

# SUDAN

## background information



### Basic statistics

- **Population:** 33.6 million (UN, 2003)
- **Capital:** Khartoum
- **Major languages:** Arabic; Nubian, others
- **Major religions:** Sunni Muslim 70% (in north), indigenous beliefs 25%, Christian 5% (mostly in south and Khartoum)
- **Ethnic breakdown:** black 52%, Arab 39%, Beja 6%, foreigners 2%, other 1%
- **Main exports:** Oil, cotton, sesame, livestock and hides, gum arabic

### Ripe for further exploitation

“The economic dividend of a full peace settlement could be great. Sudan has large areas of cultivatable land, as well as gold and cotton. Its oil reserves are ripe for further exploitation.” *BBC News 6/5/04*

# A brief history of Sudan

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**1821:** Conquered by Egypt, who found Khartoum as their base and develop trade in slaves and ivory.

**1870s and 1880s:** Egypt, backed by Britain, decides to extend its control in the south. This leads to resistance by Muhammad Ahmad ('the mahdi') who aims to drive out foreign influences and purify Islam in Sudan. British forces, led by Gordon, are defeated at Khartoum.

**1890s:** Britain, under Lord Kitchener, destroy power of Mahdists. Agreements in 1899 (reaffirmed by the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936) established the government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Sudan was administered by a governor-general, appointed by Egypt with the consent of Britain. In practice, however, the British controlled the government of Sudan. The Sudanese continued to oppose colonial rule, and the Egyptians resented their subordinate role to the British.

**1924:** British institute a policy of isolating the southern Sudan by administering it separately from the north. An advisory council for the northern Sudan is established in 1943, and in 1948 a predominantly elective legislative assembly for the whole territory is set up.

**1948:** Elections: the Independence Front, which favours the creation of an independent republic, gains a majority over the National Front, which seeks union with Egypt. Britain and Egypt agreed to prepare Sudan for independence in 1956. In 1955 southerners, fearing that the new nation would be dominated by the Muslim north, begin a revolt that lasts 17 years.

**1956:** Independence from Britain followed by a period of instability. Continuing civil war between north and south, and a series of military coups.

**1989:** Bloodless coup brings Lt. Gen. Omar Ahmed al-Bashir to power. He strengthens ties with Libya, Iran, and Iraq, reinforces Islamic law and bans opposition parties.

**1990:** America cuts off aid and begins to arm rebels in south, exacerbating civil war. *"Remember the scenario - a rebel group being trained and armed by the CIA to topple a sovereign government, cross-border incursions from secluded camps, and the whole de-stabilisation exercise backed by international sanctions and a massive propaganda campaign. It sounds like Nicaragua or Angola circa 1984. In fact it's Sudan 1998."* *Guardian*, 1/5/1998

**1998:** American missiles destroy pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum. The plant *"provided 50 percent of Sudan's medicines, and its destruction has left the country with no supplies of chloroquine, the standard treatment for malaria,"* but months later, the British Labour government refused requests *"to resupply chloroquine in emergency relief."* *Observer*, 20/12/1998

**2002:** Under American pressure a cease fire is agreed between the government and the southern rebels. Talks lead to a framework for peace based on autonomy for the south and a referendum on independence after six years.

**2003** A separate rebellion against the weakened government begins in the Darfur region.