“A new strategy to stop the massacres in Darfur”

In an alarming escalation of violence in Sudan's Darfur region, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), an influential armed faction, has been implicated in a harrowing massacre in the city of Geneina. After taking the city, RSF troops systematically killed the adult men in the Ardamata neighborhood, predominantly inhabited by the Masilit ethnic groups. The Masalit have historically been in conflict with the Rizeigat, who form the backbone of the RSF. Estimates of the number killed range a few hundred to [1,300](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudan-west-darfur-ardamata-new-massacre). Since the massacre the [RSF has escalated attacks on El-Fashir](https://sudantransparency.org/field-dispatch-from-el-fasher/), the capital of North Darfur which hosts several large IDP camps. If the defense of El-Fashir collapses the RSF may commit another massacre.

Current US policy is unlikely to prevent the next massacre. The State Department has focused on facilitating peace talks between the two sides and using sanctions to drive them to the negotiating table. Sanctions are unlikely to drive the two parties into a peace deal before the next massacre. The RSF, adept at circumventing sanctions through concealed assets and reliance on gold, remains largely unaffected. The US is rightly hesitant to sanction RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan “Hemedti” Dagalo, which would commit the US to indefinitely excommunicating a man who could become Sudan’s next head of state. The UAE has been accused of supplying the RSF with arms and vehicles, and could be a pressure point for the US.

Addressing this ethnic violence requires different tools. US policy must impose transparent punitive measures on the RSF, contingent on their involvement in massacres. These measures should scale with the number of massacres, to maintain a constant incentive. Any policy should also avoid locking the U.S. into inflexible long-term commitments, such as when the State Sponsors of Terrorism listing prevented [an agile response to the 2018 revolution](https://www.csis.org/analysis/humanitarian-impacts-sudans-removal-state-sponsors-terrorism-list). Finally, the US must hit the RSF where it hurts, to force leadership to come down hard on the commanders allowing these massacres.

To find that policy, we need to get into warlord’s head. Since 2018, U.S. policy has aimed at bolstering civilian structures. However, civilian control has proved elusive, and governments have de facto required the confidence of the RSF and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). Civilian leverage over the armed groups has always been limited by the harsh, anarchic realities of Sudan. For a Sudanese general, civilian allies are useful because they make ruling easier, but your priority is your armed rivals; they can kill you. The main policy priority of the RSF and SAF has always been jockeying for position against each other, the threat of violence hanging over them like the sword of Damocles.

The U.S. should consider a policy of responding to each RSF massacre by offering grants to purchase American arms to the RSF's rivals, the SAF, through the Peacekeeping Operations account (PKO). This would begin with a modest grant in response to the Geneina massacre. The amount need not be large; even a sum as nominal as $2.5 million would significantly impact the RSF's strategic calculations. The PKO can be deployed more rapidly than alternative programs and is already training and equipping militaries across Africa. This policy should be clear in its intent: it would not be an endorsement of the SAF but a tactical move to deter further RSF atrocities.

The choice of what assistance to supply is critical. It should maximize deterrent effect while minimizing new complications for U.S. foreign policy. Non-lethal equipment like surveillance drones, Kevlar vests, and night vision goggles could minimize US commitment. Aircraft maintenance services for the SAF's fleet, which has been degraded by months of combat, would be difficult to divert and pose no risk of falling into terrorist hands. While the SAF could make use of military training and advising, these options should be avoided to minimize US commitment to one side.

This policy choice offers great value for money. The RSF have already committed several massacres so far this war; if US does nothing, another is likely. If this policy prevents one additional massacre of 500 people, it saves one adult man for every 5,000 dollars granted, not including knock-on effects such as the children saved from orphanhood. Moreover, if this successfully deters massacres it can be repeated in other civil wars.

The US should not extend this policy to other human rights abuses. It is true that armed groups indiscriminately bomb cities, cutting roads, divert aid and commit other heinous acts. However, when such actions are pervasive across conflict actors it is not advisable to fund both sides for retaliation. It would also create perverse incentives for hiding crimes and false flag attacks. One-sided mass killing are unusually rare and impossible to hide, making this policy a viable response.

This strategy, while bold, offers a pragmatic solution to a complex crisis. It addresses immediate humanitarian concerns while aligning with broader U.S. interests in the region. The international community, led by the U.S., must act swiftly and effectively to prevent further mass killings of civilians.