

# SUDAN

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*Factions · Key Figures · Foreign Influence · Proxy Dynamics  
· Peace Efforts · Shifting Alliances*

**War Onset: 15 April 2023**

~150,00–  
200,000+

Est. Deaths

12M+

Internally  
Displaced

3.5M+

Refugees  
Abroad

2 Parallel  
Govts

As of 2026

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## 1. The Core Conflict: Background & Context

The Sudanese civil war began on **15 April 2023** as a structural collision between two competing military-capitalist enterprises masquerading as institutions of state. On one side: the **Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)**, the country's constitutional military. On the other: the **Rapid Support Forces (RSF)**, a paramilitary whose origins lie in the Janjaweed militias deployed in Darfur from 2003 and formally reconstituted by presidential decree in 2013. Both institutions were formally allied through the military junta that governed Sudan following the October 2021 coup, when SAF commander **General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan** and RSF commander **General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo ('Hemedti')** jointly dissolved the civilian-led transitional government.

The proximate trigger was a deepening dispute over terms for integrating the RSF into the regular armed forces — a requirement under the **Framework Agreement** signed in December 2022 with civilian actors. Hemedti demanded a ten-year integration timeline to preserve the RSF's operational autonomy and his personal financial empire; SAF-aligned hardliners and Islamist remnants of Omar al-Bashir's **National Congress Party (NCP)** pushed for rapid absorption or dissolution. Neither side was willing to accept subordination. On 15 April 2023, coordinated clashes erupted across Khartoum, Darfur, North Kordofan, and beyond — triggering what the UN has since described as the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

### Strategic Context

- **RSF economic base:** Rooted in artisanal gold mining (particularly Jebel Amer, North Darfur), cross-border trade networks, and commercial interests in the UAE. Hemedti weaponized these into a parallel state-within-a-state — controlling taxation, labor, and export routes independent of Khartoum, transforming it into a political and military financing machine.
- **SAF institutional base:** Controls formal state institutions, the air force, armored units, and the intelligence apparatus, underpinned by Sudan's deep-state Islamist networks. SAF's Military Industry Corporation, known as Masad or (DIS), generates an estimated \$2 billion annually across hundreds of subsidiaries, all exempt from civilian audits.
- **Geographic split:** The war has effectively divided Sudan into two administrative blocs: a SAF-controlled north and east (operating from Port Sudan, with the government issuing a return-to-Khartoum order in December 2025 following the army's recapture of the capital) and an RSF-dominated west (centered on Nyala, South Darfur), with active frontlines in Kordofan.
- **Partition trajectory:** By May 2026, both sides have proclaimed parallel civilian governments. The RSF's *Government of Peace and Unity* (Tasis coalition, proclaimed from Nyala) and the SAF's Port Sudan administration represent a de facto partition scenario with few historical precedents in the region— and none with comparable humanitarian scale.

## 2. SAF — Sudanese Armed Forces: Structure & Sub-Factions

The SAF is Sudan's constitutional military, encompassing the army, air force, navy, and intelligence units. Since the war's outbreak, it has functioned as both a military combatant and the de facto governing authority in eastern and northern Sudan, operating out of Port Sudan.

### Core SAF Composition

The SAF's backbone consists of professional army units, an air force that had provided critical aerial superiority, armored brigades, and intelligence services. However, it has been significantly augmented by ideologically motivated paramilitaries and armed movement signatories to the **2021 Juba Peace Agreement (JPA)**.

### SAF-Aligned Factions & Sub-Groups

Group / Actor	Role & Composition	Key Notes
<b>Justice &amp; Equality Movement (JEM)</b>	Darfur armed movement, largely Zaghawa; led by Gibril Ibrahim (Finance Minister). Their fighters are battle-hardened- decades of insurgency.	Formally allied with SAF since Nov 2023; pivotal in defending El Fasher. JEM retains an autonomous command structure independent of SAF chain of command.
<b>Sudan Liberation Movement/Army – Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM)</b>	Largely Zaghawa faction; controls territory in North Darfur. Led by Governor Minni Arko Minnawi.	<b>SAF Allied from Nov 2023.</b> Key force that held <b>El Fasher</b> . Minnawi retained ministerial post despite PM Idris's reform attempt in 2025.
<b>Sudan Liberation Movement – Mustafa Tambour (SLM-Tambour)</b>	Present primarily in Central Darfur; signatory to the <b>JPA</b> .	Allied with SAF from conflict onset; smaller operational capacity but adds political breadth to SAF's Darfuri coalition.
<b>Sudanese Alliance (SA)</b>	Led by (the late) Khamis Abdallah Abkar, West Darfur Governor, who was assassinated in June 2023. Execution attributed to <b>RSF commander Abdel Rahman Juma</b> .	Abkar's killing became a galvanizing symbol of RSF's genocidal campaign in West Darfur and accelerated the Darfuri armed groups' alignment with the SAF.
<b>Popular Defense Forces (PDF) / Islamist Militias</b>	Remnants of al-Bashir's Islamist mobilization apparatus, NCP-affiliated volunteer fighters.	Ideologically hostile to both RSF and civilian reformers; provide manpower & internal political cover for SAF hardliners; act as a veto bloc against peace negotiations.

Group / Actor	Role & Composition	Key Notes
<b>Sudan Shield Forces (SSF)</b> / <b>Abu Aqla Keikel's Forces</b>	Switched allegiances three times: Pro-SAF (Apr–Aug 2023) → Pro-RSF (Aug 2023–Oct 2024) → Returned to SAF (Oct 2024 onwards) in exchange for a military amnesty.	Instrumental in SAF recapture of <b>Gezira State</b> (Jan 2025). HRW documented atrocities by his fighters. EU sanctioned him in July 2025.
<b>Darfur Joint Forces (DJF) – residual</b>	Originally a coalition of JPA signatories mandated to protect civilians in Darfur; fractured in early 2024 when SLM-Transitional Council and GSLFA reaffirmed neutrality.	Originally deployed to protect El Fasher; Now effectively reduced to a SAF-aligned sub-coalition. The DJF's fracture clarified battle lines in North Darfur ahead of the prolonged El Fasher siege.
<b>Self-Defense Militias (Khartoum/Omdurman)</b>	Spontaneous armed neighborhood groups formed to resist RSF occupation of the capitals.	Not under formal SAF command. Played a significant role in urban combat during Khartoum's recapture. Represent the organic anti-RSF mobilization not captured by formal political structures.
<b>Zaghawa Native Administration</b>	Tribal authorities; declared war on RSF in April 2024 and offered RSF fighters an amnesty deadline.	Mobilized Zaghawa civilians in North Darfur; channels fighters to JEM and SLM-MM. A critical informal pillar of the SAF coalition's Darfuri ground presence.
<b>National Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) &amp; Eastern Corps</b>	Eastern Sudan armed factions with ethnically Beja-adjacent and Eritrean-border networks; backed by Eritrea.	Operate along Sudan's eastern frontier. Eritrea directly supports their recruitment, training, and deployment — described as an example of transnational ethnicity-based militarization.

### 3. RSF — Rapid Support Forces: Structure & Sub-Factions

The RSF was formally established by presidential decree in 2013 out of the Janjaweed militias used by the Bashir government to crush the Darfur insurgency. Under Hemedti's leadership, RSF transformed from a tribal Arab militia into a national paramilitary with business interests, diplomatic connections, and a recruitment apparatus. Its fighters are predominantly drawn from Arab nomadic tribes of Darfur (**particularly Rizeigat, of which Hemedti is a member**) and the broader Sahel.

In **February 2025**, the RSF and allied civilian forces signed a transitional charter in Nairobi, establishing the "**Government of Peace and Unity**" (**Tasis coalition**), based in Nyala — a direct bid for international legitimacy and a mechanism to purchase weapons, access aid, and negotiate as a proto-state entity. The formal parallel government structure was consolidated in July 2025. Both moves are not peace initiatives but *pre-negotiation legitimacy maneuvers*: the RSF is seeking to enter any future settlement as a government, not a rebel force.

## RSF-Aligned Factions & Sub-Groups

Group / Actor	Role & Composition	Key Notes
<b>Arab Tribal Militias (Darfur)</b>	Network of heavily armed Arab ethnic militias affiliated with Arab supremacist ideology; administered local communities across RSF-controlled Darfur.	Perpetrators of widespread ethnic violence against the Masalit and other non-Arab communities; directly responsible for mass atrocities in West Darfur, including the El Geneina massacres (April–June 2023).
<b>Musa Hilal's Revolutionary Awakening Council</b>	Mahamid tribal leader and former Janjaweed organizer; publicly announced support for SAF in April 2024—a significant defection signal from within the RSF's Arab coalition.	Historically central to RSF's origins; his shift to the SAF side reflects deepening tribal fractures. Initially neutral, then defected — weakening RSF's claim to unified Arab tribal support.
<b>Tamazuj Movement</b>	Small armed faction; joined the RSF coalition during the conflict.	Adds nominal political breadth to RSF's coalition claims but lacks significant military capacity.
<b>SPLM-N (al-Hilu) via Tasis</b>	Nuba Mountains insurgency (see Section 4). Shocked observers by joining the RSF-led Tasis coalition in <b>February 2025</b> .	Provides ideological diversity cover for RSF. Reported potential exit from Tasis (June 2025) over government post allocation disputes reveals the alliance's transactional fragility.
<b>Foreign Mercenaries</b>	Colombian fighters recruited via Abu Dhabi firm Global Security Services Group (GSSG); Chadian and Sahelian recruits; reports of Central African Republic-based fighters.	UAE-funded; deployed primarily in Darfur. Bolsters RSF's numerical strength and indicates UAE's direct investment.
<b>SLM-AW (Abdul Wahid al-Nur faction) — formerly courted</b>	Zaghawa-dominated SLM faction in Jebel Marra, North Darfur; led by Abdul Wahid al-Nur. Met Hemedti in Kenya (Jan 2024) as tactical discussions outreach.	Remains officially neutral; internal faction dynamics prevent formal alignment with either side. Controls mountainous terrain that neither the SAF nor RSF can easily occupy — a critical strategic asset.

## RSF Internal Fractures

The RSF is not a monolith. Significant internal fault lines have emerged that undermine the organization's operational coherence and long-term sustainability as a proto state:

- **Abu Aqla Keikel's defection (October 2024):** His return to the SAF directly contributed to the army's Gezira recapture in January 2025. His case reveals how internal RSF power

struggles, over access to resources and command positions, produce strategic consequences at the theatre level.

- **Command breakdown in Khartoum:** The loss of experienced field officers in the capital's extended urban battle weakened RSF operational cohesion in its most visible theatre like Khartoum and Omdurman.
- **Tasis coalition fragility:** SPLM-N's potential exit and government post disputes expose the inherent contradiction in the RSF trying to build a multi-ethnic civilian coalition while simultaneously conducting genocidal operations in Darfur.

#### 4. SPLM-N — Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North

The Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) is an armed movement rooted in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan and Blue Nile State. It emerged from the broader SPLM of South Sudan following the 2011 secession and has fought successive Khartoum governments for decades over rights, autonomy, and access to resources. The SPLM-N split in 2017 into two factions:

##### SPLM-N (Abdel Aziz al-Hilu) — South Kordofan / Nuba Mountains

- **Leadership:** Abdel Aziz al-Hilu, a veteran Nuba Mountains commander. His faction controls significant territory in South Kordofan.
- **Platform:** Demands a secular state and the right to self-determination for the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile — directly incompatible with SAF-aligned Islamist politics.
- **The February 2025 realignment:** The war's most ideologically dissonant realignment. Al-Hilu joined the RSF-led Tasis coalition in Nairobi — a force whose Darfuri Arab militias have perpetrated atrocities against communities similar to the Nuba. The alliance is best understood not as ideological convergence but as a tactical calculation: al-Hilu may be leveraging RSF proximity to extract post-war constitutional guarantees for the Nuba Mountains, recognizing that the SAF's Islamist core will never deliver them.
- **Fragility:** By June 2025, reports indicated SPLM-N may exit the Tasis coalition over government post allocation disputes. The alliance appears to be a marriage of desperation on both sides.
- **Battlefield:** SPLM-N forces clashed with both SAF and RSF at various points in South Kordofan. Dalang was a key contested battleground in January 2024.

##### SPLM-N (Malik Agar) — Blue Nile / Transitional Government

- **Leadership:** Malik Agar; signed the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement and participates in Sudan's transitional political framework.
- **Orientation:** Closer to the SAF-aligned establishment. Has not joined the RSF coalition.
- Significantly weaker militarily than al-Hilu's faction; functions primarily as a political actor within the **JPA** framework.

## 5. Civilian Factions & Political Forces

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Sudan's civilian political landscape, already fractured by the 2021 coup, has further splintered under the pressures of war. The critical structural feature is that *no civilian formation has successfully maintained credibility with both warring parties simultaneously* — each has been forced, through the logic of territorial control and external patronage, to choose a side or be rendered irrelevant.

### Taqaddum (Coordination of Civil Democratic Forces)

- The main umbrella civilian coalition, officially led by former Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. Formed in late 2023 to represent civilian and democratic forces.
- Taqaddum sought to act as an interlocutor between both warring parties, positioning itself as the legitimate voice of Sudanese civil society.
- The RSF signed a joint declaration with Taqaddum to work toward ending the war—but critics noted the RSF ignored its commitments almost immediately. This association damaged Taqaddum's credibility among pro-SAF Sudanese.
- Internal divisions paralyzed Taqaddum throughout 2024: disagreements centered on whether armed groups should shape Sudan's political future, and on engagement with competing mediation tracks.
- In **February 2025**, Taqaddum formally split: part of the coalition joined civilian administrations in RSF-controlled areas (becoming Tasis), while others broke away under Hamdok to form Sumoud. Taqaddum as an independent unified force effectively ceased to exist.

### Sumoud (Resilience) Democratic Alliance

- Led by former Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok; emerged as the successor to the anti-RSF, anti-exile faction of Taqaddum following the coalition's February 2025 fracture.
- Rejects both the SAF's militarized Port Sudan government and the RSF's parallel Nyala administration, calling instead for a negotiated ceasefire and an inclusive, civilian-led transitional government.
- Remains the most internationally recognized civilian coalition, actively engaging the AU and IGAD mediation processes and maintaining credibility in Western diplomatic circles.
- Despite this, the SAF routinely accuses Sumoud of harboring RSF sympathies — a charge rooted less in evidence, than in the SAF's broader hostility toward any civilian actor that refuses to endorse the military's political primacy.

## Tasis (Sudan Founding Alliance)

- Broke away from Taqaddum in February 2025, representing the faction of the civilian coalition that chose alignment with the RSF over continued opposition to both warring parties.
- Participated in the RSF's parallel government formally declared in July 2025, with Tasis figures taking positions within the Nyala-based administration.
- Its defection was a major credibility blow for Sudanese civilian unity, effectively splitting the country's civil society along the same east-west fault line as the military conflict.
- Rejected by the AU, IGAD, and most international actors as a genuinely independent civilian voice; viewed as a political instrument of the RSF rather than a representative democratic body.

**Note:** *The Tasis civilian wing is performing a function analogous to what Islamist networks performed for the SAF in earlier decades: providing a civilian facade for an armed actor that cannot obtain international legitimacy through military force alone.*

## Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) / Central Committee

- The original civilian coalition that led the 2019 revolution against Bashir and participated in the transitional government. It fractured before the war into competing blocs (Central Council vs. Democratic Bloc).
- Remains a significant nominal force but is contested by Taqaddum and Resistance Committees for genuine grassroots leadership.

## Sudan Charter Forces (SCF)

- Pro-SAF civilian political bloc formed in May 2024 as a direct counterweight to Taqaddum's growing association with the RSF.
- Includes the FFC Democratic Bloc and other parties aligned with the Port Sudan government.
- Widely perceived as the SAF's civilian legitimacy cover rather than an independent political actor — its formation closely tracked SAF's need for a civilian facade as international pressure over the war mounted.
- Neither AU nor IGAD recognizes it as a genuinely independent civilian voice, limiting its diplomatic utility beyond the SAF's own political framework.

## Resistance Committees (Lijan al-Muqawama)

- Grassroots neighborhood-level organizing bodies formed during the 2019 revolution. They became the most direct expression of civilian mobilization in Khartoum and other cities.
- Their slogan, *"No negotiation, no partnership, no legitimacy"*, articulated during the transition period, proved to be an accurate structural diagnosis of Sudan's dual-power arrangements.

- The SAF banned all resistance committees in January 2024, citing the security situation, a move that confirmed the army's hostility to genuine civil society oversight.
- Banned by the SAF in January 2024, confirming the army's hostility to genuine civil society oversight. Continued operating underground in parts of Khartoum, providing mutual aid, emergency coordination, and anti-RSF intelligence.
- The Resistance Committees' systematic exclusion from all formal negotiations — AU, IGAD, Jeddah, Quad, Quintet — is both the most consistent failure of international mediation and the most reliable indicator of the peace process's structural superficiality.

### National Congress Party (NCP) / Islamist Networks

- Remnants of Omar al-Bashir's ruling party. Though formally dissolved, NCP networks remain embedded in SAF structures, intelligence services, and business interests.
- Strongly oppose the RSF and any negotiated settlement that would give Hemedti political standing. This faction acts as a veto bloc within the SAF coalition, blocking compromise peace initiatives.
- Their influence helps explain the SAF's consistent refusal to enter serious mediation—NCP figures fear that a civilian-led transition would expose them to accountability.

### Democratic Bloc

- A political grouping that broke away from the FFC's Central Council faction, positioning itself closer to the SAF-backed government in Port Sudan.
- Participates in the Port Sudan political process and is considered part of the Sudan Charter Forces constellation, though it retains a nominally distinct identity.
- Its alignment with the SAF places it outside any credible neutral mediation track and limits its appeal to Sudanese constituencies in RSF-controlled or contested areas.

## 6. Key Individuals: Commanders, Politicians & Brokers

### SAF & the Defacto Government Side

Name	Title / Role	Side	Significance
<b>General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan</b>	SAF Commander-in-Chief / Head of State	SAF	Leads Sudan's internationally recognized government from Port Sudan (recent return to Khartoum). Veto power over all peace negotiations; consistently blocked SAF engagement in Jeddah, IGAD, and Geneva processes. In May 2025, he appointed Kamil Idris as PM but retained effective authority by overruling Idris's cabinet formation.

Name	Title / Role	Side	Significance
<b>General Shams al-Din Kabbashi</b>	SAF Deputy Commander	SAF	Conducted secret talks with Hemedti's brother in <b>Manama</b> (Jan 2024) without Burhan's knowledge; recalled after media exposure. Key military strategist. Represents a pragmatist current within the SAF that Burhan and the NCP hardliners have repeatedly marginalized.
<b>Kamil Idris</b>	Prime Minister (appointed May 2025)	SAF/Govt	Technocrat PM appointed by Burhan for the Port Sudan government. Sought to appoint independent cabinet but was overruled by Burhan, who kept armed faction leaders <b>Gibril Ibrahim</b> and <b>Minni Minnawi</b> in their posts, underscoring the priority of armed coalition management over governance. .
<b>Gibril Ibrahim</b>	Leader of JEM / Finance Minister	SAF-aligned	One of Sudan's most powerful armed actors. JEM fighters are essential for the SAF in Darfur. Refused to vacate his ministerial post. Controls significant gold and resource revenues that make him operationally indispensable and politically untouchable.
<b>Minni Arko Minnawi</b>	Governor of Darfur / SLM-MM Leader	SAF-aligned	Controls North Darfur territory and was militarily pivotal for El Fasher's defense. Like Gibril Ibrahim, retained his position against PM Idris's wishes. Commands Zaghawa fighters whose battlefield commitment is personal, not institutional.
<b>Gen. Yasir al-Atta</b>	Senior SAF Commander	SAF	Hardline figure who threatened in March 2025 that N'Djamena and Amdjarass airports in Chad would be "legitimate military targets." Publicly described UAE's president as "the devil of Arabs" — a statement that encapsulates the SAF hardliner faction's posture toward the conflict's external architecture.

### RSF & Tasis Side

Name	Title / Role	Side	Significance
<b>General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo ('Hemedti')</b>	RSF Commander / Tasis Government Head	<b>RSF</b>	Sudan's most powerful military-economic actor. Built power through Darfur gold mines, UAE connections, and two decades of calculated political positioning. Central figure in the 2021 coup. Now heads the RSF-proclaimed parallel government from Nyala while conducting active international diplomacy.

Name	Title / Role	Side	Significance
<b>Abdelrahim Dagalo</b>	RSF Deputy Commander / Hemedti's brother	<b>RSF</b>	Participated in the secret Manama talks (January 2024) with SAF's Kabbashi. Key operational commander and Hemedti's political enforcer. His family-based command structure reflects the RSF's fundamental nature as a personal empire, not a professional institution.
<b>Abdel Aziz al-Hilu</b>	SPLM-N Commander / Tasis Co-Signatory	<b>RSF/Tasis</b>	Nuba Mountains insurgent leader who joined the RSF-led Tasis coalition in Feb 2025. His inclusion gave the RSF political cover as a multi-regional government. May exit coalition over post-allocation disputes.
<b>Abu Aqla Keikel</b>	Militia Commander (defected from RSF)	<b>Defector→ SAF</b>	Former RSF commander who switched to SAF in Oct 2024. His forces aided SAF's Gezira recapture. HRW and Al Jazeera documented atrocities by his fighters. EU sanctioned him in July 2025.
<b>Musa Hilal</b>	Mahamid tribal chief / Revolutionary Awakening Council	<b>Shocking→ SAF</b>	Former Janjaweed organizer who publicly supported SAF in April 2024, marking a tribal split within the RSF's Arab coalition. His shift signals that RSF's claim to unified Darfuri Arab support is more fragile than its territorial control implies.

### Civilian & Diplomatic Figures

Name	Title / Role	Side	Significance
<b>Abdalla Hamdok</b>	Former PM / Taqaddum Leader	Civilian	Prime minister ousted in 2021 coup; led Taqaddum coalition, now Soumoud. Positioned as potential post-war civilian leader. The RSF sought his international legitimacy through the Taqaddum declaration; his association with the RSF alienated pro-SAF forces without securing meaningful RSF compliance.
<b>Khamis Abdallah Abkar</b>	Late West Darfur Governor (assassinated June 2023)	Civilian/SAF-allied	Assassinated June 2023, by RSF. Had publicly accused RSF of genocidal attacks against Masalit. Death became a galvanizing symbol for anti-RSF sentiment and catalyzed the Darfuri armed movements' alignment with the SAF.

Name	Title / Role	Side	Significance
<b>Abdul Wahid al-Nur</b>	SLM-AW Leader	Neutral/Courted by RSF	Long-standing Darfuri rebel leader controlling Jebel Marra. Famously refused all peace deals; met Hemedti in Kenya Jan 2024 for tactical discussions. Remains nominally neutral. His control of mountainous terrain gives him strategic leverage neither side can easily dislodge.
<b>Alaa Nugud</b>	Tasis Spokesman	RSF/Tasis	Civilian face of the RSF-led Tasis coalition. Portrays Tasis as cornerstone of a 'New Sudan' protecting marginalized communities — a narrative that sits uncomfortably against the RSF's documented atrocities against those same communities.
<b>Mohamed Ibn Chambas</b>	AU High-Level Panel Chair	Mediator	Chaired the AU's peace panel; has described the humanitarian crisis as one of the worst globally. Consistently calls on both sides to cease military solutions — to little effect given the structural incentives of the war economy.
<b>Volker Perthes</b>	Former UN Special Envoy (resigned June 2024)	International	German diplomat who led the UN's Sudan mission until resigning in June 2024 under SAF pressure, which accused him of bias toward the RSF. His resignation confirmed the pattern: any international actor who acknowledges RSF complexity rather than treating it as a pure spoiler is accused of complicity.
<b>Pekka Haavisto</b>	UN SG's Personal Envoy for Sudan (2025–present)	International	Former Finnish Foreign Minister appointed by the UN Secretary-General to bridge the Quad and Quintet frameworks. Faces the same structural constraints as Perthes: neither warring party wants a neutral mediator.

## 7. External Actors & Their Roles

The Sudan war has become one of the most heavily externally financed conflicts in recent African history, with at least half a dozen states providing weapons, financing, or diplomatic cover to one or both belligerents. This external dimension is a primary reason for the conflict's intractability: without the sustained arms pipelines, no military stalemate could persist at this scale.

## United Arab Emirates (UAE) — Primary RSF Backer

- The UAE is the most consequential external actor in the conflict. The architecture of UAE support encompasses weapons, drones, financing, mercenaries, and diplomatic legitimation.
- Investigations by Amnesty International (Nov 2024) confirmed UAE-manufactured Nimr armored personnel carriers and FH-95 drones being used by the RSF—a direct violation of the UN arms embargo on Sudan.
- Kenyan-labelled ammunition crates were found in RSF depots (Bellingcat, June 2025), raising questions about a Kenyan arms conduit suspected to be UAE-funded.
- The Conflict Observatory, UN Panel of Experts, Amnesty International, and Reuters all independently corroborated that weapons were transferred from the UAE to the RSF through Amdjarass airport in Chad — with at least 86 flights from UAE to Amdjarass documented, three-quarters operated by carriers previously linked to arms trafficking.
- RSF gold from Darfur mines was funneled through UAE, with Hemedti's financial empire centered in Dubai. The UAE gained preferential access to Sudan's gold and mineral resources in exchange. The UAE-owned company **Emiral Resources** holds a majority stake in Sudan's largest gold mine (the Kush mine), administered by the SAF — a structural contradiction that reinforces both sides' financial dependence on Emirati markets.
- Colombian mercenaries recruited through an Abu Dhabi firm were deployed to Darfur in November 2024 as paid RSF reinforcements - the most concrete evidence of direct UAE operational involvement.
- **March 2025 — Sudan v. UAE at the International Court of Justice:** On 6 March 2025, Sudan filed proceedings against the UAE at the ICJ, alleging complicity in genocide against the Masalit under the Genocide Convention. The case cited UAE's sustained financial, political, and military support for the RSF. The ICJ dismissed the case on 5 May 2025 (9–7 vote) on jurisdictional grounds — the UAE holds a reservation to Article IX of the Genocide Convention, the provision granting the Court jurisdiction over inter-state genocide disputes. The dismissal does not constitute an acquittal; six dissenting judges argued the Court's rushed ruling effectively punished Sudan for seeking provisional measures. Sudan stated it will continue pursuing accountability through other mechanisms.
- **May 2025 — RSF drone strikes on Port Sudan and diplomatic rupture:** Beginning 4 May 2025, the RSF launched multiple waves of drone attacks on Port Sudan — the first time the RSF struck the de facto SAF capital. Attacks targeted Osman Digna Airbase, fuel depots, and the international airport. On 6 May 2025, Sudan's government severed all diplomatic and economic ties with the UAE, accusing it of direct responsibility. This represented a significant escalation in the SAF-UAE rupture, though its economic logic was self-undermining: Sudan's SAF-administered areas rely heavily on UAE gold markets and banking infrastructure.
- The UAE hosted the February 2025 High-Level Humanitarian Conference in Addis Ababa—widely seen as an RSF legitimation exercise—alongside the AU and IGAD.

- **U.S. Congress response:** Congressman Gregory Meeks halted U.S. arms sales to the UAE in March 2025 specifically over Sudan; legislation (Stand Up for Sudan Act) was introduced to sanction warring parties and states fueling the conflict.

### **Egypt — SAF's (SLM-MM (Minnawi faction) Strategic Partner**

- Egypt provides strong political, diplomatic, and military support to the SAF, rooted in historical military ties, Nile water security interests, and strategic opposition to an RSF-aligned secular state on its southern border.
- In April 2023, Egyptian troops were reportedly taken prisoner by the RSF near Merowe—a politically explosive incident that crystallized Egypt's active role. Cairo denied direct military involvement but did not deny the soldiers' presence.
- Egypt chaired the AU Peace and Security Council's rotating presidency in October 2024, using it to push for Sudan's AU readmission under Burhan's terms and limit the RSF's diplomatic gains.
- Egypt provided the SAF with Bayraktar TB2 drones (via Turkey), K-8 fighter jets, ammunition, training, and military intelligence to SAF-allied SLM-MM forces. Egyptian Air Force strikes reportedly targeted weapons convoys moving through the Kufra corridor in Libya.
- 15 new fighter jets supplied to SAF jointly by Russia and Egypt in August 2024, directly enabling an increase in SAF airstrikes in Darfur.
- Egyptian Foreign Minister coordinated SAF support openly, framed as part of a Horn of Africa coalition with Eritrea and Somalia. Egyptian President al-Sisi pledged "continued support" to Burhan at a November 2024 meeting.

### **Eritrea → SAF Basing and Eastern Front Support**

- Eritrea hosts SAF aircraft as a transit and basing hub, enabling the SAF to receive Iranian and Russian drone deliveries routed through Eritrean territory to Port Sudan.
- Direct backing of the National Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) and the Eastern Corps — two SAF-affiliated eastern Sudan militias operating in Eritrea's border zone.
- Transit facilitation for weapons from Egypt, Russia, Iran, and Turkey destined for the SAF.
- Eritrea has also reportedly deployed troops directly alongside SAF, particularly in operations around Khartoum and Gezira State (confirmed by multiple monitors including ACLED).
- Strategic alignment with Egypt's anti-Ethiopia coalition, providing Asmara a seat in the broader SAF-support architecture.

### **Saudi Arabia — Ambiguous Mediator**

- Saudi Arabia hosted the May 2023 Jeddah peace process, the first serious international mediation attempt. The Jeddah Declaration was signed by both parties but never implemented.

- Saudi interests are primarily economic (Sudan's Red Sea access, agricultural investments) and stabilization oriented. Riyadh's influence is constrained by its Gulf partnership with Abu Dhabi, which limits how forcefully it can pressure the UAE to halt RSF arming. Saudi Arabia's co-authorship of the September 2025 Quad roadmap alongside the UAE reflects this structural tension.
- Saudi Arabia participated in the Manama talks in January 2024 alongside the UAE and Egypt, coordinating with U.S. officials.

### **Russia — Background SAF Supporter (After 2024 Pivot)**

- Russia initially used the preexisting relationship between the Kremlin-funded Wagner Group and the RSF to provide drones and other weapons to the RSF in early 2023. Russia switched sides in spring 2024 and promised military aid to the SAF in exchange for its commitment to implement a stalled 2017 discussion and a 2020 agreement that promised Russia a small Red Sea naval base.
- This is one of the conflict's most consequential alliance shifts: Moscow's pivot from RSF to SAF in 2024 deprived the RSF of a major arms supplier while bolstering the SAF's offensive capabilities — and directly contributed to the SAF's Khartoum recapture momentum. In Both sides confirmed the finalisation of a Red Sea naval base agreement in **February 2025**.
- The Wagner Group has historically had gold and arms dealings in Sudan; their involvement has reportedly deepened the SAF-RSF rivalry by backing competing factions at different moments.
- Wagner Group (now Africa Corps) fighters were reported in El-Geneina, West Darfur, fighting alongside RSF in 2023 before the switch. Russian fighters were simultaneously seen in SAF-controlled Omdurman — suggesting a deliberate hedge while the switch was being negotiated.
- Russia provides UN Security Council diplomatic cover for both sides at different moments, vetoing or blocking resolutions that would constrain its preferred partner of the moment.
- Amnesty International's report (2024) and separate investigations found Russian-origin weapons supplied to both sides, though Russia's official stance is non-interference.
- Arms and financial backing to SAF: reports of Russian drone technology and munitions reaching SAF, along with Iranian-supplied drones.

### **Iran — SAF Weapons Supplier**

- Iran has supplied the SAF with Shahed-series drones and other weapons, deepening the SAF's aerial advantage over a militarily less capable RSF ground force.

- Iran's Sudan relationship predates the current war; Sudan was an Iranian arms transit hub before Bashir pivoted toward Saudi Arabia in 2015. The current war restored the relationship.
- Iran sent drones to support the SAF in hope of securing an Iranian Red Sea naval base in exchange. Specific systems: Mohajer-6 combat UAVs (arrived Port Sudan via cargo flights, December 2023–July 2024); Ababil-3 drones, locally modified by the SAF and renamed the "Zajil-3," first deployed in January 2024.
- Iran intensified its involvement after October 2023, resuming relations with Khartoum and providing advanced Mohajer-6 drones via flights by Qeshm Fars Air, a transportation firm linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.
- Iranian personnel have been reported in Port Sudan hotels, providing advisory and technical support.
- The strategic quid pro quo is a Red Sea naval basing agreement, which Russia also sought simultaneously — revealing a competitive dynamic between Moscow and Tehran for the same prize.

### **Turkey → SAF (via Egypt)**

- Turkey provided Bayraktar TB2 drones to the SAF via Egypt. Turkey maintains a military presence agreement for Suakin Island on Sudan's Red Sea coast — a strategic foothold predating the war that gives Ankara an interest in SAF control of the eastern coast.
- The TB2 drones are widely credited by the SAF as decisive in the September 2024–March 2025 recapture operations that retook large swaths of territory including Khartoum.
- Turkey and Qatar are both associated with actors linked to the former Islamist regime, giving them natural alignment with SAF-connected Islamist networks.
- Turkish weapons manufacturers supplied ammunition and small arms to the SAF, confirmed by Amnesty International. Turkey and Qatar are both associated with actors linked to the former Islamist regime, giving them natural alignment with SAF-connected Islamist networks.

### **China — Arms to Both, Diplomatic Caution**

- Chinese weapons confirmed in the hands of both the SAF and RSF in violation of the Darfur arms embargo (Amnesty International 2024). Specific systems: advanced drone jammers, mortars, anti-material rifles used by both sides; Chinese kamikaze drones used in high-profile RSF strikes (range up to 2,000km).
- China's official posture is non-interference; it has not publicly acknowledged any support to either faction. Its arms export pipeline operates through commercial channels that Beijing maintains arms-length deniability over. Beijing's strategic interest is infrastructure and trade continuity; it seeks working relations with whatever entity controls key territory and pipelines.

- The December 2025 CNPC exit request from Block 6 in Sudan's oil sector — citing force majeure — signals that even China's most significant economic stake in Sudan cannot be protected under the current security environment. This may compel Beijing toward more active diplomatic engagement with the RSF.

### ***Libya (Khalifa Haftar / LNA) → RSF***

- The RSF maintained links to the Russian-supported Libyan National Army (LNA) of Libya's warlord Khalifa Haftar. The LNA-RSF relationship predates the 2023 war: both were Wagner Group clients, and Darfur's border with Libya provides a direct overland weapons corridor.
- The Kufra airbase in Libya's southeastern desert served as the primary hub for Emirati hardware bound for the RSF — described as the key node in the UAE-to-RSF weapons pipeline. Egypt reportedly pressured Libya to temporarily close the Kufra base under the guise of "runway maintenance" following the fall of El Fasher.

### **Chad → RSF (passive/ facilitation) Transit State & Fragile Neighbor**

- Chad has not actively armed the RSF but Amdjarass and N'Djamena airports have been used as RSF logistics hubs for UAE weapons deliveries — a situation Chad's government under President Kaka has struggled or been unwilling to halt, given its own border instability and dependence on Gulf financing.
- Chad shares a long border with Darfur and is a primary humanitarian transit corridor. RSF has used Chad's territory (N'Djamena and Amdjarass airports) as logistics hubs.
- In March 2025, SAF commander Yasir al-Atta threatened both airports as "legitimate military targets" — placing Chad in an impossible diplomatic position. Sudan's SAF has accused Chad of complicity; Chad houses over 700,000 Sudanese refugees and cannot afford to antagonize either side.
- Chad houses over 700,000 Sudanese refugees, straining national resources. President Mohamed Kaka faces pressure from both sides.

### **Ethiopia — An Increasingly Entangled Neighbor**

- Ethiopia's relationship with the conflict is shaped by its tensions with Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, making it amenable to potential positions that counterbalance Cairo's influence in Sudan.
- In February 2026, Reuters reported Ethiopia was hosting an RSF military training camp near the border, with UAE financial support—an explosive allegation that sharply deepened Khartoum's hostility toward Addis Ababa.
- Sudanese military intelligence has accused Ethiopia of hosting and facilitating the operation of RSF-controlled drones from airbases in Bahir Dar and near the Sudanese border to strike SAF positions in eastern Sudan.
- The disputed Al-Fashaga border region has become a flashpoint for proxy warfare, with the SAF accusing Ethiopia of using the RSF to reclaim the territory, while Ethiopia accuses the SAF of sheltering Fano and TPLF remnants.

- Ethiopia hosted peace initiatives (Feb 2025 High-Level Conference) but this was seen by Khartoum as an RSF-legitimizing exercise.
- Ethiopia maintains that its engagement with all Sudanese parties is a necessity for regional stability, viewing Khartoum's accusations as a scapegoating tactic designed to distract from the SAF's internal military failures and its inability to secure Sudan's borders.

### South Sudan → RSF (officers, informal channels)

- The RSF maintains close ties with South Sudanese officers as part of its sprawling international supply network. South Sudan's Juba-based political figures have had financial and personal connections to Hemedti's business network dating back to his gold trading operations. Project Ploughshares.
- South Sudan's President Salva Kiir has attempted bilateral mediation between Burhan and Hemedti, but Juba's informal pro-RSF tilt — shaped by personal ties and economic dependence on RSF gold networks — constrains its credibility as a neutral broker.
- Following the RSF's **December 2025 seizure of the Heglig oil fields** (see Section 11), South Sudan deployed troops to Heglig under a three-way agreement between Juba, the SAF, and the RSF, to protect processing infrastructure critical to South Sudan's 90+ percent oil-dependent revenue. This constitutes the most significant South Sudanese intervention in the conflict to date, and forces Juba toward direct negotiation with the RSF as a de facto territorial authority.

### United States

- On 7 January 2025, Secretary of State Antony Blinken formally designated the RSF's actions in Darfur as genocide — concluding that the RSF and allied Arab militias had systematically murdered men and boys on an ethnic basis and deliberately targeted women and girls for sexual violence. The U.S. simultaneously sanctioned Hemedti personally and seven RSF-linked shell companies in the UAE.
- Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield highlighted evidence of sexual violence by RSF against girls as young as 14.
- The U.S. co-facilitated the Jeddah process alongside Saudi Arabia, though engagement weakened significantly in 2024–2025 amid domestic political shifts.
- U.S. Congress members introduced legislation to halt arms sales to UAE and impose sanctions on conflict fuelers. The Trump administration's broader disengagement from African affairs constrained active diplomacy.
- The *Stand Up for Sudan Act* to sanction UAE arms transfers was introduced in Congress in March 2025 — signaling bipartisan concern that has not yet translated into policy.

### Kenya & Uganda → IGAD Proxies and RSF (*diplomatic facilitation, disputed arms*)

- Both countries engaged diplomatically with Hemedti and participated in IGAD processes that SAF viewed as RSF-legitimizing. And it provoked Sudan's formal suspension of IGAD membership in January 2024.

- Kenya hosted the Nairobi RSF-Tasis charter signing in February 2025.
- Kenyan ammunition crates found in RSF depots sparked a diplomatic crisis in June 2025. Kenya denied direct arms transfers, stating engagement was within the IGAD framework.

## 8. Regional Organizations

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### African Union (AU)

- The AU suspended Sudan's membership following the October 2021 coup. It does not recognize Burhan's SAF-led government as Sudan's legitimate authority, unlike the UN.
- The AU High-Level Panel on Sudan (chaired by Mohamed Ibn Chambas) was established to facilitate political dialogue and has called for inclusive engagement of civil society and displaced populations.
- Internal AU divisions, competition with IGAD, and competition among member states have severely hampered the AU's mediation effectiveness. Officials have been criticized for prioritizing bureaucratic positioning over genuine peacemaking.
- Egypt used its October 2024 AU PSC chairmanship to push for Sudan's AU readmission under Burhan's terms, revealing how member states are weaponizing institutional processes for bilateral strategic goals.

### IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development)

- **IGAD** serves as the Horn of Africa's primary regional body and was the original lead mediator in the Sudanese conflict.
- **Sudan Suspension (January 2024):** Sudan suspended its membership in January 2024 after IGAD invited Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo, head of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), to a summit in Uganda. Khartoum accused the bloc of violating Sudan's sovereignty and being influenced by states friendly to the RSF.
- **Period of Isolation:** During this hiatus, IGAD's legitimacy as a neutral broker was heavily questioned as it continued to engage RSF actors.
- **Re-entrance (February 2026):** Sudan resumed full activity in the bloc following a significant diplomatic shift. The decision followed a January 2026 meeting between Sudan's Prime Minister Kamil Idris and IGAD's Executive Secretary.
- **Terms of Return:** Sudan's re-entry was secured after IGAD issued a statement condemning RSF violations for the first time and reaffirming its full recognition of Sudan's sovereignty and state institutions. Some organizations and analysts characterized the move as a step toward restoring regional solidarity and improving the coordination of humanitarian aid.

## UN (United Nations)

- The UN Security Council extended weapons embargo and sanctions on Sudan through 2025.
- The UN Fact-Finding Mission identified the 'hallmarks of genocide' in Darfur in its findings. The UNHCR described the violence as 'emblematic of the genocide' of 2003–2005.
- Former Special Envoy Volker Perthes resigned in 2024 under SAF pressure; the UN has struggled to maintain credibility with Khartoum. His successor Pekka Haavisto faces the same structural constraints.
- The UN's development of a peace plan was rejected by Darfur governor figures in October 2025, with accusations that the UAE was fueling the war.

## 9. Peace Efforts: Chronology & Status

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Since April 2023, multiple overlapping mediation tracks have been launched by different regional and international actors. None has produced a durable ceasefire. All share a common structural pathology: they address the symptoms of the conflict while leaving its enabling architecture — arms pipelines, war economies, and external patron interests which remains largely untouched.

### The Troika (US, UK, Norway) — Historical Framework, Background Role

- The Troika has been Sudan's most consistent long-term external mediator, instrumental in brokering the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that led to South Sudan's independence and the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement.
- Since April 2023, the Troika has not acted as a unified lead mediator but continues to operate through its individual member roles: the US in the Jeddah process and Quad, the UK as a co-host of international conferences, and Norway as a major humanitarian donor and quiet back-channel facilitator widely seen as a trusted actor by both sides.
- Analysts have consistently recommended Troika's backchannel experience be better integrated into current frameworks, arguing its long institutional memory is underused.

### Doha Document for Peace in Darfur / DDPD (2011 — Historical Reference)

- Qatar sponsored exhaustive negotiations on the Darfur conflict that produced the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur in 2011. The agreement introduced power-sharing arrangements, a victims' compensation fund, official government recognition of Darfur, and a Darfuri vice president.
- The DDPD reduced local violence in the years before the current war but was never fully implemented; most major Darfuri armed movements refused to sign it.
- Qatar's authorship of the DDPD and its relationships across RSF elements, tribal leaders, senior Islamists, and SAF officers gives Doha a unique backchannel flexibility. Qatar has sought to join the Quad/Quartet, and its potential inclusion is actively debated as a way to include Islamist-connected actors in the peace framework.

## Juba Peace Agreement / JPA (2020 — Foundational Reference)

- Signed in October 2020 between the transitional government and a range of armed movements, the JPA was Sudan's most comprehensive peace deal in decades. It provided the framework for integrating Darfuri rebel groups and allocating government posts to armed movement leaders.
- The JPA signatories (JEM, SLM-MM, SLM-Tambour, and others) are now a central part of the SAF coalition — their military participation in the current war is directly enabled by the political legitimacy and government positions the JPA gave them.
- The JPA is simultaneously a peace achievement and a conflict driver: it armed and empowered the very factions now fueling the war's escalation in Darfur.

The following is a structured chronology of the major peace initiatives launched after the start of the war on April 2023:

## Jeddah Process (May 2023 – Ongoing, Stalled)

- Launched by Saudi Arabia and the United States in May 2023; the first structured international mediation attempt after the war's outbreak.
- Produced the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan — committing both sides to humanitarian corridors, civilian protection, and continued negotiations. Neither side implemented the declaration meaningfully.
- Two formal rounds were held in Jeddah; a third attempt was convened in Geneva in August 2024 by U.S. Special Envoy Tom Perriello. The Geneva talks excluded several key actors and were boycotted by the SAF, which objected to UAE participation.
- The process retains more legitimacy with the SAF than other tracks because it did not include actors Khartoum views as hostile. It has not been formally abandoned, and the September 2025 Quad roadmap explicitly built on the Jeddah platform.

## IGAD Mediation (Dec 2023 – Jan 2024, Collapsed)

- IGAD attempted to bring Burhan and Hemedti face to face in Djibouti in December 2023. Hemedti pulled out at the last minute.
- IGAD's January 2024 Kampala summit invited Hemedti, prompting the SAF to formally suspend Sudan's IGAD membership and accuse the body of violating Sudanese sovereignty.
- Sudan's IGAD suspension effectively destroyed the bloc's neutrality and killed its lead mediator role. IGAD continues to engage RSF-aligned actors and co-hosts the Quintet framework but is no longer credible as a bilateral broker.

## Manama Talks (January 2024, Secret)

- Secret talks in Bahrain, facilitated by Egyptian and Emirati intelligence with Saudi and U.S. participation. Hemedti's brother Abdelrahim Dagalo and SAF's Kabbashi met in person.
- Reportedly agreed on prisoner exchanges and a framework for a unified army.

- Collapsed when Burhan recalled Kabbashi after media exposure. Exemplifies how back-channel progress is undermined by SAF hardliner's aversion to accommodation.

*The Manama talks are the clearest evidence that both sides have explored negotiated off-ramps that the hardliner factions within their respective coalitions then sabotaged.*

### **AU High-Level Panel (2024 – Ongoing)**

- Chaired by Mohamed Ibn Chambas; organized multiple rounds of Inter-Sudanese dialogue meetings in Addis Ababa.
- Called for inclusive political dialogue, emphasizing civil society, political parties, and displaced populations.
- The 4th Meeting of the Expanded Mechanism in Djibouti (Dec 2023) called for the AU and IGAD to organize an all-inclusive dialogue addressing a permanent ceasefire and civilian transitional government.
- Status: Has not produced direct talks between SAF and RSF. Both parties use these meetings to position for international legitimacy.

### **Taqaddum–RSF Declaration (2024)**

- The civilian coalition Taqaddum signed a joint declaration with the RSF to work toward ending the war.
- The RSF used the declaration for international legitimacy purposes; Taqaddum received minimal compliance in return. The deal damaged Taqaddum credibility with SAF-aligned Sudanese.

### **Egypt's Neighboring Countries Initiative**

- Egypt launched a regional approach gathering Sudan's neighbors. Seen as a counterbalance to IGAD processes.
- Cairo Conference of Political and Civil Forces (July 2024) was undermined by Taqaddum's equivocal engagement.
- Status: Limited impact.

### **RSF Tasis Charter / Parallel Government (February 2025)**

- Signed in Nairobi by RSF and allies including SPLM-N (al-Hilu), the charter established the 'Government of Peace and Unity,' outlining a secular, democratic, decentralized post-war Sudan.
- This is not a peace initiative per se but a hardening of RSF's political position and a pre-negotiation legitimacy move to enter any future talks as a government rather than a rebel group.
- The parallel government—with Hemedti at its head—operates from Nyala, South Darfur.

### Paris Conference (April 2024 — Humanitarian Focus)

- The first edition of the international Sudan conferences was held in Paris on 15 April 2024 under the title "International Humanitarian Conference for Sudan and Neighboring Countries," jointly organized by France, Germany, and the European Union, with a focus on humanitarian aid.
- Produced donor pledges but no political or diplomatic breakthrough. No SAF or RSF presence at the negotiating table.
- Established the annual conference format that continued in London and Berlin.

### London Conference (April 2025)

- The second edition took place in London on 15 April 2025, yielding pledges of approximately €800 million in support for Sudan.
- Like Paris, produced aid commitments but ended without a joint communiqué from participating states — a sign of divisions among international actors over language and political positioning.
- The conference did amplify calls for a ceasefire and gave Sudan's humanitarian crisis higher visibility ahead of the Quad's September 2025 roadmap.

### The Quad (US, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE — September 2025)

- On 12 September 2025, the United States, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates announced a breakthrough roadmap for ending the war in Sudan.
- The roadmap prescribes a tightly sequenced exit: a three-month humanitarian truce, a permanent ceasefire, and a nine-month transition to civilian rule.
- The Quad is the first framework to bring together the primary external backers of both warring parties under a single diplomatic roof — Egypt and Saudi Arabia lean SAF; the UAE backs the RSF. This is its core logic and also its core weakness: the UAE's simultaneous role as arms supplier to the RSF and co-author of a ceasefire plan is a structural contradiction that has not been resolved.
- Critics describe it as "calendar peace" converting complex political choices into milestone dates without enforcement mechanisms or meaningful changes to combatant incentives.
- The AU and IGAD welcomed the Quad statement, noting it fully aligns with the AU and IGAD roadmaps for peace, and reaffirmed their readiness to work in partnership with the Quad.
- A planned Quad summit was subsequently cancelled with no official explanation, suggesting deep disagreements among members remain unresolved.

### The Quintet (AU, UN, EU, IGAD, League of Arab States — 2025-Ongoing)

- The AU-led Quintet — comprising the African Union, United Nations, European Union, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and League of Arab States — has launched a

platform for Sudanese civilian political groups, aiming at their unification and a civilian transition.

- The Quintet operates a distinct track from the Quad: while the Quad focuses on the ceasefire and military dimensions, the Quintet is charged with the political dialogue track — preparing the ground for an intra-Sudanese civilian political process once a ceasefire is reached.
- Sudan has a Troika, a Quad, and a Quintet — but these diplomatic groupings suffer from a lack of coordination. The two-track architecture (Quad on ceasefire, Quintet on political dialogue) has theoretical logic but in practice the tracks operate in parallel without sufficient integration.
- Pekka Haavisto (former Finnish Foreign Minister) was appointed as the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Sudan, tasked in part with bridging these frameworks.

### Berlin Conference (15 April 2026 — Most Recent)

- Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, the African Union, and the European Union convened the third International Sudan Conference in Berlin on 15 April 2026 — the third anniversary of the war — bringing together ministers and representatives from 55 countries, alongside donors, regional organizations, UN entities, and 38 international and Sudanese NGOs.
- The major breakthrough was the creation, for the first time in three years of a platform for Sudanese civilian and political actors to convene and agree on a joint statement. Some 46 representatives endorsed a joint call structured around seven key priorities: an immediate ceasefire; protection of civilians and infrastructure; humanitarian access; civilian democratic governance; a Sudanese-owned political process; international support; and justice.
- The conference nonetheless closed without a joint communiqué from participating states — divisions reportedly resurfaced over language relating to the preservation of "state institutions," a phrase the RSF reads as entrenching SAF primacy.
- Sudan's government denounced the conference as a "colonial tutelage approach." The RSF-aligned Tasis coalition raised concerns about inclusion of SAF-linked actors. Both reactions confirm the Berlin process faces the same legitimacy battles as every prior track.
- The Berlin Principles for Sudan — endorsed by participants — reaffirm that there is no military solution, call for an immediate humanitarian truce followed by a sustained ceasefire, and demand an end to all external military, financial, and logistical support fuelling the conflict.

### Overall Assessment of Peace Efforts

All peace processes to date have shared the following structural failures:

- **SAF refusal:** The SAF has consistently declined to engage in talks that grant the RSF political legitimacy, citing RSF war crimes. NCP/Islamist hardliners within the SAF coalition use peace process sabotage as a tool.

- **RSF instrumentalization:** The RSF participates in talks to gain international recognition without genuine commitment to ceasefire, evidenced by continued offensive operations during every ceasefire agreement.
- **Competing mediators:** The multiplicity of tracks—AU, IGAD, US-Saudi, Egypt, South Sudan, Uganda—allows both parties to shop for the most favorable process and stall unfavorable ones.
- **External state capture:** UAE (pro-RSF) and Egypt (pro-SAF) have effectively captured or constrained the mediation actors, preventing a neutral process from emerging.
- **Civilian exclusion:** The most genuine Sudanese civilian voices (Resistance Committees) are absent from all formal negotiations. Every process that has excluded them has failed.

## 10. Shifting Alliances: Major Realignments

The Sudan conflict has been characterized by significant alliance shifts at both the internal and external levels. The table below maps the major realignments from the conflict's onset through May 2026:

Date	Actor(s)	Shift Description	Impact
Apr–Nov 2023	Darfur JPA Groups (JEM, SLM-MM, SLM-Tambour)	Initially neutral under the Darfur Joint Forces ceasefire mandate. Shifted to active SAF support by November 2023 after RSF's genocidal attacks on Masalit in West Darfur and the killing of Khamis Abkar.	Brought experienced Darfuri fighters into the SAF coalition; pivotal for El Fasher's defense. Gave the SAF a ground presence in Darfur it would otherwise lack.
Nov–Apr 2024	SLM/A-Transitional Council & GSLFA	Withdrew from Darfur Joint Forces in April 2024, choosing to reaffirm neutrality rather than back either side.	Fractured the formerly neutral Darfur Joint Forces umbrella. Reduced the DJF to a purely SAF-aligned coalition, clarifying the battle lines in North Darfur.
Apr 2024	Musa Hilal (Revolutionary Awakening Council)	Publicly declared support for SAF—a major defection from the RSF's Arab tribal coalition.	Signaled tribal fractures within the RSF's Darfur support base; Hilal's Mahamid tribe provides fighters and territory. Weakened RSF's claim to represent all Darfuri Arabs.
Jan–Feb 2024	RSF / Taqaddum	RSF signed joint declaration with Taqaddum civilian coalition, creating an unexpected political alignment between a paramilitary accused of	Gave RSF international legitimacy cover. Damaged Taqaddum's standing with SAF-aligned Sudanese. Hemedti used the

Date	Actor(s)	Shift Description	Impact
		genocide and the pro-democracy civilian movement.	alliance for diplomatic outreach tours to African capitals.
<b>Jan 2024</b>	Sudan / IGAD	Sudan suspended its IGAD membership in retaliation for IGAD inviting Hemedti to Kampala summit.	Destroyed IGAD as a credible neutral mediator. Forced IGAD-member RSF-sympathetic states to continue engaging RSF bilaterally, fragmenting the regional response.
<b>April 2024</b>	Russia pivot: RSF → SAF	Moscow switched from RSF arming (2023) to SAF support, exchanging military aid for a Red Sea naval basing agreement.	One of the conflict's most consequential external shifts. Deprived RSF of a key arms supplier while bolstering SAF capabilities.
<b>Feb 2025</b>	SPLM-N (al-Hilu) → RSF/Tasis	Abdel Aziz al-Hilu joined the RSF-led Tasis coalition, signing the Nairobi charter for a 'Government of Peace and Unity.'	The most shocking realignment of the war: a historically anti-Janjaweed, secular-federalist Nuba Mountains insurgency aligning with a force accused of genocide. Gave Tasis multi-regional legitimacy. Fragile from the start; potential exit reported June 2025.
<b>Feb 2025</b>	Taqaddum (partial)	Part of Taqaddum joined civilian administrations in RSF-controlled areas after the coalition's internal split.	Effectively divided Sudan's civilian opposition along pro-SAF and pro-RSF lines; ended Taqaddum's claim to be a unified alternative to both warring parties.
<b>Mar-Apr 2025</b>	U.S. Congress / UAE relationship	U.S. Congressman Meeks halted arms sales to UAE; Stand Up for Sudan Act introduced to sanction UAE and other conflict fuelers.	First concrete Western pressure on UAE over Sudan. Signal that the RSF's external support network faces reputational and potential legal risk. UAE impact on ground: limited in the short term.
<b>May 2025</b>	Sudan severs ties with UAE	Following RSF drone strikes on Port Sudan (4–9 May 2025), Sudan's government severed all diplomatic and economic ties with UAE on 6 May.	Escalated the SAF-UAE rupture. Contributed to renewed international attention on UAE's RSF support.

Date	Actor(s)	Shift Description	Impact
Dec 2025	RSF seizure of Heglig oil fields	RSF captured Heglig (December 8, 2025), Sudan's largest oilfield and the main processing facility for South Sudan's oil exports. SAF withdrew; South Sudan deployed troops under a three-way agreement.	Transformed the conflict from a territorial struggle into a contest for economic sovereignty. Forced South Sudan to negotiate directly with RSF as a de facto territorial authority. CNPC exited Block 6.
2025-ongoing	Battlefield partition solidification	SAF recaptured Khartoum and consolidated eastern/central Sudan; RSF consolidated Darfur and western Sudan. Two parallel governments are formally proclaimed.	De facto east-west partition has hardened each side's negotiating position. The prospect of a unified Sudan negotiated settlement is more distant than at any prior point.
May 2026	Sudan recalls ambassador from Ethiopia	Sudan recalled its ambassador from Addis Ababa (5 May 2026) over RSF training camp allegations.	Signals SAF's expanding definition of hostile external actors. Risks fragmenting the already fractured Horn of Africa diplomatic landscape further.

## 11. Humanitarian Dimensions & War Economy

### Scale of Human Suffering

- **Death toll:** Estimates range from 61,000 (conservative) to potentially hundreds of thousands; analytical consensus is that official figures are severe undercounts given the collapse of data infrastructure in conflict zones.
- **Displacement:** 12 million internally displaced; 3.5 million fled abroad—one of the largest displacement crises in the world. Receiving countries include Egypt, Ethiopia, Chad, and South Sudan, all of which face their own governance fragility.
- **Famine:** Multiple areas declared famine or pre-famine conditions. The closure of over 60% of emergency food kitchens following USAID cuts has dramatically worsened food security. The UN estimates 638,000 people are facing the most severe famine conditions. In total, nearly 20 million individuals, which is about 41% of Sudan's population are facing acute food insecurity, with over 14 areas considered at high risk of active famine.
- **Sexual violence:** The RSF's systematic use of rape and sexual violence against women and girls — documented by HRW, the UN, and Sudanese civil society — has been described as a deliberate war crime. The U.S. State Department's January 2025 genocide determination specifically cited the RSF's targeting of women and girls from non-Arab ethnic groups.

## War Economy & Resource Extraction

- **Gold as conflict fuel:** Sudan is Africa's third-largest gold producer. The RSF's control of artisanal mining in Darfur (especially Jebel Amer) provided Hemedti's primary financing. Gold is smuggled through the UAE, laundering conflict revenue through Dubai markets. Approximately 97% of gold exports from SAF-controlled areas also went to the UAE in 2023, creating financial dependence on Dubai for both sides — a structural feature that constrains any unilateral break with Emirati markets.
- **The Heglig oil field seizure (December 8, 2025):** The RSF's capture of Heglig — Sudan's largest oilfield and the primary processing facility for South Sudan's crude — represents the conflict's most consequential economic development since the war's outbreak. The seizure stripped the SAF of its last significant foothold in West Kordofan, gave the RSF territorial contiguity stretching from West Darfur to the South Sudan border, and threatened to terminate South Sudan's 90%-oil-dependent national revenue. South Sudan deployed troops under a three-way agreement to protect the Central Processing Facility. The Chinese state oil company CNPC simultaneously requested early termination of its Block 6 production-sharing agreement — citing force majeure — signaling a potential exit of Sudan's primary Asian strategic partner.
- **Siege economics:** Both sides use fuel blockades and food access as weapons: the RSF has besieged cities; the SAF has conducted airstrikes on civilian infrastructure. In January 2025, RSF drone strikes crippled Sudan's electricity grid by targeting the Merowe Dam and substations, knocking out power across major army-held regions.
- **RSF Port Sudan drone campaign (May 2025):** The RSF's May 2025 FH-95 drone strikes on Port Sudan — the first time the RSF struck the SAF's de facto capital — constituted a new escalatory threshold. Attacks targeted Osman Digna Airbase, fuel depots, and the international airport, causing civilian displacement and disruption to humanitarian logistics. Port Sudan was the last safe haven in Sudan; its targeting eliminated any remaining refuge.
- **Domestic drone production:** The SAF's Military Industry Corporation debuted a one-way attack UAV in September 2025, signaling an intent to reduce dependence on external supply chains through domestic arms industrialization.
- **Narcotics and illicit economies:** Investigative and regional security reports indicate the emergence of Captagon production and trafficking routes in territories affected by the war, particularly in western and borderland regions where state authority has collapsed — reflecting the broader conflict-zone pattern of armed groups diversifying revenue through illicit economies.

## Cultural & Infrastructure Destruction

- UNESCO World Heritage Sites at Naqa and Musawwarat es-Sufra were targeted by SAF airstrikes following RSF incursions, representing irreversible cultural destruction.
- Sudan's banking system, hospitals, water infrastructure, and power grid have been devastated, particularly in Khartoum and Darfur. Over 235 villages were set on fire in Darfur alone in the first 14 months.

## 12. Analytical Assessment: Outlook & Scenarios

As of May 2026, the conflict is at a military stalemate with an entrenched geographic split. The SAF has recaptured Khartoum and stabilized eastern Sudan but is stalled in Kordofan and unable to retake Darfur. The RSF has lost the capital but holds most of Darfur and is pushing into parts of South Kordofan. Both sides are building parallel governmental structures and upgrading their arsenals—the SAF with domestic drone production and foreign weapons, the RSF with FH-95 drones that can now strike Port Sudan.

### Scenario A: Protracted Partition (Most Likely)

The most probable near-term trajectory is continued military stalemate, de facto territorial division between the SAF's eastern bloc and the RSF's western bloc, and a slow political hardening of two parallel governments. This mirrors the Libyan model (post-2014) and risks becoming permanent. The conditions for a durable partition are increasingly present: two governments, two financial systems, two arms supply chains and an economic partition formalized by the Heglig seizure. The international community's failure to impose a credible ceasefire makes this the default outcome.

### Scenario B: SAF Military Victory (Low–Medium Probability)

SAF's offensive momentum and Khartoum recapture opened a window for further advances. However, long supply lines, fuel shortages, and RSF drone capabilities have stalled the advance. A military victory would require the SAF to retake Kordofan and Darfur—a multi-year campaign with uncertain outcome. Even a partial military victory risks a Pyrrhic outcome if it entrenches Islamist NCP control and excludes civilians from governance, reproducing the transition failure that generated this war.

### Scenario C: Negotiated Settlement (Low Probability)

A negotiated settlement requires: (1) UAE willingness to pressure the RSF to genuinely engage; (2) SAF hardliner concessions on civilian governance; (3) a unified mediation track. None of these conditions currently exist. Both sides have invested in parallel governments, which increases their reluctance to compromise. The Quad's cancellation without explanation after its September 2025 announcement suggests unresolved member-state disagreements. A settlement becomes more likely only if both sides reach a military exhaustion threshold or if external pressure — through sanctions, asset freezes, or arms embargo enforcement — significantly increases the cost of continued war.

### Key Risks

- **El Fasher:** RSF capture of El Fasher triggered another genocidal campaign against African communities in North Darfur and a regional refugee crisis involving Chad and Egypt.
- **Partition consolidation:** Two governments locking in control could produce a Somalia-Libya hybrid — endemic armed competition, regional spillover, and permanent humanitarian crisis with no viable reunification pathway.

- **Escalating civilian targeting:** Both sides have demonstrated willingness to attack civilian infrastructure. The RSF's Port Sudan drone campaign and the SAF's Darfur airstrikes establish escalation patterns that the absence of accountability mechanisms only reinforces.
- **Regional contagion:** Instability spillover into South Sudan (post-Heglig), Chad, and the Central African Republic, all fragile states, risks destabilizing the broader Sahel–Horn nexus at precisely the moment when those states have the least institutional capacity to absorb it.
- **Accountability gap:** The absence of any functioning war crimes accountability mechanism normalizes atrocity and reduces any armed actor's incentive to restrain. The ICJ Sudan v. UAE jurisdictional dismissal (May 2025) reduced one potential avenue for external pressure. The ICC investigation into Darfur continues but faces the same enforcement constraints.

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**Notes on sources and methodology:**

*This document was compiled using open-source reports from ACLED, EUAA, ICG, CFR, HRW, Amnesty International, Al Jazeera, Reuters, Sudan Tribune, Bellingcat, the UN Panel of Experts, the Conflict Observatory, Horn Review, among others, information reflects developments available through May 2026. The analysis is intended for research and informational purposes and does not necessarily represent institutional positions or official editorial views.*

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