

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## Sudan and South Sudan: Failed Talks Require New Strategy

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Today, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton travels to South Sudan as part of her two-week tour of Africa. During her visit she will meet with South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and discuss the country's ongoing crisis with Sudan. Clinton's visit takes place a day after the two countries failed to meet the deadline imposed by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2046 to end hostilities and resolve outstanding disputes.

The U.S. played a major role in ending the decades-long Sudanese civil war in 2005 under the Bush Administration, but Washington's influence over the continuation of hostilities under President Obama has waned. The Administration has relied on the African Union (AU) and the U.N. to mediate a peaceful resolution to the conflict while encouraging

the two sides to find amicable solutions. It is in the U.S.'s interest to not only preserve its accomplishments under the previous Administration but advance a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

**Khartoum: An Unreliable Actor.** By codifying South Sudan's path toward independence through the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, the U.S. helped realize South Sudan's right to self-determination, which Khartoum continues to resist. The U.S. has also punished Khartoum for its support for terrorism. In 1993, the Clinton Administration suspended diplomatic relations with Khartoum and listed Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism, resulting in a number of sanctions, including bans on foreign assistance, arms sales, and financial restrictions. These sanctions have been renewed every year since.

However, in 2010, before southern Sudan held its referendum on independence, the Obama Administration offered a number of incentives to Khartoum. In exchange for Khartoum's respect for South Sudan's decision to secede and its cooperation in resolving the outstanding issues under the CPA, President Obama offered to remove Sudan from the state sponsor of

terrorism list, normalize diplomatic relations, and encourage the World Bank to relieve Sudan's foreign debt.

This agreement was suspended following the Sudanese military strikes against the civilian populations in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile border regions in 2011. In response, Khartoum criticized the U.S. for renegeing on its promises. Given Khartoum's untrustworthiness, it makes little sense for the U.S. to be impartial in the conflict.

**Recommendations.** While Washington lacks significant leverage in pushing Khartoum to reconcile its relations with the South, Washington does have opportunities to influence internal and external actors. The Obama Administration should take the following steps:

- **Aid the South.** Decades of protracted conflict against the South and rebel groups, particularly in Darfur, have strained Khartoum's military capabilities and precipitated an economic crisis. A weakened Sudan provides South Sudan with an opportunity to gain the upper hand in negotiations and enhance its capacity to defend itself. The Obama Administration should assist South Sudan by providing military training and

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equipment, including arms and anti-aircraft defense systems. Such hardware would send a strong message to Khartoum: Any attempt to strike civilian populations or violate South Sudan's territorial integrity will not be conducted without cost. The United States should continue to provide assistance to help South Sudan through the economic crisis arising from its conflict with Khartoum. Beyond the short term, however, many former rebel movements fail to uphold democratic standards of governance once they are in power. Therefore, the U.S. should also focus on encouraging sound policies conducive to economic growth, good governance, and development of civil society. Similarly, allegations of South Sudanese officials stealing \$4 billion from state coffers are worrisome and should be appropriately addressed.<sup>1</sup> Juba should not be given any free passes by the U.S. or the international community.

- **Discourage extension of the U.N. Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA).** The peacekeeping force, deployed last June, has proven unable to prevent renewed conflict or defuse tensions. If Sudan and South Sudan are resolved to war, there is no peace to keep. The U.N. lacks the capability to impose and enforce a peace through a peacekeeping force unless supported by intervention of a major power, such as the U.S. Although the U.S. has

interests in preventing war, there is little public appetite for such an intervention, especially when both sides have contributed, albeit unequally, to the escalation in violence. Furthermore, a deployment of U.S. forces would inflame neo-colonialist suspicions throughout African capitals and the AU. In short, unless there is a marked improvement in peace prospects, continuing UNISFA would be a waste of resources and needlessly imperil additional lives.

- **Press regional governments to advance negotiations.** The Obama Administration should test the willingness of regional governments to play a constructive role in mediating dialogue between Sudan and South Sudan. Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi maintains friendly relations with both Kiir and Sudan's Omar al-Bashir and is therefore in a favorable position to mediate the negotiations process. However, Ethiopia also hosts 35,000 Sudanese refugees, putting significant strain on Ethiopian resources. Additionally, new Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi took particular interest in the Sudan–South Sudan negotiations last month at the AU summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Egypt relies on the Nile River as its primary source of water, receiving 55 billion cubic meters of water each year.<sup>2</sup> Any disruption to this supply would have a severe impact on Egypt's weak economy. While Egypt has traditionally

maintained friendly relations with Khartoum, South Sudan's ability to regulate water flow to Sudan—and hence to Egypt—provides Cairo with an incentive to improve relations with Juba.

- **Do not make deals with Khartoum.** In 2010, former U.S. special envoy to Sudan Scott Gration urged the Obama Administration to provide conditional removal of Sudan from the state sponsor of terrorism list and other carrots. In response, Khartoum has continued its pattern of widespread human rights abuses via air strikes and village raids despite the presence of U.N. peacekeepers. The Obama Administration should not politicize the state sponsor of terrorism list. Sudan is known to have harbored members of al-Qaeda, including Osama bin Laden in the 1990s as well as members of Hamas and Hezbollah. Sudan has also provided resources and safe haven to the Lord's Resistance Army, which became a proxy force against the South during the civil war. Sanctions should be removed only once it has been proven that Khartoum no longer supports terrorism and not as a tool to elicit good behavior from a nefarious regime.
- **Engage Sudanese civil society.** Despite suspending diplomatic relations with Sudan, the U.S. posted a charge d'affaires to the embassy in Khartoum and has increased its diplomatic activity.

1. David Smith, "South Sudan President Accuses Officials of Stealing \$4bn of Public Money," *The Guardian*, June 5, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/05/south-sudan-president-accuses-officials-stealing> (accessed August 3, 2012).

2. Bradley Hope, "Morsi Visits Ethiopia to Seek Unity in Nile Nations Over Water," *The National*, July 16, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/morsi-visits-ethiopia-to-seek-unity-in-nile-nations-over-water> (accessed August 3, 2012).

This appointment aids U.S. efforts to assess the situation in Khartoum and offers an opportunity to interact with the Sudanese populace. As the Sudanese people begin to feel the effects of the country's economic crisis, pressure is mounting on the government for reform. The U.S. should build relationships with members of civil society seeking democratic reform so that, if the situation deteriorates or a political shift occurs, the U.S. would be positioned to influence the process in a manner that bolsters democracy and good governance.

**Be Proactive.** Resolving hostilities between Khartoum and Juba requires a mutual commitment to peace and stability. Yet after decades of bloodshed, the breakdown of trust and the repeated failure to act in

good faith has prevented meaningful progress.

While the Obama Administration is limited in its ability to influence Khartoum, it can be proactive in working with South Sudan and other stakeholders. By putting indirect pressure on Khartoum, the Administration can weaken the regime and provide openings for positive change.

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