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MARCH 2025

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC:

7TH MARCH 2025

DEADLY ATTACKS AGAINST ETHNIC FULANI INCREASE

In February, a robbery triggered escalating violence between Anti-balaka and Fulani pastoralists, two groups locked in a longstanding competition for power in the country. The Anti-balaka arose from self-defense groups, primarily recruited from animist and Christian populations, and have contested power against numerous predominantly Muslim groups, including ethnic Fulani. Civilian targeting increased after two people, who had been part of an Anti-balaka militia under the leadership of Michel Bélo, stole a motorcycle, gold, and a sum of money on the Baoro-Bouar axis in Ouham-Pendé on 14 February. Subsequent reprisals and counter-attacks were coordinated by numerous militias, with violence concentrated in Ouham-Pendé prefecture.

The violence primarily targeted civilians and led to at least 130 reported fatalities. Fulani pastoralists were particularly affected by the violence, comprising at least 85% of the reported fatalities from civilian targeting last month. The escalation in civilian targeting led

to February being the deadliest month in the country since March 2022, when the Wagner Group carried out widespread violence targeting civilians in Vakaga prefecture.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO:

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO: CIVILIAN TARGETING SURGES AS M23 ADVANCE IN SOUTH KIVU

In February, the March 23 Movement (M23) and the Rwandan Defense Force (RDF) captured the South Kivu regional capital of Bukavu. They marched further into the province, with the Congolese army (FARDC), Wazalendo, and Burundian army retreating southward to positions around Uvira. Each month, fighting tends to break out between the Wazalendo and FARDC, who have maintained a precarious relationship in their collaboration against the M23-RDF offensive. The retreat of the FARDC sparked clashes with allied militias under the Wazalendo coalition, who resisted

the withdrawal of the FARDC and demanded fleeing Congolese soldiers surrender their weapons.

Amid the instability and changing authority in the province, there was a spike in civilian targeting in South Kivu last month. Nearly half of the violence targeting civilians was carried out by FARDC soldiers, who often looted and attacked civilians in areas under threat from the M23 offensive or during their retreat from the frontlines. The FARDC is composed of numerous ex-militants from various

armed groups and tends to lack discipline and cohesion. They frequently pose risks to civilian populations and engage in widespread violence targeting civilians, looting, and property destruction.⁴ The M23 and Twirwaneho – an armed group of ethnic Banyamulenge allied with the M23 – also accused the FARDC of conducting aerial bombardments on civilian-populated areas under M23 control

in South Kivu.⁵ The M23, meanwhile, attacked civilians in South Kivu after taking control of populated areas. Contributing to the civilian targeting was a rise in mob violence. Given the unstable governance in the province, locals increasingly took justice into their own hands through lynchings and collective violence against suspected criminals.

Source: www.acleddata.com

ETHIOPIA:

25TH MARCH 2025

ARE ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA HURTLING TOWARDS WAR?

THE TWO COUNTRIES' HISTORICALLY FRAUGHT RELATIONSHIP WAS MENDED IN 2018, BUT HOSTILITIES ARE FLARING AGAIN.

Tensions are again mounting between longtime foes Ethiopia and Eritrea over Addis Ababa's quest for maritime access, causing fears of yet another conflict in the Horn of Africa barely seven years after the two neighbours restored ties. Eritrea has, in recent months, called for young people to sign up for the army, while Ethiopia has reportedly deployed troops to joint border areas. Analysts say those moves could potentially see the two armies come face to face in a conflict. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, in a recent statement on X, ruled out conflict with Eritrea to gain access to the Red Sea. Abiy, who has previously said gaining access to the Red Sea was "an existential issue", stressed that his country wanted to achieve it "peacefully via dialogue". But Eritrea has, on its part, struck a harsher tone, and called Ethiopia "misguided" over border tensions.

Here's what to know about the two countries' historically fraught relationship, and why tensions are building again: What are the signs of tension between Ethiopia and Eritrea?

There has been a build-up of hostilities in recent months. Last September, Ethiopian Airlines, the country's national carrier, was forced to suspend flights to Eritrea after it received a ban notice from Asmara and its bank accounts there were frozen. Officials of the airline said no reasons were given for the ban. Then, in February, an Eritrean rights group, Human Rights Concern Eritrea (HRCE) reported that the Eritrean government was issuing military mobilisation directives to citizens below 60 years old, and was calling up reservists. The group said the announcements represented forced conscription policies in the authoritarian-led country.

"This sudden and unprecedented mobilisation has sent shockwaves through Eritrean society, as it is assumed that the war could be

with neighbouring Ethiopia," HRCE said in its report.

"We call on the United Nations, the African Union, and all concerned governments to intervene and pressure the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments to cease these actions, respect the rights of their citizens, and halt any escalation towards war." Similarly, according to reporting by the Reuters news agency, Ethiopia deployed troops and tanks on its northern borders with Eritrea early in March. Officials did not give any reasons for the troop build-up there. What's happening in the Tigray region and how is it related to the tensions? Conflict in Ethiopia's northern region of Tigray has also signalled escalating hostilities between the neighbouring countries. Political disputes in Tigray, which borders Eritrea, have seen the government there splinter, with one faction reportedly allying with Eritrea.

The semiautonomous Tigray region was the epicentre of a civil war that lasted from 2020

to 2022, and that created a humanitarian crisis that saw hundreds of thousands killed, and about three million internally displaced. It was a result of the Ethiopian government's attempts to put down a rebellion by the Tigrayan governing party – the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Addis Ababa accused the TPLF of trying to dominate the country's federal politics, while the TPLF saw the central government as controlling too much power. Eritrean forces collaborated with Ethiopian troops during the Tigray war, with all sides being accused of severe human rights violations. However, when a peace deal – the Pretoria Peace Agreement – was signed in November 2022 between the Ethiopian federal government and the rebel regional government, Eritrea was not invited to the negotiations. Some analysts believe officials in Eritrea felt slighted, and that the move drove a wedge between the two governments. Why has the TPLF broken into factions? The fragile peace achieved in Tigray has since come apart as an interim TPLF administration installed after the war split into two factions this year. A dissident faction accuses the interim TPLF government, led by Getachew Reda, of failing to uphold the peace deal agreements, such as returning displaced people to their homes, and of "selling out" Tigrayan interests in its alliance with the federal authorities.

In the latest offensives last week, the breakaway faction, under TPLF chairman Debretsion Gebremichael, seized the major Tigrayan towns of Adigrat and Adi-Gudem amid reports of civilian displacements and injuries. The group also reportedly took over the main radio station in Mekelle, the regional capital. The breakaway faction is also accused of collaborating with Eritrea, although the government in Asmara denies any links with dissident TPLF members. In a statement on Wednesday, the interim TPLF administration sought help from the federal government in Addis Ababa, saying "the region may be on the brink of another crisis".

General Tsadkan Gebretensae, a vice president in the interim administration in Ethiopia's Tigray region, writing recently in the *Africa Report*, an Africa-focused magazine, echoed those thoughts. "At any moment, war between Ethiopia and Eritrea could break out," he wrote.

Why are relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia historically fragile?

Eritrea was an Italian colony until 1951, when it fell under British control and became an autonomous part of Ethiopia. In 1962, Ethiopia sought to annex Eritrea, but rebel forces, led by leader Isaias Afwerki, resisted in an armed struggle and secured independence in 1993.

In 1998, clashes broke out over disputed border territories, resulting in a two-year war. An estimated 80,000 people were killed, and the conflict broke apart families across borders as all diplomatic ties and interstate communication – transport, phone, and postal networks – were cut. In 2000, a UN-backed peace deal granted the disputed territories to Eritrea, but the deal was never implemented. When Abiy became prime minister in 2018, he immediately moved to end the tensions and normalise diplomatic relations with Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki, who has ruled since 1993.

"We will demolish the wall and, with love, build a bridge between the two countries," Abiy had said during his historic trip to Asmara after decades of strife.

Soon, communication links were re-established and many families reunited. Flights also commenced between the capital cities of Addis Ababa and Asmara. However, analysts say Eritrea, following its involvement in the Tigray war, was unhappy about being excluded from the peace negotiations. The TPLF main faction and Eritrea remain deeply hostile towards each other, and some reports reveal that Eritrean forces have not fully

withdrawn from parts of Tigray, despite the war being over. There is speculation that both countries could turn Tigray into a proxy battlefield. Abiy's ambitions to seek direct sea access for landlocked Ethiopia have also contributed to the tensions. Addis Ababa's access to the port was severed after Eritrea declared independence. Since then, the Red Sea port of Djibouti has been the main trade conduit for Ethiopia, but it is costly – about \$1bn annually.

In recent years, Abiy has repeated that Ethiopia has a right to sea access, words that officials in Asmara take as a declaration of territorial conflict with Eritrea, which lies on the Red Sea and took all of Ethiopia's sea access with it upon independence. Some say Abiy is eyeing the port of Assab, one of Eritrea's two ports. In a press briefing last week, Eritrea's Foreign Minister Osman Saleh scolded Ethiopia for its

rhetoric and denied preparing for a war.

"Eritrea is perplexed by Ethiopia's misguided and outdated ambitions for maritime access and naval base through diplomacy or military force," Saleh said. "In this respect, Eritrea urges the international community and its relevant bodies to put pressure on Ethiopia to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours." Ethiopia has also angered Somalia, its neighbour to the east, with those declarations. After Ethiopia signed a port deal with autonomous, coastal Somaliland, Somalia, which sees Somaliland as one of its regions, cut off diplomatic ties with Addis Ababa. In what appeared to be retaliation and, perhaps, taking sides, Eritrea signed a security agreement with Somalia and Egypt last October. Ethiopia has also fallen out with Egypt over issues related to shared access to the Nile River.

WHAT NEXT?

Amid fears of another conflict, residents in Tigray are queueing at banks to withdraw cash, some hoping to leave the region for Addis Ababa or neighbouring countries, according to reporting by the United Kingdom's Guardian newspaper. Government forces are also patrolling heavily and conducting ID checks. Abiy, in a post on X, sought to allay fears. He assured that Ethiopia would not go to war with Eritrea but would seek a peaceful dialogue to resolve the issues. "Ethiopia does not have any intention of engaging in conflict with Eritrea for the purpose of gaining access to the sea," Abiy said on Thursday, according to a post by his office on X. Eritrea has not responded to Abiy's statement. Earlier, Osman Saleh, the country's foreign minister, denied

allegations of Eritrean troops' presence on the ground in Ethiopia.

This week, Saleh also met Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Cairo to discuss "the security of the Red Sea" as Asmara appears set to continue parlaying with stronger rivals of Ethiopia. Meanwhile, the African Union, the European Union, and the United States have called for a de-escalation of hostilities. Writing in the US magazine Foreign Policy last week, Payton Knopf and Alexander Rondos, former US and EU special envoys to the region, described the developments as "dry tinder waiting for a match that could ignite an interstate war between Ethiopia and Eritrea".

Source: Al Jazeera

UGANDA:

11TH MARCH 2025

UGANDA DEPLOYS TROOPS IN SOUTH SUDAN AS CIVIL WAR FEARS GROW

MOUNTING TENSION IN SOUTH SUDAN LEADS TO CLASHES AS POWER-SHARING DEAL BETWEEN PRESIDENT SALVA KIIR AND VICE PRESIDENT RIEK MACHAR UNRAVELS.

Uganda has deployed special forces in South Sudan as fears grow that the country could descend into civil war.

Kampala's military chief announced on Tuesday that the troops had been sent to help "secure" Juba, the capital of Uganda's northern neighbour. Tension between President Salva Kiir and First Vice President Riek Machar are spiralling as a power-sharing deal unravels, and clashes have erupted.

In a series of posts on X, Muhoozi Kainerugaba wrote that "as of two days ago, our Special Forces units entered Juba to secure it".

"We the UPDF (Ugandan military), only recognise one President of South Sudan, H.E. Salva Kiir ... Any move against him is a declaration of war against Uganda! All those who commit that crime will learn what it means!" he added.

The military chief did not elaborate on how long the troops would be stationed in Juba or if Uganda had been asked to aid Kiir.

Sporadic fighting has broken out in South Sudan in recent days as tension threatens to pull Kiir and Machar back into conflict. The pair signed a peace deal to bring a five-year civil war to an end in 2018.

Kiir's government detained two ministers and several senior military officials allied with Machar last week.

Dozens of soldiers and a general were killed in the northern town of Nasir amid clashes between the South Sudanese army and the White Army militia, which Kiir has linked to Machar.

Kiir has insisted that he will not allow a return to war. However, analysts have warned that there is a threat of renewal of the conflict.

In a statement on Friday, the United Nations urged "all actors to refrain from further violence and for the country's leaders to urgently intervene to resolve tensions through dialogue and ensure that the security situation in Nasir, and more broadly, does not deteriorate".

The entry of Ugandan troops mirrors a similar move after the civil war broke out in 2013 when Kampala deployed soldiers to Juba to reinforce Kiir's forces.

While the troops were withdrawn in 2015, they were again deployed in 2016 after the fighting reignited.

The building tension in South Sudan carries the fear for Uganda that a full-blown war could send refugees across the border and create further regional instability.

Kampala has sent troops across its eastern border into the Democratic Republic of the Congo in recent months, where rebel groups

backed by Rwanda are fighting the government over control of eastern regions.

Source: www.aljazeera.com

SOMALIA:

US AND UAE-SUPPORTED AIRSTRIKES AGAINST INSURGENTS ESCALATE

Puntland state security forces, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States carried out an intensive joint airstrike campaign targeting bases, training facilities, and camps linked to the Islamic State Somalia Province (IS Somalia). Early in February, US airstrikes targeted members of IS Somalia in Puntland, killing 14 militants, including a senior IS Somalia recruiter, a financier, and an external operations leader responsible for the deployment of fighters into the US and across Europe. US officials believe that the IS threat is growing in Somalia after top IS members allegedly traveled to the country to expand and develop links in the region.⁸ Although the

Emirati military had conducted airstrikes in Somalia before, the scale of UAE airstrikes in February was unprecedented, with at least 30 strikes targeting militant positions in the mountainous areas of Bari. For its part, IS Somalia has ramped up the use of drone strikes, which struck Puntland Maritime Police and Dervish Forces at bases in Qandala district of Bari. This aerial campaign represents a significant escalation in the fight against IS Somalia, whose leader, Sheikh Abdulkadir Mumin, is believed to have risen through the ranks of the global militant organization. US airstrikes were reported to have killed Mumin in 2024, but his death has never been confirmed.

US, ISRAEL WANT TO DISPLACE PALESTINIANS FROM GAZA TO EAST AFRICA:

REPORT: OFFICIALS FROM US AND ISRAEL SAY GOVERNMENTS OF SUDAN, SOMALIA AND SOMALILAND HAVE BEEN ASKED TO TAKE IN PEOPLE OF GAZA.

14TH MARCH 2025

The United States and Israel have discussed with three East African governments the forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza to Sudan, Somalia and its breakaway region of Somaliland, according to US and Israeli officials quoted by The Associated Press news agency.

Friday's report said officials from Sudan claimed to have rejected overtures from the US, while officials from Somalia and Somaliland told AP they were unaware of any contacts.

Speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss a secret diplomatic initiative, US and Israeli officials confirmed the contacts with

Somalia and Somaliland, while the US officials confirmed Sudan as well. They said it was unclear how much progress the efforts made or at what level the discussions took place.

The development comes more than a month after US President Donald Trump floated the idea of forcibly displacing Palestinians and

"taking over" the Gaza Strip. It was roundly rejected by Palestinians and countries in the Middle East, with many describing it as ethnic cleansing.

Separate outreach from the US and Israel to the three potential destinations began last month, days after Trump floated the Gaza plan alongside Netanyahu, according to the US officials, who said Israel was taking the lead in the discussions.

'RED LINE'

Tamer Qarmout, an associate professor at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, told Al Jazeera the forced displacement of Palestinians is "a red line that should not be crossed".

He said governments around the world have a responsibility to stop the "outrageous" proposal and "should not be engaging with Israel on any of these scenarios", especially the displacement of Palestinians to African countries, "many of which continue to struggle from colonial legacies".

"Sudan and Somalia are still ravaged by wars due to the colonial legacy. They [the Israeli government] have to be exposed and put on a shame list," Qarmout added.

In exchange for accepting resettled Palestinians, it is thought that a variety of incentives – financial, diplomatic and security – would be offered to the East African

'HIDDEN AGENDA'

Meanwhile, it is difficult to understand why Somalia would want to host Palestinians given the country's strong support for Palestinian self-rule, Sambu Chepkorir, a lawyer and conflict researcher in Nairobi, told AP.

"The realignments keep changing, and so maybe there is a hidden agenda in why Somalia," Chepkorir said.

There was no immediate reaction to the report from the US or Israel.

But Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a longtime advocate of what he calls "voluntary" emigration of Palestinians, said this week that Israel is working to identify countries to take them in. He also said Israel is preparing a "very large emigration department" within its Ministry of Defense.

governments.

A US official involved in the efforts confirmed to AP that the US was "having a quiet conversation with Somaliland about a range of areas where they can be helpful to the US in exchange for recognition".

The US could offer the breakaway region of more than 3 million people international recognition, which is a priority for Somaliland's new president, Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi.

Abdirahman Dahir Adan, Somaliland's foreign minister, told the Reuters news agency denied the breakaway region's authorities having received a proposal.

"I haven't received such a proposal, and there are no talks with anyone regarding Palestinians," he said.

Two Sudanese officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive diplomatic matter, confirmed the Trump administration has approached the military-led government about accepting Palestinians.

One said the contacts began even before Trump's inauguration, with offers of military assistance against the RSF paramilitary group,

assistance with postwar reconstruction and other incentives.

immediately rebuffed," said one official. "No one opened this matter again."

Both officials said the Sudanese government rejected the idea. "This suggestion was

Source: www.aljazeera.com

SUDAN:

THE SAF CAPTURE NUMEROUS LOCATIONS AND STRATEGIC PARTS OF KHARTOUM

In February, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) gained control of numerous strategic locations in Khartoum, including the Kafouri neighborhood, parts of the East Nile locality, and central Khartoum. Seizing control of the Kafouri neighborhood proved difficult for the SAF due to the presence of high-rise buildings utilized by Rapid Support Forces (RSF) snipers. The fight to control central Khartoum was predominantly focused on the Republican Palace, a symbol of political power in Khartoum and central Sudan. Although the SAF made numerous advances in Khartoum, fighting with the RSF continued in west and south Omdurman neighborhoods, East Nile, and central Khartoum. The SAF campaign in Khartoum began in September 2024, when the SAF adopted an offensive posture that helped recapture several locations in southern and central Sudan from the RSF.

The wider offensive also gained momentum across the country, with the SAF and its allies regaining control of at least 100 different locations from the RSF and supporting militias in February, the most since the onset of the war in April 2023. Outside of Khartoum, the SAF made important gains south of the capital along the White and Blue Nile rivers

in al-Jazirah and White Nile states, as well as North and South Kordofan. The capture of locations in North Kordofan opened up critical supply routes as El Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan, could be used as an operations hub for the SAF to reach areas of West Kordofan and Darfur, including the highly contested city of al-Fasher.

THE SUDANESE ARMY ON THE BATTLEFIELD: STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND POSSIBLE TRAJECTORIES

THE SUDANESE ARMY RECAPTURED WAD MADANI, THE CAPITAL OF GEZIRA STATE, AFTER STRIKING THE RAPID SUPPORT FORCES AND WEAKENING THEIR POSITION. USING WAD MADANI'S STRATEGIC LOCATION, THE ARMY LIFTED THE SIEGE ON KHARTOUM'S GENERAL COMMAND, RECOVERED SIGNALLING EQUIPMENT AND THE OIL REFINERY, SETTING UP FOR FUTURE OPERATIONS IN DARFUR.

10TH MARCH 2025

In what could be a pivotal turning point in the war in Sudan, the Sudanese army recaptured Wad Madani, the capital of the Gezira state, in early January 2025. The army surrounded the city from the south, west and east, to close in on the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), using a combination of weapons, most notably air strikes, to target RSF sites, infrastructure and supply depots, thus

weakening RSF morale, preventing it from gathering its forces, and paving the way for army's ground operations.

The recapture of Wad Madani will disrupt RSF supply lines to its forces in the capital, thereby alleviating pressure on the Sudanese army in Khartoum, as well as giving the army control of roads connecting southern and eastern Sudan.

The failure of the RSF to hold Wad Madani is attributable to successive strikes by the Sudanese army that wore down the RSF. Moreover, in November 2024, Sudanese armed factions in Darfur announced they would join the Sudanese army in the fight against the RSF. This joint force was able to thwart RSF attempts to take al-Fasher, the capital of Darfur, as well as strategic areas in North Darfur, disrupting RSF supply lines and hampering their operational capabilities.

The regional and international environment is also tilting slightly in favour of the Sudanese army, as demonstrated by the shift in the position of the Kenyan government, which in early January 2025 refused to allow Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (also known as Hemedti), Head of the RSF, to hold a press conference. This will further isolate Hemedti in East Africa and enhance the legitimacy of the government of Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, Chairman of the Transitional Sovereignty Council and the de facto ruler of Sudan, perhaps spurring other countries to follow Kenya's example. Turkey's offer of mediation has also been welcomed by the Sudanese government and Abu Dhabi.

The Trump presidency may further tip the balance in favour of the Sudanese army. In addition to Trump's expressed desire to end wars, the US administration may act to curtail the influence of rivals like Russia, which is aiding Hemedti's forces.

All of these developments could enable the

Sudanese army to gradually encircle the RSF. The first RSF positions to be affected will likely be in Khartoum and its suburbs, where the RSF will face increasing difficulties in obtaining support personnel, equipment and supplies. The army may also use its position in Wadi Madani to prevent RSF deployments on the Ethiopian border, cutting off supplies and hindering RSF efforts to obtain recognition from the Ethiopian leadership.

These partial pressures may ultimately weaken the cohesion of Hemedti's forces in Darfur and exacerbate, or create, cracks in the RSF's support structure. The RSF maintains rear bases in Chadian territory near the Sudanese border but the relationship between the RSF and the Chadian government is fragile and could be undercut by tribal differences and rising tensions between Chad and the Burhan government.

The Sudanese army and allied militias will also seek to cut off RSF supply lines in the Central African Republic, which relies on Russia's African Corps to maintain the current government. The Sudanese government could offer Russia incentives—gold concessions or facilities on the Red Sea—to withdraw its support for the RSF.

Given these conditions, the likelihood of the Sudanese army retaking full control of the capital seems high, but other developments, such as the defeat of the RSF in Darfur, depend on too many unknown variables to predict with any certainty. Chad may alternately intensify its cooperation with the RSF, and influential regional actors could act to ease international pressure on Hemedti's forces. If Hemedti consolidates his control over Darfur, the two warring parties may end up in a stalemate similar to the one in Libya.

Historically, the Sudanese army has not ended internal wars with a decisive military victory, but through political settlements. This war, however, has distinct features and so may diverge from this pattern. The RSF does not have a large base in Sudan, being limited to some areas of Darfur. It also depends on the leadership of Hemedti and his relatives. If the Sudanese army manages to overthrow the leadership, the forces may disintegrate. Moreover, the length of the war, the scale of atrocities committed, and widespread popular support for the Sudanese army has prompted several countries to reevaluate their support

for the RSF and may lead others to do so.

If the Sudanese army is able to exploit these weaknesses to dismantle the RSF, it will still face many challenges. RSF remnants may turn to organised crime, spreading terror across Sudan. And while the political forces currently rallied around the Sudanese army have put aside their differences to confront the RSF threat, once the threat is removed, their differences may resurface, making it difficult to reach a consensus on a political system that can succeed military rule.

Source: www.aljazeera.com

KENYA:

21ST MARCH 2025

KENYA'S HANDSHAKE POLITICS: ELITE SELF-PRESERVATION DISGUISED AS COMPROMISE

THE RECENT MOU BETWEEN RAILA'S AND RUTO'S PARTIES FOLLOWS A LONG TRADITION OF INTRACTABLE ENEMIES COMING TOGETHER TO GET RICH, BLOCK REFORM AND SURVIVE IN KENYAN POLITICS.

The handshake is an honoured tradition of Kenyan politics. It signifies the coming together of seemingly intractable enemies into an agreement to share the spoils rather than fight over them. It has always been negotiated in secret between a party with state power and a rival claiming popular legitimacy and has always functioned as a ploy by the political elite to dent popular momentum towards any change that threatens to upend the country's rigid political caste system.

It is a legacy of British colonialism. The first handshakes were doled out at the dawn of colonial rule as the British co-opted local potentates and pretenders as colonial officials, giving them the opportunity to "eat" as they sold out their people. Just prior to granting Kenya independence in 1963, the British executed another handshake, this time with the person they had scurrilously accused of leading the Mau Mau rebellion and jailed for seven years, Jomo Kenyatta. Despite labelling him a "leader unto darkness and death", they nonetheless cut a deal with him to smooth his way into power in return for a promise to let them keep the land they stole.

In the years following independence, the handshake became the go-to tactic for managing elite contestation for power as well as popular dissent. Its cynical practicality – as veteran journalist Charles Obbo put it: "every politician has a chance to eat. Every deal is possible. No betrayal is unthinkable" – has paradoxically been responsible for preventing Kenya's success as well as stopping the country from sliding into violence and anarchy. The handshake that ended the post-election violence in 2008 is a great example. It stopped a conflagration sparked by a dispute over the

presidential election that had taken more than 1,300 lives and displaced hundreds of others. However, it also saddled the country with a regime whose first order of business was to institute a fake maize subsidy scheme that lined the pockets of politicians of all stripes and left a third of the nation starving.

One of the two protagonists in that particular episode was Raila Odinga, probably the most prolific practitioner of handshake politics. A permanent opposition doyen who has never officially won a presidential election – he was a controversial losing candidate in five of the last six elections, some of which were stolen from him – he has nonetheless succeeded in executing a power-sharing agreement with each of Kenya's last four presidents.

These agreements have always been claimed to be in the national interest, but in reality have allowed him to leverage his popularity to access the trough. In 2000, he shook hands with former dictator Daniel Arap Moi in what many in the reform movement that was pushing for a new constitution saw as a betrayal. His 2008 handshake was with Moi's successor, Mwai Kibaki. A decade later, in 2018, in the wake of more violence following

yet another disputed election, he was at it again with then-incumbent President Uhuru Kenyatta.

Two weeks ago came news of yet another handshake, this time in the shape of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Raila's Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party and current President William Ruto's United Democratic Alliance (UDA). There are some interesting aspects to this particular deal.

First, Ruto, then deputy president, was the main casualty of the 2018 deal. At the time, it was widely perceived that Kenyatta was paving the way for the state to install Raila as his successor as president in return for quiet in his second term. In the process, he was sacrificing Ruto's ambitions, despite having promised to support him since they got together in 2013 (that's yet another handshake tale – the two were indicted by the International Criminal Court for being on opposite sides of the 2007 violence). However, Kenyatta eventually failed to deliver his end of the bargain.

Secondly, just like Kenyatta before him, Ruto had in 2023 ruled out a handshake with Raila, who had, following the 2022 election, been leading weekly protests to push a rather dubious case for the election having yet again been stolen from him. Despite initially gaining little traction, these protests were supercharged by the cost-of-living crisis, but still Ruto held firm.

It was not until last year's youth-led protests, which completely sidelined the political elites, that Ruto relented, bringing members of ODM into his expanded government whilst backing

Raila's bid for the chairmanship of the African Union Commission. Following the failure of the latter effort, the MoU has now formalised the handshake.

Once again, the agreement is being framed as a response to national challenges rather than as a self-preservation measure. Odinga has claimed that a military coup was imminent if he didn't sign on – hotly denied by the Ministry of Defence – as well as intimating that it was an opportunity to implement the report of the National Dialogue Committee.

That report, which was compiled in the aftermath of the Gen Z protests, itself illustrates just how politicians use handshakes to pad their pockets while undermining popular causes. It largely failed to engage with the issues advocated by the protesters and instead, like the National Accord and Building Bridges Initiative reports that followed the 2008 and 2018 handshakes respectively, it proposed a raft of new well-paid public positions for politicians – including prime minister and leader of opposition as a panacea to the country's political problems.

It is unlikely that this handshake will buy Ruto the legitimacy he craves, however. Raila's credibility as opposition leader has been eviscerated by these repeated accommodations, none doing more damage than the 2018 one. Today, he seems less like the political powerhouse of old and more like an old man desperate to cash in one last time. The real political power has shifted to a new generation that has loudly rejected the politics of handshakes, and they are gearing up for another fight.

Source: www.aljazeera.com

SOUTH SUDAN:

VP'S ARREST ENDS SOUTH SUDAN PEACE DEAL, HIS PARTY SAYS

27TH MARCH 2025

Machar's senior allies were arrested by security forces earlier this month. The detention of South Sudan's First Vice-President Riek Machar has effectively collapsed the 2018 peace deal that ended the country's five-year civil war, his party has said. An armed convoy led by top security officials, including the defence minister, entered Machar's residence in the capital, Juba, and disarmed his bodyguards late on Wednesday, said the Sudan People's Liberation Movement In Opposition (SPLM/IO).

Machar was detained alongside his wife Angelina Teny, who is also the country's interior minister, the party added. The US has urged the authorities to free Machar, while the UN, African Union and neighbouring countries have all expressed their concern. The UN Mission in South Sudan, Unmiss, warned that the world's newest nation risked losing the "hard-won gains of the past seven years" if it returned to "a state of war". "Tonight, the country's leaders stand on the brink of relapsing into widespread conflict," the mission said in a statement on Wednesday. The government is yet to comment on Machar's reported house-arrest. But addressing religious leaders on Wednesday, President Salva Kiir said "he will never return the country to war".

Tensions have been building between Machar and the president for several weeks. The two leaders agreed in August 2018 to end the civil war between their forces that killed nearly 400,000 people. But over the last seven years their relationship has become increasingly strained amid ethnic tensions and sporadic violence. Earlier this week, the UN said that barrel bombs believed to contain a highly flammable liquid had been used in airstrikes during fighting between the army and a rebel group previously linked to Machar. "The arrest and detention of H.E. Dr Riek Machar effectively brings the [peace] agreement to a collapse," SPLM/IO deputy leader Oyet Nathaniel Pierino told

journalists on Thursday. "The prospect for peace and stability in South Sudan has now been put into serious jeopardy," he added.

A similar warning was issued by the UN mission in the country, which said the country's leaders "stand on the brink of relapsing into widespread conflict". The situation has been exacerbated by the deployment of Ugandan troops and their battle tanks into South Sudan, following a request by the country's president, according to the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan chair Yasmin Sooka. She says this raises serious concerns over potential violations of the UN arms embargo and the growing partisan role of foreign forces, which further endangers civilians and risks regional escalation. Tension remains high in Juba with a heavy military presence reported around Machar's home. "The public are in a panic," civil society leader Edmund Yakani told the AFP news agency.

"There is a high chance of full-scale war but it will be more deadly and more violent because of [the need] for revenge," he added. Pierino called on SPLM/IO members and the public to remain calm as diplomatic efforts continue to resolve the situation. The BBC understands that the African Union and the regional body, Igad, are expected to send high-level delegations to Juba on Friday, to help curb the escalating crisis. Reath Muoch

Tang, chairman of the party's foreign relations committee, said Machar was under house-arrest, but that security officials initially tried to take him away.

"An arrest warrant was delivered to him under unclear charges," Tang said in a statement, calling the action a "blatant violation of the constitution and the Revitalized Peace Agreement". The UN mission warned that violations of the 2018 peace deal "will not only devastate South Sudan but also affect the entire region". The British and US embassies have scaled down their diplomatic staff and

Source: BBC World News

urged their citizens to leave the country while the Norwegian and German embassies have closed their operations in Juba. The US has called on President Kiir to free his rival from the reported house-arrest, urging the two leaders to show commitment to peace. "We urge President Kiir to reverse this action & prevent further escalation of the situation," the US Bureau of African Affairs wrote on X. The escalating tensions come amid renewed clashes between forces loyal to the two rivals in the northern town of Nasir in the oil-rich Upper Nile State.

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P.O. BOX 619, Hai Jebrona, Adjacent to Martyrs School,
Opposite Simba Playground, Juba, South Sudan.
Tel: +211 (0) 920 310 415 | +211 (0) 915 652 847
<https://cspss.org.ss>