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Sudan After the War

The Case for a Civilian State and a Development-Led Recovery

EPIC Research Team

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Executive summary

Sudan's war is not a break with its history but the latest and most destructive result of questions it has never settled: how a diverse country should be governed, who holds legitimate force, and whether the state belongs to its citizens or to a movement. In the author's assessment, a ceasefire on its own will not end the war. Ending it requires a monitored ceasefire with humanitarian access, joined from the start to a Sudanese-led political process, and a firm rejection of partition in any form. Every month of delay deepens the displacement, hunger and collapse of services that the war has already caused. The paper traces how Sudan reached this point, from independence through the 2019 revolution and the 2021 coup to the course of the war since April 2023. It also maps the war's toll state by state. Where the fighting has stopped, as in Khartoum, Gezira and Sennar, millions have gone home; where it continues, in Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile, displacement and hunger are still rising.

The paper sets out what that political process should build. It argues for a federal settlement that gives every region real authority within one united state; for party pluralism without exclusion, with one limit for movements that subordinate the nation state to a transnational project; for national institutions rebuilt so that no movement can capture them again, as the Muslim Brotherhood did after 1989; for undoing that capture lawfully, case by case and under judicial review; for one national army under civilian authority; and for transitional justice that covers every armed party. In the author's assessment, the Muslim Brotherhood's network has embedded itself in the army's war effort, and any settlement must close the state's institutions, including the armed forces, to capture by any movement.

The economic case follows from the political one. Sudan's land, water and people could feed the country and much of the region, but only a state that serves producers rather than a narrow network will invest in them. The paper sets out how to restore the Gezira Scheme, revive the five development belts and move from raw exports to processing at home. It shows how the 2021 coup froze the debt relief and international finance that the transition had secured, and why a recovery path can so far be costed only in part. It argues that technology, including artificial intelligence, is one of the clearest reasons to end the war: in water and farming, in keeping medicines and health facilities working, in extending the reach of Sudan's doctors at home and abroad, in widening access to psychological support for a traumatised population,

and in restoring the identity, payment and communication systems through which a state reaches its citizens.

The paper closes with Sudan's people: the generation that brought down the old regime, the women who stood at the front of the revolution, the millions uprooted by the war and their right to return to their land and homes, the scale of its psychological toll, and a medical profession largely working abroad. A civilian settlement must treat them as founders of the new order. Each of these costs could be reversed in peace, and only a civilian state can reverse them.

Methodology

This paper sets out the case for a civilian-led government in Sudan and for a recovery built around development. It covers Sudan only. Other states appear where their policies bear directly on Sudan's war and its settlement, chiefly as members of the Quartet. The paper is a policy analysis, not an investigation. It brings together published evidence, assesses it and draws conclusions. It does not produce new survey data or field interviews.

The paper draws on five types of source, roughly in order of the weight they carry.

Official primary documents. These include government determinations, sanctions notices and designations published in the US *Federal Register* and by the US Department of State and the US Department of the Treasury; the texts of agreements such as the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan (2020); and statistical releases from Sudanese institutions such as the Central Bank of Sudan.

Multilateral and humanitarian data. These are reports and datasets from UN agencies and international financial institutions, including UNHCR, IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNFPA, FAO, UNDP, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification and the World Bank.

Peer-reviewed research. These are journal articles and academic books on Sudan's history, political economy, agriculture, health and society, and on comparable cases elsewhere.

Independent policy research. These are publications from established research institutes and monitoring bodies, such as Chatham House, the International Crisis Group, the Small Arms Survey, the Carter Center and C4ADS.

News reporting. Reporting is used mainly to date events and to record statements by the parties, and is drawn from international outlets and specialist Sudan-focused media. News reports are not used as the sole basis for a statistic where an official or research source exists.

All sources were screened before use. Because the paper examines the role of political Islam in Sudan's state and armed forces, the author excluded sources with known or suspected ties to Islamist movements, and sources whose editorial independence on this subject could reasonably be questioned. Several outlets were removed under this rule and their citations replaced with other sources. Where a source's standing was uncertain, it was left out rather than kept with a caveat.

Every factual claim was checked against its cited source, and each claim was given one of four verdicts:

- **Confirmed:** the source, read directly, states the claim as written.
- **Partly confirmed:** the source supports the substance of the claim but not all of its wording, scope or figures. The text was revised to match the source.
- **Not confirmed:** the source, or the best available evidence, does not support the claim. The claim was removed or recast.
- **Cannot be verified:** the source could not be accessed or read in full. Claims in this category have been removed from the paper.

A source counts as confirmed only once the relevant passage has been read. A title, abstract or catalogue record alone is not enough.

- **Source figures only.** Every number is reported as its source gives it, in the source's own units, with the source's date and definition. The author does not convert units, combine figures from different sources or calculate derived totals of its own.
- **Differing figures are reported side by side.** Where credible sources give different figures for the same quantity, both are given and attributed. An example is the 2024 contraction of Sudan's economy, which the World Bank and the Central Bank of Sudan put at different levels.
- **Different measures stay separate.** Figures that measure different things are attributed separately and not compared as if they were alike. One example is UNHCR's count of people forcibly displaced since April 2023 and IOM's count of everyone displaced inside Sudan.
- **Modelled estimates are labelled.** Projections and model results are presented as estimates. Where a figure rests on a single study, the text says so, and any published estimate that disagrees is disclosed alongside it.
- **Single reports stay out of the summary.** Figures from a single unconfirmed report, such as local accounts of deaths in a specific facility, are attributed to their source and kept out of the executive summary.

The paper separates three kinds of statement:

- **Findings of governments and international bodies.** These are reported in those bodies' own words and attributed to them. Examples are the United States determination that the Government of Sudan used chemical weapons in 2024, and the US designations of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood.
- **Findings of researchers.** These are attributed to the works that make them.
- **The author's own assessments.** These are labelled as such. Where the paper reaches a judgement that goes beyond what a cited source states, such as on the place of the Muslim Brotherhood network within Sudan's armed forces, the text says that it is the author's assessment and sets out the evidence it rests on.

The paper does not attribute criminal conduct to named living individuals.

- **Restricted access to evidence.** The war has severely limited independent access to much of Sudan. Many humanitarian figures are estimates compiled under difficult conditions, and they are revised often. The paper gives each figure's date, and readers should expect later figures to differ.
- **Gaps in the official record.** Sudanese official statistics have been disrupted since 2023, and some series are inconsistent internally. Where this is so, the paper does not use the inconsistent figure.
- **Unread or blocked sources.** Some sources could not be read in full, for example because of access restrictions. Claims resting on them have been either resolved against another source or removed.
- **A policy argument.** The paper argues a case. Its conclusions on governance and development are the author's, drawn from the evidence presented. Readers may weigh that evidence differently.

The paper uses British English and Chicago author-date citations, with a single reference list. Names are transliterated in the forms most common in English-language scholarship. Dates are given in full where they matter to the argument. Information is current to 21 October 2026 unless stated otherwise.

1. Context: an old crisis in a new and more destructive form

The war that broke out on 15 April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces did not come from nowhere (UK Home Office 2026). It is the most destructive expression so far of questions that Sudan has carried, unresolved, since before independence. In the author's view, any serious account of how the war can end has to start from that inheritance. The point is not to dwell on the past. It is to understand why every previous pause in the fighting has failed to become peace.

The first of those questions surfaced even before the flag was raised. On 18 August 1955 soldiers of the Equatoria Corps mutinied at Torit, an event that marked the beginning of hostilities between North and South. Southern grievances had been compounded by the government's refusal to grant the South federal status (Poggo 2009). From the outset, then, the new state faced a demand for a fairer share of power and a different relationship between centre and regions. It never answered that demand by consent. The question of the South was settled only by secession in 2011, and the wider question of how a diverse country should be governed remains open.

The second inheritance is the habit of taking power by force. Sudan has experienced nearly thirty-five coups or coup attempts since independence, six of them successful (Ayferam 2023), and its democratic interludes have been brief: 1956–58, 1964–69 and 1985–89. By 2021 the military had controlled Sudan for 52 of its 65 years of independence (Soliman 2021). Military rule, in other words, has been the norm and civilian government the exception. Each cycle left the next government with a more militarised state, a larger security economy and a longer list of unsettled disputes.

The third inheritance is the 1989 coup and the thirty years that followed. That coup was carried out jointly by army officers under Omar al-Bashir and the National Islamic Front (NIF), the political vehicle of Sudan's Muslim Brotherhood movement, later the National Congress Party (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.; Abdelwahid 2008). The Muslim Brotherhood then ruled through the National Congress Party for three decades (Taylor 2016; US Department of State 2025b), and Hassan al-Turabi was the movement's intellectual architect (Taylor 2016). In December 1999 the movement's leadership split: al-Bashir moved against Turabi, who went into opposition and the following year founded the Popular Congress Party, while the National Congress Party continued in power under al-Bashir (Taylor 2016). The consequences for state institutions, and what the author assesses as the movement's refusal to accept the nation state as the frame of political loyalty, are examined in sections 8 and 9. This section notes only what matters for ending the war. The Muslim Brotherhood's networks are not a spent force. The four governments of the Quartet stated in September 2025 that Sudan's future "cannot be dictated by violent extremist groups part of or evidently linked to the Muslim brotherhood" (US Department of State 2025a). On 9 March 2026 the United States designated the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood a Specially Designated Global Terrorist, and its designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization took effect on publication in the Federal Register on 16 March 2026 (US Department of State 2026b). The State Department identified the al-Baraa bin Malik Brigade as the movement's own unit, already sanctioned in September 2025 for its role in the war (US Department of State 2026a; US Department of the Treasury 2025). Any settlement that leaves this current free to use the war to recover the state would be no settlement at all.

The fourth inheritance is the most recent. The civilian-led transitional government formed after the 2019 revolution was dissolved on 25 October 2021, when the military arrested Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and other civilian leaders. Washington responded by pausing US$700 million in economic support (US Department of State 2021). The coup was the joint work of the army's commander, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces' commander, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Ayferam 2023). Eighteen months later the two partners in that coup turned their guns on each other. The war is therefore not a break with Sudan's history of military politics. It is where that history leads when no civilian authority is left to hold the armed centres of power in check.

Sudan became independent in 1956, and the first cycle of civilian rule and military takeover began within three years. In 1958 General Ibrahim Abboud led a military coup against the civilian government elected earlier that year. Civil war began in the South in 1962, led by the Anya Nya movement. In 1964 the "October Revolution" overthrew Abboud (BBC News 2019c). The pattern set then has recurred ever since. A popular movement in the cities removes a military ruler, a fragile parliamentary government follows, and that government cannot settle the question of the peripheries before officers take power again.

The second military government came in 1969, when Jaafar Nimeiri led a coup. Nimeiri's years in power hold the clearest lesson in Sudan's modern history. Political settlement can end a war, and the abandonment of that settlement can restart it. Under the Addis Ababa agreement of 1972 between the government and the Anya Nya, the South became a self-governing region. In 1983 civil war broke out again, now led by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement under John Garang, and in the same year Nimeiri declared the introduction of sharia law. In 1985, after

widespread popular unrest, a Transitional Military Council deposed him. Elections in 1986 produced a coalition government under Sadiq al-Mahdi (BBC News 2019c).

The elected government of 1986–89 neither ended the war nor repealed the September Laws. It was overthrown on 30 June 1989 by the officers and the movement identified in the main text (BBC News 2019c; Constitute Project 2019, preamble). The Constitutional Charter of 2019 later took that date as the point at which the constitutional order was undermined. It declared that crimes committed since 30 June 1989 would not be time-barred, and it mandated the dismantling of the regime's structure of empowerment (Constitute Project 2019, arts. 6(3), 8(15)). Section 9 discusses the institutional legacy of those years in detail. In 1993 the United States designated Sudan a state sponsor of terrorism, a listing that lasted twenty-seven years (Reuters 2020).

The regime's second decade was shaped by two wars that it handled in opposite ways. With the South it negotiated under heavy international pressure. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, signed on 9 January 2005 between the government and the SPLM, ended a war that had lasted more than two decades. It provided for a six-year interim period and a referendum on self-determination (UNMISS n.d.). The referendum was held on 9–15 January 2011, and 98.83 per cent of valid votes were cast for secession. South Sudan became independent on 9 July 2011 (UNMISS n.d.). The CPA was a peace between two armed parties, and it did not democratise Khartoum. That is relevant now. A bilateral settlement between armed parties that sets aside the question of how the centre governs the whole country produces a pause, not a peace.

In Darfur the regime chose counter-insurgency by proxy. When the Sudan Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality Movement attacked government targets in 2003, Khartoum armed Arab militias, known collectively as the Janjaweed, and used them with air power against the communities seen as supporting the rebels (Small Arms Survey 2017). On 22 April 2008 the UN humanitarian chief, John Holmes, told the Security Council that as many as 300,000 people were estimated to have died in Darfur since early 2003, counting deaths from disease, malnutrition and reduced life expectancy as well as from combat. More than 2.7 million had been displaced, and some 260,000 had fled to eastern Chad (UN News 2008). Holmes himself called the figure an extrapolation rather than the result of a new mortality survey. Sudan's ambassador put the toll at 10,000 and called the UN figure exaggerated (Reuters 2008). The gap between those two numbers is itself evidence of how the regime handled Darfur: by denial. In 2009 and 2010 the International Criminal Court issued two arrest warrants for President al-Bashir. They cover war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide (ICC n.d.-a). Neither was executed while he was in power.

The force that now fights the army began as an instrument of the regime that created it. The army first set up the Border Guards, ostensibly to protect Sudan's frontiers, above all with Chad. In practice they became the main militia used against Darfur's non-Arab communities from 2003 to 2005 (Small Arms Survey 2017). In August 2013 the regime formed the Rapid Support Forces, mostly from militiamen accused of war crimes in the Darfur counter-insurgency (Sudan Tribune 2017). The new force was placed first under the National Intelligence and Security Service, which gave the intelligence service a paramilitary arm of its own. It was commanded at first by an NISS major general, with Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, a

former Border Guards commander, beside him (Small Arms Survey 2017). Its roughly 30,000 fighters fought alongside the army in Darfur and the Two Areas but stayed under NISS command. On 16 January 2017 parliament passed the Rapid Support Forces Act. It brought the force into the military system and provided that the president, as commander-in-chief, would appoint its commander. Dagalo welcomed the law, saying it had made his men "a semi-autonomous force". Some members of parliament objected that it did not make clear whether the RSF was under the command of the armed forces or the defence minister (Sudan Tribune 2017). International Crisis Group later described the effect as placing the RSF directly under the presidency (International Crisis Group 2019).

The author draws a direct line from this decision to the war. A regime that did not trust its own army built a second army loyal to the president and paid for it partly through gold and the war economy. Section 11 discusses that economy. It handed the second army a legal status that blurred the state's monopoly of force. When al-Bashir fell, Sudan therefore had two armed centres of power, each with its own chain of command, revenue and foreign relationships. The war of April 2023 is the collision between them.

Protests against soaring bread prices began in mid-December 2018 in several towns at once, among them Atbara, Ed Damazin, El Obeid and Gedaref, as well as Khartoum, Bahri and Omdurman. Security forces answered with live ammunition and tear gas. The Sudanese Professionals Association, a coalition of doctors, engineers, lawyers, journalists and other professionals formed in 2016, quickly emerged as the body spearheading the movement (Human Rights Watch 2019b, 15). From 6 April 2019 protesters held a sit-in outside army headquarters in Khartoum (Human Rights Watch 2019b, 15). On 11 April the army removed al-Bashir and formed a Transitional Military Council. When its first head, Awad Ibn Ouf, stepped down on 12 April under pressure from protesters, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan replaced him. The same day al-Burhan appointed Dagalo, the RSF's commander, as his deputy (Human Rights Watch 2019b, 15–16). On 3 June 2019 security forces, prominently including the RSF, broke up the sit-in. Human Rights Watch could not establish the total number killed. It reported that independent doctors' groups gave "credible estimates of over 120 protesters killed between June 3 and 18 and over nine hundred injured" (Human Rights Watch 2019b, 2–3). The Constitutional Charter signed two months later required an independent national committee to investigate the violations of 3 June (Constitute Project 2019, art. 8(16)). The massacre is the founding wound of the transition. The two men later responsible for the 2021 coup and the 2023 war were already at the head of the security apparatus that carried it out.

After African Union and Ethiopian mediation, the Transitional Military Council and the Forces of Freedom and Change signed a Constitutional Declaration on 17 August 2019 (Constitute Project 2019). It set a transitional period of thirty-nine months (art. 7). Under it, an eleven-member Sovereignty Council of five military members, five civilians chosen by the Forces of Freedom and Change and one civilian chosen by agreement acted as head of state. The Council was to be chaired by a military member for the first twenty-one months and by a civilian for the remaining eighteen (art. 11). A cabinet of no more than twenty ministers, led by a prime minister chosen by the Forces of Freedom and Change, held executive authority. The ministers of defence and interior, however, were nominated by the military members (art. 15). The Charter also provided for a Transitional Legislative Council in which women were to hold at

least 40 per cent of seats (art. 24) (Constitute Project 2019). That council was never formed. Abdalla Hamdok, an economist who had worked for the United Nations, was sworn in as prime minister on 21 August 2019 (BBC News 2019b). The Declaration set out a programme of peace, accountability for the crimes of the old regime, dismantling of the Islamist empowerment system and preparation for elections. Its weakness was structural. Article 35 named the armed forces and the RSF together as "a national military institution", and article 8(12) entrusted the reform of military bodies to the military institutions themselves (Constitute Project 2019). The military kept control of the security sector and of the large companies attached to it, and the civilians had no means of enforcing reform on the generals who sat beside them on the Sovereignty Council.

Even so, the transition achieved more in two years than many had expected. The government began a hard programme of economic stabilisation, which Economics sets out in section 11. On 14 December 2020 Sudan's removal from the US list of state sponsors of terrorism took effect. The Secretary of State attributed it to the civilian-led transitional government's efforts (Reuters 2020). The formal rescission notice was published in the Federal Register on 18 December 2020 (US Department of State 2020). Removal opened the way to arrears clearance and debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. Section 11 gives the amounts, which are Economics' figures. On 3 October 2020 the transitional government and the Sudan Revolutionary Front signed the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan. It covered Darfur, the Two Areas and other regions with tracks on power and wealth sharing, land, displaced persons and security arrangements (Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan 2020; UN Secretary-General 2020). Two significant movements, Abdel Aziz al-Hilu's SPLM-North and Abdel Wahid al-Nour's SLM, stayed outside it (UN Secretary-General 2020).

The Juba Agreement nonetheless shows the limits of a peace negotiated mainly with armed movements. It made the armed movements partners in the transition. The Framework Agreement of 2022 would later list its "evaluation and rectification" as one of five unfinished issues (Framework Agreement 2022, 8). By the time of the Cairo conference in 2024, three of its signatories, Malik Agar, Jibril Ibrahim and Minni Minawi, were fighting alongside the army (Dabanga 2024).

The coup of 25 October 2021 came when the chair of the Sovereignty Council was due, on the civilians' reading, to pass to a civilian. The 2019 Charter had provided for a civilian chair for the final eighteen months of the transition (Constitute Project 2019, art. 11(3)). The African Union's Peace and Security Council suspended Sudan from all AU activities on 26 October 2021. In March 2022 the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights condemned the coup and recorded at least 82 protesters killed and at least 400 detainees held (ACHPR 2022). On 21 November 2021 al-Burhan and Hamdok signed a political agreement reinstating Hamdok as prime minister. The street and most of the Forces of Freedom and Change rejected it as a legitimisation of the coup. Hamdok resigned on 2 January 2022. The African Commission attributed his resignation to his inability to form a civilian government and to "serious disagreements" between the parties over the rest of the transition (ACHPR 2022; ACCORD 2022).

On 5 December 2022 the military and a broad group of civilian parties signed a Political Framework Agreement. It restored the goal of a two-year civilian-led transition and left five issues for final talks: transitional justice, security sector reform, review of the Juba Agreement, the East and the dismantling of the old regime (UN News 2022; Framework Agreement 2022, 8). The second of these, the timetable for merging the RSF into the army, destroyed the process. A memorandum of 15 March 2023 set a ceiling of ten years for integration. At the security reform workshop, however, the army proposed completing it within the two-year transition (Sudan Tribune 2023). Talks hit a roadblock over the timeline at the end of March (Reuters 2023a). The signing of the final agreement, first set for 1 April and then for 6 April, was postponed (Sudan Tribune 2023). Within three weeks, on 15 April 2023, the two forces were at war.

The author draws from this sequence the lesson that frames the rest of the paper. The Framework Agreement did not fail because civilians asked too much. It failed because the armed parties were allowed to treat the integration of their forces as a bargain between themselves, with civilian government as the reward for agreement and not as the authority that would impose it.

2. Why a ceasefire is not the same as ending the war

The author draws a firm distinction between a ceasefire and the end of a war. A ceasefire is an urgent security measure: it separates forces, stops the killing and lets aid in. Ending a war is a political and social process. It settles who holds legitimate force, under what constitution and through which institutions. The first can be agreed in days. The second takes years, and it fails if it is reduced to a bargain between the men with guns.

The record since April 2023 bears this out. Within a month of the outbreak, the two forces signed the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan on 11 May 2023, under Saudi and American facilitation (US Department of State 2023). The declaration bound them to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian action. More than three years later, outside governments are still calling on the parties to honour those same commitments (US Department of State 2025a). In August 2024 the talks convened in Switzerland by the Aligned for Advancing Lifesaving and Peace in Sudan (ALPS) Group secured guarantees of humanitarian access through two routes: the Adre border crossing into Darfur and the Dabbah Road from Port Sudan. They also put a compliance mechanism to both forces (US Mission Geneva 2024). On 15 August the Transitional Sovereignty Council announced that the Adre crossing, closed since February, would reopen for three months to humanitarian aid (OCHA 2024; UN News 2024). Yet the Sudanese Armed Forces declined to attend the talks in person, which the group said limited progress towards a national cessation of hostilities (US Mission Geneva 2024). The British government's country assessment of July 2026 summarises the outcome bluntly: attempts to broker ceasefires and end the conflict "have all failed", and fighting has reached every one of Sudan's eighteen states (UK Home Office 2026).

On 24 April 2025 the United States determined, under its Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act of 1991, that "the Government of Sudan used chemical weapons in 2024", and an accompanying report found the government in non-compliance with

the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Sudan is a party (US Department of State 2025c). The resulting sanctions, which restrict US exports and access to US government credit, took effect on 27 June 2025 (US Department of State 2025d). Sudan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected the allegations as "baseless" (BBC News 2025b). Washington imposed a second round of measures, effective 20 July 2026, after finding that Sudan had not met the conditions set by US law (US Department of State 2026c). No finding by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons or the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan had been made public as of 21 October 2026.

Truces have failed for a reason. They were treated as an end in themselves, or as a prelude to talks between the two forces alone, and not as one part of a wider settlement. A pause that leaves the question of legitimate authority untouched gives each side time to rearm and recruit, and the incentive to hold territory as a bargaining chip.

The author therefore proposes that the effort to end the war be organised around two linked tracks, pursued at the same time and not in sequence. The first is a ceasefire with credible monitoring and verification. Into it must be folded unhindered humanitarian access and the protection of civilians, which cannot wait for any political deal. The second is a Sudanese-led, inclusive political process that addresses the causes of the war: the system of government, the constitution, the reform of the security sector and the state's monopoly of legitimate force.

The author does not offer this framework in isolation. It matches the direction that international mediators have themselves arrived at. When the Quartet and the Quintet met jointly for the first time on 23 September 2026, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York (Sudan Tribune 2026c), the African Union Commission chairperson emphasised that humanitarian, security and political tracks "must advance in parallel and reinforce one another". The meeting called for a shared roadmap linking humanitarian action, cessation of hostilities and civilian dialogue, and participants identified preparations for the monitoring and verification of any agreement (African Union 2026). The African Union Commission chairperson named three priorities at that meeting: a humanitarian truce, a cessation of hostilities and an all-inclusive, Sudanese-owned dialogue (African Union 2026). The author's two-track formulation, with humanitarian access built into the first track, is consistent with that public framework.

The obvious objection is that politics should wait until the killing stops. The record answers it. Every truce agreed without a political horizon has collapsed. Humanitarian access is not made conditional on a political deal under this framework: it runs alongside the political track and does not follow it.

The war has passed through four broad phases. Each shows why military advantage has not turned into political victory.

Phase one: the battle for the capital and the fall of West Darfur (April–December 2023). Fighting began on 15 April 2023 in Khartoum, Merowe and other cities. The RSF quickly took most of Khartoum, Omdurman and Bahri, including the Republican Palace and the airport, and the army leadership moved the seat of government to Port Sudan (BBC News 2025a). In West Darfur the RSF and allied Arab militias attacked El Geneina and the Masalit community. The

UN Panel of Experts cited intelligence estimates that 10,000 to 15,000 people were killed in El Geneina alone in 2023 (UN Panel of Experts 2024; Reuters 2024b). Between 26 October and 22 November 2023 the RSF took the army's headquarters in Nyala, Zalingei, Ardamatta in West Darfur, and Ed Daein. By mid-December it controlled four of the five Darfur states, and the army kept a presence only in North Darfur, centred on El Fasher (UN Panel of Experts 2024, 3, 11).

Phase two: RSF expansion into the centre (December 2023–2024). On 18 December 2023 the RSF entered Wad Madani, the capital of Gezira and a refuge for hundreds of thousands who had fled Khartoum (Guardian 2023). Over the next year the RSF occupation emptied large parts of Sudan's agricultural heartland. Residents and rights groups accused the force of killings, sexual violence and looting (Sudan Tribune 2025a). In late June 2024 the RSF advanced into Sennar state and took Sinja, the state capital, displacing large numbers (Reuters 2024c; IOM 2026a). The army began its counter-offensive in the autumn of 2024. It retook Sinja and the 17th Infantry Division headquarters on 23 November 2024, its first recapture of a state capital in the war (Sudan Tribune 2024).

Phase three: the army's counter-offensive in the centre (late 2024–2025). The army and allied forces retook Wad Madani on 11 January 2025 (Sudan Tribune 2025a). Days earlier, on 7 January, the United States had determined that members of the RSF and allied militias had committed genocide, and it sanctioned Dagalo (US Department of State 2025e). On 21 March 2025 the army retook the Republican Palace. On 26 March al-Burhan landed at Khartoum airport and declared, "Khartoum is free, it's done" (Reuters 2025c; BBC News 2025a). Both sides read the recapture of the capital as decisive, but it was not. Reuters noted that it came as the RSF hardened its control in the west and moved to form a government of its own (Reuters 2025c).

Phase four: Darfur, Kordofan and the hardening of division (2025–2026). The RSF and its allies signed a founding charter in Nairobi in February 2025 for a parallel "government of peace and unity" (Reuters 2025b). On 30 August 2025 Dagalo was sworn in at Nyala as head of its presidential council, with al-Hilu as his deputy (Reuters 2025e). The alliance is known as Tasis, and section 3 discusses its significance. On 26 October 2025, after a siege of some eighteen months, the RSF took the army's 6th Infantry Division headquarters in El Fasher, the army's last stronghold in Darfur (Reuters 2025g; BBC News 2025c). Reuters gathered accounts of summary killings of people fleeing the city (Reuters 2025i). The front then moved to Kordofan. On 1 December 2025 the RSF took the 22nd Infantry Division headquarters at Babanusa in West Kordofan (Reuters 2025j). On 8 December the RSF said it had taken the Heglig oilfield in South Kordofan, which houses the main processing facility for South Sudan's oil. According to government sources, army units and oil workers had withdrawn the day before to avoid damage to the installations (Reuters 2025k). Within days South Sudan said its own troops were guarding the field (Reuters 2025l). The episode showed how far the war now reaches into neighbouring states' vital interests. By October 2026 the IPC described Greater Kordofan as "the epicentre of Sudan's conflict". El Obeid was being supplied through a single route vulnerable to drone strikes, and Kadugli and Dilling were at risk of full siege (IPC 2026).

The pattern across these phases bears out the main argument of this section. Each side has won major battles: the RSF in Khartoum in 2023, Gezira and El Fasher, and the army in Wad Madani and Khartoum in 2025. None of those victories has ended the war. Each moved the front and the suffering to another region. Military victory, as the war is actually fought, means a change of front lines, not an end to the fighting.

2.3

The cost of delay is measured in a country's people, land and institutions. UNHCR counts 11.3 million people forcibly displaced since April 2023, as of 5 October 2026, including 3.7 million who have fled abroad (UNHCR 2026). IOM's wider count of everyone displaced inside Sudan, including those displaced before the war, stood at 8.58 million as of 26 August 2026 (IOM 2026a). In late 2025 the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification's Famine Review Committee found famine in the besieged towns of El Fasher and Kadugli, with a risk of famine in surrounding areas. It called the crisis "a man-made emergency" (IPC Famine Review Committee 2025). The land itself is failing. Sudan's 2025 cereal harvest (sorghum, millet and wheat) was estimated at about 5.2 million tonnes, 22 per cent below the previous year and 19 per cent below the five-year average, as conflict drove input shortages and soaring costs (FAO 2026). The health system is close to collapse: in 2025, 38 per cent of health facilities were non-functional and only 14 per cent of hospitals remained operational (WHO EMRO 2025a).

The national figures in section 2 hide great differences between regions. IOM records the 26 August 2026 count given above as a 26 per cent decrease from the highest IDP population it has recorded, 11,585,384 in January 2025 (IOM 2026a, 1–2). Of the total, 2,173,728 people, 25 per cent, had been displaced before April 2023, a reminder that the current war sits on top of older ones (IOM 2026a, 1). In the same period 5,145,165 people had returned to their areas of origin. Most of them, about 4.2 million, had been displaced inside Sudan, and about 930,000 came back from abroad (IOM 2026a, 2026b). The country is therefore split in two ways. In the centre and north-east people are going home to damaged cities. In the west and south, displacement is still growing.

Darfur. IOM reports that 65 per cent of all IDPs in Sudan were hosted across the five Darfur states in August 2026 (IOM 2026a, 1): South Darfur 1,765,922, North Darfur 1,671,637, Central Darfur 994,752, East Darfur 809,405 and West Darfur 351,532 (IOM 2026a, 3). The single largest place of origin is Al Fasher locality, from which 1,332,146 people, 16 per cent of all IDPs, have fled (IOM 2026a, 1, 5). Most people displaced from North and South Darfur stay within their own state or elsewhere in the region (IOM 2026a, 5). In North Darfur, 54 per cent of IDPs were staying at informal gathering sites (IOM 2026a, 7). In October 2026 the IPC warned of rapidly worsening conditions across Greater Darfur. Rain came too late for most cereal crops, and 64 per cent of North Darfur's cropland showed poor plant growth. Nutrition surveys found emergency levels of acute malnutrition across much of the region (IPC 2026; UN News 2026). OCHA's partners estimated that 7.1 million of the 9.1 million people expected to need food assistance in Darfur in the final quarter of 2026 could face gaps in support (UN 2026).

The Kordofans. The IPC now calls Greater Kordofan "the epicentre of Sudan's conflict". More than 300,000 people have been displaced there since October 2025, over 60,000 of them in

North Kordofan during the 2026 planting season. More than 170 airstrikes, lootings or armed clashes have hit markets in the region this year (IPC 2026; UN News 2026). In August 2026 the number of IDPs in North Kordofan rose by 13 per cent, from 218,664 to 247,909, mainly in Sheikan locality (IOM 2026a, 2). El Obeid has absorbed them despite damaged power, water, health and education facilities. It is supplied by the single Kosti–El Obeid road, which remains vulnerable to drone strikes. The IPC judges that the risk of a full siege of the city has lessened (IPC 2026). On 1 October 2026 a drone strike in El Obeid killed one child and injured twelve, according to UNICEF (UN 2026). South Kordofan hosts 330,034 IDPs and West Kordofan 421,263 (IOM 2026a). In South Kordofan, Kadugli and Dilling remain at risk of full siege, and Heiban locality has become a new flashpoint, with market bombardments and attacks on Kauda (IPC 2026). On 2 and 3 October 2026 trucks contracted by WFP were hit near Dilling, and a driver was killed (UN 2026). West Kordofan can be reached only by a long route from Nyala, and movement from Khartoum and Ad Dabbah is severely restricted. Households there increasingly depend on wild foods (IPC 2026).

Khartoum. The capital has seen the largest return in the country. By August 2026, 2,707,261 people had returned to Khartoum state, 53 per cent of all recorded returns, while 421,450 people remained displaced within it (IOM 2026a, 3). Yet Khartoum is also the second-largest place of origin: 735,356 people from Khartoum locality alone are still displaced, and people from Khartoum are scattered across all eighteen states (IOM 2026a). IOM warns that returnees are going back to damaged homes, closed schools and barely functioning clinics, with few livelihoods, and risk being uprooted again without support (IOM 2026b).

Gezira and Sennar. The RSF occupation of Gezira from December 2023 to January 2025 turned the country's agricultural heartland into a state at risk of famine (Reuters 2025a). By August 2026, 1,271,440 people had returned to Aj Jazirah and 262,515 to Sennar, while 48,290 and 22,151 people respectively remained displaced there (IOM 2026a). IOM reports that 87 per cent of IDPs in Aj Jazirah and 84 per cent in Sennar were staying with host families (IOM 2026a, 7). The state of the Gezira Scheme is covered in section 11.4.

Blue Nile. Blue Nile is the newest front. IOM estimates that 99,277 people were displaced within the state between the escalation of fighting on 11 January 2026 and 23 August 2026, most from Geisan, Al Kurmuk and Baw localities. Of these, 45,740 went to Ed Damazin (IOM 2026a, 5). More than 10,000 more were displaced between 26 September and 4 October (UN 2026). The state hosted 380,620 IDPs in August (IOM 2026a). The IPC reports that fighting has intensified sharply in Blue Nile and Greater Kordofan since August, and expects severe disruption to agriculture (IPC 2026). On 15 October 2026 the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, speaking in Ed Damazin, warned that humanitarian food and nutrition stocks could run out by early 2027 without urgent funding (UN RC/HC Sudan 2026).

The East. The eastern states carry a quieter but continuing load. In August 2026 Gedaref hosted 163,740 IDPs, Red Sea 90,985 and Kassala 41,569 (IOM 2026a, 3). Gedaref is also a leading departure point for people going home: 13 per cent of returnees from inside Sudan moved back from there (IOM 2026a, 9). The Red Sea coast and Port Sudan remain the main entry point for national aid and the seat of government.

Funding and access. As of 8 October 2026 the humanitarian response plan had received less than half the funds requested. Food security was 42 per cent funded, nutrition 30 per cent and water and sanitation 23 per cent. Only 26 per cent of expected cases of severe acute malnutrition with medical complications had been treated by August (IPC 2026). Even so, more than 200,000 tonnes of food crossed front lines within Sudan in 2026, and more than 60,000 tonnes crossed international borders (IPC 2026). That shows what access, once negotiated, can achieve. The state-by-state picture supports the paper's central argument. Wherever the fighting has stopped, as in Khartoum, Gezira and Sennar, millions have gone home, and wherever it continues, in Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile, displacement and hunger are rising. The most effective humanitarian measure available is a ceasefire.

None of this can be reversed by force. The Quartet has stated that "there is no viable military solution to the conflict" (US Department of State 2025a). The Famine Review Committee warned that aid alone can prevent famine "only temporarily and in limited locations" unless the conflict itself ends (IPC Famine Review Committee 2025). Peace, and a civilian government able to rebuild institutions, is what unlocks recovery. Section 12 sets out how that recovery could be accelerated once the guns fall silent, and section 13 sets out the human cost.

3. The danger of partition

The gravest risk of a war that is paused but not ended is that Sudan's present lines of control harden into lasting division. Sudan has already lost one part of its territory to the failures described above, when South Sudan seceded in 2011. The danger now is a second split, this time between rival authorities that each claim to be the Sudanese state.

That danger is no longer hypothetical. By early 2025 Sudan was administered by at least four recognisable entities. The government in Port Sudan claimed sovereignty over the whole country but controlled only the north and east. The Rapid Support Forces ran a patchwork of state-level administrations, and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army of Abdel Wahid al-Nour and the SPLM-North of Abdel Aziz al-Hilu held enclaves of their own (Horner 2025). On 30 August 2025 the Rapid Support Forces swore in a rival government in Nyala, South Darfur, in alliance with al-Hilu's movement. International Crisis Group judged that, without an early breakthrough in negotiations, Sudan risked moving from all-out war to "a protracted stalemate and de facto partition" (International Crisis Group 2025). By mid-2026 both sides claimed to have formed civilian governments, one in Port Sudan and one in Nyala. The Rapid Support Forces had set up state institutions including a parallel central bank and currency, and neither administration was democratic (UK Home Office 2026).

The Quintet has stated that it "rejects parallel governing structures" (DPPA 2026). The Quartet's first principle is Sudan's "sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity" (US Department of State 2025a). Statements alone will not prevent partition, however. In the author's assessment, the only durable guarantee of unity is a political settlement that gives Sudanese in every region a stake in a single civilian state. A settlement that divides territory between two armed forces would in effect be a partition agreement. The economic side of unity, including the five development belts and the border agreement with South Sudan, is set out in section 11.

The Nairobi charter of February 2025 matters because it gives the RSF what it lacked as a militia: a political programme and civilian allies. Its signatories committed to a secular, decentralised state (Sudan Tribune 2025c). That language appeals to Sudanese who have suffered under the old regime's Islamism, and the RSF's opponents cannot simply dismiss it. Yet the force that adopted it is the one the United States has found responsible for genocide in Darfur (US Department of State 2025e). The co-chairs of the London conference rejected "any announcement of parallel governments" that would put Sudan's unity at risk (UK Government 2025). The fall of El Fasher in October 2025 gave the Nyala authority unbroken control of Darfur. Reuters observed at the time that a full takeover would "entrench a geographical division of the country between rival military factions" (Reuters 2025h).

The author's view is that the existence of two governments makes a civilian settlement more urgent, not less. Each authority now has institutions, revenue and patrons with a stake in its survival. The longer they exist, the more the cost of reunification rises. A negotiation limited to the two armies would most likely formalise the line between them. Only a political process that reaches beyond both, to the civilians in Port Sudan's territory and in Nyala's, can rebuild a single state.

4. Sudan's borders and its neighbourhood

Sudan's war is not contained within its borders, and its neighbourhood shapes both the fighting and the prospects for peace. Two dynamics matter most.

The first is the human and economic spillover. Chad offers the starkest example. About one million refugees and returnees have crossed into its isolated eastern provinces. The population of Ouaddaï has grown by 60 per cent in two years, and competition for water, firewood and work has sharpened tensions between newcomers and local communities (Bouëssel 2025). The cross-border trade that once linked eastern Chad to Sudan has largely collapsed. In its place an illicit economy has grown up, including the sale of goods looted in Sudan and the smuggling of fuel from Libya through Chad into Darfur (Bouëssel 2025). The African Union Commission chairperson stressed the war's "growing regional spillovers" and the burden on neighbouring countries hosting millions of refugees when the Quartet and Quintet met in September 2026 (African Union 2026).

The second is the way the borders feed the war. Reporting by governments, researchers and journalists, collated by the European Council on Foreign Relations, indicates that a wide range of external actors have facilitated the flow of weapons into Sudan. It also identifies rival Libyan authorities lining up behind opposite sides in the war (Horner 2025). Long, lightly policed frontiers with Libya, Chad and the Central African Republic allow fuel, fighters and arms to move with little control. This is one reason the Quartet has stated that "an end to external military support is essential to ending the conflict" (US Department of State 2025a). It is also why the Quartet commits its members to promoting the security of the wider Red Sea region (US Department of State 2025a).

The conclusion the author draws is practical. Border management and regional security cooperation must be built into any ceasefire's monitoring arrangements from the start. A

ceasefire that can be resupplied across open frontiers will not hold. Sudan's neighbours also have a direct interest in an end to the war, because they bear its costs. That interest is a resource mediators should use.

Sudan's other borders also shape the war. South Sudan's oil, processed at Heglig and exported through Sudan, makes up the bulk of its government's public revenues (Reuters 2025l). The RSF's seizure of Heglig in December 2025 therefore threatened Juba's public finances directly and drew South Sudanese troops across the border to guard the field (Reuters 2025l). South Sudan has a direct stake in a ceasefire in Kordofan. Egypt sees the Nile and the integrity of the Sudanese state as core security interests and has hosted large numbers of Sudanese refugees, as well as two rounds of civilian talks. Ethiopia is both a neighbour and a mediator: Addis Ababa hosted the founding of Taqaddum and is the seat of the African Union. Return movements show how closely the region is tied to Sudan. Of the roughly 930,000 people who had returned to Sudan from abroad by September 2026, half came from Egypt, a quarter from South Sudan, 10 per cent from Libya and 8 per cent from Gulf countries (IOM 2026b). IOM recorded 4,681,314 crossings from Sudan into neighbouring countries between 15 April 2023 and 17 September 2026 (IOM 2026a).

On the eastern frontier, Sudan's Red Sea coast became the country's lifeline once the government moved to Port Sudan. All the main aid routes now depend on it. The Quartet's commitment to Red Sea security, set out in section 4, reflects that dependence. The author adds a practical point. Any monitoring mechanism should cover the main overland corridors from Chad, Libya and South Sudan as well as the ports, because those are the routes by which the war is supplied and by which aid reaches the worst-affected areas.

5. Scattered mediation and the move towards coordination

For much of the war, mediation suffered from the same weakness as Sudan's politics: too many centres and too little coordination. The Saudi- and American-led Jeddah track produced the May 2023 declaration (US Department of State 2023). The ALPS Group convened in Switzerland in August 2024 (US Mission Geneva 2024). The African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development pursued their own efforts, and a series of international conferences followed. Each initiative had its own membership and priorities. The warring parties could exploit the gaps between them, and civilians were too often consulted at the margins.

Two formats have since emerged as the main channels. The first is the Quartet, whose own statement calls it "the Quad": the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. On 12 September 2025 its foreign ministers agreed a shared set of principles (US Department of State 2025a). These were Sudan's unity and territorial integrity; that there is "no viable military solution"; unhindered humanitarian access and the protection of civilians under the Jeddah commitments; and that Sudan's future governance "is for the Sudanese people to decide through an inclusive and transparent transition process, not controlled by any warring party". The ministers called for a humanitarian truce of an initial three months, to lead immediately to a permanent ceasefire. That was to be followed by an inclusive transition concluded within nine months, leading to "an independent, civilian-led government with broad-based legitimacy and accountability" (US Department of State 2025a; Reuters 2025f).

The statement also called for an end to external military support (US Department of State 2025a).

The author regards the Quartet's roadmap as the right direction for ending the war. It combines influence over the two forces with an explicit commitment to a civilian-led outcome. Its weakness is the gap between principle and implementation. A year after the roadmap was published, no humanitarian truce had taken effect: in September 2026 the African Union Commission chairperson was still calling for "an immediate humanitarian truce" (African Union 2026), and the British government's assessment records that every attempt to broker a ceasefire has failed (UK Home Office 2026). Coordination has improved, but the mediators' own interests in Sudan still differ.

The second format is the Quintet: the African Union, IGAD, the League of Arab States, the European Union and the United Nations. Its role is the political track. In September 2026 it carried out a good offices mission to Khartoum. There it met the leadership of the Transitional Sovereignty Council and the prime minister, as well as political and civilian groups and independent women's and youth groups. It restated its support for "a credible and inclusive Sudanese led and Sudanese owned political track" leading to a democratic, civilian-led government (DPPA 2026).

The most important recent development is that the two formats have begun to work together. Their first joint meeting, held in New York on 23 September 2026 (Sudan Tribune 2026c), called for stronger operational coordination, a shared roadmap and more regular contact between technical teams. It also pointed to ongoing work on a humanitarian declaration and the need to address external military interference (African Union 2026). The author welcomes this convergence and urges both formats to complete the move from shared statements to a single, sequenced and monitored plan.

Jeddah. The Saudi–US talks that produced the 11 May 2023 Declaration went on to agree a series of short-term ceasefires in May and June 2023, each of which was broken within days. A second round in Jeddah in late 2023 secured humanitarian commitments. It was adjourned in early December 2023 without a new agreement, as both parties dug in for further fighting (Reuters 2023c; Dabanga 2023). Jeddah's commitments stayed the reference point for later initiatives, and both the London conference and the Quartet cite them (UK Government 2025; US Department of State 2025a).

IGAD and the African Union. The African Union adopted a roadmap in May 2023 with six core pillars, and it convened an Expanded Mechanism on the Crisis in Sudan to coordinate partners (African Union 2023; UK Government 2025). The East African bloc IGAD tried to bring al-Burhan and Dagalo together in person. In January 2024 the government in Port Sudan suspended contact with IGAD after the bloc invited Dagalo to its Kampala summit (Reuters 2024a). The African Union and IGAD then turned to civilian dialogue, holding preparatory meetings for an inter-Sudanese political dialogue that the London co-chairs later commended (UK Government 2025).

Cairo. Egypt hosted a conference of Sudanese civilian and political forces in July 2024. The meeting ran under the slogan "Together to Stop the War". Its closing statement called for an

immediate end to the war and urgent humanitarian aid, adherence to the Jeddah Declaration with updated mechanisms for implementing it, and an end to outside support for the parties. It also called for a unified, federal, democratic civil state based on citizenship (Dabanga 2024). Three army-aligned leaders refused to sign: Malik Agar, Jibril Ibrahim and Minni Minawi. Minawi objected that the statement did not condemn RSF abuses (Dabanga 2024). The London co-chairs later commended the conference's outcomes (UK Government 2025). That a single statement could not hold even the civilian and armed-movement leaders of one camp shows how deeply the war has divided Sudan's politics.

Geneva/ALPS. The August 2024 talks in Switzerland, described in section 2, showed what can be achieved when mediators concentrate on humanitarian access. They also showed the limits when one of the two forces declines to attend.

London. On 15 April 2025, two years into the war, the United Kingdom, the African Union, the European Union, France and Germany co-hosted the London Sudan Conference. It brought in foreign ministers from fourteen other states, among them all four future Quartet members, together with the League of Arab States and the United Nations (UK Government 2025). The co-chairs called for "an immediate and permanent ceasefire", stressed "the necessity of preventing any partition of Sudan" and backed "the transition to a civilian-led government". Eight participants, including the UK, the US, the European Union, France, Germany, the UAE, Canada and Switzerland, "highlighted their commitment to provide over £813 million of funding for Sudan and its neighbours this year" (UK Government 2025). The conference failed to agree the contact group its hosts had sought (Guardian 2025). That failure is a reminder that the divergent interests named in section 5 are real.

From Quartet to Quintet. The September 2025 Quartet statement, discussed in section 5, was the first time the four governments with the greatest leverage over the two forces committed in writing to a civilian outcome. Its value is that it joins influence with principle. The convergence with the Quintet, first in its good offices mission to Khartoum and then at the joint meeting of 23 September 2026 (DPPA 2026; African Union 2026; Sudan Tribune 2026c), adds the legitimacy of the continental and global institutions. The author's recommendation is that the two formats should agree a single lead mediator and a single text, so that neither force can pick its preferred forum.

6. Civilian coalitions, the Sumud alliance and national dialogue

No mediation can succeed if civilians appear only as observers. The civilian camp is itself divided, and an honest account must say so. Taqaddum, a civilian coalition formed in Addis Ababa in October 2023 and led by Abdalla Hamdok, split into two factions on 10 February 2025. One faction, Tasis, supported proclaiming a parallel government dominated by the Rapid Support Forces. The other, Sumud ("Resilience"), led by Hamdok, kept to non-violence and neutrality and declined to align with either warring party (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2025, 11). Sudan Tribune reported the coalition's formal dissolution over the parallel government plan on the same day (Sudan Tribune 2025b).

Sumud should not be presented as the sole voice of Sudanese civilians. It does not, on its own, represent all of them. Nor should the paper pass over the criticism Taqaddum attracted. On 2 January 2024 it signed the Addis Ababa Declaration with the Rapid Support Forces (Taqaddum and Rapid Support Forces 2024). Critics accused the coalition of a lack of inclusion, saying many resistance committees, trade unions, and youth and women's groups did not feel represented. At least among critics, the declaration fed a perception that Taqaddum was under the Rapid Support Forces' influence. Taqaddum, for its part, emphasised its neutrality (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2025, 11). The author's view is that Sumud's credibility rests on consistent opposition to the war and to both armed forces' claims to rule.

The deeper task is a genuine national dialogue. Consultation should be widened to civilian forces that disagree with one another, including those close to each warring party and those aligned with neither. The Quintet's engagement with a committee working on a conducive environment for Sudanese dialogue is a start (DPPA 2026). The author proposes that a preparatory phase first agree the dialogue's agenda: the system of government, a permanent constitution, institutional and security-sector reform, transitional arrangements and civil–military relations. Only a process that Sudanese own, and that is not controlled by any warring party, can produce what the Quartet itself has called for: an independent, civilian-led government with broad-based legitimacy (US Department of State 2025a).

The history set out in the new subsections of section 1 points in one direction. Since 1956 every military government in Sudan has promised order and left a more divided country: Abboud as war began in the South, Nimeiri as the war restarted in 1983, al-Bashir in the South, Darfur and the Two Areas, and the generals of October 2021 in the capital itself. Every advance towards peace has come from civilian government or popular movements. The October Revolution, the 1985 uprising and the December Revolution each opened a political space that the army later closed. The CPA and the Juba Agreement achieved what they did because a political authority negotiated them. They fell short where they left the armed men in charge of their own reform.

The war since 2023 confirms the point. Both armies have won battles and both have lost cities, and neither has ended the war. The Quartet's judgement that "there is no viable military solution" (US Department of State 2025a) is not a diplomatic formula. It describes what three and a half years of fighting have shown. A civilian-led transition, with the integration of forces under a single civilian-controlled command, is the only arrangement that has never been tried in full, and the only one that does not reward the men who started the war.

7. Federalism: managing diversity within one state

Sudan is too large and too varied to be governed well from a single centre. For most of its independent history, power, revenue and development have collected in and around the capital, while the regions that grow the food, raise the livestock and hold the minerals have had little say over how they are governed. Federalism is the author's answer. Its purpose is to bring government closer to citizens and to give each region real authority over its own affairs, within a single, united state. It is not a first step towards break-up.

The demand for federalism predates independence. Southern leaders asked for federal status at the Liberal Party's Juba conference in 1954 (Salman 2013, 351–52). On 19 December 1955 Parliament adopted the independence resolution, which promised that the South's request for federal status would be given "due consideration by the Constituent Assembly" (Salman 2013, 353). The promise was not followed up. Sudanisation of the civil service in the same period left Southerners with only six of some 800 posts, mostly junior ones (Salman 2013, 351). The country has been paying for that broken undertaking ever since. Had the question been settled at the outset, the wars that followed might have been less severe.

Sudan has tried decentralisation several times, but the attempts have rarely moved real power away from the centre.

Sudan's first serious attempt to share power with a region was negotiated, not imposed. The 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement ended seventeen years of war in the South. It turned the three provinces of Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile, "in accordance with their boundaries as they stood January 1, 1956", into "a self-governing Region within the Democratic Republic of the Sudan… known as the Southern Region" (Addis Ababa Agreement 1972, arts. 3–4). The region had its own legislature, the People's Regional Assembly, elected by citizens living there. It also had an executive, the High Executive Council, whose president the head of state appointed on the Assembly's recommendation (Addis Ababa Agreement 1972, arts. 3, 8). English was recognised as "the principal language for the Southern Region", while Arabic remained the official language of Sudan (art. 6).

The design was sound in two respects. First, the agreement listed the matters reserved to the centre: defence, foreign affairs, currency, inter-regional transport, telecommunications, customs and foreign trade, nationality, economic and educational planning, and public audit (art. 7). Everything else could be devolved. Second, the law was entrenched. It could be amended only "by a three quarters majority of the People's National Assembly and confirmed by a two-thirds majority in a referendum held in the three Southern Provinces" (art. 2).

The entrenchment did not survive the will of one man. In June 1983 President Nimeiri divided the South into three regions, "in abrogation of the Addis Ababa agreement of 1972" (International Commission of Jurists 1986, 8). No referendum was held, although the agreement required one. The second civil war followed. The lesson for Sudan now is that a federal guarantee is only as strong as the institutions that enforce it. A written settlement that a military ruler can cancel by decree is a truce, not a constitution. That is why the author treats civilian, constitutional government as the precondition of any federal design, not an optional extra.

Under the NIF government, decentralisation was formalised in the Federalism Act of 1991. In February 1994 the Tenth Presidential Decree redivided the country into 26 states, with 16 states in the North replacing the six provinces that had existed since independence (Saeed 2010, 18–19). The number of states grew, but authority did not move with it. Even the 1998 Constitution, the first to adopt the federal principle formally, gave the federal government "more authority" over the states (Ouma 2005, 27–28).

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 between the government and the SPLM/A changed both the map and the money. The power-sharing and Abyei protocols signed on 9 January 2005 "abandon the stipulations of the Tenth Presidential Decree and effectively dissolve West Kordofan State", returning South Kordofan to its 1974 boundaries (Saeed 2010, 19). The CPA's wealth-sharing agreement set out a formula for oil revenue that remains the most detailed revenue-sharing rule Sudan has had:

- At least 2 per cent of oil revenue was to go to "the oil producing states/regions in proportion to output produced in such states/regions" (CPA Wealth Sharing Agreement 2004, art. 5.5).
- After that and the payment into an Oil Revenue Stabilization Account, 50 per cent of net oil revenue from wells in the South was to go to the Government of Southern Sudan and 50 per cent to the national government and the northern states (art. 5.6).
- A Future Generation Fund was to be created once national production reached 2 million barrels per day (art. 5.7).
- All funds and special accounts were to be "on-budget operations" (art. 5.8).

For Abyei the protocol went further, dividing net oil revenue between the national government (50 per cent), the Government of Southern Sudan (42 per cent), Bahr el Ghazal Region (2 per cent), Western Kordofan (2 per cent), and the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya peoples locally (2 per cent each) (Abyei Protocol 2004, art. 3.1).

The CPA showed that Sudanese negotiators could write precise, transparent revenue rules. It did not show that a captured state would honour them. The South voted to leave in 2011. In the author's assessment, the failure lay less in the formula than in a ruling party that never treated the federal bargain as binding on itself.

The Juba Agreement for Peace, signed in October 2020, was the civilian-led transitional government's attempt to end the wars in the peripheries. The talks with the Sudan

Revolutionary Front, a coalition that brought together 13 movements, were divided into five regional tracks: Darfur, the Two Areas, the East, the Centre (central Sudan) track and the North. Together they covered 16 of Sudan's 18 states, leaving out only Khartoum and North Kordofan (Thomas 2023, 9). The main provisions were as follows (Thomas 2023, 9–10):

Track	Revenue provision	Other main provisions
National issues	National Revenue Fund and commissions to monitor regional allocations	National constitutional and federal governance conferences; commissions on pastoralists, nomads and farmers, and on transitional justice
Darfur	40 per cent of revenues from local natural resources to the regional government for ten years	A Darfur region of five states; a Darfur Peace Support Fund of USD 750 million a year for ten years; transitional justice, compensation, and the return of displaced people
Two Areas	40 per cent of revenues from local taxation and natural resources for ten years	A mechanism for sharing Blue Nile hydropower revenue; a path for West Kordofan to join after the federal conference
East	30 per cent of revenues from local natural resources for seven years	USD 348 million for the Eastern Sudan Reconstruction and Development Fund; a conference on the region's future status

Track	Revenue provision	Other main provisions
North	30 per cent of revenues from local taxation and natural resources for ten years (additional protocol, December 2021)	A share of hydroelectric revenue; compensation for land expropriated for dams
Centre	30 per cent of revenues from local taxation and natural resources for ten years (additional protocol, December 2021)	Rehabilitation of agriculture and basic services

On paper this was the most generous transfer of resources to the regions in Sudan's history. In practice it delivered little. The Rift Valley Institute's study of the agreement finds that "wealth-sharing arrangements have not been honoured in federal budgets" and that none of the commissions meant to address root causes are operational (Thomas 2023, 14). It also points to a structural flaw. Power-sharing gave the regions' seats at the centre to "militia leaders disconnected by long insurgencies from democratic processes" (Thomas 2023, 14). Six separately drafted texts, ranging from 4 to 105 pages, made up "a patchwork of protocols" that fell "far short of a unified manifesto for change" (Thomas 2023, 9).

The October 2021 coup ended the civilian government that had negotiated the agreement, and with it any chance of funding the agreement. In the author's view, Juba is the strongest evidence that federalism negotiated between armed men cannot replace federalism agreed by citizens. The tracks should be treated as a starting inventory of regional demands for a national constitutional conference. They should not be treated as a finished settlement.

However, the two largest armed movements outside the agreement, the SLM led by Abdelwahid and the SPLM-North led by al-Hilu, did not sign (International Crisis Group 2021; Thomas 2023, 27). The lesson is that federal arrangements negotiated piecemeal, track by track and between armed parties, cannot replace a settlement agreed nationally.

No federation can be copied wholesale. In the author's assessment, two models are useful because they solve different problems.

- **The United States** shows how a written constitution can fix the line between levels of government. Powers not delegated to the federal government are reserved to the states, and the courts police the boundary (US Constitution, Tenth Amendment).
- **Nigeria** is the closest comparison: a large, diverse African state with a history of civil war. Its "federal character" principle, written into the constitution from 1979 (Suberu 2022, 6) and restated in the 1999 Constitution, s. 14(3), as quoted by the Federal Character Commission, and administered by the Federal Character Commission, aims to make sure no group dominates federal institutions (Suberu 2022; Federal Character Commission n.d.). It is also a warning. Critics, particularly in the south, have attacked its quotas; in federal university admissions, for example, merit accounts for only 40 per cent or less of places (Suberu 2022, 10, 12).

The common thread is that federalism works when the division of powers is written down, revenue follows responsibility, and an independent court can settle disputes between the centre and the regions.

Sudan's own record offers three models, and the comparison helps frame the choice.

A single autonomous region within a unitary state, as in Addis Ababa in 1972. This is simple and clear, but it is asymmetric. It answers one region's demands and leaves the rest of the periphery governed from Khartoum.

Many small states with little power, as in the 1994 decree. This produces administrative fragmentation without self-government. Each state is too weak to bargain with the centre (Saeed 2010, 18–19; Ouma 2005, 27–28).

Negotiated regional deals, as in the CPA and Juba. These come with detailed revenue formulas but are bargained track by track between armed parties and depend on the centre's good faith (CPA Wealth Sharing Agreement 2004; Thomas 2023).

The author's preferred direction is a fourth option: a **symmetrical federation of a limited number of regions, defined in a permanent constitution adopted through a civilian-led process**. It would have entrenchment that cannot be undone by decree, revenue rules modelled on the transparency of the CPA's "on-budget" requirement, and an independent constitutional court to arbitrate disputes between levels of government. The exact number and boundaries of the regions are for Sudanese citizens to decide. The Juba tracks' regional revenue shares (30–40 per cent of locally generated natural-resource revenue) show the range of expectations that any formula will have to meet (Thomas 2023, 9–10).

A Sudanese federal settlement will need to answer five questions:

Regions. How many, and on what boundaries? The 26-state model fragmented administration without giving the states real power.

Powers. Which powers sit with the federal government, which with the regions, and which are shared?

Money. How revenue from land, gold, oil and water is divided, and how poorer regions are supported. International partners now list "the relationship between the center and the regions, allocation of powers… and fiscal arrangements in a federal system" among the core issues for a settlement (UK FCDO 2026). Two lessons from the CPA and Juba should be written into the fiscal design. First, every revenue stream, including those from gold and from state-owned and security-sector companies, must flow through the public budget (CPA Wealth Sharing Agreement 2004, art. 5.8; see section 10.1). Second, transfers must be published and audited. Juba's allocations went unpaid partly because no one outside the executive could see whether they were being made (Thomas 2023, 14).

Land. How customary tenure, which in rural areas such as Darfur is controlled by customary leaders (NRC 2024, 11), is recognised alongside state and investor claims.

Minorities within regions. How the rights of people who are a minority in their own region are protected.

The development belts set out in section 11.5 are the economic counterpart to these political choices, because they give each region a productive base of its own.

The strongest objection is that federalism hardens ethnic boundaries and prepares the ground for break-up. South Sudan's independence in 2011 makes the fear understandable. The record points the other way, though. The South left after decades in which the federal promise was broken, not after a federal settlement was tried. In the author's assessment, three safeguards answer the risk: national citizenship rights that no region can override, political parties that must organise across regions, and an independent constitutional court with the final word on the division of powers.

8. Party pluralism and an inclusive national identity

Sudan's political field is unusually crowded, and communist, Ba'athist, Nasserist, Islamist, sectarian and regional parties all have deep roots. The Nimeiri period shows how far the state's direction could swing. Jaafar Nimeiri took power in a coup on 25 May 1969 that was supported by the left-wing parties, particularly the Sudanese Communist Party (Salman 2013, 363). After a failed coup backed by the Communist Party in July 1971, its leaders were executed (Salman 2013, 365), and in September 1983 he decreed the application of sharia across the country, the "September Laws" (Salman 2013, 371).

The author's position is that political traditions should not be banned for what they believe. Exclusion drives movements underground and hands them a grievance. That principle has one limit. A party that fused itself with the state, as the National Congress Party did, is a different case from a party that simply holds unwelcome views. Dissolving the National Congress Party by law in November 2019 (Reuters 2019a; France 24 2019) was a measure against a party-state, not against an idea. Individuals accused of crimes or corruption belong before the courts, and nobody should be punished for affiliation alone (see section 10.3).

There is one category the author treats differently. In the author's assessment, the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood movement subordinated the nation state to a transnational Islamist project: in the 1990s it hosted Osama bin Laden and other international Islamist figures under Turabi's Popular Arab and Islamic Congress (Taylor 2016), and, on Lo's account, its rule failed to preserve Sudan as a nation state (Lo 2019). A party that seeks power while rejecting the authority of the state it would govern cannot be a normal competitor in constitutional politics. Section 9 sets out the institutional record behind this assessment.

Plurality is not in itself a weakness. In mature democracies, sustained competition tends to push parties with similar outlooks into mergers and broad alliances, because voters reward coalitions that can govern. Sudan has never had a democratic period long enough for this to happen. Its three short democratic periods, 1956–58, 1964–69 and 1985–89, were each ended by a coup (Ayferam 2023). The task is to keep the democratic period open long enough for consolidation to take place.

Imposed identity was a cause of Sudan's war in the South, not a by-product of it: from 1958 the Abboud government pursued forced Arabisation and Islamisation in the South (Salman 2013, 354–56), and the Juba Agreement itself acknowledges systematic marginalisation and commits the state to citizenship without discrimination (Thomas 2023, 10). An inclusive national identity has to embrace the country's religions, languages, cultures and ethnic groups. It

should rest on citizenship, not on ethnicity or faith, and it should be written into the constitution as a guarantee of equal rights.

8.5

No country's transition can be copied, but some lessons recur. The author has chosen three cases where the evidence is well documented.

Indonesia: taking the army out of politics, in stages. Under Suharto, unelected representatives of the armed forces and police held reserved seats in parliament, "a relic of authoritarian rule" (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2006, 1). After 1998 the military's political role was dismantled step by step. A decree of the People's Consultative Assembly of 18 August 2000 made the armed forces and the police institutionally separate, assigning defence to the former and security to the latter (MPR Decree VI/MPR/2000, arts. 1–2). At a special meeting in April 2002, some 150 senior commanders decided that the military "should begin to withdraw from its involvement in political affairs and instead, focus on its external defense role". A constitutional amendment that took effect with the 2004 elections ended the armed forces' reserved seats in parliament "five years sooner than originally planned". For the first time, all seats were contested (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2006, 3–4). The same assessment warned that the military remained "the main vetoing actor" (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2006, 4). That is the lesson. Withdrawing an army from politics is a process measured in years, with a fixed timetable written into law, and it needs elected institutions strong enough to hold the timetable.

Tunisia: truth-telling at scale, and its limits. After 2011 Tunisia created a Truth and Dignity Commission to examine abuses committed between 1955 and 2013. By late 2016 it had received more than 62,000 victim submissions, 15,000 of them from women, and had heard testimony from about 11,000 people. Public hearings were broadcast live on national television and radio (El Gantri 2016). The process also shows how fragile such work is. The International Center for Transitional Justice records that political polarisation, terrorist attacks and economic decline meant "the political will to follow through has diminished". It also records that as late as March 2015 women accounted for only 5 per cent of testimonies, until women's organisations organised outreach (El Gantri 2016). For Sudan, the lesson is that a truth process must be designed from the start to reach women and the provinces, and must be protected from the swings of party politics.

Colombia: an integrated system. Colombia's 2016 agreement with the FARC did not rely on a single mechanism. It created a system of a Truth Commission, a Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) and a unit to search for the disappeared, together with reparation measures. The system was written into the constitution by Legislative Act 01 of 2017 (JEP n.d.). The JEP judges serious crimes committed in the conflict up to 1 December 2016, by former FARC combatants and members of the state's own forces alike. It has a mandate of 15 years, extendable to 20, and the search unit has a mandate of 20 years (JEP n.d.). Colombia's lesson is that justice, truth, the search for the missing and reparation have to be designed together, apply to all sides, and be protected constitutionally from the next government.

None of these countries emerged from a war as destructive as Sudan's, and none is a model to be copied. They point to three common conditions: armed forces placed under elected civilian

authority on a timetable written into law; accountability that covers every armed party; and institutions entrenched firmly enough to survive a change of government. All three require a civilian-led state. None of them can be delivered by a military victory.

9. Political Islam and the independence of state institutions

9.1

The coup of 30 June 1989 brought to power the NIF (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.; Abdelwahid 2008). Step by step, NIF members were appointed to all leading civil and military posts; months later, tens of thousands of civil servants, soldiers and police officers lost their jobs because of their political allegiance (Abdelwahid 2008). For thirty years the Muslim Brotherhood movement governed Sudan through these organisations. That remained true after the December 1999 split, when Turabi was pushed aside and the following year founded the Popular Congress Party, while the National Congress Party stayed in power under al-Bashir (Taylor 2016).

The central problem was not that an Islamist movement held power. The problem was that the Muslim Brotherhood did not treat the state as a neutral institution belonging to all citizens. It treated the state as an instrument of the movement. The army, the security services, the judiciary, the civil service, the universities and the media were brought under its control (Ouma 2005, 27, citing Lesch 1998), and loyalty to the movement became the test for appointment and promotion. Under the policy of *tamkeen* ("empowerment"), the boundary between party, movement and state disappeared. *Tamkeen* reshuffled the military, the civil service, state companies and the universities, and dismissed those who were not part of the movement (Mann 2014, 15). Its own architects presented it as empowerment; in practice it rewarded ideological loyalty and pursued opponents, and it failed to hold the nation state together (Lo 2019).

Two features make this capture especially damaging:

- **It was built to outlast the regime.** Because the movement had placed its members throughout the state, removing Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 did not remove the network. The US government has stated that Sudanese Islamists "played a key role in derailing Sudan's progress toward a democratic transition" by undermining the civilian-led transitional government (US Department of State 2025b).
- **It extended to armed force.** The United States designated the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood, listed with the aliases Sudanese Islamic Movement and al-Baraa bin Malik Brigade, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, effective 16 March 2026 (US Department of State 2026b). The al-Baraa bin Malik Brigade is an armed unit, so the designation itself places the movement in the current fighting. The Quartet's statement of September 2025 says Sudan's future "cannot be dictated by violent extremist groups part of or evidently linked to the Muslim brotherhood" (US Department of State 2025a). These are the judgements of the governments that made them, and the paper reports them as such.

The lesson for institutional design is direct. Whatever settlement ends the war, the army, the judiciary, the civil service and the security services must be rebuilt as national institutions answerable to the constitution and closed to capture by any movement.

Thirty years of *tamkeen* did not stop at the civil service: it reshuffled the military along with the rest of the state (Mann 2014, 15), and the movement placed its loyalists in the officer corps and the security services (Abdelwahid 2008). By October 1993 some 1,500 officers, just under a third of the officer corps, had been dismissed and replaced by young pro-NIF graduates of the military academy (Flint 1993, cited in Salmon 2007, 15). That network, known colloquially in Sudan as the *Kizan* (also transliterated *Kayzan*, the spelling used in the source quoted below), did not leave when al-Bashir fell. A week into the war, a Chatham House analyst described Islamist elements of the Bashir regime, the *Kayzan*, as "an important element of the army leadership" (Soliman 2023), and by April 2024 Crisis Group reported that ousted Bashir-era Islamists had "come back to dominate Burhan's government ministries and security institutions" and were mobilising militias to fight alongside the army (International Crisis Group 2024). By mid-2023 thousands of Bashir-era intelligence operatives with ties to his Islamist movement were reported to be fighting alongside the army, which the army denied (Reuters 2023b). Islamist brigades have since provided manpower for the army's war effort (Marsden 2024; Verhoeven 2024; US Department of the Treasury 2025). The United States lists the al-Baraa bin Malik Brigade among the aliases of the designated Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood (US Department of State 2026a); the US Treasury, sanctioning it in September 2025, described it as an Islamist militia tracing its origins to the Bashir-era Popular Defense Forces that has fought against the Rapid Support Forces (US Department of the Treasury 2025).

According to the US Treasury, the al-Baraa bin Malik Brigade has contributed "upwards of 20,000 fighters" against the Rapid Support Forces, using training and weapons provided by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (US Department of the Treasury 2025). The State Department says the movement's fighters, "many receiving training and other support from Iran's IRGC, have conducted mass executions of civilians" (US Department of State 2026a). The Treasury says the Brigade's fighters "have been implicated in arbitrary arrests, torture, and summary executions" (US Department of the Treasury 2025). In the author's assessment, this evidence shows a movement that has embedded itself in the army's war effort. That is a judgement about the movement, not a claim that the armed forces as an institution are the Muslim Brotherhood.

Tamkeen worked through three mechanisms, all set out in sources the paper already uses.

Purge. Within months of the coup of 30 June 1989, tens of thousands of civil servants, soldiers and police officers lost their posts because of their political allegiance (Abdelwahid 2008). In the army, the professional officers who opposed the NIF began to be replaced by regime loyalists from 1990. Alongside the officer purge described in section 9.1, 500 non-commissioned officers and 11,000 soldiers were dismissed by October 1993 (Flint 1993, cited in Salmon 2007, 15).

Parallel force. Alongside the regular army, the regime built the Popular Defence Forces, a paramilitary body with indoctrination camps run by pro-NIF officers (Salmon 2007). According

to the US Treasury, the al-Baraa bin Malik Brigade, sanctioned in September 2025, traces its origins to these forces (US Department of the Treasury 2025).

Patronage. Tamkeen reshuffled the military, the civil service, state companies and the universities, and dismissed those who were not part of the movement (Mann 2014, 15). It also reached into the economy through companies controlled by the security forces (C4ADS 2022; Ayferam 2023; see section 10.1 and section 11.2).

The NIF thus built a state in which the movement, the army's leadership and the economy were bound together. In the author's assessment, this is why the network has outlived the regime. Its members did not depend on al-Bashir. They depended on positions inside institutions that no one had yet reformed. The US government's 2026 designation of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, effective 16 March 2026 (US Department of State 2026b), and the Quartet's call that Sudan's future not be dictated by groups linked to the Muslim Brotherhood (US Department of State 2025a), reflect the judgement of those governments that the network remains an armed actor today (see section 9.1).

For the US finding that the Government of Sudan used chemical weapons in 2024, see section 2.

The author's argument that there is no military path rests on this history. An army whose officer corps was purged and restocked on ideological lines, and whose war effort now draws on Islamist brigades (see section 9.1), cannot deliver a neutral peace by winning. Nor can the Rapid Support Forces. The UN Fact-Finding Mission has found reasonable grounds to believe that the RSF and allied militias committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, torture, rape, sexual slavery and persecution on ethnic and gender grounds (OHCHR 2024a). The Mission also found that the army and allied militias attacked civilians and civilian objects, including through airstrikes in densely populated areas, and that both warring parties carried out arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and ill-treatment (OHCHR 2024b). Neither force is a foundation for a state.

The author proposes that the settlement include:

One national army under civilian authority, with the RSF and all militias, including the Islamist brigades named in US designations, disarmed, demobilised or integrated individually after vetting. No unit should be absorbed as a block.

Vetting on conduct, not affiliation, consistent with section 10.3. Officers credibly linked to atrocities, or to command of designated groups, should be removed. Others should be judged on their record.

A legislated timetable for the army's withdrawal from politics and from commerce, on the Indonesian pattern of fixed dates written into law (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2006, 3–4; see section 8.5). This should include the transfer of security-sector companies to civilian ownership (section 10.4).

Separation of police from the army, with the police under a civilian ministry (compare MPR Decree VI/MPR/2000).

10. Undoing state capture, lawfully

10.1

State capture in Sudan can be measured. C4ADS identified 408 state-controlled enterprises, in sectors as diverse as agriculture, banking and military industry, which it calls 'the most complete publicly-available representation of Sudanese SCEs' (C4ADS 2022, 10). Security-force companies were reported to number some 250, in sectors including gold, meat exports, flour and sesame (Ayferam 2023). Months earlier, the civilian cabinet had said it controlled only 18 per cent of state-sector resources (AFP 2020). For the economic costs of these holdings, see section 11.

After the revolution, the transitional authorities passed a law in November 2019 to dismantle the former regime. The same law dissolved the National Congress Party (Reuters 2019a; France 24 2019) and created the Committee for Dismantling the Regime of 30 June 1989 and Recovery of Public Funds (as renamed in 2020), commonly known as the Empowerment Removal Committee (Law on Dismantling the Regime of 30 June 1989 and Removal of Empowerment 2019; Regime Dismantling and Disempowerment Act Amendment 2020; Dabanga 2021). Its purpose was to replace the party-state with a state of law. Its legal mandate was to dismantle the regime of 30 June 1989 and remove its empowerment, which meant reviewing appointments, assets and financing tied to that regime. That regime was the Muslim Brotherhood's (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.; Abdelwahid 2008), but the law names the regime, not the movement. The October 2021 coup halted its work.

The coup did more than stop the committee. On the day of the coup the United States condemned the actions against "Sudan's civilian-led transitional government" (US Department of State 2021). Two days later the World Bank paused its disbursements (see section 11.9). In the author's assessment, the coup ended the dismantling of the empowerment network at the moment the transitional government was beginning to receive international support. That timing fits the US government's statement that Sudanese Islamists "played a key role in derailing Sudan's progress toward a democratic transition" (US Department of State 2025b).

On 17 March 2026 the committee announced that it would resume work; it described its 2021 dissolution as lacking legal legitimacy (Sudan Tribune 2026a). No new legal instrument has been reported: the committee resumed on its own announcement, rejecting its 2021 freezing, and its head said in April that it had been restructured to operate from outside Sudan (Sudan Tribune 2026b).

10.3

A credible paper has to be candid about the committee's record. Two UN Special Rapporteurs raised with the government the alleged arbitrary dismissal of 151 judges in August 2020, under a procedure that allegedly 'did not comply with established international standards' (OHCHR 2021), and in October 2021 the High Court chamber hearing appeals against the committee's decisions reinstated senior prosecutors and returned 15 judges to service (Dabanga 2021).

Such failures matter twice over. They wrong the individuals concerned, and they hand the captured networks a story of persecution that helps them return.

10.4

The principle the author draws from this is simple. Undoing capture means undoing appointment by loyalty, not punishing membership. Belonging to a party should not, by itself, bar a qualified person from public office. Using public office to serve a movement, taking public assets or committing crimes should be tested individually, with evidence, in a body whose decisions courts can review.

A lawful asset-recovery body with a clear statutory mandate, due process and full judicial review of its decisions.

Merit-based civil service rules, with open competition for appointments and an independent public service commission.

Civilian ownership of security-sector companies. Commercial companies held by the army and security services should be transferred to civilian ownership or sold, under parliamentary oversight (see section 11.7).

International cooperation on assets held abroad, including mutual legal assistance agreements.

Individual accountability. Courts should handle crimes and corruption case by case, and no one should be excluded from public life by affiliation alone.

10.5

The Darfur cases at the ICC. Darfur was the first situation the UN Security Council referred to the International Criminal Court. Acting under Chapter VII, the Council referred the situation in Darfur since 1 July 2002 to the Prosecutor in Resolution 1593 of 31 March 2005. The Prosecutor found that Sudan's own National Commission of Inquiry had concluded that government forces committed crimes against humanity in each of the states of Darfur. Despite official announcements, however, "no judicial proceedings were conducted in relation to those crimes" (ICC OTP 2012, paras. 1–3).

The Court issued an arrest warrant for Ahmad Harun on 27 April 2007 (ICC n.d.-b). It issued a first warrant for President Omar al-Bashir on 4 March 2009, for five counts of crimes against humanity and two of war crimes. This was the first warrant the ICC had ever issued for a sitting head of state (ICC 2009). A second warrant followed on 12 July 2010 for three counts of genocide against the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa (ICC 2010). In January 2024 the Prosecutor reported that the warrants for al-Bashir, Abdel Raheem Hussein and Harun "remain active", and that Sudan remains obliged either to try them genuinely or to surrender them to the Court (ICC OTP 2024, para. 22).

The first trial has now ended. On 6 October 2025 Trial Chamber I found Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman ("Ali Kushayb"), a Janjaweed leader, guilty of 27 counts of crimes against

humanity and war crimes committed in Darfur between August 2003 and April 2004. The counts included murder, torture, rape and persecution (ICC 2025a). On 9 December 2025 he was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment (ICC 2025b). Appeals against both the conviction and the sentence are pending (ICC n.d.-b).

The verdict matters for the present war. It shows that crimes committed by the Janjaweed and government forces in 2003–04 can be proved to the criminal standard, two decades later, against an individual commander. It also shows the cost of impunity. In the Prosecutor's words, the current conflict is "the tragic legacy of the armed conflict that began there in 2003" (ICC OTP 2024, para. 23). None of the three men has been surrendered to the Court (ICC OTP 2024, para. 22). In the author's assessment, only a civilian government accountable to Sudan's victims would have both the will and the legitimacy to cooperate fully with the Court.

Accountability for the current war. The UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan has documented the crimes of the present war in detail (OHCHR 2024a; OHCHR 2024b). Any settlement should commit the Sudanese state to cooperate with the ICC and with the Mission's successors, and should rule out amnesty for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

A Sudanese truth process. Courts can try only a small number of people. The Juba Agreement already promised mechanisms for transitional justice, compensation and reparation in its Darfur, Two Areas and Eastern tracks, and a national transitional justice commission (Thomas 2023, 9–10). None was set up. The comparative cases in section 8.5 suggest four design rules:

- **Cover every armed party and every period** from 30 June 1989 onwards, including the crimes of the current war, as Colombia's system covers both the FARC and the state's own forces (JEP n.d.).
- **Reach women and the provinces from the start**, rather than correcting a gap later, as Tunisia had to do (El Gantri 2016).
- **Link truth to reparation, the search for the missing, and return of land and property** (see section 13.4), so that testimony brings practical redress.
- **Entrench the process in the constitution**, so that a change of government cannot close it, as Colombia did in 2017 (JEP n.d.).

11. The economy and development: from raw exports to a productive state

11.1

Sudan has most of what a modern agricultural economy needs. Some 73.5 million hectares are suitable for farming, yet less than 35 per cent of that land is used. The country holds about 115.4 million head of livestock, and before the war agriculture fed and employed nearly 65 per cent of the population while contributing more than 24 per cent of GDP (FAO n.d.-a). After the

loss of southern oil in 2011, agriculture became the mainstay of the export earnings that were left, rising to 55 per cent of exports by 2019 (World Bank 2020).

Yet for seven decades the structure of the economy has barely changed. Sudan sells what it grows and raises in raw form, and it earns little from turning it into anything else. Sheep, goats and gum arabic leave the country largely unprocessed, and the World Bank sees "significant upside potential" in processing them at home (World Bank 2020). Gum arabic makes the point most sharply. Sudan supplied between 70 and 77 per cent of world gum arabic exports in 2014–16, worth roughly US$150 million a year, and almost all of it left as raw gum (Atar Network 2025). No country has built lasting prosperity this way. An economy that ships raw materials ties its fortunes to world prices it cannot control, creates few skilled jobs and raises little public revenue to pay for schools, clinics and roads.

The author's argument is that this is a political failure before it is an economic one. A productive economy needs a state that serves producers rather than a narrow network, and that is the case for civilian rule made in economic terms.

11.2

From the 1989 coup, the Muslim Brotherhood set about capturing the state. Its policy of *tamkeen* ("empowerment") put loyalty to the movement above competence, and reshuffled the military, the civil service, parastatal companies and even some private businesses (Mann 2014, 15; see section 9).

The economic side of the Muslim Brotherhood's project was *tamkeen* itself: the movement purged and restaffed state enterprises with its own people; in the Sudan Development Corporation, one interviewee estimated, at least 45 per cent of staff were replaced (Mann 2014, 15; see section 9). A separate problem outlived the regime. By 2023, security forces were reported to control some 250 companies in critical sectors (Ayferam 2023). As set out in section 10, the security sector's commercial holdings formed a large share of the economy. A government that cannot see or tax most of the economy cannot plan, borrow or invest. Oil showed the same pattern. The oil years brought growth, but it was narrow and dependent on a single export, and when the South seceded in 2011 Sudan lost about three-quarters of its oil output (IMF 2012, para. 2). The revenue had not been turned into a productive base, so little survived the shock.

The Inqaz years saw real growth during the oil boom and some new

infrastructure. That should be acknowledged. But the gains were concentrated, rested on one commodity and did not survive secession, which is the opposite of the broad-based development Sudan needs.

11.3

Agriculture is not only Sudan's largest employer; it is also bound up with its conflicts. In Greater Kordofan, disputes over stock routes, water points and gum arabic forests have turned violent, and the customary systems that once settled them are failing under larger herds,

shrinking water and pasture, and the spread of arms (Siddig, El Harizi and Prato 2007). In Darfur, herds move north with the rains and return south after the harvest along livestock corridors, known as *murhal*, which farms sometimes block (Young and Ismail 2019). Any agricultural strategy must therefore be a peace strategy too. Secure land tenure, protected livestock corridors and fair access to water matter as much as new machinery.

The war that began in April 2023 has made the task far larger. Real GDP fell by 29.4 per cent in 2023 and by a further 13.5 per cent in 2024 (World Bank 2025a); the Central Bank of Sudan puts the 2024 contraction at 12.7 per cent (Central Bank of Sudan 2025a). Inflation has eased from extreme levels but remains very high, falling from 173.7 per cent in March 2025 to 113.35 per cent in June 2025 and 78.39 per cent at the end of July 2025 (Central Bank of Sudan 2025a, 2025b). Extreme poverty rose from 33 per cent of the population in 2022 to 71 per cent in 2024, and the World Bank does not expect output to regain its pre-war level before 2031 (World Bank 2025a).

11.4

The Gezira Scheme is the clearest example of what Sudan has and what it has wasted. Inaugurated in 1925, it covers about 2.2 million feddans (Salman 2010) between the Blue and White Niles. Around 130,000 tenant farmers work it, and about three million people depend on it (Salman 2010). Its water arrives by gravity from the Sennar and Roseires dams, without pumping, and it uses about 35 per cent of Sudan's Nile allocation (Ishag 2026; World Bank 2000).

Gravity irrigation is the scheme's great advantage and, once canals silt up and control structures fail, its weakness. One recent study estimates that only about 45 per cent of the 6–7 billion cubic metres released each year is used effectively, and that cropping intensity fell from 79 per cent in 1990 to 45 per cent in 2014 (Ishag 2026). Decline accelerated after the 2005 Gezira Scheme Act changed how the scheme was managed (Salman 2010). The war then brought damaged canals and looted control systems after December 2023 (FAO 2025). One recent study models what repair could recover: around 200 million m³ a year from canal rehabilitation alone and, with flow sensors, automated farm-gate control, remote sensing and precision irrigation, effective water use of about 55 per cent and up to 880 million m³ of additional usable water, enough for an estimated 150,000–200,000 extra feddans of wheat (Ishag 2026). These are modelled figures from a single study, not results. Earlier estimates differ: a 1990 World Bank review put the scheme's overall irrigation efficiency at around 65– 70 per cent, higher than in most large-scale irrigation projects in the world (Plusquellec 1990, 39), while later work finds that water supplied in excess of requirements rose from 12 to 80 per cent as management passed between institutions (Elshaikh et al. 2018). What the sources agree on is that the scheme's performance depends on maintenance and management, and that both require a working administration and secure fields.

Restoring Gezira would be the fastest way to put food back on Sudanese tables and income back in farmers' hands, and it would show what a civilian government focused on producers can deliver. Water management, solar power and farm technology for the scheme are discussed in section 12.

11.5

During the 2019–21 transition, the civilian government set out a framework of five development belts to spread investment across Sudan's regions and link local production to regional and world markets (Al-Democrati 2020; Youm7 2021; Al-Wafd 2021). As publicly described, the belts are:

The southern Tamazuj ("integration") belt, running about 2,000 km along the border with South Sudan from the Central African Republic to Ethiopia, for farming, livestock and minerals developed jointly with South Sudan (Al-Wafd 2021).

The gum arabic belt, for production and processing. The stated aims were to end raw exports and set up a gum exchange in El Obeid (Youm7 2021). Published sources differ on the belt's extent (Al-Democrati 2020; Al-Nilin 2020), so no boundary is given here.

The rivers (Nile) belt, for irrigated agriculture from the White Nile to the Atbara river (Al-Democrati 2020; Al-Wafd 2021).

The specialised crops belt, for production and value chains from Khartoum to the Egyptian border (Al-Democrati 2020; Al-Wafd 2021).

The Red Sea (eastern) belt, for minerals, ports, trade and agriculture (Al-Wafd 2021).

The belts are the economic counterpart to federalism (section 7). Federalism gives the regions political power; the belts give each region a productive base. They also turn borders into places of cooperation rather than friction. Sudan and South Sudan already committed in 2012 to a "soft border" across which "people can move, and goods and services can flow easily", to promote investment along it and to allow local subsistence trade without formal taxation (Agreement on Border Issues 2012; African Transitional Justice Hub n.d.).

The goal is an economy that processes what it grows and mines. The World Bank's value-chain analysis assesses five "high-potential agricultural value chains": gum arabic, sesame seeds, livestock (meat), horticulture and dairy (World Bank 2020, 2). Commodity exchanges, starting with gum arabic, would help bring trade into the open, cut smuggling and connect producers to world prices. Each processed tonne keeps jobs, skills and tax revenue in Sudan rather than abroad.

11.7

None of this works without peace and a civilian state. Five conditions stand out.

- **Security on farmland**, so that farmers can plant and harvest.
- **Civilian control of security-owned companies, and of any assets identified through lawful, published findings**, bringing them under the finance ministry and into the tax base (section 10).
- **Land tenure that protects smallholders and pastoralists.** Large schemes in Sudan have a record of land grabs and displacement, and the author's model must protect existing users, not simply hand land to investors.

- **Finance**, including the debt relief and international support that the transition began to unlock (IMF 2021a) and that the 2021 coup interrupted (World Bank 2021).
- **The return of displaced farmers.** About four million people had returned home by March 2026 (UK Home Office 2026).

The economic case for civilian rule comes down to this: Sudan's land, water and people can feed the country and much of the region, but only a state that answers to its citizens, and not to a captured network, will invest in them.

11.8

Section 11.3 gives the headline figures for the fall in output. Behind those totals sits a collapse that reached every part of the economy, and its shape matters for recovery because it shows what was lost and what survived.

Where output fell. The damage was heaviest where the economy was most concentrated. Services, which in Sudan means mostly health, education, telecommunications, finance and trade, were clustered in Khartoum, and the World Bank estimates that the sector's contribution to GDP contracted by 15.8 per cent in 2023 and by 6.5 per cent in 2024. Industry was hit by the destruction of factories, broken supply chains and damage to oil pipelines and facilities; its contribution to GDP is estimated to have contracted by 7.3 per cent in 2023 and by 3.9 per cent in 2024 (World Bank 2025a, 22). Agriculture held up better, not because it was spared but because farming is spread across the country and much of it lies outside the main battlefields. This pattern points to the obvious place to begin recovery.

Prices. The Central Bank's monthly series, set out in 11.3, shows inflation falling from very high levels during 2025 (Central Bank of Sudan 2025a, 2025b). Annual-average figures from the African Development Bank are a different series and should not be read against the monthly ones: on its measure, inflation averaged 150.2 per cent in 2025, down from 170.1 per cent in 2024 (African Development Bank 2026). The two series tell the same story, of prices rising very fast though somewhat less fast than at the worst point, but they measure different things and the paper reports both only with their sources.

The currency. Before the war, the transitional government had done what successive governments had avoided: on 21 February 2021 the Central Bank unified the official and parallel exchange rates, setting an indicative rate of 375 pounds to the dollar, against a previous official rate of 55, under a "flexible managed float" (Reuters 2021a; World Bank 2025a, 24). The war undid that reform. The World Bank reports that by December 2024 the official rate had depreciated by 233 per cent against April 2023, to SDG 1,994 per US dollar, while the parallel rate had depreciated by 355 per cent, to SDG 2,550. By March 2025 the official rate had settled at about SDG 2,019, against a parallel rate of SDG 2,679 (World Bank 2025a, 24). A gap of that size between two rates is more than a technical problem. It rewards whoever has access to dollars at the official rate, pushes remittances out of the banking system and invites the same rent-seeking the 2021 reform was meant to end. The World Bank links a sharp fall in official remittances in 2024 to exactly this divergence (World Bank 2025a, 27). The ministry of finance also uses a separate customs exchange rate, raised to SDG 1,700 per dollar by December 2024,

which the World Bank describes as functioning "entirely as an implicit tariff" (World Bank 2025a, 24).

Public finances. Revenue collection collapsed. Government revenues fell from 10 per cent of GDP in 2022 to 4.8 per cent in 2023 and 4.7 per cent in 2024, as businesses closed, ministries stopped functioning and the population scattered (World Bank 2025a, 26). The government responded mainly by cutting spending, including salaries and transfers, yet the fiscal deficit still widened from 1.7 per cent of GDP in 2022 to an estimated 4.1 per cent in 2024 (World Bank 2025a, 26). Because Sudan cannot borrow, the World Bank finds that printing money is "the only option for financing deficits" (World Bank 2025a, 26). That is the direct link between the fiscal collapse and inflation. The African Development Bank, on its own figures, puts the deficit at 2.8 per cent of GDP in 2025, up from 1.6 per cent in 2024, financed by continued monetisation, and foreign exchange reserves at US$1.17 billion, or 1.1 months of imports (African Development Bank 2026). The two institutions' deficit figures for 2024 differ (4.1 and 1.6 per cent of GDP), and both are given here with their sources.

Trade. The Central Bank's first foreign trade digest since the war began, as analysed by the Atar Network, shows exports falling from US$4.35 billion in 2022 to US$3.13 billion in 2024, a 28 per cent fall, while imports fell from US$11.09 billion to US$4.91 billion, a 66 per cent fall, percentages as printed by Atar (Elkamel 2025, 1). The trade deficit therefore narrowed to US$1.78 billion, the smallest in years. This was not a sign of health. Imports fell because demand and purchasing power collapsed, and the composition of what Sudan bought shifted from raw materials to finished goods as domestic processing stopped. Wheat imports fell from US$1.06 billion to US$257.42 million while wheat flour imports rose more than fourfold, to US$317.42 million, most likely because the flour mills of Khartoum North were in the war zone; fertiliser imports fell from US$213.77 million to US$15.7 million (Elkamel 2025). The fertiliser figure alone forecasts weaker harvests.

Debt. The World Bank puts public debt at 147.4 per cent of GDP in 2024 (World Bank 2025a, 21). As 11.9 explains, almost all of Sudan's external debt is old, and the relief process that would have removed most of it stopped in 2021.

The longer view. The UN Development Programme and the Institute for Security Studies estimate that Sudan lost US$6.4 billion of GDP in 2023 alone and that average incomes have fallen to a level last seen in 1992. On their modelling, even if the war ends in 2026, average growth to 2043 would be only 1.2 per cent without wider reform; with peace and sustained reform across governance, agriculture, health, education, infrastructure and trade, average growth could reach 5 per cent and GDP US$58.2 billion by 2043 (UNDP 2026). These are scenario projections, not forecasts, but they make the paper's central point in numbers: peace is necessary, and on its own it is not enough.

11.9

The single largest economic achievement of the 2019–21 transition was to bring Sudan back into the international financial system after three decades of isolation. Its debt record shows both how close the country came and what it lost.

The decision point. On 29 June 2021 the boards of the IMF and the World Bank's International Development Association found that Sudan had taken the steps needed to begin receiving debt relief under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. Sudan became the 38th country to reach the HIPC decision point (IMF 2021a). At the start of the process its public and publicly guaranteed external debt was estimated at US$56.2 billion in net present value terms; traditional relief would reduce that to US$30.9 billion, and HIPC relief proper was estimated at a further US$23.3 billion, of which US$4.6 billion would come from multilateral, US$17.0 billion from bilateral and US$1.7 billion from commercial creditors (IMF 2021a). Taking HIPC together with the initiatives anchored to it, the external debt was to be reduced by more than US$50 billion in net present value terms, over 90 per cent of the total, if Sudan reached the completion point "in about three years' time" (IMF 2021a). The heads of the two institutions called it "by far the largest such HIPC operation", more than three times the next largest case (IMF and World Bank 2021).

The Fund programme. On the same day the IMF approved a 39-month Extended Credit Facility arrangement of SDR 1,733.051 million, about US$2,472.7 million, with an immediate disbursement of SDR 991.551 million, about US$1,414.7 million (IMF 2021c). The dollar figures are the IMF's own conversions at the time.

The Paris Club. On 15 July 2021 the Paris Club creditors agreed with Sudan to restructure its debt to them. The decision consolidated about US$23.5 billion, most of it arrears and late interest, cancelled US$14.1 billion and rescheduled about US$9.4 billion, which was to be addressed again at the completion point. On an exceptional basis no payments were expected from Sudan until at least 1 December 2024, provided it continued to implement an IMF-supported programme (Paris Club 2021). The Paris Club noted that more than 99 per cent of the US$23.5 billion owed to its members at the end of 2020 consisted of arrears and late interest (Paris Club 2021). In other words, the debt was largely a legacy of the regime's years of default, not of new borrowing.

Arrears clearance. Reaching the decision point required Sudan first to clear its arrears to the international institutions. The IMF press release states that Sudan's debt to the Fund would be paid at the completion point with voluntary contributions from more than 100 member countries (IMF 2021a).

What the coup froze. The military takeover of 25 October 2021 stopped the process. Two days later the World Bank said it had paused all disbursements to Sudan and stopped processing new operations (World Bank 2021). By December, the finance minister of the dissolved government told Reuters that Sudan had been unable to access US$650 million in international funding in November, including US$500 million of World Bank budget support and US$150 million in IMF special drawing rights (Reuters 2021b). The Paris Club announced in June 2022 that the signature of the bilateral agreements implementing its July 2021 decision was "suspended until the situation improves and the implementation of the IMF program resumes" (Paris Club 2022). The World Bank's 2025 update confirms that the HIPC process "was interrupted by the 2021 military intervention" and that the absence of HIPC relief is one reason public debt will stay high (World Bank 2025a, 26).

The cost of that interruption is hard to overstate. The completion point Sudan was expected to reach by June 2024 (Paris Club 2021) never came. Instead of a debt of about US$6 billion, 14 per cent of GDP, which is where the IMF and World Bank expected it to fall at completion (IMF 2021a), Sudan entered its war with its old debt intact and with no access to new concessional finance. This is the economic case for civilian rule at its starkest. The relief was not lost because creditors changed their minds; it was lost because the government that had earned it was removed.

What a civilian government would need to do. On the institutions' own terms, relief resumes only with a government they can deal with and an IMF-supported programme in place (Paris Club 2021; World Bank 2025a, 26). A restored civilian government would therefore need, early on, to re-establish a Fund programme, ask creditors to revisit the completion-point timetable and seek relief on comparable terms from non-Paris Club and commercial creditors, which Sudan committed to do in 2021 (Paris Club 2021).

Since the loss of southern oil, gold has become Sudan's most important export and its most contested resource. About half of Sudan's recorded exports in 2024 were gold, according to the Atar Network's analysis of the Central Bank's trade digest (Elkamel 2025). The security sector's commercial holdings in gold and other sectors are described in section 10.1 and are not repeated here. This subsection deals with production, smuggling and what gold means for the public finances.

How much is produced. Official figures are uncertain and do not agree. The state-owned Sudanese Mineral Resources Company said production reached 64 tonnes in 2024, up from 41.8 tonnes in 2022 (Sudan Tribune 2025e). SWISSAID, using official data, records 53.6 tonnes of declared artisanal and small-scale production in 2024 and 5.7 tonnes of industrial production, and estimates a further 15–20 tonnes of undeclared artisanal output; it concludes that Sudan produces between 70 and 90 tonnes a year (SWISSAID 2025, 1). Artisanal and small-scale mining dominates, at 91.5 per cent of declared production in 2024 on SWISSAID's figures (SWISSAID 2025, 2).

How much leaves officially. Here too the figures differ by source. For 2024 the Central Bank reported provisional exports of 22.918 tonnes worth US$1.57 billion, the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company 27.96 tonnes worth US$1.59 billion, and the ministry of finance 31 tonnes (all as compiled in SWISSAID 2025, 26). The paper should use one series and name it; the author's preference is the Central Bank's, as the official trade statistic, with the others noted.

How much is smuggled. By any measure, much of Sudan's gold never passes through official channels. SWISSAID estimates non-declared exports at more than 40 tonnes in 2024, and calculates that between 50 and 70 per cent of production is smuggled out each year and that at least 400 tonnes were smuggled between 2012 and 2024 (SWISSAID 2025, 1, 3). Chatham House cites estimates that before the war 50–80 per cent of the country's gold was smuggled rather than exported through official channels (Soliman and Baldo 2025, ch. 2). The ranges differ, and both are reported as given.

Who controls it. Since the war, gold produced in areas held by the Rapid Support Forces does not appear in official export figures (SWISSAID 2025, 27), and key mines along the borders with

South Sudan and the Central African Republic are reported to be under RSF control, according to industry sources (Sudan Tribune 2025e). Chatham House describes the involvement of the national intelligence service, the army and the RSF in the gold sector as having made it "difficult for the state to maintain the rule of law", and describes a policy of "allowing armed actors free rein in the gold sector" as integral to the former regime's survival strategy (Soliman and Baldo 2025, ch. 2). The point for economic policy is that gold has financed armed actors on both sides of the war and has done little for the public purse. The detailed ownership picture belongs in section 10.1.

What it costs the state. Every smuggled tonne is lost revenue and lost foreign exchange. At the Central Bank's own 2024 figures, the recorded 22.918 tonnes earned US$1.57 billion (SWISSAID 2025, 26). The author does not put a value on smuggled gold: the volume estimates are too wide, and any figure would be the author's own calculation rather than a published one.

The wider informal economy. Gold is the largest but not the only flow outside the state's view. The gap between official and parallel exchange rates pushes remittances outside the banks (World Bank 2025a, 27), and the African Development Bank lists "a large informal economy" among the main constraints on Sudan's ability to raise revenue (African Development Bank 2026).

Policy. Three lines of policy follow, each drawn from the analysis rather than from a costed plan. First, bring gold sales into the open, through a licensed buying system in which the state pays a price close to the world price, so that selling officially is worth more than smuggling. Second, publish production, export and revenue figures that reconcile with one another, which the current three-source picture shows is not the case (SWISSAID 2025). Sudan is not a member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (SWISSAID 2025, 1), and joining it would be a natural first step for a civilian government. Third, place every state stake in gold under the ministry of finance, as 11.7 and section 10 propose for all security-owned companies. None of this works while gold areas are held by armed forces, which is why it belongs in a peace settlement as well as in an economic programme.

Two of Sudan's oldest exports came through the war better than most of the economy, and they show where a recovery can start.

Livestock. The World Bank estimates that livestock contributes about 12 per cent of GDP and 33 per cent of agricultural GDP, that animals are raised in almost every part of the country, and that Sudan holds "a dominant position in regional trade for sheep and sheep meat" (World Bank 2025a, 32). The Atar Network, drawing on official 2022 figures, puts the national herd at over 111 million head: about 42 million sheep, 33 million goats, 33 million cattle and 5 million camels (Nougud 2024). (Section 11.1 uses FAO's figure; the two are different sources and years and are not combined.)

Live animal exports held up during the war and even grew. On the Central Bank's trade data as analysed by Atar, sheep exports rose from US$226.63 million in 2022 to US$392.23 million in 2024 and goat exports from US$2.16 million to US$8.28 million (Elkamel 2025). Exports to Saudi Arabia, the main market for live animals, rose from US$317.3 million to US$437.41 million over the same period, almost all of it livestock (Elkamel 2025).

The war's effect shows in what did not survive. Exports of slaughtered meat fell from US$101.79 million in 2022 to US$2.3 million in 2024, which Atar attributes most likely to the shutdown of key slaughterhouses such as the Kadaro facility in Khartoum North, with a capacity of 1,500 head a day (Elkamel 2025, 7). That is the raw-export trap of section 11.1 in sharp form. Sudan now ships more animals on the hoof, and almost no processed meat. The value that slaughtering, chilling, packing and tanning would add, along with the jobs and the hides, leather and by-products, is earned elsewhere. The Atar Network also notes that successive governments failed to invest in slaughterhouses and in using hides and wool, leaving a "massive annual waste of livestock resources" (Nougud 2024).

Restoring processed meat exports means rebuilding export slaughter capacity of the kind lost at Kadaro (Elkamel 2025, 7) and protecting livestock corridors (section 11.3) so that herders can move animals safely to market.

Gum arabic. Section 11.1 sets out Sudan's dominance of the world gum trade. The World Bank describes Sudan as a "global price setter in gum arabic and sesame seeds" and identifies gum arabic, with seeds, nuts, leather and livestock, among the products in which Sudan likely has a genuine comparative advantage (World Bank 2025a, 32). The gum belt stretches from Gedaref State in the east to Darfur in the west, across thirteen of Sudan's eighteen states, and Kordofan and Darfur produce over 75 per cent of the country's gum arabic; in those regions the supply and value chains "have collapsed entirely" (Atar Network 2025, 3, 5). The Rapid Support Forces control most of the gum belt in Kordofan and Darfur, except for parts of North and West Kordofan and northern Darfur, and in October 2024 their advisory council banned moving agricultural products, livestock and other goods from areas they hold to army-held areas. Atar reports that this cut crop prices and that traders stopped financing farmers; trucks that do move face RSF checkpoints charging SDG 100,000–200,000 each on the route to the Al-Dabba market in Northern State (Atar Network 2025, 8–9).

Gum arabic illustrates both the opportunity and the problem. It is a product the world buys and Sudan supplies better than anyone, yet almost all of it leaves raw (Atar Network 2025). The transitional government's gum belt, with its plan to end raw exports, is set out in section 11.5.

Sesame and cotton. The trade digest also shows the fragility of other crops: cotton exports fell from US$383.79 million in 2022 to US$82.38 million in 2024 (Elkamel 2025, 6–7), and exports of processed vegetable goods including sesame oil fell from US$16.09 million to US$1.98 million (Elkamel 2025). Here again the processed product suffered most.

Section 11.4 describes the Gezira Scheme, its size and its decline, and section 12.2 deals with water management and technology. The modelled savings from repair, and the evidence that disagrees with them, are set out at the end of 11.4 and are not repeated here. This subsection asks a different question: what is Gezira worth to the national economy, and what would bringing it back require?

Its place in the economy. Gezira matters out of proportion to its share of Sudan's land. The tenant farmers and the people who depend on it are counted in section 11.4, and its water arrives by gravity, without the pumping costs that burden other irrigated schemes (section

11.4). Section 11.8 gives the cost of the wheat and flour Sudan imported in 2024. Every tonne grown at Gezira is a tonne that need not be bought abroad with scarce dollars.

What the war did. Section 11.4 records damage to canals and looted control systems after December 2023 (FAO 2025). FAO's March 2026 crop assessment puts the Gezira Scheme's total area at 924,000 hectares, of which 223,440 hectares, or 24 per cent, were planted in 2025 (FAO 2026, 16, table 1).

What partial support has already achieved. One small piece of evidence shows how quickly support for inputs can pay off. The World Bank's Sudan Thabat project, run through a multi-donor trust fund, supported 25,000 farmer households to harvest 73,000 tonnes of wheat in the 2024/25 winter season, which the Bank puts at 18 per cent of national wheat production that season; the assistance, delivered through WFP to 148 farmer organisations, covered 60,000 feddans and cost US$9 million (World Bank 2025b, 14–15). The project's original financing covered Northern, River Nile and Kassala states, so this is not a Gezira figure, and should not be used as one, but it shows that seeds, fertiliser and finance reaching farmers can move national output even in wartime.

The governance question. The scheme's decline accelerated after the 2005 Gezira Scheme Act changed how the scheme was managed (Salman 2010). Any recovery programme will have to decide who runs the canals, who pays for water and how tenants' rights are protected. The author does not set out a preferred model here.

11.13

No independent, comprehensive damage and needs assessment for Sudan has been published. The author has looked for one and has not found it. What exists is a set of partial estimates of very different quality, and the paper should present them as such.

Government estimates. Reuters reported in May 2025 that Sudanese authorities estimated reconstruction needs at US$300 billion for Khartoum and US$700 billion for the rest of the country, and that the UN was preparing its own estimates (Reuters 2025d). These are government figures, not independently assessed, and no method has been published with them. They should be quoted only as the authorities' estimate.

Sector estimates. Sudan's health minister said in April 2025 that the health sector had suffered estimated losses of US$11 billion, and that US$2.2 billion was needed for urgent rehabilitation in the first year (Sudan Tribune 2025d). Again this is a government estimate. Reuters also reported damage to the al-Jaili refinery, Sudan's main refinery, and a fall in oil production to 24,000 barrels a day (Reuters 2025d).

Macroeconomic losses. The UNDP and the Institute for Security Studies estimate the GDP lost in 2023 at US$6.4 billion (UNDP 2026). This is a measure of lost output, not of the cost of rebuilding, and the two should not be confused. The World Bank's 2025 update describes the damage qualitatively, sector by sector, but does not give a national damage figure (World Bank 2025a).

What is under way. The World Bank's trust fund report for 2024–25 says it was preparing an economic and social impact assessment of the conflict, titled *Sudan: Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Conflict*, for which the team had developed an analysis framework (World Bank 2025b); the report gives no publication date. When it is published it should replace the government figures as the paper's main reference.

Why the gap matters. Without an independent assessment, donors cannot plan, and any figure the paper uses will be challenged. The author's recommendation is that a civilian government's first economic act should be to commission, with the World Bank, the UN and the African Development Bank, a joint damage and needs assessment, and to publish it in full.

The author has set herself a strict rule for this subsection. She uses only cost and financing figures that have been published by a named institution, and she marks clearly where none exist. She does not add figures together where they come from different sources, years or methods, and she does not produce a single headline total. The result is less tidy than a costed plan with a round number at the bottom. It is also more honest, and a plan built on invented figures would not survive its first meeting with a creditor.

The path is set out in three phases. The phases are the author's own framework; the figures within them are the sources'.

Phase 1: stabilisation (first year after a ceasefire)

Element	Published figure	Source	Status
Emergency health rehabilitation	US$2.2 billion, first year	Health minister, in Sudan Tribune 2025d	Government estimate
Community services, food production (Thabat project)	US$130 million, plus US$60 million (trust fund partners) and US$50 million (World Bank) additional financing	World Bank 2025b	Committed, partly disbursed
Restoring budget support frozen in 2021	US$500 million (World Bank budget support) and US$150 million (IMF SDRs) were paused in late 2021	Reuters 2021b	Historical; would need renegotiation
Social protection (cash transfers)	No published estimate	n/a	n/a
Restoring the power grid	No published estimate	n/a	n/a
Agricultural inputs for the first season (seed, fertiliser)	No published estimate	n/a	n/a

The priorities in this phase follow from 11.8: revenue has collapsed, the currency is split, and the only source of deficit finance is printing money. A first-year programme would aim to restore basic revenue collection, reunify the exchange rate (World Bank 2025a, 24) and get inputs to farmers in time for the first planting season.

Phase 2: re-engagement and debt relief (years one to three)

Element	Published figure	Source	Status
HIPC and related debt relief	More than US$50 billion (NPV), reducing external debt from about US$56 billion to about US$6 billion at completion point	IMF 2021a	Agreed in 2021; frozen after the coup
Paris Club treatment	US$14.1 billion cancelled; about US$9.4 billion rescheduled	Paris Club 2021	Bilateral agreements suspended
IMF Extended Credit Facility	SDR 1,733.051 million (about US$2,472.7 million at the time)	IMF 2021c	2021 arrangement; a new one would be needed
New concessional finance from the World Bank and AfDB	No published estimate	n/a	n/a

Debt relief is not new money. It removes a burden that Sudan could never have paid, and it reopens access to grants and concessional loans. That is why the 2021 package mattered so much, and why its suspension did so much harm (11.9). The figures in this table are from 2021 and would change on any renegotiation.

Phase 3: reconstruction and productive investment (years three onward)

Element	Published figure	Source	Status
National reconstruction	US$300 billion (Khartoum) and US$700 billion (rest of Sudan)	Sudanese authorities, in Reuters 2025d	Government estimate; no method published
Gezira rehabilitation	No published estimate	n/a	n/a
Export abattoirs, cold chain, veterinary certification	No published estimate	n/a	n/a
Gum arabic processing and El Obeid exchange	No published estimate	n/a	n/a
Transport links for the five development belts (11.5)	No published estimate	n/a	n/a
Digital and AI investments	See section 12	Section 12	Costed there, where sourced

What the table shows. Two things stand out. The first is that the only large figures available are the debt relief already agreed in 2021 and the government's own reconstruction estimate, and they are of entirely different kinds: one is a negotiated, documented package from the IMF and World Bank; the other is an unexplained total. The second is how much of what Sudan most needs, from a working grid to export abattoirs, has no published cost estimate that the author could find. Filling those gaps is itself a task for a civilian government, and the joint needs assessment proposed in 11.13 is the way to do it.

Growth. The African Development Bank projects growth of 2.1 per cent in 2026 and 3.2 per cent in 2027, assuming reconstruction spending and a gradual resumption of activity, and says a durable peace agreement would "materially improve prospects" (African Development Bank 2026). The UNDP–ISS scenarios set out in 11.8 show what is at stake over the longer term: slow growth even after the war ends without wider reform, and much faster growth with peace and

reform together (UNDP 2026). The World Bank does not expect output to regain its pre-war level before 2031 (World Bank 2025a). These are three institutions' projections, made on different assumptions, and they are reported separately.

It may be objected that publishing a recovery path with so many gaps

weakens the case. The author takes the opposite view. A civilian government will be judged on whether its numbers hold up, and the old regime's habit of announcing large figures without sources is part of what this paper argues against. A path that shows plainly what is known, what was agreed and then lost, and what still has to be measured is a stronger basis for asking the world for help than a total no one can check.

12. Peace, civilian rule and technology: Sudan's path forward

War closes off Sudan's future; it does not decide it. The country's land, water and people are still there, and each of them is worth more under peace than under any battlefield gain. The author's case is simple: no armed faction can deliver what modern agriculture, a functioning health system and a skilled, connected population could deliver within a decade of a civilian settlement. Technology, including artificial intelligence, is not a luxury for after the war. It is one of the clearest reasons to end it. Section 11 sets out the size of Sudan's land, water and other resources, and section 13 the social and psychological cost of the war.

This chapter makes that case sector by sector. It does not argue that technology can substitute for peace, for public money or for trained people. It argues the reverse: that the tools now available to poor and fragile countries are powerful precisely because they multiply what a working state already does, and that they fail, or are turned against citizens, where the state is captured by armed men. The evidence comes from Sudan's own recent experience, including programmes begun under the transitional government of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, and from countries with comparable constraints that have already made these tools work: Ethiopia's farmer hotline, Rwanda's drone deliveries of blood, Kenya's and Somalia's mobile money, and India's digital identity system.

Three findings run through the chapter. First, much of the groundwork already exists: satellite monitoring of Sudan's crops and water, solar pumps installed by farmers, mobile banking used by millions, and a national identity register that was upgraded to pay cash transfers in 2021. Second, every one of these systems has been damaged or switched off by the war, and several were paused by the military takeover of October 2021 before the war began. Third, each requires decisions that only a legitimate civilian government can take: who may hold citizens' data, how public money reaches clinics and canals, and whether networks stay on when the state is criticised.

12.2

The Gezira Scheme, described in section 11.4, is watered by gravity from the Sennar and Roseires dams. As set out in section 11.4, the scheme's water losses are large and modelled

savings substantial. The decline is long-standing: a World Bank review found that efficiency began to deteriorate from the mid-1970s, with canals heavily silted and overgrown because operation and maintenance went unfunded (Salman 2010), and a peer-reviewed study of 1970–2015 data links worsening water management to repeated institutional changes in who ran the canals (Elshaikh et al. 2018). The technology to reverse this exists: flow sensors, automated farm-gate control, remote sensing and precision irrigation (Ishag 2026). It assumes a working scheme administration and secure fields. Beyond the canals, the same tools bear on the conflicts over stock routes and livestock corridors set out in section 11.3: researchers in West Darfur have used satellite tracking to follow herd movements amid protracted conflict (Sulieman and Young 2023), the kind of evidence that could help a civilian authority map and protect corridors and reduce clashes.

What AI adds to irrigation is not a new canal but better decisions about the canals that exist. Gezira's own history shows why. The scheme's minor canals were designed to act as terminal reservoirs, and the World Bank's 1990 review credited that design with keeping irrigation service going through about ten years of extreme difficulty, noting that "the decline in the overall performance of the official system was matched by a rise in compensating informal management" (Plusquellec 1990, 6). Informal management by experienced staff can hold a system together for a time; it cannot be scaled or audited. The next step is to make the scheme's knowledge explicit: measured flows at control structures, crop maps from satellites, and allocation rules that a manager can check against what each block actually received. Once those data exist, machine-learning models can forecast demand by block and season and flag where water is being lost. The peer-reviewed record shows how much depends on who is in charge: Elshaikh and colleagues found that the share of water supplied in excess of requirements rose from 12 to 80 per cent as responsibility passed between institutions (Elshaikh et al. 2018). Sensors do not settle that kind of institutional failure. They make it visible, which is the first condition for a government to fix it.

Two cautions belong here. The first is that Gezira's measured efficiency is disputed; section 11.4 sets out the modelled figures and the older estimates that differ from them, and this chapter does not repeat them. The second is that canals also carry sediment, and a Wageningen doctoral study of Gezira concluded that "rehabilitation of the system will not be one of the solutions to mitigate the accumulation of the deposition along the canals but the system itself needs remodelling" (Osman 2015). Digital tools serve that remodelling; they do not replace the engineering.

Most of Sudan's farmland is not irrigated, and the case for technology is at least as strong in the rain-fed belts described in section 11.5. There, the problem is not water allocation but information: who planted what, where the rains failed, and where pests or conflict have emptied fields.

Digital monitoring already reaches Sudan. FAO publishes satellite-based crop and drought indicators for the country, including an Agricultural Stress Index, Vegetation Health and Condition Indices and estimated rainfall, updated over a rolling 36-month window (FAO n.d.-b). Through its WaPOR programme it publishes remote-sensing estimates of water

productivity, with the Gezira Scheme as its pilot area in Sudan and partners that include the ministries of agriculture and irrigation, the Hydraulic Research Centre, the Agricultural Research Corporation and the University of Khartoum (FAO n.d.-c). In 2025 FAO went further, using satellite imagery to estimate cultivated cropland across every state for the 2024 summer season precisely "to address gaps caused by the absence of updated agricultural statistics" (FAO n.d.-c; Barhy et al. 2025). The report is candid about the method's limits: some fields may have been planted and then abandoned, and "in irrigated areas, remote sensing estimates might be higher than official reports, as some farmers did not fully report their cultivated land" (Barhy et al. 2025, 13). That candour is itself the lesson. Satellite data are now good enough to replace missing statistics, but they need ground checks by extension staff who can reach the fields.

AI belongs on that foundation: forecasting yields and pest outbreaks, targeting extension visits, and scheduling water releases. FAO's review of its own African projects shows basic mobile services still dominate, drones are weakly deployed and generative AI is at the piloting stage, best aimed first at extension agents (FAO 2024). For Sudan that means AI as a tool for the agronomist and the canal manager, introduced in the order institutions can use it. Soil monitoring follows the same order. Global soil maps already exist: SoilGrids, produced by ISRIC, uses machine learning on soil observations from about 240,000 locations and more than 400 environmental variables to map soil properties worldwide at 250-metre resolution, but its authors report that its uncertainty maps "highlighted the need for more soil observations" (Poggio et al. 2021). For Sudan, that means field sampling and laboratory capacity come first; models are only as good as the samples used to train them.

Ethiopia offers the closest comparable example of reaching farmers at scale with simple technology run by government. Its 8028 farmers' hotline, launched in 2014 by the Agricultural Transformation Agency with the Ministry of Agriculture, the national research institute and Ethio Telecom, gives voice and text advice on crops, fertiliser and pests in several local languages; a peer-reviewed review reports 2.2 million registered users in its first year and more than 5.1 million registered callers by 2018, with more than 2 million alerts sent on wheat rust, maize lethal necrosis, fall armyworm and unseasonal rain (Anteneh and Melak 2024). The service has also been improved by experiment. When first-time callers were allowed to skip registration and go straight to advice, the share who reached any content rose from 52 to 63 per cent (PxD n.d.). Sudan could adopt the same model quickly: a toll-free line, voice menus in Arabic and local languages, and advice tied to FAO's crop and drought indicators. What it needs is a ministry with a budget, a working phone network and researchers whose findings reach farmers.

Solar power extends the same logic beyond the gravity-fed core, where farmers off the national grid have relied on diesel pumps, whose rising prices, intermittent availability and transport to remote areas UNDP's evaluators found had all hurt farm productivity (UNDP 2022). In UNDP's Northern State pilot, switching to solar saved farmers about 960 litres of subsidised diesel per acre per season, measured across 11 surveyed farms (UNDP n.d.). A photovoltaic fund working with 11 commercial banks was set up to subsidise and finance 1,440 solar pumps in Northern State (UN DESA n.d.), but the project's terminal evaluation found it directly supported only 28 pumps against a target of 1,468, and saved 0.24 million litres of fuel a year against a target of

5.9 million, rating it moderately unsatisfactory; farmers installed further pumps on their own with bank loans, which the project did not count (UNDP 2022). In River Nile State, a programme funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency targeted 450 farmers (UNDP 2019); its terminal evaluation reports that the project invested US$3,941,824 in "350 solar pump systems targeted for 350 farmers", set up a State Solar Fund, trained "120 specialized engineers and extension staff" and 350 farmers, and that "more than 200 solar pumping systems [were] installed by farmers in the River Nile State that were self-financed" as a result (UNDP 2025, vi–vii). Demand exists. What is missing is security and a state able to scale it.

The Northern State shortfall deserves to be stated plainly, because it is the strongest evidence for this chapter's argument rather than against it. The project's own design documents identified the barriers as high capital cost, a lack of long-term finance and a lack of baseline data on diesel irrigation (UNDP 2022). Those are problems of finance and institutions, not of technology. Farmers who could get bank loans bought pumps without waiting for the project. A civilian government that restores a functioning banking system, keeps the tax and duty exemptions for most solar pump components that UNDP and the Ministry of Finance secured (UNDP n.d.), and runs a credible state solar fund would be scaling something farmers already want.

Solar power matters as much for clinics as for fields. Section 12.5 shows that UNFPA has already had to install or maintain solar systems at maternity hospitals during the war (UNFPA 2025). The cold chain for vaccines and oxytocin, the lights in a delivery room and the router that connects a rural clinic to a specialist all depend on power that Sudan's grid cannot guarantee outside the main towns. Off-grid solar is therefore the first layer of digital health, not a separate sector.

12.5

The war's cost to health is measured in lives that technology and basic logistics could have saved. Before April 2023, Sudan's National Medical Supplies Fund held enough oxytocin, the drug that prevents and treats bleeding after childbirth, to cover about seven months of national need. The stock became inaccessible when fighting reached Khartoum, and UNFPA warned it might no longer be fit for use, because oxytocin must be kept between 4 and 8°C (UNFPA Sudan 2023). Obstetric haemorrhage is the leading cause of maternal death in Sudan (UNFPA Sudan 2023). One doctor told UNFPA that her hospital lost six women in labour in a single month because of the shortage (UNFPA Sudan 2023). In the part of South Darfur that MSF could assess, there were 114 maternal deaths between January and mid-August 2024 (MSF 2024).

Joint WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA guidance is clear that oxytocin must stay in the cold chain throughout storage and distribution (WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA 2019). This is where modest technology saves lives:

- **Temperature monitoring.** Low-cost sensors in warehouses and clinic fridges, reporting by mobile network, show when a batch has been exposed to heat, so it is replaced rather than given to a woman in labour.
- **Stock tracking.** A national digital record of medicine stocks lets planners see shortages before they become deaths, and move supplies between states.

- **Solar power for health facilities.** UNFPA has already had to install or maintain solar systems at hospitals including Al Fashir Maternity Hospital, Sennar and Wad Al Abbas (UNFPA 2025). Reliable power keeps fridges, incubators and theatres running.
- **AI forecasting.** Once stock and temperature data exist, AI can predict demand by state and season and flag supply chains at risk.

Delivery to the last mile. Rwanda shows how far a determined health ministry can push supply logistics. Since 2017 it has used drones to deliver blood products to remote health facilities. A study in *The Lancet Global Health* of 20 facilities found that 12,733 blood product orders were delivered by drone between March 2017 and December 2019, that the mean drone delivery time was 49.6 minutes, 79 minutes faster than road delivery on official driving-time estimates, and that blood expiring unused fell by 67 per cent at 12 months (Nisingizwe et al. 2022). The authors did not measure patient outcomes, and called for studies of cost-effectiveness. The lesson for Sudan is not that drones come first. It is that Rwanda's results rested on a national blood service, facility ordering and a regulator able to license the flights. Each of those is a function of a state at peace.

Mobile reporting by community health workers. Rwanda's experience also shows the limits of technology on its own. Its RapidSMS system lets community health workers report on pregnant women and young children by text message. An evaluation of routine data from 461 health centres between 2012 and 2016 found that community health workers sent more than 9.3 million messages, but that the system increased the use of maternal and child health services only where it was combined with additional training, supervision and equipment; "implementing the RapidSMS system alone was ineffective" (Ruton et al. 2018). The authors conclude that mobile health programmes "should be considered as a part of more comprehensive interventions that provide the necessary equipment and health system capacity to support them" (Ruton et al. 2018). For Sudan, the lesson is direct: a reporting app for midwives and community health workers will save lives only if the clinic it reports to has staff, supplies and an ambulance.

Doctors and AI. Sudan's doctors, at home and abroad, are described in section 13.6. The cost of having no clinician at all is stark. Darfur24 reported, citing medical sources, that at least 11 pregnant women died after Um Dafuq hospital closed for months for lack of staff (Darfur24 2026). AI tools can extend their reach rather than replace them: decision support for clinicians in under-staffed hospitals, screening aids for diagnostics, and telemedicine linking specialists in the diaspora to rural and displaced communities. WHO's guidance holds that AI could help resource-poor countries bridge gaps in access to health services, while warning that systems trained mainly on data from high-income countries may not perform well in low- and middle-income settings (WHO 2021). WHO also finds that telemedicine can provide more timely care and expand access to underserved communities (WHO 2022b). The precondition is the same as in agriculture: a civilian ministry that sets standards, protects patient data and pays its staff.

WHO's guidance is as much a warning as an endorsement, and Sudan should adopt it as a rulebook. Its six principles start with protecting human autonomy, so that people stay in control of medical decisions, and go on to require safeguards for privacy and consent, regulatory checks on safety and accuracy, transparency before deployment, inclusiveness and

equity, and assessment of how systems perform in actual use (WHO 2021). It cautions against overestimating AI's benefits "at the expense of core investments and strategies required to achieve universal health coverage" (WHO 2021). For telemedicine, WHO recommends that every service sit within a national digital health strategy covering governance, investment, infrastructure, legislation, workforce and services (WHO 2022b). None of these can be issued by a commander. They require a health ministry, a data protection law and a regulator.

12.6

The scale of trauma and the shortage of specialists are set out in section 13.5. Technology cannot replace psychiatrists Sudan does not have, but it can widen access to proven basic care. WHO's Step-by-Step programme, a five-session app-based course for depression guided by trained non-specialist helpers through short weekly calls or messages, was tested in a randomised trial with 569 displaced Syrians in Lebanon. It improved depression, functioning, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and well-being compared with enhanced usual care, and the gains held at three months, although the trial itself names its high dropout rate as the main limitation (Cuijpers et al. 2022; WHO 2022a). An Arabic-language model already tested with displaced people in the region offers Sudan a starting point, provided it is adapted with Sudanese clinicians and reaches people with phones and connectivity.

Connectivity is the binding constraint, as section 12.8 shows. A programme of this kind would need a version that works by voice or text on basic phones, helpers recruited and supervised from within Sudanese communities, including in the diaspora, and clear referral routes to the few specialists who remain. It would also need to protect users' data absolutely. A record that a person sought help for trauma is sensitive anywhere; in a country where armed groups have detained people for what they say online (Freedom House 2024), it could be dangerous.

12.7

Sudan has already built, and lost, the core of a digital welfare state once. In February 2021 the transitional government launched the Sudan Family Support Programme, branded *Thamarat*, in the presence of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. It was a cash transfer to cushion the poorest families against economic reform, managed by the World Bank and implemented by the government, with payments linked to the national identity number (EU Trust Fund for Africa 2021). The World Bank's completion report records what it achieved. The national civil registry was upgraded, with 150 mobile stations for issuing national identity cards, 80 centres to help people update their records and satellite terminals to connect them, and coverage of national identity cards rose to 80 per cent of the population in the target states. Registration reached 9.5 million people through 352 enrolment centres. In the report's words, "the project's beneficiaries were only 0.2 million in February 2021, substantially rising to 8.7 million in October 2021" (World Bank 2025c, 8), and it describes this as "actual delivery of cash transfers to 8.7 million people (about 20 percent of the population) in only eight months" (World Bank 2025c, 13). Payments moved onto mobile money: beneficiaries on MTN received a mobile wallet, and those on Zain or Sudatel received a mobile money voucher (World Bank 2025c).

Then it stopped. The report states that "a military takeover in October 2021 triggered the World Bank Operational Policy (OP) 7.30: Dealing with De Facto Governments", and that "due to ongoing conflict in Sudan, OP 7.30 remains in effect and the pause in operations rendered the project inactive until its closure" (World Bank 2025c, 3). The project was not defeated by technology, finance or capacity. It was switched off by a coup. No episode better illustrates this chapter's argument: the identity register, the payment rails and the delivery system that a civilian government built in eight months were frozen by the seizure of power that preceded the war.

Comparable countries show what such systems can do when they are allowed to run.

- **India.** Aadhaar, India's biometric identity system, cost approximately US$1.4 billion from inception to 2017, with steady-state costs expected at around US$150 million a year, which the World Bank put at "a little over US$1 per person". The Government of India reports fiscal gains of more than US$12.7 billion since 2013 from Aadhaar-enabled direct transfers and related reforms. The World Bank adds an important caution: the methods behind those figures have not been published, and savings from Aadhaar cannot yet be separated from those of digitising beneficiary lists, or from "potentially falsely excluding deserving beneficiaries" (World Bank 2018a).
- **Kenya.** A study in *Science* estimated that access to the M-PESA mobile money system "increased per capita consumption levels and lifted 194,000 households, or 2% of Kenyan households, out of poverty", with larger effects for households headed by women, many of whom moved out of farming into business (Suri and Jack 2016).
- **Somalia.** Despite fragile institutions, "almost three-quarters of the population aged 16 and older use it on a regular basis", and "mobile money is now the main transaction instrument used by both individuals and businesses in Somalia"; the same report warns that "with increasing dependence on mobile money as a medium of exchange comes increased vulnerabilities" (World Bank 2018b, iii).
- **India's payments.** India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) was designed, in the words of World Bank specialists, "as an interoperable system that fully integrated both banks and non-banks, enabling third-party providers to innovate on top of common rails". It is "free at the point of use", and in 2024 it processed 172.2 billion transactions; more than eight in ten digital payments in India now run through it, with over 504 million unique users, "roughly half of India's adult population" (Gonnet, Srinivas and Galicia Rabadan 2026). The same authors stress that sustaining it requires "strengthening operational resilience" and "managing concentration risk" (Gonnet, Srinivas and Galicia Rabadan 2026).

Sudanese already rely on digital money to survive the war. After bank branches in Khartoum were damaged and cash ran short, businesses and households across the country turned to Bankak, the Bank of Khartoum's mobile app, for transfers, bill payments and remittances, while informal transfers of mobile airtime carried withdrawal fees of 10–50 per cent of the value transferred (ACAPS 2023). The same report found that the service was "limited and intermittent" because of disruptions to power and networks (ACAPS 2023). Demand for digital payments is not in doubt. Reliability, regulation and reach are. India's experience is relevant precisely because its payment system is public infrastructure rather than a single company's

product: any licensed bank or app can connect to it, and users can move money between them. Sudan's wartime reliance on one bank's app shows both the demand and the danger of depending on a single provider. A civilian central bank could build or license an interoperable national switch, open to banks, mobile operators and licensed fintech firms, so that a payment sent through Bankak, a mobile wallet on any network, or a humanitarian cash programme reaches the recipient without fees of the kind ACAPS recorded. That is a regulatory decision before it is a technical one, and it requires a central bank that is independent of the armed forces.

For people displaced by the war, a working identity system is the difference between being counted and being invisible. A civilian government could restart the upgraded civil registry with mobile enrolment stations in displacement areas, link it to payments as *Thamarat* did, and use it to restore access to schooling, health care and property claims. The same register in the hands of an unaccountable security apparatus could be used to track, exclude or punish. That is why section 12.10 treats data governance as a precondition rather than an afterthought.

12.8

Every tool in this chapter assumes a network. Sudan's is thin and has been deliberately cut. DataReportal's *Digital 2026* report for Sudan, published at the end of 2025 and using data for October 2025, counts 14.9 million internet users, a penetration rate of 28.7 per cent, leaving 71.3 per cent of the population offline; it cites GSMA Intelligence for 17.8 million active mobile connections, equivalent to 34.1 per cent of the population (DataReportal 2026). The *Digital 2025* report recorded a fall of 5.6 million mobile connections, or 20.6 per cent, between the start of 2024 and the start of 2025 (DataReportal 2025).

The war has turned connectivity into a weapon. Access Now reported that a nationwide shutdown began on 2 February 2024 after reports that the Rapid Support Forces had seized the data centres of internet providers in Khartoum, and noted that this came in retaliation for reports that the army had shut down internet services in Darfur for several weeks (Access Now 2024). Freedom House found that "extremely limited connectivity returned after 10 days as providers shifted their operations to Port Sudan, but service was not restored on all ISPs until May 2024", and that localised shutdowns occurred in Khartoum, Omdurman and cities in Darfur and Kordofan, including in Darfur in November 2023 while the RSF carried out mass atrocities (Freedom House 2024). A joint statement by humanitarian and rights organisations said the February shutdown "left almost 30 million Sudanese without access to the internet or telephone calls for more than a month" (NRC et al. 2024).

Satellite internet filled part of the gap. Freedom House reports that many in Sudan began to rely on Starlink, and that aid groups used it to coordinate their response, while "the military-led government attempted to restrict the import and use of Starlink devices due to their extensive use by the RSF" (Freedom House 2024). The joint statement adds that civilians and local Emergency Response Rooms often connected through informal Starlink cafés, but that the cost is prohibitive for most people (NRC et al. 2024). Satellite connections are a lifeline in war, not a national infrastructure.

Both armed parties have also used networks against citizens. Freedom House records that in January 2024 the military-led government and governors of army-held states issued decisions prohibiting the use of any means of communication to "disparage the prestige of the state", and that combatants on both sides beat, tortured and killed journalists, activists and others for what they posted (Freedom House 2024). A connected Sudan under military rule is not a freer Sudan. Connectivity serves development only when the law protects it.

12.9

The scale and distribution of Sudan's doctors and other professionals abroad are set out in section 13.6, and the place of young people in the country's future in section 13.1. This chapter adds one point. Every application described here, from crop forecasting to telemedicine and mental health support, needs Sudanese who can build, adapt and maintain it: data engineers and statisticians in ministries, agronomists who can check satellite estimates in the field, clinicians who can validate an AI tool against Sudanese patients, and software developers who can make services work on basic phones and in Sudanese Arabic and local languages.

The diaspora is the fastest source of that capacity. Telemedicine allows a specialist abroad to support a clinic in Darfur without moving home; remote supervision allows a psychologist in another country to train and back up local helpers, as the Step-by-Step model requires (Cuijpers et al. 2022). Diaspora engineers can contribute to open systems built to public standards. None of this requires people to return before it is safe, but all of it requires a government they trust with their skills and their data. Professionals who left because of repression will not lend their names to systems run by the security services.

12.10

Data are the raw material of every tool in this chapter, and the risks rise with their value. A national identity register, a payment system, a health record or a farmer database can deliver services more fairly than paper. In the wrong hands, they can map who belongs to which community, who receives aid and who has spoken out.

The international guidance is consistent. WHO requires that AI in health protect privacy and confidentiality through valid informed consent and "appropriate legal frameworks", and warns of the unethical collection and use of health data and of biases built into algorithms (WHO 2021). It also warns that systems trained mainly on data from high-income countries may not perform well for people in low- and middle-income settings (WHO 2021). The World Bank's review of identity systems cautions that apparent savings can include deserving people who were wrongly cut off (World Bank 2018a). The *Thamarat* report shows that Sudan's own system was designed with a grievance mechanism, though it recorded only about 1,182 complaints from 8.7 million beneficiaries, which the report itself treats as a small fraction (World Bank 2025c).

Regulation is also what keeps a system working. The World Bank's Somalia report, written about one of the most successful mobile money markets in Africa, concludes that "weak regulation combined with a lack of capacity for oversight stands in the way of ensuring continued and undisrupted service delivery" (World Bank 2018b, 27). Data quality matters as

much as data protection. When Ethiopia's 8028 hotline asked first-time callers to register their location, 85 per cent reported their region correctly but only 15 per cent gave correct information for their *woreda*, the local district (PxD n.d.). Systems that will be used to target aid or advice in Sudan need to be designed and tested so that the data they collect are accurate, not merely abundant.

A civilian government should therefore adopt, before any large system goes live:

A data protection law with an independent regulator, limits on the purposes for which data may be used, and penalties for misuse, including by state agencies.

Separation of civil and security data. The civil registry, health records and payment data should be held by civilian bodies, with access by security agencies only under court order.

A legal bar on network shutdowns except under narrowly defined, judicially reviewed conditions, given the record set out in section 12.8.

Standards for AI in public services, following WHO's six principles for health (WHO 2021) and requiring that tools be tested on Sudanese data before use.

Inclusion safeguards, so that people without an identity card, a phone or a fixed address, including the displaced, are not excluded from services that move online.

These measures are only credible under civilian rule. Section 9 sets out the US government's findings on the Muslim Brotherhood and the author's assessment of its role in the army's war effort; a security apparatus shaped by that history cannot be the custodian of citizens' biometric and health data.

The author proposes that a civilian government sequence technology investment in three phases. Costs are given only where a published source reports them for a comparable programme, and they are attributed as the source states; they are not estimates for Sudan.

Phase 1: the first year after a ceasefire – restore and protect.

- Restore and protect telecommunications, and legislate against shutdowns.
- Restart the civil registry upgraded under *Thamarat*, with mobile enrolment in displacement areas, and resume cash transfers through mobile money and the banking system (World Bank 2025c).
- Re-establish the medical supply chain, with temperature monitoring and solar power at warehouses and maternity units, beginning with oxytocin (WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA 2019; UNFPA 2025).
- Pass a data protection law and create the regulator.
- *Comparable evidence:* the *Thamarat* scale-up of 2021, set out in section 12.7.

Phase 2: years two to three – build national platforms.

- A national farmer advisory service by voice and text, built on FAO's crop and drought indicators, on the model of Ethiopia's 8028 hotline (FAO n.d.-b; Anteneh and Melak 2024).

- A national medicines stock and logistics system, with demand forecasting.
- A state solar fund, building on the Northern State and River Nile experience and its lessons (UNDP 2022; UNDP 2025).
- Telemedicine links between state hospitals, teaching hospitals and diaspora specialists, within a national digital health strategy (WHO 2022b).
- Measurement and control at Gezira's main structures, alongside the canal remodelling set out in section 11.4.
- An interoperable national payment switch, on the model of India's Unified Payments Interface (Gonnet, Srinivas and Galicia Rabadan 2026).
- *Comparable costs:* see India's Aadhaar costs in section 12.7. Sudan's register is smaller and partly built; the figure indicates order of magnitude, not a budget.

Phase 3: years four and beyond – scale and apply AI.

- AI-assisted forecasting for crops, water releases and medicine demand, introduced where data from Phases 1 and 2 are reliable (FAO 2024).
- AI decision support and screening aids in health, validated on Sudanese patients and regulated under WHO's principles (WHO 2021).
- Scaled digital mental health support adapted from Step-by-Step (Cuijpers et al. 2022).
- *Comparable evidence:* Rwanda's drone delivery of blood (section 12.5) and M-PESA in Kenya (section 12.7).

Who pays. The programmes cited above were financed by a mix of government budgets, development partners and private operators. *Thamarat* drew on World Bank grants and a multi-donor trust fund, with Team Europe pledging up to EUR 305 million (EU Trust Fund for Africa 2021; World Bank 2025c). Sudan's partners have shown they will fund such systems; they have also shown, in October 2021, that they will stop when a civilian government is overthrown.

The author does not claim that technology will rescue Sudan on its own. Five limits apply.

Technology follows institutions. Every success cited here depended on a ministry, a regulator or a functioning bank. Where those were missing, as in the Northern State solar project, results fell short (UNDP 2022).

Data can harm. Identity and payment systems can exclude the people they are meant to serve (World Bank 2018a), and under military rule they can be used for surveillance.

AI can mislead. Models trained elsewhere may not work for Sudanese patients or fields (WHO 2021), and remote-sensing estimates can differ from conditions on the ground (Barhy et al. 2025).

Most Sudanese are ofhine. With roughly seven in ten people not using the internet (DataReportal 2026), services must work by voice, text and in person, or they will widen inequality.

Evidence is thin in places. Several figures in this chapter come from single studies or project evaluations, and Gezira's water figures are disputed (section 11.4). Programmes should be piloted and evaluated before they are scaled.

None of this can be built by armed factions. Sensor networks, medicine databases, water-allocation systems and farmer advisory platforms need ministries that share information, budgets that reach clinics and canals, protection of personal data, and security on farms and roads. The US government findings set out in section 9 on the Muslim Brotherhood, and the author's assessment there of its role in the army's war effort, show why civilian rule, not military rule, is the precondition for building them. The same war that cut off Khartoum's oxytocin reserve keeps Gezira's canals silted and its fields short of water. The same seizure of power that ended Sudan's civilian transition also froze the cash transfers that were reaching millions of families. A civilian-led government is the only actor able to turn Sudan's land, water and people into the productive, healthy country they could support. This is the case the author puts to Sudan's partners: there is no path through fighting, and the tools for a better path already exist.

13. The human ledger: youth, displacement, trauma and Sudan's doctors

13.1

Sudan is a young country. About 68 per cent of its people are under 30 (Carter Center 2021). That generation led the December 2018 revolution. The protests that ended with al-Bashir's removal in April 2019 were driven largely by young people, especially young women, and organised through neighbourhood resistance committees (Carter Center 2021). By 2021 a Carter Center mapping counted 7,238 resistance committees and youth-led organisations across the country (Carter Center 2021).

The resistance committees grew out of years of youth protest. University students led protests from the 1990s onwards. By 2010–12 youth groups had begun organising neighbourhood committees in earnest. In September 2013 security forces killed about 200 young demonstrators in Khartoum North (El-Battahani 2021). The committees' membership was drawn from young people of every class and from many ethnic backgrounds and regions. They adopted a horizontal structure, with coordinating bodies (*tansiqiyat*) linking them, and they set out to "transcend the divides of political party affiliation" (El-Battahani 2021). After the massacre at the army headquarters sit-in, the committees acted as watchdogs over the political parties' bargaining with the generals. They also faced attempts by "the military-militia as well as the political parties… to work their way into the LRCs" and co-opt them (El-Battahani 2021).

The committees are the most important civilian infrastructure Sudan has left. They organised peacefully, under the slogan *silmiyya, silmiyya didd al-haramiyya* ("peaceful, peaceful, against the thieves") (El-Battahani 2021). They are the natural partner for the local government and national dialogue roles proposed in 13.1.

The same generation has paid the heaviest price for the war. Young Sudanese have long been recruited as fighters, have left school in large numbers and face high unemployment (Carter Center 2021). UNICEF reports that more than 8 million of an estimated 17 million school-aged children are out of school. In Darfur, 81 per cent of schools remain closed and 70 per cent of

children are not attending (UNICEF 2026a). Sudan now consistently ranks as the country with the most out-of-school children in the world, and at least 4.1 million of them are girls (UNICEF 2026b). UNICEF also warns that girls' primary enrolment suffers twice as much as boys' in settings marked by child recruitment and sexual violence (UNICEF 2026a).

The choice for this generation is stark. A child without a school, and a young adult without a job or a degree, is easier for armed groups to recruit and easier for despair to claim. The same young people are also the natural users of the digital education and work that a peaceful Sudan could offer. The generation that filled the streets in 2019 chanted "freedom, peace, justice" (Reuters 2019b). What it wants is a future, not a front line. A civilian settlement has to treat them as founders of the new order, not as recruits for the old one. The author proposes:

A formal role for resistance committees in local government and in the national dialogue.

Demobilisation and reintegration aimed at young fighters, linked to the jobs that the development belts are meant to create (see section 11.5).

Education recovery as a priority of reconstruction, not an afterthought.

13.2

Women were at the forefront of the protests that ended al-Bashir's rule. The share of women among the protesters has been put as high as 70 per cent (BBC News 2019a), and they kept marching despite threats and acts of violence and rape against them (George et al. 2019, 7). On 8 April 2019 a photograph of a student, Alaa Salah, standing on a car in white and leading a chant, became the image of the uprising. That October she addressed the UN Security Council's open debate on women, peace and security on behalf of Sudanese women (UN Women 2019).

Formal power did not follow. Women were appointed to just two of the 11 seats on the Sovereign Council. A 40 per cent parliamentary quota had been promised, and women's groups were campaigning for 50 per cent (George et al. 2019, 9–10). The pattern has continued into the war. UN Women reports that women are "systematically excluded from peace processes". It reports that women-led groups, through the Kampala Feminist Declaration signed by 49 of them, are demanding 50 per cent representation at negotiating tables (UN Women 2025).

Sexual and gender-based violence. The war has been fought on women's bodies. The UN Fact-Finding Mission found that the RSF committed sexual violence on a large scale in areas under its control, including gang rape and abduction in conditions amounting to sexual slavery, especially in Greater Khartoum, Darfur and Gezira. The Mission found reasonable grounds to believe that these acts amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity (OHCHR 2024a). In Darfur, victims were often targeted "on the basis of their gender and real or perceived ethnicity". The Mission also documented cases involving the army and allied groups, and sexual violence against men and boys in detention, which require further investigation (OHCHR 2024a). In less than two years of war, the number of people at risk of gender-based violence tripled to 12.1 million (UN Women 2025). With 80 per cent of hospitals in conflict-affected areas not functioning, survivors often cannot reach even basic care (UN Women 2025).

The author draws two conclusions. First, women's representation is a condition of a durable settlement, not a reward for it. The 40 per cent quota promised in 2019 should be the floor for the transitional legislature and for delegations to the peace talks. Second, survivors need a guaranteed route to justice and care. That means specialised prosecution units, clinical management of rape in primary care, and reparation through the truth process in 10.5. Such services require a functioning civilian health and justice system. No armed party has offered one.

13.3

Any argument about Sudan's future has to start with how many Sudanese have been forced from their homes. Section 2 gives the scale of the crisis, at more than 11 million people forcibly displaced (UNHCR 2026). At its peak in January 2025, internal displacement made Sudan the largest displacement crisis in the world (IOM 2026a).

The figures are now moving the other way. As section 2.3 shows, more than five million people have gone back to their areas of origin, most of them to Khartoum and Aj Jazirah (IOM 2026a). It warns, however, that many are returning to "a country still wracked by conflict, where damaged homes, schools and clinics cannot meet the needs" (IOM 2026b). The return shows that people want their lives back. Whether they can stay depends on whether peace brings working services and a state that can provide them.

13.4

The return of more than five million people (IOM 2026b; see section 13.3) raises a question that will decide whether peace holds: who owns the houses and land they are returning to? The Norwegian Refugee Council warns that the war has left a legacy of looting, occupation, land grabbing and destroyed homes. It notes that displaced people often fled without important documents such as title deeds, which can prevent them from proving ownership or taking a case to court (NRC 2024, 4, 9).

The problem is not new. In 2022, before this war, OCHA had already reported that around 56 per cent of Sudan's internally displaced people had been displaced for more than ten years. In Darfur, secondary occupation of land in people's places of origin was one of the most widely reported concerns and one of the main barriers to return (NRC 2024, 4, 13). In a 2022 needs assessment, 75 per cent of surveyed households reported having no security of tenure, 27 per cent had problems with occupation of their property and 23 per cent faced ownership disputes (NRC 2024, 9). Only 3 per cent of displaced people in Darfur owned land where they were living, compared with 43 per cent of the non-displaced (NRC 2024, 13). A 2022 survey found that a substantial majority of displaced people in Darfur, 67 per cent, would prefer to integrate where they were hosted (NRC 2024, 14).

Two conclusions follow. First, return and local integration have to be treated as equal choices. Many long-term displaced people will not go back, and they need secure tenure where they are. Second, restitution needs a dedicated institution. The author proposes:

A national housing, land and property commission with regional chambers that apply both statutory and customary tenure, with the power to order restitution or compensation.

Emergency recording of claims now, through digital registration by humanitarian partners, so that evidence of ownership survives the war (see section 12).

A ban on legalising transfers made under duress during the war, and a rule that occupation by armed groups confers no title.

Alignment with the UN Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons (the "Pinheiro Principles"), presented to the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in 2005 (Pinheiro 2005).

The Juba Agreement promised mechanisms for return, land and pastoralism in Darfur (Thomas 2023, 9). The new commission should take over those commitments and apply them nationally.

13.5

People carry a war's damage in their minds long after the shooting ends. In a study of 642 refugees, displaced people and civilians who stayed in conflict areas, researchers at the University of Khartoum found clinically significant post-traumatic stress symptoms in 36.6 per cent of participants. That is above the 31 per cent pooled rate reported in earlier meta-analyses of conflict-affected populations (Khalil et al. 2024). In a community study of displaced people in Al-Galgala, 25 per cent met the criteria for PTSD symptoms and 62 per cent for depression, and 23.1 per cent had both (Mohamed and Kheir 2024). Among civilians who stayed in Khartoum during the first months of the war, among 393 participants, 70 per cent had symptoms suggestive of depression and 57.3 per cent had anxiety symptoms (Ahmed et al. 2024).

These studies were not designed to be nationally representative, and their authors say so. Khalil et al., for example, used an online, non-probability sample. Even so, they all point the same way, and they tell us something important about the young. In the Khalil study, depression was more common among 18–30-year-olds, and it was linked to unemployment and to being single. The authors suggest that "the interruption of higher education and the absence of formal employment opportunities for young adults have constrained their future prospects" (Khalil et al. 2024). War does not only traumatise; it closes off the future, and people feel that loss.

Sudan has almost no capacity to treat this. The World Health Organization's *Mental Health Atlas 2024* records 0.2 psychiatrists and 2.6 mental health workers of all kinds per 100,000 people. For children and adolescents the figure is 0.01 psychiatrists per 100,000. Essential psychiatric medicines and psychosocial interventions are available in fewer than 10 per cent of primary care facilities (WHO 2024). Put simply, a population carrying mass trauma has a handful of specialists to see it. Telepsychiatry, AI-assisted screening in Arabic and training primary care staff with digital tools (section 12.6) are not luxuries for Sudan. They are the only realistic way to reach millions of people, and they can be built only in peacetime, under a government that can license, fund and protect them.

The services that do exist are under attack. Since the war began, WHO has verified 201 attacks on health care in Sudan, causing 1,858 deaths and 490 injuries. In 2025 alone, 65 verified attacks killed more than 1,620 people, and these deaths account for "more than 80% of all deaths from attacks on health care verified by WHO in complex humanitarian emergencies globally in 2025" (WHO EMRO 2025b). Mental health care cannot be delivered where clinics are shelled. The first condition for treating trauma is to stop causing it.

The author proposes a mental health plan for the transition with three elements: psychosocial support in schools and displacement sites, delivered by trained non-specialists; a referral layer of primary care staff trained to treat depression and post-traumatic stress; and the telepsychiatry and digital screening set out in section 12.6, supervised by Sudanese specialists at home and abroad. Survivors of sexual violence (13.2) and returning children (13.1) should be the first priorities.

13.6

Sudan's best-known export may be its doctors. A WHO health workforce snapshot from 2020, before the war, estimated that 60 per cent of Sudanese physicians and 25 per cent of pharmacists practise abroad. In 2015, more than 15,000 Sudanese physicians were working in Saudi Arabia and more than 3,000 in the United Kingdom (WHO EMRO 2020). A peer-reviewed study in *Human Resources for Health* found that over half of a pool of more than 25,000 Sudanese doctors work abroad. The Federal Ministry of Health issued 15,352 experience certificates, a standard proxy for emigration, in 2013, against 1,249 in 2000. Sudanese universities lost about 26 per cent of their teaching staff, and the emigration rate reached 40 per cent at the University of Khartoum (Abuagla and Badr 2016).

The same study identifies the push factors as low pay, poor working conditions and a lack of training and career progression. In the Gulf, salaries for physicians can be more than 20 times those in Sudan (Abuagla and Badr 2016). These are failures of governance, not of talent, and a competent civilian government can fix them. The diaspora is also a resource waiting to be connected. Sudanese consultants in Riyadh, London or Dublin could supervise, teach and read scans remotely for colleagues in Kassala or El Obeid, through the digital and AI-supported platforms set out in section 12. How fragile the system is shows in the basics, such as the loss of the national oxytocin reserve described in section 12.5.

The war has made a long-term drain an emergency. WHO's mapping of health service delivery units, using data up to 1 July 2025, found 37 per cent of facilities non-functioning. Lack of staff was the most commonly reported constraint on functionality, cited for 71 per cent of facilities reporting constraints, ahead of insecurity at 62 per cent (WHO 2025, 11). WHO reports that only 14 per cent of hospitals remain operational. Khartoum, which once provided 70 per cent of national health services, has seen many of its hospitals destroyed or repurposed for military use. Maternal mortality has risen by 30 per cent, and many health workers serve "in makeshift clinics, often without pay or protection" (WHO EMRO 2025a).

Rebuilding the workforce will take a deliberate policy in three parts.

Retention. The push factors identified before the war were low pay, poor working conditions and a lack of training and career progression (Abuagla and Badr 2016). The transition budget should give priority to paying health workers regularly, to safe working conditions and to clear career paths. These are the least expensive of the reforms, and they need only a functioning civilian treasury.

The diaspora. With over half of Sudan's doctors working abroad (Abuagla and Badr 2016; WHO EMRO 2020), the diaspora is the country's largest reserve of medical skill. The author proposes a structured return and circulation scheme, including short-term clinical rotations, remote supervision and teaching (sections 12.5 and 12.9), recognition of qualifications gained abroad, and protection of returnees' pay and safety. This would follow the ethical recruitment principles of the WHO Global Code of Practice that Abuagla and Badr examine for Sudan (Abuagla and Badr 2016).

Training. Sudanese universities lost about 26 per cent of their teaching staff to emigration even before the war (Abuagla and Badr 2016). Medical education should restart in safe states first, with diaspora faculty teaching remotely and with training expanded for midwives, nurses and community health workers. These are the cadres that can restore maternal care fastest, given the oxytocin and maternal mortality crisis described in section 12.5.

Each of these steps depends on peace. A doctor will not return to a hospital that is shelled or repurposed by an army. A government that controls only part of its territory cannot pay a national health workforce. The war has scattered Sudan's medical profession, and only a civilian settlement can bring it home.

Put these findings together and the pattern is clear: displacement on a world-record scale, trauma that touches a third or more of those studied, a mental health system with one psychiatrist for every half a million people, half the country's children out of school, and a medical profession that is world-class but largely abroad. Each one is a cost of war. Each one could also be reversed in peace, and that reversal can be faster than in the past because tools such as telemedicine, AI-assisted diagnosis and digital learning let scarce expertise go much further. The millions now returning home show that Sudanese people will rebuild if given the chance. The case for civilian rule is the case for giving them that chance.

14. Conclusions

Sudan's war is the product of seven decades in which power was taken by force more often than it was won by consent. In the author's assessment, the 1989 seizure of the state by the Muslim Brotherhood was the most damaging of those episodes, and its networks remain a factor in the war. Ending the war therefore requires more than a pause in the fighting. It requires a monitored ceasefire with humanitarian access, joined from the start to a Sudanese-led political process. It requires a rejection of partition in all its forms, and regional arrangements that close the borders to the flow of arms and fuel. The international architecture for this now exists in the Quartet and the Quintet. What is missing is implementation, and a civilian partner broad enough to carry a settlement. Building that partner, and the federal, institutional and economic foundations it will need, is the task set out in this paper.

Sudan's own history points the same way. The Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 lasted only until one man chose to abrogate it, and the Juba Agreement of 2020 lost any chance of being funded when the coup of October 2021 removed the government that had negotiated it. The same coup froze the debt relief that the transition had won. Neither the army nor the Rapid Support Forces can deliver a neutral peace by winning, since UN investigators have documented grave violations by both. A settlement must therefore build one army under civilian authority, justice that reaches every armed party, and institutions entrenched firmly enough to survive a change of government. In the author's assessment, there is no military path. Only a civilian-led state can end the war, return the displaced to their homes and land, and turn Sudan's land, water and people into the recovery they could support.

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