

People, Politics, and Power Sudan in Transition

“The Constitutional Declaration enshrines a uniquely Sudanese model for transition. A model that is innovative, complex and non-linear.”

Abdalla A. Hamdok, Prime Minister of the Republic of Sudan
Letter to the United Nations, 27 January 2020



This project is published by the Institute for Statecraft, a leading British think-tank focused on governance, in collaboration with a number of Sudanese, African, and international institutions. As Sudan undergoes three years of change from dictatorship through revolution and transition to democracy, we are conducting and publishing on-the-ground research into the country’s social, political, and security situation.

Our aim is to compile facts about and ask questions of both Sudan and the wider world as it deals with Sudan in the hope that each may learn from the other. The output, a series of volumes with work clustered around the three themes of people, politics, and power, is for the public record and is freely available to all.

Our scope is open-ended. We aim to develop a dynamic and evolving body of work that can act as a reference point for those seeking accurate and up-to-date information about Sudan. The project is in fact a collection of research papers, interviews, and studies in a range of formats presented along the three themes. The division into themes, like all definitions, carries an element of artificiality but provides a clear taxonomy that helps simplify already complex and large amounts of information. The most interesting output will inevitably come from the confluence of the themes.

Sudan was closed from the outside world for much of the thirty-year dictatorship of President Bashir. For its people that meant no voice in the affairs of their own country, which in turn habituated the international community to dealing only with two extremes; Bashir’s

government, and those who had fled it. For the international community, Sudan's isolation has meant precious little first-hand information coming from the country.

In this first volume we have provided initial research into each of the themes in order to stimulate thought among the wider community, which we invite to then start to contribute. We hope that by bringing in others we can keep adding to our output. Anyone with first-hand experience of Sudan is invited to submit work on any of the themes, in any format, for inclusion in subsequent volumes. A great Tweet is as welcome as a lengthy academic paper.

By engaging with as many people as possible we aim to give the Sudanese a voice, whether as subjects of our research or, preferably, as contributors of their own. We hope that in time this study will become decentralised, allowing us to move from being researchers to facilitators, and finally just eager students of the work of others. As this process continues the output will become part of the wider public debate, and so in turn a small offering in support of Sudanese democracy.

By conducting first-hand research on the ground in Sudan, an opportunity that is only just becoming available, we aim to provide facts instead of assumptions. Furthermore, we seek to challenge many assumptions about Sudan and the Sudanese people held by the rest of the world. These have grown stale and become entrenched after so many years without fresh information.

Our questions and reports are designed to stimulate conversation. By inciting people to respond, and bring forwards their own facts, we can start a debate based on truths in the best of dialectic traditions. This is not an exercise in groupthink; we have been purposely contentious in the selection of some of the topics for the initial volume.

Are elections held too soon undemocratic? At times of transition is it reasonable for the best interests of the government and of the people to be different? Would disbanding the RSF mean removing Sudan's only effective humanitarian agency? Questions like this are difficult, important, and better answered in a heated dialogue than another war.

The aim is to be contentious, not provocative, at a time when for many the events discussed have a deep emotional impact. To this end we have imposed three constraints on ourselves and request that anyone who contributes agrees to abide by them.

First, our interest is in looking at the present and the future only, not engaging in the forensic, rather than academic, task of compiling a record of the past. Where historical facts are

required for context we have endeavoured to keep to a middle ground, but fully appreciate that this will not always be accurate and we welcome amendments.

This leads to our second constraint, that this is not the proper forum for apportioning blame. A proper truth and reconciliation process working alongside the courts is best placed to do that. This project looks at what is happening and where. It proposes logical sequences of actions and outcomes that may be useful to those deciding Sudan's future or how to engage with it from abroad. It is at times either neutral or positive in character, but beyond the norms of democratic debate not intended to be critical of any individual's personality.

Finally, we are committed to factual accuracy. This means a reliance on first-hand evidence wherever possible, and a duty to include all relevant facts in any piece of work, not just those that support the argument being made. We seek to use facts and narratives to incite a conversation but not to steer it to any given conclusion.

A common theme emerged in interviews conducted for this first volume, repeated by everyone from government ministers in Khartoum to camel herders in Wadi Hawar. They wanted the outside world to appreciate just what it meant to have ended a genocidal tyranny of thirty years in a peaceful manner. People are proud of both what they did and how they did it.

Let that be the first fact on the record, and a welcome starting point for the work to come.



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