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The Impact of Conflict on State Fragility in Sudan During the Period (2019 – 2024)

Introduction:

Sudan ranks second among the most fragile countries in the world according to the Fragile States Index (FSI) issued by the Fund for Peace (FFP), scoring 109.3 out of 120 (the maximum fragility) in 2024. This is attributed to political instability and the power struggle that Sudan has experienced since the 2019 revolution. The intensity of the conflict increased significantly after the collapse of the alliance formed post-2019 between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces.

State fragility indicators in Sudan existed even before the 2019 revolution. In 2018, Sudan scored 108.6 and ranked seventh among the most fragile states. The fragility indicators continued after the 2019 revolution and notably increased due to the conflict following the revolution, rather than the revolution itself. The fragility score rose from 108 in 2019 (the year of the revolution) to 109.3 in 2024 after the escalation of conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, placing Sudan second among the most fragile countries worldwide.

After the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir in 2019, the leaders of the Rapid Support Forces (Hemedti) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (Burhan) worked together to remove the transitional civilian government from power and established a special joint alliance to control governance and marginalize civilian forces⁽¹⁾. However, in April 2023, violent fighting broke out between Hemedti and Burhan, with both sides exchanging accusations. Burhan

described Hemedti and the Rapid Support Forces as rebels, while Hemedti described Burhan and the Sudanese Armed Forces as coup plotters and remnants of the old regime.

Problem Statement:

This study addresses a critical problem: the dialectical relationship between power struggles and state fragility. Scholars differ on which has priority: conflict or fragility? Some argue that conflict increases fragility indicators and leads to state failure. Others assert the opposite that conflict is merely a consequence of state fragility, as when all fragility indicators are present and the state becomes weak, elite groups easily compete for power.

This study attempts to examine this dialectic relationship: is conflict a precursor to state fragility, or is fragility what leads to conflict? The research question is thus:

What is the nature of the relationship between conflict and state fragility in Sudan?

Study Objectives:

The study aims to define the concept of a fragile state, clarify its difference from the failed state concept, understand the Fragile States Index, identify the various determinants of state fragility, and analyze the current conflict in Sudan, including its history, parties involved, nature, determinants, and its relation to state fragility, ultimately seeking recommendations and solutions to the ongoing conflict in Sudan.

Research Questions:

The main question generates the following sub-questions:

- 1- What is meant by the concept of a fragile state and its determinants?
- 2- Does the current conflict in Sudan have historical roots?
- 3- What are the indicators of state fragility in Sudan?
- 4- Has the current conflict in Sudan increased the levels of state fragility?
- 5- What is the future of the current conflict in Sudan?

Temporal and Spatial Framework:

1-Spatial framework: The study focuses on the concept of the fragile state and applies it to Sudan.

2-Temporal framework: The study period begins in 2019, marking the start of the popular revolution supported by the Sudanese army that toppled the Bashir regime, and continues until 2024, covering the ongoing consequences of the 2019 revolution and the armed conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces that began in April 2023.

Study Methodology:

The study uses Gabriel Almond's functional-structural approach because it suits the study's subject. This methodology focuses on the concept of function, where the essence of function is the study of activities necessary for the system's continuity⁽²⁾. Failure to perform

these functions leads to functional imbalance, reducing the chances of the system's survival and continuity.

Applied to this study, any state must perform specific functions, such as meeting its citizens' basic demands. Failure to fulfill these functions leads to fragility and weakness, potentially resulting in failure and collapse. In Sudan's case, since the 2019 protests, the state has experienced functional failure, unable to perform its key roles like ensuring citizen security or fulfilling their basic needs, resulting in a high score on the Fragile States Index (FSI).

Study Structure:

The study covers the following points:

- 1- Conceptual framework of the study.
- 2- The impact of conflict on state fragility in Sudan, divided into:
 - History of conflict in Sudan.
 - Cohesion indicators (the current conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)).
 - Political indicators of state fragility in Sudan.
 - Economic indicators of state fragility in Sudan.
 - Social indicators of state fragility in Sudan.
- 3- Study results and recommendations.
- 4- Study summary.

First: Conceptual Framework of the Study

The Concept of the Fragile State:

The term "failed state" became widespread in the 1990s and the early 2000s to describe states unable to perform their basic functions. The Fund for Peace (FFP) issued the Failed State Index since 2005 to measure state failure. However, the "failed state" concept faced widespread criticism politically and academically, leading to a shift to the "fragile state" concept, and the index was renamed the Fragile States Index (FSI) from 2014⁽³⁾.



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Many studies have analyzed these concepts and confirmed that the two terms did not emerge simultaneously nor follow the same trajectory. The failed state concept originated with foreign policy analysts in the early 1990s in the post-Cold War context, aiming to describe the alarming spread of civil conflicts leading to state institutional collapse, economic stagnation, and deteriorating security. Examples include the wars in Bosnia and Croatia, factional conflicts in Somalia, and the Cambodian government's failure to end Khmer Rouge guerrilla warfare. These developments led to new forms of warfare beyond traditional war concepts and introduced new terms like "quasi-state," "failed state," and "collapsed state." The term "failed state" gained wide usage, especially in U.S. security policy after the 9/11 attacks⁽⁴⁾.

The term "fragile state" gained prominence among donor agencies, technical agencies working in development, humanitarian aid, and peace building, particularly through the OECD and World Bank since the mid-2000s. It describes the poorest, least stable countries unable to meet minimum donor standards, with declining legitimacy and institutional authority. The term became widely used after the Fund for Peace renamed its index in 2014.

Literature studying these concepts divides into two trends⁽⁵⁾:

- **The first focuses** on state institutional arrangements state institutions and their capacity to perform functions to achieve societal stability. This includes studies by humanitarian donor agencies like the World Bank, USAID, and the UK's Department for International Development.

- **The second focuses** on underlying causes of state failure and factors destabilizing the state, concentrating on political, economic, social, and environmental determinants of fragility. These studies propose various indicators causing erosion of state authority and legitimacy, including political structure issues like weak bureaucracy, corruption, authoritarian leadership; social environment issues like civil wars, inequality, poverty; and external factors like international interventions, wars, and environmental degradation⁽⁶⁾.

The Fund for Peace (FFP) uses 12 indicators to measure pressures and capacities reflecting state fragility or stability. These include three cohesion indicators related to security apparatus, elites, and group grievances; three economic indicators economic decline, uneven development, and brain drain; three political indicators state legitimacy, public services, human rights, and rule of law; and three social indicators demographic pressures, displaced populations, and external intervention⁽⁷⁾.

The World Bank defines a fragile state as one facing serious challenges like political instability due to armed conflicts, ongoing violence, weak institutional capacity, and poor governance. OECD defines a fragile state as lacking political will or capacity to provide essential functions needed to reduce poverty, maintain security, protect human rights, and achieve development.

USAID uses the term fragile state to refer to a broad group of failing and recovering states, distinguishing vulnerable states from those in crisis. A vulnerable state is unwilling or unable to ensure adequate security and provide essential services to large population segments, casting doubt on government legitimacy. A state in crisis lacks effective government control over its territory, is unwilling or unable to provide vital services to large areas, and has weak or nonexistent government legitimacy, characterized by ongoing violent conflict.

The UK's Department for International Development defines a fragile state as one whose government cannot perform essential functions for most citizens. Fragility is not limited to conflict zones; it also includes countries with strong governments that fail to reduce poverty or respect human rights⁽⁸⁾.

Determinants of State Fragility:

There are many causes that contribute to state fragility, the most important of which are:

1- Weak Political Institutions

This means the presence of weak political institutions that are unable to manage and

distribute state resources in a way that achieves equality and social justice. The stability of any state depends on the balance of its political institutions and their ability to perform their duties. When discussing the balance of state institutions, three key elements of political systems must be noted:

- First, selection how leaders and governments are chosen, whether through periodic elections, appointments, or seizure of power by force.
- Second, authority the limits of executive power, whether it is the strongest power in the state or if there is a balance among the three branches (executive, legislative, and judicial).
- Third, participation the degree of citizen participation in the political process⁽⁹⁾.

2- Economic Decline

Economic growth and poverty reduction are among the most important factors of state strength, but this growth depends on certain conditions in the state, such as peace, stability, and good governance. Economic growth cannot be achieved without strong institutions. Differences between states in institutional quality explain why some experience economic decline while others achieve growth. Many fragile states have weak institutions, resulting in very low domestic and foreign investment in human development and infrastructure.

There is debate among researchers about the nature and direction of the relationship between state fragility and economic and social development. Some assume that economic growth may increase state fragility because growth involves structural changes within state institutions that can lead to the weakening of political coalitions and changes in the balance of power among different interest groups⁽¹⁰⁾.

Others argue that fragility can force rebellious governments to undertake long-awaited reforms. While short-term changes may exacerbate fragility, strong political systems succeed in restoring balance in the long term.

This variation in opinions is because fragility depends on many other factors; economic decline alone cannot explain state fragility but contributes to it along with other factors.

3- Natural Resources

Violence in fragile states often results from conflict and competition over natural resources such as land and water. Many cases illustrate the contribution of natural resource supplies to the beginnings of conflict, such as in Sierra Leone, Angola, and Sudan. However, not all cases involve natural resources; there are conflicts with no connection to natural resources, such as in Nepal, Senegal, Bosnia, and Lebanon. Additionally, not all resource-rich countries experience conflict, such as Canada and Botswana. Violent conflict usually arises due to political maneuvering by competing groups controlling natural resources. Abundant resources provide strong incentives for those in power to distribute these resources unfairly to serve their interests, creating strong motivations for opposition parties to resort to illegal means, including riots and coups, to change the distribution method. Thus, the cause of conflict is not the resources themselves but how they are used and distributed by those in power.

4- Violent Conflicts

Violent conflict is the ultimate manifestation of the breakdown in communication and negotiation between disputing groups. It is the destructive side of any development process. There is debate over whether violent conflict is a cause or result of state fragility, but many pieces of evidence show it is a cause that exacerbates fragility and instability. Civil war is currently the most common form of violent conflict⁽¹¹⁾.

5- Transitional Periods (Transitions)

Political systems and state institutions derive their legitimacy from the people they govern. Without this legitimacy, the system cannot last long-term. The age of institutions can also confer legitimacy, as long as they meet people's expectations. This explains the resilience of



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authoritarian regimes; if the regime consistently provides services, even with coercion, the people will not seek to change the power structure.

Conversely, when the state consistently fails to provide services, people stop expecting the government to do so, causing the government to lose legitimacy and prompting demands for political change.

During transitional periods, when institutions shift and the state no longer provides services as before, people tend to feel dissatisfaction with the system, leading to loss of legitimacy and fragility. Political systems transitioning from authoritarianism to democracy may also be unstable due to increased political demands requiring a long time to be met, generating public frustration towards new actors.

6- External Shocks

States do not exist in isolation; they are significantly affected by events in other countries. The greater or more extreme these events are, the more likely they affect neighboring states, especially if the latter have weak institutions and notable social divisions. External shocks exacerbate state fragility. For example, the conflict in the Balkans spread from Slovenia to Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia.

7- Geography, Climate, and Diseases

The geographic location of a state may cause its fragility by leading to economic stagnation or putting pressure on it. Landlocked countries or those without sea access tend to have a lower GDP than coastal countries because it is difficult for them to export goods or attract foreign investment. If the country's terrain is mountainous and harsh, farming becomes difficult, causing dependence on food imports, which hinders economic growth.

Climatic conditions also play a significant role; frequent natural disasters like earthquakes and floods make farming difficult and destroy infrastructure, obstructing development. The spread of infectious diseases such as HIV/

AIDS negatively affects a state's capacity to govern itself. For example, Southern African countries suffered economic decline due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

8- International System and External Interventions

Loan granting institutions like the World Bank and IMF, and investors like multinational companies, form part of a state's national economy. The state's relationship with these actors can significantly help combat poverty and state fragility through grants and aid.

However, these actors sometimes exacerbate fragility through interventions, conditionalities, and institutional reform requirements tied to aid. These reforms may cause political unrest and violence because institutional reform and democratization require long time frames⁽¹²⁾.

Fragile States Index (FSI)

The Fragile States Index (FSI) annually ranks 179 countries based on the various pressures leading to their fragility. The index includes multiple indicators measuring⁽¹³⁾:

- **State Cohesion:** Strength of security apparatus (corruption, internal conflicts, coups), elite cohesion (conflicts or splits), and collective grievances (tensions and violence between groups due to the state's inability to ensure security and enforce law).
- **Economic Indicators:** Economic decline, poverty, inability to provide basic needs, uneven development due to ethnic/religious/regional favoritism, and brain drain due to lack of jobs.
- **Political Indicators:** State legitimacy eroded by corruption and election fraud, low political participation, inability to provide public services (health, education, infrastructure), human rights, civil and political freedoms, freedom of the press, and rule of law.
- **Social Indicators:** Demographic pressures like natural disasters, diseases,

food shortages, environmental pollution, population growth, high mortality rates, large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons, diseases caused by these factors, inability to absorb displaced populations, and external interventions (foreign aid, peacekeeping forces, UN missions, credit rating, and foreign military interventions)⁽¹⁴⁾.

Second: The Impact of Conflict on State Fragility in Sudan

1- History of Conflict in Sudan

Looking back at history, Sudan has experienced many civil wars due to being an ethnically, tribally, and politically divided society. The history of civil wars in Sudan dates back to the 1950s, during which Sudan witnessed the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) conflict from 1955 to 1972, and again from 1983 to 2005. This conflict eventually led to the independence of South Sudan in 2011.

Since its independence, Sudan has also experienced numerous military coups. Omar al-Bashir came to power following the military coup of 1989 and remained in control until the 2019 coup. During Bashir's rule, Sudan suffered from conditions that contributed to state fragility, including a deteriorating economy, human rights violations, war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocides, civil wars, and displacement from states such as Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile. The secession of South Sudan also took place during this time⁽¹⁵⁾.

Sudan also witnessed many poor peace agreements that benefited only the upper ranks of armed groups. In 2006, Bashir's government signed three peace agreements simultaneously:

- The Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the SPLM/A to end the long war in Darfur.
- The Abuja Agreement with the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and other armed groups from Darfur.

- The Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) with the Beja Congress and the Free Rashaida.

All these agreements failed to strengthen central authority, failed to enable the national army's monopoly on violence and armed power, and did not bring stability. On the contrary, they led to divisions between armed groups and the state itself, escalating conflicts and polarization. The ESPA transformed the low-intensity conflict in eastern Sudan into a complex one and intensified tribal conflicts. Consequently, Sudan recorded the highest fragility index scores in 2006 and 2007, ranking first with scores of 112.3 and 113.7 respectively⁽¹⁶⁾.

These agreements also inspired many armed groups to fight for positions and gains through power-sharing deals. For example, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement led to the fragmentation of armed groups in Darfur, a fragmentation that continued even after the Doha Peace Agreement in 2011. By the end of 2019, more than 80 known armed groups were operating in Darfur.

The emergence of Hemeti and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has deep roots in the country. Decades of failed peace agreements and militarization by the central government towards the regions led to Hemeti's forces joining the government to fight rebellion. Hemeti's rise began after the Darfur peace agreement when, in 2007, he voiced grievances against the central government and decided to fight alongside armed groups by forming his own militia. Consequently, the central government enticed Hemeti to join with a military rank and financial incentives⁽¹⁷⁾.

During the first decade of the 21st century, Bashir succeeded in suppressing successive protest waves. However, the uprising that started in December 2018, sparked by Bashir's decision to lift bread subsidies, was too large to contain. The movement grew, and a coalition of labor unions called the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) was formed. This coalition led the widespread protests, uniting opposition



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forces in January 2019. Armed groups, civil society organizations, and opposition forces joined the alliance, united under a common declaration that allowed the birth of the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC).

Protests peaked in April 2019 with demonstrators camping outside the main military headquarters in Khartoum. Junior officers pledged to protect protesters, and distrust grew among the army, RSF, and the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). The military sided with protesters and intervened to support the popular movement demanding Bashir's removal and a transfer to civilian rule. Bashir was indeed ousted, and a military council named the Sovereignty Council led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan was formed to govern during the transitional period. However, this transition faltered due to military greed for power and internal military conflicts⁽¹⁸⁾.

In the following weeks, the generals negotiated with the Forces of Freedom and Change, refusing any concession that would threaten their dominance. Civilians rejected any military representation in transitional institutions, organizing sit-ins that were violently dispersed by police, resulting in beatings, rapes, and bodies dumped in the Nile, causing approximately 120 deaths and 900 injuries.

These events prompted the U.S. to pressure the UAE and Saudi Arabia to intervene to curb violations by the armed forces against protesters. By June 2020, the generals and the FFC agreed on broad power-sharing outlines. Despite repression, protests continued, culminating in the million-man march organized by popular forces. On August 4, 2020, the generals and the FFC signed the constitutional declaration⁽¹⁹⁾.

The declaration stipulated a transitional period lasting more than three years, peace agreements with armed groups, a new constitution, free elections, and the formation of a Sovereignty Council headed by General

Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, with Hemeti (leader of the RSF) appointed as deputy, until May 2021 when power would be handed over to civilians⁽²⁰⁾.

During this period, the state continued rewarding Hemeti for his support to the army and also rewarded armed groups in Darfur and South Sudan through the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) in 2020. However, the level of violence witnessed afterward was unprecedented in Sudan's history, reaching its peak in April 2023 when Hemeti and the RSF negotiated integration into the Sudanese Armed Forces under a deal led by the international community. The army insisted on placing the RSF under the supreme commander's authority to unify the Sudanese army, while Hemeti insisted on RSF's subordination to the civilian president after election. This disagreement triggered the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) led by Burhan and the RSF led by Hemeti.

2- Indicators of Lack of Cohesion: (Current Conflict between SAF and RSF)

The state cohesion index reflects elite conflicts and splits, exemplified by the current conflict in Sudan a conflict within the elite between the Sudanese army and the RSF. After the 2019 revolution, the army and civilian forces agreed to establish a Sovereignty Council to govern Sudan for 39 months, headed by a military figure (SAF leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan) for 21 months, then followed by a civilian leader. However, tensions between military and civilian elements led the military to refuse relinquishing power in October 2021, sparking widespread protests.

A disagreement arose within the military component itself over the fate of the RSF whether to integrate it into the Sudanese army or keep it as an independent force under the Prime Minister's authority⁽²¹⁾. In April 2023, the conflict escalated into a full-scale war between the Sudanese army (with over 220,000 soldiers) and the RSF (with around 100,000 soldiers, controlling a gold mine but no

airbases). The RSF besieged the army's airbase in Merowe (northern Sudan) to neutralize the air force and prevent aircraft use. They also seized intelligence offices and headquarters of the dissolved National Congress Party (NCP) affiliated with Bashir, and controlled several institutions exploiting their widespread presence in Khartoum and Darfur⁽²²⁾.

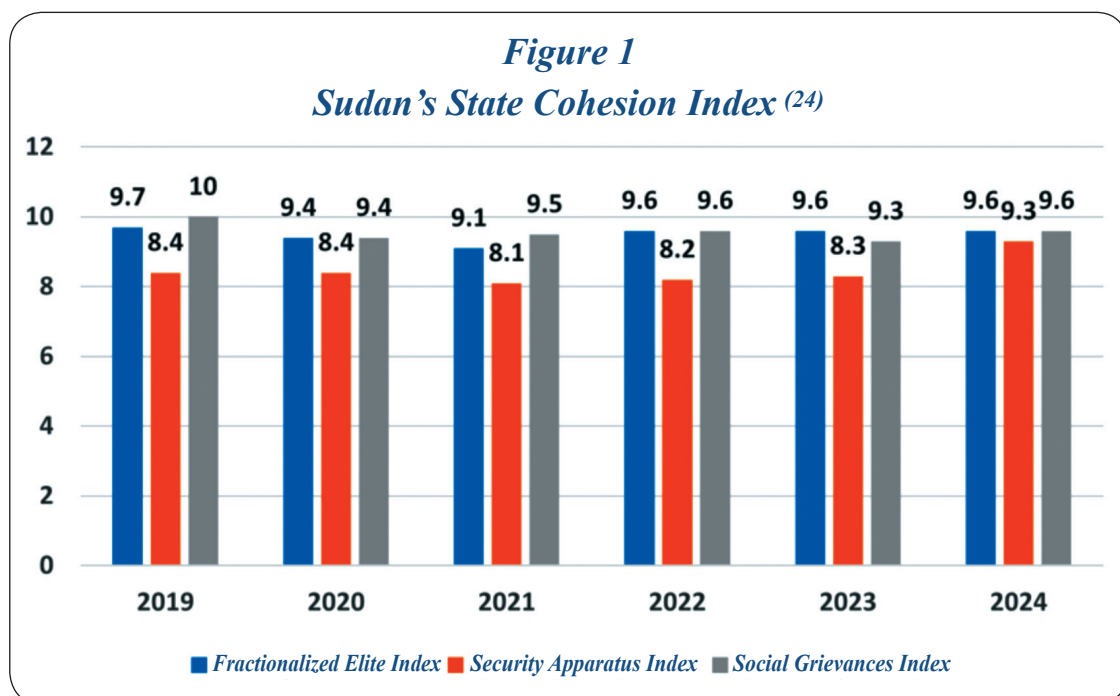
The war destroyed Khartoum, then spread to Darfur and El Fasher a refuge for Darfur's displaced people. A ceasefire eased the conflict temporarily but was threatened when RSF attacked to control parts of Darfur, causing army positions to fall except for the garrison in El Fasher. Security arrangements in El Fasher collapsed as former rebel leaders, such as Minni Minnawi, allied with the RSF in eastern Sudan, causing the ceasefire to break down. With fighting intensifying in villages outside El Fasher and ongoing army airstrikes against RSF positions, the RSF mobilized thousands of fighters to encircle the city.

By April 2024, the situation boiled over with armed groups in Darfur turning against

each other. RSF imposed a siege on the city, while armed groups attacked both the RSF and the army. The army continued bombing, escalating the conflict amid civilians trapped in dire conditions with no safe access to food or shelter. Civilians remained in RSF-controlled areas while the Sudanese armed forces blocked aid deliveries.

In February 2024, Burhan's government relocated from Khartoum to Port Sudan, unable to operate from the capital. It also revoked UN authorization for aid deliveries from Chad to RSF-controlled areas. After further negotiations, Burhan's government offered a single aid corridor at the Al-Tina border crossing, still under its control, though insufficient for large-scale relief efforts⁽²³⁾.

The following figure (Figure 1) shows Sudan's State Cohesion Index, comprising the Fractionalized Elite Index, Security Apparatus Index, and Group Grievances Index during 2019-2024.





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According to the Fragile States Index (FSI), Sudan's elite fractionalization rose significantly after the 2019 revolution, scoring 9.7 in 2019 due to the revolution. The division persisted through subsequent years, reaching 9.6 in 2024. There is a slight improvement in elite fractionalization from 2019 to 2024, indicating that the elite split was sharper during the revolution than afterward.

The Security Apparatus Index, indicating the use and availability of weapons, rose from 8.4 in 2020 to 9.3 in 2024, which is logical given that conflict increases weapon proliferation and use.

The Social Grievances Index also increased, from 9.4 in 2020 to 9.6 in 2024, confirming the conflict's negative impact on citizens' lives.

3- Political Indicators of State Fragility in Sudan

Political indicators refer to the erosion of state legitimacy due to corruption, election fraud, low political participation, the state's inability to provide health, education, infrastructure, human rights, civil and political freedoms, press freedom, and rule of law.

Due to ongoing conflict, Sudan has lacked an effective government since October 2021. After the army dismissed the transitional government and Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, a state of emergency was declared. The UN mediated between all parties, and in December 2022, politicians and civilians formed a framework agreement expected to be signed in April 2023 but was postponed, leading to political instability and rising protests.

An agreement on integrating the RSF into the army and civilian-led military command was planned but soon internal elite and military faction conflicts (between SAF and RSF) erupted, causing legitimacy erosion and the state's failure to perform its duties or provide health and education services⁽²⁵⁾.

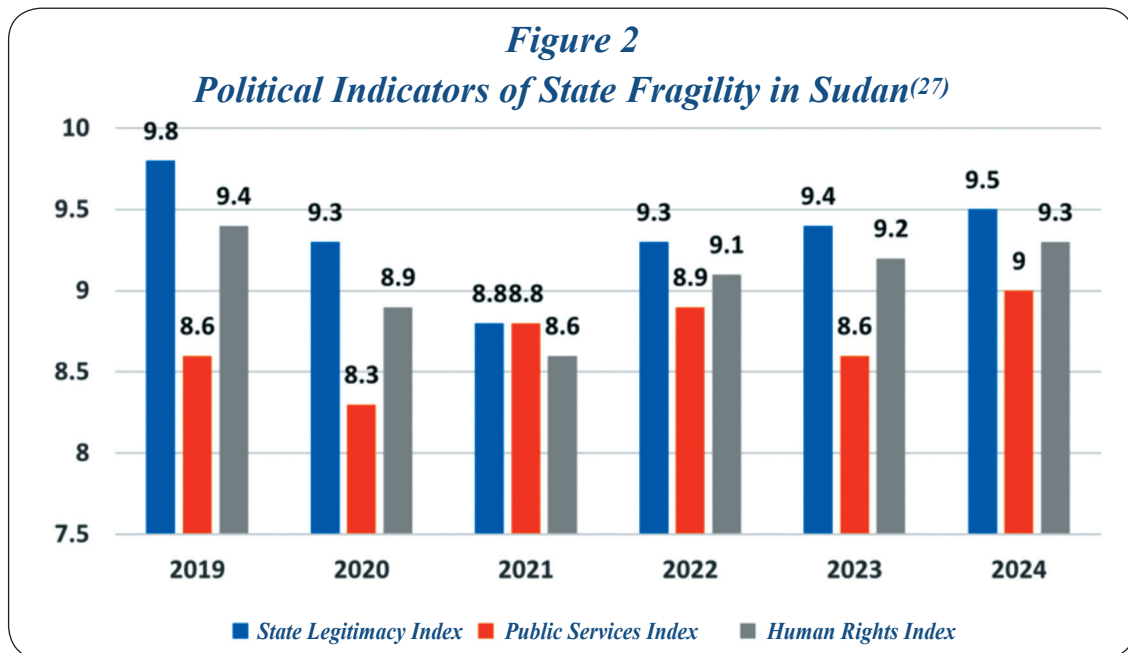
Regarding the health situation in Sudan, the conflict has led to the closure of most health facilities across the country. Fighting resulted in the shutdown of child care centers in Khartoum, and the city's cardiac surgery hospital was forced to operate only under emergency conditions. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies warned of a total collapse of the health system in Sudan. Additionally, 39 out of 59 hospitals in Khartoum and surrounding states were closed. The conflict also caused a shortage of medical supplies. The World Health Organization reported an acute shortage of blood supplies, blood transfusion equipment, intravenous fluids, and other vital supplies needed to treat the wounded in Khartoum's health facilities. Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) confirmed that airport closures and the shutdown of many roads were among the main reasons behind this shortage.

Medical units also came under attack. In Khartoum, some doctors reported raids on one of the hospitals, and missiles struck the Al-Muallem Hospital before it was evacuated. Armed groups looted medical supplies and other equipment during these raids. Even hospitals far from the fighting were forced to shut down due to their staff being unable to reach the facilities and citizens being unable to access them. According to Médecins Sans Frontières, more than 30% of the population lives over 30 minutes away from the nearest hospital, and 20% live more than an hour away.

As for infrastructure, it has been significantly affected by the ongoing conflict. Several reports highlighted the damage to the country's main airport, Khartoum International Airport, due to heavy artillery shelling between the army and the Rapid Support Forces. Satellite images show damage to railways in Khartoum, government buildings, military and civilian aircraft, and a large number of water

and electricity facilities leading to power and water outages in Khartoum. Communication between Sudanese people was also restricted, as telecom companies announced they had suspended local network services.

Figure (2) below shows the rates of state legitimacy, human rights, and the provision of public services in Sudan during the period (2019–2024), according to the Fragile States Index⁽²⁶⁾.



According to the above figure, Sudan’s State Legitimacy Index dropped from 9.8 in 2019 to 9.5 in 2024 a slight decrease, but it indicates that the Bashir regime lacked legitimacy and that the 2019 revolution was a natural result of this illegitimacy. The regime’s legitimacy improved slightly in 2024, possibly due to citizens’ suffering from conflict, violence, and killings, and their desire to end the conflict even if that meant remaining under military rule.

The Public Services Index decreased from 8.6 in 2019 to 8.3 in 2020, then increased slightly to 9 in 2024. Meanwhile, the Human Rights Index declined from 9.4 in 2019 to 9.3 in 2024 logically reflecting the rise in human rights violations.

4- Economic Indicators of State Fragility in Sudan

These indicators include economic decline, poverty, the state’s inability to provide basic

necessities for its citizens, and unequal development due to the government’s ethnic, religious, or regional distribution of services. It also includes brain drain caused by a lack of job opportunities, which leads to a reduction in human capital.

Before the current conflict, Sudan had already been suffering from multiple economic issues due to state control over the economy. Economic activity in Sudan revolved around several government-owned companies, leading to rampant corruption and unbalanced economic development due to elite capture of state resources and their affiliated companies⁽²⁸⁾. These elites entrenched monopolies, distorting the market. Despite billions of dollars in oil revenue accumulation, Bashir’s government failed to invest in most of Sudan’s resources. Instead of investing in the agricultural and pastoral economy, the government funneled large sums into the bloated security apparatus



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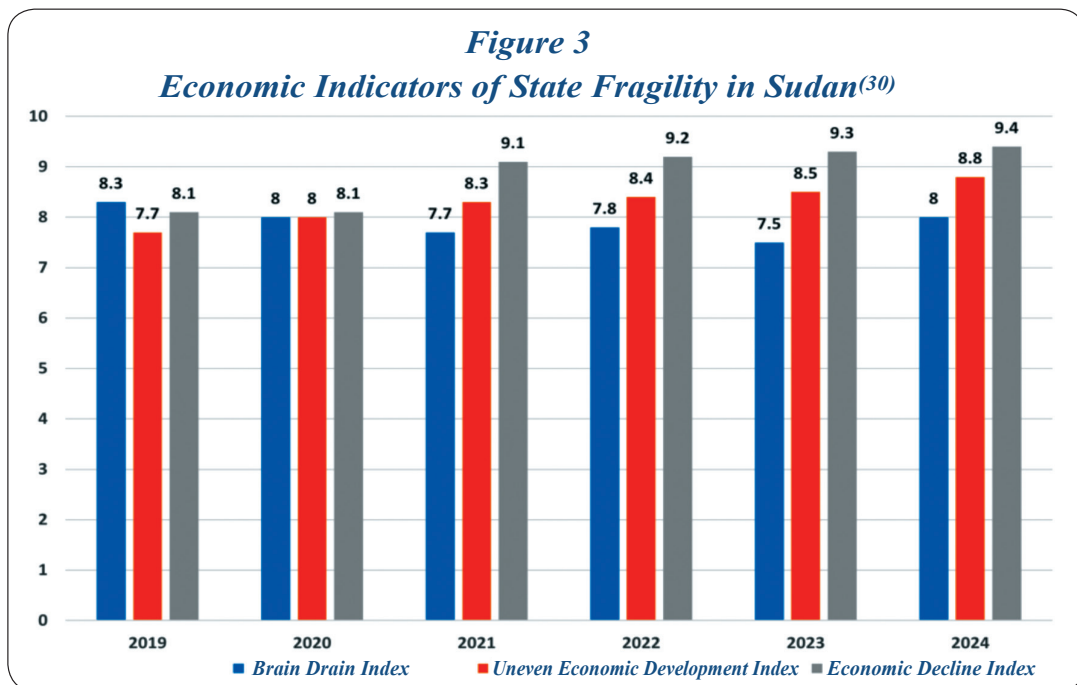
and bureaucracy, leading to a buildup of debt and burdens.

Following South Sudan's secession in 2011, Khartoum lost a vital source of oil revenue, leading to rising inflation and deepening the economic crisis one of the main reasons behind the popular protests in 2018⁽²⁹⁾.

The current conflict has caused a devastating economic crisis, with more than 65% of the

population now living below the poverty line. From the 2021 revolution through December 2022, inflation exceeded 100%. The conflict caused trade stagnation, market closures, and rising food prices.

Figure (3) below shows the economic indicators of state fragility in Sudan for the period 2019–2024.



From the above figure, we observe the Brain Drain Index declined from 8.3 in 2019 to 8 in 2024. Uneven Economic Development increased from 7.7 in 2019 to 8.8 in 2024. Economic Decline worsened from 8.1 to 9.4 by 2024.

5- Social Indicators of State Fragility in Sudan

Social indicators refer to demographic pressures such as natural disasters, disease outbreaks, food scarcity, environmental pollution, population growth, high mortality rates, large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), diseases caused by

displacement, and the inability to accommodate these populations. They also include external interventions, whether through foreign aid, peacekeeping forces, UN missions, credit ratings, or foreign military interventions.

Among the major challenges faced by millions are water and food shortages due to ongoing violence. Food prices have tripled in some areas due to supply shortages and continued market and shop closures, leading to food insecurity. Around 15 million people suffer from food insecurity, and the prevalence of acute malnutrition has reached about 15% roughly three million people. Most children under the age of five suffer from moderate to severe acute malnutrition.

Access to drinking water has recently become severely limited, with over 17 million people unable to obtain safe drinking water, and 24 million lacking access to sanitation services. Humanitarian programs have become the sole source of food and water in areas besieged by the ongoing conflict. Due to attacks on World Food Programme (WFP) workers, some aid programs have been suspended, worsening the situation.

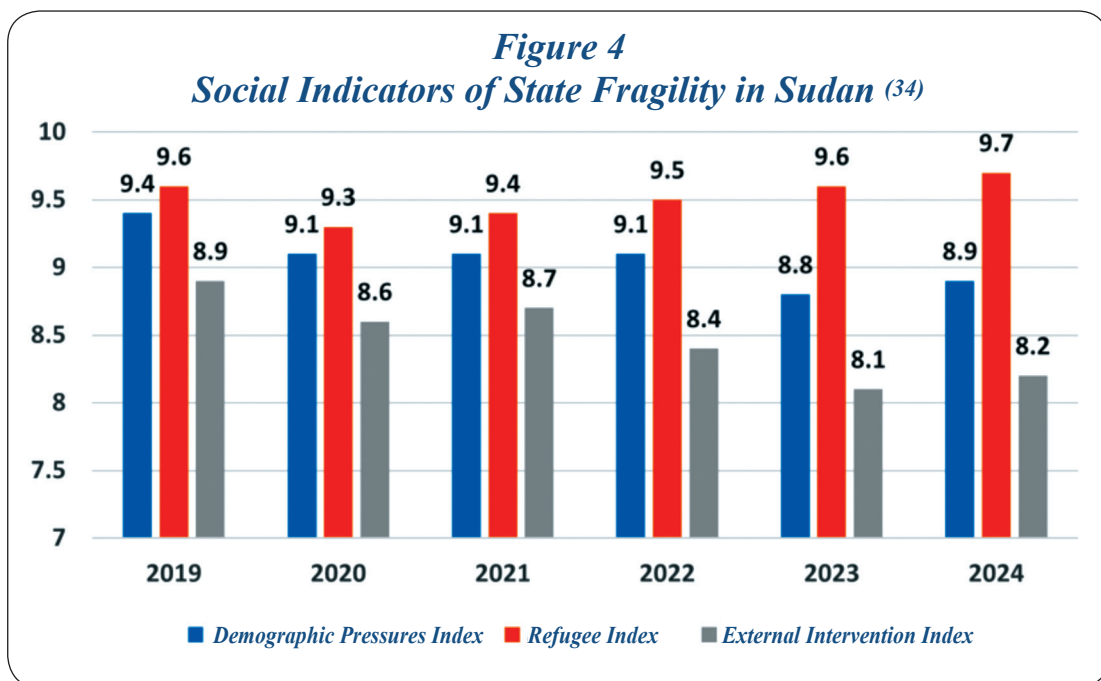
Displacement rates have also increased dramatically due to the conflict. In 2023, major violence broke out between the Masalit and Arab tribes in the town of Foro Baranga, West Darfur, leading to mass displacement and the burning of numerous homes. In North Darfur, conflict erupted between two groups of the Bani Hussein tribe. Violence also flared between the Zaghawa Arabs and the Masalit in Al-Geneina locality in West Darfur, resulting in numerous deaths, injuries, and displacement most victims being children, the elderly, and women.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) condemned the violence resulting from the conflict between the Sudanese

Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)⁽³¹⁾, which has led to displacement across the country particularly in Darfur, Khartoum, and Kordofan displacing over 3.7 million people, including 3 million in Darfur alone. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in refugee camps have been subjected to beatings and killings, with some camps bombed, causing numerous deaths. The conflict has also produced large numbers of refugees fleeing to neighboring countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Chad⁽³²⁾.

The conflict, combined with malnutrition and displacement, has led to the spread of many diseases. Sudan now ranks among the top four countries worldwide with the highest rates of acute malnutrition. As a result, outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, dengue fever, and malaria have occurred. The health crisis has been exacerbated by the collapse of the health infrastructure, with 70% to 80% of medical facilities in conflict zones rendered non-operational⁽³³⁾.

Figure (4) below illustrates the social indicators of state fragility in Sudan during the period 2019–2024.





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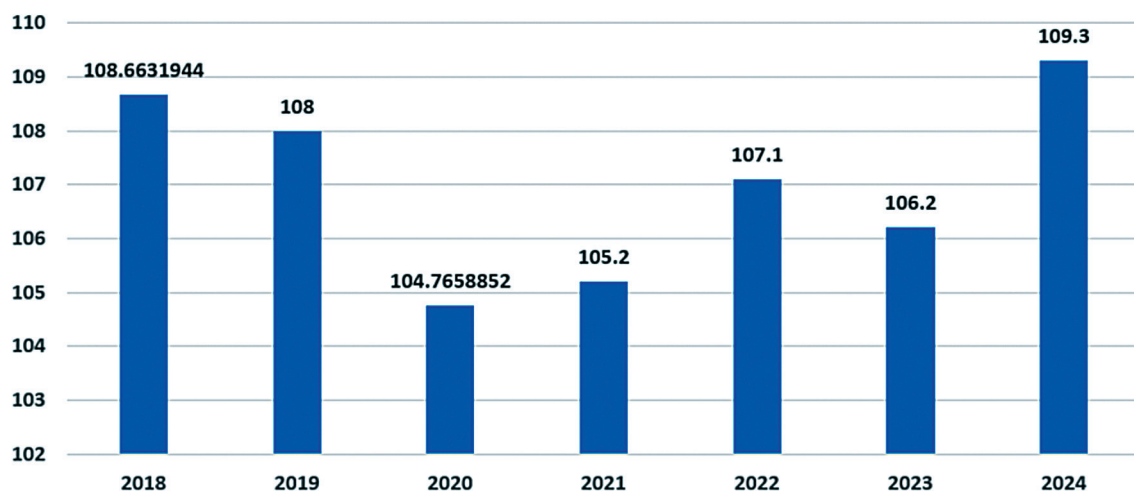
According to the figure above, demographic pressures in Sudan increased from 8.8 in 2023 to 8.9 in 2024. The refugee index also rose due to the revolution and conflict from 9.6 in 2019 to 9.7 in 2024. Meanwhile, external political and economic intervention decreased from 8.9 in 2019 to 8.2 in 2024. This decrease may indicate that external interventions were more evident during and immediately after the revolution than during the ongoing conflict, where many foreign actors are involved in a more covert or indirect manner.

Third: Study Findings and Recommendations

1- Study Findings

From the above analysis, it is concluded that the power struggle in Sudan has had a significant impact on increasing the fragility of the state. The study indicates that it was the conflict itself that led to a rise in state fragility, rather than state fragility causing the conflict. All indicators of fragility were lower before the outbreak of the conflict but increased significantly afterward, as illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 5
State Fragility Index in Sudan (2018–2024) ⁽³⁵⁾



The above figure shows that Sudan's state fragility increased in 2024, reaching a rate higher than in the years prior to the conflict.

Following the outbreak of conflict in Darfur in 2003, fragility increased dramatically in 2006 and 2007, placing Sudan at the top of the global fragility index. Despite the signing of many peace agreements at the time, they all failed. It is notable that the effects of conflict on fragility indicators do not manifest immediately but rather two to three years later.

For instance, the 2003 conflict led to increased fragility indicators in 2006 and 2007. Similarly, the current conflict that began in 2023 has already begun to affect fragility indicators by 2024, placing Sudan second globally in terms of fragility. If the conflict remains unresolved, Sudan may top the Fragile States Index in the coming years.

The following table shows Sudan's ranking on the Fragile States Index (FSI) between 2018 and 2024.

Table: Sudan's Ranking on the Fragile States Index (FSI) ⁽³⁶⁾

| Year | Center | Fragile State Index in Sudan |
|------|--------|------------------------------|
| 2018 | 7 | 108.6631944 |
| 2019 | 8 | 108 |
| 2020 | 8 | 104.7658852 |
| 2021 | 8 | 105.2 |
| 2022 | 7 | 107.1 |
| 2023 | 7 | 106.2 |
| 2024 | 2 | 109.3 |

The table indicates an increase in Sudan's fragility index from 107.1 in 2022 before the outbreak of conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces in April 2023 to 109.3 in 2024. Sudan now ranks second globally among the most fragile states, up from seventh or eighth in previous years. This suggests that the conflict has clearly worsened state fragility. If left unresolved, Sudan may become the most fragile state globally in the near future.

The conflict may follow one of two possible trajectories: a peaceful resolution or a violent path of continued fighting.

- The peaceful path appears difficult to achieve, as both sides have reached a point of entrenched hostilities and are unlikely to back down before securing their objectives.
- The Sudanese Armed Forces want to integrate the RSF into the national army, gaining control over their equipment, personnel, and funding, and curbing their influence in Darfur.
- The RSF, on the other hand, seeks to remain an independent force under the authority of the head of state only.

As long as both sides cling to their positions, the possibility of negotiations or a ceasefire remains very slim.

The conflict dynamics are extremely complex, and it is unclear whether Sudan's conflict should be addressed as a Middle Eastern, Arab, or African issue or a matter of concern for the international community at large due to the grave human rights violations taking place. The situation remains opaque due to the failure of all media to effectively cover the events, as conflict parties restrict journalistic access.

Several organizations and countries including the United Nations, African Union, Arab League, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United States have called for an end to the fighting and a return to negotiations. Despite numerous peace initiatives and offers of humanitarian aid, all have failed, and the conflict continues to this day.

Future Scenarios for the Conflict

If the second path continued conflict prevails, three future scenarios may unfold:

1- First Scenario (Most Likely)

Victory of the Sudanese Armed Forces over the RSF, due to their numerical superiority, air power, and support from various local, regional, and international actors who view them as the national army.

- In this case, the army might either:

- Lead the transitional phase, ultimately



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transferring power to civilians through free elections, or

- Retain power, prolonging military rule in Sudan.

2- Second Scenario (Worst Case)

The conflict escalates into a full-scale civil war, with each side maintaining control over its current territories.

- This could result in the partition of Sudan into two separate states, similar to the secession of South Sudan in the past.

3- Third Scenario (Least Likely)

Victory of the RSF over the Sudanese army, with backing from regional and international actors.

- **This is highly unlikely because:**

- The Sudanese Armed Forces outnumber the RSF by more than two to one.
- The army has air superiority, enabling it to strike RSF-held areas something the RSF lacks.
- The army is recognized as the national military, which gives it legitimacy and international support.

To avoid the second (worst-case) scenario, all actors local, regional, and international must intensify their efforts to end the conflict and prevent the disintegration of the Sudanese state.

2- Study Proposals

It is clear from the above discussion that the current conflict in Sudan is a power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces, led by al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Hemedti. Over time, this conflict could shift from a political power struggle to an ethnic, tribal conflict between the tribes loyal to the army and those loyal to the RSF. This development poses a grave threat not only to Sudan's internal security but also to the security of neighboring countries, which are currently witnessing an influx of Sudanese refugees fleeing violence and bloodshed.

Therefore, resolving this conflict requires the intervention of all local, Arab, regional, and international powers to pressure both parties to cease hostilities, negotiate, facilitate humanitarian aid, and preserve the security of Sudan and its neighbors.

• **At the domestic level**, all Sudanese parties and civilian forces must make concerted efforts to resolve the conflict and present initiatives that offer compromise solutions acceptable to both sides. Civilian forces should also establish an institutional body that represents the various ethnicities and tribes in Sudan. This body would serve as a political counterweight to both al-Burhan and Hemedti on the international stage and speak in the name of the Sudanese people globally. A precedent for such a move occurred in October 2023, when a coalition under the name "Progress" met with Hemedti in Ethiopia and signed the Addis Ababa Declaration to end hostilities. The formation of this coalition was a promising step toward managing the conflict.

It is worth noting that civilian forces and parties have already attempted to present initiatives to resolve the conflict. A notable example is the document submitted by the civilian forces in early 2024, which proposed a political solution. The document called for an end to hostilities, the entry of humanitarian aid, and a two-month truce, followed by the formation of a transitional civilian government and a unified Sudanese army within a ten-year framework. This proposal became known as the Abdalla Hamdok Initiative, after the former Sudanese Prime Minister. It built upon earlier peace efforts, such as the Jeddah Declaration signed in May 2023, the IGAD and African Union roadmap, and the Manama Declaration signed in January 2024. Despite all these efforts, the initiative ultimately failed, even though the UN Security Council, in March 2024, adopted a draft resolution calling for a ceasefire during Ramadan, supported by 14 countries⁽³⁷⁾.

- **At the Arab and regional levels,** countries should present and promote initiatives to the conflicting parties, as the United States and Saudi Arabia did through the Jeddah Agreement, signed in May 2023 by the Sudanese army and the RSF. The agreement encouraged both parties to allow humanitarian aid and to halt the fighting. The two sponsoring states also urged both sides to extend the truce before its expiration⁽³⁸⁾.

Additionally, the Egyptian government must step up efforts to resolve the conflict as swiftly as possible, because the ongoing turmoil in Sudan poses serious threats to Egypt's national security for two main reasons:

- 1- Sudan is a neighboring country to Egypt, and the ongoing violence has caused a refugee influx into Egyptian territory. Egypt could become a transit point for irregular migration from these refugees to Europe.

- 2- More importantly, Egypt needs Sudan's support in resolving the Nile water dispute with Ethiopia, since both countries are downstream states and the most adversely affected by the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project. Cooperation between Sudan and Egypt is essential to securing their water shares from the Nile a matter of existential importance to both nations. If the Sudanese conflict continues, Sudan will be too preoccupied with its internal crisis to engage in the Nile issue, leaving Egypt to confront Ethiopia alone. Therefore, Egypt must intervene diplomatically, urging all parties to ceasefire, allow humanitarian aid, and enter negotiations to resolve the conflict and preserve Sudan's stability, unity, and military cohesion.

Egypt is already making significant efforts to deal with the crisis. The Egyptian government has stated that it remains equidistant from both conflicting parties. Egypt hosted a summit for Sudan's neighboring countries in July 2023 to discuss solutions to the crisis. It also organized a conference for Sudan's political and civil factions to reach a consensus that would end the conflict and prevent Sudan's fragmentation.

- **At the international level,** global powers, including the UN Security Council, must work seriously toward resolving the conflict by issuing a binding resolution that obliges both parties to negotiate. If they fail to comply, the Council should impose severe sanctions on both, such as economic penalties and the cutting off of financial and logistical support by countries that back either side.

It is notable that the European Union, in January 2024, imposed sanctions on companies manufacturing arms and military equipment for both the Sudanese Armed Forces and the RSF. Similarly, the United States imposed its first sanctions in June 2023. The United Kingdom followed suit in July 2023, sanctioning six companies associated with the Sudanese army and the RSF. The UK also imposed sanctions on companies affiliated with Wagner Group in Africa, due to their support for parties in the Sudanese conflict⁽³⁹⁾.

Despite all these efforts, further action is needed to end the conflict as soon as possible, because prolonging the war could lead to a full-blown civil war and the fragmentation of the Sudanese state.



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Conclusion:

In conclusion, Sudan is currently one of the most fragile countries in the world, ranking second on the Fragile States Index (FSI) due to the ongoing conflict, which is essentially a power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces. This conflict deepens the state's fragility and elevates its fragility indicators. When conflict broke out in 2003, Sudan's fragility indicators rose significantly, and the country topped the FSI rankings in 2006 and 2007. The 2023 conflict has once again worsened Sudan's fragility, pushing it to second place on the 2024 FSI.

If the conflict persists, it could evolve into a civil war that may ultimately result in the breakup and disintegration of Sudan. Therefore, all local, regional, and international actors must intensify their efforts to compel both sides to stop the fighting and reach an agreement to prevent further escalation.

If a peaceful settlement is not reached, three scenarios could unfold:

- 1- Victory of the Sudanese army over the RSF: In this scenario, the army might lead the transitional phase in Sudan, ultimately handing power over to civilians through free elections.*
- 2- Continuation of the conflict into a civil war: This is the worst-case scenario, where each party maintains control over its respective territories, leading to Sudan's eventual division into two countries similar to the 2011 secession of South Sudan.*
- 3- Victory of the RSF over the Sudanese army, supported by regional and international actors: However, this scenario is highly unlikely, as the Sudanese army has more than twice the number of troops as the RSF and possesses an air force capable of striking RSF-held areas something the RSF lacks. Additionally, the Sudanese army, being the national military, enjoys the support of international and regional actors committed to ending the conflict.*

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The Impact of Conflict on State Fragility in Sudan During the Period (2019 – 2024)

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The Impact of Conflict on State Fragility in Sudan During the Period (2019 – 2024)

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Abstract:

This study seeks to analyze the fragile state concept, and focuses on the determinants of the fragile state, and it tries to answer the following question: What is the impact of struggle for power on the fragility of the state in Sudan? Through using the functional structural approach, and using the fragile states index, to analyze the reasons of the state's fragility. The study will be classified into three sections, the first section will study the conceptual framework of the fragile state, and the main determinants of the fragility, the second section will focus on the conflict in Sudan, its history and parties, and its impact on the indicators of fragility in Sudan, the indicators can be classified into four categories of indicators. Firstly, the indicators of cohesion which include indicators like factionalized elite; secondly, the political indicators which include state legitimacy, the inability of the state to pursue its functions and human rights; thirdly, the economic indicators which include the economic downturn and economic inequality, and brain drain; fourthly, the social indicators which include the demographic pressures, refugees, and external intervention. The third section of the study will focus on the results and recommendations of the study, and the future scenarios of the conflict. The study concludes that the conflict in Sudan is a struggle for power, and it has led to increasing the rates of fragility in Sudan. Hence, many efforts should be made by national, regional, and international parties, to avoid the escalation of the conflict to civil war and to avoid the division of Sudan.

Keywords: Fragile State, Conflict, Sudan.

تأثير الصراع على هشاشة الدولة في السودان في الفترة (٢٠١٩ – ٢٠٢٤م)

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المستخلص:

تسعى الدراسة إلى تحليل مفهوم الدولة الهشة، وتوضيح محددات هشاشة الدولة، وتحاول الدراسة الإجابة عن التساؤل التالي: ما تأثير الصراع على هشاشة الدولة في السودان؟ من خلال استخدام المنهج البنائى الوظيفى ومؤشر الدولة الهشة (FSI)، لتحليل أسباب هشاشة الدولة في السودان، وتم تقسيم الدراسة إلى ثلاثة أقسام، القسم الأول يتناول الإطار المفاهيمى للدولة الهشة ومحددات الهشاشة، والقسم الثانى يتناول الصراع الداخلى فى السودان وتاريخه وتأثيره على مؤشرات هشاشة الدولة، وهى تنقسم لأربع فئات، الفئة الأولى هى مؤشرات عدم التماسك والمقصود بها الصراعات والانشقاقات داخل النخبة، والفئة الثانية هى المؤشرات السياسية وهى تشمل تآكل شرعية الدولة، وعدم قدرة الدولة على توفير خدمات صحية أو تعليمية أو بنية تحتية، وحقوق الإنسان. والفئة الثالثة هى المؤشرات الاقتصادية وتضم مؤشرات مثل التراجع الاقتصادى والفقر وعدم قدرة الدولة على توفير المتطلبات الأساسية لمواطنيها، والتنمية غير المتكافئة، وهجرة العقول. والفئة الرابعة هى المؤشرات الاجتماعية وتشمل الضغوط الديموجرافية مثل الكوارث الطبيعية والأمراض ونُدرة الغذاء، وأعداد اللاجئين والتناحيز الكبيرة والتدخلات الخارجية، والقسم الثالث يوضح نتائج الدراسة ومقترحاتها ومستقبل الصراع فى السودان. وخلصت الدراسة إلى نتيجة مهمة وهى أن الصراع فى السودان (وهو صراع على السلطة بين قوات الجيش السودانى وقوات الدعم السريع) نتجت عنه زيادة معدل هشاشة الدولة، وتقترح الدراسة بذل مزيد من الجهود المحلية والإقليمية والدولية لمنع تحول الصراع إلى حرب أهلية ولتجنب تفكك دولة السودان.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدولة الهشة، الصراع، السودان.