

## Submission on the Future of UK-Sudan Relations

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### **Abstract**

This submission argues that Sudan's instability and worsening economic crisis are the direct results of the government's expensive and brutal wars against its own citizens, state-enshrined grand corruption, and ill-advised economic policies. Sudan's international isolation compounded these problems, but it did not create them. The Submission calls on the UK Government to use the leverage it will acquire through its "Strategic Dialogue" with the Government of Sudan to press its dialogue partner into seeking comprehensive and just political solutions for Sudan's protracted conflicts and chronic political crisis, to combat corruption, and to invest more budgetary resources on productive and social development sectors of the economy rather than on its bloated military and tribal militia forces as it has been doing since its accession to power in 1989. Recognizing the fundamental solutions depends on the political will of the Government of Sudan and no level of engagement with the UK or other international partners absolves the Government of Sudan of this responsibility.

The reliance of the Government of Sudan on a counterinsurgency strategy integrating tribal militias into the state's military and security apparatus has exacerbated ethnic and regional polarization and threatens the country with even higher levels of human suffering and further casualties. The government is now using one of these militias to meet its engagements to contain migration. The UK government should demand strict accountability for funds earmarked for this undertaking lest they end up subsidizing abusive militias. Lasting solutions to Sudan's political crisis and protracted conflicts require comprehensive approaches and the respect of the entitlement of millions of victims to justice and reparations.

### **I. Introduction**

1. The Government of Sudan (GoS) faces daunting challenges as it attempts to end its international isolation that resulted from more than two decades of sanctions imposed to varying levels of severity by the EU, the UN, and the US. Concerns about Sudan's one-time overt hosting of multiple violent extremist groups, its protracted civil wars, and a persistent record of serious human rights abuses and massive humanitarian law violations have caused the sanctions to remain in place.
2. Driven by survival imperatives, the regime has used Sudan's strategic leverage to push for an end to its international isolation. The initiatives it has taken include:

- 1) a well-coordinated diplomatic and media campaign blaming the US sanctions for Sudan's worsening economic crisis and calling for their end;
  - 2) engaging in political talks, strictly on its own terms, with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) to end conflicts in Blue Nile and South Kordofan and with the two Darfur armed movements that rejected the 2011 Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD);
  - 3) changing its regional alliance from an active covert security cooperation with Iran to joining the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemen war;
  - 4) committing to address irregular migration from and transiting through Sudan to Europe; and
  - 5) cooperating with Western intelligence services in counterterrorism efforts.
3. This repositioning made closer EU-Sudan cooperation on migration possible, which led to an EU grant to the GoS of €100M, meant to improve conditions for migrants in Sudan and to encourage their retention there. That rapprochement paved the way to the UK Government's "Strategic Dialogue" with the GoS, and Italy's signing in early August of a memorandum of understanding with the GoS on combating crime and illegal migration.
4. According to statements by UK officials, the objectives of the British Government in Sudan remained unchanged, namely working with UK partners to:
- 1) end Sudan's conflicts;
  - 2) improve the serious humanitarian and human rights situation;
  - 3) tackle migration; and
  - 4) counter the global spread of violent extremism.
5. On the surface, it would appear that the strategic interests of both governments are converging. However, this perception is belied by the GoS's long record of reneging on its international obligations under multiple international human rights and international humanitarian law treaties and conventions that Sudan has duly ratified since its independence in 1956.
6. On the matter of the future of UK-Sudan relations, therefore, the UK should be guided only by the Government of Sudan's actions and not its words or written pledges.

## II. On the Areas of Interest of APPG's Hearings

### A. Sudan's Economic Crisis

7. In a report published by the Enough Project, "[Khartoum's Economic Achilles' Heel: The Intersection of War, Profit, and Greed](#)," I argue that Sudan's collapsing economy and widespread human suffering in the country are the results of state-enshrined grand corruption, ill-advised economic policies, and Sudan's expensive and brutal wars waged

against its own citizens. As such, Sudan's economic crisis is largely self-inflicted. Economic sanctions and Sudan's isolation compounded the problem, but did not create it. Sudan must muster the political will to take desperately needed bold steps to end the civil war, root out corruption, and reduce government spending. These measures, which depend on the political will of the GoS, would go a long way to easing the suffering of the Sudanese people and ending the country's isolation.

8. Given widespread official corruption, the UK government should insist in its Dialogue with the GoS that all development packages meant to assist Sudan to better manage irregular migration of its citizens and thousands of migrants from the East and Horn of Africa are subjected to rigorous transparency and accountability scrutiny. It is in the self-interest of the GoS to adopt such measures if it is to resolve the economic crisis crippling the country today.

### ***B. Conflict and Peace***

9. Sudan has a record of dishonoring the terms of peace agreements it signs with armed opposition groups even when these are co-signed by regional and international guarantors. In one of the latest occurrences, Sudan only partially adhered to the terms of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005). Ignoring the CPA's clauses requiring the accommodation of diversity, mandating the transition of Sudan to a genuine democracy, and according special administrative status to Abyei district, and Blue Nile and South Kordofan states, were key factors in South Sudan's decision to opt for secession in 2011. Reneging on these clauses also triggered an avoidable war in Blue Nile and South Kordofan states, while the rebellion continued in Darfur and Abyei remained a volatile disputed territory.
10. In Darfur, the GoS conducted a referendum on the administrative status of the region in April 2016, as required by the DDPD, and declared results confirming the existing division of the region into five states. Despite this outcome, Darfur continues to witness high levels of deadly conflict. The DDPD non-signatory armed movements, many in the large population of the 2.6 million internally displaced people, and other Darfurians maintained their rejection of the referendum. Further, the dynamics of deadly violence have dramatically changed in Darfur during the thirteen years of conflict. Civilian casualties and mass displacements no longer occur solely from government-rebel fighting, but increasingly as a direct result of counterinsurgency strategies that indiscriminately target civilians.
11. Today, a chaotic situation prevails, in which the numbers of intra- and intertribal conflicts have risen dramatically. This communal violence often involves government-allied militias on both sides of the conflict. When the ability of the government to sustain its patronage networks in Darfur diminished during the current economic crisis, its allied militias drifted into levying their salaries from extortion, banditry, and other criminal activities.
12. In South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, civilians also bear the brunt of the GoS' counterinsurgency attacks in which they are the targets of aerial bombardments and

ground assaults. The SPLM-N is unable to prevail militarily or to drive the ongoing peace negotiations with the GoS to a lasting deal, largely due to its internal limitations and the intransigence of Khartoum.

13. The containment of the conflict to the peripheries serves the interests of the regime in several ways. First, the government believes it can develop leverage to impose a peace of the victor. This insistence is causing the peace process led by the African Union's High Implementation Panel (AUHIP) to falter. Second, an open-ended state of emergency in conflict areas serves as a cover for widespread corruption linked to military procurement and to spending on militias and the command corps of the army to secure their loyalty. Since 1989, the GoS has consistently spent a disproportionate share of public money on the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), the national police, and other uniformed forces and auxiliary militias as laid out in the aforementioned report.
14. The result is a stalemate on both tracks of the peace process.
15. The UK Government should encourage solutions to end Sudan's internal armed conflicts that meet these minimum standards:
  - Be comprehensive and inclusive, and aim to resolve the root causes of the conflicts.
  - Adopt measures for the voluntary demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration into civilian life not only of rebel fighters, but also of government-allied tribal militias.
  - Address the legitimate demands of communities that provided recruits for both rebel movements and militias for basic social services and for development interventions aimed at improving their economic lot, in particular through investments in the agricultural and livestock sectors.
  - Ensure the voluntary and secure return of more than 3 million forcibly displaced people camped in conflict areas and hundreds of thousands of refugees to their home areas and directing meaningful resources to the rehabilitation and economic recovery of conflict-affected areas.
  - Introduce transitional justice interventions to address the rights of victims of continuing and past massive atrocity crimes to justice, reparations, and the non-recurrence of the injustices to which they had been subjected.
  - Mandate a rigorous security sector reform program.
  - Observe international human rights standards.

### ***C. Migration and Khartoum Process***

16. The government deployed the Darfur tribal militia known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which has spearheaded the government's counterinsurgency efforts since 2013, to lead operations in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. The latest deployment of the notoriously abusive RSF was to police Sudan's northern border with Libya in the framework of the

“Khartoum Process.” The RSF is therefore gaining a national role and an international profile as the GoS instrumentalizes it in the context of the Khartoum Process.

17. The UK Government should avoid extending direct or indirect military, logistical, and financial assistance to the RSF or other paramilitaries in the context of bilateral agreements. Without such vigilance, the cooperation risks seriously compromising the human rights credibility and standing of Sudan’s international partners in migration containment.

#### ***D. Extremism***

18. While engaging in intelligence cooperation, the GoS continues to tolerate several extremist Salafist groups, allowing them to operate freely in Khartoum and throughout the country. These groups constitute a fertile breeding ground for the propagation of violent extremist ideologies, accounting for a strong appeal of groups like the Islamic State among Sudan’s disillusioned youth. While the numbers of Sudanese youth who actually joined the IS in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, and al-Qaida affiliated groups in Mali and Somalia, remain limited, the GoS accommodation of extremist Salafist groups is a serious gamble that could backfire, thereby further destabilizing an already fragile state.
19. The UK Government should engage the GoS on the issue of the growing reach of Salafism and other extremist ideologies of Islamist inspiration and press for the containment of these groups and their ideologies.

#### ***E. Humanitarian Issues and Human Rights***

20. The UK Government and the Troika have repeatedly denounced the GoS’s targeting of civilians and basic infrastructure necessary for their survival and welfare in rebel-held areas. Paradoxically, the GoS allows cross-border humanitarian deliveries to conflict victims in South Sudan but continues to adamantly block similar deliveries to its own citizens trapped in areas under the effective control of the SPLM-N as long as the armed opposition insists on procuring even a small percentage of relief supplies from neighboring countries. Humanitarian access has thus been held hostage to the political posturing of the parties.
21. The UK and its partners should continue pressing the parties to delink humanitarian access from the political and security agenda items of the talks mediated by the AUHIP.

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