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Sudan

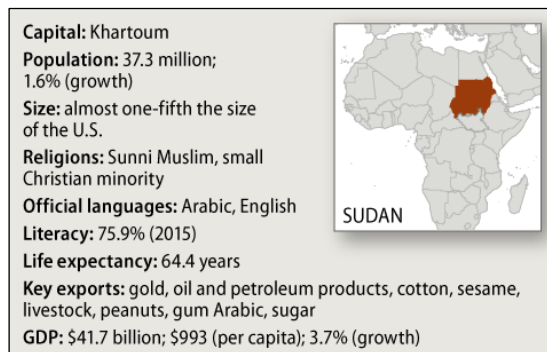
On April 11, 2019, Sudan's military removed President Omar al Bashir from office after three decades in power. Four months of near-daily protests across the country had shaken the government, and in early April, huge crowds gathered in front of the military's headquarters in Khartoum to demand regime change. The protests, triggered by austerity measures amid an economic crisis, were fueled by a range of grievances against the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and Bashir, who took power in a 1989 coup.

The trajectory of the post-Bashir transition in Sudan is uncertain. The protests continue as a coalition of opposition groups and professional unions—the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC)—seek to negotiate a transfer of power from the Transitional Military Council (TMC) that ousted Bashir to a civilian-led transitional government. The African Union has voiced support for the democratic aspirations of the Sudanese people and condemned what it terms a coup d'état, demanding that the military cede authority to civilians by June 30. While the TMC and FFC have reached agreement on some aspects of a transitional arrangement, in which elections would be held in 2023, they remain at odds over the role of military leaders in the interim government. Meanwhile, the TMC has assumed de facto authority—issuing decrees, replacing various government officials, and conducting foreign relations.

Sudan's military has a long history of intervention in politics (Bashir's 1989 coup was the country's fourth). Military leaders played prominent roles in Bashir's regime, and some observers question the TMC's commitment to reform. The protest leaders have sought to pursue change peacefully, but several violent attacks on protesters by members of the security forces have raised tensions during the negotiations. While the TMC condemned the attacks and blamed rogue elements, the incidents fuel concern about splits in the security forces and about TMC leaders' intentions. Islamists are also seen as potential spoilers.

With rampant inflation, a foreign currency shortage, and a heavy debt burden, Sudan needs international support to stabilize its economy. Its \$1.3 billion in debt arrears to the International Monetary Fund restrict access to international financing, as does its designation by the United States as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt have supported the TMC politically and financially, and by some accounts may have played a role in facilitating Bashir's ouster. The UAE and Saudi Arabia have offered \$3 billion in aid, but economists say it will only provide short-term relief. The European Union says it stands ready to assist "as soon as a civilian transition takes place." The United States has suspended bilateral talks on easing sanctions and suggested that it would be "harder" to support Sudan's economic development without a transition to civilian rule. Some Members of Congress have called for U.S. pressure to ensure a swift transfer of power to civilians in S.Res. 188 and in correspondence.

Figure 1. Sudan Key Facts



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

Background

Sudan, when unified (1956-2011), was Africa's largest country. In 2011, after decades of fighting often broadly described as a conflict between the predominately Muslim "Arab" north and non-Muslim "African" south, Sudan split in two. The split did not resolve Sudan's other conflicts; overlapping struggles between security forces and rebels, nomadic and farming communities, and among ethnic groups have caused extensive displacement and suffering.

Northern regimes espousing Islamist ideals have dominated government for much of Sudan's post-independence history, despite its diversity, pressing distant provinces to conform to the riverine heartland, rather than accommodating local customs and institutions. Instead of forging a national identity, these policies exacerbated the country's racial, cultural, and religious differences. Attempts to Arabize and Islamize the south sparked insurgencies. Groups in other regions also rose up periodically, citing local grievances. Some in the states of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile joined the southern rebels, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

The north-south wars took a heavy toll. 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." Southern Sudanese voted overwhelmingly in January 2011 to secede and achieved independence in July of that year.

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 bloated security sector budget, mismanagement, and corruption have all compounded Sudan's economic troubles. The International Monetary Fund assesses that U.S. sanctions also undermined economic 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.

While disputes remain, relations between Sudan and South Sudan have improved in recent years. Sudan surprised

many when it mediated a new peace deal between South Sudan's warring parties in 2018. The deal, if it holds, would allow oil production in fields shut by South Sudan's civil war to resume, generating needed revenue for both countries. Rebel activity along the countries' shared border complicates the border's demilitarization, as does 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 delayed indefinitely. The deployment of the U.N. Interim Force for Abyei (UNISFA) defused a violent standoff in 2011, but local tensions still have the potential to spur a larger conflict.

Conflicts

The CPA did not resolve longstanding center-periphery tensions in Sudan. Successive governments have responded to the political demands of restive regions more often with force than reform and have financed local militias to help counter insurgencies. Those militias have been linked to indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilians. U.N. experts continue to document violations of an arms embargo and ban on offensive military overflights established in Security Council resolution 1591 (2005).

Darfur. Violence continues to plague the Darfur region of western Sudan, where peace remains elusive. The government launched a major offensive in early 2016 that led to mass displacement. Fighting has diminished since Bashir declared a ceasefire in mid-2016, with some rebels withdrawing to Libya to regroup. U.N. monitors report that significant clashes between government forces and one rebel faction resumed in 2018. Sporadic skirmishes, intercommunal violence, and attacks on peacekeepers, aid workers, and civilians persist. Nevertheless, the African Union-U.N. Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) is withdrawing, with plans for the last troops to leave in 2020.

In 2005, the U.N. Security Council granted the International Criminal Court jurisdiction over serious crimes committed in Darfur. The TMC has rejected calls to extradite Bashir to the Hague, where he is wanted on Darfur-related charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

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 set out a process by which the two states might achieve greater autonomy within Sudan, but it stalled and the conflict reignited in 2011. The Sudanese government has restricted aid agencies' access to rebel-held areas.

Humanitarian Situation

Sudan began 2019 with over 5.7 million people in need of aid, a situation expected to worsen in the lean season mid-year. Roughly 1.8 million Darfuris are displaced internally, and Chad hosts over 330,000 Darfuri refugees. IDP estimates for Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile vary; South Sudan and Ethiopia host over 300,000 refugees from those areas. Over 30,000 people are displaced in Abyei. Sudan hosts over 900,000 refugees, most from South Sudan.

Sudan's Foreign Relations

Strategically positioned on the Red Sea, Sudan's political trajectory is of interest to an array of foreign actors. Egypt's engagement is driven by domestic political considerations and its concerns about the flow of the Nile. Sudan's former ties with Iran and links to the Muslim Brotherhood under Bashir strained its relations with key Arab Gulf countries, which are important sources of investment. In 2014, struggling with the loss of oil revenue and under mounting pressure from Saudi Arabia, Sudan severed relations with Tehran. It joined the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen in 2015, reportedly deploying as many as 14,000 troops, some underage, in return for Gulf aid. Bashir's refusal to cut ties with Qatar was a source of tension with the Saudis and Emiratis. Sudanese officials worked to repair relations with the United States, but Bashir also engaged Russia, already a top weapons source, seeking to expand cooperation and offering to host Russian naval facilities. Russian security contractors have been increasingly active there.

U.S. Policy and Foreign Assistance

U.S. relations with Sudan have been turbulent for three decades. The United States restricted aid after the 1989 coup, and in subsequent years imposed a range of sanctions through Executive Orders and congressional measures. Restrictions on U.S. engagement are based on Sudan's debt arrears, links to international terrorism, and pervasive human rights violations. The State Department has designated Sudan as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act.

Sudan has long sought relief from U.S. sanctions. The Obama Administration moved to ease them in January 2017 as part of a bilateral reengagement effort, after determining Sudan had taken positive steps on five "tracks": enhancing counterterrorism cooperation; ceasing hostilities in conflict zones; improving humanitarian access; ending negative interference in South Sudan; and addressing the threat of a regional armed group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

In October 2017, the Trump Administration reported that Sudan had sustained positive actions on the five tracks and permanently revoked certain sanctions. Others remain in place, and in November 2018, despite reports of backsliding on some tracks, the Administration announced "Phase II" of the bilateral engagement framework. Under Phase II, the Administration would consider rescinding Sudan's 1993 State Sponsor of Terrorism designation if the country met the statutory criteria and made further progress on the original tracks and other areas of longstanding U.S. concern, including human rights, religious freedom, outstanding terrorism-related claims, and Sudan's relations with North Korea. The United States has suspended Phase II discussions as it calls for a civilian-led transition.

Development aid for Sudan is extremely limited, and debt relief is restricted by Congress in annual appropriations. The State Department requested \$1.5 million in nonemergency aid for FY2020, to support civil society and consensus-building. The United States has provided over \$378 million in humanitarian aid in FY2018-FY2019.

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