


Sudan's Conflict (2023-Present) and Its Implications for Ethiopia

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Abstract

This article analyzes the post-2023 conflict in Sudan by examining how historical legacies, internal ideological divisions, and the competing interests of external actors have impeded the country's political transition, turning it into a protracted cycle of crises, and explores the broader implications for its immediate neighbor, Ethiopia. To understand the interplay of these factors and their impact, the study adopts a qualitative approach, relying primarily on secondary sources. The study argues that Sudan's post-2023 conflict stems from internal political divisions driven by the power and economic interests of competing military factions, compounded by substantial external influences. Both the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Force (RSF) have re-strategized the war geographically from east to southwest and instrumented tools from air and ground operations to UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles). The findings reveals that the conflict has a spillover effect on Ethiopia which ranges from increased border insecurity, refugee influx, arms trafficking to increased presences of insurgents operating along the border. As a result, Ethiopia faces a dilemma: safeguarding its national security while respecting the sovereignty of its unstable neighbor. The study concluded that resolving the conflict requires an integrated and proactive diplomatic approach led by continental and sub-regional institution, with external actors playing a supportive role, aimed at reaching a permanent ceasefire, cessation of hostility, and at the end strengthening civilian forces in the transition to state power.

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Introduction

Sudan, located at the crossroads of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, possesses a rich history intertwined with internal strife and external influence. Sudan shares borders with Ethiopia, Egypt, Eritrea, the Central African Republic, Chad, Libya, and South Sudan. Alhareth (2022) aptly observed that the country's size, historical legacy, and diverse geography make it a microcosm of the African continent, significantly shaping its identity. Sudan occupies a pivotal geopolitical position, straddling the divide between Africa and the Middle East. Its strategic location grants it considerable influence.

As a key Arab nation bordering the Red Sea, Sudan serves as a strategic depth for Arab interests in Africa. Sudan's national security is Arab security (Eisa, 2019), providing access to crucial maritime routes connecting the Red Sea, Arabian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, its proximity to Arab oil sources and its position within the Nile River basin enhance its strategic

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importance. This confluence of factors has placed Sudan under intense regional scrutiny, with its internal affairs often drawing significant global attention and raising concerns.

Decades of internal conflict have overshadowed this strategic advantage, profoundly impacting the nation. The legacy of civil wars, spanning from 1956 to 1972 and 1983 to 2005, coupled with the devastating Darfur conflict (2003-2010), characterized by acts of genocide and widespread human rights abuses, has inflicted immense suffering on the civilian population (Campbell, 2007). The Darfur conflict alone resulted in a staggering loss of life due to famine, violence, and displacement, with millions of people forced to flee their homes (Rothbart, Korostelina, and Gjeloshi, 2023).

The ongoing conflicts have left a lasting impact on Sudan's socio-economic environment. Poverty afflicts a significant portion of the population, with over 46% living below the poverty line (Alhareth, 2022). This pervasive poverty, coupled with the inefficient utilization of resources and the challenges of managing a diverse and growing population, has eroded the legitimacy of governing institutions. This erosion of legitimacy, in turn, has fueled political instability and social unrest, creating an environment ripe for conflict.

The historical grievances of marginalized ethnic groups, often stemming from historical injustices and economic disparities, have fueled numerous rebellions aimed at securing greater autonomy and resource control as a result of the center-drift development role (Alhareth, 2022). The center-periphery divide also presents a significant political challenge. The political elite, often situated in the center, frequently perceives itself as superior and disregards the interests of peripheral regions (Ryle et al., 2012; Ali, 2022). Ryle et al. (2012) elaborated on this by characterizing the Sudanese state as a top-down model of state-building. This model assumes that the regime possesses superior knowledge compared to local knowledge. This denial of local knowledge leads to a disconnect between the elite and ground realities, ultimately hindering effective governance. Furthermore, this sense of superiority and denial not only limits the elite's effectiveness but also invites and facilitates external intervention. These internal dynamics intersect with external factors, including regional power struggles and the pursuit of strategic interests by external actors.

The conflict in Sudan exemplifies a broader pattern observed across the African continent, where underdevelopment, social inequalities, and weak governance often converge to create conditions conducive to armed conflict. The OECD (2015) aptly recognized Sudan as one of the world's most fragile states, highlighting the interconnectedness of these challenges. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of conflict in Sudan by examining its historical context, internal ideological divisions, and the influence of external interests that have contributed to the nation's ongoing political instability and its potential implications for Ethiopia.

Methodologically, the study employed a qualitative research approach, primarily relying on secondary data. It used an integrative or narrative review approach, which is advisable for a qualitative research review when the goal is to critically assess an extensive body of literature on a specific topic. Accordingly, secondary sources such as academic publications, reports, policy briefs, media outlets, and statement were used.

Historical Context: A Legacy of Coups and Failed Transitions

The Sudanese people rose up in December 2018, demanding an end to the authoritarian rule of Omar al-Bashir, who had seized power in a 1989 coup against the democratically elected government of Sadiq al-Mahdi (Elsheikh, 2019). This coup effectively ended Sudan's nascent experiment of democracy. Despite facing increasing violence and repression, demonstrators persisted in their calls for 'freedom, peace, and justice,' ultimately leading to al-Bashir's ouster in April 2019 (Johnson, 2022) by a coup led by elements within the very military he once commanded. This marked the third civilian uprising in Sudan's history that successfully deposed a military dictator.

While the first two popular uprisings, in October 1964 and April 1985, led to brief periods of democratic rule (Young, 2020), the recent popular revolt has yet to achieve its desired outcome: a negotiated transition to democracy. Instead, internal power struggle within the military have consistently thwarted democratic progress. The coup against the civilian government by General Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan in 2021 abruptly ended the transitional government (Sayiqh, 2021) and has plunged the country back into military rule. Moreover, ongoing disagreements and power struggles among rival military factions have fueled violent conflict and plunged the nation into uncertainty, creating a cyclical pattern of instability.

A close examination of Sudanese politics reveals a disturbing reality: Sudan's history is dominated by military rule. With nearly thirty-five coup d'état experiences (Armstrong, 2023), Sudan has earned the unfortunate distinction of being a "laboratory of coups" (Fabricius, 2020). These coups have repeatedly interrupted periods of democratic rule (1956-1958, 1964-1969, 1985-1989) (Ylonen, 2023), demonstrating that the Sudanese military elite has historically viewed force as the primary means of acquiring and maintaining political power. This distinguishes Sudan from many African countries where elections, however imperfect, are often employed to attain political office.

Furthermore, Sudanese military history is rife with instances of internal power struggles, where once-loyal military factions turn against their leaders, leading to new coups. This cyclical pattern of military rule has created a deeply entrenched culture of violence and instability, severely undermining the development of democratic institutions. This historical legacy of military dominance poses a formidable obstacle to the establishment of sustainable democracy in Sudan.

A predatory political economy, characterized by a patronage system, undermines Sudan's political experiment (Hoffman & Lanfranchi, 2023). Those in power exploit control over critical resources, including land, oil and gold to maintain this system. Government officials, the military and powerful elites with close ties to the government dominate the economy (Berghof Foundation, 2006; Hoffman & Lanfranchi, 2023). This intricate web of interconnectedness between political power, economic control, and access to resources like oil, gold, land and water

(Patey, 2024) severely hinders state-building and undermines democratic governance. While land and water have historically fueled conflict, oil previously dominated the conflict landscape, and now gold has taken precedence. Control over these resources significantly influences the nature of conflict, shaping power dynamics and alliances (Abushama et al., 2023). This direct link between political power and economic control contributes significantly to the recurrence of coups and civil wars (Tchie, A. E. Y & Zabala, M. L., 2023).

Another key challenge to democratic transition in Sudan stems from deeply entrenched and conflicting visions of political order. A powerful elite favors an Islamist-oriented political order. This is evident in the activities of various Islamist political and militant groups operating within the country, including those actively involved in the current conflict. Kurtz (2024) stated that Islamist influence was prominent under regimes like that of President Omar al-Bashir (1989-2019) and during the era of Jaafar Nimeiry in 1983 (Abdel-aziz & Aroob, 2021).

Conversely, moderate Sudanese groups advocate for a democratic political order, viewing it as the most suitable form of governance for the Sudanese context. The recent popular uprising, with its rallying cry of "freedom, peace, and justice" (Basel Institute on Governance, 2023), reflects this aspiration. However, the inability to reconcile these competing visions of political order poses a significant challenge. In the absence of a consensus, social and political forces have resorted to bargaining and exerting pressure on the state to democratize. However, the state's resistance to these pressures, due to weak linkages with society, has hindered the emergence of genuine democracy. This unresolved conflict over the nature of political order also fuels the ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), weakening the ability of social and political forces to collectively pressure both sides towards a ceasefire.

Regional State Intervention and the Escalation of Conflict

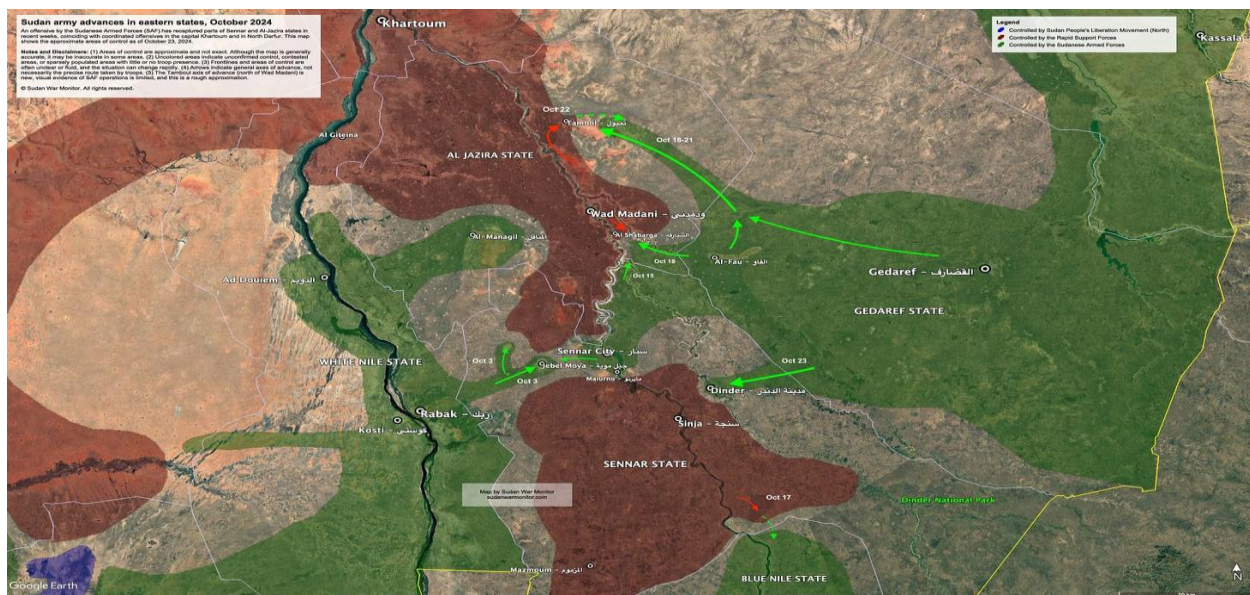
The ongoing conflict in Sudan, which erupted in April 2023, is primarily an inter-military elite power struggle for control over post-transition Sudanese politics and vital economic resources (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). Initially, the SAF conducted airstrikes in Khartoum state, concentrating the fighting largely within its boundaries. Battles between the two warring parties were also confined to urban areas along major east-west corridors from Kassala to West Darfur. Gradually, three areas of intense competition emerged: Khartoum and its surroundings, North Kordofan state, and the larger Darfur region (Medani, 2024). Khartoum experienced the most intense urban conflict. Darfur also became a site of intense fighting, drawing in local militia groups. As the conflict progressed, the SAF shifted their political base to Port Sudan in the east, while the RSF expanded its power base in its more familiar territories of Darfur and Kordofan (Ali, 2024). Although some observers and scholars initially feared a Libya-type scenario with the country splitting (Ali, 2023; Amin, 2023; Hudson, 2023) into east and west, this did not happen yet. Instead, intense conflict has continued between the SAF based in Port Sudan and the RSF in Darfur.

Significant developments occurred in November and December 2023 when the RSF advanced quickly towards the country's east and captured Wad Madani in Al-Gezira State (Medani, 2024). The fall of Wad Madani was considered by some scholars (Sudan War Monitor, 2023, German Institute for Global and Area Studies, 2024) as a watershed moment for the RSF. Another crucial development was the RSF's June 2024 advance towards the Ethiopian border. These advances opened new arms and gold smuggling routes for the RSF, further strengthening its ability to finance and continue the war.

The intensity and the location of the war are frequently changing across years and months. Though RSF controlled and advances towards the vast territory including the capital city, since the beginning of 2025, SAF launched a highly coordinated offensive attack against RSF controlled areas such as Khratoum, Bahri, and Omdurman (CFR, 2025). It is also observed that RSF have begun a massive attack on Port Sudan using UAVs. Following the recapture of the capital, Khartoum, by the SAF in March, the dynamics of the war have shifted both geographically and in nature. The fighting on the ground has intensified in the western and southern parts of the country, such as North Darfur and various areas of the Kordofan states, while aerial attacks by the RSF have expanded the conflict to previously unaffected areas in the north and Far East of the country. The SAF has also continued a series of drone attacks on RSF positions in South Darfur and other regions.

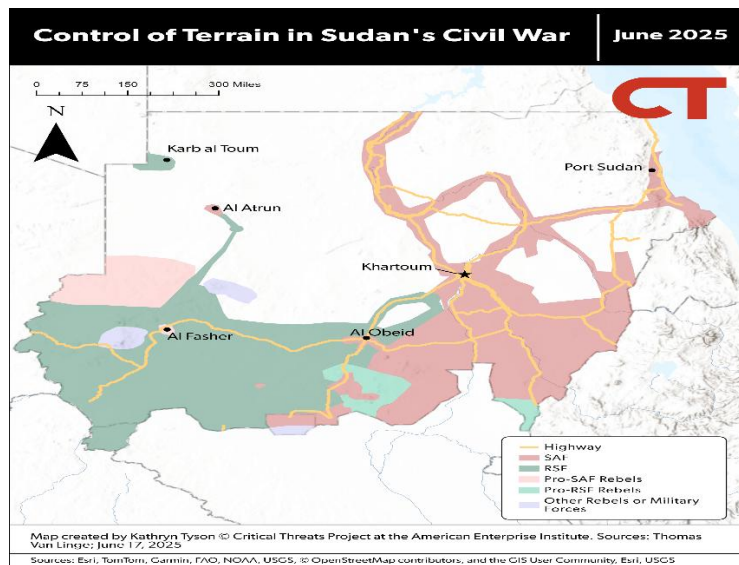
To add supply routes and reinforce its operations, the RSF captured a strategic area in the Northern State of Sudan, where the borders of Sudan, Libya, and Egypt meet allegedly with support from forces loyal to eastern Libyan commander Khalifa Haftar, according to the SAF. The intensified conflict in the western part of the country has led to a significant increase in refugees arriving in Chad.

Map 1: Advancements by the RSF and SAF in controlling key areas continued until December 2024



Source: Sudan War Monitor, 2024

Map 2. SAF, RSF and other Rebels controlled area June 2025



Source: Uarr, Tyson, & Ford, 2025

The trends and shifts of territorial control in the course of the war don't guarantee the winner.² As a result of internal fragmentation and lack of structured state apparatus, many external state actors from the region and beyond are intervening in Sudan war. Despite the shift of power within the two warring parties, both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have re-strategized the war geographically from east to southwest and instrumented tools from air and ground operations to UAVs. Additionally, they also work for political legitimacy, by which the SAF has appointed prime minister and the RSF executes local administration in the area it controlled.

The Sudanese conflict, which erupted in Khartoum on April 15, 2023, has rapidly escalated from a stalemate to a more intense phase of fighting, punctuated by temporary ceasefires (U.S. Department of State, 2023; BBC, 2023) and the introduction of drone warfare (ACLED, 2024; Military Africa, 2024). RSF controls major arms smuggling routes, providing them with a significant strategic advantage over the SAF. These routes connect to key hubs in Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic, Uganda, and South Sudan, facilitating the flow of weapons from sources like the UAE and the Wagner Group to the RSF (Ali, 2024).

Beyond the SAF and RSF, numerous militias have emerged through time and are actively participating in the conflict. These militias frequently shift alliances and engage in independent acts of violence, further destabilizing the situation and hindering peace efforts. The influx of weapons through smuggling networks has empowered these militias, making them increasingly independent actors.

The conflict is further characterized by fragmented alliances. While civilian forces strive for unity, internal divisions weaken their ability to pressure the warring parties towards a ceasefire. There

² Selam, T. (2025). Personal interview. Institute of Security Studies (ISS). Addis Ababa

is no legitimacy for any of the parties in Sudan politics including the *Taqaddum* by which these group members also fragmented and some join the factions.³ This fragmentation is exacerbated by the competing interests of foreign actors who support different factions. Both the SAF and the RSF have forged alliances with various militias and civilian groups, further complicating the conflict.

Sudan's political transition is deeply influenced by the multitude of external actors with vested interests in the country (Eldoh, 2023). Sudan, with its strategic location on the red sea, rich natural resources (fertile land, oil, gold and rare earth minerals), and diverse cultural heritage, has become a focal point for regional and global powers. This geopolitical competition, with each faction receiving support from different external powers, fuels the ongoing conflict. The defeat of one faction could lead to the defeat of their foreign backers, further intensifying the conflict. For example, Russia seeks to establish a military base on the Red Sea, while the Wagner Group pursues gold mining interests (Eldoh, 2023). The United States has both security and economic interests in the region, while China pursues significant economic opportunities. Gulf countries (Al-Anani, 2023) have diverse and often competing ideological, security, and economic interests in Sudan.

The UAE, recognizing Hemedti as a key ally, has significantly deepened its partnership with him (Donelli & Gonzalez-Levaggi, 2021). This partnership aligns with the UAE's objective of removing Islamist elements from the former Sudanese government, whom they consider adversaries (D'Agoût, 2023). The UAE has also invested in Sudanese agriculture to enhance food security and safeguard its strategic interests in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa (Telci, 2021). Khalifa Haftar provides military and financial support to Hemedti, forming a trilateral partnership that significantly impacts the geopolitical landscape of Sudan and North Africa (Shay, 2019). In contrast, Egypt supports al-Burhan and promotes a political narrative aligned with the military and the policies of the previous al-Bashir regime (Meservey, 2023). The UAE has been accused of supplying weapons to the RSF (Sudan Tribune, 2024), and there are also reports of potential UAE support for both sides for huge economic and political interests. In this regard, Hoffman & Lanfranchi (2023) indicated that SAF has received large sums of money from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia for the deployment of Sudanese soldiers to Yemen though the former is predominantly accused of supporting the RSF.

Saudi Arabia supports al-Burhan and the Sudanese Armed Forces, driven by a complex set of strategic, economic, and political objectives. Saudi Arabia aims to counter the influence of regional rivals such as the UAE, Iran, and Turkey. A stable Sudan aligned with Saudi Arabia serves as a crucial buffer, safeguarding its strategic interests in the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea (Alizadeh & Kazemi, 2021). Maritime security in the Red Sea is vital for Saudi Arabia's energy exports, and a stable Sudan is essential for maintaining freedom of navigation and protecting vital trade routes.

3 For more see Al-Badawi, Mohamed (n.d.). Tagadum's split and impact of new parallel government. Available at: <https://sudantribune.com/article297479/>

Saudi Arabia has made substantial investments in Sudan's economy, particularly in sectors like telecommunications, transportation, electricity, water, and sanitation (Greco, 2023). These investments represent significant economic interests for Saudi Arabia, and their protection and return on investment depend on a stable Sudan. Furthermore, access to Sudan's natural resources presents a potential economic opportunity for Saudi Arabia, contingent upon a stable and cooperative government in Khartoum. Politically, supporting al-Burhan enhances Saudi Arabia's regional standing and solidifies Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's (MBS) image as a regional leader and peacemaker. Saudi Arabia has actively mediated direct talks between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, demonstrating its commitment to finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Additionally, the Wagner Group is alleged to be supplying arms to the RSF, while according to Solomon (2024) Iran is accused of providing drones to the SAF. Egypt supports military rule in Sudan to exert influence and control over Sudanese policies, particularly regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). However, supporting the Muslim Brotherhood could be a strategic failure for Egypt. While recent RSF advances may influence Egypt's stance, its historical ties to the SAF's leadership may lead to continued support. Ultimately, Egypt's primary concern seems to prevent Sudan from falling under the control of other actors and needs a stronger military wing in power.

Ethiopia, another rival of Egypt with whom Sudan shares a border and water disputes, has maintained an official statements of neutrality. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has emphasized neutrality and avoiding involvement in the conflict. Despite the issues of border tensions in Alfashga, where the Sudanese army under Al-Burhan's leadership invaded Ethiopian territory following the withdrawal of the Ethiopian army from the area in November 2020, Ethiopia has kept its promise of neutrality and not intervened in Sudan's internal affairs. It has worked to mediate between the two warring parties. Abiy Ahmed's visit to Port Sudan⁴ and Hemedti's visit to Ethiopia⁵ reflects Ethiopia's neutral stance, emphasizing that national conflicts should be resolved internally without foreign interference.

The competing interests of these regional actors have contributed to the failure of several peace initiatives, including those led by the US, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and IGAD (IDEA, 2023; State Department, 2023). Sudan's history is marked by a persistent struggle for democracy, frequently resulting in failed transitions and the rise of more repressive military regimes. While a recent popular uprising initiated a new political transition, the legacy of past failures and the entrenched culture of violence heavily burdens this effort. A predatory political economy, a history of military coups, and the intervention of external actors deeply influence the country's political landscape. Addressing the root causes of conflict, including the struggle for power, the control over resources, and the deeply ingrained culture of violence, is crucial for overcoming these challenges and establishing a sustainable democracy in Sudan.

⁴ Sudan Tribune. (2024, July 9). Ethiopia's PM Ahmed visits Sudan, discusses peace with Burhan. Available at <https://sudantribune.com/article288018/>.

⁵ Aljazeera. (2023, December 28). Leader of Sudan's RSF visits Ethiopia in rare foreign trip as war rages. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/28/leader-of-sudans-rsf-visits-ethiopia-in-rare-foreign-trip-as-war-rages>

Table 1: Regional State Actors: Motives, Instruments, and Supporting Groups in the Sudanese Conflict

Country	Motives	Instruments	Supporting Groups
UAE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Counteract Iranian influence - Secure Red Sea access and trade routes - Exploit Sudanese resources (gold, agriculture) - Regional power projection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Military and financial support to RSF and to some point SAF financial - Private security contractors - Economic and political influence operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RSF (Rapid Support Forces) - Certain Sudanese militias and tribal groups
Saudi Arabia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Counteract Iranian, UAE, Turkey influence - Maintain regional stability (to protect oil and its investment interests) - Secure Red Sea access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diplomatic and political support predominantly to SAF and in shadow to some level RSF (opportunistically) - Economic aid and investment (conditional) - Intelligence sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SAF - Some Sudanese armed forces factions - Certain tribal and political elites
Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Counteract Iranian influence - Access to African markets and resources - Counter-terrorism cooperation (against Islamist groups) - Regional strategic alignment with some Gulf states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intelligence sharing and security cooperation - Economic and technological assistance (limited) - Indirect support through regional allies - work with both warring parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some Sudanese security and intelligence agencies - Certain political and business elites
Egypt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prevent regional instability that could impact its security - Maintain influence over Sudan - Counteract Ethiopian influence - Secure Nile River water resources - Preventing the coming of Radical Islamist in Sudan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diplomatic and political support to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) - Intelligence sharing - Economic and military aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) - Certain Sudanese political elites with ties to Egypt
Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prevent the spread of instability from Sudan - Secure its borders and protect its interests in the Red Sea - Counteract Egyptian influence in Sudan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diplomatic and political engagement with various Sudanese actors - Potential support to civilian groups 	Maintain a neutral stance though there is allegations

	- Support for groups aligned with its interests (potentially)		
Eritrea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain regional stability and counterbalance Ethiopian influence - Prevent the influx of refugees and instability from Sudan - Potential economic and security interests in Sudan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diplomatic and political engagement with Sudanese actors - Potential support to groups aligned with its interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some Sudanese armed factions with ties to Eritrea and SAF

Note: All information regarding supporters and instruments of support for factions from state actors is based on allegations from various sources, including news reports, statements from warring parties, and open-source data. It is important to acknowledge that this information may be incomplete, subject to change, and may not accurately reflect the full extent of external involvement in the conflict.

Sudan Conflict and Its Implications for Ethiopia

Ethiopia officially announced that it has a neutral position in this conflict and attempted to bring peace to the country. Its neutrality is defined not only by its intention to avoid escalating diplomatic tensions over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) or its border issue with Alfashga (Kiros, 2024), but also by a shift in foreign policy that prioritizes neighborhood relations and recognizes the importance of peaceful neighbors for national and regional prosperity. The ongoing conflict in Sudan poses a significant threat to Ethiopian national security and stability. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) advances in Sennar and West Kordofan, as reported by ACLED (2024), bring violence closer to the Ethiopian border, increasing the risk of spillover. The proliferation of arms among militias in these areas raises the potential for cross-border attacks and instability.

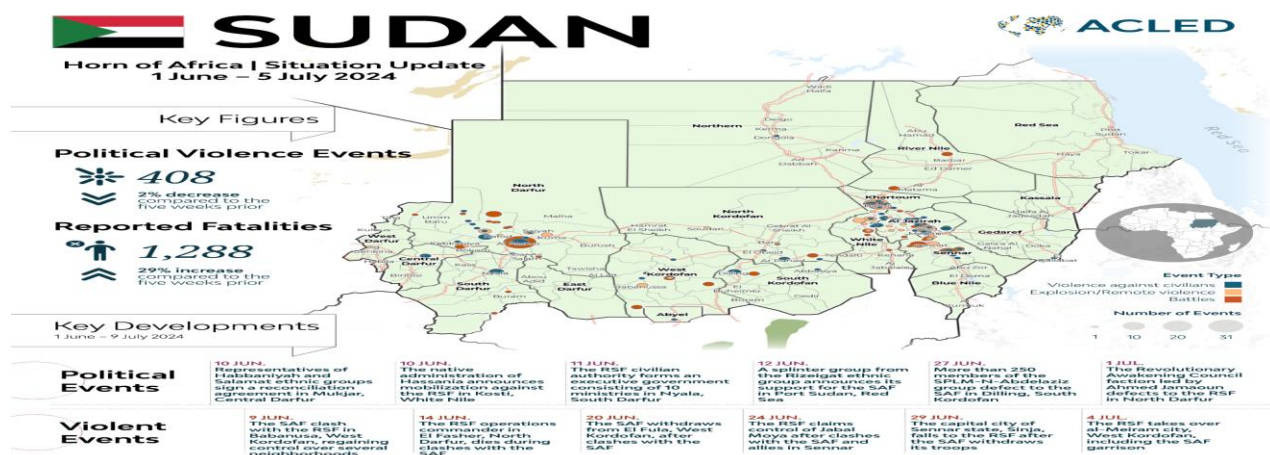
Furthermore, the RSF's control over Sennar state, which borders Ethiopia, poses a direct threat. This has already caused significant displacement within Sudan, with nearly 136,000 civilians fleeing Sennar since June 2024, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2024). This displacement, coupled with existing internal displacement within Ethiopia, exacerbates the humanitarian crisis. The influx of nearly 100,000 Sudanese refugees into Ethiopia as of 2024 (UNHCR, 2024; OCHA, 2024) further strains the country's resources. Ethiopia, already burdened by over 3 million internally displaced persons (IOM, 2024), faces significant challenges in accommodating this influx, particularly given its prior commitments to hosting refugees from other countries like Somalia, South Sudan, and Eritrea (UNHCR, 2024). This increased refugee influx may also overburden the health and social service systems of the federal and regional governments in Ethiopia.

The border tensions between Ethiopia and Sudan (ACLED, 2021) may escalate. Ethiopia's rivals, notably Egypt, may exploit the RSF's advance to destabilize Ethiopia's relations with the SAF by creating narratives that suggest Ethiopia is supporting the RSF or supplying them with weapons.

The conflict may further destabilize the region, especially in the Benishangul-Gumuz and Amhara regions of Ethiopia. In these areas, armed insurgents could have connections to foreign actors. Additionally, the ongoing instability in Sudan will offer armed groups a safe haven to smuggle arms, organize, and train. This could also create opportunities for Egypt, as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is located in the Benishangul-Gumuz region, which borders the areas where the RSF has advanced. Additionally, the conflict may increase the risk of terrorism and arms trafficking in the region, including drones.

Economically, the war significantly impacts bilateral trade between the two countries. It disrupts transportation corridors and critical cross-border infrastructure like roads and electric power grids and may increase informal trade and smuggling (Chatham House, 2024). Sudan's inability to pay the electric fees exceeding 90 million USD (Moges, 2024) has affected Ethiopia's power sector and strained relations with the government, as the government continues to supply electricity to Sudan despite the unpaid debts. It also brings a foreign policy dilemma between Khartoum and Port Sudan, humanitarian crises, refugee issues, and border security, which align with internal political pressure. It may also create a dilemma of national security and sovereignty of the neighbor state for Ethiopia. However, the attack near the Ethiopian border and the overall situation of the Sudanese conflict may also risk destabilizing Ethiopia and its relations with major powers, particularly Egypt. Egypt may initiate efforts to counter Ethiopia's role and initiatives in the region. Finally, the conflict and its advancement near the border may also affect the GERD negotiations and the regional stability where the dam is located.

Map 3: Active Battles from June to July 2024 near the Ethiopian Border



Source: ACLED (2024)⁶

Conclusion

Decades of conflict and political instability have plagued Sudan, a country with a rich cultural heritage and a strategically significant geographical position. The country's convoluted history,

⁶ <https://acleddata.com/2024/07/12/sudan-situation-update-july-2024-the-rsf-marches-on-sennar-and-west-kordofan/>.

marked by a legacy of coups and unsuccessful attempts at political transition, has created a challenging landscape for the establishment of democratic governance. The recent popular uprising that resulted in the ousting of President Omar Al-Bashir in 2019 offered a potential pathway for Sudan to move towards democracy. However, persistent militarized political culture and political instability, internal ideological divisions, and external influences have significantly impeded this transition. The conflict, primarily driven by internal failures, attracts regional and international state actors that influence its nature and duration. These actors, mainly the Gulf and great powers, with their diverse and sometimes contradictory ideological, political, and economic interests, along with existing internal differences, complicate the process of achieving stability. Major regional actors, mainly those from the Arab side of the Red Sea, play a significant role in the state's political and economic processes and are supported by competing great powers.

Despite Ethiopia's neutral stance in the conflict and its prioritization of a peaceful Sudan with a strong civilian government, the war in Sudan poses a national security threat to Ethiopia's current political reform process. This is due to arms trafficking, the potential for Sudan to serve as a breeding ground for insurgents given its lack of central authority to effectively control its territory, and the ongoing refugee crisis along with the existing border issues. Ethiopia, also, faces a dilemma safeguarding its national security and the sovereignty of its unstable neighbor. It also makes transnational crime monitoring very difficult unilaterally, bilaterally or in multilateral forms.

Thus, the Sudan conflict requires an integrated approach to reach at some level of an agreed upon settlement. This approach should incorporate active mediation, humanitarian assistance, partnerships, border security measures, African-focused strategies, and strategies focused on achieving a ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. To achieve this, Ethiopia and other regional states should either revitalize the IGAD Peace Initiative or bring the issue before the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) through agenda-setting mechanisms to initiate an AU-led peace initiative, with Ethiopia potentially leading the effort.

Any proposed solutions should build upon existing initiatives and efforts. This requires prioritizing collaboration with African countries, including members of the Peace and Security Council (PSC), countries bordering Sudan, and IGAD member states. Summit diplomacy should be emphasized to achieve this goal. Furthermore, active diplomacy should be directed towards Gulf countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, as well as international partners like the US, Russia, and China, and international inter-governmental organizations (IGOs).

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