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Foreword

“Permacrisis” was the word of the year in 2022 according to the Collins Dictionary (Bushby, 2022), defined as “an extended period of instability and insecurity, especially one resulting from a series of catastrophic events” (Collins Dictionary, n.d.). While much of 2022 was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s war against Ukraine, numerous other conflicts worldwide have been long forgotten or ignored, despite being unresolved.

The “Crisis Observatory” Think Tank was founded in the autumn of 2022 as a means for students and early career researchers in Political Science and International Relations to express their views and opinions on such conflicts. The cohort of the Crisis Observatory, currently comprising nine analysts, monitored Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, Mozambique, Sudan, and Yemen during the last quarter of 2022 to provide an accurate depiction of current events. In the following pages, you can discover the latest developments in Afghanistan, the expanding interests of the parties involved in the DRC conflict, how COVID-19 amplified the security crisis in Mozambique, the historic gas extraction agreement between Lebanon and Israel, the democratisation process in Sudan, and the aftermath of the failed negotiations between the Houthi rebels and the Yemeni government.

We hope the following pages will help you better understand the situation in the countries mentioned above and that this publication will be a stepping stone for more students to voice their opinions and publish their research.

On behalf of the Crisis Observatory Think Tank Team,

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The presence of Al-Qaeda and the emerging threat from IS-KP shows the Taliban’s respective unwillingness and inability to ensure Afghanistan's stability. Weak governance framework, facing legitimacy crisis, paves way for a sustained terrorist campaign inside and outside Kabul. Nevertheless, the Taliban’s failing counterterrorism, human rights and inclusiveness commitments shrink international cooperation avenues. Policy prioritising counter-terrorism and security can only slow down the process of conflict renewal in Afghanistan.

In the foreseeable future of a war-torn state experiencing generational violence, peace remains an illusion. After an inconclusive war, Afghanistan experienced a subsequent reduction in physical violence. However, the apparent emergence of armed opposition to the Taliban poses a serious survival challenge to the regime while threatening the global and regional security landscape with the potential nurturing of transnational terrorism. This analysis highlights the scope of necessary cooperation in Afghanistan, where the de facto regime faces multifaceted challenges partially due to its own rigid posture. Under the circumstances, the international community must seek to protect global interests by prioritising Afghanistan’s peace and security.

- The presence of Al-Qaeda and the emerging threat from IS-KP shows the Taliban’s respective unwillingness and inability to ensure Afghanistan's stability.
- Weak governance framework, facing legitimacy crisis, paves way for a sustained terrorist campaign inside and outside Kabul.
- Nevertheless, the Taliban's failing counterterrorism, human rights and inclusiveness commitments shrink international cooperation avenues.
- Policy prioritising counter-terrorism and security can only slow down the process of conflict renewal in Afghanistan.

Introduction
With the United Nations' estimated 18 per cent reduction in fighting, attacks by non-state groups have surged in Afghanistan recently. Nearly 200 episodes have been carried out post-Taliban takeover, killing hundreds that keep intensifying from soft to hard targets, most recently targeting Pakistani Chargé d’affaires to Afghanistan and Chinese diplomats in Kabul hotel. Such developments challenge the Taliban's central narrative since seizing power, endorsing the end of the war and restoring security. The country’s stability and security remain uncertain with the evident rise of the Islamic State of Khorasan (IS-K) claiming such attacks responsibility. Moreover, Al Qaeda and its affiliates remain a point of contention between the U.S. and the Taliban. The regime struggles to counter threats due to its functional incapabilities and missing international support, subsequently related to its posture towards terrorism, transnational militants and human rights violations. The Taliban's ideological rigidity has further daunted international willingness to engage and invest in Afghanistan. Security stands prerequisite for the interim government’s survival, state stability and regional integration (Cuffley, 2022; Dreikhausen & Gaub, 2022; Maizland, 2022).

Rise of terrorism
The qualitative assessment of conflict probability has shown that under the Taliban's debilitated security framework and unwillingness to form ideological concessions, Afghanistan is a fertile ground for extremists with global agendas (Pantucci & Basit, 2021). The threat of conflict relapse, exacerbated by attacks to diminish the Taliban's legitimacy at home and abroad, appears destined to worsen under an incoherent, centralised, and shadowed by hardliners regime, neither trying enough to achieve domestic acquiescence nor fulfilling international commitments.
IS-K, defected militants of the Afghan Taliban movement, having affiliations with ISIL, has shown intent and capability to execute a sustained terrorist campaign in and from Afghanistan. The traditional enemy of the Taliban aims to disturb Afghan stability and threatens its legitimacy. The situation might deteriorate because of weak government control and the reported military hardware captured by IS-K during the U.S. evacuation process. While missing much-desired international recognition and support, the Taliban remains technically insufficient to counter national and transnational terrorism (Bridgeman & Anderson, 2022).

Once again, Afghanistan is on the verge of a state collapse, which could feed and empower transnational terrorists, posing an immediate threat to regional and global peace. The Pakistan-oriented Tehreek e Taliban (TTP), with 300 terrorist incidents within one year, is an example of intensifying cross-border terrorism and militancy sheltering inside Afghanistan.

**Taliban's legitimacy crisis**

The rise of IS-K, a group with global ambitions, in Afghanistan is not only a security challenge to regional peace but also to the Taliban's survival as the authority (Crisis Group, 2022). Therefore, the fear of being overthrown can be used as leverage by the international community to have pragmatic engagement that would hold the Taliban responsible for security commitments. The U.S. and the Taliban share an interest in countering and dismantling IS-K's presence in Afghanistan. Although the consideration in Washington of preventing terror groups from reconstituting Afghanistan is underway, any future collaboration explicitly depends upon the Taliban's internal social policies. The possibility of the U.S. working with the Haqqani network, which is currently security in charge, to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a sanctuary for terror groups that target “beyond Afghanistan” seems unlikely, significantly due to the Taliban's posture.

The Taliban must understand that their internal policies will reflect the nature and extent of the international community's willingness to engage, without which the regime's survival remains challenged. The government, which is currently fighting an insurgency as well as serious issues of state rebuilding and the threat of dismantlement, does not appear ready to make concessions. However, to secure the centre, the Taliban must stop seizing opportunities by reshaping rigid religious ideology and an ethnically exclusive political agenda, which requires federal, inclusive, and decentralised administration. As the regime's lack of cohesion worsens, true decentralisation and moderate policies can allow for a break in the pattern.

**Need for active global engagement**

With dim prospects of cooperation, as Taliban hardliners drive their often-confused agenda, it would not be rational for the international community to terminate the engagement. However, the lens of engagement must be upgraded and extended to reflect Afghanistan's dynamics. Taken into consideration, the convergence of security interests in the region, notably counter-terrorism and the rise of IS-K, reflect potential avenues for engagement. At First, U.S. "over the horizon" strategy must take into account the Taliban's lack of sophistication as a state authority to counter security threats and continue pushing for
It can be done by urging regional actors to mount diplomatic pressure on their respective Taliban associates to coordinate neutralising security threats. Secondly, the Taliban’s dire wish to be recognised could be another possible avenue if integrated as a political choice rather than a legally binding obligation. Thirdly, efforts to bring bottom-up reform to Afghanistan stand as the only viable, sustainable, and long-term solution for a stable and secure Afghan society. Empowered civil societies could pave the way towards constitutionalism, inclusive governance, respect for human rights, and transforming the Taliban’s rule of law.

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Assessing Security Concerns in Afghanistan under the Taliban and Prospects for Peace and Cooperation

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The panorama of the current diplomatic crisis among Rwanda, Uganda, and the Congo.
The relationship between the diplomatic crisis and the illegal exploration of DRC's mineral abundance by neighboring nations through armed militias, and the upsurge of the Tutsi rebel group March 23 (M23), pointed as being the biggest issues for social and political stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at this moment. The work is based on reports made in the last months by three agencies on the ground: The Crisis Group, The Congo Research Group, and the Africa Center for Strategic Studies.

Introduction

For decades, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been the scene of one of the world’s longest-running conflicts. The conflict in the DRC became regionalised and has overspilled to most parts of the Great Lakes Region. The complexity of it is derived from the fact that there are several actors with interests in the country: Rwanda, Uganda, and many armed militias, such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Tutsi rebel group “March 23” (M23) and the Mai-Mai. These are among the deadliest in North Kivu and Ituri, two mining provinces bordering Rwanda and Uganda.

Congo is extremely rich in natural resources, predominantly coltan, of which the DRC owns 80% of the world’s reserves (Earth Sciences Museum (n.d.)). Most of this wealth is concentrated in the eastern portion of the country, covering the province of Katanga and its surroundings (Munanga, 2008), which has been the nucleus of the instability for at least 20 years.

Coltan gained notoriety from the 2000s onwards when UN reports revealed the connections between its exploitation and violence in Congo (Macedo, 2016); Warlords exploited the mineral and financed their activities with profits. The large Congolese reserves of the compound are concentrated in the provinces of Kivu and Maniema, bordering Rwanda (Núñez, 2009). As noted, Rwanda borders the main Congolese coltan-producing regions and has also tantalite, albeit in smaller quantities (Macedo, 2016). Therefore, it is easy to mix illegally obtained Congolese coltan with Rwandan one and, after passing through intermediaries, to sell it to multinationals (Macedo, 2016). However, it is not only Rwanda that has been profiting from the illegal exploitation of the Congolese mineral wealth: “Therefore, while the DRC is recognized as the world’s largest coltan producer, Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi rank third, ninth, and eleventh, respectively, even though they only have limited known deposits themselves.” (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2022).
Tensions among Rwanda, Uganda and the Congo-Kinshasa: instability based on mineral extraction

According to the Congo Research Group (CRG) analysis of the UN Group of Experts (GoE) on the DRC field investigation conducted between April 2021 and July 2022, “the escalation of tensions between Rwanda and the DRC during the period in question” includes “the presence of Rwandan soldiers on Congolese soil” and “allegations of bombing by both sides” (Eliora Henzler, n.d.). Counting the logistical support from the Rwandan military forces, M23 has, since November 2021, resumed its attacks and even expanded its area of operation. The Tutsi rebel group was militarily defeated in 2013 and, since then, has been considered a minor threat (Eliora Henzler, n.d.).

The current instability in the DRC, driven by the M23 upsurge, began in November 2021 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2022); “By March 2022, M23 had seized key parts of Rutshuru territory, bordering Uganda and Rwanda. In May, they overran the Rumangabo military base, FARDC’s largest military installation in North Kivu. They then pushed south toward the provincial capital, Goma, and across Rwanda’s border city of Gisenyi” (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2022). The geographical concentration of the M23’s operations has a very clear economic logic: It covers a coltan-rich area, extending from Bunagana, near the border with Uganda, to Goma, located in the Congolese territorial limits with Rwanda (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2022).

Diplomatic relations have ceased to exist between the two countries: in October 2022, Félix Tshisekedi, DRC president, expelled the Rwandan ambassador (The Crisis Group, 2022); a few months later, in November, Rwandan President Paul Kagame did not attend a Great Lakes summit (The Crisis Group, 2022). Besides the matters involving M23, Kinshasa-Kigali relations have not been well since 2021: Kagame felt disappointed after Tshisekedi kept close relations with Uganda in order to gain the support of the nation in the fight against ADF (The Crisis Group, 2022).

Kenya and Angola have worked, during 2022, in a diplomatic solution to de-escalate the tensions in the region - the two nations are leading the ICGLR effort: “In July, it brokered the Luanda roadmap agreement between Tshisekedi and Kagame, which appears to tacitly acknowledge that Kigali and Kinshasa have influence over the M23 and the FDLR, respectively […]” (The Crisis Group, 2022). The Luanda roadmap presents several confidence-building measures to be developed between the DRC and Rwanda (The Crisis Group, 2022).

ICGLR seems to be the last alternative before the deployment of the Kenyan Armed Forces to directly fight the M23: last year, the DRC joined the East African Community (EAC), which established “[..] a force, made up of Kenyan, Ugandan, Burundian and South Sudanese soldiers, to help the Congolese army battle the various armed groups in the country’s east” (The Crisis Group, 2022); would be a duty of the Kenyan Army to fight M23 in North Kivu (The Crisis Group, 2022).
Conclusion
The EAC and Kenya show to be the key actors on the path to stabilization. Having as its negotiator the former Kenyan President, Uhuru Kenyatta, the EAC maintained intensive dialogues with the DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, and UN Secretary-General António Guterres during late 2022 (The Crisis Group, 2022). The organization also began to promote round talks between Congolese officials and militias representatives (The Crisis Group, 2022). Kenya is a regional power and has good relations with all Great Lakes leaders. The country must keep using its influence within the region to push for a solid ceasefire agreement between the FARDC and M23. Direct combat between Kenyan forces and M23 in North Kivu must be avoided since it can turn the situation even more complex.

References


In early October 2022, Lebanon and Israel reached a historical agreement on gas extraction and the demarcation of their maritime borders. However, its consequences on Lebanon’s economy and politics have yet to be seen: the constant blockage of its institutions and the lack of prospects for an economic upturn continue to be the norm. This article tackles the maritime demarcation process between these two countries in a state of war and analyzes how this pact has not helped Lebanon improve its political and economic fragility.

- The oil and gas resources found in the Lebanon-Israel maritime border are the world’s most significant finds in a decade.
- The inexistent diplomatic relations between both countries have jeopardized the agreement on different occasions.
- Meanwhile, the Lebanese Parliament attempted unsuccessfully for the tenth time in four months to elect a President of the Republic.

Introduction
Since 2010, significant oil and gas deposits are being constantly discovered in the maritime area dividing Lebanon and Israel. Considering that these findings are globally the most extensive ones found in a decade, the recent agreement between these two countries was seen at the beginning as a potential source of an economic upturn for Lebanon and even a symbol of a certain diplomatic normality with Israel after decades of constant confrontation. Four months later, there is immense uncertainty about how relations with Israel will evolve in 2023. Additionally, it does not seem likely that the discovery and extraction of off-shore gas will be sufficient to help the Lebanese economy rebound and help the country’s struggling population.

A negotiation process within peace absence
Lebanon-Israel diplomatic relations have historically been hostile. The latter’s occupation of Palestine in 1948 - provoking a massive exodus of Palestinian refugees to Lebanon during the so-called ‘Nakba’ - and its invasions of Lebanon on different occasions (during the Lebanese Civil War and in 2006) have provoked the non-recognition of Israel as a state by ‘the country of the Cedars’. This reality has intrinsically meant the nonexistence of peaceful diplomatic relations between these two countries for years.

Last October, both countries reached an agreement concerning the demarcation of their maritime borders and gas extraction. Despite being historical, the negotiation process has been genuinely rocky since the demarcation of each country’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) became a critical issue. According to Article 56 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a convention to which Israel is not a signatory, states have the right to exploit living and non-living resources in their respective EEZ. Although Lebanon sustained that the so-called “Leviathan field”, discovered in 2010, was located within its EEZ, Israel managed to retain it by reaching a unilateral agreement with Cyprus. Years later, the discussion
concerning two other gas fields discovered in 2013 (Karish and Qana) provoked a new clash. The Lebanese government expressed its intention to use line 29 as a reference for the border demarcation, backing up this decision through the current method established by UNCLOS. Contrarily, Israel sustained that the legitimate maritime border was line 1.

Since both countries have been in a state of war since 1948, the “joint authority model” of negotiations could not be applied. Instead, a trustee authority model was introduced, with the United States as a mediator at the UN armed forces headquarters UNIFIL. Finally, after two years of indirect negotiations, the two countries reached a formal agreement in early October. This agreement concluded with the use of Line 23 as the maritime boundary dividing the two countries. The right to extract resources from the Karish camp remains in the hands of Israel, while Lebanon will benefit from the extraction of all the resources found at the Qana camp.

The political and economic fragility in Lebanon before and after the pact
As Israel built its offshore gas extract infrastructure and announced that activity would begin shortly, Hezbollah and Israel experienced short periods of tension and threats, such as the Israeli interception of three drones in July. However, despite Hezbollah’s animosity towards Israel, it did not oppose the negotiations and instead sought to de-escalate. Following the completion of the talks, Hezbollah’s leader Hassan Nasrallah branded it as a victory for the resistance and called on his supporters to celebrate it. Despite the apparent success of Lebanese diplomacy, this reality proved that Hezbollah continues to be the most potent military force inside Lebanon, with significant political support.

Meanwhile, according to a recent World Bank report, Lebanon’s current crisis “is likely to rank in the top 10, possibly top 3, most severe crisis episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century”. Policy inaction, the absence of full executive authority, and fragile social peace are only some explanations behind Lebanon’s current economic crisis and political deadlock. In this context, gas and oil extraction could become a new pillar of the broken Lebanese economy.

Nevertheless, no evidence has proved the existence of oil and natural gas resources in the Lebanese area. In such a case, this would imply another failure for Lebanese diplomacy in the internal context of a state that unsuccessfully attempted for the tenth time to elect a new President of the Republic last December. Lebanese mainstream political parties - like Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement, which held the presidency during negotiations - continue in 2023, maintaining power along with other sectarian movements by promising a reform that never comes and seeking international backing.
Conclusions
As such, Lebanon’s agreement with Israel through US mediation should not be seen as a genuine attempt to start normalizing relations. It is an attempt by the Lebanese ruling class to gain favor with the international community, and more specifically with the American administration, which recently imposed Magnitsky sanctions on important Lebanese figures in an effort to punish parties that are friendly towards Hezbollah. The Maritime Border agreement is historic, as it involves two Middle Eastern countries that have not engaged in peaceful diplomatic relations in decades. However, it will be necessary to see how relations evolve in 2023 since the inaccuracies of the agreement itself could lead to further misunderstandings between them. It is still a fragile agreement that could be discarded by the signatories, as Israel’s returning Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, recently expressed. The new far-right government in Israel is likely to adopt more aggressive rhetoric towards its northern neighbour. It also remains unclear if the Lebanese population benefits from this agreement since its institutions remain enormously fragile, broken, and corrupt. The survival of the agreement also depends heavily on foreign actors. A sudden shift in Iranian foreign policy because of the country’s deteriorating relations with the west could upend the deal through its proxy Hezbollah.

References


Introduction
Armed conflicts have categorised the African continent, and the arrival of COVID-19 shocked an already vulnerable system. Raleigh (2020) states that at the start of the pandemic, United Nations Security General Antonio Guterres viewed COVID-19 as the foundation for conflicting parties to have a conversation for peace and face one enemy. Although the call for peace was legitimate, there was a sharp increase in terrorist attacks and government repression in states such as Mozambique. The Al-Shabaab group continues to be the main initiator of armed conflicts in the Northern region of Mozambique (Lima, 2021, p. 1). However, the existence of terrorist attacks in Mozambique has traces to 2017. Scholars such as Nhamirre, Jossai, Cortez, Bande and Fael (2020) indicate that from October 2017 to October 2020, the terrorist group caused over 60% of civilian deaths. Furthermore, in September 2020, the armed conflict displaced 13% of the population (Nhamirre et al., 2020) amid the pandemic.

Background to the study
Framing COVID-19 as a global threat by the World Health Organisation gave states the foundation to implement forceful measures against civilians. Failure to comply with COVID-19 movement restrictions led to imprisonment. For example, in the first 21 days of Mozambique's lockdown, 400 people were detained, several were injured, and one was killed because of police violence (Lima, 2021, p. 511). However, it is not only the Mozambique government which has exploited the pandemic to some extent. Islamic State has launched several attacks since the pandemic.

SADC and Mozambique
The conflict crisis in Mozambique has increased the number of displaced individuals from 800,000 to 946,508 from February to July 2022 (Fabricius, 2022). The displacement of civilians is occurring because of the SADC mission dispensing the Islamic group, and they are moving to other places in Mozambique. For example, according to the Cabo Ligado Monitor (2022), on the 19th of July 2022, in the village of Mihecane, six displaced people returned home to collect their belongings.
However, five of them were captured by the Islamic State, while one managed to escape, and the Islamic State released a statement that five of the captured people were killed by them.

Nonetheless, in August 2022, 58 organised attacks occurred in Mozambique, resulting in 63 fatalities. These events occurred in various places such as Macomia, Mocimboa da Praia, Nangade, Muidumbe, Meluco, Ancuabe, Chiure, and Palma districts in Cabo Delgado, (Cabo Ligado, 2022), demonstrating the expansion of the Islamic State in Mozambique. Furthermore, on the 31st of August 2022, the terrorist attacked villages in Chiure district, causing 11 fatalities in Metoro and continued the attacks in Megarume where three people were confirmed dead (Carta de Mozambique, 2022).

In September 2022, the number of organised attacks decreased from 58 to 33; however, fatalities increased from 63 to 92 (ACLED, 2022) compared to August 2022. In Macomia, the Islamic State attacked the Defence and Security Forces (FDS). However, the following day, in Nangade, the SADC troops responded with aerial and ground attacks, specifically against the hideout places of the Islamic State (Carta de Mozambique, 2022). 30 km South of the peace enforcement mission, the terrorists attacked a police station in Namuembe, causing the security officials to flee (Cabo Ligado, 2022).

According to ‘Cabo Ligado October 2022 Monitor’, the tally of organised attacks increased from 33 in September to 52 in October, while reported fatalities dropped to 73 from 92. The interventions by the SADC have been robust and demonstrate the impact it continues to have in addressing the fatalities caused by the Islamic State. In addition, the SADC Ministerial Committee, in November 2022, highlighted the significant improvement concerning the security crisis in Mozambique and the return of displaced people (SADC, 2022). However, the main contributor of troops in the SADC mission, South Africa, is experiencing setbacks, including financial resources and logistics problems. The deployment costs South Africa approximately 1 billion ZAR, equivalent to 58 million USD (2022) (DefenceWeb, 2022).

Heitman (2022) notes that South Africa has cut its budget due to stretched military capacity caused by internal deployment during the peak of COVID-19 and external deployment in DR Congo under the Force Intervention Brigade inclusive to the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in DR Congo. The continuous budget cuts indicate that South Africa cannot continue intervening in Mozambique, leading to reduced intelligence on the Islamic State.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The security situation in Mozambique remains unstable regardless of SADC troops' deployment. However, the fatality rates seem to be dropping due to continuous interventions by the SADC; what remains worrisome is the organised attacks around Mozambique which demonstrate the lack of intelligence and coordination from the SADC security committee. The debates on the financial capacity of South Africa concerning military intervention raise concerns because it is the main contributor of troops. The possibility of South African military withdrawals means that the Islamic State will have enough room for growth, as the regional organisation is still struggling to stabilise Mozambique.
The SADC mission in Mozambique is essential to avoid spillover effects to neighbouring countries and to assist Mozambique in stabilising. African states should avoid a copy-paste approach when applying the lockdown regulations for future pandemics, as it is in a different socio-economic stance compared to Europe and North America. Framing COVID-19 as a threat made it possible for the Islamic State in Mozambique to expand. The summit of the SADC organ on Politics, Defense and Security set for April 2021 was postponed due to staff members testing positive for COVID-19.

References


Sudan: The Potential Breadbasket of the MENA Region

Ontlotlile Seemela

Sudan has experienced political, economic, and social turmoil for decades under the rule of al-Bashir. It was widely thought that once he was removed from power, the country would become a harmoniously legitimate democracy. This fallacy has been disproved; Even after his toppling, there was a coup in October 2021, the year that the country was expected to hold its first legitimate democratic elections in decades. In the last quarter of 2022, there have been steps taken by the RSF to ensure that Sudan becomes a civilian-led democratic country. This analysis will investigate the recent developments that have taken place in the country and will determine if the RSF is indeed democratising the country to free the oppressed or to gain control once they must vacate from power.

- In the last quarter of 2022, Sudan has taken steps towards becoming a democracy.
- The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is trying to legitimize itself and seems pro-democracy.
- The media is suppressed and is not free. The government prohibits social media platforms.
- RSF leaders Buhran and Hemeti are aware that they may not be chosen as leaders in a democratic Sudan, but they have propped up their allies as attractive leaders.

Introduction
Following the events that have taken place in Sudan during the last quarter of 2022, it is widely believed that the Sudanese government is on its way to becoming a legitimate democracy. Reforming Sudan has been a contentious issue since the toppling of al-Bashir in 2019. Consequently, the coup in 2021, which resulted in the military junta ascending into power, prompted civilians in Sudan to protest publically against the government. The RSF’s leaders have publicly professed to be pro-democracy. This study will examine whether Sudan’s leaders’ rhetoric will result in action or if it is just lip service to impress the international community to acquire significant donation funds.

In the last quarter of 2022, Sudan has taken steps towards becoming a democracy
During the last quarter of 2022, the Sudanese government has shown signs of being willing to become a democratic government. More specifically, the signing of the Sudan Political Framework Agreement at the UN Security Council on the 5th of December 2022 is expected to ensure that the country becomes a legitimate civilian-led democracy. On 8 December 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping met with General al-Burhan, to reinforce China’s support towards the Sudanese government. In December 2022, the US government reiterated its support for Sudan’s transition to becoming a democracy. The international support has emboldened the people in Sudan to speak the truth to power. These are signs that the government must change willingly or through force.

In November 2022, “al-Burhan renewed his warnings to the Islamists and other opponents against any attempt to use the army to bring them to power again” (Sudan Tribune, 2022). This move reinforces the notion that the military is open to Sudan becoming a democracy.
The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is trying to legitimize itself
The leaders of RSF have started taking steps towards legitimizing themselves. Nashed (2022) echoed this point of view when stating that “Sudan coup leader [Hemeti] bids to co-opt pro-democracy movement... the RSF leader is backing efforts to form a civilian government to secure popular and international legitimacy”. Hemeti has publicly stated that he is pro-democracy, even though he was one of the masterminds of the 2021 coup. His rhetoric is contradictory to his actions, and this may lead the public to be skeptical of electing him as their leader. Skepticism for the junta is warranted because the leaders of Sudan have only expressed their support for Sudan becoming a democracy when it was monetarily beneficial for them to do so. It can be concluded that money is at the root of their change in sentiment; this is substantiated by the fact that in November 2021, “Sudan was unable to access $650 million in international funding” (Lewis et al., 2022). With so much at stake, it does make sense for the leaders to co-opt the democratic movement.

The media is suppressed and is not free. Social media platforms are banned
The military controls the media, using it to spread propaganda. With the RSF publicly stating that they are pro-democracy, they should start following the principles of democracy and freedom of the media is central to measuring the legitimacy of a country’s democracy. Van Cuilenburg & van der Wurff (2000, p. 30) concur with this statement and state that “modern democratic society cannot exist without communication media which make available information necessary for citizens to make informed choices about their lives and their communities”. The public has accused the military of suppressing their views. As stated by the Carter Center (2022), “on June 30, access to the internet and mobile communications was cut in Sudan. This communications blackout comes as Sudanese citizens engage in demonstrations in support of democracy”. Even without access to the Internet, the people of Sudan were able to communicate with the rest of the world. These actions are similar to those of the people who fought against apartheid. The government cannot silence or kill the desire of the Sudanese to become a democracy.

RSF leaders have propped up their allies as attractive leaders
Sudan is an institutional kleptocracy, and as stated in The Sentry (2019) “at their root, the crimes of Sudan’s kleptocracy are financial”. It should be stressed that it is difficult to change the government systems effectively without overhauling the entire government structure. Eujayl (2020) believes that “the country’s new government has yet to definitively leave behind the military dominance and corruption of the former regime”. Sammer Hamza, a pro-democracy activist, posits that “Hemeti knows that the military coup failed ... that’s why he is now claiming to support the people of Sudan. But all he wants is power in the next government” (Nashed, 2020). Al-Burhan and Hemeti have propped up their allies to be part of the new civilian government in case they are not chosen to be part of a democratic Sudanese government, thus ensuring that they can retain their power in the background. Salim (2021) concurs with this sentiment by stating that “the military putschists invested in creating a controlled political alliance to be their agenda in creating the image of an elusive division among civilians”. Having their allies in power will ensure that they will still monetarily benefit whichever way the pendulum swings. “Senior members of the government are engaged in
extensive corruption, thus undermining the government pledge to combat graft” (The Sentry, 2019).

The regime’s actions are contradictory to the ethos of a democratic government, which always acts in the best interest of the public. The current government members are only trying to enrich themselves and accumulate power. The only way to remedy this situation is to implement a diverse, civilian-led government of people of all ages, racial groups, gender, religion, and regions.

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Violence escalates in Yemen after truce renewal agreements failed on October 2, 2022. Following Houthi drone assaults on oil installations, the internationally recognized government labelled the Houthis as a terrorist organization. The international community needs a more effective deterrence tactic to deal with the Houthis' provocative attacks left without reprisals.

Introduction
On April 2, 2022, the Iran-allied Houthi rebels, de facto authorities in the north of Yemen, and the internationally recognized Government of Yemen (GOY), which is supported by a Saudi-led military coalition, agreed on an UN-mediated truce. Despite attempts by UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg to extend the truce, the warring parties were unable to reach a compromise, and the ceasefire eventually ended on October 2. During the months of the truce, the Houthis were responsible for 95% of violations (Nagi, 2022). For instance, they refused to lift the siege on Taizz, a vital component of the truce (Young, 2022) and rejected all road-opening suggestions made by the U.N. (Jalal, 2022). The UN Security Council attributed the failure to extend the truce to the Houthis' "maximalist demands" (UN Press, 2022).

Escalation in violence after the end of the truce
In the weeks that followed the end of the truce, efforts to extend the ceasefire continued. UN SpecialEnvoy Grundberg met with regional and international diplomats in Saudi Arabia, and the GOY established a new team to explore negotiation possibilities (Xinhua, 2022). Saudi Arabia reopened indirect talks with the Houthis in September, with Oman as a mediator (Magdy, 2022).

For the first two weeks, the warring sides limited armed encounters, with few clashes primarily concentrated in Taizz governorate, Sadah and Marib (Soumenaro et al., 2022a). On October 21, the Houthi forces launched drones at an oil ship at the al-Dhabba oil terminal in the province of Hadhramaut, marking the first escalation since the truce collapsed (Al-Batati, 2022). Houthi forces asserted that the operation was meant to stop the "looting" of Yemeni oil (Ansar Allah, 22 October 2022). A similar claim was made following a drone attack on a ship carrying imported fuel derivatives on November 9 at the Qana port in the Shabwah governorate. Since then, Houthi drone activity has intensified (Roy et al., 2022a). On
November 10, a drone attack targeted three GOY coast guards in the Al Haymah port (Roy et al., 2022b). After the attacks, the GOY labelled the Houthi movement as a terrorist organization.

Unceasing violence in the Yemen landscape is not just due to ongoing hostilities between Houthi and GOY forces. Three more factors should be taken into account: a rise in tribal violence in areas both under Houthi and GOY rule, a resurgence of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s activity following the deployment of Southern Transitional Council affiliated forces in Abyan, and disputes within the anti-Houthi side (Khelifi et al., 2022). The Presidential Leadership Council (PLC), established at the start of April and includes all anti-Houthi groups brought together by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, has not been able to get past its internal conflicts and difficulties. This has undermined its efforts against Houthi rebels (Nagi, 2022).

**Analysis**

The Houthis’ drone attacks in Yemen ports to impose an embargo on oil shipments were part of a larger campaign to pressure the national government to share extractive resources and fulfill their demands (Alasrar, 2022). Recent developments demonstrate that bringing the Houthis to the negotiating table is not enough. The truce itself had been prompted by tiredness rather than a sudden sense of morality (Young, 2022). The increasing requests in the lead-up to the truce renewal even appear to be an intentional effort to escalate the conflict once again. The Houthis have, indeed, taken advantage of the cease-fire to recruit military members and radicalize Yemeni children (Jalal, 2022). Besides, since the 2018 Stockholm Agreement, Houthi rebels have used port profits to fund their war efforts, as they expect to be entitled to state resources (Jalal, 2022; Alasrar, 2022). Consequently, the rest of the population was cut off from essential services.

The country’s economy has also been devastated by Saudi Arabia’s security-focused strategy, causing discontent and insecurity, and strengthening the ties between the Houthis and Iran, which finances the majority of the armaments used by the rebels against Saudi territory (Nagi, 2022b).

The continuous violence during the truce and Yemeni internal security issues have allowed rebel militias to survive. But if the Houthis are classified as terrorist organizations by the global arena, there may be negative effects on getting supplies into the country. A resolution could also be more difficult since this can inflame anger, a major driver of violence. Meanwhile, the fragmentation of the PLC and the inability to lessen the humanitarian disaster has hindered progress towards the spirit of the truce and the plan of action, arguably making Yemenis discouraged by the government.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

The international community should be aware that the Houthis are employing violence to carry out their demands. There is no sign that the rebels would be willing to share power with the GOY. The U.N. could take more action, such as sanctions by the UNSC, to pressure the Houthis and to ensure their attacks have repercussions. However, disarming the rebels would...
not be enough; an effort to promote talks peacefully would be required. For this purpose, a unification of objectives within the PLC would make negotiations more straightforward. After the Ukraine crisis, Yemen has gained significant international relevance, with numerous nations working to prevent the conflict from spreading to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, two major oil-producing nations. Such a strategy proved ill-suited to Yemen's demands and should instead focus on the country's internal security issues (Young, 2022). Yemen's economic resources should be used to deliver services and improve the humanitarian environment.

The situation in Yemen is complex and delicate, and how it develops could have a significant impact on the future of the Yemeni people. Increased pressure at the UN level is required, given how tepid and powerless the international response to the rebels' actions appears to be. However, the political settlement process should be inclusive of all the competing interests of the warring parties, including Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE.

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