

Monopolizing Rescue and The Value of A Foreign Passport: A Case of Sudan

The 15th of April 2023 was a devastating and memorable dawn in the minds of the Sudanese people. A morning that unfolded with the shattering sounds of gunfire announcing a brewing and violent clash -between a paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the military government otherwise known as the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)- a conflict that took hold of the capital Khartoum before rapidly spreading across. In sudden shock and disbelief Sudanese people were caught in the middle of a bloody war that is sadly still ravaging the country a year later. As reported by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) since the start of the war [15,550 fatalities](#) have been reported. A power-struggle between two sides, a power-grab by a paramilitary and predatory faction, or a cruel puppetry scheme by external powers, however direction the discourse takes, a total disregard for human lives and livelihoods is the one definitive thread.

As of May 2024 the [Operational Data Portal](#) of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported a total of 8.8 million Sudanese people (8,861,630) were forced to flee their homes since the war began. With [a report](#) from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) published in April 2024, that 6.6 million are internally displaced (an estimated 6,657,550), and 2 million (approximately 2,044,248) displaced across borders into neighboring countries; such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Chad, Central African Republic (CAR), and South Sudan. As the war persists these numbers are expected to rise, as Sudanese people desperately search for a resemblance of safety that was long-stolen from them. According to the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) an overwhelming number of [20,000 people](#) are forced to flee their homes everyday, with the country becoming the largest global crisis of internal displacement.

This article studies the case of Sudan in three parts; beginning with a brief history and analysis, followed by an exploration of the efforts exerted to escape the war, this is supported by qualitative data collected from interviews with participants who are citizens and dual nationals, and lastly the article highlights the current crisis with a backdrop of the country's position in the global agenda.

Part I

A brief timeline

Not to oversimplify history but in order to understand the factors that led to the current declined state of Sudan, it is important to retrace a recent timeline from late 2018 when civilian (and peaceful) protests erupted demanding then-president and dictator Omar Al-Bashir to step-down, after a 30-year rule which was widely regarded as a regime of prolonged government crackdown. The most detrimental of which was the genocide perpetrated in Darfur and ethnic cleansing ordered by Al-Bashir which led to [his indictment](#) to the International Criminal Court in 2009 and 2010. It is important to note that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) (known at the time as the Janjaweed militia) are not only [responsible for carrying out](#) these orders, but are in fact the barbaric legacy of Al-Bashir, who -and in an effort to protect his regime- incorporated them into the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) [in 2014](#).

During late March and April of 2019 a peaceful sit-in was organized in Khartoum with protestors coming together to build a community of connection, gathering everyday and spending the nights chanting for freedom, peace, and justice. Many Sudanese people organized food drops, musical and poetry nights to uplift the spirits, artists painted drawings blended with the colors of hope, and many others volunteered different services for protestors in need of medical attention. On the 11th of April 2019 the sit-in succeeded in overthrowing Al-Bashir but a road of many obstacles still laid ahead. While Sudanese people felt they were a step-closer to actualizing a dream of democratic rule, only two months after the celebrations of April a massacre was committed by armed groups namely the RSF targeting Sudanese protesters, with an alarming [death toll of hundreds](#), outside of the bodies recovered from the River Nile, and [numerous accounts](#) of sexual violence reported. Despite all of that shared-anguish Sudanese people were determined to find democracy and accountability for the injustices.

In late 2019 a joint sovereign council was established detailing a three year power-sharing military and civilian rule with plans for the country to hold its first democratic election, but this was later halted due to a military coup in 2021 orchestrated by the military leader of the transitional government, which resulted in the arrest of many senior actors of the government as well as the prime minister of the civilian cabinet, this was met with public outrage and resulted in [the harm and deaths of many protestors](#). Although he was later reinstated that same year with a [new power-sharing agreement](#) with the military, in January 2022 Sudan's prime minister resigned from the role, which led to the 2022 December agreement between the military and various civilian and political actors (belonging to a political coalition otherwise known as Forces of Freedom and Change) which envisioned the military stepping away from politics, and for the actors to agree upon a new prime minister to oversee a [two-year transitional period](#) with an election set at the end of that period.

Many protests, promises of democratic election, and failed agreements, Sudan's transitional period was nothing but an empty promise; a short-lived vision that saw many demonstrations and protests carrying demands that were ultimately never met. Perhaps it was a domino effect set in slow motion, a three-decade rule of one political party (i.e. National Congress Party) and the impact of its rigid hold on power securing it by any means necessary;

its [deeply-ingrained and harmful practices](#), seen in (to name a few examples): government embezzlement and corruption, censorship and intimidation of political commentators and journalists, suppression of personal freedom and peaceful protests, restricting religious liberty and expression, eradication of a safe political climate and any rise of opposition, unlawful arrests, detaining, arbitrary torture, and killing. Perhaps it is true that plants cannot grow on rotten soil, when every progress toward democracy was restricted and later eliminated entirely. Sudan amidst its revolution of 2019 was a picture of resilient optimism during a time when it was getting harder to believe in a promising future, and unfortunately with its arrival it proved to be bleaker than ever.



Otherness and consequences

In pressing times of wars, citizens are advised prior to the calamities ahead to prepare a conclusive [emergency plan](#); by evaluating potential threats within their homes (e.g. locking and securing exits), identifying safe spaces (e.g. basements, windowless rooms), arranging evacuation backpacks with necessary supplies, and contacts for family in case of emergencies. Even with warnings communicated, incidents unfortunately still occur that can be life-costly. It is not unusual to encounter such incidents as traumatic events produce a range of emotions the least of which is crippling-fear and anxiety, even with preparation, when panicked the human mind can find it difficult to follow steps. What about a sudden clash of armed forces with no prior warning or indication? Unaware, confused and certainly unprepared, Sudanese people were left completely on their own to make sense of what was happening, and predict what was in store for them.

A Sudanese passport is [ranked amongst the least powerful](#) documents globally, restricting the freedom of mobility and requiring its holder to apply for visas (of entry) for largely over a 100 destinations. The low rank of the passport indicates not only economic deficiencies in the country, but also torn ties of international relations with other countries. Sudan has long suffered the actions of its government; from long-imposed sanctions by the United States, to quite recently financial sanctions imposed by the United Kingdom. Diplomatic strains such as

these hinder and very often block the prospect of foreign investment, business integration, and talent exchange, which causes the country to fall behind and last in aid and development. It is not a rare tale to tell and regardless of the cause of travel; whether it is for studies, visit of family abroad, or a much needed leisure time, Sudanese citizens are expected to gather and ‘check-off’ a list of required documents, each time they intent to travel, then collect, translate and notarise documents, answer all repeated questions with a pleasant attitude, pay and in-full non-refundable appointment fees prior to receiving any feedback, and lastly endure exhaustive visa-processing time. Even when completing a rather flawless application, there remains a chance of hearing the word ‘No’.

A displaced person, a refugee or an asylum seeker all share deep desires to better their lives although the circumstances greatly differ, which formed their decision to leave behind the home they’ve always known, they all risk their lives and the wellbeing of their children in chase of such hope, and outside of the scope of how a receiving country can manage this, it is no doubt that a decision of such harrowing effect isn’t an easy one to make. I mention this to place the context of preconceived notions that leads a person to stubbornly hold onto judgements blinded from seeing things as they really are, but rather looking from within the narrow lens of opinions long-settled in their minds. There is a terrible fault in this as it creates a rampant storm of prejudice and discrimination aimed at devaluing people. Preconceived notions forges a huge distance that is difficult to eradicate, and when left unexamined it makes way for stigmatization to fill-up that space. A mix of ignorance, stereotypes, prejudice-based discrimination, stigmatization dangerously [targets minority groups](#) that are perceived to be at a lower social category because of their religion, gender, ethnicity, or country of origin. The notion that allows an official to discredit a complete application based on a clerical error, is the same one (in an extreme extent) that dehumanizes those seeking refuge, not seeing them for what they were back in their home-country; not as family-oriented, hardworking professionals but unfortunately dismissing them due to worry and fear of the unfamiliar.

A little over a year has passed since the war broke-out in Sudan, and with the [recorded and ongoing atrocities](#), the killings of innocent civilians, kidnapping and recruitment of child soldiers by the RSF, sexual crimes and violence, looting and irreversible damages to houses and properties, the overwhelming (and increasing) numbers of displaced persons, not to mention the use of explosive weapons, both on-the-ground and air launched, according to [a data briefing](#) by the Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) released in September of 2023 the higher risk areas (where explosive were deployed) constitute of urban zones and residential areas with 66.7% incidents reported where civilian casualties comprised 46.4% of that total. Ground-launched explosives accounted for 61.1% of incidents reported, and air-launched weapons accounted for 28.9%. The briefing also showed that civilian infrastructures, schools, markets, and hospitals were all targeted and impacted.



The detrimental impact in living through the horrors of a warzone of bombings and sudden attacks is formidable to say the least, and yet Sudan remains lost in the map of news-media that was once vocal about the war, but has dialed down the reports substantially. The preconceived notion of an African country torn by its war-lords isn't an assumption difficult to reproduce, and place forth as a reason for ignoring the violations occurring. Without media attention Sudan is dubbed a 'forgotten war' present mostly in the minds of a displaced nation, and little-to-nowhere else. But, surely it is much more complicated than that.

Othering or otherness is a way for one group to look at and identify another group of individuals as a threat to social order in order [to validate their dominance on the 'other'](#). An 'us vs. them' exclusion mentality that dismisses the other's agency and even humanity believing them less worthy of value or respect. This is seen not only in the silence of news-media, but perhaps even depictions of that are plainly obvious on the ground. What makes a once-absorbed faction of the military rebel against it, as did the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a name relatively new for an armed-militia always known as the Janjaweed or 'devils on horseback'? What makes a once-favorable and appointed prime minister deposed by [a military coup](#), as did General Abdel-Fattah Burhan to then Prime Minister Dr. Abdalla Hamdok? (his civilian-partner in Sudan's 2019 transitional government), and what drives the RSF to continue committing [horrific crimes and human rights violations](#) against the people of Sudan? Otherness is why. Simply stated, the divide in Sudan is a long-and-winded history of tensions driven by the politics and policing of the other; the dominance of one group to rule over and against a perceived 'enemy', fueled by armed conflicts and coups that left a country, once rich in resources and potential, sadly extremely vulnerable to intrastate violence and outside influence.



Part II

Nationality as currency

In the short days that followed the 15th of April, and when the realization of a deadly war was on every mind, evacuation plans and rescue missions were developing at a rapid pace, and with it a strange phenomenon was afoot. When a distinctive split was taking place; Sudanese people were assigned values, alas life-saving values based upon a dominant indicator, the passport they held in their hands. A passport indicates not only the identity of its holder, but also their nationality. With the backdrop of a politically and economically unstable country, globally restricting the movement of its citizens within normal circumstances, would it be naive to assume that during the dire times of war, humanity can trump prejudice? Absolutely yes.

Sudanese nationals with residency abroad and ones with dual citizenships received a completely different treatment to Sudanese citizens. When strong statements of condemnation followed shortly-after by rescue missions; planned and carried out by officials of a foreign government to retrieve their citizens (and residents) safely, Sudanese citizens holding Sudanese passports were left to plan their own escapes to safety.

An airbase in Djibouti was a [crucial point in facilitating evacuation plans](#), France extracted 388 nationals and citizens of its country alongside citizens of different European countries on a four-flight mission, also carrying citizens from Africa, Asia and North America. Other countries that utilized the airbase were Italy that aircrewed 200 from Khartoum to Djibouti, Spain that evacuated 172 of its nationals and citizens (as well as citizens of Argentina, Colombia, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Portugal and Poland), while Germany evacuated 311 citizens of European countries in 3 military aircrafts from Khartoum to Jordan. The United Kingdom carried out [mass evacuations of 2,197](#) from nationals, citizens and citizens of other western countries (such as the United States,

Ireland, Netherlands, Canada, Germany and Australia) from Port Sudan and a military airfield in nearby Khartoum. The United States deployed a two-mission convoy to evacuate its citizens (excluding a convoy that was [attacked by the RSF](#)), marking a total of [1000 of private US citizens](#) as well as citizens of its allies. The situation with Sudan's own government was much more complicated, as agreements failed between the SAF, RSF and with the international community intervening to demand a ceasefire and allow for safe passageway to evacuate the people trapped in the war, such attempts were continuously made and routinely violated by the clashing sides, with reports of the failure of at least [sixteen ceasefire](#) truces and agreements, as commentators argued that the warring sides use calls for ceasefire as a chance to [increase ground control](#), thus escalating the conflict to strengthen their position on the ground.

The following section contains interviews with Sudanese people who fled the war of April 2023, both citizens and dual nationals who bravely shared their experiences of escape and evacuation. These accounts do not represent all experiences of Sudanese people fleeing the war, but rather aim to present a condensed look into a much larger frame.

Participant One

Calling to mind the day of the 15th the participant remembers being awakened by sounds of gunshots during the morning hours, in the residential area of Al-Amarat in Khartoum (a focal area during the start of conflict) shortly after she received a call from her brother reassuring his family, that although he left for university that same morning, and could hear gunshots surrounding him outside of campus however he found shelter in a small mosque in the university, and will return as soon as the shooting stops. This never happened and by the next day an armed group of RSF invaded the university and began shooting to force-out the people who frantically tried to find cover and escape, with the participant's brother forced to climb over the fence of the university to save his life. That same day, the participant recalls that power was cut in their neighborhood and would remain that way, even following (and after) the 18 days she was stuck inside her home. With no electricity there is usually no access to water either, and for 3 to 4 days the family suffered from an acute water shortage. Although signs of clashes between the military government (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) were beginning to take painful shape, this participant assures that hers and her family's initial thoughts were that this clash would soon be over, as incidents of the past carried somewhat the same degree before being terminated. However this time was different with her brother trying to find his way back home, stopping in his tracks by a sniper's bullet that nearly missed him, he begins to communicate with relatives in a different neighborhood to inquire about the safety of the area and deciding to stay with them, trapped away from his family for a week unable to return.

This first week was crucial as a lot of families began leaving their homes, after recognizing that this clash was more than a struggle that would soon end. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) were taking control of certain roads and residential areas, stopping people in their tracks to intimidate, robbing vehicles, and hiding from the military forces that took control of other residential areas and neighborhoods. Close to the participant's home was a checkpoint controlled by forces of the military (SAF) as she recalls that part of remaining home for over two weeks was the security she felt with it nearby. Within the second week however the sounds of gunshots and

airstrikes were getting louder and closer, with military aircrafts flying closer to residential homes, the piercing sound of which the participant still remembers today, she even recalls seeing a sniper in a neighbor's abandoned home, directly overlooking their front yard, and with the conflict becoming more violent, a decision to leave was made.



A contrast in experiences can be seen clearly with the decision to leave. Sudanese citizens were often conflicted about where to go and which areas were deemed safer than others, rolling the dice of choices as the participant remembers that a destination was never a set-in-stone place, but kept changing three times based on the circumstances they were in, and the time they feared would be wasted in deliberation. Sudanese nationals with residency abroad or dual citizenships were presented with an evacuation plan in advance, outlining where they will go in order to reach the country of citizenship or residency. The participant even recounts stories of her relatives with dual citizenships; one with an American passport, and another with a British passport, the first of whom was evacuated within the first days following the war by an American military aircraft and landed safely in Egypt, while the other, a mother whose son holds a British passport, hand-in-hand she accompanied him to be evacuated together to England, juxtaposed with her own journey she asserts that evacuation isn't the term she would use to describe her experience, but rather escape is a more accurate description, a journey of almost two months to leave for the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

With the first attempt to leave home the participant and her family drove the car down a relatively empty road, they set out to reach a relative's home in a different residential area in Khartoum in order to formulate together an escape plan, but they were ordered by a group of the military (SAF) to return an hour after leaving as the streets were heavily barricaded and unsafe. The second attempt of escape with the luggages still packed from the day before, they headed to a nearby bus station with a plan that quickly unraveled due to news of the unsafe roads leading to their chosen destination, then and there they decided to take the bus to PortSudan. During that journey

RSF forces would stop buses and conduct searches of people's belongings and she recalls being warned to hide cash underneath the garments they wore, never in the bags they carried.

A 12-hours journey to a destination that was overwhelmed with the numbers of people arriving, leading to a shortage in hotels and apartments to rent, the participant and her family found a small motel located in a busy market, and they all shared a single room with only 3 available beds. The next day they searched extensively and found an apartment to rent and spent the following month in PortSudan. That period was one of deliberations as the family planned to leave for Egypt, but had to wait for the youngest son to be granted a visa for entry, however the decision changed when the family received news from relatives abroad that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) opened a small window for visas and the quicker they act the better. As it was not possible to book a direct flight to the UAE, the family planned their flight from PortSudan to Jeddah (in Saudi Arabia) then the UAE, they had to ensure enough layover time in Jeddah as the flights from PortSudan were quite often delayed. Making the move during a state-wide curfew the family finally reached the airport in PortSudan and landed in the country, a few days prior to the temporary halt in visas for Sudanese citizens.

An exhaustive account of deliberations and travels, although the participant reassures that her experience is far better than most. When asked about the expenses of such travels, and how she managed to gather enough cash during a time when bank systems were down, she explains that for days in PortSudan she would go to the Bank in order to withdraw money and after waiting for hours she'd be met with the same line to come back tomorrow, she remembers interacting with many people there in the same predicament telling her that they've been making these visits for weeks. One year later and the feeling of settling into a new country isn't quite there, even though a feeling of gratitude is sensed in the participant, she says that she left her heart back home, worried about the remaining family in Sudan, and grieving the loss of her uncle whose news of passing was a painful shock to a family trying to find ways to communicate with him for over two weeks.

As the fighting intensified in the country amidst growing concern that followed with a list of western countries planning to evacuate their citizens, diplomats and their families, transported by aircrafts was the common sight in the early weeks of the war, but making it to the assembly-points wasn't an easy task, but rather one that was filled with delays, obstacles, and sacrifices.

Participant Two

It is not uncommon for households in Sudan to have sons and/or daughters immigrating abroad in search of employment, better standard of living, and ultimately aspiring to financially support their families back home. An admired devotion that channels the love and responsibility rooted in them since childhood. In the wake of the bombardment of homes, loss of property and assets, it is that same sense of responsibility that many displaced families now lean on, supported entirely by the funds sent to them weekly and monthly by their offspring to cover rent and living expenses. A mother's love is the purest manifestation of the word; earnestly selfless and steadfast, that pushed her son to follow one of the final evacuating aircrafts, even when presented with the chance of accompanying him, she firmly refused to go without the rest of the family who lacked foreign documents and

representation. A second interview participant who at the time was visiting his family from the United Kingdom (UK) was awakened to words about the clash, although he initially dismissed the seriousness of it until watching the news, listening to the two heads of the SAF and RSF spewing out statements of slander and blame to further escalate the conflict, he began conversing with friends in Khartoum where the participant could clearly hear in the background the sounds of gunshots penetrating through the walls, and even stepping outside to the balcony and seeing clouds of dark smoke (due to explosions and tire burnings) engulfing the skies of nearby residential areas. Even though the participant felt that the area in which he lived (i.e. the city of Omdurman) was safer as the clash was heavily concentrated in Khartoum during the time, however by the third day he kept insisting on working-out a plan for the family to leave Sudan safely.



With a residency in the United Kingdom the participant was at an advantageous position; by the second week of the war ongoing communication by his employer provided him with detailed information on safe roads to take in order to reach each city and state outside of Khartoum, updated prices of ferries leaving from Port Sudan, and prices of bus tickets and destinations. The information was not only accurate but crucial at a time where most Sudanese citizens were blindly moving down roads unaware of what lay ahead, with prices of bus transportation accelerating often by the hour. The participant was also asked by his employer to download an application on his work-phone that enables the company to track his movement and ensure his safety. When evacuation plans by the United Kingdom were forming, a military airfield known as Wadi Sayyidna was utilized as a main assembly and evacuation point. The participant's employer reached out to him again confirming that he can get on one of the aircrafts to be transported directly to the UK but he refused to do so without his family, in the absence of foreign representation and after many deliberations the employer affirmed that only his parents can accompany him. A terrible sacrifice which many Sudanese nationals with residency abroad and dual citizenships faced during evacuations, and to be placed in such a position to desert a family member is difficult to comprehend, let alone agree to. Deliberations then proceeded again but time wasn't in anyone's favor, yet the participant's parents never

changed their stance, and kept on insisting that he leaves to the UK, and they will instead make the move to a state North of Sudan, awaiting the visa processing of his brother to eventually leave for Egypt.

With his father and brother driving to drop-off the participant in the military base located North of Omdurman; a ride that should take them a maximum of ten minutes, however was interrupted by 20-checkpoints by the military conducting quick screening, when reaching the base after almost half-an-hour, the military advised the participant's family to await a few hours before making the journey back as clashes were getting more severe down the road. Whilst his family waited for an hour, the participant was taken into the base to be processed and present his residency, he remembers the processing time took about 2-3 hours, and the overall stay in the military base was around 6 hours, where supplies of snacks and water were distributed to people and toys were handed-out to children as they waited with their families. In an effort to organize and smooth the process the people were grouped into priority (1) that was reserved for UK nationals, citizens and residents, and priority (2) were citizens of other European countries whose governments collaborated in efforts with the UK to retrieve them safely, everyone waited inside the shaded tents with fans allocated all around to keep them cool in the hot climate of Sudan.

A privileged position is how the participant describes his experience of evacuation, asserting that Sudanese citizens were never presented with a plan for evacuation, but rather what they relied on was a complete individual effort to escape. He recalls that the worries of gathering finances to cross from one city or residential area to another wasn't at all his experience, trips that hold real danger of coming face-to-face with armed men of RSF, being caught in-between an active gunfire, and having to (in more than a few cases) bribe these armed men to allow families to reach their destination, risking not only a dire shortage in finance but also their lives. Sudanese nationals with residency abroad or dual citizenships had to reach the assigned military bases in order to be evacuated, trips that often required moving from one residential area to reach the base, and once there it was a matter of waiting to be aircrafted, an experience very different to Sudanese citizens. He remembers that his family's stay in North Sudan was a period that extended for 5 months, where he supported them financially in a country not only war-torn, but deep inside a pit of ever-lasting inflation.

Sudan's economy prior to the war was at [a declined state](#) with rampant inflation and shortage in goods and supplies adding to that factories, banks, markets have all been looted and vandalized in the war which pushed the country further into a crisis seen in plummeting public revenues, a standstill in exports, damaged sectors (e.g. industrial, mining, agricultural, service), and lastly a diminishing and devalued currency. Sudan is now experiencing a contraction of [40% in gross domestic product \(GDP\)](#). To further illustrate this, the country's largest sector representing a third of its GDP is the agricultural sector which was severely impacted by a loss of production inputs such as fertilizers and seeds, increase in fuel prices and prolonged periods of power outages led to the farmers' inability to carry-out and complete agricultural operations. The impact in export revenue has seen [a decline of 60%](#) due to the indefinite closure of the country's main airport (i.e. Khartoum International Airport) which in turn led to a decline in the volume of key exports such as livestock and Arabic gum.

Participant Three

Of the greater tragedies of the impact of this war is the unforgiving and relentless erasure of Sudan. With each day that passes, more lives are taken, more homes are broken into and valuables stolen, more historical landmarks are bombed and burned, and the land that once belonged to the Sudanese people is being emptied of them, along with the memories they created and shared together. This participant begins by detailing the day prior to the 15th of April in vivid recollection, taking a moment to ponder on the cherished memories of that final day before the country was changed forever. Picking up an old friend from the airport, going out to dinner, laughing and reminiscing over the past, this was just another night and it gave no warning to what came next.

Awakened by his brother the morning of the next day, he was informed that their next-door neighbor was shot at point-blank range by the RSF for attempting to cross the bridge and reach his office, the RSF men then began to fire multiple gunshots into the air, in order to scare and prevent bystanders from reaching the man who bled out to his death. As tragic and unprovoked as this incident was, unfortunately it is all too common and with that in mind the participant began to communicate with friends and families about Sudan's unpredictable future in the coming days, but no one shared his initial thought of forging an escape plan, and rather felt safer staying inside their homes and away from the streets. However by the third day all of that changed with stores quickly running out of supplies, masses of people moving away from Khartoum into different states, the participant organized a plan with a neighbor to rent a small van and set out to travel to the state of ElGezira.

When making the move early in the morning, the van was stopped by the RSF men who exercised intimidation tactics; with some entering the vehicle to scare the driver and passengers, while others were banging aggressively on the outer sides of the van, the participant remembers that these men were merely kids veiled in scarves covering their faces, holding guns that are bigger in stature than they were, who found a malicious sense of gratification when witnessing the terror they caused. With everyone in the van on the same page; nobody tried to resist or escalate the situation and when the RSF left the van to regroup and discuss what to do next, seeing the dead bodies in the roads and burned vehicles the driver made the immediate decision to drive in full speed, saving everyone's lives in that van including his own.

A journey that usually takes 2 hours lasted double that time, and when the participant and his family arrived safely in ElGezira, he remembered the overwhelming and joyous feeling that took over where everyone began embracing each other, grateful for living to see a new day. The participant's stay in ElGezira lasted around 3 weeks, where he recalls being blessed for having a home to stay in, a case that was different for the people he met there where he observed many arriving to the state with only the terrible need to find safety but no plan on how they'll support their stay, he even recalls seeing a family sitting by a pavement with a young girl crying in her mother's lap, this was one of many stories of families who had no place to stay and no money to rent a place either, essentially no one was prepared for the financial burden of surviving the war as an internally displaced person.



By the third week of his stay the participant decided to accompany a friend and document a film together focused on the current circumstances facing the people of Sudan, they began visiting pharmacies and hospitals to get a sense of what the situation was truly like, and what the people would be in dire need of in the future, in one pharmacy he was told that the country is running out of life-saving medications (e.g. insulins), and once the medications in this pharmacy are sold-out, the place will indefinitely shut down. In another hospital they met a doctor who spoke about the gruesome crimes of sexual violence committed by the RSF, with a number of cases transferred to the hospital many of which were of minors, the participant then recalls a heartbreaking case of a 12 year old girl treated in the hospital after being violatngly raped.

During that third week the participant began forming a plan to leave the country, setting out to Port Sudan with a few friends, he remained there for 3 months deliberating on his destination then deciding to leave for the UAE believing that the chances of finding employment were higher over there. Making the move to another state known as Halfa, he stayed there for almost 2 weeks with a family who hosted him and a few friends, bonded by the circumstances and trying to forge a sense of normalcy, they created a beautiful routine for the children of the family where the participant and his friends would provide English lessons each afternoon, the family were also in Halfa for the purpose of planning their own journey out of Sudan. By the second week the participant received a message from his brother that his visa for the UAE was granted. He then traveled to the state of Al Qadarif to notarise his documents with the necessary stamps, arriving at the bus station there before traveling to Ethiopia where he was set to fly to the UAE.

The two friends who shared the terror of escaping the war, were later divided by very different fates. One of the friends who accompanied the participant to ElGezira was visiting the country for a couple of weeks to gather a few important documents before flying back to France, but with the sudden break of the war he was stuck in the

country like many others. When the evacuation plans were beginning to take shape, a Whatsapp group was formed by the officials responsible for evacuation, and all citizens of European countries, dual citizens and residents were added by their personal numbers to this group except for the participant's friend who at time didn't have his residency, but his wife who is a french national was back in France communicating tirelessly with the embassy and its officials to add her husband to the list of people to be evacuated. With her pleas finally heard he was added to the group and communicated with whilst in ElGezira to travel to the assembly point of evacuation in a military airfield in Omdruman, a difficult thing to do whilst being in a different state altogether, with risks of unsafety in the journey back, the participant's friend communicated his concerns to the officials and they assured him to await further instructions, as another evacuation plan was underway and formulating from PortSudan.

Once the confirmation arrived the participant accompanied his friend to a bus station in a different state known as Medani with many buses transporting people throughout the different states, the participant remembers the chaotic scenes in that bus station with families frantically filling the seats of buses, and the exploitation by the drivers that was difficult to stomach. The participant noted that every driver priced the ticket however they pleased, and with the bank systems down cash was in dire shortage and desperately sought after. There the participant's friend found a bus to PortSudan, he remembers his friend paid the excessively high price of 100 US dollars for a single ticket, when reaching PortSudan he stayed the night in a hotel before boarding the ship the next day to Saudi Arabia, then taking the plane to Jordan and at last arriving in France.

Part III

The forgotten people

In witnessing and escaping a deadly war, all of those who fled share a similar sense of gratitude for making it through that difficult journey, and are gradually trying to find their footing once again. But what of the people left behind? The financial burden that came with the sudden displacement could only be afforded by a selected few who had savings to rely on and families abroad that offered help, however this is not the case for everyone where many of the people who initially fled the war into different states within the country, ended up making the journey back due to the inability to keep-up with the skyrocketing prices for accommodation. According to one interview participant, the rent of apartments in ElGezira started at 100-150 US dollars and kept increasing at uncontrolled rates, this ultimately led to families deciding to return to Khartoum risking their lives yet again. To put this into perspective, [when converted](#) 1 US dollar stands at 586 Sudanese pounds.

There is also the problem of visa issuance that saw people enduring [months-long processing time](#). Egypt is a crucial example to present, in 2004 Sudan and Egypt signed a [Four Freedom Agreement](#) that guaranteed citizens of both countries the freedom of movement, residency, work, and property ownership. The first of the agreement is ensuring unrestricted and greater mobility for citizens of those countries across borders, where women, children and the elderly from Sudan were exempted from entry visas. However 2 months after the outbreak of the war, in June of 2023 Egypt imposed a [new and strict rule](#) upon Sudanese citizens to obtain visas, claiming the aim is to regulate rather than limit entry. While the prior and original agreement demanded men aged 16-49 to obtain entry

visas, separating families during the war by leaving fathers and sons behind, this new ruling deliberately denied all Sudanese citizens entry, leaving a population helpless and in grave conditions.



Wadi Halfa and Port Sudan saw [thousands of Sudanese citizens flood the Egyptian consulates](#) that were unequipped to handle the overwhelming numbers of applications, resulting in longer waiting times while applicants struggled to find accommodation, and instead resorting to sleeping in the streets and public spaces (e.g. mosques and schools) with the overcrowding numbers of people in those territories leading to shortages in food supplies and critical medications. While Sudanese citizens placed their hope on the relations of the two countries, Egypt's unforeseen new ruling left many stranded for days and weeks in the border crossings (i.e. Argeen and Qastal-Ashkit), terribly suffering conditions of unbearable heat with a clear absence of aid and medical units resulting in [people dying while queuing in the borders](#), awaiting to be processed to enter Egypt.

Egypt is a large donor-recipient of the European Union (EU) only recently in March of this year [8 billion euro in aid package](#) was signed and announced in a deal to assist the country's economic pressures as conflict across borders and neighboring countries festers. The deal aims to foster such ideals as fundamental freedoms, human rights, and gender equality in the country with the goal to improve conditions and standards of living, and ultimately manage to curb and stop the flow of refugees to Europe. Egypt was even hailed as a pillar of security, moderation and peace by the Union, this follows [a track of donations](#) from 80 million euro in October of 2022 to assist Egypt with its operational capacity regarding coast and border guards, and in 2023 with 5 million euro in humanitarian aid, followed with an additional 20 million euro pledged for new arrivals from Sudan to cover food, water, sanitation and hygiene items. The EU-Egypt migration/cooperation donations have been [criticized before](#) for lacking a comprehensive humanitarian program, with Egypt leaning on the donations to strengthen its image as a regional leader, simultaneously securing the funds to pour on its many domestic projects, whilst the EU's unyielding support has reinforced and even legitimized the country's harsher border management practices.

The difficulties in obtaining an entry visa to Egypt has led many Sudanese citizens to illegally cross the borders with the help of smugglers, as they risk dangerous routes along the desert, rocky roads and mountains, where they are hidden onto the back of pick-up trucks, clinging onto ropes to prevent them from falling off a vehicle moving in full-speed ahead. In April of 2024 an [investigative report](#) emerged that showed thousands of Sudanese people were detained in a discreet network of military bases where Egyptian authorities exerted a nationwide, systematic effort to deny Sudanese people the right to seek asylum, many of whom were interviewed and shared their experiences about the treatment of the border guards who chased them, shot at them, arrested and deported them in mass campaigns without a fair or legal process. This is a clear violation and breach of Egypt's obligations under international refugee law and its core principle of non-refoulement.

Not long after this, in June of 2024 Sudanese people died while attempting to cross the border into Egypt, many of whom died of heat strokes and dehydration, it was [reported that between 24 and 50 died](#) including children and women with numbers expected to be much higher as more bodies are being recovered and actively delivered to hospitals across the border in Aswan. This is not the first incident of Sudanese people dying while attempting to cross the borders, with [past reports](#) released of several dead through smuggling. Sadly, the experience of those who do make it into the country isn't any better, since April of 2023 a staggering number of 300,000 new Sudanese arrivals were registered as [refugees with Egypt's UNHCR](#) with an additional 250,000 awaiting registration, in a country already struggling with high inflation impacting prices of goods and accommodation, UNHCR provides families with a [one-time emergency cash payment](#) that fails to sustain families long-term. Threats of homelessness, eviction due to families' overcrowding in small apartments, and an inability to find employment or manage expenses has led many [Sudanese people to abandon Egypt](#) and the hopes they had of beginning anew, to instead return back to war-torn Sudan.

In May of 2024 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that Sudanese people within and outside the country, who fled and are fleeing the war are all likely to be in need of international refugee protection under two humanitarian conventions (i.e. Article 1(2) of the 1969 OAU Convention, and the Cartagena Declaration) which states all persons fleeing conflict should be allowed access to safe territory with assistance on their onward travel. The UN Agency shared [a document](#) calling on countries to allow non-discriminatory access to their territories including those with no possession of identification or passports, to ensure fair and efficient processing for those seeking to apply for international protection, respecting the principle of non-refoulement, and suspending forcible return of people. The [principle of nonrefoulement](#) absolutely prohibits governments from forcibly returning people to a country where they are at risk of persecution, torture, and irrecoverable harm.

With an 8 billion euro deal backed by the support of a powerful international institution that claims Egypt as a partner, and expected to fulfill its obligations to observe the people's right to non-refoulement and to uphold their human rights, yet in this very-same extravagant deal [200 million euro](#) are accounted for in migration control making it clear what is fueling this EU/Egypt partnership. With a mass deportation of thousands on their way to

seeking asylum there is no telling what other inhumane practices the country is capable of next, and it does not start or stop by the borders; [deportation campaigns by Egyptian authorities](#) are carried out since August of 2023, with nationwide arrests charged by xenophobia and targeting mostly Sudanese people with darker skin tones who are detained in terrible conditions and denied access to their families, lawyers or even the UNHCR before being prosecuted with charges of ‘irregular presence’ -even though they are in fact registered with the UNHCR or awaiting renewal dates of their residence cards- and under such false acquisitions they are deported.



[More than 25 humanitarian organizations](#) signed a joint statement calling on the Egyptian authorities to end arbitrary detentions and forced deportation of Sudanese people. Human Rights Watch penned [a joint letter](#) to the European Union outlining steps of intervening and taking urgent action regarding Sudan, some of which is detailing ways to engage with the warring sides to end the war, safeguard human rights, and increase emergency funding to the country. The Global Detention Project is another actor that has written [an urgent appeal](#) to stop the detention and refoulement of Sudanese refugees in Egypt, asking to remove all visa requirements for those fleeing the war. These are but a few examples of humanitarian appeals that saw no response whilst Egypt perpetuates human rights violations and faces no consequences, largely due to the proximity, financial support and silent compliance of an international institution, all the while more Sudanese lives are lost inside this vicious cycle; either awaiting their visas in a deteriorating country, or illegally crossing the borders risking death or deportation.

It is truly unfortunate that it took a year of a catastrophic war for a UN Agency to reach an obvious realization that people fleeing a war are in need of international protection, a statement that came vacant of assertion and enforced consequences, while Sudanese citizens are still experiencing the discrimination and baffling inaction regarding the atrocities of this war, not to mention the plight facing an-already forgotten population in Sudan; the pre-existing 3.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) now scattered across borders.

The unfolding crisis

According to the World Food Programme (WFP) Sudan is at risk of becoming the [world's largest hunger crisis](#) where 90% of the population are facing emergency levels of hunger, this is an estimate of over 25 million Sudanese people who are displaced across the country, and in the borders of South Sudan and Chad. Zamzam camp in North Darfur suffers from a critical malnutrition crisis as reported by the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) where [a mass screening](#) of over 46,000 children was performed with results showing 30% of the children suffering from acute malnutrition, with a child dying every 2 hours in the camp. 16,000 pregnant and breastfeeding mothers were also screened with results showing that 33% of the group are acutely malnourished, the [report](#) shows that the figures are double the numbers of an emergency threshold, indicating a life-threatening crisis within the camp. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [reported](#) that two thirds of the population in Sudan now lack access to health care, with three quarters of the health facilities in the country are out of service leading to a widespread outbreak of diseases such as cholera, measles and malaria.



The blockage and prevention of humanitarian aid delivery and access is another problem triggering the crisis, the WFP [reported](#) that authorities revoked authorizations for cross-border delivery of aid from Chad to Darfur, where over 1 million people in West and Central Darfur are suffering from severe hunger and malnutrition. As the war intensifies across the different regions in the country, the delivery of humanitarian aid turns into a difficult and even deadly process, the United Nations alongside different aid organizations have decided to [temporarily halt and in other cases scale back](#) operations in areas that had fallen under the control of RSF, such is the city-capital of Wad Madani in ElGezira which was once a key center for aid assistance but due to the escalating violence this led to several international organizations abandoning the area entirely. Wad Madani is also a key agricultural land of the country and became a cornerstone to many businesses lately such as the banking sector. During March and April of 2024 [an estimate of 860,000](#) in need of urgent assistance did not receive it due to the violence and

bureaucratic blockages. Funding is also another serious hindrance, the United Nations [2024 Humanitarian Response for Sudan](#) appealed for 2.7 billion to support urgent humanitarian assistance to the county, so far only 16% of that amount was funded.

Sudan is the fastest unfolding crisis in the world, with each day carrying more atrocities and suffering as the fighting grows and spreads into more regions, only recently on the 10th of May clashes between the RSF and SAF resulted in [the injury of 700 civilians with 85 reported dead](#) in the city of AlFasher in Northern Darfur, and less than a month later on the 5th of June the RSF attacked Wad Al-Noora village in ElGezira [killing over 100 people](#). It is impossible to think that pleas for humanitarian intervention could be heard outside of the frame of politics and the global agenda. Sudan is an important geopolitical interest point for external actors, the first of many is the Red Sea coastline where countries like the U.S, Russia, the UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, China and Turkey seek to hold control over. This coastline is [rich in mineral resources and holds incredible potential](#) for agricultural production, investment in battery industries and renewable energy. Military engagement is another way for outside actors to exercise influence and increase their powers internally, Russia for example channels that through [arm sales](#) and is reportedly providing surface-to-air missiles to the RSF, and China is another example of establishing [naval bases](#) to expand political and military power abroad. The UAE is another country that is exercising major influence by [covertly and continuously supplying arms](#) to the RSF, further allowing the faction to largely overpower the SAF in battleground. The country has long ties with the leader of RSF who controls Kebel Amer mines in Darfur and smuggles gold into the UAE where its support extends from [direct funding to supplies](#) of logistics and military equipment. Russia's footprint is present as well in the gold-mining industry with a mercenary company whose owner, Wagner [holds ties](#) to the Russian Defense Ministry and was reported in multiple cases to have influenced suppression of Sudanese political protests such as the protests in 2019 that circulated photos on social media where a Russian kremlin-vehicles linked to Wagner PMC was [present](#) on the ground.

The international community's neglect highlighted in the media's disregard of Sudan's news, and the blank statements serving as lip service from large international organizations is reminiscent of [a profile](#) shared by The Center for Disaster Philanthropy in 2023, that examined the sharp difference in reactions between the war in Sudan and Ukraine where the latter saw immediate attention and media coverage, funds poured in profusely that by the 100-day mark the grants topped 1.2 billion US dollars excluding pledges that added another 700,000 US dollars, all of which was being tracked by a philanthropy disaster metric that observes noticeably significant grants made for a country, a case that never happened with Sudan. Furthermore the contributions of governments to both countries saw Ukraine receiving in 2022 a total of 3.73 billion US dollars from the amount needed of 4.29 US dollars, this is 86.8% of that total amount which was later increased by an additional 1 billion US dollars in 2023, whereas Sudan's first [humanitarian appeal in 2023](#) by the United Nations; a call for a total of 2.57 billion US dollars was later finalized with half of that needed amount. This is but a small snapshot, the arms-wide-open support and outcries for Ukraine was an incredible display of the world's capacity for empathy, the European Union [embraced the country](#) as a member-state, Ukrainian citizens were exempt from short-stay visas, and the

Union swiftly activated the Temporary Protection Directive to provide Ukrainian citizens with immediate protection.

These accounts and estimates echo the merit the world assigns people of certain nationalities as opposed to others. Even a capacity for empathy is deeply biased and now documented in numerous planned evacuations prioritizing certain citizenships, and leaving behind a starving population on the brink of death, proving once again that an individual's value in this world is based on their geography. It is simply untrue anymore to speak of this war as a conflict between two sides, when Sudan holds crucial resources for external actors that continue to benefit from driving the violence farther. This war has doomed the country with mass killings, destruction and the displacement of millions of people to name only a few examples. But it is the urgency in action the world has denied Sudan resulting in the rising death toll, and the unfolding humanitarian disaster mirroring the brutal apathy Sudan is experiencing as its citizens remain unworthy of the world's watchful care.