

Religious Influence in the Sudanese Armed Conflict (2023–2025): Patterns of Violence, Intergroup Relations, and the Shaping of Alliances among the key actors SAF and RSF.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which religion has greatly influenced violence, while shaping political alliances in this current conflict in Sudan, which began in 2023-2025 between the two warring parties, Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General *Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan*, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), founded by *Musa Hilal* in Darfur in 2013, and led by General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, known as (*Hemedti*). The religious power has been a major pattern in shaping violence and alliances. This thesis looks into the use of religion in Sudan, both historically or currently, where it is being used as a tool of justification to human rights violations and violence, or participating in dividing communities.

It looks into how both warring parties in Sudan continue to use religious narratives to help them in shaping alliances or gaining support from other groups. Either minorities or the military. It also shows how Christians and non-Arab Muslim like some tribes in Darfur, such as *Masalit*, and *Zagawa* have faced discrimination while being targeted. Both RSF and SAF have used houses of worship and changed them into military zones, while using religious languages to justify the current conflict and the violence behind it.

Furthermore, it also explains the alliances shaped by both warring parties, such as the Sudanese Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), while examining peace efforts by other external countries and parties such as the Kenya, and Jeddah talks. Lastly, this paper highlights the need for approaches that respect diversity, religious freedom and choice, and protection of minority groups in the country.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht, inwiefern Religion Gewalt maßgeblich beeinflusst und politische Allianzen im aktuellen Konflikt im Sudan, der 2023 begann, geformt hat. Der Konflikt spielt sich zwischen den beiden Kriegsparteien ab: den sudanesischen Streitkräften (SAF), angeführt von General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, und den Rapid Support Forces (RSF), die 2013 von Musa Hilal in Darfur gegründet und heute von General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, bekannt als „Hemedi“, geführt werden. Religiöse Macht hat sich als zentrales Muster zur Rechtfertigung von Gewalt und zur Bildung politischer Allianzen erwiesen.

Die Arbeit untersucht den historischen und aktuellen Einsatz von Religion im Sudan – sei es als Mittel zur Rechtfertigung von Menschenrechtsverletzungen und Gewalt oder als Werkzeug zur Spaltung von Gemeinschaften. Beide Kriegsparteien bedienen sich religiöser Narrative, um Allianzen zu schmieden oder Unterstützung von anderen Gruppen zu gewinnen – sei es von Minderheiten oder vom Militär.

Die Arbeit zeigt auch, wie Christen sowie nicht-arabische Muslime, etwa bestimmte Stämme in Darfur wie die Masalit und Zaghawa, Diskriminierung und gezielten Angriffen ausgesetzt waren. Sowohl die RSF als auch die SAF haben Gotteshäuser in militärische Zonen umgewandelt und die religiöse Sprache verwendet, um den aktuellen Konflikt und die dahinterstehende Gewalt zu rechtfertigen.

Darüber hinaus analysiert die Arbeit die von beiden Parteien geschlossenen Allianzen, wie etwa mit der SPLM-N, und bezieht auch Friedensbemühungen externer Akteure wie Kenia und die Gespräche in Dschidda mit ein. Abschließend betont diese Arbeit die Notwendigkeit von Ansätzen, die Vielfalt, Religionsfreiheit und die Rechte von Minderheiten im Land schützen.

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– Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek” – Barack Obama

– “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you” – Maya Angelou

Firstly, I am deeply thankful to God for giving me the strength, the courage, the motivation and the patience to complete this work, during the most difficult times I am going through.

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List of Abbreviations

SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
NIF	National Islamic Front
SPLM-N	Sudan's People's Liberation Movement-North
SPLM/A	Sudan's People's Liberation Movement Army
TMC	Transitional Military Council
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontieres
WHO	World Health Organization
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
PAIC	Popular Arab and Islamic Congress
ICF	Islamic Charter Front
IDPs	internally displaced persons
AIAI	Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya
EIJ	Eritrean Islamic Jihad
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ACJPS	African Center for Justice and Peace Studies
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
RNS	Religion News Service
US DoS	United States Department of State

Hudud	Islamic punishment for crimes, usually amputation
ICJ	International Court of Justice
HUR	Main Intelligence Directorate
FFC	Forces of Freedom and Change
LNA	Libyan National Army
MIC	Military Industry Corporation
UNSC	The United Nations Security Council
UNCAT	The United Nations Convention Against Torture
UNHRC	The United Nations Human Rights Committee
UAE	The United Arab Emirates
NISS	Intelligence and Security Services
PAIC	Popular Arab and Islam Congress
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Services
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
OPAC	The Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict
AU	African Union
PSC	Peace Security Council
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
UNCAT or CAT	The United Nations Convention Against Torture
OPAC	The Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict
ICC	The International Criminal Court

ACHPR	The African Charter on Human and People's Rights
HNPWa	Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks
JCPA	The Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs

Introduction

The research examines the influence of religion in violence and in the relations between groups and alliances shaped in the current conflict in Sudan of (2023-2025). In addition to the history of Sudan, it asks: *To what extent has religion been used to justify violence and shape relationships between different groups, especially among the key actors SAF and RSF?*

For over decades, Sudan has been constantly going through different types of tensions, whether social, religious or political. However this current conflict between the two warring parties, The Rapid Support Forces (RSF)¹ founded by *Musa Hilal* in Darfur in 2013, and led by General *Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo*, known as (*Hemedti*), and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) led by General *Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan*, shares the highest level of intensity.² Sudan has been historically known as a country in which Religion plays a major role in its rule of law, constitution and the eruption of its conflicts, where religion has been misused to justify violences, in addition to shaping alliances while dividing communities, instead of bringing them together. (Interviewee 004) emphasizes this historical pattern:

*Religion has greatly influenced all wars in Sudan, each side believes they are religiously justified in fighting the other, which leads to actions like rape or torture being committed under religious slogans.*³

The current conflict (2023-2025) in Sudan mirrors a continuation of this pattern, and that it's not only a war of political control or the military authority, it's also about religion and different beliefs, referring to them as they are defending Islam and the community. (Interviewee 003) points out, that *'both parties tend to use religious messages such as 'Allahu Akbar' and other slogans during these attacks, which creates an impression that the violence is not political rather a part of the holy mission of protecting Islam'*⁴ However the main question remains on how

¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Rapid Support Forces*, Darfur-based paramilitary group, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rapid-Support-Forces> (accessed 10 August 2025).

² BBC News, 'Sudan coup: military dissolves civilian government and arrests leaders', 25 October 2021, Available from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-59035053> (accessed 4 April 2025)

³ Interviewee 004.

⁴ Interviewee 003

religion has been used by both armed groups in the current conflict, and what is the relationship between religious groups and ethnicity. In the current conflict RSF has been accused of changing mosques into military zones, whilst SAF, has used religion as a tool of justification to their violence and different violations to Human Rights.⁵ As (Interviewee 002) points out, '*The SAF and their allied militias often speak of defending Islam and Sharia against secular forces, which helps them recruit support and divide communities*'.⁶

Additionally, Religion has also played a role in shaping alliances and gaining support by both parties. For instance SAF has strengthened its ties with some Islamic institutions, while framing their actions as a defense of religion. Meanwhile RSF used it to expand their support and shape alliances with movements, such as the Sudan Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), is a group that has long resisted the government forces in Sudan, and its under the leadership of *Abdelaziz al Hilu*, this groups currently operates in several areas along the country's Southern border, particularly within the regions of the Blue Nile and South Kordofan.⁷ As (Interviewee 006) from the Nuba Mountains notes '*Many people support SAF because they see them as the defenders of Islam, others support RSF for its power or for the hopes it will bring a secular state*'.⁸ It almost seems that the modern history of Sudan reflects how religion has been always politicized for decades and has been rather political than a belief.

Under the Former *President Omar Al-Bashir*'s regime, religion was strongly connected to the state through the implementation of the Islamic Sharia law supported by the National Islamic Front (NIF), transliterated: (*al-Jabhah al-Islamiyah al-Qawmiyah*), founded by *Dr. Hassan Al-Turabi*. This alliance used religion to limit freedoms, control and oppress society, specifically other religious groups who disagreed with their religious beliefs such as Christians, Shia,

⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Sudan 2023 International Religious Freedom Report, 2023*, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/547499-SUDAN-2023-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁶ Interviewee 002

⁷ MSN News, 'Is Sudan's war merging with South Sudanese conflicts?', Available from <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/is-sudan-s-war-merging-with-south-sudanese-conflicts/ar-AA1BTj6h> (accessed 4 April 2025)

⁸ Interviewee 006

Sufi..etc while continuing its implementation of the Sharia Law.⁹ We can find that the same pattern continues in today's conflict. As both warring parties claim to defend Islam and its values, but in reality and practice, it's used in imposing power and control, which makes peace even more difficult to be achieved.

Religious leaders and community members are aware of the religious manipulation in the current war, as some use religion to maintain cooperation and to promote peace, while others feel confused, which shows the dual role of religion. As (Interviewee 001) states, '*Religion can be used for both peace and violence, it depends on who uses it, and for what reasons*'.¹⁰ He also added that religious leaders have a full responsibility to speak up and guide people towards peace, internal division among Islamic sects, and political pressure make this difficult. While Interviewee 008 similarly points out, that religious sermons in areas controlled by SAF often encourage people to '*defend Islam against enemies*' while framing the violence as a religious duty.¹¹

This shows how religion plays a major role in shaping people's understanding of the current (2023-2025) conflict, the alliances, in addition to their hopes and fears. It's clear that some religious leaders actively support violence, while others on the contrary are working to promote peace which causes a clear confusion in the society's mindset and beliefs. As (interviewee 005) explains, 'People don't trust religious leaders anymore, they go to Friday prayers and hear politics instead of peace'.¹²

This is an ongoing conflict with almost daily developments regarding the political, religious concerns leading to instability, different types of violence, and conflict between the warring parties leading to the significant violations. Therefore this thesis aims to explore the role of religion in the current Sudanese Armed conflict, while focusing on the ways through which religion can influence different patterns of violence, and at the same time shape relationships

⁹Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed, *One Against All: The National Islamic Front (NIF) and Sudanese Sectarian and Secular Parties*, Sudan Working Paper (Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2008), SWP Working Paper SWP 2008: 6, 14 pp., <https://www.cmi.no/publications/3115-one-against-all-the-national-islamic-front-nif> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁰ Interviewee 001

¹¹ Interviewee 008

¹² Interviewee 005

between different political and religious groups, countries within and outside the African continent, it also seeks to identify ways through which religious beliefs have been manipulated by both SAF and RSF to justify the violations during the conflict, through the following question:

To what extent has religion been used to justify violence and shape relationships between different groups, especially among the key actors SAF and RSF?

2. Research Design

This research uses a qualitative approach combining literature, documents analysis, semi-structured interviews, and case studies. It takes a closer look into religion and human rights violations in Sudan's current conflict. Using several sources, from news articles, scholars, NGOs and United Nations (UN) reports and some other on ground organizations, as well as official documents. In addition to specific cases where religion clearly played a role in the conflict. Most importantly using the conducted interview with the religious leaders, community representatives, scholars/experts and some locals in Sudan. The mixed approach allows for detailed, context-based analysis while prioritizing human experiences. It emphasizes ethics and other reflective methods while ensuring sensitivity and accuracy to the country's complicated realities.

2.1 Literature

The literature covers NGO reports, Sudanese government's official documents, scholarly and academic papers to give an overview of the role of religion in the Sudanese armed conflict (2023-2025). Focusing on places on how the religious identity has been shaping the social relations in the country and the intergroups dynamics between both warring parties, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Some of the other sources used for this research, include case studies, and different interviews, as well as reports from different media and online newspapers, that shows alliances, patterns, and marginalizations, as well different types of violence by different religious narratives and parties.

Establishing both theoretical and a legal framework for understanding different human rights violations and religiously motivated violence. Additionally, it also consults international legal instruments signed by the Sudanese government, such as the Convention Against Torture (CAT), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and other relevant documents such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. In addition to judicial rulings from both regional and international human rights bodies, which will be reviewed in order to explore several terms for a better understanding within the context of Sudan, including ethnic violence, persecution, ethnic discrimination, hatred and other types of violence and violations to the basic human rights.

a) Interviews

The interview process for this thesis started in June 2025, and continued for a period of 2 weeks. These interviews have an essential importance to this research, because they bring current perspectives to the current war in Sudan in shaping their alliances and the use of religion in justifying the current occurring human rights violations. Most of the interviewed have lived through the war.

The number of the interviews is 8 in total, which were conducted via video or voice calls, due to the difficulty and the inaccessibility of being in person in Sudan at the moment, as well as security and travel restrictions to the region. All the interviewed were requested to give their consent before recording, in addition to them being fully informed on the use of how these interviews will be used for only research purposes.

However, Out of the 8 interviews, only 7 voices were allowed to be recorded, while the only 1 person requested and preferred not be recorded, therefore, only notes in detail were taken and noted down during the conversation.

The interviews were all conducted in English language, while sometimes explaining the questions in Arabic to one of the interviewed persons. The interviews were only close-ended questions in order to assist in the analysis with the different answers received, additionally the interviews were conducted with people from different age ranges with a wide range of areas of expertise. Some of the interviewed were religious leaders or religious institutions representatives, local community members, experts, politicians and community leaders.

Here is a structured breakdown of the interviewed :

- ❖ Two of the interviewed were community/political representatives, one from Darfur region and the other one from Blue Nile state, which gives a different perspective to the 2 politicians from the 2 marginalized groups in the country. They both spoke about the history, and the background of the war, as well as the situation in Sudan on the ground, in addition to the human rights violations, as well as the effect of religion and politics in justifying these violations faced by their communities in the 2 regions.

- ❖ One young religious leader, who is a Muslim, Sunni, living in Sudan, who stated clearly the use of religion since the independence and the religious languages that are currently used in the conflict, while mentioning the ways through which Sudanese community, and the religious leaders are trying to maintain the peace and trust among the communities especially in the affected areas.
- ❖ Two Sudanese Experts/Scholars in Sudan, who shared their perspective and experience dealing with the intertwining of religion and politics in the country, and how it has affected the country, leading into the current war, in addition to the human rights violations and the attacks on religious places of worship or religious communities.
- ❖ 2 Sudanese, from the civil society living in Sudan, who also spoke about the situation on the ground, and what could the society require at the moment to achieve peace and stability, in addition to the human rights violations and the types of violence faced by the society.

The 7 interviews have been recorded directly on the Voice memos, while the 1 interview was recorded on Googlemeets account, as it was conducted via video and then converted into audio ensuring the privacy of the interviewed. Afterwards analysed in a qualitative method using the software MAXQDA (for codification and analysis).

b) Ethics

The ethical consideration to the conducted interviews for this research is essential, because the topic directly deals with violence and an ongoing conflict, this section has been conducted ensuring several rights, such as the right to dignity and privacy of all interviewed parties. Meaning, before conducting these interviews, all participants were informed about the main purpose of the research, including how these data collected will be used, as well as confirming the voluntary aspect to their participated, they have been all informed prior the call/interview that they hold the full right to stop/skip any questions they don't feel comfortable with and do not have the right/enough knowledge to answer them, all the consents were collected verbally and recorded at the beginning of each interview.

Participants were also given the option to imply their anonymity in case they require, the names of the individuals who were interviewed are not mentioned in any of the sections in this research. Instead, they have been referred to generally by their position while interviewed, such as '*religious leaders*', '*community leader*'...etc, in some cases the locations of the locations have also not been mentioned, ensuring their safety and privacy.

Lastly, The interviews were conducted in a full form of listening carefully while avoiding judgment, tied with empathy and respect.

2.2 Data Limitation

The research endured a few limitations to the data collection, as a result of the challenges while studying the ongoing war in Sudan. Firstly, due to the conflict that is still ongoing, which almost hindered the possibility to conduct the interviews to the number of people which was expected.

These limitations were also caused by several factors such as, security concerns, communications limitations or difficulties, in addition to the limitation of internet access that caused the impossibility of reaching more individuals in the country, as a result, the number of interviews is relatively small, and the views represented could only represent a very small percentage of the community affected by the conflict. Many of the sources used in this research, including, official documents and media reports, could have the possibility of being affected by some political bias or propaganda, as both warring parties Sudan Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, are both strategically using information, which means some reports might not be accurate enough, as they might show either a level of exaggeration or an underreported events.

Additionally, due to several factors such as the sensitivity and the nature of the current events, some participants might have been cautious in what they said or what they have shared, due to mistrust which could possibly lead to either guarded or simply incomplete answers. Lastly, the study depends on qualitative data, while aiming to provide detailed insights.

Chapter 1

1. Historical and Religious Context of the Sudanese Armed Conflict

Sudan's current war is witnessing massive violence and displacement, which can be comprehended through its history and the religious roots and religious roots. The ongoing conflict that erupted in April 2023, between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), is not solely a reflection of power, but also the result of long lasting complex tensions and conflicts between the Sudanese community in different parts of the country, shaped by the colonial legacy and policies, in addition to other factors such as religious ideologies, and the persistent marginalization of diverse communities.

This Chapter examines the roots of the conflict. It also examines the rise of Islam and its politics, the evolution of both paramilitary and military forces in the country, while highlighting the institutionalization of the Sharia law and ways through which it has been used to justify suppression, violence and power. It also explores colonial tactics such as the '*divide and rule*' and how it has supplemented the rise of authoritarianism and sectarianism throughout the years, in addition to the ways in which factors such as systematic inequality paved the groundwork of the humanitarian crisis Sudan faces today.

1.1. Colonial legacy and post-independence politics

When the British officially began its colonial rule over Sudan in 1899, the region was already marked by significant ethnic and political diversity. Sudan, once the largest nation on the African continent, covered a wide area and included hundreds of different ethnic communities.¹³

Sudan's ongoing conflict (2023-2025), is strongly connected to the colonial period. Between 1899 and 1956, Sudan was ruled by both the British and the Egyptian governments, These both powers used the tactics of '*divide and rule*'. They gave privileged access to education and state resources to the North of Sudan where the Arab Mulsim groups were dominant. They were usually offered more educational opportunities and investment. In addition to the significant political representation where most of the government officials hired were from Arab

¹³ Robert O. Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 4.

background. In contrast, the South and West, home to minority communities have historically faced discrimination, both governments isolated the multi ethnic, and multi religious in the South, Darfur state, Blue Nile state, and South Kordofan who were excluded from development.¹⁴ This fueled long-term regional tensions between the communities in all the regions of Sudan till this very day.

Furthermore, the British administration reinforced these patterns of inequality and created tensions that continued after independence. For example, colonial authorities banned Arabic language instruction and Islamic studies education in the South in order to keep it culturally and religiously separated from the North which they preferred. In Eastern Sudan, similar patterns emerged.¹⁵ As *Ejami* explains, the British continued their favoritism towards certain tribal and religious leaders whom they labeled as ‘good natives’¹⁶, and gave them power, land, and education. While other groups, labelled as ‘bad non-natives’¹⁷, were neglected and excluded from authority and positions of power.¹⁸ These structural divisions continued to shape political authority, access to power and resources distribution after independence. This type of division was referred to as not only religious or an ethnic conflict, but practically it was considered as a result of the colonial capitalist patterns that imposed favoritism while discriminating or oppressing others.¹⁹

Another important aspect of Sudan's colonial legacy is reflected in the British ‘*indirect rule*’ theory of practice, in which ruling powers controlled specific territories. *Mahmood Mamdani* shows in his analysis of the British colonial systems across the African continent, that under this tactic the colonial governments gave power to some selected local ethnic leaders and chiefs. Instead of ruling directly.²⁰ These appointed leaders were typically responsible for their own ethnic or religious communities, which also created a division between people who lived in

¹⁴Abdaljbar A. M. M. Ejami, “Colonial and Postcolonial Legacy of ‘Ethnic’ and ‘Religious’ Clashes in Eastern Sudan”, *Cahiers d’études africaines* [Online], no. 240, 2020, pp. 973–980, online since 4 January 2023, accessed 10 August 2025, URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/32742>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafriaines.32742>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 974-975

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 975-976

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 978

²⁰Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 1–28.

urban cities and were usually ruled by civil law, and subjects mostly people who were often ruled by customary law and traditional authorities.²¹ Although *Mamdani's* work is not forced solely on Sudan, his explanation helps understand how the British administration and its legacy works in Sudan, especially in areas like the West (Darfur), and South Sudan. This legacy still affects Sudan today reflected in the ongoing conflict.

Another less often discussed impact of the British legacy in Sudan was how the education during that era shaped different ideologies, especially political ones among young Muslims in the North of Sudan. During the last years of what's called the 'Anglo American rule' several schools like Gordon Memorial College and Hantoub Secondary School helped educate students who would later become the founders of Sudan's first Islamist movements in the region. These selected students were taught European ideologies and ideas of progress and modernity but were also taught to reject marxism and embrace a sense of cultural purity. This pattern created generations of Islamists and extremists who saw themselves as leading a civilizational project to 'rescue' the country from foreign interference and domination. Ironically, even as they tried to reject colonial power, their thinking still mirrored some colonial values such as the belief that one group has the ability to shape the country's future alone. This paved the path for post-independence politics controlled by Islamists groups whose worldview was significantly shaped by colonial education systems and their contradictions.²²

Fastforward, was the rise of the National Islamic Front (NIF), led by *Dr. Hassan Al-Turabi*. The NIF became an essential force in the late 20th century. It emerged from groups in the colonial era institutions such as Gordon Memorial College. Additionally, the NIF worked with the military to establish an authoritarian regime right after the 1989 military coup.

This type of alliance shaped with the military allowed the NIF to impose its ideology on the country's legal system, leading not only to limitation in the democratic process but also increasing repression.²³ Over time, internal divisions within the Islamist movement, coupled with

²¹ Ibid.

[https://files.libcom.org/files/\(The%20W.%20E.%20B.%20Du%20Bois%20Lectures\)%20Mahmood%20Mamdani-Define%20and%20Rule%20Native%20as%20Political%20Identity-Harvard%20University%20Press%20\(2012\).pdf](https://files.libcom.org/files/(The%20W.%20E.%20B.%20Du%20Bois%20Lectures)%20Mahmood%20Mamdani-Define%20and%20Rule%20Native%20as%20Political%20Identity-Harvard%20University%20Press%20(2012).pdf)

²²W. J. Berridge, "Colonial Education and the Shaping of Islamism in Sudan, 1946–1956", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 46, no. 4 (2018): 583–601, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2018.1447441> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²³Mohamed Osman Obeid El-Faki, *Islam and Human Rights: A Case Study of the National Islamic Front (NIF) in the Sudan*, MA thesis (American University in Cairo, 1996), pp. 30–32, accessed [date you accessed], URL:

international isolation and economic challenges, led to a decline in the NIF's influence. Fast forwards, the death of Turabi in 2016 further marked a turning point to the movement, and by 2019, widespread protests started in the sit area in front of the military headquarters in Khartoum helped withdraw *Al-Bashir's* dictatorial regime. The period marked a significant turning point as Sudan began transitioning away from decades of Islamist rule towards a more inclusive and secular governance structure and a transitional government that could offer basic freedoms and human rights to the citizens.²⁴

After Sudan gained its independence in 1965, the country experienced intense political instability marked by multiple military coups in the years from 1958, 1969, 1985, and 1989. This instability soon escalated into civil wars and conflicts, particularly between the Muslims-majority in the North and the Christians in the South.²⁵ Another major outcome of the colonial legacy and post independence was the rise of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Founded in 1983, the SPLM/A came as a response to years of economic and political marginalizations experienced by the South. Led by the former South Sudanese President *Dr. John Garang*, the SPLM/A started as an opposition movement but also had the goal of restating the South by implementing equality and secular governance. The South Sudanese community strongly supported this group, especially those who were angry over the re-imposition of the Sharia law and the failure of the North to come to an agreement that eventually could lead to peace. As *Maszka* points out, this group played an essential role as a powerful political actor, rather than solely seen as a rebel force. The SPLM/A showed how Sudanese politics failed to create an inclusive identity that includes South Sudanese. Additionally, it also reflected the significant effect of the colonial patterns that shaped these

https://www.academia.edu/208297/Islam_and_Human_Rights_A_Case_of_the_National_Islamic_Front_NIF_in_the_Sudan.

²⁴International Crisis Group, *Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival*, Briefing No. 174, 21 March 2022, pp. 3–5, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/b119-sudan-s-islamists-from-salvation-to-survival.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2025)

²⁵Douglas H. Johnson, *The Root Cause of Sudan's Civil Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), pp. 9–58.

modern conflicts, such as the civil war between the SPLM/A group and the Sudanese government.²⁶

On the other hand, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, that was signed between the Sudanese government in Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) was considered to be a huge political step. It offered the South the opportunity to become independent. Fast forward, in 2011, South Sudan gained its independence. However, the agreement mainly involved political alliances and did not include other regions that faced the same type of conflict, such as Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile state and Abyei. As a result, rebel groups in these areas continued to fight, since they were left out of the peace agreement.²⁷ However, after the independence of South Sudan, Sudan lost a significant amount of its oil's percentage, leading to serious long-lasting economic challenges and instabilities.

Much of the division between the regions in Sudan stemmed from the British colonial policy known as the '*Britain's Southern Policy*', as mentioned before this policy aimed at banning the Arabic language education and the Islamic influence in the Southern part of Sudan while promoting Christianity and Christian missionary activities, and emphasized English language education²⁸.

This approach created two separate legal and administrative systems in Sudan: one in the South based on customary practices and missionary rule, and another in the North based only on civil law. According to *Douglas H. Johanson*, this colonial legacy has significantly affected not only the national identity, but also the governance, leaving the Southern Sudanese side and its communities both politically and socially excluded at independence, while contributing to long-term conflict in Sudan.²⁹

Additionally *Collins* in his publication '*A history of Modern Sudan*' follows the history of many years in Sudan, explaining how many of today's political and social conflicts have origins

²⁶Dr. John Maszka, "A Strategic Analysis of Conflict in Sudan and South Sudan," *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, vol. 68 (January 2019), p. 16,

<https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/IAGS/article/download/45956/47458>(accessed 10 August 2025).
[core.ac.uk+6iiste.org+6iiste.org+6](https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/IAGS/article/download/45956/47458)

²⁷ International Crisis Group, *Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival*, Briefing No. 174, 21 March 2022, pp. 3–5.

²⁸Helen Chapin Metz (ed.), *Sudan: A Country Study* (The British Southern Policy), Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1991, <https://countrystudies.us/sudan/16.htm> (accessed 10 August 2025)

²⁹Johnson, *The Root Cause of Sudan's Civil Wars*, pp. 9–58

in the long-lasting history of divisions and colonial legacies.³⁰ Furthermore, many post-colonial countries, including Sudan, inherited different political systems from the colonial rule that gave authority to religious groups, this made it only more challenging to create truly secular states with secular institutions even after independence. And building a political system that guarantees equal rights for its citizens is usually more challenging to achieve when the state's power is deeply rooted in religion, and the system continues to divide people.³¹

The Colonial strategy of favoring certain groups over others resulted in deep ethnic and regional inequalities throughout Sudan. From the independence in 1965 onwards, political power remained dominant in the North, leading to the continued division and marginalization of the Southern and the Western regions. These marginalizations sparked lasting conflicts and civil wars first between South Sudan and North Sudan, and later in the Darfur region contributing to the significant humanitarian crisis that followed till this day.³²

As per Noah R. Bassil in '*The Postcolonial State and civil war in Sudan*', shows that the roots of the Sudan's several conflicts, including the long lasting genocide in Darfur, cannot be comprehended without examining the colonial legacy in Sudan that shaped the state's policy. He argues that British colonial policies created divisions by favouring certain groups and excluding others from economic power.³³

When it was the time to Nation-building in Sudan. During the period after independence, Sudan faced a number of challenges within its system and political structure, marked from the colonial inheritance. These challenges were followed by economic imbalances and foreign interference. Francis M. Deng in his publication '*War of Visions, Conflict of Identities in the Sudan*', shows that Sudanese state experienced severe crisis of national identity from day one, as the state remained dominated by an Arab-Islamic North majority tried to reshape the entire

³⁰ Robert O. Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), summary front matter, accessed 10 August 2025,

https://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/58205/frontmatter/9780521858205_frontmatter.pdf

³¹ Christopher Tounsel, "Religious Elements of the Sudanese Civil War," *Canopy Forum*, 4 April 2025, <https://canopyforum.org/2025/04/04/religious-elements-of-the-sudanese-civil-war/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³² Kim Searcy, 'Sudan in Crisis,' *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective*, vol. 12, no. 10 (July 2019), <https://origins.osu.edu/article/sudan-darfur-al-bashir-colonial-protest> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³³ *Ibid.*, P. 6-7

Sudan, while the non-Arab, Christian South minority resisted and saw itself as an independent state.³⁴

This separation sparked a number of two civil wars of liberation in South Sudan, resulting in its independence in the year 2011. However, *Deng* also explains that the same pattern of identity tensions and exclusion continued in other regions near the South like the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile state, and in Darfur in the far West leading to the ongoing conflicts even after the South gained its independence.³⁵ Furthermore, *Deng* emphasized that the crisis in Sudan is not solely in the South, but also involved excluded groups in the North who felt neglected by the narratives of the identity.³⁶

Similarly, in the '*Colonial Rule and its Political Legacies in Africa*', the author explains that most of the African states inherited administrative policies and rules practices from colonial rule. These policies prioritized resource extraction and control over inclusive governance and accountability. By doing so, it has marked African states and left them with major obstacles or not prepared for self-governance, independence or democracy in the region.³⁷ For instance, a study by *Hagan and Raymond-Richmond* analyzed testimonies from refugees in Darfur with Drafuri origins and found that the government and militias have used racial complains and targeted the none-Arab communities by using sexual violence and framing their violence in ethnic terms.³⁸

Many people see Sudan's conflicts as just civil wars, while neglecting the international interference cause, or even the colonial legacy. Sudanese did not decide in a day and night to discriminate against each other or even fight against each other. As *Alison J. Ayers* argues, the assumption that Sudan's conflicts are rather internal is too narrow. She explains that the violence

³⁴Francis M. Deng, *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995), pp. 1–3, https://www.google.at/books/edition/War_of_Visions/iAPLHidx8MkC?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA1&printsec=frontcover (accessed 10 August 2025).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1-4

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.1-2

³⁷Amanda Lea Robinson, "Colonial Rule and Its Political Legacies in Africa," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, last modified 26 March 2019, <https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1346> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³⁸John Hagan, Wenona Rymond-Richmond, and Alberto Palloni, "Racial Targeting of Sexual Violence in Darfur," *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 99, no. 8 (2008), pp. 1386–1392, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2008.141119> (accessed 10 August 2025).

in Sudan is not only caused by local problems between different ethnic or religious groups in different regions, but it's significantly affected by the international and colonial legacy. As mentioned before, it stems from how the British administration used the *'divide and rule'* tactics and other strategies that kept different groups neglected and feeling unequal. These divisions were designed to control not only people but also the rich resources more effectively.³⁹ Also *Ayers* further explains that both the economic interests and the global politics played a role in worsening Sudan's crisis. She points out that the Western administrations often supported the central government instead of helping fix the unequal colonial rule systems.⁴⁰

Similarly before Sudan came under the official Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule, it had already experienced foreign domination during the Turkiyah period between (1820-1885). During this time, Egypt, which was under the control of the Ottoman Empire, ruled Sudan through military force and economic dominance. Furthermore, during the *Turkiyah* rule, Sudan was ruled under Muhammad Ali. This period was the beginning of the major social and political divisions in Sudan. The main goal of the Egyptian rulers was to gain wealth from the region in several ways, either by controlling the land, slavery and imposing heavy taxes...etc. Later, governors such as Charles Gordon led anti-slavery campaigns that were supported by Europeans. These missions were perceived by many Sudanese citizens as religious and cultural attacks, especially since they were run by those with other religious beliefs than Islam. However these missions were often seen as the cause of anger and mistrust among the local community. Which helped shape resistance such as the Mahdist revolt in 1881. The system during the Turkiyah resulted in deep divisions that existed for a long time even when the period ended.⁴¹

This shows that Sudan's current wars are deeply connected to colonialism and its legacy. Both the British colonial and the Turkiyah periods implemented systems and tactics that divided the people either by religion, region and ethnicity, rather than uniting them.

1.2 Regional demographics and historical role of religion in Sudanese conflicts

³⁹Alison J. Ayers, "Beyond the Ideology of Civil War: The Global-Historical Constitution of Political Violence in Sudan," *Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 4, no. 10 (January 2012), pp. 264–365, <https://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol4no10/4.10Beyond.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, P. 264-266

⁴¹Robert O. Collins, "History of Sudan," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 21 April 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Sudan> (accessed 9 August 2025). [britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com)+2**britannica.com**+

Sudan's religious nature is not only diverse but significantly integrated with its both social legacy and political history. Understanding how religious identities are distributed across regions helps explain the roots of many of Sudan's past and even current conflicts.

When it comes to the demographics, Sudan's has a wide range of religious diversity, although the percentage of the populations that identifies as Sunni Muslim is almost about 89-95%, the country is also shaped by other sects such as , Sufi through orders like the Qadiriyya and Khatmiyya, Shi'a, and Christian-minority in the South of Sudan as well as a percentage in the Nuba Mountains and its surroundings.⁴² According to a recent study, around 91% of the population is Muslim, while Christian percentage is estimated at around 5.4% . Within the Christian community there are followers to different sects as well, such as Coptic, Greek, Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox, as well as Roman Catholics.⁴³

The religious landscape and differences in Sudan, did not promote harmony; instead it helped shape political power and exclusion. Colonial and post-colonial regimes preferred Sunni Islam while marginalizing Christianity and its followers. In turn, Sudan became a major source of different types of conflicts, as political leaders used Religion as a way to legitimize authority, creating divisions that lasted into today's conflicts.⁴⁴ An important historical moment was the Mahdist or the Mahdi Revolt transliterated to '*Al-Mahdiyya*'. 'Although it's considered to be a religious concept, the Quran does not refer to the *Mahdi*;⁴⁵ however many 'Hadith (*corpus of the sayings or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad*) does mention it'.⁴⁶ In 1880, *Muhammed Ahmed* declared himself the Mahdri or '*guided one*' claiming that he was told by the Prophet Mohammed that he was the chosen one to help restore the true Islam. Notably at that time, Sudan was under Egyptian rule and many people were frustrated by several factors of injustice in the

⁴²The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), "Sudan National Profile," *World Religion Database* (2023), Available from <https://www.thearda.com/world-religion/national-profiles> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁴³APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (APPG FoRB), "Sudan," *Commentary on the Current State of Freedom of Religion or Belief* (2020), Available from <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/sudan/>(accessed 10 August 2025).

⁴⁴Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report: Sudan* (2024), Available from https://bti-project.org/fileadmin/api/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2024_SDN.pdf (accessed 10 August 2025)

⁴⁵Faris Muteb Almutairi, "Mahdist Movement Political Dimensions in Sudan: Islamic State Creation Religious Mentality during the Nineteenth Century (1884–1881)," *Journal of Arts* **11**, no. 4 (2023): 757, <https://journal.tu.edu.ye/index.php/artsmain/article/view/1702/1427> (accessed 10 August 2025)

⁴⁶Sayeed, A., "Hadith," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14 June 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hadith> (accessed 10 August 2025).

country. *Muhammed* took this chance to shape alliances and gain support. He combined strong religious messages and claims with the political state, he openly claimed that obeying him was a must and it's a part of obeying God.⁴⁷ He used the Sufi traditions, including the belief that saints have the ability to speak directly with the prophet and they could possibly perform miracles, all to prove his power and dominance. At that time most of the Sudanese were followers of the Sufi sect and its orders, so many fell for his claims and obeyed. His beliefs and teaching spread widely and quickly through the mosques, Sufi gatherings and prayers. Many people came to worship him and see him as their savior who is sent by God.⁴⁸ After gaining dominance, *Muhammed* accused the supporters of the Egyptian government of being in opposition to the Islamic religion. This helped him justify violations not just against Muslims, but also against foreign rulers. In 1881, Muhammed officially declared himself as the awaited Mahdi and told whoever followed him and his beliefs to migrate to Abba Island, where he established a pure Islamic state that intertwined political control and religion. His era ended in 1898 but he left a mark on the Sudanese community.⁴⁹

Under the Islamist rule of the former president *Omer Al-Bahsir*, the country's legal system was entirely based on a strict Sunni interpretation of Sharia law, as outlined in the constitution of 2005. Which led to religious discrimination, especially against both Shia Muslims and communities with Christian background. Churches were torn down, believers were either imprisoned or harassed sometimes leading to death penalties.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) often targeted religious minorities and whoever did not follow the state's Sunni Islam. This slightly changed, when the revolution of 2019 happened. It brought hope while reforming the legal system. However these legal amendments did not fully eliminate the different forms of discrimination.⁵¹ This mirrors that regardless of the legal reforms, both religious and cultural intolerance remains strong, more specifically in regions with significant political instability.

⁴⁷Almutairi, p. 758.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 763-765

⁴⁹ Ibid., 766-768

⁵⁰ APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (APPG FoRB), "Sudan," *Commentary on the Current State of Freedom of Religion or Belief* (2020), Available from <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/sudan/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁵¹Ibid

The regional tensions are often due to religious exclusion and discrimination against certain communities, as mentioned above due to their ethnic or religious backgrounds. In particular, the Christians in some parts of the Blue Nile state and the Nuba Mountains have been a target of the conflict, where both SAF and RSF are accused of causing these political distributions under the justifications and the name of religion.⁵² Which leaves us to the point that religion has long been used in Sudan either to exclude, control or to unify, and even justify the violence committed in the current war and other conflicts like Darfur's genocide.

1.3 Rise of the Political Islam and Sharia law

When it comes to the Sharia Law and its development in Sudan, it has been an essential part of Sudanese society since the 7th century, shaping an important part of the country's both cultural and religious life. For many generations, most Muslims in Sudan have followed different Sufi religious groups, known as tariqas '*Sufi path of spiritual development involving stages of meditation and contemplation leading to intimate communion with the deity*'⁵³. One of the most influential Sufi groups, the Khatmiyya '*Sufi order or tariqa founded by Sayyid Mohammed Uthman al-Mirghani al-Khatim. The Khatmiyya is the largest Sufi order in Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia*'⁵⁴, became especially strong in the Northern and Eastern parts of Sudan by the 18th century, while other groups like the Tijaniya '*especially proselytizing order (tariqa) of Islamic mystics (Sufis)*'⁵⁵ were more common in the west. These different orders shaped a unique form of Islam in Sudan that focused mainly on spirituality and other peaceful values rather than extremism.⁵⁶

Fast forward, in the 1880s a religious leader named Mohammed Ahmed Al-Mahadi led a rather successful movement opposing the Turko-Egyptian governors, while creating a government that is based on the education of Islam. During his rule era, Islamic Law (Sharia)

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³'Tariqa', *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Available from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tariqa> (accessed 10 August 2025)

⁵⁴'Khatmiyya', *DBpedia*, Available from <https://dbpedia.org/page/Khatmiyya> (accessed 10 August 2025)

⁵⁵ Tijaniyyah', *Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tijaniyyah> [accessed August 10, 2025].

⁵⁶Salah M. Sharief, "The Influence of Sufism on the Sudanese Belt Sūfisms 'Sudānas joslas' zonā," *Latvijas Universitātes Raksti* no. 819 (2021), Available from https://www.apgads.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/apgads/izdevumi/LU_Raksti/819/os.819.05-Sharief.pdf(accessed 10 August 2025)

was fully implemented in the country. However, his government ended in 1898 when the joint British and Egyptian forces reinforced their power over Sudan. After this, Sudan adopted the new legal system which was influenced by the British-Indian law, more specifically for the criminal cases, while both traditional and Islamic laws were still used in most cases for some personal or family matters such as inheritance and marriage...etc. Over the years, the legal system started to portray Sudan's practices and development into a uniquely local form of law⁵⁷.

After Sudan was colonized and during the years after it became independent in 1956, Islamic beliefs became even more influential in the North of Sudan. Old sects like the *Ansar*, 'companions of the Prophet'⁵⁸ and *Khatmiyya* continued to grow, while new Islamic groups appeared, including the Burhaniya 'religious path (*tariga*) founded by Sayyidi Ibrahim Disuqi in the 13th century and his uncle Sayyidi Abul Hasan ash-Shadhuli.'⁵⁹ Another group was Ansar al Sunnah transliterated to *Jama'at 'Anṣār as-Sunnah*, Also known as 'Ansar al-Islam, Partisans of Islam, Protectors of Islam, Supporters of Islam, Devotees of Islam,, Jaish Ansar al-Sunna, Ansar al-Sunna Army, Army of Ansar al-Sunna, Jund al-Islam, Soldiers of Islam, Protectors of the Sunna Faith)⁶⁰ from Saudi Arabia, the Republican Brothers, transliterated to *Jumhurriyun* 'a Sudanese Islamic reform movement started by the late Mahmud Muhammad Taha, they advocate equality for women and for non-Muslims'⁶¹ and the Muslim Brotherhood. Furthermore, during British rule, Islamic activities in the South were limited to support Christian campaigns, however this policy had changed by the time Sudan gained its independence.⁶²

Even though Islam dominated the North of Sudan, Sudan has also many citizens with other religious beliefs than Islam, including the Coptic Christians, reverted through Christian missionary work in the South or the Nuba Mountains and the Southern Blue Nile areas, and

⁵⁷R. O. Collins, "History of Sudan," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2024, Available from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Sudan/Egyptian-Ottoman-rule-over-the-Sudan> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁵⁸ Ansar', *Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ansar> [accessed August 10, 2025]

⁵⁹ Alburhaniya, 'About Us' <https://al-burhaniya.com/> [accessed August 10, 2025]

⁶⁰ Ansar al-Sunna', Parliament of Australia, Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (2024), Available from https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=pjcis/groupe/d/ansar%20al-sunna.pdf (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁶¹ Abdullahi Ahmad Al-Nai'im, "Sudan's Republican Brothers: An Interview with Abdullahi Ahmad Al-Nai'im," *Middle East Research and Information Project* (1987), Available from <https://merip.org/1987/07/sudans-republican-brothers/>(accessed 10 August 2025).

⁶² "Arabization and Islamization in the Making of the Sudanese 'Postcolonial' State (1946–1964)," *Cahiers d'études africaines* [Online] (2018), Available from <https://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriques/32202?lang=en> (accessed 10 August 2025).

others who follow other traditional or local beliefs. However due to the recent political instability followed by other factors such as, hunger, poverty and ongoing conflicts in South Sudan, mostly none Muslim South Sudanese citizens now live in different parts of Northern Sudan.

When speaking of Sudan's legal and political system, we can find that it has had a lasting effect on its national identity, intergroup relations and its governance. Sharia, derived from the *holy Qur'an* and Hadith (*corpus of the sayings or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad*)⁶³, offers personal guidance but has also been intertwined with its legal systems, especially through what's called the *hudud* punishments (*fixed penalties for serious crimes and offenses*). However the implementation of these laws has fueled political divisions and inequality among communities in Sudan. Furthermore, The earliest formal integration of Sharia into Sudan's legal system and constitution occurred under president *Jaffar Nimeriri* who then introduced '*September Laws*', which is a set of legal codes that are intertwined into the strict Islamic laws and principles. These laws presented the beginning of a political shift towards a pure Islamic state. Even though some exemptions for the South were applied, many leaders from the South did not approve of these changes, describing them as religious and cultural domination by the Arab-Muslim North.⁶⁴ These laws undermined previous efforts towards a different legal state and instead promoted a pure strict Sunni Islamic identity. Scholars such as *Abdullahi An-Na'im* have argued that the use of Islamic religion and Islamic law as a state law especially in countries with diverse religious backgrounds and ethnicity like Sudan, could only lead to inequality, repression, even exclusions and marginalization, more specifically of Muslims and non-Muslims with different interpretations of religion.⁶⁵ By presenting the Sharia law as the state ideology and legal foundation, it deepened the divides between North-South religiously. As Ayers states, what is often projected as 'civil war' instead reflects longer lasting historical systems of rule that use religion as a weapon.⁶⁶

⁶³Sayed, "Hadith," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2025, available from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hadith> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁶⁴Johnson, *The Root Cause of Sudan's Civil Wars*, p. 59

⁶⁵Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, "An Inclusive Approach to the Mediation of Competing Human Rights Claims from an Islamic Perspective," *Constellations*, vol. 20 (2013), pp. 11–13, <https://evolutionofsharia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Constellations-2013-AnE28090Na-im-An-Inclusive-Approach-to-the-Mediation-of-Competing-Human-Rights-Claims.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁶⁶Ayers, pp. 261–262

Additionally, Sudan's use of Sharia as a state's legal and political system created several challenges in the country, in addition to how the country reacted to the international human rights law. When Sudan first joined global agreements like the 'International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)',⁶⁷ in addition to 'the Convention Against Torture (CAT)'.⁶⁸ Sudan stated that it would only follow these rights and instruments, if they didn't oppose or threaten the Sharia Law.⁶⁹ This shows how the Sudanese government gave priority to religious laws over any universal or global rights. By doing so, some of the protections under the International law were not fully implemented in the country. These reservations, specifically affected not only women, but also religious minorities and even those with different interpretations on Islam. It automatically excluded them from any forms of legal protection. Sudan created a legal system that eventually led to discrimination and divisions among the society.

Religion in Sudan has shaped not only people's personal beliefs but also the way in which the country has been ruled. For decades, Islamic ideologies became connected to the political and legal system. This is when the National Islamic Front (NIF), led by *Dr. Hassan Al-Trbai*⁷⁰ began to play a major role in promoting policies based on strict Islamic rules. After the 1989 military coup led by *Omar Al-Bashir*, the National Islamic Front (NIF) came to power. Sudan was then declared an Islamic state, and the Sharia law was applied across the country. This affected not just Muslims, but also people from other religious backgrounds.

The Islamist regime's policies extended beyond legal reform. The government founded the Popular Arab and Islam Congress (PAIC) in order to present Sudan as the foundation of Islamist movements globally.⁷¹ However, these actions led to different types of human rights

⁶⁷*International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, Art. 14 (accession by Sudan 1986).

⁶⁸*Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (adopted 10 December 1984, entered into force 26 June 1987) 1465 UNTS 85 (accession by Sudan 10 August 2021).

⁶⁹Sudan, *Fifth Periodic Report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, UN Human Rights Committee, CCPR/C/SDN/5 (2017).

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1322987?ln=en&v=pdf>

⁷⁰The Editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 'Ḥasan al-Turābī', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1 March 2025, available from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hasan-al-Turabi> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁷¹Marie Besançon, "Islam in from the Cold: A Muslim Brother's Reflections on the Past, Present, and Future of the Islamic Movement in the Sudan," *PRISM*, vol. 6, no. 4 (2017), p. 4.

abuses, including arbitrary detentions, and violations of religious freedoms, in addition to limitations to other types of freedoms⁷²

And during the rule of President *Omar Al-Bashir's* government, they used religion as a way to justify human rights violations, through laws that mostly targeted women and were used to limit their freedoms, including how they dressed or even behaved in public. A number of women were arrested for wearing trousers or clothing that was described as ‘*against religion*’ or even ‘*Western*’. Different types of punishments were implied. They were either beaten or kept in a police station for days with no justification. According to Amnesty International, women faced arbitrary arrests under vague laws that were implemented and justified in the name of religion.⁷³ Meanwhile Human Rights Watch also documented that women were punished for simply protesting or simply speaking up for their rights, and these punishments were often defended by the government as a part of the religious or cultural values that the country holds.⁷⁴

Building on that, *Mozamil A. M. Assal* explains that Sudan’s Islamist regime of Al-Bashir, has fully relied on religious legitimacy to gain control over civil society, especially minorities, through laws and rules that controlled women’s behavior and limited their freedoms. The author shows how the 2019 uprising protests were not only political, but also show a clear rejection of this Islamist system, especially among women and youth who played an essential role in the uprising while demanding their freedoms after years of repression.⁷⁵ This history of religious governance continues to form both social and political divisions in the current war in Sudan, as competing patterns to imply their political authority.

⁷²Human Rights Watch, *Sudan: Shari’a and Human Rights* (1991), p. [specify page if needed], <https://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/s/sudan/sudan914.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2025)

⁷³Amnesty International, *Sudan, Urgent Action, Women Risk Flogging for ‘Indecent’ Clothing*, Doc. AFR 54/2046/2015 (2015), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AFR5420462015ENGLISH.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁷⁴Human Rights Watch, “*Good Girls Don’t Protest*”: *Repression and Abuse of Women Human Rights Defenders, Activists, and Protesters in Sudan* (2016), available from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/03/24/good-girls-dont-protest/repression-and-abuse-women-human-rights-defender-s> (accessed 10 August 2025) .

⁷⁵ Mozamil A. M. Assal, *Sudan’s Popular Uprising and the Demise of Islamism* (Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute, CMI, 2019), available from <https://www.cmi.no/publications/7062-sudans-popular-uprising-and-the-demise-of-islamism>(accessed 10 August 2025).

As mentioned above, Politicizing Islam during Sudan's recent history, has participated in creating these societal divisions based on either religion or ethnics, that still affects the country till this day. The current conflict between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) mirror this past, as both warring parties stem from groups that were shaped by the Islmaist regime of *Omar Al-Bashir*. For example, the SAF still carries the legacy of the National Islamic Front's (NIF) political and religious influence, while RSF was created from militias that were once empowered by the same regime. And in most cases religion was used as a tool of control, division and to show political power. The constant unsolved issues continue to shape the violence, shape alliances, and justify the violations in the ongoing conflict in Sudan.

1.4 The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) is the national army of Sudan, currently led by General *Abdul-Fattah Al-Burhan*. SAF has been playing an essential role in creating the country's legal system as well as maintaining national security. Over time, it has been involved in many coups and eras of military governance. *Al-Burhan* is a long time serving soldier who rose through the ranks during the government of the former President *Omar Al-Bashir*. Today, SAF consists of at least 300,000 soldiers.⁷⁶

Historically, SAF has been often supported by the National Islamic Front (NIF) and the Islamist Political Group led by *Dr. Al-Turabi*. Following the fall of *Al-Bahsir* in 2019, the SAF continued to be a powerful force, often acting against initiatives and efforts led by civilians to achieve democracy in the country such as the 2019 famous protests that led to the withdrawal of *Al-Bashir*'s regime, and eventually having an agreement of a two years transitional government. However, in 2021, this government was removed by *Al-Burhan* who justified this move by saying it was an essential move in the process of preventing internal and civil conflicts, but many observed it a tactic to maintain the military power in Sudan. Rather than protecting this important move towards the democratic governance, the SAF worked with security agencies and allies to arrest political activists and key leaders, including the transitional government's assigned Prime

⁷⁶Al Jazeera, "After a Year of War in Sudan, What's the Situation Now?" (11 April 2024), available from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/11/why-did-war-break-out-in-sudan-a-year-ago-where-does-it-currently-stand>(accessed 10 August 2025).

Minister *Abdallah Hamdok*.⁷⁷ This incident demonstrates that while the SAF showed its commitment and readiness to a new democratic state, it still remained loyal to the old structure built during *Al-Bashir's* rule.⁷⁸

During the 1990s, SAF was not only involved in the military operations but also in supporting the regime's violent campaigns in South Sudan. These campaigns were often framed as religious call '*Jihad*' by the ruling Islamist government, in order to gain the public support and to justify the war. As Crisis group explains, the Sudanese government mobilised schoolchildren and Islamic militias under religious slogans to fight the war in South Sudan.⁷⁹

In addition to this, the Sudanese regime has played a main role in protecting and safeguarding, while granting security to many extremists groups from many countries, who ended being in Sudan for a limited time such as '*Al-Qaeda*'⁸⁰ 'a broad-based militant Islamist organization founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s',⁸¹ Both the SAF's involvement in an ideologically-motivated conflict and the regime's support for the irrational extremists groups presents an evidence that the SAF's mission and role had already expanded beyond the traditional national defense to one of the ideological enforcement

Moreover, the SAF has long acted as the guardians of the state and the enforcer of Islamist political power, regardless of the consequences. For Example, in 2013, with the peaceful protests started in several states in Sudan, as a result of the economic instability. SAF used force to suppress the peaceful protests, resulting in the deaths of almost 179 civilians.⁸² This incident highlights how the military often places maintaining the regime's legacy above the safety of the

⁷⁷Al Jazeera, "Sudan security forces arrest PM Abdalla Hamdok" (25 October 2021), available from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/25/sudans-abdalla-hamdok-under-arrest-report> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁷⁸Adam Smith, Kris Nugroho, and Adam Abballa Adam, "Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF)," *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention*, **12**, no. 1 (2025), p. 8365, available from <https://valleyinternational.net/index.php/theijsshi/article/view/4933/2773> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁷⁹International Crisis Group, *Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival*, Africa Report No. 119 (2023), p. 2, n. 1, available from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/b119-sudan-s-islamists-from-salvation-to-survival.pdf>(accessed 10 August 2025).

⁸⁰ al-Qaeda', *Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/al-Qaeda> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁸¹J. Peter Pham, "Sudan: Still a State Sponsor of Terrorism?," *Atlantic Council*, 8 June 2016, available from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/sudan-still-a-state-sponsor-of-terrorism/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁸²Human Rights Watch, "*We Stood, They Opened Fire*": Killings and Arrests by Sudan's Security Forces during the September Protests (April 2014), available from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/04/21/we-stood-they-opened-fire/killings-and-arrests-sudans-security-forces-during> (accessed 10 August 2025).

citizens. There were reports stating that SAF worked closely with Islamist security forces to harass Christian communities and to shut down churches during this period, showing a pattern of religious inequality and division linked to the political alignments with the regime.⁸³ This close alliance between the Military and the regime of Bashir, has weakened the possibility of a balanced and representative government in Sudan, instead of supporting the country as a whole, they became a tool for maintaining power. Today these long lasting divisions inside the military and the government fueled the ongoing conflicts and the instability, where the two warring parties SAF and RSF both claim power and leadership.

1.5 The Rise of the Rapid support Forces (RSF)

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF), '*Janjaweed*' 'an Arab militia active in Sudan, particularly in the Darfur region. The militia's name is thought by many to be derived from the Arabic *jinnī* (spirit) and *jawad* (horse). Also known as '*ghostly rider*' or '*evil horsemen*', are paramilitary militias founded by the former president *Al-Bashir* and the former leader in West Sudan *Musa Hilal*, to respond quickly, guard the state and protect the president from any coup attempts.

As a report points out, RSF were '*used by the former president Omar Al-Bashir and by the army to help in putting an end to a rebellion*'.⁸⁴ Additionally these militias were in control in the West of Darfur for decades, and it has been a challenge to put an end to their horrific violence towards the residents of Darfur. They have become one of the most powerful military groups in Sudan, originally formed from tribal fighters, their transformation into the main armed forces shows the deep political and the significant challenges Sudan faces.⁸⁵

Moreover, In 2013, under *Al-Bashir's* government, these militias were recognized into the RSF to serve and suppress internal dissent, where *Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo*, commonly known as '*Hemidti*' with ethnical roots from the Reiziegat tribe in Darfur, was announced as the

⁸³*Morning Star News*, "Sudanese Authorities Demolish Church Building in Anti-Christian Campaign" (February 2014), available from <https://morningstarnews.org/2014/02/sudanese-authorities-demolish-church-building> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁸⁴*Al Jazeera*, "Sudan unrest: What are the Rapid Support Forces?" (16 April 2023), available from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/16/sudan-unrest-what-is-the-rapid-support-forces> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*,

commander in charge.⁸⁶ *Hemedti's* leadership and the RSF's loyalty to him have been pivotal in their rise to prominence, while being accused of several violations to human rights and the current conflict in Sudan.⁸⁷

Further ahead, under *Hemedti's* command, the RSF expanded its operations beyond Darfur, they were deployed to patrol borders, particularly with Libya, and were involved in controlling migration flows in the collaboration with European initiatives like Khartoum process.⁸⁸ Furthermore, The RSF participated in the war in Yemen, where a number of its fighters were sent to support the Saudis. At the same time, the RSF strengthened its economic power by taking control of large gold mining areas founded in Sudan. Much of this was done through a company called *Al-Junaid*, which is managed by *Hemedti's* brother, *Abdul Rahim*. This control not only enriched the RSF's leadership but also provided the financial means to enrich their military capabilities and political influence.⁸⁹ The RSF became a key cause in Sudan's political instability after the fall of Al-Bashir and his regime in 2019. They held a powerful position in the Transitional Military Council (TMC), with *Hemedti* serving as the main leader. This showed the huge influence the RSF had during the transition.⁹⁰ Yet, their political image was ruined after the incident of the Khartoum massacre in June 2019 when some forces broke up a peaceful sit-in during the 2019 revolution, causing several deaths and injuries. The incident resulted in serious doubts about the RSF's commitment to supporting a democratic transition period in Sudan.⁹¹

⁸⁶*Al Jazeera*, "Who is 'Hemedti', General Behind Sudan's Feared RSF Force?" (16 April 2023), available from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/16/who-is-hemedti-the-puppeteer-behind-sudans-feared-rsf-fighters> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁸⁷*ADF Magazine*, "Rise of Armed Groups Complicates Sudan's Brutal Civil War," *ADF Magazine*, June 2025, available from <https://adf-magazine.com/2025/06/rise-of-armed-groups-complicates-sudans-brutal-civil-war/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁸⁸Mohamed Elagami, "The Checkered Past of Sudan's Hemedti," *The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy*, 29 May 2019, available from timep.org/2019/05/29/checkered-past-of-sudans-hemedti/ (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁸⁹Global Witness, "Exposing the RSF's Secret Financial Network" (9 December 2019), available from <https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/conflict-resources/exposing-rsf-secret-financial-network/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁹⁰Mohamed Elagami, "Checkered Past of Sudan's Hemedti," *The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy*, 29 May 2019, available from <https://timep.org/2019/05/29/checkered-past-of-sudans-hemedti/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁹¹Human Rights Watch, "They Were Shouting 'Kill Them': Sudan's Violent Crackdown on Protesters in Khartoum" (18 November 2019), available from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/11/18/they-were-shouting-kill-them/sudans-violent-crackdown-protesters-khartoum> (accessed 10 August 2025).

The RSF also used religious narratives as a way to strengthen its legitimacy. Under their leader *Hemedti*, the militias have aligned rhetorically with Islamic values and beliefs, even in forming informal connections with other groups such as the Sudanese People Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), whose leaders portray their struggle in religious and identity based terms.⁹² On an additional note, the SPLM-N, led by *Abdelziz al-Hilu*, the co-founder of the RSF, might have facilitated the cooperation between these two groups with their religious ideology that calls for the separation of religion from the state.⁹³ Additionally, the RSF has actively participated in the recent peace talks held in Kenya 2025, where it signed a political charter with other armed factions including the SPLM-N in order to establish a so-called ‘*Government of peace and Unity*’. Analysts saw this move less as a real step towards peace and reconciliation, and more as an attempt to gain a diplomatic appearance, in addition to access to weapons and possibly international funding.⁹⁴ In the same pattern, under the Saudi-American mediation efforts in Jeddah in 2023, the RSF engaged in negotiations aimed to stop violence and secure humanitarian access. Observers questioned whether RSF’s involvement is a sign of genuine intent for peaceful transition or is it a strategic bid to project their international legitimacy.⁹⁵

However, The conflict between the RSF and SAF transcends beyond the battleground and continues on media outlets and platforms as they both have polar labels for their ‘mission’ or ideology. The RSF uses the hashtag ‘*#Battle_of_Democracy*’ and the SAF uses ‘*#Battle_of_Dignity*’.⁹⁶

⁹²*Al Jazeera*, “Why Sudan’s RSF Chose This Parallel Government Ahead of Peace Talks,” 28 July 2025, available from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/28/why-sudans-rsf-chose-this-parallel-government-ahead-of-peace-talks>(accessed 10 August 2025).

⁹³*Jamestown Foundation*, “The Third Front: Sudan’s Armed Rebel Movements Join the War Between the Generals,” *Jamestown Foundation*, August 2023, available from <https://jamestown.org/program/the-third-front-sudans-armed-rebel-movements-join-the-war-between-the-generals/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁹⁴*Al Jazeera*, “Sudan’s RSF, Accused of Genocide, Signs Charter to Form Rival Government,” 23 February 2025, available from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/2/23/sudans-rsf-allies-sign-charter-for-rival-government-despite-criticisms>(accessed 10 August 2025).

⁹⁵*Arab Center Washington DC*, “The Failure of the Jeddah and IGAD Mediation Efforts for Sudan” (2024), available from <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-failure-of-the-jeddah-and-igad-mediation-efforts-for-sudan> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁹⁶“War Propaganda, Concept and Application in the Sudan War,” *disinfo.africa* (n.d.), available from <https://disinfo.africa/war-propaganda-concept-and-application-in-the-sudan-war-6350f289a0e0> (accessed 10 August 2025).

1.6 The ongoing conflict and Humanitarian crisis.

In Sudan's, starting in April 2023, the struggle for power between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has turned Sudan into one of the world's worst and the biggest humanitarian crises. The violence has resulted in mass displacement, with millions seeking refuge, and has been followed by massive violations to the human rights⁹⁷ According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the conflict in Sudan has led to a massive displacement with over 8.8 million people are displaced within the country, and more than 3.8 million have sought refuge in neighboring nations such as Chad, Egypt, and South Sudan⁹⁸

The humanitarian situation within Sudan is critical. In North Darfur, the Zamzam Refugee Camp has reached famine conditions. On this matter, reports show that at least one child dies every two hours due to malnutrition and lack of medical care. Moreover, The World Health Organization has warned of a *'very real risk'* of mass starvation in several regions, noting that over 70% of hospitals in conflict zones are non-functional.⁹⁹ Furthermore both SAF and RSF, have been accused of committing war crimes, however, the RSF in particular, have been involved in ethnically targeted violence against the *'Masalit' 'non-Arab ethnic group. These tribes live in remote areas of western Sudan and Chad.'*¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the affiliated militias have committed acts of ethnic cleansing, including mass killings in towns such as Misterei and El Guneina.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, these violations committed by both warring parties have not only

⁹⁷Kholood Khair and Asmahan Akram, "Sudan's Dangerous Descent into Warlordism," *TIME*, 7 December 2023, available from <https://time.com/6342732/sudan-burhan-hemedti-descent-warlordism> (accessed 10 August 2025).

⁹⁸UNHCR, *Sudan Emergency: Two Years On – 2025 Impact Update* (16 April 2025), available from <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/sudan-emergency-two-year-impact-update.pdf>(accessed 10 August 2025).

⁹⁹UNICEF, *'Famine Confirmed in Sudan's North Darfur, Confirming UN Agencies' Worst Fears'*, 1 August 2024, available from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/famine-confirmed-sudans-north-darfur-confirming-un-agencies-worst-fears>(accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁰⁰Joshua Project, "**Masalit,**" **Joshua Project**, available from https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/13578/SU (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁰¹Lisa, "RSF Seized North Darfur Garrison, Reportedly Committed Mass Atrocities in West Darfur," *Dabanga Radio & TV Online*, 8 November 2023, available from <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/rsf-seized-north-darfur-garrison-reportedly-committed-mass-atrocities-in-west-darfur> (accessed 10 August 2025).

targeted specific communities only due to their ethnicity, but also by their religious identity and their places of worship. Reports confirm that in May 2023, RSF fighters occupied and looted Christian Churches in both Khartoum and Omdurman, including the famous Mar Grigis Coptic Church, which was changed into a base of violence against worshippers. Followed by the destruction of another church in Khartoum North on July 8th, with no prior notice or any further justification.¹⁰²

In addition, several Sufi shrines and the mausoleum of Sufi *Sheikh hassan Al-Fatih Qaribullah* in Omdurman were reportedly either burned or damaged during RSF operations in the neighborhood, which maybe a signal of broader missions against spiritual traditions as well, or simply against any types of religious beliefs.¹⁰³ These actions demonstrate that religious identity, not only ethnicity, has become a cause of vulnerability. The targeting of Mosques, Churches and even Sufi worship places shows how both the SAF and RSF intend to use religion as a tool for imposing power.

These horrific violations are not only driven by political goals, but also deeply influenced by religious narratives used to justify violence and power. Flint and De Waal explain that much of Sudan's religious violence today originates from the 1990s rise of the NIF Islamist regime, which used Islam as a tool for political control, while suppressing and limiting alternative religious traditions. This legacy informs how SAF and RSF currently use the Islamic religion to legitimize power.¹⁰⁴ As an interviewee points out, 'as well as a main reason and a big permission to do all the crimes, especially as many in the population lack deep religious understanding and are easily manipulated.'¹⁰⁵

Lastly, the war in Sudan today is not solely about power, but also about religion. The violence between both SAF and RSF continues a long lasting history where religion was used to control and gain power as well as exclude some communities. From British and Egyptian

¹⁰²VOA News, "Witnesses Recount Gunmen's Raid on Church in Sudan's Capital" (18 May 2023), available from <https://www.voanews.com/a/witnesses-recount-gunmen-s-raid-on-church-in-sudan-s-capital/7099598.html> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁰³"Omdurman Mosque Fire Sparks Controversy: Sudanese Army Blames RSF," *Sudan Tribune*, 21 March 2024, available from <https://sudantribune.com/article283535/> (accessed 10 August 2025)

¹⁰⁴JJ. Flint and A. de Waal, *Darfur, A New History of a Long War* (London: Zed Books, 2005), pp. 17–32, available from <https://www.rahs-open-lid.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Darfur-A-New-History-of-a-Long-War-rev.-upd.-ed.-2008AFRICAN-ARGUMENTS-Julie-Flint-Alex-de-Waal-.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁰⁵ Interviewee 005

colonial times to the rise of political Islam, leaders have used religion to divide the country. Now both warring parties tend to use the same methods, including attacking churches, mosques and other religious groups only to gain power while justifying their violence.¹⁰⁶

And although both the SAF and the RSF use religious messages as a means of gaining followers, alliances and to justify their use of power, there is no clear public statement or publication that shows that SAF officially referred to the RSF as ‘*none Islamic*’ or accused them of betraying Islam. Most SAF’s public statements focus more on political and national security concerns, rather than religious blame.

Still, however, the way in which both armed groups use Islamic symbols and language when addressing their public speeches, mirrors that religion remains a very powerful tool in this ongoing conflict. The silence from SAF on these serious religious accusations may be either strategic or simply considered unnecessary, because both warring parties appear to be more focused on gaining the ruling power or the public trust.

¹⁰⁶ For more on this, see chapter 2

Chapter 2

2. Patterns of violence: Religious motivations and justifications

This Chapter examines how both the SAF and the RSF have weaponized religion, in order to justify their violence during the current conflict 2023- 2025. Sudan's history is known for its efforts led by the state-led efforts implementing an Islamic identity, the current conflict has reflected this pattern by turning religious rhetoric into a tool for justifying all types of aggression committed by either the SAF or the RSF. At this point, religion is no longer considered as a belief, but rather used as a tool of power and control. Both warring parties used different religious languages and slogans to describe their enemies by either '*not real muslims*' or '*unIslamic*'...etc

It explains how Islam is used by both parties in justifying the violations they commit, while investigating the reason for targeting religious minorities, and lastly examining some case studies from the current 2023-2025 conflict.

2.1 Religious rhetoric and ideological justification of violence by SAF and RSF

The Islamic law was not solely used for religious purposes, but also became a way of controlling society and imposing punishments. In the 1990s, the NIF introduced strict laws based on their own interpretations of Islam. These laws allowed different types of punishments, such as amputation and were used to limit freedoms and plant fear in anyone who disagreed with the regime, including peaceful protesters and religious minorities with other religious beliefs. Even today, Sudan's legal system continues to reflect this past.

Human rights watch reported that both SAF and RSF forces have committed cruel punishments and violence without fair trials during the current 2023-2025 conflict, using religion and law to justify these acts of violence against the civilians.¹⁰⁷ This reflects how the law itself has become a part of the violence. This specific use of religion was also highlighted by several interviewees.

¹⁰⁷Human Rights Watch, "*Sudan: Warring Parties Execute Detainees, Mutilate Bodies*" (29 August 2024), available from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/29/sudan-warring-parties-execute-detainees-mutilate-bodies> (accessed 10 August 2025).

For instance, (interviewee 006) pointed out, *"They are all saying things like 'Allahu Akbar', you see? and also killing each other ... shouting slogans to frame their violence as a part of religious obligation"*.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, (interviewee 005) added on the aspect of this pattern of manipulation noting, *"The way they use religious speeches..its not to guide people to God, it's to control them and justify what they're doing"*.¹⁰⁹ This reflects the use of religion by both parties as a tool of legitimizing brutality and violence, as a shield for their actions, rather than a simple belief. This dynamic is further stressed on by (an Interviewee) that stated:

*SAF has a long history in using Islam to define their actions and national identity, while excluding us the Christians, even in our neighborhood, it always felt like we were outsiders.*¹¹⁰

On the same pattern, he also described the RSF saying they *'speak in religious terms too, for instance jihad, and justice'*¹¹¹ while stressing that religion is one of the reasons behind the conflict, and, *'it might all seem political, but religion is a very strong aspect in shaping this conflict'*.¹¹² Additionally, this political use of religion has a long history. According to *Flint and De Waal*, many early rebels were themselves strict Muslims, but were jailed, tortured, and mistreated under Sudan's Islamic legal system for having an opposing opinion, some had once worked for the state but were forced to resist after their families and villages were attacked or destroyed by government forces.¹¹³

Moreover, according to Amnesty International Sudan's use of Islamic criminal laws has led to the ongoing violations of the international human rights standards. These laws permitted different inhuman punishments such as the death penalty for reverting to any other religion than Islam.¹¹⁴ In this pattern, these laws were not limited to the past, even during the 2023-25 conflict SAF leaders have reintroduced these legal traditions as symbols of moral authority. While these

¹⁰⁸ Interviewee 006

¹⁰⁹ Interviewee 005

¹¹⁰ Interviewee 008

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ Flint and de Waal, pp. 70–74.

¹¹⁴ Amnesty International, *Sudan: The Penal Code: Human Rights Violations Enshrined in Law* (25 January 1995), available from <https://www.amnesty.org/ar/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/afr540541994en.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2025).

punishments may not always be carried out, their presence in the legal code allows for the arbitrary detention of those seen as ‘*enemies*’ of the Islamic state, especially non-Muslims.¹¹⁵

The use of religion to justify and limit freedoms is not limited to Sudan, it included some Arabic countries and some within the African continent, which have significantly affected Sudan’s use of religion. The Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs (JCPA) in its recent report discusses how religious ideologies and rhetoric from certain countries within the Horn of Africa such as Egypt, and other Arabic Islamist countries Qatar, who supported Islamic groups as ‘*The Muslim Brotherhood*’, had an influence in Sudan’s legal state and its relations with these countries.¹¹⁶ In relation to the current Sudanese conflict, both the SAF and the RSF continue to use religious language to make their violence seem acceptable. For example, SAF tries to present itself as the protector of Sudan’s Islamic identity. They often speak about defending the state, its traditions, and Islam. This helps them to gain support from people who fear losing their religious values. On the other hand, RSF sometimes uses Islamic slogans to show they are fighting for justice or to protect oppressed Muslim communities. They even use religious words to recruit young fighters, saying they will be rewarded for fighting.

As *Roald* highlights how Sudan’s state has promoted a singular view of Islam as the exclusive public and political identity. This persistent narrative reinforced by state controlled education and religious institutions, frames those who oppose the official interpretation of Islam as threats to national unity and stability.¹¹⁷ Although *Roald* was writing before this current conflict, their analysis helps explain how the 2023-25 conflict, both SAF and RSF draw on religious rhetoric, they present their campaigns not only as military efforts, but as a defense of the only ‘*true islam*’ recognized by the state and the nation.

Le Monde shows that, RSF allied militias used religious and ethnic language to justify attacks, survivors reported that RSF fighters called themselves ‘defenders of Islam’ and used

¹¹⁵U.S. Department of State, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sudan*, United States Department of State, available from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sudan/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹¹⁶Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA), *The Broken Horn: Geopolitical Influences in Yemen, Somalia, and Sudan*(May 2025), available from <https://jcpa.org/the-broken-horn-geopolitical-influences-in-yemen-somalia-and-sudan/>(accessed 10 August 2025).

¹¹⁷A. N. Longva and A. S. Roald (eds.), *Religious Minorities in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 325, available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369790958_Freedom_of_Religion_in_Sudan (accessed 10 August 2025).

religious slogans such as ‘*Allahu Akbar-Allahu Akbar*’ during attacks, in some cases, they referred to those from Sufi backgrounds as not real Muslims, and this proves the struggle of religion that has been faced by those with different religious backgrounds.¹¹⁸ Moreover the ways in which religion is used to validate these human rights violations is to some extent a way how SAF also continues to position itself by having the ‘the support of God’, using these languages in public speeches and military propaganda. Both sides, in this way, use religion as a shield to justify what are clearly war crimes, for instance in the Darfur region.¹¹⁹

This shared use of religious language and identity by both SAF and RSF does not happen in isolation; rather it reflects a deeper, long lasting state ideology in Sudan where Islam has been promoted as the only acceptable identity. Sudan’s religious landscape is shaped more by state control, than by genuine diversity. For decades, the Sudanese state has long presented Islam as the only acceptable public identity, and anyone who doesn't fit that, were often treated with suspicion and exclusion.¹²⁰ This ideological mindset goes beyond law, it is part of national education, media, and public discourse. This mindset is not used only by the government, but also encouraged among the population, so when RSF or SAF today act violently in the name of religion, they are supported by years of ideological education led by the state, showing that religious control equals national security.

Additionally, the current conflict is not only supported by political and military factors, but also by a deep connection linking faith and loyalty to ethnic and tribal identities. Religion has been added into the logic of territorial expansion and military control. Both SAF and RSF have systematically used Islam as a Islamic identity to decide which ethnicity should be displaced, which institution should be dismantled, and which areas are set for occupation. RSF in particular, has forcibly taken over regions with large Christian and non-Arab Muslim populations such as

¹¹⁸Rüzgar Mehmet Akgün and *Le Monde*’s video investigation team, “Sudan: Videos Prove Ethnic Crimes Committed by Rapid Support Forces-Affiliated Militias in Darfur,” *Le Monde*, 9 September 2024, available from https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2024/09/09/sudan-videos-prove-ethnic-crimes-committed-by-rapid-support-forces-affiliated-militias-in-darfur_6725329_124.html (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹¹⁹Adam Greco, “Sudan’s Civil War and the Future of Information Warfare,” *Encyclopedia Geopolitica*, 28 June 2024, available from <https://encyclopediageopolitica.com/2024/06/28/sudans-civil-war-and-the-future-of-information-warfare/>(accessed 10 August 2025).

¹²⁰Anne Sofie Roald, "Freedom of Religion in Sudan," in *Religious Minorities in the Middle East*, edited by Anh Nga Longva and Anne Sofie Roald (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 149–168, available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369790958_Freedom_of_Religion_in_Sudan (accessed 10 August 2025).

parts of South and Central Darfur, where mosques and churches were either destroyed or converted into military bases, or RSF Islamic learning centers that promote their own ideology.¹²¹

Al-Bashir's regime continued the ongoing civil war against the southern part of Sudan and labeled it a '*Jihad*' also known as '*exertion or struggle*' or '*holy war*'¹²². This deepened the divide through that the promise of martyrdom and '*eternal heaven*' was soon associated with murder or crimes against those who were not Muslim, and further associated with the tribes, skin tones and other characterizations of those who were not from the northern or eastern parts of the country.¹²³ This association of religion as a driving factor soon blurred the lines and not only sanctioned the crimes committed against a large part of the country, but were associated with glory and pride. It is believed to be of the highest honor to have fought or died in a holy war and the purpose of fighting shifted in definition from '*fighting against*' those of different religious orientations to '*fighting for*' or '*defending*' Islam. This ideology was a fueling force that not only changed perspective across the country but gave license to kill for the crime of being different. It transcended throughout the years and its roots spread deeper allowing for the thoughts and driving opinions that carried out a lot of the violations committed by SAF and RSF in the modern day conflicts.

The region was highly influenced by Sharia law and the strict enforcement of Sharia law. Though neighboring countries like Somalia and Eritrea adapted Salafi Jihadist ideals and harbored militant Islamist groups. Then Sudan went a step further in harboring Osama Bin Laden from 1991 to 1996 as well as harbored reported training of *Al Qaeda*. This led to the 1993 US State Department designation of Sudan as a "state sponsor of terrorism"¹²⁴. Though *Osama Bin Laden* was then deemed a terrorist globally, and had a falling out with the Saudi ruling family over the Gulf war, Sudan still hosted him with no regard for consequences in the name of Islam.

¹²¹ Open Doors. "Sudan: The conflict exposes ethnic, tribal and religious vulnerabilities." *Open Doors*, 2023. <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/articles/stories/Sudan-The-conflict-exposes-ethnic-tribal-and-religious-vulnerabilities/>.

¹²²John L. Esposito, "Jihad: Holy or Unholy War?", *United Nations Alliance of Civilizations*, April 2006, available from https://www.unaoc.org/repository/Esposito_Jihad_Holy_Unholy.pdf (accessed 10 August 2025), p. 1.

¹²³"*Sudan's war criminals: Lessons on how to get away with murder*," *Coalition for the International Criminal Court*, 2 March 2017, available from <https://www.coalitionfortheicc.org/news/20170302/sudans-war-criminals-lessons-how-get-away-murder> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹²⁴"Sudan and Terrorism," *U.S. Department of State*, 1997, accessed 10 August 2025, available from https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/terrorism/mckune_970515.html.

This shows that the Islamization in Sudan was early on deemed the only driving factor behind decisions that determined the future of the country regardless of economic or existential consequences. The Islamic regime of *Al-Bashir* - early on - made clear its intentions in validating choices or decisions as long as they are in the name of Islam. This marred the belief system of the people and solidified the '*whatever it takes*' ideology that we see carried out in today's conflicts. It was only after dire consequences and international pressure that he was thus expelled from Sudan.¹²⁵

As a result, religious violence in Sudan has evidently not emerged spontaneously, but has been shaped by decades of ideological control guided by the Islamic state that was influenced by extremist Jihadist movements.

2.2 Targeting of religious minorities, sectarian violence incidents

Systemic discrimination and restriction for those not following the government-imposed Islam on everybody, non Muslims, non-Arab Muslims and even Muslims from parties or sects that were not associated with the ruling party, was now a way of life. There was a clear divide and restriction in government jobs, permits for places of worship, religious education, registration of religious groups, and even taxation and registration processes for religious groups or organizations including volunteering groups which however did not apply to Muslim groups or organizations.

The legal system made it normal to treat non-Muslims as second-class citizens, which over time justified harsher and more violent actions, which shows that RSF has inherited this mindset in the current conflict, where they don't just attack people in battle but they humiliate and target people based on religious identity, often echoing old justifications used in the 1990s, which goes beyond, where today RSF continues this legacy by committing gender-based violence, especially against women from non-Arab or minority communities while they are

¹²⁵ "State Sponsors: Sudan," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2008, accessed 10 August 2025, available from <https://www.cfr.org/background/state-sponsors-sudan>.

described by the rationalization as ‘less Muslim’.¹²⁶ For instance in Darfur, as a person interviewed by the Human Rights Watch shared,:

*The attackers pursued people who sought safety in schools and the mosque. Many women and children, and some members of the self-defense group wounded earlier, fled to a school complex, on the northern edge of the town, where the assailants repeatedly entered classrooms looking for men and summarily executed those they found..*¹²⁷

Although, the term or the perception of ‘less-Muslim’ which is doubted by many people as one of the reasons behind the violence in Darfur in the current 2023 conflict, and yet not stated directly by RSF during their attacks in the Darfur region. This perception remains deeply driven from the historical background and contest of the ‘Arab Supremacy’, and the ‘Anti black racism. As a result whether the attacks in Darfur are religious or not, remains unknown..

Abbinck shows how violence in the Horn of Africa can target religious minorities, and how religious identity. He warns that religious identity is often mixed with the ethnic and political identity, making people more vulnerable to being attacked because of who they are or what they believe. In Sudan, this has become a serious problem, since 2023, both SAF and RSF have targeted religious minorities, especially those who are Christian or follow different Islamic traditions like Sufism or Shi’a Islam. This fear was expressed by an (interviewee) from the Nuba Mountains shared:

They destroyed all the churches in our town. Some people tried to rebuild secretly, but the soldiers came again. We stopped gathering after that. We felt it was better to pray at home.

And in some areas controlled by the RSF, religious leaders have been kidnapped or killed. SAF has also been accused of ignoring attacks on Christian communities or even being involved in them. This kind of violence is not only political, it also becomes sectarian, meaning people are

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch, “*The Massalit Will Not Come Home*”: *Ethnic Cleansing and Crimes Against Humanity in El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan* (9 May 2024), available from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/09/sudan-ethnic-cleansing-west-darfur> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹²⁷ Ibid (person to the Human rights watch)

targeted for their religion.¹²⁸ Amnesty states that women were a main target, especially those from minority communities including those seen as not practicing “pure” Islam, were raped or assaulted, and in some cases forced to abandon their religious practices.¹²⁹

On the other hand, in addition to attacking minorities claiming religious differences or through religious motives, the RSF and SAF both denounce the actions of each other. The RSF labels the SAF them as a ‘*terrorist Islamic movement*’ that is ‘*supporting transnational violent groups and fostering an environment ripe for extremism and instability*’. The RSF goes on to further state that the reason for the crisis in Sudan over the last thirty years was due to ‘*the insistence of the terrorist Islamic Movement and its militias*’. Its claims connect the SAF to *Jihadist* movements and that its intentions are not for the nation’s benefit.¹³⁰ In return, The SAF in its reference to the RSF call them ‘rebel militia’ in an attempt to de-legitimize their existence or their right to rule, make decisions on behalf of the country or claim to defend its democracy.¹³¹

Reports have stated that RSF soldiers used rape as a weapon of war against women from minority groups in some regions including Khartoum and Drafur state, as well as some other parts of the country. Other reports claim ethnic cleansing of entire tribes and towns and burning of them. Mass graves have also been reported. Additionally, UN experts stated that, RSF fighters are systematically using rape to punish, terrorize, and dominate communities, specially the Masalit, Nuba tribes and other none Arab muslims in Darfur and Khartoum.¹³² On the other hand, reports show SAF’s violations and crimes that are similar to those credited to the RSF. SAF is accused of conducting airstrikes and using heavy artillery in heavily populated civilian

¹²⁸U.S. Department of State, “2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sudan,” 2024, available from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sudan/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹²⁹Amnesty International, *Death Came To Our Home: War Crimes in Sudan* (Amnesty International, 2023), available from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/7037/2023/en/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹³⁰The Rapid Support Forces, *Important Statement on the Danger Posed by Terrorist Militia to the Future of Sudan and the Regional and International Security* (2025), available from <https://rapidsupportforce.com/en/news-details/Important-Statement> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹³¹Maram Mahdi and Kyle Hiebert, “Manufacturing a Veneer of Legitimacy, Warlords Drag Sudan into the Abyss,” *Centre for International Governance Innovation*, 1 June 2023, available from <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/manufacturing-a-veneer-of-legitimacy-warlords-drag-sudan-into-the-abyss/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹³²“Rape by Sudan’s RSF Militia Used to ‘Punish, Terrorize,’ Warn Rights Experts,” *UN News* (2023), available from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1139847> (accessed 10 August 2025).

areas as well as civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and markets especially in Khartoum and Darfur. SAF is also accused of ‘retaliating’ against civilians who are accused of having supported the RSF, especially in areas reclaimed by the SAF through arrests, torture and execution. Videos have also circulated showing SAF members celebrating and chanting ethnic slurs whilst carrying decapitated heads or in the middle of killings. Reports of rape and sexual violence by members of SAF have also been documented.

However while both parties engage in rhetoric to discredit each other, reports from the ground in different parts of the country reveal that both SAF and RSF have committed serious violations to human rights during the current conflict and prior to its inception in April of 2023 as well. This leaves much to be contemplated in terms of defining roles or choosing sides. Their rhetorics seem to be aimed towards gathering allies and supporting their individual narratives. However, when viewed side by side, it can be seen that one is no better than the other.

2.3 Case studies of Religious Justification of Military Actions and Associated Religious Framing

Interpretations of sacred texts and religious symbolism have been used as justification to fight wars when needed at times throughout history. Because the text in the Qur'an can be - when taken out of context - incomplete in meaning, it can be used to advocate certain ideals, especially with military intention. Things taken out of context can often be altered to use in whatever need the manipulator chooses. Wars and war crimes become ‘*religiously sanctioned*’ when certain verses of the *Qur'an* are interpreted or understood in a certain way.¹³³ The verses do bear a flexibility allowing for adaptation however the meanings do not waiver when taken into consideration as a whole. The manipulation of the meaning of some texts when decontextualized leads to an abuse of the power of the text as a whole, and an authority over those looking for guidance in religious leaders claiming to better understand the holy text and thus can incite action and movement from believers who choose to follow them.¹³⁴

¹³³Horn Institute, *Understanding Jihad: What It Is and What It Is Not* (2025), available from <https://horninstitute.org/understanding-jihad-what-it-is-and-what-it-is-not/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹³⁴ Ibid

The Islamic term *Jihad* is widely spread and with negative connotations. Jihadists are labeled as ‘terrorists that have killed, plan to kill, or believe in murder for reasons justified as Islamic.’ But, necessary is the true meaning of the word *Jihad*. Its literal translation is ‘to struggle’ meaning to make effort in your personal path when struggling internally with your ‘lower self’ and externally in a defensive struggle. The primary interpretation of this now much-feared word is first the fight you have within yourself that you struggle against and secondly, the fight outwards only in very strict/specific conditions such as self-defense when under oppression.¹³⁵

It is through this struggle, whether internally or externally, that one may find solace and achieve the highest levels of heaven. Now, this belief, then, that Jihad, *the struggling*, is thought to guarantee the garden of Eden, its glorification and attempt to achieve grows and becomes a goal. If one can be guaranteed that through their ‘*struggle*’ in the name of God, they can be awarded heaven, for sure, it has been proven to not be a difficult feat to get them to fight or pick up a weapon if a narrative that validates actions can be told. It is, in their faith, this ultimate reward and the concept of martyrdom for those who lose their lives in the *struggle* to want to die in Jihad in the name of God. This powers those who can preach to followers the words of the *Qur’an* in ways or through interpretation giving justification to actions that label them as terrorists, militia, or violators of human rights, sometimes rightfully so.¹³⁶

Religious leaders manage to rally troops that follow them blindly to fight battles and wars, truly believing that they are doing the work or the will of God. This fearlessness that sometimes may appear cold, heartless and evil stems from a feeling of conviction and internal peace associated with an absolute assurance that this is exactly what God asks of them and through these actions they will be awarded the highest levels of heaven for themselves and their family members. (interviewee 004) points out, ‘*The way they use religious speeches.. It’s not to guide people to God, it’s to control them and justify what they’re doing*’.¹³⁷

¹³⁵“Jihad,” *Religion and Philosophy Research Starters*, EBSCO (2022), available from <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/religion-and-philosophy/jihad> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹³⁶ Horn, *Understanding Jihad: What It Is, What It Is Not*, International Institute for Strategic Studies (2025), available from <https://horninstitute.org/understanding-jihad-what-it-is-and-what-it-is-not/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹³⁷ Interviewee 004.

The definition of *Jihad* is essential in understanding why and how religious influence came to power the conflicts in Sudan, and also in historically documented battles that claim the name of Islam.¹³⁸

The *Qur'an* addresses combat and wars more than once, but it is cited out of context and converted with manipulation as an intent when used to recruit, train, power or motivate an army. Below is a review of some of the most commonly used verses from the Holy *Qur'an* that have been used to fuel, validate and cause wars, crimes and human rights violations. Exploring some of the most commonly cited verses in the *Qur'an* and comparing between translation as well as varied interpretations shows how it is being used as motive for violation and justifying it through altering the interpreted message.¹³⁹ As the verses below and their translation, show the differences between the mainstream Interpretation and the extremist Interpretation:

١٤٠. وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمَعْتَدِينَ

[البقرة: 190]

*1. Fight in the cause of Allah 'only' against those who wage war against you, but do not exceed the limits. Allah does not like transgressors.*¹⁴¹

- Mainstream Interpretation (Contextual/Defensive/Conditional): Interpreted as strictly defensive, permitting fighting only against those who initiate aggression, with clear limits on conduct and a prohibition against exceeding bounds.
- Extremist Interpretation (Decontextualized/Offensive/Unconditional): Often selectively quoted as "Fight in the way of Allah," ignoring the crucial "do not transgress" clause, to justify offensive and indiscriminate violence against perceived enemies.

١٤٢. وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةً وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ ۚ فَإِنِ انتَهَوْا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ عَلَيَّ وَالظَّالِمِينَ

[البقرة: 193]

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ John L. Esposito, "Jihad: Holy or Unholy War?", *United Nations Alliance of Civilizations*, April 2006, available from https://www.unaoc.org/repository/Esposito_Jihad_Holy_Unholy.pdf (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁴⁰ The Holy Qur'an, Al-baqara (190) verse in Arabic

¹⁴¹ The Holy Qur'an, Al-baqara. (190) <https://quran.com/al-baqarah/190> (Already translated on this website)

¹⁴² The Holy Qur'an, Al-baqara (193) verse in Arabic

2. *Fight against them 'if they persecute you' until there is no more persecution, and 'your' devotion will be to Allah 'alone'. If they stop 'persecuting you', let there be no hostility except against the aggressors.*¹⁴³

- Mainstream Interpretation (Contextual/Defensive/Conditional): "Fitnah" is understood as oppression, persecution, or sedition. Fighting is to remove this oppression, and aggression ceases if the oppressors desist. Emphasizes justice and cessation of hostilities upon enemy surrender.
- Extremist Interpretation (Decontextualized/Offensive/Unconditional): "Fitnah" is broadly interpreted to include any disbelief or deviation from their strict ideology, justifying continuous offensive warfare until their version of Islam is universally dominant. The condition "if they desist" is often ignored or reinterpreted to mean complete submission.

144٣. فَإِذَا انسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرْمُ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ وَأَخْصِرُوهُمْ وَأَقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصِدٍ ۚ إِنَّا تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتُوا الزَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

[التوبة: 5]

3. *But once the Sacred Months have passed, kill the polytheists 'who violated their treaties' wherever you find them, capture them, besiege them, and lie in wait for them in every way. But if they repent, perform prayers, and pay alms-tax, then set them free. Indeed, Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.*¹⁴⁵

Mainstream Interpretation (Contextual/Defensive/Conditional): Known as the "Sword Verse", but interpreted within its historical context of specific treaties and ongoing warfare against polytheists who broke covenants. It is not a general command for indiscriminate killing, but applies to specific combatants in specific circumstances after a period of grace.

Extremist Interpretation (Decontextualized/Offensive/Unconditional): Decontextualized and presented as a universal, timeless command to kill all non-believers or those who do not adhere to their specific interpretation of Islam, justifying widespread violence and terrorism against civilians.

¹⁴³ The Holy Qur'an, Al-baqara. (193) <https://quran.com/al-baqarah/193> (Already translated on this website)

¹⁴⁴ The Holy Qur'an, Al-Tawba (05) verse in Arabic

¹⁴⁵ The Holy Qur'an, Al-Tawba. (05) <https://quran.com/9/5?translations> (Already translated on this website)

Building on that, and in relation to the ongoing conflict in Sudan, these interpretations may not seem only historical and abstract. Even though they were not echoed directly using these verses, there seem to be some of the violations committed which are justified by the term and the meaning of '*Jihad*'. The army explicitly gets the motivation to fight in the name of religion and in most cases its being perceived as pride. For Example, as mentioned above the SAF has been accused of destroying some worship places and other religious sites, whether mosques or churches or any other sites.¹⁴⁶ Some of these sites are in West Darfur, and in El-Geneina and in Omdurman and Khartoum.¹⁴⁷ And while these actions are considered as abuses, the religious framing behind these armed focuses seems to generally focus on some broader justifications behind the war itself, again, the fight against RSF might be seen generally by the SAF as *jihad*, instead of presenting direct religious justifications or the reasons behind these attacks or destroying these religious sites.

Although, the SAF may not say in words, '*we shelled this church because it's Christian*', or may not cite any *Qur'anic* verses directly, their alliances with other Islamists groups and countries, in addition to the way in which they are using religion and religious language, does suggest a somehow an influence while underlining some certain interpretations such as the ones mentioned above. This leaves us to whether this is all intentional or not, the fact remains that these actions draw attention to questions and thoughts about how religion continues to shape the justifications and reasoning of violence in some states such as Sudan and other Islamists countries.

¹⁴⁶U.S. Department of State, "*2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sudan*," 2024, available from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sudan/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

Chapter 3

3. Human Rights violations in the ongoing conflict 2023-2025

This Chapter discusses the human rights violations committed by both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), during the 2023-2025 armed conflict. The violation committed include differet types of violences, such as sexual violence, forced displacement, torture, attacks on religious minories, attacks whether they were on civilians, journalists, or human rights lawyers and defenders, violations targeting religious minorities, and child soldiers. It also explores that Sudan has signed several International Covenants and legal instruments that calls for the protection of civilians in all cases, specially during war. But regardless, both sides are clearly breaking these obligations.

Furthermore, the chapter provides a comprehensive explanation of both the International Humanitarian law violations while providing an examination on human rights violations, and the Sharia justification on the human rights violations. It shows that the 2023-2025 conflict in Sudan is not just political, but rather a human rights crisis as well, where religion is often politicized, misused to justify unpredictable acts of violence.

3.1 Introduction to Sudan's International Legal obligations

Sudan, like many other states which are considered to be a part of the International community, which is obliged to protect the human rights and dignity of its citizens, has signed and also ratified a number of important humanitarian strategies and legal instruments, throughout the years. These legal instruments clearly define the responsibilities and the obligations of both the Sudanese government and the armed groups protecting the state not only when there is peace, but also in times of conflict. Furthermore, these signed obligations required Sudan not to only protect the civilians, but also prevent any types of human rights abuses, and hold those responsible for these violations accountable.

These International obligations and agreements are not optional, and ones ratified, they naturally become legally binding. In other words, Sudan is obligated to respect and follow these rules at all times, even during this current conflict. Building on that, if we look at the current

conflict, we can find many of these instruments are being violated and broken by the Sudanese government.

The following sections provides an outline to the most relevant signed treaties and obligations that shape Sudan's International obligations today:

3.1.1 The Geneva Convention of (1949) and their additional protocols

The four Geneva conventions of 1949, along with their later protocols, form the fundamentals of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL). They seek to limit the harm caused by war, protecting civilians, those no longer involved in fighting and others affected by conflict.¹⁴⁸ The four Conventions read as follows: '*(First and Second Conventions)* is to provide strong protection for wounded and sick soldiers, as well as the ones who fall victims of injury during conflicts.¹⁴⁹ *(Third Convention)* is to protect and treat prisoners of war.¹⁵⁰ And lastly, *(Fourth Convention)* is to strictly protect Civilians and populations'.¹⁵¹¹⁵²

Sudan is a State Party to all of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, in addition to other 196 countries that have accepted it widely as an essential rule for different behaviours during conflicts.¹⁵³ Due to that, when Sudan breaks these rules, it will not only be violating a treaty, but it will also be a violation to the international legal and moral agreements which are agreed upon globally.

3.1.2 The Convention Against Torture (CAT)

The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT or CAT) is an essential Convention, that prohibits any forms of torture. (Art.2.2)¹⁵⁴ specifically states that '*No exceptional circumstance whatsoever, whether a state of war of a*

¹⁴⁸American Red Cross, *Summary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Their Additional Protocols* (April 2011), available from https://www.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/atg/PDF_s/International_Services/International_Humanitarian_Law/IHL_SummaryGenevaConv.pdf(accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

¹⁵⁰ Ibid

¹⁵¹ Ibid

¹⁵² Ibid. p. 2-4

¹⁵³International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *States Party to the Geneva Conventions and Their Additional Protocols* (2025), available from <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/treaties-states-parties-commentaries>(accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁵⁴*Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (adopted 10 December 1984, entered into force 26 June 1987) 1465 UNTS 85, Art 2.

threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture'.¹⁵⁵¹⁵⁶ Under this Convention all ratifying states are obliged to adopt the legislative, judicial and administrative measures to prevent torture, and criminalize it, and to ensure they have every right to complain and receive their rights.¹⁵⁷

Sudan officially ratified and accepted the CAT agreement on August 12, 2021, despite having signed it much earlier in 1986, this delay is often seen as an attempt to not fulfill the obligations and it's also seen as either slow or internationally delayed.¹⁵⁸

3.1.3 The Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC)

The Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), Or often called the child soldier treaty, is an essential international agreement that aims to protect the children from the danger and abuses, which are normally linked to the armed conflict, it's clearly bounce the recruitment and arming of the children who are under the age of 18 under any military group or armed fights.¹⁵⁹

Sudan signed this treaty on October 12, 2003, and delayed its ratification until September 2004, formally committing and being obliged to protect children from use for any military or armed purposes or causes in any types of conflicts.¹⁶⁰

3.1.4 The Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court

The Rome Statute is a fundamental treaty of the International Criminal court (ICC), it recognizes the most serious crimes under the international Criminal law. This includes different crimes, such

¹⁵⁵ *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (adopted 10 December 1984, entered into force 26 June 1987) 1465 UNTS 85, Art 2.

¹⁵⁶ United Nations, *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* (adopted 25 May 2000, entered into force 12 February 2002) United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-rights-child-involveme-nt-children> accessed 10 August 2025.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

¹⁵⁸ "Sudan Fulfills Promise to Ratify UNCAT," *CTI2024.org* (August 2021), available from <https://cti2024.org/news/sudan-fulfils-promise-to-ratify-uncat/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁵⁹ *Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* (adopted 25 May 2000, entered into force 12 February 2002)

¹⁶⁰ Ibid

as genocides, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and all types of crimes of aggression. The Statute presents a strong legal framework and legal basis for prosecuting atrocities in Sudan.

- Crimes Against Humanity (Article 7): *'It refers to specific acts such as direct attacks, murder, torture, rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, forced pregnancy, or any types of attacks'*.¹⁶¹
- War Crimes (Article 8): Particularly relevant to Sudan's conflict this includes, intentionally direct attacks, rape, child soldier, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual violence.¹⁶²

The Rome Statute defines all types of crimes whether they were war crimes or crimes against humanity, many of these acts were reported in Sudan. These definitions are fundamentals to the ICC. *'However, the UN Human Rights Office strongly recommended that the ICC must be expanding the ICC's jurisdiction to cover all parts of Sudan, while currently it only includes Darfur'*.¹⁶³

3.1.5 The UN Council Resolution 1820

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1829 (2008), *'explicitly condemning sexual violence against women and girls. The resolution also states that sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and components of genocide. The Security Council calls on armed groups to protect civilians from sexual violence.'*¹⁶⁴

Although UNSC Resolution 1820's clearly states the importance of protecting women from any sexual violence, while underlining the severe codmen to it as a serious crime under the International law.¹⁶⁵ Sudan highlights a failure in outing it into force and its resolution to protect the vulnerable communities. In relation to the current conflict, this can be seen in the wide range

¹⁶¹Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (adopted 17 July 1998, entered into force 1 July 2002) 2187 UNTS 3, art 7.

¹⁶²Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (adopted 17 July 1998, entered into force 1 July 2002) 2187 UNTS 3, art 8

¹⁶³United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Sudan: Entrenched Impunity Fuelling Gross Human Rights Violations and Abuses* (United Nations, February 2025) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/sudan-entrenched-impunity-fuelling-gross-human-rights-violations-and-abuses> accessed 9 August 2025.

¹⁶⁴Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820* (GIWPS, 2025) <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/united-nations-security-council-resolution-1820/> accessed 10 August 2025.

¹⁶⁵United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008) (19 June 2008).

of different kinds of sexual violences and abuses committed during the current conflict by either RSF or SAF.¹⁶⁶

3.1.6 The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR)

The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), was adopted in 1981, and later on was put into force in 1986.¹⁶⁷ 'The charter specifically serves as the fundamental regional human right instrument on the African continent'.¹⁶⁸ The African Union's 53 member states have officially committed to uphold the ACHPR.¹⁶⁹ The charter includes several types of human rights 'It explicitly prohibits all forms of exploitation and degradation, including slavery, slave trade, torture, and cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment and treatment'.¹⁷⁰

Both the African Union (AU) and the Peace Security Council (PSC) have always condemned the ongoing violence in Sudan, they have constantly requested both parties to uphold their obligation and commitment under the ACHPR, and a wider International Humanitarian law.¹⁷¹ Moreover, The AU has created mechanisms like the African commission on human and peoples rights (ACHPR Commission) and the African court on human and peoples rights in order to protect and promote these essential human rights¹⁷². However, conducted research indicates that the African human rights system faces what is called '*weak capacity*' and a '*lack of*

¹⁶⁶United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Sudan: Entrenched impunity fuelling gross human rights violations and abuses* (February 2025), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/sudan-entrenched-impunity-fuelling-gross-human-rights-violations-and-abuses> [accessed 9 August 2025].

¹⁶⁷African Union, *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ African Union, Final Communiqué of the 83rd Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

<https://achpr.au.int/en/news/press-releases/2025-05-22/final-communication-83rd-ordinary-session-african-commission-human>

¹⁷⁰ Organization of African Unity, *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*,

https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36390-treaty-0011_-_african_charter_on_human_and_peoples_rights_e.pdf(accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁷¹African Union, *Final Communiqué of the 83rd Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights*,

<https://achpr.au.int/en/news/press-releases/2025-05-22/final-communication-83rd-ordinary-session-african-commission-human> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁷²Amnesty International, *A Guide to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*,

<https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ior630052006en.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2025).

political will' from all the members of the African Union or the African states. Which hinders the ACHPR Commission's effectiveness, resulting in a low level of implementation of the legal instruments.¹⁷³

3.1.7 The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), is an essential instrument within the major International Human Rights treaty, which was adopted in 1966, and then implemented in 1976. The aim of this treaty protects a wide range of different fundamental rights, these rights include, the right to life, freedom from torture, and arbitrary detention, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and equality before the law once ratified, all states become elagally binding and obliged to protect, respect, and fulfill these rights all times, even during the times of conflicts.¹⁷⁴

However, Sudan acceded to the ICCPR on March 18th 1986, but without applying any reservations to the Sharia law which means the treaty obligations fully apply under the international law. Moreover, the ICCPR is specifically mentioned by the United Nations Human Rights Committee, which explores and examines the reports submitted and then issues recommendations. In July 2014, Sudan submitted the fourth periodic review report, which the committee reviewed, however the committee raised concerns about Sudan regarding the Human Rights and the restriction of specific rights and freedoms, such as the arbitrary arrests, in addition to some other significant violations regarding the security forces.¹⁷⁵¹⁷⁶

As a result, the concerns raised remain highly relevant to the current 2023-2025 conflict, as the violations to the basic human rights continue to occur where we find both warring parties RSF and SAF have been documented in several acts of violence either towards each other's groups or towards the citizens and the local community, which directly violates the ICCPR

¹⁷³Directorate General for External Policies, Policy Department, *Human Rights Protection Mechanisms in Africa: Strong Potential, Weak Capacity* – European Parliament, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2013/491487/EXPO-DROI_SP\(2013\)491487_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2013/491487/EXPO-DROI_SP(2013)491487_EN.pdf)(accessed 6 August 2025).

¹⁷⁴International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN Doc. A/6316 (1966), entered into force 23 March 1976. [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_2200A\(XXI\)_civil.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_2200A(XXI)_civil.pdf)

¹⁷⁵UN Human Rights Committee, *Concluding Observations on the Fourth Periodic Report of the Sudan*, CCPR/C/SDN/CO/4 (22 July 2014), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/779411?v=pdf>.

¹⁷⁶UN Human Rights Committee, *Considers Report on Sudan*, CCPR/C/SDN/4 (July 2014).

articles that implies protections, such as (Art.6)¹⁷⁷ on the extrajudicial killings, For instance, RSF has been involved in destroying homes, committing mass-killing, ethnic cleansing crimes towards some tribes such as Masalit and others in Darfur regions.¹⁷⁸, additionally, as the UN fact-finding mission reported both parties have been involved in inhumane torture crimes that violate (Art.7)¹⁷⁹ on torture, (Art.9)¹⁸⁰ on arbitrary detention, and (Art.19)¹⁸¹ on suppression and free expression.

Additionally, the rising number of these violations in relation to the current conflict, are in direct contradiction to Sudan's ICCPR obligations. On the other hand, in the absence of Sharia laws its reservations, which means Sudan has not made any official declaration on these treaties to be subject and protected under its national law, which only made the violations even more severe in the eyes of international law.

3.1.8 The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), was adopted in 1966, and it was put into force in the year 1976, the agreement guarantees several economic rights, such as the right to access work, health, education, adequate food, and an adequate standard of living.¹⁸²

In March 1986, similarly to the ICCPR, Sudan acceded to the ICESCR, but also without any reservations in relation to the Sharia Law due to the timing. It occurred just three years before the 1989 coup which brought the Islamists group to power under *Al-Bashir*. This all together means that the commitment Sudan made to the ICESCR's regulations and obligations

¹⁷⁷International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, art. 6.

¹⁷⁸Human Rights Watch, *War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity, Ethnic Cleansing in West Darfur*.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/09/qa-war-crimes-crimes-against-humanity-ethnic-cleansing-west-darfur>

¹⁷⁹ International Convention in Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, Article 7

¹⁸⁰ International Convention in Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, Article 9

¹⁸¹ International Convention in Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, Article 19

¹⁸² United Nations, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, 1966.

was made under different legal and political circumstances. However, in today's context, those obligations remain legally binding.¹⁸³

When it comes to these economic and social rights, we found they have been significantly undermined and violated in today's ongoing conflict. Several articles under this covenant were, and still remain to be violated by both conflicting parties. Such as, looting of humanitarian aid, destruction of farmland, blocking humanitarian aid, and the lack of the right to inadequate food, caused by the RSF. On that note, the Sudan Tribune reports that *'The terrorist militia yesterday proceeded to loot the remainder of the UN humanitarian aid in the Al-Kuma area,'* the foreign ministry said in a statement, referring to the RSF¹⁸⁴, and the Sudan Media Forum reported saying, *'The RSF also looted all commercial crop warehouses in Al-Nuhud, a key trading hub for cash crops like peanuts, sesame, and gum Arabic, according to local sources and eyewitnesses'*.¹⁸⁵ which violates (Art.11)¹⁸⁶. On the right to inadequate food and access to humanitarian aid.

In addition, the severe number of citizens facing forced displacement violates (Art.11)¹⁸⁷ on the right to adequate housing. Seemingly, the closure of many educational institutions throughout the country, while some are used for other purposes than its educational one. On that statement, The Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks (HNPW) points out, *'Many schools are being used as shelters, preventing education from resuming'*.¹⁸⁸ This has led to the disruption of education for millions of students. The HNPW further points out, *'9 million children are unable to return to school, adding to the pre-existing 6.9 million out-of-school*

¹⁸³G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, UN Doc. A/6316 (1966), entered into force 3 January 1976.

¹⁸⁴*Sudan Tribune*, "Sudan Accuses RSF of Looting UN Aid Convoy in North Sudan."="

¹⁸⁵The Sudan Media Forum, 'Thousands Flee as RSF Accused of Killings, Looting in Sudan's West Kordofan', July 2025, Available from

<https://sudanmediaforum.org/en/thousands-flee-as-rsf-accused-of-killings-looting-in-sudans-west-kordofan/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁸⁶ International Convention on economic, social and cultural rights, (adopted 1966, entered into force 1976) 999 UNTS 171, Article 11

¹⁸⁷ International Convention on economic, social and cultural rights, (adopted 1966, entered into force 1976) 999 UNTS 171, Article 11

¹⁸⁸Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, 'Sudan's Education Crisis: Panel Discussion Highlights Urgent Action Needed', April 2025, Available from

<https://eiehub.org/news/sudans-education-crisis-panel-discussion-highlights-urgent-action-needed> (accessed 10 August 2025).

*children' as well as*¹⁸⁹ and that violates (Art.13)¹⁹⁰, on the right to education. These acts reflect Sudan's direct violation to its obligations under the ICESCR, demonstrating that this conflict is not only a political crisis but also a collapse of its economic and social rights. And if Sudan continues to break its obligations to such basic rights, it could form a threat to Sudan's future and its relations and alliances with the International community.

3.2 Documented violations committed by SAF and RSF

3.2.1 Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War

The United Nations defines Sexual violence as, *'any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object'*.¹⁹¹

Sexual violence includes many types of forced acts, such as rape, enforced prostitution, sexual slavery and even gang-rape. Some of these violations have been documented and reported in high numbers in Sudan, especially during the current conflict started in 2023 the Violence distributed in many cities in the country killing thousands of people while leaving others displaced.¹⁹²

Reports show that the majority of these acts are committed by the RSF and its allied groups or militias, particularly in the areas mostly controlled by RSF, for example in many displacement camps.¹⁹³, However this does not explicitly mean the SAF was involved, as SAF and its allied forces have been also implicated in some acts of sexual violence.¹⁹⁴ Such acts reflect *'outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape,*

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, (adopted 1966, entered into force 1976) 999 UNTS 171, Article 13

¹⁹¹ World Health Organization, 'Violence Against Women' [website], 2025, https://www.who.int/health-topics/violence-against-women#tab=tab_1 (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁹² Amnesty International, 'Destruction and violence in Sudan', *Amnesty International*, (2025), accessed August 10, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/projects/sudan-conflict/>.

¹⁹³ Ibid

¹⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch, 'Sudan: Events of 2024', *Human Rights Watch*, (2025), accessed August 10, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/sudan>.

enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault’ under the common (Art.3)¹⁹⁵ of the Geneva Conventions, and Additional Protocol II (Art.4)¹⁹⁶.

In addition to that, they also violate different freedoms and rights including the right to freedom from *‘torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment’*, outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art.5)¹⁹⁷ and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Art.7)¹⁹⁸, it also falls under the obligation to prevent *‘other acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment’* in the Convention Against Torture (Art.16).¹⁹⁹ Under the International Criminal law, these types of systematic sexual violences can amount to *‘Crimes Against Humanity’* (Rome Statute, Art.7), more specifically *‘rape, sexual slavery’*.

3.2.2 Torture, Arbitrary Detention, and Extrajudicial Killing

The Trial International defines detention as *‘the violation of the right to liberty. It is defined as the arrest and deprivation of liberty of a person outside of the confines of nationally recognized laws or international standards. International treaties may be implored to guarantee the right to liberty if national laws protect the individual in an incomplete or partial manner’*²⁰⁰

In the case of Sudan, Both RSF and SAF have committed this type of violation which they used in some cases to limit the freedom of the citizens. Both parties have been involved either in killing, arresting and torturing or executing detainees in their own detention centers.²⁰¹, Such unlawful actions violate the international human rights law, however this specifically violates the (Art.3)²⁰² of the Geneva Conventions which explicitly prohibits *‘violence to life and*

¹⁹⁵ The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 3

¹⁹⁶ The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 4

¹⁹⁷ United Nations, *Peace, Dignity and Equality on a Healthy Planet: Universal Declaration of Human Rights* [website], n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> (accessed 10 August 2025).

¹⁹⁸ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS. Article 7.

¹⁹⁹ The Convention against Torture and other Cruel or Inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (adopted 10 December 1984, entered into force 26 June 1987) 999 UNTS 171, Article 16.

²⁰⁰ Trial International, ‘Arbitrary Detention’ [website], n.d., <https://trialinternational.org/topics-post/arbitrary-detention/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²⁰¹ Human Rights Watch, Sudan, events of 2024 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/sudan>

²⁰² The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 3

*person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture and 'the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgement pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees'*²⁰³

These acts also limit the certain essential rights such as, the right to life and freedom from torture and arbitrary detention under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art.3,5,9)²⁰⁴ and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Art.6.7.9)²⁰⁵. A July 2020 report revealed the massive increase in the human rights abuses in Sudan, this finding suggests a very rather disturbing pattern of several incidents such as enforced disappearance and the systematic ill-treatment of detainees, including some unlawful acts such as torture. These actions reflect the severe online violations against the civil society in the country²⁰⁶. Moreover, reports from 2023, indicate that both warring parties in Sudan's conflict have been significantly involved in systematic human rights violations. These violations which include torture and excursions, have been documented in detention centers run by both the SAF and the RSF, the abuses targeted not only civilians but also aid workers and human rights defenders, suggesting a broader pattern of suppressing opposition in areas controlled by SAF²⁰⁷.

'On the other hand, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), have reportedly been involved in public excursions and mass arrests in newly controlled areas in Khartoum, including districts like Al-Kalakla. According to reports, these unlawful killings and detentions have targeted many civilians who were suspected to be forming alliances or cooperation with the RSF., and they have been conducted without judicial oversight. The whereabouts and conditions of many of these detainees and those taken into custody remains unknown till this day.²⁰⁸ Similarly, the RSF's

²⁰³ The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 3.

²⁰⁴ United Nations General Assembly Res 3314 (Art.3.5.9), 14 December 1947.

²⁰⁵ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, Article. 6.9.7.

²⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Sudan: Events of 2023* [website], 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/sudan> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²⁰⁷ Ibid

²⁰⁸ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 'Sudan: UN Fact-Finding Mission Deplores Darfur Killings as Conflict Enters Third Year, Warning Darkest Chapters May Lie Ahead', *ReliefWeb*, 2025, Available from <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-un-fact-finding-mission-deplores-darfur-killings-conflict-enters-third-year-warning-darkest-chapters-may-lie-ahead-enar> (accessed 10 August 2025).

actions on April 27, which resulted in the death of multiple civilians in Omdurman's Alsalha neighborhood, were condemned as a war crime by then Sudan Doctor's Network.²⁰⁹ and the percentage of detention conditions in Sudan currently, is considered rather dire, including women and children who are held without any charge or contract with their families, in addition to being kept in unlivable places while some are facing death due to lack medical treatment in both SAF and RSF detention centers in addition to the targeting of aid workers which directly contributes to the instability and disruption in humanitarian aid.²¹⁰

3.2.3 Attacks on Civilians and Forced Displacement

When war breaks out, the same as in so many countries, ordinary people are often the ones to suffer the most. For instance, Sudan's current conflict is not just random violence but carefully planned attacks tend to target communities. Both of the warring parties, the Rapid Support RSF and the SAF, since the eruption of the 2023 conflict, have been significantly involved in the use of different types violence, while violating human rights, and sometimes tend to use different types of weapons in areas with high numbers of population around the country.²¹¹ These attacks violate the Common (Art.3)²¹² of the Geneva Conventions, which mandates humane treatment for persons taking no active part in conflicts, and prohibits violence to life and person.¹⁶ More precisely, it violates the additional Protocol II (Art.13)²¹³ which states *'the civilian population as such, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack'*. And they also violate the right to life (UDHR, Art.3)²¹⁴.

²⁰⁹Al Jazeera, 'Sudan Doctors Network Accuses RSF of "War Crimes" After 31 Killed', *Al Jazeera*, 2025, Available from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/4/27/sudan-doctors-network-accuses-rsf-of-war-crimes-after-31-killed> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²¹⁰United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 'Sudan: UN Report Details Rampant Abuse of Detainees Amid Ongoing Conflict', *OHCHR*, 2025, Available from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/sudan-un-report-details-rampant-abuse-detainees-amid-ongoing-conflict> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²¹¹ Human Rights Watch, Sudan events of 2023 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/sudan#:~:text=Since%20the%20fighting%20started%2C%20both,civilian%20property%20and%20critical%20infrastructure.>

²¹² The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 3

²¹³ The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 13

²¹⁴ Universal Declaration on Human Rights Res 217, (Article 3)1948.

The ongoing attacks by the SAF have led to a massive death toll in Sudan, with tens of thousands of people killed since the conflict began. For instance, a UN report documented an attack in Al-Koma that killed at least 15 civilians. These actions have drawn criticism from organizations like Human Rights Watch, which has found the use of unguided bombs and weapons in civilian areas, such as during the April attacks in Nyala, to be a violation of international law. This reflects a pattern of unlawful and significant violence.²¹⁵ Additionally, a UN Fact-Finding Mission condemned a recent massacre which happened in the western side of Sudan, in a camp with over 100 people in Darfur, the incident took place in April 2025.²¹⁶

Reports indicate that as of July 2025, people have been forced to flee their homes and face forced displacement, leading to one of the world's highest numbers of internally and externally displaced persons (IDPs), and many refugees outside the country. On the same pattern some reports stated that the number of the displaced people have increased massively since September.²¹⁷ Which is considered to be a massive number of the forced displacement, and it initially violates the right to freedom of movement and residence (UDHR, Art.13²¹⁸, ICCPR, ART.12)²¹⁹, it also violates the Additional Protocol II (Art.17)²²⁰, which prohibits the displacement of civilians unless strictly required for their security or military reasons.²²¹ And in accordance with Geneva Convention IV (1949), targeting civilians or forcing them to leave their

²¹⁵ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "Sudan war intensifying with devastating consequences for civilians, UN Fact-Finding Mission says," *United Nations*, (2025), accessed August 10, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/06/sudan-war-intensifying-devastating-consequences-civilians-un-fact-finding>

²¹⁶ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "Sudan war: 'Darkest chapters' ahead as Darfur massacre claims over 100 lives," *UN News*, (2025), accessed August 10, 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/04/1162211>.

²¹⁷ Migration Policy Institute, 'Forgotten and Neglected, War-Torn Sudan Has Become the World's Leading Displacement Crisis', *Migration Policy Institute*, 16 July 2025, Available from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/sudan-civil-war-displacement> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²¹⁸ Universal Declaration on Human Rights Res 217, (Article 13)1948.

²¹⁹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, Article. 12.

²²⁰ The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 17.

²²¹ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II) (adopted 8 June 1977, entered into force 7 December 1978) Article 17.

homes is strictly forbidden during war (Articles 27 and 49)²²²²²³. And even though Sudan is a party to this convention, which means all armed groups, including both warring parties are obliged to protect civilians at all times, Yet, it doesn't appear to be serving its purpose .

These crimes were not only limited to that, for instance, it also included looting of civilians homes and properties. Reports show that villages and homes are being attacked and in some cases burned by the RSF, such as the burning of dozens of villages around El-Fasher, including some places in the North between *Kutuk* and *Anka*. Moreover, In the *Zamzam* area, civilians are facing some severe restrictions on food, water, medicine, food and living essentials, leading to deaths from hunger. In addition to the intentional limitation of access to humanitarian aid restricted by RSF, causing massive famine conditions in Darfur.²²⁴ which violates the Additional Protocol II (Art.14)²²⁵, which prohibits the systemic deprivation of essential resources indicates an intentional use of starvation as a method of warfare, which are the actions committed by RSF towards citizens in the Darfur region.

When it comes to looting, it is also considered as a '*war crime*' (Rome Statute, Art.8)²²⁶. All together, it indicates the effect of attacks and certain types of violations including aid blocking, which could be leading to a '*no win*' case for the civilians and the oppressed, as it forces them to fight or forces them to extreme vulnerability.

3.2.4 Use of Child Soldiers

²²² The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 27.

²²³ The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 29.

²²⁴United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 'Sudan: UN Fact-Finding Mission Deplores Darfur Killings as Conflict Enters Third Year, Warning Darkest Chapters May Lie Ahead', *ReliefWeb*, 2025, Available from

<https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-un-fact-finding-mission-deplores-darfur-killings-conflict-enters-third-year-warning-darkest-chapters-may-lie-ahead-enar> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²²⁵ The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 14.

²²⁶Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (adopted 17 July 1998, entered into force 1 July 2002) 2187 UNTS 90, Available from <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/Rome-Statute-eng.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2025).

Child soldier is considered as one of the most common during the times of conflicts, it's considered as one of the most significant violations of the child rights. In relation to the current conflict in Sudan, this conflict has led to a noticeable number of children who are either currently recruited as soldiers, or either facing the threat of being recruited.

‘In 2023, a number of 209 cases of child recruitment were verified, representing a massive increase in comparison to the previous year. ‘Similarly, in 2024, the number of violations against children increased by 16%’. These actions violate the Additional Protocol II (Art.4)²²⁷, which clearly states that *‘children who have not attained the age of fifteen years shall neither be recruited in the armed forces or groups not allowed to take part in hostilities’*.²²⁸ However, this has not been the case in Sudan recently. It also violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, Art. 38), which obligates the states parties to *‘take all feasible measures to ensure persons under fifteen do not directly participate in hostilities’* and *‘shall refrain from recruiting persons under fifteen into armed forces’*.²²⁹ Further on, the recruitment and the use of children also defines a *‘war crime’* (Rome Statute, Art.8).²³⁰

In Sudan, both SAF and RSF, and six additional armed groups are currently listed in the UN Secretary-General's annual report for the multiple violations against children, including the use of children in conflicts. Notably, the RSF has recruited children as young as 14 years old as guards in Soba prison, and on the other hand detained children as young as 13 years old alongside adults. This doesn't blur the fact that children are not only recruited but they are also killed and maimed through crossfire, with both RSF or SAF being identified as the perpetrators for committing such crimes.²³¹ Un Fact-finding mission report says:

Witnesses indicated that tribal leaders played a significant role in recruiting children, describing the following process. Tribal military leaders or “*Agid*” receive

²²⁷ The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 4

²²⁸ Ibid

²²⁹ The Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted on November 20, 1989, entered into force on September 2, 1990) 1577 UNTS 3, Article 38

²³⁰International Criminal Court, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (adopted 17 July 1998, entered into force 1 July 2002) 2187 UNTS 90, Article 8,

<https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/Rome-Statute-eng.pdf> accessed 10 August 2025.

²³¹Security Council Report, ‘Sudan: Briefing’, *Security Council Report*, 2025, Available from <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2025/03/sudan-briefing-5.php> (accessed 10 August 2025).

instructions from mid-level administrators or “*Omdas*” who respond to tribal leaders “*Amirs*” orders to provide them with a specific number of combatants from a specific tribe. “*Agid*” would then request each family of the clan to assign a number of their sons, including the ones below 18.²³²

With that said, the recruitment of children and with the widespread closure of schools and the severe malnutrition that is caused by this conflict, represents a direct violation to human rights, and the future of Sudan.

3.2.5 Attacks on Healthcare and Infrastructure

Health centers and hospitals were repeatedly targeted by both parties during these conflicts. They have been both intentionally destroying.. However some of them faced closure, causing a tidal destruction in the healthcare system, with roughly 80% facilities destroyed. And an additional estimated 70-80% of the facilities in these areas affected by the conflict are no longer functional.²³³

Such forms of attacks violate Common (Art.3)²³⁴ of the Geneva Convention, which requires the wounded and sick to be collected and taken care for.16, an additional violated instrument is the Additional Protocol (Art.11)²³⁵, that directly states ‘medical units and transport must be respected, protected, and not attacked’. On the same pattern, such actions constitute ‘*war crimes*’ (Rome Statute, Art.8)

The targeting of the medical facilities which are protected under the International law, is particularly unacceptable as it not only causes immediate concerns, but it also limits the possibilities of treating the wounded and sick, which could eventually lead to preventable deaths

²³² Human Rights Council, Findings of the investigations conducted by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan into violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and related crimes, committed in the Sudan in the context of the conflict that erupted in mid-April 2023, Mission on Sudan FFMS_A_0466. P. 55
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session57/A-HRC-57-CRP-6-en.pdf>

²³³ UN Human Rights Council, *Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions on Qatar*, 21 February 2019, A/HRC/WG.6/33/QAT/3.

²³⁴ The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 3

²³⁵ The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 11

and suffering. And building on that, since (Art.18)²³⁶ Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions clearly states that medical units and personnel must be respected and protected. Destroying hospitals or blocking medical aid is a serious violation of international humanitarian law and whoever of the both parties would be required to hold themselves accountable.

3.2.6 Ethnic Cleansing

The horrific acts of ethnic cleansing in Sudan, more specifically committed by the RSF in Darfur against communities with non-Arabic backgrounds, are considered very tragic manifestations of a broken state like Sudan. This type of systemic violence is a direct consequence of the lack of a functioning fair, legal and just system. And according to *Birk and Suntinger*, who argue that in the absence of strong rules, working courts or a fair police system, perpetrators of violence are not punished.²³⁷ In relation to Sudan, when a country doesn't have strong rules, working courts or a fair police system, people who hurt others do not get punished. The long history of Sudan has given the militias the authority and the power to carry out different types of crimes such as the Ethnic Cleansing.

Historically, Ethnic cleansing in Sudan has always been ethnically motivated violence. Even in the current conflict, with the United States determining on January 7, that the RSF and its allied militias committed the violent crime of genocide and other crimes in Darfur.²³⁸ This determination followed a December conclusion that the RSF and its Arab alliances have committed a significant number of crimes against humanity, in addition to the ethnic cleansing.²³⁹ These acts particularly when committed with the intention to destroy, in whole or in a part, a national, ethnic, racial, or a religious group, it falls under the definition of 'Genocide' according to the (Rome Statute, Article 6), which includes 'killing members of group', 'deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in

²³⁶ The Geneva Convention and its additional protocols (adopted on June 8, 1977, and entered into force on December 7, 1978) 999. UNTS 171. Article 18

²³⁷ Birk, M., & Suntinger, W. (2019). *A Systemic Approach to Human Rights Practice*. In: Benedek, W., Kettemann, M.C., & Markus, M. (Eds.), *European Yearbook on Human Rights 2019* (pp. 33–45). NWV Verlag

²³⁸ Operation Broken Silence, *Sudan Crisis Guide* [website], n.d., <https://operationbrokensilence.org/blog/sudan-crisis-guide> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²³⁹ US Department of State, *Genocide Determination in Sudan and Imposing Accountability Measures* [website], 7 January 2025, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/genocide-determination-in-sudan-and-imposing-accountability-measures/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

whole or in part ‘imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group’ or ‘forcibly transferring children of the group to another group’.²⁴⁰

The systematic nature of these abuses also constitutes ‘*crimes against humanity*’ (Rome Statute, Article 7) specifically ‘*murder*’, ‘*extermination*’....etc or other grounds universally recognized as impermissible under international law.²⁴¹ In relation to the current conflict, the RSF and its allies have murdered men and boys, including infants, but on an ethnic basis, and deliberately targeted women and girls from specific ethnic groups for rape and other brutal sexual violence.²⁴² ‘The RSF and its allies then attacked the majority of different tribes, children and community leaders were also among the victims, including women, in addition to that, RSF fighters used racist slurs and declared the land would be theirs, which proves the failure of SAF to protect the community.’²⁴³ Amnesty International has verified that Sudan’s conflict has killed thousands, and displaced millions, and civilians are facing mass killings. While both SAF and RSF have been carrying out crimes nationwide, which only shows that the crisis is nationwide and international actions are urgently needed.²⁴⁴

The RSF continued its violent actions in the region, as they forced people to flee their homes and go to Chad, which was considered a part of the cleansing process in the region. And while the RSF is the primary perpetrator of ethnic cleansing, SAF army units have also carried out ethnically targeted attacks on civilians.²⁴⁵ Notably, the violence forced a number of people to flee and leave their homes, where they found refuge in Chad due to its geographic locations bordering Darfur, which facilitated the road for them to reach.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, Article 14.

²⁴¹ Ibid

²⁴² US Department of State, *Genocide Determination in Sudan and Imposing Accountability Measures* [website], 7 January 2025, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/genocide-determination-in-sudan-and-imposing-accountability-measures/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²⁴³ Human Rights Watch, “*The Massalit Will Not Come Home*”: *Ethnic Cleansing and Crimes Against Humanity in El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan* [website], 9 May 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/05/09/massalit-will-not-come-home/ethnic-cleansing-and-crimes-against-humanity-el> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²⁴⁴ Amnesty International, *Sudan Conflict* [website], n.d., <https://www.amnesty.org/en/projects/sudan-conflict/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²⁴⁵ Operation Broken Silence, *Sudan Crisis Guide* [website], n.d., <https://operationbrokensilence.org/blog/sudan-crisis-guide> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2024: Sudan* [website], 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/sudan> (accessed 10 August 2025).

Which shows how RSF is using its power to take over a region after forcing its citizens to flee, it also shows that the conflict might still result in ongoing cleaning and gencodes, unless the international community interferes.

3.2.7 Attacks on Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society Groups

In Sudan, a country where speaking the truth or expressing an opinion can instantly put one in danger. Human Rights activists and defeders have always faced challenges for speaking the truth. And in this current conflict, both warring parties have intentionally targeted specific groups of people, including activists, human rights defenders, in addition to journalists, responders, and some civil society groups through intimidation and unlawful detentions, violent attacks and other types of abuse.²⁴⁷.

Similarly, dozens of local responders have been killed, and the RSF has sexually assaulted some.²⁴⁸ such crimes violate the fundamental human rights, that includes the right to life, liberty and security of person (UDHR, Art.6)²⁴⁹, it also violates the freedom of arbitrary detention, protected ion (UDHR, Art.9²⁵⁰, ICCPR, ART.9), freedom of opinion and expression (UDHR, Art.19)²⁵¹. Furthermore, these types of attacks directly violate the principle of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which recognizes and defends the right of human rights defenders to either conduct work, and outline states' duty to protect them against violence, threats and possibly arbitrary action.²⁵² This can be presented in specific incidents such as, the RSF looting supplies from a food kitchen which run by Hadhreen '*youth led civil society initiative*', in 2024 their supervisor was arrested, and later was announced '*martyred*' in the detention facilities of the RSF, with their only '*offence*' being the provision of meals to citizens. Hadhreen volunteers have faced interrogation, detention, and faced severe threat, kidnapping,

²⁴⁷Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2025: Sudan* [website], 2025,

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/sudan> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²⁴⁸ MPI, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/sudan-civil-war-displacement>

²⁴⁹United Nations General Assembly Res 3314 (XXIX), 14 December 1974.

²⁵⁰United Nations General Assembly Res 217 A (III), Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, Article 9.

²⁵¹United Nations General Assembly Res 217 A (III), Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, Article 19.

²⁵²International Service for Human Rights, 'Declaration + 25: Articulating International Standards to Protect the Right to Defend Rights' [website], 2023, Available from

<https://ishr.ch/25-years-un-declaration-on-human-rights-defenders/>(accessed 10 August 2025).

looting and killings from the RSF. Meanwhile, in May 2023, SAF military intelligence detained ambulance volunteers, accusing them of collaborating with the RSF.²⁵³

As these violations continue, The Emergency Response Room (EERs), as well other grassroots organizations and humanitarian workers, reported that some of their colleagues had been killed by the army or army aligned groups in Khartoum North, they have also targeted local leaders and human rights defenders in *El Geneina*, searching for than detaining some, and killing four lawyers who represented victims of RSF and and their allie's previous attacks. That shows the targeting of human rights defenders and civil society groups is not random, these individuals are crucial for documenting abuses and reporting on violations.²⁵⁴

On the other hand, civil society representatives face immense pressure, with both sides imposing obstacles and labeling anti-war voices as affiliated with this opposition, making neutrality impossible, which massively limits their operational space, hindering their vital human work.

3.3 The religious justification to the act of violence that constitutes the HR violations

As mentioned above, from the legal perspective on sexual violence that is being used as a weapons of war. Amnesty International stated that RSF fighters use '*widespred sexual violence*', against wimen and girls in the country, with the aim to '*assert and impose power and control in areas of displaced communities across the country*'.²⁵⁵ On that note, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has also stated that it carries '*reasonable grounds to believe*' that the types of systematic sexual violence is only being used as a weapon of war, in a sense of often

²⁵³International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171, Available from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²⁵⁴Front Line Defenders, *Sudan: Killing of Three Human Rights Defenders in Darfur* [website], 5 July 2023, Available from <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/sudan-killing-three-human-rights-defenders-darfur-3> (accessed 10 August 2025).

²⁵⁵ Amnesty International, 'Sudan: Rapid Support Forces' horrific and widespread use of sexual violence leaves lives in tatters' (News Article, April 2025), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/sudan-rapid-support-forces-horrific-and-widespread-use-of-sexual-violence-leaves-lives-in-tatters/#:~:text=The%20report%2C%20They%20raped%20all,April%202023%20and%20October%202024> accessed 10 August 2025.

targetting women and girls in those specific areas of displacement with certain communities.²⁵⁶ From a Sharia law perspective, it directly calls for the protection of women from sexual violence. On its legal framework this prohibition comes from the foundation of the Islamic religion and its principles, starting with the *Qur'an*'s direct prohibition of unlawful sexual acts such as '*Zina*' - '*sex outside of the mariagewed*' it also stresses on the importance of the human rights and its dignity, saying '*do not go near adultery. It is truly a shameful deed and an evil way*'.²⁵⁷ while in some cases the victim of rape is often declared not guilty, the Sharia law applies serious laws against the perpetrator and often faces serious legal procedures. Beyond these measures, the Islamic law similarly seeks to restore justice and the rights to the victims by offering her some compensations paid by the perpetrator, or could also face imprisonment in some cases, as a punishment for committing this horrific act.²⁵⁸ However, the misinterpretation and the manipulation of Islamic principles forms a rather complicated and a dangerous framework where acts which are strongly forbidden by religion first and then law, are often re-interpreted to justify the different acts of violence.

In relation to the current conflict and whether there are any religious justifications used by the warring parties, there seem to be no direct religious justification presented regarding the act of rape or any sexual act directly expressed by both SAF or RSF, in the available information, it explains that there is a general misuse of religion in some cases, as the verse from the *Qur'an*, '*Those whom your right hand possess*'.²⁵⁹ has been falsely used to state that sexual access to female captives or slaves is okay even without their consent. This is how some extremist groups or organizations like ISIS, and muslims with extremist ideologies have misused these historical concepts and interpretations of specific verses to rationalize or make its '*Halal*' or '*not forbidden*' to perform any type of sexual violence and slavery.²⁶⁰ which might

²⁵⁶ International Criminal Court, Karim A.A. Khan KC, Prosecutor, 'Statement of the ICC Prosecutor to the United Nations Security Council on the Situation in Darfur, pursuant to Resolution 1593 (2005)' (Statement, January 2025), <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/icc-prosecutor-statement-UNSC-darfur-january-2025> accessed 10 August 2025.

²⁵⁷ The holy Qur'an 17:32. Surah Al-Israa <https://quran.com/17/32>

²⁵⁸ O. Köndgen, 'Shari'a and National Law in the Sudan', in J. M. Otto (ed.), *Sharia Incorporated: A Comparative Overview of the Legal Systems of Twelve Muslim Countries in Past and Present* (Leiden University Press, 2010), p. 211, Available from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv30hx3wg> (accessed 10 August 2025)

²⁵⁹ The Holy Qur'an. sūrat l-nisāa (The Women), <https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=4&verse=24>

²⁶⁰ Abdul Malik Mujahid, 'Contradiction between ISIS and Islam's Actual Concept of Slavery in Quran', *Soundvision*[website], n.d., Available from <https://www.soundvision.com/article/an-islamic-response-to-isis-revival-of-slavery> (accessed 10 August 2025).

have an influence on the understanding of both parties to religion while shaping their belief in the justification of such acts.

Although the provided information doesn't directly quote neither RSF nor SAF religious leaders presenting religious justification to their committed crimes on sexual violence and rape, this historical concept offers a background for how they might have rationalized their actions, especially when combined with ethnic supremacy.

And on the use of child soldiers, which is legally prohibited and considered as one of the most important crimes of war. For instance, the International Law bans and prohibits any forcibly recruiting children to fight not only times of war but at all times, the Islamic law on the other side legally allows '*maturity*' known as '*bulugh*' to participate in any offensive acts of jihad, some of these interpretations, particularly within the '*Hanafi, Shafi, and Maliki*'²⁶¹ '*major schools of thought within the Sunni islam*'. Allows them to decide who is '*able to fight*' Or who is possibly expected to join the troops without the requirements for any parental approval or consent. This shows how the concept of '*able to fight*' can be stretched to the limits of misuse and misinterpretation, in order to include younger individuals.²⁶²

However this does not mean that there is a direct religious justification to this act of child soldiers, but rather explains the misunderstanding or the application of legal rules to practice that it is prohibited worldwide.

Similarly on the protection of Human rights defenders, there initially as mentioned above have been the legal obligations to protect them, but when speaking of the Islamic legal framework, on '*human rights defenders*', there appears to be no exact Islamic obligation that calls for the protections of these defenders. However, this absence of obligations can be looked at from an indirect perspective, while underlying the concept rooted in the foundational Islamic principles and rules, '*amr bil ma'ruf*' which is '*promote the good*' and on the contradictory, forbidding the evil '*Nahy anil munkar*'. They are considered as the foundation of the Islamic religion, as they constantly call people to act justly and always witness in justice when possible. *An-Na'im* in his book argues that the religious obligations does provide a strong basis for the

²⁶¹ Major schools of thought within the Sunni islam

²⁶² Chiara Pellegrino, 'Sharia Law Does Not Call for Child Soldiers', *Oasis Center* [website], 11 May 2015, Available from <https://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/sharia-law-does-not-call-child-soldiers> (accessed 10 August 2025).

Muslims to actively work on promoting what is considered justice and fair, while challenging the injustice. Which is the reason for human rights and advocacy.²⁶³

While the established Sharia laws and islamic principles strongly condemn the sexual violence against women and the use of child soldiers, these principles are often missinterpreted and misused by extremists or religious groups in different contexts to rationalize and justify themselves and their actions. Ultimately, the problem does not stem from the Sharia law itself, but the way how it's perceived and misapplied by those in power.

²⁶³A. A. An-Na'im, 'The Islamic Law on Human Rights: Its Compatibility with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights', in M. A. Baderin (ed.), *Islam and Human Rights: Selected Essays of Abdullahi An-Na'im* (London, Routledge, 2017)

Chapter 4

This Chapter explores how religion has shaped political allies for both parties, and how religious identities have become more familiar and visible, and how religion has affected the relationships between communities and citizens in Sudan, as well as the armed groups and the local institutions. It shows how religious beliefs and identity when politicized, can strongly participate in either bringing people together or dividing them.

Additionally, this chapter argues the role of religious institutions and leaders, the use manipulation of faith in recruitment and alliances-shaping by SAF and RSF, it also shows how religion has shaped survival in several areas, in addition to building trust and growing the feeling of belonging in some cases. While religion has been often misused for justification of violence, it has also been used as a source of care through few grassroots organizations and humanitarian support.

Lastly, the chapter explains the qualitative methods and data collected in this research, including the interviews conducted with community leaders, religious leaders, scholars and locals in Sudan.

4. Analysis

Shaping alliances usually depends on several factors, in Sudan. One of these factors could be religion, as it plays a major role in shaping patterns of violence, political-military alignments as well as intergroup relations in the country, during the current 2023-2025 war between both warring parties SAF and RSF. War is usually referred to as a power struggle. However different stakeholders argue that religious rhetoric and religious identity have been used to either bring together or divide communities, spread hatred, influence loyalties and relations with the international community, in addition to justifying the current violence.

This becomes evident in the way these religious justifications are being used by both parties, either through direct violence, or indirectly by targeting specific religious groups or

communities. Additionally, religion has been used to gain support from different members and political institutions supporting their religious ideologies. These particular dynamics show how religion has a broader role in Sudanese history, where belief has often intertwined with state authority and power, identity in politics and the regional tensions.

4.1 Religious Justification for Violence in the current conflict

In the current conflict 2023-2025, the use of religion has been wide in terms of justifying inhuman acts such as, killings, detentions, genocide, ethnic cleaning, child soldier, and different types of sexual assaults. These justifications are by both SAF and RSF but each follows a different method to present these justification. For instance, there has been a use of symbols and religious language and slangs that are used to give a spiritual meaning to the act of violence and war. In this instance, the religious framing is not based only on true religious values, but it's also used to manipulate emotions of the community and gain either military or political support in some cases both SAF and RSf, have “*used religious messages, as away of promotion*”²⁶⁴ and to “*gather people*”²⁶⁵ even though “the targets or the aims are not religious at all”²⁶⁶ He described this as a clear misuse of faith.

As mentioned above, both parties have been using slogans when committing violations, these slogans are used to attract the attention and the support of the society in most cases when attacking mosques or churches, these slogans are seen as a way of showing how religion is being protected. Interviewee 006 points out, “*They are all saying things like “Allahu Akbar, you see? And killing each other*”²⁶⁷ or to “*Shout slogans to frame their violence as a part of religious obligations*”.²⁶⁸ which echoes the historical belief in Sudan, that fighters are always acting on behalf of the Islamic religion creates a very dangerous mindset in which violence becomes morally or religiously acceptable—even sacred in most cases, where religion becomes a tool of silencing and control, while providing a moral excuse and a shield to those committing violence, and at the same time creating a feeling of guilt in those who might consider to question them.

²⁶⁴ Interviewee 00

²⁶⁵ Ibid

²⁶⁶ Ibid

²⁶⁷ Interviewee 006

²⁶⁸ Interviewee 003

Even acts like rape and torture are sometimes carried out under the belief that they are religiously justified, and that those who in the battle are praised as *'martyrs'*²⁶⁹ This way of thinking reinforces the idea that the war is not only political but rather *'holy'*, and that anyone who fights against the 'enemy' is doing God's work. Such patterns make it easier for both RSF and SAF to gain support while convincing their followers that violence is not only allowed, but also justified, not by them, but by religion. It also turns the war into a type of a religious struggle *'Jihad'*, and removes the moral responsibility from those who commit those abuses, leaving no space to be held accountable by anyone. In most cases in Sudan where there is a lack of the correct religious education or any alternative interpretations. In this Instance, an (interviewee 004) says: *'People are not educated on the Word of God, so using religion and telling them, God said, this allows one side to get away with whatever they want'*²⁷⁰ Additionally, an (interviewee 008) highlights how the SAF is actively using the Friday calls and prayers for their religious speeches in which they justify violence and inhuman acts. He pointed out that in areas controlled by SAF, some Imams intend to give speeches warning people from what they call 'enemies of Islam' which initially gives people the *'permission to kill if it's in the name of God'*²⁷¹ He also warns adding that in his opinion this strategy hinders accountability and only makes violent acts acceptable as long as they are justified by the Islamic religion, and it will no longer be considered as political. He described the danger behind these acts by saying they are 'very dangerous because it only makes accountability even more difficult'²⁷².

Moreover, when people are told that violent actions such as fighting the 'enemy' is not a crime, and it will only bring them closer to heaven, it only becomes more complicated to stop the violence and the cycle yet to follow. This somehow reflects how religion has been used as a justification for different acts of violence and why it remains such a powerful tool in shaping the mindset and the actions of those involved in the war.

It's noticeable that religion is not just a background factor to the conflict, as it's being actively used to give legitimacy to violence and violations, whether by using the languages,

²⁶⁹ Interviewee 004

²⁷⁰ Ibid

²⁷¹ Interviewee 008

²⁷² Ibid

slogans or simply by manipulation, even when those actions go against the moral core of religion itself - “Those people claiming they are here for islam, they didn't do what Islam instructed.”

4.2 Propaganda and Manipulation

While religious justification gives violence a moral excuse. The religious propaganda in the current Sudanese conflict serves as a strategy in shaping public opinion, support and silencing dissent, recruiting children and adults with force and in some cases willingly. Which reflects that religion in this case is not used primarily to defend spiritual morals and values—rather to manipulate minds and hearts and reinforce loyalty in the context of this conflict. Additionally, the militias and groups supporting the Islamists governance have allied with the SAF, which often presents the war as a fight to protect nothing but Islam and the community while maintaining the Islamic Sharia Law, targeting people with limited access to education, information and technology.²⁷³ This framing changes the political and economic goals into a strong religious narrative, as well as forming a false moral war. Many citizens believe they are defending their religion and morals, while in reality, they are actually being used as a means of support to one side of a conflict that is political rather than religious. This framing occurs even in Friday prayers and sermons “*Khutba*”, which is one of the most important gatherings for Muslims in Sudan, and it's being used as a tool/way for this kind of unnecessary manipulation, while promoting their propaganda.²⁷⁴ Such manipulations build fear, while framing the enemy as not just political opposition, but as enemies of religion. This particularly makes the peaceful resistance even harder because rejecting the army’s message can be interpreted into not accepting religion itself. Similarly, Christians are often losing the sense of belonging where their houses of worship are being either destroyed or changed into military bases, for instance, churches in both Khartoum and Omdurman were burned down during this conflict, which sends our community the messages that ‘*we don't belong here*’²⁷⁵, he also added how simply being from the religious minority seems to challenge. To him, religious identity nowadays does not only fall under political propaganda, but it’s also used as a way of promoting discrimination, in addition to justifying violence. Where both SAF and RSF mirror their military operations through the

²⁷³ Interviewee 002

²⁷⁴ Interviewee 006

²⁷⁵ Interviewee 008

religious lens while using religious languages to gain power, calling it '*holy language used only for power*'²⁷⁶.

Furthermore, many Sudanese are raised only to follow religious orders and beliefs, without questioning them, which increases the power of propaganda, where the name of God and religion is being used to silence people and seek for their acceptance of certain conditions and actions without having to question anything, at the same time, gives more power to the speaker, in this case, whether SAF or RSF.²⁷⁷ Where certain dynamics are shaped by the history of politics in Sudan, for instance after the 1989 Islamic coup, religious rhetoric became a common tool for maintaining power and control, where propaganda was only used in mosques or churches, in school curriculums, TV, radios and also in politics, religion strongly became a part of the state's main language of power. The spread of this type of control was due to the limited education, which contributes to how easily people are influenced by anyone.²⁷⁸

4.3 Religion and Intergroup Relations

In the context of the current Sudanese conflict, it has not only involved violence, violations and propaganda, but it has additionally reshaped relations between religious communities and other groups. While religion couldn't present as a means for unity, the war has extremely increased fear, mistrust and the confusion between different groups involved. We find that religion plays a major role in the way people perceive and accept each other, how they respond to conflict, and how the intergroups alliances or divisions are usually formed.

In these debates, religion is not the only reason behind division, but it becomes a powerful tool of division when combined with fear, politics and power. In some cases religious identity leaves people feeling unprotected or threatened in their communities due to their different beliefs, whether Islamists or those who are tied to their culture and tradition more than religion..²⁷⁹ Similarly, religion has been used to judge and decide who belongs and how not, and currently people on both sides of the current conflict strongly believe they are fighting to purify

²⁷⁶ Ibid

²⁷⁷ Interviewee 004

²⁷⁸ Interviewee 005

²⁷⁹ Ibid

the nation, based on their interpretation of faith and religion and they strongly believe it's their mission to achieve a pure community.²⁸⁰

Additionally, the judgment based on religion and belief highly affects the way in which certain groups or communities interact and accept each other, communities may mistrust or not welcome others who worship a different God than theirs, or simply assume that political beliefs are tied to religious identity. For example, in the case of different sects such as Sunni, Shia, Sufi..ect they are mostly found in constant conflict and mistrust between each other.²⁸¹ However, this does not necessarily mean that the cause of deep divisions in Sudan is always religion, maybe politics or ethnicity, or even any other differences the communities could find. On that note, it's noticeable to mention that some people overcome this hate and fear, and continue to live their lives peacefully with their neighbors regardless of the different religious beliefs they have, and the widespread hate speech and propaganda by politicians and some “Imams”, (Religious leaders).²⁸² In other words, this discrimination, and this tension mostly comes from how religion is used by political actors, not from the people themselves.²⁸³

Lastly, the role of religion in intergroup relations is very complex. It can be used either to divide communities and justify exclusion and hatred, but many Sudanese communities are also working to strengthen coexistence and peace among them, even during the current conflict. It's true that religious identity is important—but it's also how leaders, groups, politicians and systems use religion that affects how relationships between these communities are formed.

4.4 Religion and the Shaping of Alliances

In the context of this Sudanese armed conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), religion has played a direct and a main role in the eruption of this conflict. Both SAF and RSF have used religious identity, religious language, slogans, to shape both external and internal alliances and affiliations, gain support and legitimize their alliances. These alliances are not only about shared political or religious interest, or opposition to them but maybe for economic benefits.

²⁸⁰ Interviewee 004

²⁸¹ Interviewee 006

²⁸² Interviewee 003

²⁸³ Interviewee 002

People support the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), due to their position as the defenders of Islam and the community.²⁸⁴ For instance, if we look at some communities, we find they particularly support SAF because of their trust in SAF, and they also strongly observe that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), is an invader to the country, and have committed some violence actions that are considered religiously immoral and some mostly considered as severe violations to the human rights, such as rape, theft, and destruction .²⁸⁵

On the other hand, some alliances in support of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), are shaped by their religious history and belief, but through opposition to the Islamic state legacy of the SAF militias. Many people, especially those from the Republican movement and state, support the RSF not because they agree with their violence, and acts of violation to human rights, but because they observe SAF alongside its Islamist allies as a bigger threat to civil society and their freedoms.²⁸⁶ In this pattern, religion also works indirectly to shape affiliations and alliances, shaped not just through belief, but also through shared opposition to religious extremism. For instance, those who are in favor of the secular state, may side with RSF, not because they support their morals and beliefs, but because they fear the return of the Islamist state ruled and under SAF backed militias and the former president Omer Al-Bashir, that took at least 2 years to withdraw after many losses during the 2019 revolution.²⁸⁷

However, there is a third group within the community that no longer trusts or believes either parties, whether Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), or the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Interviewee 002 stated: *“They don’t care about the religious discourse, and they don’t trust that RSF is fighting for democracy. They are not supporting either side”*.²⁸⁸ This group shows its growing frustration among other ordinary Sudanese citizens who feel trapped in between two forces, two militarized religious narratives, one encouraged by those who are pro-Islamism and the other encouraged by those who are pro-secularism. Which shows that religion is now being used to justify power to the limit where people can no longer tell the difference between faith and

²⁸⁴ Interviewee 006

²⁸⁵ Interviewee 001

²⁸⁶ Interviewee 002

²⁸⁷ Ibid

²⁸⁸ ibid

manipulation.²⁸⁹ It is almost as if religion is not particularly not a neutral background in the Sudanese war, it is rather a key factor in how people decide which side to choose, shape alliances and define their enemies.

4.5 Contextual Reflection: Foreign Religious and Ideological Influence on Alliances and Conflict Dynamics

Although this section does not rely directly on direct interview responses, it provides an additional essential background for and understanding to the religious alliances and narratives mentioned by some of the interviewees. While many argue the ways in which religion is used to divide communities and at the same time gain loyalty; this is further complicated by the religious and ideological involvement of foreign states in the war. The following perspective offers a wider geopolitical understanding that supports and deepens the interview-based findings.

In the context of Sudan's civil war, it has become a part of a broader proxy conflict, in which some regional powers use religious identity and ideology to maintain their networks and support their favored parties, particularly either SAF or RSF. The conflict has drawn in several countries, such as Egypt, Iran, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and others, who picture Sudan as a strategic and ideological battlefield. These states provide the country with several things, for instance, they provide political backing, providing military aid, and religious justifications to the factions they support, while enhancing division, whether religious, ethnic or political in Sudan.²⁹⁰

In the Context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which regardless of its religious beliefs, and being an Islamic state itself, it has been one of the essential foreign supporters and backers to the RSF since mid 2023. It has provided the RSF with war supplies such as arms,

²⁸⁹ Interviewee 004

²⁹⁰ Fiona Nicholson, 'Unpacking the new face of conflict: Sudan's civil war amid a fragmented geopolitical order' (Report, 22 May 2025) *Vision of Humanity*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/unpacking-the-new-face-of-conflict-sudans-civil-war-amid-a-fragmented-geopolitical-order/> accessed 10 August 2025.

drones, weapons, and other types of support, mainly routed through Chad.²⁹¹ Which is not only considered as a strategic support—it also shows Gulf opposition to Islamist movements.²⁹²

By contrast, Egypt, which has particularly historic ties and networks to the Islamist Sudanese Armed militias, supports SAF, possibly to mutual benefits as well, such as the expected negotiations to be held regarding the Nile .²⁹³ On the other hand, Iran has also regained its trust in Sudan, by providing drones and providing and supporting SAF by done, probably due to its economical and religious ties to Sudan, where religion might be playing a role in shaping this specific alliance as Iran seeks to promote Shia religion education in Sudan. A form of religious soft power that supports the SAF military even though Sudan is still mostly Sunni²⁹⁴ Turkey on its end with its pan-Islamist foreign policy, has provided the SAF with security assistance, arms, drones and security assistance.²⁹⁵ This support may be linked to a form of border Islamic solidarity.

4.6 .Role of religious leaders and institutions in community responses

In Sudan, religious leaders and their religious institutions often play contradictory roles in terms of responding to ongoing conflicts. Their actions differ in wide range, from supporting the actions of either one of the warring pastries, by joining their calls and engagements in the critical peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts, this reflects the deep complex division of morals within the Sudanese community.

They have responded to the ongoing violence in different ways, as (interviewee001) a Muslim religious leader, highlights, the ways in which religion have been used in this conflict by

²⁹¹ Ibid

²⁹² Mai Hassan and Ahmed Kodouda, 'Sudan is Unraveling: Why War Is Likely to Once Again Tear the Country Apart' (News Article, 30 April 2025) *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/sudan/sudan-unraveling> accessed 10 August 2025.

²⁹³ Fiona Nicholson, 'Unpacking the new face of conflict: Sudan's civil war amid a fragmented geopolitical order' (Report, 22 May 2025) *Vision of Humanity*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/unpacking-the-new-face-of-conflict-sudans-civil-war-amid-a-fragmented-geopolitical-order/> accessed 10 August 2025.

²⁹⁴ Ibid

²⁹⁵ Ibid

both parties, he believes in the ‘*weaponization*’ and ‘*manipulation*’ of the religion as well as the propaganda they use in order to gain support from other allies or even the citizens, each warring party wants to prove the correct use of religion, even though this conflict appears to have almost no religious aim.²⁹⁶

This individual states that religious messages are being used to gain supporters because Sudanese people are ‘*very keen on it*’²⁹⁷ and ‘*love to be distracted through religion*’²⁹⁸. This important observation sheds the focus on the amount of manipulation that religion faces. Including the understanding that ‘*the targets or the aims are not religious at all*’²⁹⁹. This leads to a clear understanding of the differences between the religious justification and the actual material or political goal of the warring parties.

On the other hand an (Interviewee 008), a Christian religious leader, highlights the differences between the warring parties, by saying, even though SAF is using *its own way to frame this fight as a mission to protecting Islam from what they refer to as ‘Western influence’*, we can see RSF commanders in the mosques praying and even sometimes they give donations, as they call themselves ‘*defenders of ‘the weak’ against the corrupt religious groups*’³⁰⁰. This mirrors the misuse of religion, as well the competition, and how important it is for both warring parties to be validated by the people and seen as the legitimate leaders.

Additionally, religious leaders with different religious backgrounds play an equally important role in this conflict, some of them offered their places and places of worship to people who lost their homes since the beginning of this conflict, and some volunteered to feed the ones in need.³⁰¹ An (interviewee008), points out confirming that both Muslim and Christian religious leaders are working together to protect the civilians and call for reconciliations despite all of these divisions.³⁰² Notably, this cooperation between religious leaders for the cause of peace and the protection of the civilians, reflects that regardless of the misuse of religion by the leaders for

²⁹⁶ Interviewee 001

²⁹⁷ *ibid*

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹⁹ *ibid*

³⁰⁰ Interviewee 008

³⁰¹ Send Relief, *In War-Torn Sudan, God Is Bringing Healing and Hope* [website], 26 November 2024, Available from <https://www.sendrelief.org/story/in-war-torn-sudan-god-is-bringing-healing-and-hope/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³⁰² Interviewee 008

division purposes, the desire and the willingness of coexistence that goes beyond the religious lines or differences

However some other leaders and institutions use their positions differently, some are using it to promote political messages which in case of Islam are usually delivered during Friday prayers, these messages are purely political and usually call for the support of SAF, however Such acts only result in the mistrust towards those religious leaders, or simply hinders the criticism of the '*religious leader*' an '*imams*'. On this note, an (interviewee 005), points out, '*people in Sudan now, they don't trust religious leaders at all*' because '*some of them took sides and talk about politics in mosques during Friday prayers*'³⁰³. This had always led to the mosques '*being empty or almost empty*'.³⁰⁴

On the contradictory, a report by the United States Institute for Peace, highlights the potential religious contribution to peacekeeping, stating that religious leaders have the ability to mobilize and facilitate peace due to their '*credibility as a trusted institutions*' , '*respected set of values*' and the '*moral warrants for opposing injustice*'³⁰⁵ While the conducted interviews show the current challenges faced by religious leaders in times of religious-backed conflicts, the report stresses on the strength that religious institutions possess in peacemaking.

³⁰³ Interviewee 005

³⁰⁴ Ibid

³⁰⁵United States Institute of Peace, *Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War*(Washington, DC: USIP, January 2006), Available from <https://www.usip.org/publications/2006/01/religious-contributions-peacemaking-when-religion-brings-peace-not-war> (accessed 10 August 2025).

Chapter 5

5. Shaping Alliances: Religion as a Factor in Political and Military Alignments

This Chapter argues how both warring parties in Sudan have used religion to shape their international alliances with countries and groups that share the same belief, or either serves its own economical or geopolitical interests. These alliances are countries such as Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Egypt. These international actors use religion as a part of their influence which indirectly makes the conflict even more complex. Religion in these cases was only used to empower faith driven acts, but used as a means of control and power, which simply makes peace and stability even harder to achieve. In countries like Sudan, lines between religion and politics, and war become more intertwined.

5.1 Religion and political power in the SAF-RSF rivalry

As mentioned before, Religion plays an essential major role in the ongoing war between the two warring parties, SAF and RSF. While the fights continue for military control, another aspect to the fight is for both religious and political authority. Each group has been using religion differently to gain power and control, justify their violence and human rights violations, in addition to forming different alliances and armed groups. In this conflict, the role of religion has been identified to be rather as a tool rather than a means of faith and practice.

For instance, SAF has been known historically for its alignment with Islamist leaders since the government of *Al-Bahsir*, even after his removal, the SAF continued to be closer to the Sunni, but the conservative Sunni Islamist groups than the liberal ones. Which has given SAF the power and the control to present themselves as *'defenders of Islam and national order'* while using religious symbols and language. In 2022, the *U.S State Department stated Sudan's* stated, government has been supporting the Sunni Islamic groups while failing or ignoring the protection of minorities in Sudan, such as Shia Muslims and Christians..etc³⁰⁶ These patterns still

³⁰⁶U.S. Department of State, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sudan* (Report, 2022), Available from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sudan/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

continue to exist in the current war. As the SAF leaders tend to begin their speeches with religious openings, or work with the “*Imams*” or religious clerics who bless their actions.

Furthermore, the SAF has always been questioned by those who believe that SAF is only using propaganda to be able to rule the country. According to *Georgetown University*, some Islamist leaders from the former regime support SAF both ideologically and financially.³⁰⁷

In contrast, the RSF focuses on the use of tribal and localized religious strategies, which are not observed as traditional Islamist groups or traditionally Islamic. Instead, they fully depend on tribal networks, especially in areas in the West of Sudan, such as Kordofan and Darfur where most of their conflicts stemmed from.³⁰⁸

RSF has signed a charter in Nairobi, with its allies forming a rival government that consists of tribal and religious leaders from their regions. The charter stated that Sudan should be a ‘secular, democratic, non-centralised state’.³⁰⁹ However, the ways that SAF and RSF use religion is considered dangerous, as it turns religion into a weapon as well as leading to division between the communities with different religious sects, and other minorities such as Christians and Shia.³¹⁰

5.2 External actors’ religious/sectarian influence

The conflict in Sudan didn't stem only internally, it rather had several external factors who have played a main role in the war, some of these influences are either sectarian or religious. Both parties are being strongly supported by other countries and allies, not only for military

³⁰⁷Georgetown University (CCAS), *Authoritarian Legacies and the War in Sudan* [blog], 16 May 2025, Available from <https://ccas.georgetown.edu/2025/05/16/authoritarian-legacies-and-the-war-in-sudan/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³⁰⁸United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan* (Report, 2024), Available from https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4039195/files/S_2024_65-EN.pdf (accessed 10 August 2025).

³⁰⁹Al Jazeera, ‘Sudan’s RSF, Accused of Genocide, Signs Charter to Form Rival Government’, *Al Jazeera*, 23 February 2025, Available from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/2/23/sudans-rsf-allies-sign-charter-for-rival-government-despite-criticisms> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³¹⁰Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), *Civil War in Sudan* (Global Conflict Tracker Report, 15 April 2025), Available from <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/power-struggle-sudan> (accessed 10 August 2025).

reasons, but also because of shared religious beliefs, sectarian ties, or to promote their own agendas on religion, some of these countries are such as, Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Wagner and Russia, Iran, Turkey, and other countries.³¹¹

5.3 Egypt's Religious alignment with SAF

Egypt's political involvement in Sudan is shaped by shared religious ideology. As a Sunni Muslim state with a powerful military, Egypt supports the SAF because they both represent conservative Sunni authority and centralized control, noting the history of Egypt with the Muslim brothers and the history between Sudan and Egypt since the colony. Their alliances and supports reflect both military strategy and religious identity. The government in Egypt has been constantly supporting Sunni nationalist agenda which matches the SAF's legacy as an Islamist-rooted military institution. According to the U.S State Departments and some analysts, Egypt supports that Sudan remains under the military-Islamist leadership by maintaining their strong ties to the leaders of SAF, who seemed to have visited Cairo several times since the beginning of the war.³¹² Egypt continued to warn of the "religious extremism", and the "Chaos", while directly associating these with the actors and other military groups such as RSF.³¹³ However, this serious concern doesn't seem to be only theological, it's also a strategic one. The possibility of Sudan to weaken Egypt's influence in the region and to allow other alliances and groups like Iran or non-state militias to gain stability and ground. Which leads to Egypt fully believing that Sudan should only remain Sunni-led, and a military dominated neighbor.

Additionally, Egypt's involvement in Sudan's war and alliances is not only on the military and the political support level, it has also included growing control over Sudan's natural resources such as gold trade, which plays an essential role in funding both the war and the

³¹¹European Council on Foreign Relations, *The Falcons and the Secretary Bird: Arab Gulf States in Sudan's War* (Policy Brief, 30 July 2025), Available from <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-falcons-and-the-secretary-bird-arab-gulf-states-in-sudans-war/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³¹²Kamal Tabikha, 'Sudan's Al Burhan Meets Egypt's El Sisi in Cairo Amid Shifting War Dynamics', *The National News*, 28 April 2025, Available from <https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2025/04/28/sudans-al-burhan-meets-egypts-el-sisi-in-cairo-amid-shifting-war-dynamics/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³¹³ Kholood Khair and Asmahan Akam, 'Sudan's Dangerous Descent into Warlordism' (News article, 7 December 2023) *TIME*, <https://time.com/6342732/sudan-burhan-hemedti-descent-warlordism/> accessed 10 August 2025.

regional influences, as traditional gold routes through UAE come under–due to its support to RSF–lastly, Egypt, has become an additional or an alternative outlet, the shift maybe not only to economic benefits, but it also shows how Egypt using other ways to strengthen its alliances with RSF, by using trade networks. While challenging the influence of rival actors in the conflict.³¹⁴

5.4 UAE’s mixed motives: Tribal Support and Sectarian Politics

UAE denies its support to RSF, referring to them as allegations.³¹⁵ In this conflict in Sudan, it is countries like the UAE that backs up the RSF leader and his militias due to the business effects, since RSF is known for not being a strongly religious group in Public, that only leaves the economical benefits being exchanged between both UAE and RSF, noting that UAE officials and politicians have historically supported decentralized, tribal-based actors across the region in Sudan, including other countries such as Yemen, and Libya, as their way to counter Islam based on politics and maintain their Gulf dominance.³¹⁶ UAE might also have other benefits in Sudan, and since RSF seems to shape the powerful party at the moment, they have been controlling huge percentages of the oil and gold in Sudan, which enabled them to sell it to UAE in exchange. RSF controls gold mines as well as trade routes, and on the other hand, the UAE has been allegedly smuggling weapons, fuel, and drones to the RSF though several neighboring countries and hidden routes, such as Chad, which also has a number of the militias group, as well as through the Central African Republic, by using networks that involved external parties, like Russia’s Wagner Group and Turkey.³¹⁷ Additionally “UAE has been using Wagner as means of transporting and smuggling weapons into the conflict area”.³¹⁸

³¹⁴ISPI, *The Role of Gold in the Sudanese War* (Commentary, 30 April 2025), Available from <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/the-role-of-gold-in-the-sudanese-war-207364> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³¹⁵Vision of Humanity, *Unpacking the New Face of Conflict: Sudan’s Civil War amid a Fragmented Geopolitical Order*(Report, 22 May 2025), Available from <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/unpacking-the-new-face-of-conflict-sudans-civil-war-amid-a-fragmented-geopolitical-order/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³¹⁶Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, *The Sudanese Crisis: On the Field, Foreign Influences, and Projections*(Situation Assessment, 16 August 2023), Available from <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/Lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/sudan-crisis-on-the-field-foreign-influences-and-projections-en.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³¹⁷The Soufan Center, *Is the Conflict in Sudan Approaching a Tipping Point?* (Intelbrief, 26 March 2025), Available from <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2025-march-26/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³¹⁸The Telegraph, ‘UAE Using Wagner Fighters to Smuggle Weapons into Sudan’, *The Telegraph*, 14 September 2024, Available from

However, speaking of Chad, which position with Sudan has been different before the meeting of its president Mohammed Idriss Deby to UAE in mid 2023, Chad was one of the countries that announced that Sudanese citizens were not welcome and it has announced its closure to the borders with Sudan, in order to limit the possibility of entry of RSF militias which could possibly lead to the leaking of the war to its lands, however this has changed when the UAE paid the president a huge amount of dollars, which enabled Chad to open borders at the region of Amdjarass, as well as to host the first meetings for Sudan's aiming to participate in ending the war in Sudan, which has also helped the UAE in smuggling weapons and other resources throughout the Chadian borders.³¹⁹

Even though the UAE is a Sunni state, and known for its ties and somehow religious rules to Islam, it has intentionally avoided supporting SAF, or the Islamist groups, and according to Georgetown's 2025 analysis, states that the RSF's what's known as non-ideological and tribal identity, make it a "safer" partner for the UAE, than the Islamist group linked SAF and its allies, meaning that, SAF has stronger ties to the Islamist elites from the former president Bashir's era and continues to protect wealth and institutions created under his *Tamkeen* policies. This extremely ideological background, as Medani argues, is very essential to understanding the goals and the intentions of SAF in the current war.³²⁰ In contrast, the RSF is more motivated and affected by tribal affiliations and economic ambitions, as mentioned before such as gold and fuel smuggling. With few connections to Islamist ideologies.³²¹ This explains how religious neutrality is sometimes more accepted and preferred than shared belief—more specifically when managing influence and natural resources.³²² Still, this all creates a contradiction, for instance, the RSF

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/09/14/uae-wagner-group-fighters-weapons-sudanese-civil-war/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³¹⁹ Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, *The Sudanese Crisis: On the Field, Foreign Influences, and Projections* (Situation Assessment, 16 August 2023), p. 4, Available from <https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/Lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/sudan-crisis-on-the-field-foreign-influences-and-projections-en.pdf> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³²⁰ Khalid Medani, 'The Unravelling of an Autocratic Regime', *CCAS Newsmagazine*, Fall 2024–Spring 2025, Available from https://issuu.com/georgetownccas/docs/ccas_newsmagazine_fall_2024-spring_2025 (accessed 10 August 2025).

³²¹ *ibid*

³²² Vision of Humanity, *Unpacking the New Face of Conflict: Sudan's Civil War amid a Fragmented Geopolitical Order* (Report, May 2025), Available from <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/unpacking-the-new-face-of-conflict-sudans-civil-war-amid-a-fragmented-geopolitical-order/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

formed alliance and is fully supported by a Sunni state (UAE), creating a gap of mistrust with the Islamists, meanwhile the SAF has its alliances and is being backed by Sunni connections and networks that want to imply the religious law and the political control, this paradox shows that the sectarian alliances in Sudan are not only based on fear—but also on belief, control and power.

5.5 Saudi Arabia's cautious religion role

Countries sharing the same religious alliances and beliefs tend to have stronger ties in some cases, for instance, when it comes to Saudi Arabia, it has always been known as the center of Islamic religion, due to the existence of the ‘*Kaaba*’ also known as ‘*Ka’bah*’ on its lands. Decisions of Saudi Arabia have always mattered in all Sunni muslim countries, especially in a country like Sudan, on how other countries respond to the conflict. Yet, the country decided to take its path carefully and cautiously, even though it hosted the well-known Jeddah back in the year 2023, with the participation of the United States of America, most of the Sudanese citizens had higher hopes in these talks to become an end to the current chaos. However, surprisingly Saudi Arabia chose a very neutral side by supporting neither SAF or RSF, but only hosting negotiations between the 2 parties.^{323 324} The Kingdom’s neutrality in the talks could have a religious purpose, maintaining its image as the leader of the Muslim world. Analysts believe that Saudi Arabia doesn't trust the structure built on tribalisms as in the RSF, and at the same time doesn't want to appear to be openly supporting Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and its Islamists allies and networks.³²⁵

In fact tension between UAE and the Kingdom have increased over Sudan, since both seem to hypothetically support either of the warring parties, and as mentioned above, UAE leans towards

³²³Maram Mahdi, ‘Is Peace Possible between Sudan’s Warring Parties?’, *ISS Africa*, 6 August 2024, Available from <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/is-peace-possible-between-sudan-s-warring-parties> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³²⁴Moses Crispus Okello, ‘Is Peace Possible between Sudan’s Warring Parties?’, *African Arguments*, 6 September 2024, Available from <https://africanarguments.org/2024/09/is-peace-possible-between-sudans-warring-parties/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³²⁵ Ibid

RSF due to its geopolitical reasons, meanwhile the Kingdom is indirectly closer to the Egyptian position, which supports the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF).^{326 327}

5.6 Wagner and Russia

Unlike other foreign actors, Russia has been active in the country since 2017, after the visit of Omar Al-Bashir to Russia meeting the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, asking for his protection from the U.S government and in return offering to give Russia accessibility to the African continent, through Sudan.³²⁸ The Russian president, on his part supported his Sudanese counterpart with Russia's Wagner group, "a private military group company supported by the state", and in return for control over gold resources in Sudan.

Later on, even after the withdrawal of the Sudanese president. Till this day Russia has been maintaining its alliances in Sudan with both warring parties RSF, and SAF, but noticeably stronger with RSF, as most of the gold mining areas are controlled by these militias, and in return they are providing weapons and military trainings as well as some other services such as intelligence.

Recently, Russia has recently expanded its support to SAF, as a part of its strategy in changing goals. In April some Russian officials were in Port Sudan, where they offered the SAF military aid and some other assistance. This clear shift in policy is most likely a reflection of Russia's long goals in the Red Sea area, including having a military base, to which an agreement was signed back in 2020. Although Sudan's government rejected the agreement in 2021, some developments suggest that Russia is reattempting to revive the deal. Another reason for Russia's renewed support may be to block growing SAF cooperation with Iran or Ukraine, which has

³²⁶Talal Mohammad, 'How Sudan Became a Saudi-UAE Proxy War', *Foreign Policy*, 12 July 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/07/12/sudan-saudi-arabia-uae-proxy-war-military-rsf-rsf-al-burhan-hemti/> (accessed 10 August 2025).

³²⁷Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, *The Sudanese Crisis: On the Field, Foreign Influences, and Projections*.

³²⁸Associated Press, 'Sudan's President Visits Russia, Asks for Protection From US', *VOA News*, 23 November 2017, Available from <https://www.voanews.com/a/sudan-president-visits-russia-asks-for-protection-from-us/4131704.html>(accessed 10 August 2025).

reportedly supported Sudan's Army by providing weapons and special forces to fight against Wagner.³²⁹

In addition to security control and dealings with both warring parties, Russia's existence in Sudan is considered to be a wide range plan to gain more influence and power over other African countries.³³⁰ To Russia, Sudan's gold resources do not only shape a local interest, but also a part of its long term strategy to protect its own economy if the Western sanctions are applied. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, Wagner groups have been constantly smuggling billions of Dollars bypassing the Central Bank in Sudan. Igman argues that this gold has helped Russia stabilize the fund against its aggression to Ukraine, especially when most of its National Welfare Fund, has been changed into gold and Chinese Yuan before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. By saying : "*Russia' has become the world's most important sovereign buyer of gold, Sudanese gold has been used to fund its aggression against Ukraine*"³³¹ Gold has also been used to maintain and strengthen ties with Russia and its known wartime allies like China, Turkey, UAE and Iran.³³²

Beyond gold, Russia's plans for a naval base in Port Sudan, shows its long term plans for the military ambitions, if implemented, this will be the first base to be owned by Russia in Africa, which enables Moscow to have its naval power in the Red sea, in addition to the Indian ocean. The location is near one of the world's busiest shipping routes, which will increase Russia's global reach and enable it to challenge not only the Western influence, but also the Gulf one in the region.³³³ Although the original base was put to an end, by the transitional government

³²⁹ Fiona Nicholson, 'Unpacking the new face of conflict: Sudan's civil war amid a fragmented geopolitical order' (Report, 22 May 2025) *Vision of Humanity*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/unpacking-the-new-face-of-conflict-sudans-civil-war-amid-a-fragmented-geopolitical-order/> accessed 10 August 2025.

³³⁰ John Kennedy, Elena Grossfeld, Zsofia Wolford, and Thomas Kenchington, 'Gold Rush: How Russia Is Using Gold in Wartime' (Research report, 9 September 2024) *RAND Corporation*, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA3230-1.html accessed 10 August 2025.

³³¹ Cecelina Ingman, 'Great power ambitions and proxy wars: Sudan as a battlefield between Russia and Ukraine' (Master's thesis, 2023) *Doria.fi*, https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/190578/Ingman_Great%20power%20ambitions%20and%20proxy%20wars_online.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y accessed 10 August 2025.

³³² John Kennedy, Elena Grossfeld, Zsofia Wolford, and Thomas Kenchington, 'Gold Rush: How Russia Is Using Gold in Wartime' (Research report, 9 September 2024) *RAND Corporation*, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA3230-1.html accessed 10 August 2025.

³³³ Cecelina Ingman, 'Great power ambitions and proxy wars: Sudan as a battlefield between Russia and Ukraine' (Master's thesis, 2023) *Doria.fi*,

which was put into force, after the protest that helped withdraw the former President Bashir in 2021, however new meetings in 2024, between the SAF and some Russian officials, suggest that the agreement is being renewed, likely in exchange for military and weapons.³³⁴ “*SAF delegation would soon travel to Russia to agree on exchange of arms and ammunition in return for a Russian logistics hub in Port Sudan*”.

Moreover, Russia’s actions also present a larger tactic known as “*gunboat diplomacy*”, where the military is often used to pressure and gain political influence while increasing the economic advantages. As Ingman argues, this strategy enables Russia to achieve its planned global objectives– such as disrupting NATO, gaining leverage in UN votes, and projecting strength, while securing more logistic possibilities in some states.³³⁵ In Sudan, this pattern reflects Russian operations in the Central African Republic and in Mali, in which Wagner fighters protect political alliances in exchange for access to gold and influence,³³⁶ The same applies to when president Bashir met his Russian counterpart. Ingman refers to this explicitly, linking Russia’s use of military bases like (Syria, Crimea, and potentially Sudan), with its naval doctrine in 2022. Saying: “Russian activities in Sudan are also a classic example of gunboat diplomacy”³³⁷ While Moscow keeps claiming its support to stability and peace around the globe, its words contradict with its actions, which mainly benefit its own interest, whether economical or geopolitical, these interests often seem to shed instability in several countries, more specifically African countries, such as Sudan, where they are indirectly supporting the violence by providing weapons to both parties, for strategic gain. Ingman argues saying : “*Russia has managed to pose itself as an alternative partner, offering what it has: arms and soldiers*”³³⁸

Unlike Russia that uses Sudan for its own internal benefits. Ukraine has been recently active in Sudan in several parts of the country, specially in Port Sudan, regardless of its activity, Ukraine’s presence appears to be reactive, and narrowly focused. Ukrainian forces are not supporting any of the Sudanese military groups, but due to its long term disagreement with

https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/190578/Ingman_Great%20power%20ambitions%20and%20proxy%20wars_online.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y pp 11-12 accessed 10 August 2025.

³³⁴ Ibid p 12

³³⁵ Ibid, p. 12-13

³³⁶ Ibid . p 13

³³⁷ Ibid pp 11-13

³³⁸ Ibid p.13

Russia, Ukrainian forces are conducting operations to eliminate activities of Wagner and its operations, while limiting Russia's network internationally. This specific difference between Russia and Ukraine leaves a different mark of the intervention in the current conflict in Sudan, in short, where Russia actively seeks long-term beneficial relations through gold, weapons and other resources, Ukraine's activities are part of a global counter aimed at eliminating Russian influence—wherever it exists or operates.

There have been several videos released showing Ukrainian drone strikes against Russian mercenaries and their partners in Sudan, showing the growing intensity of Ukraine's operations in Sudan.³³⁹ Furthermore, Ukrainian forces confirmed their plans on “cleaning up” Wagner operations in the region³⁴⁰. These actions are a part of a broader strategy, led by the Main Intelligence Directorate (HUR) to remove Russia's overseas both economic and military presence—especially in the African continent. Where external groups like Wagner, shape an essential instrument of the Russian influence in different ways.

Importantly, this also changes Sudan into a strategic battlefield for global rivalries, where local conflict intertwines with more ideological and military challenges. Ukraine's presence in Sudan has introduced the country into a new layer to the international interventions shaping the conflict—not driven by religion or regional alignment, rather by a direct campaign to confront Russian military actions beyond Europe.

5.7 Israel

Israel's position in this Sudan conflict, is similar to Russia's and UAE's, specially when shaping alliances and connections in the country, it seems to have tied relations with both RSF and SAF, which somehow seems to be less than religious, and more related to the strategic positioning. This doesn't deny the main role played by religion and regional rivalries regarding the alliances. Sudan's inclusion in the 2020 Abraham Accords was considered as a diplomatic

³³⁹ Kateryna Zakharchenko and Chris York, 'Ukrainian Drones 'Destroy Russian Mercenaries' in Sudan' (News article, 30 January 2024) *Kyiv Post*, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/27383> accessed 10 August 2025

³⁴⁰ *ibid*

move, while serving broader goals, including containing Iranian influence in the country, more specifically in the surroundings of the Red Sea.³⁴¹

Meanwhile maintaining these strong ties with both warring parties, Israel's plans might be connected to ensuring that regardless of who remains there, it can still keep its presence in Port Sudan, which could possibly be due to its strategic location near the main shipping routes and how it connects the African Union, allowing Israel to have more advantages either symbolic for strategic in its efforts to align more Sunni states with its regional vision, partiality against Iran.³⁴²

both sides of the conflict. Which makes it unclear whether China has intentionally or indirectly provided these armed weapons.³⁴³

In conclusion, regardless of the strategic interests, even without any religious motives or ties, can still influence different dynamics on the ground, whether by empowering one of the actors over the other or simply maintaining ties with both.

³⁴¹ Ibid

³⁴² Ibid

³⁴³ Ibid

6. Findings:

The Analysis to the research, reflects a complex with different understandings of the Sudanese current conflict (2023-2025) between both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General *Abdulfattah Al-Burhan*, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by the commander *Mohammed Hamdan Dagolo*. After conducting a deep search with different perspectives, found to be true is a fight or a struggle for power and authority, however it also reflects other motives to this conflict. This research highlights Sudan's both historical and the current affect and role of the Islamic religion in the conflict, and to what extent has it been used as a strategic tool, source of division, and a justification for violence and the violations to human rights and its instruments. This approach was implemented using both, a qualitative methodology, combining an in-depth review of the historical literature, analysis of legal and political documents, and insights from semi-structured interviews.

The main findings are:

- a) **The religious manipulations and justification of violence:** The research provides some evidence that both the RSF, and the SAF, have used religion as an instrument in order to justify their violent actions. The SAF and its associated militias often impose narratives that frames their military campaigns and gatherings as a '*holy war*', or '*Jihad*', to fulfill its obligation and duty to protect both Islam and the Sharia law in Sudan, against the perceived '*secular*' forces, which call for the implementation of the not '*true Islam*'. Meanwhile, the RSF has been documented by several international, national organizations and news agencies, for being involved in religious manipulation as well, by participating in seizing control of mosques and repurposing them of military operations, while at the same time, using religious slogans and messages to frame and justify their actions. This widespread manipulation has participated in creating an environment in which violence is not only tolerated, but is also given to some extent a religious legitimacy, causing a deep confusion and suffering among the Sudanese community. Furthermore, the research points out the division and tension between the religious leaders themselves and their institutions, with some actively calling for the violence and encouraging the conflict while defending the SAF by calling them the 'protectors of the

Islam', and actively using the religious Fridays prayers and other religious gatherings for political advocacy. While some other religious leaders work tirelessly for promoting peace, while cooperating with the ordinary citizens to participate in supporting the community in certain ways. This research lastly undersources that this manipulation is a major key and drive of the conflict and resulting in the protection of some of these human rights violations, due to its misuse by both parties.

- b) **The role of religion in shaping alliances and divisions:** The research further explains how religion has been a key factor in the shaping of the alliances and the deepening of the social divisions. For example, the SAF, and its constant attempts for legitimization and gaining support, has intentionally strengthened its ties with some Islamic and other political institutions, while mirroring and presenting itself as the protector of the Islam, and its historical values that the religion holds in Sudan. Meanwhile, the RSF has been working on building a broad coalition that includes shaping alliances with some groups such as the Sudanese Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), which holds a secular vision for the state with the implementation of a democratic state that serves the community. This strategic use of religion has only fueled pre-existing political and social divisions, which, as the research argues, can be traced by the history and the institutionalization of the both, religious and ethnic divisions created during the British-Egyptian colonial era, the research further complains that this misuse and manipulations of the religious identity has made it significantly difficult to achieve national unity and a stable political vision for the country in the coming few years.
- c) **Extensive legal violations and the misuse of law:** The research documents a pattern of continuous violations of international law, by both the RSF, and the SAF. while providing some on ground evidence and testimonies of the severe war crimes and abuses to human rights and its systems. This also included the several unlawful attacks on the civilians, in addition to the systematic use of violations such as gender-based violence as a weapon of war, and the children's recruitment for war purposes. The research further reflects that these actions are in direct violation to the Sudan's international legal obligations under treaties and conventions, such as the Geneva Convention of 1949 and its additional protocols, the Convention Against Torture (CAT), the Optional Protocol on the

Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), The Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court, The UN Council Resolution 1820, The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The research also highlights the complicity of the legal system itself, while noting how both the SAF and the RSF have manipulated the international and the national legal system, as well as the different religious sects to justify the violations they committed, such as torture, mass-killing and other cruel punishments without any further process, while directly weaponizing the law against their enemies and whoever opposes them from the civilian population.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings related to this research on the current conflict, the following recommendations are made to somewhat fulfill the goals to foster peace and stability in the country, while putting strong emphasis on establishing a different legal framework that calls on promoting inclusive governance.

- a) **Establishing a state built on a Secular legal and government Framework:** The historical use and the ongoing misuse of the Sharia law by several regimes, since the postcolonial government of *Al-Bashir* and other leaders in Sudan, has systematically led to the exclusions, discriminations against and the marginalization of people with both different ethnic and religious backgrounds, thereby fueling the very divisions that are now at the midst of the conflict. Therefore an essential recommendation is the creation of the secular state that is fully based on an inclusive legal and administrative system, even though it might seem critical to be implemented in the country due to its strong historical ties to the Islamic religion and its values.
- b) **Strengthening the legal accountability and justice mechanisms:** The research strongly recommends the importance of establishing more comprehensive mechanisms in order to ensure the legal accountability is being taken for the documented war crimes and the massive abuses to the human rights system, since Sudan has accepted, signed, and

rectified some of the international legal instruments such as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), there is a legal and a moral obligation to hold those responsible for committing these war crimes, crimes against the humanity and the human dignity, and other international violations. The main aim is to put an end to the patterns of the crimes that go unpunished, while ensuring that all victims receive justice, as well as demonstrating that those who commit such crimes will be held accountable by facing serious legal consequences.

- c) **Empowering the independent religious and civil society leaders:** Since there has been a dual role played by the religious leaders, where some have been a massive asset in committing to promote peace and stability, and others have shown a clear sign of being a source for division. An essential recommendation is to provide the support needed to the independent religious leaders and civil society organizations to foster a cooperation between all groups who are actively working on the same cause of promoting peace, tolerance, mutual respect and the implementation of the basic human rights laws. In addition, since the Sudanese community lacks the correct education to the Sharia, thereby supporting those religious leaders and educators with the right support that is required to facilitate their mission on promoting the correct Sharia, which will help in the process of reaching a secular state that is based on rights and respect. This strategy also aims to build different framing to the manipulation of religion used by the two warring parties, as well as to help healing long-lasting social wounds, while rebuilding trust between different ethnic and religious communities.
- d) **Establish a Coordinated International Mechanism and imposing sanctions to specific states involved in supporting the conflict:** Given the finding this research came to on the international interference by some states fueling this conflict based on their geopolitical and economic interests, an essential step might be to establish a joint international framework to monitor, sanction, and diplomatically pressure those states who provide support to the warring parties. This mechanism should be formed by a membership between countries as well as the many international organizations and bodies such as the African Union (AU), the United Nations UN) agencies, and other accredited affiliations. The sanctions would involve individuals, companies, and governmental states

that are found to be currently active in supporting the 2 parties, either by providing weapons, financial transactions (e.g gold smuggling,....etc), or even intelligence forces. Furthermore, the aim is to break the ties with the countries which could eventually assist both warring parties to focus on how to bring peace to Sudan.

8. Conclusion

This research shows that this (2023-2024) conflict in Sudan, is deeply rooted in the country's long-lasting history and the colonial legacy that has shaped Sudan's both legal and religious system and left a mark till this day. Historically, religion has played a very important role in that history, but throughout the time it has been used in harmful and unlawful ways combined with systematic manipulation. Both warring parties, RSF and SAF have used religion as a tool to directly and indirectly keep power, gain support and shape alliances, justify violence and seek validation, as well as to divide the community. This equality was again deeply rooted from the colonial era when the systems and ideologies of inequality and discrimination based on religion and ethnicity were created, and has continued under different governments.

Additionally, the findings states that peace in Sudan cannot come only from political agreements, or armed forces achievements against the 'enemy', the process of reaching a long-lasting peace needs a significant change in the society first, the system, and the political atmosphere, including laws which are fair for all and are fully serrated from any religious influence and control. It will additionally need a strong system that aims to hold those who commit crimes accountable. In short, Sudan's future highly depends on facing the way in which religion has been misused, diminishing the colonial legacy by rebuilding trust between communities, and supporting those who work towards the long-lasting fairness, better education and economic development, as well as the equal rights for all.

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Interviews

Interviewee 001, Student, Religious leader/Imam, From Khartoum state, residing in both Port Sudan, Sudan / and in Doha, Qatar, Muslim Sunni, interview was conducted in Vienna (Remote). June 2025.

Interviewee 002, Former Minister in Sudan, Community leader/ Sudanese Community Representative, From Darfur state, residing in Port Sudan, UAE and Washington, DC, Muslim Sunnin, interview was conducted in Vienna (Remote). June 2025.

Interviewee 003, Former Politician, Community leader/ Sudanese Community Representative, From Blue Nile State, residing in Port Sudan, Just Muslim, interview was conducted in Vienna (Remote). June 2025.

Interviewee 004 Doctor, Sudanese Academic, residing in Khartoum, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, graduate of Medicine, with a degree in Islamic Studies, Muslim, interview was conducted in Vienna (Remote). June 2025.

Interviewee 005, Businessman, Sudanese Academic, from Darfur region, residing in Port Sudan, graduate of Business studies, conducted peace and reconciliation projects in Darfur region, Muslim, interview was conducted in Vienna (Remote). June 2025.

Interviewee 006, Artist, and an activist, local in Sudan, from Nuba Mountain, residing in Port Sudan, Just Muslim with some Christian family members, interview was conducted in Vienna (Remote). June 2025.

Interviewee 007, NGO employee, Local in Sudan, from West Darfur region, residing in Khartoum, and in Omdurman, Muslim Sunni, interview was conducted in Vienna (Remote). June 2025.

Interviewee 008, Christian, religious leader/Imam, From Nuba Mountain, residing in both South Sudan and Ethiopia, interview was conducted in Vienna (Remote). June 2025.

Interview Summary with interviewee 001 (Muslim Sunni, religious leader/Imam, From Khartoum state, residing in both Port Sudan, Sudan / and in Doha, Qatar).

Consent to this interview being recorded.

As a religious leader, how do you see religion influencing the ongoing conflict between Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces?

Okay, I think there is an effect, but I'm not gonna say I'm happy about it, because there's a great extent of manipulation happening. And I would love to be clear about it, and to be direct about it, And to say, religion has been weaponized, somehow, in a place and in a country that shouldn't take place this way.

I believe religion shouldn't be used in this, you know, kind of conflict. Unless it's to support people in getting their rights, saving their lives. If you know what I mean. But not to weaponize one of the sides, taking sides or supporting one of the parties. So that's one of the problems, but yes, religion exists as a religion, of course, because it's a core and let's say it's a part of the culture, especially in Sudan, but making it the core of the problem takes religion into a place to be, let's say, convicted. I don't know if we mean in the right word, or you get what I mean.. But that's exactly what I'm trying to say.

I'm afraid that we sometimes put religion in a place which gives an infamous view about our religion. That's a problem I'm trying to address.

Is the influence limited to churches and mosques being destroyed or what else since both parties seem to be fighting for more than just power, it's rather a religious fight as well?

Both of them of course. I don't think so, I'm not sure, but I don't think it's intentional. We can call it collateral damage, I believe, if I'm using the right word, because everything has been in every place, everything, has been bombed and destroyed with no limits, but approaching those places, like mosques and churches and worship places, I think, of course, it's itself, it's a very bad act itself. And we are responsible for keeping those places safe.

Have you noticed religious messages whether directly or indirectly are being used to justify any types of violence or human rights violations during the conflict?

Okay, You know, this exactly, you know, where is this coming from? They are truly definitely too. Let's say it's a way of gathering people and gathering supporters. So definitely Sudan. One of the smartest ideas is to gather people in a way, based on religious messages. The Sudanese

people love this, they are actually very keen on it. They love to be directed through religion. That's well known about the Sudanese people. So definitely, as a way of propaganda, or let's say, a promotion, they definitely try to do that. Although, the targets or the aims are not religious at all. If you know what I mean. But they have to do it because it's a weapon. It's a tool. It's actually a real tool so you can gather people's support 1 of both parties. So both of them, I believe, both of them use that in a clear way, I think. Yeah, it was clear. Yeah, it's a surprisingly, you just answered the second question. It was about, in what you already answered by saying that they used religion as a way of manipulation.

In what ways do you think religious beliefs have been manipulated by both, either political or military leaders ? Could you please clarify with concrete examples?

They have to do it because it's a weapon. It's a tool. It's actually a real tool so you can gather people's support 1 of both parties. So both of them, I believe, both of them use that in a clear way, I think. Yeah, it was clear. Yeah, it's a surprisingly, you just answered the second question. It was about, in what you already answered by saying that they used religion as a way of manipulation.

How have religious communities or institutions responded to the violence linked to this conflict?

All right. I understand that one. Okay, yeah. Because I thought you've been asking about something else because there is a part of the military itself that joined the military under religious beliefs, they're fighting under religious belief. I thought you're talking about that.

If you are talking about the people who are worshipers, you mean from the community? This is definitely, definitely for more what I'm seeing. They're supporting one of the parties, which is the military, I think the Sudan military and they're supporting according to one single effect, which means they believe that the RSF has they're like an invader to the country. They are killing, of course. They started you know, raping, they steal, they destroyed, and etc. They believe, according to this, because actually, these acts are also forbidden by the religion, and the doers of these actions considered the bad people. So from this perspective, and under this concept, they actually divided themselves into either with the defenders, which is the military, or with the factors, which is the RFF. So that's why I believe that's the main reason why they supported the Sudan military. And that's I think that's the side they're taking.

Do you believe religion has been used as a tool for division or for peace in this conflict?

Believe it or not, it depends on the user.

Exactly. I want you to hear me carefully. Hear me out. Knowing Islam, and knowing the religion concepts and beliefs, details, and everything about the in and outs. Making You able to use it, this is proportionately a human act, and unfortunately, you are able to use it for both acts, if you want to use it for violence, you can, you want to use it to bring peace to people, you can. So this is unfortunate, unfortunately. The point where people would be definitely responsible and accountable for their actions, for what they are saying to people, for how they are addressing the community and the society. You are definitely responsible for what you're saying as a scholar, or as an influencer, And this makes you a part of the reaction. You're actually responsible also for the reaction, because it can be used for both directions. I don't know at my point, I'm trying to

Generally, also from what I believe, the belief should be, should be, the source of peace, the way how we make peace. We should be the conflict, the conflict, let's say, a source of reduction. And that's what I believe, that's what I believe should happen. But in some places, and in some parts of time, or some, yeah, in some parts of time, you need to defend yourself if you need to ride back. You have the right also through a religious corset to empower people and to lift them up, to lift themselves up in order for them to be strong and to get their rights back. You know what I mean?

Exactly. Without reaching a point where you are just producing extremists to the society.

But there's another thing that has been probably running in my head as well as you were talking right now, probably this question popped up. So you said like as scholars or religious leaders, they do have a rope, right in helping in this conflict.

Have there been any religious calls for reconciliation since the beginning and during the conflict?

Yeah. Well, yet they are not even, they are not the same. You know, also, oh, I got you points. let's say the religious tribes or parties also. It's really many in Sudan. It's many. It's not one direction. One of them might believe, might believe in getting into these solutions. And using diplomacy, trying to also empower the peaceful direction. And some of them go completely to the other side so that we shouldn't get into this. We should just fight and keep on fighting under this "*holy war*". It turned out to be a holy war. And what they're doing is too, of course, to keep it running.

And some of them in the middle, like, yes, we shouldn't go there. We should just, you know, keep our boundaries and stand still for our country, looking from away, you know, from a lazy eye and being a blind eye to diplomatic solutions.

So I think they're not the same, they're not the same. There's a great conflict also religiously in Sam, by the way. I don't know if you recognize that. They're completely different, and they're

what brings the nonsense and also the confusion to the people of Supan, by the way. This brings people to a point where they don't know, actually, what is right and what is wrong.

Which makes it hard to make a decision. let's say to make a decision, especially a religious, religious decision where you're not able and you don't have the gadgets and the tools to make such a decision, so it's the scholar's responsibility at the end of the day.. They are, you know, they're doing it.

What would you want the others to understand about religion generally and the current war between the 2 warring parties? What is your message?

That's a good question. Well, if I may say, I will say one main important point about religion and specifically here, I'm going to talk about Islam as my religion, because I'm a Muslim, I'm a believer in Islam. And I consider myself a good believer in Islam, and definitely I'm not sure enough, but I reach a place where I'm very balanced, I believe., I just want them to know, all Muslims and especially the all specifically, the Muslims in Sudan, that religion is not asking us to die, which religion is asking us to live, by the way.

And it's clear and should be clear that all the specific interpretations and the worshiping details, the hundreds and hundreds of details in Islam, tell us in an indirect way that we are here to live. But at the same time, we can be strong, we can be defenders, we can be tigers, we can actually defend ourselves, even if it's if we are holding our swords. But this is for a specific time, for a specific need. We don't need to live among this. We're not here to live among this. As the prophet Muhammad said, "The strong Muslim is better than the weak. and closer to Allah from the weak".

Why? Because weakness generally reflects a bad view. It's not a good view about your personality, about your, you know, in turn to believe about your society as well. So because there is a level where you need to show that you are strong and you are capable of defending yourself. But not to raise the whole society and the community and make them believe that we are here to die. That if it's your place, where we start the war, that we are definitely going to die, all of us, because we're going to want to reach the heavens accordingly, and the last work that we're going to find or to meet is in the heavens.

I believe there is a message of us being here, all of us. There's a great message of Muslims supporting humanity, by the way. that you believe that we have a great role as believers and Muslims and also there are religious people in empowering humanity and supporting humanity, to thrive, and so we can live in a better place.

Interview Summary with interviewee 002 (Former Minister in Sudan, Muslim Sunni, Community leader/ Sudanese Community Representative, From Darfur state, residing in Port Sudan, UAE and Washington, DC).

Consent to this interview being recorded.

How do you think religion has affected your community during the armed conflict ?

Well, religion has impacted both Muslims and and none-Muslims. As far as Muslims are concerned, the Islamists who are actually fighting on the side of the Sudanese armed forces are actually mobilizing people or many communities or the baseists of religion. And by doing so, they are actually pitching Muslims who are radical or who are part of their organization against Muslims, who are actually moderate, or are not actually on their side. On the other hand, the non-Muslims have been affected also by the conflict, their churches have been destroyed. Intentionally, and sometimes not intentionally, and many of them were actually arrested in Omdurman and other places.

But if we want to talk about religion and conflict, we should also speak about historical discrimination. That has been inflicted on the non Muslims in the Nuba Mountains and in Blue Nile. Because the state is actually religious and it is based on Islamic laws or on Sharia, many Muslims are actually discriminated against because they are not actually seen as part of the nation, or they are not actually seen as citizens who enjoy or should enjoy full rights. In that sense, religion is also used, actually, against larger communities in places like the Nuba Mountains., and this is something that has been going on for more than four decades. So religion has historically impacted communities, but it is also impacting communities, Muslim communities and non-Muslim communities in Sudan.

How do different religious groups within your community interact during the conflict?

Well, uh, uh, when you actually exclude the political dimension, in the current conflict, and I mean the use of religion by the warring parties and especially the islamists in Port Sudan. Sudanese are normally very peaceful. They coexist. They don't have any problems, actually living together or dealing with each other, without any discrimination. So I don't think that there is any issue for the Muslims and non-Muslims to live together peacefully as that has been according to my best knowledge, the case in this conflict.

Can you share any examples of violence or discrimination based on religion that you or your community have experienced, and has religion been used as a way of justification in any of the cases by both parties?

Uh, well, I think there are many, many examples. For example, I can start with hiring people in government positions or roles. Many Christians are rather actually appointed because they are not Muslims or because they are not, of course, part of the ruling organization. That was in particular, the case during Bashir's rule, this kind of discrimination did not only impact non Muslims. It also impacted Muslims who were not actually part of the ruling party. So that is one. Another example, has to do with students or students in general. at the level of primary education, or the level of secondary education, or even at the higher education level. The curricula are not actually based on diversity. They are actually based on an assumption that holds the knees are Muslims, and that is something that negatively impacts children, and it impacts the students at the higher education level as well at the other levels of education. So I think these are two examples that one can mention and of course.

example.

You could also speak about, you know, running for public office, you cannot actually do that according to the Sudanese political traditions, because people are going to assume that since you are a Christian and Christians are a minority or are not actually powerful constituencies in Sudan, you will not be able to win elections. So your political organization will not actually nominate you, or if you decide to do so, they will not support you.

So there are many ways that religious minorities are impacted Sudan, because of this politicization of religion or because of discrimination based on religion.

How do religious beliefs influence people's attitudes towards the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)?

Well, I think.. Honestly speaking, the party that is using religion in this conflict is the, not to say the Sudanese armed forces, in particular, but the militias that are actually fighting under the banner of the Sudanese armed forces.

They are getting support. They are getting logistics. They are getting intelligence for the armed forces, and they are Islamists, whose aim is to actually come back to power. So these are the ones that are actively using religion, they talk about Islam, they actually literally adopt the same agendas of the National Islamic front (NIF) or the Islamic movement in Sudan, for this group, I think many people who are maybe religious or who do not have any problem with political Islam, they are actually follow the Sudanese armed forces, and its allies because of this religious, maybe discourse, so to speak.

So I think this is something that gained them support and divided our community more because people who were actually united by the political agendas of the revolution of the December 2018, revolution are now divided on on the basis of religion, because one party is using religion

to actually recruit people, to mobilize people, and to recruit people. And this is actually helping them, but it is actually dividing the Sudanese community.

What are the ways that are used to recruit people?

So, they are saying that this fight is actually for Islam, and this fight is for defending Sharia. Against, those who were actually ruling the country during the transitional period, and they are now allies of the RSF, of the militia, of the RSF, as they say, as this actually resonates with so many people who did not follow the work of the transitional government or who did not have enough information about what we were doing during the transition.

So they really believe that this fight is against the secularists who are part of the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC). And the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) is actually aligned with the RSF, which is not true.

Because they are actually using lies and religion to mobilize people who don't have access to enough information, or who do not actually exert any effort to gather information, so that they can actually make informed decisions.

Do you think the 2019 revolution has in any way shaped the current conflict, either directly or indirectly? For instance, has it influenced the mindset of politicians, policy makers, or even the ordinary people in terms of how they perceive or respond to the revolution itself plays a role in shaping how people are engaging with the current crisis? If yes, how? In short, how do you think religion shapes the way people explain or justify the conflict?

I think so. I think, yes, and it depends. It depends on who you are talking about?

I think if you are talking about those, uh, who were actually aligned with the islamists or who were a part of Al-Bashir's regime, or people who are actually hearing from conservative, very conservative communities, yes. They have decided to actually support the army and support the allies of the army, the islamists who are fighting with the army.

For others, actually they decided to be on the side of the RSF because regardless of what is happening on the ground, they believe the RSF is actually fighting the islamists, and they are with the RSF against the Islamists.

An example is actually a Republican party or movement in Sudan. Most of them are actually supporting the RSF because they have historical grievances. Again, Islamists, they killed or executed their thinker and founder, Mahmood Muhammad Taha, and they believe that the Islamists will not be eradicated from Sudan, unless you have power or you have military power.

And the only organization that has military power right now is the RSF, that is fighting them, and therefore, they are supporting the RSF because the Islamists were again in the revolution, they were trying persistently and consistently to undermine the revolution. They were against undoing the October 25th school and re-establishing the transition or another transition, and they ignited the April 15th War. So this is not only the position of the Republican movement or the Republican brothers, but also the position of many pro-December Revolution. activists and supporters.

There is a third group, there is a third group, maybe this is the majority of those who actually participated in the December Revolution, who think that the two parties do not represent them. They don't care about the Islamists discourse or the arguments that they make to actually convince people to support them because their agenda actually, the agendas of the vast majority, those who ignited the December revolution are not actually religious agendas.

They don't care about religion, especially when it is related to politics. And they also don't think, they don't believe that they don't trust that the RSF is fighting for agendas, you know, agendas that have to do with the revolution or agendas that have to do with democracy. So this can be called maybe a third block of organizations and people who are not actually, who are not actually supporting either of the parties, or the warring parties. *“So I think you can speak about these three groups, on that has been impacted by the religious agendas of the one of the fighting parties, and a group that has decided also, because it's against the Islamists support the other, the other warring party, and there is a third group, which is maybe the majority, in my opinion, that has decided to be impartial and not support any of the two, any of the warring parties”.*

Given the long history of violence and ongoing atrocities in Darfur region – including the genocide, ethnic cleansing, and severe human rights violations committed by both Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) even now during the current conflict of 2023-2025, can you provide some context on the current situation there, particularly regarding the targeting of Sufi communities and ethnic groups like Masalit and Fur? And could you share any specific examples if possible?

So, I follow up the situation in Darfur very closely.

According to my best knowledge, there is no targeting of Sufis, at all. All the Darfuri are actually Sufis, they also, they are following the Tiganiyya denomination, and they don't have any issues with Sufism. So I don't think there is any issue related to religion or religious denominations.

There is, of course, ethnic tensions in Darfur. This is not something new, it is historical, it has always been the case, maybe since, you know, 1916 or ever before 1916, but ethnic tensions intensified in Darfur, after the independence of Sudan, and they became more intense.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, and reached their peak in the war that actually broke out in 2002 or 2003 because of that, where the war broke out in Darfur, many people actually were killed because of their ethnicity.

And when the April 15th war broke out, the SAF tried to actually exploit some tribes against other tribes. As they did actually when the 2003 war broke out, they immobilized the Arab tribes to fight against the African tribes, all the movements that were actually overwhelmingly African led movements, because for them, they've always targeted the party that is powerful, that is a threat in their opinion to their power and dominance in Khartoum.

When the April 15th war broke out and this time the war was actually led by Arabs or by people from the Arab tribes. They started to mobilize the African tribes. They started with the "Masalit" in Genina, and the "Masalit" actually were aligned with the Sudanese armed forces - SAF. Many of them were actually part of the Sudanese armed forces (SAF). They were part of the police forces and most of the RSF you know, come from the Arab tribes.

So when the war actually started between the SAF and the RSF in Darfur and especially in "Dar masalit" in Genina, it was not actually a war with the RSF and the SAF. It was a war between the "Masalit" and the "Arabs". And that is exactly what the SAF intelligence understood, that they promised to give them weapons, they promised to give them aircover, so that they could actually destroy the Arabs. And because of the local tensions and conflict, historical tensions and conflicts, they were actually captivated by this offer and they decided to actually fight against them, that is exactly what they did.

Eventually, SAF did not actually provide them with any weapons that could actually enable them to defeat the Arabs or the RSF. They did not actually give them any air cover, and the war for the locals there was actually an ethnic war.

They were fighting because they were Arabs, and they were fighting because they were "Masalit", and they were fighting because they thought they were defending their tribes, and their ethnic groups. Against, is the other ethnic group, or the other tribe. So the conflict is actually very different. It doesn't have anything to do with ethnicity, with religion sorry. It has to do with ethnicity, not with religion.

The leads of the center have always used the local divisions to actually dominate and continue in power. And to further divide the Darfuri communities. That is something that I can tell from my personal experiences.

In the four areas, there were issues, but not ethnic cleansing. I come from “Wadi Salih”, people now, they actually have problems, economic problems, they don't have enough cash. They don't have issues that anybody in Darfur is actually facing. But nobody targets the “Fur” because they are “Fur”. Maybe some armed groups from the Arabs because they want to take phones, they want money, they can actually target anybody. They can target “Fur”, they can target “non-Fur” elements.

So I think the conflict, the classification of this conflict, it Darfur is pretty pretty different and it has nothing to do with religion, it has everything to do with ethnicity, and the needs of the center, the staff, in particular, have always used this ethnic, ethnic division to actually create problems between the tribes because they are ultimate goal is to actually rule the country, they see Darfur, as a threat because it is the largest region in Sudan, it has a lot of educated people, it has a lot of business people, and also it has organizations and movements that can actually, if you, defeat the SAF or weaken the SAF.

And with the emergence of the RSF as a powerful organization, the SAF believed that this was the end of the rule. And the only way for them to weaken the RSF was to actually create problems in Darfur, and that is what happened in “Al-Fashir”. They actually supported Jibriel and Minni Minawi who were actually fighting the SAF. The SAF supported them to fight the RSF because they wanted to weaken the RSF in Darfur, and that is exactly what happened in “El-Fasher”.

Many died from the two parties. Many young people from the “Zagwa” died, many young people from the Arabs died and the elites in Port Sudan, were actually in my opinion, smiling while seeing this happen in Darfur. Because for them, this is the best case scenario. They did this in “Dar Masalit” in the early days of the war and created a division that will not actually be solved easily, in the near future, between the “Masalit” and the “Arabs”.

In the “Fur” areas, in the north “Darfur”, in “Zalinge”, in “Jebel Marra”, in “Wadi Salih” they couldn't do that because the leads of the “Fur” were actually very clear from the very beginning that they did not want to go in this war. They did not want to fight with any party in this war. They decided to be impartial, and that is exactly what happened. Abdulwahid Muhammad Ahmed Alnoor, decided not to actually join the SAF or the RSF, and he maintained his position in the old Sudan in the SAF, and he decided not to mobilize his community or his communities across Darfur. Against the RSF, because if that had happened, we would have seen massacres.

What type of support do communities affected by religious violence, or any of the communities in the country need the most right now? And what is your message?

Oh, as far as as my minorities are concerned, I think they need:

Number one, Humanitarian assistance. Many of them, especially in the Nuba Mountains, in the Blue Nile, are in remote areas and relief does not reach them. They are in places that are hard to

reach, so I think it is very important that organizations that can help them, provide them with humanitarian assistance, all types of humanitarian assistance.

Number two, they need protection in places like Port Sudan or in many SAF controlled areas, they are actually targeted because they are Christian, but also because they are from Kordofan, or because they are from Blue Nile. So I think any type of legal protection through, you know, legal procedures, legal advocacy, all by talking directly to the authorities in Port Sudan, to not target them is actually extremely important.

This can also include providing asylum to those who actually find their way out of the country, who are in Egypt or who are in the Nuba Mountains and in the Europeia, or those who are in the Mountains, actually are able to actually flee to to the south, the South Sudan, to the Republic or South Sudan. So I think there, where they reach, they can actually be provided with asylum and all other types of assistance, humanitarian assistance, and also legal assistance or legal protection.

And finally, I think they need a comprehensive solution. A comprehensive solution is to establish a secular state or an impartial state, a state that does not adopt Sharia or any other religion as the formal, formal religion of the state. If that doesn't happen, minorities, religious minorities, in particular, but also other minorities will continue to face discrimination, because it is only through a state that is secular, that is diversity accommodating, that we will be able to fully protect the rights of minorities, especially those of religious minorities

Interview Summary with interviewee 003 (Former Politician/Community leader/ Sudanese community Representative, Muslim, From Blue Nile State, residing in Port Sudan).

Consent to this interview being recorded.

How do you think religion has affected your community during the armed conflict ?

Well, I believe that we should judge this question again as the background that Sudan has been ruled for 30 years by dictatorship that has used Islam, and the Islam religion to justify, its crime, and to justify, mode of operations, which is whether it is their act politically or militarily. And therefore, you can see very clearly, during this war, for instance,, both parts to the conflict, they are using religious jargon and they're shouting "*Allahu akbar*" and they are both trying to send a

message that what they are doing is as it is more or less there are fulfilling their obligation religiously..

It is true that the RSF. Uh, they went between having a new political discourse and also they partially were also shaped by the old political discourse of the experience when they were with Bashir. But at the same time, that army, and the forces that affiliated to it, especially the forces that are coming from the Islamic movement. There were also shouting slogans and trying amid the sentiments of evil. that they are pro god and pro-Islam and all this. I believe that Islam religions are figuring out in one way or another during this war.

Can you share any examples of violence or discrimination based on religion that you or your community have experienced, and has religion been used as a way of justification in any of the cases?

Well I can't really, tell or recall certain incidents that were based on religion, because both parties appeal to the sentiments of Muslims. I think racial discrimination, and geographical discrimination is more used than religion. And also, the vulnerable groups like women, children, were more subjected to harassment, than from the religion side. So I believe it is more racial and in terms of where you, the geographical area belonged to. It can have more impact than your religion. Maybe those who are not Muslims, they might feel alienated more than those who are Muslims.

How do different religious groups, whether Christians, Muslims from different sects or any other types of religion, within your community interact during the conflict? Is there any acceptance?

Well, I believe despite the hate speech, which is common in this war. And despite the agitations, on many different levels, whether it is religion or racial or geographical.

But the Sudan society responded in an amazing way, refusing the hate speech coming from both sides. And despite the killing and the abusing and the violations of human rights, but in many ways, our society as peoples are large in society, they refuse to engulf into a racial geographical war. And it is still limited to those who are carrying arms, but community against community. It is, in many ways, it has been resisted by the tribes, by the communities, they didn't want to engage into community against community war. Despite that there are a lot who are pushing and there is a hate speech that has been circulated.. but the society actually resisted. And because those societies are coming from thousands of years, or at least hundreds of years, they were living together

So they do not, in many cases, they didn't want to buy the propaganda war propaganda and war hate speech. It has been resisted. Plus that the activist, and the Sudanese in general using all

mediums of addressing the Sudanese people, people they were consistently resisting the hate and the agitations, on racial, geographical and discriminations between different Sudanese, then also, I might I had to say this also, this war is very complex phenomena. Because we will find in those camps, those are engulfed in this war and they are fighting in both camps. You will find guys from different racial backgrounds or geographical backgrounds.

If you go to Port Sudan, you will get some guys like Manni Minawi, Malik Agar, Gabriel Ibrahim, and Tambour and many others. You get them together with the leaders of the army, the leaders, the command of the army itself, you get Burhan, Kabashi, and others, like the recent minister of Defense, who was appointed, Gabron... So you find them also somehow they involve the diversity, and if you go to the **RSF**, you will find also different tribes and different guys in **Tasis**, for instance, you will find Ibrahim Almarghani and, or as this spokesperson, doctor Aladdin Nugud, and different guys from from Western Sudan, from Eastern Sudan, like Mubarook Mubarak Saleem and others,. you find also Al Taher Hjer, Dr, Al-Hadi, Suliman Sandal.

So the two components, they are mixed and they also represent in a way or another the diversity of Sudanese society. Despite that they are in war camps, this also makes it difficult to evict any one of them. It has just been totally a racial group. They are not, they are also diverse in your own games, and they are still involved in this world.

There have been reports of both churches and mosques being destroyed or repurposed by either Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) or The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in various parts of Sudan, including Khartoum, do you think there is a pattern or an intention behind this? For instance, are these acts driven by religious targeting or strategic purposes? What's your take on the motives behind the actions?

No, I don't think that is intentionally against Christian or against Muslim, or against certain sects in Islam. Or that.

The destruction engulfed the whole of society. And I did not recall that it is true that there is agitation from certain voices.. Like *Al-insirafi*, like, this other guy called, what is his name? There are some voices that used to agitate a long racial line, more than religious line, but I think the destruction that included mosques and churches, was not it's income as a systematic policy.

I don't think so.

For both sides, I don't think that they are intentionally having a systematic policy, but their *main policy*, which I could say, is “*anti-civilian*”, Or “*anti-December Revolution*”. This is true..

They both undermine the civilians and they undermine the forces of change.

What type of support do communities affected by religious violence, or any of the communities in the country need the most right now? And what is your message ?

- The most needed right now across support is security.
- And number two is food,
- And number three shelter.

Those are the basic needs for all communities. The communities need security and to be prevented again is the attack, where it is on the ground or by air or whatever type of attack, and security is number one, then after that they need food and after that they need shelter and then medicine and others down the road.

But those are the main occupation of the communities is Securities number one, and food is number two and shelter is number three. It is across the board. That word all the Sudanese are looking for in a nutshell, and they are also, they are all looking for civilian protection.

Yeah, the humanitarian crisis is big, and mostly people, they want food and shelter, and they want protection.

Interview Summary with interviewee 004 (Sudanese Academic, Muslim, residing in Khartoum, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, graduate of Medicine, with a degree in Islamic Studies).

Consent to this interview being recorded.

How has religion historically influenced conflicts in Sudan especially between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) ?

I think, religion has greatly influenced the war that's happening, and I think it has influenced all the wars that have happened in Sudan, including tribal, wars, and discrimination, first starting between the south of Sudan and the north of Sudan, and then extending into, you know, letting it ripple onto tribal wars and having more and more reasons to distinguish or segregate between people.

So I think regarding the conflict, the advertised conflict between the SAF and the RSF right now that's currently happening, definitely the background of religion and of religious practices that have been influenced have empowered them to decide who the enemy is, based on what they think religion is right for both sides.

I think if they believe that they are on the right side of religion and therefore it is their job, and it is their duty, to fight against the opposites. So then that's what they do.

So I believe that it's their job to purify a nation of, you know, some sort of misconduct. They should fight against a certain way that women are dressed, they should fight against behaviors or certain liberties that have been declared human rights, worldwide, or, you know, even in religion, but Islamic religions, as say, it's not your job, you're not entitled to putting people in their place or you're not entitled to judging people's. He who judges is God.

What patterns of religion and religiously motivated violence can be seen in the current war?

I think, uh, rape.. murder. I think rape has been actually. It's been used as a weapon. People forget that what rape actually is, whether it's rape, whether they're raping women or raping men. I think definitely all the different types of torture that are happening, all the stories that you hear, and, like they say, I'll say this in Arabic, “what is hidden is worse”. All of these things that are being done to people are religiously motivated, because they'll do it in the name of God, and looking back at history worldwide, that is unfortunately how it's been plastered or painted, that these are religious, you know, religiously driven things. And those who die are declared martyrs. You know, of them die on the side of the, you, the ASF. They're declared martyrs. Like, you're going straight to heaven for having killed somebody, for having done this, for having done that. And I disagree with that. I don't, you know, even religion, the true, the true scripture, doesn't say that. Even if you are to say somebody's a martyr, because they were fighting or they were doing, you know, “jihad” to protect their nation. That's what both sides are saying, that they are protecting their lab, they are protecting this goes under the knowledge of, you have to do this. That's what Islam tells us to do to protect our honor, to protect our lab.

And so they're looking at it as a religious, uh, you know, jihadist, and not jihadist as a terrorist, but just, I'm going to go straight to heaven 'cause God's gonna appreciate what I'm doing.

To what extent is religion used as a justification for violence by both parties, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) ?

To the ultimates, to the ultimates are, especially in Sudan, because in 1989, the Islamist movement, all of that happened. People are, you know, it's become a way to, you, remove the power from people, because if you say that's what God said, then it shuts them up immediately.

They can't argue with the Word of God, and unfortunately, a lot of people are not educated on the Word of God. They haven't been able to, you know, read it or ponder it or understand it or think about it and look at all the different angles and decide for themselves what they think is right.

Should they be quiet and just listen to what a leader has said or do they need to disagree with a mindset or a movement? And so using that and telling them, no, we know the word of God, you need to be quiet and listen to what we say has allowed one side or just any ruling party to get away with whatever they want to get away with.

And it's been a lot of things in Sudan, even prior to the 2023 war, you know, the rules that were put in state that were Islamist rules in a country where, before the referendum in 2011, South Sudanese people, not everybody's a Muslim. There's a big Christian party, or a lot of Christian people, and then also you have the Copts who were still there, and so the war happened. Who is Christian? So that's not fair..

What has happened to the churches and mosques or any of the worship places during this current conflict ?

I mean. They've blown up what they've blown up, and they've left what they left. Like houses, you know, it's like.. You know, some of our houses are blown up, some of our houses are okay. The same applies to churches and mosques and hospitals.

How do religious ideologies shape the alliances and divisions among armed groups?

It depends on who is heading, the religious group. So some are, you know, not very religious. They're a little bit on the softer end, let's say, where they allow certain liberties, and then they have a follower that wants to follow that preaching in that messaging. But what took over after the Coup of 1989, was that one party took over, they had a very strict religious rule. They forced a lot of people to either leave the country, live an exile, and for the rest, it's just either, you know, deal with it and be okay with whatever the government of Omar Al-Bahsir was pushing, or to deal with being in, you, these little torture houses that they big, sorry, torture houses, or be, you know, unjustly crucified, basically, for whatever crimes they deemed God said was okay, or not okay, according to them, or according to what benefited them.

What are the challenges in addressing religious influence when seeking peace in Sudan?

I think there is no way for there to be peace when, you know, you're taking religious or, you know, religious mindsets into account, especially since we are highly influenced, a lot of the religious orientation in Sudan. I think it's based on a lot of ignorance. It's not very scholarly. It's not based on studying. I'm not saying this is everything, but just in general, even because I've

traveled all around Sudan, you know, I've been to Darfur. I've been to Kordofan, I've been to the East, Kassala, I've been to Port Sudan, I've been to the North, Al-Shimaliyya.

It's not really an understanding of, you know, we've studied these, we've understood this. It's just, these are the rules that, you know, my ruler said, I needed to follow. And so therefore, it leads to a lot of constriction.. And that leads to no growth. There's a lot of, I think, and this is something I've decided is my conclusion for one of the reasons that Sudan has been where it is, is that, you know, we're taught that if you suffer in the world, you're gonna go straight to heaven, you're

gonna be blessed in heaven., You know, I'm poor, if I'm poor on earth, I'm rich in heaven. So they're like, okay, let me stay poor. You know?

Or also, I think the mindset of martyrdom of becoming a Shahid or a martyr in Sudan is is so strongly painted in a way that the youth is just seeking death. And I saw that during the revolution, where those who were, you know, at the protests or at the sit-in, and didn't die, were upset. I wish I died. I don't want to fight. I'd rather die and have my picture posted online for a few days, or whatever, and my mom gets the glory of thinking she's going to go straight to heaven, 'cause I died, shot by a bullet. Running.

That It's taken away our want to live, and influence the focus, just become this life, narrow vision towards death, and then looking for death by you know, glorified death through putting up with suffering. And I think that mindset, the fact that it was implemented in the youth and in the generations before, and people seeking this, like, absolution from all their sins by becoming a “martyr” has taken away their inner will to want to fight for something and to actually develop the country and make it better, because to do that, that means you want to live in the results that you help create.

Otherwise, you're just like, let me go. I'll go. God has it set up, I'm gonna have seven mansions and 70, you know, beautiful women and all of that.

What sources or evidence are most important for studying religion’s role in this conflict?

I think the Quran, If you're a Muslim, just read the book. Teach people the Arabic language and let them read the book. That's all they need to do. That's your book. That's what God gave you. You know, I didn't disagree with everybody with the “Sunnah” and all these other explanations. These were all written by man, you know? They were not, if you believe in God and you believe in the book, God said, this is what I'm giving you, and this is all you need in his book. So read his book. And if you don't understand his book, then don't ask some, you know, don't listen to what somebody else said it means. Learn the language, especially in Sudan, where, you know,

people, they want to become an Arab country or a part of the Arab, you know, the Arab league, so then focus on learning the language rather than memorizing what somebody else said.

And then also we have all these, how do you say, you know, we have all these like little sub you know, chefs who have their own following, like, you know, just like the Shia and Sunna, Sufis. We've got, and everybody's just preaching their own language and their own things, and they're having people follow rules and thinking that that's how they're going to be absolved, and that's just all, you know, other than it being misleading, is just keeping people stuck.

What would you want the others to understand about religion and this conflict?

It's a weapon. Religion's a weapon.

Religion's definitely a weapon, and it's a weapon that we've been taught since we were very, very young, and it's a weapon that you're not allowed to think about. You know, that is the nuclear bomb of all nuclear bombs, religion.

Definitely. And whoever is, you know, like they say, "guns don't kill people. People kill people", which is true. It's just that's the tool that people use. But they blame the guns, but it's not about the gun, it's not who held the gun and shot. So it's not religion, it's who used religion, and the way how it is being misinterpreted, and playing on people's lack of education and making sure they continue to have a lack of education so that you have that power over them. You know, evening Sudan, like, one of the things that really bothers me in our region is, you know, all of these refugee camps, all of these humanitarian efforts to teach people things, are to keep them as carpenters or farmers or you, why isn't anybody teaching anybody AI? Why isn't anybody teaching anybody software engineering? Why isn't anybody teaching IT? Or, you know, even when they teach medically related things, it's to keep women as midwives or, you know. So all of these things are just to keep people stuck where they are

It's such a technique that's been used, and I don't know when that's gonna change honestly.

But it has, it has to come from within. You know, people just have to be sick of it. And once as long as they believe with the power of religion, that you shouldn't be sick of it, because ultimately you're going to go to heaven, that it's much better than, you know, this is the real American thing, you know. Straight to heaven, whatever you want. And so, then why would I fight? You know?

Being impatient is easier than being religious.

Interview Summary with interviewee 005 (Sudanese Academic, Muslim, from Darfur region, residing in Port Sudan, graduate of Business studies, conducted peace and reconciliation projects in Darfur region).

Consent to this interview being recorded.

How has religion historically influenced conflicts in Sudan especially between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) ?

I think the level of religions that are already in our country is affecting the war in Sudan because we are in Sudan. Our belief is on the surface, I can say, it's not deep believing with religion. The people there don't know what's the purpose and what is the main, what is the main thing, what is that why we do things, why we are in this life deeply, people don't know practically. So this limited knowledge is fact really negatively. And when we say, or study the nature of war. But on another level, the negative level is positive for them because this is helping them to go far, I think, in my opinion.

To what extent is religion used as a justification for violence by both parties, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) ?

Both parties used religion RSF and SAF, they used it in so many different strong ways, to a very large extent to justify human rights violations, they used religion as a big reason,. a big permission to do this all.

And this is due to the limit and understanding of being, of our religion. There is nothing like this. This is, I think, if I understand your question.

How do political and religious factors interact in the ongoing conflict?

In my opinion, our political system in our country is already built by this limited knowledge of religious freedom among the past years. So political in my opinion is one of our living activities dialect activities when we build our work with this limit information, that's already affecting, when we now in our country, I think we have this thing is as basic will do anything without counting the opinion of religion, and very, very strong in believing, but unfortunately in limited believings, I would keep the understanding of what is the purpose of religion studies, and no one wants to study or find evidences, you know, for the, what are the most important studying of religion role in this.

What sources or evidence are most important for studying religion's role in this conflict?

Yes, there is a lot of evidence, in all their activities, activities start they use the word “Allahu Akbar” when they started the war they said “Allahu Akbar” they are saying the name of Allah. They mentioned the name of all the activities. When the people kill others, they say “Allahu Akbar”. When they want to attack it's also “Allahu Akbar”like that. It's, it's very easy to say they use what is it?

What patterns of religion and religiously motivated violence can be seen in the current war ?

Honestly, religion is not always the first reason, I think, but it's usually used as a strong tool to divide people in Sudan, especially between groups seen as more “Islamists” or religiously conservative, and others seen as more leaning towards tribalism and the importance of culture and tradition, there is certainly a pattern that targets people based on few things such as how they practice religion or which group/tribe they belong to or what community they come from.

How do religious ideologies shape the alliances and divisions among armed groups?

I think, in my opinion, There are many alliances that participate in shaping more political pattern and ethnicity as well, but religion always adds another understanding or what they call, i think layer, you can find so many groups, and so many religious parties, but some groups align because they share the same of a bit different religious visions, and others find differences that lead in the end to their division in ways through which religion should influence the state.

Can you please explain the role of religion and religious identity in intergroup relations during the conflict?

I think religion generally, or even lets say religious identity can be a main reason, I think for so many things, like fear or maybe something else. In so many places sometimes where you can find only one sect from islam for example, people who come to that region and who are practicing different or other religions, they always feel isolated or they don't belong to that space.

What are the challenges in addressing religious influence when seeking peace in Sudan?

I don't know if there is directly one, or many, but I think people in Sudan, now they don't trust religious leaders are all, you know, why? Because some of them took sides, they do go on Friday prayers and they start talking about politics, about Burhan, about Hemedti, and people just want to pray, but they don't care. I think they just want to talk about politics.

Wallah I remember last Friday, when I went to do “Juma’a” or Friday prayers, the mosque was almost empty. You know, I think people are getting tired of Burhan or those crazy people and their stories, people are tired of the war, they just want peace. So yeah I think when religion is very much based on politics, it becomes very “Haram” to talk about it, it's like forbidden and not because of fear, but maybe again people, we are just tired.

How do local and international religious organizations impact the conflict dynamics?

It's very hard to answer this, some organizations are really doing nothing in the country, not bad, and not good, just nothing, they get money and they don't help. And some of them try to help people, like in villages like in Aljazeera, they help them with food, water, clothes, and so many other things.

What would you want the others to understand about religion and this conflict?

There are a lot of things, maybe I can answer very short. Religion is one of the reasons why people in Sudan are struggling today, it's a very main reason and I think it's not because it's Islam, Christianity, or “Sufi” or anything else. It's just how the politicians in so many places or countries, even in Sudan, use religion to control people and have power over them. And the war is very bad, we need help.

Interview Summary with interviewee 006 (Local in Sudan, Just Muslim, from Nuba Mountain, residing in Port Sudan).

Consent to this interview being recorded.

1. How do you think religion has affected the fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)?

You know, I think like as a Sudanese, the religion has always an effect to the situation of Sudan and even before the divide of South Sudan, I think always religion is play huge role of dividing people and also playing people together. But yeah, and I think, yeah.

But, here especially in this, especially in this war right now, is going now in Sudan. And also it shows how deep religion could go on a different level. It's not only about other people having a different belief system, but also even during this Islam, and now you can hear between Sufi and and Sunni, you know. Also, there's a conflict in between.

2. Have you or your family been affected by violence connected to any religious differences?

I think Yes, but now, I don't think so, like, but I think it's more like, ethnic. like, yeah, like, I lost many of my relatives, many of them from my family, you know, and then I think even most of my family are Muslim, but also they get killed.

So it's something beyond, I think it's more like ethnic things too. Because, you know, both whether, what they are called, Rapid support or the national army. They are all saying things like, "Allahu-Akbar," you see? killing each other.

3. What do people in your community say about the role of religion in the conflict?

I think, yeah, like, you know, like, for example, my family, right now, they became more religious, but also I understand during the situation like how people are feeling, you know? And in that sense, people, sometimes we start to seek for a belief, just to give them some hope. But in a way, but also what they hear from the government, from the news, but also it's covered by the religious, by religious Islamists, like, you know? They're using that and even in "Almasjid", in a lot of massagid, Mosques, like, even the army, they are the ones who give "Khutba", you know? So, and it's all about those people that are attacking our belief system, they want to destroy the identity of Sudan, they want to destroy our legacy, I mean this kind of nonsense.

And I think they are using that too..Yeah, this is in the scale of the government of the Sudan, how the country, like the system. Yeah.

4. How do you see different religious groups living together during these times?

No, no, I mean, like, I don't I don't see like huge difference because like if you throw my humble understanding about the Sudan system, you know, because I feel all the parties

and even all the rebel groups, you know, they are a part of the Sudanese system. It's Something very rooted. It's not all about now. and the belief system is always playing a huge role, even in many rebel groups, even when they are speaking about Replsia, freedom, about human rights.

But when it comes to the belief system, it's very, they can't get out of that.

Because it's something very deep, it's something, it changed our identity, you know. Like, I think it's something we never sit down and speak about. and, yeah, like, I think both, like, whether they are what they call it the Rapid support, whether, you know, they all, we all suffering from that, like, I think even the liberals, parties and all of that, when it came, they're not very honest about that thing.

5. Do you feel religion is used to divide people or bring them together?

I think you know, since the, let's start since the collapse of the Sudanese ancient civilization. we lost, and no religion that united us. It always makes us divide more, more than to unite, because the culture of Sudan, and the history of Sudan, is based on the diversity of belief. It's not true to believe in one or two major religions.. So, I think, yeah, there's always problems like that. And then, you know, like, let's say, you know, in South Sudan and right now in Nuba Mountain, in North Sudan, also, in Darfur, and all those people, they have their own belief system, you know, and even before this time we are 200 years Christian by the Greek people, you know, and those things, it played huge role in our world, but right now, we are totally lost in, you know, because also, Islam, it's it has a different form of understanding of belief, you know, some of Sudanese that became a Muslim because they are escaping from the slavery.

So if you are a Muslim, so, you, and some of them are still, they have those kinds of rumors. And when they think about belief, they think about freedom, you know?

Yeah, so you have to understand like, what, because belief is very big, image, picture. Yeah. Like. So it is like a different, which way, you know, like, you know, it's about that, like. Yeah, yeah, it's almost like, because we are not, we are not a democratic country. We are not a country “Hurra” meaning there is no freedom of religion, of speech, of. You know, there is but like, we don't understand, like, the freedom. No, no, we don't understand the meaning of to be citizens, you know, to be, this land. And this is our struggle more.

6. Do you think the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), have used religion, such as references to the Quran, to justify human rights violations committed during the conflict—framing them not as violations, but as actions acceptable under religious belief ?

Yeah, of course, they're using that both of them, like both of them, for example, when “Hemidit” say. “Allahu-Akar, Bism Allah Alrahman Alraheem” “In the name of Allah” When they start this speech, like, you to yourself, you make it very clear.

And also for the government, you have ‘Al-braouon’. This is whatever you call it. Yeah. And those people, they don't fight to bring democracy for the country. They fight to bring “Sharia Law” for the country. And that itself scared people even to believe or to accept.

7. How do you think religion influences who supports the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)?

I think religion has a very strong role in this, you know, many people support and cheer for SAF because they think they are the defenders of Islam, and I think I said before that the Sudanese people care a lot about religion, so this could be a reason why they support SAF for example. And then for the other people who support RSF, maybe because they think it wants to bring the

secular state so they support them, or maybe not because of religion, I think some people in the West support them because they think RSF has a lot of power, and it will help protect them. So yes, there could be many reasons, I don't know.

What would you want others to understand about religion and this conflict?

I don't think there is much to say, I think people there like the majority in Sudan. Sudan is the creator of the human civilization, and I think, like, it's a creator of even of the belief system, but, like, yeah, for the Sudanese, we just lost things that I don't, you know, like, the knowledge is out, I don't know.

Interview Summary with interviewee 007 (Local in Sudan, Muslim Sunni, from West Darfur region, residing in Khartoum, and in Omdurman).

Consent to this interview being recorded.

How do you think religion has affected the fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)?

Religions, for me, I didn't link religion to any fighting either in Sudan or out Sudan. Maybe some countries, yeah, but inside Sudan, I think this is not the issue. The issue is that this is what we call "Al-Akhwan Almuslimeen", I don't know how to translate it in Arabic, "MuslimBrothers" but this is like Alkizan . They claimed that they were fighting for the Islam, and in reality, they didn't. They treat Islam like something that really. And this is the picture that's come out for the other people that are outside of Sudan.

But religion, it's not it's not a part of, you know, the conflict. I'm sure from that side.

Have you or your family been affected by violence connected to any religious differences?

No, actually, no, but to be honest with you, nowadays, most Sudanese are Muslims, I think. Only a few, but the part that non-Muslims are already separated in 2011, right?But inside Muslim people, there are different what we call "Sufi", "Shia" and "Sunni", I mean religious sects.

Yes, So if you talk about these divisions, yeah, it might be like some

conflict in between them. But generally, they were all Muslim. or not all, but most of them. I didn't find any non-Muslim nowadays among Sudanese, actually.

What do people in your community say about the role of religion in the conflict?

Um. People they don't know about the entity, or the details of what happened in Sudan, think that maybe religion is a part of this conflict. As I mentioned before. But for me, personally, I'm not not half any doubt that religion would not. have any contribution to this conflict in Sudan . Some people, yeah, when I talk to other people from other nationalities, here in Saudi Arabia, for example, they feel like there are some religious issues between the two parties that lead to a conflict guarantee and Sudan.

Do you feel religion is used to divide people or bring them together?

when I talk about religion, I talk about Islam, for sure, because this is our religion, the. And our country, you know.

So Islam is, if they apply in the right ways, they will align people together. If they are treated as those or maybe also the other parties "Al-dam Alsarre" "Rapid Support Forces" that some of them, they are claiming they are keen of Islam. all of them, they are really, maybe, impact negatively toward this where currently in Sudan.

Have you seen any efforts by community members to reduce religious tensions?

Unfortunately, Hager, I didn't hear about anyone taking care of Sudan right now. Only this part, but the other part, that politicians and also they are Muslim. They are trying to solve the issues, but they have no power to do so, but from outside of Sudan, for example, like you say, South Sudan, I didn't find like they care to in this conflict. No one cared for that right now. Yeah. This is the reality.

How do you think religion influences who supports the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)

Okay, the thing that is apparently showing, because I'm not a politician, I'm not have any, I'm interfering with this one or with the details, but the things that apparently show that this is RSF, right?

Yes, they are supported by Non-Muslim countries, especially African countries, maybe Israel, or other countries, like Kenya.

On the other side, the military side is supported by Muslim countries. Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey. I think those are a group of countries that are supporting this is what we call, “Muslim-brothers”.

But this is. Yes, yes, yes, yes. But added to that, they are military, they are not caring for just taking support from Muslim. If they find Russian support and they invite Russia, China, and Israel, even if they want to support the military, they are most welcome. anybody, but I find Muslim countries, they are supporting the military right now.

What would you want others to understand about religion and this conflict?

The most important message is that religion is not part of this conflict. If they apply religion in the right way, in a proper way, religion will be growing people, not dividing people. And I think, yes, using our claiming that we are supporting Muslim, Islam or something like that, this is part of the conflict, but actually, those people claiming they are here for Islam,. They didn't, you know, like doing what Islam instructed people to do.

This is the part that, yeah, I want to emphasize. Islam will not have. It's a peaceful religion.

Interview Summary with interviewee 008 (Christian, religious leader/Imam, From Nuba Mountain, residing in both South Sudan and Ethiopia).

As a Christian religious leader, how do you see religion influencing the ongoing conflict between the SAF and RSF?

In my opinion, religion is not a surface cause for this war that started in 2023, I think it's deeply present in the background as well in relation to everything, even in politics. The SAF for example in particular has a long history in using Islam to define their actions and national identity, while excluding us the Christians and we always felt discriminated against by so many citizens in Sudan, even in our neighborhoods, it always felt like we were outsiders, maybe at least where we live. And if we speak about the speeches held by the SAF, they always make their speeches and actions carry that tone, that the army is defending the “Islamic” nation or the Muslim nation. The RSF on the other hand, even though less ideological, often speaks in religious terms too—for instance jihad...etc, and justice. Maybe I can say that it might all seem

political, religion may not seem as a source, but it's a very strong aspect in shaping how people look at this war and how they chose sides on whom they support.

The influence limited to churches and mosques being destroyed or what else? Is it a religious fight as well?

This is a difficult one to know the answer for, but as my understanding, it goes beyond the destroyed buildings only. The war has also touched so many people's spiritual identities. In some areas, our Christian communities feel the war is only targeting them, intentionally and not just by accident, but because of who we are, because of the God we worship who is different than theirs, sometimes they see us as people who don't have any religion. Even militias sometimes treat Muslim Civilians from certain tribes better than others, and again I can say this war may or may not be completely religious, but it definitely has some religious consequences. I personally feel that when our churches are burned down, especially the ones in Omdurman and Khartoum, that shows a clear message of showing us that "we don't belong here".

Have you noticed religious messages used to justify violence or violations?

I would like to say yes, there was a time I was in Khartoum and then Port Sudan recently, during this war I noticed that especially in SAF-controlled areas. There have been Friday sermons that speak of defending the faith, warning people against what they call "The enemies of Islam", I don't know why, but it's very sad because they give people permission to kill if it's in the name of God. This is very dangerous because it only makes accountability even more difficult.

In what ways have religious beliefs been manipulated by political or military leaders? Examples ?

In most cases, the SAF has always shown itself to the community in Sudan, as the savior of religion and Islam and its values as well. I mean even during this current war, they showed their fight as protecting Islam from the western influence, or even the international influence generally. In some cases SAF in the White Nile state was telling the troops that the RSF were "anti-Islam" just because they worked with some Western NGOs and "Zionists". On the other side, RSF commanders have visited some mosques, and gave donations to Imams, while calling themselves the defenders of "the weak" against corrupt religious groups. I think I see both RSF and SAF are very much reflecting their work on the holy language, but only for power and becoming the rulers of the country.

How have religious communities or institutions responded to the violence ?

It depends, I can say some may have been very brave because they helped in organizing shelters, and sometimes hiding the victims of the war, or even by offering food. And some are very much divided. For example, in some states like in Kadugli, one church leader told me he couldn't fight or say anything against the SAF in that area, because they are the ones protecting the town. Others in some places held by RSF in Darfur for example, had no other choice than to cooperate with the RSF even if they didn't like it, they just did it to survive. And yes, I have seen Muslim and Christian leaders working together to protect civilians and they don't always speak with one voice, but many care. I hope that answers the question.

Do you believe religion has been used as a tool for division or for peace ?

In Sudan, this is very difficult to decide. But now I see it more for division than bringing peace in the country. I think it's mostly used to differentiate between who is loyal, how real, and how deserving also makes them feel less. I am not saying there are no peace messages at all, no, they are just quieter, especially in refugee camps around the country, in places shared by Muslims and Christians who lived through this trauma. So maybe we can say they share the pain.

What role can religious leaders play in reducing tensions between militias and military groups ?

We have a very strong role as religious leaders, but I think it becomes better and stronger only when we work together and unite. We really need to share the truth and say loudly "This war is not only holy. This violence is not from either of Gods whether Allah, Jesus or any other that people believe in". I think we have the power to bring people together. Maybe we can start by running some get-togethers, and peace building sessions. Maybe if this happens, there will be some hope left somewhere.

How do different religious groups or alliances view each other in this conflict?

There is a huge mixture of fear. In most cases Muslims think of Christians as supporters of the RSF just because of the secular state they are calling for, and on the other hand Christians think all Muslims are supporting SAF. But I believe that's not true at all. There are many people who are somewhere in the middle, they don't support this or that. So I think this has had a huge effect on how people see or perceive each other, especially for displaced people who are affected by the war.

Have there been any religious calls for reconciliation?

I think yes, as I remember in some places but they are very weak compared to the voice and the way this war looks like. There are some bishops and imams who issued some joint letters and calls, and if I remember right, there was a prayer I attended in Juba where Muslim and Christian leaders have called for an end to the war but I don't believe they reached any of the commanders, and simply there is a lot more that needs to be done.

How have religion and religious practices been affected by the war?

As we have seen in the news and what we have witnessed recently, many many churches and mosques have been either closed and in worst cases destroyed completely by both sides. Which made so many people more afraid to gather in RSF areas and zones, and I heard that Christians were told not to ring bells in the churches. In some SAF zones, Muslim leaders who are against the war have been silenced. But I still see how positive people are and pray for a change.

What is your perspective on Islam Christianity, and ethnic identity in this conflict?

I would like to say that in the case of Sudan, home, faith and tribe cannot be separated, for example being Christian is automatically linked to being from the South or the Nuba Mountains. While being Muslim is simply tied to Arab or Darfuri identities, even if not all Arabs are extremists. And I think this war has made these links even more clear. In some cases when us Nuba Christians are being stopped at the checkpoints, our faith and ethnicity both put us at risk. But all I want to say: Islam is not the enemy to us at all. Us Christians are not the enemies to Muslims as well. The real enemy is the people in power and the hatred planted in the hearts of different communities, in addition to lies and other factors.

What message do you want others to understand about religion and the war?

I would like people to understand that religion is not the main cause of this war, but it's just being used in this war, and it's very important for all of us to separate God from violence, I don't believe that God in any religions has called for violence, whether in Christianity, Islam or any other beliefs. Both Muslims and Christians in Sudan need to reject those who speak of war, killing, and blood and say it's holy. In addition they need to understand that SAF and RSF do not represent any of our faiths, and Sudan needs peace rather than conflict.

Annex

Interview Thesis: Consent Questions and Guiding Questions

Consent and Context

These interviews were conducted only for educational purposes for the Master's Thesis of *Hager Eissa Abdallah Mohammed* for the Vienna Masters of Arts in Applied Human Rights. This thesis explores and investigates the question: *To what extent has religion influenced patterns of violence and intergroup relations in the Sudanese armed conflict (2023–2025), particularly in shaping alliances and justifications for violence among both key actors SAF and RSF?*

This Thesis will be submitted and graded in Austria, Vienna, and there is a possibility of its accessibility to other members and students at the university.

Anonymity:

Your insights, experiences and opinions are very essential for this thesis, I would like to include them in my research. While I will require information at your end, regarding your identity/name, role, religion (if any), area of expertise, the community you represent, and the city you reside. All of this information will not appear in the final thesis and will not be available to anyone else but myself. Meaning names of all participants will remain anonymized, and each interviewee is identified by a code or a specific number, for instance (001, 002etc) and the community represented if needed/required.

1. I have carefully read and understood the above statement. YES / NO
2. I consent to this interview being recorded. YES / NO
3. I am aware that my participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time without the obligation for any reasoning. YES / NO
4. I willingly agree to take part in these thesis interviews, as long as it's for research purposes only. YES / NO
5. I understand that it will be anonymized. YES / NO
6. I give permission to only notes to be taken, and not recorded YES / NO
7. I understand this research might be available for other members at the university.

Should you have any concerns or any further questions, interviewees could contact: Hager Eissa, via Email at (hagirrorowa@gmail.com).

Interview Questions Outline - in June/July 2025

Questions for Religious Leaders

1. How do you see religion influencing the ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)?
2. Is the influence limited to churches and mosques being destroyed or what else since both parties seem to be fighting for more than just power, it's rather a religious fight as well?
3. Have you noticed religious messages whether directly or indirectly are being used to justify any types of violence or human rights violations during the conflict?
4. In what ways do you think religious beliefs have been manipulated by both, either political or military leaders ? Could you please clarify with concrete examples?
5. How have religious communities or institutions responded to the violence linked to this conflict?
6. Do you believe religion has been used as a tool for division or for peace in this conflict?
7. What is the role that can be played by the religious leaders in attempting to reduce tensions between conflicting militias and military groups in Sudan?
- 8. How do different religious groups or alliances view each other in the context of the conflict, meaning the different communities?**
9. Have there been any religious calls for reconciliation since the beginning and during the conflict?
- 10. How do you think religion and religious practices as well as different community worships have been affected by the war?**
- 11. What is your perspective on the relations between both religions, Islam/christianity or any other types of religious sects, and ethnic identity in this conflict?**
12. What would you want the others to understand about religion generally and the current war between the 2 warring parties? What is your message?

Questions for Community Representatives

1. How has religion affected your community during the armed conflict ?
2. Can you share any examples of violence or discrimination based on religion that you or your community have experienced, and has religion been used as a way of justification in any of the cases?
3. How do different religious groups within your community interact during the conflict?
4. What impact has religious violence had on social cohesion in your area/community ?
5. Do community members feel protected or targeted because of their religious beliefs or identity ?
6. There have been reports of both churches and mosques being destroyed or repurposed by either Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) or The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in various parts of Sudan, including Khartoum, do you think there is a pattern or an intention behind this? For instance, are these acts driven by religious targeting or strategic purposes? What's your take on the motives behind the actions?
7. How do religious beliefs influence people's attitudes towards the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)?
8. What are the ways that are being used to recruit people?
9. Do you think the 2019 revolution has in any way shaped the current conflict, either directly or indirectly? For instance, has it influenced the mindset of politicians, policy makers, or even the ordinary people in terms of how they perceive or respond to the revolution itself plays a role in shaping how people are engaging with the current crisis? If yes, how ? In short, how do you think religion shapes the way people explain or justify the conflict?
10. Given the long history of violence and ongoing atrocities in Darfur region – including the genocide, ethnic cleansing, and severe human rights violations committed by both Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) even now during the current conflict of 2023-2025, can you provide some context on the current situation there, particularly regarding the targeting of Sufi communities and ethnic groups like Masalit and Fur? And could you share any specific examples if possible?

- 11. Are there any local efforts by the community to promote peace and understanding between religious groups?**
- 12. How has the conflict changed the way people practice their religion in your community ?**
13. What type of support do communities affected by religious violence, or any of the communities in the country need the most right now? And what is your message ?

Questions for Experts/Scholars

1. How has religion historically influenced conflicts in Sudan especially between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) ?
2. What patterns of religion and religiously motivated violence can be seen in the current war?
3. To what extent is religion used as a justification for violence by both parties, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) ?
4. What has happened to the churches and mosques or any of the worship places during this current conflict ?
5. How do religious ideologies shape the alliances and divisions among armed groups?
6. Can you please explain the role of religious identity in intergroup relations during the conflict?
7. How do political and religious factors interact in the ongoing conflict?
8. What are the challenges in addressing religious influence when seeking peace in Sudan?
9. How do local and international religious organizations impact the conflict dynamics?
10. What sources or evidence are most important for studying religion's role in this conflict?
11. What would you want the others to understand about religion and this conflict?

Questions for Locals in Sudan

1. How do you think religion has affected the fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)?
2. Have you or your family been affected by violence connected to any religious differences?

3. What do people in your community say about the role of religion in the conflict?
4. How do you see different religious groups living together during these times?
5. Do you feel religion is used to divide people or bring them together?
6. Do you think the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), have used religion, such as references to the Quran, to justify human rights violations committed during the conflict—framing them not as violations, but as actions acceptable under religious belief ?
7. How has the conflict changed religious events or gatherings in your area?
8. Have you seen any efforts by community members to reduce religious tensions?
9. What role does religion play in how people explain the causes of the conflict?
10. How do you think religion influences who supports the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)
11. What would you want others to understand about religion and this conflict?