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This **CSF Research Update** brings you a curated roundup of key open-source research and analysis to support aid actors working in Sudan. These updates provide timely insights into evolving dynamics, helping strengthen conflict-sensitive and effective aid responses.

We also feature select articles from the **CSF Knowledge Hub**, offering historical context, lessons learned, and background analysis. You can find all the publications below in the CSF Knowledge Hub.

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## War Economy, Trade and Geopolitics

**UAE-Sudan Economic Tensions:  
Business Dispute or Battle for  
Influence?**

Economic tensions between Sudan and the UAE are disrupting trade flows while pushing key sectors, particularly gold, into informal and cross-border networks, where control is weaker and accountability is limited. The analysis highlights how restrictions and policy responses reshape rather than reduce economic activity, reinforcing a fragmented war economy with direct implications for prices, supply chains, and humanitarian access.

### Business Dispute or Battle for Influence?

Mohamed Salah Abdelrahman April 2026

The US Israeli war with Iran and the latter's expanding of the conflict to its Arab neighbors are straining Sudan's fragile fuel supply. The Gulf war and resulting closure of the Gulf of Hormuz have already disrupted oil supplies and caused price spikes that hit import-dependent nations like Sudan the hardest. Local officials warn that any route blockages will trigger immediate domestic shortages. Sudan's vulnerability is aggravated by its ongoing conflict.

Sudan was exposed to similar pressures in the recent past. An August 2025 United Arab Emirates (UAE) air and maritime embargo cut off Sudan's primary hub for trade and financing. Without the UAE's logistics, traders must use longer, more expensive routes. Ultimately, Sudan's fuel market and the flow of its strategic consumer goods are trapped between regional geopolitics and its own internal war, making the country highly vulnerable to external economic shocks.

Measures that Sudan adopted to mitigate the effects of the UAE embargo, such as the diversification of trade routes and the building of fuel stockpiles, might prove helpful in helping it adjust to the new supply shortages.

#### Introduction

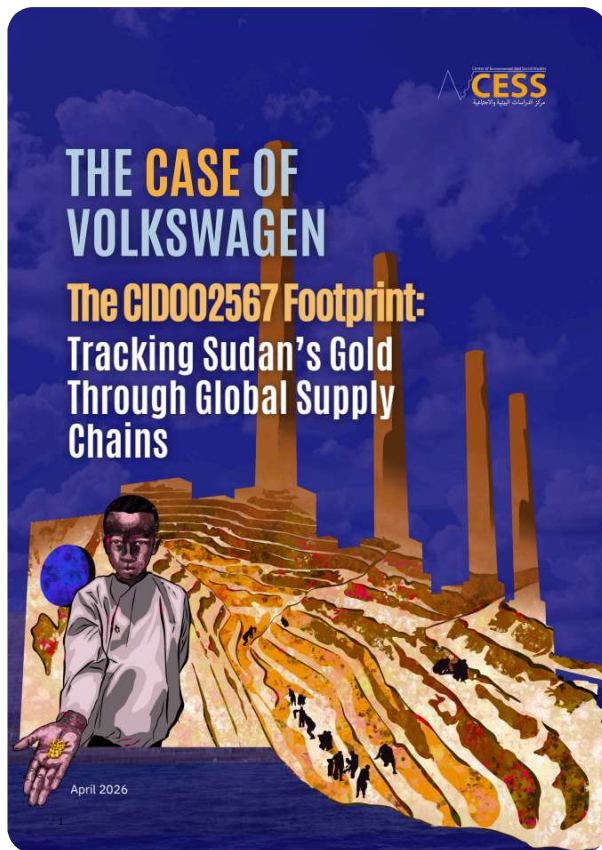
On August 7, against the backdrop of increasing diplomatic tensions, the UAE imposed an air and maritime embargo on all flights and maritime traffic between the UAE and Port Sudan—the country's de facto capital and main export hub since the outbreak of the war in April 2023. The embargo barred vessels from utilizing UAE ports for direct shipments to Sudan or for the transshipment of goods from third countries destined for Sudan. CMA-CGM, one of the world's largest shipping companies also confirmed the restrictions.<sup>1</sup>

In response, the Economic Emergency Committee, headed by the Prime Minister, undertook a number of decisions aimed at promoting alternative destinations for Sudanese goods and exerting tight control over exports. Unfortunately, most of these responses draw on an old playbook that relies on control and which has already been largely shown to be ineffective.

Both the embargo and the Sudanese government response were exceptional developments, but they have not received much discussion or comment internationally. This paper argues that, despite their emanation from different and largely conflicting political centers, they intersect to negatively impact the Sudanese economy, especially the gold sector. They are likely to reinforce the dominance of parallel and military markets, increase cross-border smuggling, and exacerbate the humanitarian situation in the country.

<sup>1</sup> CMA CGM, "Customer Advisory #28-2025 - Restrictions on Port Sudan Operations," August 11, 2025, available at <https://www.cma-cgm.com/local/united-arab-emirates/news/333/customer-advisory-28-2025-restrictions-on-port-sudan-operations>

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### Volkswagen: Tracking Sudan's Gold Through Global Supply Chains

*The Sudanese Centre for Environmental and Social Studies (CESS)*

April 2026

Gold has become a central pillar of Sudan's war economy, moving through informal routes into global markets despite clear evidence of conflict-linked origins. This investigation exposes how corporate supply chains continue to reflect gold from a non-operational refinery, raising serious questions about due diligence, accountability, and the role of international markets in sustaining conflict.

### Sudan: The Contested Host State

Sudan's conflict is reframed as a system of external resource competition, where control over gold, land, water, and strategic routes shapes the behaviour of multiple regional and global actors. The analysis shows how these overlapping interests sustain a fragmented war economy that extends beyond the Sudanese state.

GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICT ANALYSIS - NORTHEAST AFRICA

## Sudan: The Contested Host State

*A Geopolitical Conflict Matrix Analysis of Multi-Actor Resource Competition in Northeast Africa*

**Isaam AW Mohamed**  
Professor of Economics - ALNEELAIN University - Sudan  
 March 2026 - Draft v1.0

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**ABSTRACT**

Sudan's ongoing conflict cannot be adequately analyzed through the lens of internal political dysfunction alone. This paper introduces the Geopolitical Conflict Matrix (GCM) — a structured analytical framework adapted from systems biology's microenvironmental modeling — to map the competing resource extraction strategies of seven external actors operating within Sudanese territory. We identify five strategic resource categories: Red Sea/Port Sudan access, gold, agricultural land, Blue Nile hydraulic position, and oil pipeline infrastructure, and score each actor's stake intensity across these dimensions on a 0-5 ordinal scale. Our analysis reveals that Sudan functions as a "contested host state" — a territory in which multiple sovereign and non-sovereign actors simultaneously extract resources while the host government's capacity deteriorates. Key findings: (1) the UAE-RSF-Wagner triangle constitutes a self-financing gold-military closed-loop system independent of the formal state; (2) Egypt faces a structural contradiction between needing Sudan weak and needing it stable; (3) Ethiopia's GERD strategy provides hydraulic leverage over both Egypt and Sudan simultaneously; (4) captured political parties are the primary internal mechanism transmitting external interests into Sudanese governance. We propose four structural interventions targeting resource decoupling as prerequisites for conflict resolution.

Keywords: Sudan · Geopolitical Conflict Matrix · Red Sea · Gold Economy · Blue Nile · RSF · UAE · Ethiopia · Egypt · Resource Competition

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**A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR**

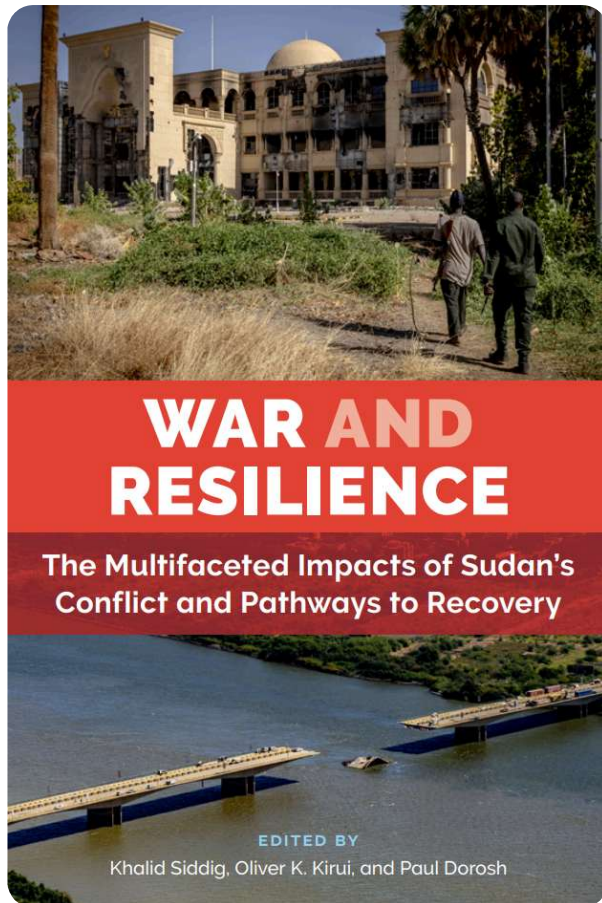
I did not begin this analysis as an academic exercise. I began it as a Sudanese economist watching his country come apart and struggling to answer a question that no one around me seemed able to articulate clearly: *why does this war refuse to end, even when everyone claims to want peace?* I have spent my career studying economic systems, and what I have learned is that when a system behaves in a way that seems irrational on the surface, it is almost always because we are looking at the wrong actors or the wrong incentives. We were watching the war through the lens of Sudanese internal politics—the SAF, the RSF, the political parties, the transitional failures—when the more honest answer was that Sudan had become a terrain of competition for interests that do not live inside Sudan at all. The Geopolitical Conflict Matrix was my attempt to draw that map honestly: not to assign blame, but to name what is actually happening and to whom it is happening. You cannot negotiate a peace agreement with a set of parties whose external backers have stronger material incentives to continue the conflict than to end it. And you cannot design those incentives away until you have first made them visible.

Sudan is not a failed state. It is a systematically extracted one. There is a difference — and that difference matters enormously for how we think about solutions. A failed state collapses from within; an extracted state is held in a condition of controlled dysfunction by those who profit from it. Gold

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## Conflict Impacts and System Disruption



### War and Resilience: The Multifaceted Impacts of Sudan's Conflict and Pathways to Recovery

*Khalid Siddig, Oliver K. Kirui, and Paul A. Dorosh*  
 April 2026

Sudan's conflict is reshaping livelihoods, markets, and basic services at a systemic level, driving food insecurity and economic decline while forcing households to adapt through informal and often precarious coping strategies. The analysis highlights how recovery depends on reconnecting markets, restoring services, and addressing the structural drivers of vulnerability.

## Food Systems and Survival

## What it Takes to Eat: Conflict and Sudan's Fragile Food System

*Nana Ndeda, Azzaa Ahmed Abdel Aziz, and Sara Karrar*

*April 2026*

Conflict in Sudan is breaking the path of food at every stage, from farms to markets to household consumption, driving widespread hunger and famine risk. The analysis shows how violence, displacement, and access constraints are reshaping how food is produced, moved, and consumed, while local actors continue to sustain fragile systems under extreme pressure.



## Local Responses, Gender and Resilience

### From Emergency Response to Feminist Action: The Evolving Role of Women Led Organisations in Sudan

*Samia al-Nagar, Liv Tønnessen*

*April 2026*

Women-led organisations in Sudan are delivering frontline responses to gender-based violence while navigating shrinking funding, political constraints, and operational risks. The analysis shows how these groups function not only as service providers but as agents of structural change, operating at the

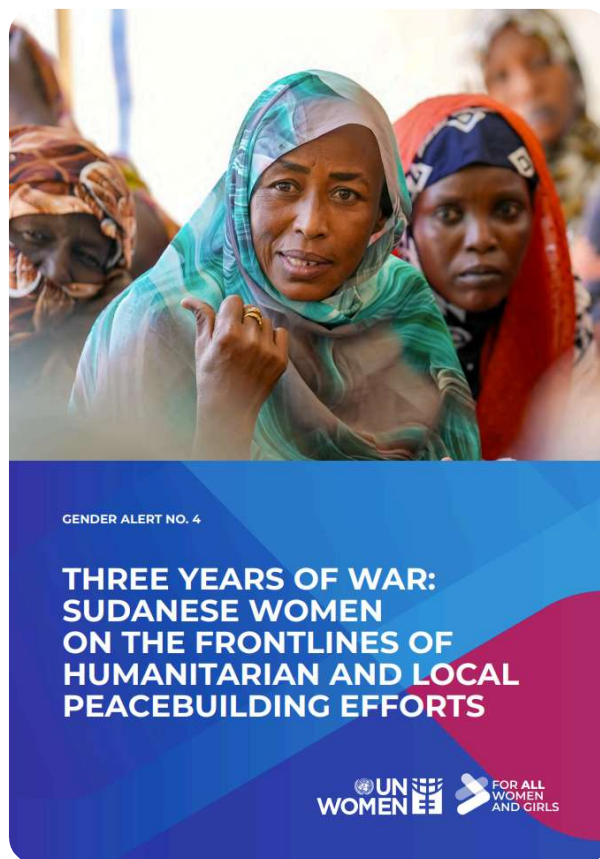


### Three Years of War: Sudanese Women on the Frontlines of Humanitarian and Local Peacebuilding Efforts

*Jenni Seppanen*

*April 2026*

Sudanese women are at the forefront of humanitarian response and local peacebuilding, delivering critical services and negotiating access in conflict-affected areas, yet remain excluded from formal decision-making and peace processes. The analysis highlights how this gap, combined with funding constraints and security risks, continues to limit the effectiveness and sustainability of locally led response efforts.



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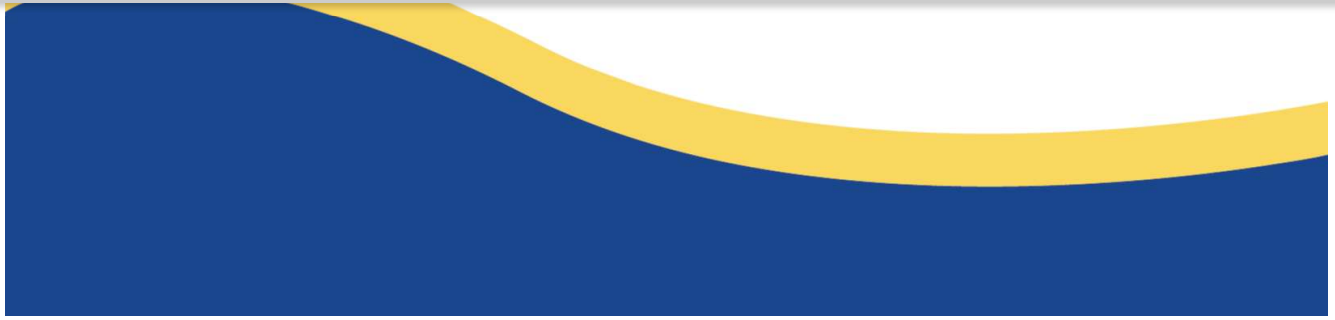
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