

Sudan

Population: 35.1 million

Life expectancy: 57 years

National capital: Khartoum

Independence from Egypt and UK: 1 January 1956



Abstract

The Sudanese war between the North and the South first broke out in August 1955, just four months before independence was declared on January 1, 1956. On the one hand this war has been religious (North Islamic, South Christian/Animist) and racial (North Arab, South African). On the other hand, antagonism and conflict motivations have their roots in the history of economic and political marginalization and exploitation of the South. The dispute over the rights of the South has escalated as the hostilities have become more and more intensive, and it has finally made unification of the country very difficult, if not impossible. There are some grounds for optimism, however, that a reduction of violence could be achieved through a division of the country. Yet splits in both the Southern and Northern fronts can be expected to pose problems even in the event of separation. The international humanitarian relief effort has not been very integrated in nature, and the political aspects of humanitarian operation have not always been taken into account. Furthermore, the international approach to the conception of the conflict has been criticized as too simplistic.

The Conflict in the Sudan

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The seeds of frustration and disappointment blossomed into demonstrations, mutiny, and rebellion, marking the beginning of a bloody chapter in the history of Southern Sudan that soon brought the whole country to a full-scale civil war. In late 1980s the war in the South moved northwards into the non-Arab areas of the Nuba Mountains in Southern Kordofan, the Ingasana in the Southern Blue Nile, and, to a lesser degree, the Fur in the western region of Darfur in western Sudan. In this war the frontlines became less clear as the Southern movements found allies in the Northern opposition to General Al Bashir's government.

The magnitude of the human destruction in the Sudan since independence makes the conflict one of the most savage of our time. Over a million and a half Southern Sudanese have perished in a prolonged and bloody civil war fuelled by the fratricidal and ideological fanaticism of those who have claimed to lead the people of the Sudan. No one can give an accurate account of those who have died from bullets, malnutrition, or neglect due to the government of the Sudan and the SPLM-SPLA. Nor can we know how many others, weakened from starvation, are buried in mass and impersonal graves" (Burr & Collins 1995, 1). The refugees, who have fled to the urban areas of Northern Sudan to escape from the depredations suffered in their homelands in the South, find no solace in or sympathy from their government.

The devastation wrought by two well-armed combatants during decades of civil war has resulted also in major social upheavals in both Southern and Northern Sudan. Both the interminable conflict and the social upheavals were made worse by repeated cycles of drought, accompanied by starvation and diseases, all of which escalated the number of

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civilian deaths and contributed to the dissolution of the state and Sudanese communities. The crucial role played by the Western humanitarian relief agencies also must be reckoned with in what proved to be a continuing and controversial effort to provide aid to the long-suffering Sudanese. Furthermore, war, drought, and relief must be seen as intimately connected to the policies of the governments of the Sudan, the United Nations, and Western donors, e.g. Non Governmental Organizations (NGOS) and Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOS). The main flaw of the international approach was in its religio-ethnic orientation. The approach has treated the conflict in the Sudan as one between a Christian-African South and an Islamic-Arab North and it has neglected other dimensions, e.g. the economic (uneven development) and political (power-sharing).

Together, drought and war caused again the death and displacement of hundreds of thousands of Nilotic people, particularly the Dinka, the Anuak, and the Shiluk tribes. Once villages were burned, villagers experienced debilitating famines and drought, and once Nilotic herders suffered the destruction of their cattle, they were forced to flee or starve. They sought food and refuge beyond their devastated homeland in the North and in neighboring countries e.g. Uganda, Kenya, Republic of Central Africa ... etc. Even more debilitating was the infighting among the leaders and their followers in the Southern rebel groups in August 1991. By 1992 a virulent civil war within a civil war was raging in the Southern Sudan. This vast region of swamps, plains, forests, and mountains is a landscape hardly conducive to the conduct of conventional warfare, but it is ideal for guerrilla operations. The most recent statements by the President of the Sudan have, however, given grounds for optimism in the conflict, since they seem to indicate the government's softening stance towards the South.

Agents

The current state of affairs in the Sudan is the culmination of a long historical process in which Northerners and Southerners are the principal antagonists in a war of racial, cultural, and religious identities. This historical process, which has separated the Arab Muslim North and the African Christian and animist South, has its roots, again, in the

Arabization and Islamization of the North and the resistance to those same forces in the South. The assimilation process favored the Arab Islamic religion and culture over the African /negroid race, religion, and culture that remained dominant in the South. Northern Sudan has nearly almost completely Islamized and to a large, though lesser extent, also Arabized. The South, on the other hand, remained virtually untouched by these influences until the nineteenth century. The physical isolation of the Southern region from the outside world began to be broken only in the nineteenth century. The slave trade that ensued, which was not completely stamped out until well into this century, instilled among Southerners a deep-rooted fear, suspicion, and mistrust of Northerners. British colonial policy, especially that of Closed Districts, did little to bring the two parts of the Sudan any closer together. By stressing “the isolation of the South and implementing one of the most paternalistic administrations that colonialism introduced anywhere in Africa, the British succeeded in keeping contacts between Northerners and Southerners to the minimum.” (Rogge 1985, 49.)

Because of the Southern perception that British colonialism was being replaced by Northern Arabic and Islamic hegemony after independence, Southern resistance initially organized politically into the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM). Escalation of the conflict between the South and the North eventually turned the state and its coercive apparatus into a conflict party, which in the South was perceived to represent the North. After further escalation of the conflict, the organization of the Southern rebellion became militarized, leading to the establishment in 1983 of The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and its military wing, The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The spread of the war to the North at the end of the 1980s introduced a new agent in the war between the North and the South, when the SPLM-SPLA started a joint battle against the government along with The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which represents the Northern opposition to General Al Bashir's government.

The present agents in the Sudanese conflict are illustrated in Table 1:

Acronym, Name	Established	Represents	Affiliation	Support	Conflict With
SPLM, Sudan People's Liberation Movement	1983, following the abrogation of the Addis Ababa Agreement and the application of Islamic Laws (Shari'a) in the Sudan	The Southern Sudan	Southern Nilotic Tribes in the Sudan, particularly the Dinka	Ethiopia, Libya, Cuba, Israel, Uganda	Government (s) of the Sudan in general and the present one in particular because of its repressive policies.
SPLA, Sudan People's Liberation Army	1983. Soldiers of the previous Southern military Opposition Movements, e.g, Any-Any and Southern Sudan Liberation Movement	Majority of the Southern Sudan ethnic tribes, particularly the Dinka	under SPLM	from the same sources as the SPLM	the present government of the Sudan
NDA, National Democratic Alliance	1995	Nothern And Southern Opposition to the present government of the Sudan	a roof of, Northern and Southern political parties.	U.S.A., Uganda, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia	the present government of the Sudan
NSG, National Salvation Government	30th June 1989, following a military coup	the National Islamic Front (NIF)and its supporters in the armed forces	the National Islamic Front and its collaborators from Muslim Brotherhood, the Umma Party, the Democratic Unionist Party and some Southerners	Iran, Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya	

Motives

On the one hand, the root motivations of hostility between the North and the South in the Sudan are related to the exploitative economic structure of interaction between the two regions. On the other hand, they are related to the effort of extending a single normative order (Islam) over a country that is culturally divided and has no common social basis for the introduced order. Another root motivation is related to the use of the Nile: the environmental motivation seems to be quite clear in the fighting between the South and the North (Laakso & Launonen 1998, 40). The fact that the River Nile and its tributaries which run through the Sudanese territory for hundreds of kilometers, has always played a significant role in determining the character and the policies of the country from times immemorial to the present day.

The exploitative economic relationship is deeply rooted in the unequal regional practices of the colonial administration, of which the most extreme expression was the slave trade. The preoccupying concern among both the Northerners and Southerners at the dawn of independence was the creation of a government capable of rising to the task of building a strong self-supporting nation, with a comprehensive plan aimed at industrialization, educational expansion, and standardized costs of living, as well as having a commitment to a less exploitative and divisive socio-economic structure. Unfortunately, independence was born in an atmosphere characterized by the malaise of political opportunism and nepotism. Factionalism and sectarianism rather than party politics were the order of the day. Neither military nor civilian governments were able to solve the problem of the exploitative relationship. Successive governments established an exploitative economic relationship between the centralizing powers of the state and its hinterlands or peripheries and created a group of people with an ambiguous status in relation to the state. The inequalities in economic, educational and political opportunities triggered by British colonial policy of the twentieth century were in turn aggravated again by successive governments, which in some cases built upon earlier patterns of socio-economic and political injustices. "The war, seen objectively, must be attributed primarily to comparative underdevelopment. The lack of development in the South gives rise to numerous and legitimate complaints. The Southern Sudan has not received its fair share of development resources or attention either under colonial rule or since independence" (Ahmed 1998, 8).

Furthermore, the extension of state structures in the South also contributed to its deprivation. It frustrated and pained Southerners to see Northerners coming to the South and filling the bulk of the positions in the civil service, which had been, previously held by colonial officials. In the eyes of Southerners self-government was simply a change of masters. The result of Sudanization, i.e, the filling of positions in the civil service by Sudanese officials, "sent shock waves throughout the South. Discontent spread like a bush-fire in the South, and fears of Northern domination were openly held and echoed by townsmen and villagers alike, whether educated or illiterate, old or young. Feelings of

bitterness ran high and idle thinkers began to play with the idea of the imminence of another era of slavery at the hands of the Arabs. Conditions in the South became so appalling as to threaten the security of the state. Every Southerner was ready for a direct physical and political confrontation with the North” (Ruay 1994, 72).

Independence did not solve the problem of economic structures, but instead, along with escalating of hostilities between North and South, it strengthened the second impetus of war by consolidating a unified order with less tolerance to the diversity of the Sudanese.²

Governments sought national unity by adopting or pursuing the forced assimilation of the South through Arabization and Islamization, which again for the South was tantamount to replacing British colonialism with Northern Arabic and Islamic hegemony. Southern resistance was intensified, first in the political struggle for a federal government and later in an armed strife for secession. In the late 1980s the situation changed even more radically in favor of the religious right, represented by the National Islamic Front (NIF). On June 30th, 1989, a radical Islamic faction in the armed forces, led by General Omar Hassan Ahmed Al Bashir took over. Their Islamic policies have widened the cleavages even within the SPLM-SPLA and have sharpened the issues and options confronting the nation. As a result, religion has become such a highly divisive factor that it is beginning to reactivate calls for secession again even within the SPLM-SPLA, a movement which had been committed to the unity of the Sudan. Strong currents of Islamic fundamentalism and Pan-Arab cultural nationalism in the North further inflamed the conflict especially in recent years deepening the Southern alienation. The Islamic laws, in effect, make non-Muslims second class citizens and curtail the rights of Muslims who are not fundamentalists” (Prendergast 1997, 6-7).

² The roots of this source of conflict in the Sudan were already planted in the colonial period, the Mahdist State introduced a particular brand of militant Islam in the late nineteenth century. The increase of power of Islamic groups in the independent state had the same effect as during the colonial period, giving rise to grievances in the South and also to disputes between the South and the North.

Instruments

The introduction of sophisticated weaponry on both sides greatly increased the intensity of the conflict. Even more terrifying was the use by the Sudanese government of displaced people and ethnic militias to support its armed forces, which led to atrocities that the professional officers of the Sudan's government army could not prevent and which was instrumental in the displacement of millions of Southern Sudanese. At first the "SPLM-SPLA soldiers possessed only their weapons, but these were soon augmented with weaponry seized during engagements at Rumbek, Yirol and elsewhere. Colonel Moammar Kadhafi, the Libyan strongman, was pleased to purvey arms, particularly, if doing so would embarrass his enemy, President Nimeiri. Major Arok Athon Arok, Commander of the SPLA's Locust (Jarad) battalion, claimed he was included in a delegation that had travelled to Libya and obtained large quantities of arms. They ranged from guns to SAM-7 anti-aircraft missiles, with many weapons in between and from December 1984 through April 1985 they were shipped through Ethiopia to Garang's headquarters in the Baro Salient" (ibid., 17).

As the SPLM-SPLA firepower increased, some analysts assumed that additional weaponry must have been provided by yet another regional strongman, Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile Miriam. Although John Garang, the leader of SPLM-SPLA, denied the allegation, the SPLA had no difficulty purchasing small arms in Ethiopia, given the fact that huge quantities had been provided to them by the Soviet Union and the fact that Mengistu was happy to discomfort Nimeiri for harboring Eritrean and Tigrean rebels. Certainly the SPLA was freely allowed to recruit Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia, but more important was Mengistu's willingness to permit the SPLM-SPLA leadership to use Naru, near Addis Ababa, as its headquarters and the center for its clandestine broadcasts. Radio SPLM-SPLA, which began to broadcast short wave programs in English, Arabic, and Nilotic languages in October 1984, was an effective weapon in increasing military recruitment and morale. However, the radio also pounded away at the Muslim extremists and their obvious effort to create an Islamic state in the Republic of the Sudan.

In counterpoint, the Muslim extremists branded Garang a Marxist, who was to be destroyed along with all Sudanese communists. Despite Garang's denial, analysts, both inside and outside the Sudan, including those who had no use for the Muslim Brotherhood, the National Islamic Front, or its movement, questioned the SPLM-SPLA ideology. Clearly, the Ethiopian connection necessitated a certain amount of Marxist rhetoric that was anti-North, anti-Arabic, and anti-Islamic. The present government of the Sudan claims that this Ethiopian connection is also supported by Cuba, Israel, former East Germany, Eritrea, Uganda, and Chad.

With regard to the present Islamic government of President Al Bashir, it resuscitated a moribund military agreement with Libya, which shipped armaments to the Sudan from July 1989 onwards. The government's arms build-up has been augmented by support from China, Iraq, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The increase in the amount of weaponry, Islamic militancy, and authoritarianism in the Sudan soon led to the aggravation of the conflict, violations in human rights, and the frustration of western relief agencies at a time of famine, drought, and dislocation.

Attempts to mediate a settlement of the conflict have been made by Nigeria, the Intergovernmental Agency for Drought and Development (IGADD), the International Council of Churches (ICC), the government of Norway, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and the Arab League. These attempts however, have been concentrated on the cessation of violence and the facilitation of humanitarian assistance, while the heart of the dispute and the root-causes of the conflict have not been addressed. To reach a settlement of the Sudan's long conflict, several policy alternatives can be conceived. One approach assumes an overriding goal of national unity and then builds on those elements that are most likely to achieve this aim. A major factor in this approach is the argument that a shared African identity will provide the common denominator on which a unitive national identity can be built. A second argument recognizes that the identities of Northern and Southern Sudan have evolved into sharply contrasting racial, cultural, and religious self-perceptions. This argument offers not a redefinition of national identity to achieve unity, but rather a form of diversified co-existence based on the principle of "live

and let live”. If the above-mentioned alternatives sound utopian and unrealistic, then it is time to recognize that unity is not an end in itself, that the Sudan has failed to guarantee the minimum standards of what a state owes its citizens, that the people of the Sudan have suffered too much from the conflict for far too long, and that partition may be the only option left to bring lasting peace and development to a beleaguered country.

Sources

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Chronology

- **1820-1885:** Turco-Egyptian Rule in the Sudan
- **1885:** Mahdist Revolution, the overthrow of Turco-Egyptian rule and the establishment of a theocratic state.
- **1898:** Collapse of the Mahdist State due to military defeat under the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium.
- **1900-1947:** Separation of the South from the North.
- **12-13 June 1947:** Juba Administrative Conference and the resolution of the Sudan Administrative Conference annexing the South to the North.
- **16 August 1955:** Army mutiny in Torit in Southern Sudan.
- **1 January 1956:** Sudan achieves independence from Britain.
- **17 November 1958:** Military takes power under the command of General Ibrahim Abboud.
- **The Spring of 1960:** Development of the Southern Sudan Political Movement in Exile and the birth of Anya -Nya, the embryo from which Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) and the later Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) and its military wing Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) eventually originated
- **24 October 1964:** October uprising and the fall of General Abboud and his military regime.
- **16 March 1965:** Round Table Conference convened to reach a peaceful settlement to the North-South conflict.
- **25 May 1969:** Military seizes power under the command of General Jafaar Muhammed Nimeiri, the Northern-Southern conflict enters a new phase and acquires new dimensions.
- **1972:** Addis Ababa Agreement (AAA) concluded and autonomy granted to the South.
- **1983:** Formation of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement and its military wing the Sudan People’s Liberation Army following the abolition of the Addis Ababa Agreement
- **April 1985:** Collapse of Nimeiri’s military regime.
- **1985-89:** Various peace initiatives to settle the North-South conflict.
- **30 June 1989:** Return of the military junta under the command of General Omar Hassan Al Bashir and the inception of a new authoritarian regime, a new era of aggravated conflict and an ideological (Islamic) revolution in the Sudan.

- **January 1999:** A European ministerial delegation visits the Sudan and discusses official peace proposals: continuation of the comprehensive cease-fire and definition of the date for the next round of peace negotiations between Khartoum and the SPLM in Nairobi.
- **February 1999:** The Sudanese President, Omar Hassan Al-Bashir: “the option of separation with peace is better than that of unity with the continuation of the war.”
- **11 March 1999:** Libyan leader Col Moammar Kadhafi negotiates with the Sudanese president over the issue of peace in the Sudan.