

## DYNAMICS AND IMPACT OF THE NEW SUDAN CONFLICT

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### Abstract:

This paper investigates the phenomenon of “sudden” re-activation of cycles of violence in Sudan through a twin comparative lens: the transition of Janjaweed militias into Security Forces (RSF) and the ramifications of this for the region at large, Nigeria in particular. Following a critical analysis of the existing literature, the paper draws on a theoretical blend of political marketplace (de Waal), structural violence (Galtung) and regional security complex theory (Buzan & Waever) to highlight the “in-depth “deja-vu”” of the Sudanese: persistent marginalisation of the periphery, fragmentation of power, cyclical precipitance of violence, chronic failure of peace processes. Comparing the respective periods of 2003-2009 (Darfur war) and 2023-2025 “deja vu” illustrate the reproduction of the same logics: dependence on armed groups, instrumentalisation of identity, humanitarian crises and massive migration. The metamorphosis of Janjaweed militias into the RSF illustrates the ways in which neopatrimonialism and militarisation of a society deepens impunity and closes doors on democratisation. The Sudanese crisis is displayed as one that goes well beyond the national level, with Nigeria facing considerable impact upon it from migrations routes, trajectories of armed groups and the twin brother dynamics of a regional dynamic of insecurity. To conclude, understanding Sudanese “deja-vu” is not just an observation at the level of history: it speaks to a deeper mechanism of reproducing violence, both within the internal makeup of the state and in its interactions with neighbours for institutional, judicial, and diplomatic responses.

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Keywords: Sudanese conflict, deja-vu, Janjaweed / RSF, structural violence, impunity

### INTRODUCTION:

After a revolution begun in December 2018, Omar al-Bashir is removed after he has wielded power in Sudan for almost three decades. What follows that watershed moment in national political life, both because of the oppression directed against the protesters and because of how that regime was received and legitimized by many international actors? Then, on 15 April 2023, these two putschist forces Sudanese Armed Forces, headed by General al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces, commanded by General Hemetti engage in an unprecedented deadly conflagration that sends Sudan spiralling back into war. We seem doomed to repeat ourselves, generations reliving these same struggles of power, these fractures of identity, these tragedies of humanitarian necessity. Announcement made: what is it that is happening now in understanding Sudan? Not a surprise. The return of the familiar chaos, a conflict whose machinery armed rivalries, collapse of state, humanitarian crisis is all too familiar (Casciarri, Al-Ameen Al-Faki & Al-Nour 2024), and whose reverberations are not contained to the frontiers of Sudan, but spread out across an entire regional system, affecting, for instance,

Nigeria too. Indeed, as Sudan's political and security historian Deshayes (2023) points out, the Sudanese transition has too marked a consolation in violence: marginalization of the periphery, militarisation of local actors, state-backed militias, windows of power fragments, coups, and coups again. From the Darfur conflict to the rise of the Janjaweed, through their metamorphosis into the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), to the participation of the same actors in the coup and in the ongoing war, the same structural logics are reproduced. This persisting and cyclic nature has become the theme of many academic studies on how best to understand the many armed conflicts (Kurtz, 2024; International Crisis Group, 2025), as well as the formation, evolution and role of militias in all of these conflicts (United Nations Security Council, 2025; Abu Bakr, 2023), and the humanitarian crises resulting in displacement, famine and limited access to aid (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2025). Some works have begun to discuss regional impacts, including increased migratory flows and intensified cross-border security tensions. However, despite the breadth of this literature, few studies have undertaken a comparative analysis of the conflicts from 2003 through 2025, especially regarding the institutional transition of Janjaweed militias to RSF, the succession of political cycles, and the role of impunity in the repetition of violence. There are again few studies that have explored the impacts of the ongoing Sudanese conflict on Nigeria, in terms of security, migration dynamics or regional political levels of stability. This reflects the authors' conviction that it is important to explore these dimensions more in depth in order better to understand the recurrence of the "déjà vu" phenomenon in Sudan.

On this basis, we ask: how does the current conflict reproduce the structural patterns seen during the 2003-2008 violence? How did the metamorphosis of the Janjaweed militia into the RSF transpire, and did it instigate impunity in Sudan? And what are the implications of the current Sudanese conflict on Nigeria in terms of security, migratory, and regional stability?

This inquiry is articulated around four axes: the first furnishes the theoretical and methodological frame; the second juxtaposes conflict cycles in Sudan; the third inspects the metamorphosis of Janjaweed militias into RSF and structural impunity; and lastly, after looking at the effect of the conflict on Nigeria, the piece terminates with recommendations and possible lines of action for a durable resolution of the Sudanese crisis.

### **Literature review:**

Turning to literature on Sudanese conflicts, there is a strong emphasis on the recurrence of patterns of violence and the relevance of internal structural dynamics, vis-à-vis lacking consideration in parts of the literature on the institutionalisation of armed actors and the regional dimension of the conflict, especially Nigeria. Several major works have examined the structural roots of the conflicts, the perpetuation of cycles of violence and the failure of international responses to these realities. De Waal et al. in *Complicating Darfur* insists that the root cause of the 2003-2008 war lies in "toxic mix" of elites concentrating wealth and power in Khartoum, identity-based politicisation and poor management of land. But the analysis stops short of the birth of RSF and does not tackle the mutation of Janjaweed, the institutional question in general or the cross-country implications, including potential knock-on effects for Nigeria. The *Martello Paper Darfur: Reflections on the Crisis* (2006), provides striking data about mortality numbers (numbering from 200,000 to 450,000 deaths) and the number of displaced people estimated to be "somewhere in the range of 2.7 million people". It is interesting on the failure of the international community and especially with regard to how the R2P "has completely failed in the conflict" and the gender dynamics of sexual violence as a "gendered security issue", but does not deal with the mutation of the Janjaweed into the RSF or the question of regional impact. Some other works may deepen understanding of the current political and militia-related dimensions. Casciarri, Al-Ameen Al-Faki and Al-Nour (2024)

observes the role of the Resistance Committees in the revolutionary phases but the authors focuses more on internal socio-political dynamics without examining cross-border and chronic militia issues. Deshayes (2023), while describing the overlap of revolution and war and the fracturing of power as a source of chronic instability, does not touch upon the institutional trajectory of the Janjaweed & RSF and its ramifications. Kurtz (2024) discusses the new balance of power in Sudan in the wake of Bashir's fall and the crisis of transition, focusing principally on the antagonisms internal to the military and the RSF, and not developing up the ramifications for Nigeria.

The International Crisis Group's reports *Two Years On, Sudan's War is Spreading* (2025) and *Sudan's Calamitous War: Finding a Path Toward Peace* (2025) offer an overview of the newborn conflict, external support, incipient fragmentation, and the persist in of this "déjà vu" into national and international context. The reports only lightly touch on militias as agents of Sudanese destruction, discussing regionally at length without explicit reference to the Nigerian case. Abu Bakr (2023) hopes to sketch out how the problem with moving forward is the militias primarily, how their persistence reproduces impunity and instability, without narrating the inter-regional implications; NRC report (2025) simply tries to document the humanitarian crisis (displacement and famine) but not Nigeria; and the United Nations Security Council report (2025) on the political and security context, does not develop up the comparative cycle 2003-2008 / 2023-2025, nor to Nigeria's crossbordering.

In short, while the literature enables the core causes and humanitarian consequences of the conflict to be grasped, it fails to explain adequately three fundamental dimensions: (1) the institutional reconfiguration of the Janjaweed militias into the RSF and the forging of impunity; (2) comparative between the cycles of violence (2003–2008 / 2023–2025); and above all (3) how the impact of current conflict on security / migration / political stability in Nigeria. These are the blind spots that this research will engage, so as to offer a fresh reflection on Sudanese dynamics and their externalities.

### **Theoretical framework:**

The analysis of the Sudanese conflict and its regional consequences draws on a combination of three theories, which allow us to grasp the complexity of the internal and external dynamics at play, as well as the logic of historical repetition of "déjà vu".

First, the theories of praetorianism and neo-patrimonialism, especially worked on by Alex de Waal through the concept of the political marketplace (de Waal, 2015), offers an essential lens for understanding the transformation of the Janjaweed into the RSF. In this model, political power in Sudan is based on constant bargaining around loyalties and resources, and violence is a tradable commodity in return for the retention and conquest of power. The conversion by Hemedti of his tribal network into a clientelist actor, with foreign backers (UAE, Saudi Arabia etc) becomes understandable in terms of this logic of transactional governance, where the militarisation of power goes hand in hand with institutionalised impunity and the absence of formal judicial accountability (de Waal, 2017).

Second, the theory of structural violence (Galtung, 1969; Straus, 2012) and of cycles of violence puts the Sudanese conflict at deeper roots: the concentration of wealth in Khartoum, the manoeuvring of provincial elites, and a politicising of land (hakura). This group of structures led to an original cycle of conflict (2003–2008) which, absent reform and transitional justice, re-emerged in 2023–2025, more militarised. The persistence of these structures can account for the repetition of the pattern of marginalisation, uprising and repression, reaffirming the cyclical pattern of "déjà vu", the stability of its apprehension across Sudan and the difficulty of breaking the reproduction of violence.

Third, the Regional Security Complex Theory (Buzan & Waever, 2003) and migratory spillover (IOM, 2022) are relevant for understanding the externalities of the Sudanese conflict on its neighbours, chiefly Nigeria. Sudan is a hub of instability: massive displacement (more than four million internally displaced people, flows of refugees towards Nigeria) and the crossborder circulation of armed groups (links between RSF and Nigerian militias) operate to illustrate the regional spreading of crises from it, warranting the RSC model for analysis, beyond borders, of the security, migratory and governance impacts at the regional level of the Sudanese environment. The articulation of these three theoretical perspectives permits one to show: how the political marketplace of Sudan reproduces the cycles of structural violence; how the militarisation of the Janjaweed into the RSF translates into institutionalised impunity; and how these processes spill over into neighbouring countries, thereby affecting stability, security and governance in Nigeria.

This theoretical choice, which centres around transactional and structural frameworks (de Waal, 2015; Galtung, 1969; Buzan & Waever, 2003), as distinct from classic institutionalist works, is justified by the specificity of Sudan which has experienced the collapse of state routines, the specificity of clientelist networks at play and the circulation of violence between states.

### **Methodology:**

This work is based on a qualitative method, we conducted a documentary and comparative analysis, limited to secondary sources, since we do not have field data collection of our own. Our corpus is made out of specialised works (Prunier, de Waal, Casciarri, Deshayes), reports from international and non-governmental organisations (International Crisis Group, Norwegian Refugee Council, United Nations Security Council), as well as recent specialised articles and institutional documents. Our method consists of firstly a thematic analysis, which aimed to studied the dynamics of the Sudanese conflict for two key periods (the cycles of violence from 2003-2008 and 2023-2025), linking them to the processes of institutional transformation of militias and structural impunity and the regional effects on Nigeria. An issue we considered paramount was the triangulation of the data, i.e. the cross-checking of all information in order to corroborate the value of our interpretation. The qualitative methodology has its drawbacks, hence the absence of empirical field data on our part and the overdependence/over-reliance on already published analyses. Our work was also subjected to the bias as well as shortcomings on the quality, objectivity, and timing of whichever works we consulted, which warned to interpretative mistakes or blindspots in phenomena. Nonetheless, this was a decent method for carrying out an in-depth, critical, and contextual reading of the dynamics of the Sudanese conflict and its regional repercussions.

### **Research objectives:**

This study is an attempt to make sense of this cycle of violence in Sudan, including the institutional change during the transformation of the Janjaweed into the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the regional “echo” of this - particularly for Nigeria.

To be specific, I will attempt to:

- Show how the logic of the “political marketplace” and neo-patrimonialism make sense of the mutation of the Janjaweed into RSF and the continuity of impunity in the situation in Sudan;
- Show how the structural violence and cycles of crises (2003–2008, 2023–2025) seem to reflect a “déjà vu” syndrome in Sudan’s political history;

- Demonstrate to what extent the instability in Sudan influences the region (in terms of migratory flows, of circulation of armed groups, of security issues in Nigeria);
- Suggest some further thinking on this issue of sustainable management of the conflict and its regional spill over.

## **1. The institutional evolution of the Janjaweed into the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)**

### **1.1 Birth of the Janjaweed: tribal confederations and state clientelism**

At the dawn of the 2000s, Darfur was suffering from the exclusion dictated by the power of Khartoum; not able to establish stable domination over the Sudanese territory, Omar al-

Bashir's regime developed for Darfur a strategy of reproducing violence, made of local elites manipulation, community groups systematic division, and available auxiliary militias. This background produced the Janjaweed, mainly forming within Arab tribes of Darfur, themselves weakened by exclusion from the \*hakura\* (communal land) and climatic instability making them more subject to scarcity (Kurtz, 2024; Abu Bakr, 2023). Recruitment into the Janjaweed was organised around rhetoric of community self-defence against rebellions from the Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit. Armed, financed and supported by the regime, these militiamen were charged, in particular, with violently suppressing rebellions and carrying out damaging division under the guise of property law and security duties. This dynamic belongs to the logic of the "political marketplace", where the central power trades protection, access to resources and material goods for the armed loyalty of its militias, in the kind of clientelism of violence depicted by Alex de Waal (Deshayes, 2023; Abu Bakr, 2023).

### **1.2 Internal mutation: leadership, split and rise of Hemedti**

Leadership in Janjaweed became contested in the 2000s, with tribal chief authority no longer enough. Rivalries, and in particular the rise of Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (a.k.a. Hemedti), emerged in the context of an unequal allocation of finance and military assistance from the regime (which pragmatically bet on Hemedti as a more likely controller, better capable of ensuring the usefulness of the militias). The regime thus decided to offer financial aid, weapons, military ranks and the prospect of political recognition for his men, in the face of a backdrop of tribal rivalries exacerbated during the same time (Abu Bakr, 2023).

### **1.3 Janjaweed institutionalisation: birth and formalisation of the RSF**

The true breakthrough materialised in 2013, when the Sudanese intelligence services (NISS) for refusing to "integrate" the Janjaweed into the country's regular armed forces decided to "reorganise" them into a new paramilitary body: the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), with control passing directly to the presidency (Deshayes, 2023). The RSF would benefit from this moment onwards from legal existence, administrative and budgetary autonomy, and immunity from prosecution through enshrinement in the 2017 RSF Act. The force would then be able to attract large numbers of former Janjaweed but also enlarge its recruitment base to other regions and ethnicities, though the family domination of the Dagalo clan remained.

The RSF became an essential military partner: employed in Darfur against the rebellious populations, they were deployed again across the Libyan border to control migrations (in cooperation with the EU) and then mercenaries in the war in Yemen, which brought huge amounts of money into Hemedti's hands from abroad (Deshayes, 2023; Crisis Group, 2025).

## **1.4 Institutional changes and external backing: the RSF an integral and independent actor**

Taking power disrupted the equilibrium of the state's security forces. After the fall of Bashir in 2019, the RSF strengthened by their military successes (amid which Yemen overtly on behalf of the United Arab Emirates) and their enormous financial and other support from controlling access to gold and maintaining the border, became the arbiters of politics in Sudan despite their inferior military strength. They had no unelected chief to stand in their way (Kurtz, 2024). In terms of support from outside, they looked mainly to money, hardware and political support in Abu Dhabi, while the SAF turned elsewhere towards Egypt, Saudi Arabia and to a smaller extent, Turkey and Iran. This rivalry luxuriated in economic competition, and the RSF moved into gold-mining and other investments, real estate, agriculture and wherever else money could be made, in direct competition with the SAF's monopoly on business in Sudan (Deshayes, 2023; Crisis Group, 2025).

## **1.5 Political consequences: power, impunity and the militarisation of Sudan**

The empowerment of the RSF through violence and economic entrenchment redefined the national power equation, with Hemedti emerging as one of the leading men in the country, against the historic local elites of the "centre" (the Nile Valley). This rise placed a burden on the transition that followed 2019: the RSF had come to stand for an agents of the revenge of the peripheries over the centre, but it also represented an aggravation of impunity. No RSF members have ever been tried for the acts committed during the repression of the 2019 sit-in. Paramilitary violence was hosted as a way of conducting politics, with the RSF taking the lead. The institutionalisation of the RSF made stronger a new kind of transformation of the system: on one hand an army, increasingly conditioned by its reliance on militias, still determined in many ways by older economic power structures, and on the other a paramilitary with its own resources, capable of rivalling the state in its own right, and of challenging the old hierarchy. Politically, the duality between RSF and SAF provided the conditions for an inevitable clash; that of 2023-4 solidifying the failure of the transition to democracy and the depth of the penetration of the political marketplace in Sudan, with armed loyalty, regional clientelism and impunity replacing state authority. (Crisis Group, 2025)

## **2. The cyclical logic of violence and "déjà vu" in Sudan**

### **2.1 Marginalisation, structural exclusion and manipulation of identities**

A profound gulf exists between the elites of the centre (Khartoum, the Nile Valley) and the periphery (Darfur, Blue Nile, Kordofan). Since independence all governments (military, civilian and Islamist) have excluded peripheral regions from the management of public affairs and from access to available resources. This exclusion concerns both access to the "political" (under-representation of the peripheral regions in "political" institutions), distribution of wealth (access to and appropriation of the provinces' mineral, agricultural resources by Khartoum), access to public services (educational, medical, social), laws governing the occupation [124] and management of land (hakura, etc.). As a consequence, Darfur has for a long time suffered from extreme under-development, lack of health services, infrastructure and roads, a situation which was not made better by the West's sanctions and isolation of Sudan in the light of the events in the Sudanese south in the 1990s (Denis, 2007).

This glamorous process of exclusion is accompanied by perverted cynicism: the central power that cannot impose a political homogeneity by use of force, always creates war by using the card of ethnic division: it creates and widens rifts between ethnic groups and increases the

tendency of "politicising the tribal apparatus" or "native administration", thus generating land conflicts. This is especially true in Darfur, Kordofan. Access to land is geographically and socially selective and the land is viewed as a "scarce and valuable" resource; as a result and backdrop for the wrongs done to the different ethnic groups are: the aspect of competition that exists between the communities and the tug of war between people leading to ethnic struggles. The part environmental factors (degradation of the land, desertification and demographic growth) play in the conflicts needs stressing as it explains why these revolve around landscapes, trees etc. (Marchal, 2007).

This manipulation imposes an architecture upon political violence: having no other channels of political representation or direct access to decision-making, protest can only devolve into armed rebellion. Peripheral regions find themselves trapped in a double dependency: that of the central state for redistribution, and that of the international community for humanitarian aid, for lack of the prospect of autonomous development (Denis, 2007).

## 2.2 Structural violence and the deadlock of peace agreements

The marginalisation of peripheral regions, nurtured in the institutional order of Sudan, is what Johan Galtung (1969) would define as

“Structural violence is violence exerted systematically that is, in the constant, repeated, regular and habitual ways upon the ongoing social processes without regard to and independently of individual and group motivations”. The inequality of social and political systems wherein access to goods, resources, power and recognition are valgus, not equalitarian, resulting in a form of violence “diffuse”, that is not intentional, more structural than personalised or corporate” (Galtung *ibid*) takes place in Sudan via:

- unequal sharing of natural wealth and oil earnings
- capture of political and economic space for the centre
- degradation of traditional regulatory structures and associations of local elites to centres of power
- direct or indirect suppression of progressive opportunities for peripheral groups ➤ Which have the following aspects:
- famine and food disasters
- access to education and health care
- lack of infrastructure/transport system
- precarious popular mobilisations in popular provinces repressed

The consequences of this form of violence is evidenced in the cyclical boom and bust of cyclic return of peace situations when no attention was given to their causes. Agreements concluded in Khartoum or in the face of international pressure tend to sidestep real redistribution of power and the proper recognition of the claims of those on the margins. Implementation by opportunistic coalitions or holders of arms (army, militias, RSF), tends towards reintegration and recycling of old power and violence, rather than transforming them (Deshayes, 2023). Impunity remains and the distrust persists and the demand never for true inclusion is never delivered, thus reproducing the cycle: revolt – repression – agreement – betrayal - violence.

## 2.3 2003–2008 vs 2023–2025: repetition and innovations in Sudan’s war

The parallels between these two major cycles of conflict (2003–2008 and 2023–2025) are remarkable so remarkable that they are indeed heavy with the weight of Sudanese “*déjà vu*”.

Both breakouts of war come after the savage reaction by the central power to a regional demands for what it feels to be threats to its monopoly. In 2003 assaults on its forces in Darfur by Zaghawa and Fur rebels, led to “massive repression”. The regime mobilised the army, supported by various Arab militias: the Janjaweed, together they burned whole villages, killed several hundred thousand civilians and displaced millions of people (Al Jazeera, 2023; Denis, 2007). Now in 2023, the conflict between SAF, the army, controlled by central elites, and the RSF, the paramilitary embodiment of militarised peripheries, has broken out into the open first in Khartoum. The methods again are similar: indiscriminate violence, siege tactics promulgated by civilian militias, attacks on civilians, hospital infrastructure destroyed, and community-to-community cleavages deepened (Al Jazeera, 2023). Even if the theatre of war has shifted (from provincial periphery to the capital), the logic is still competition for control of the state, with the important additional twist that the periphery, led now by RSF, covets the centre. The world response, too, is much as before; late, ungainly, held hostage by geopolitics, temporising, and often ill-adapted to the realities of Sudan (Crisis Group, 2025). The humanitarian consequences are, if anything worse every year; millions of displaced people, endemic levels of famine, mass killings (for example in El-Geneina, in the Zamzam camps, etc) make a return to peace seem more and more difficult.

Yet in other respects things have changed: where previously the conflict associated periphery and centre, now the conflict is between two heirs of the regime: Burhan as symbol of old military guard of the centre, Hemedti and the RSF that he heads: paramilitary militarisation of the provinces. This dualism has animated an institutional paralysis, brought chaos generalised, so much so that the very heart of the state has itself become a battlefield. Both cycles therefore share the same failure of national and international reconciliation efforts: unable to address fundamental structural violence, to truly include the peripheries, unable to disruptive the pattern “agreement – betrayal – conflict”, they reproduce the conditions of future crises.

#### **2.4 Social dissension and mutation of warfare practices in Sudan (2003–2008 vs 2023–2025)**

We no longer have a conflict reducible to the opposition of centre and periphery. What we have now is a far deeper social dissension and mutation of warfare. In the early 2000s there was violence revolving around a dominant state mainly deploying peripheral militias (Janjaweed) against rebel groups from marginalised regions of Darfur. We have now moved forward quickly since 2019. The militarised periphery (Hemedti’s RSF, heir to the Janjaweed) is now at the heart of national power, indeed in direct competition with the regular army (SAF) in managing both the capital and the political centre of Sudan. This shift in the gravity of the war, where two elites from different social and regional backgrounds (Burhan as embodying the old centralising Nile elite; Hemedti as embodying the “return” of the Darfurian margins) come face to face, disrupts the classic foundations of the Sudanese state. Where the centre once exploited the periphery, the periphery now penetrates even absorbs the centre, whilst preserving its tribal alliance, its economic networks and relationship to violence.

Methods of warfare have also mutated: conflict as mobilising rural militias, destroying villages, executing mass killings, and forcing displacement of the civilian population in 2003–2008 has given way to the expanding localisation of structured violence into cities (Khartoum, ElFasher), the new means of military warfare (drones, and heavy foreign instruments), the use of civilian material infrastructure as target (hospitals and humanitarian homes), and more use of a professionalised and internationalised method of fighting: foreign alliances and intervention (the Emirates backing the RSF, Egypt the SAF plus assorted neighbours), the financialisation of militias, and the migration and humanitarian aid used as weapons of war.

In short, today's Sudan reverses to a pan central crisis of power: to the old centre/periphery has been added a rivalry of actors from different patches, carrying with them their own networks, mythologies, legitimacy and clientelist system, but all equally incapable of producing a genuinely new and inclusive political order. This social dissension and degradation of tools of violence lies close to the heart of failing to find a way towards reaching a lasting exit from wars, hence "Sudanese" *déjà vu* in the contemporary period.

### **3. Humanitarian and social consequences: comparison of the 2003–2009 and 2023–2025 cycles in Sudan**

Between 2003 and 2009, the Darfur war created one of the worst humanitarian disasters of the 21st century, where estimates compiled in Martello Paper 35 suggest that between 200,000 and 450,000 deaths occurred, most not being as a direct act of war, but through a collapse of living conditions: malnutrition, disease and lack of healthcare decimating population way beyond the front lines (North-South Institute, 2010). Over 2.5 to 2.7 million people displaced in Darfur as well as over 600,000 people across the border to Chad. Instrumentalised humanitarian sieges, attacks on villages, massive destruction of livelihoods, instrumentalisation of militias (most notably the Janjaweed) and closure to humanitarian access of almost 200,000 people as early as 2006 (North-South Institute, 2010).

Two decades later the rebrutalisation of war since 2023 has thrown Sudan into an unprecedented continental crisis: in two years over 11 to 12 million (internally displaced and refugees) have left all homes, an absolute record, making the country the world's hotspot for displacement (ACAPS, 2024; DTM, 2025). In mid-2024, the UN had recorded over 30 million people as in need of humanitarian assistance, i.e. almost 60% of the country (OCHA, 2024).

Documented mortality figures are staggering: between 24 000 and 31 000 deaths were reliably recorded between April 2023 and December 2024, but (it is often noted) the actual number of direct and indirect deaths is larger if one includes directly uncounted or inaccessible deaths from the acute famine, disease and violence wrought by the war (Security Council Report, 2024). Several million children are severely malnourished (UNICEF, in AP News, 2024). Famine, repeated displacement, the closure of schools for more than 17 million children, the targeting of civilians and the use of sexual violence and abuse as a weapon of war all confirm the "structural" dimensions of crisis. The comparison of the two cycles tells the stark story of repetition. In both cases, similar practices collide: use of paramilitary forces and ethnic targeting, directly coordinated attacks against civilian populations, rigid and teetering restrictions on access to international aid, collapse of state and of near all public services, displacement of populations on a mass scale, and mortality in part initiated by the direct brutality of violence and in part stemming from pervasive collapse in living conditions.

Sudanese "*déjà vu*" is expressed in methods (the siege, the collective punishment, the scorched earth), in visible result (waves of refugees, a multiplication of the invisible victims succumbing to hunger and disease), in the persistence of impunity and, last but not perhaps worst of all, in the incapacity of the political system and the international world to "make sure this does not happen again."

If there is a difference, it is in acceleration and intensification. Where the 2003–2009 crisis was gradual and multi-layered, the 2023–2025 cycle has, in two years, expended more displacement and destruction of livelihood than ever before: technological ingredients, rapidity of military plans, the generalisation of async urban wars (Khartoum), the exacerbation of political fragmentation, combined render this cycle the most violent immediate, human and institutional since independence, and presents the case for analysing Sudan as a 'foretold disaster', as revealing the structure and adjudicating instance of the suicide of the Sudanese state apparatus (OCHA, 2024; ACAPS, 2024; DTM, 2025; Security Council Report, 2024).

#### **4. Regional implications of the Sudanese conflict: the example of “spill-over” towards Nigeria.**

The intensification of the Sudanese conflict since 2023 is no longer an internal disaster: it destabilises at the regional level, according to the “spill-over” logic characteristic of the Sahel or Lake Chad Basin security complexes. The Crisis Group report (2025): “Sudan’s instability is thus at the epicentre of a ‘contagion’ of insecurity. The sundering of the central state is leaving behind power vacuums and insecure dynamics to which neighbouring states must adapt. With the crisis already spilling over borders, Nigeria, the significant regional power, now faces many of the principal threats arising from this”. Thus, “The most intensifying dimension of spill over is [easy] movement of Africans towards neighbouring countries”; “The precarious movement of that many refugees is stretching resources water, food, healthcare its presence in neighbouring countries is overwhelming reception structures and causing ethnic tensions in the border areas, and contributing to a level of food insecurity, already peaking in the north of Nigeria”, alongside Chad and South Sudan, principally. [Crisis Group, 2025]. Besides, “the dynamics involving the circulation of armed groups and criminal networks” are on the rise, “the porosity of borders in the region enables Sudanese fighters or former rebels/militiamen from places such as Darfur, Kordofan and elsewhere to join or reinforce armed groups active in the region, further fuelling the proliferation of arms, of the grey economy and the spread of mercenarism”. These dynamics interact with those of Nigerian armed groups (Boko Haram, ISWAP) and threaten the stability of the Lake Chad states, as no security apparatus can, alone, contain the scale of movements generated by Sudan’s collapse [Crisis Group, 2025].

Thirdly, geopolitical destabilisation is deepening: the breakdown of state in Sudan, and the impotence of institutions like the African Union, UN and ECOWAS, is exacerbating regional fragmentation. Nigeria must contend on its own territory the arrival of refugees, border volatility, the overmilitarisation of its north-east and north-west, and growing competition for its already replenishing natural resources amenities all factors which historically drive localised conflicts and unravel long-term governance.

To summarise, the crisis in Sudan and the socio-economic domino effects it leads to make Nigeria both destination and relay for the migratory, and security and economic shocks, released in Khartoum or Darfur. As Crisis Group notes, “If war does not stop in Sudan, the country will continue to export its problems, fuelling instability and competition for survival across the Sahel region and as far as Nigeria.”

#### **Conclusion:**

By the end of this study, it therefore becomes quite apparent that Sudan is caught in a tragic “*déjà vu*”, not only an academic impression but a mode of producing politics and violence in the country. The cycle that started with the fall of Omar al-Bashir, carrying revolutionary hopes for a whole generation, has violently closed in on society at large, making everyone aware that the dynamics which led to the Darfur catastrophe have not in the least disappeared. This “return of the same” can be traced at every level: peripheries that are forgotten in the re-allocation of resources and access to power, militarisation, by mirroring the transformation of Janjaweed into RSF only arresting impunity and giving a “new face” to old logics of armed clientelism, structural violence from the inheritance of decades of authoritarian centralism, identification against, naïve reproduction of the logic of a particularisation of citizenship populated by bad “others” and land policies not fitted to the (social and geographical) space they were implemented, lead to rebellions that resist structural reactions directed from the centre and that

almost inevitably conclude in (mass) repression, displacement, famine, to “new” balances of power that are just as unstable.

The comparison of 2003-2009 and 2023-2025 sheds light on the extent to which institutional innovations have not broken the cycle, which tends to reproduce the same instruments of terror militias, siege, collective punishment; now and affecting directly the capital, accentuating actors who before inhabited the margin. This continuity of modes is mirrored by the unprecedented acceleration of the scale of the calamities: in just two years the war has uprooted more than 11 million people and robbed millions of children of any expectation of a future. But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Sudanese “*déjà vu*” is to be found in the rigidification of responses, at both the national and the international level. The same calls for reform or for redistribution or for justice are thwarted in the same manner; peace agreements become hollowed-out shells, and are captured by militarised actors; rhythms of reconciliation, pact and rupture seem doomed to repeat themselves forever unless a radical transformation of the social contract takes place. Finally, the crisis spreads well beyond Sudan’s borders; that which starts in Sudan besmirches the whole of the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel, contaminating Nigeria and forcing the region to deal not only with large shocks of displacement but with the spread of also armed networks, as well as heightened competition for already scarce resources where there has been overall state erosion. To understand contemporary Sudan is thus to accept to understand oneself in confronting this mechanism of “*déjà vu*”, of tragic recurrence, of the inability to transform fundamentally political, social and economic systems steeped in institutional violence, neo-patrimonialism and the hypertrophy of several centres of power at once. Only at this cost can a truly genuine path out of the crisis be envisaged but not from a blank slate, rather lucidly, inevitably confronting oneself with a legacy of unresolved conflicts.

#### **Recommendations:**

Given cycles of violence and the regional contagion of Sudanese crises, it is imperative that we take a multidimensional and coordinated approach. The lessons of Sudanese “*déjà vu*” show that any sustainable exit strategy must rest on the following pillars:

**Prioritise a comprehensive and inclusive ceasefire:** The international community, the African Union and regional actors must redouble their efforts to impose a verifiable ceasefire involving all parties, including peripheral armed groups and civilian representatives. A neutral monitoring mechanism is necessary, backed by clear international logistical and diplomatic support.

**End impunity and launch genuine transitional justice:** Any lasting peace requires an end to impunity: it is urgent to open national and international investigations into crimes committed (massacres, sexual violence, forced displacement, etc.) and to support the implementation of a transitional justice process, including truth, reparations and guarantees of non-repetition.

**Refound governance on decentralisation and inclusion of the peripheries:** Restoring a voice and real political agency to marginalised regions (Darfur, Kordofan, Blue Nile, etc.) is essential for rebuilding trust. This involves genuine resource-sharing, land reform, integration of local leaders and the guarantee of fair representation in transitional institutions.

**Strengthen regional management of migratory flows and humanitarian assistance:** With more than 11 million people displaced, it is imperative to support neighbouring countries (including Nigeria) in reception, humanitarian management and the prevention of community tensions. Regional coordination (ECOWAS, AU) and emergency funding for food, health, education and security are critical to limiting the spread of chaos.

**Combat the spread of arms and fighters and reinforce security cooperation:** A stronger circulation of weapons and fighters requires closer cooperation between regional security

forces, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes and local conflict resolution/reconciliation initiatives.

**Support research, documentation and regional monitoring:** Continued production of reliable data and applied research on militias, impunity and regional networks is needed to accompany political action and to anticipate the risks of “déjà vu”. Universities, think tanks and NGOs deserve support in this vital work.

If Sudan is ever to know peace, its political pact will have to undergo a structural revolution. The same goes for regional politics. A system that is able to confront the dynamics of marginalisation, impunity and violence that underlie Sudan’s woes will need to be one of collective, coordinated mobilization operating on political, security, humanitarian and social fronts. Only this kind of operation can break the mechanism of tragic repetition in Sudan and Central Africa.

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