



Sudan's Armed Conflict: External Actors and the Lack of Accountability

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Abstract

This blog examines the ongoing armed conflict in Sudan by focusing on the roles of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), as well as the involvement of external actors. It explores how foreign support has contributed to the escalation and prolongation of the conflict, raising serious concerns about state responsibility under international law. Alongside this legal perspective, it emphasizes the importance of raising awareness and supporting Sudanese communities amid what has become a largely underreported humanitarian crisis.

Key words: Sudan, RSF, SAF, civil war, humanitarian crisis

Introduction

In February 2026, a guest speaker event was held at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The Amsterdam Law Forum was honoured to have Pubudu Sachithanandan from the International Criminal Court (ICC), Guido Lanfranchi from the Clingendael Institute, and Ahmed Idriss from Sudan Connect as guest speakers on the ongoing war in Sudan.

Sudan has been engulfed in a civil war between its national army, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). During the lecture, Guido first touched on the roots and trends of the war. Pubudu Sachithanandan is investigating crimes in Darfur but was a guest lecturer in a personal capacity, not as a representative of the Court. Pubudu ended his talk with an appreciation for seeing so many young people at the guest lecture, emphasizing the importance of student activism. He told the group that the value of young people coming together and working towards justice should not be underestimated.

To end the guest lecture, Ahmed told us about [SudanConnect](#), a Sudanese youth organisation trying to connect young Sudanese people, send a message to Dutch society, and create awareness. He reminded us of the importance of talking about Sudan without reducing it only to the war. It is their contributions that inspired this piece. Beyond the immediate violence of the RSF and SAF,



this blog examines the foreign actors sustaining both sides of the conflict, the legal frameworks that have so far failed to hold them accountable, and what individuals can do in response to the largely underreported humanitarian crisis.

RSF and the international factors behind them

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) were originally created as a tool by the Sudanese government to repress rebel groups during armed conflicts in Darfur. They are the successor of the *Janjaweed* militia. The RSF is supported by numerous countries including the United Arab Emirates, Chad, Kenya and Ethiopia, all of which have reportedly contributed to the RSF's capacity to wage war. This section examines the role of these external actors and the extent to which they can be held accountable under international law.

Chad faces accountability questions under international law for allowing its territory to be used for fighter recruitment, mercenary transit, and weapon transfers to the RSF, making it a known facilitator of the conflict.¹ Kenya has similarly received criticism after hosting RSF representatives in Nairobi in February 2025 to form a parallel government, a move that occurred just four days after the African Union Peace and Security Council (AU) condemned all forms of external interference, fueling the conflict and called for inclusive political dialogue. Civil society groups condemned Kenya's decision as undermining Sudan's sovereignty and directly contradicting the AU's own peace efforts.² Ethiopia too has been implicated, with reports indicating that a secret camp was constructed on Ethiopian soil to train thousands of RSF fighters.³ Sources include a senior Ethiopian government official pointing to the UAE for the financing and logistical support behind its establishment.⁴

This is not surprising since, of all external actors, the UAE stands out as the primary backer of the RSF. Despite denying any involvement, the UAE has frequently offered financial support to the

¹ Letter from the Representative of Sudan to the President of the Security Council, UN Doc S/2024/843 (2024) <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/843> accessed 1 May 2026.

² International Commission of Jurists, 'Joint Statement: Kenya's RSF Ties Undermine Sudan Peace Efforts' (*ICJ Kenya*, 23 February 2025) <https://icj-kenya.org/news/joint-statement-kenyas-rsf-ties-undermine-sudan-peace-efforts/> accessed 1 May 2026.

³ Reuters, 'Ethiopia Builds Secret Camp to Train Sudan RSF Fighters, Sources Say' (10 February 2026) <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/ethiopia-builds-secret-camp-train-sudan-rsf-fighters-sources-say-2026-02-10/> accessed 1 May 2026.

⁴ Arise News, 'Ethiopia Hosts Secret Camp To Train Sudan's RSF Fighters, Report Says' (*Arise TV*, 10 February 2026) <https://www.arise.tv/ethiopia-hosts-secret-camp-to-train-sudans-rsf-fighters-report-says/> accessed 1 May 2026.



RSF. The UAE's role in Sudan raises serious questions of state responsibility under international law. Evidence gathered by the Conflict Insights Group shows that a UAE-backed network of Colombian mercenaries were operating drones, training fighters, and fighting during the RSF's capture of El Fasher in October 2025. The UAE also supplied weapons and drone capabilities that enabled these operations. The report concludes that without this assistance, the siege and resulting atrocities would likely not have occurred to the extent that they did.⁵ The UN Fact Finding Mission found that the RSF attacks bore the hallmarks of genocide.⁶

The UN Security Council's arms embargo on Darfur has been in place since 2004. This means that the supply of weapons, mercenaries, and training to the RSF constitutes a binding violation of international law, notably one committed while the UAE itself held a seat in the Security Council, undermining the very body responsible for enforcing it.⁷ In March 2024 Sudan formally demanded that the Security Council compel the UAE to cease its support and provide reparations under the principles of state responsibility for internationally wrongful acts.⁸ In May 2025, it once again called on the Council to confront what it described as systematic aggression against Sudan's sovereignty by the UAE. The UAE has consistently denied these allegations, stating in November 2024,⁹ and again in April 2025 that it has not provided and is not providing support or supplies to any warring party since the outbreak of the civil war in April 2023, dismissing Sudan's claims as part of a disinformation campaign.¹⁰ So far, no action by the Security Council against specific violators has been made.

⁵ Conflict Insights Group, *Blood Money: How UAE Support and Foreign Mercenaries Enabled the Fall of El Fasher* (April 2026)

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6967365f36aacc18599406e8/t/69e7da4dad33435e658c982c/1776802495385/BloodMoneyCIG.pdf> accessed 1 May 2026.

⁶ Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan, *Paths to Justice: Accountability for Atrocities in the Sudan* UN Doc A/HRC/60/CRP.7 (24 October 2025)

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/ffm-sudan/a-hrc-60-crp.7-en.pdf> accessed 1 May 2026.

⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 2791 (2025) UN Doc S/RES/2791(2025)

[https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2791\(2025\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2791(2025)) accessed 1 May 2026.

⁸ Letter from the Representative of Sudan to the President of the Security Council, UN Doc S/2024/276 (2024)

<https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/276> accessed 1 May 2026.

⁹ Letter from the Representative of Sudan to the President of the Security Council, UN Doc S/2024/843 (2024)

<https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/843> accessed 1 May 2026.

¹⁰ Letter from the Representative of Sudan to the President of the Security Council, UN Doc S/2025/260 (2025)

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When Sudan attempted to seek legal redress, it brought a case before the ICJ, alleging the UAE had violated the Genocide Convention by funding and arming the RSF. In May 2025, the Court dismissed the case for lack of jurisdiction, as the UAE held a reservation to Article IX of the Convention, which blocks this kind of unilateral referral.¹¹ Outside these multilateral mechanisms, individual states retain the independent authority to impose their own sanctions and halt arms transfers to countries supporting the RSF. That avenue too remains unused.¹² The result is a structural accountability gap across three levels: the Security Council has taken no binding action, the judicial route through the ICJ regarding the UAE is procedurally closed for the time being, and unilateral measures by individual states have not yet materialized. Across all three levels, multilateral political action, judicial remedy, and unilateral state measures, no binding accountability has followed yet.

SAF and the international factors behind them

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) are Sudan's official national army, formed after Sudan's independence in 1956. The SAF is under the leadership of Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.¹³

The SAF has been subject to sanctions under UN Security Council Resolution 1951, since 2005.¹⁴ The SAF has reportedly bombed civilian infrastructure, schools, markets and hospitals.¹⁵ As the conflict between the SAF and the RSF progressed over the last three years, the SAF began using new combat drones from Turkey and Iran in mass drone attacks.¹⁶

According to the Sudan Post, the SAF controls the majority of the country, about 60% of its territory, including the north, east, and central regions. These areas are described as fully under

¹¹ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Sudan v United Arab Emirates)* (Preliminary Objections, Judgment) ICJ Rep (5 May 2025) <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/197/197-20250505-pre-01-00-en.pdf> accessed 1 May 2026.

¹² Amnesty International UK, 'Sudan Three Years On: UK Government Urged to Halt Shameful Arms Sales' (2026) <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/latest/sudan-three-years-on-uk-government-urged-to-halt-shameful-arms-sales/> accessed 1 May 2026.

¹³ *Sudanese armed forces [SAF] and main allies*, (June 2025) <https://www.euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-sudan/22-sudanese-authorities-sudanese-armed-forces-saf-and-main-allies>, accessed 29 April 2026.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Security situation in Sudan: recent events, (June 2025), <https://www.euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-sudan/security-situation-sudan-recent-events>, accessed 29 April 2026



government control, with central Sudan “completely liberated” from RSF presence.¹⁷ In the south, including the Blue Nile and White Nile regions, the SAF reportedly controls around 95%. The remaining areas are under the control of the RSF.

Foreign involvement has played a major role in sustaining the conflict. External actors have backed both sides, with countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Iran linked to support for the SAF.¹⁸ Their involvement has led to growing accusations of complicity in prolonging the war. Egypt is widely described as a key backer of the SAF, providing military cooperation and viewing the army essential to its regional security interests, especially regarding the Nile.¹⁹ Saudi Arabia is allegedly motivated by regional security dynamics, providing financial and logistical support as it sees Sudan as a crucial ally against Iran's influence in the region.²⁰

According to the UN, the eleven million people that have been displaced from their homes make the world's largest displacement crisis and the hundreds of thousands of deaths make the Sudanese war the current most catastrophic humanitarian crisis.²¹ The SAF has been accused of targeting civilians, indiscriminate shelling of residential areas and blocking aid.²² Even after the reports and allegations of international involvement, Egypt denies having any role in the conflict. There have not been reports of Egypt, Iran, Turkey or Qatar facing legal repercussions for their involvement in the conflict.

How to move forward

¹⁷ Ali R, ‘Territorial Control: Who Holds What in Sudan’s War?’ (*Anadolu*, 4 November 2025), <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/territorial-control-who-holds-what-in-sudan-s-war/3734931>, accessed 29 April 2026

¹⁸ ‘Global Proxy War: Which Foreign Powers Are Backing Sudan’s Warring Generals’ (*NDTV*, 31 October 2025) <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/global-proxy-war-which-foreign-powers-are-backing-sudans-warring-generals-9550320> accessed 29 April 2026

¹⁹ Ray CA, ‘Foreign Influence Is Fueling the War in Sudan’ (*FPRI*, 2 July 2025) <https://www.fpri.org/article/2025/07/foreign-influence-is-fueling-the-war-in-sudan/> accessed 30 April 2026

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Mohammed Salih Z, ‘Conflict in Sudan: A Map of Regional and International Actors’ (*Wilson Center*, 19 December 2024) <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/conflict-sudan-map-regional-and-international-actors> accessed 30 April 2026

²² ‘Egypt Denies Involvement in Sudan War’ (*Arab News*, 10 October 2024) <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2574709/middle-east> accessed 30 April 2026



It has become apparent that the legal accountability of RSF, SAF, and its supporters stand at the forefront of the fight towards peace. In the meantime, support for Sudan and its people remains essential. Current efforts are already being made by the EU to stabilize the situation.²³ However, many stay critical about the role of the EU in regard to the war. Some go as far as stating that the EU has financially contributed to the atrocities committed by the RSF.²⁴ Others claim that the EU's efforts to support Sudan fall short and may even prove to be counterproductive.²⁵

While the majority of the heavy lifting is up to states and international organisations, that does not mean that there is nothing to be done at an individual level. The most accessible form of support, that the average individual is capable of providing, is done by raising awareness of the crisis in Sudan. Only by spreading the word about the horrors that take place in Sudan can we make a difference. According to Li Fung, a UN Human Rights Representative, the crisis in Sudan is all the more alarming considering its invisibility.²⁶ Raising awareness not only creates political pressure, it also makes room for direct support in the form of humanitarian relief. It is also important to prevent the spread of misinformation regarding the war. It is easy for the average person to disregard the urgency of the situation, as a result of disinformation.

Another way to support Sudan is through the act of donating. It is of utmost importance that donations are made to reputable and trusted charities. This ensures that they will be used solely for the purpose that was intended, to support Sudanese people in need. Charity organisations such as “[Save the Children](#)” and the “[Red Cross](#)” are well-known reputable organisations. Aside from large, broader organisations, charities run by Sudanese themselves are recommended. For example, [Khartoum Aid Kitchen](#) provides essentials such as food and medicine. Another financial contribution, or rather lack thereof, constitutes the boycotting of states and companies.

²³ EU Reporter Correspondent, ‘EU and Member States Pledge over €812 Million In ...’ (*EU Reporter*, 22 April 2026) <https://www.eureporter.co/world/sudan/2026/04/22/eu-and-member-states-pledge-over-e812-million-in-response-to-crisis-in-sudan> accessed 30 April 2026

²⁴ ‘Inside the EU’s Flawed \$200 Million Migration Deal with Sudan’ (*Statewatch*, 15 December 2025) <https://www.statewatch.org/analyses/2025/inside-the-eu-s-flawed-200-million-migration-deal-with-sudan/> accessed 30 April 2026

²⁵ ‘EU Risks Making Things Worse in Sudan’ (*PAX for peace*, 6 June 2026) <https://paxforpeace.nl/news/eu-risks-making-things-worse-in-sudan/> accessed 30 April 2026

²⁶ ‘Three Years of War in Sudan: A Crisis the World Can’t Ignore | Ohchr’ (*OHCHR*, 20 April 2026) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2026/04/three-years-war-sudan-crisis-world-cant-ignore> accessed 30 April 2026



A clear example is the various ongoing petitions against the UAE.²⁷ This boycott is aimed at UAE companies that are complicit with human rights violations, including those beyond Sudan.

Supporting Sudan also means supporting its people. During the lecture given by Ahmed Idriss, he made it known that support does not always need to be realized in the form of speaking about the war. We must speak about what makes Sudan, Sudan. The war alone does not define Sudan. It is the culture, the people, the geography, and so much more.

Conclusion

The situation in Sudan highlights the complex relationship between internal conflict and external influence, with both the RSF and SAF accused of serious human rights violations and supported by foreign actors. Despite credible allegations, meaningful accountability has yet to occur due to political and legal obstacles. Moving forward, stronger international commitment is needed to close this accountability gap. At the same time, individuals can contribute by staying informed, supporting humanitarian efforts, and engaging with Sudan beyond the narrative of war, recognizing its people, culture, and resilience as part of a path toward justice and peace.

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