

Written Submission: UK-Sudan Relations: Consequences of Engagement

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Abstract

This submission notes the principled and human rights-driven approach that the United Kingdom has taken towards the Government of Sudan and urges UK leaders to continue this approach. It also argues that the Government of Sudan has succeeded in undermining and manipulating numerous peace processes because it faces little pressure to act in good faith during these processes and subsequent negotiations. The Enough Project finds that increasing financial pressure on regime elites and key government officials can supply this pressure, adding the missing leverage to move the government to enter negotiations with the aim of compromising to reach peaceful solutions to the country's several crises, rather than undermining these processes and continuing conflict, serious human rights abuses, and a repressive society that tolerates little dissent. The UK can and should apply financial pressure on the Government of Sudan until a truly inclusive and comprehensive peace process between the regime and the armed and political opposition takes hold.

UK Engagement with the Government of Sudan: Maintaining a Principled Approach

1. The UK has demonstrated a principled, human rights-driven approach towards engaging with the Government of Sudan. However, as the UK reappraises its relationship with Sudan, some would chart a different course that prioritizes closer political and diplomatic relationships at the cost of this principled approach. Such individuals argue that as odious as it might be, national security objectives such as fighting extremism and addressing irregular migration make working with the regime of General Omar al-Bashir an unfortunate reality. The Enough Project strongly disagrees with this assessment and finds that current economic realities make the Sudanese government vulnerable to financial pressure that, if applied correctly, could finally force the regime to enter peace negotiations in good faith and make meaningful concessions towards a genuine transition to peace, democracy, and the rule of law.
2. Put simply, to waiver from this approach now, when the Government of Sudan is increasingly vulnerable to financial pressures and its own economic mismanagement, would result in a missed opportunity to move Sudan away from conflict and towards peace. Of course, some engagement with the Government of Sudan, particularly on issues as significant as irregular migration, is unavoidable. Still, Enough firmly believes that such engagement should be limited to essential issues that will aid the people of Sudan and not the regime. Such examples include providing humanitarian assistance and supporting a comprehensive peace process that will end the ongoing armed conflicts and attacks on civilians.

Modernizing Sanctions in Sudan and the Need for Leverage during Negotiations

3. Earlier this year, Enough Project Founding Director John Prendergast and Director of Policy Brad Brooks-Rubin authored [*Modernizing Sanctions in Sudan: Unfinished Business for the Obama Administration*](#). Although written specifically for U.S. policymakers working on Sudan, we believe that this report illustrates important points that are crucial for the United Kingdom to consider while weighing its options towards engaging with Khartoum. Most importantly, Enough argues that peace processes in Sudan have failed in the past, and will continue to fail in the future, until the Government of Sudan feels sufficient pressure when negotiating with its opposition. Under current negotiating conditions, opposition leaders and external policymakers have little if any leverage to pressure the regime.
4. The most recent sputtering of the AUHIP Roadmap negotiations illustrates this point. Lacking pressure or incentives to provide meaningful concessions to either the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudan Liberation Movement – Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM) in Darfur or the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement – North (SPLM-N) in the Two Areas, the Government of Sudan began the negotiations by demanding conditions that it knew the opposition would not accept, thus ending the negotiations almost as quickly as they began. This same pattern applies to the regime’s engagement with its political opposition, including the Sudan Call and individual parties such as the Umma Party.
5. Financial pressure can help to change this pattern. Sudan remains financially isolated and the regime has badly damaged the Sudanese economy to serve its own interests. Although the regime has bent Sudan’s considerable natural resource wealth to serve its own narrow interests, regime insiders and political elites still require access to the international financial system to enjoy this wealth. With regard to U.S. sanctions, this includes correspondent banks that may help to evade sanctions or contribute to money laundering. Moreover, despite some appearances to the contrary, elites and high-ranking government officials feel this pressure. Accordingly, sanctions relief has replaced debt relief as the government’s primary foreign policy objective.
6. In *Modernized Sanctions*, we argue that U.S. sanctions have long been underutilized and poorly implemented in Sudan. To increase the effectiveness of the sanctions, Enough recommends ratcheting up targeted financial pressure on Sudan’s ruling elite and key government officials. We also argue for minimizing the unintended negative consequences that sanctions have on the Sudanese people—especially within the medical, humanitarian, people-to-people, and academic sectors. By combining enhanced targeted pressures on the individuals most responsible for the continued conflict and violence in Sudan, while also easing the effects on the Sudanese people, we hope to move Sudan policy forward in a way that avoids the typical pitfalls of engaging with the regime. As we note in the report:

The regime in Khartoum has undermined every peace process aimed at addressing Sudan’s internal conflicts since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which ended the North-South war in 2005. The Sudanese government effectively uses

these peace talks as a means to divide opposition and undermine progress toward an end to conflict, because leading regime figures have benefited financially from the state of insecurity and absence of rule of law which this hijacked government has cultivated. The regime has thus undermined any potentially promising political agreement, and the United States and other partners have not heretofore cultivated the leverage necessary to change the calculations in Khartoum from war to peace.

International Support for a Comprehensive Peace Strategy

7. While the United States government can apply the necessary pressure on the Government of Sudan by modernizing and properly implementing the existing sanctions, without a strongly supported and comprehensive peace strategy, this pressure will become a tool lacking a meaningful use. The UK can and should help to build this comprehensive peace strategy. In addition, Enough urges the United States government to engage with influential countries, such as the United Kingdom, to pursue their own targeted pressures and incentives on the Government of Sudan. Indeed, Enough recognizes that the larger and wider the international push for peace in Sudan is, the more likely that this push will succeed.

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Sudan and South Sudan Areas of Interest

8. Regarding the topics that the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Sudan and South Sudan identified: (1) conflict areas, (2) migration and the Khartoum process, (3) extremism, and (4) humanitarian issues and human rights; we respectfully submit that Government of Sudan's policy choices and decision making are the foremost contributor to these issues. Indeed, perhaps no government is quite as resourceful as Sudan in creating a problem and then rushing in to appear to address the same problem for political gain. Examples of this tactic include the government's widely discredited Darfur Referendum this spring or its continued criticism of UNAMID's usefulness despite undermining the joint peacekeeping operation in a myriad of ways. Likewise, while claiming to want to alleviate the humanitarian need within its borders, Sudanese officials continue to deny humanitarian assistance to the conflict areas and expelled Ivo Freijsen, the Head of OCHA in Sudan, for challenging such behavior.
9. These tactics demonstrate that the Government of Sudan is not seriously reconsidering its past mistakes or taking meaningful steps to end the conflicts or to address its root causes. Instead, erroneously convinced that a military victory is near and that the international community is no longer closely concerned with its many abuses, the Government of Sudan is emboldened to obstruct and delay the processes intended to bring peace to the country even as Sudanese citizens continue to suffer.

Conclusion

10. UK engagement with the Government of Sudan should remain focused on pressuring the regime to alter its strategy and to join a truly inclusive and comprehensive peace process. At minimum, this process would merge the Darfur and Two Areas negotiations and the National Dialogue into a single affair. Greater engagement that does not rely on applying significantly increased pressure (and incentives) on the regime will likely lead to negative outcomes and a less secure Sudan. As the ruling circle in the Bashir regime grows smaller and remains insulated from the consequences of its actions, there is less chance that eventual transition will be stable, let alone peaceful, inclusive, or democratic.

11. For the reasons stated above and detailed in the attached report, Enough finds that increased financial pressure can lead to the Sudanese government's acceptance of a truly inclusive and comprehensive peace process. We hope that the UK government can use this report as a touchstone to design and implement its own financial pressure against Sudan and to cooperate with the United States and other concerned actors to maximize the effect that this strategy has on Sudan's ruling elite.