

## **Turkey's involvement in Sudan's civil war**

### **Is the UN ignoring Turkey's involvement in Sudan's civil War?**

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The Sudanese Civil War began in April 2023, sparked by escalating tensions between two rival factions: the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces (RSF), headed by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly referred to as Hemeti. At first, these two influential generals were allies during the 2021 coup that overthrew Sudan's developing pro-democracy transitional government, which had emerged following the ousting of long-time dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019. However, their alliance soured due to conflicts over how to integrate paramilitary forces into the national army.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Turkey's foreign policy agenda**

The civil war in Sudan has persisted for a long time, in part due to foreign nations vying for access to and dominance over the strategically vital Red Sea. al-Burhan has allowed Russia to establish a naval base in Port Sudan. Significant regional Muslim countries participating in the conflict include Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Turkey, each pursuing their own agendas.<sup>2</sup>

Turkey has established itself as a key player, striving to exert military, political, and economic influence that goes beyond traditional international alliances. This engagement includes the Turkish government, private security firms from Turkey, and even the president's family. Together, they present a challenge to the sovereignty of Sudan. This situation drains resources from both the Turkish and Sudanese populations. Currently, Turkey faces an inflation rate of 32%, an unemployment rate of 9%, and a debt-to-GDP ratio of 23%, while Sudan grapples with an inflation rate of 146%, an unemployment rate of 20%, and a debt-to-GDP ratio of 187%.<sup>3</sup>

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's involvement in Sudan is complex and multi-dimensional. Reflecting Turkey's historical legacy from the Ottoman Empire, his ambition is to raise Turkey's profile as a leading regional and global power. Turkey perceives Sudan's strategic geopolitical value as a gateway to Africa and a significant point along the Red Sea. Mastery over these territories would empower Turkey to limit the influence of other nations, akin to Iran's diplomatic and military manoeuvres in the Strait of Hormuz to advance its conflict with America and Israel<sup>4</sup>

The ongoing conflict in Sudan is a continuation of Turkey's previous and escalating involvement in the region. For example, in 2017, Ankara secured a 99-year lease for Suakin Island, a historic Ottoman port situated on Sudan's Red Sea coast, with plans to create a naval dock and military

training center. Suakin holds a strategic position between the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, linking Saudi Arabia and East Africa. Historically, it served as a significant stop for Muslim pilgrims traveling to Mecca and Medina for Hajj. It's important to note that the Red Sea corridor is a crucial maritime route, responsible for about 12% of global trade. Recent Houthi attacks on shipping have underscored the vulnerability of this already fragile chokepoint in the waterway.<sup>5</sup>

Turkey's role in the island and its relations with Sudan are part of a larger pattern of proxy confrontations in Africa. Moreover, Turkey has secured a uranium mining agreement with Niger's government. While there is no current indication of any nefarious plans, this could evolve into Turkey seeking uranium enrichment and nuclear weapons development, following a path like that of Iran.<sup>6</sup>

Thrown into the cauldron are rising tensions between Sudan and Egypt fuelled by border disputes in Halayeb. The diplomatic relationship between Ankara and Cairo has reached its lowest point since 2013, as Turkey does not recognize President Abdel Fattah El Sisi of Egypt as a legitimate leader following his ousting of the previous president. In response, Egypt has been critical of Sudan for its connections with Turkey and Qatar, accusing the three nations of plotting against Egypt. Additionally, Saudi Arabia and countries with military bases in neighbouring Djibouti, such as the United States, France, China, Japan, and Italy, are worried that this situation could lead to instability, particularly due to Turkey's close relationship with Somalia and the associated threats from terrorism, including Al Shabab and Somali pirates.<sup>7</sup>

### **Does the means justify the ends?**

Turkey's involvement in Sudan, particularly in supplying arms that contribute to the humanitarian crises in the Darfur region, indicates a foreign policy that seems to disregard fundamental values. It appears willing to ignore international sanctions designed to halt the ongoing violence. Furthermore, Turkey's involvement includes the sale of weapons to both the SAF and the rebel RSF, which only serves to prolong the conflict.<sup>8</sup>

This revelation shouldn't come as a surprise. Erdogan has been also skilfully balancing his position regarding the Ukraine war alongside Russia using the same tactics.<sup>9</sup> In the midst of chaos and potential anarchy, Turkey stands a greater chance of achieving and advancing its objectives. The emergence of a new regime focused on conflict resolution and stability could lead to Turkey's expulsion, something it aims to avoid.

Erdogan's involvement extends beyond just international relations and the ambition to restore Turkey to the grandeur of the Ottoman Empire. His personal financial gain is also a significant factor driving his actions in Sudan. At the center of this is Baykar, a leading Turkish arms manufacturer owned by Selcuk Bayraktar, who is Erdogan's son-in-law. Baykar has provided offensive weaponry to the Sudanese Defense Industries System (DIS), the procurement agency for the Sudanese military. This particular contract, worth \$120 million, encompasses six TB2 drones, three ground control stations, and 600 warheads. It represents just one of numerous agreements that breach the existing sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union. With such financial benefits flowing to his family, Erdogan has a strong personal incentive to ensure that these dealings do not come to an end.<sup>10</sup>

The provision of such weaponry has indeed marked a significant moment in history. In early May 2026, the world witnessed its first documented instance of a drone taking down another drone in aerial combat, involving two Turkish-made Akıncı drones. This interception took place when a

drone controlled by government forces loyal to General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan shot down another drone operated by UAE forces, which were part of a larger proxy campaign backing the RSF. The emergence of this technology has changed the landscape of warfare, highlighting the evolving nature of military engagements.<sup>11</sup>

The involvement of Turkey's inaugural private military company (PMC) SADAT in Sudan highlights not just the potential for financial gain but also raises concerns regarding religious extremism and fundamentalism. Founded in 2012 by a collective of Turkish military generals led by Adnan Tanriverdi, a close ally of Erdogan, SADAT has been providing military security and training to groups with Islamist ideologies in Libya and Syria since its inception. The company aims to expand its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as in Azerbaijan and Iraq. Its stated mission includes the goal of forming an alliance of Islamic nations that seeks recognition among the world's superpowers.<sup>12</sup>

### **The perfidious mediator**

Despite fuelling ongoing strife and conflict through arms sales and military support, Turkey has positioned itself as a peacemaker; attempting to mediate between the warring factions in the civil war. In this role, Turkey professes to care about the humanitarian impact of the conflict and the broader geopolitical implications of human suffering in Africa. However, this is merely a façade.<sup>13</sup>

The foundation of these conflicting positions is undeniable. Turkey has been manoeuvring between opposing sides. The risks are significant, as the consequences could jeopardize its status as a NATO member and its ambitions for joining the European Union. If not addressed, Turkey will persist in backing a military group that faces serious allegations of violating international humanitarian law.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, it seems that Turkey's cunning two-faced strategy may be working. Western governments within NATO and the European Union have held back from openly condemning Turkey, which has been a key player in the conflict, and have even commended its role in mediation. This reluctance to criticize Turkey can also be viewed through a more limited diplomatic lens. Ankara is vital in safeguarding NATO's southern border, manages migration into Europe, and serves as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine.<sup>15</sup>

It's crucial to understand that although Turkey's role in Sudan is often addressed in media and scholarly discussions, the United Nations has an established procedure for voicing concerns via resolutions or official statements. According to the most recent publicly accessible information, there are no resolutions from the Security Council or General Assembly that explicitly condemn Turkey for its involvement in Sudan.

### **The consequences and ramification**

Turkey's involvement in Sudan reflects a story that resonates deeply across numerous African countries. It highlights a recurring pattern that mirrors the historical tragedies faced by Africa due to centuries of external involvement. This situation recalls the invasions by European Empires that dismantled indigenous governance, the missionaries from both Christian and Muslim backgrounds who eradicated local belief systems, and the experiences of being puppets and victims during the Cold War era.

Rather than promoting stability in Sudan, Turkey's engagement has made the internal situation more complex, weakened institutions, and hindered efforts for a thorough national resolution. Every

Western aid ship that arrives in Port Sudan next to another carrying arms from Turkey diminishes the core of humanitarian values. Each account of civilian casualties linked to drone strikes and other armaments supplied by Turkey challenges the integrity of the rules-based order that NATO and the European Union claim to support.

As time goes on without addressing Turkey's involvement in Sudan, it becomes increasingly clear that other arms suppliers and foreign entities see there are no consequences for their actions against humanity. This lack of action from NATO, the European Union, and the United Nations suggests an unspoken endorsement of the circumstances at hand. There are ample evidence and information regarding Turkey's involvement in Sudan's civil conflict. Are we really waiting for another disaster reminiscent of Armenia in 1917?

## Sources

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