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Al-Shabaab Leader Abu Ubaidah Reemerges From the Shadows

Jacob Zenn

Al-Shabaab leader Ahmed Umar Abu Ubaidah (alias Ahmed Diriye) is notorious for keeping out of the spotlight. He had, for example, never made a public appearance until a November 2019 video, in which he gave a motivational speech to al-Shabaab fighters before they raided the Baledogle Airfield (voanews.com/africa, November 5, 2019). Baledogle is primarily used as a base from which American forces in Somalia operate. Abu Ubaidah claimed that “we have exerted all this effort and undertaken all this preparation to attack the American troops. Therefore, you must carry out the operation with great efficiency” (hiiraan.com, October 19, 2019).

The attack itself, which involved suicide car bombings to allow al-Shabaab foot soldiers to breach the base’s perimeter, would have been successful if not for US forces’ repelling of al-Shabaab in what later would be described as a heroic defense (garoweonline.com, January 7). Together, both his role as the leader of al-Shabaab (since his predecessor Ahmed Abdi

Godane’s death in 2014) and his part in the Baledogle attack caused the US State Department to designate Abu Ubaidah a terrorist in 2022 (state.gov, December 18, 2022). Interestingly, like Godane, Abu Ubaidah is from Somaliland, a region in which al-Shabaab has a minimal presence.

After remaining behind the scenes for three years after his first appearance, Abu Ubaidah again was present in a video put out by al-Shabaab on May 21 (garoweonline.com, May 21). Similar to the 2019 video, where Abu Ubaidah was masterminding an attack and motivating the attackers, in this video he was again up-close and personal with Somali militants. Rather than attacking US forces, however, Abu Ubaidah is now focusing more on Ethiopian troops in Somalia. This is due to the fact that Ethiopian forces have taken the lead in organizing a regional offensive against al-Shabaab (with the assistance of forces from Kenya, Djibouti, and the Somali government) since early this year (aljazeera.com, February 1). In his speech, Abu Ubaidah also pointed out that the Turkish and American militaries were behind the regional military effort against al-Shabaab as well.

According to Abu Ubaidah, al-Shabaab has the support of the Somali people. He claims that the civilian population of Somalia will fight alongside al-Shabaab against the regional military alliance. In terms of optics, Abu Ubaidah's video justified this claim, with the video's being set in a large conference hall where more than 100 delegates were in attendance, including senior clan leaders and Shura (an Islamic council) heads. Entitled the "second Consultative Forum of the Jihad in East Africa," the conference sought to rally support for al-Shabaab's fight against the regional forces under Abu Ubaidah's leadership ([Twitter/SahanResearch](#), May 22).

More than 15 years since its formation, al-Shabaab continues to be a force in Somalia and, to an extent, the entire region—though it has not attacked Kenya, Uganda, or Ethiopia as frequently or as devastatingly as it did in previous eras of the group's history. Al-Shabaab may have been overshadowed on the international stage by the rise of Islamic State (IS). Nevertheless, Abu Ubaidah has proven to be a competent, albeit reclusive, leader for al-Shabaab.

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Tides Turn Against the Pakistani Taliban: The Killing of Iqbal Bali

Farhan Zahid

Since the fall of Kabul and the return of the Afghan Taliban to power in August 2021, Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Province has faced a resurgence of Islamist terrorism. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), or "Pakistani Taliban," has perpetrated scores of terrorist attacks across KPK Province. The most lethal attack was the January 30 suicide bombing of a mosque inside the provincial police compound in Peshawar, which killed 72 and injured 150 police officers and civilians

during Friday prayers ([Geo TV](#), January 30).

The KPK police have struggled to turn the tide against the TTP, but they managed to kill Iqbal (alias "Bali") in a gun battle in the Dera Ismail Khan District of southern KPK. The encounter between police and Iqbal (along with his fellow militants) took place in the early morning hours of May 3 in the Dirdoni area of Ghulam Khan Tehsil (an administrative division) of Dera Ismail Khan District. Iqbal and two of his accomplices were killed, while two others received injuries, to include the area's subdivisional police officer. The timing of Iqbal's killing was relevant, as it boosted the morale of Pakistan's security forces on the same day that six soldiers were killed by militants in the North Waziristan District of KPK Province ([ANI News](#), May 5).

Iqbal masterminded more than 26 deadly terrorist attacks in Pakistan and was a key commander of TTP, having a bounty on his head of 10.5 million rupees (around \$37,000) ([Bol News](#), May 4). Before his death, he was wanted in both Punjab and KPK provinces for the terrorist attacks that he organized during his 15-year "career" as a jihadist.

Who Was Iqbal Bali?

Not much is known about Iqbal, save that he hailed from Dera Ismail Khan District. He established the Khiyara Group of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and began conducting attacks in the southern districts of the KPK as well as neighboring districts in Punjab Province when he was in his early 30s ([News International](#), May 5). Although he later joined the TTP, he continued to remain associated with the LeJ ([Dawn](#), May 5). The LeJ has close links with the TTP and al-Qaeda, and at times has worked in tandem with both of them.

Both the LeJ and TTP maintain a strong liaison with the Afghan Taliban, whose territory often provided a safe haven for their militants. As such, Iqbal—who has served as a commander for both the LeJ

and TTP—also maintained strong connections with the Afghan Taliban. [1]

According to KPK police, Iqbal was involved in high-profile attacks in not only KPK Province but also Punjab. There Iqbal masterminded the attack on a convoy of Sri Lankan cricket team players in 2009, which killed six police officers and injured several players on the team. In addition, he orchestrated a separate attack in the Multan District of Punjab ([Express Tribune](#), May 4). The government of Punjab subsequently announced a bounty of 2.5 million rupees (\$8,800) for any information leading to his arrest.

Apart from these attacks, Iqbal was also wanted for targeted killings and kidnappings that occurred within Dera Ismail Khan District. Additionally, he was wanted by Multan police in five other cases, including a high-profile suicide attack on the District Headquarters Hospital that killed several people, including senior police officials ([Sama English](#), May 4). Because of such persistent terrorist strikes in Punjab and KPK provinces, Iqbal was considered among the most lethal militants among law enforcement circles—and one of the most revered among Jihadist spheres.

Conclusion

The killing of Iqbal was a major achievement for the struggling KPK police amid a recent wave of attacks in the province. He was one of the most wanted militants in Pakistan and was involved in inter-provincial operations. Further, he was an experienced and seasoned operative with links to multiple Islamist militant organizations in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The fall of Kabul has also affected Pakistan's KPK Province by precipitating a rise in terrorist attacks. Despite repeated demands from Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban has not taken significant measures against the TTP to prevent their use of Afghan territory as a safe haven. The sudden resurgence of the TTP and their attacks in

KPK Province reflect this. Pakistani security policymakers must find ways of ending the TTP's use of Afghanistan as a safe haven, else incidents of terrorism will likely increase—and previous successes on the part of police and other security forces in eliminating notorious militants like Bali prove to be in vain.

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Notes:

[1] Discussions with a senior Islamabad-based journalist, May 10, 2023.

Eganius Kogoya: The Headline-Making Leader of the West Papua National Liberation Army

Irma Rahim

Since 2017, Eganius Kogoya has committed 65 attacks, resulting in the deaths of 46 individuals ([kompas](#), February 12). He has also waged a guerilla war on two fronts: The first one is in the Papuan jungles, where he and his militants exploit the mountain's difficult terrain ([detik](#), May, 15; [hot.grid.id](#), May 18); the second one entails propaganda on social media ([tribunnews](#), August 21, 2021).

In consequence, Egianus' first and second entry into international headlines evoked assertions that his guerilla warfare techniques are on-par with those of other, older "second generation" West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) military commanders, such as Chairman of the United Liberation Movement West Papua (ULMWP), Benny Wanda, and Commander-in-Chief of TPNPB for the Paniai region, Demaniaus Yogi ([suarapapua](#), June 28, 2021). Eganius, however, has thus far failed to demonstrate prowess on the international diplomatic front by, for example, not succeeding in his goal of

holding an international dialogue with the UN in West Papua, with the hope that it might pressure Indonesia into allowing an independence referendum.

International Headlines

Egianus first made international headlines in December 2018 when, at the age of 19, he led his group of young militant troops in the abduction of 24 Indonesian construction workers. The construction team had been working on the Trans-Papua Highway project in Nduga Region. Subsequently, 17 of them were executed (hot.grid.id, December 4, 2018; [detik](http://detik.com), Dec 7, 2018; [tribunnews](http://tribunnews.com), November 27, 2019). As a result, several hundred Nduga villagers fled to refugee camps and a humanitarian crisis ensued. Egianus designated the district area as a TPNPB “war zone,” causing villagers to fear returning to their home ([suarapapua](http://suarapapua.com), January 4). For one year, Egianus paralyzed the growth of the Nduga region, which consisted of 32 districts, 248 villages, and a total population of 73,696 people. The living conditions of refugees after his attack has since been weaponized repeatedly by Egianus to attract human rights watchers (arsip.jubi.id, [July 18, 2019](http://arsip.jubi.id); [October 10, 2019](http://arsip.jubi.id)).

Egianus consequently employed an identical tactic to again attract international headlines when his threats to 15 health clinic construction workers forced the workers to leave the Paro District. This occurred not long before Egianus’ fighters actually kidnapped a New Zealander pilot, who has remained in captivity since February ([kompas](http://kompas.com), February 22). He then proclaimed Paro District a war zone, escalating the humanitarian crisis as a tactic. For example, Egianus forced the exodus of Paro residents to refugee camps in districts both within and beyond the Nduga region, such as Wamena District ([detik](http://detik.com), Feb 21; [cenderawasihpos](http://cenderawasihpos.com), March 3; [kompas](http://kompas.com), Feb 17).

Yet the difference between the first and second instances where Egianus made

international headlines was his transformation from child soldier to commander-in-chief of the Nduga war zone. In this transition, Egianus was able to complete the internal restructuring of his Regional Defense Command and extended his area of operation, increasing the number of his battalions, and recruiting and training child soldiers. Of a more personal significance, Egianus also reactivated the old platoon of his father ([suarapapua](http://suarapapua.com), Feb 3, 2022).

The Rise of Egianus Kogoya

Egianus is the son of General Silas Kogoya. Other “second generation” militants include Benny Wenda—25 years older than Egianus—who is the son of General Mathias Wenda; and Demaniaus Yogi, the son of General Tadeus Yogi—just five years older than Egianus ([kompas](http://kompas.com), December 4, 2020; [tribunnews](http://tribunnews.com), October 9, 2022; [thetpn-pbnews](http://thetpn-pbnews.com), January 26, 2021). Additionally, Benny Wenda, Daminaus Yogi, and Egianus Kogoya were all raised in three different regions: Benny in Wamena District, Jayapura Region; Demianus in the Paniai District; and Egianus in the remote Mugi District in the Nduga region of the Papua highlands.

In the 1970s, the insurgent unit led by General Kelly Kwalik recruited and trained Egianus’ father and other members of his Dani tribe, who formed platoons and battalions for their respective districts ([suarapapua](http://suarapapua.com), February 3, 2022). Thus, Egianus grew up in Mugi village and heard about how his father became an insurgent commander-in-chief alongside other “first generation” TPNPB generals. Most importantly, Egianus was also raised listening to the story of how his father’s hostage-taking of 26 people in Mapenduma garnered the attention of UN Secretary General Boutros Ghali and Pope Paul John II. This occurred prior to Egianus’ birth in 1999, but would inspire the methods used in his own attacks later in life (militer.id, March 26; militer.id, March 28). After his father passed away in 2011 from an illness, Egianus continued junior high school at

Wamena District. Egianus, who was then a 12-year-old Papuan from a remote village with limited educational opportunities, was lagging behind his peers in reading, writing, and mathematics. As a result, he developed a guarded personality. This did not prevent Egianus from expressing his discontent with the government of Indonesia. He refused to recite the Indonesian national anthem and salute the flag during the school's flag ceremony. This rebellious behavior was not deterred by punishment from his teachers or bullying from the other students ([nusaraya](#), March 31).

Starting the Ndugama War

Egianus became a young insurgent of the TPNPB in Nduga by raising the West Papuan flag in his father's hometown, Mugi district, and launching his first offensive in late 2017 against construction workers building Trans-Papua Highway, resulting in the death of one of the workers ([BBC](#), December 13, 2018). In addition to being a competent insurgent commander, Egianus also functioned as a recruiter and trainer of Papua's youth. As a training commander, he instructed young soldiers and children in the use of traditional combat weapons, such as bows and arrows, spears, and machetes ([westpauadaily](#), May 16, 2022). The fact that Egianus was surrounded by child soldiers when he consented to be interviewed by a senior Papuan journalist in 2019—during which he discussed Silas Kogoya as his father—is evidence of his recruitment methods ([hot.grid.id](#), July 31, 2019). Further, on his most recent raid, on April 16, he surrounded the military rescue team with child soldiers and female militants, which made it difficult to identify the actual insurgent combatants ([detik](#), April 19; [suarapapua](#), April 16).

As previously stated, in December 2018, Egianus first made international headlines after his abduction and murder of 20 Indonesian construction workers. This signaled the start of the “Ndugama War.” West Papuan separatists celebrate the

anniversary of their independence from the Dutch on December 1, and one of the workers took an unauthorized photo of a local militant group during the ceremony and refused to delete it. Egianus and his youth-militant organization chased the worker back to their camp, using this event as a pretext to initiate the Ndugama War. The location of the construction workers camp—already categorized as a “red zone”—is an eight-hour drive from Wamena, the capital city of the Jayawijaya region, and additionally requires several more kilometers of walking to reach. Furthermore, there is no phone signal available in the area ([hot.grid.id](#), December 4, 2018). The Ndugama War was publically declared on Egianus' social media account on July 20, 2019 ([hot.grid.id](#), Aug 20, 2019).

Despite the fact that Egianus' war had already begun in 2018, his declaration of war was withheld from the public at large until the February 2023 kidnapping, when a letter was discovered on the grounds of the same Paro airport, supposedly having been left behind in October 2018. In addition, in a report put out by the TPNPB, the “2019 Report of Regional Defense Command III Nderakma Ndugama,” Egianus highlighted the significance of the Ndugama War for the second generation of TPNPB combatants in the Nduga region ([kompas](#), February 17; [suarapapua](#), Jan 2, 2020). Egianus and his young militant squad were reported to have performed a traditional war dance before brutally executing the construction workers and declaring the beginning of his Ndugama War ([detik](#), December 7, 2018).

Conclusion

Eganius represents the second generation of the Free Papua Movement (OPM), which was founded to oppose the transfer of West Papua (formerly Irian Jaya) to then-President Sukarno's administration ([surabaya.inews](#), May 2; [tribunnews](#), November 15, 2021). As the children of OPM guerilla fighters, they witnessed how the military operations conducted during

the administrations of Sukarno and his successor Suharto affected their lives, particularly those who were raised in the Nduga region ([kompas](#), April 20; [republika](#), February 9; [en.jubi.co.id](#), January 31, 2022; [en.jubi.co.id](#), February 1, 2022; [okezone](#), May 25, 2021; [suarapapua](#), January 2, 2020). Therefore, Egianus and his militant fighters, which include child combatants and female insurgents, are suspicious of any proposed negotiations and any peace is unlikely to occur so long as Egianus is in command ([kumparan](#), February 13; [merdeka](#), February 25; [sumeks.disway.id](#), May 4).

Egianus had sought to propose a peaceful negotiation to end the conflict through intervention from the United Nations. This is why, on May 26, Egianus issued a two-month deadline for the execution of the New Zealander pilot who his fighters have held captive since February 7. If the international community and countries like New Zealand and Australia do not initiate a dialogue with Indonesia regarding West Papua's independence, it is possible that Egianus will kill his hostage, further increasing his international notoriety ([nzherald](#), May 26; [suara papua](#), May 27; [cnnindonesia](#), May 27; [cnnindonesia](#), May 29).

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Janjaweed Commander to Political Power Broker: An In-Depth Profile of Sudanese General Hemedti

Herbert Maack

On April 15, clashes broke out in Sudan's capital city of Khartoum between rival factions of the country's military government. Pitted against each other were the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces

(RSF). The latter is led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (alias Hemedti or "Little Mohamed"), who is a mercurial figure in Sudanese power politics. He has risen from being a militia commander in Darfur to become one of the richest and most powerful men in the country—and now one of the two main actors in the latest armed conflict to engulf Sudan.

Hemedti's Humble Origins

Hemedti was born in western Sudan's Darfur region around the year 1974. He grew up in a camel-herding and trading clan called the Mahariya of the Rizeigat. This Chadian Arab sub-clan fled wars and drought in Chad to take refuge in Darfur. Hemedti is also reportedly the grandson of the head of a sub-clan of the Mahariya Rizeigat. His uncle Juma Dagalo was not recognized as a tribal leader in Sudan's North Darfur state, however. Nevertheless, South Darfur authorities welcomed the newcomers and allowed them to settle on land belonging to the Fur tribe, which is Darfur's main indigenous non-Arab group. The Sudanese authorities also armed Dagalo's followers, who, as early as the 1990s, began attacking their Fur neighbours ([The Conversation](#), April 17).

During the 1990s, Hemedti was a teenager who had dropped out of primary school in the third grade to trade camels across the borders of Libya and Egypt. When the Darfur rebellion began in 2003, he became a militia commander in the area and led attacks against neighbouring Fur villages. The most common story about Hemedti is that he was compelled to take up arms in the Darfur conflict when men attacked his trade convoy and killed 60 members of his family and looted his camels ([Al Jazeera](#), April 16). To justify joining the government-backed militias, Hemedti himself has claimed that the rebels attacked a caravan of fellow camel traders on their way to Libya and killed 75 men and looted 3,000 camels ([The East African](#), July 21, 2019).

Darfur Conflict

The war in Darfur began in 2003 when two rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), launched a rebellion against the Sudanese government. Opposing Omar al-Bashir's regime, the rebel groups mostly recruited from local non-Arab communities, and in particular the Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit. The government responded with a counter-insurgency strategy based on mobilizing Arab militias (known pejoratively as *Janjaweed*) and enlisting the support of some of the nomadic tribes in Darfur, including the Rizeigat, to put down the rebellion.

Hemedti gradually moved up from being just one of the *Janjaweed* warlords to becoming their primary leader. During its initial and most intense years, the war in Darfur led to the deaths of several hundred thousand non-Arab civilians and displaced around two million people (un.org, October 7, 2003). In 2006, armed with new equipment, Hemedti led several hundred men on a raid across the rebel-held area of North Darfur. His violent methods created tensions with accompanying army officers, but gained the attention of Sudan's military dictator, Omar al-Bashir. In Darfur, Hemedti earned a reputation as a ruthless commander and a loyal servant to al-Bashir, who called him instead "Hemayti," meaning "my protector." The dictator was evidently fond of Hemedti and sometimes appeared to treat him as the son he never had (The Conversation, April 17).

Promotion after Darfur

Hemedti knew how to promote himself. Following the Darfur conflict, Chad and Sudan began a proxy war through their respective rebel groups. The Chadian government used its own Arab officials to push the *Janjaweed* to betray Khartoum. Bichara Issa Jadallah, a cousin of Hemedti, was the Defence minister in Chad at the time and, in 2006, he invited Hemedti to N'Djamena and had him sign a secret

nonaggression pact with JEM behind the back of Khartoum. Shortly afterward, Hemedti announced that he had become a rebel, although he remained a rebel for only six months before switching back to Khartoum's side. He stated in an interview in 2009 that: "We didn't really become rebels... We just wanted to attract the government's attention and tell them we're here in order to obtain rights, military ranks, political positions, and development in our area" (Foreign Policy, May 14, 2019).

Hemedti was rewarded for defecting from the rebels with the position of security advisor to South Darfur's governor, which was his first official government position. Other *Janjaweed* leaders were also increasingly critical of the government, including the most powerful among them, Musa Hilal, who in 2013 quit his post as presidential advisor in Khartoum and began forming his own movement. Hilal returned to North Darfur, where his fighters launched widespread attacks on government forces and allied militias (Dabangasudan.org, March 16, 2014). Hemedti, however, remained loyal to Khartoum and was picked to lead the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which was an enhanced paramilitary force initially intended to re-establish control over the *Janjaweed*. However, the RSF became uncontrollable and engaged in looting, killing, and rape in Darfur, as well as in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states (Dabangasudan.org, March 28, 2014).

Controlling the Goldmines

Years after the 2003 Darfur conflict had ended, Hemedti and his militia took full control of the goldmines of Darfur's Jebel Amer mountain region in 2017 from Musa Hilal (Dabangasudan.org, May 30, 2017). Al-Bashir allowed him to hold onto the region's prize. This enabled Hemedti to build a fortune, with family-controlled companies flying gold bars worth millions of dollars to Dubai and later to Russia. The profits were used to build up the RSF and allowed Hemedti's business ventures to virtually merge with his own militia called

al-Junaid (the soldiers). Meanwhile, a gold trading company formed from Hemedti's coffers was run by Hemedti's brother, Abdul Rahim, who has also served as the deputy head of the RSF. In addition, two of Hemedti's nephews, who are the sons of Abdul Rahim, were given key positions in the same company. Moreover, yet another brother of Hemedti, Algoney Hamdan Daglo, is a director of another company that has channelled funds to the RSF ([Globalwitness.org](https://www.globalwitness.org), December 9, 2019).

The RSF has been protecting their source of wealth ruthlessly against any local protests since 2019 ([Reuters](https://www.reuters.com), November 26, 2019). Until 2019, Hemedti remained loyal to al-Bashir, with Hemedti's forces crushing demonstrations in the capital in September 2013 and later in 2018. This occurred before Hemedti—together with his current adversary, army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan—ousted al-Bashir from power amidst popular protests against the regime in 2019 ([Sudan Tribune](https://www.sudantribune.com), July 29, 2019).

Regional Alliances

Hemedti and al-Burhan initially got along well, but they reportedly had meetings with Emirati and Saudi officials to discuss the post-al-Bashir era. These officials informed them that they were the men that the Emirati, Saudi, and Egyptian government were looking to lead Sudan. This is because they were Arab military leaders, who were not Islamists or friendly with Qatar, Iran, or the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood like al-Bashir had been. These meetings formed the basis for Hemedti to build regional alliances, with thousands of RSF fighters being sent to fight as an "army for hire" for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen's civil war (where up to 10,000 RSF-members were fighting at one time), and possibly in Libya as well. Hemedti has also always maintained close relations with the Libyan rebel general, Khalifa Haftar ([Middle East Eye](https://www.middleeasteye.net), April 20).

This model of "state mercenarism" brought hard cash and modern weapons to the RSF.

It remains to be seen if Hemedti will be able to leverage these relations in the current conflict. However, according to some reports UAE continues to back Hemedti with weaponry ([Middle East Monitor](https://www.middleeastmonitor.com), April 26). Hemedti's political networks, moreover, span across the Gulf region and also to the south, where Hemedti has been involved in the affairs of the neighbouring Central African Republic (CAR). For example, he allegedly prevented a coup against the government of President Faustin Archange Touadera earlier this year ([Darfur24.com](https://www.darfur24.com), January 3; [Sudantribune.com](https://www.sudantribune.com), January 3).

Hemedti and Wagner

It is noteworthy that both in Libya and CAR Hemedti is on the same side as the Russian mercenary company, the Wagner Group. Hemedti's business interests converge with those of Wagner, with the mercenary company allegedly buying Sudanese gold and transporting it via Libya and Syria to Russia. Active in Sudan since 2017, Wagner has allegedly provided security at its gold mines, while also training the RSF in Libya, including in using surface-to-air-missiles ([The New Arab](https://www.thenewarab.com), April 25). Hemedti's links to Russia became undeniable when Russian President, Vladimir Putin, received Hemedti in Moscow on the same day that he launched his invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, 2022 ([Al Arabiya News](https://www.alarabiya.net), February 23).

The outbreak of violence in Khartoum in April was preceded by frenzied diplomatic lobbying. In March, Hemedti was invited to meet Eritrea's authoritarian leader, Isais Afwerki, ostensibly to speak about bilateral relations. It is, however, possible that the discussions also included an exchange of information on the issue of eastern Sudan. The details of these discussions are not known, but it was pointed out that the visit came amid a rapprochement between Russia and Eritrea and in the context of the RSF pursuing its own political agenda; this included the fostering of regional and international relationships separate from

the Sudanese government (Dabangasudan.com, March 14).

Conclusion

It remains to be seen if Hemedti's international connections are strong enough to resist the pressures of an open war with the Sudanese army, as regional states will have to calculate several factors before providing any support to the RSF. Hemedti is reportedly backed by some of the same Darfuri Arab politicians who created the *Janjaweed* 16 years ago. If they rise to power, it would threaten to "steal the revolution from the people," as one protest slogan claims, and transform Sudan from a military regime into a militia state, replacing the Islamism that the military still represent with Hemedti's Darfurian Arab supremacism.

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