

Sudan and Chad: A Liberalist Perspective

The conflict between Sudan and Chad began as a result of simultaneous internal instability that spilled over a porous border. While many factors have contributed to the crisis, in this essay I focus on the economic and political aspects as seen through the lens of liberal international relations theory, that which is defined by the writing of Robert Keohane, Joseph Nye and Michael Doyle. I start by dissecting the causes of Sudan's current internal state as it pertains to the conflict with Chad, then discuss Chad's domestic situation as it relates to Sudan. Although I mention ethnicity as a cause, I argue that it is a byproduct of the economic and political situation in both cases. I then discuss how the international conflict emerged, and eventually how positive peace may be constructed. I end with an attempt to predict, with reservation, possible future scenarios based on the presence or absence of international action.

Violent conflict in Sudan stretches back to British colonial domination. Sudan's borders were drawn with little consideration of original settlements and communities and failed to represent the historical territory of the various ethnicities. This, as with many African colonies, posed a problem right from independence. With the exception of eleven years of peace, from 1971 to 1982, Sudan's entire history has been engulfed in violence stemming from poor economic power sharing, lack of equal political representation, and subsequently, ethnic tension.

During the 70's, government attempts to speed up development and pay off international debt through the creation of large-scale mechanized farms sparked an

economic “conflict between the state, as major backer of the scheme owners, and the small farmers and pastoralists.”¹ In addition, progressive drought exacerbated the need for fertile land and thereby increased tension. However, the discovery of southern oil in commercial quantities ended up being the main source of dispute, as arguments over the distribution of oil revenue led to all out violence. Oil has continued to play a major role in all of Sudan’s affairs, as it is the main source of income and allows the Sudanese government to remain relatively stable despite internal discord.

Another aspect of Sudanese conflict is the ethnic differences between the Muslim dominated north, and the various indigenous tribes of the south. “In September 1983, as part of an Islamicization campaign, President Nimeiri announced his decision to incorporate traditional Islamic punishments drawn from Shari’ā (Islamic Law) into the penal code. Southerners and other non-Muslims living in the north were also subjected to these punishments.”² However, it is important to note that ethnic tension became a key aspect of current Sudanese violence only after economic distress was vocalized.

In 2005, the Sudanese Government and Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement/Army signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that guaranteed equal “sharing and allocation of wealth emanating from the resources of the Sudan.”³ However, the treaty failed to include the region of Darfur in any terms of significance. For the people

¹ Mohed Suliman, “Civil War in Sudan: The Impact of Ecological Degradation,” ed. Ali B. Ali-Dinar, 10 Oct. 2008 <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/cvlw_env_sdn.html>

² “Sudan Second Civil War,” GlobalSecurity.org, 10 Oct. 2008 <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/sudan-civil-war2.htm>>

³ “The Comprehensive Peace Agreement Between the Government of The Republic of The Sudan and The Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Sudan People’s Liberation Army,” 2005, 10 Oct. 2008 <<http://www.unmis.org/English/cpa.htm>>

of Darfur, many of whom were already impoverished, the formation of a treaty that didn't provide them with adequate economic power sharing or sufficient democratic representation became a major source of conflict. Subsequently, tribal leaders used ethnic association to motivate the population; the non-Arab populace who dominated Darfur accused the Arab government of oppression, and violence erupted. In response, the Sudanese government began a brutal campaign of ground-based attacks supported by aerial bombardment. However, since the government didn't have the resources to deploy regular infantry, they hired the Janjaweed militia to do the groundwork for them. The Janjaweed has since led a vicious wave of attacks on non-Arab civilians and rebels alike. Although the Sudanese government initially denied support, it is now well known that they supply the Janjaweed with weapons and finances, even though they no longer control them.⁴

While Sudan's internal crisis has received much more of an international response, it is by no means the only cause of the interstate dispute. The monopolization of political power in Chad has led to the distribution of resources based on clan favoritism, sparking inter-ethnic revolt that has left the country in a continuous state of instability.

Chad has never seen a peaceful regime change. "Changes in power have thus always been the result of military force and have merely led to a replacement of the

⁴ Stephanie Hanson, "Sudan, Chad, and the Central African Republic," 2007, Council on Foreign Relations, 10 Oct. 2008 <http://www.cfr.org/publication/12309/sudan_chad_and_the_central_african_republic.html>

ruling elite while otherwise maintaining the existing political system.”⁵ In 1991, Idriss Deby took power, and has since led the state to be listed by Forbes as the most corrupt nation in the world by using philanthropic funds to buy the arms that keep his regime from collapsing.⁶ The revenue comes from a World Bank sponsored oil pipeline that runs though Chad and Cameroon. Similar to the situation in Sudan, the exploitation of oil has proven to be a major source of conflict, as distribution of the proceeds stops in the capital and never reaches the truly destitute.

Chad is also similar to Sudan in that it has experienced ongoing ethnic tension since independence. French colonialism left Chad in disunity, without the proper tools to remain peaceful. As a result, President Deby, a member of the Zaghawa ethnic clan, has “appointed trusted members of his Zaghawa tribe to positions in all levels of government,”⁷ and supported the “distribution of the spoils of government on the basis of clan favoritism.”⁸ Although his actions have sparked ethnic revolts for equitable resource distribution and political representation all across the country, in Chad, “ethnic solidarity is never automatic and alliances among rebel groups do not follow ethnic lines.”⁹ According to Human Rights Watch researcher Leslie Lefkow, “you even now

⁵ Patrick Berg, “The Dynamics of Conflict in the Tri-Border Region of Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic,” 2008, 10 Oct 2008 <library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/05375.pdf>

⁶ “The Most Corrupt Countries,” 2006, Forbes, 10 Oct. 2008 <http://www.forbes.com/feeds/2006/01/24/06caphosp_corrupt_slide.html?thisSpeed=6000>

⁷ “Darfur Bleeds: Recent Cross-Border Violence in Chad,” 2006, Human Rights Watch, 8 Oct. 2008 <www.hrw.org/campaigns/darfur/pdf/darfur_bleeds.pdf>

⁸ “Chad: A New Conflict Resolution Framework,” 2008, International Crisis Group, 10 Oct. 2008 <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5694&l=1>>

⁹ Marielle Debos, “Porous Borders and Fluid Loyalties: Patterns of Conflict in Darfur, Chad, and the CAR,” 2008, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 10 Oct. 2008 <<http://forums.csis.org/africa/?p=119>>

have Zaghawa members of the Chadian rebel groups who were former allies to President Deby.”¹⁰

It is in this context of simultaneous domestic insecurity that the international conflict emerged. As the Janjaweed terrorized Darfur, refugees spilled over the porous border into Chad, augmenting the internal violence already present in the country. However, the main stimulus for the crisis came when the Janjaweed “staged cross-border raids into Chad, attacking Darfurian refugees and Chadian villagers alike, seizing their livestock and killing those who [resisted].”¹¹ Chad’s internal rebellion left the government unable to secure its border and protect its citizens. Instead, Chad began supporting the Sudanese rebel groups, including JEM (Justice and Equality Movement) and SLA/M (Sudanese Liberation Army). In turn, the Sudanese government began backing the Chadian rebel forces with money and arms. From the Janjaweed’s initial cross-border raids and Chad’s internal instability, both of which were byproducts of poor economic power sharing, undemocratic political representation and ethnic disunity, the proxy war between Sudan and Chad began.

The solution to the conflict between Sudan and Chad lies within solving each countries internal crisis, stabilizing the border and ending arms flow, and eventually establishing complex economic interdependence between the two states. These three

¹⁰ Leslie Lefkow, Interview, “Eastern Chad: A Spillover of Violence from Darfur,” 9 Nov. 2006, 9 Oct. 2008

< <http://odeo.com/episodes/22049955-November-9-2006-Eastern-Chad-A-Spillover-of-Violence-from-Darfur>>

¹¹ “Darfur Bleeds: Recent Cross-Border Violence in Chad,” 2006, Human Rights Watch, 8 Oct. 2008
<www.hrw.org/campaigns/darfur/pdf/darfur_bleeds.pdf>

steps are vital to bring about positive peace to the region, and adequate international support must be given each one.

To resolve the crisis in Sudan, the first priority is to create conflict resolution conferences in which the leaders of the warring ethnic factions and the Sudanese government convene to discuss their needs and interests. However, the idea that the leaders of such a horrifying conflict would simply stop fighting and talk is unrealistic. Therefore, incentives must be offered. Considering that resource distribution has played such a powerful role in causing the conflict, one reward for nonviolent cooperation would be access to a Natural Resource and Revenue Distribution Committee in which the members would democratically decide how to distribute Sudan's oil revenue and other resources. This would give Sudan's economic power sharing mechanism to the moderates and encourage collaboration for peaceful conflict resolution.

However, for such a mechanism to function properly, the Sudanese government must allow its economic control to be minimized, which is unrealistic considering the government's history of deceit, corruption, and outright support of Janjaweed violence. Therefore, a simultaneous drive for democratic political reform must be supported. This step follows the arguments of the Democratic Peace Theory, which states that democratic capitalism leads to peace.¹² Although a forced upheaval of the Sudanese government would most likely cause the collapse of the entire state, international pressure to enact legitimate political reform would help transition the government from political monopoly to include democratic representation and economic power sharing.

¹² Michael Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," The American Political Science Review Vol. 80, No. 4, December 1986.

A similar strategy must be used in Chad. Throughout the conflict, “political leaders who chose to be part of the non-armed opposition have been little rewarded.”¹³ Offering economic power sharing access to the rebel groups that participate in non-violent negotiation would give a larger profit incentive to those who partake in cooperation rather than combat. Democratic reform must also take place to end the Zaghawa monopolization of power and to allow the promise of economic power sharing to be realized. Political negotiations with widened participation “should produce a political accord to address national revenue sharing, decentralization of state authority, security sector reform, judicial reforms to ensure accountability and administration.”¹⁴ International pressure for such action, especially from France, who currently provides the Chadian government arms and capital, is critical to resolving the internal disputes and on a larger scale, the regional crisis as a whole.

Along with the resolution of internal conflict within Sudan and Chad, the stabilization of the border and the subsequent cut of arms flow between the governments and their proxy rebel forces is critical to ending violent conflict between the two countries. Lack of a secure, enforced border is what originally allowed the Janjaweed to stage raids onto Chadian soil; there was nothing to stop them. In addition, despite the UN embargo, weapons, money, and stolen humanitarian equipment still manage to slip into rebel hands in both countries. Securing the border would increase the potential for

¹³ Marielle Debos, “Porous Borders and Fluid Loyalities: Patterns of Conflict in Darfur, Chad, and the CAR,” 2008, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 10 Oct. 2008 <<http://forums.csis.org/africa/?p=119>>

¹⁴ “Chad: A New Conflict Resolution Framework,” 2008, International Crisis Group, 10 Oct. 2008 <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5694&l=1>>

regional positive peace by hindering cross-border attacks and hampering the support of rebels inside the states.

Finally, complex interdependence between Sudan and Chad would finalize the construction of regional positive peace by making the support of each other's rebel forces not economically sensible. According to Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, "military force is not used by governments toward other governments within the region, or on the issues, when complex interdependence prevails."¹⁵ Complex interdependence entails the formation of vital formal and informal ties between states' governmental elites, non-governmental elites, and transnational organizations that leads to each country's reliance on the other for survival.¹⁶ Currently, the only form of regional interdependence lies between the Sudanese government and the Chadian rebels, and vice versa. Hence resolving the conflict necessitates the transformation from violent interdependence to complex interdependence through the participation of each government in the resolution process of the other state's internal crisis. "Although rebellions in Chad and Darfur have unique histories, peace cannot be achieved in Darfur without reserving a place at the negotiating table for the Chadian government. Nor can peace be achieved in Chad without a buy-in from the Sudanese government."¹⁷

Although complex interdependence would start with participation in the other state's internal peace process, it would continue to function on a more economic plane.

¹⁵ Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, "Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989), Chapter 2.

¹⁶ Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, "Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989), Chapter 2.

¹⁷ Colin Thomas-Jensen, "Nasty Neighbors: Resolving the Chad-Sudan Proxy War," 2008, ENOUGH, 10 Oct. 2008 <www.enoughproject.org/files/reports/ChadSudanApril.pdf>

One idea would be to add on to the pipeline recently constructed between Chad and Cameroon so that it includes Darfur. This joint economic venture would provide the oil profit incentive for Chad and Sudan to establish a peaceful relationship, particularly through the construction and maintenance of such a powerful revenue builder.

In conclusion, the conflict between Sudan and Chad has many underlying components that all must be confronted simultaneously. Both internal crises need to be resolved through conferences that address economic power sharing and democratic governmental reform. In addition, the border must be stabilized to prevent the continuation of cross-border raids and the flow of arms and money to the various rebel groups. Finally, complex interdependence must be established to prevent the eruption of another conflict, a process that would start with intergovernmental cooperation in internal conflict resolution and end with the formation of long lasting economic ties. However, what all this comes down to is a choice that must be made by the international community. We can decide whether to increase support for these initiatives, both politically and financially, or to leave the region in a state of disrepair. Projects like MINURCAT in Chad and UNAMID in Sudan have begun protecting civilians from inter-ethnic violence and arranging peace talks. With the global economic crisis taking its toll on oil prices, these forces are now more crucial than ever to prevent even more violence from breaking out. Therefore, I conclude my essay with the argument that the true difference between a future of violence and a future of peace for Sudan and Chad lies in the hands of the international community and their willingness, or hopefully, their inability, to allow such a devastating conflict to continue.

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