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Military coup betrays Sudan's revolution:

Scenarios to regain the path towards full civilian rule

On Monday 25 October 2021, Lieutenant-General Abdul-Fattah al-Burhan staged a military coup that stalled Sudan's political transition towards civilian rule. With the government dissolved and a state of emergency declared, two years of painfully gained achievements towards democracy could be lost, the hopes of millions of peaceful protestors shattered, and an already fragile region further destabilised. The military takeover is a desperate attempt by the generals to protect the security elite's economic interests and to abscond from justice. In response to the coup, millions of Sudanese mobilised to reject the coup and demand full civilian rule. Western governments and the EU have strongly condemned the coup and suspended economic support, while Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are believed to back it. Three outcomes from the current crisis are on the table: a) a full civilian transitional government; b) a return to the power-sharing agreement; or c) military dictatorship. To assist Sudan to regain its path towards democracy, Western governments must put all their weight behind the civilian demands and: i) streamline the ongoing mediation processes and ensure civil society is consulted; ii) bolster the legitimacy of Prime Minister Hamdok and his cabinet, iii) increase pressure on Sudan's military junta and its backers; and iv) strengthen Sudan's non-violent resistance movement.

Introduction¹

On Monday 25 October 2021, Sudan's transition to democracy in the Horn went astray, as commander-in-chief of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and chair of Sudan's Sovereignty Council, Lt. General

Abdul-Fattah al-Burhan decided to take what he called 'corrective action'. Prime Minister Abdulla Hamdok was put under house arrest and four figureheads of the civilian component of the government were detained, some also beaten up. Currently they are detained in undisclosed locations. Hours after the arrests, the general appeared on national television explaining that he saw no other option than to take power in order to correct the course of the revolution and prevent a civil war. He declared a state of emergency and dissolved the transitional government by cancelling crucial articles of

¹ I would like to thank Hafiz Ismael, Imad Babikir, Khansa Alhag, Kholood Khair and Mutaz Mohamed for sharing their valuable insights. The brief's content naturally remains the responsibility of the author.

the Constitutional Declaration.² Al-Burhan further announced the appointment of a new transitional government of technocrats within a week to lead Sudan to elections in July 2023.³

The international response has been immediate and strong. The EU and Troika (USA, UK and Norway) have condemned the coup. The Arab League and the African Union (AU), with Egypt as an important member of both bodies, have rejected the coup and called upon al-Burhan to restore the constitutional charter. The AU's Peace and Security Council suspended Sudan's membership, similarly to in 2019 when the Transitional Military Council (TMC) replaced al-Bashir. The WB announced the freezing of US\$2 billion in aid, the US put their \$700 million support package on hold, and the EU is considering similar measures. Sudan is also unlikely to benefit from tens of billions of dollars in debt relief for as long as the military pursues unilateral control.⁴ At a donor conference in Berlin in June 2021, \$1.8 billion was pledged for economic reconstruction, with the EU and the US being the main benefactors. Washington had become a strong backer of Sudan's transition, removing Sudan from its State Sponsor of Terrorism list in December 2020. This set in motion the country's reintegration into the global economy and facilitated the process for securing billions of dollars of debt relief. President Biden's special envoy for the Horn of Africa, Jeffrey Feltman, met

with al-Burhan at the dawn of the coup, reportedly warning him against deviating from the transitional path.⁵ However, as of Monday 25 October, Sudan finds itself stripped of its hard-fought for re-connection to the international finance system.

Five days after the coup, on 30 October, across Sudan millions of peaceful protestors took to the streets, defying the threat and use of excessive violence by heavily armed security forces. Their demands were clear: reversal of the coup and establishment of a full civilian transitional government. The overwhelming turnout was even more impressive considering an almost total blackout of mobile phone and internet coverage and the closure of all strategic bridges and roads by security forces, composed mostly of police and the notorious paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). In the capital alone, at least seven protestors were killed and more than 140 injured.

As developments in post-coup Sudan rapidly unfold, this policy brief aims to capture the current situation, and shed light on the causes behind the coup and on its plotters and their backers. The brief then presents three plausible scenarios for a way out of the crisis and concludes with considerations for policy makers to get Sudan back on track towards democratic rule.

A miscalculated coup

The October 2021 coup brought an abrupt halt to a political transition that began after a popular uprising led to the overthrow of former President Omar al-Bashir in 2019 and to the installation of a Transitional Military Council (TMC). Just a couple of months later, persistent non-violent resistance, in spite of a bloody crackdown forced the military into a compromise and the TMC gave way to a power-sharing government. This military-civilian transitional government was

2 For a thorough analysis of General al-Burhan's coup declaration see: Abdelhalim Seed, S. (2020), *Sudan's Constitutional Crisis: Dissecting the Coup Declaration*, 13 November 2021. Online: <https://www.justsecurity.org/78848/sudans-constitutional-crisis-dissecting-the-coup-declaration/> (Accessed 3-11-2021).

3 Washington Post. (2021), *Sudan Coup leader says he'll appoint new premier within a week*. Online: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/sudan-coup-leader-says-will-appoint-new-premier-within-week/2021/10/29/d6d38d12-3899-11ec-9662-399cfa75efee_story.html (Accessed 30-10-2021).

4 Lewis, A. (2021), *Analysis-Sudan's military leaders could face isolation*. Reuters. 1-11-2021. Online: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-politics-analysis-idUSKBN2HM2TG> (Accessed 1-11-2021).

5 Reuters. (2021), *Sudanese general ignored U.S. warning as army rolls out coup plan*. 28-10-2021. Online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/sudanese-general-ignored-us-warning-army-rolled-out-coup-plan-2021-10-28/> (Accessed 28-10-2021).

composed of a Sovereignty Council chaired by Commander-in-Chief of the Sudanese Forces, Lt General Abdul-Fattah al-Burhan, and a cabinet led by Prime Minister Dr. Abdullah Hamdok. In the coming month(s) the Sovereignty Council was scheduled to hand over chairmanship of the council to one of its civilian members to continue guiding the country towards elections in late 2023.⁶ That was the plan whose implementation al-Burhan wanted to forestall.

The more than two years of the civil-military power-sharing agreement have been a struggle, with tensions between the two sides reaching a highpoint after yet another thwarted coup attempt on 21 September, allegedly by al-Bashir loyalists, the fifth according to the military.⁷ The uneasy alliance between the military and civilians was strained, on the one hand, by what analysts have described as the military's reluctance to relinquish economic and political power and instead maintain the status quo, from which it has largely benefited.⁸ As the European Institute for Peace observed a year ago, 'It has been the military side of the transition that has recurrently tried to reinterpret or change the equation in its favour by creating facts on the ground and thus upset that very balance.'⁹ Examples include, obstructing the

commitments made towards transitional justice, bypassing of the Cabinet of Ministers, fomenting insecurity in Sudan's peripheries, bypassing formal state revenue collection mechanisms and a return to repressive practices from the past. With the Juba Agreement signed in October 2019, largely financed by Saudi Arabia and orchestrated by the Sovereignty Council's vice-chairman and de facto leader of the RSF, Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo (known as Hemedti), leaders of Darfur's rebel movements became integrated in the already difficult government arrangement, further tilting the balance of power in favour of the military, making it increasingly difficult for Hamdok's cabinet to advance structural reforms.

The civilian component of the power-sharing pact, on the other hand, has been accused of delaying the transition due to political infighting and party politics. Their main body of representation and official voice are the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), an opposition coalition formed in early 2019, which steered the civilian uprising until the ouster of the al-Bashir regime and signed the power-sharing pact with the military junta. The FFC brings together a diverse range of professional, civil society and political parties and its internal dynamics mirror the complexity of the coalition's composition. Its internal struggle for unity presents difficulties in maintaining close ties to the people on the streets, including the Sudanese Professionals' Association, its founding member, and resistance committees at neighbourhood level, that have formed the backbone of non-violent resistance since 2013. In the morning of the coup, al-Burhan tried to convince the Prime Minister that the only way to overcome these struggles within the civilian component was to give his consent for a military take over. Prime Minister Hamdok refused.

Talking to protestors in the days following the coup, it became clear that people, although frustrated, were not back in the al-Bashir area. 'We have upgraded and refined our skills of peaceful resistance' explained one protestor. 'In contrast with

6 Tossell, J. (2020), *Consolidating Sudan's transition A question of legitimacy*, CRU Policy Brief, The Hague: Clingendael, February 2020. This earlier CRU Policy Brief describes the background to the December 2018 uprising, the power-sharing arrangement and the challenges pertaining to Sudan's transition to democratic rule.

7 Reuters. (2021), *Sudan says coup thwarted, accuses Bashir loyalists*. Online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/measures-being-taken-contain-failed-coup-attempt-sudan-official-source-2021-09-21/> (Accessed 26-10-2021).

8 See, for example: Gallopin J.-B. et al. (2021), *Sudan's Political Marketplace in 2021 – Public and Political Finance, the Juba Agreement and Contests over Resources*, London: LSE; International Crisis Group. (2021), *'Safeguarding Sudan's Revolution'. Africa Report No 281*. 21-10-2019, p. 30.

9 European Institute for Peace. (2020), *Sudan after Sanctions and the Peace Agreements: The Role of Europe in Strengthening the Economic Transition*. December 2020.

2018/19, we have all experienced the taste of freedom. This time round, we know not only what we are resisting, but what our struggle is for!¹⁰ A leader of one of the resistance committees reported that in response to the coup even loyalists of the al-Bashir regime who kept quiet during the previous uprising are now joining the streets to set up barricades and chant revolutionary slogans, even in neighbourhoods dominated by former al-Bashir supporters.¹¹

What also became visible in the days after the coup is that under Prime Minister Hamdok's leadership, a new generation of talented and adamant revolutionaries have started to transform the civil service. Their presence turned out to be one of the success factors of the nationwide general strikes and civil disobedience. All federal and regional ministries were closed during the week following the coup, many of them actively declaring their support for the resistance. Sixty-three Sudanese ambassadors around the world are no longer fervent defenders of the al-Bashir regime. They spoke out against the coup and in support of Prime Minister Hamdok and the ongoing resistance, as did oil company workers in the contested border areas with South Sudan. Another difference with the December 2018 revolution is that the loss of life and wounds inflicted by security forces during that uprising are still fresh. The longing for justice and accountability is what drives protestors in Sudan today. Al-Burhan and his accomplices miscalculated both the perseverance of the streets and the Prime Minister's determination to stand by his people.

Considering that low and mid-ranking SAF officials are likely to share some of the protest movement's grievances¹² and potentially turn against their leader, many Sudanese describe al-Burhan's coup as

suicide. So, what provoked the military junta to make such a bold move?

Reasons behind the coup: the civilian threat to the security force's immunity and business networks

Al-Burhan's narrative in defence of his power grab attempts to portray the general as the guardian of the revolution. However, this claim is neither new nor compelling. As he spoke at his press conference the day following the coup, his soldiers harassed peaceful protestors, the very same young women and men to whom he owes his position as head of state in his capacity as chair of the Sovereignty Council. Every ordinary Sudanese citizen understands that, rather than protecting the transition's Constitutional Charter, by this coup al-Burhan further undermines it. Ironically, if, as military leaders claim, divisions and controversies within the civilian component induced the military takeover, that coup has reunited the masses and their various organisations more than ever.

The actual reason behind the coup and its timing is twofold. First, the approaching civilian takeover of the chair of the Sovereignty Council, poses a direct threat to al-Burhan and Hemedti's largely uncontrolled business empires. Second, growing civilian oversight also threatens to put an end to the generals' de facto impunity.

The generals fear the long overdue dismantling of the security sector's opaque business empires, which grew under al-Bashir and have since expanded.¹³ Together the army and the RSF control approximately 250 companies in key sectors including gold, rubber, livestock and sesame which bypass the oversight of the Ministry of Finance and do not generate any tax revenue. It is only recently that

10 Telephone interview with young entrepreneur in Omdurman, 26-10-2021.

11 Telephone interview with civil society leader in Khartoum, 26-10-2021.

12 African Argument. (2021), "This is Not a Coup": Democracy's Path to Victory in Sudan. 30-10-2021.

13 International Crisis Group in a post-coup update, 26-10-2021. Online: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/reversing-sudans-dangerous-coup> (Accessed 27-10-2021).

Prime Minister Hamdok publicly tackled this delicate matter, in line with IMF and WB demands.¹⁴ It is no surprise that the generals are not keen to see their business networks dismantled and their supply chains cut-off.¹⁵ This became clear when Hemedti, with intense lobbying from the UAE, reclaimed the driver seat of Sudan's economic emergency committee, which the civilian component of the government had allocated to the Prime Minister. This formalised and legitimised Hemedti's de facto economic power position,¹⁶ creating more leeway for him to advance personal business interests in key sectors of the Sudanese economy.

Adding to the generals' fear to see their economic power dismantled is the work of the Dismantling Committee, an anti-corruption body tasked with retrieving assets that were unlawfully seized under the previous al-Bashir regime.¹⁷ Recently, the Committee also documented the ongoing illegal export of diamonds and import of drugs. Weeks prior to the coup, the military

withdrew all its physical protection from the Committee's 18 members and its various premises.¹⁸ Member of the Transitional Sovereignty Council and deputy head of this Committee, Mohammed El-Faki, was detained on the day of the coup and arrests of committee members throughout the country are ongoing, in particular in Sudan's peripheries.¹⁹

The other threat prompting the military's recent junta concerns its de facto immunity from criminal jurisdiction to date. Both Hemedti and al-Burhan are allegedly implicated in the Darfur genocide. Once the Prime Minister's public commitment to hand over former president al-Bashir to the ICC in The Hague translates into action, more inculpatory evidence is likely to emerge, which the generals will have to answer to. Adding to that are the outstanding results of the investigation into the massacre on 3 June 2019, which Hemedti allegedly orchestrated with tacit support from other TMC members, to terminate a powerful sit-in by civilians. The independent national commission of inquiry into the massacre was also dissolved by al-Burhan. Heading the investigation, the prominent lawyer and human rights defender Nabil Adib had repeatedly warned that the (threat of imminent) publication of the commission's findings could prompt a military coup.²⁰

Rather than rescuing the revolution to achieve freedom, peace and justice for all Sudanese citizens, this coup is a desperate attempt by al-Burhan and Hemedti to protect the security elite's personal economic interests and to, once again, abscond from justice.

14 Aljazeera. (2020), Unacceptable Sudanese PM criticises army's business interests. 15 December 2020. Online: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/15/unacceptable-sudanese-pm-criticises-armys-business-interests>. (Accessed 26-10-2021).

15 Attempts to map these business empires are far from complete, but give a good indication of the scale and type of business (sectors) involved: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/sudan-security-forces-resist-calls-civilian-control> <https://carnegie-mec.org/2021/04/23/sudan-s-military-companies-go-civilian-how-recent-divestment-agreement-can-succeed-pub-84374> https://ecfr.eu/publication/bad_company_how_dark_money_threatens_sudans_transition/ <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/secret-financial-network-of-sudan-s-main-militia-exposed> <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/conflict-minerals/exposing-rsfs-secret-financial-network/>

16 Gallopin, J-B. (2020), *Bad company: How dark money threatens Sudan's transition*. June 2020

17 The Empowerment Elimination, Anti-Corruption, and Funds Recovery Committee was formed in November 2019 after the transitional government approved a law to dismantle the institutions set-up by the regime of Omar Al Bashir and his National Congress Party (NCP).

18 Reuters. (2021), *Sudan military-civilian tensions reach low point wake coup attempt*. 26 September 2021. Online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sudan-military-civilian-tensions-reach-low-point-wake-coup-attempt-2021-09-26/>. (Accessed 26-10-2021).

19 As reported by Mr. al-Faki's media office.

20 Altaghyeer. (2021), *Adeeb: Sit-In Dispersal Findings could Lead to "...Coup d'Etat or Mass Unrest..."*. <https://www.altaghyeer.info/en/2021/05/06/adeeb-sit-in-dispersal-findings-could-lead-to-coup-detat-or-mass-unrests/> (Accessed 30-10-2021).

Before exploring different scenarios for a way out of the political crisis, it is worth looking at the coup plotters and their backers.

The coup plotters and their backers

While al-Burhan is the face of this coup, the military junta stands firmly behind him,²¹ bringing together the RSF of Hemedti, the security services and the two signatories of the Juba Peace agreement, namely the Darfuri rebel groups of Jibril Ibrahim and Mini Minawi. While they have been fighting each other in the past, they all know that working together is essential to preserve their joint interests.

Early in the transitional period, frictions and competition between the SAF and the RSF were repeatedly reported, with al-Burhan being closer to Egypt and Hemedti working in close cooperation with the KSA and the UAE. Most of the SAF's rank and file, except al-Burhan, are said to hate Hemedti, questioning the fact that 'they have to salute a camel herder',²² with some refusing to take orders from him. Such frictions within the military junta and between their regional allies played out as an advantage for the civilian side of the government. Yet, after the Juba peace agreement, which was financed largely by the Saudi Arabia and managed by military members of the Sovereignty Council, including Hemedti, Darfur rebel movements joined the power-sharing arrangement and the power balance increasingly shifted to the advantage of the military component. Also, deepening rivalry between political parties and other civilian organisations represented

in the FFC was exploited to foster a greater sense of unity among the military component.²³

Regarding Egypt, the KSA and the UAE, it is important to recall that they were involved in bringing al-Burhan and Hemedti to power in April 2019, when Bashir was overthrown. By installing them in power as chair and vice-chair of the TMC, which replaced al-Bashir and preceded the establishment of the transitional government, Cairo, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi had hoped to bring Sudan into their axis.²⁴ This effectively ended years of being played against al-Bashir's allies and backers of the Muslim Brotherhood, Qatar and Turkey. Hemedti had already established a strong relationship with his new patrons thanks to the RSF deployments in Yemen and ongoing gold exports to Dubai.²⁵ However, after seeing a compromise of civilian-military power sharing, by the end of 2019 the UAE and the KSA had withdrawn their direct support to the Sudanese government, with only half of the \$3 billion they had promised to the TMC having been disbursed.²⁶ The fear of civilian rule in Sudan remains, as neither the KSA nor the UAE signed the public condemnation of the coup issued by the Friends of Sudan group.²⁷

21 It is worth noting that until one week after the coup, al-Burhan has been the only public face behind it. The army as such has not expressed their support for the coup. Most visible in the streets are RSF soldiers, their tacticals, and police, according to protestors, with very few SAF soldiers (telephone interviews with several civil society activists and political analysts in Khartoum, 30-10-2021 and 2-11-2021).

22 Telephone interview with Sudanese political commentator with close ties to the military, 30-2021.

23 Abuzai, O. Middle East Eye. *Sudan coup attempts is a warning that civilian transition is in danger*, Middle East Eye Opinion, 11 October 2021. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/sudan-coup-attempt-army-takeover-tensions-enable> (Accessed 26-10-2021).

24 Gallopin, J.-B. (2020) European Council on Foreign Affairs, *The Great Game of UAE and Saudi Arabia in Sudan* <https://pomeps.org/the-great-game-of-the-uae-and-saudi-arabia-in-sudan> (Accessed 27-10-2021).

25 Kent, R. Exposing the RFS's Secret Financial Network, Global Witness, 9 December 2019. <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/conflict-minerals/exposing-rfs-secret-financial-network/>

26 Gallopin, J.-B. (2020), op. cit.

27 The statement was signed by Canada, France, Italy, Germany, Norway, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the UK and US, the EU and UN and issued on 28 October. None of the Arab or African countries (Qatar, Kuwait, Ethiopia) signed. UNITAMS. (2021), *Friends of Sudan group statement on the ongoing military takeover in Sudan*. Online: <https://>

Egypt, in turn, has been in close touch with al-Burhan throughout. The Sudanese commander-in-chief visited Egypt shortly before the coup, and in many his recent takeover resembles the Egyptian playbook of a post-revolution return to autocratic military rule. In the end, having a close military ally in power in Sudan is a safe bet for President al-Sisi to protect Egypt's strategic interests around the Nile.²⁸ All in all, none of the Sudanese military's regional allies is keen to see a successful transition to democracy unfold on their doorstep.

Joining the group of coup backers is Russia, which is said to have given its approval prior to the coup, assuring the Sudanese generals that no condemnation would be issued by the UN Security Council in reaction to the power grab.²⁹ As expected, the UNSC statement had to undergo several revisions to be passed by Russia, resulting in a weak statement expressing concern rather than a resolution stipulating outright condemnation

with follow-up actions.³⁰ Although Russia provides the vast majority of Sudan's weapon imports, China is also one of the country's main arm suppliers. Just like Russia, China expressed only general concern about the unrest in Sudan. The youngest member of the club of Sudan's military backers is Israel. Sidelining the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister Hamdok, al-Burhan has been the driving force behind a US-brokered deal to normalise Sudan's ties with Israel. This probably explains why high-level Israeli officials have welcomed the military's takeover, reportedly for the sake of stability in the region.³¹

No viable way forward without people's demand for full civilian rule at its heart

Several mediation efforts are underway,³² with coup leaders, civilian leaders and regional players negotiating around what can be framed as three possible scenarios for a way forward. Further fragmentation towards civil war is a real threat rather than a trajectory that is openly discussed as a solution package. UNITAMS' head, Volker Perthes, in accordance with his mandate facilitates several of the mediation efforts between al-Burhan and Hamdok. Largely excluded from these efforts to date is Sudan's arguably most consistent and astute political actor, the country's streets.

What the coup and the reactions it triggered has made crystal clear is that Sudanese citizens from all regions, age groups, classes, gender, ethnicities and political affiliations are determined to resist until a full civilian transitional government is put in place. If civilians have increasingly struggled to

unitams.unmissions.org/en/friends-sudan-group-statement-ongoing-military-takeover-sudan (Accessed 27-10-2021).

- 28 Andrew, F. (2021), 28 October 2021 Sudan coup 2021: *What's at stake for neighbouring powers*. Middle East Eye, 28-10-2021. Online: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudan-coup-neighbouring-powers-have-stake> (Accessed 28-10-2021).
- 29 As one of Hemedti's close business allies, Russia is keen to keep its unchecked access to Sudan's lucrative resources such as gold and other minerals intact. In addition, days after the coup, al-Burhan confirmed an earlier deal including the construction of a naval base on the country's Red Sea coast. ANI. (2021), *Sudanese leader confirms commitment to deal on Russian military base construction*. 1-11-2021. Online: <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/europe/sudanese-leader-confirms-commitment-to-deal-on-russian-military-base-construction20211101121400/> (Accessed 3-11-2021). Since 2019, the private security firm Wagner has been cooperating closely with the RSF, and Russia is thought to provide surveillance technology to the RSF-affiliated company, GSK: EIP. (2020), *Sudan after Sanctions and the Peace Agreements: The Role of Europe in Strengthening the Economic Transition*. European Institute of Peace, December 2020.

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- 30 Aljazeera. (2021), *UN calls on Sudan's military to restore transitional government*. 28-10-2021. Online: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/28/un-calls-on-sudans-military-to-restore-transitional-government> (Accessed 28-10-2021).

- 31 Andrews, F. (2021), op. cit.
- 32 The following mediators are reportedly active in Khartoum: US/UAE, AU, UNITAMS, South Sudan, the Wise Men.

speak with one voice in the past months of transition, on 30 October their demands were unanimous and should be at the heart of any future arrangement: the reinstatement of the Constitutional Declaration, immediate release of Prime Minister Hamdok and other detainees, removal of coup leaders, and prosecution of those responsible for the violence.³³

Essentially, the three following scenarios are on the table: i) Full civilian transitional government; ii) Return to pre-coup power-sharing arrangement; iii) Military dictatorship.

Scenario one is a governance format that responds to the demands of millions of Sudanese protestors – a full civilian government headed by Prime Minister Hamdok who has full executive powers and appoints a cabinet of technocrats to lead Sudan towards elections in 2023. This would entail three main immediate changes: the removal of all military from the Sovereignty Council; the replacement and prosecution of all military and security sector actors who have been implicated in the coup and in the post-coup violence; and civilian control over all ministries, including Interior and Defence. The Constitutional Charter would need amendment to reflect these changes.

This scenario comes closest to democratic transition as guided by the Constitutional Document, which foresees the handing over from the military to civilian leadership. It goes without saying that the military will resist a scenario that relinquishes its power. However, all means of pressure and incentives should be explored to sell this option to the men in uniform and their backers. The call from the streets for fully-fledged civilian rule is too powerful not to be reflected in the ongoing mediation. Any solution will be easier to sell to Sudanese citizens if its genesis is publicly and repeatedly aimed at meeting the popular aspiration of full civilian rule.

33 Several Neighbourhood and Resistance committees from across the country, professionals' associations and others submitted their demands for the 30 October March.

The second scenario comes down to a return to the situation before the coup and sees the military-civilian power-sharing agreement restored. US, Saudi, Emirati and other diplomatic efforts are underway to broker the return of Prime Minister Hamdok, with the military continuing to occupy government positions.³⁴ This scenario would involve concessions from both the military and civilian sides. The coup would be reversed, the Constitutional Declaration and the Juba Peace Agreement reinstated, and a new cabinet of technocrats appointed. Regardless of who chairs the Sovereignty Council, the military would keep the upper hand and have the power to prepare for elections.

As ambitious and positive as a reversal of the coup might sound, this scenario falls nothing short of a fallacy. It would mean the return to an arrangement that has proven to be an impasse. Moreover, not only would a return to the pre-coup situation betray the demands of the Sudanese people by downplaying the harm inflicted upon the population in the days following the coup. It would reward the coup plotters and hence strengthen the military junta. By re-setting the clock with no radical changes in the power distribution, nor criminal prosecution of the coup plotters, would send a dangerous message to the coup leaders in Sudan and potential likeminded generals in the region.

The third scenario follows the Egyptian playbook of President al-Sisi and is tantamount to a return to the al-Bashir era. In contrast with the other two scenarios, this trajectory does not include the reinstatement of the Constitutional Declaration. Rather, it would

34 Lake, E. (2021), *Can an Arab Ally of the U.S. Reverse the Coup in Sudan?* Bloomberg, 29-10-2021.

Online: <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-10-28/sudan-military-coup-can-an-arab-ally-of-the-u-s-reverse-it> (Accessed 29-10-21). The most recent effort by the US-led 'Quad for Sudan' talks about restoring the military civilian partnership for the remainder of the transitional period: <https://www.state.gov/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/> (Accessed 3-11-2021).

be a prolongation of the current state of affairs, in which the army's Commander-in-Chief is fully in charge, where free speech and press belong to the past, the Internet is shut down, and people are arbitrarily detained and abused. It is a scenario Egypt, the KSA and the UAE and others favour. In the soft version of this scenario, Al-Burhan and Hemedti would establish a new government of technocrats to lead Sudan to elections in 2023, as outlined in al-Burhan's press conference of 26 October. As a Sudanese analyst commented: 'Al-Burhan might be able to pull this off with support of (...) Egypt, the Saudis and the Emiratis. (...) He will find a new, more pliant civilian face, he will maintain formalities, and the West will simply end up dealing with that patron.'³⁵ In the case of a counter-coup by Islamists or al-Bashir loyalists, a more violent and oppressive version of this scenario could unfold. News about the release of al-Bashir allies and Islamists in the days following the coup are a bitter reminder that civil war could be just around the corner. Such developments could be orchestrated to convince the West, the KSA and the UAE that sticking with al-Burhan for the time being is the best bet after all.

Al-Burhan and his coup allies (Hemedti, Jibril Ibrahim and Mini Minawi) have manoeuvred themselves into a corner. Al-Burhan's press conference scheduled for the evening of the mass protests was cancelled, Mini Minawi's residence in El Fasher was allegedly burned down, and some Justice and Equality Movement leaders have publicly stated their disagreement with the coup and hence distance themselves from their leader, Jibril Ibrahim. Notorious head of the RSF and deputy chair of the Sovereignty Council, Hemedti, has been conspicuously quiet, watching from the sidelines while his troops have been at the forefront of attacking and arresting peaceful protesters.³⁶ Worryingly,

as al-Burhan emerges weaker after his coup, Hemedti's position grows stronger.

In the present situation, the de facto starting position for any negotiation is scenario three. The most realistic outcome of ongoing mediation efforts is a power-sharing arrangement under scenario 2. However, to maximise the chances of such an arrangement being both acceptable to the streets and potent enough to drive structural change towards full civilian rule, negotiations will have to aim high – at scenario 1. All possible efforts should therefore be undertaken to steer towards that scenario, keeping in mind the short-term gains but long-term costs of the other two trajectories that are likely to be presented or hinted at during negotiations.

Practical actions for Western policy makers in support of Sudan's democratic transition

1. Streamline the mediation process and ensure meaningful consultations with the streets

The various mediation efforts must be aligned to avoid creating an echo chamber where the needs of the mediators to be heard drown out the people on the streets. At the end of the day, the inclusiveness of the process will determine the persuasiveness and legitimacy of the deal, as much as its content or more.

2. Bolster Prime Minister Hamdok and his cabinet ministers as legitimate representatives of Sudanese citizens

Western governments have been swift and strong in condemning the coup and the arrest of civilian leaders. The longer the coup remains unreversed and Prime Minister and ministers under (house) arrest, the higher the risk that the coup becomes a fait accompli. Western governments should therefore:

- Continue their condemnation of the coup in the strongest possible terms, from the highest level and in a concerted effort with EU, USA and AU. The demand for the release of all civilian leaders

35 Interview with Magdi el-Gizouli in Washington Post, 26-10-2021.

36 Rickett, O. (2021), *Sudan Coup: Where is Hemedti?* Middle East Eye. 28-10-2021. Online: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudan-coup-where-is-hemeti> (Accessed 28-10-2021).

should be reiterated and coupled with consequences in the absence of action.

- Strictly refrain from recognizing al-Burhan as ‘new’ head of state, avoid lending the coup plotter legitimacy through official high-level visits. While dialogue with all parties is indispensable, backstage consultations will convey less political weight.
- Create a counter-reality to the coup by bolstering Prime Minister Hamdok and his cabinet by regular (requests for) visits and phone calls with high-level Western government representatives, go public about these visits (not the content). Use the access to the Prime Minister to close the gap between him and the streets.
- Encourage and support the African Union’s and IGAD’s role in the ongoing mediation, ensure that they are in line with people’s demand for civilian rule.

3. Increase pressure on Sudan’s military junta and its backers

Western governments should reiterate their condemnation of the coup and put utmost pressure on the generals and their backers to return to the democratic transition.

- Western governments should welcome publicly the AU’s suspension of Sudan’s membership and use it to exert pressure on China and Russia to recognise the unconstitutional nature of the military takeover.
- Decisions to withdraw aid should be communicated by high-level authority and backed up with numbers to publicly shame the coup plotters for the loss in aid and the additional socioeconomic burden that places on the ordinary Sudanese citizen.
- Keep reminding the Sudanese security forces to refrain from resorting to violence and oppression. The 3 June massacre and ensuing demonstrations have clearly demonstrated that the KSA, UAE and Egypt worry about their own image. By keeping eyes on Sudan and blaming and shaming human rights abuses quickly and loudly, regional allies are more likely to also call for restraint.
- Openly discuss and decide on targeted measures (travel bans, freezing of assets) against security sector leaders and their

allies, and consider the designation of RSF as a foreign terrorist organisation.³⁷

Regarding targeted measures, a first list of sanctions could be adopted under Europe’s Global Magnitsky Act.

- Engage with European firms and the European Chamber of Commerce in Sudan to explore the possibility of issuing a public statement from the business community condemning the coup and urging a return to democratic transition, including numbers to quantify the potential loss of investment.
- Encourage regional allies to develop possible offers for a soft landing for the generals, should they decide to leave Sudan’s political scene.

4. Strengthen Sudan’s non-violent resistance movement

The viability of any outcome from current crisis depends on the extent to which it is acceptable to the vast majority of Sudanese citizens. By disqualifying themselves as the legitimate voice of the Sudanese people, the FFC created a vacuum. This offers an opportunity for partners to meaningfully engage with Sudan’s streets, and in particular the country’s youth. More specifically, policy makers are advised to:

- Demand immediate restoration of the Internet and telephone network in Sudan.
- Keep eyes on Sudan to deter security forces from resorting to further violent crackdowns.
- Keep pressuring for the immediate release of all unlawfully detained journalists, activists and civil society leaders. Make their names public.

37 Hudson, C. (2021), *Sudan’s coup wasn’t a failure of US diplomacy. It was the dawn of a new era in Africa*, Atlantic Council, 29 October 2021. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/sudans-coup-wasnt-a-failure-of-us-diplomacy-it-was-the-dawn-of-a-new-era-in-africa/> (Accessed 29-10-2021); A petition has been launched, directed at the US Congress to designate the RSF a terrorist organisation: <https://www.petition2congress.com/ctas/sanction-sudans-rapid-support-forces-janjaweed-its-leader-lt-gen-mohamed-hamdani-dagalo> (Accessed 02-11-2021).

- Engage in a structural exchange with different civil society groups, including resistance committees, professional associations but also for example Koran schools to form broad consensus and test ideas.
- Intensify humanitarian aid to alleviate economic hardship of the population at large.
- Use ongoing development programmes to strengthen civil society organisations through, for example, access to the Internet and safe meeting spaces, training in conflict mediation, communication and first aid.

Conclusion

Sudanese people have spoken clearly, with one voice. Their demand for full civilian rule needs to be at the heart of any viable way forward. Diplomatic and economic efforts by the AU, US, EU and other Friends of Sudan that have supported the country's

path towards democracy need to acknowledge the obstruction from the military and paramilitary side from the onset of the transition. Friends of Sudan should heed earlier warnings that the exclusionary and exploitative political economy structure left over from 30 years of autocratic rule was still intact and that any support that leaves the political economy of the al-Bashir regime largely unchallenged can yield only short-term gains. More critically, such gains are likely to entrench existing power structures that underpin protracted violence in Sudan.

From that perspective, Sudan's current deep political crisis, with all the dangers it holds, creates an opportunity for Western governments. An opportunity to put all their weight behind the people of Sudan's demand for civilian rule and to create a new government formula that does not prioritise short-term stability over a transformation of Sudan's political economy into a more inclusive and fair settlement.

About the Clingendael Institute

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