

ARTICLE

Internal and External Factors behind the Instability in Sudan

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Abstract

Sudan's recent history has been marked by persistent instability caused by historically shaped internal and external factors which can be associated with the country's colonial history, incomplete and problematic state-building processes, and the interactions of external actors with the country. Internally, Sudan has grappled with long-standing issues such as political and ethnic divisions, economic mismanagement, and social unrest, all of which have fueled discontent and volatility. After examining the internal factors affecting the country's instability, the article delves into the external forces that have shaped Sudan's trajectory, including regional conflicts, foreign interventions, and geopolitical interests. These factors have exerted significant influence on Sudan's internal dynamics, exacerbating existing tensions and undermining attempts at stability. By analyzing the interplay between internal and external factors, the article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Sudan's instability, highlighting the complex challenges that the country faces as it strives to achieve lasting peace, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

Keywords

Sudan, Rapid Support Forces, Ethiopia, Egypt, Türkiye, Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), civil war

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Introduction

Sudan, a state located in northeastern Africa, has experienced a tumultuous history marked by recurring periods of instability. From political upheavals to social unrest, Sudan has grappled with numerous challenges that have hindered its progress and threatened its stability. While the causes behind Sudan's instability are multifaceted and interconnected, a closer examination reveals a complex interplay of internal and external factors that have shaped the nation's trajectory.

Internally, Sudan's history has been marred by power struggles, ethnic tensions, economic disparities, and inadequate governance. The country's vast and diverse population, encompassing numerous ethnic and cultural groups, has long struggled for equitable representation and inclusive political participation. The marginalization of certain regions and communities has fostered grievances and fueled ethnic divisions, leading to simmering conflicts that often erupt into violence. Moreover, the economic challenges facing Sudan have been significant contributors to its instability. Chronic inflation, high unemployment rates, and limited access to basic services have bred frustration and dissatisfaction among the populace. Economic mismanagement, corruption, and inadequate infrastructure have impeded development efforts and widened the gap between the affluent and the impoverished, further exacerbating social tensions.

While internal factors have played a pivotal role in Sudan's instability, it is essential to recognize the influence of external forces on the nation's trajectory. Sudan's geographical location and its historical interactions with neighboring countries and regional powers have left it vulnerable to external pressures. Geopolitical interests, resource competition, and proxy conflicts have frequently spilled over Sudan's borders, impacting its internal dynamics and exacerbating existing fault lines.

One notable external factor is the long-standing proxy conflict between regional powers, which has found its arena in Sudan. These powers have often supported rival factions and armed groups, prolonging conflicts and impeding efforts towards peace and stability. Additionally, Sudan's strategic position has made it a conduit for illicit trade, arms smuggling, and the movement of extremist ideologies, further destabilizing the country.

Sudan's relationship with the international community has also had profound implications for its stability. Sanctions imposed by foreign powers in response to human rights abuses and allegations of state-sponsored terrorism have had detrimental effects on the economy

and societal well-being. Conversely, international interventions and peacekeeping efforts have had mixed results, highlighting the complex nature of external involvement in Sudan's affairs.

This article aims to examine and analyze the internal and external reasons behind Sudan's instability, originating from the colonial period legacy and later the neocolonial relations network. A detailed analysis of the reasons behind the recent conflict, which broke out in April 2023, is vital for forming the necessary strategies for the country to achieve peace and stability. In this context, the study consists of two parts. In the first, the internal reasons behind the instability in Sudan are examined by taking the historical, political, economic, and sociocultural factors into consideration. In the second part, the external actors that directly or indirectly affect the instability in Sudan are analyzed.

Internal Reasons behind Sudan's Instability

The internal causes of Sudan's instability can be related to its colonial legacy and inadequacies in state building. Sudan, which has a deep-rooted history and an important geopolitical position, has hosted many civilizations over the centuries. The lands of present-day Sudan were once ruled by the Nubian, Kush, and Meroitic Kingdoms and the Ottoman Empire, and also came under the influence of Western colonial governments.¹ The social cracks and political crises that emerged with the practices of the British colonial administrations persisted in various neocolonial practices in the post-independence period and form the basis of today's problems.

After the 7th century, during the Nubian period, due to commercial activities, the Arabic language and culture began to be influential in the region.² Along with the developing trade, the religion of Islam began to spread in the Nubian Kingdom. With the Baqt Treaty, signed between Islamic Egypt and Nubia in AD 656, Islam started to show its influence in both the sociocultural and political field.³ During this period, it is possible to say that the "Islamic-African culture" was born in the Sudan region.

In the 15th century, during the period of the Funj Sultanate (1504-1820), under a rule defined as an Islamic monarchy, the region witnessed an intense Islamization.⁴ With the immigration of Muslim scholars from countries such as Egypt, Hejaz, Yemen, and Morocco, Islamic mysticism sects and schools of Islamic thought began to spread in and around Sudan. During the Funj Sultanate, many Muslim

students traveled from Sudan to the Middle East and Gulf countries to receive Islamic education. Meanwhile, Muslim caravans from West Africa, which were on pilgrimage via Kordofan and Darfur, were also influential in the Islamization and ethnic diversification of this region.⁵ As a result of these developments, especially in the northern regions of Sudan, Islamization and Arabization became intense. So much so that during this period, Arabic became a daily spoken language in many parts of Sudan.⁶

In 1821, the territory of present-day Sudan began to be controlled by the Egyptian Governor of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmet Ali Pasha.⁷ In 1881, the Mahdit Revolution was carried out by Muhammad Ahmad bin Abdallah, a Nubian Sufi leader who claimed to be the Mahdi.⁸ The rule of Muhammad Ahmad bin Abdallah, who declared a *jihad* (holy war) against the Ottoman and Egyptian administrations, did not last long. In 1896, British forces abolished the Mahdist state formation in Sudan and initiated colonial rule that would last until 1956.⁹ It should be mentioned that the Darfur Sultanate, led by Ali Dinar, was not under British rule and Dinar continued to show his solidarity to the Ottoman Empire.

The British colonial rule, especially with the “Native Administration” declared in 1921, deepened the gap between the northern, predominantly Muslim, and southern, Christian- and Animist-dominated, regions.¹⁰ The colonial administration paid great attention to the formation of a new elite that would serve British interests in the country and operate the system. For example, Gordon College in Khartoum played a major

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role in educating the country’s elite, excluding non-Muslims and non-Arabic speaking individuals for many years.¹¹ As a result, the British colonial forces brought more modern education and infrastructure to the Arab- and Muslim-majority northern regions, while less attention was paid

to the southern regions which were predominantly inhabited by Nilotic peoples. In fact, the northern elites dominated the administration of the southern regions.

Sudan’s independence from British rule on January 1, 1956 did not eliminate the country’s inter-regional development gap. The unequal and unjust situation in the colonial order persisted with the new elites and neocolonial policies, which were carefully raised by the British in

the post-independence period, taking care of their own and the British interests instead of the general public. While there were approximately 572 tribes in Sudan in the post-independence period, only three of them, namely the Shaigiyya, Danagla, and Ja'aliyyin tribes, had a weighted representation in the central government.¹² The limited number of ministries given to other southern tribes such as Dinka and Nuer were confined to ministries such as youth, sports, or animal resources. In the table below, the tribal affiliation rates of the ministers in Sudan from 1956, when independence was gained, to 1998, are given in detail.¹³

Table 1: Tribal affiliation of ministers in all Sudanese governments from independence to 1998

Tribes	First democratic government	First military regime (1958–64)	Second democracy (1965–69)	Second military regime (1969–85)	Third democracy (1986–1989)	Third military regime (of Omar al-Bashir, 1989–present)
Danagla	16	8.33	10.20	8.86	8.59	16.11
Mawalid	12	25	–	4.81	1	2.84
Mahass	10	4.17	4.8	8.10	–	5.795
Bederiya	10	–	6.12	2.3	6.25	2.36
Nubians	8	4.17	–	1	1.56	–
Dinka	9	–	6.12	4.56	7.81	7.11
Nuer	5	–	4.8	–	–	–
Halfawiyin	4	4.17	–	1.52	1.56	–
Merafab	3	–	8.16	–	1	0.5
Shukriya	3	–	–	–	–	0.5
Ja'aliyyin	3	12.5	6.12	25.32	8.59	15.17
Shaigiyya	3	16.67	12.24	4.34	9.38	12.80
Zandi	3	–	–	–	2.34	2.37
Funj	1	–	–	1.1	–	–
Ababeda	–	12.50	–	2.78	–	0.5
Jwama'a	–	8.33	–	1.77	1	–
Rekabiyya	–	–	–	4.81	1	–
Rebatab	–	–	–	3.4	1	2.84

Source: Abdu Mukhtar Musa, "Marginalization and Ethnicization in the Sudan: How the Elite Failed to Stabilize a Diverse Country," *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (2010), p. 558.

Southern peoples, who complained about the hegemony of the northern ethnicities and bad administration conditions in Sudan, waged uprisings and civil wars against the central government. The first of these civil wars, the Anyanya Rebellion, took place between 1955 and 1972. The civil war developed within the framework of the demands of more political representation and regional autonomy of the

peoples in the south of Sudan and resulted in the death of more than one million people. Following the war, which was ended with the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, permanent peace in the country could not be achieved.¹⁴

Apart from the inequality of political representation, the utilization of natural resources and the distribution of economic wealth have also caused conflicts between the northern and southern communities. After the Addis Ababa Agreement, the efforts of the northern elites to use the oil resources discovered in regions such as Bentju, Kordofan, Upper Blue Nile, Heglig, and Adar caused great reactions among the southern peoples. In addition, in 1983, President Jaafar Nimeiry ended the autonomy of South Sudan and declared an Islamic government based on sharia law throughout the country, causing the second civil war in Sudan. In this civil war, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which was established in 1983 under the leadership of John Garang, aimed to re-establish an autonomous administration in the south and fought against the central government.¹⁵ This civil war, which was followed with concern in the international arena, especially in neighboring countries, and in which foreign actors also got involved

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from time to time, ended with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Nairobi in January 2005. With this agreement, autonomy was first provided to South Sudan, and then, with a referendum in 2011, the way was paved for South Sudan to become an independent state.¹⁶

Another uprising against the central government occurred in 2003 in Darfur. In February 2003, the Sudan

Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement took up arms to end the Sudanese central government's oppressive regime against non-Arab peoples. This war witnessed fighting between then-president Omar al-Bashir and the Arab militia known as "Janjaweed," which he founded in 2013, on the one side, and the civilian population, on the other.¹⁷ Later, al-Bashir tried to suppress the revolts against him with intense violent interventions by establishing the paramilitary force "Rapid Support Forces" (RSF), in which the Janjaweed were deployed.¹⁸ The United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) was established on July 31, 2007 against this fierce war with resolution 1769 of the United Nations

Security Council.¹⁹ However, large-scale conflicts in Darfur continued for many years, causing great instability in Sudan and its surroundings. According to UN reports, while thousands of people have died in the war in Darfur, approximately two million people have had to leave their homes.²⁰ International Criminal Court prosecutors have prepared an indictment accusing al-Bashir of war crimes in Darfur.²¹

In 2019, the soldiers under the command of Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf overthrew al-Bashir and seized power. After the coup, the Transitional Military Council (TMC) was established and a state of emergency was declared in the country.²² In July 2019, the TMC and the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) alliance reached a political agreement, which was subsequently finalized in the form of the August 2019 Draft Constitutional Declaration. The latter led to the establishment of the Transitional Sovereignty Council on August 20, 2019, serving as Sudan's collective head of state. Within the framework of this newly formed government, the Sovereignty Council of Sudan, in accordance with the August 2019 Draft Constitutional Declaration, appointed Abdalla Hamdok as prime minister. Hamdok proceeded to assemble a cabinet of ministers, and on October 4, 2019, initiated a significant overhaul of leadership within Sudan's public universities. This overhaul involved the removal of 28 chancellors and 35 vice-chancellors, and the appointment of 34 new vice-chancellors. The primary objective of the restructuring was to replace individuals in positions of authority who had been associated with the al-Bashir government.

The tension in the country did not decrease under the Sovereignty Council, and many civilians were killed in the ongoing protests. Although decisions were taken by the Transitional Military Council and the leaders of the protesters regarding the transition to civilian rule, they did not materialize. As a result, Sudan faced a new coup on October 25, 2021.²³ It is known that during this coup process, RSF took part in the streets of Khartoum against protesters. The actions of the RSF were not limited to Sudan as they participated in important missions in the international arena as well. For example, about 1,000 RSF soldiers were sent to Libya in July 2019 to support Haftar's forces. The RSF were also among the Arab coalition forces, including Sudanese army, led by Saudi Arabia with the Sudanese army in the Yemeni civil war.²⁴

The RSF caused another conflict in the country in April 2023. After the 2019 coup, a transitional military government and a civilian opposition coalition were established in Sudan. However, in October

2021, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan seized the administration and detained civilian politicians. Following this development, al-Burhan and RSF leader General Muhammed Hamdan Dagalo stand out as two influential figures in the country's administration. Yet, disagreements over the inclusion of the RSF in the Sudanese army fueled the power rivalry between Dagalo and al-Burhan, causing a new civil war in the country.²⁵

As summarized above, Sudan's political life, which consists of civil wars, coups, and political crises, is the main source of instability and poverty in the country. The people of Sudan have not been able to enjoy peace and stability as a result of inequality and injustice, corruption, and the authoritarian leaders inherited from the colonial period. The central government's neglect of the needs and demands of regions such as Darfur, the Blue Nile, and South Kordofan, and the unequal distribution of resources and political representation have led to ongoing political crises, coups, and civil wars in the country.

Another major internal cause of instability is the very poor management of the economy. As mentioned earlier, the country's natural resources, which are actually quite abundant, are controlled by a small number of northern political elites and military leaders,²⁶ while large masses of people struggle with deep poverty and unemployment. At the same time, the sanctions imposed on Sudan by Western actors like the U.S. due to authoritarian practices such as those of the al-Bashir period deeply shook the country's economy. In the current process, real GDP per capita in Sudan in 2021 was \$3,700, putting the country in the 190th place in the world GDP per capita ranking. In addition, approximately 36% of youth aged 15-24 in the country are unemployed.²⁷

Apart from the country's political crises, climate change, which has become more evident in recent years, appears as another factor that negatively affects the country's economy and the lives of the Sudanese people. More than 80% of the country's population is involved in agriculture and animal husbandry in Sudan, and climate change causes both a decrease in agricultural incomes and more difficult access to food.²⁸ According to research, Africa is one of the regions that will be most affected by climate change in the future. In this negative scenario, the current adverse situation in Sudan is also likely to worsen. In fact, the vulnerability of the Nile River, which is a transboundary water source and the primary water source of approximately 67% of the Sudanese people, to temperature increases may increase water scarcity in the states in the Nile basin.²⁹ This would double the number of ten

million people currently facing food insecurity in Sudan. Meanwhile, the decrease in fertile land and wetlands, and poor management and weak policies in these regions may increase the competition of different communities over resources and even lead to sporadic violent conflicts. For example, competition for resources and fertile lands in the al-Fashaga region between Sudan and Ethiopia may increase in the future within these possibilities.

Another factor that reinforces the instability in Sudan is the displacement and refugee crisis. In 2022, at least 314,000 people had to leave their homes while conflicts over resources continued in Sudan, especially in West Darfur. In previous migration cases, for example at the end of 2022, approximately 3.6 million people were internally displaced in Sudan.³⁰ What is more, Sudan was already hosting around one million refugees from South Sudan, Eritrea, Chad, the Central African Republic, Yemen, and Syria even before the military clashes began. In fact, this made Sudan the second-largest refugee-hosting country in Africa. In addition, more than one million people, some for more than a decade, are unable to return to their homes due to violence and financial difficulties and are trying to survive in camps in South Darfur.³¹ The displacement and refugee crisis, which puts pressure on the country's economy and causes security weaknesses in areas where immigrants are concentrated, is another important obstacle to stability in Sudan.

The clashes between the central army forces and the RSF, which broke out in Sudan on April 15, 2023, can be closely associated with the reasons for instability mentioned above. After its independence, Sudan could not attain political stability and a large part of the Sudanese people could not achieve representation in the corrupt political structures of the putschist and authoritarian regimes. The civil war between the forces of al-Burhan and Dagalo, both of whom want to maintain their privileged positions in terms of political authority and natural resources, and ultimately gain advantage over the other, has killed thousands of people so far and caused many more to leave their homes. This civil war, which disrupts the security of the country and also causes security concerns in the neighboring states, has the potential to continue the ongoing spiral of instability and violence, causing deep crises in the political and economic structures.

External Reasons behind Sudan's Instability

The growing disagreement over a number of cross-border issues, including the construction process of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and the war in al-Fashaga and northern Ethiopia, has deepened distrust between Ethiopia and Sudan. The instability in Sudan has showed itself not only with the disagreements with Ethiopia, but also with the border problems with Egypt and South Sudan. This situation threatened relations between states and regional stability and security.

Sudan's Foreign Policy Issues: Water Resources Controversies and Border Disputes

The Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project, which was started by Ethiopia in 2011, is the first foreign policy problem causing instability in Sudan. The GERD has emerged as an important infrastructure project in Ethiopia and is of great importance in terms of being the largest hydroelectric power plant and meeting the electricity needed for Ethiopia's rapidly growing economy.³²

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However, the dam's construction process has led to international discussions. In particular, the dam construction process has caused a crisis between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia, with the interest-centered approach of the parties inhibiting reaching a consensus. Despite differing interests, Egypt and Sudan argue that the issue should be resolved through an agreement between the three countries, including Ethiopia. For Egypt, agricultural activities and the supply of drinking water to a

population of 100 million along the Nile River are the main reasons for its objections to the dam. Sudan, on the other hand, claims that due to the dense population living around the dam, filling and operating it without reaching an agreement on legal and technical issues will pose a risk in terms of regional security, and opposes Ethiopia's unilateral initiatives.³³ Ethiopia, which covers the entire \$4.6 million cost of the dam, will provide electricity to 110 million citizens with the energy to be obtained from the GERD, considers the construction necessary for

the welfare of its citizens, and remains insensitive to disagreements/criticism.³⁴

The construction of the GERD has caused reactions from global actors as well. In the face of the exacerbation of the conflict between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia, the U.S. ended its aid to Ethiopia. Moreover, the U.S. has argued that the filling and operation of the dam could only be possible with a fair agreement between the parties.³⁵ The African Union considers it necessary to resolve the issue without threatening regional peace and security, to operate the mediation mechanism to resolve the issue, and to provide technical advice to help the three countries reach a mutual agreement within the scope of the UN Environment Programme. The Arab League has demanded that Ethiopia not act unilaterally without an agreement and that the issue be discussed at the UN Security Council. However, Ethiopia rejected this request due to the politicization and internationalization of the problem.³⁶ The Office of the UN Secretary-General emphasized that the problem should be resolved through an agreement to be concluded between the parties on a fair, permanent, and equitable basis.³⁷

On July 13, 2023, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed jointly acknowledged the need for immediate negotiations aimed at concluding an agreement among Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan regarding the filling and operational protocols of the GERD. Nevertheless, in September 2023, Prime Minister Ahmed made an announcement declaring the successful conclusion of the fourth and ultimate filling of the GERD. Following this development, Egypt promptly criticized Ethiopia's action, deeming it a breach of international legal norms.

The second foreign policy concern affecting Sudan is the al-Fashaga dispute with Ethiopia, whose origins date back to the early 20th century. As Ethiopia plunged into civil war in 2020, Sudanese authorities deployed troops and took control of the disputed al-Fashaga border area. Against this attempt, Ethiopia engaged in heavy clashes with Sudanese troops by deploying federal forces and militias.³⁸ The fact that the conflict has reached a level that regional allies (Eritrea) have intervened, emerges as the biggest concern in this process.

The third problem is the historically disputed "Halayeb Triangle" issue between Sudan and Egypt. The fact that the Halayeb Triangle region has rich resources such as oil, gold, graphite, nickel, iron and manganese is one of the most important reasons for the conflict between Sudan and Egypt. Especially after Egypt left the Tiran and Senafir Islands to Saudi Arabia with a bilateral agreement, Sudanese authorities began to

reiterate their ownership claims to the region.³⁹ The troubled region on occasion pits Egypt and Sudan against each other politically and militarily.

The fourth issue is the fact that the separation of South Sudan in the 2011 referendum brought about border problems as the border roads between South Sudan and Sudan are undrawn and not clear. At the same time, the failure to hold the 2011 referendum on whether Abyei would become a part of Sudan or South Sudan led to an increase in conflicts in the region. Moreover, the conflicts that took place in Abyei spread to South Kordofan (especially the occupation of the Heglig oil field) and the Blue Nile, which also became contentious areas.⁴⁰ These regional issues include complex issues of nationalism, deep-rooted local grievances, and competition between local tribes for water and pasture in both South Sudan and Sudan.⁴¹ Unresolved problems regarding the border areas led to the outbreak of violence immediately after the separation. Nonetheless, it's crucial to underscore a key aspect here: despite the historical challenges and the unresolved Abyei issue, there exists potential for the preservation of relations between Sudan and South Sudan. For instance, the peace accord between Sudan and rebel groups was successfully ratified in 2020 in Juba with South Sudan playing a mediating role. Additionally, the South Sudanese government has been actively engaged in efforts to bring an end to military conflicts within Sudan.

Policies of Regional and Global Actors on the Axis of Competition and Interest

With the dismissal of Omar al-Bashir and the transition to civilian rule in 2021, a high-intensity armed conflict has erupted across the country since April 15, 2023.⁴² The resulting armed conflict between al-Burhan and Dagalo has the potential to end the autocratic rule in Sudan and destabilize the volatile region bordered by the Sahel, the Red Sea, and the Horn of Africa. However, the deepening of the crisis is based on the struggle of regional and global actors for sovereignty and interests in the region as well as the internal dynamics of Sudan.

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While the conflicts between al-Burhan and Dagalo, also known as “Hemeti” continue, the interest of global actors has had an impact on the region. Unlike the U.S. and Russia, China is involved with the

international community on issues such as peacekeeping and conflict mediation, and carries out a deep economic engagement in the region. In this context, China's intentions and attempts to intervene in Sudan are important. However, previous peace attempts by China have been inconclusive and China's mediation efforts in Sudan have remained marginal mainly because of its continued preference to stay away from internal struggles in conflict-prone countries; its declining socio-economic and political interests in Sudan; and the complex geopolitical nature of the conflict.⁴³

Unlike China, Russia has preferred to take a position in favor of the continuity of its interests in the African continent, especially in Sudan, without being involved with international organizations. Russia's activities in Africa aim to restore its influence under the Soviet Union through arms sales, joint military exercises, and private military companies such as the Wagner Group to train the Sudanese army. As a matter of fact, through the Wagner Group, which has been in Sudan since 2017, Russia aimed to minimize the U.S. and French influence in Africa and to obtain valuable metals such as gold from Sudan, the third-largest mining producer in Africa. Russia wants to use the financial resources it has obtained here for the ongoing war in Ukraine.⁴⁴ In addition, there are claims in the West that Russia is providing surface-to-air missiles to the RSF to fight against the Sudanese army, contributing to a protracted armed conflict that has only increased the chaos in the region.⁴⁵ The U.S. has reacted to Russia's attempts and announced that Russia, through the Wagner Group, has displaced 1.3 million people in Sudan and supplied weapons to the paramilitary RSF which is a party to the ongoing conflict.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, Sudan is very important geostrategically to U.S. interests both in Africa and the Middle East. Sudan connects Africa and the Middle East, ensuring the safety of navigation in the Red Sea, and is important to the United States because of its role in China's Belt and Road Initiative, and its ties to China in various sectors such as agriculture, energy, and mining.⁴⁷ Although the U.S. has imposed sanctions on individuals and institutions that cause conflict and instability in Sudan,⁴⁸ it has been criticized for its failure to implement a policy that gives priority to Sudan, the timing and effectiveness of its sanctions, and its failure to apply on a mechanism of responsibility for violations that occur during the conflicts in Sudan.⁴⁹

Another dimension of the instability in Sudan is the competition of regional actors. Although the will to improve bilateral relations between

Israel and Sudan has been demonstrated, Sudan's internal conflicts have prevented any further developments in this field. Israel attaches great importance to its relations with Sudan as it wants to expand the Abraham Accords and improve its relations with other Arab countries via normalization with Sudan.⁵⁰ Israel also wants to increase its geostrategic interests in the Red Sea and East Africa, especially in the Horn of Africa, in order to strengthen its relations with sub-Saharan African countries further and benefit from Sudan's rich agricultural and natural resources.⁵¹ However, the power struggle between al-Burhan and Dagalo has rendered Israel's attempts after al-Bashir fruitless. In addition, the internal conflict in Sudan has prevented Israel from forming the strategic security corridor that it is trying to create there in order to expand its regional influence.

Gulf countries, especially the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, have played an important role in Sudan's issues. The UAE and Saudi Arabia have developed strong relations with the al-Bashir regime, which has been subjected to international pressure for its military activities and crimes in Darfur. These relations have been influential in Sudan's foreign policy choices, the most concrete example of which has been Sudan severing its relations with Iran.⁵² With the emergence of the 2023 Sudanese crisis, the UAE and Saudi Arabia have established close relations with Dagalo rather than al-Burhan.

Although the Sudan policy of the UAE and Saudi Arabia are similar, they are established on differing motivations. Saudi Arabia places great importance on the Red Sea which is an integral part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's "Vision 2030" that aims to position the Saudi economy as a global hub for trade, innovation, and tourism.⁵³ In addition, Saudi Arabia attaches importance to its presence in Sudan in order to protect its financial and economic investments in the region – among others, energy, agriculture, water, sanitation, transportation, and telecommunications – and to strengthen the emerging role of Saudi Arabia as a regional actor.

The UAE, on the other hand, wants to eliminate the remnants of the Sudanese regime, especially the Islamists, whom it sees as local, regional, and global enemies, by developing close relations with Dagalo. The UAE's relations with Dagalo date back well before April 15, 2023. The UAE stands as the world's foremost recipient of Sudanese gold, accounting for a staggering 99.2% of the country's gold exports, as per global trade data from 2018. Additionally, the UAE has engaged RSF militiamen to participate in conflicts in Yemen and Libya, thereby

offering financial support to the RSF. Another link is the mining and trading corporation Al Gunade which maintains strong connections with Dagalo and the RSF. The ownership of Al Gunade lies with Dagalo's brother, Abdul Rahim Dagalo, and his sons, while the reported RSF deputy, Abdul Rahman al-Bakri, serves as the general manager. According to one of the documents acquired by the anti-corruption organization Global Witness, Muhammed Hamdan Dagalo himself is a member of the board of directors. After reviewing substantial evidence regarding the activities of Al Gunade and the RSF, Global Witness has drawn the conclusion that "the RSF and an affiliated company have effectively taken control of a significant portion of Sudan's gold industry, likely using it to finance their operations." The organization has gained access to banking records and corporate documents that, in its view, demonstrate that the RSF maintains a bank account in its name at the National Bank of Abu Dhabi (now part of the First Abu Dhabi Bank) in the UAE. This serves as proof of the RSF's financial independence.⁵⁴

With the end of al-Bashir's rule, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi did not view the democratization process in Sudan favorably, showing his support to the military groups led by al-Burhan and Dagalo which in turn planned a coup against the government of Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. Thus, al-Sisi aimed to maintain the status quo in Sudan in line with Egypt's interests.⁵⁵ He also prefers that Sudan not follow a foreign policy that could affect Egypt's interests regarding the GERD on the Nile River.⁵⁶

Türkiye holds the potential to play a significant role in stabilizing the volatile situation in Sudan. It is worth noting that Türkiye was among the first nations to recognize Sudan and its capital, Khartoum, officially. The Turkish Embassy in Sudan was established on January 1, 1957. Moreover, Türkiye pursues a policy of maintaining impartiality while engaging with all stakeholders within the country. Since the onset of military conflicts in Sudan, Turkish authorities have consistently emphasized that the key to resolving these issues lies in dialogue and consensus-building. Türkiye gives paramount importance and aligns itself with the principle of "African solutions to African problems," and actively supports regional organizations such as the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in their

Since the onset of military conflicts in Sudan, Turkish authorities have consistently emphasized that the key to resolving these issues lies in dialogue and consensus-building.

efforts. After the April 15, 2023 events, Türkiye displayed a similar attitude. Having taken initiatives to eliminate the instability in Sudan and end the armed conflict, Türkiye has been in close contact with al-Burhan and Dagalo and has informed both parties that all kinds of support will be provided to prevent the humanitarian crisis, including mediation.⁵⁷ After the overthrow of al-Bashir, Türkiye did not become a party to the struggle between the conflicting actors in order not to cause any crisis in its relations with Sudan. Türkiye maintains its presence in the region with foreign policy tools such as public diplomacy.⁵⁸

As has been established above, external factors have been as important as internal reasons in Sudan's inability to achieve peace and stability in the post-independence period. The neo-colonial policies developed after independence and the relations developed in line with the interests of global and regional powers that want to establish influence in the region have relegated the Sudanese people to live in chaos and poverty. The failure of attempts to bring peace and stability to Sudan, which is a center of struggle for interests and power, emerges as the main reason for the ongoing conflicts today.

Conclusion

Sudan's instability is driven by a combination of internal and external factors that have intertwined and perpetuated cycles of conflict and fragility. The state's colonial and neocolonial history is marked by internal power struggles, ethnic divisions, economic disparities, and governance challenges, all of which have contributed to social unrest and political instability. Simultaneously, Sudan's strategic geographical location and its historical interactions with regional powers have exposed it to external pressures, proxy conflicts, and resource competition, exacerbating its internal dynamics.

It is evident that addressing Sudan's instability requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that tackles both internal and external factors. It is essential to establish a multisectoral and multilayered strategy supported by international actors in order to ensure sustainable peace and stability in Sudan.

First, the problematic state-building that is at the backbone of Sudan's instability should be reconsidered. Building a functional state that will ensure social reconciliation and rapid and sustainable development is essential for Sudan. To do so, first, the Sudanese government should prioritize inclusive governance mechanisms that ensure equitable

representation of all ethnic and cultural groups. Strengthening democratic institutions, promoting political participation, and fostering dialogue between different communities can help address grievances and foster a sense of national unity. At the same time, the most effective way to ensure democratic consciousness, national unity, and sustainable development in Sudan is to expand the quality of education throughout the country. Due to long years of conflict and lack of budget, eight million children in Sudan today remain out of school.⁵⁹ This crowded young generation, lacking in education and facing deep poverty and unemployment in the future, poses a great threat to the stability of the country in the medium and long term.

Second, addressing the economic challenges facing Sudan is crucial to reducing social tensions and building a stable society. The government should implement comprehensive economic reforms aimed at reducing inflation, promoting job creation, improving access to basic services, and combating corruption. Encouraging foreign investment and diversifying the economy can also contribute to long-term stability.

However, the most important factor in ensuring an environment of peace and stability in Sudan is the common will of international actors in this direction. External actors who establish relations with different power centers in Sudan for the sake of their individual interests pit different groups against each other within the country due to their conflicting interests. Since the peace and reconciliation attempts to end this tense atmosphere are mostly carried out by the same actors, the reconciliatory atmosphere is usually short-lived. As a matter of fact, when Sudan's political history is taken into consideration, the peace that was achieved by the mediation of external actors in civil wars and other high-intensity armed conflicts, was shortly followed by more complex conflicts and internal divisions.

At this point, it is possible to say that Türkiye, which has a high level of strategic cooperation with Sudan, is an actor that can contribute to the stabilization of the country. First, Türkiye's policy towards Sudan includes respect for territorial integrity and internal affairs, and is based on the win-win principle. Türkiye has equal distance relations with all ethnic groups and power elites in Sudan. Türkiye-Sudan relations, built on these foundations, consist of initiatives in many fields, including the political, military, economic, and sociocultural areas. Considering the inadequacy of basic services and infrastructure in the country, the projects carried out by Türkiye in the fields of education, health, transportation, and energy in Sudan, and humanitarian aid can meet

the country's important needs. Türkiye supports the issues of the country's economy and youth employment with investment projects that have been or will be realized. With these indicators, Türkiye will be able to make direct and indirect contributions to the stabilization of Sudan. Türkiye is also an important potential mediator for ending the conflicts that broke out in April 2023 and for building peace in the country. History has shown that the actors who previously mediated in ending the conflicts and civil wars in Sudan, in a way, caused these events. In this respect, Türkiye's mediation can be much more effective in achieving lasting peace and stability in Sudan.

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