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The Sudanese Revolution and the Horizons of Democratisation**

الثورة السودانية وآفاق الانتقال الديمقراطي

Abstract: This study poses several questions: Did the fall of the Salvation regime in Sudan result from an initiative from within the regime, an opposition coalition, or both? How influential was the external factor in the overthrow of the regime and the period of transition to democracy? Will the post-Salvation regime order stay the course of democratisation, or will it revert to an authoritarian system? The study concludes that the likely agreed-upon aim of world powers and their authoritarian partners in the region is to steer Sudan toward a hybrid system that keeps members of the old regime in control of the key positions of power while preserving a minimum degree of democracy. In this framework, the ruling civilian-military alliance will receive support from the US, the EU, and their regional allies, which will enable it to dismantle the institutions of the former regime, assimilate a number of militant movements in the political process, and gradually integrate into the international security and economic orders. Meanwhile, on the domestic front, the transitional government will encounter formidable challenges of a nature that might not only cause the transitional process to fall apart but also precipitate the collapse of the Sudanese state.

Keywords: Sudanese Revolution, Democratic Transition, Sudan, Protest.

الملخص: تطرح هذه الدراسة تساؤلات من بينها ما يلي: أكان سقوط نظام الإنقاذ في السودان نتيجة لـ «مبادرة من الداخل» أم لتحالف المعارضة أم لهذين الأمرَين معًا؟ وما مدى تأثير العامل الخارجي في مرحلة إسقاط النظام والانتقال إلى الديمقراطية؟ أيُتوقّع أن يتّبع نظام ما بعد الإنقاذ مسارًا ديمقراطيًا، أم أنه سيتحوّل إلى نظام تسلّطي جديد؟ تنتهي الدراسة إلى القول بأرجحية أن يكون الهدف المتّفق عليه بين القوى الدولية وشركائها السلطويين في الإقليم هو الانتقال بالسودان إلى النظام «الهجين»، حيث تبقى عناصر النظام السلطوي القديم مُمسكة بمفاصل السلطة، مع المحافظة على الحدّ الأدنى من الديمقراطية. يُضاف إلى ذلك أن التحالف العسكري – المدني الحاكم سيجد دعمًا من الولايات المتحدة الأميركية والاتحاد الأوروبي (ومن حلفائهما الإقليميّين)، وهو ما يُمكّنه من تفكيك مؤسسات النظام السابق، واستيعاب عدد من الحركات المسلّحة في العملية السياسية، والانخراط المتدرّج في المنظومة الدولية (الأمنية والاقتصادية). أما من ناحية الداخل السوداني، فستواجِه الحكومة الانتقالية تحدّيات صعبة، قد لا تؤدي إلى انهيار الوضع الانتقالي فحسب، بل إلى انهيار الدولة السودانية ذاتها أيضًا.

كلمات مفتاحية: الثورة السودانية، الانتقال الديمقراطي، السودان، الاحتجاج.

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The study was written in mid-2021 and many changes have occurred since then on the Sudanese political scene. The author, however, does not believe that these updates have changed the main idea of this study, if they have not confirmed it already.

Introduction

Transitioning to democracy presents a problem not only because of practical difficulties but also because of the need to agree on a clear conceptual framework to explain it. After all, why should a political group in power relinquish control or share it with others who oppose it? What would make a ruling political elite that holds a monopoly on arms enter into negotiations with groups of unarmed civilians? This study attempts to examine the nature of the negotiations and alliances that occurred in the wake of the Sudanese Revolution (December 2018) and to shed light on the complexities of the transition from the 'Salvation'[1] regime, which had been overthrown by a grassroots uprising, to an alternative political system based on the Constitutional Charter agreed upon by the Alliance of the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC).[2] The study focuses on a model that was developed to predict the contours of a transition from an authoritarian to an alternative democratic system and aims to apply it to the Sudanese case, highlighting consistencies and inconsistencies that surface by contrasting theory and reality. The importance of this study lies in its approach based on using a 'case study' to critique the theoretical paradigm.

It has only been a year and a half since the Sudanese revolution broke out; the process of revolutionary transformation is ongoing. Academic writings on it are therefore scant. But there do exist many documents and data that can be used to analyse the political positions of the different groups involved. There are also published interviews with some of the players that furnish important background information on the events. With respect to the theoretical dimension, numerous studies have been written on the transition from autocracy to democracy. This study tests one of the models that have been developed to explain this transition.

A Theoretical Introduction: The Alfred Stepan Model

Many contemporary political theorists have focused on the phenomenon of transition from authoritarian to democratic systems. Some have formulated scenarios and models for the process based on extensive research on the experiences of Latin America and Southern and Eastern Europe. Yet, in general, theorists favour two models. One is the Spanish model, derived from the period following the death of Francisco Franco (1892-1975), in which the transition to democracy is initiated from within the authoritarian system. The second is the opposition coalition model. Here, an array of political and social forces opposed to the regime manage to forge a broad-based alliance, then succeed in toppling the authoritarian regime and agreeing to a power-sharing formula (fleshed out in principles and charters that govern the interim period) that sets in motion the transition to a democratic system.[3] This study tests the explanatory power of the first model by applying it to the Sudanese case. In the process, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Was the fall of the Salvation regime in Sudan the product of an initiative from within, of an opposition coalition, or both?
2. How influential was the foreign dimension in the overthrow of the regime and the democratic transition period?
3. Can we expect the post-Salvation regime to follow a democratic path, or will it revert to a new authoritarian system — and, in either case, why?

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[1] A label that refers to the political regime led by the former president Omar al-Bashir through the National Congress Party, which ruled Sudan for thirty years.

[2] In January 2019, a group of Sudanese forces launched a declaration titled 'Forces of Freedom and Change Declaration' that included four main forces: the 'Sudanese Professionals Association', the 'National Consensus', the 'Sudan Development Call Association [Nidaa]', and the 'Unionist Opposition Alliance'. The declaration demanded the overthrow of former Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir (1989-2019), the achievement of a comprehensive and just peace, and the formation of a transitional government for a four-year period.

[3] Alfred Stepan, 'Paths toward Redemocratization,' in: Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter & Laurence Whitehead (eds.), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore/ London: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 65.

The democratic waves that ushered in the fall of dictatorships in Latin America and Southern and Eastern Europe in the 1970s sparked a growing interest in the transition from authoritarian regimes toward democracy among political theorists and scholars of comparative politics. Samuel P. Huntington documented the dates, locations, and features of these democratisation 'waves' in a famous paper that has had a major influence on democratic transformation studies.[4] But Huntington was not alone in this field; other scholars had led the way with pioneering theories and models to help explain this phenomenon by drawing comparisons between similar cases, conducting in-depth studies of the overall structure of society as shaped by various economic, political, and international dimensions, or analysing the main players and their particular values, skills, and decisions.

This paper attempts to test one model for democratic transition, formulated in 1986 by Alfred Stepan, who served as director of the Center for the Study of Democracy, Toleration, and Religion and professor of political science at Columbia University.[5] The model was devised based on lengthy discussions and investigations by a group of political scientists who, due to their interest in studying democratic transition processes, became known as 'transitologists'.[6]

Stepan opens his analysis with the assertion that there is not necessarily a single path to democratisation. Multiple, overlapping routes are possible, but the simultaneous pursuit of several strategies at once, he holds, is one of the conditions of successful democratisation. He proceeds to identify eight paths leading to the end of authoritarian regimes and the process of 're-democratisation'. However, he immediately discards three that rely on warfare and military conquest (as occurred in some European cases before World War II) and asserts that since the 1960s — and for the conceivable future — "the majority of cases of redemocratization have been and will be ones in which sociopolitical forces rather than external military forces play the key role, though international and economic forces, as well as political blocs, play an important role".[7]

Stepan divides the paths to re-democratisation into two general processes. In the first, (a) change emanates from within the authoritarian regime, i.e., it is initiated by the power-holders themselves. In the second, (b) change is mainly driven by a broad coalition of political forces opposed to the regime. A brief summary of both follows:

Process (a)

In cases where change originates within the authoritarian regime, the regime leaders (or groups initiating change) seek to reduce pressures on themselves and, simultaneously, to preserve their interests to the greatest possible extent. Stepan hastens to point out that re-democratisation initiated from within the authoritarian regime is quite a broad category, and that it is therefore useful to focus on three subtypes, each defined by the institutional base on which the initiating group relies.

Power-holders will cling to power unless conditions compel them to modify the power equations. For example, they might feel it necessary to allay pressures arising from socio-political demands within the regime or politically influential groups who had once been loyal to the regime. Another example is that some circles in the ruling order — particularly those in charge of law enforcement and exacting

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[4] Samuel Huntington (1927-2008) published a book on the third wave of democracy in 1991, expanding on his lecture at the University of Oklahoma in 1989. The university published the text two years later; see: Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twenties Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

[5] The research was published as part of the project titled 'Transition from Authoritarian to Democratic Regimes', concerned with what came to be known as the 'Third Wave of Democracy'. Many professors participated in this project in 1979, led by Guillermo A. O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead. The works of the project was published in four volumes in 1986.

[6] Howard J. Wiarda, 'Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, and Comparative Politics: Transitology and the Need for New Theory,' *World Affairs*, vol. 164, no. 4 (Spring 2002), pp. 149-156.

[7] Stepan, p. 65.

obedience — may harbour growing doubts over the regime's legitimacy, or rifts might arise within these circles. Alternatively, some stakeholders may see an opportunity to retain some of their authority through a forthcoming electoral contest, or at least to remain active in political life in the post-regime period. Should such circumstances arise, there is a high probability that a reform initiative from within the regime will emerge and that the democratic transition will succeed. This said, preparations for the transition cannot take place until opposition forces and moderate leaders in government find a way to work together to formulate a peaceful framework for the process.

Even if the transition to democracy succeeds, the repressive apparatus that served the old regime may retain their power for some time. This could present a serious impediment to new policies that could bring those agencies under control through democratic procedures. It could also jeopardise the stability of the new order and render it vulnerable to domestic coups engineered by these old regime agencies, especially if they perceive that democratic measures might pose a threat to them.[8]

The clearest example of democratisation launched from within an authoritarian regime is the Spanish experience following the death of General Franco in 1975. His disappearance from the political scene presented an opportunity to discuss basic questions about the legitimacy of the laws promulgated by his regime. Furthermore, there were mounting grassroots pressures pushing for change and, to complete the picture, political opposition circles were alternately asserting pressure and bargaining with circles in the regime. These elements combined made it possible for the democratisation process to evolve from a limited reform initiative from within the regime, to a larger reform process that included political opposition forces, to revolution, and then to a complete break with the past as the result of negotiations with the opposition forces. Moreover, the cooperation between the government and the opposition decreased the chances of a military reaction and led to success in the transition to democracy.[9] Finally, the electoral law reached through a consensus between opposition forces offered old regime figures, such as Adolfo Suárez (1932-2014), the prospect of coming to office through elections or to continue to participate in the political process if they did not succeed in the polls. Despite all the foregoing, the democratic transition in Spain remained fragile for reasons pertaining to the conflict over the Basque region, which jeopardised national unity and presented a possible opening for security forces to obstruct the democratic system.

Process (b)

The second process of transition to democracy proceeds from an initiative undertaken by a broad political alliance or 'Grand Oppositional Pact',[10] by which anti-regime forces unite in the framework of a type of federation that ultimately succeeds, through revolution, in defeating the authoritarian regime. Then they draw up the rules for a democratic system which establishes the path to power for most opposition forces. This process has attracted considerable interest among researchers on democratisation because it addresses two problems at once. The first is how to erode the bases on which the old regime relied, and the second is how to lay the foundation for a forthcoming democratic order that includes a formula for power-sharing among an array of political forces and factions.

Stepan observes that while it may be easy for opposition forces to create this kind of broad alliance, this is no guarantee that it will last. Pacts can just as easily fall apart or exclude important political groups, which, in turn, could signify the emergence of an authoritarian tendency that could obstruct re-democratisation. He further notes that partisan coalitions cannot be created in all political systems, as "by their very nature

[8] Ibid., p. 71.
[9] Ibid., p. 74.
[10] Ibid., p. 79.

[they] have two indispensable requirements: first, leaders with the organizational and ideological capacity to negotiate a grand coalition among themselves; second, the allegiance of their political followers to the terms of the pact".[11]

This transitional model presumes first that there are 'reformers' in the regime and 'moderates' among the opposition, just as there are 'hardliners' in the regime and 'radicals' in the opposition. Second, it presumes that the reformists on one side and the moderates on the other will enter into negotiations over the nature and extent of the desired change, whereby reformists will try to retain the greatest amount of power possible while moderates will push as hard as they can for the transition to democracy. Third, it presumes that the regime hardliners and the opposition radicals have the ability to thwart any settlement that does not meet their approval. This means that if a peaceful democratic transition is to succeed, the negotiating parties must arrive at a formula that satisfies both the hardliners and radicals; otherwise, they could descend into violence, and put paid the transition to democracy.[12]

The Sudanese Revolution: What Happened?

The Military-Security Leadership

The end of the Salvation regime can be dated to 11 September 2019, when the First Vice President and Defence Minister of Sudan (2015-2019), Lieutenant-General Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf, appeared on television to announce that "the regime has been uprooted and its head is being kept in a safe place". Ibn Auf also stated that he had formed a military council to manage affairs for two years, dissolved the presidency, and declared a state of emergency.[13] Within a single day, he announced that he had stepped down as chairman of the military council and handed the helm to Lieutenant-General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan (April 2019-August 2019).[14]

This formal pronunciation of the regime's end came in the wake of popular protests and demonstrations that swept many Sudanese towns and cities. Initially sparked by a severe bread and fuel shortage and an unusual scarcity of local currency, the protest movement lasted for nearly four months, from 19 December 2018 to 11 April 2019 when the crisis reached its height. At that point, the regime's Supreme Security Council (SSC) stepped in and told President Omar al-Bashir, having been in power for thirty years (1989-2019) at the time, to announce a new policy intended to end the crisis. It consisted of four main points: his resignation as head of the National Congress Party and his decision not to run for president in the next elections; the dissolution of the Council of Ministers and the National Assembly; the establishment of a fully-empowered transitional government to replace them; and the creation of a military council he would chair that would be responsible for the country's security during the transitional period of no more than two years.[15]

Apart from resigning as head of the ruling party, Bashir had no intention of acting on these points. Moreover, he reportedly instructed the SSC leadership to use military means to end the crisis.[16] This was

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[11] Ibid., p. 80.

[12] Jakub Zielinski, 'Transitions from Authoritarian Rule and the Problem of Violence', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 43, no. 2 (April 1999), p. 214.

[13] 'al-Jaysh yuʿlin iqtilāʿ' Niẓām al-Bashīr wa iḥtijāzihi fī makān āmin,' *France24*, 11/4/2019, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3e5eVJf.

[14] 'Ibn ʿAwf yatanāzal wa-l-Burhān khalafan lah', *SUNA*, 12/4/2019, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3y8ixB8

[15] The head of the security apparatus, General Salah Gosh, announced these points in an interview with editors-in-chief of daily newspapers on 22 February 2019. President al-Bashir's speech included some of these points, excluding the one related to his decision not run for presidency in the next elections. See: 'Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn Bilāl: Qarārāt al-Rāʾīs!' *Bajnews*, 24/2/2019, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/36fq3Pn

[16] 'Nāʾib rāʾīs jihāz al-amn al-sābiq yakshif li-awwal marra fī ḥiwār maʿuh al-tafāṣīl al-Kāmila li-suqūṭ al-Bashīr wa dawr gūsh wa bin ʿawf wa ḥamedtī wa khuṭat qatl al-mutaẓāhirīn', *Tag Press*, 5/10/2020, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3y87UhL

what prompted the Council to act decisively and take full control of power. It was in a position to do so easily since it held the reins to the military and security agencies. It was also aware of how to get through to the revolutionaries who had amassed in front of Army Command Headquarters in Khartoum, as it had been in contact with some of them since the protest movement began.[17] Talks, negotiations, and compromises took place between members of the SSC, renamed the Transitional Military Council (TMC), and opposition groups which culminated in the partnership between the military and the FFC. It appears from numerous testimonies that the TMC had established channels of communication with some opposition circles, and that it had gradually distanced itself from the regime and grown inclined toward change; the above-mentioned televised address by Lieutenant-General Ibn Auf suggests as much. In the course of explaining what had led him to turn against Bashir, he said that:

1. The SSC, which consists of the armed forces, the police, the security and intelligence agencies, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), implemented the change.
2. The Council had been keeping track of the mismanagement and corruption within governmental institutions and how horizons were being closed off before the people, especially the youth.
3. The regime insisted on a military solution, but the Council opposed this and presented alternatives and suggestions to end the crisis by political means.
4. The Council decided to carry out what the head of the regime had refused to do and thus assumed full responsibility of regime change for a two-year transitional period, during which the armed forces would be mainly responsible for managing the government and maintaining security, with limited representation of the other components of the Council.[18]

Ibn Auf's speech did not address foreign parties, above all Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt: the three regional powers that were instrumental to laying the groundwork for the regime change and that supported it directly.[19] These countries' interest in Sudan stemmed from two main concerns: the Saudi-UAE war in Yemen and the Ethiopian-Egyptian dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). On 12 February 2015, as part of its conflict with Iran, Saudi Arabia launched Operation Decisive Storm to counter the forces of the Ansarullah (Houthi) Movement in Yemen and restore the legitimate government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who had been elected in 2012. Saudi Arabia expected military support from Egypt and Pakistan, but as this was not forthcoming for various reasons, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi turned to Sudan. They wanted Khartoum to take three actions: sever diplomatic relations with Iran, eliminate Islamist elements from the commands of its military and security agencies, and commit Sudanese troops to the war in Yemen.[20]

Because of the Sudanese government's economic straits, President Bashir agreed to do so in exchange for financial support. He cut off relations with Iran, took steps to remove a number of Islamists from the military and security hierarchies, and dispatched troops to Yemen under the command of Lieutenant-

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[17] Many sources indicate that former National Security Advisor Salah Gosh was in contact with some opposition leaders to attempt to win their support in the weeks that preceded the isolation of President al-Bashir, particularly with Sadiq al-Mahdi, head of the National Umma Party; Omar al-Dugair, head of the Sudanese Congress Party; and other members of the Baath party. See: 'Reuters takshif kawālīs Tawarruṭ al-imārāt fī al-iṭāḥa bi-ʾUmar al-Bashīr', *Al Jazeera*, 3/7/2019, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3JbYPYA

[18] The speech was televised on *Sudan TV* and *Al Jazeera Mubasher* and streamed on various social media platforms. To access the full text of the speech, see: 'Naṣṣ al-bayān al-awwal… hāthā mā aʿlanahu al-jaysh al-sūdānī', *Al Jazeera*, 11/4/2019, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3q1i0wF

[19] Among the characteristics of this role is the former's cooperation with General al-Burhan and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo in the Yemen war, as well as the continued support presented by these states to the Military Council to strengthen its position among other political forces. For more on this topic, see the report prepared and published by 'The Project on Middle East Political Science' at the Middle East Institute in the George Washington University: Jean-Baptiste Gallopin, 'The Great Game of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in Sudan', *Middle East Political Science*, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3tSBYLl.

[20] Ibid.

General Burhan and RSF commander (2010-) Lieutenant-General Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo, more familiarly known as Hemeti. Bashir's concessions seem only to have encouraged Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to contemplate overthrowing his government and replacing it with the very military leadership that oversaw Sudanese military operations on the ground in Yemen (i.e., Burhan and Hemeti).[21]

In light of the foregoing, it is possible to assert that the decisive step toward regime change in Sudan originated from within the regime — specifically, from the army and security leadership — with support from abroad (Saudi Arabia and the UAE), and that the military-civilian transitional government was the product of their arrangements. Still, the process of persuading some civilian elements to get on board with the Saudi-UAE plan remained ongoing through various exchanges and agreements that aimed to rally an alignment against the Muslim Brotherhood.[22]

The Political Front: What Happened?

Just as the TMC became a de facto government, the grassroots movement in the sit-in square became the 'revolution government' as well. But it was a government without executive power. The distance between the square and the cabinet building is not a geographic span measurable in miles, but an entirely political span as complex as the gap between revolution and state. At the phase when the revolution only needed to rally the ranks, build enthusiasm, and prepare to make the necessary sacrifices, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) assumed its leadership[23] and was soon joined by a number of other organisations to form an umbrella entity called the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC). The FFC was a loose political alliance made up of four main groups, each of which consisted of a number of smaller parties (some militant, some unarmed). It was a fragile alliance managed by a steering committee with limited executive powers due to the haste and urgency of the first weeks of the revolution.

Later, when it came time to manage the affairs of the state, revolutionary romanticism ceded way to the need for political realism. The latter compels every party to review its strategy, reach the desired political common ground, break with old alliances, and conclude new ones, depending on what it deems necessary at that juncture. At this point, attitudes and outlooks diverge and the 'getting rid of partners' phase looms. Herein lay the crux of the problem, as clearly identified by some members of the opposition, within the structure of the FFC: it is a large political body but one that lacks a unified executive leadership and strategic

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[21] Considering the confidential nature of such roles, we have no choice but to rely on two corroborating reports. The first, published by *Foreign Policy* one month after the fall of the Bashir regime and written by French journalist Jérôme Tubiana, a specialist in African affairs, indicated the participation of a Sudanese army division in the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemen war. Leading the division, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Ahmad Dagalo (Hemeti) met with Saudi and Emirati officials and agreed on arrangements for the post-al-Bashir period. The Saudi-UAE side became convinced that the two men (Burhan and Hemeti) met the conditions of Saudi Arabia and the UAE for new leaders without ties with Iran, Qatar, or the Muslim Brotherhood; see: Jérôme Tubiana, 'The Man Who Terrorized Darfur Is Leading Sudan's Supposed Transition', *Foreign Policy* (May 2019), accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3KEbofB.

The second report was published by *Reuters* on 3 July 2019 (three months after the fall of the regime) and was prepared by three reporters based on interviews conducted with more than ten insider sources. The report stated that President al-Bashir reached an understanding with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed whereby the former dispenses with the Islamists and deploys military forces to support Saudi Arabia and the UAE in the Yemen war, in exchange of financial support from the UAE to Sudan. However, president al-Bashir did not fulfil all his pledges, so the UAE cut off its fuel supply to Sudan in December 2018 as a manifestation of its dissatisfaction, exacerbating the economic crisis that eventually led to the fall of the regime; see: Khalid Abdelaziz, Michael Georgy & Maha El Dahan, 'Abandoned by the UAE, Sudan's Bashir Was Destined to Fall', *Reuters*, 3/7/2019, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://reut.rs/36gQXXq.

[22] Among the attendees of those meetings were Mariam al-Sadiq al-Mahdi (National Umma Party), Khalid Omar Yousef (Sudanese Congress Party), and Yasir Arman (Sudan People's Liberation Movement – northern sector); see: '*Thawrat dīsambir: al-siyāqāt wa-l-fāʿilūn wa taḥaddiyāt al-intiqāl al-dīmuqrāṭī fī al-sūdān*', *Reports*, ACRPS, 2/6/2020, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/35TXtn1

[23] The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) is the most prominent component of the Forces of Freedom and Change. Established in 2018, it began its activity with a study on wages and submitted a memorandum about it to the government of President al-Bashir. It included seven professional bodies at the time: Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, Democratic Lawyers Association, Sudanese Engineers Association, Sudanese Journalists Network, Teachers' Committee, Association of Democratic Veterinarians, and Central Pharmacists Committee. It later began to appear in the media a week after the spontaneous outbreak of the popular revolution on 13 December 2018 alongside many other organisations and professional bodies, issuing a declaration on behalf of the Forces of Freedom and Change, the entity that became the platform for popular command ever since.

vision (apart from the January 1st, 2019 declaration, which was a declaration of principles, not a programme for action). The deficiency was detrimental to the FFC's negotiating performance with the TMC. That said, while a 'unified leadership' may have boosted the FFC's strength, the person who stood to benefit from it the most was the Imam Sadiq al-Mahdi in view of his long-established political legitimacy and political party influence. This, however, was an option that appealed little to the other groups in the FFC.

It turned out that some leaders[24] under the FFC umbrella had a regional agenda that was more in tune with the TMC's agenda than with the general mood of the grassroots movement, which was opposed to regional interventions in Sudanese affairs. Such intersections within the FFC confirmed that internal differences were not about tactics and therefore resolvable within the framework of the greater aim. Rather, they reflected essential contradictions related to how the state should manage the economy or foreign relations. The disputes, therefore, were of a nature that was not easily surmountable and that bode ill for the unity of ranks and objectives: if they spread and spiralled, then were fanned by the charged media climate, they could end in a clash that would put paid to any attempt to proceed toward the awaited democratic transition.

Despite its organisational fragility (or due to it), the FFC decided to enter into a partnership with the former regime's military wing and share executive power on the basis of the Constitutional Charter the two sides signed.[25] The FFC thus obtained a number of seats in the Sovereignty Council and all the ministerial portfolios in the cabinet except for Defence and Interior. With this, the TMC's presidency ended, and the term of the transitional government began in September 2019. Abdalla Hamdok became prime minister (2019-2022), and Lieutenant General Burhan became chairman of the Sovereignty Council in the framework of a grand pact backed by around seven political parties.[26]

The Fragile Coalition Between the Military and Civilian Components

We can identify two main stages in the relationship between the military and civilian partners in the transitional government: one shaped by revolutionary impetus, the other by political realism. The first stage brought a relative decrease in the roles of two historically dominant parties — the Democratic Unionist Party and the Umma Party — and a more prominent role played by three left-wing minority parties (the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP), the Sudanese Baath Party, and the Unionist Democratic Nasserist Party), the Sudanese Congress Party, and some professional and civil society organisations. These are the organisations that had challenged the regime beneath the banner of the Declaration of Freedom and Change,[27] and they were the political incubator for the 'revolution government'. It was they who drafted the Constitutional Charter, defined the governmental structures and hierarchy, and shared power with the TMC.

They saw themselves as the real authors of the revolution and the foremost players in the political arena. The FFC, as one of its leaders, Mohammed Naji al-Assam, put it, coordinated the popular efforts and crystallised the options of their struggle. In his view, the military leadership managed to march at their side on the path of revolution and change in order to establish a 'sustainable democracy' in Sudan.[28] Not all members of the FFC shared this optimistic perception of the role of the armed forces. The Sudanese

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[24] In reference to those who conform with the policy of the UAE: Khalid Omar Yousef, Mariam al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, Yasir Arman, and others.

[25] 'al-wathīqa al-dustūriyya lil-fatra al-intiqāliyya bi-jumhūriyyat al-sūdān', *Conflict Sensitivity Unit*, 19/2/2021, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/35NCBOr

[26] The seven main parties participating in the government are: National Umma Party, Sudanese Congress Party, Sudanese Communist Party, Democratic Unionist Party, Sudanese Baath Party, Unionist Democratic Nasserist Party, and Socialist Republican Party.

[27] 'iʿlān al-ḥurriyya wa-l-taghyīr', *Facebook*, 1/1/2019, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3q0Rrb6

[28] 'intaṣarnā wa nuṭālib bi-ḥaqq shuhadāʾina: kalimat muḥammad nājī al-aṣam baʿd tawqīʿ al-ittifāq al-tārīkhī fī al-sūdān', *YouTube*, 17/8/2019, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3CDvow5; Ismael Mohammed Ali, 'Siddīq Yūsif: rāīs al-wuzarāʾ al-sūdānī laysa shuyūʿiyyan', *Independent Arabia*, 20/12/2019, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3KzhMok

Communist Party, for example, did not view the army's actions positively: it held that the generals had staged a 'military coup' to prevent the revolution from fully realising its ends.[29] This researcher anticipates that the difference in outlooks will broaden and eventually lead to the FFC's collapse.

The foregoing begs the question of how the TMC perceives itself and its role in the post-Bashir era: does it see itself as a partner in power, or as the rightful owner? We find an answer to this in an early speech by TMC chairman Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, after talks with the FFC were suspended on 15 May 2019. He said that the constituent components of the TMC, including the leadership of the Rapid Support Forces, were borne of the people, and they had performed an important and effective role in supporting the revolution. The members of the TMC had sided with the people's choice and ensured their victory.[30] The speech appears to represent a fixed strategic line for the military.

Certainly, the army — or, more precisely, the security establishment — refused to open fire on demonstrators on 6 April 2019. It protected them and, in so doing, boldly disobeyed the president's orders, which hastened the end of the Salvation regime. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that, by that point, the spontaneous popular movement had reached a fervour that was uncontainable. It is therefore fair to say that the army and the people should both be credited with the success of the revolution and the overthrow of the former regime, inclusive of its constitution, institutions, and officials. But this created a vacuum that, for practical and legal reasons, the army had to fill, and so it did — thereby becoming the guardian of power in addition to being a partner. Then the TMC became the de facto government in both the executive and legislative capacities.

Although it would not be difficult for the TMC to market its partnership in power by vaunting its support for the revolutionaries, other issues will continue to haunt it. Not least are the 'threads' linking it with the former regime, such as the promotion of several members to the rank of Lieutenant General only a few weeks before the revolution; the operations they took part in; or the atrocities of the 'Khartoum massacre' about which they remain silent. In order to put this matter behind them and prove they had cut all ties with the old regime, the officers signed a decree, in the name of the Sovereignty Council, to form a committee to remove and dismantle the old regime. Thus, only a few weeks after the formation of the TMC-FFC coalition government in September 2019, Chairman of the Sovereignty Council Lieutenant General Burhan issued a decree establishing a committee to disempower and combat corruption and recuperate plundered assets. This brought the dissolution of the National Congress Party: it was struck from the register of official political parties and organisations, its assets were sequestered, and any political fronts, syndicates and professional associations related to the party or any individual or entity empowered by it were shut down.[31] The main Islamist figures whom Saudi Arabia and the UAE wanted removed from power, such as Ali Othman Mohammed Taha, Bakri Hasan Saleh, and Nafie Ali Nafie, had been thrown in prison within a week following the overthrow of the regime.[32]

As expected, some members of the FFC, above all the Communist and Baath parties, welcomed and praised these measures and felt that one of the revolution's most important strategic goals was being undertaken by the Empowerment Removal Committee. These parties, in turn, engaged in fierce haggling over quotas of government posts and ranks, as they hastened to 'empower' their own members in key

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[29] An interview Ali with Siddiq Yousef, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, conducted by Ismael Mohammed: *Independent Arabia*, 20 December 2019.

[30] 'Shāhid… bayān rāīs al-majlis al-ʿaskarī al-farīq ʿabd al-fattāḥ al-burhān', *YouTube*, 16/5/2019, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3pVRkh1.

[31] Abd al-Hameed Awad, 'al-sūdān: tashkīl lajna li-izālat wa tafkīk niẓām al-bashīr,' *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 10/12/2019, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3MHity5

[32] 'Badʾ muḥākamat al-rāīs al-sūdānī al-sābiq ʿUmar al-bashīr bi-tuhmat al-inqilāb ʿalā al-ḥukūma al-muntakhaba', *Lusail News*, 21/7/2020, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3t7iZh2

offices. Further, the old, recurrent ideological conflict between the Islamist Current and the secularist Left, determined to reconstitute and reorient the whole of Sudanese society culturally, politically and economically, stoked the animosities that seethed behind this scramble.

The strategic aim of the transitional government and its political base, at this stage, was to eradicate the Salvation regime and eliminate its affiliates from all state agencies, especially those concerned with defence, security, economy, education, and the judiciary. But this situation did not last long, and the partners in the transitional government soon had to deal with pending issues on which they found it hard to agree. Also, each side had developed visions and aspirations that would be difficult to realise within the framework of the Constitutional Charter they had signed. Though this is not the place to cover all the bones of contention between them, it is useful to highlight the most salient issues:

1. Companies owned by the army, security forces, and police (and how to bring them under civil authority);
2. Relations with militant movements (and how to include them in the framework of the constitutional charter);
3. The management of the economy (the nature of the desired economic reform and relations with the World Bank and its prescriptions);[33]
4. The management of foreign affairs (how to deal with the UN mission to Sudan, the Saudi-Emirati factor, and the recognition of Israel);
5. The management of the Ethiopian-Egyptian dispute over GERD (what stance Khartoum should take on the matter, and how far).

The task of addressing all these issues and resolving their concomitant questions forced each camp to revise its calculations entirely and re-examine its alliances.

The Phase of Realism and Contentious Issues

The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), which had been entrusted with leading the revolution, did not survive long after the revolution succeeded. It quickly succumbed to a schism that dulled its revolutionary lustre and put it out of action. A contingent within the SPA leadership affiliated with the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) had been accused by fellow SPA members of hijacking the association, using it to further narrow partisan interests and goals opposed to the revolution, and fragmenting the unity of the revolutionary forces. The SCP's response was more severe: it accused components of the FFC of concluding spurious secret deals at home and abroad, leading the alliance toward designs for a counterrevolution, and approving policies that deviate from agreed upon charters and declarations. Moreover, contrary to their stated positions in the FFC Council, those elements were conspiring against the recommendations of the FFC's economic committee and promoting the government's policies which favoured deregulating and lifting subsidies on essential commodities and adopting IMF prescriptions. The consequence was deteriorating standards of living, rising inflation rates, continued high youth unemployment, worsening conditions for displaced persons, partiality toward parasitic capitalism at the expense of patriotic capitalism in industry and agriculture, and a complete coup against the revolution by means of a new constitutional charter.[34] Following this lengthy list of charges, the SCP central committee announced that it had decided that the party would 'withdraw from the national consensus forces and the FFC and work alongside the forces of revolution and change

[33] The Sudanese Communist Party maintains that the transitional government has capitulated to global capitalism which seeks to dominate the Sudanese economy, and that it is moving in the direction of dependency on the West in compliance with all conditions instead of relying on Sudanese resources and internal reforms; see: al-Haj Abdalla Ahmad (Interviewer), 'muqābala maʿ ṣiddīq Kablū, ʿuḍw al-lajna al-markaziyya', *al-Midan* (3797), 25/5/2021.

[34] Bahram Abd al-Moniem, 'al-ḥizb al-shuyūʿī al-sūdānī yuʿlin insiḥābah min al-iʾtilāf al-ḥākim', *Anadolu Agency*, 7/11/2020, accessed on 20/4/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3OpgAXt

that are connected with the causes of the people and the aims and programmes of the revolution'. It added that the party had chosen 'to stand with the masses and their causes rather than to mislead them and plant false hopes to deceive them'.[35]

The internal rift tells us that the FFC's strength stemmed less from a robust strategic consensus as from its components' collective participation in the fight against the Salvation regime. Once the regime fell, the FFC forces collapsed on the shoals of conflicting visions and interests. But another factor that aggravated discord perhaps emerged from an aversion to the responsibilities of the interim period and the possibility of having to shoulder the blame in the event of possible failure, especially in economic affairs. It had become clear to the ruling left-wing parties (as well as to the TMC) that the economic deterioration was grave and there was no avoiding dealing with it.

However, acting effectively required a strong political will and the resolve to take tough decisions and bear full responsibility for the results. In other words, the real battle began to descend from lofty ideological horizons to the daily suffering of the people, and from the left-right dichotomy to the triad of bread, fuel, and medicine. The essential questions now were: who could the FFC choose as a minister with the wherewithal to take on this task? Which regional and international powers would back him? Would the Sudanese public continue to support the FFC government if it could not agree on an economic programme, approve a budget, or pay the debt for flour? Faced with such questions, each camp began to doubt the other, recalibrate its positions, and search for a more solid and rewarding partnership. Those who remained in the FFC grew convinced that the 'partnership' between it and the TMC was unlikely to last much longer.

The TMC, for its part, grew convinced that the FFC had lost its initial momentum and could no longer serve as a reliable political vehicle, and that it now had two options. One was to remain patient and endure the difficulties of the transitional period until the elections, as stipulated in the Constitutional Charter, at which point it might have to stage a loser's exit from the political process (and possibly face criminal proceedings). The other was to act pre-emptively, bypass the FFC, and enter into a new alliance that would include some of the militant movements and receive the blessing of regional and international powers, thus killing several birds with one stone. The TMC opted for the second choice, which is why it moved quickly in order to conclude the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan (as we will show below). Meanwhile, SCP, the best organised group among the FCC members, quickly grasped that the ruling military wing was not a reliable ally. It therefore began to openly display its hostility toward the transitional government and, as of early 2020, started to call for its dismissal and replacement with another government.

Obstacles to the Transition to a Democratic System

General Obstacles: The Search for a 'Democracy with Guaranteed Consequences'

A frequent question in discussions of democratic transition is: What kind of democracy is being transitioned to, and who wants that transition? None of the participant groups in the transitional government had actually grappled with that question out loud in a deep intellectual way. In fact, some of them, such as the Baath party, were not keen on transitioning to a democratic system to begin with, while others entertained notions that were at odds with the generally accepted concept of democracy. In its simplest definition, democracy is a 'method of government' in which the people chose a leadership to whom they entrust matters of legislation and promulgation of binding laws concerning the general affairs of society.[36] Such a definition

35 'Bayān al-lajna al-markaziyya lil-ḥizb al-shuyūʿī', *al-Midan*, 8/11/2020.

36 Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row Publisher, 1942), p. 243.

presented many problems for the partners in the transitional government and made each camp hesitate on the matter of democratic transition.

The first problem was that democracy would entail, at its most basic level, turning to the people to choose the leaders of government, and the only way to do that would be through elections or referendums. But either of these mechanisms could yield undesirable results, as the polls might not favour the ruling military-civilian alliance. To the military contingent, holding elections to end the transition period would entail the total exclusion of the military clique from the political process, not to mention upsetting all the pledges and agreements they concluded with their regional backers, namely the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. In addition, the elections might pave the way to measures that could hurt the generals directly, whether through legal proceedings or economic measures introduced by the post-transitional government. Given such considerations, the military explored ways to extend the transitional period instead of a return to the polls. Towards this end, it took advantage of three basic issues that offered avenues to perpetuate themselves in power for as long as possible:

1. Achieving domestic peace with the militant movements;
2. Normalising foreign relations with Israel, in conformity with the UAE-Saudi axis;
3. Reordering relations with the Egyptian military junta in its dispute with Ethiopia over the GERD.

Any of these courses of action promised to strengthen the military wing's standing in government. The generals would effectively become a de facto government that no one could dispense with, as we will show below.

Obstacles Fabricated by the Military Component of the Transitional Government

The Relationship with the Militant Movements

The transitional government's military wing saw a domestic peace process as the lifeline it was looking for: it would enter into lengthy negotiations with the militant movements and, if the negotiations succeeded, score points that would ensure it remained in power. Should the negotiations fail, it would have an excuse to prolong the transitional period on the pretext of continuing the pursuit of peace. As we know, the generals in power did, indeed, succeed in reaching an understanding, brokered by South Sudan, with some of the opposition militant movements, such as the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF). Then, in October 2020, they signed the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan[37] by which the signatory parties agreed to a new transitional period lasting 39 months as of the date of signing. Hence, the agreement effectively cancelled the first year of the existing transitional period and initiated another transitional term based on the newly forged partnership. Of course, this would entail restructuring the current ruling authority — the Sovereign Council and cabinet, in particular — and creating a legislative council. It was clear that Khartoum was on the threshold of a shift from the 'Freedom and Change' government based on the articles of the Constitutional Charter to a new order for which the Juba Peace Agreement had laid the foundations.

Though it is beyond the scope of this article to examine all the articles of this agreement, it should suffice to address one point that represents the agreement's essence and clarifies the relationship between the Juba Peace Agreement and the Constitutional Charter. Instead of accepting the latter as a higher authority, the agreement treats the charter's provisions as on par with its own. Moreover, in the event of a

[37] The Sudan Revolutionary Front signed on behalf of the armed opposition, comprising four political movements and five armed movements: the Justice and Equality Movement, the Sudan Liberation Forces, the Sudan Liberation Army, the Transitional Council of the Sudan Liberation Army, and the Sudanese Alliance. Those who did not sign include the Popular Movement – North (led by Abdulaziz al-Helu) and the Sudan Liberation Army Movement (led by Abd al-Wahid Mohammed Nour). For more on the main provisions of the agreement, see: *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 15286, 4/10/2020.

conflict between the two, the text of the agreement would prevail and the charter would have to be amended accordingly. The agreement further called for the creation of a Council of Partners for the Transitional Period made up of the parties to the Constitutional Charter, the prime minister, and the signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement (Article 80).

Such provisions leave little doubt that the military is determined to sidestep the democratic transition process and engineer a shift away from the 'revolutionary stage' and the agreements and charters it generated, toward a new phase of embracing and sharing power and wealth with the militant movements for as long as possible.

The Relationship with Israel

The generals in power were as quick to enter into secret talks with Israel as they were to negotiate with the Sudanese militant movements. During an unpublicised visit to Uganda, Lieutenant General Burhan met with former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in an attempt to impose a fait accompli. He cared little about the censure and criticism he would encounter from some quarters of the FFC, which regarded normalisation with Israel as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause and a departure from the remit of the transitional government.[38]

Reopening the Israeli question was less the brainchild of the military contingent's mindset in the Sudanese coalition government than it was borne of persistent pressures on the part of the Arab Coalition (the UAE and Saudi Arabia). Just as those Gulf powers had prevailed upon Burhan and Hemeti to join the war in Yemen, they subsequently pressured the leaders to sign onto the 'Abraham Accords', a trend, spearheaded by the UAE, aiming to normalise Arab relations with Israel.[39]

Relations with Egypt

All political forces that have come to power in Egypt have held that Sudan falls within the scope of their country's national security and represents its strategic depth. For this reason, Cairo has continually sought to maintain close relations with Khartoum. In this context, the government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was greatly interested in developing relations with the transitional government in Sudan. The interest was inspired, in part, by the Sisi government's fight against the Muslim Brotherhood and pursuit of its rank and file at home and abroad. But for the most part, Egypt was eager to establish a close relationship with the military component in the transitional government with an eye to incorporating Sudan in the framework of the Egyptian security strategy. This desire was informed, in particular, by the threat Egypt perceives from Ethiopia due to the GERD project.

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[38] For more details on the relationship between al-Burhan and Israel, see: Abd al-Baqi al-Zafir, 'Riḥlat al-baḥth ʿam al-taṭbīʿ maʿ isrāʾīl… limādha ṭalab al-burhān an yakhlud ilā al-nawm ʿind al-ʿawda min abū ẓabī?' *Al Jazeera*, 25/9/2020, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3CFeMnZ. al-Burhan later clarified that the decision to normalise with Israel came after long discussions with political and social powers that did not oppose this step, and that the partners in the transitional government are also partners in ending hostility with Israel. For an example of the objection of the Arab Communist Baath Party that is taking part in the transitional government, see: Abd al-Hameed Awad, 'Al-sūdān: ḥizb sūdānī sharīk fī al-ḥukm yuṭālib bi-muḥākamat al-mushārikī fī al-taṭbīʿ', *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 25/10/2020, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/34E9lZHl.

Sources indicate that the United States, during the visit of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (2018-2021) to Khartoum, imposed normalisation of relations between Khartoum and Tel Aviv as a condition to remove Sudan from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism; see: 'Pompeo yujrī ittiṣālan maʿ ḥamdūk bi-shàn izālat ism al-sūdān min qāʾimat al-duwal al-rāʿiya lil-irhāb', *CNN Arabic*, 22/10/2020, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://cnn.it/3i4ryCS.

The Israeli Minister of Intelligence, Elie Cohen, and his delegation visited Khartoum a month after the Sudanese government agreed to normalise its relations with Israel on 26 January 2020. This date marked the siege of Khartoum by Ansar al-Mahdi in 1885. It is worth noting that the official media in Sudan made no mention of this visit. The Israeli minister mentioned that the delegation met with the president of the Sovereignty Council, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Defence Minister, Yassin Ibrahim, to discuss diplomatic, security, and economic issues. It is also worth mentioning that Sudan signed the Abraham Accords on 6 January 2021.

[39] Here, we should make note of the regional factor in the Sudanese case. What is conspicuous is that the central military command that contributed to overthrowing al-Bashir's government (i.e., Ibn Auf, Hemeti, and al-Burhan) had direct connections with the Saudi-UAE-Egyptian camp; these leaders even participated directly in the Saudi-Yemeni war by deploying Sudanese Army units or the Rapid Support Forces to the battleground.

The Sudanese military leadership, aware of Egypt's influence within the UAE-Saudi-Israeli alliance, understood that getting involved would give them access to the coalition's logistic and/or military services, making them an indispensable player whether in the preservation of regional security and stability or in actual military engagements. In light of such prospects for mutual benefit, Cairo and Khartoum began a series of meetings between their military officials which culminated in a military cooperation agreement, signed on 2 March 2021,[40] followed by joint military manoeuvres between the Sudanese and Egyptian armies in May 2021.[41]

In the preceding paragraphs, we attempted to highlight some policies undertaken by the military side of the transitional government with the aim of protracting its stay in power and diversifying its sources of strength. It has, in fact, succeeded in achieving this end and in joining a regional alliance led by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. In the process, the leader of this component, Lieutenant General Burhan, managed to prove to his regional allies that he is the crucial strongman in Khartoum whom they need to protect their interests. In the following section we will examine the civilian component to determine whether it, too, was pursuing the end of perpetuating its stay in power or, instead, was seriously committed to democratisation.

Obstacles Created by the Civilian Partner

Given that the civilian contingent in the transitional government consists of numerous political organisations, each seeking to attain its own aims, it cannot be assessed as a single political body. Nevertheless, this does not preclude the fact that ideological and practical reasons have led civilian stakeholders to share their military partners' desire to extend the transitional period and avoid general elections. Foremost among the reasons was that the ideological orientations of some of the constituent organisations are inconsistent with democratic principles; the Baath Party, for example, entertains a concept of democracy that has little to do with generally accepted definitions of democracy. It underscores the difference by using such terms as 'people's democracy' and 'democracy of participation and accomplishment'.[42]

The Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) also baulks at the notion of re-democratisation for ideological reasons, having questioned the value of democracy since the mid-1960s. It argued at times that Sudanese social foundations were too weak to support a Western-style parliamentary system due to the disproportionate weight of the country's conventional feudal forces. At other times it called for a new democracy that would limit the activities of counterrevolutionary forces.[43] The party termed this variety 'democracy of the society' in which the people would have an authentic role in policy design and decision-making, thereby ensuring true democratisation.

The main practical reason why left-wing organisations in power wanted to avoid elections was that any electoral process would open the doors to political forces they deemed undesirable, most notably the Umma Party, the Democratic Unionist Party, the Islamists who had been the mainstay of the former regime, and some traditional social forces. Most of the small parties that have come to dominate the political scene today, such as the Sudanese Baath, the Nasserist Democratic Unionist Party, and the Sudanese Communist Party, would lose their influence or vanish from the scene entirely were free elections held. The Imam Sadiq al-Mahdi, leader of the Umma Party, wields the 'election card' with precisely this in mind. He has

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[40] 'Fī khiḍamm al-nizāʿ bayn al-sūdān wa Athyūbya wa Azmat sadd al-Nahḍa… ittifāqiyya jadīda tuwaṭṭid al-taʿāwun al-ʿaskarī bayn al-kharṭūm wa-l-qāhira', *Al Jazeera*, 3/3/2021, accessed on 20/4/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3xFF60B

[41] 'Tastamirr li-khamsat ayyām… inṭilāq munāwarat 'ḥumāt al-nīl' al-ʿaskariyya bayn al-jayshayn al-sūdānī wa-l-miṣrī', *Al Jazeera*, 26/5/2021, accessed on 20/4/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3Mm7yJ9

[42] Abdulaziz Hussein al-Sawi, *Dirāsa Naẓariyya wa Taṭbīqiyya fī Tārīkh al-Sūdān al-Ḥadīth* (Khartoum: Dar Azza for Publishing, 2016), p. 7.

[43] Kamal al-Juzouli, *al-Shuyūʿiyūn al-Sūdāniyūn wa-l-Dīmuqrāṭiyya* (Khartoum: Dar Azza for Publishing, 2003), pp. 79-80. For more on the concept of democracy in Marxist thought, see: Crawford Brough Macpherson, *The Real World of Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1966), pp. 13-17.

reminded those parties that his party had won a majority of parliamentary seats in every election held in Sudan and warned them that if they got up to any 'funny business' he would call for early elections.[44] The smaller political parties, therefore, began to speak of a 'democracy with guaranteed consequences', meaning elections should not be held until they could be assured of winning. Towards this end, they have worked to prolong the transitional period, insisting that elections should not take place until the processes of eradicating the old regime were complete. These included the restructuring of the military and security apparatuses and the realisation of domestic peace. As all these processes take a long time — and time is what those small groups need in order to strengthen their position in power and in society — there was a good likelihood they would reach an agreement with their military partner to extend the transitional period as long as possible.[45]

Although the SCP continued to share this outlook, call for the eradication of the old regime, and waver on the matter of re-democratisation, none of this reduced the mounting acrimony between it and its fellow FFC organisations, nor prevented it from withdrawing from the SPA and FFC. As noted in the party's Central Committee reports, the party leadership had reached the conclusion that the transitional government, in both its military and civilian components, was taking what it termed 'the soft-landing approach', taking up the same policies as the old regime that

> *serve the interests of the parasitic capitalist cliques and promote the linkage with regional and international forces that have no interest in the advancement of the revolution [... Instead, they] are conspiring against it in order to preserve their interests in Sudan and the region as a whole, so that they can continue to plunder Sudan's wealth and resources; use its geopolitical position to control this peoples and countries of the region; use Sudan's Red Sea coast to control that international and commercial waterway; and push Sudan into taking the same political path that leads to a country's underdevelopment, the impoverishment of its people, its subjugation to the dictates of foreign powers, and orbiting in the galaxy of global capitalism and its influence, all in the service of the accumulation and concentration of wealth in capitalist countries at the expense of the people and the nation.*[46]

The SCP would not have taken such a radical position had it not been so alarmed by implications of the Juba Peace Agreement between the transitional government and some of the militant movements.[47] To the party, that agreement signalled a victory for the military contingent, and the militant movements that signed it, such as the Justice and Equality Movement, had once espoused Islamist outlooks. In response, the SCP quickly turned to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North, led by Abdulaziz al-Helu. The SPLM-North is a left-wing movement that shares many of the SCP's outlooks and positions. In September 2020, they concluded an agreement to counter the Juba agreement. In it, they reaffirmed their commitment to the revolution's rejection of any compromise or agreement called for by the soft-landing project and stressed the priority of rooting out the former regime and dismantling its parasitic capitalist pillars and system, and the need to begin laying the foundations for a new Sudan based on a socio-political method that achieves real democracy. In an expression of their conviction that the flame of the revolution was still burning, the SCP and SPLM-North released a joint statement reaffirming their commitment to "the achievement of

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[44] 'Kānī mānī al-Imām.. al-ṣādīq al-mahdī yuṭālib bi-iʿṭāʾ ḥizbih aghlabiyyat ikhtiyārāt wulāt al-wilāyāt… mathā qāl wa limāthā yaʿtaqid thālik? al-ijāba fī al-vīdyu.. #vīdyu_būst #zūl_būst', *Facebook*, 13/1/2020, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3J9R6KM

[45] In a public speech, Mr Mubarak al-Fadil, leader of the Umma Party, said that a military commander in the Sovereignty Council informed him of an offer proposed by the Forces of Freedom and Change to extend the transitional period by ten years.

[46] 'Dawrat al-lajna al-markaziyya yanāyir 2021 – al-waraqa al-siyāsiyya (4/5)', *Sudanese Communist Party Facebook*, 27/2/2021, accessed on 20/4/2022, at: https://bit.ly/37A7xCp

[47] 'Ittifāq Jūba lil-salām fī al-Sūdān: Taḥaddiyātuh wa Furaṣ Najāḥih', *Situation Assessment*, ACRPS, 10 December 2020, p. 3, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3I7e8k6

radical change and the making of a new Sudan"and to reforming the course of the transitional period, to be based on a democracy that is indivisible from the democracy of society, which is itself based on collective, grassroots action outside of official organisational frameworks and is organised through the independent, democratic platforms the masses have created and will create in the future, in order to secure their rights, participate in decision-making, and follow up on implementation.[48]

As a result of this course of action, the SCP now played both sides of the fence as a participant in the government and the opposition. On the one hand, it pushed some of its members to take up posts or duties in the government's administration; on the other hand, following its departure from the SPA and the FFC, it disassociated itself from the government and called for its fall. The strategy led some to dub the SCP the 'hidden ruler'.[49] Such radical, ideologically informed ideas and stances are par for the course among traditional Leninist parties which exclude any political groups that espouse alternative visions for society and try to come to power through periodic elections in accordance with normal democratic procedures. The attitude might be accepted by the party's base and supporters, but it does nothing to advance democratic transition.

Perhaps it is now obvious that neither the military nor the civilian wing of the transitional government have been keen on transitioning to democracy. This leaves only the external factors: will international political and economic powers play a key role in pushing the transitional government toward democratisation, as the Stepan model anticipates?

Foreign Powers and the Democratic Transition

In his transition model discussed earlier, Stepan spoke of some European instances of successful democratic transition via 'external military conquest', citing as examples the imposition of democracy on Germany and Italy after their defeat by the Allied Powers in World War II. He quickly points out that this experience was unique and unrepeatable. He also observes that most re-democratisation processes took place in the 1960s, and that they will be mainly driven by domestic political and social forces for the foreseeable future. While foreign military forces will not be involved, international political and economic powers and political blocs would continue to play an important role.

Stepan reached this conclusion in 1986, yet less than two decades later we watched attempts to impose democracy by external military conquest in Iraq (2003), Afghanistan (2001) and Libya (2011). This naturally leads us to ask: how might foreign powers support the transition to democracy? Will the US administration and EU countries push for democratisation in Sudan? We will attempt to answer these questions below.

EU Countries and the Transition to Democracy

EU countries have shown great concern for the situation in Sudan and maintained a significant presence in the Sudanese political sphere through their various embassies, missions, and envoys. Their interest is motivated by a variety of geopolitical and security reasons. Sudan (according to their assessment) directly influences the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, Africa, and the Middle East. Security circumstances in all these areas have direct and indirect impacts on the security and well-being of EU countries. Therefore, they believe that supporting the Sudanese people's transition to a democratic system will promote peace and stability across the region. We should note, however, that with regard to Sudan per se, they care only about two things: fighting extremism and terrorism, and stopping emigration and illegal migration to European countries. This requires strong governments that can act as border guards and preserve security and stability in the region.

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[48] 'Ittifāq Siyāsī bayn al-ḥizb al-Shuyūʿī wa-l-ḥaraka al-Shaʿbiyya – al-ḥelu', *Sudanipost*, 6/9/2020, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3t2O3hL

[49] Yassir Mahjoub al-Hussein, 'al-Shuyūʿī' al-Sūdānī… al-ḥākim al-khafiy al-mutalawin', *al-Sharq*, 18/1/2020, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3CHmu0D; Mohammed Ali.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the EU mission in Sudan has focused its attention on the military establishment and on educational standards and the content offered students in order to 'build a new and different generation of professionals for Sudan and the region'.[50] Accordingly, the military establishment's educational system must be developed to include 'combatting terrorism and human trafficking, border management, fighting smuggling, conflict resolution, and peacekeeping and peace-building'.[51]

In other words, when EU countries talk about helping Sudan with its transition to democracy, they mean, among other things, restructuring the Sudanese military establishment and changing its educational curriculum so that this establishment will safeguard and serve European interests and aims in the region. In this context, the strategic aim is not to let the Sudanese revolution succeed completely, which would bolster the Arab Spring wave, yet not to let it fail completely either, which would precipitate a descent into civil warfare that would become a source of instability and security breakdown in the region.

To facilitate this strategy, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2524 in June 2020. Jointly sponsored by the UK and Germany, the decision provided for the establishment of a mission to assist Sudan in the transitional period.[52] The purpose of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), as stated in the resolution, was to '[a]ssist the country's political transition towards democratic governance', the protection and promotion of human rights, and sustainable peace.[53] In his first briefing to the Security Council, Volker Perthes, who was appointed head of UNITAMS, identified the four strategic aims of the mission: to 'assist the political transition; support peace processes; assist peacebuilding, civilian protection and rule of law; and support the mobilization of economic, development and humanitarian assistance'.[54] Subsequently he said that he looked forward to working with the UN and its partners to support the peaceful transition to democracy in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 2524. However, apart from such statements, the EU, in our opinion, is unlikely to take definitive, practical steps to help accelerate democratic transition in Sudan.

The US and the Democratic Transition

One cannot help but note that once the administration of former US President Donald Trump (2017-2021) got what it wanted from Sudan (i.e., adding it to the collection of Arab states that have signed peace treaties with Israel), it stopped pushing the transitional government toward democratisation. When Congress passed the Sudan Democratic Transition, Accountability, and Fiscal Transparency Act of 2020, it met with Trump's veto. Congress overrode this with more than the required two-thirds majority, making the act binding on the Trump administration and its successor.

Will the Democratic administration under President Joe Biden (2021-) put the Sudan Democratic Transition Act into action and push for democratisation in Sudan? Or will it take the line of the Saudi-UAE-

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[50] The press covered the mission's visit, by the President of the EU delegation Robert Van Den Dool and the EU ambassadors to Sudan, to the Nimeiri High Military Academy in Omdurman. Van Den Dool said that 'we are very interested to understand the level and content of the advanced education offered to students in this central institution, as well as the ongoing educational transformation that will cover human rights and international and humanitarian law that will lead to building a new, different generation of professionals in Sudan and the region'. He further insisted that the EU remains a strong supporter of the Sudanese people's transition to a real democracy [which could become] a beacon of safety and stability in the region. See: 'Al-safīr Robert Van: Amn al-sūdān muhimm jiddan bil-nisba lil-ittiḥād al-ūrūbbī', *SUNA*, 3/3/2021, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/35QVFuU

[51] This is according to Major General Ezz al-Din Othman Taha, director of the Academy, while welcoming the EU ambassadors and insisting that the Academy is in the process of developing an 'educational system' for the military and civilian students in the next stage that ensures fighting terrorism and human trafficking, managing the borders, combatting smuggling, conflict resolution, and peace-keeping and peace-building; see: Ibid.

[52] It is worth mentioning that this resolution followed a speech by Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok on 27 January 2020 addressing the UN Secretary-General, in which he requested the UN pursue a Security Council mandate to establish a process to support peace in accordance with Chapter VI of the UN Charter (viz. pacific settlement of disputes); see: 'Al-Sūdān yaṭlub min majlis al-amn inshāʾ biʿtha khāṣa li-daʿm al-salām', *Anadolu Agency*, 9/2/2020, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3tWJi8V

[53] 'Majlis al-amn yuqarrir inshāʾ biʿtha umamiyya jadīda fī al- sūdān', *UN News*, 4/6/2020, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3i4ujEe

[54] For more on UNITAMS, see: https://bit.ly/3GMroNZ

Egyptian alliance which favours manufacturing a regime in Khartoum in their own image? It is impossible to come up with a definitive answer to this question because the Act was formulated in such a way as to leave things ambiguous. If the administration wants to press towards democratisation, the Act permits this, just as it permits steps to promote economic reform and the fight against corruption. The piece of legislation gives the administration a broad remit. It calls for support for: the protection of human rights, accountability for human rights crimes and abuses, oversight over intelligence and security services, strengthening rule of law and democratic governance, programmes to further economic growth, private sector production, opportunities for peace and long-term stability, utilisation of natural resources, the smooth transfer of power, strengthening government institutions and financial transparency, and fighting corruption.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the (European and American) international community are inclined to support the transition to democracy in Sudan, and to secure economic support for this process. But it is also clear that the international community's support comes with strings attached. The first demand, which is undisputed among partners abroad and at home, is to dismantle the security and administrative apparatuses created by the former regime and restructure these institutions to serve the aims of the European-American alliance and its partners in the region. The second demand is two-pronged. It requires, firstly, the transfer of power from the military side of the transitional government to the civilian side. It is a condition that is hard for the generals in power and their regional allies to accept. Secondly, it requires that Sudan submit to the prescriptions of the World Bank and IMF (especially those pertaining to lifting subsidies on essential goods and deregulating the local currency). The consequences of this would be hard for the Sudanese people to bear, to such an extent that they could trigger another grassroots uprising that would destroy all hope for the transition to democracy. The net result is that the democratic transition will remain incomplete.

Suitability of Alfred Stepan's Model to the Sudanese Case

It may now be appropriate to refer back to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper to see whether the transitologists' model helped us answer them. The explanatory ability of this model, as Stepan formulated it, seems clear and strong in some respects, but less so in others. Stepan anticipated that domestic socio-political forces would be the main drivers of most democratisation process, especially after a major change occurs within the authoritarian regime, and this certainly applies to a large extent to the Sudanese case. Firstly, the change was the product of an act undertaken by a group at the top of the military-security establishment within the regime; secondly, it was a response to grassroots pressures coordinated by a broad political front.[55]

It is irrefutable that the Sudanese Security Council, renamed the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and then became one of the transitional government partners, originated from within the regime. Lieutenant General Abdel Rahman Burhan had served as the inspector general of the armed forces, Lieutenant General Awad ibn Auf as Omar al-Bashir's first vice president and defence minister, and Lieutenant-General Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo (Hemeti) as commander of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the special forces of the regime. As for Lieutenant General Salah Gosh, the architect and executor of the coup operation against the Salvation government, he had been a pillar of the Bashir regime's security apparatus for many years.[56]

According to Stepan's model, a group of senior leaders in the regime would not take the initiative to overthrow it until the demands of opposition forces reached critical mass, nor unless these leaders could

[55] To speak of the military-security group's role in effecting change is not to diminish the role of the massive popular movement, which witnessed the participation of social sectors and political entities including the youth, professionals, and political parties. For more on this popular movement, see: 'Thawrat dīsambir: al-siyāqāt wa-l-fāʿilūn', pp. 1-4.

[56] It is worth mentioning that Gosh was abruptly discharged from the apparatus in 2009 and appointed a consultant for security affairs. He was discharged again in 2011 and arrested in 2012 on charges of participation in a coup attempt. He was released by presidential pardon in 2013 (after seven months in prison), then reinstated in the apparatus without warning on 11 February 2018.

hope to remain politically active and influential in the following period. This, too, conforms with the Sudanese case. Had key figures in the Sudanese military and security leaderships not felt the force of the grassroots opposition to the regime, and had some of these figures — Burhan and Hemeti, in particular — not wanted to ensure their personal safety and secure the interests of their regional allies, they would not have ventured on the new revolutionary course.

Stepan's model predicts that the opposition forces' success in forging a broad-based coalition is no guarantee of that coalition's sustainability. The alliance could dissolve and lose its potential for collective action just as quickly as it came together unless its leaders were equipped with the organisational skills and ideological flexibility to enable them to engage in essential major negotiating activities. This, too, applies to the Sudanese case. We have seen how the Professionals Association unravelled and how the FFC alliance remains plagued by rifts and fragmentation. We have also seen how the FFC's constituent parties and groups lacked the requisite organisational skills and ideological flexibility to conduct the bargaining processes needed to keep major alliances together.

On the other hand, the Sudanese case departs from the model in that opposition forces' ability to forge a coalition and work together to the regime did not translate into a foreseeable transition to democracy, regardless of whether the process was driven by civilian socio-political forces, as the Stepan model predicts, or by the military-security collective that had turned against the regime.

A starker contrast between the Sudanese case and the model has two facets. One is that the opposition political forces did not enter talks with the Islamist-dominated civilian quarters of the regime's leadership hierarchy but with the military-security component, one which is not supported by an active political institution and lacks deep social roots. This is a sign that we are not looking at a kind of broad coalition that could be expected to carry out the process of democratic transformation.

The second facet reveals a greater divergence from the model. Although senior military and security leaders in the Sudanese regime supported the revolution, as was the case in Spain, this support did not emanate from an independent 'reformist will' such as that displayed by regime figures in the post-Franco era. After Franco died, he was succeeded by Juan Carlos in November 1975. As reigning monarch, Carlos enjoyed full constitutional powers and control of material resources. Yet, he opted to lead a democratic transformation and, as such, personally became the engine of change. Carlos chose Filipe González, a member of the old guard, to serve as prime minister. In that capacity, González drew on his political expertise to extend his influence over the bureaucratic establishment while King Carlos steered the democratisation process with acumen and finesse. The result was one of the few instances of the transition from the grip of an authoritarian regime to a (pluralistic, parliamentary) democratic system through 'reform from above' without civil war, popular revolution, or foreign military intervention.[57]

The Sudanese case has nothing comparable. President Bashir did not leave power as a result of natural death, as had Franco. Burhan did not assume control as a legitimate successor to the head of the former regime nor in accordance with the constitution, as did King Juan Carlos (1975-2014) in Spain; instead, he came to power by dint of a scheme, devised by regional actors (the UAE-Saudi-Egyptian axis), which was antidemocratic and bent on obstructing any democratisation process in the Arab region.[58] Then he was confirmed in this position, in form, by virtue of a new Constitutional Charter co-signed with opposition forces. Unlike González in Spain, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok did not come from the ranks of the

[57] Eric Solsten & Sandra W. Meditz (eds.), *Spain: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1988).

[58] Azmi Bishara, 'Mulāḥaẓāt ʿan al-ʿĀmil al-Khārijī fī al-Intiqāl al-Dīmuqrāṭī', *Siyasat Arabiya*, no. 38 (May 2019), pp. 7-24.

former regime, nor did he have González's ability or expertise to cause government institutions to move in the directions he wanted or to communicate effectively with the various political and social forces.

The Sudanese case thus exposes some shortcomings of the Stepan model. The model gives no consideration to the output of 'dependency theories' studies, nor does it significantly account for the (direct or indirect) influence of external forces, whether in the process of overthrowing the regime or in the process of democratic transition. Azmi Bishara draws attention to these shortcomings in his examination of the role played by external factors in the transition to democracy (at the global level), demonstrating that the transitologists' model cannot be applied to a number of cases, including the Arab case, and underscores the extent to which the regional environment was a factor that complicated the transition to democracy in the Arab world.[59] This study on the Sudan case observes the same phenomena that Bishara noted and described in other cases around the world where the external factor was instrumental to either accelerating or impeding the transition to democracy. In Sudan, the (regional) external factor played a crucial part in the overthrow of the Salvation regime and continued to play a central role in efforts to obstruct democratisation. In fact, in the Sudanese case, we could say that the regional factor is no longer a foreign element but rather akin to a key domestic political player.

In this regard, we must ask a final question concerning the Stepan model. Presuming that the interim government does not wish or is unable to proceed with the transition to democracy, will it evolve into another authoritarian system, or will it collapse, opening the doors to anarchy and civil strife? The model as first formulated in 1986 does not offer a satisfying answer. This led Stepan to publish another study more than 25 years later, in 2013, titled "Democratization Theory and the 'Arab Spring'". He asks what concepts from earlier works on democratisation need to be modified, and what new perspectives researchers need in order to comprehend what happened during and after the Arab Spring uprisings. A major modification (or revision) he introduced to his transition model is particularly striking: Stepan now posited that the transition from an authoritarian regime might not be to a democratic system (the basis of his previous model) but rather to a regime that mixes authoritarian and democratic elements. He termed it the 'authoritarian-democratic hybrid'[60] and explained that, in such a system, most major actors believe that they will lose legitimacy and their followers' support should they fail to embrace certain core features of democracy (such as elections to produce the leaders of government). At the same time, they conclude that they must also retain (or at least allow) some authoritarian controls on key aspects of the emerging polity if they hope to further their goals and (again) retain their supporters.[61]

Conclusion

The new position developed by Stepan will certainly come as a disappointment to advocates of democratisation. But it will be welcomed by authoritarian regimes in the Arab region and met with an element of relief among many European-American decision-makers, especially those who feel morally uneasy toward, and face popular opposition at home because of, their support for authoritarian regimes that abuse human rights, but who simultaneously believe that the fall of those regimes would jeopardise their country's interests in the region. Therefore, it is not unlikely that the agreed-upon aim among those international powers and their authoritarian partners in the region is to transition Sudan into a 'hybrid' system that would leave certain elements of the former authoritarian regime in possession of the keys to power while preserving a minimal level of democracy.

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59 Ibid.

60 Alfred Stepan & Juan J. Linz, 'Democratization Theory and the "Arab Spring"', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 24, no. 2 (April 2013), p. 20.

61 Ibid.

Should this be the case, the ruling military-civilian alliance will find support from the US and the EU countries (and their regional allies) that will enable it to dismantle the institutions of the former regime, assimilate a number of militant movements into the political process, strengthen the relationship with the regional power triumvirate (the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt), phase into the international security and economic orders, and gradually evolve into a 'hybrid' regime. Domestically, the transitional government will encounter challenges of a magnitude that could not only bring down the transitional government but may also lead to the collapse of the Sudanese state itself. The foremost challenge has to do with the country's abnormal military structures: Sudan has four active armies operating on the ground, not to mention the forces at the command of the militant movements. Moreover, a portion of the military, security, and police forces remain loyal to the National Congress Party.[62] It is impossible to say for certain whether the military component of the transitional government has the ability to control this complicated military situation and restructure the forces (in accordance with the allies' specifications) or whether it will follow in the footsteps of the Bashir regime and be ousted from power. The other challenges pertain to the civilian contingent of the transitional government: firstly, the splintering of its political alliance and inability of its constituent groups to agree on an acceptable formula for joint action; secondly, the inability to build new government institutions by which the state directs the revolutionary momentum and translates it into realities on the ground; and, thirdly, the inability to remedy the increasingly grave economic crisis.

As it tries to extricate itself from this predicament, the transitional government will find itself following two parallel courses. One is to fully engage in the order of the Saudi-UAE-Egyptian regional triumvirate's axis: a course that will be pursued by the military component and the civilian groups that favour it. The other is to reignite the grassroots revolution by mobilising the poor and underprivileged who can from time to time be roused to march and demonstrate in the streets and squares. This is the course that some left-wing parties (above all the SCP) will take, as well as many youth groups that championed the revolution from the outset. Perhaps these difficult choices are what made the prime minister appear more pessimistic than usual in a speech to the Sudanese people:

> *our country is facing harsh circumstances that threaten its unity and cohesion, in which the discourse of hate and the spirit of tribal discord run rampant. This state of fracture could lead us to a state of anarchy in which gangs and criminal groups prevail. It also contributes to the spread of animosity among all segments of the population, which could bring about a civil war that would destroy everything. This danger threatens not only our country; it could drag the entire region into instability. Any threat of instability in a country such as Sudan will present a unique and qualitatively different situation, unprecedented in the world.*[63]

It appears that the prime minister's reference to a devastating civil war was not so much a diagnosis of the current domestic situation as it was an urgent appeal to the international community (viz. the EU and the US) to step in before it is too late. It echoed a previous appeal Hamdok made to the UN secretary-general to intervene to protect the transitional period.

If there is a lesson we can draw from the successful models of democratic transition (such as that in Spain) it is, as one researcher put it, that 'democracy has to be chosen by real, live political actors who have plenty of room for making the wrong and right decisions', and that 'it hinges on effective and legitimate political leadership supported by competent and well-organised political institutions with deep roots in

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62 'Thawrat dīsambir: al-siyāqāt wa-l-fāʿilūn'.

63 'al-Sūdān #sūnā/ khiṭāb dawlat rāīs majlis al-wuzarāʾ dr. ʿaballah ḥamdūk lil-umma al- sūdāniyya', *Youtube*, 15/6/2021, accessed on 13/3/2022, at: https://bit.ly/3tS2IvB

society'. [64] Unfortunately, most of such qualities and conditions are lacking in the current Sudanese case. Political actors (both civilian and military) do not have the room to make major decisions — many of them lack popular legitimacy and/or executive efficacy, and they are not supported by well-organised political institutions with roots in society. Indeed, Stepan himself said that democratic transformation is not as contingent on the existence of institutions as on the type of leaders who are committed to its values and endowed with political acumen.

[64] Omar G. Encarnacion, 'Spain After Franco: Lessons in Democratization', *World Policy Journal*, vol. 18, no. 4 (Winter 2001/2002), p. 43.

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