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RA Reviews' Editorial Voice: Opinions on Sudan

We, the Intellectuals, and another war in Sudan

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The conflict in Sudan has lasted 20 days, and the worst is still to be feared for the civilian populations, victims of urban violence, political chaos, and who are lost in the "labyrinth of Generals." Currently, 45 million Sudanese are held hostage by warlords and regional interests. As of early May, 2023, the toll from the fighting across the country is reported to have exceeded 530 civilian deaths, a number that will surely rise in the days to come. There are already 1.1 million refugees, and nearly 2.5 million displaced persons. In Khartoum, more than 60% of health services are destroyed, and we are witnessing an escalation of violence.

As the conflict has just started, the foreign powers thought only of evacuating their diplomatic personnel, repatriating their nationals, and calling for a ceasefire, without intervening on behalf of the civilian populations. Does this mean that they did not foresee this conflict, if we are to believe the words of the UN special representative for Sudan, Volker Perthes, who, reported to the Security Council that the return to peace is near with "the settlement and the return of a civilian government" before mid—April?

The big mistake of these powers is that they no longer manage to foresee, but to govern is precisely to foresee—according to the French journalist, publisher and politician Emile de Girardin, in his book *The Universal Politics* (1852)—in a world where the local stakes of power, and in this case in Sudan, are easily discernible: namely the tensions that already exist within the cohabitation between the head of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman al-Burhan--and that of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)—the former associate of Al-Burhan, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, known as "Hemedti".

The other error of the foreign powers was to consider that the military could contribute to the reconstruction of a democratic and stable State, while the over militarization of the Army and militia was the predictable sign of a certain conflict. Finally, the last mistake is to have forgotten that the Sudanese people could rise up against their own regime, as they did in 2019, and that they could still do so, when the defiance of their leaders would have reached a climax. Distrust that the conflict ended up arousing,

especially since the ceasefire, supposed to have started on April 27, is only a masquerade.

The Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces did not fully respect this ceasefire, as witnessed in Khartoum where gunshots and explosions were reported three days later, on April 30. Does this indicate a collapse of the truce? Certainly, and no doubt the collapse of all hope of stopping an absurd conflict linked to the sole issue of a scramble over resources that the former military partners no longer want to share. Because, indeed, we are witnessing a total war, which mobilizes "Terminators", that devastate institutions deplete resources, compromise security, and leave a traumatized and divided population and a democracy yet to be born. This is another one of those wars that has been bleeding Africa for decades. The utopia of an "end of history" that consists of domesticating violence through international law, is no more. In the 21st century, we are still witnessing traditional wars—conventional wars, which affect civilians who die at home or on the road to exile, under the impassive gaze, if not indifferent, of the international community. In the case of a conflict, we often try to judge History:

--- History, which has precisely not judged former war criminals.

The conflict also reveals the ghosts of the former regime of dictator Umar Bashir, with the release of former figures of the regime from Kober prison in Khartoum—in particular, Ahmad Haroun who was a former associate of Bashir and who is wanted by the International Criminal Court of Justice. Dictators are no longer a fatality in the 21st century!

If we fear a government of soldiers, we must fear more the power of the Islamists, who are taking advantage of this conflict to impose themselves again as an authority in a Sudan that is divided and scarred by its history.

--- History repeating itself by renaming foreign interventions
"neo--- colonialism."

History has not been that of the progress of Humanity but that of a renewal of barbarism by making civilians a weapon of war.

Indeed, since the stalemate caused by the military coup of October 25, 2021, the West has continued to demand an agreement. The current conflict is only a reflection of the failure of international mediation on the part of the mission of the United Nations, the United States, Great Britain, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. An international political intervention today must be in the order of establishing a balance on the Sudanese political scene, which must begin by (a) protecting civilians, (b) ensuring humanitarian corridors in conflict zones, and (c) in particular,

safeguarding the most vulnerable areas in Sudan. The priority is on practical issues, which consist of securing population mobility knowing that roads and airports have been the target of destructive strategies.

This balance is then only possible if an inclusive transition is put in place. The *sine qua non* condition of this undertaking would be greater representation of civilians in future political options. Regionally, this transition requires a constructivist drive from neighboring countries and regional actors for a lasting peace. Sudan cannot embark on the road to peace without a new regional integration policy. Otherwise, the country would descend into an endemic conflict, whose economic and humanitarian consequences would be disastrous for Sudan and its neighboring countries.

We, researchers, and intellectuals, place ourselves on the side of the victims in a humanistic approach. And it is because we know the hidden face of this conflict, the reality of power, and international interactions, that we have a duty, even a responsibility towards Humanity; this duty is to defend the few values that guide our steps towards the little civilization that remains to us in a world where barbarism is more and more raging; this duty is to enlighten consciences, to teach just, right citizenship, and democracy in order to be the judges of war, the judges of history, those who do not sacrifice principles, but who apply them fastidiously.

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