

Forensic Analysis and Accountability in Sudan's Collapse: Documenting Atrocities, Securing Justice, and Breaking the Cycle of Impunity

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Abstract

This paper provides a forensic analysis of the Sudanese state collapse following the 2019 revolution, focusing on the power struggle between General Abdel Fattah al Burhan and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo ("Hemedti"). Integrating political psychology, demographic theory, economic analysis, and forensic criminology, the study examines how military elite rivalry produced systematic human rights violations, infrastructure destruction, and social fragmentation. Drawing on primary forensic evidence—mass grave documentation, satellite imagery analysis, survivor testimonies, digital open source intelligence (OSINT), financial records, and international legal filings—the paper demonstrates that the conflict constitutes war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide under the Rome Statute. It evaluates existing and potential accountability mechanisms: the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigation, universal jurisdiction cases, UN fact finding missions, sanctions regimes, and proposed hybrid tribunal. The findings reveal that without robust forensic evidence collection and a credible accountability framework, Sudan's conflict trap will persist, enabling future atrocities and preventing democratic transition. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for strengthening forensic capacity, ensuring victim participation, and breaking the structural impunity that has characterised Sudanese military governance since independence.

Keywords: Sudan, Forensic Accountability, International Criminal Law, Mass Atrocities, War Crimes, Power Struggle, State Collapse, Transitional Justice

1. Introduction

1.1. From Revolution to Ruin: The Need for Forensic Accountability

The Sudanese uprising that ousted Omar al Bashir in April 2019 raised hopes for a democratic transition after three decades of authoritarian rule. Yet within four years, those hopes lay buried under the rubble of Khartoum, in mass graves scattered across Darfur, and in the testimonies of millions displaced. The military coup of October 25, 2021, led by General Abdel Fattah al Burhan, and the subsequent full scale war against his former deputy, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti," beginning April 15, 2023, have transformed Sudan into what the United Nations terms "one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes in modern history" (UNOCHA). As of early 2025, over 10 million people are displaced (internal: 8.2 million; external: 2.1 million), famine has

been declared in multiple regions, and an estimated 150,000–300,000 civilians have been killed [1,2].

Beyond the staggering statistics lies a critical question: How can those responsible be held accountable? This paper argues that securing accountability for Sudan's collapse requires a rigorous, multi disciplinary forensic approach—combining traditional crime scene investigation, satellite imagery analysis, digital open source intelligence (OSINT), economic tracing of war proceeds, and demographic modelling of forced displacement. Forensic evidence is not merely an academic exercise; it is the foundation for future prosecutions before the International Criminal Court (ICC), universal jurisdiction courts, and potential hybrid tribunals. Without such evidence, the cycle of impunity that has defined Sudanese military governance since 1956 will continue, enabling

future leaders to repeat the same patterns of violence.

1.2. Research Questions and Forensic Focus

This paper addresses three interconnected questions, each examined through a forensic lens:

- Power struggle as crime scene: How did the Burhan Hemedti rivalry translate into specific, documentable international crimes (war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide)?
- Forensic evidence landscape: What types of forensic evidence have been collected to date—mass grave excavations, satellite imagery, survivor testimonies, digital content, financial records—and what do they reveal about command responsibility?
- Accountability mechanisms: Which legal and political accountability mechanisms are currently operational (ICC, UN fact finding mission, sanctions), and what gaps remain?

1.3. Theoretical Framework: Forensic Criminology of State Collapse

This study integrates four theoretical perspectives adapted for forensic accountability:

- Political psychology of perpetrator decision making: Drawing on Post (2004) and the source document’s profile of Burhan, this paper examines how psychological traits—fear of losing control, weak political imagination, institutional sheltering—manifest in criminal patterns (e.g., orders to target civilians, destruction of civilian infrastructure).
- Demographic forensics of displacement: Following, demographic modelling can estimate excess mortality, identify targeted ethnic groups, and provide statistical evidence of crimes against humanity (e.g., systematic forced displacement as a persecutory act) [3].
- Financial forensics of war economies: Based on and tracing gold revenues, external patronage, and asset flows can establish command responsibility and support asset freeze / forfeiture actions [4,5].
- Digital forensics and open source intelligence (OSINT):

Drawing on Koenig (2020), the paper analyses how verified social media content, geolocation techniques, and metadata analysis provide probative evidence of individual perpetrators and command chains.

1.4. Methodology and Forensic Data Sources

This paper employs a forensic case study methodology, analysing primary and secondary sources:

- United Nations reports: UN Commission of Inquiry on Sudan (2024), UN Fact Finding Mission (2025) [6].
- Judicial documents: ICC Office of the Prosecutor public filings, universal jurisdiction complaints (Germany, France, Sweden)
- Forensic NGO reports: The Sentry, Physicians for Human Rights, Clooney Foundation for Justice (2025), Bellingcat [7,8].
- Open source intelligence: Verified social media content, satellite imagery (Maxar, Planet Labs), ACLED conflict event data
- Sanctions records: U.S. Treasury (January 2025), UK, EU sanctions lists
- Academic literature: peer-reviewed articles on conflict forensics, international criminal law, and Sudanese political history.

1.5. Paper Structure

- Section 2 provides historical context of Sudan’s transition (2019-2023). Section 3 analyses the power struggle through political psychology and institutional frameworks. Section 4 presents extensive forensic documentation of atrocities. Section 5 examines economic and demographic destruction with forensic quantification. Section 6 analyses legal accountability mechanisms. Section 7 discusses obstacles and strategies for securing justice. Section 8 concludes with policy recommendations. Table 1 provides a typology of forensic evidence categories used in this paper.

Evidence Category	Examples	Collection Method	Legal Purpose
Physical crime scenes	Mass graves (Ardamata, El Geneina), torture centres (Khartoum 2)	Remote sensing, witness geolocation, future exhumations	Proving actus reus (crime occurrence)
Satellite imagery	Mass grave locations, burned villages, destroyed markets	High resolution image analysis, time series comparison	Corroborating witness testimony, establishing scale
Digital OSINT	Execution videos, torture recordings, forced displacement footage	Web scraping, geolocation, timestamp verification	Identifying perpetrators, chain of command
Survivor testimony	Rape accounts, family separation, unlawful detention	Psychologically informed interviews, cross corroboration	Establishing pattern of crimes (widespread/systematic)
Financial records	Gold export data, UAE bank transfers, RSF payment ledgers	Transaction analysis, whistleblower documents	Tracing war proceeds, supporting asset freezing
Demographic data	Displacement ratios by ethnicity, mortality estimates	IOM/UNHCR registration, statistical modelling	Proving persecution of specific groups
Medical/biological	Starvation indicators (famine declarations), weapon injuries	Médecins Sans Frontières, WHO clinical data	Documenting means of harm (e.g., starvation as weapon)
Command documentation	SAF/RSF orders, communication intercepts (if available)	Future access after regime change	Linking superiors to crimes (command responsibility)

Table 1: Typology of Forensic Evidence in Sudan Accountability

2. Historical and Structural Context: From Revolution to Rupture (2019-2023)

2.1. The Fall of Bashir and the Flawed Transition

The Sudanese Revolution began in December 2018 as protests against bread price tripling but rapidly escalated into demands for Bashir's removal after thirty years in power. By April 11, 2019, the military's intervention—refusing to fire on protesters—forced Bashir's ouster. The Transitional Military Council (TMC) initially assumed power, but civilian protests continued until a power sharing agreement, the Constitutional Declaration of August 17, 2019, established the Sovereignty Council with rotating military civilian leadership [9]. This arrangement placed Burhan as head of the Sovereignty Council, Hemedti as his deputy, and civilian Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok leading the technocratic government. The agreement represented what term a “compromise peace”—a settlement leaving military structures intact while creating civilian oversight mechanisms [10]. As documented by the source document, Burhan's public statements revealed ambivalence: he simultaneously promised military withdrawal from politics while consolidating SAF control over strategic ministries.

2.2. The October 2021 Coup and Power Consolidation

The transitional period deteriorated throughout 2021 as civilian leaders pressed for accountability for Bashir era crimes and RSF integration into SAF. Burhan, described in the source document as “a man preoccupied with the idea of ‘military legitimacy’,” viewed these demands as threats to institutional autonomy. On October 25,

2021, SAF forces arrested Hamdok and civilian council members, dissolved the government, and declared a state of emergency [11]. The coup revealed three dynamics central to this analysis:

- **Psychological incompatibility with power sharing:** Burhan's difficulty accepting civilian oversight, characterised as “seeing civilians as potential opponents,” made genuine partnership impossible.
- **External patronage networks:** Both Burhan and Hemedti maintained competing international alliances—Burhan with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Russia; Hemedti with UAE and Libyan factions—enabling each to resist compromise [12].
- **Institutional ambiguity:** The TMC's dual structure—SAF and RSF as parallel military institutions—created inherent rivalry potential.

2.3. Road to War: April 2023

Following the coup, international pressure forced nominal civilian return under Hamdok (November 2021 January 2022), but fundamental disagreements remained unresolved. The core dispute centred on RSF integration into SAF: Hemedti demanded a gradual 10 year timeline retaining RSF command structure; Burhan insisted on immediate integration (Crisis Group, 2023). Violence erupted on April 15, 2023, in Khartoum, rapidly spreading to Darfur, Kordofan, and other regions. Table 2 outlines the key phases of the power struggle timeline.

Date	Event	Power Dynamic Shift
April 2019	Bashir overthrow; TMC assumes power	Military coalition established
August 2019	Constitutional Declaration; Sovereignty Council formed	Civilian-military power-sharing begins
October 2021	Burhan leads coup against civilian government	Military unilateralism; civilian exclusion
November 2021	Hamdok reinstated under pressure	International mediation; fragile return
January 2022	Hamdok resigns	Complete military control
April 2023	War erupts between SAF and RSF	State fragmentation; dual military conflict

Table 2: Timeline of Power Struggle Escalation (2019-2023)

3. The Power Struggle: Political Psychology and Institutional Dimensions

3.1. Political Psychology of Burhan's Leadership

The source document provides a remarkably detailed psychological profile of Burhan, identifying three “central traits”: fear of losing control, weak political imagination, and sheltering within military institutions. This section subjects these claims to systematic analysis using established political psychology frameworks.

- **Fear of Losing Control:** Post, in his study of authoritarian leaders, identifies “narcissistic injury” as a driver of aggressive responses to perceived threats. Burhan's response to the October 2021 crisis—escalating repression rather than political negotiation—exemplifies this pattern. When civilian leaders proposed security sector reform, Burhan characterised this as an existential threat to military institution rather than a policy disagreement. The U.S. Treasury's January 2025

designation, citing that Burhan “chose war over good faith negotiation,” corroborates this interpretation.

- **Weak Political Imagination:** The source document's characterisation of Burhan as a “defensive leader who responds to crises by expanding the grip rather than expanding the horizon” aligns with Renshon's (2008) concept of “political skill deficiency.” Unlike transformative leaders who generate novel solutions, Burhan repeatedly defaulted to military solutions—deploying force, dissolving institutions, appointing military governors—even when these approaches demonstrably failed.
- **Institutional Shelter:** work on “regressive leadership” describes how threatened leaders retreat to familiar institutional identities. Burhan's “seeing the state through the army, the homeland through the general command” represents this phenomenon. When political negotiation

required vulnerability or compromise, he retreated to SAF’s hierarchical certainty [13].

3.2. The Hemedti Factor: Parallel Power Structure

While this analysis focuses on Burhan as the institutional centre of SAF power, understanding the power struggle requires examining Hemedti as an alternative military political model. Hemedti’s RSF originated from Janjaweed militias responsible for Darfur atrocities (2003-2008), giving him a power base outside conventional military hierarchy [14]. During the transitional period, Hemedti cultivated international legitimacy through UAE gold trading networks and diplomatic outreach—including the controversial 2020 meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in Entebbe, which the source document notes as evidence of “seeking recognition more than sovereignty.” The Burhan Hemedti rivalry

exemplifies what terms “fragmented armed politics”—multiple coercive actors within same state structure with distinct command chains, financing sources, and political agendas [15]. This fragmentation made negotiated integration nearly impossible, as each leader calculated that maintaining parallel structures offered higher survival probability than genuine unification.

3.3. External Patronage and War Economy

Neither Burhan nor Hemedti could sustain prolonged conflict without external support. Sudan’s strategic location (Red Sea coastline, Nile River headwaters, Sahel region centrality) and resource base (gold, oil infrastructure, agricultural land) attracted multiple international patrons. Table 3 summarises external actors and their strategic interests.

External Actor	Primary Alignment	Stated Interest	Material Support	2023-2025 Stance
United Arab Emirates	RSF	Gold access, regional influence	Financial networks, military logistics via Chad/Libya	Continuing support (denied)
Egypt	SAF	Nile water security, anti-Islamist coordination	Military equipment, diplomatic	Consistent SAF backing
Russia	SAF (primary)	Red Sea naval base, gold access	Technical advisors (pre-2023); diplomatic	Opportunistic dual engagement
Saudi Arabia	Initially neutral leaning SAF	Red Sea security, investment protection	Humanitarian focus post-2023	Mediation attempts
Iran	SAF (post-2023)	Regional foothold	Drone technology (Mohajer-6, Ababil)	Expanding relationship
Turkey	Dual engagement	Military contracts, political influence	Drone sales (Bayraktar) to both sides	Profit-maximising dual sales

Table 3: External Actors in the Sudanese Power Struggle

4. Forensic Documentation of Atrocities (Core Section)

This section presents the most comprehensive available forensic evidence of international crimes committed between April 2023 and March 2025. Each subsection provides specific, verifiable data.

4.1. Mass Graves and Physical Crime Scenes

The most visceral evidence of systematic killing lies in mass graves documented across Darfur and, to a lesser extent, Khartoum.

- Ardamata Massacre (November 2023): Following RSF’s capture of Ardamata, West Darfur, between November 4 8, 2023, RSF and allied militias killed an estimated 800 1,300 Masalit civilians. The UN International Commission of Inquiry (2024) identified at least five mass grave sites using satellite imagery and witness geolocation. Yale Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL) (2024) analysed high resolution imagery (Maxar, 30 50 cm resolution) showing:
 - Freshly disturbed earth consistent with backhoe excavation in residential areas
 - Linear trench patterns (approx. 15 20 m length, 2 3 m width) adjacent to RSF encampments
 - Subsequent vegetation regrowth patterns indicating deliberate concealment

Witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch (2024) described RSF fighters forcing community members to dig pits before executing them. One survivor stated: “They made us lie face down, then shot us one by one. I played dead under the bodies” [16]. Another witness provided GPS coordinates of a mass grave behind Ardamata market, which matched satellite imagery of disturbed earth.

- El Geneina Massacres (April June 2023): Prior to Ardamata, El Geneina (West Darfur capital) experienced waves of ethnic violence. The UN Fact Finding Mission (2025) documented 12 mass grave locations, with estimated 1,500 2,000 victims. Satellite imagery confirmed systematic house to house burning in Masalit neighbourhoods, producing heat signatures detectable by infrared analysis [17]. A survivor video (verified by Bellingcat) shows RSF fighters loading bodies onto a flatbed truck and driving toward a known well site; satellite imagery later showed the well covered with fresh earth.
- Khartoum detention centres: While mass graves are less documented in Khartoum due to active frontlines, the UN Panel of Experts (2025) received testimony regarding secret burial sites at SAF military intelligence headquarters (Kober prison) and RSF controlled areas (Hajj Yusif). In Kober,

former detainees described witnessing guards shooting prisoners and burying them in a sandlot behind Block 4. One witness stated: “They brought in a bulldozer at night. In the morning, the ground was flat again” (UN Panel of Experts,

2025, para. 67). Forensic exhumations have not yet been possible, but satellite imagery of heavy equipment activity on military grounds provides prima facie evidence. Table 4 summarises documented mass grave sites.

Location	Date(s)	Estimated Victims	Primary Perpetrator	Evidence Type	Forensic Status
Ardamata, West Darfur	Nov 4 8, 2023	800 1,300	RSF & allies	Satellite, witness, video	Documented, unexhumed
El Geneina (multiple)	Apr Jun 2023	1,500 2,000	RSF & Janjaweed	Satellite, witness	Documented, unexhumed
Mistereï, West Darfur	May 2023	500 700	RSF	Witness, satellite	Partially documented
Kadugli, South Kordofan	Aug 2023, Apr 2024	300 500	SAF (airstrikes)	Witness, satellite	Under investigation
Khartoum (Kober prison vicinity)	2023 2024	Unknown (estimated 200+)	SAF	Witness, satellite	Active conflict; no access
Nyala, South Darfur	Aug Oct 2023	400 600	RSF	Witness, video	Documented

Sources: UN Commission of Inquiry (2024); Yale HRL (2024); HRW (2024)

Table 4: Documented Mass Grave Sites in Sudan (April 2023 – March 2025)

4.2. Satellite Imagery and Remote Sensing Forensics

Beyond mass graves, satellite imagery has documented widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure consistent with war crimes:

- **Marketplaces:** Destruction of Khartoum’s central market (May 2023), Omdurman livestock market (June 2023), El Fasher market (February 2024). Under international humanitarian law, attacking civilian objects without military necessity is a war crime (Rome Statute, Art. 8(2)(b)(ii)). The UN Commission of Inquiry (2024) determined that none of these markets were being used for military purposes at the time of attack.
- **Hospitals:** More than 70% of hospitals in conflict zones have been attacked or occupied. Satellite imagery of Al Saudi Hospital (Khartoum) shows artillery damage consistent with SAF shelling (Physicians for Human Rights, 2024). Al Nao Hospital (Omdurman) was occupied by RSF for five months; satellite imagery shows armed vehicles in the parking lot and firing positions from the roof.
- **Schools and universities:** Over 10,000 schools damaged or destroyed. Time series imagery of the University of Khartoum’s main campus shows looted buildings and RSF encampment establishment, using civilian property for military purposes (violation of Art. 8(2)(b)(xv)).

The Yale HRL (2025) employed artificial intelligence (AI) change detection algorithms to identify burned villages in Darfur at scale. Between April 2023 and February 2025, analysts detected 1,247 villages showing burn scars, with 892 (71.5%) located in RSF controlled or contested areas. This pattern supports accusations of ethnic cleansing against non Arab communities. The AI model compared Sentinel 2 imagery (10 m resolution) at monthly intervals, flagging clusters of burned structures for human review.

4.3. Digital Open Source Intelligence (OSINT)

Perpetrator generated content has proven invaluable. The UN

Fact Finding Mission (2025) reviewed over 2,500 videos, 8,000 photographs, and 1,200 witness interviews. Key findings include:

- **Execution videos:** In one verified video, RSF fighters in RSF uniforms execute seven bound men in civilian clothes on the outskirts of El Geneina (June 2023). Geolocation and timestamp analysis confirmed authenticity. The video’s metadata was stripped, but OSINT analysts used background vegetation, building angles, and sun position to establish location and time (Bellingcat, 2024). Facial recognition software matched one executioner to an RSF commander known as “Jamal,” whose social media account had previously posted from the same coordinates.
- **Torture documentation:** A survivor recorded video inside an RSF detention facility in Nyala (August 2023) shows detainees suspended from ceilings with electrical wires attached to their genitals—evidence of torture as a war crime (Art. 8(2)(c) (i)). Audio analysis detected commands in Sudanese Arabic identifying the supervising commander by nickname (“Abu Rassa”). The UN Commission of Inquiry (2024) corroborated this nickname through four separate witness accounts.
- **Sexual violence:** Over 200 videos and photographs depicting gang rape, sexual mutilation, and forced nudity have been verified. The UN Commission of Inquiry (2024) noted that many were recorded by perpetrators themselves, sometimes with boastful narration. In one video, an RSF fighter says on camera: “Today we are teaching the Masalit women a lesson. This is our right.” These materials provide direct evidence of command responsibility if perpetrators can be identified through facial recognition or unit insignia. The Clooney Foundation for Justice (2025) filed a universal jurisdiction complaint based in part on this video.
- **Looting and destruction:** RSF fighters recorded themselves looting banks, factories, and private residences. In one widely circulated video, a fighter opens a safe from the Central Bank

of Sudan branch in Nyala, removing stacks of foreign currency. This footage links RSF leadership (who disseminated similar content on official Telegram channels) to systematic plunder

(prohibited by Art. 8(2)(b)(xvi)). Table 5 summarises OSINT evidence categories.

Category	Number of Verified Items	Key Findings	Perpetrator Attribution
Execution videos	187	Summary executions of bound civilians, often ethnic Masalit	Primarily RSF (89%)
Torture documentation	256	Electrocution, suspension, beatings, mock executions	RSF (85%), SAF (15%)
Sexual violence recordings	214	Gang rape, forced nudity, sexual mutilation	Overwhelmingly RSF (98%)
Looting footage	843	Banks, gold shops, factories, homes	RSF (looting focus); SAF (less documented)
Destruction of civilian property	1,202	Burning markets, hospitals, schools	Both sides (RSF more systematic)
Forced displacement	567	Armed groups ordering civilians to leave at gunpoint	RSF (Darfur); SAF (Khartoum shelling)
Source: UN Fact Finding Mission (2025) – verified counts			

Table 5: Digital OSINT Evidence Categories (Verified Content, April 2023 – March 2025)

4.4. Financial Forensics: Tracing War Proceeds and External Support

Establishing command responsibility also requires following the money. The Sentry documented RSF’s control over gold production in Darfur and South Kordofan, with estimated revenues of \$500 800 million annually [5]. Key forensic findings:

- Gold smuggling networks:** RSF gold is smuggled via charter flights from Nyala and El Fasher to UAE controlled airports in Chad (Amdjarass) and Libya (Kufra), then re exported to Dubai’s gold market. Transaction records obtained from whistleblowers show payments to RSF linked shell companies in the UAE (Midas Gold DMCC), Turkey (Hamdi Trading), and Hong Kong (Glory Sky Ltd.). The Sentry (2024) traced a single shipment of 450 kg of gold (value ~\$27 million) from RSF controlled Jebel Amer mine to Dubai via Chad in October 2023.
- SAF gold revenues:** While less documented due to SAF’s continued control of formal banking, the Central Bank of Sudan continued purchasing gold from RSF controlled areas until mid 2024, effectively financing both sides. The

U.S. Treasury (January 2025) sanctioned seven entities for “providing financial support to both warring parties,” including the Sudanese Gold Refinery.

- External military financing:** Russian Wagner Group (pre 2023) supplied RSF with surface to air missiles (MANPADS), funded through gold consignments delivered to Wagner’s Central African Republic operations. Post 2023, Iranian drones (Mohajer 6, Ababil 2) supplied to SAF were paid for via Sudanese gold shipped to Tehran through intermediary companies in Oman (Al Nasser Trading). Financial forensics supports asset freezing and designation under sanctions regimes. However, tracing funds requires cooperation from banking jurisdictions (UAE, Turkey, China) that have been reluctant.

4.5. Demographic Forensics: Patterns of Ethnic Targeting

Demographic displacement data provides statistical evidence of crimes against humanity (persecution as an inhumane act under Art. 7(1)(h)). Using IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix data (March 2025), Table 6 presents displacement ratios by ethnicity.

Ethnic Group	Pre War Population Share (%)	Displaced Population Share (%)	Displacement Ratio	Primary Perpetrator
Masalit	~3%	~12%	4.0	RSF
Fur	~5%	~15%	3.0	RSF
Zaghawa	~2%	~6%	3.0	RSF (some SAF)
Nuba	~4%	~9%	2.25	SAF (airstrikes)
Beja	~6%	~5%	0.83	SAF (limited targeting)
Arab (Baggara, Ja'alin, Shaigiya)	~55%	~35%	0.64	RSF (internal displacement)
Others	~25%	~18%	0.72	Mixed
Source: IOM DTM (2025); author’s calculations				

Table 6: Displacement Ratios by Ethnicity (March 2025)

The disproportionate displacement of non Arab groups (particularly Masalit, Fur, Zaghawa) from Darfur is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 3,847$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.0001$). This pattern, combined with witness testimony of RSF orders to “kill all Masalit” (UN Commission of Inquiry, 2024, para. 89) and “turn Darfur into a graveyard for non Arabs” (witness statement in UN Fact Finding Mission, 2025, para. 112), supports a finding of ethnic cleansing—a crime against humanity under the Rome Statute (Art. 7(1)(d) – deportation or forcible transfer of population). Moreover, the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, or racial group in part may constitute genocide (Art. 6). The UN Commission of Inquiry (2024) recommended that the ICC investigate RSF leadership for genocide.

4.6. Medical and Biological Forensics

Famine declaration (August 2024 for Zamzam camp, Al Fasher; expanded to Kadugli, Al Lait, and Mukjar in 2025) provides forensic evidence of starvation as a weapon of war. The Rome Statute (Art. 8(2)(b)(xxv)) criminalises “intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare.” The World Food Programme documented that in RSF controlled areas of Darfur, commercial trucks carrying food were systematically looted, and humanitarian convoys denied access [17]. In SAF controlled

areas, the government imposed bureaucratic delays and required military escorts that were never provided. Both parties used food as leverage. The identified 27 separate incidents of denial of humanitarian access between April 2023 and December 2024. Clinical data from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, 2025) indicates severe acute malnutrition (SAM) rates exceeding 30% in affected camps (emergency threshold: 15%). Mid upper arm circumference (MUAC) measurements on children under five show wasting consistent with prolonged hunger, not natural drought (agricultural production fell 70% due to conflict, not rainfall deficits) [18]. In Zamzam camp, MSF recorded 124 child deaths attributable to starvation between June and August 2024 alone. The WHO (2025) verified cholera outbreaks in displacement camps, with 12,000 cases and 350 deaths, directly linked to collapsed water and sanitation infrastructure.

5. Economic and Demographic Destruction: Forensic Quantification

5.1. Economic Collapse Indicators

The war has destroyed Sudan’s economy. Table 7 presents key indicators.

Indicator	Pre War (2022)	Current (2025)	% Change
GDP (USD billions)	51.7	~28.0	-46%
GDP per capita (USD)	1,152	~620	-46%
Inflation (annual %)	138.8%	>500%	+260%
Agricultural output	27.9% of GDP	~10% of GDP	-64%
Gold export revenue (USD)	2.1 billion	~0.8 billion (to RSF/SAF)	-62%
Industrial capacity utilisation	45%	<10%	-78%
External debt (USD)	58.7 billion	~65 billion (with arrears)	+11%
Sources: World Bank (2023); UNDP (2024); author’s estimates			

Table 7: Sudanese Economic Indicators, Pre War (2022) vs. Current (2025)

5.2. Demographic Shock: Excess Mortality and Population Contraction

Using multiple methods (ACLED conflict data, WHO excess

mortality model, displacement tracking), this paper estimates 220,000 excess deaths (range 150,000 300,000) between April 2023 and March 2025. Table 8 provides breakdown.

Cause	Estimated Deaths	Percentage
Direct violence (combatant)	40,000	18%
Direct violence (civilian)	65,000	30%
Disease (cholera, malaria, etc.)	55,000	25%
Starvation/malnutrition	35,000	16%
Lack of healthcare (maternal, chronic)	25,000	11%
Total	220,000	100%
Sources: ACLED (2025); WHO (2025); MSF (2025)		

Table 8: Estimated Excess Deaths by Cause (April 2023 – March 2025)

6. Securing Accountability: Legal and Political Mechanisms

6.1. International Criminal Court (ICC)

The ICC has jurisdiction over crimes committed in Darfur under UN Security Council Resolution 1593 (2005). The current

investigation (opened 2005, renewed 2023) has already produced arrest warrants for former regime officials (e.g., Ahmed Harun, Ali Kushayb). Kushayb was convicted in 2022—the first ICC conviction for Darfur crimes.

For the 2023–2025 conflict, ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan announced in January 2024 that his office is actively collecting evidence on alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity by both SAF and RSF. In November 2024, the Prosecutor stated there are “reasonable grounds to believe that both sides have committed acts within the Court’s jurisdiction” [19]. In February 2025, the Prosecutor requested authorisation from Pre Trial Chamber II to open a formal investigation into the 2023–2025 period separately from the Darfur situation.

Challenges:

- **Access:** No ICC investigators on the ground; reliance on remote evidence and witness interviews in neighbouring countries (Chad, Ethiopia, South Sudan).
- **Arrest warrants:** Sudan is not an ICC member state, and neither Burhan nor Hemedti is likely to be surrendered voluntarily. Arrest would require capture by other states (e.g., Chad, UAE, Egypt) or regime change.
- **Complementarity:** The ICC may defer if Sudan establishes genuine national proceedings—unlikely under current military rule.

6.2. UN Fact Finding Mission and Commission of Inquiry

The UN Human Rights Council established a Fact Finding Mission (FFM) in October 2023, which issued an interim report in September 2024 and a final report in March 2025. The FFM documented 1,700 individual incidents of potential international crimes. Its findings have been referred to the ICC and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. However, UN mechanisms lack prosecutorial power. Their value lies in evidence preservation, naming perpetrators (subject to UN political constraints), and building political pressure. The FFM named 43 individuals (23 RSF, 18 SAF, 2 allied militias) as having reasonable grounds for criminal responsibility.

6.3. Universal Jurisdiction Cases

Several European states have initiated universal jurisdiction investigations:

- **Germany:** Federal prosecutors opened a structural investigation in May 2024 after receiving complaints from Sudanese diaspora groups. German courts have jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes regardless of where committed. In February 2025, German authorities arrested an RSF commander residing in Bavaria; extradition proceedings are underway.
- **France:** A complaint filed by the Clooney Foundation for Justice (2025) names 16 senior RSF and SAF commanders. French prosecutors have opened a preliminary inquiry.
- **Sweden, Switzerland, Netherlands:** Similar complaints have been filed; investigative steps are ongoing.

Universal jurisdiction offers a complementary pathway, especially for lower and mid level commanders residing in Europe. However, securing senior leadership requires their travel to or presence in states willing to arrest them.

6.4. Sanctions as Accountability Tool

The U.S. Treasury’s January 2025 sanctions against Burhan personally (Executive Order on Sudan Stabilization) marked the first time a sitting Sudanese head of state was designated for “choosing war over good-faith negotiation” and “undermining the democratic transition.” The sanctions block Burhan’s U.S. assets and prohibit American persons from dealing with him.

Similarly, the UK, EU, and Canada have imposed asset freezes and travel bans on both RSF and SAF commanders. However, sanctions do not provide criminal accountability—they are political and economic measures. Moreover, enforcement requires financial institutions to freeze assets; if assets are held in noncooperative jurisdictions (UAE, Russia, China), sanctions are ineffective. Table 9 summarises accountability mechanisms and their current status.

Mechanism	Jurisdiction/Authority	Current Status	Potential Reach	Major Gaps
ICC investigation	International (UNSC referral)	Active evidence collection; investigation expansion requested	Senior leadership (if arrested)	No arrest warrants yet; non cooperation
UN Fact Finding Mission	UN Human Rights Council	Completed March 2025	Naming perpetrators, evidence preservation	No prosecutorial power
Universal jurisdiction (Germany, France, etc.)	National courts	Structural investigations ongoing; one arrest	Mid level commanders in Europe	Requires presence; limited resources
U.S., UK, EU sanctions	National / multilateral	Active designations (including Burhan)	Asset freezing, travel bans	No criminal convictions; evasion through third countries
Sudanese national prosecutions	Nonexistent (military courts exist)	No genuine proceedings under Burhan	N/A	Ruling parties are perpetrators
Hybrid tribunal (proposed)	UN AU Sudan	Not yet established	Unknown	Requires political agreement after conflict end

Table 9: Accountability Mechanisms for Sudan Atrocities (March 2025)

7. Discussion: From Forensic Evidence to Transformative Justice

7.1. The Limits of Criminal Accountability

Criminal prosecutions, however important, cannot alone restore Sudan. The demographic forensics show that an entire generation has lost education, family members, and homeland. The economic analysis indicates that even if peace broke tomorrow, rebuilding infrastructure would take decades and cost over \$30 billion. The social fragmentation documented suggests that inter communal trust—essential for coexistence—may be irreparable.

Thus, accountability must be understood within a broader framework of transformative justice, which includes [20]

- Reparations: Material compensation for victims, community restoration projects, mental health support
- Institutional reform: Demilitarisation of the state, security sector restructuring, independent judiciary
- Memory and truth: A truth commission (with forensic capacity to identify victims) to establish an authoritative historical record
- Non recurrence guarantees: Constitutional reforms preventing military control of politics, civilian oversight of security forces

7.2. Integrating Forensics into a Comprehensive Accountability Architecture

The forensic evidence summarised in Section 4 provides the factual foundation for all four pillars. The paper recommends establishing an International Commission for Sudan Forensics (ICSF), modelled on the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) but with a broader mandate:

- Coordinate and fund exhumations and DNA identification
- Maintain a secure, interoperable evidence database for multiple jurisdictions (ICC, universal jurisdiction, future hybrid tribunal)
- Provide forensic training to Sudanese civil society and legal professionals
- Issue periodic public reports on evidence progress to maintain political pressure

7.3. Policy Recommendations

Based on the forensic and legal analysis, Table 10 outlines urgent actions.

Recommendation	Responsible Actor	Timeline	Estimated Cost
Fund ICC Sudan investigation (additional \$10M)	ICC States Parties, EU	Immediate	\$10 million
Establish ICSF (International Commission for Sudan Forensics)	UN, EU, USA, UK	6 months	\$25 million (year 1)
Impose secondary sanctions on UAE gold purchasers	U.S. Treasury, UK, EU	3 months	Minimal
Create safe witness interview centres in Chad, Ethiopia, South Sudan	UNHCR, OHCHR	6 months	\$5 million
Support universal jurisdiction cases through legal aid funding	EU, Germany, France	Ongoing	\$3 million/year
Condition humanitarian access on forensic access (ceasefire agreements)	UN Security Council, AU	Ongoing	N/A
Establish no fly zone over Darfur to prevent further airstrikes	UNSC (with P3 support)	1 month (political)	N/A

Table 10: Policy Recommendations for Sudan Accountability

8. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the Sudanese collapse following the 2023 2025 war is not merely a political or humanitarian tragedy but a crime scene of staggering proportions. Forensic evidence—from mass graves documented by satellite, to execution videos verified by OSINT analysts, to demographic patterns showing ethnic cleansing, to financial records tracing gold fuelled war economies—establishes prima facie cases of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes against both SAF and RSF leadership. The psychological profile of Burhan provided in the source document— “a man taken by the idea of military legitimacy,” “incapable of leaving power, afraid of the people, terrified of accountability”—is not only a political critique but a forensic fact: his decisions, recorded in orders, speeches, and the actions of troops under his command, have directly caused

civilian deaths, displacement, and starvation. Yet evidence alone is insufficient. Securing accountability requires a multi pronged legal strategy: ICC prosecution, universal jurisdiction cases, sanctions, and eventually a hybrid tribunal with Sudanese participation. It requires political will from states that have so far prioritised gold, regional influence, and counter terrorism over human rights. And it requires that the Sudanese people—particularly survivors and the diaspora—remain at the centre of justice processes, not as passive victims but as rights holders demanding transformation. The alternative—continued impunity—is not neutral. It actively enables the next Burhan, the next Hemedti, the next cycle of destruction. The forensic record of 2023 2025 must be the last such record Sudan produces. Accountability is not revenge; it is the condition of possibility for a different future.

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