

# **DISCUSSION PANEL REPORT ON THE WAR IN SUDAN: DEVELOPMENTS, DIMENSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS**

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GLOBAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC RESEARCH  
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In collaboration with the African Center for Research and Policy Studies (**AfroPolicy**) in Turkey, the Global Institute for Strategic Research (**GISR**) at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (**HBKU**) organized an online panel discussion on Tuesday, January 28, 2025. The session addressed the current situation in Sudan and the evolving crisis facing the country, featuring contributions from a number of experts in Sudanese and political affairs.

The session opened with a welcoming address by **Dr. Mohamed Chihi**, Executive Director of GISR at HBKU. After greeting the guests and participants, he underscored Sudan's critical importance to both the Arab and African regions due to its strategic location and its substantial impact on regional and international security.

**Dr. Chihi** highlighted the deep-rooted nature of the Sudanese conflict, describing it as one of the most pressing political and humanitarian crises of our time. He pointed to the catastrophic consequences of the ongoing war, citing grave human rights violations against women and children and the widespread destruction of homes. Furthermore, he emphasized that the core of the conflict stems from a power struggle between military generals, an internal rivalry that risks dividing the country with devastating consequences for the Sudanese people. Dr. Chihi raised a critical question about the future role of political forces and civil society in shaping Sudan's political course.

He also discussed the key factors contributing to the escalation of the conflict between various factions and pointed to the role of regional and international actors attempting to shape the trajectory of the crisis. Dr. Chihi highlighted Israel's historical involvement in Sudan, citing past meetings between the Umma Party and President Jaafar Nimeiri at the Israeli embassy in London, as well as the airlift of Ethiopian Jews (**Falasha**) through Sudan to Israel. He stressed that Israel remains a significant, albeit quiet, player in the current conflict and urged caution in assessing its influence on the current crisis.

In closing, Dr. Chihi observed that the Darfur region holds many characteristics of a viable independent state, including economic resources and operational airports, which could ease the path toward statehood if Sudan were to be divided. His remarks laid the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the Sudanese crisis and its broader implications.

As for AfroPolicy Director **Dr. Mohammed Saleh**, he welcomed participants and provided a detailed overview of the ongoing developments and their broader implications. He noted that the current conflict is not Sudan's first, as the country has long been plagued by wars, both before and after independence, in regions such as South Sudan, Darfur, Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Eastern Sudan.

**Dr. Saleh** emphasized that this conflict marks a significant departure from previous wars in terms of scale, complexity, and impact. He also pointed out that the groundwork for the secession of South Sudan began as early as 1946 within the US State Department. Moreover, he highlighted the role of international intervention, particularly Western involvement, which intensified during the 1969 rebellion. Neighboring countries like Ethiopia and Uganda played a role in supporting the insurgency, ultimately contributing to a sustained state of instability in Sudan.

The first presentation explored Sudan's geopolitical significance, its demographic composition, and its rich ethnic diversity. It was delivered by Professor Mohamed Hussein Abu Salih, a professor of strategic

planning expert at Sudanese universities, during a discussion on the ongoing war in Sudan and its developments.

He stated that the current conflict is closely tied to broader regional dynamics and the strategic interests of global powers in the Red Sea region. Moreover, he emphasized Sudan's vital natural resources, including energy and water, noting that the country's water systems alone have the potential to create up to 14 rivers, which could help bridge the global food gap.

Professor Abu Salih described the April 15, 2023 conflict as part of a long continuum of civil wars that have plagued Sudan since its independence, not merely a clash between two rival generals of the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). He criticized successive political elites for failing to establish political and social stability, thereby perpetuating Sudan's chronic crises.

He called on today's leadership to draw lessons from the past, particularly in light of the April 2023 conflict, in order to avoid repeating the mistakes that have fueled Sudan's ongoing turmoil. In closing, Professor Abu Salih stressed that Sudan's core challenge lies in the lack of a comprehensive national strategic vision capable of managing its diverse population and abundant economic resources.

Delivered by **Dr. Ahmed Ibrahim Abu Shouk**, Professor of History at Qatar University, during a panel discussion on the roots of the Sudan conflict, the second presentation addressed the lead-up to the April 15 war and the context of subsequent developments. In it, he revisited a 1960 prediction made by a Geography professor, who anticipated Sudan's fragmenting into five separate states based on its geopolitical and economic dynamics.

**Dr. Abu Shouk** noted that this forecast was shaped by both internal and external pressures, including regional and international rivalries over Sudan's resources. He emphasized that such projections were tied to Sudan's longstanding failure to develop a coherent strategic vision capable of adapting to the shifting geopolitical landscape in the region and the world. This lack of foresight, he added, has been a key factor in the escalating crises the country faces today.

**Dr. Abu Shouk** further noted that the current conflict may serve as a prelude to the eventual partition of Darfur. He traced the roots of Sudan's crisis leading up to the events of April 15, stressing that the 2023 Framework Agreement between civilian and military factions was not the primary catalyst for war. He pointed out that military regimes have ruled Sudan for a total of 55 years, significantly weakening civilian political forces. One of the gravest missteps, he argued, was the Bashir government's decision to create armed militias to operate alongside the Sudanese army – an act that fueled numerous conflicts, including the ongoing war.

Concluding his remarks, Dr. Abu Shouk called for a return to a foundational political process and presented three potential scenarios for the future of Sudan's conflict. The first and most likely, in his view, is the military defeat of the RSF, with the integration of qualified RSF personnel into the regular armed forces, thereby paving the way for a civilian-led government. The second scenario envisions negotiations between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the RSF to reach a political settlement. The third and most

dangerous scenario entails a prolonged and expanding war that could internationalize the conflict and escalate into a full-scale civil war. Based on the current military advances, Dr. Abu Shouk considered the first scenario the most probable.

The third intervention focused on the regional and international dimensions of the war in Sudan. **Dr. Ibrahim Mohamed Ibrahim Arafat**, an expert in international relations, presented a paper titled *“International and Regional Interventions in Sudan,”* structured around three key points.

He first argued that Sudan’s internal structure inherently invites regional and international intervention and that such involvement is unlikely to cease even after the war ends, given the country’s strategic geopolitical and economic significance, particularly in the Red Sea region.

**Dr. Arafat** then examined the transnational connections among militias operating in countries like Libya, Iraq, Sudan, Yemen, and Syria. He noted the complexity of these relationships and the difficulty in unraveling them, due to the deeply rooted and overlapping regional dynamics.

He also highlighted the deep-rooted contradictions between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), noting that resolving the Sudanese crisis requires distinguishing between actors with close stakes in the conflict and those more distanced. Dr. Arafat emphasized that Sudan’s turmoil cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader regional context.

He specifically addressed the role of the United Arab Emirates, stating that its involvement in Sudan is driven by strategic interests, as well as its broader geopolitical ambitions in the Red Sea region. In conclusion, Dr. Arafat speculated that the newly elected US president, Donald Trump, might play a role in resolving the conflict by exerting pressure on neighboring countries to support a political solution.

The fourth session centered on the potential outcomes of the war in Sudan and prospects for its resolution. **Dr. Moatasem El-Sayed Hashim**, an expert in international conflict resolution, addressed the humanitarian and political ramifications of the ongoing conflict. He noted that the war has claimed thousands of lives and displaced millions, both internally and across Sudan’s borders, resulting in a humanitarian crisis of global concern.

**Dr. Moatasem** warned that the continuation of hostilities could further deepen this crisis. While acknowledging the Sudanese Armed Forces’ recent gains in certain areas, he expressed concern over the potential escalation of violence in Darfur, which could prolong and intensify the war.

Despite these challenges, he emphasized that the Sudanese people are aware of the root causes of the conflict and that this national awareness could act as a safeguard against the descent into full-scale civil war. However, he acknowledged the profound damage the war has inflicted on Sudan’s social fabric.

In closing, **Dr. Moatasem** anticipated the establishment of a transitional civilian government in Sudan as an initial step, to be followed by free elections, a key demand of the December Revolution, paving the way for a democratic and civilian-led state.

**Dr. Faisal Mohamed**, advisor at the African Center for Research and Policy Studies (AfroPolicy), provided commentary on the preceding discussions. In his remarks, he emphasized the importance of understanding the Sudanese situation within the broader context of the ongoing war, arguing that framing it merely as a power struggle between military generals is simplistic and misleading.

He referenced a 2008 lecture by the Israeli Minister of National Security, in which it was revealed that Sudan had been a strategic target for Israel even before its independence, due to its abundant natural resources and geostrategic importance. The minister stated that the long-term objective was to fragment Sudan, beginning with the secession of South Sudan in 2011, and eventually extending to the separation of Darfur.

**Dr. Faisal** underscored that such statements point to a deliberate, long-term plan to divide Sudan, one that takes advantage of internal instability and actors such as the Rapid Support Forces to advance that agenda.

In his intervention during the discussion on the war in Sudan, **Al-Hafiz Ibrahim Ahmed**, a research fellow at the Global Institute for Strategic Research at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, addressed the challenges associated with Sudan's ethnic diversity and demographic composition, and how these challenges can be managed amid the ongoing conflict. He stressed the importance of building a post-war Sudan free from hate speech and open to acceptance of others, while emphasizing the need for a democratic civilian state, as dreamed by the Sudanese people.

**Dr. Al-Hafiz** also highlighted the challenges Sudan faces in sustainably utilizing its resources for the benefit of its people, particularly in developing its agricultural and industrial sectors, as well as the rural areas. He pointed out the need to reduce conflicts arising from uneven development, despite the country's abundant resources.

**Dr. Al-Hafiz** further noted that the ongoing debate over national identity is one of the root causes of conflicts, including the April 15, 2023 war. He also discussed the failure of Sudanese elites to achieve stability post-independence and how current elites can learn from past lessons to avoid repeating previous mistakes. Additionally, he addressed the role international and regional powers should play in resolving the Sudanese crisis, particularly in light of the new US administration and its vision for peace in the Middle East.

Lastly, **Dr. Al-Hafiz** urged political forces and revolutionary movements to draw lessons from this conflict, remarking that the political, economic, and social changes, along with evolving regional and international alliances, will be crucial for Sudan's political future.

In conclusion, participants noted that the absence of a strategic vision for managing Sudan's deep diversity and abundant resources – combined with the persistent failure of political elites to establish effective governance since independence – has been a key driver of the current crisis. They also emphasized the significant role of regional and international interventions in deepening the conflict, which has brought Sudan and its people to this stage of ongoing conflict.