of 47 million people have failed. The United States and Saudi Arabia, two major players in the internal politics of Sudan, encouraged the SAF and RSF representatives participating in the talks in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to declare temporary ceasefires primarily for humanitarian reasons.

However, these declarations of a cessation of hostilities for a few days have gained mixed results as people inside the country indicate that fighting has never stopped completely. The RSF militias have seized neighborhoods forcing people away from their homes. In retaliation, the SAF has attacked RSF-held positions often utilizing aerial bombardments.

The African Union (AU) has put forward its own peace plan for Sudan which has received

almost no attention within the imperialist countries. Initially, President Salva Kiir of the Republic of South Sudan stated openly that western states should not consider intervening in its northern neighbor while offering to host talks in the capital of Juba.

Nonetheless, the two opposing military structures have ignored the appeals for an immediate truce made by AU member-states. Both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have either contributed enormous amounts of money to the military leaders in Sudan in the case of Riyadh, while Washington has attempted to influence the political transition process in Sudan in a direction which is compliant with imperialist policy in Africa.

By establishing conditionalities for Sudan to receive debt refinancing and loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other institutions, the previous administration of President Donald Trump and his successor Joe Biden required that the military and the ousted interim administration of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok normalize relations with Israel. Such a decision not only violated the Sudanese Israeli Boycott Act of 1958 it clearly undermines international support for the plight of the Palestinian people.

In the western Darfur region of Sudan, where the RSF has its origins during the efforts by the central government to repress a rebellion in the area beginning in the early 2000s, has witnessed an eruption of violence. The Governor of West Darfur state, Khamis Abakar, was assassinated on June 15 after accusing the RSF in an interview with Al Hadath Television of endangering the lives of civilians. Abakar had appealed to the international community for assistance.



Sudanese refugees in Chad

Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Calls for AU Military Force to Intervene

The proposal advanced by the ISS would be designed primarily for the consistent distribution of humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in Sudan. However, such a mission would face severe obstacles as a result of the heavy fighting in Khartoum, sections

of Darfur and South Kordofan state which borders the Republic of South Sudan.

[A Reuters news agency report](#) on the situation in the southwest of Sudan notes that:

“The army on Wednesday (June 21) accused the SPLM-N rebel group led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu, which controls parts of South Kordofan state, of breaking a long-standing ceasefire agreement and attacking an army unit in the city. The army said it had fought back the incursion but sustained losses. South Kordofan has Sudan’s main oil fields and borders West Darfur State as well as South Sudan. The SPLM-N, which has strong ties to South Sudan, also attacked the army in the South Kordofan city of al-Dalanj on Wednesday, as did the RSF, residents said. Residents of Kadugli said the army had redeployed forces to protect its positions in the city on Thursday, while the SPLM-N was gathering in areas on the outskirts. There were electricity and communications outages as well as dwindling food and medical supplies, they said.”

These developments in Darfur and South Kordofan stem from the alliances which developed over the course of the last four years where the Transitional Military Council (TMC), led jointly by General Abdelfattah al-Burhan of the SAF and his RSF counterpart Mohamed Hamden Dagalo (Hermitti), negotiated separate peace agreements with the armed opposition groupings that arose during the reign of former President Omar Hasan al-Bashir.

A tenuous ceasefire between the military structures and the armed opposition in Darfur and South Kordofan is seriously endangered due to the open split between the SAF and the RSF. Any AU stabilization force would have to take into consideration the complex dynamics operating among the various factions in Khartoum, Darfur and South Kordofan.

The ISS said in its proposal that the prospects for a negotiated ceasefire and the resumption of a transitional process are unlikely as long as there is no African regional military presence which could ostensibly act as a counterforce to the SAF and RSF. Nonetheless, the intervention of an AU peacekeeping mission would require tens of thousands of troops prepared to defend its personnel along with civilians seeking humanitarian aid.

Maram Mahdi of the ISS office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia [emphasized](#):

“Sudan needs an AU-mandated and -supported intervention force to establish a humanitarian corridor and protect civilians and critical infrastructure. The AU’s principles and purpose call for a more proactive response that reflects a commitment to safeguarding human lives and upholds the continental ideals of non-indifference. The AU’s peace support operations doctrine and the African Standby Force concept provide relevant scenarios for such an intervention. A force with a quick reaction capacity could help create conditions for conflict resolution, support humanitarian and relief efforts and ensure broader stabilization. Considering the rapid escalation, spread and transformation of the conflict to intercommunal violence in areas such as El Geneina, a short-term objective should be to end the hostilities. A small to medium-sized contingent capable of securing a safe zone in Khartoum and creating humanitarian corridors could be replicated in restive West Darfur. Timing of the intervention is crucial and attempts at post-conflict reconstruction demand an expedited show of force now.”

The AU has the legal authority to intervene based upon its Constitutive Act 4(h). This measure could be implemented irrespective of the approval by the United Nations Security Council. (See [this](#))

Based upon events in the Republic of Sudan since April 15, drastic and unprecedented actions may be required to reestablish some semblance of political stability. The question remains as to whether the AU can mobilize the necessary financial and military resources for deployment in strategic centers of Sudan.

Port Sudan in the east of the country is on the Red Sea and provides a major outlet for external trade. Material resources and troops could be funneled into the country from this area while allowing those wanting to leave the country a safe outlet for evacuation and resettlement.

This proposal from the ISS should be discussed and debated by the AU at its headquarters in Addis Ababa within the Peace and Security Council (PSC). If it proves to be an effective way to facilitate humanitarian assistance and the lessening of violence against civilians, Sudan could turn the page on the current crisis.

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