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The perverse manifestations of civil militias in Africa:

Evidence from Western Sudan

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Abstract

The crisis in the Darfur Region of Western Sudan, breathtaking as it is, provides an empirical space for engaging with the literature on civil militias and their realities in conflict prone and plural societies in Africa. The crisis has given rise to debates and concerns in regard to the violent atrocities committed by state military forces against non-combatant civilians in the name of counter-insurgency. At the centre of this debate is the alleged conspiracy by the regime of General Omar El-Bashir to recruit a proxy civil militia, known as *Janjaweed*, to confront, alongside its standing army, the insurgencies, that were started in 2003 by two rebel groups: the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The key questions are whether the Janjaweed militias are an (in)formal unit of the regular Sudanese army, or an ethnically-motivated militia with no connection to the state. Empirical evidence from this paper suggests the need for a more holistic conceptualisation of civil militias in the context of unstable societies. This paper argues that the *Janjaweed* militias are formidably linked to the formal and informal interests and structures of the state and its leaders. Following on from this, the paper rejects a narrow conceptualisation of civil militias and argues for a more 'organic' conceptualisation that takes on broad complex emergencies and intricately interwoven linkages between state and non-state factors.

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1. Introduction

Conflict-prone countries of Africa – such as Sudan – have no doubt grabbed the headlines as "the home of complex emergencies"[1]. Buzan and Waever note that:

> Africa is a pessimist's paradise, a place where the Hobbesian hypothesis that in the absence of a political leviathan life for individuals will be nasty, brutish, and short seems to be manifest in everyday life.[2]

In his work *Power in Africa*, Patrick Chabal confirms the views of Buzan and Waever and other poignant observers of unfolding events in the continent:

> The most enduring, even if not the most accurate, image of Africa…has been that of a continent of violence perennially on the edge of survival. Africa appears to be, at least in the popular imaginations of the West, a land of hunger, famine, flood, civil wars and above all a land of refugees[3]

The dilemmas posed to Africa by such phenomena as civil wars, civil militias, 'warlordism', (counter)insurgencies, child soldiers, and violence against non-combatants – especially vulnerable social categories (elderly, children, disabled and women) – are "perhaps comparable to the on-going 'global' *war on terror*"[4]. This paradox is stressed by Paul Collier, the Director of the Centre for the Study of African Economies, Oxford University: "currently, discussions of security are dominated by terrorism and Iraq. Important as they are, they are not the security issues that are most pressing for the populations of developing countries".[5]

Similarly, David J. Francis, the Director of the Africa Centre for Peace and Conflict, University of Bradford, contends that in 'peripheral' Africa, wallowing at

[1] Tar, U.A. "Old conflict, new complex emergency: the crisis in Darfur and a 'road map' for peace in Sudan" Presentation International Conference on Darfur Crisis organised by the Government of Libya and the Academy of Graduate Studies, Tripoli, (November 29-December 1, 2004) p.1.
[2] Buzan, B. and O. Waever *Regions and Powers: the Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 219.
[3] Chabal, P. *Power in Africa: essays in political interpretations* (London: Macmillan, 1994) p. 179.
[4] Tar, U. A. "Janjaweed militia and the crisis in Darfur, Western Sudan: Trends and perverse manifestations" Paper for International Conference on Darfur Crisis, Tripoli, Libya (November 29-December 1, 2004) p. 2
[5] Collier, Paul "Development and security" Presentation at the 12th Bradford Development Lecture, University of Bradford, UK, (November 11 2004) p. 11.

the very margin of an unequal world, the phenomenal explosion of civil militias represents the continent's "intractable security menace" and that "the national and human security problems posed by civil militias are far worst than the current concerns and threats by terrorism in Africa".[6] Yet such security challenges are given scant attention in policy and academic circles, both in Africa and around the world. For the past five decades, Sudan has been a regular scene of several, if not perpetual, complex emergencies occasioned by a sequence of civil wars and accompanying catastrophes.

The crisis in Darfur is closely linked to issues of political domination and unequal development: in that sense it is coextensive with the southern rebellion carried out for decades by the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army/Movement (henceforth SPLA/M)[7]. There is a whirlpool of controversies surrounding how the government of Sudan is responding to the rebellion staged by the Sudan Liberation Army (henceforth SLA) and Justice and Equality Movement (henceforth JEM). One key issue pertains to the controversial and mysterious role of the Janjaweed militia – specifically their inconspicuous links to a complex web of state and non-state interests which manifest in their violent 'reprisals' on, and atrocities against, vulnerable, non-combatant targets. On the one hand, all fingers of blame seem to point at the government for recruiting, arming and deploying the Janjaweed militia in its counter-insurgency drive; and on the other, the government continuously denies any links with the militia.

[6] Francis, D. J. "Introduction" in Francis, D. J. (ed.) *Civil Militias: Africa's intractable Security Menace? (*Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, forthcoming) p. 1.
[7] Young, J. "Sudan: Liberation movements, regional armies, ethnic militias and peace" *Review of African Political Economy* No. 97, (2003) p. 425.

This paper makes a modest attempt to examine the theoretical and empirical lessons that may be derived from the evolution, structure and activities of the Janjaweed militia in the Darfur crisis in western Sudan. The paper is divided into six sections. After the introduction, the second section engages with the literature on civil militia and its relevance in the post-Cold War era, and what conceptual insight it offers for understanding the situation in Sudan. The third section examines the political context of Sudan's instability and the emergence of civil militia. The fourth section examines the evolution and conflict equations of the Darfur crisis. The fifth section diagnoses the structure and activities of Janjaweed militia and determines whether they are linked to the state or not. The final section concludes with a statement on the need for an organic framework of understanding of civil militias.

2. Civil militias: the debate in its relevance to unstable societies

Writing in the context of Africa, Francis raises a set of questions which sound most appropriate to be quoted *in extenso*:

> "How do we define and conceptualise civil militia? Is it primarily an African phenomenon? Why and how civil militias emerge in weak, failed and collapsed states [like Sudan], or why do they proliferate in situations of complex political emergencies [such as the one in Darfur]?"[8]

The term civil militia, like most concepts in the social sciences is a highly contested one. There is a tension between three sets of perspectives:

- *State-centric perspectives* which see civil militias as state-centred projects or paramilitary units of the state armed forces. These perspectives emphasise the structural foundations of civil militias, at the expense of its agency.

[8] Francis, D. J. "Introduction" (2005) p. 1.

- *Society-centred perspectives* which see civil militias as non-state projects comprised of actors and interests that are either at 'war' with the state or, conversely, in alliance with it. Specifically, these perspectives take into account the role of non-state variables (for instance sub-nationalist tendencies like ethnicity and racism) in responding to (in)adequacies of the state sector;
- *Hybrid perspectives* which see civil militias as complex phenomena that transcend simplistic formal/informal and state/state dichotomies – as demonstrated by the experience of weak or failing states, specifically conflict-prone, war-torn, post-conflict and transition societies.

Early conceptualisations of civil militia, which follow the state-centric perspectives, can be traced to its didactic Latin connotation – which equates the term civil militia with "warfare, military service, [and] soldier"[9]. Recent views depict the term as ancillary units of the state's armed forces. The following are examples of state-centric conceptions of civil militias:

> "Military organization composed of citizens enrolled and trained for service in times of national emergency. Its ranks may be filled either by enlistment or conscription"[10]

> "A citizen army made up of free men between the ages of sixteen and sixty who performed occasional mandatory military service to protect their country, colony, or state. Also armed and trained bands of locals who could arm themselves on short notice for their own defence".[11]

Implicit in the foregoing definitions are references to sovereignty-inclined terms and functions that are constructed as the exclusive preserve of modern states in dealing with their 'submissive' subjects: protection of one's country, mandatory military service, calls at short notice for collective self-defence, and so on. Maurice

[9] Answers.com "Militias" available: http://www.answers.com/topic/militia accessed 29th June 2005.
[10] Answers.com "Militias" available: http://www.answers.com/topic/militia accessed 29th June 2005.
[11] See www.pbs.org/williamsburg/calltoarms/glossary.html accessed 29th June 2005.

Duverger notes the close link between civil militias and the regular army of a state[12]. The key assumptions that underlie the state-centric conception of civil militia are that it is: (1) organised either voluntarily or by means of compulsory conscription; (2) maintained, serviced and remunerated by the state sector; and (3) structured along regular military tradition and values system.[13] These assumptions are reinforced by the following classification of civil militias:

1. An army composed of ordinary citizens rather than professional soldiers.
2. A military force that is not part of a regular army and is subject to calls to service in an emergency.
3. The whole body of physically fit civilians eligible by law for military service[14].

Are these assumptions universally relevant? Can they be said to apply to the African context, where many states are weak and collapsing, and have virtually lost control over their traditional functions?

Society-centred perspectives seek to take on board the role of non-state interests which may or may not be linked to those of the state actors. This perspective conjures

[12] He sees civil militia as an irregular military force looking to the state's standing army to provide such specialist functions as *esprit de corps*, mobilisation, discipline, training and combat readiness. Even though Duverger's definition makes no mention of the word 'state', its centrality in organising and deploying both regular and irregular coercive apparatus at its disposal are obviously implied. See Duverger, M. *Political Parties*,(Methuen & Co., 1967) pp. 36-7.

[13] In many states state civil militias are assumed to be volunteers, even though this may sound ambivalent in reality. In the United States, the constitution empowers the state to forcefully conscript paramilitaries in times of national emergencies. See "Militia history and Law FAQ" available, http://www.adl.org/mwd/faq2.asp (accessed 29th June 2005).

[14] Answers.com "Militias" available: http://www.answers.com/topic/militia?method=5 accessed 28th June 2005. The distinction is also made between two nuanced types of civil militias: "governmental sanctioned state militias and private citizen militias that are unaffiliated with government". Even here, the omnipotent role of the state is reinforced (see "Contemporary militias, political ideology and terrorism" available: http://www.asu.edu/cronkite/thesis/freemenstudy/Section2.htm (accessed 29th June 2005).

militia in the metaphors of divisive and anti-state tendencies that permeate groups in a state. It emerged against the back drop of what Said Adejumobi calls "de-nationalization of the state on a global scale" which has resulted in "the rise of sub-state identities being the fulcrum of group rights and citizenship claims"[15]. In order to achieve their group aspirations, these militia groups violently engage with the state and rival actors within it. It is instructive to note that anti-state civil militias are common to both developed and developing societies, even though the nature of their formation and activities differ significantly.[16]

The hybrid perspective emerged to provide a holistic and 'organic' platform for conceptualising civil militias in terms of the new security challenges that confront conflict prone societies. The proliferation of complex political emergencies in many parts of the global south, where militias are supported by both state and non-state interests, meant that a simplistic construction of the term as state or anti-state centred is not sufficient. The hybrid perspective combines the elements of traditional interpretation – such as the role of the state – with the role of non-state interests and factors. It is descriptive, context specific and applies to the complex realities of weak and unstable societies such as Sudan. In that sense, civil militias are seen as:

> marginalised and dissatisfied with the prebendal state [who]…are organised by a diverse group of interest and stakeholders, including governments or regimes in power, mostly with no constitutional provision or legislation legalising their existence… Other diverse

[15] Adejumobi, S. "Ethnic militia groups and the national question in Nigeria" *GSC Quarterly* Spring available: http://www.ssrc.org/programs/gsc/gsc_quarterly/newsletter8/content/adejumobi.page (accessed 29th June 2005).

[16] For instance, in the context of United States, it has been observed that "most militias engage in a variety of anti-government rhetoric, but are not *anti-government*, they are anti-repression. Because of their beliefs that the U.S. government is to varying degrees unlawful, or engaged in unlawful practices, their activities range from the protesting of government policies to the advocating violent and/or nonviolent revolution..." (see: http://www.answers.com/topic/militia?method=5 accessed 28th June 2005). In the context of developing world however, anti-statism is compounded by the dynamics of plurality and zero-sum power relations in which indicators of primordial divisions such religion, ethnicity, and sectionalism are politicised and configured into national politics.

> interests include non-state and sub-national group militias (sometimes referred to as ethnic militias), and … 'civil security forces.[17]

As this study shows, the hybrid perspective provides a relevant framework of analysis in that it pays as much attention to the role of the state as its does to the agency of non-state actors or extra-structural forces. Without risking the view being advanced on balancing the emphasis on state and non-state factors, the perspective retains the taken-for-granted capacity of the modern state in monopolising, to a greater or lesser extent, the means of coercion in its territory. This monopoly still gives the modern state the authority to recruit, train, arm and deploy an auxiliary or reserve force. In mobilising a reserve force, the state has more privileges and resources than any non-state actor or interest within its territory. However, in a situation where the state is weak, collapsing or 'does not have control or monopoly of the threat or the use of force'[18], as manifested in many African countries, civil militia forces mobilised by non-state interests – less organised and untrained as they may look – may develop the capacity to challenge the legitimacy of the government. In such situations, referred to as complex emergencies, civil militias not only emerge in larger numbers, but also exacerbate lawlessness and disintegration.

There are three reasons why the hybrid perspective provides a better alternative. First, its emphasis on *context specificity* could facilitate a proper understanding of the volatile nature of Sudan's political instability, characterised, inter alia, by chains of civil war – each caused by a related set of factors. Secondly, by emphasising an organic framework, it promises to capture both state and non-state interests which define the emergence of civil militias. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, while

[17] Francis, D. J. "Introduction", *ibid*, p. 3.
[18] Francis, D. J. "Introduction" *op cit.*

sharing the views held by structuralist theorists on the capacity of the state to use civil militia for public security, it is very cautious, even reluctant, to generalise it:

> "in the situation of weak states, underwritten by prebendal governance, the normative ethos for the establishment of civil militia is often subverted and privatised to serve particular vested interests"[19].

3. The national context: unequal development, domination and political dissent

The Republic of Sudan provides one of the most severe cases of unstable states in Africa - having experienced continuous and intermittent civil wars stretching its entire post-colonial life – with breath-taking human and material costs. It is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse countries and undoubtedly the largest nation-state in Africa. It shares borders with Chad, Egypt, Congo, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya and Uganda. It has an estimated population of 28 million people, drawn from about 20 linguistic groups and over six hundred sub-dialects. Ethnically, the 'Arabs' constitute 39 percent while 'Africans' make up 61 percent. Religiously, Muslims make up 70 percent while the rest are Christians and traditional believers.[20] Because of their sheer majority, 'Arab-Muslims' have been dominant in Sudan's central government since independence in 1956.[21]

A strong culture of domination, the imposition of Islamic law, and unequal regional development combined to provide the impetus for rebellion and secessionist

[19] Francis, D. J. "Introduction" *ibid* p. 3.
[20] Cited in Human Rights Watch "Q & A: Crisis in Darfur" available: http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/05/darfur8536.htm (accessed 29th June 2005), p. 1.
[21] A publication titled *Black Book of Sudan* (written by anonymous authors) graphically chronicles, with the aid of statistical data, the degree of northern domination, with a population of 5.4%, over other regions, with a combined population of 74.5%. While the attention drawn by the book to issues of domination sound valid, it is flawed in the sense that it fails to acknowledge why and how a minority elite has ingeniously manipulated religion and resources to command patronage and negotiate domination. Two reviewers of the book have noted that the authors pay no attention to grievances of the Western region, a region that is played as pawn in the Sudan's national chess game (See El Tom, A. O and Salih, M. A. M. *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 97 (2003) pp.511-14.

struggles from marginalised regions.[22] With the probable exception of the period 1972-83, Sudan's post-colonial history has been weighed down by armed insurrection mainly from southern dissident groups – the Anya-Nya and later SPLM/A – demanding greater autonomy to end what they perceive as inequality perpetrated by traditional northern Muslim-dominated Arab oligarchy.[23]

Other manifestations of Sudan's instability include, among others: governmental crisis arising from incessant conflict among political actors – resulting on the one hand in constant collapse of shaky coalitions and on the other the oscillation of power between those coalitions and repressive military regimes; and the domination of national power by northern Arab dominated section of the country and their introduction of unacceptable policies on marginalised sections of the country. The resort to armed struggle by aggrieved southern Sudanese is essentially aimed at overcoming domination, underdevelopment and attaining some level of autonomy, somewhat similar to one obtainable in a confederation, within a plural Sudan.

[22] A number of published academic materials have documented both the history and politics of Sudan's instability. For further details see for instance, Woodward, Peter *The Horn of Africa: Politics and International Relations* (London: I. B. Tauris & Company Ltd, 2003) Chapter 2: pp. 36-64; Woodward, Peter *Sudan, 1898-1989: the Unstable State* (Boulder, Col: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc, 1990) especially Part 2: Chapters 4, 5, & 6; Daly, M. W. "Broken bridge and empty basket: the political and economic background of the Sudanese civil war" In Daly, M. W. and Sakainga M. M. (Eds.) *Civil War in Sudan* (London, New York: British Academic Press, 1993) pp 1-26 and Bechtold, Peter K "More turbulence in Sudan: a new politics this time?" In. Voll, John O (Ed.) *Sudan: State and Society in Crisis* (Washington D.C.: Middle East Institute, 1991) Chapter 1, pp. 1-23.

[23] For details of southern rebellion see Beshir, Mohamed Omer *The Southern Sudan: Background to Conflict* (London: C. Hurst and Co, 1968) Chapters 8, 9, 10 & 11; Wakoson, Eliason Nyamlell "The politics of southern self government, 1972-83" In Daly, M.W. and A. A. Sakainga (Eds.) *Civil War in the Sudan* (London, New York: British Academic Press 1993) pp. 27-50. For account of a southern activist in the conflict see Albino, Oliver *The Sudan: a Southern Viewpoint* (London: Institute of Race Relations/ Oxford University Press, 1970).

Over the past four decades, Sudan has featured prominently as a scene of protracted civil wars each related to one another by time and circumstances. In 1955, the first protracted rebellion was started by the Anya-Nya Movement against successive governments in Khartoum. It ended in 1972 when the movement negotiated limited autonomy for Southern Sudan, albeit within a united state. The violation of the Addis Ababa Agreement by the former military ruler, General Nimieri and his imposition of Islamic Law sparked a second (SPLM/A) rebellion in March 1983.

In early 2003, while negotiations were underway for resolving the SPLA/M rebellion, another wave of conflict erupted in Sudan's *Western region of Darfur*, considered for decades to be a traditional northern 'sphere of influence'[24]. The crisis in Darfur exposes the multifaceted nature both of domination and anti-domination struggles in Sudan. In the past, Sudan's instability and the need for peace were constructed in terms of North-South regional conflict[25]. Since the eruption of crisis in Darfur, however, a new reality has emerged from the politics of unequal development and response to it in Sudan: unlike the southern rebellion which was normally stereotypically constructed by the government as one coming from the 'disbelievers' or 'southerners', the western rebellion is coming from the mainly Muslim west:

[24] Tar, U.A. "Old conflict, new complex emergency: the crisis in Darfur and a 'road map' for peace in Sudan" p. 6. Indeed, Alex de Waal aptly notes that "geography is against Darfur". He further observes that the region has received far less than its fair share of developmental resources: 'Khartoum has ignored Darfur; its people have received less education, less healthcare, less development assistance and fewer government posts than any other region – even the Southerners, who took up arms 21 years ago to fight for their rights, had a better deal' (De Waal, A "Counter-insurgency on the Cheap" *Review of African Political Economy* No. 102, 2004, p.720).

[25] Young, J. "Sudan: A flawed peace process leading to a flawed peace" *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 103 (2005) pp. 99-113.

> "Perhaps for the first time, religion is loosing relevance as a divisive factor in this scenario of Sudan's civil war. Mysteriously enough, contending actors in the crisis - the government in Khartoum, rebellious movements as well as civil communities in western Sudan – are all mainly Muslims"[26].

The evolution of civil militias in post-colonial Sudan

A close reading of the post-colonial history of Sudan indicates that civil militias are deeply rooted in the country's civil war and instability. Alex de Waal stresses that for a long time, there has been alarming growth in the number of armed militia groups in Sudan mostly in the South, and Kordofan and Darfur regions of the West with serious implications for the 'integrity and governability of the country'. According to him:

> "Militia activity has resulted in the complete breakdown of law in parts of south, Darfur, and southern Kordofan…[They] have in places become even more powerful than the armed forces, with the result that the power of central government can no longer extend to these areas. Fear of growing power of militia with narrow political or sectarian loyalties was an important stimulus for the Armed Forces' Memorandum to the government of Sadiq Al-Mahdi in February 1989.[27]

Several militia organisations have emerged in post-colonial Sudan. The first category includes those found among rebel groups that rival the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) in southern Sudan: Anya-Nya II force, Mundiri, Murle and Fertit, among others. An important factor which sustained in-fighting between these groups, was that the government of Sudan often utilised the rivalries prevailing among them to execute its counter-insurgency strategies. Several Sudanese governments were known to have sided with and armed militia groups rival to the SPLA/M in order to undermine its insurgency.

[26] Tar, U.A. "Old conflict, new complex emergency: the crisis in Darfur and a 'road map' for peace in Sudan" *ibid* p. 7.
[27] De Waal, A. "Some comments on militias in contemporary Sudan" In Daly, M.W.and Sakainga, A. A. *Civil War in the Sudan* (London, New York: British Academic Press, 1993) p. 142.

The second category of militias, were/are found mainly in urban centres of power – they are often associated with political parties and power brokers. An example is the militia wing of the National Islamic Front. This kind of militia outfit is common in many plural societies, and fragile and unstable states where power struggles and relations often play in zero-sum dimension.[28]

A third category of civil militias known as Muraheleen were found mainly in Western Sudan. They emerged in Darfur and southern Kordofan (among Bagara Arabs notably Riqayqat and Misiriya) during the regime of Sadiq El-Mahdi (1986-89) when the state adopted a policy of arming Arab Baggara militias as a counter-insurgency force against the SPLA/M.[29] Successive governments continued to arm and deploy Muraheleen. Their activities focused primarily on looting, raiding, enslaving and punishing Dinka and Nuer civilians living in SPLA/M territories from which rebel recruits were drawn.[30] After taking power in a coup in 1989, the National Islamic Front ruling party absorbed many militia forces into the Popular Defence Forces (PDFs), a new organ established to take care of civil matters such as crime and community protection. However, as they were used to committing violence with state impunity, there were reports that PDF paramilitaries have committed a lot of human rights abuses as documented by many organisations.[31]

[28] A good example is Nigeria where private paramilitaries (linked to party, ethnic and regional interests) are used in the contest for power. I have argued elsewhere that there is similarity between Sudan and Nigeria in this respect: "Every major political party and most politicians especially the so-called 'power brokers' or 'money bag politicians' have to employ the services of regular militias as weapon for the protection of supporters and intimidation of rivals. This scenario is somewhat similar to urban militias in Sudan" (Tar, U.A. "Janjaweed militia and the crisis in Darfur, Western Sudan: Trends and perverse manifestations" p. 8: fn 8).

[29] One common denominator of the two categories of civil militia (those within SPLA territory and the *Muraheleen* based in the West) is the influence of the state, at least at some points in time, in their derive to combat and defeat insurgency. While the southern-based militia groups were used to fight the SPLA/M from 'within', the *Muraheleen* were used from 'outside' the sphere of Southern rebellion.

[30] See Human Rights Watch *Darfur in Flames: Atrocities in Western Sudan*, *ibid*, p. 8.

[31] Human Rights Watch *Darfur in Flames: Atrocities in Western Sudan*, ibid.

Following the 2003 rebellion in the West, the current government in Sudan followed the precedent set by its predecessors by forging an alliance with an outgrowth of Muraheleen militia known as Janjaweed to perform a similar counter-insurgency function. However, as revealed by unfolding realities, Janjaweed militia seem to have gone beyond their strategic bounds of counter-insurgency to commit systematic violence against non-Arab, mainly black Africans.

Factors motivating the growth of civil militias

Several factors are responsible for the emergence and growth of militias in contemporary Sudan. Alex de Waal identified four but his typology is drawn mainly from past experience which needs to be critically reviewed in light of recent trends, especially the current crisis in Darfur. The first factor which gives rise to most militia is *local disputes* involving two or more groups especially "when established systems of conflict-resolution have broken down and increased access to gun through black market facilitates violent escalation of disputes".[32] While the breakdown of conflict resolution initiatives between the nomadic Arabs and sedentary African communities is an escalating factor, a more volatile one in the current situation is the alleged conspiracy by the Arab dominated state to recruit them into its counter-insurgency machinery.

De Waal considers state violence and state conspiracy with friendly-militia as a factor in its own right, but seems to overlook the ethnic and racial dimensions of it: in patronising an ethnic militia, the state risked communal tensions and political dissent. Furthermore, while de Waal's emphasis on black markets as a source of small arms

[32] De Waal, Alex (1993) "Some comments on militia in the contemporary Sudan", *op cit.*

cannot be ruled out, recent reports suggest that governmental and military sources are often responsible for the leakage of those arms to militia forces.[33]

A second, related, factor is the government's military strategy of fighting against rebellion:

> The Sudan armed forces have been active in fighting insurgents in the Southern Sudan since 1980s and the SPLA since 1983. The armed forces do not have sufficient manpower to mount the extensive counter-insurgency operations required by the nature of guerrilla war. Instead of resorting to mass conscription in the northern provinces, which has been politically unacceptable, the government and army have instead used local militia as a deliberate strategy for containing [rebellion].[34]

While de Waal sees government strategy in the context of the war between Khartoum and SPLA, limiting it to north-south political dynamics, such strategy has taken new forms. While past militia outfits such as Muraheleen were founded and mobilised to fight southern 'unbelievers' in the name of 'Jihad', the current Janjaweed outfit has taken more of an ethnic than religious colouration.[35] It is composed mainly of Arab nomads who are uncompromisingly loyal to the Arab government. Some sources have suggested that the government of Sudan is using Janjaweed as a weapon of SLA/JEM counter-insurgency because the government fears that its standing army, whose rank and file are drawn mostly from the insurgent communities it is fighting against, is too risky to be trusted lest they may prove disloyal or change sides while conducting counter-insurgency operations – a bitter lesson it learnt long time ago in its fight against Anya-Nya (1955-72). In this case, the government seems to have more confidence in the loyalty of its proxy militia than its standing army.

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[33] The report noted that "the Sudanese government…have recruited [and armed] 20,000 Janjaweed militia members" (See Human Rights Watch *Darfur in Flames ibid* p.22).
[34] De Waal, Alex "Some comments on militia in the contemporary Sudan" p. 143.
[35] A significant percentage of the population in southern Sudan are either Christians or traditionalists. In addition, one of the key demands of the southern-based SPLA/M in its confrontation with the government is putting an end to the so-called 'September Laws', a series of Islamic legal instruments introduced by the government of Nimieri in September 1983, in contravention of the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement which brought earlier *Anya Nya* Rebellion to an end.

The third factor is the material gains that are associated with the raiding activities of militia and other criminal elements. Most militia raids are motivated by theft and pillage of the hard-earned wealth of victims: livestock, jewellery, food and so on. The fourth factor is associated with the political interests and aspirations of the political elites. This particular factor, according to de Waal, is 'shadowy and politically controversial' in the sense that it is often associated with militia groups set up by rival politicians and their parties as paraphernalia for political competition and power struggle.[36]

A final factor is Sudan's massive borders, which make it extremely difficult to secure and protect. Sudan's neighbours – especially Chad, Egypt, Congo, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya and Uganda – have provided breeding grounds for both insurgencies and militias. An example is provided by Libya who sponsored such groups in the 1980s. "Janjaweed leaders are among those said to have been trained in Libya"[37]

4. Darfur Crisis: genesis, complexities and conflict equation

In early 2003, Darfur became the home of an insurgency led by two groups – SLA and JEM – against the government. This rebellion is deeply rooted in past resource conflicts between Arab nomads and African farmers co-habiting in the region. In its report, Human Rights Watch establishes the link between past and current conflicts in the crisis in Darfur:

[36] See note number 28.
[37] De Waal, A "Counter-insurgency on the Cheap" *Review of African Political Economy* No. 102, (2004) p.720.

The current conflict in Darfur has deep roots. It is but the latest culmination of a protracted problem, yet there are key differences between the 2003-2004 conflict and prior bouts of fighting. The current conflict has developed serious racial and ethnic overtones and clearly risks shattering historic if fragile pattern of co-existence. A number of ethnic groups previously neutral are now positioning themselves along the Arab/African divide, aligning and co-operating with either the rebel movements or the government and its allied militia. Remaining neutral and outside the conflict is becoming impossible, though some groups have tried to do so.[38]

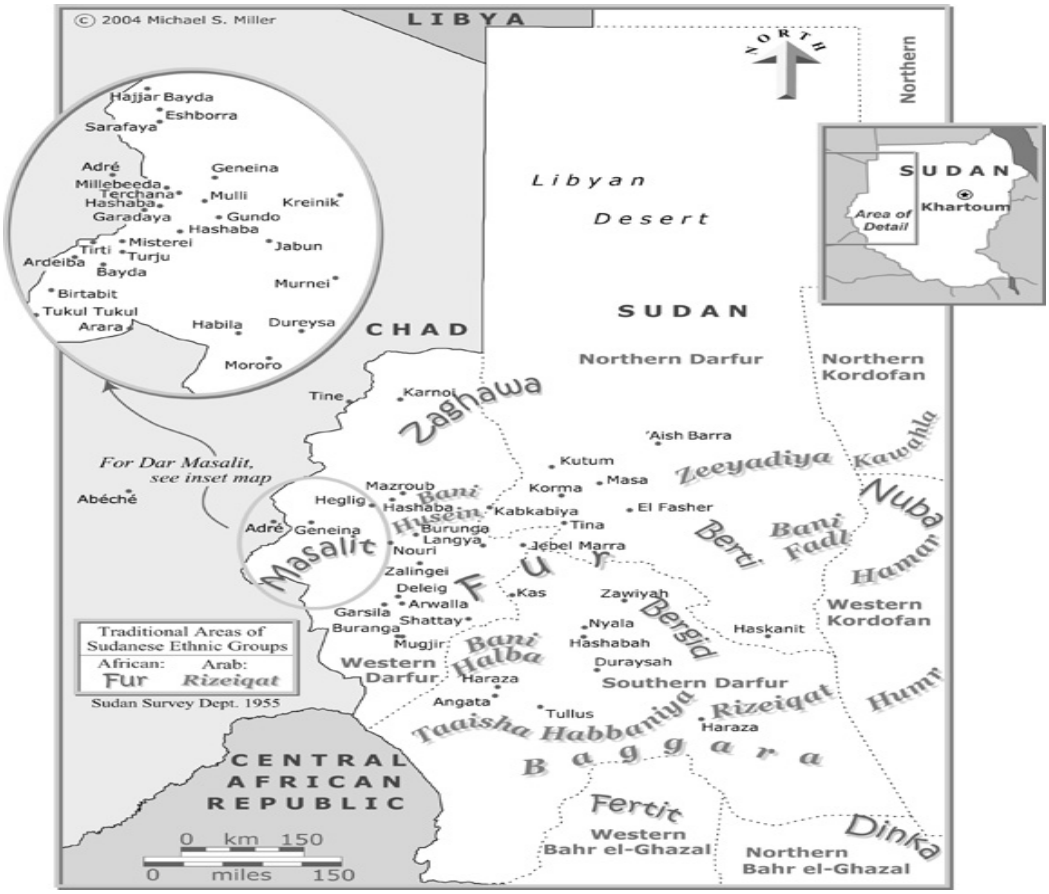

Figure 1: A Map of Sudan showing Darfur Region and Ethnic Groups[39]

The SLA and JEM demanded "…an end to chronic marginalisation [to which Western Sudan has been subjected for over forty years]"[40] through 'power-sharing within the Arab ruled Sudanese state…[and] government action to end the abuses of their rivals, Arab pastoralists who were driven onto African farmlands by drought and

[38] Human Rights Watch (2004) *Darfur in Flames: Atrocities in Western Sudan ibid*, p. 8.
[39] Source: Human Rights Watch: http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/darfur/map.htm (accessed 30th June 2005).
[40] Human Rights Watch *Darfur in Flames: Atrocities in Western Sudan, ibid*, p. 1.

desertification – and who had a nomadic tradition of armed militias'[41]. The rebellion eventually spiralled into a sustained armed conflict between the armed forces of Sudan (allegedly in alliance with Janjaweed militia drawn from the pro-government Arab ethnic group) and the two rebel groups comprising mainly of non-Arab African ethnic groups – the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa.

The two groups emerged in rapid succession. The first, initially known as the Darfur Liberation Front (DLF), emerged in February 2003 and captured the town of Gulu. Thereafter, it transformed into SLA. Initially, the Sudanese government refused either to acknowledge the demands of SLA or to negotiate with them. The government became serious when the rebels attacked El-Fasher, the capital of North Darfur in April 2003 and destroyed a number of Sudanese military aircraft and helicopters, looted fuel and munitions facilities and captured a Sudanese Air Force officer who was forced to give an interview to the 'Arab' international Television Channel, Al-Jazeera.

Subsequently SLA joined forces, albeit temporarily, with JEM and intensified attacks on important garrison towns, targeting key military and civil targets. In May 2003, the Sudanese authorities responded by making key political and administrative reforms and establishing a heavy military presence in the Darfur region. Subsequently, the government of Sudan decided to use its military might, not only in confronting the SLA and JEM rebels, but also by targeting the 'African' civilian population suspected of contributing fighting forces to both rebel groups.

[41] Human Rights Watch *Darfur in Flames: Atrocities in Western Sudan, op cit.*

The state decided to contain the rebellion *conventionally*, using the state's instruments of coercion, and *unconventionally*, using popular appeals to religiosity, ethnicity and racism. To accomplish the latter objective, the government *co-deployed* its standing army and armed 'Arab' nomads, who form the bulk of Janjaweed militia. These militias were clandestinely trained, armed and provided with necessary legal immunities to aid the government in its counter-insurgency operations. As I noted elsewhere:

> Having been allowed…'free rein', the militia became an important irregular arm of the Sudanese Army and were often deployed in tandem with the armed forces (both infantry and air force) in attacking communities suspected of supporting rebel movements; killing, raping, and abducting men, women, minors and the elderly as well and destroying their domiciles and property.[42]

The western rebellion further widened the existing ethnic and racial tensions between conflicting 'Arab' and 'African' communities. While mutual ethnic suspicion and racial hate have been obvious in past resource conflicts, they were essentially blurred and crosscutting.[43] Following the rebellion, the hitherto blurred boundaries of identity and resource conflict gradually collapsed. In its place emerged an 'explosive' divide: the 'Arabs' pitched tents with the government while other ethnic/racial groups became accomplices of SLA and JEM.

Initially, SLA and JEM were mainly composed of the three 'African' ethnic groups: Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa.[44] In the long run however, other 'minority'

[42] Tar, Usman A. "Counter-insurgents or ethnic vanguards? Civil militia and state violence in Darfur region, Western Sudan" in Francis, D. J. (ed.) *Civil Militias: Africa's Intractable Security Menace?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, forthcoming) n.p.

[43] While resource clashes were predominantly between Arab nomads and African farmers, there were a few incidences of clashes within farming and rearing communities.

[44] There were divisions and tension among and within these ethnic groups about preference and loyalty to one of the two rebel groups. For instance, among the three sub-ethnic groups of the Zaghawa, the Bideyat and Kobe are commonly found in the JEM, while the Wagi constitute majority of SLA/M rebels. Before they became united, at least partially for a shortwhile, the two rebel groups were not on good terms with each other, their bone of contention being the ideology and strategies of the rebellion.

African ethnic groups such as Dorok and Jebel were forced to identify with their 'fellows' among Africans.

Bloodbaths and blames; denials and testimonies

The humanitarian situation in Darfur is catastrophic[45]. The crisis is deepening day by day with huge spill-over effects in neighbouring countries. The UNCHR estimates that in May 2004, there were over one million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) inside Darfur as compared to 250,000 in September 2003. Over half of the IDPs (570,000) are located in Western Darfur while the rest are spread across North and South Darfur (290,000 and 140,000 respectively). The rising pace of humanitarian disaster in Darfur is caused primarily by targeted attacks on the civilian population by government forces and Janjaweed militia. Several reports, media documentaries, research and fact-finding mission have revealed an ugly picture of calculated attacks on civilian communities in Darfur committed by the Janjaweed militia force in liaison with the Sudan Armed forces[46]. All fingers of blame are therefore pointed at the government of Sudan as the key mastermind behind the complex emergency in Darfur, as well as the atrocities committed by its sponsored Janjaweed militia. How far is this assignment of blame justifiable? Are the Janjaweed militia sponsored and

[45] UNCHR *Situation of Human Rights in the Darfur region of Sudan* a Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights; (Document No E/CN.4/2005/3, 2004) p. 7.

[46] See, for instance, UN High Mission to Darfur, *the Sudan 27 April-2 May 2004* (Report) Khartoum: United Nations Office available: www.unsudanig.org, Para. 4-8 (accessed 22nd June 2004); Darfur Monitoring Group *Ethnic Cleansing in Darfur Region of Sudan* available: www.d-a.org.uk/pages/dmg1.htm (accessed 28th June 2005); UN High Mission to Darfur *Mission Report*, Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan* Report of the Human Rights Watch, April Vol. 16 No 6 (A), available: http://hrw.org/reports/2004/sudan0504/ (accessed 28th June 2005); Amnesty International *Sudan: Government Responsible for Humanitarian Devastation but still in Denial* AI Press Release, AI Index: AFR 54/067/2004 (Public), News Service No: 155, 20 June 2004 available: http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAFR540672004 (accessed 28th June 2005); Amnesty International (2004) *Sudan Crisis: In our Silence we are complicit* available http://web.amnesty.org/pages/sdn-index-eng (accessed 28th June 2005).

supported by the state? How far does the composition and activities of Janjaweed demonstrate its controversial links with state structures?

A key question is whether Janjaweed militias are connected to the state or not. A careful deconstruction and evaluation of the Janjaweed militia and their activities suggests that it is misleading to exclusively consider the Janjaweed militia either as 'counter-insurgents' or 'ethnic militia': indeed, the two elements come together as a composite descriptive feature. The binding force for these two contested elements is the role played by the government in supporting the militia group to commit ethnically-motivated human rights abuses in the name of counter-insurgency.

The western rebellion and the nature of government response to it has transformed the Janjaweed militia from a scattered armed nomadic group to a modern, organised and government-backed paramilitary armed with sophisticated arms, communication equipment (such as satellite phones), logistical support and legal protection. Disturbingly, the Janjaweed militia have seemed to exploit their 'strategic' status as an ally of the Sudanese government, perhaps with the tacit approval of the latter, to vent racial/ethnic anger and hatred on rival African communities with whom they have clashed for decades over economic resources and ethnic/racial differences.

The government of Sudan has consistently claimed that Arab militia have always been present in the region and that they are "a few side-lined ostracised outlaws" using the current crisis to carry out criminal activities. Conversely however, concerned international institutions have refuted government's claims. Their common position, which is informed by their direct involvement in and assessment of the

situation in Darfur, is that the government is deliberately involving the Janjaweed militia as a state sponsored armed tribal militia for systematic and deliberate attacks on non-combatant, non-Arab civilian communities.[47] The role of the government in supporting the Janjaweed as well as the latter's structure and activities need to be critically examined with a view to appreciating the extent of its violent activities (committed in tandem with the army) and the extent to which the government is implicated.

There is a relative consensus, both within Sudan and outside, on the role of the government of Sudan in the recruitment, deployment and maintenance of the Janjaweed militia. While the government continues to keep mute or at best present a cloaked official position, confessions by several serving and past state officials, as well evidence from intercepted classified official documents, tends to reveal that that the Janjaweed militia are indeed an *ad hoc* unit of Sudan's army.[48] Outside Sudan,

[47] See Human Rights Watch *Targeting the Fur: Mass Killings in Darfur* available: http://hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/darfur0105/ (accessed 30th June 2005); *Darfur: Women Raped Even After Seeking Refuge* available: http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/04/11/sudan10467.htm (accessed 30th June 2005); *Darfur in Flames: Atrocities in Western Sudan (ibid); Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan* Report of the Human Rights Watch, April Vol. 16 No 6 (A), available: http://hrw.org/reports/2004/sudan0504/ (accessed 29th June 2005); "Q & A: Crisis in Darfur" available: http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/05/05/darfur8536.htm (accessed 4th August 2004); *Darfur Documents Confirm Government Policy of Militia Support*, a Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper 20th July 2004 available: http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/07/19/darfur9096.htm (accessed 04/08/2004); Amnesty international *Sudan: Government Responsible for Humanitarian Devastation but still in Denial* AI Press Release, AI Index: AFR 54/067/2004 (Public), News Service No: 155, 20 June 2004 available: http: web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGAFR540672004 (accessed 30th June 2004); *Sudan Crisis: In our Silence we are complicit* available http://web.amnesty.org/pages/sdn-index-eng (accessed on 18th June 2004); UNCHR "Situation of human rights in the Darfur region of Sudan" a Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights (Document No E/CN.4/2005/3).

[48] For instance, on 21st July 2004, an exiled former governor of Darfur, Ahmed Diraige stated in a live discussion on the BBC programme – *Breakfast* – that the Sudanese army and Janjaweed militia are operating as allied forces in carrying out attacks on Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa communities (Monitored on BBC News, 21/06/2004). In a conversation, the former Governor emphatically confirmed these atrocities to me (Conversation held on 29 November 2004, Tripoli, Libya). Similarly, intercepted officials documents collected by the Human Rights Watch reveal that the government has given approval for recruitment of more Janjaweeds as well as their remunerations (Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan*, ibid, p. 46.

several concerned individuals and organisations such as the UN secretary-General, Mr Kofi Annan, US Secretary of State, Mr Collin Powell, and UK Secretary for International Development, Mr Hillary Benn; UN High Commission for Refugees, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and so on have blamed the government of Sudan for complicity with the *Janjaweed* militia. As aptly described by the Human Rights Watch in its report Darfur, "the government [of Sudan is] working hand in glove with Janjaweed"[49] a precedent that has always been used by the state in its counter-insurgency strategies:

> The Arab militia group known as Janjaweed are but the latest incarnation in a longstanding strategy of militia use by successive governments. The militias in Darfur are clearly supported by the Sudanese government, which uses them as counterinsurgency proxy to attack civilians while somewhat hiding the government's hand.[50]

Within Sudan, experiential testimonies of threats and utterances of Janjaweed militia on their victims as well as confessions made by key state functionaries validate the concerns held by the international community: that there has been a deliberate and well planned decision by the government to involve and support Janjaweed militia, both as a client and an ally to carry out counterinsurgency and ethnic cleansing against Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa Sudanese in the Darfur region. Some of the oft-repeated claims made by the Janjaweed in their encounters with victims suggest that they enjoy state patronage: "we are the government", "if you have problem don't go to the police" [an institution dominated by members of rebelling Masalit ethnic group]…come to the Janajaweed…Janjaweed is the government.[51] Similarly, victims of Janjaweed attacks have repeatedly submitted that while conducting operations

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[49] Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan,* ibid, p. 42.
[50] Human Rights Watch *Darfur in Flames: Atrocities in Western Sudan*, ibid, p. 22.
[51] Interview conducted by Human Rights Watch with Adam, a victim of Janjaweed abuse, Chad April 2, 2004 (cited in Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan*, ibid, p. 42).

government forces and *Janjaweed* militia were always seen together: "they come together; they fight together and leave together".[52]

On several occasions, several agents of the government of Sudan have admitted Sudan's working relationship with the *Janjaweed* militia or support for its cause. A recent statement made by the Sudanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, reveals confessions of a common cause between the government counter-insurgency drive and the Janjaweed militia, implying that the cause of the militia "was a just one…Because those militia are targeting the rebellion." The Minister further reiterated the government's denial of Janjaweed as a gang of tribal militia involved in ethnic cleansing and grossly under-estimated the human cost of their atrocities: "I would say not more than 600 people [have been killed] at most"[53]. Similarly, in an address to the people of Kulbus on December 31st 2003, the President of Sudan, Omar Al-Bashir said that in pursuing the government priority of defeating rebellion in Western Sudan, "the horsemen" [that is, Janjaweed] were used alongside the army.[54]

Why did the government conspire with Janjaweed militia? There are three possible reasons. First, the government is suspicious that some Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa elements within the army might sabotage its counter-insurgency drive. By involving the Janjaweed militia, not only are the possibilities of sabotage overcome, but also a trustworthy 'ally' can work alongside the military. Secondly, by virtue of being nomads the Janjaweed militia are very much familiar with the geographic terrain in

[52] Interview conducted by Human Rights Watch with Abdullah, a forty nine year old headman of Terbeba village, held in Chad March 24, 2004 (cited in *Darfur in Flames* (ibid).
[53] Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan*, ibid, p. 43.
[54] Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan*, op cit.

Darfur providing a better sense of direction for counterinsurgency operations. Perhaps a stronger reason is that as rivals to the rebelling ethnic groups and loyal to the government, the Janjaweed militia are better poised to face both rebel groups and their 'anti-establishment' civil communities.

5. The structure and activities of Janjaweed

Over the past couple of years, the Janjaweed militia has emerged as a robust coercive outfit drawing its authority and source of impunity from the state. It has gradually developed into a structured paramilitary formation as well as an irregular auxiliary unit of the Sudanese army, even though the government keeps hiding its complicity with the Janjaweed. It is extremely difficult to confirm the precise number of Janjaweed militia. However, some reports reveal that the Sudanese government has recruited 20,000 Janjaweed militia members[55]. In terms of ethnic composition however, there is certainty that the Janjaweed militia is an all-Arab outfit. The clans and tribes frequently reported as the main suppliers of militia members are the Irayqat and Ouled Zed sub-clans of the camel herding northern Rezeigat, the Mahariya and the Beni Hussein. In terms of nationality, Janjaweed militia members are drawn both from Sudanese and Chadian Arabs.[56]

The leadership of the organisation is drawn mainly from the leadership of the Arab clan system and those politically appointed: "many or most of the Janjaweed leaders were emirs or *Omdas* from Arab tribe, and several were appointed by the government

[55] Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan, ibid*, p. 22.

[56] Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan, ibid*, p. 23.

in the administrative reorganisation of the mid-1990s".[57] The Janjaweed have been structured into brigades or *Liwa,* each headed by a general. Rebel leaders claim that there are no less than six *Janjaweed Liwas,* while victims and IDPs identify two: the Buffalo Brigade – *Liwa al-Jammous* – formerly headed by Musa Hilal and Victory Brigade – *Liwa al-Nasr* – formerly headed by Abdul Rahim Ahmad Mohammad alias "Shukurtallah". These brigades are structured along the rank and file tradition and *esprit de corps* of the Sudanese army. Their uniforms and ranking insignia are patterned in the same colour, quality and design as those of the regular army. However, there are features that distinguish Janjaweed from other sections of the Sudan's army: the breast pockets of Janjaweed uniforms and fatigues have fixed badges showing an armed horseman or red patch on the shoulder and their typical, but symbolic, means of transportation is either a camel or horse. Apart from this, other military conditions of service and incentives apply both to Janjaweed and the army: Janjaweed 'officers' use same four-wheeled drive *Toyota Land Cruiser* vehicles and are accompanied by bodyguards, as are those in the army. In addition, they mount checkpoints as the army does, impose taxes on commuters, and carry the same Thuraya satellite phones as senior army officers.[58]

Men and officers of Janjaweed are believed to receive an attractive wage and related incentives from the state. Credible claims state that new conscripts receive a starter wage of 100-400 US dollars, as well as a confirmation of continuing state

[57] Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan* ibid, p. 45.

[58]Human Rights Watch reports describe a number of cases of the Janjaweed and the army imposing tax on IDPs and escaping refugees. An example is worth citing here: "Displaced Fur civilians in Garsila, Deleig , Mugjir and other towns controlled by government forces and Janjaweed are regularly forced to pay bribes and subjected to violence by Janjaweed 'officials' when attempting to move outside the displaced settlements and camps around these towns…" (Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan* ibid, p. 38).

support for their relatives should they die in combat[59]. Long serving Janjaweed members are believed to receive salaries and incentives better than those of regular army members. In addition to a regular supply of arms, reinforcements, and food items, they are also issued with state-endorsed identity cards confirming their rank and other personal details.[60] Since the eruption of the western rebellion, the Janjaweed militia have been armed with new weapons and communications facilities. The assault riffle and allied equipment carried by each Janjaweed militia – such as Kalashnikovs, 'Bazuka', Belgique, G-3s, and long-range vision equipment – as well as communication gadgets – such as walkie-talkies and satellite phones – are commonly believed to be provided by the state, as they are either illegal or too expensive to carry under normal circumstances. Furthermore, in their barracks and homes the leadership of the Janjaweed have massive leisure facilities available to them, similar to those enjoyed by state functionaries: satellite dishes for receiving international television channels (such as Al-Jazeera, Sudan TV, Kuwait TV, Nile TV and so on), landline telephones (to complement Thuraya cell phone), computers and so on.[61]

Although they are not stationed in the same barracks with the military, the Janjaweed are known to be using abandoned military barracks and decommissioned facilities of the Sudanese Army.[62] There are controversies surrounding the overall

[59] Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan op cit.*

[60] The evidence for this claim is revealed in a confidential army document captured by the rebels in one of their attacks on military facilities in December 2003 (see Human Rights Watch, *Darfur in flames, ibid*, p. 24 and fn 46).

[61] Many Janjaweed leaders combine militia leadership with clan leadership and have residential homes in major centres of power across Sudan and Chad. They use those homes when they are off-duty, on holidays or when consulting state officials (Sudan).

[62] The Sudanese army is perhaps careful not to mix Janjaweed militia with its regular army in the same military facilities or join their hierarchies of command. There are two possible reasons: First, the Sudanese government has consistently claimed that it has no hand in the recruitment of Janjaweed militia – and mixing them in the same facilities could substantiate the views held by the international community, indicting Khartoum of arming *Janjaweed.* Secondly, the Janjaweed is an all-Arab ethnic

hierarchy of command in the Janjaweed.[63] However, there is consensus that the command headquarters and operational base of the Janjaweed is Geneina, the headquarters of West Darfur. The Geneina barracks – a former customs yard known as *Medina al-Hajjaj* – is believed to have a training camp situated outside the town and equipped with modest facilities, to serve the training and strategic needs of the Janjaweed. It is believed to have residential military homes and offices, convenient to serve as the headquarters of Janjaweed Central Command (JCC – a possible classified acronym for a mysterious organisation!) for coordinating remuneration, and the training and armament needs of Janjaweed militia members. *Medina al-Hajjaj* also serves as the main contact point with the Sudanese army, especially men of the military intelligence unit, who regularly visit the facility to distribute arms and reinforcements (for instance bullets, new uniforms, food supplies, communication equipment etc), and receive briefings from and relay government instructions to the Janjaweed leadership. It also serves as a payment unit for the army paymasters who regularly come to hand out salaries and other incentives to Janjaweed members.[64]

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militia, while the mainstream Sudanese army consists of a tribal mix of all Sudanese. While the *Janjaweed* is seen to possess a specific ethnic agenda, the army is constructed by the state as a national institution that is too risky to be openly politicised. While secretly mixing the two in counterinsurgency operations, the Sudanese government, it seems, has internalised the two units to serve as checkmates: the Arabs militia have the duty to defend the interest of the Arab controlled government ('we are the government' as they usually claim); the army, especially men and officers from Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa ethnic extraction are duty bound to apply the state's means of coercion, in any way and to any extent, in obedience to commands even if it is against their wishes.

[63] There is debate over who holds the position of the General Officer Commanding the Janjaweed militia. Some sources believe that the overall commander is 'General' Shukurtallah, the Commander of Victory Brigade (*Liwa al-Nasr)* and a former military officer convicted and imprisoned for killing civilians but who was later discharged and given amnesty by the Sudanese government in order that he could head Janjaweed. He is believed to be a member of Mahariya clan from Arbukni village in the outskirts of Geneina. There were indications that he was killed while fighting in North Darfur in January 2004. Others believe that the overall Janjaweed commander is one Rezeigat tribal chief from Kutum who is believed to command a high degree of respect and obedience from the rank and file of the Janjaweed. Because of the mysteries surrounding it and its relationship with the state, however, the command structure of the Janjaweed continues to be closely guarded.

[64] Tar, U. A. "Janjaweed militia and the crisis in Darfur, Western Sudan: Trends and perverse manifestations" paper for International Conference on Darfur Crisis, Tripoli, Libya, November 29-December 1, 2004, p. 20.

While there are mysteries surrounding its structure, there is little disagreement on the violent activities of the Janjaweed militia. With the probable exception of manning sophisticated and heavy-duty military vehicles, and conducting aerial reconnaissance/attacks – all of which require highly specialised military skills – the Janjaweed are known to have been involved in almost every part of the counterinsurgency operations, along with the regular Sudanese army. Elsewhere, I have noted three functions for which the army may heavily rely on the Janjaweed.[65] First, the army may depend on Janjaweed to provide an advance party to penetrate and cordon off targeted communities in order to ease aerial and ground attacks.[66]. Secondly, as iterant nomadic people, the Janjaweed are very familiar with the terrain in Darfur region: they know every nook and cranny of the region and have precise knowledge of communities and their leaders, especially those suspected of supporting the rebellion. Thirdly, the Janjaweed are a useful tool for exonerating the Sudanese army and its leaders and obscuring state violence. Any military operations conducted by the army without the company of the Janjaweed can easily implicate the state when they result in clear ethnic cleansing, as they always appear to do. The state has been claiming that the Janjaweed usually exploit regular military surveillance. This claim hardly holds water, as the Janjaweed are seen together with the army both in combat with SLA and JEM and in attacks on vulnerable non-combatant civil communities.

Most, if not all, attacks are aimed at rival ethnic communities, specifically adult Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa men. While attacks on rebel combatants may be justifiable, what appears disturbing are the atrocities committed against 'non-combatants' and

[65] Tar, U. A. "Janjaweed militia and the crisis in Darfur, Western Sudan: Trends and perverse manifestations" ibid, p.21.
[66] Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan,* ibid, p. 17

vulnerable persons: attacks on infants, elderly and handicapped people; rape of women and young girls (usually in front of their relatives); pillage of stored food, livestock, and jewellery; and burning of houses. The range and nature of violent, ethnically motivated, abuses carried out by the Janjaweed militia are wide, gruesome and horrific. In its report, the UNCHR classified Janjaweed/army violence into the following categories: (1) indiscriminate attack against civilians; (2) rape and other forms of sexual violence; (3) destruction of property and pillage; (4) forced displacement; disappearances; (5) persecution and discrimination. For each of these violent acts, the report clearly blamed the army and Janjaweed as their perpetrators.[67]

Similar reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, not only blamed the government and Janjaweed, but also documented detailed testimonies from victims of violence (IDPs within Sudan and refugees who have fled to neighbouring Chad Republic) of how these attacks were carried out[68]. According to many accounts from those reports, the pattern of attacks comes in phases, ascending in order of severity: initial, intermediate and chronic attacks. The initial phase involves visitation by well-armed Janjaweed militia often resulting in theft of livestock, verbal threats on the population and firing into the air. The intermediate and chronic phases, usually occurring in quick successions, and involving combined attacks by the militia and army, graduate into more violent attacks on communities. An account from a Masalit refugee from West Darfur is worth citing here:

> There have been three attacks [on my village] since October 2003, but the last attack [in January 2004] was the worst. The first time, the [Janjaweed] men came on camels and horses and frightened us, but in the third attack they came by car and killed a lot of people. All the inhabitants fled at once after the last attack. The military told us they

[67] UNCHR "Situation of human rights in the Darfur region of Sudan" ibid.
[68] See footnote No. 45 & 46 for these reports.

> would erase us. We asked why they wanted to hurt us and they answered that it was none of our business, that orders come from above.[69]

In the foregoing account the role of the state is clearly revealed in the form of the threatening statement made by a member of the Sudanese army. The account also showed the stages at which state means of coercion are heavily applied: the second and third stage of attacks. At these stages, heavy military equipment and aircraft are brought into use, as revealed by a victim, a man from Fara Wiya town, a commercial town and administrative district in Darfur destroyed for suspected presence of SLA rebels:

> "The government bombed us with Antonov, MiG, and helicopters. About 140 bombs dropped in Fara Wiya town in that month. The MiGs specifically hit the school – the hole was more than two metres deep. After that we were afraid and took our children away into the mountains. After the bombing in the morning, we saw about 2,000 soldiers come with tanks in the early afternoon. They surrounded the village on three sides and the Janjaweed came on the fourth side. The plane had already destroyed the health clinic. The Janjaweed and the soldiers broke onto the shops and looted, then they burnt the houses. The Janjaweed put a dead animal in the well".[70]

Other forms of violence such as rape, abduction, disappearances, deliberate destruction of water sources, etc. come alongside (before, during or after) those attacks.

6. Conclusion

For most of its post-independence life, Sudan has presented a typical case of an unstable and volatile state. This is in part due to the socio-economic and political gaps that exist between the different regions and peoples of the country. Over the years, the 'Arab' ruling class has appropriated power, and its benefits, to the detriment of other ethnic and racial groups in the country. The rise of the Janjaweed militia in the on-

[69] Interview by Human Rights Watch, Chad, February 11 2004 (Cited in Human Rights Watch *Darfur in Flames: Atrocities in Western Sudan, ibid*, p. 21).
[70] Interview by Human Rights Watch, Chad, February 23, 2004 (Cited in Human Rights Watch *Darfur in Flames: Atrocities in Western Sudan, ibid*, p. 20).

going crisis in Darfur region of western Sudan is a clear manifestation of how the ruling elites of a state can mobilise ethnic and racial tensions to maintain their vested political interests. By all indications, the Sudanese government is implicated in playing a role in recruiting, arming, protecting and sustaining the Janjaweed in its current counter-insurgency drive.

While the state officially continues to deny its connections with the Janjaweed, a closer look at the organisation, composition, structure and *modus operandi* of the outfit suggests that the Janjaweed is organised and 'serviced' alongside other coercive organs of the state. From the uniforms worn by Janjaweed militia up to the barracks they occupy, the patronage role of the Sudanese state is manifest. Indeed, several involuntary confessions by state officials as well as 'bragging' by Janjaweed leaders and members also provide evidence of the government-Janjaweed alliance. It is quite possible therefore, that the Janjaweed is organised by the Sudanese government to enable it shield its standing army in acts of violence against its civilian population. In the context of a complex political emergency, there is a high possibility that dominant political interests, such as those held by the Arab ruling class in Sudan, could 'politicise' civil militia by resorting to primordial appeals and maintaining the *status quo*. The reality therefore is that, while being recruited as a tool for counter-insurgency, the Janjaweed militia also double as a force for ethnically motivated violence.

While past rebellions from southern Sudan have been constructed in religious (in addition to ethnic) terms, the current rebellion in the west has not provided the state with an opportunity to mobilise religious difference because both parties to the

conflict and its victims are mainly Muslim. However, with the exception of religion, attempts by the state to mobilise ethnic, tribal and racial difference among western Sudanese, came to bare in how it recruited and co-deployed the Janjaweed. While the SLA and JEM rebel groups have played a role both in inciting and compounding the conflict (for instance, by stationing themselves near civilian communities) they have so far proved themselves a lesser evils compared to the state. The state lacks any justification for extinguishing its citizens in the name of ethnically motivated counterinsurgency.

The empirical findings from this paper suggest that the hybrid perspective, which emphasises context and a complex web of state-society dynamics and power relations, provides a useful theoretical framework for the situation in Western Sudan and other unstable societies in Africa. In terms of its obvious connection to the authoritarian state, the Janjaweed militia is very much like a state paramilitary, and in terms of the dynamic web of non-state actors and interests (tribal leaders, ethnicity etc) involved, it seemingly falls into non-state sphere, albeit with state connections by default. Overall, however, the degree of complex emergency created in Darfur speaks volumes of how zero-sum power relations are played out in weak, plural and unstable societies.

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