Conflict, Humanitarianism, and Global Rivalry: An Interview with Professor Alex de Waal on Peacebuilding in Sudan and the Horn of Africa

Interview by Ishika Gupta and Mary Anna Joyce

Alex de Waal Biography

Alex de Waal is the Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation and Professor at the Tufts University Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. He is one of the leading experts on Sudan and the Horn of Africa, having served on the mediation team for Darfur from 2005 to 2006 and on the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan from 2009 to 2011. Professor de Waal has also worked for several human rights organizations and the Social Science Research Council. His 2017 book, "Starvation: The History and Future of Famine," explores the weaponization of starvation as a war tactic through a close examination of the history of modern famines. He was included in Foreign Policy's list of the 100 most influential public intellectuals in 2008 and named one of Atlantic Monthly's 27 "brave thinkers" in 2009. Additionally, he received the Royal Anthropological Institute's Huxley Medal in 2024.

1. *I understand you were a senior advisor to the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan. How did your work on this panel begin?*

The most important point here is actually how the panel started. It was established in 2009 as the African Union High-Level Panel on Darfur. At that time, the issue of Darfur—the massacres, mass displacement, and starvation had been the focus of an enormous student movement here in the United States. [This movement] had pressed and pushed the United Nations (UN), as well as the U.S. government—initially under President Bush, and then under President Obama—into action.

However, the actions that were being taken to send peacekeepers, to send the blue helmets, to protect civilians, and [actions] to invoke the International Criminal Court (ICC), were not making progress in creating peace. The African Union (AU) [then] stepped in with a high-level panel on Darfur, and they asked the former South African President Thabo Mbeki to head the panel.

Now, Mbeki's first question when taking this position was: "What is the definition of the problem that we're trying to solve?" You cannot solve a problem unless you understand it. He listened—he heard many different definitions from the diplomats, the experts, the political leaders. Then he posed the question: "What do the people of Darfur have to say about this?" It turned out nobody had consulted them. The first thing he said coming out of the background of the African National Congress in South Africa and the democratic revolutionary movement intended to bring an end to Apartheid was: "Let's go and talk to the people and listen to what they have to say. So, he assembled the team, and I was a member of that team. We had 40 days of town hall meetings in communities in Darfur, in government-held areas, in rebel-held areas, in camps for internally displaced people, in places where the government couldn't go, and in places where the UN was even reluctant to go. We listened to what people had to say, and on the basis of that, we formulated a report that took the conflict in its entirety, defining it around the issues that the people themselves had articulated as most important. Now, unfortunately, what then happened was that the United States and the UN still persisted in the approaches that they already had undertaken and were not ready to, as it were, flip the script and say that we will adopt the priorities of the affected people—that are a mixture of reconciliation, justice, peace and above all democracy. The process got stuck at that point. The Panel then later went into a negotiation with the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement on the issues facing Sudan as a whole, because the next issue that arose was the independence of South Sudan.[1] That was fascinating in a very different way, but what it was not was an exercise in emancipation through mediation, which was what the panel on Darfur intended to achieve.

2. *Shortly after independence, South Sudan experienced a civil war from 2013–2018, which formally ended with the signing of a peace agreement known as the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. Very recently, this Peace Agreement has come under threat due to the arrest of First Vice President Riek Machar, the country's main opposition figure, by President Salva Kiir's regime. Do you believe that there were any flaws or unresolved issues during the 2011 independence negotiations that might have laid the groundwork for conflict in South Sudan post-independence?*

When we, as the AU High-Level Implementation Panel headed by President Mbeki, addressed the northerners and the southerners in Sudan, our first question [again] was: "What is the problem that we're going to try and solve? How do we define this?" [We addressed this] in consultation with the leaders of the parties—we didn't go to the people, because the mandate of the panel was to implement an already agreed upon comprehensive peace agreement from five years previously. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 did not have provisions for what would happen if South Sudan separated, so we asked the question: "What could be the key problem that arises [in the event

of secession]? What is the problem that needs to be solved?" President Mbeki, in consultation with the parties, came with a twofold definition. Part one was that both Sudan and South Sudan needed to be economically viable states. In order to do that, there needed to be an agreement on a number of fundamental economic issues: the division of the oil wealth, the allocation of the huge external debt, and issues around trade, migration, and residency. This was not achieved because the two sides could not come to an agreement. The failure of that agreement led to a crisis in oil production. The South Sudanese shut down their oil, which led to a major economic crisis in both countries. This economic crisis was the direct driver of the conflict in South Sudan. This was foreseeable at the time—I actually wrote an article for the *New York Times*, called "South Sudan's Economic Doomsday Machine." Then, a similar crisis and slide to war happened in Sudan, though it took longer.

The other dimension of the problem was that there was a conventional view of the division between North and South Sudan—that the North will be Arab and Islamic, and the South would be African and Christian. However, with Mbeki and the rest of the team, we identified this as an error. We believed that when Sudan divides, it will not divide into an Arab Islamic north and an African Christian south. It will divide into two African countries, each of them characterized by diversity, and that the problem of each country will be solved only when they recognize that, in principle, they are diverse countries. Sudan, the north, was the first to violate that principle. The moment that South Sudan became independent, it initiated a new war within northern Sudan against a group called the Nuba, who were just north of the north-south border, because [the Nuba] did not accept the Arab Islamic identity that the ruling party in the North wanted. That war, in turn, caused an outcry internationally and made it impossible for the United States to lift Sudan's designation as a state sponsor of terror. This meant that sanctions stayed, and there was no debt relief and no economic normalization. This self-inflicted wound contributed to the economic crisis that unraveled the government in northern Sudan. So, when a non-violent civic revolution came in 2019, the incoming democratic government faced an insurmountable economic crisis, which doomed it. So, northern Sudan experienced the same trajectory into civil war that South Sudan had followed between 2011 and 2013. The South Sudanese could not handle the political pressures unleashed by this really severe economic crisis. The northern Sudanese went through the same process just a decade later, and that led to the civil war today. So the war was foreseeable, and indeed it was foreseen.

The resolution of the 2013 to 2018 Civil War was not done according to a correct definition of the problem. The model of the peace agreement that was imposed was a standard template, which would have worked only in the context of a much more prosperous economy, where there were enough resources to divide among the different parties in order for all different contenders to be happy. Those resources were not available, so designing a peace agreement on a false premise of those resources was destined to fail. There was no real peace,

just the diplomatic pretense of peace. Exactly the same thing happened in northern Sudan after the democratic revolution—there were mediators, from the AU, a fellow called Ambassador Hacan Lebatt, and then a representative from the UN, both of whom just failed to get to the core of the problem. The Khartoum Declaration of 2019 that set up the civilian government and the Juba Agreement a year later which brought former rebels into government were fundamentally flawed. That same cycle of having an agreement that appeared strong on paper, but in practice just postponed the problem, was replicated. In both South Sudan and Sudan, some form of conflict was inevitable.

3. *As you said, northern Sudan has been in the midst of a Civil War since 2023. What are the interactions between the war in northern Sudan and the conflict in South Sudan? More broadly, what have been the regional implications of those two wars happening so geographically close to each other?*

If we go back about 15 years, there was a lot of trouble in the Northeast Africa region—Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia. There was a lot of actual war in Somalia, and a lot of potential war in Sudan and South Sudan, as well as an autocratic regime in Eritrea that was destabilizing its neighbors. Two factors were preventing the region as a whole from descending into overall chaos and turmoil. The first factor was Ethiopia's role as an anchor state. Ethiopia was the state that could be relied upon to provide peacekeepers and to provide the diplomatic skills for convening parties in Sudan and South Sudan. They were less successful in Somalia, but they were at least an active participant in international efforts to rebuild the state in Somalia and to contain the threat posed by the extremist group al-Shabaab.

The second factor was a multilateral peace and security architecture that was quite fragile and elaborate, but it was beginning to work. The AU, which is based in Addis Ababa, was developing different mechanisms for political peace missions, and also providing troops, especially troops into very dangerous situations like Somalia, where the UN would not dispatch peacekeepers. The UN was very supportive of the AU role, as well as the Obama administration and the Europeans.

Both these factors collapsed, approximately in the period of the first Trump administration. The Trump administration had a hand in this because in order to keep these delicate structures intact, [the region] needed international support, care, and understanding. But, the Trump administration was not interested—not in the UN—and probably had never even heard of the AU.

When there was a move toward democratizing Ethiopia, which was very hopeful at the beginning, the democratization turned very bad very quickly. From an anchor of stability, Ethiopia turned into a spread of instability—it turned into a war zone, with several wars instigated by its own government [in 2020], with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in power. That happened partly because of his own failings as a vain and erratic leader, but also because the international community, and especially the United States, did not see the danger of a reckless and irresponsible leader. They actually encouraged some

of [Ahmed's] crazy actions, instead of remaining invested in keeping Ethiopia as a nature of stability. As a result of that, what we see is a cascade of wars. The most terrible of these was the genocidal onslaught on Tigray, including the weaponization of starvation.

The war in Ethiopia meant that the country was no longer playing a stabilizing role in Sudan and South Sudan. We then saw the AU and the UN surrendering their role, partly because they didn't have the backing of the US and other international partners. So, [in 2020], not only is there an essentially unmanageable conflict in Ethiopia for the first time for many years, there are also conflicts in Sudan, South Sudan, and in Somalia—where we see the disintegration of a fragile federal system and the resurgence of al-Shabaab, which is now mounting attacks within the national capital, Mogadishu. By the time this interview is published, it's possible that they may have taken over the city. If they do that, it would be a bit like the Taliban taking over Kabul a few years ago. The whole region is in flames, in one way or another, as we speak.

4. *Given this backdrop of "the region in flames," what is the path forward in addressing the conflict in northern and South Sudan, and in the region more broadly? What is the role of the African Union and the wider international community?*

Before going down that path, we need to look at the next layer of complication, which is that the whole region has now been brought within the security perimeter of the Arab world. The key Arab states—Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and to a lesser extent, Qatar and Turkey—are very active in their region. They have a lot of money, and they are not interested in using multilateral peace mechanisms like the UN, or the AU and the Arab League. They do direct transactional business, and they do it with massive financial resources that none of the players within the region of Northeast Africa can match.

Now, if you take the war in Sudan, for example, you have the two major belligerents. You have the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) of General Abdul Fattah al-Burhan. The armed forces call themselves the government of Sudan, and are backed by Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Even though the economy of Sudan is now essentially destroyed, they have enough resources—from their patrons in the Middle East—to carry on fighting indefinitely. On the other side, you have the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) of General Mohammed Hamdan, who is known as Hemedti. He is backed by the UAE, and like SAF, has the resources to fight indefinitely.

There is a similar configuration of external support in Ethiopia and in Eritrea, which are on the point of going to war with each other. There is a different configuration in Somalia, but the Middle Eastern rivalries are very much alive there. The question then is, why have these countries gotten involved in this way? For one, they see that U.S. power has been waning—the United States used to provide a security umbrella to this whole region, including the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula, the Red Sea, and the Horn of Africa. Now

that this [security umbrella] has been folded, these countries want to secure their positions. [The] key to this is the Red Sea, which is one of the world's most strategic waterways, and is a major route for maritime transport from Asia to Europe.

The most immediate threat to the Red Sea is posed by Yemen, controlled mostly by the Ansar Allah group, known as the Houthis. The Houthis claim they're acting in solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza by firing on ships, saying they are targeting Israeli, American and other allied ships. Attacking merchant ships is a crime. They are also more indiscriminate and target other ships. They say they won't target Chinese ships, for example. But the amount of maritime traffic through the Red Sea has dropped enormously because ship owners are not confident. Insurance rates have gone up. What is the solution to this? Well, some 15 to 20 years ago, there was a problem of piracy off the Somali Peninsula. When the government collapsed in Somalia, coastal fishing communities were left unprotected, allowing foreign trawlers, including those from South Korea and other countries, to take the fish. In response, Somalians turned to piracy. The immediate response to piracy was to dispatch military vessels to patrol the waters off the Gulf of Aden and the Somali coastline. However, it soon became clear that the only [sustainable] solution to piracy was not in the sea, but on the shore—it was essential to establish functioning civil authorities and promote employment development and protect the fisheries to keep the shipping lanes safe. There needed to be a protective onshore peace and stability order so that the shipping lanes could be safe.

The question of the Houthis is a lot more complicated because it's much more political. However, the same basic rule applies. The immediate problem is the safety of shipping, but the larger problem is peace and security onshore—which applies to both the Arab and African shores of the Red Sea. Before the Houthi attacks began, Egypt used to get about $9 billion in revenues from the Suez Canal every year. That dropped by about 60 percent [when the Houthi attacks began]. The Saudis have enormous investments along their Red Sea coastline. The Emirates have been investing in ports in the Gulf of Aden. So, they all have a vested interest in promoting peace and security. However, the way they are seeking maritime security, through military action and military bases, is only ratcheting up the problem—the arms-and-bases race is only making it worse. Even if the Houthis are defeated now, you will have other problems arising. So, what is needed for this region is a cooperative security framework—a peace and security framework—that spans the whole of what we call the Red Sea arena. An arena is like a geographical region with a difference. It's somewhere where people go to fight—it's not a region that is bound together by institutions and customs. Until the Red Sea arena becomes a stable region, this problem is not going to be solved.

So President Trump and his national security team can shoot as many missiles as they'd like at the Houthis, and they may destroy a lot of the Houthi military infrastructure, but they will not achieve lasting maritime security by doing so—and they know that. In fact, they made it very clear in that famous

Signal chat that the United States does not want to bear the cost of sealane protection alone, and it's a valid point. The United States spends about $40 billion per year on the US Navy for international sea lanes protection—China spends next to nothing. The only two other countries that spend significant amounts, though much smaller than the United States, are the UK and France. This is not sustainable. Similar issues around who should pay for NATO have become very prominent. As for the issue of who should pay for maritime protection—while the cost may be smaller, the implications of who bears that cost are huge. I think this part of the world is a sort of microcosm of the global issues that are arising in the era of the second Trump administration.

5. *As you said, Africa as well as the Red Sea region serves as a microcosm of great power rivalry and global shifts in power. How might these developments on the global stage affect conflict in the region itself?*

What we have seen developing in the Red Sea arena over the last eight years is an augur of what has begun to happen elsewhere. What we're seeing in the global arena, with the Trump administration, is just what we have seen already in that arena over the last eight years writ large. The same forces, the same issues, the same ways of doing business that the Trump administration wants to make the norm for the world as a whole have already been taking shape in the region.

There's another implication of this—mass starvation. If you look at the data for famines, where are the famines in the world? The UN has a Famine Review Committee. Whenever the data of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification System (IPC), which is a standardized system for generating data on food insecurity, indicates a risk of famine, the Famine Review Committee is convened. It has been convened about 20 times in the last 12 years, and on top of that, a famine was also declared in Somalia in 2011 before it was constituted. If we take those 21 cases, 19 of them are in the Red Sea arena. So why is it that almost all the famine cases are in the countries that are either adjacent to the Red Sea or just one country away? The two exceptions are Nigeria and Madagascar. The reason for this, I would argue, is precisely this conflux of factors that we've been discussing. The dissolution of a security order that was based upon one stable state—Ethiopia—combined with the evaporation of the multilateral system and the dominant role played by middle-ranking powers that are in ruthless pursuit of resources, influence, and strategic real estate. What we see, as they do that, is that the types of conflict that they spark and that they sponsor tend to create humanitarian emergencies. Now, all conflicts in poor countries create humanitarian emergencies, and this part of the world is in many ways more vulnerable than others because of its history.

However, the key aspect is not that this region is poor, but that wars are not restrained by humanitarian principles and laws. These mechanisms, according to international procedures, ought to be invoked to restrain wars being fought in this way and to provide humanitarian relief. But, that isn't happening; it's blocked systematically. The blockage starts with the information itself

being blocked—the UN's IPC can't get access to complete or reliable data, as in Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen, or it is thrown out, as in Sudan or Ethiopia. Often, reports are also challenged and denied. So, first, the information is blocked. Then, without that information, it's possible for those who are inflicting famine through siege, starvation, or pillage to deny that anything is happening and to prevent action being taken. There was a UN Security Council resolution on armed conflict and hunger, resolution 2417, that was adopted in April of 2018, seven years ago. Among other things, this resolution stated that starvation of civilians in war may be a war crime, and that when armed conflict threatens famine or widespread food insecurity, it should be brought swiftly to the attention of the UN Security Council. This [mechanism] has not been used, it has been blocked along with human rights investigations and other attempts to call out starvation as a war crime.

Essentially, there are three factors at play. One is that you have these wars occurring in a region that is already vulnerable. Next, starvation crimes are not being stopped. Finally, in the last few months, you have seen what has happened with the world's largest humanitarian donor, USAID. Responsible for 42% of humanitarian funding in the world and more than 50% in this region, USAID has essentially been shut down. While some of it may resume, the damage is enormous.

6. *Building off of our discussion, in what ways do governments weaponize starvation and famine as a form of political strategy? How has this weaponization been employed in Darfur and in other global conflicts?*

The definition of the war crime of starvation in international criminal law is found in the Rome Statute of the ICC. It reads:

> "Intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions."

The key point is that the war crime of starvation is not just [the lack of access to] food, but also water, medicine, shelter—anything that is necessary for survival. It is not just the obstruction of food, but also the destruction of all of these necessities. We see many different configurations of this. In the war famine in Tigray, Ethiopia, between 2020 and 2022, you saw a combination of siege—of obstructing not only relief food, but all commercial food. This included cutting off the banking system and trade, combined with massive destruction of the agricultural, health, and water infrastructure.

We see similar things in Sudan. Both sides are responsible, but the RSF is primarily operating as a sort of pillage machine. They loot, stealing everything, and then they often vandalize things that they don't steal, which is bizarre. Why would you destroy a hospital? Why would you destroy irrigation infrastructure, if your intention actually is to capture it? They're also laying

siege to places that they haven't captured, like the city of Al Fashir in North Darfur, along with the surrounding camps for displaced people, particularly a camp called Zamzam. [Individuals living in these camps] were displaced 22 years ago in the previous round of war in Darfur, who were still living in that camp [far after the war], and were [still] very dependent on humanitarian relief. As soon as the war began, their rations were stopped. Therefore, the RSF is responsible not only for all that pillage and destruction, but also the siege on Al Fashir, and particularly on Zamzan and some other camps. That is where we have seen the worst starvation.

The other side, which is the Sudan Armed Forces, has not been so destructive, but has attacked critical infrastructure and obstructed relief supplies. Their argument is that allowing international relief assistance and international relief workers into the areas controlled by the rebels will consolidate the resources and garner international sympathy and support. Essentially, they argue that those relief workers on the ground will end up sympathizing with those supporting the cause of those rebels. Therefore, they want to block [humanitarian aid], even if the cost is the starvation of the people.

In Gaza, we've seen a different configuration. Even before the Hamas attacks and atrocities of October 7, the Gaza people were extremely dependent on imported food, fuel, and other necessities. It was very straightforward for Israel to cut [these necessities] off, which it did. What was equally, perhaps more devastating, was the massive destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. This included massive destruction of housing, health infrastructure, water infrastructure, and electricity supply. This led to a speed of deterioration of humanitarian conditions unlike anything we have seen certainly in the past 20 years, and probably not in the past 70 years.[2] Depending on your definition of famine, the majority of the population is either in what's called catastrophe, which means the worst stage of food insecurity, or indeed some of the population is in a famine, which according to the IPC approach, is a combination of both acute food insecurity, acute malnutrition, and elevated mortality. Now, there's a reason for caution as the data for mortality is not good—it has not been possible to conduct the kinds of surveys that humanitarian agencies normally do in crises. My view is that the obligation to collect data is on Israel, which obviously wants to deny the gravity of what is happening. Additionally, the United States has not pressed for better data. The U.S. has its own family warning system network—it was the best data source, but its reporting on Gaza was blocked under the Biden administration, and then the entire system was fully shut down by the Trump administration. So there's a tendency to say there's no data for famine. However, the absence of evidence is not the same as evidence for absence. We're not able to properly ascertain what's going on. Until we can ascertain what is going on, I believe we should take a precautionary principle and assume that the situation is dire.

7. *Would you be able to share more about your experience on the African Union mediation team for Darfur? Given that the crisis is now widely recognized as a genocide,[3] it would be valuable to understand what measures you implemented as part of the team to address the conflict. Additionally, what is the status of Darfur now, as a particularly vulnerable region in Sudan?*

So the situation is really awful now, and there is no viable peace process at the moment.

The mediation efforts up to now have been extremely feeble. The Biden administration couldn't decide whether it should do a principled, multilateral negotiation using the African Union and the United Nations, or a sort of realpolitik, transactional bargaining dealing with the Arab sponsors of the two sides. They ended up following neither approach, and the US mediation completely failed.

Now, the Trump administration is paying, so far as I know, no attention to Sudan.

Some in Washington have said that there is an opportunity for the Trump administration to get the Arab leaders together and fix the problem. It's not likely that the current administration is going to use the African Union. The United Kingdom has recently taken the lead on seeking to lead a Sudanese peace process—it is convening a ministerial conference on April 15, and is looking at different options. I would hope that it's able to get a formula that brings the external power brokers together, to incentivize them to disengage from Sudan. This would then create the space for the Sudanese to find their own solution. The key aspect to that solution being sustainable is that it can't just be a deal between the military leaders, and it can't just be a return to the old formula of power sharing and an unrealistic roadmap to democracy. It needs to go back to where we started in this conversation: consulting the people of Sudan themselves about what it is they need in terms of peace, reconciliation at local levels as well as national levels, democracy, and disarmament—all these issues need to be on the table, because the only solution that will be legitimate will be one that the Sudanese have truly been brought into.

8. *With the backdrop of the second Trump administration, do you have any insights as to what students who will enter careers in public service might expect over the next four years? Amid the crackdown on USAID and humanitarian databases, how can students respond to these challenges?*

This is a very disorienting and frightening time. I think many students who anticipated having a professional career in the system of international aid, human rights, conflict resolution, and related fields are looking in with horror as all of their opportunities are evaporating. I started my career 40 years ago, and this apparatus didn't exist—there were very, very few careers available [in this field]. Over time, that apparatus was built by humanitarian entrepreneurs, essentially small, local NGOs. Over the years, I would argue that much of the field was not taken in the right direction. What I have called

the "humanitarian international" was inefficient and unaccountable in many ways. It was not working very well, but it was working better than not having a system at all.

Given the current political climate, don't think of rebuilding [the system] as it was. We must go back to a much more local, community-based, accountable system of humanitarianism. A grassroots, emancipatory humanitarianism would actually allow those who are most affected to have their voices heard and their priorities reflected. Because the previous system, yes, it fed people, but it didn't meet the needs that people were demanding.

In the case of Sudan, one of the things that was actually most shocking was that when the war broke out two years ago, in the middle of April 2023, all the international agencies withdrew, and they stopped their operations in Sudan. Who took up the mantle of humanitarian action? It was local groups. They set up emergency response groups at the neighborhood level. They were extremely effective, very cheap, and very flexible. However, when access to humanitarian funding came online, these local response groups didn't receive it due to administrative barriers—they were not able to fill out forms and check certain boxes or say, "Yes, I have a project," with all the necessary documentation. Therefore, the money went to the World Food Program instead, which was an extremely inefficient, old-fashioned way of using convoys of trucks for aid delivery, with many trucks either being diverted or utilized by the warring parties. [This system] wasn't useless, but it was extraordinarily inefficient. If those modest resources had been put into community groups instead of the World Food Program, the situation would not only be materially different, but also politically different, because it would have empowered those groups. As we look to rebuild the system, don't rebuild what has been demolished. Create a different system based on real human solidarity with the people who have been affected in these countries. They are skilled and perfectly capable of articulating their own needs.

The reason I went to Sudan in 1984 to do my PhD was that the humanitarian workers in Sudan, and those who were studying humanitarian issues in Sudan, were more advanced. They had more to contribute compared to Oxford University, where I was. So, I went to the University of Khartoum. If they knew what to do then, 40 years ago, then they must be even more advanced today. So, let's take that as a new opportunity. What I've always encouraged my students to do if they want a career in this field is to not start here in the United States, but start there, in Sudan or in Bangladesh or in Colombia. It's more difficult, but it's far more rewarding, because the people you will learn from are based on the ground.

Notes

1. South Sudan officially gained independence from Sudan on July 9, 2011, when approximately 99 percent South Sudanese citizens voted in favor of secession in a referendum. This followed the landmark 2005 Comprehensive Peace

Agreement, which brought an end to the second Sudanese Civil War, 1983 to 2005. (Center for Preventive Action, "Instability in South Sudan," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 21, 2025)

2. The reason we cannot definitively claim that this speed of deterioration in humanitarian conditions has not been seen in the past 70 years is due to the lack of data collection from more than 20 years ago. However, it is probable that this rapid deterioration of conditions is unlike anything we have seen in the past 70 years.
3. Full scale war broke out in Darfur in 2003, when rebels in the region attacked national troops in Al Fashir. In response, President Omar al-Bashir recruited and armed local Arab militias, named the "Janjaweed," to violently suppress the rebellion. The Janjaweed, as well as the Sudanese Armed Forces, are responsible for the deaths of an estimated 400,000 people and the displacement of over three million others. Both the Jajaweed as well as President Al-Bashir are accused of genocide and war crimes. Today, in the midst of Sudan's civil war, conflict remains rife in Darfur, with the Rapid Support Forces led by Hemedti responsible for mass and ethnically targeted killings in the region. (Tubiana, Jerome "Darfur: Between Two Wars," *Al-Jazeera*, June 30, 2023; Sudan: Ethnic Cleansing in West Darfur," *Human Rights Watch*, May 9, 2024)

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