



Sudan's Southern Rebellion: The "Two Areas"

Comprehensive Information on Complex Crises

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*This document discusses the "Two Areas" of South Kordofan and Blue Nile states as they relate to security in the southern region of Sudan. A background on the history of the conflicts in the two states is provided in addition to information on the resulting humanitarian crisis. Related information is available at www.cimicweb.org. **Hyperlinks to source material are highlighted in blue and underlined in the text. All maps are hyperlinked to their source locations.***

Introduction

South Kordofan state and Blue Nile state, sometimes referred to as the "[Two Areas](#)", are located along Sudan's volatile southern border with South Sudan. These areas experienced decades of [armed conflict](#) as the South Sudanese fought for independence; witnessing the deaths of many and the displacement of hundreds of thousands. Fighting in the region briefly ceased in January 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA); however, following the end of the CPA-stipulated period in 2011, both areas devolved into open conflict, resulting in more than [600 deaths](#)¹, the [displacement](#) of hundreds of thousands and a large-scale humanitarian crisis along the border with South Sudan. This report will outline the rebel groups active within the two areas, the current status of the conflict in the region and the humanitarian impacts of the conflict.



Regional Rebel Groups

There are multiple rebel groups within present-day Sudan that have evolved over the past few decades in different regions of the country (see Table One below).² The main rebel group in the southern region of Sudan is the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N)³, established by Sudanese who once fought alongside the South Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) rebel group in the second civil war between Sudan and South Sudan (1983-2005). According to the Small Arms Survey (SAS), the number of SPLM-N forces is estimated to be between [2,500 and 4,000](#) in Blue Nile state and [20,000 - 40,000](#) in South Kordofan. Most of their weapons came

¹ Sudanese Interior Minister Ibrahim Mahmoud reported on 16 October 2012 that [633 people](#) have died in Blue Nile and South Kordofan state since fighting began in 2011, reports *Reuters*. Most of the dead were civilians and the rest government soldiers. He did not report the number of rebel soldiers killed. He added that 791 people have been wounded and 151 are missing from the Two Areas. These statistics are the first official numbers released since fighting began.

² Present day Sudan refers to the country as it exists following the independence of South Sudan in July 2011.

³ [SPLM-N](#) is the political arm of the opposition and the [SPLA-N](#) is the military component; however, for the purposes of this paper, they will be referred to as simply the SPLM-N.

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from the SPLA's former 9th Division headquarters and from recent captures of important caches of weapons, vehicles and tanks from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) after routing their troops in battle or capturing strongholds with weapons arsenals. South Sudan's political and military leadership have deep ties with SPLM-N leadership and have offered limited support to the rebels, despite international pressure on South Sudan to sever the relationship.

In November 2011 the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) was established from an [alliance](#) between the SPLM-N and three Darfurian⁴ rebel groups – the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the two factions of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA-Minni Minawi (SLA-MM) and SLA-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW)). The SRF and its members have called [for regime change](#) in Khartoum by either political or military means and the establishment of a democracy within Sudan. The formation of the SRF challenges the Government of Sudan's (GoS) strategy of isolating [rebel groups](#) and provides the Darfur groups with access to the Nuba Mountains as rear bases for possible attacks on Khartoum. SRF's centres of control and military operations are in Sudan's South Kordofan state but extend to Blue Nile state and into South Sudan's border states. Though SRF's Darfurian members focus their military activity mostly in Darfur, attacks often occur near the South Darfur/South Sudan border. SRF is actively seeking to expand its area of operations by amalgamating with other rebel groups throughout the country. According to SAS, in order for the alliance to be successful, "it must overcome the persistent power struggles and philosophical differences between the Darfur factions, as well as the challenges of increased military cooperation".

Table One: Armed Entities in Southern Sudan

NAME	Type	Year Founded	Location
Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)	National Army		Sudan
South Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)	National Army	Previous rebel group. Became national army in 2005.	South Sudan
Sudan People's Liberation Movement - North (SPLM-N)	Rebel		Blue Nile, South Kordofan
Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF)	Rebel	November 2011	Blue Nile, South Kordofan and Darfur (Comprises SPLM-N, JEM, SLA-AW and SLA-MM)
Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)	Rebel	2003	Darfur (but move in and out of Nuba Mountains)
Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid faction (SLA-AW)	Rebel	SLA originally founded in 2011.	Darfur
Sudan Liberation Army - Minni Minnawi (SLA-MM)	Rebel	SLA originally founded in 2011.	Darfur

The Two Areas

South Kordofan

South Kordofan state in southern Sudan is inhabited by a mix of Arab and [African tribes](#). The Nuba Mountains region, an area about the size of Scotland, makes up the majority of South Kordofan and is inhabited by a non-Arab population known as Nuba. The Nuba have been "subjected to displacement policies [by the Khartoum government] under the pretext of modernisation, their land expropriated for national development projects and their culture targeted for homogenisation", according to a 2011 report by the International Crisis Group (ICG). During the second Sudanese civil war (1983-2005), the Khartoum government waged a sustained campaign lasting fifteen years (1987-2002) in the Nuba Mountains. Members of the Nuba tribe joined the SPLA in their fight against the government, while Khartoum used a pan-Arabist and Islamist ideology to create divisions between Nuba and Arab tribes. During the civil war, the SPLA generally held the Nuba Mountains, while SAF controlled the towns and fertile lands at the base of the mountains.

⁴ Darfur is a region within Sudan that has experienced fighting for the past ten years, resulting in the deaths of between 100,000 to 300,000 people and the displacement of hundreds of thousands. There are still pockets of violence in the region. For detailed information on the Darfur conflict, please see the Small Arms Survey's Human Security Baseline Assessment on Sudan and South Sudan [webpage](#).



According to ICG, Nuba populations were “among the [biggest victims](#) of the North-South war and hold multiple grievances”, most notably unfair representation in government and the loss of land rights to Arab tribes. In early 2002, the Khartoum government and the SPLA agreed to an internationally supervised ceasefire for Southern Kordofan, which later became the foundation for the 2005 CPA between Khartoum and Juba, South Sudan. The CPA was viewed by many Nuba Mountain tribal leaders negatively, as it cost them key benefits gained from the 2002 local ceasefire, most notably the ability to negotiate a [peace deal](#) on their own terms and the right to self-determination. The CPA also failed to address the issue of the 30,000 Nuba enrolled in the SPLA.

Tensions escalated when two unrelated incidents occurring in 2011 increased resentment against the government. The first occurred when the former Minister of State for the Interior of the Government of Sudan, Ahmed Haroun, was [re-elected](#) as governor of South Kordofan in May 2011 amid accusations that the elections were rigged. Haroun is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur. The second occurred at the beginning of June 2011 when the National Congress Party (NCP)-led government began a [disarmament campaign](#) of the SPLA joint integrated police force. The campaign prompted resistance among the locals since it would have resulted in their losing access to weapons. Following a skirmish between SAF and SPLA soldiers, on 06 June 2012, tanks entered the state capital Kadugli and fighting ensued. Both SPLM-N and SAF mobilised their forces quickly and established front lines. Despite several military confrontations, the conflict was largely stalemated as front lines shifted only slightly with SPLM-N “controlling a main portion of the state that is contiguous with South Sudan and extends to the north and east, as well as a small isolated pocket of resistance to northwest of Kadugli”.⁵ Based on testimonies collected by SAS, [initial attacks](#) by the government targeted SPLM-N soldiers and supporters but as rebel groups fought back and the situation deteriorated, pro-government forces began to randomly target members of the Nuba community in Kadugli. The establishment of front lines diminished indiscriminate attacks against civilians; however, SAF continues to bombard the area.

Since the conflict began in 2011 women, children, and the elderly have fled to caves in the mountainside or dug holes in the ground for protection from SAF aerial bombardment. In March 2012 Peter Grete, an *al Jazeera* reporter, documented evidence of [destroyed villages](#) and crops and stated that “what is concerning is the attempts to drive a lot of the African tribes off their lands and to deprive them of resources”. Sudanese officials have denied reports that the army is behind the attacks and has placed the blame on SPLM-N rebels. As of June 2012, there had been more than 1,000 confirmed [aerial bombings](#) by MiG fighter jets and Antonov warplanes which has displaced half a million civilians. The *New York Times* (NYT) also reported that the Sudanese government is using long-range, [Chinese-made](#) rockets to bombard the Nuba Mountains, which the government does not deny. Agricultural production has decreased dramatically due to fear of bombings, and food stockpiles have been destroyed by SAF and affiliated militias following military clashes. The lack of food across most of the rebel-held areas has caused many civilians to resort to eating leaves off trees and ground roots to survive. According to SAS, there have been reports of numerous cases of severe human [rights violations](#), such as mass arrests of Nuba civilians, arbitrary executions and several cases of rape and sexual violence against women and girls by Khartoum-backed militias⁶.

Blue Nile

Sudan's Blue Nile state, located at the crossroads of Western Ethiopia, South Sudan and the Northern Nile Valley, is [strategically significant](#). In addition, 75% of Nile waters enter Sudan in Blue Nile state. During the 1970s and 1980s, top down agriculture programmes were imposed by the president, resulting in the displacement of thousands of small landholders and pastoralists. When South Sudanese SPLA rebels invaded the area in 1987 during the second Sudanese civil war, many locals joined the rebels against Khartoum. Conflict in the area was further

⁵ According to Julie Flint of the US Institute of Peace (USIP), the Nuba peoples' “ability to deny the central government control of the state, and to mount a significant and [enduring challenge](#) to it, is beyond question”, even if South Sudan were to decrease its support for the insurgency.

⁶ The largest government backed militia is the [Popular Defence Force](#) (PDF), which was established as a legal entity in 1989 and became one of the primary instruments of Islamist political and popular mobilization until 2001. Currently the PDF “exists as a military and civilian network to mobilize militia auxiliaries throughout Sudan” and has active units in Darfur and areas along Sudan's southern border.

fuelled when Khartoum “declared Blue Nile a model province for Islamizing Sudanese society and crushing secularist forces”, reports SAS. Thousands of Ethiopians and Eritrean soldiers backed the SPLA during the conflict from 1995 onwards. Blue Nile was one of the “most difficult elements” of the 2005 peace negotiations, with a compromise reached that favoured neither Sudan nor South Sudan. It was determined that the state would have a “popular consultation”, allowing residents the choice in how to restructure their relationship with Khartoum and address the conflict’s regional root causes of massive poverty and underinvestment.

A shaky peace held for five years until contested state elections in April 2010 highlighted underlying tensions. According to SAS, residents of Blue Nile felt that Khartoum continued to [withhold investment](#) in the state, in addition to the heightening of the Roseires Dam that resulted in the displacement of tens of thousands of local residents, and little or no benefits for the state from the dam project. The first round of “popular consultations” in 2011 highlighted a widening divide between those who lobbied for more government investment and development aid for the state and those who demanded the highest degree of autonomy from Khartoum. Tensions continued to rise, and were exacerbated when conflict broke out in South Kordofan state in mid-2011. Shortly thereafter, fighting in Blue Nile erupted on the evening of 01 September 2011, and by the next morning, SAF was using MiG fighter jets to bomb SPLM-N strongholds, while dozens of tanks and artillery were used against key positions in the state capital, al Damazin, including the residence of the commander of Blue Nile’s Joint Integrated Units and the governor’s mansion. Sudanese President Omar al Bashir declared a state of emergency in Blue Nile state and dismissed the state’s SPLM-N governor, replacing him with a military commander. Then on 03 September, government authorities banned the SPLM-N, seizing their office and arresting [party leaders](#) and members across the country, reports Human Rights Watch (HRW). Within days of the initial fighting in Blue Nile, the Sudanese government controlled sixty percent of the state. Following SAF’s initial triumphs, SPLM-N forces began an [insurgency](#) resulting in the group reclaiming control of twenty-five percent of Blue Nile state.⁷

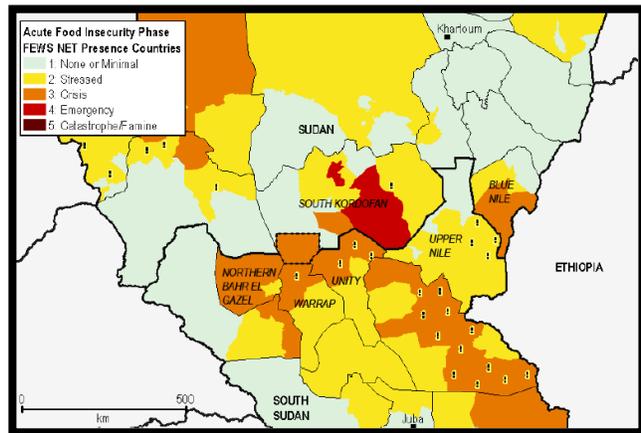
In interviews conducted by HRW, witnesses described “[indiscriminate bombings](#) in civilian areas, killings, and other serious abuses by Sudanese armed forces” in addition to “extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and mass looting and destruction of property”. The SAF bombings destroyed markets, homes, schools, farms and aid group offices and have caused thousands to flee into South Sudan and Ethiopia.

The Resulting Humanitarian Crisis

Sudan

According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), [665,000 people](#) remain internally displaced or severely affected by on-going fighting in Blue Nile and South Kordofan states. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) reports that in areas of the two states controlled by SPLM-N, “poor [crop production](#) has been exacerbated by on-going limitations on trade, movement, and humanitarian access, which severely hinder access to other sources of food (wild foods, market purchases) and income (agricultural labour opportunities, sales of wild foods) as well as limit market supplies”. As a result, food prices have been pushed well above market prices. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) within South Kordofan experience high levels of acute malnutrition, excess mortality and heavy asset losses. Those in SPLM-N-controlled areas of Blue Nile have greater mobility and better access to food than those in South Kordofan. However, as the situation continues, food security is expected to deteriorate as food prices peak, food stocks are exhausted among both IDPs and the host population, and limitations on trade, movement and humanitarian assistance continue.

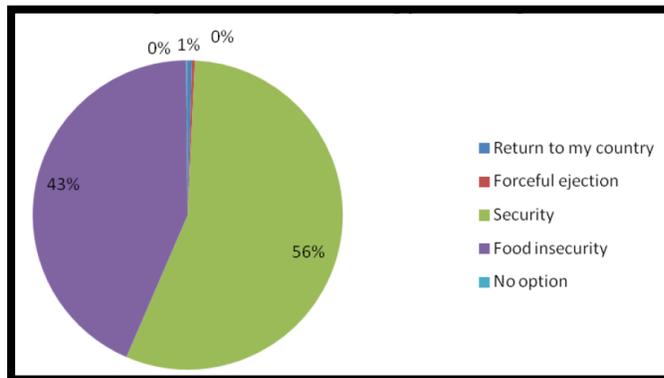
Acute Food Insecurity Along the Border



⁷ Khartoum puts the figure at between five and ten percent.

According to Amnesty International, Sudanese officials have [severely restricted](#) humanitarian assistance to South Kordofan and Blue Nile since the conflicts began in 2011. UN agencies have repeatedly been [denied access](#) to rebel held areas and the government is refusing to allow any SPLM-N involvement in the distribution of humanitarian supplies, because of fears that the aid will be used to benefit the rebels. On 05 August 2012, the rebels and Khartoum signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), developed by the African Union (AU), Arab League and UN, to allow delivery of humanitarian aid into Blue Nile and South Kordofan. However, as of the end of Sep-

Figure One: Reasons for Leaving Place of Origin



tember 2012, this tripartite agreement has not been implemented and rebels accuse Khartoum of “not respecting” the MOU. In order to circumvent Khartoum, rebels have [called for aid](#) to be sent through South Sudan and Ethiopia in order to reach civilians caught in the fighting, reports *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*. Over 120 international organisations submitted a [signed letter](#) to the UN Security Council on 21 September demanding that humanitarian aid be delivered to the rebel held areas of the two states. Because of insecurity in their places of origin, persistent food insecurity, and lack of humanitarian aid, over [172,000 refugees](#) have flooded into South Sudan and an additional 38,700 into Ethiopia, reports OCHA.

South Sudan

Of those fleeing violence in the North and now living in South Sudan, [over 109,000](#) are in camps in Upper Nile state and more than 65,700 people are in Unity state. Living conditions in the camps and the health of the population have varied since they were [opened](#) by relief agencies. FEWS NET reports that many of the refugees reach the registration point of the camps [exhausted](#), weak and malnourished. Mortality rates in camps were highest between mid-June and mid-July, reports *Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)*, also known as Doctors Without Borders). Results of an epidemiological study conducted by *MSF* in July 2012 revealed that [mortality rates](#) in the Jamam camp, located in South Sudan’s Upper Nile state, were nearly double the emergency threshold.⁸ In the camp, almost nine children a day were dying with sixty-five percent of deaths due to diarrhoea.⁹ In the Yida refugee camp in Unity state, FEWS NET reported that three to [four children](#) under the age of five were dying per day. Food security within the camps is mainly dependent on food rations from the UN World Food Programme (WFP), which include: cereals, pulses, oil and salt. A survey conducted by FEWS NET revealed that many households consume their monthly rations within two to three weeks and are therefore forced to use coping mechanisms such as borrowing food on credit and eating bitter wild foods. Due to a lack of monetary income for many refugees, food is often used as a substitute for payment. For example, most households prefer to grind the cereals in order to make it consumable for children, a process that often requires the use of a grinding machine whose operators are usually paid in food. The heavy rains also force many women to use a portion of their food to pay transporters with camels and donkeys to carry the heavy food rations from the food distribution sites across swampy lands to the refugee’s camp site.

Some of the refugee camps are experiencing severe [water shortages](#) which have contributed to a rise in mortality and malnutrition rates, reports the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The onset of the [rainy season](#) (typically mid-July through November) has exacerbated the dire humanitarian situation by increasing the risk of water-borne diseases as the rains cause latrines to overflow and contaminate standing water. “Owing to a lack of clean water, people are drinking contaminated [surface water](#)” in the Yusuf Batil refugee camp in Upper Nile,

⁸ The World Health Organisation defines the [emergency threshold](#) as the mortality rate above which an emergency is said to be occurring. Usually taken as a crude mortality rate of 1 per 10 000 per day, or as an under-five mortality rate of 2 per 10 000 per day

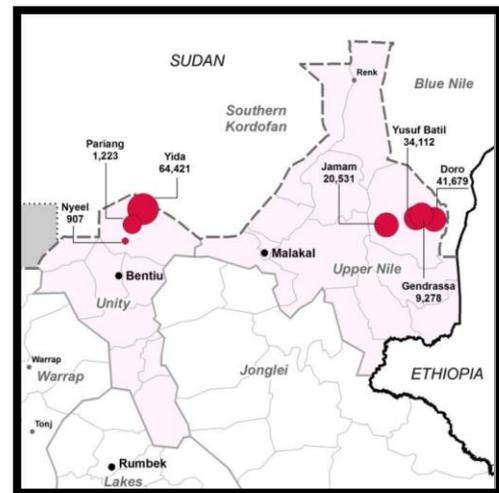
⁹ Diarrhoea is an important cause of [under nutrition](#) since nutrient requirements increase during diarrhoea and nutrient intake and absorption are usually decreased. The feeding of children in these refugee communities, especially in the incidence of diarrhoea is “below the recommended standard and contributes to increased cases of severe malnutrition and in some cases leads to death”.



reports Melker Mabeck, head of the ICRC delegation in South Sudan. People must also wade through mud to get basic services. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that 21 people have died from an outbreak of the [Hepatitis E](#) virus in three South Sudanese refugee camps which is linked to poor water sanitation issues. Over 600 suspected cases of the virus have been reported since the outbreak was identified in July. The disease has put “immense pressure on the available [health services](#) and resources”.

Transportation of relief items has also been affected by the rains. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres stated that humanitarian efforts in South Sudan were close to the breaking point as “[flooded roads](#) block access and the possibility of relocating people elsewhere – even where better sites can be found”. Additionally, UN officials reported that landmines were [hampering relocation](#) efforts as well. At the end of September, international aid agencies reported that South Sudan’s rainy season has [overwhelmed](#) aid efforts in refugee camps located in Upper Nile’s Maban County, one of the most remote and least developed areas of South Sudan. The four camps in Maban house over 106,000 refugees, and can only be reached by air or boat during the rainy season. Sean Casey, International Medical Corps UK (IMC) country director for South Sudan, stated that “we’ve got an emergency on our hands which is worsening day by day and it has the potential to get bigger with more refugees coming in”. Within Unity state, The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported in late-September that “about 100 refugees a day are arriving in the border town of Yida” as a result of a new round of air and [ground attacks](#) in Sudan’s South Kordofan state. The “refugees are in poor health and without any belongings” and it is expected that by the end of the year the number of refugees in Yida camp will increase from its current 64,200 inhabitants to more than 80,000. UNHCR hopes to relocate the camp to a safer location once the rainy season ends in November, amid safety concerns given the camp’s close proximity to the Sudanese border.

Sudanese Refugee Camps in South Sudan



Due to relief efforts within Yida camp, mortality rates in the hospital operated by *MSF* [dropped](#) from twenty-five percent to two percent in August. September 2012 witnessed a [modest drop](#) in malnutrition rates in various camps from forty percent to thirty-three percent. Though these slight improvements have been achieved, the main [causes](#) of disease remain unchanged, resulting in deaths from diarrhoea, water-borne infections and pulmonary infections. When the heavy rains stop and flooded routes between Sudan and South Sudan reopen, there is an expectation that up to 40,000 [additional people](#) could arrive in the South Sudanese camps by the end of 2012. The UN has expressed fears that another [influx of refugees](#) into South Sudan could quickly overburden the camps and undermine recent modest improvements in the camps. Due to these concerns, UNHCR has called on relief agencies to scale up operations in expectation of more refugees. However, aid agencies are [underfunded](#), with WFP reporting that they have only received a third of the USD 6 million it needs to airdrop food and UNHCR stating that it has only received forty percent of its USD 183 million appeal.

Ethiopia

UNHCR reported that many of the first [refugee arrivals](#) into Ethiopia were women, children and the elderly. As fighting escalated throughout 2012, larger numbers of men arrived at the camps. Many refugees fleeing into Ethiopia from Blue Nile state passed through the Ad-Damazin transit centre, located about twelve miles from the Sudanese border. At the end of April 2012, the Ethiopian government decided to [close the camp](#) because of overcrowding and its close proximity to the Sudanese border. Over 15,000 refugees were ordered to relocate to another camp about 62 miles away near Bambasi in the Benishangul-Gumuz region, reports *MSF*. Some of the refugees, such as those with cattle or former SPLM-N fighters, wanted to [remain](#) close to the border; while others refused to leave Ad-Damazin because of the gold-mining opportunities nearby. Following violent protests in the camp by those who refused to leave, Ethiopian authorities suspended humanitarian assistance such as food and health care for more than two months and prohibited relief agencies from intervening. When 12,000 refugees were eventually transferred to the Bambasi camp in mid-June 2012, twenty-five percent of children under five suffered from acute



malnutrition. Around 3,000 refugees did not travel to the new camp and have likely returned to Sudan or are squatting along the border. *MSF* reports that the flow of new arrivals to Bambasi has decreased significantly and a local market has been established within the camp where refugees trade with the local Ethiopian community.

Negotiations Efforts

UN Security Council [resolution 2046](#), passed on 02 May 2012, demands that Khartoum engage in peaceful talks with the SPLM-N on the issue of South Kordofan and Blue Nile and that South Sudan ceases support for the rebel groups based there. However, there is little evidence of the fighting subsiding in the two states, with [new attacks](#) in South Kordofan occurring in early October 2012.

Negotiations between the Sudanese government and the SPLM-N have stalled over [political differences](#), according to the *Sudan Tribune*. SPLM-N seeks an agreement that includes issues related to Darfur, the lifting of the organisation's ban, the release of political prisoners, and the reinstatement of Malik Agar, a former SPLM-N rebel, as the governor of Blue Nile. Sudan's head mediator, Kamal Obeid, remains pessimistic on the likelihood that a comprehensive agreement will be reached, as Sudan is willing to make few concessions. In October 2012, Sudan accused the SPLM-N of [threatening](#) to hamper the implementation of the recently reached security agreement signed with South Sudan and has called on the UN Security Council to "act against the SPLM-N". According to SAS, "the GoS is also publicly hostile towards [negotiations](#) with the SRF, condemning it a proxy of the SPLA/GoSS¹⁰ and thus a matter best dealt with by reaching accord with the GoSS over the outstanding Sudan-South Sudan secession issues". SAS reports that though the SPLM-N is part of SRF, the African Union's High Level Implementation Panel in Addis Ababa only recognizes the SPLM-N as [interlocutor](#) for issues related to the "Two Areas". The SPLM-N therefore has the difficult task of trying to balance their calls for a national process for all of Sudan (including Darfur) and the immediate political and humanitarian needs of the "Two Areas".

Conclusion

Sudan is in the midst of political, economic and security upheaval as the country battles [popular protests](#), an [inflation](#) rate of forty-two percent, and an insurgency in Darfur and its southern states. The root causes of the conflicts: poverty, lack of investment from the government and marginalisation of the population, are far from being addressed. Though there have been promising security agreements between South Sudan and Sudan along their shared border, there is [little evidence](#) to suggest that this will improve the security and humanitarian situation in the "Two Areas". The insecurity along the border has created a humanitarian crisis within Blue Nile and South Kordofan states which has spilled over into neighbouring countries. If the security situation does not improve, there will continue to be an increase in refugees flowing into already overburdened refugee camps in South Sudan's Unity and Upper Nile states. According to John Ging, OCHA's Operations Director, there is an expectation that South Sudan will be hosting up to [350,000 Sudanese](#) by the end of 2013 and that "refugees who arrive over the coming months will also be weaker and more malnourished because of prolonged food insecurity in Sudan".

¹⁰ Government of South Sudan (GoSS)