19. Geopolitics of a Fragile State at the Gateway of Sub-Saharan Africa: Multilayered Conflicts and Failed International Interventions in Sudan

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Abstract

Sudan has faced recurrent armed conflict since independence in 1956, culminating in today's devastating war. This article argues that a core driver of Sudan's chronic instability is the failure to consolidate a strong national identity, a weakness shaped by Sudan's geopolitical position as the gateway to Sub-Saharan Africa and centuries of layered external influences—from the Arab and Mediterranean worlds to European imperial rule. The state's vast, harsh geography and the persistent gap between Khartoum's claims of territorial sovereignty and peripheral realities have produced enduring center–periphery fractures, ethnic tensions, paramilitary proliferation, and governance deficits. The paper traces historical foundations from Nubian kingdoms through Turco-Egyptian and Anglo-Egyptian rule, highlighting how modern territorial sovereignty was imposed without cohesive nation-building. It then reviews UN and AU interventions (UNMIS, UNAMID, UNISFA, UNITAMS), concluding they delivered only temporary stabilization and ultimately failed to prevent renewed wars because they did not build durable political cohesion or legitimacy and often functioned as additional external influences. The post-2019 transition after al-Bashir's fall illustrates this fragility: military takeover in 2021 and the SAF–RSF war in 2023 shattered hopes for civilian rule and deepened territorial division, displacement, and atrocities. The article concludes that sustainable peace requires more than technical reforms: Sudan needs endogenous nation-building that strengthens cohesiveness and ownership beyond militartistic bargains and external templates.

Keywords: Cross-civilizational national identity, cohesiveness, Geopolitics of Sudan, Multilayered armed conflicts, Failed international interventions, Nation-building and state fragility

1. Introduction

The Republic of Sudan has experienced numerous tragic armed conflicts, including the deadly war that continues today. Although the ongoing conflict has dominated global attention in recent years, Sudan has in fact suffered from recurrent armed violence since its independence in 1956. The aspirations of the Sudanese people to build a unified and peaceful nation have repeatedly been betrayed by harsh realities.

The challenges to peacebuilding in Sudan are multifaceted, including ethnic confrontations, the proliferation of parallel paramilitary groups, poor natural resource management, the effects of climate change, such as desertification, excessive concentration of political power, and interventions by external actors. Histroically speaking, external influences on the geographical area of what we now understand as Sudan is complex, even compared to some other African nations where colonization was more monolitic. This chapter argues that Sudan's geopolitical nature as the gatewary to Sub-Saharan African in the face of external influences exhibited in its history is a hotbed of the fundamental problem of the lack of a strong national cohesiveness and consequently of its militaristristic political culture.

There have been various peacekeeping and political missions in Sudan, organized by the United Nations in cooperation with regional and sub-regional organizations—namely, UNMIS (United Nations Mission in Sudan), UNAMID (African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur), UNISFA (United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei), and UNITAMS (United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan). The penholder country in the UN Security Council has been the United Kingdom,

while South Sudan's penholder is the United States.[1] Despite the Anglo-American countries' interests and commitments in Sunda/South Sudan, it must be concluded that given the current circumstances in Sudan, all these missions would have to be regarded as failures in the sense that they could not keep or create peace. The article argues that those missions failed in the face of the difficulty of nation-building in Sudan by appearing in thie history of Sudan as additional external influences without achieving the goal of consolidating a strong national identity of a unified sstate necessary for long-term stability.

In describing the many difficulties, this article highlights one distinctive aspect concerning Sudan: its geopolitical nature as the gateway to Sub-Saharan Africa. The country lies on the eastern edge of the Sahara Desert along the Nile River and the Red Sea. This location defines Sudan's fundamental geopolitical character as the gateway to Sub-Saharan Africa, exposed to external influences—from the Arab world in the Middle East, the wider Mediterranean world represented historically by the Ottoman Empire, and later by European colonial powers such as the British Empire.

This does not mean that the vast territory of Sudan can be easily governed by regimes influenced by external powers. The severe natural environment of the Sahara has acted as a formidable barrier to rulers based around Khartoum along the Nile Valley. When the British Empire introduced the modern concept of territorial sovereignty, Sudan revealed fundamental difficulties in adapting to this legal principle. Even before independence, armed conflicts had already emerged—reflecting the intrinsic challenge of establishing effective national sovereignty across Sudan's extensive territory. The persistent gap between the assumption of territorial control exercised by the central government in Khartoum and the realities of peripheral communities has remained a defining feature of Sudanese statehood.

Khartoum, along with Port Sudan, was a creation of imperial powers that sought strategic hubs

[1] United Nations, "The Penholder System", https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Penholders.pdf (accessed 16 Nov. 2025).

for penetration into the African interior. The capital's political, economic, and cultural dominance has often manifested negatively through coups d'état and authoritarian regimes. The fall of President Omar al-Bashir's regime in 2019 was initially regarded as a hopeful step toward democratic transition, yet it ultimately resulted in military elites seizing power from civilian leaders in 2021 and the eruption of full-scale war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in 2023.

The weakness of the Sudanese state—characterized by fragility in Khartoum and vulnerability in other regions—reflects the complex geographical and historical foundations of the country. The task of nation-building in Sudan cannot be underestimated. The recurrence of armed conflict is symptomatic of the enduring difficulty in consolidating sovereignty and building a cohesive national identity. Unless a robust sense of national unity and ownership among the Sudanese people themselves is cultivated, the vision of a peaceful and stable Sudan will remain elusive.

From this perspective, this article examines the weakness of Sudanese statehood by tracing its historical record with particular emphasis on the evolution of its armed conflicts. The critical perspective is the lack of a strong national identity and cohesiveness necessary for long-term stability in Sudan, which has been caused by the long history of external influences as a result of Sudan's geopolitical nature as the gateway of Sub-Saharan Africa. By cohesiveness, this chapter means strong national unity beyond the dependence upon the rule of militaristic culture. Militaristc political culture is the cause and consequence of fragility of Sudan. By exploring such elements in the history of Sudan, this chapter seeks to analyze the geopolitical character of the Sudanese state in the 21st century and to answer a central question: *What does the lens of geopolitical theory reveal in the history of fragilty in Sudan?*

In exploring this question, in the next section the article first looks at the long history of Sudan well before the modern period. By doing so, this chapter shows that the nationally cohesive identity of Sudan was critically weak in the territory of what is now called Sudan due to consecutive territorial wars. The third section illustrates a series of United Nations peacekeeping and political missions, which might have sustained stages of termporary peace, but did not consolidate a strong national identity as a foundation of long-term durable stability. The fourth section summarizes the development of recent events in Sudan since 2019 to indicate the ongoing disruption of the country. They are the struggles

among various military and civilian factions, which eventually furthermore divide the country politically as well as territorially. The fifth section provides an overall decription of the failures of international interventions as another dimension of external influence in Sudan, which failied to consolidate, or even hindered, the consolidation of a strong national cohesiveness for long-term stability in the country.

2. Fragility of Sudan exhibited in History[2]

2-1 Pre-modern Period

Almost half of the territory of Sudan consists of desert or semi-desert.[3] Despite the image of Khartoum as the intersection of the Blue Nile and the White Nile as well as Port Sudan as a key trade port facing the Red Sea, the natural environment of the territory of Sudan is very severe for humans to inhabit. While there have been always human communities along the Nile in particular, it is difficult to identify one coherent political community throughout history in the area of contemporary Sudan. The Kingdom of Kush, an ancient kingdom in Nubia, centered along the Nile Valley in what is now northern Sudan and southern Egypt, reigned in the period from the 9th century BC to the 4th century AD. In almost the same geographical area in the upper Nile up to the point of Khartoum, there were Christian Nubian kingdoms in the period from the 4th century to the 15th century. The history of these kingdoms shows that the area of the upper Nile up to the point of current Khartoum is the backyard of Egypt, or the Mediterranean World, whose influence stretched along the Nile valley. The so-called Islamization was the process by

[2] The contents of this section overlaps with Hideaki Shinoda, "Sudan toiu kokka no saikouchiku: Jyusoutekifunsoutenkaichiiki niokeru heiwakoutikukatsudou (Re-building Sudan as a State: Peacebuilding Activities in a Multilayered Conflicts Area)" in Shin'ichi Takeuchi (ed.), *Sensou to heiwa no aida: funsouboppatsugo no Africa to kokusaishakai (Between War and Peace: Africa and International Society in Post-conflict Circumstances)* (IDE-JETRO Institute of Developing Economies, 2008), pp. 59-89.

[3] Sudan is "29 percent desert, 19 percent semi-desert, 27 percent low rainfall savanna, 14 percent high rainfall savanna, 10 percent flood regions and less than 1 percent mountain vegetation." Nasreldin Atiya Rahamtalla, "Causes and Economic Consequences of Desertification in Sudan", *International Journal of Social Sciences and Conflict Management*, Volume 3, Number 1, March 2018, p. 126. <https://casirmediapublishing.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Pages-126-135-2018-3033.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com>

which the Islamic religion spread in the African backyard of the African continent. With the decline of the Christian Nubian kingdoms, the current territory of Sudan was overrun by Bedouin tribes who introduced Islam and the Arabic language to the region in the 14th and 15th centuries. They came under attack from an invader to the south, the nomadic-pastoralist Funj, who established the Funj Sultanate from the area of contemporary Eritrea and northern Ethiopia to the part of Sudan along the Nile valley in 1504.

The Turco-Egyptian Sudan came in the 19th century, from 1820, as the first wave of modernity in the political system in Sudan. Following the brief period of the Mahdist State between 1885 and 1899, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan was established in 1899 and lasted until 1956. During such a period of rule by modern outside powers, Sudan shaped the current understanding of its territory without reaching a perfect manner of territorial sovereignty. But it was always difficult to fill in the gap between the theory of territorial sovereignty and the reality of fragility in ruling a vast area around the eastern edge of the Sahara Desert in face of the Nile River and the Red Sea.

2-2 The Origins of the Concept "Sudan"

The territorial boundaries of today's Sudan were forged by the armies of Egypt's Muhammad 'Alī dynasty, which conquered the Funj Sultanate (emerging along the Nile in the sixteenth century) anhd the Dār Fūr Sultanate (arising in the seventeenth century in the west) and in 1821 established "Egyptian Sudan." When Egypt later came under British protection, "Egyptian Sudan" fell under Anglo-Egyptian condominium rule. The drawing of state boundaries in the course of colonization was not unique to Sudan. Yet the fact that indigenous polities were conquered by neighboring Egypt—an Arab state—thereby producing "Egyptian Sudan," the prototype of modern Sudan, speaks to a political complexity that cannot be reduced to colonization alone.

In Arabic, *Bilād al-Sūdān* means "land of the blacks," referring historically to the belt south of the Sahara from the Atlantic to the Red Sea. The territory of today's Republic of the Sudan corresponds only to the eastern edge of this broader "historical Sudan"—that is, "Eastern Sudan." Prior to the nineteenth century, this "Eastern Sudan" contained Muslim sultanates that nonetheless ruled over "lands of the

blacks": in the north, the Funj Sultanate (whose rulers portrayed themselves as "Muslim/Arab," disparaging others as *kāfir*—unbelievers, i.e., "black"), and in the west, the Dār Fūr Sultanate (where Arabs of the "Fūr" dominated those labeled *fartīt*, "black"). Alongside these states existed smaller groups such as the Dinka, Shilluk, and Nuer (now in South Sudan), each with its own political culture.[4]

Within the vast "historical Sudan," adjacent to the Arab world and blending with Islamic culture, the "Eastern Sudan" became the site of what is now the Sudanese state. When this "Eastern Sudan" was conquered by Egypt—unambiguously an Arab state—an explicitly territorial framework, "Egyptian Sudan," was created: in effect, a Sudan under the direct purview of the Arab world.

Muhammad 'Alī rule brought major social change to "Eastern Sudan." Notably, heavy taxation precipitated the collapse of traditional village society in settled agricultural zones, while the development of transport routes spurred the opening and exploitation of the South. Displaced northern peasants moved southward and engaged in commerce and transport. These "*jallāba*" (itinerant traders) came into dense contact with western pastoralists (the *Baqqāra*) and with peoples of the South and the Nuba Mountains (*Jibāl al-Nūba*). Those from the West, South, and Nuba targeted by early slave-raiding under Muhammad 'Alī were incorporated into activities led by northerners, becoming slave soldiers in government forces (the *jihādiya*) or private militias of northern merchants known as *bāzinqir*.[5]

By the 1870s, the rising northern social forces of the *jallāba* frequently clashed with the Muhammad 'Alī government. Egypt's mounting debts led to Anglo-French control in 1876 and British occupation in 1882. Europeans, intervening in the administration of "Egyptian Sudan" under the banner of suppressing the slave trade, moved to quell *jallāba* revolts. Consequently, the *jallāba* assumed a political posture of resistance to European colonialism and became a catalyst for modern Sudanese national consciousness.

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[4] Yoshiko Kurita, "Higashi africa no syokuminchi bunkatsu to teikou: sudan's mahdi undou to Africa bunkatsu no mechanism (The Divisions of Colonies in East Africa: Sudan's Mahdi Movement and the Mechanism of the Divisions of Africa)" in Takashi Okakura (ed.), *Africa shi wo manabuhito notameni (For those who study African History)* (Sekaishisosha, 1996), p. 141.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145.

2-3 The Image of Sudan under the Mahdist State

The Mahdist movement, launched in 1881 by Muhammad Ahmad b. ʻAbd Allāh—who proclaimed himself the *Mahdī* ("the guided one")—quickly developed into a major social upheaval, aligning with anti-government forces such as the *jallāba*. The army led by this "black" *Mahdī* repelled government troops and in 1885 expelled the British, establishing an independent Mahdist state.

The ideological core of the Mahdist movement was Islamism with mystical elements. Yet its capacity to attract *jallāba* support must not be overlooked. The *jallāba* sought to overhaul the Muhammad ʻAlī regime, which was being subjugated by European powers. The movement symbolized an ideal type of "Sudanese" nation repelling European forces through the cultural resources of the Arab-Islamic world. In this sense, the Mahdist state was epoch-making as the first "Sudanese state" governed by "Sudanese," in the lineage of today's Sudan.

The Mahdist state fell in 1898 to the Anglo-Egyptian army equipped with modern machine guns. The nascent "Sudanese nation" was once again confined within Anglo-Egyptian rule. Determined to prevent "Egyptian Sudan" from emerging as a nation-state, Britain pursued measures—especially after 1924—to divide North and South. It is well known that this policy had a devastating effect, leaving independent Sudan in the latter half of the twentieth century exhausted by the North–South conflict. The collapse of the Mahdist state was also the failure of an autonomous Sudanese nation-state.

Attention must also be paid to internal contradictions within this first Sudanese nation-state. An "internal colonial" order was instituted,[6] and intense struggles over the structure of power emerged. While the regime's practical base lay in northern forces centered on the *jallāba*, Muhammad Ahmad himself, wary of their expansion, appointed as his omnipotent successor the Khalifa ʻAbdallāhi from the Taʻāisha clan of the western *Baqqāra*, just before his death in 1885.[7] Thus, even this primordial

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[6] Douglas H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars* (Oxford: James Currey), p. 7.

[7] Yoshiko Kurita, *Kindai sudan niokeru taiseihendou to minzokukeisei (Regime Changes and Nation-building in Modern Sudan)* (Otsukishoten, 2001), pp. 144–160.

"Sudanese nation-state" contained antagonistic forces rooted in complex regional, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

2-4 Independence and Confrontation

In the South, Britain adopted policies distinct from those in the North—policies that could be described as anti-Arab and anti-Islam—on the view that traditional tribal orders had been shattered through contact with the North via nineteenth-century slave-raiding and the Mahdist movement.[8] Exploiting this situation, armed rebellions incited by self-styled prophets recurred. Britain sought to stabilize security by rebuilding tribal order and strengthening chiefs, while greatly restricting northern merchants' commercial activities in the South. In fact, the centralized tribal systems Britain hoped for scarcely existed; many groups had distinctive, acephalous political structures.[9] British policy, therefore, met with limited success.

In the twentieth century, several bases for independence movements emerged in Khartoum, evolving in the North with anti-European characteristics. The "Graduates' General Congress," founded in 1938 and often seen as reviving national activism, consisted of alumni of secondary and higher schools and allied with merchant classes. Both were anti-British and favored promoting Arab-Islamic culture in the South. Urban intellectuals leading the post-war independence movement prioritized national unity, but with the North as its center. Among pro-unity forces arose not only movements seeking the "Arabization" and "Islamization" of the South but even calls for separating the "backward" and pro-British South from Sudan. By the time of the first elections in 1953, advocates of union with Egypt coalesced into the National Unionist Party.

By contrast, the Umma Party, led by al-Sayyid 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Mahdī of the Mahdi family, took a stance closer to the Sudan Government and espoused a moderate "autonomy" under the

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 271.

[9] See E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Pantianos Classics, 1940).

banner of "Sudanese nationalism." As the government shifted after World War II toward North–South integration, the Umma Party strengthened ties with the South. Opposing the "unionists," it advanced the slogan "Sudan for the Sudanese," asserting the existence of a "Sudanese identity" distinct from Arab/Egyptian identity—in effect countering "Arabness/Islam" with "Africanness."

In 1955, with the withdrawal of Anglo-Egyptian forces and the completion of "Sudanization" (transfer to local officials), parliament declared independence; Sudan became a sovereign state on 1 January 1956 under a National Unionist Party government. As Egypt moved toward neutrality, "unity" came to be interpreted not as union with Egypt but as internal Sudanese unity.

Post-independence Sudan repeatedly saw parliamentary democracy supplanted by military rule: a 1958 takeover by General Ibrāhīm ʻAbbūd; his regime toppled by the popular "October Revolution" in 1964; the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1966; a 1969 coup by Colonel Jaʻfar Muhammad Numayrī's "Free Officers"; the fall of the Numayrī regime in the 1985 *intifāḍa* and the return of parliamentary rule; then a 1989 coup led by Major ʻUmar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashīr, bringing to power a regime born from the National Islamic Front seeking an "Islamic state." Democratic forces were thus pushed back as the Khartoum regime intensified domestic militarization and ideological Islamization.

During this period, southern actors formed organizations such as the Sudan African National Union (SANU) and the Anyanya ("poison insect"). After 1964, they engaged northern parties in dialogue, including a 1965 "Round-Table Conference on the South," but with little result, contributing instead to the 1969 coup. SANU affirmed a non-Arab tradition of "African black identity," condemned the "Arab North" for the devastation inflicted by nineteenth-century slave-raiding, and argued that British rule had saved the South—hence the South should have separated at independence. Anyanya, sharing similar views, operated as a guerrilla force; with Israeli military support, it renamed itself the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement in 1971.

When the Numayrī regime partitioned the South and declared the application of Islamic law, armed resistance by the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/SPLM) intensified from

1983.[10] Led by John Garang, the SPLA/SPLM rejected narrow southern regionalism, sought the "true identity" of a "New Sudan," and advocated forging a distinct "Sudanese civilization".[11] While political, economic, and cultural cleavages between North and South clearly underlay the SPLA/SPLM's rise, the South—composed of diverse ethnic groups—lacked a singular identity independent of the Sudanese state; it existed as part of the broader problem of Sudan's state form. The SPLA/SPLM's splintering (mainstream Torit faction vs. Nasir faction), and its entanglement with the historically complex rivalries among Dinka, Nuer, and other peoples, generated wars both between the SPLA/SPLM and Khartoum and among armed groups within the South.[12] The internal Sudanese war also reflected external dynamics: the SPLA/SPLM's emergence was aided by Ethiopia's socialist regime under Mengistu Haile Mariam—opposed to Khartoum—and, behind it, the communist bloc; Ugandan political changes after its own civil war in the 1980s likewise affected Sudan. Meanwhile, innumerable killings and human rights abuses—often not reducible to formal warfare—spread across southern Sudan and neighboring states.[13]

A distinctive feature of Sudan's civil wars was the persistence of pre-modern practices: armed raids on villages, seizing women and children to be enslaved in the North, conducted over the long term within the North–South conflict.[14] Similar practices sometimes occurred among southern communities themselves.[15] Such phenomena—occurring outside "purely" military operations yet imaginable only in wartime—show how Sudan's war structure was deeply entwined with a distorted social order; the military confrontation between Khartoum and the SPLA/SPLM was only one element of a broader

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[10] Kurita, "Higashi africa", pp. 71–73.

[11] Eisei Kurimoto, "John Garang niokeru kojinshihai no kenkyu (A Study of 'Personal Rule' in the Case of John Garang" in Akira Sato (ed.), *Tochisha to kokka: Africa no kojinshihai saikou (Rulers and the State: Re-examining Personal Rule in Africa)* (Institute of Developing Economies, 2007), pp. 165-222; and John Garang, *The Call for Democracy in Sudan, edited and introduced by Mansour Khalid* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1992).

[12] Oystein H.Rolandsen, *Gurilla Government: Political Changes in the Southern Sudan during the 1990s* (Nordiska Africainstitutet, 2005).

[13] Kurita, "Higashi africa", pp. 71–73.

[14] Madut Jok, *War and Slavery in Sudan, Philadelphia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

[15] Kurita, "Higashi africa", pp. 71–73.

conflict configuration.[16]

Peace talks nevertheless advanced by focusing on concrete conflict parties. Mediation by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) since 1993, UN support led in 1997 by Special Adviser Mohamed Sahnoun, and U.S. diplomacy under President George W. Bush all contributed to the July 2002 Machakos Protocol—between Khartoum and the SPLA/SPLM—providing for a referendum on the South's status and setting principles of governance, transition, religion and the state, and self-determination. Later agreements on resource sharing (January 2004) and power sharing (May 2004) paved the way for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in Nairobi in January 2005.

To intensify the peace efforts, the UN Security Council established a special political mission, the UN Advance Mission in the Sudan (UNAMIS) by resolution 1547 of 11 June 2004. On 24 March 2005, the Security Council established the UN Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) by its resolution 1590 with up to 10,000 military personnel, up to 715 civilian police personnel, and an appropriate civilian component. The Council decided that the tasks of UNMIS, among others, would be: to support implementation of the CPA; to facilitate and coordinate, within its capabilities and in its areas of deployment, the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons and humanitarian assistance; to assist the parties in the mine action sector; to contribute towards international efforts to protect and promote human rights in the Sudan.

2-5 The Darfur Conflict

Another internal conflict became acute in western Sudan's Darfur region, long a focus of global humanitarian concern. Its background likewise involves ethnic tensions and complex political-economic issues, including competition over scarce resources in an austere environment. Darfur had suffered severe famine since the 1980s; the decline of arable land heightened social insecurity.[17] The post-2003 violence produced one of the world's largest humanitarian crises: more than 200,000 deaths and over

[16] Madut Jok, *Sudan: Race, Religion, and Violence* (Oneworld, 2007).
[17] Alex de Waal, *Femine That Kills; Darfur, Sudan* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

two million refugees and internally displaced persons.

In response to abuses by the government-backed Janjaweed militias, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A)—emerging from the Darfur Liberation Front—and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) launched attacks on government facilities in February 2003. Government forces deployed to Darfur and carried out repeated aerial bombardments. Widespread and protracted attacks by armed groups on villages, looting, and enslavement—phenomena not reducible to conventional warfare—were mediated by social formations that had evolved over long histories.[18] The structure of war in Darfur thus reflected a distorted social order rather than mere clashes among discrete armed groups, paralleling dynamics seen elsewhere in Sudan.

At the UN Security Council's request, a Commission of Inquiry was established in October 2004 to investigate violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and the possible commission of genocide. Its January 2005 report concluded that, while the Sudanese government had not committed genocide, government forces and allied Janjaweed had engaged in "killing of civilians, torture, enforced disappearances, destruction of villages, rape and other forms of sexual violence, indiscriminate attacks, pillaging, and forced displacement"; crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur were of gravity comparable to genocide. The Council referred the situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and, in March 2005, imposed sanctions on Sudan under Resolution 1591, following the July 2004 arms embargo under Resolution 1556.

A "Declaration of Principles on the Resolution of the Sudanese Political Crisis" was agreed in July 2005 between the government, the SLM/A, and JEM, with Khartoum pledging to disarm the Janjaweed. The Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) was then signed in May 2006 by the government, the SLM/A (Minni Minawi faction), and fifteen rebel groups, stipulating power sharing (including a presidential assistant post for the opposition), wealth sharing, a comprehensive ceasefire, security arrangements (Janjaweed disarmament; partial integration of rebel forces into the army/police), and a Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and

[18] Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, *Darfur: A Short History of a Long War* (Zed Books, 2005).

Consultation. However, JEM and the SLM/A (Abdelwahid al-Nur faction) refused to sign and continued hostilities under the National Redemption Front (NRF). Government-aligned forces also persisted in attacks, and by 2008 the conflict had intensified and spread, drawing in Chad and its opposition (United Nations 2008b; IRIN 2008a). A renewed peace process under a joint AU-UN mediator took place in Doha, Qatar, from 2010 through June 2011, producing a framework document. Intensive diplomatic and political efforts to bring the non-signatories into agreement with the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur continued.

The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) was founded in 2004, with a force of 150 troops, and by mid-2005 its size increased to about 7,000. Under UN Security Council Resolution 1564, AMIS was to closely and continuously liaise and coordinate with the UNMIS. Following the 16 November 2006 High-Level consultations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the UN prepared to deploy an unprecedented joint AU/UN peacekeeping operation in Darfur. Intensive diplomacy by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and several actors in the international community resulted in Sudan's acceptance of this force in June 2007. The African Union - UN hybrid operation in Darfur (UNAMID) was formally established by the Security Council on 31 July 2007 through the adoption of resolution 1769 under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. UNAMID formally took over from AMIS on 31 December 2007. UNAMID continued to operate on 31 December 2020.

2-6 Other Conflicts

From around 1994, eastern Sudan experienced a lower-intensity insurgency by anti-government groups. The region's low economic level and center–periphery disparities created fertile ground for conflict. Hundreds of thousands of refugees from Eritrea, whose relations with Khartoum were unstable, added to fragility.[19] Peace talks mediated by Eritrea from 2005 culminated in the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) in Asmara in October 2006 between the government and the Eastern Front (a

[19] Mohamed H.Fadlalla, *Short History of Sudan* (iUniverse, Inc., 2004)

coalition including the Beja Congress, active since 1994, and the Free Lions, emerging in 1999). Despite the coalition's limited capacity for coherent policy, it secured ministerial posts in the Government of National Unity and initiated DDR (disarmament, demobilization, reintegration) for its fighters.[20]

In the South, Uganda's rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) operated for years. The Government of Southern Sudan mediated talks between Uganda and the LRA, but the LRA rejected proposals in 2007 and progress stalled. The International Criminal Court (ICC), which had issued warrants against LRA leaders, was sometimes portrayed as an obstacle to negotiations. Whatever one's view of the ICC, the situation undeniably grew more complex.

3. Failed Peace Operations in Sudan

3-1 The CPA and UNMIS

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of January 2005 on the North–South conflict consolidated earlier agreements and protocols into a vast package: four protocols, two framework agreements, and two annexes—namely, the Machakos Protocol (July 2002); the Agreement on Power Sharing (May 2004); the Agreement on Wealth Sharing (January 2004); the Resolution of the Abyei Conflict (May 2004); the Resolution of Conflict in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States (May 2004); the Security Arrangements (September 2003); Annex I on permanent ceasefire and security arrangements (December 2004); and Annex II on implementation modalities and a global matrix (December 2004).

Under the CPA schedule, after six and a half years of interim arrangements under international monitoring, a referendum would determine whether the South would remain in a united Sudan or secede (monitoring would continue for six months afterward). Fifty percent of oil revenues from the South would accrue to the Government of Southern Sudan, with the rest distributed to the central government and northern states. Both the Government of Sudan and the SPLA/SPLM would maintain

[20] United Nations, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Sudan" UN Document, S/2007/42, 2007.

their respective forces, withdrawing gradually—government forces from the South, the SPLA from the North—while each would station units in unstable areas under separate command. Power sharing allocated cabinet posts in the Government of National Unity: 52% to the National Congress Party (NCP), 28% to the SPLM, and the remainder to other parties from North and South. The constitution was to be amended so that Islamic law applied only in the North.

The CPA thus functioned, first, as a ceasefire while deferring rapid unification into a single national army/state; programs common in other African peace operations, such as DDR, were to be phased in, as the formation of a unified national army was not yet a settled agenda. Second, various commissions created under the CPA were expected to foster confidence between the NCP and SPLM, charting a path toward future force integration and resolving outstanding territorial issues—such as Abyei—through confidence building during the interim. Third, as an interim stabilization and preparation for eventual unification, "power sharing" was adopted, allocating cabinet posts between the NCP and SPLM; a comparable "sharing" applied to resources. The CPA's hallmark was thus an attempt to manage struggles over power and resources through mechanisms of "sharing." It should be noted that the CPA rested on the assumption that trust built through sharing between Khartoum and the SPLM would consolidate Sudan as a unified state. A document representing an agreement between only two conflict parties was thus endowed with the grand significance of contributing to the unity of a vast and complex country.

Despite the establishment o UNMIS, the CPA process stalled. The death of the leader of SPLM, John Garang, on 30 July 2005 brought Salva Kiir to office as First Vice-President and President of the Government of Southern Sudan; perceived as more separatist than Garang, Kiir's rise altered the CPA's meaning. A "South–South Dialogue" aimed at coordinating southern factions quickly faltered. Numerous CPA-mandated bodies were established—e.g., the National Constitutional Review Commission, Joint Media Commission, Collaborative Committee of Other Armed Groups, Ceasefire Political Commission, Ceasefire Joint Military Committee, and Assessment and Evaluation Commission—but most functioned poorly. Implementation of the Abyei Boundary Commission's decision lagged; open clashes between government forces and the SPLA in May 2008 plunged Abyei

into crisis and led to UN staff withdrawal. In 2007, delays in northern troop withdrawals from the South prompted the SPLM's temporary withdrawal from the Government of National Unity. Although the SPLM returned, the CPA process was undeniably delayed: redeployment, border demarcation (including Abyei), election law, and census all progressed sluggishly.

UNMIS, expected to help break the deadlock, found its capacity stretched as the Darfur crisis intensified, undermining its ability to support the CPA process. Given Sudan's repeated experience of failed agreements,[21] there was no guarantee the CPA would be an exception. While many spoke as if southern independence after a referendum was inevitable, the priority question remained whether the CPA process would advance at all,[22] a concern widely shared among development actors.[23]

3-2 The DPA and UNAMID

International strategy took shape in deploying separate missions for Sudan's two major conflicts—the North–South war and Darfur—within a single state. Initially not self-evident, this approach evolved as Khartoum resisted UNMIS's involvement in Darfur under Jan Pronk, shifting attention toward a distinct Darfur mission. Thus, rather than a single comprehensive framework, peacebuilding in Sudan proceeded through multiple, differentiated operations.

A "Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement" between the government, SLM/A, and JEM was signed in April 2004, leading the African Union to deploy the African Union Mission in the Sudan (AMIS). UN Security Council resolutions throughout 2004 supported AU efforts, and a UN Support Cell was established in Addis Ababa. AMIS grew from an initial Rwandan deployment in mid-2004 to 465 personnel by October. The AU Peace and Security Council subsequently authorized expansions to 2,505 military and 815 police (October 2004), then to 6,171 military and 1,560 police (April 2005). Resolution 1679 (May 2006) called for preparing AMIS's transition to a UN operation, but Khartoum's resistance

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[21] Abel Alier, *Southern Sudan: Too Many Agreements Dishonoured* (Ithaca Press, 1991).

[22] International Crisis Group, *A Strategy for Comprehensive Peace in Sudan*, Africa Report N°130, 26 July 2007.

[23] IRIN, "Sudan: Peace Deal in 'Critical Phase' as Donors Meet," 6 May 2008.

delayed deployment for over a year; even after agreement, cooperation was limited and member-state contributions lagged.

The Secretary-General's July 2006 report recommended substantial troops and police for Darfur and urged Khartoum to accept a UN PKO. Resolution 1706 (31 August 2006) extended UNMIS's mandate to Darfur, authorizing support to the DPA and the humanitarian ceasefire; Chapter VII measures to protect civilians and the agreement's implementation; deployment of 17,300 troops and 3,300 police with 16 formed police units; and arrangements for transition from AMIS. "Light" and then "heavy" support packages to AMIS were planned, and tripartite cooperation among the UN, AU, and the Government of National Unity was affirmed.[24]

In January 2007, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Jan Eliasson as UN Special Envoy for Darfur to work with AU Envoy Salim Ahmed Salim. They sought an end to violence, expanded humanitarian access, and a peacebuilding framework including Darfur. Security Council Resolution 1769 (July 2007) established UNAMID—the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur—mandated to protect civilians and humanitarian workers (numbering roughly 12,000), advance the political process (including early DPA implementation), and promote human rights and the rule of law. Authorized at 20,000 troops and 6,000 police, UNAMID became one of the largest PKOs, though by April 2008 only 7,393 troops (and 128 observers) and 1,716 police were deployed, with 405 international staff, 730 national staff, and 134 UN Volunteers.

Events in 2008 illustrated regional spillover: rebels temporarily seized Chad's capital, reflecting Khartoum's irritation at Chad's hosting of Darfur refugees.[25] Chad's hostility toward Khartoum became evident. In May 2008, JEM attacked the outskirts of Khartoum itself. Darfur increasingly transcended regional confines (UN News 2008d). The UN established MINURCAT in September 2007 to protect refugees across Chad and the Central African Republic, further complicating the response. Both the

[24] United Nations, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Sudan" UN Document, S/2007/42, 2007.

[25] UN News, "Sudanese Rebel Groups Continue Recruiting Refugees in Camps in Chad, UN Reports," 16 May 2006; "Ban Ki-Moon Welcomes Reconciliation Agreement between Sudan and Chad," 7 May 2007; "Security Council Backs Initiative to Try to Resolve Chad's Worsening Crisis," 4 February 2008.

conflict dynamics and the number of UN missions multiplied.

3-3 International Strategy

Since the CPA, the international community has sought to align development assistance with support for its implementation. A Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) comprising the Khartoum government, SPLM, the World Bank, and UN agencies produced a March 2005 report identifying eight priority areas, including institution building/capacity development and governance/rule of law. It declared: "Now is the time to strengthen and expand the partnership among the CPA parties, civil society, and the international community to realize the vision of a unified Sudan".[26] But no clear evidence exist to show that international aid had effectively promoted not only peacebuilding but also the CPA process or a settlement in Darfur. Previously, large-scale humanitarian aid sometimes exacerbated Sudan's social contradictions.[27] From a long-term peacebuilding perspective, assistance must move beyond generic support to underdeveloped regions toward politically proactive measures to resolve and prevent social contradictions. However, the comprehensive political framework necessary for such aid was not in place.

The international community's approach was to bolster humanitarian and development aid via specialized agencies; to restore and maintain security through UNMIS and UNAMID; and, in parallel, to establish social order through the rule of law. The CPA and DPA embody a further strategy: stabilizing the political system through "sharing"—of power, resources, and religious authority—among parties and regions, thereby preserving the framework of a "unified state." In other words, to "make unity attractive," as the CPA puts it, wide-ranging peace missions have been deployed. But the moment of such attractive unity did not come.

South Sudan became independent in 2011. Attention of the international community poured into South Sudan. Sudan remained as such in the Northern part, still large, and without cohesive and

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[26] JAM Sudan, "Volume I, Synthesis, Framework for Sustained Peace, Development and Poverty Eradication," 2005, pp. 9, 14-16..

[27] Geoff Loane and Céline Moyroud (eds.), *Tracing Unintended Consequences of Humanitarian Assistance: The Case of Sudan* (Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2001).

attaractive national unity newly re-constructed. With the loss of the stable oil resources, Sudan became even more fragile economically. The long-term concentration of power of the Al-Bashir regime continued to deteriorate the frustration among citizens. The opportunity to rise up against the regime was lost around the time of the Arab Spring in the midst of the high tension at the time of the independence of South Sudan. But it was sought later as the frustration was not alleviated.

4. Political Transition and War after 2019

4-1 The Fall of the al-Bashir regime and the Political Transition

Sudan underwent a major political transformation in 2019 with the fall of Omar al-Bashir's regime after thirty years in power, following a broad popular revolution led largely by youth and professional groups within the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC). The uprising emerged in response to deepening economic and political deterioration. While Bashir's removal represented an important victory for popular aspirations, the subsequent transitional period faced substantial challenges, including power struggles, military interference, and severe economic crises—all of which impeded progress toward the revolution's goals. The Transitional Military Council (TMC), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, assumed authority alongside civilian forces demanding a fully civilian government.

A political and constitutional agreement was reached in August 2019 between the military and civilian actors, establishing a joint military–civilian Sovereign Council as the interim governing authority. Civilian groups continued to insist on full civilian rule, arguing that the military remained an extension of the former regime. The TMC leadership consisted of al-Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo ("Hemedti"), whom Human Rights Watch accuses of abuses in Darfur.[28] Although the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Hemedti, originated in Darfur, they rapidly expanded their presence into

[28] See Human Rights Watch. "Sudan: After Two Years of War, the World Must Act." March 28, 2025. < https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/28/two-years-conflict-sudan-marred-global-failure-protect-civilians> (accessed 16 Nov. 2025); and Human Rights Watch. "World Report 2025: Sudan" <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/sudan> (accessed 16 Nov. 2025).

Khartoum. Abdullah Hamdok was appointed Prime Minister, and the agreement outlined a transitional process culminating in democratic elections. However, this period was marked by persistent economic hardship and weak coordination between civilian and military leaders, while the RSF steadily increased its political and military influence.

Both sides ultimately agreed on a transitional government headed by the Sovereign Council.[29] A civilian cabinet was formed during the early phase of the transition, with plans for general elections and institutional rebuilding. Yet many provisions of the Constitutional Declaration remained symbolic and were never implemented due to conflicting interests and weak political will. Meanwhile, al-Burhan cultivated a broad alliance between the army and the RSF. His ties to Gulf military and security networks—particularly in Saudi Arabia and the UAE—were well established due to his role in the Yemen campaign, in which Hemedti also participated. Regional interventions became increasingly visible, particularly from Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Russia, each supporting different actors based on their strategic interests.[30]

During the sit-in preceding Bashir's downfall, the RSF operated alongside Sudanese security agencies and committed acts of violence against civilians in Khartoum. This culminated in the 3 June 2019 massacre at the army's General Command, when security forces—led by the RSF—opened fire on unarmed protesters, killing dozens, injuring hundreds, and committing widespread abuses, including sexual violence. A second violent crackdown occurred on 30 June as demonstrators protested the killings and renewed demands for civilian rule.

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[29] Comparative Constitutions Project (constituteproject.org.), "Sudan's Constitution of 2019," 27 Apr 2022 <https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Sudan_2019.pdf> (accessed 16 Nov. 2025).

[30] Emadeddin Badi, "Sudan is caught in a Web of External Interference. So Why is an International Response still Lacking?" *Atlantic Council*, 17 December 2024 https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/sudan-rsf-saf-uae-intervention (accessed 16 Nov. 2025); Steffen Krüger, Gregory Meyer, Nils Wörmer, "The Unnoticed War in Sudan", Konrad *Adenauer Stiftung*, 16 December 2024 https://www.kas.de/en/web/auslandsinformationen/artikel/detail/-/content/der-unbeachtete-krieg-im-sudan (accessed 16 Nov. 2025); and Ahmed Soliman and Suliman Baldo, "Gold and the War in Sudan: How Regional Solutions can support an End to Conflict," Chatham House, 26 March 2025 https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/03/gold-and-war-sudan (accessed 16 Nov. 2025).

The 3 June massacre, which resulted in more than 100 deaths and hundreds of injuries, halted negotiations temporarily and triggered strong international and African pressure to resume dialogue. Meanwhile, the FFC consolidated its position as the primary political representative of the popular movement. Mediation led by the African Union and Ethiopia resulted in the signing of the Constitutional Declaration on 17 August 2019, establishing the legal framework for the transitional period. The agreement created an 11-member Sovereign Council (five civilians, five military officers, and one mutually agreed member) and appointed Abdullah Hamdok as civilian prime minister. It also envisioned a transitional legislature, which was never formed due to political instability and the subsequent war. The transition was set for 39 months, ending with national elections.

The negotiations on national issues addressed some of the most complex questions, including state structure, citizenship, power and wealth sharing, diversity management, and transitional justice—covering accountability, victim compensation, and national reconciliation. The Agreement on National Issues comprised 30 articles forming the foundation for subsequent sectoral agreements. Article 2 mandated a 39-month transition period beginning from the signing of a peace agreement, requiring amendments to the Constitutional Declaration and an extension of the transition. The agreement allowed signatory actors to run in elections provided they resigned from government positions beforehand.

The agreement also required adjustments to the Sovereign Council and Cabinet to incorporate signatories of the Juba Peace Agreement, including adding new members and allocating legislative seats to participating groups.[31] Additional provisions included the implementation of transitional justice mechanisms, census administration, election preparation, establishment of specialized commissions, the convening of a national governance conference, and the drafting of a constitution. For Darfur, the power-sharing protocol required restoring the former regional administrative structure within sixty days

[31] United Nations, "Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan between the Transitional Government of Sudan and the Parties to Peace Process," 3 October 2020 <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/node/9903> (accessed 16 Nov. 2025).

of the Juba signing, unifying the five Darfur states into a single federal region and defining representation quotas for the transitional government, armed movements, and local stakeholders.

The RSF originated from earlier militias, many of which were associated with the Janjaweed in Darfur. Over time, the group evolved from an irregular militia into a semi-regular force. In 2017, it was formalized as an independent force nominally under the army but retaining its own command structure under Hemedti. The RSF's cohesion relied heavily on tribal networks, especially among the Rizeigat, Messiria, and Hawazma. It also participated in regional conflicts—notably the Yemen War as part of the Saudi–UAE coalition—which enhanced its capabilities and regional networks. Economically, the RSF built a powerful enterprise through commerce, investments, and control of gold resources, enabling it to exert political leverage during the transition. Its regional alliances, particularly with Gulf states, further strengthened its position, making it not only a security force but also a political competitor.

During the transition (2019–2021), Prime Minister Hamdok focused on economic reform and reintegrating Sudan into the international community, including securing Sudan's removal from the U.S. list of State Sponsors of Terrorism. The Juba Peace Agreement was signed in 2020 with armed groups from Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan. However, the government faced persistent challenges: ongoing economic deterioration, weak civilian institutions, and an intensifying power struggle between the military and civilian components.

4-2 The Military Takeover in 2021 and the Eruption of the War in 2023

These tensions culminated in a military coup on 25 October 2021, led by al-Burhan, which toppled Hamdok's government. Although Hemedti initially aligned with al-Burhan, their partnership quickly fractured due to competition over power, economic resources—including gold—and control of the security sector. Their temporary alliance, shaped by shared economic interests and joint enterprises, deteriorated as disagreements emerged over integrating the RSF into the national army. Civilian actors pushed for immediate integration, while the RSF sought to delay it to preserve autonomy. Economic hardship and public discontent further enabled the military to justify its return to power. Following the coup, tensions between the army and the RSF escalated steadily until they erupted into open conflict.

The dispute over integrating the RSF into the national army escalated into full-scale war in April 2023. Beneath this formal disagreement lay a deeper struggle for political and economic dominance. The war led to massive destruction in Khartoum and Darfur, near-total institutional collapse, and the displacement of millions. As the conflict unfolded, the RSF expanded its influence in western regions, while the army retained control over the east and north. Significant foreign interventions became increasingly evident, with the UAE reportedly supporting the RSF and Egypt leaning toward the army.

4-3 Escalating Military and Political Tensions in Sudan (2022–2025)

Between 2022 and the outbreak of war in April 2023, which continues to this day, tensions between the SAF and the RSF intensified, particularly over the integration of the RSF into the regular army. According to a report by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), disagreements over "security sector reform" were among the most contentious issues. SAF demanded the integration of RSF within two years, whereas RSF leader Hemeti insisted on a ten-year timeline. Disputes also arose over the chain of command: whether RSF would be subordinated under SAF leadership or remain under an independent civilian authority.[32]

These disputes translated into real-world clashes across multiple regions, particularly in Darfur, where the RSF attempted to seize strategic facilities and control key transit points. Despite numerous international efforts to broker a ceasefire, all initiatives failed to stabilize the security situation, culminating in a full-scale war in April 2023. Widespread fighting erupted in Khartoum and other cities, resulting in thousands of civilian casualties, mass displacement, a collapse of governmental functions, and a deepening humanitarian crisis. This situation prompted regional and international actors to initiate negotiations, including the Jeddah Peace Talks in May 2023.[33]

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[32] Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. "The Unnoticed War in Sudan," December 16, 2024 <https://www.kas.de/en/web/auslandsinformationen/artikel/detail/-/content/der-unbeachtete-krieg-im-sudan> (accessed 16 Nov. 2025).

[33] Relief Web, "Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan," 11 May 2023 <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/jeddah-declaration-commitment-protect-civilians-sudan> (accessed 16 Nov. 2025).

In May 2023, Saudi Arabia and the United States launched a negotiation platform in Jeddah to address the ongoing conflict between SAF and RSF. These talks aimed to achieve two main objectives: first, to secure a temporary ceasefire, and second, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians affected by the war. On 11 May 2023, both parties signed what became known as the "Jeddah Declaration", formally committing to protect civilians, respect international humanitarian law, ensure unhindered aid delivery, withdraw forces from civilian facilities such as hospitals, and restore essential services. The declaration also guaranteed voluntary civilian movement away from conflict zones, reflecting a focus on protecting populations rather than merely pausing hostilities. Subsequently, a temporary ceasefire agreement was signed on 20 May 2023, coming into effect 48 hours later, designed to last one week with the possibility of extension.

IGAD played a central mediating role between the Sovereign Council and RSF. In December 2023, IGAD held an extraordinary summit, emphasizing the need to pressure both parties to return to the political track and calling for coordination of regional mediation efforts to strengthen international legitimacy. According to UNU-CRIS reports, IGAD was formally mandated as the lead facilitator, in collaboration with Saudi Arabia and the United States through the Jeddah platform, with proposals to integrate the Jeddah process with IGAD/African Union mechanisms for more coordinated efforts.

The Sudanese conflict has also been heavily influenced by regional competition. Analyses indicate that Egypt backed SAF to safeguard its national security interests, particularly border protection and control over Nile water sources. Meanwhile, the UAE allegedly supported RSF both militarily and economically, including involvement in gold mining activities in RSF-controlled areas. Saudi Arabia acted as a mediator through the Jeddah platform but maintained strategic ties with both sides, raising questions about its neutrality. Russia sought to expand its influence via military and economic channels, including previous engagements by the Wagner Group. This convergence of economic, military, and strategic interests produced a fragmented mediation environment, where each regional actor pursued its own objectives, making fragile agreements prone to collapse and obstructing a comprehensive, sustainable resolution. Consequently, Sudan became a battlefield reflecting broader regional interests beyond the control of local actors.

Despite the Jeddah Declaration, the war between SAF and RSF has persisted for over three and a half years, and humanitarian conditions are deteriorating at an alarming rate. Epidemics have spread alongside acute shortages of food and medicine, resulting in rising mortality rates, while international and regional actors have struggled to find a lasting solution. The conflict has produced a major humanitarian catastrophe. Large portions of the population have been displaced internally, with reports indicating over 12 million internally displaced persons and millions more facing severe food insecurity. Airstrikes and ground fighting hinder aid delivery in some areas, while both parties impose bureaucratic or outright restrictions on humanitarian access, intensifying civilian suffering.[34]

The Soveregin Council on the side of SAF moved to Port Sudan to bring the functions of the central government to the town at the coast of the Red Sea. In 2025 the SAF regained the control of Khartoum, while it is not practically easy to bring back the government functions to the capital due to the occasional drone attacks on the capital. The RSF dominates almost all the major cities in Darfur including El-Fasher which it fully captured in November 2025. The fighting between two military organizations led to the territorial division of the country.

Both SAF and RSF have been accused of serious violations of international humanitarian law. According to Human Rights Watch, RSF has carried out mass killings, sexual violence, and looting in regions such as Gezira state, while SAF has conducted aerial attacks on civilian markets, most recently in El Fasher, Darfur. Reports from the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (Global R2P) indicates that some of these abuses have links to terrorist groups and may amount to crimes against humanity, including ethnic cleansing in Darfur.[35] The prevalence of mass killings, sexual violence, and deliberate destruction of infrastructure, making the establishment of a stable civilian state increasingly remote. Former Prime Minister Hamdock and other civilian fitures as well as civil society group fiture

[34] Human Rights Watch, "Sudan: Events of 2024" < https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/sudan> (accessed 16 Nov. 2025).

[35] Human Rights Watch, "Two Years Of Conflict In Sudan Marred By Global Failure To Protect Civilians: Joint NGO Letter to HRVP Kaja Kallas and EU Foreign Ministers", 28 March 2025 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/28/two-years-conflict-sudan-marred-global-failure-protect-civilians> (accessed 16 Nov. 2025).

took refuge outside of Sudan. They occasionally organize gatherings to protest against the ongoing crisis in Sudan, while being unable to create any change on the ground.

All of these intensify the disruption of Sudan, and seriously divide the country politically and territorially. The momentum to consolidate a strong national identity after the fall of the Al-Bashir regime had gone deeply.

4-4 The Closure of the UNITAMS

The United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) was established on 3 June 2020 by Security Council resolution 2524. UNITAMS' objective was to support Sudan's democratic transition, which started in 2019, in addition to the protection and promotion of human rights and sustainable peace, as well as to support peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements, peacebuilding, civilian protection and rule of law, and the mobilization of economic and development assistance and coordination of humanitarian assistance. However, aftr the eruption of the war in April 2023 and the request by the Sovereign Council for UNITAMS to leave, on 1 December 2023, the Security Council passed resolution 2715 to terminate UNITAMS.

Given that fact that UNITAMS was established in exchange for the withdrawal of UNAMID, its failure to keep peace, let alone to promote the democratic transition, was quite dramatic. The civilian mission was powerless in face of the confrontation of the two military organizations. UNITAMS was accused of taking sides, as it apparently sought to promote the civilian groups with Hamdok as their leader. UNITAMS failed to mobilize international backings to pressurize military figures to stay in the course of the political transition.

5. History of Sudan from the Perspective of Geopolitical Configurations

5-1 Liberal Intervention in the 21st Century tested in Sudan

There were some critical moments brought about by international interventions led by the United Nations in the 21st century. First, the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) led to the

formation of UNMIS in 2005; second, the independence of South Sudan led to the closure of UNMIS to form UNMISS (United Nations Mission in South Sudan) in 2011; third, the political transition after the fall of the regime of former President Al-Bashir was followed by the withdrawal of UNAMID and the introduction of UNITAMS in 2020. The interventions in Sudan were introduced in the period when the so-called "liberal peacebuilding" was at the peak. In 2000 the United Nations issued the Report of the Panel on International Peace Operations (so-called "Brahimi Report") to show how systematically peacekeeping and peacebuilding should be pursued to be strategic to be successful.[36] In 2001 the report on the responsibility to protect (R2P) appeared to stimulate debates about humanitarian intervention.[37] In the same year the US attacked Afghanistan and in 2003 it invaded Iraq, which led to the cases of gigantic nation-building respectively.

This was a new type of influence of external forces in Sudan, symbolized by the special trend in the 21st century. Each time international interventions brought reforms in line with the international standards of human rights, the rule of law, good governance, etc., based upon the ideas of liberal democracy. Whether this approach was reasonable remains questionable. In the end, international interventions could not fill the gap between such international standards and the reality on the ground.

In Sudan, the historical formation of the state occurred almost simultaneously with the proliferation of armed conflict within the state. In a country in such a condition, structures of conflict are deeply embedded within the very existence of the state; re-examining the conflict structure leads inevitably to re-examining the nature of the state. The history of Sudan as a state is replete with the struggles of people compelled to coexist within the institutional framework and material conditions of a modern political community. The external influences, including UN peacekeeping missions, reflect Sudan's geopolitical nature as the gateway of Sub-Saharan Africa. In consequence, the interventions did

[36] United Nations, "Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (Brahimi Report)" UN Document, A/55/305 S/2000/809, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/brahimi-report-0, accessed 30 September 2025.

[37] International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (International Development Research, 2001).

not sufficiently contribute to the consolidation of a strong national identity and cohesiveness of the Sudamese people necessary for long-term stability.

5-2 Social Fault Lines in a Region of Layered Conflicts

Sudan has become a country where cases of conflict and peacebuilding are stacked one upon another. This is no accident: the instability of the Sudanese state has allowed multiple conflicts to arise and evolve in a layered fashion.

Historically entrenched patterns of discriminatory relations and domination among identity groups, superimposed on regional disparities in economic and social development, have produced Sudan's multilayered conflict structure.[38] Many scholars emphasize that Sudan's conflicts cannot be reduced to simple antagonisms among parties but are embedded in complex social structures closely linked to historical and social factors such as colonization and enslavement.[39]

Takeuchi has analyzed African conflicts through the lens of the "Post-Colonial Patrimonial State" (PCPS): states that, despite formal sovereignty, lack internal political legitimacy; key offices are occupied by those bound to rulers through patron–client ties; and the state is run for private gain.[40] The argument reflects a recognition that, after decolonization, many African states retained distorted state foundations. Sudan, which likewise underwent decolonization in the twentieth century, fits this pattern in many respects—compounded, however, by even more severe historical structures of discrimination for a long history of external influences well before the its annexation in the British Empire. The lack of a strong national identity and cohesiveness prompts such a phenomenon of fragility of state formation. As in other African countries, and perhaps more so, peacebuilding in Sudan requires re-examining the very form of the state called "Sudan," given the lack of a strong national identity and cohesiveness of

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[38] Douglas H.Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars* (James Currey, 2003).

[39] *Ibid.*, Amir Idris, *Conflict and Politics of Identity in Sudan* (Macmillan, 2005); Flint and de Waal, *Darfur*; Jok, *Sudan*.

[40] Shin'ichi Takeuchi, *Kokka, bouryoku, seiji: asia africa no funsou wo megutte (The State, Violence, and Politics: On Conflicts in Asia and Africa)* (Institute of Developing Economies, 2003, p. 21.

the Sudamese people to consolidate long-term stability.

5-3 International Intervention as Another External Influence

In hindsight, the intervention through UNMIS was an attempt by a Western-led international coalition to impose a liberal form of governance on Sudan. This ostensibly benign intervention ended with South Sudan's independence, after which similar modes of engagement were transferred to the newly formed state. The UN–AU hybrid mission was intended to prevent the eruption of armed conflicts and mass atrocities. However, following UNAMID's withdrawal, a tragic war did in fact break out. The political mission of UNITAMS—under the penholdership of the United Kingdom in the UN Security Council—proved hopeless in the face of the rapidly deteriorating situation after UNAMID's closure. UNISFA has maintained relative calm in the Abyei Protocol Area between Sudan and South Sudan but has had no leverage over the broader circumstances within Sudan.

This chapter has argued that Sudan's geopolitical nature—as the gateway to Sub-Saharan Africa—has contributed to its chronic difficulty in forming a strong national identity capable of sustaining cohesion and stability across its vast territory. Unfortunately, Sudan's long history of war attests to this harsh reality. While UN-led international interventions may have achieved temporary and relative stability through de facto external imposition of internationally recognized governance norms, they have not succeeded in cultivating the strong national identity necessary for Sudan's long-term stability.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the paramount task of peacebuilding in Sudan is long postponed due to the lack of the country's strong national identity and cohesiveness. It first traced the historical background to illuminate the distinctive problems embedded in Sudan as a unified state. It then showed how these have manifested as multilayered conflict structures. This articles has also shown that the consecutive UN peacekeeping and political missions have failed to prevent the eruption of the ongoing political and military crises in Sudan, which are furthermore intensifiying the disruptions of the country

politically and territorially. The chapter has argued that the fundamental problem of the lack of a strong national identity and cohesiveness in Sudan was not well addressed and improved even thourgh international interventions which tended to stress liberal-democratic ideals like the rule of law, human rights promotion, etc. But the picture is even more fundamentally serious.

This chapter has suggested that fundamental advances will not result from technical refinements in planning political processes and international missions. What is required for constructive state formation for long-term stability in Sudan is to consolidate a strong national identity and promote cohesiveness of the Sudanese people without negative external influences. Institutional and technical reforms alone cannot secure durable peace and prevent the political and territorial disruptions of the coutry. This chapter reaffirms the indispensable importance of the consolidation of a strong national identity as the foundation of future peacebuilding efforts for the country.