SUDAN HUMAN RIGHTS HUB
SUDAN TRANSPARENCY AND POLICY TRACKER

Sudan Conflict Monitor 23

From Stalemate to Systemic Collapse

Executive Summary:

Since October 2025, Sudan's war has entered a more dangerous phase, marked by systematic territorial consolidation through mass violence, siege, and population control. Both the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have pursued tactics involving civilian harm and reduce prospects for de-escalation: the RSF through campaigns of terror and depopulation in Darfur and Kordofan, and the SAF through increased reliance on air power, allied militias, and hardline mobilization.

In both warring parties, internal fragmentation, particularly among SAF, and hardliner influence have limited armed leaders› ability to commit credibly to ceasefire arrangements. RSF engagement with diplomacy has primarily served reputational management rather than restraint. Civilians are the only constituency consistently advocating ceasefire frameworks and inclusive political outcomes—yet are increasingly marginalized and repressed.

The humanitarian crisis has become an instrument of war. Access restrictions, sieges, and attacks on services and responders are deliberately used to control populations, particularly in Darfur and Kordofan. Public health emergencies and the targeting of local Emergency Response Rooms underscore the collapse of civilian protection and governance.

Economically, Sudan's war economy is maturing, locking in incentives for prolonged conflict amid mass impoverishment. A majority of the population lives in extreme poverty, while armed actors extract revenue through routes, checkpoints, and asset control. The Helglig oilfield "neutral protection" arrangement—coordinated by SAF, RSF, and South Sudan—illustrates how belligerents can cooperate to safeguard strategic revenues even as violence escalates elsewhere. Despite intensified international engagement, diplomacy has not achieved a ceasefire altered battlefield behavior. Absent enforceable pressure, protection of civilian space, and disruption of war-economy incentives, Sudan is likely to slide further into entrenched conflict and systemic collapse.

Security Developments

In late October, the city of El Fasher fell after an 18-month siege. The city's fall consolidated the RSF's position in Darfur. It shifted the focus of the fighting to the Kordofans, where Kadugli and Dilling remain under siege, and military operations continue around El Obeid. On December 24, 2025, insecurity had grown to the point that the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei was forced to evacuate its logistics base in Kadugli. On December 30, the RSF and their Sudan People's Liberation Army- North (SPLA-N) allies overran SAF positions at Keiga Junction, Balif, and Hajar Daleib on the Kadugli to Dilling road, threatening both cities, key locations in Kordofan.

In the aftermath of this reordering, the security landscape in Sudan has deteriorated sharply, shifting from large-scale battles to strategies aimed at territorial consolidation through mass violence, siege, and population control. Both the RSF and SAF have adapted their military approaches in ways that significantly increase civilian exposure to harm and reduce the prospects for de-escalation.

Consolidation through terror: The RSF strategy

The RSF's recent operations in Darfur and Kordofan reflect a clear strategic pattern: the use of extreme violence against civilians as a means to while consolidate territorial control.

The strategic importance of El Fasher—as the last major SAF-held urban center in Darfur— has made it a focal point for violence aimed at reshaping the territory through killings and displacement. The scale and organization of the violence have raised serious international concern, including statements from UN human rights bodies warning of mass atrocities in Darfur.

In Kordofan, similar dynamics are visible. RSF activity has concentrated on controlling roads, junctions, and supply corridors linking Darfur, Kordofan, and central Sudan. According to Reuters, this approach reflects a broader RSF strategy to secure economic routes and impose sieges rather than prioritize urban governance.

In and around El Fasher, RSF forces have pursued the systematic depopulation of civilian neighborhoods, including Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) camps. Reporting by Radio Dabanga and Amnesty International documents widespread killings, looting, sexual violence,

and the destruction of civilian property, echoing RSF conduct previously observed in El Geneina and other parts of West Darfur and El Fasher.

Reports from UNHCR highlight horrific violations against those fleeing the violence in both Darfur and Kordofan. Women have faced rape, and men have faced kidnapping for ransom. All have faced theft of their possessions. Those fleeing are taking longer, more circuitous routes to avoid abusive armed fighters at checkpoints, creating additional risks from more extended travel and the remote areas they are forced to pass through.

This violence in Darfur and Kordofan regions appears designed to dismantle civilian resistance, fracture communal cohesion, and eliminate perceived demographic obstacles to RSF control. Road closures and checkpoints have restricted civilian movement and humanitarian access, and constitute an important part of this coercion.

SAF reliance on air power and militia groups

In the face of RSF advances and its own overstretched conventional ground forces, the SAF has increasingly relied on air power as its primary military instrument. The BBC has reported an uptick in SAF airstrikes targeting towns, markets, and transport infrastructure across Darfur and Kordofan, often resulting in civilian casualties and damage to essential services.

In addition, SAF has increasingly relied on allied militias and irregular armed factions to hold territory on the ground. These include SAF-aligned militias such as the Sudan Shield Forces and the Al-Baraa Ibn Malik Brigade, as well as armed movement elements and locally mobilized forces operating outside formal SAF command structures. Together, these actors have become central to SAF's war effort in contested regions, providing manpower and local control while operating with significant autonomy.

While there is no public evidence of a unified command linking air operations and militia deployments, available reporting indicates that aerial attacks are frequently followed by the presence of SAF-aligned armed groups exercising control on the ground. In this context, air power has functioned to offset SAF's limited conventional ground capacity, while allied militias and armed factions absorb the political and humanitarian costs of territorial control.

Reporting further suggests that the growing prominence of these actors has narrowed the space for negotiation, as militia leaders and allied factions exert pressure on SAF leadership to prioritize military victory over compromise, reinforcing tactics that privilege bombardment and coercion over civilian protection.

Expansion of drone warfare

A defining feature of the current phase of the conflict is the expanding use of drones by both warring parties. Drone strikes have increasingly targeted not only military positions but also infrastructure critical to civilian life, including power facilities and transport nodes. In one example, at least 30 civilians were reportedly killed in an attack on the town of Katila in South Darfur on December 8. This shift has widened the battlespace and eroded the distinction between front lines and areas previously considered removed from active fighting.

The normalization of drone warfare in Sudan is reflected in the growing frequency and geographic spread of drone strikes, many of which have been reported by the Associated Press, including attacks affecting civilian and international-linked targets. While drone use has been documented in earlier phases of the conflict, recent reporting and OSINT documentation indicate that such strikes are no longer exceptional but have become a routine component of military operations, including against infrastructure critical to civilian life.

This pattern points to an escalation in the role of remote warfare capabilities and a further erosion of spatial and civilian protections.

From maneuver warfare to siege and depopulation

Taken together, these developments indicate a rebalancing in the conduct of hostilities. While both the RSF and SAF continue to pursue military objectives, the systematic targeting of civilians through siege, punishment, and depopulation has become increasingly central to how territory is contested and ctrolled. Civilian areas are no longer merely affected by fighting but are treated as pressure points in their own right, with displacement, infrastructure degradation, and population control functioning alongside conventional military operations.

In Darfur and Kordofan, this shift has produced some of the war's most severe atrocities to date, while simultaneously entrenching fragmented systems of control that rely on fear rather than governance. Humanitarian agencies monitoring access constraints through a Gannet report that insecurity and road control have directly curtailed aid delivery, reinforcing siege conditions in multiple locations.

Dim prospects for peace

The security trends observed since October 2025 suggest that Sudan's war is entering a more entrenched and destructive phase. Territorial consolidation through terror, the expanded use of air power and drones, and the systematic targeting of civilians and infrastructure have reshaped incentives in ways that favor continued conflict over negotiation. Militarily, these tactics enable control without governance; economically, insecurity sustains revenue through route control, asset capture, and coercion; and politically, prolonged war empowers hardline actors while marginalizing civilians. Absent meaningful external pressure or internal restraint, these dynamics are likely to deepen civilian suffering and further fragment Sudan's security landscape.

Political Developments

Since October, political dynamics within Sudan's warring camps have further fragmented, undermining the prospects for translating diplomatic engagement into meaningful restraint on the ground. Decision-making within both the SAF-aligned authorities in Port Sudan and the RSF leadership has increasingly reflected internal power struggles, hardliner influence, and rent-seeking incentives rather than coherent pathways toward de-escalation.

SAF grows increasingly beholden to hardline influence

Within the SAF camp, political authority is increasingly constrained by hardline Islamist actors and SAF-aligned armed constituencies whose influence and wartime leverage are strengthened by continued conflict. This influence was evident when the SAF-aligned Defense and Security Council convened in Khartoum in early November 2025 and declined to endorse the Quad- proposed ceasefire framework, instead announcing the formation of a committee to develop a "vision for restoring peace" while criticizing the international community for failing to enforce UN resolutions on Darfur.

Subsequent statements by SAF leadership have reinforced the influence of these constituencies on policy, reflecting a recurring pattern rather than an isolated position. In late November, Al Burhan informed the UN Secretary-General's envoy that the SAF would not engage in talks until the RSF withdrew from territories it had seized—restating a position the SAF has advanced at multiple points since 2023. By conditioning negotiations on prior battlefield concessions, this stance functions as a mechanism for refusing talks while shifting responsibility for diplomatic failure onto the RSF. It also aligns with the interests of hardline constituencies for whom negotiations threaten political and economic leverage.

The growing prominence of Islamist-aligned militias is further demonstrated by the Al-Baraa Ibn Malik Brigade's public rejection, earlier in the conflict and reiterated following U.S. sanctions in September 2025, of SAF efforts to restructure or integrate allied forces. Despite external pressure, the brigade has maintained operational autonomy while continuing to mobilize in support of the SAF's war effort. This resistance underscores the degree to which armed ideological actors retain leverage within the SAF camp, limiting the leadership's ability to commit credibly to ceasefire arrangements.

RSF announces unilateral ceasefire for political cover

The RSF announced a unilateral ceasefire in late November in an apparent effort to manage international pressure and reputational costs related to its human rights violations, in particular in the aftermath of heightened scrutiny of RSF atrocities in Darfur. The RSF leadership framed the move as a gesture of cooperation with mediation efforts, but analysts said the move aimed to deflect condemnation. At the same time, RSF continued to consolidate gains on the ground.

Civilians remain the only consistently pro-peace constituency, but struggle to organize

Civilian political forces have remained the only actors consistently advocating for a ceasefire and an inclusive political process. Former Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, alongside civilian coalitions including Somoud, publicly urged the SAF to accept the Quad-backed truce proposal in November, warning that continued military escalation threatened Sudan's very survival.

In December, the Somoud coalition announced internal restructuring to strengthen civilian unity and engagement amid shrinking political space and escalating risks to activists. Yet civilians lack coercive leverage and face increasing repression, rendering them politically marginalized even as they articulate the most coherent vision for ending the war.

International mediation efforts have sought to re-center civilians since 2023, most notably through the African Union's renewed initiative in late 2025 to convene Sudanese civilian actors. However, the proposed meeting did not take place inside Sudan due to acute security risks, restrictions imposed by warring parties, and objections from civilian groups concerned about legitimacy, inclusion, and the absence of guarantees that consultations would translate into binding political outcomes.

Humanitarian Situation

Since October 2025, both sides have continued to instrumentalize humanitarian aid through access restrictions, insecurity, and attacks on aid providers and civilian responders. These trends have persisted since the outbreak of the war but have become especially acute in Darfur and Kordofan.

Weaponization of humanitarian access continues

Humanitarian agencies report that insecurity, checkpoints, and direct attacks are systematically constraining access across Darfur and Kordofan. In December 2025, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported that the widespread looting, road closures, and fighting had trapped civilians and inhibited adequate humanitarian response in conflict-affected areas, particularly in North Darfur and South Kordofan. As of mid December 2025, El Fasher remained inaccessible, creating serious concerns about the situation of populations remaining there.MSF has also called on authorities to ease administrative and bureaucratic barriers hindering the transport of measles vaccines, underscoring how access restrictions are increasingly used to shape civilian survival conditions in Darfur and Kordofan.

Compounding these challenges, funding shortfalls have forced aid agencies to reduce assistance. UNHCR reports that it has received only 35% of the funding needed to respond to the crisis. In December, the World Food Programme (WFP) announced significant cuts to food rations due to funding shortages, saying that it would only be able to provide 70% rations to communities facing famine and 50% to communities at risk of famine, the "absolute minimum for survival."

Cholera outbreaks have intensified amid conflict-related disruptions to water and sanitation systems. UNICEF situation reports document rising cholera cases and fatalities, noting that insecurity and access constraints have hampered containment and treatment efforts. The World Health Organization (WHO) further links the spread of cholera to displacement, overcrowding, and the destruction of health infrastructure, underscoring how disease has become a marker of state collapse.

The World Food Program (WFP) warned of a dangerous escalation of attacks on the healthcare sector. The agency reported that it "verified 201 attacks on health care in Sudan, resulting in 1858 deaths and 490 injuries" since the conflict began in April 2023. Sixty-five of these attacks occurred in 2025, approximately 80% of all attacks on health care that it has verified across all complex emergencies over the year.

Emergency response rooms under pressure

Local Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs), which have played a critical role in sustaining civilians amid state collapse, are themselves increasingly targeted, co-opted, or displaced. An Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) assessment from October 2025 details how ERRs face harassment, legal insecurity, and interference from authorities and armed actors, severely constraining their ability to operate. The report notes that members of Security Cells in SAF-controlled areas have investigated ERR members and have threatened to suspend the registrations of both national and international NGOs that collaborated with them. In RSF areas, the ERRs also face suspicion, detention, and forced collaboration with the Sudanese Agency for Humanitarian Relief (SARHO). Despite international recognition of ERRs' lifesaving role—including the awarding of the Rafto Prize—volunteers continue to face arrest, threats, and violence.

Human Rights

Mass atrocities committed in El Fasher

When the RSF took control of the city of El Fasher, its forces engaged in mass killings of civilians that appear to have taken place on an ethnic basis, in which RSF fighters targeted non-Arab communities. The ethnic dimensions of mass atrocities committed by the RSF have been evident since the beginning of the war, especially in Darfur. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) found that RSF's attacks on the Zamzam IDP camp from April 11 to 13, in which at least 1,013 people were killed, also targeted specific ethnic groups. RSF committed similar mass atrocities along ethnic lines in El Geneina when RSF attacked and took over the city in 2023.

The Yale Humanitarian Research Lab, which monitored the situation around El Fasher using satellite imagery, reported evidence of mass killings in the city in the 48 hours after it fell. Satellite analysis identified large groups of civilians gathered at the former Children's Hospital, followed by the appearance of bodies at the same location the following day, consistent with reports of mass executions. The Lab also corroborated other accounts of mass killings at the Saudi Hospital, where at least 460 patients and their companions were reportedly killed. Many of these atrocities were filmed by RSF fighters themselves and later circulated on social media.

Beyond these initial mass killing events, the Yale Lab documented evidence of continued killings and systematic body disposal across the city. Between the fall of El Fasher and 13 November, satellite imagery detected body disposal activity at four separate locations. The Lab identified clusters consistent with human remains, including individuals likely killed while attempting to flee and civilians sheltering in the Daraja Oula neighborhood, described as the "last known major civilian refuge" in the city.

A group of UN special rapporteurs expressed alarm about the scale of atrocities, and the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, Chaloka Beyani, sounded an alarm about the mass nature of the atrocities, which, in his words, "rings over and beyond the ordinary violations of human rights or of international humanitarian law."

Economic & War Economy Dynamics

Economic conditions in Sudan have continued to deteriorate sharply, reinforcing incentives for armed actors to sustain conflict while rendering civilian recovery increasingly remote. While many conflicts initially give rise to adaptive war economies—in which armed actors improvise revenue sources to sustain operations amid disruption—available indicators in Sudan point to a more matured war economy increasingly dominated by systematic predation and mass impoverishment. In this phase, economic activity is less about short-term survival and more about entrenched extraction, territorial control, and the deliberate production of civilian dependency. These dynamics are not mutually exclusive; rather, Sudan's conflict has shifted from improvised wartime adaptation toward a stabilized system in which violence and deprivation themselves generate durable economic and political power.

Poverty surge and economic collapse

World Bank analyses indicate that Sudan's economy has contracted severely due to prolonged conflict, inflation, and institutional breakdown. In early 2025, the World Bank projected that more than 70 percent of Sudan's population was living in, or at high risk of, extreme poverty under continued conflict conditions.

Since mid-2025, there is no evidence of economic stabilization or recovery that would reverse these projected poverty levels. Instead, continued displacement, market disruption, and the consolidation of war-economy dynamics suggest that extreme poverty has become structural rather than temporary, with conditions locking in deprivation rather than enabling recovery.

War economy deepening

Sudan's war economy has deepened over recent months through the consolidation of asset capture, route control, and the monetization of displacement. While checkpoints and forced taxation existed earlier in the conflict, reporting, by Sudan focused-monitoring platforms, since October indicates that armed actors have increasingly relied on systematic control over displaced populations as a revenue source. This includes taxing or extorting civilians at checkpoints, charging for passage along displacement routes, controlling access to markets and services in areas of displacement, and interfering with or extracting rents from humanitarian assistance destined for displaced communities, particularly in Darfur and Kordofan.

Displacement data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) indicate that heightened insecurity along key movement corridors linking Darfur, Kordofan, and central

Sudan has driven repeated waves of forced displacement. This, in turn, has concentrated economic power among armed groups by depopulating contested areas, increasing civilian dependence on controlled routes and markets, and expanding opportunities for taxation, extortion, and control over aid and movement—reinforcing incentives to sustain territorial fragmentation rather than stabilize civilian governance.

Aid reductions and access constraints have compounded these dynamics. As WFP rations are cut and humanitarian reach shrinks, armed actors controlling markets and routes gain additional leverage over civilians' survival, reinforcing cycles of dependence and coercion.

Recent developments around Sudan's oil infrastructure further illustrate the maturation of the war economy, in which armed rivals are able to coordinate pragmatically around strategic revenue-generating assets even as violence continues elsewhere. In December, SAF and RSF representatives, in coordination with the government of South Sudan, reached an agreement to place the Helglig oilfield under a "neutral" protection arrangement to safeguard production and export flows despite ongoing hostilities. Although the details of the agreement remain unclear, and it is uncertain what, if any, compensation the RSF may be receiving for its withdrawal, the arrangement reflects a shared interest among belligerents in preserving oil revenues. This capacity to stabilize and protect income streams—while civilian areas remain subject to violence and deprivation—signals a war economy that is no longer improvised but institutionalized and resilient to conflict dynamics.

While framed as a stabilizing measure, the Helglig agreement shows that armed rivals can protect and profit from key economic assets even in the absence of political settlement or improvements in civilian conditions. The ability to preserve oil revenues despite ongoing violence reduces pressure on the parties to pursue peace, as economic gains no longer depend on ending the conflict.

Collapse of civilian livelihoods and forced dependence

The cumulative effect of economic collapse, displacement, and aid contraction has been the near- total erosion of civilian livelihoods. Recent humanitarian reporting indicates that a growing share of households have exhausted reversible coping strategies. According to UN-coordinated humanitarian assessments conducted in late 2025, more than half of households in parts of Darfur and Kordofan reported selling productive assets or livestock, and an increase in exploitative labor arrangements and child labor as assistance declined. These conditions increase civilians' dependence on armed actors controlling markets, movement, and access to aid, making it easier for those actors to consolidate territorial control and extract compliance.

International & Regional Response

Since September 2025, international engagement on Sudan has intensified but has had little impact. While diplomatic actors have converged around shared principles—civilian- led transition, ceasefire, and humanitarian access—these efforts have not translated into behavioral change by the belligerents.

Quad engagement: clear principles, but limited implementation

The most significant diplomatic development in recent months has been the Quad's renewed engagement (the United States, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates). In September, the Quad issued a joint statement outlining a framework for ending the war, emphasizing that Sudan's future governance must be determined by civilians and calling for an end to international engagement. The statement represented a key point of convergence, particularly given the historically divergent positions of Egypt and the UAE regarding their respective allies in Sudan.

However, subsequent developments illustrate the limits of the initiative. Despite the Quad's efforts to convene talks in Washington in October 2025 and later in Jeddah in November 2025, neither the SAF nor the RSF has demonstrated sustained restraint on the ground. SAF-aligned authorities declined to formally endorse a ceasefire framework, while RSF forces continued major offensives in Darfur and Kordofan even as their leadership engaged diplomatically. This pattern indicates that the Quad framework, while normatively significant, lacks enforcement mechanisms sufficient to alter military calculations.

Sanctions reinforcing Quad objectives, but not yet changing dynamics overall

Targeted sanctions have been used selectively to signal international red lines, particularly regarding Islamist-linked armed actors. In September, the United States sanctioned the Al-Baraa Ibn Malik Brigade and its leadership, citing their role in fueling violence and undermining peace efforts. The move reflected a growing U.S. focus on countering Islamist hardliners within the SAF coalition. The US had earlier sanctioned several RSF commanders including Hemedti, in early 2025.

After the fall of El Fasher, the United Kingdom took additional action on December 12, 2025, and it sanctioned four senior RSF commanders—citing alleged mass killings, systematic sexual violence, and deliberate attacks on civilians in and around El Fasher—imposing asset freezes and travel bans. However, these measures have so far functioned more as accountability signaling than as coercive leverage to shift battlefield incentives.

African Union, IGAD, and UN engagement

Regional and multilateral actors have sought to reassert roles in the diplomatic process, though coordination challenges and legitimacy deficits persist. In October, the African Union announced plans for civilian consultations in Addis Ababa; however, the initiative faced criticism from civil society coalitions for exclusion, top-down agenda-setting, and the absence of clear pathways from consultation to binding political outcomes. Subsequent efforts to relocate the consultations—first to Luanda and later to Djibouti—failed to resolve these concerns, and the meetings ultimately did not take place. This sequence underscores broader tensions between international mediation frameworks and Sudanese civilian actors seeking genuine ownership over political processes, as well as the limited capacity of external actors to translate procedural initiatives into effective engagement under current conditions.

Recent analysis of regional mediation dynamics further underscores these challenges. According to a December 2025 assessment of Sudan's mediation landscape, regional initiatives by Elwathig Kamier, published by STPT—including those led by the African Union and IGAD—remain fragmented, poorly coordinated, and constrained by competing interests among regional states, some of which maintain ties to Sudan's belligerents. The analysis highlights that mediation efforts have often prioritized procedural engagement and diplomatic visibility over leverage, enforcement, and civilian inclusion, resulting in parallel tracks that dilute pressure on armed actors rather than consolidate it. Civilian actors, while frequently invoked rhetorically, are rarely positioned as agenda-setters or decision-makers, reinforcing perceptions that regional mediation frameworks reproduce the exclusionary dynamics that contributed to Sudan's political collapse.

At the UN level, engagement has tilted toward documentation and accountability mechanisms, with mediation and political facilitation playing a less prominent role in recent months. The UN Human Rights Council's Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Sudan has continued to document atrocities, despite strong opposition from SAF-aligned authorities demanding termination of its mandate. In October, the FFM's mandate was extended, underscoring the relative momentum of accountability efforts even as UN political engagement has remained constrained by limited leverage and access.

As noted above, various UN actors have repeatedly warned that the conflict's trajectory risks further mass atrocities, particularly in Darfur. However, these warnings have not been matched by collective action capable of altering battlefield dynamics.

Forward-Looking Assessment

The trends observed since October point toward a conflict that is becoming more entrenched, fragmented, and resistant to diplomatic intervention. As outlined above, territorial consolidation through violence, the maturation of war-economy incentives, the instrumentalization of humanitarian access, and the marginalization of civilian political actors have collectively reduced the costs of continued fighting. The convergence of these military, political, humanitarian, and economic dynamics suggests that Sudan is entering a phase where violence is increasingly self-sustaining.

Short-term trajectory (the next 3–6 Months)

In the near term, continued territorial consolidation through violence remains likely. RSF forces appear intent on securing dominance across Darfur and key corridors in Kordofan. At the same time, the SAF is likely to continue relying on intensifying air power and allied militias to offset constraints on ground forces. Although available data suggest that airstrikes have decreased in some areas in recent weeks, both sides retain the capacity to escalate aerial and remote attacks when tactically advantageous. The RSF's expanding access to drones, alongside the SAF's continued use of aircraft, means that civilian areas remain exposed even during periods of reduced fighting, particularly in urban and peri-urban locations.

Humanitarian conditions are likely to deteriorate further as access constraints persist and aid resources shrink. WFP ration cuts and continued insecurity along supply routes are expected to deepen food insecurity, particularly in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. As described above, the underlying drivers of public health emergencies—displacement, overcrowding, damaged water and sanitation systems, and limited healthcare access—remain acute, sustaining a high risk of renewed disease outbreaks and excess mortality.

Medium-term risks

Over the medium term, the maturation of Sudan's war economy presents one of the most serious obstacles to peace. As armed actors consolidate revenue streams through

checkpoints, asset capture, and control of movement, incentives to prolong conflict will deepen. Civilian impoverishment and displacement reduce the social base for resistance and increase dependence on armed actors and aid intermediaries who control access to aid, transportation, and basic services, including checkpoint authorities, local brokers, and armed group–affiliated committees.

Politically, continued fragmentation within armed camps and the marginalization of civilians risk foreclosing viable negotiation pathways. Diplomatic initiatives that fail to address internal power dynamics within SAF and RSF camps are unlikely to produce sustained restraint.

Implications for international policy

The current trajectory underscores the limits of diplomacy that is decoupled from enforcement and protection mechanisms. Absent stronger coordination among international actors, including credible consequences for violations and meaningful protection for civilians and responders, Sudan's conflict is likely to persist as a war of attrition characterized by mass civilian harm.

At the same time, Sudanese civilians—despite their marginalization—remain the only actors articulating a coherent vision for ending the war. Supporting their political agency, protecting humanitarian and civic space, and disrupting war-economy incentives will be critical if international engagement is to move beyond crisis management toward conflict resolution. These incentives include armed actors' revenue from checkpoints, control of trade corridors, exploitation of displacement, diversion of aid, and access to strategic assets such as fuel, land, and extractive infrastructure—areas where coordinated sanctions enforcement, monitoring of supply chains, and protection of civilian movement could raise the costs of continued violence.