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THE DYNAMICS OF CHAOS

REVOLUTION, WAR AND POLITICAL TRANSITIONS IN SUDAN

Clément Deshayes, PhD

East Africa Research Fellow at IRSEM

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BIOGRAPHY

Clément Deshayes is an East Africa Researcher at IRSEM (Institute for Strategic Studies of France's Military Academy). He obtained his PhD in Political Anthropology from Université Paris 8 Saint-Denis. In 2020, France's GIS MOMM (Scientific Interest Group for the Middle East and Muslim Worlds) awarded him a Special Jury Prize for his thesis on clandestine political movements in Sudan.

He was previously a post-doctoral fellow at Université Paris 8, as part of the "ANR THAWRA-SuR" project (THinking Alternative WoRlds Across Sudanese Revolution). Clément Deshayes taught at Université Paris 1, namely the Political Science department's Conflicts, Security, Africa and Mediterranean Worlds Masters programs. He also taught at Université Paris 8 as a member of the Sociology and Anthropology department. He is a Research Associate at LAVUE (urbanism and social sciences) and CEDEJ-Khartoum (Sudan).

His current research focuses on the transformation of political institutions following periods of crisis and major political events (revolutions, wars, uprisings and the restoration of authoritarianism, among others).

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

In April 2023, a violent conflict broke out in Sudan between the Sudanese army and a paramilitary group named the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This clash constituted the climax of a multidimensional political crisis, one that stemmed from Sudan's popular uprising of 2019. In order to understand the dynamics underlying this power struggle, we first need to grasp certain – more or less lengthy – historical processes: the reconfiguration of power, sparked by the fall of Omar al-Bashir; the counter-insurgency practices that emerged during the country's civil wars; the interweaving of the armed forces' political, security and economic interests; and finally, the concentration of power in the "center" of the country, which fueled forms of marginalization in other regions.

The Sudanese revolution ushered in a period of change, officially putting an end to the Islamic Republic and to the hegemony of the National Congress Party (NCP). Thus, the balance of power in Sudan began to shift between various groups, as illustrated by five major sequences of events – which we will analyze further on. The first sequence consisted in a multi-faceted confrontation between protesters and the Sudanese regime, culminating in a sit-in in front of army headquarters and the coup d'état that ousted Head of State Omar al-Bashir on April 11, 2019. The second sequence was defined by intense competition between the Transitional Military Council and the revolutionary forces – the latter having essentially become united within the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) – that culminated in the massacre of June 3 and the Million March of June 30. This sequence of events resulted in a constitutional document being signed in order to organize the distribution of power. The third sequence consisted in an attempt to establish a transitional civilian government which, following the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA), included certain rebel groups from the states of Darfur and Blue Nile, despite resistance from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the RSF. The fourth sequence began with the coup d'état of

October 25, 2022. The latter was soon contested, thereby giving rise to a new phase of intense mobilization and confrontation. Finally, the fifth sequence began in April 2023 with the outbreak of large-scale armed conflicts between the SAF and the RSF.

This outbreak of violence was initially sparked by the fact that armed groups refused to transfer power over to civilians, as well as by issues surrounding the reform of the security sector. However, the conflict is rooted in a longer-standing history, as well as in transformations brought about by rapid political shifts in recent years. In order to truly understand the violence that has erupted since April 15, 2023, we need to look back on the challenges and failures of the political transition, particularly regarding the representation of peripheral areas and marginalized groups. We must also highlight the fact that this conflict is rooted in governance and counter-insurgency practices inherited from the NCP regime (1989-2019) and that it extends beyond a mere competition between rival generals.

The aim of this study is to clearly situate the various protagonists – of both the war and the transition – within specific social, political and economic dynamics, in a country that stands at the crossroads of the Arab and African worlds. The upheavals and violence that defined the Sudanese transition can only be understood in light of three distinct processes: the political shift that occurred following the popular uprising; the reshuffling of the former regime; and the dynamics of Sudan's civil wars. These events produced different effects, which the present study aims to explore: competition for control over the state, the emergence of new actors from peripheral areas and marginalized groups, and the gradual militarization of the transition.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TMC: Transitional Military Council
CRP: Central Reserve Police
DDR: Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
DUP: Democratic Unionist Party
ERC: Empowerment Removal Committee
FFC: Forces of Freedom and Change
FFC-2/FFC-NA: Forces for Freedom and Change – National Accord
GIS: General Intelligence Service
SLFA: Sudan Liberation Forces Alliance
JEM: Justice and Equality Movement
JPA: Juba Peace Agreement
NISS: National Intelligence and Security Service
NCP: National Congress Party
NUP: National Umma Party
CP: Communist Party
PDF: Popular Defense Forces
RSF: Rapid Support Forces
SAF: Sudanese Armed Forces
SCP: Sudanese Congress Party
SLM-Minawi/SLA-Minawi: Sudan Liberation Movement/Sudan Liberation Army – Minni Minawi
SLM-TC: Sudan Liberation Movement – Transitional Council
SPA: Sudanese Professionals Association
SPLM-N: Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North
SRF: Sudanese Revolutionary Front
UNITAMS: United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan

Sudanese cities and states

INTRODUCTION

Since the popular uprising of 2018-2019,[1] which precipitated the fall of the military-Islamist regime led by Omar al-Bashir since 1989, Sudan seems to have been plunged into an unreadable, multidimensional[2] crisis, one that is defined by many a twist and turn. Indeed, the period that followed the population's massive mobilization and the disbanding of the authoritarian coalition[3] was defined by great political fluidity. Many possibilities opened up, with new players emerging onto the scene and known faces returning to the fore, accompanied by a major reconfiguration of the country's political balance. The war waged between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)[4] since mid-April 2023 undoubtedly constitutes the pinnacle of this conflict, as it is no longer confined to remote regions and has reached the heart of Sudan's capital Khartoum. Such fierce competition between two armed groups – both of which are opposed to handing power over to civilians – was unthinkable just a few years ago. This situation clearly highlights the political challenges inherited from the thirty-year reign of the National Congress Party (NCP). Some of these issues are specific to Sudan: the way in which civil wars are resolved;

1. Jean-Nicolas Bach, Raphaëlle Chevrillon-Guibert and Alice Franck, "Introduction au thème. Soudan, la fin d'une domination autoritaire ?" [Introduction to the theme: Sudan, the end of authoritarian domination?], *Politique africaine*, 158 (2), 2020, p. 5-31.

2. Michel Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques. La dynamique des mobilisations multisectorielles* [Sociology of political crises: The dynamics of multi-sector mobilizations], Presses de Sciences Po, 2009.

3. This coalition has evolved over time, but has always been centered on four groups with shifting boundaries: the NCP and, by extension, the Sudanese Islamist movement; the army backed by its military-industrial complex; the NISS; the PDF and, since 2013, the RSF headed by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, aka "Hemedti".

4. Regarding the reshuffling of the security sector's various actors, see: Anne-Laure Mahé, "L'appareil sécuritaire et la transition politique au Soudan" [Sudan's security apparatus and political transition], Research note, 78, IRSEM, September 5, 2019.

regional inequalities and discrimination; and the impact of the NCP's grand project for a religious transformation of society. Other issues, however, are common to all political transitions: What role should the army play? Given the numerous armed groups involved, how does one negotiate and strike up a balance of power that is favorable to civilian organizations? How does one stop the armed forces from becoming militias? And finally, how does one treat supporters of the former regime? These various challenges make up the core of the transition's dynamics. They also constitute the crux of conflicts that have opposed different armed groups since the popular uprising of 2019.

The Sudanese revolution ushered in a period of change, officially putting an end to the Islamic Republic and to the hegemony of the NCP.[5] Thus, the balance of power in Sudan began to shift between various groups, as illustrated by five major sequences of events – which we will analyze further on. The first sequence consisted in a multi-faceted confrontation between protesters and the Sudanese regime, culminating in a sit-in in front of army headquarters, as well as the coup d'état that ousted Head of State Omar al-Bashir on April 11, 2019. The second sequence was defined by intense competition between the Transitional Military Council and the revolutionary forces – the latter having essentially become united within the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) – that culminated in the massacre of June 3 and the Million March of June 30. This sequence of events resulted in a constitutional document being signed in order to organize the distribution of power. The third sequence consisted in an attempt to establish a transitional civilian government which, following the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA), included certain rebel groups from the states of Darfur and Blue Nile, despite resistance from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the RSF. The fourth sequence began with the coup d'état of October 25, 2022. The

5. Clément Deshayes and Elena Vezzadini, "Quand le consensus se fissure. Processus révolutionnaire et spatialisation du soulèvement soudanais" [When consensus breaks: The revolutionary process and the spatialization of the Sudanese uprising], *Politique africaine*, 154 (2), 2019, p. 149-178.

latter was soon contested, thereby giving rise to a new phase of intense mobilization and confrontation. Finally, the fifth sequence began in April 2023 with the outbreak of large-scale armed conflicts between the SAF and the RSF.

In the night of October 25, 2021, a coup d'état took place, led by the army's high command. It gave the impression that the period of political transition sparked by the popular uprising of 2019 had been brought to an abrupt halt. Sudan is often portrayed as the only country in the region to have undergone a regime change during the uprisings of the so-called "Second Arab Spring" (2018-2019). This change boils down to the ambiguous separation of power between armed forces from previous regimes, former armed rebel groups and a broad civilian alliance. Since then, the country has experienced a series of deep-seated tensions. The government led by Abdalla Hamdok – formed after the constitutional document of August 4, 2019 was signed – was dissolved and the ministers and main representatives of the civilian alliance (FFC) were arrested. This power grab by the army and its temporary allies should not be perceived as the end of the revolutionary movement, but rather as a situational highlight[6] – or as a turning point[7] – in the reconfiguration processes that typically occur during periods of political fluidity.[8]

After tensions rose over a framework agreement sponsored by UNITAMS[9] and "QUAD for Sudan[10]", aimed at transferring

6. Erving Goffman, *Strategic Interaction*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1970.

7. Andrew Abbott, "À propos du concept de Turning Point" [About the Turning Point concept], in Michel Grossetti (ed.), *Bifurcations. Les sciences sociales face aux ruptures et à l'événement* [Bifurcations: Social sciences in the face of ruptures and events], Paris, La Découverte, 2009, p. 187-211.

8. Michel Dobry, "Conjonctures fluides" [Fluid conjunctures], in Olivier Fillieule (dir.), *Dictionnaire des mouvements sociaux* [Dictionary of social movements], updated and expanded 2nd ed., Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2020, p. 130-138.

9. United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan – UNITAMS was established by UN Security Council Resolution 2524 on June 3, 2020. The aim of this UN mission is to provide assistance towards the transition process in Sudan.

10. QUAD was formed in 2021 to facilitate mediation between civilians and the military. It is composed of the United States, Great Britain, Saudi Arabia

power to civilians who had previously been excluded, deadly fights between the RSF and SAF broke out in Khartoum and several of the country's major cities. At a glance, this outbreak of violence appeared to have been sparked by the fact that armed groups refused to transfer power over to civilians, as well as by issues surrounding the reform of the security sector. However, the conflict is rooted in a longer-standing history, as well as in transformations brought about by rapid political shifts in recent years. In order to truly understand the violence that has erupted since April 15, 2023, we need to look back on the challenges and failures of the political transition, particularly regarding the representation of peripheral areas and marginalized groups. We must also highlight the fact that this conflict is rooted in governance and counter-insurgency practices inherited from the NCP regime (1989-2019) and that it extends beyond a mere competition between rival generals.

The aim of this study is to clearly situate the various protagonists – of both the war and the transition – within specific social, political and economic dynamics, in a country that stands at the crossroads of the Arab and African worlds.[11] The upheavals and violence that defined the Sudanese transition can only be understood in light of three distinct processes: the political shift occurred following the popular uprising; the reshuffling of the former regime; and the dynamics of Sudan's civil wars. These events produced different effects, which the present study aims to explore: competition for control over the state, the emergence of new actors from peripheral areas and marginalized groups, and the gradual militarization of the transition.

and the United Arab Emirates. The creation of this group has been criticized by the African Union, which advocates continental mediation in Sudan.

11. Ali Mazrui, "The Multiple Marginality of Sudan", in Yusuf Fadl Hassan (ed.), *Sudan in Africa*, Khartoum, Khartoum University Press, 1971.

I. THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT: COMPETING FOR CONTROL OVER THE STATE AND THE ECONOMY

THE SEPARATION OF POWER BETWEEN ARMED GROUPS AND CIVILIANS

From the very start of the revolution, on January 3, 2019, the political platform known as the FFC was born. The signatories of this alliance are the following: the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA),[1] which played a central role in terms of mobilization; the parties that composed the National Consensus Forces (Communist Party, or CP, New Forces Democratic Movement, or Haqq, as well as various Ba'ath and Nasserist parties); the political parties that composed the Sudan Call[2] (National Umma Party, or NUP, and Sudanese Congress Party, or SCP);[3] armed rebel groups that were part of the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) (Sudan

1. The SPA is a group of professional associations that began to form in 2012, before becoming more structured in 2016. This organization was illegal prior to the revolution and was originally formed by the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, the Sudanese Journalist Network, the Democratic Lawyers Association and the Teachers' Committees. The SPA was later joined by other unions and associations. It played a central role in the demonstrations, deciding on dates and locations in coordination with the resistance committees that were springing up in different parts of the city.

2. Sudan Call is a coalition created in 2013. It brings together most of the political opposition, the SRF and a group of civil society organizations. After demonstrations were brutally repressed in September 2013, the coalition aimed to structure the opposition's forces in order to provide an alternative to the current regime.

3. Sudanese parties that bear no links to the former government can be divided into several groups. The first group is composed of confederate parties, i.e. political parties backed by confederate or religious organizations. The two parties in this category – the NUP and the Democratic Unionist Party, or DUP – dominated Sudanese politics from the country's independence until the 1989 coup. The second group is composed of left wing and/or pan-Arab parties, including the historically powerful Communist Party, the Haqq, the Nasserist Party and four Ba'ath parties. A third group was formed by modern parties with a weaker ideological corpus, such as the Sudan Congress Party, the Liberal Party and other

People's Liberation Movement–North (SPLM-N) Agar, Sudan Liberation Movement-Minni Minawi, or SLM-Minawi, Justice and Equality Movement, or JEM, Sudan Liberation Movement-Transitional Council, or SLM-TC, and Sudan Liberation Forces Alliance, or SLFA);[4] the Unionist Alliance;[5] and the Alliance of Civil Forces, which included numerous civil society associations and organizations. In practice, however, the revolutionary committees organized demonstrations[6] and the SPA attempted to establish nation-wide coordination.

After al-Bashir was deposed by a coup d'état led by the army, the security services and the RSF on April 11, 2019, the FFC established itself as the preferred civilian mouthpiece for political negotiations. At the time, the coup's instigators had no intention of launching a genuine political transition. Instead, they intended to reorganize the authoritarian coalition by getting rid of part of the NCP and, conceivably, by limiting the power of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS).[7] Nevertheless, the sheer might of the popular movement, the sit-in massacre of June 3, 2019[8] – which rekindled the mobilization of the Sudanese population, who took to the streets – and

smaller political movements. Parties opposed to the NCP came together as part of the National Consensus Forces in 2010 and/or the Sudan Call in 2013.

4. The SRF brings together several armed movements from the states of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. It has faced a number of reorganizations and tensions. Darfuri movements are known to have been highly fragmented in terms of their political and community goals, ever since the insurgency was launched by the SLA and JEM in 2003. Thus, this alliance, which was created in 2011, aims to coordinate these armed groups in their fight against the NCP.

5. DUP executives, who had become dissatisfied with the alliance between their party and the NCP for several years, created the Unionist Alliance at the time of the revolution.

6. Magdi el-Gizouli, *Mobilization and Resistance in Sudan's Uprising*, Rift Valley Institute Briefing Paper, 2020.

7. Regarding the April coup that deposed Omar al-Bashir and the unclear role played by NISS director Salah Gosh, see: Willow Berridge, Justin Lynch, Raga Makawi and Alex de Waal, *Sudan's Unfinished Democracy*, London, Hurst, 2022.

8. Jean-Nicolas Bach, *Ramadan de Sang. Le Soudan entre révolution et négociation (décembre 2018-juillet 2019)* [Bloodshed on Ramadan: Sudan between revolution and negotiations (December 2018-July 2019)], Observatory of Eastern

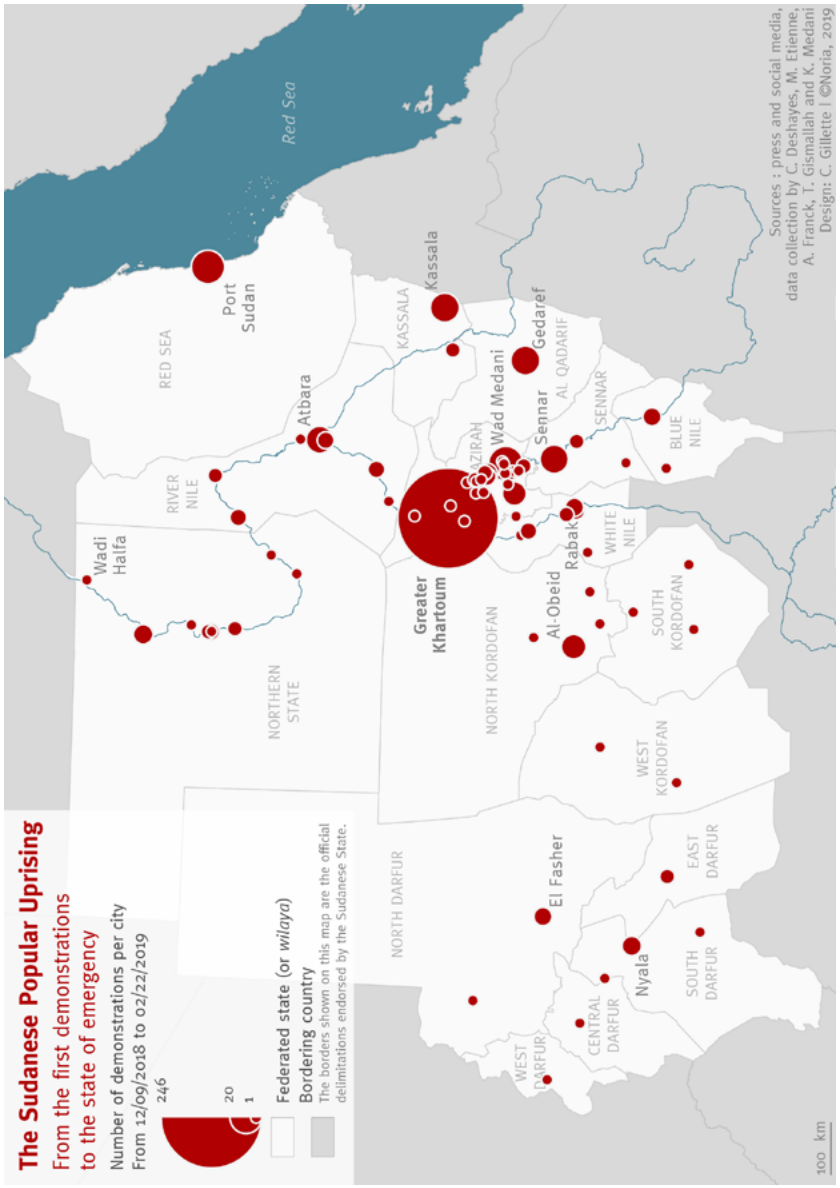
international pressure forced the army and the RSF to enter negotiations and reach an agreement with the FFC in August 2019.

The constitutional document of August 2019 established a diarchic power structure shared between two institutions: the Sovereignty Council and the government. The former was headed by Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan, an army General from the former regime, who was assisted by RSF Commander Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, aka "Hemedti". The council features eleven members, including six civilians. The government – headed by Abdalla Hamdok, a former Deputy Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa – was composed of ministers proposed by the FFC and selected by the Prime Minister, with the exception of the Ministers of the Interior and Defense. The "formulation of the initial agenda"[9] was ambitious: ending Sudan's international isolation, signing peace agreements – within a year – with rebels in the states of Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan, putting public finances back on track, as well as ending inflation, dismantling the interests of the former regime and preparing multi-party elections for 2023. The "transitional institutions" were thus given 39 months to meet this agenda. The constitutional document, which was very precise regarding the procedures for appointing members of the government and the Sovereignty Council, did not formally define the powers of these transitional institutions. It vaguely established a new form of dual federal power, which appeared to mark a break with the extreme presidentialization implemented during the previous regime.

Africa, 2019, https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr.ceri/files/OAE12_201907.pdf.

9. Juan J. Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic regimes*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Popular uprising in Sudan



The document initially aimed to renew laws pertaining to local power, while postponing the issue of organizing federated regions within an institutional framework to an unspecified date.[10] The following two years were marked by institutional hypertrophy, with a proliferation of transversal consultative and decision-making bodies designed to restore intelligibility and coherence to the new power structure.

The FFC exposed itself to major criticism regarding both the form and the substance of the agreement, by signing the document without consulting part of the revolutionary forces and by excluding armed political and civilian groups originating from the country's peripheral areas[11] from the negotiations. Several political players severely condemned the idea of a power-sharing agreement that gave the SAF and RSF the upper hand. What's more, the negotiations were not transparent and failed to involve players who could have been key in ensuring the transition's success – i.e. certain groups representing these peripheral areas.

The issues surrounding the substance of the agreement are threefold. Firstly, the agreement, which acted as a transitional constitution, set up power-sharing institutions, yet postponed the constituent process and the deadline for elections. This approach, which favored the devolution of power rather than its legitimization, was also reflected in the inability and unwillingness of both the transitional government and the FFC to appoint the Legislative Council provided for in the constitutional document. Secondly, the agreement was unclear – in many aspects – regarding the transitional government and Sovereignty Council's respective jurisdictions. This form of vagueness largely benefitted the SAF and the RSF, who retained control over numerous

10. Since South Sudan acquired independence in 2011, Sudan is a federal republic composed of eighteen states. The provisional constitution of 2019 reaffirmed this principle during the political transition. Prior to the transition, each state had a governor and a council of ministers, largely chosen by the central Head of State.

11. In the present study, the "center" not only refers to a geographic region, but also to a space of concentrated wealth and power. The center is therefore understood as an opposite to peripheral areas and marginalized groups.

institutions. Finally, power sharing without electoral or political deadlines had two consequences on the political arena: the advanced fragmentation of parties and coalitions when negotiating their respective positions, as well as skepticism regarding these players' legitimacy.

This agreement effectively divided the forces supporting the revolution, right when power was gradually being handed over to an incipient civilian government in September 2019. Confidence in the SRF's armed groups vanished, leading their involvement to be deferred to later peace agreements. What's more, some of the revolutionary committees and the SPA became concerned by the role given to the military.

The first transitional government consisted in an outfit of technocrats, whose appointment was negotiated between the Prime Minister and the FFC. The selection process proved problematic and often chose ministers based on their international background, particularly favoring representatives of the United Nations – as was the case of Abdalla Hamdok and his Minister of Finance, Ibrahim Ahmed al-Badawi. The government's cabinets, however, featured a mix of young political activists, associations from Sudan and people who were able to return to Sudan following the revolution (refugees, diasporas, exiled activists or technicians who had spent little to no time living in Sudan).[12]

COMMITTEES TO DISMANTLE THE FORMER REGIME AND RESISTANCE FROM NCP NETWORKS

The transitional government, which emerged from the revolution and was closely supervised by the army, began the process of dismantling the former government in accordance with Article 8 of the constitutional document. The aim of this process was to put an end to the NCP's stranglehold on the state, to weaken its economic power and abate the networks of the Sudanese Islamic movement, as well as to combat the effects of *tamkin*.

12. Interviews, Khartoum, July and October 2022.

From the 1990s onwards, *tamkin* was an active policy aimed at empowering militants and strengthening their hold on both the state and the economic apparatus.[13] After massively joining Sudan's civil service during the 1990s, players who were loyal to the National Islamic Front (which later became the NCP) then integrated the state and rose through the ranks, thereby bypassing all forms of ordinary career development. State-owned companies endured a similar fate, as they were privatized to the benefit of businessmen from Islamist ranks. This policy – which primarily favored people loyal to the Islamist "civilizational project" of the 1990s, as well as those who later became loyal to the NCP within the administration and the economy – considerably strengthened the NCP's base and further blurred the lines between the party, the country's public administration and its security services (which were also major economic players).

The main aim of dismantling the former regime was to break the NCP's – and, more broadly, the networks of political Islam's – political hold on the state apparatus. Civilians were aware that a political transition could only take place by reestablishing control over the administration and the economy.[14] On November 29, 2019, following a confrontational meeting between the civilian government and the Sovereignty Council, a law was promulgated to organize the dismantling of the former regime. It ordered the dissolution of the NCP and the confiscation of its assets. It also made former members of this party ineligible for ten years and appointed a committee to oversee the dismantling process. This committee, known as the Empowerment Removal Committee (ERC),[15] was appointed in December 2019. We will study the latter in further detail, as its actions and structure embodied two salient challenges faced by the transition: the

13. Noah Salomon, *For Love of the Prophet: An Ethnography of Sudan's Islamic State*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2016.

14. Interviews with members of the ERC, Khartoum, July 2021.

15. Committee for Dismantling the June 30, 1989 Regime, Removal of Empowerment and Corruption and Recovery of Public Funds.

competition for control over the state and the influx of armed groups into transitional bodies.[16]

The committee was initially chaired by Lieutenant-General Yasser al-Atta,[17] a military member of the Sovereignty Council, assisted by a civilian member of the Sovereignty Council, Mohamed al-Faki Suleiman.[18] The committee was composed of eighteen members representing various ministries (Defense, Finance, Interior, Justice, Federal Affairs, etc.), the security services, the RSF and five influential members of the FFC (Wajdi Saleh, Ahmed al-Rabee, Babiker Faisal, Taha Osman Ishaq and Salah Manna). It took decisions based on a simple majority of attending members, with a quorum of two-thirds. According to the dismantling law of November 29, 2019, the committee had the authority to: dissolve associations and companies, dismiss civil servants who obtained their positions via *tamkin*, request official documents from various state institutions and seize or freeze the accounts and assets of institutions, organizations and individuals when obtained through *tamkin* or corruption.

The role played by the army – which was in charge of appointing members of the Ministries of Defense and the Interior, and controlled the security services – was limited, but far from negligible.[19] The presence of RSF and SAF members on the ERC effectively limited the latter's mission of dismantling the *tamkin* to NCP and a number of so-called "Islamist" or *kayzan*[20] networks. The army, which initially had close ties with the NCP after the

16. Numerous institutions and supervisory mechanisms were set up during the transition period: the High Economic Committee, the committees for implementing the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) and overseeing its application, the "Way Forward" initiative, etc.

17. Yasser al-Atta resigned from the committee in February 2021.

18. Mohamed al-Faki Suleiman is the youngest member of the Sovereignty Council, as well as a member of the Unionist Alliance and the FFC.

19. Atta el-Battahani, "The Sudan Armed Forces and Prospects of Change", CMI Insight, 3, 2016.

20. The term *kayzan* refers to supporters of the NCP regime. This expression is a fitting representation of the sheer diversity of NCP supporters actively participating in power – at both the lowest and the highest levels of state. While the impulse of political Islam was preponderant in the 1990s, with activists

1989 coup (let us remember that al-Bashir, a military officer, was also President of the NCP), thus found itself beyond the reach of this committee. The constitutional document and the resulting separation of power allowed both the army and the RSF to assert that they were not infiltrated by the NCP. Thanks to this maneuver, and by acquiring a dominant position within Sudan's transitional bodies, these groups evaded the dismantling process and, more importantly, any form of economic retribution. Thus, the interests of the military-industrial complex and the proceeds of the excessive exploitation of economic resources – such as gold – in peripheral areas were protected from seizure and inventory rights. The committee's spokesperson, Salah Manna, was briefly arrested after making statements about an army-run company[21] – an event that went to show the committee's true scope.[22]

The main committee is supported by three specialized sub-committees (respectively targeting the National Bank of Sudan, the NCP and individuals or groups linked to the NCP) and by twenty-four regional sub-committees responsible for gathering information throughout the country. The appointment of the ERC was accompanied by a proposal to create of an appeals committee, composed of: two members of the Sovereignty Council, Divisional General Ibrahim Jaber (Chairman) and Raja Nicola (Vice-Chairman); Minister of Justice Nasredeen Abdulbari; and two members of the FFC, Siddig Yousif and Amina Mahmoud.[23] However, the Sovereignty Council did not validate the decree that defined the appeals committee's scope, despite insistent requests from the ERC. The impossibility of launching

still playing a central role at the time of the revolution, the NCP's social fabric began to feature less political profiles over the last two decades.

21. "Police arrest ERC rapporteur, Salah Manna", *Darfur 24*, February 7, 2021.

22. The reaction of those involved was extremely violent at times. In 2022, after the coup d'état, the daughter of a civilian member of the FFC was kidnapped and raped by armed men. The men told the young woman that this was a message to her father regarding his actions within the ERC.

23. *Al Jazeera Mubasher*, "السودان.. لجنة إزالة التمكين في قلب الأزمة السياسية بين شركاء الحكم" [Sudan: Empowerment Removal Committee at the heart of a political crisis between ruling partners], September 29, 2021, https://mubasher.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2021/9/29/ما-مستقبل-لجنة-إزالة-التمكين-بعد-تصاعد.

administrative and judicial appeals was used to undermine the ERC's work, with arguments presenting it as overstepping legal rules and procedures.[24]

The committee was very popular up until the coup. Numerous testimonies and pieces of evidence were presented on public television and on the committee's social networks. This newfound transparency and the ERC's investigative power led to much resistance and criticism from members of the former regime.[25] In 2021, this criticism became increasingly pressing and was relayed by a number of civilian and military players who felt threatened by the sheer scale of these investigations. This led to the resignation of the committee's chairman, General Jaber. In April 2021, the committee declared that it had seized 50 companies and 60 associations, 420,000 hectares of farmland and 1 million square meters of residential property.[26] It handed over $1 billion to the Ministry of Justice and just over $400 million to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments. Some of the dissolved organizations, such as the Islamic Da'wa Organization, were of crucial importance to the Sudanese Islamic movement, particularly in terms of financing. Members of the Central Bank were also ousted. Around 7,000 civil servants were dismissed during this period. What's more, only a few months after it was launched, the committee targeted sectors perceived as being particularly loyal to the former regime: 109 ambassadors and diplomats within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (February 2020), 151 judges, 23 prosecutors (August 2020),[27] the Chief Justice and

24. Abdelaziz Khalid and Nafisa Eltahir, "Sudan task force chasing Bashir-era assets sees progress, faces criticism", Reuters, April 6, 2021.

25. A striking example involved Mohamed al-Tirik, Head of the newly formed High Council of Beja Nazirs. As a former member of and relay for the NCP in the east of the country, this community leader (a Nazir from the Hadendawa tribe) sparked a mobilization in this part of Sudan, the demands of which included the dissolution of the ERC.

26. Abdelaziz Khalid and Nafisa Eltahir, "Sudan task force chasing Bashir-era assets sees progress, faces criticism".

27. UNITAMS report, *Situation in the Sudan and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan*, S/2020/1155, December 1, 2020, https://unitams.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2020_1155_e.pdf.

the Attorney General (February 2020), all of whom were expelled from Sudan's civil service.

The legal ambiguity surrounding appeals sparked confrontation between the judiciary – i.e. a stronghold of NCP executives – and the committee. In January 2021, the Ministry of Justice decided to overhaul the appeals system and created a new Court of Justice composed of three Supreme Court judges.[28] On paper, this drive to create a clear procedure for appeals, one that was independent from the government, was intended to provide legal guarantees for the committee's actions and thereby depoliticize its work. This decision led to a tug-of-war within the judiciary, which intensified following the resignation of Chief of Justice Nemat Abdullah Khair, who had been appointed at the start of the transition. On September 25, 2021, the ERC announced the dismissal of 399 civil servants, including 10 judges, 7 magistrates of the Supreme Court and several prosecutors. The Appeals Chamber reacted swiftly and overturned the committee's decision, taking the opportunity to overturn ten other decisions in similar cases. To do so, it relied on procedural issues and argued that the committee lacked the necessary authority (in contradiction with the law of November 2019).

Several salient points have emerged from the dismantling committees' experience during the transition period in Sudan. The central point is that all actors perceive taking control of the state as an essential step for building or retaining power. Certain civilian forces launched a political and economic purge to weaken the NCP's foothold. More or less structured networks from the former regime tried to resist or slow down the ERC's progress.[29] The SAF and RSF initially managed to avoid becoming priority targets. They then tried – with some amount of success – to undermine the committee's work. Given that the committee depended upon both the police (controlled by the SAF) and

28. Ibid.

29. Sudan in the News, "Three major challenges facing the post-coup uprising in Sudan", May 20, 2022, https://www.sudaninthenews.com/political-briefings.

judges, it was unable to undertake rapid systematic actions, ones that may well have proven effective.[30] The issue of state ownership is not simply a question of the actual presence of a given actor within the government or at the negotiating table. Rather, it is a question of ensuring the administration's loyalty at all levels – to avoid internal resistance and the perpetuation of authoritarian enclaves[31] – and of securing the economic resources that come with controlling the country's institutions.[32] The civilian forces' inability to secure control of the police and the judiciary greatly hampered the civilian government's ability to carry out purges and, thus, to weaken administrative resistance against the political transition.

Shortly before the coup of October 2021, in a context of escalating confrontation with civilian forces, the SAF stopped protecting the ERC's various buildings. The Darfur building was attacked and looted mere hours after their withdrawal. The SAF, which perceived the ERC as an emblematic institution of the civilian transition that was increasingly escaping its grasp, attacked the latter more and more head-on. The day after the coup of October 2021, the committee was dissolved and its decisions overturned.

30. The judiciary and the police were particularly loyal to the former regime. The civilian government had great difficulties regaining control over these institutions.

31. Manuel A. Garretón, "Problems of democracy in Latin America: on the processes of transition and consolidation", *International Journal*, 43 (3), 1988, p. 357-377; Olivier Dabène, "Enclaves autoritaires en démocratie : perspectives latino-américaines" [Authoritarian enclaves in democracy: Latin American perspectives], in Olivier Dabène (dir.), *Autoritarismes démocratiques. Démocraties autoritaires au XXI^e siècle* [Democratic authoritarianisms: Authoritarian democracies in the 21st century], Paris, La Découverte, 2008, p. 89-112.

32. Control over strategic ministries (such as Finance and Mining) was the subject of bitter negotiations, ones that the civilian forces lost: both ministries were placed under the direction of movements that had signed the JPA (respectively the JEM and SLM-Minawi).

Table 1
Chronology of the main events of the Sudanese revolution

December 19, 2018: Protests begin
January 1, 2019: The Forces of Freedom and Change are created
February 22: A state of emergency is declared and ministers and governors are replaced by the military
April 3: Start of the sit-in in front of the armed forces' headquarters (al-Qiada)
April 11: Omar al-Bashir is deposed by the army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), before being replaced by a Transitional Military Council (TMC)
June 3: The sit-in is violently dispersed (200 dead) by the TMC
August 4: A constitutional document is signed providing for civilian-military power sharing for a period of 39 months
September 2019: A new government is appointed under the leadership of Abdalla Hamdok
October 3, 2020: The Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) is signed between three of the main rebel groups from the states of Darfur and Blue Nile
January 2021: The Hamdok II government is appointed in accordance with the JPA
October 25, 2021: A military coup is held against the transitional government
November 21, 2021: Abdalla Hamdok becomes Prime Minister again, following the signing of an agreement with the armed forces
January 2, 2022: Abdalla Hamdok resigns following bloodshed during the repression of demonstrations and the FFC's refusal to endorse the coup of October 2021
December 5, 2022: A framework agreement is signed between the FFC, RSF and SAF, providing for the transfer of power to a civilian government
April 15, 2023: Fights between the SAF and RSF begin, mainly in Khartoum and Darfur

THE OCTOBER 2021 COUP D'ÉTAT AND THE GRADUAL RETURN OF NCP EXECUTIVES

The coup took place at a time when civilian and revolutionary forces were becoming more and more fragmented. Tensions within the FFC led the latter to split in two: the FFC-1, which supported the civilian government; and the Forces for Freedom and Change – National Accord (FFC-2), which essentially represented armed groups who felt excluded from the transition process.[33] The latter gradually drew closer to the armed forces and organized a sit-in to demand that the Hamdok government step down.[34] The details of this sequence of events – and of the rise in tension that ensued – do not fall within the scope of the present study. However, competition, political opportunism and the reversal of alliances are constants in periods of political fluidity and crisis.[35] This political fluidity only added to the existing reality of the Sudanese political arena, in which coups and alliances (be they temporary or long-term) are central to the rules of the political game.[36] Tensions between the civilian government and the army became cemented around two issues. The first concerns the presidency being transferred from the Sovereignty Council to a civilian. The military and the FFC had different interpretations of the constitutional document and the JPA and could not settle on a date. What's more, General al-Burhan categorically refused to give up his position. The second point of contention concerned the control of military-run companies, which the

33. "الخرطوم و لندن تنفيان وجود ازمة دبلوماسية بعد انهاء فترة عمل السفير البريطاني في السودان" [New coalition says Sudan's FFC monopolizes power], *Sudan Tribune*, November 23, 2021, https://sudantribune.net/article70141/.

34. The dynamics underlying the fragmentation of the FFC will be explained in the second part of this study.

35. Vincent Bonnecase and Julien Brachet, "Les 'crises sahéliennes' entre perceptions locales et gestions internationales" ["Sahelian crises" between local perceptions and international management], *Politique africaine*, 130 (2), 2013, p. 5-22.

36. These traits apply to a political space that is located more towards the center of the country. They are also rooted in a form of nepotism among Sudan's political elite. Since the revolution, other dynamics have also been at play, both in peripheral areas and in Khartoum.

civilians wished to hand over to the Ministry of Finance. Despite hundreds of thousands of Sudanese people demonstrating in support of the civilian government in October (thereby acting as a counterweight to the FFC-2's smaller presence at the sit-in), the SAF and RSF took over power on October 25, 2021. Most FFC-1 leaders expected this coup; in fact, General al-Burhan had directly threatened Hamdok and several ministers at a meeting in September.[37] The leaders of the FFC-1 felt that they could no longer strike up new compromises with the military without cutting themselves off from their revolutionary base. What's more, giving in on these issues would only entrench the army's domination. The coup faced extreme resistance: Khartoum and many other cities were filled with barricades and strikes multiplied. The military junta responded with brutal repression, yet failed to bring the situation back under its control. Weekly demonstrations and strikes disrupted the exercise of power and forced the SAF to return to the negotiating table one year after the coup.

Beyond the obvious attempts to halt the transition process and the massive mobilization of the Sudanese population, the key issue here remains the drive to control the state apparatus. The military soon reintegrated NCP officials into the civil service. Officials appointed during the transition were dismissed[38] in the days or weeks following the coup, and were often replaced by their predecessors. In many cases, prosecutions were dropped, with the exception of the most prominent personalities. NCP-related networks made a quiet comeback within the army-run state.[39] What's more, NCP *kayzan* and executives who had fled abroad (to Turkey or Egypt, depending on their allegiances) received express orders[40] from the dissolved party to return home, with the guarantee that they would not be bothered when they got off the plane. The Islamic Da'wa organization was

37. Interview, Khartoum, October 2021.

38. Interviews, Khartoum, October 2022.

39. "Under military's watch Sudan's former ruling party making comeback", Reuters, April 22, 2022.

40. Interview with a member of the NCP, Khartoum, November 2021.

revived and restructured to accommodate party executives.[41] The military junta needed administrators in order to revive the state apparatus.[42] which had been in disarray since the coup. Yet, the army was not a central institution within the former regime's administration. It therefore needed to rely on NCP executives having fled the country or having been dismissed during the purges. However, their return led considerable friction to arise.

The Islamic movement remained fragmented, with more or less distinct networks sometimes competing against each other; some actively supported the junta from within the state, and others remained outside of the state apparatus while supporting the military takeover.[43] Certain members of the NCP also tried to stage coups and derail the transition process on several occasions, before going on to support the SAF.[44] Thus, the army's high command found itself in a rather uncomfortable position. On the one hand, the army needed competent executives to run the country and had never truly severed its ties with parts of the NCP and the Sudanese Islamic movement; on the other hand, it had participated in the dissolution of the NCP and NISS for its own benefit in 2019, and could thereby not allow itself to give the impression that it was putting the NCP back in power. Nevertheless, in the face of popular resistance to the coup of October 2021, the army was forced to find allies and relied more and more openly on former NCP members.

However, this return to power and the resulting system of alliances were precarious and could not include the entire Sudanese Islamic movement, so as not to offend SAF's sponsors in the region – particularly Egypt. This may well explain the fact that Mohamed Tahir Ayala, al-Bashir's last Prime Minister, returned

41. "Power struggle inside the Islamic Call Organization in Sudan", *Sudan Tribune*, February 15, 2023.

42. "Burhan lets the Islamists back in", *Africa Confidential*, May 12, 2022.

43. *Attempts by Islamists to return to power: a relentless effort to thwart the transition*, Fikra for Studies and Development, 2022, https://mcusercontent.com/a52f171f5b264d075dd231cfb/files/996d1e53-0eaa-1d39-44ac-edec03b97835/محاولات_الاسلاميين_للعودة_الي_الحكم.pdf.

44. Ibid.

from Egypt shortly after the coup. The most prominent form of tension, however, was the one that existed between General Hemedti and the former regime's networks. Several tense face-offs took place between Ali Karti,[45] the leader of the dissolved NCP, and the leader of the RSF, who opposed the return of former NCP administrators and politicians to the inner core of the state apparatus.[46] Indeed, this return limited the RSF leader's room for maneuver, as he was perceived as a threat by the former NCP. In April 2023, shortly after fights broke out between the RSF and SAF, NCP leaders detained in Kober prison escaped. Some of them, such as Ahmed Haroun, called sympathizers to support the army, as did other NCP executives.[47]

45. A former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Justice, who was also a PDF Coordinator from 1996 onward.

46. "General Burhan and islamists in Sudan – Allies or foes", *Sudan Tribune*, October 12, 2022.

47. The "escapees" from the SAF-run prison included a number of prominent figures: Ahmed Haroun (Governor of South Kordofan, wanted by the ICC), Abdel Rahim Hussein (former Minister of Defense, wanted by the ICC), Nafi Ali Nafi (former Presidential Advisor and Director of the Security Services in the 1990s), Ali Osman Taha (former Vice-President) and Awad Ahmed al-Jaz (former Minister of Oil).

II. IS PEACE THE ENEMY OF THE TRANSITION? COMPETING POWER-SHARING DEALS

THE MARGINALIZATION OF PERIPHERAL AREAS IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Part of the revolutionary forces made an initial mistake in the way they treated different parts of the country. In the first part of the revolution (December 2018 – August 2019), armed and civilian groups were quickly sidelined within the FFC itself. The negotiating team did not include any members of the SRF, a group whose demands were withdrawn from the final draft of the constitutional document without notice, before being deferred to separate peace talks. SRF leaders expressed their frustration regarding the fact that topics relating to peace and equal representation within the country's institutions were relegated to the background.[1] They also criticized the fact that FFC representatives signed the document despite discussions being underway between the two groups in Addis Ababa at the time – discussions that included, among other topics, joint negotiations with the army.[2]

The negotiators' sleight of hand set a precedent that would go on to define the relationship between armed groups and civilians within the FFC. What's more, the document was rejected by other organizations, both within and outside of the FFC, such as the CP, the Sudanese Journalists Network and the Darfur Displaced General Coordination. In fact, the distrust between the SRF and certain political parties – mainly located at the center of the country and led by politicians from Khartoum – began as early as June 2019, during discussions on the FFC's decision-making

1. "Sudan rebels reject junta-opposition political agreement", Radio Dabanga, July 18, 2019.
2. Dawit Astatike, "Sudanese Revolutionary Front rejects power sharing agreement", *Capital Ethiopia*, July 29, 2019.

process.[3] Up until then, the process allowed each signatory political platform to designate two representatives, which gave political parties a rather significant advantage. Members of the SRF, who claimed historical legitimacy after having weakened the former regime through armed struggles, demanded a revision of the FFC's framework. They also opposed other groups, who considered themselves the representatives of a peaceful civilian movement that had defeated Omar al-Bashir. After the civilian government was appointed, the FFC was given a new structure that was ratified in November 2019. The latter widened the political representation of several groups on the Central Council: the SPA (five members), Sudan Call (six members), the National Consensus Forces (five members), the Unionist Alliance (three members) and the Civil Forces Alliance (three members).[4] The SRF's representatives were not registered and the group's participation in the FFC's Central Council was suspended.

In reality, misunderstandings were rife in this context. Many political leaders did not consider that armed groups had participated in the revolution, since the latter had taken refuge in Libya or South Sudan.[5] What's more, these groups did not fit in with the FFC's depiction of a peaceful civilian revolution. On the other hand, the armed groups were slow to comprehend the true depth of the protest, even in the areas they claimed to represent. Nevertheless, their historical legitimacy as members of the opposition in several states (Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile) made these armed groups key players in the success of the revolutionary movement. The divide between the center and the periphery within the revolutionary movement was clearly illustrated by one of the events that occurred during this period. During the sit-in that began in April 2019, and ended in bloodshed when it was dispersed on June 3, the arrival of

3. Sudan Rapid Response Update, "One Year after the coup. What's next for Sudan's Juba Peace Agreement", Rift Valley Institute, November 2022.

4. "Sudan's FFC forms enhanced leadership structures", *Sudan Tribune*, November 5, 2019.

5. Interviews with leaders of the FFC's Central Council, September-October 2021 and November 2022.

trains filled with revolutionaries from Atbara – a city located just a few hours north of Khartoum – provoked a form of massive collective emulation. This movement used revolutionary imagery that borrowed from the past to express the historic reality of the present. The arrival of buses of revolutionaries from Darfur paled in comparison; the fact that Darfuri activists set up stalls during the sit-in and described the brutality of the war, one that was invisible in Khartoum and largely subcontracted to militias, received a lukewarm welcome from "revolutionaries" from the center of the country who wished to defend the revolution's unity. Following a caricatured accusation by the former regime, according to which Darfuri students were provoking demonstrations, the slogan "the whole country is Darfur" came into being. Yet the slogan was not followed up with concrete action – on behalf of opposition parties – to merge demands for a change of regime with those of political and armed movements from marginalized states (Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile and East). This gap in perception was also glaring in that martyrs who fell during clashes with the police or during the dispersal of the sit-in were viewed as heroes, compared to the relative invisibility of the repression and violence suffered by revolutionaries during the multiple sit-ins in Darfur. What's more, Darfur suffered the greatest number of deaths during the revolution. The varying values attributed to the protagonists' deaths – which we have analyzed in other articles[6] – stem, on the one hand, from historical processes of marginalization and discrimination inherited from the colonial period[7] and, on the other hand, from the

6. Clément Deshayes and Anne-Laure Mahé, "'Ils ne mouraient pas tous, mais tous étaient frappés' : répression et violence structurelle au Soudan" ["They didn't all die, but they were all struck": Repression and structural violence in Sudan], *Pôle Sud*, 53 (2), 2020, p. 83-99.

7. Francis Deng, *War of Visions. Conflict of Identities in the Sudan*, Washington, The Brookings Institution, 1995; Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, *Darfur: A New History of a Long War,* London, Zed Books, 2008.

non-killing pact[8] signed by the country's elites, which largely became void during the revolution.

The signing of the constitutional document and the FFC's internal meltdown in terms of confidence broke the cycle of rapprochement that had begun in 2014 with the Sudan Call.[9] At its inception, the latter brought the majority of Sudan's armed or civilian opponents together: the National Consensus Forces (CP, Haqq, and several Ba'ath and Nasserist parties), the NUP, the Civil Society Initiative and the SRF (JEM, SLA-Minawi, opposition Beja Congress and SPLM-N).[10] After the notion of peace was deferred to a later and different political process, the FFC's coherence began to falter. The power-sharing agreement provided for in the constitutional document allowed the army and the RSF to retain a significant amount of power, leading the country's two largest rebel groups – SPLM-N and SLA-Nur – to defy and reject the terms of the transition. The SPLM-N, led by al-Hilu, controlled the Nuba Mountains and enjoyed a structured and coherent political framework. The SLA-Nur, led by Abdul Wahid al-Nur, remained in control of part of Jebel Marra, despite numerous internal splits. The SLA-Nur also enjoyed substantial support in refugee camps and from a large portion of the Darfuri population. In 2019, these two groups were the only ones to boast a significant military presence within Sudan's borders. What's more, they resisted the RSF's various offensives during the military campaigns held between 2013 and 2018. Both were unwilling to negotiate until the military and NCP networks stepped down and were dismantled. Other major groups, such

8. Willow Berridge, Justin Lynch, Raga Makawi and Alex de Waal, *Sudan's Unfinished Democracy*, London, Hurst, 2022.

9. *The Political Index: Mapping of the Political Scene in Sudan*, Fikra for Studies and Development, 2022.

10. At its inception in 2013, the Sudan Call brought together almost all of the political forces opposed to Omar al-Bashir's regime. It was divided into three branches. The first brings together political parties, the second armed movements and the third "civil society" organizations. This tendency to create coalitions is not new in Sudan: before the FFC, the Sudan Call (2013) or the National Consensus Forces (2010), a number of political groups had already come together in 1989 to form the National Democratic Alliance.

as the JEM, SLM-Minawi, SLFA and SLM-TC, were present in Libya since this series of defeats, and mainly acted as mercenaries for Field Marshal Haftar (with the exception of JEM, which fought for the Tripoli government).[11]

The injunction to sign a peace agreement provided for in the constitutional document, according to a procedure that was distinct from the civilian political process, opened a window of opportunity for former regime players to regain a playing field that they had never truly left. RSF commander Hemedti was a key player in organizing negotiations with Darfur's armed groups, which began in Juba in September 2019 under the mediation of South Sudan.[12]

THE JUBA PEACE AGREEMENT: THE LEGITIMIZATION OF ARMED COMBAT AS PART OF THE REVOLUTION?

The JPA was finalized in August 2020 and officially signed on October 3, 2020,[13] following a year of negotiations between various armed actors and the transitional government. It was divided into five sections (called "tracks") after separate negotiations with regional players: the Darfur track, the East track, the Center track, the North track and a final track for both Blue Nile and Kordofan. We will briefly review the main characteristics of the JPA, before analyzing its effects on the political transition and the realignment of the actors involved.

The JPA was a "comprehensive" peace agreement, aimed at correcting power and wealth inequalities between the center of the country and peripheral areas. The agreement included three

11. UN Security Council, "Expert Panel Report on Darfur 2019", S/2019/914, https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/399/48/PDF/N1839948.pdf?OpenElement.

12. *The Rebels Come to Khartoum: How to Implement Sudan's New Peace Agreement*, Crisis Group Africa, Briefing 168, February 2021.

13. Zaid Al-Ali, "The Juba Agreement for peace in Sudan", Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021, https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/the-juba-agreement-for-peace-in-sudan-en.pdf.

types of power sharing: political, territorial and military.[14] It proposed improved wealth-sharing strategies, by directly allocating part of the taxes from resource extraction (oil and ores) in certain regions to regional governments. It also proposed to allocate $750 million to Darfur each year for a period of 10 years as compensation for war damage. One of its objectives was to target the causes and effects of the wars by providing for land reform, organizing the return of refugees and promoting justice during the transition. A large portion of these arrangements concerned security. The agreement provided for the integration of rebel forces into the army, the establishment of monitoring and follow-up committees, as well as the creation of a joint force (RSF, SAF and ex-rebels) in Darfur. It also stipulated that the state would be federal and that federated states would be able to levy certain taxes.[15]

In terms of the distribution of power, each track included a set number of seats for signatory political movements. At a national level, signatories were awarded three seats on the Sovereignty Council (Malik Agar for the SPLM-N; Al-Hadi Idris for the SLM-TC and the SRF; and Al-Tahir Hajar for the SLFA), 25% of all government seats and 30% of seats at the future consultative assembly – which never saw the light of day. In virtue of this agreement, six ministers were appointed in February, including the JEM's Jibril Ibrahim, who became Minister of Finance. Other armed group leaders were appointed to strategic positions: Minni Minawi (SLM-Minawi) as Head of the state of Darfur; Khamis Abdalla Abkar (Sudanese Alliance) as the Governor of West Darfur; and Nimir Abdel-Rahman (SLM-TC) as the Governor of North Darfur.[16]

14. Niels-Christian Bormann and Ibrahim Elbadawi, "The Juba Power-Sharing Agreement: Will it Promote Peace and Democratic Transition in Sudan?", Economic Research Forum, October 2021.

15. Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan between the Transitional Government of Sudan and the Parties to Peace Process, Official English Version, https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Juba%20Agreement%20for%20Peace%20in%20Sudan%20-%20Official%20ENGLISH.PDF.

16. Ibid.

When the agreement was signed,[17] a number of different issues were raised. The first concerned the agreement's financing, which included a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program. It also provided for substantial cash transfers, despite Sudan being in the midst of a major economic crisis and that the central government had great difficulties in paying civil servants' salaries. The agreement relied on aid from the international community, but since the latter had committed to neither negotiations nor aid, this section remained largely hypothetical. The agreement's economic clauses – which included annual compensations – never took effect, due to the extremely poor state of the country's public finances.

The second major issue stemmed from the SPLM-N al-Hilu and the SLA-Nur[18] – the country's two most powerful groups, both militarily (before the transition) and politically –refusing to sign the agreement or to enter negotiations.

The absence of these two actors reflected badly upon the process and raised the question of representativeness, which constitutes the third main issue with this agreement. The latter gave a major role to groups that were weak back when the agreement was signed. The so-called "comprehensive", yet non-inclusive nature of the agreement allowed these groups to position themselves as their regions' legitimate representatives, while excluding leaders and organizations linked to refugees and displaced persons, political groups and civil actors.

The fourth problem stemmed from the supremacy clause, which placed the JPA above the constitutional document in the hierarchy of norms.[19] In fact, the constitutional document was later amended so as not to contravene the JPA. This implied major political consequences, since it gave the JPA a form of legitimacy that competed with the civilian legitimacy that was established by the revolution. What's more, the JPA defined fields in which

17. *The Rebels Come to Khartoum.*

18. Ibid.

19. Alessandro Mario Amoroso, "A Legal Analysis of the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan and its Darfur Components", *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 12 (2), 2022, p. 23-48.

the government could no longer intervene during the transition period and put forward a number of provisions to be included in the country's future constitution.

The final issue with the JPA is that it established an asymmetrical form of federalism. In the different tracks, provisions on the degree of autonomy and power given to each region presented striking differences. This asymmetry stemmed from the parallel negotiations that were held for each region. The resulting imbalance thereby reflected the varying importance of the actors involved. Thus, the agreement was disputed by certain regions, as well as by players who were not represented during the negotiations and who felt like they had been short-changed compared to signatories from war zones such as Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan.

This imbalance had two political consequences. The first was a substantial increase in the representation of peripheral regions within the transition, particularly Darfur.[20] This shift disrupted Sudan's usual political scene, which has – somewhat hastily – been described as a political marketplace,[21] one that is based solely on transactions and the ability to secure resources. However, this economic approach to politics does not allow us to understand the factors underlying the country's broader political dynamics,[22]

20. Several key players in the transition originated from this region, including Hemedti and his RSF, as well as most of the JPA's signatories. In all of Sudan's post-independence history, Darfur had never been so well represented at the heart of power.

21. Alex de Waal, "Sudan: A Political Marketplace Framework Analysis", Occasional Paper, World Peace Foundation, 2019, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/101291/1/De_Waal_Sudan_a_political_marketplace_analysis_published.pdf; Jean-Baptiste Gallopin, Eddie Thomas, Sarah Detzner and Alex de Waal, *Sudan's political marketplace in 2021: public and political finance, the Juba agreement and contests*, Conflict Research Programme, London, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2021.

22. Clément Deshayes, *Lutter en ville au Soudan. Ethnographie politique de deux mouvements de contestation : Girifna et Sudan Change Now* [Urban struggles in Sudan. Political ethnography of two protest movements: Girifna and Sudan Change Now], Anthropology thesis, Université Paris 8 Saint-Denis, November 29, 2019.

i.e. social dynamics,[23] political trajectories and the interpretations of various situations by the players involved. Nevertheless, the fact that players were driven to secure advantageous positions and glean material (as well as symbolic) resources remained a key issue, both in the negotiations and in the transition process as a whole. The presence of actors such as Hemedti and rebel groups in Khartoum, at the center of power, was a true novelty. It constituted a major change in the Sudanese power space, hitherto dominated by local Arab elites.[24] Power was no longer confined to a central elite, i.e. to the old families of the colonial pact. Hemedti's growing grasp on power and the central position secured by certain armed group leaders marked the start of a new side path on the road to power: a politico-military dynamic, similar to that observed in other countries in the region, such as Chad.[25]

The second consequence was that the political parties at the head of the FFC wished to join the government, since the JPA had ratified the end of the technocratic model by appointing members of rebel movements. Thus, the government itself became a political arena, one in which three of the transition's main players grappled for power: the army, the FFC and former rebels, all of which were in turn subjected to "centrifugal" forces.

This facet of the transition allowed for the country's peripheral areas to be better represented, yet weakened the role of civilians within transitional institutions. This became all the more striking when rebel groups moved closer to Hemedti, first and foremost, before attempting a rapprochement with the army. Certain players like Minni Minawi, Leader of the SLM-Minawi

23. Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, *La revanche des contextes. Des mésaventures en ingénierie sociale en Afrique et au-delà* [The revenge of contexts: Social engineering misadventures in Africa and beyond], Paris, Karthala, 2021.

24. Heather Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism,* Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2003; J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Darfur: The Long Road to disaster*, Princeton, Markus Wiener, 2006.

25. Marielle Debos, *Le métier des armes au Tchad. Le gouvernement de l'entre-guerres* [The profession of arms in Chad: The interwar government], Paris, Karthala, 2013.

– which was in conflict with the FFC since the constitutional document came into force – believed that civilians were incapable of removing the army from power and that, consequently, the army was both the true guarantor of the JPA and the true seat of power.[26] Meanwhile, Jibril Ibrahim's JEM was returning to its Islamist stance (despite it including a large branch that did not share the same political history as the JEM, represented by Ahmed Tugod Lissan)[27] and was trying to create a political party that could attract members of the Sudanese Islamic movement. Similarly, some groups were drawing closer to Hemedti. These groups perceived the latter as a competitor or enemy in Darfur. In Khartoum, however, Hemedti was seen as an ally in the fight against the former elites. This was amplified by the fact that the head of the RSF was not seen as a potential sympathizer of former regime supporters. These multidimensional dynamics led the civilians on the Sovereignty Council to emerge as a minority on certain issues, which weakened their grasp on certain parts of the administration. The rebel groups, for their part, were trying to retain the political advantages granted to them by the JPA. Thus, they forged closer ties with the players they deemed most qualified to help them do so. These ties, based on political bargaining[28] and coexistence, would not, however, prevent conflicts from resuming – as was the case in Darfur and other similar contexts.[29] On the contrary, they encouraged fragmentation and factionalism within rebel groups.[30]

These difficulties in implementing the JPA, combined with an incomplete and non-inclusive separation of power, constituted

26. *The Rebels Come to Khartoum.*

27. *The Political Index.*

28. Andreas Mehler, "Peace and Power Sharing in Africa: A Not So Obvious Relationship", *African Affairs*, 108 (431), 2009, p. 453-473.

29. René Lemarchand, "Consociationalism and Power Sharing in Africa: Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo", *African Affairs*, 006 (422), 2007, p. 1-20.

30. Victor Tanner and Jérôme Tubiana, *Divided they Fall. The Fragmentation of Darfur's Rebel Groups*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, 2007.

fertile ground for political fragmentation and the takeover of the transition by the SAF and the RSF.

THE FFC AND SRF BREAK UP WHILE ARMED GROUPS BECOME POLITICALLY REALIGNED

Contrary to the hopes of many of the transition's protagonists, the reciprocal assimilation between civilian elites[31] from the center of the country and representatives of armed groups – who could have helped bolster the forces opposing the army's stranglehold – did not take place. In fact, these two types of group, the legitimacy and social roots of which varied greatly, underwent a similar process of fragmentation, induced by the nature of the distribution of power in Sudan, as well as by the fact that these groups' pools of supporters remained permeable to revolutionary aspirations.

First of all, let us look back on the dynamics underlying their fragmentation. In the case of the FFC, political tensions soon arose over the question of the army's participation in the transition, as well as over the liberal-inspired economic reforms steered by Minister of Finance and former World Bank Economist Ibrahim al-Badawi. The CP, certain resistance committees and several branches of the SPA counted among the most critical voices. The CP withdrew from the FFC in November 2020, and the NUP indicated that it was "freezing" its participation in the political platform. In May 2020, the SPA – one of the founding members of the FFC – held internal elections that brought in a new, more radical generation to lead the union. The losers of the election sat on the FFC's Central Council and rejected the results of the vote. They continued to represent the SPA within the FFC, by drawing upon support from a majority of the political parties involved, despite their electoral defeat.[32] This episode left a deep

31. Jean-François Bayart, *L'État en Afrique. La politique du ventre* [The State in Africa: The politics of the belly], Paris, Karthala, 1989.

32. Interviews with members of the FFC and the SPA, Khartoum, July 2021 and October 2022.

mark in the revolutionary forces' outlook, particularly regarding the true willingness of these parties to play the political game in a transparent and democratic way. At the same time, the revolutionary committees that emerged from the revolution continued to organize in many of Sudan's towns and districts. They regularly called for demonstrations, both to support civilians and their participation in the process and to remind the latter that compromises must not be made with the armed forces.

During the revolutionary upheaval of 2019-2021, numerous political initiatives and parties were created or rekindled. Certain political entrepreneurs and groups looked to position themselves in ongoing negotiations and upcoming elections, which would allow them to secure seats at the table. Other parties were created by former government supporters, who were trying to cover up their troubled past and, ultimately, weaken or compete with the revolutionary groups. The case of Sayed Tirik who, with the aid of Musa Mohamed Ahmed and Ali Abu Amna, created the High Council of Beja Nazirs (despite featuring only one of the seven Beja Nazirs), is a perfect illustration of these attempts to reframe regional elites and their ability to cause harm.[33] Fragmentation and political competition go hand-in-hand with power-sharing agreements, yet in the case of Sudan, they were exacerbated by the sheer multiplicity of decision-making bodies and the feeble institutionalization of each of these centers of power. Thus, in addition to the FFC and the government, the former – aided by the military – created the Council of the Governing Partners in December 2020, which included the Prime Minister, FFC and army leaders and boasted supervisory powers over the executive.[34] The aim here was to exert political control over Hamdok's technocratic government, while retaining control in case the FFC's power became weakened following the appointment of a legislative council.

33. Jean-Baptiste Gallopin et al., *Sudan's political marketplace in 2021.*

34. Amgad Fareid Eltayeb, "Back to barracks: Building democracy after the military coup in Sudan", European Council on Foreign Relations, November 3, 2022.

This dynamic of fragmentation within the SRF – which brought together several rebel movements and armed groups – was long-standing, since many of its factions had emerged from splits within Abdul Wahid al-Nur's SLA (founded in 2003) and the SPLM-N (which took over from the SPLM in Kordofan and Blue Nile after the secession of South Sudan in 2011). What's more, a number of groups that had split off from the JEM were still present in Libya and had not signed the JPA. Initially, armed groups had sought to disassociate themselves from the shaky SRF alliance. During the peace negotiations, Minni Minawi (SLM-Minawi) claimed his independence and went on to negotiate and sign the JPA separately. The JEM, whose political goals and stances were far removed from those of the SRF and the FFC, also began to remove itself. At the time, the SRF led by al-Hadi Idriss was essentially composed of the SPLM-N Agar, SLM-TC, SLFA and the opposition Beja Congress. In 2021, the SRF was rocked by growing tensions between the military and the FFC, leading it to come under great pressure from Darfur.

The Darfur region, which saw a major upsurge in violence following the signing of the JPA, was also a hotbed of violent activity after the revolution.[35] Numerous sit-ins and demonstrations took place in major cities and refugee camps, some of which were brutally attacked by Arab tribal militias. The civil unrest and violent repression suffered by the population led armed groups and their representatives in regional institutions to face mounting pressure from civilians. In order to strengthen their position, these armed groups massively recruited young people from within their communities following their return from Libya. These new recruits exerted considerable pressure on politico-military organizations that were sometimes poorly structured, as was the case of the SLFA and Khamis Abdalla Abkar's Sudanese Alliance. During this upsurge in violence, community self-defense groups – especially among the Massalit

35. Jérôme Tubiana, "Delays and Dilemmas: New Violence in Darfur and Uncertain Justice Efforts within Sudan's Fragile Transition", International Federation for Human Rights, November 2021.

people of West Darfur – appeared to become more structured and were able to inflict heavy losses on Arab tribal militias, particularly on the Rizeigat.[36] The history of clashes in Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, proved to be a decisive component in the large-scale violence and war crimes committed by Arab militias – who were allies of the RSF – against the army, which took place in the city in May and June 2023. These crimes took on the form of an ethnic cleansing, with the Massalit population being systematically targeted, leading tens of thousands of inhabitants to flee.[37]

Therefore, the revolution was not merely a product of Sudan's center, one that would only have had a limited impact on peripheral regions. This raised powerful questions regarding regional balances of power, as demonstrated by the riots and blockades in the east of the country,[38] the bloodshed in Blue Nile,[39] the rearmament of the Misserya tribe – which was formerly part of the Popular Defense Forces (PDF) in South Kordofan[40] – and the rekindling of multi-faceted violence in Darfur. JPA signatories gradually became divided, between those who were closer to the military (JEM and SLM-Minawi) and those who preferred an alliance with civilians (SRF). Yet the lines of this disagreement were not always clear-cut, as some players distrusted the military while maintaining good relations with the SRF. Nevertheless, this dividing line gradually widened until the fall of 2021.

A new alliance was created following persistent tensions within the FFC, both between its members and with JPA signatories: FFC-NA – Consensus Forces (not to be confused with

36. Ibid.

37. At the time of writing, the true scale of these massacres is still poorly documented, yet their toll is said to have exceeded 1,000 dead and 3,000 wounded. According to Massalit community leaders, these numbers are thought to have reached 5,000 dead. For more information on these events, see: "Sudan: at least 1000 have been killed in Darfur", *African Center for Justice and Peace Studies,* June 21, 2023.

38. Jean-Baptiste Gallopin et al., *Sudan's political marketplace in 2021.*

39. Sudan Rapid Response Update, "One Year after the coup".

40. *The Rebels Come to Khartoum.*

the National Consensus Forces), better known as the FFC-2 or FFC-NA. As for the JPA signatories, the group was created by the JEM and the SLM-Minawi, which was joined by the Kush Liberation Movement and the Sudanese Alliance. This coalition was also joined by smaller political parties, such as the Democratic Alliance for Social Justice (Mubarak Ardol and Ali Askouri), al-Tom Hajo (member of the SRF and Head of the JPA's Center track), the Unified Federal Party and one of the smaller Ba'ath parties (Yahya al-Hussein).[41] This new alliance called for a reorganization of the government and quickly took on the attitude of a pro-military (SAF) group. It brings numerous groups from Sudan's various regions together and claims to oppose the central parties' domination over the transition process. The reality on the ground appears to be more complex, as the coalition includes parties from the center of power and former NCP allies – a fact that was later confirmed by a rapprochement with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The FFC-NA launched a sit-in in front of the presidential palace in October 2021, which drew thousands of supporters of this coalition. The protest was also spurred on by the army and networks loyal to the former regime, which saw it as a means of weakening the transition.[42] Participants clearly called for the army to take power in order to remove the FFC-1. As a result of rising tensions between the FFC-1 and the army, and despite massive demonstrations in response to the FFC-2 sit-in, the military and the RSF took over the government on October 25, 2021. Hundreds of opponents were arrested, including the Prime Minister and several ministers. The coup was supported by the majority of FFC-2 members, who then tried to give the events a form of civilian legitimacy. Nevertheless, the public's response was truly resounding in many towns across the country (including Darfur) and did not

41. These small parties either stemmed from political splits or were previously small parties opposed to the NCP. They either had narrow social roots or were located in specific regions.

42. Interview, Sudan, October 2021.

taper off for many months. Thus, the coup's leaders found themselves in a political stalemate.

Support for the coup, which was not unanimous within the FFC-2, linked the fates of armed groups who clearly supported the military takeover (JEM and SLM-Minawi) to the political fate of the armed forces – and that of al-Burhan in particular. The FFC-2 went from being a regional guarantor in a competitive political game with multiple players, to a minority in an asymmetrical relationship with the army. The groups that composed the SRF opposed the coup and defended the idea of a civilian government, despite their differences with the pro-civilians, their decision to honor the JPA and their continued presence on the Sovereignty Council. The FFC-2 alliance gradually disbanded and, in 2022, the JEM and SLM-Minawi gradually drew closer to players who had supported the military and participated in the NCP regime, such as the High Council of Beja Nazirs and the Mirghani family's DUP. These various actors eventually founded the Democratic Bloc. The latter was clearly aligned with the army's views and slowed down the negotiations between the army, the FFC and Hemedti once they resumed under the patronage of QUAD and UNITAMS in 2022. This dynamic was an integral part of the fragmentation process that occurred within armed groups, and of the political factionalism[43] sparked by the armed forces and the negotiations over Sudan's political transition.

43. Tarik Dahou, "Entre engagement et allégeance. Historicisation du politique au Sénégal" [Between commitment and allegiance: Historicizing politics in Senegal], *Cahiers d'études africaines* [Handbook of African studies], 167 (3), 2002, p. 499-520.

III. ECONOMIC AND SECURITY-RELATED COMPETITION AS POLITICS BECOME MILITIA-ORIENTED

The third defining – albeit evolving – facet of Sudan's political dynamics is twofold: politics becoming militia-oriented, and rivalries between actors in the security sector. Once again, these phenomena are linked to competition for control over the state and its resources.

As we have already seen, the revolution brought about major reconfigurations among the armed groups connected to the state.[1] This shift produced both winners and losers. The losing side included the former regime's security services: the NISS and the PDF, i.e. two central players from the former regime. The NISS' elite military forces were disbanded and briefly started to rebel. The General Intelligence Service (GIS), a new security agency created under the aegis of the military, recruited a number of former NISS agents. The RSF also created an integrated intelligence service. Also on the losers' side, the PDF was once the armed wing of the Islamic movement's historic civilizational project, before being dissolved by the Hamdok government.[2] It then evolved into a low-cost counter-insurgency tool that relied on the mobilization of political activists and youths from urban areas (mainly during the early years of the regime) on the one hand, and on tribes from the west of the country on the other – particularly during the conflicts in South Kordofan and Darfur.[3] The winning side, however, was clearly composed of the RSF and the army. Other groups, such as the Third Front-Tamazuj and the Central Reserve Police (CRP), gradually started to gain

1. Anne-Laure Mahé, "L'appareil sécuritaire et la transition politique au Soudan" [Sudan's security apparatus and political transition].

2. "Popular Defence Forces integrated into Sudan army", Radio Dabanga, June 2020.

3. Jago Salmon, "A Paramilitary Revolution: The Popular Defence Forces", Geneva, Small Arm Surveys, HSBA working paper, 10, December 2007.

traction, as they benefitted from their alliance with the military and from rivalries between actors in the security sector.

Since April 2023, two of Sudan's armed forces, i.e. the RSF and the SAF, have been engaged in an armed battle to seize power. This confrontation extends much further than a mere war between generals. The rivalry between these two forces is part of the four following complementary dynamics: counter-insurgency practices in peripheral areas[4] and security issues in Khartoum, which arose during the previous regime; the political process following the revolution, which included these two groups as part of the transition; economic competition; and finally, the marginalization of groups from peripheral areas by the elites at the center of the country.

HEMEDTI AND THE RSF: THE SUCCESS OF A MILITARY AND POLITICAL ENTREPRENEUR

We are now relatively familiar with the story of the RSF. Founded in 2013 and led by Hemedti, this unit was initially under the control of the NISS,[5] yet enjoyed considerable operational autonomy. It attracted and united many former *janjaweed*,[6] who became infamous for the sheer brutality of their methods during the conflict in Darfur. The RSF once competed with another paramilitary force, which was trying to become autonomous at the time: the Border Guards, headed by Musa Hilal, which counted around 20,000 men.[7] These units mainly recruited members from the so-called "Arab" tribes of Darfur, which were often called upon by the Sudanese government to suppress insurgencies and

4. Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, *Darfur. A Short History of a Long War*, London and New York, Zed Books, African Arguments, 2005, p. 24.

5. The NISS was tasked with creating and managing new armed forces. In practice, these forces enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and received arms and funding from the NISS.

6. *Janjaweed* is a term used to designate members of the militias and armed groups employed by the Sudanese government during the war in Darfur. These fighters specifically targeted civilians and committed numerous war crimes.

7. Jago Salmon, "A Paramilitary Revolution".

target certain populations in Darfur. Later, the RSF came under the direct control of the presidency. Its deployment around Khartoum is thought to have started as early as 2013-14. After a successful campaign against Darfuri rebel groups in 2015 and 2016, which led to the expulsion of many future signatories of the JPA to Libya, the RSF moved out of its usual area of operation and was deployed in Yemen and South Kordofan (where it faced several setbacks caused by the SPLM-N). It was also present on the Libyan border to control migration, as part of the Khartoum Process that was launched under the impetus of the European Union.[8] In 2017, Hemedti arrested his rival Musa Hilal and took control of the Jebel Amer gold mines, which were previously operated by Hilal.[9]

The RSF is not a militia in the strictest sense of the term, but a regular paramilitary force that falls under a specific law: the RSF Act of 2017.[10] This document gave the RSF its own state-funded budget,[11] described its missions and granted immunity to its members in the context of their missions. The RSF was placed under direct control of the Head of State. Other troops, such as the CRP, Border Guards or PDF, were institutionalized and formalized after they mobilized civilians to fight in Sudan. Yet the RSF is the only one to have succeeded in becoming autonomous, gradually freeing itself from the army and the NISS without being disbanded.[12] The group's empowerment and institutionalization came about in a favorable international context, which enabled Hemedti to benefit politically from the RSF's deployment, both

8. Suliman Baldo, "Border Control from Hell. How the EU's migration partnership legitimizes Sudan's 'militia state'", *Enough Project*, April 2017, https://enoughproject.org/files/BorderControl_April2017_Enough_Finals.pdf.

9. Mohamed Elagami, "The Checkered past of Sudan's Hemedti", The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, May 29, 2019.

10. "Sudanese parliament passes RSF Act integrating militiamen in the army", *Sudan Tribune*, January 16, 2017.

11. Just like the army and the NISS.

12. The Central Reserve Police – also composed of former *janjaweed* – was once under the control of the NISS, before being taken over by the SAF. The Border Guards were disbanded when the RSF was created, due to its leader Musa Hilal's penchant for autonomy. Hilal was later arrested by the RSF.

in Yemen and as part of the Khartoum Process. Various military victories against the rebels in Darfur also enabled the RSF to establish itself as a key player in the region and, thereby, to take control of strategic economic resources. Finally, Hemedti benefited from the patronage of Omar al-Bashir, who placed the RSF under his control as a way of balancing out the security sector – between the army, the NISS and the RSF – at a time when internal opposition to the regime was becoming increasingly vocal.

By formally becoming part of the state in 2017, the RSF had to become more compliant with the country's institutional framework so as to appear sufficiently amenable and legitimate (to control migration and to intervene in Yemen) in the eyes of Sudan's various regional players. Making the RSF a state player meant improving its management and internal structure (i.e. separate divisions of armored units, engineers, military police, intelligence, communications, human rights, etc.), increasing recourse to training and developing an embryonic form of bureaucracy. Several hundred SAF and NISS officers joined the force to supervise and train officers and NCOs. These processes accelerated with the revolution and Hemedti's appointment as Vice-President of the Sovereignty Council.

Although the RSF is now a legally bound military force, with a recruitment pool extending beyond the Arab tribes of Darfur, its chain of command is essentially based on family and clan ties, which are in turn rooted in economic activity.[13] Due to the increasing presence of militias in Darfuri society[14] – i.e. the mobilization of whole sections of the population for war and resource control – and the gradual integration of these forces into the state, these state-created, low-cost counter-insurgency forces have become major actors. Hemedti's aim is not to destroy the state, but to take control. The fact that the RSF recruits among Darfur's

13. "The Rapid Support Forces: A comprehensive Profile", *Sudan in the News*, October 29, 2019.

14. Roland Marchal, "Terminer une guerre" [Ending a war], in Roland Marchal and Christine Messiant, *Les chemins de la guerre et de la paix. Fins de conflits en Afrique orientale et australe* [The paths of war and peace: Ending conflicts in Eastern and Southern Africa], Paris, Karthala, 1997.

thousands of Arab tribesmen has become a particularly striking part of the group's anti-army rhetoric. This rhetoric exalts the military prowess of the "sons of the desert" against the weak military, which mainly recruits from the Center and the South.

The RSF is backed by the family businesses owned by the Dagalo family and, more specifically, the al-Junaid conglomerate.[15] The latter includes a number of companies run by Hemedti's family members (who are often senior officers in the RSF). These companies operate in a wide range of sectors: mining, construction (buildings, roads, etc.), automotive, services, etc. The bulk of the wealth upon which this economic powerhouse is built comes from the war in Yemen, public contracts awarded to Hemedti's companies, gold mining and trading, as well as the war economy in Darfur.[16] During the revolution, this wealth was massively reinvested in buildings and land in Khartoum, as well as in the purchase of businesses, sold at low prices by regime supporters attempting to avoid their assets being seized by the ERC.

The SAF increasingly perceives Hemedti's emergence as a leading economic player as a threat to its own interests. The army is in charge of entire economic sectors and, since the 1990s, has largely focused on managing the companies it owns. The SAF is at the head of Sudan's military-industrial complex, which produces ammunition, small arms, armored vehicles and even tanks (based on a Chinese design). It also runs many other types of business: agribusiness, livestock trading, transport, services, pharmaceuticals, oil and mining. These companies are managed by senior officers and generate substantial revenues. Whether they were handed over by the former regime or acquired gradually, these companies escape state supervision and are privately managed by the army. During the transition, the government's control over these companies proved to be an obstacle for negotiations with civilians. Thus, the SAF is effectively part of a category

15. Hemedti is part of the Dagalo family. His brothers, cousins and other family members hold key positions in both al-Junaid and the RSF.

16. "Exposing the RSF's secret financial network", *Global Witness*, December 9, 2019.

of military-political-economic actors similar to the RSF (but does not feature the latter's family and clan-related dynamics).

While the RSF is a state-created paramilitary force that has become institutionalized, the army is a regular armed force that essentially serves the former NCP, and which has gradually become militia-oriented. These two processes occurred in parallel and reinforced each other. Thus, the army has managed to free itself from state supervision while pursuing private economic interests.[17] Since the transition, the two forces have been engaged in a highly aggressive economic rivalry, with Hemedti trying to compete with the army in the highly profitable cattle export sector, for example, and the SAF increasing its investment in the gold sector. Let us point out that the RSF's institutionalization process is incomplete, as illustrated by its strong mobilization of Arab groups in Darfur and the family dynamics that define its chain of command.

Despite his privileged relationship with al-Bashir, Hemedti actively participated in the coup of April 2019 and tried to rise above rebel groups, the army, regional elites and revolutionary forces. The RSF protected the sit-in – in its early stages – against groups linked to the NCP and NISS, yet largely participated in the massacre of June 3, 2019 that aimed to disperse the very same sit-in. In order to emphasize his Darfuri identity, Hemedti has been able to forge ties and tactical alliances with many former rebels. He has rapidly tried to assume the role of a politician and statesman by maintaining relations with multiple players. Two core aspects emerge from this dynamic. Firstly, Hemedti makes up for the state's financial shortfalls by using his personal fortune, including paying the salaries of police officers after the 2019 coup, as well as those of teachers and baccalaureate supervisors in 2021 and 2022. He has declared having deposited $1 billion at the Central Bank to make up for Sudan's lack of liquidity.[18] As Vice-President of the Sovereignty Council, he has also succeeded

17. On the concept of the army becoming militia-oriented, see Roland Marchal, "Terminer une guerre" [Ending a war], p. 34.

18. Mohamed Elagami, "The Checkered past of Sudan's Hemedti".

in being appointed Head of the High Council for Economic Emergencies.[19] He has since forged and maintained ties with traditional rural leaders, in both Darfur and elsewhere. To do so, he has made gifts and held conferences to unite the leaders of the Native Administration – after the latter was revived under al-Bashir in 1996.[20] This policy wouldn't be possible without the support of regional sponsors, particularly the United Arab Emirates, and international sponsors such as Russia.

In July 2022, a few months after the coup, Hemedti strategically began to disassociate himself from the overthrow, dubbing it a mistake and calling for power to be returned to Sudan's civilians.[21] This new stance was brought on by his mutual hostility with members of the Islamic movement, who perceived Hemedti as a "traitor". However, the army was partly allied with these actors and became increasingly insistent on making the RSF a part of the SAF. Among Sudan's many dynamics, the army and the RSF's competition for control over power seems to have played a major role in the reorganization and surge of armed actors in the country, up until the clashes that broke out between the SAF and RSF.

THE REORGANIZATION AND MULTIPLICATION OF ARMED GROUPS

The increase in the number of armed groups occurred in response to the two dynamics described previously: firstly, the movements that signed the JPA launched major recruitment

19. "Higher Committee for Economic Emergencies Discusses Living Challenges", *Suna*, April 15, 2019.

20. Barbara Casciarri, "'La *gabila* est devenue plus grande.' Permanences et évolution du "modèle tribal" chez les pasteurs Ahamda du Soudan arabe" ["The *gabila* has grown." Permanence and evolution of the "tribal model" among the Ahamda pastoralists of Arab Sudan], in Pierre Bonte, Édouard Conte and Paul Dresch (dir.), *Émirs et présidents. Figures de la parenté et du politique dans le monde arabe* [Emirs and presidents: Figures of kinship and politics in the Arab world], Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2001, p. 273-299.

21. Olewe Dickens, "Mohamed Hemeti Dagalo: top sudan military figure says coup was a mistake", BBC, February 20, 2023.

campaigns, in order to financially benefit from the DDR program provided for in the JPA on the one hand, and to increase their weight in the political balance in Darfur and Blue Nile on the other; secondly, competition between the army and the RSF became increasingly pronounced following the coup d'état.

The stakes for the different armed groups vary according to their political standpoint. Nevertheless, all of these groups found themselves at a considerable military disadvantage after the JPA was signed. Regarding the Darfuri groups that have been fighting in Libya over the last few years (SLM-Minawi, SLM-TC, JEM and SLFA); we are now witnessing either a partial or near-total return of their troops from southern Libya. Some groups have maintained their presence on the other side of the border, both as a strategic guarantee and as a way to secure income from their various activities.[22] The largest groups boast several thousands of fighters and dozens of technicians.[23] Assembly points were defined in Darfur, to which several thousands of fighters flocked to join the army. These fighters were also expecting the formation of a joint force and the implementation of a hypothetical DDR program. Upon their return mainly from Libya, it seems that these troops did not remain confined to the defined assembly points and began to recruit massively among nearby communities (Zaghawa, Fur and Massalit). Although assessing the exact scale of these recruitment campaigns – and evaluating their opportunistic nature (i.e. to draw benefit from the DDR process and secure advantageous positions) – remains difficult, witnesses speak of substantial recruitment.[24] This dynamic led to the remobilization of Arab tribal militias, which became worried

22. United Nations Security Council, "Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan", S/2022/48, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2022_48_E.pdf.

23. Fighters moving between different locations and activities, as well as the fragmentation of these various groups, make it difficult to provide precise estimates. Nevertheless, the largest groups appeared to count between 2,000 and 3,000 fighters at the time of the revolution.

24. Interviews, Khartoum, October 2022.

about the effects of the JPA – in which they did not take part – regarding control over land and water resources.

The SPLM-N Agar, a group historically located in the Blue Nile only, mainly recruits among the Ingessana people. In order to extend its – hitherto somewhat limited – political legitimacy, Agar joined forces with and supported the demands of the Blue Nile's Fellata and Hausa tribes. SPLM-N Agar also began recruiting men from these communities, which have been calling for the creation of their own Native Administration since the mid-1990s. This local issue is political in nature, as it is linked to land rights and population management. The other branch of the SPLM-N, which is loyal to Abdelaziz al-Hilu, massively recruits from the region's Funj communities (Hamaj, Uduk, Berta and Kadalo).[25] The overlap between local governance, the recruitment of new fighters and political antagonism has repeatedly led to violence and even massacres. These clashes have intensified since a governor from the SPLM-N Agar was appointed in June 2021. These dynamics, defined by recruitment campaigns and a race for positions of power, have had three major consequences that greatly complicate the transition process. The first regards the impossibility of implementing the JPA's security provisions, particularly the reform of the security sector. The second relates to the protection of gains secured through the JPA by its signatories, thereby leading to the implementation of a spoiler strategy[26] by the latter to prevent the effective transfer of power over to civilian forces. The third consequence is a rise in tension within the regions where signatories units are deployed.

Since the beginning of the transition, the army[27] has encouraged the formation or the reinforcement of armed groups capable of counterbalancing the RSF's power. The first of these groups is the CRP, which came into being in 1974 and sports

25. Sudan Rapid Response Update, "One Year after the coup".

26. Gerrit Kurtz, "The Spoilers of Darfur", *SWP comment*, 53, November 2022.

27. The army officially boasts 109,000 active members and 85,000 reservists ("2023 Sudan Military Strength", *Global Firepower*, January 1, 2023).

a recognizable black bird insignia (known as *Abu Tira*).[28] It is a militarized police unit and the scope of its missions has evolved over the years. Despite not being born during the war in Darfur, it was extensively involved in the conflict and, above all, massively recruited among the *janjaweed* and more specifically from the Arab tribes known as the Baggara (cow breeders). Musa Hilal's Border Guard, on the other hand, mainly recruited from the Rizeigat Abbala (camel breeders). The RSF does not recruit from any groups in particular, although it does count a substantial number of Rizeigat members. The CRP's most famous leader was Ali Kushayb, who is currently on trial before the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed between August 2003 and April 2004.[29] This unit, which was under the control of the NISS prior to the revolution (despite being officially controlled by the Minister of the Interior), was taken over by the military following the revolution and the appointment of Deputy Director of the GIS General Husham Hussein. From 2009 to 2018, the latter acted as Deputy to NISS Director Mohamed Atta.[30] The CRP, which counted several tens of thousands of men prior to the revolution, is mainly deployed in Khartoum and Darfur. It has been used to repress demonstrations since the coup[31] and has played an active role, alongside the SAF, in the ongoing clashes in Khartoum since April 2023.

In parallel, the army encouraged the creation of the Third Front Tamazuj and its inclusion in the JPA. This armed group is composed of fighters from the former SPLM – which disbanded prior to the separation of South Sudan – who fought under the command of Riek Machar, an ally of the Sudanese government.

28. "Sudan: Central Reserve Police", REDRESS briefing, March 2022.

29. Ali Muhamad Ali Abd-al-Rahman, aka "Ali Kushayb", is a *janjaweed* leader who was a member of both the PDF and the CRP. Following his major involvement in the crimes committed in Darfur, he was prosecuted by the ICC from 2007 onwards and was arrested in the Central African Republic in 2020.

30. Both were high-ranking members of the NCP.

31. "Treasury sanctions Sudanese Central Reserve Police for serious human rights abuse", US Department of the Treasury, March 21, 2022.

Following its integration into the JPA,[32] this group enjoyed a sudden upsurge in strength and was able to recruit. It is believed to count no more than a few thousand fighters (2,000 to 5,000 according to certain estimates). Similarly, the SAF encouraged the creation of a new militia called the "Sudan Shield Forces", which appears to be an assortment of former PDF members and supporters of the former regime.[33] This group is mainly active in the center of the country, particularly north of Khartoum. It aims to defend the interests of groups located at the center of the country against forces from the periphery, namely the RSF.[34]

Concordant testimonies[35] and public denunciations by tribal leaders[36] attest to a dual policy being enforced by the army in Darfur. It seems that, on the one hand, the army pursued an aggressive recruitment policy among the Rizeigat people to weaken Hemedti, as the latter hails from one of the branches (Mahariya) of the Rizeigat. On the other hand, the army is said to support Musa Hilal and to have recruited members of the Rizeigat Mahamid clan (from which Musa Hilal hails) in order to compete with and weaken the RSF's hold on Darfur.[37] In parallel, the PDF[38] was officially disbanded in June 2020 and placed under the control of the army as part of a Reserve Department. Since the coup of 2021, the army has benefited from the support of former NCP executives, such as Ali Karti, who was once its

32. *The Political Index*.

33. Interview, Khartoum, October 2022.

34. "Central Sudan's new armed group of Al-Butana region", *Sudan Tribune*, December 22, 2022.

35. Interviews, Khartoum, October 2022.

36. "Rizeigat paramount leader rejects recruitment among his tribesmen in Darfur", *Sudan Tribune*, March 16, 2023.

37. "Sudan army intends to reintegrate the border guard forces to its ranks", *Darfur 24*, October 11, 2022.

38. Since its creation in 1989, the PDF has undergone many transformations. It was originally a mobilizing force for the Jihad waged in South Sudan by the National Islamic Front, which was seizing power at the time. In 2019, the PDF was still mobilized, both as a force loyal to the regime and as a tool for recruiting rural populations to wage war in South Kordofan. Most of its men are reservists. Due to an unstable hierarchy and poor coordination, PDF groups differ from one area to another.

coordinator during the 1990s. Nevertheless, many operational units in Kordofan are known to recruit based on tribal affiliations (i.e. among the Baggara Arabs) and seem to have drawn closer to the RSF.

This policy of providing military support to militias or armed groups is part of a deep-rooted history of governmental and counter-insurgency practices. Since the 1980s-90s and their series of defeats against the SPLM, the SAF and the country's political powers have relied on militias to carry out counter-insurgency campaigns. Ever since the 1980s, hiring non-professional actors – recruited from the local population and mentored by various institutions (such as the PDF) – has been an ongoing practice for managing the country's peripheries. The first forces to be called upon to support the army were the Murahileen, created in 1985-86, followed by the PDF, the CRP, the Border Guards and the RSF. This practice was combined with a policy of holding negotiations separately, while bribing commanders to fragment rebel movements and encourage splits. The systematic use of auxiliary forces to wage war can also be explained by the Sudanese army's recruitment process. The overwhelming majority of officers are post-colonial elites from the center of Sudan, who were trained at military academies in Khartoum and Cairo.[39] On the other hand, most of the men in the ranks come from regions where civil wars are waged (Blue Nile, South Kordofan and Darfur).

This regional asymmetry in the army's recruitment process is compounded by two other factors: the ineffectiveness of the SAF's counter-insurgency practices, and the regime's need to protect itself against military coups by relying on external armed groups. These governing practices, based on the outsourcing of violence to militias or paramilitary forces, have in fact reinforced factionalism and the creation of personal allegiances within the armed forces (RSF, Border Guards, tribal militias and PDF).

39. Let us note that, after 1989, being a member of the NCP or being supported by a party executive was a prerequisite to enter these academies. Almost all of Sudan's army officers were active or opportunistic members of the party in power at the time of the revolution.

These two dynamics go hand-in-hand with a form of informalization, one that is illustrated by the simultaneous positions held by paramilitary and military actors: tribal militia members can also be economic operators and officers in the RSF; alternatively, SAF officers can also be directors of SAF companies. These three dimensions (counter-insurgency practices, factionalism and informalization), which are also present in the Chadian army,[40] apply to Sudan, yet in a less clear-cut but nonetheless conspicuous manner. They point to the armed forces becoming more militia-oriented as a whole, as well as to an influx of armed groups into the state. These processes are nothing new, but were hastened by the Sudanese revolution and the various opportunities it opened up.

Thus, the army's current practices are inherited from previous governments. Yet the current context is novel in that the RSF, which is a product of this low-cost counter-insurgency policy, has become autonomous and sufficiently institutionalized to enter into competition with the SAF. Competition between these two players is not only political; it also challenges the social and economic hierarchies that enabled post-colonial elites from the center of the country to dominate the rest of Sudan. The emergence of a politico-military entrepreneur capable of competing with the army, on both a military and economic level, constitutes a profound change in Sudan's balance of power and social hierarchies.

40. Marielle Debos, *Le métier des armes au Tchad* [The profession of arms in Chad], p. 173.

CONCLUSION

The conflict between the RSF and the SAF in Sudan should not be analyzed in simplistic terms. Although this confrontation is part of a complex regional and international political game, its dynamics are essentially specific to Sudan. This eruption of violence needs to be considered in context, i.e. in view of Sudan's history of civil strife, if it is to be understood at all. Far from being a mere conflict between two generals, the war that broke out marks the failure of a political transition model, one that is defined by negotiations between civilians and a variety of armed groups. The difficulties experienced by the transitional government in undertaking sensitive reforms (regarding security services, transitional justice and regional inequalities), as well as its struggles in carrying out a sufficiently effective purge or dismantling problematic groups, go to show the sheer impracticability of this partnership. The SAF and RSF were pillars of the NCP regime that ruled Sudan for 30 years, including nearly 25 years under international sanctions. Thus, these two groups were able to utilize their role within transitional institutions to consolidate their power and resist civilian endeavors. Sudan's civilian political forces made the mistake of excluding armed groups and civilians from peripheral areas from the power-sharing agreement. This mistake – as well as the JPA, which thereby became necessary – sparked competition for legitimacy and a form of power race that weakened pro-change actors. In this decisive race for control over the state apparatus, the SAF and the RSF gained a clear advantage over civilians and JPA signatories.

The SAF never truly appeared to consider an effective transfer of power. As a negotiator of the 2019 constitutional document put it: "We felt that we couldn't ask for more. We wanted to secure what we could before pushing to regain the remainder of power."[1] This form of resistance was illustrated during the coup d'état of October 2021, followed by delays in the draft framework

1. Interview, Khartoum, July 2021.

agreement of 2022-23. Once again, the latter provided for a transfer of power, which never saw the light of day. It is no coincidence that the 2021 coup took place just as General al-Burhan was due to hand over his seat as Chairman of the Sovereignty Council to a civilian. What's more, the war waged in 2023 started a week before the deadline for the appointment of a civilian transitional government.

Beyond the transition, we can analyze the current conflict according to other historical factors and processes: firstly, the Sudanese state's governance and counter-insurgency practices since 1985-86; secondly, the RSF being established as a regular force with specific prerogatives in 2017; thirdly, the regular forces (SAF and RSF) using their positions within the Sudanese state for economic gains; and fourthly, the fact that the SAF was loyal to the NCP as it grew over the last 30 years, which explains its realignment with members of the former regime following the coup of October 2021.

The RSF and the SAF's political, economic and security-related competition became more pronounced after the civilians were sidelined during the coup d'état. This caused several dynamics to accelerate: dynamics linked to the security sector being recomposed, with the multiplication and increase of armed groups; and dynamics linked to the political game being redefined, with Hemedti's rapprochement with the FFC-1 and certain resistance committees, as well as the alliance between the army, the Democratic Bloc (composed of groups previously allied with the NCP, JEM and SLM-Minawi) and part of the former NCP. A third, civilian-led group, composed of numerous resistance committees, trade unions and some Sudanese left-wing parties, refused to negotiate with the RSF and SAF until the very end.

In Khartoum's urban environment, which is uncharted territory for Sudanese warfare, the violent conflict waged since April 2023 bears a striking resemblance with the type of warfare that was developed in Darfur, South Kordofan and Yemen over the last few decades. The army relies on its air force to carry out indiscriminate air strikes and, to some extent, outsources

close-quarter combat (to the CRP and former PDF members). What's more, the RSF – as a light infantry unit – concentrates on waging war in the streets, takes advantage of the terrain and resorts to looting and rape.

LIST OF ACTORS

Political parties	Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) FFC-1/ Central Council FFC-2/ National Accord National Consensus Forces : - Communist Party (PC) - Haqq - Ba'ath and Nasserist parties National Congress Party (NCP) Sudanese Professional Union (SPA) Sudan Call: - National Umma Party (NUP) - Sudanese Congress Party (SCP) - Civil Society Initiative - National Consensus Forces - Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) Unionist alliance Alliance of civilian forces Civil Society Initiative Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Arman (SPLM-N Arman) High Council of Beja Nazirs Democratic Alliance for Social Justice Kush Liberation Movement Unified Federal Party Popular Congress Party (PCP) Reform Now Broad Islamic Current
Armed groups	Sudan Liberation Army – – Abdul Wahid al-Nur (SLA-Nur) Sudanese Liberation Army – Minni Minawi (SLA-MM) Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) Sudanese Revolutionary Front : - Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Agar (SPLM-N Agar) - Sudanese Liberation Movement-Transitional Council (SLM-TC) - Sudan Liberation Forces Alliance (SLFA) - Sudanese Alliance - Opposition Beja Congress Third Front Tamazuj

Security forces and paramilitary groups	Border Guards Central Reserve Police (CRP) Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) Rapid Support Forces (RSF) Sudan Shield Forces Popular Defense Forces (PDF)
Institutions (including international organizations)	Transitional Military Council (TMC) Sovereignty Council Empowerment Removal Committee (ERC) General Intelligence Service (GIS) National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) QUAD United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) African Union (AU) Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Trilateral mechanism (AU-IGAD -UNITAMS)

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REPORT – No. 109

THE DYNAMICS OF CHAOS

REVOLUTION, WAR AND POLITICAL TRANSITIONS IN SUDAN

Clément Deshayes, PhD

In April 2023, a violent conflict broke out in Sudan between the Sudanese army and a paramilitary group named the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This clash constituted the climax of a multidimensional political crisis, one that stemmed from Sudan's popular uprising of 2019. In order to understand the dynamics underlying this power struggle, we first need to grasp certain – more or less lengthy – historical processes: the reconfiguration of power, sparked by the fall of Omar al-Bashir; the counter-insurgency practices that emerged during the country's civil wars; the interweaving of the armed forces' political, security and economic interests; and finally, the concentration of power in the "center" of the country, which fueled forms of marginalization in other regions.

This outbreak of violence was initially sparked by the fact that armed groups refused to transfer power over to civilians, as well as by issues surrounding the reform of the security sector. However, the conflict is rooted in a longer-standing history, as well as in transformations brought about by rapid political shifts in recent years. In order to truly understand the violence that has erupted since April 15, 2023, we need to look back on the challenges and failures of the political transition, particularly regarding the representation of peripheral areas and marginalized groups. We must also highlight the fact that this conflict is rooted in governance and counter-insurgency practices inherited from the NCP regime (1989-2019) and that it extends beyond a mere competition between rival generals.

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