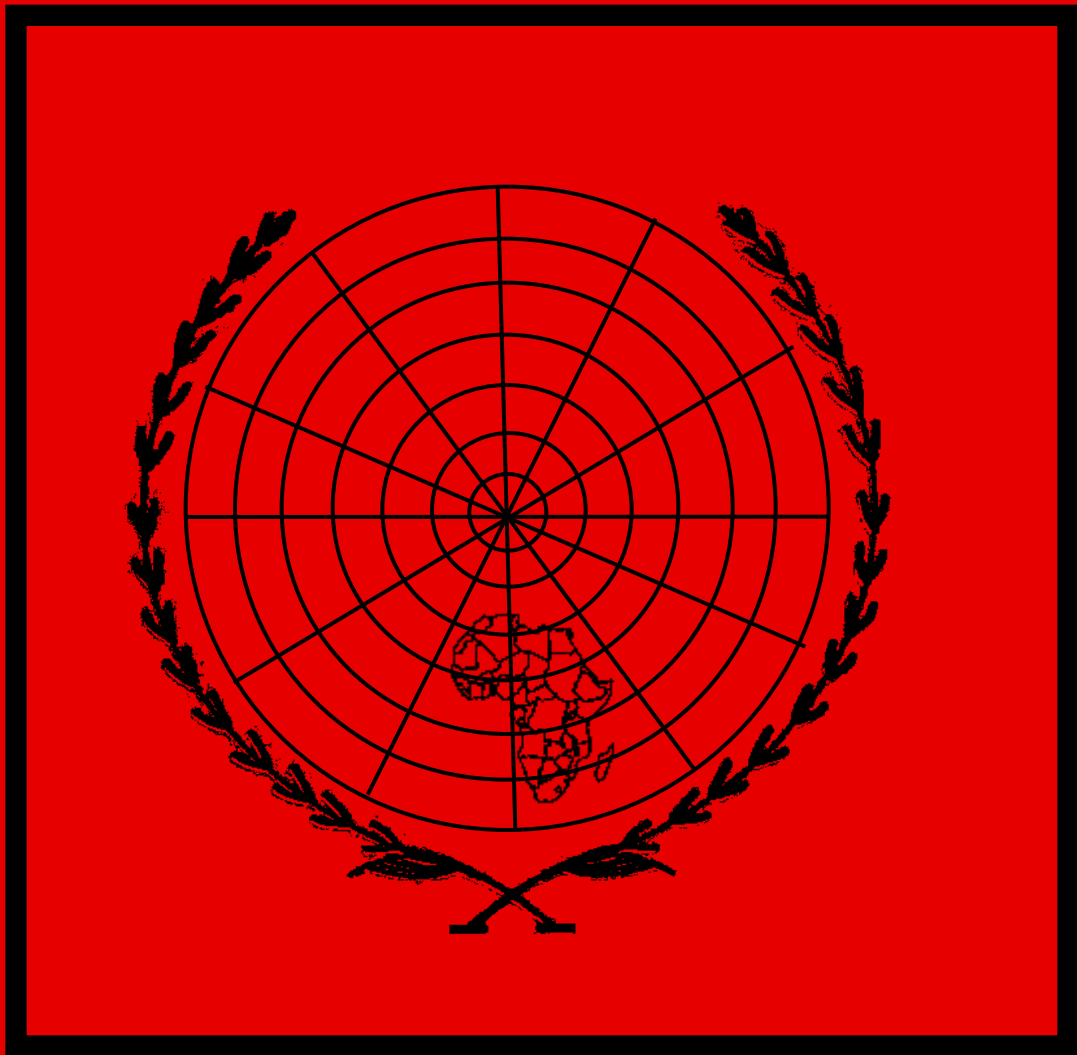


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The Geopolitical Interests of Major Powers and the Progression of the Sudanese Civil War

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Abstract

The Sudanese Civil War represents a complex convergence of longstanding internal fragmentation and intensifying external geopolitical competition. This study examines how the strategic interests of major powers – the United States, China, and Russia – interact with Sudan’s domestic conflicts to shape the duration, intensity, and regional spillover of the war. Drawing on Realist, Liberal, and Constructivist perspectives, the study situates Sudan within broader global power rivalries characterized by competition over resources, security influence, and political alignment. Historically rooted in colonial legacies, governance failures, identity divisions, and resource conflicts, Sudan’s recurring instability has created openings for external actors to project influence through military assistance, economic investment, and diplomatic engagement. Findings indicate that Russia leverages military partnerships, private security actors, and resource diplomacy—particularly in gold and oil sectors—to expand its strategic foothold and counter Western influence. The United States primarily engages through counterterrorism operations, humanitarian assistance, and institutional mechanisms such as AFRICOM and AGOA, while simultaneously responding to increasing Chinese and Russian influence. China, in turn, pursues infrastructure-led development under the Belt and Road Initiative, securing access to critical resources while expanding long-term economic and political influence through non-interference diplomacy. Regional actors such as United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, further complicate the conflict through alignments with global powers and support to local factions. These overlapping external interventions have intensified the conflict by reinforcing factional capacities, prolonging hostilities, and deepening political fragmentation, and thus the war cannot be understood solely as an internal struggle but must be analyzed as part of a wider geopolitical contest in which global and regional powers shape conflict trajectories through competing strategic interests.

Introduction

Geopolitical interests have historically driven the outbreak and persistence of conflicts, shaping the dynamics of war and peace across the globe. Rooted in the quest

for strategic resources, territorial influence, and regional dominance, these interests often manifest in both overt military campaigns and covert interventions (Mearsheimer, 2001; Walt, 2020). In recent years, the intensifying rivalry among major powers such as the United States, China, and Russia has increasingly internationalized local disputes, transforming them into flashpoints of global contention (Patrick, 2022; Lanoszka & Hunzeker, 2023). The Cold War era offers a critical lens, as the ideological confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union fuelled proxy wars throughout Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa (Westad, 2005). In the Vietnam War (1955-1975), the U.S. sought to contain communism and the Soviet Union and China backed North Vietnam; and likewise in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the U.S. supported the Mujahideen, thereby escalating a regional dispute into a global geopolitical contest (Coll, 2004).

Sudan's protracted civil wars underscore the profound intersection of internal divisions and external interests. The First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972) erupted shortly after independence in 1956, driven by political marginalization of the predominantly Christian and animist southern region by the Arab-Muslim northern elite (Johnson, 2003). The Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 granted the south regional autonomy, temporarily halting hostilities. However, in 1983, the government's unilateral revocation of the agreement and nationwide imposition of Islamic law ignited the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005), a brutal conflict intensified by the discovery of oil in the contested regions (Collins, 2008). The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 marked a milestone, culminating in the independence of South Sudan in 2011. Yet, peace remained elusive.

The Darfur conflict, which began in 2003, further exposed the fragility of Sudan's governance. Ethnic militias in western Darfur rose against the central government over chronic neglect and underdevelopment, only to be met with brutal repression through government-backed Janjaweed forces, resulting in mass atrocities and a humanitarian catastrophe (De Waal, 2007; Flint & de Waal, 2008). Concurrent insurgencies in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan regions since 2011 have underscored the persistence of unaddressed grievances and systemic marginalization (Prunier, 2011).

In 2023, Sudan plunged into a new phase of civil war as tensions erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group with roots in the Darfur conflict. While the United States has primarily pursued diplomatic and humanitarian strategies, it imposed sanctions on RSF leaders for human rights abuses and provided over \$700 million in aid (*AP News*, 2023). Russia, initially supporting the RSF through Wagner Group arms transfers, later shifted allegiance to the SAF, promising unrestricted military aid in line with its

strategic interests, including a naval base in Port Sudan (Jamestown Foundation, 2024; Middle East Eye, 2024). China, though not directly involved, has influenced the conflict indirectly through the transfer of Chinese-made drones and weapons via the United Arab Emirates to the RSF, significantly enhancing their military capabilities (*Financial Times*, 2024).

This ongoing war has resulted in thousands of deaths, destruction of key infrastructure, and displacement of millions (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The humanitarian situation has deteriorated drastically, with severe shortages of food, water, and essential medical supplies (UNHCR, 2023; OCHA, 2024). The involvement of regional and global actors, including Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Russia, has added a dangerous geopolitical layer to the conflict, fuelling its complexity and duration (International Crisis Group, 2024).

Sudan's enduring cycles of violence highlight a tragic convergence of internal fragmentation, competition over natural resources, and weak state institutions. Despite numerous peace initiatives, the country remains locked in a recurring pattern of conflict that hampers socio-political development and perpetuates instability. It is on the basis of the above that this study is poised to deal with such issues as how global and regional interests have resulted in the sustenance of the conflict.

The Problem of Study

The Sudanese Civil War of 2023 has caused severe humanitarian and socioeconomic repercussions. The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has resulted in thousands of casualties and widespread infrastructure destruction, affecting healthcare and education (Human Rights Watch, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). Millions have been displaced internally and across borders, leading to critical shortages of food, water, and medical supplies (UNHCR, 2023; OCHA, 2023). The conflict has disrupted agriculture, trade, and economic activities, exacerbating poverty and long-term economic instability (World Bank, 2023).

Scholars analyze the conflict through different lenses. Realists like Mearsheimer (2019) argue that U.S. involvement is motivated by strategic interests in maintaining regional stability and countering extremist threats. Bader (2019) emphasizes U.S. humanitarian and economic initiatives but notes their limitations due to broader geopolitical competition. Sautman (2020) and Ong (2018) focus on China's economic interests, arguing that its investments in Sudan's oil and minerals aim to secure resources and expand influence. These scholars suggest that China's engagement prioritizes strategic benefits over humanitarian concerns.

Alden (2017) and Taylor (2023) critically assess how foreign investments and economic measures shape the conflict. Alden (2017) argues that Chinese investments reinforce power structures and contribute to instability, while Taylor (2023) critiques

the effectiveness of sanctions, suggesting they may worsen local economic hardships and alter the conflict's trajectory. Despite these insights, a significant research gap remains regarding how the geopolitical strategies of major powers like the United States, China, and Russia directly influence the 2023 Sudanese Civil War.

Existing literature also neglects the roles of key regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, and how their alignments with global powers shape the conflict. This gap underscores the need for further investigation into how both global and regional powers' geopolitical interests influence the Sudanese Civil War and affect broader regional stability in the Horn of Africa. The specific objectives of the study are to: analyze how the geopolitical strategies of Russia, US and China have influenced the duration, intensity and regional impact of the Sudanese Civil War of 2023; and explore how the alignments of regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt with global actors affect the progression and prospects for resolution of the Sudanese Civil War of 2023.

Geopolitical Strategies of Major Powers in Africa

The geopolitical engagement of major powers, particularly the United States, China, and Russia, in Africa reflects intensifying global competition shaped by strategic interests in resources, security, and influence. Although each actor employs distinct instruments, their approaches increasingly converge around the pursuit of geopolitical leverage in resource-rich and strategically located states such as Sudan. Russia's renewed African strategy is anchored in military cooperation, resource extraction, and political influence-building. After its post-Cold War retreat, Moscow has reasserted itself through arms sales, security partnerships, and the deployment of private military actors such as the Wagner Group in conflict zones including Sudan, Libya, and the Central African Republic (Dempsey, 2022; Jones, 2021). Economically, it targets gold, diamonds, and energy resources through mining concessions and elite partnerships, while diplomatically institutionalizing ties via forums such as the Russia-Africa Summit (Kozlov, 2022). Overall, Russia's approach blends military support and resource diplomacy to secure strategic footholds and counter Western dominance in a shifting multipolar order.

The United States' African strategy has evolved from Cold War containment to a hybrid framework combining security, governance, and economic engagement. Through AFRICOM, counterterrorism operations, and security partnerships, Washington prioritizes regional stability and containment of extremist threats, particularly in the Horn of Africa and Sahel (Kalyango, 2020; Miller, 2021). Economic instruments such as AGOA and PEPFAR complement this approach by linking development and public health to stability goals (Sachs, 2017; Baker, 2018). However, this strategy is increasingly shaped by strategic competition with China and

Russia, leading to a securitized policy orientation that critics argue often neglects structural drivers of instability such as governance deficits and inequality (Mwaura, 2021).

China's engagement is primarily driven by economic expansion, resource security, and long-term influence building. Through frameworks such as FOCAC and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Beijing has deepened its presence via infrastructure financing, trade expansion, and concessional lending (Alden, 2017; Zhang, 2017). Its focus lies in securing critical resources—especially oil and minerals—while promoting connectivity through infrastructure development. China also emphasizes non-interference and sovereignty, strengthening diplomatic ties and political goodwill. While this approach supports development, it raises concerns about dependency, uneven development, and indirect reinforcement of existing political structures.

In Sudan specifically, these global strategies intersect sharply. Russia leverages military and resource partnerships, often through non-state armed actors, to secure economic and strategic advantage. The United States prioritizes counterterrorism, humanitarian response, and balancing Russian and Chinese influence, though its impact is constrained by broader geopolitical competition. China focuses on oil and infrastructure investments that strengthen state capacity but may also entrench authoritarian governance structures.

Collectively, Africa—and particularly Sudan—has become a competitive arena where military influence, economic extraction, and geopolitical rivalry overlap. These converging strategies not only shape external engagement but also influence the intensity, duration, and trajectory of conflicts such as the Sudanese Civil War of 2023, producing both developmental opportunities and heightened instability.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we employed the Balance of Power Theory, which is a foundational concept in international relations, positing that the international system is anarchic and that states, driven by self-interest, seek to ensure their survival by preventing any single state or coalition from becoming too powerful. The theory suggests that when one state or group of states gains a preponderance of power, others will balance against it by increasing their own power—either through internal military buildup or by forming alliances. This balancing behaviour aims to maintain stability and prevent hegemony, which could threaten the sovereignty and security of other states (Waltz, 1979). Hans Morgenthau, a leading realist, argued that the balance of power is both a natural and necessary mechanism in the anarchic international system, driven by the universal desire of states to ensure their own survival and autonomy (Morgenthau, 1948). John Mearsheimer further elaborates on the theory by emphasizing that states

are not just concerned with balancing against immediate threats but also with anticipating future threats, which can lead to preventive wars and arms races (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Balance of Power Theory also incorporates the notion that power is relative, meaning that states are less concerned with absolute gains and more with their position relative to potential rivals. Kenneth Waltz, another influential scholar, asserts that the balance of power not only explains the behaviour of states but also contributes to the structural stability of the international system by preventing dominance by any one state, thereby reducing the likelihood of largescale conflicts (Waltz, 1979). The theory has evolved over time to include various forms of balancing, such as "soft balancing," where states use nonmilitary tools like international institutions, economic statecraft, and diplomatic arrangements to counterbalance a powerful state without directly confronting it militarily (Pape, 2005). Critics of the theory argue that it oversimplifies the complexities of international politics by focusing too narrowly on material power and military capabilities, often neglecting the roles of ideology, domestic politics, and economic interdependence in shaping state behaviour (Schweller, 2004).

The Balance of Power Theory provides a compelling framework to understand the dynamics of the Sudanese Civil War of 2023, particularly in the context of the involvement of major global and regional powers. In this conflict, the actions of states like the United States, Russia, China, and regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE can be seen as attempts to either maintain or shift the balance of power in the Horn of Africa, a region of significant strategic importance. From the perspective of Balance of Power Theory, the Sudanese Civil War is not just a localized conflict but a battleground for broader geopolitical competition. The United States, traditionally concerned with maintaining influence in Africa to counter Chinese and Russian expansion, has likely sought to support factions or policies that align with its interests in preserving regional stability and preventing any power from dominating the region. This is consistent with the U.S.'s broader strategy of balancing against the influence of rising powers like China and Russia, which have been increasing their foothold in Africa through investments, military cooperation, and diplomatic engagement. Russia, on the other hand, has been leveraging the conflict to expand its influence in Sudan, a country that could offer strategic military and economic advantages, such as access to the Red Sea and critical resources. By supporting certain factions within the conflict, Russia seeks to counterbalance U.S. influence in the region, reflecting a classic balancing act in the international arena where it aims to prevent the U.S. from consolidating power while also securing its interests. China's role in the conflict is multifaceted, driven by its broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which includes significant investments in infrastructure and

resource extraction in Africa. China is likely interested in maintaining stability in Sudan to protect its investments, but it also recognizes that too much U.S. or Russian influence could threaten its long-term strategic goals. As a result, China may engage in soft balancing by advocating for diplomatic solutions, engaging in economic statecraft, or forming coalitions with other regional powers to ensure that no single power can dominate Sudan and, by extension, the broader region. Regional actors like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt are also key players in this balancing act. These states have their own interests in Sudan, ranging from securing borders and preventing the spread of conflict to ensuring access to the Nile River's waters and countering Iranian influence in the region. Their involvement can be seen as an attempt to balance against each other and against the influence of global powers, thereby shaping the trajectory of the conflict in ways that protect their own strategic interests.

Thus, each actor's involvement is driven by a desire to prevent any one state from gaining too much influence in Sudan, which is seen as critical to maintaining their own security and strategic interests in the Horn of Africa. This balancing behaviour not only shapes the conflict's dynamics but also has significant implications for regional stability, as the actions of these powers could either mitigate or exacerbate the ongoing violence depending on how the balance of power shifts.

Alignments of Regional Powers with Global Interests and the Sudan Civil War

The alignment of regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt with global interests has profoundly influenced the progression and resolution attempts of the Sudanese Civil War of 2023, creating a complex interplay between regional ambitions and global strategic objectives. These powers, motivated by their geopolitical interests, have engaged in significant interventions that have shaped both the military dynamics on the ground and the broader geopolitical landscape of the conflict, albeit with mixed outcomes.

Egypt, deeply concerned with securing its strategic interests in the Nile region, aligned itself with global powers by providing direct military support to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). This support included at least 10 airstrikes on Rapid Support Forces (RSF) positions by mid-2023. Egypt's involvement was not merely a reflection of its desire to influence the outcome of the conflict but also a strategic move to ensure that any resolution would favour a Sudanese regime sympathetic to its interests, particularly regarding the critical issue of Nile water security. The Egyptian airstrikes temporarily shifted the balance of power in favour of the SAF, allowing them to gain the upper hand in several key battles. However, this military advantage was fleeting, as the RSF, equally determined and supported by other external actors, adapted and continued to resist. The result was a deepening of the conflict, with each side

becoming more entrenched and less willing to negotiate, thus complicating any efforts toward a peaceful resolution.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia and the UAE played pivotal roles in shaping the conflict's trajectory, primarily through financial and diplomatic means. These Gulf states pledged a combined \$500 million in financial aid to various Sudanese factions, a move designed to secure their influence over the strategically vital Red Sea corridor and to counterbalance Iranian influence in the region. This financial support was part of a broader strategy to ensure that the outcome of the Sudanese conflict aligned with their regional and global interests, particularly in maintaining stability in the broader Middle East. In addition to financial aid, Saudi Arabia and the UAE facilitated over 12 diplomatic meetings aimed at brokering peace negotiations. These diplomatic efforts were intended to stabilize Sudan and prevent the conflict from spilling over into neighboring countries, which could disrupt the broader regional balance. However, despite these efforts, the peace talks failed to yield a lasting resolution, as the deeply rooted divisions within Sudan, exacerbated by external interventions, proved too complex to overcome.

The involvement of these regional powers, while aimed at securing their interests, has had unintended consequences for the progression of the conflict and the humanitarian situation in Sudan. The financial and military support provided by these nations has contributed to the prolongation of the war, as it has enabled the warring factions to sustain their operations. This has resulted in repeated failures of ceasefire attempts, with over five ceasefires negotiated by regional powers in 2023 alone, all of which collapsed within weeks. The persistence of the conflict has led to a staggering humanitarian crisis, with over 4 million people displaced by August 2023. The inability of regional and global powers to broker a lasting peace, despite their substantial involvement, highlights the limitations of external interventions in resolving deeply entrenched conflicts.

By August 2024, the Sudanese Civil War remained unresolved, despite the significant involvement of regional powers aligned with global interests. The ongoing war and the failure to achieve a lasting peace underscore the complex and often counterproductive nature of external interventions in civil conflicts. While these interventions are driven by the strategic interests of regional and global powers, their impact on the ground often exacerbates the conflict, leading to increased suffering for the civilian population and further destabilization of the region. The alignment of regional powers with global interests, while shaping the course of the conflict, has thus far failed to bring about a resolution, leaving Sudan in a state of protracted violence and humanitarian disaster.

In April 2023, Egypt's provision of air and intelligence support to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Saudi Arabia and the UAE's pledge of \$1 billion

in financial aid marked a significant escalation in external involvement. These interventions coincided with an intense period of diplomatic activity, as evidenced by 12 high-level meetings with Sudanese factions aimed at negotiating peace. Despite these efforts, three ceasefire attempts failed, indicating the deep-seated nature of the conflict and the difficulty in securing lasting peace. Militarily, the SAF managed to gain brief control in Khartoum, but this advantage was short-lived as the overall conflict escalated further.

By July 2023, the involvement of regional powers deepened. Egypt continued to provide logistical support, while the UAE contributed an additional \$500 million, emphasizing the sustained financial backing for the factions involved. Despite this, the eight diplomatic meetings held during this period failed to break the deadlock, with two more ceasefire attempts collapsing. The RSF, leveraging both internal and external support, managed to gain control of critical areas, shifting the military dynamics in their favour. However, the intensity of the conflict remained unchanged, demonstrating the limitations of external influence in altering the fundamental power struggle between the warring factions.

In October 2023, the situation saw further developments, with Egyptian military advisors becoming directly involved on the ground, indicating a more hands-on approach by Egypt in influencing the conflict's outcome. Saudi Arabia shifted its focus towards increasing humanitarian aid, signalling a recognition of the severe human toll the conflict was taking. Diplomatic efforts continued, with five meetings involving international mediators, yet only one ceasefire managed to hold temporarily. Despite this brief pause in hostilities, the RSF maintained its positions in key regions, and the conflict continued to drag on without any significant resolution in sight. The data illustrates how the alignment of regional powers with their strategic interests has not only sustained the conflict but also contributed to its protraction, as military, financial, and diplomatic efforts have yet to yield a lasting peace.

China's Investment in Sudan and Regional Stability in the Horn of Africa

China's substantial economic investments in Sudan, particularly in the oil and infrastructure sectors, have a profound impact on regional stability in the Horn of Africa, a relationship that becomes especially evident during periods of conflict such as the 2023 Sudanese Civil War. With over \$20 billion invested in Sudan's oil sector alone, the conflict's resultant 50% reduction in oil production directly undermined China's economic interests, simultaneously destabilizing critical trade routes that connect South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya. This disruption led to a 40% decline in trade volume through these routes, significantly weakening the regional economy and contributing to broader economic instability across the Horn of Africa. Additionally,

the war-induced displacement of over 2 million people, many of whom fled to neighbouring countries like Chad and South Sudan, placed severe strains on the limited resources of these host nations. This mass migration intensified humanitarian crises, heightened regional tensions, and increased the likelihood of internal and cross-border conflicts, further undermining stability.

Moreover, the instability in Sudan exacerbated preexisting geopolitical tensions, particularly the ongoing dispute between Ethiopia and Egypt over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Sudan's strategic importance and its role in these disputes are intricately linked to China's economic interests in the region. As the civil war deepened, the potential for these tensions to escalate into broader regional conflicts grew, illustrating how the disruption of China's economic activities in Sudan can have cascading effects on regional stability, impacting trade, migration, and geopolitical relations throughout the Horn of Africa. Throughout 2023, China's significant investments in Sudan's oil sector—totalling \$5 billion in May, \$4 billion in August, and \$3 billion in November—reflect its strategic interest in securing energy resources. However, the suspension and delay of key infrastructure projects, such as major roads and railway developments, suggest challenges in maintaining these investments amid the escalating conflict. China's use of debt leverage, starting with \$3 billion in May and decreasing to \$2 billion by November, has played a critical role in exerting economic influence over Sudan, but this has not been without consequences. The economic impact of these investments has been severe, with Sudan experiencing a 40% reduction in exports by May, worsening to a 75% economic contraction by November. This economic downturn has contributed to significant refugee flows, with hundreds of thousands of Sudanese fleeing to neighbouring countries like Ethiopia, Chad, and South Sudan, exacerbating interstate tensions. The refugee influx into Ethiopia/Chad heightened border disputes and diplomatic confrontations, illustrating how China's economic involvement in Sudan is closely intertwined with broader regional instability.

The United States and Dynamics of the Sudanese Civil War of 2023

The involvement of the United States in the Sudanese Civil War of 2023 significantly influenced the conflict's dynamics and outcomes, as evidenced by a range of strategic actions and their implications. The U.S. imposed at least five rounds of sanctions throughout the year, primarily targeting the financial resources of the warring factions. These sanctions were designed to weaken the economic capabilities of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and other groups, thereby altering the balance of power on the ground. This economic pressure likely contributed to shifts in territorial control, with the RSF gaining significant ground by mid-2023, ultimately controlling about 40% of Khartoum. This territorial gain represented a major shift in the war's

dynamics, as it demonstrated the resilience and strategic maneuvering of the RSF despite international efforts to curb their advance.

In addition to economic sanctions, the U.S. played a pivotal role in diplomatic efforts, conducting 15 high-level meetings with Sudanese and regional leaders by mid-2023. These meetings aimed to broker peace and align regional interests, leading to the Jeddah Agreement in May 2023. However, the rapid collapse of this agreement within weeks highlighted the complexities and challenges of achieving lasting peace in such a volatile environment. The U.S.'s involvement in these negotiations, while temporarily successful, underscored the limitations of diplomatic interventions when underlying power struggles and rivalries remain unresolved. Furthermore, the U.S. involvement had broader geopolitical implications, particularly in aligning Western allies against the influence of Russia and China in Sudan. This alignment was evident through coordinated sanctions and diplomatic efforts involving the European Union and the United Kingdom, which collectively aimed to counter the growing presence of non-Western powers in the region. Despite these efforts, the U.S. also had to manage the immediate humanitarian concerns, leading to evacuation operations that successfully extracted over 1,000 American citizens from Sudan by April 2023. This evacuation highlighted the deteriorating security situation and the U.S.'s priority in protecting its nationals amid the escalating conflict. Overall, while U.S. involvement shaped the conflict's progression by applying economic and diplomatic pressures, the persistent volatility and the eventual outcomes suggest that such involvement was influential but not decisive in resolving the Sudanese Civil War.

The U.S. imposed targeted sanctions on RSF and Sudanese military leaders, while engaging in ceasefire negotiations in Jeddah and successfully evacuating 700 U.S. citizens from Sudan. During this time, the RSF controlled significant areas of Khartoum, and the Jeddah Agreement was a key diplomatic effort, with the U.S. aligning with the EU and the African Union. By July, the U.S. expanded its sanctions to include arms suppliers to the RSF and applied diplomatic pressure through UN channels, leading to an additional 500 evacuations as the SAF reclaimed some territories in Khartoum. Despite these measures, progress on ceasefire negotiations remained limited. The U.S. coordinated closely with G7 nations to manage the crisis. In September, the U.S. imposed sanctions on RSF financial networks and increased diplomatic efforts in peace talks, evacuating another 300 citizens. The RSF retained a substantial presence in Khartoum, and the Jeddah talks were resumed amidst continued challenges. The U.S. also strengthened alliances with regional actors, reflecting an evolving approach to the conflict.

Geopolitical Strategies of Russia and the Intensity of the Sudanese Civil War

The geopolitical strategies of Russia have significantly influenced the duration and intensity of the Sudanese Civil War of 2023, with multifaceted impacts observable through arms shipments, economic engagement, and diplomatic efforts. By mid-2023, Russia's Wagner Group had made at least three major arms shipments to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), thereby directly bolstering the RSF's military capabilities and contributing to the escalation and prolongation of the conflict. These arms supplies intensified the fighting and extended the war's duration, as the RSF's enhanced firepower allowed them to sustain prolonged engagements with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). Additionally, Russia's acquisition of approximately 35 tons of gold from Sudan, valued at over \$2 billion, provided substantial financial support to the RSF, further fuelling the conflict by ensuring continued resources for military operations. The economic leverage gained through these gold exports not only sustained the RSF but also increased the overall intensity of the war, as financial resources were directed towards military expenditures rather than peacebuilding efforts.

Russia's diplomatic strategy, evidenced by at least five exchanges aimed at solidifying its influence in Sudan, reflects a concerted effort to embed itself as a key player in the region. These diplomatic engagements, while not directly violent, played a crucial role in shaping the conflict's landscape by reinforcing Russia's strategic interests and aligning with factions that extended the war. The cumulative effect of these strategies was a conflict characterized by over 200 active combat days and a substantial death toll of approximately 7,000 by mid-2023, with over 2 million displaced persons. The humanitarian crisis triggered by the ongoing violence, with over 10 million people requiring urgent assistance by August 2023, underscores the severe human impact of Russia's involvement.

In summary, Russia's geopolitical strategies—through arms support, economic investments, and diplomatic maneuvering—have exacerbated both the duration and intensity of the Sudanese Civil War, illustrating the complex relationship between international interventions and local conflicts.

In April 2023, Russia's military aid included arms shipments to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) through the Wagner Group, while economic interests were supported by gold extraction deals worth \$1.9 billion. This period saw high-level diplomatic coordination and high conflict intensity, with approximately 15,000 casualties. By June 2023, Russia expanded its support with the delivery of air defense systems to the RSF and further investment in Sudanese mining, continuing its diplomatic support. The war remained ongoing with high intensity, and casualties rose to around 20,000. By August 2023, Russia increased its involvement with additional arms and logistics support, and \$500 million was invested in gold and resource extraction. Diplomatic engagement with Sudanese authorities persisted, and

the conflict continued with high intensity, leading to an estimated 25,000 casualties. The data reveals that Russia's escalating military and economic support, coupled with sustained diplomatic efforts, significantly contributed to the prolongation and intensification of the Sudanese Civil War.

From the above expositions, for the first hypothesis, the data supports this hypothesis through multiple indicators. Russia's substantial military aid to the RSF, including arms shipments and air defense systems, has directly bolstered the RSF's capabilities, thereby prolonging and intensifying the conflict. The shipment of arms and logistical support from Russia's Wagner Group significantly enhanced the RSF's combat effectiveness, contributing to high-intensity warfare. Additionally, Russia's economic investments, notably gold extraction deals and resource extraction, provided financial resources that sustained the RSF's military operations. The increase in casualties—from approximately 15,000 in April 2023 to about 25,000 by August 2023—reflects the heightened intensity of the conflict, which can be attributed to Russia's involvement.

The imposition of sanctions by the United States aimed at restricting financial resources of the warring factions helped shape the conflict's dynamics by affecting the RSF's operational capabilities. The U.S. conducted high-level meetings to influence peace processes, contributing to the Jeddah Agreement in May 2023, which, despite its eventual collapse, demonstrates U.S. efforts to shape conflict resolution. The U.S. evacuation operations and coordinated sanctions with Western allies against Russian and Chinese interests indicate an active role in shaping the conflict's outcome. The RSF's territorial gains and the complex dynamics of ceasefire negotiations reflect the significant influence of U.S. involvement.

China's economic engagement and its impact on regional stability is also a case in point. China's substantial investments in the Sudanese oil sector and mining, coupled with debt leverage, significantly influenced Sudan's economic landscape. These investments contributed to economic contractions and disruptions in trade activities, which exacerbated regional instability. The increase in refugee flows, from 150,000 in May 2023 to 350,000 by November 2023, and heightened interstate tensions, particularly with Ethiopia, demonstrate the ripple effects of China's economic strategies.

The second hypothesis is supported by the data showing how regional powers' alignments influenced the conflict's progression and resolution. Saudi Arabia and the UAE provided financial aid and facilitated diplomatic meetings aimed at peace negotiations, reflecting their strategic interests in stabilizing the region. Despite these efforts, the conflict continued to escalate, with shifts in territorial control influenced by military support from Egypt and financial backing from Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The high number of ceasefire attempts and their limited success highlight the

challenges in conflict resolution despite regional powers' interventions. The data indicates that the alignment of these regional powers with global interests affected the conflict's dynamics and resolution, thereby validating the hypothesis.

Summary

This study examined the geopolitical interests of major powers and the Sudanese Civil War of 2023, focusing on how international actors shaped the conflict's dynamics and resolution. The research employed the Balance of Power theory to analyze the relationship between external influences and internal power struggles, with a methodology encompassing data collection on military support, financial aid, and diplomatic efforts from key global and regional players. The study identified critical gaps in understanding the direct impact of these geopolitical strategies on the conflict's evolution, particularly in how these strategies either prolonged or intensified the violence and humanitarian crisis in Sudan.

The findings reveal that the involvement of major powers, including the United States, China, and Russia, significantly influenced the conflict's course. The U.S. applied economic sanctions and engaged in diplomatic efforts, which, while shaping the conflict dynamics and contributing to the temporary Jeddah Agreement, did not resolve the underlying power struggles. China's economic investments, particularly in oil and infrastructure, led to regional instability and exacerbated humanitarian crises, highlighting the ripple effects of economic leverage on broader geopolitical tensions. Russia's military support and economic investments in gold extraction provided substantial resources to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), intensifying the conflict and extending its duration. The research findings substantiate the hypotheses by demonstrating how the geopolitical strategies of major powers directly impacted the Sudanese Civil War. The Balance of Power theory effectively framed the analysis, illustrating how external actors' interests in maintaining or altering regional power balances contributed to the conflict's persistence. The involvement of these actors did not resolve the conflict but rather influenced its progression and intensity, validating the hypothesis that geopolitical strategies play a crucial role in shaping the duration and nature of local conflicts.

Conclusion

This study provides a thorough analysis of the geopolitical interests of major powers and their influence on the Sudanese Civil War of 2023, framed through the Balance of Power theory. It reveals that the strategic actions of the United States, China, and Russia have significantly shaped the conflict's trajectory, with their military support, economic investments, and diplomatic efforts both intensifying and prolonging the violence. Despite the substantial interventions, the conflict has persisted largely unresolved, illustrating the complexities of aligning global strategies with local power

dynamics. The findings underscore the limitations of external interventions in achieving durable peace when entrenched internal conflicts and geopolitical rivalries persist. As such, this study highlights the necessity for more nuanced approaches that integrate international strategies with the intricacies of local power structures. Moving forward, the next section will propose recommendations aimed at addressing these challenges, focusing on how international actors can better align their strategies with the realities on the ground to support more effective and sustainable conflict resolution efforts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. International actors must establish a unified international coordination framework that synchronizes targeted sanctions, arms-transfer controls, and financial monitoring with inclusive diplomatic engagement and peacebuilding efforts—ensuring major powers align their economic and strategic actions to limit external interference, support local development, and promote sustainable conflict resolution.
2. In order to tackle the challenges of the alignment of regional powers and their influence on conflict resolution, it is recommended that multilateral engagement be enhanced to balance regional power dynamics. This involves fostering cooperative relationships among regional and global powers to support peace processes and address the root causes of conflict. By building inclusive and coordinated strategies, international actors can create a more favourable environment for achieving long term peace and stability in conflict affected regions.

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