

Sudan: could it happen elsewhere?

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Namaa Al-Mahdi spoke recently at the online forum 'Africa: the role of Russia and the war in Ukraine', hosted by the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. Here we publish an edited version of her speech.

25 men, women, and children were killed yesterday [September 3rd] in crossfire between Sudanese armed forces and their rapid support paramilitary forces, five in Omdurman and twenty in Khartoum.

In North Kordofan and the capital Khartoum, the Rapid Support Forces have not only occupied people's homes and forcibly evicted them from their homes, jobs and livelihoods and separated their families – they have also looted their property, savings, destroyed their homes and memories and left them destitute, while subjecting women to horrific sexual violence and rape.

Over the past 142 days, inhabited villages in Nyala, South West Darfur and West Darfur have been razed to the ground. People were massacred as they tried to flee for their lives and women and girls were subjected to horrific sexual violence and rape, which has now become tantamount to genocide.

Why West Darfur? West Darfur is a region rich in uranium. Sudan is estimated to have 1.5 million tons of uranium reserves, mostly located in the West Darfur and Nuba Mountains. Both are now sites of human genocide.

A few days before this conflict erupted, a shipment of uranium was confiscated by Sudanese police in Khartoum airport, widely reported on the news. Tribal conflict, supported and fuelled by the Rapid Support Forces, erupted in Tour Baranga, a uranium-rich part of West Darfur. The conflict left over 50 people dead. People were being shot at, while burying their dead. It was horrific.

A few days after this uranium incident, conflict erupted between the Rapid Support Forces, and the Sudanese Armed forces!

Why Khartoum? Khartoum, with its more than 8 million inhabitants, is the place where the greatest resistance to this war and this genocidal government lives.

The resistance is made up of the Popular Resistance Committee, alongside a collation of opposition forces, which the Sudanese Armed Forces and their paramilitary troops, now engaged in conflict – the Rapid Support Forces – have been relentlessly trying to crush since the popular resistance to this neo-colonial government began to take shape in 2011. The resistance is calling for civilian rule and democratic government accountable to the people.

What is happening now, with the support of Russia and its Middle Eastern ally the United Arab Emirates, is a scorched-earth campaign to destroy the peoples of Sudan in order to free the country for mineral extraction and economic exploitation.

Sudan is also Africa's largest producer of gold – the gold reserves that fuel Russia's war against

Ukraine and enable Russia to defy the world. Meanwhile, Sudanese die of poverty and famine and this violent war, that is using 60 million dollars' worth of military aircraft and an endless supply of weapons and troops trained by the Kremlin's private armed operation, Wagner.

To put this in perspective, humanitarian aid to Sudan at the start of this violent conflict amounted 40 million dollars, less that the cost of these military planes, used by the Sudanese Armed forces to destroy Sudan in this senseless war.

The link between Wagner and Sudan is so strong that on 23rd August, when the news came of the death of Yevgeny Prigozhin, the leader of Wagner, Russia's state-funded private army, Sudanese Facebook pages and social media accounts were flooded with posts and comments about the news. One activist wrote: "Africa will sleep soundly tonight." Another said that Putin was wearing a black tie, which must mean that his strongman had been killed!

The Kremlin-linked private army has been Russia's colonial arm since its inception. It is a complex network of business and mercenary groups across Africa, in the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali and Sudan.

In Sudan, the group was mainly involved in training the army and paramilitary troops, the Rapid Support Forces, and in supplying weapons and extracting gold and other valuable minerals from Sudan for Russia's benefit.

Russia is looting the gold in Sudan to support Putin's war effort in Ukraine through it. Wagner's main vehicle is a US-sanctioned company called Mero Gold, a subsidiary of Prigozhin-owned M-invest, which mines gold while providing arms and training to the armies.

[Through Mero Gold](#) and other companies linked to Prigozhin employees, he developed a strategy to plunder Sudan's economic resources. The centre was founded by Mikhail Khodorkovsky, one of Russia's richest men, who lives in exile in London. Operations in Sudan are overseen by a senior associate of Wagner, Alexander Sergeyevich Kuznetsov. Kunznetsov is a convicted kidnapper who fought in neighbouring Libya.

What Wagner is doing in Sudan is using special equipment to ensure that gold extraction is maximised. Russian planes land at Khartoum airport to take the gold directly to Russia.

Meanwhile, 8 million Sudanese were dependent on World Food Programme subsidies at that time, even before the eruption of the violent conflict. Now after the conflict, 40 million Sudanese are dependent on aid, but most of it is not being distributed to the people who need it, instead being sold on the market by the current Sudanese government.

Power is sovereignty, the ability to govern a territory without interference from other entities. Sudan is ruled by puppets who change allegiance quickly.

Today, the Sudanese armed forces are allied with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the US, while the Rapid Support Forces are allied with the United Arab Emirates and Russia. Both are involved in this brutal conflict and both are leaving the Sudanese people of all classes and political persuasions to fend for themselves. Both armies are only protecting their generals and are using the people and their foot soldiers as fodder for this terrible conflict.

The relationship between the generals and the neo-colonialists is direct and ever-changing. In February 2023, Sudanese forces negotiated with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who visited Sudan to establish a naval base for at least a quarter of a century, part of Moscow's efforts to expand its global reach.

The agreement, recently published on the official government documents portal, allows Russia to maintain up to four naval vessels, including nuclear-powered ones, at Port Sudan on the Red Sea at any one time. The agreement has a term of 25 years and can be automatically extended for ten years at a time if neither party objects.

The document states that the Russian naval base is to contribute “to the strengthening of peace and stability in the region” and is not directed against third parties. In return for Sudan’s permission to establish the base, Russia will provide Sudan with weapons and military equipment.

So here we have it: another Russian link to the violent conflict in Sudan and the ongoing scorched earth campaign, displacing, killing and destroying the people of Sudan for Russian interests.

What has Russian support enabled in Sudan? It helped the army capture the country through a military coup in October 2021, which dissolved a transitional civilian government, that was working towards a democratic transition and people’s rule. Now the country has descended into a genocidal war – mass displacement, destitution of all economic classes, impoverishment and now the spectre of famine, because of the looting of humanitarian aid by the government in order to sell it on the local markets.

It has enabled the expansion of the Rapid Support militia – the paramilitary section controlled by one man, gold trader Hemiti – who is estimated to have traded over 3 trillion worth of gold with UAE and Russia.

It supported the oppression of liberation groups such as the Resistance Committees and now it is supporting the Rapid Support Forces, which are destroying the peoples of Sudan. Complete destruction is happening – to lives, property and livestock. Major industries have been burnt and looted – grain mills, medical supplies, factories, food stocks – and replenishment and supply routes have been compromised.

Humanitarian aid delivered to Sudan is distributed by the Sudanese Ministry of Finance. Jibril Ibrahim, the ex-Justice and Equality Movement Commander in Chief was part of a delegation that visited Russia in March 2022. Humanitarian aid is directed from cargo to local markets to be sold at extortionate prices to remaining residents

Hemiti and his Rapid Support Forces are aided and trained by Russia, which is acting in the capacity of a global neo-colonial force, and supported by UAE, which is acting in the capacity of a regional neo-colonial force, looting Sudanese minerals for their benefit. The Sudanese army, also trained and armed by Russia, is now supported by Saudi Arabia and Egypt, both acting as regional neo-colonial forces.

Egypt’s role is not just one of direct military support of the Sudanese Armed Forces, including the active involvement of their air force in Sudan, and the occupation of the Mero airbase which is named as one of the reasons for the discord between the Sudanese Armed Forces and its Rapid Support Forces. It is also benefiting from the plundering of Sudanese gold from the northern parts of Sudan, and the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan.

In South Kordofan another war front is being waged between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudanese Liberation Army, under the command of Abul Aziz Al Hilo. On that front, Al Hilo is funding his armies by selling gold on the cheap to Egypt.

Also, while 2.5 million have fled the conflict internally and moved from Khartoum to nearby states, approximately 250,000 of middle income and wealthy Sudanese have fled to Egypt. Refugees who fled without their income will be supported directly by the UNHCR.

Both will be spending their money in the Egyptian economy; wealthy Sudanese with money overseas, will be investing in homes, schools, and buying goods from the Egyptian economy and many are already sending their children to Egyptian universities. Egypt has since taking in Sudan's most wealthiest, shut its borders and its visa scheme to Sudanese and is no longer allowing Sudanese refugees to seek refuge there.

Will the rest of Africa, Gabon, Niger, Mali and DRC follow suit? Probably, with the advancement of new, labour- and cost-efficient farming methods, such as Centre Pivot; irrigated farming and vertical farming both rely on technology and computing and less on human labour.

Wagner's technologies of gold extraction also uses cutting-edge technology that is not heavily reliant on human labour to get the most out of the gold mines and the gold dust in Sudan. And with the advancement of the digital economy or 4.0 revolution and robotics such as those produced by Boston Dynamics, labour is no longer needed as much as it was in the past.

Exploitation is no longer based on land, labour and resources, but on land and resources. So the human factor is expendable and this makes it a very dangerous situation for the Sudanese, and Africans generally.

Furthermore, before the conflict erupted, 11 billion Sudanese were out of work. This is almost a third of the population. These unemployed youths and middle-aged people were fuelling the resistance but also provided the people-power for the armies. In a way, the war is acting as a form of population control, similar to the function of jails in places like the US, where people considered as excess labour are jailed. In the Sudan, they are killed!

Will this happen in Europe too? It is already happening in the Mediterranean and on the borders of Europe where 40,000 have died since the early 1990s and it will happen in mainland Europe - the Boomerang effect that Aimé Césaire talks about in his book *Discourse on Colonialism*.

The new commodity that the world powers are interested in is human-free land, to enable exploitation and expansion of neo-colonial interests. This is what is happening in the Sudan.

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