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The Role of Egypt in the Armed Conflict in Sudan

The ongoing armed conflict in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which erupted in April 2023, has entered a new phase with the recent military developments that represent a paradigm shift, especially concerning the future of Sudan as an administratively unified country. Alas, these serious developments are marked by a noticeable slowdown in the progress towards a negotiated political settlement during the ongoing round of indirect talks taking place in Washington since 22 October 2025.

This deadly stagnation in the peace process was due to the refusal of SAF's representatives to sign the draft ceasefire agreement that called for a three-month truce and the launch of an international operation to protect civilians in active combat zones and to deliver humanitarian assistance to millions of hungry and displaced people across the country. The delay in reaching a ceasefire agreement constitutes a blatant disregard for the lives of millions of innocent civilians who, over the past thirty months, have paid a dire price for SAF's unjustified obstinacy and intransigence, through displacement, hunger, and disease.

A new element has entered the equation of war and peace in Sudan i.e. the military advances achieved by the RSF and its allies, which have gained control over key cities and vast areas, most notably El Fasher, capital of North Darfur State. This city holds both strategic and symbolic significance and was taken by the RSF on Sunday, 26 October 2025. Earlier that same week, the RSF had regained control of Bara, another military strategic town in North Kordofan State.

The RSF's military advances represent major military and political setbacks for SAF, and could have been avoided or their effects mitigated, especially the heavy human casualties and other atrocious acts committed against civilians as well as their physical and psychological impacts, had SAF's representatives placed the interests and well-being of their own civilian compatriots that were trapped in the battlegrounds at the top of their agenda, and consequently acted in good faith and agreed to sign the ceasefire draft agreement, thereby preparing the ground to ending the fighting and launching an international campaign to protect civilians and deliver humanitarian relief. They had every opportunity to do so upon their arrival in Washington on Wednesday, 22 October 2025 but unfortunately, they refused.

The recent military gains achieved by the RSF have placed it in a stronger operational position than before and gave it both the capacity and the readiness to advance into additional regions, most likely toward the resource-rich Greater Kordofan States, possibly to secure control over the remaining towns. Should such control be consolidated, the RSF and its military and political allies would effectively dominate about two-thirds of Sudan's territory and administer the affairs of nearly half of its population. This scenario would significantly enhance their ability to expand the areas under their administration to encompass vast portions of the country and pose a new strategic challenge to the army and its domestic and external backers. The ultimate result is that SAF's obdurate position and continued procrastination in reaching a negotiated political settlement, or any future RSF's military success, will only strengthen the latter's negotiating position and, consequently, magnify the security and political value of its gains.

It is expected that the recent RSF's military advances will force the army and its allied militias and military and political backers, particularly the extremist groups, to further harden their position in support of the war efforts, declare general mobilization, and heighten military buildup. They may even contemplate countering any RSF's military advances by using what a senior member of the ruling Council had once described as the "lethal force," a thinly veiled reference to the army's potential willingness to use unconventional or internationally prohibited weapons.

At the same time, there is a serious risk that the army and the security apparatus intensify their ongoing pre-emptive retaliatory campaigns against innocent civilians accused of collaborating with the RSF. These campaigns typically manifested in arbitrary arrests of political activists, peace advocates, humanitarian workers, and human rights defenders, as well as in the mass arrests and extrajudicial killings of civilians on ethnic or regional grounds. They are also accompanied by systematic destruction of homes belonging to the poor working-class and the marginalized populations displaced by the war and residing in impoverished neighbourhoods on the outskirts of major cities.

On the external front, the RSF's recent military successes are expected to generate new responses and reactions from regional and international powers which monitor the war dynamic in Sudan. These developments may compel them to reshape their strategies in a way that their political positions become more explicit and decisive with regard to Sudan's internal affairs, and their security plans become more inclined toward direct military intervention to resolve the crisis – particularly if such new military developments affect the national security concerns or the territorial integrity of both Sudan and the African sub-region.

It is worth recalling that early signs of such threats of a change of regional strategies towards the crisis in Sudan came to the fore in late 2024, when one of Sudan's neighbours publicly hinted at the possibility of altering their approach and directly intervening in the fighting.

A widely held belief among observers of Sudan's political and military landscape is that SAF's leadership would have not dared to continue the war, nor to systematically sabotage attempts to achieve a sustainable and negotiated peace, without the backing of external powers that provide them with funding, political backing and military support to their war efforts. This is

compounded by the influence of domestic political forces that incite the army to assume defiant positions and discourage engagement in any serious process aimed at halting hostilities and initiating dialogue toward peace and transition toward democratic civilian rule. With regard to the domestic forces, there is unanimous consensus that the fundamentalist Islamic Movement – operating under the auspices of the National Congress Party – is the principal actor with a direct interest in derailing any effort to achieve a negotiated political settlement that would end the fighting, mitigate the effects of the devastating humanitarian crisis, and pave the way for a civilian-led democratic rule grounded in justice, the rule of law, and lay down the foundations for a modern state where citizens are equal in dignity and rights enjoy their freedoms without ethnic discrimination, and bound by a spirit of cooperation and national solidarity.

The complexity of the situation in Sudan unfolds amid an escalating humanitarian catastrophe and growing broad-based public demands for an immediate end to the war and destruction of lives and livelihoods. These demands find their origin in a clear and comprehensive political vision for peace and reconstruction proposed by the Civil Democratic Alliance for Revolutionary Forces (SUMOUD). This vision was articulated in the appeal titled “For Peace and Ending the War”, launched by SUMOUD´s President Dr. Abdalla Hamdok, in early March 2025. This appeal is the most practical and realistic framework that reinforced the Quad States’ Initiative for Peace in Sudan, comprising the United States, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Quad’s position was officially declared on the roadmap announced on 12 September 2025 and the indirect negotiations on implementation of its provisions were subsequently held between SAF and the RSF in Washington in October 2025.

It appears that several countries are collaborating with and supporting SAF in its war efforts through funding and the sale and supply of weapons and military equipment and technology, namely Qatar, Turkey, Iran, Russia, China, and Pakistan. However, the role of neighbouring states – Egypt and Eritrea – is the most significant in all respects. Involvement of these two counties is not only limited to providing military assistance; far more critical are their declared intentions and political positions regarding the conflict and the potential participation of their armies in direct combat operations in support of SAF as well as their ability to penetrate Sudanese territory adjacent to their borders to occupy and exploit its resources. In addition, both states offer critical political and diplomatic backing to the military regime, with Egypt playing the dominant role, driven by its ambitions to secure control over Sudan’s vast water sources, fertile land, and abundant natural resources – mineral, agricultural, and livestock alike.

While SAF commanders and some observers focus their attention on accusations against the United Arab Emirates, alleging that it supports one party to the conflict, what is striking is the absence of any discussion about the role of Egypt, Qatar and Eritrea in support of SAF’s war and intelligence operations. There is also a marked silence about Egypt’s political and diplomatic support for the military authorities across negotiation platforms and international and regional decision-making circles. Egypt’s interference in Sudan’s internal affairs has effectively become a taboo subject, rarely raised by observers or addressed by Sudanese political forces in a transparent manner, despite the fact that such interference is real and its negative effects

are far greater when compared to other foreign interventions or external financial and military assistance, which could otherwise be halted once their sources were identified and confirmed.

In case the Sudanese themselves fail to bring a prompt, final and conclusive end to the armed conflict through their own independent decision and will, thus protecting their national interests, then the war is likely to drag on for a prolonged period, potentially spilling over into new regional conflicts, no less devastating than the present one. The inevitable result would be a much heavier death toll on innocent civilians, serving only the strategic objectives of some of Sudan's neighbours, who have long sought to set footsteps on its land.

It is worth recalling that Eritrea has previously threatened military intervention in support of SAF in case the military confrontations with the RSF were to spread into eastern Sudan, considering such a development as a direct threat to its national interests. This threat was made during General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan's visit to Asmara, the Eritrean capital, on 27 November 2024. In fact, the visit was preceded, in late October 2024, by the deployment of an armed militia group in eastern Sudan known as the "Eastern Brigade" (al-Orta al-Sharqiya). It is widely believed that this militia group had been trained and armed in Eritrea, and that its deployment serves as a logistical and intelligence cover for a potential Eritrean military intervention in Sudan whenever deemed necessary.

The regional security landscape is becoming increasingly complex following threats by the RSF against neighbouring states it accused of allowing SAF to use their territories as platforms to launch military operations and direct combat drones against RSF positions. The RSF has further declared that airports used for such purposes constitute legitimate military targets. In response to these threats, Egypt declared general mobilization of its security forces and deployed additional border guards and army troops along its southern borders with Sudan. This escalation signals the possibility of expanding the war beyond Sudan's international borders and suggests a readiness to strike Egypt or Eritrea.

In addition to the dangers of regional escalation and the potential acceleration of direct foreign military intervention, the most pressing challenges facing Sudan today is the effort of the movement of political Islam and the dissolved National Congress Party to return to power under the protection of the army and security apparatus. This scenario rests on two interlinked pillars: first, the unlimited support provided by the Islamist movement to the army in terms of manpower and financial backing; and second, a campaign of disinformation and psychological warfare, a 4th Generation Warfare-style, aimed at securing the SAF's victory over the RSF.

A major component of this disinformation campaign involves plans to criminalize and discredit the pro-democracy civilian forces – that are advocating for a return to civilian rule – in the eyes of the Sudanese public and international observers, thereby eliminating them from the political equation. Within this context, SUMOUD and the Sudan Founding Alliance (TASIS) have become prime targets to be eliminated to pave the way for the return of the Islamist forces to power under military protection. This could then be followed by sham elections designed to

manufacture a façade of legitimacy and reproduce the former authoritarian regime under new names and slogans.

To prevent such dangerous outcomes, it is imperative that peace-loving nations and peoples unite their efforts to bring the armed conflict in Sudan to an immediate end, remove obstacles, outcast detractors, and begin preparing for the post-war recovery phase. Rebuilding the state institutions during the transitional governance phase that follows must be long enough – no less than five years – and should be accompanied by effective safeguards to prevent the transition period from being hijacked by fractious political forces or be dominated by foreign influences that could distort the path toward genuine democratic civilian rule in favour of entrenched political groups possessing material wealth and strong organizational capacity.

Egypt and Sudan

Sudan represents the lifeline for Egypt, and Egypt's geopolitical and national security interests in the country require the active presence of a loyal regime ruling Sudan. Supporting such a regime is thus the most important pillar of Egypt's long-standing strategy to protect its national interests, particularly regarding exploitation of Sudan's share of the River Nile waters and containing the implications of the completion of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Evidence suggests that Egypt has long been the principal architect behind the long years of military governance in Sudan as well as the successive military coups that have toppled civilian governments and thwarted peaceful, negotiated solutions to Sudan's armed conflicts. Among Egypt's policy circles, the prevailing belief is that the only guarantor of Egypt's strategic interests in Sudan is the presence of a military authority ruling with an iron fist, loyal to Cairo, and prepared to suppress the aspirations of the Sudanese people for democratic civilian governance, freedoms, justice, and sustainable peace as well as restoring balanced foreign relations that could lift Sudan's isolation and generate economic and developmental benefits.

Egypt's close collaboration with the military authorities in Sudan and its ability to influence the security, political, and economic decision-makers, places it in the position of a trustful advisor yet the principal culprit in the suffering that now engulfs the country. This is especially evident considering that Egypt's strategic posture toward Sudan has changed little since its invasion and colonial occupation of the country under the Ottoman Caliphate in the early nineteenth century (1820). This historical relationship laid down the foundation for Egypt's exploitative policies toward Sudan – viewing it not as a strategic partner whose interests deserve respect and protection, but rather as a source of raw material and a subordinate political and economic appendage. Consequently, Egypt's current policies toward Sudan are well behind the evolving political consciousness and growing aspirations of the new Sudanese generations who seek sovereignty and yearn to freedom, peace, justice and mutual respect in regional relations.

Although Egypt's strategy towards Sudan is complicated and multifaceted, its most evident manifestations during the current crisis, and since the overthrow of the former region in April 2019, can be summarized in the following main findings:

1. Active interference in peace and humanitarian efforts.

Permanent and regular participation in every negotiation platform or international or regional fora, large or small, that aim to address the situation in Sudan, especially the peace process and the humanitarian crisis. However, it is observed that the presence of Egypt often complicate and obstruct the negotiation efforts and seems to be targeting to ensure the continued dominance of a loyal military regime that serves its strategic interests, secures its influence over Sudan's internal affairs, and guarantees unwavering support in any conflict related to its vital national security concerns, particularly the smooth inflow of the River Nile waters and economic gains.

2. Political and diplomatic protection for Sudan's military regime.

Consistently providing political and diplomatic cover to Sudan's ruling military authorities in all major decision-making institutions dealing with the situation in Sudan, at both regional and international levels. A striking example is its persistent attempts to persuade the African Union (AU) to lift the suspension of Sudan's membership, even as the country remained under military rule and engulfed by war. Moreover, it has played a significant role in undermining major AU decision-making institutions, particularly the Peace and Security Council, by obstructing effective action to resolve the crisis in Sudan, thereby emboldening the SAF to ignore AU and IGAD initiatives.

3. Turning a blind eye to SAF's obstruction of the peace efforts.

Overlooking the military authority's repeated delaying tactics and/or refusal to implement previously agreed upon commitments, including the Jeddah Declaration (Saudi Arabia, May 2023) and the Manama Agreement (Kingdom of Bahrain, February 2024). Likewise, it ignored the army's evasion of indirect negotiations mediated by the United Nations and the Aligned for Saving Lives and Peace in Sudan (ALPS) in Geneva (Switzerland, Summer 2024), which sought to achieve a humanitarian ceasefire. Thwarting efforts of the ALPS Group, which is composed of the Governments of Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, Egypt, and the African Union and the United Nations, should have been considered as a confrontation with the international community.

4. Undermining international consensus on peace.

Disrupting regional and international consensus on collective diplomatic efforts to reach a peaceful settlement and to address the humanitarian disaster in Sudan. This was most visible in the failed United Kingdom's attempt to form a Contact Group to facilitate ceasefire talks during the London/Sudan Conference (April 2025), when Egypt refused to sign the Final Communiqué and consequently prevented its release. Examples can also be cited from other multilateral negotiations platforms including the 60th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council held in Geneva, Switzerland, in September/October 2025.

5. Profiting from prolonged warfare.

Sustaining the conflict and ensuring that Sudan remains dependent on Egyptian trade routes and markets, as the ongoing war weakens Sudan's productive capacity and export potential. It views the destruction of Sudan's infrastructure and the enormous cost of postwar reconstruction as an opportunity for Egyptian companies to monopolize and profit from multi-billion-dollar contracts. Such projects open the door to the settlement of millions of Egyptian workers in Sudan under the guise of reconstruction and labour programs.

6. Deepening Sudan's international isolation.

A prolonged conflict deepens Sudan's international isolation by obstructing development aid, blocking foreign debt relief, and delaying Sudan's reintegration into the global financial system. In this respect, it encouraged the 2021 military *coup d'état* and the dismantling of the civilian transitional authority led by Dr. Abdalla Hamdok, which achieved remarkable progress across multiple sectors. Egypt, therefore, prefers a military regime modelled after its own, dominated by the security apparatus and hostile to liberal and democratic forces which are reasons that it was among the first states to endorse the *coup d'état*.

7. Encouraging hardline positions to justify intervention.

Continuously encouraged the Sudanese military to harden its negotiating stance, placing obstacles before any serious attempts for peace negotiation with the RSF. The effect of such an approach is to engineer a security crisis that threatens regional stability, thereby providing the pretext for direct military intervention claiming to save the country and the region from chaos but, in reality, it seeks to occupy parts of Sudan and exploit its resources.

Conclusion:

This Briefing Paper concludes that the armed conflict in Sudan is steadily evolving into a complex regional and international threat which could far exceed the boundaries of an internal war. Sudan has effectively become a battleground for competing foreign powers, each seeking to advance its own interests at the expense of Sudanese blood and suffering, first and foremost Egypt and other neighbouring countries. The armed conflict must come to an immediate end the only viable solution is neither military nor should be a temporary arrangement that maintains the historical socio-economic relationships in post-conflict Sudan.

A lasting solution of Sudan's protracted armed conflicts and civil unrest must be a durable one based on a comprehensive national project that effectively addresses the root causes underneath conflicts and political thrives. The solution rests on the elaboration of a new Social Contract in which the values of justice, the rule of the state of law and equal citizenship rights are enshrined. Sudan's contractual obligations under international and regional law (human rights, humanitarian and criminal law) must be an integral pillar of the reconstruction of the state apparatus process as well as the legal and institutional reform to reinforce Sudan's practices in these vital fields and to ensure inclusive participation in political and economic life from all regions and social groups without exclusion or marginalization.