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TÜRKİYE - SUDAN
RELATIONS

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From the Editor in-Chief

The historical, political, and economic interrelations between Türkiye and Sudan are complex and multifaceted. Both countries have formally acknowledged each other on a diplomatic level. Türkiye was among the first countries to recognize Sudan, which gained its independence on January 1, 1956. On this occasion, the Embassy of the Republic of Türkiye in Khartoum was inaugurated on 1 January 1957. Furthermore, Sudan's embassy in Ankara was inaugurated on 14 September 2009. The relationship between Türkiye and Sudan is also commensurate with the level of international organizations. Türkiye and Sudan have longstanding and multifaceted relations, encompassing agriculture, energy, health, security, and education.

However, the official visit of the President of the Republic of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to Sudan on December 24-26, 2017, signified a strategic shift in the bilateral relationship, particularly in terms of political and security cooperation. In accordance with the aforementioned framework, the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC) was constituted. In this context, a plethora of agreements, memoranda of understanding, and protocols have been signed and implemented in numerous areas related to economics, military, culture, science, education, and agriculture.

Türkiye's exports to Sudan encompass a wide range of goods, including machinery, iron and steel, automotive components, boilers, iron and steel goods, plastic products, non-woven clothing, and paper and cardboard. In terms of imports, Sudan's trade with Türkiye includes oilseeds and fruits, sugar and sugar products, raw hides, lacquer, gum, resin, essential oils, and cotton. Furthermore, Türkiye, through the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), a public diplomacy institution, implements development aid projects throughout Sudan. The construction of a modern 150-bed teaching hospital in Darfur-Nyala, the Nyala Sudan-Türkiye Training and Research Hospital, is a prime example of one of Türkiye's most comprehensive foreign aid projects.

It is evident that the relationship between Türkiye and Sudan is characterised by an educational dimension. The Türkiye Scholarships programme, administered by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), provided scholarships to 840 Sudanese students between 1992 and 2024. At present, scholarships are provided to 280 Sudanese students. This scholarship programme, an application of Türkiye's educational diplomacy, enables Sudanese students to pursue their studies in Turkey, thereby strengthening the ties between the two countries in the political, economic, educational, social and cultural spheres, and cultivating future citizen diplomats.

The seeds of relations between the two countries were sown during the Ottoman Empire, and today, historical ties are established in a multifaceted way. The Almanac Diplomatique has issued a call for contributions to its second issue, which will provide a comprehensive examination of Türkiye-Sudan relations from historical, political, economic, cultural, and security perspectives. This issue, guest-edited by Dr. Tunç Demirtaş, a faculty member in the Department of International Relations at Bursa Uludağ University, aims to examine the process since the establishment of diplomatic contacts within the framework of development, security, and diplomacy in light of regional and global dynamics. The objective of this study is to establish the foundations for an interdisciplinary approach to evaluating the strategic implications of relations between Türkiye and Sudan, both bilaterally and in the context of the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, and the Middle East.

This issue offers a comprehensive and multidisciplinary examination of ongoing conflicts, state policies, and societal responses, shedding light on the political, legal, and humanitarian challenges at the heart of Sudan. I hope this issue will serve as a meaningful contribution to Türkiye-Sudan relations.

Asst. Prof. Recep Şehitoğlu
Gaziantep University

Guest Editor's Note

Reading and Rethinking the Sudan Crisis

The latest issue aims to conceptualise the multifaceted crisis that Sudan has been embroiled in since 2023, seeking to provide a more comprehensive analysis than a mere chronicle of the present conflict. The study explores the continuity of the state, debates on sovereignty, the production of legitimacy by armed actors, the political economy of humanitarian disasters, and the intersection of regional competition with conflict dynamics. The primary concern of the guest editor in preparing this issue was that addressing the Sudanese crisis solely under the heading of a civil war would be incomplete. This crisis must be regarded as a crisis of the institutional state, a crisis of the social contract, a regional security crisis, and an increasingly evident crisis of international intervention and proxy rule.

A seminal threshold of the Sudanese conflict is the dissolution of the state's legitimate security apparatus and the erosion of public authority. At this juncture, the nature of the armed competition that is emerging on the ground is of critical importance. The crisis, while eroding the capacity of the institutional state, simultaneously encourages armed actors to produce de facto spheres of sovereignty. In this process, RSF's transformation of cities into conflict zones, its practices aimed at establishing public order by force of arms, and its approach of disrupting institutional functioning in areas of control have deepened a

picture that directly targets the continuity of the state. Therefore, the conflict can be understood as indicative of a broader transformation, encompassing the erosion of state capacity, the collapse of public services, the commodification of security, and the institutionalisation of a war economy.

The second key point of the current issue is that the humanitarian catastrophe is not a secondary consequence, but a central component of the crisis. The displacement of millions, the deterioration of food security, the collapse of the health system, and the disruption of educational continuity have been shown to increase the social cost and make post-conflict state-building more challenging (UNHCR, 2022). As the humanitarian crisis intensifies, the capacity of local solidarity networks is gradually diminishing. This has resulted in the emergence of new vulnerabilities with regard to both social resilience and political legitimacy. Therefore, a more nuanced understanding of the situation in Sudan can be achieved by considering the humanitarian crisis in conjunction with broader processes such as the management of the war, the shrinking of civilian space, and the militarization of the fragile economy.

The third line of reference pertains to the regional and international context of the crisis. It is evident that Sudan is situated at a crossroads of intense regional competition. This is due to a number of factors, including its geographical location,

proximity to the Red Sea basin, cross-border trade networks, and resource-economic balance. This underscores the significance of external incentives in prolonging the conflict and the channels that fuel the conflict economy. This issue focuses on studies that move beyond mere speculation on the nature and scale of external support. Instead, it offers a more analytical perspective through mechanisms such as arms flows, financial networks, logistical routes, diplomatic legitimization strategies, and information operations/disinformation. The objective of this study is to transcend the binary question of the existence of external intervention and to instead demonstrate which instruments of intervention engender the crisis.

The fourth line of reference pertains to deliberations on peace and political transition. The Sudanese example serves to underscore the notion that negotiation processes are not confined to the mere act of convening at the negotiating table. In circumstances where armed actors hold politics hostage, security is fragmented, and de facto areas of sovereignty are established, calls for ceasefires can often result in the freezing of conflict; however, they do not ensure a resolution. The present issue thus seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate on the question of whether security or politics should be prioritised, not as a rigid dichotomy but as a comprehensive discussion encompassing sub-topics such as institutional reconstruction, disarmament/integration models, transitional justice, the protection of civil space, and the reproduction of local legitimacy. The establishment of peace is not only achievable through the cessation of conflict, but also through the restoration of the state, society, and economy. It is posited that this issue makes a dual contribution to the reader. Firstly, it proposes an analytical framework that does not reduce the Sudanese crisis to a single cause, but rather examines internal dynamics, the strategies of armed actors, societal vulnerabilities, and external interactions together.

Secondly, it poses the question of “what should be done?” for policymakers and actors working in the field, eschewing simplistic prescriptions. This includes the following measures: securing humanitarian access, strengthening civil protection mechanisms, cutting off networks that fuel the conflict economy, supporting local capacity, and considering the institutional foundations of post-conflict reconstruction in advance.

It is both a pleasure and a great honor for us that the foreword of this issue, which focuses on Sudan–Türkiye relations, was written by H.E. Abdel-Fattah Al-Burhan, Chairman of the Sovereignty Council of Sudan. Mr. Chairman approaches the crisis not merely as a confrontation between rival armed groups, but as a foundational challenge to state sovereignty, political legitimacy, and national unity. The foreword demonstrates how the erosion of state authority, external interference, and the proliferation of armed actors have intensified insecurity, humanitarian collapse, and social fragmentation. It argues that sustainable peace requires the restoration of legitimate state authority and the dismantling of parallel centres of armed power as a prerequisite for any meaningful political process. In addition, the foreword draws attention to the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe and highlights the role of humanitarian diplomacy and social resilience in post-conflict recovery. Taken together, the analysis underscores that Sudan’s reconstruction and stabilisation depend on sovereignty-centred solutions, inclusive national dialogue, and strategic partnerships—particularly with Türkiye—grounded in respect for territorial integrity and regional stability.

Tirab Abbkar Tirab’s study addresses the border disputes between Sudan and South Sudan by tracing their historical roots, identifying key contested areas, and assessing the broader security implications of these tensions. It situates the dispute within national, regional,

and international contexts, while also evaluating prospects for future relations between the two states. The analysis further considers the potential role of Türkiye as a mediator in supporting conflict resolution and regional stability.

Waleed Mohamed's contribution examines the war that began on 15 April 2023 through its social dimensions and structural consequences. It demonstrates how the conflict has reshaped identities, power relations, and patterns of social organisation, accelerating a shift from national frameworks toward tribal and regional affiliations. The study argues that the war represents a foundational rupture with Sudan's pre-conflict order, marking the emergence of a profoundly reconfigured social and political landscape in which state-based institutions and networks have been displaced by armed, pre-state, and ethnically rooted formations.

Focusing on the period between 2023 and 2025, Miada Bashir Mohamed Abdallah analyses how armed conflict has transformed Sudan's media landscape. The study explores changes in information flows, journalistic practices, and public trust, showing how media institutions have become both instruments and targets of warfare. By situating Sudan as a critical case, the article sheds light on the interaction between war, media manipulation, and the erosion of credible public discourse in contemporary conflict settings.

Esin Güzel's study explores the historical and cultural foundations of relations between Sudan and Türkiye by focusing on the legacy of Ottoman rule in Sudan and its enduring impact. It traces how Ottoman-era administrative, educational, and social practices shaped Sudanese society and contributed to a shared historical memory. The analysis demonstrates how this legacy continues to inform contemporary Türkiye–Sudan relations through cultural connections, humanitarian

engagement, and diplomatic cooperation, offering a *longue durée* perspective on bilateral ties.

The off-topic article by Ebrar Şebin addresses the implications of contradictory counterterrorism approaches adopted by Western European states toward the PKK/YPG. It examines how international cooperation with the group's Syrian branch has contributed to perceptions of legitimacy and facilitated the recruitment and participation of foreign terrorist fighters from Europe. By focusing on the security consequences of these dynamics, the study highlights the risks posed by returning and redeployed foreign fighters during and after their involvement in the organisation.

In the present issue of *Almanac Diplomatique*, two additional analytical contributions are featured.

Younis Ahmed Adam Yahya's analysis, entitled "The Deepening Crisis of War in Sudan: Collapse in Darfur and International Balances," examines the armed conflict that erupted on 15 April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Focusing on the fall of El-Fashir and the ethnically motivated massacres in El-Jeneina, the study situates the conflict among the most severe humanitarian crises of the century, marked by mass displacement and the accelerating collapse of the state. Moving beyond a local power struggle, the analysis demonstrates how the war has evolved into a broader contest for regional influence, with the United Arab Emirates providing logistical and military support to the RSF, while Egypt and Saudi Arabia align with the SAF. Despite repeated warnings from the international community regarding the risks of ethnic cleansing and war crimes, these externally reinforced dynamics persist, further eroding Sudan's territorial integrity and regional security balances.

The issue also features Subhi Adam's analysis, "Sudan as a Country at Risk of Fragmentation," which examines the country's ongoing political and social crises through the conceptual lens of state fragmentation and the weakening of territorial authority. The study traces structural fragilities within Sudan's political and administrative institutions since independence and links them to the dynamics of the civil war that erupted in 2023 amid sustained internal conflicts and external interventions. It concludes by outlining possible scenarios for Sudan's future, highlighting the risks and trajectories associated with continued institutional erosion.

In the present issue of *Almanac Diplomatique*, two book reviews are also included.

The first review, authored by Suliman Nasir Ibrahim Abdallah, examines *Sudanese Folk Riddles*, a seminal work by Abdullah al-Tayyib. Rather than approaching the book solely as a collection of folkloric material, the review situates it as a cultural document that illuminates the moral values, oral traditions, and historical memory of Sudanese society. It highlights the pedagogical, sociological, and linguistic dimensions of the work, underscoring its significance in preserving an oral heritage at risk of disappearance and in revealing Sudan's multi-layered identity as a historical bridge between the Arab-Islamic world and African civilisations.

The second review, written by Abdullatif Hüseyin Mazi, focuses on *Politics to Practice: Türkiye–Africa Relations*, edited by Tunç Demirtaş. The review traces the evolution of Türkiye's engagement with the African continent from the 1998 Africa Initiative Action Plan to the institutionalisation of a strategic partnership in 2008. It examines this relationship across areas such as security, energy, economics, and cultural diplomacy, conceptualising Türkiye's presence in Africa not as a temporary or purely humanitarian endeavour, but as an increasingly

institutionalised and deepening partnership model. In doing so, the review offers a substantive analytical contribution to the literature on contemporary Turkish foreign policy.

Finally, a conscious decision was taken to prioritise the perspectives of Sudanese academics, researchers, and experts with field experience in the preparation of this issue. It is the view presented here that the individuals wielding influence over the future of Sudan should not be those who merely observe the crisis from a distance, but rather those who are in direct contact with the segments of society that are shouldering the greatest burden of the crisis and who possess an intimate understanding of the local reality. It is hoped that this issue will make a lasting contribution to the literature on understanding Sudan, and that it will also make the humanitarian devastation on the ground visible, thus fostering discussions on more just, realistic, and implementable solutions. Last but not least, this issue is dedicated to the memory of the innocent civilians who lost their lives in Sudan and Gaza. It is hoped that it will serve as a call to a shared conscience for humanity, reminding us of the inviolability of human life.

Dr. Tunç Demirtaş

Bursa Uludağ University & Researcher at SETA

Foreword

Abdel Fatah al-Burhan

Chairman of the Sovereignty Council of Sudan

Sudan



A Framework on the Sudan Crisis: Sovereignty, Legitimacy, and Reconstruction

Sudan today is facing not only an internal conflict, but also a broader test concerning state sovereignty, the society's sense of unity, and the future of the regional order. The crisis we are experiencing cannot be read merely as a confrontation between two armed formations. As state authority has been damaged, the security architecture has eroded, public services have been disrupted, and debates over external actors' interventions have deepened, the crisis has evolved into a "foundational moment" that will shape Sudan's political future.

Within this framework, my first priority is the preservation of Sudan's territorial integrity and the continuity of the state. The will of the Sudanese people must prevail over any militia logic and over networks of power connected to personal interests or external ties. The historical and constitutional responsibility of the Sudanese Armed Forces is to prevent faits accomplis that could drive the country toward fragmentation and to restore the minimum security environment that can make a civilian transition possible. This is not to make war an end in itself; it is to recognize that a lasting political solution cannot be built without eliminating the reality of "armed rebellion" that generated the war in the first place.

Why do we say "security first"?

Calls for a ceasefire and negotiations in Sudan are, of course, important. Yet in a context where the gun has taken politics hostage on the ground, a negotiating table gains meaning only through certain principles.

At the outset of the war, we were open in good faith to negotiation initiatives in order to prevent Sudan's fragmentation and to stop the bloodshed; for this reason, we participated in the talks in Jeddah. However, for good-faith efforts to yield results, there is a basic condition: armed formations must abandon any claim to parallel sovereignty vis-à-vis the state's legitimate authority.

Even today, the essence of our conditions has not changed: withdrawal from occupied areas, the removal of heavy weapons from the equation, and the termination of any separate power center operating outside the state's chain of command. Without these conditions, a ceasefire cannot become more than a temporary pause; it freezes the conflict but does not resolve it. Our aim is not to "manage" the conflict, but to return Sudan to the line of an institutional state.

The Issue of External Interference and Regional Calculations

It is impossible to deny the impact of external support networks in prolonging the Sudan crisis and increasing its cost. Sudan's position is clear: Sudan belongs to the Sudanese. A solution must not be shaped by an externally imposed equation, but by Sudanese-Sudanese dialogue and national priorities.

In this context, our assessment that certain external actors have been supporting the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) at various levels has been reinforced by realities on the ground and by the findings at our disposal. As long as external support continues, the war economy is nourished, ending the war becomes more difficult, and the repair of the social fabric is delayed. Sudan's national security cannot be turned into a "carrier line" for regional rivalries.

The Humanitarian Catastrophe: The Heaviest Face of the Crisis

Civilians are paying the highest price of this war. Millions have been displaced; cities have been worn down, infrastructure has collapsed, and essential ser-

vices have come to a standstill. International data indicate that the number of people forcibly displaced since the outbreak of the conflict has reached into the tens of millions. This picture shows that Sudan is not only undergoing a security crisis, but also a development and state-capacity crisis.

For this reason, “humanitarian diplomacy” is not a slogan for us, but a necessity: ensuring humanitarian access, restoring health services, protecting displaced persons, and making education and food systems functional again. Local initiatives and volunteer networks that sustain social resilience also play a vital role in this process; preserving this capacity is a precondition for Sudan’s reconstruction.

Strategic Partnership With Türkiye: The Post-War Horizon

As I emphasized during my engagements in Ankara, relations between Türkiye and Sudan are historical and rooted in fraternity. Türkiye’s keeping the Sudan issue on the international agenda and demonstrating solidarity with the Sudanese people is a stance whose value is understood even more clearly in difficult times.

The period ahead is not only about the cessation of fighting; it is also Sudan’s reconstruction period. This reconstruction will encompass a very wide range of areas, from infrastructure to energy, from agriculture to ports, and from health and mining to education. Türkiye’s institutional capacity, private-sector dynamism, and experience working in the field offer a meaningful basis for partnership in Sudan’s recovery. This is why we are considering facilitative steps such as improvements in the visa regime for businesspeople that would open the way for investment and trade.

Regional Order and The Principle of Sovereignty: The Somaliland Example

Finally, we observe that steps which erode the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity in our region generate instability in the long term. Debates that begin in one place through “recognition” can turn into precedents that encourage separatism in other geographies. I believe such developments may affect not only one country, but the entire regional balance.

Sudan’s objective is clear: to re-establish the state’s legitimate authority, ensure the protection of civilians, and move toward an inclusive political process on a secure basis. Cooperation with friendly countries is important in this process; however, the compass of the solution will be Sudan’s sovereignty and the shared future of the Sudanese people.

In this context, I hope that this piece will serve as a foreword to the Türkiye–Sudan themed issue to be published in our journal. I trust that the perspective articulated here—centered on Sudan’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, social cohesion, and reconstruction—will provide a shared intellectual ground for academic circles, policymakers, and practitioners alike, and contribute to constructive debate and sustainable solutions. I am firmly confident that Türkiye–Sudan relations, shaped by historical ties, mutual respect, and solidarity, will deepen further in the period ahead and evolve toward a more advanced level of strategic cooperation. It is my sincere hope that this issue will not only help illuminate the complexities of today’s crises, but also offer a modest contribution to the construction of a more stable, just, and shared future for Sudan and the wider region.

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Future Scenarios for the Abyei Dispute Between Sudan and South Sudan: Permanent Solutions or the Continuation of the Conflict?

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Abstract

This study examines the border conflicts between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan, which seceded in 2011. The introduction provides a general overview of ongoing border disputes across Africa. Later, a detailed framework is developed around the specific territorial disputes between the two countries. The study discusses the historical background and root causes of the conflict, followed by an analysis of the efforts made to resolve it, including national and regional dimensions. Furthermore, the impact of the dispute on national, regional, and international security is evaluated from a security perspective. Predictions regarding the future relationship between the two countries are also provided, along with recommendations for conflict resolution. In conclusion, the study explores the potential role of the Republic of Türkiye in facilitating a settlement, given its successful diplomatic relations with both Sudan and South Sudan, as well as in the region.

Keywords: Africa, Sudan, South Sudan, Türkiye, Border Disputes, Abyei Region.

Introduction

Border conflicts between African countries are among the most prominent manifestations of political and security instability on the continent and fuel ongoing civil wars and regional conflicts. The main causes of these conflicts are several interconnected factors, including historical, economic, ethnic, and geopolitical factors. Foremost among these are the borders inherited from colonialism. Most of the current borders were imposed by European colonial powers (particularly Britain, France and Belgium) during the Berlin Conference of 1884--1885, without considering ethnic or geographical realities. This led to the division of peoples and tribes across different states or the integration of warring groups into a single state. This situation can be described as a failure to establish

proper borders. Colonial borders were not accurately drawn on the ground; instead, they were often based on superficial maps or vague agreements, leading to subsequent conflicts over border areas. In addition, political and geopolitical reasons, economic reasons, ethnic and cultural reasons, and weak state institutions are also among the factors involved.

However, the presence of natural resources such as oil, gold, diamonds or water in border regions makes control of these areas a direct source of conflict. Indeed, the dispute over the Abyei Region between Sudan and South Sudan, which is the subject of our article, is one of the most prominent examples in Africa. Sudan gained independence from the British in 1956 as Africa's largest country in terms of area. However, immediately after independence, tensions between the north (predominantly Muslim and Arab) and the south (predominantly Christian and adhering to traditional African religions) began to escalate rapidly.

The war, which began in 1955, a year before independence, erupted over the south's demands for autonomy and the exclusion of the region, and ended with the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, which granted regional autonomy to the south. After the abolition of southern autonomy and the implementation of Islamic law throughout the country, the conflict resumed in 1983. To end the war, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed between the parties in 2005. This agreement was signed in Naivasha between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (South). The agreement stipulated that the region would have the right to self-determination after a transition period for the south. Accordingly, in 2011, southern Sudanese were granted the right to a Self-Determination Referendum, and in January 2011, an overwhelming majority of South Sudanese voted for secession. Subsequently, on 9 July 2011, the Republic of South Sudan officially declared its independence from Sudan, becoming an independent country. Thus, Africa's longest civil war, which had caused millions of deaths and large-scale displacement, came to an end.

However, despite mutual recognition, relations between Sudan and South Sudan have remained tense at times. These disagreements mainly concern disputed border issues (such as Abyei), the sharing of oil wealth, and security matters. Unresolved issues between the two countries, such as border demarcation, the status of the disputed Abyei region, and resource distribution, have caused tensions to continue.

Based on the above, this article discusses the Abyei region, which is the subject of tension between the two countries. In this context, the strategic importance and structure of the region are explained, followed by an examination of the historical background of the dispute. Subsequently, the reasons for the dispute and the regional and international efforts to resolve it are discussed. Furthermore, the regional and international dimensions of the dispute are addressed, discussing its impact on national, regional, and international security. The article also considers how the dispute may shape relations between the two countries. Finally, predictions are made about the future of the dispute, discussing the role that the Republic of Türkiye, which has constructive relations with both countries, could play in resolving it.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical case study design, addressing the Abyei issue as a contemporary phenomenon within its natural context. The methodology employed is a systematic documentary research approach, where the analysis relies primarily on collecting and analyzing secondary sources to construct a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the conflict.

This study aims to answer the following questions;

Question 1: Will the Abyei issue pose a threat to the stability of bilateral relations between the two countries in the future?

Question 2: What are the expected future scenarios for the Abyei issue given the ongoing dispute between Sudan and South Sudan?

Question 3: What Can Türkiye Do to Resolve the Dispute?

The main methodological components are as follows:

Historical-Tracing Analysis: Tracing the roots of the conflict from the colonial era, through successive civil wars, to the post-secession period and its accompanying challenges.

Policy and Agreement Analysis: Examining the legal and political framework governing the conflict, including the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005), the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling (2009), and the role of UN resolutions and regional initiatives.

Descriptive-Interpretive Analysis: Describing the geographical, demographic, and economic characteristics of the region, and interpreting the underlying causes of the conflict and its multi-layered repercussions.

Prospective Analysis: This section presents future scenarios and recommendations for conflict resolution, while also considering the potential role of regional actors such as Türkiye.

Therefore, the methodology is qualitatively analytical, aiming to synthesize knowledge from a wide range of literature and documents, rather than relying solely on collecting primary field data. This makes it a theoretical-applied study focused on contextual and policy analysis.

The study also relied on the concept of national and regional security and their overlap in addressing the issue.

The Theoretical Framework Related to the Concept of Security

The article adopts a comprehensive, multi-level approach to security analysis, moving beyond the narrow, traditional view that focuses solely on military state security. This approach can be categorized under the framework of “multi-level security analysis,” where threats and challenges are examined at interacting levels:

State Security (National Level): This section analyzes how the conflict threatens the internal stability of both states (Sudan & South Sudan) by exacerbating ethnic conflicts, triggering internal displacement, and fueling competition for strategic economic resources (oil and land).

Regional Security: This section assesses the potential for the conflict to escalate and its impact on the stability of the wider Horn of Africa region. It also examines the practical challenges of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and the role of regional organizations such as the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in crisis management.

International (Systemic) Security: This approach is based on the classification adopted by the UN Security Review, which considers conflict a threat to international peace and security. The analysis expands this concept to include the burden on global humanitarian resources, potential risks to energy supplies, and challenges to international law and peacekeeping operations.

Human Security: This approach integrates elements of the human security concept by focusing on the hu-

manitarian dimensions of the crisis, such as the protection of civilians, mass displacement, and food and livelihood insecurity for local communities (such as the Misseriya and Dinka Ngok). This integrated, multi-layered analysis reflects a contemporary understanding of complex border conflicts, which cannot be isolated from interactions at the local, national, regional, and international levels. It demonstrates how a conflict over border resources can escalate into a comprehensive security issue that affects the stability of an entire regional system and threatens the well-being of the population.

1 - Subject of the Dispute: The Abyei Region

Abyei is considered a disputed and oil-rich region between Sudan and South Sudan. Historically, Abyei was one of Sudan's most important oil-producing regions before South Sudan's secession. Some sources indicate that the Abyei field is the largest field in Sudan in terms of production. After South Sudan's secession, Sudan lost 75% of its oil reserves to South Sudan (Ibrahim, 2005, p.106). Consequently, control of this oil-rich region has remained a significant point of contention between Sudan and South Sudan.

Generally speaking, Abyei holds significant strategic importance due to its geographical location, natural resources (particularly oil), and the complex tribal and administrative disputes surrounding it. It is a crucial region in terms of the stability or instability of relations between Sudan and South Sudan. The Abyei region is a disputed area between Sudan and South Sudan and has a complex and diverse demographic structure (Musa, 2009, p. 218). The region's population consists of a mixture of Arab and African tribes. As mentioned, the Abyei region, which is a subject of dispute between Sudan and South Sudan, is rich in natural resources, demonstrating its economic importance.

Abyei is a region rich in oil and is considered one of Sudan's largest fields (before secession). Oil is the region's most important economic resource, and part of the extracted oil is exported to Khartoum and Port Sudan via pipelines. Oil resources have long been a major point of contention in the dispute over the region's ownership (Ishaq, 2014, p. 24). On the other hand, the Abyei region, covering an area of 10,546 square kilometres (4,072 square miles), has rich water resources, including two rivers that can be used for irrigation to support agricultural activities. These water resources contribute to the fertility of the soil and the potential for developing large-scale agricultural projects. Although sources do not provide definitive information about the forests in Abyei, Sudan as a whole has significant forest resources (Qili, 2006, p. 89). It is assumed that Abyei, a former part of Sudan, is home to some of these forest resources, making Abyei a region of critical strategic and economic importance for both Sudan and South Sudan. Although stability and development in the region are thought to contribute to the effective use of these resources for the benefit of the population, they have been a subject of dispute between Sudan and South Sudan.

Although the region was granted special administrative status under the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, its final status remains a matter of dispute between the two countries. The Abyei issue is one of the most complex and sensitive issues between Sudan and South Sudan, and it remains a significant point of contention that has not been fully resolved even after South Sudan's secession in 2011. The strategic importance of the Abyei region stems from several key factors that have made it a sensitive point of contention between Sudan and South Sudan. The first is its geographical and geopolitical location. Abyei serves as a bridge between North and South Sudan, forming an important transit route and connection between the two regions, thus holding strategic importance (Musharaf, 2018, p. 98). The second is that it is an important grazing area. The region is characterised by rich pastures that are essential for

the movement of herders from the Arab Misseriya tribes in the north and the Ngok Dinka tribes in the south, making it a vital area for traditional economic activities and livelihood security (Musa, 2021, p. 47).

The third fundamental point is that it is a region rich in natural resources. As mentioned above, Abyei is located in the oil-rich Maglad Basin and has historically contributed significantly to Sudan's crude oil production. Although some reports indicate that reserves are nearing depletion, the presence of a major oil pipeline (the Great Nile Pipeline) passing through Abyei makes the region vital for exporting oil to other areas, thereby increasing its economic importance (Craze, 2011, p. 59). Views on the region's identity differ between the Arab Misseriya tribe (seen by the North as a tribe settled in Abyei) and the Ngok Dinka tribe (seen by the South as the region's permanent indigenous inhabitants) (Deng, 2011, p. 402). Therefore, an important detail that needs to be stated here is that this disagreement over the identity of the population and the right to vote in any future referendum further complicates the situation. Abyei is inhabited by the Ngok Dinka (South Sudanese) and the Arab Misseriya (Sudanese), each of whom has a different vision of the region's allegiance and rights. Historically, the region has been a shared living space between these tribes.

The Ngok Dinka are a South African ethnic group recognised as the indigenous people of the region. This group views the Misseriya as temporary herders. The Misseriya, however, are a nomadic Arab herding tribe who regard Abyei as part of their traditional grazing lands. The Misseriya view the Dinka as guests in the region. The Abyei region has witnessed occasional clashes, usually over land and grazing disputes, between the Ngok Dinka tribe and Twic Dinka militias from South Sudan, and between the Misseriya and the Ngok Dinka. These clashes have worsened recently due to the ongoing war in Sudan.

Due to its strategic location and oil wealth, the region has witnessed repeated conflicts and disputes that have significantly affected its demographics,

including large population displacements. For example, in 2011, approximately 50,000 residents of Abyei, mostly Dinka, fled to the south (Bashir, 1971, p. 219). Consequently, there have been mutual accusations between the warring parties of attempting to settle specific population groups in order to alter the demographic structure and influence the outcome of any future referendum on the region's allegiance. This is because, following the peace agreements, large parts of the region were rebuilt, and attempts were made to return some displaced persons.

The two countries appealed to the International Court of Justice to resolve the dispute. In 2009, the Hague Court ruled on Abyei, returning significant oil rights in the region to the North and awarding most of the land to the South. Specifically, the Court awarded two large fields in the Abyei region (Heglig and Bamboo) to the North and one small field to the South (Al-Nour, 2012, p. 63). It could be argued that this ruling not only failed to resolve the dispute but also caused the situation to escalate further. Consequently, the Abyei region remains a diverse area in terms of ethnicity and culture, still facing significant challenges related to conflicts over land and resources. This situation directly affects the stability and structure of the population and continues to be a pending dispute between Sudan and South Sudan.

2 - Historical Background of the Dispute

The dispute between Sudan and South Sudan has deep historical roots dating back to the British colonial period, which was marked by decades of armed conflict and ultimately led to the secession of South Sudan. The history of this dispute can be summarised in the following key points.

2.1. The British Colonial Period

Britain divided Sudan into two separate regions, north and south, and administered it in this manner. This situation can be interpreted as the well-known British strategy of "divide and rule." Indeed, it declared the south a closed region and prohibited those without permission from travelling from the north to the south or vice versa. Furthermore, northerners were prohibited from taking up positions in the south, and missionary work was encouraged in the south to prevent the spread of Islam. It is important to note here that while the north was predominantly inhabited by Muslim Arabs, the south was predominantly inhabited by Christian and animist Africans (Artin, 1911, p. 189). In 1946, Britain implemented the North's pressure to unite the two regions. However, this decision angered the southern elite, who had been educated in English and felt marginalised after Arabic became the administrative language in the South (Farhati, 2016, p. 79).

2.2. The First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972)

Before Sudan gained full independence in 1956, officers in the southern army rebelled in 1955. The reasons for this rebellion included the southerners feeling marginalised, demands for regional autonomy, and ethnic and religious differences between the north and south. The war ended with the signing of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement in 1972, which granted the south a degree of autonomy (Hamamci, 2020, p. 140).

2.3. Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005)

In 1983, a new rebellion broke out in the south under the leadership of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and its armed wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Army. The reasons for this were stated as the Sudanese government's termination of the Addis Ababa Agreement and its division of the south into three states. Furthermore, one of the most important factors driving southerners to revolt was the declaration of Islamic law by the ruling power at the time. This war ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. This agreement granted the

south a six-year period of autonomy, followed by a referendum on self-determination in the region (Idris, 2011, p. 13).

2.4. The Secession of South Sudan (2011)

In accordance with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, a referendum was held in January 2011, in which the majority of South Sudanese voted overwhelmingly in favour of secession from the north. Subsequently, on 9 July 2011, the Republic of South Sudan declared its independence and became a separate country (Young, 2014, p. 30).

2.5. Post-Secession Challenges

Despite the secession, tensions and disagreements between Sudan and South Sudan have persisted for various reasons. This is because there are still unresolved border issues between the two countries. For example, there are still disputed border areas such as the oil-rich Abyei region. In addition, there are disagreements over the sharing of oil. Disagreements over transit fees for southern oil passing through Sudanese territory have led to economic disputes. On the other hand, mutual accusations of supporting rebels on each other's territory have also been raised from time to time.

Two years after independence, a devastating civil war broke out between rival groups within South Sudan (forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and the opposition led by Riek Machar) (Agha, 2011, p. 89). This war caused the loss of thousands of lives in South Sudan and forced millions of people to flee to neighbouring countries, including Sudan.

As can be seen, the history of the dispute between Sudan and South Sudan is a long and multifaceted conflict story, the roots of which date back to the colonial era and which continues to create difficulties even after the South's secession. The conflict in South Sudan dates back decades before its independence in 2011 and is intertwined with complex historical, political, social and economic factors.

This has been one of the main reasons behind the

subsequent emergence of the dispute between the two countries. Indeed, Abyei has remained a disputed area claimed by both countries. A brief war broke out over the region in 2012, and the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) was established to maintain peace. Furthermore, in 2013, the Ngok Dinka clan, who identify as South Sudanese, held a unilateral referendum in which an overwhelming majority voted to join South Sudan, but the African Union and the United Nations did not recognise the results. Finally, looking at the current situation in the region, despite the presence of an international peacekeeping force (UNISFA), the status of Abyei has not yet been finalised. South Sudan largely controls the region (Al-Ladawi, 2005, p.142).

3 - Reasons for the Dispute

The dispute between Sudan and South Sudan over the Abyei region is complex and multifaceted, and its main causes can be summarised as follows.

3.1. Contested Status and Geographical Location

Abyei is located on the uncertain border between Sudan and South Sudan and acts as a bridge between the north and south. This strategic location makes the region a constant point of tension. Furthermore, the region is rich in oil, making it economically important for both

Sudan and South Sudan. On the other hand, two main tribes live in Abyei: the Arab Misseriya, who lean towards the north, and the Ngok Dinka, who lean towards the south. The Misseriya are a semi-nomadic pastoralist tribe that moves seasonally through the region to graze their livestock. Sudan believes that the Misseriya tribe should have the right to vote in any referendum that will determine Abyei's fate (Juwayda, 2025).

The Ngok Dinka, as a settled tribe, view Abyei as their historical homeland and demand integration into South Sudan. South Sudan regards the Misseriya as temporary residents and therefore argues that they are not eligible to vote. Consequently, this disagreement over who is eligible to vote in the referendum to determine the region's fate lies at the heart of the problem. Furthermore, despite the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the civil war, the issue of border demarcation has not been definitively resolved, particularly in the Abyei region (Mikhail, 2019, p. 24).

This has left the region vulnerable to renewed tensions. Furthermore, in addition to the conflict between the two states, Abyei is also experiencing internal conflicts between different tribes. For example, conflicts between various Dinka groups and Misseriyas and Dinka, which are usually caused by disputes over resources such as land and water, are exacerbated by climate change (Mikhail, 2019, p. 98).

3.2. Failure to Implement Agreements and Lack of Trust

Despite international efforts to reach agreements and a solution (such as the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague), these have not been fully implemented, and the Abyei referendum has been suspended due to disagreement over the definition of "settled" in the region (Kamal, 2016, p. 79). This situation has led to a lack of trust between the parties, increased frustration, and contributed to ongoing violence. In short, the dispute over Abyei stems from a combination of historical claims, the region's economic importance (particularly oil), demographic and tribal complexities, and the failure to reach a lasting and effective political solution.

3.3. Colonial Legacy

During the Anglo-Egyptian administration, Sudan was treated separately as north and south. The north was predominantly Arab and Muslim, while the south was predominantly African, Christian and animist. This division led to uneven development and different poli-

cies. Furthermore, the north was the focus of the administration, while the south was neglected. This led to the marginalisation of southerners and made them feel excluded. During the

colonial period, the region's borders were drawn without regard to ethnic and cultural affiliations, which led to internal tensions (Kumm, 1910, p. 258).

3.4. Political and Economic Marginalisation

After gaining independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956, Sudan concentrated most of its power in northern Khartoum, increasing the southerners' sense of political and economic marginalisation. The demands of southerners began as simple requests for increased participation in public services, but later evolved into political demands for power sharing and federalism (Muhammad, 2023, p. 204). Subsequently, the discovery of oil in Sudan, particularly in the southern regions, exacerbated the conflict by increasing competition for control of resources.

3.5. Long Civil Wars

The first civil war in the country took place between 1955 and 1972. This war began just before Sudan's independence and lasted 17 years between the Sudanese government and the southern Anya Nya movement. It ended with the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, which granted autonomy to the south. The second civil war then took place between 1983 and 2005. This time, the civil war resumed after President Jaafar Nimeiri revoked the Addis Ababa Agreement and imposed Islamic law on the entire country, including the predominantly non-Muslim south. This war was led by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and its armed forces (SPLA), under the leadership of John Garang. It is considered one of the longest and bloodiest wars in Africa and witnessed major human rights violations. It ended in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which paved the way for a self-determination referendum (Yeoh, 2014, p. 49).

3.6. Independence and After

In January 2011, the majority of South Sudan's population (nearly 99%) voted to secede from Sudan, and on 9 July 2011, it officially declared its independence, becoming the world's newest country. Just two years after independence, in December 2013, a civil war broke out between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir (from the Dinka tribe) and his former deputy Riek Machar (from the Nuer tribe). The conflict quickly turned into an ethnic conflict between the Dinka and Nuer tribes, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths and the displacement of millions of people. Despite the signing of several peace agreements, the fighting continued intermittently, causing a catastrophic humanitarian crisis (Mohammed, 2014, p. 36).

Tribal tensions and conflicts, particularly between the Dinka and Nuer, have remained the main factors fueling the violence. The newly born state suffers from high levels of corruption and poor governance, which hinder development and contribute to instability. Therefore, control over land and resources, including oil, has remained a source of conflict (Yeoh & Jadin, p. 114). In short, the war in Sudan and South Sudan is the result of centuries of marginalisation, flawed colonial policies, conflicts over power and resources, and ethnic tensions that worsened after independence. 2016

4 - Efforts to Resolve the Dispute

The Abyei issue is one of the most prominent and complex problems in relations between Sudan and South Sudan and has been addressed in various agreements and resolution efforts. The most prominent of these agreements are as follows.

4.1. 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)

This agreement is a fundamental element in finding a solution to the Abyei issue and contains a special protocol for Abyei. The protocol envisaged granting Abyei a "special administrative status" under the control of

the Presidency of Sudan and holding a referendum to determine whether the region would remain part of Sudan or join South Sudan. The agreement stipulates that the Ngok Dinka and other Sudanese residing in Abyei shall be eligible to vote in this referendum (Al-Tawil, 2018, p. 63). However, despite these provisions, many issues remain unresolved, including border demarcation, resource sharing, and security arrangements.

4.2. 2009 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) Decision

Due to ongoing disputes over the demarcation of Abyei's borders, both parties resorted to international arbitration. The court ruled on the borders of Abyei, confirming the grazing rights of all tribes in the region and emphasising the need for peaceful coexistence. Although the decision was binding on both parties, some tribes, particularly the Misseriya, rejected it, claiming that they had not been sufficiently consulted (Bahij, 2014, p. 118).

4.3. Kadugli Agreements (January 2011)

These agreements were made with the aim of calming tensions and achieving reconciliation in the region, particularly after the violent incidents that occurred in early 2011 (Al-Sharbiny, 2011, p. 195).

4.4. Interim Security and Administrative Arrangements Agreement for Abyei (2011)

Following the escalation of violence and the Sudanese army's occupation of Abyei in May 2011, an agreement was reached to establish the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) to prevent violence and ensure stability. The agreement contained provisions on security arrangements, the return of displaced persons, and the establishment of a temporary joint administration for the region (Biaba, 2021, p. 78).

4.5. African Union and UN Proposals (2012)

In October 2013, the African Union proposed a referendum in Abyei without the participation of the Misseriya tribe. However, Sudan rejected this proposal.

This situation made it difficult to resolve the dispute through regional means and led to the issue being taken to the international level. In this context, the Security Council issued several resolutions concerning Abyei, most of which focused on extending the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and encouraging both parties to continue dialogue on the final status of the region. These resolutions (2024, 2075, 2550, and others) expanded UNISFA's mandate and emphasised the importance of facilitating the implementation of agreements and dialogue (Musa, 2013, p22).

Consequently, despite all these efforts and agreements, the final status of Abyei remains unresolved. Disagreements persist over voting rights in the proposed referendum, the region's definitive borders, resource sharing, and security arrangements. The recent conflict in Sudan (since April 2023) has significantly affected progress on this issue, and Abyei-, and border-related political issues have been suspended until further notice. However, efforts continue at the community level to reach local agreements, particularly to prevent tensions between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya tribes during the annual migration season.

5 - Regional and International Dimensions of the Dispute

The Abyei issue is one of the most complex and sensitive issues in relations between Sudan and South Sudan and has intertwined international and regional dimensions that affect the stability of the region as a whole. As stated, Abyei is a region with a "special administrative status" under the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that led to the secession of South Sudan. Nevertheless, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) has been operating in

the region since 2011 to maintain peace and facilitate dialogue between the parties. On the other hand, the UN Security Council has shown particular interest in the Abyei issue and, viewing the conflict as a threat to international peace and security, has issued periodic resolutions on the matter (Osama, 2015, p. 142).

There is international sympathy towards South Sudan on this issue. This sympathy arose particularly after the Ngok Dinka tribe organised a unilateral referendum in 2013 to join South Sudan, which was rejected by the international community (Musa, 2021, p. 79). Abyei is considered an oil-rich region that has attracted the attention of international powers seeking to secure energy resources, thereby increasing its strategic importance. The struggle for control over these resources adds another layer of complexity to the issue.

The dispute is inherently international in nature and poses challenges to international law in resolving border disputes and resource allocation (Mikhail, 2019, p. 24). Indeed, the ongoing conflict in Abyei has led to waves of displacement and refuge, placing a burden on international humanitarian organisations and necessitating international humanitarian intervention. It can therefore be stated that the conflict in the Abyei region, located on the border between Sudan and South Sudan, is a complex and strategically important issue that is significantly affected by regional and international developments.

Indeed, the establishment of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) is the most obvious indicator of this. This mission was established in 2011 after Sudanese forces occupied Abyei. Its primary mission is to protect civilians and monitor the demilitarised zone. The UN Security Council continues to renew UNISFA's mandate (the latest renewal was until 15 November 2025, pursuant to Resolution 2760 of 2024), emphasising the importance of maintaining peace and stability (Juwayda, 2025).

Furthermore, the United Nations has consistently called on Sudan and South Sudan to engage in con-

structive dialogue to determine the final status of Abyei and resolve outstanding border issues. UN officials have expressed concern that the ongoing civil war in Sudan (between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces) has hampered progress in these talks. The United Nations stresses the need to respect Abyei's demilitarised zone status and calls on both sides to withdraw their forces from the region. Consequently, concerns about the humanitarian situation in Abyei are mounting. Chief among these concerns are the influx of large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons fleeing the conflict in Sudan and tensions within local communities (Juwayda, 2025).

The United States is the author of the Security Council resolution on Abyei and supports the UN's efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region. It has expressed concern about the continued presence of armed groups from South Sudan and Sudan in Abyei, stating that this situation threatens Abyei's status as a demilitarised zone. Most Security Council members, including China, Russia and African countries (such as Mozambique, Algeria, Guyana and Sierra Leone), have called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict through dialogue and respect for Abyei's demilitarised status (Al-Kaabi, 2014, p216).

While this is the situation at the international level, at the regional level, a proposal has been put forward by the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP). The African Union supported this proposal, presented by the High-Level Implementation Panel in 2012, which called for a referendum to determine the final status of Abyei. The African Union condemned the unilateral "referendums" held in Abyei as unacceptable, irresponsible, and contrary to the decisions of the African Union Peace and Security Council (Al-Madini, 2012, p. 98). The African Union called on the Abyei communities to cooperate with UNISFA to maintain maximum peace and stability. It has also sought to find a lasting solution to the conflict by cooperating with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), but these efforts have encountered difficulties (Al-Baksh, 2021).

In general, the international and regional community has called for a peaceful resolution of the Abyei conflict through dialogue between Sudan and South Sudan, emphasising the importance of ensuring security and stability in the region and protecting civilians. However, the conflict in Sudan and ongoing tensions on the ground have prevented concrete progress in this regard. Consequently, Abyei remains a disputed region between Sudan and South Sudan, but no significant progress has been made in negotiations regarding its final status. Furthermore, it is difficult to say that a solution will be reached in the near future. The ongoing civil war in Sudan has negatively affected potential negotiations regarding Abyei, creating unfavourable conditions for political dialogue.

6 - Impact of the Dispute on National, Regional and International Security

When considered from a security perspective, it is possible to state that the conflict in the Abyei region, located on the border between Sudan and South Sudan, poses a serious threat to the national security of both countries. This is because Abyei has witnessed repeated violence between the Ngok Dinka (affiliated with South Sudan) and Misseriya (affiliated with Sudan) tribes, leading to loss of life and mass displacement. Abyei is of significant economic importance due to its oil reserves and fertile agricultural land. Competition for these resources fuels the conflict and further complicates the situation. On the other hand, the influx of large numbers of displaced persons and refugees from Sudan into Abyei has increased pressure on resources, leading to rising crime rates and a deteriorating humanitarian situation.

Moreover, the conflict over Abyei deepens ethnic and tribal divisions in both Sudan and South Sudan, weakening the concept of a unified national identity and threatening long-term stability. Indeed, elites in both countries are complicating the issue and causing instability in national security by politicising ethnic origins to serve their personal interests. In short, the ongoing conflict in the Abyei region is a major source of instability and violence that negatively affects the national security of both Sudan and South Sudan by intensifying disputes, worsening humanitarian conditions, fuelling ethnic tensions, and hindering efforts to reach a sustainable political solution. In addition, violent incidents still occur frequently between herders and farmers along the border, in addition to illegal activities and organised crime.

At the regional level, there is a risk that the conflict in Abyei could spread to neighbouring African countries, particularly given the region's long history of war and conflict, and therefore any escalation in Abyei could destabilise the region. On the other hand, African Union peacekeeping forces in Abyei also face challenges such as attacks on their positions in the region and equipment shortages (Al-Hamdani, 2019, p. 408). This is because any escalation in Abyei could lead to direct armed clashes between Sudanese and South Sudanese forces, threaten existing peace agreements, and further destabilise the region. In addition, the ongoing conflict is leading to the proliferation of weapons in the region and increasing the risk of tribal conflicts turning into violent clashes.

In this context, the conflict in the Abyei region poses a threat not only to national and regional security but also to international security. Indeed, Abyei is a sensitive and important region in terms of international security because any escalation there increases the risk of destabilising the Greater Horn of Africa region, which is of strategic importance. On the other hand, the conflict in Abyei has created significant challenges for the United Nations and peacekeeping forces (UN-ISFA) (Al-Amin, 2014). The ongoing violence increases the need for military and humanitarian assistance,

placing a burden on international resources. The conflict hinders humanitarian access to the affected population, worsens the humanitarian situation, and impacts the efforts of international organisations to provide aid.

Furthermore, the Abyei region is rich in oil, and any disruption there could affect oil production and supply. This could potentially have repercussions on global oil prices and the global economy. In short, the conflict in Abyei represents a series of interconnected security, humanitarian and economic challenges whose impact is not limited to local or regional borders but also affects security and stability at the international level.

7 - The Future of Relations Between the Two Countries in the Context of the Dispute

Relations between Sudan and South Sudan have historically been complex and tense. Periods of cooperation have been followed by periods of tension and conflict. Despite South Sudan's independence in 2011, many unresolved issues from the pre-secession period and new challenges continue to affect the future of these relations. Both countries accuse each other of supporting rebel groups on each other's territory, increasing instability and undermining all peace efforts. However, Sudan and South Sudan share the longest land border in Africa and there are still disputed areas, such as the Abyei region, where a self-determination referendum, delayed due to conflict, is still pending (Al-Adhari, 2014, p. 43).

The Abyei issue has been a significant point of contention and a thorn in the side of relations between Khartoum and Juba since the secession of the south. The failure to resolve this issue has prevented the full

normalisation of relations between the two countries and has affected cooperation on other issues such as oil, borders, citizenship and international debt (Abu Saada, 2011, p. 193). South Sudan's secession from Sudan in 2011 has had profound and far-reaching repercussions for both countries and the entire region. This is because oil constituted the majority of Sudan's revenues prior to secession, and most oil fields are located in the south. This secession led to a significant loss of revenue for North Sudan, significantly affecting its economy and causing a terrible deterioration, including a decline in public revenues, weak export revenues, and payment imbalances (Abu Majida, 2019, p. 17). On the other hand, oil accounts for 98% of the South Sudanese government's revenues (Al-Amin, 2014, p. 20). This extreme dependence has made the southern economy vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices and has also led to problems associated with corruption and mismanagement in this sector.

South Sudan relies on North Sudan to export its oil through pipelines crossing Sudanese territory, which has led to tensions and disputes over transit fees (Ahmed, 2015, p. 148). South Sudan relies heavily on oil revenues exported through pipelines via Sudan. Disagreements over transit fees and disruptions to oil flows due to the conflict negatively affect the economies of both countries (Abu Shouk, 2009). On the other hand, both countries suffer from ongoing internal conflicts. The civil war in South Sudan and the ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces directly affect stability and further complicate bilateral cooperation. Meanwhile, some regional and international countries are attempting to expand their influence by supporting one side at the expense of the other, further complicating the situation (Abdel Rahim, 2015, p. 112).

Consequently, the future of relations between Sudan and South Sudan largely depends on the political will of both countries, their ability to overcome historical differences, and their capacity to identify common interests. Given the current internal conflicts in both countries, the focus now appears to be on crisis management and avoiding direct escalation. However, it

is becoming increasingly apparent that stability in one country directly affects the other. Therefore, any progress towards internal peace and stability in both Sudan and South Sudan will have a positive impact on bilateral relations. This may require formulating new mechanisms for border cooperation, addressing unresolved issues such as Abyei, ensuring stable oil flows, and preventing support for rebel groups. In the long term, building trust among the people and encouraging open dialogue are key to achieving stable and productive relations.

8 - Future Vision for Resolving the Dispute

The Abyei region is a chronic point of conflict between Sudan and South Sudan and requires a comprehensive and sustainable solution that addresses the roots of the conflict and protects the rights and interests of all parties. With the problem persisting, it is almost impossible to speak of complete stability in relations between the two countries. Therefore, important steps must be taken to achieve sustainable stability in bilateral relations between the two countries. Foremost among these is resolving a disputed area such as the Abyei region, ensuring peaceful coexistence between Sudan and South Sudan, and developing a model that can serve economic cooperation.

Furthermore, the focus should be on developing the region economically and socially, providing opportunities for all, and reducing the economic drivers of conflict. The importance and necessity of implementing the Abyei Protocol, which envisages a referendum to determine the status of the region, should be reaffirmed within the framework of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Furthermore, based on the 2009 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling defining the Ngok Dinka region, agreement must be reached on clearly defining Abyei's northern borders.

The Misseriya community should be granted special guarantees regarding grazing and movement rights throughout Abyei, even if it joins South Sudan, and their traditional livelihoods should not be jeopardised. These guarantees should include agreed security corridors and shared grazing areas. A permanent joint mechanism should be established between the two countries to address any future border-related, social or economic disputes that may arise in Abyei.

Subsequently, community reconciliation programmes between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya tribes should be supported through dialogue and joint cultural events to build trust and overcome the past. Indeed, the peoples of the two countries have deep and historical ties, including marriage and social cohesion, particularly in the border areas (Al-Beheiry, 2010, p. 145). This social structure is considered to be the foundation for establishing better relations. To support this, local and national media organisations should be encouraged to play a positive role in addressing the issue in a balanced manner, highlighting success stories of coexistence, and promoting a culture of peace rather than hate speech.

In addition, local communities and civil society organisations should be provided with training in conflict resolution, negotiation and peacebuilding skills and in leading local peace initiatives. Large-scale awareness campaigns should be launched in Abyei, Sudan and South Sudan on the importance of resolving the issue peacefully and the danger that the ongoing conflict poses to the stability of the entire region.

Internationally, continuous diplomatic pressure should be exerted on Khartoum and Juba to adhere to a peaceful solution and implement the agreements. Meanwhile, periodic reports should be submitted on the monitoring of the implementation of agreements and protocols related to Abyei, the degree of compliance with them, and the difficulties encountered in their implementation. Serious and intensive negotiations must be restarted under the auspices of the African Union and the United Nations to reach an agreement between the governments of Sudan and

South Sudan on the final status of Abyei. Free, fair and transparent negotiations should be conducted under full international supervision (African Union, United Nations and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)) to ensure the credibility and acceptance of the region's status by all parties. In addition, comprehensive disarmament, demobilisation and re-integration programmes should be implemented to reduce the proliferation of weapons and violence.

In short, the future of the conflict in Abyei largely depends on developments in the political and security situations in both Sudan and South Sudan, the ability of the parties to reach agreement on the final status of the region, and peace-building efforts at the community level. Without a lasting political solution and without addressing the root causes of violence, Abyei will remain a flashpoint for tension and instability, and thus relations between the two countries will always be destabilised.

9 – What Can Türkiye Do to Resolve the Dispute?

Türkiye can play a constructive and contributory role in resolving the dispute between Sudan and South Sudan over the Abyei region by utilising the following factors.

9.1. Türkiye's Position as a Reliable Mediator

Türkiye has an increasingly strong reputation as a reliable mediator in various regions, including Africa. This reputation has been demonstrated in its mediation efforts in regional and international conflicts (such as the Black Sea Grain Initiative between Russia and Ukraine), enhancing its impartiality and ability to bring conflicting parties together.

9.2. Relations with Sudan and South Sudan

Türkiye has established good relations with both Sudan and South Sudan (Ali, 2013, p. 17). It was one of the first countries to recognise South Sudan's independence. Türkiye has an embassy in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, and maintains its historical and commercial ties with Sudan. These balanced relations grant it a "privileged position" and make it an acceptable mediator for both sides.

9.3. Expertise in Preventive Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution

Türkiye actively participates in peace mediation initiatives and seeks to promote solutions to regional conflicts (Bong, 2015, p. 13). It uses its expertise to facilitate dialogue and identify mutually acceptable solutions, moving away from a rigid legal approach that does not take into account all the political and social dimensions of the conflict.

9.4. Providing Technical and Financial Support

Türkiye can provide technical and material support to conflict resolution mechanisms related to Abyei; for example, it can support the work of joint committees, provide capacity-building assistance to local institutions in Abyei, or even contribute to development projects that could help stabilise the region. Indeed, Türkiye also provides humanitarian and development assistance to South Sudan through the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) (Christopher, 2021, p. 29).

9.5. Promoting Dialogue Among Local Communities

The conflict in Abyei is not only a political conflict between two governments but also encompasses tensions between local communities (particularly the Dinka Ngok and Misseriya tribes) (Hassanein, 2010, 149). Türkiye can facilitate dialogue between these communities and encourage grassroots reconciliation, which is essential for achieving sustainable peace in the region.

9.6. Focusing on Common Interests

Türkiye can help Sudan and South Sudan focus on their common interests, such as economic development and regional stability, rather than on points of contention in Abyei. Abyei's natural resources, particularly oil, could be used as a source of trilateral cooperation rather than conflict. However, despite this potential, resolving the Abyei dispute is extremely complex for a number of reasons. Chief among these reasons is the region's economic value in terms of oil.

Furthermore, disagreements over who can vote in the promised self-determination referendum are also a sensitive issue. On the other hand, tensions between local tribes must also be addressed with the utmost care. Another challenging factor is the failure to implement many provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement concerning Abyei. Therefore, any role for Türkiye will require considerable patience, a comprehensive approach that takes all these dimensions into account, and coordination with other international efforts to resolve the conflict.

Conclusion

South Sudan seceded from Sudan in 2011 after decades of civil war that caused millions of deaths and displacements. The main reasons for the secession were the political and economic marginalisation of the South, cultural and religious differences, and conflicts over natural resources (especially oil). Since secession, both Sudan and South Sudan have been working to build their own independent national identities. The disputed Abyei region between North and South remains a significant unresolved point of tension, further complicating relations.

Overall, the Abyei issue is not a simple border dispute; rather, it is a mixture of historical, economic, ethnic, religious, and political factors. Its resolution requires integrated efforts at the international and regional levels, focusing on building trust between local parties and relevant governments. This issue remains a thorny and complex matter, requiring comprehensive solutions that address the political, economic and social dimensions of the dispute and respect the rights of all parties.

In summary, the shared history of Sudan and South Sudan is a mixture of forced unification under foreign rule, decades of violent conflict, and subsequent secession based on the right to self-determination. Unfortunately, numerous challenges still stand in the way of establishing stable and productive relations between the two countries. Under current

conditions, the political situation in Abyei is likely to remain uncertain and ambiguous. The ongoing conflict and violence, combined with the influx of displaced persons and refugees, will worsen the humanitarian crisis in the region, leading to shortages in healthcare, water, and other basic resources. Without a comprehensive political solution, the potential for inter-communal violence to escalate among the different tribes in Abyei remains high, particularly due to

the proliferation of weapons and the erosion of government authority.

The country's division in 2011 weakened national will in both countries and led to a further deterioration of the political and economic situation in both. Furthermore, South Sudan's secession has affected regional stability as it could encourage other separatist movements in neighbouring countries. The conflicts in South Sudan have caused millions of people to be displaced within the country and across borders, triggering a major humanitarian crisis with food and healthcare shortages. As a result, the majority of South Sudan's population today suffers from harsh living conditions and is deprived of basic services such as education and healthcare. Overall, secession has not brought the stability and prosperity that many in both countries had hoped for; instead, it has led to immense economic, political, and social challenges and further fuelled internal and regional conflicts.

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15 April Conflict in Sudan: Causes, Process, and Outcomes from a Sociological Perspective

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Abstract

This study addresses the ongoing war of April 15, 2023, in Sudan between the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces from a sociological perspective. This war has undergone a set of radical transformations in its nature, the actors involved, and their agendas. The study employs a qualitative research design based on a sociological and interpretive approach to analyse the causes, processes, and consequences of the war in Sudan. The research strategy relies on a multi-method data collection process centred on documentary analysis—including academic literature, official reports, media narratives, and primary source documents—to ensure triangulation. The collected data was analysed through thematic analysis, structured around predefined axes of causes, processes, and consequences, and through process tracing to uncover causal mechanisms and event sequences. Throughout, the inquiry is structured and interpreted using key social theories and concepts, such as grievance versus greed, the monopoly of legitima violence, the social contract, and symbolic capital. The main argument is that this war represents a foundational moment that has placed Sudan on the threshold of a radical transformation in its social and political structure. It may produce a new social entity radically different from pre-conflict Sudan. The central finding of this study is that this war represents a foundational moment that has placed Sudan on the threshold of a radical transformation in its social and political structure. It may produce a new social entity radically different from pre-conflict Sudan. Identity has also been sharply redefined from its broad national character to tribal and regional affiliations. The state-based social networks such as parties and unions have been replaced by pre-state social networks of the tribal or ethnical armed military networks.

Keywords: Conflict, Sudan, Rapid Speed Force, Sudanese Army

Introduction

Wars among the people of a single nation have been a distinguishing feature of developing countries. The African continent has taken the lead in the record of these conflicts, to the extent that the term “intra-state armed conflict” has become synonymous with Africa today (Adebite & Oyelade, 2017). Unfortunately, these internal wars have not led to the formation of strong states; rather, they have had a destructive character for the structure of the state in developing countries and its economy. This condition has hindered the weakened states resulting from such conflict from preventing subsequent rebellions or internal wars (Hoeffler, 2015).

The contemporary state of Sudan is a political product of the wars witnessed in this geographical area of east Africa, starting from the wars establishing the Funj Sultanate in central Sudan (1505-1821), passing through the Egyptian invasion of 1821, then the wars waged by the armies of Zubair Pasha to annex parts of South Sudan and Darfur to Sudan and Mahdisim revolution (1881-1899). Since the mid-twentieth century, Sudan has witnessed a series of internal wars. The war between the central government and rebel groups in South Sudan extended from 1955 to 2005, interspersed with short periods of peace, followed by the war in the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan and Darfur since 2003. It is now witnessing the most dangerous war in the history of the Sudanese state, where fighting is taking place between the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces since April 2023. This war has undergone a set of radical transformations in its nature, the actors involved, and their agendas.

The lives of millions have turned into a hell of fear and destruction. But the effects of this war go far beyond material destruction, deaths, and injuries; it strikes at the very core of Sudan's social structure. This war has created a humanitarian crisis, the worst in its modern history, but it also threatens to tear apart the already fragile social fabric of a multi-ethnic society (Nour, 2024).

The main argument is that the war raging in Sudan since April 15, 2023, is a radical transformation of Sudan's social and political structure as a result of this conflict. The central premise is that this war is not merely a military or political conflict, but a complex social phenomenon that could lead to the disintegration of the social contract among the components of the Sudanese state, the fragmentation of the social sphere, and the transformation of cities into areas of ethnic influence. This is accompanied by the disintegration of intermediary structures such as the family, school, and political parties, along with strong manifestations of a reshaping of identity from a broad national identity to armed tribal and regional identities. In this context, the dismantling of the state's monopoly on the means of violence has led to the proliferation of armed forces, the deepening of ethnic and tribal divisions, and their further arming. Nevertheless, this war represents a foundational moment that could produce a new social entity radically different from the previous Sudan. Reconstruction requires a new social and political vision that addresses the root causes of disintegration and redefines the relationship between the state and society.

This study addresses the ongoing war of April 15, 2023, in Sudan from a sociological perspective, across several topics, including the causes of this war, its processes, its results, and its social repercussions on Sudan.

By answering the key questions of this study:

How did historical processes of state formation, ethnic inequality, economic marginalization, and the establishment of parallel armies contribute to creating the structural conditions for the outbreak of the April 2023 war?

To what extent can the causes of the war be explained by the competition of elite interests, and how does this competition interact with the conflict between military and paramilitary factions for control of economic resources and political power?

How has the social construction of ethnic and regional identities by successive regimes become a tool for mobilizing conflicting parties to ignite violence, and how has this contributed to escalating the conflict and giving it the character of a civil war?

How is large-scale internal displacement based on ethnicity reshaping the social geography and demography of urban and rural areas in Sudan?

In what ways does the war fragment national identity and entrench sub-national (regional and ethnic) identities?

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design based on a sociological and interpretive approach to analyze the causes, processes, and consequences of the April 15, 2023, war in Sudan. The methodology is designed to provide a deep and contextual understanding of the conflict as a complex social phenomenon, rather than simply a political or military event. The research strategy relies on a substantial case study of the Sudanese conflict, analyzed from the perspective of established social theories of war.

The main sources of data of this study were; Academic references: Scholarly books and journal articles on the sociology of war, civil conflict, state fragility, and social identity, particularly those focusing on Sudan and similar African contexts. Official reports from international organizations and research centers, detailing humanitarian situations, displacement figures, and human rights violations. Primary source documents: Such as public statements, declarations, and policy statements issued by key actors and media sources to trace the narrative and events of the ongoing conflict.

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis and process tracing. In the thematic analysis the predefined research axes (nature of war, causes, process,

and social consequences) formed broad thematic categories. Within these categories, sub-themes were derived. The process tracing was crucial for studying the social processes of the conflict. The study tracing the causal mechanisms and sequence of events linking historical and structural causes to the outbreak of the April 2023 war and its subsequent social dynamics.

In analysis the key social concepts and theories such as grievance versus greed versus opportunity, the monopoly of legitimate coercion, the social contract, and symbolic capital were used as analytical lenses to interpret the data.

The Nature of War: A Sociological Approach

In this section, the researcher reviews the sociological literature concerning the nature of war and the interpretive approaches to its causes, attempting to provide a preliminary sociological reading of the ongoing conflict in Sudan.

Singer and Small (1972) offer one of the simplest definitions of war; they consider it as any armed conflict resulting in the deaths of at least one thousand people in combat (Malešević, 2017). Despite three years having passed since the outbreak of war in Sudan on the morning of Saturday, April 15, 2023, there is no consensus on the definition of the war.

International media sometimes describe it as a civil war, and at other times as an internal conflict. Some prefer to describe it simply as a conflict, while the Sudanese government describes it as an armed rebellion against the legitimate government in Khartoum. Given the clear foreign interventions during the war in Sudan, the prominent Sudanese academic Mohamed Jalal Hashim describes it as a foreign invasion of Su-

dan. Meanwhile, Sudanese communists have adhered to the traditional Marxist interpretation of the war. A statement from the Sudanese Communist Party reads:

“We in the Sudanese Communist Party always affirm that what is happening is not merely a military conflict over power, but a complex scene representing a conflict between the wings of parasitic capitalism within the country over power and resources. These are forces that have accumulated their wealth and privileges through corruption and the exploitation of power to plunder resources, and they use armed conflict and terrorism to reinforce their dominance.” “And it – the war – is, at the same time, a regional/international/imperialist scheme aimed at weakening the Sudanese state and preparing the conditions for disintegration and partition to drain the people’s capabilities and the country’s wealth and violate national sovereignty.” “This political and economic dimension (local, regional, and international) of the conflict places a double responsibility on the international community to intervene immediately to stop this war and those massacres.” (The-Sudanese-Communist-Party, 2025)

In contrast, there are variances in academic definitions of violent conflicts that occur within a state, due to differing perspectives on the context of the conflict, its demand, and the nature of the actors involved. A conflict is defined as a civil war if the armed conflict within a sovereign state is between the established legitimate government and another non-governmental party claiming sovereignty over the state’s territories or part thereof, and the goal of the war is political control. Cederman and Vogt, distinguish between two types of civil wars based on the ultimate goal of the non-governmental party. They use the description “governmental civil war” if the goal of the rival party is complete control of the state and the forcible removal of the existing government. However, if the main goal of the non-governmental party is the secession of their region or the land over which they claim sovereignty, then this type of war is called a “regional civil war” (L.-E. Cederman & M. Vogt, 2017).

Sociologist Sinisa Malešević sees war as a social phenomenon, considering it organized violence resulting from two social processes: social organization with its complex structure providing a degree of solidarity, and an ideology with popular acceptance that provides legitimacy for this violence. He believes that war usually ends in social change (Malešević, 2017). Gaston Bouthoul, the proponent of the theory of Polemology (the science of war), asserts that war is a historical social phenomenon, one that gave birth to history and forms the major turning points in societies (Kazem, 2024).

Explanatory Approaches to War

Scholars of wars have presented several explanations for the causes of civil wars. Cederman & Vogt, distinguish between three explanatory approaches: Grievances, Greed, and Opportunities (L. E. Cederman & Vogt, 2017). The approach based on Grievances views internal conflict as a reaction to social, economic, and/or political injustice. In contrast, interpretations focusing on Greed explain civil war from the perspective of individuals' desire to maximize their profits from a narrow material perspective. This interpretation sees motives as less important, while a third logic seeks the causes of civil war in the Opportunities that enable actors to engage in violent mobilization.

Others add ideology as a cause of wars, considering that it provides a direct motive for collective violence, making armed conflicts longer and more bloody. Findings show that although ideology increases the duration of conflict, these effects vary by type and timing (Basedau et al., 2022). Others look at the state's condition of strength and weakness or fragility and stability as a conditional or contextual factor for the likelihood of war outbreak. That is, the (logic of opportunity) here explains how rebel violence is more likely to erupt in weak states. Therefore, we find that semi-democratic regimes are more susceptible to civ-

il violence than stable authoritarian and democratic regimes. Others add the ethnic factor, considering the conflicts that erupted in Rwanda and elsewhere. They see that marginalized ethnic groups, especially those that have undergone transformations in social status, have featured prominently in conflict statistics. They explain this result primarily from the perspective of grievances and the dialectical relationship with the perspective of opportunities; where grievances motivate the ethnic group to rebel and engage in conflict, especially if the size of the ethnic group is large. But paradoxically, some studies indicated that ethnic groups richer than the country's average income are more susceptible to rebellion, just like the poorest ethnic groups (Adegbite & Oyelade, 2017). The Sudanese experience indicated that the relationship of ethnic groups with power (Opportunities) plays a decisive role in the conflict. Elbadawi, confirms that the longest civil wars are caused by ethnically polarized societies, as rebel cohesion is easier and lasts longer under polarization (Elbadawi, 2000).

The researcher prefer to use the term civil war, due to the social division and the participation of a large number of Sudanese tribes in a long war. Despite the importance of the external factor, this does not diminish the social dimension of the war and its legitimacy among local actors.

Researchers' perspectives have varied regarding the causes of the conflict and war between the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Deng points out that the ongoing conflict in Sudan is not merely ethnic, but rather a conflict of an instrumental character, which found its legitimacy due to the collapse of social contracts concerning access to resources, political participation, and the institutional weakness within Sudanese state institutions. Therefore, Deng views this war as an opportunity to rethink and reach an agreement on these issues and to reimagine governance and power in Sudan (Deng, 2025).

Meanwhile, others argue that the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Janjaweed militia, the precursor to

the Rapid Support Forces, became embroiled in a destructive struggle for control of the state following the fall of President al-Bashir's regime in 2019. As a result of the sustained support from President al-Bashir for the Rapid Support Forces when he used them to suppress rebel movements in Darfur as well as to protect his regime against military coups, this transformation allowed the Rapid Support Forces to expand their influence and turn into a powerful actor with ambitions exceeding their original mandate. This fostered within them coup intentions against the very regime and the seizure of the state, its institutions, and its resources (D'Agoût, 2025).

Konozy and Baleela trace the emergence of the Rapid Support Forces phenomenon back to the Janjaweed militia. The Janjaweed began when successive ruling regimes in Sudan employed fighters from the Misseriya and Rizeigat tribes to fight as their proxies in Bahr al-Ghazal during the 1980s. They point to the role of President Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya in supporting this phenomenon as part of his efforts to create an "Arab Belt" to encircle neighboring Chad, with which Libya was disputing some border areas. Baleela contends that the leaders of the Arab Belt militia forces in the 1980s later became the leaders of the Janjaweed militia in Darfur (Konozy, 2025).

Afriyie (2024) sees the fundamental reason for the outbreak of this conflict between the army and the Rapid Support Forces as the difference in perspectives between the two sides regarding the integration of the Rapid Support Forces into the Sudanese army, control over economic assets, and the nature of the democratic transition in Sudan. Here, the focus is specifically on the broad debate that dominated the public sphere in Sudan after mediators presented a roadmap to settle the dispute between the Sudanese army and some political parties concerning the democratic transition, known as the "Framework Agreement negotiations." These negotiations failed to reach an agreement on the timeframe required for integrating the Rapid Support Forces and to whom these forc-

es would be subordinate throughout the transitional period (Afriyie, 2024).

Finding

1 - Causes from a Sociological Perspective

Disintegration of the Social Contract:

Here two issues are presented: the first is the collapse of the "imagined social fabric" that used to connect various groups within the framework of the national state, and the other issue is the erosion of the state's legitimacy as a guarantor of security and justice and its transformation into a spoil for looting.

The problem of the social contract among Sudanese has remained one of the main dilemmas of the nation-building process in Sudan. According to the Sudanese historian Professor Hassan Mekki, Sudan's dilemma stems from it being a land of migrations. The course of the Nile River, which cuts through Sudan from south to north, played a role as an attraction point for these human migrations. On the other hand, Sudan represented a transit state for Muslim groups from West Africa and the Maghreb on their journey to Mecca to perform the Islamic Hajj pilgrimage. Many of these migrant groups settled in different parts of Sudan in distinct geographical patches, and Sudanese tribes exaggerated their distinction from each other by drawing lines on individuals' faces with a sharp tool to determine tribal lineage with permanent, unchangeable marks. Due to the Egyptian occupation in 1821, then the Mahdist Revolution (1881-1899), and

the British occupation (1899-1956), the contemporary state was formed in Sudan, carrying within it the roots of disparity and difference. The outbreak of the first armed rebellion against the state in Sudan, known as the Torit massacre in 1955, is considered the first manifestation of the weakness of the social contract regulating the relationship between the North and the South. This was followed by the emergence of protest movements such as the Darfur Development Front and the Beja Congress in 1958 in eastern Sudan, and protest movements in the Nuba Mountains, which later developed into armed rebellions against the state during the era of President Gaafar Nimeiry's government (1969-1985) (Alzaylai, 2014), in a practical crystallization of the process of dialectical social dialogue about the social contract governing Sudanese society and the erosion of the state's legitimacy as a guarantor of security and justice.

After the war between the North and the South stopped in 2005, the state and its local opponents in Sudan attempted to build a new social contract by establishing a new legal and political framework (a constitution) to address issues of identity and socio-economic inequality in Sudan, to guarantee Sudan's unity and put an end to the phenomenon of protest wars in the peripheral regions. However, after five years, the Southerners chose to secede from the mother state. Similarly, all peace agreements between the Sudanese government and protest movements in Darfur, the latest of which was the Juba Agreement following the popular revolution that overthrew the regime of Omar al-Bashir (1989-2019), failed to build a new social contract. Tirab argues that this approach to dealing with political and security problems in Sudan has been futile throughout Sudan's political and social history from independence to the present time (Tirab, 2021).

Breaking the State's Monopoly on the Means of Violence

Historically, the Sudanese Army was the monopolist of legitimate violence in Sudan. However, the emergence of armed regional protest movements with an ethnic dimension forced the Sudanese government to negotiate with these movements in Addis Ababa (1973), Nigeria, and Kenya (2005), and in Doha (2013). One of the most important results of this was the integration of these tribal militias into the Sudanese Army with their same tribal composition and different fighting doctrine. These integrated groups remained a renewable seed for new rebel movements taking up arms against the state in Sudan. On the other hand, the state in Sudan resorted to arming tribal groups that were being attacked by those rebel ethnic groups. Soon, these tribes turned into new militias killing on behalf of the state by proxy without formal integration according to known military arrangements. The Rapid Support Forces represent one of the most prominent models in this regard; where the government of President Omar al-Bashir (1989-2018), since the rebellion erupted in Darfur in 2003, worked to recruit some Arab tribes – the Janjaweed or camel herders – to fight the protest movements belonging to non-Arab ethnicities. These tribes enhanced their military participation by recruiting fighters from Chad belonging to the same ethnicity (D'Agoût, 2025; Mamdani, 2009).

Here we find that some Arab tribes that sided with the Sudanese government were not only fighting by proxy for the Sudanese government but were also waging their own battle within the context of the conflict between Arab and non-Arab tribes over land ownership and alleviating the feeling of lack of authenticity in that land. Mamdani, (2009) sees that if Darfur is marginalized in Sudan, then the Arabs of Darfur are marginalized in Darfur. In other words, these groups found an opportunity.

Later, those Arab fighting groups were granted the name Border Guard Forces, and this model was later developed into the Rapid Support Forces, with its command given exclusively to the Dagalo family. They were granted wide political, economic, and military privileges, and doors were opened wide for them to build relationships with external parties, such as Gulf countries and the European Union, and to recruit fighters from abroad, as happened after the 2003 rebellion. Press reports and videos have indicated the participation of military leaders and soldiers from the Chadian FACT movement and groups from the Arabs of Niger (Aljazeera.net, 07/04/2024), groups previously described by Tubiana as “Chadian Janjaweed” (Tubiana & Walmsley, 2008) who obey orders issued by Janjaweed leaders in West Darfur state, Sudan. Here, the third cause emerges, which is the expansion of the Rapid Support Forces and their domination over the traditional social system.

The transformation of the Sudanese economy into a rentier economy influenced by armed alliances

The Sudanese economy has suffered from an imbalance in the relationship between development on one hand and the distribution of services. Professor of Economics at the University of Khartoum, Professor Muhammad Hashim Awad, points out that successive Sudanese governments found it easy to establish development projects in central Sudan or along the Nile River and its two main branches, the Blue Nile and the White Nile, due to the presence of railways, paved roads, and electricity. In return, they used part of the returns from these projects to establish and build ser-

vice projects like schools and universities, without realizing that the graduates of these universities would need employment in development projects, which are lacking in their regions. That is, this economic plan worked on creating generations of educated people who cannot find jobs, forcing them to turn into protest movements (ضروع, 1974).

In this context, we study the phenomenon of the Rapid Support Forces’ expansion within the context of the war economy in Sudan. We observe that the Sudanese economy transformed from a productive economy to a rentier economy relying on armed alliances since the emergence of armed rebellion movements with the launch of the Anya-Nya movement – meaning black snake venom – in South Sudan, where money began to flow into the hands of the warlords through support from neighboring countries and other countries (Lagu, 2006). The weakness of development in the peripheries previously led the people of those areas to resort to military service in the armed forces. But after the establishment of the Border Guards and later the Rapid Support Forces, and the significant financial support provided by the state to them, and opening the door wide for them to invest in gold mining in some areas rich in the yellow metal, such as the Jebel Amer area.

In addition to participating in the war in Yemen on behalf of Sudan between the Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, and the Houthi group since 2015, affiliation with the Rapid Support Forces became attractive as a source of money and securing livelihoods for large segments of Sudanese, particularly from the Arab tribes in Darfur (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed newspaper, August 30, 2015). This was accompanied by the emergence of a “shadow economy” that creates material interests linked to the Rapid Support Forces. The activities of this economy included gold smuggling, black-market dollar trading, real estate speculation, currency counterfeiting, and the manufacture of chemical drugs.

After the war broke out, the “shadow economy” worked to support the continuation of the conflict. On February 13, 2025, Sudanese authorities revealed the discovery of a factory for producing narcotic pills in the Khartoum North oil refinery area, producing 100,000 Captagon pills per hour, owned by the Rapid Support Forces, and that most of the production went as stimulants for its soldiers. The Sudanese authorities did not rule out that part of the factory’s production found its way to neighboring countries and local communities (Aljazeera.net, 13/02/2025).

Conflict over Symbolic Capital and Hegemony

The competition between military and civilian elites to monopolize the “representative legitimacy” of the state is one of the most prominent causes of the war in Sudan. This harmful competition began since the success of the uprising in April 2019 and the accession of some political forces to power through an alliance with the army leadership and the Rapid Support Forces. This is due to the fact that the political forces proceeded from the belief that the Sudanese army was still loyal to the old regime, and to prevent any coup by it against the authority, they resorted to an alliance with the Rapid Support Forces as a military force representing the objective counterweight to the army. Thus, the commander of the Rapid Support Forces gained a high political status alongside his military power. On the other hand, the commander of the Rapid Support Forces began communicating with tribal leaders and mobilizing them politically, and the Rapid Support Forces became an expression of, and a substitute for the traditional system. For this reason, the commander of the Rapid Support Forces rejected all attempts to dissolve his forces and integrate them into the Sudanese army. Thus, the competition between the army and the Rapid Support Forces over hegemony and power ended in war on the morning of April 15.

Native Administrations and Land Ownership

Sudan has witnessed a hybrid administrative system in its peripheral regions, combining formal state institutions with traditional tribal institutions. The Native Administration system consists of three levels, mostly the Nazir and his family, the class of Umdas, and the class of Sheikhs from among the Sheikhs and Umdas. The British colonial authorities established this system in order to administer Sudan at the lowest cost through the previous tribal system of the Mahdist state in Sudan, which established a more national administrative system and did not require tribal backgrounds for the rulers of the regions.

This system has weakened the concept of the state in the minds of the region’s inhabitants, strengthening tribal ties instead. It has also undermined the idea of equal citizenship by granting tribes the right to own vast tracts of land without developing them through infrastructure projects or allowing other tribes to own and benefit from them. This hybrid administrative system is a major cause of conflict between local groups in Sudan and has intensified the ongoing war (Abdul-Jalil & Unruh, 2013).

2 - The Process of Sudanese War from a Sociological Perspective

Militarization of Identity

Here, the researcher observes the transformation of tribal and regional affiliations from cultural ties into armed military identities in the ongoing war in Sudan. Although the Rapid Support Forces had an ethnic composition in its original formation, after the war broke out on April 15, 2023, and the Rapid Support Forces failed to achieve complete control over power in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, due to the intervention of the Sudanese Air Force. Thus the Rapid Support Forces began mobilizing the people of Arab tribes in Kordofan and Darfur according to the norms and traditions of traditional tribal wars in those areas, known as Al-Fazaa. Waves of non-professional tribal fighters began flocking to the battlefields in the capital Khartoum and other conflict areas in Sudan. Likewise, local communities in the Darfur and Kordofan regions split between the army and the Rapid Support Forces according to ethnic or racial background. Here, the nature of tribal alignment in the 2023 war differed from that in 2003, where Arab tribes sided with the Rapid Support Forces, while non-Arab tribes sided with the Sudanese army this time.

Here, the war in Sudan entered a new phase, becoming a “multi-layered war” or small local wars within a large national war, where the collective memory of historical conflicts was summoned and reproduced. For example, the traditional conflict between the Arab Hawazma tribes and the black Nuba tribes in South Kordofan was reproduced, as was the conflict be-

tween Arab tribes and the Zaghawa tribe in the city of El Fasher in North Darfur state, and between Arab tribes and the Masalit tribe in the city of El Geneina in West Darfur state, where Rapid Support Forces soldiers committed horrific massacres against the Masalit and Zaghawa tribes. Mamdani, explains the excessive cruelty that characterized the wars in Darfur, which is part of the African Sahel region, as stemming from the crisis of nomadic peoples who have no homeland and are fighting for survival and land (Mamdani, 2009). Among these groups are the Abala tribes (i.e., those who raise camels) (Tubiana & Walmsley, 2008). Members of these tribal groups represent the backbone of the Rapid Support Forces, and the commander of the Rapid Support Forces, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), and the most prominent leaders of the Rapid Support Forces belong to these cross-border tribes. These groups worked to affirm their distinction from the other side in the war by using cultural expressions and war terminology specific to their social components.

Fragmentation of the Social Sphere

The April 15 war in Sudan has resulted in the fragmentation of the public into multiple spheres of influence subject to parallel authorities. Cities and regions have transformed from spaces of coexistence into arenas of social exclusion. As the war shifted from fighting around the Sudanese army’s military headquarters in Khartoum to looting citizens’ homes and displacing them, and then moved to other cities with the aim of controlling, plundering, and subjugating civilians, Sudan has witnessed massive internal displacement. Amnesty International estimates the number of internally displaced persons at 9 million, with approximately 1.8 million refugees in neighboring countries. The movement of populations from one area to another within Sudan indicates that it occurs based on ethnic and racial backgrounds, and the reason for this is that

aggression against civilians is carried out based on their ethnic and tribal backgrounds, especially by the Rapid Support Forces (Hoeffler, 2015).

At the beginning of the war, the displacement movement began with the departure of members of Arab tribes belonging to northern Sudan from various cities in Darfur. In contrast, following the Sudanese army's liberation of the capital Khartoum and cities in central Sudan, many families and population groups belonging to Arab tribes in Darfur, especially those whose members participated in military operations on the side of the Rapid Support Forces, were displaced.

Comparing this dimension with the previous South Sudan war experience (1955-2005): I noticed that the fighting was exclusively between the regular fighting forces, while the cities were open paths for social communication between citizens from the North and the South through trade and population movement, to the extent that northern Sudan became the main destination for the displacement of Southerners. This phenomenon later contributed to the process of cultural assimilation among the mostly Christian Southerners into the prevailing Arab-Islamic culture in the North. The war also involved a new pattern of conflict, where it is noted that the conflict sometimes takes on the character of a conflict between urban communities and rural communities, as rural people and nomads constitute the vast majority of the soldiers and leadership of the Rapid Support Forces, while the supporters of the Sudanese Armed Forces belong presumably more to urban or settled communities.

Disintegration of Intermediate Structures

A United Nations report reveals that Sudanese women and girls are paying a heavy price and bearing the brunt of the humanitarian crisis of one of the world's largest displacement crises. Women constitute approximately 53% of those displaced by the ongoing war in Sudan since April 15, 2023. In addition to displacement and homelessness, women are facing numerous dangers. Around 7,000 women die from childbirth amidst hunger and the lack of medical and health services. They also face sexual violence, rape, human trafficking, and slavery during their displacement or while searching for livelihoods and food. The UN report indicates that approximately 7 million women have experienced gender-based violence (UNWomen, 2024). The member of the National Committee for Investigating Violations of National and International Humanitarian Law Rawda Abdel Qader, revealed that the committee documented 1,392 cases of sexual violence against women in several states across the country. These cases included gang rapes, sexual slavery, enforced disappearances, as well as forced pregnancies and marriages. Abdel Qader explained that "these figures represent only 2% of the actual violations on the ground," noting that "the Rapid Support Forces used sexual violence as a weapon to humiliate civilians for ethnic reasons and force them into displacement from their homes." Experts say that fear of social stigma and social restrictions prevent Sudanese women from reporting violations and seeking medical, legal, and psychological support (Aljazeera.net, 2025).

The war has shown the dissolution of social institutions that represented spaces for social settlement. The family has transformed from a stable institution for sound social upbringing into an institution suffering from hunger, displacement, fear, and aggression

due to its ethnic or regional background. Schools have closed and their places have turned into prisons or refugee camps for the civilians. Likewise, political parties have transformed from their role in promoting civic values into tools for war propaganda. Armed organizations have emerged as alternatives to traditional state institutions, even in regions where there have been no armed movements since the establishment of the Sudanese state, such as Al Jazirah state in central Sudan.

Transformations in the Social Structure

Wars affect societies and their structures radically. In the case of Sudan, we find that the conflict revolves primarily due to competition over power and wealth (Niblock, 1987; TIRAB, 2016). But internal wars in Sudan usually do not lead to equality; rather, they end up creating a new class within the context of the system of inequality, which the protest movements or groups rebelling against the official authority complained about. This phenomenon has begun to appear in the context of the ongoing war in Sudan, where a new class of war profiteers or those who have climbed the social mobility ladder has emerged. It is a new “warrior class” that monopolizes violence and has begun to acquire wealth, whether through direct benefit from looting public property and banks or due to the war and support from foreign countries. This class includes a group of highway robbers and thieves who previously led local gangs in Kordofan and Darfur and found in this war an opportunity for wealth and social status transition. The local community now mentions prominent names in the ongoing war events. In contrast, intellectuals and civil society leaders are being marginalized.

Change in the Social Values System and Reshaping of Identity

A further consequence of the war is the erosion of national citizenship and coexistence in favor of narrower, primary loyalties to tribe and region. Within this environment, a process of identity restructuring unfolds, whereby local identities—ethnic, racial, or regional—crystallize into dominant and exclusive alternatives to a unifying national identity.

This dynamic is exemplified by the emergence of “Al-Juniadya or Al-Atawa” as a consolidating identity for Arab tribal groups in Kordofan and Darfur. Proponents frame it as the authentic identity of Sudan’s indigenous Arab population. In pursuit of this vision, advocates have sought to establish common ground with Arab tribes in other regions, such as the Shukriya in eastern Sudan’s Butana region (encompassing parts of Al Jazira, Gedaref, and Kassala states) and the Al-Rifa’i tribe in the Blue Nile and Sennar states.

An early manifestation of this trend was a speech by Rapid Support Forces Commander Makin Al-Sadiq, delivered before thousands of Misseriya youth in West Kordofan who declared their allegiance to the RSF (Shatot, 2023).

Contrasting with this discourse is a parallel, exclusionary narrative centered on a distinct Arab identity for northern Sudanese tribes. Some of its proponents have called for secession to form a separate “State of the River and the Sea.” Mirroring this ethnic based identity upsizing, certain groups in eastern Sudan have moved to form ethnically based militias, advocating explicitly for autonomous control over their region and its resources. This position was articulated, for instance, by Eastern Sudan Liberation Movement leader Ibrahim Dunia in a statement published on December 25, 2025 (IBRAHIM, 2025).

Running parallel to this profound identity fragmentation, Sudan's societal value system faces a severe crisis. The tolerance once characteristic of Sudanese society has been supplanted by violence, suspicion, and fear of the "other." The enduring civil wars—first in Darfur and now in Khartoum and central Sudan—have formed the backdrop against which a new generation has come of age. Consequently, the institutions responsible for social cohesion now confront fundamental and unprecedented challenges within a society exhausted by poverty and conflict.

Conclusion

Sociologically, this war represents a foundational moment that has placed Sudan on the threshold of a radical transformation in its social and political structure. It may produce a new social entity radically different from pre-conflict Sudan, where infrastructure has been destroyed and Sudanese people have been pushed below the poverty line. The reconstruction process in Sudan must include a social vision for building the new Sudan, where its peoples are united socially and politically, and where economic and social inequalities are eliminated.

The international experiences of healing and reconciliation after genocide or mass killing shows that it is also necessary to launch a serious process of recovery from the war experience at the individual and collective levels (Staub et al., 2005).

Identity has also been sharply redefined from its broad national character to tribal and regional affiliations, and from cultural ties to armed military identities. Social networks such as parties and unions have been replaced by a social network of a tribal or ethnic nature with all its cultural baggage. De Dreu, points to a similar experience in West Africa where the symbolic dimensions of local culture fueled the long-term conflict between the Mandingo and Loma and embodied the metaphor of maternal kinship as a complete political culture for political alliance among lineage groups (De Dreu, 2010).

The study showed that the state's relinquishment of the monopoly on weapons leads to conflict and the fragmentation of authority in the country. Also, the integration processes of rebel groups following peace agreements were unsuccessful, as the integrated groups remained a latent nucleus for a new rebellion. The historical experience in Sudan proved the fallacy of this, as the Anya-Nya forces were integrated into the army in 1973, but they reproduced themselves in the form of a rebellion against the army they were integrated into in 1983. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the Turkish model in dealing with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), where it was agreed that the party would voluntarily announce the dissolution of its formations and hand over its weapons, and its soldiers, who are not accused in a specific private case, would return to live in society.

The competition between civilians and the military over power and legitimacy in Sudan is one of the most important causes of internal wars in the country. The constant demand from civilians was to remove the army from politics and return it to its barracks. However, it seems that Sudan needs a new approach that systematically and constitutionally incorporates the army into politics, making the army's presence within the political process and the democratic system a guarantee for the continuity of democracy and preventing its deviation on one hand, and an acknowledgment of the reality that the army is the skeleton upon which the flesh of the state in Sudan was built. Experiences in South America indicate that some army leaders were the ones who led their countries towards full democratic transformation (Huntington, 1991). Peoples may go through war in their history, but it is important that this war leads to a better future so that the souls of the victims may rest in peace.

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When Voices Are Silenced An Examination of the Truth in Sudanese Media Under the Flames of War (April 2023 – 2025)

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Abstract

This study is guided by the central research question: How does armed conflict transform media structures, truth production, and public trust in Sudan between 2023 and 2025? Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative analytical approach combining document analysis of international media reports, discourse analysis of official and parallel media outputs, and comparative interpretation grounded in conflict communication theory.

The article examines the transformation of the Sudanese media landscape between 2023 and 2025 under conditions of armed conflict. Drawing on international reports, journalist testimonies, and media-content analysis, the study explores how war has reshaped information flows, journalistic practice, and public trust. It argues that Sudan represents a paradigmatic case of post-truth communication in conflict zones, where media institutions are simultaneously targets, tools, and arenas of war. The article as well contributes to media and diplomacy studies by linking conflict journalism, propaganda, and post-war media reconstruction.

Keywords: Sudan, War Journalism, Media, Conflict, Post-Truth, Digital Propaganda

Introduction – Voices Silenced in War and the Price of Truth

Sudan has been the scene of one of the most devastating humanitarian crises in its modern history since April 2023, when war broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces militia (RSF). With the outbreak of war, Sudan's media environment also underwent a dramatic transformation, with journalistic activities facing both

physical and structural obstacles. The destruction of infrastructure, power and internet outages, violent incidents targeting members of the press, and systematic censorship have severely limited the media's capacity to produce and distribute information (Reporters Without Borders, 2025).

The role of the media in times of war and conflict has long been a focus of communication and political science literature. While fulfilling its functions of informing the public, ensuring transparency, and promoting accountability, the media also carries the risk of becoming a propaganda tool for the warring parties or being silenced under state pressure (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005). The Sudanese case provides an important case study in terms of showing how these theoretical frameworks manifest in practice. In particular, the physical damage to traditional media institutions and the forced displacement of journalists have led to the emergence of digital platforms and social media as alternative information channels. However, this digital transformation has also brought new challenges, such as the spread of disinformation and misinformation. Therefore, the process undergone by the Sudanese media since April 2023 allows us to understand both the limits of crisis journalism and the resilience capacity of the media.

This study comprehensively examines the transformation of the media in Sudan between 2023 and 2025. The aim is not only to describe the destructive effects of war but also to examine forms of resistance to truth. The methodology is based on national and international reports (UNESCO, RSF, IMS), local journalist testimonies, and media products. The research seeks to answer the question, "How does the media survive in war and preserve social consciousness?" The findings of the study will not only document Sudan's current situation but also contribute to the development of policy recommendations for the protection and support of the media in regions where similar wars may occur in the future.

The Outbreak of War and the Collapse of Communication Infrastructure

The moment the first explosions echoed in the skies over Khartoum on the morning of April 15, 2023, Sudan's information ecosystem began to fragment. Around 9:00 a.m., as gunfire erupted in different parts of the capital, the infrastructure of internet service providers was targeted. Fiber optic lines were cut, and mobile operators' base stations came under fire (NetBlocks, 2023). Access Now's (2023) real-time monitoring data shows that internet access dropped by 87% within the first 48 hours. This situation was not merely a technical failure but constituted a systematic communication blockade. The parties to the conflict have realized that controlling the flow of information is as critical as military superiority. While city residents were unable to get news from their families, the international community also struggled to understand the events unfolding in Sudan. All three of Sudan's main internet service providers were completely shut down amid the ongoing conflict, according to reports citing internet-monitoring data, severely disrupting communication for civilians trapped in conflict zones as well as for those attempting to flee violence (JURIST, 2024). The collapse of the communications infrastructure has been etched into the collective memory as an experience as traumatic as the war itself.

Traditional media institutions also found themselves at the center of this chaotic process. The central building of the national news agency SUNA in Khartoum was bombed in the early days of the conflict; archives, equipment, and decades of accumulated document collections were either completely destroyed or ren-

dered unusable). Television studios were caught between the front lines, while transmission towers were knocked out by power cuts and physical attacks. Established institutions such as Sudan TV, Al-Nilein TV, and Omdurman Radio were forced to suspend broadcasting. According to the Sudanese Journalists' Union (Sudanese Journalists Syndicate, 2024). With the escalation of violence as a result of the ongoing conflict, 2024 saw a huge increase in the number of victims. Sixteen journalists were killed, a 300% increase over the previous year, 2023. The number of journalists assassinated since the beginning of the war has risen to 20, and the crimes are not limited to murder, but also include blackouts and defamation. Many of the assassinations were accompanied by systematic smear campaigns and the withholding of information about the circumstances of the incident. The most heinous forms of torture and abuse are also practiced against journalists, with the aim of intimidating them and silencing their voices. Assassinations are no longer limited to journalists, but have extended to include anyone suspected of collaborating with them. These crimes are committed out of revenge and a desire to control information, and they underscore the extent to which the right to life and human dignity are disregarded (Sudanese Journalists Syndicate, 2024).

As a result of the war, more than 90% of media outlets have ceased operations. Of the 22 local radio stations, only three remain in intermittent operation. The total number of violations against journalists and media outlets since the outbreak of the conflict has reached 509 documented cases, each of which testifies to the magnitude of the crime committed against truth and freedom of expression. They are classified and documented according to the nature of each violation in the reports of the Sudanese Journalists' Union (Sudanese Journalists Syndicate, 2024).

Data detailed in UNESCO's (2024) report concretizes the scale of the destruction. Of the 180 media outlets active when the conflict began, 126 ceased operations within the first three months. This represents

a 70% loss and creates an unprecedented void in Sudan's media history. The threats faced by journalists are multifaceted. According to reports documented by Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2025), at least 23 journalists were killed in the 2023-2024 period, more than 40 were detained, and dozens faced threats of torture and enforced disappearance. Some journalists were injured by bomb fragments in the midst of clashes, some were targeted by armed groups, and some were arrested while simply trying to conduct an interview. In this context, being a journalist means not only practicing one's profession but also putting one's life at risk. Media freedom indices have placed Sudan at the top of the "dangerous areas for journalists" category.

Beyond the physical devastation, a more insidious collapse has occurred — the erosion of epistemic trust. With the disappearance of traditional news sources, Sudanese society has lost its ability to discern what to believe (Harsin, 2015). WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, and anonymous Telegram channels have emerged as primary sources of information; yet most of the content circulating on these platforms could not be verified. Videos purportedly showing the bombing of a neighborhood were later identified as footage captured months earlier in different regions. Figures concerning civilian casualties were routinely adjusted to serve the propaganda needs of each warring faction. The line between fact and fabrication has become almost impossible to draw.

This situation triggered what social scientists conceptualize as "epistemic insecurity"—a condition in which the public loses fundamental confidence in its sources of knowledge, and skepticism becomes the default epistemological stance (Sismondo, 2017). Sudan has thus lost not only its physical infrastructure but also its very capacity to define and share truth. The war operates on deeper, less visible layers, corroding society's relationship with knowledge itself.

The Three Layers of Sudanese Media During the War: Official Media, Parallel Field Media and Exiled Independent Media

Official media relocated to Port Sudan and increasingly functioned as a state propaganda apparatus. Programming centered on patriotism, heroism, and "defending the homeland." Victories were amplified; losses minimized. Classical propaganda techniques structured output. Reach remained limited by infrastructure collapse and restricted connectivity. In RSF militia -controlled areas, a flexible media network emerged via livestreams and social platforms. Content resembled citizen journalism, relying on mobile footage and drones. Visual strategies maximized emotional impact through scenes of destruction and suffering. Authenticity was often uncertain, but propaganda value persisted. Regarding exiled independent media, Independent journalism inside Sudan became nearly impossible. Exiled platforms in Cairo, Nairobi, Istanbul, and Doha filled the gap, gathering information through networks and correspondents. While claiming relative independence, funding and location shaped perspectives. Nevertheless, exile media documented violations, casualties, and displacement.

Together, these layers reveal a pluralistic yet fragmented system: official propaganda, armed-group narratives, and constrained exile journalism. Fragmentation deepened polarization and complicated peace-building.

Information Wars: Perception Management, Propaganda, and Disinformation

In 21st-century conflicts, victory is measured not only by territorial gains or military achievements but also by control of the narrative (Bjola and Pamment, 2018). The war in Sudan stands as one of the starkest illustrations of this fact. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces militia (RSF) have clashed not only on the battlefield but across digital platforms. Both sides have developed sophisticated media strategies to construct legitimacy, delegitimize the opponent, and influence international opinion.

The army has positioned itself as the guardian of the state and defender of the homeland; concepts such as “sovereignty,” “the flag,” “honor,” and “constitutional order” dominate its official statements and social-media messaging. The RSF militia, conversely, has framed itself as the voice of the people and the vanguard of change, emphasizing themes of “justice,” “civilian protection,” and “resistance against dictatorship.” This discursive battle has not been limited to words: both parties have deployed visual material, short video clips etc. By tying “defense of the homeland” to “religious duty,” both camps increased public acceptance of the war while suppressing critical thought. Within this context, the media ceased to be a neutral provider of information and instead turned into an ideological battlefield.

Social-media platforms became the most intense arenas of this information war. Coordinated inauthentic-behavior (CIB) campaigns flourished across Facebook, Twitter (X), TikTok, and Telegram. Through fake

accounts, bots, and troll farms, thousands of posts were disseminated daily. According to Abbas’s (2025) comprehensive report, between April 2023 and June 2024, at least 250 coordinated disinformation campaigns were identified. These campaigns included manipulated videos allegedly showing massacres committed by the opposing side, fabricated stories of fallen heroes, invented victory reports, and edited images “proving” the moral corruption of rival groups.

In many cases, footage filmed years earlier in Syria, Yemen, or Libya was re-captioned and circulated as if depicting current events in Sudan. Although independent fact-checking organizations attempted to debunk such content, the speed of misinformation dissemination vastly outpaced that of corrections. Reports from the Digital Forensics Lab and the Atlantic Council (2023), Sudan’s fragile information environment has played a critical role in undermining democratic processes and public trust. The Atlantic Council revealed that many of these campaigns were orchestrated by professional media teams and, in some instances, received logistical or financial backing from foreign actors.

This environment crystallized the notion of a “post-truth era” within the Sudanese context. As defined by the Oxford Dictionary (2016) — when objective facts become less influential than appeals to emotion and personal belief (Lewandowsky et al., 2017) — post-truth politics took hold. During the two years of conflict, what mattered most was not factual accuracy but the persuasiveness of competing narratives. Individuals gravitated toward information that confirmed their ideological positions; rather than confronting cognitive dissonance, they confined themselves to one-sided sources.

In such an atmosphere, critical reasoning became a social luxury. Truth turned into one of the first casualties of war (Hamilton, 2020). As media credibility eroded, polarization deepened. Information wars ceased to be a by-product of armed confrontation and instead became a strategic domain at its very center.

Sudan, in this sense, has become a modern laboratory for studying how knowledge itself can be weaponized. This process has led to the materialization of the concept of the “post-truth era” within the Sudanese context. Chosen by the Oxford Dictionary as the Word of the Year in 2016, post-truth describes a condition in which objective facts become secondary to statements appealing to emotions and personal beliefs (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). Throughout the two years of war in Sudan, what mattered most was not what was true but which narrative appeared more convincing. Individuals preferred to believe news that confirmed their own ideological positions; faced with contradictory information, rather than experiencing cognitive dissonance, they clung to one-sided sources. In this environment, critical thinking became a social luxury. Truth itself turned into one of the first casualties of war (Hamilton, 2020). As the credibility of the media declined, social polarization deepened. Information wars ceased to be a mere by-product of military conflict and evolved into a strategic domain at its very core. Sudan has thus become a modern laboratory in which knowledge itself has been weaponized.

Case Study – TRT Arabi’s “Under Siege: The General Command” Documentary

Released in 2025, the TRT Arabi documentary *Istiqrari Under Siege: The General Command* portrays, through the language of documentary cinema, the two-year siege of the Sudanese Army’s General Command building in Khartoum. By combining eyewitness testimonies, archival footage, and on-site imagery, the film explores both the physical and symbolic dimensions of the war.

Its central statement — “The General Command is not merely a building, but the heart of resistance” — establishes the headquarters as more than an architectural space: it becomes a symbol of national identity and military pride.

The documentary’s narrative strategy relies on emotional appeal and heroic discourse.

The daily lives of soldiers under siege, their struggles, and stories of endurance aim to elicit empathy from the audience. Statements by commanding officers emphasize themes of “defending the homeland” “honor” and “sacrifice” resonating with Turkey’s own military culture and historical experience.

The film’s factual credibility is reinforced by its overlap with verified information from international outlets such as Al Jazeera and BBC Africa. Independent sources confirm that the General Command had indeed been besieged, that soldiers inside maintained resistance under dire conditions, and that the building held deep symbolic importance for both sides (Al Jazeera, 2024; BBC Africa, 2024).

In this sense, the documentary can be viewed not as mere propaganda but as a production that reflects a documented reality. It offers a cinematic archive of endurance and national symbolism, contributing to the collective memory of the Sudanese conflict and to the broader study of war representation in Middle Eastern media.

Women Journalists and the Gender Dimension

The war in Sudan has created a contradictory experience for women journalists—one that has produced both destruction and visibility. According to data from UN Women Sudan (2024), 60 percent of women work-

ing in the media sector lost their jobs during the first year of the conflict, and many were forced to flee the country due to security concerns. Yet, paradoxically, the visibility of women journalists on digital platforms increased by 40 percent. This phenomenon can be explained by the collapse of traditional media structures and the subsequent filling of this void through digital tools (Byerly and Ross, 2006).

Women journalists found opportunities to make their voices heard through social-media accounts, independent blog platforms, and podcasts. However, this increased visibility also brought greater risk. Cyber-harassment, threatening messages, and gender-based violence became systemic challenges for women working in media (International Women's Media Foundation [IWMF], 2023). Journalists such as Iman Fathi (Al Jazeera Mubasher) and Maha Abdelrahim (Sudan Post) carried out significant journalistic work during the conflict. Fathi drew international attention with her reports documenting the civilian tragedies in Darfur, giving voice to the stories of displaced women and children and making the human dimension of the war visible. Abdelrahim, on the other hand, investigated the experiences of women living in refugee camps, cases of gender-based violence, and women's survival strategies. The work of these journalists embodies the concept of "witness journalism" bringing empathy, ethical sensitivity, and social responsibility into the practice of reporting (Peters, 2011). As Ellison, E. (2013) notes, women correspondents introduce a distinctive perspective to war coverage—treating violence and conflict not merely as military phenomena but as social and human traumas. Their work has also made gender inequalities more visible. During wartime, women have been both direct targets of violence and victims of displacement, poverty, and the increased burden of care (UN Women, 2024). While documenting this multi-layered victimization, women journalists have simultaneously highlighted women's active roles in resilience, solidarity, and community reconstruction.

In post-war media-reform debates, equal representation of women and their participation in decision-making mechanisms have come to be viewed as prerequisites for sustainable peace. In Sudan's case, the content produced by women journalists underscores the critical importance of ensuring that women occupy both productive and decision-making positions in the post-conflict restructuring of the media sector. The experiences of Sudanese women journalists demonstrate that the future of Sudanese media must be shaped not only by technical infrastructure or legal regulations but also by the principle of gender equality (Van Zoonen, 2003).

The Social-Media Ecosystem: Digital Resistance or Digital Chaos?

The collapse of traditional media infrastructure and the restriction of internet access have placed social-media platforms at the center of information flow in Sudan. Throughout the war, Twitter (X), Facebook, and Telegram functioned both as sources of news and as tools for social mobilization. Yet these same platforms simultaneously became arenas where disinformation, manipulation, and digital propaganda campaigns were most intensely conducted.

On one side, journalists and citizen reporters on the ground instantly shared footage captured with their mobile phones; on the other, coordinated fake accounts, bots, and troll networks systematically ran campaigns manipulating the conflict. This dual dynamic illustrates the tension between social media's liberating potential and its use as an instrument of control and manipulation.

Morozov's (2012) concept of the "net delusion" becomes particularly evident in the Sudanese case: digital technologies can easily be instrumentalized by authoritarian structures, reversing their emancipatory potential. During this process, the notion of "digital resistance" acquired new meaning within Sudan's context. To overcome internet shutdowns, young Sudanese activists and technologists established VPN networks, used Tor browsers, and developed alternative communication channels. Alternative news portals operating on local servers, mesh-network technologies, and offline content-sharing systems became tangible instruments of digital resistance. At the same time, cyber-activists sought to educate the public on information security—producing guides on encryption techniques, secure-communication applications, and digital-privacy strategies. However, the reach of this resistance remained limited; these methods required technical literacy and therefore could not extend to the broader population.

The Regional and Global Visibility of Sudanese Media

The war in Sudan has been described in international media as a "forgotten crisis".

Global news organizations such as BBC Africa, TRT World, Al Jazeera English, and CNN International paid limited attention during the first months of the conflict; as the war dragged on, its news value declined and Sudan faded from the global media agenda.

Hawkins's (2008) concept of "media saturation" helps explain this phenomenon.

High-profile conflicts—such as the war in Ukraine or the crisis in Gaza—have dominated the global attention economy, pushing Sudan further down the hierarchy of news relevance.

As a result, a humanitarian catastrophe in which tens of thousands have been killed and millions displaced has vanished from the radar of global public consciousness.

According to Freedland (2024), wrote in Guardian; Sudan represents the most severe humanitarian crisis globally, but it remains largely overlooked by the international community. This observation highlights that the issue is not merely international indifference but Sudan's inability to project its own narrative onto the global stage. Western media representations of Africa have long been framed through stereotypes of helplessness, chaos, and primitivism, neglecting the continent's structural problems, historical contexts, and political complexities. Because Sudan has failed to communicate its perspective internationally, it has become the object of an Orientalist gaze—depicted as passive, voiceless, and devoid of agency. In Western coverage, Sudan has been reduced to an image of humanitarian despair rather than a political actor capable of defining its own destiny. This lack of representational agency underscores a deeper crisis of media diplomacy and narrative sovereignty in Sudan's post-colonial trajectory.

The Future of Sudanese Media and the Diplomatic Communication Dimension

In post-war Sudan, media must be viewed not merely as a vehicle of information but as a strategic instrument of diplomatic communication and public diplomacy. Within this context, the role of the media extends beyond news reporting to become central in national image reconstruction and the restoration

of trust with the international community. Sudanese embassies abroad and journalists within the diaspora are now tasked with re-narrating Sudan's story, amplifying the voices of civil society, and legitimizing peace processes. We can take, the relations between Turkey and Sudan as an example. Cause this relations serve not only bilateral interests but also function as a strategic bridge for sustainable cooperation across Africa. This partnership enhances Turkey's regional legitimacy under its "Africa Opening Policy," while offering Sudan new diplomatic spaces on international platforms (Tirab, 2022). Collaborative programs in media education and technical capacity-building with Turkey, Qatar, and the African Union could significantly strengthen Sudan's institutional capacity. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) has already implemented media-development projects across the Middle East and Africa, providing a model for Sudan. Qatar's Al Jazeera Media Institute offers specialized training in conflict reporting and digital safety (Al Jazeera Media Institute, 2024). The African Union's "Strategy for Information and Communication in Africa 2020–2025" emphasizes media freedom and professionalization among member states (African Union, 2020).

Academic exchange programs between Selçuk University and Khartoum University in fields such as crisis communication, peace journalism, and digital literacy exemplify this model of knowledge transfer. Such collaborations reinforce the emerging concept of "post-war media diplomacy." In this paradigm, the media becomes not only an information carrier but also a diplomatic actor—building peace, supporting national reconciliation, and mobilizing international solidarity (Gilboa, 2023).

The diplomatic communication dimension is crucial for shaping the future of Sudanese media across three main axes: i) Establishing strategic partnerships with international news agencies to ensure that stories from Sudan are told from a Sudanese perspective; ii) Building alliances with regional media net-

works to develop a Pan-African narrative of solidarity; iii) Using digital platforms to democratize the flow of information between the diaspora and local communities (Stremlau, 2018).

Platforms such as Twitter/X, Facebook, and WhatsApp facilitate the participation of the Sudanese diaspora in post-war reconstruction efforts and play a key role in public-diplomacy campaigns.

However, for this form of digital diplomacy to succeed, media professionals must receive comprehensive training in disinformation management, ethical journalism, and intercultural communication. In this respect, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) guidelines for reporting in conflict zones and UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy programs provide essential resources for Sudan (UNESCO, 2024).

Reconstruction and Reform Proposals: A New Vision for Peace Journalism

Building a sustainable media ecosystem in Sudan requires institutional reform and normative transformation. The first step is to establish a National Council for Media and Peace, whose independence must be constitutionally guaranteed. This council should oversee press freedom, journalist safety, and ethical standards—while remaining free from government interference. The model could draw inspiration from South Africa's post-apartheid Independent Communications Authority (ICASA), which strengthened the media's democratic role through its dual regulatory and protective functions (Duncan, 2017).

Creating capacity-building funds for women and young journalists would increase the demographic and perspective diversity of Sudanese media. During

the war, women reporters took the lead in covering issues of sexual violence, refugee women, and gender-based discrimination, yet faced immense challenges related to safety, access to resources, and cultural pressure (Khartoum Centre for Human Rights, 2024). Special fellowships, mentorship programs, and safe workspaces for women journalists are essential.

Young journalists, meanwhile, must be trained in digital literacy, mobile journalism, and social-media verification techniques—with projects like those led by UN Women and Gender Links in Africa providing useful models (UN Women, 2023). Universities should also incorporate Peace Journalism modules as compulsory courses, ensuring that future media professionals are equipped with conflict sensitivity, trauma awareness, and ethical responsibility. According to Johan Lynch, & Galtung, (2013) concept, peace journalism challenges the causes of violence, emphasizes solution-oriented approaches, and gives voice to all sides. In Sudan's fractured society, this approach is indispensable for reconciliation and social healing.

A National Archive and Documentary Center should be established to systematically document the memory of the war. This center would preserve journalists' work, eyewitness accounts, civil-society reports, and audiovisual materials through digital archiving systems.) (Ciorciari, 2012). (Examples such as the Rwanda Genocide Archive and the Bosnia War Crimes Documentation Center demonstrate how such initiatives contribute to justice and collective recovery.

In Sudan, such an archive would not only serve as a historical record but also as a vital data source for future truth and reconciliation commissions. Similarly, creating Media Ethics and Digital Verification Boards would enhance operational capacity in the fight against disinformation (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). These boards should operate under the standards of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) and provide multilingual (Arabic, English, and local dialects) content verification services.

Ultimately, these reforms represent more than technical restructuring—they constitute the communication pillar of national reconciliation. Media must become an instrument of reckoning with the past, pursuing justice, and collectively rebuilding the future.

Journalism Education and the Crisis of Professional Ethics in Sudan

Before the war, journalism education in Sudan was predominantly theoretical, offering little room for practical experience. The communication faculties of Khartoum University, Omdurman Islamic University, and Sudan University of Science and Technology had, for decades, relied on outdated curricula dating back to the 1980s. This stagnation hindered the development of multi-platform reporting, data journalism, and verification techniques required by the digital age (Skjerdal & Ngugi, 2007). Course content focused primarily on print and radio journalism while neglecting contemporary topics such as social-media dynamics, algorithmic news distribution, cybersecurity, and digital ethics. In addition, technical deficiencies—aging computer labs, limited internet access, and lack of modern software—prevented students from gaining practical skills. Consequently, young graduates often found themselves unprepared for labor-market demands. When the war broke out, many faculty members fled the country, laboratories were shut down, and campuses became non-operational due to security concerns. Thus, journalism education in Sudan experienced both a physical and epistemological rupture.

In response, members of the Sudanese diaspora—academics and journalists—launched emergency online-learning initiatives. For example, the “Sudan Me-

dia Initiative” organized webinars for young journalists on digital security and verification techniques (Sudan Media Initiative, 2024).

However, such voluntary efforts were insufficient to fill the systemic and accredited educational vacuum.

Journalists remained ill-equipped to confront the algorithms of the social-media era, lacking the methodological tools, technical resources, and institutional backing needed to combat misinformation. This deficiency facilitated the uncontrolled spread of fake images, manipulated videos, and provocative content via Facebook and WhatsApp, deepening societal polarization.

Ethically, a similar void persisted. The core journalistic principle of “do no harm” was frequently replaced by emotional sensationalism, partisanship, and the unfiltered publication of traumatic imagery (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2013).

The International Federation of Journalists’ (IFJ, 2023) “Reporting in Conflict Zones Guide” and the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma’s (2024) trauma-awareness training modules could offer guidance in this field. Moreover, adopting UNESCO and the African Journalists Union’s Peace Journalism Principles within local professional bodies—particularly the Sudanese Journalists Network—could mark the first step toward rebuilding trust in the post-war era (UNESCO, 2024). Journalism education in times of war increasingly emphasizes ethical responsibility, empathy, and human-centered reporting, particularly when covering victims of violence and humanitarian crises. Rather than sensationalizing suffering or amplifying hostile narratives, students highlighted the importance of responsible language use, conflict sensitivity, and awareness of the psychological impact of reporting on both journalists and affected communities. In this context, universities are encouraged to adapt their curricula by integrating training in psychological resilience, trauma awareness, critical thinking, and digital and information literacy. Such curricular adap-

tations aim to prepare future journalists to operate safely and ethically in extreme conditions marked by disinformation, emotional pressure, and physical risk, while maintaining professional integrity and public trust (Fiialka & Kornieva, 2024).

Overcoming Sudan’s crisis of media ethics requires not only the adoption of normative principles but also their integration into daily practice, institutional policy, and journalism education.

Only then can Sudanese media emerge as a professional, credible, and socially responsible pillar in the nation’s democratic reconstruction.

The Role of the Sudanese Diaspora and New Media Networks

Although the war in Sudan has resulted in large-scale displacement and forced migration, it has simultaneously facilitated the emergence of a transnational digital media sphere shaped by the Sudanese diaspora. Since the outbreak of the war in 2023, Sudanese journalists operating from global hubs such as Istanbul, Cairo, Doha, Nairobi, London, and Washington have increasingly relied on blogs, independent digital platforms, YouTube channels, and podcast networks to document events inside Sudan and communicate them to international audiences. This diasporic media ecosystem functions not only as an alternative source of information in the absence of domestic media infrastructure, but also as a space for political engagement, identity reconstruction, and narrative contestation beyond national borders, reflecting broader patterns of digital diasporic activism and mediated transnationalism (Bernal, 2006). Unlike the traditional model of “foreign correspondence,” these networks have cultivated a model of collective witnessing, op-

erating not under a single institutional authority but through a multi-voiced, horizontal, and participatory ecosystem of news production. Sudanese journalists have assumed the responsibility of serving as both the voice and conscience of the nation—publicizing the war’s brutal realities while also highlighting Sudan’s cultural richness and resilience. Visual-first platforms like Instagram and TikTok have enabled young Sudanese creators to share the everyday impacts of war, refugee experiences, and struggles over identity (Leurs and Ponzanesi, 2024).

An independent platform known as the Sudanese Voices Network has become a digital memory bank, systematically archiving audio testimonies, written statements, and visual materials from victims—resources that can serve as evidence in future justice processes. The platform has functioned as an important source for the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other human-rights organizations documenting war crimes in Darfur and Khartoum (Sudanese Voices Network, 2024). By combining oral-history methodology with digital archiving technologies, this initiative demonstrates the power of civil society in preserving the memory of collective trauma and combating injustice. Similarly, the Africa Media Initiative operating in Türkiye has provided scholarships and technical support to young Sudanese journalists, offering a concrete example of “media diplomacy.” The program has delivered training in digital content production, data analysis, mobile journalism, and social-media strategy, while building cultural and professional bridges between Türkiye and Sudan (Africa Media Initiative, 2024). Projects conducted in cooperation with TRT World are seen as part of Türkiye’s soft-power strategy toward the African continent. Another critical contribution of diasporic media networks is their role in sustaining cultural transmission and supporting identity formation (Yüksel, 2025).

Through radio programs, online literary magazines, digital art exhibitions, and social-media campaigns, the languages of Sudan (Arabic and Nubian languages),

along with its music, poetry, and artistic memory, are being kept alive. This can be understood as a form of cultural resistance to the war’s physical destruction. For example, the “Sudan Sounds” podcast series carries the voices of Sudanese musicians, poets, and storytellers to the world while encouraging younger generations to reconnect with their cultural roots (Sudan Sounds, 2024).

Public Trust and Media Literacy

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2025), 68% of Sudanese do not believe that national media outlets report impartially, and 72% are uncertain about the accuracy of information encountered on social media. For this reason, media-literacy education must be treated as a strategic priority in rebuilding democratic society after the war. Media literacy encompasses the skills required to critically engage with media content, evaluate sources, recognize disinformation, and consume information consciously (Hobbs, 2023). Workshops conducted in schools, NGOs, women’s centers, and community libraries can strengthen the public’s capacity to identify fake news, verify sources, and understand manipulation techniques on digital platforms. In rural areas and communities with lower levels of formal education, media literacy should be disseminated using visual and interactive materials (UNESCO, 2024).

In addition, public service broadcasting must be structurally reformed. Amid growing uncertainty and competing narratives surrounding the reality of the war, the Sudanese public has increasingly turned to digital platforms to meet its information needs and navigate the ambiguity of conflict. At the same time, state-affiliated institutions—particularly the National Radio and Television Corporation and the Sudan News Agency—have sought to reinforce their role in shaping public opinion under conditions marked by extreme political and informational pressure (Al Jazeera Media Institute, 2024).

A new public broadcaster modeled on the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) or TRT (Türkiye Radio and Television Corporation) could serve as a voice for national reconciliation in Sudan. The BBC model represents an entity supported by public funding yet safeguarded by editorial independence, with a governing board composed of representatives from civil society, academia, and professional bodies (BBC Trust, 2023). The TRT model emphasizes nation-building and cultural diversity while playing an active role in global diplomacy through international broadcasting (Güner, 2024). A new Sudanese public broadcaster that combines the strengths of both models should produce content in the languages and cultures of local communities (e.g., Nubian, Fur, Beja) and help shape Sudan's narrative on international platforms. Such a model is essential not only to restore public trust but also to strengthen democratic participation and reconstruct national identity on the basis of pluralism rather than polarization.

For media-literacy programs to be effective, tailored interventions must be developed for different segments of society. For children and youth, school curricula should incorporate media-literacy courses that instill the principles of digital citizenship and critical thinking (Common Sense Media, 2025). For women, gender-sensitive media-literacy workshops should raise awareness across a broad spectrum—from women's representation in media to coverage of gender-based violence. For the elderly, alongside basic digital-literacy training, programs should teach strategies to guard against phone scams, fake health news, and manipulative content. International funders and development agencies should provide long-term, sustainable support for media-literacy programs in Sudan, while ensuring local leadership and ownership in their design. Ultimately, media literacy is not merely a technical skillset; it is a cornerstone of democratic citizenship, critical reasoning, and freedom of information. Without this foundation, a durable transformation in Sudan's post-war recovery and democratization will not be possible.

Conclusion

Sudan's war shows that media can become a direct victim of war—yet also a last bastion of truth. Despite destruction and exile, journalists continued documenting reality. Rebuilding media requires ethical renewal, safety, memory preservation, and trust restoration. Media reform is integral to transitional justice and democratic reconstruction.

Truth reconstruction is an epistemological and political challenge amid competing narratives. Independent journalism must commit to verifiability, inclusivity, transparency, and correction. A sustainable post-war media order depends on justice, ethics, and freedom—interdependent pillars. Sudan's future hinges on making silenced voices audible again, democratizing narrative production, and using media as a tool for social healing and democratic transformation. For Sudanese journalists, every report is testimony, and every word is an act of hope.

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نقابة الصحفيين السودانيين سكرتارية الحريات التقرير السنوي للعام ٢٠٢٤ رصد الجرائم والانتهاكات والتجاوزات على الصحفيين والحريات الصحفية خلال العام ٢٠٢٤

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Historical and Cultural Foundations of Sudan-Türkiye Relation

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Abstract

This study examines the historical and cultural foundations of Sudan–Türkiye relations by analyzing the enduring legacy of the Ottoman Empire in Sudan and its transformation into a modern diplomatic partnership. Drawing on primary Ottoman archival documents (BOA) and recent academic sources, the research traces how Ottoman administrative, educational, architectural, and social institutions shaped Sudanese society between the 16th and 19th centuries. It highlights Sudan’s integration into the Ottoman imperial framework through soft governance based on Islamic unity rather than colonial domination, and explores the development of bilingual administration, urban modernization in Khartoum and Suakin, and the establishment of madrasahs reflecting Ottoman pedagogical models. The study further investigates how this legacy persisted during Sudan’s path to independence in 1956 and continues to influence contemporary Türkiye–Sudan relations through cultural diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and institutional cooperation. Findings reveal that Ottoman-era foundations such as social justice, education, and charitable institutions have evolved into modern mechanisms of Türkiye’s African engagement policy. This research contributes uniquely by connecting historical continuity with present-day diplomacy, demonstrating how shared civilizational memory forms a distinct model of postcolonial partnership with global relevance.

Keywords: Türkiye, Sudan, Ottoman-era, Culture, Diplomacy.

Introduction

Sudan–Türkiye relations are rooted in a historical experience that predates modern diplomatic frameworks and extends back to the Ottoman Empire’s presence in the Red Sea and Nile basins from the sixteenth century onward. Unlike the asymmetric relationships produced by European colonialism in Africa, Ottoman engagement in Sudan developed through a model grounded in Islamic legitimacy, administrative accommodation, and cultural integration. This historical interaction generated enduring institutional, educational, architectural, and social structures that continued to shape Sudanese society well beyond the end of formal Ottoman political authority. Sudan occupies a distinctive position within Türkiye’s historical memory of Africa, not merely as a former administrative territory but as a space of shared civilizational experience (Mohamoud, 2023).

Following Sudan’s independence in 1956, this deep-rooted historical and cultural familiarity facilitated the re-emergence of bilateral relations with the Republic of Türkiye in a manner largely free from the post-colonial tensions that characterized many African states’ relations with external powers. Contemporary cooperation in areas such as cultural diplomacy, education, humanitarian assistance, and heritage preservation, most notably the restoration of Ottoman-era sites in Suakin, reflects the transformation of this historical legacy into modern diplomatic practice. In this respect, Sudan–Türkiye relations provide an illustrative case for examining how historical continuity and collective memory can function as active components of foreign policy rather than as passive remnants of the past (Melis, 2024).

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the historical and cultural foundations of Sudan–Türkiye relations by tracing the institutional and social legacy of Ottoman rule in Sudan and examining how this legacy has been reinterpreted and operationalized in contemporary bilateral relations. Rather than ap-

proaching Ottoman rule solely as an imperial experience, the study conceptualizes it as a process of civilizational interaction that shaped administrative practices, educational networks, urban development, linguistic culture, and social welfare mechanisms in Sudan. By doing so, the research seeks to demonstrate that modern Sudan-Türkiye relations are not the product of short-term strategic interests alone, but are deeply embedded in a *longue durée* historical framework (Başkan, 2023).

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative historical and interpretive approach. Primary sources from the Ottoman Archives (Ottoman Archives - BOA) constitute the core empirical basis of the research, particularly documents related to administrative governance, education, urban planning, foundations, and correspondence between the Ottoman center and Sudanese provinces. These archival materials are complemented by secondary academic literature, including historical monographs, journal articles, and contemporary analyses of Türkiye's Africa policy. Through a comparative reading of archival evidence and modern diplomatic practices, the study establishes a link between Ottoman-era institutions and present-day mechanisms of cultural diplomacy, humanitarian engagement, and development cooperation.

The scope of the research spans from the sixteenth century when Sudan became integrated into the Ottoman imperial system following the conquest of Egypt to the twenty-first century, with particular emphasis on the post-2000 period in Türkiye-Sudan relations. While acknowledging political ruptures such as European colonial intervention and Sudan's independence process, the study prioritizes elements of continuity, especially in the domains of education, religious institutions, urban culture, and social solidarity (Collins, 2008).

Structurally, the article is organized into three main sections following this introduction. The first section examines the social and cultural legacy of the Ottoman Empire in Sudan, focusing on governance prac-

tices, educational institutions, urban transformation, linguistic interaction, and foundation-based social welfare systems. The second section analyzes the role of this legacy during Sudan's independence process, highlighting the persistence of Ottoman institutional culture and its influence on the formation of modern Sudanese state structures (Inalcık, 1994). The final section explores contemporary Sudan-Türkiye relations, demonstrating how Ottoman historical memory has been mobilized through cultural diplomacy, humanitarian initiatives, educational exchanges, and economic cooperation. The conclusion synthesizes these findings and argues that Sudan-Türkiye relations represent a distinctive model of post-colonial partnership grounded in shared historical consciousness and reciprocal engagement (Adam, 2022).

By linking historical experience with contemporary diplomatic practice, this study contributes to the broader literature on international relations and sociology, offering an alternative framework for understanding Türkiye's engagement with Africa. It suggests that civilizational continuity and collective memory can function as durable diplomatic resources, shaping foreign policy behavior in ways that transcend conventional geopolitical calculations (Buzan and Lawson, 2015).

The Social and Cultural Legacy of the Ottoman Empire in Sudan

Sudan, a region historically shaped by the abundance of the Nile River and a site of one of the most powerful reflections of Islamic civilization in eastern Africa, underwent a multifaceted transformation under Ottoman rule. The region, annexed to Ottoman territory following Selim I's conquest of Egypt in 1517, became

the empire's administrative gateway to the African interior with the establishment of the Habesh Province in 1555 (Benli, 2023, p. 109). From this date on, the Ottoman Empire's political and cultural influence was felt not only along the Red Sea coast but also inland. It has been observed that Islamic identity, educational structure, and urbanization model were ingrained in Sudanese society, as they were in Ottoman centers. The foundations of this transformation deepened with the new administrative order established in 1821 with the expedition of Ismail Pasha, son of Kavalali Mehmed Ali Pasha, to Sudan. From this date on, Sudan was reconstructed economically and culturally under Egyptian rule under Ottoman rule (Milanlioğlu, 2023, pp. 10–12). The initial phase of Ottoman rule in the region aimed to reestablish the Islamic order, link tribal relations to central authority, and align local administrators with Ottoman rule. With the establishment of an administrative and fiscal order in Sudan, a new balance was established between traditional local structures and the Ottoman bureaucracy, which quickly led to a radical transformation in social relations (Çetin and Amid, 2022, p. 162).

The Ottoman Empire's approach to governance in Sudan was founded on a soft integration model based on the concept of Islamic unity, rather than a harsh colonial policy (Özkan, 2022). The Istanbul-centered administrative system was put into operation in Sudan with the support of local leaders and ulema, ensuring public participation in government. Provisions regarding the salaries and job assignments of Sudanese civil servants (BOA. HAT. 245/123, 15 Cemaziyelahir 1241) clearly demonstrate the Ottoman effort to integrate local elements into the state apparatus. A concrete example illustrating how this model operated in practice can be observed in the administration of Mahu Bey Urfali. As one of the Ottoman representatives in Sudan, Mahu Bey preferred negotiation and alliance with local tribal leaders and prominent members of the ulema rather than relying solely on military force and taxation. Particularly in his relations with tribes such as the Kababish in the Nile Valley, mechanisms of

conciliation and consultation were emphasized over armed coercion, which contributed to the maintenance of temporary stability in the region. Mahu Bey's approach demonstrates an effort to secure political stability by incorporating key elements of Sudanese society into the administrative framework. Accordingly, Ottoman governance adopted an integration strategy in which central directives and local leadership operated collaboratively to address regional challenges (Collins, 2025). The reconstruction of Khartoum and its designation as the capital during the Ottoman period placed a modern understanding of order at the center of urbanization in the region. The city became a center of administration and a center of civilization through which imperial culture was brought to the African continent. The neighborhood layout, government buildings, and places of worship planned by Ottoman engineers created a new urban identity on both banks of the Nile, representing the empire's aesthetic and administrative approach. This identity also paved the way for the development of a bilingual administrative culture, where Turkish was used alongside Arabic in official correspondence (BOA. A.DVN. 17/232, 20 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1255). One of the most lasting impacts of Ottoman rule on social life in Sudan was in education. The modern school established in Khartoum during the reign of Abbas Pasha was one of the first examples of the Ottoman educational system in Africa. The decree establishing the school (BOA. İ.MVL. 45/2102, 12 Rabi' al-Awwal 1269) stipulated that the languages of instruction would be Arabic and Turkish, and that the curriculum would include courses such as jurisprudence, geography, arithmetic, history, and grammar. Therefore, this step reflects the Ottomans' desire to maintain the balance between science and administration in Sudan. With the expansion of educational activities, young Sudanese began to take positions in the Ottoman administrative system, cementing the cultural transmission. Steps were also taken to enhance women's education and participation in social life. The decision to open a school for widows and orphans to receive basic education (BOA. C..HR. 138/6882, 10 Dhu al-Hijjah 1274) was a testament to

the Ottoman understanding of social justice. Through these institutions, social cooperation and the teaching of Islamic sciences became widespread, and a direct link was established between Sudanese ulema and Ottoman madrasas.”

Within this framework, Suakin Island functioned not only as a crucial hub for trade and maritime transportation but also as a central site for the dissemination of Islamic education and cultural interaction in the region. During the Ottoman period, the architectural complexes developed alongside its port functions, particularly mosques, madrasas, and social facilities contributed to transforming the island into a center of learning and culture for the study and transmission of Islamic sciences (Taha, 2014). Suakin’s historical urban fabric enabled the coexistence of diverse religious structures representing different Islamic schools of thought, thereby facilitating the spread of Islamic knowledge in Sudan through local ulema and Sufi traditions. In this respect, Suakin should be understood not merely as an economic port but also as a powerful focal point of cultural and religious exchange. The multilayered role of Suakin’s historical architectural and social structure demonstrates that the island functioned as a significant crossroads within the Islamic world, serving both commercial networks and educational/spiritual connections. These structures, constructed with stones obtained from the coral reefs surrounding the island, reflect the harmony of Ottoman stonemasonry with local materials (Petersen, 2002). The record of ten wells opened for water supply. Demonstrates that the Ottomans considered infrastructural and social needs together in urban planning. In the 19th century, under the administration of Khedive Ismail Pasha, the island was revitalized with the repair of houses and the construction of new mosques, mills, and a school. With the opening of the Suez Canal, Suakin became the Ottoman Empire’s gateway to the Indian Ocean. During this period, the Ottomans consolidated their presence in Africa not only through military bases but also through cultural and economic centers (BOA. MAD.d. 18604, 10 Cemaziyelahir 9329).

The transformation Sudan underwent under Ottoman rule was not limited to administrative or religious institutions; it also brought innovations in fields such as agriculture, farming, and handicrafts. During the reign of Kavalali Mehmed Ali Pasha, the introduction of modern agricultural equipment to Sudan, the training of the local population in agricultural production, and efforts to increase agricultural productivity were seen as integral to Ottoman modernization. The decree issued to develop animal husbandry in the Kordofan region (Warburg, 1989). Demonstrates the adoption of a production-oriented structure at the center of economic life in the region. With the establishment of transportation and telegraph lines on the Nile, Sudan became an extension of the Ottoman communications network by the mid-19th century, revitalizing trade routes extending from Khartoum to the Red Sea. These developments demonstrate that modernization in Sudan began not only with European influence but also with the local implementation of the Ottoman system (BOA. MKT.UM. 45/26, 2 Muharram 1268).

The socio-cultural transformation that Sudanese society underwent under Ottoman rule was also evident in the areas of language and identity. The Ottoman administration’s use of Turkish alongside Arabic as the official language of correspondence (BOA. A.DVN. 17/232, 20 Dhu al-Qi’dah 1255) led to the emergence of a bilingual bureaucratic culture in Sudan. This enabled the two languages to coexist not only in government positions but also in social interactions. Turkish words became part of everyday speech among the public, and terms such as “Pasha,” “Efendi,” and “Mektep” became concepts denoting social status. With the education of Sudanese scholars in Ottoman madrasahs, Arabic was preserved as the language of knowledge, while Turkish became established as administrative and military terminology (Shaw, 1976). This cultural unity facilitated Sudan’s integration with the Islamic world and left a sustainable cultural identity after the Ottoman era. The Ottoman legacy in Sudan is also evident in the understanding of social solidarity and mutual aid. The organization of zakat, foundations, and

charitable institutions acquired an institutional character during the Ottoman period. Edicts sent from Istanbul encouraged public participation in education, mosque maintenance, and supporting the poor through foundations (BOA. Y.EE. 117/11, 27 Shaban 1315/21 January 1898). These documents demonstrate that the Ottoman administration in Sudan was based not only on financial or political grounds, but also on moral principles. Ottoman social welfare institutions paved the way for the establishment of Islamic principles of justice and equality among African societies and fostered public confidence in state authority.

Although Ottoman influence in Sudan began to wane with European interventions in the late 19th century, it persisted in the people's collective memory as a period of order, justice, and prosperity. The decree concerning the unification of the people of Kordofan and Darfur around Islamic brotherhood (BOA. İ.DH. 121/6021, 14 Cemaziyelahir 1278) is a clear indication of the Ottoman policy of preventing tribal conflicts and strengthening religious solidarity in the region. This approach endured in Sudan not only as a model of governance but also as an ideal of civilization (Buzan & Lawson, 2015). This social structure, formed under Ottoman rule, continued to influence Sudan's identity after independence; the foundations of a national consciousness based on Islamic values were laid during this period. In this continuity, the traces of Ottoman administrative culture and social organization did not vanish with the political ruptures of the late nineteenth century; instead, they survived as reference points that shaped both the collective memory of Sudanese society and the framework of later political relations (Adam, 2022).

Some of the Ottoman monuments in Suakin still stand today and have been restored as part of the cultural diplomacy activities of the Republic of Türkiye. The reuse of two mosques, a customs building, and a port, undertaken by TİKA in 2014, represents a contemporary continuation of the Ottoman legacy. These restorations demonstrate that the structures built during

the Ottoman period, as well as the social and cultural values they represent, serve as a vibrant reference point in contemporary Sudan-Türkiye relations (Yeni Asya, 2014).

Ottoman rule in Sudan signified not only a political era but also a multifaceted civilizational transfer. This interaction, ranging from the planned urbanization of Khartoum to the coral-stone architecture of Suakin, from the courses taught in madrassas to bilingual administrative correspondence, left a lasting mark on Sudan's identity (Assmann, 2011). Ottoman reforms in education, architecture, agriculture, law, and religion prepared the region not only for the 19th-century administrative order but also for the process of modern statehood. Many administrative terms, architectural forms, and social institutions still used in Sudan today are legacies of the Ottoman era. The Ottoman presence in Sudan served as a bridge to the Islamic world of Africa, both historically and culturally; this legacy formed the cornerstone of the historical closeness between the two countries (Alçı, 2023).

Bilateral Relations During Sudan's Independence Process

From the second half of the 19th century onward, the Ottoman Empire's influence over Sudan was reshaped by the dynamics of international politics and colonial competition in Africa. The semi-independent administrative structure established by Kavalali Mehmed Ali Pasha in Egypt created a complex balance between loyalty to the Ottoman center and local autonomy, with Sudan at the center of these balancing acts (Holt & Daly, 2014). During this period, Sudan's administration, while ostensibly subordinate to the Egyptian governorship, retained its legal status as a province

of the Ottoman Empire, and sermons continued to be delivered and coins minted in the Sultan's name. This meant that the Ottomans maintained both their political sovereignty and religious authority (Adam, 2022). From the 1850s onward, increasing British influence in the region challenged the classical structure of Ottoman administration. International competition over Sudan intensified as the Red Sea trade routes grew in importance, particularly after the opening of the Suez Canal. During this period, the Ottoman Empire sought to maintain its dominance in Sudan not only through military means but also through diplomatic and cultural means. Edicts sent from Istanbul demanded that local administrators maintain their loyalty to the sultan and avoid any foreign influence that might undermine the idea of Islamic unity (BOA. Y.EE. 117/11, 27 Şaban 1315/21 January 1898).

While Khartoum's establishment as an organized city under Ottoman rule led to the establishment of modern institutions, the increasing influence of the British in the region from the 1880s onward altered the course of relations between the Ottomans and Sudan. The Mahdi movement, which began in 1881, challenged the authority of both the Ottoman and Egyptian governments, and this uprising was considered the first expression of Sudan's quest for political independence (Hamdan, 1960). However, the legitimization of this movement through Islamic discourse did not constitute a direct rebellion against the Ottoman caliphate. On the contrary, the Mahdi leadership maintained its loyalty to the Ottoman caliph but opposed the corrupt practices of local administrators. Without eliminating the religious legitimacy of this movement, the Ottoman Empire sought to reestablish order in the region in harmony with Egyptian administration (Özdağ, 2018). In parallel with these internal developments, the implications of the Mahdi uprising and the shifting balance of authority in Sudan began to reverberate beyond local governance and entered the realm of imperial diplomacy, compelling the Ottoman state to reassess its administrative and legal position in the region (Holt, 1958).

The impact of developments in Sudan on Ottoman foreign policy became particularly pronounced between 1880 and 1890. Decisions regarding the administration of Sudan in documents in the Ottoman archives reveal that the region was not merely a part of Egypt but a province under direct Ottoman sovereignty (BOA. A.DVN. 17/232, 20 Dhu al-Qi'dah 1255). These documents state that governors in Sudan were appointed in the name of the sultan and that administrative correspondence was conducted in accordance with Ottoman state protocol. This legal framework demonstrated that Sudan continued to be considered Ottoman territory under international law. However, the de facto balance of power in the region shifted as Britain increased its control over Egypt. The occupation of Egypt by British troops in 1882 paved the way for Sudan to fall within the British sphere of influence; This situation led to the weakening of direct administrative ties between the Ottoman Empire and Sudan (Robinson and Gallagher, 1961).

Although the Ottoman Empire's influence in Sudan began to wane, cultural and religious ties persisted. Declarations of allegiance from Sudanese ulema to the Ottoman Caliph and letters sent by religious authorities to Istanbul are strong evidence of this spiritual connection. The order issued in the BOA records (İ.DH. 121/6021, 14 Cemaziyelahir 1278) to unite the peoples of Darfur and Kordofan through the love of Islam reveals the Ottoman policy of keeping the Muslim communities in Sudan around the Caliph. This policy was developed not only for the purpose of religious unity but also as a defense mechanism against the Anglo-French rivalry. The ideology of the Caliphate became the most effective tool for the Ottomans to maintain their influence over African Muslims in the late 19th century. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman Empire's de facto control over Sudan had largely ceased, and the region was administratively reorganized under the Anglo-Egyptian joint administration of 1899. However, even within this new administrative model, the bureaucratic structure, language, and institutional culture inherited from Ot-

toman rule persisted (Weiker, 1968). A large portion of the civil servants serving in administrative positions in Khartoum were trained during the Ottoman era. Arabic and Turkish terms used in education were preserved in administrative correspondence for many years. This continuity demonstrates that the Ottoman legacy was not merely a historical memory but a cornerstone of the pre-independence Sudanese state structure (Göksoy, 2019).

The Ottoman Empire's alliance with Germany during World War I further strengthened the British position in Sudan. The Darfur Sultan Ali Dinar's declaration of allegiance to the Ottoman Caliphate in 1916 can be considered the Ottoman Empire's last political manifestation in Africa. The Darfur Sultanate's declaration of allegiance to the Ottoman Sultan (BOA. İ.HR. 176/8058, 20 Shawwal 1258) demonstrates that the caliphate was perceived as an anti-colonial symbol. However, this initiative was suppressed by British forces, and the annexation of Darfur eliminated the last significant Ottoman influence in the region. Despite this, the Ottoman religious and cultural legacy was remembered among the Sudanese people through its understanding of just administration and respect for the Caliph became a symbol intertwined with national consciousness (Vaughan, 2015).

One of the areas where Ottoman influence was most clearly felt throughout Sudan's independence process was the continuity of religious educational institutions. Sudanese scholars, trained in Ottoman madrasahs in the 19th century, assumed both religious and political leadership roles until the mid-20th century. In this context, the institutionalization of Islamic institutions in Sudan during the Ottoman period significantly contributed to the establishment of the idea of a modern state during the period of independence (Kaptein, 1989). The foundation system, established during the Ottoman period, became the primary institution the Sudanese state modeled itself on in terms of organizing social services. The foundations' functions in education, healthcare, and mosque maintenance were

also continued in the social policies of the modern Sudanese government (BOA. C..HR. 138/6882, 10 Dhu al-Hijjah 1274). This represents the transformation of the Ottoman legacy into a post-independence institutional culture.

With Sudan's official declaration of independence in 1956, these social and cultural structures inherited from the Ottoman period formed the cornerstones of the modern state mechanism. The use of administrative terms of Turkish origin, the retention of some elements of legal regulations from the Ottoman period, and the continuation of the madrasa-based approach to education in the education system represent a continuity extending to the period of independence (Beshir, 1982). Mosques, madrasahs, and administrative buildings constructed during the Ottoman period in Sudan became symbols of national identity after independence. The Ottoman monuments in Suakin and Khartoum are not merely architectural relics but also an expression of the Sudanese people's cultural attachment to the Ottoman Empire (Sharkey, 2003).

Contemporary Sudan-Türkiye Relations and the Ottoman Empire's Place in Sudan

The Ottoman Empire's centuries-long legacy in the Red Sea and Nile basins has served as a significant historical legacy and potential diplomatic bridge for the Republic of Türkiye, particularly for Sudan. It is no coincidence that Türkiye was the first country to recognize the new state immediately after Sudan declared its independence in 1956 (Göktaş and Karataş, 2022, p. 27). The political, religious, and cultural ties established during the Ottoman period fostered a

continuing public sympathy. During the years of British colonial rule, intellectuals in Sudan perceived Türkiye as a symbol of independence and resistance, interpreting Atatürk's anti-imperialist struggle as a symbol of honor for the Islamic world. This intellectual affinity, despite the Republic's secular and modernist identity, positioned Türkiye as a cultural brother country in the eyes of the Sudanese people (Yılmaz, 2018, p. 93).

Diplomatic contacts with Sudan, which began in the 1950s, contributed to the revival of the Ottoman legacy in the historical memory of both countries. The administrative traditions and urban culture that developed in Sudanese society during the Ottoman period followed a similar trajectory to the modernization projects of the Republic of Türkiye. This similarity was one of the main reasons for the interest in the Turkish reform model in Sudan. The intellectual circle that developed around the University of Khartoum during this period viewed Türkiye not only as a political model but as the continuation of a historical continuity, holding it up as an example, particularly in matters of modernization, education, and women's rights (Bruce, 1964, pp. 47–50).

The slowdown in Türkiye's African policy in the 1970s can be explained by the influence of global economic conditions. However, relations with Sudan did not cease during this period. The memory of the commercial ties established during the Ottoman period paved the way for the reestablishment of economic relations between the two countries. From the mid-1970s onward, Turkish construction companies operating in Khartoum and Port Sudan were seen in the modern era as heirs to Ottoman-era merchant and artisan communities. During this period, Türkiye began to view Sudan as a gateway to Africa, and the Sudanese government, with its Muslim identity and its aversion to colonialism, perceived Türkiye as a close ally (Tirab, 2022).

In the 1980s, Turgut Özal's foreign policy vision opened a new chapter in Sudan-Türkiye relations. During Özal's tenure, Türkiye adopted a multidimensional foreign policy approach grounded in its historical heritage in its relations with African countries. During this period, economic and technical cooperation agreements were signed with the Khartoum government, and Sudanese students were provided educational opportunities in Türkiye (Adam, 2022, p. 104). These initiatives are seen as a reflection of the education-based relations implemented during the Ottoman period in the Republican era (Özkan, 2011). Considering the presence of scholars and madrasahs, which Evliya Çelebi noted during his travels through Sudanese cities in the 17th century (Çelebi, 1938, pp. 52–55), Türkiye's efforts to re-establish relations through education in this century demonstrate a historical continuity.

By the 1990s, the transformation in the global system opened up a new diplomatic avenue for Türkiye in Africa. With the end of the Cold War, Türkiye viewed Africa not merely as an economic market but as a partnership area where historical and cultural ties could be reestablished. The Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement signed during this period institutionalized the economic ties between the two countries (Türkiye-Sudan Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement, 1982).

The 2000s were a period of true transformation in Türkiye's African policy. Beginning with the declaration of 2005 as the Year of Africa, Türkiye gained observer status in the African Union and deepened its relations with Khartoum. During this period, Sudan became one of Türkiye's strategic partners in Africa. TİKA's projects in Sudan reflect both the symbolic and practical dimensions of cooperation between the two countries. The restoration of Ottoman-era structures on Suakin Island is the most striking example of Türkiye's policy of preserving its historical heritage (Göktaş and Karataş, 2022, pp. 27–28). These restoration efforts were based on plans and documents from Ottoman

archives, thus representing a project grounded in both historical awareness and cultural diplomacy. Furthermore, it is known that the Hanafi-style mosque plans seen in the architecture of Ottoman cities persisted in the interior regions of Sudan, synthesizing with local culture to create a unique identity. Even after Ottoman rule weakened in the late 19th century, these structures were referred to by the local population as “Turkish mosques.” This observation strengthens the historical significance of TİKA’s restoration work in the same region centuries later. (Nour, 2005, p. 152).

In the post-2000 period, Türkiye’s presence in Sudan has become evident not only in the cultural sphere but also in humanitarian aid and education. The Nyala Sudanese-Turkish Training and Research Hospital, opened in 2014, is a concrete demonstration of Türkiye’s transformation of the foundation concept inherited from the Ottoman period into a modern healthcare system. The hospital is not only a medical institution but also a symbol of the “brotherhood” bond between the two countries, as Türkiye’s humanitarian diplomacy strategy expanded in the 21st century with large-scale health infrastructure projects in Africa (Devecioğlu, 2024).

A similar continuity is observed in education. Hundreds of Sudanese students study in Türkiye thanks to scholarships provided by the YTB, and some, upon their return, take up positions in public administration, diplomacy, and education. This situation bears resemblance to the role of judges and professors sent to the region during the Ottoman period. It is noted that the Ottoman administration did not directly oversee religious educational institutions in Sudan, but established scientific ties by sending scholars from Anatolia to these institutions. Today’s scholarship programs can be considered a contemporary form of the same tradition (Anadolu Agency, 2022).

In terms of economic relations, Türkiye’s approach to Sudan represents a model of “equal partnership” rarely seen in post-colonial Africa. Türkiye carries out its development projects not as a means of grants or

loans, but within a framework of cooperation based on mutual benefit and fraternity. This approach is a modern version of the Ottoman policy of patronage in Africa. For the Sudanese people, Türkiye is not a coercive force of the past Ottoman administration, but a representative of a legacy remembered with justice and compassion. (Hazar, 2016, pp. 15-16)

Preserving Ottoman artifacts in Sudan does not merely mean the restoration of historical buildings; it also contributes to the process of rebuilding a shared identity. Sudanese scholars are examining Ottoman-era documents in Turkish archives and, drawing on these documents, contributing to the rewriting of Sudanese history. In other words, while Türkiye revives its past presence through academic collaborations, Sudan is rereading its own history beyond the post-colonial era, incorporating Ottoman memory.

Since the mid-2000s, Türkiye’s policy of opening up to Africa has gained an institutional framework, and the reinterpretation of historical ties has been central to this policy. Sudan emerged as one of the first and strongest links in this process. It is noteworthy that, as the effects of the Arab Spring began to shake North Africa in 2011, the continued stable diplomatic communication between Türkiye and Sudan was significant. This stability was maintained not only at the intergovernmental level but also thanks to the historical closeness between peoples (Devecioğlu, 2017). Sudanese leaders have frequently emphasized that Türkiye has transformed the tradition of justice, foundations, mutual aid, and education inherited from the Ottoman Empire into a model of contemporary development cooperation. This emphasis parallels their assessment of the function of Ottoman cities in Africa; for Ottoman cities were not merely administrative centers but also sites of social solidarity and cultural transmission. This historical definition forms the basis of the discourse Türkiye uses today in its approach to education, healthcare, and cultural heritage projects in Sudan. (Nour, 2005, p. 153).

The institutionalization of the strategic partnership between Türkiye and Sudan has been instrumental in the acceleration of Türkiye-Sudan relations in the post-2010 period. Numerous protocols signed in Khartoum in 2014 have expanded relations between the two countries beyond a purely cultural or economic framework, extending them to areas such as defense, transportation, and energy (Fidan, 2023). However, the strongest legitimacy behind these relations lies in the shared historical consciousness that stems from the Ottoman era. He notes that the Sudanese people's remembrance of the Ottoman Empire as a system of justice serves as a moral foundation in Türkiye's contemporary diplomatic discourse. In this context, the restoration project of Suakin Island has become a symbolic highpoint in relations between the two countries (Yılmaz, 2018, pp. 93–94). Suakin Island served as the heart of Red Sea trade during the Ottoman period and became both the administrative and religious center of the region in the 17th and 18th centuries. In his *Seyahatname* (Travel Book), Evliya Çelebi describes the island as an Islamic city surrounded by domed mosques and adorned with stonework. Today, the island's reconstruction and restoration demonstrate that the Ottoman legacy is not merely an archaeological relic but a diplomatic form of remembrance. With the Suakin project, the Republic of Türkiye fulfilled a historical responsibility while also placing this heritage at the center of its soft power strategy in Africa. During the project, Türkiye recreated original building materials based on archival documents and revitalized administrative buildings and mosques built on the island during the Ottoman period (Haşıl, 2019).

During this period, Türkiye's humanitarian aid and social responsibility projects to Sudan also increased. In particular, following the drought and floods in Sudan in 2017 (Anadolu Agency, 2017), aid efforts coordinated by the Turkish Red Crescent, TİKA, and the Diyanet Foundation were met with great satisfaction by the local population. The Sudanese local press has dubbed these aid efforts the modern tradition of foundations

(Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, 2019). Considering that foundations, madrasahs, and soup kitchens were institutions that strengthened social solidarity in cities like Suakin and Dongola during the Ottoman era, Türkiye's contemporary aid practices are a direct reflection of a historical continuity.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Khartoum in 2017 represented one of the most intense periods in relations. Twelve agreements signed during this visit envisioned comprehensive cooperation in agriculture, energy, education, and security. During the meetings, it was agreed to restore Suakin Island in accordance with its historical identity, and Türkiye was also granted priority partnership in the modernization of Sudanese ports (Republic of Türkiye MFA, 2017). Immediately following these diplomatic contacts, Türkiye was referred to in the Sudanese press as a friendly country that revived the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, further reinforcing the positive public perception. This diplomatic momentum not only expanded the political and economic dimensions of bilateral relations but also paved the way for deeper cooperation in cultural and religious spheres, where shared historical memory and institutional continuity became more visible (Yılmaz, 2018, p. 93).

A notable aspect of Türkiye-Sudan relations is their shared approach to protecting religious and spiritual heritage. The cooperation agreement signed in 2015 between the Presidency of Religious Affairs and the Sudanese Ministry of Religious Affairs covers mosque restoration, religious education, and scholarly exchange. The intellectual basis of this agreement is based on the tradition of unity between the Ottoman ulema and scholars established with the Islamic world. In this context, recalling how the madrasah networks extending from the Hejaz to Khartoum functioned during the Ottoman period reveals the historical basis for today's cooperation models. (Burckhardt, 1819, pp. 77–79).

Economic relations have expanded in both volume and diversity in the 2020s. Türkiye's investments in Sudan are concentrated in the construction, energy, mining, and agriculture sectors. These investments, unlike the asymmetrical relationships often seen in countries with a colonial past, are based on the principle of mutual benefit. The most striking difference in Türkiye's African policy is the preservation of a moral framework while transforming historical ties into political and economic tools. The activities of Turkish companies in Sudan contribute to the development of local production capacity and increased employment (UNCTAD, 2022).

All these developments demonstrate Türkiye's awareness of the historical continuity in its Sudanese policy. The Ottoman presence in Sudan has become, beyond being a foreign policy legacy for Türkiye, a founding element of its diplomatic identity. Türkiye's approach to Sudan is not a quest to re-establish historical administrative dominance, but rather an effort to carry a shared cultural heritage into the future (Tepeciklioğlu et al., 2024). This can be explained through the concept of the two-way construction of collective memory; This is because both Türkiye is reinterpreting its past and Sudan is re-interpreting its own history within the Ottoman context. This mutual reading of history constitutes an example of cultural depth rarely seen in contemporary international relations (Adam, 2022, pp. 327–329).

In the 21st century, Sudan-Türkiye relations have developed within a multidimensional structure of continuity. Administrative, architectural, linguistic, and cultural traces from the Ottoman period reproduce the ties between the two countries through modern institutions. Here, history is not merely a reminder of the past, but a diplomatic language used in building the future (Voll, 1994). In its relations with Sudan, Türkiye treats the Ottoman legacy not as a tool of superiority, but as the foundation of a common identity; Sudan, on the other hand, embraces this legacy as part of its own historical self-respect. This mutual understand-

ing is a model in which the idea of brotherhood, which has endured throughout history, finds new life in contemporary diplomacy (Wendt, 1999).

Conclusion

The historical foundations of Sudan-Türkiye relations reveal a continuity that extends from the Ottoman period into the present. Ottoman administrative and educational practices, the institutionalization of social welfare through foundations, and the development of urban and linguistic structures in cities such as Khartoum and Suakin formed a cultural framework that persisted beyond the end of formal imperial authority. This legacy, remembered in Sudanese society as a period marked by justice, institutional order, and Islamic unity, later enabled Türkiye to reestablish relations without the post-colonial tensions seen in many African contexts.

In the modern era, this shared memory has evolved into concrete cooperation. Cultural diplomacy, heritage restoration projects, educational exchange programs, humanitarian initiatives, and sector-based economic agreements illustrate how historical familiarity has been transformed into practical diplomacy. Türkiye's investments in Sudan, structured around mutual benefit rather than asymmetrical dependency, demonstrate a contemporary reinterpretation of earlier principles of social responsibility and partnership.

Ultimately, the case of Sudan-Türkiye relations shows how historical experience can operate as a diplomatic asset. The interaction between memory and policy has produced a model distinct from conventional geopolitical approaches in Africa: neither a revival of imperial authority nor a purely strategic engagement, but a partnership grounded in shared heritage and reciprocal interests. In this respect, the Sudan-Türkiye relationship offers a meaningful example of how civilizational continuity can shape foreign policy in the twenty-first century.

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Off-Topic Article

The Impact of Western European Countries' Ambivalent Attitudes on PKK / YPG Recruitment and Positioning: A Policy Analysis of France, Germany, and Belgium

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Abstract

This study examines how the ambivalent counterterrorism policies of Western European countries toward the PKK/YPG terrorist organization are reflected in the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their positions within the organization. Although the PKK is officially designated as a terrorist organization by many Western European states, the cooperation between its Syrian affiliate, the PYD/YPG, and the U.S.-led coalition has contributed to the expansion of the organization's perceived international legitimacy. This situation has facilitated the recruitment of numerous foreign terrorist fighters from Europe.

The study adopts a qualitative research design. The data set consists of official government documents, national counterterrorism strategies, parliamentary reports, judicial decisions, and relevant academic sources related to France, Germany, and Belgium. These materials are analyzed through discourse and textual analysis in order to examine participation motivations, organizational roles, and the security risks posed by returning foreign terrorist fighters. By linking foreign terrorist fighter participation to inconsistencies in Western European counterterrorism policies, the study offers an original contribution to the literature on terrorism and security studies.

Keywords: PKK, Foreign Terrorist Fighters, Counterterrorism Policies, Western Europe

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of “foreign terrorist fighters” (FTFs) has become widely used, particularly to describe individuals who travel to conflict zones in the Middle East following the Arab Spring. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of foreign fighters is not historically new. Throughout history, individuals have participated in armed conflicts outside their home countries for religious, ideological, political, or personal reasons. For instance, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a substantial number of foreign fighters joined the Afghan resistance, while the Russia–Chechnya conflicts also saw international fighter mobilization. However, the civil wars that emerged in Syria and Iraq after 2011 represent an unprecedented scale of foreign fighter involvement.

Although the term FTF is commonly used in the literature, no universally accepted definition exists at the international level. According to Malet (2013), foreign terrorist fighters can be defined as individuals who participate in armed insurgencies outside their country of citizenship without expecting material gain (p. 6). Hegghammer (2011) provides a narrower definition, emphasizing that such individuals must have no citizenship or familial ties to the conflict zone, not belong to a formal army, and participate in the insurgency without receiving a salary (pp. 57–58). United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) defines foreign terrorist fighters as persons who travel outside their country of residence or citizenship to commit, plan, prepare, participate in, or receive training for terrorist acts (p. 2).

In recent years, the threat posed by FTFs has been highlighted by ISIS's attacks on Western countries and its open calls for recruits. Consequently, numerous studies have analyzed Western foreign fighters joining ISIS. In contrast, foreign fighter involvement in groups other than ISIS—particularly those operating in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq—has received relatively limited scholarly and public attention. Among these,

foreign fighters joining the YPG, operating in Syria on behalf of the PKK, constitute one of the least examined cases.

Since 2014, the PKK/YPG terrorist organization has recruited numerous foreign fighters from Europe and other regions. Yet this phenomenon has been minimally debated in European public discourse and political decision-making. The de facto recognition of the YPG by Western countries as a partner in the fight against ISIS has sparked serious legal, moral, and political debates. Furthermore, returning foreign fighters from conflict zones represent a significant security threat due to their potential involvement in violent acts and propaganda activities.

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative case-study design to critically examine European state policies toward the PKK/YPG within the broader context of the foreign fighter phenomenon. France, Germany, and Belgium were selected as case studies due to their significant exposure to foreign fighter mobilization, distinct legal frameworks, and differing policy approaches toward Kurdish armed groups operating in Syria.

The research relies primarily on discourse and text analysis to explore how state actors conceptualize, justify, and implement policies related to the PKK/YPG. Data sources include official government documents, parliamentary debates, legal texts, policy reports, and statements issued by relevant ministries and security institutions, as well as reports from European Union bodies. In addition, selected media coverage and secondary academic literature were used to contextualize state discourse and policy decisions.

The analysis follows a comparative logic, highlighting both convergences and divergences in national approaches. By systematically comparing legal categorizations, enforcement practices, and official narratives, the study identifies patterns of inconsistency and ambiguity in European policy responses.

To enhance the credibility and validity of the findings, the study employs source triangulation by cross-referencing official documents with independent reports and existing scholarly analyses. Nevertheless, the research faces certain limitations, including restricted access to classified security materials and potential discrepancies between official discourse and policy implementation.

1 - Motivations for Foreign Fighters Joining the PKK/YPG

The PKK has historically maintained a sympathetic support base within Western Europe's mainstream left and radical left circles. This ideological and political environment has facilitated the recruitment of European foreign fighters. For instance, Eva Juhnke, a German national captured in Hakkâri in 1997, and Andrea Wolf, a former member of the Soviet-backed Red Army Faction, participated in armed activities for the PKK. Wolf, who died in combat for the PKK in Turkey in 1998, remains symbolically commemorated by the organization, illustrating the continuity of ideological influence.

1.1. Ethnic-Based Motivations

The PKK utilizes ethnic identity as a central tool in its European recruitment strategy. Recruited individuals generally fall into two categories. The first group comprises individuals of Kurdish descent born and raised in Europe, who radicalize through PKK-affiliated associations and later either operate domestically on behalf of the organization or travel to conflict zones. The second group consists of individuals born in Turkey who migrated to Europe; these individuals exhibit relatively higher participation rates. Identity and integration challenges encountered during migration, com-

bined with the PKK's ideological propaganda, increase the likelihood of their joining the PKK/YPG (Yalçın et al., 2019, p. 28).

1.2. Motivation to Combat ISIS

Another significant segment of foreign fighters comprises Western individuals without ethnic ties to the Kurdish cause. Many come from far-left political backgrounds, and their recruitment increased markedly after 2014 as the PKK/YPG emerged as a prominent actor in the fight against ISIS. ISIS's attacks in Sinjar and Kobani elicited strong public reactions in Western countries, motivating many foreign fighters to join the YPG, perceiving it as an effective actor opposing ISIS's atrocities. Among former soldiers with prior combat experience in Iraq or Afghanistan, the sense of "unfinished responsibility" was particularly influential. Digital platforms such as Jordan Matson's "Rojava Lions" social media network became critical mobilization channels (Orton, 2017; Martin, 2019). Similarly, U.S. Army veteran Jeremy Woodard framed his YPG involvement as a moral obligation to fight ISIS, demonstrating the internalization of this motivation at the individual level (Muir, 2014, p. 79).

1.3. Role of Social Media

The PKK has developed a longstanding, institutionalized propaganda network across Europe. It disseminates messages through outlets such as Yeni Özgür Politika newspaper, STERK TV, and Rohani magazine in Germany; ROJ TV in Denmark; and Fırat News Agency in the Netherlands (Onay, 2017). These outlets frame the PKK as a legitimate actor engaged in a "freedom struggle" rather than a terrorist organization. German-based ARTE programs further illustrate media's role in shaping public perception (ARTE TV, 2017).

The YPG effectively uses social media for foreign fighter recruitment. Platforms like the "Rojava Lions" Facebook page serve as the first point of contact for interested Western individuals. Prospective recruits submit intention statements and participate in online surveys assessing ideological, political, and reli-

gious alignment, as well as familiarity with the conflict and the organization's framework (Didziulis, 2016, p. 7). Those who pass the screening are directed to encrypted messaging channels, accelerating the recruitment process. For some recruits, the process is remarkably brief. Canadian Firas Vancouver reported that it took less than a month from initial contact to deployment, while British former soldier Kostandinos Scurfield—known as "Kosta" in the PKK/YPG—joined camps in Northern Iraq within weeks (AFP, 2015; MailOnline, 2017, p. 18).

1.4. Ideological and Normative Appeals

YPG/PKK aims to convey to Russia and Europe that it is a useful and legitimate actor by disseminating messages on social media that emphasize not only its opposition to ISIS and political Islam, but also its alleged commitment to women's rights, democracy, pluralism, diversity, economic justice, and even environmental sustainability. While the organization engages in trade in Rojava through narratives rooted in Kurdish nationalism, it simultaneously seeks to recruit fighters by circulating these strategically constructed and internally inconsistent messages (Öz, 2022, p. 7). In this context, certain individuals influenced by such propaganda choose to join the organization in order to transform their ideological beliefs into action, particularly because they perceive the PKK as an organized and powerful structure capable of operationalizing these ideals (Tinas & Demirden, 2021, p. 80).

Before being deployed to designated conflict zones, recruits are initially transferred to northern Iraq to undergo training, after which they are sent to assigned areas of combat. Consequently, despite being internationally recognized as a terrorist organization, the PKK/YPG has strengthened its operational capacity by incorporating a significant number of European foreign terrorist fighters. This has been facilitated both by European states' reluctance to confront the organization directly and by the favorable coverage it has received in international media. In other words, while combating ISIS—another designated terrorist

organization—European states have opted to cooperate with the PKK/YPG. By disregarding the fact that the PYD/YPG constitutes the Syrian branch of the PKK, European countries have prioritized the fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda within their counterterrorism strategies. As a result, despite its explicit organizational links to the PKK, the YPG has received substantial support from the U.S.-led international coalition. Under the pretext of combating ISIS and benefiting from a comparatively tolerant international media environment, the YPG/PKK has succeeded in attracting numerous foreign terrorist fighters into its ranks.

Several far-right extremist groups also operate within the PKK/YPG ecosystem. In particular, ISIS's persecution of Christian minorities in Syria and Iraq provided the YPG/PKK with an opportunity to cooperate with armed far-right groups. While some of these groups operate independently, others function under the protection of the Assad regime. Despite ideological and organizational differences among far-right extremist groups, religious identity appears to play a decisive role in motivating their mobilization to Syria. Among these groups, Dwekh Nawsha ("The Sacrificers") stands out as one of the most prominent. Founded in 2014 in response to ISIS atrocities against Christians and other minorities in Iraq, the group's primary objective is to defend Christian communities and fight ISIS (Lucente, 2015).

Members of this group—many of whom describe themselves as Crusaders—believe that their religious identity faces an existential threat. Volunteers from the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Australia have joined Dwekh Nawsha. For example, U.S. Army veteran Brett Felton, who traveled to Iraq in 2014 to join the group, stated: "These are some of the towns in Nineveh where church bells used to ring. In almost all other towns, the bells have been silenced, and that is unacceptable" (Coles, 2015, p. 9). Although Dwekh Nawsha does not formally operate under the YPG, it is permitted to function within YPG-controlled territories. Through this arrangement, the YPG seeks

to draw such extremist groups into its sphere of influence and allows them to establish armed units aligned with its broader objectives. The primary motivation behind these partnerships is to alter the balance of power on the battlefield and to meet operational needs (Tinas & Demirkan, 2021, p. 11).

An analysis of the motivations driving Western foreign terrorist fighters to join the PKK/YPG indicates that many of these individuals are predominantly apolitical military veterans. Since 2014, the influx of Western former soldiers into YPG ranks has become a notable trend. Approximately 40% of YPG-affiliated foreign fighters have prior military experience. In 2014, veterans constituted 64% of foreign fighters joining the YPG; this figure declined to 36% in 2015 and to just 1% in 2016. These individuals often struggle to reintegrate into civilian life and experience a sense of loss stemming from the absence of camaraderie and brotherhood characteristic of military service (Orton, 2017, p. 20).

In this regard, the statements of former U.S. soldier Jeremy Woodard are particularly illustrative. Explaining his decision to join the YPG, Woodard remarked that finding employment was difficult and that civilians often perceived him as a potential threat. For him, joining the YPG represented an escape and a sense of belonging reminiscent of military life (PBS NewsHour, 2015). By emphasizing its anti-ISIS mission, the YPG presents itself as an organization that gives meaning to the sacrifices made by soldiers and their comrades in post-9/11 conflicts, particularly in Iraq, thereby serving as a powerful pull factor (Tuck et al., 2016). This sentiment also resonates with individuals who left the military shortly before the September 11 attacks and consequently feel guilt for missing deployments to Afghanistan or Iraq. Many Western foreign fighters share the belief that there is still more that can be done and that insufficient action has been taken (Gallagher, 2015).

As the fight against ISIS prolonged, however, the composition of Western foreign fighters increasingly shifted toward individuals motivated by anarchist, Marxist-Leninist, and other far-left ideologies. While early recruits tended to be apolitical veterans, later waves were more ideologically driven. One foreign fighter affiliated with the YPG described this ideological convergence by stating that ideological differences often dissolve within revolutionary contexts and that inspiration drawn from the Rojava revolution led many to embrace armed struggle (Dearden, 2016, p. 21).

Some Western foreign fighters opposing ISIS were already embedded within ideological movements prior to traveling to Syria and Iraq. Upon arrival, ideological indoctrination continued in training camps and operational units. Western recruits attending YPG training camps reportedly read PKK texts alongside works on guerrilla warfare by figures such as Che Guevara, Mao Zedong, and Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap (Bauer, 2019, p. 19). Western left-wing radicals often frame the Syrian conflict as the equivalent of the Spanish Civil War for their generation (Harp, 2017, p. 3). Moreover, the concept of a “Rojava revolution” serves as a powerful attraction. The YPG/PKK provides Western foreign fighters with the necessary conditions to participate in what they perceive as a revolutionary struggle while simultaneously enhancing their militant skills. Members of the International Revolutionary People’s Guerrilla Forces (IRPGF) articulated this motivation by emphasizing their desire to defend the ongoing social revolution and to learn from diverse militant traditions, including Apoiist, communist, and anarchist movements (Rojava Solidarity NYC, 2017).

2 - The Role of Foreign Terrorist Fighters within the Organization

The military significance of Western foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) within terrorist organizations has often been a subject of debate. Observations indicate that the PKK/PYD generally attempts to keep these individuals away from front-line combat and assigns them limited operational roles. Instead, the organization predominantly utilizes foreign fighters for propaganda purposes, targeting Western audiences to shape public perception and enhance the acceptance of the organization’s message abroad. In line with this strategy, YPG/PYD initially provides opportunities for FTFs to engage in activities aligned with their motivations for traveling to Rojava (Orton, 2017, p. 163).

Within this framework, Western FTFs with limited military experience are typically assigned secondary roles rather than combat positions. In contrast, individuals with prior military expertise or technical skills may receive brief training before being deployed directly to conflict zones. These experienced fighters contribute not only to combat operations but also provide tactical, logistical, and medical support to local militias, as well as training in guerrilla warfare techniques.

Accounts from Western volunteers highlight the harsh realities of frontline conditions. U.S. YPG member MacTaggart described the terrain as “barren, rocky, and extremely deprived—virtually hellish” (McNulty, 2015, p. 61). Similarly, Dean Parker, another Western fighter, characterized life on the front lines as cold, unsanitary, and lacking basic human necessities, emphasizing food shortages and the prevalence of disease (Parhlo, 2015, p. 8).

Following the successful defense of Kobani against ISIS, the continued cooperation between the YPG and the U.S.-led coalition strengthened the organization's position in northern and eastern Syria. During 2014, when the YPG faced an existential threat, foreign fighters from Western countries were considered a strategic asset to garner support. However, as the ISIS threat diminished and the organization stabilized its administrative capacities, the YPG adopted a more selective approach toward foreign volunteers.

Some foreign fighters, particularly Christian volunteers, chose to leave upon learning about the YPG's ideological orientation. For instance, an American volunteer known as "Scott" reported leaving the YPG after discovering its radical leftist ideology. Likewise, British volunteer Alan Duncan indicated that the organization's leftist political framework prompted his departure, and he noted that many others had similar intentions. Some of these volunteers subsequently joined the Christian militia group Dwekh Nawsha operating in Northern Iraq (Agence France-Presse, 2017).

The establishment of the International Freedom Battalions (IFB) in June 2015 marked a significant institutional development in the YPG's recruitment and vetting process for foreign fighters. The IFB incorporated radical leftist elements from various international groups, including the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP), TKP-ML/TİKKO, and the United Freedom Forces (BÖG) (Demokrat Haber, 2015).

Through the IFB, the YPG conducted retrospective purges while aiming for future foreign recruits to possess stronger ideological alignment with PKK principles. Consequently, the number of Western volunteers joining the YPG decreased after 2015. Nevertheless, some foreign fighters who remained committed to PKK ideology or extreme leftist beliefs, such as anarchism or communism, continued their involvement in the organization (Orton, 2017, pp. 47-49).

3 - Threat Potential of Returning Foreign Fighters

Foreign fighters returning from the YPG pose a significant domestic security threat, regardless of their individual motivations for return. Whether aligned with PKK ideology or other radical leftist networks, returnees often maintain connections with PKK's European networks. This continued association increases the likelihood of their involvement in PKK-related criminal or terrorist activities in Europe. Moreover, they may contribute to financing terrorism under the guise of humanitarian assistance (Orton, 2017).

There have been reports of returning foreign fighters engaging in street-level violence in European countries. For example, Greece, Italy, and Spain have observed increased activity among anarchist and radical leftist groups. The expansion of PKK's transnational networks in Europe indicates that such threats are not confined to Southern Europe and may pose broader regional security challenges.

4 - Procedures for States Regarding Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters

When individuals join terrorist organizations abroad, it is crucial for law enforcement agencies to begin working on related investigations before the return of these individuals. This approach has three primary justifications (RAN Centre of Excellence, 2017, p. 6):

- i. **Risk to Family and Peers:** Foreign recruitment often entails risks to siblings and peers. Police and security agencies should prioritize preventing the chain of events associated with terrorist recruitment.
- ii. **Facilitating Reintegration:** Returning foreign fighters require specialized counseling and support to establish trust with their families and close contacts. This support is essential for successful resocialization and reintegration.
- iii. **Gathering Contextual Information:** Contact with family members provides valuable insights into family dynamics and surrounding conditions. This also allows authorities to collect information about the environment of returning fighters, which is essential for managing reintegration processes. Most returnees re-enter familiar social contexts, making these observations particularly valuable for assessing risks and monitoring radicalization (RAN Centre of Excellence, 2017, p. 6).

Between 2011 and 2016, over 42,000 foreign fighters from more than 120 countries joined terrorist organizations, of whom approximately 5,000 were from Europe. Since 2016, the number of foreign fighters has decreased. Although foreign fighters vary in nationality, ethnicity, age, and gender, all share certain levels of trauma and psychological challenges (RAN Centre of Excellence, 2017, p. 6).

The primary factor to consider is the reason for their return. Individuals may return due to disillusionment, remorse, continued adherence to organizational ideology, pursuit of better living conditions, or compulsion by authorities. The second consideration is the individual's role within the organization. Men, women, and children occupy different positions within terrorist groups. Men are generally considered more dangerous upon return due to accumulated combat experience and exposure to violence. While the literature often suggests that female fighters adopt nurturing roles for future combatants, this is not applicable

to the PKK/YPG, as female fighters actively participate in operations—for instance, within the YPJ (RAN YF&C, 2017, p. 30).

Few studies exist on individuals returning from the YPG in Europe within the context of fighting ISIS, creating significant informational gaps. This lack of data obscures the number of returnees, their combat experience, and any crimes committed, leaving them largely unmonitored and potentially posing serious security risks upon return (Koch, 2019, p. 3).

Procedures for Reintegration

Several procedures are recommended to facilitate the reintegration of returning foreign fighters (RAN Centre of Excellence, 2017, p. 8):

1. **Psychological Support:** Providing mental health support is essential. Research shows that assessing the trauma levels of returnees is challenging, as many are reluctant to share their experiences even after imprisonment. Forcing individuals to recount traumatic events may have adverse effects.
2. **Family and Community Support:** Reintegration relies heavily on family and community engagement. However, officials must consider various family dynamics, such as distressed relatives, families that glorify the returnee, or families who traveled with them. If family influence is deemed counterproductive (e.g., reinforcing extremist beliefs), authorities should introduce external actors, such as religious leaders or NGO professionals, into the social network.
3. **Ideological Support:** Ideological guidance is necessary to counteract negative influences acquired during detention. Conditions in prisons—such as overcrowding, solitary confinement, and interaction with like-minded inmates—can exacerbate

extremist beliefs. Rehabilitation programs may be mandatory or voluntary, depending on legal and organizational frameworks.

Most European approaches follow a similar process, largely mirroring interventions designed for radicalized individuals. This intelligence-driven and investigative framework begins with criminal investigations and risk assessment, followed by case-specific intervention by multi-agency teams. The RAN Police Findings (RAN POL) emphasize adapting and improving existing best practices rather than developing entirely new radicalization programs.

Countries such as Australia, Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom prosecute returnees for criminal acts associated with their involvement in terrorist groups. However, some countries still lack effective mechanisms. The United States, for instance, does not charge U.S. citizens who join the YPG, despite counterterrorism laws allowing prosecution for participation in terrorist organizations (Tinas & Demirkan, 2017, p. 34).

5 - European States' Policies Regarding the PKK/YPG: Examples from Germany, France, and Belgium

Despite the European Union's official designation of the PKK as a terrorist organization, several European countries have either refrained from recognizing the PKK as a terrorist group or have failed to take meaningful measures against its activities. Even in states that acknowledge the PKK as a terrorist organization,

necessary countermeasures are often not implemented, and the operations of affiliated organizations are sometimes overlooked. This permissive environment has provided the PKK with significant political and operational space within Europe, effectively enabling the group to advance its activities against Turkey both politically and economically. Moreover, some NGOs that openly support the PKK in Europe receive substantial funding from EU programs, further consolidating the organization's influence.

Germany, with its substantial Kurdish population, represents a central hub for the PKK's European network. For decades, Germany treated the PKK primarily as a security concern for Turkey. However, following the end of the Cold War and the increase in PKK-led terrorist incidents within Germany, authorities began recognizing the PKK as a threat to domestic public order. In response to German attacks in 1995, the PKK formally apologized and pledged to refrain from further violence (Deutsche Welle, 2015). Despite occasional punitive actions, German Federal Prosecutor reports indicate that imprisonment of PKK members has had limited deterrent effect, as militants often resumed their activities upon release (Müller, 2005). Germany's fluctuating policies have largely been shaped by its significant Kurdish population, which intelligence reports identify as having a high mobilization potential. Furthermore, Western cooperation with the PYD/PKK in the fight against ISIS has inadvertently strengthened the organization's presence in Germany. Notably, many German courts have demonstrated reluctance in prosecuting PKK affiliates, exemplified by a 2016 case in which a PKK member was acquitted due to his Yezidi heritage and involvement in anti-ISIS operations in Syria (Bloomberg HT, 2016).

Belgium represents another key locus of PKK activity in Europe. Historically, Belgium has harbored individuals on Turkey's wanted lists and maintained a permissive stance toward PKK-affiliated NGOs, media, and cultural institutions. The establishment of KON-KURD in 1993 marked one of the first umbrella structures

of the PKK in Belgium. Belgian authorities have often overlooked the organization's illicit activities, failing to recognize them as terrorist acts, and courts have frequently allowed cases involving PKK members to lapse or conclude in favor of the defendants. The escalation of ISIS activity in Syria further encouraged Belgium to adopt a more lenient approach, allowing the PYD to organize numerous congresses and public demonstrations under formal oversight (Yalçın et al., 2019, pp. 183–200).

France also plays a significant role in the PKK's European network. For decades, France has provided various forms of support to the organization, which has contributed to tensions in Franco-Turkish relations. A 2018 Europol report highlighted the PKK's recruitment of young individuals into indoctrination camps under the "Komalen Ciwan" structure, where they were trained in PKK ideology and combat techniques (Strategic Studies Organization, 2018). French President Jean-Michel Frédéric Macron publicly acknowledged support for the PYD in Syria in 2018. However, recent violent incidents within France, such as the December 23, 2022 attack on a cultural center in Paris that resulted in three deaths, illustrate the tangible security threat posed by the PKK/PYD in Europe. Following this attack, PKK militants and supporters staged demonstrations that escalated into violent clashes with law enforcement, with similar incidents subsequently occurring in other European cities (Yıldız, Arslan, & Çakmak, 2022). These developments underscore the fact that tolerating PKK activities solely due to anti-Turkish sentiment is not a viable security policy, as it compromises European safety and emboldens terrorist operations.

Given the existing political obstacles to countering the PKK's criminal and terrorist activities in Europe, the legitimization of the YPG in anti-ISIS operations provides no tangible benefit to European states. It is therefore essential that European countries do not allow the PKK to build political infrastructure. A key component of this strategy should involve curbing

the PKK's electoral and societal influence in Western countries. The organization's recruitment and propaganda efforts can be countered directly and indirectly. Direct measures include the closure of PKK-affiliated television channels, newspapers, and social media platforms, such as the Facebook page "Rojava Lions," which romanticizes YPG's military operations and serves as a recruitment tool for European volunteers. Indirectly, the PKK's influence can be mitigated through counter-messaging strategies that disseminate factual information about the organization's history, authoritarian structure, and criminal activities. Providing platforms for Kurdish opponents of the YPG to share their experiences, as well as for former YPG fighters to publicly recount disillusioning experiences, can help disrupt the romanticized narrative that attracts foreign recruits (Orton, 2017, p. 131).

In sum, comprehensive measures targeting both the political and propagandistic dimensions of the PKK/PYD's European network are critical. Failure to address these issues not only allows the PKK to consolidate power within Europe but also exacerbates regional and transnational security risks. European states must adopt coherent, proactive, and legally enforceable policies to restrict PKK influence, prevent recruitment, and ensure the organization cannot exploit political or social permissiveness to advance its objectives.

Conclusion

This study has examined the relationship between Western European countries' ambivalent counterterrorism policies toward the PKK/YPG and the participation of European foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) in the organization. Focusing on the cases of France, Germany, and Belgium, the findings demonstrate that inconsistencies between the formal designation of the PKK as a terrorist organization and the de facto political and military engagement with its Syrian affiliate, the PYD/YPG, have created a permissive environment for recruitment and mobilization.

The analysis reveals three interrelated empirical patterns. First, the normalization of the PYD/YPG in political and public discourse has contributed to the perception of legitimacy among potential recruits, reducing the stigma traditionally associated with participation in terrorist organizations. Second, legal and institutional responses toward individuals joining the PKK/YPG have remained fragmented and delayed, particularly when compared to the comprehensive measures adopted against those joining ISIS. Third, the absence of a coherent and unified counterterrorism framework across European states has limited deterrence and enabled the PKK/YPG to expand its operational and propaganda activities within Europe.

These findings suggest that European foreign fighters joining the PKK/YPG represent not only an ideological or political challenge but also a long-term security risk. Through their involvement in violent organizations, these individuals acquire operational skills, transnational networks, and radicalized identities that may pose threats upon return. However, European counterterrorism approaches have largely underestimated this risk due to the political ambiguity surrounding the PYD/YPG.

Based on these empirical insights, the study argues that effective counterterrorism requires policy coherence and institutional consistency. Recognizing the

PYD/YPG as an organizational extension of the PKK constitutes a necessary first step toward addressing existing contradictions. Moreover, measures aimed at preventing recruitment, restricting propaganda activities, and prosecuting foreign terrorist fighters should be applied uniformly, regardless of the specific terrorist organization involved. Without such consistency, existing counterterrorism efforts risk remaining selective and ineffective.

While recent legal initiatives in some European states indicate a growing awareness of the issue, the current political and normative climate continues to constrain comprehensive action. Addressing this challenge will require the coordinated use of intelligence, legal, and political instruments, as well as the legitimization of these measures in the public sphere. Although the implementation of such policies may be gradual, failing to act risks entrenching a security environment that allows terrorist organizations to exploit normative and institutional gaps within European counterterrorism frameworks.

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The Deepening Crisis of War in Sudan: Collapse in Darfur and International Balances

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Analysis

The war between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which began on 15 April 2023, has for more than two years continued to generate a catastrophe that has shattered Sudan's political structure, displaced millions of people, and turned Darfur in particular into one of the gravest humanitarian tragedies of the century. The clashes that erupted in Khartoum rapidly spread to Darfur, Kordofan, and the White Nile regions, with the most devastating consequences unfolding in Darfur.

Darfur, which carries in its historical memory the resistance led by Sultan Ali Dinar against British forces in 1916, is today confronting destruction of a comparable magnitude. The fall of El-Fasher—the heart of North Darfur—to RSF control on 26 October 2025 after a two-year siege was described by the United Nations as “the collapse of a gigantic open-air prison.” Throughout the siege, access to fuel, food, and medicine was cut off; electricity and water infrastructure was destroyed; and civilians were subjected to intense bombardment. Following the capture of the city by the RSF, Reuters reported that El-Fasher had been transformed into an “almost completely deserted ghost city.”

In El-Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, the war reached its bloodiest phase. Human Rights Watch reported that African ethnic groups—most notably the Masalit—were systematically targeted, that thousands of civilians were killed, and that tens of thousands were forced to flee to Chad. The killing of the Governor of West Darfur by RSF-affiliated militias and the public desecration of his body provoked widespread international outrage and reinforced accusations of “ethnic cleansing” directed at the RSF. The International Criminal Court subsequently stated that the acts committed in Darfur should be assessed within the scope of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Throughout the war, it is estimated that more than 120,000 soldiers and civilians have been killed, while over 15 million people have been forced to flee their homes.

External Actors Behind the Power Struggle Between RSF and SAF

The war in Sudan has ceased to be merely a confrontation between two domestic actors and has evolved into a struggle for influence involving regional and global powers. The balance of international support has become one of the key determinants shaping the course of the conflict on the ground.

External support for the RSF constitutes one of the most striking elements highlighted in United Nations reports. There is substantial evidence suggesting that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has provided the RSF with weapons, ammunition, and logistical support, and it has been alleged that some armored vehicles and military equipment used by the RSF are of UAE origin. The Abu Dhabi administration, however, has denied these allegations. Findings indicating that certain military equipment manufactured in the United Kingdom has come under RSF control and been used in the field have also appeared in United Nations documents. There is no evidence that the United States has provided direct military support to the RSF; nevertheless, Washington's diplomatic maneuvers within the framework of its relations with Gulf countries have been the subject of analytical scrutiny. In addition, it is claimed that the RSF has recruited fighters and procured weapons through Chad, the Central African Republic, and regional militia networks.

By contrast, the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) have aligned themselves with more traditional allies. Egypt has emerged as the SAF's closest supporter, continuing to provide military training, intelligence, and advisory assistance. Saudi Arabia, perceiving the excessive empowerment of the RSF as a regional threat, has adopted a position closer to the Khartoum authorities through diplomatic and humanitarian channels. Eritrea is also known to have, at times, taken positions aligned with the SAF.

These external support dynamics have become one of the most decisive factors shaping both the direction and intensity of the conflict on the ground. The protraction of the civil war is leading not only to Sudan's political and economic collapse, but also to the destabilization of regional security balances.

Sudan as a Country at Risk of Fragmentation

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Analysis

As a result of the expansionist policies pursued throughout the nineteenth century by Mehmed Ali Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Egypt, and his dynasty toward East Africa, the Sudanese territory was brought together into a single political and administrative unit. This territory was subsequently governed within a unified political-administrative framework for nearly two centuries, encompassing the period of British colonial rule (1898–1956) as well as the post-independence nation-state era. Nevertheless, despite the passage of considerable time, this political and administrative unity did not translate into lasting geographical integration or social cohesion. On the contrary, disconnections among the country's diverse regions and deep-seated social cleavages generated structural problems within the framework of center-periphery relations. These structural problems manifested themselves through unconstitutional revolutionary processes (1964, 1985, 2019), military coups (1958, 1969, 1989), and protracted civil wars (South Sudan and Darfur), ultimately rendering the state structure increasingly fragile over time. The most tangible outcome of this process was the declaration of South Sudan as an independent state in 2011. Furthermore, under the influence of the post-2010 Arab Spring wave, mass protests that intensified in Sudan between 2013 and 2019 led to the collapse of the Omar al-Bashir regime (1989–2019), which had remained in power for three decades, plunging the country into a profound and multilayered period of political uncertainty. In the continuation of this process, Sudan—engaged in nation-state building efforts since 1956—has reached the brink of disintegration as a result of a hybrid civil war that erupted on 15 April 2023 and has been fueled by external interventions.

When the current crisis in Sudan is examined within the framework of the approaches developed by political scientist Jieli Li in the field of state theories, the concepts of state fragmentation and the territorial power of the state provide a strong conceptual basis for analyzing the dynamics, evolution, and potential outcomes of the ongoing civil war. State fragmenta-

tion refers to the process whereby a state's central authority weakens and, as a result, partially or completely loses its sovereignty over the territories it controls. This process denotes the formal (*de jure*) or *de facto* division of an existing state into at least two separate political entities. The territorial power of the state, by contrast, denotes a state's capacity to establish and sustain sovereign authority over a defined geographical area. This capacity encompasses not only physical control over territory but also political, legal, and administrative control over the population residing within that territory. In this context, the weakening of the state's territorial power signifies the erosion of its ability to establish effective and legitimate authority within defined geographical boundaries. In the case of Sudan, this erosion has manifested itself through the emergence of alternative spheres of sovereignty created by armed actors and local power centers amid the civil war, drawing the country into a structural crisis that is advancing toward state fragmentation.

Jieli Li emphasizes that processes of state fragmentation and the weakening of territorial power typically emerge in contexts where ruling elites are displaced as a result of unconstitutional and revolutionary political ruptures. In such contexts, disputes among groups that exercise—or seek to exercise—effective control over the state are resolved not through institutional and legal mechanisms, but through unlawful and coercive means. This process deepens ideological, ethnic, religious, and economically based polarizations among groups, thereby generating multilayered and mutually reinforcing structural weaknesses within the state apparatus. Moreover, external interventions further complicate and render this fragile process increasingly unmanageable, significantly heightening the likelihood of state fragmentation and the erosion of territorial power. In the Sudanese case, following the unconstitutional regime change in 2019, polarization among elite groups intensified markedly, while external interventions by regional actors—most notably the United Arab Emirates—accelerated the transformation of this process into armed conflict. The re-

sulting war environment has, in turn, led to a severe erosion of the state's territorial sovereignty capacity.

Even prior to the unconstitutional regime change of 2019, certain regions of Sudan had already fallen noticeably outside the state's territorial power. In particular, South Kordofan and Darfur stood out as areas in which the central authority struggled to establish effective and sustainable control. These regions were under the control of various armed rebel groups. Aware of this structural weakness, the Bashir regime sought to compensate for the erosion of state authority and to prevent further dissolution of central sovereignty by relying on paramilitary structures such as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to maintain control. However, this strategy generated serious reactions both among elite cadres within the state apparatus and among opposition political and social groups. Following the regime change, these tensions culminated in full-scale civil war as the power struggle between rival political and military actors seeking to control Sudan escalated into armed confrontation. At this stage, the weakening of the state's territorial power ceased to be a limited loss of authority confined to specific regions and instead pushed Sudan into a structural crisis advancing toward state fragmentation. In this context, both the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the RSF have sought to establish *de facto* control over the entire country or over specific territorial areas, demonstrating a tendency to develop alternative sovereignty practices and to institutionalize their own military, administrative, and economic structures within the territories under their control.

At the current juncture, while the SAF—representing the central government—has adopted a military-centric strategy aimed at reclaiming areas beyond its control, the RSF paradoxically employs both secessionist rhetoric and arguments claiming to defend national unity. This dual discourse reflects the RSF's strategic ambiguity in its pursuit of political legitimacy. Although the RSF has established *de facto* control over large swathes of Sudanese territory, it lacks

the capacity to substitute a fully institutionalized and functioning political order in terms of governance and administration. Nevertheless, encouraged and supported by the United Arab Emirates, the RSF leadership has taken steps toward establishing semi-autonomous or independent administrative structures in certain regions, particularly in Darfur. This trajectory risks transforming state fragmentation from a potential threat into a tangible reality. By contrast, the SAF, operating from the premise that it is the sole legitimate representative of the state, has adopted the restoration of territorial integrity as its primary objective. In this regard, the SAF frames its armed struggle within the discourse of “state reconstruction” and the “reestablishment of constitutional order,” grounded in the principles of state sovereignty and territorial unity.

In conclusion, when the ongoing war in Sudan is assessed through the conceptual lenses of state fragmentation and the territorial power of the state, it becomes evident that the country has reached the threshold of disintegration. Reversing this process appears possible not merely through the military termination of the conflict, but also through the reestablishment, institutional centralization, and sustainable strengthening of the state's territorial power. Otherwise, Sudan's future risks evolving into a *de facto* division characterized by territorial fragmentation among regional and local power centers, further deepened by external interventions. Countries such as Somalia, Libya, and Yemen have already experienced similar processes; however, each occupies a different stage and degree with regard to state fragmentation and the erosion of territorial sovereignty.

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DIPLOMATIQUE

Abdullah al-Tayyib, Sudanese Folk Riddles, 5th ed. Khartoum University Press, 2008.

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Book
Review

Today, when the term Sudan is mentioned, the simultaneous emergence of associations related both to Africa and to the Arab–Islamic world is by no means coincidental. This circumstance is closely connected not only to Sudan’s geographical location but also to the multilayered character of its anthropological, ethnic, and cultural structure. Sudan is a country with a historical depth that cannot be adequately understood within the narrow framework of a modern nation-state. Extending back at least four millennia before the Common Era, this geography has historically been regarded as one of the principal centers where ancient African civilizations intersected with the Arab–Islamic cultural sphere. In this respect, Sudan is recognized as one of the rare cultural spaces that simultaneously embody a sense of belonging to both Africa and the Arab–Islamic world.

This historical and cultural depth has played an undeniable role in the formation of Sudanese literature and culture. Sudanese culture and literature have largely been shaped through oral tradition, with stories, folktales, legends, and riddles transmitted from one generation to another. Sudanese Folk Riddles, published by Prof. Dr. Abdullah al-Tayyib in 1977, should be regarded as one of the foundational sources for the documentation of this oral heritage and its transfer into written culture. The work examines twenty-one folk narratives and riddles recounted across different regions of Sudan; through these narratives, the value system, moral outlook, and collective memory of Sudanese society are rendered visible.

The significance of this work extends beyond its being a mere literary compilation that brings together folkloric narratives. Abdullah al-Tayyib approaches these narratives as cultural documents that reflect Sudanese customs, traditions, social practices, and value systems. It is important to emphasize here that an examination of the meanings and values embedded in the twenty-one stories included in the work requires not only a brief evaluative commentary but also a more profound and comprehensive scholarly

study. This is because the messages each story seeks to convey—through its narrative themes, concepts, and characters—as well as the values and meanings it aims to instill in children, are distinct and multilayered.

The author’s birth in 1922 in the city of Ed-Damer in northern Sudan, and his residence in various regions of Sudan throughout his educational life, enabled him to compile these narratives not as an external observer but as an individual deeply embedded within this cultural milieu. Indeed, the work contains narratives collected from a broad geographical expanse, ranging from Kassala and Port Sudan in eastern Sudan to the Gezira, Khartoum, and White Nile regions in central Sudan, and extending even to southern Sudan. This diversity indicates that the work offers a pluralistic and polycentric cultural representation rather than a homogenizing vision of Sudan.

Abdullah al-Tayyib explicitly states his motivation for classifying and recording these narratives: the gradual disappearance of stories transmitted through oral culture as a result of modernization, and the risk of their complete loss in the near future. From this perspective, Sudanese Folk Riddles should be regarded as a written repository of collective memory, preserving narratives that were traditionally conveyed—largely in the evenings—by grandmothers and elderly community members for the purposes of educating and entertaining children. Nevertheless, these narratives do not merely serve functions of amusement or consolation; rather, they assume a formative, educational, and moral mission. Core values such as generosity, courage, tolerance, political acumen, cunning, patience, and social solidarity are transmitted through the stories within an implicit pedagogical framework.

The texts also offer rich sociocultural details concerning the everyday life of Sudanese society. Practices employed during periods of war, wedding customs, social rituals, neighborhood life, and popular beliefs are vividly reflected in the narrative background. Moreover, while benevolent heroes and angels are portrayed as representatives of goodness, the ways

in which evil infiltrates human life are symbolically explored through extraordinary beings, demonic forces, and metaphysical elements. Within this narrative universe, the social role and status of women in Sudanese culture are also prominently addressed; the female figure is frequently positioned as a bearer and guardian of the moral order.

From the perspective of language policy, Sudanese Folk Riddles consciously maintains a balance between poetic and colloquial (vernacular) Arabic and Classical Arabic, while remaining faithful to its original stylistic character. Although Abdullah al-Tayyib privileges Classical Arabic in order to reach a broad Arabic-speaking readership, he deliberately preserves certain local words and expressions within the text. This choice reflects a clear stance regarding the historical and philological legitimacy of Sudanese Arabic. The author does not regard Arabic usage in Sudan as a “corrupted” dialect; rather, he situates it as a living linguistic variant that maintains continuity with Classical Arabic. In this way, language in the work functions not merely as a narrative medium but also as a fundamental component of cultural identity.

In conclusion, Sudanese Folk Riddles is not simply a collection of folk tales; it is a multidimensional cultural document that reveals the cultural strata, value systems, and educational and moral frameworks of Sudanese society. The work is particularly significant in that it challenges the tendency in the modern world to reduce African societies to narratives of “ignorance” and “lack of education,” demonstrating instead that the Sudanese people possess a deeply rooted and functional moral and cultural system of education. Through this study, Abdullah al-Tayyib not only recorded Sudan’s oral heritage but also made a lasting methodological and theoretical contribution to the cultural history of both Africa and the Arab-Islamic world.

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Book
Review

Introduction

Türkiye's relations with Africa have become one of the most rapidly transforming and institutionalized domains of Turkish foreign policy over the past two decades. This process began with the 1998 Africa Action Plan and was placed within an institutional framework with the declaration of a strategic partnership in 2008. Today, these relations have evolved into a multidimensional foreign policy practice that must be assessed not only through diplomatic rhetoric but also through tangible outcomes on the ground. The edited volume *From Policy to Practice: Türkiye–Africa Relations*, prepared under the editorship of Tunç Demirtaş, responds precisely to this need. The book stands out as a comprehensive edited collection that analyzes Türkiye–Africa relations across a broad spectrum—from security and energy to economics and cultural diplomacy—moving beyond purely normative claims.

Rather than portraying Türkiye's presence in Africa as temporary or solely based on humanitarian assistance, the book conceptualizes it as a multi-layered and increasingly institutionalized partnership model. This perspective not only distinguishes the volume within the literature on Türkiye–Africa relations but also adds significant analytical depth to ongoing academic debates.

The Content and Structure of the Book

The volume is composed of two main sections. The first section, entitled “Türkiye–Africa Relations from Security to Culture,” addresses the thematic and sectoral dimensions of these relations. The second section, “Türkiye's Partnership Map in Africa,” offers in-depth case studies based on selected country

examples. This structure provides methodological coherence by presenting a macro-level conceptual framework while simultaneously offering micro-level, field-based empirical findings.

The first section examines key issues such as defense industry cooperation, energy security, counterterrorism, migration, and cultural diplomacy. Analyses of defense industry cooperation, in particular, discuss Türkiye's role in Africa not merely in terms of arms provision, but within a broader framework of a security partner shaped by military training and capacity-building initiatives. By focusing on fragile regions such as the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, the volume illustrates how Türkiye has positioned itself as an alternative security partner at a time when the influence of traditional actors such as France has been declining.

Under the heading of energy security, the book explores the convergence between Türkiye's strategy of diversifying its energy supply and African countries' pursuit of expanded access to energy. Investments by Turkish companies across the continent—especially projects such as floating power plants—are analyzed as practical manifestations of a mutually beneficial, win-win cooperation model.

In the field of cultural diplomacy, alongside institutional actors such as TİKA, the Yunus Emre Institute, and the Türkiye Maarif Foundation, the volume addresses the concept of “First Lady Diplomacy,” which has received relatively limited attention in the literature. At the same time, initiatives such as the Africa Culture House are examined to assess both the institutional and symbolic dimensions of Türkiye's soft power.

The country studies presented in the second section demonstrate that Türkiye–Africa relations do not follow a uniform or homogeneous pattern but are shaped by the distinct historical and political dynamics of each country. Somalia emerges as one of Türkiye's most institutionalized and deep partnerships, particularly in the context of security sector reform

and state capacity-building. By contrast, the analysis of the Libyan case highlights the structural risks inherent in security cooperation, alongside the opportunities it offers. Case studies on countries such as Senegal, Sudan, Kenya, and Angola further reveal the regional diversity of Türkiye's engagement across the African continent.

Methodology and Contribution to the Literature

One of the most striking methodological features of the volume is its hybrid approach, which integrates theoretical frameworks with policy practice. The contributors move beyond diplomatic rhetoric by grounding their analyses in field research, trade data, defense industry agreements, and official documents. Moreover, the inclusion of contributions by African scholars and individuals with direct field experience prevents the study from being confined to an Ankara-centric perspective. This approach ensures that local perceptions and dynamics are meaningfully incorporated into the analysis.

One of the book's most significant contributions to the literature lies in its analytical and rational assessment of Türkiye-Africa relations, rather than reproducing romanticized narratives. The impact of defense industry exports on conflict dynamics, patterns of cooperation in the fields of energy and trade, and the tangible outcomes of cultural diplomacy are all examined and substantiated with up-to-date empirical data. From this perspective, the volume stands out as one of the rare studies that discuss Türkiye's Africa policy not through normative judgments, but through measurable practices and concrete policy outcomes.

Critique

Despite its strong scope and analytical depth, the volume also has certain limitations. Given the heterogeneous nature of the African continent, which consists of 54 countries, it is understandable that the analysis concentrates on cases where Türkiye has been relatively more active, such as Somalia, Libya, and Senegal. However, this focus inevitably leaves the potential and risks associated with regions where Türkiye's influence has been more limited—such as South Africa, Angola, and Equatorial Guinea—comparatively underexplored. In addition, the predominance of energy- and security-oriented analyses tends to relegate sociological dynamics, including the role of civil society and local societal responses, to a secondary position.

Conclusion

Overall, *From Policy to Practice: Türkiye-Africa Relations* stands out as a high-quality study that examines the transformation of Türkiye's Africa policy over the past two decades within a framework that is consistent with its practical outcomes on the ground. The volume demonstrates that Türkiye's presence in Africa should not be understood as a temporary orientation, but rather as an institutionalized partnership model built upon security, energy, economic engagement, and cultural diplomacy.

In this respect, the book makes a lasting contribution to the literature on Türkiye-Africa relations and provides a solid analytical foundation for future critical and theoretical research.

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