

Report

June 2020



SUDAN UPRISING

Popular Struggles, Elite Compromises,
and Revolution Betrayed

John Young



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A publication of the Small Arms Survey's Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan project with support from the US Department of State

Credits

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Cover photo: Protesters chant and wave the Sudanese flag during the sit-in at Sudan's military headquarters, Khartoum, 7 April 2019. Source: Muhammad Salah Abdulaziz

The HSBA project

The Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA) for Sudan and South Sudan is a multi-year project administered by the Small Arms Survey. It was developed in cooperation with the Canadian government, the United Nations Mission in Sudan, the United Nations Development Programme, and a wide array of international and Sudanese partners. Through the active generation and dissemination of timely, empirical research, the project supports violence reduction initiatives, including disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programmes and incentive schemes for civilian arms collection, as well as security sector reform and arms control interventions across Sudan and South Sudan. The HSBA also offers policy-relevant advice on redressing insecurity.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

AU	African Union
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EU	European Union
FFC	Forces for Freedom and Change
GWOT	Global war on terrorism
ICC	International Criminal Court
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JEM	Justice and Equality Movement
NCF	National Consensus Forces
NCP	National Congress Party
NFP	National Front for Professionals
NIF	National Islamic Front
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Service
NUP	National Umma Party
PDF	Popular Defence Forces
PHR	Physicians for Human Rights
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
SCP	Sudanese Communist Party
SPA	Sudanese Professionals Association
SPLA/M	Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement
TMC	Transitional Military Council
UAE	United Arab Emirates
USD	United States dollar(s)

About the author

John Young has a PhD in Political Science from Simon Fraser University in Vancouver and has worked in the Horn of Africa in various capacities since 1986. He has authored three books, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975–1991* (1997); *The Fate of Sudan: Origins and Consequences of a Flawed Peace Process* (2012); and *South Sudan's Civil War: Violence, Insurgency and Failed Peacemaking* (2019), as well as 35 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on conflict, armed groups, and peace processes in the Horn. Two co-authored books are forthcoming on the failure of the Western nation state in the Horn of Africa and of Western democracy in the Horn.

About this study

The research for this study is based on years of experience in Sudan, consideration of a wide variety of secondary material, and visits to Khartoum in late November and early December 2018 immediately before the start of the uprising, as well as four weeks in Khartoum ending on 4 June 2019, one day after the Rapid Support Forces killed more than 150 protestors at the opposition sit-in.

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Executive summary

The National Islamic Front (NIF) came to power in Sudan in 1989 as a result of a coup (it was renamed the National Congress Party, or NCP, in 1998), and held power under Omar al-Bashir for the next 30 years, despite widespread opposition, wars in the country's peripheries, and the 2011 secession of southern Sudan to form the new state of South Sudan. In 1999, when NIF foreign policies threatened the continued existence of the regime, al-Bashir dismissed Hassan al-Turabi, the author of the party's Islamist programme; however, a growing economic crisis led to the implementation of austerity measures after 2011 that intensified internal opposition, while al-Bashir was unable to overcome the country's regional and international isolation. Concluding that al-Bashir had become a major threat to the survival of the regime, the head of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), Salah Gosh, began to plan for his removal with the support of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Egypt.

A grouping of professional associations, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), was formed in June 2018 to press for economic reforms. After youth-led demonstrations in December 2018 in response to rising bread prices and fuel rationing, in January 2019 the SPA brought together many of Sudan's political parties and some armed groups to form the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC). The FFC committed to removing al-Bashir, establishing a civil administration, and eliminating the roots of the ruling party in the state and society. In the wake of continuing demonstrations that included increasing numbers of people from all corners of the country, on 11 April 2019 the generals jailed al-Bashir and attempted to rule on their own. But in a turbulent context of continuing resistance, on 3 June the dominant element in the security services, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by Lt. Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Daglo (known as 'Hemeti'), attacked the sit-in outside military headquarters in Khartoum. The brutality of the attack lost the junta domestic and international support, and the subsequent FFC-led country-wide strike made clear that the generals could not rule alone. The FFC was in turn overawed by the potential violence that the junta could unleash, and on 17 July 2019 the antagonists reached a power-sharing agreement that was planned to last for 39 months. The FFC was successful in displacing al-Bashir, but did not achieve its objective of establishing a genuine civil administration, and thus the primary issue that produced the uprising has not been resolved and instability will likely continue.

Key findings

- Similar to uprisings in 1964 and 1985, a major cause of the 2018–19 uprising was an extended period of economic decline and uneven development that fostered insurgencies in Sudan’s peripheries. The economic crisis was exacerbated by the cost of combating these insurgencies, a vastly inflated security sector, endemic corruption, and US sanctions. The economic crisis and the regime’s attempt to foster Islamist values served to bring large numbers of youth, notably including women, onto the streets, in contrast to the uprisings of 1964 and 1985, when trade unions played a leading role.
- Divisions developed within the NCP as a result of al-Bashir’s centralization of power and marginalization of his competitors, which led NISS chief Salah Gosh and other leaders to conclude that the regime could only be preserved by removing the president.
- With the support of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, the military expected that, after it had deposed al-Bashir, it could form a transitional government on its own, but the brutality of the RSF’s suppression of the sit-in in Khartoum on 3 June 2019 lost the junta domestic and international legitimacy, and it was compelled to sign a power-sharing agreement with the FFC on 17 July 2019. Fearing further attacks on civilians, weakened by internal divisions, and under international pressure, the FFC accepted an agreement that involved abandoning its central demand for a civil administration.
- Youth made up the core of the uprising, and their challenge to the junta was mainly manifested in the sit-ins that they organized. But when the brutal RSF attack on the Khartoum sit-in on 3 June 2019 effectively ended the sit-ins, the youth lost much of their influence over the FFC, had no say on the political agreements reached between it and the generals, have no representation in the transitional government, and cannot be expected to exert much influence during the 39-month transitional period.
- This report concludes that because the opposition was unable to impose its objective of a genuine civil administration and, given the preponderance of the military in the transitional government, it is very unlikely that this government will be able to eliminate the deep and corrupting influences of the NCP and the military in the state and society, much less overcome systemic inequities that have afflicted Sudan since its independence. Unless the civil and armed opposition can overcome the power of the military, the 2019 uprising will suffer the same fate as those of 1964 and 1985, when hopes for a radical transformation of Sudanese society were quashed.



Because the NIF never governed with the consent of the Sudanese people, violence was always integral to the pursuit of its domestic and foreign policies.”

Introduction

The NIF came to power in 1989 as a result of a military coup that overthrew the democratically elected coalition government of Sadiq al-Mahdi. Led by Brig. Gen. Omar al-Bashir and Hassan al-Turabi, who provided the party's inspiration and ideological direction, the coup was timed to prevent parliament from endorsing a peace process to end the war in southern Sudan (Young, 2012, pp. 31–32). The NIF was the first Sunni Islamist movement to hold state power in any country, but the military, key sections of which were under the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, was always key, and comprised the leading component of the government. Because the NIF never governed with the consent of the Sudanese people, violence was always integral to the pursuit of its domestic and foreign policies. Under al-Turabi's influence Sudan became a global centre for the export of political Islam, with the first targets being its neighbouring states. Not only were these endeavours unsuccessful, but after the NIF government facilitated an assassination attempt against Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in June 1995, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Uganda came together to support the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) operating in southern Sudan and launch their own attacks against Sudan. Were it not for the outbreak of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998, this alliance might well have brought about the collapse of the al-Bashir regime.

These and other foreign policy misadventures isolated Sudan, and al-Bashir responded by marginalizing and repeatedly jailing al-Turabi and attempting to reconcile with the country's neighbouring states and the United States, which was allied with these states. But this moderation in foreign policy was pursued in tandem with a ruthless suppression of human rights, including 'public order' laws that targeted women; the escalation of the wars in southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile state, and later Darfur; growing inequality and corruption; and the erosion of the country's social safety net as the NIF pursued a kleptocratic capitalism under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The internal wars and suppression of dissent drained the national budget and swelled the security services, while US sanctions and the designation of Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism restricted foreign investment. The economy picked up with the advent of oil production in the early years of the first decade of the 21st century, and this led to a tacit agreement whereby the government would be left alone by those that opposed it in exchange for maintaining high subsidies on oil and bread (Dwamena, 2019). But little of the oil revenues went into developing the economy, and instead they were used to finance patrimonial politics and the security services upon which the weak government depended for its survival.

This period also corresponded with the peace process to end the war in southern Sudan, which was led by the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the international Troika comprising Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United



Female protesters hold a sign with the slogan 'Let's live as brothers and sisters and let's build Sudan together' during the sit-in at Sudan's military headquarters, Khartoum, 14 April 2019. Source: Muhammad Salah Abdulaziz

States. These efforts produced the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, national elections in 2010, and the secession of southern Sudan in 2011 to form the new state of South Sudan. Sudan's relations with the United States had been tense, but improved when the regime accepted the US-led peace process, with the expectation that this would end the sanctions and the country's isolation. The southern peace process provided the al-Bashir regime with a new lease on life, because the peacemakers needed the regime to implement the CPA, but the process also provided valuable political space for Sudan's long-repressed civil society. The regime experienced a major blow in March 2009, however, when the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted al-Bashir for the conduct of his government's war in Darfur, which increasingly isolated him internationally.

Faced with the ICC indictment and the looming secession of southern Sudan, which would involve the loss of most of Sudan's oil production and therefore of a major government revenue source, al-Bashir was compelled to agree further to the demands of the United States and its Gulf allies. This included supporting the US global war on terrorism (GWOT), ending relations with Iran, stopping support for Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and becoming a major troop contributor to the Western-backed Saudi and UAE war in Yemen (Young, forthcoming). Sudan also found itself on the same side as the West in the latter's war to overthrow the Qaddafi regime in Libya, which

had long been a bitter enemy of the Islamists. The United States persisted in its designation of Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism, however, even though the US State Department admitted that ‘no al-Qaeda elements had been present in Sudan with the knowledge and consent of the Sudanese government since 2000’ and ‘that Khartoum had become a “strong partner” in the [GWOT]’ (Stratfor, 2010). Ultimately, massive humanitarian abuses associated with the war in Darfur and a very active lobby in the United States derailed prospects of improved Sudanese–US relations (Young, 2019, p. 56).

As a result, Sudan’s international isolation did not end and its economy went into further decline with the secession of South Sudan. Al-Bashir was forced to intensify austerity measures, which both lowered living standards and increased opposition at the same time that the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ was unfolding in 2011. Nonetheless, the NCP was able to ride out the storm and win a landslide victory in the 2015 elections, in part because of the systemic fraud that characterized all elections during the NIF/NCP period; fears that the country could follow the same chaotic route as Syria, Libya, and Yemen; and distrust of the traditional political parties after their poor performance in government between 1986 and 1989 (Young, 2012, p. 30).

No sooner were the elections over than al-Bashir made clear his intention to run for the presidency in the 2020 elections—in contravention of the national constitution and NCP rules (Reuters, 2018)—no doubt to prevent a successor from turning him over to the ICC. He further reduced the role of the ruling party, appointed a technocratic and increasingly military-dominated government, and removed those most likely to challenge him for the presidency. As a result, the head of the NISS, Salah Gosh, contacted some opposition leaders and officials in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt with the objective of removing al-Bashir in order to ensure the regime’s survival (Lynch, 2019b). In the face of a collapsing economy, regional isolation, and the failure of al-Bashir’s various initiatives, and after four months of FFC-led country-wide demonstrations and the establishment of a protestor encampment directly across the street from military headquarters in Khartoum, Lt. Gen. Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf led the military’s removal of al-Bashir from power on 11 April 2019 and the establishment of a Transitional Military Council (TMC). But due to massive opposition to his leadership he was replaced by Lt. Gen. Abdel-Fatah al-Burhan, while Gosh was also compelled to resign. This set the stage for a contest of power between, on the one hand, a military that was discredited but supported by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt and hastily recruited allies among remnants of the old regime and other Islamic formations, and, on the other hand, an opposition that had legitimacy and was supported by most Sudanese, especially the street protestors, but was politically weak and had no military capacity. ●



Sudan has an illustrious history of civilians overthrowing military dictatorships and a dismal record of their replacements.”

Sudan's history of rebellion

Sudan has an illustrious history of civilians overthrowing military dictatorships and a dismal record of their replacements. The country became independent on 1 January 1956, but parliamentary paralysis led Prime Minister Abdallah Khalil to hand over power to Lt. Gen. Ibrahim Abboud in 1958 (Treaster, 1983), who aggressively pursued a programme of Arabization and Islamization in southern Sudan that turned a minor insurgency into a fully fledged civil war. But because Abboud opposed communism during the cold war, his regime was supported by the United States, Egypt, and the same Gulf states that opposed the 2018–19 democratic movement in Sudan; however, this support did not protect Abboud from a popular uprising known in Sudan as the ‘October Revolution’ (because it took place in October 1964).

In a pattern that was to be repeated in 1985 and 2019, a revolt in the periphery destabilized the regime, but more important was widespread opposition to Abboud’s efforts to implement an IMF programme that reduced subsidies, including on the price of bread, and lowered the already precarious living standards of workers and the poor. Against this background clashes took place between University of Khartoum students and the police in which one student, Ahmad al-Qurashi, was killed, and this brought large numbers of people onto the streets (Global Nonviolent Action Database, n.d.). They in turn were followed in their opposition to the government by the traditional political parties and the Sudan Islamic Movement (the forerunner of the NIF), which were angered at their marginalization by Abboud. After a week of strikes and demonstrations led by the National Front for Professionals (NFP), some of the lower ranks of the army joined the popular insurgency, after which the regime quickly collapsed.

The NFP selected Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa, a non-political senior civil servant, as prime minister to head a transitional government for six months (Sudan Ministry of Information, 2019). Although the military supported the transition, it did not have a designated continuing role, as was to be the case in 1985 and 2019. Instead, a Council of Ministers was formed mostly of leftist technocrats, because supporters of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) from the University of Khartoum dominated the revolution. From the outset the uprising suffered from the absence of a united leadership and a clear political programme, and as a result the northern elites were able to resist the demands of the southern insurgents for federalism, and little was accomplished during the transitional period. The 1965 elections were inconclusive, although the left lost badly to the traditional parties. Two noteworthy achievements of this period were the first legal participation of women in elections and the election of the first female member of parliament, SCP member Fatima Ibrahim (*Sudan Tribune*, 2017b). But after a series of ineffective coalition governments, in May 1969 Col. Jaafar Nimeiri took power in a coup with little resistance.

With the backing of the SCP, Nimeiri implemented a non-aligned foreign policy, which caused the enmity of the United States. He also agreed to negotiate with the southern rebels, and in 1972 this resulted in the Addis Ababa Agreement, which ended the

war on the basis of the establishment of a federal system to satisfy the demands of the southern Sudanese. Resentment at Nimeiri's rule grew, however, and in 1970 the Mahdists unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow the regime, while in 1971 a faction of the SCP made a more serious attempt. After this Nimeiri shifted radically to the right. He endorsed US policies in the region and, after the Eastern bloc supported the Ethiopian military regime, or 'Derg', the United States gave its support to Nimeiri, and Sudan became the largest recipient of US economic and military aid in sub-Saharan Africa (Pettersson, 1999, p. 9). Nimeiri then reconciled with the traditional sectarian parties, endorsed IMF policies, and made Hassan al-Turabi his justice minister, who introduced sharia law and Islamic banking. At the instigation of the traditional parties who disapproved of the Addis Ababa Agreement and Equatorians angered at the domination of the large Dinka tribe in southern Sudan, Nimeiri divided the area into three regions, which effectively ended the economic independence of the south and revoked the agreement (Shinn, 2004, pp. 247–48). This led to the SPLA's resumption of the civil war in southern Sudan in 1983.

Once again a revolt in the periphery undermined the regime, but declining living standards and Nimeiri's implementation of IMF austerity policies after 1972 proved crucial in mobilizing the people. Repeating the experience of 1964, the civilian uprising was led by trade unions and the SCP, Baathists, and Nasserites. Although these were small parties, they were highly influential during times of turmoil because of their popularization of the concerns of the people and their activism. Crucially, the NIF withdrew from the government on the eve of the popular uprising, depriving it of support, although it did not participate in the 1985 uprising. The traditional parties, however, upset at their minor status under the Nimeiri government, joined the uprising. Tensions increased and, while visiting Washington, Nimeiri was removed by a coup on 7 April 1985 led by the defence minister and army chief of staff, Gen. Abdel Rahman Mohammed Suwar al-Dahab (Miller, 1985).

Gen. Suwar al-Dahab, a Muslim Brotherhood supporter, together with a civilian cabinet of non-party professionals took power as a TMC and promised to hold democratic elections within one year. Despite government entreaties, SPLA leader John Garang refused to return to Khartoum until the government offered a peace agreement, thus weakening the uprising and ensuring the continuation of the war. There was subsequently a widespread purge of military officers, and, although leftists dominated the uprising, officers affiliated with al-Turabi's NIF were appointed to key positions in the army (Abdelwahid, 2008, p. 214). Suwar al-Dahab's transitional government also helped to ensure the victory of the traditional parties in the 1986 election—the National Umma Party (NUP) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)—and the relatively strong performance of the Muslim Brotherhood, which took 50 seats, almost all from the undemocratic Graduate Council, which allowed those with a university education to have an additional vote (African Elections Database, 2011).

After the election Sadiq al-Mahdi formed a coalition government of the three Islamist parties—the NIF, NUP, and DUP.

Although providing a welcome democratic environment (at least in the north of the country, which was largely unaffected by the civil war), the preoccupation of al-Mahdi's government with reforming Nimeiri's Islamic laws and its failure to stimulate the economy and end the southern rebellion lost it much support. Al-Mahdi also angered the United States because of his non-aligned foreign policy, his opposition to IMF austerity proposals, and the NUP's ties to Libya's Qaddafi regime. As a result, the United States suspended concessionary food sales to Sudan and gave the impression that it would not oppose a military coup (Young, 2019, p. 39). The immediate stimulus for the NIF-led coup was the al-Mahdi government's rejection of a framework peace agreement reached in Ethiopia between the DUP and SPLA. The agreement gained widespread public support, as evidenced by many large demonstrations in support of it (as witnessed by the author). In response to the government's rejection of the agreement the army leadership demanded that the prime minister form a new government within one week made up of representatives of all parties, and work to end the southern civil war (Abdelwahid, 2008, p. 126). This led in short order to the NIF's leaving the government, the DUP's joining it, moves to approve the DUP peace initiative in the National Assembly, and the NIF's collaborating with al-Bashir and other Islamist generals to block the peace initiative and carry out a coup that would keep the NIF/NCP and the generals in power for the next 30 years. ●



There is a long history of Sudanese opposition parties and civil society opposing oppressive governments, but never before had they confronted a government as ruthless as that of the NIF/NCP.”

The NIF/NCP in power

Knowing the proclivity of the Sudanese to rebel against repressive regimes, the incoming NIF regime reorganized the security forces and public bureaucracy, undermined civil society, and replaced the leftist-dominated trade unions with NIF- or company-led unions. It also used the state apparatus to ruthlessly contain dissent and ‘deep-rooted security apparatus people in government structures’, effectively creating a parallel government.¹ Political parties were restricted, the war in southern Sudan was ramped up, and the NIF pursued a ‘civilization project’ (known in Arabic as ‘al-Mashru al-Hadari’) to change Sudanese society. The national army could not be relied on, as the experiences of 1964 and 1985 demonstrated, and the NISS was given an expanded role. It was supplemented by a quasi-civilian force known as the Popular Defence Forces (PDF) that virtually every adult was required to join, and the establishment of militias, including the ‘*janjawid*’ in Darfur in 2003 (first operating under the PDF and later renamed the Rapid Support Forces, or RSF). The war in the south was considered a *jihad*, and those who were killed were called martyrs and their deaths were celebrated. In return for the support of the security organs, the NIF created a vast and expensive patronage network that drained government finances. The civil service experienced a similar transformation to that of the armed forces; employees were forced to sign loyalty oaths, and almost everyone had to do *khidma ilzamiyya* (volunteer duty) for the regime. Leaders of Sudan’s previously extensive and powerful civil society were dismissed or jailed, and the security services infiltrated their organizations.

Under al-Turabi’s influence, the NIF set about transforming Sudanese society along Islamist lines and injecting its version of Islamic values and practices into a society imbued with generally tolerant Sufi values. Educational institutions became a prime focus of the NIF, and party loyalists assumed key positions in them. Higher education was vastly expanded, both to modernize society and to control the youth and ensure their pacification. Women’s attire became a major focus, even though Sudanese women typically dressed modestly, and the universities became instruments to ensure that Islamist standards were enforced. The war in the country’s peripheries also served to inculcate youth conscripted into the army with the values of the regime. The institutionalization of terror was particularly evident in the early years of the regime and this dampened overt expressions of opposition, but the Sudanese found covert ways to resist. Noteworthy in this regard was the family, which the regime was unable to penetrate, and until the final days of the Islamist–military regime, when many Sudanese institutions had been destroyed or weakened, the family remained a site of relative freedom.

Many people left the country, discouraged by either limited economic prospects or fear of government repression. In the peripheries, resistance took the form of armed struggles, but apart from the SPLA in southern Sudan, these movements were not successful in their own areas, much less in taking the war to the centre. Meanwhile,

the various internationally supported peace processes served to undermine opposition unity, while the secession of southern Sudan removed a major military and political threat to the regime.

The regime repressed the established parties and had some success in dividing them or bringing them into the government, but they were not banned outright, and the SCP and other leftist factions were permitted to function within a constrained environment as long as they did not take up arms. The regime also established front parties and launched a so-called National Dialogue, but these initiatives were designed to deflect dissent, and the NIF/NCP was never prepared to share power. Media censorship and the periodic jailing of outspoken politicians served to undermine the opposition. The NIF's/NCP's approach was deemed so effective that late in the 2019 uprising former vice president Ali Osman Taha said that the regime could not be overthrown and that shadow battalions were protecting the ruling party (Gordon, Abdallah, and Martin, 2019). But he was wrong. Power and wealth proved to be corrupting, opportunists were attracted to the party, corruption became rife, and with al-Turabi's departure the party ideologues increasingly questioned the regime's Islamist philosophy and al-Bashir's rule. Decay from within was the starting point of the collapse of the regime.

There is a long history of Sudanese opposition parties and civil society opposing oppressive governments, but never before had they confronted a government as ruthless as that of the NIF/NCP. United in wanting to overthrow the regime, the main opposition parties were divided between those prepared to talk to the government in the hope that this would lead to a positive outcome, and those who held that dialogue gave the government unwarranted legitimacy and called for a popular uprising, sometimes in conjunction with the armed groups in the country's peripheries. The first opposition organization to be established was known as Sudan Call, which included most of the armed groups and the NUP, and the second was the National Consensus Forces (NCF), which included the SCP and the leftist factions (*Sudan Tribune*, 2017a). Opposition groups were operating among Sudan's large expatriate community, and many people of an anti-government persuasion participated in social media.

A group of students that called themselves Girifna ('we are fed up' in Arabic) was founded in October 2009. It called for the non-violent overthrow of the regime and was later linked with other groups motivated by economic discontent (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2014). Like the youth that would form the backbone of the 2018–19 protests and other activist groups in the 2011 Arab Spring, Girifna had no acknowledged leaders, headquarters, or aspirations to gain power, and largely communicated through social media. From its inception Girifna highlighted the concerns of women, and popularized the concept of *kandake*, a Meroitic term that refers to ancient Nubian queens who ruled on their own and that was used during the 2018–19 demonstrations to express support for the empowerment of women (Winters, 2016;

Gulf News, 2019). Demonstrations of students and youth became more common in the wake of the secession of South Sudan and the Arab Spring in 2011, with the high cost of living being the primary focus of the mobilization. The loss of oil revenues as a result of the secession of southern Sudan and the failure of the regime to plan for this loss produced a growing economic crisis and, pressed by the IMF, it introduced an austerity programme in June 2012. This programme included raising taxes on consumer goods, dismissing civil servants, increasing the price of petrol, and removing fuel subsidies, and it in turn stimulated anti-government activism, and students at the University of Khartoum chanted 'No, no to high prices' and 'The people want to overthrow the regime' (Abdelaziz and Dziadosz, 2012).

While most of these demonstrations were of a local character, in late June 2013 thousands of people, including leading opposition politicians, took to the streets of Omdurman and called for the displacement of the regime. With the exception of the one in Omdurman, most of the other demonstrations were met with state violence, and protestors were often jailed, tortured, and raped (Abdelaziz, 2013). The resistance reached its height in September 2013 when NISS forces gunned down an estimated 200 youth on the streets of Khartoum during three days of rioting (Kingsley, 2013). Demonstrations continued sporadically, but this mass killing served to dampen the rebellious tide, while the established parties were never able to overcome their divisions and mutual suspicions and lead a united movement against the regime. Although a growing number of young Sudanese were politically active during this period, they still only constituted a small minority, and the majority probably retreated into their private lives or were disillusioned and apathetic, while a very small group joined jihadist groups like the non-state armed group Islamic State (IS) (Khomami, 2015).

Apart from the SPLA/M, which led South Sudan's secession, the armed opposition groups were unable to undermine, much less overthrow, the regime. On the eve of the 2018–19 popular uprising a faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement led by Abdelwahid al-Nur had been restricted to Jebel Mara in Darfur, and another, led by Minni Minawi, had mostly been marginalized after he reached an agreement with the government, while the RSF had largely forced the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) out of the country, and it existed only in camps in Libya. The 2011 secession of South Sudan weakened the SPLA/M-North, while a leadership split in 2017 left Abdelaziz al-Hilu in overall command and the former leader, Malik Agar, and his deputy, Yasir Arman, isolated and without military forces (Young, 2018). Crucially, none of these movements was successful in taking its rebellions to the centre; however, they served to radicalize people in the peripheries and gave the international community a means to pressure the regime. Internally these conflicts led to fears that Sudan's failure to accept diversity could lead to the dissolution of the country, which incentivized some intellectuals to work to overthrow the regime.² ●



Over the years regional conflicts and configurations of power significantly shaped Sudan's politics, including the 2018–19 uprising.”

Regional context on the eve of the collapse of the al-Bashir regime

Over the years regional conflicts and configurations of power significantly shaped Sudan's politics, including the 2018–19 uprising, and will undoubtedly continue to be influential. Most significant was the impact of the Gulf conflict, which pitted Qatar with its support of the Muslim Brotherhood against Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which opposed the Brotherhood and electoral and democratic politics generally. The roots of the conflict largely derive from these countries' differing positions on the 2011 Arab Spring, in which Qatar actively supported the revolts (which the Qatar-based Al Jazeera covered extensively and sympathetically, including the one in Egypt), while Saudi Arabia and the UAE viewed them as existential threats.

While Qatar and Turkey supported the Mohamed Mursi-led Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE funded Gen. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who led a coup on 3 July 2013 that deposed Mursi. On 14 August 2013 security forces attacked unarmed Brotherhood protestors in Cairo, killing hundreds (Kirkpatrick, 2013). In June 2017 three members of the Gulf Cooperation Council—Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—launched a wide-ranging boycott against Qatar, demanding that its emir, Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, fall in line with their foreign policy, end support for terrorism, terminate its relations with Iran, and close the Qatar-based Al Jazeera, which had long been an irritant to those opposing Qatar. In response, Qatar acknowledged its support for the Muslim Brotherhood, but rejected allegations that it aided groups linked to al-Qaeda and IS, and refused to consider shutting down Al Jazeera or ending its relations with Iran (BBC News, 2017; Al Jazeera, 2017).

A competition ensued in the region for supporters, which quickly brought Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to the side of Emir Tamim, and Erdogan sent troops to Turkey's already established military base in Qatar (Bora, 2017). After Saudi Arabia closed Qatar's sole land bridge that the tiny country depended on for food imports, Qatar started to obtain agricultural products from Iran, thus further angering Saudi Arabia and the UAE (and the United States), which viewed Iran as a mortal enemy. In the Middle East the Muslim Brotherhood Hamas government in the Gaza Strip sided with Qatar and Turkey, Jordan's King Abdullah aligned his country with his fellow monarchies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and the two camps supported opposing factions in Syria and Libya. Israel had no trouble opting to support Saudi Arabia and the UAE because of their shared antipathy to Iran and alliance with the United States. Meanwhile, Iran tried to develop a presence in the Red Sea from which it could support Hamas and Hezbollah (the Shia militant group in Lebanon), and reputedly the Yemeni Houthis, but it was never able to establish bases in the region. China's commercial expansion into Africa, its Road and Belt Initiative, and its establishment of a military base in Djibouti in 2017 encouraged Indian and Japanese involvement in the region and gave an Indo-Pacific dimension to the conflict (Melvin, 2019, p. 16).

The most intense competition for supporters, however, was among Sudan's neighbouring weak states in the Horn of Africa. Djibouti became a hub for competing navies and Somalia suffered from the rivalry among a host of different countries for control of its ports. Eritrea hosted a UAE naval base at Assab that was used to attack the Houthis in Yemen. Eritrea and Ethiopia came under the sway of the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which engineered the reconciliation between the two countries that had officially been at war since 1998 (Salehi, 2018). Sudan's relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE became more difficult after the rise to power of the Muslim Brotherhood-linked al-Bashir regime, which initially was contemptuous of these monarchies; supported Saddam Hussein in the 1990–91 Iraq war; developed relations with Iran; cooperated with Qatar in supplying Hamas with weapons; and opposed the United States, which was the major foreign backer of the Gulf states (albeit including Qatar).

As Sudan's economic position declined, al-Bashir tried to win the favour of the Gulf states and begged for their financial assistance. This increasingly brought his foreign policy in line with their requirements, by first breaking off relations with Iran (AFP, 2016) and then providing the largest troop contingent to fight the Houthis in Yemen (Al Jazeera, 2019d). Sudan had no quarrel with Yemen, and most sections of Sudanese society opposed the war, with the exception of parts of Darfur from where the well-paid fighters came. The UAE and Saudi Arabia financially backed the RSF contingent in Yemen, but the withdrawal of most Emirati forces from Yemen in July 2019 and the capture of Aden by UAE-backed southern separatists who opposed the Saudi-supported al-Hadi 'government' in August 2019 (DW, 2019a) mean that the UAE's financing of Hemeti's troops has been cast in doubt, and reportedly the numbers of RSF forces in Yemen have declined (Associated Press, 2020).

Whether because of an ideological affinity or because he wanted support from both camps, al-Bashir refused to side exclusively with the Saudi–UAE camp, and maintained good relations with Qatar. This angered the UAE, which had provided enormous sums to the al-Bashir regime in return for the promise that Islamists would be removed from the Sudanese government and ties to Islamists in the region would end (Abdelaziz, Georgy, and El Dahan, 2019a). However, al-Bashir attempted to strengthen ties with Turkey and reached an agreement on developing the Red Sea port of Port Suakin, which the Gulf states and Egypt contended was for a military base, although this was by no means clear (Hassanin, 2019). Al-Bashir's attempt at neutrality angered both the Saudi–UAE–Egyptian coalition and the Qatar–Turkey bloc, and was responsible for the former group's limited financial support, while in December 2018 the UAE halted fuel supplies to Sudan (Hassanin, 2019). Increasingly the Saudi–UAE–Egyptian coalition endeavoured to keep al-Bashir on a short string until a suitable time when he could be dispensed with entirely. On the eve of the collapse of the stricken al-Bashir regime these states publicly condemned him for corruption and the diversion of the previous assistance they had provided to private

hands. They saw the collapsing Sudanese economy and growing dissent as an opportunity to bring the military to power in a similar fashion to that of 1985, and turn back the democratic tide. Because the UAE and Saudi Arabia had close relations with the generals who would take power in Sudan's TMC, President Erdogan would claim that the coup was directed against Turkey (Tastekin, 2019).

Egypt, and particularly President el-Sisi, shared a revulsion for the Muslim Brotherhood-tainted al-Bashir regime, and also opposed Sudan's growing alliance with its historical regional enemy, Ethiopia, and its 2012 endorsement of Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam, which Egypt feared would reduce the downstream flow of the Nile and posed an existential threat to the country (Young, 2020). There was also a long-running dispute between Sudan and Egypt over the Hala'b Triangle border territory (Young, 2020), and the two countries had conflicting approaches to Libya. Muammar Qaddafi had close relations with Sadiq al-Mahdi's government in the 1980s, but abhorred the Islamist NIF/NCP. As a result he provided critical support for the various Darfur armed groups, while Khartoum worked to undermine his regime and played an important role in supporting the Western-led assault on it (Elhag, 2012).

After Qaddafi was overthrown the NCP government, together with Qatar and Turkey, aided Islamist groups in Libya (Sudan and South Sudan News Updates, 2017), while Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE supported Gen. Khalifa Haftar, a dual Libyan-US citizen, who heads the Libyan National Army in opposition to the UN Security Council-endorsed Government of National Accord. After Qaddafi was removed Sudan accused Egypt of supporting Darfur rebels based in Libya (*Mada Masr*, 2018). In turn, Cairo repeatedly demanded that Egyptian Islamists in Sudan be handed over to it, and in the wake of the overthrow of al-Bashir, pressured Sudan to suspend Turkey's alleged plan to develop a naval base at Suakin (Middle East Observer, 2019a).

For strategic, commercial, and security reasons the Gulf states and Turkey have become increasingly active in the Red Sea and the Horn, but this activism was also fuelled by the perceived decline of US engagement in the region and the United States' willingness to give regional allies a greater hand in protecting its interests. Encouraging this perception, the United States announced that it would reduce its military forces committed to counter-terrorism activities in Africa (Copp, 2019). While President Obama assumed a neutral position in the Gulf conflict, President Trump moved firmly into the Saudi-UAE-Egyptian camp despite the fact that the United States has its largest air base in the Middle East in Qatar (O'Connor, 2018). This appears to be due to the positive relations of these countries with Israel, their opposition to Iran, and Saudi purchases of US weapons, which Trump believes are vital to the well-being of the US economy (Borger, 2018). In early 2019 the Trump administration announced it was taking steps to have the Muslim Brotherhood declared a terrorist organization, which brought it in line with the approach of the Gulf

states and Egypt (and, indeed, the announcement was made during el-Sisi's visit to Washington) (Savage, Schmitt, and Haberman, 2019).

After the United States had long presented itself as the foremost opponent of the NCP regime, repeatedly launched rounds of sanctions, and called for democratic change, US support for the Saudi–UAE–Egyptian alliance and its declining interest in Sudanese affairs served to limit the US role in Sudan's developing crisis. Since the Bush era the principal US concern in Sudan was not, as was claimed, that of fostering democracy, but rather of countering terrorism, in which the al-Bashir regime had proved to be very cooperative, and had also attempted to bring its foreign policy in line with US precepts (Young, forthcoming). ●



The Sudanese uprisings of 1964 and 1985 shaped the thinking and actions of both the opposition and the government during the 2018–19 uprising.”

Internal developments preceding the 2018–19 uprising

The Sudanese uprisings of 1964 and 1985 shaped the thinking and actions of both the opposition and the government during the 2018–19 uprising, in which many of the youth who participated in the earlier, if sporadic, anti-NCP protests were to play leading roles. The course and outcome of the uprising were also influenced in important ways by the regional and international context referred to above, as well as internal developments that undermined the regime.

After the 2010 elections al-Bashir endeavoured to reduce the political space provided by the signing of the CPA and return to unmediated authoritarian rule. This involved placing himself above the NCP, centralizing power, playing off different party factions against one another, and isolating key figures such as Ali Osman Taha and Nafi Ali Nafi who were popular in the party and had leadership aspirations. After sidelining Hassan al-Turabi, al-Bashir began downgrading the role of the party as an instrument of governance and replacing NCP cadres with technocrats and, later, military officials. Al-Bashir's intent was not only to centralize power in the President's Office, but also to strengthen the regime by distancing himself from the unpopular ruling party and limit the prospect of being replaced by someone who might turn him over to the ICC. These moves may have bought al-Bashir time, but they produced internal unease about the future of the regime, resentment among those pushed aside, or apathy and disinterest among NCP cadres regarding the fate of the government.

Disenchanted Islamists thus helped to undermine the legitimacy of the government and al-Bashir and indirectly facilitate his removal.³ Al-Turabi provided the ideological basis and direction for the NIF, but successive failures on both the domestic and foreign fronts led to his marginalization, and questioning among his followers about the entire Islamist project and al-Bashir's leadership. Interviews of leading present and former NCP intellectual leaders carried out on the eve of the December 2018 demonstrations made their frustration clear. According to Al-Mahboob Abdelsalem, an Islamist intellectual who had been close to al-Turabi, although intellectuals led the party, they were ideologically weak, ill prepared for government, and largely depended on al-Turabi for both leadership and inspiration.⁴ Other Islamist intellectuals acknowledged their discomfort with the NIF/NCP monopolization of power and frequent resort to extreme brutality. According to one official, the party had become 'a bureaucratic organization concerned with holding power which had no objectives', while another official held that its leaders had developed into a 'class separate from the people' (Young, forthcoming). Still another acknowledged that Islamist leaders could move rapidly from one position to another and did not have any real concern for the people. One leader who had held numerous senior positions in the government wrote in similar fashion about his colleagues forming 'a conservative elite who would cling to power as a way of protecting their position and possessions' (Young, forthcoming).

Critical to al-Bashir's displacement was the role of Salah Gosh, a committed Islamist, close confidant of the president, and head of the NISS since 2004, who had played

a critical role in the suppression of the insurgency in Darfur (*Sudan Tribune*, n.d.). But in November 2011 he was arrested for plotting a coup and held until July 2013, when he was released (*Sudan Tribune*, 2013). Giving substance to the allegation that he was involved in a coup attempt, a Wikileaks cable made clear that in November 2008, just four months after the ICC indicted al-Bashir, Gosh and First Vice President Ali Osman were beginning to view their leader as a liability (*Sudan Tribune*, 2011).

Gosh was not just a functionary, but became a critical link to the United States via the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) because of regime fears of a US attack. This took concrete form in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, when even President George W. Bush asked al-Bashir for support (Daily Beast, 2019). Gosh's NISS provided the CIA with information and analysis on Islamists and Islamist organizations in the region—some of them hosted by the NIF and later the NCP—and Khartoum became a centre in the US rendition programme, with the NISS interviewing and torturing foreign suspects at the request of Western intelligence agencies. This relationship intensified after the 11 September 2001 attacks and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, when President Bush's commitment to world democracy was undercut by concerns with security (Young, 2012, pp. 342–43; 2019, p. 53). Gosh publicly bragged about his relations with the CIA and contended that these links had saved the regime from a US military attack, and indeed the CIA flew Gosh to New York and Washington in April 2005 to be thanked for his role in assisting the US 'war on terror' (Silverstein, 2005). The CIA's appreciation of Gosh's support occurred at a time when he was being widely accused of genocide for his role in suppressing the insurgency in Darfur and of having ties to terrorism, and this led to divisions within the US government on how to deal with him (Shane, 2005). Gosh's actions may have reduced the threat posed by the United States, but his ties to senior officials in the CIA, leadership ambitions, and subsequent meetings with senior opposition leaders, including Sadiq al-Mahdi, bred suspicion and unease among his NCP colleagues.

After his release from prison in 2013 Gosh spent time travelling abroad and renewing his relations with intelligence officials in the region and Europe. And in February 2018, with al-Bashir facing the greatest threat to his personal security, Gosh was again appointed head of the NISS (Middle East Monitor, 2018), either because of his undoubted expertise or based on the principle of keeping one's enemies close. In the wake of continuing demonstrations in Sudan, the members of the Saudi–UAE–Egyptian bloc were convinced that al-Bashir could soon be displaced and that Gosh, whom they had known for 15 years, was best placed to assume leadership in the country and ensure that their interests were protected. With the help of Egypt Gosh reportedly met the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, Yossi Cohen, and European intelligence chiefs on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference of 15–17 February 2019 (Hearst, Hooper, and Sneineh, 2019). Israel was held to have the capacity to open doors in Washington, but according to another report the CIA

was not working to bring about regime change, because Khartoum was providing valuable intelligence on al-Shabaab in Somalia, conditions in Libya, and the Muslim Brotherhood (AfricaIntelligence, 2019), and, as noted, al-Bashir had gone out of his way to bring Sudan's foreign policy into line with US requirements.

With pressure on al-Bashir from the street, from within his own government and ruling party, and from the region, Gosh thought he had received a commitment from the president to resign. Indeed, he told journalists on 22 February 2019 that al-Bashir would step down as head of the NCP, and the constitution would not be amended to allow him to run in the 2020 presidential elections (Dahir, 2019). But within hours al-Bashir said on national television that he intended to run for the presidency again in 2020. He also declared a year-long state of emergency, dissolved the national and regional governments, and the next day announced a new government with Mohamed Tahir Ayala as prime minister and Gen. Awad Mohamed Ahmed Ibn Auf as first vice president and defence minister (African Diplomatic, 2019). Ibn Auf had been a participant in the coup that brought al-Bashir and the Islamists to power, and was placed on the US sanctions list due to his involvement in the Darfur conflict. Thus, Ibn Auf would not be expected to turn al-Bashir over to the court (Dabanga, 2019a).

Gosh felt betrayed by al-Bashir's refusal to resign and intensified his contacts in the region, especially with the UAE, and also reached out to Sudan's opposition, including party leaders who had been jailed. But his primary focus was on the security heads, including the defence minister, the army chief of staff, and the police chief, to convince them of the necessity of displacing al-Bashir (Abdelaziz, Georgy, and El Dahan, 2019a). Hemeti, an acolyte of Gosh, was reputedly one of the last to be informed of these plans. ●



From the outset of the uprising its leaders were committed to peaceful struggle.”

Dynamics of the uprising

From the outset of the uprising its leaders were committed to peaceful struggle—not as exponents of Mahatma Gandhi, who considered non-violence as the highest human value, but because the alternative was not considered to be realistic. Drawing from the experience of the 1964 and 1985 uprisings, the opposition understood that the state security organs could not be directly challenged, and instead hoped for a split among members of the security forces, particularly in those sections of the national army that the Islamists had not completely co-opted. It was also decided that there would be no attempt to bring the country to a halt or collapse the economy, so as not to unduly disrupt the lives of ordinary people and lose their support, resulting in the seeming incongruity of an uprising proceeding in tandem with daily life going on as usual.

A marked difference between the uprisings of 1964 and 1985 and that of 2018–19 was—with the exception of the professional associations of engineers, doctors, lawyers, and to some extent journalists—the general absence of worker-controlled trade unions in 2018–19 after 30 years of NCP rule. The repression of the unions, particularly the railway union and the Gezira association (which represented the farmer tenants on one of the world’s largest agricultural schemes), also undermined the SCP, because these organizations had served as its core support base. Because of the absence of trade unions, the weakness of political parties, and the willingness of the regime to use extreme violence, it was difficult to develop a mass-based opposition movement. In response to these conditions opposition took the form of grassroots organizations in urban neighbourhoods known as resistance committees, usually dominated by youth. These committees supported one another and engaged in small-scale actions, and on the eve of the December 2018 protests there were 30 such groups in Khartoum alone (Abbas, 2019c). They formed a national organization that became one of the signatories of the Declaration of Freedom and Change, which was the founding document of the uprising (SPA, 2019).

The counterpart or substitute for a working-class movement in the 2018–19 uprising was the major role of the youth. SCP Politburo member Siddig Yousef stressed that the level of mobilization during the uprising was more extensive than that of its predecessors in 1964 and 1985, but that the level of political consciousness of protestors—that is, the youth—was lower.⁵ The youth (understood in Sudan to be those between 18 and 40) suffered from limited opportunities, systemic corruption in the economic sphere, a malfunctioning education system, forced participation in the regime’s wars, and a lack of personal freedoms. Another analyst concluded that what distinguished the 2018–19 uprising from those of 1964 and 1985 was its sociocultural dimension and the leading role of youth, especially women, who were not particularly interested in political and economic issues.⁶ Thus, a largely youth revolt of the children of the regime challenged the authority of the state and their elders, but echoes of this challenge were replicated across all political parties, giving a generational element to the uprising.

Although subject all their lives to Islamist socialization, the youth had to a considerable extent assumed a globalized—which is to say a Western—identity and adopted individualist values acquired through the internet, social media, participation in civil society, and foreign travel, and in response to government repression. They had little taste for the complexities of politics, however, and no interest in ideological concerns or engaging in the political process, which left them vulnerable and prone to being either isolated or co-opted. The values of the youth and the society they yearned for were most graphically expressed in the anarchist-like encampments in Khartoum and other Sudanese cities and were best articulated by the SCP, but it had no control over them.

Long before the start of the December 2018 demonstrations it was clear that young women were angry with the government and their lives in Sudan, which was due to a number of factors. Firstly, they were angry that the regime permitted child marriage and marital rape, which graphically expressed its general view of women. Secondly, women were upset at being targeted by the NIF/NCP civilization project, which attempted to instil Islamist values and dress codes under the threat of women's receiving lashes for failure to conform. Under the Public Order Act, 45,000 women in the past ten years had been lashed, and many more were fined and imprisoned, often for such things as wearing trousers in public.⁷ Thirdly, women had higher levels of post-secondary education than men, but nonetheless had worse employment prospects. Lastly, educated young women without jobs were increasingly drawn to civil society organizations that served to heighten their consciousness and encouraged Western perspectives.

It was into this political space that the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) formed in June 2018 comprising 17 civil society components (SPA, n.d.). It did not have deep roots or strong ideological convictions, but was initially largely concerned with economic issues, and focused on increasing the minimum wage.⁸ This changed when 22 organizations, including the NCF, Sudan Call, armed groups, civil societies, independent unionists drawn from the DUP, and professionals endorsed the Declaration of Freedom and Change on 1 January 2019 (SPA, 2019). This document became known as the FFC Charter, and effectively marked the founding of the FFC. Although not widely known and with almost no leaders of national stature, the FFC served to unify the diverse forces opposed to the regime.

The FFC Charter's primary goal was the 'immediate and unconditional end of Gen. Omar al-Bashir's presidency and the conclusion of his administration', while the second was the formation of a transitional government 'of qualified people based on merits of competency and good reputation, representing various Sudanese groups and receiving the consensus of the majority'. The first task of the proposed transitional government was to 'End Sudan's civil wars by addressing the root cause(s) of each and seeking remedies to their disastrous manifestations' (SPA, 2019).

The lessons learned when 200 youth were killed in violent demonstrations on the streets of Khartoum in September 2013 were critical to the SPA's attempts to fulfil these aims. It decided to support peaceful marches and try to limit the exposure of protestors to the violence of the security forces. It also concluded that what was needed was to create a broad-based alliance and not to form a political party at this stage, to conduct a country-wide uprising, and not to reveal the identity of the FFC's leadership, so that its members could not be targeted. But the lack of a coherent political agenda—much less an ideology—together with the absence of a structured leadership caused problems later. Against the background of short transitions in 1964 and 1985, which served to marginalize the progressive forces despite their leading role in the uprisings and leave the traditional parties in a dominant position, the FFC insisted on a four-year transitional period.

Fearing Khartoum's history of activism, the NCP government introduced higher bread prices in the peripheries, where people were also the first to suffer fuel shortages. But the NCP misjudged the situation, and unlike 1964 and 1985, when Khartoum led and the peripheries followed, in the 2018–19 uprising the situation was reversed. The first demonstration took place in El Damazin on 13 December, to be followed by one in Atbara (Abbas, 2019b). The demonstrations in Atbara and Wad Medani turned violent; protestors burned down buildings, and a number of them were killed. A participant in the events in Atbara described the anger with the regime that motivated the demonstrators and said that NCP officials had deserted the city by nightfall in fear of their lives. The FFC leadership opposed protestor violence, believing it would provoke the state, and there was fear of another massacre like that of 2013. On 9 January 2019 thousands of protestors in Khartoum and Gedaref chanted, 'Revolution is the people's choice' and 'Just fall that is all' (in Arabic *tasquṭ bas*). By mid-January protest movement demonstrations were under way in 15 of Sudan's 18 states, including Khartoum, and had advanced from expressing economic grievances to demanding that al-Bashir leave office (Abbas, 2019a). As well as demonstrations, the FFC organized various disruptive actions and strikes to undermine the functioning of the state, stretch the capacity of the security forces, and reduce the effectiveness of the government crackdown.

As the protests continued the role of women increased, and by March demonstrators were chanting, 'You women, be strong' and 'This revolution is a women's revolution' (Christian Science Monitor, 2019). While the uprising began in the peripheries, Khartoum soon became the centre of the protests, symbolically at the massive General Command of the Sudan Armed Forces building (the country's military headquarters). Here the protestors rallied, held sit-ins, and organized what amounted to a live-in resistance enclave in the heart of the city. On 6 April the opposition called for a major demonstration in commemoration of the victory of the 1985 uprising, an astute move that reminded both protestors and the army of their role as patriots in that

uprising. Four months of demonstrations had convinced Sudanese that the regime could be overthrown and al-Bashir was becoming increasingly isolated, and protestors responded with a massive march that made clear that the regime's days were numbered. Similar events were replicated on a smaller scale in 13 other Sudanese cities.⁹ The Sudanese diaspora and some businesses provided funding for the uprising and assumed an important role in supporting the sit-in.

“ Four months of demonstrations had convinced Sudanese that the regime could be overthrown.”

Despite the impressive march the protestors were dangerously exposed to a violent response from the regime, and on 7 April were attacked by NISS forces and possibly Islamist militias.¹⁰ With disaster looming, a navy captain had one of the gates to the military headquarters opened so that protestors could escape the attacks, and ordered others to lie down while his forces shot over them at their attackers. The attacks on the protestors continued through 8 April, when more than a million people were estimated to have demonstrated in Khartoum against the military. About a hundred soldiers came to the aid of the demonstrators during this period and at least two died in the clashes (Al Jazeera, 2019a). On 9 April al-Bashir ordered Hemeti's forces to clear out the protestors within 48 hours, but according to Hemeti he refused (Al Jazeera, 2019a), after which Ahmed Haroun agreed to bring in militias from Kordofan to carry out the task. But the buses bringing these militias to Khartoum were stopped by the RSF and protestors on 10 April, after which Hemeti claimed he went to military headquarters and persuaded the army leadership to take power. More credible is the belief that the majority of the most senior security forces officers had already decided that al-Bashir had to be removed, or were convinced of this by Gosh.¹¹ Hemeti's questionable narrative was nonetheless widely accepted in Sudan and led to a brief period during which he was very popular. Also key to the generals' changing their views was the fear that the lower ranks would not obey orders to kill protestors on the scale demanded by al-Bashir, while they were also aware that the youthful protestors included members of their own families.

The next day (11 April) the TMC was established headed by Gen. Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf, who announced that al-Bashir was under house arrest; the cabinet, National Legislature, and state legislatures were dissolved; and political prisoners would be freed (Doubek and Walmsley, 2019). The 2005 transitional constitution was suspended, thus giving the generals absolute executive, legislative, and judicial powers. But the FFC did not accept Ibn Auf because of his long and close ties to the regime and the senior positions he had held in the al-Bashir cabinet, and he was forced to

resign, as was Salah Gosh on 12 April. Gosh's plan to become president—which the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt had endorsed—collapsed when the extent of the revulsion of the Sudanese not just towards al-Bashir, but to his entire regime and anyone associated with it became apparent. Like Ibn Auf, Gosh had to leave office if the core of the military leadership was to claim legitimacy as being anti-regime.

Lt. Gen. Abdel-Fatah al-Burhan became head of the TMC, with Hemeti serving as his deputy. But with the latter's troops guarding key installations in the city and with his strong ties to the Gulf, it was an open secret that he and the RSF, and not al-Burhan and the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), dominated the security sector, even if many in the military probably opposed Hemeti. From the perspective of many in the FFC and most of the protestors, replacing al-Bashir with Ibn Auf and then with al-Burhan constituted coups comparable to the replacement of Mubarak by el-Sisi in Egypt, as reflected in the protestors' slogan 'Victory or Egypt' (Al Jazeera, 2019f). Also, the opposition could not tolerate the presence in any position of power of such a regime stalwart as Salah Gosh, whom the TMC claimed had been placed under house arrest, but it was learned that he had fled the country. The TMC was made up of between eight and ten members from the various security organs, and one of its problems from its inception was the involvement of known Islamists, who had become a source of embarrassment. As well as Ibn Auf, generals Omer Zain al-Abidin al-Sheikh, Jalal al-Din al-Sheikh al-Tayeb, and al-Tayeb Babikir Ali, and the chief of staff, Abdel-Maarouf, were subsequently forced to resign because they were known Islamists (Middle East Observer, 2019b). An SCP-led minority in the FFC and many at the Khartoum sit-in argued against negotiating with the TMC, and the attitude of the activist youth was made clear when the overthrow of al-Bashir became a signal to attack and sometimes kill members of the security forces who had shot many protestors during the four months of demonstrations.¹² This was not the view of most of the FFC leadership, however, which formed a negotiating team drawn from its main member groups, including the SCP.

On 13 April al-Burhan announced that the TMC would hold power for a two-year transitional period and appoint a government of technocrats, before handing over to an elected government, a proposal that the FFC rejected out of hand (NBC News, 2019). Saudi Arabia and the UAE rushed to aid the Sudanese military with pledges of USD 3 billion in assistance. An initial payment of USD 500 million was made, together with transfers of cheap food, fuel, and medicines (Abdelaziz, 2019). Protestors denounced this foreign involvement, marched on the embassies of these countries, and demanded that they should not interfere in Sudan's internal affairs. An observer noted that traditional Sudanese anti-Western imperialist sentiments had been transferred to the Gulf, while another commentator said that Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are 'keen to snuff out democratic revolutions in the Arab world and have the resources to do so' (Woldemariam, 2019, p. 187).

Box 1 ‘Hemeti’

While al-Burhan and his officers were highly trained, Hemeti was a militia leader who had never attended an officers’ training college. His forces received higher salaries and better equipment, and this was resented by the army, whose budget dropped by 49 per cent in 2018 (SIPRI, 2019). Al-Burhan was not considered to be an Islamist, even though he had served as a commander in Darfur, coordinated Sudanese forces in Yemen, and was closely associated with the hated Islamist PDF. Hemeti’s RSF was reputedly involved in the 2013 killing of protestors (which he denies) and was linked to numerous atrocities in Darfur (HRW, 2015). Although not himself indicted, the ICC issued warrants for the arrest of his predecessor and cousin, Musa Hilal (whom Hemeti jailed) and another RSF leader, Ali Khushayb. Presumably because of Hemeti’s successes, particularly the sidelining of JEM in Darfur, and al-Bashir’s distrust of the regular forces, the former president had placed Hemeti in charge of his personal security. Although widely hated by non-Arabs in Darfur, Hemeti is accepted among many Arab Darfurians as a leader. He is also very wealthy through his conglomerate, the Al-Junaid group of companies; has a private agreement with the UAE for the supply of his forces fighting in Yemen (BBC News, 2019b); and (until the programme was cancelled in August 2019) acquired much of the funds the Government of Sudan received from European Union (EU) partner organizations for intercepting migrants in western Sudan en route to Libya and Europe. He has been involved in human trafficking (Tubiana, 2019) and has a major stake in Sudan’s gold-mining industry (Abdelaziz, Georgy, and El Dahan, 2019b). (With the United States ignoring its own sanctions laws, the gold is sold on the UAE gold market (American Conservative, 2018).) As a result, at the time of al-Bashir’s removal Hemeti was one of the richest men in Sudan (BBC, 2019b).

In the following days the military declared two red lines: the imposition of Islamic law (sharia) and the continuation of the war in Yemen (Abdelaziz and Awedalla, 2019), while the protestors were united in wanting to end Sudan’s involvement in the Yemen war, and probably most opposed sharia. Uprising leaders considered the military’s demand for sharia a means to gain legitimacy among forces opposed to the opposition and to divide people, and held that the issue should be addressed by a constitutional conference after the formation of a transitional government. They also called for the dismantling of the ‘deep state’ left behind by al-Bashir (Acquah, 2019). The FFC initially demanded that it should constitute the entire transitional government, but this did not take account of other groups that had not signed the FFC Charter but had participated in opposing the regime. The FFC’s demand for a four-year transitional period was opposed by the TMC; by traditional political parties, who wanted to move more quickly to the holding of elections; and initially by the West.

Although political relations between Sudan and Egypt have often been tense, al-Bashir's removal dramatically improved these relations, and after assuming the leadership of the TMC, al-Burhan paid his first international visit to Cairo, to be followed by Hemeti. Very quickly Sudan's foreign policy began to change as Khartoum rejected Qatar and moved closer to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which became the principal funders of the TMC. In a move that pleased the TMC's allies, Khartoum stopped supporting Islamist groups in Libya, and it was reported in various Middle Eastern media that in the last week of July 2019 Hemeti had sent RSF forces to Libya paid for by the UAE to support the rebel Khalifa Haftar (*Daily Sabah*, 2019).

The African Union (AU) under the chair of Egyptian president el-Sisi was a strong supporter of the TMC, and el-Sisi engineered a resolution extending the deadline for Sudan's generals to surrender power from 15 days to three months (Reuters, 2019a), although this was later reduced to two months. As one commentator noted,

More than just arrogance, the African Union showed disrespect to the Sudanese people and their aspirations for democratic rule. If you badly want Sudan to revert to civilian rule, why give the army more time to entrench itself? (Kato, 2019).

Appreciating its lack of domestic support, the military tried to gain legitimacy internationally by sending delegations to neighbouring countries and meeting with Khartoum's diplomatic community, selling itself as a force for stability in Sudan and the region. The TMC also reached out to the non-NCP Islamist parties, threatened to hold an election in six months, and demanded that the protestors end their road- and rail blocks. Fearing a breakdown in relations between the military and FFC, respected journalist Mahgoub Mohamed Salah and businessman Osama Daoud helped the two sides to sort out their differences over a presidential system favoured by the military and a parliamentary system preferred by the FFC.¹³ Long-pent-up grievances erupted in a series of strikes in Port Sudan at Kenana Sugar, the Electricity Board, and state television, which the RSF quickly broke up (Dabanga, 2019c). Despite the strikes, the dismissal of state governments, and the general absence of police, most of the country remained calm.

Ramadan began on 6 May, which is the hottest month of the year in Sudan, and the generals might have reasoned that these conditions would dampen support for the uprising, particularly the encampment outside military headquarters in Khartoum, but this was not the case. Thousands of protestors camped on the street and in the evening the numbers swelled to an estimated 100,000 or more, and a festive atmosphere prevailed.¹⁴ The sit-in participants provided their own security based on governance through mutual assistance and the principle of youth from specific parts of Khartoum assuming responsibility for particular areas of the encampment, and for the approximately seven weeks of its existence the sit-in operated entirely outside the purview of the state.

Within the encampment there were booths to educate people on the African origins of the ancient Nubian civilization, large pictures of the martyrs killed in the recent fight against the regime, pictures of soldiers executed for a 1990 attempted coup, a booth highlighting the issue of sexual harassment, speeches and exhortations, poetry readings, art displays, boisterous marches, music, dancing in the streets, and many Sudanese flag wavers, all of which was overlaid by the constant clanging of metal by youth on the railway tracks overpass, which served as the basic sound track of the uprising. On any given evening one could listen to speeches on the popular struggle, the need for trade union rights, the deep state, the evils of military rule, updates by FFC leaders on the course of the uprising and negotiations with the generals, or a condemnation of the repression of *sitt al-chais* (tea ladies, who were hated by the former government, which held them to be purveyors of immorality). Liquids and food were provided gratis.

Observers noted that middle- and upper-middle-class uprising supporters largely organized the encampment, but soon the largest number of residents and visitors were younger and drawn from the lower classes. Claims on social media of drug taking and drinking at the encampment were vastly exaggerated, but on the margins and outside the sit-in some youth challenged Sudan's conservative social norms. Medical services and assistance for street children were provided at the site. Feeding, watering, and providing sanitary facilities for protestors living on the streets when temperatures typically reached the mid-forties centigrade and most were fasting created daunting logistical problems, but these were overcome.

The protest organizers saw the encampment as simply a means to put pressure on the military and assumed it would end when they had achieved their objective; however, the way in which the encampment almost spontaneously emerged, its popularity among Sudanese as indicated by the many thousands who visited it each night during Ramadan, and its expansion suggested a phenomenon beyond the expectation or imagination of the FFC leaders. Sudanese protestors without direction or forethought created an island of freedom in the midst of an existing repressive state. The encampment became a living embodiment of the ideals of classical anarchism, even if almost no one understood it in these terms.¹⁵

The crisis took a new turn after the TMC refused to budge from its demand to dominate the transitional government, challenged the legitimacy of the FFC, and pointed to its divisions. But the military was also divided. Firstly, as became evident on 6 April 2019, there were divisions between the high command and an undetermined number among the lower ranks who came to the rescue of the protestors. Secondly, there had long been tensions between SAF and the privileged position of the RSF in the security forces (see Box 1). Thirdly, there were ideological divisions in the military, as evidenced by the senior command's purge of those most closely associated with the old regime and accused of being Islamists. And, lastly, it can be surmised that many

A protester stands on Khartoum's Central Railway line as part of the sit-in at Sudan's military headquarters, Khartoum, 13 April 2019. Source: Muhammad Salah Abdulaziz





among the security forces shared the views of their fellow Sudanese in resenting the interference of the Gulf states and Egypt in the country's affairs and the influence these countries exerted over the TMC. These divisions were also evident in contradictory statements made by the military, some of which suggested a willingness to hand over power to the FFC, and others that implied that the military rejected the FFC and would bring other groups into the transitional government or move quickly to hold an election. The junta was united, however, in its desire to lead or dominate a transitional government.

In response to the deteriorating situation the RSF beat demonstrators, killed five protestors and an army officer, and wounded scores more protestors on 13 May (*Sudan Tribune*, 2019a). Claims by the TMC that the killings were the result of 'infiltrators' in the sit-in enraged protestors and produced more roadblocks and nightly anti-military chanting outside the military headquarters. Two days later another protestor was killed and more were wounded. It was never clear who the killers were, but some protestors were quick to raise the banner, 'RSF is the Janjaweed, and Hemeti is a new Bashir' (as observed by the author). In this environment protestors expanded the encampment area and blocked Nile Street, where most government ministries are located, and a bridge across the Blue Nile to Khartoum North. The area along Nile Street was known as 'Colombia' because of that country's association with drugs, and youth and soldiers who were consumers and sellers of the illegal substances frequented the area. The generals attempted to tarnish the sit-in by conflating those in the Colombia area with the protestors in general.

The TMC called a 72-hour break in talks with the FFC and demanded that the encampment be dismantled before it would return to negotiations (BBC News, 2019a). There was little chance of the protestors agreeing to this, but the FFC convinced its youthful followers to take down some of the road- and bridge blocks outside the encampment, in an act of goodwill that made clear the authority it held over the protestors, but also its willingness to bend to the pressure of the generals. This did not, however, end the tensions, and on 17 May an RSF contingent attempted to dismantle some of the protestors' barricades outside the military headquarters, before being forced to retreat. Hemeti denied any connection with these events, but the Darfur Bar Association concluded that the 'preliminary information indicates the involvement of elements belonging to the army and the RSF' in the earlier killings (Dabanga, 2019b). After Hemeti claimed he had refused al-Bashir's orders to kill the sit-in protestors he became a hero, but as a result of the brutality of his forces and a better understanding of his role in Darfur provided by non-Arab Dafurians his popularity declined. This was aided by elements in the opposition and the elite who emphasized his origins as a camel trader, lack of formal education, and Chadian origins and links.

The failure of the army to protect the unarmed protestors and the generals' demand that the barricades be removed convinced many protestors interviewed by the author

that the army should not have any representation in the transitional government. The FFC leadership feared antagonizing the army, however, and claimed that it was necessary for the army to protect protestors from attacks by Islamist militias, although there were doubts as to whether some of the supposed 'Islamist militias' were not in fact RSF soldiers. As a result, the FFC and TMC reached agreement in principle on a legislative assembly of 300 members, of which the FFC would constitute 67 per cent, while the remaining 33 per cent would come from other opposition groups that did not sign the FFC Charter, but had opposed the regime. A prime minister and cabinet were to be appointed entirely by the FFC (except for the ministers of defence and the interior), and there was a compromise between the FFC's demand for a four-year transitional period and the TMC's demand for a two-year period in favour of three years; however, the two sides disagreed over participation in and the responsibilities of the Sovereign Council. The army claimed that a multifaceted security problem necessitated its holding the leading position in the Sovereign Council, which the FFC rejected (Al Jazeera, 2019b; 2019h), but it did accept a major role for the generals in the transitional government, which angered many of its supporters.

Although senior NCP leaders were imprisoned, the party retained considerable human and financial resources and control over militias, while some of its neighbourhood 'popular committees' were allegedly still operational and accused of obstructing water and electricity supplies. On 17 and 18 May non-NCP Islamist parties held marches in Khartoum, and their leader, Al-Tayeb Mustafa, said, 'The main reason for the mobilisation is that the alliance is ignoring the application of sharia [Islamic law] in its deal' (Al Jazeera, 2019c). Such groups had little popular support, but the demonstrations provided the TMC with the basis to again claim that the FFC did not exclusively represent the people, provided the generals with potential allies, and served as an excuse for their reneging on the agreement in principle with the FFC. While the TMC, and particularly Hemeti, defamed the FFC, its followers on the street called for Hemeti to be jailed, and indeed his future and that of the other generals under an FFC-led government that was beholden to the protestors would be at best uncertain. The opposition leadership, however, did not talk about retribution, and the SPA called for a truth and reconciliation commission in which the crimes of the regime needed to be acknowledged as a prerequisite if the country were to make any kind of progress in the future.¹⁶

The emergence of tensions within the FFC further strengthened the TMC's case. While the SPA demanded civilian dominance of the Sovereign Council (already a climb down from the original demand for a completely civil administration), NUP leader Sadiq al-Mahdi urged a cautious approach in dealing with the military for fear of a counter coup, and was prepared to agree to the generals' chairing the council, as long as the FFC held the majority of the 11-person body (Georgy and Abdelaziz, 2019). The Sudan Call group, of which the NUP was the leading member, also indicated its

willingness to accept a transitional military presidency (*Sudan Tribune*, 2019b). An even bigger disagreement in the opposition ranks emerged when al-Mahdi indicated that under certain conditions—the removal of NCP personnel from state institutions, the drawing up of new election laws, and the appointment of an independent electoral board—he would endorse the TMC’s proposed early elections. Employing the same language as the generals, al-Mahdi justified his approach on the grounds that neither the military nor the FFC had a popular mandate (*Sudan Tribune*, 2019c).

In response to the stalemate the FFC called a general strike for 28 and 29 May, and all members of the organization supported it except the NUP (*Sudan Vision*, 2019). The two-day strike was widely supported, but it had little impact on communications, water and petrol supplies, the airport, and even on banking and the electricity supply, where there were disruptions, but the services generally continued. If the measurement of the strike was determined by the support for the FFC call for civil administration, it was successful; if its success was measured by bringing the government and economy to a halt and forcing the generals to make concessions, it was not a success. There were various acts of violence by the security forces, notably the killing of two protestors and of a pregnant woman by a drunken soldier, and the RSF were involved in trying to break up the strike.

The military also found it politically useful to emphasize the behaviour of a minority of socially rebellious youth in order to discredit the revolt and arouse middle-class indignation, and there were reports of RSF beatings, the indiscriminate use of weapons, and more deaths in the Colombia area. While some youth held that the consumption of drugs was an individual choice—as liberals in the West might contend—most older Sudanese were horrified at the idea, and a generational divide developed that the military encouraged. Again there was talk of holding an early election and that the TMC was negotiating with groups other than the FFC, while Hemeti claimed that the opposition was not being serious about sharing power and that it wanted to confine the military to a ‘ceremonial role’ and that ‘their slogans [i.e. those of the FFC] cheated us’ (*Asharq Al-Awsat*, 2019). He also claimed that the FFC wanted to return the security forces to their barracks, which from the perspective of security officials was abhorrent. Reflecting these sentiments, the TMC withdrew Al Jazeera’s licence to operate in the country and raided the Ramtan news agency, which had broadcast from the sit-in (*Dabanga*, 2019d). On Friday 31 May Islamist, Sufi, and other groups held a rally in support of the TMC at the Republican Palace (*France 24*, 2019).

Meanwhile, Hemeti met with Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman and al-Burhan met with Egyptian president el-Sisi and UAE crown prince Mohammed bin Zayed, after which the generals stated that the sit-in constituted a ‘threat to national security’ (*Reuters*, 2019b). It is not known whether the generals were taking their orders from these Gulf leaders or simply endorsed an already planned crackdown, but what is clear is that it unfolded immediately after these meetings. It began with the

build-up of a large RSF armoured force in the Colombia area on the night of 2 June, as witnessed by the author, after which an attack was launched with the support of the police and other security forces at 5 a.m. the following morning. The generals claimed that these forces followed unruly elements from Colombia who retreated to the sit-in site, but eyewitnesses say that from the outset the attack was on protestors at a time when relatively few were at the site. The RSF shot and beat protestors, burned down their tents, went into a nearby hospital to shoot wounded protestors, killed at least 118 people in various areas of Khartoum and other parts of the country,¹⁷ raped women, and randomly abused people (Abdelaziz and Georgy, 2019). Wanting no record of the sit-in and the threat it posed to the established order, the RSF burned down any structures at the sit-in and set about removing or defacing the extensive mural art in the area. On 6 April elements in the national army had opened the military headquarters' gates to protect protestors from attack by NISS forces, but this time the gates were kept closed and the protestors experienced the full wrath of the RSF. The security forces assumed that their actions would end the uprising, but they were mistaken, and protestors moved to other areas of Khartoum and put up more barricades.

Al-Burhan waited until the day after the RSF attack (4 June) to go on national television to say that the TMC no longer recognized the FFC or the agreement the military had reached with the FFC-led protestors, that other groups could be brought into the negotiations, and that elections would be held in nine months (Oliphant, 2019). Predictably the SPA and FFC rejected the call for early elections and said that they were going ahead with their previously announced civil disobedience campaign. The crackdown had the unanticipated result of uniting the internal opposition and much of the international community in condemning the actions of the military, and even the UAE expressed 'great concern' (The National, 2019), while the AU suspended Sudan's membership (Al Jazeera, 2019e).

While the Sudanese security forces lacked the unity of their Egyptian counterparts, their intent was—like the Egyptian military—to hijack the revolution. The RSF attack on the opposition sit-in of 3 June was meant to consolidate the military's power, particularly that of Hemeti, but the extent of the brutality proved an embarrassment for the junta's internal and foreign backers, and the widespread support for the resulting SPA- and FFC-led strikes made any attempt on the part of the military to grab power impossible. Moreover, led by the AU and Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed, and

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with the support of the United States, the EU, and others who feared an all-out civil war in Sudan, pressure mounted on the junta to return to its earlier agreement in principle with the FFC. The outline of a formal power-sharing agreement was reached by representatives of the AU, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the United Kingdom, and the United States in Khartoum on 5 July (Walsh, 2019). Although the TMC was forced to reach an agreement with the FFC, the majority of the FFC concluded that the generals would go to almost any lengths to ensure that they were not displaced, and decided that it was expedient to compromise with them.

On 17 July a power-sharing agreement was signed that established an 11-person Sovereign Council that would govern for 39 months, after which elections were to be held (Dabanga, 2019e). In the first 21 months of the transition the Sovereign Council would be headed by a general and would be followed by a civilian for the remaining 18 months of its tenure. The Sovereign Council would be Sudan's highest authority and would be composed of five military personnel chosen by the TMC and five civilians selected by the FFC, with the 11th member being a civilian selected by consensus. The government was officially formed on 21 August, when the head of the TMC, Lt. Gen. Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan, was sworn in as head of the Sovereign Council. Other TMC members on the council included his deputy, Hemeti, together with generals Yasser Atta, Ibrahim Gaber, and Shams al-Din Kabashi. The five FFC-appointed members were Hassan Sheikh Idris Qadi, Al-Siddiq Tawer Kafi, Mohammed al-Fekki Suleiman, Mohamed Osman Hassan al-Taayeshi, and Ayesha Musa Saeed (Al Jazeera, 2019h).

A Council of Ministers was to be established in which the FFC-appointed prime minister, Abdullah Hamdok, an economist, would select one of three FFC-proposed candidates to head each of 14 ministries, excluding the interior and defence ministries, who would be appointed by the military. Four national councils were also to be established and members assigned by the prime minister. Lastly, a 300-member Legislative Council composed of two-thirds FFC members and one-third others who had supported al-Bashir's overthrow was agreed to, but its formation was postponed until the other governance institutions had started functioning. On 4 August—just days after (according to the opposition) the RSF killed five people during protests in El Obeid against rising prices, four of whom were school children (Al Jazeera, 2019g)—the FFC and TMC signed a Constitutional Charter that paved the way for the formation of an interim government on 17 August (Reeves, 2019).

Despite the demands of the street protestors, the Constitutional Charter did not provide for the dissolution of the RSF, and instead called for the militia to be brought under the control of the regular armed forces, which were to be under the command of Sudan's president, that is, al-Burhan (who had effectively been under Hemeti's control since at least 11 April). The SCP rejected the Constitutional Charter because it failed to institutionalize the executive powers of the Sovereign Council, and because of its inclusion in the interim government of five members of the TMC who were

ultimately responsible for the killing of hundreds of civilians during the course of the uprising (*Sudan Tribune*, 2019d). The SCP also took exception to the fact that the Sovereign Council alone would decide on matters such as declarations of war, joint military actions with foreign countries, and allowing or removing foreign bases in the country. The SCP believed that the country should be ruled by a parliamentary regime in which the civilian government and parliament held all powers. Finally, the SCP and others argued that ceding power to the military was contrary to the aims of the transitional government set out in the Declaration of Freedom and Change (Peoples Dispatch, 2019).

Like the SCP, the armed groups rejected the TMC–FFC agreement because of the military’s domination of the security organs during the transitional period and the wide powers granted to the Sovereign Council (Amin, 2019). They were also angered at the FFC’s failure to deliver on its founding commitment to shift power away from a Khartoum elite, as well as its neglect of the peacebuilding process that was needed after the long wars that the Sudanese security forces had been fighting against minority communities in the peripheries of the country. And, lastly, the armed groups were upset at the refusal to grant them representation in the transitional government. A meeting of the FFC leadership to sell their agreement with the TMC to the people of North Darfur had to be cancelled when youth in El Fashir rioted, which is indicative of the sentiments of the rebel groups and the displaced people in Darfur (*Sudan Tribune*, 2019e). Meanwhile, a new coalition of rightist Islamist parties known as the National Forces Coordination, which included the Popular Congress Party; the Reform Now Movement (established by NCP dissidents); and the Just Peace Party, founded by El Tayeb Mustafa, an uncle of al-Bashir, also rejected the agreement and announced its intention to peacefully bring down the new government (Dabanga, 2019f). ●



Attempts to overcome endemic corruption will be undermined, because the security organs are a primary source and beneficiary of such corruption.”

Conclusion

The SPA, which led the initial stages of the uprising, began its existence as a lobby group to press for an increase in the minimum wage, not to make a revolution, and when it found itself dragged into a revolutionary situation by the activist youthful protestors, it was anxious to return to 'normal' politics as soon as possible. The international mediation that led to the agreements between the TMC and FFC on 17 July and 4 August 2019 prioritized stability over instituting a genuine civil administration and ensuring a democratic transition. It did so even when this meant sanctifying a power-sharing arrangement in which a serial abuser of human rights, Hemeti, and his *janjawid*-based RSF assumed a leading role and al-Burhan became head of state. Just as they did in the TMC, al-Burhan and Hemeti will lead the Sovereign Council for the first 21 months of the 39-month agreement. The other generals in the TMC, together with the interior and defence ministers in the Council of Ministers, will make far-reaching and much needed security sector reforms very difficult. Attempts to overcome endemic corruption will be undermined, because the security organs are a primary source and beneficiary of such corruption. There are also major obstacles to reforming Sudan's finances, because the deeply entrenched generals can be expected to resist attempts to reduce the lion's share of government expenditure controlled by the security services. Moreover, a prime minister and minister of finance steeped in mainstream economics are unlikely to challenge either the national or international economic status quo, and as a result the economic inequities that have afflicted Sudan since its independence will likely continue. Finally, apart from the many international constraints, there can be little prospect of realizing the FFC's objective of Sudan's implementing a balanced foreign policy when the generals have their own links to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt; the RSF is conducting private military operations abroad; and the Western powers continue to oppose the country's adoption of a non-aligned foreign policy, as they have done in the past (see above).

The FFC coalition was successful in uniting the opposition by concentrating on the overthrow of the al-Bashir regime. But this was done at the cost of establishing a strong leadership and a coherent and genuinely transformative programme, which made it unwieldy and frequently incapable of speaking with a united voice when dealing with the junta. While Sadiq al-Mahdi repeatedly called for compromises with the junta, the SCP held that the government must be entirely civilian and there should be no negotiations with the generals. The FFC was thus divided between those who wanted Sudan to return to the pre-NCP days when the country was dominated by the traditional parties, and leftists and youth who wanted a complete clean-out of the 'deep state', including the al-Bashir-appointed generals, and viewed the traditional parties with contempt. The agreement between the FFC and the junta thus represented the success of opportunist and conservative elements within the FFC led by the NUP, which made common cause with the generals to undermine the left and its supporters, in a similar fashion as during the 1964 and 1985 uprisings.

That the FFC leadership signed these agreements with the TMC speaks not only to its members' short-term perspective, but also to the extent of international pressure and their fear of the consequences of continuing to challenge the generals, their lack of practical experience, the absence of clearly defined objectives and the commitment to reach them, and a distaste for the politics of the street, over which they had little control. Although most protestors understood that the security agencies were the main obstacle to the opposition

objective of constructing a civil state, the FFC leadership reached a power-sharing agreement with the generals that negated the possibility of a genuine transformation, and ensured the political survival of the generals and their continuing influence. The FFC was equally confused about its supplementary demands, such as eliminating the 'deep state', achieving a democratic transition, and implementing a balanced foreign policy, and surprisingly little was said about the economic aspirations of the people and the means to achieve them, even though economic hardship was understood to be the major cause of dissatisfaction with the al-Bashir government.

The appointment of Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok, a mainstream economist, and his selection of the Council of Ministers does not suggest anything more than a moderately reformist government—and one fundamentally constrained by its military partners. The government appointees include Ibrahim Elbadawi, a former World Bank economist, as finance minister and Asmaa Abdallah, Sudan's first female foreign minister (DW, 2019b). It remains to be seen how much authority they can exert, but in the economic sphere the government will be constrained by Sudan's economic crisis and dependence on international support, and in the field of foreign relations by the multifaceted power of the military and the demands of the country's powerful benefactors.

While the term 'uprising' is often used synonymously with 'revolution' and the protestors and the SPA/FFC were often called revolutionaries, this is not accurate. A leading authority on revolutions, Theda Skocpol, defines social revolutions or true revolutions as rapid and basic transformations of a society's state and class structures (Skocpol, 1979). She distinguishes them from rebellions, which involve a revolt of subordinate classes but may not create structural change, and from political revolutions, which may change state structures but not social structures. By this classic formulation it can be understood that with the possible exception of a handful of leftist activists, it was not the objective of the SPA, FFC, or many of the activist youth

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to carry out a social revolution, and the power-sharing agreement between the FFC and the military was not intended to start a process of structural change, and makes even any attempts to change state structures problematic.

The uprising in Sudan can be compared to those of the Arab Spring and particularly Egypt, where ultimately the military was able to stay in power. In the case of Sudan, the leadership of the uprising did not have revolutionary objectives, but the extent of the popular mobilization, the protestors' deep distrust of the military (unlike in Egypt), and the divisions within the military made it impossible for the TMC to govern the country on its own. The Sudanese experience can also be compared to the so-called 'colour revolutions' that overthrew communist and authoritarian governments in the former Soviet Union and the Balkans in the early years of the first decade of the 21st century. These revolutions were largely non-violent, occurred in countries where states and governments were weak, and involved the mobilization of civil society, while the role of the international community was pivotal (Mitchel, 2012, pp. 10–11). According to a crucial study, although youth often played a major role in the overthrow of these regimes, their impact on the resulting governments was minimal and their influence steadily declined (Mitchel, 2012, pp. 12–13). As a result, these protests were as much reflections of continuity as they were moments of radical change, and did little to spur fundamental democratic change. In that light many of the 'reforms' that the Hamdok government is carrying out in the economy and foreign relations are not breaks from the past, but represent a continuation of policies pursued by the al-Bashir regime, which also endeavoured to win the favour of the United States and integrate Sudan into the global state and economic system that the United States dominates.

In the case of Sudan, the youth who were the mainstay of the uprising largely viewed the political process with disdain; had no firm links to any of the political parties, even if their sentiments linked them to those on the left; never challenged the economic and social structures of Sudan; and—unlike in the past—did not express anti-IMF sentiments, even though the Islamist government they brought down and whose economic policies they condemned had instituted IMF austerity measures for years. The youth typically held liberal individualist values that reflected Western influences,¹⁸ which sometimes led to tensions with Sudan's broader and more socially conservative and collectivist mainstream society. As a result, the youth had little influence on the agreements reached by the FFC with the generals; have no role in the transitional government; and, short of going back to the streets under a leadership with a transformative agenda, cannot be expected to have any significant impact on the course of the transitional period.

The mass sit-ins throughout Sudan, particularly the one in Khartoum immediately outside military headquarters, which was the acknowledged seat of power in Sudan, did—even if inadvertently—constitute a fundamental political and social challenge

to the state. The organization and activities of the sit-in provided an egalitarian and democratic model on which a radically different model of governance and society could have been constructed. It thus constituted the foundation for a social revolution, but few of its participants understood it as such, and the SPA and FFC leaderships considered the sit-in as merely an instrument that could be used to pressure the junta to achieve narrow political ends, after which it was to be abandoned and normal politics were to be pursued. Prior to its destruction on 3 June, only a minority of participants in the Khartoum sit-in called for its continuation irrespective of the outcome of FFC–junta negotiations. The military authorities led by Hemeti understood better than the opposition the threat to the existing order posed by the sit-in, repeatedly attacked it, and made its suppression a priority. The brutality that characterized the destruction of the Khartoum sit-in not only undermined the legitimacy of the junta, but served to enhance the stature of the FFC, limited the power of the protestors and their leftist allies, undermined the FFC’s dependence on them, and placed it in the driving seat to carry forward the political process. But it failed to capitalize on this situation and gave in to the demands of the generals. A once-in-a-generation opportunity to replace a state that had ill served the people of Sudan since independence was thus lost.

The unions played a major role in 1964, and especially in the 1985 uprising, which brought a class dimension to what were largely economically motivated struggles. The unions broadly represented Sudanese society in ways that were not possible for the youth during the 2018–19 uprising. The SPA was not made up of traditional trade unions with close links to working people, but was led by professional associations of the educated and liberal middle and upper classes. The SPA was seriously under-represented in the country’s peripheries, had almost no women among its leadership, did not develop a class perspective on the conflict, never effectively raised issues of social injustice and uneven development, and at no stage advocated a transformative project. In keeping with Sudan’s post-colonial experience, the SPA’s prevailing orientation was one of paternalism. The generals were able to use this weakness and tarnish the youthful protestors with the claimed anti-social activities of a small minority of youth in the Colombia area to foster a generational cleavage between the youth who made up the large majority of the protestors and the country’s socially conservative majority to undermine the uprising. Only the RSF attack on the opposition encampments of 3 June served to temporarily bridge the gap between the socially radical youth and the Sudanese people.

Despite the major role of women in the uprising, their unique problems of oppression were not highlighted by either the SPA or FFC, and both organizations had few women among their leaderships, while the generals cultivated socially conservative and religious constituencies who are not sympathetic to women’s concerns. Like the youth of which they were in many ways a component, the young women protestors typically

espoused liberal values of human rights and gender equality, and apart from concerns about government corruption, had little to say about Sudan's systemic economic inequities that fuelled the wars on the country's peripheries and the widespread hatred of the regime.¹⁹ While the Legislative Council will have 40 per cent female members, there are only two women on the powerful Sovereign Council and four in the 20-person Council of Ministers. In any case, there is nothing transformative about gender quotas or appointing a handful of women to elite organs in the government unless they are linked to a government committed to ending patriarchy. And this is not the case with the transitional government. Indeed, the few female appointments suggest paternalism and tokenism. Not surprisingly, the signing of the Constitutional Charter led to complaints and demonstrations by some women in Khartoum (Lynch, 2019a).

Since its inception the Sudanese state has been defined by its rulers as Islamic, Arab, and rooted in elites from ethnic communities in the centre and north. The African origins of ancient Sudan constituted a major theme at the Khartoum sit-in, and protestors prided themselves on overcoming ethnic divisions during the uprising. The al-Bashir government in turn played on fears of the centre being dominated by people from the peripheries, particularly Darfurians, and protestors responded with the chant, 'We are all Darfur' (Rosenberg, 2019), but this friction remained. The Sudanese state has long had a predatory relationship with the peoples of the peripheries, and this problem crystalized around the demand of southern Sudanese for federalism. The government's refusal to implement a federal system set the southerners on the path to secession, and the needs of other marginalized communities are not dissimilar, have also been ignored, and remain a threat to the unity and stability of the country.

The uprising began outside Khartoum, which gave people from the peripheries hope that for the first time in Sudan's post-colonial history their voices would be heard. But the needed transformation of the state is unlikely under an agreement in which power is shared with the military, particularly the RSF, whose leaders view Darfur as a private fiefdom and espouse Arab supremacy. Moreover, both the SPA and FFC leaderships were drawn from traditional Sudanese political elites concentrated in the riverine core of the country. The agreements between the FFC and TMC make no provision for federalism or regional representation in the Sovereign Council, Council of Ministers, or Legislative Council. Lastly, the generals will not readily accept the transformation of the ethnocratic state of which they have been major beneficiaries, and neither will the traditional political parties.

Many who participated in and supported the 2018–19 uprising wanted a secular regime to be established, but this is determinedly opposed by the generals, sectarian parties whose legitimacy is based on Islam, traditionally minded Sudanese, and the Gulf backers of the generals, and these same Gulf countries are financially underwriting the transitional government. After the 1986 elections the Sadiq al-Mahdi

coalition government resolved to replace Nimeiri's 'September laws' with what it considered to be genuine Islamic laws, but this proved beyond its capacity, and as a result parliament spent the next three years preoccupied with this problem, to the detriment of other important concerns (Young, 2012, p. 30). This led to growing disenchantment with democratic rule and paved the way for the NIF–military coup of 1989. Under the FFC–junta power-sharing agreements secularism will not be seriously considered before a constitutional conference is held, and attempts to reach a compromise could produce the kind of destructive deadlock of al-Mahdi's government.

“ Many who participated in and supported the 2018–19 uprising wanted a secular regime to be established.”

During the uprising the SPA and protestors called for independent economic and foreign policies, but under the FFC's power-sharing agreement, and with the security forces closely tied to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, together with Sudan's dependence on financing from the Gulf states, this objective is unlikely to be realized. Indeed, restraints on the conduct of foreign policy were effectively acknowledged by the SPA and FFC leaderships, which opposed RSF participation in the Saudi–Emirati war in Yemen, but made clear during the uprising that they would not raise the issue in a transitional government because of the opposition of the military. Exacerbating the problem, according to the UN Security Council Panel of Experts, approximately a thousand RSF fighters had joined the Eastern Libyan Military Council (that is, Khalifa Haftar's group) on 25 July 2019 (UNSC, 2019, para. 24), with the UAE apparently covering costs. The Panel of Experts also determined that a contract was signed in Khartoum on 7 May 2019 between Hemeti on behalf of the TMC and the Canadian company Dickens & Madson, in which the latter would 'strive to obtain funding for your [that is, Hemeti's] Council [that is, the TMC] from the Eastern Libyan Military Council' (UNSC, 2019, para. 25).

Further constraining the prospects of an independent foreign policy is Sudan's USD 72.7 billion debt in 2018, which constituted 212 per cent of its gross domestic product (Countryeconomy.com, 2018), while in the previous year Sudan exported USD 4.7 billion and imported USD 9.9 billion worth of goods and services, resulting in a negative trade balance of USD 5.2 billion (OEC, n.d.). The country's financial survival was only possible because of remittances by Sudanese workers, most of whom work in the Gulf states, and were these workers to be expelled, Sudan's economy would collapse. This, together with these states' close link to the generals, gives them enormous leverage.²⁰

That Sudan is in desperate need of external financing was made clear by incoming prime minister Abdullah Hamdok, who said shortly after his appointment that his package of reforms is dependent on receiving USD 8 billion in foreign aid and USD 2 billion in foreign reserve deposits. He stated that the government was looking to the Gulf states as the most likely source of these funds, despite the uprising protestors' negative views of these states (CGTN Africa, 2019). The other potential financial backers of the country are China and the IMF. Although China is Sudan's biggest trading partner, some in the protest movement also viewed it adversely because of its apparent support of the al-Bashir regime, while Sudanese have traditionally viewed the IMF as a predatory agency of the West (see above). Moreover, in the midst of a trade war with China, there is also little doubt that the United States would object if China were to play a leading role in financially supporting Sudan's transitional government. Since entering office Hamdok has devoted considerable time to reaching an agreement with the IMF and convincing the United States to end its sanctions, which diplomatic sources indicate may require Khartoum to recognize Israel, a move that even seemed likely under al-Bashir (Almeghari, 2019). Already on 16 March 2017 the United States and Sudan had announced the resumption of military relations, and a month later it was revealed that the CIA would open its largest office in the Middle East in Khartoum (*Sudan Tribune*, 2017c). This intelligence-sharing and military cooperation agreement can be expected to intensify under the transitional government, which once again suggests continuity with the al-Bashir government's approach. Indeed, the United States can be expected to use its sanctions and the desire of the transitional government to end them to press for pro-US changes to Sudan's foreign policy, thus further limiting hopes that the transitional government will be able to formulate an independent foreign policy.

Based on past experience, the IMF will demand the imposition of austerity as a prerequisite to debt relief and granting new loans to Sudan, and these measures are typically borne by the poor and offer few prospects of improving living standards, at least in the short run. IMF structural adjustment programmes are dedicated to the integration of subject countries into the Western-dominated global economic system, which further limits the prospects of Sudan developing autonomous economic and foreign policies. National governments are severely constrained in carrying out economic reforms unless they fall within the IMF-prescribed neoliberal framework (Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009). This framework limits the role of the state in tackling economic injustices, emphasizes the market, and fosters the economic inequality and unequal development the transitional government must overcome if it is to improve the lives of Sudanese and end the wars in the country's peripheries. Just as debt placed severe constraints on the al-Bashir regime, the transitional government will face similar obstacles, and just as the former regime felt compelled to introduce austerity measures, there is little chance that the Hamdok government can avoid them, given its commitment to mainstream economics. Lastly, the main focus of the

Trump administration's new Africa policy is on challenging the Russian Federation and China in Africa. It does not accept developing countries' having non-aligned foreign policies, and former national security advisor John Bolton said that US aid will only go to countries that advance US interests (National Security Council, 2018).

The overthrow of al-Bashir was a remarkable feat that testifies to the courage and commitment of the protestors and the strong support they received from the Sudanese people and the diaspora. But the 17 July power-sharing agreement and 4 August Constitutional Charter that established a joint civilian–military transitional government fall well short of even the reformist objectives of the uprising's leaders, particularly the commitment to a genuine civil administration. Indeed, the actions of the leadership of the SPA and FFC in making a deal with the military suggest a revolution betrayed. The leadership and activists of Sudan's 1964 and 1985 uprisings had a much firmer commitment to transformation than their counterparts in 2018–19, but their struggles were undermined and ultimately co-opted by traditional forces, and the power-sharing agreements of July and August 2019 place Sudan on a similar trajectory. ●



The FFC's and transitional government's commitment to reaching peace agreements with the rebel groups within six months of taking office has not been met."

Update as of 8 March 2020

The FFC's and transitional government's commitment to reaching peace agreements with the rebel groups within six months of taking office has not been met; fundamental issues of power in the government have not been resolved; the Legislative Council, which promised to inject a measure of accountability into the system of government, has not been appointed; and it was decided that civilian regional governors would not be appointed until after peace agreements had been signed with rebel movements. Although five armed groups quickly agreed on a Declaration of Principles, there have been no agreements with any of the main rebel movements, and violence in Darfur has continued. The SPLA-North forces of Abdelaziz al-Hilu in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile have said they will set aside their demand for national self-determination if the government commits to a secular Sudan (*Sudan Tribune*, 2019g), while the Sudan Liberation Movement forces of Abdelwahid al-Nur in the Jebel Mara mountains of Darfur have insisted that the transitional government implement the demands of the revolution before peace negotiations can begin (*Sudan Tribune*, 2019f). Al-Hilu's position corresponds to that of the SPLA/M during the North–South civil war, which made secularism a precondition for national unity, and the failure of the NIF/NCP to accept this demand set southern Sudan on the path to secession.

To date the transitional government has been unwilling to challenge Hemeti, who continues to maintain foreign forces, is widely reported to be involved in human trafficking, and whose family plays a major role in a largely opaque gold-mining industry in Darfur.²¹ While Sudan's foreign minister, Asmaa Abdallah, has been virtually invisible, Hemeti has played a leading role in government–rebel negotiations in South Sudan and has led Sudan's negotiations with its rebel groups. The latter process is being mediated by South Sudanese president Salva Kiir's security advisor, Tut Kew Gatluak Manime. Manime is known in South Sudan as 'son of Bashir', because he was raised in al-Bashir's family; is currently hosting three members of that family, including al-Bashir's wife, in Juba; and had close relations with Salah Gosh and many of Sudan's leading generals (South Sudan News Now, 2019). That someone so close to the former regime is mediating these negotiations should have raised alarm bells in Sudan's transitional government, but apparently has not. Also, there have been repeated allegations that Hemeti is using the rebel groups negotiating in Juba to weaken the structures set up in the Sudanese Constitutional Charter and permit the Sovereign Council to take more unilateral action in the absence of a parliamentary body (al-Amin, 2019). According to Gen. al-Burhan, who is the SAF commander-in-chief and chairman of the Sovereign Council, Hemeti's RSF is an 'integral part of the Sudanese army' (Dabanga, 2019g), which would make its involvement in foreign wars official government policy. On 14 January 2020 there was an outbreak of violence in central Khartoum involving members of the General Intelligence Service (the successor of the NISS), ostensibly over concerns about their pensions. It was alleged to be part of a coup attempt orchestrated by Salah Gosh and was suppressed by the

RSF. Incidents such as these make clear the continuing dangers of the vast military and security apparatus created by al-Bashir and the NCP, as well as the dependence of the transitional government on its military partners led by al-Burhan and Hemeti (Gallopín, 2020). Surprisingly, however, Prime Minister Hamdok contends that the military–civilian partnership in government represents ‘a model in the region and the world’ (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2020), but perhaps what he had in mind were the examples of Myanmar and Pakistan, which have nominally democratic governments, but where real power lies with the military.

That seemed to be the case when on 3 February 2020 al-Burhan met in Kampala with Benjamin Netanyahu, prime minister of Israel, a state not recognized by all previous Sudanese governments because of its treatment of the Palestinians (Middle East Eye, 2020). Under the TMC–FFC agreement foreign affairs are the sole prerogative of Hamdok and his cabinet, but al-Burhan argued that as head of state his actions were in the interests of the country and national security, specifically to get Sudan removed from the US state sponsor of terrorism list (Middle East Eye, 2020). What has never been clear is what Sudan’s refusal to enter into diplomatic relations with Israel had to do with its being designated an alleged state sponsor of terrorism. Nevertheless, al-Burhan reportedly asked Netanyahu for help to improve ties with the United States and urge the Trump administration to drop Sudan’s terror designation, and 24 hours before the meeting US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo phoned al-Burhan and invited him to visit Washington (*Times of Israel*, 2020). Coming in the wake of the Trump administration’s announcement of the ‘deal of the century’ peace plan (which Sudan as a member of the Arab League rejected) and a month before Israeli elections, al-Burhan’s meeting with Netanyahu won the favour of the Netanyahu and Trump governments and dealt a blow to the Palestinians. The meeting also took place less than a week after President Trump added Sudan for the second time to a list of 13 largely Muslim countries whose citizens were ineligible to receive visas through the US diversity visa programme (Center for American Progress, 2020) because, as the president had previously explained, once African migrants had seen the United States, they would ‘never go back to their huts’ (Shear and Davis, 2017). The response of the Hamdok government made clear that the issue of visas was not its concern, but it was upset at al-Burhan’s usurpation of its authority, even though this was quickly papered over.

Al-Burhan’s meeting with Netanyahu was not a surprise, since Foreign Minister Asmaa Abdallah had already hinted at an impending normalization of relations with Israel, and thus the issue was not the government’s rejection of normalization, but merely its timing (Al Jazeera, 2019i). Contrary to claims by Atlantic Council senior fellow and former US diplomat Cameron Hudson that the al-Burhan–Netanyahu meeting ‘marks an important break with past pro-Iranian, pro-Islamist policies of the Bashir regime’ (Middle East Eye, 2020), the initiative represented a continuation of the policies of

the former regime and their pursuit by al-Burhan, who had been a senior military official of that regime. The al-Bashir regime had severed diplomatic relations with Iran in January 2016, diluted its Islamist policies, and encouraged a media debate on the recognition of Israel in 2018, while NISS head Salah Gosh had met his Israeli counterpart in February 2019 (see above). Moreover, in response to Netanyahu's claims of Sudan's impending normalization of relations with Israel in late 2018, al-Bashir said that 'sustenance is in the hands of God' (i24NEWS, 2019), which was widely interpreted as meaning that recognition was imminent. The SPA organized demonstrations to oppose any normalization of relations with Israel (Middle East Monitor, 2020), but the significance of the controversy was the continuing power of the military (a key pillar of the al-Bashir regime) and the transitional government's efforts to distance itself from its origins in radical street protests and win the favour of powerful international actors.

Like the al-Bashir regime which it replaced, the Hamdok-led government quickly focused on ending US sanctions, which it considers the main obstacle to overcoming the country's economic crisis and gaining international (which is to say US) legitimacy. To win US favour the Hamdok government shut the Khartoum offices of Hamas and Hezbollah (Middle East Monitor, 2019). As was also the case with al-Bashir's government, the United States is demanding that Sudan's economic and foreign policies be brought in line with US dictates (Hudson, 2019), including reaching agreements with the families of those killed in the 1998 US embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania and the 2000 bombing of the USS *Cole* because of 'alleged' material support for these attacks provided by the former Sudanese government (Mossberg and Prendergast, 2020; US DoS, 2020). In February an agreement was announced in which Khartoum will pay USD 30 million to the families of the 17 USS *Cole* crew members killed in the attack on 12 October 2000 (*Sudan Tribune*, 2020). Later the same month the US Supreme Court opened the door to lawsuits for USD 4.3 billion in punitive damages against Sudan for its alleged complicity in the al-Qaeda bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that killed 224 people (Reuters, 2020). As well as severely undermining the near-bankrupt Sudan, US demands will further limit the capacity of the government to achieve the Sudanese-determined economic and foreign policies it promised to its supporters. While a number of individuals and lobby groups led by The Sentry and the Enough Project, which had been leading US advocates of sanctions, have called for Sudan to be removed from the state sponsor of terrorism list (*Sudan Tribune*, 2019h), it is clear that the Hamdok government is not in full control of the country's security forces, and thus is not in a position to guarantee that elements of the government are not involved in terrorism. After Hamdok has satisfied the United States, Sudan will go to the IMF, which can be expected to wring further concessions from the beleaguered government.²²

Tensions between the military and civilian components of the transitional government increased when the military high command announced the dismissal of a number of

officers, including Lt. Muhammad Siddiq, who supported the protestors during the first days of the Khartoum sit-in in front of Sudan's military headquarters (Vox, 2020). The SPA organized demonstrations against the dismissals, which were brutally put down, a number of protestors and children were injured (Vox, 2020), and the government was compelled to launch an investigation. Further emphasizing the divide between the generals and the techno-

crats in the government was the March 2020 release by the US NGO Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) of its study that found that the 3 June attack on the Khartoum sit-in had been planned in advance; victims identified their attackers as members of the RSF; the regular armed forces had been disarmed and ordered to stand aside while the attack took place; and the RSF targeted doctors, healthcare workers, hospitals, and makeshift clinics that treated victims (PHR, 2020). While many accepted estimates that 150 protestors were killed in the attack, the PHR study endorsed an earlier investigation by a Sudanese lawyers and legal practitioners' association in the United Kingdom that listed the names of 241 victims (PHR, 2020, note 106).²³ Although the study made clear the involvement and likely leadership of the RSF in the attack on the sit-in, it concluded that, because RSF leader Hemeti served as the vice president of the Sovereign Council and because of the prominent role of the security forces on the council, prosecutions of the perpetrators were unlikely (PHR, 2020, p. 7). What is clear, however, is that the security forces that brutalized the Sudanese people for 30 years under al-Bashir have not suddenly changed as a result of entering into government with the FFC and will not readily relinquish their privileged position in the state, as some assume.

Since the uprising there has been a significant increase in personal freedom in Sudan, but this was not granted by the transitional government and instead was due to the refusal of protestors to bend before the military, which made the government's repeal of the hated public order laws almost redundant. In addition, the political space has opened for political parties; some progress has been made in reforming the senior elements of the judiciary; there have been moves to disband the government-controlled unions and permit the emergence of independent unions; former regime-aligned media are being closed; some tentative steps have been made to dismantle the al-Bashir regime (including the possibility that the former president will be sent to The Hague to be tried by the ICC); and an aid corridor has been opened to the Nuba Mountains. However, there is reason to doubt that the efforts of Hamdok and Finance Minister Ibrahim Elbadawi, both of whom are deeply steeped in Western economics and neoliberalism, to integrate Sudan into a global economic system

“ The study made clear the involvement and likely leadership of the RSF in the attack on the sit-in.”

that is now in crisis can overcome Sudan's economic malaise, which long pre-dates the al-Bashir regime. Moreover, the Hamdok government's slowness in completing the investigation into the crimes committed by the security forces in Darfur and determining responsibility for the 3 June attack on the sit-in, its reluctance or inability to stop the engagement of SAF-aligned forces in foreign wars, and the failure of the military-led peace talks in Juba are increasing unease among the forces that brought it to power. But to move forward on these issues and carry out the changes demanded by the supporters of the uprising would bring the government into direct confrontation with its military partners, who cannot countenance a reckoning with the al-Bashir regime's crimes of the past three decades, in which they are deeply implicated. ●

Endnotes

- 1 Author interview with Mahgoub Mohamed Salah, publisher of *Al-Ayam* newspaper, Khartoum, 21 and 25 May 2019.
- 2 Author interview with Mahgoub Mohamed Salah, publisher of *Al-Ayam* newspaper, Khartoum, 21 and 25 May 2019.
- 3 This paragraph is drawn from Young (forthcoming).
- 4 Author interview with Al-Mahboob Abdelsalem, Islamist intellectual, Khartoum, 28 November 2018.
- 5 Author interview with Siddig Yousef, SCP Politburo member, Khartoum, 8 May 2019.
- 6 Author interview with Prof. Mohamed Yousef, Khartoum, 9 May 2019.
- 7 Author interview with Prof. Mohamed Yousef, Khartoum, 9 May 2019.
- 8 Author interview with Prof. Mudawi Ibrahim, academic and human rights activist, Khartoum, 17 May 2019.
- 9 While the anti-government demonstrations began outside Khartoum and were followed with sit-ins in these places, the author was not in a position to observe them, and unfortunately they have not been widely reported by local and international journalists, most of whom were based in Khartoum.
- 10 The following description is garnered from a number of participants and first-hand observers of events in Khartoum.
- 11 Author interview with Faisal Mohamed, journalist, Khartoum, 25 May 2019.
- 12 Some of these scenes were videoed and uploaded to YouTube.
- 13 Author interview with Mahgoub Mohamed Salah, publisher of *Al-Ayam* newspaper, Khartoum, 21 May 2019.
- 14 Much of the material in the following consideration of the Khartoum sit-in is based on about 16 visits by the author to the site between 6 May and 2 June 2019.
- 15 Anarchists hold that the state and its organs of repression are not only unnecessary, but an affront to the human condition, and people should provide their own security and establish institutions of cooperation that make the state superfluous.

- 16 Author interview with Amjed Farid, SPA spokesperson, Khartoum, 1 June 2019.
- 17 The opposition gave the figure of 118 dead; the authorities claimed that 62 people were killed (Abdelaziz and Georgy, 2019).
- 18 While there is little evidence of overt engagement of Western agencies in the uprising, an organization like the US National Endowment for Democracy, which the US government tasks with promoting democracy internationally, did attempt to foster Western democratic values in its Sudan programming (NED, 2018).
- 19 An uprising mobilizer for the SCP—admittedly a young man—whom the author met at the SCP headquarters in Khartoum (22 May 2019) and did not want to be identified, reported that male and female youth had a similar concern with individual rights, and did not focus on economic issues, and there was little to distinguish them politically.
- 20 Author interview with Mubarak al-Fadl al-Mahdi, businessman and former minister of industry, Khartoum, 21 May 2019.
- 21 A recent study found that as well as aiding Khalifa Haftar’s forces, RSF troops in Libya were working with larger criminal networks facilitating human trafficking across the Kufra border; see Poulos and Profazio (2020). However, while a 2019 report of the UN Panel of Experts on Libya confirmed the contract between Hemeti (on behalf of the TMC) and the Canadian lobbying firm Dickens & Madson (see above, and UNSC, 2019, para. 25), a subsequent UN Panel of Experts on Sudan report found ‘no credible evidence of the presence of Rapid Support Forces in Libya’ (UNSC, 2020, para. 72). It found that the earlier findings of the Panel of Experts on Libya could be due to the presence of Darfuri rebel groups in Libya and the fact that ‘individual mercenaries for the Libyan National Army and other groups ... hail from the same tribes as the majority of Rapid Support Forces personnel’ (UNSC, 2020, para. 72). But this report does not attempt to explain why Hemeti would sign a contract to obtain payment from Haftar’s group unless he either provided military services or intended to provide such services.
- 22 The Hamdok government seeks debt relief under the IMF’s Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative, which its predecessor failed to gain because of the US state sponsor of terrorism designation, a shortage of funds, and opposition in the US Congress to the provision of funds to the al-Bashir government. This IMF initiative is not designed to cancel debts, but to ensure that they are paid, and it is not concerned with enhancing human development, reducing poverty, or even increasing growth; see Focus on the Global South (2000).
- 23 Note 106 in PHR (2020, p. 63) reads, ‘Sudanese lawyers and legal practitioner’s association in the UK, “Sudanese army headquarters massacre,” August 10, 2019. On file with PHR.’

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