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## Sudan

When unified (1956-2011), Sudan was Africa's largest country 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 Muslim "Arab" north and "African" south, Sudan split in two. The split did not resolve other conflicts, in Darfur, Southern Kordofan, and Blue Nile. Overlapping struggles between security forces and armed groups, nomadic and farming communities, and among ethnic groups have caused extensive displacement and suffering. Across Sudan, economic pressures, social tensions, and dissent present challenges for the Islamist government of President Omar al Bashir, who came to power in a 1989 coup. Nationwide anti-government protests in early 2019 suggest growing pressure for regime change.

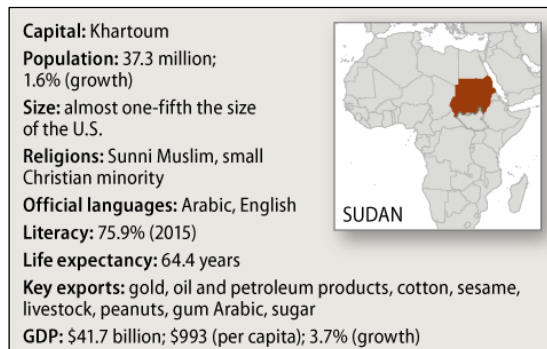
South Sudan's secession was a major financial blow to Sudan, which lost 75% of its oil production, two-thirds of export earnings, and over half its fiscal revenues. A large security sector budget, mismanagement, and corruption all compound Sudan's economic troubles, which spur periodic protests and domestic criticism of the government. The International Monetary Fund assesses that U.S. economic sanctions, imposed in 1997, also undermined economic stability and growth. Major U.S. enforcement actions for sanctions violations in 2014-2015 significantly reduced Sudan's access to U.S. dollars and further impeded its access to international financial markets and institutions.

Sudan has long sought relief from U.S. sanctions, and the outgoing Obama Administration announced a move to ease them in January 2017, after determining that Sudan had taken positive steps over a six-month period in five key areas: enhancing counterterrorism cooperation; addressing the threat of a regional armed group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA); ceasing negative interference in South Sudan; ceasing hostilities in conflict zones; and improving humanitarian access. President Trump permanently revoked the economic sanctions in October 2017. Some U.S. restrictions remain, including on debt relief and based on a state sponsor of terrorism designation—the latter is now the focus of "Phase II" of a bilateral engagement framework.

### Background

Despite Sudan's diversity, northern-led regimes espousing Islamist ideals have dominated government since independence, often pressing distant provinces to conform to the center, Khartoum, rather than accommodating local customs and institutions. Instead of forging a national identity, these policies exacerbated Sudan's racial, cultural, and religious differences. Attempts to Arabize and Islamize the countryside were resisted by southerners and other marginalized groups and sparked insurgencies in the south. Groups in other regions rose up periodically, citing local grievances. Some in the central states of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile joined the southern rebellion, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A).

**Figure 1. Sudan Key Facts**



**Source:** Fact information from CIA World Factbook and IMF, 2018.

The north-south wars 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 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 have continued on border disputes and related security issues, debts, and once-shared resources, such as oil. The proximity of Sudanese rebel activity to the border complicated its demilitarization after separation, as did the unresolved status of contested areas, notably Abyei, which was granted special semi-autonomous status in the CPA. An official referendum for Abyei residents on whether to retain their special status in Sudan or join South Sudan was slated for 2011 but has been indefinitely delayed. The deployment of the U.N. Interim Force for Abyei (UNISFA) defused a violent stand-off in 2011, but local tensions persist and still have the potential to spur a larger conflict.

Relations between Sudan and South Sudan improved in 2018. A long-delayed joint border monitoring mission is now semi-operational, though there has been little progress on border demarcation. Sudan surprised many by mediating a new peace deal between warring parties in South Sudan mid-year. If the deal holds it would allow a resumption of oil production in fields shut by South Sudan's civil war, generating needed revenue for both Khartoum and Juba.

### Ongoing Conflicts

The CPA did not resolve Sudan's longstanding center-periphery tensions. Khartoum has responded to the political demands of restive regions more often with force than with substantive reform and has financed local militias to help counter insurgencies. The militias have been linked to indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilians. Sudan has conducted aerial attacks in Darfur in violation of U.N. Security Council resolution 1591 (2005).

**Darfur.** More than a decade after the George W. Bush Administration declared genocide in Darfur in 2004, violence still plagues the region. Fighting reportedly displaced as many as 265,000 Darfuris in the first half of 2016, primarily in the Jebel Marra area, a long-time rebel stronghold. After a major offensive, the government declared Darfur free of rebellion in April 2016, and on June 30, 2016 it declared a unilateral ceasefire in Darfur and in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan. U.N. monitors suggest the military conducted aerial bombardments in Jebel Marra into late 2016, however. Sporadic skirmishes, insecurity, and government restrictions continue to limit access by aid workers and peacekeepers to some areas.

Direct clashes between the military and the Darfur rebels quieted after the 2016 offensive, but there has been little progress in the peace process. U.N. monitors report that significant clashes between government forces and one rebel faction resumed in 2018; other rebels have withdrawn to Libya to regroup. Intercommunal clashes in Darfur continue, as do attacks by armed groups on civilians, peacekeepers, and aid workers. In this context, there has been debate within the U.N. Security Council over pressure from Khartoum to end the African Union-U.N. Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). The Council agreed in 2017 to reconfigure the mission and in 2018 authorized a significant troop reduction (to just over 4,000 troops by mid-2019), with UNAMID's possible exit in June 2020.

**The ICC.** In 2005, the U.N. Security Council granted the International Criminal Court (ICC) jurisdiction over serious crimes committed in Darfur. Over a decade later, the ICC has yet to commence a trial, and five arrest warrants remain outstanding, including two for the arrest of President Bashir on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. The ICC Prosecutor has repeatedly expressed frustration with Security Council inaction on the arrest warrants. Sudan remains uncooperative with the Court.

**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 rebellion. The CPA provided for a process in which the two states might achieve greater autonomy within Sudan, but it stalled and the conflict reignited in 2011. South Sudan's ruling party denies supporting the rebels, known as the SPLM-North (SPLM-N), despite their historic relationship. The SPLM-N (now split into two factions) and the major Darfur rebel groups have a loose alliance, the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF). Khartoum has restricted aid agencies' access to rebel-held areas since the onset of the conflict.

## Political Challenges

The government faces mounting domestic pressure as 2019 begins: protests that began over the price of bread have spread across the country, with demonstrators demanding an end to the regime. Elections are scheduled for 2020, and the NCP's plan to remove term limits from the constitution to allow Bashir to run again now appears likely to spark further unrest. Several prominent opposition leaders who had joined a “National Consensus Government” (formed in 2017) have quit. The major opposition parties boycotted the last elections, in 2015, when Bashir won 94% of the vote.

## The Humanitarian Situation

Over seven million Sudanese were in need of humanitarian aid in 2018. Almost 1.8 million Darfuris remain displaced internally, and Chad hosts over 330,000 Darfuri refugees. As many as 780,000 people may be displaced in Blue Nile, Southern Kordofan, and Abyei. South Sudan and Ethiopia host over 300,000 refugees from the Two Areas. Sudan hosts over 900,000 refugees, most from South Sudan.

## Foreign Relations

Sudan has taken conspicuous steps since 2014 to repair relations with key Arab Gulf countries, which are important sources of investment. Those ties had cooled amid concern over Sudan's ties to Iran and its perceived support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Sudan has deployed as many as 14,000 troops, reportedly including child soldiers, to support the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, in return for Gulf aid. Sudan's relations with European countries also have improved in recent years, in part based on cooperation to counter migrant flows through Sudan.

## U.S. Policy and Foreign Assistance

U.S. relations with Sudan, turbulent for over two decades, have improved since 2016. After a nine-month review of Sudan's compliance with the Obama Administration's “five-track engagement strategy,” the Trump Administration announced its decision in October 2017 to make permanent the temporary sanctions relief provided by President Obama. President Trump has indicated support for continued efforts to improve bilateral relations, but has stressed that further normalization of ties will require additional progress by Sudan, including with respect for human rights and religious freedom, as well as compliance with U.N. Security Council resolutions on North Korea.

U.S. sanctions on Sudan, some of which remain in place, have been imposed through both Executive Orders and congressionally enacted legal restrictions. They are based on Sudan's debt arrears, support for international terrorism, and pervasive human rights violations. The State Department continues to rank Sudan poorly on human trafficking and has designated it as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act. Sudanese law permits the death penalty for apostasy and adultery and prison sentences or flogging for blasphemy.

Sudan has been designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism since 1993. Nonetheless, successive administrations have described Sudan as a “cooperative” counterterrorism partner and have praised its cooperation regarding the Islamic State in particular. The Trump Administration has indicated that it would consider lifting Sudan's designation if more progress is made on counterterrorism cooperation, human rights and other key issues. The government's response to recent protests may affect that decision.

Development aid for Sudan has been extremely limited since South Sudan's separation. The State Department requested \$2.4 million for FY2019 in nonemergency aid, to support civil society and conflict mitigation. U.S. humanitarian aid totaled over \$327 million in FY2018.

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