

Entry Points Towards Ending Violence, Inclusive Peacemaking, and Democratic Transition in Sudan

Policy Paper

SUMMARY

The outbreak of the armed conflict between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) on 15 April 2023 has pushed Sudan to the brink of collapse. This policy paper draws on both interviews with and an in-person convening of Sudanese civil society actors, as well as secondary literature, to argue that a flawed diplomatic approach favouring short-term stability over genuine democratic transition, unresolved security sector reforms, and a challenging political transition process that saw civilian actors sidelined by armed forces after 2019, amongst others, have contributed to the escalation of hostilities between the RSF and the SAF and the stalling of the civilian-led political transition process in Sudan. The paper also identifies several immediate obstacles to ending the violence and moving towards inclusive peacemaking in Sudan. They include, among others, conflict parties' rejection of diplomacy, the exclusive nature of the Saudi/US mediation initiative in Jeddah, external interference, a lack of coherence among civil society actors, and a culture of impunity.

There are seven potential scenarios for how the situation in Sudan could evolve over the coming weeks and months:

- Scenario 1: War drags on without a decisive outcome
- Scenario 2: Military victory for SAF
- Scenario 3: Military victory for RSF
- Scenario 4: De-escalation, leading to an elite deal between SAF and RSF
- Scenario 5: De-escalation, leading to a more inclusive process
- Scenario 6: War ends in stalemate and territorial fragmentation
- Scenario 7: Conflict is sustained, allowing for “deep state” actors to consolidate and re-emerge

Ending the fighting and enhancing Sudanese people's access to humanitarian support are the utmost priorities for domestic and international stakeholders under all scenarios. Local ceasefires are one **entry point** in this regard.

To pave the way for restarting a democratic transition and sustainable peace, it will be important for civilian actors to intensify their strategising and planning activities about Sudan's political future. A combination of internal coordination and external lobbying will help prepare Sudanese civilian actors to influence any

upcoming peace and democratic transition process. This policy paper identifies six **entry points** for advancing inclusive peacemaking and subsequently a civilian-led democratic transition in Sudan.

- **Using humanitarian entry points for peace:** Civilian actors like the Resistance Committees could use their basic service provision activities and the resulting interaction with armed groups as well as their high legitimacy among the population to influence Sudan's political space moving forward.
- **Positioning to engage in (and influence) formal negotiation processes:** This refers to civilian actors advocating and lobbying for their direct inclusion in any formal negotiation process to end the armed conflict in Sudan, for example, as part of an independent civil society delegation that is representative of all gender, age, religious and traditional, ethnic, geographic, language, and professional groups of society, including the business community. Developing and promoting clear decision-making and selection criteria that mirror Sudan's social diversity and guarantee civilian representation in any upcoming peace process could enhance such lobbying and advocacy efforts. Any such criteria would ideally focus on increasing the leverage of women and youth to ensure a gender-transformative negotiation process.
- **Rethinking peacemaking in Sudan – towards a civilian-led peace process:** Building on recent process proposals from the African continent to end the fighting in Sudan, Sudanese civilian actors could prepare for the establishment of a civilian-led peace process that paves the way for a democratic transition in Sudan. Creating spaces for civilian actors to coordinate their strategising activities and build internal coalitions could be an important first step. Sudanese women could take the lead on such spaces, which would ideally allow civilian actors to connect across borders. Civilian actors could also use these spaces for coordination and exchange to prepare for establishing an independent civilian-led political process if the external pressure for such a process declines.
- **Lobbying for an inclusive civilian-led peace process:** Besides internal coordination and coalition building, civilian actors could launch a broad lobbying and advocacy campaign to ensure the regional and international community's long-term support for a civilian-led peace process. Any such lobbying campaign would ideally revolve around several core messages that Sudanese civilians jointly formulate

regarding the country's political future. This includes reinforcing Sudanese civilians' message about the absence of a legitimate government since the military coup on 25 October 2021.

- **Addressing social injustices and ensuring accountability and justice:** Sudanese civilian actors, along with other domestic and international stakeholders, could start discussing concrete steps towards rectifying social injustices and addressing grievances, and preparing viable accountability mechanisms to create a conducive environment for sustainable peace in Sudan.

Developing a roadmap for inclusive reconstruction: Starting to think about potential strategies to rebuild Sudan's infrastructure and societal cohesion once the fighting stops could help civilian actors to maximise national and civilian ownership of any future reconstruction process.

Introduction

The escalation of hostilities between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group, led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagolo “Hemedti”, and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, on 15 April 2023 has pushed Sudan to the brink of state collapse. The latest available estimates at the time of writing hold that the fighting killed over 3,900 people and wounded a further 11,796 between 15 April and 14 July 2023.¹ The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) stood at 2.4 million as of 13 July 2023.² An additional 500,000 Sudanese fled the country between 15 April and 13 July 2023, the majority of them to Egypt, Chad, and South Sudan.³ Preliminary estimates hold that the economic losses caused by the armed conflict are around USD four billion.⁴ Damage to public infrastructure and private property is significant, with the appropriation and theft of private property, including land (and land records), allegedly widespread.

Public service provision has ceased to exist. Inter-communal violence has flared up again in previously conflict-affected regions like Darfur and could spill over into other regions both within and beyond Sudan’s borders. The armed conflict and its ramifications have reverberated throughout Sudanese society, reflecting and reopening pre-existing and long-standing fault lines and divisions around ethnicity, language, and geography.

The US and Saudi Arabia have mediated several ceasefires between the RSF and SAF through talks in Jeddah since early May 2023, although the majority of the ceasefires have not been adhered to and none have lasted for more than a few days. The dire humanitarian, security, and political situation in Sudan raises fundamental questions about the country’s future.

The objective of this policy paper is two-fold. Firstly, it seeks to highlight the drivers of the contemporary armed conflict between the SAF and the RSF. This includes identifying obstacles to ending violence and inclusive peacemaking in Sudan as well as considering potential scenarios for the country’s political development in the short- and medium-term future. Secondly, it aims to use the preceding analysis

- 1 Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED). “Sudan: The SAF Faces Setbacks as Armed Groups Overtake Territory Across the Country,” ACLED (2023), <https://acleddata.com/2023/07/21/sudan-situation-update-july-2023-the-saf-faces-setbacks-as-armed-groups-overtake-territory-across-the-country/> [last accessed: 22 July 2023]. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). “Sudan. Situation Report,” OCHA (2023) https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/?_gl=1%2af7cy1t%2a_ga%2aNzk00TcyNzAxLjE2ODQ5MDU3NTk.%2a_ga_E60ZNX2F68%2aM-TY4OTA1MzY4MS45LjEuMTY4OTA1NDEwNy4yMC4wLjA. [last accessed: 22 July 2023].
- 2 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Sudan Situation,” Operational Data Portal (2023), <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/sudansituation> [last accessed: 17 July 2023].
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Sudan Tribune. “Sudan’s Daily Battle Against RSF Costs \$1.5 Million, Estimate Experts,” <https://sudantribune.com/article274063/> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

to identify entry points for Sudanese civilian actors, particularly women, regional state and non-state actors, and the international community to further inclusive peacemaking in Sudan.

The policy paper identifies ending the fighting as quickly as possible as an utmost priority to alleviate the disastrous humanitarian situation. At the same time, it stresses the importance of civilians discussing pathways towards inclusive peacemaking and democratic transition immediately. Preparing to push for inclusive peacemaking and seize opportunities to advocate a civilian-led democratic transition process will be key for creating an inclusive, sustainable peace in Sudan. This preparatory work includes strengthening the coherence of Sudanese civilian actors and establishing strong civilian leadership.

The policy paper is based on a qualitative analysis that draws on secondary research and ten semi-structured interviews with diverse Sudanese civilian stakeholders. The interviewees came from various backgrounds and included Sudanese gender experts, journalists, and academics as well as employees of international organisations that operate in Sudan. Interviews with Sudanese counterparts who left Sudan after 15 April 2023 were conducted using online communication technology. Limited access to internet and security concerns prevented live interviews with stakeholders residing in Sudan, who hence provided input in writing. The policy paper was also informed by an in-person convening bringing together Sudanese women civil society and political actors. A thorough review of secondary literature substantiates and supplements the insights gathered during the interviews and the in-person convening.

Looking back – Proximate causes of the present conflict

The ouster of long-standing dictator Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 and the ban of his National Congress Party (NPC) in November that year opened a window of opportunity for political transition in Sudan. Civilian forces, organised in resistance committees (RCs), and political opposition parties had staged mass protests and civil disobedience campaigns against the regime in late 2018. Women and youth played a prominent role in the peaceful protests, coordinating and organising weekly demonstrations.⁵ Civilian protesters showed a high level of resilience and stamina. Bashir's military supporters, including Hemedti and Burhan, ultimately removed him from power. Hemedti, Burhan, and other leaders from the armed forces subsequently formed the "Transitional Military Council" (TMC). They agreed to share power with a civilian coalition entitled "Forces for Freedom and Change" (FFC) under the Constitutional Declaration of August 2019 and set up a transitional

5 Interview with H II.

government.⁶ Before political power was transferred to the FFC coalition, Burhan and Hemedti allied to overthrow the transitional government in a coup in October 2021.⁷

The coup triggered another year-long episode of peaceful mass protest in Khartoum. The international community froze aid programs and suspended Sudan's membership in the AU aiming to support domestic pressure on the coup leaders and allow for political change. A trilateral mechanism headed by the UN, AU, and IGAD mediated a Framework Agreement between SAF and civilian political parties organised under the FFC in December 2022. The Framework Agreement provided, among other things, for the integration of RSF forces into the SAF. Disagreement among Burhan and Hemedti on the timeframe for the merging of their respective armed forces ultimately gave rise to a violent struggle over the country's domestic military supremacy between the two former partners.

The current armed conflict is thus the legacy of a power struggle between two competing armed factions, a dysfunctional state, and a long history of divide and rule. The latter two have characterised Sudan ever since its independence in 1956, but particularly so under the Bashir regime.⁸ Several factors have constrained the country's envisaged political transition since the wave of peaceful civilian protest prompted the ousting of Bashir in spring 2019. A detailed understanding of these constraining factors may inform future strategising around how to further inclusive peacemaking and democratic transition in Sudan.

- **Persistence of the deep state:** Bashir's patronage system of tribal leaders, certain religious leaders/institutions, and powerful armed actors persists. Affiliates of the Bashir regime remain influential and have undermined the transitional work of the civilian forces since 2019.⁹
- **High number of and tensions among domestic armed groups:** Sudan is home to a plethora of well-equipped armed groups. The RSF is a rival faction of the SAF. The former acted as a protector of Bashir before ousting him in collaboration with the SAF in April 2019 in response to enduring civilian pressure for political change. After a period of collaboration in the transitional period, including the joint coup against the transitional government on 25 October, 2021, Hemedti and Burhan clashed over access

6 A. Boswell. "A Breakthrough in Sudan's Impasse?" *International Crisis Group (ICG), Q&A/Africa* (2022), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/breakthrough-sudans-impasse> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

7 International Crisis Group (ICG). "A Critical Window to Bolster Sudan's Next Government," *Statement/Africa* (2023), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/critical-window-bolster-sudans-next-government> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

8 Interviews with H I, H II, J, and M; International Crisis Group (ICG), "A Race Against Time to Halt Sudan's Collapse," *Briefing N°190/Africa* (2023), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/b190-race-against-time-halt-sudans-collapse> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

9 Interviews with I, J, and R II.

to executive power and resources, as well as the speed of the integration of RSF forces into the SAF. RSF forces, along with Arab militias, have allegedly also contributed to atrocities committed against the non-Arab population in West Darfur since June 2023. At the same time, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) under the leadership of Abdelaziz al-Hilu launched several attacks against the SAF in South Kordofan, seeking to evict the latter from Blue Nile and South Kordofan. The persistent competition between these armed groups for power and territorial control threatens to derail any democratic transition effort.¹⁰

- **Problematic collaboration between civilian and armed forces in the transitional period:** Several interviewees consulted for this policy paper, along with analysts, have described Sudan's civilian leaders' decision to collaborate with the TMC to prevent potential backlash against the democratic transition as a core mistake that enhanced the political visibility of armed actors during the transitional period after 2019.¹¹ The partnership between the civilian FFC coalition and the RSF, despite the latter's key role in the brutal crackdown of peaceful protests on 3 June 2019, sparked outrage among many civil society actors who as a result rejected the December 2022 Framework.¹²
- **Embracing armed actors as political actors:** Diplomatic initiatives to resolve Sudan's multiple crises over the past decades have helped armed actors to establish themselves as the de-facto power in the country's political space. The attempt to bring armed actors into power-sharing agreements, along with the collaboration of the international community with the RSF to contain migration flows towards Europe,¹³ gives armed groups significant leverage over the political transition.¹⁴
- **A diplomatic approach favouring short-term stability over democratic transition:** Diplomatic initiatives to promote democratic transition in Sudan have suffered from a lack of imagination, creativity, courage, and innovation. They were built on the old-fashioned model of peacemaking and statebuilding of the 1990s, i.e. bringing the main power holders into agreement, and neglecting the civilian-led pathway to political transition.

10 Interviews with H I, I, and R I.

11 Interviews with H I, H II, R I, R II, and W; Boswell, "A Breakthrough in Sudan's Impasse?"; ICG, "A Critical Window to Bolster Sudan's Next Government."

12 Ibid.

13 S. Baldo, "Border Control From Hell: How the EU's Migration Partnership Legitimises Sudan's 'Militia State'," *The Enough Project* (2017), <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/border-control-hell-how-eus-migration-partnership-legitimizes-sudans-militia-state> [last accessed: 10 July 2023]. The EU has repeatedly rejected allegations of directly or indirectly financing the RSF to contain migration flows. See EU Parliament, "Motion for a European Parliament Resolution on the Humanitarian Situation in Sudan, in Particular to the Death of Children Trapped by Fighting," EU Parliament B9-0271/2023 (2023), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2023-0271_EN.html [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

14 Interviews with H I and O.

The international community has sought to hastily negotiate power-sharing agreements including military actors, thereby sacrificing genuine democratic transition for short-term stability. Mediation mechanisms such as the Tripartite (UN, AU, IGAD) or Quad (UK, US, Saudi Arabia, and UAE) have marginalised civilian voices. Power-sharing agreements such as the December 2022 Framework have proved unfit to pave the way for democratic transition in Sudan.¹⁵

- **Unresolved security sector reforms and tensions between civilian and armed actors:** Sudan's security sector reform remains incomplete. Tensions between Burhan and Hemedti regarding the timeline and modalities of the incorporation of the RSF into the SAF have contributed to the outbreak of the current armed conflict. More generally, the SAF aims to retain political power whereas civilians call for excluding the army from politics after 30 years of repression. These conflicting positions complicate a democratic transition.¹⁶
- **Marginalisation of Sudanese regions in the periphery:** Khartoum has exploited the resources of Sudan's peripheral regions such as Darfur, North and South Kordofan, or Blue Nile, and simultaneously excluded them from political power for decades. The resulting grievances, along with tribal conflicts, Arab nationalism, discrimination against those with a darker skin colour, and clashes between the black and non-black population, are significant impediments to the country's democratic transition.¹⁷

15 Interviews with J, M, R I, and W; A. de Waal, "Sudan is Bleeding to Death and Current Triage Is Useless," *Responsible Statecraft* (2023), <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/06/06/without-bold-new-diplomatic-approaches-sudans-state-will-collapse/> [last accessed: 10 July 2023]; S.A. Dersso, "Why the Idea of the Establishment of a Civilian Transitional Authority in Sudan Should Be Taken Seriously and How It Can Be Realised," *Amani Africa, Ideas Indaba* (2023), <https://amaniafrica-et.org/why-the-idea-of-the-establishment-of-a-civilian-transitional-authority-in-sudan-should-be-taken-seriously-and-how-it-can-be-realized/> [last accessed: 10 July 2023]; ICG, "A Critical Window to Bolster Sudan's Next Government"; K. Khair, "The Muddled Diplomacy of Sudan's Tripartite Mechanism," Arab Center Washington, D.C. (2022), <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-muddled-diplomacy-of-sudans-tripartite-mechanism/> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

16 Interview with R I; Boswell, "A Breakthrough in Sudan's Impasse?"; International Crisis Group (ICG). "Stopping Sudan's Descent Into Full-Blown Civil War," *Statement/Africa* (2023), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/stopping-sudans-descent-full-blown-civil-war> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

17 International Crisis Group (ICG), "Safeguarding Sudan's Revolution," *Report N°281/Africa* (2019), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/281-safeguarding-sudans-revolution> [last accessed: 10 July 2023]; International Crisis Group (ICG), "The Rebels Come to Khartoum: How to Implement Sudan's New Peace Agreement," *Briefing N°168/Africa* (2021), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/b168-rebels-come-khartoum-how-implement-sudans-new-peace-agreement> [last accessed: 10 July 2023]; Khair, "The Muddled Diplomacy of Sudan's Tripartite Mechanism."

Immediate obstacles to ending violence and moving towards inclusive peacemaking in Sudan

The outbreak of armed conflict and the collapse of several ceasefires indicate that the prospects for domestic stability and peace in Sudan are currently bleak and face several immediate obstacles, namely:

- **Conflict parties' rejection of diplomacy:** Both the RSF and the SAF are convinced of their capacity to achieve military victory in what they regard as an existential war of dignity. Neither side is hence willing to genuinely pursue diplomatic strategies to end the fighting.¹⁸
- **Internal fragmentation of the SAF:** The SAF unites a variety of armed actors, including paramilitary units, and affiliates of Bashir's Islamist movement, who are united by their rejection of Hemedti but otherwise disagree on many issues.¹⁹ This high level of internal fragmentation makes it difficult to design impactful diplomatic initiatives to stop the fighting.
- **External interference:** Sudan has become a locus for regional and global power contests. External actors are fuelling the current escalation of violence by providing the conflict parties with weapons, money, and other means of support. Egypt is the main backer of the SAF; the RSF receives support from the UAE.
- **Cessation of domestic political opposition:** Civilian actors are currently occupied with providing basic services and humanitarian support to fill the vacuum created by the absence of a functioning government. It follows that civilian actors struggle to pursue political opposition work and develop political pathways out of the crisis. There is also a lack of any political narrative in the current situation in which survival in Sudan and in exile is a primary and overriding concern.²⁰

18 Interviews with H I, H II, R I, and O; de Waal, "Sudan is Bleeding to Death and Current Triage Is Useless"; Dersso, "Why the Idea of the Establishment of a Civilian Transitional Authority in Sudan Should Be Taken Seriously and How It Can Be Realised"; France 24, "Sudan War Lays Bare 'Fault Lines' Between Capital and Periphery," France 24 (2023), <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230517-sudan-war-lays-bare-fault-lines-between-capital-and-periphery> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

19 de Waal, "Sudan is Bleeding to Death and Current Triage Is Useless"; ICG, "The Rebels Come to Khartoum"; ICG, "A Race Against Time to Halt Sudan's Collapse."

20 Interviews with H I, H II, M, and R II; T. Paffenholz (ed), "Civil Society & Peacebuilding. A Critical Assessment," Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers (2010).

- **Security concerns:** Heavy fighting and reports of kidnappings of political actors by RSF troops are core pillars of the hostile environment in Sudan, which limits the opportunities for civilian actors to engage in political discussions or planning.²¹
- **Lack of creativity and inclusion in the US/Saudi mediation initiative:** The Jeddah talks emulate the flawed diplomatic approach that international actors have pursued in Sudan in the past. They exclude civilian actors and several former armed groups. This boosts the conflict parties' standing as the most relevant political actors in Sudan.²²
- **Lack of coherence among civil society actors:** Sudan's civil society sector is united by their desire to establish democracy. Yet, despite this shared objective, different ideological affiliations and competition for influence have hitherto prevented the emergence of a common vision for the country's future. Ongoing displacement of people within and beyond Sudan's borders makes it even more challenging to jointly strategise for concrete next steps and greater coherence.²³
- **Conflict narratives and societal fragmentation:** While the armed conflict between the SAF and RSF is ostensibly a power struggle, the conflict parties often frame it as a wider contest between centripetal forces and those advocating for the need to address historic marginalisation of "the regions". Sudanese society is widely against the current war. However, the attribution of blame differs significantly and often draws on broader societal perceptions and prejudices.
- **Lack of accountability and culture of impunity:** Sudan's dysfunctional judicial system has struggled to hold the SAF and the RSF accountable for the various crimes and violations of international law that they have committed.²⁴

21 Interviews with H I, H II, and R II.

22 de Waal, "Sudan is Bleeding to Death and Current Triage is Useless"; Dersso, "Why the Idea of the Establishment of a Civilian Transitional Authority in Sudan Should Be Taken Seriously and How It Can Be Realised"; ICG, "A Race Against Time to Halt Sudan's Collapse."

23 Interviews with C, H I, H II, M, O, R II, and W.

24 Interviews with H I, I, O, and W.

Scenarios moving forward

There are seven potential scenarios for how the situation in Sudan could evolve over the coming weeks and months. Each scenario entails specific implications regarding entry points for civilians to work towards an end to the armed conflict and to push for a democratic transition.

- **Scenario 1 – War drags on without a decisive outcome:** Both conflict parties remain convinced of their ability to achieve military victory and therefore refuse to genuinely engage in diplomatic initiatives to end the armed conflict. Continued external financial and military support enables both sides to maintain their military operations. Sudan enters the post-2011 Syrian pathway: a plethora of armed groups operate in the country, which also becomes the battleground for external interference to further regional and international interests. Heavy fighting spreads throughout the entire territory. Darfur plunges into another cycle of mass atrocities. Urban warfare renders Khartoum an inherently hostile place. The humanitarian disaster increases popular desire for an end to the war at all costs. This opens the door for an authoritarian regime, which blocks attempts towards democratic transition but stabilises the country.
- **Scenario 2 – Military victory for SAF:** Over time, SAF, with support from the NPC, the Islamists,²⁵ and young, militarily trained men, gains the upper hand on the battlefield and ultimately defeats the RSF. This leaves SAF in primary control of shaping the post-conflict political order. The NPC and Islamists take advantage of their political comeback and retake the power they had under Bashir. SAF and the NPC jointly embark on a political transition process, which restores the ruling style of the Bashir regime, just with new faces. The large number of young men who received military training and weapons from the SAF exacerbate patterns of domestic militarisation and perpetuate the volatile security situation.
- **Scenario 3 – Military victory for RSF:** Over time, RSF gains the upper hand on the battlefield and ultimately defeats the SAF. The RSF victory turns Sudan into a country that is ruled by a militia. The rule of the RSF reinforces and exacerbates ethnic, geographic, and other cleavages, particularly in Darfur. Fighting continues in some parts of the country. The risk of the Sudanese state disintegrating increases. Like the SAF in Scenario 2, the RSF seeks to establish itself as the internationally accepted ruler of Sudan. The authoritarian regime sometimes draws on civilian support for basic service delivery.

25 There were alternative perceptions of the Islamists' viability as a potential meaningful SAF ally. One Sudanese counterpart consulted mentioned that the Islamists are weak, mainly due to significant divisions among their constituency in Sudan and their leadership being based in Türkiye.

- Scenario 4 – De-escalation, leading to an elite-deal between SAF and RSF:** War fatigue, limited access to weapons and external financial support, and logistical challenges create a mutually hurting stalemate on the battlefield. International diplomatic pressure to stop the fighting incentivises both conflict parties to embark on negotiations and de-escalation. The conflict parties use the Jeddah talks to negotiate a deal, which allows them to share the spoils, i.e. political and military power. The RSF and the SAF build up the necessary capacity to restore basic service provision in the post-agreement phase and thereby manage to establish themselves as key political actors. An authoritarian military rule emerges, which seeks to exclude civilian actors and the signatories of the 2020 Juba Agreement.
- Scenario 5 – De-escalation, leading to a more inclusive process:** The SAF and RSF agree to engage in negotiations to end the current violence, which creates conducive conditions for a broader negotiation process. The process is both more inclusive in terms of stakeholders involved, as well as in terms of the agenda items addressed.
- Scenario 6 – War ends in stalemate and territorial fragmentation:** Both conflict parties stop the fighting amidst a mutually hurting stalemate on the battlefield. This leads to Sudan’s de-facto partition, where both conflict parties control parts of the country’s territory. However, they struggle to agree on a roadmap to move forward, creating a political vacuum. Neither side has the capacity to fulfil the role of the government in the territory they respectively control, first and foremost regarding service provision. This leaves Sudan with two incapable governments in one state. Hemedti and Burhan realise that they depend on civilian actors to run the territory they control and rebuild their legitimacy as prospective rulers. This opens the door for political exchanges between armed and civilian factions.
- Scenario 7 – Conflict is sustained, allowing for “deep state” actors to consolidate and re-emerge:** As the conflict drags on, both the SAF and RSF are significantly weakened and seen as illegitimate options to govern the country moving forward. While the SAF may exert a military victory or relegate RSF to certain parts of the country, it consolidates its control of Khartoum, Omdurman, and Bahri. However, the protracted conflict allows elements associated with the Bashir regime – including tribal leaders and certain religious actors – to establish a foothold by projecting their ability to ensure “stability”.

Entry points for pushing for the end of violence and an inclusive democratic transition

Ending the fighting and opening humanitarian space is the utmost priority for domestic and international stakeholders. Moreover, the complete collapse of Sudan's governing system creates opportunities to rebuild the political system. Civilian actors have started preparing to push for and subsequently seize any opportunity towards promoting inclusive peacemaking and civilian-led democratic transition in Sudan under each of the scenarios outlined above. The entry points presented below provide guidance in this regard.

Entry point 1: Ending the violence – local/preliminary ceasefires and African intervention forces

The repeated collapse of nationwide ceasefires mediated by the US and Saudi Arabia in Jeddah indicates the need to pursue a different strategy to stop the fighting in Sudan. Evidence from Syria, Yemen, and the Philippines suggests that local or preliminary ceasefires with limited geographic and temporal scope can be effective in halting violence for a period of time and enhance the affected population's access to humanitarian support and basic services.²⁶ Implementing local ceasefires in a stepwise manner can build trust between the conflict parties and give them the opportunity to stop the fighting along some roads or in certain villages or humanitarian sites (e.g. IDP camps) for some time while remaining committed to military victory.²⁷ It is important for local ceasefires to specifically address women's needs and include human rights provisions.²⁸ Civil society actors and women could push for local ceasefires and join the associated negotiations in their neighbourhoods wherever possible, ensuring that the ceasefires are both procedurally and substantively inclusive. They could also help establish localised

26 G.D. Clayton et al. "Ceasefires in Intra-State Peace Processes," *CSS analyses in security policy* 252 (2019), <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse252-EN.pdf> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

27 R. Forster and C. Bell, "Gender Mainstreaming in Ceasefires: Comparative Data and Examples (PA-X Report, Spotlight Series)," Edinburgh: Global Justice Academy, University of Edinburgh (2019), <https://www.politicalsettlements.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/PA-X-Spotlight-Ceasefires-Digital.pdf> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

28 A. Bramble and K. Hashem, "Reaching an Inclusive Truce: Gendering Ceasefires," Geneva: Inclusive Peace (2022), https://www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Ceasefires_final-Inclusive-Peace-Mar2023-UNW.pdf [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

mechanisms to monitor conflict parties' compliance with local ceasefires.²⁹ Over time, local ceasefire negotiations could broaden their scope and start sketching the core pillars of a compromise on Sudan's future security sector.³⁰

IGAD has also started exploring the opportunity of an external African intervention force being deployed in Sudan to mitigate the impact of the ongoing fighting on the civil population. One proposal under discussion concerns an East African standby force that could focus on protecting critical infrastructure in Sudan.³¹ A second option is a temporary all-African intervention force led by five countries from the continent's five regions, i.e. North, East, South, West, and Central Africa. This all-African intervention force could create buffer zones where civilians and critical infrastructure are protected from shelling and fighting. Clear provisions on its time-limited mandate would increase any external intervention force's legitimacy among Sudanese civilians. For example, an all-African intervention force could be demobilised immediately once transitional security mechanisms are established.

Entry point 2: Using humanitarian entry points for peace

Since 15 April 2023, civilian actors have taken over various government functions across the country. Setting up emergency health facilities and distributing food have been two main activities in this regard.³² While these activities require most of civilians' attention and time, and hence reduce their capacity to initiate a civilian-led dialogue, they also increase civilians' legitimacy in Sudan and bring them into contact with armed actors. This is because the latter must greenlight civilian service deliveries, which armed actors often do to retain their legitimacy.³³ This frequent interaction with the conflict parties allows civilian actors such as the RCs to re-establish themselves as political actors. Civilian actors could use their resulting leverage to influence the political space moving forward (e.g. under scenario 5).

RCs might want to contemplate building on their legitimacy to form a political coalition to push for a civilian-led transition process once the security situation

29 Bramble and Hashem, "Reaching an Inclusive Truce"; International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), "10 Steps to Ensure Gender Responsive Processes & Ceasefire Agreements," ICAN (2019), <https://icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ICAN-BPI-Steps-for-Inclusion-in-Ceasefire-Agreements.pdf> [last accessed: 10 July 2023]; S. Stigant, "Sudan: Engage Civilians Now, Not Later," United States Institute for Peace (2023), <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/05/sudan-engage-civilians-now-not-later> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

30 ICG, "A Race Against Time to Halt Sudan's Collapse."

31 D. Endeshaw, "Eastern African Bloc Seeks Summit to Deploy Regional Force in Sudan," Reuters (2023), <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/eastern-african-bloc-seeks-summit-deploy-regional-force-sudan-2023-07-10/> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

32 Interviews with M and R II.

33 Interviews with M and R I.

allows for it.³⁴ To this end, it would be important to implement the most effective possible protection measures to allow Sudanese civil society organisations, including women-led organisations, to continue their service delivery activities.³⁵

Entry point 3: Positioning to engage in (and influence) any upcoming formal negotiation process

The objective for this engagement would be to influence any formal negotiation process between the SAF and RSF, to bring an end to the armed conflict, and to secure civil society's involvement in any ceasefire and political process. This could be furthered by developing decision-making and selection criteria that pave the way for a gender transformative formal negotiation process.³⁶

Comparative evidence suggests that women civil society and political actors are rarely included in formal efforts to stop violence, at least in the initial phase.³⁷ Gender and other quotas to ensure representative inclusion in negotiation delegations, stand-alone women's and/or civil society delegations, or specific inclusion mechanisms, including observer status, are entry points towards enhancing civil society's and women's participation in and influence over the negotiation process.³⁸ For example, Sudanese civilian actors could consider developing specific decision-making and selection criteria to ensure the relevant and fair representation of all segments of Sudanese society in any formal negotiation process. Gender, age, ethnicity, religion, profession (including the business community), language, and geography are potentially relevant inclusion criteria in this regard. These decision-making and selection criteria could serve as the basis for developing quotas for any formal political or civil society delegations

34 Interview with R.I.

35 International Civil Society Network (ICAN), "Action Points to Guarantee Gender Responsive Humanitarian Aid and Protection for Sudanese Women, Men, Girls, and Boys," ICAN (2023), <https://icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Action-Points-to-Guarantee-Gender-Responsive-Humanitarian-Aid-and-Protection.pdf> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

36 Gender-transformative negotiation processes give women from all backgrounds the opportunity to participate in the negotiation process at or near parity and allocate decision-making power to them. The outcome of a gender-transformative negotiation process intentionally targets the underlying drivers of gender inequality, including existing patriarchal norms and biased gender power dynamics. See N. Ross, "A Practical Guide to a Gender-Inclusive National Dialogue," Geneva: Inclusive Peace (2022), <https://www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/National-Dialogues-final-Inclusive-Peace-Mar2023-UNW.pdf> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

37 J. Krause et al., "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace," *International Interactions* 44:6 (2018); T. Paffenholz et al., "Making Women Count— Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations," Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative (The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies) and UN Women (2016), <https://www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/report-making-women-count-en.pdf> [last accessed: 10 July 2023].

38 Bramble and Hashem, "Reaching an Inclusive Truce"; T. Paffenholz et al., "Making Women Count— Not Just Counting Women."

that participate in the negotiation process. Sudanese women and youth could also form small civil society delegations to provide inputs into any upcoming formal peace talks.

Pushing for inclusion can happen before any formal negotiation process takes shape. At the time of writing, it remains unclear whether there will be competing regional and international diplomatic initiatives to end the armed conflict and put Sudan on the pathway towards democratic transition. States from the East African region have recently presented a three-track approach as an alternative to the Jeddah talks format:³⁹

- a humanitarian track, which includes organising a regional intervention force;
- a ceasefire track, which foresees direct talks between Burhan and Hemedti; and
- an inclusive political process that paves the way for democratic transition.

As indicated above, civil society inclusion is paramount for the humanitarian and ceasefire track, while the political process is led and owned by civilian actors. Work on the humanitarian track could address challenges around humanitarian access, humanitarian security, and gendered humanitarian issues. Topics to be discussed under the ceasefire track between the RSF and SAF could include gender-based violence, disarmament and cantonment, and demobilisation and reintegration.

Entry point 4: Rethinking peacemaking in Sudan – towards a civilian-led peace process

Importantly, power-sharing agreements and sustainable peace are not the same thing in Sudan, as elsewhere.⁴⁰ This indicates the need to rethink peacemaking and develop new approaches to addressing the underlying causes of violence. The future relationship between civilian and military actors will be an equally important theme to address in this rethinking exercise. Developing a new public narrative around negotiations, democratic transition, and peace that centres on civilian actors and includes an explicit commitment to democracy is a promising first step in this regard.⁴¹ This narrative could also stress the perpetual nature of Sudan's political transition, which starts with a robust nationwide ceasefire but may well subsequently encounter continuous challenges by authoritarian actors inside the country.⁴²

39 A. de Waal, "Sudan crisis: From Ruto to Sisi, Leaders Vie to Drive Peace Process," BBC (2023), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66169535> [last accessed: 18 July 2023].

40 Interviews with R I and W.

41 Stigant, "Sudan: Engage Civilians Now, Not Later."

42 See T. Paffenholz, "Perpetual Peacebuilding: A New Paradigm to Move Beyond the Linearity of Liberal Peacebuilding," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15:3 (2021), pp. 367-85.

Besides pushing for civilian inclusion into formal peace processes (see entry point 3), Sudan's civilian sector, including political and civil society actors, can work towards a civilian-led peace process to end the violence and lead the country on a pathway to an inclusive, democratic transition. The upcoming civilian-led political track that regional states are promoting (see entry point 3) offers a potential opening. The same is true for separate initiatives like a national dialogue, which the final communiqué released by the participants in the "Sudan's Neighbouring States Summit" on 13 July 2023 recommended to organise.⁴³ The civilian-led political process track or a national dialogue like process could deal with Sudan's future political system, constitution, and security sector reform.

Minimising the influence of the RSF and SAF over the humanitarian and civilian-led political process track would render any multiple-track process framework a genuine deviation from the flawed diplomatic initiatives of the past to promote sustainable peace and stability in Sudan. The same is true for a potential national dialogue in Sudan, as mentioned earlier.

Moving forward, it will be important to create safe, inclusive, and independent spaces and platforms for Sudanese civilian actors residing inside and outside Sudan to coordinate their strategising activities regarding and building internal coalitions towards a civilian-led peace process and Sudan's political future.⁴⁴ Sudanese women could lead on such spaces for civilian exchange, which could help to mitigate internal divisions among Sudanese civilians. An increased level of internal coherence will help to prevent detrimental solo efforts by individual actors. The FFC, which signed the December 2022 Framework without any prior consultation with other civilian actors, is a case in point. Moreover, these dedicated consultation spaces could help civilian actors to prepare for and independently establish their own civilian-led peace process in the eventuality that external pressure for such a process ceases.

Entry point 5: Lobbying for an inclusive civilian-led peace process

As indicated above, the international community's previous approach to peacemaking in Sudan has centred on armed groups, thereby minimising civilian actors' political leverage. The outbreak of armed conflict on 15 April 2023 indicates the need for international actors to rethink their peacemaking strategy for Sudan. This would ideally include embracing civil society as the key actor in Sudan's future

43 That summit was hosted by the President of Egypt, H.E. Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. State leaders from the Central African Republic, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya, and South Sudan attended the summit. The Chairman of the AU Commission and the Secretary General of the League of Arab space were also present. See <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/183662/Communique-of-Sudan%E2%80%99s-Neighboring-States-Summit?lang=en-us> [last accessed: 15 July 2023].

44 Interviews with C and M.

political space and supporting a civilian-led democratic transition process accordingly. The quartet of Eastern African states' push for a civilian-led political process described above is an important step in this direction.

Sudanese civil society actors could use any existing platform or links to regional and international actors to engage in intense lobbying and advocacy for a civilian-led political process.⁴⁵ This could cause a genuine shift in international peacemaking policies in Sudan. Any lobbying campaign would ideally be broad in scope and target various actors of the regional and international community, including state and civil society actors. It could also reinforce one of the Sudanese civilians' core message, i.e. that there has been no legitimate government in Sudan since the military coup on 25 October 2021. Reinforcing that message could help civilian actors to convince the regional and international community of the need to commit to long-term support to a civilian-led peace process, i.e. beyond the establishment of a robust nationwide ceasefire.⁴⁶

Civilian actors could also use their lobbying campaign to promote a comprehensive understanding of the complex drivers of domestic instability in Sudan among the regional and international community. A better regional and international grasp of the Sudanese context will be conducive to a genuine democratic transition process. Moreover, advocacy efforts could place strong emphasis on the need for the regional and international community to both cut off the conflict parties from any external financial or weapons supply. Sudanese civilian actors could also urge regional and international states to employ senior diplomats and thereby increase the pressure on the SAF and RSF to de-escalate.⁴⁷

Entry point 6: Addressing social injustices and ensuring accountability and justice

Social injustices and grievances have sparked and perpetuated armed conflict in Sudan in recent decades. Developing concrete strategies for how to rectify these injustices and foster political, social, and economic inclusion will be a core pillar of any framework for sustainable peace in Sudan. This requires negotiating a new social contract that addresses persistent patterns of marginalisation, particularly between the centre and the periphery.⁴⁸

By extension, sustainable peace will only materialise if there is justice and accountability. Efforts to collect data on the atrocities committed by the conflict parties and thinking about inclusive reconstruction and reconciliation will be key to

45 de Waal, "Sudan crisis: From Ruto to Sisi, Leaders Vie to Drive Peace Process."

46 Interview with R I.

47 Interviews with H I and H II; A. de Waal, "Sudan is Tearing Itself Apart and Washington Lost Its Capacity to Help," *Responsible Statecraft* (2023), <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/04/20/sudan-is-tearing-itself-apart-and-washington-lost-its-capacity-to-help/> [last accessed: 10 July 2023]; ICG, "A Race Against Time to Halt Sudan's Collapse."

48 Interviews with H II, R II, and W.

ending the prevailing culture of impunity in Sudan. Sudanese inside Sudan and their counterparts in neighbouring countries are currently undertaking several initiatives in this regard. Finding ways to bring these disparate efforts together would help civil society to prepare for pursuing accountability and justice in a more comprehensive manner once the fighting stops. Defining the longer-term strategy on accountability and justice might be premature at this stage. However, thinking about and discussing viable accountability mechanisms can happen in parallel to the conflict as an initial step to start paving the way towards sustainable peace.⁴⁹ The same is true for the formation of fact-finding missions to investigate and document crimes against humanity in places such as Darfur, which civilian actors have started to discuss already.

Entry point 7: Developing a roadmap for inclusive reconstruction

The scale and cost of damage to public infrastructure and private property is significant but currently difficult to validate and assess accurately. Sudanese civil society actors have therefore identified the potential to establish an “inclusive reconstruction fund” for Sudan, with the armed groups responsible for the fighting liable to pay compensation into the fund. The inclusion reconstruction fund would also have a strong focus on localised responses, which leverage both Sudanese private sector and Sudanese civil society capacity, positionality, and expertise. Experiences from Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iraq, and Syria indicate that external actors tend to dominate reconstruction processes and planning. The resulting marginalisation of civil society actors often nurtures vulture capitalist practices and, in the longer term, contributes to exacerbated inequality and malpractice, e.g. corruption.⁵⁰ Firm positioning of Sudanese civil society on this agenda may help to mitigate this kind of eventuality unfolding in Sudan. Regarding inclusive reconstruction, as with a democratic transition more generally, it will be important to develop societal mechanisms to ensure the inclusive representation of different age, ethnic, religious, and professional groups, gender, and geographic origin.

49 Interviews with I and W.

50 N. Tzifakis, “Post-Conflict Economic Reconstruction,” Princeton University Encyclopaedia (2023), <https://pesd.princeton.edu/node/586> [last accessed: 10 July 2023]; N. Tzifakis and C. Tsardanidis, “Economic Reconstruction of Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Lost Decade,” *Ethnopolitics* 5:1 (2006), pp. 67-84; C.M. Zinn, “Consequences of Iraqi De-Baathification,” *Cornell International Affairs Review* 9:2 (2016), pp. 80-100.

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