



Radical Intolerance

Sudan's Religious Oppression and Embrace of Extremist Groups

By Dr. Suliman Baldo | December 2017





Cover: A church building being torn down in Omdurman, Sudan. Photo: Morning Star News

Radical Intolerance

Sudan's Religious Oppression and Embrace of Extremist Groups

By Dr. Suliman Baldo
December 2017

Executive Summary

The Obama and Trump administrations, in temporarily and then permanently lifting comprehensive sanctions on Sudan, cited improvements in the Sudanese government's counterterrorism and its broader humanitarian and human rights record. But a closer look reveals these claims to be very problematic, with major implications for the next stage of dialogue and policy between the United States and Sudan.

Now that the comprehensive sanctions have been lifted, it is essential that the United States pivot rapidly and aggressively to the relationship's next phase, which should focus on creating leverage in support of American counterterrorism interests and much more fundamental reforms that could change the nature of the authoritarian, kleptocratic Sudanese state and better secure the rights of Christians, minority Muslims, war-affected Sudanese people, and others who have been victimized by this regime for nearly 30 years.

Khartoum's track record raises critical questions about its role and true interests as a counterterrorism partner. Top U.S. policymakers who chart the next phase of engagement with Sudan should account for this as they engage in anticipated discussions about remaining sanctions, a significant shift in bilateral relations, terminating Sudan's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, and forgiving Sudan's debt, estimated to have mushroomed to \$50 billion.¹

Sudan's intolerant regime has a long-established tradition of religious persecution that continues today despite its bid for normalized ties with the United States and the rest of the world. It also has maintained long relationships with active extremist groups. This record suggests Sudan may be an untrustworthy

1 [The Enough Project • enoughproject.org](https://enoughproject.org)
Radical Intolerance
Sudan's Religious Oppression and Embrace of Extremist Groups

partner in the bid to push back against religious extremism that is gaining momentum in the region and is essential for combatting international terrorism. The next phase of the policy effort should therefore focus on more structural changes in Sudan to address these core problems that continue to be central to the Sudanese regime: links to extremists and deep discrimination against religious minorities.

Sudan may be an untrustworthy partner in the bid to push back against religious extremism that is gaining momentum in the region.

The current Sudanese regime maintains documented, long-standing links with active extremist religious groups within Sudan, some of which call for jihad, advocate for groups like al-Qaida or the Islamic State group, threaten Westerners and Western interests, and/or are routinely involved in committing or inciting acts of religious persecution within Sudan. Some of these groups are associated with domestic attacks on religious groups (which include but are not limited to Christians, Muslim Sufi groups, and moderate Muslim scholars), and on rights defenders and intellectuals. Khartoum maintains these

relationships with extremists to increase domestic and international political support for its leadership in Sudan and to demonstrate its support for jihad to international extremists. The Sudanese government also keeps these ties to claim an edge in intelligence gathering for Western intelligence services, by infiltrating extremist groups to acquire information, though these groups in turn use the space they are given by the Sudanese government to threaten Western interests. The regime in Khartoum also cultivates these ties with Salafist groups (those who adhere to an ultraconservative interpretation of Islam) and Salafist jihadi groups (ultraconservatives who support holy war against Muslims and non-Muslims they consider as threats to their interpretation of the religion) to protect the dominance of *Sharia* law in Sudan and intimidate and repress those of other faiths and beliefs (including Christians and many others) who seek greater rights and freedoms in Sudan.

Historically, the Sudanese regime had ties to international terrorist actors like al-Qaida and Hamas in the 1990s, which promoted jihad (see Annex I). Currently, it tolerates radical Islamist groups and clerics, allowing them to spread virulent ideologies including those of the Islamic State group and other international terrorist groups. Some of the extremist groups that the regime allows to operate freely in Sudan are involved in recruiting followers within Sudan for international terrorist groups such as al-Qaida, the Islamic State group, Boko Haram (active in several countries in West and Central Africa), and the Somali al-Shabab group. In considering these factors and the future of bilateral ties with Sudan, Sudan's regional and international interlocutors and U.S. leaders should factor for the Sudanese regime's extremist orientation and long history of mass killings, forced displacements, and large-scale violations of the fundamental rights and religious freedoms of the Sudanese people.²

U.S. and international engagement with Khartoum should address the system of violent kleptocracy³ that is perpetuated by a regime that runs a militia state⁴ and persecutes religious groups and rights defenders and commits violent abuses. Because the Sudanese regime may make small adjustments but retain its overall strategic objectives, the international community, with U.S. leadership, should use sustained pressures and incentives to encourage fundamental reforms in Sudan that would benefit all Sudanese people and align with U.S. strategic interests.⁵ Among the fundamental reforms needed in Sudan are protections of freedoms and equal rights for all Sudanese citizens, including religious freedoms, along with a comprehensive peace agreement with armed groups and more inclusive power-sharing. Most critically, Sudan should rein in groups that are currently publicly advocating and actively recruiting for violent

2 [The Enough Project](https://enoughproject.org) • enoughproject.org

Radical Intolerance

Sudan's Religious Oppression and Embrace of Extremist Groups

extremist groups such as the Islamic State group, al-Qaida and their affiliates in North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

The Sudanese government's record of attack, opposition, obstruction, and inaction toward these ends suggests that little is likely to change without the kinds of serious and sustained financial pressures and incentives that U.S. policymakers and their international partners can wield most effectively together.

Sustained pressures should focus on key officials and their networks that undermine peace and human rights, and these pressures should spare the Sudanese public. Financial pressures should include network sanctions (i.e., asset freezes and other measures targeting a network of multiple individuals and entities together, rather than a single person, for greater effectiveness) based on financial investigations, including information verified by The Sentry.⁶ Network sanctions should be combined with anti-money laundering measures, such as advisories issued by international financial intelligence units to encourage financial institutions to engage in heightened monitoring and alert potential money laundering activities or other risky activities, particularly by Sudanese politically exposed persons (PEPs) who may otherwise use the U.S. and international financial systems to move or obscure the proceeds of corruption. These types of anti-money laundering measures can help banking institutions comply with their due diligence obligations, generate information that helps law enforcement actors take action to counteract illicit financial flows, keep bad actors out of the global financial system, and promote the integrity of the financial system itself.

Incentives for the Sudanese government, such as removal of the state sponsor of terrorism designation and support for Sudan's debt relief, should be tied to the implementation of fundamental reforms.

Incentives for the Sudanese government, such as removal of the state sponsor of terrorism designation⁷ and support for Sudan's debt relief, should be tied to the implementation of fundamental reforms.

The ultimate reward that the Khartoum regime seeks, that of the abolition of its designation as a state sponsor of international terrorism, should be directly connected to real and measurable changes on the ground such as the implementation of a comprehensive peace deal in Darfur that returns the millions of forcibly displaced persons to their original areas. Other tangible reforms to be delivered by the regime in Sudan could include:

- Reforming the laws that discriminate against Christians and other religious minorities;
- Ensuring that constitutional provisions guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens—regardless of their religious beliefs or regional or ethnic background—are respected in practice;
- Upholding the rights to free speech and freedom of association and assembly, including and especially for those defending fundamental rights; and
- Genuinely countering violent extremist groups, including Salafist jihadi groups, that threaten, excommunicate, and attack those defending freedoms of religion and thought.

Overview of attacks on Christian communities in Sudan

The Sudanese regime led by President Omar al-Bashir, which has waged war against its own citizens for much of its 28 years in power, has recently engaged in discreet and systematic acts of persecution against the country's Christian minority. These attacks, described below, are just the tip of the iceberg for an extremist Sudanese regime defined by intolerance of all kinds. But these recent attacks on Christian communities are particularly brazen and noteworthy for the fact that they come as U.S. policymakers, who hold significant leverage, scrutinize the regime's behavior in the wake of the lifting of U.S. sanctions and amid consideration of further normalization of bilateral relations. Given that the Sudanese regime is orchestrating provocative acts like these as it presents its best face, it is not difficult to surmise how the regime will act if the remaining sanctions linked to its state sponsor of terrorism designation and the Darfur sanctions, as well as other pressures, are totally lifted.

At this pivotal time, the regime's attacks on Christians have included the demolition of multiple churches.⁸ The destroyed structures include at least one incident immediately following the departure of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had visited Sudan in early August to discuss church demolitions and announce that Sudan would become the world's newest Anglican communion.⁹ The Sudanese regime's recent attacks have also involved the arrests and interrogations of numerous clergy members and parishioners resisting the Sudanese government's attempts to seize control of church buildings and land.¹⁰



The Kurada Sudanese Church of Christ building, destroyed by a jet fighter from the Sudanese government in November 2014, Tojor village, Dalami county, South Kordofan, Sudan. January 2015. Photo: Giovanni Diffidenti

These recent incidents follow a well-documented pattern of persecution and attacks by the Sudanese government and security forces that the U.S. government and many Sudanese nongovernmental organizations have documented for years. An August 2017 report by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom notes, for example, that in 2016 in Sudan, "There were eyewitness reports of the

4 [The Enough Project • enoughproject.org](https://enoughproject.org)
Radical Intolerance
Sudan's Religious Oppression and Embrace of Extremist Groups

government arresting, detaining, or intimidating Christian clergy and church members, as well as an imam, denying permits for the construction of new churches, closing or demolishing existing churches and attempting to close church schools, restricting non-Muslim religious groups and missionaries from operating in or entering the country, and censoring religious materials and leaders.”¹¹

The Sudanese government’s history of “systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom”¹² has prompted the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to keep Sudan designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” since 1999.¹³ The nonprofit Open Doors, which supports persecuted Christians in more than 60 countries, has also ranked Sudan the fifth worst country in the world for “extreme Christian persecution” in the 2017 World Watch list.¹⁴ International human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have amply documented attacks against the Christian minority in the country.¹⁵ Prominent Sudanese think tanks and rights groups have also extensively reported on the repression of Christians in the country.¹⁶

The more recent incidents of arrests and demolitions follow similar or more egregious reported past incidents, including:

- The April 2017 killing of a church leader at Evangelical Church and School in Omdurman.¹⁷
- The orders for an August 2016 church demolition in the Alhaj-Yousif neighborhood of Khartoum North.¹⁸
- The heavily armed Sudanese government arrests in July 2016 of 19 Evangelical priests, sheikhs, and students who were staging a peaceful sit-in at the Evangelical School in Khartoum-North to protest the sale of church land by the government.¹⁹
- The December 2015 arrest without charges and holding in detention of two senior Church of Jesus Christ of Sudan pastors²⁰ in Khartoum.²¹ The two, together with an activist and a Czech national, were charged in August 2016 with at least seven crimes, including espionage and waging war against the state for having sought to assist a student who was badly burnt during a protest.²²
- The October 2015 destruction of two churches in Omdurman.²³
- The December 2014 stripping of the Evangelical Church in Khartoum North of much of its land and destruction of several church buildings.²⁴
- The August 2014 padlocking by Sudanese security forces of a Pentecostal church housing a Christian center in Khartoum.²⁵
- The July 2014 demolition of a Church of Jesus Christ of Sudan church in the Tayba Alahamdab area in northern Khartoum.²⁶
- The sentencing of Ms. Mariam Ishag to death by hanging and 100 lashes in May 2014 for apostasy for her conversion to Christianity.²⁷
- The February 2014 demolition by bulldozers—without warning—of a church in the Ombada area of Omdurman.²⁸

This sampling is hardly a comprehensive list. At the time this report was written in November 2017, there were multiple court cases underway against priests of the Anglican Church and the Church of Christ of Sudan, which are targets of particularly virulent crackdowns by Sudanese authorities. For instance, 11 church members were scheduled to face trial on November 11, 2017, before Omdurman Criminal Court. One was scheduled to appear before the court on November 13 and another on November 15.²⁹ On November 21, 26 church members were expected to appear in court, followed by 25 more on November 28.

The Sudanese regime's manner of exploiting differences and pitting communities against one another is particularly noteworthy in its destructiveness. For instance, the Sudanese Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs has legally and operationally empowered a dissident branch of the Anglican church that split off from the mainstream Anglican community in 2013. It also supports a group that rivals the official Church of Christ representative body. These two rival groups are used to destroy property and attack leaders. In a recent incident, seven Church of Christ leaders were detained. They were all members of a committee that had been elected by the church to represent the church from 2015 to 2018. Several rulings by Sudanese administrative courts have backed the mainstream Anglican and Church of Christ recognized by the congregations, but the ministry has backed the dissident groups and is using them in the Sudanese

regime's attacks on churches of the two denominations.³⁰ The regime's orchestrated repossession or destruction of property and the harassment and imprisonment of church members is the more obvious and immediate outcome of these attacks. But the more insidious effect of the regime's actions is the self-destruction from within a minority community.



A man holds a bible in the Kurada Sudanese Church of Christ, which was destroyed with a series of jet fighter bombs in November 2014. Tojor village, Dalami county, South Kordofan, Sudan. January 2015. Photo: Giovanni Diffidenti

In its actions with the Anglican and Church of Christ communities, the Sudanese government has been able to frame the conflicts it has stoked and the divisions it has exacerbated as "internal disputes."³¹ This narrative allows the regime to preside over the more comprehensive and permanent destruction of Sudanese minority groups, such as Christian communities, without exposing its own destructive intentions and without looking like it has done anything wrong.

The Sudanese regime's attacks and incidents against Christian communities in addition to and predating these incidents have been described at length elsewhere.³²

In these types of incidents, church members have been arrested and/or charged with such improbable offenses including waging war against the state and undermining the constitutional system. These offenses carry the death penalty. Other common charges against members of the clergy and other Christians include promoting hatred among or against sects, disturbance of the public peace, and insulting religious creeds. These charges are punishable by prison sentences and flogging.³³ Beyond these immediate attacks, there exists a Sudanese government order to demolish more than two dozen additional listed churches and seize the land on which these churches were built on the pretext that they were constructed on residential plots or public squares in areas considered for urban planning.³⁴ Neighborhood mosques and places of worship for Sufi followers in these areas were not known to have

been subjected to similar threats of demolition. Often, an added motivation behind the demolition of churches and their properties is sheer greed by regime cronies aspiring to own the prime urban plots on which older churches are constructed or plots that are about to increase in value due to new urban zoning rules.

These measures point to a systematic effort to circumvent existing constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion by preventing the construction of new churches, overtaking and shutting down services such as church-run schools, and reducing the number of existing churches and institutions through the use of administrative and judicial tools.

Persecution and extremism in Sudan

The regime's systematic persecution of Christians is directly connected to its deeply-rooted religious intolerance and its historical ambition to make Sudan the first modern Islamic state, an ambition that led it to host violent extremists and terrorist groups in Sudan in the 1990s. Today, the regime appears to have subcontracted the realizations of its jihad aspirations to proxy extremist religious groups that publicly preach the ideologies of the likes of the Islamic State group and al-Qaida. While the government uses an arsenal of administrative and judicial tools to grab the prime urban lands as pointed above, it also tasks an array of "scholars" associated with the official religious establishment with justifying and masking its repressive practices with religious arguments. In a thinly veiled *démarche*, the regime in these and similar cases is leveraging religious value systems to justify a blatant form of venal corruption, that of urban land grabbing by its cronies. The opportunistic use of religious value systems and its extension in religious intolerance are thus additional instruments in the Sudanese regime's particular brand of violent kleptocracy.

Backing these individuals are an assortment of extremist groups, some of which are Salafist jihadi groups that are proponents of holy war and active recruiters for al-Qaida and the Islamic State group. By allowing groups that advocate for violent extremism to operate publicly and recruit youth with the use of propaganda for the war efforts of the Islamic State group in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, and al-Shabab in Somalia, President al-Bashir's government is at minimum complicit in the crimes of such groups.

The opportunistic use of religious value systems and its extension in religious intolerance are thus additional instruments in the Sudanese regime's particular brand of violent kleptocracy.

While attacks on churches, churchgoers, and the clergy remain the most visible dramatic manifestation of Sudan's religious intolerance, such intolerance has many less visible layers. These layers have yet to be recognized by outsiders but also infringe equally on the religious freedom of the Sudanese people. This intolerance expresses itself in the routine attacks on Sufi Islam's followers and shrines and in the harassment of Muslim minorities (see below).

Understanding the Sudanese regime's persecution of Christians and other religious minorities and its ties to religious extremists and terrorist groups requires more broadly understanding the demographic diversity in Sudan, the country's history of

political contradictions, and the context in which the current regime in Khartoum seized power and has since wielded it.

Extremists: A threat for diversity and tolerance in Sudan

Once-unified Sudan has always been demographically and religiously diverse. It has had a mainly Christian population and followers of indigenous African beliefs in the south, a mainly Muslim population in the north, and a leadership in the north that has used extremist laws and ideologies to divide, dominate, and abuse the many diverse communities throughout the country that are different from the leadership. In power since 1989, the regime has taken these practices to new extremes, compared with its predecessors.

In what is now Sudan (following South Sudan's independence in 2011), a Muslim majority country, multiple versions of Islam have long coexisted, as in almost all majority Muslim countries. There are disciples of minority Islamic beliefs, but most Sudanese Muslims are Sunni and practice Sufism. This form of Islamic mysticism accommodates the local cultures and pre-existing traditional African belief systems that predominate in the Muslim communities across the Sahara and Sahel regions of Africa, running from Senegal to Eritrea.

Followers of Sufism are known for their tolerance and accommodation of other religions and contemporaneous traditional African belief systems. This tolerance and accommodation is a main reason Sufi Muslims in Sudan have been targeted by regime hardliners and other extremists who oppose and attack these principles.

Also victimized by the Sudanese regime's intolerance are intellectuals, activists, rights defenders, and those who promote freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, speech, and expression—and those who resist the forcible imposition of Islamic beliefs, Arabic language, and *Sharia* law on everyone in the country.

Attacks targeting not only religious and other minorities, but also those fighting for rights and freedoms for everyone or for the accommodation of Islam and modernity, are a constant of Sudan's political life. As described in greater detail below in Annex I, such attacks peak when the Sudanese regime faces demands from opinion leaders to accommodate the rich ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity of the Sudanese people by instituting equal citizenship as the basis for the enjoyment of rights. Instead, the regime of President al-Bashir was, and continues to be, determined to impose, by coercion and force if needed, its own interpretation of Islam as the official religion, Arabic as the language, and *Sharia* as the law of the land. The violent tactics deployed to further this interest reflect the fundamental extremist orientation that this regime has displayed from the beginning of its hold on power.

The regime's symbiotic ties to Salafists and Salafist jihadis

The Sudanese regime maintains mutually beneficial relations with Salafist groups, including Salafist jihadi groups that openly advocate for al-Qaida or the Islamic State group, for multiple reasons:

Tolerance and accommodation is a main reason Sufi Muslims in Sudan have been targeted by regime hardliners and other extremists who oppose and attack these principles.

- **To increase political support for itself as a guarantor of stability.** Politically, these ties allow the Sudanese regime to send discreet messages both domestically and internationally suggesting that the regime represents a better option for leading Sudan than the extremist fringe of the jihadi groups.
- **To demonstrate support for jihad to international extremists.** Ideologically, these ties allow Sudanese regime hardliners to delegate to Salafist jihadi groups the fulfillment of the jihad agenda by allowing these groups to publicly propagate the ideology of the Islamic State and other violent extremist groups, and actively recruit fighters for these groups as well.
- **To gain and hold an edge in intelligence-gathering for counterterrorism efforts with Western intelligence actors.** The Sudanese regime appears to have successfully persuaded its partners in the Western intelligence community that its close ties to Salafist and other extremist groups enable the regime to infiltrate terrorist organizations and gain intelligence on their activities to aid counterterrorism efforts. However, these groups are using the space the regime provides to invite their followers to attack Westerners and Western interests in the country.
- **To protect the dominance of Islamic *Sharia* law in Sudan and repress calls for expanded rights and freedoms.** The Sudanese regime uses the official religious establishment's bully pulpit and maintains ties with Salafists and extremist prayer leaders to intimidate Christians along with those Muslims who support a secular state or advocate for human rights and freedoms.
- **To suppress religious diversity and tolerance in Sudan.** While posing as a moderate and modern Islamic law-abiding state, the Sudanese regime allows Salafist groups to publicly preach religious intolerance and to act with total impunity when they violently suppress popular manifestations of Sufi Islam or attack and destroy churches. The regime also condones the consistent campaigning by Salafist groups to prevent Muslims from joining their Christian neighbors and friends in celebrating Christmas, the new year, and Easter holidays, a customary practice that has turned these Christian religious events into manifestations of religious coexistence among Christians and Muslims in Sudan for generations.

For their multiple roles in helping realize its agenda, the Sudanese regime rewards jihadi groups by allowing them to own and operate their own FM radio and satellite television channels and to publish magazines and other literature. However, the regime denies these opportunities to the opposition and independent human rights groups. Thanks to this favorable treatment, the Salafist jihadi groups are also able to establish charitable organizations and to be overrepresented in higher education institutions as lecturers of Islamic studies and overseers of student extracurricular activities.

The Salafist jihadi groups in Sudan have managed, as a result, to develop student chapters in campuses as part of a means of branching out to the general population. This is a common practice among ideological political formations on the left and right of the political spectrum in Sudan, but regime-affiliated armed student militias selectively and violently suppress the free expression of groups opposed to the regime. Direct public addresses in gathering places further extend the radical groups' reach. The Sudanese public has become accustomed to seeing Salafist jihadi campaigners appearing in neighborhood markets, setting up a stand with a megaphone, and launching into long harangues against Sufis, Christians, and intellectuals who preach religious tolerance, and at times, not sparing even the ruling Islamist elites.³⁵ Similar public addresses by youth groups, such as "Grfina," or opposition parties, such as Sudanese Congress Party that are both active in direct public outreach, are immediately dispersed by police and security agents. All of these strategies have helped Sudan's Muslim Brotherhood movement dominate Sudanese society in the way it does today. Now the Salafist jihadi extremist groups are systematically

deploying the same methods under a complacent government that hopes to use the rise of these groups to protect itself and ensure its continued survival.

One of the most virulent Salafist jihadi groups is the Gamat'at al-Itisam Bi al-kitab wa al-Suna [unofficially translated as the "Association of Adherence to the al-Kitab (Quran) and the prophet's tradition"]. The association, a radical breakaway faction of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, celebrated the attack on the satirical French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 among other blatant past and continuing manifestations of support for ISIS.³⁶

Two Salafist leading clerics, who have attracted attention and concern, are Sheikh Dr. Mohamed Ali Abdalla al-Gizouli and Sheikh Mohamed Abdel-Karim. Sheikh al-Gizouli is a prominent jihadi cleric who made no secret of his allegiance to the Islamic State group. Most notably, in a direct address to the American people in June 2014, as the United States joined the international bombing campaign against the Islamic State strongholds in Iraq, the cleric threatened,

*"Oh Americans, if your armed forces land in Iraq once again, this will mean a new phase in targeting you—your tourist resorts, your embassies in our Arab capitals, your diplomatic delegations, your universities and schools, your coffee shops and restaurants, your airplanes and ships, your shops and companies. Oh Americans, give the White House idiot a smack on the hand, so that he will not lead you once again into attrition, which will cause further deterioration and collapse of your economy."*³⁷

Al-Gizouli later confirmed and further justified his threats against civilians in an interview with the online Sudanese newspaper Hurriyat. The online publication underscored the regime's accommodation of al-Gizouli's brand of extremism by listing the many official positions he occupied, several of which ominously placed him in a guidance role meant to enable him to advocate for his extremist ideology among students and youth groups. At the time of his diatribe against Westerners, Al-Gizouli served as accredited instructor in the regime-affiliated Omdurman Islamic University, Africa International University, and Sudan Open University. He was also a guidance counselor for an organization caring for foreign students.³⁸ His position and accreditation made his call to youth to join the extremist causes championed by the likes of the Islamic State group, which was issued at the same time as the threats against Western interests, an even more ominous call to arms. He had said,

*"I would like to address two kinds of youths. First, let me address the youths who sit on the sidelines, as reserves. They have not entered the fray. They warm up on the sidelines. Reserves. I say to them: Enter the fray and join the game...Play a role in defending the nucleus of the caliphate!"*³⁹

However, it is al-Gizouli's role as one of the clerics who lectured students at the private University of Medical Sciences and Technology (UMST) in Khartoum, owned by Dr. Mamoun Humeida, a prominent Sudanese regime figure, that drew the most attention. Up to 22 medical students from UMST, most of whom were also British citizens or residents, joined the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, and three more were intercepted before making the trip via Turkey. Several of these recruits were later killed in Syria and Iraq.⁴⁰

Prompted by his public threats against U.S. civilians and attacks Sheikh al-Gizouli made in one of his subsequent sermons against President al-Bashir and his regime, the regime barred him from delivering

public sermons and publishing in the local media. Later, the regime arrested him⁴¹ and released him eight months later, following a plea in his favor from a prominent Islamist, the head of the Islamic Fiqh Academy, Isam Ahmed al-Bashir. The regime justified the release by stating that Sheikh al-Gizouli had changed his extremist ideas thanks to dialogue with religious scholars advocating more moderate approaches, an argument that al-Gizouli ridiculed in his first statement after the release and by telling the *Sudan Tribune*, “I hit a dead end in my discussion with those scholars. Of course, a scholar who respects his knowledge wouldn’t debate a captive.”⁴² The regime would similarly justify the release from preventive detention of some 20 extremist militants and Islamic State group sympathizers in mid-2017 on the same shaky grounds: that its program of dialogue and ideological persuasion had succeeded in converting them to moderation.⁴³

Another leading Salafist cleric who has attracted attention in Sudan, Sheikh Mohamed Abdel-Karim, was expelled from Saudi Arabia in 1993 for his radical sermons in a local mosque and suspected links to al-Qaeda.⁴⁴ Shortly after returning to Sudan, an “Armed Islamic Front” emerged composed of the youth who were attracted to his sermons and who shared his beliefs about the corruption and heresy of modern Islamic rulers and the justification of warfare against them.⁴⁵ In one of the earliest acts of violence by Salafist jihadi groups in Sudan that took place in Campo 10 in central Sudan in late 1993, this group of Sheikh Mohamed Abdel-Karim followers engaged a detachment of Sudanese policemen in a confrontation in which several members of the group and policemen were killed.⁴⁶

In 2012, Sheikh Abdel-Karim defended himself and his followers against press reports that his sermons incited the mob that burnt a Church in April in El-Gireif, a suburb of the capital Khartoum. However, in his denial, he stated that “scholars ... were anonymous in prohibiting the building of churches in Islamic lands and in agreement on the imperative of demolishing them if already constructed.”⁴⁷ At the time of this denial, the sheikh served as the Head of the Islamic Culture Department at the University of Khartoum, and was a member of the national religious associations of proselytizers and international association of Islamic Scholars.⁴⁸

“Scholars of the Sultan”: The Sudanese regime’s orchestrators and enablers of persecution

Defenders of freedom of religion and advocates of democracy face two types of adversaries in Sudan. The first is the “official religious establishment” represented in Sudan by the Council of Religious Scholars, which is affiliated with the government. The second is the Sharia Association of Scholars and Preachers, a parallel grouping of Salafist and jihadi clerics and scholars. This latter association maintains a tenuous relationship with the Sudanese government; however, both associations seek to preserve the use of *Sharia* law in Sudan.

The official religious establishment is unwavering in its political support of the Sudanese regime, and it is ready to issue *fatwas* (religious edicts) at will to justify the regime’s policies and actions with religious arguments. The official religious establishment also tends to frame as heresy organized initiatives of the political opposition that are threatening to the regime. This tendency has prompted opinion writers and the public at large to label those issuing the edicts as the “scholars of the Sultan,” a tongue-in-cheek nod to the overtly political and partisan function that this institution plays in the service of the regime. For example, the chairman of the Council of Religious Scholars recently stated that the chronic high cost of

living in Sudan, due mainly to economic mismanagement and rampant official corruption, is a test from God to remind the Sudanese people to repent and return to the divine path.⁴⁹

Christians and rights defenders face persecution from the official religious establishment, but they are also often forced to fend off chilling threats of excommunication and physical attacks from groups espousing Salafist jihad ideologies. In incidents where intimidation and attacks failed to silence minority rights advocates, the regime has resorted to the state's repressive machinery of local government regulations and arbitrary detention by the Sudanese National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), often followed by sham trials before courts that are more complicit than not in many instances.

The double hammers wielded by these "scholars" in the government-affiliated religious establishment and the more tenuously linked Salafist sheikhs thus await those who stand up for the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of faith, expression, association, and assembly that are nonetheless consistently ignored by the Sudanese regime.

A history of criminalizing tolerance and religious co-existence

Persecution in Sudan rises when the regime faces heightened pressure to accommodate modernity and demographic diversity and to extend rights and freedoms across the entire Sudanese population. Such conditions are antithetical to the regime's imposition of a narrow interpretation of Islam as the official religion, Arabic as the language, and *Sharia* as the sole legal system for all of Sudan's diverse people. The Sudanese leadership—especially the current regime—has reacted to these pressures by (1) labeling acts or declarations of religious tolerance as apostasy (relinquishment or abandonment of religious faith); and (2) issuing *takfir* (excommunication) edicts. These gestures systematically and institutionally criminalize non-extremism and the efforts to promote tolerance and accommodate diversity in Sudan. Several examples from the past three decades illustrate this pattern. The trend became particularly pronounced around key points in South Sudan's secession.

Persecution in Sudan rises when the regime faces heightened pressure to accommodate modernity and demographic diversity and to extend rights and freedoms across the entire Sudanese population.

Extremists have subsequently issued excommunication edicts against the political actors and intellectuals they see as taking positions that threaten the hold of the 1983 *Sharia* laws in Sudan (see Annex II). The targets of these excommunication edicts have included secularists and rights advocates, alongside Islamists doubling as political figures such as Dr. Hassan al-Turabi and al-Imam Sadiq al-Mahdi, who are widely acknowledged as being religious scholars in addition to their prominent political roles as party leaders.

As the SPLM gained traction in its movement for autonomy (and exemption from *Sharia* law) of the mostly Christian southern Sudan, accusations of apostasy and sedition emerged along with *takfir* (excommunication) edicts. In July 2002, the Sudanese government signed the Machakos Protocol with the SPLM. This protocol provided the framework for the landmark 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which recognized freedom of religion for all Sudanese people. It also created an opening for reconciling

Sudanese laws with Machakos Protocol principles, and Sudan's subsequent 2005 constitution that came with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.⁵⁰ The Sudanese government and religious establishments were alarmed at this prospect and the broader prospect of separating religion and state; such a shift would entail the abrogation of the September 1983 *Sharia* laws.

The rising tide of social and political support for the separation of religion from state affairs in 2002 and 2003 drew a ferocious response from the government's own propagandists and from its extremist allies. Against this backdrop, in May 2003, a wide range of representatives of political Islam in Sudan coordinated a campaign of threats calling for the excommunication of those who advocated for freedom of faith and equality among citizens regardless of their race, religion, or region. Those behind the campaign of intimidation were key figures of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP), and spokespersons of the official religious establishment represented by the Council of Religious Scholars of Sudan. Some of the campaigners went as far as putting a price, equal to about \$4,000, on the heads of key defenders of the rights of minorities to practice their religions freely in Sudan. These defenders included the prominent lawyer Kamal El-Gizouli, the writer El-Haj Warrag, the late Farouk Kodouda, and the liberal Sufi leader Azrag Tayba.⁵¹

The 2005 peace agreement and constitution are not the only commitments to accommodating rights and diversity that the Sudanese government has endorsed and violated.

The regime's acts were consistent with its stance against accommodating diversity and rights, but in this case, a concerted social pressure campaign provided a temporary check on some of the regime's activities. In July 2003, some 500 Sudanese writers, journalists, musicians, rights activists, democracy advocates, and leaders of civil society groups addressed an open letter to President Omar al-Bashir

expressing serious concerns about their safety and demanding that authorities take firm measures to ensure their security. The response to the advocates' memorandum was a tactical retreat by the Head of State, echoed by the regime's official religious propagandists. Both committed to "moderation" in the interpretation of the majority's religion, Islam.

However, prior and subsequent actions and statements by President al-Bashir and members of the official religious establishment continue to belie their claims of moderation. For instance, after the entry in force of the 2005 Sudanese constitution, which required rights to be based on the sole criteria of citizenship, Dr. Hassan al-Turabi declared in mid-2006 that he would have no problem voting for a qualified Christian or a woman candidate in future presidential elections. In retaliation, the Council of Religious Scholars declared him a nonbeliever and an apostate.⁵²

The 2005 peace agreement and constitution are not the only commitments to accommodating rights and diversity that the Sudanese government has endorsed and violated. In January 2008, the Sudanese government signed the Cairo Declaration, a separate peace agreement with an umbrella group of exiled political opposition parties and trade unions that had been allied with the southern rebellion. The Cairo Declaration states, "Citizenship is the basis of public rights and responsibilities. Based on the rights of citizenship, equality among citizens shall be guaranteed, including the respect of their beliefs and traditions, and the non-discrimination among them on the basis of religion, belief, race, gender culture, or any other consideration."⁵³ This commitment by the Sudanese government did not prevent Sudanese

extremists from declaring a government leader, who sought exemption for Christians from *Sharia* law, an apostate and putting a price on his head that resulted in a failed assassination attempt in mid-2009.⁵⁴

As South Sudan's July 2011 independence approached, President al-Bashir even more openly disavowed his commitments to protecting religious freedom, upholding rights more broadly, and accommodating diversity in Sudan. He explicitly stated that his past endorsements of peace agreements and even the constitution in no way altered his regime's determination to pursue and reinforce the application of *Sharia* laws. President al-Bashir told a crowd of supporters in December 2010, "If southern Sudan secedes, we will replace the constitution and at that time there will be no time to speak of diversity of culture and ethnicity, and *Sharia* and Islam will be the main source for the constitution. Islam will be the official religion and Arabic the official language."⁵⁵

The regime seems to have kept this particular commitment, unlike others. A broad range of Sudanese opposition parties, civil society groups, and armed movements, which signed a January 2013 declaration known as the New Dawn Charter, have been called apostates in a fatwa issued by the Council of Religious Scholars. Signatories promised their concerted action to bring down "the totalitarian regime of the Islamist Movement" and to transition the country to democracy. The charter recognized in its preamble and first articles the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of the Sudanese and committed signatories to work together to uphold equal citizenship as a source of entitlement to fundamental rights and responsibilities emanating from them. The regime's actions have shown that such principles are fundamentally incompatible with its position.

Conclusion

The Sudanese regime led by President Omar al-Bashir subjects Sudanese Christians to multiple forms of discrimination and harassment, and persecutes those Muslims and Christians alike who advocate for upholding the constitutional rights of religious minorities. It also maintains ties with religious extremist groups that openly advocate for international terrorist groups. This accommodation raises serious doubts about the regime's credibility and interests as a counterterrorism partner for the United States and other Western intelligence communities. This regime welcomes and rewards ultra-conservative Muslims who have taken hold in Sudanese society, call for holy war against nonbelievers, and actively persecute Christians and other minorities and rights defenders. Because of these troubling indicators, the current travel advisory posted on the U.S. State Department's website advises U.S. citizens about the risks of travel to Sudan, noting that "Terrorist groups are present in Sudan and have stated their intent to harm Westerners and Western interests through suicide operations, bombings, shootings, and kidnappings."⁵⁶

U.S. policymakers have leverage as they factor for these real concerns, engage with Sudan, and consider the future of sanctions, bilateral relations, Sudan's debt, and Sudan's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism by U.S. the State Department. The Sudanese government claims to actively fight international terrorism while at the same time empowering domestic groups that advocate for the deadliest international terrorist organizations and routinely incite the population against the country's Christian communities. The Trump administration should carefully weigh this troubling duplicity in considering the immediate and long-term trajectory of the U.S-Sudan relationship.

Two issues have not changed significantly in the past 28 years: the Sudanese regime's multifaceted connections to violent extremism and its state-sponsored and institutionalized religious discrimination, particularly against Christian southerners. Today, the Sudanese Islamist Movement-controlled regime continues to abuse Christians and Sudanese citizens who have beliefs that differ from the regime's own interpretation of the Islamic faith. Sustained external pressure can reinforce the domestic pushback against these repressive trends and begin to counter this systematic abuse.

To avoid further secession from Sudan, the Government of Sudan (GoS) should:

- Ensure that any future revisions of the constitution will continue to guarantee equal rights to all citizens regardless of their religious beliefs.
- Reform the laws that discriminate against Christians and other religious minorities in violation of constitutional provisions guaranteeing these rights.
- Uphold the rights to free speech, association and assembly for those defending fundamental rights that are constitutionally mandated.
- Genuinely counter violent extremist groups, including Salafist jihadi groups that are prone to incite hatred against religious minorities and to excommunicate and threaten or attack those defending freedom of religion and thought.

Annex I: Mapping of Sudan's Political Islam Actors

Sudan has a wide spectrum of active political players with varying affiliations to political Islam. They espouse different interests, ideologies, and outlooks on the role of Islam and *Sharia* law in Sudanese society and political life. These different groups hold varying degrees of political power.

Sufis

At one end of the spectrum are the Sufi communities, representing the majority of Muslims in the country. While Sudan's Sufi Muslim sects had shunned the pursuit of power, increasing pressures on them by the political and radical groups led some to consider forming a political party in order to represent their interests in national decision-making through participatory processes.

In fact, the country's two oldest and still largest political parties, the National Umma Party (NUP) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), have as core constituencies the two largest Sufi sects in the country, the Ansar and the Khatmiya sects respectively. While politically committed to the retention of some form of *Sharia* law as a source of legislation, these groups have historically maintained an increasingly indefensible ambiguity towards the accommodation of the reality of religious diversity in the country. The NUP and the DUP were considered the two main (unarmed) political opposition parties to the ruling power, until the regime succeeded in engineering multiple defections and splits within each, with several NUP and DUP splinters joining the government.

Islamists

Toward the other end of the spectrum is the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) of President Omar al-Bashir, which acts to consolidate its political and economic power and is backed by the Islamist Movement of Sudan, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement.⁵⁷ While exploiting democratic freedoms during Sudan's short-lived three democratic eras to build itself and expand beyond its narrow base to the mainstream, the NCP has always sought to conquer and monopolize power, and it finally did so in 1989, in an ongoing effort to establish and rule a modern Islamic state.⁵⁸

The NCP aggressively pursues multipronged strategies to keep potential political adversaries and insurgents at bay. In its early years after seizing power in 1989, the regime cultivated ties with Sufi sects in an attempt to broaden its base. By co-opting and actively enticing a constant flow of NUP and DUP dissidents into government positions that come with many perks, the regime succeeded in considerably weakening these two political opposition parties. Sudan's Islamist Movement provides religious arguments to justify its actions to conquer and preserve its power, including when these tactics include atrocity crimes such as the wholesale killing and ethnic cleansing of more than 2 million Darfuris between 2003 and 2005; the systematic detention and widely practiced torture of suspected political and civil society opponents; the killing of noncombatants in conflict zones, etc. Sudan's Islamist Movement has also justified the takeover of the national economy for the benefit of its members and affiliated organizations as necessary to consolidate its power, creating and enabling a system of violent kleptocracy.⁵⁹

True to its value in the belief of holy war, the Sudanese regime has always maintained complex and intimate institutional relations with violent international extremist groups, including terrorist groups like

al-Qaida and Hamas in the 1990s. This very relationship—between the Sudanese regime and al-Qaida—in large part prompted the U.S. decision to apply sweeping economic sanctions to Sudan in 1997. The fact that this relationship endures to this day through proxy extremist groups publicly operating in Sudan does not seem to have yet seriously affected the effort to have sanctions lifted.

Salafists and Salafist Jihadi Groups

Starting in the early 1990s, different Salafist groups began to make their presence felt in Sudan in the wake of the application of the “open door” policy that the regime of President al-Bashir introduced shortly after taking power in mid-1989. Under that policy, the regime welcomed to Sudan, among other extremist groups from the Arab Muslim world, Osama bin Laden and hundreds of his battle-hardened supporters, the Arab Afghans, after the 1992 to 1996 phase of civil conflict in Afghanistan.

Salafism preaches the reform of the practice of the teachings of Islam by a return to the traditions of the first Muslims or “Salaf” which requires confronting other beliefs and excommunicating individual Muslim wrongdoers and Muslim rulers who deviate from that perceived ideal. Prior to the arrival of the Arab Afghans, Sudan had known a traditional and peaceful form of Salafism, represented by Ansar al-Sunna, or “Supporters of the Traditions of the Prophet.”

A particularly virulent strand of Salafism justifies the use of violence—including violence against corrupt Muslim rulers and of political actors who ally themselves with nonbelievers and other enemies of Islam—to attain these ends. Those who believe in the use of violence in Salafism are called Salafist jihadi groups. Several of these radical groups and preachers continue today to publicly advocate for the ideology of the Islamic State in Sudan even as the regime cites its role in counterterrorism efforts as a reason for the United States to lift sanctions.⁶⁰

Annex II: Opposition to Sharia, secessionist war, and the rise of an extremist regime

In September 1983, then-Sudanese President Jaafar al-Nimeiri (who held power from 1969 to 1985), issued a decree that came to be known as the “September Laws” that made Islamic *Sharia* law and jurisprudence the sole legal system in Sudan.⁶¹ A movement known as the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) had in the previous months launched a rebellion in southern Sudan and gained strength in its opposition to the September Laws (seen as the final straw in a long pattern of oppression) and what they represented for non-Muslims and southerners especially. The SPLM’s formation and opposition to the decrees and laws issued in Khartoum was a key triggering factor in Sudan’s north-south civil war that began in 1983.⁶²

In January 1985, less than two years after the “September Laws” made Islamic *Sharia* law and jurisprudence the sole legal system in Sudan, the government of President Jaafar al-Nimeiri executed a 76-year-old man named Usataz Mahmoud Mohamed Taha. A nonviolent political opposition figure and Islamic reformist, who founded the Republican Brotherhood movement in the 1940s and 1950s, Taha was hanged after being accused of sedition and found guilty of apostasy. He had advocated for a liberal interpretation of Islam and its teachings to accommodate modernity—and he and his followers opposed the implementation of *Sharia* law in Sudan. Taha’s execution was one of the main triggering factors of the April 1985 popular uprising and civil disobedience campaign four months later that contributed to the end of the Nimeiri regime.⁶³ The invocation of the term “apostate” or “apostasy” has since continued to have a lasting chilling effect on the Sudanese population.

In 1989, six years into a war that would last until 2005, two fundamentally incompatible ideologies emerged to further crystallize the divisions between the dominant political and military leaders of the north and south. From the south, the SPLM called for a secular, democratic, and united Sudan as a basis for voluntary unity in a “New Sudan.” This ideology strongly appealed to minorities elsewhere in the country that have suffered from decades of cultural, political and economic marginalization under successive governments in post-independence Sudan. The “New Sudan” ideology and vision developed by SPLM Chairman Dr. John Garang also drew the support of many intellectuals and urban youth nationally, from across all of Sudan.

But not everyone supported the “New Sudan” vision, which represented a mortal threat to the “Civilization Project” ideology of the Sudanese Islamist Movement, which was growing in northern Sudan and sought to impose Islam and Arabic on non-Muslim parts of Sudan, including the south. Sudan’s radical Islamist Movement took power on June 30, 1989, after toppling a democratically elected government. The timing of the coup d’état was not coincidental. Then-Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi had convened a cabinet meeting for that day which would have authorized his signature on an agreement mandating the freezing of the application of Islamic *Sharia* laws. The agreement was to pave the way for a cessation of hostilities with the SPLM and for the SPLM’s participation in a Sudanese government of national unity. The coup scuttled that agreement’s forward movement, and civil war with the south would continue for 16 more years.

Immediately after taking power in Khartoum in 1989, the Sudanese regime responded to the threat of a secular state spearheaded by the SPLM by declaring the war in South Sudan a “jihad,” or holy war, propelling to the forefront the religious factor in Sudan’s civil war, which had not previously been used as a central means of division and force recruitment. In a series of tactics similar to those used by the Iranians

in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war,⁶⁴ the Sudanese Islamist leaders recruited and deployed human waves of foot soldiers inculcated with extremist beliefs to the battlefields' front lines. The Sudanese Islamist Movement recruited thousands of Sudanese fighters from its youth and student chapters, calling them to join a holy war to defend the country's Islamic system. Subsequent human waves, sent by the Sudanese Islamic leaders of the north, consisted of forcibly conscripted and poorly trained youth and students coerced into joining the Sudanese paramilitary Popular Defense Forces (PDF), which were meant to back up the counterinsurgency efforts of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF).

Typical of the recruitment campaigns that were deployed nationwide was the one launched in 1992 in North Kordofan state to counter the SPLM-N as it began to take hold in South Kordofan. In April 1992, imams and religious scholars aligned with the newly empowered regime of Omar al-Bashir issued a fatwa in reaction to the southern-led SPLM incursion in South Kordofan. The gesture provided an early indication of the lengths to which the new regime would go to suppress non-Muslims and silence both its political and insurgent opponents with excommunication edicts. Framing the struggle for freedom as a betrayal of the Islamic faith, the fatwa read in part, "Insurgents in South Sudan and South Kordofan rebelled against the state and waged war against Muslims...as a result, rebels who were Muslims are to be considered as apostates; and non-Muslims are nonbelievers. Muslims have the duty of fighting both as both are opposed to the call for Islam. Muslims who doubt the legitimacy of Jihad and interact with the rebels...are to be considered as apostates."⁶⁵

As the war continued, the northern Sudanese opposition parties, exiled activist civil society groups, and trade unions drew closer to the southern SPLM and formed a joint National Democratic Alliance with the southern armed rebellion. The NDA pledged to topple the regime of President al-Bashir and replace it with a democratic Sudan that fully acknowledges the diversity of its population and respects the fundamental rights of its citizens.

Extremists in al-Bashir's regime framed even the supporters of rights for all Sudanese people as betrayers of the faith. When deposed former Sudanese prime minister Sadiq al-Mahdi signed the Nairobi declaration in 1993 with the southern Sudanese SPLM leader John Garang, committing to equal citizenship as basis for rights and responsibilities—a good decade before al-Bashir's regime conceded the same point in the lead-up to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement ending the north-south war—the Sudanese extremists labeled al-Mahdi an apostate.

Dr. Hassan al-Turabi—who is widely considered the spiritual guide and architect of Sudan's Islamist Movement's rise to power—had several brushes with the representatives of the official scholarly establishment following the fallout between him and his disciples in the Islamist Movement who sided with President Omer al-Bashir in the wake of the split of the movement in 2000. In February 2001, al-Turabi's breakaway Popular Congress Party signed an opportunistic memorandum of understanding in Geneva with SPLM leader Dr. John Garang that condemned the lack of recognition of Sudan's diversity and called, among other demands, for a policy of nondiscrimination among Sudanese people. In response, the Association of Scholars issued a statement condemning the memorandum as sedition (the offense of provoking resistance or rebellion) and as a sinful threat to *Sharia*.⁶⁶

The “grand bargain”: Southern secession for *Sharia* in the north

Military exhaustion and intense regional and international pressures brought the Sudanese parties of the north and south to elaborate peace talks that lasted from 2002 to 2005 and culminated in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). By that time, an estimated 2 million South Sudanese had perished in the violence or as a result of war-related preventable diseases and famines. Tens of thousands of fighters from the north had also lost their lives.

The CPA provided southern Sudan with full autonomy and the right to a self-determination referendum after a six-year transition, ending in mid-2011. The regime in Khartoum conceded to exempting southern Sudan, with its significant Christian population that wields considerable political influence, from the application of Sudan’s Islamic *Sharia* laws. This “grand bargain” allowed the Sudanese Islamist Movement to maintain the application of *Sharia* in the rest of Sudan.

The CPA consequently brought little relief to sizable followers of the Christian and African traditional faiths, and to those practicing minority Muslim beliefs that differ from the official version of Islam promoted by the regime. Contented with the preservation of Islamic *Sharia* laws on the books, even when many of their provisions violated the spirit and the letter of the CPA’s National Interim Constitution, the regime applied *Sharia* law for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The CPA succeeded in stopping the north-south war, but the provisions of the agreement that were designed to address the root causes of conflict and instability in Sudan, accommodate the diversity of the Sudanese citizens, and promote a transition to democracy were only partially implemented, if at all.

Likewise, the regime’s driving “Civilization Project” ideology, which aspired to transform Sudan into the first Islamic state of modern times, had long since faltered as a result of the moral failure of its leaders, who became so corrupt by power and the pursuit of ill-gotten wealth that they lost all religious standing to lead an Islamic revolution. Nonetheless, the regime kept discriminating against religious minorities, as its very survival depended on its ability to terrorize its citizens into submission rather than to gain their support by delivering public goods to them. If allowed to prevail through these kleptocratic and repressive practices, the regime will continue to imperil not only the welfare of its own citizens but the peace and security of the entire region.

Endnotes

- ¹ The World Bank, “Sudan Overview,” available at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/sudan/overview> (last accessed November 2017).
- ² John Prendergast and Ian Schwab, “The Sudan Sanctions Must Stay: The continued persecution of Christians in Darfur should be a serious red flag to the Trump administration,” U.S. News & World Report op ed, October 2, 2017, available at <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/world-report/articles/2017-10-02/the-trump-administration-shouldnt-lift-the-sanctions-on-sudan>.
- ³ Ken Menkhaus and John Prendergast, “Defining Violent Kleptocracy in East and Central Africa,” Enough Said blog, October 20, 2016, available at <https://enoughproject.org/blog/defining-violent-kleptocracy-east-and-central-africa>.
- ⁴ The Enough Project, “Sudan’s Deep State: How Insiders Violently Privatized Sudan’s Wealth, and How to Respond” (Washington: April 2017), available at https://enoughproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/SudansDeepState_Final_Enough.pdf.
- ⁵ The Enough Project, “U.S.-Sudan Relations: Enough Project’s Statement on Making the Next Step Count,” Press release, August 28, 2017, available at <https://enoughproject.org/press-releases/u-s-sudan-relations-enough-projects-statement-making-next-step-count>; The Enough Project, “The Missing Track: The case for a new policy framework between the United States and Sudan” (Washington: June 2017), available at <https://enoughproject.org/policy-briefs/the-missing-track>.
- ⁶ The Sentry is an investigative initiative of the Enough Project and Not On Our Watch. For more information, see, The Sentry, “About The Sentry,” available at <https://thesentry.org/about/> (last accessed November 2017).
- ⁷ See, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, “Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism,” found in “Country Reports on Terrorism 2016,” available at <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272235.htm> (last accessed November 2017).
- ⁸ Baptist Press, “Pastors jailed in Sudan as gov’t muscles church control,” August 29, 2017, available at <http://www.bpnews.net/49448/pastors-jailed-in-sudan-as-govt-muscles-church-control>; Human Rights and Development Organization (HUDO) Centre, “Urgent Action: Demolition of the remaining church Soba Aradi, Sudan,” May 9, 2017, on file with Enough.
- ⁹ La Croix International, “Sudan becomes 39th province of Anglican Communion,” August 1, 2017; Sudan Tribune, “Archbishop of Canterbury, Khartoum governor discuss churches’ demolition,” August 1, 2017.
- ¹⁰ Baptist Press, “Pastors jailed in Sudan as gov’t muscles church control,” August 29, 2017, available at <http://www.bpnews.net/49448/pastors-jailed-in-sudan-as-govt-muscles-church-control>.
- ¹¹ U.S. Department of State, “Sudan 2016 International Religious Freedom Report,” p. 1, August 15, 2017, available at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/268944.pdf>. Full report on all countries available at <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>.
- ¹² U.S. Department of State, “Frequently Asked Questions: IRF Report and Countries of Particular Concern,” available at <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/irf/c13003.htm> (last accessed September 2017).
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Open Doors, “World Watch List,” available at <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/> (last accessed November 2017).
- ¹⁵ See, for example, the following Amnesty International Urgent Action Appeals and reports: Amnesty International, “Sudan: Further Information: Two South Sudan Pastors Risk Death Penalty: Reverend Yat Michael and Reverend Peter Yen,” June 9, 2015, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/1820/2015/en/>; Amnesty International, “Sudan: Further Information: Two Pastors Sentenced to Time Served, Released: Reverend Yat Michael and Reverend Peter Yen,” August 7, 2015, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/2237/2015/en/>; Amnesty International, “Sudan: Amnesty International Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review,” May 2016, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/3532/2016/en/>; Amnesty International, “Sudan: Courageous and Resilient: Activists in Sudan Speak Out,” September 2017, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/7124/2017/en/>.

-
- ¹⁶ See, Sudan Democracy First Group (SDFG), “Expansion of the Religious Discrimination against Christians in Sudan,” April 8, 2017, available at <http://www.democracyfirstgroup.org/expansion-of-the-religious-discrimination-against-christians-in-sudan/>; SDFG, “The dilemma of freedom of religion in Sudan,” Op-Ed published in Sudan Tribune, May 31, 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article51185>. See also, the African Center for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS), “Demolition of church in Khartoum and arrest of two parishioners,” May 11, 2017, available at <http://www.acjps.org/demolition-of-church-in-khartoum-and-arrest-of-two-parishioners/>. The website of the Sudan Human Rights and Development Organization (HUDO) also carries regular reporting on incidents of harassment and persecution of Christians, available at <http://hudocentre.org/english/>.
- ¹⁷ Sudan Democracy First Group, “Expansion of the Religious Discrimination against Christians in Sudan,” April 8, 2017.
- ¹⁸ Human Rights and Development Organization (HUDO) Centre, “Urgent Action: Sudan authorities gave a notice to demolish church,” August 4, 2016, available at <http://hudocentre.org/sudan-authorities-gave-a-notice-to-demolish-church/>.
- ¹⁹ Sudan Democracy First Group, “Expansion of the Religious Discrimination against Christians in Sudan,” April 8, 2017.
- ²⁰ Sudan Democracy First Group, “Sudan Religious Discrimination and the Quest for National Integration, March 14, 2016, available at <http://us7.campaign-archive1.com/?e=a9db638c83&u=7acabab6ae470b89628f88514&id=4d8a6e41df>.
- ²¹ Dabanga, “‘Religious discrimination in Sudan creates space for extremism’: SDFG,” March 16, 2016, available at <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/religious-discrimination-in-sudan-creates-space-for-extremism-sdfg>.
- ²² Christian Solidarity Worldwide, “Free at last,” May 11, 2017, available at <http://www.csw.org.uk/2016-sudan-trials.htm>.
- ²³ Human Rights and Development Organization (HUDO) Centre, “Sudanese authority destroyed two churches at Omdurman,” December 21, 2015, available at <http://hudocentre.org/sudanese-authority-destroyed-two-churches-at-omdurman-2/>; Morning Star News, “Church Building Demolished, Two Christians Arrested in Sudan,” May 8, 2017, available at <http://morningstarnews.org/2017/05/church-building-demolished-two-christians-arrested-sudan/>.
- ²⁴ Sudan Democracy First Group, “Sudan Religious Discrimination and the Quest for National Integration, March 14, 2016.
- ²⁵ Morning Star News, “Church Building Demolished, Two Christians Arrested in Sudan,” May 8, 2017.
- ²⁶ Sudan Democracy First Group, “Sudan Religious Discrimination and the Quest for National Integration, March 14, 2016.
- ²⁷ Aljazeera, “Sudan woman gets death sentence for apostasy,” May 17, 2014, accessed here: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/05/sudan-woman-given-death-penalty-apostasy-20145159264775754.html>.
- ²⁸ Morning Star News, “Church Building Demolished, Two Christians Arrested in Sudan,” May 8, 2017.
- ²⁹ Daoud Musa was scheduled to appear on November 13 and Yohana Fahmi on November 15.
- ³⁰ Phone interviews, September 2017.
- ³¹ See a typical official explanation of a police raid on a church in Al-Youm al-Tali newspaper (in Arabic), “The police reveal the details of the crisis in the Church of Christ of Sudan,” October 27, 2017, available at <http://www.alyoumaltali.com/shownew/88522>.
- ³² For a consolidated review of reports of religious persecution incidents in Sudan from 2011 to 2014 from a broad range of sources see Equal Rights Trust, “In Search of Confluence: Addressing Discrimination and Inequality in Sudan,” pp. 44-50 (London: October 2014), available at <http://www.equalrightstrust.org/ertdocumentbank/Sudan%20-%20In%20Search%20of%20Confluence%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>. See also Asylum Research Consultancy, “Situation in Khartoum and Omdurman,” (United Kingdom: September 2015), available at http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1226_1442295734_55efe85e4.pdf.
- ³³ Baptist Press, “Pastors jailed in Sudan as gov’t muscles church control,” August 29, 2017, available at <http://www.bpnews.net/49448/pastors-jailed-in-sudan-as-govt-muscles-church-control>.

⁵² The Network for the Defense of the Sunna (in Arabic), “Sudanese Association of Scholars excommunicates Dr. Hassan al-Turabi, and declares him a non-believer and an apostate,” August 6, 2006, available at <http://www.dd-sunnah.net/forum/showthread.php?t=52460>.

⁵³ “Sudan Media Center (in Arabic), “Text of the Cairo Agreement between the government and the Alliance,” published January 27, 2008, available at www.sudaress.com/sms/656.

⁵⁴ At a time when the SPLM was already a key partner in the transitional government, a call in May 2009 by SPLM leader Yasir Arman for the government to grant a special status to the national capital that would exempt its Christian residents from the application of Sharia laws caused him to be declared an apostate, with some extremists placing a price on his head. The incitement paid off, as Arman was the target of a failed assassination attempt weeks after he made that statement. Occasional Witness, “Semi-bombardment at SPLM office,” May 25, 2009, available at <http://www.occasionalwitness.com/Articles/20090525a.html>.

⁵⁵ Al Rayam newspaper, issue No 475577, December 20, 2010.

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of State, “Sudan Travel Warning,” last updated October 19, 2017, available at <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings/sudan-travel-warning.html> (last accessed November 2017).

⁵⁷ The Muslim Brotherhood is a global movement that was founded in Egypt in 1928 and has an important history in Sudan. The Muslim Brotherhood began as a community-based organization with a mainly social, not political orientation in its purpose. Over time it developed a broad political platform and evolved to become more of a resistance movement to counter the West. The global Muslim Brotherhood sought to unite Muslims around the world and adapt the global issues to local contexts. The Muslim Brotherhood took root in Sudan in 1954, at a time when there were competing ideas by different Sudanese political groups about the degree to which the government should be religious or secular in nature. The Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan unified many groups with different political ideologies around the establishment of an Islamic constitution with the formation of the Islamic Front for the Constitution (IFC), a group that opposed a secular government. In 1964, the Brotherhood reorganized itself, and Hassan al-Turabi became its leader. Turabi transformed the IFC into the Islamic Charter Front, a political party that represented the Muslim Brotherhood’s political interests but was formally a separate entity. Turabi and the ICF at times were excluded or integrated in Sudanese governments throughout the late 1960s and the late 1970s. Sudan’s Muslim Brotherhood, however, grew significantly in size and clout in the mid-1970s, particularly in the political, economic, financial (banking), and social spheres. Turabi reorganized the Islamic Charter Front ahead of Sudan’s 1988 elections, and formed the National Islamic Front (NIF), a strong political party with platforms and interests that ultimately could not be reconciled with those of other groups. In 1989, NIF military supporters, led by Omar al-Bashir, seized power in Sudan and have since held power. In the early 1990s, NIF members formed the National Congress Party, Sudan’s present-day ruling party led by President Omar al-Bashir. Mohammed Zahid and Michael Medley, “Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt & Sudan,” *Review of African Political Economy* 33 (10) (2006): 693-698.

⁵⁸ Babiker Faisal Babiker (in Arabic), “Muslim Brothers and Daei’sh,” January 1, 2016, available at <http://www.alrakoba.net/news-action-show-id-220548.htm>.

⁵⁹ For more about Sudan’s violent kleptocracy see, Enough Project, “Sudan’s Deep State: How Insiders Violently Privatized Sudan’s Wealth, and How to Respond.”

⁶⁰ Al-Jazeera Center for Studies, “Salafis in Sudan: Non-Interference or Confrontation,” July 3, 2012, available at <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2012/07/20127395530326675.html>.

⁶¹ For more on the September 8, 1983, decree by President Jaafar al-Nimeiri that *Sharia* would be the only legal system used in Sudan, see Robert S. Kramer, Richard A. Lobban Jr., and Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, eds., *Historical Dictionary of the Sudan*, 4th ed., “September laws,” p. 379 (The Scarecrow Press, Inc.: Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth, UK: 2013).

⁶² For more on the overall history of Islamization and Islamic law in Sudanese society, see Kramer, Lobban, and Fluehr-Lobban, *Historical Dictionary of the Sudan*, “Islamic law (Shari’a)” and “Islamic law, reform,” “Islamization,” pp. 220-225.

⁶³ Robert O. Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 147-149; Kramer, Lobban, and Fluehr-Lobban, *Historical Dictionary of the Sudan*, “Al-Nimeiri, Ja’afar (Numayri) (1930-2009),” pp. 324-325.

⁶⁴ Dr. Mohamed Suliman describes the ideological and strategic elements undergirding these tactical moves in context in a 2009 writing, where he noted, “The victory of the Iranian revolution in 1979 exerted a tremendous impact on the Islamic world. The argument went around then that if a few dedicated Islamists can topple the mighty regime of the Shah, well-organised and disciplined Islamic movements everywhere else could surely aspire to similar success.” ... “1979 is the year, when political Islam began to concede leadership to Action Islam [defined by Mohamed Suliman as non-ideological, non-intellectual, non-conciliatory, exclusionary, power-hungry, opportunistic, and focused on short-term self-serving results] almost everywhere in the Islamic world. The Islamic movement in the Sudan was no exception to the growing trend. Since the beginning of the 1980s, the leadership of the movement began to work diligently towards an armed take-over of power in Khartoum. The politicians around [influential Islamist religious and political leader Hassan] Al Turabi allowed the Actionists around [top political leader] Ali Osman Taha to dictate the future direction of the movement. Most work was henceforth dedicated to the goal of an armed coup. Clandestine recruitment of members of the armed forces was intensified; civilians trained in insurrection and arms were smuggled into the Sudan. The preparations culminated in the June 1989 armed take-over of power in Khartoum, not by the activists of political Islam, but by the rising generation of young eager Jihadists of Action Islam. They are the ones that have been ruling the Sudan since then.” Dr. Mohamed Suliman, “The Regime of Action Islam in the Sudan,” Institute for African Alternatives, December 9, 2009, available at <http://new.ifaanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/ActioIslam.htm>.

⁶⁵ Abdel-Ghani Breish Fiof (in Arabic), “The army and what not: does the Sudan have a national army?” (article includes the text of the fatwa), May 29, 2017, available at <http://www.alhamish.com/-لجيش-وما-أدراك-ما-الجيش-السوداني-هل-ل/>.

⁶⁶ Kamal Elgizouli (in Arabic), “Scholars and the Competition to Excommunicate,” August 8, 2003, on the website “al-Hewar al-Mutamedin” (civilized dialogue) in July 2017, available at <http://www.m.ahewar.org/s.asp?aid=9082&r=0>.