



By: *Sharmila Devi*

Worse may lie ahead in Sudan's humanitarian crisis



History is repeating itself in Sudan, said the **Red Cross** in the wake of reports of mass killings and atrocities after the fall of the city of El Fasher to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) last week.

In stark contrast to Gaza, the global response to the alleged war crimes has been muted, and the world looks unlikely to act amid divisions and lacklustre leadership from Washington.

To put an end to what the UN calls one of the world's most acute humanitarian crises, the US would have to exert pressure on the warring parties and the outside powers that have helped to fuel the conflict.

This would require a reassessment by Trump of his admiration for his friends in the Gulf, including the United Arab Emirates, and few see this happening soon. Sudan is likely to pay the price.

"We're in frequent contact with our Arab partners and want to see this conflict come to a peaceful end," said Karoline Leavitt, **White House** spokesperson, this week. The situation on the ground remains "very complicated."

Not just a civil but a proxy war

Parallels with the Syrian war were made soon after the Sudanese war started in 2023 because of the complicated web of alliances and entanglements that quickly emerged, making it not just a civil but a proxy war.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia broadly support the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). Qatar, Turkey and Eritrea have also been key partners. Russia, meanwhile, is reportedly close to reaching an accord with Sudan to establish a naval logistics hub on the Red Sea.

There are reports that Iran may also seek a foothold in Sudan and has been supporting the SAF to this end.

The fall of El Fasher has cast a spotlight on the UAE's role

The UAE, despite its vehement denials, stands accused of providing materiel support to the RSF, foes of the SAF, which has accused Emirati companies of contracting Colombian mercenaries.

The fall of El Fasher has cast a spotlight on the UAE's role. A UN panel of experts last year presented what they described as "credible" evidence that Abu Dhabi had supplied arms to the RSF.

Advanced Chinese weaponry, including guided missiles and howitzers, had "almost certainly" been re-exported to the RSF by the UAE, according to an Amnesty International report earlier this year.

In January, the outgoing Biden administration imposed sanctions on a network of UAE-based companies for providing military equipment and financial support to the RSF, but Trump did not follow up with any further action.

It's history repeating, and it becomes worse every time

Perhaps the UAE is experiencing some misgivings for its involvement in Sudan, but it is still far from dropping its support for the RSF and its wider goals of gaining access to resources and deterring Islamism.

Anwar Gargash, **UAE** diplomatic envoy, said it had been a mistake not to impose sanctions on the leaders of the 2021 coup, which was led jointly by the SAF and RSF.

"We all made a mistake when the two generals who are fighting the civil war today overthrew the civilian government," Gargash said. "That was, looking back, a critical mistake. We should have put our foot down collectively. We did not call it a coup."

The UAE not only condoned the coup, but it, along with other Gulf sheikhdoms, failed to support civilian democratic governance after a popular uprising toppled the 30-year dictatorship of Omar Al-Bashir in 2019.

Hard questions are now being asked, but the UAE and other countries are likely to dodge any serious repercussions for their support of proxies that continue to commit atrocities.

Horrific witness reports are trickling out from people who have managed to flee El Fasher in North Darfur in the last week following an 18-month siege of the city. Many dead bodies are reportedly lying in the streets amid mass executions and sexual violence as the RSF exerts control.



It's history repeating, and it becomes worse every time a place is taken over by the other party - Mirjana Spoljaric

International Criminal Court prosecutors said on Monday that atrocities committed by the RSF “may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity”.

The RSF has its origins in the Janjaweed militias that were mobilised by the Sudanese government to crack down on Darfuri rebels in the 2000s, resulting in what many called genocide, including Hollywood celebrities and activists who then campaigned on the issue.

During Sudan's current war, the Sudanese people have struggled to raise awareness of fresh genocidal acts being committed, including now in El Fasher.

“It's history repeating, and it becomes worse every time a place is taken over by the other party,” Mirjana Spoljaric, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, told Reuters.

A geo-strategic nightmare in the making

The SAF has vowed to continue fighting the RSF even as Washington says it remains “actively engaged” with the rest of the Quad framework that includes Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

On 12 September, the Quad called for a three-month humanitarian truce in Sudan to enable the delivery of emergency aid to all areas as a step toward a permanent ceasefire.

Massad Boulos - **US envoy** and father of Michael Boulos, who is married to Trump's daughter Tiffany - said both the SAF and RSF had agreed in principle to a humanitarian truce, and talks were ongoing.

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But he has a full portfolio, as he is the senior envoy for Arab and African affairs, and the US has no envoy dedicated to Sudan.

Meanwhile, business interests controlled by the Trump family and some of his senior officials have received financial backing from the UAE, including crypto investment.

Hassan Kabroun, **Sudan's defence minister**, said the army's continued campaign against the RSF was “a legitimate national right” in response to what he called “grave violations” against civilians in Darfur.

The RSF has de facto control of more than a quarter of Sudan, including much of Darfur and parts of the south, while the SAF has much of the north, east and central regions along the Nile and Red Sea.

There is a very real prospect of a lasting division of the country that would be a geo-strategic nightmare, leading to destabilisation of the region and an outflow of refugees. If

more attention were paid now, an even worse crisis could be averted.