



Sudan: an Overview

When unified (1956-2011), Sudan was Africa's largest nation by area, and the site of its longest running civil war. In 2011, after decades of fighting broadly described as a conflict between the predominately "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 to pull the two countries back to war. 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 Sudan's Islamist government, which came to power through a coup in 1989.

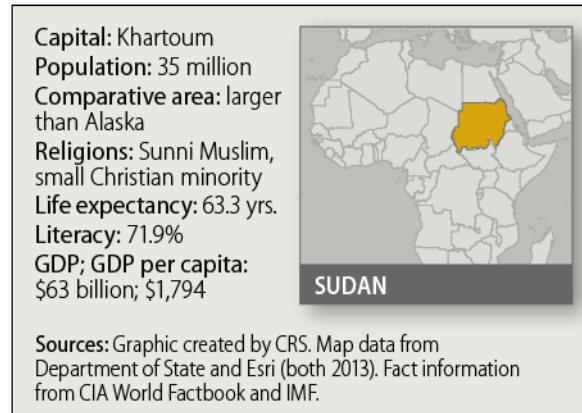
The secession of South Sudan was a major financial blow to Sudan, which lost 75% of its oil production, two-thirds of its export earnings, and more than half its fiscal revenues. The cost of waging war on multiple fronts compounds Sudan's economic troubles and, along with allegations of political repression, fuels domestic criticism of the government and periodic protests. Military operations against restive regions continue to draw international condemnation and have prevented Sudan from improving 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. Sudan has taken several conspicuous steps to repair relations with key Arab Gulf countries, which are important sources of investment. Those relations had cooled in recent years amid concern over Sudan's ties to Iran and its perceived support for the Muslim Brotherhood.

Background

Northern-led regimes espousing Islamist ideals have dominated Sudan since independence, 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 were resisted by southerners and other marginalized groups, sparking two related southern insurgencies (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. In 2005, the government and the SPLM signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which enshrined the south's right to self-determination after a six year "interim period," during which the SPLM and the ruling

Figure 1. Sudan Key Facts



National Congress Party (NCP) 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 border disputes and related security issues, debts, and once-shared resources, such as oil. Sudan and South Sudan signed partial deals on security and economic cooperation in 2012, but the deployment of a joint monitoring mission to ensure the demilitarization of the border has been repeatedly delayed.

The proximity of rebel activity in Sudan's "new south" complicates border demilitarization, as does the unresolved status of contested areas such as the disputed Abyei region. Abyei was accorded special semi-autonomous status in the CPA, and it has repeatedly been a flashpoint for violence. A referendum for Abyei residents on whether to retain their special status in Sudan or join South Sudan was slated for 2011 but has been delayed by voter eligibility disputes. The deployment of the U.N. Interim Force for Abyei (UNISFA) defused a violent stand-off between Sudan and South Sudan in 2011, but local tensions still have potential to draw the two Sudans back into conflict. Their armed forces have engaged in minor clashes sporadically since separation, and South Sudan periodically accuses Sudan of air strikes on its territory. Those strikes reportedly target Sudanese rebels that Khartoum accuses South Sudan of harboring.

Ongoing Conflicts

The CPA did not resolve Sudan's long-standing center-periphery tensions. Khartoum has continued to respond to the political demands of restive regions more often with force than reform, and has financed local Arab militias to help counter insurgencies. These militias are widely criticized for indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against civilians. 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.

Darfur. More than a decade after the George W. Bush Administration declared genocide in Darfur in 2004, widespread violence still plagues the region. Fighting in 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 not stemmed the violence. Insecurity and government restrictions limit access by peacekeepers and humanitarian groups to affected communities. Attacks by armed groups against civilians, peacekeepers, and relief workers are a major problem—more than 60 peacekeepers have been killed in Darfur. The credibility of the African Union-U.N. Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) has been questioned amid allegations that it has self-censored its reporting on crimes against civilians and peacekeepers, and the mission is under pressure from Khartoum to develop an exit strategy.

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. 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, and in December 2014, the ICC Prosecutor announced that she was suspending the investigations, expressing frustration with inaction by the Security Council on the outstanding arrest warrants.

Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. The conflict in these states, often referred to as “the Two Areas,” is driven by unresolved grievances that date back to the north-south war, when some local groups joined the SPLM's rebellion against the government. 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 2011. South Sudan's ruling party has denied supporting 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

In 2014, President Bashir announced that the government would commence a National Dialogue on conflict and political issues in the country, in preparation for the development of a new constitution. The government is under domestic pressure for reform—alongside the unrest in the periphery, inflation and related economic troubles have fueled periodic protests in urban centers, and protestors have been killed by police on several occasions. New rifts within the NCP have emerged as “reformists” have criticized government policies. Press censorship and the detention of political opponents raise questions about the regime's commitment to an inclusive dialogue. Major opposition parties boycotted elections held in April 2015; President Bashir was reelected with 94% of the vote.

The Humanitarian Situation

More than 6.6 million Sudanese are estimated to need humanitarian aid in 2015, 4.4 million of them in Darfur. More than 2.5 million Darfuri have been displaced internally, and Chad continues to host almost 370,000 Darfuri refugees. Another 2 million in Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Abyei are internally displaced or severely affected by conflict. Ethiopia and South Sudan host over 275,000 refugees from the two states. Relief agencies are also struggling to assist more than 146,000 South Sudanese refugees who have fled to Sudan since December 2013.

U.S. Policy and Foreign Assistance

U.S. relations with Sudan have long been turbulent. The United States maintains various sanctions against Sudan through Executive Orders and congressionally imposed legal restrictions, which currently prohibit 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 for peacekeeping support. Since South Sudan's independence, development aid for Sudan has been limited. The State Department has requested \$9.1 million for FY2016 in non-emergency aid, to support civil society and peace and conflict mitigation efforts. Humanitarian aid has totaled \$413 million to date in combined FY2014 and FY2015 funding. The FY2016 request includes \$366 million for UNAMID and \$92.5 million for UNISFA.

Sudan remains designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism, although the State Department describes Sudan as “a generally cooperative counterterrorism partner” in its Country Reports on Terrorism. Hamas maintains a presence there, per the report, and elements of Al Qaeda-inspired terrorist groups remain in the country. Sudan's purported role in Iranian arms smuggling to Gaza has also been of concern. The State Department has named three Sudanese involved in the 2008 murder of two USAID employees as Specially Designated Global Terrorists. Sudan is designated as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act. A Christian woman was sentenced to death for apostasy in 2014, drawing international condemnation; her conviction was later overturned and she settled in the United States with her family. For more information, see CRS Report R43957, *Sudan*, by Lauren Ploch Blanchard.

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