
STPT Monitor

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This Monitor is intended as an overview of key developments in Sudan over the last two months along with our analysis of why it matters to inform and engage public opinion and Sudan watchers.

1 Light at the End of the Tunnel



Photo by Ayin

With pressure mounting from internal forces, leading among them FFC-1, regional, and international partners, Burhan and Hemeti, who have been at each other's throats for weeks, stepped back from the brink and engaged in a series of meetings with the Framework Agreement civilian signatories to expedite the progress towards the finalization of the political process and the

launch of the new transitional institutions by April 11. The agreements foretold consensus among the military establishment and Framework Agreement signatories on the contentious issue of security sector reform (SSR). Let us hope things move to the conclusion of the political process to transform all the tensions in the political arena into positive energy during the next phase of the transition.

Daunting challenges will remain, not least the dire security and humanitarian crises, the crushing impact of the failing economy, and the huge undertaking of shoring up the democratic transition against spoilers, armed and political alike. Approaches must be found for responsibly accommodating the expectations of some in the breakaway Democratic Bloc to broaden the inclusivity of the current processes.

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Sudan Transparency and Policy Tracker

Photo credits: 1. Ay'in; 2. Sudan Tribune, taken by Abu Akla Kikel, 3. Consultation organizers



2 The Battle for Khartoum Will Not Take Place

This turn of events could not have come at a more appropriate moment. On Thursday night March 9, Khartoum was beset by myriad roadblocks and rumors of an imminent second coup or open confrontation between the RSF and army. There was no lack of other doomsayers as the public apprehension of imminent armed clashes between the SAF and RSF grew in February and March. Social media platforms manipulated by actors suspected to be former Bashir regime loyalists and operatives sought to beat genuine concerns about that prospect to a frenzy by displaying videos of parading SAF and RSF fighters shouting battle cries. Old video statements by the feuding generals were displayed out of context to imply that they were talking about the current tensions.

Sudanese breathed a sigh of relief following the meeting on March 11 between the Sudan Armed Forces' (SAF) general commander Lt.-Gen. Abdel Fatah Al-Burhan, and Lt.-Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemeti), the commander of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Sudan's *de facto* parallel army. The two generals agreed to set up a security committee including both of their forces and those of the armed movements who have signed the Juba Peace Agreement to monitor the security situation and resolve issues as they arise. They also renewed their commitment to staying the course leading to the conclusion of a final political agreement they initiated in the December Framework Agreement together with the prodemocracy opposition Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC-1) and other political and civic actors. That agreement dictates the end of the coup regime, the withdrawal of the military from politics, and empowers civilian control of the executive and legislative under a civilian sovereign entity. Security agencies would be represented in a national security and intelligence council chaired by the prime minister.

In the weeks and days leading to the encounter, top commanders of the SAF and RSF traded coded statements threatening one another as the underlying tensions between the two rivals bubbled to the surface. At issue is the timeline for the integration of the RSF into the army stipulated in the Framework Agreement. Burhan and the army's top three commanders appeared to suggest that their signature of the final agreement was conditional on the prior agreement on an accelerated integration of the RSF during the two-year transition. Their statements, often made in military bases before cheering soldiers, or during social gatherings, such as collective weddings, became more strident over time, but the audience underscored the absence of a genuine political constituency for the generals. Hemeti and his older brother, Lt.-Gen. Abdelrahim Dagalo, the RSF second in command, are reportedly thinking of a decade's timeline at minimum, and taunted their SAF counterparts equally before limited audiences as seeking to "cling to power."

Burhan and the army's top generals gave the RSF commanders an easy political win by appearing readying to renege on their signature on the Framework Agreement if their conditions for "broadening the base" of the agreement and an expedited integration of the RSF were not met. This allowed Hemeti and Abdelrahim to pose as the defenders of the transfer of power to civilians and the champions of democratic change. In fact, their position is more indicative of the imperatives of the political survival of their clan in the highest echelons of military and political control. Both power positions are necessary to preserve the Dagalo family's business interests,

which build on the security and political clout of the RSF. The economic hegemony carried over during the first phase of the post-Bashir transition, as Hemeti boasted about lending money to the Central Bank of Sudan and the government of Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok.

For the opposition FFC-1, Burhan's conditionality of "broadening the base" of the Framework Agreement is synonymous with diluting the broad understandings to which the military had committed by forcing them to accept political actors and Darfur armed movements members of the rival FFC-Democratic Bloc in the next government. Bloc members paved the way to the October 2021 coup by calling on the military to take power as a short cut for resolving their political differences with the mainstream FFC-1. The latter have insisted that only the signatories to the JPA, and the DUP leader Gafara El-Mirghani would be welcome.

International facilitators and mediators of the Tripartite Mechanism (of the African Union, IGAD, and the United Nations) and the Quad (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States) who helped the parties to the Framework Agreement get to a yes, spent considerable effort to keep the political process on track. Egypt, on the other hand, made one attempt after the other to keep the army in a position of control of the new transition, with a fig leaf of civilian governance, including by inviting a host of sympathetic Democratic Bloc members and other political actors to Cairo to solidify their ranks behind Burhan.

As the Cairo Declaration fell flat, Mini Minawi, Mubarak al-Fadil al-Mahdi, Mubarak Ardol, and other Democratic Bloc figures took to the air to accuse the FFC-1 of leveraging the Hemeti's position to their advantage and warn of a disastrous outcome if Framework Agreement signatories proceeded without figures of the Democratic Bloc retaining and acquiring positions of influence in the new political dispensation. That seems to be the primary concern of Finance Minister and head of the Justice and Equality Movement Jibril Ibrahim, and of Darfur Regional Governor Mini Minawi, who would likewise want to remain in that position and maintain one of his top aides as the Minister of Minerals.

The March 11 meeting contributed to diffuse the tensions, real and engineered, of urban warfare in the capital and beyond. However, polarization between the FFC-1 and allied signatories of the Framework Agreement and the Democratic Bloc barons remains as disruptive as it has always been.

3 Saber Rattling is Developing into a National Obsession

Against a backdrop of heightened rivalry between the SAF and RSF and the environment of power vacuum that the coup regime created, several new regional and ethnically based militias emerged in Sudan's already over-militarized society. The two rivals appear to have sought to increase their ranks in preparation for an eventual showdown. According to media reports, former officials of the Bashir regime were hard at work behind



the scenes throwing oil on the embers with the aim of sabotaging the ongoing political process and reclaiming power.

In mid-March, Mahmoud Madibo, the paramount chief of the Rezeigat people in eastern Darfur state, denounced large-scale recruitment campaigns of Darfur's tribesmen, which he said were underway in the region. He accused "intelligence services" of enlisting the youth to further their own political ambitions at the risk of fueling intertribal conflict in the region and called on recruiters and those behind them to desist.¹ Madibo, a Rezeigat, is known to have strongly supported Hemeti in October 2022, after it became clear that the SAF was trying to sideline the RSF commander. Since then, local reports have pointed to the involvement of the SAF in attempts to recruit followers of Hemeti's historic rival Musa Hilal, the Rezeigat chief and militia commander, to revive the rival Border Guards Corps that Hemeti integrated into the RSF after defeating Hilal in 2018.^{2,3} The UN Panel of Experts reported that the SAF recruitment drive was responding in kind to Hemeti's.

The prominence of the concessions given to the JPA signatory movements in national power and wealth-sharing arrangements during the first phase of the transition that continued in the post-coup caretaker government fueled growing resentment across other regions. Failure to integrate the JPA movements' forces into SAF in a timely way left these forces unbridled, roaming with weapons and machinery in other regions and recruiting youth in areas far away from the ones they rose to defend.

In November 2022, several retired senior SAF officers launched "the Homeland Entity," a freshly minted political and armed movement that purports to defend the interests of greater northern, central, and eastern regions of Sudan. Top on the agenda of the group is the cancelation of the JPA and greater equity in the allocation of power and wealth among all regions, not just Darfur. Touting an almost identical program, the "Sudan Shield Forces," established in December also by retired SAF officers, recruited hundreds in the Butana region of central Sudan and sought to extend its political mobilization and military recruitment into the East Nile suburbs of Khartoum.⁴ In both areas, traditional leaders and community organizations denounced the attempts to re-tribalize and militarize their regions. Not to be outdone, Sheba Dirar, the leader of an alliance of political parties and movements in eastern Sudan and commander of the alliance's militia, also called for abandoning the JPA and giving the east its fair share in power and national wealth. Dirar later donned a uniform of senior SAF commander and displayed to the media a range of self-appointed generals in SAF uniforms.

All three regional militia leaders stated in the media they were "against militias" in Sudan, had no quarrel with the army, and professed readiness to integrate into the SAF, but not before the JPA movements did so. All expressed hostility to the JPA

¹ Sudan Tribune, "Rizeigat paramount leader rejects recruitment among his tribesmen in Darfur," March 16, 2023, available at: <https://sudantribune.com/article271945/>

² For background on the Hilal-Hemeti rivalry, see: Suliman Baldo, "Mus Hilal's "Awakening: the Government of Sudan's Worst Nightmare?", a brief for Democracy First Group, 20 April, 2015, available at: <https://democracyfirstgroup.org/2015/04/20/musa-hilals-awakening-the-government-of-sudans-worst-nightmare/>

³ See also Suliman Baldo, "Ominous Threats Descending on Darfur," an Enough Project Report, November 2017, available at: https://enoughproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/OminousThreatsDarfur_Nov2017_Enough1.pdf

⁴ Sudan Tribune, "Central Sudan's new armed group of Al-Butana region," December 22, 2022, available at: <https://sudantribune.com/article268570/>

and saw the concessions made to the signatory armed movements as coming at the cost of the entitlements of their own regions to the benefit of natural resources therein.

The coup authorities' tolerance and soft response to the new militias sharply contrasted with the extreme violence they used for months and years to suppress the regular peaceful protests of the pro-democracy youth movement in the capital and across Sudan. This accommodating treatment is seen as evidence of the attempts of the SAF brass, reportedly encouraged by Burhan and former Bashir regime officials, to disrupt the political process, despite SAF's engagement in that process.

The media and opinion writers regularly denounce coup authorities' apparent tolerance of the often-criminal conduct of one JPA signatory movement in particular, Tamazuj - the Third Faction. A well-documented investigative report aptly titled "Sudan: Trade in military ranks: Militia chaos infiltrate the Sudanese army," displayed evidence of the sale of military ranks, ID cards, and uniforms, by members of Tamazuj in Khartoum and beyond.⁵ In a recent incident, heavily armed members of Tamazuj surrounded and threatened to storm one of Khartoum's largest police stations to free Tazuj self-appointed generals found circulating in a vehicle without plate numbers. The police hierarchy ordered the suspects released to avoid a gun battle in the heart of the capital. Both Hemeti and other Darfur armed movements signatory of the JPA have distanced themselves from Tamazuj and stated or hinted that the group was a creation of SAF's Military Intelligence Department.⁶

Addressing a rally on March 21 in North Kordofan's locality Umsayala, Burhan appealed to tribal leaders to intervene promptly to prevent and resolve conflict, seemingly seeking to distance the military from any responsibility for the alarming proliferation of militias and the distribution of weapons to civilians. The record of the SAF since the beginning of the North-South civil war in the mid-1980s and that of the RSF from its creation in 2013 show that the two forces were and remain key drivers of reckless arming of tribal fighters across Sudan and subsequently abandoning them to their own devices. The planned security sector reform in Sudan must have as key components the demobilization and disarmament of all tribal militias and paramilitary forces.

⁵ Afrique, "Sudan: Trade in military ranks... Militia chaos infiltrate the Sudanese army," September 6, 2022, in Arabic, available at: <https://www.afrique2050.net/2022/09/06/-تجارة-الرتب-العسكرية-فوضى-المليشيات/>

⁶ For a full account and analysis of the incident, see Prof. Abdallah Ali Ibrahim, "The nation's horrified opinion: separating weapons from politics. Uncontrolled militias in Sudan defy government forces," in the Independent Arabia, 19 March 2023, in Arabic, available at: <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/432626/%D8%A2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1/%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D9%81%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9>

4 Transitional Justice Consultations: Giving Voice to the Voiceless

The transitional justice conference, one of the series of five envisaged to finalize the Framework Agreement, took place from March 16-20. It represented the apex of six regional conferences convened in Sudan's six historic regions of greater Kordofan, Darfur, Blue Nile, Khartoum and central Sudan, eastern, and northern Sudan. This will leave only the national conference on the reform of the security sector to be held as the ones on dismantling the remnants of Bashir's kleptocratic regime, the JPA review, and the eastern Sudan problem were already held.



Blue Nile transitional justice consultation, photo by organizers

The bottom-up approach to these regional consultations is novel and was championed by an alliance of civil society organizations focused on transitional justice which managed to persuade the FFC-1 and the Tripartite Mechanism that it was necessary to reach the widest possible base of stakeholders and to reflect the variations in the experiences of different communities and regions of the systematic and widespread rights violations both under the Bashir regime and since its fall. The heavy

logistical lift was facilitated by considerable support from international associations focused on justice, the rule of law issues, and UNITAMS.

While the conferences for central Sudan (in Khartoum), Blue Nile (in Damazin), Darfur (in Nyala), and greater Kordofan (in Kadugli) went smoothly, the ones for eastern and northern Sudan were blocked by local officials in Kassala and Atbara. To defeat the obstruction, organizers brought participants to Khartoum so that their voices could be heard.

The struggle will be long to achieve justice for the victims of the wars that successive governments in Khartoum had waged against their citizens, particularly during the three decades of the Bashir regime. However, the transitional justice national conference and regional lead-up conferences may help cement a broad alliance of organized victims' groups across Sudan and their local and international advocates which may prove pivotal in advancing the transitional justice agenda in the future.