Instability in South Sudan’s oil-rich Unity state threatens the already fragile, newly independent country, the International Crisis Group has warned.

The ICG considers Unity a test case for the broad range of deferred internal issues that South Sudan has to deal with after six years of focusing on the peace deal that ended decades of civil war with the north and culminated in peaceful secession in July.

“Unity State, a territory of unique importance and complexity in the fragile new country of South Sudan, faces a perfect storm of political, social, economic and security dilemmas,” some of which are shared across the new country, the ICG said in a report released late on Monday.

Analysts say Unity is the most important oil-producing area in South Sudan, which gained 75 percent of the oil with secession and relies on it for more than 95 percent of total revenues.

But the landlocked country is still negotiating with Khartoum over transit fees and revenues sharing and how to demarcate borders in critical zones such as Unity.

The think tank warns that a complex web of national interests, political and military alliances and the economic isolation of this resource-rich “frontline state” are compounded by new issues.

“Some troubles have festered for years, while more recent developments, prompted by the partition of Sudan, have exacerbated instability and intensified resource pressure,” said senior analyst Zach Vertin.

Tens of thousands of returnees and refugees have come from the north following independence and conflict in Sudan’s southern South Kordofan and Blue Nile states between government forces and the SPLM northern faction, that fought alongside southern rebels for years.

The tenuous north-south relationship is intensified by cross-border tensions over migration and a block on the movement of people and goods.

A series of armed rebellions in Unity over the past year have drawn attention to the state, but the group says activities by rebel militia groups mask the internal, festering issues of deeply polarized politics.

“Now that independence has been achieved, long-suppressed grievances will increasingly surface in an already tenuous political environment,” said EJ Hogendoorn, ICG’s Horn of Africa project director.

“Untangling Unity’s web of intersecting challenges will prove no easy task,” he warned, urging the government to strengthen local institutions to save South Sudan’s “economic life-blood.”

The UN has said it will ramp up demining activities due to a worrying “localised” problem of new mines being laid in Unity. The most recent incident killed 20 people last week when a civilian bus was hit by an anti-tank mine in Mayom county.

A leading politician who asked not to be named called the increase part of a north-south “tit-for-tat proxy war,” with Sudan funding rebels in the oil-rich state in retaliation over suspicions of South Sudan supporting SPLM-N rebels in Sudan’s war-torn southern border states and harbouring Darfuri rebels.