The Sudan War: An empirical assessment of the effects of Sudan war on South Sudan

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Abstract

This study assesses the consequences of the protracted war in Sudan on South Sudan country. The objectives is to establish the drivers of the war and secondly, to determine the consequences of the war on the neighboring South Sudan. The data was collected from focus groups and at times purposively sampling was undertaken targeting those in leadership to understand power dynamics. Among the findings power struggle between the incumbent government and an amorphous RAF, secondly the issue of resources distribution especially gold have driven the escalations. Another important driver has been the historical unresolved governance issues. South Sudan ties with the Sudan considered the northern Sudan is historical. The former ceded or gained independence from the later after an armed struggle for many years that culminated in the referendum in 2011 that gave nod for independence. The two countries still share resources especially the oil resources. The distribution of oil is an agreed arrangement and the Norh is charged with distribution and marketing to the international market. Though the country has held together for more than 10 years and made progress towards nationhood, it has had its share of challenges partly due to power struggles, skewed resources distribution, external interference in exploiting the natural resources, poverty compounded by weak or non-existent institutions and lack of support from the international community. The effects of the war are dire. Around 2millions refuges from Sudan that is a strain not only on the economy but socially affected the country's ability to take care of its citizenry. The war affected the pipeline that distributes oil to Port of Sudan enroute to international market. The economic recession is exacerbated by dwindling oil revenues occasioning imbalance of payments. The hyperinflation is currently caused by foreign currency inadequacy since the country is solely a consumption one affecting businesses and the poor households. The recommendations to South Sudan among others include diversifying its revenues to avert overdependence on oil. The historical issues should be resolved through a healing and reconciliation framework.

Key words: power struggle, resource distribution, oil dependence and external interference

1. Introduction

The origin of the conflict can be found in the political tensions following the coup d'état coordinated by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) that overthrew Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 after a massive demonstrations by the public. Both forces established a transitional government, presided over by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, general of the SAF, with Mohamed Hamdan 'Hemedti' Dagalo, leader of the RSF, as vice president, and with economist Abdalla Hamdok as prime minister (Lopez, 2025).

The new Sudanese government set itself the goals of mitigating the country's economic crisis and promulgating a new constitution. The collapsed projects in October 2021 causing international institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, to cease their aid to Sudan, which led to protests by the population demanding a civilian government.

Government negotiations to establish a new regime were truncated by disagreements between the two leaders, especially when it came to setting a date for the integration of the RSF into the Sudanese army. This increased tensions between the two, setting off a power struggle that hampered transition efforts, until on April 15, 2023, a series of explosions and gunfire erupted in Khartoum between the two armies, kicking off the civil war in which Sudan remains mired today.

The current status of the conflict is worrying: attacks persist and neither side seems willing to move towards a peace process. The RSF have consolidated their control over a large part of the western part of the country. Meanwhile, on March 21, the RSF took possession of the presidential palace in Khartoum, a major step forward in their task of expelling the paramilitary group from the capital. The African Union (AU) warned of a possible division of the country after the RSF signed the founding charter of a separatist government in April 2025. The regional body has urged all member states and the international community not to recognize such a government or any entity seeking separation from the Republic of Sudan.

Sudan's military government has accused United Arab Emirates (UAE) of supplying arms to the RSF, which the Emiratis have denied. The UAE's relationship with the RSF can be traced back to the 2015 Yemen war, where the RSF was used to recruit fighters who were sent to Yemen to fight for the Saudi and UAE forces. The UAE's interest in Sudan is also down to its gold, most which has ended up in the UAE in recent years (Mohdin and Ahmed, 2025).

The Sudanese civil war has resulted in a devastating humanitarian crisis, including over 150,000 deaths, mass displacement of over 12 million people, widespread famine, and extensive sexual violence. The conflict has also destroyed critical infrastructure like hospitals and water supplies, crippled the economy, and fueled regional instability by attracting external intervention. Additionally, environmental damage is a consequence, exacerbated by the conflict's impact on resource-rich areas and artisanal gold mining (Mohdin and Ahmed, 2025).

The internal conflict in Sudan remains particularly active. The (RSF) continue to fight against the (SAF), leaving thousands of victims and increasing the humanitarian catastrophe: since the beginning of the war in April 2023, it has caused a huge issue of refugees and displaced persons, estimated at eleven million people.

Both sides have been accused of a litany of human rights violations and war crimes against civilians. The US, UN and others have also determined that the RSF has committed genocide and mass rape against ethnic Masalit and non-Arab communities in Darfur. In August that year, famine was declared in the Zamzam camp for displaced people, south of El Fasher. In April, the RSF killed as many as 2,000 people when it seized the camp, which at the time housed 500,000 people.

The consequences of war are devastating and multifaceted, including the immediate loss of life, physical destruction of infrastructure, and mass displacement of populations. Long-term effects include severe economic hardship, lasting psychological trauma, and the breakdown of social and political structures, which can persist for generations. Environmental damage is also a significant and lasting consequence of armed conflict.

2. Theoretical framework

War is a two-level game, it is essential to comprehend the domestic political dynamics of the parties involved in order to explain why interstate conflicts persist and ultimately come to an end (Stanley, 2009). Stanley provides insightful analysis on when to end a war, pointing out the underappreciated category of long-lasting conflicts that rationalist models have not been able to adequately account for. Various scholars have discussed various forms, strategies and causes of wars. For instance, Foster and Brewer (1976) studied the pre-war strategies that could impact the ability to end a prospective conflict on agreeable terms and at agreeable costs, while Slantchev (2004) examined the interstate conflicts that lasted from 1816 to 1991 and proposed some theories on their length and terms of settlement. Further, to draw attention to historical connections in issues related to war termination, Linda Legier-Topp (2009) looked at three wars: World War I, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War of 1991. On the contrary, Levy (1998) discussed what leads to conflict and what makes a peaceful society, in his study he answered the most pressing problems, such as why conflicts break out and how they end. Griffith (1992) analyzes the doctrine and philosophy of war termination as applied in the Persian Gulf War.

Guner et al. (2022) provides the link between causes and termination of war and belabour to shows the factors that affect the duration of the war based on the Second Karabakh War. However, Massoud (1996) attempts to study the forms and consequences of war outcomes paying more attention on the particular variables that explain termination of wars end as explained by three factors namely 1) military dimension; 2) costs, and 3) terms of settlement. Lutmar and Terris (2017) adds to this discussion by looking at war termination from the perspectives of the balance of power and power transition theories focusing on leadership changes, bargaining and the psychology of leaders' decision-making.

The position of these first strand of literature shows the pragmatic and often power-centric nature of decisions to end conflicts in the international arena. They believe that the termination of war occurs when states achieve a favorable balance of power, secure their national interests, and make pragmatic decisions based on the costs and benefits of continued conflict or when both sides recognize that continued fighting will not significantly alter the balance of power.

However, the Liberal scholars (Kant ,1795; Wilson, 1917; Keohane, 1984; Bruce Russett, 2025 and others) offer a different perspective on war termination. They argue that war termination is best achieved through the promotion of democracy, the strengthening of international institutions, the fostering of economic interdependence, and the adherence to international norms and laws. While the Constructivist (Wendt 2025; Finnemore, 2019; Katzenstein, 2015; and others) on the other hand, offer a distinct position on war termination. They view war termination as a process influenced by identities, norms, values, social interactions, and discourse. They argue that the way states perceive themselves and others, as well as the shared norms and values within the international system, significantly influence decisions about terminating wars.

Diehl and Goertz (2000) suggest that the majority of the world's wars are repetitive conflicts between sets of states identified as rivals. However, there are theories that explains the war causes. The following strands of literature by Coccia (2019), summarizes the theories that underpin wars.

Angell (2007)'s theory of no economic advantage, posits that wars are ineffective and unproductive from an economic standpoint. According to Angell, since modern economies are inextricably connected, war is not only irrelevant for a country's growth but also detrimental to everyone's economy. He highlights the reciprocal benefits of economic cooperation and the significant costs of fighting.

Fearon (1995)'s theory of the failure in bargaining   on the other hand, exhibits a persuading rationale for nations engagement in conflict despite its high costs and shows why reaching a peaceful settlement in the best interests to avoid the expenses of war may be difficult. Fearon offers a framework for comprehending the intricacies of international conflict and the challenges in reaching peaceful settlements by concentrating on indivisibilities of issues, private information, and commitment issues.

Theory of biological and sociological advocate for war so that nations protect themselves from decline as advanced by Slavich (2020). He asserts that nations fight to safeguard the social institutions and vital resources required for their survival and prosperity. This theory focuses on the basic elements that support a country's stability and development. These elements can be roughly divided into two categories: sociological necessities, that constitutes the social structures, cultural practices, and institutional frameworks, and biological necessities, which are constitute the physical and genetic well-being of a people.

In conclusion, the theories bother on realism, which posits that war is a result of states seeking power and security in an anarchic international system; liberalism, which suggests that democracies are less likely to go to war with each other; and marxism, which views war as driven by economic competition for resources and markets. Other perspectives include just war theory, an ethical framework for both initiating and conducting war, and approaches from other disciplines like feminism and evolutionary biology, which offer unique analyses of war's causes and their dynamics.

3. Methodology

Both primary and secondary data was collected in South Sudan. A total of 600 interviews were conducted from the victims of the war and Secondary data was collected through document examinations and reports analysis of government and international agencies. An exploratory and descriptive research designs were adopted for the study.

4. Findings and Discussions

The conflict is still having sever ramification on the region's stability and economic growth. It has had far reaching consequences, beyond the borders of the country. South Sudan, in particular, is witnessing devastation arising from the war in its northern territory which is increasingly causing internal instability and, with it, the possibility of a new civil war.
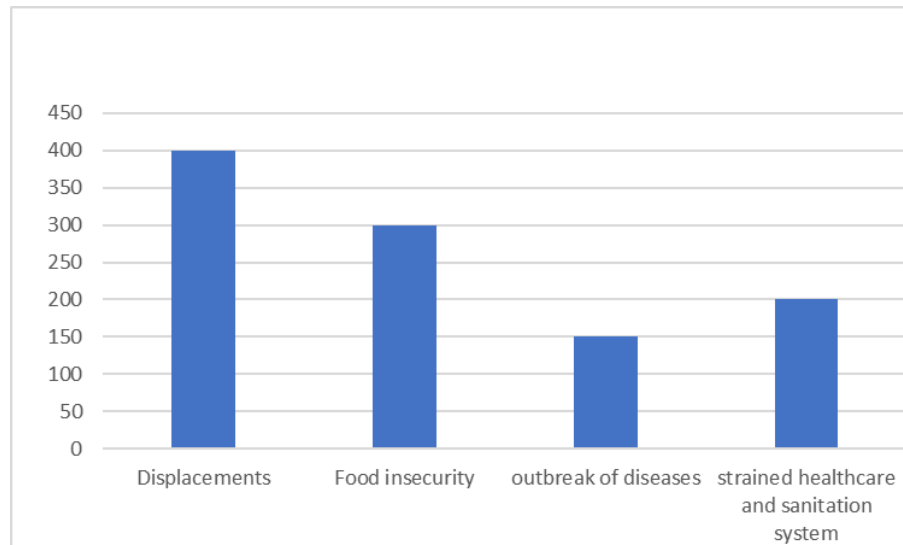
Figure 1: Humanitarian Situation

From figure 1, it can be deduced that a majority of people are displaced, suffering from food insecurity compounded by outbreak of diseases due to strained healthcare and sanitation facilities
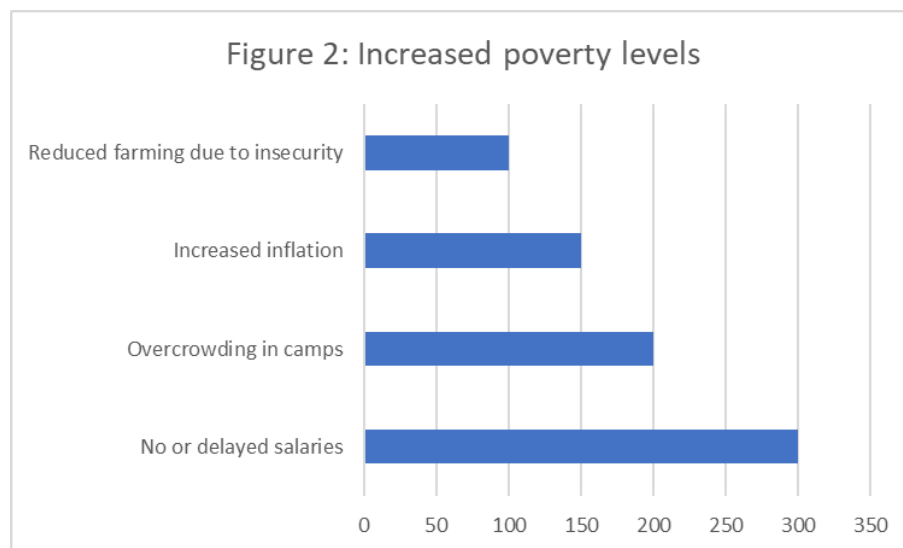
Figure 2 shows that majority of people have been affected by lack of or delayed salaries followed by overcrowding in camps, increased inflation and reports of reduced farming due to insecurity. This combined exacerbates poverty in the country.

On the humanitarian situation, the current conflict in Sudan has caused massive displacement of Sudanese people, with over 300,000 fleeing to neighboring countries like South Sudan itself, Ethiopia, and Uganda in 2025 alone. This has created a severe humanitarian crisis, characterized by widespread food insecurity, famine conditions, and outbreaks of disease, further exacerbated by the collapse of healthcare and sanitation systems in affected regions.

Economically, in addition to the above, the instability and humanitarian status in South Sudan is compounded by the impact of the war on Juba's ability to continue, exporting the oil it produces, which is the country's main source of revenue, Issue for an estimated 90% of its GDP. The main pipeline carrying oil from South Sudan to the terminal near Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast has been suffering from blockages in Sudan since February 2024. The blockages have had an impact on the oil sector and GDP: since the conflict began in Sudan, the oil and gas sector has contracted by 70%while GDP has declined by 5%. Prior to the disruptions, and as agreed when the country gained independence from Khartoum in 2011, South Sudan had been exporting about 150,000 barrels per day; the Petrodar pipeline outage reduced the Export Issue to about 58,000 barrels per day by the end of 2024.

The conflict has also led to a drastic increase in poverty, as employment and economic activity have collapsed, and the spillover effects have increased the risk of further instability and violence within South Sudan. The humanitarian conditions in large parts of the country have generated an urgent need to improve the security and protection of South Sudanese civilians, whose status has worsened since the beginning of the war in Sudan in April 2023, with a displacement of refugees to the southern neighbour that has aggravated the problem of overcrowding in the camps; refugees are exposed to famine and violent clashes, and their humanitarian needs cannot be adequately addressed by aid organizations or by the government itself due to a lack of resources; as a result, South Sudan suffered the worst famine crisis the territory has ever faced in 2023.

The effects of inflation have been seriously felt by different sectors of the country. The radical increase in prices has affected, first of all, consumers and small businesses: the price of corn, a staple food product for the Sudanese, went from 800 to 2,000 pounds in just a few months, which has made it difficult for many families to access basic necessities, as well as the ability of vendors to keep their businesses afloat. In May 2024, the government, warned of the state's inability to pay the salaries of police, military and civil servants as a result of the budget deficit caused by the loss of 70% of oil revenues.

Socially and politically, there have been increased instability. The influx of refugees and the economic hardship have likely increase political instability and potentially fuel further conflict within South Sudan. Access to education for many children has been severely impacted, with a high percentage of children out of school. Sudanese refugees have reported faced human rights abuses, including harassment and forced relocation, in neighbouring countries.

There are reported environmental consequences. The lack of sanitation and clean water has led to a significant increase in waterborne diseases and other health issues. The disruption of the agricultural system and other economic activities has created scarcity of resources, including clean water, which has further worsened health conditions

5. Recommendations

However, despite these figures, the war continues to be overshadowed in the international discussion by other wars like the Israel – Palestine and Russia-Ukraine wars thus presenting serious ramifications on Sudan Sudan. The following mitigation measures and policy initiatives may help manage the conflicts and terminate the war. Stopping the war requires a multi-faceted approach involving intensive diplomacy, addressing root causes of conflict, upholding international law, and investing in long term peacebuilding efforts.

Intervention of internation community is needed especially in terms of stopping the war and providing humanitarian support. Disarmament and Sanction countries providing weapons to the warrying parties. The African Union and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) should take a leading role in stopping the war through negotiations and arbitration. However, they have been muted silence since some African countries are accused of implicit in war.

The discussion of Sudan situation should be done at high level of United Nation - UN Security council. There is need to strengthen international frameworks to reinforce the authority and effectiveness of international institutions like UN Security council and International Criminal Court (ICC).

Lastly, South Sudan needs to protect it is economy against external shocks by diversifying the revenue earnings. This is to mitigate against the supply chain risk, so that disruption on oil supply that she solely depends does not negatively impact the economy.

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