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## From Rent to Genocide: Dissecting the Economic Architecture of War in Sudan

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**By Muhammad Adel Zaky**

To observe the Sudanese landscape today is to witness not a traditional civil war, but the terminal collapse of an economic and political order founded, since independence, on a bedrock of rent. The state has functioned as a mechanism for distributing spoils among elites who control the levers of power and violence. What we are seeing is a deviation from this path, but its ultimate culmination; a rentier economy leads inexorably to war, for when distributable resources are depleted, redistribution is enforced by bullets.

The Sudanese state was never a productive entity at any point in its history. It was, instead, a mechanism for extraction and distribution, subsisting on what it could gather from external sources. Wealth was seized not to foster new productive capacities or to expand existing ones, but to be recast as influence and repressive power. Over time the state institution itself mutated into a parasitic structure feeding on the remnants of society. When resources finally ran dry, the system began to cannibalize the state, breaking it into its constituent parts: each sector or apparatus now hunts for its own funding, securing its interests with weapons just as it once did with budgets.

The Rapid Support Forces (*RSF*) are the logical and natural outcome of an economy that bred them; they are no anomaly in the state's history. They were conceived as an economic instrument first and a military one second: guarding mines, extracting gold, expending lives, and auctioning loyalty to the highest bidder. In this sense, the ongoing genocidal wars are merely the militarized expression of the rentier economy. The horrors unfolding in El Fasher, Wad Madani, Zalingei, El Geneina, Omdurman, and Nyala represent the moment of convergence between wealth and violence, where the distinction between those who hold the gold and those who wield the guns dissolves, for both are plundering the same resource: human life.

The collapse of the Sudanese state stems not merely from the failure of its elites to govern, but from their historical formation as a stunted component of a predatory global capitalist system. Since the colonial era, the state was constructed around a center that owned and commanded, and peripheries that were drained, marginalized, and even annihilated. Every subsequent national project merely reshuffled roles within this same fundamental framework. Reform never touched the core; they only refined the management of plunder and killing. Thus, Sudan remained trapped between two false paradigms: a military project that sanctifies brute force, and a civilian project too impotent to grasp that freedom cannot be built upon a rentier economy.

The consequence is that rent consumed politics, and then proceeded to consume the state itself. When a state's *raison d'être* is reduced to distributing surplus rather than producing it, militias become *de facto* ministries, mercenaries become rulers, and genocide and ethnic cleansing become the operating law. In this reality, society transforms from a productive body into an open marketplace for violence, and blood becomes the currency of a stateless economy.

What perhaps distinguishes the Sudanese experience is that this internal collapse did not occur in isolation, but within a context of systematic and brazen international pillage. The nations financing and arming the militias are driven not by political strategy alone, but by a cold calculus to protect their stake in gold, ports, and land.

The United Arab Emirates, for instance, views Sudan not as a sovereign nation but as an economic space to be managed through secretive contracts. Russia treats the war as a mechanism to secure gold-smuggling routes for its corporate interests. Turkey and Israel pursue their overlapping ambitions in the Red Sea, each in their own fashion, while the United States observes the spectacle under the banner of "regional stability," as if devastation is a prerequisite for hegemony.

External involvement, therefore, is not a parasite on the crisis; the Sudanese rentier economy was integrated from its inception into the global capitalist market as a periphery for supply and extraction. What is happening today is simply a transition from indirect hegemony to an armed partnership: capitalism holds one hand, and mercenaries the other.

Sudan has become the quintessential model of what might be termed a "violence economy," where war becomes a method for managing surplus, and poverty itself is weaponized as a tool for social control and suppression. When a society is reduced to consumers and combatants, the state devolves into a broker between foreign financiers and local fighters. This is not a war between two armies, but a clash between two economic systems within a single, moribund entity.

Within this structure, no "political solution" can succeed unless it severs the fundamental link between wealth and weaponry. Dialogue that fails to dismantle the logic of rent will not end the war; it will merely reorganize it. What is needed is not a new settlement, but a historical rupture with the very structure that produced the ruin: a civilian state that derives its legitimacy not from violence, but from production; a society governed not by patronage but by right.

And despite the overwhelming devastation, something in Sudan remains worth saving, indeed, worth defending: its people. It is in the eyes of those who share their last morsel of bread, in the villages that steadfastly resist displacement, and in the dawning awareness that war is not fate, but policy.

The beginning of salvation lies not merely in a ceasefire, but in comprehending the war: we must see it as the natural result of an economic system whose productive foundation was obliterated, leaving society to decay in a web of rent and violence. At this juncture, the question surpasses "Who will win?" and becomes "Who will survive?"

What is crumbling in Sudan today is not merely a government, an army, or a regime, but the very concept of the state itself. Unless this concept is resurrected on new foundations of justice and production, every truce will only be a prelude to the next war.

Sudan today stands at the final frontier of a long experiment titled "Rent." Unless this consciousness is transformed into radical political action, the ruin will spread from the periphery to consume the entire Arab world, for the logic of rent is universal, and its destiny is singular: to explode from within.

**Muhammad Adel Zaky is an Egyptian researcher specializing in the history of economic thought. He is the author of *Critique of Political Economy*, a book that has gone through six editions. His research explores the evolution of economic ideas in relation to social and historical change.**

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