



Study of Internal Conflict (SOIC) Case Studies

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Second Sudanese Civil War 1983–2005

Executive Summary

The civil war in Sudan resulted from British colonialism and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. When the Ottoman Empire governed Sudan, social fault lines emerged between the predominantly Arab northern population and the predominantly Black African southern population.¹ After pushing the Ottomans out and establishing the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium in 1899, British colonial politics further divided the country internally and stoked the division behind the violence that emerged in Sudan after the British withdrawal in 1956.² An equally large factor leading to conflict was the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the north, which, in seeking to spread Islam aggressively throughout the country, discriminated against non-Muslim southerners. The dominant north attempted to rule based on Sharia law and viewed jihad as an acceptable strategy to promote Islam through the state.³ These factors led to the first Sudanese civil war, between 1956 and 1972.

The second Sudanese civil war (1983–2005) was fought between the Muslim-dominated central government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) representing the southern, non-Muslim population. It was a continuation of the first Sudanese civil war. While the South began the first war due to the oppression by the Arab northern government, the second war was also partially about natural resources, specifically oil.⁴

The SPLA was founded in 1983 when the 105th Battalion of the Sudanese army's 1st Division mutinied at garrisons in southern Sudan.⁵ Former members of that battalion formed the nucleus of the SPLA, whose primary goal was an autonomous southern Sudan. Its rhetoric, however, proclaimed that it fought for all suppressed Sudanese.⁶ Within the rebel camp, factions diverged, as some wanted to unify Sudan, some were fighting only for freedom of religion, and others were fighting for the profits from the South's natural resources.⁷

The SPLA forces received logistical support from Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Uganda.⁸ The United States also aided the rebels indirectly in the late 1990s. Government forces and SPLA forces both disregarded civilian casualties; between 1983 and 2005, more than 2 million casualties were reported.⁹ Although many sources depict the war as a fight between Sudan's Arab north and its Black African south, some academic sources argue it was a war about the form of governance.¹⁰ The Muslim central government inherited and employed traditions of Ottoman exploitation, a strategy of governance known as the Sudanic State.¹¹ This form of governance saw the central government exploit all citizens, but the southern Sudanese bore the brunt of this policy.

In the early 1990s, Eritrea, Kenya, and Uganda led the international community's diplomatic effort to bring peace to Sudan. By 2004, the two parties agreed that the South would gain six years of autonomy, and the region would host a referendum for independence. By 2005, the two parties signed a ceasefire

agreement and allowed John Garang de Mabior, the leader of the SPLA, to become the first vice president of Sudan in a power-sharing agreement.¹²

Assessing the Five Factors

1. Was the country at the time of the conflict a nation?

No. Sudan struggled to accommodate the large, diverse population resulting from colonial borders, and it failed to develop any model for inclusive citizenship.¹³ Sudan's population fell into two major groups by geographic region: a northern, Muslim area and a southern, animist and pagan area.¹⁴ The northerners embraced the desert, spoke Arabic, and followed Islam. The southern half of the country was of a different race and culture dominated by "heterogeneous dark-skinned pagan peoples."¹⁵

2. Was the government perceived as legitimate by 85 percent of the population?

No. Sudanese President Gaafar Mohamed el-Nimeiri imposed Sharia law across the country, focusing heavily on the non-Muslim south.¹⁶ This form of law was viewed as a direct assault on the identity, culture, and autonomy of southern Sudan.¹⁷ Sudanese African ethnic groups significantly outnumbered Sudanese Arabs. Only 40 percent of the country identified as Arab.¹⁸ Therefore, less than 85 percent of the population viewed the government as legitimate amid an aggressive attack on their cultural identity and forced conversion to Islam.¹⁹

3. Did the government maintain or achieve security control over roughly 85 percent of the country's overall population?

No. More than 2 million people died due to the conflict, and approximately 4 million people were displaced.²⁰ By 1983, the Sudanese population was 19.1 million; therefore, approximately 30 percent of the population was affected by the war and rebel actions, signaling that the government failed to protect 85 percent of the country.²¹

4. Did the rebel movement have persistent access to external sanctuary in a neighboring country to a militarily significant degree?

Yes. The SPLA rebels used Ethiopia as a haven, training area, and logistical supply depot.²²

5. Was there a government army or armed constabulary force in existence at the start of the conflict?

Yes. After independence in 1956, the Sudanese military forces were "regarded as a highly trained, competent force."²³ The Sudanese military expanded after independence to nearly 50,000 men in 1972.²⁴

SECOND SUDANESE CIVIL WAR 1983–2005	
NATIONAL IDENTITY	NO
GOVERNMENT LEGITIMACY	NO
POPULATION SECURITY	NO
EXTERNAL SANCTUARY	YES
EXISTING SECURITY FORCES	YES

Outcome

Government defeat. Negotiations to end the war began in the early 1990s, but multiple negotiations fell short of a permanent ceasefire. In 2004, the belligerents signed a peace accord, which provided six years of autonomy for the South Sudan region and placed SPLA leader Garang in the position of vice president in an attempt for a power-sharing agreement.²⁵ This peace was tenuous at best. In 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, an official peace agreement, set a referendum date to establish South Sudan's self-determination.²⁶ By July 2011, South Sudan voted to secede from Sudan and officially established its independence.²⁷ The government's defeat is attributed to the lack of a national identity and legitimacy of government, the failure of the government to provide security to the population, and the external sanctuary Ethiopia provided to the rebels. This case study supports the Five Factors model.

Endnotes

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