

*In the last five months Sudan has seen more change than in the previous 30 years. People in and outside of the country are eying the unfolding developments with both euphoria and caution about the future. While peaceful protesters continue to demonstrate patiently outside the army headquarters, a transformation of the entire political arena that allows diversity and a new generation to flourish is needed. The chain of succession witnessed after Al-Bashir's removal were no more than attempts by the regime to perpetuate itself by changing figureheads at the top without addressing the violent, corruption-fueled system underneath. The Sudanese people are well aware that if the army is allowed to oversee a transition to democracy, even in a limited capacity, this could undermine efforts at rooting out corruption and state-sponsored violence—the hallmarks of three decades of military rule in Sudan.*

*The international community now has a chance to redesign its engagement strategy and policy vis-à-vis Sudan to support the people in their demand for a peaceful and timely handover of power to a civilian transitional government. With negotiations between the Military Transitional Council (MTC) and the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) ongoing, PAX offers a thorough analysis of actors and events concerning this delicate process as it unfolds, to inform decision-making at this precarious stage in Sudan's transition.*

*Accompanying this Sudan Alert is a detailed actor map explaining important dynamics within and between the main actors, which will be modified as needed.*

## Analysis

### MTC and FFC Political Negotiations

The Military Transitional Council (MTC) and the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) have engaged at times in fraught political negotiations. Both bodies are newly created, have minimal negotiating experience and both are suffering from internal disagreements and external threats. The MTC that Inspector-General Abdel-Fatah Burhan inherited from General Awad Ibn Ouf was created by the former regime as place holder until it could consolidate control again—former NISS chief Salah Gosh never designed it to turn over power to civilians. The FFC coalition grew out of an organic and seemingly leaderless protest movement and consists of trade unions, opposition political parties, women's and youth groups, and political wings of some rebel groups. Although its unity largely held while it was in opposition, now that the FFC need to engage in political negotiations, which generally require compromising, internal divisions have grown—exacerbated by a well-coordinated dis-information campaign perpetrated by Islamist counter-revolutionaries (CR).

On 24 April, following a breakdown in negotiations on 21 April, the MTC and the FFC resumed talks. Initially the MTC agreed to negotiate only with the FFC and refused to include certain non-FFC political parties, such as the Islamist Popular Congress Party (PCP). One stumbling block was Omar Zain's leadership of the MTC's Political Committee. Omar Zain was one of the main Islamist CR MTC members, and used his position on the MTC's Political Committee to delay negotiations with the FFC and obfuscate the process by calling parties that used to be part of Al-Bashir's government to present their ideas for a transitional period. The inclusion of these non-FFC parties in the political negotiation process was a serious cause for concern among the FFC as most of those non-FFC parties had previously participated in the former regime's national dialogue process largely seen as a capitulation to this regime, and some remained part of Al-Bashir's government until its demise. Prior to the resumption of the negotiations on 24 April, MTC President Burhan removed Omar Zain from the MTC's Political Committee. At the close of this stage, the MTC and the FFC agreed to form a joint committee to continue finalizing the civilian-led government's structure. As a final show of increased trust between the groups, the FFC decided not to unilaterally announce its civilian-led government and not to use popular pressure to force the MTC to accept it.

As the negotiations progressed, trust built between the two sides eroded and negotiations stalled again on 30 April. By 29 April both sides had agreed to form a transitional government consisting of a 'Sovereign Council', composed of both military and civilian members, which would function as Sudan's ruler. They further agreed to form a 'Council of Ministries' led by a Prime Minister that would function as Sudan's civilian government and a transitional Legislative Body. The main points of contention between the two sides were the Sovereign Council's duties, whether the military or the civilians would make up the majority, and who would chair the Sovereign Council. The MTC is proposing that the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) hold a majority within the Sovereign Council that would have executive functions. Conversely, most of the FFC are demanding a civilian majority on the Sovereign Council that would leave executive functions to the Council of Ministers. These differences are crucial: whoever holds the key to executive functions will be Sudan's de-facto ruler, and most of the FFC do not want SAF to rule.

### Threats to the Negotiations

The primary threat to the negotiations, and to the transfer of power to a civilian-led government, remains the Islamist CR who oppose a transfer of power to civilian rule, and are most likely supported by Qatar and Turkey. Burhan has taken steps to reduce the Islamist CR political and military power by (1) removing influential figures from the MTC; (2) freezing assets of individuals and CR security forces; (3) replacing senior officials including the country's chief justice and attorney general; and (4) arresting several key members of Al Bashir's National Congress Party (NCP) and two of his brothers on corruption charges. Other important Al-Bashir allies, including Salah Gosh and short-lived MTC head General Ibn Ouf, have stepped aside but remain both at liberty and influential. The CR remain well funded through their vast and diverse business investments in Sudan, and continue to control much of the deep-state's security apparatus. At the moment evidence from the ground strongly suggests that they are using their resources to carry out a well-coordinated disinformation campaign among the protesters. The campaign's objective is to discredit the negotiation process to the point of break down by spreading anti-MTC messages in an attempt to develop and increase acrimony between the MTC and the rank-and-file protestors. By focusing their attempts on the MTC, the CR are pushing the image that the MTC is in charge, that Burhan is there to protect the Ingaz regime, and that the deep-state does not exist. Seen as how the Islamist CR still have control over militia forces, media, continue to hold large reserves of cash, and are effectively Sudan's best organized political movement—they remain a viscous challenge to any transfer of power to a civilian led government.

Islamist CR and the Gulf coalition (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), while antagonistic to each other due to their ideological differences regarding Islamism, are both trying to stop the transfer of power to civilian rule. As the Gulf coalition equally prefers military government rule in Sudan, concern is warranted that they are lobbying SAF MTC members to maintain a SAF majority on the Sovereign Council. For instance, Saudi Arabia and UAE have close business and military ties to Hemedti, considering the Rapid Support Forces' (RSF) involvement in the war in Yemen.

Some of the MTC's members' desire to retain a majority on the Sovereign Council is likely linked to both SAF and Gulf coalition manipulations of these individuals. As outlined in the mapping of actors, some of SAF's leadership is sympathetic to the Islamist CR. Additionally, some of SAF's leadership benefits financially from Sudan's support for the war in Yemen and SAF's vast business investments inside and outside of Sudan, and fear losing access to this patronage network under a civilian government. SAF however is needed to protect the new civilian government from the Islamist CR threat. Thus, any new civilian-led government's relationship with the SAF is likely to be fraught and

complicated as it will be needed to protect the new government but will potentially be a destabilizing actor as well.

Since starting negotiations with the MTC, disagreements have emerged within the FFC between some of the long-standing political parties and the other FFC members concerning SAF's future role, and the role of political Islam within a new government. While most of the FFC want the Sovereign Council to have a civilian majority which holds the chair, some appear more open to the military having a majority. This division is largely due to the fact that some FFC signatories relatively trust Burhan and fear the Islamist CR more than they do SAF. Some of the old-guard political parties appear more open to SAF having a more robust role, and are more conformable with political Islam. The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) and the civil society groups, on the other hand, are very wary of both SAF and political Islam. Accountability for the two heads of the MTC, Burhan and Hemedti, plays a role too. This affects the unity of the Sudanese people, especially the Darfuri population, and is an unseen hurdle to agreeing that SAF would chair the Sovereign Council.

With all of these complicated negotiations taking place and various actors' attempting to manipulate the situation to their benefit, it can be challenging to properly ascertain the motivations of Burhan and other key MTC members. The best way to measure Burhan's seriousness in transferring power to civilians is to look not for 'good faith' actions, as those are easy to mask and difficult to distinguish from subterfuge. Instead, it is prudent to identify what 'bad faith' actions could look like. Potential 'bad faith' actions include taking on a long-term reform project, as this would provide the MTC with cover to continue ruling as a force for stability. Other such actions could include attempts to co-opt rank-and-file protestors by addressing their concerns directly, instead of working with the FFC as their negotiating partner. Monitoring if Burhan and the MTC avoid these types of 'bad faith' actions will be more telling about the likelihood that they are, for the moment, negotiating in good faith with the FFC.

### Conclusion

The political situation in Sudan is at a critical juncture as both the MTC and the FFC are still at an impasse, and their respective trust has diminished. The cause for this should be shared equally: the FFC are struggling to maintain internal cohesion and to adequately convey their negotiation positions to the rank-and-file protestors, while the MTC have alluded to ending the sit-ins, which almost all FFC signatories and rank-and-file protestors view as their main means of pressuring the MTC to ensure that their goals are met. Indeed, the MTC made mistakes during a press conference on 30 April by publishing a statement by Hemedti that the MTC would 'not allow chaos' in an apparent reference towards the sit-in site near SAF HQ. Any threat to remove people from the sit-in, or violence used against protestors, only further reinforces the idea that the MTC's true goal is military rule. The FFC will need to maintain a unified front and a positive relationship with the rank-and-file protestors to achieve most or all of their negotiation goals with the MTC.

The longer the negotiation process takes, the more time the Islamist CR have to negatively manipulate the process. Similarly—a short transitional period of only two years, as suggested by the MTC and some members of the international community, will not give the transitional bodies enough time to genuinely start reforming institutions to root out the devastating impact of the deep-state structures. As this brief is being written it appears both parties are still at odds with each other on the way forward and trust in the MTC intentions is frail. The next several days will likely be crucial in determining if an orderly and managed transition towards civilian rule in Sudan can be expected.

## Recommendations

- ◆ The international community should underwrite the FFC's demand for a **four-year transitional period** to allow for genuine reform of the deep-state institutions and preparations for free and fair elections, and proactively push for this in all official contact with the MTC;
- ◆ The international community should **work towards protecting the valuable negotiating space** between the FFC and MTC by understanding their challenges and allowing the parties time to work issues out, while building leverage to persuade the MTC to timely and orderly turn over executive functions to a civilian-led transitional government;
- ◆ Sudan's elites are financially vulnerable. Sudan's lifeline has consisted of [emergency donations](#) from Gulf countries and European assistance aimed at reducing the flow of migrants to Europe. While civilian rule in Sudan is not yet in place and militias have not been disbanded, the international community should primarily **invest available resources in strengthening the capacity of independent civil society organizations** working hard to contribute towards development, human rights and peacebuilding;
- ◆ As a result of the [documented corruption](#) and lack of adequate anti-money-laundering controls recently [highlighted by the Sentry](#), regime elites are likely expanding their efforts to [hide their illicitly obtained wealth outside Sudan](#) while working to undermine the negotiation process and further their own CR agenda. The international community should **cooperate in going after the assets laundered** by [Al-Bashir](#) and his allies **through the international financial system**;
- ◆ The United States and EU should use the [Global Magnitsky Act](#) **sanctions** against officials responsible for mass corruption and rights abuses.

This Sudan Alert will be issued twice a month. It is compiled through: (1) conversations with a multitude of Sudanese sources on the ground. Some of these sources have longstanding connections to members of the security services, army, and the Islamic Movement. Others are in direct contact with both the FFC and MTC; (2) assessment and analysis of official statements made by the negotiating parties as well as their postings on social media; (3) assessment and analysis of public conduct and statements issued by the international community, as well as those of regional stakeholders; and (4) assessment and analysis of articles by journalists and researchers.

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## The Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC)

The FFC are a group of trade unions, opposition political parties as well as political wings of some armed movements, and civil society groups. Each of these entities signed the 'Declaration of Freedom and Change' outlining their opposition to the Al-Bashir regime and the desire for democratic change in Sudan. There are approximately fifteen trade unions, about twenty political parties, and fifteen civil society groups in the FFC.

In early December 2018, the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA), a network of trade unions originally formed in 2014, took notice of the anti-government protests taking place outside of Sudan and called for people in Khartoum to protest as well. While the SPA was relatively unknown in Sudan, its call to protest tapped into a large reservoir of disgruntled people mistrustful of the traditional opposition parties. The SPA also echoed early calls for regime change and helped move the broader protest movement from one of economic concerns to one explicitly calling for a new democratic government. In January 2019 the SPA formalized its demands by publishing the 'Declaration of Freedom and Change' calling for President Al-Bashir to unconditionally step-aside, and the creation of a transitional government.

Since the FFC consists of long-standing political parties, as well as newly formed and politically less experienced groups, these divisions at time led to disunity. Compounding this situation is the relatively autonomous position of the SPA within the FFC and the fact that the SPA has a stronger and more direct relationship to the rank-and-file protestors than other FFC signatories. Since starting negotiations with the MTC, disagreements have emerged within the FFC between some of the long-standing political parties and the other FFC members concerning SAF's future role, and the role of political Islam within a new government. Some of the old-guard political parties appear more open to SAF having a robust role that is more conformable to political Islam. Conversely, the SPA and the civil society groups are wary of both SAF and political Islam. Specifically, the Umma Party and the Justice and Equality Movement (both from the Sudan Call) appear more comfortable with political Islam, and the Umma Party is more likely to grant the SAF executive functions in any new governmental arrangements.

These disagreements have occasionally become public on social media and led to break downs in negotiation. Additionally, the counter-revolutionary (CR) disinformation campaign has exploited these internal differences, which led to greater internal acrimony than may otherwise have existed. Two Arab media outlets are adding to this confusion: Al Hadath from Saudi Arabia, and Al Jazeera from Qatar. However, so far the FFC has been able to overcome these internal differences, regroup, and then continue negotiations with the MTC. As long as the FFC is able to maintain a unified front and maintain a positive relationship with the rank-and-file protestors, they stand a good chance to achieve most or all of their negotiation goals with the MTC.

## Military Transitional Council (MTC)

National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) Director Salah Gosh and 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, as well as Minister of Defense, Awad Ibn Ouf, created the MTC on 10-11 April in an apparent attempt to placate protestor demands. However, it quickly became obvious that the MTC's real goal was to provide just the veneer of regime change, while keeping power within the ruling clique. However, it quickly became apparent that Ibn Ouf's position was untenable as he was deeply unpopular within both the protestors and within SAF's leadership. On 12 April Salah Gosh, with support from senior Egyptian, Saudi, and Emirati intelligence officials based in Khartoum, convinced Ibn Ouf to hand over power to SAF Inspector-General Abdel-Fatah Burhan. Burhan is an officer popular among the SAF's leadership and rank-and-file, and formerly the coordinator of the Sudanese troops in Yemen, which largely consist of Rapid Support Forces (RSF) soldiers. Together with Mohamed Hamdan 'Hemedti', formerly the head of RSF and currently the MTC vice-president, Burhan is well positioned to guarantee the continuation of Sudanese troops in Yemen. The MTC that Burhan inherited was created by the former regime as place holder until they could consolidate control again—it was not designed to turn power over to civilians.

The MTC mirrors the former regime's split loyalties as it includes some members who still support the Islamist deep-state, and some members with ties to the Gulf coalition (and these groups are often antagonistic towards each other). Additionally, the MTC consists of people implicated in some of Sudan's worst atrocities (especially Hemedti) and is far from a 'pro-democracy' body.

Since taking over as MTC President, Burhan has presided over this MTC that is fraught with internal divisions, internally suspicious of civilian power, and threatened by powerful internal and external actors that do not want democratic civilian control in Sudan. Despite these challenges and threats, our independent sources consistently state that Burhan himself almost certainly desires to turn power over to a civilian-led body. To allow this to happen Burhan has taken steps to weaken or placate some of these threats, and this has created space to negotiate with the FFC on the design of Sudan's next ruling body. Additionally, Burhan appears to have avoided undertaking actions or reforms that might be a pretext to prolong his rule—such as proposing long-term governance projects, like complete security sector reform. Burhan's reforms have all been short and easily executed, and appear designed to keep the peace while creating negotiation space. While these negotiations are fragile, they do appear to be working.

## Islamist Counter-Revolutionaries (CR)

The Islamist CRs are led by members of the former regime's deep-state, an Islamist parallel state that controlled much of Sudan's economic, cultural, media, and security policy since 1989, and who want to retain control over the Sudanese state. The leaders of the CR movement are Nafie Ali Nafie, Ali Osman Taha, Awad al-Jaz, and Ali Karti, along with Al-Zubair Ahmad Al-Hassan (head of the Islamic Movement) and various Islamist militia leaders. The Islamist actors who have taken the counter-revolutionary lead are many of the same people who helped lead the 1989 revolution, which involved extremely well planned and violent actions. As former President Bashir solidified his rule over time, he managed to divide, and then weaken these actors. However, now that these Islamist actors are out of power they are again united in much the same way as they were in the 1990s. They still control significant militia forces, and they have access to large amounts of cash due to their high levels of corruption when they were in power—with some of the cash saved and appropriated specifically to finance their security forces. Specific deep-state security forces include the Popular Defense Force (a parallel body of the SAF), the Popular Police Force (a parallel body of the Police), the Popular Security Force (a parallel body of the NISS), and the well-armed student militias known as the Student-Secretariats. As they are now essentially fighting for their survival, and they have shown their cunning and willingness to use violence in the past, they remain a formidable challenge in the FFC efforts to move power from the security/army to civilians.

These CRs remain well funded and in control of much of the previous regime's deep state, and are most likely supported by Qatar and Turkey, who are known to offer support to Muslim Brotherhood aligned groups. Since Burhan's ascension to MTC President, he took steps to weaken the CRs. Initially, Burhan removed the top two personnel levels of the NISS (a bastion of deep-state support) and took control of NISS's vehicles. Burhan also took control of the assets—such as guns, ammunition, and vehicles—of the Popular Defense and Popular Police Forces. Burhan further curtailed the Islamist CR's abilities by closing six of their bank accounts—including those of the Popular Defense and Popular Police Forces.

Burhan also attempted to curtail the reach of the Islamist CRs into the MTC itself, by sidelining three key CR members. Since these members (Omar Zain; SAF, Jalaldeen el-Sheikh; NISS, and Al-Tayeb Babikir; Police) comprised the MTC's Political Committee, they were able to stall and effectively block political negotiations with the FFC. While their removal from the Political Committee means they cannot directly hamper negotiations with FFC, it still appears that they are attempting to manipulate the negotiation process. While Burhan's actions have deprived the Islamist counter-revolutionaries of key personnel and assets to carry out their agenda, they still remain a potent political and military force in both the short and long-term.

## Gulf Coalition

A Gulf coalition of Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, support the MTC, in order to achieve certain goals that may be antagonistic to Burhan's ability to transfer power to civilians. This Gulf support includes items such as flour and fuel in order to allow the MTC to keep Sudan's economy running and its people fed. While this

support is certainly helpful to Sudan, the Gulf coalition's long-term goal is likely to establish a military-based rule similar to Egypt's President Abdel-Fatah al-Sisi—a military style ruler hostile to the Muslim Brotherhood (and Islamists in general) and supportive of the Saudi/UAE side of the Gulf split against Qatar and Turkey who are supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood. In addition to these desires, each of these Gulf coalition countries has its own specific goals with regards to supporting the MTC:

◆ **Egypt:** Their goals include a ceasing of support for Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) as Egypt is supporting its rival, the Libyan National Army (LNA) of General Khalifa Haftar. Egypt also desires a reduction of support for Muslim Brotherhood activity or support inside Sudan, and a Sudan that supports Egypt's position vis-à-vis Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam. The Hala'ib Triangle also remains of interest. After the first official AU response to events unfolding in Sudan after Al-Bashir's removal, which gave the MTC fifteen days to hand over power to a civilian led transitional government before suspension from the AU would follow, Egypt used its influence and Chairmanship of the AU to strongarm it to allow the MTC three months' time, thereby undermining official procedures.

◆ **Saudi Arabia:** Their main goals are that Sudan does not become a safe haven for the Muslim Brotherhood and that Sudan continues supporting their war in Yemen. As their war in Yemen is heavily reliant on Rapid Support Forces (RSF) fighters, Saudi Arabian pressure is one of the main reasons why RSF Commander Mohamed Hamdan 'Hemedti' is Burhan's deputy on the MTC.

◆ **UAE:** Similarly to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the UAE's goals include a Sudan that does not support the Muslim Brotherhood and rejects Qatar's ambitions in the Gulf. As the UAE has an interest in projecting its power throughout the Gulf region by controlling various Red Sea ports, the UAE has a specific interest in Sudan after its Dubai Ports World lost out to a Pilipino-based company in a bid to manage Sudan ports—especially Port Sudan.

Ultimately, these sources state that this Gulf coalition likely feels that a military ruler like Burhan would be more willing to support Egypt's goals as opposed to a civilian-led government that might be more inclined to be independent. Thus, these countries may be wary, and may even oppose, Sudan's transition to a civilian-led coalition.

## The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)

The SAF currently has competing loyalties. Many of the junior officers and rank-and-file support Burhan and a transfer of power to a civilian-led government. Some of SAF leadership's, especially those that were part of former President Bashir's patronage system as well as senior and junior Islamist officers, are sympathetic to the former regime and the Islamist CRs and antagonistic to a transfer of power to civilians. Many of these SAF members are part of SAF's own investment system, or benefit financially from their involvement in the Saudi-led Yemen war, and thus fear losing access to this patronage network. Additionally, some of these SAF members fear they may be held accountable under civilian rule for atrocities committed during Sudan's many internal wars. Burhan removed SAF's top leadership, including its Chief and Deputy Chiefs of General Staff, some of whom are linked to the Islamist CRs. While this likely reduced the Islamist CR's influence within SAF, and contributed to Burhan's consolidation of support within SAF, some within SAF's leadership still have concerns about civilian rule. Thus, SAF's leadership remains a credible threat to the transfer of power to civilian rule.

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