

SUDAN: SCENARIOS

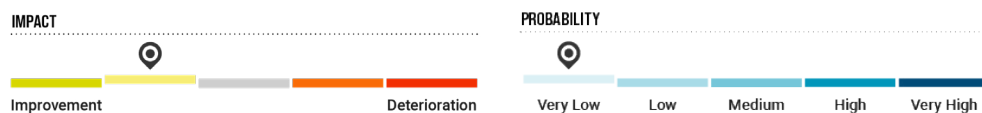


Possible developments in people's ability to meet their needs over the next 12 months in Sudan.



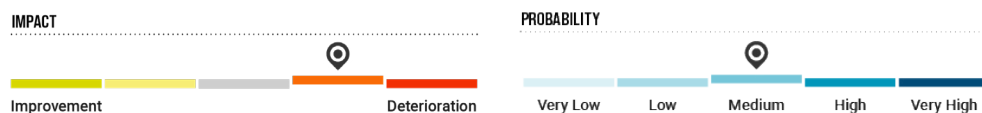
SCENARIOS AT A GLANCE

SCENARIO 1: ceasefire



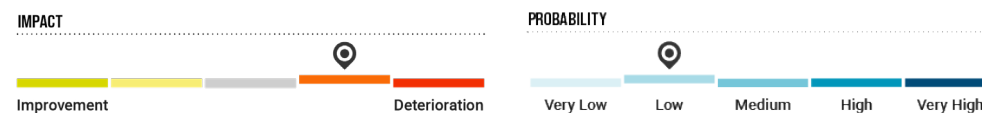
As international diplomatic pressure increases and foreign military assistance decreases, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) agree on a ceasefire and negotiations over a sustainable political transition. That said, trust in the peace process remains low, and armed groups reinforce their capacities. A temporary halt in violence allows for some return movement and economic recovery, particularly in Khartoum. Sanctions are relaxed, and international financial support helps curb inflation. Some private businesses restart, and some state salary payments and services, such as healthcare, gradually resume. Regardless, high national debt hampers the recovery pace. Khartoum benefits more than other regions, causing resentment. Civilian protests arise from slow political reform, and sporadic conflict hinders progress in certain regions. Humanitarian access improves, but bureaucracy and security concerns remain obstacles, particularly in Darfur.

SCENARIO 2: protracted



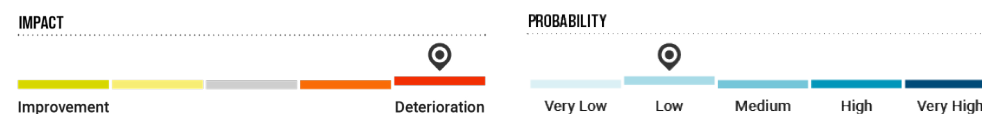
A prolonged stalemate entrenches the conflict, particularly in Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan regions. The conflict parties exploit weak ceasefires to rearm and regroup, and the RSF seek ethnic dominance in the regions under their control, triggering atrocities and escalating violence. Attempts to revive governance structures and the economy face substantial challenges, with infrastructure damage and insecurity hampering essential services. Localised healthcare provision relies on aid groups given a failed state system. Widespread looting worsens shortages of crucial goods, pushing people into dire coping mechanisms. Food insecurity rises from disrupted markets and harvests, especially in conflict-prone areas. Displacement persists, and the protracted conflict further divides communities. Territorial control divisions, access barriers, and reduced funding, as the conflict's stagnation further reduces international attention, heavily constrains the humanitarian response.

SCENARIO 3: oppression



The SAF regain control of Khartoum following fierce fighting, destroying much of the city. While the SAF's control improves security in the east, governance remains disputed. Violence escalates in Darfur and Kordofan regions, displacing many within the regions and to White Nile state, Chad, and South Sudan. Returnees to Khartoum struggle to find suitable housing, and the restoration of essential services and economic activities is slow. Civil society faces increased harassment, the SAF violently suppress dissent, and protests against the strict military rule increase. The east of the country is generally non-violent, but in the south and the west, fighting, ethnic tensions, and competition over scarce resources drive displacement and needs. Insecure regions struggle for access to basic services and goods, and Darfur faces a dire humanitarian crisis, with IDPs needing urgent aid. Amid reduced funding, limited access, and rampant bureaucracy, with state pressure to focus on SAF-controlled areas, delivering humanitarian assistance remains a significant challenge.

SCENARIO 4: collapse



Conflict intensifies in an extremely fragmented landscape and spreads to previously safe areas, such as Port Sudan. Armed groups exploit divisions, fuelling ethnic violence and severely damaging the country's social fabric. Widespread violence and atrocities persist, leading to mass civilian casualties. Military intervention from neighbouring states creates buffer zones along the borders, restricting displacement. Civil society faces increasing threats, and radical groups gain prominence. Populations face increasing protection risks and resort to dire coping mechanisms. Conflict destroys much of the infrastructure, severely restricts movement, and isolates many locations. Some isolated populations survive through localised agriculture, but those living in arid areas struggle with severe food insecurity and famine-like conditions. Despite increased funding, humanitarian response is severely constrained and limited to some border areas, and most international staff evacuate.

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INTRODUCTION

The scenarios consider four different yet plausible futures for Sudan until October 2024, including their possible impacts and humanitarian consequences. Each scenario considers the differences in three main variables: conflict, governance, and socioeconomic conditions. Scenarios identify the potential change in people’s ability to meet their needs.

Scenarios are not forecasts but describe situations that could occur and illustrate a range of futures. They are based on a clear understanding of the current situation and the factors that have led to it. It is advisable for readers unfamiliar with the Sudanese context to read Annex A, which summarises the current situation, before exploring the scenarios. Annex B is a table of events that may lead to the scenarios materialising.

Intended purpose and audience of the report

The report primarily aims to support strategic planning, promote anticipatory action, create awareness, and encourage discussion among humanitarian policymakers, practitioners, and donors through an understanding of the possible ways humanitarian needs may develop and be met or not – whether intentionally or unintentionally. Users are suggested to consider how each scenario might influence their engagement in Sudan and identify preparatory actions to improve or reduce any humanitarian service delivery disruptions resulting from each scenario.

Problem statement

Since independence in 1956, Sudan has been grappling with conflict. It is one of the largest countries in Africa, and its population is diverse, with more than 500 ethnic groups speaking more than 400 languages. Historically, the country has been governed from the centre, with military dictatorships ruling through oppression from the capital, Khartoum. A transitional government – formed to steer the country to democratic elections after the ousting of President Omar Hassan al-Bashir in April 2019 – collapsed following a military coup in October 2021. Civilian resistance to military rule persisted through 2022, driven by a widespread distrust of the military and rejection of power-sharing by civilian movements. In April 2023, a power struggle broke out in Khartoum between the two main factions of the ruling military regime: the RSF, a paramilitary unit, and the SAF.

Since April 2023, fighting has been fierce and persistent, prompting many Sudanese to flee the country. Many businesses have closed, the formal banking system has collapsed and led to a cash shortage, and the payment of non-military government salaries has ceased. Sudan’s fragile economy – already struggling before the recent conflict with a large budget deficit and suspended international funding – has been driving inflation (over 200% as at August 2023 compared to same period in 2022) and high humanitarian needs. The conflict has resulted in much structural damage to Khartoum, and many government services across the country, including schools and hospitals, are no longer functioning. At the same time, the conflict in West Darfur has increased, leading almost 500,000 Sudanese to flee to Chad since April 2023. The conflicts in South Kordofan and Blue Nile simmer, discontent in the east is on the rise, and neighbouring countries are in various states of crisis and fragility.

KEY FINDINGS

Considerations for humanitarian operations

Workshops held with experts in September 2023 identified several considerations for humanitarian operations for all scenarios. There was agreement on the need for immediate action to adapt programming modalities, which would require donors to support NGOs and UN agencies as they innovate and adjust to the shifting dynamics in Sudan. Among the many approaches discussed (e.g. improving local joint contextual and conflict analysis, scaling up explosive remnants of war/unexploded ordnance awareness training, revisiting risk appetites, and investing in early warning early action systems), five key priority areas emerged:

Improving localisation

The people best placed to assist those in need in Sudan are their community members. Humanitarian organisations should strengthen and expand support to grassroots movements and organisations, such as emergency response rooms. This will necessitate viewing them as partners (rather than implementors) to enable them to guide programming priorities and engaging meaningfully in risk acceptance and mitigation strategy development.

Decentralised coordination and operation structures

Three of the scenarios foresee increasing control by local armed groups, with whom humanitarian access will need to be negotiated. To ensure a coherent position and avoid individual humanitarian responders unilaterally determining 'red lines' or making concessions, humanitarian coordination structures should be established at a more local level to ensure a united approach. This includes considerations for the overall positioning of the humanitarian system and the use of a cross-border response where relevant. At the same time, limitations in central coordination and operations from Port Sudan are expected to become more evident, in particular for response directed to Darfur and Kordofan regions.

(Virtual) cash modalities

Local markets and traders are remarkably adaptive. Traders typically find a way to provide goods wherever there is a market. With banknotes in short supply, virtual cash will become increasingly important. Consideration should be given to programming that enables the ability of communities to continue receiving sufficient cash assistance to keep local markets functioning, including by supporting telecommunication structures, when relevant and possible. At the same time, the diaspora, individually and as organisations, can send funds via the hawala system. Organisations that support specific localities could also channel cash assistance. Aid responders should be aware of the risks that come with cash programming, potentially affecting local economies and markets and turning them into spaces for exploitation. Detailed analysis and understanding of local contexts are required.

Monitoring and evaluation

With a significantly reduced humanitarian organisational presence across much of Sudan, most scenarios describe operating environments where local civilian organisations will provide the bulk of humanitarian assistance. Support for these initiatives will be vital but difficult to monitor directly. Traditional monitoring and evaluation methods need to be rethought, possibly to embrace more informal and flexible methods. Consideration should be given to ideas, such as establishing networks of local contacts who could be periodically contacted by phone to provide feedback on the situation. Careful questioning and analysis could then ascertain whether assistance is being received, making a difference, or being diverted.

Conflict sensitivity

As the crisis unfolds in Sudan, aid responders should understand the dynamics and take the necessary operational and programmatic steps to navigate the evolving situation and avoid doing harm. During times of crisis, humanitarian assistance faces significant risks of manipulation by conflict parties, as aid organisations face pressure to continue delivering assistance while concurrently drawing back field staff and operations for security reasons. Aid must avoid legitimising conflict parties and improve communities' abilities to manage social tensions and conflict. A balance is required between short-term humanitarian demands and their long-term conflict impacts.

METHODOLOGY

The scenarios were developed from August–September 2023 with input from 40 humanitarian, donor, and academic organisations and independent experts, who contributed through online and in-person workshops, bilateral meetings, and reviews. The collaborative process involved:

- agreeing on the research question and current situation and mapping a wide array of variables affecting the Sudan context
- creating miniscenarios from different combinations of assumptions on how the main variables might change over 2023–2024
- reviewing and further developing the four most interesting scenarios.

ACAPS uses the chain of plausibility approach to scenario-building, as outlined in our guidance note. Key terms used throughout the scenario-building process and the report are:

- **Variable:** a development or event likely to cause a change in a situation.
- **Assumption:** the direction that a variable can take (i.e. increase, decrease).
- **Scenario:** an imagined picture of a possible future state based on a number of assumptions (which may be more or less probable) as to how certain key variables will change. Scenarios describe both the future state and the impact and consequences on people and society.
- **Triggers:** events that, should they occur, may contribute to a scenario materialising.
- **Compounding factor:** a development that can occur in parallel with any of the above scenarios and which has the potential to significantly change their evolution and the nature of humanitarian needs and response.

A combination, but not necessarily all, of the triggers is required to reach any given scenario. Estimated impact levels and probability are subjective and based on the views of individual participants. They are most useful as a comparative guide in assessing the relative probabilities of the scenarios.

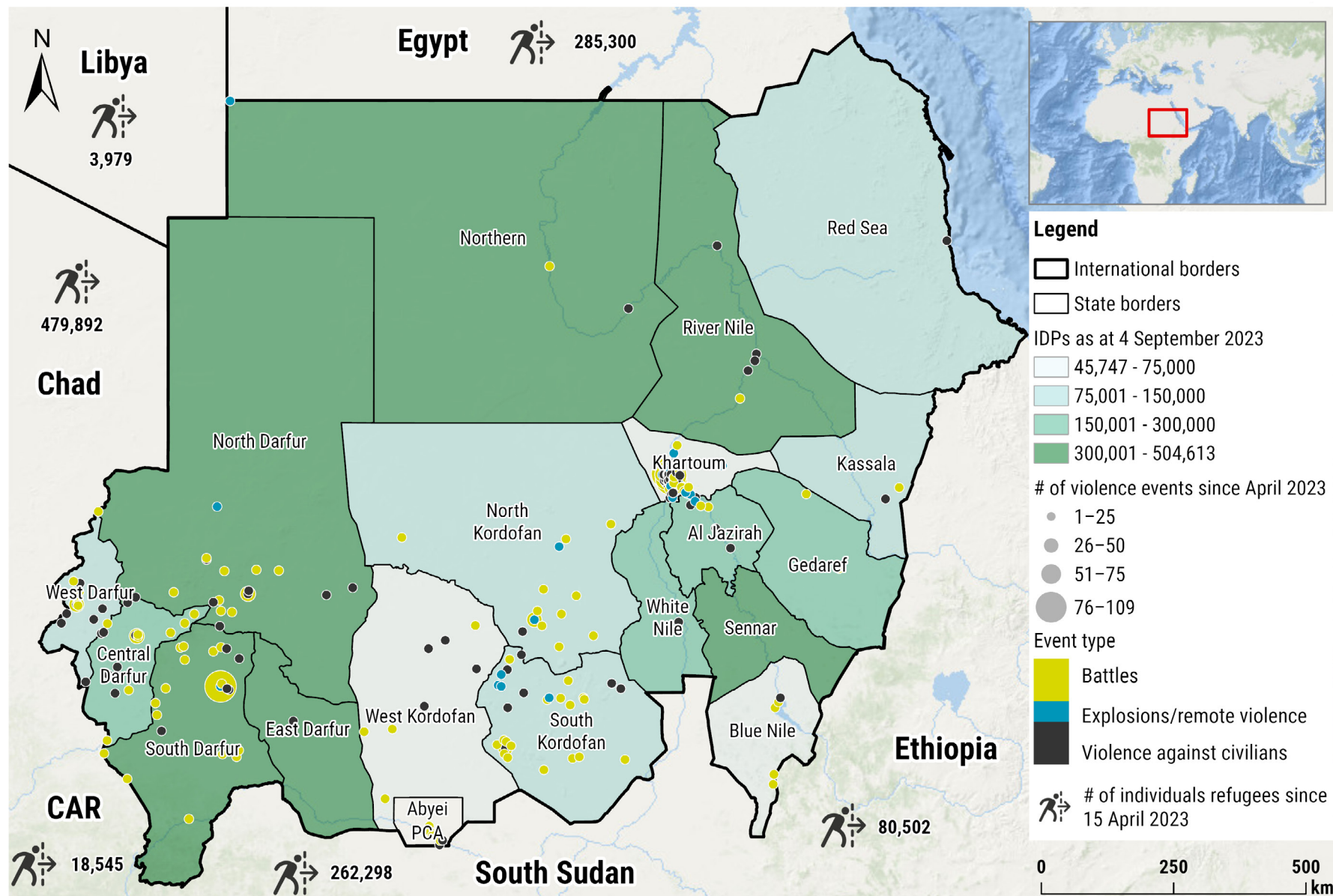
Limitations

Scenarios can seem to oversimplify an issue, as the analysis balances details against broader assumptions. Scenarios are not consensual or scientific but are the result of joint structured analysis by a group of experts. Scenario-building is not an end in itself; it is a process for generating new ideas that should, in turn, lead to changes in project design or decision-making. These scenarios focus primarily on how changes in the conflict, economy, and governance will ultimately affect the ability of the Sudanese to meet their basic needs.

Thank you

ACAPS would like to thank all the participants and organisations that provided input to these scenarios, in particular the Conflict Sensitivity Facility, the INGO Forum, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, which were part of the core group that helped develop and organise the exercise.

MAP 1. CURRENT SITUATION AS AT OCTOBER 2023



Sources: ACAPS using data from ACLED (accessed 26/09/2023); IOM (14/09/2023)

1. Ceasefire

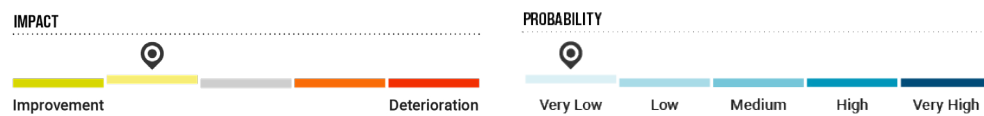
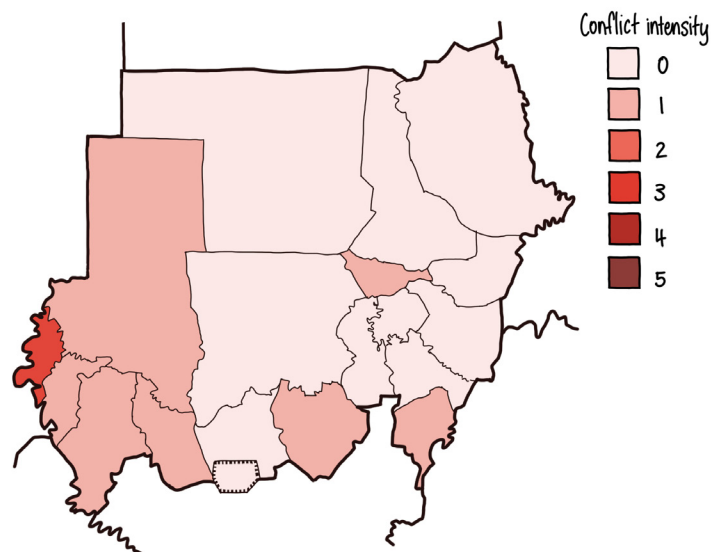


Figure 1. Conflict intensity per region in Scenario 1



Source: ACAPS

As international pressure on the SAF and the RSF grows and becomes more unified, foreign military assistance decreases, and both sides agree to a ceasefire and engage in peace negotiations. While conflict does not end overnight, the ceasefire holds sufficiently, creating space for the diplomatic groundwork for a civilian-centred political transition. Still, power-sharing agreements are delicate, trust in the peace process remains low, and the SAF, the RSF, and other armed groups continue to strengthen their military capacity. Conflict occasionally breaks out, especially between groups excluded from the peace negotiations or serving as proxies to the belligerents to destabilise their opponents, particularly in Darfur and Kordofan regions.

The security and political situation remains uncertain, but a respite from violence for the wider population allows for the recovery of markets and economic activities, particularly in Khartoum and along the Nile River. The slow pace of political reform and reconstruction results in civilian protests in Khartoum. Most of the assistance for recovery and peace processes favours Khartoum, limiting visible peace dividends elsewhere and fuelling resentment.

The relaxation of sanctions and increased international financial support enable the Central Bank to curb inflation, although with modest results. High national debt levels limit the recovery pace. International support to recovery and peace negotiations helps initiating a decentralisation of the financial sector and the development of a range of private entities not under military control. Some state salary payments resume, helping restart service provision, such as healthcare, although many people still depend on mutual aid initiatives led by civilian groups. While international assistance targets the recovery of key businesses, including telecommunications, many private businesses are slow to restart, and private foreign investment is limited.

Possible triggers

Armed groups

- The SAF and the RSF agree on a temporary division of Khartoum and central institutions.
- Continued conflict becomes less appealing to SAF/RSF generals (e.g. as international governments continue to deny their legitimacy, increase accountability threats, push for independent investigative mechanisms, and escalate sanctions).
- Armed group recruitment does not increase significantly.

Civilian entities

- Grassroots civil society groups promoting peace gain momentum and influence (withstanding pressures from armed groups).
- An enabling international mechanism meaningfully engages civilian actors in peace talks.

International community

- The international community consolidates mediation initiatives and unites diplomatic efforts to bring the SAF and the RSF to the negotiating table.
- Foreign military support to the SAF and the RSF decreases.
- Foreign military support to only the SAF increases.

- Foreign financial support to the SAF and the RSF decreases.
- International sanctions are relaxed to enable the central bank to resume activities.
- International sanctions on leaders of the SAF and the RSF are tightened.
- International development assistance increasingly supports humanitarian aid and economic recovery.

Impact and humanitarian consequences

Displacement: return movements occur mainly to Khartoum, primarily involving those seeking to resume their livelihoods and recover property. Repair of damaged and destroyed housing is a priority need. Clashes erupt as people return to find their properties occupied, aggravated by a lack of documentation and the breakdown of a central system to confirm title deeds. Displacement increases in Darfur and Kordofan region and to Blue Nile and White Nile.

Essential services: most improvements occur in the capital, but chronic staff shortages constrain services, such as healthcare. Elsewhere, local mutual aid groups provide most services, and health needs remain high. A lack of electricity, safe water, sewage, and waste management systems results from the slow and patchy repair of destroyed infrastructure. Waterborne disease outbreaks are common in overcrowded areas. A lack of funds and personnel, with IDPs occupying education facilities, hampers efforts to restart schooling.

Household purchasing power: the banking system slowly recovers and mobile networks resume, there is higher circulation of cash and mobile pay is increasingly used. Jobs and markets restart, leading to improvements in the households' purchasing power and access to goods. That said, in large-scale return locations, pressure on constricted markets surges, increasing the prices for basic goods, such as food, which disproportionately affects the poorest who could not afford to flee conflict areas.

Food security: despite improvements, high food security needs because of economic and agricultural disruptions persist, mitigated mostly in Khartoum and along the Nile River. Humanitarian assistance successfully supports the planting season in some locations, but food needs remain high in many areas until harvest.

Humanitarian concern by geographic location

Darfur: despite slightly improved security, most people remain in need of protection in a still fragmented society, with groups continuing to fight for control. Little economic recovery occurs, and health services remain broken. Most people are still depend on aid, with the region seeing the highest food insecurity in Sudan.

Khartoum: the city remains fractured, with the SAF and the RSF controlling different areas, hampering reconstruction and significantly diverting aid. Many people remain without electricity, safe water, and WASH facilities with the slow repair of essential infrastructure. Established police and civilian criminal justice systems are insufficient, with the controlling military determining security locally. The city is largely peaceful, but dissatisfaction with the speed of recovery and political progress grows. Unaddressed calls for compensation for property destroyed during the conflict and insufficient service provision prompt public protests. Ethnic and tribal divisions become clearer.

Kordofan: food and healthcare remain priority needs, as the economic benefits of the ceasefire are slow to reach the region. Protection needs rise, and some violence prevails, as armed groups continue to expand their control and seek more weight in the peace process.

Port Sudan: increased commercial and humanitarian traffic improves employment opportunities and the local economy. The majority of the humanitarian response remains coordinated from the city. Some disruption occurs as different groups vie for control over revenue sources.

Humanitarian constraints

Humanitarian access increases but faces significant bureaucratic and security barriers, particularly in Darfur. Increased humanitarian funding and improved security scale up direct assistance delivery, but many international organisations reduce their engagement with local counterparts, simply using them as final delivery mechanisms and disempowering many local responders, creating resentment. Some key international humanitarian staff return to Khartoum, but most remain in Port Sudan or outside Sudan. Despite decreased central administrative delays to humanitarian activities – for instance, regarding visas and permits – the lack of clear bureaucratic pathways between central and local authorities responsible for humanitarian aid delays services in locations where those in power seek to advance their own interests. Aid flow, corruption, and aid diversion remains controlled by armed groups. Scrutiny and distrust of humanitarian responders, particularly in Darfur and Kordofan regions, increase as the popular sentiment of exclusion from the peace and recovery processes grows.

2. Protracted

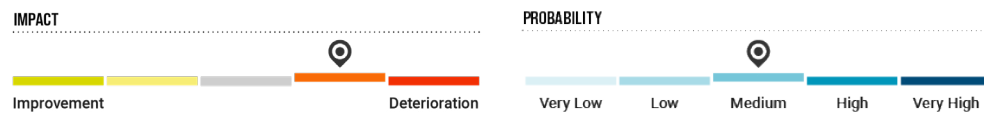
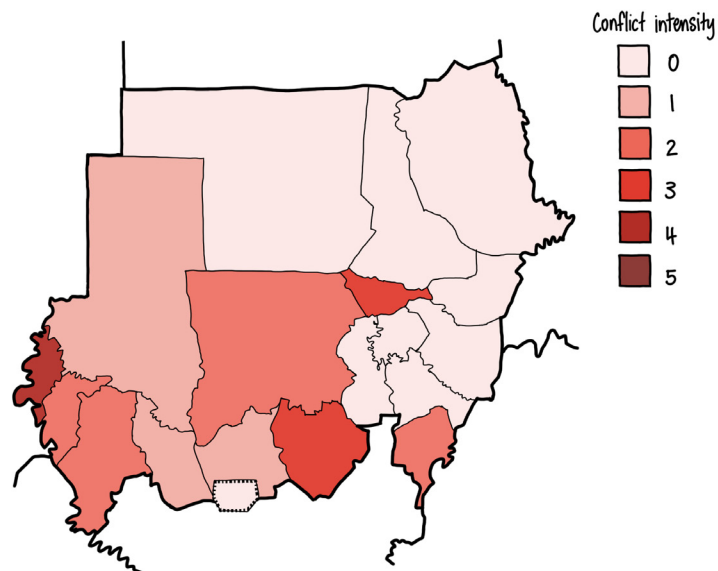


Figure 2. Conflict intensity per region in Scenario 2



Source: ACAPS

SAF and RSF face increasing difficulties with military funding, resulting in a stagnant conflict with persistent fighting but no significant territorial shifts. Particularly in Khartoum, the conflict sees intermittent, weak ceasefires that both groups exploit to rearm and regroup, while tension mounts in anticipation for renewed fighting that eventually re-emerges. With deepened control of some territories, the RSF attempt to establish an ethnic population across their areas of control, resulting in mass atrocities. The response from militias and self-defence civilian groups and the intervention of SAF-aligned proxy groups escalate violence in Central, South, and West Darfur. In South and North Kordofan, efforts of Abdelaziz Adam al Hilu's Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North (SPLM-N Al-Hilu) to secure territory in Kadugli and Abu Jubayha, and attempted incursions to El Obeid city, increase the violence level in the regions.

The conflict becomes more localised and entrenched. Regions and communities are increasingly and more evidently fragmented, and the decentralised nature of the conflict means that attempts at negotiated solutions only focused on Khartoum see little effect in other regions. The few attempts at involving civilian groups in negotiations do not succeed in including all relevant stakeholders, fuelling discontent, leading to violence, and increasing the prominence of more radical parties. Most armed groups and militias hesitate to clearly choose a side in the conflict, further fragmenting the landscape. Continued divisions within the international community also undermine efforts for effective peace negotiations.

The SAF prioritise the military and struggle to finance institutions and services under their control. At the same time, their rigid bureaucratic system thwarts humanitarian operations and general economic functioning. Their attempts to transfer central governance responsibilities to Port Sudan and turn it into a stable humanitarian and economic hub fail given a lack of infrastructure and institutional knowledge with good enough leverage. The RSF are unable to implement the rule of law and provide proper basic services to the population in areas under their control. On the other hand, local governance generally improves as civilians develop and consolidate their own governance structures and mechanisms in the absence of capable central and regional governments. In some localities, resistance committees and civilian-led groups are the main decision makers. In others, they align with traditional structures, bringing brief stability. Some regions see localised conflict and clashes over limited resources.

Temporary ceasefires and security arrangements revive trade opportunities, but inflation continues growing rapidly, production capacity remains severely strained, and import prices continue rising, including of basic goods such as food and medicine. The widespread looting of markets, banks, industries, and warehouses increases essential goods shortages. Sporadic conflict challenges the establishment of regular and stable trade routes, including for industry and agriculture, and markets remain dysfunctional. Because front lines are generally retained, it is challenging to cross areas of control, and isolated areas experience severely deteriorated socioeconomic conditions.

Possible triggers

Armed groups

- Conflict parties increasingly divert aid for their own resources.
- Recruitment to armed groups does not increase significantly.

Civilian entities

- Grassroots civil society groups promoting peace remain disunited (unable to withstand pressures from armed groups; lacking international support).

International community

- The international community fails to consolidate mediation initiatives, and diplomatic efforts to bring the SAF and the RSF to the negotiating table remain unfruitful.
- Foreign military support to the SAF and the RSF decreases.
- Foreign military support to both the SAF and the RSF continues or increases.

Impact and humanitarian consequences

Displacement persists with continued conflict and an inability to meet basic needs in areas of existing displacement, especially in Darfur, North and South Kordofan, and Chad. Violence continues at unpredictable times and places, preventing returns, although returns do occur to safer urban areas, mainly Khartoum, at periods of relative peace. Given damage to residential areas and escalating housing prices, displaced populations struggle to find safe shelter. New outbreaks of violence and difficulties in accessing markets and services force them to move again. Despite remarkable resilience and the normalisation of a new state of life, people without the ability or resources to relocate from conflict areas become increasingly vulnerable to increasing protection needs and shortages of essential goods and services, such as food, water, power, and healthcare. While most displaced people continue residing with host families throughout the country, new displacement results in overcrowding and pressure on services in existing IDP camps, especially those in safer areas, such as White Nile and Kassala states. The number of unaccompanied minors increases as displacement and violence continue to split families.

Essential services: infrastructure damage, including healthcare facilities, schools, power and water sources, and telecommunications, hinder essential service provision throughout the country. The deepening division of the country into fragmented areas of control further reduces the central authorities' relevance and the capacity of governmental institutions to provide services. Some groups attempt to resurrect pre-existing state institutions in their respective areas of control, with generally insufficient success. Service provision, such as healthcare, throughout the country becomes increasingly localised, and populations mostly rely on local mutual aid groups, such as emergency response rooms.

As the state healthcare system collapses and local emergency response rooms struggle to access medicine and supplies, dependency increases on supply chains facilitated by humanitarian organisations. Access limitations to power and water severely hinder healthcare assistance, particularly in areas blockaded by fighting. The risk of infectious disease outbreaks increases, including waterborne diseases such as cholera, particularly in overcrowded locations.

Household purchasing power: severe banking system constraints and continuous shutdowns limit cash circulation. Essential goods prices continue to rise with reduced production and increased transport times and costs because of the proliferation of checkpoints. As livelihood opportunities reduce, declining household purchasing power and consequent difficulties in meeting basic needs increase the adoption of negative coping mechanisms, such as acquiring debt, begging, and transactional sex, particularly among displaced populations, poor households, and women. Young men resort to joining armed groups or participating in criminal activities given the lack of livelihood opportunities.

Food insecurity increases as fighting disrupts markets and the 2023 harvest and planting seasons, affecting staple crop production. This affects the whole country, but areas experiencing higher violence levels face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) or worse food insecurity, leading to extreme acute malnutrition levels. Competition over limited resources also increases polarisation and clashes among communities and ethnicities.

Humanitarian concern by geographic location

Darfur: continued conflict and displacement increases the number of people in need of assistance, while limited access and reduced humanitarian funding constrains response. Food insecurity increases, especially among IDPs, despite cross-border assistance from Chad. Demands on emergency response rooms and humanitarians for food and healthcare services intensify, and infectious disease outbreaks increase. There is an increased adoption of negative coping mechanisms.

Khartoum: increased returns drive competition over limited resources, especially housing and food. Continuing conflict erodes public infrastructure and services. Markets function, but prices continue rising as unemployment increases. Food insecurity and disease outbreaks spread among the poorest, who increasingly adopt negative coping mechanisms. The city becomes increasingly divided between conflict areas and safer areas, while people adapt to a new normal.

Kordofan: food insecurity and protection needs significantly increase for displaced people as humanitarian access decreases. Reliance on emergency response rooms increases as their resources do not. Armed group recruitment increases.

Humanitarian constraints

The deepened division of the country into different territories of control requires humanitarian organisations to engage in more in localised negotiations with armed groups and fragmented humanitarian government offices. This reduces the dependence on centralised bureaucracy, making access to some areas easier through checkpoints and lengthy permit processes. That said, armed groups rejecting permits issued by another group hinders mobility between front lines and areas of control, at the same time the intimidation of humanitarian workers and rent-seeking behaviours from authorities persist throughout the country. Insecure conditions generally limit humanitarian access, and armed groups increasingly divert aid resources.

Conflict stagnation creates a false sense of stability, diverting international attention and consequently reducing operational funding to humanitarian organisations. Port Sudan remains the hub for humanitarian activities, but most organisations struggle to operate at a full scale and access certain areas, including those with growing numbers of displaced people and rising needs, such as South Kordofan.

3. Oppression

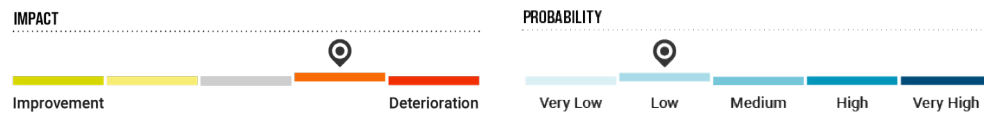
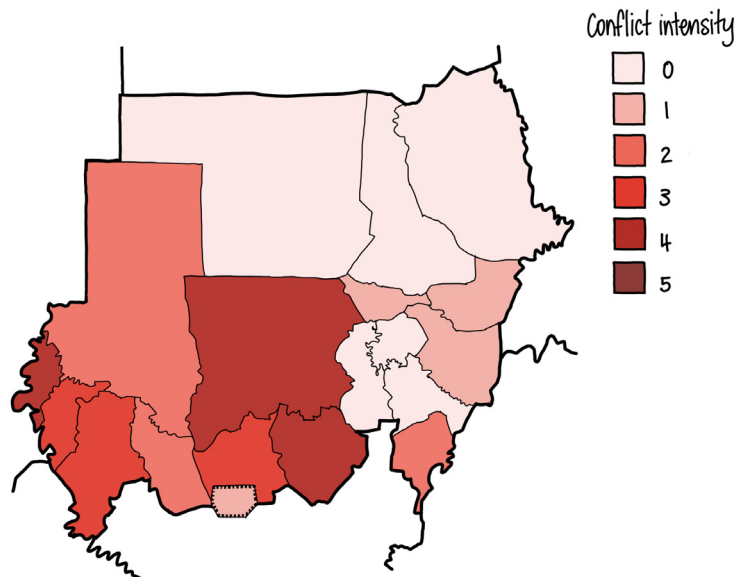


Figure 3. Conflict intensity per region in Scenario 3



Source: ACAPS

The SAF regain control of Khartoum after intense fighting, forcing the RSF to retreat to Darfur, where conflict intensifies. The SAF fund and equip proxies in Darfur, and violence escalates rapidly as increasing numbers of armed groups join the fighting and old ethnic tensions resurface. South and West Darfur bear the brunt of the conflict, and widespread atrocities drive mass internal and external displacement. Large populations try to move to Chad, specifically the Masalit community fleeing the RSF. Consequently, eastern Chad becomes increasingly unstable as armed groups use refugee camps to (re)arm and recruit militia. These groups launch attacks in Darfur, causing a re-evaluation of Chad's position in the conflict and cross-border security. Long-running competition over scarce resources, such as gold and fertile arable land, further fuel conflict.

A return of Khartoum and government institutions to SAF control improves security in some eastern areas. Regardless, the situation remains fragile, with power still disputed in other locations. In South Kordofan, conflict escalates as the SPLM-N (Al Hilu) and the RSF seek to maintain or expand their areas of control.

To consolidate control and portray themselves as the protectors of the country, the SAF make efforts to improve governance in Khartoum and the east by establishing a civilian administration under their supervision. Civil society groups and diaspora criticise and consider the process a sham. The SAF is unable to respond to popular demands of security sector reforms, the youth, and civilian governance. Conversely, the group increasingly harasses civic entities and violently quashes dissent, increasing arrests, arbitrary detention, and disappearances. Protests and demonstrations against the military government occur mainly in Khartoum. In Port Sudan, international influence forces the SAF to give civil society more freedom, strengthening civic groups.

The SAF government fails to receive international recognition, and without significant peace talks, sanctions remain. Government service improvements occur in the east, and more state salaries are paid, but liquidity and inflation crises and a lingering bureaucracy continue constraining effective governance. International investment does not resume, and the brain drain continues, further reducing state and commercial capacity. Some re-investment in Khartoum and the east starts but remains insufficient to reverse the overall economic decline driven by increased conflict in the south and the west. Agricultural sector disruptions persist across the country, although more peaceful areas experience good harvests and some small-scale economic recovery, particularly along the Nile River.

Potential triggers

Armed groups

- The SAF retake control of Khartoum and government institutions.
- Conflict parties increasingly divert aid for their own resources.
- SAF/RSF leadership becomes more hardline.
- More military groups and militias align with the SAF.
- The RSF increasingly become fragmented.
- Armed groups, such as tribal militias, proliferate.
- Armed group recruitment (e.g. through polarising, tribal, or ethnic rhetoric) increases.

Civilian entities

- Grassroots civil society groups promoting peace remain disunited (unable to withstand pressures from armed groups; lacking international support).
- Disinformation/hate speech by and against different ethnic, tribal, and political groups increases.
- Communities become increasingly militarised as civilians take up arms.

International community

- The international community fails to consolidate mediation initiatives, and diplomatic efforts to bring the SAF and the RSF to the negotiating table remain unfruitful.
- Foreign military support to only the SAF increases.
- Foreign military support to only the RSF decreases.

Impact and humanitarian consequences

Displacement continues increasing in Darfur and Kordofan regions and across the borders, mainly to Chad. Some IDP and refugee return movement also occurs as people attempt to restart livelihoods in Khartoum and other previously insecure eastern areas. For these people, the repair of damaged and destroyed housing is a priority need. Competition over shelter and returning to property occupied by other people drive local clashes. Conflict and violence in North and South Kordofan drive displacement to other Kordofan states, White Nile, and the disputed Abyei region, worsening tensions between South Sudan and Sudan.

Essential services: provision heavily relies on mutual aid groups and humanitarian organisations. A shortage of qualified staff and a lack of funds also hamper the re-establishment of services. Some, including healthcare and education, resume slowly in Khartoum while remaining a priority need elsewhere in the country, particularly in IDP camps.

Household purchasing power: the reduction in violence in the capital and the east allows for some resumption of livelihoods and markets. In the rest of the country, escalation of conflict severely hinders livelihoods and access to essential goods, driving severe difficulties in meeting basic needs and an increase in adoption of negative coping mechanisms, such as transactional sex and armed group recruitment. Poverty is rampant, job opportunities insufficient and the banking system faces a continued crisis.

Humanitarian concern by geographic location

Darfur: violence escalation drives increased displacement and high protection needs. The increased prevalence of more severe negative coping mechanisms especially endangers children, who increasingly face armed group recruitment, trafficking, and sexual abuse. Reduced humanitarian access drives food, health, and WASH needs. Emergency response rooms and humanitarian assistance struggle to meet demands for food, medical equipment, and medicine. Infectious disease outbreaks increase. Those displaced within Darfur are the most economically vulnerable and food insecure, with few resources and high dependence on humanitarian assistance. Those displaced to Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) increase shelter, food, WASH, healthcare, and education assistance needs in the refugee camps.

Khartoum: despite reduced violence, humanitarian needs remain significant given high casualty numbers, widespread destruction, and severe damage to healthcare and WASH systems. Protection needs remain high, and infectious disease outbreaks occasionally occur. While markets function and food is available, the lack of employment and income drives poverty. As the SAF reassert control and increase resistance group surveillance, the civic space shrinks. Reprisals against civilians considered pro-RSF, discrimination, human rights abuses, and detentions increase. Poor living conditions drive anti-government sentiment and an increase in protests against the military.

Kordofan: violence and a reduced workforce inhibit planting and harvesting, leading to livelihood and agricultural output losses. Protection concerns increase as fighting escalates between the SPLM-N (AI-Hilu), the RSF, and the SAF. A bigger number of people in the safer IDP locations escalates demands for humanitarian assistance, competition over scarce resources, and crime. Shelter, WASH, healthcare, and food are priority needs for the newly displaced. Insufficient state and emergency response room health capacity results in increased morbidity and mortality.

Port Sudan: aware of their economic relevance, local groups disputing power disrupt port operations to seek economic benefits from the SAF government. Increased import costs and delays drive price rises throughout the country.

Humanitarian response

As the SAF encourage humanitarian access to Khartoum, bureaucratic impediments decrease for organisations serving Khartoum and the east while increasing for operations elsewhere in the country. Pressure on humanitarians to respond only in SAF-controlled areas, where security and bureaucracy are significantly more permissive, results in partial humanitarian service delivery. The targeting of emergency response rooms and humanitarian assistance in contested areas, primarily Darfur and Kordofan regions, limits humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian access in Darfur significantly decreases as conflict roots itself in the region and cross-border operations are restricted. Access to Kordofan also becomes more insecure. In Chad, the presence of armed Sudanese in refugee camps presents security challenges, while the demand exceeds humanitarian delivery capacity. Refugee and cross-border aid movements remain feasible but present mounting challenges for responders given the growing polarisation and politicisation of the response by all sides. Overall humanitarian funding decreases with reduced international media coverage.

4. Collapse

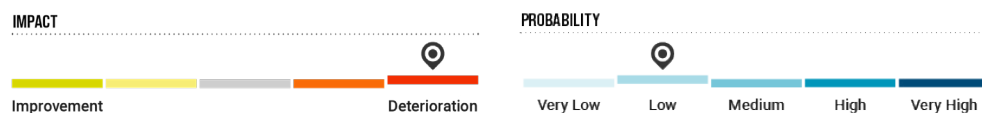
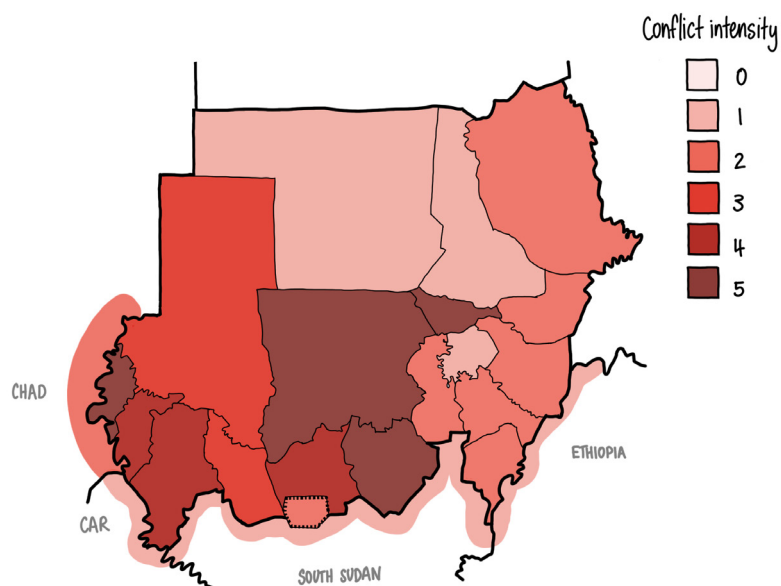


Figure 4. Conflict intensity per region in Scenario 4



Source: ACAPS

Conflict intensifies and spreads amid an extremely fragmented landscape and a growing arms race. Existing parties see their ranks break – factions develop within armed groups, with hardliners being more prominent. At the same time, new groups form as communities who feel the need to protect themselves and survive amid growing needs take up arms and enter the conflict. Armed groups also increasingly exploit divisions within communities, fuelling ethnic and tribal violence. Extremist armed groups launch ethnically motivated attacks, including on the displaced sheltered in makeshift camps, leading to mass atrocities and furthering the ethnic conflict, particularly in Darfur. The result is a severely damaged social fabric and a complex network of militias and civilian self-defence groups fighting each other throughout the country. Khartoum is a de facto besieged area.

In bordering countries such as Chad, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, military interventions of different compositions and capacities try to establish buffer zones to restrict the inflow of displaced people and prevent the further spread of violence. The South Sudanese military attempts to gain control of some previously disputed regions. Increased displacement from Darfur to eastern Chad and armed groups using refugee camps to (re)arm themselves prompt violence and increased border security.

Armed groups struggle to fortify their legitimacy as ‘state’ figures or authorities of their controlled areas. They resort to more authoritarian control by intensifying their repression and threats to civil society and efforts to redirect humanitarian aid, undermining organisations such as the UN, the African Union, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. Civil society is increasingly under threat, and while some elements of resilience and resistance prevail, peaceful civic groups fail to establish internal leadership and face increased division. The political context rewards and increases the prominence of belligerent, radical, and extremist entities. Regional parties and neighbouring countries become more involved in the conflict, supporting proxy groups that help advance their interests in Sudan. The scattered engagement of international figures, disrupted SAF and RSF command and control, and conflict fragmentation inhibit attempts at ceasefires or peace negotiations. At the same time, the international community is divided and fails to provide effective support for democratic alternatives.

The socioeconomic situation continues to severely deteriorate as armed groups focus on resourcing the conflict. There is widespread infrastructure destruction, the movement of people and goods is severely constrained, and the economy mostly relies on localised trade pockets. Looting and logistic challenges further drive essential goods shortages across the country. Some border regions, despite heavy militarisation, benefit from a level of militarily controlled cross-border humanitarian aid and minor trading, and displaced population groups cluster in the areas with better access to essential goods and services.

Possible triggers

Armed groups

- Conflict parties increasingly divert aid for their own resources.
- SAF/RSF leadership becomes more hardline.
- More military groups and militias align with the RSF.
- Fragmentation increases within the RSF.
- Fragmentation increases within the SAF.
- Fragmentation increases within the RSF and the SAF.

- Armed groups, such as tribal militias, proliferate.
- The RSF take control of Khartoum.
- The RSF expand the conflict to other regions with major population areas (mainly the east).
- Armed group recruitment (e.g. through polarising, tribal, or ethnic rhetoric) increases.

Civilian entities

- Grassroots civil society groups promoting peace remain disunited (unable to withstand pressures from armed groups; lacking international support).
- Disinformation/hate speech by and against different ethnic, tribal, and political groups increases.
- Communities become increasingly militarised as civilians take up arms.
- Radical hardline figures become more prominent.

International community

- The international community fails to consolidate mediation initiatives, and diplomatic efforts to bring the SAF and the RSF to the negotiating table remain unfruitful.
- Foreign military support to both the SAF and the RSF continues or increases.
- Foreign military support to only the RSF increases.
- Foreign military support to only the SAF decreases.
- Regional intervention in the conflict increases, with potential engagement from external parties (in Chad, Egypt, or the United Arab Emirates).

Impact and humanitarian consequences

Displacement: as central areas of the country become more insecure and isolated, population movements progress towards border regions. That said, fighting, territorial control fragmentation, and the proliferation of checkpoints challenge these movements and keep their ranges short. Isolation generally increases throughout the country, trapping many populations with limited resources.

Essential services: throughout the country, the availability of services exclusively relies on local dynamics. Mutual aid groups, such as emergency response rooms, often stand as primary service providers (but struggle to meet the demand) as local authorities primarily concentrate on military control and struggle to establish effective governance structures.

Violence results in extensive critical infrastructure damage and severely limits the transport of essential supplies, including medicine, to conflict-affected areas. Access to fundamental resources, such as electricity, water, and telecommunications, also faces severe constraints, significantly hampering service delivery and amplifying the risk of the spread of preventable diseases, particularly in overcrowded locations.

Household purchasing power: poverty increases and people become highly dependent on local produce and humanitarian assistance where available. Cash circulation further decreases with the increased use of foreign currency, while prices – especially of food and fuel – soar. Household purchasing power declines across the country driving the widespread adoption of negative coping mechanisms. People experience frequent multiple displacement and some IDP sites become areas of conflict. A lack of livelihood opportunities drives young men to join armed groups or criminal activities.

Food insecurity rises rapidly across Sudan, mitigated only in areas where agricultural production remains possible. Malnutrition rates significantly increase, especially in areas of Darfur and Kordofan regions and Khartoum inaccessible to humanitarian organisations.

Humanitarian concern by geographic location

This scenario envisions widespread conflict across Sudan, but there will be areas of relative calm. Humanitarian concerns will vary more given people's isolation, proximity to conflict and to Sudan's borders than because of their specific region.

Areas under active conflict: widespread and more indiscriminate violence leads to more civilian deaths, including through mass atrocities driven by ethnic and tribal divisions. In these locations, the rule of law is extremely precarious; lootings, rent-seeking activities, and an increasingly authoritarian control by the groups in power are widespread. As some civilian self-defence groups and local militias take up arms, violence escalates.

Isolated areas: in areas with agricultural production, mainly in the southeast and along the Nile River, populations have some access to food production and localised markets, preventing extreme food insecurity levels despite high prices. In arid areas, food access becomes increasingly constrained, and famine-like conditions with high severe acute malnutrition levels emerge. Population groups living in isolated locations, often the most disadvantaged, face increased protection risks and often resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as transactional sex and armed group recruitment, including child recruitment.

Border areas: as large numbers of people seek safety in neighbouring countries and with the creation of buffer zones, numerous informal settlements emerge close to the borders, where displaced people experience limited access to essential services and basic goods. Despite

their rent-seeking behaviour, neighbouring countries' military forces in border regions reduce violence and improve humanitarian access to some limited areas. For areas where clashes and looting are more frequent, access deteriorates. As the displaced cluster in safer areas, the population in camps grow with mostly highly economically vulnerable people with limited coping capacity. This overwhelms humanitarian assistance services, resulting in IPC 4 food insecurity levels and occasional infectious disease outbreaks in some camps.

Humanitarian constraints

Insecurity in Port Sudan results in the evacuation of the international staff of humanitarian organisations, and the region ceases to act as a hub for humanitarian operations. The withdrawal of international humanitarian organisations means that of most service and aid provision throughout the country happens via local mutual aid groups, except in border regions where humanitarian organisations have some access to IDP and refugee camps (e.g. Chad, Egypt, and South Sudan). Conflict escalation brings some international attention back to the Sudan crisis, increasing funding for the humanitarian response. That said, access routes to more interior regions involve different lines of control, requiring highly complex negotiations with great financial costs and high insecurity. This effectively restricts humanitarian assistance to border areas and prevents an adequate response to the dire conditions of displaced populations in these regions.

COMPOUNDING FACTORS

Compounding factors are developments that have the potential to significantly change the situation and affect basic needs, irrespective of which scenario(s) the actual future resembles.

Severe weather

Floods regularly hit Sudan and severely affect the population. They aggravate humanitarian needs by affecting access to essential services, damaging livelihoods, destroying infrastructure, and hindering humanitarian access to populations in need. They also affect military movements and the territorial control of armed groups. Heavy rainfall during June–September 2023 already caused flooding and displacement in North Darfur, Northern, and White Nile states (OCHA 17/08/2023). The effects of El Niño are expected to bring above-average rainfall to eastern Sudan in late 2023, particularly affecting Blue Nile, North Darfur, South Kordofan, and White Nile states (ICPAC accessed 23/08/2023).

Drought: Sudan is a drought-prone country, with severe impacts on the population's livelihoods. Above average temperatures were observed in the June–September period and the October–December forecast predicts a high probability of above-normal temperatures throughout the country, because of El Niño. These elevated temperatures could worsen the effects of low rainfall in some regions, increasing the chances of severe drought. This affected and is expected to affect the crop planting (typically June, July, and November) and harvesting (November, December, and March) seasons, increasing the demand for and competition over limited water and grazing land resources (FAO 14/08/2023; ICPAC accessed 17/10/2023; ACAPS 21/06/2023).

The Greater Nile Oil Pipeline

This oil pipeline carries significant political weight in the current Sudan conflict. It serves as both a revenue source and a tool for influence. The SAF and the RSF see control over the pipeline as crucial for their negotiation positions, both domestically and internationally. The SAF manage the pipeline's export terminals in Port Sudan, while the RSF control various stations along it. Any party may attempt to sabotage the pipeline if they believe that the other side is benefiting from it. The pipeline's route through West Kordofan also makes the region a focal point for various parties aiming to secure sections of the pipeline for potential leverage in future peace negotiations. South Sudan heavily relies on the pipeline for its economy; any oil flow disruptions would seriously damage relations between the two countries (ST 19/06/2023; S&P Global 02/05/2023; Africa Intelligence 18/05/2023).

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)

The GERD has been a source of tension between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan since its inception. A sudden large or uncontrolled release of water would have serious consequences for Sudan's own dams and cause unpredicted flooding in the eastern part of the country, reaching as far as Khartoum. A catastrophic failure would cause all of Sudan's dams to fail and submerge property, agricultural land, and roads across approximately 25,400km². Most damage would take place between the Sennar Dam and Khartoum city (15,800 km²) given the flat nature of the area and the high concentration of population and economic activities (Elnour 2019).

Regional dynamics in neighbouring countries

Internal conflicts in **CAR** have resulted in the Government seeking military support from the RSF in the past. The RSF's presence in CAR has grown over the years to include military bases in the country and involvement in gold mining. The relevance of CAR to the Sudanese conflict might increase in the event of the RSF losing part of its territorial control and being obliged to regroup abroad (RVI 11/06/2023).

The conflict in Sudan directly affects **Chad**, a nation experiencing high political instability. A total of 820,000 Sudanese refugees live in Chad, nearly half a million of whom crossed the border after the conflict started in April (UNHCR accessed 27/09/2023). While the Masalit host population welcomes the refugees, predominantly of the same ethnicity, the sheer number of people is a challenge. Prices have doubled since April, and in Adré (the main point of entry), refugees outnumber permanent residents three to one. While the border is officially closed, the smuggling of fuel and other essential commodities, as well as weapons, is a concern. Authorities have reached an agreement to facilitate cross-border operations between both countries, but implementation remains a challenge. Chad's ruling family is also from the Zaghawa tribe, whom the RSF have alienated in Darfur and who has formed alliances with the SAF in the past. In the current conflict, the SAF may use its ties to the Zaghawa tribes to mobilise support from Chad, affecting the development of the war, particularly in Darfur. A political change in Chad's leadership could have the opposite impact (ICG 10/08/2023; OCHA 15/08/2023; ISS 08/05/2023).

Egypt and Sudan have a long history of ties dating back to before Sudan's independence. Egypt has actively influenced Sudan's politics, including more recently by supporting former dictator al-Bashir. Their close relationship continues, exemplified by the rapport between SAF General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi. A significant increase or decrease in military and financial support to the SAF could have a strong effect on the development of the conflict. Egypt's interest in Sudan centres on controlling Nile Basin

waters, as is crucial for its water supply. The conflict and a deterioration of Sudan's relations with Ethiopia might weaken Sudan's position on the GERD, which is seen as a threat to Egypt's water supply. The inflow of refugees, international pressure, and internal political changes might also alter Egypt's border posture. Any changes (i.e. the opening of the borders) could have a profound impact on the displacement dynamics in Sudan (Brookings 05/08/2020 Darwisheh 03/2019; RVI 11/06/2023; Al Jazeera 12/07/2023).

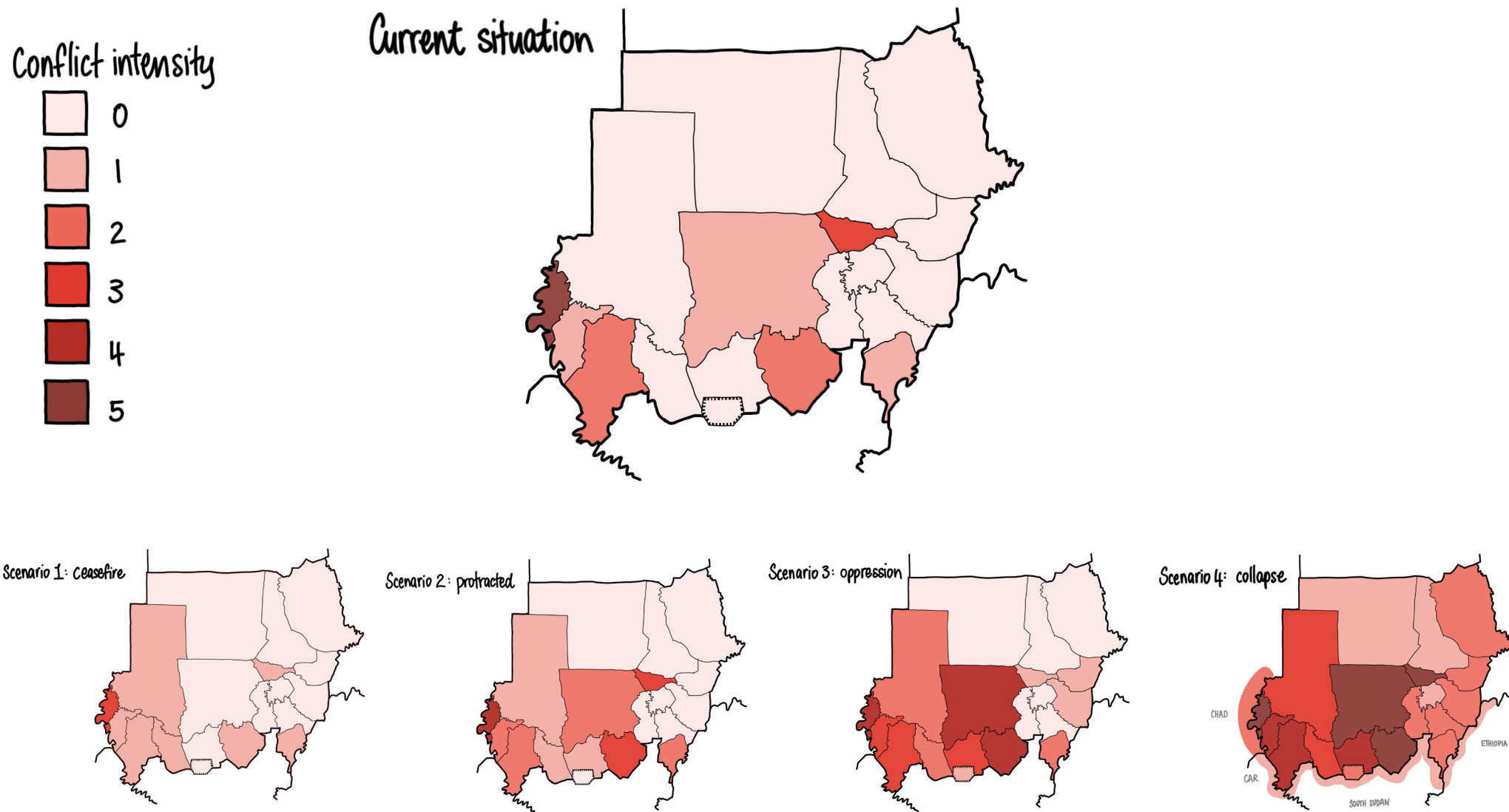
Relations between **Ethiopia** and Sudan deteriorated when Sudan took advantage of the Tigrayan crisis to occupy and remove Ethiopian farmers from the disputed border region of Al Fashaga. Sudanese support for the Tigray People's Liberation Front has also fed border tensions with Ethiopia's Amhara region. Any expansion of the conflict in Ethiopia towards Sudan or vice versa, as well as a deterioration in relations between the two countries, could result in cross-border conflict and destabilise eastern Sudan (Chatham House 12/04/2023).

Libya also plays a role in the development of the crisis in Sudan. Increased border insecurity because of the cross-border movements of fighters, fuel, and displaced civilians could have an increasing impact on Sudan's conflict dynamics (EIU 09/05/2023). Armed groups currently in control of some areas in eastern Libya also favour the RSF (The Guardian 23/04/2023).

Conflicts within Sudan tend to significantly affect **South Sudan** because of the robust economic ties and interconnections among their people. South Sudan's reliance on oil revenue leaves it exposed to any oil export interruptions via Port Sudan. Consequently, the country has tried to adopt a neutral position and played a key role in mediating the current conflict. Regardless, damage to or the shutdown of the oil pipeline, or an increase in violence or displacement along its borders, may compel South Sudan to mobilise into Sudan to defend its economic interests (RVI 11/06/2023). South Sudan will also hold elections in 2024, and any major change in leadership or high violence levels in the lead-up to the elections could influence the country's approach to the war in Sudan (The EastAfrican 10/07/2023).

SCENARIO CONFLICT INTENSITY COMPARISON

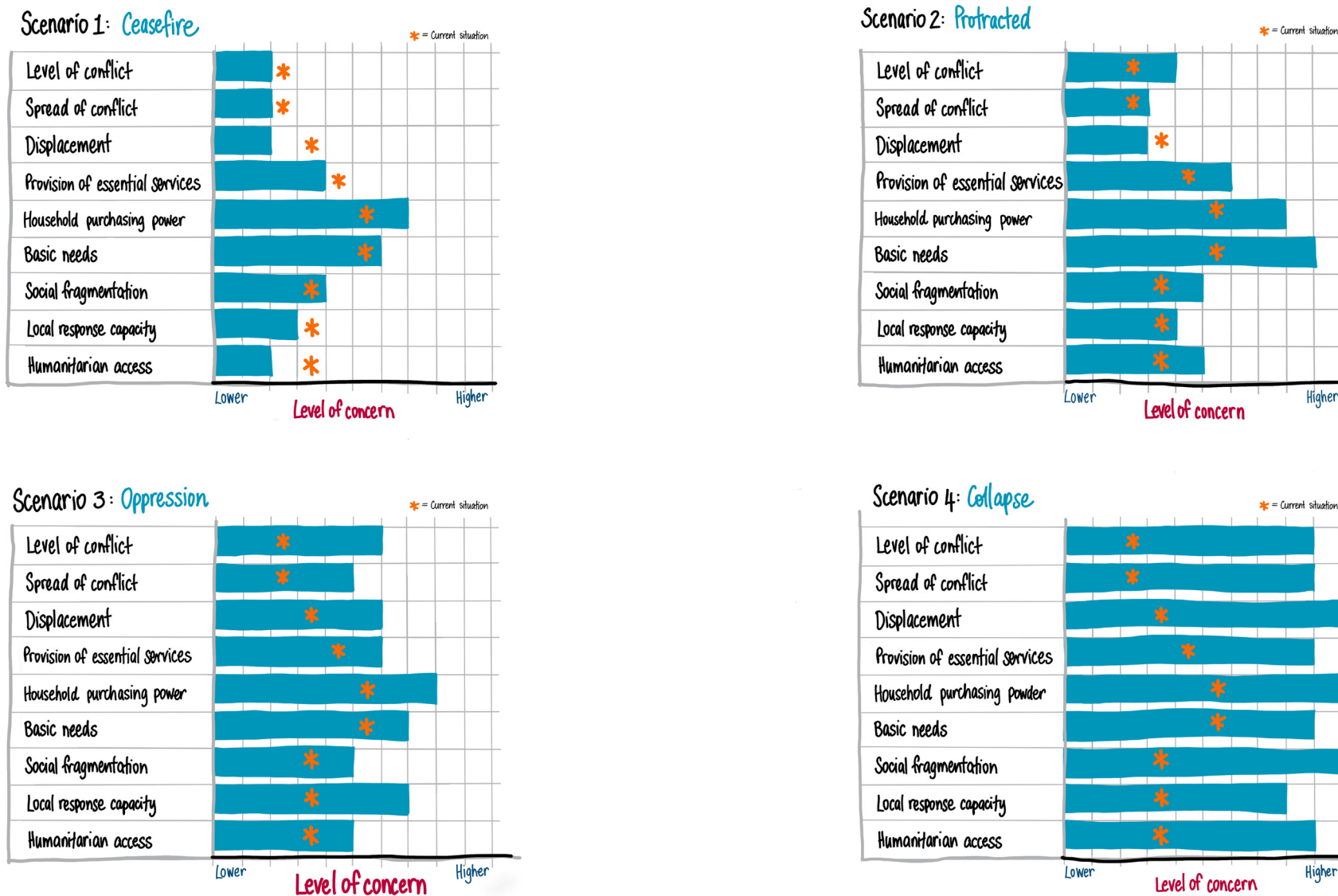
Figure 5. Conflict intensity per region reflecting the current situation and the four scenarios



Source: ACAPS

SCENARIO IMPACTS COMPARISON

Figure 6. Level of concern per domain reflecting the current situation (in stars) and the four scenarios.



Source: ACAPS

ANNEX A: CURRENT SITUATION AS AT OCTOBER 2023

Background

With a population of almost 47 million, Sudan is one of the largest and most diverse countries in Africa. It sits at the crossroads of sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and has long been mired in conflict as a result of weak government structures. Central governance structures built around military power have existed since its 1956 independence. Most notably, 30 years of oppressive Islamist dictatorship by Omar Hassan al-Bashir (marked by political oppression, human rights abuses, and alleged genocide) ended in April 2019 after a civilian revolution that installed a civilian leader, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok (Clingendael 11/2021; Chatham House 11/11/2021; TIMEP 26/07/2023).

In October 2019, Sudan formed a transitional government with joint military and civilian leadership. In October 2020, the Juba Peace Agreement was signed to address marginalisation through political and wealth sharing, decentralisation, and various reforms, but progress on its implementation was limited. In October 2021, a military coup removed Prime Minister Hamdok, citing institutional delays because of political disputes, but international condemnation led to Hamdok's return in November 2021. Unmet civilian demands, including for the end of violence against peaceful protesters, led to his resignation two months later, paving the way for a return to military rule (IDEA 21/04/2021; Clingendael 11/2021; Chatham House 11/11/2021; NYT 07/02/2022; BBC 03/01/2022).

Following this resignation, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, leader of the SAF, chaired the Sovereign Council that governed the country. General Mohamed Hamdan 'Hemedti' Dagalo was his deputy who headed the RSF. SAF salaries benefited from the national budget, while around 250 companies in the SAF-controlled Defence Industries System funded the group's military expenses. The RSF generated income from gold mining, trading, and mercenary activities, and the 2017 RSF takeover of the Jebel Amer gold mines in Darfur provided a stable income. The RSF developed its international ties by supplying mercenaries against the Houthis in Yemen. After the 2021 coup, Hemedti engaged further with the international community, including through trips to Abu Dhabi, Addis Ababa, and Russia (CMEC 23/04/2021; Al Jazeera 16/04/2023; TIMEP 26/07/2023).

The relationship between the SAF and the RSF had deep historical roots in Sudan's politics, economy, and social fabric. Their alliance was reinforced through time and culminated in their joint involvement in the October 2021 military coup. That said, changing post-coup political dynamics, including the resurgence of figures from the former regime, disrupted this alliance and revived historical rivalries, as both the SAF and the RSF relied on patronage networks within and outside Sudan to maintain their economic and political influence (Clingendael 11/2021; RVI 10/05/2023).

In December 2022, in response to escalating unrest and international pressure, a coalition of stakeholders from various backgrounds endorsed the Framework Agreement. The agreement aimed to establish a transitional civilian government based on five key pillars: accountability and transitional justice, security and military reforms, the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement with signatory and non-signatory armed groups, the dismantling of structures associated with the previous regime, and the addressing of the crisis in eastern Sudan. Significant tensions emerged between the SAF and the RSF in relation to the timeline of the RSF integration into the SAF, delaying the signing of the agreement twice. Following this, in April 2023, a violent power struggle broke out (Insecurity Insight 11/07/2023; Redress 05/12/2022).

The conflict since April 2023

What does the conflict look like?

The conflict in Sudan has shifted to its capital, Khartoum, breaking from previous conflicts primarily in marginalised regions. Initially involving the SAF and the RSF, both sides have enlisted allies to expand the war to new areas, including Darfur and Kordofan regions. While the SAF maintain control over parts of the north and the east, as well as some locations of South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, the RSF have made significant gains in Khartoum, seizing critical government installations. In Darfur, the RSF enjoy substantial support from the local administration. With the progression of the conflict, various armed groups and local militias, initially uninvolved, have taken advantage of the instability to settle old scores and expand their territories. To strengthen his position, General al-Burhan has replaced the RSF leader, naming Malik Agar as the new Deputy Chairperson of the Sovereign Council. Senior officials, military officers, and ambassadors suspected of supporting the RSF have also been replaced. Both sides have called on the youth to join the conflict, and SAF bases across the country have been instructed to arm those who respond. Arab leaders in Darfur have called on their SAF members to defect and join the RSF, while the RSF is urging native administration units to encourage their members within the SAF to defect and join their ranks (Reuters 17/04/2023; ICG 23/01/2023; UNSC 31/08/2023; ACLED 21/07/2023; ST 19/05/2023).

Despite calls for dialogue from various quarters and political factions, the conflict continues. Many civilian-led groups, including political organisations, women's rights groups, youth networks, resistance committees, civil society organisations, and academic institutions, remain opposed to the war and consistently advocate dialogue to address the conflict (UNSC 31/08/2023; ST 15/07/2023).

The efforts of regional and international diplomats to halt the conflict have proven ineffective. The conflict parties have largely disregarded multiple negotiations of a ceasefire agreement. Initiatives by organisations such as the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the League of Arab States, the EU, and the UN to create a peace roadmap have yet to yield positive outcomes (UNSC 31/08/2023; ISS 03/05/2023).

Type and spread of conflict

As the armed conflict between the SAF and the RSF in Sudan continues, a mix of intricate communal tensions, political motives, and ethnic affiliations within multiple armed factions underpins a complex and scattered conflict landscape throughout the country, in particular across Darfur and Kordofan regions and Blue Nile state. Both main sides have obtained sophisticated weapons of war, such as drones, attesting to the evolving nature of the conflict and the presence of external influences shaping conflict dynamics. With multiple failed attempts at ceasefire agreements, the conflict continues, with the SAF facing setbacks that have resulted in the loss of control of significant territories in Khartoum and other states. In Darfur and Kordofan regions, violence has escalated (ACLEDD 21/07/2023).

Ethnic and tribal violence

Although violence between the SAF and the RSF has majorly been observed in Khartoum and parts of Darfur, ethnic and tribal violence, often with profound historical and political roots, has occurred in other parts of the country, such as Darfur region and South Kordofan and Blue Nile states. As the conflict continues, communal divisions across the country increase, leading to systematic, ethnically driven violence against civilians and aggravated intercommunal conflict.

Fighting in Khartoum

Since April 2023, most of the violence has occurred in Khartoum state, particularly in the tricity metropolitan area of Khartoum. This conflict has disrupted services, including frequent power and water supply interruptions (Chatham House 21/04/2023). Both parties lack experience in extended urban warfare in Greater Khartoum. The SAF struggle to effectively pursue the RSF given the RSF's superior mobility, while the SAF's control of the skies forces the RSF to occupy civilian homes, abandoning their capital bases. Both forces are engaged in intense clashes for control of key locations, including the presidential palace, military headquarters, and bridges (RVI 10/05/2023; Chatham House 21/04/2023). In June, the RSF controlled various sites, including the Central Reserve Police headquarters (ACLEDD 21/07/2023). In late August, General al-Burhan left the SAF headquarters amid rumours of the RSF assuming control. Both sides widely fuel the propaganda war to influence the conflict (ST 28/07/2023).

Fighting in Darfur region

Conflict in Darfur flared up almost immediately following the events in Khartoum. Darfur has a history of conflict dating back to the 1980s. Governments in Khartoum have regularly waged wars in the outlying regions of Sudan by deploying irregular or paramilitary forces. These locally recruited militias have gradually gained greater prominence than the national armed forces (Small Arms Survey 20/04/2017). The RSF has roots in Darfur, notably in the Janjaweed militia, and the region has been under their control for almost two decades. As a result, they command the majority of the current support in Darfur, and their campaign in the region has been successful (Al Jazeera 30/06/2023; OCHA 15/06/2022).

In West Darfur, violence has largely clustered in El Geneina, its capital, which has turned into a hotbed of fighting between RSF-backed Arab and SAF-enabled non-Arab Masalit militias. Since the start of the conflict, violence has also spread to other parts of the region, with both sides gunning for control of key supply chains, routes, and checkpoints (ACLEDD 23/06/2023). In Central Darfur, RSF-backed Arab militias have been engaged in a cycle of capturing and recapturing various locations in Zalingei. In July, violence broke out between the Sudan Liberation Movement faction led by Abdelwahid El Nur (SLM-AW) and the RSF after the RSF attacked IDP camps under SLM-AW control, signalling the entrance of a new party in the conflict (ACLEDD 21/07/2023; UNSC 31/08/2023). In South Darfur, violence has escalated in Nyala as local leaders called on community members to join the fight against SAF presence in the region. The RSF have overtaken several bases, leading to the surrender of SAF soldiers, and taken control of the police headquarters in Nyala. Consequently, on 3 July, seven tribal leaders from different communities expressed their support for the RSF, a move that significantly bolstered the RSF's campaign in the region (Dabanga 30/08/2023; ACLEDD 21/07/2023). In North Darfur, RSF-backed Arab militias looted and destroyed several locations, including Al Fasher and Tawila, in July (Africanews 18/08/2023).

Fighting in Kordofan region

Before the onset of the current conflict, Kordofan region was already unstable, with clashes between different armed groups and population displacement. With the current conflict, in North Kordofan, fighting between the RSF and the SAF regularly takes place near the capital, El Obeid. The Kababish people, a nomadic tribe of the region, have taken up arms in response to RSF attacks on civilians. In South Kordofan, the SAF, the RSF, and the SPLM-N (al-Hilu) control different areas. The SPLM-N (al-Hilu) has successfully regained control of some territory through attacks on SAF bases in South Kordofan while also establishing a new front line in Blue Nile state. In West Kordofan, the RSF have imposed a significant road tax on goods from El Obeid (ACLEDD 21/07/2023 and 11/08/2023; OCHA 15/08/2023).

Impact of the current conflict

Socioeconomic situation

From April–August, the conflict killed more than 3,000 people and displaced over four million (OCHA 22/09/2023). The fighting, which has involved the use of heavy artillery weapons and air strikes, has also heavily damaged and destroyed buildings, mostly in Khartoum (ACLED 21/07/2023).

Amid conflict and economic decline, food insecurity has escalated in Sudan, particularly among rural communities. The latest IPC projections revealed a dire situation, with over 20.3 million people (more than 42% of the population) experiencing high acute food insecurity levels – Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse – between July–September 2023. 14 million individuals were estimated to face IPC 3 levels, while nearly 6.3 million face IPC 4 levels. The most severely affected states include Khartoum, South and West Kordofan, and Central, East, South, and West Darfur, where over half the population faces acute food insecurity levels and grapples with active conflict (FAO 02/08/2023; IPC 02/08/2023).

Basic service provision has been either intermittent or unavailable in areas experiencing conflict, especially Khartoum and Darfur. Water and electrical infrastructure damage in Khartoum has blocked access to these essential services. The situation has also led to the breakdown of the operations of federal ministries and institutions (OCHA 15/08/2023; WASH Cluster 29/08/2023). Healthcare has been particularly disrupted, with infrastructure damage and destruction, a lack of supplies, and personnel displacement putting 70–80% of hospitals out of service in conflict states (Reuters 19/09/2023; OCHA 15/08/2023). Blockades against medical supply distribution have been reported in Khartoum (Insecurity Insight 13/09/2023).

Livelihood disruptions as a result of job losses and limited business operations because of insecurity, infrastructure and land damage, limited movements, and trade flow disruptions have resulted in price increases, limited stocks, and market interruptions (FAO 02/08/2023; ACAPS 11/08/2023). In Khartoum, markets are only open for a few hours, and the supply of goods is limited (ACLED 21/07/2023).

The damage and destruction of the banking infrastructure have affected cash flow, increasing the use of informal transaction methods, such as the hawala system, and of telecommunications airtime in place of cash to transact goods. This issue severely affects household purchasing power throughout the country, and poverty is rampant. In May, farmers did not receive their annual agricultural credits that allow them to purchase farm inputs during the planting season; as such, below-average harvest is expected this season, in November and December (FEWS NET 22/08/2023; ACAPS 11/08/2023). Inflation has also risen to unprecedented levels. Despite the

Central Bank not issuing official inflation rates since February, estimates report rates higher than 200% in August compared to the same period in 2022 (WFP 31/07/2023).

The conflict has severely affected education in the country. Schools have either closed or been disrupted, denying many children and young people access to formal education. Displacement has affected both teachers and students, and school buildings have been damaged or repurposed as shelter for displaced people. This disruption not only affects the immediate educational opportunities of Sudan's youth but also has long-term consequences for the country's development, as an educated population is crucial for stability and progress (THE 19/06/2023; Reuters 10/08/2023).

Displacement

Before the conflict, Sudan hosted 3.7 million IDPs and 1.14 million refugees, 38% of whom lived in camps. Half of the displaced were in Khartoum and White Nile states (OCHA 07/11/2022). The conflict has caused a major change, with 96% of recent displacements being linked to armed conflict and intercommunal clashes compared to previous years when natural hazards were the primary cause (IOM 26/08/2023 and 20/02/2023).

Internal displacement: as at 13 September, the current conflict had displaced three million people within Sudan. Almost 60% were displaced from urban areas. 70% of IDPs lived with host communities, 11% in rented accommodation, and 6% in camps (IOM 19/09/2023). (Please refer to Map 1 for displacement figures per region.)

Regional displacement: escalating violence in Sudan has forced over one million people to flee to neighbouring countries, where they face challenges involving insecurity, climate hazards, and limited services (REACH 22/08/2023). Despite initial border openings, strict border laws and a lack of safe corridors have made refugee movement difficult. Almost 500,000 Sudanese refugees have sought shelter in Chad since April 2023, adding to the existing refugee crisis in the country (The Conversation 08/06/2023; OCHA 15/08/2023). These displaced people are mainly in Ouaddai, Sila, and Wadi Fira provinces (UNHCR 18/07/2023). Conflict have pushed many to flee to eastern Chad, posing additional humanitarian challenges, especially during the rainy season (MSF 02/08/2023; OCHA 08/07/2023). Over 260,000 people displaced from Sudan are in South Sudan, primarily South Sudanese who had previously sought refuge in Khartoum to flee conflict and drought in their country since 2013 (IOM 15/08/2023).

Humanitarian response

Humanitarian access

Humanitarian response challenges include operational interference, limited funding, a lack of personnel, fuel shortages, restricted fund access, insecurity, electricity and communication limitations, and bureaucratic impediments. Insecurity particularly affects areas beyond state capitals. These issues are worsened by the intricate conflict network involving various groups with different motivations and approaches to external aid, the presence of checkpoints, requests for ransom and attacks on aid workers, transport infrastructure limitations, and population movement restrictions by armed groups and neighbouring countries. Port Sudan is one of the main hubs for humanitarian response, while many organisations have moved their operational centres to Kampala (Uganda), Cairo (Egypt), and Nairobi (Kenya). Given persisting access difficulties to several areas of the country, the response is considering scaling up cross-border operations from Chad (MSF 09/08/2023; Protection Cluster 10/08/2023; OCHA 15/08/2023; UNHCR 18/07/2023).

Role of local responders

Resistance committees, grassroots neighbourhood groups that have played a vital role in Sudan's pro-democracy movement after the ousting of al-Bashir, have stepped in to address response gaps. With uncertain traditional political structures and humanitarian responders leaving because of safety concerns, these committees have taken on the task of delivering essential services and organising the local response to the impacts of the conflict and the precarious socioeconomic situation for many. Beyond facilitating service provision, such as medical care, they have coordinated evacuations for trapped civilians and spread anti-war messages (New Internationalist 23/05/2023; Bishai 27/04/2023; Al Jazeera 22/04/2023).

To address rising humanitarian needs, these committees have formed emergency response rooms that have taken initiatives that include setting up community clinics, delivering medicine, restoring utilities, establishing soup kitchens and providing food and organising local markets. Attacks on these volunteers have become increasingly common in Sudan (The Guardian 08/05/2023; TNH 02/06/2023; CMI 07/2023).

Humanitarian presence

Despite security concerns and challenges with operation interference, from April–July, humanitarian responders managed to provide life-saving assistance to approximately 2.9 million people across various states. This assistance encompassed a range of vital services, including education, healthcare, food provision, nutrition support, water supply, and protection

services (OCHA 14/08/2023 and 15/08/2023). As at 22 September, only 31.4% of the required USD 2.6 billion humanitarian budget for Sudan had been funded (OCHA accessed 23/09/2023).

Natural hazards

Over the years, the country has grappled with a series of natural disasters and environmental hazards that have had profound effects. From 1980–2020, floods and persistent drought were the most recurrent climate hazards in Sudan. The most severe flooding took place in 2020, affecting more than 850,000 individuals and damaging 37,000 homes across the country (OCHA 22/02/2021).

ANNEX B: SCENARIO TRIGGERS LIST

Scenario 1: ceasefire; Scenario 2: protracted; Scenario 3: oppression; Scenario 4: collapse

SCENARIOS	1	2	3	4
Armed groups				
The SAF retake control of Khartoum and government institutions.	X		X	
The RSF take control of Khartoum.				X
The SAF and the RSF agree on a temporary division of Khartoum and central institutions.	X			
Continued conflict becomes less appealing to SAF/RSF generals (e.g. as international governments continue to deny their legitimacy as alternatives for a government, increase threats of accountability, push for independent investigative mechanisms, and escalate sanctions).	X			
Conflict parties increasingly divert aid for their own resources.		X	X	X
SAF/RSF leadership becomes more hardline.			X	X
More military groups and militias align with the SAF.			X	
More military groups and militias align with the RSF.				X
Fragmentation within the RSF increases.			X	
Fragmentation within the SAF increases.				X
Fragmentation within the RSF and the SAF increases.				X
Armed groups, such as tribal militias, proliferate.			X	X
The RSF expand the conflict to other regions with major population areas (mainly the east).				X
Armed group recruitment does not significantly increase.	X	X		
Armed group recruitment (e.g. through polarising, tribal, or ethnic rhetoric) significantly increases.			X	X
Civilian parties				
Grassroots civil society groups promoting peace gain momentum and influence (withstanding pressures from armed groups).	X			
An enabling international mechanism meaningfully engages civilian actors in peace talks.	X			
Grassroots civil society groups promoting peace remain disunited (unable to withstand pressures from armed groups; lacking international support).		X	X	X
Disinformation/hate speech by and against different ethnic, tribal, and political groups increases.			X	X
Communities become increasingly militarised as civilians take up arms.			X	X
The prominence of radical and hardline entities increases.				X

SCENARIOS	1	2	3	4
International community				
The international community consolidates mediation initiatives and unites diplomatic efforts to bring the SAF and the RSF to the negotiating table.	X			
The international community fails to consolidate mediation initiatives, and diplomatic efforts to bring the SAF and the RSF to the negotiating table remain unfruitful.		X	X	X
Foreign military support to the SAF and RSF decreases.	X	X		
Foreign military support to both the SAF and the RSF continues or increases.		X		X
Foreign military support to only the RSF increases.				X
Foreign military support to only the SAF increases.	X		X	
Foreign military support to only the RSF decreases.			X	
Foreign military support to only the SAF decreases.				X
Foreign financial support to the SAF and the RSF decreases.	X			
Regional intervention in the conflict increases, with potential engagement from external parties (in Chad, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates).				X
International sanctions are relaxed.	X			
International sanctions on SAF and RSF leaders are tightened.	X			
International development assistance increasingly supports humanitarian aid and economic recovery.	X			