



Evolving Sudanese Crises and Maritime Security in the red Sea and its implications on Northeast Africa

Shedrack Chukwuezeugo Igboke*, , Akogwu Chukwunonso Joseph, 

Ojo Idowu Akinnwumi, , and Ogonna E. Chukwuma 

Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka-Anambra Nigeria

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*Corresponding Author: **Shedrack Chukwuezeugo Igboke** | Email Address: sc.igboke@unizik.edu.ng

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Abstract

The developing problems in Sudan and their effects on maritime security in the Red Sea region were investigated in this article. Since gaining independence in 1956, Sudan has seen ongoing political unrest marked by civil wars, coups, ethnic conflicts, and humanitarian catastrophes. The most current crisis broke out in April 2023 as a result of a bloody power struggle between Mohamed Hamdan Dagolo's Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and Abdel Fattah al-Burhan's Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). The conflict exacerbated Sudan's pre-existing humanitarian and governance issues by causing extensive violence, significant civilian casualties, and widespread displacement. The study looked at how the ongoing conflict impacted regional stability and maritime security in the Red Sea, as well as the fundamental causes of the Sudanese legitimacy issue. The study used a qualitative research methodology and relied on secondary data from reliable international sources, policy publications, and scholarly literature. Power theory, which clarified the battle for political control between rival military players and the larger regional interests affecting the conflict, served as the foundation for the analysis. The results showed that human trafficking, refugee flows, weaponry proliferation, and cross-border insecurity had all been made worse by the long-running power struggle between SAF and RSF. By raising dangers like piracy, smuggling, and disruptions to trade routes, the crisis also put marine operations in the Red Sea at risk. The study came to the conclusion that in order to resolve Sudan's internal strife and protect maritime security in the Red Sea, concerted regional and international actions were required.

Keywords: Sudanese Armed Forces, Rapid Support Forces, political unrest, Red Sea region, and maritime security.

Introduction

Every human culture has crises from time to time. Both managing and preventing crises are possible. Violent disputes are frequently the outcome of poor crisis prevention or management. The violent conflict that is currently wreaking havoc on Sudan is the result of inadequate crisis management. The world is currently experiencing a democratic recession. Around the world, democratic norms are under pressure. In Sri Lanka, protesters overran the presidential palace and forced out President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who quickly installed an ally in his place; in Hungary, Viktor Orban boasts he is creating a "illiberal state"; and in the United States, demonstrators overran Capitol Hill in an effort to thwart the transfer of power (Aidi, 2022). These facts support a report published in 2006 by V-Dem, a research institute that tracks democratic retreat, which claimed that more democracies are regressing and even returning to authoritarianism (https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf).

The global democratic recession has a severe impact on Africa. For example, there was a military coup in Mali in 2020, military takeovers in Chad, Mali, Guinea, and Sudan in 2021, two coups in Burkina Faso in 2022, and an attempted coup in Guinea-Bissau (Aidi, 2022). The Sudanese crisis is a democratic crisis.

Africa's democratic crisis is a complicated, multifaceted problem that has been a source of worry for many years. While there have been some encouraging recent developments, such as the peaceful handover of power in Senegal, South Africa, and Botswana, among other countries, many African countries still face difficulties, such as political instability in Burkina Faso, Libya, and Mali. The most recent instance is the developing situation in Sudan, which has been caused by a crisis of legitimacy since April 15, 2023 (Aidi, 2022).

Sudan has been involved in conflicts since gaining independence in 1956. Ethnic divisions, two civil wars, violent protests, political upheaval, humanitarian crises, the proliferation of weapons, and the current crisis of legitimacy that is ripping the country apart are all examples of these post-independence conflicts (Searcy, 2019).

Due to a power struggle between two opposing military chiefs that turned into full-scale warfare, Sudan has been plagued by bloodshed for the past few months. The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) are engaged in combat (Calson, 2023, para. 1). More than 300,000 Sudanese have been forced from their homes as a result of the conflict's escalation, which has resulted in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries.

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Since the fighting began on April 15, at least 528 people have died and 4,599 have been injured, according to Gadzo& Jamal (2023) (para. 1). Mohamed Hamdan Dagolo, also known as Hemedti, and Abdel Fattah al-Burhan are the competing candidates for power. The two men had previously teamed up in October 2021 to carry out a military takeover and violently suppress Sudan's democratic revolutionary movement. They are now using their weapons against one another (Alneel, 2023; Bociaga, 2023).

Disagreements about the timescale required to integrate the Dagolo-led RSF into the Al-Burhan-led SAF, as outlined in a framework agreement dated December 5, 2022, served as the impetus for the current conflict. Burhan desired a two-year window, whereas Dagalo desired a ten-year one. As the two generals attempt to achieve a military triumph, this ignited the war and prompted Dagalo to send in additional troops (Akua, 2023, para. 5). Due to their shared desire to hold onto power and delay Sudan's transition to a civilian government, the two generals have initially worked together for more than three years. However, tensions between the SAF and RSF have steadily increased in recent months (Soliman & Hassan, 2023), and according to Bociaga (2023), "none of them wanted a real civilian-led government." The army's top brass is fighting to hold onto their wealth, and a militia leader is attempting to do the same (Akua, 2023). There is currently fierce warfare in Darfur, neighbouring Omdurman, and the capital of Sudan, Khartoum (Calson, 2023, para. 1).

In addition, the crisis in Sudan has led to large-scale protests against military authority and violent confrontations between protesters and security personnel in the cities of Khartoum and Omdurman. These protests have worsened the nation's failing economy and contributed to high rates of inflation. They have also caused injuries and damage to fundamental infrastructure, including road blocks, communication blackouts, and the suspension of foreign financial help (ACAPs, 2023).

Three million Sudanese were domestically displaced and one million were refugees from neighbouring countries due to the wars that followed the coup on October 25, 2021, before the current violence broke out on April 15. Approximately 16 million people, including three million undernourished children, relied on humanitarian aid for basic necessities including food, water, and shelter. Their problems were exacerbated by disease outbreaks and climate-related disasters including floods and droughts (Kapila, 2023, para. 2). The ongoing conflict in Sudan is making the country's humanitarian problems worse and forcing people to flee their homes on a daily basis. Sudan is already at a humanitarian "breaking point," according to the UN (Gadzo& Jamal, 2023, para. 1).

Maritime and regional security has been greatly impacted by the violent wars in Sudan. Gadzo& Jamal (2023, para. 1) state that "border countries are facing an economic strain as they take in Sudanese refugees, and the volatility of the region has worsened human trafficking and weapons trafficking in the region." The ongoing conflict in Sudan has also led to the emergence of triggers and drivers that have been demonstrated to compromise or have the potential to compromise maritime security, particularly the security of the Red Sea. The increasingly deadly conflict in Sudan poses a serious threat to the Red Sea. It is impossible to overstate the significance of protecting the Red Sea. Due to its geographic location, economic potential, and geopolitical significance, Sudan and the surrounding regions find great significance in the Red Sea.

In addition to offering chances for trade, resource development, and tourism, the Red Sea's close proximity to Sudan and the surrounding areas is crucial for international maritime communication and transportation. Thus, this research examined Sudan's security challenges against this setting. It emphasised the prospective effects of the crises on maritime security, especially the Red Sea, and the significance of protecting it in the midst of the ongoing conflict in Sudan. There are six sections in this study. After this introduction, the second section will.

Clarifications of Concepts and Context

The concepts of SAF, RSF, Red Sea, Port Sudan, Maritime Security, and Regional Stability are the main topics of this essay, yet they are so important that they require specific explanation. An overview of the terms and conceptual clarification will be done to help with clarity.

SAF

Over 120,000 soldiers make up the SAF nationwide, and many more are in reserve. Its leadership is mostly made up of elites from the central Nile area, although its recruits are mostly from the country's peripheries. The army's air force, heavy ground weapons, battle tanks, and other armoured infantry vehicles all contribute to its capability (Carlson, 2023, para. 6).

RSF

The majority of the RSF's more than 75,000 fighters are from the far western area of Darfur. The Janjaweed, a government-backed militia accused of atrocities in Darfur since the start of the violence there in 2003, gave rise to the RSF ten years ago (Adetayo, 2023, para. 4). It was supported in the years that followed by mostly Arab recruits from Chad (up to 7,000, according to some estimates), many of whom enlisted in order to obtain higher salaries. Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo, the head of RSF, has close ethnic ties to Chadian populations. This, together with the RSF's wealth (the group owns profitable mines in gold-rich Sudan), encourages some residents to support Hemedti (Adetayo, 2023, para. 5). AK-pattern rifles and more advanced high-caliber weapons are among the many tiny and light weaponry that the paramilitary force possesses (Carlson, 2023, para. 9).

The Red Sea

Like other social notions, the Red Sea has been defined in a number of ways over the years by governments, the media, academic institutions, international organisations, and civil society organisations. The Red Sea, for example, is "a seawater inlet of the Indian Ocean located between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula," according to Ryan & Schreiber (2023). According to Najeeb & Steward (2015), "the Red Sea is a prominent body of water with unique geological features, rich marine biodiversity, and significant economic and strategic importance for the countries like Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen which border it." Dinwinddie (2008) further stated that "the Red Sea stretches over 1,900 kilometres (1,180 miles) in length and has a maximum width of roughly 355 kilometres (220 miles)." Deep tunnels, volcanic islands, and coral reefs have been formed by this rift system, which is a portion of the Great Rift Valley (<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/rift-valley/>).

It is a well-liked location for scuba divers and snorkelers because of its colourful coral reefs and varied marine life. Numerous marine animals, such as vibrant fish, dolphins, turtles, and several kinds of coral, can be found there. Because of its advantageous location for international trade and shipping, the area around the Red Sea has substantial economic significance. In order to ease trade, nations like Egypt and Saudi Arabia have built significant seaports along the Red Sea coast. It is an essential maritime route connecting the Middle East, Europe, and Asia (Al-Anazi, 2001).

Petroleum deposits, evaporite deposits (sediments deposited as a result of evaporation, such as halite, sylvite, gypsum, and dolomite), sulphur, phosphates, and the heavy-metal deposits in the bottom oozes of the Atlantis II, Discovery, and other deeps are the five main categories of mineral resources found in the Red Sea region. The countries that border the sea have exploited the oil and natural gas deposits to differing degrees; the deposits close to Egypt's Jamsah (Gemsa) Promontory, which is where the Red Sea and the Gulf of Suez converge, are particularly noteworthy. The evaporites are readily available, although they have only been used sparingly, mostly locally. Since the early 20th century, sulphur has been mined extensively, especially from resources near Jamsah Promontory. Although there are phosphate resources on both sides of the ocean, the ore's grade is too poor to be exploited using current methods. Although the sediments of the Atlantis II Deep alone have been projected to have significant economic potential, none of the heavy metal deposits have been mined.

(<https://www.britannica.com/place/Yemen>).

Port Sudan

Port Sudan is the largest port in Sudan and a major economic and trading hub that houses vital oil export facilities. It is situated in one of the most significant maritime routes in the world, connecting the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea. One of Sudan's primary sources of income and employment is the USD 11 billion in annual foreign trade that passes through its eastern states (30% of GDP) (Boudiaf, 2022, para. 2).

Any major disruption at the port is likely to have an impact on the trade that passes through Sudan because it serves as a commercial sea gateway for neighbouring landlocked nations, especially South Sudan, Chad, and the Central African Republic. Any new blockades are likely to worsen the existing severe shortages of essential products and commodities and interfere with exports, especially to nearby nations (Boudiaf, 2022, para. 3).

Maritime Security

Maritime security has become widely used in academic, media, security, and policy circles because of its importance. Crossley (2023), for instance, defined maritime security as the use or deployment of a nation's maritime security agency to carry out surveillance and monitoring of all maritime resources against the threats of piracy led by sea pirates and other maritime theft that deprive the state/country of its invaluable maritime resources. However, a more detailed definition of maritime security was provided by the Maritime Institute of Technology and Graduate Studies [MITAGS] (2023, para. 2), which defined it as "a general term for the protection of vessels both internally and externally through supervision, inspection, and proactive measures to minimise threats to maritime security, both malicious and accidental."

Terrorism, piracy, robbery, illicit trafficking of people and goods, illegal fishing, and pollution are the areas from which ships and maritime operations need to be protected. Additionally, as the marine sector expands and the industry changes, training, enforcement, and monitoring must keep up with new dangers and technological advancements.

Additionally, maritime resources like fish, crude oil, and other vital resources that are either exported to other nations or consumed by the nation's population are protected and safeguarded by maritime security. Maintaining the flow of oil and gas money and vital sea ports, which have the ability to greatly advance regional growth, depends on maritime security in Sudan and the surrounding nations. However, many Africans rely directly on marine resources like fish, aquaculture, and intact ecosystems for their livelihoods (Royal Institutes of International Affairs, 2013). Port Sudan, Al Khair, Osman Digna, and El Zubir are important seaports in the Republic of Sudan (Crossley, 2023). Shipping firms, importers/exporters, and the Sudanese economy will probably suffer major setbacks as a result of the ongoing conflicts between the SAF and RSF over the allocation of authority and resources within the government (Crossley, 2023, par. 4).

Regional Stability

Social scientists, legislators, governmental organisations, international organisations, and concerned global citizens now discuss the idea of "regional stability" on a daily basis. This is due to the fact that every nation and its people must comprehend the security procedures and phenomena that occur in its environment. A number of authority have intellectualised the term in different ways due to user disagreement. For example, Bailes & Cottey (2006) described regional stability as the collective actions and endeavours of nations in a particular geographic area to foster peace, stability, and defence against a range of security risks and difficulties. In order to solve shared security challenges, it entails collaboration, communication, and the creation of agreements and institutions among regional states.

"Regional security focuses on the unique security dynamics and specific challenges faced by a particular region," according to Clinton (1997). Conflicts, territorial disputes, terrorism, organised crime, arms proliferation, resource competition, environmental degradation, and political instability are just a few of the many issues that can arise. Diplomatic negotiations, measures to foster confidence, cooperative security arrangements, intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, and the creation of regional frameworks and institutions are frequently used to improve regional security.

Cooperation and coordination in regional security are greatly aided by regional organisations like the Organization of American States (OAS), the African Union (AU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Clinton, 1997). The main objective of regional security is to create an atmosphere in which states may cohabit peacefully, advance mutual trust, and successfully address security issues as a group. Countries seek to prevent conflicts, reduce the likelihood of aggression, safeguard their sovereignty, and advance socioeconomic growth in the region by tackling regional security issues.

The East African region, where Sudan is situated alongside nations like Chad, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Egypt, Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Libya, is characterised by regional instability caused by state and non-state armed clash/conflicts,

terrorism, arms proliferation, insurgency, oil conflicts, maritime and land disputes, and other crises. Armed conflicts, refugee crises, ethnic and religious conflicts, and most recently, the fight between the Sudanese SAF and RSF, have all been caused by regional instability in East Africa (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2023, para. 1). With complicated issues of forced migration and internal population relocation, regional instability in East Africa has shortened the socio-political and economic well-being of the populace, leading to the fragility of the region's states.

Theoretical Framing

Power theory serves as the foundation for this paper's analysis. Within the fields of international relations and political science, power theory—also referred to as power politics or *realpolitik*—examines how power shapes and influences the actions of nations and other actors in the global system. According to power theory, the pursuit of national interests and international relations are primarily motivated by power and self-interest (Barnett & Duvall, 2005).

The theory's proponent, A.F.K. Organski, initially presented it in his 1958 textbook, *World Politics*. Organski claimed that the distribution of political, economic, and military powers across rival groups of states/countries is likely to enhance the likelihood of conflict and war in order to explain the dynamics of political instability orchestrated by power struggles. When disadvantaged and advantaged nations/countries have unequal national capabilities, peace is best maintained. The aggressor is more likely to be the weaker power than the stronger one, and it will come from a small number of disgruntled powerful nations. Douglas Lemke extended power theory to include regional hierarchies, contending that each region has its own dominant, great, and small powers. Originally, Organski's hierarchy only applied to the entire world system. Organski's order of power theory, for instance, is evident in the conflict between the United States and Russia/China in the international system. The power struggles between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia over Ethiopia's construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) are implied by Douglas Lemke's theory of regional hierarchies.

The ongoing conflict in Sudan can be effectively analysed using power theory. The origin, dynamics, sustainability, and scope of the current, fierce conflict between the SAF and RSF in Sudan are all well explained. Both groups are well armed to maintain a protracted battle in order to seize power and stay politically relevant, which has led to an increase in bloodshed and fierce fighting in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, as well as other nearby Omdurman and Darfur regions (Carlson, 2023).

The Implications of Sudan's crises on Security in Northeast Africa

Sudan, one of the world's poorest nations, is in danger of turning into a hub of lawlessness that spreads insecurity throughout the region due to its harsh environment, scarcity of natural resources, and location in the Sahara Desert (Nations Encyclopedia, 2020). The scope and rate of Sudan's decline into death and devastation are unparalleled, according to the UN Secretary General. People are being attacked in their homes and on the streets as fighting rages on in Sudan. There have been thousands of injuries and hundreds of civilian deaths. These figures are increasing daily (UNSG, 2023). People are being attacked in their homes and on the streets, and more than two-thirds of hospitals close to war regions are unable to operate. The situation is dire, especially in Darfur and Khartoum.

Violent conflicts in Sudan have intensified since the coup that overthrew President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 and the subsequent crisis of legitimacy between Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan Dagolo in 2023. This has serious ramifications for regional security in northeast Africa. The following are some ways that these implications are changing.

Internal Instability

The region's already severe security situation is being made worse by the ongoing turmoil in Sudan (Vanguard, 2023, para. 1). The 2019 coup itself brought attention to Sudan's political unrest and domestic instability, which has been demonstrated to have repercussions for the whole region. The post-coup transitional government has had difficulty upholding stability and meeting the aspirations of different groups in the nation. For example, hundreds of civilians have died in recent weeks in Darfur, one of the war's epicentres, mostly from small weapons fire. Small arms and heavy machine guns are being used by RSF forces in Khartoum, which has witnessed the most prolonged and concentrated fighting, to maintain positions jammed between residential apartment buildings and to control the airport and government buildings.

Aerial fire has been triggered by the RSF's use of infantry vehicles and anti-aircraft guns in Khartoum's highly populated residential neighbourhoods. Both civilians and paramilitary fighters have died as a result (Carlson, 2023, para. 7). Additionally, the RSF and Sudanese forces are using tanks and ammunition in areas where millions of civilians reside. Everyone in Sudan is facing extremely difficult circumstances, particularly those who reside in Khartoum, northern Sudan, and Darfur state (Akua, 2023, para. 9). Carlson (2023, para. 2) states that "both forces are sufficiently armed to sustain a protracted conflict, while mediation efforts continue to stumble." This suggests that the battle will go on for a very long time because it is doubtful that either can defeat the other.

It is clear that Sudan's internal unrest contributes to regional insecurity. Analysts have already cautioned that the battle in Sudan, which has moved to the western province of Darfur, a militarised, conflict-weary area the size of France, could destabilise surrounding nations, especially Chad, and have repercussions for the larger Sahel region (Adetayo, 2023, para. 3). The region has seen increased arms proliferation, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and an increase in militia fighters and mercenaries as a result of the fighting in Sudan. For example, the SAF head accused the RSF commander of hiring mercenaries from CAR, Chad, and Niger; and it is known that the Wagner Group has technical consultants in Sudan who support Hemedti and RSF. Mali, Chad, and Niger sent mercenaries to Sudan (Soufan Center, 2023, para. 2). Additionally, other nations that border Sudan may experience a crisis of legitimacy as a result of Sudan's domestic unrest. This is due to the fact that history has consistently repeated itself across Africa, particularly in nearby nations. For example, five of Sudan's seven neighbors—Ethiopia, Chad, the Central African Republic, Libya, and South Sudan—have experienced political unrest or conflict in recent years, according to Aljazeera (2023, para. 3). Given the current brutal conflict in Sudan, the cycle would most likely continue.

Border Disputes and Cross-Border Infiltration

The Sudanese situation is having a cross-border effect on several fronts (United Nations [UN NEWS], 2023). Sudan is bordered by Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Libya, among other nations in northeastern Africa.

Sudan has been impacted by the internal strife and political upheavals in these nearby nations (Reuters, 2023, para. 3). Sudan's neighbouring countries are experiencing spiralling impacts due to the severity and spread of the country's present violent problems. For example, border conflicts and cross-border infiltration of armed groups have been persistent security problems since the conflict, potentially contributing to regional instability (UN News, 2023). In a similar vein, conflicts occasionally break out along disputed sections of Sudan's border with Ethiopia. Both could exploit Sudan's upheaval to further their goals, according to analysts. Tensions over the rich but disputed Al-Fashqa border arose when violence broke out in Ethiopia's northern Tigray province in 2020, forcing over 50,000 Ethiopian refugees into already impoverished areas of eastern Sudan. Given the tensions surrounding its \$4 billion Blue Nile dam, which Sudan claims could endanger its own Nile dams and its people, Ethiopia will also be keeping an eye on developments (Aljazeera, 2023, para. 6).

Regional Terrorism and Extremism

Terrorism and extremism have complicated histories in Sudan. It is also easy to anticipate that criminal and likely terrorist groups will have another fantastic chance to profit from and exploit additional unrest in Sudan. Terrorism and extremism are already spreading throughout the region as a result of the country's continuing strife. Extremist organisations in Sudan, such as the Abu Nidal Organization, Palestine Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Hizballah, and al-Qaida, take advantage of times of instability and poor governance despite the nation's efforts to resolve these problems (US Department of State, 2020). Due to its geographic location and open borders, Sudan is vulnerable to extremist elements, endangering both regional stability and Sudan's domestic security.

Refugee and Displacement Crisis

Massive population displacements brought on by the conflict between Sudan's rival military factions are straining the region's already precarious coping mechanisms. Due to wars in neighbouring countries like South Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, Sudan has long been home to a sizable population of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs). The region's infrastructure, security, and resources are strained by the enormous numbers of refugees and internally displaced people. UN agencies estimate that more than 1.2 million people have been internally displaced since the start of the Sudan conflict, and about 450,000 have fled to Egypt, Chad, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Libya, and the Central African Republic (CAR), all of which are dealing with their own stressors (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2023, para. 4).

The prolonged turmoil in Sudan has had an especially negative impact on Egypt, the CAR, Libya, and Chad. Egypt has been a key conduit for Sudanese migrants fleeing Khartoum since the start of the conflict. UNCHR reports that 175,565 migrants, primarily Sudanese, have arrived thus far. It is anticipated that these figures would keep rising. With around 9 million economic migrants living there, Egypt is a major transit and destination point for migrants fleeing difficulties in other parts of Africa. In a same vein, since April 2023, over 10,300 Sudanese have fled to the CAR. More than 3,400 CAR refugees who had already fled the war there joined them. Additionally, since April, some 1,300 Sudanese have succeeded in reaching the isolated Libyan border.

For many years, Libya has served as a crucial transit nation for migrants and refugees escaping violence and oppression in the western Sahel and other regions of Africa (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2023, para. 7). Again, since the most recent violence started in April 2023, some 20,000 more refugees from Sudan have arrived in Chad, which has already taken in about 400,000 displaced Sudanese from earlier conflicts (Aljazeera, 2023, para. 4). Given that refugee flows frequently involve cross-border movements and have the potential to escalate already-existing tensions, they undoubtedly contribute to regional instability (UNHCR, 2023).

Nile River and Water Security

Sudan's ongoing conflict is unsettling its neighbours and other nations for a variety of reasons, including worries over oil pipelines and shared Nile waters (Aljazeera, 2023). Water security is a crucial regional problem because of Sudan's location along the Nile River. Persistent disagreements over the use of Nile resources, especially between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan, have the potential to worsen tensions and affect regional stability. Concerns regarding resource rivalry and water availability have been highlighted by Ethiopia's development of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which has further complicated regional dynamics (United Nations, 2021).

Regional Power Competition

Power dynamics in northeast Africa are affected by Sudan's internal crisis of legitimacy and the changing alliances among regional players. It's crucial to remember that the security situation in northeastern Africa is extremely complicated, impacted by numerous parties, and prone to abrupt shifts. Al-Bashir (2014) states that "regional powers, including Egypt, Ethiopia, and Gulf countries, have vested interests in Sudan's stability and have sought to influence developments in the country." Given the current crises, rivalries and competing interests among these regional actors may exacerbate political tensions and regional insecurity.

Humanitarian and Economic Challenges

Poverty, food insecurity, and inadequate infrastructure are just a few of the serious humanitarian and economic issues Sudan faces. These difficulties may worsen already-existing complaints, impair societal cohesiveness, and provide an environment that is conducive to a number of security risks, including criminal networks, smuggling, and illegal activity (OCHA, 2023). Regional security may be impacted by the interaction of several variables. Sudan is a major factor in the region's humanitarian problems. For example, two million people have been displaced from their homes in less than two months, fleeing to safer areas of Sudan or other countries. Nearly 500,000 migrants have already entered neighbouring nations. Sudan was already facing a humanitarian crisis before to the start of this conflict. More than half of the nation's population is now affected by this catastrophe (UNSG, 2023). As a result of the violence, the UN has already issued a warning about an imminent humanitarian crisis, stating that 800,000 people are anticipated to leave the nation (Bociaga, 2023, para. 14). In a similar vein, the UN refugee agency reported that thousands have already left Sudan due to the violence and that it is preparing for up to 270,000 people to flee into South Sudan and adjacent Chad. Before the most recent violence broke out, about 15.8 million people in Sudan, or one-third of the country's population, were in need of humanitarian relief (Akua, 2023, para 7).

Many individuals in Sudan and its bordering nations are suffering economically as a result of the conflict, particularly those who rely on daily income. Many lack the resources to purchase meals. The majority of markets are closed. These markets have been plundered by militias and soldiers. There are no emergency services available. The state is absent (Akua, 2023, para. 4). In these nations, about 40 million people experienced severe food insecurity. Due to the brutal conflict in Sudan, resources to support these populations are currently even more stretched (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2023, para. 1).

Arms Proliferation and Human Trafficking

Sudan is rife with weapons. With a total of nearly three million firearms held by both security services and citizens, the nation is ranked second among its neighbours in the area. Civilians own the great bulk of these weapons. This highlights the serious potential that as the conflict continues, there will be more violence in Sudan, the Red Sea region, and the entire northeast (Calson, 2023, para. 3). Sudan has had difficulty stopping the illicit transfer, buildup, and misuse of small guns and light weapons both inside and without its borders since the coup in 2019 (Bociaga, 2023, para. 9). The Rapid Support Forces have contributed significantly to the spread of weapons in Darfur since the present conflict. They have increased demand among a populace affected by the region's ongoing insecurity and facilitated supply, which was partially funded by Dagalo's wealth (Carlson, 2023, para. 8).

Due to the flow of weapons, the conflict in Sudan has increased bloodshed throughout the area. In addition to escalating the violence in Sudan, the unfettered spread of weapons, ammunition, and explosives destabilises nations like South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Libya, and others. One of the main factors sustaining the Sudanese conflict has been the diversion and illegal trade of small arms and light weapons (Bociaga, 2023, para. 10). These weapons are obtained by non-state actors through direct government contributions, government stock leaks, battlefield captures, and international trafficking (OCHA, 2011).

Furthermore, beginning April 2023, human trafficking has been widespread in Sudan. Human traffickers have exploited the fighting and political unrest because Sudan serves as both a starting point and a transit route for asylum seekers coming to Europe via Libya (Aljazeera, 2023, para. 5). Human trafficking routes have expanded both within Sudan and beyond the region as a result of the country's challenges.

Implications of the Sudanese crises on maritime security: The Red Sea

According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), coastal nations are in charge of overseeing the security of their exclusive economic zones, which are located between 12 and 200 nautical miles from their shorelines, and their territorial waters, which are located up to 12 nautical miles from their shorelines. This includes defence against illicit maritime activities, including terrorism, armed robbery, illegal fishing, piracy, and other related crimes (<https://www.imo.org/en/ourwork/legal/pages/unitednationsconventiononthelawofthesea.aspx>). However, a variety of security risks make Africa's maritime resources extremely susceptible. The Red Sea in particular has been vulnerable to challenges over the years, including interstate tensions, terrorism, and piracy.

The potential to further jeopardise maritime security, particularly the security of the Red Sea, has been demonstrated by the recent legitimacy crisis in Sudan between al-Burhan and Hemeti, which has escalated into a full-fledged war. The Red Sea is of great economic, strategic, and environmental importance to Sudan and other neighbouring countries. For example, Sudan's major seaport, Port Sudan, is one of several ports along the Red Sea coast. Additionally, by facilitating the import and export of products, these ports act as vital entry points for global trade. The Red Sea is very important to the nations that border Sudan because of its strategic location and several geopolitical and economic considerations. The following security risks could arise on the Red Sea if the situation is not promptly resolved:

Piracy

Maritime security in the Red Sea is under risk due to instability, poor administration, and the growth of armed organisations in Sudan. The ongoing violence in Sudan may lead to a rise in pirate events near the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, similar to the period of the country's civil wars.

People may be forced to conduct a variety of crimes in order to survive due to the already extreme poverty, inflation, and humanitarian catastrophe. Piracy is at the top of the list of crimes, and it would undoubtedly represent a major security risk to maritime operations in the Red Sea. Money will be needed to finance the conflict as it continues. Large sums of money are needed to pay soldiers and mercenaries, as well as to purchase weapons and other supplies needed to keep the conflict going. conflict is a costly business. Furthermore, according to Madkour (2023), "piracy no doubt poses a significant threat to the shipping industry, endangering the safety of crew members and vessels and leading to higher insurance costs." In other words, in order to continue funding the war, SAF and RSF might both participate in piracy along the Red Sea. The safety of ships passing through the Red Sea could be threatened by piracy in the region, which could also disrupt shipping routes and raise insurance prices.

Disruption of Trade and Transport Operations

Established trade routes might be disrupted by political conflicts, which presents serious difficulties for the maritime sector. Trade over the Red Sea may be hampered by the ongoing legitimacy conflict in Sudan. Sudan's import and export operations depend on the Red Sea. Conflicts and political unrest in Sudan may interfere with port operations, impede the flow of products into and out of Sudan, and have an effect on the larger regional network (Mbaku, 2023).

Since 2019, political violence and protests have frequently hampered trade and transit operations within and surrounding ports in Sudan's Red Sea state, particularly Port Sudan. These events are mostly caused by rivalries between communities and shifting power dynamics throughout Eastern Sudan. Beja tribal leaders blocked access to vital infrastructure supporting Red Sea ports, particularly Port Sudan, in September and October of 2021. This action was probably supported by members of the military leadership who were dissatisfied with their now-deposed civilian counterparts (Boudiaf, 2023, para. 1). With more than 900 containers stranded at the port, the Sudanese National Chamber of Importers reported in October 2021 that the one-month interruption at Port Sudan had cost the Sudanese economy up to USD65 million every day. Furthermore, about 3,000 vehicles were stopped by highway blockades, resulting in losses of up to USD 2 million every day (Boudiaf, 2022, para. 5).

Ships may find it challenging to reach vital trading hubs if ports are closed or restricted due to the region's ongoing violence and instability. Accordingly, "disruptions in trade routes in Sudan could result in increased shipping costs, longer delivery times, and logistical complications, impacting the efficiency of maritime transport," according to ACS Logistics (2023).

Humanitarian Concerns

The Red Sea region may be affected by the humanitarian situation brought on by the Sudanese turmoil. Numerous internally displaced people and refugees may try to escape the unrest and fighting, which might put pressure on neighbouring nations and strain their resources. This may make handling humanitarian emergencies in the Red Sea region more difficult (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

Regional Security

The Red Sea region's security may be affected more broadly by Sudan's instability. Sudan shares borders with South Sudan, Egypt, and Eritrea, therefore disputes or power struggles inside Sudan may have an impact on these neighbouring nations. This could lead to border conflicts, cross-border tensions, and possible escalations that could affect the security environment in the Red Sea, according to Stigant (2023).

Geopolitical Dynamics

According to Holmes & Fulton (2023), the geopolitical dynamics of the Red Sea region may be impacted by the problems in Sudan. International and regional players may become involved in Sudan's internal legitimacy disputes in an effort to further their own agendas or provide support to various factions. The stability and security of the Red Sea may be impacted by such actions, which may also fuel proxy wars, power struggles, and a complicated web of conflicting interests.

Increase in Attacks on Critical Infrastructure and Maritime Accidents

Attacks on the vital infrastructure in the Red Sea, particularly those owned by Port Sudan, may be necessary due to the continuous violence in Sudan. "Infrastructure damage is a common consequence of political conflicts, impacting port facilities and operations," states Boudiaf (2022, para. 9). Labour unrest has a long history in Port Sudan, particularly because job security is unstable. The port is the biggest employer in Red Sea State, employing people from all across the region. During previous Sudanese conflicts, ports like Port Sudan suffered damage and disruptions that made it difficult for them to handle goods effectively (Madkour, 2023). Damaged infrastructure, such as port facilities, storage areas, and transportation networks, could cause delays, higher expenses, and inefficiencies in the shipping process in Sudan's present legitimacy crisis.

Additionally, an upsurge in maritime mishaps could result from the conflict. As they attempt to escape Sudan to safer locations, these incidents may take the form of people drowning or their boats capsizing.

Why the Sudanese Legitimacy Crisis Could be far from Ending

Al-Burhan and Hemedti's recent legitimacy problem started in April 2023, and since then, the war's severity and death toll have increased. The parties have also often violated ceasefires during the conflict, accusing one another of doing so.

Accordingly, Rondos (2023, para. 5) reported that the army and RSF had consented to the week-long ceasefire mediated by the Saudis and the United States last week. But like previous ceasefires, this one did not put an end to combat in the nation's capital, Khartoum, or elsewhere (Rondos, 2023, para. 5). Aljazeera (2023) reports that "the vicious war between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary RSF has hit two-month mark, with hostilities showing no signs of winding down despite all efforts." During the second full month of intense conflict between the SAF and RSF, which ran from May 20 to June 16, 2023, ACLED recorded over 260 incidents of political violence and over 1,020 reported deaths in Sudan. Khartoum and its environs continue to be the epicentre of violence, accounting for about 70% of all events reported during the reporting period (ACLED, 2023). This suggests that the disagreement may not be resolved anytime soon. So why does it seem like the conflict will never end? This could be explained by two main factors:

First, there is a power and legitimacy conflict between Hemedti's RSF and al-Burhan's SAF. Such conflicts are difficult to settle, particularly when they involve people with comparable political and economic power. Power struggles are ultimately about survival and ego. Midway through April, a growing power struggle between army head Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo erupted into a full-scale conflict, plunging Sudan into turmoil. There are no indications that the fighting would stop very soon because both the army and the RSF view the conflict as an existential struggle to the bitter end, according to Aljazeera (2023). In a similar vein, Bociaga (2023) noted that none of them desired a true civilian-led government, which helps to explain why the conflict doesn't seem to be ending.

International and regional interests in the Sudanese crisis are the second reason the conflict is likely to continue. For example, Russia, the United States, and regional powers have all been involved in the crisis and are competing for influence in Sudan (Aljazeera, 2023). Once more, some regional players, such as Egypt and the Gulf Arab states, have attempted to influence Sudan's political process in ways that are frequently at odds with one another, making de-escalation and resolution more difficult. Egypt, in particular, maintains close military links to Sudan and is eager for Khartoum to have a regime akin to Cairo's (Soliman & Hassan, 2023). Furthermore, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are the primary foreign supporters of the SAF and the RSF, respectively, according to Lanfranchi & Hoffmann (2023).

Negotiations are hampered, the conflict is prolonged, and the Red Sea is more exposed to security risks that could have long-term effects on Sudan and the entire area due to the assistance that international sponsors give the warring sides.

Coordinated Approach to Addressing Security Challenges in Sudan and the Red Sea

The national, regional, and international governmental and security actors must work together effectively to address the underlying causes of the Sudanese crises, foster political discourse, and support initiatives for peace and stability in Sudan in order to lessen these effects and preserve stability in Sudan and the Red Sea region. These could be accomplished by:

Enhanced maritime security: Enhanced maritime security measures, such as increased naval patrols, intelligence sharing, and cooperation among regional and international navies, could deter and respond to pirate attacks and ensure the safety of vessels and maritime trade because piracy poses a serious

threat to maritime activities in the Red Sea and because of the ongoing conflicts in Sudan.

Maritime surveillance: The transit of illegal products, weapons, and people over maritime boundaries may be stopped with the use of monitoring operations. This might be accomplished by putting in place efficient monitoring systems, making use of radar and marine domain awareness technologies, and carrying out routine patrols to find and stop any questionable activity.

Protection of marine infrastructure: The stability and operation of the Red Sea region depend on the protection of vital maritime infrastructure, including ports, harbours, and offshore installations. Strong security measures, such as physical protection, monitoring systems, and access controls, could assist stop attacks, sabotage, and unauthorised access to crucial marine infrastructure as the Sudanese crisis continues.

Regional collaboration and information exchange: The Red Sea region's nations could improve marine security by working together. This could involve exchanging intelligence, organising patrols, carrying out cooperative drills, and setting up regional cooperation institutions like information-sharing centers or task forces devoted to marine security. The African Union (AU) should also make sure that its charter on marine security and safety development is implemented throughout Africa, particularly Chapter II, which outlines steps to prevent and combat crimes at sea. (2016).

Maritime domain awareness: Real-time situational awareness of maritime activities in the Red Sea could be obtained by improving maritime domain awareness through the use of technology, such as radar systems, satellite monitoring, and automatic identification systems (AIS). This makes it possible to identify possible security risks early on and enables efficient coordination and action.

Training and capacity building: Funding local law enforcement, coast guards, and maritime security personnel could improve their capacity to defend the Red Sea. This entails giving them technological support, resources, and training to improve their operational capabilities and ability to respond to threats to maritime security.

Diplomatic routes and negotiations: In order to resolve the disputes between SAF and RSF, diplomatic channels and negotiations between disputing parties may be essential. Constructive communication with various stakeholders, such as disputing parties, civil society organisations, and marginalised communities/groups, could resolve grievances and foster consensus. Neighbouring nations, regional organisations, and international organisations could all be involved in promoting communication and settling disputes between opposing groups.

Peace agreements: Resolving the current conflict in Sudan requires the creation of a comprehensive peace deal that tackles the underlying causes of the conflict, creates a framework for reconciliation, and guarantees the involvement of all pertinent stakeholders. This may entail discussions about resource distribution, security plans, power sharing, and transitional justice procedures.

Additionally, members of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) should move swiftly to bring both sides to the negotiating table, gather resources, and guarantee the implementation of a peace accord. They should also make sure that the crisis in member nations, particularly Sudan, does not present a security risk to regional maritime operations.

Humanitarian aid: In Sudan, it is crucial to give impacted populations humanitarian aid and support in areas affected by violence. International organisations and non-governmental organisations could work together to address pressing humanitarian issues and lessen civilian suffering.

Regional cooperation: Engagement with adjacent nations and regional organisations is essential in light of Sudan's problems surrounding the Red Sea. Cooperation might solve cross-border security issues, advance stability, and seek regional solutions.

Multilateral involvement: Coordinating efforts to resolve Sudan's conflict and gaining support for peace measures could be accomplished by interacting with international organisations including the United Nations, African Union, and other pertinent bodies. They could offer tools, knowledge, and diplomatic support to help resolve disputes. Importantly, in order to avoid duplication or dilution, international efforts should be linked with continental and regional mediation efforts by the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Furthermore, Western nations ought to encourage Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, the principal foreign supporters of the SAF and the RSF, respectively, as well as other foreign sponsors, to reduce their assistance to the warring parties, particularly by permitting their commercial networks to operate.

Conclusion

The study has illuminated the intricate relationship between the critical issue of maritime security in the Red Sea region and the developing crises in Sudan. International maritime interests could be seriously jeopardised and current security issues in the Red Sea could be made worse by the legitimacy problem in Sudan. Among these risks to the Red Sea include terrorism, people trafficking, arms smuggling, piracy, and maritime mishaps. Therefore, in order to improve marine security in the Red Sea and manage the changing crises in Sudan, a comprehensive and multifaceted approach is required.

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