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Conflict Dynamics, Geopolitics & Peace Processes

The Destabilising Role of the United Arab Emirates in African Conflicts

SWP Comment

NO. 19 MAY 2026

The Destabilising Role of the United Arab Emirates in African Conflicts

Gerrit Kurtz, Wolfram Lacher and Stephan Roll

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has become one of the most aggressive external actors in African conflicts, from Ethiopia, Libya and Somalia to Sudan. The leadership in Abu Dhabi obstinately denies its support for belligerents, yet it has maintained it even during the US-Israeli war against Iran – despite the serious repercussions for the UAE. Its role impedes efforts at conflict resolution and exacerbates humanitarian crises and regional instability. It undermines Europe's interest in reliable trade routes, the prevention of forced displacement and regional integration. Germany and its European partners should accord much greater weight to the UAE's destabilising actions in their bilateral relations, criticise them more explicitly and consider sanctions. The context of the war with Iran, as well as tensions between the UAE and Saudi Arabia, offers an opening for a change in policy in Abu Dhabi.

The Iran war has eclipsed a development that had attracted increasing attention among the European public in late 2025: the role of the UAE in African conflicts, particularly in light of the devastating humanitarian consequences of the ongoing war in Sudan. This war reached a new peak in October 2025, when the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) captured the city of El-Fasher in North Darfur and subsequently committed massacres leading to an estimated tens of thousands of deaths. The UAE is regarded as the RSF's most important military, logistical and financial backer. Even after the start of the war with Iran, numerous suspicious cargo flights departed from the Emirates to Ethiopia, apparently to transport supplies across the border to the RSF. The UAE's in-

volvement in African conflicts, however, extends far beyond Sudan. As early as 2014, it supported Khalifa Haftar's Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) in the Libyan civil war, including during their offensive against the internationally recognised government in Tripoli in 2019–20. In Ethiopia, the government of Abiy Ahmed relied on drones from the UAE to repel an offensive by Tigrayan rebels in autumn 2021. A hallmark of Emirati interventions is the reluctance to deploy its own military forces. Instead, it exerts its influence mainly through local partners, many of them quasi-state or non-state armed groups.



Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for International and Security Affairs

This report examines the UAE's growing role in conflicts across Africa, including Sudan, Libya, Ethiopia, and Somalia. It argues that financial support, logistics networks, arms transfers, and relationships with local armed groups have enabled the UAE to expand its influence while contributing to conflict escalation and regional instability. The analysis highlights how these interventions have complicated peace efforts and deepened humanitarian crises across the continent.

A Religion, Peace, and Conflict Country Profile

Janette Yarwood

April 2026

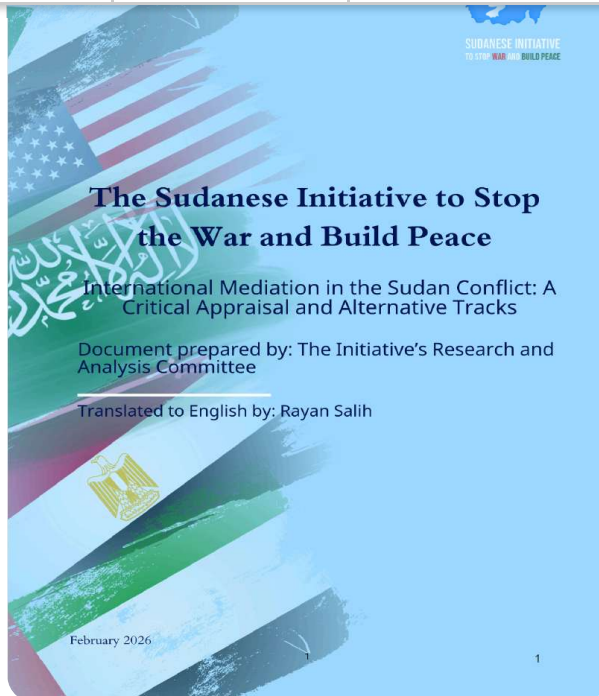
Religion is not the primary driver of Sudan's current war, yet it continues to shape how communities experience conflict, protection, and governance. This country profile explores how religious institutions provide refuge and support during crises while also examining how religious narratives are used by armed actors to reinforce legitimacy and control. The report argues that understanding religion's role is essential for humanitarian access, civilian protection, and post-conflict recovery.



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Tracks

The Sudanese Initiative to Stop the War and Build Peace

February 2026

Examining the evolution of mediation efforts since the outbreak of war in April 2023, this report argues that competing international and regional initiatives have struggled to deliver meaningful progress toward peace. It explores how external geopolitical interests, fragmented diplomatic tracks, and the marginalisation of Sudanese actors have undermined mediation efforts. The report advocates for a Sudanese-led peace process that addresses the structural drivers of conflict, including governance failures, the war economy, and questions of justice and accountability.

War Economy, Finance & External Influence

The Flow of Arms and Money Feeding the War in Sudan Can Be Cut. What is Missing is The Will

Hubert Kinkoh

May 2026

Focusing on the external networks sustaining Sudan's war, this analysis traces the flow of arms, financing, and political support that continue to benefit both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). It argues that weak enforcement of sanctions and arms embargoes,

persist. The paper calls for greater international action to disrupt these support systems and address the political economy sustaining the war.



Future Bank: Sudan's Monetary Partition

Suliman Baldo
May 2026

In an indication of acute cash scarcity in areas controlled by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the military intelligence department of the RSF's 4th Division in Al Dacin issued a decree on April 23, 2026—a copy of which was seen by STPT—capping at 15% the commission that traders may charge for converting money held digitally in Bankak, the most commonly used platform in Sudan, into Sudanese pound banknotes. While still higher than usual rates for cash out transactions, 15% is significantly below the amount that traders had been charging in RSF areas, up to 40%. In response, many traders stopped offering the service at all, sparking a fresh crisis that disrupted both commercial activity and family remittances.

To address the worsening crisis surrounding access to and circulation of currency, the prime minister of the RSF-controlled Tasis government, Mohamed Hassan Al-Taishi, issued a decree on May 11 establishing a "Transitional Monetary Council" tasked with promoting monetary stability and regulating banking affairs. The decree mandated the Council to oversee and manage currency circulation, implement the currency exchange program, and issue licenses for banking activities, in coordination with the Governor of the Central Bank of Sudan.¹

The Tasis government's policy response to the crisis culminated in the appointment of its own central bank governor on May 21, Hussein Yahya Jangol, a veteran banker who rose through the ranks of the national central bank and served as its governor from February 25, 2022 to May 14, 2023.²

These far-reaching measures underscore the deepening institutional crisis confronting the Tasis authorities as they attempt to establish credibility and legitimacy as a governing authority. The first clear signs of this structural challenge emerged in January 2026 with the appearance of the Bank of the Future and its affiliated digital money transfer application in RSF-controlled areas.

Private sector sources report that, beginning in 2024, the RSF—and later the Tasis government—faced strong pressure from business leaders to standardize currency in RSF-controlled areas and create a money-transfer alternative to Bankak.

To address chronic and severe cash shortages, of which the RSF decree offered additional evidence, the RSF-controlled Tasis political alliance launched "El Mustaqbal (Future) Bank" in early January 2026 in Nyala, a semi-electronic financial exchange in Darfur. In addition to addressing cash shortages, the mechanism aims to facilitate bank transfers, reduce reliance on paper currency, and bypass the

¹ "The Prime Minister issues a decree establishing the Transitional Monetary Council," in Arabic, May 11, 2026, <https://x.com/wasilalatah/status/2053901641397166412?s=20>

² "Official: The Tasis Peace Government appoints Hussein Yahya Jangol governor of the central bank of Sudan," May 21, 2026, Tasis Government's official Facebook page Tasis 24, at: <https://www.facebook.com/sharelp/1E7E1pgfWw7mbxtdid=wwXfr>

As Sudan's formal banking system fragments under the pressures of war, new financial mechanisms have emerged in areas outside government control. This report examines the rise of Future Bank and its digital payment system in RSF-controlled territories, assessing their role in addressing liquidity shortages while simultaneously reinforcing economic fragmentation. The analysis warns that competing financial systems risk deepening Sudan's monetary divide and strengthening the incentives that sustain the war economy.

Humanitarian Risks, Recovery & Development

SUDAN Thematic Report: Risk Analysis (2026)

ACAPS

May 2026

Looking ahead to the second half of 2026, this ACAPS report identifies the key risks likely to worsen humanitarian conditions across Sudan. Potential conflict escalation, displacement, trade disruptions, access constraints, and service collapse are assessed according to their likelihood and potential humanitarian impact. The report is intended to support preparedness planning by highlighting the scenarios most likely to drive future needs.

SUDAN Risk analysis (2026)

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Aim and scope

This report outlines seven risks of emerging or deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Sudan between June–December 2026. The risk analysis aims to support humanitarian decision makers in anticipating potential escalations in humanitarian needs, displacement, humanitarian access constraints, and service disruptions to inform proactive preparedness and response planning.

These seven risks were selected based on their relevance to humanitarian decision-making. They were identified based on emerging triggers, conflict and political developments, and deteriorating trends likely to worsen humanitarian outcomes over the next six months.

Data collection, triangulation, and validation

ACAPS used a combination of secondary data review, joint analysis, and targeted external consultation to identify risks and assess their probability and potential humanitarian impact through trends analysis, precedent analysis, and the triangulation of operational and contextual information.

- **Secondary data review:** the ACAPS team reviewed publicly available data and information to identify emerging developments, escalating trends, and deteriorating conditions likely to heighten humanitarian needs, including displacement, humanitarian access constraints, service disruptions, and food insecurity. The review included reports, datasets, and knowledge products from humanitarian organisations, research institutions, and media sources covering Sudan.
- **Key informant interviews (KIIs) and external reviews:** ACAPS conducted a limited number of KIIs and external reviews with operational responders working in humanitarian INGOs and NNGOs in Sudan. These consultations were used as a supplementary input to gather insights, collate operational perspectives, and validate findings.

¹ Any comments or questions? Please contact us at info@acaps.org



Beyond the Conflict: Charting a Path to Sustainable Growth and Development in Sudan

UNDP

April 2026

Despite abundant natural resources, a young population, and a strategic geographic position, Sudan has struggled to achieve sustained development due to decades of conflict and weak governance. Using long-term forecasting models, this report explores alternative development scenarios and examines what would be required to place Sudan on a more inclusive and sustainable growth trajectory. It concludes that lasting peace, institutional reform, and

Double Jeopardy: Conflict and Natural Disasters-Driven Cholera Outbreaks in Sudan

Rana Osman, Arwa Mohamed, Damilare Akintunde, Alexander Habtemariam, Gorashey Ahmed, Iyas Dawood, and Rawa Badri
February 2026

Cholera outbreaks in Sudan are increasingly shaped by the combined effects of conflict and environmental shocks. This paper examines how displacement, overcrowding, damaged infrastructure, and weakened disease surveillance systems have created conditions for recurring outbreaks. It argues that effective responses must integrate vaccination campaigns, water and sanitation improvements, hygiene promotion, and stronger early warning systems to build resilience in fragile settings.

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Double jeopardy: conflict and natural disasters-driven cholera outbreaks in Sudan

Rana Osman^{1,2,3,4}, Arwa Mohamed^{5,6}, Damilare Akintunde^{7,8}, Alexander Habtemariam^{9,10}, Gorashey Ahmed¹¹, Iyas Dawood^{12,13} and Rawa Badri^{14,15}

¹Research and Development, End the Neglect Initiative, Khartoum 1111, Sudan; ²Faculty of Medicine, Red Sea University, Port Sudan 31111, Sudan; ³Sudan Medical Specialization Board, Family Medicine Council, Khartoum 1111, Sudan; ⁴Faculty of Medicine, Khartoum University, Khartoum 1111, Sudan; ⁵Faculty of Medicine, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria 010107, Nigeria; ⁶Faculty of Medicine, University of Lagos, Lagos 100001, Nigeria; ⁷Faculty of Medicine, Omdurman Islamic University, Khartoum 1111, Sudan; ⁸Faculty of Medicine, University of Lagos, Lagos 100001, Nigeria; ⁹Faculty of Medicine, Khartoum University, Khartoum 1111, Sudan; ¹⁰Faculty of Medicine, Khartoum University, Khartoum 1111, Sudan; ¹¹Faculty of Medicine, Khartoum University, Khartoum 1111, Sudan; ¹²Faculty of Medicine, Khartoum University, Khartoum 1111, Sudan; ¹³Faculty of Medicine, Khartoum University, Khartoum 1111, Sudan; ¹⁴Faculty of Medicine, Khartoum University, Khartoum 1111, Sudan; ¹⁵Faculty of Medicine, Khartoum University, Khartoum 1111, Sudan

*Corresponding author: Tel: +249910711161; E-mail: ranahwaytalia@gmail.com

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Cholera continues to be a global threat, particularly in regions affected by conflict and environmental shocks, such as Sudan. Such humanitarian crises disrupt sanitation, water, and health systems, exacerbating cholera transmission. Overcrowded camps from displacement, poor hygiene, and weak surveillance further contribute to the outbreaks even beyond national borders. This paper explores armed conflict-driven crises and population movement as epidemiological drivers of cholera. It highlights the critical need for integrated, multisectoral strategies combining vaccination, water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure, and early detection systems. The interventions are necessary for mitigating outbreaks and building long-term resilience in such fragile settings.

Keywords: cholera, conflict, hygiene, outbreak, sanitation, vaccine.

Epidemiological drivers of cholera: the role of conflict and population displacement

Cholera is an acute bacterial severe diarrhoea, dehydrating disease caused by *Vibrio cholerae* that can be fatal within hours.¹ The transmission of this disease is facilitated by complex factors, including political conflicts, community movements, and environmental shocks, especially when access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities is compromised.²

The cholera outbreak in Sudan is part of a larger global and regional crisis. Between January 1 and May 25, 2025, the African Region recorded 117 346 cholera cases across 17 countries. The largest burdens were reported in South Sudan (51 054 cases), followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (27 000) and Angola (22 557). Sudan reported 16 564 cases during this same period.³ From 1 January to 11 August 2025, Sudan reported 48 763 suspected cases of cholera and acute watery diarrhoea, with 1 094 deaths, corresponding to a case fatality rate of 2.2%. The disease has affected all 18 states, with notably elevated transmission detected in Khartoum, North Kordofan, White Nile, and across the Darfur region.⁴ Cholera has impacted people of all ages, with more than 70% of reported cases occurring among infants and individuals up to 50 years old.⁵

Armed conflicts and population movements are impacting cholera transmission. Globally, conflicts can lead to the collapse of essential public health infrastructure, including WASH systems.⁶ The subsequent displacement of people into overcrowded camps or urban settings with poor living conditions creates an environment ripe for rapid disease spread.⁷ The ongoing civil war has created one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises, displacing millions of people internally and across borders, and the movement of displaced people into temporary shelters has created a favorable environment for cholera.⁸

Health system disruption and response limitations

Approximately 80% of healthcare facilities in conflict-impacted zones are out of service. Medical teams at centers such as Al Jazeera East Hospital in Al Bashraha, Al Jazeera State, continue to care for patients with cholera by delivering oral rehydration therapy and reserving intravenous fluid administration for individuals with severe dehydration.⁹ Before the outbreak of the civil war, Sudan's healthcare sector was already characterized by

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COMMENTARY
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