

**RULE BY THE RIFLE:
HOW MILITARIZATION BECAME THE
LANGUAGE OF THE SUDANESE STATE**

**THE WEAPONIZATION OF
SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE SUDAN WAR:
A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD**

**ROOTS OF WAR AND PEACE:
A FEMINIST READING**

**FAZA' AND ISTINFAR:
A READING ON THE EROSION OF THE
STATE'S MONOPOLY ON
THE LEGITIMATE USE OF VIOLENCE**





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Sudan Democracy First Group

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Zawaya

Zawaya

A quarterly magazine dedicated
to peace and security issues
in Sudan and its regional
surroundings.

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BOARD OF TRUSTEES' MESSAGE

RULE BY THE RIFLE: HOW MILITARIZATION BECAME THE LANGUAGE OF THE SUDANESE STATE

We, at Sudan Democracy First Group (SDFG), are pleased and honored to present to our distinguished readers the inaugural issue of Zawaya, in the hope that it will develop into platform of knowledge through which we strive to broaden the horizons of public debate and contribute to the production of knowledge pertaining to peace and security in Sudan and its geopolitical surroundings.

We, at Sudan Democracy First Group (SDFG), are pleased and honored to present to our distinguished readers the inaugural issue of Zawaya, in the hope that it will develop into platform of knowledge through which we strive to broaden the horizons of public debate and contribute to the production of knowledge pertaining to peace and security in Sudan and its geopolitical surroundings. No problem poses a greater threat to Sudan's security and its future than the dangers of fragmentation and instability. Undoubtedly, these dangers will deepen, grow more complex, and become further entangled, if not examined analytically putting in consideration regional and global dimensions. Peace and security encompass multi-dimensional issues in which politics intersects with culture and society, and at which countless related issues converge, including: identity conflict, power relations, the state and its sovereignty,

legitimacy, and multi-track, multi-level security, among others.

Zawaya is published at a historically critical moment in which Sudan is experiencing severe ruptures that continue to unfold before our eyes. The war of 15 April 2023 erupted like a volcano with multiple epicenters, and since there are preexisting conditions, its destructive energy was multiplied. It is a case of the adverse transformation of what had once been regarded as relative advantage. For instance, while Sudan's vast geography, social diversity, and crowded regional neighbourhood once seemed to constitute comparative strengths, they were turned into absolute liabilities, contributed to activating the volcanic core and giving it the ability to carry blazes outward to ignite further fires across the wider political and social landscape.

After three years of ideological turmoil, state collapse, power intoxication, and the escalation of grievances, the war continue to expand. The volcano became fissile, with an exceptional capacity to ignite multiple sites and intensify the blaze. As a result, consequent fractures emerged in the fabric of the Sudanese entity, both geographically and demographically. This fragmentation of the post-independence state, together with the inevitable manifestations of the scattering of social formations, raises the legitimate follow-up question: Why did what happened took place, and what comes next? For that reason, multidimensional, analytical approaches have become a necessity.

In this first issue of Zawaya, we address the war's dossier within the broader perspectives outlined above. Sudan's civil war that is neither the first nor a stray meteor that suddenly fell upon Sudanese territory, it is rather one linked to muted chain of persistent failures in the governance patterns that have successively ruled the country. The central question remains: how and why did the instruments of violence move from being assets monopolized by sovereign institutions within the state to becoming common property in the hands of individuals and other nonstate militarized actors? Similarly, a second obvious question arises: how did the militia and the rifle become qualifying conditions for entry into politics? That question and related ones, certainly require a careful, multi-lens examination and a political memory that does not merely record the present, but also grasps the long history of the practices of the agencies charged with managing the monopoly of the gun, how they relinquished that monopoly and managed to surrender their constitutional rights to nonauthorized social groups.

The articles in this issue address a range of

concerns centered on tracing the roots of rule by the rifle in Sudan and the transformation of violence into a language of negotiation among political and economic elites. Within this framework, conflict is not read merely as a confrontation between opposing sides, but as a political system with its own logic, rules, networks, and markets.

As we announce the birth of this new publication, we invite you to make it one of your interactive platforms for sharing your thoughts and views on public matters connected to the concerns of our country. The building of a just peace and a sustainable democratic transition cannot be achieved except through critical knowledge and sustained dialogue, by broadening the spaces of debate and encouraging experts, researchers, intellectuals and practitioners to contribute to these debates.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity, on behalf of all members of the Board of Trustees of Sudan Democracy First Group, to extend to our colleague Ms. Omayma Gutabi, the Executive Director of the organization, our highest expressions of gratitude and appreciation for conceiving the idea of Zawaya and following it through until it took shape as the magazine you are reading today. Our dear colleague fully deserved her designation as General Supervisor of Zawaya, in recognition of her tireless perseverance through the completion of all production stages from commissioning contributors, to compiling materials, and overseeing the artistic design and publication process.

Once again, welcome to the pages of Zawaya.

Abdulrhman Alamin
President
Board of Trustees, Sudan Democracy First
Group (SDFG)

IN THIS ISSUE

The first issue of Zawaya magazine is published at a critical Sudanese moment, one in which layers of violence are multiplying, and the levels of crisis are intertwined from the local to the regional and international. This is not merely a moment of war; it is rather a moment of exposure for the deep-rooted structures that have reshaped the state and society over decades. In a context where politics has been reduced to armed alignment, and opinion is often synonymous with betrayal, Zawaya emerges as a space to articulate questions and develop conversations around peace and security in their complex sense, not merely as the absence of violence.

In our view, the ongoing war is not an isolated incident, but a culmination of a long process of militarisation that has penetrated the civilian fabric. In Sudan, militarisation has not only meant the dominance of the military institution over governance, but also the redefinition of citizenship, duty, and belonging - where public action has been reframed by one's susceptibility to recruitment and participation in combat.

The Political Economy of War and Sovereignty Shifts

The war extends beyond military confrontation to reshape the very structure of the economy, where security interests intersect with networks of local and transnational capital. This reconfiguration of sovereignty is explored by Magdi El Gizouli, who writes on the phenomenon of 'militiarisation, offering a comparative reading that links the rise of coercive apparatuses in different contexts to a broader analysis of the relationship between the state and capital—particularly its need to regulate labour and maximise accumulation. El Gizouli situates Sudan's war within global patterns of militiarisation and exploitation, arguing that it expresses capitalism's continuous drive for domination. He compares militias and violence in Sudan to paramilitary policing in the United States and elite-driven exploitation, portraying the Sudanese crisis as

part of a global system of capitalist violence rather than an isolated event.

Aroub Alameen offers a feminist reading of the roots of war and peace in Sudan arguing that the exclusion of gender from the analysis of conflict has deepened cycles of violence and hindered sustainable peace. She further argues that marginalisation, toxic masculinity and structural violence are interlinked, shaping how power and identity are constructed during war and how women's bodies have become symbolic and physical battlegrounds reflecting broader systems of domination.

Khalid Taha offers a comparative study of the traditional institutions of faza' and istinfār, analyzing how they have been used as mechanisms to penetrate the civic space and integrate civilians into the logic of

war, mobilizing thousands of youths under varying slogans, from national dignity to the restoration of democracy. His study reveals how mobilization is used as a tool for reproducing power and reorganising society around a single coercive center.

The Continental Framework and Prospects for Reform

Sudan's crisis cannot be understood in isolation from its continental context. Over the past two decades, the African Union has developed a policy framework for reforming the security and military sectors, grounded in principles of governance, accountability, and civilian oversight. Omayma Cutabi analyses this framework, questioning its applicability to the Sudanese case and exploring the political and institutional conditions required to transform it from a normative document into a practical reform agenda. This discussion opens a horizon for thinking about security sector reform not as a technical arrangement, but as a political process that necessitates redefining the relationship between power and legitimacy.

The Digital Sphere and Children's Bodies as Battlefields

War is no longer fought solely on the ground; the digital sphere has become a parallel battlefield for sharing tactics and plans, mobilizing supporters, spreading hate speech, and shaping public opinion. Gada Kadoda writes on the weaponisation of social media, revealing how the boundaries between media and combat, information and symbolic ammunition, have eroded. In parallel, Zeinab Abbas addresses the war's most brutal human cost: Sudanese children whose bodies have become fragile frontlines in the heart of conflict. She analyses patterns of violations and offers practical policy recommendations to mitigate the destruction of childhood, placing child protection at the core of any

serious vision for ending the war.

Knowledge as an Act of Resistance

In times of polarisation, precise knowledge becomes an act of resistance against the dominance of singular narratives. Magdi El Na'im provides an analytical review of key writings on Sudan's war, both local and international, revealing the trends, strengths, and blind spots of existing discourses. This first part of an annotated bibliography is to be continued in the upcoming issues.

This issue also covers the Anti-Corruption Taskforce (Sudan) panel's discussion on arms flows and international jurisdictions, connecting global obligations with the complexities of local realities. The issue extends into culture as well. Mamoun El-Tilib, in "In the Untrodden Lanes of the Individual: Armed Operations for Cultural Revolution," explores the fraught relationship between cultural action and violence, and between the individual and the collective in times of collapse.

Zawaya is published in both Arabic and English, primarily in digital form with limited printed editions, expanding the circle of exchange and linking Sudanese debates with continental and global fields of knowledge, while maintaining deep roots in its local context.

With this issue, we begin a path we hope will expand with every edition, one that does not merely document war, but serves as a space for ideas that can help imagine and build sustainable peace. We invite our readers to engage critically, to question rigorously, and to take part in a dialogue that goes beyond political alignments, so that research and critical thinking can contribute to dismantling violence and supporting the reconstruction of Sudan.

STUDIES

RULE BY MILITIA: MINNESOTA BY WAY OF NYALA

Magdi El Gizouli

A Researcher of Sudanese Affairs Whose Interests Include Political Economy,
Intellectual History, and Grandmother's Tales

Global Echoes of the Sudanese Crisis

The ongoing war in Sudan has earned the epithet of the 'world's largest humanitarian crisis' in the language of United Nations (UN) agencies. Quantification of a war with such a superlative might draw sympathetic attention but leaves much to say about its meaning, an absence that is often occupied by the term 'senseless', as if observers are simply encouraged to throw their arms up in the air and gasp at the inexplicability of the tragedy at hand.

Two aspects of the war in Sudan are often singled out as particularly resistant to explanation: the fact that it is a war between the national army and a militia to which it once under presidential orders outsourced its counter-insurgency operations, border management functions and deployments on foreign soil; and the rampant sexual violence directed against women.

Both aspects have invited considerable introspection into the particularities of Sudan's human and political geography, social and cultural bents, and political upheavals, some insightful and many circular revolving around essentialist conceptions of ethnicity and gender. Two parallel developments on the global stage might however help reposition Sudan's war within a global ecosystem of violence where it is not an incidental local misnomer that invites gasps but a peripheral premonitory manifestation of history at large; the history of the world. While this is an ambitious claim to make, it is no more ambitious than the 'world's largest humanitarian crisis'.

The President's Militia

The Economist asked its readers in an exasperated tone with reference to the U.S. Office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in its 31st January 2026 issue whether the US President is "building his own paramilitary militia?" and answered in the affirmative of potentiality: "The most disturbing possibility is that the president is creating a militia which answers only to himself."

The same US president makes frequent appearances in what is now officially the 'Epstein library', a wealth of communications and records between sex offender and trafficker Jeffrey Epstein and a global elite of powerful men and women recently disclosed by the United States Department of Justice. A cursory review of the Epstein library suggests that, at the heart of the liberal notion of women's emancipation promoted by segments of the Western elite as a global model, there lies, in concrete terms, the sexual exploitation of teenage girls within clandestine networks of privilege and power, functioning as an excess adjunct to lavish dinners, networking events, business deals, and political alliance-building.

Now, the US rendition of the militia form and the epidemic peacetime sexual violence against women in the highest circles of power throw into sharp relief the limitations of a purely localised explanation of the wartime tragedies of Sudan in terms of ethnic and cultural particularities. The term 'senseless' seems more appropriate when applied to the specific form of militia and sexual violence in the US democracy stripped of the obfuscations of 'tribal' rivalries and rabid masculinity in an African periphery. The following is a brief outline of the first of these two aspects, the US president's very own militia.

The fatal force, known as 'la migra', was founded in 2003 at the height of the US "war on terror" with the aim of swiftly detaining and deporting individuals, at the time mostly Muslim Arab and South Asian men, deemed a threat to US national security. ICE came into being as an operational arm of the Department of Homeland Security established in 2002 in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks as one of 16 agencies including the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the US Coast Guard and the US Secret Service.

The lethality of ICE is partially grounded in law and feeds off a chain of contradictions in US society. President Trump signed on 29 January 2025, weeks into his second term, the Laken Riley Act¹ which stipulates that agents of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) "must detain an individual who (1) is unlawfully present in the United States or did not possess the necessary documents when applying for admission; and (2) has been charged with, arrested for, convicted of, or admits to having committed acts that constitute the essential elements of burglary, theft, larceny, or shoplifting."

Translated into action the DHS boasted of deporting 675,000 "illegal aliens" in 2025 claiming further another estimated 2.2 million have self-deported. During the first year of President Trump's rule ICE reported arresting 43,305 potential national security risks, 1,416 known or suspected terrorists, deporting another 1,392 known or suspected terrorists and arresting another 7,000 alleged gang members². A record number of some 70,000

1- Laken Riley Act, Pub. L. No. 119-1 (2025). <https://www.congress.gov/bills/119th/congress/senate-bill/5>.

1 Laken Riley Act, Pub. L. No. 119-1 (2025). <https://www.congress.gov/bills/119th/congress/senate-bill/5>.

2- U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2026, January 20). DHS sets the stage for another historic, record-breaking year under President Trump [Press release]. <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2026/01/20/dhs-sets-stage-another-historic-record-breaking-year-under-president-trump>

3- Riley, Dylan, and Robert Brenner. 2025. "The Long Downturn and its Political Results." *New Left Review* 155 (January/February): 25-70.

individuals are being held in paramilitary immigration detention centres, many run by private sub-contractors in what is effectively a service industry of detention and incarceration.

This empowerment comes about thanks to generous funding from President Trump’s ‘Big Beautiful Bill’. Together CBP and ICE are today the largest policing agency in the US with 30 billion US dollars in funding for direct operations and another 170 billion US dollars for further expansion over the coming four years. Politically, the ICE onslaught is the attempt to realise a fantasy of right-wing politics in the US, constructing a nativist majority through cleansing the nation of aliens and intruders.

Interests Cross Borders, Militias Follow

The basic elements of the ICE operation are American in form; the outcome of a steady but firm rightwards reorientation of working class interests and ideological motifs in a highly industrialised social order from the Keynesian redistribution formulae born out of the post-World War II consensus to individualist non-class based but nevertheless economically determined strategies of racial exclusion and anti-immigration, against the background of the long downturn of industrial production since the 1970s.³ What is essentially a crisis of the productive base of the social order is ideologically reprojected as a distribution crisis between racial factions of the working class, a crisis of race. The politics of race, in many ways a psychoanalytic category, are hard to map into a constitutional order premised on citizenship, as flawed as it might be.

Indeed, the violence necessary to enforce a new hierarchy of worth, a strict pecking

order under conditions of scarcity, explodes the constraints of any constitutional order in the recognisable sense of the term. The consequence is the emergence of an institutional force that ICE designs, recruits and equips to mete out such violence with the objective of enforcing a new rationality of law and order. This is especially true when established state security forces are unable to fully carry out the aims of those in power because they are constrained by rules of engagement tied to the constitutional order (or at least its appearance), shaped by a social composition that does not fully align with new political leadership, weakened by limited political loyalty to emerging rulers and lawmakers, or slowed by institutional inertia.

But what are these elemental features of ICE and similar formations? In brief, the outsourcing of militarised policing functions by political fiat to formations recruited from the vast pool of an expendable unemployed and effectively unemployable surplus labour force invested with a supremacist ideology of racial difference and grievance popularised through the figure of a princely saviour, a superhuman of sorts who embodies the promise of “clearing the swamp”, overcoming history as it were, and delivering a new era of prosperity for his flock come what may.

Similar elements can be recognised outside the US metropole in human geographies that overlap with critical nodes of the capitalist world system and where a restructuring of the social order by whatever means is necessary to guarantee the prompt delivery of returns. Evidently, where interests cross national borders so do militia formations, epitomising in spirals of cross border and transcontinental violence the globalisation that underwrites and equally threatens the state-based order as we know it, whereby the balance of stabilisation and threat is

unequally distributed fanning out from the stable centres of financial capital to the failed peripheries of extractive resources. Interestingly, ICE born, raised and operative within the US metropole is the exception that proves the rule.

Indeed, a generic pattern with a global remit emerges whether in inner-town Minnesota, the border regions of Fortress Europe, the coastal zones of the Red Sea, Palestine, the flatland of Gezira between the Niles, the fertile crescent, the Donbas, the plains of Kordofan and Darfur, or even in Alberta, Quebec or Greenland. Where contradictions within national formations fail to deliver the necessary allies, some are manufactured ad hoc for policing operations, their meaning plastically extended as a euphemism for high-tech military onslaughts that pierce as far as presidential chambers tucked in military garrisons to pluck a Maduro and his wife.

Primitive Accumulation as Permanent Requisite

In that sense, Nyala, the capital of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) proto-state, is not a surprising outlier; and self-incriminating introspection into the failings of the post-colonial state in Sudan might be informative but does satisfactorily address what in essence is a local manifestation of a global scramble for the reordering of human geographies to match the requirements of a renewed drive for primitive accumulation under conditions of an epochal slack in industrial productivity. Rosa Luxemburg would have recognised these patterns under her general law of primitive accumulation as a permanent requisite of capitalist accumulation; a notion she dared even challenge Karl Marx with its salience. Marx, albeit not the natural optimist, generally understood primitive accumulation as an incidental feature of the capitalist mode of production, and its wrenching violence a

travesty of the genesis of capitalism. The lady contravened: “Capital needs the means of production and the labour power of the whole globe for untrammelled accumulation; it cannot manage without the natural resources and the labour power of all territories. Seeing that the overwhelming majority of resources and labour power is in fact still in the orbit of pre-capitalist production – this being the historical milieu of accumulation – capital must go all out to obtain ascendancy over these territories and social organizations. There is no a priori reason why rubber plantations, say, run on capitalist lines, such as have been laid out in India, might not serve the ends of capitalist production just as well. Yet if the countries of those branches of production are predominantly non-capitalist, capital will endeavour to establish domination over these countries and societies. And in fact, primitive conditions allow of a greater drive and of far more ruthless measures than could be tolerated under purely capitalist social conditions. Whatever the theoretical aspects, the accumulation of capital as an historical process, depends in every respect upon non-capitalist social strata and forms of social organisation.”⁴

As a possible rejoinder to Luxemburg, capital indeed needs the means of production of the whole globe but only a fragment of the labour power, the surplus of which is housed in two departments of Homo sacer, the displaced and the militiaman.

3- Riley, Dylan, and Robert Brenner. 2025. “The Long Downturn and its Political Results.” *New Left Review* 155 (January/February): 25-70.

4- Luxemburg, R. (2015). *The Accumulation of Capital*. Routledge, p. 345-346.

STUDIES

ROOTS OF WAR AND PEACE: A FEMINIST READING

Aroub Alameen

A Social Researcher Focusing on Studies of Violence, Inequality, and Community Peacebuilding

Compared to issues deemed more fundamental to Sudan's context such as distribution of power and wealth, governance, the permanent constitution, transitional justice, and the like, gender, when brought up at all, is typically treated as an afterthought, a marginal concern. Yet the intersections of gender with violence and security in the Sudanese context reveal dense entanglements that are rarely addressed in the analytical literature with the seriousness they deserve.

This article argues that the persistent fragmentation of war and peace issues in Sudan has been a key factor in the failure of peace agreements throughout the country's modern history. This fragmentation, however, has not only been regional in character¹, nor merely a matter of military or ethnic representation², it has also been fundamentally discriminatory: shaped by who is recognized as a legitimate actor and whose voice carries weight at the negotiating table³.



1- Such as concluding regionally tailored agreements like the Darfur Peace Agreement of 2006 and 2011, the East Sudan Peace Agreement of 2006, and the Juba Peace Agreement through its various tracks in 2020.

2- Such as concluding bilateral agreements between the center and armed movements of an ethno-military nature.

3- Such as allocating pre-defined peace negotiations between military-military parties represented by men of military institutions and armed movements, especially those related to the security arrangements clauses, military-civilian negotiations such as the 2019 Constitutional Document negotiations between the Transitional Military Council and the Forces of Freedom and Change, or negotiations with civilian-civilian parties in which men are predominantly represented over women, such as the negotiations of the political and partisan coalitions prevalent in the Sudanese political scene.

Gender relations, I contend, lie at the very heart of these mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination.

Consequently, the absence of gender and its various intersections from analyses of the roots of war in Sudan contributes to the erasure of gender dimensions in understanding the manifestations of violence within Sudanese society and politics. It also fuels the cycle of violence and sustains ongoing conflicts (Badawi, 2024). Furthermore, the narrow approach to gender, one based on normative worldviews imposed from above onto cultural and social contexts different from those in which these frameworks emerged, serves to narrow the lens through which gender is viewed as an integral issue in the Sudanese conflict. It reduces gender to little more than a rhetorical matter, a secondary criterion that international organizations and UN agencies insist on bringing to the negotiating table, and that the negotiating parties reluctantly accept only when it serves their political agendas.

In calling for a feminist intersectional lens on the question of war and the prospects for peace in Sudan, we are not advocating for intersectionality to be added as a top-down criterion sprinkled atop existing peace negotiation models, what analysts sometimes refer to as the “adding and stirring” approach. Rather, the imperative is to undertake a careful elucidation of gender's violent entanglements with the war in Sudan, and to attempt to unpack these entanglements by examining their character and historical contexts, and in doing so, we can help forge a vision of peace that is more just and sustainable.

To understand the nature of this entanglement, we must start with a conception of gender relations as a magnifying lens, one through which the

continuum linking militarisation, masculinity, and violence in our societies can be grasped. Militarisation is not necessarily about building national army as much as transforming the manifestations of civilian life, including civilians themselves, into instruments and arenas that serve armed conflict. Masculinity here does not signify biological differences. It points, rather, to the phenomenon social scientists have called “toxic masculinity”, despite the varied feminist critiques this concept has provoked⁴. Violence, for its part, must be understood as a phenomenon with deep articulations: it begins with sexual violence behind closed doors, extends through domestic violence, then racist and discriminatory violence in the street, and culminating in the broader, more systemic forms of structural violence and economic inequality.

Abrahamian (2019) notes that feminist analysis of war illuminates how these different systems of violence converge and intertwine at the height of armed conflicts, with gender reproduced and maintained as a mechanism for extending violence. Thus, hierarchical relations of domination in this process do not merely serve existing forms of power. Rather, the gap between men and women deepens further. Men are redefined as more manly, women as more feminine. And as the militarisation of public life persists through family relations and daily gendered interactions, civilians unable to

Toxic masculinity is associated with a series of gendered attitudes such as competitiveness, dominance, and aggression, which appear more frequently in the behaviors of men than women. The term attempts to separate men as social actors from the recurring patterns of this behavior (De Boise 2019) and also to increase awareness of violence directed by men against women, being the counterpart to the term “healthy masculinity” as an attempt to encourage men to express masculinity in ways that are not harmful to themselves or others. However, Andrea Waling (2019) argues that using the term “toxic masculinity” positions men as victims of “a broader, ambiguous entity, rather than highlighting their role in the reproduction of masculinity.” Meanwhile, Carol Harrington (2021) frames the term in the context of individual therapy and warns feminists against adopting it as a broad analytical concept without considering its origins and historical use in individual discourses that historically targeted marginalised men, rather than for maintaining hierarchical structures and assigning responsibility for gender inequality to some abusive men.

bear arms, particularly women and children, are transformed into consumers of security; a commodity that only armed men can provide. This, in turn, deepens discrimination through power relations now rooted in the weapon.

These interlocking forms of violence in Sudan’s war amount to more than security fragility. It is not simply that women and children lose protection and become more vulnerable to sexual and economic exploitation. Rather, we are confronted with a conflict mentality that transforms civilians generally, and women in particular, as symbolic markers, into instruments of war. It does so by drawing on preexisting forms of violence and deploying them intensively, such that the targeting of women’s bodies becomes a necessity, not collateral damage.

Sexual violence is also deployed to inflict defeat upon enemies and to diminish their masculinity as men who failed to protect their women. Videos of rape are filmed and circulated on social media as a means of intensifying humiliation. Meanwhile, those who retreat and abandon their positions are dismissed as *awald aween* which means sons of women, a slur that signifies cowardice and an incapacity to fight. They are then drawn back to battle by the promise of attacking the enemy’s so-called “social incubators” and violating their women.

These narratives glorify armed, weapon-bearing masculinity while underscoring the vulnerability of unarmed civilians unable to protect themselves. These narratives are not products of the current war. Rather, they crystallize cultural and political roots deeply embedded in our societies. The South Sudanese thinker Taban Lo Liyong observes that the transfer of power through military coups and the forcible detention of political rivals can be understood as an accepted form

of political transition if traced back to the stories and folk tales preserved in the oral culture of East African societies. The tales of heroism and valor that grandmothers recount to their grandchildren are not merely connected to heritage; they reproduce themselves, for “the old masculine spirit keeps drawing attention to itself” (Lo Liyong, 1972, Introduction, p. xi).

Professor Sharif Harir (2024)⁵ observes that the central governments in Khartoum historically paid no attention to rebel movements until they took up arms. This carried an implicit message, that the grievances of the marginalized would be heard, and negotiation would be possible, only for those who could defend their cause, those who could bear arms as men. By the same logic, civilians, both men and women, become the weakest link at the negotiating table. This means that peace, at its cultural and political level, has not been sought through Sudanese popular wisdom such as *al-galad* (forbearance)⁶, *al-rakuba* (the shaded space for neighbourly gathering)⁷, or *missmais al-massareen* (the patient untangling of knots)⁸ nor through Sudan’s peaceful Sufi inheritance, with its call to “do good to those who hate you and to those who love you”⁹. Rather, peace comes only in response to pressure from armed movements and international actors on the central governments.

This negative conception of peace, understood as the absence of manliness, as retreat from battle ‘like women’, does not merely call for broadening the scope of peace to accommodate more positive visions. It demands, rather, a reversal of value: a reframing of peace itself as a decision that

5- In a presentation at the Conflict Studies Conference – Doha, July 2024.
6- An example of one of the mechanisms of social peace in Eastern Sudan
7- An example of one of the mechanisms of social peace in Darfur
8- An example of one of the mechanisms of social peace in Kordofan
9- Sheikh Abdul Rahim Al-Burai – Poem: Bawreek Tibak



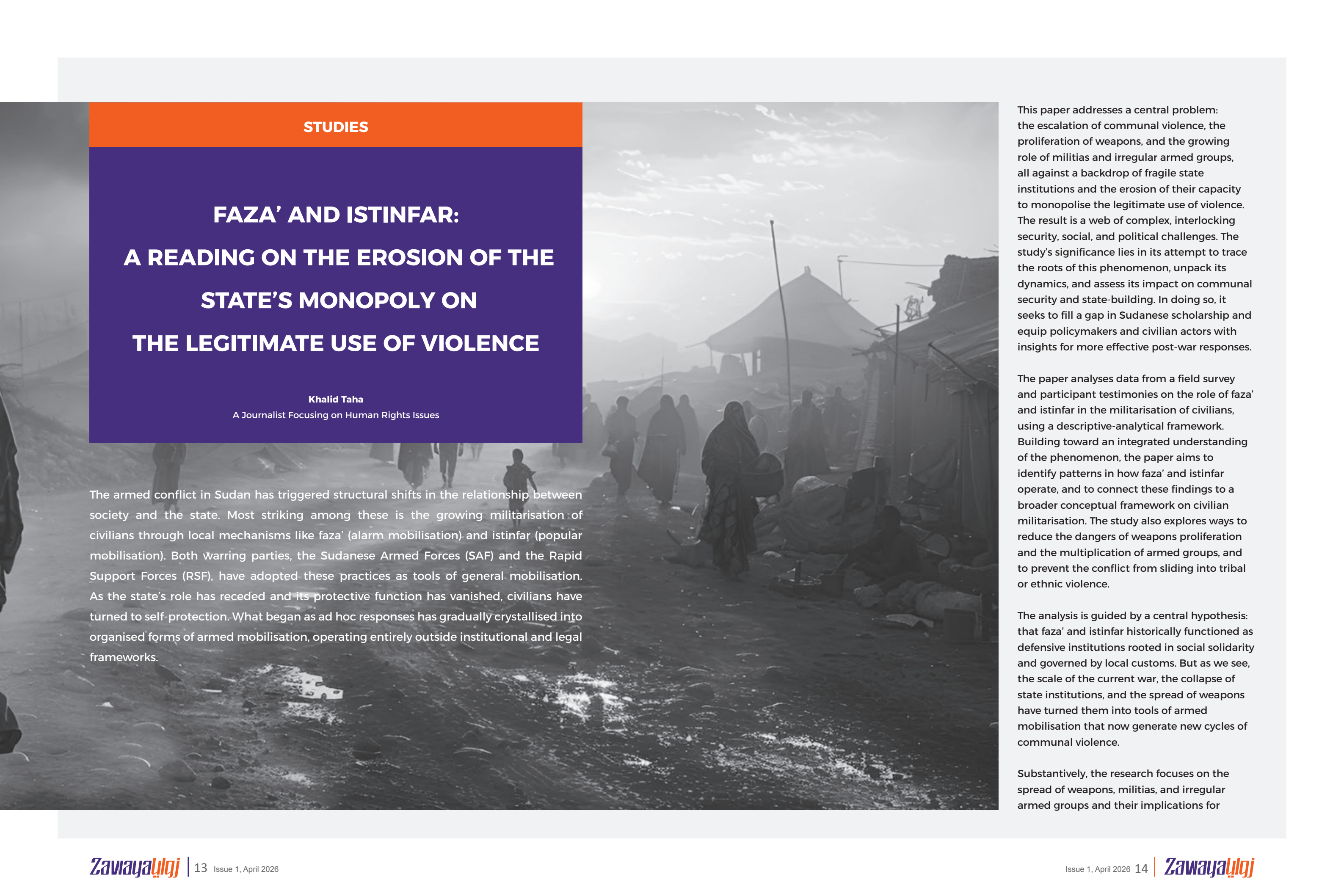
embodies strength through self-restraint, not weakness or forced cessation, but a deep-rooted impulse to contain violence.

Only through such a value reversal does security sector reform and the imperative of ending the proliferation of armed forces become a truly Sudanese concern, one that belongs to every Sudanese woman and man. Peace negotiation, in turn, becomes a gateway to processes of historical transitional justice, not one that deploys the grievances of women and various ‘demand-based groups’ as bargaining chips, but rather treats them as genuine partners in ending violence and in establishing a decisive break with entrenched forms of historical economic and social inequality.

At the same level, the discussion of

mechanisms for women’s representation and participation in peace negotiations is no longer consumed by quantitative, categorical notions of quotas for delegations. Instead, it becomes more focused on the gendering of peace processes themselves. Women’s participation is no longer justified solely by their status as those harmed by the absence of gender justice, though the legitimacy and importance of that rationale remain. Rather, participation is transformed into a shared Sudanese civic responsibility: one whose burden is not carried by feminist movements alone, and whose discursive content is not reduced to adding some linguistic touches to concluded agreements. It extends beyond this to lay the groundwork for a just societal reconciliation that redefines the collective interest on the basis of equal principles of citizenship.

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STUDIES

FAZA' AND ISTINFAR: A READING ON THE EROSION OF THE STATE'S MONOPOLY ON THE LEGITIMATE USE OF VIOLENCE

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The armed conflict in Sudan has triggered structural shifts in the relationship between society and the state. Most striking among these is the growing militarisation of civilians through local mechanisms like faza' (alarm mobilisation) and istinfar (popular mobilisation). Both warring parties, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), have adopted these practices as tools of general mobilisation. As the state's role has receded and its protective function has vanished, civilians have turned to self-protection. What began as ad hoc responses has gradually crystallised into organised forms of armed mobilisation, operating entirely outside institutional and legal frameworks.

This paper addresses a central problem: the escalation of communal violence, the proliferation of weapons, and the growing role of militias and irregular armed groups, all against a backdrop of fragile state institutions and the erosion of their capacity to monopolise the legitimate use of violence. The result is a web of complex, interlocking security, social, and political challenges. The study's significance lies in its attempt to trace the roots of this phenomenon, unpack its dynamics, and assess its impact on communal security and state-building. In doing so, it seeks to fill a gap in Sudanese scholarship and equip policymakers and civilian actors with insights for more effective post-war responses.

The paper analyses data from a field survey and participant testimonies on the role of faza' and istinfar in the militarisation of civilians, using a descriptive-analytical framework. Building toward an integrated understanding of the phenomenon, the paper aims to identify patterns in how faza' and istinfar operate, and to connect these findings to a broader conceptual framework on civilian militarisation. The study also explores ways to reduce the dangers of weapons proliferation and the multiplication of armed groups, and to prevent the conflict from sliding into tribal or ethnic violence.

The analysis is guided by a central hypothesis: that faza' and istinfar historically functioned as defensive institutions rooted in social solidarity and governed by local customs. But as we see, the scale of the current war, the collapse of state institutions, and the spread of weapons have turned them into tools of armed mobilisation that now generate new cycles of communal violence.

Substantively, the research focuses on the spread of weapons, militias, and irregular armed groups and their implications for

communal security and state-building in Sudan. It does not address operational military dimensions. In terms of timeframe, the research focuses on the period from April 15, 2023, to January 31, 2026, while incorporating relevant historical background where needed. Its geographical scope is Sudan as a whole.

As for methodology, the study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, drawing on secondary sources and available reports alongside original data from an electronic survey. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions. Responses from 104 participants of varied age, geographical, social, and educational backgrounds were analysed qualitatively using a descriptive-interpretive framework. These were supplemented by interviews, key informant observations, and open-source materials.

The research proceeds from three hypotheses: first, that state weakness and the erosion of its monopoly on legitimate violence leads to the expansion of armed faza'; second, that faza' and istinfar have become central drivers of combat mobilisation, fueling the reproduction of violence and prolonging the conflict; third, that high rates of armed civilian engagement weaken social bonds and undermine community cohesion, thereby narrowing the prospects for state reconstruction.

The Concept of Faza'a in Language, Culture, and Social History

The word faza' carries a dual linguistic meaning: it signifies both fear and the readiness to act. In Sudanese social contexts, it refers to a collective call for help in the face of an imminent threat. When one says "faza' le-fulan," it means he responded to so-and-so's call and joined in offering aid.

For the purposes of this study, faza' is defined operationally as a traditional collective

response that arises within local social frameworks, outside official state institutions, to repel an immediate danger facing the community or its customs. Historically, the practice took root in tribal and rural societies and in areas marked by resource conflicts. In these contexts, it functioned as an institution of self-defense, limited in scope and socially accepted precisely because the state was weak.

Faza' is closely bound up with the institution of nafeer which is the voluntary collective mobilisation for a shared task, whether social, developmental, or security related. Nafeer represents the broader framework of community solidarity (Qasim, 1972, p. 783). Here, one can think of faza' as an urgent, specific form of nafeer, summoned in response to an immediate event, while nafeer encompasses general mobilisation for multiple purposes.

Historically, faza' operated as a traditional institution for solidarity and rapid response to emerging risks and threats (Hashim, 2015, p. 22; Fadlallah, 2018, p. 45). In the Sudanese collective imagination, it is intertwined with values of chivalry, courage, and mutual responsibility. Communities invoked it in varied contexts: self-defense, protecting land and honor, responding to natural disasters, or settling local conflicts, particularly in rural and semi-pastoral societies (Holt and Daly, 2011). When a threat befell community members or their shared property, individuals were obligated to respond without delay (Ismail, 2020, p. 13). What this expectation reflects is the dense web of social ties linking the individual to the tribe, the clan, and the local community. It also testifies to the strength and cohesion of those bonds when danger strikes (Hashim, 2015, p. 25).

Faza' has been shaped by Sudanese societies'

experiences with local conflicts and tribal wars. Experiences that etched values of courage, sacrifice, and social responsibility deep into the collective ethos (Ismail, 2020, p. 17). In this sense, it also functions as a symbolic mechanism for affirming collective identity and social cohesion when crises hit (Fadlallah, 2018, p. 50). Geertz observes that such community traditions serve to anchor identity and steer collective behavior in times of upheaval (Geertz, 1973, p. 95).

Faza' spans a wide range of situations demanding urgent response: crises, disasters, assaults, tribal conflicts (whether for defense or to enforce disengagement), and social support during marriages, deaths, or financial hardship. Then there is moral faza' which is answering the call to aid the oppressed, protect a neighbour, or defend honor and dignity. As noted, faza' overlaps with Sudanese civic institutions like nafeer. But, it also connects to other local concepts: shahama (chivalry) as the motivating moral value, najda (ad hoc rapid relief) as a practical expression, awna (assistance) as organised help in labor, and hiss (civic responsibility) as the social consciousness that impels action (Fadlallah, 2018, p.47).

In tribal societies, faza' is a social duty. To hold back is seen as a failure of chivalry, a social stain on one's reputation. The call typically goes out through a cry, a drumbeat, a shouted summons, or messengers, though recently, modern communication and social media have joined these traditional means.

But the context of the current Sudanese war has tangled these two institutions together. Both have been repurposed for popular mobilisation and armed rallying. What we see now is what once belonged to a paradigm of solidarity has transformed into machinery for military mobilisation. This shift has generated

a new pattern of communal violence: it has seen armed force wielded by non-state actors; while simultaneously pushing individuals to take up arms, crossing the line from civilian to combatant in Sudan's ongoing conflict.

Faza': From Community Protection to Instrumental Exploitation

Faza' is rooted in the traditional patterns of social organisation that predate the modern nation-state, when local groups relied on customary mechanisms to maintain security and resolve disputes. Here, it was part of a larger system encompassing native administration, customary law (urf), reconciliation (sulh), and social solidarity (takaful) (MacMichael, 1930). Within that framework, faza' was a temporary tool of self-defense, situational response to a specific threat, bounded in both geography and time. Its purpose was to restore social balance once the danger passed, not to seize control or expand power. Local leadership played a crucial role in organizing and containing it, preventing any slide into uncontrolled violence (El-Battahani, 2009).

Moreover, it was also tied to the reconciliation culture that typically followed incidents where it had been needed, making faza' part of the traditional conflict management system, rather than a durable alternative to it. What constituted its traditional restraints included its temporariness, lack of military structure, and its subordination to customs and local leaders. It was this priority given to ending conflict through reconciliation that kept faza' from hardening into permanent armed formations or independent militias (Young, 2012).

In the present context, faza' has been repurposed for militarisation and arming to secure direct economic gain or political ambition. Here, this exploitation unfolds

against a backdrop of the state militarisation and the entrenched belief that carrying arms opens the door to wealth and power. The result threatens wider arms proliferation and a multiplication of self-perpetuating militias, as it were, a pattern Sudan has endured for decades (Ahmed, S.A., 2026).

Demand-driven grievances have seeped into the discourse of some emerging formations built on faza'. What the research reveals is a structural shift in mobilisation patterns: a move from politics to security, from rights to identity, from protest to militarisation. In this light, undoing this transformation is now a fundamental prerequisite for rebuilding any civilian, demand-driven movement, one capable of turning grievances into solutions rather than feeding the war machine.

Historically, demand-driven movements spoke the language of peaceful civilian activism, centered on economic and social rights. But war and state fragmentation have emptied that language of its civilian content, refilling it with a discourse of faza' and istinfa. This is a discourse built on existential fear, tribal or regional threat, and armed self-defense. As a result, the public sphere is no longer a space for negotiable political demands. Instead, it has become a terrain of coercive mobilisation calls, in which violence edges out politics. Grievances like marginalisation, exclusion, and insecurity are reframed within narratives of collective threat, offering armed response as the only way forward.

As the discourse shifted from rights to identity, the center of gravity moved from the glossary of citizenship to the language of affiliation with tribes, regions, or groups. This reframed faza' and istinfa as social duties rather than political choices. Civilian actors receded as violence brokers ascended; trade unions, resistance committees, and demand-based

bodies weakened, while local and military leaders, both of whom have the tools of mobilisation at hand, rose in their place. Istinfa acquired the facade of "legitimate" mobilisation, rewarding immediate violence over deliberate negotiation and thus collapsing politics into the realm of security. What emerged was a discursive duality took hold: the language of demands deployed publicly, while military or ideological agendas advanced beneath the surface.

This instrumentalisation of faza' and istinfa intersects with symbolic violence. What we see is that hegemony reproduces itself through a discourse that normalises violence, presenting it as a moral imperative for collective defense, while simultaneously stripping civilian discourse of legitimacy, painting it as impotent or elitist. In this context, the transformation is starkly visible across Sudan's regions. In Darfur, grievances over protection and land have hardened into armed tribal faza', untethered from any unifying demand-based framework. In Gezira, communities reorganised around protection committees and istinfa, bypassing institutional channels for safety and security. In Kordofan, long-standing demands for liberation and development have been absorbed into an armed mobilisation narrative centered on defending the region.

On the social level, polarisation and fragmentation have deepened; horizontal trust between groups has eroded, communal violence has intensified, and coercive gender and age roles have reasserted themselves. Here, men are mobilised, youth are militarised, and women are pushed into militarisation forcibly in some cases (such as the women's training camps in eastern and northern Sudan), voluntarily in others (as occurred in El Fasher). Yet women are often confined to less significant military roles. And so, as the state fails to protect them, women are regularly

coopted into narratives of self-protection. The Political ramifications are not less significant as the ground for settlement and negotiation has shrunk. Demands have become mobilisation tools; armed actors have gained legitimacy at civilian expense. Securitisation has accelerated weapons proliferation and fractured the state's monopoly on violence, while cycles of retaliatory violence escalate which complicates any future disarmament efforts. In public discourse, rights-based and legal language has retreated. Symbolic violence now prevails, manifest in the intensified image of the "enemy," accusations of treason, and the dehumanisation of opponents.

In essence, these cases reflect the dynamics of state failure. Without a legitimate monopoly on violence and with services collapsing, communities turn to alternative forms of coercive organisation. Demand-driven movements, once instruments of political pressure, become mechanisms for reproducing conflict within the discourse of existential threat, one where tribal and regional identities offer the most readily available bases for mobilisation. Hassan (A.M., 2026) emphasises that faza' is not a demand-driven movement, even when it drapes itself in genuine grievances. Instead, it disrupts politics, turns demands into zero-sum conflicts, entrenches the logic of force, and systematically excludes those who do not carry arms especially women and youth. Moreover, the blurring of civilian and military lines, and the use of demand-based slogans to justify armed mobilisation, poison the ground for any future peaceful movement.

Findings and Conclusion

The research findings lay bare the primary motive for participation in faza' and istinfa: the absence of state protection. Most participants said they took up arms not by

choice, but because they had to respond to the need to protect themselves, their families, and their communities. Social and tribal pressure also proved decisive. Here, a significant number of respondents explained that staying out meant being seen as abandoning the community, a moral failure that stains one's name.

The findings also showed that the call to faza' and istinfa does not come only from regular military forces. In fact, it is issued just as often from native and tribal leaders, influential local figures, and organised youth groups. This signals the transfer of mobilisation authority from the state to the social sphere. Participants described their own involvement as irregular and untrained, and undisciplined, relying on light and medium weapons. This indicates an armed civilian mobilisation that operates entirely outside any clear legal framework.

Analysis of the survey results reveals that faza' and istinfa are not merely spontaneous reactions. Instead, they have become structural mechanisms through which the warring parties militarise civilians. At this point, the civilian is no longer defined as someone outside the conflict, but as a potential security actor, someone from whom carrying arms and joining an armed group is expected. What becomes clear is that the state's absence did not simply create a vacuum; it triggered a redistribution of violence within society. Local groups now perform security roles that were once the exclusive domain of the state. Respondents' answers also reveal a growing normalisation of weapons: bearing arms is increasingly seen as a tool of protection, a source of social power, and a condition for survival. In this way, the militarisation of society deepens over the medium and long term.

The findings confirm that the militarisation of civilians in Sudan is no momentary phenomenon. It is, rather, a structural outcome of state collapse. Faza' and istinfar are social mechanisms for practicing armed violence outside official frameworks, with social and tribal pressures pushing individuals into armed activity. As we see, this trajectory blurs the line between civilians and combatants and undermines any hope for sustainable peace.

Addressing faza' and istinfar demands a comprehensive vision that transcends narrow security approaches. In practice, this means reaffirming civilian agency, restoring the state's role, and addressing the social structures that have reproduced violence. Such a vision includes several interconnected elements: enhancing community awareness of the dangers of civilian militarisation; supporting state institutions and civil society alongside alternatives for non-armed civilian protection; neutralizing native administrations by removing them from military mobilisation roles; establishing reconciliation programs and backing local peace initiatives that rebuild community trust; rehabilitating former

combatants; curbing inflammatory media and political discourse while monitoring its effects; and linking humanitarian aid and development to concrete efforts toward civilian demilitarisation. Taken together, these balanced measures are essential if the cycle of fear and symbolic violence is to be broken, and if sustainable security and stability are to take root in Sudan.

Finally, a comprehensive vision for a solution must go beyond narrow security approaches in favour of a strategy to dismantle the infrastructure of militarisation. This requires parallel tracks, beginning with distancing native administrations from military mobilisation and restoring the state's role as the sole guarantor of protection, ultimately adding community-based disarmament efforts to post-conflict security arrangements. Breaking the cycle of fear necessitates a radical transformation based on strengthening alternatives for civilian protection and drying up the sources of incitement, thereby ensuring that istinfar is converted from an instrument of war into a catalyst for rebuilding social peace and lost communal trust.

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Ahmed Salah Alameen, expert in humanitarian aid, interviewed on January 28th, 2026
Hassan Imadeldeen Mirghani, president of the General Assembly of Demand-Based Groups Association (TAM)

SUDAN IN ITS CONTINENTAL CONTEXT

FROM RUPTURE TO REFORM: SUDAN
AND THE AFRICAN UNION'S POLICY
FRAMEWORK ON
SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

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Sudan's transition toward a peaceful democratic governance depends, fundamentally, on transforming its deeply militarised state structures and its security sector's governance system. Security Sector Reform (SSR) should not be a narrow technical process but rather a comprehensive political and societal endeavour aimed at redefining power, rebuilding trust, and restoring the political, economic, and security legitimacy of state authority. SSR must, therefore, be connected to an innovative transitional justice model, anchored in a new constitutional pact between the state and the Sudanese people. A social contract that includes establishment of a unified, professional, and accountable security sector under civilian leadership, with a new combat doctrine to restore the state's monopoly on legitimate use of force, capable of protecting human rights, observing the rule of law, and upholding national sovereignty.

The roots of Sudan's security crisis lie in decades of militarisation, politicisation, and institutional disintegration. Since independence, the military has repeatedly intervened in governance, staging coups and consolidating control over key political and economic institutions. This pattern has entrenched a political culture in which the military perceives itself as the ultimate custodian of national authority.^{1 2}

1- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. (2023, August). <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2023/08/sudans-conflict-in-the-shadow-of-coups-and-military-rule>
2- Reuters. (2023, May3). Sudan's history of coups and instability. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sudans-history-coups-wars-instability-2023-05-03/>

The current war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is not an aberration but a violent culmination of a long trajectory in which security institutions were deliberately politicised, pluralised, and isolated from civilian oversight. What is unfolding is not merely a power struggle between two armed actors but a rupture of a security system that was never reformed to serve the state or its citizens.

For so long, the Sudanese security architecture evolved through parallelism rather than integration³. Successive regimes relied on overlapping forces, militias, and intelligence organs to manage internal threats, suppress dissent, and balance elite interests. Instead of a unified professional security sector, Sudan developed a landscape of competing armed organisations and groups with distinct chains of command, economic interests, notions of sovereignty and political loyalties. Attempts at a transition after the 2019 revolution exposed these structural weaknesses yet failed to address them. On the contrary, transitional arrangements entrenched armed autonomy by postponing fundamental questions of civilian control, force unification and accountability.

The current war has laid bare the consequences of these unresolved issues. The absence of a single national security doctrine, the lack of democratic oversight, and the legalisation/normalisation of parallel armed forces have eroded the very foundation of state authority. Parallel armed groups in Sudan refer to non-state militias and rebel factions operating alongside or independently of the main warring parties, often operating in areas where the conflict is active. These

3- Statista. (2023). Chart: A history of Sudan's coups. <https://www.statista.com/chart/26044/sudan-coup-timeline/?srsltid=AfmBOoqn timer>

groups number in the dozens, many of which are documented. Key examples of parallel armed groups include the Sudan Liberation movement - Abdalwahid Nour (SLAM/ AW), Sudan People's Liberation Movement - North (SPLM-N/AL HILU), Sudan Liberation Movement - Minni Minawi (SLM-MM), Tamazuj Militia and the islamists' militia of Albraa Ibn Malik⁴, to name a few⁵. It is notable that the recruitment of post-war militias has been an ongoing process through various mechanisms, including Faza' and Instinfar⁶ processes. The armed groups operating before the 2023 war functioned within a creatively contained political and security framework, where alliances and territorial influences were shaped within established power balances and local dynamics. Comparatively speaking, post 2023 armed groups have emerged fragmented, hurriedly recruited, have witnessed competition, and contestations over authority and resources.

Security provision has become predatory, localised, and militarised while civilians bear the costs through deadly violence, mass displacement, and institutional collapse. In this context, restoring stability cannot be reduced to ceasefires or elite bargains among armed leaders; it requires reimagining the security sector itself; its purpose, governance, and relationship to the political power and the citizens.

This is where the African Union Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform (AU SSR Policy Framework) offers a critical analytical and normative lens. While non-binding, the framework articulates core principles that

1- Ayin Network. (2025, March 25). Sudan's army, Islamists, and Al-Baraa Bin Malik Brigade. <https://3ayin.com/en/bin-malik-/>
2- Al Jazeera. (2023, December 24). Sudan's Civilians pick up arms as RSF gains and army stumbles. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/24/sudans-civilians-pick-up-arms-as-rsf-gains-and-army-stumbles>
3- Faza' and Instinfar are Arabic words referring to processes of mobilisation of allied groups and individuals to help in times of need including wars and intercommunal conflicts.

Sudan's security sector has, consistently, violated. The framework emphasises the political nature of SSR, situating reform within broader processes of constitutional order, democratic governance, and state legitimacy. Applying the AU's SSR policy framework to Sudan is, therefore, not a technical exercise but a means of diagnosing how the failure to reform security governance produced fragmentation and, ultimately, rupture.

The African Union's Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform: A snapshot

The African Union Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform, although it only functions as a normative and policy guidance instrument rather than a treaty or enforceable legal obligation, it offers a remarkably precise diagnosis of Sudan's security collapse, even though it was not written with Sudan's current war in mind. As Sudan searches for a path out of war, the AU framework remains one of the most relevant and underutilised tools for imagining a genuinely civilian, accountable, and unified security sector. Without such reform, peace in Sudan will remain temporary, fragile, and reversible, when reached.

The framework provides a comprehensive continental blueprint for building accountable, professional, and civilian-led security institutions. The framework offers a powerful analytical lens for understanding how Sudan's failure to reform its security sector directly contributed to state collapse and renewed large-scale violence. This article analyses the core principles of the AU SSR Policy Framework and assesses their relevance to Sudan's present crisis, highlighting both missed opportunities and pathways for future recovery and post-conflict reform or reconstruction of the security sector. The Framework establishes a normative and operational guide for African states emerging from conflict, political transition,

or authoritarian rule. It defines the security sector broadly, encompassing armed forces, police, intelligence services, paramilitary units, justice institutions, oversight bodies, and civilian authorities. At its core, the Framework advances a model of democratic security governance, grounded in civilian control, constitutionalism, and respect for human rights. Security is treated not merely as regime protection, but as a public good serving citizens and the state alike.

Key objectives of the framework

The objectives of the framework are:
a) professionalising security institutions under
b) unified national command;
c) ensuring civilian oversight by elected authorities and legislatures;
d) preventing politicisation and fragmentation of armed forces;
e) integrating human security, gender sensitivity, and the rule of law; and
f) addressing legacies of militarisation and conflict economies. The framework explicitly recognises that poorly governed security sectors are a primary driver of coups, civil wars, and state failure across Africa⁷.

Core Principles of the framework

Civilian Leadership and Democratic Oversight: The framework prioritises clear civilian authority over all security institutions, exercised through constitutional mandates, parliaments, independent courts, and accountable ministries. Militaries are positioned as subordinate to political authority, not as autonomous power brokers. Unified, National Security Architecture: Parallel forces, militias, and personalised security units are identified as existential threats to state stability. The framework emphasises integration, demobilisation, or dissolution of

7- For more details on the object refer to section A4 of the AU Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform and Governance

non-state and semi-state armed groups⁸. Professionalism and Political Neutrality: Security actors are expected to operate on the basis of merit, national loyalty, and professionalism, rather than ethnic, ideological, or factional affiliations.

Rule of Law and Human Rights Compliance: Security forces must be subject to civilian courts, human rights standards, and international humanitarian and human rights laws, with accountability mechanisms for abuses.

Transparency and Sustainable Financing: Independent military economies and off-budget financing are viewed as eroding governance. The framework calls for transparent budgeting and civilian control over defence resources.

Limitation of the AU’s SSR framework
The framework, although it provides a coherent normative vision for security governance in Africa, but has clear structural and political limitations. On its own, it cannot resolve Sudan’s current security crisis, though it can contribute to a longer-term pathway out of the current fragmentation, if applied under well-thought-out processes. The framework’s limitations include: a) its non-binding nature as it has no enforcement mechanism; b) the fact that compliance depends entirely on political consent from national leadership who are involved, actively, in the current conflict; c), that the framework presumes the existence of a minimally coherent state capable of exercising authority; and d) an additional complexity is related to the fact that Sudan’s reality is one of the competing armed centers of power, not a single reformable security sector. Therefore, Sudan’s crises require prior

political settlement and force containment before such reform can be meaningfully implemented.

Despite the challenges mentioned above, and the fact that the framework cannot directly help in resolving Sudan’s security crisis, the framework can still contribute in three limited but meaningful ways, if embedded within a broader political process:

1. It can provide a normative benchmark and a shared language on what a security sector should look like in Sudan;
2. It can help in providing a post-conflict roadmap by guiding sequencing after the political settlement especially on integration, demobilisation, and oversight, and designing transitional security arrangements; and
3. It can offer a reference point for mediators to avoid reinforcing armed pluralism and can well give insights on how to integrate SSR within peace processes.

The security sector reform process in South Sudan can be used to guide the post-conflict SSR process in Sudan, including ideas on integrating SSR within peace agreements. In South Sudan, the African Union’s SSR experts helped finalise SSR guidelines. Enforcement requires resources, a clear mandate from the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) to tie SSR operations to peace processes, and, above all, sustained political will.

Relevance to Sudan’s Current War
Sudan represents a textbook case of what the AU framework seeks to prevent. The current war is best understood as a security sector failure, not merely a power struggle between individuals without ruling-out other chronic factors of socio-economic and political nature. The rupture of Sudan’s security sector can be attributed to the following factors:

- I. Absence of Unified Command**
- The AU’s framework explicitly warns against parallel forces operating outside a single national chain of command. Sudan’s failure to dismantle or integrate the RSF under genuine civilian authority created two rival armies within one state.
- II. Militarised Political Transition**
- Sudan’s post-2019 transition subordinated civilian politics to military bargaining. SSR was delayed, partial, and elite-driven, contradicting the AU framework’s insistence on civilian-led reform processes.
- III. Lack of Oversight and Accountability**
- Security institutions in Sudan retained legal immunity, economic autonomy, and political dominance. This absence of accountability facilitated atrocities, entrenched impunity, and normalised violence as a political tool.
- IV. Political Marketplace Dynamics**
- Although not named explicitly in the AU’s document, Sudan exemplifies how unregulated security sectors become political marketplaces, where loyalty is bought, armed actors compete for rents, and violence becomes transactional⁹. It is also a situation where leaders function as business owners/managers, loyalty is exchanged for money, and violence is used as a tool to extract resources as well as negotiating power. In Sudan gold mines, land, water, agricultural resources are auctioned-off to foreign sponsors in exchange for weapons and political alliances.

Missed Opportunities for AU Engagement
The AU’s framework envisions an active role for the African Union in supporting, guiding, and, when necessary, pressuring Member States to undertake genuine SSR processes. In

Sudan, this role remained largely declaratory. Opportunities that were missed include: a) conditioning political agreements on binding SSR benchmarks; b) preventing the normalisation of militia leaders as political stakeholders; c) supporting civilian actors with technical and political backing; and d) addressing the military’s economic interests as part of governance reform. Sudan’s case reveals the gap between AU normative frameworks and enforcement capacity, particularly when security elites dominate transitional political processes.

Lessons for Sudan’s Future and the AU’s SSR Framework
Sudan’s war reinforces the AU framework’s central argument: there is no viable political transition without security sector reform. Any future peace process that postpones SSR risks reproducing the same conditions that led to war. For Sudan, there are several unavoidable imperatives:

1. Full civilian-controlled integration of parallel forces;
2. Removal of security actors from business activities;
3. Establishment of a civilian Ministry of Defence with actual and full authority;
4. Transitional justice for security-related crimes while ensuring ‘no impunity’;
5. The AU needs to move from policy articulation to enforcement by embedding the framework within the African Union Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The AU needs to intentionally and systematically integrate SSR objectives and core principles within peace processes and mediation efforts using leverage of its Mediation and Dialogue Division (MDD).
6. Broad civilian participation in defining national security priorities and the development of a National Security Strategy (NSS) with an emphasis on human security.

8- For more information on the core principles, refer to section B of the AU Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform and Governance

9- Sudan Democracy First Group. (2024, January). <https://sudandemocracyfirstgroup.org/soldiers-in-business-suits/>



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PERSPECTIVES AND DEBATES

THE WEAPONIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE SUDAN WAR: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

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The conflict in Sudan that erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) offers glimpses of the complex role of social media as both a tool for lifesaving communication and a weapon for public opinion manipulation. In this opinion piece, I explore some of the intersections between technology and warfare, using the Sudanese scenario that provides a striking case study of how social media platforms may be weaponized, impacting not only the dynamics of the conflict but also the broader societal landscape.

Although Sudan's political history has long included violence and divisions between the state's centres of power and its peripheries, as well as the presence of deep-seated racism within society, these problems have been exacerbated and amplified by social media. Similarly, since the 1990s, hate speech on social media has become a widespread global problem, and while it has existed for centuries – Sudan being no exception – digital platforms have introduced virality, anonymity, and algorithmic amplification, fundamentally changing how it spreads.

However, the violence in the contemporary hate-speech landscape in Sudan and the divisive war rhetoric are unparalleled in our past, demonstrating both the substantial influence of injustices in our society and the adept use of social media by the warring sides and their supporters. Conversely, the Sudanese community culture, which is rooted in solidarity traditions like “alnafeer” (collective voluntary action) and “altakiya” (communal kitchen), has driven local resilience and supported social networks to provide essential services and relief when the state collapsed. In other words, platforms like Facebook, X, and WhatsApp have been a double-edged sword. On one hand, they provided the means for activists and ordinary citizens to share information, mobilize support, and document human rights abuses. On the other hand, the same platforms have been utilised by the warring sides and their supporters to disseminate propaganda, incite violence, and perpetuate disinformation.

Social media has also drastically changed the nature of war, turning it into a “hyperconnected,” multi-domain warfare in which the battle for public opinion is just as important as the fight for actual territory. Traditional military-media partnerships are no longer as relevant since digital platforms have made everyone involved—from soldiers to civilians—a potential source of intelligence or a combatant by facilitating real-time, viral, and decentralized content sharing. Real-time information on military manoeuvres is made possible by social media, which makes coordinated attacks and tactical adjustments easier. The spread of conflicting reports about battle outcomes was a prominent feature of the use of disinformation as a political tactic in the ongoing conflict in Sudan. For instance, given their importance in determining the war’s ultimate course, military bases were a crucial strategic target for RSF to seize and for SAF to hold on to. As a result, a recurrent pattern developed following each battle, in which both sides claimed victory and total control of the target base. This was evident in many cases such as those of Jabel Awliaa, Al-Mudaraat, and even the headquarters of the SAF in Khartoum.

Furthermore, misinformation campaigns have the ability to change public opinion and behaviour on the ground because they can spread quickly. For example, misleading reports of alleged crimes may incite fear or retaliation, which could start new violent cycles. Since social media warfare aims to create confusion and ambiguity, this manipulation complicates an already challenging situation for journalists and researchers who must sift through a plethora of information to distinguish factual reporting from propaganda. An interesting example is the recurring, unsubstantiated reports regarding the death of RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti,

which have been a key false narrative throughout the continuing conflict in Sudan. Intense psychological warfare has been waged in response to these reports, mostly by the SAF sympathizers who want to sow discord among the RSF ranks. Similarly, in order to obtain international legitimacy, whitewash atrocities, and frame the conflict in their favour, the RSF has launched a complex, multi-layered disinformation campaign, bolstered by coordinated social media campaigns and AI-generated content, which is often at odds with ground-level reporting from UN agencies, human rights organizations, and witnesses. In late 2025, it was believed that the majority of the videos and posters in circulation were artificial intelligence (AI)-generated, enabling the warring sides to fake evidence or refute real-world atrocities. Carelessly, and without accountability, this narrative warfare persists and is present in every bombing when either side targets humanitarian aid convoys, destroys infrastructure, or claims civilian lives.

According to reports, the RSF has been using foreign public relations and communications companies, such as Dickens & Madson in Canada, Think Doctor in France, and Zero Gravity in the United Arab Emirates, to help them disseminate misinformation and enhance their image. Prior to the suspension of their accounts on X, they used to post statements and videos nearly every day, claiming victories. Surprisingly, these statements also attempted to recast the paramilitary as an organisation that fights for the marginalised and is committed to establishing democracy and the “justice, freedom, and peace” tenets of the Sudanese revolution. Compared to the RSF, the SAF’s uses of social media platforms for disinformation is regarded by observers as less sophisticated, relying mostly on trolls and bots, fake accounts, and mass posting, to refute the RSF’s accusations and support

its own disinformation campaign. While genuine Sudanese voices demanded an end to the bloodshed, pro-SAF tweets conducted a widespread manipulation campaign with the goal of deceiving Sudanese and foreign spectators into believing that there is broad support for the SAF to escalate and resolve the conflict militarily.

Since the start of the conflict, the Islamists have also stepped up their propaganda efforts and organized militias to fight alongside the SAF. Islamist-affiliated accounts are allegedly utilizing a planned social media script to attack civilian organizations and political figures, claiming they have conspired with the RSF to assault the SAF and try to seize power. They have also labelled all actors taking a neutral stance and calling for the end of the war as “traitors” who are “conspiring” with foreign countries and considered their peace initiatives as acts of treason. In addition to encouraging citizens to arm themselves and join the SAF in combat, their propaganda and disinformation campaigns have been pushing for the SAF to recruit jihadists. Additionally, they have continuously opposed SAF participation in peace negotiations with the RSF in their propaganda. Although the propaganda tactics of the Islamists are against the RSF and in favour of the SAF, they mostly target civilian political actors. The historic online campaign against civilian actors accusing them of being pro-RSF during the October 2024 visit of leaders of the Civilian Sudanese Coordination of Civil Democratic Forces (known as Taqadum, and later as Somood) to London serves as an illustration of this. The campaign led to a sizeable demonstration in London that called for support for SAF military action and denounced the civilian leaders.

Perhaps inadvertently by those involved in social media warfare, but unfortunately,

its ability to influence public opinion can have long-term sociopolitical repercussions in addition to its immediate effects on conflict. A culture of violence and intolerance that transcends the present dispute can be fostered by the normalization of hate speech and divisive language on internet platforms, as well as by demonizing opposing groups and inciting fear in communities. A common practice of demonising “the other” is exemplified in the use of inflammatory terms like “sons of guests” to label RSF soldiers as outsiders, “falngay” to label Darfur’s armed groups that are now fighting on the side of SAF as house-slaves, and “traitors” or “foreign spies” to label anti-war activists. The success of these demonisation campaigns can be seen in how pro-SAF accounts are silent when the SAF executes airstrikes on civilian areas and even sometimes celebrate them if these areas are RSF-controlled, often distorting these events as legitimate military targets. Similarly, pro-RSF accounts incite violence not only against civilians in central and north Sudan as retaliation for these airstrikes, but more effectively against non-Arab communities in Darfur, which served as a digital pretext for ethnic cleansing and massacres on the ground. Bizarrely, this incitement is complemented by RSF fighters frequently posting self-incriminating videos celebrating their war crimes.

During times of intense crisis, fear often drives the public to support existing leaders, creating a “rally-round-the-flag” effect. It does not only affect ordinary citizens but Intellectuals and pro-democracy activists are also impacted, as those on the SAF side ignore historical facts about the SAF and the Islamists under the guise of preventing the state from collapsing, while those on the RSF side overlook the paramilitary’s violent past under the pretence of purging Sudan of the Islamists. Fear during conflict acts as

WHEN WILL THE SACRIFICES OF SUDAN’S CHILDREN END?

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During the current war in Sudan, children have borne a disproportionate share of the violence, displacement and institutional collapse that followed. This paper argues that the crisis affecting children in Sudan is not only a humanitarian emergency but the outcome of long-standing structural inequalities, militarised governance and entrenched impunity. Durable peace and national reconstruction will remain unattainable unless justice and equity for children are placed at the centre of ceasefire arrangements, transitional justice processes and long-term state reform.

Children constitute approximately half of Sudan’s population¹. Even before the current conflict, millions faced poverty, malnutrition, limited access to education and healthcare, and exposure to discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, disability or geographical region. The current war has intensified these pre-existing vulnerabilities and generated widespread and grave violations of children’s rights.

This paper examines the structural drivers of child rights deterioration, analyses the principal categories of violations committed during the conflict, and proposes a framework for justice grounded in equity, accountability and institutional reform. The analysis draws upon international humanitarian law, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)², and the United Nations framework on children and armed conflict³.

1- UNICEF country profiles and situation reports on Sudan frequently state that around 50%-55% of Sudan’s population are under 18 years old.
2- Convention on the Rights of the Child. (1989). OHCHR. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>
3- UN. Security Council (54th year : 1999). (1999, August 30). Resolution 1261 (1999): adopted by the Security Council at its 4037th meeting, on 25 August 1999. United Nations Digital Library System. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/278324?v=pdf>

a powerful, often manipulative, emotional tool that fundamentally alters opinions and standpoints by intensifying threat perceptions, enhancing in-group solidarity, creating demand for strong leadership, and driving demand for authoritarian political stances. For instance, the ability of the RSF to succeed in recruiting large numbers of youth from certain groups in western Sudan, seen as their social base, is the result of the perceived threat of being annihilated that is often part of pro-SAF hate speech on social media. In addition, discriminatory practices against people from areas where most RSF fighters come from, as well as the crackdown on political opponents and activists by Port Sudan’s de facto government, do not get the level of condemnation that they would have had from pro-democracy activists before the war. It’s plausible that history, geography, and identity are all playing a role in maintaining divisions, justifying violence, ignoring repression, and even accepting a return to military rule.

Notwithstanding, in such a setting of unprecedented hostile rhetoric and deep division, communities face long-standing mistrust and hatred that are made worse by the power of social media, making post-conflict reconciliation efforts more difficult. This poses important queries for activists, intellectuals, and even military personnel regarding the consequences of such rapid and vast information sharing in armed conflicts. In order to effectively use technology in combat, a greater comprehension of its effects on military performance and public safety is required. In this article, I highlighted some of the issues that relate to social media’s complex role in conflict with focus on the Sudan War and understanding the wider effects of technology on society. By and large, this entails understanding the ethical implications of technology use, which can be a potent, two-edged sword that can be

used to both promote solidarity and amplify bigotry, propel social justice movements while permitting pervasive injustice, and serve as a catalyst for democratic liberation and a weapon for authoritarian repression. Its impact is heavily determined by the intentions, motivations, and behaviours of the user.

In conclusion, the use of social media in the Sudanese war as a weapon offers valuable insights into contemporary warfare. It emphasises how important it is to evaluate how technology shapes narratives, influences behaviour, and encourages violence. As a result, we must adapt our approaches to understanding and addressing the complexities that arise in the digital age. We must also be vigilant among the chaos of online warfare, questioning the broader societal effects of technology and striving to safeguard the spaces for authentic dialogue and discourse, which for Sudan must also involve online healing and social cohesion. Despite its drawbacks if abused, social media can be a useful instrument for communication, social capital reconstruction, and reconciliation, all of which contribute to post-conflict recovery. It offers unique opportunities to give voice to the voiceless, bring divergent groups together, and provide a platform for peacebuilding efforts, in addition to a plethora of ways for embracing the full spectrum of what it means to be Sudanese.

Structural Drivers of Child Rights Deterioration

The current catastrophe cannot be understood in isolation from Sudan's political history. Decades of military-dominated governance prioritised security expenditure over social investment, weakened civilian institutions and normalized impunity for human rights violations. As a result, education, health and child protection systems remained chronically underfunded and unevenly distributed across regions.

Deep territorial disparities left marginalised regions with fragile infrastructure and limited access to services. Civil registration systems remained incomplete, leaving many children without formal identity documents and therefore without access to legal protections. Structural discrimination affecting girls, children with disabilities and children from marginalised communities further compounded exclusion.

The eruption of war accelerated institutional collapse. State fragmentation disrupted administrative oversight, halted service delivery and eroded already fragile accountability mechanisms. The crisis facing children is therefore not solely the product of active hostilities but the manifestation of long-standing structural neglect intensified by the armed conflict.

Despite Sudanese cultural traditions that value and celebrate children, the parties to the conflict have committed grave violations against them, disregarding both moral responsibilities and national and international legal obligations to protect children's rights. Experiences in Sudan show that it is impossible to effectively protect children's rights or implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child in a broader environment characterized by widespread human rights violations.

Grave Violations Against Children

The war has exposed children in Sudan to the six grave violations identified by the United Nations⁴: killing and maiming, recruitment and use by armed actors, attacks on schools and hospitals, rape and other forms of conflict-related sexual violence, abduction, and denial of humanitarian access.

Indiscriminate shelling, aerial bombardment and urban warfare in densely populated areas have resulted in high civilian casualties, including children. The use of heavy weaponry in residential neighborhoods has increased the risk of death, permanent injury and disability. Beyond physical harm, children have experienced severe psychological trauma from witnessing killings, destruction and displacement.

The destruction or suspension of essential services has compounded these harms. Damage to hospitals, water systems and electricity networks has disrupted healthcare, sanitation and vaccination campaigns. Food supply chains have been interrupted, contributing to heightened food insecurity and acute malnutrition among young children. Preventable diseases have re-emerged in areas where immunisation programmes have collapsed.

Education has been profoundly disrupted. Schools have been damaged, occupied by armed actors or repurposed as shelters for displaced families. Prolonged school closures risk permanently excluding children from formal education⁵, particularly girls in rural areas. The absence of documentation due to displacement further obstructs school enrolment both within Sudan and in neighboring host countries. Educational disruption not only affects cognitive

4-The six grave violations. (2013). Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/>
5- SUDAN: Children have lost about 500 days of learning due to war in one of the world's longest school closures. (2026, January). Save the Children International. <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/sudan-children-have-lost-about-500-days-learning-due-war-one-worlds-longest-school-closures>

development but increases vulnerability to child labour, early marriage for girls, and recruitment into armed groups.

Sexual and gender-based violence has emerged as a grave concern. Reports indicate that women and girls, including minors, have been subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence. Survivors often face stigma, lack of medical care and limited access to psychosocial support⁶. Children born as a result of rape often encounter discrimination and obstacles in civil registration, compounding cycles of stigmatisation and marginalisation⁷.

Mass displacement represents another defining feature of the crisis. Millions have been internally displaced or forced to flee across borders, with children comprising a substantial proportion of the displaced population. Displacement exposes children to family separation, exploitation, trafficking and hazardous living conditions. Traditional extended family support systems are strained by resource scarcity and insecurity, weakening informal protection mechanisms that previously mitigated risk.

Children with disabilities face heightened vulnerability. Mobility limitations impede evacuation during attacks, while the destruction of medical facilities reduces access to treatment, rehabilitation and assistive devices. Conflict-related injuries have increased the number of children living with permanent disabilities, placing additional strain on families and communities.

Child Recruitment and Militarisation

Child recruitment in Sudan predates the current war and is closely linked to poverty, marginalisation, proliferation of small arms

6- More than Numbers – Report on the State of Violence Against Women and Girls in Sudan (2023-2025). (2025, December 15). SIHA. <https://sihanet.org/report-launch-more-than-numbers-report-on-the-state-of-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-sudan-2023-2025/>
7- Women grapple with unplanned pregnancies after sexual violence in Sudan war. (2024, April 10). UN Women – Headquarters. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2024/04/women-grapple-with-unplanned-pregnancies-after-sexual-violence-in-sudan-war>

and protracted insecurity. The present war has reportedly intensified these patterns. Children may be drawn into armed groups through economic inducement in contexts of extreme deprivation, through coercion or abduction, or through mobilisation by community leaders. In some cases, children join seeking protection, status or revenge following the loss of relatives. Armed actors have employed narratives that glorify violence or frame participation as a defence of community or identity⁸.

The consequences are profound. Recruitment exposes children to combat, injury and psychological trauma, disrupts their education and social development, and increases the likelihood of long-term reintegration challenges. Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes will face significant obstacles, including weak institutional capacity, ongoing insecurity and limited economic opportunities in post-conflict Sudan.

Intergenerational Consequences

Prolonged exposure to violence reshapes socialization patterns. Children growing up amid brutality, displacement and polarization may internalize narratives of revenge, exclusion and mistrust⁹. The erosion of social cohesion, combined with the destruction of cultural institutions and heritage, threatens long-term national stability. Justice for children must therefore be understood not only as accountability for discrete violations but as a broader process of social reconstruction that addresses intergenerational harm.

8- Salazar, B. & Cash, O. (2025, March 18). The Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Sudan. Genocide Watch. <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/the-recruitment-and-use-of-child-soldiers-in-sudan>
9- Sharma, N., Dajani, R., Tofail, F., Black, C., Tutlam, N., & Bhutta, Z. A. (2026). Long term effects of childhood exposure to violence in fragile and conflict affected settings. BMJ, 392, e086040. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2025-086040>

A Framework for Justice and Equity

Achieving justice for Sudanese children requires integrating accountability, restoration and structural reform within peacebuilding and state reconstruction processes. In the short term, ceasefire arrangements should incorporate explicit child protection provisions, including commitments to halt recruitment, facilitate humanitarian access and protect schools and hospitals from military use. Independent investigations into grave violations are necessary to establish accountability and deter future abuses. Transitional justice mechanisms must be designed to accommodate child-sensitive procedures, ensuring that victims receive reparations, psychosocial support and recognition of harm.

Immediate restoration of essential services is critical. This includes access to food, healthcare, vaccination, emergency education and safe shelter. Mechanisms to reunite separated children with their families and to protect unaccompanied minors must be prioritised. Children should be consulted in age-appropriate ways within peacebuilding processes to ensure that their perspectives inform reconstruction.

Long-term justice requires structural transformation. Constitutional and legislative reform should align domestic law¹⁰ with international child rights standards and eliminate discriminatory provisions. Sustained budgetary allocation to education, healthcare and child protection institutions is essential to redress historical underinvestment. Universal birth registration systems must be strengthened to guarantee legal identity and access to services.

Education reform should promote inclusion, gender equality and respect for cultural

Laws that need to be reformed to such end include Personal Status Law Act of Sudan (1991), The Sudanese Criminal Act (1991), The Sudanese Labour Act 1997, The Sudanese National Civil Service Act (2007), The Sudanese National Prison and Treatment of Inmates Act (2010), The Sudanese Child Act (2010), to name a few.

diversity, while reintegration programmes for former child soldiers must combine psychosocial care, education and livelihood support. Data systems capable of monitoring child wellbeing across regions are necessary to guide equitable policy interventions. Equity demands particular attention to children from marginalised regions, areas of active conflict, displaced populations, girls and children with disabilities. Addressing structural inequality is indispensable to prevent renewed cycles of violent conflict.

Conclusion

The suffering of children in Sudan reflects the immediate brutality of armed conflict and the cumulative effects of decades of structural neglect. Violations of their rights are not incidental consequences but indicators of deeper governance failures. A political settlement that sidelines children's rights risks entrenching instability and perpetuating cycles of violence. Justice and equity for children must, therefore, form a central pillar of peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction. Accountability, institutional reform and sustained social investment are not auxiliary to peace; they are its foundation. Ensuring that Sudan's children survive, recover and thrive is inseparable from securing the country's long-term stability and cohesion.

REVIEWS AND CRITIQUES

SHATTERED SOVEREIGNTY: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY TO UNDERSTANDING THE APRIL 2023 WAR IN SUDAN

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Erupting after months of mounting tension, the 15 April 2023 war marked the final collapse of the dual-headed military and political order that underpinned Sudan's transition. Yet, the post-colonial state in Sudan was already grappling with elusive nation-building processes, deep economic imbalances, dependency on foreign powers, and grievances of all kinds in an overcentralised political order. In a word, it continued to nurture its colonial legacy without questioning, at least not by the country's dominant actors.

On the ground, the confrontation that erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) - the latter heavily supported by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) - turned Sudan into a proxy battlefield for competing regional powers. While the SAF consolidated alliances with regional actors at odds with the UAE or with interests in Sudan, both the SAF and RSF are fragmented. With the mushrooming of militias within the SAF's camp and the very nature of the

RSF's composition, and recruitment patterns, command and control have loosened on both sides. No force retains a monopoly over the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force. Warlords with ethnic and ideological support are now funded and equipped by public and external sources on both sides; many are implicated in atrocities amounting to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and even genocidal acts.

This project develops an annotated bibliography on the 2023 war in Sudan, a conflict that has devastated the country and its people, killing over 150,000, displacing more than 11 million, and destroying the livelihoods nationwide. With the influx of IDPs and refugees, cross-border criminal activities and regional alliances, the spillover of conflict is evident. The envisaged bibliography seeks to synthesise scholarly and policy-oriented perspectives on the war's dynamics by curating a selection of peer-reviewed analyses, humanitarian assessments, geopolitical studies, and literary works providing a multidisciplinary overview of the war's trajectories.

The selection of entries is based on scholarly rigour and institutional authority, prioritizing peer-reviewed journals, reports by international organisations and established publishers, alongside empirical reliability from verified conflict databases. The criteria also prioritise temporal relevance (mostly starting April 2023) and source diversity, integrating academic literature and cultural works to balance theoretical and human perspectives. The bibliography is curated with the hope that it will serve as both a research tool and an interpretive framework for examining how war dismantles and redefines the very idea of the Sudanese state. This ambition may seem high, especially in the light of the limited research currently available on the developments in Sudan; however, by centring the work of Sudanese intellectuals who utilise situational proximity and empirical grounding, this project seeks to bridge the gap between abstract geopolitical and international analysis and the lived realities of state collapse.

The diversified entries cover materials published between April 2023 and the present. In some cases, the bibliography includes entries published before the war that help contextualise its dynamics. Organised into six sections, this series of annotated sources will be published in *Zawaya* starting

with the current issue while four sections (with one entry in each) appear on the first issue. As a living and evolving project, it will remain flexible, accommodating necessary adjustments as new research on the ongoing war emerges. We welcome your suggestions, whether about publications in printed format or online formats.

Section 1: The Direct Roots of Rupture

Medani, K. M. (2024). The struggle for Sudan. Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), Issue 310. Retrieved from <https://www.merip.org/the-struggle-for-sudan/>

Khalid Mustafa Medani, a political scientist at McGill University, offers a concise yet penetrating overview of Sudan's turmoiled transition and the structural roots of the 2023 war. Writing for Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), Medani situates the confrontation between the SAF and the RSF within decades of militarised governance, economic predation, and the co-optation of civilian politics. The piece synthesises political-economy insights and field-based knowledge accumulated through the author's academic research, rendering it both accessible and analytically informed.

The failure of Sudan's transition was primarily driven by an imbalanced power-sharing agreement that allowed the military to retain a "deep state" influence, including control over vast sectors of the economy and the persistence of Islamist influence networks. This incentivised the SAF and the RSF to weaken civilian rule rather than surrender their financial and political hegemony. Ultimately, the generals prioritised their competing interests in the "illicit economy" over the democratic demands of the popular uprising, leading to the collapse of the transition. The article provides interpretive value for understanding the sociopolitical foundations of the war as well as the limitations of international mediation. Its strength lies in

framing Sudan's crisis as the culmination of a longer continuum of militarised neoliberalism rather than a sudden rupture. As such, the piece represents a contextual commentary translating academic insight into engaged, public scholarship that bridges expert and civic discourse.

Section 2: Documented Human Toll

Elgadal, M. M. S., & Glade, R. (2024). Research in displacement: The impact of war on Sudan's higher education and academic research community (Rift Valley Institute). Retrieved from https://riftvalley.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Research-in-Displacement-English_FINAL-update-291024.pdf

Mirroring the institutional and intellectual destruction resulting from the war, this report assesses the extent of damage to Sudanese higher education institutions and examines how they have continued to operate against the odds. It documents the experiences of displaced academics and students striving to sustain their work and rebuild their lives within Sudan and in neighbouring countries. Before the war, Sudan hosted 39 public and 25 private universities, with at least 700,000 students enrolled in university and over 14,000 university lecturers. It notes that the war's impact was immense, as most of these institutions were concentrated in Khartoum. While public institutions have managed to sustain operations through online platforms and relocation, private universities have largely been forced to discontinue or downsize their operations.

The researchers employed a multi-border approach that combined qualitative fieldwork in four major cities including Cairo, Addis Ababa, Juba, and Kampala, with an online questionnaire that gathered 92 responses from academics across more than 20 institutions, integrating individual and group interviews with students and faculty, and

consultations with government officials. The authors also drew on their personal experience and knowledge of the Sudanese higher education system, of which they were a part when the war broke out.

The report concludes that despite the catastrophic disruption of Sudan's higher education system, the academic community has demonstrated remarkable resilience through grassroots coordination and digital adaptation. It recommends that international donors and regional bodies move beyond short-term emergency aid to provide structured, long-term support for displaced scholars and institutions. Furthermore, it calls for the protection of academic records and the integration of Sudanese researchers into global knowledge networks to ensure the survival of the country's intellectual future.

Section 3: Internationalisation and Geopolitics

Zaidan, Y. (2025). Ethno-mercenarism in Sudan's RSF and the Sahelian Arab Belt in Africa. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Advance online publication, 1-24. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2025.2576673>

This research paper examines the rise of "ethno-mercenarism" in Sudan, a phenomenon the author views as 'armed mobilisation driven by transnational tribal networks and explicit material gain', allowing detached paramilitary organisations to operate across borders with the support of regional patrons. The paper argues that the recruitment of cross-border Arab militias is not merely a product of ideology or migration, but a complex manifestation of ethno-mercenarism driven by the collapse of state authority, ecological crises, and the militarisation of pastoralist communities. It states that these militias require a new analytical framework to address the rise of irregular, cross-border armed movements. The article seeks to examine the RSF's composition, recruitment strategies, and battlefield behaviour, militia

politics, and regional security dynamics. The paper utilises the author's firsthand field observations from Khartoum during the onset of the 2023 conflict, alongside informal conversations with civilians and RSF-linked individuals. Supplementary insights were drawn from monitoring social media platforms. The paper also employs an open-source verification protocol.

The paper concludes that the RSF represents a powerful case study in the transformation of irregular militias into state-challenging actors. This is attributed to its roots in tribal militias, adaptation to environmental collapse, and exploitation of transnational Arab networks, which helped the RSF to mobilise resources and fighters beyond borders. The author defines this as model as 'ethno-mercenarism', which is based on transnational ethnic/tribal networks; material incentives (pay, loot, access to war-economy rents); detachment from any single state; and external logistical enablers (climate change, UAE). The author identifies three implications for policymakers: 1) responses to groups like the RSF must move beyond counterterrorism paradigms as it is a quasi-institutionalised force rooted in regional patronage, tribal legitimacy, and extractive economies; 2) support to fragile states must be accompanied by investments in restoring traditional tribal governance institutions and equitable land adjudication systems; and 3) enforcement of regional pastoral mobility management frameworks.

Section 4:
The Theater of War: Tactical and geographic

analyses using satellite and conflict data. Tyson, K. (2024, August). An inventory of foreign drones in Sudan's civil war. Critical Threats Project. Retrieved from <https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/An-Inventory-of-Foreign-Drones-in-Sudan%E2%80%99s-Civil-War-1.pdf>

Operating from a US national security perspective, the Critical Threats Project (AEI) analyses the Sudan conflict as a strategic battlefield where the proliferation of drone technology and regional instability pose direct threats to US interests. This short report provides an overview of the foreign supporters of the warring parties as of August 2024 and their geopolitical and economic interests in the country, including Iran, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The report analyses the arsenal of drones under the control of both parties. While the SAF received drones from Iran in addition to Egyptian-supplied Turkish hardware, the RSF relies on a sophisticated procurement network linked to the United Arab Emirates. Notably, the RSF utilises a high volume of Chinese-origin technology. The SAF inventory includes Iranian Systems (Mohajer-6, Ababil-3 and Zajil-3), Turkish Bayraktar TB2; and Russian Systems, while the RSF inventory includes the Chinese Wing Loong II and weaponised commercial Chinese-made drones like DJI and Autel. This source illustrates a major aspect of the internationalisation of the conflict. It moves the narrative away from a purely "internal" power struggle and demonstrates how foreign technology has further "eroded" Sudanese sovereignty by making the country's security dependent on external military hardware and influence.

REVIEWS AND CRITIQUES

Seminar Review

**SUDAN ARMS FLOWS:
ILLICIT SUPPLY AND DIVERSION**

Editorial Board

Sudan has become a crossroads where political, military, and economic interests intersect with numerous other circuits; where corruption fuels arms networks, prolongs the war, and compounds the suffering of Sudanese women and men. This brief report presents the key information that emerged from Anti-Corruption Taskforce (Sudan) seminar on arms flows into Sudan's war theatre, and the role of regional and international actors in the spread of weapons through their illicit export and diversion. The aim is to explore ways to halt these unlawful supplies in order to ensure civilian protection and establish avenues for accountability.

It should be noted that the seminar addressed broader topics, including: the lack of accountability and the proliferation of weapons in eastern Sudan, the regulation of illicit arms flows, community perspectives on weapons proliferation, the resurgence of older armed groups, and the regional and international dimensions of conflicts in Eastern Sudan. The seminar's objective was not merely to diagnose the crisis, but to attempt to understand the linkages between arms proliferation, corruption, and the war's continuation, with the aim of contributing to breaking this vicious cycle.

The speakers' presentations revealed that the question of arms in Sudan is not merely a narrow security matter, but a nexus in which the dynamics of corruption, natural resources, regional interventions, and global markets are all tightly entangled. The discussions traced multiple threats: the analysis of supply routes, international violations linked to the arms trade, internal smuggling networks and corruption, and a case study of Eastern Sudan with its strategic and geopolitical particularities.

The deliberations concluded that breaking the cycle of arms, corruption, and resources is imperative. This demands a comprehensive approach encompassing internal political and legal reforms, regional cooperation through activating the roles of regional organizations, effective international pressure to close illicit supply channels, and amplifying the voices of civil society and communities scorched by the flames of war.



The Map of Arms Flows: Diverse Sources and Convoluted Routes

Investigations, particularly those published by Amnesty International, have established that modern weapons and ammunition are flowing to both warring parties: the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) through complex pathways. The key actors in this landscape are:

1. China and the United Arab Emirates: Reports have documented the RSF's use of GP-50 Norinco aerial guided bombs, Chinese-made munitions sold by China to the UAE, which then diverted them to the RSF. Norinco 155mm Howitzers have also been traced to the RSF via the same Emirati channel; the UAE is the sole importer of this type of weapon, making it the only possible conduit.
2. Turkey: Between 2020 and 2023, Turkey exported massive shipments including approximately 239,000 blank-firing rifles and 26 million rounds of ammunition, which were subsequently converted within Sudan into lethal weapons for the benefit of the SAF.
3. Russia and Serbia: Deliveries of MK-series rifles from the Russian company Kalashnikov Concern have been documented, alongside ammunition and small arms from Serbia.
4. French Technology: The integration of the French Galix System into Emirati Nimr Ajban armored vehicles, used by the RSF, reveals the deep entanglement of international supply chains in the conflict.

Mechanism of Arms Diversion: From Civilian to Lethal

Legal loopholes and administrative corruption have enabled the diversion of weapons from legitimate channels to battlefields, thereby sustaining the conflict. The patterns of this diversion include:

- From civilian to Military Use: Weapons, such as hunting rifles, are imported under the guise of civilian use and subsequently modified for military purposes. Similarly,

non-lethal arms are converted into lethal weapons, a prime example is the modification of blank-firing rifles and their ammunition into live, deadly weapons. Turkey, for instance, exported massive shipments of blank-firing rifles and rounds of ammunition between 2020 and 2023 as described above.

- Leakage from stockpiles: The collapse of state structures, weak oversight, and poor management of national stockpiles within regular forces have led to the theft of national arsenals, as well as the sale of weapons by individual soldiers, whether their own or those seized by their units as personal spoils of war.

Violations of International Law and the Absence of Accountability

Two major violations of international law by the warring parties constitute a breach of binding international instruments:

1- Violations of UN Security Council Resolution 1591 (2005) on Sudan, which imposed an arms embargo on Darfur. The resolution includes:

- Extending the arms supply embargo to cover all parties to the conflict in Darfur, including the Government of Sudan, not merely non-government groups.
- Prohibiting the provision of technical assistance, training, or financial support related to military activities in the region.
- Imposing restrictions on the transfer of military equipment to Darfur without prior approval from the Sanctions Committee.

2- Violations of article 7 of The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT): Article 7 establishes a binding legal obligation to conduct a broader risk assessment before authorising arms exports. It prohibits granting and export license if there is an overriding risk that the weapons could be used to commit serious violations of international law or international crimes, with particular attention to gender-based violence. Article 7 stands as one of the treaty's most

critical provisions, transforming principles of international responsibility into a binding and operational standard for arms export decisions. According to the aforementioned Amnesty International report, the States party to the treaty that have been documented supplying weapons to Sudan during the war are China and Serbia.

Eastern Sudan: A Grey Market for Weapons
One researcher warned during the seminar that Eastern Sudan, despite being relatively distant from the combat zones, has become a grey market for weapons. The legitimization of armed civilians through “popular resistance” committees has effectively institutionalised chaos, as officially distributed arms have

- become entangled with smuggled ones. Common practices within this grey market include:
- Using intermediary states to conceal the destination of weapons;
 - Forging or misusing end-user certificates;
 - Deploying front companies or international brokers to mislead authorities;
 - Using embargo-free intermediary states to funnel weapons to conflict zones, with the complicity of local authorities.



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A concise list of recent reports published up to February 2026, covering arms supplies from various countries:
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3. Al Jazeera Investigative Unit. (2026, February). Sudan's Drone Revolution: How Foreign Tech Changed the Frontlines. Al Jazeera Media Network. <https://www.aljazeera.com/investigations/2026/2/sudan-war-drones>
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CULTURES AND ARTS

IN THE UNTRODDEN LANES OF
THE INDIVIDUAL:
ARMED OPERATIONS FOR CULTURAL
REVOLUTION

By Mamoun Eltlib¹
Poet, writer and cultural editor

“There has never been a single moment in the history of humanity when mankind did not stand upon faulty foundations. Yet this does not mean that arriving at catastrophic ends must be regarded as inevitable. We have lived through such times, and here we still are, aren’t we?”
Pavel Vilikovsky²

The Map of Revolutionary Struggle
What price must we pay to unleash a worldwide cultural revolution, one capable, through art, thought, science, and knowledge, of readying the soil for a new world to sprout amid the merciless ruin ahead? Very well: we must offer our bodies, our revolutions entire, our homelands, what are so grandly termed national sovereignties, our nation-states, our systems, and even our identities. It has been laid bare to us, through the depth of our lived experience during the glorious December Revolution 2018, persisting to this very day, the sheer fallacy and utter illusion that any people can rewrite their own history and

thereby imprint their mark upon the world’s history without first entirely abandoning their national borders and shedding off the delusion of their seclusion from the rest of humanity. Perhaps, for a fleeting instant that endured through the sit-ins across the cities of Sudan, and at the forecourt of the General Command of the Sudanese Armed Forces in Khartoum, one might feel utterly severed from the world, as though no force on earth could rival the might of the revolting masses. Yet the moment the flagrant massacre against the protesters erupted, the world’s claws are bared, its tightly woven scaffolding exposed laid bare: the limb branded cancerous is

1- This essay was published in an ill-fated issue of Al-Hadatha magazine, the Sudanese journal issued in Khartoum by the Democratic Thought Project and Dar Al-Hadatha for Publishing. For the first time, the poet Ahmed Al-Nashadir assumed the role of editor-in-chief, following the decision of the project’s director, Shams Al Din Daw Al Bait, to step aside in recognition of Al-Nashadir’s role in founding the magazine. The issue ran to over three hundred pages, as it was a double issue, and was titled with the feature dossier: “Culture and Revolution.” I completed the text of this piece on 10 April, 2023. After we finished work on the issue on Thursday, 13 April, it was scheduled to go to the printing press on Sunday—but Khartoum’s apocalypse came on Saturday. The war erupted. Now, I am honored that it is finally being published—in an abridged version—in the inaugural issue of Zawaya magazine. This introduction serves as a signal to the reader to take into account the context and time of writing, and perhaps also as a reminder of the dreams squandered in the great marketplace of global war.
2- This quotation is taken from Andrew Boros-Kazai’s English translation of Pavel Vilikovsky’s novel Evergreen Is... (original Slovak title: Večne je zelený...). See: Vilikovsky, P. (2002). Evergreen is... (A. Boros-Kazai, Trans.). Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1988).

torn out. Then follow the slow, excruciating chemotherapy, session after session, the people inflicted by their own revolution, laid out upon the world's operating table; for you cannot rejoin the "international community" and its "markets" with the bodies so defiantly insurgent. Discipline and chastisement commenced, and the class materials are global alliances, alliances no longer anchored even in ideologies but in scant threadbare connections whose inner logic the peoples of the world will never grasp: the mesh of human rights, democracy and progress. They are also the resistance to the unipolar capitalist hegemon by growing global powers, ascending calmly. They are arms market, colossal human displacements, as millions continue fleeing wars, poverty and starvation.

Has the Revolution Been Defeated?

If we examine the revolution through a sober historical-political lens aligned with our own definition for it, then, yes, it is defeated, inevitably and irrevocably. It has drunk defeat to satiety. No proof cuts deeper than the expressions on the faces of young women and men when politicians' names are mentioned, you would see the dough of betrayal/ purity baked daily into bread to feed the starving minds. In its political dimension, it was and will forever remain a revolution of the body. Our politicians and leaders today harbor no aspiration for genuine cultural or intellectual transformation. Such horizons lie beyond the reaches of their imagination, and their fundamental incapacity for motion. The cosmic spider enfolds them in an absurdly tiny cocoon: their political ambitions and their earnest, naive yearning for the rebirth of the homeland. What homeland, truly? Whose homeland, even? Does the word still carry any meaning whatsoever in the world of today? Let us, for once, be brutally honest with ourselves! We no longer inhabit the world that appears on the map, splashed across news bulletins and media hallucinations. We dwell in the Atlas, in that subtle gradient from brown to blue to green, the planet as viewed from outer space, where satellites drift alongside women and men in helmets.

Death and Defeat

The sensation of defeat arises also from our mortality, our fleeting tenure. We would inflict a profound injustice upon ourselves by luring our soul with the promise of witnessing humanity's grand and decisive triumph. Human victories of the past strike us as indescribably inspiring; we read them in books, and observe them in films as if gazing upon a dream. In today's world, humanity can exist only in the realm of imagination. Those victories inspire precisely because they now manifest solely in colossal ephemeral flashes: the sit-ins across the cities of Sudan, bestowing upon humanity one more shove down the road of global hell. We have merely traded one ruling system for another, even if in the best scenario it cloaked in the guise of democracy, this amounted to nothing more than a shift in dominion as occurs with every revolution of the body. Yet on the plane of intellectual impact upon society, immense transformations did take place. Questions once marginal, have entered the public square: issues of cultural and religious diversity, the rights of women, and the place of youth. The very fact of the fierce erupting disputes over these matters, the rugged ferocity of the conflict among diverse factions, this raw vitality, wounding though it may be, stands as an achievement. This achievement unfolded concretely during the revolution. Women surged forward leading the masses, sending their ululations into the sky. Young women and young men offered up their lives, and the people of Khartoum awoke to the reality of another Sudan, indeed to the existence of a sit-in in a remote place called Nertiti. Situated on the map of global revolutionary of today, the December Revolution occupies a position of genuine influence. Paradoxically, it is precisely its politically disappointing outcomes that will secure its lasting status on the world's path. From it we draw the stark lesson: changing our countries in isolation has never been, and will never be, a solution to the persistent riddle of state and power. Today, there is

neither power nor state. This is a plain fact. These revolutions will pile up; the knowledge about the workings of warring global systems, and their absolute grip on the fates of the world's peoples, would also accumulate. The wasting away that has ravaged the body of the United Nations defies belief to the point that its Secretary General's 'Deep Concern' has become the punchline of the day.

On the Enduring Traces of Cultural Effect

Cultural change was, and remains, the surest path, always. It was the single flame that never dimmed, not even for an instant, throughout the long night of total darkness from 1989 to 2019. Cultural resistance charted its goals with clarity, and we can put them in one sentence: the liberation of the individual. Cultural resistance never aimed at the masses, as political movements do, it sought out individuals.

That approach proved profoundly effective, from the literary supplements of the 1990s through experiments in vital institutions such as the Abdulkareem Mirghani Cultural Center, and the Abdulmajeed Imam Center, as well as revered bodies like the Sudanese Writers Union; onward to the Democratic Thought Project, the Reading for Change Series and its reading groups; down to the events organized by the Mushafaha Poetry Forum, always held in open areas, in the streets. Then came the great communal gatherings such as Mafroush, curated by the Cultural Work Group. Mafroush was an event that provoked an aesthetic and intellectual rupture, evolving and mutating its forms until most events today unfold as a cascade of Mafroush-esque gatherings, organized even during the weeks-long sit-in across the army headquarters in Khartoum.

The "I" speaking these lines is liberated in precisely this way- through the quiet passing of a book, from one hand to another. I came to realize that we had been deceived, terribly so! In the time of our childhood, in

the early 1990s, we lived through something truly astonishing. We felt nothing of it at the time, yet it was omnipresent. Only from here, from this now, do I see it clearly: if any crime has been done against Sudan, any crime at all- a wrongdoing concealed from the eyes of the Sudanese people, from the gaze of the world, a felony that shivers from its own dark nightmares- it would be this: the relentless war waged against knowledge, fearing that it would sabotage the minds of women-primarily women- then inflict the same damage on the minds of men. They feared knowledge would propagate ideas from cultures tainted by nothing other than their difference from our own, in a manner that is, above all, creative. Homes raided. Books seized. Cinemas crushed under mortal blow. Artists fired. Authors, intellectuals, and scientists all fired. An ideological purge swept away every opponent of the Islamist's thought, accompanied, naturally, by the methodical mutilation of school curricula. Then, in one decisive stroke, the state's cultural institutions were torn by the roots: the Sudanese Writers' Union, which was democratically elected in the 1980s, was shuttered, and its house, nestled proudly near the confluence of the two Niles, was confiscated. The deception struck me most keenly the moment I stumbled upon Dostoevsky! A question that could stun anyone anywhere: so there really is such a thing as literature? How had we never happened to meet it? And where had it vanished to?

Real radical change arrives exactly like this: you head to a newspaper kiosk on a certain day of the week, the day the literary supplement is published. Back then, the literary supplement sat at the heart of the pages of the newspaper; you could extract it cleanly, discard the rest of the paper, and step straight into the world: The literary supplements-those of the poet Al-Saddig Al-Raddi, and those edited by the literary editor Osama Abbas, transcended every border and anchored what is most human and universal.

I recognized in the act of literary editing a noble labor: in your hands rested the power to publish the new and powerful ideas, the new aspirations and worldviews, all written for the emerging generations, all by obscure writers. Thanks to these literary editors, we saw our own names appear in print, and so a whole path for cultural work opened through this modest yet boundless window.

Sudanese men and women produced vast bodies of writing that today overflow the archives of the National Records Office. The transformations these writings-and their accompanying translations - wrought upon individuals went largely unobserved. Yet. I was a direct witness to them throughout my 15 years as a literary editor. I watched. I saw them, women and men pouring their souls out onto paper. I saw them broadcasting dreams of liberation from every boundary and border, even the national ones. In this way they liberated countless individuals, some of whom went on to become leaders, and perhaps martyrs, women and men alike.

We always regard those who have passed, with their souls intact, as the revolution's only true leadership. And I have always maintained that our leaders were deliberately assassinated in the broad daylight.

The sheer existence of someone like Kamal Wida'a, with his books arrayed in precisely the right corner of fate; the sheer presence of Yasser Al Soul in the 1990s; the sheer existence of Al Zahraa Bookshop, owned by Ibrahim, at the Posta station, in Omdurman; the influence of such figures reached thousands upon thousands of individuals in quiet pursuit of knowledge and truth. Nor can we overlook Eltayeb Elmosharaf's readiness to conjure, with the barest means and from his own pocket, a space as vital as the online magazine Albaeed. Or consider the young women and men in Port Sudan who pressed forward, publishing a magazine of a rare caliber: Jeel Jadeed, "New Generation"- and note the significance

of a name. It first emerged as a students' Wall Magazine at Red Sea University, and from there into the vast space of the world. These two experiences, Abaeed and Jeel Jadeed- to name but two- showed that what Sudanese poets and artists see transcends the confines of their national borders. These platforms welcomed an immense tide of creative work written in Arabic and English. All these are adventures worthy of contemplation.

We also had access to the complete archive the magnificent Sudan For All, a website founded by our mentors, foremost among them the late great visual artist and thinker Abdalla Bola, alongside Nagat Mohamed Ali, and Hassan Musa. In that space which laid bare our true character, we studied, and learned, as students in the underbelly of the globe.

Where did all of that disappear? Is that not a piercing question? Well, simply put: cultural work is now owned by the people. It is fully democratized.

The arts erupted and seized the streets; artists set about founding their own galleries. A new generation arrived, a new moon ascended, and colors claimed the walls of the cities.

Once more: was the Revolution defeated? I say no- it was not defeated, nor will it ever be, so long as we look at it with new eyes.

Its intellectual continuity is inscribed on the map of the global revolution, creeping forward in acute agony. The crude, explicit and utterly direct savagery that brands the world of today cannot possibly be vanquished by a revolution confined within borders, any borders, for "the cultural revolution works in mysterious ways"- secret ways, seeking no recompense and craving no balm for its wounds.

Random individuals appeal to random individuals, in the hope that the unknown within them may emerge.



**Call for Contributions for
the next issue on:**

RED SEA SECURITY

Sudan and the Wider Region

Zawaya is pleased to announce a call for articles for its next issue, titled: “Red Sea Security: Sudan and the Wider Region.” This issue will explore the Red Sea as a critical geopolitical, economic, and security corridor, examining how local, regional, and global actors are shaping its evolving landscape. The Red Sea has become one of the world’s most contested waterways. From Sudan’s shifting internal dynamics to the ambitions of the Gulf and global powers, the region stands at the intersection of trade, security, and diplomacy. This issue of Zawaya seeks to unpack these layers, offering analysis that bridges academic research and policy insight.

SCOPE AND THEMES

We welcome original research articles, policy analysis, and reflective essays addressing, but not limited to, the following themes:

1. Sudan’s strategic position in the Red Sea security and maritime governance
2. Regional rivalries and alignments involving the Horn of Africa, the Gulf States, Egypt, and Israel
3. External powers’ engagement including the US, Russia, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and the EU
4. The impact of Sudan’s political dynamics; how political unrest and violent conflicts influence the Red Sea diplomacy and regional alignments
5. Foreign military presence and base politics, and how external powers’ footprints in Sudanese territory or waters (e.g. Russia, UAE, Turkey and their implications for sovereignty)
6. Cultural and historical dimensions of Sudan’s Red Sea heritage, historical trade networks, and their influence on identity.
7. Port privatisation and foreign investment; the political economy of foreign involvement in Sudan’s ports.
8. Sudan and the African Union Maritime Security Vision: challenges of policy harmonisation
9. Treasures of the Red Sea

Submission Guidelines:

- Abstract of a maximum of 250 words outlining the main argument, methodology, and relevance to the issue’s theme
- Full analyses should not exceed 1500 words; shorter essays and opinion pieces are accepted
- Citation style APA
- Languages: Arabic or English
- Deadline for abstracts May 7th, 2026
- Deadline for full contributions May 31st, 2026

Accepted articles will be published in Zawaya’s upcoming issue both in print and online. Selected authors may also be invited to participate in a virtual roundtable discussion hosted by the Sudan Democracy First Group (SDFG)

Submission and Contact:

Please send your abstract and contribution to the Editorial Board:

zawaya@sdfg.ngo

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