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Sudan's Uncertain Transition

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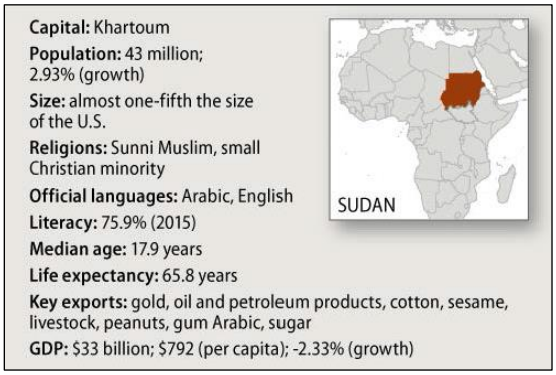
Overview

Sudan faces an inflection point as elements of deposed President Omar al Bashir's regime struggle to maintain power in the face of a popular uprising and international pressure. Sudan has a long history of rebellion and resistance; mass protests in 1964 and 1985 against military regimes spurred coups that led to brief periods of civilian rule.[1] The current social movement, however, 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.

Bashir's security chiefs, who seized power in April, 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. The rise within the TMC of a former Darfur militia leader, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemeti," whom human rights groups have accused of war crimes, has drawn particular concern. Former U.S. envoy to Sudan Andrew Natsios has described the current moment as Sudan's greatest political crisis since independence in 1956.[3]

Developments in Sudan, a country described as a crossroads between Africa and the Arab world, can have implications beyond its borders. Some observers have asked whether Sudan's uprising represents a new phase of the Arab Spring, with the potential to revive pro-democracy movements elsewhere.[4] Protests in Algeria, sparked by an effort to extend the tenure of aging President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and prompting his resignation, have occurred concurrently with Sudan's. By many accounts, the protesters in Sudan and Algeria have learned lessons from previous uprisings, and from each other.[5]

Figure 1. Sudan Key Facts



Source: Fact information from CIA World Factbook and IMF, 2018.

A transition that would bring an end to Sudan's internal conflicts and allow for economic recovery could have positive impacts in neighboring countries, including South Sudan.

[1] See, for example, 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] Andrew Natsios, "How Washington and the World Can Help Sudan Fulfill its Democratic Dream," *Washington Post*, June 20, 2019. Natsios, a former Administrator of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), was envoy from 2006 to 2007.

[4] 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; Annette Weber, "Is Sudan's Transition Over Before It Began?" The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, June 10, 2019.

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

A failed transition, however, could spur 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 that rank high on fragility indexes. State collapse could also provide a haven for violent extremists.[6] As a result, the stakes are high, not only for the Sudanese people, but for the region and the international community.

Developments in 2019: 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.[7] 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.[8] Alongside frustration with the deteriorating economic conditions, demonstrators cited corruption, poor governance, and repression, and they chanted demands for "freedom, peace, justice."[9] The government's response further fueled anti-regime sentiment. The authorities detained more than 2,000 people, including more than a dozen U.S. citizens, and more than 100 people were killed in the fray.[10] A common refrain among the protesters was "Tasgut bas" ("Just fall, that's all").[11] 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.[12] 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."[13]

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

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

[8] For more on the economic situation, see, for example, Patrick Werr and Khalid Abdelaziz, "Sudan's Economic Decline Provides Fuel for Anger Against Bashir," Reuters, February 20, 2019.

[9] See, for example, 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.

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

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

[12] 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.

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

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.[14] Some party members opposed a proposal to amend the constitution so he could stand again.[15] 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.[16] 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 out.

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.[17] Foreign correspondents were granted visas. Hopes for a quick transfer of power to a civilian transitional government dimmed, however, as 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 they were violently dispersed by security forces. More than 120 people reportedly died in that attack, led by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which includes members of the former Janjaweed militias of Darfur.[18]

The RSF remain heavily deployed in the capital, where they have been implicated in serious abuses, including rapes, abductions, and killings.[19] 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."[20]

The violent nature of the June 3 attack, from which security forces reportedly sought to conceal the extent of the death toll, has drawn international condemnation.[21] Some in the opposition went into hiding, while others were detained. An ongoing internet shutdown severely hampers the work of human rights monitors and coordination among pro-democracy advocates.[22] The shutdown also further damages the ailing economy. Deteriorating security conditions have led foreign embassies, businesses, and aid organizations to evacuate staff, leaving diplomatic missions operating at limited capacity. UN agencies have withdrawn nonessential staff.

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[14] 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.

[15] CRS interviews in Khartoum in March 2019.

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

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

[18] "Sudan: The Names of 100 People Killed in a Week of Deadly Violence," Middle East Eye, June 12, 2019.

[19] See, for example, 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.

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

[21] *Letter to the UN Security Council: Appealing for Urgent Intervention to Prevent Further Bloodshed in Sudan*, signed by 29 human rights groups and available at https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/12/un-security-council.

[22] 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;

The Transitional Military Council: Bashir's Security Chiefs Seize Control

Sudan's military has a long history of intervention in politics: Bashir's 1989 coup was the country's fourth. Military leaders played prominent roles in Bashir's regime, and the extent to which the TMC represents a break from the NCP is debated. Bashir purged the top ranks of the Sudanese military when he seized power, and many officers burnished their Islamist credentials to rise through 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 its many counterinsurgency campaigns.

Dynamics within the TMC, its relationship with the former regime, and the personal ambitions of its members are all subject to considerable speculation.[23] Some observers contend that the old regime remains in place, with new leadership.[24] 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.[25] Burhan declared that the TMC was "complementary to the uprising and the revolution," and "committed to handing over power to the people."[26] 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 and concern.[27] Rumored to be a former Janjaweed member, Hemeti was tapped in 2013 to lead the newly formed RSF.[28] Under his command, the RSF has been accused of serious abuses and possible war crimes.[29] 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.[30] Some observers describe him as the TMC's most powerful member, reportedly drawing support from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which facilitate the RSF deployment in

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

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

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

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

[27] See, for example, 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.

[28] For more on the government's use of militia and the creation of the RSF, see Small Arms Survey, *Remote-Control Breakdown Sudanese Paramilitary Forces and Pro-Government Militias*, HSBA Issue Brief, April 2017.

[29] See, for example, 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.

[30] 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.

Yemen.[31] He is the only member of the TMC without a formal military background and the only one from Darfur.[32]

By some accounts, tensions between the military and the RSF are rising, increasing fears that fractures within the security forces could be destabilizing.[33] 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 National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), have also been implicated in violence against protesters and civilians; their relationship with the RSF is unclear.

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 UN 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."[34]

International Responses

There have been many expressions of international support for the democratic aspirations of the Sudanese people in the wake of Bashir's ouster, including from the United States, the UN Secretary-General, and the African Union (AU).[35] The AU, which has a policy of rejecting coups, has condemned the military takeover and set a June 30 deadline for the TMC to hand over power to civilian leaders.[36] 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 the Europeans, the TMC entered into negotiations with the FFC. They reached agreement on some aspects of a transitional arrangement, in which elections would occur in 2022, but the talks stalled as the parties disagreed over the extent of the military leaders' role in the interim government.

[31] See, for example, International Crisis Group (ICG), "Sudan: Stopping a Spiral into Civil War," June 7, 2019.

[32] Hemeti is from the Mahariya clan of the Rizeigat tribe. He commanded Sudan's Border Guards prior to leading the RSF. For more on his role in the Border Guards, including his brief uprising in 2007, see Small Arms Survey, "Border Intelligence Brigade (Al Istikhbarat al Hudud) (AKA Border Guards)," November 2010.

[33] ICG, op. cit.

[34] ICC Prosecutor, Statement to the UN Security Council on the Situation in Darfur, Pursuant to UNSCR 1593 (2005), June 19, 2019.

[35] 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 it called on the military to "follow the will of the people" and commit to a "speedy handover to civilian rule." State Department Spokesperson Morgan Ortagus, "Sudan Transition Underway," April 11, 2019.

[36] The AU initially demanded that the TMC cede authority to civilians within two weeks, but extended the deadline to June 30 after discussions hosted by Egypt. See the AU Peace and Security Council Communiques of April 15, April 30, June 6, and June 13, 2019.

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 June 30 deadline. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia, who is the chairman of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD, the 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 set several preconditions for returning to direct talks with the TMC, including an international investigation into the recent violence, the release of political prisoners, an end to the internet shutdown and related restrictions. It accepted Abiy's mediation. The TMC, however, dismissed the FFC's preconditions and rejected the Ethiopian proposal, arguing that it be incorporated with a proposal from another mediator under the auspices of the AU.[37] The Ethiopian and AU mediators presented a joint proposal to the parties on June 26 that outlined a possible power-sharing formula for the interim government.[38]

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in response to the recent violence, has called for the TMC to allow the rapid deployment of a UN human rights monitoring team to Sudan. UN experts have raised concern that Sudan may be sliding into a "human rights abyss" in the wake of the attack and have urged the Human Rights Council to establish an independent investigation into violence against protesters since the beginning of the year.[39]

Foreign Interests in Sudan

Strategically positioned on the Red Sea, Sudan and its current 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.[40] Sudan and Egypt have a complicated history and an ongoing border dispute, but the two governments had appeared to mend ties in 2018, when Egypt's President Sisi and Bashir exchanged visits and agreed to work together on various issues.[41] Sisi currently holds the rotating presidency of the AU, which provides an additional platform from which to express Egypt's views on the situation. (Egypt was suspended temporarily by the AU, after Sisi led a military takeover against Egypt's democratically elected government in 2013.)

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 direct 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, reportedly deploying as many as 14,000 troops in return for Gulf aid. According to Hemeti, Sudan is the largest troop contributor to the coalition.[42] Saudi Arabia and

[37] Kalid Abdelaziz, "Sudan Military Council Head Says It's Ready To Negotiate With Opposition," Reuters, June 19, 2019.

[38] CRS interviews with Western diplomats, June 28, 2019.

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

[40] 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.

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

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

the UAE have provided at least $3.6 million in cash support to Sudan since 2016, as well as various investment pledges.[43]

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.[44] 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.[45] 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.[46]

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.[47] 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.[48] In early 2019, Russian officials acknowledged that private Russian companies were training the army and law enforcement in Sudan.[49] 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.[50]

Differing International Views on the TMC's Role in a Transitional Government

Despite widespread rhetorical support for the Sudanese people since Bashir was deposed, the international community is divided on how to deal with the TMC's apparent reluctance to transfer power to civilians. Russia has declared the situation in Sudan to be an internal matter in which

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

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

[45] A Saudi official noted in January that Saudi Arabia had provided over $2 billion in loans for development projects in Sudan, but did not offer new funding. "King Salman Expresses Saudi Solidarity with Sudan President Omar al Bashir," *The National,* January 30, 2019.

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

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

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

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

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

external actors should not interfere, while China appears to recognize the TMC as the government.[51] 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.[52] Burhan has visited the capitals of Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, while 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 direct cash assistance, but economists say it will only provide short-term relief.[53]

Explaining their engagement with the TMC, Emirati officials have suggested 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."[54] Following the recent violence, the UAE has argued that its continued ties with TMC leaders aim to support a peaceful transition and preserve the state and its institutions.[55] Saudi Arabia has taken a more cautious tone since June 3, noting that it is watching developments with "great concern" and urging a resumption of talks to "fulfill the aspirations" of the Sudanese people.[56] Qatar has called for a transition that meets the will of the people, and Turkey has called for a quick handover to civilian rule.[57] Qatar and Turkey appear sidelined by the TMC, and the status of their recent deals, including on Suakin, is unclear. The European Union, for its part, says it stands ready to assist "as soon as a civilian transition takes place."[58]

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 estimated 8 million people now in need of aid, according to USAID.[59] Of those assessed to be in

[51] In UN Security Council discussions, China references positions taken by the TMC as those of the Government of Sudan. See, for example, Remarks by the Russian Representative at a meeting of the UN Security Council, UN doc. S/PV.8549, June 14, 2019.

[52] 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.

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

[54] "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.

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

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

[57] "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.

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

[59] Testimony of Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa Ramsey Day, in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations,

need of aid, about 2 million people are internally displaced, of whom 1.76 million are in Darfur and 235,000 are in the "Two Areas" (Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile).[60] South Sudan and Ethiopia host at least another 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

Uncertainty regarding the country's leadership and the role of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces in Khartoum have implications for international responses to the protracted conflict in Darfur that began in the early 2000s. Peace remains elusive in that region, where more than 2 million people are displaced (1.8 million internally, and more than 330,000 as refugees in neighboring Chad).[61] Sporadic skirmishes, intercommunal violence, and attacks on peacekeepers, aid workers, and civilians have persisted. The RSF and other security forces were implicated in gross human rights abuses during that operation.[62]

The UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has been drawing down, despite concerns expressed by human rights advocates that the decision in 2017 to cut troops reflected a "false narrative about Darfur's war ending."[63] In 2018, the Security Council tentatively set an exit date for the mission of June 30, 2020, prior to which UNAMID facilities were to be handed over to Sudanese authorities. It declared the exit contingent on the security situation.

UN 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.[64] Protests in Darfur have been violently suppressed by security forces, including the RSF, per UN 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.[65]

Several recent incidents suggest security conditions for UN 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

Hearing on the U.S. Response to the Political Crisis in Sudan, hearing, 116th Cong., 1st sess., June 25, 2019.

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

[61] The situation in Darfur has evolved from the height of the conflict in the 2000s, and the scale of armed confrontation subsided after a major government offensive against insurgents in the first half of 2016 gave security forces dominance in the region. The government subsequently declared a temporary ceasefire to which, according to U.S. officials, it has largely adhered, contributing to the Trump Administration's decision to lift some sanctions on Sudan in 2017. Some rebels have withdrawn to Libya, reportedly to regroup. UN monitors reported clashes between government and rebel forces in 2018. See the reports of the U.N. Panel of Experts on Sudan.

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

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

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

[65] Ibid.

being used specifically by the RSF.[66] 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 Darfur."[67] The Council called for UNAMID's remaining troops to be consolidated until the situation stabilizes. Amnesty International has argued against UNAMID's closure, suggesting it would "recklessly and needlessly place tens of thousands of lives at risk by removing their only safeguard against the government's scorched earth campaign," of which it has presented what it terms new evidence.[68] One expert assessed that "to continue to hand over UN 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 UN mission's departure."[69] On June 27, the UN Security Council voted to pause the drawdown until October 31.[70]

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.

The Sudanese government 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 Sudan 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 (LRA).

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

[66] "Document of the Week: Sudan's Paramilitaries Are Seizing Abandoned U.N. Outposts in Darfur," *Foreign Policy*, June 7, 2019.

[67] Communique from the 856th Meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council, PSC/PR/COMM.(DCCCXLVI), June 13, 2019.

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

[69] Aly Verjee, "In Downsizing the UN-AU Mission in Darfur, First Do No Harm," U.S. Institute of Peace, June 4, 2019.

[70] "UN-AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) Mandate Renewal," What's in Blue, June 26, 2019.

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."[71] 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 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."[72] 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."[73]

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 Oslo, London, and Berlin. Under Secretary of State David Hale made several calls to Arab leaders in June to discuss the situation in Sudan.[74] 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.[75] The United States has not had an ambassador in Khartoum since 1997; the U.S. embassy is led by a chargé d'affaires.

Considerations for Congress

As Congress reviews U.S. engagement on Sudan in the context of the current crisis, it may explore various 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.[76] Other experts have urged that the United States move to isolate RSF commander and TMC deputy leader Hemeti internationally and financially.[77] 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

[71] State Department Spokesperson Morgan Ortagus, "Supporting a Transition to Civilian Rule in Sudan," April 18, 2019.

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

[73] Testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Makila James, in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations, *Hearing on the U.S. Response to the Political Crisis in Sudan*, hearing, 116th Cong., 1st sess., June 25, 2019.

[74] See, e.g., State Department, Under Secretary Hale's Call With Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman, June 4, 2019.

[75] 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," Press Release, June 11, 2019.

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

[77] Natsios, op. cit.

lifting of the State Sponsor of Terrorism designation or debt relief, until there is a civilian-led transition.[78] Human rights groups have called for UN Security Council Members to pressure Sudan to accept an international human rights investigation. Some former U.S. officials have urged stronger support for the opposition, civil society, and human rights defenders.[79]

The role of the Arab Gulf countries and Egypt in shaping Sudan's transition is a common theme among many analysts and activists urging U.S. engagement. Sudan is particularly vulnerable to external competition, and many observers worry that foreign backing for the TMC encourages its leaders to dig in rather than compromise.[80] Several observers have argued that the United States could apply greater leverage with these countries to pressure or isolate the junta.[81] Some experts argue that there is a limited window to influence Sudan's trajectory, either toward greater stability or broader violence and insecurity.[82]

Some Members of Congress have called for increased pressure on the TMC to ensure a swift transfer of power to civilians, expressing their views in statements, correspondence, and legislation (S.Res. 188 and H.Res. 432). Some Members have called on the Administration to sanction Hemeti and the RSF.[83] Upcoming hearings may provide an opportunity for further examination of the situation in Sudan, the prospects for a successful transition to democracy, and the policy options available for U.S. engagement.

Developments in Sudan may bring changes to the U.S. assistance portfolio, which Congress oversees. The United States has provided more than $378 million in humanitarian aid 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 central government are restricted by Congress in annual appropriations and in various statutes. U.S. bilateral assistance to Sudan totaled more than $154.6 million in FY2018, 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)

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

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

[80] See, for example, Elizabeth Dickinson, "Exporting the Gulf Crisis," War on the Rocks, May 28, 2019; Natsios, op. cit.; and Cameron Hudson, "Washington Is Turning Its Back on Sudan," *Foreign Policy*, June 6, 2019;

[81] See, e.g., Eli Lake, "Don't Let the Saudis Ruin Sudan's Democratic Moment," Bloomberg, June 6, 2019.

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

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

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.

Author Information

Lauren Ploch Blanchard
Specialist in African Affairs

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