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The West's struggle in Sudan

Standing with the people while being stuck with the coup regime

Three years after the historic ousting of the long-time dictator al-Bashir, Sudan's revolution continues. The military coup of last October has effectively ended Sudan's post-Bashir transition to democracy but has fanned the flames of the Sudanese people's struggle for freedom, peace, and justice. Protesters from Sudan's non-violent resistance movement continue to risk their lives by taking to the streets demanding the end of military rule and the transfer of power to a civilian government. The international community, however, has spent the last eight months trying to restore a power-sharing government whose very viability had become untenable. Meanwhile, conniving with Islamist elements of the former al-Bashir regime, the coup alliance is cementing its stranglehold over the state. The historic opportunity for genuine democratic transition risks being lost. This policy brief argues that, by holding on to a transition that has ceased to exist, Western governments have helped consolidate the coup. To counter that course Western donor governments are well advised to 1) increase economic and diplomatic pressure on the coup regime, 2) strengthen the civil society that opposes the coup, and 3) safeguard aid against diversion and political manipulation.

Introduction

Three years ago, in an event coined as “the most significant event in Africa in 2019”¹, Sudan's long-time military dictator Omar Hassan al-Bashir was toppled by a peaceful protest movement. Similar to the country's previous uprisings of 1964 and 1985, however, the already wobbling democratic transition that ensued came to a grinding halt. On 25 October 2021 the head of the army, General Abdul-Fattah al-Burhan, sacked the Prime Minister and his civilian cabinet, with whom the military component

had been sharing power in a transitional government for 15 months. By dissolving the transitional government, cancelling crucial articles of the Constitutional Document, and declaring a state of emergency, al-Burhan effectively put an end to Sudan's democratic transition.

The revolution, however, remains very much alive. Predominantly young women and men from all walks of life and across all 18 states continue to take to the streets every week to demand a transition to civilian rule. Fearlessly defying the unrestrained violence by Sudan's security forces, they display incredible perseverance and determination in expressing their fierce rejection of the coup. In the past eight months, protesters have

¹ BBC. 2019. ‘Sudan after Bashir: “The Revolution is on the Curriculum”’, *BBC*, 28 December, [online](#) (accessed 20 June 2022).

applied increasingly sophisticated methods of non-violent resistance to voice their unanimous dismissal of a return to brutal military dictatorship.

While Western governments have condemned the military takeover, their stance has been ambiguous. On the one hand, the US, EU, and other Western donor governments have sent a clear signal by putting all debt relief and financial aid on hold. On the other hand, however, the international community appeared, at first, to mistake the coup for an unfortunate deviation from the transitional path towards democracy. Consequently, their efforts focused on restoring the path and putting the transition back on track, a track that had just turned out to be a *cul-de-sac*. With time, Western governments and the UN shifted their stance toward coming to terms with the new coup regime, doubling down on efforts to engage all stakeholders, including the coup plotters, in a political process.

This policy brief argues, however, that by holding on to a transition that has ceased to exist, Western governments have helped and continue to help to consolidate the coup regime. It further shows that by holding on to a heavily facilitated political process that lacks legitimacy in the eyes of Sudan's pro-democracy movement, Western governments, no matter how good their intentions, hamper rather than enable Sudan's transition to civilian rule. The brief therefore proposes concrete entry points for Western donors to match their deeds with their words and to back the ongoing revolution with tangible and conflict-sensitive support.

The brief starts by taking stock of the current state of affairs in Sudan, highlighting ways in which Sudan's current reality differs sharply from the circumstances marking the eve of the December revolution. It then examines Western governments' response to the coup concluding that, despite all the good intentions, the diplomatic, economic, and political efforts to date have contributed to reinforcing the coup regime's power position, rather than counterbalancing it. Seizing the opportunity of learning from mistakes and drawing on past donor engagement

experience in Sudan and elsewhere, the brief concludes by presenting some concrete entry points for policymakers and development practitioners alike to turn the tide towards more constructive support for Sudan's struggle for democracy.

Coup versus revolution

For the third time in its history, the people of Sudan are committed to turning the page of authoritarian rule. The older Sudanese generation vividly remembers the two earlier civil uprisings in 1964 and 1985. They also recall the military coups that subsequently interrupted these interludes of democratic rule.² This section sets out to highlight what marks the recapturing of the state by the military this time around. On the one hand, a swift return of al-Bashir loyalists and growing tension and competition within the security sector pose a different and more imminent threat today than before the 2018 uprising. On the other hand, the revolution is centred on an unabating resistance movement, organized across the country, and spearheaded by increasingly mature neighborhood-based resistance committees: as the countervailing power to the coup, and fervent advocates of non-violence resistance, the resistance committees have emerged as Sudan's most powerful political actors today. Rather than aiming at a return to the previous power-sharing agreement, their vision and agency are consistently geared towards transformative political change.

The coup: relapse into military dictatorship and growing tension within the coup alliance

After seizing power, the coup forces – an opportunistic alliance of the military, paramilitary, and former rebel chiefs – sugarcoated their move as a necessary step to rescue the transition. All it would take, so they claimed, for the democratic transition to resume was a (new) tamable civilian face (prime minister) and a cabinet

2 Berridge, W. 2015. *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan. The 'Khartoum Springs' of 1964 and 1985*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

of technocrats. Eight months later, neither is in place. Increasingly desperate attempts to appoint a new prime minister have failed.³

Meanwhile, behind this façade of ostensibly good intentions, the coup regime worked hard to consolidate power, effectively terminating a sincere transfer to civilian rule as they advanced their reconquest of the state. Unsuccessful in mobilizing popular support and civilian allies⁴, the coup regime reverted to the support base of the ousted al-Bashir regime. Loyalists of the former dictator's National Congress Party (NCP) and Islamists who had been removed from power by the transitional government have been gradually returning to the civil service. The freezing of bank accounts and other assets owned by Islamists has been reversed.⁵ The most prominent example is the release of the former Foreign Minister and head of the NCP, Ibrahim Ghandour. Once released, Ghandour publicly attested his support for the coup and Al-Burhan.⁶ Another prominent NCP stalwart and former regime Foreign Minister is Ali Karti. As acting general secretary of the Sudanese Islamist Movement and the founder of the infamous Popular Defense Forces, an Islamist militia he established in the 1990s, Karti recently

declared on TV that the Islamists had the right to re-organise themselves and to run in the upcoming elections.⁷

Key foundational democratic institutions foreseen in the Constitutional Document underpinning Hamdok's transitional government had not been established – inter alia the Parliament, the electoral committee, the anti-corruption committee. As a result, taking over the state was a relatively swift affair. It largely consisted of replacing new and reformist government officials and their reform agendas with loyalists of the former regime.⁸ Today, the General Intelligence Service (GIS), the judiciary, the state media, and the educational sector as well as many embassies abroad and state governorates have been placed back in the hands of former regime officials. While many of them are well-known Islamists, all of them have a history of active political engagement under the previous NCP regime. The transfer of Bashir himself from prison to a military hospital and the publicly aired eased conditions of his detention sent further signals to former regime loyalists that their fate is no longer threatened in the post-coup Sudan.

The few institutions that had been established under the transitional government to curb the deep state, fight corruption, and recover misappropriated funds were dissolved on the very day the coup was staged. The Committee to Dismantle the Former Regime is the most prominent example. While some of the committee leaders have been recently released, the Committee's decisions have been reversed resulting in the reinstatement of institutions that had been dissolved.⁹ A case in point is the Islamic Call

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- 3 Former Prime Minister Hamdok was arrested on the day of the coup, reinstated a month later, but ultimately resigned from the post within weeks, lacking legitimacy in the eyes of both the people and the executive authority.
 - 4 Africa Confidential 2022. 'Burhan lets Islamists back in', 12 May 2022, [online](#) (accessed 20 June 2022); De Waal, A. 2022. 'Strongmen, coups, corruption drive horn of Africa to the brink', *Responsible Statecraft*, 4 May, [online](#) (accessed 22 June 2020).
 - 5 Reuters. 2022. 'Court Orders Return of Key Islamist Group', *Reuters*, 29 April, [online](#) (accessed 22 June 2022). Other entities that the Dismantling Committee had frozen in an attempt to recover funds looted by the former al-Bashir regime include media outlets and the Holy Quran Society: Middle East Monitor. 2020. 'Sudan: Holy Quran Society and Media Outlets Foreclosed to Recover Funds', *Middle East Monitor*, 23 January, [online](#) (accessed 22 June 2022).
 - 6 Sudan Tribune. 2022. 'NCP's Ghandour Voices Support for al-Burhan Coup, Saying Sudan is Now Better', *Sudan Tribune*, 8 April, [online](#) (accessed 22 June 2022).

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- 7 Hasim, M. 2022. 'Sudan Alarm at Return of Bashir Loyalists and the NCP', *BBC*, 14 June, [online](#) (accessed 22 June 2022).
 - 8 Mashamoun, J. 2022. 'Buying Time: Burhan's Strategy in Sudan', *Responsible Statecraft*, 31 January, [online](#) (accessed 23 June 2022).
 - 9 Dabanga Sudan. 2021. 'Jurists Launch Group to Protect the Revolution and Democratic Transition in Sudan', *Dabanga Sudan*, 12 October, [online](#) (accessed 23 June 2022).

Organisation (MADA), which had served since the 1980s to finance Islamist activities across the continent. While the security services work in full swing, unleashing severe repression on unarmed protestors, there is no government in place. Core state functions are not executed; civil servants fail to report to work.¹⁰

Merely eight months into the coup, the rapid (re-)militarization of the state has successfully consolidated the generals' political and economic power, and effectively shields the amalgamated military-paramilitary-militia bloc from civilian demands for accountability, transitional justice and security sector reform. However, beyond the shared interest of saving their own necks and wealth, the three parties to the coup diverge when it comes to their longer-term ambitions, and the means that are available to achieve them. Competition over the monopoly of violence, access to and control over resources, and regional allies are likely to undermine the very stability that the coup regime used as a pretext to usurp power.¹¹

It is this growing competition at the heart of the coup regime, particularly between the regular army, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), the paramilitary force of Mohamed "Hemedti" Dagallo, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and, to a lesser extent, the two former Darfur-based rebel movements – the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) of the Finance Minister Gibril Ibrahim and the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) of Darfur Governor Mini Minawi – that fuels growing insecurity in the regions. While al-Bashir ensured his long-term survival by creating local militias to control the peripheries, fight rebel movements and pitch them against each other, the same toxic mix of rebels, state security, paramilitary and militia today finds itself in Khartoum. Each actor leans on the other for as long as they need their

company to stay in power. It is an unstable alliance that is unlikely to last.¹²

In addition to the tensions between al-Burhan and his deputy,¹³ rifts are also deepening within the RSF and the SAF's own ranks. Frustration within the SAF is fuelled by lower pay compared to the RSF. Aware of the growing disgruntlement within his ranks, al-Burhan recently purged hundreds of high-ranking officers in fear of a coup from within the army.¹⁴ Meanwhile, grievances within the RSF are observed between the former hotbed of the Janjaweed militia and recent recruits coming from other ethnic groups and regions, including the Nuba and African tribes in Darfur.¹⁵

Results: economic collapse, oppression, insecurity in the marginalised regions

A relapse into military dictatorship coupled with quickly rising tensions within the military camps have resulted in an acceleration of economic collapse, insidious military oppression, and exacerbated insecurity in the marginalised regions.

Just before the October coup, macro-economic indicators suggested that the transitional government's tough but necessary economic reforms were starting to pay off.¹⁶ Having borne a very high cost of the economic reform, the ordinary people of Sudan were desperate to see these promising numbers translate into easing living conditions. With the coup, however,

10 Interviews with representatives of Western diplomatic missions, government officials, and civil society leaders, Khartoum, June 2022.

11 Khair, K. 2022. *A Coup Cannot Serve Two Masters*, Washington DC: Arab Center Washington DC, [online](#) (accessed 23 June 2022).

12 Idem.

13 Africa Intelligence. 2022. 'Hemeti and Burhan Prepare to Cross Swords', *Africa Intelligence*, 16 March, [online](#) (accessed 23 June 2022).

14 Sudan Tribune. 2022. 'Sudan Purged Political Elements in National Army to Prevent Coup: General', *Sudan Tribune*, 16 February, [online](#) (accessed 23 June 2022).

15 Toubiana, J. 2022. *Darfur After Bashir: Implications for Sudan's Transition and for the Region*, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace.; Toubiana reports that 20,000 fighters have been recruited from South Kordofan.

16 Alarabiya News. 2021. 'World Bank Head Sees Situation in Sudan Improving, Urges Patience', *Alarabiya News*, 30 September, [online](#) (accessed 23 June 2022).

these hopes have been shattered. According to Sudan's Central Bank, exports plummeted by 85% from 266 million euros in December to 40 million euros in January this year. Rising inflation has driven up the monthly bill for public sector salaries from 54 billion Sudanese pounds at the start of 2022 to 180 billion pounds today.¹⁷ To compensate for over \$ 4 billion of suspended international aid,¹⁸ the coup regime has been touring the region asking for support. Although few details concerning these negotiations are known, none seem to have resulted in alternative support whose size would compare to the support which has been lost.

Instead, the coup regime has intensified efforts to consolidate its economic power by extracting resources from the country and its people. Through their kleptocratic networks, the SAF and the RSF control large parts of the economy and smuggle gold and other resources out of the country. In addition, taxes are being levied on everything from healthcare to cooking gas.¹⁹ A teacher with an average civil servant salary now spends 90% of his monthly wage on bread alone to feed a household containing 6 children.

Sudan is once again isolated from the international finance system it had fought hard to reconnect to. More concerning, the economic freefall comes at a huge human cost. The World Food Programme estimates that over 14 million Sudanese will need humanitarian assistance in 2022. Food insecurity is no longer confined to rural areas but increasingly affects the cities as well.²⁰ As the 2018 protests were sparked in

the cities by rising bread prices, the coup regime's proven inability and unwillingness to mitigate the ongoing crisis will inevitably continue to fuel public unrest and erode their own power position.

Diffident attempts by Prime Minister Hamdok's government to pave the way for accountability and civilian oversight have also been scorched in a couple of months. After the military takeover, the clampdown on the opposition, the media, pro-democracy activists, and civil society leaders have indeed intensified. An emergency order, reinstated by al-Burhan in the month following the coup, restored the power of arrest (the power of law enforcement) to the GIS and gave security forces temporary immunity from prosecution. The effects have been most palpable for the unarmed protestors. The recent lifting of the state of emergency, in turn, has had no perceivable effect. Since the coup over 100 protestors have been killed²¹ by state security forces in the capital alone, with hundreds injured, 16 women reportedly raped²², and more than 1,000 people arrested and mistreated since October, including children.²³ In addition to the crackdown on civilians, the civic space has increasingly come under attack since the coup. Hospitals are being attacked and blocked for people in need. News organizations have been raided²⁴, and journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers, and trade unionists continue to be arrested, posing a severe threat to the basic rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

17 Abdelaziz, A. and M.N. Abdalla 2022. 'Sudan's economy sinks as post-coup leadership searches for support', Reuters, 22 June, [online](#) (accessed on 23 June 2022).

18 Dabanga Sudan. 2022 'Military coup has cost Sudan \$4.4 billion in suspended aid', *Dabanga Sudan*, 27 June, [online](#) (accessed 23 June 2022).

19 Abdelaziz, K., Eltahir, N., and Lewis, A. 2022. 'Sudan's Economy Tumbles in Post-Coup Deadlock', *Reuters*, 2 March, [online](#) (accessed 23 June 2022): resulting in e.g. an increase in fees for a doctor's appointment from 250 to 4,200 Sudanese pounds.

20 Thomas, E. and de Waal, A. 2022. 'Hunger in Sudan's Political Marketplace', *Occasional Paper 32*.

21 Dabanga Sudan. 2022a. 'Sudan Doctors: 83 Eye Injuries, 14 Cases of Eye Loss Since Coup', *Dabanga Sudan*, 14 April, [online](#) (accessed 24 June 2022).

22 Relief Web. 2022. 'UNITAMS SRSG Mr. Volker Perthes Remarks to the Security Council, 28 March 2022', 28 March, [online](#) (accessed 24 June 2022).

23 Relief Web. 2022. 'Oral Update on the Situation of Human Rights in the Sudan', 8 March, [online](#) (accessed 24 June 2022).

24 CPJ. 2021. 'Sudanese military forces arrest state television manager, pro-military protesters assault journalists amid unrest', 26 October, [online](#) (accessed 24 June 2022).

Violent conflict is also on the rise in the marginalised regions. The recent escalation of violence in West Darfur alone has claimed at least 300 lives and displaced more than 115,000 people.²⁵ While Western diplomats and UN officials continue to refer to inter-communal violence²⁶, analysts and community leaders have repeatedly pointed to the link between the power struggle taking place at the central level (between the SAF, the RSF, and signatories and non-signatories of the Juba Peace Agreement) and the localised clashes between ethnically affiliated armed groups and security forces.²⁷

The revolution: Sudan's most consequential political force – the resistance committees

Despite the undampened militarization of the state and the resulting escalation of violent attacks, as well as arrests targeting unarmed civilians across the country, Sudan's non-violent resistance continues unabated. Compared with earlier protest movements in 1964 and 1985 and considering the discordant and quarreling civilian opposition, today's protest movement – since the

beginning, the main driving force of the Revolution – forms a new and arguably the most astute and consequential political force in Sudan.

The protest movement that ousted al-Bashir and continues today predates the 2018 December uprising. Some argue that it is the violent repression of Sudan's Arab Spring in 2013²⁸ that prepared the ground for more resilient and more sophisticated non-violent resistance. After many years of tenacious civil society development in highly repressive circumstances, these local civil initiatives gradually coalesced into an organized grassroots structure,²⁹ spearheaded today by an estimated number of 5,000 neighbourhood-based resistance committees across the country.³⁰

Much of the strength of today's resistance stems from these matured neighbourhood committees in conjunction with the labour unions. First of all, and most critically, the resistance committees that form the backbone of Sudan's ongoing revolution draw upon the trust and respect that they have earned among local communities. Through years of issue-based mobilization and service delivery, rather than a mere rejection of a failing government, they have become the legitimate representatives of the people's needs.

In parallel with these nascent civil society structures, informal trade unions were formed in the shadows of the only legally permitted labour organization that existed by 2011. Although working underground, in 2012 these shadow unions succeeded in establishing a critical element of the December Revolution: the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA). When the uprising was underway, their focus started

25 Dabanga Sudan. 2022b. 'OCHA: Up to 115,000 Displaced by West Darfur Violence', *Dabanga Sudan*, 4 May, [online](#); Dabanga Sudan. 2022c. 'OCHA Sudan: More Than 125 Killed in Kulbus Conflict and More than 18,300 Affected by Aby Jubeiha Clashes', *Dabanga Sudan*, 14 June, [online](#) (all accessed 24 June 2022).

26 UNITAMS. 2022. 'Security Council Press Statement on Darfur, Sudan', 29 April, [online](#) (24 June 2022).

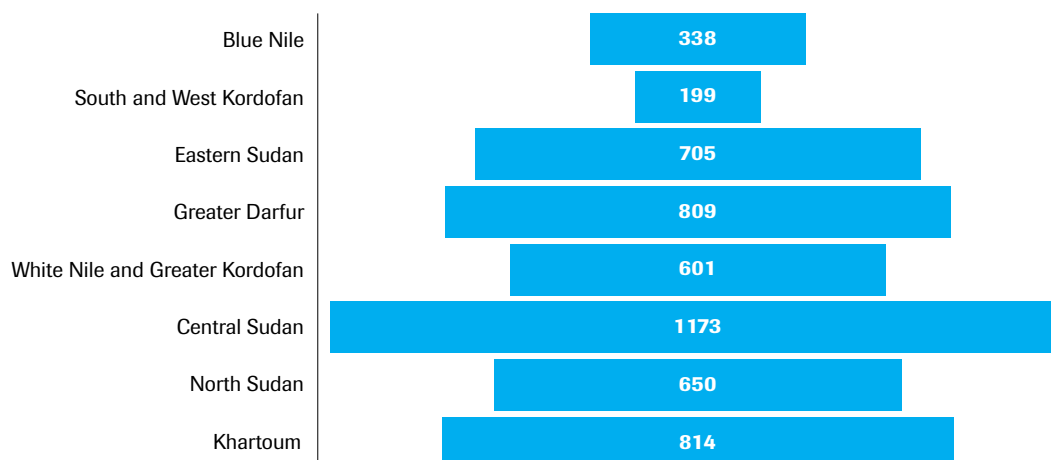
27 The recent deadly attacks in West Darfur features RSF vehicles and RSF uniforms with eye witnesses reporting that an army helicopter circulated the area until the attack began. Rather than a spontaneous escalation of a tribal dispute, the degree of organising and planning involved in the attack, as well as the means of coercion displayed all point to a well-orchestrated attack, in which different security forces, including the RSF and the armed forces, were involved. For a further analysis of the link between insecurity in the peripheries and the power struggle at the centre: Gallopin, J.B., Toubiana, J. and Kulkarni, P. 2022. 'Massacres in West Darfur: Depopulation campaign on mineral-rich lands by Sudan's military junta?', *Peoples Dispatch*, 5 May, [online](#); Espanol, M. 2022. 'Wave of atrocities in Darfur tarnishes Sudan's coup authorities', *Al-Monitor*, 16 May, [online](#) (all accessed on 27 June 2022).

28 Amnesty International. 2013. 'Sudan Escalates Mass Arrests of Activists Amid Protest Crackdown', 2 October, [online](#) (accessed 27 June 2022).

29 Marovic, M., and Hayder, Z. 2022. *Sowing the Seeds of Nonviolent Action in Sudan*, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace.

30 The Carter Center. 2021. *Sudan's Youth and the Transition: Priorities, Perceptions and Attitudes*, Atlanta: The Carter Center.

Resistance Committees surveyed by The Carter Center³¹



to shift from labour rights to more political themes.³² While the resistance committees are organised on a geographical basis, the unions are grounded in the workplace, spanning regions and industries.³³ Having played a critical role in 2019, they have been less visible during the transitional period. However, nationwide strikes by bank employees, medical staff and teachers have intensified after the coup.³⁴ Their organized protests are significant not just because of the disruption they cause through their general strikes. This layer of the middle-class emerged in the 1980s, as a result of the expansion of the financial sector in which the old ruling alliance between the Islamist movement and the military was rooted.³⁵

The present movement with the resistance committees and trade unions at its core

spans across all states and is more inclusive than is often argued. For instance, many civil society leaders who received training in non-violent campaigning in the past decade have passed on this knowledge to the youth in other parts of the country. Indicative of this much broader grounding of the uprising in comparison to previous ones is the fact that the 2018 Revolution started in El Damazin, Blue Nile State, and then first spread to other states before reaching the capital only two weeks later on December 25. The significant share of internet-savvy youth further helped to communicate and mobilise across the states.

Analysing the origins of Sudan’s non-violent resistance identifies two factors that will remain critical for the revolution’s success: the ability of neighbourhood-based resistance committees to act in concert with the labour unions, and their ability to bridge the centre-periphery divide.

Yet, resistance committees have evolved beyond a grassroots movement. Although fragmentation within Sudan’s civilian bloc forms an indisputable challenge to Sudan’s revolution, the single largest obstacle that resistance committees face today is the lack of recognition as a political actor. This lack of recognition, at national and international levels, is at odds with the legitimacy the resistance committees enjoy, the political vision they increasingly articulate and the impact they generate.

31 The Carter Center (2021), Sudan’s Youth and the Transition: Priorities, Perceptions and Attitudes, August 2019, p. 12.
 32 Marovic, M., and Hayder, Z. 2022. *Sowing the Seeds of Nonviolent Action in Sudan*, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace.
 33 Alexander, A. 2022. ‘All Power to Sudan’s Resistance Committees?’, *Socialist Worker*, 8 January, [online](#) (accessed 27 June 2022).
 34 Dabanga Sudan. 2022c. ‘Sudan’s salary strike wave continues, also anti-violence and anti-racist protests’, *Dabanga Sudan*, 24 June, [online](#) (accessed 27 June 2022).
 35 Alexander, A. 2022.

Box 1 Fragmentation within the civilian component

Traditionally, civil society in Sudan is deeply divided along tribal, ethnic, religious, ideological, and regional lines. It has been historically difficult for political leaders to inspire trust across those lines. When the 2018 revolution started, there was no leadership. The SPA only stepped into the void as a mobilizer and communicator when the uprising was already in full swing. Later the SPA, political parties, and armed movements aligned under Sudan's Revolutionary Front all joined together in one coalition forming the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), which negotiated power-sharing with the military on behalf of the civilian population. However, leading up to the coup, the FFC fragmented, and so did the SPA, further disintegrating along old divides and the question of how to deal with the security pact behind the coup.³⁵ Once again, the protest movement finds itself rudderless. Keen to strengthen their constituency and improve their revolutionary appeal, political parties and security actors alike have tried to infiltrate and co-opt resistance committees to advance their own agenda.³⁶

None of the traditional political actors enjoys such broad-based support and recognition among ordinary Sudanese from across the country and including people from all walks of life.³⁸ The resistance committees have introduced innovative ways of political participation and a novel culture of political debate and engagement, which continue to shape developments that impact people's daily lives in Sudan today. The Sudanese researcher Magdi El Gizouli has aptly described the resistance committees' role in making the revolution transcend generations and demographics, ingraining it into the muscle memory of the Sudanese. He compares it to playing football or riding a bicycle, a skill that one does not unlearn,³⁹

which explains why the coup could upend the transition, but not the revolution.

Beyond mobilizing people and organizing protests, the resistance committees have orchestrated a consultative process leading to the production of two political charters.⁴⁰ While these charters and the process that led to them are far from perfect, the political governance model they propose is innovative and transformative. However, the two political charters and the intensive consultations that led to their publication failed to resonate with Sudan's political leaders, and the charters were also not picked up by the international community. The resistance committees' non-conventional horizontal structure and their lack of a hierarchical leadership – the very guarantors of the movement's survival – as well as their members' young age and lack of experience appear not to fit the conventional toolbox of seasoned politicians and 'state of the art' diplomacy.

Yet, while unity among those opposing the coup is critical for the next phase of the revolution, the key to its success lies with this new and unusual, but quintessentially political actor: the resistance committees. The possibility to effectively end the coup and

36 Marovic, M., and Hayder, Z. 2022. *Sowing the Seeds of Nonviolent Action in Sudan*, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace.

37 "RCs have told the press that the RSF, security services, Bashir era NCP cadres and FFC parties are all seeking to gain a foothold in the committees with an eye on the coming elections" El Gizouli 2020, p. 6.

38 This sets them apart from the two largest traditional political parties, the Umma party and the Unionist party whose constituencies have always been primarily from the South and West, and from the North and East, respectively.

39 Abbas, S. and Akram-Boshar, S. 2022. 'The Future of the Resistance Committees in Sudan: A Roundtable with Abdelsalam Mindas, Muzan Aneel, and Magdi El Gizouli', *Spectre Journal*, 14 April, [online](#); El Gizouli, M. 2020. *Mobilization and Resistance in Sudan's Uprising*, Briefing Paper, Rift Valley Institute, [online](#) (all accessed on 27 June 2022).

40 Aneel, M. 2022. *The Charters of Sudan's Political Landscape*, Washington DC: The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy; Resistance Committees. 2022a. [Online](#) (accessed 27 June 2022). The charters are currently under revision and can be accessed [here](#) and [here](#).

open a new chapter of political governance in Sudan hinges on the ability of the political opposition and its international allies to place the resistance committees and their political agency at centre stage. By continuously strengthening the political awareness and self-organizing capacity of their members, thereby deepening the alliance between the centre and the peripheries, and across urban-rural divides, resistance committees continue to build democratic foundations that will be difficult to undo.

The re-emergence of closer coordination between resistance committees and trade unions, whose general strikes proved highly effective in 2019 and are currently intensifying across the country once again, will further increase the pressure on the military government.⁴¹

Reviewing the West's response to the coup

Although Western governments have been quick to condemn the military takeover, their efforts to reverse its course have been ineffectual at best. While the future of Sudan lies in the hands of the Sudanese people, the modest outcomes of the West's efforts in the form of its diplomatic engagement, economic pressure, and the political process it supports, warrants some critical reflections.

Diplomatic engagement

Whereas the West's condemnation of the military takeover was immediate, diplomatic engagement remained half-hearted. In the abiding 25-year-long absence of a United States' (US) ambassador to Sudan, whose nomination had been pending for two years and was confirmed only recently by the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations⁴², post-Coup Sudan witnessed the resignation

of two US envoys to the Horn of Africa region. Jeff Feltman departed in January of this year; his successor David Satterfield left only three months later. Feltman had held meetings with Al-Burhan on the eve of the coup but failed to prevent the imminent power grip from unfolding the next morning. His departure and the lack of a meaningful diplomatic engagement on the ground are widely interpreted as manifestations of the absence of a strategic US policy for the region.⁴³

Since the October coup, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States (the so-called Troika) have released several press statements on Sudan, two of them in conjunction with the European Union and other bilateral donors, to condemn the military's unconstitutional seizure of power and to reiterate their support for Sudan's democratic transition. The EU special representative for the Horn, Annette Weber, visited Sudan at least twice, and a delegation of senior officials from the EU, European donor governments, the UK, and the USA undertook what appeared to be a last ditch attempt to salvage an unpromising political process. Yet, neither have these diplomatic efforts translated into a political solution nor have they produced meaningful concessions from the coup regime.

Two persistent flaws weaken the West's diplomatic engagement: a language of denial and the lack of any consequences. The statements have consistently negated the fact that the unconstitutional takeover and the dissolution of the transitional government had effectively ended the democratic transition. Western governments, on the contrary, kept calling for a resumption of a path that had, in fact, proven to be an impasse. Statements by the US Congress, certainly in the immediate

41 Dabanga Sudan. 2022e. 'More Sudan Strikes and Protests, Especially Around Salaries', *Dabanga Sudan*, 14 June, [online](#) (accessed on 28 June 2022).

42 Hudson, C. 2022. 'Sudan's Democratic Transition is Over. Now it's Time to Support the Revolution', *Atlantic Council*, 3 January, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

43 Karam, J. 2022. 'Departure of second US envoy for Horn of Africa exposes Ethiopia and Sudan policy rifts', *The National News*, 13 April, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022). This comes after the US had upgraded their diplomatic ties with Sudan in support of the post-Bashir transition three years ago after al-Bashir's ousting, further leading to Sudan's removal from the US' State Sponsor of Terrorism List in 2020, which is currently under re-evaluation. The State Department did not make use of its strengthened diplomatic ties to increase its pressure on the generals.

aftermath of the coup, avoided calling the coup a “coup”. This language of denial served the cause of the coup leaders. It bought them time and, worse, subscribed to the coup regime’s narrative of the takeover being a mere corrective measure aimed at rescuing Sudan’s transition.

The other shortcoming that increasingly undermines the meaningfulness of these statements is the absence of any palpable consequences. Repeated outrage rhetoric about the state security forces killing peaceful protestors, invading hospitals, chasing and arresting activists, silencing journalists, raping women and men, and roaming the streets murdering and plundering has weakened rather than reinforced the bearing of expressions of concern. To date, these expressions of outrage have not been followed by effective punitive measures. This is interpreted by many as a consolidation of the coup regime and an encouragement of their insidious repression of civilians with complete impunity.⁴⁴ Similarly, public promises to “stand with Sudan’s protest movement” will continue to be taunted with bitterness in social media, until they translate into meaningful support for the coup opposition and effective pressure on their aggressors.

Economic pressure

The most significant pressure that the West has exerted on the coup alliance is the United States’ suspension of \$ 700 million in financial assistance, the freezing of a \$ 56 billion external debt relief package under the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Initiative, and the general move by Western donor governments to temporarily halt all financial assistance to and development cooperation with the military government. While Jibril Ibrahim – the Finance Minister and head of the Darfur-based armed group JEM – and Hemedti have blamed the West for condoning Sudan’s economic collapse, protestors and resistance committees have called upon the international community to

withhold development assistance from the coup plotters, including when Prime Minister Hamdok was reinstated.⁴⁵ To date, Western donor governments have continued to make international support for Sudan conditional on a return to a civilian-led transition. Yet, economic pressure has lagged far behind the demands of domestic anti-coup critics.⁴⁶ Moreover, resistance committees have repeatedly made it clear that they will not accept another power-sharing agreement with the military, even if it is civilian-led.

Since January, when former Prime Minister Hamdok resigned only a few weeks after his reinstatement, and the coup regime failed to find a replacement, the West lacked a civilian face to serve as a pretext for not imposing punitive measures. Representatives of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the European Council on Foreign Relations have repeatedly argued in favour of targeted sanctions.⁴⁷

While previous economy-wide sanctions have not yielded the intended effect and harmed the population at large, today’s playbook of individual sanctions targeting not only individuals but also their networks is much more effective. Whether enacted through Europe’s Global Magnitsky Act or the Sudan Democracy Act, which was already passed by the Senate and the House of Representatives in the US, such sanctions could block the assets of the coup leaders and their networks and impose visa bans. In addition, international banks could engage in detecting the coup regime and its supporters and preventing them from using the international financial system. On March 21, the US Department of the Treasury’s Office of

44 Kulkarni, P. 2022. ‘Sudanese Resistance Committees Reject UN Calls To Negotiate With Coup Leaders’, *Popular Resistance*, 15 March, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

45 Nashed, M. 2021. ‘Sudanese demand freeze of international aid to the military’, *Al Jazeera*, 11 December, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

46 Amin, M. 2022. ‘Hamdok’s resignation leaves Sudan in the military’s hands. Sanctions may be next’, *Middle East Eye*, 3 January, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

47 Coons, C., and Prendergast, J. 2022. ‘Targeted Sanctions Can Help Restore Democracy in Sudan’, *Foreign Policy*, 28 February, [online](#); Murphy, T. 2022. *Sudan after Hamdok: Three steps Europeans should now take*, European Council on Foreign Relations, [online](#) (all accessed 28 June 2022).

Foreign Affairs (OFAC) accused Sudan's Central Reserve Police (CRP) of serious human rights abuses.⁴⁸ This accusation came in direct response to the CRP's killing and harassing of peaceful protestors resulting in several being killed and many wounded. Based on this designation of the CRP as an abuser of human rights under the Global Magnitsky Act, all property and assets of the CRP in the US must be reported and will be blocked. Resistance committees and the FFC have welcomed the announcement, pointing out that sanctions should also target those higher up in the chain of command,⁴⁹ including the officers behind the coup as well as the financial networks sustaining them.⁵⁰

However, rather than using the discussion and incremental implementation of targeted economic sanctions as a complementary tool of a comprehensive strategy to pressure for a more meaningful diplomatic engagement and political process, the West appears to handle these diplomatic, economic and political policy tools as mutually exclusive. This is the impression one gains when observing the wobbling political dialogue that the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance in Sudan (UNITAMS) has been facilitating since January, in conjunction with the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

Political process – too many facilitators, no ownership

Shortly after Hamdok's resignation in January, the UN Special Envoy to Sudan and head of the United Nations Integrated

Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), Volker Perthes, launched a UN-facilitated intra-Sudanese political process to find a way out of the political crisis.⁵¹ This mechanism commenced amid ongoing protests against the military coup. Five weeks later, UNITAMS published a summary paper drawing on a wide range of bilateral consultations with different stakeholders.⁵² In May, AU and IGAD joined UNITAMS for the second phase of the political process to end the political impasse.⁵³ While all Western governments continue to reiterate their full support for this initiative⁵⁴, this political process is problematic with regard to its underlying assumption, the lack of Sudanese ownership as well as the absence of minimum conditions to ensure a conducive environment for the talks.

Underpinning this UN/AU/IGAD-facilitated process is the earlier discussed assumption that Sudan's transition is still ongoing when it has effectively ended. This assumption is inherently linked to the very mandate through which UNITAMS came into existence and which presumes that there is indeed a transition towards democratic governance that can be restored and supported. This explains why UNITAMS insists on working

48 The United States of America. U.S Department of the Treasury. 2022. *Treasury Sanctions Sudanese Central Reserve Police for Serious Human Rights Abuse*.

49 Dabanga Sudan. 2022f. 'Sudan opposition welcome US sanctions against Central Reserve Police' *Dabanga Radio*, 23 March, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

50 A recent mapping of the complex corporate structure that finances the coup regime offers sound information to guide such sanctions targeting individuals and companies: Cartier, C., E. Kahan and Zukin, I. 2022. 'Breaking the Bank. How Military Control of the Economy Obstructs Democracy in Sudan', 29 June 2022, [online](#) (accessed 30 June 2022).

51 UNITAMS. 2022. 'Statement attributable to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan – on the announcement of talks on Political Transition in Sudan', 8 January, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

52 Relief Web. 2022. 'Summary Paper: Consultations on a Political Process for Sudan: An inclusive intra Sudanese process on the way forward for democracy and peace', 2 March, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

53 Dabanga Sudan. 2022g. 'AU-IGAD-UN trilateral mechanism holds "indirect talks" with Sudan opposition and women's groups' *Dabanga Sudan*, 16 May, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

54 Expressions of that support include the recent Friends of Sudan meeting in Dubai and the recent joint press statement by France, Germany, Norway the UK, the USA, and the EU on their visit to Khartoum: EEAS. 2022. 'Sudan: Joint Statement by France, Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the European Union on their visit to Khartoum', 29 April, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

towards the restoration of a pre-coup “civilian-led” governance model that has clearly failed. Admitting that the transition trajectory no longer exists would call into question the very existence of UNITAMS. Similarly, as the main facilitator of the now aborted political deal of 2019, Mohamed Lebatt, the AU’s Special envoy to Sudan, has little interest in declaring the need for a new political order.

More critically, after six months of its existence, the process lacks local ownership. The latest research on adaptive mediation and conflict resolution has observed a problematic shift in focus away from the conflict and the parties to the mediator and the agreement.⁵⁵ The resulting agreements, the research has shown, tend to reflect international expectations rather than the interests of those involved. In the case of Sudan, the triplification of facilitators has not boosted local ownership. Rather, dynamics between the three facilitators have further alienated the very party whose participation is critical for any meaningful local ownership to materialise: the resistance committees.

Another critical factor for successful mediation is greatly undermined in the current political process: mediators are not adequately shielding the parties from external agendas. By placing the Sudan file in the hands of the AU chair and Chadian politician Moussa Faki and his Chief of Staff and Special Envoy to Sudan, Mohamed Lebatt, the political process is marred with external agendas. Hailing from the same ethnic group as the Chadian president and the two rebel leaders who are now backing the coup, Minawi and Jibril Ibrahim, Faki’s interest is to ensure that whoever reigns in Khartoum will support his own career ambitions back home.⁵⁶ Lebatt, for his part, has served as Foreign Minister

under Mauritania’s military coup regime. His track record in accommodating generals dwarfs any experience with engaging pro-democracy movements. Rescuing whatever may be left of the 2019 power-sharing deal that he himself brokered has more political gain for him than the creation of a new political order.

Long before the coup, military leaders of the Sovereign Council had effectively sabotaged the “National Committee for Coordination with UNITAMS”, a coordination mechanism that was meant to anchor UNITAMS’s role in local ownership.⁵⁷ Since then, facilitation has waxed, ownership has waned. The categorical rejection by the resistance committees, the SPA and a majority of FFC members to engage in a dialogue with the members of the coup regime has continued to frustrate mediators.⁵⁸

In addition to questionable assumptions and a lack of local ownership, the process lacks minimum conditions to ensure a conducive environment for the talks. While UNITAMS keeps urging all stakeholders to fully engage in the process, state security forces continue to shoot, arrest, rape, and torture peaceful civilians. Violent repression and detention further increased after the state of emergency was lifted earlier this month⁵⁹, showcasing the coup supporters’ old tactics of making nominal concessions to advance an opposite agenda. The lack of any preconditions for the political process to take place whitewashes the growing violence against protestors and cements the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators. By not setting any preconditions, the tripartite mechanism is perceived as being more concerned with protecting the political process than protecting civilians and the aspirations the

55 Coning, C., Muto, A. and R. Saraiva (eds). 2022. *Adaptive Mediation and Conflict Resolution: Peacemaking in Colombia, Mozambique, the Philippines, and Syria*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

56 Salim, K.M. 2022. ‘How the military harnessed the African Union in the UNITAMS process to legitimize the coup’, *Sudan Tribune*, 22 April, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

57 Bormann, N.C., and Elbadawi, I. 2021. ‘The Juba Power-Sharing Peace Agreement: Will It Promote Peace and Democratic Transition in Sudan?’, Working Paper 1490, 1-38.

58 Khair 2022.

59 Dabanga Sudan. 2022h. ‘More human rights abuses in Sudan despite lifting of State of Emergency’, *Dabanga Sudan*, 31 May, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

process is meant to help realise.⁶⁰ In other words, it is proving increasingly impossible to ‘stand with the people of Sudan’ while sitting with the coup plotters.

Through their patchy diplomatic engagement, the lack of consequential actions, and an inadequate political process, Western governments have lost credibility not only in the eyes of Sudan’s pro-democracy and anti-coup movement,⁶¹ but also in the eyes of the military regime. The West’s evident leniency towards the regime’s systemic violations of civilians’ basic rights has fostered the coup regime’s confidence. Their concessions have remained largely nominal: neither has the lifting of the state of emergency led to less violence, nor has the release of some high-profile civilian leaders been followed by the release of more detainees, let alone to an end of random arrests. Instead, the coup regime has, for its part, started to communicate red lines that the West cannot cross and has issued a summons against the head of UNITAMS over calls to refrain from violence.⁶²

If Western governments’ diplomatic, economic and political response to the October coup has to date cemented the coup and hence hindered Sudan’s revolution, what would it take to turn that tide?

Pragmatic entry points for the West to enable civilian rule in Sudan

To restore their image as a credible actor in support of Sudan’s struggle to end the coup and complete the revolution, Western governments urgently need to walk their

talk: condemnations of violence must be coupled with tangible consequences for the perpetrators; expressions of solidarity with the Sudanese people are only meaningful if they are underpinned by demand-driven support. Moreover, drawing on 30 years of humanitarian aid and development cooperation under the al-Bashir regime, the international community should be under no illusion that bypassing government authorities will safeguard their engagement from diversion and manipulation.

Intensify economic and diplomatic pressure on military actors and their allies

Eight months after the October coup, it has become very clear that the coup alliance that seized power is unable to govern the country. Early elections are unlikely to change that, as those in charge have demonstrated that they are prepared to do anything that it takes to stay in power and avoid facing justice. Instead of coming to terms with the coup regime or trying to convince civilians to enter into another power-sharing agreement with the military, Western governments should refrain from aiming for speedy elections to avoid legitimizing autocratic rule, and instead increase their economic and diplomatic pressure on the coup leaders and their kleptocratic networks.

Push back on the Sudanese military’s call for elections in 2023

Western governments should counter any proclaimed commitment by the coup regime to fair and free elections by an unequivocal demand that a conducive environment should be created through electoral reforms, free media and the right of assembly.⁶³ Elections are a meaningful tool in building democracies when not merely understood as “a means to choose leaders, but a means to remake the nature of governance”.⁶⁴

60 Espanol, M. 2022. ‘Sudanese public widely rejects new UN initiative’, *Al-Monitor*, 26 January, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

61 Khair 2022. Sudanese diaspora has also expressed their rejection of both, the coup and the UN/AU/IGAD facilitated process, which they accuse of legitimising the coup. Dabanga Sudan 2022g.

62 Sudan Tribune. 2022. ‘Sudan summons UNITAMS’ head over calls to refrain from violence, 29 June 2022, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

63 Hamdan, A. 2022 ‘Sudan’s military are calling for elections in 2023: Here is why that’s a bad idea’, Chr. Michelsen Institute, January 2022, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

64 Willis, J., el-Battahani A. and P. Woodward. 2009. *Elections in Sudan: Learning from Experience*, Rift Valley Institute, [online](#) (accessed on 28 June 2022).

Implement tailor-made sanction packages targeting coup leaders and affiliated companies

To increase the economic pressure on the military bloc, the condemnation of the Central Reserve Police should be followed by a set of tailor-made sanction packages targeting the leaders of the SAF, the RSF, the GIS, as the main perpetrators of violent repression in Khartoum, Darfur, South Kordofan and elsewhere, as well as the heads of the companies and banks they control or rely on. Rather than a tool of last resort, targeted sanctions should be devised and presented as part of a comprehensive strategy to urge the military to change course.

Put pressure on regional coup supporters highlighting shared interests

On the diplomatic front, Western donors can send a clear message to the regional power brokers, especially Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, leveraging points of shared interest such as the unease concerning an Islamist takeover in Khartoum or the establishment of a Russian naval base in Port Sudan. It is crucial to make it very clear to regional allies that backing the current autocratic course is tantamount to bringing back the Islamists and a shifting influence in the Gulf of Aden in favour of Russia.

Strengthen civil society actors

Sudan's resistance has shown tremendous perseverance, unflinching despite ongoing killings, arrests, and torture by state security forces. The West should double down on supporting their efforts, not merely to avoid channelling support through the coup government, but as a priority in and of itself, recognizing that for non-violent resistance to navigate post-regime transitions successfully towards durable democratic consolidation, time and continued capacity strengthening are critical.⁶⁵ It is important to note, however, that the achievements

of Sudan's revolution so far are due to the authenticity and ingenuity of Sudan's homegrown resistance and can only be sustained from within. Attempts to put the cart before the horse by imposing pre-set donor agendas on resistance committees should be avoided at all costs. Regime-controlled civil society organizations tend to mushroom in the presence of supply-driven interventions.

Condemn any basic rights abuses and support people's demand for justice

To preserve the authenticity and popular legitimacy of the protest movement, a combination of diplomatic pressure and civil society programming support is recommended. Diplomatic pressure should be kept high and match the stamina of the resistance to keep monitoring, documenting, and publicly denouncing any abuses of basic rights. Expressions of concern and demands for the accountability of perpetrators should not be reserved for excessive violence only. Introducing shades of grey when human rights are abused compromises the very principles that these rights are meant to preserve, effectively exonerating the perpetrators' continuous lower-level abuses.

Seek meaningful engagement with resistance committees, on their own terms

It is time for the resistance committees to be recognized as the most astute and consequent political actors in Sudan's political landscape today. Western governments should seek direct engagement with these neighbourhood-based committees, on their own terms. This entails accepting their refusal to enter into negotiations, let alone a partnership, with the coup regime. At the political level, their charters warrant a central place in any trajectory out of the current political and economic crisis. At the institutional level, Western support should focus on countering fragmentation within the civilian bloc (incl. resistance committees, political parties, SPAs, and the FFC – Central Council) by strengthening the capacity of all actors and facilitating systematic consultations.

⁶⁵ Chenoweth, E. and Stepan, M.J. 2011. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Non-Violent Conflict*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Provide direct support to civil society organisations, also in the regions

Programming aimed at preserving civic space is best advised to combine larger programming through international organizations with direct contracting of local civil society organisations, including from Sudan's conflict-ridden regions. The benefit of investing in the additional resources required to manage a greater diversity of implementing partners is twofold. It enables Western donors and implementers to keep their ears and eyes close to the reality in which their support is destined to make a difference. It also ensures that the support reaches more directly the structures it is meant to strengthen, mitigating the risk of diversion along the way, provided that the implementing partner is cautiously selected. Supply-driven interventions are particularly prone to being exploited by regime-controlled civil society organisations, such as the Women's Union under al-Bashir, established to capture aid while expanding the leading party's control and ensuring regime loyalty.⁶⁶

Rescue aid and development assistance from diversion and political manipulation

During the three decades of al-Bashir's rule, both humanitarian aid and development cooperation have been systematically exposed to tricks of diversion and manipulation. The Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), an institution in charge of overseeing and monitoring all humanitarian and non-governmental aid, remains in place today with a proven track record of extracting rent from international aid and exploiting it to advance the incumbent's (political) agenda. Though humanitarian aid is the main target, development cooperation is also affected.

66 Interviews with representatives of international development organisations in May 2022.

Monitor and report incidences of aid diversion

A consolidated effort is needed by implementing agencies and donors alike to closely monitor and report such malpractices. With food insecurity soaring and humanitarian needs on the rise⁶⁷, it should come as no surprise that bureaucratic impediments for humanitarian organisations in Sudan have started to increase again since the coup.⁶⁸ The pre-2019 playbook of rent extraction from humanitarian aid includes pressuring relief organisations for incentives, such as vehicles, and invoking fees or fee-generating requirements.⁶⁹ All these impediments have reportedly been on the rise since the coup,⁷⁰ and are likely to strengthen the very structure of the coup regime.

Know your implementing partners and contractors and their links to security actors

Development cooperation is not exempted from this risk of diversion. When considering the channelling of support directly to the private sector, it is critical to carefully assess how individual companies, their owners and shareholders, services and finances are linked to the security apparatus. The risk of private sector development support benefiting the coup regime, whether directly or indirectly, through its tentacular network of parastatal companies, is not merely reputational but potentially involves human rights abuses and an escalation of violent conflict.

67 According to UN estimates 14.5 million people will be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022.

68 USAID. 2022. 'Sudan – Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #3', 22 April, [online](#) (accessed 28 June 2022).

69 Jaspers, S. and El Tayeb, Y. 2022. *Caught in Transition: Food aid in Sudan's changing political economy*. Conflict Sensitivity Facility, Khartoum, The Conflict Sensitivity Facility, p. 15. A classic example is a request put forward to NGOs to pay for HAC officials to carry out humanitarian project monitoring which is part of their mandate and whose fulfilment is a prerequisite for any project to continue its implementation. A failure to comply with such requirements results in restrictions in access and delays in obtaining HAC approval of technical agreements, travel permits and visas.

70 Interviews with several NGO representatives in Khartoum in May 2022.

Be wary of any political manipulation of humanitarian and development assistance





After the coup and with the unfolding re-establishment of the old Bashir network, the risk of funding and legitimizing exclusionary actors and structures in the humanitarian and development system remains high. To mitigate this risk, it is critical that donor governments request aid implementers to develop a solid understanding of the institutions, individuals and companies they (potentially) engage with across their operations. Implementing agencies must act in a conflict-sensitive manner. This entails not only an in-depth understanding of the political economy in which they operate but also a systematic monitoring of the inevitable interaction between this context and their interventions. More specifically, this requires implementing agencies to better understand the political baggage of traditional leaders⁷¹ and their role and image in the community. It further demands thorough due diligence of all private-sector vendors and service suppliers, including security service providers, and their links to state and non-state security actors.

71 Jaspers, S. and El Tayeb, Y. 2022. *Caught in Transition: Food aid in Sudan's changing political economy*. Conflict Sensitivity Facility, Khartoum, The Conflict Sensitivity Facility, p. 15.

About the Clingendael Institute

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