



# مبادرة وحدة السودان

*Unite Sudan Initiative*

*Dignity, Justice, and Peace*

Economic Exploitation and War Profiteering in the Sudan Crisis

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#### Executive Summary

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in a devastating conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), resulting in one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. While the human cost continues to mount—with tens of thousands killed and over 11 million displaced—a parallel economy of war profiteering has emerged, transforming suffering into profit for various state and non-state actors.

This proposal examines the systematic commercialization of the Sudan conflict, revealing how the war has created lucrative opportunities for arms dealers, private military contractors, resource extractors, and even humanitarian intermediaries. The conflict economy operates through multiple interconnected mechanisms: illicit gold mining and trade, international arms trafficking, mercenary services, smuggling networks, and the exploitation of humanitarian aid systems.

Key findings demonstrate that both warring factions have established sophisticated revenue-generation systems that perpetuate violence. The RSF controls significant gold mining operations in Darfur and other regions, generating an estimated \$400-500 million annually through illicit gold exports, primarily routed through the United Arab Emirates. Meanwhile, both SAF and RSF have secured weapons supplies through complex international networks, with external actors providing military support in exchange for economic concessions and geopolitical influence.

This proposal outlines the mechanisms of conflict commercialization, identifies key actors and beneficiaries, assesses the humanitarian and economic impacts, and proposes comprehensive policy recommendations to disrupt these profit-driven incentives for continued warfare.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Context

The current conflict in Sudan erupted on April 15, 2023, when tensions between the SAF, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the RSF, commanded by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), escalated into open warfare. This confrontation emerged from a power struggle within Sudan's transitional government following the 2021 military coup that derailed the country's democratic transition after the 2019 ousting of long-time dictator Omar al-Bashir.

What began as a political dispute over the integration of the RSF into the national army has transformed into a devastating civil war with profound humanitarian consequences. The conflict has killed an estimated 15,000-20,000 people, though actual casualties may be significantly higher. More than 11 million people have been displaced, making Sudan home to the world's largest internal displacement crisis. Additionally, over 2 million refugees have fled to neighboring countries, straining regional resources and stability.

The humanitarian catastrophe includes widespread reports of sexual violence, ethnic targeting, and deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Famine conditions have emerged in several regions, particularly in Darfur and Kordofan, with approximately 25 million people—more than half of Sudan's population—requiring humanitarian assistance.

### 1.2 The Concept of Conflict Commercialization

Conflict commercialization refers to the systematic transformation of warfare into a profit-generating enterprise, where various actors develop economic interests in the perpetuation of violence. This phenomenon extends beyond traditional war economies to encompass sophisticated networks of resource extraction, arms trading, private security provision, and even the monetization of humanitarian suffering.

In the context of Sudan, commercialization manifests through several interconnected dimensions:

- Resource extraction economies, particularly gold mining, which finance military operations while enriching commanders and external partners
- International arms markets that supply weapons to both factions, creating dependencies and ongoing revenue streams for suppliers

- Private military contractors and mercenary forces operating for profit
- Smuggling and trafficking networks that exploit porous borders and state collapse
- Humanitarian aid systems where intermediaries extract rents from assistance delivery

These commercial interests create powerful incentives against peace, as settlements threaten to disrupt established profit flows. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for developing effective interventions to end the conflict.

### 1.3 Objectives of This Proposal

This proposal aims to:

1. Document and analyze the primary mechanisms through which the Sudan conflict has been commercialized
2. Identify key actors—both domestic and international—who profit from the conflict's continuation
3. Assess the humanitarian and economic impacts of conflict commercialization on Sudanese civilians
4. Evaluate existing international responses and their limitations
5. Propose comprehensive policy recommendations to disrupt commercial incentives for warfare and support sustainable peace

## 2. Mechanisms of Conflict Commercialization

### 2.1 Gold Mining and Mineral Extraction

Gold mining represents the single most lucrative source of conflict financing in Sudan, particularly for the RSF. Sudan possesses significant gold reserves, with production estimated at 80-100 metric tons annually before the conflict, making it Africa's third-largest gold producer after South Africa and Ghana.

The RSF's control over key mining areas in Darfur, particularly around Jebel Amer and other sites in North and West Darfur, provides substantial revenue streams. The militia exercises de facto authority over artisanal and small-scale mining operations, imposing taxation on miners, controlling supply chains, and directly operating mining facilities. These operations generate an estimated \$400-500 million annually for the RSF, according to reports from the UN Panel of Experts.

The gold is typically smuggled out of Sudan through informal channels, avoiding official export procedures and tax obligations. The primary destination is the United Arab Emirates, particularly Dubai, where Sudanese gold enters the global market through refineries and trading companies. This arrangement benefits both the RSF, which receives payment for the gold, and UAE-based entities, which profit from the processing and resale of conflict minerals at minimal regulatory oversight.

The mining operations themselves create additional humanitarian concerns. Reports indicate the use of forced labor, child labor, and mercury contamination of water sources. Local communities face displacement, environmental degradation, and violence from competing groups seeking to control mining territories. The RSF's mining empire thus exemplifies how resource extraction fuels both conflict financing and civilian suffering.

## **2.2 Arms Trade and Weapons Supply**

The continuous flow of weapons into Sudan demonstrates how international arms markets perpetuate conflict. Both the SAF and RSF have received significant military supplies from external sources, despite UN arms embargoes on Darfur and international calls for restraint.

The RSF has received weapons and ammunition from several sources, with particularly strong evidence of UAE support. Reports document cargo flights from the UAE to RSF-controlled areas, delivering small arms, ammunition, and military equipment. Libya has also served as a source, with weapons flowing across Sudan's western border from Libyan militias and arms depots.

The SAF has maintained access to its traditional suppliers, including Russia, China, and various Eastern European countries. Egypt has provided support to the SAF, seeing the conflict through the lens of regional competition with the UAE and concerns about instability on its southern border. Iran has also been implicated in providing drones and other military equipment to the SAF.

The arms trade creates a self-perpetuating cycle: suppliers' profit from ongoing demand, while armed factions require continued resource extraction to fund weapons purchases. This dynamic transforms manufacturers, intermediaries, and logistics providers into stakeholders in conflict continuation. Moreover, the opacity of international arms dealing, including the use of shell companies, third-party transfers, and diplomatic immunity for shipments, makes enforcement of arms embargoes extremely challenging.

## **2.3 Private Military Companies and Mercenaries**

The privatization of military force represents another dimension of conflict commercialization in Sudan. Both factions have utilized external military contractors and advisors, though the extent and nature of this involvement vary.

The RSF has historical connections to the Russian private military company Wagner Group, which operated in Sudan before the current conflict. Wagner's presence in Sudan centered on gold mining concessions and military training, creating a model where security services were exchanged for resource extraction rights. While Wagner's

direct involvement has diminished following internal Russian developments, the precedent of PMC involvement remains significant.

Additionally, both sides have recruited fighters from neighboring countries and conflict zones. The RSF has incorporated fighters from Chad and other Sahelian countries, while various reports suggest the presence of foreign advisors and technical specialists supporting both factions. These arrangements typically involve cash payments, resource access, or other economic incentives, further embedding commercial logic into military operations.

The use of private military actors raises accountability concerns, as these forces often operate outside formal command structures and international humanitarian law frameworks. Their presence also indicates how modern warfare increasingly incorporates market-based provision of military services, with violence becoming a commodity traded internationally.

#### **2.4 Smuggling and Illicit Trade Networks**

State collapse and conflict have created ideal conditions for smuggling and trafficking networks to flourish across Sudan. These networks move diverse commodities—from drugs and contraband goods to weapons and even people—generating revenue for armed groups and criminal organizations.

Sudan's geographic position makes it a natural transit corridor. The country shares borders with seven nations and provides routes connecting sub-Saharan Africa with North Africa and the Middle East. Control over border crossings and transport routes thus offers lucrative taxation and extortion opportunities for whichever faction holds territory.

The RSF, building on its origins as a border patrol and counter-smuggling force, has particularly strong involvement in these networks. Despite official anti-smuggling mandates, the militia has been implicated in facilitating and profiting from smuggling operations, including human trafficking and migrant smuggling toward Europe via Libya and Egypt. Reports indicate that migrants pay fees to RSF-affiliated groups for passage or protection, creating revenue streams from desperate people seeking safety.

Drug trafficking has also increased, with Sudan serving as a route for narcotics moving from production areas toward consumer markets. Tramadol, cannabis, and other substances transit through Sudan, with armed groups taxing shipments or directly participating in distribution networks.

These illicit economies demonstrate how conflict creates opportunities for criminal profit, while simultaneously showing how commercial interests in smuggling routes provide

incentives for continued territorial control and resistance to peace settlements that might restore state authority and law enforcement.

## **2.5 Exploitation of Humanitarian Aid**

Perhaps most troublingly, the humanitarian response to Sudan's crisis has itself become partially commercialized, with various actors extracting profits from aid delivery systems. This phenomenon does not implicate legitimate humanitarian organizations but rather refers to the broader ecosystem in which aid operates.

Armed groups have imposed unofficial taxation on humanitarian convoys and demanded payments for access to populations in need. Both SAF and RSF have been accused of restricting aid delivery to areas controlled by opponents while facilitating access to their own territories, weaponizing humanitarian assistance for strategic advantage. Such restrictions create artificial scarcities that armed groups can exploit.

Additionally, intermediary companies providing logistics, security, and transport services for humanitarian operations operate in an environment with inflated costs due to insecurity and limited competition. While many of these services are necessary, the lack of oversight and competitive pressure can result in exploitation of humanitarian budgets.

Currency exchange manipulation represents another mechanism. In contexts with multiple exchange rates or currency controls, those controlling foreign exchange access can extract significant rents from aid organizations required to convert foreign currency for local operations. Reports suggest that armed groups and associated businesspeople have profited from forced currency exchanges at disadvantageous rates.

The commercialization of humanitarian aid creates perverse incentives, where actors benefit from sustained crisis conditions and thus have little interest in conflict resolution that would normalize the operating environment and reduce profit opportunities.

## **3. Key Actors and Beneficiaries**

### **3.1 Domestic Actors**

#### **3.1.1 Rapid Support Forces (RSF) Leadership**

The RSF, under Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), has developed a sophisticated conflict economy centered on gold mining operations. Hemedti and his family have built a business empire extending beyond military operations to include mining companies, agricultural ventures, and import-export businesses. The conflict has enabled the RSF to consolidate control over resource-rich territories while using military force to suppress competition and extract wealth.

The RSF's economic interests create powerful incentives against accepting peace settlements that would require integration into formal state structures with greater transparency and accountability. The militia's leadership benefits from the current situation where they exercise sovereign-like authority over territories and populations without formal state oversight.

### **3.1.2 Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) Leadership**

The SAF leadership, centered around General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, also has economic interests tied to state resources and military-controlled enterprises. Sudan's armed forces have historically controlled significant economic assets, including manufacturing, agriculture, and import businesses. The conflict has enabled SAF leadership to consolidate political power while maintaining control over these economic interests.

Additionally, individual commanders and units have been accused of looting, extortion, and resource appropriation in their areas of control. While perhaps less systematically organized than the RSF's gold operations, these activities nonetheless create economic motivations for continued conflict among SAF personnel.

### **3.1.3 Business Networks and Intermediaries**

A network of businesses and businesspeople profit from conflict conditions through various means: supplying goods and services at inflated prices to armed groups, controlling scarce commodities and imports, operating in grey markets enabled by state collapse, and facilitating resource exports and financial transactions for armed factions. These actors often maintain relationships with multiple factions, prioritizing commercial gain over political allegiances.

## **3.2 Regional Actors**

### **3.2.1 United Arab Emirates**

The UAE has emerged as a particularly significant external actor in Sudan's conflict, with evidence suggesting support for the RSF. This involvement appears motivated by multiple interests: access to gold and other resources, countering regional rivals (particularly Turkey and Qatar), establishing influence in the Red Sea region, and securing agricultural land for food security purposes.

UAE-based companies and individuals have been implicated in the gold trade from RSF-controlled areas, with Dubai serving as a major destination for Sudanese gold exports. Additionally, reports suggest UAE provision of weapons and other military support to the RSF, though Emirati officials have denied direct involvement.

The UAE's involvement demonstrates how regional powers can profit from conflict through resource access while pursuing geopolitical objectives, creating complex motivations for either supporting peace or perpetuating instability.

### **3.2.2 Egypt**

Egypt has provided support to the SAF, driven by concerns about instability on its southern border, competition with UAE influence in the region, and the Nile water dispute with upstream countries. Egypt views a strong Sudanese military as preferable to militia control and has historical military cooperation relationships with the SAF.

While Egyptian involvement may be less explicitly commercial than some other actors, Egyptian businesses and military-linked enterprises operate in Sudan, and stability under SAF control could provide economic opportunities for Egyptian interests.

### **3.2.3 Libya and Chad**

Sudan's western neighbors have played roles in weapons flows and fighter recruitment. Libya's fragmented political landscape and abundant weapons stockpiles have made it a source of arms for both Sudanese factions. Chad has complex relationships with both sides, with Chadian fighters reportedly present among RSF ranks, while the Chadian government officially supports regional stability efforts. These relationships involve both political and economic dimensions, including cross-border trade networks and ethnic ties.

## **3.3 International Actors**

### **3.3.1 Arms Manufacturers and Dealers**

Companies and individuals involved in arms manufacturing and dealing profit directly from weapons sales to Sudanese factions. These include established defense contractors from countries like Russia, China, and various Eastern European nations, as well as shadowy networks of arms brokers operating through shell companies and third-party jurisdictions.

The ongoing demand for ammunition and replacement weapons creates continuous revenue streams. Arms dealers benefit from plausible deniability through complex transaction chains and from weak international enforcement of arms embargoes.

### **3.3.2 Gold Trade Participants**

International gold refiners, traders, and dealers who process and market Sudanese gold profit from acquiring conflict minerals at below-market prices due to the informal nature of the trade. Major gold markets, particularly in Dubai, Switzerland, and other trading hubs, have been implicated in facilitating the laundering of conflict gold into legitimate supply chains.

The gold industry's opacity, with limited traceability requirements and weak enforcement of due diligence standards, enables this trade. Companies can profit while maintaining plausible deniability about the origins of their gold supplies.

### **3.3.3 Private Military Companies**

International PMCs and security contractors profit from providing services to armed factions, governments, and even humanitarian organizations operating in conflict zones. These companies benefit from sustained insecurity that creates demand for their services while operating in regulatory grey zones that limit accountability for their actions.

## **4. Humanitarian and Economic Impacts**

### **4.1 Humanitarian Crisis Dimensions**

The commercialization of conflict has directly contributed to Sudan's catastrophic humanitarian situation, with the profit motive actively prolonging civilian suffering.

Displacement and refugee flows have reached unprecedented levels, with over 11 million internally displaced persons and more than 2 million refugees. Many displaced populations find themselves in areas controlled by armed groups that restrict movement and exploit their vulnerability. Displacement camps have become sites of taxation, forced labor recruitment, and sexual violence.

Food insecurity and famine conditions affect approximately 25 million people. The conflict has disrupted agricultural production, destroyed infrastructure, and prevented humanitarian access. Armed groups have weaponized food supplies, blocking aid to opponent-controlled areas while using food distribution for strategic advantage. The result is artificial famine conditions that serve military objectives while generating profits for those controlling scarce food supplies.

Healthcare system collapse has left millions without access to basic medical services. Hospitals and clinics have been deliberately targeted, with medical supplies looted and health workers killed or displaced. The commodification of medical care in conflict zones means that those with resources can access treatment while the poor suffer preventable deaths from treatable conditions.

Gender-based violence has been widespread and systematic, with sexual violence used as a weapon of war. Women and girls face rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage. These atrocities not only constitute grave human rights violations but also reflect the broader dehumanization inherent in treating conflict as a business opportunity.

## 4.2 Economic Destruction and Development Reversal

The conflict has devastated Sudan's formal economy, reversing development gains and entrenching poverty. GDP has contracted sharply, with the World Bank estimating economic decline of 15-20% in 2023 alone. Infrastructure destruction, business closures, and capital flight have eliminated productive capacity.

Banking system dysfunction has left millions unable to access savings or conduct transactions. Currency collapse and hyperinflation have destroyed purchasing power, with the Sudanese pound losing much of its value. This economic chaos benefits those with hard currency access and control over goods, while impoverishing ordinary citizens.

Investment and development have halted, with international donors suspending programs and foreign investors fleeing. The conflict has destroyed human capital through displacement, death, and the disruption of education affecting an entire generation of children.

The economic impacts disproportionately affect the poor and marginalized. While conflict profiteers accumulate wealth, ordinary Sudanese face unemployment, hunger, and loss of life savings. This inequality is both a consequence and an enabler of conflict commercialization, as desperation drives people into exploitative arrangements with armed groups.

## 4.3 Regional Spillover Effects

Sudan's conflict has created negative externalities for neighboring countries. Refugee flows strain resources in Chad, South Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Central African Republic, all countries with their own stability challenges. Cross-border smuggling and trafficking networks destabilize border regions. Arms proliferation from Sudan risks fueling other conflicts in the Sahel and Horn of Africa regions. Environmental degradation from conflict-driven activities like unregulated mining affects shared ecosystems and water resources. These regional impacts demonstrate how commercialized conflict exports instability and human suffering beyond national borders.

## 5. International Response and Limitations

### 5.1 Current Interventions

The international community has attempted various responses to Sudan's crisis, though these efforts have proven largely inadequate given the scale of the catastrophe and the entrenched commercial interests in conflict continuation.

The United Nations has maintained diplomatic engagement through the UN Special Envoy and UN agencies providing humanitarian assistance. However, access

restrictions, funding shortfalls, and lack of leverage over warring parties have limited effectiveness. UN sanctions and arms embargoes on Darfur have been poorly enforced, with weapons continuing to flow into the country.

Regional organizations, including the African Union and IGAD, have attempted mediation efforts with limited success. The Jeddah peace talks, facilitated by the United States and Saudi Arabia, have produced temporary ceasefires that both sides quickly violated. These diplomatic processes struggle to overcome the fundamental problem that the warring parties and their backer's profit from continued conflict.

Humanitarian aid has scaled up significantly, but delivery remains constrained by insecurity, bureaucratic obstacles, and deliberate obstruction by armed groups. Aid organizations struggle to reach populations in need while navigating the commercial interests of various gatekeepers.

Some countries have imposed targeted sanctions on individuals and entities involved in the conflict and resource exploitation. However, these measures have had limited impact due to enforcement challenges and the ability of sanctioned actors to operate through proxies and third parties.

## 5.2 Structural Limitations of Current Approaches

Several structural factors limit the effectiveness of current international responses:

Geopolitical divisions prevent unified international action. Regional powers support different factions based on their own interests, undermining coordination. Major powers prioritize other conflicts and have limited appetite for robust intervention in Sudan. This fragmentation allows conflict profiteers to play different actors against each other.

Economic enforcement mechanisms remain weak. The international financial system offers numerous opportunities for laundering conflict proceeds. Gold, arms, and other trades operate through informal channels difficult to monitor or interdict. Companies and individuals face minimal consequences for trafficking in conflict resources or violating sanctions.

Humanitarian approaches cannot address root causes. While aid saves lives, it also creates systems that can be exploited for profit, as previously discussed. Without parallel efforts to disrupt conflict financing and create incentives for peace, humanitarian response alone will remain insufficient.

Traditional diplomacy struggles with commercial conflict dynamics. Peace processes designed for political disputes fail to address entrenched economic interests. Mediators often lack tools to reshape the profit calculations that motivate continued warfare.

### 5.3 Lessons from Other Conflicts

Other conflicts where commercial interests drove prolonged violence offer relevant lessons. The blood diamonds campaigns that addressed conflict financing in Sierra Leone and other countries demonstrated the potential of combining public pressure, industry engagement, and regulatory measures. The Kimberley Process, despite its limitations, showed that international certification schemes can reduce trade in conflict resources. Similarly, efforts to combat conflict minerals in the Democratic Republic of Congo through supply chain due diligence requirements in the United States and European Union indicate that regulation can shift corporate behavior. However, these examples also reveal the challenges of enforcement, the role of willing jurisdictions in undermining controls, and the need for sustained pressure to prevent backsliding.

## 6. Policy Recommendations

### 6.1 Disrupting Conflict Financing

Effective interventions must target the commercial mechanisms that finance conflict:

Implement comprehensive sanctions on Sudanese gold. Major gold trading hubs, particularly the UAE and Switzerland, should prohibit the import of Sudanese gold that cannot demonstrate legitimate provenance. Gold refiners and traders should face strict due diligence requirements and penalties for processing conflict minerals. International coordination through the OECD and UN could establish a certification system for Sudanese gold that requires verification of non-conflict origin.

Target financial networks supporting armed groups. Enhanced financial intelligence cooperation should identify and freeze assets of conflict profiteers. Banking institutions should face requirements to screen transactions for Sudan conflict links. Cryptocurrency and informal value transfer systems (hawala) used to move conflict proceeds should be subjected to greater monitoring and regulation.

Strengthen arms embargo enforcement. UN member states should enhance monitoring of arms shipments and investigate violations. Countries serving as arms sources or transit points should face diplomatic pressure and potential consequences for enabling weapons flows. End-user certification requirements should be tightened to prevent diversion of weapons to Sudan.

Expand targeted sanctions on individuals and entities. Economic sanctions should extend beyond current lists to include the full network of businesses and intermediaries facilitating conflict commerce. Asset freezes and travel bans should encompass not just military leaders but also businesspeople, traders, and service providers profiting from the conflict.

## 6.2 Enhancing Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability for conflict crimes and profiteering must be strengthened:

Support International Criminal Court (ICC) investigations. The ICC should receive full cooperation from member states in investigating alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide in Sudan. Economic crimes and resource exploitation that facilitate atrocities should be included in investigative mandates.

Establish a UN Commission of Inquiry focused on conflict commercialization. Beyond documenting human rights violations, this body should investigate economic crimes, resource looting, and the financial networks enabling warfare. Its findings should inform targeted sanctions and potential prosecutions.

Develop documentation for future accountability. Civil society organizations and international bodies should systematically document evidence of economic crimes and conflict profiteering for eventual use in judicial proceedings.

Create international mechanisms to seize and repatriate conflict assets. Develop legal frameworks allowing for the identification, freezing, and eventual return to Sudan of wealth stolen through conflict commercialization.

## 6.3 Addressing Regional Dynamics

Regional powers must be engaged to shift their calculus from competition to cooperation:

Diplomatic pressure on external backers. Countries supporting warring factions—particularly the UAE and Egypt—should face coordinated diplomatic pressure to halt military support and resource exploitation. This requires major powers to prioritize Sudan despite competing interests.

Create positive incentives for regional cooperation. Economic development assistance, debt relief, and other benefits could reward countries that constructively support peace efforts and cease enabling conflict commerce.

Strengthen regional organizations. The African Union, IGAD, and Arab League should receive support to play more effective roles in mediation and enforcement. Regional mechanisms for arms control and resource governance should be enhanced.

Address refugee and migration pressures. Supporting Sudan's neighbors in managing refugee flows reduces one source of regional instability that can be exploited by conflict actors. Burden-sharing mechanisms should ensure adequate resources for humanitarian response.

## 6.4 Supporting Sustainable Peace

Beyond disrupting conflict commerce, long-term peace requires building legitimate alternatives:

Link peace negotiations to economic governance. Mediation efforts should explicitly address how Sudan's resources will be managed post-conflict, ensuring transparency and benefit-sharing. Armed groups must be offered credible pathways to legitimate economic activities rather than simply losing their revenue sources.

Plan for security sector reform. Any peace agreement must include provisions for reforming military and security forces, ensuring civilian oversight, and eliminating their independent economic activities. This requires international support for alternative livelihoods and retirement packages for combatants.

Prepare for transitional justice. Truth-telling about economic crimes alongside other atrocities should inform post-conflict reconciliation. Asset recovery programs should aim to return stolen wealth to public use.

Develop post-conflict economic reconstruction plans. International financial institutions and donors should prepare for supporting Sudan's recovery once peace is established. This includes debt relief, development assistance, and support for economic governance institutions.

Empower civil society and civilian governance. Support for Sudanese civil society organizations, professional associations, and democratic movements should continue, maintaining the vision of civilian-led governance that motivated the 2019 revolution.

## 6.5 Reforming Humanitarian Operations

The humanitarian response must adapt to minimize exploitation while maximizing civilian protection. This includes enhanced monitoring of aid delivery to prevent diversion and taxation by armed groups, direct cash transfers to affected populations where possible to reduce intermediary involvement, coordination with efforts to document and prosecute those obstructing aid access, and support for local civil society organizations that can navigate conflict dynamics with greater legitimacy than international actors. While humanitarian principles of neutrality must be maintained, this does not require complicity with those who weaponize aid.

## 7. Conclusion

The commercialization of Sudan's conflict represents a profound challenge to peace and humanitarian response. Armed groups, regional powers, international arms dealers, and various intermediaries have developed profitable interests in the conflict's

continuation. These economic incentives must be understood not as peripheral to the violence but as central drivers of its perpetuation.

The human cost of this commercial logic is catastrophic. Millions of Sudanese people face displacement, starvation, violence, and death while others profit from their suffering. The longer the conflict continues, the more entrenched these profit structures become, making eventual resolution more difficult.

Current international responses, while not negligible, have proven insufficient to disrupt conflict financing or create meaningful incentives for peace. Humanitarian aid alone cannot end a war fueled by gold mines, arms sales, and geopolitical competition. Traditional diplomatic processes struggle to address the economic dimensions of the conflict.

What is required is a comprehensive strategy that combines multiple elements: aggressive enforcement against conflict financing through sanctions on gold trade, arms embargo monitoring, and financial network disruption; accountability for both war crimes and economic crimes that enable atrocities; diplomatic coordination to address regional dynamics and pressure external backers; and planning for post-conflict economic governance and reconstruction that offers legitimate alternatives to war economies.

This approach demands sustained international attention and resources at a time when global focus is divided among multiple crises. It requires difficult choices about confronting powerful actors who benefit from the status quo. It necessitates coordination among countries with competing interests.

Yet the alternative—allowing Sudan's conflict to continue while profiteers enrich themselves through civilian suffering—is morally unacceptable and strategically shortsighted. The regional spillover effects, humanitarian costs, and precedent for commercialized warfare demand action.

The Sudanese people have demonstrated their desire for peace, democracy, and dignity through the 2019 revolution and ongoing civilian resistance to military rule. They deserve an international response that addresses not just the symptoms of conflict but its commercial drivers. Only by disrupting the profit incentives for war can space be created for negotiations, reconciliation, and the building of a peaceful, prosperous Sudan.

The recommendations in this proposal offer pathways toward that goal. Their implementation requires political will, sustained commitment, and recognition that ending commercialized conflict serves not only humanitarian values but also long-term international stability and security interests. The question is whether the international community will act with the urgency that Sudan's crisis demands.

## List of Abbreviations

<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>DPPA</b>	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>IGAD</b>	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>PMC</b>	Private Military Company
<b>RSF</b>	Rapid Support Forces
<b>SAF</b>	Sudanese Armed Forces
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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**Note:** This proposal synthesizes information from multiple sources including UN reports, academic research, investigative journalism, and humanitarian organization assessments. Given the ongoing nature of the conflict, information continues to evolve. Readers seeking the most current data should consult the latest reports from organizations such as the UN OCHA, UNHCR, WHO, and humanitarian NGOs active in Sudan.

## RSF-ASSOCIATED ENTITIES:

### Key Companies:

- **Al Junaid (Al Gunade) Multi-Activities Company** - The primary RSF business empire controlling gold mining, livestock, tourism, abattoirs, and construction. Owned by Hemedti's brother Abdulrahim Dagalo and his two sons (valued at ~\$1 billion in assets, \$160-180 million annual revenue)
- **GSK Advanced Business** and subsidiaries (GSK Contracting, GSK IT) - Established 2017 by Algoney Dagalo (Hemedti's younger brother)
- **Tradive General Trading** - Dubai-based company, sanctioned as RSF front company
- **Al-Khaleej Bank** - RSF-operated bank in partnership with UAE
- **Al Jil Alqadem General Trading** - Dubai-based, held shares in Al-Khaleej Bank
- **Capital Tap Holding** - Sanctioned for providing money and weapons to RSF
- **Al Zumoroud & Al Yaqoot Gold Trading** - Dubai-based, sanctioned for RSF ties
- **Natwest Logistics** - Customs broker and cargo company

### Key Individuals (RSF Network):

- **Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti)** - RSF Commander
- **Abdulrahim Dagalo** - Deputy RSF head, controls Al Junaid
- **Algoney Dagalo** - Hemedti's younger brother, established GSK group
- **Mazin Gamareldin Mohamed Fadlalla** - RSF frontman who bought ~200 Toyota pickups (2019) for conversion to technicals; director at GSK; involved in multiple gold trading companies

- **Abozer Habib (Abu Dharr)** - Sanctioned owner/manager of Capital Tap Holding
- **Ahmed Hashim Hamad El Basher** - Sudanese national linked to RSF procurement
- **Naser Helal Abdulla Helal Al Hammadi** - Emirati linked to RSF companies
- **Essa Mohammed Rashed Saif Al Marri** - Emirati with extensive corporate footprint in RSF-linked firms

## **SAF-ASSOCIATED ENTITIES:**

### **Key Companies:**

- **Defense Industries System (DIS)** - Formerly Military Industrial Corporation; SAF's largest defense enterprise generating ~\$2 billion annually through hundreds of subsidiaries
- **GIAD Industrial Complex** - Produces weapons, vehicles, ammunition for SAF
- **Sudan Master Technology (SMT)** - Arms company, major shareholder in DIS companies
- **Omdurman National Bank (ONB)** - One of Sudan's largest banks, at center of SAF-controlled economic network
- **Military Industry Corporation** - Under Ministry of Defense, manages arms production

### **Key Individuals (SAF Network):**

- **General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan** - SAF Commander, controls extensive state-owned enterprise network of 200+ companies
- Various SAF commanders controlling regional territories and associated businesses (names not publicly documented in detail)

## **SMUGGLING & INTERMEDIARY NETWORKS:**

### **Documented Activities:**

- RSF-linked businessmen in **El Geneina** providing trucks/vehicles to UN agencies and NGOs while simultaneously smuggling fuel for RSF and aid groups
- Traders in Darfur markets with known RSF connections facilitating money transfers and commodity sales
- Networks operating through **Chad, Libya, CAR, South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda** for arms trafficking and gold smuggling
- Libyan militias aligned with **Khalifa Haftar** facilitating RSF supply routes through Kufra
- Gold smuggling networks routing through **Dubai** refineries

### **Humanitarian Aid Exploitation:**

- Both SAF and RSF impose unofficial taxation on humanitarian convoys
- Currency exchange manipulation by armed groups forcing aid organizations into disadvantageous rates
- Looting of WFP warehouses and humanitarian supplies by both factions
- Intermediary logistics companies operating at inflated costs in insecure environments
- Reports of humanitarian flights from UAE disguised as aid but carrying weapons

## **EXTERNAL ACTORS:**

### **Regional Supporters:**

- **UAE-based companies** - Receiving RSF gold, processing conflict minerals
- **Dubai refineries and gold traders** - Processing Sudanese conflict gold
- Various international arms dealers and PMCs (Wagner Group historically, now Africa Corps)

This represents the documented network of commercial actors profiting from Sudan's conflict, though the actual network is likely more extensive given the opacity of these operations.

## **TRANSPORT COMPANIES & HUMANITARIAN CONTRACTORS:**

### **For-Profit Private Contractors:**

#### **Fogbow (US-based)**

- Private military contractor company operating humanitarian airdrops in Sudan and South Sudan
- Led by retired US military officers including Mick Mulroy (former CIA officer and Pentagon official)
- Senior adviser: **David Beasley** (former UN World Food Programme head)
- Conducting aid drops on behalf of South Sudan's government
- Controversial because they operate in conflict zones where governments are combatants
- WFP has distanced itself, stating it's "not involved in the planning, targeting or distribution" of Fogbow's airdrops

#### **Global Security Services Group (GSSG) - Abu Dhabi-based**

- Hired Colombian mercenaries who were deployed to Sudan to support RSF
- Recruitment done through Colombia-registered firm **International Services Agency (A4SI)**

### **Local Sudanese Transport Contractors:**

#### **El Geneina Businessman (Name Withheld)**

- Described by The New Humanitarian as a "prominent businessman" with "strong family and community links to the RSF"
- Based in El Geneina, West Darfur
- **Provides trucks and vehicles for several UN agencies and international NGOs**
- Simultaneously smuggles fuel into Darfur for use by both RSF and aid groups
- The New Humanitarian obtained rental contracts between this individual and at least one major international NGO with large presence in Darfur
- Sources indicate this represents the dilemma aid agencies face: needing local logistics support in RSF-controlled areas means inevitably dealing with RSF-linked businesspeople

#### **Corporate Logistics Partners (Legitimate):**

The **Logistics Emergency Team (LET)** - World Economic Forum initiative involving:

- **Agility** (logistics company)
- **AP Moller-Maersk** (shipping)
- **DP World** (UAE port operator - also has political ties in region)
- **UPS** (courier service)

These provide pro bono support to WFP's Logistics Cluster for warehouse space, transportation, and customs clearance.

#### **Local Transport Networks:**

- **Commercial truck operators** in Mellit, Darfur who are diverted by RSF to Al-Kuma locality to pay fees before being allowed to proceed
- Traders and businessmen in Darfur markets with "known RSF connections" who facilitate money transfers and commodity sales
- Local transport companies operating between Chad border crossings (Adré, Tine) and Darfur

#### **The Systemic Problem:**

The research reveals a fundamental dilemma: **humanitarian organizations cannot operate in RSF-controlled areas without engaging with RSF-linked intermediaries.** This creates an unavoidable commercialization of aid where:

1. Transport contractors in RSF areas have RSF connections by necessity
2. These contractors profit from both humanitarian work AND conflict activities (like fuel smuggling)

3. Aid agencies are aware of these links but have limited alternatives
4. The RSF taxes or controls commercial traffic, extracting rents from humanitarian logistics

The **UN and major NGOs** generally don't publicly name their local transport contractors for security reasons, but investigative reporting confirms these relationships exist throughout RSF-controlled Darfur.

### **TRANSPORT COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH UN/WFP LOGISTICS CLUSTER:**

#### **106 Registered Companies:**

According to the WFP Logistics Cluster's Digital Logistics Capacity Assessment, there are 106 registered transporting companies in Sudan (as identified by the National Chamber of the Heavy Trucks) [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#). These companies operate:

- Large rigs and trailers (70-ton capacity) on main routes from Port Sudan through to El Obeid and Khartoum
- Smaller trucks (5-25 tons) for "deep field" distribution
- Registered in: **El Obeid, Khartoum, Port Sudan, and Darfur**

**Key limitation:** The WFP Logistics Cluster maintains a transporter contact list but notes in its disclaimer that "Inclusion of company information in the LCA does not imply any business relationship between the supplier and WFP / Logistics Cluster" [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#), meaning they list available companies but don't publicly identify which ones they actually contract with.

### **Named Logistics/Transport Companies Operating in Sudan:**

#### **Major Commercial Operators:**

1. **Sudan Shipping Line Co.** - State-owned, established 1958
  - Provides trucks and trailers for door-to-door transport and efficient cargo distribution across regions [Opensanctions](#)
2. **Cannata Sudan**
  - Provides specialized road freight and humanitarian logistics solutions to all Darfur states and border areas with Chad, including trucking to El Geneina, Sirba, Kereinek, Jebel Moon, Nyala, Zalingei, El Fasher, Kutum [United States Department of State](#)
  - Over two decades of logistics expertise in Sudan and the UAE, with experience in humanitarian and NGO deliveries [United States Department of State](#)
3. **Darka For Trading & Services Co. Ltd.**
  - Inland transportation to all Sudan cities
  - Customs clearance services at Khartoum Airport and Port Sudan

4. **Coastal Shipping Co.**

- Port Sudan-based
- Provides shipping agencies, stevedoring, handling services

5. **Seair Logistics Ltd.**

- Port Sudan-based
- Logistics services

6. **Blue Water Logistics Company Ltd.**

- Khartoum-based
- General logistics services

7. **Port Sudan Stevedoring**

- Freight & logistics services, marine shipping & transportation [European Union Agency for Asylum](#)

8. **Alwatania Shipping & Logistics Services**

- Port Sudan-based
- End-to-end supply chain solutions

9. **Wingee Shipping Agency**

- Port Sudan-based
- Shipping, stevedoring, clearance, and logistics

10. **Dahla** - Khartoum-based

- Air and sea freight services

11. **Asfar Logistics** - Khartoum-based

12. **Worldwide Movers Sudan Ltd.** - Khartoum-based

**THE CRITICAL PROBLEM: RSF-LINKED INTERMEDIARIES**

**Unnamed but Documented:** The New Humanitarian investigation revealed that in El Geneina, West Darfur, a "prominent businessman" with "strong family and community links to the RSF" provides trucks and vehicles for several UN agencies and international NGOs while simultaneously smuggling fuel into Darfur for use by both RSF and aid groups [Thesentry](#).

The reporting notes rental contracts were obtained between this individual and at least one major international NGO with large presence in Darfur, but **names were withheld for security reasons**.

## THE STRUCTURAL DILEMMA:

According to research findings:

1. **Subcontracting Chain:** Main transport companies tend to subcontract/tender to smaller companies, especially in deeper field areas [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)
2. **Security Convoys:** Government of Sudan police usually organizes and conducts military escort to protect fuel tankers passing through Darfur states, with escorts involving up to 500 vehicles occurring three times per month [Chatham House](#)
3. **Regional Control:** Companies operating in RSF-controlled Darfur necessarily must have RSF approval/connections to operate
4. **WFP's Own Fleet:** Due to these complications, WFP operates its own fleet of trucks, which is strategically placed in the 3 Darfur areas, El Obeid and Khartoum [Chatham House](#)

## WHAT THE UN/NGOs WON'T PUBLICLY DISCLOSE:

- **Specific contractor names** in RSF or SAF-controlled areas (security risk)
- **Payment arrangements** and fee structures
- **Verification processes** for contractor political/military affiliations
- **Taxation or "access fees"** paid to armed groups

## ALTERNATIVE HUMANITARIAN DELIVERY:

To avoid these compromised commercial networks, some donors are shifting to:

- **Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs)** - Community-led volunteer networks made up of Sudanese citizens, many of them young people, who organized locally to meet urgent needs when formal systems collapsed [The Conversation](#)
- **Direct funding to local mutual aid** - bypassing international contractors entirely

**Bottom Line:** The UN system knows it's contracting with RSF-linked businesses in Darfur but cannot publicly name them due to security concerns and operational necessity. The 106 registered companies exist, but actual contractors used—especially in conflict zones—remain deliberately opaque.