



SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE SUDAN CONFLICT

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Summary:

The ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan continues to escalate, with peace talks faltering and a growing risk of foreign involvement. This position paper explores four possible outcomes:

- Scenario 1: Protracted Civil War
- Scenario 2: Emergence of General Burhan as a Strongman
- Scenario 3: Victory of Hemedti and his Rapid Support Forces (RSF)
- Scenario 4: Fragmentation of Sudan

Each scenario is analyzed in detail, considering the driving factors, uncertainties, and implications associated with the respective outcomes. These scenarios highlight the complex dynamics and challenges of the conflict.

Introduction:

The ongoing conflict in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has escalated, spreading beyond Khartoum into the western and eastern regions of the country. Despite multiple ceasefire attempts, the hostilities continue unabated, with both sides using these periods to regroup, rearm, and launch subsequent offensives. The conflict now presents a significant risk of attracting foreign fighters and both state- and non-state actors who may seek to exploit the situation and the resulting security and political vacuum.

As the conflict enters its third month, the situation in Sudan remains dire, with no signs of de-escalation or a peaceful resolution in sight. The epicenter of the conflict is Khartoum, where the RSF, backed by militias, has gained control over strategic locations. But violence has spread to other regions, particularly in Darfur and South Kordofan. The conflict has resulted in extensive infrastructure damage and civilian casualties, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

The intervention of external actors is another critical aspect of the Sudan conflict. These actors, driven by their own interests, may directly or indirectly support one of the warring factions. Their involvement exacerbates the violence, prolongs the conflict, and

complicates efforts for a peaceful resolution. Regional rivalries, resource competition, and geopolitical considerations play a significant role in shaping external intervention. The presence of valuable resources in Sudan, such as oil and minerals, adds to the appeal for external actors seeking to exploit these resources.

Amidst the conflict, attempts at ceasefire and mediation have proven ineffective. Contradictory initiatives and the power struggle between SAF and RSF leaders create challenges for achieving a negotiated solution. Both factions have a strong belief in military triumph as a pathway to power, making a sustainable resolution unlikely in the immediate future. The conflict is transitioning into a protracted war of attrition, with SAF relying on air power and the RSF demonstrating proficiency in guerrilla and counterinsurgency operations.

Given this context, a comprehensive scenario analysis is necessary to assess the potential trajectories and implications of the Sudan conflict. This scenario analysis focuses on the conflict in Sudan within the timeframe of 2023-2025. Each scenario presents its own set of driving factors, uncertainties, and implications for Sudan and the region. By examining these scenarios in detail, we can gain insights into the potential outcomes and challenges facing Sudan as it grapples with the ongoing conflict and the involvement of external actors.

Scenario 1: Protracted Civil War

In this scenario, Sudan becomes embroiled in a protracted civil war characterized by prolonged and intense fighting between General Abdul Fattah Al Burhan's Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Mohamed Hamdan Daglo's ("Hemedti") Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution through ceasefires and negotiations prove ineffective, leading to a relentless escalation of hostilities.

The conflict expands beyond the borders of Khartoum, engulfing regions such as Darfur, South Kordofan, and Eastern Sudan. Both the SAF and RSF utilize periods of ceasefire to regroup, rearm, and plan subsequent offensives. Urban combat within Khartoum wreaks havoc on infrastructure and results in a devastating toll on civilian lives. In their quest for dominance, RSF-backed militias strategically seize control

of key locations, disrupting SAF supply lines and isolating SAF-controlled areas. The conflict spills over into other regions, igniting fierce clashes between the SAF and rebel factions in Darfur and South Kordofan. As the violence escalates, the humanitarian crisis worsens, with a surge in forced displacements, widespread food insecurity, and limited access to vital services.

The complexity of the conflict draws the attention of external actors who become directly or indirectly involved by providing support or resources to the warring factions. This external intervention intensifies the fighting and prolongs the suffering of the Sudanese people. The protracted civil war has profound implications for Sudan’s stability and regional security. Ethnic tensions are heightened, exacerbating social divisions and fracturing the fabric of Sudanese society. The ongoing violence and displacement strain the country’s resources and infrastructure, hindering economic development and perpetuating a cycle of poverty. Regionally, the conflict poses a significant threat to stability, as it has the potential to spill over into neighboring countries, fuel regional rivalries, and create safe havens for militant groups. The international community faces the challenge of addressing the humanitarian crisis and preventing further escalation while also considering the long-term political and economic implications of Sudan’s protracted civil war.

Driving Factors	Uncertainties
▲ Deep-rooted political, economic, and ethnic divisions	▼ Duration and intensity of the civil war remain uncertain, as both SAF and RSF have shown resilience and the capacity to sustain the conflict
▲ The pursuit of power and control over resources contributes to the persistence of the conflict	▼ Response of regional and international actors, including neighboring countries, the AU, and the UN
▲ Weak governance structures, historical grievances, and the absence of an inclusive political process further fuel the conflict	▼ Potential for fragmentation and the emergence of new armed groups or secessionist movements within Sudan
▲ Regional and international rivalries, as well as the involvement of external actors with competing interests, exacerbate the situation	▼ External military support for the warring factions

Implications	▶ Humanitarian crises worsen, with increased displacement, refugee flows, and limited access to basic services
	▶ Ethnic tensions and violence escalate, exacerbating divisions and hindering prospects for reconciliation and social cohesion.
	▶ Conflict negatively impacts Sudan’s economy, hindering development, and exacerbating poverty and unemployment.
	▶ Regional security is compromised, with the potential for cross-border spillover of violence, arms trafficking, and the proliferation of armed groups.
	▶ Neighboring countries grapple with the influx of refugees, increased security threats, and economic disruptions.

Scenario 2: Emergence of General Al Burhan as a Strongman

In this scenario, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) achieve a decisive victory over the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and other armed factions, solidifying their control over the country. The SAF strategically utilizes its superior military capabilities, including air power, intelligence networks, and trained personnel, to gain the upper hand in the conflict. They weaken the RSF and other armed groups through coordinated offensives and effective tactics, pushing them into retreat and regaining control over key strategic areas. As the conflict intensifies, internal divisions within the RSF come to the fore. Some RSF commanders and troops defect or join the SAF, drawn by the SAF’s growing strength and the potential for stability under their leadership. This fragmentation within the RSF weakens its overall capacity and cohesion, further favoring the SAF’s advance and solidifying its position.

The SAF’s decisive victory garners significant diplomatic support from Egypt and other international actors who view it as a means to stabilize Sudan and prevent further escalation of violence. This support may manifest in the form of military aid, diplomatic recognition, and economic assistance, bolstering the SAF’s position and legitimacy. General Al Burhan, as the leader of the SAF, assumes a prominent role in the transitional government, leveraging his newfound influence to establish a central leadership position.

In this scenario, General Al Burhan may establish himself as the head of a military council or as an influential figure within a broader political coalition. Recognizing the need for stability and national reconciliation, he aims to rebuild state institutions, initiate some

political reforms, and position himself as a key player in Sudan’s future governance. Efforts are made to integrate former RSF members and other armed factions into the political process, fostering a more inclusive environment and addressing grievances to prevent further conflicts and promote stability.

However, the emergence of a strongman in Sudan brings with it a trade-off. While relative stability may be achieved under General Al Burhan’s leadership, it comes at the cost of democratic principles, civil liberties, and political pluralism. The consolidation of power in the hands of a single leader raises concerns about the erosion of democratic institutions, the stifling of opposition voices, and the potential for human rights abuses.

Driving Factors	Uncertainties
▲ SAF demonstrates superior military capabilities	▼ Extent to which the SAF can successfully integrate former RSF fighters and other opposition members into its ranks
▲ SAF receives substantial international support, either through direct military assistance, diplomatic backing, or economic aid	▼ Reaction of the Sudanese population to the SAF’s victory and Burhan assuming leadership varies
▲ International actors view the SAF as a stabilizing force	▼ Response of regional actors and the international community to the SAF’s victory
▲ SAF maintains a cohesive and unified front, minimizing internal divisions and power struggles	
Implications	▶ With the SAF’s victory, there is a significant potential for the restoration of state authority and the reestablishment of centralized governance. This includes the gradual extension of state control over previously contested territories, the restoration of basic services, and the implementation of law and order.
	▶ The SAF’s control and Al-Burhan’s leadership contribute to a sense of stability and security, creating a conducive environment for economic recovery.
	▶ If Al-Burhan successfully navigates the transitional period and demonstrates a commitment to democratic governance, human rights, and inclusive politics, Sudan may receive increased international recognition and engagement.
	▶ The concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals heightens the risk of corruption, nepotism, and authoritarian rule.
	▶ The strongman’s rule may exacerbate ethnic tensions and deepen divisions within Sudanese society, potentially fueling further conflicts in the long run.

Scenario 3: Victory of Hemedti and the RSF

In this scenario, the RSF emerges as the victor in the conflict, consolidating its control over Sudan. The RSF, with its decentralized structure and proficiency in guerrilla warfare, proves to be a formidable adversary for the SAF. Through a series of well-coordinated offensives, the RSF gains the upper hand, capturing key strategic locations and military bases. The RSF's territorial control expands as it asserts dominance over various regions in Sudan.

The RSF's success is further bolstered by forming alliances with other armed groups, both within Sudan and from neighboring countries. These alliances provide additional military capabilities, resources, recruits, and funding, enabling the RSF to sustain and escalate its offensive operations. As the RSF gains ground, it garners international recognition and support from countries or actors with aligned interests. This support provides legitimacy to the RSF's actions and may encompass military assistance, intelligence sharing, or diplomatic backing.

With the consolidation of their control, the RSF extends its influence over key government institutions, effectively marginalizing opposition factions and establishing its authority. Hemedti, as the leader of the RSF, solidifies his leadership position and becomes a powerful figure with broad influence and control. He assumes the role of a strongman, centralizing power and decision-making under his command. Under Hemedti's leadership, Sudan experiences an authoritarian form of governance characterized by centralized control and limited political freedoms. Emphasis is placed on maintaining law and order, often through strict security measures that suppress dissent and opposition. This approach may raise concerns about human rights abuses, restrictions on civil liberties, and the stifling of political pluralism.

Hemedti, leveraging his position of power, exploits Sudan's economic resources to consolidate control and secure financial resources. This includes exploiting land, natural wealth, and commercial ventures to solidify the RSF's authority further. However, the RSF's victory brings with it mixed implications for peace and stability in Sudan. While it may bring relative stability to some regions under the RSF's control, concerns persist regarding potential human rights abuses, ethnic tensions, and the potential for resistance from opposition factions.

Driving Factors	Uncertainties
▲ The RSF demonstrates superior military capabilities, tactical expertise, and efficient command and control structures.	▼ International community's, especially Egypt, response to the RSF's victory and consolidation of power
▲ The RSF receives substantial support from the Wagner group, including financial aid and weaponry	▼ Internal power struggles or factionalism could potentially undermine the RSF's control and lead to further instability.
▲ The RSF successfully recruits and forges alliances with various armed groups, militias, and tribes.	▼ Internal developments in Russia, restricting or enabling Wagner support for the RSF
▲ The RSF's leadership, particularly under Hemedti, remains strong and cohesive.	
Implications	▶ The RSF's victory leads to the consolidation of power in the hands of Hemedti and his loyalists, allowing them to shape Sudan's political landscape and decision-making processes.
	▶ The RSF's authoritarian governance may lead to human rights abuses, suppression of dissent, and restrictions on civil liberties.
	▶ The RSF's control over Sudan's economic resources may lead to economic exploitation, corruption, and unequal distribution of wealth, potentially exacerbating socio-economic disparities and grievances.
	▶ Hemedti's rise to power could have implications for regional dynamics and geopolitical alignments, as regional actors may reassess their relationships with Sudan and navigate their interests based on the new power dynamics.

Scenario 4: Fragmentation of Sudan

In this scenario, the ongoing conflict between the SAF and the RSF takes a drastic turn, leading to the fragmentation of Sudan. The intensifying power struggle fuels existing ethnic and regional divisions, pushing Sudan towards a state of disintegration. The power struggle between Hemedti and Burhan becomes the focal point of the conflict, with both leaders driven by personal ambitions and a desire for power. Their competition for control and dominance over Sudan exacerbates tensions, further polarizing factions and regions. As the conflict escalates, the central government's authority weakens, overshadowed by the ambitions of the SAF and RSF. Both factions prioritize consolidating power within their respective areas of control, leading to a disintegration of central governance and the emergence of autonomous regions.

With Sudan fragmented, violent conflicts and power struggles erupt between different regions or ethnic groups vying for control over territories, resources, or political influence. Historical grievances and unresolved conflicts, such as the Darfur conflict or the South Sudan secession, continue to shape regional dynamics and drive calls for self-determination. The disintegration of central governance exacerbates existing humanitarian crises, resulting in increased displacement and refugee flows and straining regional and international humanitarian response capacities.

External actors, including neighboring countries and international powers, grapple with the complexities of recognizing and engaging with the newly fragmented regions. They must navigate the delicate balance between supporting claims for autonomy and advocating for the preservation of Sudan’s territorial integrity. Economic challenges also arise as disputes emerge over resource distribution, control of key economic sectors, and the division of national debt and assets.

Driving Factors	Uncertainties
▲ Existence of deep-rooted ethnic and regional divisions, leading to demands for autonomy or secession.	▼ Extent to which Sudan may fragment, whether through the creation of independent states or the establishment of autonomous regions
▲ Internal power struggles within the SAF and RSF, fueled by personal ambitions and conflicting interests, weaken the unity of these factions and contribute to the fragmentation.	▼ The international community’s response could range from recognition and engagement with newly formed entities to efforts to preserve Sudan’s territorial integrity
▲ Emergence of movements or groups calling for greater regional autonomy or outright secession	▼ The likelihood of interethnic tensions and the potential for violence in the context of Sudan’s fragmentation
▲ Ability of marginalized regions to establish and sustain functional governance structures	▼ The viability of newly formed entities in terms of governance, economic sustainability, and security
▲ Regional and international actors, motivated by geopolitical considerations or their own interests, provide support to specific factions or regions.	▼ The consequences of Sudan’s fragmentation on regional stability, including cross-border conflicts, refugee flows, and economic integration

Implications	▶ Sustained violence and security challenges within newly formed entities, hindering stability and development.
	▶ Heightened ethnic tensions and the risk of mass atrocities as different groups assert their interests and vie for power
	▶ Challenges in providing basic services and implementing development initiatives due to administrative fragmentation and limited resources.
	▶ Tensions and potential conflicts with neighboring states, such as Egypt, Chad, and South Sudan, due to border disputes, resource competition, and security concerns.
	▶ Fragmentation may result in the proliferation of armed groups, cross-border conflicts, and regional insecurity, necessitating enhanced regional cooperation and security measures.



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