Please cite as: EUAA, '1.1. Historical background' in *COI Report - Sudan: Country Focus*, February 2025.

1.1. Historical background

Sudan has a complex history marked by colonialism, civil war and authoritarianism. The country was a joint protectorate of Egypt and the United Kingdom known as the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium until 1956.5 After gaining independence, the country was mostly ruled by military authorities and faced high instability6 due to seventeen coups and two major civil wars.7 Over time, the military's influence has extended beyond politics to the economy, with interests in significant sectors such as manufacturing, banking, and gold mining.8

The country's struggles for independence and democracy set the stage for the rise of Omar al-Bashir and his Islamist-dominated administration that shaped the country's politics and society between 1989 and 2019. 9 In 1989, Omar al-Bashir, a commander in the Sudanese army, staged a coup against Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi, dissolving the government and all political parties. 10A secret police, repression of opposition, persecution of minorities and widespread corruption were among the autocratic practices that Sudanese citizens had to face.11 Sharia legislation and morality police were enforced with punishments that included amputations and stoning. Women's rights were also heavily restricted.12 Members of the Nationa l Congress Party (NCP) as well as members of the Sudanese Islamic Movement and any former employees of government organisations were seen as members of the Bashir authoritarian regime.13

In the 2000s the country continued facing internal instability as a result of ongoing internal conflicts.14 Between 2003 and 2005, the Bashir regime fuelled the conflict in Darfur when increasing tensions in the region were met with racially targeted attacks by government-backed Arab militias, known as *Janjaweed*.15 These resulted in the destruction of thousands of villages, the deaths of thousands, and the displacement of over two million people.16 Following the regional conflicts, the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted Bashir and some of his associates for genocide and crimes against humanity in Darfur.17

Furthermore, the civil war between North and South, ongoing since 1983, came to an end in 2005 with the signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). According to the agreement, a referendum would be held on Sudan's unity or Southern Sudan's independence. 18 In 2011, a referendum in the south of the country resulted in a partition and the split in the Republic of Sudan and the new Republic of South Sudan.19 The secession and the lack of addressing the growing differences between Khartoum and the border regions triggered a new wave of violence.20

By the end of 30 years of an authoritarian a regime and international sanctions, Sudan was on the verge of collapse.21 At the end of 2018, a wave of extensive public demonstrations22 lasting several months led, in April 2019, to the ousting of the President by his own security forces, the SAF and the RSF.23 In the same year, protests and sit-ins calling for handover to civilian rule continued in Khartoum culminating in the June attacks, when security forces violently cracked down protesters in multiple instances, with hundreds of civilians killed, over nine hundred injured and dozens missing.24 West Darfur experienced a new escalation of attacks and violence, which has remained at high levels since then.25

In the aftermath of the 2019 coup, the military leaders - General al-Burhan and RSF leader Lt Gen Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti - struggled to relinquish control of the country. They agreed to share governing responsibility with the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), which represented a coalition of opposition parties, trade unions, civil society groups, rebel movements and resistance committees.26 The negotiated power-sharing agreement, leading to the establishment of a Transitional Sovereignty Council (TSC), intended to facilitate the transition of power from military to civilian authority by November 2021. Despite this arrangement, persistent political discord regarding representation in the legislative body and growing military criticism of civilian officials undermined

the coalition.27

The appointed prime minister, economist and development expert Abdalla Hamdok, was arrested and removed from office in October 202128 and the 2019 Constitutional Charter Declaration was suspended.29 He was later reinstated in November 2021 once he agreed to concede additional governing powers to Burhan, Hemedti and the rest of the security sector30. However, pro-democracy protesters, with women activists playing a pivotal role,31 went back on the streets against the terms of Hamdok reinstatement in a number of cities, including Port Sudan and Khartoum.32 Demonstrators had to face a heavy security presence with many being arrested and beaten.33 Hamdok ultimately resigned in January 2022 and Burhan operated as *de facto* head of state with Hemedti acting as his deputy.34 Further negotiations followed throughout the year, culminating in a deal in December 2022 outlining a two-year transition to civilian leadership and national elections.35 However, unrest broke out in the country as several thousand people took the streets of Khartoum protesting against the deal36 and calling for the military to hand over power to civilians. Protests continued until the first months of 2023.37 The military began negotiations to form a civilian government38 and initiated a number of technical workshops. Following the failure of the security sector reform workshop, due to the disagreement around the military chain of command and the timeline for integrating the RSF into the SAF, tensions escalated,39 ultimately triggering the conflict between the two main security forces in the country.40 For more information on the political situation and crisis background see section 1.1.1 of the EUAA Sudan report – Country Focus (April 2024).

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