

## **Policy Paper: Repositioning Sudan as a U.S. Foreign Policy Priority**

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**About Author:** An international development scholar-practitioner whose work and research engage with governance reform, civil society participation, and peacebuilding in fragile and post-conflict states. With a professional background spanning nearly a decade of program management, policy advocacy, and field-based research across Sudan and East Africa. His publications and policy work explore mechanisms for inclusive political transitions, locally led development, and accountability in international peace processes. His current research focuses on designing sustainable, community-driven models for post-war reconstruction and democratic governance in Sudan

## **Executive Summary**

Sudan is experiencing the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, a ruthless war between SAF and RSF that is characterized by atrocities and the displacement of millions of people. Although the U.S. acknowledges genocide in Darfur and has strategic interests in the Red Sea and counterterrorism activities, its policy is divided in part due to interbureaucratic divisions and frequently underprioritized. Although there have been renewed U.S. peace efforts of late, there is no general, coherent strategy, and this has been evidenced by the lack of sustained congressional focus. Using literature and interviewing the stakeholders, this paper examines the U.S. policy approach, outlines gaps, and suggests actionable advocacy mechanisms. The primary findings highlight the inconsistency of the policy, its interweaving with the overall regional alliances (e.g., Abraham Accords), and a lack of responsibility towards the external facilitators (e.g., UAE). The recommendations promote proactive political and diplomatic action, selective accountability, enhanced humanitarian response, and effective coalition building. More importantly, the paper presents the fluidity of the current U.S. policy as a strategic chance for the advocates to actively influence the decisive U.S. role, such that it supports the Sudanese sovereignty, unity, and welfare of its people.

## Introduction

The ongoing conflict in Sudan, spanning approximately two-and-a-half years, constitutes the largest humanitarian crisis globally. This war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has led to appalling human sufferings, featuring tens of thousands of deaths, more than 15 million displaced persons, and a bigger population over 26 million people in urgent need of humanitarian aid. Relying on the action by RSF in Darfur, the U.S. State Department officially declared that the actions by RSF involved genocide, which was characterised by widespread atrocities involving ethnic cleansing as well as sexual violence and starvation. What also makes the crisis worse is the continuous delivery of weapons by the external actors, which contributes to the violence and creates instability along the entire horn of Africa and the Red Sea<sup>1</sup>.

The U.S foreign policy in Africa has always been oriented towards humanitarian, counter-terrorism, and strategic rivalry issues with world adversaries. Sudan's role is understood as part of this larger pictures, which itself has been quite inconsistent in securing the regular attention of leaders at the highest level, though the geopolitical position of the region and the magnitude of the domestic crises in it are enough to keep it under the regular attention of such leaders persistently. As much as the U.S has been concerned and has taken part in different diplomatic strategies, its approach to the Sudan war has been viewed as cautious, fragmented, and inadequate<sup>2</sup>. One of the factors that bring about this disjointed and hazy direction of policy is the fact that the Sudan case tends to be divided between the Middle East and Africa bureaus of the U.S government, which in turn makes the policy lack coordination and strategic consistency. Recent declarations by the Trump administration of a renewed effort to end the conflict in Sudan such as the plans to hold a ministerial-level meeting with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, is an action that indicates renewed but perhaps complicated activity on the part of the Trump administration. Nevertheless, initial insights from the research interviews indicate that the U.S. government is still actively navigating and defining its long-term policy and strategic direction regarding Sudan.

The documented lack of sustained congressional focus on the crisis in Sudan necessitates a study into more effective advocacy mechanisms. Initial direct engagement with the U.S. Congress, including over 50 meetings across the Senate and House during the Sudan advocacy week in April, revealed that capturing the attention of legislative staffers remains challenging when solely presenting a just and fair case.

This observation underscores the urgent need, identified by the current study, to explain Sudan's crisis within the context of principal U.S. interests and associated concerns that resonate with congressmen. These key interests include Red Sea security, counterterrorism, and preventing Sudan from becoming a failed state.

The objective of the current research, therefore, became the development of alternative effective mechanisms for securing Congressional attention, requiring immersion in the context of rival issues and committee structures. Although advocacy efforts have produced considerable results, such as requesting and receiving two congressional hearings regarding Sudan, and securing more than five co-sponsors for

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<sup>1</sup> Hudson, C, "[Only Trump Can Make Peace in Sudan](#)", Foreign Policy, January 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Marks. S, "[The UAE in Africa. power, influence, and conflict](#)" Bloomberg, July 2025

key legislation, including the Stand Up for Sudan Act (H.R. 2059) and the U.S. Engagement in the Sudanese Peace Act (H.R. 1939), achieving a greater policy impact remains an ambitious goal.

This paper aims to critically analyze the current U.S. foreign policy approach to Sudan, identify key policy gaps, and propose actionable mechanisms to strategically elevate Sudan as a priority within U.S. foreign policy. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to shaping a more active and decisive U.S. role that champions Sudan's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the well-being of its people.

## **Background and Literature review**

In Sudan, the United States has been holding great strategic concerns especially boosted by the current war Security in the Red Sea is paramount, as the instability in Sudan will directly affect this strategic line of trade and energy in the world. The U.S. has a presence in some regions of the Red Sea such as in Egypt, Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, the fact that there is no major U.S. presence in Yemen and Somalia, as well as destabilization in these countries makes the U.S. strategic interests in the realm of the Red Sea quite unfortunate (Footnote 1). The war in Sudan has a direct threat of destabilizing the region further and it is potentially creating an arc of instability spanning the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea (1).

Terrorist activities are always an issue of concern in the U.S., as this existed in the history of Sudan with extremism groups. The war threatens to make Sudan a backbone of international terror activities once more and the region of Sahel, with its present instability, poses another challenge in dealing with international terrorism. There is also the thriving human as well as gold trafficking, and the same finances the warring parties. Gold especially experienced a higher traffic and profit since the onset of the war with the majority of it deemed to be on its way to the UAE demonstrating the unwarranted connection of external parties in the conflict economy. This cross-border business undermines both security and humanitarian efforts.(1,2)

U.S. policy towards Sudan has been strongly influenced by the transition in presidential administration and other priorities in general foreign policy. Sudan had the risk of being sidelined in the Trump administration in light of the increased attention paid to the Abraham Accords and the development of the alliance in the Middle East. Such reorientation took place even when the Gulf states, especially UAE, further entrenched themselves in Sudan, providing the RSF with logistical connections, field hospitals, and weapons, which they nonetheless have not admitted. Such resistance, seen as the U.S. unwillingness to have effective sanctions against its allies such as the UAE due to their overall strategic connections by members of Congress and other analysts, is bordering on complicity in the unfolding atrocities.

Previous attempts by the U.S. and its mediators to arrange peace in the region, including the Jeddah talks, have not produced much breakthrough in terms of settling ceasefires and binding political solutions. These may be explained by the reluctance of the belligerents to sincere engagement or devotion to peace, the fractured international reaction that made it possible to get a favourable decision and to conduct such a policy as the hunt of the forums by the SAF and the RSF, as well as the emphasis on military rather than inclusive peace processes, including the Sudanese civilian society. At the time, the appointment of the U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan by the Biden administration was reported to be welcomed, but it was technically sidelined since there was no high-level presidential involvement, and interest in the region was left to the American allies(2).

The recent events are an indication of increased U.S. diplomatic effort over Sudan where the current president Donald Trump, has shown commitment as his administration looks forward to "facilitating peace." His Special Adviser on African Affairs Massad Boulos has highlighted the crisis as the world greatest humanitarian disaster of the present time and now makes resolving all that a priority, recommending to denounce internal Sudanese dialog without intervention by outside influences and a timely humanitarian aid (2). A ministerial-level encounter between Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt (the so-called Quartet) in Washington is scheduled to re-engage with Sudan. This situation coincides with additional deliveries of U.S. aid and calls for unrestricted access to aid, enhanced civilian security, and the protection of humanitarian workers. While discussions of regional security between regional leaders such as Egypt are currently being discussed trilaterally with Sudan and Libya on the issues of regional stability and shared concerns of common security threats considering the reports of the seizure of the strategic triangular border area between and among these three countries by the RSF. This tentative yet genuine renewal of diplomatic activity sidelines the increasingly recognised regional dimensions of the crisis.

Another important element of U.S. strategic calculus is a relative cost benefit assessment of a passive and active action. The war has only escalated and had disastrous humanitarian effects due to what can only be described as a distracted, disjointed, and anaemic policy of the U.S at present. This passive strategy has also enabled external actors to support the war, resulting in Sudan effectively becoming an international arms market and a theatre of strategic diplomacy. The opportunity cost of inaction includes the potential for Sudan to become a failed state, serve as a base for terrorism, and experience increased degradation of the Red Sea. Although the paper does not mention explicitly that the long-term consequences of passive intervention (e.g., loss of human life, destabilization of a region, rise of extremism oppose, etc.) are by far greater than the direct costs of active diplomatic and punitive actions, it does suggest that in case Washington fails to respond urgently, all there will be left to do is a containment strategy of a disintegrating third-largest nation of Africa (1, 2). Giving Sudan its right of passage in an already complicated geopolitical situation is not an easy matter. However, this paper suggests that including Sudan in important American foreign policy issues, like Red Sea security and fighting terrorism, and getting key regional partners to help lessen involvement in the conflict could lead to more significant actions. It provides new perspectives of creating an interest-based alignment, which uses strategic interest as an anchor issue to generate continued attention and political will, and on how Sudanese actors and advocates can use that strategic positioning of the conflicts on issues that resonate in dominant U.S foreign policy discourses in order to spur greater and more effective U.S. action.

## **Methodology**

The study utilized a qualitative research design, based on a thorough background of the literature that is available both academically and as the reports by various policy organizations and the Congressional testimonies. The primary data was collected by using Seven semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (that included congressional staff, the Sudanese civil society leaders, humanitarian aid workers, and regional experts). To bring out the rich perceptions on U.S rule in Sudan, the interview questions had been framed to bring out depth considerations on policies in the U.S towards Sudan, success of the preceding mediation efforts, the role of regional players as well as suggestions on how it can actively engage in the future. Thematic analysis was used to create an overall understanding of the data; the technique involved a systematic process of organising the interview transcripts to highlight

specific details and common trends. The coding was further divided into more general themes based on the major research questions and the identified key policy areas. The organized action of this project was to help conceptualize different perspectives to guide constructive policy proposals that can help induce the formulation of a U.S policy which can be helpful to the sovereignty of the land, cohesion of the people and welfare of the nation of Sudan.

## **Interviewee Insights: U.S. Policy on Sudan**

The analysis of interviews with the variety of Sudanese and U.S.-based experts present a rather sophisticated and sometimes critical approach to the contemporary U.S. policy towards Sudan showing the lack of coherence and prioritisation and the inability to successfully utilize the power of the U.S. influence.

### ***U.S Interests and Prioritization:***

A former Sudanese Minister of Transport underlined the fact that the U.S policy in Sudan is mainly caused by its interests, especially related to the Red Sea, the countering of Iranian and Russian influence, as well as the war against human trafficking. He pointed to the feeling that the current conflict is a direct threat to the U.S interests, in particular, the Red Sea, gold smuggling and human trafficking. These interests were further developed by one of the Senior Fellows of a well-known strategic studies institution, and these were namely preventing Sudan from becoming a failed state, a terrorism camp and preventing a resurgence of the Islamist leadership. In spite of these great interests, some of the interviewees cited the fact that Sudan does not have rank high in the foreign policy agenda of the U.S. According to a congressional staffer, many members of the congress do not consider Sudan to be a level one crisis. This was confirmed by a Sudanese-American human rights activist, who revealed that Sudan has always been of low priority to the U.S, and most of the U.S involvement has not been proactive. An academic in a reputable law school opined that the U.S is recognised to be having the atrocities, but the political willpower to make concrete action is usually missing.

***Historical Context and Policy Shifts (including Abraham Accords):*** A former Sudanese Minister of Trade gave a historical background stating that the international relations between Sudan and the United States have been characterized by strained relationships and collaboration. The minister stated that the U.S had in the past been interacting with Sudan as far as the matters of debt relief and terrorism were concerned, ultimately leading to the fact that Sudan was to be taken out of the list of the State Sponsors of Terrorism. This participation was, however, in the form of transactions. One of them is the conditionalism of the Abraham Accords under the Trump presidency, in which the establishment of relations of normalization with Israel has been made dependent on the withdrawal of Sudan from the terror list and the reduction of sanctions retained by the U.S. The situation was termed by the minister as Sudan being given no leverage to withstand. A Sudanese-American human rights activist noted that there appears to be a disjuncture between the proclaimed Bush-era commitment to human rights and democracy and the Biden administration's response to Sudan; furthermore, politics often interferes with these proclaimed values, which are largely influenced by the geopolitics of relations with the signatories of the Abraham Accords. A Senior Fellow in one of the leading centres on strategic studies observed that the Trump administration is unable to achieve the revival of the Abraham Accords, and at the same time, it is able to witness the collapse and disintegration of one of its five signatories, insinuating that the stability of Sudan is linked to the achievement of the accords.

***Success of American Current Engagement and Mediation:*** Consensus was wide that the present U.S policy and mediations have been weak. One of the Sudan activists complained about the Jeddah talks, terming them as futile and not having an explicit peaceful vision. The activist reproached the U.S with the lack of involvement with the Sudanese civil society in such processes and provision of excessive legitimacy to the warring parties. To this effect, a Sudanese-American scholar noted that the ability of the U.S to realign its diplomatic policies to the changing ground realities, most especially in dealing with the atrocities of the RSF, has not been successful most of the time. A former Minister of Transport in Sudan further indicated that the non-interference of the U.S and the international community has strengthened the belligerent elements and lengthened the war.

***Contribution of External Influences and Accountability ("Name and Shame" UAE):*** The interviewees agreed that there is a negative influence of external players, especially the UAE, and the fact that they are a source of the conflict. Human rights campaigner in Sudan, a Sudanese-American stated how imperative it is that the U.S revives the case against the UAE regarding its widespread sponsorship of the RSF; and that the current U.S. policy seems not to be keen on making any significant impact toward such oppressor nations under the pretext of greater strategic ties. A scholar at one of the most recognized law schools displayed that though there is a substantial piece of evidence that the RSF has outsiders providing to it, even Chinese-manufactured arms, the U.S. is yet to take tough actions to interfere with the supply routes.

A report concerning the UAE and Sudan war gives a description of the wide logistical network of UAE in the nations surrounding Sudan, consisting of field hospitals and airfields in Chad and South Sudan, which is perceived to help in transferring military supplies to the RSF under the pretext of humanitarian activities (2). Another major investment made by the UAE in Africa especially to the Central African Republic in exchange of airfield access is represented in this document. More importantly, the report underscores the fact that the majority of the gold is exported by Sudan to the extent of 2 billion dollars annually where it is processed in the UAE (2).

Senior Fellow of one of the most renowned strategic studies centres leaves no doubt as to where he places responsibility regarding the war in Sudan, claiming that the UAE is the main foreign participant in that conflict, the prime military and political sponsor of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia (1). Interviewees and advocacy letters are very in support of namings and shames, in particular, the UAE according to its involvement. This involves the promotion of the halt of the American sale of arms and security coordination with the UAE. In addition to a governmental response, a researcher at a prominent law school expressed more precisely the idea to use available platforms to call upon its constituents to press international sports leagues (i.e., NBA), artists, and other cultural representatives (i.e., Disneyland Abu Dhabi) not to come to the UAE and cancel initiated activities, or planned engagements. This will influence the will of the UAE to have a good picture and attract economic advantage, which is regarded as a shift in distraction of its blanket violation of human rights and destabilizing activities.

***Challenges to Effective Advocacy (including "Africanism" and cross-crisis collaboration):*** Interviewees alluded to those issues in the form of a challenge to effective advocacy, either explicitly or implicitly. A tone sounded that tended to generalise the issue of Africa policy and does not see the peculiarities and acuteness of the crisis in Sudan. This implies that there is a requirement of advocacy that should focus more on the unique situation and needs of Sudan than on being a part of the larger and less situation-specific strategies that are applicable in the continent. It is notable that one human rights activist

among the Sudanese-Americans emphasized that the Sudanese crisis should be considered to be unique and urgent rather than another case of the so-called African problems.

Furthermore, one more strong mechanism that is identified is cross-crisis collaboration. One of the scholars of a very famous law school proposed to pursue the opportunities appearing on the national broadcasts (such as The Late Show, Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, and Fox News shows). The scholar has also suggested making connections with representatives of other large-scale crises, namely the ones dealing with Gaza and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The point is to be included into larger humanitarian and human right messages in order to use the platform, and existing advocacy infrastructure of larger campaigns to further introduce the same to people and political action on Sudan. It is this strategy that understands the fight to capture attention and focuses on promoting solidarity with the various humanitarian situations.

Generally, interviewee reports bring out an important time that the U.S. is still trying to work out its policy on Sudan. It is being said that the U.S. needs to get out of its present tentative and disjointed policy and put in place a more virile one, which is holistic and principled and that is in a real sense focused on civilian protection, atrocities accountability, and a democratic transition in Sudan.

## **Strategic Recommendations of the U.S. Policy Engagement in Sudan: A Framework of Co-ordinated Action**

The strategic recommendations below outline a framework for U.S. policy engagement in Sudan, based on insights from carefully examined interviewees and a thorough study of existing policy statements.

- ***Proactive Diplomatic and Political Advocacy:***

**Action:** Develop specific advocacy programs towards the Congress of the U.S and the Executive Branch. Here, these campaigns must tactically take advantage of the existing fluidity of the U.S. policy to blatantly raise the priority of Sudan by making it coincide with fundamental national interests of the U.S. This creates the need to promote the appointment of a **top-level Special Envoy, stand Up for Sudan Act (H.R. 2059)** to suspend U.S. arms sales to the UAE until it ends its support for the RSF. **Advance the U.S. engagement in the Sudanese Peace Act (H.R. 1939)** to outline a strategy that supports inclusive, civilian-led peace negotiations, protects civilians, facilitates humanitarian aid, and enforces sanctions against those who perpetrate atrocities. Moreover, essential questions for the Secretary of State must be prepared in advance and presented at any congressional hearing on the subject to help the administration spell out its overall policy and strategy towards Sudan.

**Coordination:** The Sudanese diaspora, and international advocacy groups are well placed to organize such direct lobbying activities and expert briefings to maintain a consistent message and have maximum impact in lobbying key diplomatic appointments and inclusive peace process.

- ***Compulsory Responsibility and Tactical Civic Demand:***

**Action:** Provide high-powered public education activities that would create a lot of pressure on the part of the constituents. This can be done through proactive “naming and shaming” of the external actors,

especially UAE, which is clearly shown to be contributing to the conflict, by strategically attacking their economic and reputational interests (e.g. tourism, sports investments). At the same time, put pressure on the strict implementation of sanctions against such enablers and demand justice of all those who commit atrocities.

**Coordination:** These ongoing public campaigns should be coordinated by international advocacy organizations and by the Sudanese diaspora, using international media outlets, grassroots/organizing (including mass citizen calls and emails to their representatives), and developing a substantial amount of pressure.

- ***Enhanced Humanitarian Action and Civilian Protection:***

**Action:** Support the need to restore and permanently fund U.S. humanitarian assistance to Sudan and prioritize direct support to local aid delivery mechanisms. This will also involve advocating for free humanitarian access, establishing effective civilian protection systems, and increasing the current UN arms embargo throughout Sudan.

**Coordination:** The presence of Sudanese advocates within Sudan is important in real-time documentation to inform and prioritize such humanitarian activities, and their efforts are facilitated and enhanced by international organizations.

- ***Fostering Unified Coalitions to the greater Effect:***

**Action:** Create a common platform of the Sudanese diaspora as well as civil society organizations to coordinate advocacy activities and promote the development of collective strategies. To gain more momentum and support, this initiative must proactively develop cross-crisis partnerships (e.g. with Gaza or Democratic Republic of Congo advocates) and involve various communities, and Black American advocacy coalitions to expand the base and raise awareness of the issue in Sudan.

**Coordination:** All the stakeholders committed to this collaborative framework are encouraged to play their role in this framework in order to have a smooth communication and coordination of strategic objectives to have a greater capacity of influencing the U.S. policy to have a more decisive and effective engagement in Sudan.

## **Conclusion**

The United States must respond to the crisis in Sudan in a timely manner by means of a coherent and principled manner. The present U.S. policy, according to the statements of interviewees, is in transition without a doubt, as illustrated by the recent news of a new effort to seek peace posed by the Trump administration (1). There seems to be a general feeling that Sudan is not given enough attention, which is why it becomes possible to worsen the conflict and cause tremendous suffering due to the activity of third parties, most prominently, the UAE. A transactional pattern of previous engagements, as seen in the case of the Abraham Accords impact on Sudan policy, points towards a necessity of a reconsideration of the U.S. pressure and its moral ramification.

As a bona fide servant of the sovereignty of Sudan, its unity and the welfare of the people, the U.S. should move out of its reactive and fragmented policy to proactive and decisive involvement. This will consist of a three-pronged advocacy plan: long-term congressional and administrative activism, the extensive use of the aggregated strength of the Sudanese diaspora and international advocacy organizations, strategic sanctions against conflict enablers (such as public national and international "name and shame" campaigns with entities such as those of the UAE tourist industry and sports investments), the provision of strong humanitarian assistance and civilian protection, and the creation of coalition ties with other crisis activists. Most importantly, this flexibility exhibited in the existing U.S. policy gives a special chance to the advocates to exert direct influence on its future orientation. It is important to appoint a powerful Special Envoy and to commit a civilian-led, inclusive peace process. Implementation of such mechanisms will allow the United States to make its impact, uphold its moral and legal responsibility and avert further disintegration of Sudan. And gaining a status of long-term generators of regional instability. Regional stability and indeed the future of Sudan is dependent on the renewed vigorous and dedicated focus by the U.S. to Peace and Justice.

"We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." – **Elie Wiesel**

"أي زول يشتغل شغلته" - الشهيد وليد عبدالرحمن

"Each person must carry out their role". Said by Martyr Waleed Abdelrahman

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