

A map of Sudan and its neighboring countries: Ethiopia to the east, Uganda to the west, and Kenya to the south. Major cities like Khartoum, Addis Ababa, Kampala, and Nairobi are marked. Rivers such as the Nile, Sobat, and Atbara are shown. A black box with white text is overlaid on the top right of the map.

FROM CRISIS TO LEADERSHIP: SUDAN IN REGIONAL CONTEXT

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WORKING FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

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An *Agence France Presse* report in February 2000 headlined “Sudan Heading for Improved Ties with Neighbours” perhaps summed up the new position Sudan found herself in early 2000.¹ It is a matter of history that during the past ten years or so, Sudan has had difficult relations with some of its neighbours. This has been in large part because of American attempts at destabilisation, difficulties with neighbours such as Uganda prone towards destabilisation and positions previously perceived to have been held by Sudan. Nevertheless, despite considerable difficulties and crisis, Sudan has over the past three years emerged as a leader of the region culminating in its hosting of the Eighth Heads of State summit of the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) body, as well as the February 2001 Heads of State summit of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States - a body which brings together eleven north African states. Sudan also plays a central role in another African grouping, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. This leadership role has been a success for Sudanese and regional diplomacy. Political moderation and common sense have triumphed over failed American attempts at regional destabilisation.

Sudan’s relations with Egypt are at their best since the 1980s, and *Agence France Presse* has stated with regard to Sudan’s Gulf neighbours: “Relations with Gulf states were brought to normal following Beshir’s tour, even with Kuwait which has pledged to restore full diplomatic representation as well as economic cooperation”.²

In the case of Sudan’s southern and eastern neighbours, her relations have been complicated by United States government attempts to encourage some of Sudan’s neighbours to destabilise the Khartoum government. This encouragement took the form of political, financial and military support, including a grant of \$20 million in military assistance, to Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda.³ As early as February 1997, commentators had outlined the dangers of Washington’s policies. In an article entitled ‘US Masterminds 3-Pronged War on Sudan’, **Africa Analysis** reported:

There is growing anxiety in eastern and central Africa that Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda, the Americans and their European friends are steering into open warfare with Sudan. This is in turn stimulating contrary alliances extending to the shifting frontline of the Great Lakes region...The ramifications are alarming diplomats [in Nairobi].⁴

Washington’s attempts to destabilise the biggest country in Africa, a politically delicate country made up of several ethnic groups, hundreds of tribes and languages, and an Islamic-Christian fault line, can only but be viewed with incomprehension. Sudan has ten neighbouring states. A successful attempt to destabilise and fragment Sudan would very likely lead to the “Lebanonisation” of the country, with all the grave implications that would entail. Alternatively, Sudan might become another Somalia, an anarchic patchwork of clan and tribal allegiances. Yet this was the policy so avidly pursued by Washington.

¹ ‘Sudan Heading for Improved Ties with Neighbours’, News Article by Agence France Presse on 21 February 2000.

² ‘Sudan Heading for Improved Ties with Neighbours’, News Article by Agence France Presse on 21 February 2000. See also See, for example, ‘Kuwait-Sudan End Decade of Enmity With Summit’, News Article by Reuters on 14 February 2000 at 14:23:35; and Sudan’s Beshir to Make First Visit to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia Since Gulf War’, News Article by Agence France Press on 13 February 2000.

³ This encouragement has included debt relief as well as significant increases in the levels of British and American aid to these countries. The **Financial Times** of 26 February 1997 reported, for example, that Uganda was said to be expecting debt relief of between US\$ 252 and US\$ 386 million in April 1998.

⁴ ‘US Masterminds 3-Pronged War on Sudan’, **Africa Analysis**, 7 February 1997.

As much was clear to American newspapers such as **The Boston Globe**: “To the peril of regional stability, the Clinton Administration has used northern Uganda as a military training ground for southern Sudanese rebels fighting the Muslim government of Khartoum.”⁵

By 2000, however, in part because of Uganda’s extensive military intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in part because of the 1998 Eritrean-Ethiopian war, and in part because of significant political developments within Sudan itself, Sudanese relations with Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda normalised to a greater or lesser extent. This has been acknowledged and welcomed by the international community.⁶

Sudanese-Ethiopian relations are now noticeably warm. In December 1999, Ethiopia and Sudan agreed to open to traffic the road linking Azezo, Metema and Gedarif. Some 118 of the 175 kilometre road linking the Ethiopian-Sudanese border to Gedarif had already been completed, as had 50 of the 187 kilometre road from Azezo to Metema.⁷ In March 2000 Sudan and Ethiopia stated that their countries’ ties were “now much stronger” than they were in early 1990s. The two governments announced that they had signed agreements on cooperation in political, security, trade, roads, communications, agriculture and other spheres.⁸ In June 2000, Ethiopia and Sudan signed a further treaty on agricultural cooperation, including wildlife protection, crop production and the development of natural resources, as well as joint efforts to control smuggling along their common border.⁹ Work also began in May 2000 on the Doka-Gallabat road link between Sudan and Ethiopia.¹⁰ Additionally, plans have now been made to link Sudan and Ethiopia by rail.¹¹ The railway will link Port Sudan on Sudan’s Red Sea coast with Ethiopia’s southern-most town of Moyale.¹² It was also announced in November 2000 that Sudan will be exporting oil to Ethiopia, and that an oil pipeline linking the two countries was being considered.¹³

In January 2000, Eritrea and Sudan resumed diplomatic relations with each other.¹⁴ Eritrea handed back the Sudanese embassy building to the Sudanese government. The Eritrean government had previously given it to the Sudanese rebels.

Relations with Uganda have proved to be more problematic. In December, 1999, Sudan and Uganda signed an agreement brokered by Jimmy Carter which sought to normalise relations. This agreement sought to end support for combatants in their respective civil wars.¹⁵ Despite having signed this, and other, agreements pledging an end to military support for the SPLA rebels, Uganda has, however, continued such assistance. The first Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Eriya Kategaya, appearing before the Ugandan parliamentary committee on presidential and foreign affairs, stated for example that Uganda would not stop supporting the SPLA. He said that “To be seen to abandon them because we want peace with (Sudanese President) Bashir is not correct.”¹⁶ Six months after having signed the Nairobi accord, Museveni admitted to the Ugandan newspaper *New Vision*, that was still providing the SPLA with weapons.¹⁷

It is with Egypt, however, that Sudan has established a very constructive new relationship. Up until Sudanese independence in 1956, Egypt and Sudan had essentially been one country. Egypt still looks on

⁵ ‘Carter, Others Say US Has Faltered in Africa’, **The Boston Globe**, 8 December, 1999.

⁶ See, for example, ‘Declaration by the Presidency on Behalf of the European Union on the Normalisation of Sudanese Relations with Neighbouring Countries’, European Union, Brussels, 31 January 2000.

⁷ ‘Ethiopia, Sudan Agree to Open Roads’, **Addis Tribune**, Addis Ababa, 31 December 1999.

⁸ ‘Sudan, Ethiopia Say They Have Normalised Relations’, News Article by Agence France Press on 5 March 2000 at 15:14:30.

⁹ ‘Ethiopia, Sudan Sign Agreement on Agricultural Cooperation’, News Article by Xinhua on 23 June 2000.

¹⁰ ‘Work Starts on Sudan-Ethiopia Road Link’, News Article by PANA on 21 May 2000.

¹¹ ‘Ethiopia, Sudan to be Linked by Rail’, News Article by XINHUA on 8 January 2001.

¹² ‘Railway Linking Port Sudan, Moyale in Pipeline’, News Article by PANA on 9 January 2001.

¹³ ‘Sudan Set to Begin Oil Export to Ethiopia’, News Article by PANA on 4 November 2000.

¹⁴ See, ‘Sudan, Eritrea Resume Diplomatic Relations’, News Article by Panafrican News Agency on 4 January 2000.

¹⁵ See, for example, ‘Carter’s Patience Pays Off in Africa’, **The Washington Post**, 12 December 1999; ‘Uganda, Sudan Agree On Ending Rebel Activity’, News Article by Reuters on 8 December 1999.

¹⁶ ‘Kategaya Takes Up Issue with Defence’, **New Vision**, Kampala, 3 March 2000.

¹⁷ ‘Museveni Warns Sudan on LRA Rebels’, **New Vision**, Kampala, 25 May 2000.

Sudan as its hinterland, and has long been concerned about the unity of Sudan.¹⁸ Egypt has previously come into conflict with Sudan over several issues, including allegations of Sudanese complicity in an attempt on the life of the Egyptian president in 1995 while he was attending a summit in Ethiopia.

Whatever the past differences may have been, from 1999 onwards Egypt and Sudan normalised their relations.¹⁹ The Egyptian government has also entered into a constructive dialogue with Sudan. The Egyptian foreign minister, Amr Moussa, has stated:

There's now an openness in Sudan's government. It is prepared to listen and negotiate and reach a vision for a new Sudan that accepts all opposition factions.²⁰

The warmth of Egyptian-Sudanese relations were summed up by the Egyptian foreign minister on the occasion of President Bashir's state visit to Egypt in 1999: Moussa stated that "Egypt sees al-Bashir as the head of the Sudanese state and as a representative of his country". Egypt and Sudan were bound up, he said, by "eternal, special, historical, and future relations".²¹

The Egyptian Assistant Foreign Minister, Mustafa al-Feqi, has also stated that Egypt and Sudan have reached agreement on economic, trade, industrial, agricultural, cultural and consular cooperation. Egypt would drop the requirement of an entry visa for Sudanese travelling to Egypt. Mr al-Feqi stated that the visa had previously been needed for security reasons but that "[n]ow that those reasons have disappeared, there is no need for a visa requirement and arrangements will be taken for removing this requirement in two phases".²² Egypt has vigorously thrown itself into finding a peaceful solution to the Sudanese conflict, outlining a peace plan designed to secure a comprehensive political settlement of the Sudanese conflict. This peace initiative called for a permanent cease-fire, and a national peace conference. Sudan immediately accepted the Egyptian-Libyan proposals.²³ Feqi also stated with regard to the Libyan-Egyptian peace initiative:

We are launching this mediatory initiative on consent by the legitimate government and the northern and southern opposition...I believe that if they sit down together at the negotiating table, the two sides will certainly reach agreement.²⁴

Sudan and Egypt have also formed a joint business council, made up of 40 members (20 from each side) to encourage private investment and trade exchanges between the two countries.²⁵ With regard to business and trade, Sudan has also been at the forefront of establishing a free-trade area under the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Sudan is amongst the first nine of twenty COMESA member states to implement the first stage of the envisaged Free Trade Area. This will be Africa's first step towards full regional integration and a common currency by 2025.²⁶

It is clear that Sudan has established a leadership role for itself within its region. Several years of building up closer political, diplomatic and economic relationships with its neighbours have resulted in Sudan's presidency of IGAD. It is also evident that the Organisation of African Unity, as well as most of the international community have noted the changes with Sudan, and Sudan's new relationships regionally. The coming year will hopefully see a peaceful resolution to several of the protracted conflicts

¹⁸ See, for example, statements by Osama El-Baz, political adviser to Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak: 'El-Baz: Sudan is the Strategic Depth of Egypt', News Article by ArabicNews.com on 14 September 1999; 'Egypt Reiterates Backing for Sudan's Territorial Integrity', News Article by Xinhua on 22 December 1999 at 20:22:38.

¹⁹ 'Egypt and Sudan Restore "Full" Diplomatic Relations', News Article by Agence France Presse on 23 December 1999 at 12:13:59; 'Focus - Egypt Restores Diplomatic Ties With Sudan', News Article by Reuters on 23 December 1999 at 12:09:13.

²⁰ 'Focus - Egypt's Moussa in Sudan to Discuss Peace', News Article by Reuters on 4 January 2000 at 14:02:46.

²¹ 'Egypt Hails Sudanese President's Visit', News Article by Xinhua on 22 December 1999 at 20:24:41.

²² 'Sudano-Egyptian Cooperation, Sudanese Reconciliation', News Article by Agence France Presse on 20 May 2000.

²³ See, 'Report: Sudan Accepts Egyptian-Libyan Peace Plan', News Article by Associated Press on 24 August 1999 at 10:10:00; 'Sudan "Willing" to Enter Peace Talks, Newspaper Says', News Article by Agence France Presse on 21 August 1999 at 11:32:43; 'War-Torn Sudan Takes Step Towards National Dialogue', News Article by Reuters on 21 August 1999 at 11:35:11.

²⁴ 'Sudano-Egyptian Cooperation, Sudanese Reconciliation', News Article by Agence France Presse on 20 May 2000.

²⁵ 'Sudanese, Egyptian Businesses Form Joint Council', News Article by Panafrican News Agency on 24 November 2000.

²⁶ 'Sudan to Join African Free Trade Area', News Article by Reuters on 30 October 2000 at 11:46:41 EST.

that have destabilised the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region. Africa looks toward Sudan to continue to play as full as role as possible in the search for peace.