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Sudan's Uncertain Transition

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Overview

Sudan's future is uncertain in the aftermath of President Omar al Bashir's ouster as elements of his regime have sought to retain power in the face of a popular uprising and international pressure. The Sudanese military has a history of intervention in politics: the 1989 coup in which Bashir came to power was the country's fourth. Sudan also has a long history of rebellion and resistance. While the armed uprisings are more widely known, mass protests against military regimes in 1964 and 1985 spurred coups that led to brief periods of civilian rule.[1] The current protest movement is unprecedented for Sudan in its scope, bringing together professional and labor unions, community groups, civic activists and business leaders, opposition parties, and insurgents in a common call for change. Negotiations with the military over a political transition pose a major test for the diverse coalition as it seeks to lay the foundations for democracy.

The objectives of Bashir's security chiefs, who seized power in April, are less clear, and they have appeared divided at times on how to proceed. They allowed an initial opening of political space, pledging a transition to civilian government and negotiating with the opposition.[2] But in early June, the Transitional Military Council (TMC) launched a violent crackdown on the pro-democracy movement, killing and arresting protesters, raiding hospitals, blocking the internet, and deploying paramilitary forces across Khartoum and other key cities.

Despite the threat of further violence, tens of thousands of protesters returned to the streets on June 30, demanding justice and a civilian-led government.[3] In the days that followed, military and opposition leaders negotiated a preliminary deal—announced on July 4 and signed on July 17—under which they would share power during a three-year transition period. The July 17 deal left many key details of the arrangement subject to further talks, and thousands have gathered in subsequent protests calling for "justice first."[4] The rise within the TMC of a former Darfur militia leader, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemeti," has drawn concern from many observers. His forces have been accused of serious human rights abuses and possible war crimes, and his prominent role in the TMC fuels worries about impunity for security force abuses.[5]

Developments in Sudan, a country described as a crossroads between Africa and the Arab world, have implications beyond its borders. Some observers have asked whether Sudan's uprising may represent a new phase of the Arab Spring, with the potential to revive pro-democracy movements elsewhere.[6] Protests in Algeria, sparked by an effort to extend the tenure of an aging president and prompting his resignation, have occurred in parallel with Sudan's. By many accounts, protesters in Sudan and Algeria have learned lessons from previous uprisings, and from each other.[7]

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[1] Anakwa Dwamena, "The Historic Precedents of the Current Uprising in Sudan," *The New Yorker*, February 8, 2019.

[2] Khalid Abdelaziz, "New Military Council Leader Promises Civilian Government for Sudan," Reuters, April 13, 2019.

[3] Declan Walsh, "Bouncing Back from Crackdown, Protesters Surge Through Sudan's Streets," *New York Times*, June 30, 2019.

[4] Nadine Awadalla and Khalid Abdelaziz, "Sudan Protesters Take Over Square Where Bashir Challenged Uprising," Reuters, July 18, 2019.

[5] "The Sudan Peace Deal is Greeted with Little Excitement," The Economist, July 8, 2019.

[6] Fergal Keane, "Sudan's Bold Challenge to Authoritarianism," BBC, April 27, 2019; Editorial Board, "Can Sudan Revive the Arab Spring?" *Washington Post*, May 15, 2019.

[7] Isma'il Kushkush, "Protesters in Sudan and Algeria Have Learned From the Arab Spring," *The Atlantic*, April 13, 2019.

A transition that could bring an end to Sudan's internal conflicts and allow for economic recovery might have positive impacts in neighboring countries, including South Sudan. A failed transition, however, could lead to civil war or state collapse. Such a scenario could have devastating humanitarian consequences, spurring refugee flows and putting existing relief efforts at risk. (Sudan is already a top source of African migrant flows to Europe.) Further instability in Sudan could have spillover effects in surrounding states (**Figure 1**) that rank high on fragility indexes. State collapse could also provide a haven for violent extremists.[8] As a result, the stakes are high, not only for the Sudanese people, but for the region and the international community.

Figure 1. Map of Sudan

Source: CRS graphic, drawn from Esri.

Protests, Revolution, and Repression

On April 11, 2019, Sudan's military removed President Omar al Bashir from office, three decades after he seized power in a 1989 coup. Four months of near-daily protests across the country had shaken his government, and on April 6, huge crowds gathered outside the military's headquarters in Khartoum to demand an end to his regime. Five days later, Bashir was ousted by his security forces in what the African Union has termed a coup d'état.[9] The protests continued.

The demonstrations, initially triggered by the government's imposition of austerity measures amidst a worsening economic crisis, were fueled by a range of grievances against Bashir and his Islamist National Congress Party (NCP), an Islamist party that emerged from Sudan's chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood.[10] Alongside frustration with the deteriorating economic conditions,

[8] Nicolas Hénin, "The Caliphate is Gone, but Islamic State Has a New Plan," *The Guardian*, May 7, 2019.

[9] Communique from the 840th Meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council, April 15, 2019.

[10] For more on the economic situation, see, for example, Patrick Werr and Khalid Abdelaziz, "Sudan's Economic

demonstrators cited corruption, poor governance, and repression, and they chanted demands for "freedom, peace, and justice."[11] The government's response further fueled anti-regime sentiment. The authorities detained more than 2,000 people, including over a dozen U.S. citizens, and more than 100 people were killed in the crackdown.[12] A common refrain among the protesters was "Tasgut bas" ("Just fall, that's all").[13] Women have been prominent in the protests, as have young people. The median age in Sudan is 18; many Sudanese have known no other leader than Bashir.

The protest movement has been organized by the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), a network of groups representing doctors, journalists, lawyers, teachers, engineers, and other professions.[14] They joined with opposition parties, rebel groups, and civic organizations on January 1 to sign the Declaration of Freedom and Change (DFC). The signatories committed themselves to a peaceful struggle aimed at several broad goals: an end to Bashir's presidency and to the rule of his administration; the formation of a transitional government; an end to the violence against protesters and restrictions on freedoms of speech and expression; and justice and accountability for "crimes against the Sudanese people."[15]

Alongside the protests, there were tensions within the ruling party over whether Bashir, who faced term limits, should seek another term in office in scheduled 2020 elections.[16] Some party members opposed a proposal to amend the constitution so he could stand again.[17] Under pressure, Bashir made a televised address in February 2019. He struck a conciliatory tone at first, pledging economic reform and a new national dialogue (despite the recent arrest of several opposition leaders), and directing the legislature to pause efforts to lift term limits.[18] He also announced a state of emergency, however, dismissing many in his cabinet and replacing state governors with senior security officers. Bashir decreed a ban on unauthorized gatherings and demonstrations; tightened restrictions on the press; and expanded authorities for searches, seizures, and arrests. Protesters returned to the streets, and less than two months later, Bashir was deposed.

Bashir's ouster drew cautious optimism initially, as the TMC released hundreds of political prisoners. Political space in Khartoum opened, and authorities allowed the press to operate more freely.[19] Foreign correspondents were granted visas. Hopes for a quick transfer of power to civilians dimmed, however, when talks stalled between the TMC and the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), the coalition of pro-democracy elements that signed the DFC. The protesters maintained their vigil in Khartoum for almost two months, until June 3, when security forces violently dispersed them in an incident that was extensively documented on mobile phone

Decline Provides Fuel for Anger Against Bashir," Reuters, February 20, 2019.

[11] Aya Elmileik, "What prompted the protests in Sudan?" Al Jazeera, December 26, 2019; Nasredeen Abdulbari, "The Strong and Beautiful Message of Sudan's Young Protesters," *New York Times*, January 29, 2019; and Andrew Edward Tchie, "How Sudan's Protesters Upped the Ante, and Forced al-Bashir from Power," The Conversation, April 11, 2019.

[12] Human Rights Watch (HRW), "Sudan: Heed Calls for Justice," April 18, 2019.

[13] Atta El-Battahani, "Sudan Uprising: Anything Can Happen," Middle East Eye, February 6, 2019.

[14] For more on the SPA, see http://www.sudaneseprofessionals.org. See also Reem Abbas, "How an Illegal Sudanese Union Became the Biggest Threat to Omar Al Bashir's 29-Year Reign," *The National* (Abu Dhabi), January 28, 2019.

[15] The DFC is available at https://www.sudaneseprofessionals.org/en/declaration-of-freedom-and-change/.

[16] Bashir was subject to a two-term limit imposed under the 2005 constitution adopted after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. In December, members of his party proposed a constitutional amendment to allow him to stand again.

[17] CRS interviews in Khartoum in March 2019.

[18] Khalid Abdelaziz, "Sudan's Bashir Names VP, Prime Minister as Protests Continue," Reuters, February 23, 2019.

[19] Zainab Sultan, "How the Press Emerges from the Coup in Sudan," *Columbia Journalism Review*, April 13, 2019.

cameras. Over 120 people reportedly died in that attack, led by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which includes members of Darfur's former Janjaweed militias.[20]

The RSF remain heavily deployed in the capital, where they have been implicated in serious abuses, including rapes, abductions, and killings.[21] Security forces have used lethal force against protesters in Khartoum before (killing as many as 170 in 2013), but the extent of the abuses on June 3 shocked many city residents. One civic activist, referencing abuses attributed to the RSF in the country's key conflict zones, suggested, "Darfur has come to Khartoum."[22]

The violent nature of the June 3 attack, during which security forces reportedly sought to conceal the extent of the death toll, drew international condemnation. Some in the opposition went into hiding; others were detained. The TMC shut down the internet for five weeks, hindering the work of human rights monitors and coordination among pro-democracy advocates.[23] By some estimates, the disruption may have cost the economy up to $1 billion.[24] Security concerns have led foreign embassies, businesses, U.N. agencies, and aid groups to evacuate nonessential staff, leaving diplomatic missions operating at limited capacity.

The TMC: Bashir's Security Chiefs Seize Control

The leaders of Sudan's security forces played prominent roles in Bashir's regime, and the extent to which the TMC represents a break from the NCP is debated. When he seized power in 1989, Bashir, then an army brigadier, purged the military's top ranks, and many officers subsequently burnished their Islamist credentials to rise in the ranks. Under Bashir and the NCP, the military played a role in political repression and was implicated in mass atrocities against civilians (particularly ethnic minorities) in the course of multiple counterinsurgency campaigns. Adopting from prior governments a strategy of using locally recruited militias to help the army fight insurgents, Bashir developed a "hydra-headed" security state during his rule, building up parallel forces, including within the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), as a counterweight to the army and to notionally "coup-proof" his regime.[25] While Bashir's use of local militias was sometimes described as "counterinsurgency on the cheap," Sudan's expansive security sector, which includes a dozen or more paramilitary forces and pro-government militias, comes at a high cost, by some estimates comprising as much of 70% of the government's budget.[26]

Dynamics among the TMC's members, their relationship with the NCP regime, and their personal ambitions are all subject to considerable speculation.[27] Some observers contend that the old

[20] "Sudan: The Names of 100 People Killed in a Week of Deadly Violence," Middle East Eye, June 12, 2019; BBC Africa Eye, "Sudan's Livestream Massacre," July 12, 2019.

[21] Alan Yuhas, "100 Killed in Sudan and Dozens of Bodies Are Pulled From Nile, Opposition Says," *New York Times,* June 4, 2019; HRW, "Investigations and Monitoring Needed in Response to Sudan Violence," June 7, 2019; Nermin Ismail, "Militiamen in Sudan Raped Men and Women, Says Eyewitness," *Deutsche Welle,* June 9, 2019.

[22] Declan Walsh, "Sudan Ousted a Brutal Dictator. His Successor Was His Enforcer." *New York Times,* June 15, 2019.

[23] For more on the internet shutdown and the role of social media in the uprising, see, for example, Netblocks, "Severe Internet Outage Across Sudan Amid Reports of Darfur Paramilitary Attacks," June 10, 2019; Steven Feldstein, "To End Mass Protests, Sudan has Cut Off Internet Access Nationwide. Here's Why." *Washington Post,* June 13, 2019; Ayen Bior, "Sudan's Social Media Deemed Major Player in Bashir's Ouster," VOA News, April 18, 2019.

[24] "Sudan Activists Say Internet Restored After Crackdown," Associated Press, July 10, 2019.

[25] Alex de Waal, "Sudan After Bashir," London Review of Books blog, April 18, 2019; Small Arms Survey, *Remote-Control Breakdown Sudanese Paramilitary Forces and Pro-Government Militias,* HSBA Issue Brief, April 2017.

[26] James Copnall, "Sudan's Third Revolution," *History Today,* July 7, 2019.

[27] The TMC appeared sensitive at first to protester concerns about some of its members: four of its original members stepped down from the council, including the original TMC leader, Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf. Notorious intelligence chief

regime largely remains in place, with new leadership.[28] The TMC's original leader was Bashir's defense minister, Lt. Gen. Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf, whom Bashir had promoted to vice president in February, and who has been under U.S. sanctions since 2007 for his role in the violence in Darfur. Protesters rejected the terms of a military-led transition that he outlined, and a day after announcing Bashir's ouster he resigned, handing power to another senior officer, Lt. Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan.[29] Burhan declared that the TMC was "complementary to the uprising and the revolution," and "committed to handing over power to the people."[30] That has yet to occur.

The TMC's deputy leader, Lt. Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, better known by his nickname "Hemeti," has attracted particular attention.[31] He is the only member of the TMC without a formal military background and the only one from Darfur.[32] Rumored to be a former Janjaweed member, Hemeti was tapped in 2013 to lead the newly formed RSF.[33] Under his command, the RSF has been accused of serious abuses and war crimes.[34] The RSF has grown in recent years, with estimates of 20,000 to as many as 50,000 troops (allegedly including child soldiers), and is said to comprise the core of Sudan's forces supporting the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.[35] Many observers describe him as the TMC's most powerful member, reportedly drawing support from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which facilitate the Sudanese deployment in Yemen.[36] Hemeti also draws power from his control of gold mines in Darfur, which reportedly finance an expanding family business empire.[37] In April, Hemeti declared that he had deposited $1 billion in the Central Bank, sourced from his forces' Yemen deployment and gold revenue.[38]

Tensions between the military and the RSF have reportedly risen since the TMC took power, raising fears of fractures within the security forces that could be destabilizing. The reported role of the RSF in leading the violent crackdown on June 3 and the heavy deployment of its forces in Khartoum underscore concerns about the force, whose troops are drawn from Darfur and other peripheral areas. Other security forces, including those of the NISS, have also been implicated in violence against protesters and civilians. The TMC claims that it has foiled several coup plots.

Salah Gosh also resigned from his post, though there are rumors that he continues to wield significant influence. Several senior security officials were replaced, some allegedly for their ties to the Muslim Brotherhood.

[28] Yousra Elbagir, "Atrocities in Sudan are a Reminder the Regime Never Left," *Financial Times*, June 25, 2019.

[29] Max Bearak, "Sudan's Defense Minister, Who Ousted Nation's Longtime Leader, Resigns Just One Day After Takeover," *Washington Post*, April 12, 2019.

[30] Hamza Mohamed, "Sudan's Military Leader Vows to Hand 'Power to People,'" Al Jazeera, April 21, 2019.

[31] Tom Wilson, "Sudan's Paramilitary Leader Hemeti Closes In On Power," *Financial Times*, June 21, 2019; Jerome Tubiana, "The Man Who Terrorized Darfur Is Leading Sudan's Supposed Transition," *Foreign Policy*, May 14, 2019; and "Sudan Ousted a Brutal Dictator. His Successor Was His Enforcer," *New York Times*, June 15, 2019.

[32] Hemeti commanded Sudan's Border Guards prior to leading the RSF. For more background, see Small Arms Survey, "Border Intelligence Brigade (Al Istikhbarat al Hudud) (AKA Border Guards)," November 2010.

[33] For more on the government's use of militia and the creation of the RSF, see Small Arms Survey, op. cit.

[34] See HRW, *"Men With No Mercy": Rapid Support Forces Attacks Against Civilians in Darfur, Sudan*, September 9, 2015, and the reports of the UN Panel of Experts on Sudan.

[35] See, for example, David Kirkpatrick, "On the Front Line of the Saudi War in Yemen: Child Soldiers from Darfur," *New York Times*, December 28, 2018.

[36] International Crisis Group (ICG), "Sudan: Stopping a Spiral into Civil War," June 7, 2019 and Alex de Waal, "From Camel Herder to Dictator," *Foreign Policy*, July 2, 2019.

[37] Dr. Suliman Baldo, "Sudan: Hidden Economic Stakes in Ongoing Power Struggle," Radio Dabanga, July 17, 2019; Alex de Waal, "General Mohamed Hamdan Dagolo 'Hemedti,'" Reinventing Peace Blog, July 1, 2019.

[38] Mohamed Elgami, "The Checkered Past of Sudan's Hemedti," Tahrir Institute of Middle East Policy, May 29, 2019.

Bashir's own status is also in question: TMC leaders claim he was moved to prison in mid-April, but he was not seen publicly until June 17, when he was formally charged with corruption. The TMC has declared that they will not hand him over to the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has two outstanding warrants for his arrest, for crimes in Darfur (see below). The ICC Prosecutor, whose efforts to pursue accountability for atrocities in Darfur have been unsuccessful to date, declared to the U.N. Security Council on June 19, "The former status quo is over." She noted the reported arrest of Bashir and two others facing ICC arrest warrants, and called on Sudanese authorities to cooperate with the Court. Consistent with the Rome Statute's principle of complementarity, she suggested she was ready to discuss options for the Darfur suspects "to face independent and impartial justice, either in a courtroom in The Hague, or in Sudan."[39]

International Responses

There have been many public expressions of international support for the democratic aspirations of the Sudanese people since Bashir's ouster, including from the United States, the United Nations, and the African Union (AU).[40] There has also been broad condemnation of the violence against protesters. The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, in response to the June 3 attack, has called for the TMC to allow the rapid deployment of a U.N. human rights monitoring team to Sudan. U.N. experts raised concern in the wake of the attack that Sudan could be sliding into a "human rights abyss" and have urged the Human Rights Council to establish an independent investigation into violence against protesters since the beginning of the year.[41]

The AU, which has a policy of rejecting coups, condemned the military takeover in April and demanded that the TMC transfer power to civilian leaders.[42] The State Department has sought to support the AU position and has coordinated with other like-minded governments, dubbed the "Friends of Sudan," to facilitate a civilian-led transition. Under pressure from protesters, the AU, and others, including the United States and Europeans, the TMC entered into negotiations with the FFC in mid-April. They reached agreement on some aspects of a transitional arrangement, under which elections would occur in 2022, but the talks stalled in May as the parties disagreed over the extent of the military leaders' role in the interim government.

In the aftermath of the June 3 violence, the AU suspended Sudan from the organization and threatened further punitive action if the TMC did not meet its deadline of June 30 to transfer power to civilians. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia, who heads the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD, an East African regional body), offered to mediate between the parties; the United States and European governments expressed support for his initiative, as did IGAD. The FFC, which had set several preconditions for returning to direct talks with the TMC, accepted Abiy's mediation. The TMC dismissed the FFC's preconditions and called for the Ethiopian mediation to be combined with one under AU auspices.[43] In late June, the Ethiopian and AU mediators presented a joint proposal for a power-sharing arrangement to the TMC and the FFC; the parties have broadly accepted the proposal, with modifications, as discussed below.

[39] ICC Prosecutor, Statement to the UN Security Council on the Situation in Darfur, June 19, 2019.

[40] The United States declared on April 11 that the protests had "clearly articulated the will of the Sudanese people to end Omar al Bashir's rule," and called on the military to "follow the will of the people" and commit to a "speedy handover to civilian rule." State Department, "Sudan Transition Underway," April 11, 2019.

[41] OHCHR, "Sudan: UN Human Rights Experts Call for Independent Investigation into Violations," June 12, 2019.

[42] The AU initially demanded a power transfer within two weeks, but moved the deadline after talks hosted by Egypt.

[43] The FFC's preconditions included an international investigation into the June 3 attack and related violence, the release of political prisoners, and an end to the internet shutdown and related restrictions. Kalid Abdelaziz, "Sudan Military Council Head Says It's Ready To Negotiate With Opposition," Reuters, June 19, 2019.

Power-Sharing

On July 17, 2019, TMC and FFC representatives signed a preliminary deal on a power-sharing arrangement during a 39-month transitional period to be followed by elections.[44] Under the deal, originally announced on July 4, the TMC and FFC would form a transitional government with the following structures:

- **a Sovereign Council** with 11 members (5 from the TMC, 5 from the FFC, and a civilian selected jointly), led for 21 months by a TMC member and then for 18 months by a civilian member;
- **a Council of Ministers** led by a prime minister, who would be selected by the FFC and who would appoint ministers from an FFC nomination list, with the exception of the ministers of defense and interior, whom the TMC would select;
- **a Legislative Council**, to be formed within 90 days of the establishment of the Sovereign Council.

The powers of these institutions and their relationship with each other are subject to ongoing negotiations among the parties. Among other issues, the TMC has sought to revisit the FFC's percentage in the Legislative Council (the two parties had agreed in May that the FFC would select 67% of the legislative body). It is unclear from the agreement and the parties' statements whether this deal would, in fact, establish a civilian-led government, at least until the FFC assumes leadership of the Sovereign Council, notionally in 2021. The parties have not yet agreed on key details, including how state governors, judges, and other key government posts would be selected. A constitutional document, now subject to deliberations, is expected to more clearly define the powers of the transitional government structures and positions. When completed, it may provide more clarity on the relative authority of civilians in the proposed government. Regardless, the TMC's demand to maintain control of decisions related to the security sector may complicate the work of civilian authorities, including with respect to the government's budget and revenue collection. The role of military leaders in government may also complicate Western donor efforts to support the transitional government and facilitate economic recovery.

The agreement proposes an ambitious six-month period at the start of the transition in which the government would seek peace deals for the conflict areas of Darfur, Blue Nile, and Southern Kordofan. The insurgent groups, however, have publicly rejected the July 17 deal; they are in talks with FFC leaders on the path forward.

The July 17 deal leaves many questions unanswered regarding accountability for abuses committed under the TMC or the Bashir regime. The agreement suggests that a national independent investigation committee would lead an inquiry into the violence on June 3 and other incidents, but it does not clarify how that committee would be chosen. Rumors that the TMC seeks to include an immunity clause in the constitutional document have further heightened concerns that justice could be deferred during the transition period. Foreign diplomats have welcomed the deal, but some observers have raised concern that in doing so, they prematurely convey legitimacy on an arrangement that "settles little, delays a lot, and creates a set of expectations that will be hard to meet."[45]

Foreign Interests in Sudan

Strategically positioned on the Red Sea, Sudan and its political crisis are of interest to an array of foreign actors. The engagement of neighboring Egypt is driven by domestic political considerations and its concerns about the flow of the Nile.[46] Sudan and Egypt have a complicated history and an ongoing border dispute, but the two governments appeared to mend ties in 2018, when Presidents Sisi and Bashir exchanged visits and agreed to work together on various issues.[47] Sisi currently holds the rotating presidency of the AU, which provides an additional platform

[44] Declan Walsh, "Military and Civilian Leaders in Sudan Inch Forward With Political Deal, *New York Times*, July 17, 2019 and Jason Burke and Zeinab Mogammed Salih, "Sudanese Military and Protesters Sign Power-Sharing Accord," *The Guardian*, July 17, 2019.

[45] Cameron Hudson, "Sudan's Power Sharing Deal: An Exercise in Optimism," Atlantic Council, July 17, 2019.

[46] Egypt views preserving its use of the Nile as a primary national security interest and fears curtailment of its flow upstream by Ethiopia, which is building a major dam on the river. Sudan, in the middle, would derive benefits from the dam (e.g., the ability to regulate flooding and import power from Ethiopia) and is a key player in regional talks on the river. The prospect of Sudan increasing its own water use, to irrigate an expanded agriculture sector, may be a longer-term concern for Egypt.

[47] "Egyptian-Sudanese Relations Witness Massive Development," Egypt Today (Cairo), August 30, 2018.

from which to express Egypt's views on the situation. (Like Sudan, Egypt was suspended by the AU in 2013, after Sisi led a military takeover against the democratically elected government.)

Sudan's former ties with Iran and links to the Muslim Brotherhood under Bashir strained its relations with Egypt and key Arab Gulf countries, which are important sources of investment and financial support. In 2014, struggling with the loss of oil revenue and under mounting pressure from Saudi Arabia, Sudan severed relations with Tehran. Sudan joined the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen in 2015, deploying thousands of troops in return for Gulf aid. According to Hemeti, Sudan is the largest troop contributor to the coalition.[48] Saudi Arabia and the UAE have provided at least $3.6 million in cash support to Sudan since 2016, as well as various investment pledges.[49]

Bashir's refusal to cut ties with Qatar was an increasing source of tension with the Saudis and Emiratis, however, who jointly have sought to isolate Qatar since 2017, in part over Qatar's support for Muslim Brotherhood organizations. The growing engagement of Turkey, a Qatar ally, in Sudan also reportedly raised Saudi and Emirati concerns, particularly its deal, alongside Qatar, to develop Sudan's Red Sea port of Suakin, where Turkey planned, among other projects, to build a naval dock.[50] The countries planned to rebuild Suakin's old city as a tourist site and transit point for Muslim pilgrims crossing the Red Sea to Mecca.

In early 2019, when Bashir toured several Middle East capitals in a reported effort to secure emergency financing to address the economic and political crisis he was facing, he received rhetorical support, but little in terms of monetary backing.[51] Qatar, which had played an important mediation role on the Darfur conflict and reportedly provided $1 billion in cash support when Sudan faced a wave of protests in 2013, also reportedly declined to extend another line to Bashir, possibly because of his outreach in tandem to Doha's rivals.[52]

While starting in 2014, Sudanese officials worked to repair relations with the United States as part of an effort to shake the country's pariah status and regain access to international financing, Bashir also engaged Russia, already a top weapons source, seeking to expand cooperation and offering to host Russian naval facilities.[53] Russian security contractors have been increasingly active in Sudan, engaging in the mining sector and training forces from the neighboring Central African Republic. Companies associated with Kremlin-linked businessman Evgeny Prigozhin, including the Wagner private military company, reportedly are among those operating in Sudan; some reports suggest the Russian Ministry of Defense has facilitated their operations.[54] In early 2019, Russian officials acknowledged that private Russian companies were training the army and law enforcement in Sudan.[55] In May, after Bashir's ouster, Russia released details on new agreements on military training, port and airfield visits, and the establishment of a Russian Ministry of Defense representative office in Sudan.[56]

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[48] "Hemeti: Sudan Provides Largest Force in Alliance Against Houthi Rebels in Yemen," Dabanga, June 24, 2019.

[49] "As Sudan Grapples With a Post-Bashir Future, Regional Powers Circle," *Wall Street Journal,* April 27, 2019.

[50] Mohammed Amin, "Suakin: 'Forgotten' Sudanese island becomes focus for Red Sea rivalries," Middle East Eye, March 18, 2019.

[51] Saudi officials said in January that they had given over $2 billion in loans to Sudan, but did not offer new funding. "King Salman Expresses Saudi Solidarity with Sudan President Omar al Bashir," *The National,* January 30, 2019.

[52] "As Sudan Grapples With a Post-Bashir Future, Regional Powers Circle," *Wall Street Journal,* April 27, 2019.

[53] Sudan's use of Russian military equipment, in violation of a UN arms embargo on Darfur, has been documented by UN monitors. See also Small Arms Survey, *Broken Promises: The Arms Embargo on Darfur Since 2012,* July 2016.

[54] Bellingcat, "Wagner Mercenaries With GRU-Issued Passports: Validating SBU's Allegation," January 30, 2019.

[55] Reuters, "Russian Contractors are Training the Army in Sudan, Says Moscow," January 23, 2019.

[56] "Russia, Sudan Agree To Boost Military Cooperation," Xinhua News Agency, May 24, 2019.

International Views on the Role of Military Leaders in Government

Despite widespread rhetorical support for the Sudanese people since Bashir was deposed, there are divergent views within the international community on how to respond to TMC's assumption of power. Russia has declared the situation in Sudan to be an internal matter in which external actors should not interfere, and China appears to recognize the TMC as the government.[57] Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt have supported the TMC politically and financially, and by some accounts they may have played a role in facilitating Bashir's ouster.[58] Burhan has visited the capitals of Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE; Hemeti has visited Saudi Arabia's Mohamed bin Salman. The UAE and Saudi Arabia have offered $3 billion in aid, $500 million of it in cash support, but economists say it will only provide short-term relief.[59]

Explaining their engagement with the TMC, Emirati officials contend that Sudan needs an "orderly and stable transition" that "carefully calibrates popular aspirations with institutional stability," arguing that the region "doesn't need more chaos."[60] Following the violence of June 3, the UAE suggested that its continued ties with TMC leaders aim to support a peaceful transition and preserve the state and its institutions.[61] Saudi Arabia has taken a more cautious tone recently, noting that it is watching developments with "great concern" and urging talks to "fulfill the aspirations" of the Sudanese people.[62] Qatar has called for a transition that meets the will of the people, and Turkey has called for a quick handover to civilian rule.[63] Qatar and Turkey appear sidelined by the TMC, and the status of their deals with Khartoum are unclear. The European Union, for its part, says it stands ready to assist "as soon as a civilian transition takes place."[64]

With rampant inflation, a foreign currency shortage, and a heavy debt burden, Sudan's transitional authorities arguably would need broad, sustained international support, along with internal reforms, to stabilize the economy and address growing food insecurity. Sudan's $1.3 billion in debt arrears to the International Monetary Fund restrict access to international financing, as does its continued designation by the United States as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. These factors may give the United States and other key Western donors additional leverage as they seek to encourage compromises by the TMC.

The Humanitarian Situation

Sudan's deteriorating economic conditions have exacerbated food insecurity in the country. The number of Sudanese in need of humanitarian aid has increased by 40% from 2018, with an

[57] UN Security Council Meeting Record, UN doc. S/PV.8549, June 14, 2019.

[58] See, for example, Samy Magdy, "As Sudan Uprising Grew, Arab States Worked to Shape Its Fate," Associated Press, May 8, 2019, and Declan Walsh, "Amid U.S. Silence, Gulf Nations Back the Military in Sudan's Revolution," *New York Times*, April 26, 2019.

[59] Patrick Werr, "Gulf Pledges Offer Scant Reprieve for Sudan's Economy," Associated Press, May 7, 2019.

[60] "UAE Signals Support for Sudan Military Amid Escalating Tensions," The New Arab (London), May 1, 2019, and "UAE Defends Contacts with Sudan Military," Gulf News (Dubai), June 12, 2019.

[61] Ramadan Al Sherbini, "UAE Defends Gulf Contacts with Sudan Military," Gulf News, June 12, 2019.

[62] Saudi Press Agency, "KSA Follows With Great Concern the Developments in the Brotherly Republic of Sudan," June 5, 2019.

[63] "Qatar Calls for Democratic Transition in Sudan After Coup," The New Arab, April 12, 2019; "Turkey 'Deeply Concerned' About Violence in Sudan," Andalou Agency (Ankara), June 4, 2019.

[64] European Union, Statement by the Spokesperson on the Current Situation in Sudan, May 15, 2019.

estimated 8 million people now in need of aid, according to USAID.[65] Of those in need, roughly 2 million people are internally displaced, with over 1.7 million in Darfur and some 235,000 in the "Two Areas" (Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile).[66] South Sudan and Ethiopia host over 300,000 refugees from those areas. Some 30,000 more are displaced in Abyei. Sudan hosts a million registered refugees, including 850,000 South Sudanese and almost 120,000 Eritreans.

The Situation in Darfur

The uncertainty regarding the political situation in Khartoum has implications for the protracted conflict in Darfur. Peace remains elusive in the Darfur region, where over 2 million people remain displaced (in addition to those displaced internally, there are over 330,000 Darfuri refugees in Chad). Sporadic skirmishes, intercommunal violence, and attacks on peacekeepers, aid workers, and civilians have persisted, despite a cessation of hostilities declared by the government in mid-2016. That declaration came toward the end of a large-scale offensive against rebels in which the RSF and other security forces were implicated in gross human rights abuses.[67]

The U.N.-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), once one of the world's largest peacekeeping operations, has been drawing down its forces, despite concerns expressed by human rights advocates that a decision in 2017 to cut troops reflected a "false narrative about Darfur's war ending."[68] Under pressure from Khartoum, the Security Council in 2018 set a tentative exit date for the mission of June 30, 2020, prior to which facilities were to be handed over to Sudanese authorities. The Council declared UNAMID's exit contingent on the security situation.

U.N. officials report that the human rights situation in Darfur has deteriorated in recent months, with increased reports of killing, abduction, sexual violence, and other abuses.[69] Protests in Darfur have been violently suppressed by security forces, including the RSF, per U.N. reporting. UNAMID has documented the killing of at least 47 and injury of over 180 civilians in Darfur since Bashir's ouster, and it has reported intensified attacks and harassment of civilians and looting of houses and livestock by the RSF.

Several recent incidents suggest security conditions for U.N. and aid operations are worsening. In May, UNAMID's West Darfur headquarters were looted on the eve of its scheduled handover, with military and police personnel implicated in the incident. In June, World Vision and World Food Program facilities in South Darfur were looted and vandalized. The United Nations reports that most of the facilities that UNAMID has closed as part of its drawdown to date have been occupied by security forces (the sites were supposed to be handed over to the government to be used for civilian purposes). An internal UNAMID review of 10 closed sites indicates that nine are being used specifically by the RSF.[70] In June, the TMC demanded that remaining bases be handed over directly to the RSF; the AU rejected the order, which the TMC has since reversed.

In mid-June, the AU Peace and Security Council determined that the "drastic change on security and political developments … has contributed to the deterioration of the security situation in

[65] Testimony of Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa Ramsey Day, House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, *Hearing on the U.S. Response to the Political Crisis in Sudan*, hearing, 116th Cong., 1st sess., June 25, 2019.

[66] USAID, "Sudan-Complex Emergency," Fact Sheet #2, FY2019, March 12, 2019.

[67] See, for example, Amnesty International (AI), *Sudan: Scorched Earth, Poisoned Air: Sudanese Government Forces Ravage Jebel Marra, Darfur*, September 29, 2016.

[68] HRW, "UN: Drastic Cuts to Darfur Mission Misguided," June 14, 2017.

[69] UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour, Security Council Briefing, June 14, 2019.

[70] "Sudan's Paramilitaries Are Seizing Abandoned U.N. Outposts in Darfur," *Foreign Policy*, June 7, 2019.

Darfur."[71] The Council called for UNAMID's remaining troops to be consolidated until the situation stabilizes. Amnesty International, which has argued against UNAMID's closure, suggests doing so would "recklessly and needlessly place tens of thousands of lives at risk by removing their only safeguard against the government's scorched earth campaign," which Amnesty contends continues.[72] One expert assessed that "to continue to hand over U.N. bases previously scheduled for closure effectively legitimizes the TMC. Handovers implicitly demonstrate that the international community recognizes the sovereignty of the TMC and its role as a legitimate counterpart in the U.N. mission's departure."[73] On June 27, the U.N. Security Council voted to pause the drawdown until October 31.

U.S. Policy

U.S. relations with Sudan have been turbulent for three decades. During that time, Congress has played an active role in shaping U.S. policy toward the country. Efforts to support an end to Sudan's numerous conflicts and human rights abuses have dominated the congressional agenda on the country, as have counterterrorism concerns. The United States restricted aid to Sudan after the 1989 coup and in subsequent years imposed a range of sanctions through executive orders and congressional measures. Restrictions on U.S. engagement are based on Sudan's debt arrears, links to international terrorism, and pervasive human rights violations. The State Department has designated Sudan as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act. Despite restrictions on some types of aid, the United States has been and remains the largest bilateral donor of humanitarian assistance to the country.

Sudan has long sought relief from U.S. sanctions. The Obama Administration moved to ease them in January 2017 as part of a bilateral reengagement effort, after determining Khartoum had taken positive steps on five "tracks": (1) enhancing counterterrorism cooperation; (2) ceasing hostilities in conflict zones; (3) improving humanitarian access; (4) ending negative interference in South Sudan; and (5) addressing the threat of a regional armed group, the Lord's Resistance Army.

In October 2017, the Trump Administration, reporting that Sudan had sustained positive actions on the five tracks, permanently revoked certain sanctions. Others remain in place, and in November 2018, despite reports of backsliding on some tracks, the Administration announced "Phase II" of the bilateral engagement framework. Under Phase II, the Administration declared that it would consider rescinding Sudan's 1993 State Sponsor of Terrorism designation if the country met the statutory criteria and made further progress on the original tracks, as well as on other areas of long-standing U.S. concern, including human rights, religious freedom, outstanding terrorism-related claims, and Sudan's relations with North Korea.

The United States has expressed its support since Bashir's ouster for "a transition to a peaceful and democratic Sudan led by civilians who represent the diversity of Sudanese society."[74] U.S. officials have suspended Phase II discussions as they call for a civilian-led transition. The State Department has sought to coordinate with like-minded governments, and in May it hosted a meeting with foreign diplomats to discuss their efforts. The United States, United Kingdom, and Norway have expressed concern that the TMC might seek to rush elections, rather than follow a

[71] Communique from the 856th Meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council, June 13, 2019.

[72] AI, "Sudan: Fresh Evidence of Government-Sponsored Crimes in Darfur Shows Drawdown of Peacekeepers Premature and Reckless," June 11, 2019.

[73] Aly Verjee, "In Downsizing the UN-AU Mission in Darfur, First Do No Harm," USIP, June 4, 2019.

[74] State Department, "Supporting a Transition to Civilian Rule in Sudan," April 18, 2019.

three-year period agreed to with the FFC, saying that "the people of Sudan deserve an orderly transition, led by civilians, that can establish the conditions for free and fair elections, rather than have rushed elections imposed by the TMC's security forces."[75] State Department officials say they view the TMC as ultimately responsible for the "brutal violence" against protesters on June 3, and have warned that "no more violence will be acceptable."[76]

On June 12, the State Department announced the appointment of former Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan Donald Booth to serve as Special Envoy for Sudan (his mandate does not cover South Sudan). He has since traveled to Sudan and various capitals in the region, and has attended multilateral meetings on Sudan in Europe. Under Secretary of State David Hale made several calls to Arab leaders in June to discuss the situation in Sudan. Some former officials and Members of Congress have called for the State Department to also deploy "more robust" and senior representation at the U.S. embassy in Khartoum.[77] The United States has not had an ambassador in Khartoum since 1997; the U.S. embassy is currently led by a chargé d'affaires.

Considerations for Congress

As Congress reviews U.S. engagement on Sudan in the context of the current situation, it may explore recommendations proposed by experts, advocacy groups, and members of the Sudanese diaspora in the United States. The Enough Project, for example, has called on the United States and other governments to pursue capital flight from "politically exposed persons" in Sudan and to apply sanctions under the 2017 Global Magnitsky Executive Order 13818 against Sudanese officials responsible for mass corruption and human rights abuses.[78] Other experts have urged that the United States move to isolate RSF commander and TMC deputy leader Hemeti internationally and financially.[79] Some have called for the United States and its allies to apply more pressure on the TMC to accept a transfer of power to civilians.[80] The International Crisis Group has suggested that U.S. officials reiterate that they will not engage in any talks toward the normalization of relations, including on lifting of the State Sponsor of Terrorism designation or debt relief, until there is a civilian-led government.[81] Human rights groups have called for the more pressure on Sudan to accept international human rights monitors. Some former U.S. officials have urged stronger support for the opposition, civil society, and human rights defenders.[82]

The role of the Arab Gulf countries and Egypt in shaping Sudan's transition is a common theme for many analysts and activists urging U.S. engagement. Sudan is particularly vulnerable to external competition, they argue, and many observers worry that foreign backing for the TMC emboldens its leaders rather than encouraging them to compromise.[83] Several observers have

[75] State Department, Joint Statement on Developments in Sudan, June 4, 2019.

[76] Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Makila James, House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, *Hearing on the U.S. Response to the Political Crisis in Sudan*, hearing, 116th Cong., 1st sess., June 25, 2019.

[77] Cameron Hudson, "Dialogue, International Diplomacy Might Avoid Catastrophe in Sudan," *The Hill*, June 10, 2019; Senator Corey Booker, "Booker Calls for U.S. Diplomatic Leadership in Sudan, South Sudan," June 11, 2019.

[78] George Clooney and John Prendergast, "Sudan Needs More Than Words. It Needs Action." *Washington Post*, April 14, 2019.

[79] Natsios, op. cit.

[80] Amir Idris, "US Should Choose to Help Sudan's Protesters Promote Democracy," *The Hill*, September 19, 2019.

[81] ICG, "Sudan: Stopping a Spiral into Civil War," June 7, 2019.

[82] Michelle Gavin, "Sudanese Opposition Needs Stronger International Support," Council on Foreign Relations, June 11, 2019.

[83] See, for example, Elizabeth Dickinson, "Exporting the Gulf Crisis," War on the Rocks, May 28, 2019; Natsios, op.

argued that the United States could apply greater diplomatic leverage with these countries to pressure or isolate the junta.[84] Some experts argue that there is a limited window to influence Sudan's trajectory, which could lean toward either greater stability or broader insecurity.[85]

Some Members of Congress have called for increased pressure on the TMC to transfer power to civilians, expressing their views in statements, correspondence, and legislation. S.Res. 188 and H.Res. 432, which the Senate and House of Representatives passed in July 2019, call for a civilian-led government in the country. Some Members have requested that the Administration sanction Hemeti and the RSF.[86] Hearings, such as one held by the House Africa Subcommittee in late June, may provide an opportunity for further examination of the situation in Sudan, the prospects for a successful transition to democracy, and the options available for U.S. engagement.

Developments in Sudan may bring changes to the U.S. assistance portfolio, which Congress oversees. To date, the United States has provided over $556 million in humanitarian aid to Sudan in FY2018-FY2019. Development aid, which is focused on supporting civil society and conflict mitigation, is limited. Debt relief and most types of aid to the Sudanese government are restricted by Congress in annual appropriations and in various statutes. U.S. bilateral assistance totaled over $154.6 million in FY2018 (**Table 1**), including $5 million in support of democracy, human rights, and governance; almost $5 million for health programs; and $145 million for humanitarian assistance. The State Department requested $1.5 million in nonemergency aid for FY2020, to support civil society and consensus-building. If a transition to a civilian-led transitional government occurs, the Administration may seek congressional support to address existing legal and policy restrictions on certain types of aid, should it endeavor to support transitional authorities.

Table 1. U.S. Bilateral Aid to Sudan, Selected Accounts (State + USAID)

$ millions, appropriations

	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019 (req.)	FY2020 (req.)
ESF	10.7	9.2	6.2	4.8	5	5	2.4 (ESDF)	1.5 (ESDF)
P.L. 480 Title II (FFP)	142.5	159.7	124.4	127.7	72.8	149.6	—	—
Total	**153.2**	**168.9**	**130.6**	**132.5**	**77.8**	**154.6**	**2.4**	**1.5**

Source: State Department Congressional Budget Justifications, FY2015-FY2020.

Notes: May not include all regionally and centrally managed funds. Totals may not sum due to rounding. ESF=Economic Support Fund; FFP=Food for Peace. ESDF refers to a Trump Administration proposal to replace ESF and several other aid accounts with a consolidated Economic Support and Development Fund.

cit.; and Cameron Hudson, "Washington Is Turning Its Back on Sudan," *Foreign Policy*, June 6, 2019;

[84] See, for example, Eli Lake, "Don't Let the Saudis Ruin Sudan's Democratic Moment," Bloomberg, June 6, 2019.

[85] Payton Knopf, "Golden Hour in the Horn of Africa," *Washington Examiner*, April 27, 2019.

[86] Letter from the House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman to the Secretaries of State and Treasury, June 28, 2019.

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