

July 1, 2014

Sudan: Issues for Congress

When it was unified (1956-2011), Sudan was Africa's largest nation, and the site of its longest running civil war. In 2011, after decades of fighting broadly described as a conflict between the "Arab" Muslim north and "African" Christian and animist south, Sudan split in two. Mistrust between Sudan and South Sudan lingers, and unresolved disputes still threaten the stability of the region. **The north-south split did not resolve other simmering Sudanese conflicts, notably in Darfur, Blue Nile, and Southern Kordofan.** Overlapping struggles between security forces and armed groups, among ethnic groups, and between nomadic and farming communities have caused extensive displacement and human suffering. Across the country, social tensions, economic pressures, and political dissent pose ongoing challenges for the Islamist government that came to power through a coup in 1989.

The secession of South Sudan was a major financial blow to Sudan, which lost 75% of its oil production, two-thirds of its export earnings, and more than half of its fiscal revenues. The ongoing cost of waging war on multiple fronts also fuels domestic criticism of the government. Khartoum's military operations against restive regions continue to draw international condemnation and have prevented Sudan from normalizing relations with many countries, including the United States. U.S. sanctions limit Sudan's access to U.S. dollars and impede its access to international financial markets and institutions. Relations with some Arab Gulf countries have cooled, slowing investment, amid rising concern over Sudan's ties to Iran and perceived support for the Muslim Brotherhood.

Background

Northern-led regimes espousing Islamist ideals have dominated Sudan's modern political history, often pressing policies to force distant provinces to conform to the center, Khartoum, rather than accommodating local customs and institutions. Instead of forging a common national identity, these policies exacerbated Sudan's racial, cultural, and religious differences. Government attempts to Arabize and Islamize the countryside met with resistance from southerners and other marginalized groups, sparking two related insurgencies in the south (1955-1972 and 1983-2005). Groups in other regions rose up periodically, citing local grievances, and some, in the central states of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, joined the southern rebellion, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A).

The north-south war took a heavy toll on both sides, and in 2005, the government and the SPLM signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The CPA enshrined the south's right to self-determination after a 6.5 year "interim period," during which the SPLM and the

Capital: Khartoum
Population: 35 million
Comparative area: larger than Alaska
Religions: Sunni Muslim, small Christian minority
Life expectancy: 63.3 yrs.
Literacy: 71.9%
GDP; GDP per capita: \$63 billion; \$1,794



Sources: Graphic created by CRS. Map data from Department of State and Esri (both 2013). Fact information from CIA World Factbook and IMF.

ruling National Congress Party formed a unity government. Southern Sudanese voted overwhelmingly in January 2011 to secede and achieved independence in July of that year.

The CPA failed to resolve several contentious issues, and talks continue on once-shared resources, such as oil, and debts; border disputes; and related security issues. Partial deals on security and economic cooperation were signed in 2012, but the deployment of a joint monitoring mission to ensure the demilitarization of the border has been repeatedly delayed, and the two countries' forces have clashed periodically along the border since separation. The proximity to the border of rebel activity in Sudan's "new south," and the unresolved status of contested areas such as the disputed Abyei region, significantly complicate demilitarization. Abyei was accorded special status in the CPA, and it has repeatedly been a flashpoint for violence. A referendum for Abyei residents slated for 2011 on whether to retain their special status in Sudan or join South Sudan has yet to occur. The deployment of the U.N. Interim Force for Abyei (UNISFA) in 2011 defused a violent stand-off between Sudan and South Sudan, but tensions have risen in the past year among communities in the area.

Ongoing Conflicts

Sudan does not discriminate between fighters and civilians in its counter-insurgency campaigns. It finances local Arab militia, including the new paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), that are widely criticized for indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against civilians in Darfur and Southern Kordofan. The government also continues aerial bombings in Darfur, in violation of U.N. Security Council resolution 1591 (2005), and has been accused of targeting hospitals in both Darfur and Southern Kordofan in 2014.

Darfur. Fighting in Darfur among communities, armed groups, and the military has escalated since early 2013, causing displacement on a scale not seen since the first years of the conflict. The 2011 Doha Document for Peace in Darfur has failed to stop the violence. Access by peacekeepers and humanitarian organizations to affected communities is limited by both insecurity and government restrictions. Attacks by armed groups against civilians,

peacekeepers, and relief workers is a major problem—16 peacekeepers were killed in 2013. The credibility of the African Union-U.N. Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) has increasingly been questioned amid allegations that it has self-censored its reporting related to crimes against civilians and peacekeepers.

In 2005, the U.N. Security Council granted the International Criminal Court (ICC) jurisdiction over serious crimes committed in Darfur. It was the first case the Council referred to the Court. Almost ten years later, the ICC has yet to commence a trial, and five ICC arrest warrants remain outstanding, including two for the arrest of President Bashir on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Sudan's government remains uncooperative with the Court. African countries have struggled to determine how to respond to a warrant issued against a head of state. Most are States Parties to the Rome Statute and thus bound to execute ICC warrants, but several have allowed Bashir to visit in recent years.

Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. The conflict in these states, often referred to as “the Two Areas,” is driven by unresolved grievances against Khartoum that date back to the north-south war, when some local groups joined the SPLM. The CPA provided for a process in which the two states might achieve greater autonomy within Sudan, but the process stalled and the conflict reignited in mid-2011. South Sudan's ruling party has denied any ties to the insurgency, although the rebels, known as the SPLM-North (SPLM-N) remain linked to the SPLM by their historic relationship. The SPLM-N and the major Darfur rebel groups form a loose alliance, the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF). Khartoum has restricted aid agencies' access to rebel-held areas since the onset of the conflict, and bombings by the military and militia attacks exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation in these areas.

Political Challenges

The government's proposed National Dialogue on conflict and political issues in preparation for a new constitution suggests recognition of mounting calls for reform. Economic pressures have been compounded since 2011 by the loss of most of Sudan's oil revenues (gold is now the most important export earner), fueling periodic protests. Sudan's intelligence and security forces have been quick to respond to protests and student-led uprisings, and protestors have been killed by police on several occasions. Reports of increasing press censorship and the detention of political opponents in 2014 raise questions about the regime's commitment to an inclusive dialogue. Rifts within the NCP also bear watching as **Sudan prepares for upcoming elections scheduled for 2015.**

The Humanitarian Situation

More than 3.8 million people from Darfur and 2.4 million from Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Abyei are currently displaced or severely affected by conflict. More than 6 million Sudanese need humanitarian aid. Some 373,000 Darfuri have been displaced in 2014, adding to an existing displaced population of 2 million. Chad hosts

353,000 Darfur refugees. Among those severely affected or displaced by conflict in the Two Areas are 1.2 million people in government-held areas and some 800,000 people in SPLM-N-held areas. Ethiopia and South Sudan host more than 253,000 refugees from the two states, and 44,000 Abyei residents remain displaced. Relief agencies are also struggling to assist more than 86,000 South Sudanese refugees who have fled to Sudan since December 2013.

U.S. Policy and Foreign Assistance

U.S. relations with Sudan are turbulent. The United States maintains various sanctions against Sudan through Executive Orders, permanent law, and annual appropriations legislation, which currently prohibits assistance to the government or to modify loans held by Sudan. Khartoum is also subject to economic sanctions based on debt arrears (since 1988), support for international terrorism (since 1993), and pervasive human rights violations. Trade sanctions were imposed in 1997. **Congress has repeatedly tightened sanctions,** including in response to abuses in Darfur. **Khartoum seeks to improve the bilateral relationship, in part to boost its international standing and its efforts to reengage with multilateral financial institutions.** Sudan seeks relief from almost \$45 billion in external sovereign debt, much of it in arrears. Sudan owes over \$2 billion to the United States.

In the years prior to separation, Sudan ranked among the top destinations for U.S. foreign aid globally, with more than \$1 billion allocated annually for humanitarian and development aid and peacekeeping support. Since South Sudan's independence, development aid for Sudan has been limited. The State Department has requested \$9.5 million for FY2015, to support civil society and peace and conflict mitigation efforts. Humanitarian aid totaled \$260 million in FY2013 and \$160 million to date in FY2014. The State Department's FY2015 request includes \$410 million for UNAMID and \$92.5 million for UNISFA.

The State Department has designated Sudan a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act since 1999. A Christian woman, Meriam Ibrahim Ishaq, was sentenced to death for apostasy in May 2014, drawing international condemnation; her conviction was overturned by an appeals court in late June 2014.

Sudan remains designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism, although the State Department's *Country Reports on Terrorism* describes Sudan as “a **generally cooperative counterterrorism partner.**” Per the report, Hamas continues to have a presence and raise funds in Sudan, and elements of Al Qaeda-inspired terrorist groups remain in the country. Sudan's purported role in Iranian arms smuggling to Gaza is another area of concern. In 2013, the State Department named three Sudanese involved in the 2008 murder of two USAID employees as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs). For more information, see CRS Report R42774, *Sudan and South Sudan: Current Issues for Congress and U.S. Policy.*

Lauren Ploch Blanchard, lploch@crs.loc.gov, 7-7640

IF00034