

Sudan on a Precipice

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After more than six years, Darfur remains lawless. Armed men loot the livestock of vulnerable people, hijack humanitarian vehicles and relief supplies, impose war taxes, and extort protection money.

The Problem

The secession of South Sudan in July 2011 was meant to end 22 years of hostilities between Juba and Khartoum. However, as the governments of Khartoum and Juba persist in taking provocative actions, fears linger that sporadic violence could escalate into a full-blown war.

In 2007, IDA assisted the US Central Command (USCENTCOM) with a study of the problems facing Sudan and their implications for the country and its neighbors. Most critical at the time were preservation of the fragile Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the North and South, the ongoing crisis in Darfur, and northern Sudan's potential as a sanctuary for international terrorists.

In July 2011, South Sudan gained independence. The viability of the fragile new state rests on peaceful relations with its northern neighbor, Sudan. However, skirmishes have erupted along the North-South border, and the two sides are at loggerheads over oil and accusations that each side is arming groups to destabilize the other. Almost all of the two countries' oil lies underground in the South and is pumped North via a pipeline. In late January 2012, the South accused the North of stealing its oil and shut down production of crude. The North maintains that it was merely taking its due in unpaid oil transit fees.

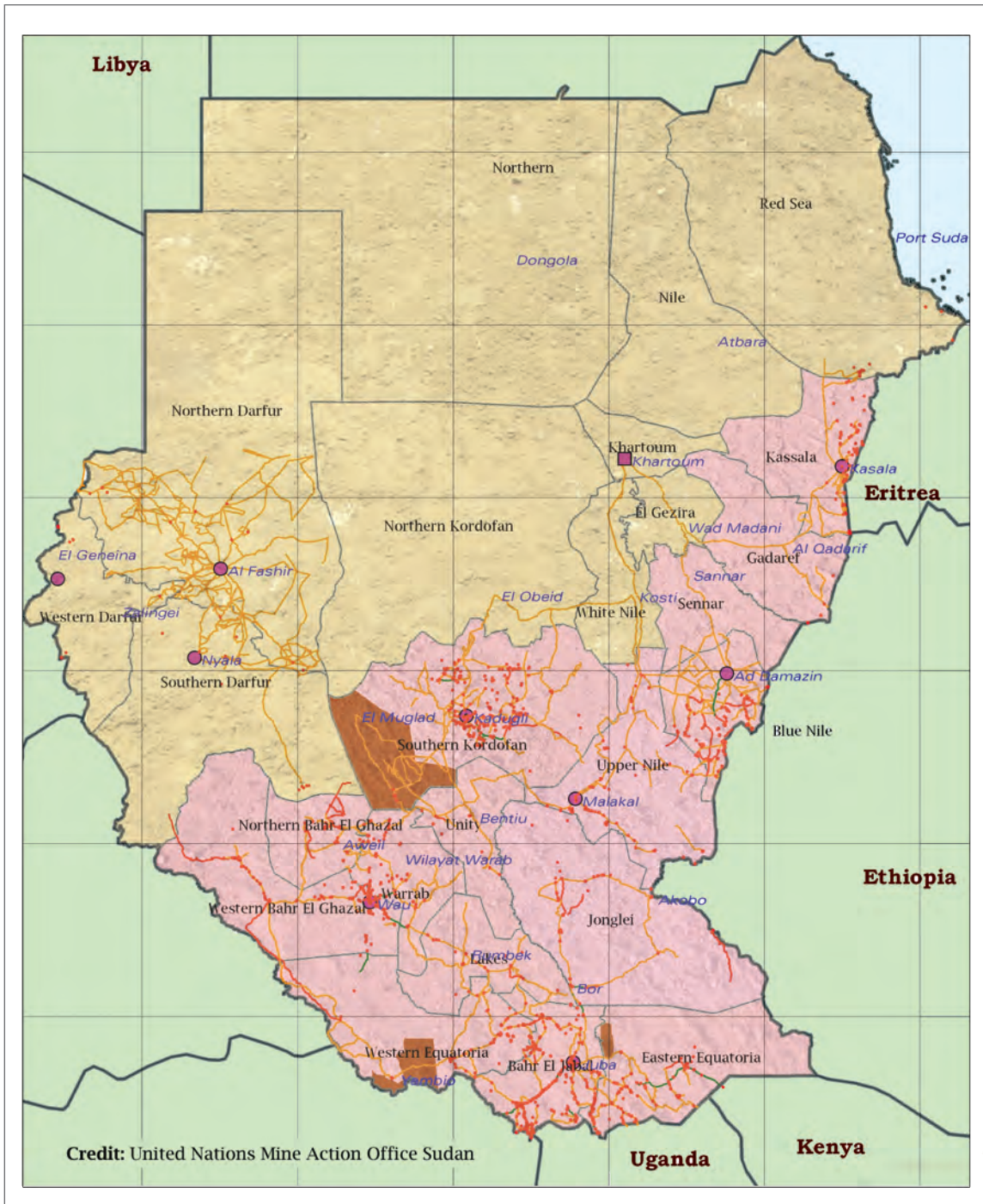
Today, the North and South are still in conflict, and there are fears it could escalate into a renewed civil war. Darfur remains in crisis, and terrorists are still drawn to Sudan. The outcome of these problems will affect not only the two immediate parties, but regional neighbors and international partners as well. All of these entities have a vital interest in the stability and resources of the two countries.

Border Problems

The United States was the driving force behind the independence of South Sudan, as only it had the diplomatic heft to force the major actors together. Unfortunately in this process, some issues (e.g., the failure of the United Nations (UN) Security Council to develop a coherent peacekeeping plan) fell through the cracks and allowed the North to make mischief. UN missions were established in Darfur, the South, and Abyei, but none were established in the Nuba Mountains, where forces in Khartoum—

the capital of Sudan—proceeded to attack civilians. These attacks led to a series of low-key proxy wars along the 1,200-mile disputed border and to state-on-state economic warfare. Tribal

loyalty in the South also intensified into a number of open tribal conflicts in which about 26,000 head of cattle were stolen and about the same number of people were displaced. Among



these migrant pastoralists, life is articulated through cattle ownership, as it is the primary store of wealth. The thefts left vast sections of the population destitute.

Along the new border, a number of areas are home to militias and other groups allied with the South. These groups have found themselves caught on the wrong side of the realigned border, particularly as they view Khartoum as their enemy. Sudan used indiscriminate and disproportionate force over the summer of 2011 to bombard the militias and civilians in the three border areas of Abyei, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile, with devastating results. Tension continues along the border.

North-South trade is now at a virtual standstill, and although South Sudan oil exports—its only significant source of revenue—continued to flow for six months following independence, there were no agreed terms to its transit and export through Port Sudan. At independence, South Sudan took about three-quarters of the 500,000 barrels per day of oil produced by Sudan; however, the South has no facilities to export crude. The two sides disagree over how much the South should pay the North for the use of its pipeline and port. Despite the South shutting down crude production, foregoing 98 percent of its revenue, economic activity appears unmoved. South Sudan, however, is a fragile country, and the oil decision could ultimately have a disastrous impact. Salaries of the army and state soak up 40 percent of state spending, and there will be the added burden of needing to purchase food aid for about a third of the country's 8.3 million people. Half a million South Sudanese may also be expelled

from Sudan, and their need for care will further burden government coffers. The January 2012 shutdown, which was popular initially, is expected to lose its luster soon, as it presages the austerity that will come when the \$1.5 billion in foreign reserves are expected to be exhausted.

By March 2012, under the mediation of the African Union, Sudan and South Sudan signed a framework agreement in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, addressing this oil issue, border demarcation, and citizens' rights. Following this accord, leaders of the two countries agreed to meet on April 3rd in Juba, the South Sudanese capital, to hold a much-anticipated summit in an attempt to find solutions to these outstanding issues and establish positive relations.

For General Omar al-Bashir, the Sudanese president who has been in power for 23 years, this meeting comes none too soon, as he now faces a revolt in his own military for his threat to invade the South because of the oil dispute. More than 700 officers signed a letter protesting the threat. There is also popular unrest in the northern cities of Sudan over rising food prices. This unrest will be aggravated during the coming months by the massive budget deficit and the need to layoff government workers and cut subsidies. Hence, like the South, Sudan has a compelling need to come to agreement over the transit fees to forestall severe trouble for Bashir.

Fault Line

To understand the fragility of the Sudanese peace accords, it is necessary to review a bit of history. The fault

line running across Sudan around the twelfth parallel divides the Muslim North from the non-Muslim South, Arab from African, and has been a continued cause of conflict. At independence in 1956, northerners gained control of the central government in Khartoum, and this has been a point of friction since then. The basis for this modern divide was laid in the British preparation for independence, as colonial officials were replaced largely by northerners. Out of a total of about 800 senior posts in the civil service, only 6 were given to southerners. This lack of representation and the new presence of northern administrators, teachers, and traders in the South, frequently abrasive in their dealings with the local people, soon rekindled long-standing resentments and has set the tone of North-South relations to this day.

When the army took control of the country in a 1958 coup, General Ibrahim Abboud began to promote Islam and the use of Arabic in the South, saying that this would encourage national unity. He considered Christianity an alien religion and imposed restrictions on missionary activity. He also expressed contempt for African religions, denigrated indigenous languages and customs, and ordered the construction of Muslim religious schools and mosque throughout the South. He then changed the day of rest from Sunday to Friday. Southern protests were met with increasing repression, and this prompted a number of southern politicians to flee into exile and to found the Sudan African Nationalist Union movement, whose goal was independence for the South. In 1963, armed groups of dissidents began a sustained

insurgency that lasted 10 years and claimed half a million lives. When Abboud was replaced in 1964, the same policies of repression remained.

A military coup in 1969 brought to power the Revolutionary Command Council, which was determined to sweep aside religious-based political groups. By 1983, it had abandoned any effort to accommodate southern interests, declared an “Islamic revolution” in which Sudan would become an Islamic republic governed by strict Islamic law, and terminated the constitutional arrangements with the South. These actions resulted in civil war. Southern troops fled across the eastern border with Ethiopia, where they formed the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM). The SPLM called for a united, secular, and socialist Sudan, free of Islamist rule. Following the droughts of 1983 and 1984, in which an estimated 250,000 people died, Sudan’s economy collapsed.

The 1986 elections brought power to northern politicians fully committed to continuing an Islamic state. Consequently, the SPLM refused to accept a cease-fire or to participate in the election and asked for a constitutional convention. In turn, Khartoum armed Arab militias and encouraged them to attack the South. Atrocities became common. Villages were burned, livestock was stolen, wells were poisoned, and people were abducted into slavery. The war culminated in a severe famine in 1988. As international aid entered the country, food denial was used as a weapon by both sides. By 1989, the tide of war turned against the government. As Khartoum began to negotiate with the SPLM, the concession on the suspension of Islamic law

was too much for Islamic militants, and a group calling itself the National Islamic Front overthrew the government in June 1989. This coup sunk the peace negotiations. General Omar al-Bashir, after suspending the constitution, dissolving parliament, banning trade unions, closing newspapers, and purging the officer corps, declared that Khartoum would never again be a secular capital. Bashir's coup marked the beginning of an Islamic dictatorship that dealt ruthlessly with Muslim and non-Muslim opponents. One institution after another was purged of dissent.

In reaction to the US-led recovery of Kuwait in 1991, Sudan became a hive of pan-Islamic activity, and a throng of militant groups and personalities established themselves there. Abu Nidal, Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, Ilich Ramírez Sánchez (Carlos the Jackal), and Osama bin Laden were among the most notorious, and Sudan soon became infamous as a rogue state that supported terrorist causes.

All About Oil

Bashir's jihad in the South was meanwhile prosecuted with ever greater zeal and ruthlessness, and slaughter occurred on a massive scale. Villages and relief centers were bombed indiscriminately. Military units and militias massacred civilians and plundered their cattle and property. Thousands of women and children were captured and forced into slavery. The refugees from this genocide faced starvation and were completely dependent on relief supplies reaching them through the fighting. Bashir's vision of regional jihad alarmed neighboring

governments, which began to support the southern rebellion.

Though reduced to a wasteland, the South still held the ultimate prize of oil. To protect it from the rebels, Khartoum initiated a campaign of ethnic cleansing to establish a cordon sanitaire around the fields. Based on the relative quiet in this enclave, a new consortium, the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company, was established as an umbrella for foreign investment and attracted state-owned oil companies from China and Malaysia. Within two years, a 1,540-kilometer pipeline had been built from the Nile oil fields to a new marine terminal for super-tankers near Port Sudan. By 2001, Sudan was producing 240,000 barrels per day, and oil revenues comprised 40 percent of government revenue. Bashir, with new funds at his disposal, virtually doubled defense spending between 1998 and 2000. His new helicopter gunships and armored combat vehicles were used to clear the southern population for additional areas of oil exploration.

There were several peace initiatives, but Bashir made essentially no concessions to the rebels. His Islamist agenda continued. His record of supporting international terrorism, his savage conduct of the war in the South, and his repression of all opposition made his government one of the most reviled in the world. In 2001, the US House of Representatives passed the Sudan Peace Act, which enumerated a series of sanctions to be implemented if Khartoum failed to engage in meaningful negotiations to end the war or continued to obstruct humanitarian relief. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Bashir became anxious to shed sup-

port of terrorism and became open to negotiations to end the war. Consequently, the administration of President Bush acted as an intermediary, culminating in a January 2011 referendum that allowed South Sudan to secede.

Darfur

Just when one war was coming under control, another reignited in the western region of Darfur and would rival Rwanda in magnitude of disaster. Its origin was the intensification of the traditional conflict over land between the nomadic Arab pastoralists and the settled African agriculturalists of the region, as well as the political and economic marginalization of Sudan's periphery regions by Khartoum's riverine elite.

In February 2003, a rebel group (the Darfur Liberation Army, later the Sudan Liberation Army) emerged, launched an insurgency, and demanded a share in the central government. A second group, the Justice and Equality Movement, also joined the fight. Khartoum reacted with a savage campaign of ethnic cleansing intended to destroy the local population and make way for the Arab settlers. In addition to deliberate and indiscriminate government air and ground attacks, Khartoum licensed Arab militias, known as janjaweed, to kill, loot, and rape at will. By February 2004, these actions had left a million refugees with no means of survival. When UN agencies attempted to intervene, Khartoum blocked access to the area. The US government declared the Khartoum actions genocide, and world pressure forced Bashir to stop

aggravating the disaster. The violence dropped, but the situation festered and Darfur remained lawless. In March 2009, Khartoum expelled and suspended the operations of 13 international and at least 3 domestic aid organizations operating in Darfur and across Sudan. Following this development, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Bashir on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Looking to the Future

When South Sudan seceded, it was clear that it would possess the lion's share of the Sudanese oil wealth. Despite the South's dismal infrastructure, its vast oil reserves gave hope that it could develop into a regional economic highlight. A developing South Sudan would be a boon to the region. The country would link its growing market with those in the strengthening East African Community (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi) and beyond, enhancing the infrastructure of pipelines, railways, roads, and fiber-optic communication networks.

The problem with this dream has always been one of how to get the oil safely and reliably to market, as the only immediate partner in this venture is the old foe, the North. Khartoum has spent its time before and after independence sowing unrest and instability in South Sudan and continues to subvert the fledgling land-locked democracy today through political and economic means. Indeed, both countries have been implicated in conducting proxy wars inside the other.

Despite the much-publicized meeting on April 3rd to solve the oil transit and refining issue and the export of agricultural and other products, its outcome does not represent a long-term solution. Khartoum has proven over time that it does not negotiate in good faith. Whatever the arrangement between the South and the North, it will be only a band-aid. South Sudan understands this and will use the breathing room to diminish the economic power of Khartoum in their lopsided bilateral relations, lay the groundwork through some seri-

ous strategic planning to cement its prospects for prosperity and, secure its position in the region.

Dr. Cann is an adjunct research staff member at IDA. He earned his doctorate in war studies at King's College London and has published books and articles on Africa. A retired US Navy captain and flight officer, he has been awarded the Portuguese Navy Cross Medal and the Medal of Dom Afonso Henriques for his writings on conflict in Lusophone Africa.

Source:

Meredith, Martin. 2005. *The Fate of Africa: From the Hopes of Freedom to the Heart of Despair*. New York: PublicAffairs Books.