



## South Sudan

South Sudan emerged in 2011 as the world's newest country, and as one of its least developed. After almost 40 years of war between the Sudan government and southern insurgents, an overwhelming majority of southern Sudanese voted in January 2011 to secede from Sudan. More than 2.5 million people were killed in the civil war and more than 4.5 million were displaced. Many fled as refugees, including to the United States. South Sudan was devastated by the conflict, which hindered the development of basic infrastructure and formal civilian institutions. The war created massive, chronic humanitarian needs that persisted, despite a bounty of natural resources, including 75% of Sudan's former oil reserves. Reported corruption in the new government slowed post-war recovery and development. South Sudan was the world's largest recipient of humanitarian aid in 2013; its needs since then have grown.

In December 2013, less than three years after independence, growing political tensions among key leaders in South Sudan erupted in violence. The political dispute that triggered the crisis was not based on ethnic identity, but it overlapped with preexisting ethnic and political grievances, sparking armed clashes and targeted ethnic killings in the capital, Juba, and then beyond. Ongoing fighting, between forces loyal to South Sudan President Salva Kiir and forces aligned with his former vice president, Riek Machar, has caused a security and humanitarian emergency, adding to vast preexisting needs and development challenges.

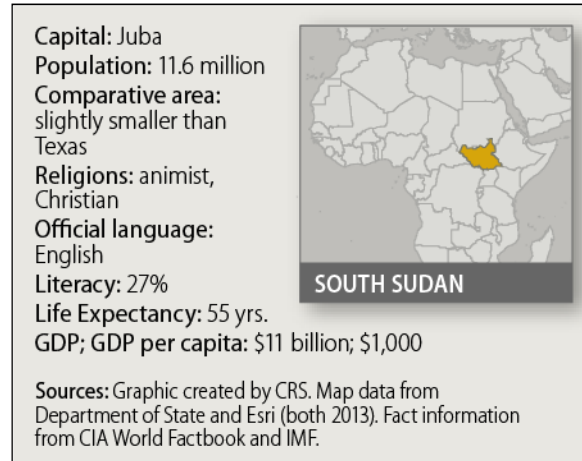
After the initial outbreak of violence, in which by some accounts thousands died in targeted ethnic attacks, Riek Machar declared a rebellion against President Kiir, who accused Machar of plotting a coup. The fighting has continued, despite international pressure to resolve the conflict and repeated commitments by the warring parties to observe a January 2014 cessation of hostilities deal.

Regional mediators have led negotiations in Ethiopia amid ongoing violence, but progress has been limited. In May 2014, the two sides agreed to the mediators' proposal for a transitional government, but they continue to disagree on its composition and responsibilities and have missed multiple deadlines set by regional leaders to sign a peace deal. Significant questions remain regarding the willingness of either side to compromise and the extent to which other stakeholders are included in the process. Some observers express concern that a proposed power-sharing arrangement may not address the root causes of the conflict.

### Impact of the Conflict

More than 2.2 million people have been displaced since December 2013. Acute malnutrition levels are rising, and U.N. officials estimate that one-third of the population, 3.5 million people, will need emergency food aid by June 2015.

Figure 1. South Sudan Key Facts



The fighting has disrupted farming cycles, grazing patterns, and trade routes, and local markets have collapsed. Of the displaced, more than half a million people have fled as refugees to Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya. The conflict also affects humanitarian access to over 220,000 Sudanese refugees sheltering in camps in South Sudan.

U.N. officials assert that targeted attacks against civilians and U.N. personnel perpetrated during the conflict may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity. The U.N. Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) reported in May 2014 that “from the very outset of the violence, gross violations of human rights and serious violations of humanitarian law have occurred on a massive scale. Civilians were not only caught up in the violence, they were directly targeted, often along ethnic lines.” Both sides have reportedly used child soldiers, and conflict-related sexual violence against civilians is reportedly prevalent. Tens of thousands have been killed, and more than 117,000 have sought refuge at UNMISS peacekeeping bases, some of which are located in low-lying areas prone to flooding. By numerous accounts, many of those sheltering at the crowded U.N. bases fear that they may be targeted based on political or ethnic affiliation if they leave. The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights has described South Sudanese efforts to hold perpetrators of serious abuses accountable as “few and inadequate.”

### Background and Context

The current crisis reflects underlying tensions and mistrust among South Sudanese leaders and ethnic groups that date back to Sudan's civil war, and before. While that war was described broadly as a north-south conflict, infighting among southern rebel commanders in the 1990s nearly derailed the southern bid for self-determination, as leaders of the insurgency, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA), competed for power and mobilized supporters along ethnic lines, resulting in atrocities by all sides. Khartoum fueled SPLM splits by financing and arming breakaway

factions. The major factions reconciled in the early 2000s, although several smaller southern militias continued to operate.

In 2005, the Sudan government and the SPLM signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) to end the war. That deal paved the way for 2010 elections and the southern referendum, after which South Sudan, led by the SPLM, seceded in July 2011. The relationship between two Sudans remains tense, and parts of the CPA have yet to be fully implemented. In 2012, South Sudan's government, angered by Khartoum's unilateral decisions regarding the transit and export of South Sudanese oil through Sudan, and by border disputes, suspended oil production for over a year. This led to fiscal austerity measures and economic shocks in both countries, and to clashes that threatened to reignite the war.

Most SPLM leaders publicly put aside their differences as the war was ending to present a unified front and, in some cases, position themselves for political office. However, ethnic tensions and bitter interpersonal rivalries grew under the strain of increased governing responsibilities, amid severe human, institutional, and infrastructure capacity constraints. The country remained awash in small arms, and localized interethnic violence increased and appeared increasingly politicized. Political maneuvering ahead of anticipated 2015 elections added to these dynamics. Work on a new constitution stalled, and a political struggle among senior SPLM members unfolded. President Kiir's July 2013 cabinet reshuffle, in which long-time political rival and presidential hopeful Machar and other key officials were removed from office, formalized a major fissure in the ruling party. Tensions rose as Machar and others publicly accused President Kiir of becoming increasingly dictatorial.

The conflict began on December 15, reportedly with fighting in Juba among presidential guard soldiers from the country's two largest ethnic groups, the Dinka and the Nuer, from which Kiir and Machar, respectively, hail. The fighting soon spread to the eastern state of Jonglei, where intercommunal violence had already displaced 100,000 people, and to the oil-producing states of Unity and Upper Nile. The military split, largely along ethnic lines. Some military units rebelled against Kiir, purportedly in response to targeted attacks against Nuer in Juba by government forces. Ugandan military support for the government has been controversial. Other neighbors have sought to maintain the appearance of neutrality, although some South Sudan officials accuse Sudan of arming the opposition.

Senior SPLM political figures were arrested in the first days of the conflict, purportedly for plotting a coup. U.S. officials reported no evidence of such an effort. The detained politicians were later released, but not exonerated, and have sought to form a third block at the peace talks. Rebuilding trust among political leaders, and between communities affected by ethnic violence, may prove increasingly difficult the longer the crisis continues.

## Responding to the Crisis

The international community is mobilizing humanitarian, peacekeeping, and diplomatic resources to respond to needs, protect civilians, and bring an end to the conflict. The United States is by far the largest humanitarian donor, giving more than \$1 billion in aid since the conflict began.

The humanitarian response has been constrained by funding shortfalls, access challenges, threats against U.N. and other aid agency personnel, and ongoing hostilities. The looting of relief supplies at the onset of the conflict, followed by heavy seasonal rains, necessitated the costly distribution of food supplies by air in 2014. Overland and riverine routes to some areas have subsequently opened, but threats against aid workers and restrictions on their movement continue to impede relief deliveries. By some accounts, incidents involving aid workers may be designed to deter assistance to certain communities. The U.N. Security Council authorized an increase in peacekeeping forces for UNMISS at the onset of the conflict and, in May 2014, modified the mission's mandate to focus on four key tasks: protecting civilians, monitoring and investigating human rights abuses, facilitating aid delivery, and supporting the cessation of hostilities deal. In March 2015, the Security Council unanimously passed a U.S.-sponsored resolution, 2206 (2015), laying the framework for targeted sanctions. Deliberations on a possible U.N. arms embargo continue. East African officials have repeatedly threatened punitive measures against the warring parties, but several leaders in the region maintain close ties to South Sudanese elites, potentially inhibiting political will to support sanctions.

## U.S. Policy and Foreign Assistance

The United States played a major role in facilitating the CPA and South Sudan's subsequent independence, and the United States has been the country's largest bilateral foreign aid donor. It also plays a lead role in U.N. Security Council deliberations on the country. Engagement by Congress has been historically driven by human rights and humanitarian concerns. The current conflict, along with previous allegations of corruption and human rights abuses, has strained the bilateral relationship. U.S. officials have sought to pressure both sides to accept a settlement that will facilitate reconciliation and as accountability for crimes committed during the conflict. President Obama imposed targeted sanctions under Executive Order 13664 on two military leaders deemed responsible for fueling the war—a senior rebel commander and the head of the presidential guard—in May 2014. Two additional commanders were sanctioned in September 2014. In March 2015, Secretary of State John Kerry declared that “legitimacy is not a presumed right of any government, accusing the government of neglecting its responsibility to “demonstrat[e] leadership to protect and serve all citizens” and criticizing both sides for failing to make needed compromises. The State Department has requested \$265 million in FY2016 foreign aid for South Sudan (not including anticipated humanitarian aid) to deliver essential and life-saving health and education services, promote government accountability, and facilitate local and national peace processes, in addition to a request of more than \$340 million to support UNMISS.

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**Lauren Ploch Blanchard**, [lploch@crs.loc.gov](mailto:lploch@crs.loc.gov), 7-7640

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