

Case Study of International Conflict: Darfur, Sudan

Sudan

Sudan is the largest country in Africa, and the 10th largest in the world. The country has been in internal (and sometimes external) conflict for long periods of time since its independence from Britain in 1956. In 2010 the population of Sudan was estimated at 43.2 million. The population composition is:

- 52% non-Arab
- 39% Arab
- 6% Beja
- 2% foreign
- 1% other

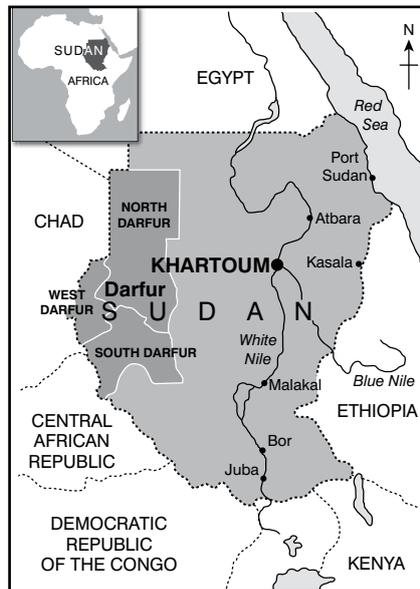
70% of the population are Muslim, but there are also Christians and others who hold indigenous beliefs. The current government, the National Congress Party led by President Omer al-Bashir, took power in a military coup in 1989. Despite significant oil and other natural resources, the vast majority of Sudan's people live in poverty, and its government has been described as one of the most repressive regimes in the world.

Although Darfur has been in the international media spotlight, it is part of a wider pattern of conflict that has destabilised the country for most of its post-independence existence. Two civil wars between the government and its people in the south took place between 1955 and 1972, and again between 1985 and 2005. An estimated 2 million people died and 4 million people were displaced. This conflict ended with the signing of the North/South Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The focus of this article is the causes and consequences of the conflict in Darfur.

Darfur: location and physical features

Darfur, which means 'land of the Fur', is a region in western Sudan comprised of three federal states: West Darfur, South Darfur and North Darfur (Figure 1). Darfur has international borders with Libya, Chad and the Central African Republic.

Figure 1: Map of Darfur in Sudan



The Fur are the largest ethnic group in Darfur. The other two major non-Arab tribes are the Zaghawa and the Masalit. The region covers a land area of over 493,000 sq. km, about the size of Spain. Much of Darfur can be described as an arid plateau with the Marrah Mountains, a range of volcanic peaks rising to just over 3,000 metres. The main towns are Al Fashir, Nyala, and Geneina.

There are four significant elements to the physical geography of the region:

- The plains and low hills of sandy soils, known as 'goz', occupying the eastern half of Darfur. Much of this region lacks water and only offers habitation where there are water reservoirs or deep wells. Where water is available there are some areas of rich pasture and arable land.
- The wadis (valleys or streambeds), which range from seasonal watercourses that flood occasionally in the wet season to large wadis that flood for most of the rainy season and flow from western Darfur to Lake Chad.
- The basement rock of western Darfur, which is sometimes covered with a thin layer of sandy soil. This is generally infertile for arable farming but sporadic forest provides cover for grazing.
- The Marrah Mountains, volcanic

Figure 2: Darfur peace must address climate – a news report

Darfur peace must address climate issues

An eminent economist has argued that war-torn Darfur cannot achieve lasting peace unless the region's water shortages are tackled. Jeffrey Sachs, director of Columbia University's Earth Institute, said that international efforts to end conflicts such as Darfur in western Sudan rely too heavily on peacekeeping and military strategy, paying too little attention to climate and development.

Sachs traces the origin of the Darfur conflict to decreased rainfall and population growth in the 1980s that ignited a struggle between settled farmers and pastoralists. He stated that crises such as Darfur are usually viewed in geopolitical and military terms, frequently ignoring the desperation that extreme poverty can bring. Thus, a viable development option is a prerequisite to lasting peace.

Sachs has asked for greater international recognition of the role of climate in causing conflict and deeper understanding of the interaction between climate change and marginal communities.

plugs created by a massif, which rise to a peak at Deriba Crater.

Overall, the region has provided an environment of limited opportunities for the population living there. Most people have been involved in subsistence agriculture. Living standards were thus low before the conflict began. The region has no history of tourism or exports to the wider world. Jeffrey Sachs believes that international efforts to resolve wars such as Darfur have paid too little attention to climate and development (Figure 2).

The causes and consequences of the Darfur conflict

In the post-independence period Darfur was mainly viewed as a peripheral region by the

government in Khartoum. As a result, the region suffered considerable neglect, with poor transport infrastructure and little investment in health and education. This led to considerable feelings of resentment among the people in the region. Factions in Darfur began to arm themselves in the 1990s. The Arabs, with funding and support from the Sudanese army, established the Janjaweed militias. The non-Arab Africans split into three main groups, forming two factions of the Sudan Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality Movement. The dispute is racial rather than religious, as Muslims are in the large majority on both sides of the conflict.

The current and major phase of the Darfur conflict began when the rebel Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) began attacking government targets in early 2003, accusing the Sudanese government based in Khartoum of oppressing black Africans in favour of Arabs. Darfur has faced many years of tension over land and grazing rights between the mostly nomadic Arabs, and farmers from the Fur, Massaleet and Zaghawa communities. In April 2003, refugees began arriving in eastern Chad to escape the conflict in Darfur. Large numbers of civilians also became internally displaced people (IDPs) in Darfur itself. By September, refugee numbers in Chad had reached 65,000 and the UN estimated that at least 500,000 people in Darfur were in need of humanitarian aid. The crisis had reached such a scale that it was attracting considerable international attention.

A ceasefire agreed in September 2003 was quickly broken. This established a familiar pattern over the years of the conflict. A fresh round of attacks by Janjaweed militias in December led to at least 10,000 more refugees fleeing to Chad. The UN now estimated that more than a million people were in need of aid. By the end of the year there were almost 100,000 refugees in Chad, raising the level of tension between Chad and Sudan. Chad had accused Janjaweed militias of numerous cross-border raids. Figure 3 illustrates the horrors faced by the civilian population from attacks by the Janjaweed militias. The NGO Human Rights Watch said that many Janjaweed attacks were purely economic, but sub-groups within the militias were also motivated

Figure 3: An account of the violence

Janjaweed Attacks

The attacks by the Janjaweed on isolated villages, as described by witnesses, have exhibited similar characteristics. In the early morning government aircraft flew overhead. Not long afterwards the Janjaweed arrived on camel, horseback and in pickup trucks to kill, rape, pillage and burn the villages. Those who survived fled into the desert.

by racism, while others had joined the Janjaweed out of criminal opportunism.

As the refugee crisis worsened, more camps were established both within Darfur and across the border in Chad. Figure 4 shows the current location of refugee camps in both Chad and Sudan according to USAID. The size of the circles represents the number of people in each camp. Some NGOs have claimed that rebel groups forcibly recruited civilians living in refugee camps.

In January 2004 UNHCR staff began relocating refugees to safe camps away from the Chad-Sudan border. However, the refugee flow out of Darfur continued, with at least 18,000 arriving in one week in January. NGOs in Darfur complained that aid was being routinely stolen by militias. In March the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan said the situation in Darfur was comparable to the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

A UN official spoke of a 'scorched earth' campaign of ethnic cleansing by Janjaweed militias against Darfur's black African population. The UN called on the Sudanese government to neutralise and disarm the Janjaweed militias. At about the same time the Sudanese government said they would make it easier for aid workers to travel to Darfur. In June 2004 UNICEF began a campaign to vaccinate 2 million children against measles, and at least 100,000 children against polio. The UN WFP (World Food Programme) appealed for \$200 million to feed two million people in Darfur, saying another \$30 million was needed to help Sudanese refugees in Chad. More accusations of human rights abuses surfaced, including the slaughter of civilians in Darfur villages.

In July the UN and Sudan signed a joint communiqué in which they both made pledges to alleviate the conflict in Darfur. At the time, the UN Secretary General described the situation facing IDPs in Darfur as grave. Shortly afterwards the WFP reached agreement with Libya for that country to serve as a humanitarian corridor for delivering emergency supplies to Chad and Darfur. In August 2004 the number of IDPs was estimated to be at least 1.2 million. The Secretary-General's Representative for Sudan informed the UN Security Council in September 2004 that the Sudanese government had not disarmed the Janjaweed, nor stopped their attacks against civilians. A WHO survey in September showed that more than 200

Figure 4: Map of refugee camps in Chad and Sudan

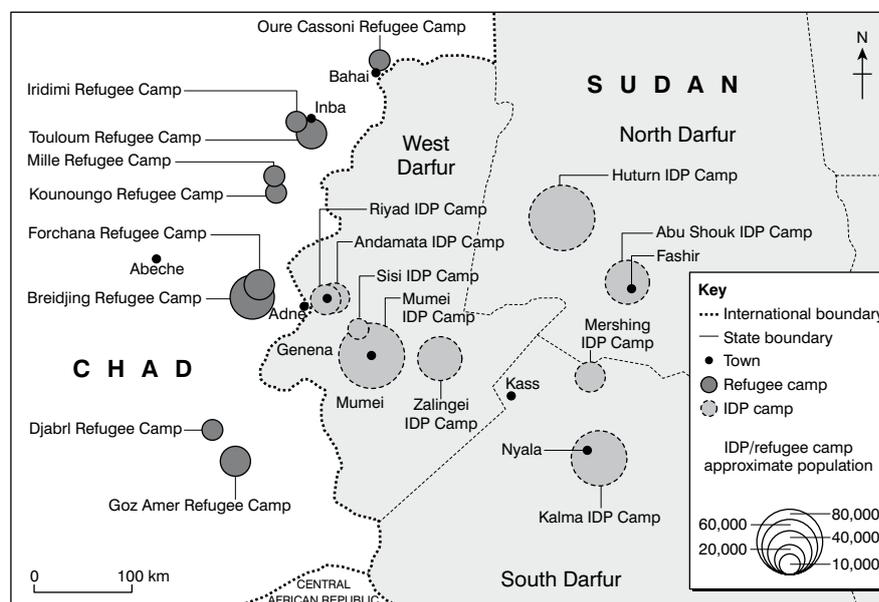
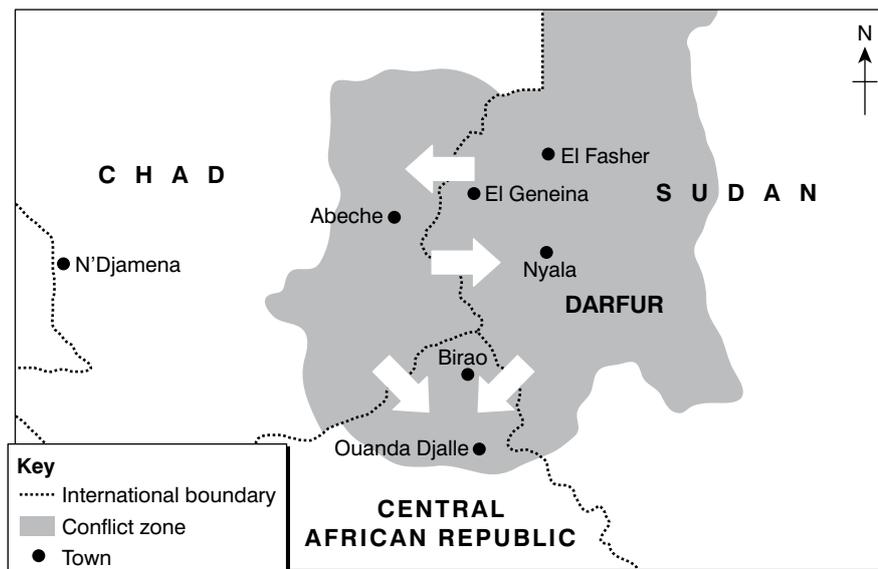


Figure 5: Darfur conflict zones map, 2006



IDPs were dying every day in north and west Darfur due to Janjaweed attacks and unhygienic conditions in camps. On 24 September the UN Secretary General told the Security Council that the ‘terrible violence’ in Darfur meant the crisis was a global issue and ‘not simply an African problem’.

In spite of promises by the Sudanese government, little action was taken against the Janjaweed and the crisis continued. In May 2006 the Sudanese government and the main rebel group in Darfur, the Sudanese Liberation Army, signed a peace agreement. However, two smaller rebel factions rejected the deal and fighting continued. In August of the same year the Sudanese government rejected a UN resolution calling for a UN peacekeeping force in Darfur, arguing that this would compromise national sovereignty. In November 2006 the African Union extended the mandate of its peacekeeping force for six months. However, hundreds of people died in fighting centred around the town of Malakal. Figure 5 is a conflict zone map of Darfur published by BBC News in December 2006.

In April 2007 the Sudanese government said it would accept a partial UN troop deployment to reinforce African Union peacekeepers in Darfur. In May 2007, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for a government minister and a Janjaweed militia leader suspected of war crimes in Darfur. In the same month the United States announced fresh sanctions against Sudan. A few months later,

in July, the UN Security Council approved a resolution authorising a 26,000-strong peacekeeping force for Darfur. Sudan said it would co-operate with the United Nations-African Union Mission (Unamid).

In January 2008 Sudanese government planes bombed rebel positions in West Darfur, stopping aid work in a number of areas because of the danger. The commander of the UN-African Union force called for more peacekeeping troops in West Darfur.

In March 2008, Sudan and Chad signed an agreement aimed at halting five years of hostilities between the two countries. In April 2008, UN humanitarian chief John Holmes said that 300,000 people may have died in the five-year Darfur conflict.

Tension again increased between Chad and Sudan after a Darfur rebel group mounted a raid on Omdurman, Khartoum’s twin city across the Nile. Sudan accused Chad of involvement, and broke off diplomatic relations.

In July 2008 the International Criminal Court’s top prosecutor called for the arrest of President Bashir for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur. This was the first ever request to the ICC for the arrest of a sitting head of state. The government of Sudan rejected the indictment. A few months later, in September, Darfur rebel groups accused their opponents of launching air and ground attacks on two towns in the area.

In November 2008, Sudan’s President Bashir announced an immediate ceasefire in Darfur. However, the two main rebel groups stated that they would fight on until the government in Khartoum agreed to share power and wealth in the region. In March 2009, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for President Bashir on charges of war crimes in Darfur. In August 2009, the UN military commander in the region said that the war in Darfur was over, although his comments drew substantial criticism. In March 2010, the Jem Darfur rebel movement signed a peace accord with the government, resulting in President Bashir declaring the Darfur war over. However, continued clashes with smaller rebel groups mean that the situation remains uncertain.

On the wider political front in Sudan, in December 2009, leaders of the North and South said they had reached agreement on the terms of a referendum on Independence due in the South by 2011, and in January 2010 President Bashir said he would accept the referendum result.

The international dimension

Apart from the United Nations and the African Union, Qatar, the Arab League and Chad have all helped to arrange peace talks at various stages over the past few years. Other countries such as China, Russia and France have also urged opposing groups to talk. The US envoy to Darfur has been instrumental in trying to get rebel groups to agree a common position to enable realistic peace talks to occur. Some authorities have voiced the opinion that in some ways the extraordinary attention surrounding Darfur has actually made the solution to this violent conflict trickier. Multinational organisations, individual countries and global civil society groups have different agendas, for instance whether to focus on the issue of genocide, holding leaders accountable, on humanitarian responses, or on the shape of the political process.

The final toll

The United Nations estimates that up to 300,000 people have died from the combined effects of war, famine and disease as a result of the conflict in Darfur. Sudan’s President Bashir says the death

toll is about 10,000, arguing that the impact of the conflict has been grossly exaggerated. There can be no doubt that accurate figures have been difficult to research as has been the difficulty in distinguishing between those dying as a result of violence and deaths due to starvation and disease in the camps and elsewhere. As much accuracy as possible will be needed to successfully press charges of genocide against those responsible.

The accusations levelled against the Sudanese government include:

- use of mass starvation and forcible displacement as a weapon of destruction
- a record of obstructing international aid
- harassment of internationally displaced persons
- bombing of hospitals, clinics, schools, and other civilian sites
- use of rape as a weapon against targeted groups
- training and supporting ethnic militias who commit atrocities
- destroying indigenous cultures
- enslavement of women and children by government-supported militias
- impeding and failing to fully implement peace agreements.

There can be no denial that rebel groups in Darfur have also committed abuses, but the argument has been that these have been on a much smaller scale and were not part of a systematic policy.

Half of Darfur's six million people are dependent on the continuing international aid effort as displacement and insecurity continue. It will be many years before a semblance of normality returns, providing of course that conflict does not resume. Due to the conflict there are very few functioning villages left in the Darfur region. Google Earth and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum have collaborated to let people see the destruction for themselves. You can zoom in on destroyed villages, houses and schools and see exactly the damage that has been done. Visit: <http://www.ushmm.org/googleearth/projects/darfur/>.

It must also be remembered that even more people have suffered

in wider conflicts in Sudan. If the people in the South vote for independence, will it be possible for the country to divide into two nations on a peaceful basis? If not, will neighbouring countries be drawn into the conflict?

Late News: Sudan Referendum

The Sudan referendum result was officially confirmed in Khartoum on Monday 7 February 2011. It showed that nearly 99% of people from the south had voted for independence, with the south seceding from the north. The referendum was a culminating point of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), ending two decades of civil war between the north and the south. This landslide result was greeted with dancing and flag-waving in the southern capital, Juba. Southern Sudan is now preparing for independence on 9 July this year. The division of Sudan, Africa's largest country, into two separate states, will leave Algeria as the continent's biggest nation in land area. The question of the name of the new country is still unresolved. It may well be just 'South Sudan'.

While observers were generally pleased with the relatively peaceful conduct of the vote, human rights groups expressed concern over reports that Sudan's president, Omar al-Bashir, could receive a year's reprieve from war crimes charges relating to Darfur. This was after France and the US agreed to consider deferring the International Criminal Court's indictment. The US government also appears to be considering removing Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism as well as reducing the strict trade sanctions currently in place against Sudan.

The director of the campaign group Waging Peace, Olivia Warham, warned the world not to turn its attention away from Sudan. She

pointed to the fact that student protestors, who were demanding the same freedoms as their counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt had done recently, had been killed on the streets of Khartoum as the election results were announced. In addition, the Darfur genocide was continuing as Sudanese troops had swept into camps and villages in the province. These views were echoed by Human Rights Watch, another important campaign group.

Concerns remain over the stability of both the north and the south in the next five months of negotiations over how to divide oil revenues, border security and other important issues. A major concern is that up to a million people who moved to the north to avoid the decades of turmoil in the south could return home, creating shortages of water, food and shelter. The United Nations Refugee Agency is seeking \$53 million to assist with this process. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has estimated that 200,000 southerners have already returned from the north over the past three months.

Political splits within southern Sudan have also to be overcome. Since the announcement of the election result, over 100 people have been killed in clashes and there are concerns that the north is secretly backing one group against another. The intervening period until 9 July will be absolutely crucial to the formation of the new state.

Focus Questions

1. Summarise the causes of tension and civil war in the Darfur region of Sudan.
2. Consider opportunities for the resolution of the Darfur crisis. Assess the likelihood of a resolution.