

The cause of Sudan's crisis. Letter to Editor from Ken Isaacs, former head of OFDA, re Sudan, *The Washington Post*, 11 July 2025

The June 29 front-page article “[As U.S. cut aid, Sudan's children starved](#)” was emotionally powerful but analytically flawed.

The article framed U.S. government aid reductions as a central reason as to why children in Sudan are dying of starvation, and in doing so, misled the public.

I spent more than 35 years responding to crises around the world — including 32 years working inside Sudan — and I can say with certainty that the driving force behind Sudan's humanitarian collapse is not budget restructuring in Washington. It is war.

Sudan is being torn apart by a brutal internal conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. More than [12 million people](#) have been displaced. And according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification initiative, [entire regions](#) have tipped into Phase 5, their most catastrophic level of food insecurity. Infrastructure has collapsed, supply routes have been severed and aid workers have been targeted. In these conditions, even the best-funded programs fail.

The article acknowledged the war, but its overall framing gave disproportionate weight to the idea that the U.S. Agency for International Development's reorganization is what pushed the conditions in Sudan over the edge. Even when USAID's budget approached \$43 billion annually, there were starving children in Sudan and elsewhere. We should understand that in 2023, disaster relief and other humanitarian assistance made up only [21.7 percent](#) of all the foreign aid disbursed. That type of funding has saved lives and continues to do so. But even fully funded humanitarian appeals cannot stop a war, or prevent militias from looting clinics, burning towns or blocking relief convoys.

The article also omitted a crucial detail about how Sudan got here. The RSF, now a central actor in the conflict, was born from the [Janjaweed militias](#) that devastated Darfur in the early 2000s. In [2013, they were rebranded](#) and formalized. And in 2014, the European Union launched the Khartoum Process and the [Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](#) the following year, directing hundreds of millions of euros toward migration control and border security to countries such as Sudan. The financial support was a major contributing factor to the RSF's transformation from tribal militia to powerful paramilitary force. That is a key part of Sudan's tragedy — and one the article should have acknowledged.

I have personally seen the unfathomable suffering and loss of life in Sudan — it is devastating and heartbreaking. But why are we advocating a humanitarian solution to a political problem? If we provided \$50 billion in foreign assistance to Sudan today, it would not relieve the Sudanese people of their suffering. We must pursue permanent solutions, including appointing a special envoy for Sudan, as I [recently advocated](#) in front of the House Foreign Affairs Committee's subcommittee on Africa. Concerned nations must push for a real and lasting political solution to Sudan's war.

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