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# Future of Political Transition in Post-Coup Sudan

Unit for Political Studies

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Series: **Situation Assessment**

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### Unit for Political Studies

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Nearly two weeks after the coup in which the military members of the Sudanese Sovereignty Council overthrew the civilian government that was formed under the power-sharing agreement, the political crisis rages on as the military insists on retaining powers and continues to restrict the Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok's movement. Meanwhile the popular movement continues to denounce the coup and external pressures to return to the power-sharing agreement and re-install the civilian government are rapidly increasing.

## Total Power for the Military

The transitional period took off in an atmosphere characterized by mistrust between the civilian and military members of the alliance on which the post al-Bashir government was based. The internal and external mediation initiatives undertaken in the period following al-Bashir's departure clearly reflected the state of mistrust between the two sides. Escalating this situation, both the Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces, seemed more cohesive and willing to cling to power than expected, while the civilian members of the Council continued to rely on the street, which continued to show up until the constitutional document was signed.

Various factors have allowed the military to consolidate strength within the ruling coalition, including divisions among the civilian forces and the withdrawal of a number of parties, divisions within the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), which played a major role in the revolution, into different wings, and the expansion of the military's role by undertaking tasks within the competences of Cabinet. These have included the normalization initiative with Israel, establishing regional relations with anti-democratic forces and states, leading negotiations with armed movements, monopolizing foreign relations related to military affairs, and institutionalizing the Rapid Support Forces. Consequently, the military took advantage of the crisis that followed a rebellion by an armored brigade last September, and carried out a coup that overthrew their civilian partners in power.

On 25 October 2021, units of the armed forces arrested about 300 civilian occupants of high governmental and political positions. Lieutenant-General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan declared a state of emergency, dissolving the Sovereignty Council and the cabinet and freezing the work of the Empowerment Committee, which oversees work to dismantle former regime networks. He announced the military will appoint a technocratic government to lead the country to elections. The military has suspended Articles 11, 12, 15 and 16 of the Constitutional Document, which refer to the formation and specifications of the Sovereignty Council and the Cabinet, as well as Article 24.3, which refers to political quotas in the formation of the Legislative Council, giving the Forces of the Declaration of Freedom and Change 67% of the Council's membership, and Article 71, which states the constitutional document is derived from the political agreement between the Military Council and the Forces of the Declaration of Freedom and Change (FFC), and Article 72, which stipulates the dissolution of the Military Council.



Al-Burhan also announced the formation of the institutions stipulated in the Constitutional Document, namely, the Legislative Council, the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Judicial Council, the Supreme Prosecution Council, and the General Elections Commission, and confirmed the holding of general elections in July 2023. Notably, the arrests took place according to a specific pattern as the only member of the National Umma Party to be arrested was Orwa Al-Sadiq, who is also member of the Empowerment Removal Committee. This indicates that the military establishment's leadership goal was to strike a blow to the smaller parties in the ruling coalition,<sup>1</sup> and to try to neutralize any National Umma Party resistance to the coup movement.

## Domestic Reaction

The Central Council of the FFC expressed its categorical rejection of the military coup and the subsequent measures. In a statement issued after a meeting held at the National Umma Party premises, it denounced Al-Burhan's measures, and demanded the restoration of the dissolved institutions, the release of detainees, and the perpetrators of the coup to be apprehended. The SPA (Mohammed Naji Alasam wing) announced its rejection of the coup and declared civil disobedience. Conversely, the National Charter Group of the FFC announced its support for Al-Burhan's actions. The Communist Party - which withdrew from the FFC announced its rejection of the coup and called for its resistance. The leader of the Communist Party, Kamal Karrar, stated that the return of the previous military and civil alliance is not a solution to the current crisis, as this partnership has become useless.<sup>2</sup>

The popular movement on the street, represented by thousands of Sudanese protestors on 30 October, expressed the refusal of the Sudanese people to accept Al-Burhan's coup. The movement shut down various roads and facilities. Although an important pressure tool to return to democratic transition, the street movement's success in achieving results depends on its durability and depth, especially in light of the deteriorating economic conditions suffered by large segments of Sudan, which makes it difficult for them to risk their livelihoods and respond to calls for open civil disobedience and the continuous participation in the protests. Hence the importance of external pressures, as a decisive factor in supporting the civil movement and pushing for a return to the power sharing agreement.

## International Responses

Foreign powers responded quickly to the Sudanese crisis, condemning the coup and supported a return to the path of democratic transition. The most prominent reactions came from the US, the UK and Norway Troika, which mediated the peace negotiations that led to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. These countries issued a statement expressing "deep concern" about "the

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1 This includes the Sudanese Congress Party, the Unionist Alliance, and the Ba'ath Party.

2 Suleiman Nourin, "The Communist Party: The Return of the Partnership is Useless and Does Not Solve the Crisis," *Al-Intibaha*, 3/11/2021, p. 2.



situation in Sudan” and condemning “the suspension of the institutions of state, the declaration of state of emergency, and the military forces detaining Prime Minister Hamdok as well as other members of the civilian leadership.” The statement called “on the security forces to immediately release those they have unlawfully detained,” and claimed that “The actions of the military represent a betrayal of the revolution, the transition, and the legitimate requests of the Sudanese people for peace, justice and economic development.” Additionally, “the Troika will continue to support those working for a democratic Sudan with a fully legitimate civilian government.”<sup>3</sup>

The United Nations Security Council finally succeeded in issuing a statement drafted by Britain, with Russian input, after three failed attempts to adopt a unified statement and Russia, due to Russian and Chinese reluctance to condemn the coup and a divergence of opinions among Security Council members.<sup>4</sup> This statement called on “Sudan’s military authorities to restore the civilian-led transitional government on the basis of the Constitutional Document and other foundational documents of the transition,” and “urged all stakeholders to engage in dialogue without preconditions.”<sup>5</sup> The African Union decided to suspend Sudan’s participation in all activities until the restoration of the civilian government, and sent an envoy to Sudan to mediate a solution to the crisis.

The United States and Britain were able to persuade Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which are the most prominent supporters of the military and greatest opponents of democratic transition in Sudan, to participate in issuing a four-way statement that read: “We endorse the international community’s serious concern with the situation in Sudan. We call for the full and immediate restoration of its civilian-led transitional government and institutions. We call upon all parties to strive for cooperation and unity in reaching this critical objective. In that vein we encourage the release of all those detained in connection with recent events and the lifting of the state of emergency.”<sup>6</sup>

At the regional level, Egypt has emerged as the most prominent supporter of the coup, and has enjoyed strong relations with the military since the overthrow of Al-Bashir, for political and security reasons. Egypt has worked to Al-Burhan in the African Union by forming an alliance that includes African countries, to support him.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, since Sudan became part of the Abraham draft agreements, Israel sent a security delegation to Khartoum days after the coup, which met with the army chief, Lieutenant-General Al-Burhan, and the ousted Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok. An Israeli source said that the visit was not intended to mediate, but rather to be informed of the developments of the situation in Sudan.<sup>8</sup>

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3 “Troika Statement on Military Takeover in Sudan”, Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson, US Department of State, 25/10/2021 accessed on 4/11/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3C2BrZg>.

4 “Foreign Delegations are Flocking, the Crisis Has Not Left its Place,” *Al-Intibaha*, 3/11/2021, p. 3.

5 “Security Council Press Statement on Sudan,” UN, Press Release, 28/10/2021, accessed on 8/11/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3H37GLN>

6 “Joint statement by the QUAD for Sudan, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom, on the Developments in Sudan,” U.S. Department of State, Press Release, 3/11/2021, accessed on 4/11/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/31zzHtT>.

7 “Cairo fights Khartoum’s corner at African Union,” *Africa Intelligence*, 4/11/2021, accessed on 8/11/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3BP36gl>

8 “Israeli Sources: A Delegation from Mossad Met with Al-Burhan and Hamdok to Uncover the Ambiguous Situation,” *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 3/11/2021, accessed on 4/11/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3GX3tJz>.



## Domestic and Foreign Mediation

Several domestic and foreign committees have joined forces to mediate between the military and civilian sides of government. The well-known journalist, Mahjoub Mohamed Salih, is part of the most prominent internal mediation group. This group, which met with the parties to the crisis, is facilitating the restoration of civil institutions, in a new arrangement, and the continuation of civilian-military powersharing. US envoy to the Horn of Africa, Jeffrey Feltman, and the South Sudan initiative, led by Dhieu Mathok, who played the role of mediator in the peace negotiations in Juba, and the African Union mediation, all seek to restore the role of civil institutions in governance in a new arrangement, which is something the military seems to be aiming for as well.

According to several estimates, Al-Burhan and his allies do not aim to continue to rule directly, in a repeat of history in Sudan, but rather aims to rearrange the political scene in the remainder of the transitional period. By excluding the FFC Central Council from power, and establishing a new civilian council of ministers that does not include politicians to act as a facade behind which the military establishment controls without bearing responsibility, the military is able to rule from behind a curtain, intervening when necessary. The military leadership is aware of the magnitude of the economic and political challenges facing the country, and it is unable to deal with them or bear the responsibility to confront them before the people. In addition, the army realizes that remaining at the forefront of government will put it in constant confrontation with the street and expose Sudan to international sanctions, and threaten the achievements of the Hamdok government in terms of lifting sanctions, exempting debts, and obtaining aid and loans from international financial bodies.

The armed forces are relying on the fact that they remain the strongest player in the country, thanks to their relative cohesion compared to the civilian government, aided by the organizational nature of the institution and its awareness of its professional and political role. But this fact should not be exaggerated; The armed forces are also facing internal challenges, represented by the discontent of a segment of the officers because of their living conditions, and what they see as belittlement of the institution by some politicians. This discontent was reflected in the protest movement carried out by the Armored Brigade in the Shagara area, south of Khartoum, or the so-called failed coup attempt, led by Major General Bakrawi on 21 September 2021. Senior officers continued to express this discontent in meetings with Al-Burhanat the Nimeiri Higher Military Academy, where a number of officers expressed their dissatisfaction with their conditions and the role of the military institution.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to foresee the direction that the Sudanese crisis will take in the near future, given the number of variables, but generally speaking, there are two likely scenarios. The first, on which the



military institution depends, requires the ousted Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok's acceptance of the formation of a new technocratic government. This would ease the current polarization, but could lead to a split within the FFC Central Council. This measure would be accompanied by the release of political detainees, to ease the tension and resume the agreed-upon path of transition. The second scenario involves Hamdok's refusal to form the new government, in isolation from the main political forces in the country. In this case, it is expected that a new figure who is not organizationally connected with any political party will be assigned and will form a technocratic cabinet. This scenario would exacerbate the political polarization and tension, while the military tries to emulate steps taken by coups against the democratic transitions in other Arab countries, exposing the country's future to grave political and security risks. The preponderance of one of these two possibilities will depend on the outcome of the interaction between domestic and foreign factors, and on the ability of mediators to achieve a settlement that prevents the country from sliding into a deep and protracted political crisis.