

**Conflict Risk Alert: Stopping the Spread of Sudan's New Civil War** International Crisis Group  
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Civil

war is spreading in Sudan, and concerted international action is needed to stem the violence and prevent it from engulfing the entire country and the wider region.

Khartoum's most recent military offensive -- this time in Blue Nile state -- adds to fresh fighting between government and opposition forces in Southern Kordofan and recent hostilities in Abyei. With hundreds of thousands of people displaced, at least 20,000 of whom have fled into Ethiopia from Blue Nile in recent days, the growing war on multiple fronts poses serious dangers for the country, for its future relationship with the Republic of South Sudan and for the stability of the region as a whole.

The recently renewed conflict in these three areas is rooted in unimplemented provisions of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between Khartoum's ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), which ended a two-decade-long north-south civil war in Sudan that cost millions of lives. Those lagging issues include the failed democratic transformation of Sudan, stymied popular consultations, and the unresolved status of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) forces indigenous to the North.

After the end of the CPA, rather than negotiate with Sudanese opposition forces, NCP hardliners have opted for a military solution -- not an unusual policy response for the regime when confronted with opposition. This, however, is pushing Sudan's disparate rebel movements and opposition forces together and could trigger a wider civil war for control of the country. (...)

The situation became volatile in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, where many sided with the South during the civil war, but which remained in the North after Southern secession. The promised popular consultations were repeatedly delayed, and even when they started in Blue Nile state on September 2010, SPLM supporters and leadership lost confidence that their demand, namely the right to self-rule, would be met by Khartoum. The situation deteriorated further when Ahmed Haroun, a man indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur, was re-elected governor of Southern Kordofan in July 2011, in elections the SPLM-North candidate, Abdel Azzizal-Hilu (also Deputy Chair of the SPLM-N and former Deputy-Governor of Southern Kordofan), claims were manipulated.(...)

After conflict broke out in the Blue Nile on 1 September, Khartoum formally banned the SPLM-N, arrested a number of prominent opposition leaders and declared a state of emergency in Blue Nile state and replaced its governor, Malik Agar.

Now, the rebel forces are openly attempting to unify and pursue a policy of regime change. On 8 August 2011, Abdel Azziz al-Hilu met with the leaders of the Darfur rebel movements who rejected the Doha peace process in Kouda (an SPLM-N controlled area in Southern Kordofan), and afterwards, they announced a new alliance with a common objective: to change the regime in Khartoum by the use of force and popular uprising. (...)

In an effort to defuse the situation, Ethiopian Prime Minister Zenawi met with Malik Agar and Al-Hilu in Addis Ababa on 21 August, and on the same day, he took Malik to Khartoum to negotiate a way out of the danger. However, President Bashir responded by saying his government was unwilling to engage in further external negotiations and would not commit to the rejected framework. The door for direct SPLM-NCP talks was closed.

On 8 September, the SPLM-N officially split from the SPLM, formed a new leadership structure under Agar and vowed to continue war against Khartoum. On 16 September, the SPLM-N submitted a "road map for political transformation" to Zenawi to discuss with Bashir. It lists six conditions to be met by the government before the SPLM-N would accept a cessation of hostilities, including reinstating Governor Malik Agar, allowing humanitarian access to affected people and agreeing to international investigations into crimes committed in both Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. If Khartoum agrees to its proposals, the SPLM-N would want a mediator to negotiate the road map. Since Zenawi's 17 September trip to Khartoum, there has been no reaction from the NCP. Hundreds of thousands are now displaced, fighting has intensified in both states, and the rainy season ends in three weeks, foreshadowing increased conflict. (...)

What is urgently needed is a new approach -- supported by the key external actors, including friends of Khartoum -- to deal with the internal crisis in the North and the conclusion of post-CPA agreements between the North and South. The AU and UN should continue to support North-South talks, and both parties should be brought back to focus on the key agreements that must be reached, most immediate being economic arrangements.

Meanwhile, the international community should unite behind a single approach to begin addressing internal Sudan crises. A sustainable solution to these must focus on a cessation of hostilities and an inclusive national dialogue consisting of renegotiating the relationship between the centre and peripheries, and agreement on decentralisation and a redistribution of power leading to a new constitution, on the basis of which a referendum and new elections should be held.

A negotiated settlement of disputes is in the interest of all parties. Neither the SAF nor the SPLM-N can achieve an outright military victory. Bashir and SAF generals must be made to understand that the current military strategy of using tribal militias, ethnic cleansing and allowing insurgencies to fester, only increases the risk of fragmentation and prolongs international

interference. Likewise, the newly aligned opposition will face similar military challenges; the NCP regime is weakened but not powerless, and an alliance of the disparate opposition groups is unsustainable in the long-term. Widespread instability in North Sudan would not only exact a great toll on the Sudanese people but jeopardise the future of South Sudan. The parties should be helped by their international partners to recognise the imperative of a non-military solution. (...)

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