



# SMALL WARS

---

## JOURNAL

## The Terrorist Climate of Sudan

### Forecasting Effects of the Southern Secession

By *Jason R. Waller*

Journal Article | Sep 4 2011 - 8:32am

Sudan is a country of volatile history and uncertain potential. Decades of civil war, religious persecution, and alleged genocide have literally torn the country in two. Following the secession of South Sudan, Sudan finds itself in a precarious situation; having given up many of the economic and social centers of gravity in the south, it relies on diplomacy and foreign support more than ever. A newly impoverished base, coupled with an authoritarian regime, provide many factors leading to a violent insurgency. Such an insurgency, together with a strategic location and tolerant population, open doors for the growth of Islamist terrorism on a domestic and especially global level. In the absence of effective, multinational relations, this is precisely what will happen. With focused diplomacy spearheaded by the United States, though, Sudan will become an ally in combating terrorism and stabilizing in the region. Never has the country been more perilous, and never has it been more fertile with potential.

## The Rise of a Radical State

The modern country of Sudan traces its roots to the prosperous Nubian state known as the Kingdom of Kush. Although some of the earliest forms of Christianity were established in northeastern Africa, Arabic rule in the region converted most of the population to Islam over the course of several centuries. Sudan fell under the control of Egypt in 1820, under Mahdist rule in 1885, and effectively under the British crown, with Egyptian governance, in 1899 (Mamdani, 9). Although the British were effective in governing Sudan as a colony, the Sudanese were nonetheless subjugated to a set of cultures and norms at odds with their own. The resultant internal conflicts, in addition to pressure by Egypt to form a unified Egyptian-Sudanese state, led Britain to offer Sudan a chance to vote for its independence (Dagne, CRS-1).

## A History of Violence

Sudan gained its independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956, becoming the first independent country in sub-Saharan Africa (*World Factbook*). This milestone, though, was marred by an almost constant conflict and civil war. The First Sudanese Civil War, or the Anyanya Rebellion, began in 1955 as the 1 January 1956 Independence Day approached. From 1924 to 1946, the British had run the south and the north as two distinct territories, galvanizing enmity between the two regions (Mamdani, 175). Fearing subjugation by the Muslim north, many in the Christian and animist south formed a guerilla insurgency to combat the new political authority. The civil war between southern and northern Sudan claimed over half a million lives and lasted, officially, until 1972—although conflict and social strife continued despite the ceasefire (Dagne, CRS-2).

Shortly after the 1978 discovery of oil fields in the south, then-President Gaafar Nimeiry violated peace

accords by attempting to gain control over them. Five years later, with a growing Islamic fundamentalist presence in the capital of Khartoum, Nimeiry declared all of Sudan an Islamic state. The Second Sudanese Civil War, considered by many to be little more than an extension of the first war, began that year in 1983, eleven years after the peace accords. To further provoke the south, Colonel Omar al-Bashir led a bloodless coup against the Sudanese government and prime minister in 1989 (Dagne, CRS-2). Once a new government was enacted, al-Bashir became chairman of the legislative branch, prime minister, commander of the armed forces, and the minister of defense. Omar al-Bashir allied himself quickly with Dr. Hassan al-Turabi, an ideological leader of the National Islamic Front. Aggravating relations between Khartoum and south, al-Bashir suspended political parties and introduced national-level Islamic law (Mamdani, 194).

The civil war lasted 22 years, officially ending with the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement on 9 January 2005. In all the second conflict caused the deaths, either directly or through famine and disease, of an estimated two million Sudanese (see fig. 1). Four million people were displaced during the war, almost all from southern Sudan. Regarding the period from 1955 to 2005 as a single war with intermittent cease fires, the Sudanese conflict is considered the longest-running civil war in history. The half century of fighting claimed more civilian deaths than any war since World War II (Dagne, CRS-2).

## The Darfur Conflict

Sudan's most notorious violence, however, has been the war in Darfur. Although the Darfur Conflict affects the variable of terrorism less than South Sudanese secession, it is nevertheless one of the most internationally visible facets of the country. It is for this reason that it must be scrutinized through the lens of diplomatic relations. Darfur, a region in western Sudan, is yet another example of arbitrary national boundaries across ethnic lines. Formerly an independent sultanate, Darfur was integrated into Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in 1922 (Mamdani, 9). While tensions between the south and north can be condensed to religious lines, pressures between Darfur and the Khartoum government lie with the Arab and non-Arab distinction, as both are predominately Muslim (Mamdani, 14). Although both parties are equally indigenous to Africa, the Sudanese meaning of "Arab" does not fall into the typical, political definition. For the most part, Sudanese consider themselves Arab based on their tribal identity, or a lack thereof, and an association with geography or language (Deng, 405).

The region has been in a status of humanitarian emergency since early 2003, when several groups in Darfur began a militant remonstrance against the Sudanese government (Dagne, CRS-2). Arab and non-Arab distinction aside, the animosity leading to this violence can be traced to extensive famine within the region and resource grievances by the nomadic populace (Mamdani, 11). The aggression in Darfur quickly escalated, with rebel forces winning most of the early conflicts. The tides changed, though, when the government began sponsoring the Janjaweed, a group of armed herders near the region (Mamdani, 69). The Janjaweed killed thousands of Darfurians and pushed many more into the neighboring country of Chad, causing further political complications (Chalira).

After the Janjaweed gained international attention, the Khartoum government denied having direct ties with them. Funding and weapons, though, were sent to the Janjaweed by the government and many accounts exist of joint attacks involving both parties (Dagne, CRS-5). Several cease-fires were negotiated by Chad, the African Union, the United Nations, and others, but did little to quell the violence by rebel factions and the Janjaweed (see fig. 2). Although many have called the conflict a horrific civil war, major political leaders, including in the United States and United Nations, have issued allegations of genocide against the Khartoum government (Mamdani, 9). Death toll estimates in the region are between 200,000 and 400,000 Darfurians, with nearly 2 million displaced (*World Factbook*). This exodus has contributed

not only to instability in Sudan but also in nearby Chad, where the majority of displaced peoples from Darfur have fled.

## Islamism and Jihadism in Sudan

Sudan has been listed by the United States as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1993, subsequent to an “exhaustive interagency review and congressional pressure” (Dagne, CRS-14). The country has a lengthy history of harboring what the U.S. defines as “terrorist organizations,” tracing its earliest origins to a political endorsement of radical Islamic ideology. Dr. Hassan al-Turabi, a founding member of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood in 1954, has since been in and out of various political roles and Islamist organizations. Dr. al-Turabi was appointed as Justice Minister in 1979, and over his four-year term began implementing Islamic Sharia law as the code of justice. Most notably, al-Turabi became Speaker of Parliament in 1996, serving until President al-Bashir declared a state of emergency and dissolved parliament in 1999. Prior to this event, al-Bashir and al-Turabi were considered to be politically and ideologically aligned (Mamdani, 194).

### 1989–2001

During the decade or so of mutual cooperation, President al-Bashir and Dr. al-Turabi landscaped the country of Sudan into a hotbed for terrorism and Islamist ideology. Following the coup in 1989, the country was essentially bankrupt (Sandee). With recent sanctions against Iraq, the Khartoum government began forming a strategic relationship with Iran. By 1991, the two countries had strong economic, political, and military ties. The Iranian President went as far as to name Sudan “the vanguard of the Islamic Revolution in the African continent” (Sandee). Iran began stationing troops in Sudan to train paramilitary, mujahidin, and jihadist forces. In one short year, Sudan became viewed as the strategic outpost for the export of Islamic revolution throughout the African continent (Sandee).

The same year that Sudan formalized relations with Iran, Hassan al-Turabi invited known terrorist figures to live in Khartoum—most notably, Osama bin Laden (Shinn, 56). There, bin Laden received privileges and tax exemptions, operating upwards of 80 businesses and charities in the country (Sandee). It was in Sudan that he was given authority to establish an estimated 23 militant training camps and bases of operation. The government, including President al-Bashir and al-Turabi, publically denied the existence of these camps. A defector named George Logokwa, however, formerly the Sudanese Minister of Labor, described many such camps where the instruction focused on “all types of combat, violence, and assassinations” (Sandee). With training from Iranian special forces, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Afghani war veterans, Sudanese terrorist organizations were in a strong tactical and strategic position to begin influencing world perception (Sandee).

Many of the terrorist attacks of the 1990s were linked, directly or otherwise, to Sudan. The most notorious of such attacks were the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, the failed assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 1995, and the U.S. embassy bombings in 1998 (Sandee and Shinn, 60). Additionally, the 1993 attack on American forces in Mogadishu had several connections to Sudan, including fighters having been sent to Sudan for training and Sudanese instructors sent to Somalia (Sandee). The resulting pressure from the international community led Osama bin Laden to return to Afghanistan in 1996, a move for which the government of Sudan claimed responsibility. Concerns over Sudan as a terrorist safe haven became less significant in the nineties, after the departure of bin Laden. In 2001, though, after the 9-11 attacks and subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, many al-Qaeda fled to neighboring Pakistan. Some, however, returned to Sudan. This rekindled a focus on Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism, a focus that the Sudanese government took more seriously than it once had.

## 2001–Present Day

Sudan has made significant progress in limiting the terrorist presence inside its borders, despite contradictory pressures in the government and conflicts within the country (Shinn, 62). In 2004, the United States removed Sudan from a list of countries considered non-cooperative in the Global War on Terror; they remain on the state sponsor of terrorism list (Dagne, CRS-14). According to the Department of State, “Sudanese officials have indicated that they view their continued cooperation with the U.S. government as important and recognize the potential benefits of U.S. training and information-sharing” (Country Reports on Terrorism 2009). With the exception of Hamas, which the United Nations does not consider a terrorist organization, the government of Sudan no longer supports the presence of extremist elements within the country.

The most significant development in Sudan’s status with the United States took place on 9 July 2011, when the southern portion of the country seceded to become South Sudan. Following an overwhelming ballot in January where the south voted for independence, U.S. President Barak Obama stated that if the Khartoum government abides by the south’s decision then the United States will begin to remove the country from the state sponsors of terrorism list (Landler). This is noteworthy also because the conflict in Darfur is removed from consideration in the overall decision. Previously, a resolution in Darfur was declared by the administration to be a necessary part in removing Sudan from the list (Sen). Separate economic sanctions directly related to Darfur, however, remain in place. Although the Sudanese government formally recognized the independence of South Sudan, there is still contention over the oil-rich border provinces (Sen).

## Consequences of the Independence Referendum

While Sudan has made recent leaps in removing terrorism from within the country, concerns linger over the extremist organizations and personalities that still remain (Shinn, 62). Additionally, the recent separation of South Sudan complicates the question of terrorism by putting indigenous Islamist groups in a new economic environment and new political system, both of which are now more influenced by western diplomacy. There are four areas of immediate significance to the future of radical Islamism in Sudan: economic disparity, religious homogeneity, intra-African relationships, and diplomatic pressures. The former and the latter are likely to be the most significant in the near future, as South Sudan holds most of region’s oil and agriculture, forcing Sudan to be that much more influenced by international relations.

## Domestic Friction

This is perhaps the biggest fear regarding the secession of South Sudan—that the southern portion of the region is, in essence, in the more advantaged position as compared to the north (Chalira). South Sudan possesses the largest portion of the oil potential in the region, as well as many of the other natural resource and agricultural economies. Currently, oil profits are split between Sudan and South Sudan, who relies on northern countries for pipelines and refineries (Trivett). Over time, though, South Sudan will depend less and less on the infrastructure to the north. As Sudan loses relevance in this critical market, acrimony between the north and south will grow proportionately.

Most of the economic attention is rightly directed at oil production in the region. Prior to secession, the south claimed 80% of the country’s oil sources (Trivett). This means that South Sudan now controls as

much as four times the amount of oil potential as compared to its northern neighbor (see fig. 3). With few other options for immediate monetary stability, an estimated 98 percent of South Sudan's budget is to come from oil revenues (Rugangazi). What is of even more importance, however, is the fact that the country of Sudan still plays a major role in the oil's transportation and refinement. Per the 2005 referendum, oil income is to be shared equally between the north and south (Trivett). With the only stable pipeline to the sea, Sudan currently holds a leading position in oil profit negotiations. A large portion of the north's revenue will now be reliant on the independent country of South Sudan, who is expected to increase oil production dramatically. Despite the separation of Sudan and South Sudan by a new national border, tensions between the two countries may now be stronger than ever.

To further complicate relations between the states, the south controls many more natural resources than does the north. South Sudan exports teak and a variety of minerals, including iron ore, copper, tungsten, and gold, as well as producing cotton, peanuts, wheat, sugar, and other crops (Rugangazi). Sudan, however, is much more nomadic, dependent on cattle and other stock in its rural areas (see fig. 4). This means that, with the secession of South Sudan, the country of Sudan is that much more impoverished and separated from the mining and agricultural resources that it once could have leveraged in the international community. With disenfranchised Islamists in Khartoum, this economic instability provides an almost immediate basis for the legitimacy of an insurgency. Historically, burgeoning insurgencies have been analogous to the negative social and economic conditions of a people (O'Neill, 4). Because the federal government of Sudan is weakened by the secession and delegitimized through its dependence on South Sudan for oil revenue, insurgent organizations in the country are given an opportunity to showcase the faults of the administration and thereby challenge its authority, likely with violence. While not a cause of terrorism in itself, an insurgency would nevertheless provide means and motivations for the tactic's use.

Economics aside, the next most noteworthy effect of the southern separation is the new lack of social diversity. The south has effectively cut itself away from the Arabic and Muslim north. What was once a point of contention within a country is now a point of contention across borders. Without a focus on civil war and ethnic or religious differences, the country of Sudan now finds itself with an essentially homogenous people. This, in addition to a perceived liberalism of the government, will likely cause Sharia law to be implemented on a wider scale than it has been in the past. Taking this into consideration, one might suppose that the country will now be more united than ever. One might otherwise predict that the nation will simply shift from religious lines to sectarian lines and, in light of poor conditions and an authoritarian regime, be more disjointed than ever. Likely, Sudan's future will fall somewhere in the median. The country will always face antagonism between factions, but it is difficult to imagine levels of bloodshed even approaching that of the civil war.

## Diplomacy

Truly, the country of Sudan has many problems confronting its future stability. What is more dangerous, though, from the perspective of terrorism, is not the threat that the people are to Sudan but rather the threat that Sudan is to Africa. While the potential for violence is uncertain at the national level it is, in fact, much higher when considering militant, international insurgencies within today's global political and economic system. As a newly transformed country, Sudan is in an ill-fated position to harbor and export terrorism throughout the region—namely, Islamist terrorism. This is due largely to the catalysts of Sudan's strategic location, tolerant environment, and porous borders. Additionally, because the new borders of Sudan contain an almost uniformly Sunni Muslim population, many in Sudan may feel that they truly are “the vanguard of the Islamic Revolution in the African continent” (Sandee).

It is for this reason, strategically more than ideologically, that Sudan will be a focal point for diplomacy in

the near future. Dr. Jakkie Cilliers, executive director of the Institute for Security Studies in South Africa, stated that:

Since sub-state terrorism is already endemic in Africa, the future threat potential in the continent lies in a complex mixture of sub-national and international terrorism. Africa may come to play a central role in international terrorism. The motivation, means, and targets all exist and these opportunities will not go unheeded for much longer. Africa presents both a facilitating environment and a target-rich environment for terrorists that seek to attack the United States, and indeed the global system. (1)

With a coast on the Red Sea and nearby countries such as Libya, Egypt, Chad, Kenya, Somalia, Algeria, and, now, South Sudan, the nation of Sudan is a perfect entrance into North Africa. Adding to this the human terrain of a 97 percent Islamic population and a poor, unstable government, this entrance is easily opened by many Islamist organizations (*World Factbook*).

The position in which Sudan finds itself is concerning to many, but three countries in particular, other than South Sudan, have an extraordinary interest in the fate of the nation. The United States, for obvious reasons, is concerned with suppressing this potential for terrorism and stabilizing cooperation throughout the region. It has sought to accomplish this almost entirely through economic sanctions and diplomacy. Iran, a long-time partner of the Sudanese government, is not interested in advancing terrorism per se, but in spreading Islamist ideals throughout the continent. With the recent changes in Sudan, it is likely that Iran will place a strong diplomatic focus on the country and on Islamic ties, despite Iran being mostly Shia Muslim. Finally, China has a strong but purely economic interest in Sudan and South Sudan.

Being the almost exclusive customer to the region, China receives a significant percentage of its oil supply from Sudan and South Sudan (Trivett). Although South Sudan has most of the oil fields, the pipeline and infrastructure to transport this oil leads through Sudan. It is for this reason that Sudan can still effectively negotiate its share of the oil profits. It is also for this reason that the United States cannot purchase oil from South Sudan, with revenue shared between still-sanctioned Sudan (Trivett). China has offered, however, to build a pipeline—as well as railways, roads, and fiber optics—to the coast of Kenya and in doing so effectively cut out Sudan from the south (Rugangazi). While this is not likely to happen for some time, the economic effects on Sudan if this came about could be devastating. This potential alone is likely to encourage Sudan into relying on diplomacy more than it ever has. Accordingly, relationships with the three aforementioned countries—the U.S., Iran, and China—will shape the country of Sudan more than any other outside pressures.

## The Road Ahead

Much of Sudan's future posture in international relations will be depend upon economic and ideological influences from within the country. As mentioned earlier, the country post-secession finds itself financially disadvantaged, especially in contrast to South Sudan's potential. It lost most of the oil that once made up a considerable portion of its revenue. It also lost fertile lands and minerals, most of which were untapped. This, combined with a national religious uniformity, provides several factors which can increase the possibility of a resurgence in local terrorist groups. Bearing these new developments in mind, several countries will be strategically invested in Sudanese stability, South Sudanese stability, and the Sudan-South Sudan relationship. This multinational interest is not likely to waver for some time, especially as political alliances are built and economic disparity between the two countries grows.

Both Sudan and South Sudan face a long and complicated road to stability. For this reason, regional terrorism may encounter a fertile environment in which to reestablish itself. At present, Sudan seems to be influenced by diplomacy more than in the past, as evidenced most through the allowed separation of

South Sudan (Shinn, 62). It is nevertheless in a unique position to export violence into Africa. Although the regime has taken a stand against radical Islamist factions, such groups continue to be tolerated by many in the populace and perhaps some in government. Sudan has made noteworthy progress in eliminating terrorism from within its borders, but these borders remain permeable and this impetus could yet be stopped. Even the new country of South Sudan poses a threat of terrorism, having gained an unstable and volatile independence in much the same fashion as its northern neighbor 50 years earlier. Truly, both countries will play a principal role in shaping the landscape of Africa over the next decade. With appropriate international pressures, this landscape can be one of cooperation and collaboration. In the absence of productive diplomacy, though, Sudan could once again become a safe haven for terrorism and one of the most considerable threats to the region's stability.

## References

- Chalira, Chikondi. Personal interview. 22 Jun. 2011.
- Cilliers, Jakkie. "Terrorism and Africa." *African Security Review* 12(4). Institute for Security Studies, 2003. 91–103. PDF file.
- Dagne, Ted. *Sudan: Humanitarian Crisis, Peace Talks, Terrorism, and U.S. Policy*. Washington: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, 2006. PDF file.
- Deng, Francis Mading. *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1995. Print.
- Engdahl, William. "Darfur? It's the Oil, Stupid..." *Geopolitics – Geoeconomics* 20 May 2007. Web. 6 Jul. 2011.
- Landler, Mark. "U.S. Revises Offer to Take Sudan Off Terror List." *The New York Times* 7 Nov. 2010. Web. 18 Jun. 2011.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2009. Print.
- O'Neill, Bard E. *Insurgency & Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*. Dulles, Virginia: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005. Print.
- Rugangazi, Randa. "South Sudan: Big trading potential for EAC." *IGIHE* 8 Jul. 2011. Web. 9 Jul. 2011.
- Sandee, Ronald. "Islamism, Jihadism and Terrorism in Sudan." Speech to American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research 2007. Web. 18 Jun. 2011.
- Scrapetv.com. Web. 28 Jun. 2011.
- Sen, Ashish Kumar. "Sudan's terror-list removal untied from Darfur." *The Washington Times* 8 Feb. 2011. Web. 18 Jun. 2011.
- Shinn, David H. "Implications of Terrorism and Counterterrorism in the Horn of Africa." *Faith, Citizenship, Democracy and Peace in the Horn of Africa*. Ed. Sthlm Policy Group. Lund, Sweden: Lund University, 2009. 55–63. Print.
- "Sudan's South Kordofan fighting: 'Mass graves found.'" BBC 9 Jul. 2011. Web. 9 Jul. 2011.
- Trivett, Vincent. "Oil-Rich South Sudan Has Hours To Choose Between North Sudan, China And The U.S." *Business Insider* 8 Jul. 2011. Web. 9 Jul. 2011.

United States. Central Intelligence Agency. "Sudan." *World Factbook*. Washington: GPO, 2009. Print.

United States. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. Country Reports on Terrorism 2009. Washington: GPO, 2010. Web

*Xtimeline.com*. Web. 6 Jul. 2011.

## About the Author



### Jason R. Waller

Jason R. Waller is a staff officer in the United States Army National Guard. He graduated from the University of Michigan with degrees in business and in economics and in his civilian career is a senior consultant for Booz Allen Hamilton.

---

Available online at : <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-terrorist-climate-of-sudan>

#### Links:

{1} <http://smallwarsjournal.com/author/jason-r-waller>

{2} <http://smallwarsjournal.com/comment/reply/11416#comment-form>

Copyright © 2017, Small Wars Foundation.



Select uses allowed by Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 license per our [Terms of Use](#).  
Please help us support the [Small Wars Community](#).