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# SUDAN'S UPRISING: THE FALL OF A DICTATOR

*Mai Hassan and Ahmed Kodouda*

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On 19 December 2018, citizens in the provincial town of Atbara in northern Sudan burned down the local headquarters of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP). Their protest was sparked by rising prices and the lifting of subsidies on basic goods, but demonstrators linked these economic hardships to the rule of longtime president Omar al-Bashir and his autocratic Inqaz (Salvation) regime. In the following days, protests spread across the large northeast African country of 43 million people, with participants demanding an end to Bashir's military-backed presidency and a transition to civilian rule.

Protests and other political challenges were not new to Bashir. Since coming to power in 1989, he had spent the better part of three decades crafting a personalist autocracy that tied the fortunes of different political actors—particularly the various branches of the security apparatus—to his continued rule. This strategy had allowed him to survive past cycles of protests, including those that swept through sub-Saharan Africa during the “third wave” of democratization in the early 1990s and toppled governments during the Arab Spring of 2011–12.

The 2018–19 protests proved different. Less than four months after the demonstrations began, the ranks of their participants in Sudan's capital Khartoum alone swelled to several hundred thousand. In addition to devising their own slogans, protesters adopted chants from other popular revolutions—including the Arab Spring's mantra, “The people want the fall of the regime.” They staged a sit-in outside the headquarters of the armed forces, where they promised to stay until Sudan transitioned to civilian rule. The protesters' resolve appeared to have won out when,

on 11 April 2019, Bashir was forced to step down by his own internal-security apparatus.

Bashir's personalization of power led many to assume that his downfall would also mean the end of the Inqaz regime. One of the protesters' favorite chants had been a simple request to Bashir: "Just fall." Personalist autocratic regimes rarely outlast their leader's grip on power because, in creating such a regime, the leader deliberately weakens the capacity of other political actors in order to reduce the chances of a successful challenge to his rule.<sup>1</sup> And recent evidence from the Arab Spring suggests that authoritarian regimes are likely to break down in the face of a popular uprising if they lack a dynastic family and significant oil rents.<sup>2</sup> By 2019, Bashir's Sudan had fallen into this category due to the secession of oil-rich South Sudan.

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Following Bashir's ouster, the group of military officers who led the coup formed the Transitional Military Council (TMC). This entity began negotiating with the opposition umbrella group that had emerged over the months of protest, the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), to chart a path for the country's transition to civilian rule. By the end of August, the two groups had signed a constitutional declaration, and a new transitional executive body and prime minister were sworn in. Despite these positive developments, doubts remain about the future of the transition. Since Bashir's fall, it has become increasingly clear that the TMC represents a regeneration of parts of the old regime, and that this junta both is unwilling to step down and has the capacity to cling to power.

Evaluating Sudan's prospects for democratization requires examining the political landscape that Bashir left behind and understanding how elements of his personalist regime survived his fall. Faced with an economic crisis that limited his ability to dole out patronage, Bashir prioritized buying the loyalty of the security apparatus over sustaining patronage to the ruling party and the urban population. To hold his personalistic regime together, Bashir allowed the security forces to secure access to independent revenue streams. Yet under mounting pressure from a combination of economic strain and social unrest, Sudan's security organs opted to protect these cash flows by acting against Bashir himself.

Dictatorships around the world are becoming more personalistic. Leaders use state resources to buy loyalty, thereby enhancing their political power and weakening checks on that power—at least for a time.<sup>3</sup>

But the Sudanese coup and its aftermath suggest that, under pressure, personalistic regimes may quickly evolve in a way that strengthens alternative power centers. In part, this is because different ways of providing patronage to agencies have different impacts on those agencies' institutionalization. The consequences of personalization, in particular its downstream effects on regime durability, turn out to be more ambiguous than commonly thought.

## Weakening State and Society

Worldwide, the greatest threat to autocrats' rule has come from elites, who have the clout and resources to influence political actors. Of the autocrats who fell between 1946 and 2008, 68 percent were removed by a coup d'état orchestrated from within the political elite. There were 169 documented coup attempts in Africa alone from 1950 to 2010; more than 50 percent were successful.<sup>4</sup> Bashir's ability to shield himself from elite threats for nearly three decades was impressive, especially because he came to power in a coup carried out jointly by the military and the National Islamic Front (NIF). The NIF was the political party of the Islamist Movement, Sudan's offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. These actors were strong enough after the coup to mount a serious challenge to then–Brigadier General Bashir, initially the head of the junta that took power in 1989. But Bashir, who claimed the title of president in 1993, personalized the regime. He tied the fates of the powerful actors who had organized the coup to his own and dismantled their independent sources of power. At the same time, to guard against the danger of urban unrest, he enacted policies in Khartoum and other cities aimed at weakening civil society and using economic incentives to keep citizens quiescent.

**Political Elites.** Over the course of Bashir's rule, his relationship with other political elites evolved in ways that amounted to the creation of an increasingly personalistic regime. He sought to defuse potential threats by incorporating other, mostly loyal elites into the state apparatus, thereby ensuring that key positions would be held by individuals willing to use state resources to support him in the event of a challenge.

Initially, access to the state for loyalists was fairly institutionalized through the ruling party.<sup>5</sup> The 1989 coup was masterminded by Islamist politician Hassan al-Turabi, then leader of the NIF, but it was orchestrated under the guise of a military takeover because regional powers were hostile to the Muslim Brotherhood. As a means of concealing the NIF's direct involvement in the coup, top state positions were formally allocated to junior army officers who were themselves Islamists. But al-Turabi ran a shadow state in which top Islamists who were not part of the military crafted policy and monitored their counterparts in state

institutions. After the 1998 creation of the NCP, which absorbed the NIF, and the reopening in 1996 of the National Assembly (dissolved at the time of the 1989 coup), party leaders began to take on more formal positions in the state.

Tension between al-Turabi and Bashir grew during the 1990s, as al-Turabi attempted to use his position as speaker of the National Assembly and his sway within the Islamist Movement to restrain the president. Among other moves, he demanded that Bashir step down as head of the military. In December 1999, Bashir responded by purging al-Turabi and those considered loyal to him from the party and the government. This consolidation of power marked the beginning of the NCP's transformation from an ideologically driven, institutionalized party into a patronage-based party that placed few checks on Bashir.<sup>6</sup> As Bashir's presidency progressed, he also removed other party stalwarts who tried to challenge him.

The personalization of the regime and Bashir's cultivation of patron-client ties were evident at lower levels of government as well. In order to put in place a state apparatus that would support the establishment of an Islamic order, the Inqaz regime carried out a policy known as *tamkeen* (empowerment). *Tamkeen* involved purging institutions such as the judiciary, government departments, and universities of career bureaucrats who were not seen as supportive of the cause and replacing them with devout Islamists. The latter were expected to design and implement policies that would speed up the "Civilization Project," the regime's plan to transform and Islamize Sudanese state and society. Later in Bashir's reign, devotion to the Islamist cause ceased to be enough to guarantee a state job (in part because many individuals had opportunistically joined the Islamist Movement); one also needed a *wasta* (connection) to one of the more senior members of the elite, who themselves owed their positions to connections with Bashir.<sup>7</sup> Since *tamkeen* blatantly contravened notions of meritocracy, it generated considerable anger among the public, and among professionals in particular.

***The Internal-Security Apparatus.*** Bashir, who himself came to power with the help of the military, clearly understood the dangers that the security apparatus posed to his political longevity. He pursued two main strategies for mitigating this threat, with the overall goal of weakening the security organs' independence and tying their fate to his own.

First, Bashir ensured that the various branches of Sudan's security apparatus were well funded. Security spending accounted for around 25 percent of the official national budget in 2016, and in reality may have made up as much as 70 percent of state expenditures. By comparison, spending on education and health combined amounted to a mere 3.3 percent of that year's budget.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, the security sector needed resources to fight the country's numerous civil conflicts, which included

a long-running war in what is now the independent Republic of South Sudan (1983–2005); additional conflicts in the western region of Darfur (2003–present) and in southern Blue Nile and South Kordofan (2011–present); and a simmering low-level insurgency in the country’s east. But the regime’s concentration of resources in the security sector exacerbated Sudan’s security challenges, since the lack of social spending on the periphery added to popular grievances and supplied further stimulus for rebellion.

Second, Bashir attempted to coup-proof his regime through fragmentation of the internal-security apparatus—a strategy that entails using different security organs as counterweights to one another, giving them overlapping responsibilities, and reducing their lines of communication and coordination.<sup>9</sup> The goal is to make it more difficult for any one branch of the security apparatus to organize a coup: Rivalries between different security organs increase the costs of collective action and inhibit cooperation on a coup plot. This strategy also lowers the likelihood that any coup attempt will succeed, since each security organ has the incentive and capacity to put down an attempt led by another branch.

Historically, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) had been the country’s most institutionalized and professionalized security organ. Many of its officers were career soldiers who received formal training abroad. But Bashir deliberately weakened the SAF and replaced institutionalized norms of professionalism with patrimonial norms of loyalty. While the army recruited from across the country, promotions in the officer corps came to be based on identity: The top ranks were made up of Islamist officers from Sudan’s riverine tribes, to which Bashir and other senior regime elites belonged. As Bashir channeled resources to the SAF’s upper echelons in order to sustain their loyalty, the capacity of the rank-and-file deteriorated.

Separately, Bashir empowered the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), Sudan’s secret police. This agency was responsible for silencing opposition to the regime. It clamped down on civil liberties (for instance, by censoring the press) and engaged in physical-integrity violations such as the arbitrary arrest and torture of opposition activists in “ghost houses.” In addition, NISS chased down potentially damaging rumors, both in Sudan and among large Sudanese diaspora communities abroad. Crucially, it was also tasked with spying on government agencies, including other coercive bodies.

By 2008, NISS was regularized as a fighting force in an effort to create a more effective counterweight to the army. The secret police assumed formal oversight of multiple ethnic militias, and its officers received military ranks. Though the top ranks of NISS draw heavily from the riverine tribes, the rest of the agency is more diverse by design. It is difficult to estimate the size of the organization because it employs informants in nearly every government agency, rural village, and urban neighborhood.

Bashir's regime also bolstered regional militias. Most notoriously, it armed the Janjaweed, an Arab tribal militia that drew largely from the Rizeigat ethnic group of Darfur, and allowed these fighters to commit ethnically motivated atrocities in that region. Unlike the army and NISS, the Janjaweed is ethnically homogenous. Scholars have suggested that this trait can make groups both more able and more willing to repress: more able because homogeneity simplifies coordination and communication; and more willing because it enables commanders to characterize out-groups (such as the African ethnic groups targeted by the Janjaweed in Darfur) as an existential threat to the in-group's way of life.<sup>10</sup>

Fragmentation of the security apparatus works only if a country's various security organs are able to counter one another. In Sudan, the Janjaweed's strength and autonomy began to threaten this balance. Some factions started to rebel against Bashir. In 2013, Bashir responded by turning certain Janjaweed factions into an official paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), under the leadership of Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (known as Hemedti). The RSF also served as a praetorian guard, with Bashir informally dubbing Hemedti "Himayti" (my protector). While the RSF has begun to open recruitment to a wider swath of the population, its top leaders are drawn from the Rizeigat, and primarily from Hemedti's extended family.

Bashir's use of government resources and positions to buy off elites gave him powerful levers of control, yet it also caused the state to function inefficiently. Posts were given not to the most competent or qualified applicants, but to those whose loyalty was seen as key for preserving regime stability. Some security organs were purposefully weakened, and the security apparatus as a whole was managed with an eye to inducing rivalry, thereby hindering cooperation. The costs of this inefficiency only grew over time. Al-Bashir's regime, however, treated state dysfunction as an acceptable price for keeping political elites in check.

**The Populace.** During his three-decade rule, al-Bashir confronted numerous challenges stemming from popular discontent. The most obvious manifestations of citizens' anger were the rebellions launched in the peripheries by residents of marginalized rural areas. But al-Bashir also had to manage discontent in urban areas, where lower costs of popular mobilization make protest more likely.<sup>11</sup> The regime was likely haunted by the knowledge that popular uprisings starting in Khartoum had toppled two of the country's past dictators: In 1964 and again in 1985, teachers, doctors, and other professionals in the capital launched strikes that spread to the rest of the country and eventually brought down military regimes.

Initially, the regime deliberately weakened civil society in urban areas. It prohibited political parties, broke up labor unions, and disbanded informal "neighborhood popular committees" that mobilized residents around

issues affecting them—groups that had played a role in past revolutions. Proregime counterparts of these elements of civil society were introduced over time. The regime eventually allowed opposition parties to operate, though most were coopted and not seen as genuine. Public-sector unions also functioned, but *tamkeen* ensured that they were headed by regime loyalists unwilling to risk their positions by fighting for workers' rights. Finally, the NCP used the neighborhood committees of the Islamist Movement as a tool for building clientelistic ties to the grassroots.

Much as al-Bashir successfully used cooptation to defang elite threats to his regime, he used money to forestall outbreaks of popular discontent. As in other autocracies with large urban populations, the regime fixed the price of basic commodities such as bread, gas, and electricity well below the market rate.<sup>12</sup> As of September 2018, a liter of gasoline cost less than US\$0.30—the third-lowest gas price in the world. Citizens took advantage of these low prices. Sudan experienced a boom in industrialization, electrification, and car ownership, and domestic oil consumption increased by around 10 percent per annum between 2000 and 2011.<sup>13</sup>

Al-Bashir's strategies for personalizing the regime and subduing civil society were only feasible due to Sudan's resource windfalls. Sudan began exporting large amounts of oil in 1999, and by 2007 it had become one of the world's top twenty oil-producing nations. Rising global oil prices, which reached \$130 per barrel by 2008, helped to prop up the regime (see Figure A at <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/supplements>) and compensate for its neglect of the country's traditional productive sectors, agriculture and livestock.

## The Economic Crisis

Juggling competing threats from political elites, the security sector, and civil society was a tall order, but al-Bashir was able to maintain his hold on power so long as the resources flowed. The situation changed in July 2011, with the secession of South Sudan. The territory that made up this new state had been home to three-quarters of Sudan's oil reserves, and so the split drastically reduced Sudan's revenue stream.<sup>14</sup> This loss of revenue was compounded by a drop in international oil prices. The result was a sharp decline in Sudan's terms of trade. The country's black-market exchange rate for U.S. dollars climbed steadily from less than 5 Sudanese pounds per dollar in 2011, to around 30 pounds per dollar at the beginning of 2018, to a high of roughly 70 pounds per dollar by December 2018 (see Figure B at [www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/supplements](https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/supplements)). In that month, inflation rose past 70 percent.

The regime was forced to scale back the web of patronage it had woven through the state, which weakened the NCP. While all political elites saw a drop in the amount of patronage they were receiving,

the change was felt especially sharply among Islamists in the ruling party. Bashir had historically used the cabinet to give elites access to state resources, but by September 2018 he was forced to cut the number of ministerial positions from 49 to 21.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, the rise in inflation reduced the value of the regime's payments to lower-level operatives, such as those running the neighborhood popular committees. Bashir no longer had the resources to buy the loyalty either of important elites or of the foot soldiers who served as the regime's link to the grassroots.

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International actors supplied further incentives for a downgrading of Islamists within the regime. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Qatar, Saudi

Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) provided aid to Sudan as a means of boosting their geopolitical influence. But after tensions pitting Qatar against Saudi Arabia and the UAE escalated in 2017, the latter two made continued aid contingent on Bashir's keeping Sudan's Islamists in check. While all top elites were nominally Islamist, Bashir began to disempower stalwart Islamists in favor of elites who were more loyal to him personally than to the Islamist cause.

On top of all this, the economic crisis prompted macroeconomic policy shifts that limited the regime's ability to favor urban areas. The government attempted to curb inflation by concurrently floating the exchange rate and restricting the money supply; the idea was that this would increase the demand for hard Sudanese currency, thereby artificially strengthening the Sudanese pound against foreign currencies. But this short-sighted strategy only increased the demand for cash. With a set amount of reserves, banks limited the amount that citizens could withdraw each day (at one point, to the equivalent of \$15), and citizens waited in line for hours to access their accounts. A new black market emerged in which citizens exchanged Sudanese pounds from their bank accounts for hard foreign currency at a rate higher than even the black-market exchange rate for cash. By November 2018, this black-market "check" rate hit 90 Sudanese pounds for \$1—roughly twice the official exchange rate at the time, and about 30 percent higher than the black-market cash exchange rate.

The government also reduced its subsidies for basic goods and restricted its imports of these goods. Since wheat was among the products affected, bakeries were forced to ration bread. When the government increased the cost of a bag of wheat without simultaneously allowing bakeries to raise the price of a loaf of bread, bakeries made loaves smaller

and airier. Given the expense of fuel subsidies (which consumed around 20 percent of government revenue in 2018), the government also limited fuel shipments. A black market for fuel emerged: Some individuals would wait in line to fill their tanks, then later pump out the fuel they had bought and sell it illegally at a large mark-up. Subsidies were cut and prices rose across all major cities, although less so in Khartoum. Due to the city's size, and consequent strategic importance, shipments of basic goods that had been scheduled to go to other states were often diverted to the capital.

Worsening conditions for Sudan's citizens proved a spur to the development of a more robust civil society that was independent of the regime. This renewed civil society poured much of its energy into seeking a reprieve from economic hardship. Professionals began to form shadow unions to mobilize for better pay and better working conditions. The Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors was launched in 2011 and held its first strike in 2012. In 2016, it joined with a shadow lawyers' union and a shadow journalists' union to form the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA). Other civil society groups began to demand political change. The Sudan Revolutionary Front (an alliance of armed groups), the National Consensus Forces (an alliance of leftist parties), the National Umma Party, and a coalition of civil society organizations came together under an umbrella initiative known as Sudan Call. Through this project, they attempted to show citizens that developing a genuine alternative to the regime was possible. Yet Sudan Call quickly lost legitimacy in the eyes of the public after infighting among movement leaders.

Despite being better funded than other state organs, the security apparatus, too, suffered during the economic downturn. Faced with a shrinking budget, security agencies sought out alternatives to informal allocations from Bashir. After 2011, these agencies focused on improving the efficiency and profit margins of various economic ventures that had come under their control, in addition to launching new ventures that were possible only with Bashir's blessing. For instance, sales by the Military Industry Corporation, which is largely run by the SAF, contributed to Sudan's becoming Africa's third-largest producer of arms as of 2015.<sup>16</sup> The security apparatus funneled arms to groups in neighboring South Sudan, Chad, Somalia, the Central African Republic, and Uganda, and even as far west as Côte d'Ivoire. In addition, Bashir offered the services of Hemedti's RSF to willing buyers, effectively turning the organization into a regional mercenary group. Since 2015, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have paid handsomely for RSF soldiers to fight against the Houthi rebels in Yemen, and RSF troops have also recently been deployed to Libya. While much of the payment is funneled to the Sudanese government, Hemedti's cut has increased over the past four years.

The economic crisis forced Bashir's personalized regime to reshape

its channels of patronage to the security apparatus. Individual security organs institutionalized their independent revenue streams and increasingly relied on this income as opposed to direct regime handouts. These organs, long central to Bashir's survival, thereby ceased to be financially wedded to his continued presidency.

## The Protests

The regime's implicit social contract with civilians—acceptance of autocracy in exchange for economic stability—was fraying. The worsening economic situation helped to spark demonstrations in 2011 during the Arab Spring. Subsequent waves of protests arose in June 2012 and September 2013 in response to austerity measures. The 2013 protests were sizeable and gained traction across urban areas. But the security organs violently repressed these protests, with some two-hundred civilians killed in less than a week.

In December 2018, with the economy deep in crisis, protests that were spontaneous, uncoordinated, and leaderless broke out in a number of Sudanese cities. The mobilization in Atbara signaled a shift in the nature of citizens' demands from purely economic to political. On December 19, a week after small demonstrations in the southern city of Damazin, school-girls in Atbara marched into one of the city's major markets chanting anti-austerity slogans after the price of bread tripled and the cost of their school meals doubled. Other residents joined the protests. They blamed rising prices on the Bashir government's economic policies and corruption, and they demanded an end to the Inqaz regime. Images of the protests, which took a riotous turn, quickly circulated on social media and inspired further demonstrations in Al-Gedarif and Madani south of Khartoum, Nyala in Darfur, and Port Sudan in the north.

Civil society leaders and genuine opposition parties capitalized on the groundswell of popular discontent, something they had not managed to do during previous bouts of protests. Much as with the Tunisian General Labor Union during the Arab Spring, the SPA became the backbone of the protests after it decided to "go political."<sup>17</sup> The association had been planning to hold a demonstration on December 25, originally envisioning this event as an economic protest to demand an increase in the monthly minimum wage (from the equivalent of \$6 to roughly \$120). Opposition political parties, however, convinced the SPA to stage a political demonstration that would link the economic crisis to the government's corruption and would call for the end of the regime. According to civil society leaders, this protest marked a turning point. The gathering drew between five- and ten-thousand people, making it one of the largest protests held in downtown Khartoum since the Inqaz regime came to power. This impressive showing proved that citizens were willing to respond to a call for an explicitly political protest.<sup>18</sup>

In January 2019, the different arms of the opposition came together to form the FFC. Given the unpopularity of individual opposition parties, however, it was agreed that the SPA would remain the face of the protests. Weekly “schedules” of organized resistance were announced via Facebook, Twitter, and old-fashioned flyers. On some days, the SPA asked civilians to attend a demonstration or protest. Other days were slated for “individual initiatives”—low-level acts of resistance such as changing one’s social-media profile picture or spray-painting anti-regime slogans on local streets. The FFC also asked citizens to form neighborhood popular committees to coordinate local demonstrations nationwide. These committees took on an important role in organizing guerrilla-style urban protests. With small protests taking place in multiple neighborhoods each day, security forces were spread thin across Khartoum and other major cities.

Women played a vital role in the uprising. Statements by activists as well as images from the protests indicate that women made up a substantial portion, and at times a majority, of participants. A long list of grievances linked to the Inqaz regime’s Islamization policies helped to propel this high turnout. For instance, the regime placed various restrictions on women’s employment in addition to policing their social lives. Most visibly, Sudan’s morality police enforced a strict dress code for women that forbade them from wearing pants or leaving their hair uncovered in public, among other restrictions.

Throughout the uprising, the SPA and the FFC, whose membership included armed rebel groups, insisted on exclusively nonviolent tactics. But between December and early April 2019, more than a hundred protesters were killed by the security organs. In a pattern common to protest cycles, funerals of the movement’s martyrs often sparked new spontaneous protests.<sup>19</sup>

The SPA ramped up its protest activity in April with the call for a “March of Millions.” This event, held on April 6—the anniversary of the 1985 popular uprising that toppled autocrat Jaafar Mohamed Nimeiri (1969–85)—is estimated to have drawn hundreds of thousands of protesters. It culminated in a demonstration in front of the SAF’s General Command (*qyiada*). As day turned to night, the FFC called for protesters to remain at the *qyiada* and engage in a permanent sit-in until the regime fell.

Over the next five days, the number of protesters grew, and it became increasingly clear that Bashir had become a liability to the financial interests and public image of the security apparatus. He had tried numerous strategies to solve the economic crisis (enacting austerity measures, appointing technocratic advisors) and to quell popular unrest (restricting social media, committing violence against protesters). No political solution that left him in government would appease the demonstrators.

Just after midday on April 11, General Awad Ibn Auf, Bashir’s vice-

president and defense minister, announced that the SAF, NISS, and the RSF, along with various police forces, had jointly removed Bashir from office. The coup leaders proclaimed a two-year transition to civilian rule, to be overseen by the security apparatus. Millions of people across the country simultaneously celebrated Bashir's removal and demanded the ouster of Ibn Auf, who was seen as too close to the ex-president to represent a change of regime. Within 36 hours, Ibn Auf stepped down and was replaced by Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who became head of the TMC, with Hemedti as his deputy.

How did the security apparatus, which Bashir had worked so hard to fragment, succeed in unifying to organize the coup? Salah Gosh, the head of NISS, played a critical role in coordination—a task for which he was well suited precisely because NISS had operatives embedded in other domestic-security organs. In particular, Gosh's ability to convince Hemedti to agree to the coup, thereby breaking his pledge to protect Bashir, was crucial given the RSF's fighting capacity. In addition, Gosh held talks with opposition leaders. Through these meetings, the security apparatus signaled its willingness to remove Bashir and attempted to secure implicit guarantees that the opposition, in return, would cooperate with a military coup. External backing was also important in unifying the security apparatus against Bashir. Gosh notified key regional and international actors in advance of the coup and received guarantees from Saudi Arabia and the UAE that they would offer financial support for a new regime.

## The Ongoing Transition

Despite Bashir's removal and Ibn Auf's replacement, the sit-in continued after April because protesters insisted on a *civilian* transitional government. Citizens transformed the area around the *qiyada* into a mini-state offering free food and healthcare, among other services. The site became a haven for artists; dilapidated colonial-era buildings were painted over with images honoring martyrs of the revolution and depicting visions of the future; dozens of stages were erected, with political activists speaking and artists performing every day and night. Young men and women created checkpoints to keep visitors from bringing in dangerous items; they served as the symbolic protectors of the uprising. In many ways, the sit-in became more effective at carrying out the responsibilities of governing than the Sudanese state itself had been under Bashir, and this gave the protesters hope about what civilian rule in a democratic Sudan could achieve.

As the sit-in continued, the FFC negotiated with the TMC to set the terms of the transition. Agreement on plans for a joint civilian-military transitional council initially seemed to be within reach, but negotiations stalled. This was in part because the TMC repeatedly postponed talks

after claiming to have uncovered coup plots. Whether or not these plots really existed, the TMC used them as a pretext to purge prominent Islamists, including many in security-sector institutions. Those purged were replaced by individuals loyal to Hemedti, thus setting the stage for a potential conflict between Islamists (both inside and outside the security forces) and the RSF.

Prospects for democratization seemed to collapse entirely after June 3, when the TMC ordered soldiers from different branches of the security apparatus to brutally disperse the ongoing sit-in. At least 120 protesters were killed and fifty raped. Bodies were pulled out of the River Nile for days afterwards, and some protest participants are still missing. The TMC also initiated a three-week-long internet shutdown, both to prevent the spread of incendiary videos showing the atrocities committed by TMC forces on June 3 and to impede further mobilization.

Yet these actions failed to quell Sudan's popular uprising. The FFC called for another countrywide "March of Millions" to be held on June 30, the thirtieth anniversary of the coup that brought in the Inqaz regime. Following three weeks of ground-level mobilization by neighborhood committees, citizens responded to the call. There were simultaneous protests in all of Sudan's major urban centers. By all accounts, these demonstrations were larger than the April 6 march immediately preceding Bashir's fall.

The psychological importance of June 30 cannot be understated. Civilians were expecting a bloodbath, but they came out to march regardless. Many spoke of performing *wudu*, or ritual Islamic washing, before leaving their homes: They wanted to be in a state of purity should they be martyred. The events of that day not only revealed the renewed strength and unity of civil society, but also served as an important catharsis for the country after four weeks of crackdowns.

At the same time, regional actors continued working toward brokering an agreement. After the massacre, Ethiopia's prime minister Abiy Ahmed publicly urged both sides to return to the negotiating table, while the TMC's Gulf supporters privately pressed the military council to do so.<sup>20</sup> In August, the FFC and the TMC signed a constitutional declaration that will shape the contours of the country's transition to multiparty elections, provisionally scheduled for 2022. The transition will be overseen by an eleven-person sovereign council consisting of five members appointed by each side and an eleventh chosen by mutual agreement. In addition, veteran United Nations economist Abdalla Hamdok was appointed prime minister.

The prospects for democratization remain tenuous. Though the country has nominally moved away from Bashir's personalist regime, many of his former military elites have retained high positions. These elites have already used their power to shape the transition in a way that benefits them. For instance, despite calls for TMC leaders to be tried for their

actions during the June 3 massacre and involvement in past atrocities, the constitutional agreement grants procedural immunity to members of the new government—including the TMC. Moreover, Burhan, the head of the TMC, is leading the sovereign council during the first part of the transition. And while Hamdok and the FFC will appoint the vast majority of the cabinet, the security apparatus demanded the right to appoint the defense and interior ministers, likely in order to scuttle any attempts at security-apparatus reform.

Despite the continued presence of elements of Bashir's old regime, the new government can improve the prospects for democratization if it begins to address at least two issues. First, the new government must tackle the underlying economic crisis. If Sudan's economy does not take a turn for the better, the security apparatus may try to thwart civilian rule by arguing that the civilian-led government has proven unable to improve citizens' livelihoods. Second, the transitional government must incorporate Sudan's traditionally marginalized groups, including those living in the periphery and women, and address these groups' demands. Doing so would begin the process of closing the deep societal fissures left behind by decades of Bashir's rule.

## NOTES

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1. Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 132. Geddes discusses the death rather than the overthrow of the leader, but the logic is similar.

2. Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Also see Sean L. Yom and F. Gregory Gause III, "Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On," *Journal of Democracy* 23 (October 2012): 74–88.

3. Erica Frantz, Andrea Kendall-Taylor, Joseph Wright, and Xu Xu, "Personalization of Power and Repression in Dictatorships," *Journal of Politics* (forthcoming).

4. Jonathan M. Powell and Clayton L. Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups from 1950 to 2010: A New Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 48 (March 2011): 249–59; Milan W. Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

5. On the impact of ruling parties on autocratic durability, see Geddes, "What Do We Know?"; Beatriz Magaloni, "Credible Power-Sharing and the Longevity of Authoritarian Rule," *Comparative Political Studies* 41 (April 2008): 715–41; Svolik, *Politics of Authoritarian Rule*; and Ora John Reuter, *The Origins of Dominant Parties: Building Authoritarian Institutions in Post-Soviet Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

6. Philip Roessler, *Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa: The Logic of the Coup-Civil War Trap* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

7. Laura Mann, "Wasta! The Long-Term Implications of Education Expansion and Economic Liberalisation on Politics in Sudan," *Review of African Political Economy* 41, no. 142 (2014): 561–78.
8. Nuba Reports, "Sudan Could Spend up to 70% of Its Budget on Several War Fronts This Year," *Quartz Africa*, 12 February 2016.
9. Sheena Chestnut Greitens, *Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
10. Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 36 (January 2004): 139–57. Also see Greitens, *Dictators and Their Secret Police*.
11. Robert H. Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa: The Political Basis of Agricultural Policies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Jeremy L. Wallace, *Cities and Stability: Urbanization, Redistribution, and Regime Survival in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
12. Bates, *Markets and States*; Wallace, *Cities and Stability*; Cameron Ballard-Rosa, "Hungry for Change: Urban Bias and Autocratic Sovereign Default," *International Organization* 70 (Spring 2016): 313–46; Henry Thomson, *Food and Power: Regime Type, Agricultural Policy, and Political Stability* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Rural residents were not explicitly excluded from these subsidies, but the citizens most able to take advantage of them lived in urban areas.
13. "Country Analysis Brief: Sudan and South Sudan," U.S. Energy Information Administration, 3 September 2014.
14. Khalid Mustafa Medani, "Strife and Secession in Sudan," *Journal of Democracy* 22 (July 2011): 135–49.
15. Reliance on the cabinet to incorporate other elites is a common strategy used by African leaders. See Leonardo R. Arriola, "Patronage and Political Stability in Africa," *Comparative Political Studies* 42 (October 2009): 1339–62 and Roessler, *Ethnic Politics and State Power*. Bashir used the cabinet to incorporate both NCP loyalists and political rivals, including leaders of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, which had fought a decades-long civil war against Khartoum.
16. Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan, "Sudan's Military Industry Corporation Display at the 2015 IDEX Convention," 9 March 2015, [www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/facts-figures/sudan/HSBA-IDEX-2015.pdf](http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/facts-figures/sudan/HSBA-IDEX-2015.pdf).
17. Ashley A. Anderson, *Going Political: Labor, Institutions and Democratic Unrest in North Africa* (unpublished manuscript, 2019).
18. Interview with FFC spokesperson, 15 May 2019.
19. Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
20. Declan Walsh, "In Sudan, a Power-Sharing Deal Propelled by a Secret Meeting and Public Rage," *New York Times*, 5 July 2019.