

## **Analysis:**

# Crisis in Sudan Sheds Light on the Future of Foreign Aid

**Madeleine Seibert**

**June 2019**



@nif\_usa

Following the violent crackdown in Khartoum earlier this month, General Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan, leader of the Transitional Military Council (TMC), called for continued negotiations with the opposition. The demonstrators, however, rejected the proposed negotiations, deeming the TMC untrustworthy. The United Nations Security Council has taken the opposite approach, opting to remain in discussions, issuing statements of condemnation, and taking little action to aid those in Sudan.

While some have drawn [similarities](#) between the unfolding insurgence in Sudan to that of Egypt in 2011, the presence (or lack thereof) of Western aid has been a defining difference between the two tumultuous regime changes.

Foreign aid has proved quite complicated following the ousting of former Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir in April. While the US and UN have issued statements condemning the atrocities in Khartoum, neither has taken significant action, if any at all. The UN has urged others to take action, particularly the United States, but little as resulted from this.

Over a week after the bloodshed in Khartoum and months after the overthrow of Bashir, the US has finally appointed a special adviser to Sudan, Former US Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan Donald Booth. This is the first and only step Washington has taken, as the process has been remarkably stagnant and misguided, especially considering that “there’s no leadership on this issue in State or the White House,” according to an anonymous [White House official](#).

While these Western-based actors are aligned with the opposition and the implementation of a democratic civilian government, regional powers, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt are throwing their fiscal weight behind the Sudanese military forces.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE pledged \$3 billion to the transitional military government of Sudan, in a clear display of their allegiances and intentions.

Demonstrators fervently opposed the foreign aid package, making an example out of the types of ‘[foreign meddling](#)’ the opposition seeks to end, even if it makes life harder for them in the meantime. This is just one of the many ways the ‘deep state’ has persisted after al-Bashir’s exit. Though the former president may be out of power, this will by no means stop influential states like Saudi Arabia or the UAE from wielding their financial power in Sudanese politics.

Perhaps the demonstrator’s rejection of foreign aid has kept Western forces at bay, or perhaps it is as simple as a matter of budgeting.

Due to pressure from the US, the UN African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has been scaling back its fledgling mission in Sudan over the past year in an effort to cut back spending. Currently, there are approximately 4,000 peacekeepers still on the ground, compared to the 6,000

in 2018. While the UN recently [pulled](#) some of its staffers due to the dangerous clampdown last Monday, the UNAMID scaleback has been halted.

Since UNAMID began reducing its presence in Sudan, the Rapid Support Forces, the same group responsible for the growing body-count of peaceful civilian protesters, have been [using the abandoned camps](#) for their own operations. The UN mission has effectively stopped the evacuations of its camps until the transitional military government pledges to use the space for ‘exclusively civilian purposes’.

Freezing evacuations has amounted to some of the only action taken by the UN in reaction to the horrors and human rights abuses unfolding in Khartoum. Conversely, the African Union has risen to the occasion, going a step beyond condemnation by [suspending the participation of Sudan](#) in “all AU activities until the effective establishment of a civilian led transitional authority”.

While the African Union’s suspension of Sudan may be their best bet at encouraging a democratic outcome, the actions of the AU Peace and Security Council are limited, given Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, President of Egypt is the current rotational president of the council. Moreover, Egypt experienced the same treatment by the AU back in 2013, and yielded very disappointing results, which in turn undermined the effectiveness of the African Union.

Ethiopia has also made a bid at resolving the situation in Sudan, acting as a mediator between the military government and the opposition. Unfortunately, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has not been able to foster conversation between the two sides. After a visit with the Ethiopian PM in Khartoum, opposition leaders Mohamed Esmat and Ismail Jalab were arrested in the middle of the night for [‘unknown reasons’](#).

Of Ethiopia’s more fruitful mediation efforts, PM Abiy has endorsed several special envoys in Sudan, one on behalf of himself, and the other from the African Union. These envoys will serve to restart the dialogue between the opposition and the TMC, if possible. Given the opposition’s many demands, it is unclear how prolific the following talks will be. Nonetheless, the role of Ethiopia in Sudan is pivotal for the future of foreign aid and diplomacy.

With the vast majority of action, whether democracy-driven or not, coming from regional powers rather than Western giants, the current crisis is creating a new foreign aid precedent. If the African Union intends to take the helm and direct Sudan toward genuine democracy, it will need a greater surge of international support than just that of Ethiopia. If donations, gifts and advice from Saudi Arabia and the UAE continue to fuel the TMC, it will take much more than statements and special envoys to bring stability to Sudan.