



**BRIEFING PAPER**

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# Sudan: December 2017 update

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**Contents:**

1. The political situation
2. International dimensions



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## Summary

Sudan declared independence in 1956, having previously been under joint Anglo-Egyptian governance for the first half of the twentieth century. President Omar al-Bashir has ruled Sudan since taking power in a coup in 1989. The International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for the President for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

A two-decade long civil war was brought to a formal end in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The CPA paved the way for a referendum in southern Sudan on independence in January 2011. South Sudan subsequently declared independence on 9 July 2011 and became the most recent country to join the [United Nations](#). South Sudan has since become embroiled in civil war.

While the civil war has formally ended peace within Sudan remains elusive. There are a myriad of armed groups with different motives, support bases and allegiances within Sudan. Unilaterally declared ceasefires by the Government of Sudan and most armed groups has significantly reduced the level of fighting in the main conflict areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile (collectively referred to as the Two Areas) and Darfur. An African Union-United Nations mission in Darfur ([UNAMID](#)) peacekeeping mission has been present in Darfur since 2007.

International peace efforts to bring a complete end to hostilities in Darfur and the Two Areas has been led by the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel. This resulted in the Government of Sudan and opposition groups signing the Roadmap Agreement in 2016. However efforts to implement the Roadmap have stalled.

There has also been no progress in implementing a 2011 agreement regarding Abyei, the disputed area which borders Sudan and South Sudan.

A 'National Dialogue' led by the Government resulted in a range of recommendations on domestic issues but was criticised for lacking in inclusivity and a failure to implement the recommendations.

Opposition parties largely boycotted the 2015 Presidential and parliamentary elections, in which President al-Bashir was re-elected. The UK Government is amongst those calling on the Sudanese Government to ensure political and press freedoms.

The UK is among a number of countries, and NGOs, who are pressing the Sudanese Government to enable humanitarian access. There are thought to be 3.3 million internally displaced persons and an [estimated](#) 4.8 million needed humanitarian assistance in 2016.

Sudan's relations with western countries has improved in recent years. The EU has prioritised migration and Sudan is part of the 'Khartoum Process' aimed at preventing migration at source in the Horn of Africa. At the request of the Government of Sudan, the UK launched the UK-Sudan strategic dialogue in 2016 covering a range of bilateral issues. The UK continues to issue statements on Sudan with its Troika partners: the US and Norway.<sup>1</sup>

In October 2017 the United States lifted economic sanctions in recognition of Sudan's efforts to maintain ceasefires, improve humanitarian access and cooperate on counter-

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<sup>1</sup> The UK, US and Norway formed the Troika during the negotiations that ultimately led to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. The Troika was reformed in 2009. [HC Deb 2 November 2009 c669W](#)

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terrorism efforts. A UN [arms embargo](#) on Darfur remains in place, as does an EU arms embargo on Sudan.

Sudan's foreign policy has in recent years noticeably shifted way from its long-time ally, Iran, towards the Gulf States. President al-Bashir visited Russia in 2017.

The capital of Sudan is Khartoum and the official language is Arabic. Sudan borders seven African countries and across the Red Sea from Saudi Arabia.<sup>2</sup>

##### **Related library briefing papers**

Library briefing paper [Sudan: 2003-2009](#), provides a detailed background to Sudan including events leading up to and subsequent to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord; the conflict in Darfur; unrest in Eastern Sudan. [Sudan: peace or war, unity or secession?](#), RP10-40, 2 June 2010, looked at events in 2010.

This briefing paper focuses on Sudan rather than South Sudan. A list of library papers on South Sudan can be found in section 1.1.

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<sup>2</sup> The seven are Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya and South Sudan

# 1. The political situation

Sudan has been ruled by President al-Bashir since 1989.<sup>3</sup> A devastating two-decade long civil war (which in very simplistic turns pitted the mainly Christian and Animist peoples of the south against the predominantly Arab Muslim north<sup>4</sup>) was brought to a close in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The CPA was signed between the ruling **National Congress Party** (NCP) and the main southern rebel movement, the **Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army** (SPLM/Army).

In doing so, the CPA also brought to a temporary end related conflicts in the Nuba Mountains, which are part of South Kordofan state, and in Blue Nile State (together these are known as the Two Areas). A separate peace agreement for Darfur was agreed in 2011. While the level of violence has certainly declined in recent years the situation in both Darfur and the Two Areas remains precarious. Efforts to bring about a permanent end to hostilities is currently centred on the Roadmap signed by the major parties in 2016.

## 1.1 The CPA and South Sudan

One of the most significant outcomes of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was the provision to enable southern Sudan to gain independence as a separate state within six years.

The civil war was fought largely between southern-based rebels and forces aligned to the Khartoum-based Government (Khartoum is located in the north of pre-2011 Sudan). The CPA provided for extensive autonomy in the South and agreements over oil revenues generated under its jurisdiction. The SPLM participated in a Government of National Unity.

Significantly the CPA provided the South with the right to secede after a six-year interim period. In January 2011 a referendum on separation was duly held and on 9 July 2011 South Sudan declared independence. It became the 193<sup>rd</sup> and newest member of the United Nations.

South Sudan is led by President Salva Kiir Mayadit of the SPLM/A. Salva Kiir took over the leadership after the death of the SPLM/A's long-time leader John Garang.

Despite high hopes for the new nation, South Sudan has been embroiled in a brutal civil war since December 2013. This briefing focuses on Sudan rather than South Sudan and therefore does not delve into the conflict within South Sudan. Background on developments in South Sudan, including the humanitarian situation, can be found in the following library papers:

- [South Sudan: April 2017 update](#), CBP7944, 10 April 2017 – contains a brief update on the political and humanitarian situation
- [War and peace in South Sudan](#), CBP7532, 14 March 2016 – provides a brief overview of the main players and how it started
- [Civil war in South Sudan: a primer](#), CBP6788, 23 March 2015 – looks at the origins, character and impact of the civil war

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<sup>3</sup> President al-Bashir led the coup by the National Salvation Council (or Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation) in 1989 before being appointed President in 1993.

<sup>4</sup> "Sudan country profile", BBC News, 24 July 2017

## 1.2 Government, opposition and elections

President al-Bashir has been re-elected several times since taking power, most recently in 2015, but most opposition parties boycotted that vote. Nearly all observers agreed the 2010 elections fell well short of “international standards”.<sup>5</sup>

### 2015 elections

The most recent Presidential and Parliamentary elections were held in April 2015. Official election results show President al-Bashir receiving 94.5% of the vote. Few opposition parties participated in the election.<sup>6</sup>

President al-Bashir’s National Congress Party (NCP) won 323 of the 426 seats in the national assembly (the Majlis Watani). The second largest party is the DUP, with 15 seats, while the rest are held by independents and other groupings.<sup>7</sup>

Prior to the vote, the **Sudan troika**<sup>8</sup> of the UK, US and Norway, criticised Sudan for its “failure to create a free, fair and conducive elections environment”. The Troika specifically highlighted restrictions on political rights and freedoms, the lack of a credible national dialogue and the continuation of armed conflict. The Troika concluded “the outcome of these elections cannot be considered a credible expression of the will of the Sudanese people.”<sup>9</sup>

The EU issued a [statement](#) on the eve of the elections warning the environment in Sudan “cannot produce a credible result with legitimacy throughout the country.”

Despite domestic boycotts and international condemnation the election was viewed as reinforcing President al-Bashir’s hold on power. Crisis Group said the re-election of President al-Bashir “signalled a strengthening of the political centre around its long-time leader, neutralising opposition and forcing an empty “national dialogue” process with little prospect of significant outcomes.”<sup>10</sup>

Sudan announced a National Consensus Government in May 2017. It remains dominated by the ruling NCP. It is tasked with implementing the recommendations of the National Dialogue and the adoption of a new constitution.<sup>11</sup>

### The NCP and the Islamist movement

Sudan watchers have noted a marked shift away from the early Islamist leanings of the ruling National Congress Party. The death of the ‘father’ of the Islamist movement in Sudan, Hassan al-Turabi, in March 2016 in particular left Sudan with few younger, credible figures to revive the Islamist movement.<sup>12</sup> Analysis by Crisis Group suggested a clear shift by the ruling party away from its once fervent commitment to a radical Islamist ideology to one that is more pragmatic, evident in its pivot away from Iran towards the Gulf States.<sup>13</sup> An Inquiry by the APPG on Sudan suggests al-Turabi’s death “symbolised

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<sup>5</sup> Jon Lunn, Sudan: Peace or war, unity of secession?, RP10/40, 2 June 2010. This Commons briefing paper provides detailed analysis of the 2010 elections and the build-up to the 2011 referendum.

<sup>6</sup> “[Sudan’s Omar al-Bashir extends 26-year presidency with 94.5% of the vote](#)”, the Guardian, 27 April 2015

<sup>7</sup> [CIA world Factbook](#), accessed 13 November 2011

<sup>8</sup> The UK, US and Norway formed the Troika during the negotiations that ultimately led to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. The Troika was reformed in 2009. [HC Deb 2 November 2009 c669W](#)

<sup>9</sup> “[Troika statement on elections in Sudan](#)”, UK FCO, 20 April 2015. This position was repeated by the Government after the elections [HL868](#), 13 July 2015

<sup>10</sup> “[Sudan’s Islamists: from Salvation to survival](#)”, International Crisis Group, 21 March 2016

<sup>11</sup> “[Sudan announces awaited national dialogue government](#)”, Sudan Tribune, 12 May 2017

<sup>12</sup> “[Hassan al-Turabi obituary](#)”, the Guardian, 11 March 2016

<sup>13</sup> “[Sudan’s Islamists: from Salvation to survival](#)”, International Crisis Group, 21 March 2016

the end of the political project of Islamic revolution".<sup>14</sup> Analysis by Africa Confidential suggests there are three main factions within the Islamist Movement outside the NCP led by : Ibrahim el Senoussi, Ali el Haj (both PCP) and Ghazi Salah el Din al Atabani of Reform Now.<sup>15</sup>

## Opposition parties and armed groups

There are a vast array of armed groups in Sudan that have evolved over the years. Internal divisions within groupings have led to a complex web of factions amid ever-shifting alliances. Opposition groups or leaders have at times joined the government or endorsed peace agreements only to later re-join the rebellion.

The **Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North** (SPLM-N) is the key opposition armed group in the Two Areas. It emerged from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) which was the lead rebel group during the civil war years fighting for independence for southern Sudan. The SPLM is now the government of South Sudan.

The **SPLM-N** is a signatory to the Roadmap and designated negotiator for the Two Areas. However in 2017 divisions within the party erupted into violent clashes in Blue Nile state after the resignation of deputy chairman Abdelaziz Al-Hilu in March. Over the summer the party reportedly split between supporters of chairman Malig Aggar (mostly ethnic Ingessana) and al-Hilu (mostly ethnic Uduk) and Yassir Arman, the SPLM-N's lead negotiator.<sup>16</sup> Al-Hilu was appointed leader at the SPLM-N conference in October 2017.<sup>17</sup> Africa Confidential viewed the in-fighting as strengthening President al-Bashir's position.<sup>18</sup>

There are a number of armed groups in Darfur. The most prominent include the **Sudan Liberation Army** (SLA) and the **Justice and Equality Movement** (JEM) led by Khalil Ibrahim. The SLA later splintered into various factions of whom the most prominent include the Abdul Wahid-led **SLA-AW** and the Minni Arkou Minnawi-led **SLA-MM**.<sup>19</sup> The SLA-MM was the only Darfur group to sign 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement. Minnawi subsequently served as an advisor to President al-Bashir before re-joining opposition forces in 2011.<sup>20</sup>

In 2011 the four strongest armed groups from Darfur and the Two Areas joined forces to form the **Sudan Revolutionary Front** (SRF). The groups were the SPLM-N, SLA-AW, SLA-MM and JEM. Together, they agreed a common objective – to overthrow President al-Bashir.<sup>21</sup> Minnawi was elected leader of the SRF at a conference in Paris in October 2016.<sup>22</sup>

The SRF has now reportedly been subsumed into **Sudan Call**, an umbrella which covers all the major parties.<sup>23</sup> Sudan Call issued a statement in 2014 calling for an end to conflict and the one-party state regime and transition to a democratic system which recognises

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<sup>14</sup> 'Engagement beyond the centre: an enquiry report on the future of UK-Sudan Relations', All Party Parliamentary Group for Sudan and South Sudan, February 2017

<sup>15</sup> "The power struggle after Hassan al-Turabi", Africa Confidential, 14 March 2016

<sup>16</sup> Crisis Watch monthly update [August 2017](#). See also updates for April to October 2017 on discord within SPLM-N.

<sup>17</sup> The SPLM-N was led by Yasir Arman but after a leadership dispute he was replaced at a SPLM-N conference in early October 2017: Crisis Watch October 2017 update.

<sup>18</sup> African Confidential, 23 June 2016, vol 58, no 13

<sup>19</sup> "[Who are Sudan's rebels?](#)", BBC News, 23 February 2010; Andrew McCutchen, "[The Sudan Revolutionary Front: its formation and development](#)", Small Arms Survey, October 2014

<sup>20</sup> "Why the peacekeepers stay in Darfur", Africa Confidential, 10 July 2015

<sup>21</sup> Detailed analysis of the SRF is available in Andrew McCutchen, "[The Sudan Revolutionary Front: its formation and development](#)", Small Arms Survey, October 2014

<sup>22</sup> "[PCP to meet SRF leaders in Germany over peace in Sudan](#)", Sudan Tribune, 15 December 2017

<sup>23</sup> "The seurocrats get stronger", Africa Confidential, vol 57 no 22, 4 November 2016

human and political rights.<sup>24</sup> It was signed by the National Umma Party and the SLA-MM, both of whom signed the 2016 Roadmap.<sup>25</sup> According to the Sudan Tribune, Sudan Call also includes the Civil Society Initiative, the Sudan Congress Party (SCuP), Sudanese Baath Party (SBP), Centre Alliance Party (CAP), Sudanese National Party (SNP) and Sudanese National Alliance (SNA).<sup>26</sup> Sudan Call's Leadership Council met in Ethiopia in October 2016 to set up Leadership Council Groups to facilitate communication and coordination amongst its member organisations.<sup>27</sup>

In terms of political parties, two of the most prominent and oldest parties are the **National Umma Party** (NUP), led by former Prime Minister, **Sadiq al-Mahdi**, and the **Democratic Unionist Party** (DUP). The DUP won seats in the 2015 legislative elections but the NUP boycotted them having previously called for the elections to be postponed and a transitional government of unity to be formed with the power to amend the constitution.<sup>28</sup>

### 1.3 Reconciliation processes

International efforts to bring to an end the two major conflicts within Sudan are focused on the African Union High Level Implementation Panel. In 2014 the Troika (UK, US and Norway) said the AUHIP's "one process, two tracks" mediation approach represents "the best opportunity to secure synchronised Cessation of Hostilities agreements in Darfur and the Two Areas."<sup>29</sup>

Led by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, the panel mediated a Roadmap Agreement signed by the Government and rebel groups in 2016. The Roadmap clearly designates the parties responsible for negotiations:

- Darfur: the Government and JEM and SLM-M
- Two Areas: the Government and SPLM-N

The President separately launched a 'National Dialogue' in 2014 to bring various parties together to bring about domestic reform.

### The African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) and the Roadmap

The African Union High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan and South Sudan (AUHIP) was originally set up by the African Union Peace and Security Council in 2009.<sup>30</sup> It was tasked with facilitating the Sudanese parties in their implementation of the CPA and the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). The AUHIP is led by Thabo Mbeki, the former President of South Africa (when it was first established it also included the former Presidents of Nigeria, Abdulsalami Abubaker, and Burundi, Pierre Buyoya).<sup>31</sup>

In March 2016 agreement was reached with the Government on the [Roadmap](#). The Roadmap would "accelerate progress towards ending the conflict in Darfur and the Two Areas of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile". In August 2016 the most prominent groups

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<sup>24</sup> "[Sudan Call statement](#)", Sudan Tribune, 3 December 2014

<sup>25</sup> "[Joint Statement welcoming the Sudan Call's Signing of the AUHIP Roadmap](#)", EU external action service, 8 August 2016

<sup>26</sup> "[Sudan Call rejects AUHIP's proposal to meet internal dialogue committee](#)", Sudan Tribune, 12 April 2017

<sup>27</sup> "The securocrats get stronger", Africa Confidential, vol 57 no 22, 4 November 2016

<sup>28</sup> John Mukum Mbaku, [Sudan: election 2015](#), Brookings Institution, 1 April 2015

<sup>29</sup> "[Troika statement on Sudan](#)", UK FCO, 23 December 2014

<sup>30</sup> The name originally only referred to Sudan. South Sudan was added in 2012

<sup>31</sup> Statements from the AUHIP can be found on the African Union website using the advanced search option with [AUHIP](#). The World Peace Foundation at the Fletcher School, Tufts University, has also collated documents on the [AUHIP](#).

in Darfur and the Two Areas joined the Government in signing the Roadmap. They were the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army-Minni Minawi (SLM/A-MM), the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) and the National Umma Party (NUP).<sup>32</sup> The Chairperson of the African Union described the adoption of the Roadmap Agreement as an "important breakthrough in returning the Sudanese security and political negotiations and processes back on track to achieve a permanent end of the conflicts of Sudan."<sup>33</sup>

### Box 1: Key points of the 2016 Roadmap

- Resume negotiations to conclude a cessation of hostilities leading to a permanent ceasefire agreement
- Negotiations on the Two Areas will be conducted between the Sudanese Government and the SPLM-N
- Negotiations on Darfur will be conducted between the Sudanese Government and JEM and SLM-MM
- Parties will also provide for humanitarian assistance
- Acknowledges the National Dialogue but also notes the Dialogue did not include the signatories to the Roadmap (i.e. JEM, SLM/A-MM), SPLM-N and NUP
- Parties to negotiate a roadmap with timeframes

The UK Government, as part of the Troika, welcomed the signing of the Roadmap, describing it as a "valuable step towards ending the wars in Sudan."<sup>34</sup> The Troika issued a further [statement](#) in February 2017 urging the signatories to honour the agreement and called on the Sudanese Government to "create an environment that is conducive to freedom of expression and political participation by both armed and unarmed opposition in Sudan." The Troika also called on those who had not signed the Agreement - specifically the SLA-AW - to "cease hostilities and immediately engage with the AUHIP peace process."

However splits within the SPLM-N and disagreements over humanitarian access to the Two Areas has stalled efforts to implement the Roadmap.

## National Dialogue

The Government launched a National Dialogue in January 2014. President al-Bashir pledged comprehensive reforms but the initiative stalled quickly. Within six months the Troika was questioning the "sincerity" of the Government in announcing the initiative amid continued violence in Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur, and the "restriction and increased repression of individual, political and press freedoms"<sup>35</sup> (for example the arrests of notable opposition leaders al-Mahdi, of the National Umma Party, and the leader of the Sudanese Congress Party, Ibrahim al-Sheikh).

However the UK, through the Troika, continued to support the National Dialogue Process. In March 2015 the Troika said:

<sup>32</sup> "[Joint statement on the Roadmap agreement for Sudan](#)", UK FCO, 9 August 2016; "[Sudanese opposition groups sign peace roadmap, say ready to engage in peace talks](#)", 28 November 2017

<sup>33</sup> "[Statement by chairperson of the Commission on the signing of the Sudan Roadmap Agreement](#)", African Union, 9 August 2016

<sup>34</sup> "[Joint statement on the Roadmap agreement for Sudan](#)", UK FCO, 9 August 2016

<sup>35</sup> "[Joint statement on national dialogue in Sudan](#)", UK FCO, 10 June 2014

A comprehensive and inclusive National Dialogue remains the best opportunity to achieve a representative political system, and to confront fundamental issues of governance, political inclusiveness, resource sharing, identity, and social equality.<sup>36</sup>

The first National Dialogue Conference was held in October 2015 and the Dialogue was officially closed in October 2016 by a National Conference.<sup>37</sup> The Government published more than 900 [recommendations](#) of committees tasked to examine specific areas. These are wide-ranging and include an immediate cessation of hostilities, permanent ceasefire and amnesty. It also issued a [National Document](#).<sup>38</sup> The UK Government has welcomed Khartoum's "stated readiness to keep the National Dialogue process open for other groups to join, after October 2016" and also "supported the efforts of the AUHIP to convince the government to proceed with the National Dialogue in an inclusive way, and to convince the opposition to resume their participation constructively."<sup>39</sup>

## Human rights

Sudan's record on human rights has long been recognised as poor. Harassment and arrest of activists, journalists and political figures; restrictions on freedom of the press, peacefully assembly, freedom of expression and detentions are among concerns raised by the UK Government in successive human rights reports.<sup>40</sup> The most recent report for 2016 said:

We have seen further restrictions on freedom of expression. The government continued to confiscate newspaper runs. We remain concerned by arbitrary arrests and reports of torture and ill-treatment by the Sudanese authorities of political figures and human rights defenders, including Mudawi Ibrahim Adam who remains in detention. Restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, and sexual and gender-based violence with impunity by both state and non-state armed forces, remain concerning.<sup>41</sup>

The EU has issued statements calling on the Sudanese Government to respect freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and the media, to release detainees and give them an opportunity for fair trial, and to conduct credible investigations into a number of killings.<sup>42</sup> The UK Government says it is using the UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue to encourage Sudan to work towards ratifying the Convention Against Torture.<sup>43</sup>

A BBC profile of Sudanese media says broadcasting is highly restricted and state TV and radio reflect government policy. Sudan ranks among the bottom 10 countries in the [Reporters Without Borders](#) annual press freedom index. Reporters without Borders warned in August 2017 of an increase in free speech violations by the National Intelligence and Security Service, including seizures of newspaper issues, arbitrary arrests, interrogations and prosecutions.<sup>44</sup>

Human Rights Watch has called on the UN Human Rights Council to strengthen scrutiny of Sudan. In a letter to the Council in September 2017 HRW said Sudan "continues to repress civil and political rights, with crackdowns on protesters, human rights defenders, journalists, opposition party members, and religious minorities." HRW added "restrictions

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<sup>36</sup> ["Troika statement on National Dialogue in Sudan"](#), UK FCO, 24 March 2015

<sup>37</sup> Joint Staff Working Group [Annual Report Horn of Africa Regional Action Plan 2015/2016](#), Council of the European Union, 11 May 2017. Be aware there is an entirely separate National Dialogue underway in South Sudan.

<sup>38</sup> Further official publications on the National Dialogue can be found on the [Sudanese National Dialogue](#) website

<sup>39</sup> [HL3324](#), 30 November 2017

<sup>40</sup> FCO Human Rights and Democracy Reports dating back to 2003 are available on the [Gov.uk](#) website

<sup>41</sup> [Human Rights and Democracy Report 2016](#), FCO, 20 July 2017

<sup>42</sup> Joint Staff Working Group [Annual Report Horn of Africa Regional Action Plan 2015/2016](#), Council of the European Union, 11 May 2017

<sup>43</sup> [PQ118063](#), 13 December 2017

<sup>44</sup> ["Sudanese intelligence agency's offensive against journalists"](#), Reporters without Borders, 24 August 2017

on freedom of expression and the media continue, and the national security agency continues to arbitrarily detain, ill-treat and torture civilians.” HRW also accused Sudan of targeting human rights defenders with “trumped up criminal charges, arbitrary detention, and show trials” and of restricting freedom of religion and belief. The basic rights of women are routinely repressed, HRW said, noting that citizenship rights, movement and autonomy are all circumscribed by laws which prevent women from obtaining state identification and travelling without the permission of a male companion.<sup>45</sup>

### Box 2: humanitarian situation

Decades of war and conflict, prompting internal displacement, and economic marginalisation combine to create a perilous state of living for many Sudanese.

- 4.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Sudan, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) has estimated. This is 1 million fewer than in 2016. 3 million people are in need in Darfur<sup>46</sup>
- 3.3 million internally displaced persons, as of 31 December 2016<sup>47</sup>
- Nearly one third of Darfur’s population remain displaced, the UN reported in November 2017<sup>48</sup>
- Over 450,000 refugees from South Sudan have crossed into Sudan since 2013, of which 185,000 arrived in 2017<sup>49</sup>

## 1.4 The Two Areas

The Two Areas are South Kordofan and the Blue Nile State. They are located in southern Sudan.<sup>50</sup>

The 2005 CPA *Protocol on the Resolution of the Conflict in Southern Kordofan/Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile States* temporarily brought an end to the conflicts that had devastated these contested areas.

Unlike the South and Abyei (see below), the CPA only provided for ‘popular consultations’ over the future governance of these two areas. However there was little progress and the status of the Two Areas has yet to be resolved. Today the political process is proceeding under the 2016 Roadmap which states that negotiations on the Two Areas will be conducted between the Sudanese Government and the main opposition force, the **Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North** (SPLM-N) (now led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu).<sup>51</sup>

While the CPA did lead to an initial period of calm, conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the SPLM-N broke out again in South Kordofan in 2011.<sup>52</sup> The UK is among

<sup>45</sup> [Letter regarding the human rights situation in Sudan during the 36th session of the UN Human Rights Council](#), Human Rights Watch, 21 September 2017

<sup>46</sup> [Sudan Humanitarian bulletin issue 23](#), UN OCHA, 9-22 October 2017; [Humanitarian Response Plan, Jan-Dec 2017](#), 31 May 2017, UN OCHA. Sudan has a population of 37 million according to the CIA World factbook.

<sup>47</sup> [Sudan](#), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, accessed 6 December 2017

<sup>48</sup> [“Nearly One Third of Darfur’s People Still Displaced, Despite Drop in Violence, Assistant Secretary-General Tells Security Council”](#), UN Security Council SC/13069, 15 November 2017

<sup>49</sup> [Sudan Humanitarian bulletin issue 23](#), UN OCHA, 9-22 October 2017

<sup>50</sup> Prior to the CPA these states, together with Abyei, was referred to as the ‘Three Areas’ to reflect the areas whose ownership was disputed by the northern and southern parts of Sudan.

<sup>51</sup> The SPLM-N was led by Yasir Arman but after a leadership dispute he was replaced at a SPLM-N conference in early October 2017: Crisis Watch October 2017 update.

<sup>52</sup> Further background to the tensions in South Kordofan can be found in [“The conflict in South Kordofan”](#), HSBA/Small Arms Survey, 15 September 2011 and [“Two fronts, one war: evolution of the Two Areas Conflict, 2014-15”](#), HSBA working paper 38, August 2015

those who have condemned Sudanese government forces for aerial bombardments of civilians.<sup>53</sup>

All parties to the 2016 Roadmap Agreement agreed to resume negotiations to conclude a cessation of hostilities leading to a permanent ceasefire agreement. The Government and the main armed groups have declared unilateral ceasefires which at the time of writing remain in place. However during 2017 violent clashes within the SPLM-N resulted in the group splitting into two factions.<sup>54</sup> Baroness Cox, speaking in a debate on Sudan in December, reported the two factions show no signs of reconciliation.<sup>55</sup> Lord Ahmed of Wimbledon, FCO Minister, said in the same debate that internal divisions within the SPLM-N is hampering peace negotiations and the UK is urging both factions to move towards a permanent cessation of hostilities and a humanitarian agreement with the Government.<sup>56</sup>

The international community is also calling for all sides to enable access for humanitarian aid. The SPLM-N has rejected a US proposal for USAID to deliver humanitarian supplies to the Two Areas.<sup>57</sup>

Baroness Cox spoke of her visit to the Nuba Mountains during the Lords debate in December:

I visited the Nuba Mountains earlier this year and witnessed the destruction perpetrated by the GOS—Government of Sudan—armed forces, including the destruction of homes, in which many civilians were killed, a school and the office of the local commissioner. I climbed for two and a half hours up a mountain to visit civilians forced to flee their homes by GOS military offensives and live in caves with deadly snakes. I listened to many people who described their anguish including a father, five of whose children had been burned alive when a bomb from a GOS Antonov set the hut ablaze. His sixth child, whom I met, is suffering from burns and mental trauma.<sup>58</sup>

The UK Government advises against all travel to South Kordofan.

## 1.5 Darfur

Conflict has been a feature of Darfur since 2003 and has at times dominated public perceptions of Sudan.<sup>59</sup>

Darfur lies to the west of Sudan, bordering Chad and the Central African Republic, and is divided into five administrative areas: north, west, central, south and east Darfur.<sup>60</sup>

The UK FCO advises against [all travel](#) to the five Darfur States.

### Box 3: President al-Bashir and the International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court has jurisdiction to prosecute serious violations of International Humanitarian Law in some circumstances when domestic courts are unable or unwilling to do so. These include war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and crimes of aggression committed after 2002.

<sup>53</sup> "[Joint Statement on Aerial Bombardment in South Kordofan and De Facto Expulsion of OCHA Head](#)", UK FCO, 7 May 2016

<sup>54</sup> See [Crisis Watch](#) entries for Sudan for June to October 2017

<sup>55</sup> [HL Deb 11 December 2017 c1449](#)

<sup>56</sup> [HL Deb 11 December 2017 c1460](#)

<sup>57</sup> "[Envoys fail to convince SPLM-N to accept US humanitarian proposition](#)", Sudan Tribune, 18 January 2017

<sup>58</sup> [HC Deb 11 December 2017 c1449](#)

<sup>59</sup> A detailed analysis of the situation in Darfur can be found in a Thomson Reuters Foundation briefing on [Darfur](#) dated 31 July 2014. This includes a timeline from 2003 to 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Before January 2012 the Darfur region consisted of three states.

In July 2008 the ICC Prosecutor applied for an international arrest warrant for President al-Bashir, the first such move ever against a serving head of state, for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes related to the conflict in Darfur. The charge of genocide was later dropped when the first arrest warrant was issued in March 2009. A second warrant was issued in July 2010.<sup>61</sup> The ICC has no independent powers of arrest and is reliant on State Parties to the Rome Statute to fulfil its arrest warrants. South Africa was criticised in July 2016 by the ICC for failing to arrest President al-Bashir when he visited Johannesburg in 2015.<sup>62</sup> The Ugandan Government similarly ignored the arrest warrant when President al-Bashir visited in November 2017.<sup>63</sup> The ICC Prosecutor has urged the UN Security Council to sanction those countries who have failed to uphold the arrest warrant.<sup>64</sup> The [ICC](#) does not try individuals unless they are present in the courtroom.

## The main players in Darfur

Broadly speaking, the main parties to the conflict have been the Government of Sudan in Khartoum and its proxy militias (which includes the Janjaweed), against the various predominantly non-Arab rebel movements. However there has been a proliferation of armed groups active in Darfur over the years which complicates peace efforts.

### Box 4: Darfur's armed groups

The HSBA project, run by Small Arms Survey, provides this useful snapshot of the armed groups operating in Darfur:

The Darfur conflict features a dizzying array of armed opposition groups, factions, and alliances that are in constant flux. Many opposition groups have joined the government or endorsed peace agreements only to later re-join the rebellion. Rebel groups are divided not only in terms of their ideological and political objectives, but according to tribal and geographical representation. In addition to native distinctions, foreign governments have sought to create or support coalitions of opposition forces for the purposes of pursuing peace talks. But these coalitions, and their constituent groups, have not always enjoyed popular support or legitimacy within Darfur.

On the other side of the conflict, the government has armed and supported counter-insurgency groups, in particular of Arab fighters, almost since the eruption of the war in 2003. These groups, too, have experienced significant internal upheaval, especially since the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement, which many Arabs perceived as a betrayal. Fighting between Abbala and Baggara Arab groups in 2010 led to a second distinct "phase" of the Darfur conflict. Some Arab armed groups have turned to the opposition.<sup>65</sup>

As described in section 1.2 the major armed groups in Darfur are JEM, SLA, SLA-AW and SLA-MM.

Khartoum is supported by a range of pro-government militia including the **Janjaweed**.<sup>66</sup> More recently, in 2013, a new paramilitary force supported by the Government emerged, called the **Rapid Support Forces** (RSF). The RSF is believed to include former Janjaweed members. The RSF led government counter-insurgency operations in Darfur between 2014

<sup>61</sup> Further details about the court can be found in Commons Library briefing paper [The International Criminal Court: current cases and contemporary debates](#), 20 April 2009, SN05042

<sup>62</sup> "[South Africa should have arrested Sudan's President, ICC rules](#)", New York Times, 6 July 2017

<sup>63</sup> "[Sudan's President, wanted by the ICC, visits Uganda](#)", AP via news24, 13 November 2017

<sup>64</sup> "[Statement to the UN Security Council on the situation in Darfur, pursuant to UNSCR 1593 \(2005\)](#)", ICC, 12 December 2017

<sup>65</sup> Further analysis of [Darfur's armed groups](#) can be found on the Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan website. HSBA is a project administered by the Small Arms Survey,

<sup>66</sup> Detailed analysis of Sudanese paramilitary forces and pro-government militias can be found in HSBA issue brief (Small Arms Survey) "[Remote-control breakdown](#)", April 2017

and 2016 including in fighting in Jebel Marra. Human Rights Watch describes the RSF as a “Sudanese government force under the command of the National Intelligence and Security Services” (as opposed to Sudanese armed forces) and has catalogued alleged abuses by RSF during campaigns in Darfur in 2014 and 2015.<sup>67</sup> In April 2016 a presidential decree reportedly placed the RSF directly under the presidency’s control.<sup>68</sup> The UK Government said in December 2017 that the Rapid Support Forces “are now formally a part of the Sudanese Armed Forces.”<sup>69</sup>

While the participants to the conflict have not signed a comprehensive ceasefire, the Government and various rebel groups have extended unilateral ceasefires which has had the effect of reducing the number of open confrontations between these groups. The UN reported “no open confrontations” in the period 15 August to 15 October 2017. However intercommunal violence has continued. The UN also noted widespread opposition among the various armed groups to the Government’s disarmament campaign launched in August 2017.<sup>70</sup> One Darfur militia chief, Musa Hilal, was arrested in November 2017 after reportedly clashing with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) over the disarmament campaign. Hilal has shifted allegiances over time, having previously been one of the leaders of the Janjaweed responsible for atrocities in Darfur during the early years of the conflict (and was placed on the UN [sanctions list](#) in 2006<sup>71</sup>).

## Peace efforts in Darfur

Efforts to bring peace to Darfur have so far failed to bear fruit despite various peace proposals, including the **2006 Darfur Peace Agreement** and the **2011 Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD)**. Both were hampered in part because they did not have the support of all the major rebel groups. Only the SLA-MM signed the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement. The 2011 DDPD was originally signed by the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) a coalition of several smaller groups, and in 2013 by an offshoot of JEM, led by Mohamed Bashar, who was assassinated a few weeks later.<sup>72</sup>

Three armed groups – JEM, the SLA-MM and the SLA-AW – contest the DDPD as the framework for a political agreement.<sup>73</sup> These groups, amongst others, are referred to as the ‘non-signatories’ of the DDPD.

A Government-supported referendum in April 2016 was boycotted by the major rebel and opposition groups. The poll, to ascertain whether Darfur should remain as five states or form a single region, showed support for retaining the status quo. The rebels and opposition groups largely favour a single region on the basis it would give Darfur more power “to end what they see as Khartoum’s interference in land ownership conflicts.”<sup>74</sup> However ongoing disagreements over eligible voters and accusations of vote rigging

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<sup>67</sup> “[Men with no mercy: Rapid Support Forces attacks against civilians in Darfur, Sudan](#)”, Human Rights Watch, 9 September 2015; “Why the peacekeepers stay in Darfur”, Africa Confidential, 10 July 2015

<sup>68</sup> HSBA issue brief (Small Arms Survey) “[Remote-control breakdown](#)”, April 2017

<sup>69</sup> [PO117918](#), 13 December 2017

<sup>70</sup> “[Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations hybrid operation in Darfur](#)”, United Nations Security Council, S/2017/907, 27 October 2017, para 3. The report also outlines in more detail the views of the different parties towards the disarmament campaign.

<sup>71</sup> “Darfur militia chief to face military trial: Sudan minister”, AFP via News24, 29 November 2017; Crisis Watch [November 2017](#) update; see also a profile of [Hilal](#) from the Sudan Tribune in January 2008

<sup>72</sup> “Darfur peace process and chronology (as of 24 July 2013)”, Small Arms Survey, 24 July 2013

<sup>73</sup> “Letter dated 30 August 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council”, United Nations, S/2017/747, 30 August 2017; “Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations hybrid operation in Darfur”, United Nations Security Council, S/2017/907, 27 October 2017

<sup>74</sup> “Sudan’s Darfur votes to retain multi-state system”, BBC News, 23 April 2016

prompted the opposition groups to boycott the poll.<sup>75</sup> The UK Government at the time questioned the viability of holding the referendum amid ongoing violence (particularly fighting and civilian displacement in Jebel Marra) and the absence of a peace agreement.<sup>76</sup>

### Current situation

The 2011 Doha Declaration for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) remains the main focus of international efforts to resolve the situation in Darfur but the latest assessment is that the process has stalled.

Two statements on the DDPD, from the UN Secretary-General, dated 30 August and 27 October 2017 respectively, outline why the DDPD is still considered important but also why peace remains elusive.

30 August 2017:

The Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, although still contested by three holdout armed movements six years after its adoption by the Government of the Sudan and a number of breakaway groups, laid the ground for a number of institutional and legislative reforms, and political and security arrangements, which, if implemented in a sustainable way, may address the main root causes of the Darfur rebellion.<sup>77</sup>

27 October 2017:

Progress towards achieving comprehensive peace in Darfur through a negotiated political settlement to the conflict remains elusive. While the parties proclaim the desire to continue the negotiations, they set preconditions that constrain the progression of the talks. I urge both the Government of the Sudan and the armed movements to continue honouring their unilateral ceasefires and to resume talks aimed at reaching an agreement on the cessation of hostilities.<sup>78</sup>

### Box 5: Jebel Marra

The Jebel Marra mountain range is in the centre of Darfur and the historical homeland of the Fur people. It has been described as one of Darfur's "most troubled regions".<sup>79</sup> Sudanese Government forces launched a major military campaign in January 2016 against the Abdul Wahid faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA-AW). Tens of thousands were displaced<sup>80</sup> and Amnesty International says it has documented "a large number of serious violations of international law by Sudanese government forces" including allegations of chemical weapons use.<sup>81</sup> UNAMID is in the process of establishing a Jebel Marra Task Force which is to be operational on 1 January 2018.<sup>82</sup>

### UNAMID

In 2006 the UN decided to supplement the existing African Union Mission in Sudan with a hybrid peace-keeping force. The former was replaced by the new UN/African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) in 2007. It is authorised by UN Security Council Resolution

<sup>75</sup> "[Sudan concludes Darfur referendum amid opposition boycott](#)", Reuters, 13 April 2016; "[Sudanese opposition forces call to boycott Darfur referendum](#)", Sudan Tribune, 13 February 2016

<sup>76</sup> [HL73888](#), 20 April 2016

<sup>77</sup> "Letter dated 30 August 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council", United Nations, S/2017/747, 30 August 2017, para 1

<sup>78</sup> "Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations hybrid operation in Darfur", United Nations Security Council, S/2017/907, 27 October 2017, para 58

<sup>79</sup> "Darfur peace process and chronology (as of 24 July 2013)", Small Arms Survey, 24 July 2013

<sup>80</sup> "[Jebel Marra Crisis fact sheet issue 8](#)", UN OCHA, 1 October 2016

<sup>81</sup> "[Sudan: Scorched earth, poisoned air: Sudanese government forces ravage Jebel Marra](#)", Amnesty International, 29 September 2016

<sup>82</sup> "[Nearly one third of Darfur's people still displaced, despite drop in violence, Assistant Secretary-General tells Security Council](#)", UN, 15 November 2017

1769 (31 July 2007) under chapter VII of the UN charter. Its mandate is renewed yearly, most recently on 29 June 2017.

As well as protecting civilians, UNAMID is also tasked with mediating between the Government of Sudan and the non-signatory armed movements on the basis of the DDPD. UNAMID's Joint Special Representative, Martin Ihoeghian Uhomobhi, is also the Joint Chief Mediator for Darfur.

It was one of the largest UN peacekeeping operations with an initial authorised strength of nearly 26,000 uniformed peacekeepers. However in June 2017 the UN voted to reduce decrease troop numbers by 44%, from a then ceiling of 15,845 troops to 8,735 by 30 June 2018.<sup>83</sup>

As a result, UNAMID is, as per the Status of Forces Agreement, releasing its bases to the Government of Sudan.<sup>84</sup> There have been concerns that Rapid Support Forces (RSF) could move into these bases.<sup>85</sup> The Earl of Sandwich directly raised these concerns with the Foreign Office in November 2017:

The Earl of Sandwich: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether any bases previously occupied and managed by the hybrid United Nations–African Union peacekeeping mission in Darfur in Sudan have been transferred to the control of the Rapid Support Forces militia in the region; and if not, whether there are any plans to do so in the future.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: As part of the Status of Forces Agreement, United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) bases are being handed over to the Government of Sudan. The UK is in regular contact with UNAMID and is monitoring the reconfiguration of the Mission closely. During the Strategic Dialogue on 16 October, we impressed upon the Government of Sudan that, as they move into the security space in Darfur, it is vital that they provide safety for civilians in a manner that is compliant with both international humanitarian and human rights law.<sup>86</sup>

The UK Government confirmed the RSF are now “formally a part of the Sudanese Armed Forces” (in response to a question asked in December about the group's activities in Darfur) adding:

The UK continues to impress upon the Government of Sudan that, as they move into the security space in Darfur, and as UNAMID bases are handed over, it is vital that they provide safety for civilians in a manner that is compliant with both international humanitarian and human rights law. The UK is in regular contact with UNAMID and is monitoring the reconfiguration of the Mission closely.<sup>87</sup>

Further details can be found on the [UNAMID](#) website.

There is a separate UN mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). UK troops were deployed to UNMISS in 2017 and their work was profiled in a BBC Two documentary [Army: Behind the new frontlines](#) in autumn 2017.

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<sup>83</sup> UN Security Council Resolution [2296](#), 29 June 2016. The reduction will take place in two phases, from July-December 2016 when the ceiling is reduced to 11,395 military personnel and from 1 January 2018 to 30 June 2018 when the ceiling will be further reduced to 8,735 military personnel. The number of police are also to be cut, from 3,403 to 2,888 by June 2018. See also UN press release [SC/12893](#), 29 June 2017

<sup>84</sup> [HL2870](#), 15 November 2017

<sup>85</sup> “[UNAMID denies “improper handover” of bases in North Darfur](#)”, Sudan Call, 12 September 2017

<sup>86</sup> [HL2870](#), 15 November 2017

<sup>87</sup> [PQ117918](#), 13 December 2017

## 1.6 Abyei

The disputed region of Abyei straddles both Sudan and South Sudan and is claimed by the two countries.<sup>88</sup>

Abyei is the home of the Ngok Dinka, who are “culturally and ethnically allied to South Sudan and backed its rebel army during decades of civil war against Khartoum’s rule.”<sup>89</sup> They were heavily displaced in the course of the civil war and some of their land has been settled by the Missiriya, who are neighbouring Arab pastoralists, and want to remain in Sudan.

### 2005 CPA and Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement set up the Abyei Boundary Commission to determine the border and resolve residency issues. However the NCP rejected the Commission’s conclusions when it reported in July 2005 and refused to allow a separate administration to be set up in Abyei, as provided for under the CPA.

After violent clashes in 2008, the parties agreed to refer the Abyei dispute to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, based in The Hague. The Court issued its ruling in July 2009. The Court took some areas, including the Heglig oilfield, out of the region, but upheld the findings of the Commission in other regard. The parties accepted the ruling of the Court.

A planned referendum in Abyei, to ascertain whether the region should join Sudan or South Sudan, was set out in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and was to have been held in January 2011. However disagreements over eligibility has meant the referendum still has not taken place and it remains claimed by both nations.<sup>90</sup>

### No progress on a Joint Administration

In June 2011 the Government of Sudan and the SPLM agreed to establish a temporary joint administration and to demilitarise Abyei.

However implementation of the 2011 Agreement has hit an impasse, outlined in detail in a UN Secretary-General report to the UN Security Council in October 2017.<sup>91</sup> The report states Sudan and South Sudan have “diametrically opposed positions on the way forward to settle the Abyei question”. The two countries disagree about the establishment and composition of the joint institutions called for in the 2011 Agreement (the Abyei Area Administration, the Abyei Area Council and the Abyei Police Service). They also disagree on whether the institutions should be established at all: “Sudan continues to insist that establishment of these joint institutions is the only way forward, but South Sudan disagrees on the need for the institutions, citing that the timelines to establish them have passed.”<sup>92</sup> The Ngok Dinka and South Sudan worry that the Joint Administration will lead to an indefinite deferral of a resolution, according to analysis by HSBA, but that puts them at loggerheads with the Government of Sudan which insists on the establishment of a joint administration is a precondition for further talks on Abyei’s future.<sup>93</sup>

In the absence of a political settlement both sides have been building *de facto* situations on the ground: the Missiriya through settlements in the north and the Ngok Dinka

<sup>88</sup> [Sudan: why Abyei is crucial to North and South](#), BBC News, 23 May 2011

<sup>89</sup> [“Abyei opts to join South Sudan in unofficial referendum”](#), BBC News, 31 October 2013

<sup>90</sup> An unofficial referendum in 2013 suggested an overwhelming number of residents of Abyei wanted to join South Sudan. However the vote was organised by the Ngok Dinka and boycotted by the Masseriya: [“Abyei opts to join South Sudan in unofficial referendum”](#), BBC News, 31 October 2013

<sup>91</sup> [S/2017/870](#), 17 October 2017, para 14

<sup>92</sup> [S/2017/870](#), 17 October 2017, para 14

<sup>93</sup> [“Update on Abyei”](#), HSBA, 13 July 2015

through the Ngok Dinka-dominated administration body which is in effect the *de facto* government of Abyei.<sup>94</sup>

### **Security situation and UN force in Abyei**

The security situation in Abyei remains relatively calm but volatile, the UN October 2017 report states. Specific security concerns are the ongoing presence of armed groups, intercommunal fighting (in particular over access to grazing land and water during the annual migration of the Missiriya), criminal activities at the Amiet common market (which have the potential to exacerbate intercommunal tensions as the two communities intermingle at the market and in the surrounding areas), and petty crime.<sup>95</sup> UNISFA, a UN peacekeeping force, maintains law and order in the absence of an agreed police service and monitors the border.

Leaders from the north and south signed a peace agreement in June 2011, mediated by Thabo Mbeki, to demilitarise the region and allow Ethiopian peacekeepers into the region. Under that deal, the two sides agreed on the need for a third party to monitor the border between north and south.

The UN Security Council authorised the deployment of a peacekeeping force to Abyei in June 2011 (UNSCR 1990): the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei ([UNISFA](#)). UNISFA currently has just over 4,300 personnel under its command.<sup>96</sup>

In July 2011 the parties agreed to establish a border monitoring and verification mission which came into being in October 2012 as the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. However progress on creating the Mechanism has been slow and it remains at its initial operating capability with only two of the four sector headquarters in operation. The two countries and the African Union view the Mechanism as essential for border security and for facilitating the demarcation of the border.<sup>97</sup>

Unhappiness among the international community with the lack of movement in implementing the Mechanism in full was evident in the Security Council's decision to limit support for the Mechanism until April 2018 unless the parties agreed to a number of requirements.<sup>98</sup> These include facilitating full freedom of movement for UNISFA, opening the first phase of the border-crossing corridor and meeting to discuss border demarcation and the '14-mile' disputed area.<sup>99</sup> UNSCR [2386](#) (15 November 2017) recalls previous warnings to end the mandate for support to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM) "unless both parties demonstrate through their actions clear commitment and steadfast guarantees for the implementation of the JBVMM."<sup>100</sup>

The UK Government advises against [all travel](#) to the Abyei Administration Area saying that the security situation remains "tense and unpredictable."

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<sup>94</sup> "[Update on Abyei](#)", HSBA, 13 July 2015

<sup>95</sup> [S/2017/870](#), 17 October 2017, para 2

<sup>96</sup> [S/2017/870](#), 17 October 2017, para 20

<sup>97</sup> [S/2017/870](#), 17 October 2017, para 28

<sup>98</sup> "UN Interim Security Force for Abyei: Council to renew the mandate", [Whatsinblue](#) website, 14 November 2017

<sup>99</sup> "[Security Council Extends Mandates of United Nations Interim Force for Abyei, Joint Border Monitoring Entity, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2386 \(2017\)](#)", UN Security Council, SC/13067, 15 November 2017

<sup>100</sup> UNSCR [2386](#), 15 November 2017

## 2. International dimensions

There has been a notable improvement in Sudan's relations with western countries. Humanitarian concerns, and specifically access for humanitarian groups, remain a priority for the international community but other issues have gained prominence.

The EU is working with Sudan to address migration as part of a wider EU-African Union initiative. In 2016 the UK and Sudan launched a Strategic Dialogue. In October 2017 the US lifted economic sanctions in recognition of perceived efforts by the Government of Sudan to maintain cessation of hostilities, improve humanitarian access and counter-terrorism cooperation.

Sudan has also pivoted away from long-time ally Iran in favour of the Gulf States – Sudan is a member of Saudi Arabia's coalition in Yemen. Sudan's relationship with China continues to grow while President al-Bashir visited Russia in November 2017.

### 2.1 Humanitarian access

A major issue for NGOs has been in accessing conflict areas like Darfur and the Two Areas to deliver aid. The UK Government said humanitarian access continued to be "severely restricted" in 2015 in Darfur and the Two Areas.<sup>101</sup>

The SPLM-N is so far refusing to agree to a USAID proposal to deliver humanitarian support to the Two Areas, a position the UK Government has described as "disappointing."<sup>102</sup>

The US State department's report of October 2017 (see section 2.3) said the Sudanese Government issued in December 2016 revised Directives and Procedures for Humanitarian Action which, the report said, "largely adhere to international humanitarian principles for timely, impartial, and effective humanitarian access, and that address most of the key constraints cited routinely by relief organizations."

The State department also said the Sudanese Government had improved freedom of movement for humanitarian personnel and allowed access to areas previously unreachable because of Government restrictions/insecurity.

However the State department remains concerned about restrictions on certain travel, interference with impartial needs assessments and inconsistent freedom of movement for humanitarian personnel.<sup>103</sup>

### 2.2 Migration and the EU

Sudan is recognised as a source and transit country for migrants.<sup>104</sup> Sudan is part of a joint EU-African Union initiative known as the Khartoum Process.

#### **The Khartoum Process**

Rapidly increased migration to European countries from Africa prompted the EU to work with the African-Union to address all the relevant aspects of irregular migration including prevention, strengthening migration and border management, smuggling of migrants,

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<sup>101</sup> [Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2015 Human Rights and Democracy Report](#), 21 April 2016

<sup>102</sup> [HL481-496](#), 9 February 2017

<sup>103</sup> [The Secretary's Report on Whether the Government of Sudan Has Sustained the Positive Actions That Gave Rise to E.O. 13761 \(2017\)](#), US State department, 12 October 2017

<sup>104</sup> "Engagement beyond the centre", All Party Parliamentary Group for Sudan and South Sudan, February 2017

return and readmission and addressing the root causes of irregular migration. This resulted in a Joint Declaration and the adoption of an action plan at the EU-AU Summit in April 2014.

In November 2014 the EU and African Union launched the Khartoum Process. This is part of the broader Action Plan for the Horn of Africa. The objective was to establish political cooperation amongst the countries of origin, transit and destination along the EU-Horn of Africa migration route.<sup>105</sup> The Khartoum Process is led by a Steering Committee comprised of five EU member states (Italy, France, Germany, UK, and Malta), five partner countries (Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan) as well as the European Commission, the European External Action Service and the AU Commission.<sup>106</sup>

The EU and AU met again in November 2015 and the resulting [Valletta Action Plan](#) included a pledge to address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement. The Valletta Summit also saw the launch of an EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa.<sup>107</sup>

The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) has €2.5bn in total to address migration crises in the region of Sahel/Lake Chad, Horn of Africa and North Africa. The Trust Fund has an initial budget of approximately €878.8 million for the Horn of Africa until 2020, including €100 million channelled through a Special Measure for Sudan.<sup>108</sup> The €100 million support package is specifically targeting those in need in East Sudan, Darfur and the Two Areas through “increasing access of vulnerable people, including internally displaced people, refugees and returnees, to jobs, education and health.”<sup>109</sup>

Further information on the [Khartoum Process](#) is available online.

There are concerns EU money is being used by the Government of Sudan to fund the pro-Government Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to address migration in border areas. Human Rights Watch said in November 2017:

The EU's programs in Sudan have been widely criticised on human rights grounds, in large part because its border control support the notoriously abusive Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which were responsible for atrocities in Darfur.

The EU has flatly denied funding the RSF, but the perception that it does shows the cost of doing business with Sudan's abusive government.<sup>110</sup>

Such concerns were raised with the UK Government by Lord Alton of Liverpool in October 2016. Foreign Minister Baroness Amelay of St Johns replied:

We are concerned by the reported use of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to tackle migration in Sudan and have raised these concerns with the government of Sudan, most recently during the visit of the UK Special Representative to Sudan and South Sudan in September. We have also made clear that our cooperation on migration will necessarily be guided by our human rights principles. The EU has also raised the role

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<sup>105</sup> The separate Rabat Process involves the countries of origin, transit and destination along the western migratory route.

<sup>106</sup> Lords Library briefing pack “[Debate on the Displacement of Refugees and Migrants from Asia and Africa and the Measures Being Taken](#)”, LBP-2015-0042, 2 July 2015; further detail is also available from Commons Library briefing paper “[Migration pressures in Europe](#)”, CBP-7210, 8 September 2015; “[The European Union's cooperation with Africa on migration](#)”, European Commission factsheet, 22 April 2015

<sup>107</sup> “[Valletta Summit on migration](#)”, European Council, 11-12 November 2015

<sup>108</sup> “[Articles](#)”, Khartoum Process website, accessed 30 November 2017

<sup>109</sup> Joint Staff Working Group [Annual Report Horn of Africa Regional Action Plan 2015/2016](#), Council of the European Union, 11 May 2017

<sup>110</sup> “[EU must put Sudan under microscope at Africa summit](#)”, Human Rights Watch, 27 November 2017

of the RSF with the government of Sudan and has made absolutely clear that no funding aligned with the Khartoum Process will be provided to them.<sup>111</sup>

The All-Party Parliamentary Group report on Sudan noted that migration has become a dominant issue in shaping EU relations with the Government of Sudan. In its report the APPG called on the UK Government to push for greater transparency and accountability:

The Khartoum Process, the European Union's response to migration from and through Sudan, drew extensive criticism from witnesses who were concerned that the European Union's long-held reputation as a human rights standard-bearer was in danger of being sacrificed at the altar of migration.

The UK must ensure that human rights are fully respected in the Khartoum Process initiative by pushing for rigorous end-user accountability provisions, and by ensuring that the implementation process is transparent and open to scrutiny.<sup>112</sup>

## 2.3 US lifts sanctions in October 2017

On 6 October 2017 the US [State department](#) announced it was to lift economic sanctions on Sudan, effective on 12 October. The decision reflected months of work with the Sudanese Government on a number of key areas which began under President Obama.

The [State department](#) said the move was in recognition of the Sudanese Government's efforts to maintain cessation of hostilities, improving humanitarian access and maintaining cooperation with the US on counter-terrorism and addressing regional conflicts.

The State department issued a detailed report listing both the positive actions of the Sudanese Government that led to the revoking of sanctions and also ongoing concerns.<sup>113</sup>

### Positive steps

The report focused on five areas and highlighted the positive steps made by Sudan during the reporting period (January to October 2017):

- 1 Maintaining a cessation of hostilities in conflict areas of Sudan.** This, the report states, stands in contrast to past behaviour, notably the Sudanese Armed Forces campaign in Jebel Marra in 2015/16 and also the, until recently, regular dry season offensives in the Two Areas since 2011. The report noted there were no significant hostilities between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Darfur opposition groups, although there were minor skirmishes between SAF and SPLM-N in the Two Areas conflict zone. The report said:  
  
"In this reporting period, we have no confirmed evidence that the GOS, including the security forces under its command or control, initiated offensive military operations. Furthermore, there have been no confirmed reports of GOS aerial bombardments – a trademark of GOS offensives in previous years."
- 2 Improvement of humanitarian access throughout Sudan.** There has been a steady improvement in humanitarian access in government-controlled areas, according to NGOs, although access remains constrained and "further progress is needed."
- 3 Maintaining Cooperation with the US on Addressing the South Sudan Conflict.** The State department encourages the Sudanese Government to continue to refrain from efforts to undermine peace in South Sudan, including in stopping the "historical patterns of retributive proxy support provided by both Sudan and South Sudan to armed opposition groups in each other's territory." The US assessed

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<sup>111</sup> [HL2339](#), 26 October 2016

<sup>112</sup> 'Engagement beyond the centre: an enquiry report on the future of UK-Sudan Relations', All Party Parliamentary Group for Sudan and South Sudan, February 2017

<sup>113</sup> [The Secretary's Report on Whether the Government of Sudan Has Sustained the Positive Actions That Gave Rise to E.O. 13761 \(2017\)](#), US State department, 12 October 2017

that Khartoum did not provide any significant arms or material support to opposition groups in South Sudan, which is a positive step compared to previous years.

- 4 **Maintaining Cooperation with the US on Addressing the Lord's Resistance Army.**
- 5 **Maintaining Cooperation with the US on Addressing the Threat of Terrorism.** The report states Sudan's actions against terrorists "have been notable, significant, and have contributed to advancing U.S. Counter Terrorist objectives and the global fight against terrorism."

### Ongoing concerns

The US Government also explicitly listed in the report the following concerns it still has with the Sudanese Government:

1. its lack of progress towards a signed ceasefire with the main opposition groups in Sudan's internal conflict areas and, more broadly, towards achieving a sustainable peace consistent with the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) Roadmap Agreement;
2. its lack of progress in establishing rule of law in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan;
3. impunity for past atrocity crimes;
4. continuing areas of government interference in humanitarian operations; and
5. a number of issues related to human rights, including arbitrary detention, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, and limitations on religious, political, and press freedom.

#### Box 6: Sanctions

**United States:** The United States lifted economic sanctions in October 2017 that had been put in place by firstly the Clinton Presidency (in 1997) and later the Bush administration (in 2006). Sanctions remain in place against individuals, including individuals in connect with the conflict in Darfur ([E.O. 13400](#), April 2006, based on UNSCR 1591). Sudan remains on the US list of 'State sponsors of terrorism' which Sudan has been designated as such since [1993](#). The designation means restrictions on US foreign assistance, defence exports and sales and other restrictions remain in place. The US is reportedly [considering](#) removing Sudan from this list.

**EU:** An EU [arms embargo](#) has been in place since 1994 (later extended in 2011 to cover Sudan and South Sudan).

**United Nations:** The UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo on Darfur in 2004 (UNSCR 1556) It was extended in 2005 (UNSCR 1591).

Further information and guidance from the UK Government can be found on the gov.uk webpage: [embargoes and sanctions on Sudan](#).

## 2.4 UK and Sudan

The UK has long ties with Sudan. From 1899 until 1956 Sudan was governed by the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium.<sup>114</sup> In the last decade or so the UK has played a leading role in attempts to bring peace to Sudan. It is also one of the largest donors of aid to Sudan.

<sup>114</sup> A 2004 Commons Library briefing paper said "in practice, this meant Britain held supreme military and civil authority, although colonial administrative practice served to entrench the existing differences and divisions between north and south by allowing the south a measure of autonomy in recognition of its distinctive characteristics." [SNIA/2155](#), 15 July 2004.

The FCO designates Sudan as a Human Rights Priority Country. The UK's Special Representative for Sudan and South Sudan, Christopher Trott, was appointed in August 2016.

Foreign Office Minister Baroness Anelay of St Johns laid out the UK Government's assessment of the situation in Sudan during a debate on Sudan in the Lords in February 2017.<sup>115</sup>

The Minister highlighted the dire humanitarian situation across the country and the long-running conflicts in Darfur and the Two Areas. She expressed disappointment in the SPLM-N for walking out of the talks aimed at enabling USAID to deliver humanitarian support to the Two Areas. The Minister described as "encouraging" the recent reduction in armed conflict between the Government of Sudan and armed movements and expressed support for the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel-led peace process (the Roadmap). The Minister called on all sides to agree on the permanent cessation of hostilities and unrestricted humanitarian access to Darfur and the Two Areas. She also noted the role of the National Dialogue.

The Minister said the Government has raised concerns about the arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defenders and opposition party members in Sudan.

The Minister also mentioned international efforts to defeat terrorism and counter drug/people trafficking through Sudan. Baroness Anelay said "in the past, the Sudanese Government have failed adequately to co-operate or confront the problem of Islamic extremism and human trafficking" but that progress is being made.<sup>116</sup>

When asked what assistance the UK is giving to those affected by drought and extreme hunger in the Nuba Mountains, International Development Minister Rory Stewart said the UK is the largest contributor to the Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SHF), providing £16.5 million in 2017. The Fund provides food, health, water and other assistance to internally placed people and vulnerable communities in Sudan, including Government controlled areas of the Nuba mountains region in South Kordofan.<sup>117</sup>

#### **Box 7: DFID's programme in Sudan**

DFID says its programme in Sudan "provides humanitarian assistance to people displaced from their homes by conflict, especially in Darfur and on the border with South Sudan; helps people in rural areas to cope with variable rainfall and drought and to develop more sustainable livelihoods, reducing the need to migrate to towns or out of Sudan; works for better governance and inclusive economic development to ensure a better future for young people; and works to abolish the practice of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting."

DFID has a £50m budget for Sudan for 2018/19. It does not provide any funding directly to the Government of Sudan. The majority is delivered via multilateral organisations and NGOs. Further detail on DFID's plans for Sudan can be found online at [DFID Sudan Profile: July 2017](#)

<sup>115</sup> [HL481-496](#), 9 February 2017

<sup>116</sup> [HL481-496](#), 9 February 2017

<sup>117</sup> [PQ115397](#), 30 November 2017

## The UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue

The Government launched a UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue in March 2016 at the request of the Government of Sudan. The Dialogue is led by the Director for Africa at the FCO and so far four meetings have been held, the most recent in London in [October 2017](#). The FCO said the dialogue covered bilateral issues, the peace process, human rights, development, trade and investment, migration, defence engagement, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism, and regional issues. Meetings:

- March 2016: [Completion of UK-Sudan strategic dialogue](#)
- October 2016: [Sudanese government's delegation visits UK](#)
- March 2017: [UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue](#)
- November 2017: [UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue: Communiqué](#)

The Strategic Dialogue has been the subject of criticism for its lack of transparency. The APPG for Sudan and South Sudan said in its 2017 report:

HMG should ensure that the UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue is backed up by rigorous, transparent benchmarks, which allow for scrutiny and regular progress reviews by external actors.<sup>118</sup>

## Parliamentary activity

Sudan has been the subject of a number of tabled and oral questions in Parliament. In addition, members of the House of Lords debated the situation in Sudan on [9 February 2017](#) and again on [11 December 2017](#).<sup>119</sup>

### Select committees

Sudan has not been the explicit subject of committee inquiries in recent years. However the International Development select committee held a one-off evidence session on the situation in South Sudan in December 2016. The committee received written evidence ahead of the evidence session. All information relating to the inquiry is available on the inquiry's [webpage](#). The committee holds an oral evidence session on South Sudan on [19 December 2017](#).

### All Party-Parliamentary Group on Sudan and South Sudan

The APPG on Sudan and South Sudan published a report on UK-Sudan relations in February 2017: '[Engagement beyond the centre: an enquiry report on the future of UK-Sudan Relations](#)'. The Government responded by [letter](#) in August 2017.

## 2.5 Recent shifts in foreign policy

Sudan has traditionally been close to Iran but close watchers of the country observe a pivot away from Iran towards the Gulf States, Russia and China in recent years. In 2014 Sudan shut down Iranian cultural centres, a public sign of its intent to move away from its former ally – and formally severed diplomatic ties in 2016.

The financial lure of the Gulf States appears to be partly behind the shift. Sudan has joined Saudi Arabia's coalition in Yemen and has received significant financial support, including a \$1bn deposit by Saudi Arabia to Sudan's central bank. Sudan has also reportedly received other significant deposits from the United Arab Emirates. The increasingly antagonistic relationship between Saudi and Iran also appears to have

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<sup>118</sup> '[Engagement beyond the centre: an enquiry report on the future of UK-Sudan Relations](#)', All Party Parliamentary Group for Sudan and South Sudan, February 2017

<sup>119</sup> [HL Deb 11 December 2017 c1449-1461](#); The Lords Library has produced a briefing pack for the debate: [Recent developments in Sudan and South Sudan](#), LBP-2017-0114, 5 December 2017

motivated Khartoum to believe a closer relationship with Riyadh would bring more diplomatic and financial advantages.<sup>120</sup>

For the Gulf States, Giorgio Cafiero of Gulf States Analytics, Sudan is important for a host of reasons, ranging from food security to the Yemeni crisis and counterterrorism efforts to trade and investment and opportunities to increase their presence in Africa.<sup>121</sup>

Sudan's financial necessities are driven in part by the loss of the oil fields to South Sudan when the latter became independent. Oil production remains a hugely significant factor in Khartoum's relations with its southern neighbour, not least because South Sudan remains dependent on Sudan for its pipelines and port for export.<sup>122</sup>

China's interest in Africa is well chronicled and China and Sudan are long-term trade and energy partners.<sup>123</sup> The State-owned China National Petroleum Corp has built a refinery in Khartoum and other infrastructure. More recently, in 2016 China signed a framework agreement with Sudan to build its first nuclear reactor.<sup>124</sup> According to the [IAEA](#), Sudan plans to introduce nuclear power in 2029. Sudan's interest in China is not limited to financial reasons. Joseph Hammond, writing for the Diplomat, notes the presence of Communist Party of China officials at the ruling NCP's national congress party in 2017 and suggests the NCP is looking to China as a political model in which competition takes place *within* parties, not between them.<sup>125</sup>

Sudan is also moving closer to Russia. President al-Bashir made what was reported to be his first visit to Russia in November 2017, meeting President Putin in Sochi. The two countries are pursuing cooperation in mining, energy and military equipment – Sudan received a batch of SU-35 fighter jets just before the visit.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> "[Why has Sudan ditched Iran in favour of Saudi Arabia?](#)", The Guardian, 12 January 2016; "Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival", Crisis Group Africa Briefing no 119, 21 March 2016

<sup>121</sup> "[Can UAE be a bridge between US, Sudan?](#)", al-Monitor, 8 October 2017

<sup>122</sup> Further detail on oil production in Sudan and South Sudan is available in the US EIA [country report](#) of 3 September 2014

<sup>123</sup> "[Sudan: China's original foothold in Africa](#)", The Diplomat, 14 June 2017

<sup>124</sup> "[China signs deal with Sudan to build nuclear reactor](#)", Reuters, 24 May 2016

<sup>125</sup> "[Sudan: China's original foothold in Africa](#)", The Diplomat, 14 June 2017

<sup>126</sup> "[Sudan receives Su-35 fighter jets ahead of President al-Bashir's first Russia visit](#)", al-Arabiya, 20 November 2017; "[Sudan's President visits Russia, asks for protection from the US](#)", Washington Post, 23 November 2017

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