ACLED

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

Introduction:

South Sudan and Sudan are among the most violent countries in the ACLED dataset, with the sixth and twelfth highest conflict levels, respectively. Reported fatalities are also very high, with conservative figures estimating 38,000 conflict-related fatalities in Sudan and over 35,800 in South Sudan since 1997.

In both countries, government forces are actively fighting armed groups for control of particular regions. Both states are characterized by persistent political conflict, with significant variation in levels and intensity. Conflict declined dramatically *between* and *within* Sudan and South Sudan in 2005, after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) following two decades of civil war. Conflict in both countries has since increased **(see Figure 1)**, reflecting internal political and conflict dynamics unaddressed by the CPA or by South Sudan's subsequent independence in 2011. These include a lack of democratisation and reconciliation mechanisms and limited attempts to address local inter- and intra-group tensions, resource control, and political representation, and exclusion of other actors from the peace process.

These factors shape on-going violence in both countries. South Sudan's conflict levels have risen in recent years, and heavy fighting erupted between state and rebel forces in December 2013. Sudan's levels have remained consistently high since 2012, with a recent spike in violence in Darfur drawing international attention. This reveals gaps in CPA and current peace and dialogue processes, which focus on violence between state and rebel forces without effectively addressing more complex dynamics, including political disputes driving rebel movements, conflict roles of communal groups, and targeting of civilians. Violence against civilians (VAC) accounts for a significant proportion of conflict, representing 41% of events in South Sudan and 46% in Sudan since 1997 (compared to a continental average of 35%). This reflects the prevalent and strategic use of civilian targeting as part of political conflict activity.

Although conflict affects areas across both countries, violence is concentrated in particular geographic regions **(see Figure 2)**. Historically, most conflict in South Sudan occurred in Equatorial states. Since 2011, however, most events have taken place in Upper Nile, extending to Unity and Jonglei in late 2013. In Sudan, violence has been concentrated in the Darfur region since 2005, with significant increases in Darfur and Kordofan in 2012.
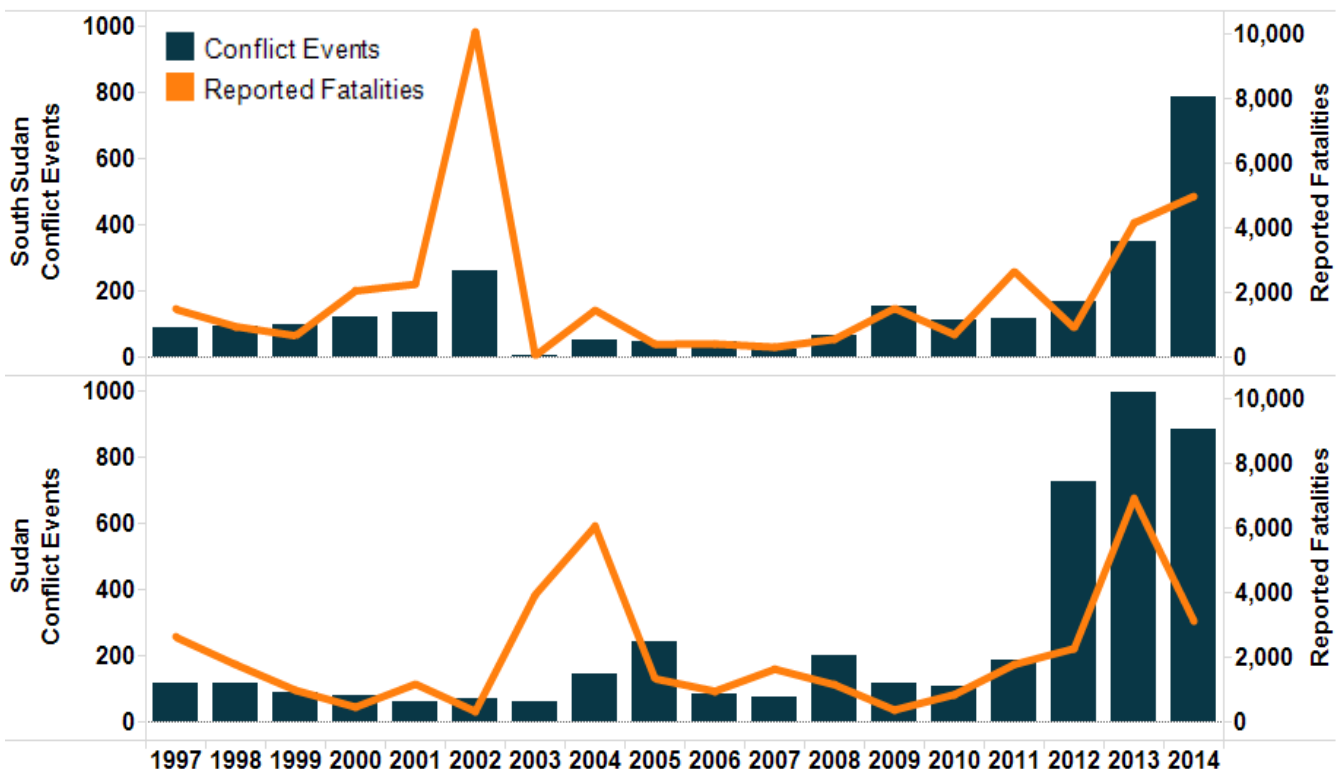

Figure 1: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities, Sudan and South Sudan, 1997 - September 2014.
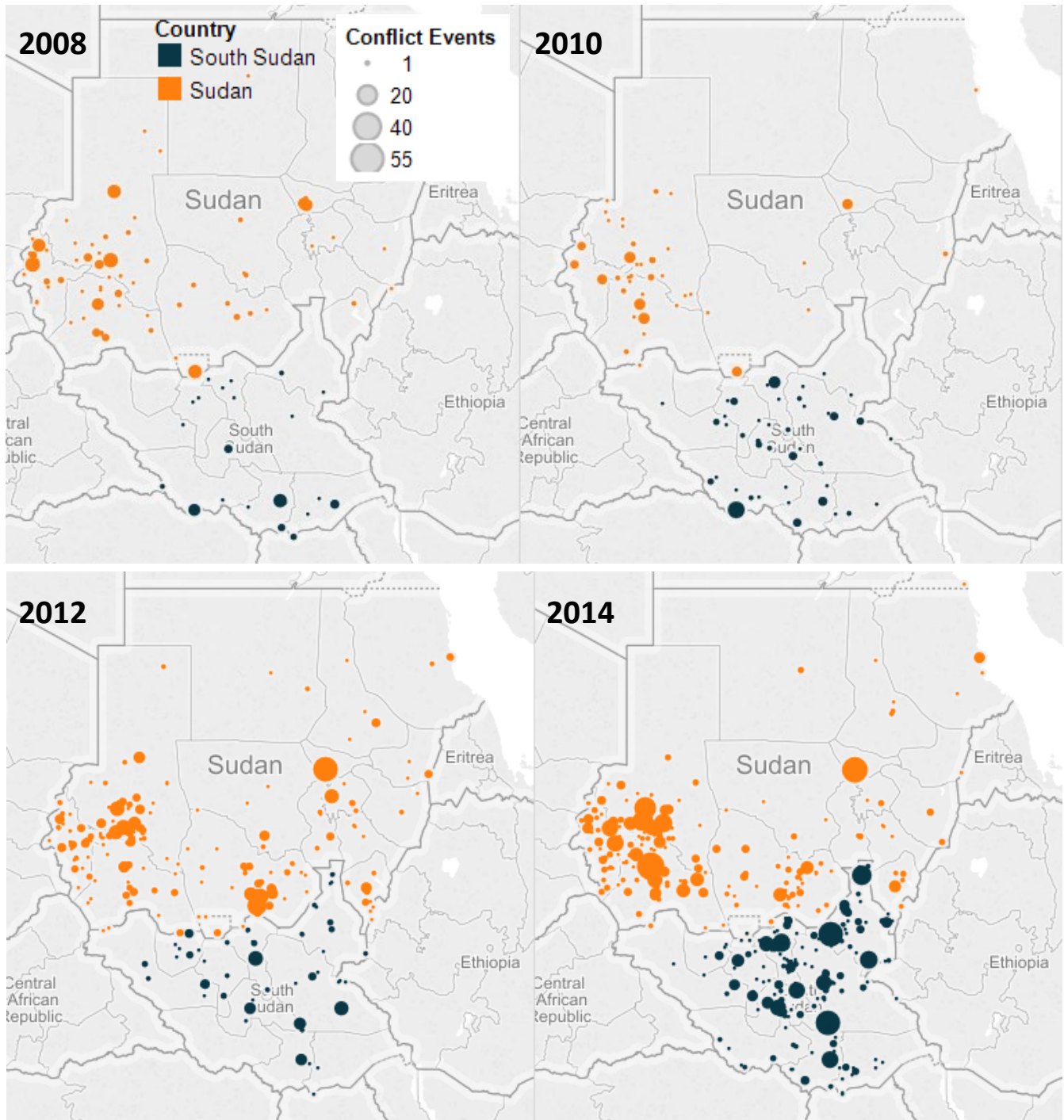
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Figure 2: Conflict Events by Location by Year, Sudan and South Sudan, 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014 (Jan - Sept).

This report will further examine these trends. Section 1 examines patterns of violence against civilians, including key actors and targeting of displaced civilians. Section 2 explores conflict between government and opposition forces, as well as factions and alliances. Section 3 analyses communal violence patterns, including key groups and alliances. The report concludes in Section 4 with an examination of responses to conflict, including United Nations responses and national peace and dialogue processes.
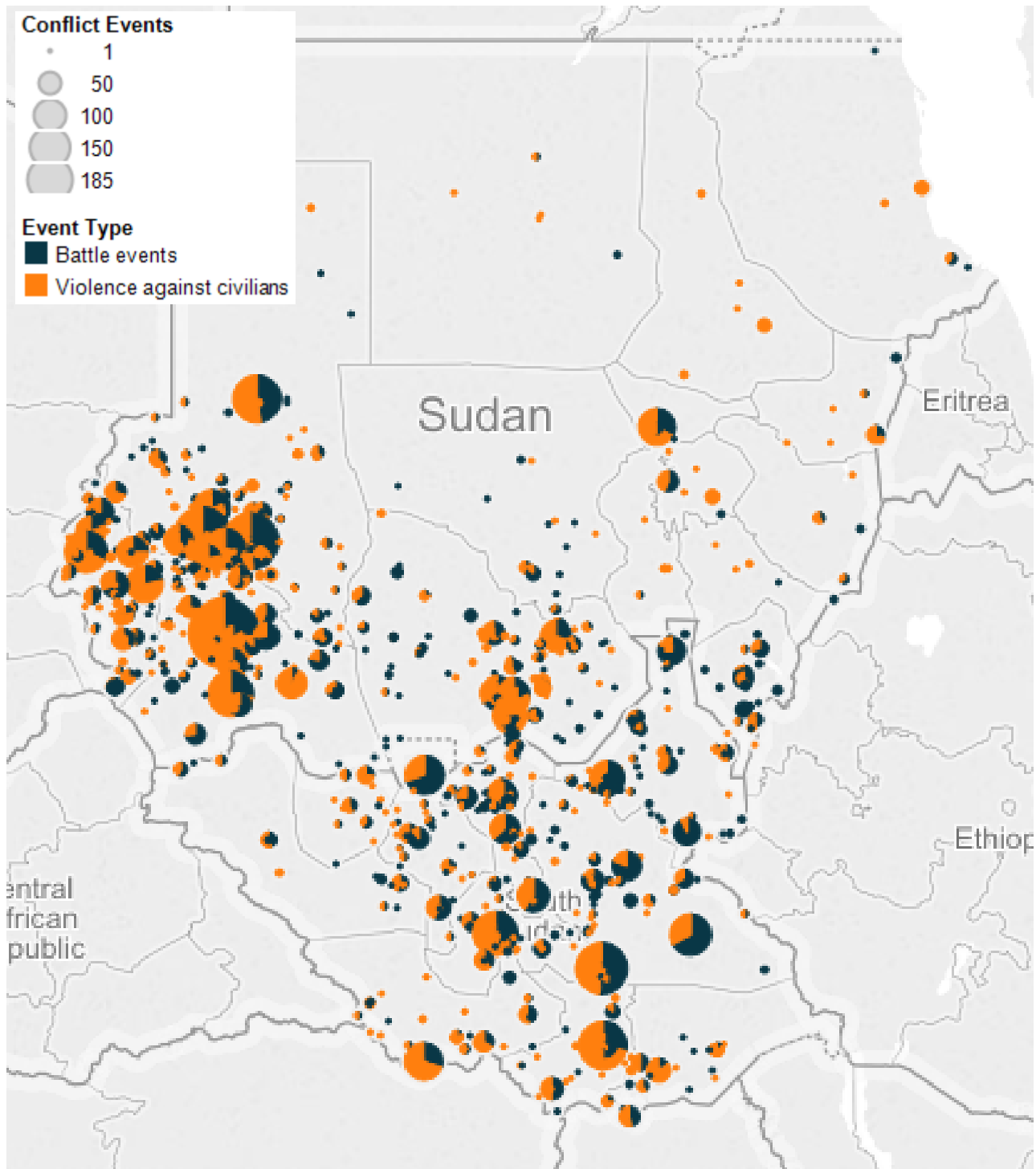
Figure 3: Conflict Events by Location and Type, Sudan and South Sudan, 2005 - September 2014.

Violence against civilians:

In 2014, VAC accounted for 60% of Sudan's conflict events, almost twice the continental average of 32%. VAC accounted for over half of South Sudan's conflict events in 2013 but dropped to less than one third in 2014, as battles between government and opposition increased. Civilian targeting in both countries involves significant casualties: in 2014, South Sudan and Sudan had the third and fourth

highest civilian fatalities on the continent. This reflects not only civilian vulnerability to violent conflict, but also patterns of targeted civilian attacks by armed groups. The occurrence of VAC in the same locations as battle events **(see Figure 3)** illustrates the links between the two forms of violence.

In South Sudan and Sudan, local militia groups (organized along ethnic, communal, or political lines) and state forces are responsible for a significant proportion of VAC **(see Figure 4)**. The targeting of civilians represents a specific response to opposing groups, whether rebel forces or local militias. VAC may be used to "punish" communities believed to support rebel forces, or as part of cycles of inter-communal reprisal attacks. Civilian targeting may also be used to reinforce the presence and control of particular armed groups within a given region. In both countries, VAC often involves looting of civilian or humanitarian property **(Amnesty International, 2014a, 2014b)**, reflecting efforts to access required resources.

In South Sudan, VAC involving state forces and communal militias has increased since 2011-2012. State-led violence is associated with counter-insurgency campaigns against rebel groups and civilian disarmament campaigns following communal violence **(HRW 2013; Jok, 2013; Knopf, 2013)**. Communal violence is examined in Section 3. In Sudan, most VAC has involved political militia groups. 2014 saw an increase in VAC attributed to pro-

government militia and paramilitary, government-affiliated Rapid Support Forces. This illustrates state responses to on-going rebel activity, including rebel alliances in Darfur and South Kordofan (examined in Section 2), with state and paramilitary forces targeting communities believed to support rebels groups, as part of counter-insurgency campaigns **(HRW, 2014a)**.

Due to the impact of conflict on civilians, South Sudan and Sudan were identified as two of the most significant humanitarian crises of 2014 **(UNOCHA, 2014)**. In South Sudan, abductions, beatings, and killings by government soldiers and other groups have been reported at UN civilian protection sites **(HRW, 2014a; Amnesty International, 2014a)**. In Sudan, displaced civilians have been targets of abductions, sexual violence, and killings by RSF, government forces, and pro-government militias **(HRW, 2014b)**. In 2014, VAC events were concentrated in South Sudan's Unity and Upper Nile states, and in Sudan's Darfur region, reflecting the continued vulnerability of civilians, particularly displaced populations, in these regions.

The prevalence of civilian targeting in the two countries points to the failures of CPA and subsequent peace efforts to effectively ensure civilian security and safety, and particularly, to ensure their protection by state forces. This illustrates the pressing importance of addressing diverse forms of political violence beyond a limited focus on specific government and rebel forces.
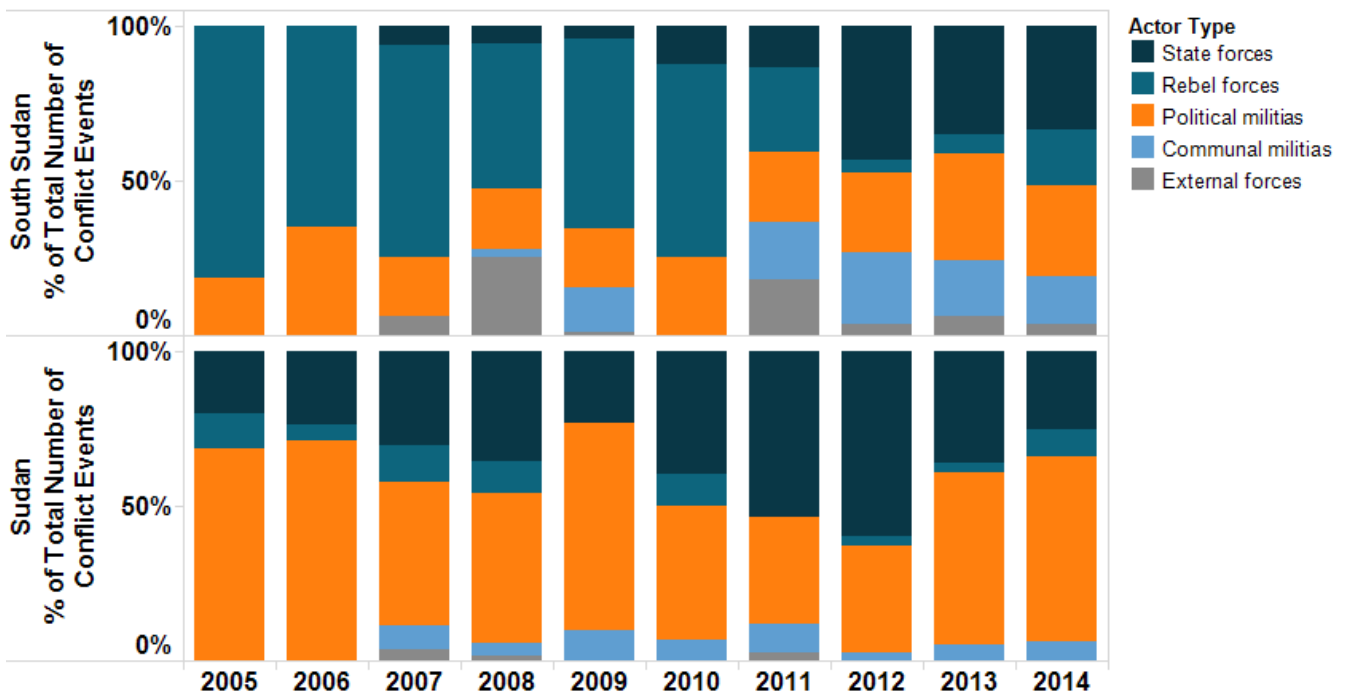

Figure 4: Violence against Civilians by Actor Type, Sudan and South Sudan, 2005 - September 2014.
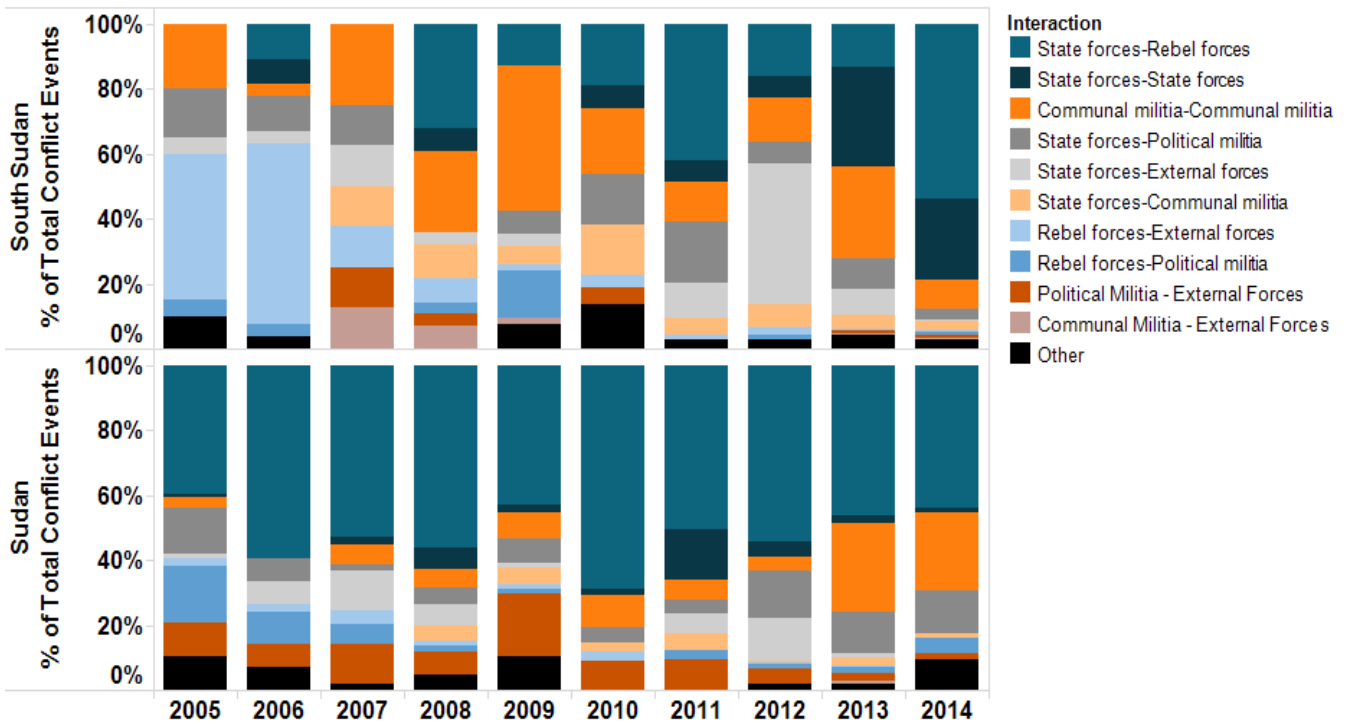
Figure 5: Battles by Interaction, Sudan and South Sudan, January 2005 - September 2014.

Conflict between government and opposition forces:

Since 2005, conflict activity involving rebel forces in South Sudan and Sudan has declined. However, government-rebel conflict persists in both countries and accounts for the largest proportion of battles since 2005 **(see Figure 5)**, representing over a third of all battles in South Sudan and half of those in Sudan. Under the CPA, north/south power sharing arrangements were not accompanied by specific internal power sharing or political reform mechanisms, and continued violence is linked to opposition forces' stated goals of governance reform, political representation, and control over particular regions, including natural resources and revenues.

Since the 1980s, the SPLA/M has been South Sudan's most active armed group, even after the CPA established the SPLA/M as the national governing and military body. Multiple factions split in the 1990s over conflicting leadership and political objectives (some fighting for independence, others for inclusive political reform for a "new Sudan").

> **The CPA established the SPLA/M as the national governing and military body, but the continued involvement of SPLA/M factions in violence reflects the persistent divisions and potential for remobilisation in present-day South Sudan.**

Many re-joined the mainstream SPLA/M before and after the CPA, although several commanders have since defected and remobilised **(Dagne, 2011**; **Sudd Institute, 2014)**. The CPA established the SPLA/M as the national governing and military body, but the continued involvement of SPLA/M opposition factions in violent activity reflects these persistent divisions and potential for remobilisation. South Sudan's current civil conflict is linked to the failure to address these long-standing divisions.

In 2014, SPLA/M-In Opposition was established as the dominant rebel movement, headed by former vice-president Riek Machar, who led a faction that split from the main SPLA/M in the 1990s and re-joined before the CPA. Other former SPLA/M faction leaders have been linked to SPLA/M-IO, which has also aligned with various rebel and military commanders.

In Sudan, the proportion of battles involving rebel forces has remained relatively stable since 2005, mainly involving Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) factions and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N). Both the

SLM/A and JEM emerged in the early 2000s and have in turn each split into multiple factions, often along ethnic or tribal lines, while the SPLM-N is the SPLA/M's former northern branch (Small Arms Survey, 2012). These groups have called for national regime change and political reform, with continued conflict associated with Khartoum's failure to implement post-CPA political reforms.

In South Sudan, violent conflict between state forces and rebels has historically occurred primarily in Upper Nile although, in 2014, there was a shift in the geography of violence into Unity and Jonglei **(see Figure 6)**. This reflects SPLA/M-IO support in Unity, Machar's home state, as well as ongoing government-SPLA/M-IO fighting around key towns and oil fields in the northeastern states, with forces battling for control of oil producing areas.

In Sudan, state-rebel battles have occurred in Darfur and, since 2011, in the Kordofan region. SLM/A, JEM, and LMJ forces are active in Darfur and SPLM-N and SRF forces are

> **Darfur alliances are characterised by power struggles, factionalism, and military cooperation challenges, including ideological differences, and differing military tactics, with the SPLM-N engaging primarily in battles with state forces, while JEM and SLM also target other rebels.**

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In 2011, SPLM-N, JEM, and SLM/A formed the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), pushing for a unified opposition and inclusive transitional government. SLM/A and Liberation Movement for Justice (LMJ) factions also formed the Darfur Joint Resistance Forces, in a response to increasing regional violence.

These alliances are characterised by power struggles, factionalism, and military cooperation challenges. For example, SRF coordination is impeded by ideological differences between key actors (such as JEM's resistance to the SRF vision of a secular state), the dominant role of SPLM/N, and differing military tactics **(ICG, 2013a**; **Small Arms Survey, 2013)**: the SPLM-N engages primarily in battles with state forces, while JEM and SLM/A also target other rebel groups. In both countries, state and rebel forces have aligned with communal militia groups, representing another key dimension of state-rebel conflict.
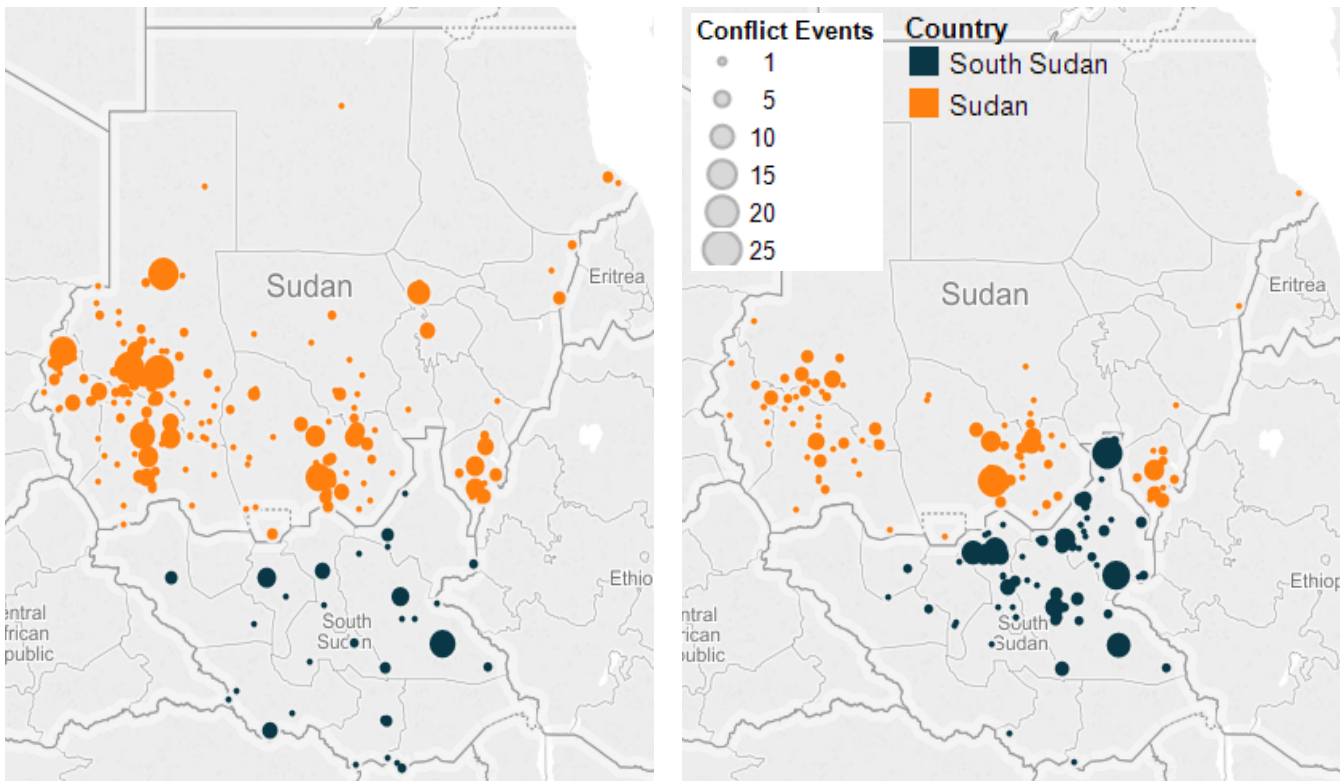

Figure 6: Battle Events between State and Rebel Forces, Sudan and South Sudan, 2005 - September 2014.

Communal violence:

In South Sudan and Sudan, conflict involving ethnic and communal militias increased dramatically after 2005, and witnessed a particularly sharp rise in the years since 2012. Communal groups are increasingly involved in battles, which are more common than communal VAC **(see Figure 7)**. These are not purely "local" events: they are linked to historical and current regional and national conflict and socio-economic changes. Communal conflict has involved significant fatalities, with Sudan and South Sudan experiencing the first and third highest communal violence fatalities on the continent since 2005. South Sudan and Sudan had average fatality rates per communal violence event of 13.6 and 19.6, respectively, compared to a continental average of 5.8, illustrating the serious implications of civil conflict for community and civilian security.

Current communal tensions may be traced to the mobilisation and arming of ethnic groups by the Sudanese government and SPLA/M during the civil war. Sudan's government supported Rizaygat and Misseriya and southern Nuer and Murle groups, while SPLA/M factions supported Dinka, Nuer, and others **(Adar, 2000**; **Jok, 2013)**. These groups are currently among those most actively engaged in communal violence, reflecting long-standing tensions

linked to conflict experiences (including the lack of formal justice and reconciliation mechanisms addressing prior ethnically-targeted violence), political and economic marginalisation, militarisation of community groups, and use of arms provided by states and rebels. Current national peace processes have largely neglected communal violence, despite its prevalence and intensity.

Communal violence in South Sudan and Sudan is also linked to post-war tensions over administrative and traditional leadership, resource distribution, and access to services and opportunities (e.g. education, employment). Community tensions, linked to pressures on service systems and land and other resources, increased with the return of displaced populations after 2005. Land and oil exploitation also contribute to conflict over resource control, revenues, and border demarcation.

Communal conflict in both countries involves many groups and sub-groups, challenging over-simplified explanations of violence which focus on tensions between dominant ethnic groups. In South Sudan, over 100 communal militias have been active since 2005, with nearly 70 active in Sudan. In South Sudan, where the current crisis has often been portrayed as a binary Dinka-Nuer conflict, multiple groups are in fact involved in conflict, including
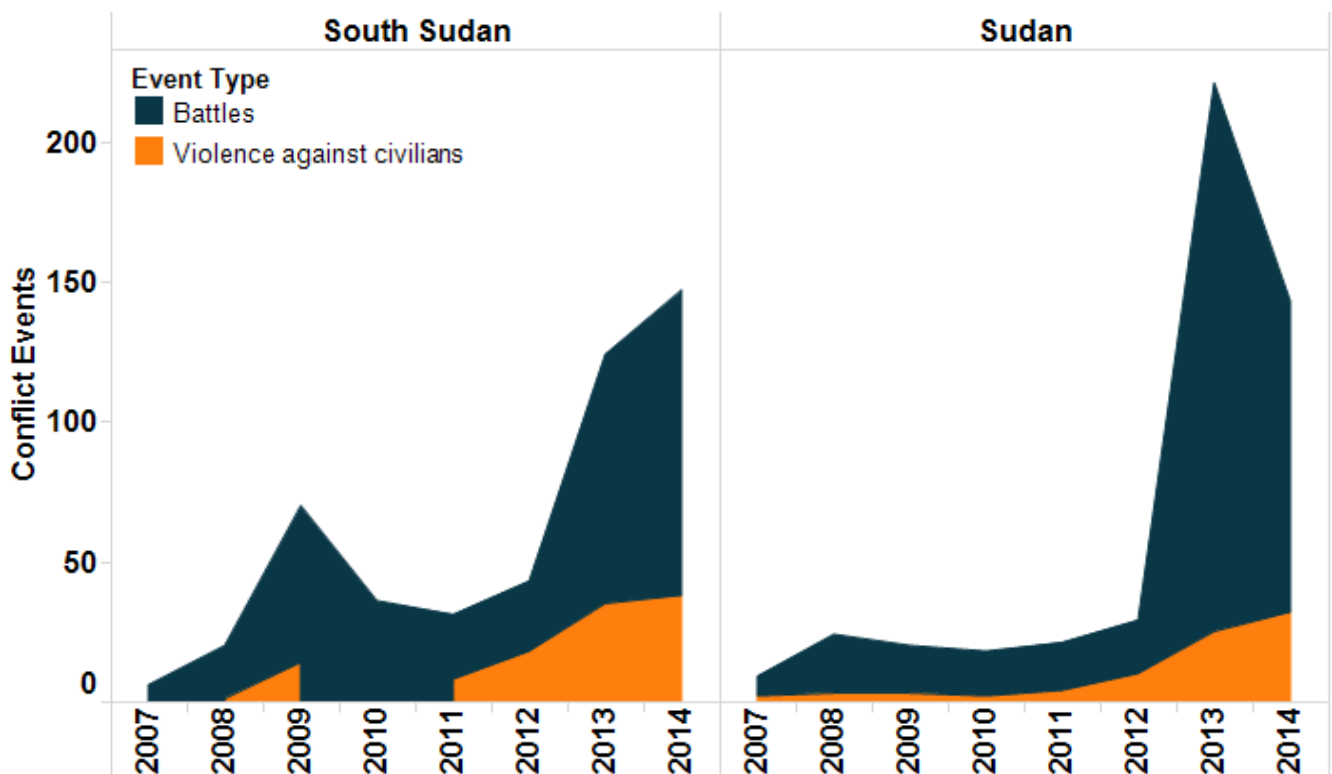

Figure 7: Communal Violence in South Sudan and Sudan by Type, 2007 - September 2014.
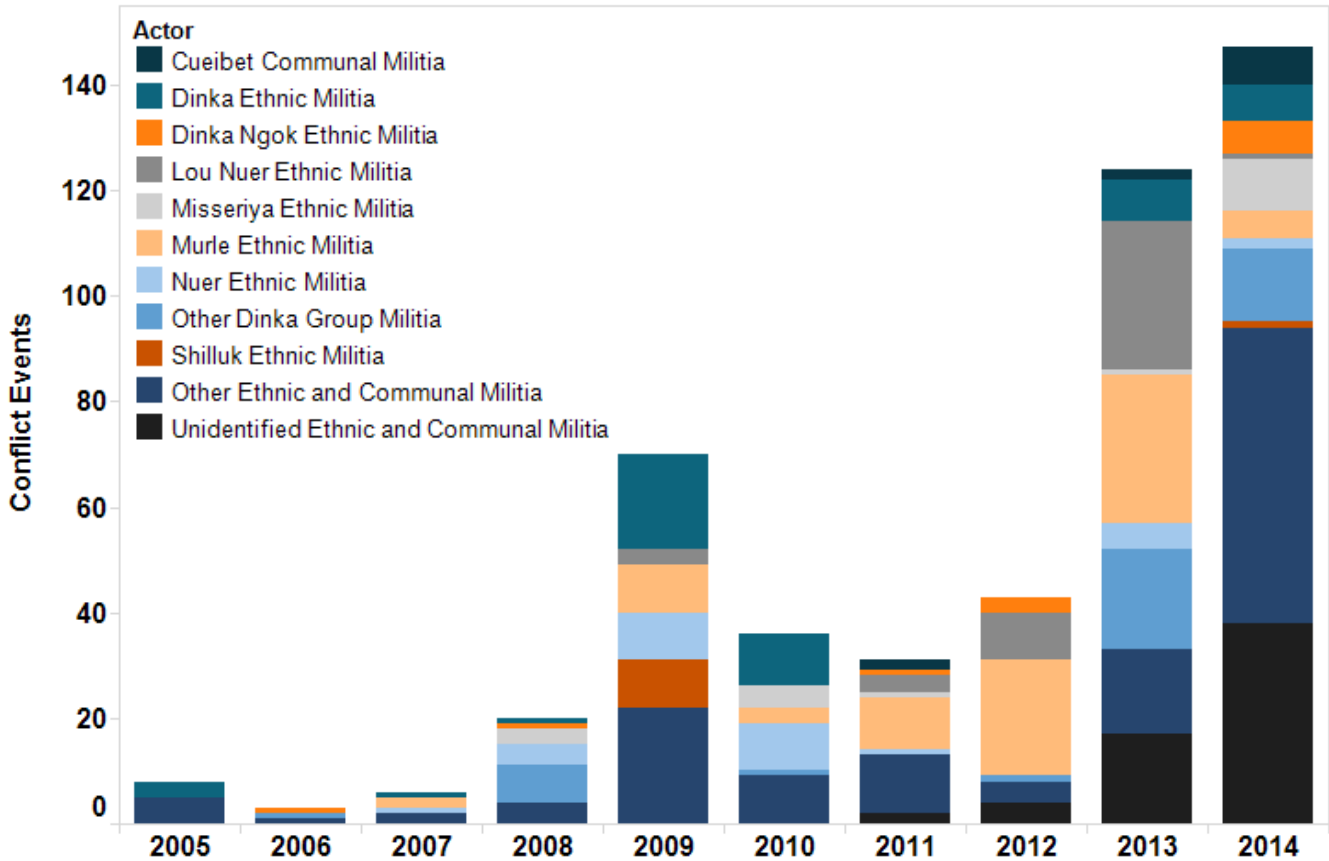
Figure 8: Communal Violence by Actor, South Sudan, 2005 - September 2014.

Murle, Dinka, Nuer, and Misseriya **(see Figure 8)**. The conflict also includes a large number of small factions and branches of communal groups (aggregated under 'Other' and 'Unidentified'), reflecting the vast range of discrete actors involved in the conflict. Community self-defence forces have also formed in response to a lack of security and rule of law. Conflict is concentrated Upper Nile, but increased in Lakes state in 2014 due to violent community opposition to the caretaker governor, appointed in 2013, and cycles of violence following attacks on traditional leaders.

In Sudan, communal violence has primarily involved Misseriya, Abala, Rizaygat, Salamat, and Maaliya groups. Violence is concentrated in Darfur, and experienced a dramatic increase in 2013, linked to increasingly intense conflict over land resources and administrative power between ethnic militias recently armed by the government to fight rebel groups **(Amnesty International, 2014b; ICG, 2013b)**.

Ethnic and communal mobilisation by state and rebel forces has continued. In South Sudan, the largely Lou Nuer White Army has aligned with the SPLA/M-IO, while other

militias are aligned with state forces **(Amnesty International, 2014a; ICG, 2014)**, who also support ethnic and communal militias during anti-insurgency campaigns **(HRW, 2013)**. Sudan's government has mobilised and armed ethnic militias to fight rebel groups in Darfur and South Kordofan, and Misseriya members have aligned with SPLM-N and SRF forces **(ICG, 2013a, 2013b)**. Since 1997, locations of communal violence roughly reflect those of state and rebel violence, illustrating the overlap between these conflict actors during and after the civil war **(see Figure 9)**.

These alliances do not necessarily reflect militias' commitment to national conflict objectives. Rather, it may be a response to ethnically targeted killings of civilians by other groups, and a means to achieve local objectives, including securing material resources (including arms), ensuring natural resource control, border demarcation, and other rewards (e.g. local administrative power) under future governance arrangements.

Given these connections between "local" violence and regional and national conflict and governance, peace efforts focusing on specific ethnic communities may not

be sufficient. "Local" violence, and its links to wider political conflict, should be addressed as part of national peace-building processes, based on an understanding of the complex multi-level dynamics of communal conflict.
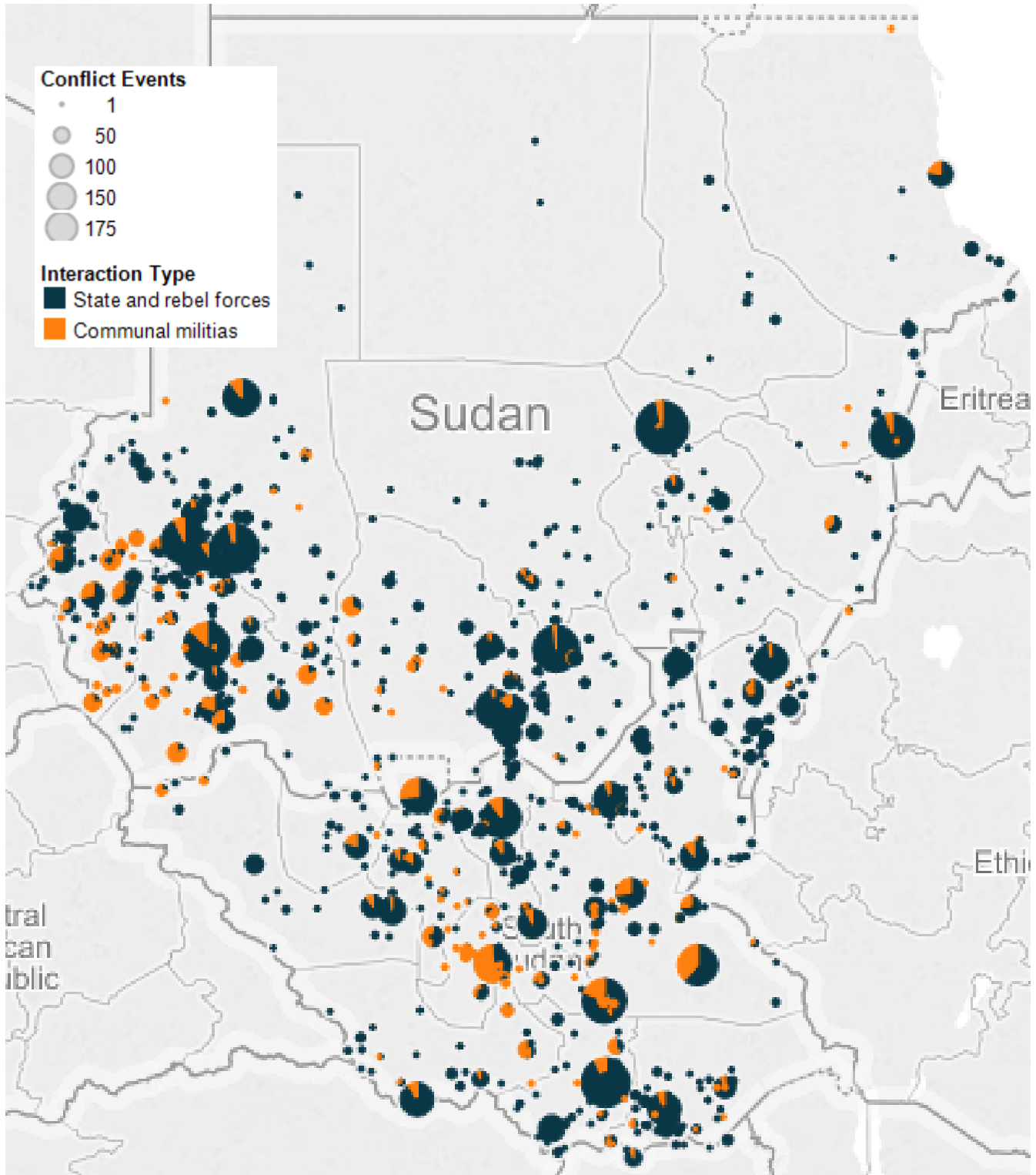

Figure 9: Conflict Events by Actor Type, Sudan and South Sudan, 1997 - September 2014.

Conclusion:

South Sudan and Sudan's on-going conflicts **(see Figure 10)** are characterized by high levels of violence against civilians, including targeting of displaced civilians by armed groups. Fighting continues between government and rebel forces, and communal and political militias are increasingly contributing to conflict levels, reflecting inter-group tensions as well as links to state and rebel forces. These trends are linked to internal tensions, including political tensions, unresolved as part of the 2005 CPA and South Sudan's subsequent independence.

UN missions have been established in both countries, reflecting international efforts focusing on civilian protection, peace process support, and strengthening political processes and rule of law. Both missions face significant conflict response and prevention challenges. In South Sudan, government and opposition forces have both accused the UN Mission for South Sudan (UNMISS) of supporting the other **(Sudd Institute, 2014)**, and armed groups have attacked civilian protection sites. In Sudan, there have been calls for a review of UN/African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) actions following allegations of failure to protect civilians and mismanagement of investigations **(UN News Centre, 2014)**.

Regional actors, including the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU), have been involved in efforts to address conflict in the two countries. IGAD has mediated peace talks between the South Sudanese government and SPLM/A-IO. Fighting continues despite a ceasefire agreement signed in May 2014. Talks are focusing on the details of a transitional government, although they have repeatedly stalled due to disagreements over stakeholder involvement and political reforms.

The AU High Level Implementation Panel has backed a Sudanese national dialogue process. The SRF, opposition National Umma Party (NUP), and Khartoum representatives have signed an agreement on a national dialogue and constitutional process, although no specific objectives have been defined **(Africa Confidential, 2014)**. Recent arrests of opposition (including NUP) leaders by national security forces also raise questions about government commitment to dialogue and reform.

The South Sudanese peace talks and the Sudanese dialogue process have focused on conflict between government and rebel forces, and have not addressed complex community-level conflict dynamics that extend beyond the specific actors involved in formal negotiations. This approach echoes the 2005 CPA, which focused on power sharing at the national level, but did not address tensions between various rebel factions, the more local dimensions of conflict, or underlying dynamics of power and exclusion. As evidenced by current conflict trends, a failure to address these issues can only result in the persistence of conflict in South Sudan and Sudan.
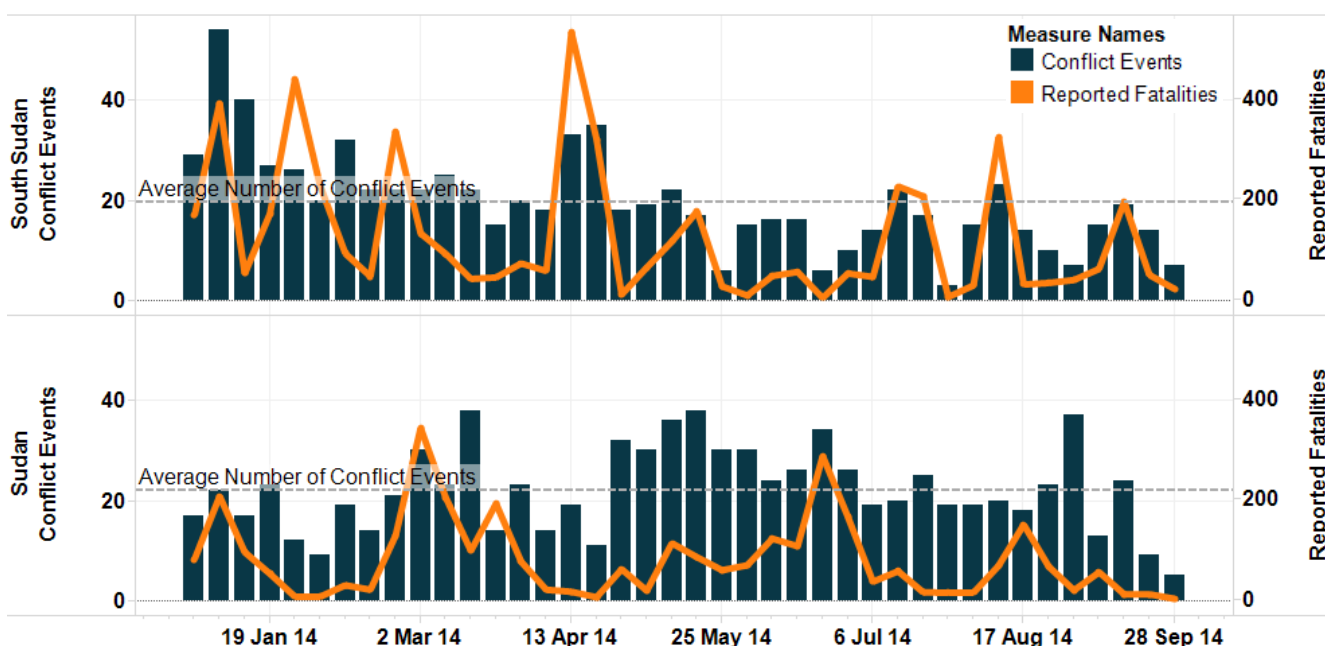

Figure 10: Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Week, Sudan and South Sudan, January - September 2014.

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