



**Statement before the House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Subcommittee on Africa**

***“A Dire Crisis in Sudan: A Global Call to  
Action”***

A Testimony by:

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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Jacobs, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Africa, thank you for inviting me to participate in today's hearing. It's an honor to be here and I commend the Subcommittee for focusing on this urgent and evolving challenge. And in particular, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your decades of work for the cause of peace in Sudan, as well as you Ranking Member Jacobs for your tireless efforts to shine a light on this conflict and its enablers. You are both a part of a long history of bipartisan U.S. engagement on Sudan that is today in desperate need of reinvigoration.

The views I express today are my own and should not be attributed to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I would like to request that the full text of my testimony be submitted for the record.

As the title of today's hearing lays bare, the ongoing crisis in Sudan is indeed dire and is worsening by the day. Now into its third year, we see in full relief the consequences of a distracted, disjointed and anemic international response: we are faced with a conflict in which no corner of the country is safe for civilians; where battlelines now shift by the hour; where every single neighboring country is playing a role, by both bearing the costs and reaping the rewards of this conflict; where civilians are sacrificial pawns in a game between generals and ambitious regional states; and where horrific humanitarian conditions threaten the lives of more people than the fighting.

Two months ago, Sudan's Army retook the Presidential Palace in central Khartoum, signaling what many of us hoped would be a turning point in this war by retaking control of the capital and allowing some of the more than 13 million displaced civilians to return home and begin the arduous task of reclaiming their lives.

But in a war marked by vertiginous momentum shifts, these army gains have no sooner been eroded, and the very nature of this conflict transformed, by the introduction of more advanced weaponry. Sudan is today an international arms bazaar and the war itself has fully transformed into a battle for influence among a host of local and regional actors who seek economic, geopolitical and strategic gain in the context of this war. Of course, we must not forget that the ultimate responsibility for the conflict and its consequences lies with the principal belligerents, who before they were enemies, shared common cause in removing an internationally recognized civilian, transitional government that risked dismantling the very political and economic system they are fighting over today.

This fight is existential for both sides, and we see that both are prepared to do whatever it takes, ally themselves with whomever it takes, and purchase weapons from wherever they must in order to emerge victorious. To illustrate this point, in a matter of days this month, an array of Sudanese Army drones, purchased from Turkey, bombed a Rapid Support Forces (RSF) airbase in Nyala, the capital of South Darfur state, that the RSF uses to export smuggled gold and gum arabic and bring in Chinese and Russian weapons. According to local media, the Nyala attack reportedly killed as many as eight Emirati military officers, along with mercenaries from Colombia, Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan. This is in addition to forces recruited from Libya, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and the Central African Republic that have been documented as fighting for the RSF.

The following day, the RSF countered some 1,200 miles away in Port Sudan using an array of long-distance and kamikaze drones piloted, it is believed, from both Nyala and Omdurman in a coordinated attack on the de facto capital. This was a sophisticated aerial operation requiring planning, coordination and targeting between forces, based hundreds of miles apart, on specific targets inside a crowded city. Skills we know the RSF alone does not possess and demonstrating that this war is no longer a conventional ground campaign with predictable battlelines and foreseeable tactics.

At this point, we might be anticipating a lull in fighting as the rainy season approaches this summer, making the movement of troops and heavy equipment around the country nearly impossible for the next three months. But a drone war negates this seasonal dynamic and forestalls what might have been a pause in fighting. Not only is every corner of Sudan now within reach, but it can be done with no notice, year-round.

More egregiously, this new aerial campaign follows no rule book and shows that despite territorial losses by both sides in recent months, each belligerent can project new threats and, in the process, make even those portions of the country securely under each other's control, entirely ungovernable and unlivable.

The RSF are currently using their drones in the conquest of the last remaining city in Darfur that remains outside of their control, the north Darfur capital of El Fasher. In its attacks, the RSF this month repeatedly struck the Zamzam internally displaced persons (IDP) camp, 10 miles south of the city, sending more than 400,000 camp residents on a perilous trek for survival, with some choosing to walk as much as 100 miles across the desert to find safety in neighboring Chad. More than 100,000 civilians remain trapped inside Zamzam camp, with no safe egress route out and no reliable way for necessary humanitarian aid to reach them. In addition to internationally recognized humanitarian zones, like Zamzam camp, the RSF has targeted other civilian infrastructure like dams, power stations, water pumps and fuel depots, plunging most of Khartoum and Port Sudan into darkness and making it impossible to sustain what meager services still exist, like health care. More concerning still are the RSF's strikes on the port itself, which remains the most critical entry point for humanitarian assistance in the country and which if sustained could imperil UN relief operations across Sudan.

As troubling and precarious as the conflict and its humanitarian consequences are inside the country, its suspension and ultimate resolution are unlikely to come from the belligerents themselves. They have shown through their words and actions that they will fight until there is nothing left to fight for: no civilian population, no wealth and no country.

Instead, if we hope to check this spiraling violence and prevent what is an increasingly plausible worst-case scenario from coming true then there are several steps the United States should take. We must first acknowledge that the previous approach taken by the Biden Administration that sought to engage the warring parties themselves in a traditional peace process while seeking to empower civilian alternatives to military rule was not ripe for success. The parties were and remain unwilling to engage each other directly and, for a host of reasons, there are no current civilian leaders that have emerged with sufficient influence to govern a new transition. Instead, we must first directly engage the regional parties who are

supporting the two sides to advance their own political, economic and strategic ambitions. There is no single country better placed to do this than the United States.

President Trump showed with his trip to the Middle East last week that he enjoys the trust of the region's leaders, many of whom are engaged on opposite sides of the war in Sudan. Unfortunately, he missed an opportunity to use his leverage to begin a dialogue and advance solutions that might end this war. Indeed, President Trump was right to acknowledge that "Gulf Nations have shown this entire region a path towards safe and orderly societies with improving quality of life, flourishing economic growth, expanding personal freedoms, and increasing responsibilities on the world stage", but he ignored the role of these countries in denying those same benefits in place like Sudan in their competition for regional supremacy.

But it isn't too late to add Sudan to our Middle East agenda. Rather than appointing another Sudan envoy whose efforts are focused inside the country, as some have suggested, we should acknowledge the determinative role regional actors are playing and realize that the Trump Administration already has a fully-staffed Middle East Envoy team in place that is well-positioned to take on this issue.

As a first priority, the Trump Administration must engage its allies in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt about de-escalating this conflict and suspending any support to the warring parties. In particular, whether through financial support to countries like Ethiopia and Kenya or via direct military engagement, often masquerading under the veil of humanitarian operations, in places like Libya, Chad, South Sudan and Central African Republic, the UAE bears a particular responsibility as it has encircled Sudan in a ring of fire from which it cannot escape.

It strains credulity for the UAE to continue to deny any role in this conflict; especially in the face of mounting and undeniable reporting from open-source intelligence, UN committees, Pulitzer Prize winning investigations, and this Congress' own assertions over the extent of UAE support and involvement. But make no mistake, the UAE are not alone in fueling this fight and while suspending their support is necessary, it is not a sufficient condition for ending the war.

That's why the Trump team should now initiate an honest conversation among our allies about the risks and rewards in Sudan. Such a discussion would likely reveal that the United States, the UAE and many other regional actors harbor the same concerns and share similar interests in Sudan: avoiding the country becoming a failed state; preventing Sudan from once again becoming a nexus for international terrorism, arresting a further degradation of Red Sea security, avoiding a return of Islamist leaders to a position of authority in the country and, perhaps most importantly, developing the economic resources and human potential of this strategic country.

The people of Sudan deserve to see their democratic aspirations supported and the promise of their popular revolution fulfilled. But that conversation is unlikely to succeed until the guns go silent and

those fueling this war are made to understand that an absolute military victory is not possible. If Washington does not use the influence it has and initiate a de-escalatory dialogue with the region quickly, we will be left with little choice but to begin preparing a containment strategy for the forces that will surely lead to the further splintering of Africa's third largest country.

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