

## Sudan: Shifting Sands

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7<sup>th</sup> June 2019

**Genuine change seems to be on the agenda in Sudan, where the military not only ousted President Omar al-Bashir but have seen their leader, Defence Minister Awad Ibn Auf, voluntarily step down as head of the 'interim military council'. However, the council have refused to hand over power to a civilian administration. Not**



**only does this represent Sudan's best (and perhaps only) chance to achieve meaningful change, but also raises uncomfortable questions about the path Sudan is taking and how likely a detour is going to be.**

Sudan was for so long under the thumb of Bashir, whose indictments on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court neatly sum him up, with the ongoing atrocities in Darfur and poverty-stricken life in Sudan painting a picture of a never-ending spiral. In recent months, protests against Bashir – a true political strongman in the very worst sense of the word – had increased and their voices may have given the final weight to the military to remove him. But the problem is that Sudan is now still controlled by the military – who were partly responsible for buoying Bashir – and they are loath to give up power now that the strongman who corralled them as much as the general citizenry, is gone.

There is a wider concern here about the degree to which the structural problems that arise in such countries can genuinely be changed if their instigators are removed, or whether they become permanent fixtures in countries that have little opportunity to take another path while their strongman remains in power. Already, in Sudan the wave of protests simply changed from opposing Bashir, to opposing the army itself: the very group that had defenestrated him. There are concerns that the 'deep state' of surveillance, government-sponsored violence and the culture of fear will be just as prevalent under any new military-supported administration.

If repression is allowed to flourish unchecked, as it has done in the Sudan, then this brings with it openings for corruption, nepotism and a sense that this unbalanced civil society will become normalised and acceptable. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: the longer these go on, the more entrenched they become, and the more entrenched they become then the greater their chances of survival as any new power will come to depend upon the practices that allowed them to succeed.

At times like this, a complete ‘new broom’ led by the proposed citizen’s assembly, could conceivably go some way towards breaking this deadlock. But there is, unsurprisingly, little sign that this will happen. The military have formally ordered the protestors to disperse and remove their roadblocks that have sprung up throughout Khartoum, while the protestors for their part have declared the officers to be “remnants” of the ousted Bashir’s regime and have broken off negotiations.

Just as it is unclear where exactly Bashir is, where he will go or what kind of justice (if any) he will face, so too is Sudan’s future uncertain. The best chance the country has of evolving its structural and societal problems could be stymied before it has properly begun, and the two-year period requested by the army in the name of security could be extended without end in sight. It may be that for Sudan needs a revolution ala Libya, although this would of course bring its own problems – but to keep the military status quo means remaining as a chrysalis version of the same Sudan. To change means relying on those in power to voluntarily cede it – and as history teaches, this is far easier said than done.

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