



# Safeguarding Sudan's Revolution

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*Preventing War. Shaping Peace.*

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	i
I. Introduction .....	1
II. From Crisis to Coup, Crackdown and Compromise.....	3
III. A Factional Security Establishment in a Time of Transition .....	10
A. Key Players and Power Centres .....	11
1. Burhan and the military .....	11
2. Hemedti and the Rapid Support Forces .....	12
3. Gosh and the National Intelligence and Security Services .....	15
B. Two Steps Toward Security Sector Reform .....	17
IV. The Opposition .....	19
A. An Uneasy Alliance .....	19
B. Splintered Rebels .....	21
V. Islamist Organisations on the Sidelines – for Now.....	24
VI. The Role of External Actors.....	26
A. Regional Mediation Efforts.....	26
B. Western Coordination with the Gulf States and Egypt .....	27
VII. Nurturing a Fragile Deal .....	29
A. Supporting the Transition Economically and Diplomatically.....	29
B. Seizing the Moment to End Sudan’s Internal Wars .....	33
VIII. Conclusion .....	35
APPENDICES	
A. Map of Sudan.....	36
B. Acronyms.....	37
C. About the International Crisis Group .....	38
D. Crisis Group Reports and Briefings on Africa since 2016.....	39
E. Crisis Group Board of Trustees .....	42

# Principal Findings

**What's new?** Since Omar al-Bashir's 11 April ouster, Sudan's military leadership and opposition alliance have appointed a new prime minister, formed a cabinet and assembled a supervisory council to oversee a power-sharing deal concluded on 17 August. If honoured, the deal could pave the way for elections and civilian rule.

**Why does it matter?** Sudan faces a crushing economic crisis, insurgencies and political polarisation, with a security establishment bent on keeping power and an opposition movement determined to instal a fully civilian administration. The 17 August agreement represents the best pathway both to achieving reform and to averting spiralling violence.

**What should be done?** The AU, U.S. and EU, together with Gulf states, should push the generals to respect the power-sharing deal. They should encourage Khartoum to make peace with insurgents in peripheral areas. The U.S. should rescind Sudan's state sponsor of terrorism designation while maintaining pressure on the military in other ways.

## *Executive Summary*

Sudan has swung between hope and despair since 11 April, when the most sustained civilian protest movement in the country's modern history swept Omar al-Bashir from power. Many Sudanese celebrated Bashir's ouster, seeing him as responsible for economic ruin and severe rights abuses. But the generals who sought to placate the demonstrators by deposing Bashir have shown reluctance to cede power. The security forces' brutal 3 June attack on protesters in Khartoum repulsed the world and galvanised support for mediation that yielded a power-sharing agreement on 17 August. Still, more outside support is needed to keep the transition on track. The African Union (AU) should appoint an envoy to help bridge the gap of mistrust between parties. For their part, Western powers should signal willingness to open the taps of badly needed financial support, encourage Khartoum to make peace with rebel factions on Sudan's periphery, and sustain pressure on the generals' Gulf allies to ensure that all sides abide by the deal Sudan needs to move ahead after Bashir's rule.

There have been encouraging steps since the military leadership and civilian opposition signed a constitutional declaration sealing the power-sharing agreement at a ceremony by the Nile in Khartoum. The parties named representatives to an eleven-member sovereign council that is to steer the country to free elections over the 39 months following 17 August. A widely respected economist, Abdalla Hamdok, became prime minister four days after the ceremony, and a new cabinet took office on 8 September. But the generals continue to wield enormous influence, and they have shown few signs that they intend to respect the Sudanese people's demand for a civilian-led administration. In Sudan's lopsided, patronage-driven economy, the top brass has a clear interest in clinging to political power.

That is just one challenge among many. In addition to being a potential spoiler, the security establishment is fragmented, unaccountable and subject to dangerous internecine rivalries. The once-dominant army has lost its primacy to the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group formed from the remnants of the Janjaweed militia of Darfur infamy and run by Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti", who may be the most powerful man in Sudan. The country's primary military and paramilitary organisations should be unified under one command, but that project will require patience and encouragement from outside powers like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Forcing the issue could result in confrontation at a time when the last thing Sudan needs is more conflict.

Then there is the challenge of maintaining the unity of the extraordinarily broad civilian coalition – named the Forces for Freedom and Change – that has been at the vanguard of the uprising. Comprising professional associations, civil society groups, unions, political parties and armed groups, the coalition has had its own internal struggles. It will need to deftly manage them lest the security establishment use fissures in its unity to peel off constituents and weaken it politically.

There are also wars on the country's periphery – in the Blue Nile, Kordofan and Darfur regions – that tear at national cohesion. The transitional government should focus on ending these conflicts.

Yet for all the challenges standing in Sudan's transitional path, there are reasons for hope. For one thing, the protest movement's strength and increasing sophistication set it apart from anything in the country's recent history. The generals have already seen that strong-arm tactics of the sort used to quell prior movements – for example in 2013 – are not likely to work here. For another thing, a botched transition could stymie prospects for a surge of desperately needed international support and investment in Sudan's flailing economy. That is an outcome for which the security forces will almost certainly not wish to be blamed.

Against this backdrop, there is a good deal that outside actors – including African powers, Khartoum's backers in the Gulf, Western states and multilateral organisations – can do to help the power-sharing arrangements succeed and nudge Sudan along the path of transition.

Diplomatically, regional actors (especially Ethiopia and the AU) played a key role in unlocking talks after the 3 June massacre and should continue to stay closely involved. The AU should dispatch to Khartoum an envoy to support the transition by mediating between the two sides and helping guard against the possibility that the security establishment (with all its structural advantages) will steamroll the civilian opposition if there are disputes over the deal's details. The deal will be all the stronger if Western powers, including the U.S., keep up the pressure to honour it and press Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt – all with close ties to the generals in Khartoum – to do the same.

There is also much to do on the economic front. Rescuing Sudan's anaemic economy will require broad international support through a major multilateral donor initiative. Hamdok has estimated that the country needs a \$10 billion infusion over the next two years. Donors, including the U.S., the EU and its member states, and Gulf countries, should begin taking steps to support this request. The U.S. should also move expeditiously to rescind Sudan's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, which forbids international financial institutions from issuing loans and impedes other foreign investment, thereby hobbling Sudan's private sector. Lifting the designation would help the newly appointed, civilian-led cabinet by giving it an early win and would be an important step toward Sudan's qualifying for debt relief. External partners should couple these supportive measures with stern warnings that spoilers in Khartoum who impede the economic and political reforms necessary for Sudan's successful transition will be subject to targeted sanctions on the part of the AU, EU and U.S.

Sudan is one of Africa's most important countries, sandwiched between two major powers, Ethiopia and Egypt, abutting the Red Sea and located in a region scarred by instability. The benefits of a successful transition are potentially enormous, and the cost of state failure would be vast. Until recently, it was hard to imagine a moment of opportunity like the country now faces. It would be a mistake to squander it.

**Khartoum/Addis Ababa/Nairobi/Abu Dhabi/Brussels,  
21 October 2019**

# Safeguarding Sudan's Revolution

## I. Introduction

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Mass protests and a military coup have ended the 30-year dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir. The same events have also released centrifugal forces in Sudan that could spark renewed violence if not contained by a coherent transition to civilian rule. The civilian opposition that mobilised in the street yearns to bulldoze the former president's corrupt, repressive legacy and hold fair elections. But the security establishment, dominated by paramilitary forces once at the vanguard of state-sponsored slaughter in the Darfur region, now controls government arsenals as well as the country's major revenue streams. It is disinclined to relinquish these assets; thus, it could stymie reform. The generals continue to receive backing from powerful Gulf monarchies and Egypt, which view them as a bastion of stability in the Horn of Africa and a source of manpower for military ventures in Yemen.

Negotiations between the civilian opposition and a military council representing the security establishment over a transitional agreement were fraught with tensions over the division of power. The standoff culminated in a violent crackdown on 3 June, when paramilitary forces killed up to 120 protesters in the capital Khartoum. The killings met with international opprobrium, with the UN and African Union (AU) issuing swift condemnations and the AU suspending Sudan's membership. The U.S., EU and UK then engaged with the Gulf states and Egypt, which corralled the junta into signing a power-sharing agreement on 17 July and accepting a constitutional declaration that was formally adopted one month later on 17 August.

The deal contemplates a transition to elections at the close of a 39-month period of reforms overseen by a civilian-dominated cabinet and legislature. It also lays out the terms for forming the institutions that will see the country through the coming period.

At the centre of the arrangements is a "sovereign council" tasked with steering the transition, which consists of five opposition representatives, five members picked by the security forces and a civilian jointly nominated by both parties. The Council moved swiftly to name a prime minister – economist Abdalla Hamdok – and a cabinet (with the military assigning the interior and defence portfolios). The cabinet will report to a legislative council, two thirds of which the civilian opposition will appoint, and which is expected to fashion a constitution pending elections. A general will head the sovereign council for the first 21 months of the transition before handing it over to a civilian for the remaining eighteen months pending elections.<sup>1</sup>

But while critically important to guiding the country through a smooth transition, the deal reached over the summer goes only so far toward addressing some of the country's most pressing needs. These include the urgent task of transforming a deeply dysfunctional economy and bringing an end to long-running rebellions in areas that Khartoum has historically neglected. The country's bloated and fissiparous security

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<sup>1</sup> See Crisis Group Statement, "Nurturing Sudan's Fledgling Power-sharing Accord", 20 August 2019.

machinery is a near-fatal drag on the state and needs restructuring. Meanwhile, segments of the army and security services appear to resent the more powerful paramilitaries, which could easily spark feuding among the generals themselves.<sup>2</sup>

This report describes Bashir's fall from power, the power-sharing deal's emergence and the challenges that Sudan's transitional leadership will face. It argues that the deal offers the best – and only viable – framework for addressing these challenges, steering the country toward reform, and avoiding the very real possibility that the country is instead pulled toward spiralling violence. It is based on interviews conducted since January in Khartoum, Addis Ababa, Abu Dhabi, Washington, Brussels, London, Nairobi, New York and Juba. It also builds on Crisis Group's past work on Sudan's long-term crisis.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Crisis Group interviews, diplomats involved in the negotiations, Khartoum and Nairobi, August 2019. Under the deal's terms, the Sudan Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) will remain separate entities tasked with "supporting the unity and sovereignty of the nation" though they are "subordinated to the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces". The diplomats pointed to this section's wording as reflecting divisions among the top brass. Some in the Sudan Armed Forces wanted to formally absorb the RSF, a suggestion that RSF leaders rejected out of hand.

<sup>3</sup> For Crisis Group reporting and analysis on Sudan's unravelling economy and political paralysis since South Sudan gained its independence in 2011, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°194, *Sudan: Major Reform or More War*, 29 November 2012; Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°119, *Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival*, 21 March 2016; Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°127, *Time to Repeal U.S. Sanctions on Sudan?*, 22 June 2017; Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°128, *A New Roadmap to Make U.S. Sudan Sanctions Relief Work*, 29 September 2017; and Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°143, *Improving Prospects for a Peaceful Transition in Sudan*, 14 January 2019.

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## II. From Crisis to Coup, Crackdown and Compromise

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Unlike many of his peers, Omar al-Bashir survived the 2011 Arab uprisings relatively unscathed. It was subsequent setbacks that caused his eventual fall: an economic slump; the ensuing street protests in regime strongholds, including across Khartoum; the alienation of core constituencies, including within a regime security architecture beset by schisms between the armed forces and paramilitary units; and eroding support from sponsors in the Gulf.

The spark for the revolution was a rapidly declining economy. Bashir had maintained his power by repressing political opposition, fighting costly counter-insurgencies in peripheral areas and underwriting his factious security sector with patronage-driven expenditures that ate up, by some estimates, 70 per cent of the national budget.<sup>4</sup> By late 2018, the economy had plunged to new depths, due to mismanagement, corruption and the loss of revenue following the secession of oil-rich South Sudan in 2011. While, in 2017, the U.S. eased some financial and economic sanctions, the impact was modest; because Washington did not lift Sudan's designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism, the country remained off limits to many foreign investors.

Protests began in the south-eastern cities of Damazin and Sennar on 13 December 2018 over the tripling of bread prices and rising cost of other staples, as well as shortages of medicine, fuel and cash. Many ATMs in banks had run dry, and queues at petrol stations stretched for kilometres. Opposition parties, professional associations and unions marched and staged strikes. By 19 December, when the snowballing demonstrations reached Atbara, a railway town and historic bastion of unionism in River Nile state, protesters were demanding regime change.<sup>5</sup>

Several factors contributed to the movement's strength. Previous protests centred in Khartoum, for instance in 2011 and 2013, had struggled to expand beyond student and middle-class youth activist circles. By contrast, the December demonstrations erupted outside the capital and leapt across geographic and class divides. These new protests were also better organised through neighbourhood resistance committees that had learned from the failures of the 2013 protests, which Bashir's forces put down with brute force, taking dozens of lives.<sup>6</sup>

Of crucial significance throughout the rise of the movement was the participation of Sudanese women, whose position in society had suffered under Bashir's brand of Islamist rule. At several points during the uprising, women outnumbered men at protests.<sup>7</sup> Mainstream interest in women's roles in the uprising surged when a pho-

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<sup>4</sup> Prime Minister Hamdok says the country spends up to 80 per cent of its budget on defence when it should spend no more than 20 per cent. He lists reducing these costs, via deals with rebel groups that yield a "peace dividend", among his priorities. "Sudan PM seeks to end the country's pariah status", AP, 25 August 2019.

<sup>5</sup> See Crisis Group Briefing, *Improving Prospects for a Peaceful Transition in Sudan*, op. cit. Sennar and Damazin are both located in Blue Nile state – of which Damazin is the capital – in south-eastern Sudan. The regime responded by arresting suspected leaders, compounding the anger on the street. "NISS in Blue Nile state detains alleged protest mobilisers", Radio Dabanga, 15 January 2019; "Sudan uprising: Sudanese youth and diaspora dispel negative stereotypes", Shabaka, 7 February 2019.

<sup>6</sup> "In Sudan, neighbourhoods mobilised against al-Bashir", Al Jazeera, 8 May 2019.

<sup>7</sup> "Letter from Africa: 'We're not cleaners' – sexism amid Sudan protests", BBC, 1 April 2019.



tograph depicting Alaa Salah, a university student, standing on a car, dressed in a traditional white *toub* and leading chants, went viral.<sup>8</sup>

The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), a grouping of labour and trade organisations formed in 2014, provided the movement's backbone. By bringing workers and professionals into the streets, the association evoked memories of previous popular uprisings in 1964 and 1985, also led by trade unionists.<sup>9</sup> Soon, the protests spread into affluent parts of Khartoum, where government officials live. Anecdotes abound of the Khartoum elite's sons and daughters joining the demonstrations.<sup>10</sup> On 1 January 2019, the SPA struck an alliance with 21 other organisations in a joint declaration calling for a national transitional government to replace Bashir. The declaration marked the birth of the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) opposition coalition, which became the protest movement's official voice.<sup>11</sup>

As pressure mounted, Salah Gosh, chief of the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), held a meeting on 22 February 2019 with select newspaper editors and reporters to inform them that Bashir would no longer be head of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP).<sup>12</sup> He also said Bashir would not run in the 2020 election and that the president would dissolve the government, form a new administration composed of technocrats and launch a national dialogue to address Sudan's challenges.<sup>13</sup> Officials leaked details of Gosh's discussion with the journalists shortly after the meeting.<sup>14</sup> Some Sudanese rejoiced, hoping that Bashir would indeed engineer a transition and leave office.

But when Bashir spoke later that day, he instead proclaimed a state of emergency, installed military officers as governors of Sudan's eighteen states and announced his

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<sup>8</sup> Lana Haroun took the famous photograph. For more on Salah, see "I was raised to love our home": Sudan's singing protester speaks out", *The Guardian*, 10 April 2019.

<sup>9</sup> The 1964 and 1985 uprisings were similarly driven by a mix of political and economic grievances. Workers, students and professionals were key players. See Willow Berridge, *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan: The Khartoum Springs of 1964 and 1985* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> See Crisis Group Briefing, *Improving Prospects for a Peaceful Transition in Sudan*, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> "Declaration of freedom and change", Sudanese Professionals Association, 1 January 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Bashir and Gosh had a turbulent relationship. In 1989, after the coup that brought him to power, Bashir appointed Gosh director of operations in the new regime's security bureau. In 1995, however, he sacked Gosh amid the backlash to the assassination attempt by militants from the Egyptian Islamic Jihad group on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa. The militants trained in Sudan and reportedly enjoyed the support of elements of the Bashir administration. Gosh is not believed to have played a direct role in supporting the militants, but amid the international outrage over the failed attack it appears that Bashir felt he needed to show he was taking action against senior figures. See "Sudan's president removes powerful intelligence chief", *Sudan Tribune*, 13 August 2009. In 2004, the Sudanese leader appointed Gosh director of the newly established NISS, only to remove him yet again in 2009, as a result of power struggles within the NCP. In 2011, following release of WikiLeaks cables showing that Gosh had considered exploiting the International Criminal Court indictment of Bashir to muster a coup attempt, the tensions intensified. Bashir ordered Gosh be arrested in 2012. Gosh was released in July 2013 without charge, and some five years later, he reassumed the NISS director's post. See "Sudan's ex-spy chief arrested in connection with 'sabotage' attempts: reports", *Sudan Tribune*, 22 November 2012; and "Sudan's intelligence chief Salah Gosh resigns: military council", *Middle East Eye*, 13 April 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Crisis Group interview, ruling party insider, Khartoum, July 2019.

<sup>14</sup> See Crisis Group Statement, "Bashir Moves Sudan to Dangerous New Ground", 26 February 2019.

second cabinet reshuffle in six months.<sup>15</sup> Bashir also formed a security committee composed of loyalists – though many would later turn against him. Among its members were senior officers from the Sudanese Armed Forces; General Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo (known as Hemedti), leader of the RSF, the paramilitary group that Bashir increasingly relied upon as a praetorian guard; NISS officials including Gosh, whom Bashir was still keeping close; and a police representative.<sup>16</sup> But the divergence between what Gosh had told the journalists and what Bashir defiantly announced highlighted fissures within the regime. Despite his position on the committee, ruling party figures say, Gosh soon began working in earnest to oust Bashir.<sup>17</sup>

Amid these brewing tensions, public unrest put the cohesion of Bashir's security committee to the test. By April, managing the daily protests had depleted state funds: the treasury had to cover four months of overtime costs for police and other security agencies. Meanwhile, inflation surged to as high as 70 per cent, emptying the pocketbooks of ordinary Sudanese.<sup>18</sup> Sensing the regime's weakness, the protest movement dialled up the pressure, calling for larger and more audacious street actions. On 6 April, protesters marched to army headquarters in Khartoum, as well as to military installations in other cities, and staged a sit-in.<sup>19</sup> Riot police and personnel from the intelligence services were poised to block the protesters' advance, a source told Crisis Group, but elements of the security forces led by Gosh held them back.<sup>20</sup>

At this point, Bashir still appeared confident that he could ride out the uprising. While he remained an international pariah – the only sitting head of state ever indicted by the International Criminal Court – he had developed important security and economic partnerships with Gulf states and Turkey, which he may have believed would help him hang on to power.

As Crisis Group has described elsewhere, starting in 2013, the Gulf Cooperation Council developed a common policy of bringing Sudan closer into its orbit.<sup>21</sup> The primary motivation was to peel Khartoum away from arch-rival Tehran. When the Saudi-led coalition launched its campaign in Yemen in 2015, its interest in the partnership intensified, as Sudan was possessed of both potential troops for the venture and a long Red Sea coastline that the coalition wanted, for strategic reasons, to ensure was in friendly hands.

For Bashir, the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen presented an opportunity. In 2015, short on cash and eager for sanctions relief, he sought to solidify his alliance with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi by deploying roughly 10,000 RSF members and some regular army soldiers to fight alongside Saudi and Emirati troops.<sup>22</sup> A year later, Bashir severed ties with the Saudis' nemesis Iran after protesters attacked the Saudi embassy

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<sup>15</sup> "Sudan's Bashir declares state of emergency, dissolves government", Reuters, 23 February 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Crisis Group interviews, NCP insiders, Khartoum, July 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Crisis Group interviews, NCP insiders, Khartoum, August 2019.

<sup>18</sup> "Sudan's economic decline provides fuel for anger against Bashir", Reuters, 20 February 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, Sudanese Professionals Association member, June 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Bashir regime insider, Khartoum, August 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Crisis Group Middle East Report N°206, *Intra-Gulf Competition in Africa's Horn: Lessening the Impact*, 19 September 2019.

<sup>22</sup> "Sudan crisis: The ruthless mercenaries who run the country for gold", BBC, 20 July 2019.

and consulate in Tehran and Mashhad.<sup>23</sup> Riyadh, meanwhile, worked to keep Sudan on its side with cash and diplomatic support.

But Bashir's relationship with the Gulf powers was nevertheless on less than firm ground. For one thing, the Saudis and Emiratis harboured suspicions of Bashir, who maintained relations with their rivals Qatar and Turkey. Bashir also alienated Riyadh and Abu Dhabi with his refusal to purge Islamists from his political machinery, security services and state bureaucracy. From the moment Bashir took power in 1989, Egyptian authorities, later joined by Cairo's allies in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, were spooked by the Islamist bent of his administration and his ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, a group that Egypt's security establishment considers its most potent domestic challenger and that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) views as a regional threat.<sup>24</sup>

Fundamentally, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Cairo simply did not trust Bashir, whom they saw as highly transactional, requiring constant cultivation and forever at risk of sliding back in Tehran's direction. As Bashir's grasp on power began to slip, the Gulf monarchies saw an opening to replace him with someone more reliable and gave their blessing to the generals planning to move against him.<sup>25</sup> A contact who was one of the last people to speak with Bashir before he was toppled said the president blamed Saudi Arabia and the UAE for his ouster.<sup>26</sup>

The coup against Bashir came quickly and decisively. When Hemedti, the RSF leader, turned against Bashir in the first week of April – as the protesters' encampment outside military headquarters swelled – the balance of power tipped for good.<sup>27</sup> On 10 April, Bashir's security committee made the decision to oust the strongman. A member later reported that the committee deliberated for one hour, then disconnected Bashir's phone and replaced his bodyguards.<sup>28</sup> A period of uncertainty followed as the generals, now a junta, worked to consolidate power. Army officers arrived at the state television and radio stations just after 3am on 11 April, but it was another twelve hours before Lieutenant-General Ahmed Awad Ibn Ouf, Bashir's first vice president, appeared to announce the president's arrest and declare a state of emergency.

Ibn Ouf's stint in power lasted only a day. On 12 April, he appeared on television again to announce that he was stepping aside to make way for General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, an obscure figure who had overseen Sudan's deployment to Yemen. Before his promotion to army inspector general in February 2019, Burhan had served as the

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<sup>23</sup> The protesters were angered by Saudi Arabia's execution of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a Shiite cleric from the kingdom's Eastern Province, whom the state had tried on "terrorism" charges for supporting demonstrations by Saudi Arabian Shiites. "Iran: Saudis face 'divine revenge' for executing Nimr", BBC, 3 January 2016.

<sup>24</sup> For background, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival*, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> See Crisis Group Report, *Intra-Gulf Competition in Africa's Horn: Lessening the Impact*, p. 8. "An Emirati foreign ministry official said, 'We have no particular nostalgia for Bashir as a leader. He is transactional: he goes to Qatar when it is convenient, and he goes to the UAE or Saudi Arabia when it is convenient. So we are not attached to his regime, but we do see it as important to make sure Sudan is stable and secure'".

<sup>26</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Bashir regime insider, Khartoum, July 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Crisis Group interview, Sudanese investigative journalist, Khartoum, June 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Crisis Group interview, NCP insider, April 2019. See also "The son protested the dictator; the father helped throw him out", *The New York Times*, 23 April 2019.

military attaché in China.<sup>29</sup> Many believe it was Hemedti who forced Ibn Ouf's resignation, partly because he harboured his own ambitions for supremacy and saw the installation of the more pliant Burhan as a way to expand his own influence.

Ibn Ouf's removal gave confidence to the protesters, who chanted "it fell once, it fell twice, it could fall a third time". Within a few days, they began agitating against Burhan.<sup>30</sup> Under pressure to contain the revolt, the junta, now calling itself the Transitional Military Council, embarked on negotiations with the opposition coalition. The two sides announced a framework on 15 May for a three-year transitional government to steer the country to elections and also agreed on mandates for the council of ministers, the legislature and a "sovereign council" to guide the transition.<sup>31</sup>

The talks exposed divisions in the military council between hardliners and others willing to compromise. Some of the council grumbled that the deal conceded too much without giving the security establishment sufficient protection from an opposition-controlled legislature.<sup>32</sup> A day later, on 16 May, the Transitional Military Council suspended the talks with the opposition coalition, instead making a show of meeting with less significant political parties.<sup>33</sup> Undeterred, the coalition stepped up the pressure. On 28 and 29 May, the opposition alliance, pushed by elements such as the Communist Party, organised a general strike that shut down much of the country.<sup>34</sup>

The standoff continued until 3 June, when security forces brutally dispersed the ten-week sit-in that had formed outside army headquarters on 6 April. Opposition medics and media outlets documented that the raid killed up to 120 people.<sup>35</sup> In the days following the massacre, forces roamed the streets assaulting civilians and looting – an extraordinary breakdown of order in Khartoum. Video and eyewitness testimony pin the bulk of the attack on Hemedti's RSF, though other security forces appear to have taken part.<sup>36</sup> The massacre took place days after Hemedti visited the Saudi crown prince as well as leaders in Cairo and Abu Dhabi.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>29</sup> "Who is Abdul-Fattah al-Burhan, the new leader of Sudan?", 7D News, 13 April 2019.

<sup>30</sup> See "Sudan's unfinished revolution: The dictator is gone but the fight continues", *The Nation*, 26 April 2019. The agitation against Burhan quieted, for the public knew little about him, though he had been integral to Bashir's war machine in Darfur. His speeches against the old regime helped improve his image during the junta's first 40 days.

<sup>31</sup> "Sudan's army rulers, protesters, agree on 3-year transition", *The East African*, 15 May 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Crisis Group interview, member of FFC negotiations committee, Khartoum, 15 June 2019. One activist advising FFC negotiators said the May talks broke down because the military council leaders felt boxed in by their own concessions, especially that the FFC would have two-thirds control of the legislature. Crisis Group telephone interview, June 2019.

<sup>33</sup> "Sudan army ruler suspends civil rule talks", AFP, 16 May 2019.

<sup>34</sup> The general strike partly shut down Khartoum International Airport as airport employees and pilots joined. It also spread to government agencies seen as regime strongholds, such as the Central Bank and federal and state ministries. See "Sudan protesters strike as deadlock with military persists", *Capital News*, 28 May 2019.

<sup>35</sup> "Sudan's factions sign constitutional declaration – Sudan unrest", TRT World, 5 August 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Crisis Group interviews, member of FFC negotiations committee, Khartoum, 5 June 2019.

<sup>37</sup> See Crisis Group Statement, "Sudan: Stopping a Spiral into Civil War", 7 June 2019; Crisis Group Report, *Intra-Gulf Competition in Africa's Horn: Lessening the Impact*, op. cit. Western diplomats told Crisis Group that though RSF and NISS elements were the main perpetrators of the attack, the military council as a whole appears to have endorsed the strategy to clear the encampment, if not

The bloody 3 June crackdown marked a turning point. The attack, coupled with a string of arrests, a total shutdown of the internet and a ban on public events, served to re-energise and reunify the opposition alliance.<sup>38</sup> Indignant that the top brass appeared intent on clinging to power following Bashir's fall, and outraged by not only the massacre but also a number of other smaller-scale killings of protesters, the opposition marshalled tens of thousands of Sudanese across the country for a "million-man" march on 30 June.

At the same time, the 3 June massacre provoked ire across the region and around the world. The UN, the EU and AU, as well as various governments – including the U.S., UK and Germany – immediately issued calls for a transition to civilian rule. The AU's Peace and Security Council suspended Sudan's membership in an unambiguous show of condemnation. The U.S. also piled pressure on Gulf powers to lean on the junta to reach an accommodation with the protesters. In a rare move, on 4 June, the U.S. State Department issued a readout of a call between Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale and Saudi Deputy Defence Minister Khaled bin Salman to discuss "the brutal crackdown against peaceful protesters [by the generals]". The American asked the Saudis to use their influence with the junta to "encourage a transition to a civilian-led government in accordance with the will of the Sudanese people".<sup>39</sup>

This combination of diplomatic pressure and internal protest – particularly the 30 June march – proved critical in drawing the generals back to the negotiating table. The scale of the 30 June demonstration was especially important in making clear to the military council that this situation would not be a reprise of 2013 – when the Bashir government squashed a protest movement in part with promises of a national dialogue that never came to pass; the 2019 movement was simply too strong. In July, the junta resumed direct talks with the opposition under the aegis of the AU and a special envoy designated by the Ethiopian prime minister, Abiy Ahmed.<sup>40</sup> By 17 July the two sides had endorsed what they described as a "political agreement" that would

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the extreme brutality meted out. Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, June-July 2019. Some diplomats believe that Gulf powers were sufficiently embarrassed by the perception that they greenlighted the 3 June violence that they shifted toward supporting a negotiated political deal. Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, June-July 2019. Increasing hostility from the U.S. Congress over the killing of Saudi Arabian journalist Jamal Khashoggi and the bloody stalemate in Yemen also played into Riyadh and Abu Dhabi's calculations, as they were wary of further alienating allies. Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, June-July 2019.

<sup>38</sup> In the days before 3 June, the FFC was divided. Some sources suspect that certain factions, namely the Umma party, were on course to strike a separate deal with the military council. The massacre on 3 June put an end to those schemes and dampened dissension within the opposition. Crisis Group interviews, figure close to opposition leaders, Khartoum, 16 June 2019; Crisis Group email interview, member of the opposition-aligned SPLM-N/A, 9 July 2019; Crisis Group interviews, civil society activist, Khartoum, 11 June 2019.

<sup>39</sup> See Crisis Group Statement, "Sudan: Stopping a Spiral into Civil War", op. cit., and "Saudi influence in the spotlight as US tells Riyadh to end Sudan violence", *The Guardian*, 5 June 2019. The attack on protesters heightened alarm among key actors in the AU's Peace and Security Council, notably Nigeria, which rallied diplomats to take a harder line toward the junta. The EU also condemned the assault in blunt terms. Crisis Group telephone interviews, diplomats involved in talks between the Sudanese parties, July-August 2019.

<sup>40</sup> "Sudan briefing: May-July 2019 timeline of events", Relief Web, 15 July 2019.

be followed by a formal “constitutional declaration” signed a month later on 17 August. The power-sharing deal reached over the course of the summer laid out a blueprint for the transitional government and a roadmap for a 39-month transition to elections. Still, many fault lines remained both between the parties involved in the agreement and within their respective ranks.

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### III. A Factious Security Establishment in a Time of Transition

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The Transitional Military Council that ousted Bashir was an awkward alliance of the competing security forces the deposed president left behind. Under the terms of the power-sharing deal, it dissolved and ceded its authority on 21 August to an eleven-member “sovereign council” that comprises five members each from the security sector and the opposition, with one consensus civilian appointee, and is headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. Much of the day-to-day responsibility for running the country has already passed to Prime Minister Hamdok and his cabinet, which manage the civil service, draw up the budget and oversee all state agencies outside the security sector.

In practice, however, and though the civilian-led cabinet has wide popular support, the security establishment continues to hold most instruments of raw power in the country. It has control of the streets, a grip on Sudan's illicit economy, and political and financial backing from foreign capitals, principally Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

This establishment is far from being a cohesive body. At its core, it comprises the Sudanese Armed Forces, Hemedti's RSF, the intelligence services and allied militias. It is vulnerable to internecine rivalries. Its constituent parts have their own loyalties and political backgrounds.<sup>41</sup> Against this backdrop, the security sector represents a dual threat to the peace process. It is, first and foremost, a spoiler that may try to block civilian oversight of the transitional government in order to preserve the extensive prerogatives it enjoyed under Bashir and has not yet been forced to yield. Additionally, its internal divisions could spur instability if they blow up into armed clashes.

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<sup>41</sup> The Transitional Military Council was originally composed of ten members. Three members resigned ten days after its formation and were never replaced: Lieutenant General Omer Zain al-Abdin of the Sudanese Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Jalal al-Deen Al-Sheikh of NISS and Lieutenant General Al-Tayeb Babikir Ali of the police. The remaining council members painted the resignations as a concession to the opposition, as these three individuals were very close to the old regime. One source, however, claims that the junta forced the three to resign as part of its purge of Islamists from the old regime, partly intended to signal to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi that they were serious about reversing the Islamists' dominance under Bashir. Crisis Group interview, NCP insider, Khartoum, July 2019. On 21 August, the FFC and generals released the Sovereign Council members' names. The five soldiers nominated were Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, Lieutenant General Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo, Lieutenant General Yassir Alatta, Lieutenant General Shams Aldin Alkabashi and Major General Ibrahim Gabir. The FFC nominated Mohamed Alfaki Suleiman, Isidig Touwer Kafi, Mohamed Hassan Altaishi, Hassan Idriss and Aisha Musa. Both sides agreed to nominate lawyer Raga Nichole Issa Abdul Massih as the eleventh member. A Copt, she is the first Christian to hold a senior political position in the country since independence in 1956. See “Profile: members of Sudan's Sovereign Council”, *Daily Africa News*, August 2019.

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## A. Key Players and Power Centres

### 1. Burhan and the military

Sudan's professional military weakened so drastically under Bashir that it is now just one power among many in the security sector.<sup>42</sup> The reasons for the Sudanese Armed Forces' decline are many. Bashir lost trust in the military following his 1999 falling-out with Hassan al-Turabi, Sudan's leading Islamist, who had hand-picked much of the top brass. Bashir's suspicion of the generals hardened after the military failed to prevent the stunning assault on Khartoum by the Darfuri rebel Justice and Equality Movement in 2008. Also, the lengthy insurgencies in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile largely precluded the army from recruiting soldiers from those regions, eroding its claim to be a unifying national institution.

Rather than rebuild the military, Bashir increasingly opted to fund and arm local paramilitary groups, leading to the proliferation of groups such as Hemedti's RSF, which, as discussed below, started out in Darfur and has grown more powerful than the army itself.<sup>43</sup>

General al-Burhan, now head of the Sovereign Council, was a little known but senior officer. In his current role, he acts as a bridge between the Sudanese Armed Forces and Hemedti, who was his deputy on the Transitional Military Council. Like most high-ranking army officers, Burhan is from central Sudan, the bastion of Sudan's political elite, in contrast to Hemedti, who comes from Darfur.<sup>44</sup>

Burhan has broadly aligned the army with the RSF. He is a known figure to the security forces of the junta's two Gulf allies, the Saudis and Emiratis, due to his role as a commander in the Yemen campaign, to which Hemedti has also contributed men and resources.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, as a professional officer, Burhan is acceptable to Cairo, which wants to make sure that the military establishment, rather than Hemedti and others whose power derives from militias, is in charge in Khartoum.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Some doubt that Sudan still has a functional infantry after years of outsourcing front-line duties to irregular militias and paramilitaries. One Sudanese political analyst said the Sudanese Armed Forces has an air force, tanks and officers, but few foot soldiers. Crisis Group interview, Washington, June 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Alex de Waal, "Counter-insurgency on the cheap", *London Review of Books*, 5 August 2004.

<sup>44</sup> "The man who terrorised Darfur is leading Sudan's supposed transition", *Foreign Policy*, 14 May 2019; "Who is Abdul-Fattah al-Burhan, the new leader of Sudan", 7D News, op. cit.

<sup>45</sup> In return for this contribution, both Burhan and Hemedti reportedly benefit from funds sent by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, which appear to go directly into accounts controlled by the security establishment with little or no oversight from Sudan's treasury. See Alex de Waal, "Sudan: A Political Marketplace Framework Analysis", World Peace Foundation, August 2019. Illustrating the opaque relations between Sudanese authorities and their Gulf sponsors, detectives told a court trying Bashir for corruption that he had admitted receiving \$90 million in cash from the Saudis but that he said he could not remember how the money was spent. He said he had not deposited it in the central bank. "Ex-Sudan leader said he received millions from the Saudis, trial told", *The Guardian*, 19 August 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Burhan's first foreign trip after taking power was to Cairo on 25 May 2019. During the visit, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said Cairo was ready to "provide all means of support to our brothers in Sudan". See "Sudan interim military council chief Al-Burhan meets with Egypt's president El-Sisi", *Arab News*, 25 May 2019. The Egyptian top brass has deep ties with their Sudanese counterparts and many Sudanese officers, including Ibn Ouf, who briefly replaced Bashir, trained in Cairo.



Notwithstanding Burhan's position atop the Sovereign Council, many in the army resent what they see as Hemedti's increasing dominance. They also take exception to the lucre that the RSF gleans from smuggling across Sudan's borders (which the RSF controls), the artisanal gold market (which the RSF has cornered) and its position as the primary conduit of support from Sudan's allies in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.<sup>47</sup> Some of the army's generals also have illicit sources of income, due to their privileges in a country where corruption is rampant, but in recent years the RSF have become the main actor in a rigged economy. Many in the armed forces see the RSF as an ill-trained, undisciplined provincial militia.<sup>48</sup>

The army's rank and file have also had a different perspective on the protest movement than their counterparts in the RSF and intelligence services. From the beginning of the uprising, many low- and mid-ranking members of the armed forces seemed to share some of the protest movement's grievances – especially with respect to the collapsing economy – and to have more sympathy for the movement's demands. In contrast to the RSF and intelligence services, which were persistently brutal in their treatment of protesters until their leaders shifted their stance in April, members of the armed forces sometimes sought to shield the protesters from harm.

Some within the armed forces would like to restore the military's prestige and dominance. Hemedti, however, resisted suggestions by army generals during negotiations leading up to the power-sharing deal that the constitutional declaration outline the need to unify Sudan's security forces.<sup>49</sup> For now, the military and RSF maintain an awkward alliance; however, as the transition progresses and with Hemedti seemingly intent on entrenching the RSF's position and acquiring greater political power, some military officials could seek to halt his rise, which would likely trigger clashes between two powerful and well-armed organisations.

## 2. Hemedti and the Rapid Support Forces

General Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo, known as "Hemedti", the boyish head of the RSF, is the most powerful man in the security forces. Hemedti draws his strength from three primary sources. First, he directly oversees much of the RSF, the pre-eminent paramilitary force among the many that Sudanese authorities spawned during Bashir's three decades in power.<sup>50</sup> The RSF now appears to control Khartoum, as well

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<sup>47</sup> On Hemedti's control of gold mining in Darfur, see Tom Collins, "Sudan's gold: Hemedti's untold power", *African Business*, 8 July 2019. Two sources said Burhan has also invested in gold mining in South Kordofan. Crisis Group interviews, NCP insider, Khartoum, 16 June 2019; Crisis Group telephone interviews, lawyers and SPA member, 16 June 2019. The RSF's tendency to react violently to protests is a potential flashpoint between the paramilitaries and the army. Following the shootings of at least five schoolchildren in al-Obeid on 30 July, allegedly by RSF units, Burhan himself condemned the killings as an "unacceptable crime". See "Sudan military rulers say El-Obeid killings unacceptable, demand accountability", Reuters, 30 July 2019; "Sudan's ruling military council identifies attackers of al-Obeid students", *Asharq al-Awsat*, 1 August 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Nairobi, August 2019; Sudanese ruling party insiders, Khartoum, July-August 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, diplomat who took part in the talks and Sudanese official, August 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Estimates of the RSF's size vary, from 30,000 (Crisis Group email interview, Omer Ismail, Enough Project analyst, July 2019) to 50,000 troops (Pax Sudan Alert, Actor Map, 20 June 2019). Though

as other towns and regions of the country, notably Darfur. Secondly, he has acquired significant wealth, including proceeds derived from stakes in major gold mining operations, which he wields to extend his power and influence in Sudan's transactional politics.<sup>51</sup> Thirdly, he has curried favour with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, which see him as an accommodating strongman who – unlike Bashir – can be relied upon to serve as a bulwark against Islamist sympathisers in the military and bureaucracy.<sup>52</sup>

Hemedti's rise exemplifies the proliferation of non-conventional security "entrepreneurs" who have eclipsed Sudan's conventional military. Born to Chadian migrants, Hemedti dropped out of primary school but thrived as a trader. The Darfur conflict gave him his entrance into Sudan's power politics.<sup>53</sup> He joined the Janjaweed militia, then led by Musa Hilal, his maternal cousin and a prominent leader of the Mahamid tribe, a sub-group of the Rizeigat.<sup>54</sup> In 2009, Hemedti received his first government post as a security adviser to the governor of South Darfur. There he served until 2011, when Bashir helped him set up the RSF, a rebranding of the Janjaweed.<sup>55</sup>

Hemedti benefited when Bashir tapped him to take down Musa Hilal, whom the president judged disloyal. The Hemedti-Hilal conflict escalated to armed clashes in 2017, with Hemedti coming out on top.<sup>56</sup> Hilal was arrested and imprisoned by state authorities.<sup>57</sup> As Hilal's fortunes declined, Hemedti took control of the lucrative gold mine they once jointly controlled.<sup>58</sup>

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the core fighters are Darfuri Arabs, since 2011 the RSF has absorbed troops, Arab and non-Arab, from West Kordofan, South Kordofan and Blue Nile states. See "Remote-control breakdown: Sudanese paramilitary force and pro-government militias", HSBA for Sudan and South Sudan Issue Brief, April 2017, p. 2. The RSF is also believed to include nomads from Sahel countries, most prominently Chad, but also Mali, Niger, Cameroon, the Central African Republic and possibly Libya. Crisis Group email interview, Omer Ismail, Enough Project analyst, July 2019. Reports of French-speaking forces in Khartoum have fuelled speculation about foreign fighters in the RSF. Crisis Group interview, EU official, Brussels, 4 July 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Some diplomats report that Hemedti paid the police in cash to get them back on the streets after Bashir's ouster. Crisis Group interview, European diplomat, Nairobi, June 2019; "From camel herder to dictator", *Foreign Policy*, 2 July 2019.

<sup>52</sup> See Crisis Group Report, *Intra-Gulf Competition in Africa's Horn: Lessening the Impact*, op. cit., noting perceptions in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi that Bashir dithered over whether to rid his political machinery of Islamists.

<sup>53</sup> He belongs to the Mahariya sub-group (specifically Awlad Mansour clan) of the Rizeigat tribe which are under the larger Baggara nomadic group that live in Darfur and Kordofan and have extensions into Chad and other Sahel countries. Hemedti's kin came from Chad in the 1980s, fleeing drought. Crisis Group email interview, Sudan and Chad security analyst, 9 June 2019.

<sup>54</sup> The Janjaweed, which, translated literally from the local Arabic dialect, means "devils on horseback", are government-backed Darfuri Arab militias responsible for many atrocities in Darfur since 2003.

<sup>55</sup> "The man who terrorised Darfur is leading Sudan's supposed transition", *Foreign Policy*, op. cit.

<sup>56</sup> The clashes took place in Jebel Amir, Mostreha and other towns in November 2017. The confrontation claimed lives in both families as Hemedti lost his cousin, Abdelrahim Juma Dalgo, who was the RSF's logistics head, and his brother-in-law.

<sup>57</sup> "Sudan says militia leader Musa Hilal arrested", BBC, 27 November 2017.

<sup>58</sup> A 2016 report by the UN Panel of Experts reported that Hilal was making \$54 million per year and estimated that more than 48,000kg of gold "was potentially smuggled from the Sudan to the United Arab Emirates from 2010 to 2014". See "Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005)", UNSC S/2016/85, 4 December 2015. One study

Hemedti has thrived as a businessman, establishing several companies under the umbrella of his al-Junaid conglomerate. His company, al-Junaid for Roads and Bridges, was awarded government contracts to help build at least three highways in Darfur (the Nyala-Fashir, Kutum-Fashir and Genina-Zalingei routes). His mining company operates in Jebel Amir and has started working in southern Darfur.<sup>59</sup>

Bashir's 2015 decision to send troops to fight under the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen provided Hemedti with a major boost. He sent troops in much larger numbers than Sudan's regular military did. RSF troops also took more front-line positions than the military's rank and file, who are generally more risk-averse and therefore often deployed defensively, such as to guard the Saudi Arabian border. The RSF's ranks were swelled by recruits from many impoverished families who were highly motivated by the financial rewards, which could reach up to \$10,000 each per offensive deployment. Some even paid bribes to go.<sup>60</sup> Apart from his role in the Yemen campaign, Hemedti has authorised a representative to forge an alliance with the UAE's ally General Khalifa Haftar in Libya.<sup>61</sup> Some diplomats, inside and outside the region, express concern that Abu Dhabi is cultivating Hemedti as a long-term security partner.<sup>62</sup>

In early 2017, Sudan's parliament passed the Rapid Support Forces Act, which put the paramilitaries directly under the office of the president, cementing their evolution from peripheral militia to quasi-presidential guard.<sup>63</sup> Bashir began referring to Hemedti as Hedayti, which translates from Arabic as "my protection". In the end, however, when Bashir's fortunes had begun to shift dramatically, Hemedti turned on his patron, sealing the former president's fate.<sup>64</sup>

Hemedti's ambitions for power and influence have led him to cultivate relationships well outside Sudan's borders. Conspicuously, the RSF's ranks feature men who

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disputes the veracity of these UN figures. See "Remote-control breakdown: Sudanese paramilitary force and pro-government militias", op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, prominent civil society figure in northern Darfur, 17 June 2019.

<sup>60</sup> "On the front line of the Saudi war in Yemen: child soldiers from Darfur", *The New York Times*, 28 December 2018. Some suggest that the RSF suffers high desertion rates when units come back from Yemen, as soldiers flush with earnings return to private life. Crisis Group interviews, journalist, Khartoum, 16 June 2019.

<sup>61</sup> According to a U.S. Department of Justice Foreign Agents Registration Act filing dated 7 May 2019 and signed by Hemedti, the Canadian lobbying company Dickens & Madson states that it would "strive to obtain funding ... from the Eastern Libyan Military Command in exchange for your military help to the LNA (Libyan National Army)" of General Haftar. Some media have reported that the RSF have since deployed troops in Libya. Crisis Group has been unable to verify these reports. See "Hundreds of Sudan militia fighters deployed to Haftar's Libya offensive", *The New Arab*, 26 July 2019.

<sup>62</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, Addis Ababa and Washington, 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Pax Sudan Alert, Actor Map, 20 June 2019. At the time, Hemedti told the press that the RSF comprised 30,000 members, with many others awaiting induction. One Sudanese analyst said the RSF has become more diverse in the last two years, with most newcomers being NISS agents, raising concerns about the future of Hemedti's hegemony. Crisis Group interviews, journalist, Khartoum, 15 June 2019; political analyst, Khartoum, 17 June 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Crisis Group interview, political analyst, Khartoum, 15 June 2019.

are not Sudanese nationals.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, Hemedti, whose Arab tribe straddles the border between Chad and Sudan, has used his ancestry to forge links to eastern Chad, as well as circles of power in N'djamena. He also maintains ties with armed groups in the Central African Republic.<sup>66</sup> South Sudan's rebel leader Riek Machar, hosted by authorities in Khartoum, has also attempted to build ties with Hemedti and travelled with him for talks with President Salva Kiir in September.<sup>67</sup>

While Hemedti lacks Bashir's charisma and is considered a thuggish provincial warlord by Khartoum's elites, he has played his distance from those elites to his advantage.<sup>68</sup> He has fashioned a role for himself as a champion of Sudanese outside the country's relatively prosperous centre, seeking to portray the opposition alliance and the military as overly focused on concentrating power in Khartoum and the Nile valley.<sup>69</sup> He has also presented himself as the key figure seeking to end the communal conflicts that have ravaged Sudan's eastern and western peripheries. While in some ways a remarkable role for Hemedti to assume, given that earlier in his career he led militias accused of perpetrating some of the worst killings in Darfur, it allows him to trade on the close ties he reportedly enjoys with several armed groups.<sup>70</sup>

The economic, military and diplomatic clout Hemedti has amassed is formidable. "He almost doesn't need to carry out a coup because he has created a role for himself as an alternative to the state and to Khartoum's elites", one diplomat who recently spent time in Khartoum told Crisis Group.<sup>71</sup>

### 3. Gosh and the National Intelligence and Security Services

Until the past decade, the National Intelligence and Security Services were a pillar of Bashir's rule. Its members are primarily drawn from Bashir's riverine stronghold and were viewed as more loyal than the army's soldiers, who have historically been

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<sup>65</sup> Numerous officials report that RSF ranks include fighters from Chad and points further west in the Sahel. Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and analysts, Nairobi, Brussels, Washington and remote communication, June–August 2019.

<sup>66</sup> Nourredine Adam, leader of the Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central African Republic, has a longstanding relationship with Hemedti. They have met several times in 2019. According to a UN Panel of Experts report, the Front continues to acquire weapons, ammunition and vehicles from RSF elements. See "Letter dated 30 July 2019 from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to resolution 2454 (2019) addressed to the President of the Security Council", UNSC S/2019/608, 30 July 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Crisis Group interview, Riek Machar, Addis Ababa, August 2019. Crisis Group interviews, African officials, Addis Ababa, August 2019. See "South Sudan rebel brings Sudanese ally for peace talks", Bloomberg, 9 September 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Conscious of his limited popular appeal, Hemedti has deployed the vast funds he commands to win support, partly through a body he created called Sudanese People for the Support of the Transitional Military Council and the Protection of the Revolution, effectively a civilian wing of the RSF through which Hemedti dispenses patronage and which offers services usually performed by the state. Hemedti's troops, for example, took prominent roles in offering aid after recent major flooding.

<sup>69</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Sudanese officials, Khartoum, July–September 2019; Western diplomats, September 2019.

<sup>70</sup> "The man who terrorised Darfur is leading Sudan's supposed transition", *Foreign Policy*, op. cit.

<sup>71</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, September 2019.

recruited from a diverse pool.<sup>72</sup> But the intelligence services declined in power and influence as Bashir became more paranoid about internal challenges to his rule.

The long-time intelligence chief, Salah Gosh, was formerly regarded as one of the most powerful people in Sudan and as a rival to Bashir. By 2011, it became clear to Bashir that Gosh and the service he commanded could threaten his rule. As a result, he sidelined Gosh and curtailed the intelligence services' operational capabilities. In November 2012, Sudanese authorities detained Gosh, accusing him of plotting to sabotage the government.<sup>73</sup> Bashir rehabilitated him six years later and reappointed him intelligence chief in February 2018.

Although in the intervening period the RSF had emerged as Bashir's favourite security force, when protests broke out in December 2018, Gosh's apparatus spearheaded the crackdown.<sup>74</sup> Overwhelmed with detainees, Gosh scrambled to build new jail cells and repurpose ordinary prison quarters to hold the service's detainees. But, as noted above, Gosh soured on Bashir after the latter's apparent about-face on initiating a transition in February 2019. In April 2019, Gosh appeared to allow the protests to swell, and even to permit the 6 April sit-in to form in front of army headquarters in Khartoum. For a few weeks, the intelligence services' vehicles disappeared from the streets; intimidation and arrests stopped.<sup>75</sup>

By this time, Gosh and Hemedti were conspiring to oust Bashir. But the relationship between the two security chiefs soon began to deteriorate. Gosh saw himself as a leader and resented Hemedti's apparent ambitions. For his part, Hemedti distrusted Gosh.<sup>76</sup>

Many in the protest movement also distrusted Gosh, given his role suppressing protests and running a service many Sudanese blamed for gross human rights abuses (including administering a network of makeshift prisons where detainees were allegedly tortured). After initially resisting calls from the movement to leave office when Bashir fell, he resigned on 13 April.<sup>77</sup> A few weeks after Gosh quit, police directed by the Transitional Military Council chiefs tried to arrest him on corruption charges, but intelligence services officers, who remained loyal to him, prevented his detention. Soon afterward, Gosh left the country, reportedly to Egypt, where he appears to have remained active in trying to shape events in Sudan.<sup>78</sup>

Gosh's rivals have worked to dismantle his power base in the intelligence services. After Gosh left office, Hemedti used his influence to sack dozens of officers from the intelligence services.<sup>79</sup> And in July, the Transitional Military Council announced that the NISS would become the General Intelligence Service, dedicated solely to intelli-

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<sup>72</sup> See "Will Sudan End Torture?", Amnesty International, 3 April 2018.

<sup>73</sup> "Sudan's ex-spy chief arrested in connection with 'sabotage attempt': reports", *Sudan Tribune*, 22 November 2012.

<sup>74</sup> De Waal, "Sudan: A Political Marketplace Framework Analysis", op. cit.

<sup>75</sup> Crisis Group interview, Bashir regime insider, Khartoum, 14 June 2019.

<sup>76</sup> A well-placed source offered the account in this paragraph. Crisis Group interview, Bashir regime insider, Khartoum, 14 June 2019.

<sup>77</sup> "Sudan's intelligence chief resigns: Military council", *Middle East Eye*, 13 April 2019.

<sup>78</sup> Crisis Group interview, regional analyst, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Sudanese ruling party insider, Khartoum, July 2019; Western diplomats, Nairobi, August-September 2019.

gence gathering and losing its other internal security capabilities.<sup>80</sup> The RSF has reportedly folded many former NISS officers, particularly those from its operational arm, into its ranks – thereby further strengthening Hemedti.<sup>81</sup>

On 15 August, the U.S. State Department announced that it would sanction Gosh, in what observers viewed as a warning to influential Sudanese attempting to sabotage the transition.<sup>82</sup>

### B. *Two Steps Toward Security Sector Reform*

As Khartoum's transitional government seeks to turn the corner on Bashir's brutal legacy and create a foundation for stable future governance, security sector reform will be critically important. Two near-term objectives for the transitional government should be 1) to make the security services more accountable for their abuses and 2) to start to bring the country's primary military and paramilitary organisations under a single command.

Concerning the first objective, the civilian leadership of the transitional cabinet should work with the legislative council, when it is formed, to repeal laws that give the security forces immunity from prosecution for crimes committed in the course of duty.<sup>83</sup> A change to this legal regime, one of the world's most permissive, would signal that the government no longer tolerates wanton abuses of power by the state's agents and would be in keeping with the commitment all sides made in the constitutional agreement to implement "legal reform (and) rebuild and develop the human rights and justice system".<sup>84</sup>

As for the second objective, the most significant challenge will almost certainly be how to deal with the RSF, which exists outside the formal military. As a Western diplomat put it: "It is difficult to see how Sudan can be a democracy if individuals control quasi-private militias outside the command of the formal armed forces".<sup>85</sup>

The RSF's wealth and power mean that simply disbanding it – which many within the opposition coalition understandably call for – is not realistic.<sup>86</sup> Instead, Prime Minister Hamdok, the military leadership and the RSF should continue discussions broached by the opposition coalition and some within the armed forces during this summer's negotiations about the power-sharing agreement on the possibility of merging the security forces. In this scenario, RSF commanders and troops would retain their jobs but fall under the military command's authority. Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Cairo, which all have stated their commitment to stability in Sudan, should emphasise to RSF leadership that placing the country's security forces under unified command

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<sup>80</sup> De Waal, "Sudan: A Political Marketplace Framework Analysis", op. cit.

<sup>81</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Sudanese ruling party insider, Khartoum, July 2019; Western diplomats, Nairobi, August–September 2019.

<sup>82</sup> "US slaps sanctions on Sudan's former spymaster Salah Gosh", *The East African*, 15 August 2019. Crisis Group interview, regional analyst, September 2019.

<sup>83</sup> See "Sudan: Khartoum dragging feet over immunity", Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 2 June 2010.

<sup>84</sup> "Sudan: Constitutional Charter for the 2019 Period", 17 August 2019.

<sup>85</sup> Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Nairobi, August 2019.

<sup>86</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western and African diplomats familiar with the negotiations leading up to the power-sharing agreement, Nairobi and Addis Ababa, August 2019.

is essential for achieving this goal and encourage them in this direction. Patience and persistence will be necessary, however, as the RSF benefits greatly from the status quo and is therefore likely to be very resistant to this sort of change.

If domestic consensus can be achieved, actors such as the EU, which have experience in backing reform of the security sector and reintegration efforts, could offer support for the reintegration into society of those RSF militiamen who do not want to join the army and would prefer to go back to civilian life.

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## IV. The Opposition

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The Forces for Freedom and Change is a fragile coalition of parties, political personalities, unions and civil activist groups often with competing interests, divergent constituencies and opposing ideologies. Some veteran opposition party leaders within its ranks are part of the same old guard that many Sudanese view as sharing responsibility for the country's woes. Its younger leadership cohort, however, particularly the professionals and civil society figures who organised the protest movement, enjoy great credibility with the public, as demonstrated by their capacity repeatedly to summon tens of thousands of Sudanese into the streets.

Throughout, the opposition has shown not only determination but also a mastery of optics. The sit-in outside the army's Khartoum headquarters was redolent with symbolism – and made for great television. In naming Ahmed al-Rabia, a school-teacher who drives a taxi at night to supplement his income, as a chief spokesman in April, the opposition drew a sharp contrast between its support base – ordinary Sudanese seeking change – and the generals who got rich during Bashir's long rule.

### A. *An Uneasy Alliance*

The Forces for Freedom and Change coalition is expected to form the bedrock of support for efforts to institute full civilian rule at the end of the pivotal 39-month transition, but it is a work in progress. For all the FFC's accomplishments, it is not yet clear whether its many component organisations will maintain the unity required to check the security sector.<sup>87</sup>

The coalition represents a wide diversity of professional, civil society and political organisations, and its internal dynamics are correspondingly complex. Upon its formation in January 2019, a few weeks after protests broke out, the coalition assembled its coordinating committee, which steered the movement until Bashir's ouster, at which point the political parties became more dominant and led the negotiations.<sup>88</sup> Its most active members were the Sudanese Professionals Association, the civil society group Sudan Call (a collection of Sudan's more established political parties, rebel representatives and civil society activists) and other lobbies, including the Families of Ramadan Martyrs and the No to Women's Oppression Initiative. As the protests took shape, established political parties also began to play a bigger role in the movement.

Of these groups, the Sudanese Professionals Association was and remains most prominent in the public eye.<sup>89</sup> The group formed in 2014, remained fairly inactive until 2018, and then assumed a leadership role in the uprising. Civil society groups rallied around the SPA's leadership and mainstream opposition parties lent it behind-the-scenes support, realising that they lacked the popular legitimacy to lead the

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<sup>87</sup> Crisis Group interviews, FFC members, diplomats familiar with the negotiating process and civil society campaigners, Khartoum, Addis Ababa and Nairobi, May-August 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, opposition activists and local analyst, October 2019.

<sup>89</sup> "Meet the men leading Sudan's protest movement", AFP, 23 April 2019.



movement.<sup>90</sup> This tactical decision accelerated the protests' momentum and also boosted the SPA's popularity. By December 2018, the group consisted of seven underground professional syndicates and trade unions, led by a committee of the union heads.<sup>91</sup> The SPA remained at the vanguard of protests until 11 April, when the military moved against Bashir, at which point it assumed a lower profile.<sup>92</sup> Said one local political analyst: "For once, the opposition managed not to shoot itself in the foot".<sup>93</sup>

Still, the coalition has had its challenges. For one thing, some groups believe the coalition has been too accommodating. A bloc known as the National Consensus Forces split with leading coalition member Sudan Call in March over the latter's decision to participate in a proposed AU-led dialogue with Bashir's government.<sup>94</sup> Two members of the bloc – the Sudanese Communist Party and the Popular Congress Party – subsequently announced that they would not join the yet-to-be-formed legislative council or nominate members to the cabinet because in their view the FFC had offered too many concessions to the generals.<sup>95</sup>

Another grievance that some groups complain of is under-representation. This is a particular concern for the Sudan Revolutionary Front, an umbrella for armed groups that have fought insurgent campaigns on Sudan's periphery.<sup>96</sup> The Revolutionary Front and National Umma Party have together called for formation of a leadership council that would represent the coalition's different strands and be its decision-making body. Civil society groups, particularly the SPA, initially opposed this idea, contending that the existing flat structure, involving hundreds of neighbourhood committees and a faceless coordinating committee, was better positioned to avoid detection by Bashir's repressive security apparatus.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, in the

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<sup>90</sup> Two sources inside the FFC said the political parties finally conceded that the public would not follow their lead and began looking to the SPA as an alternative. One source worried that this step to politicise civil society risked undermining their mobilising potential. Crisis Group interviews, Khartoum, 16 June 2019.

<sup>91</sup> At its inception, the SPA was a body coordinating among independent syndicates of university professors and lecturers, physicians, teachers, engineers, veterinarians and journalists. Bashir, aware of Sudan's history of popular uprisings led by trade unions, infiltrated and weakened the state-sanctioned unions, requiring parallel unions to mobilise underground.

<sup>92</sup> Crisis Group interview, Sudanese political analyst, Washington, June 2019.

<sup>93</sup> Crisis Group interview, Sudanese political analyst, Washington, June 2019.

<sup>94</sup> The bloc formed in 2010, with the intention of standing against the ruling NCP in that year's elections. See "National Consensus Forces", *Sudan Tribune*, 2012. Its members include the National Umma Party (a moderate Islamic party, commonly known as Umma, led by former prime minister Sadiq al-Mahdi), the Popular Congress Party (previously led by Islamist figure Hassan al-Turabi, who fell out with Bashir in 1999) and the Sudanese Communist Party (which was once one of the most powerful political movements in the country).

<sup>95</sup> "Sudanese Communists reiterate opposition to set up FFC leadership body", *Sudan Tribune*, 17 September 2019; and "Sudan rebels take issue with Forces for Freedom and Change", Radio Dabanga, 22 August 2019.

<sup>96</sup> The Front is at least notionally part of Sudan Call.

<sup>97</sup> The protest movement faced stern repression in its early stages and, as a result, adopted a decentralised structure that spread out decision-making power among a network of committees and the diaspora. Among the leaders who were detained were Mohamad Nagi Al-Asam, a 28-year-old doctor who became one of the faces of the movement following his 4 June arrest. Another early coordinator was Mohamed Yousif Ahmed al-Mustafa, an SPA founder and Sudan's former labour minister. Other key figures on the coordinating committee were Medani Abbas Medani and Muawia Shaddad.

weeks leading up to the 3 June attack on protesters, civil society leaders began negotiations about forming the leadership council. The 3 June massacre disrupted these plans, as many leading coalition figures (especially youth leaders) went into hiding, but once mediation began, the council was formed.

Beyond addressing grievances that could threaten internal cohesion, the opposition will need to communicate more effectively and promptly with the public as part of efforts to improve its capacity as a serious political player. Over the course of the summer's transition talks, it was a source of public frustration and apprehension that the opposition, understandably accustomed to operating secretly, closely guarded information on progress that was being made.<sup>98</sup> Outside civil society organisations and donors, including the EU, U.S. and others, should encourage opposition leadership to be more open and to welcome a flourishing public debate on Sudan's future as part of their efforts to build support for the transition.

Another risk to the opposition is that the generals could seek to widen the opposition's internal divisions by co-opting its constituents.<sup>99</sup> One potentially important fissure is along geographic lines. As indicated above, the opposition is already exposed to the criticism that it is too dominated by metropolitan elites and draws a disproportionate number of its leaders from Khartoum.<sup>100</sup> Against this backdrop, Hemedti has cast himself as a champion of rural Sudan and cultivated alliances with the leaders of armed groups that opposed Bashir and should be the opposition coalition's natural allies.<sup>101</sup> He could strengthen these ties and try to peel off other coalition partners using similar tactics, weakening the coalition at a time when unity will be critical to its efforts to loosen the generals' hold on power. For this reason, it will be important for the opposition to be attentive in their actions and policies to both the rebels' desire for a serious voice in coalition decision-making and to their concerns about Sudan's treatment of its citizens in its long-neglected peripheries, as discussed below.

## B. *Splintered Rebels*

Sudan's centre-periphery tensions predate the Bashir era, but its internal wars intensified under the deposed president. South Sudan eventually seceded, while wars expanded to more places in the north. Mass atrocities perpetrated by Bashir's security forces in Darfur led to his indictment by the International Criminal Court, the first of a sitting head of state.

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<sup>98</sup> "The constitutional declaration, for example, is a very good document on paper in which the opposition won many concessions. But they have hardly explained its contents to the public", a Western diplomat said. Crisis Group interview, Khartoum, 7 August 2019.

<sup>99</sup> One African mediator who worked with the veteran opposition for years characterised its leaders as "no better" than Bashir's clique and just as power-hungry. Crisis Group interview, July 2019. Another Western diplomat familiar with the opposition said they were "stuck in the past" and should yield to the new civil society campaigners, who were in tune with the street. Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, February 2019.

<sup>100</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, Sudanese analyst and Western diplomats who recently visited Khartoum, September 2019.

<sup>101</sup> One Western diplomat quoted a major rebel leader saying he trusts Hemedti more than he does the opposition alliance, which he claimed was too focused on concentrating power in Khartoum. Crisis Group telephone interview, September 2019.

The new transitional government must reckon with the legacy of decades of efforts by elites in the wealthier riverine centre to subdue rebellions across the country by force. This legacy encompasses several regions devastated by conflict, huge displaced populations and an array of rebel movements, some scattered outside Sudan's borders. Bringing peace to warring areas should be a priority during the transitional period and will require careful consideration of the accommodations that the rebels are seeking. These include steps to reverse the imposition of Islamic law on religious minorities, separate religion and state, and provide for a fairer distribution of power and resources to areas in the periphery, including by allowing them to elect governors rather than imposing these from distant Khartoum.<sup>102</sup>

Abdelaziz al-Hilu, who, as noted below, leads the largest faction of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army-North, characterised the rebels' core grievances to Crisis Group as structural. Al-Hilu said Arabic-speaking elites in Khartoum have long tried to impose a "false Arab identity" on a culturally diverse country. This attitude, he said, impelled minorities to take up arms to protect their position in society. He added that successive regimes have worsened centre-periphery relations with the logic of political Islam, which casts non-Muslims as second-class citizens. Al-Hilu concluded by saying: "The other in Sudan is always oppressed, marginalised and excluded when it comes to access to power and wealth. The other in Sudan is left with only two options, either to accept inferiority status or be exterminated".<sup>103</sup>

The nature of Sudan's internal conflicts changed after South Sudan's 2011 independence. Rebel remnants from Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile regrouped into the Sudanese Revolutionary Front.<sup>104</sup> At the time, the Darfur conflict had raged for years, but the conflict in the latter two areas was just restarting after a respite ushered in by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. In its first two years, the Front, supported by Juba, made significant battlefield gains and threatened the central government's hold on the provinces where the fighting was taking place. The group also forged an alliance with the political opposition, joining Sudan Call.

The Front has since splintered, however, limiting its relevance as an armed force. Among its constituent parts, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North faction under Malik Agar, of Blue Nile, and Yasir Arman, of northern Sudan, lost most of its fighters following a bitter split in 2017. Darfuri rebel leader Minni Minnawi's Sudan Liberation Army faction is now based in Libya as mercenaries fighting on behalf of General Haftar.<sup>105</sup> The fighting force of the Justice and Equality Movement under Jibril Ibrahim is thought to have dwindled below a few hundred operating in South Sudan and Libya.<sup>106</sup> These groups' political strength among Sudanese is difficult to gauge but is likely eroding, even in war-affected regions.

Though vocal in its efforts to get a seat at the table during transitional agreement talks, the Front is in reality overshadowed by larger, more powerful armed groups

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<sup>102</sup> Crisis Group email interview, September 2019.

<sup>103</sup> Crisis Group WhatsApp interview, September 2019.

<sup>104</sup> "The Sudan Revolutionary Front: Its Formation and Development", Small Arms Survey, October 2014.

<sup>105</sup> "Letter from the Panel of Experts on the Sudan established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) addressed to the President of the Security Council", UNSC S/2019/35, 10 January 2019.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

that sit outside it. One is the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North faction led by Hilu, who took most of the rebel fighters with him in the 2017 split. Hilu has a secure stronghold in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan and commands the largest rebel faction in Blue Nile. Another is the Sudan Liberation Movement faction of Abdul-Wahid al-Nur, which is the only remaining significant rebel force in Darfur.<sup>107</sup> Nur's faction has declined in power in its Jebel Marra stronghold during his long self-imposed exile in France, as has the strength of his personal command. Both leaders disengaged from peace talks in Bashir's final years – especially Nur, who earned notoriety among diplomats for his consistent refusal to enter negotiations.<sup>108</sup>

But even if the Front is no longer the most powerful of the armed groups, both the coalition and the generals have vied for influence over it, conscious of its symbolic significance and potential spoiler role. Negotiations in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa in July 2019 made headway in aligning the Front's demands with the coalition's positions but in the end the rebel leaders walked out. Tensions remain rife: as noted above, the Front has griped about the coalition's decision-making process and having to play second fiddle to the civilian leaders, whom they see as another collection of aloof riverine elites. Meanwhile, Hemedti, whom the military council charged with outreach to Sudan's rebel movements, has been in touch through his own channels with the Front's members. His late June meeting with Minnawi, brokered by Chadian President Idriss Deby, fed speculation that the generals are working to pull the rebels away from the coalition and into their corner.

South Sudan and Egypt have also sought roles as mediators between Sudan's generals and rebels. South Sudan, which historically has been the main backer of several of the armed groups, has taken the lead in marshalling these parties to find a compromise. In the first week of September, its president, Salva Kiir, hosted key armed group leaders for talks and subsequently met Prime Minister Hamdok.<sup>109</sup> On 11 September, the parties signed the Juba Declaration, indicating that Juba would remain the sole forum for peace talks. South Sudan is likely to remain an important actor as it seeks to cultivate ties with the new administration in Khartoum on this role, having lost its prior channel, which relied on Bashir.<sup>110</sup> The benefits of a long-term sustainable peace would be considerable. It would mean that humanitarian workers could gain easier access to regions long under siege from the security forces while a permanent ceasefire – potentially overseen by AU monitors – would allow local populations freedom of movement across lines previously controlled by the patchwork of belligerents active across rural Sudan.

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<sup>107</sup> "Letter from the Panel of Experts on the Sudan established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) addressed to the President of the Security Council", UNSC S/2019/35, 10 January 2019.

<sup>108</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, former observer of various rounds of Darfur peace talks, October 2019.

<sup>109</sup> See "South Sudan president Kiir meets Sudan rebel leaders", Radio Dabanga, 6 September 2019. After Sudanese security forces released three prominent opposition leaders – Yasir Arman, Ismail Jalab and Mubarak Ardol – from detention, South Sudanese authorities welcomed them to Juba and offered them a base as they engaged in talks with the opposition coalition and junta. "Sudan opposition leader escapes to Juba", *The East African*, 10 June 2019.

<sup>110</sup> Crisis Group interviews, UN officials and other diplomats, New York, September 2019.

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## V. Islamist Organisations on the Sidelines – for Now

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The coup against Bashir and the generals' consolidation of power with Gulf backing has put Sudan's Islamist political machinery, embodied in recent years primarily by the ruling National Congress Party, out of order. Its incapacity may be temporary, however, since it still controls layers of the state bureaucracy and military. A failed counter-coup attempt on 24 July, reportedly involving Islamist-allied military personnel, suggests that at least some of Bashir's old guard may see themselves as his legitimate heirs.<sup>111</sup>

Sudan's version of the so-called deep state has its roots in the country's Islamist movement, which Bashir co-opted first to mount his own coup in 1989 and later to extend his rule. This movement, the National Islamic Front, was led by the prominent preacher Hassan al-Turabi for almost ten years. It was a major component of Sudan's ruling party and controlled much of the government bureaucracy.

Though Bashir later fell out with Turabi and rebranded the Front as the National Congress Party, Bashir's coalition continued to comprise Islamists acting in concert with security factions and opportunists.<sup>112</sup> Bashir gradually shunted the party aside in the final years of his rule in a desperate attempt to disassociate himself from a political entity that many Sudanese blamed for the collapsing economy. Despite the NCP's troubles, however, its members remain part of a relatively well-resourced and entrenched political network on the outside of the power-sharing arrangements.<sup>113</sup> Two Islamist political organisations that are also on the sidelines are the Popular Congress, which Turabi founded after his split with Bashir, and Reform Now. Both were once allied with Bashir but decided to back the protests that toppled him.

Given their nationwide political machinery and extensive financial resources after decades of access to government resources and contracts, the NCP and allied parties could yet emerge as powerful post-Bashir actors.<sup>114</sup> In the spring of 2019, after the state of emergency declaration and weeks before Bashir's ouster, party leaders reportedly began scheming about where and how to hide their wealth.<sup>115</sup> The NCP could be positioning itself to return to the political scene, and it may have some inside

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<sup>111</sup> "Sudan military says it thwarts coup attempt, arrests senior officers", Reuters, 24 July 2019. Crisis Group interviews, NCP insiders, July 2019. Several earlier reports of "coup attempts" were seen by observers in Khartoum as subterfuge by the junta in its effort to purge opponents, but local observers view the reported 24 July coup plan as more credible. On 2 October, Sudanese authorities said ten individuals suspected of involvement in the reported plot, including the former chief of staff, would be prosecuted. Two other generals were released without charge. "Generals arrested for 2019 coup attempt released", Radio Dabanga, 2 October 2019.

<sup>112</sup> See Crisis Group Briefing, *Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival*, op. cit.

<sup>113</sup> Crisis Group interviews, ruling party insiders, Khartoum, June 2019.

<sup>114</sup> Crisis Group interview, figure with close contacts in NCP, Khartoum, 15 June 2019.

<sup>115</sup> According to a source close to the NCP's inner circle, a few weeks before Bashir's ouster, high-ranking NCP officials began executing a plan to stash party funds in personal accounts and in foreign banks. By the time Bashir fell, the money had been transferred abroad or to accounts in Sudan that were not easily linked to the NCP. The plan is to withdraw the money slowly over the next few years, partly to fund the NCP, but mainly to establish a new youth-led party. Some in the NCP believe that they should take their time building this new party and try returning to power only after seven or eight years. Crisis Group interview, Khartoum, 15 June 2019.

support.<sup>116</sup> To their Egyptian and Gulf backers, the generals claim to be purging Islamist forces from the military and senior ranks of the civil service but some observers believe that the former junta and the NCP have a quiet truce.<sup>117</sup>

By standing apart from the transition, and in fact defining themselves in opposition to both the civilian coalition and the generals, parties associated with Islamism could well profit from the inevitable challenges that the transitional government will face. Because they are outside of it, they stand to gain public support should the transitional government be unable to deliver on key promises, especially with respect to reviving the economy.<sup>118</sup> Further, they may be able to call upon eager patrons in Qatar and Turkey, which are both looking for opportunities to regain their foothold in Khartoum.<sup>119</sup>

That said, both Abu Dhabi and Riyadh are keen to keep parties with strong links to Islamists in political exile. These two monarchies calculate that Sudan's security forces are their most dependable ally in that regard. The civil society component of the opposition coalition has also consistently rejected any accommodation with Muslim Brotherhood-style political Islam, identifying it as a legacy of Bashir that must be swept away.

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<sup>116</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western and regional diplomats, Nairobi, Khartoum and Addis Ababa, July-August 2019.

<sup>117</sup> According to one local observer, during the period when the Transitional Military Council controlled the reins of government, the NCP agreed not to publicly criticise the junta. In return, the junta agreed not to order mass arrest of NCP cadres, beyond its 22 members who are already in detention, and to prohibit negative coverage of the party in state media. Crisis Group interview, figure close to NCP, Khartoum, 15 June 2019.

<sup>118</sup> One European official characterised this de facto opposition status as a "gift" to the Islamists, due to the challenges the new government will face during the transitional period. Crisis Group telephone interview, 7 August 2019.

<sup>119</sup> Crisis Group interview, senior Qatari official, July 2019.

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## VI. The Role of External Actors

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Sudan has gripped the attention of Western, Gulf and African observers who are concerned, among other things, by the prospect of the Sudanese state's implosion. External actors have had to grapple with a complex crisis, notable for deep schisms between the key actors who will determine the country's future as well as divisions within the negotiating blocs themselves. Consistent, unified support for Sudan's political negotiations is necessary to avoid a breakdown of the civilian-military transitional administration on whose shoulders Sudan's near-term fate now rests. Indeed, without substantial external pressure, it is unlikely that the junta would have acceded to the concessions necessary to arrive at the deal adopted 17 August.

### A. Regional Mediation Efforts

The AU and Ethiopia have been critical to bridging the divide between the opposition coalition and security establishment.

Until the 3 June massacre, the two sides refused offers of international and regional mediation, but the killings in Khartoum created new pressure to talk.<sup>120</sup> International revulsion over the massacre found expression in the AU's 6 June decision to suspend Sudan's membership. The action by the Peace and Security Council, reportedly taken in spite of lobbying on Sudan's behalf by Egypt, illustrated the generals' growing isolation after the killings.<sup>121</sup> Still, even as pressure for mediation grew, it was not immediately clear which regional and international actors would get traction. The AU Commission renewed its offer to step in, but the Sudanese parties initially rebuffed its efforts.<sup>122</sup>

In the end, it was Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia's prime minister, who reset the talks.<sup>123</sup> Four days after the massacre, Abiy arrived in Khartoum, wearing the hat of the Inter-governmental Authority on Development, a regional body that Ethiopia now chairs. He quickly met with both sides, leaving senior diplomat Mahmoud Dirir behind as his envoy.<sup>124</sup> Critically, Abiy's effort received the public and private backing of the

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<sup>120</sup> While the generals feared pressure from international mediators to offer concessions, the opposition coalition had grown frustrated by the muted Western and AU reaction to the security forces' abuses as the protests continued. Crisis Group interviews, Sudanese Professionals Association members, Khartoum, June 2019.

<sup>121</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western and African diplomats, Addis Ababa, August 2019.

<sup>122</sup> The opposition's rejection of AU mediation largely stemmed from its discontent with the AU's previous efforts in Sudan, which it viewed as sustaining the status quo. Crisis Group interviews, civil society figure and opposition activist 12 June, Khartoum; and African and Western diplomats familiar with the negotiations, Addis Ababa, Nairobi and London, June-September 2019. (Crisis Group amended text here based on input from an AU diplomat.)

<sup>123</sup> Answering MPs' questions on 1 July, Abiy rationalised Ethiopia taking the lead in Sudanese mediation: "When there is peace and development in the Sudan, it would benefit us and whenever a problem happens in the Sudan it would affect us in a similar manner. Whenever the Sudanese encounter a problem, we are their first choice and hence it is inevitable for us to bear their burden". See Ethiopian House of Peoples Representatives, session of 1 July.

<sup>124</sup> Dirir is one of Abiy's top diplomats. "Mediators call on Sudan generals, protesters to resume talks Wednesday", *The East African*, 2 July 2019.

UAE, which had previously played a key role in brokering Ethiopia's rapprochement with Eritrea.<sup>125</sup>

After talks got under way, apparent disunity between the AU and Ethiopian envoys stymied early efforts at achieving a breakthrough. The envoys offered contrasting proposals to the opposition and military council, each containing different numbers for the composition of the planned legislative and sovereign councils. But after discussions in Addis, the AU and Ethiopian envoys closed ranks on 26 June, and presented both sides with a joint proposal, which became the basis for the 17 July political accord and the constitutional declaration eventually adopted on 17 August. The formula for the sovereign council that finally proved acceptable – with five members each appointed by the civilian coalition and the generals and an eleventh jointly chosen civilian – echoed the initial Ethiopian proposals.<sup>126</sup>

### B. *Western Coordination with the Gulf States and Egypt*

Coordinating Western and Gulf pressure on the parties to reach a negotiated deal took some time. In the weeks and months leading up to Bashir's ouster, many Sudanese protesters were frustrated at the relative silence of key Western countries.<sup>127</sup> Even after Bashir fell, pivotal players, notably Washington, which had de facto led the Troika partnership effort to stabilise Sudan and South Sudan dating back to the early 2000s, stayed largely out of the fray.<sup>128</sup> The opposition, Addis Ababa, Washington and European governments were together frustrated with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi for supporting Sudan's military council notwithstanding signals that it did not intend to share power with civilians.<sup>129</sup>

Two international initiatives helped bring Western and Gulf governments together with regional actors behind a common position.

The first to form was the Friends of Sudan contact group, an initiative primarily driven by Western diplomats, which met first in May in Washington and included representatives from the UN, AU, EU and Ethiopia, and which expanded to include Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar at its second meeting in Berlin in June. A statement after the June meeting, issued by the German foreign ministry, said all agreed on the need for a transition to civilian rule. One Western official, however, described this forum as "cosmetic" – useful primarily for coordinating financial aid packages – mainly because neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE, the junta's critical backers, sent high-level delegations.<sup>130</sup>

Indeed, it was a second – smaller, quieter and more informal – group that proved more effective. On the sidelines of a Quad (the U.S., the UK, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) ministerial meeting in London regarding Yemen in late April the group discussed Sudan. Those discussions ultimately led to a secret, Quad-brokered meeting

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<sup>125</sup> Abiy asked the UAE to support his mediation initiative. Crisis Group interview, UAE official, Abu Dhabi, July 2019.

<sup>126</sup> Crisis Group interviews, protest leaders, activists and diplomats who took part in the talks, Khartoum and Nairobi, July 2019.

<sup>127</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, protest leader, February 2019.

<sup>128</sup> The Troika is composed of the U.S., the UK and Norway.

<sup>129</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Washington, Khartoum and Addis Ababa, June-July 2019.

<sup>130</sup> Crisis Group interview, European official, Nairobi, July 2019.



in Khartoum on 29 June between the military council, including Hemedti, and opposition coalition leaders, to cool temperatures in advance of the next day's "million-man" march.<sup>131</sup>

Beyond these group efforts, Washington also pressured Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Cairo through bilateral channels. In public, the U.S. pointedly condemned the 3 June killings and pressed the Saudis to do more so that the junta would change course.<sup>132</sup> In visits to Cairo and Riyadh in July, U.S. Special Envoy Donald Booth, appointed just nine days after the Khartoum massacre, made it clear that Washington supported a negotiated compromise and backed calls for a civilian-led administration.<sup>133</sup>

U.S. pressure on Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the junta's principal external backers, paved the way for such compromise. Diplomats who follow the region differ as to whether the two Gulf countries decided after 3 June that the military could not govern effectively using purely strong-arm tactics, or whether they were more focused on the need to defuse the immediate situation given the global backlash the June violence engendered.<sup>134</sup> Either way, Washington's diplomacy helped focus both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi on the importance of shifting their posture, which they did.

Although Egypt, another critical player, also altered its position and began pressing the junta to compromise, Cairo looks at Sudan through a somewhat different lens than the Gulf states. Its involvement in Sudan is rooted in its historical desire to maintain political stability in an important neighbour, as well as to thwart Islamist movements it views as extensions of the Muslim Brotherhood. But it is also invested in preventing its regional rival Ethiopia from outflanking it in shaping Sudan's post-Bashir order, and maintaining sufficient influence to defend its interests in a country through which the Nile river, critical to Egypt's survival, charts its course from the Ethiopian highlands.<sup>135</sup> Against this backdrop, Egypt's persistent closeness to the generals – with whom it has met numerous times since Bashir's ouster – will likely continue to be a channel for Cairo to assert itself in a political environment where it is competing with Addis, and where Ethiopia's Abiy remains popular with the opposition following his mediation efforts this summer.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Crisis Group interview, UK diplomat, July 2019. At least seven protesters were killed during this march on 30 June, as thousands of Sudanese took to the streets. See "Sudanese protesters killed during 'million-man march'", France 24, 30 June 2019.

<sup>132</sup> Crisis Group interviews, U.S., European and UK diplomats, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Washington and London, July-August 2019.

<sup>133</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Ethiopian foreign ministry official, Addis Ababa, July 2019; Western diplomat, Nairobi, August 2019.

<sup>134</sup> One senior European official said the Saudis and Emiratis realised after 3 June that the military council could not stabilise Sudan through repression alone. Hence, it supported efforts to reach a negotiated deal. The official expressed optimism that the partnership could continue, saying there was a lower degree of divergence with the Gulf on Sudan than on other regional crises, including Yemen, Somalia and Ethiopia. Another European official, however, suggested that reputational risk, rather than a change in perspective, spooked the Gulf powers into backing away from repression in Sudan, for now. Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, June-July 2019.

<sup>135</sup> Crisis Group Africa Report N°271, *Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute*, 20 March 2019.

<sup>136</sup> "Sudan interim military council chief al-Burhan meets with Egypt's president El-Sisi", *Arab News*, 25 May 2019; "Sudan's Hemedti meets el-Sisi before resumption of power talks", *Al Jazeera*, 29 July 2019.

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## VII. Nurturing a Fragile Deal

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The deal reached this summer was hard-won and remains Sudan's best hope. If implemented, it can prevent – for now – a worst-case scenario of spiralling violence and state collapse. Yet the path ahead remains daunting. A central challenge moving forward will be maintaining coordinated pressure from across several continents to make sure that the deal sticks and Sudan's transition remains on a firm footing.

### A. *Supporting the Transition Economically and Diplomatically*

A key driver of the protests that forced Bashir out of power was the parlous state of Sudan's economy. The new administration inherits the challenge of improving the lives of millions of Sudanese immiserated by decades of ruinous policies. Widespread corruption, massive transfers of capital abroad by the top brass and NCP insiders and extravagant expenditure on the defence sector contributed to an economic crisis exacerbated by high inflation, enormous foreign debt and widespread shortages of essential goods, including fuel, bread and medicine.<sup>137</sup>

In recent months, technocrats from the opposition have devised what they describe as an “emergency plan” to revive the economy.<sup>138</sup> Among its worthy components are reforming key institutions, including the central bank, to ensure that all government revenue is channelled through formal institutions and not into the generals' coffers; tackling the parallel currency market as part of an effort to stabilise the overvalued official currency; setting up a system to encourage and facilitate remittances from Sudan's vast diaspora; and trebling the budgetary allocation to the health and education sectors from 5 to at least 15 per cent.<sup>139</sup>

Prime Minister Hamdok, whose most recent posting was as deputy executive secretary and chief economist at the UN Economic Commission for Africa, has the right training and expertise to take on this task.<sup>140</sup> But he faces an enormous obstacle in the form of Sudan's debt stock, which stands at close to \$60 billion.<sup>141</sup> Securing debt

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<sup>137</sup> Sudan is rated 175 out of 180 countries on Transparency International's corruption perception index. See “Sudan, South Sudan near bottom of corruption perception index”, Radio Dabanga, 23 February 2018.

<sup>138</sup> Crisis Group interviews, technocrats appointed to devise economic management plans under the new civilian-led authorities, Khartoum, August 2019. A core team of seven experts consulted about 24 authorities on the economy, including some former government officials. The team completed a draft at the end of May and held consultations on key findings in June. Priorities include tackling mass youth unemployment, addressing chronic delays in the importation of medicine and finding more funding for public and higher education.

<sup>139</sup> At least some of these measures will help take Sudan in the direction of qualifying for the IMF-World Bank Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Initiative benchmarks. It will need to meet these criteria before it can secure a broad debt relief package along the lines discussed in this section from creditors down the road.

<sup>140</sup> Hamdok worked at the Finance Ministry in Sudan before he was forced into early retirement. He turned down an offer from Bashir to be finance minister in September 2018, at a time when the president recognised that the economic crisis posed a real challenge to his hold to power. Significantly, he hails from Kordofan in Sudan's war-torn periphery, a shift away from the traditional dominance of such positions by appointees from the wealthier centre of the country.

<sup>141</sup> “Sudan PM seeks end to Sudan's pariah status”, AP, 25 August 2019.

relief from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Sudan's Paris Club creditors, however, is bound up with the question of whether the U.S. government will rescind its 1993 designation of Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism (SST), which was imposed at a time when Khartoum hosted al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden.

Given the politics surrounding the SST issue in the U.S. and in light of historically fraught relations between Washington and Khartoum, lifting the designation will not be straightforward.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, even if it is lifted, Sudan's arrears of \$2.6 billion will nevertheless preclude debt relief until they can be cleared.<sup>143</sup>

Still, Khartoum – along with its European and Gulf partners – should press for lifting the SST designation, and Washington should acquiesce. There are more than enough economic, symbolic and political reasons to move forward with the SST lifting as soon as possible. In addition to being a necessary though insufficient step toward debt relief (which will also require meeting benchmarks for fiscal transparency in addition to clearing arrears), lifting the SST designation will open the way for international banks to re-engage with Sudan, reconnect the country to the international financial system, signal to foreign investors that the country is open for business and make clear to the world that Washington no longer considers Khartoum a pariah. Rescission will also pave the way for the loosening of other U.S. legislation and executive orders that restrict aid and U.S. economic ties to Sudan.<sup>144</sup>

Perhaps most critically, on the political level rescission will be an important win for Hamdok, who can use it to consolidate public support at a moment when he will need all the strength he can muster. Just weeks ago, Hamdok made an impassioned appeal to the UN General Assembly to help him rehabilitate Sudan's international image and lobbied for the U.S. to lift the SST designation.<sup>145</sup> Lifting it will show that he can deliver. Although U.S. government officials have indicated to external interlocutors that lifting could take up to a year once there is a decision to do it, there is nothing in the laws governing rescission to indicate that it needs to take so long, and former executive branch officials suggest that there is precedent for moving much more quickly.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, even if there are hidden impediments in the case of Sudan,

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<sup>142</sup> See Crisis Group Briefing, *Time to Repeal Sanctions on Sudan?*; and Crisis Group Briefing, *A New Roadmap to Make U.S. Sudan Sanctions Relief Work*, both op. cit. See also "U.S. is open to removing Sudan from terrorism list, diplomat says", *The New York Times*, 16 November 2017. The U.S. has as far back as 2017 attempted to use the State Sponsors of Terrorism designation to demand change on human rights and political freedoms.

<sup>143</sup> Crisis Group interviews, economist, U.S. government and Congressional officials, Washington, September 2019. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Improving Prospects for a Peaceful Transition in Sudan*, op. cit. If the transition stays on track, help for clearing these arrears might come in the form of a bridging loan from a supportive government and write-offs.

<sup>144</sup> The Centre for Global Development has compiled a list of such legislation and executive orders. See Jeremy Bennett, "Table of Legal Bases for Sanctions on Sudan", Centre for Global Development, 6 October 2011.

<sup>145</sup> "Hamdok urges US to remove Sudan from sponsors of terrorism list", Al Jazeera, 28 September 2019.

<sup>146</sup> Crisis Group conversations, diplomats, New York, September 2019. See also Congressional Research Service, "State Sponsors of Acts of International Terrorism – Legislative Parameters: In Brief", 30 November 2019. As noted in the CRS report, there are two statutory routes to rescission. Under the first, the President must certify and report to Congress that 1) there has been a fundamental change in the leadership and policies of the government concerned; 2) the government is

the U.S. government can signal its intention now, pledging to move as quickly as possible toward rescission – a signal of support that would serve Hamdok well.

Some knowledgeable observers have argued against taking this step before the RSF has demonstrated that it will allow the transitional authorities to make needed reforms and negotiate peace. They are understandably concerned that rescission will eliminate Washington's key tool for pressing Sudanese hardliners not to spoil the transition.<sup>147</sup>

Kicking the can down the road has considerable downsides, however. Indeed, there are strong arguments militating for lifting the SST designation even if Sudan were not negotiating a delicate political transition. For one thing, some commentators (including Crisis Group) have long expressed concern that the sanctions flowing from the designation disproportionately hurt the Sudanese people, create a shadow economy that empowers senior security officials and their cronies, and give the country's leadership an excuse for its poor economic performance.<sup>148</sup> For another thing, it is hardly clear that Sudan – which obviously no longer hosts Osama bin Laden and has for years been a U.S. counter-terrorism partner – satisfies the criteria for being an SST any longer.<sup>149</sup>

But the central consideration should be that Sudan is in the midst of a delicate political transition, where lifting the designation has the potential to create positive momentum and maintaining it could have perilous consequences. Securing a rescission of Khartoum's SST status would give Hamdok the political win alluded to above and boost prospects for a successful transition. It would demonstrate to the Sudanese people that moving toward civilian government – as they have been doing over the course of the past year – can open doors that were long closed to the country and give it a chance at a more prosperous future. By contrast, the longer Washington delays in lifting the designation, the more the generals will be able to sow doubt that the civilians entrusted with Sudan's transition are capable of bringing about the economic turnaround the country needs.

To be sure, if the U.S. moves forward with SST lifting, there is a risk that the generals will subsequently seek to derail the transition, and Washington will have lost

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not supporting acts of international terrorism; and 3) the government has provided assurances that it will not support acts of international terrorism in the future. The second requires the president to certify to congressional leadership, 45 days before rescission takes effect, that 1) the government concerned has not provided any support for acts of international terrorism during the preceding six-month period; and 2) the government concerned has provided assurances that it will not support acts of international terrorism in the future. Even if the executive branch determines that it must follow the lengthier second path in the case of Sudan, which requires a review of the prior six-month period, a former U.S. government lawyer noted that the government generally has updated information on which it can base its assessments, that a review need not take long, and that there is precedent for wrapping up such reviews very quickly when there is sufficient political will. Crisis Group interview, former U.S. government lawyer, October 2019.

<sup>147</sup> The Sentry (Enough Project), "A Modernised U.S. Policy for Sudan", September 2019.

<sup>148</sup> Crisis Group Briefing, *A New Roadmap to Make U.S. Sudan Sanctions Relief Work*, op. cit.

<sup>149</sup> Sudan has positioned itself as a counter-terrorism partner to the U.S. in recent years, including by sharing intelligence about the Islamic State (ISIS) and the Somalia-based insurgent group Al-Shabaab. A U.S. official told Crisis Group in April 2017 that Khartoum's cooperation on this score was "active", ahead of an October 2017 decision to drop some financial sanctions against Sudan. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Time to Repeal Sanctions on Sudan?*, op. cit.

one tool for influencing them. But there are other pressures that may help to keep the generals in line. For a start, even if the SST designation is lifted, Sudan will still need to meet certain reform benchmarks (especially with respect to fiscal transparency) in order to qualify for debt relief. Whether the generals might be willing to risk public outrage and Sudan's economic future in order to spoil the reforms and deny Hamdok a win is simply not clear; some analysts doubt it.<sup>150</sup> To help manage this risk, Washington and Brussels should also signal loud and clear that spoilers who impede Sudan's economic or political transition will be targeted for financial sanctions – as will their networks, companies and commercial facilitators.<sup>151</sup> The AU Peace and Security Council, which already warned on 7 June that it would “impose punitive measures on individuals and entities obstructing [the transition]”, should reinforce this threat to deter spoilers.<sup>152</sup>

Beyond SST rescission, the U.S. and other partners should be considering other ways to strengthen Hamdok's hand at this pivotal moment. One important step would be for them to create a broad economic relief package for the country that can help support the prime minister's government while he embarks on necessary reforms. This donor effort should involve the World Bank, the U.S., the EU and its member states, the Islamic Development Bank, the Saudi Fund for Development, the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development and other members of the Friends of Sudan international forum, such as Qatar.<sup>153</sup> All participating entities should pool funds for budget support and coordinated development projects and channel them to the government through a lead agency such as the World Bank or the African Development Bank.<sup>154</sup>

Additionally, to help Khartoum put its financial house in order, Hamdok should request, and foreign donors should provide, technical assistance to help Sudan's ministries track state revenues and illicit rent-seeking behaviour within Sudan's complex state and parastatal machineries, including in the profitable and corruption-prone oil sector. With this assistance, Hamdok will be better able to navigate Sudan's opaque financial systems and assess how he might take control of revenue streams that, legally, should be under the state's purview and not under that of politically connected individuals with ties to the security services. Hamdok initially may decide to move cautiously even with these tools at his disposal, however, lest he provoke a sharp reaction from actors within the security services who could see their interests threatened.

External actors should also consider how they can best use their diplomatic muscle in support of a successful transition to long-term civilian rule. Experience with

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<sup>150</sup> Crisis Group interview, Sudanese political analyst, Washington, June 2019.

<sup>151</sup> The Sentry, “A Modernised U.S. Policy for Sudan”, op. cit.

<sup>152</sup> Communiqué of the AU Peace and Security Council, 7 June 2019.

<sup>153</sup> Crisis Group interview, UK diplomat, July 2019.

<sup>154</sup> Crisis Group interview, UK diplomat, July 2019. Creating pooled funds is a step that donors can take even before the state sponsor of terrorism designation is lifted. Although these two agencies cannot directly lend funds to Sudan until the lift, they can legally coordinate the management of funds provided by voluntary donations. Crisis Group email interview, U.S. Congressional source, September 2019. U.S. officials have said that they would not veto the creation of these mechanisms even if it happens while the SST still remains in effect. Crisis Group interviews, U.S. Congressional sources, Washington, September 2019.

transitions elsewhere suggests that power sharing often founders when there is no party capable of offering an avenue for mediation if protagonists become deadlocked.<sup>155</sup>

The AU might be able to help on this front.<sup>156</sup> It could appoint a special envoy to Sudan and expand its liaison office in Khartoum with the objective of providing mediation and other support to the transition; the UN could channel technical assistance through this office. The proposed envoy could report to the AU chair and provide regular briefings to the Peace and Security Council, so that the Council can monitor the agreement's implementation. Having an AU representative in this role might bolster the opposition coalition's confidence that they are not politically alone when they need to square off against the generals, who enjoy an asymmetric edge in military and economic power. Finally, Sudan's Western allies – especially the U.S. – should continue to give the transition a diplomatic boost by leaning on the generals' most important external backers in Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Cairo, so that the latter governments encourage the security forces' leadership not to obstruct necessary economic and political reforms. The core message addressed to them should reprise the considerations that finally drove them to push for a power-sharing agreement this summer: without these changes, the political stability that all three seek for Khartoum will likely remain elusive.

#### B. *Seizing the Moment to End Sudan's Internal Wars*

The fall of Bashir presents a rare opportunity to end Sudan's long-running internal wars. The new constitutional charter requires that transitional authorities prioritise the pursuit of a "just and comprehensive peace" within the first six months of the transition.<sup>157</sup> Sudanese authorities should use this period to urgently address this challenge. Western, African and Gulf powers should throw their weight behind this effort.

First, the transitional government and rebel groups should swiftly proclaim a mutual ceasefire during the six-month timeframe allocated for striking peace deals. If the parties can reach a permanent ceasefire agreement, a formal African-led ceasefire monitoring mission, under the office of the proposed AU envoy, should then be deployed to bolster security on the ground. The government and rebel groups should also agree to open areas they control to humanitarian agencies and negotiate a mutual release of prisoners as they enter political talks.

Secondly, leaders from the regions that have suffered from wars with Bashir's regime or their nominees should be offered positions in transitional institutions, lest

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<sup>155</sup> See "Understanding the Transition: A Challenge and Opportunity for Mediators", The NYU Center on International Cooperation, June 2013.

<sup>156</sup> The AU has been present in Khartoum, helping resolve Sudan's internal and external crises, for at least fifteen years. An AU mission was deployed to Darfur in 2004 amid killings by pro-government militias. The AU opened a liaison office in 2008 and has accumulated in-depth knowledge of the country. From 2009 up to 2018, the AU High-Level Implementation Panel attempted to mediate between Bashir and the opposition. Although opposition figures complain that the AU has favoured the regime, there are no viable alternatives: Khartoum's relations with Western powers are too historically fraught, and regional powers tend to be too invested in either the military or the civilian side. Crisis Group telephone interview, African diplomat, August 2019.

<sup>157</sup> Sudan Constitutional Charter, 4 August 2019.

they conclude that yet another betrayal is in the offing. The two most powerful rebel leaders – Abdelaziz al-Hilu and Abdul-Wahid al-Nur of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North and the Sudan Liberation Movement, respectively – are unlikely to quickly join the government. Nur, in particular, has already denounced the new government in Khartoum. Sudan's new civilian administration should nonetheless take care to avoid the perception of exclusion. In making key appointments, it is essential for the prime minister, who himself hails from Kordofan, to include qualified candidates from rebel strongholds.

Thirdly, the transitional government will need to negotiate inclusive peace accords without succumbing to the temptation of further splintering the rebels, which would increase the likelihood of continued war by making peace negotiations even more complex. These groups will present demands for greater regional autonomy and a more formal redistribution of power; both the security establishment and the opposition coalition should take these seriously, as those demands have strong grassroots support in peripheral areas. These are concessions that the new authorities will probably need to make in order to start Sudan on its steep path to recovery. Down the road, it will be necessary to consider how political commitments to greater autonomy translate into the country's formal federal structure, and how to screen the rebels and integrate their forces into the nation's security architecture.

Dealing with the splintered Darfuri factions may require a special effort, not least because of the rise of Hemedti, whose RSF now controls most of the region and is loathed by many Darfuris. Most of the active Darfuri rebel groups are now outside the country, primarily in Libya, where they fight on multiple sides of that nation's conflict. Sudanese authorities should urge these groups to engage seriously in the talks. The AU and EU should offer technical support for the initiative to help parties formulate a roadmap for sustainable peace.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

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Bashir's fall is a victory for Sudan's people and a chance to end Sudan's legacy of state failure and civil strife. Yet the path ahead is strewn with challenges and there is hard work ahead to make the transitional power-sharing agreement hold. The Sudanese people, whose bravery brought down the strongman, will necessarily be at the vanguard of efforts to ensure that all parties abide by their commitments. External support – particularly to pull Sudan's economy out of its doldrums and to strengthen the hand of civilians in an uneasy power-sharing arrangement with generals who have an interest in sabotaging reform – is sorely needed. Sudan's elites will also need to seize the opportunity to stop the country's numerous wars and redress the structural inequalities that undergird them. Bashir's rule broke Sudan; there will be no shortcuts to repairing the decades of damage wrought. At least, albeit at great cost, the Sudanese have given themselves a fighting chance.

**Khartoum/Addis Ababa/Nairobi/Abu Dhabi/Brussels,  
21 October 2019**



Appendix A: Map of Sudan



Map No. 4438 Rev.2 UNITED NATIONS  
March 2012

Department of Field Support  
Cartographic Section

## Appendix B: Acronyms

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FFC	Forces for Freedom and Change
NCP	National Congress Party
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Service
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SPA	Sudanese Professionals Association
SST	State Sponsor of Terrorism designation

## Appendix C: About the International Crisis Group

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The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org). Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, German Federal Foreign Office, Global Affairs Canada, Irish Aid, Iceland Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the UK Department for International Development, and the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Crisis Group also holds relationships with the following foundations: Carnegie Corporation of New York, Charles Koch Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Korea Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Ploughshares Fund, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, UniKorea Foundation, and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

**October 2019**

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## Appendix D: Reports and Briefings on Africa since 2016

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*Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

*Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action*, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

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*A Tale of Two Councils: Strengthening AU-UN Cooperation*, Africa Report N°279, 25 June 2019.

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*Katanga: Tensions in DRC's Mineral Heartland*, Africa Report N°239, 3 August 2016.

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*Boulevard of Broken Dreams: The "Street" and Politics in DR Congo*, Africa Briefing N°123, 13 October 2016.

*Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*, Africa Report N°241, 16 November 2016 (also available in French).

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*Ethiopia: Governing the Faithful*, Africa Briefing N°117, 22 February 2016.

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*South Sudan's South: Conflict in the Equatorias*, Africa Report N°236, 25 May 2016.

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*Speaking with the "Bad Guys": Toward Dialogue  
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N°276 (also available in French), 28 May  
2019.

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## Appendix E: International Crisis Group Board of Trustees

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**CHAIR**

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