



CENTER FOR CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN STUDIES

# Unblocking the Pathway to Transition in Sudan

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## About Us

Established in 2016, the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies (CHS) is an independent research center that generates scholarship and engages in policy and practice on conflict mediation, humanitarian action, and post-conflict recovery in the Arab world and beyond. The Center works collaboratively with leading research organizations to inform evidence-based approaches to conflict response. CHS also work with key stakeholders concerned with humanitarian action and peacemaking to facilitate multi-track dialogues, engage in mutual learning, and build common ground.

## 1.0 Introduction

On 5 December, the Framework Agreement was signed between key actors in the Sudanese political landscape. It comes following a 14-month period of turbulent politics since the removal of the previous civilian administration in October 2021. The agreement is an important step towards placing Sudan back on track towards a military-to-civilian political transition. This Policy Briefing provides a brief contextualisation of the political crisis in Sudan over the past year and provides an analysis of the December 2022 Framework Agreement.

Maintaining momentum towards transition in Sudan will not be an easy task and will require careful reflection and analysis of the best ways forward. To this end, the Policy Briefing proposes several key recommendations intended to inform strategies and suggest practical steps for national, regional, and international parties seeking to support Sudan's transition. It draws on the author's reflections on various policy and dialogue engagements with Sudanese actors, in addition to a 3-month research mission to Sudan during October and December 2022. During this ongoing mission, there have been opportunities for multiple conversations with political actors from various backgrounds, including high-level government officials, regional politicians, and UN representatives.

## 2.0 Revolution thwarted

In December 2018, the Sudanese revolution began when peaceful protests erupted in the streets. Sudanese people protested the regime of Omar al-Bashir, who had been in power for 30 years, and demanded political representation and human rights.<sup>1</sup> For months, no real change occurred in the political scene until the Sudanese military intervened. In April 2019, Sudan's armed forces formed a

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<sup>1</sup> Munzoul, Assal "Sudan December 2018 riots: Is the regime crumbling?" CMI, (2019). <https://bit.ly/3BWbxZR>.

military council and staged a coup d'état against al-Bashir.<sup>2</sup> The Military Council succeeded in seizing control over Sudan and overthrowing al-Bashir and his regime. Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf led the council for a day before handing the leadership over to Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.<sup>3</sup> The Transitional Military Council (TMC) also announced that it created and would lead a transitional government that was intended to last two years. This clashed with the Sudanese people's expectations for a civilian post-Bashir Sudan.

Unsurprisingly, many Sudanese opposed the military takeover and the transitional plans of the Military Council, and thus civilian protests continued. The Freedom and Change Force (FFC), a coalition of 22 Sudanese political parties and social groups created in January 2019, assumed the leadership of the civilian opposition and demanded a power-sharing agreement with the Transitional Military Council.<sup>4</sup> The military's initial reaction to the continuation of the protests was violent, resulting in the death of 101 people and the injury of 326 others.<sup>5</sup> The military leadership, however, ended up agreeing to a power-sharing deal with the FFC.

After many negotiations and the intervention of the African Union (AU), on 17 August 2019, the deputy chief of the Transitional Military Council (TMC), Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), and a representative of the FFC

signed the Constitutional Declaration Deal.<sup>6</sup> The agreement initiated a three-year transitional period and established a new Sovereignty Council, which a military leader would head for 21 months followed by a civilian leader for the subsequent 18 months.<sup>7</sup> The Sovereignty Council consisted of 11 members – five chosen by the FFC, five by the TMC, and one by consensus.<sup>8</sup> The Sovereignty Council appointed Abdalla Hamdok, an economist and public administrator, as the new Prime Minister.<sup>9</sup> During the transitional period, the transitional regime's mandate was to perform 16 tasks, most importantly to 'work on achieving a just and comprehensive peace' and 'hold accountable members of the former regime'.<sup>10</sup> To conclude the transitional period, the deal scheduled elections to be held in late 2022.

### 3.0 October 2021: Two steps forward, one step back

On 25 October 2021, the Sudanese military, commandeered by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, removed the transitional government led by former Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. There are competing interpretations of the events of October 2021 according to various Sudanese, regional, and international actors. Whilst many international observers labelled the actions of the military as a coup d'état, the Sudanese military insists that it was compelled to step in because other parties

2 Al-Jazeera. "Sudan's military seizes power from President Omar al-Bashir." April 11, (2019). <https://bit.ly/3lj1Usz>.

3 Abdelaziz, Khalid. "Head of Sudan's military council steps down, a day after Bashir toppled.'" Reuters. Last modified April 12 (2019). <https://bit.ly/3I16dZ2>.

4 Bassil, Noah, and Jingwei Zhang. "The post-Bashir era in Sudan: tragedy or remedy?." Australian Journal of International Affairs 75, no. 3 (2021): 254. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2021.1882385>

5 Yuhas, Alan. "100 killed in Sudan and dozens of bodies are pulled from Nile, opposition says." The New York Times 4 (2019). <https://bit.ly/3WFJJkD>.

6 Al Jazeera. "Sudan Protest Leaders, Generals Sign Transition Deal." News | Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera, August 17, 2019. <https://bit.ly/3WlQBDS>.

7 Ibid.

8 Draft Constitutional Charter for the Transitional Period." Translated by International IDEA, (2019). <https://bit.ly/3hLdTEL>.

9 France 24. "Sudan's Hamdok Sworn in as New PM Vowing to Tackle Conflicts and Economy." France 24. France 24, August 22, 2019. <https://bit.ly/3jht4VZ>.

10 Draft Constitutional Charter.



were “hijacking the revolution” it supported, and to stop a civil war from breaking out.<sup>11</sup>

The change in government happened a few days before the leadership of the Sovereignty Council was supposed to have been transferred over from the military leader to a civilian leader, as per the 2019 power-sharing agreement between the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC).<sup>12</sup> It also happened a little more than a year after a failed coup occurred in September 2020, in which some military personnel loyal to al-Bashir attempted to seize power. That attempted coup revealed much about the military’s attitude toward democratic transition and heightened tensions between the TMC and the FFC.<sup>13</sup> Sudan’s fragility score reflects the instability caused by the failed coup attempt in 2020 and the October coup in 2021; in 2022, its state fragility score significantly rose from 104.8 to 107.1 out of 120 in 2020, ranking 7th in terms of fragility at the global level.<sup>14</sup>

There are multiple reasons for the October 2021 power change in Sudan. Firstly, in the preceding months, the Hamdok government faced a litany of challenges. It was struggling to meet the basic needs of many Sudanese civilians, and progress had stalled in the country’s transition from military to civilian rule. In a context marked by rising public dissatisfaction with fuel subsidy cuts and soaring inflation, protestors returned to the

streets, with many calling for the military to take over. This period of civil unrest gave al-Burhan a pretext and opportunity to assert the military’s control once more.<sup>15</sup> This rationale is the one deployed by al-Burhan and the military in order to justify the change in power in October 2021.

Secondly, the change may be considered a preventive measure to avoid charges for alleged human rights violations, of which al-Burhan’s military junta had been accused by various domestic factions and international observers. Any transition to democracy would entail the establishment of a constitutional court and appointing a judicial body that could potentially place military officials on trial for these alleged crimes.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the October 2021 events occurred a little over a month after Sudan decided to hand over the ousted al-Bashir to the ICC to face charges for alleged crimes committed in Darfur in 2003 and 2004.<sup>17</sup>

Thirdly, it could be interpreted as a means to maintain economic interests. According to a report by the Center for Advanced Defense Studies, some high-ranking security officers in Sudan own 408 economic entities, including agricultural companies, banks, and medical import businesses.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, Rapid Support Forces leader Hemedti owns 28.35% of shares in Khaleej Bank, which belongs to the United Arab Emirates.<sup>19</sup> Any new civil administration in Sudan would seek to limit the

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11 Al Jazeera English. “Sudan’s al-Burhan says army dissolved gov’t to avoid civil war.” YouTube video, 39:54 minutes. 26 October 2021. <https://bit.ly/3YL6t4u>.

12 Samy Magdy, “Sudan’s Military Takes Power in Coup, Arrests Prime Minister,” *AP NEWS*, October 25, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3vdyT9R>.

13 BBC, “Sudan: Protesters Demand Military Coup as Crisis Deepens,” *BBC*, October 17, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3ju79es>.

14 “State Fragility- Sudan,” *Fragile States Index*, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3hN5kca>.

15 *Ibid.*

16 Alex de Waal, “Sudan Coup: Why the Army Is Gambling with the Future,” *BBC*, October 27, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3jtTy6X> (accessed November 1, 2022).

17 Maram Mahdi and Ottilia Maunganidze, “Why Has Sudan Decided to Hand over Al-Bashir to the ICC?,” *ISS Africa*, September 21, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3vdSuGQ>.

18 Mat Nashed, “Sudan’s Economy Dominated by Military Interests: Report,” *News | Al Jazeera* (Al Jazeera, June 29, 2022), <https://bit.ly/3WGipT7>. (accessed November 1, 2022).

19 *Ibid.*

military's control over the national economy and especially the monopoly of national resources, which constitutes a major political economy obstacle to durable transition.<sup>20</sup>

## 4.0 Regional and international reactions to the October 2021 events

Regional and international perspectives have largely labelled the actions of the military in October 2021 as a coup d'état and denounced al-Burhan's militarisation of Sudan's democratic transition.<sup>21</sup> The African Union, for instance, suspended Sudan's membership and made the return of Hamdok's government to power a condition to resume membership. In a joint statement with the embassies of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the US, the EU Delegation in Khartoum condemned the unconstitutional change of government and described it as "a catastrophic development."<sup>22</sup> However, some states have adopted alternative positions. For instance, in a statement expressing its concern over the situation, Qatar did not label the events as a "coup" but rather as "developments" and instead stressed the need for the "political process [to] get back on track, [to] achieve the aspiration of the Sudanese people."<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Saudi

Arabia did not frame the events as a coup.<sup>24</sup> The Arab League did not label the events as a coup either, but instead urged parties "to fully abide by the constitutional document signed in August 2019."<sup>25</sup>

Regardless of the interpretations and labelling of the October 2021 events, the return of military rule has had severe economic repercussions on Sudan, which was already grappling with complex economic crises. Within days of the government's ouster, the United States froze \$700 million in economic aid to Sudan's government<sup>26</sup> whilst the World Bank paused all disbursements to the country.<sup>27</sup> This suspension of economic support and other essential assistance by international financial institutions further derailed development efforts in Sudan.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the inflation rate of the Sudanese pound exceeded 200%, losing 50% of its value against the US dollar, which increased the already unprecedentedly high unemployment rates in the country.<sup>29</sup> Soaring bread prices are a crucial indicator of inflation relevant to potential instability, with the cost of a loaf surging from less than one Sudanese pound to 50 Sudanese pounds.<sup>30</sup>

20 Robert Springborg, "Economic Involvements of Militaries," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 3 (2011): pp. 397-399, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020743811000559>.

21 Deutsche Welle, "African Union Suspends Sudan after Military Coup," *Deutsche Welle*, October 27, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3YRLg8X>. (accessed November 1, 2022).

22 Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of the Sudan, "Statement of the EU Delegation to Sudan + Troika + Switzerland," *Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of the Sudan*, October 27, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3hPud6O>. (accessed November 1, 2022).

23 QNA, "The State of Qatar Following Developments in Sudan with Concern" (Qatar News Agency, October 25, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3WreXMA>.

24 Reem Krimly, "Saudi Arabia Calls for Restraint, De-Escalation in Sudan: Foreign Ministry," *Al Arabiya English*, October 25, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3vfvJhOh>.

25 "Sudan Coup 2021: International Reaction to the Military Takeover," *Middle East Eye*, October 26, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3PU2tdT>.

26 Lara Jakes, "The U.S. Cut off Aid to the Sudanese Government after the Coup," *The New York Times*, October 25, 2021, <https://nyti.ms/3VDsM9H>. (accessed November 1, 2022).

27 David Malpass, "World Bank Group Paused All Disbursements to Sudan on Monday," *World Bank*, October 27, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3js8fYe>. (accessed November 1, 2022).

28 Joseph Tucker, "Sudan's Imperiled Transition: U.S. Policy in the Wake of the October 25th Coup," *United States Institute of Peace*, July 15, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3Q7bnoJ>.

29 Bassil, Noah, and Jingwei Zhang. "The post-Bashir era in Sudan: tragedy or remedy?," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 75, no. 3 (2021): 253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2021.1882385>

30 allAfrica, "Sudan-Wide Anti-Coup and Bread Demos," *allAfrica*, March 15, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3vfvJpNL> (accessed November 1, 2022).

### 5.0 December 2022: The framework agreement: an end to the year-long stalemate?

On 5 December 2022 various Sudanese political forces signed the Framework Agreement which marked a critical turning point following the 14-months of stalled transition since the events of October 2021. The agreement includes a range of provisions, most crucially of which is the launching of a transitional period expected to last for two years.<sup>31</sup>

The new agreement consists of five main clauses: general principles, transitional issues and tasks, transitional authority structures, statutory bodies, and final agreement issues. The terms of the framework agreement stipulate that the transitional period is limited to two years from the moment of the appointment of a prime minister and the selection of a transitional prime minister by the revolutionary forces that signed the framework agreement.<sup>32</sup> The deal also states that the army's commander-in-chief is to be the head of the state.<sup>33</sup> The agreement, however, does not outline the appointment date of the prime minister and left thorny issues, including transitional justice and security sector reform, for further talks.<sup>34</sup> As security sector reform and transitional justice remain unaddressed, the agreement has been perceived by protestors as another inter-elite political accommodation

or settlement that serves their political and economic interests rather than addressing the grievances of the Sudanese.

The Framework Agreement was signed by General al-Burhan, General Dagalo, the Forces for Freedom and Change coalition, the Democratic Unionist Party, the National Umma Party, the Sudanese Congress, the Federal Assembly, the Popular Congress, Ansar al-Sunna, the Unionist Hassan al-Mirghani, the Sudanese National Alliance, the Hadi Idris Revolutionary Front, the National Baath Party led by Kamal Boulad, and the Professionals Association. Despite the myriad of actors that welcomed and signed the deal, many others did not. For example, the Democratic Bloc, the Unionist Origin, the head of the Eastern Sudan Coordination, the Call of the People of Sudan, the broad Islamic current, the Communist Party, the resistance committees in Khartoum, the Arab Socialist Baath, the National Movement Forces, and the Umma Party are among those who boycotted the deal. Furthermore, among the opposers of the deal are several former rebel leaders who signed the peace deal in 2020.<sup>35</sup>

The framework agreement, which is based on a proposal by the Sudanese Bar Association, was agreed upon and signed by the facilitation of Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union (AU), the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission Sudan (UNITAMS), the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The Trilateral Mechanism, which includes the IGAD, the AU, and the UNITAMS, and oversaw the signing of the agreement, supported the agreement and urged the transitional authorities "to

31 Idris, Ashraf, and Jack Jeffery. "Sudan's Generals, pro-Democracy Group Ink Deal to End Crisis." *AP NEWS*, December 5, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3FTLsMv>.

32 Al Jazeera. "السودان.. توقيع الاتفاق السياسي الإطار بين مجلس السيادة وقوى مدنية." أخبار | الجزيرة نت. <https://bit.ly/3VrHyZy>.

33 Ibid

34 Elthahir, Nafisa, and Khalid Abdelaziz. "Sudan Generals and Parties Sign Outline Deal, Protesters Cry Foul." Reuters, December 5, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3Vwl69a>.

35 Nation. "Sudan Military, Civilian Bloc to Sign Deal Aimed at Ending Khartoum Crisis." *Nation*, December 5, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3VIZiwQ>.

commit to respect and protect the rights and freedoms of all Sudanese to ensure the success of the ongoing political process.”<sup>36</sup> It also urged the international donor community “to fully resume its financial support once a functioning government is in place.”<sup>37</sup>

The framework agreement was welcomed by various regional and international actors, such as Qatar which described it as a pivotal step to end the political crisis.<sup>38</sup> US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, also showed support for the agreement as well as called the military elites to cede power to civilians, and called the latter to live up to the expectations of the Sudanese public.<sup>39</sup> Blinken stated that the US is restricting Sudanese officials, current and former, who hinder the progress toward democracy during the transitional period from obtaining visas.<sup>40</sup>

Ultimately, regional and international actors have near-unanimously applauded the new agreement since it offers the best opportunity for a way out of the political deadlock in Sudan. All international actors are now in a wait-and-see mode and will be monitoring how the military and civilian forces, who are now accountable for diligently maneuvering the process until a new government is appointed and fundamental issues are addressed, will proceed. Progress in implementing the transitional framework will significantly determine the stance of the international community, whether through unblocking

aid and re-establishing working diplomatic relations or by severing international measures on Sudan. At present, there is a vital need for regional and international support to capitalise upon the momentum generated by the agreement and place Sudan on a pathway to a durable transition.

## 6.0 Recommendations

A. Promote an inclusive, whole-of-society dialogue through multiple tracks: There is a need for continued dialogue and consultation to bolster support for the transitional framework in Sudan. This is best served through sustained Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogue channels that bring the military, political parties, tribal leaders, figures of moral authority, civil society organisations, and others together to develop a consensus on a roadmap for implementation of the Framework Agreement and long-term transition. Multi-track dialogues must reflect the value of inclusivity and ensure that all of Sudan’s civilian and military components, parties, professional unions, youth movements, and resistance committees are represented. Such a process is vital in order to foster societal buy-in and legitimacy of the transition.

B. Hold all parties accountable and ensure commitment to the transition agreement: Sudan’s history is cluttered with political agreements and peace deals that were good on paper but never implemented or, if implemented, eventually derailed. Regional and international actors should work to provide incentives for good political behavior and disincentives for bad actors. Sudan requires sustained support from key regional and international actors that retain leverage and can implement ‘carrot and stick’ policies with the military and other stakeholders to incentivise compromise and

36 UNITAMS. “Trilateral Mechanism Statement on the Signing of a Political Framework Agreement.” *UNITAMS*, December 5, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3C2xjey>.

37 Ibid.

38 “Qatar Welcomes Signing of Political Framework Agreement in Sudan,” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, December 5, 2022), <https://bit.ly/3hRBKcG>.

39 Arab News. “US to Ban Sudan Officials Who Hold up Post-Coup Transition.” *Arab News*, December 7, 2022. <https://bit.ly/3GjkQ99>.

40 Ibid.



accommodation in support of implementing the transitional agreement.

C. Build upon previous peace efforts: Sudan is experiencing multiple ongoing conflicts and reaching a durable solution that can ensure peace is an essential precondition for the long-term viability of political transition. A key commitment of the Framework Agreement is to revisit the Juba Agreement signed on 31 August 2020 between the interim government in Khartoum and representatives of the country's various regions. Delivering on this commitment to forging a more effective peace agreement could serve to greatly bolster the legitimacy of the transitional authorities in Sudan. In so doing, peace negotiations should build upon previous agreements. On paper, the Juba Agreement contains several important aspects essential to achieving peace. Most prominently, it provides a framework for the distribution of governance among local areas through broader representation in the Sovereignty Council. It also addresses security sector reform and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programs. There is a need to revive peace agreements in Sudan alongside transitional power-sharing negotiations, building on the groundwork laid by the Doha Agreement and the Juba Agreement.

D. Promote multi-party facilitation and advice: Whilst the transition and dialogue process must be led by Sudanese actors, there remains a need to engage multiple external actors in trusted expert facilitation and dialogue support. Sudan is undergoing multiple complex transitional processes alongside multi-level conflict mediation, and this is best supported by multiple external facilitators. The situation cannot be resolved in one stroke but is rather akin to delicate surgery requiring complementary efforts by all those

equipped with the tools of political action. External facilitators can play a critical role in providing technical support to the substance of dialogue on key issues, including Sudan's constitution, elections, transitional justice, and governance. They can also advise on how to structure a national dialogue process tailored to the specificities of the Sudanese context rather than the wholesale adoption of a ready-made model and solution applied in other transitional settings. Regional third parties such as Qatar could play an important role as complementary actors within the overall multi-party efforts to facilitate transition and peace agreements in Sudan.

E. Support joint humanitarian and development efforts in Sudan: There is an urgent need for regional and international donors to commit to integrated humanitarian and development responses to the complex socio-economic situation in Sudan. In particular, there is a need to provide strategic support for development projects related to the consequences of the global food and energy crises, including investing intensively in the agricultural, mining, and livestock sectors. This is crucial both for meeting basic needs and providing the Sudanese people a peace dividend that can entrench stability.



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