



GLOBAL TRANSITIONS SERIES



## Fragmented Transitions in the Context of Competitive Regionalism: The Case of Sudan

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## Key findings

- ▶ Sudan is presently undergoing a twin transition, shifting from both armed conflict and authoritarian rule. Both processes are intertwined and substantially impacted by a fragmented regional constellation. Since the military coup from 25 October 2021 and the installation of a military junta under General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the twin transition is stalled.
- ▶ The regional and international constellation around Sudan provides a difficult and non-conducive environment for the Sudanese twin transition. Western partners prioritise regional stability over the fragile Sudanese democratic transition, and the overall foreign policies of the three Troika countries – the United States, the United Kingdom, and Norway – are currently not strongly orientated to Sudan. Conscious of regional alliances, especially with Egypt and the Gulf States, the Troika countries avoid putting heavy pressure on the Sudanese military junta and keep a relatively low profile in engaging with the Sudanese protest movement.
- ▶ Moreover, the regional influence of the Troika countries seems in decline and giving way to the strong roles of Egypt and the Gulf States, who put considerable focus on exercising their influence in Sudan. The United States, especially, appears unwilling to strategically challenge Egypt and the Gulf States over Sudan, mainly due to concerns about stability in the wider Arab region. This pragmatic stance, in turn, results in an even stronger role in Sudan for the major regional players.
- ▶ The multilateral actors are bound by strict mandates and therefore focus on facilitating negotiations with the military regime. This approach is widely rejected among the opposition and has resulted in the isolation of these actors, especially of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS).
- ▶ Whilst regional actors support stability in Sudan, they appear to have little interest in a successful democratic transition. They prefer to work with military counterparts and are supportive of more autocratic systems of rule. The regional landscape is fragmented and this impacts on Sudanese national politics. Egypt's support was decisive for the military coup. Gulf states also support the incumbent military junta. Saudi Arabia aims to secure the involvement of the Sudanese army and the RSF in Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are invested in natural resources – particularly agriculture. While Egypt unequivocally supports al-Burhan, the position of the UAE is more ambivalent.

- ▶ Regional dynamics are complex and unpredictable. They combine long-term strategic interests with transactional politics and relational aims, therefore evolving fluidly and flexibly. International as well as Sudanese actors have to constantly work on their positioning within this dynamic, and to forge and maintain alliances within the regional settlement. Whilst it is a challenge, this fluidity carries potential entry points for change in the future.
- ▶ Stability in Sudan remains the most important goal that unites all international partners. The status quo, therefore, appears relatively set: it is not in the military, regional actors, or western actors' immediate interest to shift the current dynamics. The pursuit of democratisation is primarily seen through a stability lens and has only weak international traction.
- ▶ If Western actors wish to have an influence on Sudan's twin transition, they will need to take more risks with foreign policies, and challenge regional allies. In the absence of this, negative perceptions of Western intent on the ground are likely to grow. This is despite genuine efforts to support democratic principles by Western diplomats in Sudan.

## Introduction

After the 2019 ousting of the long-standing dictator Omar al-Bashir, the re-configuration of the Sudanese political scene emerged in two phases. First, the agreement on a transitional constitutional document that brought the civil revolutionary forces into a fragile political settlement; second, the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement, that added a number of armed opposition movements into the power-sharing mix. The attempted "twin transition" – from authoritarianism to democracy, and armed conflict to peace – was effectively stalled by a coup led by the military component of the fragile power-sharing arrangement in 2021.

The regional dimension of the transition in Sudan has been underestimated and under-analysed. The tactics of the power holders in the current Sudanese political unsettlement (Bell & Pospisil, 2017; Pospisil, 2019) can only be explained by looking at the key regional actors and regional dimensions. Against this background, this paper asks how involved emergent powers and regional organisations are in the context of the Sudanese transition, and how directive they are in their approaches? The paper will also investigate their priorities and normative commitments, inter-regional relationships and perceptions, and national perceptions of regional and international actors.

Based on interviews with a variety of influential national and international stakeholders, this working paper argues that regional interests are substantially shaping Sudan's political trajectory. While the major liberal powers, assembled in the so-called "Troika", are not prepared or ready to accept the risks of supporting a democratic transition, regional powers have a strong interest in a non-democratic – albeit stable – Sudan that is supporting their, at times contradictory, regional, and geopolitical ambitions.

The tensions that emerge among the main actors in the Sudanese transition and within the ruling military block reflect these standpoints. The resulting fragmentation has effectively led to a political deadlock. As this paper argues, formal negotiation initiatives with the military junta, such as those currently pursued by multilateral actors including the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) and the African Union (AU), are unlikely to resolve this deadlock. The resistance by the opposition movement is too strong, and even a return to the pre-coup settlement is a political demand presently rejected by many. Any progress will require difficult and complex negotiations among Sudanese stakeholders themselves, and a careful balance of divergent regional interests to provide a conducive environment for a "twin transition" towards democracy and sustainable peace.

## Contextualising Sudan's Fragile Transition

The nature of the military coup from October 2021 and subsequent changes to the political configuration in Sudan is different to the previous events of 1964 or 1985. The number of actors has significantly increased. While in earlier times a relatively unified military block faced a limited number of political parties, now a fragmented military "component" meets an even more fragmented political opposition. The latter consists of not only the traditional political parties, civil society organisations and armed opposition movements that have been in existence before Bashir's downfall in 2019, but a number of new political actors, including the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), and, more recently, the Resistance Committees (RC) who are organising the nationwide street protests against the military junta.

Sudan's political context has evolved into a "twin transition". Firstly, a democratic transition based on a Draft Constitutional Charter pursued by the political forces directly involved in Bashir's downfall. Secondly, a war-to-peace transition based on the Juba Peace Agreement, which came into force in October 2020, signed by 13 armed opposition movements. While both processes were presented as essentially domestically led and driven – the Juba Peace Process was mediated by South Sudan on behalf of IGAD and saw only limited international involvement at a formal level – most actors have been embedded in a complex set of regional relationships.

The military coup of October 2021, which would not have been possible without substantial Egyptian support and the acquiescence of other regional players – especially from the Gulf – illustrates the importance of this regional dimension. The armed forces would not have been able to move without substantial support from Egypt and the backing of Russia, which used its role in the UN Security Council to mitigate potential political fallout at the international level. Further, several regionally embedded armed movements who have signed the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA), fell in line, with some even openly supporting the military takeover, most notably the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) Minni Minnawi.

The regional fragmentation also has direct implications on the Sudanese security sector. The months after the coup have seen increasing rifts between the various military components, especially between the Egyptian-leaning Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) under the President of the Sovereignty Council, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, "Hemeti", who is substantially relying on support from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Russia. Hemeti has also recently attempted to foster his relationships with Ethiopia, in a bid to broaden his regional base in the uneasy relationship between RSF and the Sudanese Armed Forces.



## Mapping International Interests: Regional and Supra-regional

Regional and international interests in Sudan are partly overlapping and partly contradicting. They have always had a strong role in Sudanese politics due to the geographical position of Sudan, which is situated in the middle of historical transport and trading routes between North and South, and the Red Sea and Central and West Africa. Sudan's transition therefore cannot escape from regional interests. However, these regional interests do not form clear lines as they previously did during the Cold War. In the absence of a regional hegemon, alliances shift constantly along sometimes strategic, but often relational interests. The following table gives an overview of the interests and ambitions of the main stakeholders as they have been raised in the consultations for this report.

|              | Style of engagement                                                                                               | Priorities in engaging with Sudan                                                                                                                                                               | Relation to transition and normative commitments                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Egypt        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavily directive</li> <li>• Public-facing presence via media</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water politics seeking support against Ethiopia GERD ambitions</li> <li>• Access to raw resources</li> <li>• Anti-Muslim Brotherhood agenda</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not supportive of a democratic Sudan</li> <li>• Not supportive of liberal norms</li> <li>• Preference dealing with military regime</li> </ul> |
| Saudi Arabia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behind the scenes</li> <li>• "Silent diplomacy"</li> </ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing RSF supply of ground troops for war in Yemen</li> </ul>                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not supportive of democratic Sudan</li> <li>• Not supportive of liberal norms</li> </ul>                                                      |

|                      | Style of engagement                                                                                                                                                                          | Priorities in engaging with Sudan                                                                                                                                                                                               | Relation to transition and normative commitments                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Saudi Arabia         |                                                                                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long-term land investments</li> <li>• Anti-Muslim Brotherhood agenda</li> </ul>                                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preference dealing with military regime</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                |
| United Arab Emirates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct relationships with individual Sudanese power holders, especially with Hemeti</li> <li>• Closer to Saudi style than Egyptian style</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gold investments via Hemeti</li> <li>• Red Sea port investments</li> <li>• Opaque interests relative to other powers (Russia, US)</li> <li>• Anti-Muslim Brotherhood agenda</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not supportive of democratic Sudan</li> <li>• Not supportive of liberal norms</li> <li>• Preference dealing with military regime</li> <li>• Active disruption to peace</li> </ul> |
| Turkey               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indirect engagement mainly via refuge to old regime</li> <li>• Student loans and scholarships</li> </ul>                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indirect support to old regime</li> <li>• Red Sea interests, especially tied to economic interests in Somalia</li> </ul>                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No public commentary for or against October coup</li> <li>• Supportive of Islamist agenda</li> </ul>                                                                              |

|             | Style of engagement                                                                                                                                                              | Priorities in engaging with Sudan                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Relation to transition and normative commitments                                                                                                |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| South Sudan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct mediation (Juba Peace Process)</li> <li>• Strengthening bilateral relations with Sudan and all neighbouring countries</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regime survival through good neighbourhood</li> <li>• Becoming a regional player</li> <li>• Securing oil export via Port Sudan pipeline</li> <li>• Building strategic partnerships, especially by relying on Tut Kew Gatluak and his links to cadres of the NCP regime</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politically flexible</li> <li>• Keen to foster relationships with all Sudanese stakeholders</li> </ul> |
| Israel      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discreet, behind doors and intelligence agency led</li> </ul>                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security and intelligence relationship</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No public commentary for or against the October coup</li> </ul>                                        |
| China       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic cooperation, albeit at a minor scale</li> <li>• Loans</li> </ul>                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional stability</li> <li>• Safeguarding the involvement in the South Sudanese oil industry and investments in Ethiopia</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politics of non-interference and respect of state sovereignty</li> </ul>                               |

|        | Style of engagement                                                                                                                                                                       | Priorities in engaging with Sudan                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Relation to transition and normative commitments                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Russia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discreet with direct relationships with RSF and SAF (training)</li> <li>• Hardly any engagement with civilian transitional government</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection of gold investments</li> <li>• Red Sea naval access and maintaining a geostrategic corridor to Central Africa</li> <li>• Weapons market and security forces</li> <li>• Destabilisation of Western liberal interests and order</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not supportive of democratic Sudan</li> <li>• Not supportive of liberal norms</li> <li>• Preference dealing with military regime</li> <li>• Actively disruptive to the transition</li> </ul> |
| IGAD   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soft-line influence</li> <li>• Formal mediation role, formally deferred to South Sudan</li> </ul>                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining regional relevance</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little to no political leverage</li> <li>• Dependent on alignment of big international players, which is currently not given</li> </ul>                                                      |

|         | Style of engagement                                                                                                                                                                                   | Priorities in engaging with Sudan                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Relation to transition and normative commitments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AU      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• African-centred solutions for peace and security</li> <li>• Achieving key mediation role between military and opposition</li> </ul>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful civilian-led government</li> <li>• Support transition to stable democratic government</li> <li>• Successful peace process</li> </ul>                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active support for peace during UNAMID mandate</li> <li>• In need for successful mediation initiatives</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                               |
| UNITAMS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional diplomacy according to international norms and UNSC mandate (UNITAMS, 2020)</li> <li>• Formal support of stalled transitional process</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support transition to stable democratic government</li> <li>• Successful peace process and implementation of JPA</li> <li>• Peacebuilding, protection of civilians, and rule of law</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formally supportive of democratic transition and liberal norms</li> <li>• Tied to existing formal document trail (Constitutional Declaration, Juba Peace Process)</li> <li>• Lost credibility due to its endeavour to negotiate with military regime</li> </ul> |

|        | Style of engagement                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Priorities in engaging with Sudan                                                                                                                                                          | Relation to transition and normative commitments                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Troika | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Traditional diplomacy according to international norms</li><li>• Clear rejection of military takeover</li><li>• Attempts to form alliances against military regime</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Civilian led transition</li><li>• Stability through democratic means</li><li>• Sustainable peace</li><li>• Poverty reduction/alleviation</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supportive of democratic transition and liberal norms: rule of law, human rights, transitional justice, inclusion</li><li>• Hesitant to accept military take-over</li></ul> |

## The Competitiveness of “Regional Interests”

The configuration of regional interests around Sudan's “twin transition” – the transition from armed conflict and authoritarian rule – is complex. This complexity makes the trajectory of the transition hard to predict. Regionalism does not evolve as an orderly construct, and appears less as a particular mode of governance than a modality of disorder. As the configuration in North-East Africa and the Horn demonstrates, regional order has failed to institutionalise as a sustainable form of collaborative governance, an “architecture”. Instead, it is competitive, relational, fluid, and often, transactional. In such a context, regional organisations cannot provide an institutional set-up for joint action and dispute resolution but evolve as arenas of political contestation.

Competitive regionalism in Sudan works on a variety of scales. Even describing the region provides challenges. It is possible to frame it as a larger configuration, the “Red Sea Region” or “The Wider Horn”, stretching from Uganda to the Middle East. Perceptions gathered for this report rather point towards overlapping but still distinct regional configurations where interests – political, economic, geo-strategic – evolve in different ways. Not least due to Nile hydropolitics, East Africa and The Horn are closely interrelated regional configurations. While the relations to the Arabian Peninsula are geographically close – which would justify thinking in terms of a Red Sea Region – they are perceived as different contexts that, nevertheless, are relational and in constant exchange.

Regional hegemony as well as political interests work differently. Hegemony in East Africa and The Horn is contested around stability, economic development, and control of Nile waters between Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sudan, with Egypt as an important player to the north. The Arabian Peninsula, in contrast, is seen as mainly driven by economic and military competition between Saudi Arabia and the UAE. And yet, both regions are closely interrelated and subject to geopolitical interests of other external powers, such as Russia, Turkey, China, and Iran.

Third, interests are hardly ever stable and clearly communicated. Often, interests are not objective but relational and result in shifting alliances and ambiguous relationships. Perceptions around interests are often the main indicator of their existence, especially because actors are not necessarily states, but actor groups within them. The different foreign policy agendas pursued by the current President of the Sudanese Sovereignty Council, General al-Burhan, who is seen as closely aligned with Egypt, and his deputy, Hemeti, who, at the same time, is developing closer relations with Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy, presently Egypt's main enemy, are just one case in point.

## The GERD Entanglement

The relationship of almost all political actors in Sudan to its powerful neighbour in the north, Egypt, is challenging. Historically, Egypt has been a colonial power, and has continued to exercise dominance thereafter. Most Sudanese civilian actors assume that Egypt is treating Sudan as a "little brother", with a heavy-handed influence on contemporary Sudanese politics. In doing so, Egypt is pursuing two interests: the first aim is to prevent the development of a vital democracy within Egypt's immediate neighbourhood that would challenge Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's mode of governance (Interview 1). As one interviewee states, "Egypt has always been uneasy about the presence of a democratic regime in Sudan – it unsettles them" (Interview 2). Egypt is not motivated by Sudan's prosperity or democratic future. It is widely assumed by national stakeholders and international observers alike that support for a democratic Sudan runs against Egypt's own interests and political stability.

Egyptian military support was a critical factor in attempting the coup of October 2021, and to its subsequent relative success. Egypt's interest was to install military Sudanese counterparts with whom the al-Sisi government prefers to work. A military leadership is perceived to be a more stable ally than the civilian transitional government, an argument that is also used by the Sudanese military regime. To this aim, Egypt can rely on close collaboration with the Sudanese army, of which many leading cadres – such as al-Burhan – have been trained in Egypt by the Egyptian armed forces. Egypt does have the means to use democratic allies to achieve its aims, for instance, by exerting its influence through Sudan's Unionist Party. However, direct modes of political influence are preferred. The political interest of Egypt is perceived as the most important influence on Sudanese politics. As an interviewee said, "Egypt builds strategies to control decisions in Sudan", which results in no other country attempting "to control power in Khartoum as much as Egypt" (Interview 3).



The second factor in Egypt's relationship with Sudan is hydropolitics around the Nile waters. Khartoum has been built around the confluence of the Blue and the White Nile; Sudan therefore has a crucial role to play in the political management of the river. Water politics have long dominated Egypt's relationship with Sudan and Sudan's other neighbours, particularly Ethiopia. The once friendly relations between Sudan and Ethiopia have cooled to the point of armed confrontations between the two countries in recent years. Egypt's influence on Sudan's positioning toward Ethiopia is considered incontrovertible by many stakeholders. Hydropolitics are the main element in this conflict, which has been a long-standing issue in Egyptian-Ethiopian relations. While Egypt upholds the Blue Nile Water Agreement of 1959 ([Agreement Between UAR and ROS, 1959](#)), Ethiopia has pursued the Cooperative Framework Agreement of 2010, which is signed by all countries in the region except for Egypt and Sudan ([Nile Basin Initiative, n.d.](#)).

In the words of an international diplomat, Ethiopia feels betrayed by Sudan, which once was generally supportive towards the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project (Interview 4). Observers say that, technically, most of the issues regarding the dam filling and the flow of Nile waters could be quickly resolved between Ethiopia and Sudan if not for the Egyptian interference. At present, Ethiopia accuses Sudan of supporting the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) in the Ethiopian civil war and of exploiting the Ethiopian Armed Forces' engagement in the Tigray war by occupying the contested Al-Fashaga triangle ([de Waal, 2021](#)).

However, this is not clear cut. While bilateral relations with the leadership of the Sudanese Armed Forces are poor, Ethiopia aimed to build relations with the civilian part of the pre-coup government. Pushing for Sudan's former Prime Minister to become chairperson of IGAD – in a remarkable move away from the usual sharing of the position between Ethiopia and Kenya – was part of the move, which also resulted in a strategic neutralisation of IGAD towards Ethiopia's internal conflict. Since Sudan's military takeover, the Abiy government has hosted Sudan's Vice-President and head of the RSF, Hemeti, twice in Addis Ababa. The first of these visits, in late 2021, happened without preceding communication with the Sovereignty Council or the Sudanese embassy in Addis Ababa (Interview 5). These two visits built on an earlier visit in 2020, in which Hemeti emerged as the primary go-to person in Khartoum for the Abiy government.

While the Ethiopian interest clearly lies in splitting the axis between the Sudanese Armed Forces and Egypt, Hemeti's interests are more difficult to assess. Observers point towards the different orientations between al-Burhan and Hemeti, especially regarding their personal economic interests. While Cairo is al-Burhan's main security-led lifeline, the UAE are perceived to be Hemeti's main strategic partner. Ethiopia's ever closer relationship to the Emirates, **politically and economically**, but also militarily, might provide a fertile background for Hemeti's endeavour to strengthen ties with Addis Ababa. Mutual military cooperation with Russia – which has a defence cooperation treaty with Ethiopia, while the Russian PMC Wagner is involved in training the RSF – might be another factor that aligns strategic interests.

### **Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula**

The relationship of the Sudanese regimes with Saudi Arabia and the UAE have historically always been critical. They are also seen as an example of a regional marketplace, with transactional politics dominating many facets of the political exchange. In recent years the evolving competition between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, particularly around their foreign economic policy and the war in Yemen, have become an increasingly important factor.

Historically, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Sudan saw Sudan with an initial edge on power: Saudi Arabia was reliant on Sudan for civil servants and human resources, both skilled and unskilled. Up until the 1970s, Saudi Arabia was not in a position to exert considerable influence on Sudanese politics. The dynamics started to change after the Bashir regime came to power in Sudan. At that time, the Sudanese leadership was under the heavy influence of the National Islamic Front under Hassan al-Turabi, and started harbouring al-Qaeda and Usama Bin Laden. The subsequent sanctions severely hit the Sudanese economy and forced the Bashir regime to turn to Saudi Arabia in search of financial support and investments, a relationship that continued after the ousting of the National Islamic Front from government in 1999. The power dynamics between Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula had strategically shifted and pushed Sudan into maintaining an equal dependence on Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar. Over time, Sudan was able to exploit differences between Arabian powers to its own advantage and even mediate between them, notably after the Saudi-Qatari diplomatic crisis in 2017.

The UAE's ascendance as major regional player in the Gulf has turned Sudan's Gulf relationships towards a transactional marketplace logic. Vice-President Hemeti, through his command over the RSF and control over the gold trade, has become the major political player in this relationship on the Sudanese side. Hemeti uses these relations, as well as his personal diplomacy with Ethiopia, as leverage against the political interests of the Sudanese army in his pursuit to either become the market maker in the regional political marketplace or, as some stakeholders argue, in his pursuit to become president himself (Interview 6).

The present interest of Saudi Arabia is mainly rooted in securing Sudanese ground troops for their war in Yemen, which is provided by both the Sudanese army and Hemeti's RSF. This engagement is well-paid, with the RSF estimated to earn several thousand US-dollars per combatant per month. Saudi Arabia's interests in Yemen are not only political. They feel that there is an existential threat to their territory that the Houthi rebellion could claim (Interview 7). Recent attacks by the Houthis on Saudi Arabia's territory add to this concern, as has UAE's disengagement from the Yemeni war in August 2019. The perception is that Saudi Arabia wants to match the Houthis in numbers, which can only be achieved by engaging a substantial Sudanese contingent. The respective alliance forged during the last stages of Bashir's rule ensures an appropriate supply of Sudanese troops. At the time of the deal, al-Burhan was the senior coordinating officer for the Sudanese Armed Forces. Meanwhile, Hemeti's RSF are seen as the major provider of lower-skilled manpower.

Saudi Arabia's influence over Sudanese politics is not played out in the public eye and happens without much acknowledgement or discussion on the Sudanese "street". The relationship is pursued in a closed door, "silent diplomacy" fashion. Saudi Arabia's ambassador is said to be highly active in Khartoum. In the few publicly known exchanges, Hemeti is known to have visited Riyadh, and a Friends of Sudan meeting was also held there. It is likely that Saudi Arabia has some common interest with Egypt in its growing competition with the UAE. Sudanese actors presently aim to avoid taking sides in this contestation but may be increasingly forced to do so in the upcoming future.

Saudi Arabia's involvement is certainly not motivated by a democratic Sudan. Although they expressed light criticism of the military takeover through statements of the Quad group – consisting of the United States, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – this was not felt to represent a genuine opposition to the military and was likely not taken seriously by the Burhan regime. Observers believe that the Sudanese military understands that Saudi Arabia cannot afford to genuinely distance themselves from them because of their dependence on Sudanese troops. Any such statement is seen as lip service (Interview 7).

The relationship between the Sudanese regime and the UAE is perceived as relating to the Sudanese gold trade, which is controlled by Hemeti and his family. The most important gold mines are located in Darfur and secured by the RSF, which is a significant conflict driver in the region, as well as a cause for mass displacement and tribal tensions (Interview 8, Interview 9). At the same time, the UAE are involved in Libya in support of Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) and facilitates military support for the LNA by Darfuri armed groups, especially the Darfuri signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement.

Other interests of the UAE are more opaque, with Sudanese actors believed to be acting as proxies in the competition between Saudi Arabia and the UAE. An important element is the UAE's quest to expand their influence over the Red Sea with the control of the ports and hence, the trade routes into the African interior. This ambition is met with fierce resistance by Saudi Arabia, which "will do anything to defend against Emirati investment in Sudan's port" (Interview 10). There are also speculations that the UAE are involved in a wider strategic game around Red Sea access, especially given Russia's interest to secure a naval base in Sudan and Ethiopia's vision of building a navy.

Publicly, the UAE take a light-touch approach in political communication. An exception to this approach emerged during the Juba peace negotiations, where they took a more present and visible stance compared with Saudi Arabia and regularly invited political players from all sides to the Emirates. The UAE were also openly supportive of the Sudanese occupation in al-Fashaga, allegedly because of land investments they are involved in in the region (Interview 11).

## The Islamist Agenda

Strong concern about the Muslim Brotherhood is a unifying factor for the Gulf countries as well as Egypt, and has guided their policies towards Sudan for decades. Both UAE and Saudi Arabia were supportive of al-Sisi's ousting of the Islamist Mursi government in Egypt, mainly as a precaution against potential religious radicalisation processes in their own countries. The relationship of the Gulf with the Bashir-regime has always been uneasy because of the same reasons.

Presently, the strong involvement of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE acts as the most solid regional firewall against the resurgence of radical Islamist forces in Sudan. The irony of this process is that al-Burhan and Hemeti are themselves products of the Bashir regime, and their constituency substantially involves elements of the former National Congress Party (NCP). Both al-Burhan and Hemeti would prefer to have a different social support base, but at present they need to have the at least ambivalent support of radical Islamists to maintain regime stability. Both are forced to play a difficult game in between the "kaizan" and their main regional supporters, which align in their rejection of Muslim Brotherhood politics.

## International Players Beyond the Region

The role of international players outside the regional context has become limited over recent years, even more so after the military coup of October 2021. The overt political influence of Western partners, aligned with the "Friends of Sudan" group and the Troika, has been inverse to the military rise in political power. Both the Friends of Sudan and the Troika condemned the military coup and applied some sanctions, but stopped short of applying substantial political and economic pressure.

While the US demands benchmark conditions for engaging with the military and the security sector, such as stopping the violence against civilian protestors, and all US foreign aid remains frozen, their capacity to productively shift the dial in this situation is limited. This is partly due to a rapid succession of special envoys and people responsible – currently, there is the third US Special Envoy engaged on the Sudan file in a period of less than one year (Donald Booth, Jeffrey Feltman, David Satterfield, each with a different portfolio). The first US ambassador to Sudan after the long years of the Bashir dictatorship has just started his tenure.

At the same time, regional stability – not just in the wider Horn, but also in the Middle East – are paramount for all Western actors. They favour engaging with the military to return to some form of transitional process, and avoiding fuelling further regional conflict in a situation where Ethiopia, Sudan's neighbour, is in a highly fragile situation itself. At the same time, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are seen as strategic partners for the US and the UK in the Arab region, notwithstanding their abysmal human rights and democracy record. All stakeholders are aware that without leveraging pressure on these actors, the regional environment for a democratic transition in Sudan will not become conducive. The US tried to exploit some internal differences in their activities towards Saudi Arabia within the Quad group, but these efforts remained limited to what observers have called "lip service" by the Gulf states (Interview 6).

In competition to Western influence, the role of Russia in Sudan has grown significantly over recent years, an engagement that has even increased since the start of the war in the Ukraine. Their relationship appears characterised by transactional exchanges around military and diplomatic support. The Russian private military company Wagner is providing training to the RSF (Interview 11), allegedly in exchange for access to the RSF-controlled gold mines in Darfur. Sudan's contribution to Russia's gold reserves is currently estimated at around 30 tonnes per year (Colins, 2022; Mihailov, 2022). Vice-President and RSF leader Hemeti visited Russia for eight days in February 2022 – in parallel to the Russian invasion of the Ukraine – and discussed plans for a Russian naval base at Sudan's coast (AfricaNews).

The strategic partnership between Sudan and Russia has been going on for some time, and seems to also be motivated by Russia's geostrategic interest to link their strong military engagement in the Central African Republic, Libya, and neighbouring states. Interviewees assumed that Sudan is already used by Wagner forces as a bridge from ports in Libya and the Sudanese Red Sea coast into the Central African Republic and further West, where Russia maintains an alliance with the military regime in Mali.

Diplomatically, the Russia-Sudan relations are also mutually beneficial. Russia's support for the Sudanese military regime in the UN Security Council is crucial, especially regarding questions of mandate and reporting by UNITAMS, both of which can be influenced by a friendly veto. Russia's veto power becomes significant in the renewal of the UNITAMS mandate, which gives it significant influence on the composition and the approach of the mission. Sudanese oppositional actors are conscious of how Russia's veto can be played to undermine the political legitimacy of the UN mission. In turn, Sudan remained officially neutral towards Russia's invasion in the Ukraine, with Vice-President Hemeti openly supporting the war. The Sudanese foreign ministry, however, subsequently denied official Sudanese support, which, again, points to severe political rifts between the leading proponents of the security apparatus (BBC, n.d.).

Turkey is another international power playing a relevant political role, albeit less direct and visible. It is said to play a significant role in pushing the Islamist agenda in Sudan, mainly through student loans and scholarships, in addition to supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, which, as an international political Islamic movement, plays an important role in Sudan's relation in the wider region. These actions are viewed with great suspicion in neighbouring countries, especially in Ethiopia (Interview 12). An additional role of Turkey is in harbouring members of the old regime and providing cover for their assets, which was mainly facilitated by the former Sudanese ambassador in Ankara, Yousif el Kordofani, a long-standing member of Bashir's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). There is ongoing speculation that NCP companies are being re-branded as Turkish in order to preserve old regime members' capital assets (Interviews).

The role of China, in contrast, appears to have substantially declined since the split of South Sudan and the associated loss of the majority of Sudanese oil reserves (Patey & Olander, 2021). China's interests are now mainly in maintaining regional stability, to not risk its substantial investments in Ethiopia and the engagement of Chinese companies in the South Sudanese oil business, and safeguarding minor economic endeavours, such as ongoing loans, in Sudan.

## The Multilateral Angle

Entry points for multilateral and regional organisation influence have diminished since the military coup of October 2021. IGAD, who is technically in charge of the Sudanese peace process, a responsibility it has deferred to South Sudan and its mediation commission, has been neutralised by Ethiopia's push for Sudan's then Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok to become the organisation's chair in November 2019. When Hamdok was then detained as a result of the coup, IGAD proved helpless in offering tangible mediation support. Recent considerations to appoint an IGAD Special Envoy to Sudan have not yet found traction (Sudan Tribune, 2022).

The two main multilateral actors active in supporting Sudan's fragile transition are presently UNITAMS and the African Union (AU). Both organisations are keen to present a picture of joint transitional support, as showcased by a joint press conference of UN Secretary General Guterres and the Chairman of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki, in New York on 1 December 2021 (Sudan Tribune, 2021). In this press conference, both supported the November 2021 deal between the military regime and Abdallah Hamdok that resulted in Hamdok's reinstatement and brief second stint as Prime Minister. However, the press conference was met with outrage by the Sudanese protest movement and sustained mistrust towards any UN-facilitated mediation initiatives.

The AU suspended Sudan's membership immediately after the military coup. In the first months, it has reacted to these events by carefully distancing themselves from the UNITAMS initiatives. While not openly critical of the UN, Moussa Faki visited Khartoum in February 2022 to explore possibilities of an AU mediation initiative, in addition to ongoing efforts by UNITAMS. The AU holds strong grievances at UNITAMS' prominence and their negotiations with the military junta and pursues a far more critical stance compared with the UN mission.

UNITAMS' role remains difficult and inextricably linked to regional and international power configurations. The figure of the Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG), Volker Perthes, has become increasingly contested among opposition actors and the "street", who accuse him of being – interchangeably – weak, incompetent, or aligned with the strategic interests of the military regime (Interviews). What contributes to his troubled public image is the contested nomination process with the UNSC, where he was the fourth candidate for the role after the top-three candidates were rejected by a Russian veto. Perthes' previous roles as UN Special Envoy to Syria and within the International Syria Support Group have also been met with increased scrutiny (Interview 13).



After Hamdok's resignation as Prime Minister in early January 2022, UNITAMS launched an initiative for political consultations among stakeholders, thereby aiming to support a Sudanese-led dialogue. This initiative met suggestions by the military regime in favour of a Sudanese national dialogue, suggestions, which, in turn, took up previous plans by armed opposition groups. The "street" met this initiative with rejection and protest, pointing towards UNITAMS' damaged credibility and calling into questions the mission's good faith towards the Sudanese democracy movement.

However eventually a considerable number of actors participated in the consultations, either by personal engagement or written statements. Among them was a number of Resistance Committees. UNITAMS has published a summary paper that provides an overview of the political positions raised in the process (UNITAMS, 2022). The findings reveal huge differences in positions and do not provide new entry points for political negotiations. The main success of the exercise undoubtedly was that it happened. In April 2022, despite this difficult relationship and AU's far more critical standpoint, UNITAMS, AU, and IGAD agreed on a joint mediation initiative to bring all relevant Sudanese stakeholders together. While the concrete success of the initiative cannot be evaluated at the time of writing, the agreement between the three multilateral mediation actors points towards the increasing pressure they have to work with – from all sides within Sudan and the main external actors as well. There is the expectation that the AU could bring more regional leverage into the mediation attempts, yet this is an uphill battle given the different external interests that strongly play into the Sudanese transition.

## Sudanese Perspectives on Regional Dynamics

### The Regional Dimension of Political Fragmentation

The fragmentation of the regional configuration finds its expression in fragmentation of Sudanese politics. The so-called "street", the protest movement organised by numerous Resistance Committees, is taking the political initiative for the opposition. The Resistance Committees have turned into a substantial legitimising force that are able to exert significant symbolic political power.

The protest movement's interpretation of regional involvement mainly focuses on Egypt, which is seen as the main supporter of the military regime and has been met with increasing hostility from the populace. Perceptions of broader international involvement centre on UNITAMS and the Troika countries. These are perceived sceptically as either aiming to legitimise the military regime (UNITAMS), or conversely, as being hypocritical towards democratic values because of their perceived weak support for the street's demands for civilian democracy and their limited pressure on regional forces, as a result of their focus on regional stability (Troika countries). The sentiments towards Egypt are particularly strong given Egypt's historic role in the colonisation of Sudan. Its support of the military coup is seen as a direct prolongation of this subjugation.

The fierce civilian opposition to Egyptian influence manifests itself in both social media and tangible action, for instance [the weeks-long blockade of the road to Egypt stopping the flow of Sudanese produce to Egypt](#). The blockade was a response to strong public perceptions of Egyptian influence in Sudan's politics and the coup, mingled with economic justification. The goods from Sudan, including raw cotton from Jazira, are supposedly being paid for in SDG and using "counterfeit money". Videos of gold trafficking and discovered counterfeit money were distributed widely (Interview 9). Protestors demand that if Egypt wants to buy Sudanese commodities, they should do so with hard currency.

Response from the Sudanese opposition movement towards Saudi Arabia and the UAE is less vocal, which is mainly ascribed to their silent and behind-the-scenes way of exerting political influence. Whereas the Egyptian influence is highly visible and public with a strong media presence that makes it easier to circulate news and form perceptions, the Gulf States prefer to keep their actions away from public attention. The regular travel of ordinary people between Egypt and Sudan and the historical reservations against Egyptian influence further contribute to the picture of Egypt in the singular role as regional enemy to the Sudanese democratic transition within the protest movement.

### Changing Discourses towards the “West”

The military component's survival strategies are substantially reliant on regional actors, especially Egypt and, to a lesser extent, the Gulf states. The military component is itself fragmented, with the private foreign diplomacy of Hemeti – especially towards Ethiopia, Russia, and the UAE – representing a substantial stumbling block to developing a joint position. Immediately after the military coup, the al-Burhan regime tried to attract international support, including from the West, by resorting to a discourse that was supportive of the democratic transition while simultaneously aiming to guarantee national and regional stability. Over the following months, which were characterised by growing street protests met with brutal response by security forces and stiff criticism by Western actors, the political strategy changed.

Now there is a growing narrative of “international interference”, promoted by the military regime and former NCP cadres alike. Paradoxically, this narrative is also shared by numerous more radical proponents of the protest movement, particularly from the political left, albeit for different reasons. Both sides accuse the “West”, a notion that often collates the “international community” and UNITAMS, as being hypocritical and selective in applying rights-based policy making. UNITAMS had to face counterdemonstrations from both regime supporters and the protest movement, both blaming the mission of either undermining the legitimate stabilisation strategy of the military or legitimising an illegal and violent military takeover.

The relevance of Western partners to political decision-making is perceived to be in decline by all sides within Sudan. Sudanese actors increasingly make their moves without international Western support. The practical impact of even strong reactions by the international community, such as the US criticism of the military coup, can be mitigated by relying on a regional network. Armed opposition groups are also looking less and less towards Washington, New York, or London when considering their options, and instead are focusing on regional powers.

*"During the struggle, the way groups listened to internationals was really different to now. Before, there would be big consideration given to the impact of decisions or policies on the western community; the western community were needed in terms of relations, support, supplies, mobility, to get more strength for pressure on government. They used to be a strong tool – used to be a big consideration, especially the US. But now we see that their influence is weak. They don't have an influence over peace actors – they don't have strong leverage to achieve what they want to achieve" (Interview 14).*

### The Question of Values

The Sudanese revolution from April 2019 saw the return of liberal values to the Sudanese political scene. Questions of transitional justice – culminating in the demand of extraditing the ousted dictator Omar al-Bashir to the International Criminal Court – of human rights application and the secularisation of laws, took centre stage. They were, in the beginning, also supported by the military component that negotiated the Transitional Constitutional Charter with the civilian opposition.

At present, liberal democratic principles such as human rights and electoral democracy see their main support from the "street" and the hold-out groups to the Juba Peace Agreement. Yet, the actions of the main Western actors regarding Sudan's democratic transition are perceived as contradictory or in conflict to the values that the "street" understands itself as fighting for. For example, the United States' and the UK's close relationship to Saudi Arabia, despite its abysmal human rights record, and the UK's failed attempts to engage in a strategic dialogue with the late Bashir regime, are both seen as hypocritical.

Recent initiatives by UNITAMS have been received especially critically by the protest movement, as the mission and the SRSG are seen as too focused on reaching a compromise with the military component. This is viewed as working towards a legitimisation of the military coup. UNITAMS is widely perceived within the protest movement as compromising on their demands and red lines. This impression of hypocrisy has become the main preoccupation of criticism directed against a "liberal West" that claims to promote democracy and human rights, but is not seen as supporting the Resistance Committees apparently for being "too revolutionary" (Interview 8).

After the military coup, liberal values have also seen a strategic backlash within the Sudanese political scene. The Transitional Military Council, despite sometimes evoking liberal elements such as a commitment to elections, is certainly not guided by a value-based agenda. At the same time, some of the traditional oppositional actors, such as the Umma Party and the Communist Party, are not supportive of economic liberalism and maintain a pragmatic relationship to liberal values. What adds to the challenges is that "Sudanese politics are still an old boys club" (Interview 7), which works against the implementation of a progressive agenda and the demands of the "street". The regional set-up, embedded in relational and transactional politics, is very much speaking to these still prevalent conditions.

## Conclusions

The tragedy of Sudan's twin transition is that none of the regional players that are able to exert substantial political influence – Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Ethiopia, and Turkey – are supportive of Sudan's revolution and prefer to align themselves with elements of the military rather than with civilian leadership. These regimes see democracy – and street protests in particular – as threatening to their positions with citizens at home. The model of electoral democracy is not favoured in the Horn of Africa and Middle East regions. Pro-democracy initiatives by Western powers are consequently limited. This in turn undermines the Troika's and the European Union Special Envoy's efforts to overcome political deadlock. As one interviewee put it, "Sudan is a platform where international agendas are played out" (Interview 15).

A long-term continuation of military leadership will leave a narrower space for Western players with an increasingly limited hand of incentives that resonate with the military. In this scenario, Western influence will continue to decline as regional players demonstrate greater willingness to consistently invest more politically, economically, and militarily. Despite several initiatives such as the Quad, the United States has shown a lack of continuity and persistence in their efforts, not the least caused by a quick succession of Special Envoys and other responsible staff. The crisis in Ethiopia drew a lot of diplomatic capacity and led to a relapse to stabilisation policies. During the peak of the Tigray crisis, the preference for stability over pursuing a democratic transition in Sudan was also prevalent among the traditional "liberal" actors.

Despite open criticism of the military takeover and attempts to convince the UAE and Saudi Arabia to take on a more critical stance through the Quad, the stabilisation approach remains dominant within the international community. This approach also shapes the political initiatives of multilateral actors, particularly UNITAMS. UNITAMS' focus on initiating a dialogue with the military has resulted in a severe loss of credibility by the "street", which still holds an uncompromising stance towards the military regime. The United States is either unable or unwilling to put substantial pressure on regional players, especially Egypt on whom the military elite rely, which leaves UNITAMS, the Troika, and the European Union stuck in a no-win situation. There is hardly any middle ground between favouring stability, and compromise with the military rulers and supporting a democratic transition. By trying to pursue both, UNITAMS, as well as the traditional "liberal" actors, have added legitimacy challenges to their already weakened political position.

A further complexity is that although the interests of regional players sometimes align and overlap, they hardly ever cohere into sustained contestation. For example, Russia, China, and Turkey are all interested in maintaining good relations with the military government, but they are mainly interested in regional stability and tactical cooperation, as are Ethiopia and the actors from the Gulf. The strongest concrete interests are largely transactional. They come from Saudi Arabia – military support for its conflict in Yemen – and the UAE – maintaining the gold trade and strategic land investments in various parts of Sudan. Among all actors, Russia seems to have the clearest geostrategic interest in Sudan, which becomes visible through its interest in Red Sea access through Sudan and, probably, maintaining a support line to Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic and, further, West Africa, where Russia pursues substantial military involvement.

The Sudan transition is an integrally regional affair. All actors feel the need to move forward with a transitional process despite the political deadlock, primarily to keep the situation in Sudan as stable and predictable as possible. While any advance along the democratisation agenda remains unlikely with the political positions between the military, the civil political opposition and the “street” being in deadlock, it seems likely that new attempts at peacebuilding will be undertaken. Fragmentation is the dominant condition: between the military, the armed militias formally supporting the military regime, those positioning themselves against it, and the civilian opposition. Nominal political differences are only one element of the political contestation in Sudan. What is more influential are the dynamics of the regional contestation, which is fluid, turbulent, and partly follows a political marketplace logic (de Waal, 2016).

This poses a challenge to regional actors. They have to choose their “horse” in the transitional process. The current military ruler, al-Burhan, feels this challenge as his only sustainable regional support comes from Egypt, which, in turn, has recently voiced concerns about becoming politically isolated regarding Sudanese affairs (Interview 16). Hemeti’s activities in Ethiopia are likely to have aggravated these worries.

The fragmentation of the regional environment is likely to remain one of the major factors impacting the Sudanese “twin transition”. With stability being the lowest common denominator between all regional players and international actors alike, the regional environment is not conducive for pursuing a democratic way forward. Stability is, however, threatened by the contestation between Egypt and Ethiopia, which directly plays out even within the Sudanese military. The consequences of the regional rift are also an opening that will strategically prevent the development of a unified military block.

Another challenge is the widening rift among the signatories of the Juba Peace Process between those who openly supported the military coup, such as JEM and SLM/A Minni Minnawi, and those who rejected a collaboration with the military regime. Some, having initially condemned the military coup have since softened their stance, such as the SPLM-N Agar, who now has a seat on the Sovereignty Council. The UNITAMS consultations can only represent this rift as it translates along the spectrum of full support to full dismissal of the Juba Peace Agreement. One of the few points of agreement appeared to be the need to include the two militarily relevant hold-out groups, the SPLM-N al-Hilu and the SLM/A Abdul Wahid (UNITAMS, 2022). A renewal of a power-sharing deal based on some amendment of the existing agreement may offer a way forward for the main regional players, which, in one way or another want the current situation to institutionalise in the form of a stabilising political framework. The likelihood of “liberal” and multilateral actors buying into such a way forward could make such initiative even more attractive.

The case of Sudan shows that competitive regionalism often results in stabilisation-focused approaches but does not favour democratic transition. Nevertheless, it prevents the transition process from becoming static. The political configuration remains turbulent, which provides openings for revolutionary moments, including the continuing street protests. The regional configuration shows that there is no middle ground for the revolutionary democratic movement in Sudan. Civilian opposition feel that they cannot rely on international partners. The democratic transition, necessarily unstable, risky, and fragile, does not align with the tactical interests of the Western powers and the United Nations, who favour regional stability. The transition process, therefore, needs to win a manifest power-struggle against the current political elites, which are deeply entrenched in regional interests, with little international support to succeed in achieving sustainable peace and democracy.



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