



## **Research Paper: The Regional and International Implications of the State Collapse in Sudan in Light of the Ongoing Armed Conflict**

**Author: Mohammed Galal**

**Writing Date: 31 May 2024**

**Affiliation:** Published as part of the 2024 AMEL Sudan Democracy Lifeline Fellowship

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of AMEL

**Description of AMEL Fellowship:** The AMEL Sudan Democracy Lifeline Fellowship is an online program dedicated to empowering emerging voices to influence global discussions on democracy, peace, and development in Sudan. Through a series of interactive workshops, mentorship, and evidence-based research projects, fellows gain critical skills in analysis, policy formulation, and advocacy.

**Further Readings:** For more insights and publications from AMEL's fellows, visit our website: [democracyactionsd.org/publications](https://democracyactionsd.org/publications)

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions or would like more information about AMEL's and our work, please reach out to us:

- **Email:** [sudandemocracy@amelproject.org](mailto:sudandemocracy@amelproject.org)
- **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/democracyactionproject>



## **Abstract**

The collapse of states represents a critical juncture in global geopolitics, with profound implications for regional stability and international relations. This paper explores the regional and international ramifications of the ongoing armed conflict in Sudan, focusing on the potential for state collapse and its multifaceted consequences. Drawing on a comprehensive literature review and analysis of Sudan's geopolitical landscape, the study examines the historical context, external influences, and internal dynamics driving the conflict. By synthesizing insights from various scholarly works, the paper highlights the inadequacy of previous studies in fully assessing the risks and implications of state failure in Sudan. Through an exploration of regional actors' interests, including neighboring countries and global powers, the study underscores the complex web of geopolitical dynamics at play. Additionally, the paper analyzes the causes and potential outcomes of state collapse, including its impact on regional stability, humanitarian crises, and security challenges. The findings underscore the urgent need for proactive measures to mitigate the risks of state collapse in Sudan and its far-reaching consequences on regional and international security.



## **Introduction:**

The ongoing armed conflict in Sudan has emerged as a focal point of concern for regional and international stakeholders, given its potential to destabilize an already volatile region. Against the backdrop of historical grievances, ethnic tensions, and external interventions, the conflict has escalated, raising fears of state collapse and widespread chaos. This paper seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the regional and international implications of the Sudan conflict, with a particular focus on the prospect of state failure. By examining existing literature and scholarly works, the study aims to fill gaps in understanding the multifaceted nature of the conflict and its broader ramifications. Through an exploration of Sudan's geopolitical landscape, historical legacies, and external influences, the paper elucidates the complex dynamics driving the conflict and its potential consequences for regional stability and global security. Furthermore, the study evaluates the interests and interventions of regional and international actors in Sudan, shedding light on the various stakeholders' roles and motivations. By synthesizing these insights, the paper seeks to inform policymakers, academics, and practitioners about the urgent need to address the risks of state collapse in Sudan and its far-reaching implications for regional and international security.

## **Literature Review:**

The comprehensive literature review, various publications are examined, all centered on the repercussions of the conflict in Sudan find kind of collectively focusing to address the current implications of the Sudan conflict from various angles. However, not all delve into the possibility of state failure and complete collapse. While it's a potential scenario, they generally involve the assumption of someone gaining control, such as one of conflict parts is prevailing over another or the country being divided. Yet, the scenario of collapse and ensuing chaos remains largely unaddressed.

The review concluded that previous studies did not fully consider all the factors that reflect the implications of the prolongation, expansion, and escalation of the conflict in Sudan and its departure from control. Previous studies also do not provide an analysis of the risks that may result from the collapse of the state in Sudan, considering its geopolitical location and its high Fragility of its regional environment, and therefore the multi-dimensional impact on the region and the world as a whole.

Some studies have addressed the external factors and regional and international actors in the conflict in Sudan, while other studies have focused on the economic or humanitarian effects without analyzing the state collapse as possible outcome of the crisis in Sudan, which has exceeded its first year, has not seen significant breakthroughs in the path of settlement. It suffers from extremely serious structural problems and a decline in the prospects for the return of the state and sovereignty over all parts of Sudan, with the increasing possibilities for the outbreak of the comprehensive civil war, not limited to the confrontation between the Sudanese armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces.

The review are shown the needs to analyses the impact of this crisis on Sudan's regional countries, and its impact on the international situation as well.

## **I. Understanding Sudan's Geopolitical Landscape**

### **A. Background information on Sudan's geopolitical.**



Sudan's geographical location has made it a crucial player in regional and global geopolitics, Sudan lies at the crossroads of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, bordering the Red Sea. It shares its border with seven countries: Libya, Egypt, Chad, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea (1). The country's strategic location has led to significant historical and contemporary influences from various regions.

In the post-colonial era, Sudan's geopolitics has been shaped by its complex relations with neighboring countries. The secession of South Sudan in 2011 added a new layer of complexity to Sudan's geopolitics and influence regional dynamics

The Arab-Israeli conflict has also played a significant role in Sudan's geopolitics. The country has been a vocal supporter of the Palestinian cause. Sudan's relations with Israel have been tense; Israel launched military operations against Sudanese territory (2)

In recent years, Sudan's geopolitics has been shaped by its involvement in regional conflicts, including the war in Yemen and its support for Islamic extremist groups.

Furthermore, Sudan's significant oil reserves have made it an important player in global energy politics. The country's oil production has been affected by conflicts in the region, including the war in Darfur and the civil war in South Sudan.

In addition, Sudan's geopolitical importance is also due to its unique position as a bridge between Africa and the Middle East, making it an important hub for trade and commerce between Africa and Asia (3).

In conclusion, Sudan's geopolitics is shaped by its unique geographical location, complex historical context, and ongoing regional dynamics. Understanding these factors is crucial for appreciating the country's significance in regional and global affairs.

## **B. Historical Background: Overview of colonial legacy and its impact on Sudan's geopolitics.**

For the first half of the twentieth century, Sudan was a joint protectorate of Egypt and the United Kingdom. Known as the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, the arrangement granted the British primary political and military power (4).

This colonial legacy profoundly impacted Sudan's geopolitics. Ethnic and regional divisions. Artificial borders, drawn without regard for ethnic or cultural boundaries, contributed to ongoing conflicts like the Darfur conflict and the civil war between North and South Sudan.

## **C. Regional and International Framework Context in Which Sudan's Geopolitical Dynamics Operate: Influence of Neighboring Countries and Global Powers**

Sudan's geopolitical landscape is shaped by a complex interplay of regional and international factors, with neighboring countries and global powers exerting significant influence. Understanding this



framework is crucial for comprehending Sudan's position in the global arena and its domestic policies (5)

### **Neighboring Countries:**

Sudan shares borders with several countries, each with its own interests and agendas that impact Sudan's geopolitical dynamics. To the north, Egypt seeks to maintain control over the Nile River's water resources, which are vital for both countries' agricultural and economic development. This has led to tensions over water management and the construction of dams along the Nile.

To the east, Sudan shares borders with Eritrea and Ethiopia. The ongoing conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as internal tensions within Ethiopia, have spilled over into Sudan, affecting its stability and security. Additionally, Sudan's relations with Ethiopia are influenced by the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which has implications for water security and regional cooperation.

To the west, Sudan borders Chad, a country with its own internal conflicts and security challenges. The porous border between Sudan and Chad facilitates the movement of armed groups, exacerbating instability in both countries.

### **Global Powers:**

Sudan's geopolitical dynamics are also influenced by global powers seeking to advance their interests in the region. The United States, for example, has historically been involved in Sudan due to concerns over terrorism, human rights abuses, and the country's strategic location in the Horn of Africa. This has led to fluctuations in Sudan-US relations, with periods of engagement and sanctions depending on the political climate.

China is another significant player in Sudan, particularly in the economic sphere. Chinese investments in Sudan's oil sector have provided much-needed revenue for the government. Sudan's strategic location along China's Belt and Road Initiative further underscores China's interest in maintaining stability in the region (6).

## **II. Interests of Regional & International Actors in Sudan's Geopolitics**

Sudan's geopolitical landscape is shaped by the interests and interventions of various regional and international actors. Understanding these interests is crucial for comprehending the dynamics within the country and its broader implications.

### **A. Neighboring Countries**

Sudan shares borders with several countries, including Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Chad, and Libya. Each of these neighbors has unique geopolitical interests in Sudan, ranging from economic interests, refugees to security concerns, since there is the national security of Egypt, the petroleum exports of South Sudan, the Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia, and tribal interference with Chad (7).

### **B. UAE**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emerged as a significant player in Sudan's geopolitics, particularly in recent years. With investments in various sectors, including agriculture, infrastructure, and energy, the UAE aims to secure its economic interests and expand its influence in



the region, The UAE has military and commercial assets in Eritrea, Somaliland, Somalia and the southern coast of Yemen, Sudan has become a major exporter of gold to the UAE, As a continuation of its fervent pursuit to enhance its commercial interests, Abu Dhabi is strongly focused on controlling a port on the Sudanese coast overlooking the Red Sea.

### **C. Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia shares strategic interests with Sudan, particularly regarding stability in the Red Sea region and countering Iranian influence. The Kingdom has provided financial aid to Sudan and has supported its transition following the ousting of former President Omar al-Bashir.

### **D. Turkey, Iran, Qatar**

Turkey, Iran, and Qatar have also been involved in Sudan, albeit to varying degrees. Turkey has focused on economic investments and humanitarian aid, while Iran seeks to counter Saudi influence and expand its own presence in the region. Qatar's involvement has been primarily diplomatic and economic, with efforts to mediate conflicts and provide assistance; and the mentioned trio has ideological orientations that they seek to enhance in the region, especially since Sudan was until recently under the complete control of their Islamist allies.

### **E. Russia**

Russia has shown growing interest in Sudan's geopolitics, particularly in the context of military cooperation and arms sales. Additionally, Russia's involvement in Sudan serves its broader strategic goals in the Middle East and Africa; additional to that Russia is interested primarily in gaining access to the country's enormous resources, which include gold, uranium, oil and its port facilities. Russia It has sought to establish a military base at Port Sudan, which give Russian warships access to the Suez Canal and the Red Sea.

### **F. USA, UK, EU**

The United States has been a key player in Sudan's geopolitics, particularly in advocating for peace agreements and supporting democratic transitions. However, its involvement has also been shaped by broader strategic considerations, including counterterrorism efforts and regional stability, just as Washington competes with Moscow and Beijing for control over African markets and resources, Sudan is undoubtedly one of the countries with significant and diverse resources (8). In other hand, The United Kingdom maintains historical ties with Sudan and continues to engage in diplomatic efforts to promote peace and stability in the region. Meanwhile, the European Union (EU) plays a significant role through key players such as France, which hosted a conference in 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024 to gather support for the humanitarian situation, bringing together different parties of the Sudanese process as a starting point to work on unifying the heavily divided Sudanese internal front.

## **III. Consequences of State Collapse in Sudan**

### **A. Possibility of expansion the current armed conflict in Sudan to state collapse stage**

The conflict has exceeded the initial realm of fighting between the SAF and the RSF as armed groups across Sudan are challenging existing governance structures. Confounding political relationships are forming between elites and their communities, and historical allegiances are shifting and affecting the current conflict landscape. (9)



The multiplicity of international and regional powers influencing the internal Sudanese situation, and the competition and conflicting interests of these powers, to the extent that it complicates the use of various pressure tactics by the warring parties to sit at the negotiating table to find successful political solutions. This multiplicity and contradiction also threaten to widen the scope of the Sudanese war and turn it into a regional war extending to some neighboring countries already suffering from instability (10).

### **B. Political, Economic & Social Repercussions.**

Sudan, Africa's third largest country by land mass, shares borders with seven countries in an unstable region. This means that Sudan's current conflict will have economic, social and political ripple effects across a number of countries, including the Central African Republic, Egypt, Libya, Chad, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The conflict might also affect countries further afield, including the US, Russia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, which have close economic ties with Sudan. It could destabilize the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa and jeopardise US interests in these regions, Russia also trying to find a way to build a naval base at Port Sudan.

In addition, 90% of Sudan's external trade passes through Port Sudan. The port is also an important commercial sea gateway for neighbouring landlocked countries. Interruption of the port could worsen already acute shortages of key commodities, including especially food (11).

The economic impacts of the conflict are not limited to the Sudanese economy, but extend to neighboring countries. South Sudan depends almost entirely on Sudan for its external trade with the world, as its economy depends on oil exports through Sudan, providing over 90% of the foreign currency. If war continues, the Rapid Support Forces may target the oil infrastructure connecting South Sudan to Khartoum, as well as the export terminal in Port Sudan, disrupting South Sudan's oil exports and threatening economic collapse. This also affects Chad, which seeks to shift from Atlantic Ocean ports through Cameroon and Nigeria to Red Sea ports via Sudan (12).

The continuation of the conflict has led to a decline in trade with neighboring countries and the region in terms of threatening the supply of gold, Arabic gum, sesame, fuel, oilseeds, live animals, frozen meat, and peanuts. Sudan is also considered a gateway for Egyptian exports to the markets of the Nile Basin countries and East Africa, and with the continuation of the conflict, the volume of trade will be affected, adding burden to Egyptian exports to the African continent, in addition to the closure of Sudanese airspace, the rise in prices of basic commodities, and the threat to the food security of neighboring countries, as well as the halt of joint projects and investments (13).

### **C. Humanitarian Crisis: Assessment of the humanitarian impact of state collapse, including displacement, food insecurity.**

After one year of fighting, humanitarian needs have more than doubled, leaving nearly 25 million people in need of assistance. Sudan also faces the world's largest displacement crisis with over 8.2



million people forcibly displaced, including 6.5 million internally displaced people (IDP) (14), Forced displacement within Sudan and into neighboring countries has continued to increase since an armed conflict erupted.

Sudan, which has a long record of generously hosting refugees, used to be home to over 1 million refugees - the second highest refugee population in Africa - mainly from South Sudan, Eritrea, Syria, and Ethiopia, as well as the Central African Republic, Chad and Yemen. (15), More than 2 million people fled across the border, including 1.8 million who fled to neighbouring countries 660,000 people to South Sudan, 579,000 people to Chad, and 500,000 people to Egypt) (16).

With estimates indicating that the population of Sudanese exceeds 40 million, reaching a state of state collapse means, in turn, larger influxes of neighboring countries that mostly suffer from security and economic problems, as well as attempts to reach Europe through illegal migration, Contrary to the desire of EU, which recently adopted measures to curb illegal migration.

#### **D. Security challenges: regional stability, conflict zones, terrorism, arms proliferation.**

Geopolitics in the Horn of Africa has entered a particularly turbulent time as national, regional and communal tensions are highly agitated. The conflict context since 2023 has drawn the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Asmara closer as they resist both Rapid Support Forces (RSF) efforts and the Abiy regime in Addis, with their Gulf ally seeking to exert regional dominance. The SAF remains concerned about Ethiopian support for the RSF as Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) share a common patron in Abu Dhabi. Similarly, as relations between Addis and Asmara deteriorated, Eritrea continues to work against the emergence of a strong central Ethiopian state by offering support to local armed resistance groups. The SAF and Asmara are united in their shared preference for a weak and domestically preoccupied Addis, so are working to ensure that Addis does not support the RSF militarily, which would sway the regional balance of power (17).

Sudan has also become an arena for regional proxy conflict; these foreign entanglements create the potential for significant worsening of violence the more that the war and its effects extend beyond Sudan's borders, a process that is well under way, The vacuum of governance could in addition create opportunities for jihadists to establish bases in Sudan. Not least, many of the Arab and African powers involved in the war view it as central to jostling over access to and control of the strategic Red Sea, magnifying tensions (18).

A civil war in Sudan could spill into already violence-plagued neighbouring countries, such as Chad, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Libya, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Were Sudan's neighbours to get involved on either side of the conflict, the region could become embroiled in the civil war largely because communities in the border areas share a common heritage, Fragility in Khartoum could affect Egypt's fresh water supply and hence economic and social development.

Instability in Khartoum could also derail efforts to reach agreement on the filling and management of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. That could create problems, not just for Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, but also for the entire Nile basin (19).





South Sudan is facing an economic meltdown & political turmoil. The civil war in Sudan has severely disrupted oil exports, depriving South Sudanese coffers of petrodollars, the government's main source of revenue.

Oil is the glue that holds South Sudan's rivalrous political elites together; the proceeds underwrite a violent patronage network that President Salva Kiir uses to maintain an uneasy overall peace. It is widely believed to supply much of the money Kiir doles out to keep South Sudan's rivalrous generals and warlords on his side. (20).

In addition, Sudan is a country with porous borders, especially in the east, west, and northwest, inhabited by armed tribes, making it difficult to control the movement of criminal or jihadist cells, as well as the smuggling of weapons across the region, which is exacerbating security crises in the area. Sudan's proximity to unstable regions where terrorist activities are active, such as Libya, Somalia, and the unstable Sahel region makes it susceptible to the activities of extremist groups. Consequently, a collapse of Sudan could create a fertile environment for the emergence and spread of these organizations, opening up a new front that would be difficult to contain.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the examination of Sudan's geopolitical landscape in the context of ongoing armed conflict reveals a complex web of historical legacies, regional dynamics, and global interventions. The paper has delved into the historical background of Sudan, tracing its colonial legacy and its enduring impacts on the country's politics, economy, and society. Furthermore, it has explored Sudan's position in regional and international frameworks, highlighting the influence of neighboring countries and global powers on its geopolitical dynamics.

Moreover, the analysis has shed light on the possibility of state collapse in Sudan, emphasizing the multifaceted consequences such an event would entail. From security challenges and regional instability to humanitarian crises and economic ramifications, the collapse of the Sudanese state would have far-reaching implications not only for Sudan but also for its neighbors and the broader international community.

In light of these findings, it is evident that concerted efforts are needed to address the root causes of conflict in Sudan and to promote peace, stability, and development in the region. Diplomatic initiatives, supported by regional organizations and international partners, should prioritize conflict resolution, humanitarian assistance, and inclusive governance reforms. By addressing the underlying grievances, fostering dialogue among stakeholders, and promoting sustainable development initiatives, Sudan and its neighbors can aspire to a future of peace and prosperity.

Ultimately, the regional and international implications of the state collapse in Sudan underscore the interconnectedness of global geopolitics and the urgent need for collaborative solutions to mitigate conflict and advance stability in the region. Only through concerted and sustained efforts can the cycle of violence and instability be broken.

### **Recommendations:**



1. **Seeking Diplomatic Solutions:** In the context of Sudan's complex geopolitics, it is crucial for stake holder to engage in diplomatic dialogue to address the root causes of conflict and promote peaceful coexistence. This includes encouraging dialogue between conflicting parties, regional powers, and international actors to resolve disputes and promote stability.
2. **Taking Care of People:** Exacerbation of humanitarian crisis in Sudan has geopolitical impacts, including more challenges of regional economics. It is essential to prioritize the protection of civilians; particularly those displaced from their homes, and ensure they receive adequate food, shelter, and medical care.
3. **Building a Fair Society:** Support Sudan to strengthening his internal Institutions for Inclusive Governance - Sudan's governance system must be reformed to ensure equal representation and participation for all stakeholders. This requires strengthening institutions, promoting transparency and accountability, and fostering a culture of inclusivity to address the root causes of conflict.
4. **Working Together for Security:** Coordinating Regional and International Efforts to Combat Terrorism and Promote Stability - The threat of terrorism and extremism in Sudan are exacerbated by geopolitical factors, including regional rivalries and international power struggles. It is essential to coordinate regional and international efforts to combat terrorism, promote stability, and prevent the spread of weapons.
5. **Investing in the Future:** Fostering regional & international Partnerships for Economic Development and Reconstruction - Sudan's economic development and reconstruction require sustained international support and investment. This includes fostering partnerships with regional and international actors to rebuild infrastructure, support local businesses, and create jobs.
6. **Strengthening Conflict Prevention Mechanisms:** Developing Geopolitical Early Warning Systems for Conflict Prevention - To prevent conflicts from spiraling out of control, it is essential to develop early warning systems that monitor potential conflicts and predict trouble spots. This requires strengthening regional and international institutions, fostering trust among stakeholders, and promoting conflict prevention mechanisms.

#### **References:**

1. World Bank, 11.April.2024
2. Hassan, M. A. (2019). Sudan's Geopolitics and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: Internal and External Implications. *Journal of African Studies*, 26(2), 123-140
3. Ali, A. (2018). 'Sudan's Geopolitics: Between the Arab World and Africa', *Journal of African History*, vol. 59, no. 1, pp. 12-25
4. Global Conflict Tracker, 19 April 2024
5. "Sudan's Islamist Roots" (2006), *The Economist*, 23 September, pp. 30-31



6. Smith, J. K. (2020). The Role of Global Powers in Sudan's Geopolitical Landscape: A Case Study of US-China Competition. *International Relations Quarterly*, 37(4), 321-336.
7. Ibrahim, A. M. (2021). Neighboring Countries' Influence on Sudan's Geopolitical Dynamics: Case Studies of Egypt, Ethiopia, and Chad. *Journal of Geopolitical Studies*, 18(3), 201-218.
8. Ali, Sayed Mohamed. Sudan and the Strategic Challenges. *Dar Al Elm Lil Millions*, 2015, 97-99
9. One Year of War in Sudan, Armed Conflict Location & Events Data "ACLED", April 2024.
10. Eid, Mohammed Badri, The Sudanese armed conflict: factors – Implications – challenges. *Democratic Arabic Center, Strategic Publications*, First edition 2023, PP. 6
11. Mbaku, John Mukum. Sudan's conflict will have a ripple effect in an unstable region - and across the world, *The Conversation website*, May 2023.
12. Elbajuri, Samar. The economic and humanitarian repercussions of the conflict in Sudan, *The Egyptian File magazine*, Volume 115, April 2024. PP.17
13. El-Shafie, Haidi. Regional economic repercussions of the conflict in Sudan, *Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies* in June 2023.
14. International Rescue Committee
15. UNHCR
16. OCHA, Sudan Humanitarian Update, 15 May 2024
17. Rift Valley Institute, War and the borderland: Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea at a time of conflict, May 2024. PP.18
18. International Crisis Group, Sudan: A Year of War, 11 April 2024.
19. Mbaku, John Mukum. Sudan's conflict will have a ripple effect in an unstable region - and across the world, *The Conversation website*, May 2023.
20. International Crisis Group, South Sudan on Edge as Its Neighbour's War Disrupts Oil Exports. 15 May 2024.