



AN ASSESSMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NIGERIA AND REPUBLIC OF SUDAN AT THE WAKE OF THE FRESH UPRISING IN KHARTOUM.

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| Received: 19.08.2023 | Accepted: 23.08.2023 | Published: 27.08.2023

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Abstract

This position paper examined the diplomatic rifts which are likely going to be caused between Nigeria and Republic of Sudan at the wake of the fresh internal conflict between the interim military government headed Abdel-Fattah Burhan and the head of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by its leader General Hamdan Dagalo. The uprising is the latest in the series of internal conflicts that ravaged the country since after the ouster of President Omar Al-Bishir. It has started and continue with emerging consequential effects on both the citizens and indeed the foreigners living in the country. This position paper has concentrated more on the assessment of the diplomatic consequences of this conflict between the two nations. It has adopted mixed methodology of literature review and field interview.

INTRODUCTION

Sudan is in a volatile region, bordering the Red Sea, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. Its strategic location and agricultural wealth have attracted regional power plays, complicating the chances of a successful democratic transition. The country has a lot of advantages especially that its strategic socio-economic development made it one of the most important countries whose political development over the years has significant impact on its nonbordering countries. It shares border with the several African countries prominent among them which include Ethiopia, Chad and South Sudan. Some of the strategic decisions taken over by the powers that be in the country have significant consequential effects on the political and economic development of these nonbordering countries.

The development in Sudan under the long dictatorship of President Omar Al-Bishir over the years, had no doubt sparked tension leading to a successful military coup in April 2021. The coup was triggered by the unending economic crises generated by years of United States sanctions against the government of Sudan led by the President Omar Al-bashir. As reported by the (BBC 2019), "cut to bread and fuel subsidies sparked demonstration in the east over living standards, but the anger soon spread to the capital Khartoum. This is couple with the split of the Southern Sudan which became

independent in 2011. The economic problems in Sudan especially at the wake of the 2019 brought Sudanese from all walks of life to the streets but the organization of the demonstrations was taken over by the Sudanese professional associations (SAP) a collaboration of doctors, health workers and lawyers (BBC. 2019).

The coup against President Omar Al-Bishir did not end the socio-economic crises in Sudan hence the members of the (SPA) tried as much as they can to mobilize the protestors to sustain the sit-in outside the army headquarters in Darfur. The decision was however taken in defiance of the dusk-to-dawn curfew enforced by the military that ouster President Omar Al-Bishir. And added to that reason was that, the coup initiators were those army personnel very close to the President Omar Al-Bishir expressing the fear that the socio-economic problems leading to the coup may further be compounded. The aftermath of the military coup in Sudan resulted to the military announcing that "there would be a three months state of emergency and two years transition period to prepare for the civilian rule. (BBC. 2019). Lt. Gen Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman was later announced by the head of the transitional military council and subsequently the third ruler/leader of the Republic of Sudan.

It was however an open fact that since successful military coup in Sudan in October 2021, the Republic of Sudan has been under the rules of the army generals. The military rules have been adjudged

to be a continued failure to the series of the socio-economic problems faced by the people of the country and that crises continued to persistently generate tension as to the fate of the socio-economic prosperity of the country. In July 2022, given the heightened public distrust of the military, the de-facto Sudanese Head of State said he would withdraw from the political talks and support the formation of technocratic cabinet but the current violence was sparked by a disagreement over the integration of the RSF into the military as part of this transition to the civilian rule. (IRC Report, 2023).

Nigerians living in Darfur no longer feel safe with the current spates of the killings and humanitarian destructions especially the Nigerian students who believed something needs to be done to ensure their evacuation before the situation gets out of hands. As reported by (Damilola 2023), the situation here in Sudan is horrible as students have been experiencing the awful sounds of gunshots, artilleries, bombing, the collapse of residential and governmental buildings” said Muhammad Jilambu the President of the International University of Africa in Sudan.

Though the development is triggering serious diplomatic problems between the Republic of Sudan and many countries in Africa, it has been a scary step as it relates to the Nigeria-Sudan diplomatic relationship. As at now Nigerians living in Sudan no longer feel protected by any international covenant hence hunger, fear and multiple of humanitarian crises is beginning to hit-hard on them and with little or no ready-made cooperation to ensure their safety. (Muhammad 2023). Nigerian students in particular are beginning to deploy options of trekking in distance to access the Ethiopian borders and because the Darfur Airport has been under lock and key, the Nigerian embassy in Darfur is finding it absolutely difficult to initiate some speedy steps to ensure the safe evacuation of its citizens through the Khartoum International Airport. The most diplomatic shock for many Nigerians is that the embassy of Sudan in Nigeria is not saying anything to please hundreds of Nigerians about the safety of their love ones in Darfur. Beyond the immediate effect of this war in Sudan, the historic legacies of inter-group relations between the people of the two countries, the economic ties in the area of import/export, the war against terrorism, Oil and Gas and aspect of the inter-group relations are becoming under serious threat.

This position examined the impacts of the diplomatic relationship between the Republic of Sudan and Nigeria at the wake of the fresh uprising in Darfur. It has specifically assessed the impacts of the uprising in relations to the economy, education, regional counter-terrorism as well as global political development. The paper has adopted mixed research methodology of literature review and field interviews to ascertain the extent of the validity of the findings.

THE FRESH UPRISING IN DARFUR, HOW IT STARTED AND ITS HUMANITARIAN OUTLOOKS

History has shown that the current uprising in Sudan started when the serving head of the military government Al-Burhan decide to dissolve the transition council and vowed to hold election in 2023. It was a crisis which revolves around infighting between two rival groups namely: the Sudanese army and a para-military group known as the RSF or Rapid Support Forces (Christopher, 2023). Since after the fall of President Omar Al-Bishir the longest serving

dictator, Sudan is led by a military transitional government headed by General Abdel-Fattah Burhan with the support of the Rapid Support Forces led by its leader General Hamdan Dagalo. Though there was a pledge of transferring power to the civilian elected power by 2023, it appears as if the two factions of the Sudanese military and that of RSF were not ready to relinquish the throne of power by the year 2023 as promised. The two warring factions were instead locked in to a power struggle.

Before the fresh crisis broke finally, there was an attempt to ascertain which of the generals between Al-Burhan the head of the Sudanese military government and Dohalo the leader of the SRF will become subordinate to one another and also how the SRF will be formally integrated into the Sudanese military. When the negotiation failed between the two factions, war broke out on the 8th of April 2023 and the city of Khartoum and Obdurman were turned to battle grounds. Though two ceasefires were agreed upon by the warring factions, both failed to stop the violence (Damilola 2023). It was on record that the transitional government led by the Sudanese military became scared when the RSF begin to deploy their members around Khartoum without the approval of the Sudanese army authority. Even though, violence has been growing tense in Sudan with utmost concern over the RSF attempt to control power and the country’s economic assets especially its gold.

Before the recent development however, it was strictly observed that even after the ouster of the President Omar Al-Bishir, there has been growing conflict along communal lines in Sudan and the conflict is believed to be influenced greatly by the agenda of the local but influential political figures within the country. The conflict which escalated along the Sudanese border was triggered by the strong need for the control of the land and natural resources along the region of Darfur, Kordofan and Kassala a circumstance that helped in making the conflict to escalate further. As reported by (IRC 2023), “the rise in violence in the Blue Nile state has displaced 97,000 people since July 2022 while a similar situation displaced 21,000 people in West Kordofon in October.

As stated by the observers of the recent development in Sudan, the two strong leaders at the helm of the fresh crisis in Sudan developed some history of having connection with the historic violence in Sudan for longer time. The leader of the RSF for Mr. Dagalo instance, “rose to power within the RSF beginning in the early 2000 when he was at the head of the militia known as Janjaweed a group responsible for human right atrocities in the Darfur region” (Christopher 2023). Janjaweed as a militia was accused by the International Criminal Court for genocide and crimes against humanity just the way the leader of the Republic of Sudan Omar Al-bashir was equally accused of similar atrocity against humanity. As head of the SRF, Dagalo has faced accusation of overseeing bloody crackdown on pro-democracy activists including the massacre of 120 protestors in 2019 (Christopher 2023).

The head of transitional government in Sudan Mr Burhan was also condemned by many domestic and international human right groups he was severally accused of ensuring total crack-down of pro-democracy movements in Sudan as the head of the transitional government. To a larger extent, one can certainly interpret both men to be obstacles to any chance of Sudan transitioning to civilian democracy (Christopher 2023). As at now the report of the

International Rescue Committee reported that, “an estimated 15,000 people had arrived over the border into Chad where relief organizations including the IRC are providing support with health, nutrition, sanitation and protection need” (International Rescue Committee Report 2023). Beside this, the crisis caused a serious humanitarian disruption where over a third of the population of about 15 million people including refugees are suffering from acute shortage of food. General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, head of the paramilitary RSF and deputy leader of Sudan’s ruling council since 2019, has gotten behind the plan for a new transition, bringing tensions with ruling council head and army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan to the surface

NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT AND ITS RESPONSE TOWARD EVACUATION OF ITS CITIZENS BASED IN DARFUR

There has been growing concern as to the safety of the Nigerians residing in both Khartoum and other trouble areas. The students most particularly had been expressing fear as to the fact that their lives may be in danger if the Nigerian government failed to do the needful. “some of us that leaves in Khartoum and closer to the military barracks could not endure the heavy sounds of the bombing and gunshots and we have to walk bear-footed to access the nearest borders. We are at the Ethiopian borders and currently as Nigerians, access to the Ethiopia is becoming a very serious problem and our diplomatic staff are helpless because there is limit to what they can do (Abubakar 2023) In an interview with the Voice of America Hausa Service, Zaharau Dauda a Nigerian student in Khartoum stated that “the condition of the Nigerian students in Khartoum is still scary as many of them have scattered themselves to the neighboring villages of Khartoum where the conflict has not yet escalated. She stated that their fear is that while other countries are busy negotiating to evacuate their students it seems the Nigerian government is too adamant to ensure their safety.

A retired military and diplomatic staff in Kano Mr. Jamil Yushau stated in an interview that, “if it means Nigerian government should use retinue of its armed military to evacuate its citizens in Sudan that should be done hence other countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, France, United Kingdom and rest had successfully evacuated their citizens. Nigerians should not always be given excuses on matters that are of sensitive concern and we have to show our strengths as the largest populous nation in the continent of Africa. (Ibrahim 2023)

But the Nigerian government through its mission in Sudan said “Nigerian Mission in Sudan have put in place necessary arrangements; any flight now is gravely risky. Airlines on ground at the airport were all burnt today, there is a curfew in place and no flights can operate. The Chairperson of the Nigerian Diaspora Commission Mrs Abike Dabiri Arewa insisted that “Nigeria is currently unable to evacuate thousands of its citizens stuck in troubled Sudan due to the dangers posed to air travel in the North African country” (Okafor 2023). During the weekly Federal Executive Council Meeting held on Wednesday, the 26th of April 2023 Nigerian government has approved the sum of \$1.2 million naira for evacuation of the Nigerian living in Kahrtoum to the border towns of Egypt for onward movement through the Egypt Airport back to Nigeria (Thunder Blowers2023).

DIPLOAMTIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE CRISIS BETWEEN NIGERIA AND SUDAN

There is no doubt to the fact that Nigeria-Sudan diplomatic relations existed since 1960 and from that time immemorial, the two countries had continued to enjoy the symbiotic mutual socio-economic relationship. Apart from being members of the African Union Nigerians had for instance have a long history of movement and migration either directly to Sudan or as a result of a failed attempt to access the holy city of Mecca for Islamic pilgrimage (Sani 2023). This history of long stay in Sudan had helped created a historic transformation of permanent settlements and development of intergroup relations. Many Nigerians of old age in Darfur were born and brought up by their ancestors who for one reason or the other decided not to return to Nigeria and rather establish a permanent settlement there. The similarity of the Sudanese culture couple with the Islamic religious identity and development of Islamic scholarship remain the influential factors that strengthen the Nigeria-Sudan diplomatic relations for years. This is owing to the fact that; many Nigerians of Sudanese background today only connect to the history of their ancestors back-home in Nigeria to remember that they have come from Nigeria by history and originality (Muhammad 2023)

This aged long relationship may suffer serios set-back if the conflict continues to subject Nigerians to series of sufferings. Presently the army and the protestors have beginning to identify and brutalized many nationales that are not of Sudan origin or background. “Just yesterday we have received a report that the crises will targeted such areas where settlers and non-Arab speaking people are residing and among these settlements there are many areas where hundreds of Nigerians are residing (Ismail 2023). In another perspective (Aisha 2023) argued, if the crisis continued the way it is going, many of us that are of permanent residency in Sudan for years will have no option than to be turn to migrants hence, we cannot go back to Nigeria since we are not use to the country. We were born here in Sudan and we knew no where than Sudan but it seems some of us have started migrating out of Khartoum to safer places living behind our investments and other extension of our family members behind.

The crisis may also have a greater implication on the academic tourism and scholarship. It is on record that currently there is between 5,000 to 8,000 Nigerians studying various courses in the Universities of Sudan. Majority of these students have extended their scholarship tourism to the level of PhD and some even joined many Sudanese universities as teachers, If the crisis continued, these students would have to leave terminate their study tour of the country and redirect their investment to another country. In the opinion of (Ismail 2023), Nigerians are investing close to twenty billion naira on educational tourism and another five billion naira spreading across the micro-economy of the country through payment of rent, buying of food stuffs as well as settlement of medical bills if the crises pursued this economic investment, the nation’s economy will be at lost. Currently many students studying in the Sudanese Universities have beginning to search for alternative universities somewhere back home in Nigeria others in another countries in order to avoid having the disruption of their academic activities (Ismail 2023).

As an extension of the impacts of the education between the people of the two countries, many Nigerians that are opportune to go to

Sudan for educational enhancement had succeeded in securing permanent appointments and have spent several years in Sudan and other major cities. This has helped in boosting the strengths of the human resources of the two countries most especially in the areas of education and health sector. As argued by (Aminu 2023). We have more than three hundred medical doctors of Nigerian origin working in different health centers across Sudan. Thirty-two of us had finished their residency and are now consultants in the various fields while some of us with high level experience are teaching in some universities here in Sudan. Some of us used the opportunity of coming here as students to secure the jobs and remain here for years now. The development in Khartoum where majority us doctors are staying, is triggering a palpable fear to the extent that, some of us are beginning to develop the fear that time has come to migrate out of Sudan for our safety. As at last week Friday, about seven of our members have migrated out of Sudan. The implication of the migration of these potential human resources out of Sudan may likely going to affect the health sector and its performance decades to come. Don't forget Sudan is earning on the average close to N20b from medical tourism and this is strongly connected to the potentiality of the country's human resource for health which foreigners including Nigerians are contributing significantly to it (Aminu 2023)

In the area of human resource for education (Abubakar 2023) argued, that there is no University in the whole of Sudan where you cannot find Professors and Academic Doctors of Nigerian origin and their years of academic contributions had helped increased in the quality of teaching and learning in the country. On the average, there are close to three hundred members of the Nigerian academics working across various universities in Sudan and their contribution to the academic development of the Sudanese Universities had helped significantly in rising the quality of these universities to the extent that they are attracting foreign and international students. The ongoing conflict in Sudan may likely have consequential effects on the ability of these potential academics to remain inside Sudan and by extension they may have no option than to move back to Nigeria or another country else in Africa to shift their services.

On the aspect of trade and investment, Sudan is one of the countries in Africa where Nigerians always tried to access on the basis of trade and commercial activities. As argued by (Aminu 2023), you cannot count the number of trading activities that took place between people of Sudan and those of Northern Nigeria most particularly. Because of the peculiarity of their culture and religious connection, the comfort is always identified between the people of the two countries and it strongly tied them to mutual diplomatic relationship. It was assessed by one of the international media recently that Nigeria is contributing to about 2.01% of the Sudan GDP and that the investment through trade and commercial activities by the Nigerians is adding a great boost to the Sudan economy. As argued by (Aminu 2023). The current development in Sudan may likely affect the continued flow of the business activities between Nigeria and Sudan hence the Airports are shot-down and that transit movement across Khartoum and its environs may be affected significantly.

Lastly Sudan is one of the strategic countries needed by the Nigeria to end its aged-long menace of terrorism. Its strategic position within the African continent remains critical to ending terrorism in the African continent more or less it is surrounded by the countries

that are also suffering from one kind of internal conflict/uprising or the other. It shares border for instance with Ethiopia and the country is currently facing a severe conflict with Eretria. It shares border with the Republic of Chad and the internal crises with Chad since the killing of its former military leader is a known history to many people. It also shares border with the Egypt and Djibouti and there is no counter-point to the fact that, Egypt despite the fact that efforts are being made to restore peace in the country has not recover from the shock of its internal civil war.

The strategic position of Sudan which is surrounded by these countries with years of civil wars make it imperative for the Nigeria to seek strong partnership with the country as part of the effort to proffer solution to the continent's years of terrorist activities. (Abubakar 2023) argued. Nigeria understands the role it has played in ending the years of conflict in Sudan and because of its current phenomenon of Boko Haram and insurgency, it has already develop some diplomatic option of seeking for partnership with the Sudan on border security and restriction of free flow of small and light weapons. However, with the current development, the fresh conflict in Sudan may likely affect the nation's border security and its relationship with the neighboring countries highlighted earlier as well as allow for the access to small and light weapons freely.

CONCLUSION

In view of the highlights made so far, the fresh uprising in Sudan has brought another serious diplomatic challenge not to the Nigeria and Sudan alone but the entire continent of Africa. The uprising is attracting global attention because of the strategic history of Sudan, its economic relevance as well as history of its internal crises before now. The fear among the people of the African continent regarding the uprising in Sudan is not because the country may not prosper after the intervention by other international political actors but because of the alarming fear that Russia and United States are behind the conflict with timely support to both sides of the divide. The diplomatic implication of this uprising between Nigeria and Republic of Sudan is categorically identified through the areas of synergy already established education, health, economy, trade and security/regional counter terrorism. The development in Sudan as at now is likely going affect the potentials of Nigeria to be able to sustain its diplomatic tiers with the Sudan and continue to sustain its strategic relevance within the country.

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