

*Follow-up
Papers*

*Sudan protests and the prospects of
change*

Omar Samir Khalaf



Arab Forum for Alternatives (AFA)
West House 3 Build., 2nd Floor Jeanne D'Arc Street, Hamra, Beirut, Lebanon, Olive
Grove offices.

Mail: info@afalebanon.org

Website: <http://www.afalebanon.org>

Twitter, Facebook: @AFAalternatives

Skype: arab.forum.for.alternatives

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOoJBExCeXW7bO5JMaSPd1Q>

Sudan protests and the prospects of change

Omar Samir Khalaf

Researcher- Arab Forum for Alternatives

Arab Forum for Alternatives (AFA): A think tank seeks to perpetuate the values of scientific thinking in Arab societies. It is working to address issues of political, social and economic development in the framework of the traditions and scientific rules. Away from the language of incitement and propaganda, in the framework of respect for political contexts and social systems, as well as universal human values.

It is working to provide space for the interaction of experts, activists and researchers interested in issues of reform in the Arab region, governed by scientific principles and respect for diversity. AFA is also keen to offer policy alternatives and the potential social, not just hoped for the decision maker and the elites of different political and civil society organizations, in the framework of respect for the values of justice and democracy.

The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of the author, and does not necessary reflect a position of AFA and any other partner institution.

Introduction:

Throughout its history, Sudan witnessed two successful revolutions, one in 1964 and another in 1986, and went through a number of incomplete democratic transitions. Under Bashir's 30-year rule, several uprisings erupted against his economic policies or his wars on several regions including Darfur or South Sudan. With the eruption of Arab Spring revolutions, limited student protests were staged on January 30, 2011 against corruption, price hikes, and the uncertainty of the country's future in the wake of South Sudan's secession. The protests mainly took place at the universities of Khartoum and Omdurman. Response to these protests was quite violent. Dozens of students were arrested, and several foreign journalists and correspondents of TV channels were prevented from covering the protests. The police had also warned earlier of staging any protests or attempting to oust the regime. Meanwhile, the ruling National Congress party accused the Popular Congress Party and leftist groups of inciting protests via the internet¹.

Other protests were staged in September 2013 and around 200 were killed, according to rights organizations². In early 2014, then President Omar al-Bashir called for a national dialogue, which did not achieve any of its goals since the regime refused to offer any concessions or to respond to the opposition's demand to postpone the 2015 elections until a new constitution is drafted and guarantees of free and fair elections are provided. Several participants in the national dialogue were arrested, such as former prime minister al-Sadek al-Mahdi, and opposition parties and armed groups boycotted presidential elections. In 2018, as the country suffered from a cash crisis and shortage of basic commodities, the ruling party amended its internal regulations to allow Bashir to run for another term in 2020³. On December 4, the parliament speaker announced that he received a letter signed by the majority of MPs (294 out of 481) that endorses a modification that extends presidential terms.

¹ "Police disperse Khartoum protests [Arabic]." *Al-Jazeera.net*. Jan. 30, 2011: <https://bit.ly/2HB3vMv>

² "Solidarity Commission's report on human rights violations in Sudan [Arabic]." *Sudanress*. Sep. 16, 2014: <https://www.sudaress.com/sudanile/72313>

³ "Ruling Sudanese party amends regulation to allow Bashir a third term in 2020 [Arabic]." *France 24*. Aug. 10, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2MN5g82>

This paper tackles the protests that erupted in Sudan in December 19, 2018 and led to the ouster of Bashir on April 11, 2019 and the signing of the Draft Constitutional Declaration and the Political Agreement for the transitional period on August 17, 2019.

The Sudanese people took to the streets on December 19, 2019 to protest high inflation rates, the government's decision to raise the price of bread by three times, fuel shortage, and low wages at state-run institutions in addition to the constitutional amendments that allowed Bashir to run for another term in 2020.

The Sudanese regime has always promoted the conspiracy theory after each wave of protests. However, the regime had waged war against most regions in the country and caused the budget to lose 90% of its resources since the secession of South Sudan as Bashir himself admitted⁴. Protests always started from Khartoum yet the recent ones started in the city of al-Qadarif in the east, Dongola in the north, and Atbara then expanded to different cities and villages all over Sudan. Even though security announced releasing all political detainees, several parties denied that this actually happened, and on January 31, 2019 the Sudanese Professionals' Association called for organizing a "grand march" in several states.

Bashir admitted in an interview with journalists that the economic situation and the emergency law are the reasons that drove youths to take to the streets and promised to release all journalists arrested during the protests⁵. However, the following day, the Sudanese Professionals' Association organized a rally in solidarity with the victims of detention and torture. This was mainly because the director of the Security and Intelligence Bureau had issued earlier a decree to release all those arrested during the protests, yet several political parties declared that dozens of its members are still in jail and that other senior members were arrested at a later stage⁶.

The cooperation between the ruling party and the state on one hand and religious institutions on the other hand was one of the main characteristics of Bashir's era. Many experts argue that the Council for National Salvation consolidated its power over the years and attempts at ousting it

⁴ "Sudanese president: We lost 90% of our budget after South Sudan seceded [Arabic]." *Al-Shorouk*, Jan. 28, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2B4fZX1>

⁵ "Bashir: The economy and the emergency law are the reasons for protests [Arabic]." *Sky News Arabia*, Feb. 2, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2GtcKMp>

⁶ "Arresting opposition leaders including al-Sadek al-Mahdi's daughter [Arabic]." *Russia Today Arabic*, Feb. 5, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2DgDKeU>

failed mainly because it managed to create a network of interests to which all state institutions were tied. The political vacuum that followed Bashir's ouster is likely to allow any faction that has enough power to dominate the currently fragile political scene, but which faction would be capable of doing so remains to be seen⁷.

Local powers divided over protests:

The protests in Sudan started on December 19, 2018 in response to raising the price of bread, deteriorating social and economic conditions, and an inflation rate that reached 66.8% in August 2018.⁸

Protestors called for Bashir and his government to step down and while political parties did not initiate the protests, they started shortly after to announce where they stand one after the other. The first parties to support the protests were the National Front for Change and the National Umma Party through a memo in which they called upon Bashir to step down and demanded the establishment of a transitional council. Both parties took part in the national dialogue and were part of the National Consensus Government. The Popular Congress Party, founded by the late Hassan al-Turabi, declared that it supports peaceful protests and demanded starting an investigation into the death of protestors. However, its positions on the ground seemed in line with the former ruling party, the National Congress. This led many youth movements to draft a memo that calls upon the Popular Congress to withdraw from the government.

The protests were supported by the Sudan Call Alliance that includes the National Umma Party, the Justice and Equality Movement, the Sudanese Congress Party, the Liberation of Sudan Movement, and other parties in addition to the National Consensus Forces that include the Sudanese Communist Party, the Baath Party, and the Sudanese Alliance, among other parties. The National Front for Change is in the process of joining the ranks of the opposition⁹.

In January 28, the Federal Umma Party split from the alliance. The party originally split from the National Umma Party, headed by al-Sadek al-Mahdi, and formed since its creation in 2004 an

⁷ "Professor Atta al-Hassan al-Bathani: The regime spent its reign in jihad and Islamic nationalism [Arabic]." *Al-Rakoba*, Dec. 2, 2017: <https://bit.ly/2RtYDbG>

⁸ "Inflation in Sudan hits record high in August [Arabic]." *CNN Arabic*, Sep. 16, 2018: <https://cnn.it/2HLIcHX>

⁹ "Bashir is politically and socially besieged: Parties withdraw their support and protests expand [Arabic]." Rawabet Center for Research and Strategic Studies, January 28, 2019: <https://rawabetcenter.com/archives/82710>

alliance with the ruling National Congress Party. This alliance earned the party several ministerial positions in the capital and different states. In the last government formed by Moataz Moustafa, the party got the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, three state ministerial positions, eight seats in the national parliament and 15 seats in state parliaments¹⁰.

The Sudanese Professionals' Association:

The Sudanese Professionals' Association was the entity most capable of representing the demands and aspirations of protestors. The association's Facebook page has the biggest number of supporters of the revolution. The association not only presents the demands of the people, but also determines the places where protests are to take place, offers medical and logistical support to protestors, and distributes statements and flyers. Through different committees, the association documents injuries and deaths among protestors. The Sudanese Professionals' Association called for staging a massive protest on December 25 to reach the presidential palace and submit a memo that calls upon Bashir to step down. The protest was violently suppressed, and protestors were dispersed, yet the association continued to organize protests, the most significant of which was the "grand march" on January 31¹¹.

Nonpartisan factions that oppose Bashir's rule include several professional groups such as doctors, teachers, and university professors. Students' protests against Bashir spread across different universities. Professors at Khartoum University launched an anti-Bashir campaign and 530 of them signed a memo calling for the president's ouster and the establishment of a transitional government¹².

In 2009, the "Girifna" group, Arabic for "we're fed up," was created. The group describes itself as a popular movement that aims at ousting the National Congress regime. The movement

¹⁰ "Divisions in the pro-Bashir alliance [Arabic]." *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 28, 2019: <http://bit.ly/2V1Pm10>

¹¹ Until January 31, 2019, the followers of the Sudanese Professionals' Association Facebook page exceeded 240 thousand and reached 640 thousand following Bashir's ouster. This is a large number in a country that is tightly controlled by security apparatuses. To follow the developments of protests, see the association's page: <https://www.facebook.com/SdnProAssociation/>

¹² "Protests staged by Khartoum University professors and initiative launched for a transitional government [Arabic]." *Al-Khaleej*, January 31, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2Bi4hIK>

campaigns for boycotting the 2010 and 2015 elections and took part in student protests staged across different universities in Sudan and a number of popular protests¹³.

The protests developed as they spread across different cities then culminated in the general strike on March 5. According to reports, almost 60% of the Sudanese people responded to strike calls¹⁴. Protests intensified after the strike and protestors became more adamant on having their demands met and it was at that time the idea of the “grand sit-in” started. The sit-in took place in the capital on April 6 and lasted till April 11 when Bashir was ousted.

Since the protests started, a large segment of protestors hoped they could have the army on their side. This seemed quite unlikely until protestors staged the April 6 sit-in front of the army headquarters, On April 8, security forces tried to disperse the sit-in, yet army officers clashed with them and the sit-in remained¹⁵. As of that moment, the army’s stance seemed ambiguous for while many protestors chanted that the army is on their side as a result of actions done by individual soldiers and officers, the army did not issue any official statement. The Sudanese Professionals’ Association and several political parties called for more people to join the sit-in in front of the Ministry of Defense to put pressure on the government and on April 11 Bashir did step down. Revolutionaries and analysts differed over the army’s stance on the revolution. Some argued that the army planned a coup against Bashir and took advantage of people’s calls for a transitional civilian government as stated in the statement issued by the Forces of Freedom and Change. This group saw Bashir’s ouster as an internal coup carried out by vice president and defense minister Awad Ibn Auf¹⁶.

Ibn Auf’s announcement—which included ousting Bashir, suspending the constitution, declaring a state of emergency, disbanding the presidency, the national parliament, and state parliaments, and establishing a two-year military transitional council—was not welcome by the Forces of Freedom and Change. Before Bashir’s ouster, Auf’s speeches were hostile to protestors. Auf also

¹³ For more information on “Girifna,” see the movement’s website: <https://girifna.com/>

¹⁴ *Mada Masr*: <http://bit.ly/2vqmq3I>

¹⁵ “Video: Sudanese army prevents security forces from dispersing the Defense Ministry sit-in in Khartoum [Arabic].” August 4, 2019: <http://bit.ly/2WfIs4L>

¹⁶ “Sudan uprising: Internal complications and external polarization [Arabic].” The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, April 17, 2019: <http://bit.ly/2GKcfw9>

has an international arrest warrant issued against him in relation to crimes he committed in Darfur. This led protestors to insist on continuing the strike until all the demands listed in the statement issued by the Forces of Freedom and Change are met. On top of these demands was the transfer of power to a civilian council. Auf had to cave in on April 12 and resigned as head of the Transitional Military Council and appointed Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the general inspector of the Sudanese Armed Forces, in his place.

The Forces of Freedom and Change witnessed remarkable organizational development whether in terms of managing protests or leading negotiations with the Military Transitional Council. The alliance offers a model for collective leadership of opposition factions in a manner that makes it hard for any entity to tarnish its image or accuse it of treason. The intervention of the army was met with relief conditioned upon the army's seriousness in handing power to civilians. Despite this relief, members of the Forces were apprehensive as a result of statements about dispersing the sit-in, removing roadblocks, and restoring normalcy. The Transitional Military Council started its rule with asserting its role in countering chaos and restoring stability and its meetings with different regional powers were closely followed by protestors across Sudan. The council's statements were understood to be an attempt at containing the revolution and presenting army procedures as significant.

The Transitional Military Council formed the Political Committee under the leadership of Omar Zein al-Abedin to become the channel through which the council can communicate with the Forces of Freedom and Change. The first meeting between the committee and the Forces took place on April 13 and the latter submitted three demands: forming a civilian presidential council where the military is to be represented, a civilian cabinet that handles executive powers, and a legislative council in which different segments of the Sudanese society are represented. The committee did not specify a time to respond to those demands. In fact, Zein al-Abedin referred to other proposals submitted by entities that remained part of the regime until right before its ouster and even suggested that they can take part in the transitional period. The forces saw this as an attempt to reproduce the old regime and decided on April 21, 2019 to suspend talks with the political committee of the Transitional Military Council¹⁷.

¹⁷ For the full statement issued by the Forces of Freedom and Change on April 21, see the Sudanese Professionals' Association Facebook page: <http://bit.ly/2WkJOXr>

The Transitional Military Council responded slowly and partially to protestors' demands. In the speech he delivered on April 13, al-Burhan promised establishing a civilian consensus government, starting dialogue with different factions, ending the curfew, releasing all detainees under the emergency law, and disbanding all political parties, yet asked the Sudanese people to go back to their normal lives¹⁸. This was considered an indirect call for ending protests and the sit-in. The council also tried to give the impression that the Forces are always demanding more than what is possible so that the council would seem to be responding to the majority of protestors' demands. Three council members did not approve and resigned immediately and a joint committee was formed on April 24 to address issues of contention. However, the council did not address the main demands put forward by protestors such as immediate transfer of power to civilians and forming a civilian sovereignty council in which the military is represented. Instead, the council focused on, or rather started, disagreements over the ratio of civilians to the military in the joint committee it proposed.

It took the council three months to reach an agreement, which was seen as an attempt by the army to win protestors to its side and consolidate its power. Despite calls for ending the rule of the military, the council still managed to maintain a balance that was, technically at least, in its favor. The agreement stated that the Sovereignty Council is to be made up of 11 members: four civilians to be nominated by the Forces of Freedom and Change, and five from the military, and the 11th member is to be chosen by both civilians and the military. According to the agreement, the Forces are to choose the prime minister while the military is to appoint the ministers of defense and interior¹⁹.

Several articles in the agreement were met by reservation on the part of the Sudanese Communist Party and armed groups, the most important of which was that the military would keep their political and security leverage through having the right to appoint the ministers of defense and interior while civilians would be consulted on other ministers. They also objected that the agreement did not include the details of the peace process and the issue of displacement, did not

¹⁸ "Breaking: Important decrees by transitional council chairman Abdel Fattah al-Burhan [Arabic]." *Al-Sudan al-Yaum*, April 13, 2019: <http://bit.ly/2GSR2kM>

¹⁹ For the Constitutional Declaration and the Political Agreement, please see the Sudanese Professionals' Association website: <http://bit.ly/30ECzk1>

give the government real power, and did not disband the Rapid Support Forces. The agreement, they argued, basically maintained the interests of the former regime²⁰.

Regional and international reactions to Sudanese protests:

Omar al-Bashir was not affected by the Arab Spring, but that was mainly because of the repercussions of the uprisings in several countries after 2013, particularly the eruption of armed conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. Bashir used those developments to instill fear into his people of a similar fate if they start an uprising and promoted his regime as the only guarantee of stability.

Many analysts saw that even after the recent protests, Bashir would remain in power and that speculations over his ouster were not realistic. They argued that Bashir was staying for the longest time possible since he was still the strongest party in the Sudanese political scene which he managed to fully control. For them, external pressure would hardly constitute a threat for Bashir, especially after he managed to take advantage of regional and international contradictions. Sudan's international status changed remarkably with the change of American and European policies in the region as major world powers chose to focus on their interests in the region and their own national security. Sudan, therefore, was better off with Bashir in power since he maintained the country's stability and prevented the recurrence of disastrous scenarios that negatively affected the security of Western countries. Stability took precedence over what many considered the illusion of democracy. Bashir had also vowed to improve the living standards of his people and not to lift subsidies on flour and fuel in the future, which made containing the protests without making substantial changes possible after all²¹.

Others saw that the recent protests were different from previous ones since they were more spread across the country, larger numbers took part in them, and they lasted for a long time. Meanwhile, the ruling party was getting weaker and less organized. True Bashir was not being pressured by external powers, but neither was he supported by those powers and many countries in the region were not willing to pay the price of him staying longer even if they seemed to be his allies. Even in Egypt, Bashir was seen as an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood rule by both official and

²⁰ Taj al-Serr Osman. "The revolution is reborn [Arabic]." The Sudanese Communist Party website, Aug. 24. 2019: <http://bit.ly/30GKQUo>

²¹ Ahmed Askar. "Possible scenarios: How the Sudanese regime manages popular protests [Arabic]." The Future Center for Advanced Research and Studies, Dec. 26, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2Uyys5B>

nonofficial circles²² and Egypt did not generally play a major role in the domestic affairs of its neighboring countries. In addition, the violent suppression of protests by security forces was an essential factor in intensifying opposition against Bashir and increasing the number of people that want him ousted.

While regional powers did not play a role in ousting Bashir, they did take part in the post-Bashir arrangement. Saudi Arabia declared its support for the Transitional Military Council and the procedures it announced with no mention of Bashir's fate. It also promised an aid package that includes wheat and oil products and welcomed appointing Abdel Fattah al-Burhan as chairman of the council²³. The UAE welcomed Bashir's ouster as another blow dealt at political Islam and saw the protests as an uprising against the long military rule of the Muslim Brotherhood²⁴.

Sudan's relationship with the United States had been tense throughout most of Bashir's rule. The US declared a state of emergency in Sudan for the first time on November 3, 1997, which allowed then President Bill Clinton to impose economic sanctions on Sudan for terrorism and human rights violations on the following day. Based on those sanctions, George W. Bush issued decree number 13400 on April 26, 2006 to prohibit transactions with figures involved in the Darfur conflict. Bashir's regime helped intensify this tension for many reasons, on top of which were Osama bin Laden's presence in Sudan in the 1990s and a military incursion the Sudanese government conducted in Darfur. The latter, labelled a genocide by Washington, led to referring Bashir's file to the International Criminal court, which in turn issued two arrest warrants against Bashir, the first in 2009 and the second in 2010²⁵. The economic sanctions remained in place and were only loosened up with the coming to power of Donald Trump. It was then that the relationship between the US and Sudan started improving gradually. On October 6, 2017, Trump annulled economic

²² Several Egyptian intellectuals and politicians signed a statement expressing their solidarity with the protests in Sudan and activists launched a hashtag called "Sudan is rising."

²³ Deutsche Welle Arabic, April 13, 2019: <http://bit.ly/2VkJlNy>

²⁴ "Anwar Gargash: After Bashir's ouster, the UAE reveals the main reason for the Sudan crisis [Arabic]." *Sputnik Arabic*, May 5, 2019: <http://bit.ly/2ZRTWxE>

²⁵ For more info about referring the Darfur case to the International Criminal Court, see the Case Information Sheet on the court's website, March 23, 2012: <https://bit.ly/2GaNrhZ>

sanctions imposed on Sudan since 1997, yet sanctions against individuals, imposed by Bush in 2006, remain in place ²⁶.

For Russia, Sudan is not as important as Syria with the latter housing Russia's only naval base in the region. However, Bashir used Russian security expertise to suppress the protests ²⁷. He also tried to garner Russian and Iranian support for his regime through visiting Syria and posing as the first Arab leader to lead a reconciliation initiative with the Syrian regime since Syria's Arab League membership was suspended.

It was not in the Sudanese regime's best interest to seek foreign intervention since this further proved its weakness and led many factions to question its patriotism. That is why news of a possible Russian intervention increased support for the protests against the regime. In all cases, this intervention was not likely to materialize since neither Bashir's regime nor the transitional council is able to pay for Russia's services.

Relations between China and Sudan have always been strong, yet they got remarkably close during Bashir's rule. China is an important trade and economic partner of Sudan and both Chinese and Malaysian oil companies enabled Bashir to extract and export oil in South Sudan before its secession in defiance of the US and the Western countries. According to several reports, China is one of Sudan's biggest arms exporters. China also cancelled Sudan's national debts ²⁸. China, however, dealt with Arab Spring uprisings in an extremely cautious and pragmatic manner. China generally supports the winner in such cases and is not involved in supporting particular regimes, but rather focuses on protecting its economic interests even at times of conflict. This is demonstrated in the continuation of Chinese oil investments in South Sudan despite the civil war.

Regional reactions to Sudan's protests varied. Qatar supported Bashir at an early stage of the protests and the Sudanese regime received a one-billion-dollar aid from Qatar to alleviate the economic crises. Qatar's support for Bashir meant lack of support on the part of Saudi Arabia and UAE, especially that throughout the crises that erupted between countries in the Gulf region, Sudan was always seen as a member of the Qatar-Turkey alliance. Saudi Arabia and the UAE also viewed

²⁶ "A new American decree against Sudan [Arabic]." *Sputnik Arabic*, Nov. 1, 2017: <https://bit.ly/2HItKAr>

²⁷ "Sudan protests: Russian trainers help government forces [Arabic]" Jan. 28, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2FTygdL>

²⁸ "China cancels Sudan's debts till 2015 [Arabic]." *Sky News Arabia*, Sep. 14, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2RvZdFH>

Bashir as a representative of political Islam that they are both fighting and the case of Egypt proved that Qatar's support for an Islamist regime is not enough to keep it in power especially when faced with a faction allied to the Saudi-UAE camp.

On the other hand, depending now on the Saudi-UAE camp does not necessarily yield the desired results. This is demonstrated in the case of Yemen where a Gulf-led military alliance has been trying to protect the legitimacy of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi since 2015 and still most cities in the countries are out of the government's control. In fact, Gulf countries' long involvement in the Yemen conflict and the international backlash they are getting for destroying the country's infrastructure and for the resulting humanitarian crises are all factors that make it seem unlikely for those countries to offer more than economic support for the Transitional Military Council. However, there has so far been no signs of economic support and protests against the council's procrastination in meeting protestors' are increasing.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt are likely to be coordinating together to contain the protest movement in Sudan in the aftermath of Bashir's ouster. True, most Arab regimes were not willing to invest in Bashir himself for longer, yet they are willing to keep the main pillars of Bashir's regime in place through making sure that the military and security apparatuses remain in control. That is why those countries would want to support the Transitional Military Council. In fact, the council's first meeting were with Saudi and Emirati officials while Egypt sent a senior security delegation to meet with members of the council ²⁹. Egypt's intervention was met with strong reactions on the part of revolutionary factions whether on social networking websites or through protests staged in front of the Egyptian embassy in Khartoum. In both cases, revolutionaries warned of the Egyptian scenario where the revolution is stalled through the reproduction of totalitarianism and military rule.

Several countries in the region are trying to keep the Transitional Military Council in power as long as possible. This is particularly demonstrated in attempts to extend the deadline given to the council by the African Union's Peace and Security Council and which originally stipulated transferring power to civilians within 15 days or Sudan would risk having its membership at the union suspended. Egypt, for example, tried to get a three-month extension that could be renewed

²⁹ "Senior Egyptian delegation visits Sudan, asserts support for people's choice [Arabic]." *Al-Ahram Newspaper*, April 17, 2019: <http://bit.ly/2JbvG3V>

and the council thanked both Egypt and Saudi Arabia for their efforts to make this happen³⁰. The union eventually agreed to give the council 60 days.

The contradiction of Arab interests in Sudan could hinder full coordination between countries in the region. Egypt wants to support the council to control the transitional period yet is concerned about the alliance between the council and Islamist factions from Bashir's regime and which aims to portray the revolution as a rejection of political Islam only rather than an uprising against the alliance between political Islam and the military to control the political scene. In fact, several military officials met with preachers and religious scholars and this was followed by calls for a rally to support Islamic laws, hence turning the protests from a revolution against oppression in the name of religion to one against religion and the Islamic identity. Those calls for rallies to support the Islamic identity of Sudan aim at creating a chaotic situation in which the military can intervene and restore normalcy, hence gaining a new form of legitimacy based on maintaining security and getting to stay till the end of the two years specified in its first declaration.

Gulf countries, on the other hand, are mainly interested in keeping Sudanese ground forces in Yemen. The chairman of the Transitional Military Council announced the council's commitment to the agreement according to which Sudanese forces take part in the Yemeni conflict despite increasing criticism among revolutionaries and the Sudanese people in general. The chairman also vowed to protect the interests of Gulf countries in Sudan even though popular protests demonstrated the Sudanese people's objection to those very interests and to Saudi and Emirati intervention and protestors expelled Emirati aid vehicles from the sit-in. Several UAE research centers admitted that developments in Sudan are too fast to make it possible to predict the future of the country and that what has been achieved so far would not solve the problem since protesters are now aware of their ability to effect a real change³¹.

It is noteworthy that all powers that have a stake in Sudan eventually accepted the change brought about by protests and the agreement different Sudanese factions reached under Ethiopian- African mediation. This was demonstrated in the presence of several foreign officials in the signing of transitional documents. Those included South Sudanese President Salva Kiir, Chadian President

³⁰ See the April 21 televised interview with Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, chairman of the Transitional Military Council on Sudan's You Tube channel: <http://bit.ly/2WdnqUt>

³¹ "Sudan after the agreement between the military council and the Freedom and Change Forces [Arabic]." Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, April 27, 2019: <http://bit.ly/2XPWmuM>

Idriss Déby, Central African President Faustin-Archange Touadéra, Egyptian Prime Minister Moustafa Madbouli, Qatari Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad al-Marikhi, foreign ministers of Turkey, Bahrain, and other countries, and representatives of the United Nations, the Arab League, and the African Union³².

Conclusion:

It could be said that developments that took place in Sudan before Bashir's ouster were initiated and controlled by internal powers while this is not necessarily the case in the post-Bashir era. Regional intervention, especially by Gulf countries, is expected to focus on supporting the very pillars of Bashir's regime. However, it is not clear how this would happen without coordination between Gulf countries and in the light of the dispute with Qatar and the failure of Kuwaiti efforts to resolve it. The situation gets more complicated by the fact that Bashir's regime was originally supported by the Qatar-Turkey camp.

Reactions of the Transitional Military Council to protests, sit-ins, and calls for strike played a major role in the developments that took place following Bashir's ouster. The 2011 uprisings in different Arab countries demonstrate that the violent repression of protests could increase popular support for protestors and make change more possible or could turn peaceful protests into violent ones and render the transition of power complicated. The latter scenario was illustrated in the cases of Syria, Libya, and Yemen and could lead to an extremely complicated situation in the Sudanese context with the dominance of tribal culture and the influence of armed groups.

The dialogue in Sudan needs to develop in a way that makes political parties and alliances and civilian groups the main negotiators in the talks with the army. This depends to a great extent on the role the Sudanese Professionals' Association would play in this dialogue and which could be similar to that of the Tunisian General Labor Union.

The fragile post-Bashir economic situation and the council's procrastination in transferring power to civilians further complicates the Sudanese political scene and makes all scenarios possible. That is why if the council does not reach an agreement with the main political players, the consequences can be grave.

³² "Transitional agreement signed by military council and revolutionary leaders in Sudan [Arabic]." *France 24*, Aug. 17, 2019: <http://bit.ly/2ZxFhum>

The Islamist initiative to hold a rally on April 29 in support of Islamic laws did not yield fruit, yet counter-revolutionary powers continue to count on keeping the Transitional Military Council in power despite objections by revolutionary factions. Even though Freedom and Change Forces used different channels to counter such attempts including protests, strikes, sit-ins, direct control of syndicates, and attempts at controlling municipal councils, the danger of undermining the revolution is still there. Added to this is the fact that revolutionary factions might be held accountable for any failure in the negotiations with the council, which is expected to decrease the credibility of the revolution on the popular level and lead the Sudanese people to lose faith in the possibility of change altogether.

The duration of the transitional period remains a problem. There are concerns that the Transitional Military Council would manage to consolidate its power whether through buying more time before transferring power to civilians or allowing figures of Bashir regimes to come back to the scene. This leads to the question of who runs the transitional period and how influential the council is compared to revolutionary forces. The economic situation needs to be taken into consideration in the light of ongoing debates over restructuring the economy so that major problems such as unemployment, inflation, poverty, and shortage of basic commodities are solved. It is also important to focus on crucial issues that need to be determined during the transitional period such as the constitution, the parliament, the status of the military and figures from the former regime, and restructuring security apparatus and the bureaucratic and administrative system.

The agreement reached so far might not be ideal for all revolutionary factions, yet they had to accept it in order to reach the closest balance possible. It is impossible for revolutionary powers to undermine the influence of the military right away, yet at the same time the military were unable to undermine the revolution. Sudan is likely to reach a resolution that is similar to that of Tunisia where political and civil freedoms are protected and security apparatuses restructured while the economic and social interests of the former regime are kept.