

The Other Catastrophe: Genocide and Famine in Sudan

written by Gilbert Achcar | April 24, 2025



Two years have passed since the war broke out in Sudan between the two sides of the military regime that the country inherited from the infamous Omar al-Bashir. While the situation in Sudan does not get even a tenth of the global media attention that the ongoing Zionist genocidal war in Gaza receives, the scale of the human catastrophe there is equally horrific. The death toll from the military-on-military war is estimated at more than 150,000, while the number of displaced people stands at approximately 13 million, and the number of those threatened with severe famine reaches 44 million—a record number that makes the war in Sudan the greatest humanitarian crisis in today’s world.

Of course, it is easy to understand the geopolitical factors that make the war waged by Israel in Gaza and the rest of the Middle East a major international concern, not to mention the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, the racist inclination that dominates the global “spontaneous” ideology cannot be denied. It has always made the extent of global media attention to wars inversely proportional to the degree of blackness of the skin of those involved. A striking example of this is the five-year war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Congo-Kinshasa) between the summer of 1998 and the summer of 2003, which claimed approximately six million direct and indirect victims. Outside of sub-Saharan Africa, the world turned a blind eye to events in the Congo, while paying far greater attention to events with far lower death tolls, such as the Kosovo War (1999), the Al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington (2001), the subsequent US intervention in Afghanistan, and the subsequent US occupation of Iraq (2003).

In general, wars in which white soldiers from the global North—whether American or European, including, of course, Russians—do not directly participate receive very little global attention. This is the case of Sudan, which is witnessing a war between two exclusively local parties, even if fueled by regional parties, particularly through their support for the genocidal Rapid Support Forces militia. The most dangerous role in this regard has been played by the United Arab Emirates, in alliance with a global player, Russia. This is the same duo that played the primary role in supporting Khalifa Haftar in the Libyan civil war.

The truth though is that Western countries, even if they have had no direct role in the Sudanese war, bear primary responsibility for what has befallen the country. The UN Special Envoy to Sudan, from early 2021 until his resignation in September 2023, the German Volker Perthes, played the role of the “white man” in his assignment with a stench of colonialism, and acted disastrously, flouting the

principles to which Westerners are supposed to adhere, perhaps because he believed the Sudanese are not worthy of democracy.

When the coup led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, which disrupted the democratic process resulting from the 2019 revolution, occurred in the autumn of 2021, it was during Perthes's watch as UN envoy to the country. Perthes sought to reconcile the military and the civilian leadership they had overthrown, instead of taking a firm stance against the putschists and calling on the international community to exert maximum pressure on them to return to their barracks and allow for the continuation of the democratic process. This leniency toward the military and the attempt to reconcile them with the civilians, rather than taking a harsh stance against their coup, encouraged them to covet maintaining their complete control over the country. This led, two years later, to the outbreak of fighting between the two factions of the military, the regular forces and the Rapid Support Forces, each side vying for sole control of the country.

The reality is that the war in Sudan faces only two possible outcomes: Either the United Nations finally assumes its responsibility, organizes the intervention of international forces, imposes a ceasefire on both warring parties, and then forces them to retreat to their barracks while allowing the democratic process to continue and providing it with full support, including the necessary means to disband the ill-fated Rapid Support Forces and impose radical changes on the Sudanese regular forces, transforming them from the army of a military dictatorship into one subject to civilian authority. Or Sudan heads toward partition, which would perpetuate military rule in its eastern part and allow the Rapid Support Forces (formerly the Janjaweed militia) to impose complete control over the Darfur region, enabling them to continue the racist genocidal war that they began waging at the beginning of the current century under Bashir's leadership (he rewarded them in 2013 by granting them official status as a faction of the Sudanese Armed Forces).

Finally, regarding Sudan's great tragedy, it is necessary to also point out the failure of international solidarity with the afflicted Sudanese people. While we warmly welcome the tremendous development witnessed by the solidarity movement with the Palestinian people against the Zionist genocidal war in Gaza, we can only regret the continued dependence of global solidarity on the shaping of media attention described above. There is utmost urgency for a broad solidarity movement with the people of Sudan to emerge, particularly in Western countries but also in all regions of the world, including the Arab region, pressing for United Nations intervention to halt this great tragedy.

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