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Article Report

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EDITOR'S NOTE

It has now been just over a month since we started the Week Or Monthly Article Report. As we have been publishing, a number of issues have been particularly interesting. We have covered the Ethiopian Civil War, the ongoing following the first editions of this monthly report, Ethiopian-Eritrean relations, Ethiopian-Sudan relations, and the Ethiopian-Egypt relations.

In this edition of the issue, the newsletter will cover with a particular emphasis on the Horn as we see the most relevant news across Africa and beyond. We will cover the Tigray Crisis, the Ethiopian-Eritrean relations, the Ethiopian-Sudan relations, the Ethiopian-Egypt relations, and the Ethiopian-Russian relations. It is therefore unsurprising that **the Ethiopian-Eritrean relations, the Ethiopian-Egypt relations, the Ethiopian-Sudan relations.**

Like Europe and Asia, and not least the Gulf Countries, Africa is currently in the middle of a geopolitical contestation. Unlike the Gulf Countries, Africa rights, explains, West African economies, and West African Leaders, Africa is not a country. Instead, Africa is the place where 54 countries are located. Africa is the place where 54 countries are located. Africa is the place where 54 countries are located.

THE IMPACT OF THE CURRENT MIDDLE-EAST WAR ON SUDAN

FOUAD HIKMAT

The escalation of conflict in the Middle East, particularly the confrontation involving Iran, carries profound implications for Sudan's internal dynamics.

These implications stem from historical connections between Sudan's Islamist movement and Iran, the shifting regional alignments around the Red Sea, and the ongoing civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). As regional tensions intensify, these historical and political linkages are resurfacing in ways that could shape Sudan's military cohesion, political positioning, and international engagement.

Sudan-Iran ties are rooted in the ideological networks of Sudan's Islamist movement, consolidated under former president Omar al-Bashir and partly grounded in a shared resistance to Western influence.

Following Iranian president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's visit to Sudan in 1991, cooperation deepened. Iran assisted in establishing the Yarmouk Military Industrial Complex in 1996 and conducted military training programs while promoting ideological outreach among Sudanese youth. Sudanese territory also reportedly served as a transit corridor for weapons destined for Hamas and Hezbollah, which led to Israeli airstrikes on the Yarmouk complex.

By 2014, increasing international pressure compelled Bashir to reduce reliance on Iran. Sudan realigned toward Gulf states, joining the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen in 2015, and formally cut diplomatic ties with Tehran in 2016. Nonetheless, informal contacts between Islamist factions and Iranian actors persisted.

After the 2019 revolution, Sudan's transitional authorities under Abdel Fattah al-Burhan sought to reposition the country internationally. In October 2020, Sudan moved toward normalization with Israel through the Abraham Accords, which contributed to its removal from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. Islamist actors initially receded but gradually regained influence, culminating in support for the October 2021 military coup. In 2023, Islamist fighters aligned with SAF forces against RSF's anti-Islamist stance.

The civil war relaunched a primarily pragmatic rather than strategic engagement with Iran. In October 2023, months after the outbreak of fighting between SAF and RSF forces, Sudanese and Iranian diplomats met in Baku to explore potential areas of cooperation. Facing isolation and restrictions on military procurement, Sudan's leadership has sought alternative sources for advanced weaponry, notably drones, while Iran requested access to Sudan's Red Sea coast to establish a monitoring and surveillance presence for maritime activity.

Considering both strategic sensitivity and international scrutiny, Sudan declined Iran's request but agreed to procure drones on a commercial basis, highlighting a transactional rather than strategic alliance. Meanwhile, units of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood and the Al-Baraa bin Malik Brigade are believed to have received training and support from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, heightening the sensitivity of their role amid broader regional tensions.

In March 2026, the United States designated the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood, the core organizational structure of the Sudanese Islamic Movement, as a terrorist entity, citing its involvement in violence and connections to Iran.

This designation complicates General Burhan's position. The SAF has relied on Islamist networks for recruitment and battlefield support, but continued association now carries heightened diplomatic and political risks. Islamist fighters have contributed thousands of combatants to the war and aim to convert their military role into renewed political influence. At the same time, Burhan has sought to distance the military from overt ideological alignment, warning armed groups against public support for Iran and asserting that such stances do not reflect SAF's policy. This underscores a widening tension between international legitimacy and reliance on ideologically-driven allies.

The U.S. designation may intensify mistrust between SAF leadership and Islamist factions. These groups could perceive distancing from Iran or engagement with Western pressure as a betrayal, while Burhan faces pressure from Gulf states and other regional actors to limit Islamist influence within the military coalition.

Potential consequences include: Fragmentation within the pro-SAF coalition, especially among Islamist militias and local mobilization networks; increased pressure to restructure or demobilize Islamist-linked units, reinforced by Burhan's recent directive requiring all armed groups to operate under SAF command; and political contestation over the post-war order, as Islamist actors seek to transform military contribution into political leverage.

Recent SAF successes have depended not only on regular army units but also on allied militias and Islamist fighters. Any deterioration in relations whether due to international pressure or disputes over Iranian influence could undermine the coalition's cohesion.

Operationally, reduced cooperation could slow SAF offensives and compromise local security in recaptured areas. Politically, balancing the need for international legitimacy with reliance on Islamist allies will become increasingly challenging.

The convergence of the Middle East conflict, Sudan's Islamist networks, and evolving international attitudes toward the Sudanese Islamic Movement adds a complex layer to Sudan's civil war. General Burhan faces a strategic challenge: maintaining battlefield alliances that have strengthened the SAF's military position while managing rising international and regional pressures tied to Iran. How this balance is managed will likely determine both the war's trajectory and the shape of post-conflict political arrangements in Sudan.

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