

SUDAN: SCENARIOS

A region-by-region analysis of possible developments affecting humanitarian needs and operations in Sudan until December 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2023, six months after the outbreak of the most recent conflict in Sudan, ACAPS published four scenarios envisioning how the crisis might evolve by 2024. One year on, the most positive, a ceasefire, remains a remote probability. Developments have been closer to the worst-case scenario of a collapse, with significant levels of conflict and displacement and sharply rising food insecurity amounting to the declaration of famine in and around Zamzam camp in North Darfur (IPC 01/08/2024).

In September 2024, ACAPS reconvened context and humanitarian experts in a new series of workshops to envisage how the crisis may evolve in 2025. These workshops have produced four scenarios for the end of 2025 and their regional specifications, although the actual future would likely contain elements of these four and other scenarios.

Scenario 1: Fragmentation

Both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) become less united, and armed groups proliferate. The result is widespread localised conflict punctuated by geographically confined truces. Regions become more isolated, creating a complex operating environment for humanitarians. While under strong pressure from armed groups, civil society plays a crucial role in meeting rising needs as international humanitarian presence decreases.

Scenario 2: Control

Intense conflict persists around Khartoum, Port Sudan, and South Kordofan as the RSF force the SAF out of much of central, eastern, and southern Sudan. High displacement rates ensue within Al Jazirah, Gedaref, Kassala, and Kordofan states, as well as from Khartoum and the east towards the north and abroad. The collapse of state institutions forces subnational structures and civil society to attempt to fill service provision gaps while subject to tight control by local authorities.

Scenario 3: Partition

The country is divided into two, with the RSF controlling much of the southern and western regions except areas under the control of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) and Sudan Liberation Movement/Abdul Wahid Al Nur (SLM-AW). The SAF

control the central, eastern, and northern regions. Intense fighting continues in Al Fasher, Al Jazirah, Al Obeid, and Khartoum. Elsewhere, improved security allows some space for civil society and local economic activity to increase, including agriculture. The control of the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) and Sudanese Agency for Relief and Humanitarian Operations (SARHO) over aid increases, further complicating access and increasing costs and diversion.

Scenario 4: International spillover

At least one neighbouring country is drawn into the conflict, which escalates and spills over the borders. Economic collapse in South Sudan pushes South Sudanese mercenaries towards South Kordofan while drawing others into escalating conflict in South Sudan. Chadian forces enter North Darfur in response to growing atrocities, while unrest erupts around refugee camps in eastern Chad. Intense fighting in Gedaref, Kassala, and nearby border areas involve elements from Eritrea and Ethiopia, and Tigrayan refugees are forced back into Amhara, sparking unrest. Khartoum remains heavily disputed between the SAF and RSF. Islamic State-affiliated armed groups from the Sahel enter Sudan. There is increased cross-border and internal displacement, particularly from eastern Sudan. Sudanese regions are isolated, and commercial and humanitarian movement is very limited across borders and within the country.

All scenarios foresee continued – or increasing – insecurity and inflation and a rise in humanitarian needs. The most alarming is famine-like conditions, expected in all scenarios; only the scale will vary according to the extent of displacement and ability of commercial and humanitarian organisations to transport food. Morbidity and mortality rates are also expected to rise as a result of direct violence, the spread of infectious diseases, poor healthcare provision, water contamination, and inadequate sanitation. While access to humanitarian assistance will mitigate some of the impacts on the population, humanitarian funding is not expected to increase – except possibly in Scenario 4. Independent of the scenarios are factors – such as the weather – that could compound or mitigate the extent of humanitarian needs.

Faced with escalating needs and continued access challenges in all scenarios, workshop participants concluded that the urgency with which the response needs to adapt and scale up requires new approaches to maximise the resources available for civil society and the international humanitarian community. This will require acknowledgement that 'business as usual' is not an option in the current context and that new approaches should be conceived and adopted without delay.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview of scenarios	6
1. Fragmentation	6
2. Control	7
3. Partition	8
4. International spillover	9
Compounding factors	10
Climate change and severe weather events	10
Bad harvest	10
Intervention from Islamist armed groups	10
Escalation between Egypt and Ethiopia	10
Annex: Regional impacts of the scenarios	11
Khartoum	11
Kordofan	12
Darfur	13
Central, eastern, and southeastern Sudan	14

INTRODUCTION

The report details four different scenarios that consider how the situation of people in and along the borders of Sudan might change by the end of 2025. While these are presented as four distinct futures, it is more probable that the actual situation in December 2025 will be a mix of all four – i.e. while one area of the country could see more similarities with scenario A, another could be closer to scenario B. It is relatively unlikely that a scenario takes place to its full extent countrywide, and the scenarios were conceptualised with a strong focus on the regions. Details of the anticipated context, humanitarian impacts, and consequences for humanitarian operations per scenario are given by region in Annex A.

For the purpose of this report, four regions in Sudan are considered: Darfur; Khartoum; Kordofan; and central, eastern, and southeastern Sudan.

Problem statement

Since the outbreak of the fighting in Sudan in April 2023, the centre, south, and west of the country have seen widespread conflict, violence against civilians, and mass displacement. International efforts to secure a ceasefire have failed, and both the SAF and the RSF have focused on recruiting more Sudanese and international fighters from across the Sahel and the Horn of Africa to their side, determined to secure total victory. Besides the ideological aim of victory and the arming of an increasing proportion of the population, the lucrative nature of the war economy – on both sides – is a major obstacle to peace. 2024 has seen a surge in hostilities as foreign players bolster both the SAF and RSF, which have received monetary and military support, including advanced weapons (Chatham House 18/09/2024; The Conversation 12/09/2024).

The situation varies significantly by region and within regions. Intense conflict in Al Jazirah, Darfur, Khartoum, North Kordofan, and Sennar has driven significant displacement and destroyed infrastructure and livelihoods (ACLEED 16/09/2024; OCHA 01/09/2024). In areas not directly experiencing conflict, such as Kassala, Northern, Red Sea, and River Nile states, the main impact has been the collapse of the economy and state services. Some locations, such as Al Fasher and Al Obeid, are besieged, while SPLM-N remains in control of areas in South Kordofan and SLM-AW controls Jebel Marra region in Darfur (ICG 24/06/2024; ACLED 16/09/2024; EEAS 22/09/2024).

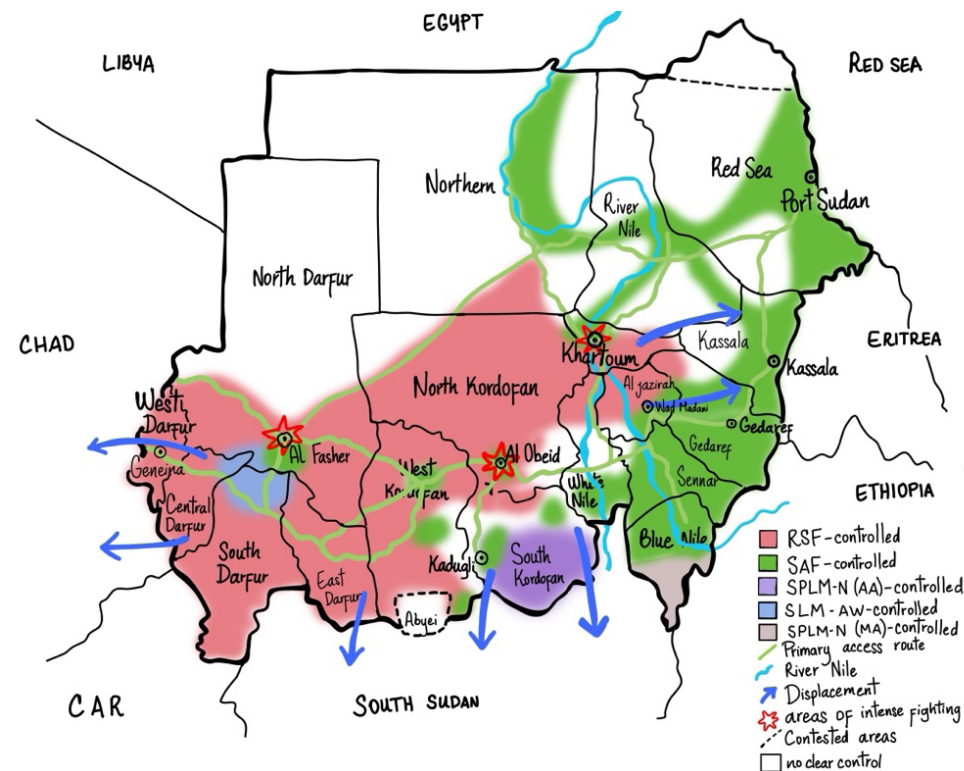
Life for the Sudanese depends on the extent to which violence has directly affected them. That said, the collapse of the state economy and inflation of 145.5% over the past 18 months affect the whole country (IMF accessed 19/09/2024). Service provision, poor even before the conflict, has collapsed in many areas, leaving much of the population without access to

healthcare, safe water and sanitation, education, and other government services (UNDP 20/04/2024). Unemployment has escalated from 28.3% in 2021 to 49.5% in 2024 (IMF accessed 23/09/2024). Agricultural production has fallen, with people losing access to their lands; in 2023, national cereal production was 40% lower than the five-year average (FAO 19/03/2024). By September 2024, 13 million people were displaced (10.7 million internally, 2.3 million cross-border) – ten million since 15 April 2023 – and food insecurity was widespread. Famine had been declared in Zamzam IDP camp, while 14 areas, including parts of Khartoum, were identified to be at risk (IPC 27/06/2024 and 01/08/2024). Food insecurity projections between June–September 2024 also indicated that 8,555,000 people (15% of the population) would face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity while 755,000 would face Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) levels (IPC 27/06/2024). This is partly attributed to disrupted food production and markets, difficult humanitarian access, and the expansion of conflict into the agricultural regions of Al Jazirah and Sennar resulting in the decline of the country’s food generation capacity (FAO 19/03/2024). Outbreaks of infectious diseases, including cholera, have also been recorded in different regions (MSF 11/09/2024). The crisis, initially marked by displacement and overwhelmed protection systems, has rapidly escalated. It now encompasses widespread human rights violations, worsening hunger, and increasing disease outbreaks

Civil society is active throughout the country, providing food and basic goods and services via mutual aid groups (MAGs), such as emergency response rooms (HPN 11/10/2023). National NGOs also provide humanitarian assistance, often as service providers of international organisations (Shabaka 14/11/2023). That said, all national responders struggle with a lack of funding, while the UN and INGOs face significant bureaucratic and access challenges (OCHA accessed 13/09/2024).

Overall, Sudan experiences pressing humanitarian needs, while humanitarian access continues to be a challenge (OCHA 01/09/2024). The parties to the conflict deliberately impose bureaucratic hurdles through administrative directives that delay or obstruct aid access in their areas of control. Alternative aid coordination platforms to HAC have been established, such as SARHO in RSF-controlled areas, while attempts by the different parties to influence humanitarian operations have increased (OCHA 24/06/2024). Port Sudan remains the main humanitarian hub in the country given its status as the de facto headquarters of the SAF and remaining government offices (ABC 03/07/2024). Within Khartoum, humanitarian access is difficult and relies on crossline aid deliveries because of SAF restrictions on aid deliveries into RSF-controlled areas (FEWS NET 12/04/2024; MSF 14/11/2023). In Darfur, the SAF closed the Adre border crossing point from Chad in February 2024, restricting cross-border aid delivery, although temporarily reopened it in August for three months following negotiations for increased access (OCHA 31/08/2024).

Map 1. Areas of control in Sudan by 1 June 2024 and new developments, including displacement patterns and fighting hotspots, as envisioned by ACAPS



Source: ACAPS using data from Sudan War Monitor (01/06/2024)

While the scenarios outlined in this report necessarily describe changes in the conflict, the purpose is not to predict specific developments in the conflict dynamics in detail but to highlight the resulting humanitarian situation. In all scenarios, food insecurity, the protection of civilians and human rights, access to safe water, and diseases are the primary concerns. All scenarios also foresee significant challenges in delivering humanitarian assistance. The conclusion is that urgent action is required on various fronts to prevent the current crisis from becoming the worst humanitarian disaster in decades.

Methodology

The scenarios were developed between August–September 2024 with input from 35 national (2) and international humanitarian (15) and donor organisations (5), UN agencies (7), civil society representatives (4), and academic and independent experts (2), who contributed through online and in-person workshops, bilateral meetings, and reviews. The collaborative process involved:

- a virtual workshop with context experts, during which the major drivers of change were used to determine plausible scenarios for the evolution of the conflict and resulting humanitarian situation during 2025
- two in-person workshops in Nairobi, Kenya to identify the impacts the envisioned scenarios would have on people and humanitarian operations in each of the regions of Sudan and to identify potential actions open to the humanitarian community to prepare to meet anticipated needs and overcome expected challenges.

ACAPS uses the chain of plausibility approach to scenario-building, as outlined in our [guidance note](#). Key terms used throughout the scenario-building process and the report are as follows.

- A **scenario** is an imagined picture of a possible future state based on a number of assumptions as to how certain key variables will change. Scenarios describe both a future state and its impact and consequences on people and society.
- **Triggers** are events that, should they occur, contribute to a scenario materialising.
- **Drivers/variables** are factors considered to have a determining influence over the direction the future will take depending on how they change.

The scenarios above are not rated, because the impacts vary so significantly by region that an overall score would have little meaning while the probabilities of the scenarios also varies by region.

Limitations

Scenarios can seem to oversimplify an issue, as the analysis balances details against broader assumptions. Scenarios are not consensual or scientific conclusions but are the result of joint structured analysis by a group of experts. Scenario-building is not an end in itself; it is a process for generating new ideas that should, in turn, lead to changes in project design or decision-making. These scenarios focus primarily on how changes in the situation will affect the ability of those in Sudan to meet their basic needs and affect humanitarian operations in and around the country.

Acknowledgements

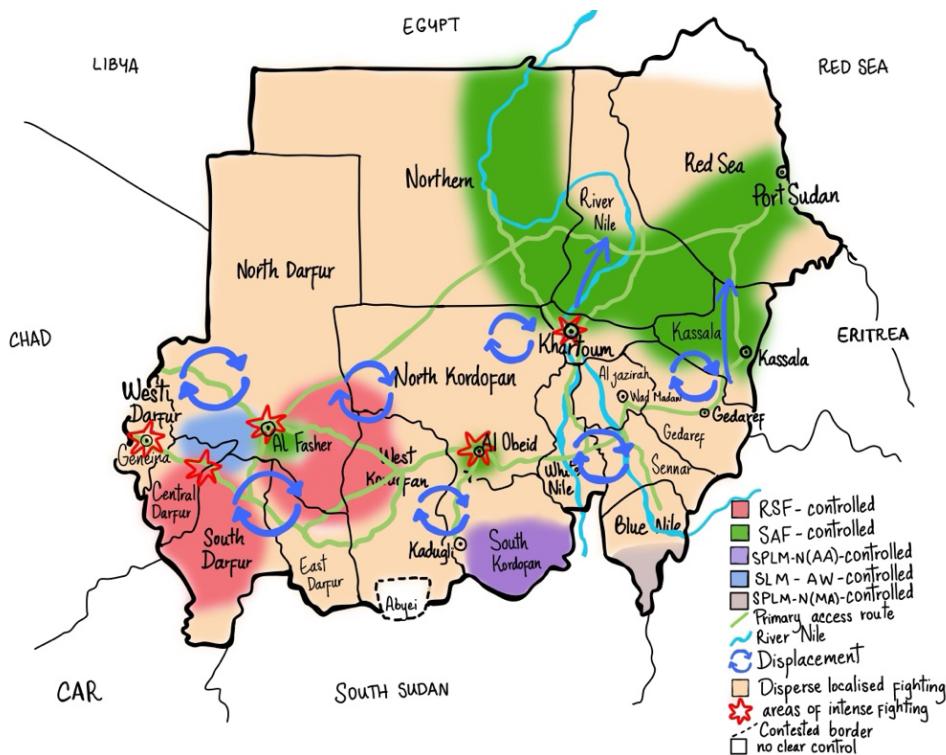
ACAPS would like to thank all the participants and organisations that provided input to these scenarios, in particular the Conflict Sensitivity Facility, the INGO Forum, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, which were part of the core group that helped develop and organise the exercise.

OVERVIEW OF SCENARIOS

The brief scenario summaries below consider the context for the whole of Sudan. More specific regional developments and their impacts, including on humanitarian operations, can be found in Annex A.

1. Fragmentation

Map 2. Possible displacement patterns, areas of control by party, and fighting hotspots by December 2025 under Scenario 1 (Fragmentation)



Source: ACAPS

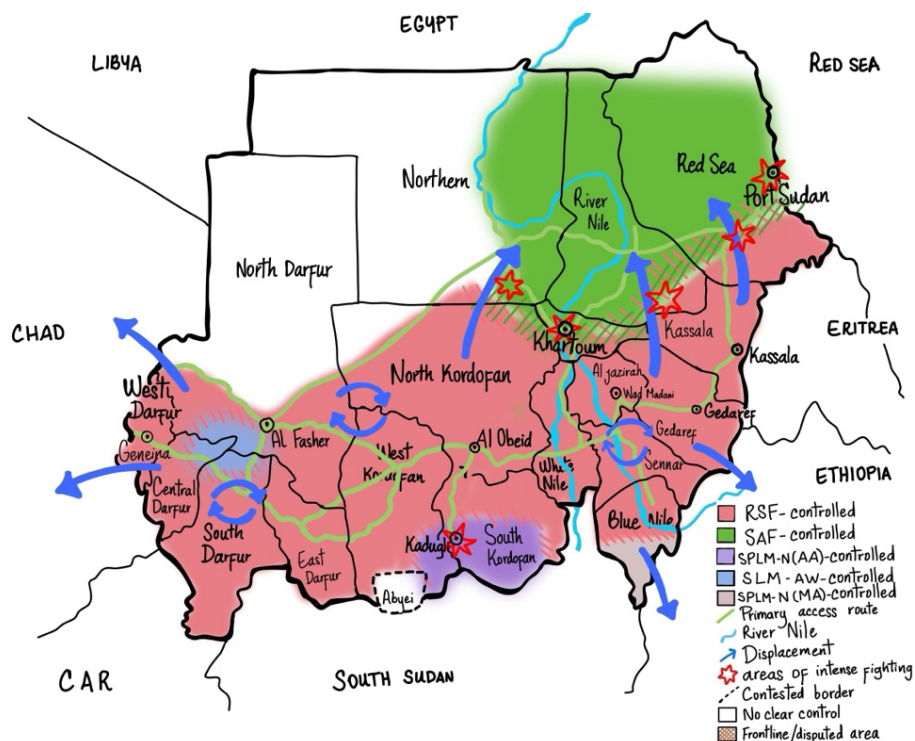
The situation across all regions features localised dynamics, including for conflict, governance, economy, and civil society. All regions become more isolated. Splits within the RSF and SAF result in territorial control that is heavily fragmented, with new non-state armed groups emerging throughout. Violence increases in many areas, especially along the borders of newly formed areas of control, although the situation is diverse, and there are pockets of relative peacefulness. Ethnic and tribal structures and agendas often drive governance dynamics, which become hyperlocalised. Some civilian authorities lose influence and relevance as local armed groups expand control over all areas of public life. Numerous checkpoints and infrastructure degradation severely restrict the movement of goods and people, and local armed parties dictate trade dynamics in an inconsistent and diverse security landscape. Displacement occurs across most of the country, although most are local and temporary as people seek to avoid conflict yet remain as close to livelihoods and property as possible.

Humanitarian engagement is more constrained, and the humanitarian community is forced to navigate the context through localised negotiations with a fragmented landscape of armed groups. Although in-kind assistance still arrives in Port Sudan, and to a far lesser extent across the Chadian border, distribution throughout the country is severely limited, and very little assistance reaches Khartoum and the states further south. Cross-border assistance from Chad is manipulated by several intermediaries to increase their influence and power. Most international humanitarian organisations reduce their physical footprint in the country, which is largely confined to Port Sudan, and increase remote management, resulting in reduced direct oversight and monitoring. On the other hand, local civil society groups and national NGOs remain the backbone of service provision and assistance despite increasing isolation and pressure from armed groups.

SCENARIOS

2. Control

Map 3. Possible displacement patterns, areas of control by party, and fighting hotspots by December 2025 under Scenario 2 (Control)



Source: ACAPS

The RSF move successfully across central and eastern Sudan, passing through Blue Nile, Gedaref, Kassala, Sennar, and White Nile states to reach Port Sudan. Heavy fighting in Port Sudan causes a near halting of city and port activities. The SAF retreat to Northern, Red Sea, and River Nile states, and their leadership moves outside the country while continuing to exert control remotely. Intense fighting continues between the SAF and RSF in Khartoum and between the RSF and SPLM-N in South Kordofan. SPLM-N and SLM –AW territories face increasing pressure, with clashes at the front lines in Darfur and South Kordofan as both groups attempt to hold ground against the RSF. Existing state institutions collapse, and the RSF attempts to set up new governance structures – with limited success as they lack the financial and human resources and sufficient leadership. Large numbers of IDPs flee violence

throughout the country, particularly from previously more peaceful areas such as Blue Nile and White Nile states, where RSF-aligned armed groups have destroyed many settlements. Although reports of atrocities garner growing international attention on the Sudan crisis, little international action ensues as conflicts elsewhere in the world are prioritised.

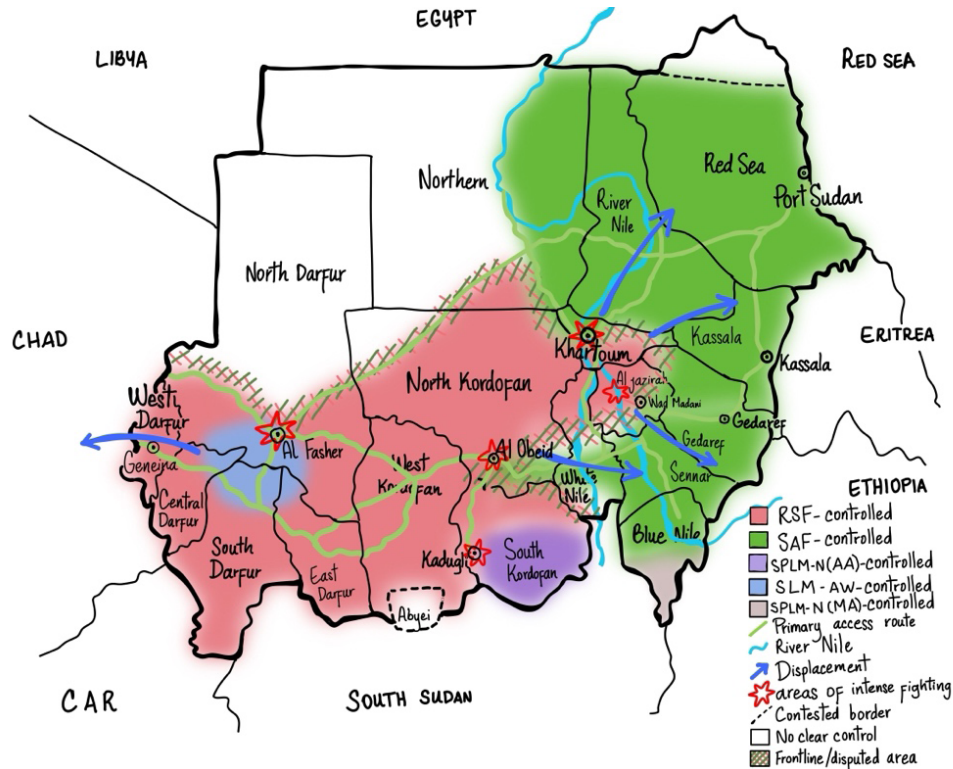
Violence in Port Sudan leads to a refocus on other entry points for commerce, such as through Chad and South Sudan. While the RSF exert significant control over trade and supply chains, major disruptions to markets occur given a proliferation of ‘taxation’ checkpoints, a rise in inflation, and the destruction or transfer of control of key infrastructure to the RSF and criminal gangs. Many regions experience shortages of basic goods and services, while armed groups, who impose taxes and tariffs to fund their operations, largely control the markets in regions.

Significant displacement, both internal and to Chad and Ethiopia, occurs as people flee armed groups and ethnically driven violence.

International organisations and the UN leave Port Sudan, and the humanitarian system struggles to adapt to a new reality with a seriously reduced presence in the country. As the RSF imposes SARHO structures throughout their areas of control, remaining national and international humanitarian organisations face burdensome bureaucracy, risks, and aid interference and diversion. Access throughout the country is highly dependent on local relationships, with aid organisations struggling to navigate an often hostile environment. The civic space shrinks, and civil society faces widespread insecurity and repression by the RSF and other armed parties in control.

3. Partition

Map 4. Possible displacement patterns, areas of control by party, and fighting hotspots by December 2025 under Scenario 3 (Partition)



Source: ACAPS

The country is effectively divided into two, with Al Fasher, Al Jazirah, Al Obeid, and Khartoum contested. In some locations, such as Khartoum, the conflict reaches a stalemate, and fighting becomes more localised. The SAF grow stronger militarily, keeping their ground in eastern Sudan and achieving some territorial advances to move the front line to Al Jazirah. The SAF also ensure a supply line from White Nile to Al Obeid, while heavy fighting continues around the latter. At the same time, although the RSF consolidate their power over the rest of Darfur, Al Fasher remains disputed. SPLM-N (AA) – i.e. SPLM-N/Abdelaziz Adam Al Hilu – consolidates its areas of control in South Kordofan; SPLM-N (MA) – SPLM-N/Malik Agar

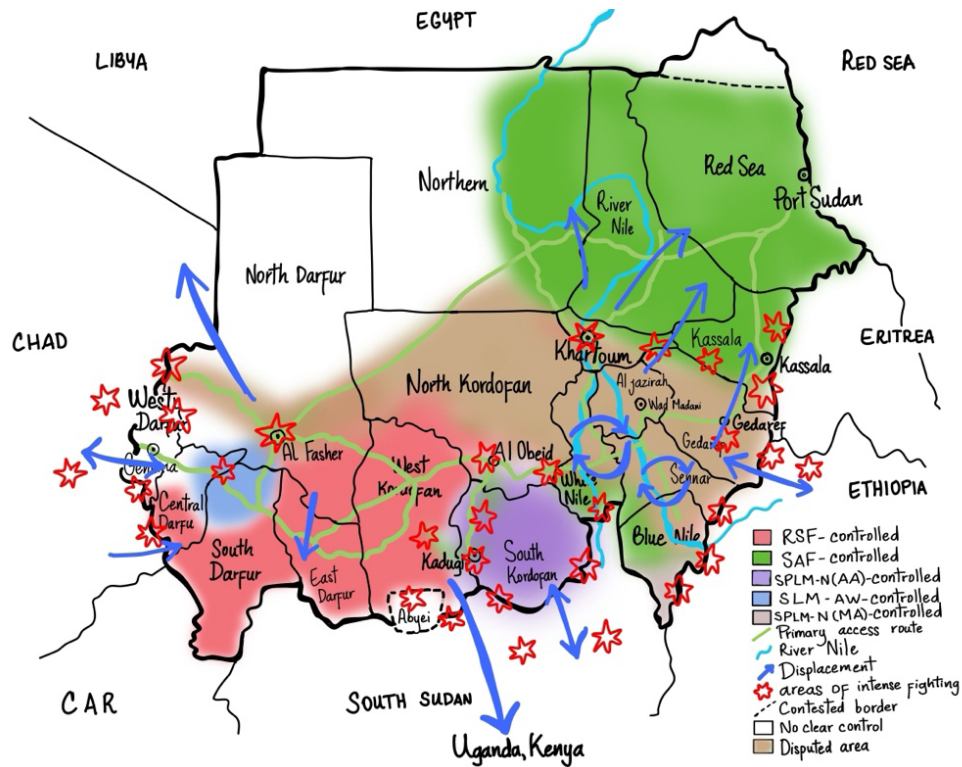
– remains in control of parts of Blue Nile; and SLM-AW remains in control of Jebel Marra. Territorial divisions and front lines become clearer, and governance structures strengthen slightly throughout the country.

Movements within areas of control are eased slightly, including for supply lines, trade, and humanitarian assistance, and some local economies improve. On the other hand, movement and trade across front lines are more complicated, and disputed areas see significant infrastructure damage. The provision of essential services varies, improving slightly in the east but degrading further elsewhere. Displacement continues out of disputed areas of North Darfur into Chad, while in other areas, particularly across eastern regions, the halt in fighting prompts returns.

There is limited space for civil society to operate independently as the SAF and various RSF-allied parties tightly control all humanitarian assistance within their operational areas. Some local leaders succeed in negotiating geographically confined truce agreements. While international humanitarian organisations are able to remain in the country, even scaling up their presence in more stable areas, both international and national organisations face higher operational costs and difficulties with the imposition of additional bureaucratic conditions, restrictive control, and widespread aid diversion. This indirectly contributes to how states are rebuilt and subsequently function. HAC restrictions on aid movements grow, reducing the ability of international organisations, especially the UN, to engage with SARHO and access RSF-controlled areas. Increased HAC control and continued conflict along the front lines make crossline assistance more complicated.

4. International spillover

Map 5. Possible displacement patterns, areas of control by party, and fighting hotspots by December 2025 under Scenario 4 (Regional spillover)



Source: ACAPS

As the conflict within Sudan intensifies, the RSF, having secured control of Darfur, concentrate their efforts on taking Khartoum and the eastern province of Kassala. Armed forces and mercenaries from Chad, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and South Sudan are drawn into the conflict as neighbouring countries become increasingly unstable, prompting soldiers and armed groups to offer their trade and services in Sudan. As the RSF take control of Al Fasher and Zamzam camps, elements from the Chadian military enter to protect ethnic Zaghawa. Violence increases in the border areas of Chad and Ethiopia as both civilians seeking safety and armed groups cross borders, while the economic and political situations of all

four neighbouring countries weaken. Egypt continues to support the SAF in an attempt to maintain influence over the sharing of water resources.

As the region becomes more unstable, insecurity spreads along Sudan's borders, and the number of armed groups present severely reduces freedom of movement. Both commercial trade and humanitarian aid decrease, constrained by increasingly precarious transport routes into Sudan. Humanitarian access negotiations are slow and complex.

The chaos and breakdown in law and order create conditions that encourage the entry of Islamic armed groups and state and non-state armed groups from neighbouring countries. The war economy and supply routes dictate conflict and market dynamics, while financial systems break down and hyperinflation spreads. As all regions become more unstable and isolated, and borders with Chad, Ethiopia, and South Sudan see a proliferation of violence, the movement of civilians and goods is increasingly restricted both within Sudan and across all borders. Very few areas are sufficiently stable to see significant market activity. Both commercial trade and humanitarian aid decrease, constrained by increasingly precarious transport routes, with much infrastructure destroyed. As a result, aid to Darfur, Kordofan, and the Two Areas decreases significantly. Supply routes from Port Sudan consequently see more traffic, but informal taxation and aid diversion increase with the widespread conflict. This conflict and deteriorating conditions drive internal and cross-border displacement. Humanitarian access negotiations are slow and complex.

COMPOUNDING FACTORS

Whichever of the above scenarios (or parts of scenarios) unfold, there are other issues that could compound the humanitarian situation in Sudan. The most significant of these are the following.

Climate change and severe weather events

Sudan is among the ten countries most vulnerable to climate change worldwide (ND-GAIN accessed 22/10/2024). In recent decades, Sudan has experienced rising temperatures, intense and unpredictable seasonal rains, and more frequent droughts (USAID 31/08/2016). The country also faces several environmental challenges, including deforestation and land degradation, which compound the impact of climate hazards (UNEP 07/10/2020). Climate change has heightened competition for access to water sources, pastures, and traditional grazing lands, fueling intercommunal conflict, particularly in West Darfur (NUPI/SIPRI 05/2022). Around 40% of internal conflicts in the past 60 years have been linked to the exploitation of natural resources, including competition for limited resources, such as fertile land and water (UNEP 04/11/2022). Extreme rainfall events and flooding during the rainy season (June–September) have devastated large parts of the country in 2024 and are expected to become more frequent (OCHA 25/08/2024; Climate Centre 29/06/2024). Floods could aggravate the humanitarian crisis by further damaging infrastructure, damaging or destroying crops, and creating conditions for the spread of waterborne and vector-borne diseases. Floods would also further reduce the ability of humanitarian organisations to deliver aid, particularly in Scenarios 1 and 4, where regional governance is weaker. Climate-induced displacement would increase the number of IDPs and put additional strain on regional communities and economies, particularly in areas already affected by violence.

Bad harvest

Agricultural production in Sudan is a critical part of the economy, but the war has severely disrupted farming (WEF 19/03/2024). Both the SAF and RSF control important agricultural regions, and violence has displaced farmers and disrupted planting cycles (FPRI 03/07/2024). A particularly bad harvest – resulting from reduced planting, lack of pest control, drought, or flooding – would severely affect food security, especially in a situation where supply chains are already compromised. The agricultural outlook for the current millet and sorghum season, two staple crops in Sudan, is raising concerns about a poor harvest given active conflict in key production areas and widespread flooding since June (GEOGLAM Crop Monitor 05/09/2024).

In all scenarios, below-average crop yields are expected to drive higher-than-normal cereal shortages countrywide, further deteriorating food and nutrition security and increasing the risk of famine (IPC 27/06/2024). In Scenarios 2 and 4, where international humanitarian assistance is expected to decrease, a reduced harvest would have particularly severe consequences on food availability and prices. Food shortages could also heighten tensions between communities, increase smuggling, and drive up inflation, further destabilising the country and driving more localised conflict over scarce resources.

Intervention from Islamist armed groups

Sudan has a history of Islamist armed group presence, including Al Qaeda's involvement in Darfur (The Conversation 10/05/2024). The RSF's fragmented control over Darfur, as well as its porous borders, could make the state particularly appealing to external Islamist armed groups, such as the Islamic State, that seek to exploit the instability to spread their influence. These groups have high activity and strong networks in the Sahel region and East Africa. Their involvement would not only intensify the conflict but also regionalise it, attracting foreign powers either in direct military action or via proxies. It may also polarise regional armed groups, complicating peace efforts and further entrenching the country's divisions.

Escalation between Egypt and Ethiopia

Tensions between Egypt and Ethiopia have been increasing. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile River is a major flashpoint, with Egypt viewing it as a significant threat to its water security (Climate Diplomacy 02/02/2024). Ethiopia also recently reached a controversial agreement with Somaliland for access to the latter's ports in exchange for its future recognition as a sovereign state (ICG 06/03/2024). This prompted the signing of a security pact between Egypt and the Somali Government, which will see Egypt provide military equipment to the country – ultimately providing its forces to replace Ethiopian troops whose military assistance against Al Shabaab will end by 2024 (Reuters 28/08/2024; LOC 25/09/2024). In this context, in the case of continued escalation, Sudan could be drawn into a larger regional conflict as both Ethiopia and Egypt seek to gain a stronger foothold over regional security and military dynamics, as well as influencing alliances. As Egypt and Ethiopia compete, the increased militarisation of the region, including the Red Sea, could lead to a further disruption of cross-border assistance, maritime trade, and the flow of humanitarian aid through Port Sudan.

ANNEX: REGIONAL IMPACTS OF THE SCENARIOS

Khartoum

Scenario 1: Fragmentation

Khartoum continues to be a protracted battleground – seen as a priority for the RSF and the SAF while neighbourhood protection militias seek to maintain control of some areas. Elements of both the SAF and RSF continue to compete for key supply lines and installations, such as army bases and the airport. That said, disunity within chains of command, reduced military capability, and defections have diminished the SAF's aerial capability, resulting in fewer aerial bombardments of the capital. Hostilities concentrate in specific areas, restricting general freedom of movement across the city but permitting civilians to occupy other relatively peaceful areas. Cases of looting, extortion, and overall criminality increase. Commercial traffic continues, but prices rise as transportation costs across the front lines increase.

Impacts: there is an influx of people towards perceived safer places in Khartoum, leading to rising protection risks given widespread criminality and lawlessness. Humanitarian needs rise, particularly for shelter, water, and healthcare. Although there is increased pressure on resources and competition for services and basic goods, such as medicine, food, and water, some neighbourhoods are able to self-organise.

Humanitarian operations: civil society takes an even greater role in aid provision as it adapts to the situation. Rising insecurity and the presence of numerous checkpoints challenge humanitarian access to the city. Navigating increasingly complex neighbourhood dynamics and insecurity significantly increases the cost of moving humanitarian goods.

Scenario 2: Control

Fighting continues in Khartoum, which increasingly falls under the control of the RSF. While more isolated, Port Sudan remains under the defence of the SAF, which fight both for the capital and to maintain essential supply corridors through northern Sudan. The SAF also continue their aerial campaign. While claiming victory, the RSF strive to assert control, establish a functioning governance structure, and return civilian institutions to the capital.

Impacts: human rights abuses and atrocities, including conflict-related sexual violence, increase greatly. Health, food, WASH, and protection needs increase throughout Khartoum. Service provision deteriorates with high insecurity levels and the absence of fully functioning

institutional structures. There is an influx of IDPs from eastern Sudan towards northern areas of the city. Civilians caught in the front lines and areas where there is fighting leave Khartoum in large numbers, seeking refuge in less conflict-affected regions.

Humanitarian operations: aid provision remains limited because physical access is further complicated. Unclear chains of command and divisions among major factions, as well as stringent bureaucratic requirements by SARHO and the RSF, cause aid diversion and delays.

Scenario 3: Partition

Khartoum remains one of the key battlegrounds for both the SAF and RSF, with the city remaining divided. The SAF control most of Um Durman and Karrari, and the RSF largely control the rest of the city, while some key locations frequently change hands. While fighting continues, it is confined to limited areas in the city, such as Khartoum North and Sharg Al Neel. Other areas see relative peace, which allows for a better functioning of trade and markets and encourages the return of some of those displaced elsewhere in Sudan. The war economy thrives as both the SAF and RSF establish numerous checkpoints at which 'taxes' are levied, driving inflation. Localised intercommunal disputes emerge among returnees, mainly related to land and housing disagreements. Although still unable to fully accommodate the continued high needs of a growing population, civil society is organised and active through MAGs despite a shrinking civil society space.

Impacts: protection concerns for civilians increase in areas of heavy fighting and besieged locations. New displacement and the return of displaced people towards relatively peaceful areas increase pressure on the provision of already inadequate services, such as healthcare and WASH. Food insecurity worsens, with famine-like conditions in Khartoum North (Bahri) and Tuti Island.

Humanitarian operations: communal groups, particularly MAGs, continue to be the backbone of service delivery. Humanitarian access and operations in the city remain generally very restricted, particularly crossline, and are dependent on access agreements with armed parties. Occasional locally mediated truce agreements allow for humanitarian assistance to reach previously inaccessible areas.

Scenario 4: International spillover

Khartoum remains a key battleground for the SAF and RSF, and fighting intensifies as the RSF bring in fighters from Darfur and the SAF receive more external support, enabling intensive air operations. Access to and from the city becomes more difficult and expensive, reducing commercial activity, making food and essential goods scarcer, and driving inflation. Lacking employment and income, increasing numbers of civilians join conflict parties or turn to crime.

Impacts: atrocities rise, including ethnically driven killings and conflict-related sexual violence against the civilian population perpetrated by both sides of the conflict. Protection risks increase, including a rise in civilian fatalities, while the widespread destruction of infrastructure worsens living conditions and service provision. Displacement out of Khartoum towards the north of the country increases, and smuggling networks thrive. Food security severely deteriorates. Access to healthcare and adequate WASH infrastructure is extremely restricted.

Humanitarian operations: as humanitarian organisations face mounting security-related access and aid distribution challenges, operations decrease throughout the city. Those remaining increasingly rely on civil society for humanitarian assistance.

Kordofan

Scenario 1: Fragmentation

Conflict persists in most areas as existing groups break up and new regional factions emerge. Generally, growing discontent within SPLM-N's tribal militias fuelled by differences between SPLM-N (MA) and SPLM-N (AA) leads to more fragmentation. The SAF and RSF continue to enlist communities, militias, and mercenaries, distribute weapons, and increasingly lose command and control, leading to more splintering and the creation of fiefdoms. At least one RSF-allied militia in West Kordofan splinters and carves out space to exert power and influence. Ethnic tensions and hostilities increase, leading to further societal fragmentation. Widespread localised conflict minimises opportunities for trade in the region. Civilian authorities and civil society organisations exist but are heavily influenced by tribal dynamics and political differences. Civilian authorities aligned with SPLM-N (AA) strengthen, and areas under their control see relatively higher stability.

Impacts: increased hostilities trigger displacement further into the Nuba Mountains, where service provision, including access to healthcare and sanitation services, is limited. Food security deteriorates, resulting in famine-like conditions in increasingly isolated areas as increasing hostilities and displacement disrupt agricultural activities. Limited road infrastructure and growing insecurity also severely challenge humanitarian and commercial access. Rising ethnic tensions and the splintering of armed groups increase protection risks for most of the population.

Humanitarian operations: humanitarian access continues from both the south and north but is increasingly complicated across fragmented areas of control, widespread checkpoints, and the remote mountainous Nuba region.

Scenario 2: Control

Kordofan region is highly unstable and characterised by shifting conflict dynamics. Having taken control of much of North Kordofan, RSF-allied militias move into South Kordofan. With the SAF having retreated from the region, some communities ally with SPLM-N (AA) while others attempt negotiations with the RSF.

The local economy, which is heavily dependent on agriculture and trade, collapses as farms are abandoned, markets are disrupted, and roads are blocked by checkpoints or destroyed by fighting. Commercial access through South Sudan is very limited but provides a lifeline for areas under SPLM-N (AA) control. Civil society's capacity is severely strained but able to provide some aid in increasingly difficult circumstances.

Impacts: increased conflict throughout Kordofan, particularly in South and West Kordofan, forces many to displace multiple times to safer areas within the state. Widespread food insecurity results in famine-like conditions in some areas of all three Kordofan states given the collapse of agricultural and pastoral economies and reduction in aid.

Humanitarian operations: aid provision is extremely limited throughout the whole region, and humanitarian organisations face severe access challenges, as armed groups often fight for, block, or control key access routes.

Scenario 3: Partition

As the SPLM-N (AA) consolidates control of its areas and attempts to expand further north into South Kordofan, heavy fighting erupts with the RSF. Fighting persists in some areas of West Kordofan, and alliances with tribal leaders enable the RSF to expand their control of the state. In North Kordofan, the SAF hold onto Al Obeid and the main road from White Nile, enabling the flow of goods from eastern Sudan into North Kordofan. In North, South, and West Kordofan, civil society finds its operating space shrinking and becoming much more complex as a result of insecurity and arrests, with both the SAF and RSF aiming to prevent it from becoming too strong. Relative calm prevails in the Nuba Mountains mainly because of reduced aerial bombardment. The war economy intensifies, especially around Al Obeid.

Impacts: high protection and food needs remain around Al Obeid, the Nuba Mountains, and rural areas of West Kordofan, where people displace locally because of fighting, although new commercial routes facilitate increasing access to essential goods.

Humanitarian operations: humanitarian access to the city of Al Obeid from the east improves, although insecurity, physical access challenges, and restrictive measures by both the SAF and the RSF limit aid provision throughout the whole Kordofan region.

Scenario 4: International spillover

South Sudan's economy deteriorates, driving rising unemployment. General discontent increases tensions throughout the country, and the South Sudanese Government's inability to pay soldiers causes many to look towards opportunities to join the SAF and RSF, further aggravating the conflict. Fighting erupts in the Nuba Mountains as the SPLM-N (AA) further engages with RSF-allied militias. Tribal loyalties are challenged, and violence spills over into South Sudan. UNISFA fails to keep the peace, and security in Abyei deteriorates. Commercial movements are extremely limited throughout Kordofan, while agricultural production decreases across the states.

Impacts: increased violence on both sides of the Sudan and South Sudanese borders triggers increased displacement in both directions, much of it localised and temporary as people avoid areas of active conflict, although some displace much further south and across borders to Uganda and Kenya. The disruption of agriculture and commercial routes drives severe food insecurity. Widespread violence and displacement also reduce the capacity of civil society. As MAGs struggle to meet increasing food, health, and WASH needs, food insecurity and the incidence of disease increase across all three states but especially in South Kordofan. More areas experience severe food insecurity, including famine-like conditions, while health needs increase throughout South Kordofan.

Humanitarian operations: insecurity along the Sudan–South Sudan border severely disrupts aid to South Kordofan, making access nearly impossible to Kordofan region. Humanitarian presence decreases in the region.

Darfur

Scenario 1: Fragmentation

Fighting intensifies across Darfur region – driven primarily by ethnic divisions – as splits in RSF leadership cause new factions to emerge and local armed groups form new alliances. Gold remains the most economically viable commodity, yet fragmentation within the RSF means that more armed parties intending to control the trade of gold emerge, increasing competition and conflict. Civil society space in the region shrinks. Transport and commercial routes are restricted and heavily disputed. The war economy thrives, and checkpoints are widespread.

Impacts: urban to rural displacement increases, while ethnically driven atrocities by various RSF-affiliated Arab militias occur across the region. Desires to control aid and resources contribute to regional conflict dynamics. The need for protection, food, safe water, and healthcare remains very high, particularly in IDP settlements.

Humanitarian operations: humanitarian organisations operate with less obstruction from the RSF, but persistent violence, degraded infrastructure, and the fragmented territorial control landscape severely restrict access. Aid provision is very limited throughout the region, and humanitarian organisations face heavy operational interference and aid diversion.

Scenario 2: Control

The RSF take control of Al Fasher and most of the wider Darfur region, consolidating their administrative presence and attempting to create structures to manage day-to-day affairs. The SAF and allied militias are forced to retreat out of the region. Despite increased control, the RSF still face occasional resistance from local armed groups, which carry out attacks and ambushes in some areas, although here are increasingly fewer and smaller pockets of resistance. The RSF consolidate their control over supply and trade routes, including an increasingly profitable gold market. Heavy taxes and restrictions along key trade routes cause the prices of basic goods to soar. The severe repression of the civilian population and targeting of individuals by the RSF severely restrict the ability of civil society to function.

Impacts: protection needs, from heightened risk of violence and forced displacement rise as the overall level of violence rises and most of the residents of camps hosting Fur and Zaghawa IDPs displace to Chad, while some are killed by the RSF and allied militia as they take control. Intercommunal tensions increase, leading to targeted attacks on civilians. As the prices of goods increase and humanitarian aid remains limited, access to food is increasingly restricted, driving famine.

Humanitarian operations: many humanitarian organisations struggle to operate in the region given SARHO restrictions and unclear RSF chains of command. Humanitarian access is conditioned, and humanitarian organisations face numerous restrictions, including heavy taxation, controlled access to key areas, and aid diversion.

Scenario 3: Partition

The RSF effectively control most regions, consolidating the group's structures of power and control over supply and market routes, including for gold trade. In areas under their control, the RSF increase taxation while allowing for some degree of heavily conditioned civil society space and humanitarian operations. Most of the region is relatively stable, but heavy fighting persists in Al Fasher, which remains besieged. The Jebel Marra area remains under the control of SLM-AW.

Impacts: displacement continues, mostly from Abou Shouk camp to nearby IDP camps, areas under SLM-AW control in Jebel Marra, and across the Chadian border. High violence levels, infrastructure destruction, and extremely limited commercial and humanitarian access result in heightened needs, including extreme food insecurity and famine in IDP

camps, such as the Zamzam camp. In the rest of Darfur region, the situation is more stable, although needs remain high.

Humanitarian operations: more RSF and SARHO control limit aid operations. SAF cross-border conditions continue to restrict UN access to the region. That said, cross-border INGO access continues based on regional negotiations.

Scenario 4: International spillover

Following the fall of Al Fasher to the RSF, reports of atrocities against the Zaghawa in and around the Zamzam camp prompt elements of the Chadian military to enter Darfur. Conflict escalates across the region, becoming increasingly based on tribal and ethnic divisions, and spreads into eastern Chad. The increasingly porous border and the lawlessness that ensues provide fertile grounds for the entry of Islamic armed groups from the Sahel via Chad into Darfur to establish their presence in Sudan. Popular discontent over the perceived prioritisation of aid to Darfur over the refugee camps in Chad further fuels tensions, leading to violence in those camps. The RSF strengthen their governance structures, including through increased taxation, while markets are heavily restricted. The illicit trade of drugs, people, and weapons continues into the Central African Republic, Chad, and Libya. The fall of all of North Darfur to the RSF facilitates the increased flow of mercenaries from Libya to join the RSF.

Impacts: insecurity increases throughout much of Darfur as the civil population is split between aligning with the RSF and Chadian military. Ethnic minorities, such as the Zaghawa, Fur, and Masalit, are increasingly targeted, leading to massacres. Displacement from Darfur to Chad and Chad to the safer areas of Darfur increases, driven by conflict, lack of food, and scarce basic services on both sides of the border. Famine and disease spread, and mortality increases. Communities are heavily dependent on scarce aid provision, mostly from community groups, as agriculture, trade, and international humanitarian operations stall.

Humanitarian operations: as insecurity spreads across borders into Chad, cross-border access is severely restricted, and the environment is less conducive for humanitarian aid delivery, resulting in a decrease in aid reaching Darfur.

Central, eastern, and southeastern Sudan

Scenario 1: Fragmentation

As the SAF's chain of command weakens and breaks down, groups within the Beja and Beni Amir assert more control over the region while pursuing tribally inclined interests, which leads to localised disagreements. In Al Jazirah state, local RSF commanders carve more space for themselves, further splintering command and control. Civilians increasingly arm, and areas of control are increasingly localised. Agriculture is affected, and access to supply chains and land resources defines occasional localised disputes. The movement of goods and people is more difficult, and trade and commerce are disrupted. In Port Sudan, control over bureaucracy is not clear as SAF leadership is fragmented and its power disputed. The city sees no active conflict, but occasional skirmishes occur.

Impacts: occasional internal displacement occurs across the region, and food insecurity levels grow as agriculture and trade are affected.

Humanitarian operations: humanitarian access is facilitated by a relatively calm environment compared with other regions in Sudan but is sometimes challenged by regional tribal authorities. Port Sudan remains a key hub for humanitarian operations but increasing aid interference and diversion and unclear chains of command render humanitarian efforts more difficult.

Scenario 2: Control

The RSF move through Blue Nile, Gedaref, Kassala, Sennar, and White Nile, forcing the SAF to retreat north. Heavy fighting in Port Sudan causes a near-paralysis of the city and port activities. This leads to a refocus on other entry points in Sudan for commerce and humanitarian aid. Throughout the region, RSF-allied groups destroy or seize critical infrastructure, leaving communities isolated. Agricultural production stops as a result of the spread of violence.

Impacts: evidence of the widespread abuse, torture, and killing of civilians surfaces amid escalating violence. Mass displacement follows, with people seeking safety within the region and the last SAF-controlled areas of Port Sudan and Khartoum, while Ethiopian refugees cross back to Ethiopia following escalating violence and increasing humanitarian needs. Access to services is heavily limited, and food insecurity escalates. Blue and White Nile states become isolated, and needs are largely unreported.

Humanitarian operations: Port Sudan ceases to be a humanitarian hub, the UN and INGOs withdraw from the city, and international staff leave. Most humanitarian organisations stop their operations in the central and eastern regions amid high insecurity and restricted movement caused by widespread infrastructure damage and checkpoints. The remaining organisations face heavy conditionalities and risks.

Scenario 3: Partition

The SAF remain in control of eastern Sudan, holding their ground and retaking some areas in Gedaref, Sennar, and White Nile. Heavy fighting in Al Jazirah leads to large-scale outward displacement. The rest of the eastern region is mostly stable, and trade and supply chains from Port Sudan are functional although heavily controlled by the SAF. In some areas, notably White Nile and Sennar, the arrival of returnees once fighting stops fuels occasional localised disputes over access to shelter and resources.

Impacts: flows of displaced people and returnees move throughout the region. Returns to Blue Nile, Sennar, and White Nile and displacement from Al Jazirah towards the centre and east of the country drive increased needs for food, health, shelter, and water. Those remaining in Al Jazirah face severe food and protection needs, while a lack of adequate water drives an increased risk of disease.

Humanitarian operations: both the SAF and RSF impose increasingly restrictive and obstructive measures on humanitarian organisations to assert more control, as well as benefit from, divert, and use assistance as a weapon of war. While humanitarian aid reaches, with added difficulties, parts of the region more easily accessible from Port Sudan, it remains inadequate, and needs remain largely unmet. Famine-like conditions spread, especially in Blue Nile and Al Jazirah. As Al Jazirah remains a hotspot for fighting, humanitarian access is highly restricted.

Scenario 4: International spillover

The RSF advance on two trajectories into Blue Nile and Gedaref. This enables armed groups from Ethiopia to reinforce the RSF for an advance on Kassala. On the other hand, militia trained in Eritrea join the SAF in preventing the RSF from controlling Kassala and reaching the Ethiopian border. The Fano militia, Amhara militants, cross into Sudan from Ethiopia to take advantage of the conflict to reclaim land in Al Fashaga. Conflict also spills over to and escalates within Ethiopia as Tigrayan refugees are forced into Amhara. The border with Eritrea becomes impassable because of conflict, and commerce across the Metema–Gallabat border severely decreases. In the Blue Nile and White Nile border regions with South Sudan, intercommunal and tribal violence increases, while the RSF's presence grows. Islamist armed groups who enter the country from the west establish strongholds in Sudan,

in areas where fighting is more pronounced and lawlessness persists, such as Al Jazirah state. Commercial trade continues through Port Sudan, albeit slower and more expensive. Smuggling and criminal activities increase throughout the region.

Impacts: intense fighting and air attacks by the SAF destroy infrastructure and force many civilians to displace from eastern areas towards Port Sudan. Others displace within Gedaref and Kassala states. Fighting also displaces people away from border areas, including within and from Ethiopia. High levels of displacement see many people settling close to refugee camps within Sudan for safety and access to scarce services and food. The reduction in agricultural activity aggravates food insecurity. Humanitarian needs increase significantly, and service provision heavily relies on civil society and the availability of food and other essential items in regional markets. Rising prices and continuing struggles to raise funding prevent MAGs and national NGOs from meeting all needs.

While displacement increases within Blue Nile and White Nile states and humanitarian needs remain unmet, food security is slightly better there than in neighbouring states given their self-sufficiency.

Humanitarian operations: the border situation between Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudan becomes a complicated operating environment for humanitarians, who need to negotiate with multiple parties in an ever-changing landscape. Aid taxation, interference, and diversion increase.