

AFRICA POLICY BRIEF
SUDANS WORKING GROUP
JANUARY 2024

PART 1

How to restore Peace, Unity and Effective Government in Sudan?

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INTRODUCTION

The Wilson Center's Sudans Working Group (SWG) has initiated a four-part discussion series to ensure a diverse range of Sudanese civilian voices are taken into consideration as the United States and other key external actors develop and implement policies regarding Sudan.

Sudan is no stranger to internal conflict. Its first civil war had begun just as Sudan gained independence in 1956. Fifty-five years and millions of war-related deaths later, the southern third of Sudan became independent South Sudan. Since fighting broke out in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), more than nine million Sudanese have been displaced, tens of thousands killed, and Sudan has become de facto divided between those two armed groups, with other armed factions also consolidating control of territory.

The first discussion session focused on how to convince the leading generals to stop fighting and, in particular, what external actors might do toward that end.

CAN THE CONFLICT END WITH ONE SIDE VICTORIOUS?

Both the SAF/rump government in Port Sudan and the RSF have taken to demonizing the other. The SAF characterizes the RSF as a rebel group that is terrorizing the Sudanese people and thus must be defeated and held accountable for atrocities. The RSF claims it is continuing the revolution against the Islamist/military dictatorship that stifled the aspirations of the Sudanese people for peace, freedom, justice, and equality. Both sides have committed external backers, funding, and ready recruits. While the RSF has made rapid territorial gains, the SAF has retaken some territory near Khartoum.

Recommendations

- External supporters providing arms and training are key to convincing SAF and RSF to negotiate a settlement. They possess the effective leverage to do so. First it is essential to understand what interests they are pursuing. Then, the focus should be on convincing them that their interests can be protected via a negotiated settlement.
- Engage the Islamists within and behind the SAF to identify those who might be amenable to a negotiated resolution of the conflict.
- Advise Sudanese civilian leaders to cast their positions, especially regarding accountability, as desired end goals rather than negotiating red lines. Help them stay focused on ending the fighting and negotiating a new governance formula for Sudan.

HOW TO ENGAGE SUDANESE CIVILIANS? WHICH ONES?

It was clear from the first discussion session that Sudanese civilians have very different views on responsibility for the current conflict and which side is amenable to a negotiated peace. The Taqadam coalition of political parties and civil society groups is more inclusive than the political party-focused Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), but it still lacks adequate representation of women and youth who were the backbone of the December 2018 revolution. However, there appears to be civilian consensus on three key points: Sudan needs civilian government, soldiers to return to barracks, and one army.

Recommendations

- In engagement with Taqadum, challenge it to broaden its representation to include more grassroots female and youth voices. Use Taqadum to help reach those female and youth voices to which we are currently denied access due to lack of presence on the ground in Sudan.
- Encourage armed potential spoilers (Juba Peace Agreement signatories who have remained “neutral, Abdel Aziz Al-Hilu in South Kordofan and Abdul Wahid in Jebel Mara) to engage Taqadum and grassroots civilian groups.

WHAT EXTERNAL PRESSURES MIGHT HASTEN END OF FIGHTING?

Sudanese civilians are asking for U.S. help in convincing the generals and those backing them with money and arms to negotiate an end to the fighting. Some expect the U.S. can facilitate an ICC indictment of SAF and RSF leaders or can hobble them financially. Others are more pragmatic, insisting civilians are willing to compromise with the generals to achieve peace and representative government. Most agree that cooperation of regional states who are providing arms and training is needed to achieve peace.

Recommendations

- Sustain policy of sanctioning both SAF and RSF persons and entities, but limit sanctions to those that can be enforced effectively (i.e., those key regional actors will cooperate in enforcing) in order to retain credibility.
- Encourage greater dialogue between Taqadum and governments of nations who are supporting the SAF and RSF so concerns about civilian governance of Sudan can be aired and hopefully addressed. Facilitate civilian access to media. Making the conflict in Sudan less “forgotten” could increase pressure on those facilitating the fighting by increasing their “reputational risk” and help generate a more robust humanitarian response.
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WHAT ROLE FOR EXTERNAL MEDIATION?

The Jeddah process has so far failed to deliver either a ceasefire or humanitarian access, yet the mediators allocated no blame to either SAF or RSF for this outcome. In receiving RSF leader Hemedti as a virtual head of state, IGAD leaders alienated the SAF from IGAD mediation efforts. The African Union has been too divided to offer effective mediation. Likewise, the League of Arab States. The UN is only now re-engaging after having been forced by the SAF/rump government to close its political mission in Sudan.

Recommendations

- Support unification of outside efforts to replace fighting with negotiation. The new UN Secretary General’s envoy has supported civilian engagement, and effort should be made to help achieve synergy between his efforts and those of the AU High-Level Panel, IGAD, the Jeddah process, and Egypt’s Neighbors of Sudan initiative.
- Pursue facilitation of talks between SAF, RSF, and civilians rather than offering mediation or specific peace frameworks.

The Sudans Working Group

The Sudans Working Group (SWG) engages US, African, and international policymakers and stakeholders in inclusive and forward-leaning policy dialogue aimed at advancing the prospects for peace, security, and development between and within Sudan and South Sudan. The SWG serves as a space for key stakeholders to share analyses and perspectives and provide policy options for addressing critical issues related to the two countries. The SWG is currently co-chaired by Ambassador Nureldin Satti and Ambassador Donald E. Booth.

The Africa Program

The Africa Program works to address the most critical issues facing Africa and US-Africa relations, build mutually beneficial US-Africa relations, and enhance knowledge and understanding about Africa in the United States.

The Middle East Program





The Wilson Center's Middle East Program serves as a crucial resource for the policymaking community and beyond, providing analyses and research that helps inform U.S. foreign policymaking, stimulates public debate, and expands knowledge about issues in the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.







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