

The Sudan at a Crossroads: Multi-layered Fragility

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Abstract

Almost three years since the ousting of former president Omar al-Bashir, and the formation of a transitional government composed of civilians and members of the military, the situation in Sudan is far from stable. Indeed, although progress has been achieved since December 2018, the democratic transition remains very fragile, with the political and economic sectors still facing significant uncertainty. This paper explains the fragility of the Sudanese transition, plagued by decades of corruption, mismanagement, and oppression.

The main argument defended in this paper is that despite the removal of al-Bashir, the agreement between the army and civilians to form a transitional government, and the different steps taken to implement gradual reforms to restructure a very unstructured country, the situation in Sudan is still very complex, with domestic politics and foreign interference hindering every step taken. Since the failed military coup in September 2021, tensions between the military and civilian leaders have been growing. Hence, this paper explains the multi-layered fragility of the Sudanese transition, especially as the military has now decided to arrest all civilian members of the government and rule on its own. The first section of the paper outlines the context in which the Sudanese decided to take the streets in December 2018 to denounce poor living conditions, and the different stages the country went through in order to finally form a transitional government. The second section focuses on the joint civilian-military transitional government, headed by Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok, and is divided in two sub-sections: first, an analysis of the economic reforms carried out since 2019, and the consequences for the socio-political sphere; and second, an analysis of the political changes implemented, in an attempt to create and maintain social cohesion, and the difficulties related to these changes.

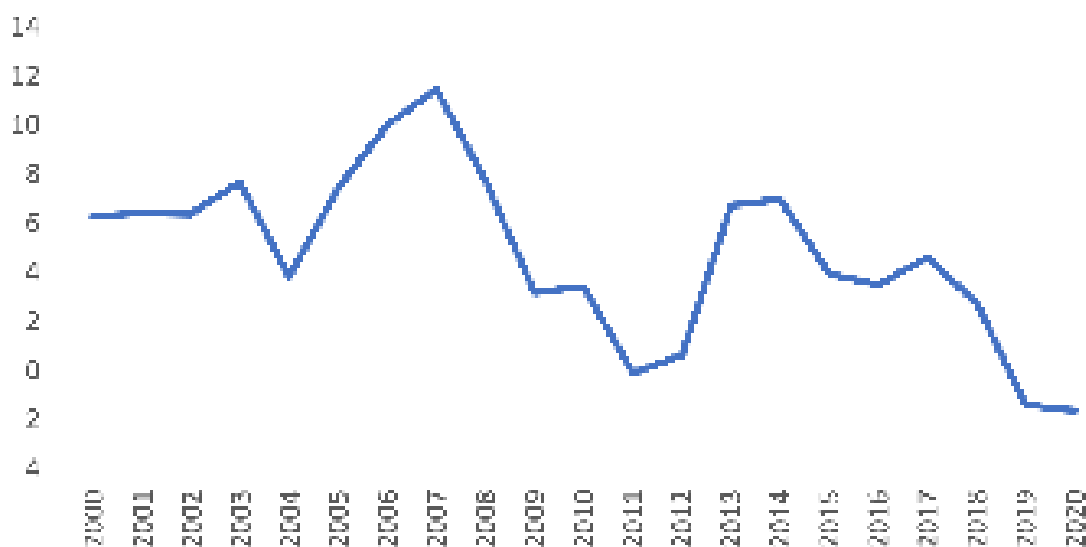
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1. Context

Sudanese army colonel Omar al-Bashir took power in 1989 through a coup against President Ahmed al-Mirghani and his prime minister, Sadiq al-Mahdi. Immediately after his coup, al-Bashir joined forces with Hassan al-Turabi, a controversial Islamist politician, and launched a campaign of Islamization in the country's north. He suspended political parties, restricted independent media, purged his political rivals, introduced an Islamic legal code, and ultimately established himself as an absolute leader with vast powers. During this period, jihadists from all over the world travelled to Sudan, mainly attracted by the ideas of al-Turabi. Osama bin Laden had set up a training camp in Sudan, and the country was listed by the U.S. in 1993 as a terrorist sponsor state, subject to international sanctions. Nonetheless, the Sudanese economy had high rates of growth from 2000 to 2010 (Figure 1). Shaken by separatists from the south for two decades, and under growing international pressure, al-Bashir ended up concluding a peace agreement with the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, granting the south six years of autonomy, followed by a referendum through which the south gained independence in 2011.

After the secession of South Sudan, Sudan lost three quarters of its oil fields, causing a rapid economic slowdown. The fall in oil prices in 2014 also hit the country hard. Inflation rose to 73% at the end of 2018 in a country where more than 40% of the population lives in poverty. Lack of availability of fuel and liquidity caused long queues in front of banks and gas stations. Moreover, the endemic corruption and the allocation of up to 70% of public spending for the military and security sector exacerbated an already untenable situation¹. Despite the lifting of U.S. sanctions in January 2018, the economic situation was severe.

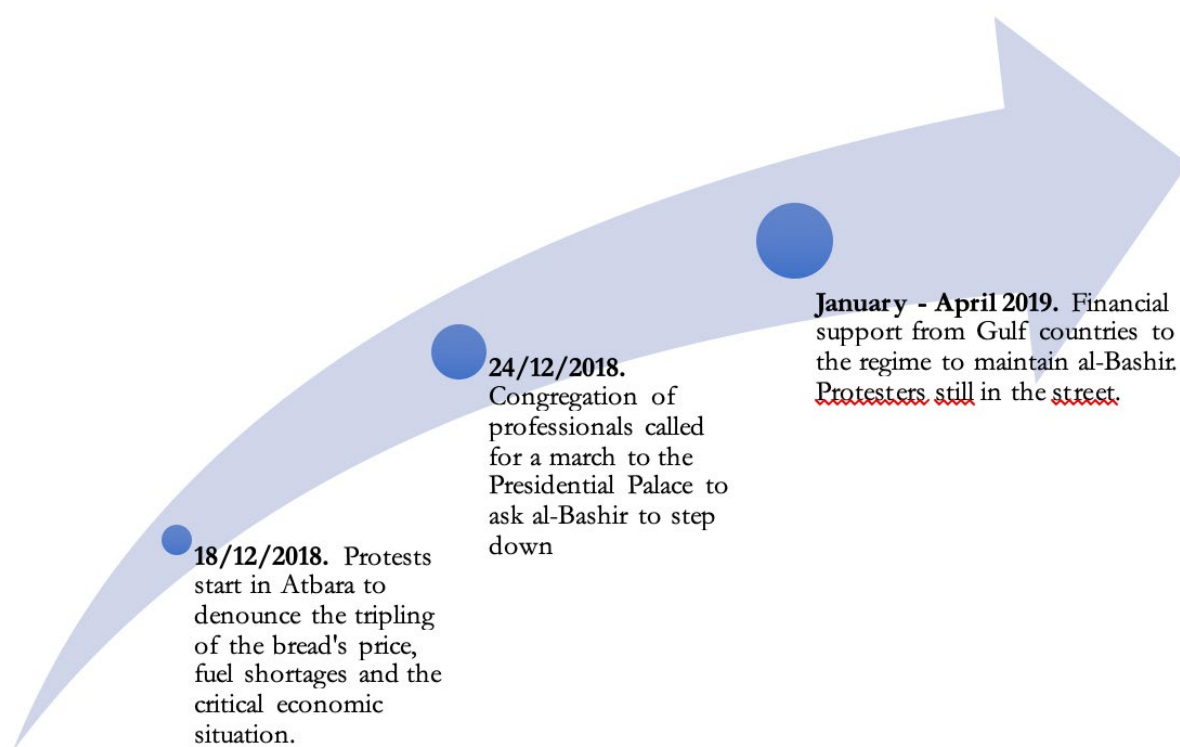
Figure 1: GDP growth rate, 2000-2020, %



Source: World Bank, 2021.

1. "Sudan's inflation rise to 72,94% in December", Sudan Tribune, January 19, 2019, available at <https://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article66936>.

In December 2018, protesters took the streets to denounce the untenable political, economic, and social situation. Bread prices tripled, and there was a continued fuel shortage and a currency crisis. It was not the first time the Sudanese took the streets to protest. In 2013, public protests end in more than 200 people being killed, although the regime claimed there were 85 deaths. The difference between these protests and those that started in December 2018 was that the former were limited to Khartoum, whereas the latter erupted in many cities across the country. The protests were not organized by the Sudanese opposition political parties, despite Salah Gosh, head of the National Intelligence Sudanese Services, accusing opposition parties of being the main culprits behind the protests. Most protestors were young Sudanese, frustrated and angered by the lack of opportunities and by a dire economic situation. Protests started in Atbara, were protesters burned down the National Congress Party's offices. NCP offices in Al-Rahad town, North Kordofan State, were also burned down.



What started as a protest against the increasing prices of basic goods in December 2018, soon escalated into a general call for the downfall of the regime of Omar al-Bashir. Local elites, who had long supported al-Bashir, were now on the protesters' side. Citizens asking Bashir to step down came from different economic and political backgrounds. At the beginning, security and police forces were still very violent towards protestors, and in February 2019, President al-Bashir declared a state of emergency that was supposed to last for a year, and dissolved the central and regional governments. Nonetheless, protestors continued to demand that al-Bashir step down and to chant "Freedom, peace and justice".²

Similar to what happened during the so-called Arab Spring, social media was key to the success of the revolution; it enabled people to organize and protest against their government. President al-Bashir tried to impose strict information controls and restricted access to Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook, but word got out and the Sudanese started using Virtual Private Networks (VPN) to bypass

2. Ayen Bior "Sudan Declares National Emergency as Protests Continue", VOA, February 23, 2019, available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/sudan-declares-national-emergency-as-protests-continue/4800993.html>.

the government's blockade.³ The Sudanese government also revoked the work permits of foreign media, including Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, in an attempt to limit coverage of the protests.⁴ Another important aspect of the Sudanese revolution was the powerful role played by women. Women were unable to join the main protests but still recorded and shared their activity in support of the movement on Facebook and Twitter. Even the global attention paid to the protests stemmed in no small part from communication via WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter through the hashtag #BlueForSudan.

The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) emerged as a driving force of the protests, after issuing a Declaration of Freedom and Change on January 1 that demanded the "immediate and unconditional withdraw of Bashir and his regime." The opposition Sudan Call and National Consensus Forces also joined the declaration. The SPA, composed of lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists, and other professionals, has tried to maintain anonymity for security reasons, while also leading organizing efforts. On February 14, 2019, Sudan's main opposition groups, the Communist Party and the SPA, issued their first joint call for President al-Bashir to step down.⁵ Another of the main rallying cries of the protests was "Fall, that's all". On January 27, the Federal Umma Party left the ruling government coalition and asked al-Bashir to resign, and the influential Popular Congress Party threatened to leave the ruling coalition as well.⁶

Al-Bashir tried to stay in power and, aware of the strength of young people, appealed to this portion of the population and blamed the unrest on foreign agents and armed opposition groups.⁷ Despite his brutal crackdown on protesters and the opposition, he held several rallies and promised to improve healthcare, education, and infrastructure.⁸ Many Sudanese did not believe these promises. Defense Minister Awad Mohamed Ahmed Ibn Auf stated in February 2019 that "young people caught up in recent turmoil had reasonable ambition", and that recent events "showed the need to reshape political entities, parties and armed movements of the political scene with a different mindset than before".⁹ Prime Minister Moataz Moussa also appeared to soften the official stance on the protests, describing demonstrators' calls for better living conditions as "legitimate". Aware of the complexity of the situation, and also of his growing isolation, al-Bashir understood that his days in office were numbered.

Many researchers, analysts, and experts on Sudan started using the expression 'game of chess' when referring to the Sudanese political crisis. The reason was al-Bashir's ambiguous foreign policy, involving the formation of different alliances with whoever was willing to help keep his country's economy afloat, since the US-led sanctions imposed in 1997. Hence, different regional and extra-regional powers were interested in the future developments in the Sudan, which is strategically important (with natural resources such as natural gas, gold, silver, chromite, zinc and iron; but also a direct access to the Red Sea) in a fragile and volatile area.

3. Abdi Latif Dahir "Sudan has blocked Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to counter anti-govt protests," Quartz Africa, December 28, 2018, available at: <https://qz.com/africa/1510229/sudan-shuts-down-facebook-twitter-instagram-amid-bread-protests/>.

4. "Al Jazeera says Sudan withdraws journalists' work permits," Associated Press, January 22, 2019, available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-6618659/Al-Jazeera-says-Sudan-withdraws-journalists-work-permits.html>.

5. "Sudan opposition groups issue first joint call for Bashir to resign", Middle East Eye, February 14, 2019, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudan-opposition-groups-issue-first-joint-call-bashir-resign>.

6. "Sudan: Party Withdraws from Pro-Bashir Coalition"

7. "Sudan president defiant as deadly protests continue," BBC, January 20, 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46940531>.

8. "Police fire tear gas as anti-government protests resume in Sudan," Al Jazeera, February 4, 2019, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/2/4/police-fire-tear-gas-as-anti-government-protests-resume-in-sudan>

"Sudan's Bashir promises growth after weeks of protests," Al Jazeera, February 3, 2019, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/2/3/sudans-bashir-promises-growth-after-weeks-of-protests>.

9. Khalid Abdelaziz "Sudan minister appeals to young as protests near seventh week," Reuters, February 4, 2019, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/2/3/sudans-bashir-promises-growth-after-weeks-of-protests>.

On one hand, al-Bashir put himself in the good graces of Turkish president Erdogan by leasing the island of Suakin to Turkey, and he supported Ethiopia in the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, much to Egypt's surprise. Egypt's desired hegemony influenced Ethiopia and Sudan to pursue common foreign policy orientations and practices. On March 4 2019, Eritrea's president Afwerki and Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed were supposed to stop at Khartoum on their way to Juba. The purpose of the visit was to meet with Salva Kiir, South Sudan's President, to discuss an agreement to bolster regional integration that would lead to a common position on regional and international issues. However, Afwerki and Abiy Ahmed ultimately did not stop in Khartoum, and did not issue a statement to explain the reasons for the change of plans.

On another hand, Bashir was also on good terms with the Qatari Emir, from whom he has received significant financial support (the \$4 billion agreement to jointly develop the Suakin port) and signed partnerships covering livestock, mining, agriculture, and development of ports. To add a layer of complexity, al-Bashir also received support from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt, especially following the secession of South Sudan and the economic hardships that ensued after the loss of its oil reserves. Sudan committed an estimated 10,000 troops to support the Saudi-led offensive in Yemen.¹⁰ The influence of Islamists was deeply entrenched in Sudan, as al-Bashir himself seized power as the head of an Islamist junta. During his presidency, Islamists controlled the military, intelligence services, and key ministries. However, following an 'understanding' between al-Bashir and Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ) Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, the former agreed to root out Islamists and in return, the UAE would provide Sudan with financial support. The UAE and Saudi Arabia, for a long time, pressured al-Bashir's government to 'choose a side', and to avoid making extreme diplomatic shifts.

By backing al-Bashir, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt were trying to safeguard their own interests. Certainly, by highlighting and reiterating their support for Sudanese stability, the three states also reminded al-Bashir that they could withdraw their support at any time if the foreign policy he was pursuing was against their interests. Moreover, the increasing intensity of protests allowed this bloc of countries to intensify their pressure on al-Bashir and obtain as many concessions as possible. A classic and strategic tactic: coercive diplomacy. In conclusion, it is important to note that despite the many differences, the international and regional powers were not interested in al-Bashir's fall.

In this complicated situation, the Sudanese people had to fight a double battle: against al-Bashir's government, and also against the different power plays that made the Horn of Africa the battleground on which Middle Eastern rivalries were played out.

1.2. March – August 2019

As popular discontent grew and the Sudanese remained on the streets, the military in April 2019 pushed al-Bashir to step down after 30 years in power. The powerful Sudanese National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), led by Salah Gosh, did nothing to stop protesters who were camping outside the Defense Ministry, illustrating the army's decision to turn its back to al-Bashir.

A military council led by General Ibn Auf took the reins and promised to oversee a transitional period that would last a maximum of two years. Al-Bashir was detained in Sudan, and was not allowed

10. International Crisis Group, Intra-Gulf Competition in Africa's Horn: Lessening the Impact, Middle East Report No 206, September 19, 2019, available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/206-intra-gulf-competition-africas-horn-lessening-impact>.

to leave the country. He then was transferred to a maximum security prison in Khartoum and two of his brothers were also detained, according to the military, as part of efforts to “uproot symbols of the regime”.¹¹ The quasi impossibility for the former president to leave Khartoum was celebrated by the Sudanese protesters, but its implications were not understood until several months later, which will be analyzed below.

The announcement of al-Bashir’s arrest and removal on April 11 was made by Defense Minister Ibn Auf, himself under U.S. sanctions for links to atrocities in Darfur.¹² He also stated that a military council would be formed by the army, intelligence, and security apparatus, and would rule for two years after which “free and fair elections” would be held. Ibn Auf was sworn in as head of the new council, and he announced the suspension of the constitution, the dissolution of the government, the imposition of a curfew, and the closure of borders and airspace, and then declared a state of emergency for three months. However, Ibn Auf announced that former president al-Bashir will not be handed over to the International Criminal Court (ICC), where he faces charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide for his deadly campaign against insurgents in Darfur.¹³ Despite al-Bashir’s removal from power, protesters claimed they would not end the sit-in outside the military’s headquarters until a civilian transition government is formed. Indeed, alongside the military was the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohamed Dagalo, alias Hemeyti, and ‘third pole of power’ within the Sudanese security apparatus. The RSF are a rival to the army and to the intelligence bodies, as they were granted by al-Bashir the status of a ‘regular force’, which reported directly to the president. The RSF also was behind the violent crackdown on protesters in Khartoum in the 2013 uprisings. It was reported that in June 2019, the RSF engaged in violence against members of the Sudanese military who showed solidarity with or sympathy for the demonstrators.¹⁴ The rivalry between the army and the RSF was clearly anticipated by the civilian protesters, and slogans against the armed forces were chanted throughout the sit-in. Protesters were not going to settle for another type of government that was not civilian, and their resilience and peacefulness was celebrated across the world.¹⁵

Ibn Auf resigned as head of the Transitional Military Council (TMC) just a day after he was sworn in, and appointed Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan as his successor.¹⁶ Alongside al-Burhan’s appointment was the one of Hemeyti, leader of Sudan’s RSF, as Deputy Head of the Transitional Military Council. Salah Gosh, the chief of the NISS, handed in his resignation on April 13, a day after Ibn Auf.¹⁷ He then settled in Egypt. Al-Burhan had been appointed in February as al-Bashir’s chief of staff and head of the ground forces, but protestors, represented by the Sudanese Professional Association

11. “Sudan coup: Military leader vows to ‘uproot regime,’” BBC, April 13, 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47918736>

12. Maggie Michael and Samy Magdy “Sudan’s military overthrows president amid bloody protests,” Associated Press, April 11, 2019, available at: <https://apnews.com/article/ap-top-news-international-news-omar-al-bashir-sudan-africa-3b259f7aaca4601a713103006de8687>.

13. “Sudan defence minister steps down as head of transitional military council,” France 24, April 13, 2019, available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20190412-sudan-defence-minister-steps-down-head-transitional-military-council>.

14. “Militiamen in Sudan raped men and women, says eyewitness,” Deutsche Welle, June 9, 2019, available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/militiamen-in-sudan-raped-men-and-women-says-eyewitness/a-49120693>.

15. Nasredeem Abdulbari “How Peaceful Protests in Sudan, Violently Suppressed, Could Yield Political Change,” The Global Observatory, April 5, 2019, available at: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/04/how-peaceful-protests-sudan-may-yield-political-change/>.

16. “Sudan’s Ibn Auf steps down as head of military council,” Al Jazeera, April 13, 2019, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/4/13/sudans-ibn-auf-steps-down-as-head-of-military-council>.

“Sudan coup leader resigns, protesters celebrate ‘triumph,’” Africanews, April 12, 2019, available at: <https://www.africanews.com/2019/04/12/sudan-coup-leader-resigns/>.

17. “Sudan’s intelligence chief Salah Gosh resigns: Military council,” Middle East Eye, April 13, 2019, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudans-intelligence-chief-salah-gosh-resigns-military-council>.

(SPA), still rejected any form of military rule, and claimed they would only accept a power handover to a transitional civilian government.¹⁸ Conscious of the protestors' strength, the TMC soon shifted its position. Security forces opened fire on the protestors, killing more than 100 persons, and General al-Burhan, the chairman of the TMC, announced that the military was abandoning the talks with the opposition coalition. Rapidly, the situation turned into a violent clash between the military and the demonstrators. The Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), the umbrella group many opposition groups were part of, decided to interrupt negotiations with the TMC.¹⁹ Many people were killed by the security forces and opposition leaders were arrested. The SPA demanded the resignation of three lieutenant generals, part of the TMC, as they were allegedly implicated in the violent crackdown on protestors. Lieutenant-General Omar Zain al-Abideen who was head of the TMC's political committee, Lieutenant-General Jalal al-Deen al-Sheikh and Lieutenant-General Al-Tayeb Babakr Ali Fadeel resigned.²⁰

It is important to acknowledge that at that stage, the socio-economic situation in the country was getting worse (Figure 2). Bakeries were empty and fuel prices remained high, and people outside of Khartoum were more interested in getting immediate material concessions instead of negotiating for months for different political concessions. One of the groups that said it was 'too early' for dialogue with the military was the insurgent group active in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile state, the Sudan Revolutionary Front.²¹ In this complicated economic context, Saudi Arabia and the UAE agreed to send \$3 billion in aid to the TMC, and Hemeyti stated that Sudanese troops would remain in Yemen: a win-win situation for both parties, but zero gain for the civilians. Meanwhile, opposition and rebel groups met with UAE officials in Abu Dhabi, and although Qatar tried to send its foreign minister for talks to Khartoum, its attempt was rebuffed.

Simultaneously, the African Union's Peace and Security Council threatened Khartoum, on April 15, with sanctions if a civilian transition was not achieved in 15 days. It was the first of three deadlines given by the AU. The second deadline came on April 23, 2019, when African leaders met in Cairo—Egypt held the Chairmanship of the AU that year—and agreed to give Sudan's TMC three months to implement democratic reforms and pressured for a quick handover of power to civilians.²² On May 1, the AU sent its third warning which gave the TMC two months to hand over power to a civilian-led Transitional Authority or risk suspension.²³

Throughout April and May, negotiations between the TMC and the FFC failed to reach an agreement. The clock was ticking, and international and local pressure to form a civilian government to lead the transition was mounting. The FFC's central demand was that the new sovereignty council should be headed by a civilian, a demand the TMC refused, but protestors remained in the streets claiming 'Madaniya' (civilian rule), their new central slogan. What is interesting is that thousands of Islamists supported military rule. It is important to acknowledge their support, as most of al-Bashir's supporters were Islamists, and a considerable part of the military is still loyal to the former president, as the consecutive attempted coups to undermine the transition have shown.

18. "Sudan defence minister steps down as head of transitional military council," France 24, April 12, 2019, available at : <https://www.france24.com/en/20190412-sudan-defence-minister-steps-down-head-transitional-military-council>.

19. Murat Sofuoglu "Here's how negotiations are shaping Sudan's political crisis," TRT World, April 26, 2019, available at: <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/here-s-how-negotiations-are-shaping-sudan-s-political-crisis-26195>

20. Khalid Abdelaziz "Three members of Sudan military council resign after demand by opposition," Reuters, April 24, 2019, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-sudan-politics/three-members-of-sudan-military-council-resign-after-demand-by-opposition-idUKKCN1S02DF?edition-redirect=uk>

21. "Sudan military, political forces engage talks but armed groups reject hasty meeting," Sudan Tribune, April 14, 2019, available at: <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article67368>

22. "Sudan protest hub: Bashir probed over money laundering, terrorism financing," Africanews, May 3, 2019, available at: <https://www.africanews.com/2019/05/03/sudan-protest-hub-africanews-updates/>

23. Abdur Rahman Alfa Shaban "10 crucial incidents in Sudan: Two months after Bashir ouster," Africanews, June 13, 2019, available at: <https://www.africanews.com/2019/06/13/10-crucial-incidents-in-sudan-two-months-after-bashir-ouster/>

Meanwhile, the UAE, Egypt and Saudi Arabia's support for the TMC further angered protesters, who started chanting "We do not want Saudi aid even if we have to eat beans and falafel!"²⁴ In an interview, Mohamed Yusuf al-Mostafa, head of the SPA claimed "a soft landing for the old regime is being orchestrated by some Middle Eastern powers so that they can keep their allies in power".²⁵ Saudi Arabia announced through its embassy in Washington that \$500 million would be provided to Sudan's central bank to help ease the pressure on the local currency and improve the Sudanese economy.²⁶ It was the first part of the aid package worth \$3 billion pledged by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to the TMC, in which the \$500 million was deposited in Sudan's central bank and \$1 billion worth of petroleum products, wheat and agricultural products were received from the UAE and Saudi Arabia by Sudan in October 2019.²⁷

On May 14, a three-year transitional arrangement was agreed between the military and representatives of the protesters, in which the military would act as a transitional government for three years at which point civilian rule would be implemented. However, the FFC and the TMC still did not agree on the composition of the sovereign council, which would be the highest decision-making body in the transitional period.²⁸ Civilians were still being killed, beaten, and arrested by the military government as they continued protesting. The attack on June 3 marked the worst violence in Sudan since al-Bashir's ousting in early April. More than 100 were killed and 300 injured by the security forces—acts condemned by the UN, the AU and other bodies. On June 4, it was reported that 40 bodies had been pulled from the Nile River after deadly violence. Fast forward to August and September 2021: Sudan publicly criticized its neighbor Ethiopia for throwing dead bodies to the river.²⁹ The two countries share the waters of the river, but also grievances.

On June 5, China and Russia blocked a bid at the UN Security Council to condemn the civilian deaths in the Sudan. They both argued that the Security Council should receive a report from the AU before deciding on any action against Sudan. Two days later, the African Union decided to suspend Sudan amid reports that more than 100 civilians had been killed by the security force, and only lifted the suspension on September 6, 2019.³⁰ Belgium, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, the Netherlands, and Sweden expressed concerns that the junta's unilateral announcement to cease negotiations, appoint a government and call for elections within a short period, could plunge the country into more chaos. They called on Sudan's military council and opposition coalition to continue working together towards a consensus, and to end the crisis. On June 7, the FFC accepted Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed as a mediator to help break the political deadlock.³¹

24. Max Bearak and Kareem Fahim "From Sudan's protesters, a warning to Saudi Arabia and the UAE: Don't meddle," The Washington Post, April 24, 2019, available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/for-sudans-protesters-another-threat-looms-meddling-by-saudi-arabia-and-the-uae/2019/04/24/b2986416-667f-11e9-a1b6-b29b90efa879_story.html

25. Murat Sofuoglu, "Why are Sudan's protesters snubbing the UAE and Saudi Arabia?," TRT World, April 26, 2019, available at: <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/why-are-sudan-s-protesters-snubbing-the-uae-and-saudi-arabia-26179>

26. "Saudi Arabia, UAE to give Sudan \$3 billion, including \$500 million in Central Bank," Arab News, April 22, 2019, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1485726/middle-east>

27. "Sudan has received half the \$3 billion promised by Saudi Arabia and the UAE", Reuters, October 8, 2019, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-emirates-saudi-idUSKBN1WN137>

28. "Sudan Briefing: May – July 2019 Timeline of Events", Reliefweb, July 15, 2019, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-briefing-may-july-2019-timeline-events>

29. "Sudan summoned Ethiopia's envoy after 29 bodies found in river," Al Jazeera, September 8, 2021, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/8/sudan-summons-ethiopia-ambassador-over-29-bodies-found-in-river>

30. "African Union lifts suspension of Sudan," Al Jazeera, September 7, 2019, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/7/african-union-lifts-suspension-of-sudan>

31. "Sudan opposition says it accepts Ethiopia PM as mediator," Al Jazeera, June 7, 2019, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/6/7/sudan-opposition-says-it-accepts-ethiopia-pm-as-mediator>

Finally, in the early days of July 2019, Sudan's TMC and the FFC reached an agreement to share power during a three-year transition until elections, in which the Sovereign Council would be formed of five civilians and five military members, with one remaining seat to go to a civilian chosen by both sides. The FFC had the right to nominate the Prime Minister, who will then form a cabinet of 20 ministers, excluding the interior and defense ministers, appointed by the TMC. They also agreed to establish a legislative council within three months, launch a transparent and independent investigation into violence against the opposition, and organize free elections in 2022. According to the framework agreement, the military will head the transitional ruling body for the first 21 months from the signing of the constitutional declaration, then a civilian will lead for the remaining 18 months. After these 39 months of transition, elections will be held in 2022 leading to the formation of a civilian administration. However, meanwhile, the TMC still has veto power over decisions taken by the Sovereign Council, and the military was to remain free of civilian oversight. The state's inability to control the army was, to some extent, a huge issue for the country's economic recovery.

As Dagalo's paramilitary forces, the RSF, were involved in the violent crackdown, there was certain skepticism to see such an investigation carried out. Nonetheless, the agreement was made possible thanks to pressure from the international community, especially the AU and Ethiopia,³² although the Troika's statement (U.S., UK and Norway) also proved to be efficient, as they exerted pressure on the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, which then pressured al-Burhan and Dagalo to accept the transition deal.

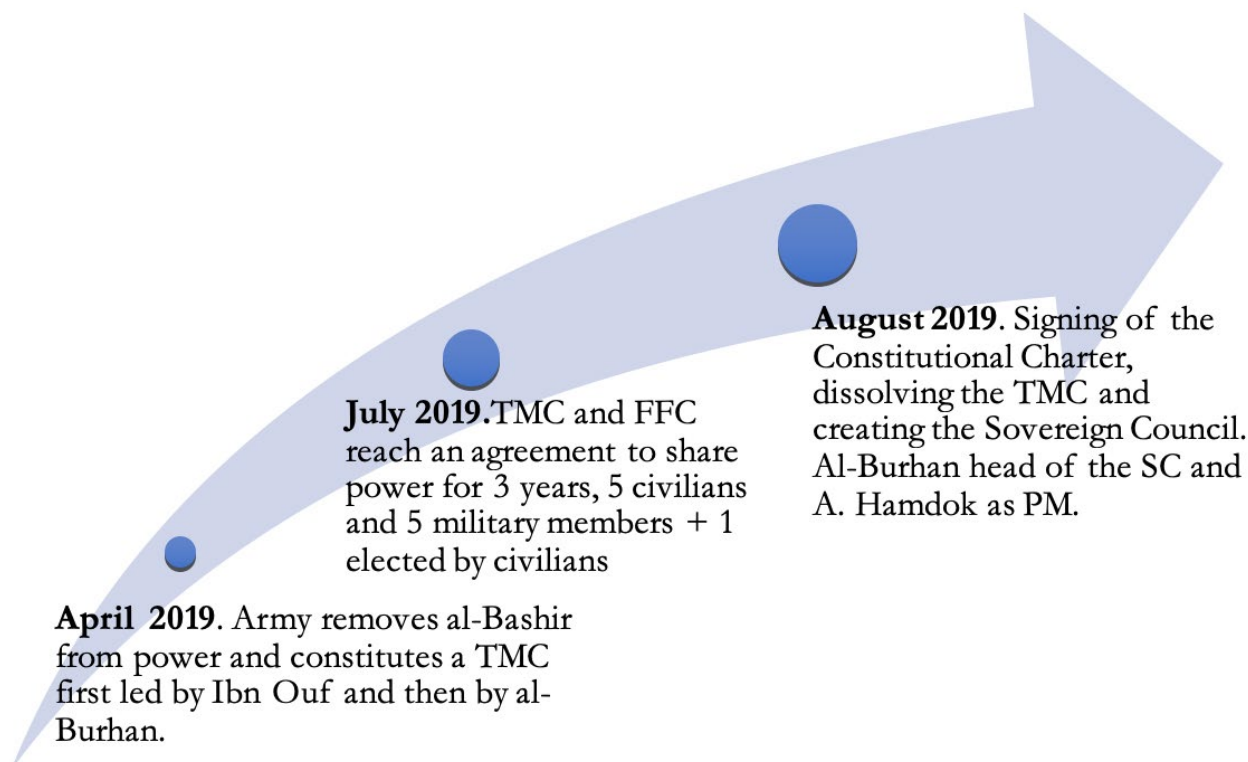
The date of the signing of the Constitutional Charter was set for August 17. The agreement was signed on August 4, and a formal signing ceremony took place on August 17, where the TMC was dissolved and a Sovereign Council was sworn in, led by Lt. General al-Burhan for the first 21 months before elections in 2022.³³ UN Economist Abdallah Hamdok was appointed by the FFC as Prime Minister, and although civilians felt relieved to have a transitional government four months after al-Bashir's ousting, there was still a feeling among opposition groups that the popular uprising had not truly materialized and had not got rid completely of the old regime.³⁴ The FFC did not receive the support of the protest movement and of opposition groups, who have announced their intention to not participate in the transitional government and/or that they do not recognize the deal sealed with the ruling generals. The SPA, the Union Gathering and the Sudan Liberation Movement all expressed doubts concerning holding accountable the military, especially the RSF led by Hemeyti, for human rights abuses committed against protesters.³⁵ Many analysts started wondering if the military was indeed willing to stick to the announced political arrangement, and if it will safeguard the revolution. Their doubts made it increasingly difficult for the Sovereign Council to strike a peace deal with rebels and militia groups, an essential step towards national unity.

32. Statement of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on the situation in Sudan, African Union, July 5 2019, available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/36976-pr-auc-sudan_05072019_.pdf

33. "Sudan transition: Lt-Gen Burhan sworn in as Sovereign Council chief,2 BBC, August 21, 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49414216>

34. "Sudan transition: Abdalla Hamdok appointed new prime minister," BBC, August 22, 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49425702>

35. "Our revolution won: Sudan's opposition lauds deal with military," Al Jazeera, July 5, 2019, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/7/5/our-revolution-won-sudans-opposition-lauds-deal-with-military>



2. Joint Transitional Government: Between Challenges and Opportunities

2.1. Unpopular yet essential economic reforms weakening the transition

Prime Minister Hamdok's most pressing issue was the economic situation, as it had triggered the revolution and the country was carrying close to \$60 billion in foreign debt³⁶. By January 2019, Sudan's annual inflation rate had reached 64.3%; in September 2019, it was reduced to 53.4%. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the government's measures to curb its spread, inflation rose to 163.26%³⁷, raising the number of food insecure people to 7 million³⁸, more than 50% above levels estimated in recent years³⁹. In an almost bankrupt country, Hamdok's cabinet had to satisfy pressing socio-economic demands to secure internal stability, a basic condition to fully implement the transition process. Sudan's economy was and still is the most fragile component of the transition.

36. Noha Elhennawy, "IMF endorses Sudan's reform plan for battered economy," The Washington Post, September 24, 2020, available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/imf-endorses-sudans-reform-plan-for-battered-economy/2020/09/24/42770a22-fe5c-11ea-b0e4-350e4e60cc91_story.html

37. Statista, Sudan: Inflation rate from 1986 to 2026, available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/727148/inflation-rate-in-sudan/>

38. "Sudan Food Security Alert: August 11, 2020," Relief Web, August 11, 2020, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-food-security-alert-august-11-2020>

39. "Sudan Situation Report, 22 April 2021 [EN/AR]", OCHA Services, Reliefweb, April 22, 2021, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-situation-report-22-april-2021-enar>

Figure 2: Inflation Rate, 1980-2020, in %

Source: World Bank, Data Bank, World Development Indicators, 2021.

To address economic priorities, Finance Minister Ibrahim Elbadawi announced a nine-month economic rescue plan with the aim of ensuring the supply of basic goods and curbing the soaring inflation, maintaining bread supplies, and petrol subsidies until at least June 2020, restructuring the budget and rationalizing spending, addressing the country's weakening currency, introducing wage increases and institutional reforms and, most importantly, creating a task force to investigate and return embezzled money to the Sudan. In the face of the impossibility of borrowing money from international financial markets to cover budget deficits, the al-Bashir government had decided to print money, ramping up the inflation. To maintain a certain social order, the government decided to maintain subsidies, which kept commodity prices down for consumers, but also led to periodic shortages of essential goods, as many actors in the supply chain smuggled the subsidized goods out of the country and sold them in neighboring countries at higher prices.⁴⁰ The state was unable to deliver cheap and available goods to the population, and this corrupt system benefited mainly the politically-connected business interests. As argued by the International Crisis Group, "through their political contacts, they have secured licenses to import commodities, profiting handsomely from preferential foreign exchange rates pegged in their favour while overstating the amount of fuel imported to benefit from the twenty-fold gap between the fuel import exchange rate and the black market rate".⁴¹ In June 2020, the IMF announced an initial agreement with the Sudanese government on a reform deal, as the country's debt reached over 190% of its GDP in 2019. Following months of negotiations, in September 2020 the IMF and the Sudanese government approved a Staff-Monitored Program (SMP), following the government's request for assistance to put in place its economic reform program.⁴² The acting Minister of Finance, Heba Mohamed, announced that through the implementation of the SMP, Sudan would be eligible for more than \$1.5 billion annually in direct

40. <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b157-financing-revival-of-sudan.pdf>

41. International Crisis Group, Financing the Revival of Sudan's Troubled Transition, Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°157, June 23, 2020, page 5, available at: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b157-financing-revival-of-sudan.pdf>

42. "IMF Board Endorses Staff-Monitored Program for Sudan," International Monetary Fund, Press Release No. 20/298, September 23, 2020, available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/09/24/pr20298-sudan-imf-board-endorses-staff-monitored-program>

development grants to stimulate investment and revive the economy.⁴³ The IMF also promised to cancel the payment of arrears in services and debt payments by Sudan. Under the 12-month SMP, covering July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021, the government reiterated its goal of eliminating fuel subsidies while increasing social spending, by introducing the Sudan Family Support Program (SFSP), and increasing health spending. The SFSP was launched following the World Bank’s signature of a \$400 million Development Policy Operation (DPO). The government also pledged to broaden the tax base.

The resulting fiscal adjustment was a critical step to reduce monetization and inflation. Moreover, both the IMF and the Sudanese government agreed that removing economic distortions coupled with measures to improve governance would reduce opportunities for corruption and help strengthen the business environment and competitiveness. In a statement, the Deputy Managing Director and Acting Chair of the IMF’s Executive Board, highlighted that “a key element to the success of the program is sufficient donor funding to support the population through the difficult transition to a well-functioning market-based economy”.⁴⁴ Keeping his promises, in December 2020 Prime Minister Hamdok decided to remove subsidies on imported gasoline and diesel, but pledged to continue to subsidize wheat, medicine, cooking gas, and electricity, despite the initial resistance of the FFC. Government-backed subsidies have, according to some estimates, absorbed more than 40% of the national budget.⁴⁵ According to acting-Finance Minister Hiba Mohamed Ali Ahmed, “by lifting subsidies, the Sudanese financial institutions were hoping to re-establish banking relations with international banks”.⁴⁶ This economic decision came at a huge socio-political cost, sparking protests and increasing the level of frustration felt by Sudanese. Indeed, the removal of the fuel subsidy resulted in higher transport costs, which in turn led to higher prices for basic goods in the market, frustrating the population and further straining the already fragile alliance between the FFC and the government. Prime Minister Hamdok’s popularity started to decline, and many Sudanese started to lose patience as the economic situation deteriorated, culminating in a failed attempt to assassinate Hamdok on March 9, 2020, in Khartoum, and in two failed coup attempts, one in June 2019 and one in September 2021.

2.2. Different power plays to “save” the Sudanese economy

The United States

The role played by the U.S. is essential in all the economic restructuring. Although the U.S. lifted most of its bilateral sanctions on Sudan in 2017, the designation of Sudan as a state sponsoring terrorism limited its potential for growth. The first step was to remove Sudan from the list of states that sponsor terrorism, on which it had been since 1993. The removal of Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism was announced in December 2020, marking a definitive break with the al-Bashir era and the beginning of a new era filled with promises of a prosperous and bright future. Removal from the list meant Sudan was allowed to finally have access to international funds and investments. Removal also put an end to an ambiguous U.S. policy towards Sudan, which treated Khartoum as both a “reliable

43. “Analyst: Khartoum economic conference ‘comes at time of disagreement’,” Radio Dabanga, September 26, 2020, available at: <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/economist-khartoum-economic-conference-comes-at-time-of-disagreement>

44. Antoinette M. Sayeh, “IMF Board Endorses Staff-Monitored Program for Sudan,” IMF, September 23, 2020, available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/09/24/pr20298-sudan-imf-board-endorses-staff-monitored-program>

45. International Crisis Group, Financing the Revival of Sudan’s Troubled Transition, Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°157, June 23, 2020, page 5, available at: <https://d2071andvipowj.cloudfront.net/b157-financing-revival-of-sudan.pdf>

46. Andres Schipani, “Sudanese citizens lose patience as economy falters,” Financial Times, January 26, 2021, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/319c1772-cb5c-42c9-b618-d80677872d90>

counterterrorism partner and a terrorist state”.⁴⁷ Most importantly, Sudan’s removal from the list also meant that the country could be included in the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Initiative, led by the IMF and the World Bank. However, the Trump administration made Sudan pay a price: it had to pay compensation to victims of the 1998 attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the bombing of the USS Cole off Yemen’s coast in 2000, and to normalize its relations with Israel as part of the Abraham Accords. The timing of these decisions came at a critical time for Hamdok, who was being criticized for his lack of progress in stabilizing of the economy. The normalization of relations with Israel came with a political cost as well, as many Sudanese believed that normalizing relations with Israel was too high a price for achieving Khartoum’s delisting. The Sudanese government was accused of being blackmailed into an agreement definitely not supported by the Sudanese public. Adding fuel to the fire, rumors started circulating claiming that al-Burhan and Hemeyti were behind the rapprochement between Sudan and Israel, triggering severe backlash from Sudanese opposition parties and civil society activists, showing the animosity between civilians and the military wing of the Sovereign Council.⁴⁸ By contrast, the agreement was a huge political win for Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu’s Africa strategy, as he managed to deepen Israel’s ties with several east African countries, including Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda and Uganda.

The European Union

Another important player is the European Union. The relationship between the EU and the Sudan during al-Bashir’s rule was difficult; the EU suspended development aid in March 1990, and after 1999 it only maintained a relationship based on humanitarian assistance. During the uprisings, the EU sided with protesters, and urged the TMC to hand over power to civilians. Following the massacre of civilians, the EU stated that the TMC was complicit in their deaths, as the TMC was the “authority in charge of protecting the population”.⁴⁹ The EU immediately reduced security cooperation with Sudan, by halting in March 2019 the training and sending of equipment to Sudanese border guards to tackle illegal migration, and deferring the construction of an intelligence center in Khartoum.⁵⁰ The relationship started improving following the composition of the Sovereign Council in August 2019. In its efforts to support a civilian-led transition, the EU pushed for the organization of two international conferences, the Sudan Partnership Conference in June 2020 and the Paris Conference in May 2021, in an attempt to raise funds to support the political and economic reforms. It also announced a €100 million package to support the civilian-led authorities in Sudan in February 2020, and €88 million in development assistance in September 2019.⁵¹

During the Paris Conference, the U.S., the United Kingdom, Sweden, France, and Ireland announced the provision of bridge loans to Sudan to help the country clear its arrears to the World Bank and African Development Bank (AfDB). This gave Sudan access to \$2 billion of conditions-based funding

47. Cameron Hudson, “What Sudan’s terror delisting really means,” Atlantic Council, December 14, 2020, available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/what-sudans-terror-delisting-really-means/>

48. Jihad Mashamoun, The Domestic Implications of Sudan Normalizing Ties with Israel, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 27, 2020, available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/82596>

Head of Sudan’s Largest Party Slams Trump and Israel Deal, Associated Press, October 24, 2020, available at: <https://apnews.com/article/race-and-ethnicity-donald-trump-israel-sudan-middle-east-%2083af13e8f2d90d479b664ddba82c8927>.

49. “Feltman: Political Transition in Sudan Serves as an Example for the Region,” Asharq al-Awsat, May 15, 2021, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2973786/feltman-political-transition-sudan-serves-example-region>

50. “EU Suspends Migration Control Projects in Sudan Amid Repression Fears,” DW, July 22, 2019, available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-suspends-migration-control-projects-in-sudan-amid-repression-fears/a-49701408>

51. “European Union announces €100 million to support the democratic transition process in Sudan,” European Commission Press Release, February 29, 2020, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_352

over two years from the World Bank and over \$200 million in AfDB grants. Aware of the socio-economic consequences of climate change in Sudan, the AfDB approved a grant of \$8.56 million to implement the Africa Disaster Risk Financing Program (ADRFi) in Sudan. The project will enhance the nation's resilience and response to climate shocks by improving the management of climate disaster risks. The five-year (2022 to 2026) project, to be implemented at a total cost of \$13.02 million, includes contributions from the Government of Sudan, as well as an in-kind contribution from the African Risk Capacity Group.⁵²

The clearing of arrears also made Sudan eligible to receive debt relief under the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative, which would eliminate \$40 billion of Sudan's external debt by the end of 2021.⁵³ At the same conference, the participant Heads of State also addressed issues including the modernization of Sudanese agriculture and poverty relief. As Sudan has huge untapped potential, including 10% of the world's unused arable land, the waters of the Blue and White Niles, abundant extractive resources, including gold, and proximity to important markets such as the Gulf, during the Paris Conference Saudi Arabia offered Khartoum \$4.5 billion in debt relief, the World Bank agreed to supply \$2 billion in grants from the Bank's International Development Association (IDA) over a ten-month period, and the African Export-Import Bank (AFREXIM) announced \$700 million in power and telecommunications projects.⁵⁴ The Sudanese government then announced that from the World Bank's grant, \$635 million would immediately be available for budget support and welfare spending.⁵⁵ Following the Paris Conference, Egypt also announced it would use its share at the IMF to help settle part of Sudan's debt. Cairo considers that its own stability and security is correlated with Sudan's, and is also increasingly seeking Sudan's support in relation to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam issue.

Furthermore, al-Burhan invited for talks the Head of the EU Delegation in Sudan, Robert van den Dool in March 2021 and asked for the EU's mediation assistance in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) dispute and urged the EU's support for the economic reform process.⁵⁶ France played an important role in ameliorating Sudan's external debt burdens, but its role cannot be analyzed without taking into account that all efforts were part of the strategic turn in France's African foreign policy, aimed at increasing its soft power in an attempt to reduce the erosion of French influence in the continent.

Gulf Countries

Other important players in the 'salvation' of the Sudanese economy were the UAE and Saudi Arabia. As previously mentioned, immediately after the ouster of al-Bashir and the formation of the TMC, al-Burhan secured \$3 billion in credit from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and there have been reports claiming that Hemeyti received arms from the UAE as well.⁵⁷ Prime Minister Hamdok's cabinet maintained and even strengthened Sudan's ties with the two Gulf countries, as Riyadh endorsed Sudan's removal

52. "Sudan: African Development Fund \$8.56 million grant to boost resilience to climate shocks, disaster risk management," Relief Web, July 10, 2021, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-african-development-fund-856-million-grant-boost-resilience-climate-shocks>

53. Mohammed Alamin and Alonso Soto, "Sudan \$60 Billion Debt in Focus at Paris Conference," Bloomberg, May 17, 2021, available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-17/sudan-s-60-billion-debt-in-focus-at-paris-investment-meeting>

54. Ibid

55. "Sudan to access \$2BN in World Bank grants after settling debts," Aljazeera, March 26, 2021, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/3/26/sudan-to-access-2b-in-world-bank-grants-after-settling-debts>

56. Mohammed Amin Yassin, "US, EU to Mediate in GERD dispute," Asharq al-Awsat, March 30, 2021, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2890281/us-eu-mediate-gerd-dispute>

57. Jean-Baptiste Gallopin, "The Great Game of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in Sudan," POMEPS <https://pomeps.org/the-great-game-of-the-uae-and-saudi-arabia-in-sudan>

from the U.S. list of states sponsoring terrorism in November 2019,⁵⁸ and both Abu Dhabi and Riyadh provided humanitarian assistance to Khartoum during the flood season and in order to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Sudan also received a \$400 million joint Saudi-Emirati investment to modernize its agriculture sector.⁵⁹ Most recently, Saudi Arabia held talks with Sudan on investments projects, and on the kingdom's willingness to transform the Red Sea into a "large development area to eradicate the roots of terrorism and poverty and increase tourism".⁶⁰ Riyadh also offered its help to alleviate Sudan's external debt burden, as Saudi Arabia is Khartoum's third largest creditor with \$4.6 billion in outstanding loans. The Saudi Finance Minister also offered to help Sudan renegotiate its debt with China, Kuwait, the UAE, and Japan, and stated that his country would work with the IMF to eliminate Sudan's external debt burden.⁶¹

In return, Saudi Arabia and the UAE expanded their engagement with Sudan on regional security issues. As a member of the Saudi Arabia-led Council of Arab and African States, Sudan welcomed Faisal bin Farhan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, in December 2020 to discuss Red Sea security, and Saudi Arabia publicly aligned with Egypt and Sudan on the GERD dispute, although it also offered to mediate in the tripartite crisis involving Addis Ababa, Cairo and Khartoum.⁶² On the other hand, the UAE has been more cautious in its foreign policy. Abu Dhabi publicly emphasized its impartiality on the GERD, and attempted to mediate in the conflict as well, a proposition firmly rejected by Ethiopia, which insists that the solution can only be African. Following the border dispute between Sudan and Ethiopia over al-Fashaga, the UAE also offered to mediate, another suggestion welcomed by Sudan at the beginning, but rejected shortly after amid claims that Sudan wants to place border markers before initiating any negotiations on this matter.⁶³

The rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and the UAE did not mean that Sudan downgraded its ties with Qatar and Turkey, although its partnerships with the two countries were disrupted by al-Bashir's ousting. Indeed, Turkey had signed a 99-year lease in 2018 to develop the island of Suakin, in a move many perceived as a way to extend its influence amid "increasingly bitter rivalries".⁶⁴ Shortly after al-Bashir's ousting, Turkey announced it will stay in Suakin for "civilian purposes", prompting rumors that the TMC had rejected Ankara's aspiration of building a military base. Following the massacre of civilians, Turkey strengthened its ties with civilians, marking the clear tensions between Ankara and Hemeyti's RSF, who were deployed with Haftar's ranks in Libya and fought against Turkish forces.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Turkey sent regular provisions of medical aid and electricity

58. "Saudi Arabia Says it Seeks Removal of Sudan from US Terror List," Al Jazeera, October 6, 2019 available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/6/saudi-arabia-says-it-seeks-removal-of-sudan-from-us-terror-list>

59. "Sudan to Receive \$400 Million from Saudi Arabia, UAE for Agriculture," Voice of America, April 11, 2021, available at: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/sudan-receive-400-million-saudi-arabia-uae-agriculture-state-media-says>

60. "Sudan, Saudi Arabia discuss Red Sea investments," The Arab Weekly, March 10, 2021, available at: <https://theArabweekly.com/sudan-saudi-arabia-discuss-red-sea-investments>

61. "Saudi Arabia to Help Sudan Cut Debts from UAE, Kuwait, China and Japan," Arab News, May 20, 2021, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1861721/business-economy>

62. 12 Mohammed Amin Yassin, "Saudi Arabia, Sudan Discuss Red Sea Security", Asharq al-Awsat, December 9, 2020 <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2672431/saudi-arabia-sudan-discuss-red-sea-security>

13 "Saudi Arabia Making Low-Key Contact with Egypt-Sudan over Nile Dispute with Ethiopia: Reports," The New Arab, March 24, 2021, available at: <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/saudi-arabia-attempting-mediate-dispute-between-nile-countries>

63. "Sudan backs UAE mediation in disputes with Ethiopia," The Arab Weekly, March 24, 2021, available at: <https://theArabweekly.com/sudan-backs-uae-mediation-disputes-ethiopia>

"Khartoum Rejects UAE's Initiative on Border Standoff with Ethiopia," Asharq Al-Awsat, April 16, 2021, available at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2922256/khartoum-rejects-uae's-initiative-border-standoff-ethiopia>

64. Mohammed Amin, "Suakin: 'Forgotten' Sudanese island becomes focus for Red Sea rivalries," Middle East Eye, March 19, 2018, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/news/suakin-island-sudan-turkey-saudi-arabia-egypt-394055164>

65. "1,000 Sudanese militiamen arrive in Libya," Dabanga Sudan, July 25, 2019, available at: <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/1-000-sudanese-militiamen-arrive-in-libya>

shipments to Sudan, and trade between the two countries increased from \$398 million in 2019 to \$481 million in 2020, whilst maintaining the Turkey-Sudan Trade Economic Partnership Agreement signed in 2018. The developments in Libya that led to the establishment of Libya's Government of National Unity appear to have reduced tensions between Hemeyti and Ankara. Interested in the vast arable land in Sudan, Turkey signed in June 2021 with Sudan an agriculture cooperation protocol, reviving the 2014 agriculture cooperation agreement that gave the Turkish General Directorate of Agricultural Enterprises and even Turkish companies several options to operate in Sudan.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, the relationship between Sudan's civilian authorities and Qatar started improving in 2020, as when al-Bashir was ousted and the military got in power, they refused receiving a Qatari delegation headed by Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani.⁶⁷ In October 2020, Doha sent food and humanitarian aid to flood victims in Sudan's West Kordofan region,⁶⁸ and, following the 2021 Al-Ula Agreement between Gulf countries to end the Saudi-led blockade against Qatar, it appears that Sudanese civilian and military authorities made amends in terms of their engagement with Doha. Hemeyti met with the Qatari Emir for the first time on January 31, 2021, and in April, al-Burhan revived 36 agreements with Qatar signed during al-Bashir's presidency, which according to estimates could expand Qatari investments beyond their current \$3.8 billion level.⁶⁹

In 2019, Saudi investments in Sudan were estimated at \$12 billion, the UAE at \$7 billion, and Qatar at \$4 billion, as per the Sudanese Bureau of Statistics.⁷⁰

2.3. Between Gains and Set-backs

After all the hardships that came with years of negotiations, clearance of arrears by different countries, and successful completion of the first six-month SMP, Sudan's government was relieved after the IMF Executive Board and the World Bank agreed to make Sudan eligible for debt relief under the HIPC Initiative, a two-step milestone-based framework.⁷¹ However, this relief was not shared by the population, which had been significantly impacted by the reform program, despite receiving benefits under the SFSP. The World Bank estimates that over 50% of the population is experiencing severe food insecurity.⁷² Hence, the situation in the country remains extremely fragile, increasing risks to the program. The overall slowness of the international community's response to the Sudanese economic hardships has tied Prime Minister Hamdok's hands.

66. "Turkey, Sudan sign agriculture cooperation protocol," Anadolu Agency, June 30, 2021, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkey-sudan-sign-agriculture-cooperation-protocol/2289427>

67. "Sudan authorities refuse to receive Qatari delegation headed by foreign minister," Al-Arabiya English, April 17, 2019, available at: <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2019/04/17/Sudan-authorities-refuse-to-receive-Qatari-delegation-headed-by-foreign-minister>

68. "Urgent relief from Qatar charity for those affected by floods in Sudan," Relief Web, October 26, 2020, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/urgent-relief-qatar-charity-those-affected-floods-sudan>

69. "Sudan Agrees to Reactivate Agreements with Qatar in First Post-Revolution Meeting," The New Arab, April 9, 2021, available at: <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2021/4/9/sudan-agrees-to-reactivate-agreements-with-qatar>

70. Julietta Mirghani, "How the End of the Gulf Crisis Affects Sudan," Fair Observer, April 9, 2021, available at: <https://www.fairobserver.com/region/africa/julietta-mirghani-gulf-qatar-crisis-saudi-arabia-uae-sudan-arab-world-news-86914/>

71. "IMF and World Bank Consider Sudan Eligible for Assistance Under the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative," The World Bank Press Release, March 26, 2021, available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/03/26/imf-and-world-bank-consider-sudan-eligible-for-assistance-under-the-enhanced-heavily-indebted-poor-countries-hipc-initia>

72. "Sudan: First Review Under the Staff-Monitored Program-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Sudan" IMF Staff Country Reports, No. 2021/082, April 21, 2021, p. 7, available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2021/04/21/Sudan-First-Review-Under-the-Staff-Monitored-Program-Press-Release-Staff-Report-and-50176>

Finally, another important economic reform to be carried out is the de-militarization of the economy. The army currently controls a number of sectors, including the two most lucrative export products—sesame and gum arabic—neither of which are taxed by the state. The Sudanese military is not only a fighting force, it also has enormous control over many key sectors of the Sudanese economy, and until that is dismantled, it will not be easy for the Sudanese economy to recover.⁷³ On March 17, 2021, an important step was taken: the Sudanese interim authorities agreed to transfer military-owned commercial companies to the control of civilian-headed government ministries.⁷⁴ However, despite the fact that the decision is encouraging, the agreement contained little, if any, detail on how and when the restructuring of the companies will be done. Hemeysi, who used to control gold mines in Jebel Amar, decided to hand over the mining areas, which allowed the government to include gold mining revenues in the state's budget starting from 2020.⁷⁵ Whilst the RSF controlled Jebel Amer, the UAE was the world's largest importer of Sudanese gold. In January, Sudan allowed private traders to export 70% of their gold production in an attempt to crack down on smuggling and attract much-needed foreign currency. The remaining 30% must be sold to the central bank.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, examples of military divestment show that the restructuring is often partial or incomplete, such as in Turkey.⁷⁷

2.4. Fragile internal situation

Prime Minister Hamdok has also made social cohesion one of his government's top priorities. A main aim was to secure a peace deal with rebels within the first six months of the transition. Peace talks started in September 2019 in Juba, South Sudan, with the aim of signing a peace deal in exchange for the safe participation of rebel leaders in the national political process in Khartoum. The negotiations were mediated by South Sudan. The challenge was considerable as the transitional government agreed on integrating rebels into the political process, include fighters in the security forces, through disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs, without bloating the military and draining the treasury, while redressing the imbalance between the country's periphery and the center and finding the funds to carry out development projects.

73. Yezid Sayigh, "Sudan's Military Companies Go Civilian: How the Recent Divestment Agreement Can Succeed," Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, April 23, 2021, available at: <https://carnegie-mec.org/2021/04/23/sudan-s-military-companies-go-civilian-how-recent-divestment-agreement-can-succeed-pub-84374>

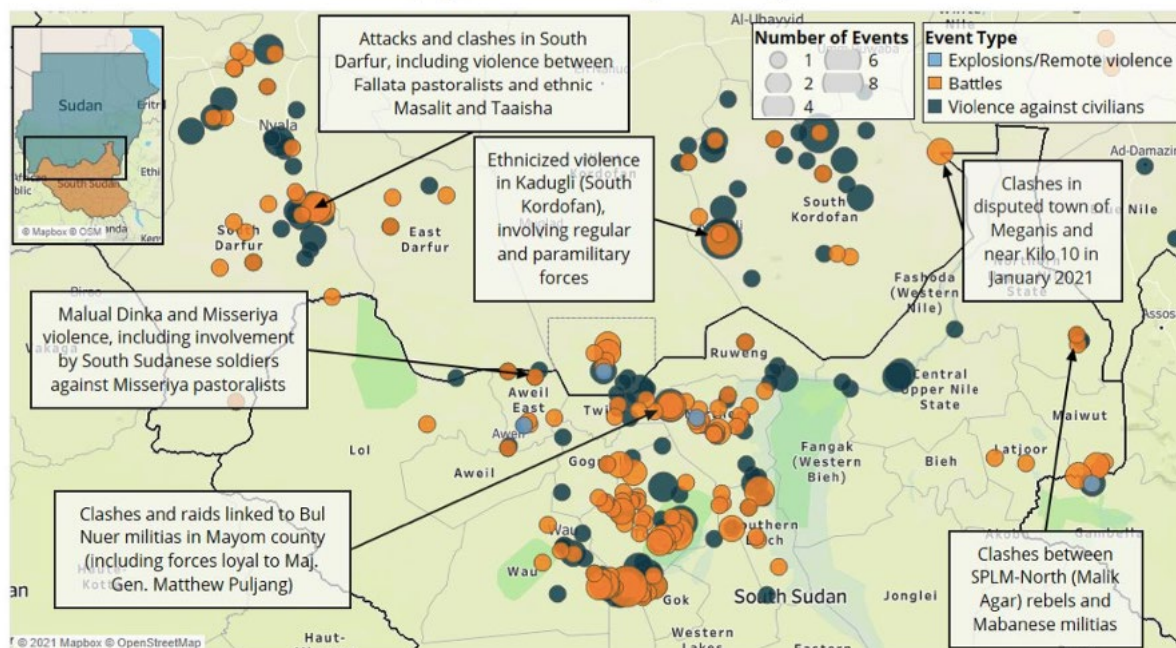
74. "Sudanese military company to give up its civilian operations," Reuters, March 17, 2021, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-economy-military-idUSKBN2B92K5>

75. Ruth Michaelson, "Militia strike gold to cast a shadow over Sudan's hope of prosperity," The Guardian, February 10, 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/10/militia-strike-gold-to-cast-a-shadow-over-sudans-hopes-of-prosperity>

76. Ali Mirghani & Khalid Abdelaziz, "Sudan opens up gold market in bid to raise revenue," Reuters, January 9, 2020, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-gold/sudan-opens-up-gold-market-in-bid-to-raise-revenue-idUSKBN1Z81M2>

77. Zeinab Abul-Magd, Ismet Akça, Shana Marshall, "Two Paths to Dominance: Military Businesses in Turkey and Egypt", Carnegie Middle East Center, June 3, 2020, available at: <https://carnegie-mec.org/2020/06/03/two-paths-to-dominance-military-businesses-in-turkey-and-egypt-pub-81869>

Organized Political Violence near the Sudan-South Sudan Border (1 Jan 2020 - 15 Jan 2021)



The Juba Peace Agreement was signed on October 3, 2020, after almost a year of negotiations. It contains a series of accords covering power and wealth sharing, land reform, transitional justice, security arrangements, and the return of displaced persons⁷⁸. Furthermore, it extended the transitional period by 39 months, postponing elections to early 2024. However, the two most powerful rebel movements, an SPLA/M-N faction led by al-Hilu operating in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile, and an SLA/M faction led by al-Nur, which operates in central Darfur, have rejected being part of the agreement as they denounce the security forces' continued dominance in the transitional government and they insist on maintaining a national dialogue before signing a peace deal⁷⁹. In early February 2021, representatives of armed groups from Darfur and the Two Areas (South Kordofan and the Blue Nile) were appointed to the prime minister's cabinet and to the Sovereign Council, and they were promised seats in the legislative council once it is formed. Nonetheless, integrating former fighters into the security forces comes with its share of challenges, as they would increase the number of officers within these forces and strengthen them, adding more pressure to an already strained public budget, and on the civilian cabinet members who carry the weight of reforming a political system historically dominated by the army, which still controls an important part of the country's political economy. The prime minister also reshuffled his cabinet by bringing in 25 ministers (including rebels and members of armed groups), to focus on economic reforms, peace-building, foreign policy goals, restructuring civilian and military entities, and achieving justice for the victims of civil wars in the country. He also announced the appointment of civilian rulers for different states and the creation of a transitional legislative assembly⁸⁰.

78. Peter Fabricius, "Is Khartoum's change of government enough to overcome the fact that two important armed groups didn't sign?," Institute for Security Studies, September 4, 2020, available at: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/all-eyes-on-sudans-peace-deal-with-armed-groups?utm_source=BenchmarkEmail&utm_campaign=ISS_Today&utm_medium=email

79. "Interview with Sudan Liberation Movement leader El Nur: Paris meeting with Hamdok 'friendly and frank'", Radio Dabanga, October 3, 2020, available at: <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/interview-with-sudan-liberation-movement-leader-el-nur-paris-meeting-with-hamdok-friendly-and-frank>

80. O Samy Magdy, "Sudan's PM reshuffles Cabinet to add rebel ministers," February 8, 2021, available at: <https://apnews.com/article/sudan-cabinets-2de07f4dee9d0d4e6d26582831e05b8a>

Despite the initial euphoria surrounding the agreement, it is worth noting that this accord could throw up new problems for an already-fragile transitional government. Indeed, politicians from other parts of the country have protested, claiming that the transitional authorities have only focused on Darfur and the Two Areas, maintain the marginalization of other parts of the country. The feeling of ‘not belonging’ has pushed the Beja leaders to engage in a blockade (since September 2021) of Sudan’s main port, Port Sudan, causing shortages of wheat and fuel oil for power generation, as a protest to draw attention to the issues affecting the eastern tribe⁸¹.

On another hand, the transitional government kept its promise of holding accountable the officers who killed civilians in 2019. In August 2021, a Sudanese court sentences to death six officers in the paramilitary RSF for the killing of six students who were protesting against economic hardship during the power-sharing negotiations between civilians and the military. The prosecution of personnel from the RSF, commanded by Hemeyti, himself deputy head of the transitional governing body, was perceived by many as a real commitment to democratization from the transitional government. The alliance between Hemeyti and rebel factions that were once on opposite sides in Darfur has also been surprising, but a number of issues have pushed both to form a pragmatic political alliance, based on a shared mistrust of the center and a sense of marginalization as they were part of the ‘periphery’⁸². It is also surprising since Hemeyti rejected the idea of integrating the RSF within a regular army, claiming that “the RSF is established under a law passed by an elected parliament. It’s not a battalion ... to be integrated into the army”⁸³. Indeed, their merger with the national army would eliminate the group’s financial and political autonomy, things Hemeyti is not willing to give up. The one reform both Hamdok and al-Burhan agreed on is the need to integrate the RSF, but following the attempted coup on September 21, 2021, it appears that al-Burhan has aligned with Hemeyti again, claiming that the failed coup attempt was the civilians’ fault, as they have been neglecting public welfare and are incapable of restructuring the economy⁸⁴. Furthermore, both military figures condemned the lack of respect for the military, and accused the civilian members of the Sovereign Council of “squabbling and quarrelling over positions instead of working for the future of the country”⁸⁵. The FFC issued a statement claiming that the military leaders’ statement is a “direct threat to the democratic transition as they attempt to create a rift between the forces of the civil revolution and the armed forces of the people”, and even the Sudanese Congress Party stated that “the failure to handle the growing insecurity in large parts of the country in a systematic manner and prevent repeated coup attempts,” and called for “the unification of the armed forces under auspices of a professional military institution”⁸⁶.

The FFC, the SPA, resistance committees, unions and other civil society organisations called for a ‘million-man march’ on October 21 against the military. The Sudanese Journalists Network also condemned the military leaders’ statement and considers it to be “an advanced step towards the seizure of power”, whilst the Democratic Lawyers Alliance raised questions about why the information

81. “Sudan says running low on fuel oil and wheat due to port blockade,” Reuters, October 10, 2021, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sudan-says-running-low-fuel-oil-wheat-due-port-blockade-2021-10-09/>

82. International Crisis Group, *The Rebels Come to Khartoum: How to Implement Sudan’s New Peace Agreement*. Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°168, February 23, 2021, available at: https://d2071andvipowj.cloudfront.net/b168-sudans-new-peace-agreement_0.pdf

83. “Sudan’s transition faces hurdle of merging paramilitary into army,” France 24, June 28, 2021, available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210628-sudan-s-transition-faces-hurdle-of-merging-paramilitary-into-army>

84. “Sudan’s military criticizes civilian politicians after coup attempt,” Reuters, September 22, 2021, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sudans-military-strikes-out-civilian-politicians-after-coup-attempt-2021-09-22/>

85. “Sudan revolutionaries urge reform of the armed forces,” Dabanga Sudan, September 24, 2021, available at: <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-revolutionaries-urge-reform-of-the-armed-forces>

86. “SudanUprising Report: Build-up to the military coup of 25 October,” Sudan in the News, November 6, 2021, available at: <https://www.sudaninthenews.com/political-briefings>

about the coup attempt only came from the military itself and why the names of perpetrators have not been made public⁸⁷. Tensions between the military and civilian partners also added a considerable layer of fragility to the transitional government, but so did the tensions within the civilian camp. Unless the latter can come together to form a unified front and agree on a clear structure of leadership, they will keep finding themselves vulnerable to the military establishment, which is using these politics of division to appear as a unified force that can safeguard the revolution⁸⁸. Within this power struggle, the military won the support of different groups that were once on the civilian side. Twenty Sudanese parties and armed movements that split from the FFC announced the creation of a ‘Charter of National Accord’, started calling themselves the ‘Reform Movement’, and denounced the marginalization they suffered during the transitional period. They also accused the FFC of being monopolized by centric and urban political parties, including the Sudanese Congress Party, the Umma Party and the Arab Socialist Baath Party—Region of Sudan, and the Federal Gathering. Prominent forces that have signed the declaration include the Sudan Liberation Army led by Minni Arko Minawi, the governor of Darfur, and the Justice and Equality Movement led by Jibril Ibrahim, the Minister of Finance, both part of Darfuri armed organizations that fought against the al-Bashir regime⁸⁹.

On another hand, civilians have claimed and attached a particular importance to al-Bashir’s trial. In April 2019, when the former President was ousted, protesters outside the military headquarters claimed that in order for them to believe that changes are underway under a TMC, they needed to see proof of the imprisonment of al-Bashir, and that justice will come to those who carried out atrocities under his regime⁹⁰. In May 2019, he was charged with incitement and involvement in the killing of protesters. In December 2019, al-Bashir was convicted on corruption charges and a Sudanese court sentenced him to two years of detention. He was also questioned on his role in the 1989 military coup that brought him to power. Anger mounted in the streets when it was reported that when he was toppled, millions of euros and Sudanese pounds were found in his residence, which were later seized by the authorities. Nonetheless, during his trial, about 3,000 of his supporters rallied in the center of Khartoum⁹¹.

In August 4, 2021, Sudan decided to sign and ratify the Rome Statute, and handed over to the International Criminal Court (ICC) former officials accused of corruption and crimes in Darfur. Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman or ‘Ali Kushayb’, surrendered himself voluntarily to the ICC in June 2020. The charges against him were confirmed by a pre-trial chamber in July 2021, and include 31 counts for crimes allegedly committed between 2002 and 2003. Ahmad Muhammad Harun was jointly charged along with Ali Kushayb, but the cases have been separated. The Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, in her last address to the UN Security Council on June 9, 2021, expressed the wish for the transfer of Harun to The Hague, in order for the case to be joined with that of Ali Kushayb. During her visit to Sudan, she also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Sudanese government in February 2021, which pledged greater cooperation and access to ICC teams for the investigations⁹².

87. Ibid.

88. Mat Nashed, “Sudan security forces resist calls for civilian control,” Al-Monitor, October 3, 2021, available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/sudan-security-forces-resist-calls-civilian-control>

89. Haitham Nouri, “Dèjà vu in Sudan?,” Ahram Online, October 6, 2021, available at: <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/426390.aspx>

Zeinab Mohammed Salih, “Sudan transition at ‘critical juncture’ as power struggle deepens,” Al Jazeera, October 21, 2021, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/20/sudan-transition-at-critical-juncture-as-power-struggle-deepens>

90. Alastair Leithead, “Sudan stand-off after Omar al-Bashir ousted,” BBC Africa, April 18, 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47980568>

91. “Ousted Sudan president Bashir convicted for corruption,” Euronews with Reuters, December 12, 2019, available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2019/12/14/ousted-sudan-president-bashir-convicted-for-corruption>

92. Priya Pillai, “Sudan, the International Criminal Court and Omar Al Bashir,” OpinioJuris, August 6, 2021, available at: <http://opiniojuris.org/2021/08/06/sudan-the-international-criminal-court-and-omar-al-bashir/>

When Hamdok's government announced that it was ready to transfer al-Bashir to the ICC, alongside other of his military officers who committed atrocities, the news were received with mixed feelings; some people were content with the decision while others promised to take revenge. The possible transfer of al-Bashir did give hope that the estimated 300,000 people who died during the conflict in Darfur will receive some justice. However, following the military takeover of power, the future of al-Bashir remains uncertain, although it is more likely al-Burhan will decide to not transfer the former president.

What is clear is that supporters of al-Bashir have also expressed their support for the military, after weeks of high tension between the military and civilian authorities. The reciprocal accusations about the transition's failure made by the military on one side and civilian authorities on the other, have shown the division within the ruling parties, but also the deep polarization within Sudanese society. Indeed, during October 2021, Sudanese streets were flooded with two types of protestors⁹³: pro-civilian government who claimed to support democracy; and pro-military government who perceive the army as the only body capable of restoring order and bringing peace and prosperity⁹⁴. On October 26, following weeks of unrest, al-Burhan decided to dissolve the country's power-sharing agreement and declared a State of Emergency. He justified the army's move by stating that reforms are not moving fast enough and that the military has been excluded from the process. Moreover, his move came shortly after he had asked Prime Minister Hamdok to support the army's takeover, which the UN economist refused and instead called on pro-democracy protestors to continue protesting peacefully. Hamdok's refusal led to his and his wife's arrest by the army, alongside numerous other arrests of civilian government ministers and officials, all held at an undisclosed location allegedly "for their own safety"⁹⁵. Al-Burhan, head of the Sovereign Council, also suspended different articles of the constitution⁹⁶. As of October 26, 2021, clashes between soldiers and street protestors have resulted in the death of seven people and 140 injured⁹⁷. The military takeover threatens end Sudan's path to democracy, and the military has already declared it will rule on its own, leaving the country's future and the possible celebration of free elections completely uncertain (elections were scheduled for July 2023). The military takeover could also provoke a complete halt of international donor support and the IMF debt relief package, worsening an already catastrophic economic situation. The U.S. has already suspended \$700 million in aid to Sudan, of which \$400 million was for the Family Support Plan, aimed to help the poorest of the poor. The African Union first expressed its "deep dismay" and urged the resumption of talks between civilians and the army, before it decided to suspend the Sudan; the UK's Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan denounced the military coup and stated that it is "impossible to be committed to Constitutional Document while dissolving transitional institutions and arresting leading civilian politicians⁹⁸"; the EU, UN and the Arab League have also expressed "deep concern"; the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which Hamdok currently chairs, called for the prime minister's release and for continued dialogue to "save the transition"; and the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry released a statement claiming it will "continue to stand firm with the democratic aspirations of the people of Sudan".

93. Khalid Abdelaziz, "Mass protests held in Sudan against prospect of military rule," Reuters, October 22, 2021, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/mass-protests-sudan-against-prospect-military-rule-2021-10-21/>

94. Khalid Abdelaziz, "Sudan's Burhan says army ousted government to avoid civil war," Reuters, October 27, 2021, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/telecommunications-interrupted-sudan-after-coup-2021-10-26/>

95. "Sudan's PM Hamdok at my home, says military leader al-Burhan," Al Jazeera, October 26, 2021, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/26/sudans-pm-hamdok-at-my-home-says-military-leader-al-burhan>

96. "Sudan coup: Which constitutional articles have been suspended?," Al Jazeera, October 26, 2021, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/26/sudan-coup-which-constitutional-articles-suspended>

97. Khalid Abdelaziz, "Seven killed, 140 hurt in protests against Sudan military coup," Reuters, October 26, 2021, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/military-forces-arrest-senior-civilian-figures-sudan-al-hadath-tv-2021-10-25/>

98. Robert Fairweather, [@RobertF40396660], October 25, 2021, "U.K. denounces Sudan military coup. Impossible to be committed to Constitutional Document while dissolving transitional institutions and arresting leading civilian politicians" [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/RobertF40396660/status/1452645515255025665>

Some have reported the possible involvement of Egypt in the coup, drawing parallels between what happened in Egypt in 2014 and the current Sudanese situation. Whilst it is true that the two countries have coordinated their regional policies, and have also signed military and security agreements that included joint military trainings, there is no clear evidence of Egyptian involvement in the army's takeover of power, if not solely the proximity of al-Burhan with the Egyptian establishment.

3. Recommendations

The uncertainty surrounding the Sudanese transition should push the African Union to play a more proactive role, and not limit itself to Sudan's suspension. During the uprisings in 2019, the AU was deeply engaged in Sudan through the AU High Level Implementation Panel for Sudan (AUHIP), the AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), and its liaison office in Khartoum. It even appointed a special envoy who worked alongside the Ethiopian special envoy to help the military and civilian protest leaders agree on a transition plan. The AU also supported the removal of Sudan from the List of State Sponsors of Terrorism through the many appeals channeled by the AU Peace and Security Council to the international community and the U.S. in particular. However, the UNAMID's mandate will end in December 2021, and the AU has not yet presented a strategy on how it will continue to support the Sudanese political transition. Therefore, the AU must sustain its political and technical efforts to provide multi-dimensional support to Sudan. To do so, it should first appoint a special envoy to Sudan, and not only rely on the AU High Representative for the Horn of Africa, and strengthen the AU Liaison Office in Sudan by giving it the necessary human and financial resources to play a meaningful role in the implementation of peace agreements. The AU must also put more effort into mediating between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia on the GERD, and help broker a deal between Sudan and Ethiopia over the border demarcation.

The international community, especially the Troika composed by the U.S., UK and Norway, has a special responsibility to continue supporting the civilian leadership in order to ensure a peaceful and effective democratic transition. It must also commit to supporting the implementation of peace agreements and help support the transitional government to strengthen the protection of civilians, including through technical advice and capacity-building support. Moreover, the international community must encourage foreign companies to invest in Sudan, as improving the Sudanese economy is intrinsically linked to the democratic process. Foreign investment could also help Sudan reduce its dependence on aid.

Furthermore, Sudan's partners must undertake a sustained diplomatic campaign to preserve the sovereignty of the region's states, and pressure Gulf countries to avoid making the Horn of Africa a battleground for their competition.

The UN and its member states should increase their financial support to address Sudan's peacebuilding and development needs, and also strengthen the cooperation on Sudan between the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council. The UN should also be more engaged in the political transition and pressure both civilians and the military to reach an agreement.

Conclusion

Today, more than two years after al-Bashir's ousting, the democratic transition in Sudan seems to be as fragile as it was at the outset. Since al-Bashir's ousting, the civilian government has tried to take one step at a time, but patience is not always perceived as a virtue by the population. The polarization of the Sudanese society is increasing, threatening the country's stability and unity.

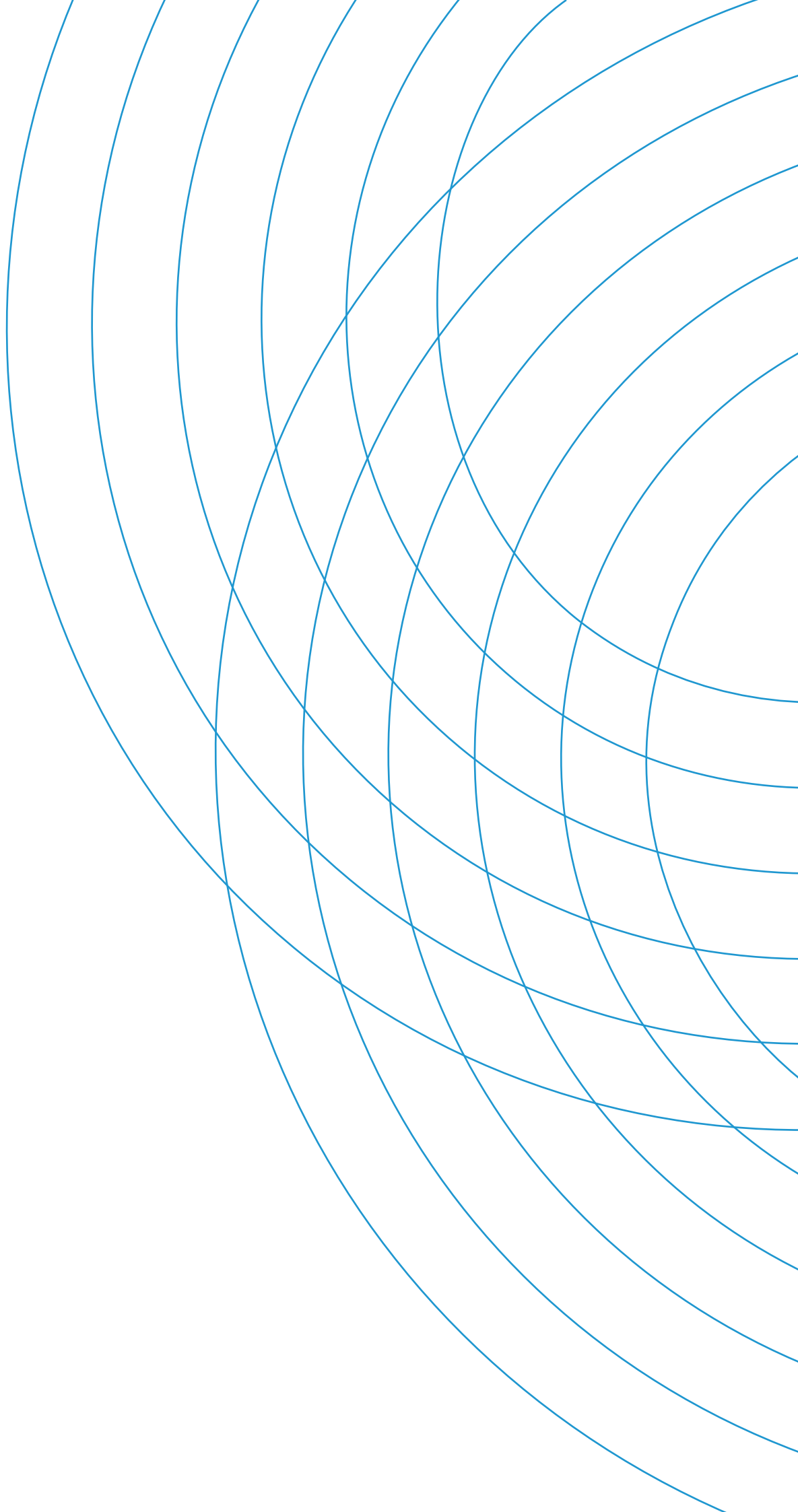
Moreover, how power sharing between rebels and the military government evolves is also an element of concern, as some rebels share a feeling of mistrust towards the military faction of the transitional government, and another part is close to Hemeyti, who brought rebel factions close to his own camp, which may tilt the balance of power within the transitional government away from civilians and towards the military wing of the transitional government. In both cases, the Juba agreements could alter the balance of power in Sudan's transitional government. Deconstructing and restructuring al-Bashir's marginalization of non-Arab individuals from power is a huge challenge for the transitional coalition, as resentment and frustrations are high, and the different power politics they are embarking on are concerning. There is also a risk linked to the end of the mandate of the UN-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), as there could be a renewal of intercommunal violence. The border tensions with Ethiopia could also escalate, especially as the al-Fashaga territory is very fertile agricultural land and many international powers—mainly France, the Gulf countries and Turkey—have expressed their interest in investing in Sudanese agriculture. Moreover, a direct conflict between Ethiopia and Sudan could have a spill-over effect on the region, as it could push Egypt to intervene in favor of Sudan and Eritrea to back Ethiopia. It is imperative to prevent further hostilities, and the AU, the UAE, the EU, the UK, and the U.S. should encourage negotiations between the two parties in order to avoid escalation, and also to pressure the two countries to engage more constructively on other divisive issues, especially on the GERD.

Furthermore, Sudan's international partners should continue to accelerate the provision of financial and technical support for the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement, as its success will help the country move to more stable and representative governance. Nonetheless, Sudan should not become the battleground of different powers aiming to develop their own plans and advance their own agendas, as was the case at the beginning of the Sudanese revolution in 2018-2019. Sudan appears to be at a crossroads in which the transitional government must face fundamental choices that will decide the country's future for decades to come, and the international community has a critical role to play to support the choice of the Sudanese to build a democratic, fair, and stable country, but also to avoid the trajectory of the country's historical transitions, in which the military always ends up taking power.

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