



Report on: Gulf Diplomacy in Crisis Management: The Case Study of Sudan's Forgotten War Workshop

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Summary:

- The civil war in Sudan is driven by deeply rooted internal and external causes and factors.
- A complex relationship between Sudan's internal conflicts and the complexities of its civil structure has allowed external interference and influence in Sudan's civil affairs.
- External interventions in Sudan are often driven by foreign interests, which overshadow the urgent humanitarian crisis unfolding within the country.
- In the first half of 2025, the conflict dynamics have shifted, with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) reclaiming cities from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).
- It is essential for the Sudanese government and civil society to prioritize the country's needs and long-term national interests over external pressures.
- It is highly recommended that Sudanese civil society appoint trusted partners to lead mediation efforts and to implement a peacekeeping action plan that addresses the root causes of the conflict.



Al Khartoum, Sudan – March 21, 2025. Sudanese Army Forces [SAF] reclaims the presidential Palace in the city. Photo by: Ibrahim Awad, Xinhua

As of March 25, 2025, the latest updates on the Sudan Civil War are as follows:

1. After seizing control of the city of Al Khartoum, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have also taken control of the Central Bank of Sudan (Al Jazeera, 2025).
2. SAF generals have threatened to attack Rapid Support Forces (RSF) military positions outside of Sudan, including in neighboring countries such as Chad (Sudan Tribune, 2025).

As of June 2025, the latest updates on the Sudan Civil War are as follows:

1. An estimated four million Sudanese have fled the country, seeking refuge in neighboring states (Al Jazeera, 2025).
2. Violence among armed militias continues to escalate, driven by the protracted struggle over power and resources (ibid., 2025).
3. Increasing numbers of Sudanese civilians are suffering from malnutrition, starvation, and disease, as resources remain under the control of the various armed groups and militias (Al Jazeera, 2025).

Introduction

On April 15, 2023, violent clashes broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Khartoum and quickly spread throughout the country. The civil war has resulted in the displacement of over 11 million people, and the death of over 150 thousand, making it one of the worst global humanitarian crises in terms of displacement and mortality. Sudan's ongoing crisis continues to threaten hundreds of thousands of lives as the struggle for control and power intensifies, making international mediation and intervention needed and indispensable.

As political instability persists, the conflict has attracted the intervention of local, regional and international players, leading rivals to assume power by force, transforming the dispute into a protracted conflict over power, land and natural resources.

Background on Political Instability in Sudan

Several domestic factors contributed to the intensification of the civil war, and its consequences on the Sudanese citizens as the political situation in Sudan continues to be dominated by corruption and instability. After suffering decades of political and economic corruption and high unemployment rates; thousands of Sudanese civilians took to the streets in 2018 to protest against rising prices of essential commodities such as food and fuel (Malafronte, 2020). Protests spread across many cities, and civilians eventually demanded the removal of Omar Al Bashir from power. For over 25 years, Al-Bashir imposed an authoritarian regime and was finally overthrown by a military coup d'état in April 2019; offering the Sudanese people a glimmer of hope for a democratic shift and real political reforms for the first time (Al Jazeera, 2019). In June 2019, a peaceful pro-democratic protest was faced with violence, resulting in what became known as the 'Khartoum Massacre,'. This was a turning point in the governance scene in Sudan as it resulted in the intervention of the African Union to create a joint transitional government that involved both Sudanese civilians and the military (Al Jazeera, 2022).

In addition to the political instability, Sudan has also been witnessing a deteriorating humanitarian crisis that was further exacerbated by the ongoing economic crisis as well as by factors attributed to climate change such as food and water shortages, droughts and famines, creating an urgent need for regional and international action

The role of the Media in the Sudan Civil War

Several narratives pertaining to the role of the media in the Sudan war can be identified. One narrative propagates the view that the international community, as well as international media outlets, prioritize broadcasting news based on political interests and the parties involved in the conflict. It was perceived that several Arab channels, including Al Jazeera, aired news about Sudan for only one hour a day, thus influencing, and limiting the Arab public's knowledge and involvement in the conflict. Another factor was the eruption of the civil war in Sudan, which coincided with three ongoing major global political events, namely the Russian war in Ukraine,

the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the US elections. This resulted in distracting global attention away from the civil war in Sudan. Additionally, the organized attacks that targeted local Sudanese media agencies seem to have played an instrumental role in limiting the outflow of news coverage from Sudan. Since the beginning of the war, there have been direct assaults on journalists, media channels and outlets, as well as seemingly systematic censoring of the media through frequent internet blackouts.

Mapping Historical Local & Regional/International Links & Alliances

The civil war that erupted in 2023 can be seen as an extension of the domestic conflicts that have divided the country for decades, presented specifically through the rivalry that exists between the north and center on one hand, versus the periphery in the south and east on the other. This division also runs along tribal and ethnic lines. Historically, the Arab and Arabized tribal elites of the north and center have controlled the political system (For example, former President Al-Bashir and SAF leader Al-Burhan) both

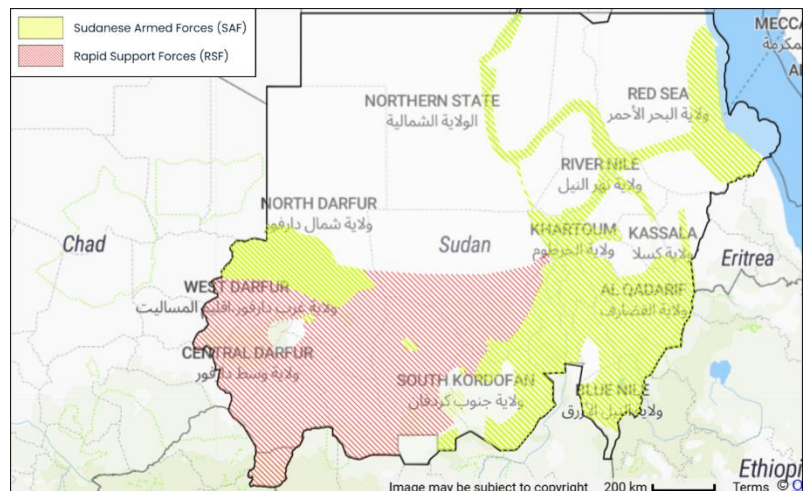


Figure 1: Map generated by Scribble Map

descend from the same confederation of riverine tribes in the north, Al-Ja'alin. Although the tribal element is not very prominent in this region, the powerful ruling elites all come from the same tribal backgrounds in the north/center. In the periphery (eg. Darfur, Kordofan, East Sudan), the tribal and ethnic lines are much more relevant. The RSF are basically the paramilitary groups and militias that were formed by the government during Al-Bashir's reign and that were known as Janjaweed, mostly coming from Arab tribes such as the Rizeigat, Hemedti's tribe, to fight non-Arab tribes and groups (eg. Al-Masalit tribe). In the current conflict, the tribes and militias, that in previous conflicts were pawns in the hands of the northern/central elites, are now led by Hemedti and fighting their own war for power. In the eastern provinces, Al-Burhan still maintains alliances with the tribes there (eg. the Hadendoa tribes) and controls the coastal area on the Red Sea (Nashed, 2023; Benny, 2024; Savage, 2024; *Sudan Horizon*, 2025).

Hence, domestically, the conflict can be seen as a continuity of the same old conflicts between the center and periphery to a great extent, in addition to incorporating ethnic and tribal conflicts where the SAF constitutes of the Arab and Arabized tribal federations in tandem with

non-Arab tribes, against the RSF which is heavily tribal, constituting of the Arab tribes of Darfur (Nashed, 2023; Benny, 2024; Savage, 2024).

Against the domestic map of alliances, international ties and alliances can also be mapped, reflecting the complex nature of the conflict, and suggesting that the longer the conflict lasts, the more complex this web of links and alliances will become:

Saudi Arabia: KSA's ties to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) date back to the war in Yemen, when the RSF provided troops to support the Saudi military's efforts. However, since the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) control the strategic Red Sea region, Saudi Arabia finds it necessary to maintain a stable relationship with General Al-Burhan and the SAF leadership. Unlike the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia does not appear to be interested in directly intervening in the conflict. Instead, it prefers to balance its ties with both sides and has offered to mediate to help bring the conflict to an end (Salih, 2024; Kurtz, 2024; Benny, 2024; Campbell-James, 2024).

Egypt: Although Egypt has attempted to adopt a neutral position by maintaining ties with the SAF and RSF at the same time, probably out of pragmatism until a clear victor emerges, it has been forced to provide more support to SAF for several reasons. Firstly, the SAF remains the legitimately recognized side in this conflict; secondly, the SAF controls the regions adjacent to Egypt while the RSF operates far to the south; and thirdly, Egypt needs to maintain a close relationship with the SAF against Ethiopia over the water conflict that the three states are involved in. Ultimately, Egypt needs a stable Sudan that is governed by a united government and that can act as a reliable partner in the water conflict with Ethiopia, and as far as Egypt is concerned, it is of little relevance whether this partner is the SAF or the RSF (Kurtz, 2024; Martin, 2024; Campbell-James, 2024).

UAE: Officially, the UAE has maintained that its involvement in Sudan is limited to humanitarian aid only. However, evidence strongly suggests that the UAE has maintained close ties with both SAF and RSF. Satellite imagery, moreover, show dozens of UAE planes landing in Darfur, the stronghold of the RSF, suggesting that the UAE is heavily involved in arming the RSF. Reports also show that the UAE has established an alliance with the Russian African Corps (formerly known as Wagner Group), allowing the African Corps to use Emirati commercial networks in Sudan and the rest of central Africa to finance the African Corps' activities through the sale of gold, diamonds and other minerals in the UAE commodity market. Although the UAE holds a pragmatic position where it supports both the SAF and RSF to guarantee that it will have close ties with whichever side wins war, its ties with the RSF date back to the war in Yemen when RSF provided soldiers to support the UAE military efforts there. Moreover, the UAE has an interest in seeing the RSF win the war against the SAF since the RSF is distant from the Muslim Brotherhood which the UAE perceives as a major threat (Kurtz, 2024; Martin, 2024; Campbell-James, 2024).

Russia: Access to the Red Sea by having a controlling stake in Port Sudan is arguably a major strategic and valuable goal for Moscow. The Russians have maintained close ties and negotiated

with SAF and RSF to guarantee strategic access to the port. Evidence shows Russian anti-tank Kornet missiles in the hands of the RSF, suggesting that Moscow is more involved in the crisis than it claims to be. Moscow also has a strategic concern to secure its economic interests in mineral-rich countries such as Chad, Central African Republic, Mali and other parts of Africa, and it seems that Moscow has established some form of military alliance with Hemedti's RSF through the African Corps. Although it seems that Russia is supporting both the SAF and RSF, its real interest more likely lies in seeing the RSF win the war since this guarantees a controlling stake for Russia in Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast. Additionally, reports suggest that Russia has been increasingly supporting the RSF rather than the SAF because the latter has been acting as an intermediary to provide weapons to Ukraine in its war against Russia (Kurtz, 2024; Martin, 2024; Campbell-James, 2024).

Iran: The involvement of Iran in Sudan came from the SAF's Al-Burhan who dispatched his acting Foreign Minister to Tehran to reconstruct the broken relations between the two sides and allegedly to offer Iran access to Port Sudan on the Red Sea. Evidence shows that Iran has already supplied SAF with Mohajer-6 drones (Campbell-James, 2024).

The United States: it is possible that one of the reasons for the failure of the US diplomacy in Sudan is that the US does not really maintain any direct strategic interests there. The main interests of the US are to see a liberal government in Sudan that does not hold a hostile position against the US, and to ensure maritime security in the Red Sea region. It is possible that the US still does not see an urgent need to commit any political, economic or military resources to resolve the conflict in Sudan (Martin, 2024; Campbell-James, 2024).

Türkiye: Prior to 2019, Türkiye had maintained a close relationship with the Islamist regime of Al-Bashir. After 2019, and specifically after the eruption of violence in 2023, Türkiye has attempted to maintain neutrality and offered to mediate between the conflicting parties. However, only al-Burhan seems to have been receptive to these moves. This culminated, in his visit to Ankara, after which SAF received Turkish drones and military supplies that were channeled through Egypt. Thus, while Türkiye continues to support the SAF, it also insists on presenting itself as a potential mediator for peace and mediation efforts between the SAF and the UAE (Sudan Tribune, 2025).

China: Throughout most of Al-Bashir's reign, China played a major economic role in Sudan, not only by investing billions in the country's oil infrastructure, but also by providing financing. With the loss of oil reserves after the separation of South Sudan and then the loss of Al-Bashir as a major political partner, the position of China toward the conflict seems to have been ambiguous. On the one hand, there have been reports accusing China of arming and financing the warring factions, but there is no support for these claims. It is also not clear how China can benefit from supporting either side, since it can simply wait to establish ties with the winner to continue its economic activities (Plichta & Peter, 2023).

Regional/International Relations with Sudan

| | Diplomatic Relations with Sudan | Economic Ties | SAF/RSF |
|--------------------------|--|---|----------------|
| KSA | Yes | Agri-investments & manpower | SAF |
| Qatar | Yes | Agri-investments & infrastructure development | SAF |
| UAE | Yes | Agri-investments and gold trade | RSF |
| Russia | Yes | Arms trade, presence on Red Sea, other forms of trade | SAF/RSF |
| Türkiye | Yes | Mostly private and non-government trade | SAF |
| Iran | Yes | Mostly private and non-government trade | SAF |
| US | Yes | low | SAF |
| China | Yes | Unspecified | SAF |
| Eritrea | Yes | Low economic trade levels | RSF |
| Kenya | Yes | Unspecified | RSF |
| Chad | Yes | Low economic trade levels & delivering weapons from UAE | RSF |
| Ethiopia | Yes | Unspecified | RSF |
| Egypt | Yes | Unspecified | SAF |
| Libyan Government | Yes | Unspecified | SAF |
| Libyan Opposition | Yes | unspecified | RSF |

International Presence in Sudan

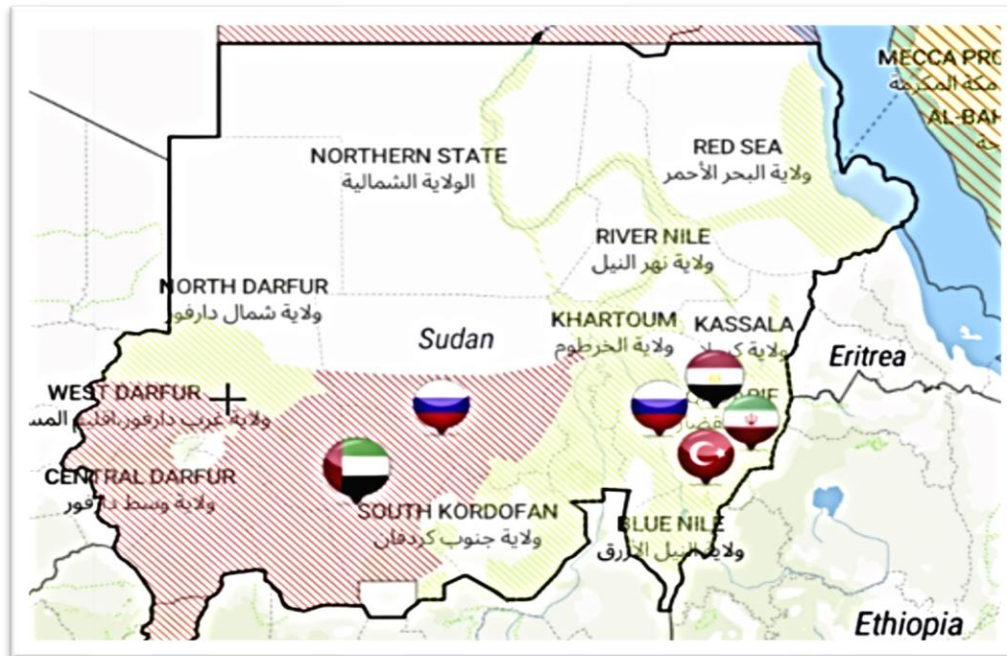


Figure 2: Map generated by Scribblemaps.com

The map (Figure 2) illustrates the territories controlled by different warring groups; the red zones are controlled by the RSF, while the yellow areas are controlled by the SAF. Flags of countries located in the yellow zone (Russia, Egypt, Iran, Türkiye) represent those supporting the SAF with arms. Flags in the red zone indicate countries that have provided arms to the RSF.

The Humanitarian Crisis in Sudan

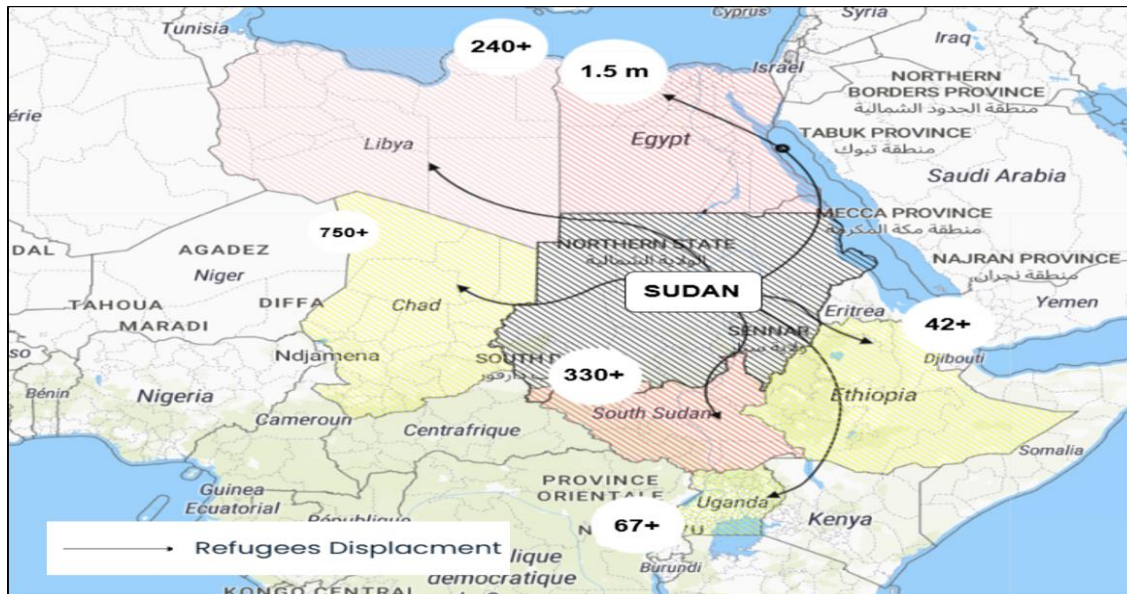


Figure 3: Map generated by ScribbleMap.com

A recent report published by the United Nations outlines a comprehensive response plan to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Sudan. It is essential to recognize the complex needs required to protect Sudanese communities both within the country and in refugee camps across the region. The report highlights that Sudanese civilians have been subjected to numerous humanitarian violations. These include manslaughter; targeted attacks on women, children, and the elderly; lack of safe shelter; insufficient access to water and food; no access to basic services such as healthcare and education; and the militarization of marginalized communities, which forces them to join the army or rebel groups.

The severity of the crisis is underscored by the horrifying figures presented in the report: approximately 31 million people urgently require humanitarian aid, including safe zones, water, food, healthcare, and other essential resources. To address these needs effectively, an estimated USD 4.9 billion is required, according to a study presented by ReliefWeb (2025).

Given the massive scale of the crisis, the international community must demonstrate its commitment to a comprehensive reconciliation plan through both political measures and continued mediation efforts between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). A key first step involves both the SAF and the RSF identifying mutually trusted mediators who can lead the reconciliation process. More importantly, the Sudanese people, along with the mediating factions, must first define the nature of the conflict itself. Only by doing so can

they develop a reconstruction plan that is grounded in the local context and built on a feasible timeline.

Following the establishment of a permanent ceasefire between the SAF, RSF, and other armed militias, it is crucial to disarm all militia groups and restrict the flow of arms within Sudan. This would pave the way for stability and reduce the risk of renewed and escalating violence. To ensure accountability and sustained progress, a unified international body should be created to monitor the enforcement of ceasefire, supervise the distribution of humanitarian aid, and oversee the rebuilding of critical infrastructure across Sudan.

Furthermore, Arab and international media outlets are urged to play a pivotal role in presenting, and even amplifying Sudanese voices and ensuring their perspectives are heard by the global community. Parties involved in the war must also be held accountable by an international body for crimes committed against innocent civilians and for damage inflicted on state infrastructure. This accountability is vital to healing and rebuilding trust among Sudan's communities.

A vigorous infrastructure plan must be developed and shared transparently with donor states. This plan should focus on immediate and long-term needs, ensuring that essential services and basic needs such as healthcare, education, and safe housing are prioritized.

Key steps to achieve these goals include:

1. The immediate implementation of a ceasefire to halt further civilian suffering.
2. Ensuring that no political party is marginalized during the reconciliation process, with SAF, RSF, and other political factions agreeing on trusted mediators for ceasefire and mediation talks.
3. Establishing international border security forces to curb the illegal arms trade and to facilitate the safe and efficient delivery of humanitarian aid to all affected regions in Sudan.
4. Coordinating the distribution of aid to Sudanese refugee camps in neighboring countries, alongside a gradual and voluntary return process that guarantees safety and dignity for returning refugees.
5. Reinstating Sudanese media outlets to ensure accurate and independent documentation of events on the ground, which is critical for transparency and accountability.

By addressing these recommendations with urgency and coordination, the international community can help Sudan navigate its path toward peace and reconstruction, ultimately restoring hope and stability to millions of affected civilians.

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