

Sudan Crisis Risks Engulfing North Africa

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Following intense negotiations since April 22, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a powerful paramilitary organization, and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have agreed to a 72 hours ceasefire which started April 24 at midnight.

Washington has [announced](#) it will assist in the creation of a committee to oversee talks. It remains to be seen whether the deal will be implemented, though. At least two other ceasefires were announced since the violence started on April 15 and none of them have been held. About 400 people have already died. Israel has also offered to host the warring parties for talks. In February, Sudan joined a number of other states which have normalized their ties with the Jewish state – this being a [divisive issue](#) in the region. United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres has warned that the violence in the Sahel country risks “engulfing” the whole region and beyond.

The UN has been implementing evacuation measures in Sudan and the German military this week flew over 300 people out of the country, mostly German citizens. Several other states, such as the US, China, Sweden and so on are carrying out similar operations.

Violent conflict between rival military factions fighting for the control of the country erupted in the capital city Khartoum this month. Forces loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan are facing those of the RSF, led by Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who is al-Burhan's former deputy. RSF personnel come mostly from the Janjaweed, that is, the militia groups which former leader Omar al-Bashir sent to the Darfur region, where these militiamen took part in the massacre of Darfuri ethnic groups. Their plight is known as the first genocide of the 21st century.

Going back in time, Omar al-Bashir was the head of state of Sudan from 1989 until 2019, when he was deposed in a military coup d'état which has never brought back civil rule. He was accused of directing the aforementioned vicious campaign of mass killings in Darfur. Before the overthrow of al-Bashir, then US President Barack Obama, in one of his last acts in

office, lifted a number of sanctions against the regime, supposedly due to progress in human rights issues. One of the key reasons for that policy shift was actually the CIA's office in Khartoum, due to the regime's cooperation with the Americans in fighting jihadist groups which were a problem to Washington. In September 2017 the US had already removed Sudan from a travel ban.

In the final years of al-Bashir, European leaders also saw him as a key ally in European struggles to restrict the number of Africans crossing the Mediterranean towards Europe. The "[Khartoum Process](#)" was part of such endeavors, as well as the 2015 Valletta Summit on Migration. European authorities [described](#) it thusly: "the number of migrants arriving to the European Union is unprecedented, and this increased flow is likely to continue. The EU, together with the member states, is taking a wide range of measures to address the challenges (...) The Valletta Summit on Migration is part of this effort, bringing the EU and African countries together to work in a spirit of partnership and find common solutions."

In that context, the Regional Operational Centre (ROCK) was established in Khartoum, aiming at halting refugee flows and human smuggling. It marked an advancement in European-Sudanese cooperation, including the latter's feared [secret police](#).

The RSF forces currently involved in the ongoing conflict are a legacy from the late al-Bashir years, when, before the coup, he enjoyed some international support even while the disgraceful Darfour situation went on and on.

Even after having lost much of its territory in 2011, to the new Republic of Southern Sudan, the Republic of Sudan is still the third largest African country, and due to its strategic location, plays an important role for stability in the whole Sahel and Horn of Africa. To its north, it is connected to neighboring Egypt, by border as well as by the Nile River, whose two tributaries merge at Khartoum. To its northeast, Sudan is at the Red Sea, thus linking the North African region to Europe. This is why many international actors have their eyes on the country.

Since the November 2021 coup, which appears to have been backed by the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, a military council of generals had been running the nation. The African Union back then suspended the country's participation in all of its activities until civil-led authority was restored – which has never taken place. The World Bank in turn froze the nation's aid.

Tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia over water and the disputed land of al-Fashqa have also been high for over a year. The [GERD project](#) (the Great Renaissance Dam of Ethiopia) threatens agriculture in both Egypt and Sudan, according to authorities in these two countries – that makes both Ethiopia and Egypt interested parties in Sudan, although on opposing sides.

Morocco and Algeria are also hot issues in the region. Former US President Donald Trump's recognition of Morocco's claim over the [Western Sahara region](#), which is in turn controlled by the Algerian-backed Polisario Front, was a kind of "quid pro quo" after the Moroccan authorities normalized the country's relations with American ally Israel. This US diplomatic decision however significantly increased tensions in the region, with potential bad outcomes for Europe, also, who has had its eyes in Morocco for energy and migration management reasons.

North Africa has been a ticking bomb for a while, engulfed, as it is, in a number of proxy

conflicts. The current crisis in Sudan, which has the potential to greatly impact the continent and beyond, also reflects the failures of Western foreign policies.

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