Sudan

ASSESSING RISKS TO STABILITY

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This report is part of a series examining the risks of instability in 10 African countries over the next decade. The 10 papers are designed to be complementary but can also be read individually as self-standing country studies. An overview paper draws on common themes and explains the methodology underpinning the research. The project was commissioned by the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

The recent upheavals and revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa reinforce the value of taking a hard look at underlying social, economic, and political conditions that have the potential to trigger major change and instability. Few observers predicted the events that have unfolded with such speed in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya since the turn of 2011. But a close analysis of the underlying fault lines in those countries may have offered some clues, uncovering a range of possibilities that would have given U.S. policymakers a head start in framing responses and devising contingency plans. Similarly, an examination of political crises and conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, such as postelection violence in Kenya in 2007–2008 and the presidential standoff in Côte d’Ivoire in 2010–2011, uncovers patterns of behavior, common grievances, and social dynamics that can help inform assumptions about other countries on the continent. The purpose of these papers is to delve below the surface of day-to-day events and try to identify the underlying structural vulnerabilities and dynamics that help to drive and explain them.

The papers in this study are not meant to offer hard and fast predictions about the future. While they sketch out some potential scenarios for the next 10 years, these efforts should be treated as thought experiments that look at how different dynamics might converge to create the conditions for instability. The intention is not to single out countries believed to be at risk of impending disaster and make judgments about how they will collapse. Few, if any, of the countries in this series are at imminent risk of breakdown. All of them have coping mechanisms that militate against conflict, and discussions of potential “worst-case scenarios” have to be viewed with this qualification in mind.
Key Stress Points

- Sudan's long-term stability depends on whether the country's North and South can reach and fully implement equitable agreements on the terms of their separation in July 2011.

- North Sudan faces a highly volatile period during the next decade. The ruling National Congress Party will face growing calls for political change, an economic slump, and the possibility of armed challenges from within. There is the added risk of contagion from the uprisings seen elsewhere in North Africa. The regime will most likely use violence to confront these challenges. The prospect of civil war cannot be ruled out.

- South Sudan faces the enormous challenge of the need to establish a functioning state with few resources in the face of serious security challenges. Its stability will depend on establishing its legitimacy as a state, which will mean being able to provide services to its citizens and keeping them safe. The next decade is likely to see slow progress checked by frequent reversals.

Overview

Instability in Sudan is not a theoretical possibility; it is a present-day reality. At the time of writing, Sudan is in the midst of an upheaval that will lead to the separation of the country into Northern and Southern portions in the summer of 2011. Any attempt to analyze the prospects for stability in Sudan must be rooted in the stark reality of the country’s impending division. For this reason alone, the prognosis for the next 10 years is discouraging.

In addition to looking at the present, efforts to predict the future direction of the country must look for clues in the past. Sudan’s history gives the optimist pause for thought. Sudan has been at war with itself for 38 of its 55 years as an independent state. Although the main axis of conflict ended in 2005, it also set the country on the path to separation, which was confirmed by a
The two Sudans will remain neighbors, intertwined by common histories, peoples, and economies. Accepting the reality of their mutual dependence and seeking to tighten their common bonds will be important ways of preventing conflict between the North and South in the coming years.

referendum on Southern secession in January 2011. Sudan’s bloody past casts a long shadow over its future. Mutual distrust poisons relations between the North and South and threatens ongoing negotiations over the terms of Southern independence. Postsecession, the two sides might be inclined to turn their backs on each other and retreat behind their yet-to-be determined border; but this is not a viable option for peace and stability. The two Sudans will remain neighbors, intertwined by common histories, peoples, and economies. Accepting the reality of their mutual dependence and seeking to tighten their common bonds will be important ways of preventing conflict between the North and South in the coming years.

The North will face enormous challenges in the next decade—politically, socially, and economically. The loss of the South and the ongoing political upheavals in North Africa threaten to unleash a wave of opposition against the ruling National Congress Party (NCP). Opposition will come from three potential sources: the established political parties; armed rebel groups in restive provinces, including Darfur and the Nuba Mountains; and the general public. If these three forces coalesce, the NCP will face a major challenge to its power. But this is by no means inevitable. The three poles of opposition are currently weak and divided. The NCP is also weakened, but it is well organized and experienced in the art of governing by coercion. An alternative threat to Northern stability could come from a power struggle within the NCP. Although reports that President Omar al-Bashir might resign in 2015 must be treated with skepticism, the fact that they surfaced at all suggests signs of vulnerability in the NCP. Both of the two main “change” scenarios, an externally led coup and an internal “palace revolution,” are likely to further destabilize Sudan. Any successor to either President Bashir or the NCP would not command majority support and would struggle to hold the country together.

The South faces a battle for survival in the coming decade. It has the unenviable task of building a nation virtually from scratch with extremely limited physical and human resources, while managing a multitude of internal security challenges and a potentially hostile neighbor to the North. Not only does it need to persuade its own people that it is capable of governing, it must also sell the very concept of nationhood to a population with multiple other forms of identity rooted in ethnicity, culture, region, and religion. The most critical tasks facing the government of Southern Sudan in the next 10 years will be to provide public services, with security being foremost; to manage the political settlement and prevent aggrieved factions taking up arms against the state; and to establish legitimacy in the eyes of its people by laying out a national vision of the new country of South Sudan. These are formidable challenges, but they can be met with enlightened leadership, sustained international support, and a degree of good fortune.

At best, the two Sudans face the prospect of a prolonged period of uncertainty in the next decade. At worst, they face the threat of renewed war, either with each other or among themselves. But conflict is never inevitable. Sudan has inbuilt mechanisms that help prevent, or at least contain, violence. Sudanese society has a tremendous ability to absorb and withstand almost unimaginable levels of violence and destruction; its localized conflicts are usually resolved by community
leaders working at the local level; and its politicians, despite their many failings, have an uncanny ability to step back from the brink and negotiate deals among themselves. Finally, Sudan’s many divisions are, paradoxically, a source of strength: They are so multilayered and acute that they rarely converge into a single, existential threat.

Defining Instability

When defining instability in Sudan, it is important to set some parameters. Although instability in more “stable” countries might be defined more expansively to include essentially nonviolent developments like political disputes, economic disruption, and social disquiet, instability in the Sudanese context can be interpreted more literally, viewed as a force with overtly destructive potential. Both in the North and the South, instability can realistically include existential threats to the states themselves, such as civil war, mass atrocities, the violent overthrow of governments, and economic collapse. Hence, instability for the purposes of this report should be taken to refer to challenges that threaten the continuation of the state in its current form in the North, or threaten to prevent the formation of a functioning state in the South.

North and South Sudan at a Glance

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<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>$2,200 (2010 estimate)</td>
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<td>Life expectancy</td>
<td>55.42 years</td>
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<td>Population</td>
<td>45,047,502 (2011 estimate)</td>
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<td>Median age</td>
<td>18.5 years</td>
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<td>40% of total population (2010)</td>
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<td>External debt</td>
<td>37.98 billion (2010 estimate)</td>
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<td>Literacy rate</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
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Background

Since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was reached in 2005, Sudan has been governed as two separate entities, the North and the South, with the South enjoying a high degree of autonomy. The referendum in January 2010 formalized this arrangement when Southerners voted overwhelmingly in favor of secession. As this report was being published, the North and the South were attempting to negotiate the terms of this separation, which is due to result in an independent nation in Southern Sudan on July 9, 2011. In recognition of the realities on the ground and the different sets of issues faced by the North and South, this report tackles the two entities separately, with a short “bridging” section that explains issues of relevance to both of them.
Placing Sudan in the Region

Sudan is a strategically important country, and its separation will add a new layer of complexity to a region that contains some of the most unstable countries in the world. As the largest country in Africa, at least until its division in July 2011, it forms a geographic and ethnographic bridge between North and Sub-Saharan Africa and links the volatile states of the Horn of Africa with Central and West Africa. Sudan shares its largely unprotected boundaries with nine states. There is a high degree of interdependence between the countries of the region. Many of its ethnic groups straddle borders. As a result, its multiple conflicts tend to assume regional dimensions. All the countries in its neighborhood have a long history of interfering in each other’s conflicts and of hosting rebel groups in a bid to leverage advantage over rival governments.

In addition, Sudan has intermittently housed terrorist groups, notably in the early to mid-1990s, when Osama bin Laden took up residence at the invitation of Hassan al-Turabi, the leader of the National Islamic Front (NIF). From its safe haven in Sudan, al Qaeda launched attacks against Sudan’s neighbors, notably an assassination attempt on then–Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. (It also plotted attacks further afield, including the 1993 World Trade Center bombing in New York.) The region’s harsh climate and precarious food security mean that humanitarian crises are frequent and often result in large refugee flows from one country to another. Water is scarce, and the River Nile, which flows through nine countries, is a highly contested resource, the management of which demands a spirit of cooperation that is largely absent. For all these reasons, events in Sudan cannot be viewed in isolation. Instability can quickly assume regional dimensions.

History

The narrative thread that runs through Sudan from the colonial period onward is one in which political power and wealth have been concentrated in the center and peripheral areas have been chronically neglected. The ability of the Khartoum-based elite to manage the volatile and alienated hinterland has varied with time. The more capable operators, which have included the ruling NIF and the NCP for long periods since 1989, have relied on a combination of violence, threats, and inducements to keep the country intact. A patronage network that purchased loyalty from strategically placed tribal leaders, political allies, and militiamen provided the glue that held the system together. It was eventually picked apart by marginalized communities in the South during two civil wars (1955–1972 and 1983–2005) and by uprisings in the Nuba Mountains, in Blue Nile State, by the Beja people in the East, and by rebels in Darfur.

Sudan is home to a bewildering array of ethnicities, languages, and religions. Consequently, the search for an identity that binds the segments of its diverse population together has been elusive—not that there has ever been a concerted attempt to do so. A tradition of predatory government extends back to the colonial period, first under the Turko-Egyptian Turkiyya, then by the jihadist Mahdiyya state, and finally by the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, from 1899 to 1956. The British accentuated the differences between North and South by ruling them as separate entities, simplistically identified as “Arab” and “African.” Attention was focused on the North, where a collaborative working arrangement was quickly reached with sections of the religious elite. The South, conversely, had to be conquered and was not “pacified” until the 1920s. Economic activity and social development were concentrated in the North. The South was largely sealed off to outside trade and was ruled indirectly through traditional chiefs. Christian missions were introduced to the South, while Islam was left unchallenged in the North. The Northern elite, which inherited
an independent Sudan in 1956, took its cue from its erstwhile masters. A succession of governments followed a myopic governance model that focused on the “core” Arab tribes of the Northern riverine states, while ignoring the aspirations of Southerners and other marginalized groups, and emphasizing Islamic and Arab exclusivity.

The civil war with the South was the disastrous outcome of this approach. This was Africa’s longest conflict, and it was only brought to an end through a combination of international engagement and recognition by the warring parties that a stalemate had been reached on the battlefield. Under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005, a Southern constituency was granted a seat at the national table for the first time and the South was granted the option, at the end of a six-year period, to vote for secession. The main rebel group, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), became the exclusive partner of the ruling party in the North, President Bashir’s NCP, in a power- and wealth-sharing arrangement. Their assignment was to “make unity attractive” for the first time in Sudan’s history and avoid an eventual split. But neither side took to the task. In reality, the NCP continued to dominate the North, while the SPLM focused its attention on the South, which was granted a large degree of autonomy under a Government of Southern Sudan. The NCP sought to obstruct and undermine its partner at every turn; the SPLM, following the death in 2005 of its founder and leader, John Garang, had its eyes on the greater prize offered by the peace agreement: a referendum on Southern secession at the end of the CPA process, in 2011.

As a result, for Southerners the referendum became the CPA’s sole objective. Attempts by the NCP to delay or derail the process came up against Southern determination, backed belatedly by international resolve. The referendum was conducted on time, in January 2011. The result, in which almost 99 percent of voters opted for secession, triggered a critical period of negotiation between the NCP and SPLM to set the terms of the separation and to divide Sudan’s assets, liabilities, and—most notably—its oil wealth in a mutually acceptable way.

The war in another of Sudan’s long-marginalized regions, Darfur, added more complexity to the country’s web of conflict. This rebellion exploded in 2003, and was met with a brutal campaign of mass killings, rapes, and evictions engineered by the NCP and implemented by hired militia groups, a method that had been perfected during the wars in the Nuba Mountains and the South. A peace agreement, which was hastily cobbled together, glossed over the concerns of local communities and failed to win the support of most of the fragmented rebel groups. Inevitably, it failed, and the conflict rumbled on.

Political Parties

The CPA was a peace agreement between the two dominant political entities in Sudan: the NCP in the North and the SPLM in the South. The NCP came to power in a bloodless coup in 1989, orchestrated by then-brigadier Omar al-Bashir. His alliance with Hassan al-Turabi’s NIF provided the ideological backbone of the new government, which pursued a path of radical Islam, institutionalizing Sharia law in the North and casting its wars against Southerners and other opponents of the regime in jihadist terms. Following the split between Bashir and Turabi in 1999, the NCP became less overtly ideological and more pragmatic. Its vision has remained predominantly short term, focused on maintaining power; keeping a lid on its opponents; and enriching itself through favorable business deals, corruption, economic speculation, and a skillful manipulation of the Islamic banking system.
The NCP is not a monolithic organization. Although President Bashir sits atop the structure thanks to the loyalty of the military, factionalism and rivalries within the senior leadership create a fluid and ever-changing picture. Bashir's position as the guarantor of the CPA has given him a degree of external security. The Southern leadership has learned to work with him, and the international community has grudgingly recognized his importance to the peace process. But with the end of the CPA and the departure of the South, Bashir will lose this claim to indispensability.

Few people outside the NCP's upper echelons have a clear understanding of its structure and internal dynamics. However, it is possible to identify two main groups, a moderate camp and a harder-line faction. The former is identified with the second vice president, Ali Osman Taha, who was the chief negotiator of the CPA process and, for many Westerners, the “acceptable” face of the regime. He is widely regarded in Khartoum as a good number two who lacks the guts needed to take on the top job, having passed up several opportunities to make his move. The hard-line camp is thought to be led by the president's assistant, Nafie Ali Nafie, who is currently believed to be in the ascendancy, having used the April 2010 elections to maneuver many of his political allies into key positions in the provinces. He is perceived as the man who is watching the back of President Bashir, guarding him against moderates in the NCP who might be tempted to turn him over to the International Criminal Court in exchange for the prospect of normalizing relations with the West.

In the South, the SPLM won the right to be treated as the sole political power broker through the efforts of its guerilla force, the Southern People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which held off the North for 22 years of war. Like the NCP in the North, the SPLM is not a monolithic organization. And though its role in guiding Southern Sudan to independence assures it of legendary status, it is admired rather than loved. Ethnic cleavages are sharp in both the SPLM and the SPLA, particularly below the top rungs of the leadership. The SPLA is widely perceived as being dominated by the Dinka, the largest ethnic group in the South, thus giving unscrupulous actors the opportunity to mobilize opposition on an ethnic basis. The Nuer, the South's next-largest ethnic group, is particularly resentful. Antipathy between the two groups is historic, and the wounds of the civil war, which was just as much an internal conflict between the Dinka and Nuer as between the North and South, have yet to heal.

Although the CPA reflected the reality of Sudan’s political power structure, it was, contrary to its name, in no way truly “comprehensive.” Its effect was to further marginalize other political organizations, particularly the traditional parties in the North, which include the Umma Party, the Democratic Unionist Party, and Turabi's Popular Congress Party—all of which have been waiting on the sidelines, divided, ignored, and frequently harassed by the NCP. Yet they remain intact, and with the CPA due to expire in July 2011, they are seeking to reassert themselves as major forces in the politics of the North.
The Economy

Sudan’s economy was traditionally based on agriculture, which continues to be its main source of employment, accounting for roughly 80 percent of the labor force. Agriculture has been particularly important in the North, where large-scale irrigation initiatives such as the Gezira Scheme have helped boost the production of commodities such as gum arabic, cotton, and sugar. The discovery of oil in the mid-1970s heralded a dramatic change of course. Sudan’s economy has become highly dependent on oil since exports began in 1999. In the North, half the government’s revenue comes from oil, and the equivalent figure for the South is a staggering 98 percent. Sudan produced an average of 490,000 barrels per day in 2010, but the oil fields are degenerating, and peak capacity is close to being reached. Approximately 80 percent of the oil is in the South, while the means for transporting and exporting it reside in the North. Under the CPA, oil revenue from the Southern fields has been split roughly 50/50 between the North and South, although the terms of this deal are being revisited as part of the postreferendum negotiations.

Outside the oil sector, the North has sought to diversify its economy to brace itself for the loss of the South. In theory, it has opportunities to move back into large-scale agriculture and develop its mining sector; it has deposits of gold, copper, and zinc, among other minerals. Economic mismanagement, however, remains a problem. Official corruption acts as a major bottleneck in the economy, and an NCP pledge to free up the economy by initiating a privatization effort has raised suspicions that more state assets will be sold off cheaply to regime cronies.

The South’s economy remains essentially undeveloped, hampered by a lack of basic infrastructure outside Juba, the Southern capital. The vast potential for agricultural development is often discussed by the Government of Southern Sudan, but so far there has been little progress. The public sector dominates the economy and employs the majority of the workforce. There is no domestic private sector to speak of, because the Southern Sudanese do not possess the entrepreneurial skills necessary to set up their own companies. This is a by-product of the civil war, which deprived an entire generation of schooling. Virtually all businesses are foreign owned, often by Ugandans and Kenyans, whose presence is increasingly resented by locals.

North-South Relations

The stability of Sudan in the next 5 to 10 years will be determined to a significant degree by the ability of the North and South to manage relations with each other. This will depend, in turn, on the outcome of the postreferendum negotiations on separation, and beyond that, the ability of the two sides to establish a post-CPA mechanism for discussing policy matters and handling disputes.

Each of the issues being tackled in the postreferendum negotiations poses a significant risk of North/South conflict unless workable solutions can be found with which both sides feel they can

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3. The source for these data is British Petroleum, 2010.
live. The willingness of both the NCP and the SPLM to soften their negotiation positions and resist the pursuit of zero-sum objectives will be the critical factor. This applies in particular to any agreement on sharing oil revenues. The South is being expected to cushion the economic blow that the North will experience when oil revenues stop flowing. For good reasons, it is unwilling to do so, arguing that it is entitled to keep 100 percent of the profits from the oil that lies within its borders. Such a position may be justified on moral and theoretical grounds, but it sows the seeds for future confrontation and makes a Northern grab for the oil fields that lie on the border a lingering temptation. Agreements that will lock in the economic interdependence of the North and South will be the key to mitigating the risk of such conflicts in the future. For this reason, the South’s aspiration to develop its own capacity to transport and refine petroleum by building a pipeline to the Kenyan port of Lamu is a potential driver of conflict. It would lower the need for North–South cooperation in the petroleum industry and deprive Khartoum of lucrative pipeline transport fees.

Other aspects of the postreferendum negotiations, if mishandled, have the potential to raise tensions in the next 5 to 10 years. Border demarcation is crucial. Extended disputes over sections of what will be a 1,250-mile-long international border carry a big risk of violence, unless agreements can be reached. The bloody border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea from 1998 to 2000 is an object lesson in the dangers of allowing territorial disputes to fester. The nature of the border agreed between the North and South is just as important as its physical location. A “soft” border that recognizes the rights of migratory groups to travel from one side to the other, and promotes trade and the easy movement of goods, will decrease the likelihood of conflict.

The contested border enclave of Abyei has the potential to remain a thorn in the side of North–South relations for years to come, carrying with it an ongoing risk of violent conflict unless a negotiated solution can be found. The intractable dispute over residency rights in the territory, which derailed the referendum there whereby people would have had the chance to choose whether to remain in the North or join the South, can only be solved at the presidential level. A cooling-off period of international administration of Abyei, combined with a revised but fixed deadline for a referendum, would help to ease tensions. But whether any negotiated solution can be enforced on the ground remains an open question. Both the NCP and the SPLM have lost the ability to control their respective allies in the region. Emotions are running high, the region is awash with arms, and a single incident of violence has the potential to spiral out of control in the absence of a more disciplined command-and-control structure within the Northern and Southern militaries and their respective proxies.

The task of defining citizenship in a two-state Sudan is another area of contention where bad decisions made in the coming months could have a ripple effect, churning up resentment and fueling conflict for years to come. Any outcome where Southerners living in the North, or vice versa, are deprived of their nationality following Southern independence could trigger destabilizing movements of people, a humanitarian disaster, and the risk of mass atrocities against civilians.

Looking beyond the CPA, which expires in July 2011, the ability of the North and South to construct a new mechanism for governing bilateral relations, managing disputes, and maintaining dialogue will help both sides navigate the choppy waters ahead. Such a mechanism, particularly if it provides for an element of international oversight, would greatly enhance the ability of both sides to mitigate conflict. In addition, each side will need to exercise restraint in its relations with the other and resist the urge to once again serve as a host for each other’s enemies. The North has a long history of dispatching militia groups to wreak havoc in the South. The South, meanwhile, has harbored the leaders of some of the main Darfur rebel groups. Any attempt to revive these
practices carries a significant risk of triggering wider conflict. Instead, both sides need to develop mutual trust—a process that will take time, effort, and a change in mindset. For the South, the instinctive reaction to any internal security issue has been to blame Northern meddling. This kind of pervasive distrust can be overcome with time, but is likely to remain a significant barrier to good relations between the North and South for several years to come.

North Sudan Country Assessment

When trying to make an assessment about the stability of the North in the coming 5 to 10 years, the most important fault lines to examine are

- the shifting political landscape,
- armed threats against the state, and
- economic trends.

For each dynamic, the secession of the South must be the starting point of analysis because this unfolding process of separation is the most important catalyst for reshaping the political, social, and economic landscape in the North. The ability of the NCP to manage the uncertain period running up to and immediately beyond Southern independence will largely determine whether Sudan undergoes a period of consolidation during the next decade or, more likely, a prolonged bout of instability. Given this context of uncertainty and stress, there is a heightened capacity for unforeseen events—perhaps a coup attempt, an economic shock, or an armed attack by regime opponents—to trigger large-scale instability and unsettling change in the North.

Political Management

Until the beginning of 2011, the assumption of most experts in Khartoum was that neither the opposition nor the public had the ability and the courage to take advantage of the NCP’s growing weakness. But the recent events in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya have shaken this assumption, exposing the potential fragility of the dominant party’s grip on power. The popular uprising in Egypt—which shares with Sudan not only a common border but also deep social, political, economic, and historical ties—made a particularly strong impression. The Sudanese people have suddenly awoke to the possibility that their government may not be as secure as they had previously thought. Comparisons with Egypt go only so far, however. Sudan may have many of the same problems faced by Egypt, but it is far less willing to tolerate the kinds of protests seen in Cairo. The NCP is resolute in its determination to prevent unrest, and its record in office suggests that any challenge will be faced down with mass arrests and overwhelming force. President Bashir’s approach to dealing with regime threats comes from the Gaddafi rather than the Mubarak school of leadership.

The NCP’s resolve to hold on to power will be severely tested in the coming months and beyond. Even before Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya erupted, the NCP was already in survival mode, having been widely blamed for the impending loss of one-third of the country’s territory through its inept stewardship of the CPA peace process. For the many Sudanese who feel a sense of pride in belonging to Africa’s largest country, the breakup of the nation is a source of grief, and the backlash against the NCP will be potentially damaging. The opposition parties distanced themselves from the NCP in the period before the referendum, determined that the blame for Southern
independence should rest with the NCP alone. But it is not clear whether they have the political
guile to capitalize on the NCP’s misfortunes. They are weakened by a widespread public percep-
tion that they are out of touch and disorganized—“all talk and no action.” The Umma Party has
been damaged by its record in office under Sadiq al-Mahdi, who remains its head.5 In Khartoum,
a common view is that Umma had its chance to govern and blew it. The ability of the traditional
parties to forge a common front, reconnect with the public, and mobilize opinion on the street
will determine whether they are able to reemerge as a potent force in Sudanese politics capable of
unseating the NCP.

The political fortunes of the Northern wing of the SPLM will be interesting to monitor in
the aftermath of Southern independence. Its leader, Yasir Arman, ran an effective campaign in
the April 2010 elections, and his ability to appeal to a cross-section of the public, particularly the
young, caught the NCP off guard. His withdrawal from the election (allegedly because he was on
course for victory, an outcome that would have prompted the NCP to derail the Southern referen-
dum) deeply disappointed those in Khartoum who identified with his call for a new constitutional
offer and a genuinely inclusive political dispensation, bringing in marginalized groups and regions
to a power-sharing arrangement in the center. The SPLM Northern sector has now formally sepa-
rated from its Southern counterpart and is trying to establish itself as a new political movement in
the North. The NCP will likely try to neutralize its threat by seeking to co-opt its members and/or
curtail its operations following Southern independence.

Aside from formal politics, the most likely driver of change—and indeed instability—will be
the public at large. The public’s willingness and ability to mobilize against the NCP remains un-
certain, but there are already signs that courage has been fortified by the example of mass protests
in Tunisia, Egypt, and throughout the Middle East. The most likely leaders will be students and
members of professional associations. Student organizations have lain dormant in recent years but
showed signs of regrouping during the 2010 elections under the Girifna (Arabic for “We Are Fed
Up”) movement. Small protests against living conditions were organized through social networking
media and were staged at Omdurman and Khartoum universities in January and February, al-
though they were swiftly snuffed out by the security forces. Doctors’ groups have emerged as a vocal
constituency of opposition to the government, and farmers are also a potentially powerful group.

Much will depend on the NCP’s response, which can be divided into two elements: first, its
strategy for dealing with organized opposition; and second, its ability to manage internal tensions.
The public expectation is that the NCP will seek to assert itself in the aftermath of Southern inde-
pendence, launching a crackdown on political opposition and civil liberties in an attempt to show
that it remains firmly in charge. Attacks on Umma Party members, the detention of journalists and
protestors, and the arrest of Hassan al-Turabi at the turn of 2011 were a foretaste of this approach.
However, a wider crackdown risks intensifying opposition to the regime, and even the most ruth-
lessly effective government will struggle to sustain an open-ended policy of coercion. The NCP
recognizes this, and thus has sought to preempt protests with conciliatory gestures, which have in-
cluded issuing vague promises to set up an anticorruption commission, loosen press controls, and
establish a council to look into graduate employment issues. Judging by past behavior, it is unlikely
that the NCP will follow through on any of these promises, but they may help buy it more time.

5. Sadiq’s short-lived government, from 1986 to 1989, failed to overturn Sudan’s hated September Laws,
which imposed Sharia law across the whole country. It also presided over the arming of the Arab militia
groups that terrorized the South and provided the blueprint for the Janjaweed in Darfur.
Many observers believe that change, if it does come, will be from within, and that the key institution to watch is the NCP itself. The ability of rival camps to distance themselves from the catastrophe of Southern secession will determine whether the moderates or hard-liners emerge on top. One disgruntled constituency is the NCP’s political Islamic flank, which is blaming President Bashir and Vice President Ali Osman Taha for signing the CPA in the first place, thereby setting in motion the process that led to Southern self-determination. Appeasing this constituency will be a challenge for the president, particularly because they have an alternative political home awaiting them in Turabi’s Popular Congress Party. A desire to shore up the Islamist base probably accounts for Bashir’s pledges to strengthen Sharia law following the departure of the South. However, any attempt to follow through on this promise would risk a backlash from the majority of more secular-minded Northerners who do not favor a return to Islamist rule.

The “loss” of the South weakens the personal position of President Bashir, providing an incentive for ambitious challengers within the NCP. As long as the International Criminal Court’s indictments hang over him, President Bashir has a strong incentive to remain in office, believing his position affords him some protection against arrest. For this reason alone, public statements suggesting that he will step down from office at the next election must be taken with a large pinch of salt. He is also aware that the smooth running of the referendum theoretically exposes him to a challenge from internal rivals who might calculate that serving him up to the international community would ease Sudan’s normalization of relations with the West. The inner workings of the NCP are not well understood, yet it seems clear that for the time being at least, Bashir can count on the backing of the military leadership that brought him to power.

In many ways, Bashir has been a force for stability both for the NCP and the North more widely—albeit a brutal, repressive stability. Within the NCP, he has successfully kept rival camps under the party umbrella, while his personal investment in the CPA has helped shepherd the peace process between North and South. His departure from office would unleash unpredictable forces, prompt a power grab by his rivals, and likely trigger a new round of the perennial debate over Sudanese identity, a debate that has tended to be accompanied by violence. It would be naive to assume that the next president will necessarily be any better than the incumbent. Making the effort to envision a post-Bashir Sudan should therefore be a strategic priority for the United States. And engaging with the opposition parties as well as civil society groups should be a critical element of this effort.

**Armed Challenges**

The secession of the South will not only deal a major psychological blow to the North and trigger a political crisis for the NCP; it will also raise serious questions about the stability of the state that is left behind. The divide-and-rule policies of successive governments and their inability or unwillingness to govern beyond Khartoum and the core states of the Nile Valley have created simmering resentment in all corners of the North—in Darfur in the West, in the border provinces of Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan in the South, among the Beja people of the East, and among the Nuba in the far North. Furthermore, the precedent of Southern secession has raised hopes among some of
these disaffected communities that they too can win the right to self-determination by taking up arms against the state.

Nowhere is situation more evident than in Darfur, which is likely to reemerge as the greatest challenge to the territorial integrity of the North after Southern independence. This region's fragmented rebel groups have never shown much inclination to compromise or negotiate, and this tendency is likely to intensify now that the South has won its right to independence. The Darfur rebel groups are likely to increase their demands; calls for greater autonomy and government as a single unitary region are already beginning to morph into calls for self-determination. The response of the NCP is likely to make the situation worse. The NCP favors a military solution to end the rebellion in Darfur, in an attempt to show Sudan that Southern secession is an exceptional event not to be repeated elsewhere. Fighting is likely to intensify in the next 12 months and beyond. The ability of Khartoum to sustain its rapprochement with neighboring Chad will be critical to its strategy. With the exception of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), Darfur's rebel groups can be contained fairly comfortably by the North. However, they become a far more dangerous proposition if they reconnect with powerful external backers, such as Chad or Libya. As for JEM, it is likely to remain the NCP's most troublesome adversary in the short to medium terms—given its refusal to compromise, its stated determination to overthrow the government, its proven ability to follow through on its threats (notably its lightning attack on Omdurman in 2008), and its powerful backers in Khartoum.

The other main flashpoint region in the next 5 to 10 years will be the states of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, which will make up the “New South” following Southern independence. These two states are openly hostile to the government in Khartoum and are spoiling for a fight. Although located in the North, both are home to populations whose sympathies largely lie with the South. This region saw some of the worst fighting of the civil war, but despite its sacrifices was cut adrift by the South when the CPA was signed. Instead of getting the chance to take part in a referendum to join the South, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile were shortchanged with ill-defined “popular consultations.” Now, resentment is growing among the region's people as they discover that the process merely enables them to voice their opinions on the CPA arrangements. After decades of war and years of being terrorized by militia groups from other parts of the North, the realization that they have nothing to show for it is a bitter pill to swallow. The situation is particularly volatile in the Nuba Mountains, where growing numbers of people are openly calling for independence and proclaiming their willingness to fight for it. The region is heavily militarized, with well-organized militia groups, particularly in Blue Nile State. There will be a high risk of conflict in the coming 5 to 10 years, unless Khartoum makes credible efforts to address the grievances of the region, tackle its chronic underdevelopment, and end its political marginalization. It is unlikely to do so.

The nightmare scenario for the NCP in the medium to long terms is the emergence of multiple uprisings across the North, which would stretch its military resources to the limit. This is a

6. Indeed, President Bashir in March 2011 approved a plan to further divide Darfur, announcing that two additional states would be formed, making a total of five.
credible risk given the recent signs that Darfur rebel groups are extending their operations into the Kordofan region. In addition, Khartoum can no longer count on the loyalty of fighters from Darfur, who traditionally made up a significant proportion of the military. A simultaneous uprising in one or more regions, combined with a mutiny within the Sudanese Armed Forces, remains a feasible possibility that would place the regime under mortal threat and challenge the very existence of the state.

**Economic Prospects**

Northern Sudan faces an uncertain economic outlook in the short term, due in large part to the secession of the oil-rich South and the terms, still to be negotiated, under which this takes place. On the one hand, the importance of oil should not be overstated. The North has an important although underutilized agricultural sector and the potential to expand its mining sector. Khartoum managed fairly comfortably without oil for many years. But it has now grown accustomed to it, and its economy has become dangerously imbalanced. Until the terms of the postreferendum negotiations on sharing oil revenue are known, it is hard to assess the potential economic hardship that Khartoum will need to endure from the loss of the South. Irrespective of the outcome of the negotiations, the fiscal shock to the northern economy will be serious, and possibly acute. Even if Khartoum manages to extract favorable terms from the South, oil revenues will most likely fall off sharply in the next 5 to 10 years. This would be the case regardless of Southern secession because, according to World Bank estimates, oil production will reach its peak in 2012.\(^7\) Claims by the NCP that it will be able to surpass Sudan’s current production level of just under half a million barrels per day even after the South departs with 70 to 80 percent of the oil are mere bluster.

On the plus side, the North can continue to count on investment from the Gulf states, China, and other important economic partners. Any normalization of relations with the United States would hold out the prospect of an end to economic sanctions. This would bring modest economic benefits but, more important, would open the door to debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries program administered by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and allow greater access to credit markets. In the long term, negotiations on debt relief will be critical to the North’s economic future. A national debt approaching $40 billion will simply not be sustainable. But the chances of negotiating a debt relief package will be complicated by the fact that an unusually high percentage of the debt, approximately two-thirds, is bilateral. Balancing the demands of such a diverse group of creditors will be difficult.

Much will depend on the NCP’s macroeconomic management. An impressive juggling act will be required to keep the currency from becoming overvalued, hold down inflation, prevent a serious balance-of-payments adjustment, and discourage capital flight. If oil revenues suddenly dip after Southern independence, there would need to be layoffs in the public-sector workforce, which

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would have a serious impact given the bloated size of the sector. The ability of the government to contain the public reaction to increased economic hardship will be important. Austerity measures announced on the eve of the Southern referendum are already beginning to bite, coming on top of rising food prices. Anecdotal evidence from Khartoum suggests that many families are being forced to get by on one meal a day. In addition, there are structural weaknesses in the economy, particularly its failure to provide enough skilled jobs for university graduates. These are the same economic dynamics that led to the revolution in Tunisia. Already, there have been small-scale protests about economic conditions and rising prices in Khartoum, Omdurman, El-Obeid, Kosti, and Gezira. The government has responded with force. This approach will become more difficult if the economy deteriorates further and the protests gain momentum.

The NCP’s long-term survival will also depend on its ability to continue feeding the patronage network, which has been instrumental in helping it hold onto power for so long. The reduction in oil revenue will put this patronage system under serious stress. The ability of the regime to buy loyalty and to use cash inducements to persuade groups such as the Arab tribes in Darfur to carry out its dirty work will be sorely tested. Much will also depend on the development agenda pursued by the NCP—whether it genuinely tries to address the economic concerns of marginalized regions or continues to focus resources on core regime supporters in the so-called Hamdi Triangle formed by the Dongola–Sennar–Kordofan axis.8

Scenarios

The outlook for the North will be bleak in the coming decade. Economic decline, political mismanagement, and a potential proliferation of armed challenges pose a significant threat to the regime. Taken in isolation, each threat has the potential to shake the NCP’s grip on power. But from President Bashir’s perspective, the real threat will be when one or more of these challenges combine. In a worst-case scenario, it is possible to see the North becoming a failed state, disintegrating into ethnically based regions. Some possible scenarios for the coming 5 to 10 years include regime overthrow, a palace coup, and a continuation of the status quo. It is useful to briefly consider each one.

Regime overthrow. One low- to medium-level risk but high-impact scenario uses as its starting point the worsening economic conditions triggered by Southern secession and the sharp reduction in oil receipts to the North. Tough austerity measures and spiraling food prices lead to street protests that the government fails to suppress, despite a harsh crackdown. The protests gain momentum, eventually drawing support from the main opposition parties. Emboldened by mounting evidence of regime weakness, the JEM or one of the other main rebel groups in Darfur decides to take advantage, launching a repeat of its 2008 military offensive. The people of the Nuba Mountains decide that this is their chance to seize control of their own destiny and join the rebellion against Khartoum. The military’s support for the regime—faced with threats on all sides,

8. The Hamdi Triangle was named after the former NIF finance minister Abdulrahim Hamdi, who proposed concentrating development and investment on Sudan’s socioeconomic heartland, to the exclusion of marginalized regions such as Darfur and the South.
and lacking the will to defend the regime—starts to wobble, and mutinies break out within the Sudan Armed Forces. Perhaps the JEM succeeds in its attempt to topple the regime, with support from neighboring countries, which see the end of the NCP regime as an opportunity for increased influence in Khartoum. More likely, one of the traditional opposition parties steps into the power vacuum by drawing on its long-established network of support in the North. Irrespective of who takes charge, the resulting government is brittle and lacks popular support. Parts of the country remain in open revolt, and Sudan starts to fragment into ethnic fiefdoms.

**A palace coup.** Another low- to medium-level likelihood but potentially high-impact scenario sees a rival camp within the NCP making a move to topple President Bashir. Hard-liners within the party become exasperated by what they see as Bashir’s supine behavior over the referendum and his willingness to let the South secede without a fight. After sounding out senior members of the Sudan Armed Forces, who promise not to stand in the way of a coup attempt, they lead a putsch. Bashir is placed under house arrest. The new leadership steers the North back to the pursuit of a more narrowly based Islamist rule. In a less likely scenario, the plotters come from the “moderate” wing of the NCP. Vice President Taha calculates that ousting Bashir would remove the main obstacle to normalizing relations with the West. His bid for power is based on the support of the secular-minded majority in the North who are fed up with their economic plight and yearn for an end to their country’s pariah status. Unofficial discussions begin with Western representatives. A deal is struck whereby Bashir is handed over to the International Criminal Court in return for international assistance to Khartoum, an end to sanctions, and the guarantee of fast-track negotiations on debt relief. Both versions of this scenario carry a high risk of violence within the NCP because of the difficulties that any successor to Bashir would face in winning the support of the whole NCP and senior military people.

**A continuation of the status quo.** Any scenario predicting major change in the North must be weighed against the lessons of the past 22 years, which are a testament to the NCP’s proven ability to dig itself in, thrive in adverse circumstances, and exploit its opponents’ weaknesses. The NCP has shown remarkable tenacity in holding onto power for more than two decades through a combination of tactical genius, brute force, and the incompetence of its opponents. President Bashir is a survivor, and he can rely on the personal loyalty of senior figures in the military. He will be difficult to shift and will not go without a fight, particularly with an International Criminal Court indictment hanging over him. Suggestions that he will step aside at the next election in four years’ time cannot be completely discounted but are likely to be a bluff. It is true that the NCP’s survival skills will be tested as never before in the coming years. With fewer resources at its disposal to either coerce or pay off opponents and with problems multiplying at every turn, political management will become harder than ever. Darfur will continue to be a running sore, and uprisings may flare up along the border with the South.

However, any regime that has clung to office for so long in the absence of widespread popular support cannot be written off, even if the evidence suggests that it will need to contend with a rising tide of security challenges, economic difficulties, and social unrest. Another factor favoring the NCP is the weakness of the political opposition, which has failed to come up with an effective strategy or to rally mass support behind its platform. For these reasons, perhaps the most likely scenario for the North in the coming 5 to 10 years is one in which the NCP remains nominally in control but faces a potent combination of economic decline and armed threats from restive regions. The result is a slow but steady disintegration of the state, an outcome that would have serious repercussions for the stability of the region and beyond. Events in nearby Somalia have shown
that the inability of weak or failed states to prevent criminals and terrorists from taking up residence within their borders can eventually pose a direct security threat to the United States itself.

**South Sudan Country Assessment**

South Sudan represents a case study unique among those examined in this project: an incipient state. Rather than requiring consideration of the security risks primarily associated with the breakdown of institutional order, the case of South Sudan demands consideration of those risks associated with the consolidation of a new order. Given the nascent level of its state-building efforts and the tremendous challenges it faces, South Sudan will struggle to attain a minimum level of stability in the next 10 years. “Stability,” in the context of South Sudan, can be defined as maintaining its territorial integrity, establishing basic security for its citizens, and ensuring that localized low-level conflicts do not explode into civil war.

The following discussion introduces some of the conditions that give rise to conflict in South Sudan, before outlining the key challenges that will most likely determine the fundamental stability of this embryonic state. These challenges are

- building a functioning government and providing public services, particularly security;
- managing the political settlement; and
- establishing relations between the state and its citizens.

At the heart of these challenges is the state’s ability to establish its legitimacy. The final subsection looks at how these dynamics might play out in the next decade by sketching out some potential scenarios.

**South Sudan at a Glance**

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<tr>
<td>Average per capita consumption per month</td>
<td>$42 (2010 estimate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>8.26 million (2008 estimate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population density</td>
<td>13/square kilometers (2008 estimate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population under 30 years of age</td>
<td>72% (2008 estimate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural population</td>
<td>83% (2008 estimate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary school completion rate</td>
<td>1.9% (2009 estimate)*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy rate</td>
<td>27% (2009 estimate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Returnees since 2005</td>
<td>2.3 million (2011 estimate)</td>
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*Sources: Southern Sudan Centre for Census, Statistics, and Evaluation for all data except the primary school completion rate, for which the source is UNESCO.*

**Conditions of Conflict**

The challenge of building a state in South Sudan is all the more formidable for having to take place in an environment where conflict is endemic, people are traumatized by war, ethnic divisions are
deep, traditional authority structures have been compromised, resources are limited, and arms are plentiful. South Sudan is a violent place. The civil wars with the North from 1955 to 1972 and 1983 to 2005 were only the largest of a myriad of conflicts fought over a diverse range of issues and grievances, most of which have been highly localized. As a result, generalizations about South Sudan’s conflict dynamics are difficult. Competition for resources such as water and cattle or disputes over access to land for grazing often intersect with interethnic or intraethnic rivalries. The prevalence of small arms, the collective memories of past wrongs committed, and the willingness of powerful local actors to manipulate tensions for their own self-interest all act as accelerants to conflict.

Many discussions about South Sudan focus on ethnic cleavages as a root cause of conflict. A commonly held view in the South is that these divisions are so deep that, for example, the Nuer and the Dinka ethnic groups will never be able to live together in an independent nation. There are those who argue that national identity will struggle to take root in South Sudan—that ethnicity will always rise above other forms of self-identification. But although ethnicity is an important lens through which to look at the South, it is only one of many. Identity often cuts across ethnic lines, and many Southerners embrace multiple and sometimes shifting identities, which may include language, lifestyle (pastoralist and agriculturist, nomadic and sedentary), geographic location, and religion. Cleavages within groups such as the Dinka and Nuer are often as important as interethnic differences. Ethnic rivalry is rarely the sole cause of violence but is more helpfully understood as an extremely powerful mobilizing tool, used by politicians and conflict entrepreneurs to manipulate existing grievances over such issues as contested internal borders or the allocation of scarce resources.

The aim of this brief discussion is to emphasize that conflict is endemic in South Sudan. It will be virtually impossible in the coming decade to prevent multiple episodes of localized violent conflict. The priority will be to contain these local eruptions of violence and prevent them from linking up with broader grievances, taking on ethnic dimensions, and escalating into wider conflicts that threaten the state itself. However, the ability of the fledgling state of South Sudan to prevent and manage conflict will be extremely limited. The criminal justice sector is in the very early stages of development, and the personnel and institutions required to prevent violence and catch and prosecute offenders are not yet in place in large swaths of the South. The onus for conflict prevention and mitigation continues to rest on traditional authority figures such as chiefs and religious leaders and on the use of customary law. These structures can play an important complementary role to the state but are not well equipped to take the lead in providing security and justice.

**Determinants of Stability in South Sudan**

**Building a capable government and providing public services.** As it nears independence in July 2011, the most urgent task facing the government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) is establishing
legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens. One of the most important ways in which it can achieve this is by acting like a government, which means establishing a reputation for competence and efficiency. Delivering public services will be critical. The task facing the GOSS is daunting. Despite the atmosphere of hope and optimism that accompanied the referendum and the months leading up to independence, South Sudan’s legacy of conflict has left deep scars and made the task of building a stable and united nation all the more difficult. The civil war deprived an entire generation of the right to an education. Skills learned during decades of fighting and surviving in the bush do not easily translate into the workplace. As a consequence, human capacity is woefully inadequate. South Sudan lacks teachers, doctors, and other key public-sector workers. There is no emerging class of entrepreneurs who possess the skills to set up businesses and spearhead the development of a thriving economy.

The impact of this skills shortage is felt keenly in the GOSS. Though there is general agreement that there are some capable and talented people in its upper echelons, they are overwhelmed by their responsibilities and have very little support from their junior colleagues, many of whom do not possess the basic skills necessary to perform office functions. Running a central bank, setting fiscal and macroeconomic policy, juggling competing development priorities, and managing a national budget are all new responsibilities for Southerners. The international community is assisting, but the challenge of establishing a level of basic competence in the GOSS will take decades, and outside help cannot be counted on forever. Mistakes will be inevitable and, particularly in the economic arena, these mistakes could have grave consequences for stability. A poorly executed fiscal policy, for example, would hamper the GOSS’s ability to deliver public services, hold back development, deter investment, and in a worst-case scenario, even set the South on the road to bankruptcy.

Economic diversification is another important area to tackle. The South’s crippling dependence on petroleum means that its economy is narrowly based and vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. Production is due to peak in about the next 12 months, yet the GOSS has been slow to grasp the potential dangers of falling revenue combined with increased demands for public services. So far, there has been a lack of urgency in drawing up plans to develop other areas of the economy such as agriculture, a sector that carries more prospects for job creation than the petroleum industry. Overdependence on oil has also led to the development of a rentier economy and encouraged the spread of corruption. The absence of strong institutions has made the problem even worse. Public perceptions of corruption have undermined faith in the government, and these grievances, if allowed to fester, could be a destabilizing force in the long term.

In addition to developing bureaucratic and economic competence, the GOSS has a responsibility to deliver services to the citizens of their new state. This is an urgent task, given the fact that South Sudan lacks even the most basic physical infrastructure and that public expectations of what the state should be able to provide are so high. Juba may be in the midst of a—largely unplanned—development frenzy, but a short trip outside the capital reveals the virtual absence of roads, schools, clinics, and other public goods. Moreover, outside the 10 state capitals of South Sudan, it is hard to find any physical evidence of the state at all. The development statistics are stark. Only one in 50 children completes primary school, and 85 percent of adults are illiterate. Nearly 2 in every 10 children die before their first birthday. The task of deciding what to prioritize when all the needs are urgent poses serious dilemmas. In addition, the GOSS is forced to balance the competing demands of providing short-term services with the need to build long-term mechanisms for delivering public goods in a sustainable way. The temptation to rely on foreign donors
for service delivery is obvious. But in the long term, the GOSS cannot establish legitimacy if its people continue to look first to the international community for assistance.

The most basic public service expected of the state is the provision of security. Without a safe environment in which to live, people's faith in the legitimacy of the state will quickly evaporate, with dire implications for stability. Without the means to provide effective security, South Sudan will fail to contain the multitude of armed groups that operate within its borders and will ultimately struggle to maintain control of its territory.

The formal security structures of South Sudan, the Southern People's Liberation Army and the Southern Sudanese Police Service (SSPS), are in principle charged with maintaining security by protecting the borders of South Sudan, maintaining a monopoly of force within its territory, and enforcing the laws of the state. The SPLA, however, is grappling with a series of transformational issues, while the SSPS remains in its infancy. Large parts of South Sudan are effectively a formal security vacuum and will likely remain so for many years to come. The burden of safety provision falls on the shoulders of individual citizens. Where the police are absent or are simply not trusted, civilians often rely on local chiefs as security providers. The president of Southern Sudan, Salva Kiir, has recognized the parallel importance of traditional security as a complement to the SSPS and SPLA, outfitting many chiefs with “chief's police” to assist them in settling local disputes. This alliance between formal and traditional security structures is necessary given the lack of resources at the government's disposal, but also makes for an uneasy relationship. Lines of responsibility are blurred, and cultural and legal mores inevitably clash. Constant negotiation will be required to prevent security arrangements from becoming sources of instability in themselves.

**Civilian disarmament.** The task of extending formal security services will take place in a context where civilian populations are heavily armed and accustomed to fending for themselves. Given the prevalence of small arms in the region—one survey estimates that as many as 720,000 weapons were held by civilians in the South at the end of 2009—disarmament will inexorably be a priority issue. However, civilian disarmament campaigns have themselves been a cause of violence in the past and are likely to remain a flashpoint issue. As long as citizens continue to doubt the state's ability to keep them safe, they will be reluctant to hand over their weapons, which often are their only source of protection. For a population accustomed to fighting, disarmament is a powder keg issue; in the words of one Juba-based security expert, taking away a person's gun is akin to taking away a part of their identity and power of self-determination. To date, the responsibility for disarmament has largely rested with the SPLA, which is not adequately trained to carry out the task. In the absence of firm direction from the government, disarmament has been approached in a haphazard fashion and has often been accompanied by considerable violence. In some cases, communities have been disarmed while their neighbors have not, leaving them exposed to attack. Unless handled sensitively, the disarmament issue can quickly take on ethnic dimensions, with

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disarmed groups claiming discrimination. It is not hard to envisage a scenario in which a botched disarmament campaign by predominantly Dinka-SPLA troops leads to a massacre that unscrupulous politicians present as an attack aimed against the Nuer or another important ethnic group. Such an episode could provide the spark for a dangerous conflict, which, unless quickly tamped down, could assume national proportions.

Reforming the SPLA. The SPLA, a guerrilla movement turned national army, is by far the largest and most important institution in South Sudan. For this reason, the long-term stability of South Sudan is to a large extent tied up with the strategic decisions made in the coming years about the future of its army. Current best estimates put the formal size of the SPLA at between 125,000 and 175,000, although nearly all adult males have either formally or informally participated in the SPLA during the past several decades.

The challenge of “right-sizing” the SPLA—reducing the number of personnel to accurately reflect the security environment it faces—is a key task in the coming decade, but one that is fraught with political risk. It is made more difficult by the failure of the country’s leadership to undertake a detailed review of the future of the SPLA and draw up a strategic blueprint that assesses the security environment and reflects upon the types of operations the military might be expected to carry out in the coming years. The case for keeping the SPLA at its current level is made most vigorously by those who argue, with some justification, that the threat of Northern aggression remains very real and that given the lack of military assets at its disposal, the SPLA’s main strength is in its numbers.

Moreover, the question of right-sizing is not concerned with military analysis alone; it also has enormous social and economic implications. The SPLA is the country’s largest employer, and it plays an important role as a welfare system—for older or disabled members—as much as an army. Conversely, some analysts point to the mounting strains on the GOSS’s budget and predict an impending catastrophe for the Southern economy unless tens of thousands of soldiers are removed from the public payroll. At the same time, slashing the size of the SPLA is not a budgetary quick fix. The GOSS is aware that neglecting the veterans who helped deliver independence to Southern Sudan would be political folly, and establishing a robust pension program for retiring soldiers is considered a high priority.

The Southern Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) Commission operates at the center of this debate and has the unenviable task of coming up with solutions that do not undermine the stability of the state. The “R” part of the equation is particularly problematic. Releasing thousands of SPLA soldiers into the community is a recipe for disaster, particularly when they possess no marketable skills and there are no jobs available for them. Currently, SPLA soldiers have a mandated minimum wage of $100 per month, a handsome payment by Sudanese standards. The severance packages they are being offered under the current DDR program do not come close to matching this figure. The prospect of disgruntled former soldiers taking up arms once more on behalf of local militia groups is very real. Several South Sudan Defense Force commanders continue to maintain independent forces, which mobilize along ethnic lines.10 They

10. By contrast, 51 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, consuming less than $29 per month, according to the Southern Sudan Centre for Census, Statistics and Evaluation, 2009.

11. The South Sudan Defense Force was an umbrella group of seven Southern militia groups which allied itself with the North during the civil war. These groups were outlawed under the terms of the CPA, which offered their members the choice of disarming or joining the Sudan Armed Forces or the SPLA. Many chose to do so but others refused.
will serve as eager beneficiaries of any demobilization campaign that fails to provide soldiers with viable employment opportunities.

Although it is fraught with difficulty, the DDR process presents enormous development opportunities if executed with patience and creativity. One possible model would involve using the large labor pool of the SPLA for development work and construction. Under this modified reservist initiative, soldiers would continue receiving their army salaries in the short to medium term while at the same time learning vocational skills to prepare for civilian life. The SPLA would retain a comparatively rapid mobilization capacity in case of an external threat, while the Southern economy would benefit from better-educated and -trained workers.

Managing the political settlement. One of the most important determinants of South Sudan’s stability in the coming decade will be the ability of its dominant political movement, the SPLM, to maintain its fragile unity. The period leading up to the historic referendum on Southern secession in January 2011 saw an impressive national reconciliation effort, in which rival politicians, militia commanders, and other potential spoilers were persuaded to join forces with the SPLM in the interests of national harmony. Maintaining this sense of unity in the years ahead will require patience, political skill, and a willingness to compromise. These skills do not come naturally to the many SPLM leaders who forged their careers in the bush fighting a brutal civil war. Such men are accustomed to giving orders and enforcing discipline; the subtle arts of diplomacy come less naturally.

Already, cracks are emerging in the national consensus. This is inevitable given that the political settlement in South Sudan is so narrowly based. It is an agreement between elites, and until the system is made more inclusive, the state will struggle to gain legitimacy and there will always be a risk that personal rivalries and thwarted ambitions will tear the entire system apart. The SPLM is run as a patronage system. In the absence of strong institutions, personalities dominate. Salva Kiir and his vice president, Riek Machar, may present themselves as national leaders, but the perception is that they represent their respective ethnic groups, the Dinka and Nuer. Their communities expect them to deliver patronage. Political loyalty is bought and sold; those who are excluded or cast out of the system are often quick to turn to violence.

An episode during the elections of April 2010 reinforces this point. The defeated candidate in the governor’s race in Jonglei State, Lieutenant General George Athor, refused to accept the outcome and launched an armed rebellion, which continues to cause a major security challenge to the government in Juba, despite efforts to reach a peace deal in the weeks leading up to the referendum. During the course of two days in February 2011, more than 200 people were killed in fighting between Athor’s forces and the SPLA. Armed threats have also emerged from Gatluak Gai in Unity State and David Yauyau in Jonglei State. These rebellions pose a serious threat to the stability of South Sudan. First of all, they expose the weakness of the SPLA, which has tried and largely failed to put them down. This failure undermines public faith in the ability of the state to protect them. Second, armed conflict can quickly escalate, drawing in other aggrieved groups, taking on ethnic dimensions, and often bringing in outside actors. The SPLA has persistently claimed that these local rebellions have been instigated by Khartoum. Although these allegations remain

12. As this report was being published, an additional rebel group appeared on the scene, led by a former SPLA general, Peter Gadet Yak. Calling itself the South Sudan Liberation Army, the group announced its intention to overthrow the GOSS; see “New Rebel Group Calls to Overthrow South Sudan Government,” Sudan Tribune, April 14, 2011, http://www.sudantribune.com/New-rebel-group-calls-to-overthrow,38566.
largely unproven, the existence of armed challenges from people like Athor presents an opportunity for outsiders to take advantage of Southern instability for their own benefit.

In the period following Southern independence in July 2011, Salva Kiir will face a welter of political challenges, and Juba is likely to witness a prolonged power struggle. The president will need to juggle demands for political posts and sinecures from SPLM loyalists and potential spoilers alike; as he makes appointments, he will also need to balance ethnic and tribal interests to combat the widespread perception that the SPLM is dominated by the Dinka. He will need to guard against potential rivals, such as his second in command, Machar, hoping that they continue to work together despite their history of opposition during the civil war. And he will need to hope that he can continue to isolate his enemies—men such as Lam Akol, an influential voice of the Shilluk tribe and leader of the splinter party SPLM–Democratic Change.

The success of Salva Kiir’s strategy of selectively incorporating some prominent dissenters while accommodating the voices of others will be a crucial prerequisite for political stability. Given the South’s violent history of disenfranchisement and neglect, the stakes are high; a stifled opposition is likely to consider violent means to achieve its political ambitions.

Establishing relations between the state and its citizens. A third major factor that will help to determine the stability of South Sudan in the coming decade relates to the ability of the GOSS to build a consensual relationship with its citizens. As the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development points out in its recent guidance on state building in fragile states, the establishment of healthy state–society relations is the central challenge for countries emerging from conflict.13 The challenge facing the GOSS is even greater: Because South Sudan has never been an independent state, the effort to build a national vision around which people can unite must begin from scratch. People in the South do not necessarily view themselves first and foremost as Southern Sudanese. To change this state of affairs, the nascent state must prove its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens.

One of the most important ways in which the GOSS can prove its legitimacy, as already mentioned, is to provide services to the people, such as security, schools, and roads. And it must also clearly demonstrate that citizens have obligations toward the state; for example, to obey statutory laws and pay taxes. It must also be careful to explain to its citizens what it can and cannot do. Most Southerners are entering the independence era with wholly unrealistic expectations of what the state is able to provide. These utopian visions pose a serious threat to the stability of the South because they are bound to be shattered—leading to resentment, anger, and even violence.

The surge of optimism and euphoria that greeted the referendum result on Southern secession presents the GOSS with a golden opportunity to rally its citizens around a clearly articulated

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vision of national unity. The immediate task of framing a new Constitution offers the chance to reach out to opposition parties, civil society groups, and ordinary citizens and to include them in a national dialogue. There are worrying signs that the government risks squandering this opportunity. A technical committee formed by President Kiir to revise the interim Constitution has been the subject of intense controversy, coming under fire from civil society groups and opposition parties alike for being dominated by SPLM voices. South Sudan's first national elections after independence will provide a test of the SPLM's commitment to national unity and indeed democracy. If mishandled, these elections will dramatically increase the risk of instability. President Kiir was elected to a five-year term in 2010, and he has given conflicting signals about whether he will agree to hold interim elections before his term ends.

Despite a strong rhetorical commitment to inclusiveness, not all in the SPLM support a strategy of rapid democratic transformation. Some believe that the SPLM deserves some time to enjoy the spoils of its victory in delivering independence from the North. Others cite security concerns and lingering internal divisions as justification for a more authoritarian approach. There are serious risks in failing to genuinely open the political field so that opposition parties have the space to develop and compete on a level playing field and citizens are able to take part in a meaningful democratic process. The April 2010 elections, in which opponents of the SPLM were harassed and detained and which saw large-scale voting fraud to ensure a victory for the dominant party, do not bode well for the future. The rash of armed uprisings by defeated candidates following the elections are proof of the dangers that lie in store for South Sudan if its leaders continue to pay lip service to democracy while denying their citizens a genuine voice in the future of their country.

The relationship between central and local governments. The ability of the GOSS to clarify the relationships between the central and local governments and between formal and informal structures of governance will help to determine the state's legitimacy in the coming years. If managed successfully, these relationships could greatly strengthen the state's stability; if they are not, they could become a driver of conflict. The CPA and the Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan envisage a fully decentralized system in which authority is held by several tiers of local government. On the face of it, this deconcentration of power seems to make sense in the context of South Sudan—given its vast size and diverse population, and the limited reach of the government in Juba. It also acknowledges the presence of legitimate alternative governance structures that pre-dated the GOSS, such as traditional chiefs, who continue to wield influence in some communities.

In practice, however, decentralization poses a number of practical difficulties. For some in the GOSS, the prospect of diverting limited resources to state and local administrations raises risks of prematurely undermining the consolidation of authority in Juba precisely when national priorities must be set and national cohesion is essential. Furthermore, moving power away from the center without adequate oversight does not guarantee better or more inclusive governance. Without effective institutions, there is a big risk that the corruption, nepotism, waste, and incompetence too often displayed by the government in Juba will be replicated at the state and local levels. Fractured administrative structures may even harden the boundaries between communities, intensify competition for resources, and entrench ethnic divisions.

The incorporation of traditional government structures into formal ones is not without its difficulties. The authority of the chiefs, for example, is not uniformly accepted, and their relationship with the formal instruments of government can be uneasy and occasionally contentious. The GOSS has already begun the difficult process of trying to define these relationships through the passage of the 2009 Local Government Act. But the debate over South Sudan's governance struc-
ture will continue in the coming years, and its outcome will help to solidify or undermine the state's legitimacy.

**Scenarios**

The outlook for South Sudan in the coming decade is volatile. Much will depend on the outcome of the South's negotiations with the North in the coming months on issues including—but not limited to—sharing oil revenue, debt relief, border demarcation, and citizenship. As the South reaches independence, important decisions will need to be made about the national Constitution, and plans will need to be drawn up for local and national elections, civilian disarmament, and the transformation of the security services. Each of these processes has the potential to trigger unforeseen consequences, making scenario building a particularly risky exercise. Nevertheless, some plausible scenarios in the coming decade include a breakdown of the political settlement, border hostilities, and botched security-sector development. It is useful to briefly consider each one.

**A breakdown of the political settlement.** A disintegration of the already-fragile political settlement among Juba's political elite is a medium-likelihood but high-impact scenario. This could happen in two main ways. The first would see a slow erosion of the relationship between the GOSS and the South's citizens in the years after independence brought about by the failure of the government to consolidate its authority or provide security and other essential services. One of the factions of the SPLM would eventually say “enough is enough” and withdraw from the coalition, taking its ethnic group or region along with it. More dramatically, there could be a sudden fracturing of the elite settlement during a moment of political crisis. A schism might be caused by a wide range of grievances, for example a noninclusive constitutional review process or the failure to agree on a timetable for elections. More likely, it would emerge from accusations of ethnic favoritism or from personal ambition, either for wealth or political power.

Disgruntled politicians do not have to look far to find armed collaborators. The persistence of rebellions by George Athor and others poses a serious threat to the stability of South Sudan, both in the near and long terms. They also provide opportunities for outside actors to get involved. The threat to South Sudan increases with each day that Athor is allowed to roam free and attack civilians, apparently at will. His rebellion exposes the limitations of the SPLA and undermines people's faith in the state. There is also a grave risk that his revolt will broaden into a wider conflict. In a worst-case scenario, the alliance of a political faction of the SPLM with an armed militia group poses the risk of triggering a civil war.

The position of Riek Machar is critical. His past conduct and status as the most senior Nuer leader make him a focal point of dissent regardless of his behavior. He is invariably linked with every plot, real or imagined. But persistent accusations that he is a rebel in waiting risk becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

**Border hostilities.** Another low- to medium-likelihood event would be that a border war erupts that sucks in both the South and the North, leading to a wider conflict. The situation on the mutual border is likely to be tense for the foreseeable future, particularly given the failure to demarcate the exact boundary between the North and South. In particular, the failure to resolve the status of the border enclave of Abyei has grave implications for peace. Given the inflamed passions on the ground and the reluctance of either the NCP or the SPLM to shift its negotiating position, it is possible that one violent incident could spark a major conflict. An even more frightening possibility for the South would be the outbreak of violence in the Nuba Mountains area of Southern Sudan.
Kordofan. A civil war between the Nuba Mountains and Khartoum would elicit the empathy of many Southerners, given their ties of kinship and history, but intervention would be dangerous. In addition, a border conflict would have inevitable subsequent effects for Southern stability, leading to large refugee movements and economic hardship.

An additional risk is that the South could engage in activities that are interpreted by the North as meddling in Northern affairs. Khartoum is alert to any signs that the rebels in Darfur are receiving assistance from the South or taking refuge in its territory. Similarly, the South’s many armed militia groups offer ample opportunity for Khartoum to play a spoiler role. Though the two sides should avoid interfering in each others’ conflicts, they must resist getting into a cycle of trading unfounded allegations of interference. This pattern of claim and counterclaim prevents the normalization of relations and makes it more difficult to contain violence when it does break out.

**Botched security-sector development.** Even if South Sudan successfully navigates the post-secession period, it will still face a difficult journey in the next decade. The task of building a state is a monumental one that cannot be realized within 10 years. To give itself a fighting chance, the GOSS will need to learn quickly, act with restraint and pragmatism, focus on short-term service provision, and keep one eye on the longer-term imperative of building sustainable government institutions. It will need to continue to rely heavily on foreign assistance but also prepare for the inevitable moment when that assistance dries up. A likely scenario is that the GOSS will slowly find its feet during the next decade, making many mistakes along the way.

One particularly important set of decisions the GOSS will need to make will be about the future of its security sector. Under a good scenario, it will develop a national security plan that clearly describes the kind of national army it needs for the independence era. A cautious and inclusive program of downsizing will begin. The program will be integrated so that demobilized soldiers leave the army with vocational skills and the financial support to help them adjust to civilian life. An army pension program will be established to ensure that retired war veterans enter old age with the means of looking after themselves. More likely, however, the process of SPLA downsizing will be put off by South Sudan’s leaders because they are fearful of the political cost of undermining the country’s most powerful institution. The result will be an increasing and ultimately unsustainable strain on the national budget. Eventually, to avoid national bankruptcy, drastic action will need to be taken. Downsizing will be rushed and unplanned, and an angry mob of demobilized men with no economic prospects will cause a major security threat to the country.

**Conclusion: Implications for the United States**

The looming division of Sudan into two independent but weak and mutually reliant countries poses challenges for the United States. Positive engagement strategies would focus on the need for the North and South to forge good working relations with each other, to promote security and economic development on their common border, and to build mechanisms for resolving disputes and identifying conflict risks.

In the North, the United States is faced with the challenge of reframing a relationship that has been largely antagonistic for the past two decades. U.S. economic and political sanctions against the regime remain firmly in place, and are loudly condemned by the government in Khartoum at every opportunity. In reality, the picture is more nuanced, and the public rhetoric masks a successful security relationship in which Khartoum has regularly shared useful intelligence on terrorist
threats. Washington has expressed its willingness to normalize relations with Khartoum, and the successful staging of the Southern referendum has increased the likelihood of this possibility.

Nevertheless, the challenges of United States–North Sudan relations remain immense. For a start, the NCP eschews long-term strategy in favor of short-term tactical goals. This day-to-day approach makes it a difficult partner with which to engage strategically. From Khartoum’s perspective, good relations with Washington are desirable but not a top priority. The referendum gave President Bashir the chance to play the role of magnanimous statesman; it is likely that he did so for purely pragmatic reasons, calculating that the South was already lost. For the time being, this has won the regime some favor with the international community.

Ultimately, however, the NCP will pursue whatever path it must take to remain in power, and this will mean that any rapprochement with the West is likely to be short-lived. Darfur is the issue most likely to set Khartoum back on a collision course with the United States. The NCP is determined to “finish the job” there militarily, but the resolution of the Darfur conflict is the main condition that the United States has placed on its offer to end economic sanctions and facilitate discussions on debt relief. In Khartoum’s mind, this makes the offer unattainable. Furthermore, the NCP is dismissive of U.S. offers of improved relations, arguing that Washington failed to deliver on promises to end its sanctions following the signing of the CPA in 2005.

For all these reasons, Washington’s engagement with Khartoum faces enormous challenges. At the same time, it should be pursued vigorously, on both the diplomatic and developmental levels. Although it is important to emphasize that Washington has limited leverage over Khartoum, engaging with elements within the NCP (along with the political opposition) and putting pressure on the regime to behave responsibly offers a small chance of moderating its behavior and could help prevent Sudan from sliding into chaos and violence. Isolating the NCP or seeking to back the regime into a corner is likely to cause it to lash out or push it further into the arms of problematic partners, such as Iran.

Although the United States has limited leverage vis-à-vis the North, in the South it has a unique opportunity to help shape the development of a new state, establish a strong partnership in a strategically important region of the world, and encourage the development of a democratic model in an authoritarian neighborhood. Yet a number of challenges offset these opportunities: How can America support economic development without encouraging a lasting dependency on aid? How can the United States support the development of democracy without upsetting the fragile balance of power? And how can America develop a durable ally in South Sudan without antagonizing or threatening the North?

One of the pitfalls the United States must avoid is giving the perception that its support for South Sudan is unconditional. The Government of Southern Sudan clearly considers U.S. assistance to be a given, and it is therefore less inclined to listen to calls for participatory institutions and a broadening of the political field. The United States can help negate this problem by supporting civil society groups in their efforts to educate the Sudanese public, by providing technical support to South Sudan’s legislators and the members of the constitutional review committee, and by making aid conditional on democratic development.

The second broad area in which the United States is already playing a substantial role is in the security-sector reform process. So far, the UN Development Program has taken the lead in the coordinating and managing international assistance for the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration mission, but the effort has been hampered by disagreements about strategy, a lack of
funding, and accusations of mismanagement. DDR and security-sector transformation is an area where the United States is well placed to take on the leading role. Southern Sudan offers a testing ground for the U.S. Africa Command’s stated mission of helping to develop capable and accountable military forces. The United States can provide needed assistance in areas such as strategic planning, logistics, and tactical and operational training.