

POLICY BRIEF

Sudan Conflict Situational Analysis: Post-January 2024 Dynamics, Impacts, and Future Scenarios

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American
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Abbreviations

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
AFSC	American Friends Service Committee
AU	African Union
AUPSC	African Union Peace and Security Council
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Executive Summary

Sudan's conflict situation has escalated since January 2024, transforming from an internal power struggle between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) into a regionalized proxy war sustained by militarized governance, external sponsorship, and a war economy. Governance collapse, ethnic polarization, and failed mediation efforts have entrenched instability and precipitated mass atrocities, including ethnically targeted killings, widespread sexual violence, and patterns that have been consistent with genocide. By late 2025, systemic state failure is evident with over 12 million people displaced, famine occurring in multiple states, and RSF's capture of El Fasher signaling a de facto territorial fragmentation. The conflict has resulted in an estimated 49,800 deaths, including approximately 15,300 civilians as of November 2025, with broader estimates accounting for indirect causes rising to 150,000. The humanitarian and economic toll is catastrophic. Inflation and trade disruptions have crippled markets, while gold smuggling and illicit networks continue to fuel the war economy. UAE, Egypt, and Iran fuel the war, destabilizing the Horn and Sahel. Refugee flows, arms trafficking, and trade collapse threaten neighbors, while AU, IGAD, and Jeddah mediation has stalled amid rival interests and weak leverage. These dynamics point to three plausible trajectories: an inclusive peace process, prolonged instability with localized negotiations, or worst-case escalation leading to partition and regional destabilization. To avert total collapse, stakeholders must act decisively by: 1) enforcing ceasefire compliance and integrating civilian and marginalized voices into governance; 2) harmonizing African Union (AU) and Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) mediation under a unified framework and securing humanitarian corridors; 3) intensifying international pressure to curb arms flows, scaling up flexible funding for life-saving interventions, and investing in long-term recovery; 4) expanding resilience programs for displaced populations, embedding gender-sensitive protection and local partnerships. Coordinated engagement among key stakeholders is critical to shift Sudan's trajectory from systemic collapse toward stabilization and inclusive peace.

Introduction

Sudan is in the midst of one of its worst. Sudan stands at the center of one of the most complex crises in Africa, with far-reaching humanitarian, political, and regional implications. The Salama Hub, a partnership between the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and the All-Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), commissioned a Conflict Situational Analysis on Sudan post 2024, under the project “Transforming Lives through Evidence-Based Advocacy and Campaigning for Peaceful Change.” The Salama Hub initiative serves as a knowledge and advocacy resource for promoting locally driven solutions to conflict across the Horn of Africa. Through rigorous research and engagement with diverse stakeholders, the Hub advances dialogue on governance, inclusion, transitional justice, and resilience. This policy brief draws on findings from the Conflict Situational Analysis and is designed to provide decision-makers with evidence-based insights into the evolving dynamics of the conflict and outline actionable strategies for stabilization and peacebuilding. It provides actionable recommendations for national, regional, and international actors aimed at supporting a sustainable ceasefire, restoring human dignity, and promoting an inclusive, gender-sensitive peace process.

Historical Drivers and Structural Triggers of Sudan’s Conflict

Sudan’s drift into war followed the collapse of its fragile post-revolution transition. The October 2021 military coup dismantled the civilian government and eroded public trust, paving the way for conflict between the SAF and the RSF. Disputes over RSF’s integration into the national army escalated into full-scale war on April 15, 2023, triggering one of Africa’s most severe humanitarian crises. Interconnected structural drivers underpin the conflict; at its core lies a contest for political dominance between rival military factions, compounded by competition over high-value resources such as Darfur’s gold reserves and strategic trade routes. These dynamics have entrenched a war economy that incentivizes sustained violence, and external sponsorship has further escalated hostilities.

Ethnic polarization, amplified through digital propaganda and hate speech, has deepened societal fractures, legitimized violence, and systematically undermined mediation efforts led by the African Union (AU) and IGAD. By January 2024, Sudan reached a critical inflection point. The collapse of governance structures, escalating famine risk, and growing regional spillover signaled the transformation of the crisis from an internal conflict to a regionalized security emergency. This shift defined the trajectory for intensified violence and deepening humanitarian distress throughout 2024 and beyond. By late 2025, systemic state failure was evident: more than 12 million people were displaced, famine was confirmed across multiple states, and the RSF’s capture of El Fasher marked a dangerous progression toward territorial fragmentation and protracted instability.

• Dynamics Leading to Sudan’s January 2024 Inflection Point

The conflict escalated rapidly following SAF – RSF clashes over military integration on 15 April 2023. Hostilities spread beyond Khartoum into Darfur, Kordofan, and other regions, dismantling governance structures and public services. Repeated ceasefire attempts under the AU and IGAD frameworks failed as both factions prioritized military dominance. RSF consolidated control over Darfur and gold-rich territories, while SAF relied on aerial bombardments to retain urban centers. Reports documented atrocity crimes, including ethnically targeted killings and widespread sexual violence.

By late 2023, Sudan had become Africa’s largest displacement crisis, with 8.6 million internally displaced and humanitarian access severely restricted. Famine warnings intensified as external involvement deepened: Egypt and Saudi Arabia supported SAF, while RSF reportedly benefited from Gulf-based financing and arms flow from countries such as the UAE. Hate speech and misinformation amplified ethnic polarization, further undermining mediation efforts.

January 2024 marked a decisive inflection point. The conflict had fully regionalized, humanitarian needs reached emergency levels, and Sudan entered the new year with governance collapse, escalating famine risk, and growing spillover into neighboring states. This transition set the trajectory for intensified violence and humanitarian deterioration throughout 2024.

- **Geopolitical Dimensions and External Influence on Sudan's War.**

Sudan's conflict has transitioned into a regionalized proxy war, sustained by complex external alignments. Egypt and Saudi Arabia have supported the SAF through diplomatic and logistical channels aimed at preserving state authority. Conversely, the RSF has reportedly leveraged Gulf-based financing and arms procurement networks, notably through gold trading channels linked to the United Arab Emirates. Additional reports implicate Iran and Turkey in supplying military technology to SAF, while RSF has drawn on mercenary networks and alliances in Libya and Chad. By January 2024, these external linkages had entrenched a war economy, enabling both factions to bypass sanctions and prolong hostilities. Mediation efforts led by the AU and IGAD faltered amid competing member-state interests, while Western actors imposed targeted sanctions and supported humanitarian operations with limited impact due to fragmented diplomacy and persistent arms embargo violations.

This interplay of geopolitical ambitions and resource competition transformed Sudan from a domestic crisis into a strategic battleground, complicating prospects for a neutral peace process and amplifying humanitarian suffering.

- **Conflict trajectory after January 2024 inflection point**

Following January 2024, Sudan's crisis entered a phase of systemic deterioration. Governance collapse persisted as peace initiatives under the AU and IGAD frameworks stalled; both SAF and RSF rejected concessions, and civilian actors remained excluded from negotiations. At least three formal ceasefire attempts collapsed (December 2023, February 2024, and July 2024), alongside nine rounds of Jeddah negotiations (April 2023–August 2024), none of which resulted in a sustained truce. The absence of a credible transition roadmap entrenched militarized governance and eliminated prospects for

civilian-led reform. Security conditions worsened significantly, and fighting intensified across Darfur, Kordofan, and Khartoum corridors. RSF expanded territorial control in western Sudan, securing gold routes and border crossings, while SAF relied on aerial bombardments and urban sieges. The RSF's capture of El Fasher in October 2025 marked a strategic turning point, signaling de facto partition and prolonged instability. External involvement continued to shape conflict dynamics. Egypt and Saudi Arabia maintained support for SAF, while RSF sustained operations through Gulf-based states such as UAE, financing and arms flows. Western actors imposed sanctions and facilitated humanitarian assistance, but enforcement gaps allowed illicit trade and arms transfers to flourish, undermining diplomatic leverage.

Impacts of the Current Conflict

- **Humanitarian Impacts: Refugee Flows, Malnutrition, Health System Collapse**

By mid-2025, Sudan faced Africa's largest displacement crisis, with more than 12 million people uprooted, including 2 million refugees in Chad, South Sudan, and Egypt (UNHCR, 2025). Humanitarian conditions deteriorated to catastrophic levels as food insecurity escalated. 24.6 million people were classified in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification IPC Phase 3+ , and famine was confirmed in five areas, leaving over 630,000 people in life-threatening hunger. Health systems collapsed, with fewer than 25% of facilities functional, while cholera outbreaks surpassed 380,000 cases and child malnutrition surged to emergency thresholds (UNOCHA, 2025).

- **Economic Impacts: Inflation, Trade Disruption, Resource Scarcity**

Inflation soared as formal markets disintegrated, forcing reliance on black-market fuel and food. Gold smuggling and illicit trade networks sustain armed groups, while agricultural production has plummeted due to insecurity and displacement. Trade routes through Port Sudan and cross-border corridors remain disrupted, deepening resource scarcity and eroding household purchasing power (ICG, 2024; The Sentry, 2025).

- **Social Impacts: Education Gaps and Gender-Based Vulnerabilities**

Education systems have nearly collapsed, leaving millions of children out of school and entire generations without access to learning. Gender-based violence has escalated sharply, including rape, sexual slavery, and early marriage, particularly in Darfur and displacement camps. Women and girls face heightened risks, while adolescent boys are increasingly recruited by armed groups (Amnesty International; UNFP 2025).

- **Regional Spillover: Effects on Chad, South Sudan, and Ethiopia.**

The conflict's ripple effects are destabilizing neighboring states. Chad hosts over 600,000 Sudanese refugees, South Sudan faces new influxes amid its own fragility, and Ethiopia reports rising cross-border insecurity. These flows exacerbate resource competition, ethnic tensions, and humanitarian burdens across the Horn of

Africa and Sahel, threatening regional stability (AU PSC; UNHCR, 2025).

Gendered Impacts and the Strategic Role of Women and Youth

Sudan's conflict has generated severe gendered and protection impacts, disproportionately affecting women and youth. Women and children account for nearly 70% of the displaced population and face heightened risks of food insecurity, loss of education, and violence. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has been weaponized across conflict zones, with systematic patterns of rape, abduction, and sexual slavery reported, particularly implicating the RSF. The collapse of health and protection services has left survivors reliant on informal psychosocial networks, while female-headed households struggle under extreme scarcity. Adolescent girls face increased vulnerability to sexual violence and early marriage, and young boys are at high risk of recruitment as child soldiers, compounding trauma and educational loss.

Despite these vulnerabilities, women and youth have emerged as critical agents of resilience and peacebuilding. Women-led networks provide trauma healing, humanitarian coordination, and community survival initiatives, while feminist groups deliver emergency reproductive health services under hostile conditions. Women also play moral and advocacy roles, mediating disputes and documenting human right violations, yet remain largely excluded from formal peace processes due to structural and security barriers. Youth mobilization through resistance committees and digital platforms has been pivotal in coordinating aid, countering misinformation, and advocating for inclusive governance. These dynamics underscore that a gender-responsive, survivor-centered, and youth-driven approach is not optional but a strategic necessity for sustainable peace in Sudan.

Anticipating Trajectories for Policy and Response

The volatility of Sudan's conflict, compounded by regional and international dynamics, makes scenario planning a critical policy tool. It offers a structured approach to anticipate plausible trajectories and guide strategic decisions. With outcomes shaped by interlocking drivers, namely political fragmentation, external sponsorship, and humanitarian collapse, the future remains highly uncertain. The following scenarios provide a basis for stakeholders to prepare for divergent pathways, mitigate risks, and design adaptive strategies for an evolving crisis.

- **Best-Case Scenario: Inclusive Peace Process and Stabilization**

A negotiated ceasefire, anchored in credible mediation by neutral Continental and international actors, could open the path to an inclusive political transition. Achieving this outcome would require sustained diplomatic pressure, withdrawal of external military support, and meaningful participation of women, youth, and civil society in governance reforms. Stabilization efforts must prioritize reopening humanitarian corridors, restoration of essential services, and implementing transitional justice mechanisms to rebuild trust and institutional legitimacy.

- **Worst-Case Scenario: Escalation, Fragmentation, and Regional Destabilization**

Failure of mediation, coupled with continued external sponsorship, would accelerate Sudan's fragmentation. RSF's consolidation in Darfur and SAF's control over central Sudan could solidify into a de facto partition, driving ethnic cleansing and widespread famine. Key results include persistent arms flows, the collapse of humanitarian access, and intensifying proxy involvement by Gulf and regional actors. Spillover into Chad, South Sudan, and Ethiopia would magnify refugee crises and cross-border insecurity, destabilizing the Horn of Africa and the Sahel; this is currently the ongoing situation.

- **Most Likely Scenario: Prolonged Instability with Localized Negotiations**

Without decisive international leverage, Sudan is likely to remain in a protracted stalemate marked by intermittent ceasefires and fragmented

governance. This trajectory is driven by entrenched war economies, competing elite interests, and weak enforcement of sanctions. While localized negotiations may emerge around humanitarian access and community-level peace initiatives, the absence of structural reforms will allow violence and displacement to persist, reinforcing systemic fragility. For civilians, this means escalating insecurity, mass displacement, famine, and governance collapse, fueling regional instability and undermining prospects for sustainable peace.

Key Recommendations

National Actors (Government of Sudan & Political Stakeholders):

Prioritize an inclusive governance framework that brings civilian groups, women, and youth into decision-making processes. Ensure ceasefire compliance through independent monitoring and launch transitional justice mechanisms to address atrocities and rebuild public trust. Implement institutional reforms in health, education, and justice systems to restore service delivery and strengthen state legitimacy.

Safeguarding media freedoms and civic space is essential; repeal restrictive laws guarantee journalist safety and promote conflict-sensitive reporting. Build national peacebuilding capacity by establishing peace training centers and embedding conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm principles into governance programs. Advance rule of law and transitional justice through independent commissions for investigations and reparations, while mainstreaming gender and youth inclusion via quotas and governance frameworks.

Regional Bodies (AU and IGAD): Strengthen negotiation and mediation architecture by harmonizing AU and IGAD efforts under a joint mechanism. Secure humanitarian corridors through coordinated diplomacy and deploy regional standby forces for civilian protection where feasible. Enhance early warning systems and cross-border security cooperation to prevent spillover.

International Community (UN, Donors, Development Partners): significantly scale up flexible financing for critical life-saving interventions, including health services, food security, and gender-based violence (GBV) response, while laying the foundation for sustainable recovery through strategic infrastructure rehabilitation and governance reforms that institutionalize gender and youth inclusion. Concurrently, diplomatic engagement must be intensified to disrupt external arms flows and enforce targeted sanctions against actors perpetuating the war economy. To strengthen local ownership and resilience, direct and adaptable funding streams should prioritize grassroots actors, including small grants for women-led civil society organizations, faith-based institutions, and youth networks.

Advancing the Humanitarian Development Peace (HDP) nexus is imperative, ensuring that emergency relief is systematically integrated with medium-term recovery and long-term resilience programming. Robust accountability frameworks, underpinned by joint monitoring systems, must track progress and compliance. Finally, global advocacy campaigns should amplify narratives of women's leadership and youth-driven innovation in peacebuilding, reinforcing inclusive approaches to stabilization and recovery.

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Humanitarian Agencies (UN Agencies, INGOs, Local CSOs): Urgently provide humanitarian support especially in El Fasher, North Kordofan, Blue Nile among others. Expand resilience-building programs for displaced populations, incorporating cash transfers, livelihood recovery initiatives, and psychosocial support. All operations must mainstream gender-sensitive protection and child safeguarding standards. Sustaining aid delivery amid insecurity requires investment in local networks and community-led initiatives. Cross-border humanitarian and protection

responses should be strengthened through mobile protection teams and contingency planning to address spillover impacts. Security threats, including arms smuggling and mercenary movements, must be mitigated through intelligence sharing and joint patrols. Finally, regional economic and environmental recovery should be advanced through collaborative livelihood programs and climate adaptation initiatives.

Community-level and Local CSOs efforts should prioritize locally driven peacebuilding and dialogue by leveraging faith institutions, women's associations, and youth groups to foster reconciliation, trauma healing, and inter-ethnic engagement. Survivor-centered approaches to gender-based violence (GBV) must be expanded through mobile outreach, safe spaces, and psychosocial support. Livelihood recovery and resilience should be enhanced via small-scale agriculture, vocational training, and savings groups for displaced households. Additionally, community radio and youth-led media collectives should be supported to counter misinformation and hate speech.

Finally, all actors involved in supplying military support should cease and leverage diplomatic influence to promote a ceasefire and humanitarian assistance.

Conclusion

Sudan is at a pivotal moment. The collapse of state institutions, intensifying armed rivalries, and a rapidly worsening humanitarian emergency require swift and coordinated engagement to prevent deeper fragmentation and wider regional instability. Failure to act will result in growing food insecurity, large-scale displacement, and insecurity spilling into the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. Immediate priorities must include protection of civilians, particularly IDPs, women, and children, through the establishment of safe zones and humanitarian corridors, alongside guarantees for the inviolability of health facilities and medical personnel under international humanitarian law. Health institutions and their facilities must be shielded from attacks and militarization to restore life-saving services and prevent further erosion of public health systems. A unified mediation effort led by the regional actors, reinforced by sustained international pressure, is essential to secure an immediate ceasefire and open space for inclusive political dialogue. Concurrently, reviving basic services, scaling up GBV prevention and child protection programs, and ensuring strong participation of women and youth in governance reforms will be critical to rebuilding public trust and legitimacy. Without decisive action, Sudan risks sliding into irreversible state failure. With coordinated diplomacy, humanitarian access, and accountability for atrocity crimes, the international community can still pivot Sudan from collapse toward recovery and peace.

Call to Action

National Authorities must enforce a full arms embargo, dismantle the war economy through strict monitoring and penalties, and condemn starvation, siege tactics, and aid obstruction. They should protect civilians, humanitarian workers, and essential infrastructure, embed governance reforms in Sudan's transition, restore media freedoms, and ensure inclusive decision-making with women and youth. Transitional justice should advance via independent commissions for investigations, reparations, and prosecutions, while safeguarding civilians and health facilities under international law. Strengthening peacebuilding capacity and mainstreaming gender and youth inclusion are critical for lasting stability.

Regional Organizations (AU, IGAD) must unify mediation under one track, press for an immediate ceasefire, and guarantee humanitarian access, especially in Darfur, Kordofan, and Blue Nile. They should secure corridors, strengthen border security, deploy early-warning systems, and include women and youth in all negotiations. Coordinated action must address spillover risks, arms smuggling, and extremist infiltration, while integrating livelihood programs and climate adaptation to reduce displacement drivers.

The International Community (UN, Donors) must enforce a ceasefire, establish humanitarian corridors, and increase funding for health, education, and food security. They should embed GBV prevention and survivor-centered services, support UN investigations, and enforce accountability for atrocity crimes through international justice systems. Arms embargoes and targeted sanctions must dismantle the war economy. Flexible funding should prioritize urgent needs, GBV, child protection, and long-term recovery through institutional reforms and inclusive governance. Invest in grassroots resilience, trauma healing, and peace narratives via local media and community-led initiatives.

Humanitarian Agencies must scale up aid in Darfur, North Kordofan, and Blue Nile, embed gender-sensitive and child protection measures, and partner with local actors to sustain delivery. Urgent expansion of assistance for IDPs requires unhindered access, safety for aid workers, and mobilization of resources for food, health, and protection services.

Arab Nations (Saudi Arabia, Qatar) must leverage diplomacy to halt militarization, enforce arms cessation, and hold violators accountable through the Arab League, OIC, and Jeddah Platform. They should mobilize resources for urgent humanitarian aid, ensuring food, health, and protection for displaced and famine-affected populations to end impunity and stabilize the region.

Coordinated engagement at all levels is essential. The window to prevent Sudan's slide into lasting fragmentation is closing. Prompt, unified action can shift the country's path from breakdown toward recovery, stability, and inclusive peace.

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The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) promotes a world free of violence, inequality, and oppression. Guided by the Quaker belief in the divine light within each person, we nurture the seeds of change and respect for human life to fundamentally transform our societies and institutions. We work with people and partners worldwide of all faiths and backgrounds to meet urgent community needs, challenge injustice, and build peace. Through its Africa Regional Office in Kenya, AFSC promotes projects in Kenya, South Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, and Zimbabwe, with an evidence-based advocacy component for policy change in the Horn of Africa, with an office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. AFSC has decades of experience leading advocacy, evidence-based research, and worldwide civil society strengthening programs. AFSC brings Global South leaders and Civil Society Organizations through the Dialogue and Exchange Program to learn and exchange ideas every year. Due to the challenging situation in the Horn of Africa, AFSC focused intensely on this region to link up with existing civil society networks and Faith Leaders to contribute with its specific expertise.

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About the All Africa Conference of Churches, AACC:

AACC (All Africa Conference of Churches) is a continental ecumenical body that accounts for over 200 million Christians across the African continent. AACC is the largest association of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, and Indigenous churches in Africa, and a member of the worldwide ecumenical network. As an ecumenical body, AACC is a fellowship of 214 members comprising Churches, National Christian Councils (NCCs), theological and lay training institutions, and other Christian organizations in 43 African countries. With eleven programmatic focus areas, AACC's current strategy ensures that churches and other Christian institutions in Africa significantly contribute to the realization of the Continental and Global sustainable development agendas, such as the 17 SDGs and the AU Agenda 2065: "The Africa We Want."

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