

WAR IN SUDAN 15 APRIL 2023: BACKGROUND, ANALYSIS AND SCENARIOS

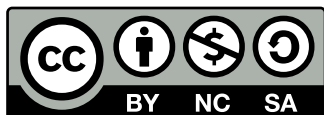
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Contents

Abbreviations	5
Executive summary	6
Introduction.....	9
Objectives of the report	11
Methodology	11
 Chapter 1	
Pre-conflict developments: December 2018 and its aftermath.....	12
 Chapter 2	
The October 2021 coup and its implications	15
The Trilateral Mechanism.....	17
 Chapter 3	
The Political Framework Agreement	19
 Chapter 4	
The war of 15 April 2023	24
Effects on the Framework Agreement.....	25
Positions of the protagonists.....	25
Humanitarian situation	27
Main brokers of ceasefire.....	28
Brief assessment of contents of ceasefire	30
 Chapter 5	
Potential future scenarios and priorities for better civilian–military relations.....	33
 Chapter 6	
Conclusions and recommendations	36
Recommendations.....	38
 References	40
About the author.....	43
About International IDEA	44

Abbreviations

AU	African Union
FFC	Forces for Freedom and Change
FFC-DB	Forces for Freedom and Change–The Democratic Bloc
FFC-NC	Forces for Freedom and Change–National Consensus
FFC-CC	Forces for Freedom and Change–Central Council
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SBA	Sudanese Bar Association
TMC	Transitional Military Council
UNITAMS	United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan
UAE	United Arab Emirates

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An end to the war should be sought through addressing the causes of protracted conflicts and durable disorders which characterize the history of post-independence Sudan.

The war of 15 April 2023 is a pedigree of the long-protracted conflict in Sudan. An end to it should be sought through addressing the causes of protracted conflicts and durable disorders which characterize the history of post-independence Sudan. The military has been central in the political life of the country throughout. The December 2018 revolution ousted the kleptocratic regime of President al-Bashir and offered an opportunity for transition to democracy in Sudan. A civilian–military coalition government was formed to steer the country through the transition. This arrangement failed due to wrangling among the transition partners, with failures in the making since 2019. Efforts to rescue the transition failed and a coup in 2021 shattered the dreams of a democratic settlement, especially for young Sudanese men and women. Efforts to build a broad-based coalition to confront the military and advance transition to democracy have been thwarted by societal cleavages.

The war has inflicted egregious human suffering and has involved destruction of infrastructure, looting, pillaging, and ransacking of homes and private enterprises. Millions of Sudanese have been displaced within the country and hundreds of thousands have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, fleeing under difficult conditions. Those trying to cross to Chad from Western Darfur were attacked and those on their way to Egypt got stranded at the border. Social polarization threatens to break the fabric of society, especially in areas like Darfur that are yet to recover from 20 years of devastating wars. Continuation of the war will further divide communities and this will make getting back to normalcy extremely challenging when the war is over.

The warring parties seem determined to continue fighting, each hoping to defeat the other. But there are no signs of significant advances by either side. The hardline position of the SAF (Sudanese Armed Forces) may be explained by the backing it receives from the Islamists who are accused of amplifying the differences between the SAF and the RSF (Rapid Support Forces). The RSF also adopts a hardline position by demanding the removal of SAF leadership. This illustrates how far the country currently is from security sector reform, whose aim is to have a unified, professional Sudanese army into which the RSF is integrated. This latter was one of the key provisions of the Political Framework Agreement signed in December 2022. Without a unified army, there can be no hope for a united Sudan.

The US–Saudi initiative is so far the only diplomatic effort to have succeeded in bringing the warring parties to the negotiating table, if only indirectly. The talks hitherto focused on short-term ceasefire and excluded civilians; mediators suspended the talks due to lack of progress. It is not known when the talks will resume or what the issues to be negotiated will be. Other initiatives include that of the IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development), which is backed by the African Union. The key objective is to bring the two Generals into face-to-face negotiations, which may be unlikely prior to achieving a long-term ceasefire. The most recent initiative was mounted by the Egyptian President and addressed Sudan's neighbours. One factor that has contributed to the lethargy of the different initiatives is that there is lack of harmony among them and the actors behind them are not all on the same page. If stopping the war and resuming a democratic transition is the goal of mediators, then a more coherent approach is needed.

It is recommended that pressure be put on the SAF and the RSF to secure a long-term, credible and verifiable ceasefire agreement. The warring parties should be made to realize that their legitimacy is on the line and that humanitarian access must be granted. One important recommendation relates to the necessity (and inevitability) of unifying mediation platforms. The Jeddah, IGAD and President al-Sisi initiatives should be merged and speak with one voice. Additionally, countries like Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) must be party to any credible initiative capable of delivering

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positive, tangible results. Civilians' involvement in the negotiations is a necessary condition for civilian control of the transition and so should be supported rather than subjected to the whims of the SAF and the RSF. Importantly, civilians' ability to devise credible and effective proposals within an inclusive political process stands in need of support from external partners.

INTRODUCTION

Sudan's post-independence history is characterized by durable disorders (Assal 2022; Sørbø and Ahmed 2013). The peak of these disorders was reached in 2011 when the South Sudanese voted overwhelmingly for secession. Conflicts have continued since in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Long before the secession of South Sudan, the country went through continuous violent conflicts, civil wars, unstable political regimes, and an alternation of military coups and short-lived multiparty democracies. Between 1956 and 2019, Sudan had three short democratic governments (1956–1958, 1964–1969 and 1986–1989) and long military dictatorships (1958–1964, 1969–1985 and 1989–2019). The ascendance of the National Islamic Front to power in June 1989 through a military coup was another chapter in this protracted instability, bringing with it divisive policies, further conflicts and genocide.

As will already be clear, most of Sudan's post-independence history was dominated by the military. Except for the first military coup of General Ibrahim Abboud (1958–1964), the remainder of military rule was given ideological presentation. General Numeiri (1969–1985) oscillated between left and right ideologies, while al-Bashir's regime (1989–2019) adopted a militant, political Islamist ideology that tightened the grip of the state and deepened existing ethnic and regional divisions in society. Backed by the Islamists and with no legitimacy, al-Bashir's regime used violence as an integral part of domestic and foreign policy (Young 2020). What is happening today in Sudan can be explained for the most part as the legacy of al-Bashir's regime, which ruthlessly suppressed human rights (through laws such as the 'Public Order Law' that targeted women in the public

sphere), waged wars in the peripheries, and entrenched inequality, corruption and kleptocracy. Oil revenues were used to finance wars and buy loyalty (Young 2020: 12). The creation of paramilitary structures such as the RSF and the like, which compete with the SAF, is a further legacy directly responsible for the current war.

US sanctions eroded the economy and restricted foreign investment, and the secession of South Sudan represented a further economic blow as oil and its revenues went to the South. In September 2013, people in Khartoum took to the streets to protest austerity measures and rising food and fuel prices. The protests were confined to Khartoum and were met with excessive and deadly force. Within three days security forces had killed hundreds of protesters.

From 2013, al-Bashir's regime started to crumble. His attempt to run for elections in 2020 led to cracks in the ruling National Congress Party as some members openly rejected the motion to allow him to do so. Between 2013 and 2018, and due to the mounting problems in the country, al-Bashir reshuffled the cabinet three times and launched many initiatives to save his regime. The December 2018 protests started in the rural periphery but were soon harnessed by middle-class youth in Khartoum using social media (Malik 2022). This conformed to the long-term pattern whereby all political changes in Sudan—going right back to nationalist movements of the 1930s and 1940s—are driven by urban, middle-class members of civil society organizations or political parties. Even though towns like Atbara, Damazin and Elfasher witnessed protests before Khartoum, in the final analysis, these towns cannot be seen as representing rural stakeholders.

Most of Sudan's post-independence history was dominated by the military.

Al-Bashir was deposed on 11 April 2019. While the young women and men who were instrumental in this aspired to a civilian government, they were blocked by the military—whose involvement in power and politics for decades made it impossible to exclude their leadership from being part of the transition governance structures. Difficult negotiations took place between civilians represented by the FFC (Forces for Freedom and Change) and the military represented by the TMC (Transitional Military Council). The period between April and August 2019 witnessed killings of protesters, most notably the violent dispersal of a sit-in on 3 June when hundreds died, with some of their

bodies dumped into the Nile. In August 2019 a deal was reached: the Constitutional Declaration, which promised to pave the way for a partnership between the civilians and the military. What followed was a tumultuous transition, a military coup in 2021 and the start of the war in April 2023.

OBJECTIVES OF THE REPORT

The key objective of this Report is to provide a situation analysis with a view to informing relevant political and third-party actors on the core issues that require resolution and negotiation. Potential actions that can help support a return to negotiation and dialogue are provided by way of concluding recommendations, building on:

- examination of the current positions of the parties to the conflict;
- analysis of international mediation efforts via the Trilateral Mechanism; and
- identification of possible scenarios for Sudan in the short and long term.

METHODOLOGY

This Report is based on a thorough and critical review of existing knowledge about political developments in Sudan since the December 2018 uprising. Following the ouster of the al-Bashir regime, the nascent transition was based on the 2019 Constitutional Declaration that envisaged power sharing between the military and civilians. The Report will look at the Constitutional Declaration and other documents as well as the provisions of the Political Framework Agreement signed in December 2022 and its implications. In addition to these legal documents, the Report benefited from a rigorous review and analysis of various further sources (academic publications, reports, policy briefs and media coverage) in this period. Within this, particular focus is given to events following the 25 October 2021 military coup.

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Chapter 1

PRE-CONFLICT DEVELOPMENTS: DECEMBER 2018 AND ITS AFTERMATH

The Constitutional Declaration envisaged the establishment of a military–civilian partnership composed of a sovereign council and a cabinet.

The December 2018 revolution¹ resulted in significant political change; it was the beginning of the end for an Islamist regime that had lasted 30 years. In the few months that followed al-Bashir's downfall, difficult negotiations resulted in the so-called Constitutional Declaration (17 August 2019) signed by the military and Forces for Freedom and Change. The Constitutional Declaration envisaged the establishment of a military–civilian partnership composed of a sovereign council and a cabinet; on this basis, a transitional national assembly should have been established 90 days after signing. This promised to ferry Sudan through a transitional period to a civilian-led, democratic order and the arrangement received support both within Sudan and from the international community. Nonetheless, much of that support was tempered by reservations about the parties' ability to meet the Declaration's ambitious goals and timeline, as well as the wisdom of preserving Sudan's powerful and widely detested military in government (Davies 2022).

The international community, represented by the African Union and IGAD, adopted a pragmatic approach: propagating and selling the idea of military–civilian power sharing. Contrary to this approach, Sudanese young women and men continued taking to the streets and calling for a transition that was fully led by civilians. The mood in Khartoum was against negotiations with the military, but the balance of power at the time meant this was unrealistic.

¹ The term 'revolution' is contested and politically charged. It is used here interchangeably with 'uprising' as a popular phrase used by the Sudanese to describe the actions that led to the downfall of El-Bashir's regime in April 2019.

During the first two years of the transition, the civilian cabinet was confronted with many challenges that eroded its popular support. Discord between the civilians and the military led to the obstruction of the Prime Minister's intended reforms. One of the milestones in this discord was the closure of the only port in the country by a tribal leader loyal to the former regime of al-Bashir. The understanding among members and supporters of the FFC was that the military was behind this closure and did it to discredit the civilian government. One of the factors that emboldened the military (Sudan Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces) was civilian disarray. Rivalry had emerged among the groups belonging to the FFC, as well as between the FFC and political forces aligned with the military and former regime figures. There are also other forces that were part of the transition scene: resistance committees, professional associations, trade unions (university staff unions, etc.) and civil society organizations.

Various analyses (e.g. Davies 2022: 7) show that in some respects, the structure of the Constitutional Declaration contributed to the crisis of transition in Sudan. Allowing the military to assume centre stage in the transition and to obstruct the dismantling of kleptocratic structures were some of the key flaws. The implementation plan of the Declaration was too ambitious and lacked prioritization. The assumption that the military and civilians could share power and work smoothly was unconvincing. The Prime Minister, who was independent of any known political affiliation, was caught in the discord between civilians and the military—a fact that he mentioned in his resignation statement of 2 January 2022.

One area of contention between the civilians and the military is the economy. The involvement of the military in economic activities goes back to the early years of independence and not just the El-Bashir period (Bienen and Moore 1987). A key aspect of economic reform in post-2019 Sudan was, and remains, the need for civilian oversight of the economy. The SAF and RSF exercise huge economic undertakings they were not willing to relinquish. Both own banks, import companies, flour mills and transportation hubs. The SAF was issued favourable letters of credit from banks it controlled, allowing them to evade import taxes and to sell goods at rates below those of civilian competitors (Cartier et al. 2022).

The structure of the Constitutional Declaration contributed to the crisis of transition in Sudan. Allowing the military to assume centre stage in the transition and to obstruct the dismantling of kleptocratic structures were some of the key flaws.

The failure of the civilian cabinet was owing to problems in the Constitutional Declaration, the strength of the military component of the sovereign council, lack of harmony among members of the Forces for Freedom and Change and active sabotage by al-Bashir loyalists.

In short, the failure of the civilian cabinet was owing to problems in the Constitutional Declaration, the strength of the military component of the sovereign council, lack of harmony among members of the Forces for Freedom and Change and active sabotage by al-Bashir loyalists. Above all, two key aspects account for the problems, and eventual failure, of the transitional government: first, some of the signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement aligned with the military component. Two of the armed movements who signed the Agreement did so—Justice and Equality Movement, headed by Gibreel Ibrahim; and the Sudan Liberation Movement headed by Minni Minnawi—and organized the Palace sit-in (early October 2021) as a pretext to the military coup. Second, the military was sabotaging the civilian government by controlling the economy and refusing to relinquish power to the civilian component. Military leaders feared that by complying with the scheduled transfer of power to a civilian chair of the sovereign council they would lose personal and institutional privileges, surrender their control over economic resources, and be exposed to legal repercussions for alleged war crimes and human rights abuses.

Chapter 2

THE OCTOBER 2021 COUP AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

On 25 October 2021, Sudan's military seized power in a coup, arrested leading civilian politicians (including the Prime Minister, Abdalla Hamdok) and declared a state of emergency. The country had been on edge since September 2021 when a coup attempt was foiled, and that failed attempt unleashed recriminations and invective between the military and civilian components of the government. General Abdelfatah El-Burhan justified the coup by claiming that infighting among civilian elements of the transition imperilled the stability of the country. Abdelfatah El-Burhan further claimed that the SAF is the guardian of the state and a guarantor of the transition, assertions that unsurprisingly proved false. Its leaders of course insisted that it was not a military coup but 'course correction' or '*tasheeh almasar*'. Consistent with this false presentation, Abdelfatah El-Burhan sought to suspend only those articles that secured the existing civilian positions, while retaining much of the outward form of the Constitutional Declaration.

In a way, the unilateral power grab by the military was the result of warped incentive structures that can be traced back to al-Bashir's era. Throughout the transition, they had resisted the imposition of civilian oversight or constraints, balked at discussions of accountability for past atrocities and maintained a range of commercial interests (as discussed) and relationships with foreign patrons. By seizing power, Sudan's security services were hijacking the state and preserving the violent kleptocratic system. Ultimately, control over the state affords the security services continued opportunities to accrue wealth while shielding themselves from accountability for past and future abuses (Baldo and Mailey 2021).

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Who supported the coup? The FFC-NC (Forces for Freedom and Change–National Consensus), which is a coalition of small but politically aspirant groups, some of which were allies of the former regime and some signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement, organized a sit-in at the Presidential Palace in Khartoum in early October 2021. This imitated the sit-in organized by youth protesters at the army's headquarters in April 2019, which was brutally dispersed in the following month. The participants in the Palace sit-in demanded the dissolution of the civilian cabinet. The military leaders were obviously supporting the sit-in since they allowed it and it was rumoured that the RSF were providing food and logistics. The Palace sit-in and its demands emboldened the military and strengthened the narrative that strife among civilians was threatening the country. The inability to reach a consensus on a national project among the revolutionary forces is, in essence, the key factor behind the stalemate in the transition and a contributing factor to the consolidation of the military's grip on power.

The coup leaders invested in creating a space for a controlled political alliance among those who led the Palace sit-in, mainly FFC-NC. But one of the key consequences of the coup was the return of al-Bashir loyalists: some jailed Islamists were released a few months afterward. Islamists were also reappointed in senior positions in the security and civil services, especially in the ministry of foreign affairs and in higher education institutions. The coup overturned and reversed the decisions of the Empowerment Dismantling Committee and returned economic assets and cash to the Islamists. This was made possible by a judicial committee whose members were previously dismissed by the Committee.

The coup can be seen as substantially undoing the December 2018 revolution and stalling the transition process.

In short, the coup can be seen as substantially undoing the December 2018 revolution and stalling the transition process. Until the war broke out in April 2023, the country had no cabinet. The progress achieved in economic reforms was halted and the international community rescinded most of its pledges of support; the chances of debt relief dwindled. Economic conditions became bad, inflation rates soared and the Sudanese pound was shaken. A few months after the coup, the World Food Programme reported that by October 2022 about 18 million Sudanese would need food relief.

Many initiatives were undertaken to undo the coup. The first one, ironically, was championed indirectly by the military and resulted in reinstating Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in November 2021. But Hamdok resigned two months later in January 2022. The second attempt was the initiative of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) mounted in January 2023. UNITAMS was later joined by the IGAD and the African Union (AU) in what later became the Trilateral Mechanism (see below). Other initiatives seeking a way out of the impasse proliferated, some of them put forward by political parties, religious leaders and Sovereignty Council members. Others rejected any attempt to legitimize the military, including the Sudanese Communist Party and Resistance Committees. This Report will not detail all these different initiatives but will instead look closely at one of them: the Trilateral Mechanism.

THE TRILATERAL MECHANISM

The work of the Trilateral Mechanism started as an endeavour of UNITAMS. On 3 June 2020, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2524 (UN 2020), establishing the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), a special political mission to provide support to Sudan for an initial 12-month period during its political transition to democratic rule. Headquartered in Khartoum, UNITAMS was mandated to support Sudan through a range of political, peacebuilding and development initiatives, including achieving the goals of the Constitutional Declaration and carrying out its National Plan for Civilian Protection. UNITAMS' core objectives are to assist political transition and progress towards democracy, support the peace process and the implementation of future peace agreements, assist in civilian protection and the rule of law, support the mobilization of economic and development assistance, and coordinate humanitarian assistance (UN 2020). Following the resignation of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in early 2022, UNITAMS undertook several meetings with different stakeholders. UNITAMS was joined in May 2022 by the IGAD and the AU and the Trilateral Mechanism was forged.

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The Trilateral Mechanism's approach is one of mediation and its modus operandi is closed-doors talks between the civilians and military leaders. Until the Political Framework Agreement was signed in December 2022, it was not possible to bring the interlocutors to a joint meeting and discussions with civilian and military figures were held separately.² There was some overlap between the Trilateral Mechanism and the Quad, a coalition of Sudan's partners represented by Saudi Arabia, UAE, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The Quad played an important role in the signing of the Political Framework Agreement.

The tense political environment brought about by the coup made it difficult for the Trilateral Mechanism to exercise effective or productive mediation.

The tense political environment brought about by the coup made it difficult for the Trilateral Mechanism to exercise effective or productive mediation. From October 2021 up to the war of 15 April 2023, young women and men continued taking to the streets in protest. The demonstrations were led by Resistance Committees whose members rejected any liaison with the military and called for the latter to relinquish power to civilians. The Sudanese Communist Party and one of the Ba'ath Parties also adopted a hardline position vis-à-vis the military. By March 2023, more than 120 peaceful protesters had been killed by security forces and thousands more injured or jailed. Beyond its mediation work, the Trilateral Mechanism issued statements condemning the killing of peaceful protesters and calling for the respect of human rights, including the right to peaceful demonstrations. Frustrated by the position of the Trilateral Mechanism, the military leader General Abdelfatah El-Burhan threatened to expel the chairperson of UNITAMS, Volker Perthes. Eventually Abdelfatah El-Burhan asked the UN for a replacement for UNITAMS' chairperson in May 2023 (Radio Tamazuj 2022). But perhaps one significant achievement of the Trilateral Mechanism was facilitating the signing of the Political Framework Agreement of December 2022, as described in the following chapter.

² Rumours abound about rifts within the Trilateral Mechanism. The military and its supporters view the head of UNITAMS as aligned with the Forces for Freedom and Change–Central Council (FFC-CC), while the FFC-CC looks at the AU as an ally of the military—even though the AU suspended Sudan's membership of the African Union following the October 2021 coup. Both sides appear to see the IGAD's position as neutral but ineffective.

Chapter 3

THE POLITICAL FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

The Political Framework Agreement signed on 5 December 2022 was based on the transitional constitution drafted by the Sudanese Bar Association (SBA) in September 2022.³ While the SBA's draft constitution gained a wider recognition and support, the Political Framework Agreement was welcomed by neither pro-coup nor anti-coup groups. It was signed by 39 entities including the Chairperson of the Sovereignty Council, General Abdelfatah El-Burhan, and the RSF leader, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti). In accordance with the Framework Agreement, the signatories agreed to repeal the 2019 Constitutional Declaration and to review the decisions issued by the military leaders after the coup of 25 October 2021. The agreement reaffirms the establishment of a single professional army and the merger of the Rapid Support Forces, as well as prohibiting the military from conducting investment and commercial business outside the defence sector. The formation of paramilitary militias was also prohibited and the text reaffirmed the principle of accountability, justice and transitional justice for war crimes, the attacks on the pro-democracy sit-in and the post-coup killing of protesters. Based on the agreement, the transitional period shall be 24 months, starting from the date of the appointment of the Prime Minister. The transitional government shall consist of the legislative council, the head of state and the council of ministers. The text stipulates that 40 per cent of

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³ The SBA held a workshop on 8–10 August 2022 to debate a constitutional framework for the transitional period. This was attended by different political parties, the Trilateral Mechanism and key stakeholders (FFC-CC, some members of FFC-NC, the Popular Congress Party and other stakeholders). One recommendation from the workshop was the formation of a committee that should work out a constitutional framework document. The draft transitional constitution produced by the SBA was well received by the international community. The RSF welcomed the document and the SAF said they will look at it. Upon its release, the SBA's document galvanized support locally and internationally, although it did not obtain a national consensus.

parliamentary seats should be allocated for women's representation. Signing the agreement represented the first phase of undoing the October 2021 coup.

On paper, the Framework Agreement ended the military's formal role in politics and referred to a transitional order in which a civilian would become head of state, serving officially as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and a high commander of the RSF.

On paper, then, the Framework Agreement ended the military's formal role in politics and referred to a transitional order in which a civilian would become head of state, serving officially as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and a high commander of the RSF, although Abdelfatah El-Burhan and Hemedti would continue to lead the SAF and the RSF, respectively. The agreement envisaged a civilian-appointed Prime Minister and a transitional legislative council plus an interim judiciary council. The Prime Minister would appoint the cabinet and state governors, and would head the defence and security council (of which Abdelfatah El-Burhan and Hemedti are members, by virtue of their positions). This seems to have been what almost everyone was calling for. But of course, there were some difficult issues remaining.

Tackling these was envisaged to take place through a second and final phase—discussions on five key issues requiring consensus: transitional justice, security sector reform, dismantling the remnants of ex-president al-Bashir's regime, the Juba Peace Agreement and the crisis in Eastern Sudan. The Trilateral Mechanism facilitated these discussions, beginning on 8 January 2023 (just over a month after the Framework Agreement was signed). The process, led and facilitated by the Trilateral Mechanism, created a positive dynamic and provided hope amid the volatile political situation, deepening economic crisis and a propensity for interlocutors to disagree on everything. Seven encouraging speeches were delivered in turn by the Forces for Freedom and Change–Central Council (FFC-CC); the Chairperson of the Sovereignty Council General Abdelfatah El-Burhan; his Deputy, RSF Leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti); the Trilateral Mechanism; EU Ambassadors; the Quad (Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK and US); and Arab diplomats. Abdelfatah El-Burhan reiterated that the military was committed to the Framework Agreement and would leave politics. For his part, Hemedti stated that they were going forward with the Framework Agreement and that their aim was to have a unified Sudanese army. The Quad hailed the process and stated that they would not allow anyone to spoil it.

The inaugural event was thus a silver lining for the cloud hanging over Sudan. The first issue addressed following it was that of dismantling former regime structures. The workshop on this question, which ran on 9–12 January 2023, discussed previous domestic experiences and the roadmap and looked at similar experiences internationally. However, the Forces for Freedom and Change–The Democratic Bloc (FFC-DB) boycotted the final political stage, the Resistance Committees opposed the process, young women and men continued taking to the streets (although in smaller numbers) and some external actors were not happy about these developments. Among these was Egypt although, surprisingly, Egypt had been the first country to hail the process, and its ambassador had lined up with Arab diplomats to support the inauguration event. Yet, at the same time, Egypt organized a meeting that brought together members of the Democratic Bloc and other political parties opposing the Framework Agreement (see Sudan Tribune 2023).⁴ Despite suggestions to the contrary, Egypt's role went in a different direction than that of key actors in the Sudanese political impasse. This has some history attached: Egypt has historically looked at Sudan as its backyard and a sense of entitlement to Sudan has permeated the thinking of Egyptian politicians for a long time.

Following the Agreement on 5 December 2022, attempts had been made to convince those opposing the deal to sign. The latter included FFC-DB, led by the Democratic Unionist Party of Gaafar Mirghani; the Justice and Equality Movement; and Sudan Liberation Army–Minnawi, among others. The Resistance Committees, the Sudanese Communist Party and one of the Ba'ath Party's factions also rejected the deal. The bickering between FFC-CC and other political actors impeded the transition and much of this did not concern substantive issues, but was more about personal grudges between leaders of these groups.⁵ As mentioned, the agreed-upon issues in the Political Framework Agreement seemed to fulfil most of the demands by the different political parties—with the exception of the Resistance Committees and the Sudanese Communist Party, who consistently

The bickering between FFC-CC and other political actors impeded the transition and much of this did not concern substantive issues but was more about personal grudges between leaders of these groups.

4 Early in February 2023, Egypt invited the holdout group FFC-DB for a workshop in Cairo. FFC-CC declined the proposal but the Egyptian Government moved on and invited political forces to participate in the forum. The meeting began on 2 February 2023.

5 The author of this Report participated in two of the workshops in January and February 2023 and had the chance to talk to different political actors and those who were against the Framework Agreement. Some of the political interlocutors mentioned that they need to be acknowledged, recognized and respected by the FFC-CC.

refused all the different initiatives aimed at resolving the political impasse in the country.

That said, it must be recognized that the Political Framework Agreement (and hence the final stage of the political settlement) were not sufficiently inclusive. The negotiations that led to its signing did not involve FFC-NC who were not party to it; basically, it was an affair between the military and FFC-CC. The workshops included in the final stage were not attended by key interlocutors. What was agreed upon offered an opportunity, nevertheless, to form a civilian-led government, which is the *sine qua non* for addressing the deepening economic and humanitarian crisis in the country and restarting negotiations with international financial institutions regarding debt relief.

Amid the volatile situation, some positive developments took place. The workshop on dismantling the former regime's structures was followed by the Juba Peace Agreement workshop (31 January to 3 February), a third workshop on Eastern Sudan (12–15 February) and a fourth on transitional justice (16–20 March). Each of these workshops was attended by hundreds of Sudanese representing different stakeholders and regions, especially from war-affected regions of Darfur, South Kordofan, the Blue Nile and Eastern Sudan. In this way, the voices of people from marginalized areas were heard and amplified, and their recommendations on the issues under discussion were listened to and recorded.

In retrospect the agreement was essentially between two weak coalitions: pro-coup forces, and a fractious pro-democracy camp that lacked the support of its key constituency.

However, in retrospect the agreement was essentially between two weak coalitions: first, there were pro-coup forces, led by ousted president Omar al-Bashir's Security Committee (SAF and RSF), who realized that they were unable to step up to the task of governing a country beset by economic, political and military crises, many of which were of their own making; and second, a fractious pro-democracy camp that lacked the support of its key constituency—the protestors who led the uprising against al-Bashir and who viewed this deal as an ersatz attempt at engendering civilian rule.

Scheduled as the last activity in the second and final phase of the political settlement (to be followed by the appointment of a Prime Minister and completing the structures of the transition),

the workshop on security sector reform started on 26 March 2023. The SAF was at first reluctant to participate, stating that security arrangements should be discussed by the military only and civilians should not have access to information it deems sensitive and classified. But as a signatory to the Framework Agreement, the SAF did then agree to participate. The workshop intended to discuss the integration of the RSF into the SAF in incremental stages following the security arrangements stipulated in the Juba Peace Agreement and agree upon timetables. The signatories to the Political Framework Agreement agreed to form a technical committee made up of SAF and RSF representatives to discuss technical issues and provide recommendations regarding the integration of forces. It was agreed that the final political agreement should be based on the Framework Agreement, the draft political declaration, the recommendations of the political process workshops and conferences, and the draft transitional constitution of the Sudan Bar Association.

Due to insurmountable differences between the two factions, the workshop did not come to fruition and the SAF boycotted the final day. The disagreement revolved around the timeframe of integration, with the SAF calling for a 2-year timeframe while the RSF wanted the integration to take place over 10 years. But the serious disagreement was about the chain of command, where the SAF wanted the RSF to report to the SAF commander, while the RSF insisted that they report to the civilian head of state. Following the failure of the security sector reform workshop, tensions between the factions soared and instead of going forward with the arrangements for signing the political settlement on 11 April 2023, FFC-CC and other civilian forces shuffled between the SAF and the RSF to defuse the escalation. In early April, the RSF deployed some of its troops to Merowe, a move that was met with a strong reaction from the army. But the differences between SAF and RSF leaders became clear before this deployment. In February 2022, Hemedti had disowned the October 2021 coup, describing it as a 'mistake' that helped to bring back the Islamists and declaring an intention to 'leave power and hand it over to a transitional authority' (see Africanews/AP 2022). Hemedti's tough language against the Islamists and his enthusiasm towards the Political Framework Agreement severed his relationship with the SAF.

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Chapter 4

THE WAR OF 15 APRIL 2023

The SAF and RSF are the two readily visible warring parties but as the war continues other actors, within and outside Sudan, are being drawn into the conflict.

When the fighting between SAF and RSF forces started in Khartoum on 15 April 2023, the Sudanese were already divided along multiple lines, including political and ethnic ones (Assal 2023a). It is yet to be established who fired the first bullet in this devastating war and each party accuses the other of starting it. The SAF narrative is that the RSF mounted a mutiny as a vehicle to topple the government and seize power, while the RSF accuse Islamist officers in the SAF of attacking the RSF in one of their barracks south of Khartoum. The Islamists were accused of amplifying the differences between the two sides. No matter who the culprit is, the war has devastated the country and created a serious humanitarian crisis. The SAF and RSF are the two readily visible warring parties but as the war continues other actors, within and outside Sudan, are being drawn into the conflict. In a dangerous new turn, evidence is mounting of Islamic extremists fighting alongside the SAF in Khartoum against the RSF. This undermines the narrative according to which General El-Burhan was leading a regular army defending the authority of the state against a renegade militia backed by mercenaries (see Arab Weekly 2023).

The war has further polarized society along ethnic and political lines. Clashes on social and conventional media are three-cornered, as between SAF and RSF supporters, and those who see the war as an affair between two criminals neither of whom should be supported. As noted by the UN Secretary-General, the continuation of fighting risks descending into an outright civil war fought along tribal and ethnic lines (UN 2023). Already in West Darfur there are signs of war crimes and ethnic cleansing; the governor of West Darfur was killed

hours after he criticized the RSF and allied Arab fighters of ‘genocide’, in an interview on 14 June 2023 with Al-Hadath, a Saudi news channel (see Nashed 2023).

EFFECTS ON THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

One of the immediate effects of the 15 April war is that the Political Framework Agreement is no longer implementable, for the foreseeable future at the very least. Even if it is still relevant, its provisions can only be contemplated when the war comes to an end and there appears a possibility for resuming the political process. Fighting between the SAF and the RSF as two key signatories to the agreement nullifies any arrangement brought by the deal. Even before the war, as mentioned, the agreement was essentially between two weak coalitions. The Framework Agreement is therefore de facto void and if the war comes to an end, it is most likely that its terms will be renegotiated.

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POSITIONS OF THE PROTAGONISTS

Both sides appear to have dug their heels in, viewing the conflict as existential and each accusing the other of starting it. The warring parties’ narratives are changing with the continuation of the fighting and with their attempts to gain regional and international recognition. The alignment of each to some regional powers and interests has been a subject of media analysis and reports (for the roles of UAE and Saudi Arabia see Mohammad 2023; ICG 2023). Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are the key regional actors that influenced the transitional period long before the start of the current war. The UAE has dealings with both the SAF and RSF, and warring parties have, to varying degrees, fought in Yemen alongside the UAE and Saudi Arabia (see Military Africa 2023).⁶ Egypt has historically supported the SAF and in recent years there were frequent joint exercises between Sudanese and Egyptian armed forces. When the 15 April war

⁶ In 2015, the Sudanese Government sent a battalion of regular forces commanded by General Abdelfatah El-Burhan to serve with the Saudi–Emirati coalition forces in Yemen. The UAE later struck a separate deal with Hemedti to send a much larger force of RSF fighters to combat in south Yemen. Hemedti also supplied units to help guard the Saudi Arabian border with Yemen.

started, there were Egyptian fighter jets stationed at Merowe military base and Egypt confirmed that the RSF took hostage some Egyptian soldiers there (Al Jazeera 2023). The presence of Egyptian troops in Merowe was one of the triggering factors of the April war and many Sudanese suspect Egypt of encouraging internal army opposition to the civilian handover (ICG 2023). The role of Saudi Arabia is not readily visible and cannot easily be discerned especially considering its current mediation efforts.

Some analysts argue that western countries should nudge Egypt and the UAE—the main foreign backers of the SAF and the RSF, respectively—to roll back the support they provide.

It is not clear whether the SAF or the RSF have received arms or funds since the beginning of the war. To finance the current conflict, both sides can rely on vast resources accumulated over the past decades through extensive networks of companies—which, according to some estimates, make up around 80 per cent of economic activity in Sudan. Some analysts argue that western countries should nudge Egypt and the UAE—the main foreign backers of the SAF and the RSF, respectively—to roll back the support they provide, including their enablement of the warring parties' business networks (Lanfranchi and Hoffmann 2023).

The SAF produced weapons and ammunitions at its military industrial complex in Khartoum, which was seized by the RSF in June 2023. Media reports indicate the existence of links and dealings between the RSF and the Russian mercenary group Wagner PMC, as well as with Khalifa Haftar of Libya. Fuel shipments and arms are said to have been received by the RSF from Libya (see Burke and Mohammed Salih 2023; Elbagir 2023). SAF supporters push the narrative that what is happening is a foreign invasion, with RSF members recruited from Chad, Mali and Niger; on its part, the RSF and its backers in Sudan say they are fighting Islamist extremists loyal to the former regime who hijacked the SAF (Assal 2023b) and that these extremists have foreign links. While the supply of fighters is made possible through transnational connections, these narratives are dangerous in themselves as they pit communities against each other and threaten to draw countries of the Sahel into the war. Most of the groups in Western Sudan to which RSF belonged traverse national borders; the same groups that exist in Sudan are also found in countries such as the Central African Republic, Chad, Mali and Niger. For example, the Mahriya exist in Chad and Sudan, the Ta'aisha

exist in Sudan and Central African Republic, the Salamat exist in Sudan and Chad, etc.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

The 15 April war is continuing and spreading. Four months into the war, fighting has resulted in widescale destruction in Khartoum. Extensive destruction of infrastructure includes hospitals, schools and government buildings as well as water, electricity and communication networks. Many factories, businesses and homes have been looted or lie in ruins. Those with the means to do so have left the city. Since Khartoum is the commercial heart of the country, its plight will reverberate well outside the city limits: with the planting season looming, for instance, the agencies that ordinarily would distribute seeds, fuel and fertilizers to farmers have all closed. The months ahead could bring humanitarian disaster to the Sudanese countryside (ICG 2023).

By July 2023, the war had displaced 2.8 million Sudanese: over 2.2 million internally and 615,000 into neighbouring countries. The fighting continues to devastate civilians, subjecting them to death, rape, separation of families, looting and pillaging of properties, and flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. The RSF in Khartoum continue to drive people out and occupy their homes, while the SAF continue their air strikes, resulting in heavy casualties among civilians and destroying homes.

But while the capital city is the focus of international attention, the war is not only confined to Khartoum; it has since spread to Kordofan and Darfur. The town of El-Obeid, capital of North Kordofan state, has been under siege by the RSF for some time. Darfur continues to witness attacks by militias alleged to be supported by the RSF, especially in Western Darfur state, which has witnessed heinous crimes against civilians. Little is being done to protect Darfur's civilians, with lack of access to victims an exacerbating factor. Humanitarian agencies cannot guarantee the safety of their staff; just weeks into the war, some humanitarian workers had already lost their lives. The context in the country is challenging for humanitarian actors as authorities impose restrictions in the areas under their

control and these have not changed since the beginning of the war. A push for safe humanitarian corridors and concerted efforts to ease government restrictions are needed, especially given that the rainy season further impedes humanitarian logistics.

The gravity of the humanitarian situation in Darfur should not be underestimated. In addition to the fighting between the SAF and the RSF, the war has pitted communities against each other and militias allied to the RSF have committed crimes in West Darfur state—including the murder of the State Governor. In July 2023 a mass grave containing 87 bodies was discovered in Western Darfur state (Farge and Abdelaziz 2023). This was part of a brutal campaign against local people and will likely escalate ethnic tensions in Darfur, which has been at war for more than two decades.

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One danger is that the country might be carved into pockets of control, with the RSF controlling much of Western Sudan and the SAF holding much of the North and East. Other groups such as tribal leaders and armed groups who were parties to the Juba Peace Agreement control other pockets. This is a recipe for state failure and collapse, and if this happens it will spread chaos and insecurity across the region. The warring parties do not seem to consider these dangerous scenarios.

MAIN BROKERS OF CEASEFIRE

Saudi Arabia and the USA are the two key mediators who, since May 2023, have been trying to secure ceasefire in Sudan. So far, the US–Saudi mediation focused on humanitarian talks only. The convenors’ aim was to pause the fighting to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid and restore services to conflict-affected areas. The provisions of the first short-term ceasefire signed on 20 May 2023 will be dealt with in the next section. Here, however, it is important to note that while the SAF and RSF each sent delegations to Jeddah these were not senior officers, and they did not go to the negotiating table in good faith. The warring parties look at the war in existential terms: the RSF controls most of the capital and feels it has the upper hand, while the SAF buys time. The latter demands that the RSF vacate residential areas, while the RSF demands an end to aerial barrages.

A recent report (ICG 2023: 7) shows that both sides seek to use the humanitarian talks for tactical advantage in this stand-off. Divisions in the senior ranks of the SAF are another obstacle to clinching a deal. Mediators have struggled to extract an agreement that sticks from El-Burhan, given that senior army officers hold divergent views. Some are more intent than others on not calling a halt to the fighting until the RSF has been destroyed.

One of the problems with the US–Saudi mediation is that it has to date excluded Sudanese civilians. This exclusion might have been due to its basic aim: to reach a humanitarian ceasefire. Another possible factor is the fact that civilians are divided on how to deal with the war, plus the question of legitimacy—who should be invited to participate and how to select the participants. Yet, war is a political decision and as such it makes sense to allow for the participation of civilians even during early stages of humanitarian negotiations. The terms of any ceasefire agreement will be relevant for further political negotiations that map out the future course of the country.

A further problem relates to the differing views of regional and international actors. Some of these differences were already outlined above but here it is important to mention that regional bodies such as the AU and IGAD were excluded from the talks in Jeddah, even though the AU and IGAD had their initiatives long before the Jeddah talks. The Peace and Security Council of the AU adopted a roadmap for Sudan at its summit of 27 May 2023, but no further steps were taken to implement it. As early as 16 April 2023, the IGAD appointed three presidents (Salva Kiir Mayardit of South Sudan, William Ruto of Kenya, and Ismail Guelleh of Djibouti) and asked them to visit Sudan to sit with General El-Burhan and General Hemedti. That visit was not possible due to security issues. In its 14th Ordinary session held on 12 June 2023, IGAD established a quartet (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan) and appointed President William Ruto as chair. The summit's key decisions were to facilitate a face-to-face meeting between the two Sudanese Generals, seek a permanent ceasefire and embark on an inclusive political process that would put an end to the war in Sudan. This summit was followed by a meeting of the quartet's foreign ministers on 19 June 2023, who pledged to implement this plan (IGAD 2023) but it failed (see 'Brief assessment of contents of ceasefire', below).

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One problem in the Sudanese position, then, is that there seems to be more than one centre of decision making.

For one thing, the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs objected to having Kenya presiding over the quartet and demanded that South Sudan be the chair instead. Sudan also protested the meeting of quartet's foreign ministers, arguing that a response from the IGAD regarding its objection about Kenya's presidency had not been received. It is to be noted that Sudan asked the United Nations to replace the leader of UNITAMS, Volker Perthes, in May and in early June the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared Perthes as persona non grata. In a statement during his recent visit to Egypt, Malik Agar, deputy chairperson of the Sudan Sovereignty Council, rejected all external initiatives, lamenting that all these initiatives will end in foreign occupation. One problem in the Sudanese position, then, is that there seems to be more than one centre of decision making: the SAF and RSF are talking in Jeddah and signing agreements, while Sudan's Foreign Ministry adopts the hardline position that external engagements are unacceptable.

The latest effort in the plethora of diplomatic initiatives was the summit convened by President al-Sisi of Egypt on 13 July 2023, attended by Sudan's neighbours plus the Arab League and the African Union. The summit in Cairo concluded with a structure for foreign ministers to seek a solution, with an emphasis on the need to prevent Sudan from collapsing. Several important questions arise: what are the mechanisms to ensure that Sudan is not divided once again; how can this group put pressure on the conflicting parties to agree on a ceasefire and instead adopt dialogue to resolve the conflict? Moreover, will the warring parties listen and adopt a united roadmap to get Sudan out of the mire? In the current diplomatic disarray, there are doubts if any mediation will succeed. It is necessary to form a single negotiating platform integrating the Jeddah initiative and the efforts of the quartet—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, UK and US—with those of the IGAD, AU and neighbouring countries.

BRIEF ASSESSMENT OF CONTENTS OF CEASEFIRE

Three initiatives warrant looking at: the US–Saudi initiative in Jeddah, the IGAD initiative and the last summit in Cairo. The latter two did not yield a ceasefire agreement or succeed in bringing the warring parties to the negotiation table and as such their content will be

outlined in brief terms. The first agreement, the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan, was signed in Jeddah on 11 May 2023. In it the warring parties agreed to observe international humanitarian law, facilitate humanitarian action to meet the need of civilians (restoring basic services), refrain from occupying public facilities such as hospitals, and prioritize discussion to achieve a short-term ceasefire necessary for these purposes. The warring parties did not heed the declaration and fighting continued, especially in Khartoum.

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A second US–Saudi sponsored agreement, the Agreement on a Short-Term Ceasefire and Humanitarian Arrangements, was signed on 20 May 2023. This had four key provisions: general provisions, short-term ceasefire arrangements, humanitarian arrangements, and a monitoring and coordination committee for the short-term ceasefire and humanitarian assistance. Like its predecessor, this agreement was not fully implemented. On 29 May 2023, the RSF and SAF signed a five-day extension to provide more time for humanitarian actors to undertake their vital work. They affirmed their intention to use the five-day extension to implement provisions of the first ceasefire that were not fully achieved, including further deliveries of humanitarian assistance, facilitation of essential services repair and evacuation of armed actors from hospitals. Due to lack of progress in implementing the extension, the USA and Saudi Arabia suspended the talks following the walk out of the SAF delegation. Additionally, the USA imposed sanctions on commercial entities belonging to the SAF and RSF (Assal 2023b). As of mid-July 2023, the Jeddah talks were still in suspension but media reports showed that they were likely to soon be resumed (Reuters 2023). The UK has followed the USA in imposing sanctions on both warring parties and the EU has threatened to do so (UK Government 2023; Payne 2023).

As already mentioned, the IGAD attempt was based on the results of the 14th Ordinary Session of the IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Djibouti on 12 June 2023. The initiative can be outlined as follows: include Ethiopia as the fourth member of the IGAD's High Level Delegation for the Peace Process in Sudan; form a Quartet chaired by William Ruto of Kenya; within 10 days the Quartet arranges a face-to-face meeting between the two Sudanese Generals; within two weeks secure a commitment from the leadership of the

SAF and RSF to establish a humanitarian corridor; and within three weeks initiate an inclusive political process towards a political settlement of the conflict in Sudan. These efforts did not materialize per the timeline of the IGAD. A meeting was organized by the IGAD on 12 July 2023 and was supposed to be attended by both warring parties, but the SAF boycotted it.

The final initiative is that of the Egyptian President Abdelfattah al-Sisi who organized a summit on 13 July for the seven neighbours of Sudan. Like previous initiatives, this one called for immediate ceasefire and humanitarian access, preservation of the integrity, sovereignty and institutions of Sudan, non-interference in Sudan's internal affairs, and the establishment of a ministerial committee to oversee the implementation of the summit's decision and to report on the matter to the heads of states.

Chapter 5

POTENTIAL FUTURE SCENARIOS AND PRIORITIES FOR BETTER CIVILIAN–MILITARY RELATIONS

The war of 15 April was the result of rifts and incongruities among civilian actors on the one hand, and between civilians and the military, on the other. The war has further widened existing divides and has created others anew. One implication is that these rifts will likely persist long after the war comes to an end. The longer the war continues, the more complex the situation becomes. There are already signs of ethnic alignments and societal polarization. Social media is rife with reports and discussions about people being targeted based on their ethnic identities. This is reported to have taken place at SAF checkpoints, for instance. Those suspected of belonging to ethnic groups supporting the RSF are abused and might be executed. A further development relates to the statements of support to the RSF issued by seven tribal leaders in South Darfur. All these tribes represent the social base of the RSF although they also represent a repository to the SAF since the SAF also recruits from these groups.⁷

While Darfur serves as a warning of the worst-case scenario, in which all of society is mobilized along ethnic lines (as the Masalit and Arabs were in West Darfur), it also offers signs of hope. Local communities in Darfur (native administration, academic institutions and community-based organizations) worked across ethnic lines to reach an agreement, and separately, between the SAF and the RSF. In North, South and East Darfur states, these communities succeeded in separating the SAF and RSF, at least for some time. Some of these

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⁷ In a video statement in June 2023, the leaders of the Habbaniya, Beni Halba, Taaysha, Targam, Fellata, Rezeigat and Missiriya of South Darfur condemned 'former regime loyalists who hijacked the army'. They further declared their support to the RSF.

local truces have held for a while, the situation is tense and there is no guarantee that they will continue, but these types of local and community-based initiatives provide hope for future coexistence between the different social groups in the future. Strengthening local-level structures would not only contribute to stopping the fighting but also counteract polarization along ethnic lines. Ideally, this should be done by the government and international partners but, given their absence on the ground, creative approaches are needed.

The first critically important step for an inclusive political process is to stop the war through a credible and verifiable ceasefire.

Notwithstanding the current devastating war, the nature of the civilian–military relationship depends on the outcome of the political process that should follow a permanent ceasefire agreement between the SAF and RSF. The first critically important step for an inclusive political process is to stop the war through a credible and verifiable ceasefire. Inclusivity of the political process is one guarantor of an improved civilian–military relationship since the current crisis is, in many ways, the result of lack of inclusion. But inclusion should also be sought at the level of mediation. While the USA and Saudi Arabia are two key players who have leverage over the warring parties, countries such as Egypt and the UAE should also be part of any mediation. This also goes for bodies such as the AU, IGAD and the Arab League.

But the most important aspect that will structure civilian–military relationships is a reform of the security sector that results in a unified, professional Sudanese army. This means integration of the RSF and other armed groups that were part of the Juba Peace Agreement into the SAF. It is likely to be a thorny issue as some elements in the SAF and their civilian backers (former regime supporters) adopt a hardline position that calls for disbanding the RSF. This position is not realistic; the war is entering its fifth month and neither side can make significant strides or is likely to defeat the other. Pervasive mistrust on the part of civilians towards high-ranking army officers accused of being Islamists is another issue likely to impede security sector reform. The wider issue of the place of Islamists in the political process—whether they should be allowed to participate or not—is yet another issue that requires comprehensive treatment.

A possible and likely scenario is that the different initiatives fail to make progress towards permanent ceasefire and eventual political settlement. This will mean the continuation of war and the possibility of Sudan's disintegration. The cost of this scenario is high and will extend to neighbouring countries and the region at large.

One option is to have a caretaker government whose basic function should be restoring basic services and this might contribute to ending the war. The SAF and the RSF would have to agree to allow such a government to function and such approval could be part of a ceasefire agreement. But in all cases, the 15 April war has already seriously damaged society and affected civilian–military relationships. A lot is needed for the restoration of confidence—not only between civilians and the military but also between the different civilian interlocutors in Sudan.

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Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Deposing the brutal regime of Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 offered an opportunity for transition to democracy in Sudan. A government was formed based on partnership between civilians and the military, the SAF and the RSF, in August 2019. The partnership was not successful due to civilian fissures and military grip on power. The October 2021 coup shattered the dream of young Sudanese women and men who aspired to democracy in Sudan. The Trilateral Mechanism engaged with the military and civilians for over a year and a half to assist in putting the transition back on track, but its efforts did not match the gravity of the situation. In March 2023, divisions within the military camp led to the obstruction of security sector reform discussions, derailing the process based on the December 2022 Political Framework Agreement. The outbreak of war in the following month was the result of failures that had been in the making since 2019.

The current war is part and parcel of durable disorder in Sudan, and its continuation will lead to far reaching consequences for the country and the region.

The current war is part and parcel of durable disorder in Sudan and its continuation will lead to far reaching consequences for the country and the region. The human suffering and destruction in Khartoum and Darfur since April have reached horrendous levels. Death, rape, robbery, looting and ransacking, demolition of homes, and a myriad of other violations have been committed by the warring parties. People in Khartoum were forced to leave their homes, leaving behind their assets and all they have in search of sanctuary elsewhere within Sudan or in neighbouring countries. Conditions for internally displaced people are dire because they are denied humanitarian assistance due to bureaucratic red tape and insecurity. For those who try to cross borders into neighbouring countries, the situation is no better. Those fleeing West Darfur to Chad were subjected to

egregious violations by RSF-backed militias; those who chose Egypt were stranded at the border due to visa restrictions imposed by the Egyptian authorities at the beginning of June 2023.

Apart from displacement and human suffering, the damage inflicted on the infrastructure in Khartoum is significant and will take time and resources to be restored. Small-scale enterprises and food-producing factories were looted or destroyed by shelling and airstrikes. These enterprises and factories used to provide employment and livelihood for skilled and unskilled persons. Some private sector enterprises closed their business and left Sudan altogether. The economic cost of war is yet to be fully realized and rebuilding what has been destroyed will require huge resources.

After four months, the SAF and the RSF remain determined to defeat each other militarily, although there are no signs that this is a realistic prospect for either side. Insisting on continuing the fighting is pitting communities, ethnic groups and tribes against each other. This is especially the case in Darfur, but also in Khartoum where increasingly people are targeted based on their tribal or ethnic identity. The continuation of the war further divides an already divided Sudanese society. This will make getting back to normalcy extremely challenging when the war is over. There are community-based efforts in Darfur to dissipate conflict and avert war. Such efforts should be supported and amplified.

Up to now, attempts to put an end to the war have not made any headway. The US–Saudi initiative is so far the only diplomatic effort to have succeeded in bringing the warring parties to the negotiating table, if only indirectly. Focused on a short-term ceasefire the talks have hitherto excluded civilians and, overall, there has not been any success. As a result, the mediators suspended the talks. It is not known when the talks will resume or what issues will be negotiated. Other initiatives include that of the IGAD, which is backed by the African Union, and the key objective is to bring the two Generals into face-to-face negotiations. This might be an unlikely event before a long-term ceasefire is achieved. The most recent initiative was mounted by the Egyptian President and addressed Sudan's neighbours. One factor that has contributed to the lethargy of the different initiatives is that there is lack of harmony among them and

The SAF and the RSF remain determined to defeat each other militarily, although there are no signs that this is a realistic prospect for either side. Insisting on continuing the fighting is pitting communities, ethnic groups and tribes against each other.

the actors behind them are not all on the same page. If stopping the war and resuming a democratic transition is the goal of mediators, then a more coherent approach is needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. More pressure should be put on the warring parties to secure a long-term, credible and verifiable ceasefire. Sanctions on individuals or entities that obstruct a ceasefire is one pressure that should be considered. Without a ceasefire, humanitarian assistance cannot be delivered to those who need it and inclusive political dialogue cannot be undertaken.
2. The warring parties should be made to realize, through the threat of litigation, that their legitimacy is predicated on their willingness to stop the war—and that violence as a means to a power grab will not be tolerated. One factor that emboldened the military in Sudan is the leniency of the international community towards the coup of 2021 and crimes committed by the military.
3. Pressure must be put on the de facto government in Sudan to ease humanitarian restrictions, remove barriers to access to victims and ease the issuing of visas for humanitarian workers. Mechanisms are needed to ensure that humanitarian supplies are not appropriated by the warring parties or used to support war efforts.
4. There should be a unified mediation platform that includes civilian actors. The multiplicity of initiatives and platforms is dysfunctional to the objective of resolving the conflict in Sudan. The Jeddah initiative, the IGAD and President al-Sisi's initiatives should be merged and speak with one voice. Additionally, countries such as Egypt and the United Arab Emirates must be party to any credible initiative capable of delivering positive, tangible results.
5. Donors, regional and international bodies such as International IDEA and others in the international community should facilitate and support platforms for Sudanese civilian groups to come together and work out a unified framework. Civilians should be supported to agree on a political process that can put the country back on the track of democratic transition.

6. Community-based initiatives aimed at conflict resolution and enhancing peaceful coexistence at the local level should be encouraged and supported, especially in Darfur. This will guard against the spiralling of conflict and ethnic polarization of the sort that happened in West Darfur.

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The aim of this Report is to provide a situation analysis with a view to informing relevant political and third-party actors on the core issues that require resolution and negotiation.

Sudan's post-independence history is characterized by durable disorders. The peak of these disorders was reached in 2011 when the South Sudanese voted overwhelmingly for secession. Between 1956 and 2019, Sudan had three short democratic governments and long military dictatorships.

An end to the ongoing war in Sudan should be sought through addressing the causes of lengthy conflicts and durable disorders which characterize the history of post-independence Sudan. The war has inflicted human suffering and has involved destruction of infrastructure, looting, pillaging and ransacking of homes and private enterprises. Millions of Sudanese have been displaced within the country and hundreds of thousands have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, fleeing under difficult conditions.

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