



RESEARCH PAPER / FEBRUARY 2023

THE PRICE OF LIFE

REVOLUTIONARY AGENCY AND POLITICAL IMPASSE IN POST-BASHIR SUDAN

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In Sudan, the revolutionary upsurge of 2018/2019 signalled the implosion of the country's postcolonial political order. The political parties of old have seen their social bases wither away and their ideological hold over the Sudanese people corrode under the sustained pressure of a hyper-extractive political economy. The so-called 'transitional period' that followed the overthrow of President Bashir in April 2019 was a theatre for the last dance of an ailing political order as it exited history in agony, failing to reproduce itself effectively. In its place, new structures of mobilization and political organization are struggling to emerge as vehicles for popular agency. This paper – part of a series focused on Sudan's political transition and the Juba Peace Agreement – explores the crisis of authority that characterizes the current juncture of Sudan's history.

THE YOUNG REVOLUTIONARIES

On 17 November 2021, Sit Al-Nifour Ahmed Bakkar was shot dead, with all her young hopes, at the age of 23. She was one among many protestors who repeatedly took to the streets in Khartoum in defiance of the 25 October 2021 coup – the brutal attempt to restore the old order, which had existed prior to the 2018/2019 revolution, in another form. On that day, the security forces killed 15 young people, among them Sit Al-Nifour. She was killed at the tail end of the protests, after the greater mass of demonstrators had been dispersed by tear gas and gun fire. She found no refuge

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from the angry and vindictive men with guns who searched the streets near to the major square that was a main location of protests that day. A bullet from a sniper – deliberately aimed to kill – struck her jaw and fatally wounded her.

Sit Al-Nifour's cumbersome name revealed her rural origins in the Butana plains, which lie between the Nile and the Atbara River to the east and are home to pastoralist peoples like the Shukriyya, which her family hailed from. Her friends from Khartoum called her Sitto. She lived with her parents in Um al-Gurra, until recently a village on the margins of Khartoum North, now engulfed by rapid urbanization. Um al-Gurra has a population of around 7,000 people, mostly engaged in trade or agriculture. During the terminal crisis of Omar al-Bashir's rule, hunger made its way into the urban realm and people in Um al-Gurra developed coping mechanisms to deal with inflationary pressures and increasing food prices. According to a limited survey conducted in the area in 2018, around 49 per cent of those interviewed reported periods of food deficit. Forty-seven per cent attempted to manage by borrowing money and often skipped a meal or two during the day.²

Sitto was a reluctant university student. She completed a year of studies in economics and political science at Al Nilein University (formerly the Khartoum branch of Cairo University) but did not take to the discipline. Her daily life involved a lot of time spent commuting. The distance between Um al-Gurra and Al Nilein campus in the centre of Khartoum is 26 kilometres and she probably needed at least 3 hours in rickety minibuses each way. This meant that she often came home late to face the wrath of anxious and conservative male guardians, her elderly father and her much older brothers. She was the youngest of her siblings and the first in the family to access university education. Two children born after her died as toddlers. She completed a short course in nursing and worked for a year in the main public hospital in Khartoum North. She supplemented her income by making and trading in accessories for women. When she was shot dead, she was planning to start a new life free of her male guardians in the Arab Gulf in whatever odd job she could find, maybe in a beauty salon, and she was waiting for a travel visa. When the visa finally arrived, Sitto's labour was no longer for sale.³

Life outside the confines of Um al-Gurra attracted Sitto. She was drawn into active political struggle in the protest movement that toppled former president Bashir. She is remembered by friends and comrades as a smiling volunteer nurse in the protest camp that surrounded the army headquarters (qiyada) in Khartoum between April

2 مروج عمر محمد. "أثر التضخم على الوضع الغذائي لمنطقة أم القرى، ولاية الخرطوم – محلية بحري". بحث تكميلي لنيل درجة البكالوريوس، ٢٠١٨: ٢٣-٢٤.

3 Interview with a close friend of Sit Al-Nifour, Khartoum, 11 April 2022.

2019 until its bloody dispersal on 3 June 2019. The popular movement acquired a dazzling materiality in the form of the massive protest camp, which represented for Sitto and her compatriots the alternative Sudan that they strived for. The tent city around the qiyada became a place where urban Sudan attempted to reinvent itself in feverish creativity and solidarity, including the free medical care that Sitto was involved in delivering. Sitto was part of that dazzle. She wanted an end to domestic violence and to see free health care for all. In one remarkable photograph, she holds a placard saying: ‘I am still beautiful, free, whole, respected, precious, loved, brave, great, inspiring and strong’. Her smiling face has since become a fixture on banners and T-shirts in every protest march against military rule.

Mohamed Ismail wad Akar went missing on 3 April 2020.⁴ His corpse was found more than a year later. It had congealed with around another 150 corpses stored in a fridge container in the yard of the Academic Hospital in a southern neighbourhood of Khartoum. The director of the mortuary told the press that at least 50 of the corpses were of people from South Sudan. The official explained that the small mortuary was dealing with four times its original capacity. The storage fridge in the yard was one way of managing the problem. Chronic electricity shortages eventually gave the corpses away when the stink and ooze became a cause for public concern in the neighbourhood.⁵

Wad Akar lived in al-Jireif Sharq on the eastern Bank of the Blue Nile, a newly urbanized zone that has long served as a source of red bricks for the construction of greater Khartoum. He dropped out of school to earn his living as a day labourer in the firewood-fuelled brick kilns that litter the length of the river bank in al-Jireif Sharq. To withstand the heat of the job, wad Akar and his friends drank salt water. He also doubled as a barber and did many other odd jobs. Wad Akar was a revolutionary, he pioneered with a small number of his comrades the formation of a Resistance Committee in his home area. He was a fierce agitator and organizer in the events of April 2019 and witnessed the downfall of Bashir from the barricades of the qiyada sit in.⁶

Wad Akar was badly injured during the military onslaught on the protestors that ended with the bloody break-up of the protest camp on 3 June 2019 but lived to fight another day. Many of the corpses that ended up in the morgue where he was

السوداني ٢٠٢١/٥/٢٨. خلفايا تصفية الثوار.. من قتل ود عكر؟ 4
<https://www.alsudaninews.com/ar/?p=125325>

قناة الجزيرة ٢٠٢١/٥/٢. السودان.. تفاصيل جديدة في قضية الجثث المتحللة بمشرحة جنوب الخرطوم. 5
<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2021/5/2/السودان-تفاصيل-جديدة-في-قضية-الجثث>

6 Interviews with friends of wad Akar, Khartoum, 13 April 2022.

eventually found date from then. Others were tied to cement blocks or bricks and thrown into the Nile. He was among the multitudes that stormed the Al Jireif bridge to cross to Khartoum during the massive demonstrations of 30 June 2019, which took place in the aftermath of the 3 June massacre. The 30 June demonstrations granted the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) the edge in the negotiations that facilitated their rise to power in partnership with the military-militia-security cartel of the Bashir era, which bore fruit in the August 2019 constitutional declaration.⁷

Wad Akar's corpse reportedly showed the marks of torture. It can be surmised but not established as fact who arrested, tortured and killed the young revolutionary. Unlike Sitto, wad Akar's digital imprint is meagre – a few photos posted by others where he poses clumsily in a yellow football shirt, his body twisted by years of hard labour. He did not have a virtual existence on social media, his age is indeterminate.

RISE OF THE RESISTANCE COMMITTEES

Sitto and wad Akar's initiation into political struggle took place through the wide avenue of the Resistance Committees. They represent the two major streams of radicalization that found their confluence in the revolutionary events of 2018/2019: students and young graduates on the one hand, and informal labour on the other. The former were better at articulating their demands and could draw on a global repertoire of rights and liberties. They largely identified with the Sudan Professionals' Association (SPA), which assumed a prominent role in the uprising.⁸ But it was day labourers who emerged as the foot soldiers of the revolution. They had no independent voice or organizational resource to fall back on apart from the Resistance Committees.

The two streams were obliged to fraternize on a socio-economic terrain defined by limited job prospects and diminishing wages: the deterioration of the middle classes and pauperization of wage labour. Sit Al-Nifour and wad Akar attempted to expand their skills and strike it out in the service sector. Both lacked any affiliation that would bind them to the political structures of old Sudan. In campus jargon, Sit Al-Nifour was a so-called 'floaters' – unaligned to the major political blocs that divided between them the allegiances of the intelligentsia, the Islamic Movement and the Communist Party.

7 Republic of Sudan Gazette, Issue No. 1859, 3 October 2019, https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/Sudan%20Constitutional%20Declaration_Arabic_Final.pdf

8 Magdi el-Gizouli, 'The fall of al-Bashir: Mapping contestation forces in Sudan', Arab Reform Initiative, 12 April 2019, <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/the-fall-of-al-bashir-mapping-contestation-forces-in-sudan/>

Wad Akar was a subaltern, merely a *zol* (person), a *zol sakit*. *Sakit* is an ambiguous northern Arabic term that translates literally as ‘silent’, but is deployed depending on context to imply the subject as incapable of speech, worthless or barred. The labour hierarchy of riverine Sudan constituted the subalterns in categories of racial difference and ethnic division⁹ — a hierarchy of exploitation and dispensability.¹⁰ Wad Akar was someone who could be killed, and before that tortured, with impunity.

The undeclared coalition of student radicals and subalterns in the Resistance Committees was the formula that brought down former president Bashir, not the scheming of the opposition politicians nor the firepower of rural insurgents. The Resistance Committees were liberating in a dual sense: they enabled members to sidestep the surveillance structures of the security services, which were designed to monitor campus politics, and to escape the censure of the predominantly patriarchal and suffocating political party structures of old Sudan. The flexibility and horizontal organization of the committees provided thousands of young women and men with channels for political expression and struggle. An extensive survey conducted by researchers with the Carter Center in 500 locations in the 18 states of Sudan mapped over 5,000 resistance committees¹¹ — a degree of spread and penetration that none of Sudan’s existing political parties can approach.

Sudan’s Resistance Committees are arguably the largest, youngest and most active political agent in the country. They initially emerged in the bloodshed of the 2013 anti-austerity protests when former president Bashir called on the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia to quell urban resistance to his rule. Since then, they have evolved from units skilled at mobilization and manoeuvring against the coercive apparatus of the state, into a diverse collection of groups displaying a much broader range of organizational experiences and political orientations expressing the popular demands of the Sudanese population.

Despite its prominent place in the widely accepted name of these organizational nodes, the term ‘committee’ is quite misleading. It suggests a degree of coherent tabularization and bureaucratic order that is at odds with their ad hoc and fluid nature. A closer approximation would be the more or less instantaneously composed teams for *dafoori*, the afternoon football games in neighbourhood squares. *Dafoori*, a northern Sudanese Arabic term, derives from an ancient Arabic verb, no longer in common use, that translates into ‘push at the back or chest’ – a style of play

9 Edward Thomas, *South Sudan: A slow liberation*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015: 78-81.

10 Stephanie F. Beswick, ‘The Black Hole of Kosti: The Murder of Baggara Detainees by Shaigi Police in a Kosti Barracks, Sudan 1956’, *Northeast African Studies* 2/1 (1995): 61-83.

11 The Carter Center, ‘Sudan’s Youth and the Transition: Priorities, Perceptions and Attitudes’, Atlanta: The Carter Center, August 2021.

common in these games. In contrast to the formal game, dafoori is not bound by the established rules of football. Teams are constituted from the number of willing players available and the ball can be formed from a mass of rags. The referee, if they exist at all, does not necessarily have the last word when matters are contested. There are certainly figureheads in dafoori but no boss.

The timescale of the game is defined by the physical endurance of the players and the light that is available – games often ending at sunset. Players can opt out of the game at any point in time when they are exhausted or injured, or when the imminent prospect of defeat becomes unpalatable. Limitless replacements blur the distinction between participants and onlookers, often making the two categories redundant. The more ambitious, dedicated or skilled might don a professional item – shorts, a jersey, boots, socks and shin pads – but will have to prove their worth to wear the outfit. For the usually barefooted players, the risk of injury increases when boots make an appearance, and a breach of the egalitarian ethos of the game might be declared in protest.

Relations between dafoori players who team up as guys from the same block or neighbourhood against like competitors are predicated on a moral economy encompassing mutual recognition, trust, social skills, sporting bravado and as a matter of course, male camaraderie. In the game, social stratification is suspended, and an egalitarian ethos predominates. Merit on the plane of dafoori is a function of skill and performance and cannot be short-circuited from positions of racial and social privilege. Dafoori was often the theatre where a northern town boy would make his one friend whose origins lay in South Sudan or the Fulani peoples of West Africa, where sporting interaction engendered a physical proximity that would not be feasible even in a busy schoolyard segregated by flexible partitions of racial ordering.

The most tenacious and resourceful committees took hold in Khartoum's working-class neighbourhoods and were constituted in many ways as dafoori teams for political agitation and struggle. Thanks to this conformation, the committees proved a magnetic field for political engagement. The pedlar, the artisan, the day labourer, the school dropout as well as the politically vocal student and the seasoned graduate – without and with a wage – nourished a new subjectivity in the committees as militants, with the protest march as their site of struggle. The protest march was the egalitarian plane of interaction for committee militants and the theatre where they demonstrated their best skills in dodging and battling the security apparatus. In the ongoing confrontation with the coercive state apparatus, steadfastness, heroism and sacrifice became the required characteristics of the committee militant and came to define a certain prototype and outlook. The committees acquired names reminiscent of male sporting teams, for instance, Lions of Burri and Tigers of al-

Abbasiya – neighbourhoods in Khartoum and Omdurman respectively that are main locations of protests.

Subsets of determined militants made a virtue of confrontation with the security forces. Groups who self-define as Kings of Combat and The Angry chose to occupy the frontline of the protest marches in order to engage the security forces. Some of approximately one hundred young men and women who were killed by the security forces during protests against the 25 October 2021 coup were such dedicated agitators – young men who filmed themselves wearing workmen’s helmets and goggles in preparation for protests and chanted together the clunky motto: ‘isaba, a’etqal, shahada’ (injury, detention, martyrdom) for posterity. The formulation reworks the jihad-era motto of the paramilitary Popular Defence Forces (PDF) ‘jihad, nsr, shahada’ (jihad, victory, martyrdom) from Sudan’s Islamist 1990s. The distinction cannot be overstated. The student mujahideen of the 1990s were equipped by the state, trained and armed, to fight a civil war in southern Sudan. Their zeal was consumed in killing people framed as heathen others of slave stock who dared to challenge the authority of the first Islamic state in the Sunni world since the collapse of the Ottoman empire.¹² In contrast, the young protestors on Khartoum’s streets self-organize to march the farthest, chant the loudest and throw the most stones at state security forces armed with machine guns.

THE FIGHT AGAINST COOPTATION

The three no’s **no** negotiation, **no** partnership, **no** legitimacy¹³ is one of the most famous slogans of the committees. The slogan exemplifies a sense of defiance – a generational disgust with the seemingly futile tactical positioning and repositioning of factions of the political class in relation to state power.¹⁴ The committees’ instinctive suspicion towards the political establishment derives partially from experience. Soon after assuming political office according to the terms of the August 2019 Constitutional Declaration, the first post-Bashir transitional government sought to tame these new players through cooptation and bureaucratization.

Yusif Adam al-Dhai, then Minister of Local Government, attempted this premature institutionalization of the Resistance Committees as early as November 2019. He issued a set of directives that called into being Change and Services Committees

حسن الترابي. تجربتي الإسلامية بين الفكر والسياسة. الدوحة، ٦-٨ أكتوبر ٢٠١٢.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZ_ZOYitvRk

13 Mohanad Hashim, ‘Sudan protesters: Ready to die for freedom’, BBC, 23 January 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-60082119>

14 ‘No negotiation, no partnership, no legitimacy’, Press release, Madani Resistance Committees, 18 April 2022, <https://resistancecommittee.com/en/press-release-no-negotiation-no-partnership-no-legitimacy-madani-resistance-committees/>

at urban neighbourhood and rural village levels composed of 10-12 members nominated by the ruling allies of the Forces Freedom and Change's (FFC) coalition of political parties and organizations.¹⁵ Each committee was to name a liaison person to be attached to the locality administration. These committees, a rebranding of the Bashir-era Popular Committees, were to be entrusted with a broad range of political and administrative duties that involved promoting the values of the revolution, deepening constitutional and democratic principles, overseeing the provision of services and strengthening communal security. The directives excluded the management of land from the prerogatives of the new committees and left them with fees for administrative certificates – primarily residence certificates and donations – as their sources of income.

The student radicals balked at the prospect of domestication through the humdrum duties of managing scarce subsidized bread and working out how to clean neighbourhood squares and manage household trash. They wanted revolutionary change not under-resourced contracts for local administration. Some argued that the Resistance Committees were there to safeguard the revolution and would be drowned by the tedious obligations of service delivery. They called for an arrangement where they would choose members of the change and services committees from their own ranks but maintain their autonomy from state bureaucracy.¹⁶ In a related vein, a government committee entrusted with developing a plan for a new internal security organ and restructuring of the police forces aired suggestions that included recruitment of fresh personnel from the ranks of the Resistance Committees.¹⁷

The militants of the committees stayed aloof from government. Most preferred the 'street' and maintained a calendar of protest marches in 2020 and 2021 commemorating the major stations of the 2018/2019 sequence. These protests proved a vexation for the politicians of the transitional government, particularly the militants' adamant focus on delivering justice for the qiyada massacre of 3 June 2019. For the younger militants of the Resistance Committees, the qiyada camp was the birthplace of their political imagination, their new subjectivity. It represented the ephemeral materiality of the other Sudan they were struggling for.

15 وكالة السودان للأنباء ٢٠١٩/١١/٥. وزير الحكم الاتحادي يصدر موجبات عمل لجان التغيير والخدمات،
<https://suna-news.net/read?id=467917>

16 أيمن سنجراب. ٢٠١٩/١١/٢٠. سياتج الثورة.. حوار من الشارع حول مصير لجان المقاومة، الترا سودان،
<https://ultrasudan.ultrasawt.com> سياتج الثورة-حوار-من-الشارع-حول-مصير-لجان-المقاومة/أيمن-سنجراب/اراصد

17 علي فارساب. ٢٠٢٠/٦/١٠. تصور لجهاز الأمن الداخلي يعرض للإجازة يتضمن وظائف للجان المقاومة، الترا سودان،
<https://ultrasudan.ultrasawt.com> الأمن-الداخلي-يعرض-للإجازة-يتضمن-وظائف-للجان-المقاومة/علي-فارساب/أخبار-تصور-لجهاز

HAMDOK'S DILEMMA

The military and militia generals and the FFC politicians might have had an unspoken arrangement to procrastinate in the face of the revolutionaries' demands for justice.

The interim government called into being a committee of investigation into the 3 June massacre led by a respected human rights lawyer who eventually declared he was not bound by any timeline to complete the job¹⁸ and never did. Accountability for the 3 June massacre remained suspended in the obfuscating and yet confessional statement of General Shams Al Din Kabbashi, a senior figure of the Transitional Military Council (TMC), the top authority at the time, who declared in a press conference on 13 June 2019: 'We instructed the military commanders to plan the dispersal of this sit-in according to the known military and security procedures. The military commanders went and laid out their plan and implemented the plan and then what happened happened'.¹⁹

Politicians of the FFC meekly appealed to the Resistance Committees to refrain from their protests. They presented the committees with a rationale that said loud criticism of the FFC government would only benefit Bashir's acolytes.²⁰ Ahead of one of the protests, the interim prime minister Abdalla Hamdok said he had understood the message of the militants. He pledged in an address on 29 June 2020 his commitment to achieve justice and to ensure that the crimes of the past three decades would not be repeated.²¹ While the Prime Minister attempted to persuade the army had deployed throughout the capital.²² One protestor was killed by a bullet to the chest, three others sustained severe gunshot wounds and another forty-four

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- 18 القدس العربي ٢٠٢٠/٣/٢٧. رئيس لجنة التحقيق في فض الاعتصام في السودان نبيل أديب لـ«القدس العربي»: سأستقيل إذا فرض علي وقت محدد لإعلان النتائج والعدالة الانتقالية مسؤولية السياسيين،
<https://www.alquds.co.uk/الس/الاعتصام-في-فض-لجنة-التحقيق-في-فض-الاعتصام-في-الس/>
- 19 قناة الغد ٢٠١٩/٦/١٣. العسكري السوداني يكشف كواليس فض اعتصام القيادة العامة بالخرطوم،
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KH0IFplcoC4>
- 20 Yasir Arman, leading figure of the Sudan's People's Liberation Movement in northern Sudan (SPLA/M-N), tweeted on 14 June 2020: 'The appeal for the 30 June protest from the resistance committees, youth and women of the revolution deserves appreciation but can be exploited by remnants of the National Congress Party and contravenes the procedures of the corona virus pandemic. Our comrades in the resistance committees, the youth and women should reconsider their decision. Let us struggle without allowing the remnants of the NCP [National Congress Party] to take advantage of our struggle'.
- 21 الانتباهة ٢٠٢٠/٦/٢٩. النص الكامل لخطاب حمدوك في ذكرى ٣٠ يونيو،
<https://alintibaha.net/online/39371/>
- 22 الجزيرة ٢٠٢٠/٦/٣٠. مليونية 30 يونيو.. الأمن السوداني يفرق مظاهرات بالخرطوم طالبت بتصحيح المسار وتضارب رسمي بشأن محاولة انقلابية،
<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2020/6/30/زامانا-مع-مليونية-الثورة-بالسودان/>

suffered head injuries, many by teargas canisters.²³

Prime Minister Hamdok's transitional government could neither afford to ignore nor accommodate the radicalism of the militants of the Resistance Committees. A situation of cognitive dissonance prevailed that undermined the credibility of the FFC politicians, who often appeared to be rationalizing the anomalies of their positions under the title of the repetitively debated 'difficulties' and 'challenges' and 'threats' of the transition. In his 29 June speech, Hamdok declared that 'it is no secret that the delicate balance upon which the transitional period rests which the government of the revolution is attempting to manage is a sensitive and critical one. It is a balance that passes every now and then through difficulties and quakes that threaten its stability. Many forces, inside and outside the country, are lurking to reverse our progress'. This was a formula that he, his ministers and aides, repeated *ad nauseam*.

In many ways they were right. Hamdok's government was in a precarious position. It promised justice but this required holding its powerful partners in the military-security-militia bloc accountable. It promised improvements in living conditions but was financially strapped by Sudan's immense foreign debt. Under the probing instructions of international financial institutions, it pushed through a blanket removal of subsidies for wheat, fuel and electricity, and a precipitous devaluation of the currency.²⁴ The consequences involved unleashing an overwhelming inflationary wave that in July 2021 reached a record 422 per cent.²⁵ It promised a clean break with the sultanic Bashir-era politics of monetized patronage, but bought a peace deal with an assortment of insurgent forces at a price it could not afford.²⁶ It promised a reorientation of Sudan's foreign relations in line with the interests of the Sudanese people and was strong-armed into signing the Abraham Accords and positioning Sudan in the security bloc composed of the dictatorships in Egypt and the Arab Gulf and the apartheid state in Israel, including the continuous export of teenage combatants to fight Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen.

23 باج نيوز 1/2020. أطباء السودان: سقوط شهيد في مليونية 30 يونيو نقطة سوداء وعار في جبين حكومة الثورة، <https://bajnews.net/اءالسودان-سقوط-شهيد-في-مليونية-30-يونيو>

24 International Monetary Fund, 'Second Review under the Staff-Monitored Programme and Request for Extension – Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director of Sudan', Washington DC.: International Monetary Fund, June 2021, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2021/06/30/Sudan-Second-Review-Under-the-Staff-Monitored-Program-and-Request-for-Extension-Staff-461363>

25 'Sudan's inflation rises further to 422.8% - official statistics', Reuters, 16 August 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/sudan-inflation-idAFL1N2PN15K>

26 See Edward Thomas and Magdi el-Gizouli, 'The Costs of Peace: Financing the Juba Peace Agreement in Sudan's new political economy', Rift Valley Institute, September 2022, <https://riftvalley.net/publication/costs-peace-financing-juba-peace-agreement-sudans-new-political-economy>

Inevitably, the transitional government made more domestic foes than could be outweighed by its foreign friends, its political capital depreciating by the day. The very policies that the transitional government considered itself obliged to pursue undermined its domestic standing and it came under fire from many quarters. The Communist Party opted out of the FFC in November 2020 and threatened to overthrow Hamdok's government – a group of 'technocrats who came from abroad and are tied to foreign interests in partnership with the military officers who orchestrated the 11 April 2020 palace coup', in the words of the party secretary Mohamed Mukhtar Al Khateeb.²⁷ The Popular Congress Party (PCP), the pro-Turabi wing of the Islamic Movement since the 1999 fallout between former president Bashir and the historical leader of the movement, called for the resignation of Hamdok's government ahead of the 30 June 2020 protests and beat the drum for an army takeover.²⁸

DEATH THROES OF THE POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT

In June 2020, the SPA officially fractured in two in the aftermath of troubled internal elections. The division set a pro-Communist Party bloc, which claimed to translate the radicalism of the resistance committee militants into political speak, against a loyalist bloc close to the transitional government.²⁹ When the armed movements, signatories of the October 2020 Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan, suspended their membership in the leadership council of the FFC in June 2021,³⁰ Hamdok's government was left standing on matchstick legs. From the assortment of FFC allies who came together at the height of the protest movement against the regime of former president Bashir a reduced crew remained tied up with Hamdok's government by virtue of their offices.

The minimal FFC that gathered around Hamdok was in some ways a reflection of the difficulties the political establishment of old Sudan – heirs of the patricians and the effendiyya – faced in reproducing itself. The dominant patrician families of twentieth century Sudan – the Mahdis and the Mirghanis – derived their influence from a convergence of religious authority and merchant capital.

The Mahdis and the Mirghanis organized their influence in twentieth century

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- 27 الشرق الأوسط ٢٠٢٠/١١/١٢. الشيوعي السوداني يهدد بإسقاط حكومة حمدوك،
<https://aawsat.com/home/article/2620586/الشيوعي-السوداني-يهدد-بإسقاط-حكومة-حمدوك>
- 28 التغيير ٢٠٢٠/٦/٢٩. مليونية ٣٠ يونيو. الشارع يعود لإزاحة كوابح الثورة،
<https://www.altaghyeer.info/ar/2020/06/29/مليونية-30-يونيو-الشارع-يعود-لإزاحة-كوابح-الثورة>
- 29 العربي الجديد ٢٠٢٠/٦/٦. تصاعد حدة الانقسام في تجمع المهنيين السودانيين،
<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/تصاعد-حدة-الانقسام-في-تجمع-المهنيين-السودانيين>
- 30 وكالة السودان للأنباء ٢٠٢١/٦/٢٣. مجلس قوى نداء السودان يجمد عضويته في قوى الحرية والتغيير،
<https://suna-news.net/read?id=715744>

Sudan as political parties, the Umma Party of the Ansar and the National Unionist Party/People's Democratic Party (from 1967 onwards the Democratic Unionist Party) of the Khatmiyya respectively. The two parties were constituted as vehicles for patronage and electoral mobilization operating at the rural level. This was predominantly achieved through the local despots of the tribally defined native administration and Sufi holy men, and at the urban level through an increasingly powerful class of commercial capitalists and the new intelligentsia who came out of the colonial school system, the *effendiyya*.

The *effendiyya*, sons of the merchants and tribal chiefs and Sufi sheikhs, occupied the lower rungs of the colonial government as clerks, accountants and teachers. Thanks to their command of modern technologies of the written and spoken word – the newspaper, the radio and the public lecture – they were in a position to imagine the nation in their own mould towards an ideal of Arabic culture and Muslim faith.³¹ Mainstream Sudanese nationalism was born in the debating clubs and the print media of the *effendiyya*.³²

Politically, the mainstream of the *effendiyya* was divided in allegiance between the Mahdi and the Mirghani houses and manned their respective political organizations, the Umma Party and the DUP, in alliances that dominated Sudan's twentieth century parliamentary regimes. But their loyalty was primarily to the state and its institutions. Colonel Nimayri who took over power in a coup against a parliamentary regime in 1969 freed the ambitious *effendiyya* from their hostage status in the patricians' parties. Two patrons were replaced by one who shared their lifestyles, tastes and inclinations and entertained an idea of progress under which they were given authority and budgets to translate into a vast bureaucratic apparatus of state corporations.

The *effendiyya* state crumbled under the weight of its debts. In the early 1980s the country began a long and painful economic restructuring prompted by its creditors with austerity and privatization as its guiding themes.³³ The *effendiyya* began a long exodus as exported labour that took them to all the corners of the earth, one that was greatly amplified during the politically repressive and economically austere pre-oil years of Islamist rule under former president Bashir. The figure of the *effendi* fused into the figure of the expatriate. Sudan's labour export has two major components, permanent migration to Western countries and circular migration to the Arab Gulf.

محمد أحمد محبوب. الحركة الفكرية في السودان: إلى أين يجب أن تتجه (١٩٣١). ضمن نحو الغد، ١٩٧٠: ٢١٥.

31

32 Heather J. Sharkey, 'A century in print: Arabic journalism and nationalism in Sudan, 1899–1999', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31/4 (1999): 531–549.

33 Edward Thomas, 'Patterns of growth and inequality in Sudan, 1977–2017', Working Paper, Institute for Middle East and Islamic Studies, Durham University, 28 November 2017.

In 1978 the total number of Sudanese migrants was estimated at around 230,000. The pace of outmigration increased in the post-oil slump from an annual 10,000 in 2008 to more than 100,000 in 2013. Government authorities estimate the current number of Sudanese emigrants at four to five million. Remittances from this exported labour force are the bedrock of urban livelihoods, amounting to an estimated peak of 3.3 billion US dollars in 2013 and USD 2.9 billion for 2017 and 2018 respectively.³⁴

Around Hamdok's government assembled the returning expatriates – he was himself one — whom the Communist Party lambasted as stooges of foreign powers – the loyalist faction of the SPA, the Sudanese Congress Party, the Unionist Association and the Arab Socialist Baath Party of Sudan, in addition to the reluctant Umma Party. The first four, who dominated the government, represented overlapping political expressions of the interests and outlooks of cosmopolitan Sudan, the higher order salariat of educated professionals distributed between the capital Khartoum and the stations of expatriate labour in the Arab Gulf and the Western world, with subtle variations.

The Sudanese Congress Party claims to be a post-ideological political formation, unlike the Communists and Baathists. The roots of the party lie in the fusion of two campus-based organs: the Congress of Independent Students established in 1977 as an alternative cluster of activists not convinced by either Islamism or communism and the miniscule Congress Party launched by the former head of the judiciary Abd Al Majid Imam in 1986 at the beginning of Sudan's third parliamentary democracy. The two streams were brought together in 2005 under the leadership of the prominent businessman-cum-politician Ibrahim Al Sheikh.³⁵ The party's current prominence draws from its record of agitation in and outside campus against President Bashir's regime³⁶ and arguably the indefatigable pragmatism, confidence and will to power of its younger (b. 1979) leader Khaled Omer Yousif³⁷, Minister of Cabinet Affairs in Hamdok's government.³⁸ The party's liberal outlook, its wholesale adoption of UN-

34 United Nations Development Programme, 'The Potential of Sudanese Diaspora Remittances', New York: United Nations Development Programme, 10 September 2020, https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/Sustainable_development/the-potential-of-sudanese-diaspora-remittances.html

35 Khaled Omer Yousif, 'In Sudan a budding opposition party is under greater crackdown, here's its story', Sudan Tribune, 20 July 2015, <https://sudantribune.com/articles54255/>

36 الأناضول 2016/12/25. الخرطوم تفرج عن 16 قياديا في "المؤتمر السوداني" المعارض، <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/713993> الدول العربية/الخرطوم-تفرج-عن-16-قياديا-في-المؤتمر-السوداني-المعارض

37 التيلين 2019/8/4. عربي، محمد حسن. من هو خالد عمر يوسف "سلك" القيادي بالمؤتمر السوداني؟ <https://www.sudaress.com/alnilin/13068170>

38 بي بي سي عربي 2021/7/4. برنامج بلا قيود يستضيف خالد عمر يوسف وزير شؤون مجلس الوزراء السوداني، <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5Q9WZbKQU8>

speak,³⁹ and the ability of its politicians to communicate effectively with Western diplomats has made it a favoured interlocutor of the international community's representatives.

The Unionist Association is the organizational outfit of a younger generation of politicians with a record of campus activism who broke away at different times from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) led by the *Khatmiyya* patrician Mohamed Osman Al Mirghani. The pace of fracturing increased after the main party partnered with the NCP to enter former president Bashir's government following the independence of South Sudan in 2011. The Unionist Association was officially declared in November 2018 at the final hour of Bashir's rule as a coalition of miniscule DUP splinter groups championed by part-time politicians from prominent *Khatmiyya* families. Factional strife reignited when the prospects of entering government became concrete and the Association shed some its components in August 2019 in preparation for rule. The young Unionists share a similar outlook to their peers described above but differ in their continued investment in the legacies of their *Khatmiyya* families, histories and linkages that might come in handy in an electoral contest for voters in historical DUP constituencies.

The survival and clout of the Sudanese rendition of the pan-Arab Baath Party in the post-Bashir era is evidence of what a relatively disciplined organization can deliver in a chaotic interregnum. This cadre party is a clockwork mechanism devised by a septuagenarian veteran who was elected to the Baghdad-based leadership of the pan-Arab party in 1992 under Saddam Hussein,⁴⁰ escaped from Iraq in 2006, three years into the US invasion, and currently identifies as its Assistant Secretary General.⁴² The Baathists delivered colourful vocal personalities to man the cumbersomely named Committee for the Dismantling of the Regime of 30 June 1989 and Reclaiming of Public Funds, entrusted with the excruciating task of identifying and disassembling the bolts and cogs of the NCP's institutional machinery and its

39 The party's 2016 manifesto highlights multiparty democracy, human rights, gender mainstreaming, adoption of the Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), protection of the environment, investment in alternative energies, balanced and sustainable development, harnessing market mechanisms "such as competition, economic calculation, price and profitability indicators", attracting aid and foreign direct investments. See English version published online by the 'Progressive Alliance', a breakaway network of social democratic parties including the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the British Labour Party founded in 2013 with headquarters in Berlin as a rival of the Socialist International: <https://alliance-progressiste.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/6.1.2-Sudanese-Congress-Party-Manifesto-2016.pdf>

الأهرام اليوم ١٧/٤/٢٠١٢. عضو القيادة القومية، أمين سر قطر السودان بحزب البعث العربي الاشتراكي على الريح السنهوري
ل(الأهرام اليوم). 40

اليوم التالي ٢٨/٩/٢٠٢١. علي الريح السنهوري.. رجل تطارده الأشواق من بغداد إلى الخرطوم. 41

الكرامة نيوز ٦/٤/٢٠٢١. 42

financial avatars.⁴³

Inevitably, this pursuit placed the Dismantling Committee on a collision course with the military-security-militia bloc that now mastered the levers of surplus extraction from Sudan's destitute miners, agricultural workers and herders. Sudan's import bill for the year 2021 stood at USD 9.2 billion, more than half of which was dedicated to fuel, imported food including wheat and flour and manufactured consumption articles. In comparison, total commodity exports valued USD 4.3 billion, in percentage contributions: 46 per cent gold, 10 per cent sesame, 10 per cent livestock, 10 per cent groundnuts, 3 per cent cotton and 2 per cent Gum Arabic.⁴⁴ The people who produce these primary mineral, farm, pasture and forest commodities are amongst the hungriest in the country.⁴⁵

To maintain this imbalance between largely urban consumption and rural production wars were necessary to clear the land and generate a cheap labour force through dispossession and displacement. The militia established itself as the key technique of rural governance and extraction and now a bridge between these realms. The militia form is partially a militarization and also a displacement of an older system of governance that relied on the authority of rural notables in league with the patricians of the Mahdi and Mirghani houses. These authorities were intimately involved in the organization of rural production as custodians of the land, labour recruitment agents, arbiters in disputes, creditors, brokers and merchants.⁴⁶ Through these powers, they were able to deliver voting majorities to the patrician parties despite considerable competition over nominations and multiple candidacies.⁴⁷

The Umma Party was such a transmitter belt between nodes of authority among peoples in Kordofan, Darfur, White Nile, and the Mahdi house under Abd Al Rahman Al Mahdi and his heirs. It commanded the largest electoral bloc in the parliamentary regime that was overthrown by the Islamist coup of 1989. Accordingly, the late Sadiq Al Mahdi, Abd Al Rahman's Oxford-educated grandson, presided over a succession

الترا سودان ٢٠٢٠/٤/١٢. وجدي صالح: التهديدات لن تثبتنا وسنفتك مؤسسات الإنقاذ صامولة صامولة.

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<https://ultrasudan.ultrasawt.com/لن-تثبتنا-وسنفتك-مؤسسات-الإنقاذ-صامولة-صامولة/سارة-عطية/راصد?scroll=1>
وجدي صالح-التهديدات

- 44 Central Bank of Sudan, 'Foreign Trade Statistical Digest 58/4, January – December 2021', Khartoum: Central Bank of Sudan, 2021.
- 45 Edward Thomas and Alex de Waal, 'Hunger in Sudan's Political Marketplace', Occasional Paper #32, World Peace Foundation, April 2022.
- 46 Elke Grawert, *Making a Living in Rural Sudan*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998: 50–54.
- 47 Justin Willis, Atta El-Battahani, and Peter Woodward, 'Elections in Sudan: learning from experience', Rift Valley Institute, 2009.

of unstable coalition governments as prime minister between 1986 and 1989. The Umma Party was perennially aggrieved in all opposition coalitions against former president Bashir's regime by organizational arrangements whereby cadre parties like the Baath who had never made it into an elected parliament would be seated as its equals in decision making bodies.

RECIPE FOR A COUP

In the immediate build-up to the 25 October 2021 coup, Prime Minister Hamdok made an attempt to salvage the situation by declaring in June 2021 a new initiative that would usher in a 'historic bloc that agrees on a national programme to lead the country'. Hamdok warned that Sudan was facing an existential crisis of Shakespearean proportions between 'to be or not to be'.⁴⁸ The immediate objective of the initiative, he told the press, was to lead the way to free and fair elections⁴⁹ — a welcoming nod to the Umma Party. The Prime Minister invited representatives of the Resistance Committees to his offices for consultations, with the cameras flashing.⁵⁰ He wanted support for the renegotiation of a deal within the deal that might help avert the now open antagonism between the FFC politicians and the leaders of the armed movements.

The 'issues of the transition' were to be handled by yet another committee of 71 members densely staffed by Sufi sheikhs, rural notables and political party leaders – the malleable type of people who would be invited to Bashir-era National Dialogues. The Prime Minister handed over chairmanship of the 'mechanism', as it was called, to the Umma Party leader Fadlalla Burma Nasir. Leaders of the armed movements, who had by this time declared the FFC politicians as usurpers of power to be wrenched out of government, boycotted the initiative.⁵¹ Activists and youth representatives followed suit,⁵² including the spokeswoman of the mechanism.⁵³

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- 48 الشرق الأوسط ٢٠٢١/٦/٢٣. السودان: حمدوك يطلق مبادرة وطنية لمواجهة قضايا الانتقال،
السودان - حمدوك يطلق «مبادرة وطنية» لمواجهة «قضايا الانتقال/3041991/aawsat.com/home/article/3041991
- 49 سكاى نيوز عربية ٢٠٢١/٨/٢٥. حمدوك: هدف «مبادرة حل الأزمة الوطنية» هو إقامة انتخابات حرة،
مبادرة-حل-الأزمة-الوطنية-إقامة-انتخابات-حرة-١459337-middle-east/skynewsrabia.com/middle-east/1459337-
حمدوك-هدف
- 50 جمهورية السودان، مجلس الوزراء ٢٠٢١/٨/٥. د حمدوك يستقبل ممثلين من لجان المقاومة بالخرطوم،
http://www.sudan.gov.sd/index.php/ar/home/news_details/3286
- 51 الشرق الأوسط ٢٠٢١/٨/١٨. آلية تنفيذ «مبادرة حمدوك» تثير الجدل في الساحة السودانية،
الدول-العربية-الخرطوم-تفرج-عن-١6-قيادة-في-المؤتمر-السوداني-المعارض/3137686/aawsat.com/home/article/3137686
- 52 التغيير ٢٠٢١/٨/٢٦. استقالة سادسة من آلية مبادرة رئيس الوزراء السوداني،
استقالة-سادسة-من-عضوية-مبادرة-رئيس-الوزراء/2021/08/26/altaghyeer.info/ar/2021/08/26
- 53 التغيير ٢٠٢١/١٠/٩. استقالة الناطقة باسم آلية تنفيذ مبادرة رئيس الوزراء السوداني،
استقالة-الناطق-باسم-آلية-تنفيذ-مبادر/2021/10/09/altaghyeer.info/ar/2021/10/09

The Prime Minister's initiative boiled down to one new ally, the octogenarian Fadlalla Burma Nasir, at the expense of many others estranged, primarily the Resistance Committee militants who once chanted his name in adoration. Fadlalla Burma Nasir, a retired army general, would re-emerge after the 25 October 2021 coup as the mediator at large between the military-militia-security bloc and the unseated prime minister. He brought with him considerable hands-on experience in managing civilian-military affairs. He was a member of the Transitional Military Council that took over power from former president Nimayri at the height of the 1985 uprising. His innovations in counter-insurgency in the late 1980s as Minister of Defence under Prime Minister Sadiq Al Mahdi are a forerunner of militia governance.⁵⁴

The 25 October restoration was in a way the full manifestation of the 11 April 2019 coup when the generals, under pressure from the protest movement, whisked away Bashir and made their truce with the FFC leaders. The interlude allowed for the management of crucial issues that the military-security-militia bloc would have had difficulty handling without the credibility of a civilian authority. Speaking a day after the coup, the army chief Abd Al Fattah Al Burhan said as much. He praised the partnership with Hamdok and expressed his appreciation for their joint achievements: implementation of the IMF austerity package, improvement of relations with the US through the Tel Aviv gateway, and the peace deals with the armed movements.⁵⁵ He was right, the transitional period began as a Faustian pact between the generals and the FFC leaders. The peace agreements with the armed movements introduced a third party into what was initially designed as a bilateral cohabitation. The generals swapped out the FFC politicians in favour of the former rebels once the partnership had exhausted its initial rationale – an unmediated manifestation of the Maoist dictum that 'political power grows out of the barrel of a gun'. But maybe not just yet.

The wish of the generals to protect their de facto veto power over political arrangements informed their decision to oust Hamdok's government by force on 25 October 2021. The immediate outrage on the streets – a feat made possible by the Resistance Committees – was evidence of the fact that the military's command of guns did not translate into command over minds. They attempted a quick fix through a hurried deal that brought the deposed Prime Minister Hamdok back into

54 David Keen, *The benefits of famine: a political economy of famine and relief in southwestern Sudan, 1983-1989*, Oxford: James Currey, 2008: 65.

العربية الحدث ٢٦/١٠/٢٠٢١. مؤتمر صحفي لقائد الجيش السوداني عبد الفتاح البرهان.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhiIxNtYKJE>

office but was immediately rejected by the protestors on the streets.⁵⁶ Devoid of political backing, Hamdok handed in his resignation in January 2022⁵⁷ and has since reportedly relocated to the United Arab Emirates.⁵⁸

STATUS QUO ANTE

Over the course of 2022, the FFC politicians and the generals engaged in a lengthy, mostly clandestine renegotiation of the terms of their cohabitation, mediated by a trio of diplomats on behalf of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and backed by the US, Saudi Arabia and the European powers. The objective of the so-called political process – to use the language of the UN and the FFC politicians is – to restore the ‘civilian-led democratic transition’.^{59, 60} Meanwhile, the rift between the FFC politicians, now assembled as the FFC-Central Council (FFC-CC), and the former rebel leaders, now aligned under the title of the FFC-Democratic Block (FFC-DB), evolved into a daily muckraking contest in the media.⁶¹

The vicious discord saw accusations of racism deployed by both sides as the two competing coalitions settled into approximations of the racial divide in Sudan⁶² — the FFC politicians from the riverine heartland on one side, and the former rebel leaders from Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile on the other. The FFC-CC condemned the FFC-DC for colliding with the generals in October 2021 but were

56 *New York Times*, ‘Ousted in Coup, Sudan’s Prime Minister Returns via Military Deal’, 21 November 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/21/world/africa/sudan-coup-abdalla-hamdok.html>

57 *New York Times*, ‘Sudan’s Prime Minister, Abdalla Hamdok, Resigns’, 2 January 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/02/world/africa/abdalla-hamdok-resigns-sudan.html>

58 *Africa Intelligence*, ‘MbZ attempting to engineer Hamdok’s return’, 18 March 2022, <https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-africa-and-the-horn/2022/03/18/mbz-attempting-to-engineer-hamdok-s-return,109761612-eve>

59 United Nations Security Council, ‘Situation in the Sudan and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan’, Report of the Secretary General, 2 September 2022, https://unitams.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_reportenglish_o.pdf; United Nations Security Council, ‘Situation in the Sudan and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan’, Report of the Secretary General, 1 December 2022, <https://unitams.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg-report-dec-en.pdf>

60 سودان تريبون ١٤/١١/٢٠٢٢. «الحرية والتغيير» تكشف خطتها لإدارة العملية السياسية بالسودان. <https://sudantribune.net/article266759/>

61 سودانية ٢٤ دائرة الحدث ٦/٧/٢٠٢٢. إلغاء المفاوضات .. العودة إلى الدائرة الشريفة. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3I_MDVm-ofs

62 راديو PRO FM ٢٠/١٢/٢٠٢٢. مبارك أردول يرد علي أمجد فريد اعتصام الموز عنصري. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhv1bjySQ9g>

unwilling to consider the genealogy of the crisis. The FFC-DC on the other hand accused the FFC-CC of attempting to hijack authority in the transitional period under Hamdok and more recently of monopolizing civilian agency in talks with the generals.

Both sides attempted to expand their remit by recruiting new or recycled partners from the shatter zones of Sudan's political scene. For example, the FFC-CC won over a faction of the late Hassan Al-Turabi's Popular Congress Party, now led by a flamboyant lawyer who doubles as a prominent member of former President Bashir's and other senior members of the National Congress Party (NCP) defence team in the ongoing trial over the 1989 coup.⁶³ It also gained the support of a faction of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), led by a son of its ailing patron chief who served as First Assistant to former President Bashir,⁶⁴ ⁶⁵ a faction of the Wahhabi Ansar Al Sunna, and several FFC-loyal professional associations and civil society groups.

The FFC-DC heavyweights are the former rebel groups the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), led by Mini Minawi and Jibril Ibrahim, who now occupy the positions of governor of Darfur and Minister of Finance respectively. They were joined by Mubarak Ardol, a former rebel figure in the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-North (SPLM/A-North), who during the transitional period launched his own political party⁶⁶ and under Hamdok's premiership assumed the influential position of Director of the Sudanese Company for Mineral Resources.⁶⁷ They enlisted a number of smaller Darfuri rebel factions and political groups from the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) negotiation tables;⁶⁸ a break-off faction of the Baathists; and appointed as chairman another younger son of the DUP chief,⁶⁹ who currently serves as his father's deputy.

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- انديندنت عربية ٢٠٢٠/٩/٢٣. هيئة الدفاع عن "البشير" تعتبر محاكمته سياسية لسقوط القضية بالتقادم، 63
<https://www.independentarabia.com/node/154016/البشير-عن-الدفاع-هيئة-العربي/القضية-بالتقادم-%C2%A0-ر-تعتبر-محاكمته-سياسية-لسقوط-القضية-بالتقادم>
- رئاسة جمهورية السودان ٢٠١٥/٦/٨. البشير يعين محمد الحسن الميرغني مساعد أول للرئيس وأربعة مساعدين، 64
<https://www.presidency.gov.sd/news/206-2015-06-07-07-32-22>
- الصيحة ٢٠٢١/٨/١٦. ما وراء عودة الحسن الميرغني! 65
<https://www.assayha.net/75925/>
- وكالة سونا للأخبار ٢٠٢١/٥/٣٠. أردول رئيسا للمكتب السياسي للحلف الديمقراطي للعدالة الاجتماعية، 66
https://suna-news.net/read?id=713663&ocid=Nabd_App
- وكالة السودان للأخبار ٢٠٢٠/٤/٢٠. تعيين مبارك أردول مديرا عاما للشركة السودانية للموارد المعدنية، 67
<https://suna-news.net/read?id=657861>
- 68 International Crisis Group, 'The Rebels Come to Khartoum: How to Implement Sudan's New Peace Agreement', Africa Briefing N°168, February 2021.
- سودان تريبيون ٢٠٢٢/١١/٢٣. جعفر الميرغني يرأس «التغيير الديمقراطي» والمجلس المركزي يرد «الأصل معنا»، 69
<https://sudantribune.net/article267254/>

The basic fissure between the FFC-CC politicians and the FFC-DC former rebels corresponds closely to frequently discussed lines of division in Sudan: the urban versus the rural realms; the centre versus the periphery; the riverain Arabic speakers versus the *gharaba* (used often as a derogatory term to refer to people from western Sudan); or Khartoum versus the rest. The politicians and the rebel leaders belong to two recognizably distinct and competing social and political networks. The first spans the social world of university-educated cosmopolitan Khartoum and the English-speaking diaspora armed with postgraduate degrees and experiences in the regional and international job markets, and the second extends into Sudan's conflict-scorched hinterlands where guns have become the dominant means of production.⁷⁰ Even the long-term allies Malik Agar and Yasir Arman, chairperson and secretary general of the SPLM/N faction led by the former, went separate ways at this juncture.

Malik Agar, the veteran leader of the SPLA insurgency in the Blue Nile, secured through the JPA membership of the Sovereignty Council, the collegial head of state, and for his SPLA/M faction a considerable degree of autonomous rule over the state. This included 40 per cent of income from the revenue of natural resources, extracted wealth, tax revenue and taxes levied there.⁷¹ Malik said the 25 October 2021 coup did indeed threaten Sudan's hopes for democracy but argued that peace was the priority – allowing him to retain his position in the presidential palace.⁷² Yasir Arman joined the SPLA/M in 1987 after a short stint as a student communist in the Khartoum branch of Cairo University to become one of the SPLA/M's most vocal spokesman with a riverine northern voice, and also a close aid to the late John Garang. Arman could not see much merit in Agar's argument and had no political stakes to protect in Blue Nile, and so consequently split away with his own faction (SPLM-Revolutionary Democratic Current) as a core player of the FFC-FC.⁷³

70 Magdi el-Gizouli, 'Counterrevolution in Sudan: A History of Military Coups and Mass Struggle', *Spectre Journal*, 7 November 2021, <https://spectrejournal.com/counterrevolution-in-sudan/>

71 Edward Thomas and Magdi el-Gizouli, 'The Costs of Peace: Financing the Juba Peace Agreement in Sudan's new political economy', *Rift Valley Institute*, September 2022, <https://riftvalley.net/publication/costs-peace-financing-juba-peace-agreement-sudans-new-political-economy>

72 الجزيرة مباشر ٢٠٢١/١١/١٦. مالك عقار: سيتم إطلاق سراح جميع المعتقلين من فيهم حمدوك خلال يوم أو يومين. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ih3U1VouLrg>

73 السوداني ٢٠٢٢/٨/٢٢. ياسر عرمان رئيساً للحركة الشعبية لتحرير السودان (التيار الثوري الديمقراطي) <https://www.alsudaninews.com/ar/?p=156945>

THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

Negotiations between the generals and the FFC-CC delivered a brief Framework Agreement in December 2022 that set out new terms for a power sharing arrangement between the generals and the FFC-CC politicians. The ranks of the FFC-CC suffered a split as a result. The Arab Socialist Baath Party denounced the deal as a surrender to the generals and walked out of the alliance in protest.⁷⁴ According to the deal, the generals would commit to withdraw from the government branches of the Transitional Period and from political life altogether but would decamp with the former rebel leaders, signatories of the JPA, to a Security and Defence Council chaired by the Prime Minister. A separate clause expanded on this situation further by stating that law would define the cases in which the Council of Ministers would be permitted to resort to the armed forces in matters of a non-military nature. The Framework Agreement also promised a military reform process, including integration of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) into the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF).⁷⁵

The Framework Agreement promises a future code to clarify how the military would get involved in the business of the Cabinet of Ministers and leaves the generals to decide how they would like to reform their armies. The FFC-CC politicians, the generals and the UN diplomats were more optimistic. The politicians said the Agreement was ‘an important step to end the coup and restore the civilian democratic path’.⁷⁶ General Al-Burhan told SAF troops ‘we want the ongoing political process to lead to the formation of a government of independents that can take the country truly forwards’ and explained that ‘true reform of the armed forces includes changes and amendments of internal regulations, a process that is already well underway’.⁷⁷ The UNITAMS chief, Volker Perthes, said ‘The framework agreement now offers a path to realize the aspirations of Sudan’s youth, women and men’ but warned of unspecified ‘challengers and spoilers’.⁷⁸

As the signing ceremony was underway, young women and men in the Resistance

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- 74 سودان تريبيون ٢٠٢٢/١٢/١٣. «البعث» ينسحب من تحالف الحرية والتغيير اعتراضاً على الاتفاق الإطاري.
<https://sudantribune.net/article268169/>
- 75 وكالة السودان للأخبار ٢٠٢٢/١٢/٥. نص وثيقة الاتفاق السياسي الإطاري.
<https://suna-sd.net/read?id=755873>
- 76 بي بي سي عربي ٢٠٢٢/١٢/٢٣. عمر الدقير: رئيس الوزراء المقبل قد يكون حزبياً أو غير حزبي،
<https://www.bbc.com/arabic/tv-and-radio-64082585>
- 77 الجزيرة ٢٠٢٢/١٢/١٤. البرهان: لا ينبغي لأي جهة محاولة اختطاف الاتفاق الإطاري لمصلحتها،
<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2022/12/14/البرهان-لا-ينبغي-لأي-جهة-محاولة-اختطاف-الاتفاق-الإطاري-لمصلحتها>
- 78 UN News, ‘New political deal ‘offers a path’ to realizing Sudanese aspirations’, 7 December 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/12/1131462>

Committees experienced a sense of déjà vu; some took out to the street in protest,⁷⁹ others were apathetic.⁸⁰ For many other people the politicking at the centre of power appeared very much detached from the immediacy of social struggles. Teachers across the country entered a series of nation-wide strikes beginning in early December 2022 demanding a living wage that had by the end of the year completely shut down the government school system.⁸¹ A similar labour strike in September over poor wages reduced the already low electricity supply by forty per cent.⁸² Traders across urban Sudan protested hikes in taxation reaching up to 1,000 per cent by closing markets over several days in October.⁸³ Others did not have the opportunity to protest as they faced gunfire in a sequence of communal clashes reflecting the increasing militarization of rural life extending across an arc of bloodshed from the Blue Nile⁸⁴ to Kordofan⁸⁵ and Darfur.⁸⁶ In the central agricultural zones of Gezira and Gedaref armed bands roamed the land to plunder harvests.⁸⁷

The militants of the Resistance Committees – women and men like Sit Al-Nifour and wad Akar – stood so far between the squabbling generals, militia leaders, former rebels, adroit politicians and the full realization of authority. The sequence of revolutionary events in the region heralded by the Egyptian revolution in 2011

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- 79 'Sudan generals and parties sign outline deal, protesters cry foul', Reuters, 5 December 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sudanese-civilian-parties-sign-framework-deal-new-political-transition-2022-12-05/>
- 80 'Repeating cycle': Protesters decry Sudan agreement', Al Jazeera, 06 December 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/6/repeating-cycle-protesters-decry-sudan-agreement>
- 81 الشرق الأوسط ٢٩/١٢/٢٠٢٢. إضراب المعلمين يشل التعليم في السودان، <https://aawsat.com/home/article/4068826/إضراب-المعلمين-يشل-التعليم-في-السودان>
- 82 السودان تربيون ٢٥/٩/٢٠٢٢. عمال الكهرباء يعاودون الإضراب ويقررون تخفيض الحملات بنسبة 40%، <https://sudantribune.net/article264556/>
- 83 القدس العربي ٩/١٠/٢٠٢٢. السودان: إضرابات جديدة في أسواق مدن رئيسية احتجاجا على زيادة الضرائب، <https://www.alquds.co.uk/السودان-إضرابات-جديدة-في-أسواق-مدن-رئي>
- 84 'At least 230 Sudanese villagers killed in tribal attacks over disputed land', The Guardian, 26 October 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/oct/26/sudan-230-killed-blue-nile-state-attacks-villages>
- 85 'West Kordofan 'still tense' following inter-tribal clashes', Radio Dabanga, 19 October 2022, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/west-kordofan-still-tense-following-inter-tribal-clashes>
- 86 'Sudan Situation Report', UNOCHA, 10 November 2022, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/>; 'Sudan: Conflict – Bileil Locality, South Darfur State', Flash Update No. 01, UNOCHA, 26 December 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-conflict-bileil-locality-south-darfur-state-flash-update-no-01-26-december-2022-enar>.
- 87 السوداني ٣٠/١١/٢٠٢٢. شكاوى من تكرار سرقة ونهب المحاصيل في الحصاد بالقضارف، <https://www.alsudaninews.com/ar/?p=163182>

have largely ended in deadlocks of devastating suppression, reaction, and violent implosion. The militants of the Resistance Committees have so far managed to partially dodge these fates. Their intransigence has proved a major break on the scheming of the men with guns, the regional security bloc and the international diplomats so adept at manufacturing consent. Are these the challengers and spoilers the UNITAMS chief was referring to?

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CREDITS

This research paper is a product of the FCDO's Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) programme, funded by UK aid from the UK government. XCEPT brings together leading experts to examine conflict-affected borderlands, how conflicts connect across borders, and the factors that shape violent and peaceful behaviour. The programme carries out research to better understand the causes and impacts of conflict in border areas and their international dimensions. It supports more effective policymaking and development programming and builds the skills of local partners. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

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