Israel and the War in Sudan: Strategic Stakes and Regional Implications

Sudan's ongoing civil war has unleashed the world's gravest humanitarian disaster and threatens to destabilize the entire Red Sea basin. For Israel, the implications are strategic: maritime security, counterterrorism, and regional normalization all depend on Sudan's future

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Executive Summary: Sudan's ongoing civil war has unleashed the world's gravest humanitarian disaster and threatens to destabilize the entire Red Sea basin. For Israel, the implications are strategic: maritime security, counterterrorism, and regional normalization all depend on Sudan's future. The conflict has become a stage for Iranian, Russian, and Chinese expansion, challenging Israel and its Western partners to act. By coordinating intelligence, securing the Red Sea, supporting humanitarian access, and preparing for post-war normalization, Israel can protect its vital interests, reinforce its alignment with the West, and help shape a more stable regional order.

Introduction

Sudan today stands at the epicenter of the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe—a collapse that carries direct implications for Israel's security, diplomacy, and regional strategy. More than twelve million people have been displaced, thirty million require emergency aid, and famine and disease are spreading unchecked. This is no longer an internal conflict: it is a regional earthquake reshaping the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea basin, and the strategic environment surrounding Israel.

While the world's attention has been consumed by the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, Sudan's collapse risks transforming the Red Sea corridor into a breeding ground for terrorism, arms trafficking, and great-power competition. For Israel, the stakes are high: maritime security, counterterrorism, and the future of normalization with the Arab and African worlds all hinge on Sudan's trajectory.

From Power Struggle to State Collapse

The war erupted in April 2023 after months of tension between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), commanded by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a powerful paramilitary led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo ("Hemedti"). Once allies in the overthrow of long-time dictator Omar al-Bashir, the two generals turned against each other in a struggle for power, resources, and foreign backing.

The consequences were catastrophic. Khartoum and Omdurman were devastated by urban warfare, while Darfur descended into ethnic atrocities reminiscent of the early 2000s. Health systems collapsed, famine spread, and millions fled across borders into Chad, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. The state disintegrated, creating vast ungoverned spaces exploited by jihadist networks, smuggling groups, and foreign powers.

Sudan's geography makes its instability uniquely dangerous. It connects the Sahel to the Horn of Africa and commands a long Red Sea coastline—an artery vital for global trade and for Israel's access to the Indian Ocean. Instability there radiates outward, threatening shipping routes, regional regimes, and the fragile equilibrium of the wider Middle East.

Foreign Powers and the Battle for Influence

Sudan has become a proxy arena in the contest between rival global and regional actors. Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia have supported different sides of the conflict, seeking leverage over Nile water politics, trade routes, and resources. Russia's Wagner Group entrenched itself in Sudan's gold sector, trading weapons for mining rights and projecting influence along the Red Sea. Iran, meanwhile, has sought to re-establish a foothold through arms transfers and maritime infiltration. China continues to view Sudan as part of its Belt and Road network, emphasizing infrastructure and extractive industries.

This mosaic of external interference illustrates the return of great-power competition to Africa. For Israel, the implications are twofold. First, the Red Sea has become an extension of the Iranian front, with Tehran's allies—the Houthis in Yemen and militant proxies elsewhere—threatening freedom of navigation. Second, the expansion of Russian and Chinese influence in the Horn of Africa undermines Western strategic access and weakens regional moderation.

Sudan thus represents a test of whether Israel and its Western partners can still shape outcomes in an increasingly multipolar environment. Failing to do so risks ceding one of Israel's most vital maritime corridors to hostile or revisionist powers.

Israel's Strategic Interests

Security and the Red Sea

The Red Sea is Israel's maritime lifeline to Asia and East Africa. Its southern port of Eilat depends on secure passage through Bab el-Mandeb—a chokepoint now threatened by Iranian-backed Houthis and by instability along Sudan's coast. Chaos in Sudan facilitates arms smuggling to Hamas and Hezbollah via the Sinai and Libya, as documented repeatedly over the past two decades. Stabilizing Sudan is therefore integral to preventing the re-emergence of a weapons corridor connecting Tehran to Gaza.

Diplomatic and Strategic Alignment

In 2020, Sudan's transitional government agreed to join the Abraham Accords, marking a historic reversal after decades of hostility. Had the process been completed, it would have sealed a strategic arc linking Israel to the Gulf and East Africa. That opportunity vanished with Sudan's 2021 coup and the subsequent war, but the underlying logic remains sound: a normalized Sudan would anchor Israel's presence in the Red Sea basin and provide a partner in counterterrorism and maritime security.

Israel's rapprochement with Sudan also carried symbolic weight. Khartoum—once the city of the "Three No's" in 1967—was poised to become a symbol of reconciliation. Restoring that trajectory would signal that normalization with Israel remains a pathway to development and stability, not a source of domestic risk.

Regional Integration and Development

Beyond security and diplomacy, Israel has practical assets to contribute. Its expertise in desert agriculture, water management, and public health can support reconstruction when the guns fall silent. Israeli technology, working alongside international aid frameworks, could help rebuild livelihoods and infrastructure in a devastated country—strengthening ties with African partners and demonstrating the tangible benefits of peace.

Israel's Policy Options

Israel cannot determine Sudan's fate alone, but it can act—directly and through coordination with Western and regional partners—to mitigate threats and shape post-war realities. Four avenues of engagement stand out:

Maritime and Intelligence Cooperation:

Israel should deepen intelligence coordination with the United States and Arab partners on Red Sea security. Monitoring arms flows from Iran through Sudan and Yemen remains vital. A reinforced Israeli naval presence in Eilat, combined with real-time data-sharing, can help deter smuggling and piracy.

Engagement with Regional Mediators:

The African Union, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have each launched initiatives to broker a ceasefire. Israel should quietly engage with these mediators, emphasizing the risks that

prolonged conflict poses to Red Sea stability. Israeli diplomacy can complement Western efforts by leveraging its growing dialogue with African and Gulf states.

Humanitarian Diplomacy:

While Israel's humanitarian footprint is modest, its capacity for rapid medical and logistical deployment is recognized globally. Coordinating relief efforts—particularly through its Agency for International Development Cooperation (MASHAV)—would demonstrate goodwill and align with Israel's broader effort to project constructive regional influence.

Preparing for Post-War Normalization:

Once a legitimate civilian government re-emerges, Israel should be prepared to revive normalization talks and support Sudan's reintegration into the Abraham Accords. Doing so would not only benefit Sudan's recovery but also strengthen Israel's regional legitimacy and create new economic opportunities.

Geopolitical Alignment with the West

Israel's position in Sudan aligns naturally with that of the United States and other Western powers. All share an interest in ensuring freedom of navigation, countering Iranian expansion, and preventing the consolidation of Russian and Chinese influence in the Red Sea corridor. Israel's intelligence, operational reach, and regional relationships make it an indispensable partner in achieving those goals.

This alignment reinforces Israel's identity as part of the Western camp—a democratic, technologically advanced power capable of contributing meaningfully to global stability. At a time when the Middle East is fractured and American engagement is contested, Israel's active involvement in African stabilization could reaffirm its role as a responsible stakeholder within the liberal international order.

Conclusion

Sudan's collapse is both a humanitarian calamity and a strategic warning. For Israel, it underscores how instability on Africa's periphery can reverberate directly through its maritime and security environment. Yet within crisis lies opportunity. By coordinating with the United States and its Arab partners, Israel can help shape a post-war Sudan that is more stable, moderate, and open to regional cooperation.

Normalization with a future civilian Sudan remains an attainable goal—one that would extend the Abraham Accords from the Gulf to the heart of Africa and transform the Red Sea into a corridor of connectivity rather than conflict. To ignore Sudan would be to allow Iran, Russia, and China to fill the void. To engage is to reinforce Israel's strategic depth, its global partnerships, and its commitment to a stable regional order.