Regional instability as a source of internal power consolidation: the realignment of Khartoum's foreign policy in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings

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Introduction

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of Sudan's foreign policy under Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir (hereinafter Bashir), President of Sudan since 1993, during the post-2011 Arab uprising period. In this paper, I present the preliminary findings of *Sudan-Egypt Relations*, a two-year research project funded by the Institute of Developing Economies (IDE). I analyze and discuss the bilateral relations of Sudan and Egypt with special attention on the perspectives of the former's main decision-makers. To pursue this line of enquiry, external and internal factors shaping these relations have been identified as part of a wider effort to illustrate an explanatory context for foreign policy-making.

Scope of Discussion

My analysis and discussion of Sudanese foreign policy in this paper proceeds in a sequence beginning with how the wave of popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region reframed the strategies of regimes for the sake of both survival and/or in order to expand their influence and consolidate their rule internally. Second, I focus on the perception of opportunities and threats as a driving factor in foreign policy making inside the Bashir regime. Third, I explore opportunity and threat perceptions with particular states and political entities such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, the European Union (EU), the USA, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, and Ethiopia. Finally, I explore the constraints on fully exploiting geopolitical opportunities as a result of the fragility of alliances and regime insecurity throughout the region.

Since political events in post-2011 MENA continue to dramatically change, a chronological approach has been deemed useful and adopted here to analyze the Bashir regime's behavior in both regional and international arenas.

Why study Sudan's Foreign Policy?

Sudan is considered by most experts on the MENA region as a minor power with little influence on regional affairs.[1] Sudan's economic indicators, geographical location, and its long internal wars, as well as the aggressive revisionist policies of the National Islamic Front (NIF)-led *Inqaz* (Salvation) government, after a coup brought it to power in 1989, isolated the country both regionally and internationally (Verhoeven 2013). These factors contributed to the weakening of state power and its capacity to exert significant influence on political events in the region.[2] Conversely, Sudan has succeeded on many occasions in recent years, namely in the post-2011 period, to emerge as an influential actor in regional politics. For example, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) played a pivotal role in the eventual overthrow Colonel Gaddafi's regime in 2011 (Ahmed 2013).

Another important case that illustrates the increasing significance of Sudan's role in regional politics is its current participation in the Saudi-led war in Yemen. Several thousand troops were deployed by the Bashir regime to the war-torn country. The Bashir regime has demonstrated its ability to abandon its strategic alliance with Iran, which posed a potential serious threat to Saudi Arabia, in favor of the seemingly more reliable ally of the latter. Sudan has provided substantial military support to the Saudi armed forces and its allies in the Yemen war (Sengupta March 26, 2015).

Other cases also showcase the Bashir regime's capacity to affect regional politics. His government has successfully brokered a peace deal in Khartoum between South Sudanese armed factions and the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) in June 2018 (Abdelaziz June 27, 2018). The improvement of Washington-Khartoum relations and the lifting of American economic sanctions in October 2017 (Verjee May 2018) is yet another indication of the increasing clout of Sudan in its regional surroundings. Additionally, EU bilateral relations with Sudan on issues such as the prevention of human trafficking and illegal immigration (Murphy 2014) reveals how an emerging security agenda has enhanced the value of Sudan's geopolitical position.[3] The aforementioned reasons appear to support the need to carry out research, presented in this article, on new developments in Sudan's foreign policy in the post-2011 era to gain a more accurate understanding of changing Sudanese-Egyptian relations.

1. The Arab Uprisings in Context

The series of popular uprisings that swept across the MENA region in late 2010 have led to a variety of political outcomes. Long-standing authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and

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[1] Most of the influential works on the international relations of the Middle East and North Africa have excluded Sudan from serious discussion.

[2] The Bashir *Inqaz* regime is used interchangeably to refer to Sudan's regime which seized power in 1989 and has ruled until 2019.

[3] The EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (HOAMRI) was held in Khartoum and it is known as the 'Khartoum Process'.

Yemen failed to suppress both armed and peaceful popular protests and finally collapsed in successive order. Others such as the Assad regime in Syria and al-Khalifa monarchy in Bahrain managed to avoid the fate of their neighbors through violent and repressive measures against protesters. The consequences of such a reaction, however, were a total collapse of the state in Syria and a brutal military intervention by the GCC joint forces against the opposition in Bahrain.

While some countries seem not to have been shaken dramatically by these popular uprisings, the GCC monarchies have undertaken precautionary or preemptive measures to contain popular discontent. However, the current context of popular uprisings still poses an ever-present threat of political unrest to monarchies with significant Shiite minority populations.[4] Attacks against Shiite in Kuwait and East Saudi Arabia have reached unprecedented levels accompanied by the swift overrunning of Yemen's major cities by the Houthi Shiite minority with its alleged linkages with Iran. All these have contributed greatly to increasing tensions between Iran and GCC states. Most importantly, popular uprisings in the MENA region during the last decade have contributed to a sense of uncertainty within ruling elite circles.

Why Bashir survived the "Arab Spring"?

Sudan was thought to be one of the most fertile grounds for a large-scale popular uprising for the following reasons. First, Sudan had a legacy of two successful popular uprisings in the past: the October 1964 Revolution which culminated in forcing president Ibrahim Abboud (1958-1964) to resign and the April 1985 popular uprising which ended Field Marshal Jafar Numeiri's sixteen-year rule (1969-1985). Second, the secession of South Sudan in 2011 and the subsequent loss of 80% of the country's oil fields led to economic hardships when oil revenues sharply fell, requiring the introduction of some austerity measures to cover the budget deficits. Such measures provoked widespread resentment amongst the population in general and those living in urban centers in particular. Third, amid the wave of popular uprisings, the country witnessed a historical landmark event, the secession of its southern region (Elbeely 2013). South Sudan's secession had its most deleterious impact not only in the economic sphere but also on the political legitimacy of the Bashir regime. Territorial integrity of the nation was a key element in the political narratives of consecutive regimes since the independence of Sudan in 1956. Fourth, the continuation of internal conflicts in Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan even after the secession of the southern region presented an imminent threat to the regime's ability to maintain security and drained its limited financial resources. Finally, the regional and international isolation imposed on the regime since the 1990s as a result of its assertive foreign policy contributed to weakening the regime on both the domestic and international fronts.

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[4] Shi'a Muslims are thought to constitute approximately 15 percent of Saudi Arabia's total population and about 40 percent of its oil-rich eastern al-Ahsa province.

All these factors were thought to be more than sufficient to generate a mass popular uprising against the regime in Khartoum. Contrary to these speculations, the Bashir regime nevertheless managed (at least until the present moment) to contain any threatening collective action aimed at bringing it down.[5] This paper will examine how the Bashir regime succeeded until recently to consolidate its power internally by fully exploiting regional instability. My analysis focuses on Sudan's response to the uprisings in Egypt, Libya, and the Yemen as well as the impact of the ICC's indictment of Bashir on Sudan both in the areas of domestic and foreign policies.

Tentative Findings

The following hypotheses derived from my analysis of the Bashir regime offer tentative findings in light of the examination of the central focus of this paper: (1) the Sudan's proactive support for the Libyan armed opposition and its cooperation with the NATO-led coalition had a dual effect of both containing the Gaddafi-sponsored Darfur's armed movements and demonstrating the regime's capacity as a cooperative regional actor that wished to change its previous status as a pariah state; (2) the regime's support to the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen, coupled with deporting the Iranian Cultural Attaché in Khartoum, could be perceived as a clear shift in Khartoum's foreign policy alliances. These steps were widely welcomed by Saudi Arabia and other GCC states, which in return, helped the regime to overcome the harsh economic difficulties through substantial financial support; and (3) the criminal indictment of President Bashir by the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Kiyani 2013) has affected the regime's decision-making process and made the "safety of the president" as a new goal of its foreign policy. The foreign policy priority of shielding Bashir from arrest and prosecution has often contradicted other primary strategies of regime maintenance and survival.

2. Sudan Foreign Policy 1989-1999: Regional Isolation in MENA and Africa

2.1.Assertive Foreign Policy

The successful military coup against the Sadiq al-Mahdi government in 1989 planned by the NFL had a tremendous impact on Sudan's foreign policy. The new regime pursued a strategy to consolidate power through a combination of adopting fully-fledged Islamization project known as the 'Civilization Project' (*al-Mashro' al-Hadari*) and the so-called 'Empowerment Policy' (*Siyasat al-Tamkeen*) which aimed at placing loyalist personnel in the all influential posts in the civil and military service (Gallab 2016: 116-18). Bashir's regime had benefited from the

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[5] In the process of concluding this paper, mass demonstrations continue to sweep major cities in Sudan for more than five months now and Bashir was arrested and forced to resign by the military on April 11, 2019. See Jason Burke, 11/04/2019, "Sudan protesters reject army takeover after removal of president," https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/11/sudan-army-ousts-bashir-after-30-years-in-power.

widespread activism of a resurgent Islamism that pervaded the region since the 1970s staving off any significant popular resistance. War in the southern region of the country was justified in the language of a holy struggle (*jihad*) in which tens of thousands of youth volunteers joined the armed forces. Government strategy aimed to create a loyal and dedicated ideological cadre of fighters to deter the armed forces from undertaking a coup against the ruling party of the NIF.

Additionally, Hasan al-Turabi, a prominent Islamist ideologue of the NIF, had ambitious plans to change regimes in both neighboring countries and across Muslim countries to Islamist-oriented regimes. To achieve this goal, Turabi established the Popular Arab and Islamic Congress (PIAC) in 1991 that invited prominent opposition leaders from these countries to Khartoum and sometimes provided a safe haven for these groups. Amongst these prominent members were the Saudi businessman Osama Bin Laden, Tunisian Nahda movement leader Rashid al-Ghannoushi and Egyptian Islamic militant groups (Sharfi 2017). This policy had a detrimental impact contributing to the later regional and international isolation that Sudan has suffered for decades.

The *Inqaz* regime's revolutionary policy encouraged the Clinton Administration to list Sudan as a state sponsor of terror in 1993, followed by comprehensive economic sanctions in 1997, which lasted for two decades. Sudan was accused of being involved in the attacks on the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar al-Salam leading to the destruction of a pharmaceutical factory located in North Khartoum that was alleged to be manufacturing chemical weapons.[6]

2.2. Friends and Foes in the Middle East

Sudan experienced regional isolation in both the Middle East and Africa until 2011. Since the *Inqaz* regime threw its support behind Saddam's Iraq during the Gulf crisis of 1990-91, the regime, with Yemen, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority, paid a high price for mistakenly anticipating the outcomes of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait that was followed by a US-led military coalition to expel Iraqi troops from the latter. Instead of trying to defuse tense relations with the GCC states, the regime in Khartoum chose to escalate its antagonistic activities through a combination of a campaign of publicly denouncing these monarchies and the harboring of dissident militant groups. A daily propaganda program on national state radio described the then king of Saudi Arabia, Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, as "the Tamed Cheetah." Most of GCC states responded harshly by ending the contracts of a large number of Sudanese workers on the one hand, and freezing almost all their development projects in Sudan on the other hand. Paradoxically, Kuwait was one of the friendliest GCC countries to Sudan investing heavily in its agricultural sector before the First Gulf War.

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[6] For detailed information on Sudanese-U.S. relations during the 1990s see(Petterson 2009)(Petterson 2009)(Petterson 2009) Donald Petterson, 2003, *Inside Sudan: Political Islam, Conflict, and Catastrophe* (New York: Basic Books).

In the post-Gulf War period, the Bashir regime managed to build stable relations with Qatar, especially after the arrival of Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifa to power in the mid-1990s. The then new Emir of Qatar had been known for his sympathy to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and some influential members of Egyptian MB were given refuge in Doha. Through its prominent position in the international MB movement, Khartoum succeeded to restore and strengthen its diplomatic and economic relations with Qatar. However, the Khartoum regime failed to regain the other GCC states' trust despite of the reconciliatory gestures that it had signaled from time to time.

After losing its major financial benefactors, Khartoum was compelled to look for new allies in the region. In return for its backing during the First Gulf War, Iraq provided the Sudanese regime with substantial military support to help overcome its disadvantageous position in internal conflicts. Moreover, Khartoum succeeded in building a strategic alliance with Tehran during the 1990s. This strategic partnership culminated in the building of military industrial complexes in the southern part of the capital city. These manufactured weapons had been used by the military in domestic wars and also sent to the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip.

2.2.1. *The Enmity of Gaddafi and Mubarak*

Muammar Gaddafi's regime in neighboring Libya sought to instigate domestic instability in Sudan (De Waal 2007). Gaddafi supported armed opposition movements when the Sudanese regime enjoyed superiority in the battlefield, but he reversed his polices when the Bashir regime was perceived to be too weak. Neither total collapse nor too strong a government in Khartoum served the interest of the regime in Tripoli. At the wake of the Arab uprisings, Gaddafi was in full support of the most influential rebel group in Darfur, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), and provided its fighters with advanced weapons. When JEM entered the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, to topple the government under what was code-named 'Operation Long Arm' (OLA) in May 2008, Bashir realized that regime change in Libya was an inevitable course of action to secure his survival.

Although Sudan's relations with Egypt witnessed a significant improvement in the years preceding the popular uprisings, these bilateral relations were the worst in the region. Egypt was traditionally an active player in Sudanese politics. It exercised considerable influence on prominent Sudanese politicians in the past. However, the Khartoum regime for the first time had become a major source of instability to Egypt during the 1990s when it harbored Egyptian radical Islamists. The failed assassination attempt of then Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in 1995 shook Cairo and pushed it towards taking robust measures against Khartoum. Cairo's unrelenting diplomatic pressure on Sudan resulted in UN economic sanctions followed by American sanctions on the country. Although American sanctions against Khartoum were a result of multiple factors, members of the Khartoum regime point to Egypt's negative role in escalating the anti-Khartoum campaign.

2.2.2. *Sudan's African Neighbors*

On the African front, the Bashir regime adopted a hostile foreign policy towards its neighbors from the very beginning of its existence. Sudan in the period prior to the 1989 coup d'état had welcomed Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees and rebel movements to counter the Ethiopian communist regime's backing of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) (Aalen 2014). After the successful ousting of the Mengistu regime, relations with Eritrea and Ethiopia improved significantly. However, relations with both countries soon worsened as a result of Khartoum's continuous interference in their internal affairs. When war broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998, each began bidding for Sudanese support. During the war, Ethiopia improved relations with Sudan seeking to ensure peace on its other borders (Woodward 2011: 46-47). To end the instability in the western region of Darfur, Khartoum aided rebel leader Idris Debbi's rapid successful seizure of power in Chad in 1990.

Despite its initial successes in bringing pro-Khartoum allies to power in neighboring African countries, Khartoum's unabated interference in their internal affairs, coupled with the rising influence of the USA in the region, brought about a drastic shift in these governments' stances towards Khartoum. In the mid-1990s, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda formed a strategic alliance with the USA. Furthermore, these governments provided military and logistical assistance to the SPLM and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) formed immediately after Bashir's seizure of power in 1989.

3. The Second Decade: 1999-2009

3.1.Moderate Foreign Policy amid Contentious International Politics

The second decade of Bashir's rule witnessed dramatic shifts in Sudan's foreign policy. The regime started to modify its attitude towards regional and international powers and adopted a series of pragmatic political decisions. These changes in Sudanese foreign policy occurred because of many factors. One such major factor was the eruption of factional in-fighting between Turabi and NIF core activists on the one hand and Bashir and his followers in both NIF and the armed forces. Bashir's faction, after months of political tensions, succeeded into eliminating Turabi's faction and strengthening its grip on power (Verhoeven 2013). The Bashir regime used this event to signal to the West and other regional powers that it had now cut ties with radical elements represented in Turabi and his cohort.

Another key factor was the success of the regime to produce and export its crude oil in 1999 due to Chinese investment in the risky venture of exploration of oil in the war-torn region of South Sudan.[7]

3.2.Sudan and the 9/11 Attacks

Devastating terrorist attacks against the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC in the USA on 9/11 played a key role in changing Sudan foreign policy. The Bush Administration's declared "War on Terror" pursued direct military intervention against "rogue states" which were accused of being state sponsors of terrorism. Sudan's political elite nervously anticipated the potential threat of an American military invasion of the country that appears to have motivated it to actively cooperate with American intelligence services to target alleged and actual terrorist organizations. Since it had been hosting large number of radical groups and individuals from the 1990s, Sudan's cooperation with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had been welcomed by intelligence circles as it provided them with new and important information on Islamist networks and individuals.

Further steps towards relinquishing the rogue status of Sudan led the Bashir regime to agree to the principle of self-determination for the people in the southern Sudan. This principle was incorporated in Machakos Protocol signed between the Congress National Party (NCP) and the SPLM/A in Kenya in 2002. The unprecedented compromise on the acceptance of the possibility of devolution and secession in the history of peace negotiations between Khartoum and southern rebel movements contributed to improving relations between intelligence communities in the USA and Sudan. Political progress on the southern question encouraged additional Western governments to recognize the Bashir regime and provide it with necessary legitimacy to conclude a peace deal.

Egypt's concern about its water share from the River Nile generated opposition to any moves towards the independence of a South Sudan. However, tense Sudanese-Egyptian relations throughout the 1990s undermined Egypt's capability to sponsor a peace process that would assuage its concerns in a future peace deal. The signing of the Machakos Protocol with no significant involvement of Egypt illustrated the decline of Egyptian influence over Sudan internal affairs. However, the previously mentioned elimination of influential members of the radical Turabi faction from the ruling party was welcomed in Cairo and contributed to a reduction of tensions with Khartoum.

Sudan's relations with Ethiopia also witnessed significant improvement. A separatist war in Ethiopia led to the creation of a new state of Eritrea and enhanced the value of Sudan's

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[7] For a detailed account of Sudan-China relations, see Daniel Large and Luke A Patey (eds.), 2011, *Sudan Looks East: China, India & the Politics of Asian Alternatives* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer Ltd), especially Daniel Large's contribution in chapter eight and Daniel Large, 2007, "China and the Changing Context of Development in Sudan," *Development* 50, 57-62. I suggest that Chinese interests did affect the decision-making process in Sudan and pushed it toward a more rational foreign policy.

geostrategic position (Woodward 2011: 45-47). Bashir's regime declared its support to Ethiopia and refrained from providing any logistical support to Eritrea in the conflict. Good relations with Sudan was also crucial to land-locked Ethiopia for access to the Red Sea. Addis Ababa similarly agreed to halt its support of Sudanese armed opposition which it previously backed during the 1990s.

Substantial improvement in relations between GCC states and Sudan soon followed Khartoum's abandoning of certain ideological policies. Gulf states were interested in investing in Sudan's agricultural sector. The rise of oil prices since 2000 boosted the GCC's investment in the Horn of Africa in general, and Sudan and Ethiopia in particular. These states have been concerned with their own food security because their region is one of the least self-sufficient regarding food production. Sudan, Ethiopia, and other land and water-rich countries have been viewed as attractive places for Gulf investment in the agricultural sector thanks to the close location of those countries.[8]

The perception among external actors that the internal power struggle between different factions within the *Inqaz* regime reflected ideological reforms in the direction towards a moderate foreign policy helped Bashir' winning faction to rebrand itself as a moderate and cooperative regime. Foreign policy changes were also related to the sharp increase in Sudan oil revenue. Strong economic and political ties with China and other Asian countries had relatively strengthened the regime's position and lessened its dependency on USA and Western powers. Contrary to the expectations of expert, the post-9/11 era had been skillfully navigated by the Bashir regime to ensure its political survival.

3.3.International Legitimacy

On 9 January 2005, the ruling NCP and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) signed a peace deal known as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the longest internal conflict in Africa. The agreement was a summation of six protocols including (a) declaration of principles; (b) security arrangements; (c) political power-sharing; (d) wealth-sharing; and (e) a protocol on the three disputed areas, Abyei, South Blue Nile and South Kordofan. According to the CPA, a six-year interim period is incorporated, and a Government of National Unity (GoNU) consisting of the peace deal's signatories and other political forces would implement the terms of the agreement. Presidential and parliamentary elections were

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[8] For a detailed account of the trajectory of the GCCs investment in the Horn of Africa, see Jos Meester, Willem Van den Berg, and Harry Verhoeven, 2018, *Riyal Politik: The Political Economy of Gulf Investments in the Horn of Africa* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael').

arranged to take place by the end of the fourth year of the interim period and a referendum on the right to self-determination was scheduled to occur by the end of the interim period.[9]

The narrow composition of the CPA, whose members mostly hailed from the ruling party and the major armed opposition, denied other political forces in northern and southern Sudan any genuine political representation. Consequently, both parties succeeded in strengthening their grip on power in their respective territories of the country. Since the international community's main concern was focused on the smooth implementation of the CPA in general and the referendum in the southern region in particular, Bashir's ruling party obtained international legitimacy as a chief broker and implementer of the CPA.

4. **The Third Decade: Regional Upheavals**

4.1. Popular Uprisings and the Secession of South Sudan

The secession of South Sudan in 2011 was also expected to present a major source of insecurity to Khartoum due to many reasons. Oil revenues sharply fell for the Bashir regime after the southern region broke away with most of the oil-producing territories in the southern region. Mutual distrust persisted between the political elites of Khartoum and Juba leading to both sides backing the other's political opponents in terms of logistical and financial assistance.

On the domestic level, reconciliation between the regime and its influential political and armed opposition is a distant reality. Various opposition forces adopted a common strategy of armed struggle and formed the umbrella organization of the Sudan Revolutionary Forces (SRF). The economic crisis pushed the government to reduce public subsidies on basic foodstuffs and fuel. As a result, mass demonstrations overwhelmed Khartoum's streets in September 2013 but they were brutally suppressed. Conflicts in Darfur, South Blue Nile and South Kordofan escalated sharply after the secession of South Sudan and have now become the "New South" with all of this term's past connotations of conflict and violence.[10]

These aspects of Sudan's domestic scene of instability and conflict compounded by its isolation on the world stage were perceived to create the sufficient conditions for a popular uprising in the country.

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[9] "The Comprehensive Peace Agreement between The Government of the Republic of The Sudan and The Sudan's People Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army," 09/01/2005, *United Nations Peacemaker*, <http://peacemaker.un.org/node/1369>.

[10] International Federation for Human Rights, 22/07/2011, *Sudan: Conflict in South Kordofan: The international community must take action now*, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4e390509c.html>.

During this present decade, the Khartoum regime managed to survive until recent protests brought down Bashir from power. The following question arises: Why was this the case? The conventional explanation is that Sudanese citizens, unlike their Arab compatriots, had already experienced popular uprisings in the past which culminated in toppling two authoritarian regimes. This legacy, however, did not generate collective action. Rather, the failure of democratic rule to generate stability or prosperity after these uprisings had been continually emphasized by the regime-controlled media. Although this explanation is plausible, it needs to be complemented by other explanatory factors which could account for the inability of the wave of the Arab uprisings in the last eight years to affect Khartoum despite Sudan's past experience. In the following subsections, I touch upon Khartoum regime's response to the Arab uprisings and try to explore how the Bashir regime succeeded until 2019 in utilizing an unstable regional environment to defuse and contain internal threats.

4.2.Khartoum's Response to the Popular Uprising in Egypt

Former President Bashir was one of the first heads of state to visit Cairo after the success of the popular uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak from power. He visited Egypt's capital less than a month after the overthrow of Mubarak (Sudan News Agency 2011). During his visit, Bashir expressed his support to the revolution. Furthermore, the government of Sudan donated 5000 cows to resolve the acute shortage of meat in Egypt. Khartoum welcomed the change in Cairo for a variety of reasons. First, Egypt in the aftermath of the revolution would be too preoccupied with its internal affairs in order for it to play an active role in Sudanese affairs. Second, Khartoum anticipated that the Muslim Brotherhood had better prospects to gain political ascendancy than other political forces if free and fair elections were to take place. Therefore, Khartoum wished for a friendlier government in Cairo. Third, by expressing its public support to revolutions across the region, Khartoum aimed at distancing its regime from being looked at as the next candidate for regime change after Mubarak's downfall.

However, the election of Mohamed Morsi and the overwhelming victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in parliamentary elections did not automatically lead to Khartoum's anticipated improvement in bilateral Sudanese-Egyptian relations. Bashir again visited Cairo after Morsi's election to the Egyptian presidency. But Morsi visited Sudan only after ten months in power following a tour of more than ten countries. In an interview conducted by the author with a former minister in Morsi's government, he mentioned that the military obstructed efforts to improve ties with Sudan. Khartoum was angered by this Egyptian attitude since it had expected a substantial improvement in Sudanese-Egyptian relations. However, to Khartoum's unexpected advantage, the reluctance of Morsi to strengthen Egypt's relations with Sudan enabled the Bashir regime to welcome another political change, the ousting of Morsi in July 2013. A visit by Bashir to meet the new president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, took place after his election in 2014.

Another dimension of Sudanese-Egyptian relations has revolved around the River Nile helping Sudan to deter a hostile attitude from Cairo. The relative decline of Egyptian regional power encouraged Ethiopia and its allies in the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) to exert greater pressure on Egypt to re-negotiate the colonial-era Nile Water Agreements (Salman 2013). Sudan was able to play an important role as a mediator between the two countries. Sudanese efforts at mediation were welcomed by the new al-Sisi government and contributed to the strengthening of strategic relations between Sudan and Egypt. More cordial ties between Bashir and al-Sisi indirectly improved Sudan's relations with Saudi Arabia and other regional patrons of al-Sisi's Egypt. Shortly before attending the greatly publicized 'Egypt Economic Development' conference at Sharm al-Sheikh in March 2015, Bashir denounced the Muslim Brotherhood movement in an interview with *al-Etihad* newspaper. He furthermore pronounced that it was a "terrorist organization." By doing so, Bashir joined the anti-Muslim Brotherhood bloc in the MENA region led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to benefit from his cooperation.

Despite significant improvements, the ties between Khartoum and Cairo witnessed several setbacks during the last two years. Khartoum's endorsement of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) has angered the Egyptian government and public opinion in Cairo.[11] Harassment cases targeting Sudanese in Egypt by security forces have been reported. The official media in both capitals have waged a hostile campaign that instigated diplomatic tensions with Egypt and reached its apex in January 2018 when Sudan recalled its ambassador in Cairo as a protest against a massive anti-Sudan campaign in the Egyptian media (Agency France Press 2018).

Improved Sudanese-Turkish ties also had a negative impact on Sudan's relations with its northern neighbor. An increased Turkish presence in the region was perceived to be a potential threat to Egypt's national security. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's historic visit to Khartoum on the Christmas Eve of 2017 and the signing of number of agreements on economic cooperation were a matter of greater concern to Cairo. Regional tensions also center on Egyptian accusations against Sudan that it still continues to harbor prominent figures of the MB amidst requests for their extradition to Cairo.

4.3. Sudan's Participation in the Libyan Revolution

The Libyan uprising in 2011 presented the Bashir regime its first opportunity to participate in a changing regional arena. Sudan's military and security forces played a vital role in providing substantial political and military assistance to the post-Gaddafi National Transitional Council (NTC) of Libya as well as deploying its forces in the southern part of Libya. Khartoum has also

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[11] Aaron Maasho, 29/01/2018, "Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan hope to break Nile dam talks deadlock in one month," *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africanunion-summit-nile/egypt-ethiopia-and-sudan-hope-to-break-nile-dam-talks-deadlock-in-one-month-idUSKBN1FI1LC>.

coordinated its activities with NATO forces and allowed its aircraft free access to Sudan's airspace. Moreover, Sudanese intelligence services provided information on targets inside Libya which helped NATO to carry out successful air strikes.

The Bashir regime's perception of threat and opportunity of participating in Libya's uprising was informed by the following factors: first, Qatar, the major player in the anti-Gaddafi campaign, provided Khartoum with substantial financial support to overcome the economic hardship in the aftermath of the secession of South Sudan; second, cooperation with the NATO-led operation was considered as the ideal opportunity to break through the international isolation that Sudan suffered for the last two decades; third, the overthrow of Gaddafi's regime would help Khartoum to drain Libyan financial and logistical support that Darfur's armed opposition movements enjoyed to the detriment of the Bashir regime.

The regime in Khartoum succeeded in weakening JEM and other armed movements in Darfur which were forced to depart from Libyan territory. In December 2011, the Sudan Armed Forces succeeded to kill JEM's charismatic leader Khalil Ibrahim who was attempting to travel from Darfur to South Sudan with his troops (BBC 2011). Since then, JEM has been severely weakened and lost its capacity to challenge Khartoum regime on the battlefield. Later events in Libya, however, indicate that Egyptian influence over Libyan internal affairs has been rapidly increasing, while Sudanese presence has gradually diminished with growing tensions between Egypt and Sudan because of their support to rival militias.[12]

4.4.Sudan and the Yemeni Crisis

The astonishing successes of Houthi rebels in overrunning the major cities of Yemen in 2014 provoked urgent action from the GCC states. For these GCC states, this event was perceived to be more than a mere Yemeni internal power struggle but a demonstration of Iranian interference seeking to install pro-Iranian governments in their own immediate neighborhood. To the north of the Arabian Peninsula, the governments in Baghdad and Damascus are strategic allies to Tehran. Despite ideological differences, Sudan, located across the Red Sea, had been a strategic military ally to Iran for more than two decades, serving to funnel Sudanese-manufactured weapons to both Hezbollah and Hamas. Restless agitation in eastern Saudi Arabia among the marginalized Shi'ite population is a continuing cause for concern. After its failure to mediate the conflict in Yemen, Saudi Arabia decided to take part in the war and declared its participation through an aerial bombardments campaign involving other GCC countries. In this complex situation, Sudan, shortly after Saudi Arabia's declaration of war against Houthi rebels, announced its support to the campaign and expressed its readiness to send troops to Yemen (*New York Times* 2015).

Khartoum, in a clear sign to Saudi Arabia, also undertook additional political action to gain further Saudi trust and political backing. The Shiite Huseiniyat (congregation halls) in Khartoum

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[12] John Pike, "Sudan-Libya Relations," *GlobalSecurity.org*,
<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/sudan/forrel-ly.htm>.

were closed down and the Iranian Cultural Attaché was expelled from Khartoum.[13] In response, Saudi Arabia eased its proposed restrictions on bank transactions with Khartoum and was reported to have provided Khartoum with financial assistance. Sudan has also been one of the few countries that agreed to sever diplomatic ties with Iran in the aftermath of Saudi-Iranian crisis in January 2016 after angry demonstrators attacked the Saudi embassy in Tehran.

5. **Constraints on Sudan's Foreign Policy**

5.1.The International Criminal Court

The initiation of the ICC prosecution of Bashir for allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity presented a new development in international law. For the first time, the prosecutor of the ICC had brought genocide charges against a sitting head of state since the court began operating in 2002. Despite its earlier support for the referral of Darfur crimes to the ICC by the United Nations Security Council, China, the Arab League and the African Union rejected the indictment of Bashir and highlighted its negative impact on the peace process in Darfur. Two arrest warrants were issued by the ICC in March 2009 and May 2010 which had a considerable impact on both internal politics and Sudan's foreign policy.

The timing of the arrest warrant was controversial since it coincided with the preparation for Sudan's post-conflict elections scheduled in April 2010 and a secessionist referendum in the south of the country scheduled in January 2011. Major reforms on laws restricting freedoms and rights were enacted in preparation for these elections. These legal reforms required full cooperation between the coalition partners in the Government of National Unity. Although the arrest warrant posed a great threat to Bashir, he recognized that the international community still needed his regime's collaboration to ensure the peaceful implementation of referendum on secession in southern Sudan. Despite the opposition demands for suspending the national elections, the USA pushed for conducting elections on time. Although widespread rigging was reported, the Western powers preferred to turn a blind eye to this electoral fraud. For the international community, the priority was to ensure the Bashir regime did not obstruct the secessionist referendum in Sudan's southern region.[14]

Bashir's indictment singling him out as a perpetrator of war crimes created tensions between the former president and influential members of the regime. An indicted president was a burden on a regime which hoped to improve relations with USA and other Western powers. A major

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[13] Reuters, 2/09/2014, "Sudan closes Iranian cultural centres and expels diplomats," *Reuters*, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-sudan-iran-culture-idUKKBN0GX15G20140902>.

[14] Sudan Tribune, 13/03/2010, "US official says Darfur's Nur forfeited peace opportunity," *Sudan Tribune*, <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article34414>.

diplomatic breakthrough to occur, however, appears to have required the stepping down of Bashir, either voluntarily or by force. As a result, an intractable contradiction between Bashir's personal interests and his regime's interest arose. Internal divisions appeared within the regime. Up to 2011, the presidency, the NCP and security forces constituted the main pillars of the Bashir regime and negotiations occurred between these institutions to reach consensus on important decisions. For example, two leaked documents in 2013 and 2014 reveal that the decision-making process of foreign policy was negotiated among multiple institutions.[15] However, after the issuing of arrest warrant against Bashir, the circle of decision-making began to be concentrated in a narrow circle of the president and his close allies.

After his re-election as president in 2010, Bashir promised that he would not run for president in the next election. However, he decided in 2014 to run for new term for the self-declared goal of completing Sudan's economic and political "renaissance". The resistance by NCP influential leaders, namely Nafie Ali Nafie and Ali Osman Taha, to nominate the incumbent president as the party's official candidate for 2015 presidential elections exacerbated Bashir-NCP relations. Reform of the election law three months before the presidential elections aimed at strengthening Bashir at the expense of the ruling party. The amendments to the election law provided the president the authority to appoint state governors who would be directly accountable to the executive.

Despite the relative success in overcoming regional crises, Khartoum's capacity under Bashir to achieve further diplomatic breakthroughs was not promising. As noted above, Bashir's indictment by the ICC in 2009 and 2010 complicated the power structure of the Sudanese regime. Bashir became more preoccupied with his own personal survival than his regime's interests. During the last two years, it became obvious that Bashir no longer trusted his party, the NCP, which led him to sideline all potential rivals. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Professor Ibrahim Ghandour was fired shortly after heading a successful negotiation process with USA that culminated in the lifting of American economic sanction. Senior NCP members were either sacked or reappointed in less important posts in 2013 and 2014 as a result of opposing Bashir's desire and eventual selection as the ruling party's candidate for the presidency.

Major reshuffles within the government by Bashir served to consolidate the power of the beleaguered former president against his party. First, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) was elevated under the direct supervision of the president's office. In doing so, Bashir aimed at counterbalancing the power of National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), where an opposing faction of senior NCP officials exercised strong influence. The RSF thus assumed the new role of the protection of the president. Second, Bashir appointed some of his relatives to senior and influential posts in the government regardless of their competence of such roles.

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[15] Peter Dorrie, 28/02/2015, "Leaked Document Alleges Sudan Planned Mass Murder," *Medium*, <https://medium.com/war-is-boring/leaked-document-alleges-that-sudan-planned-mass-murder-b08175f8e843>.

Mutaz Musa was appointed as Prime Minister in June 2018 and two of the president's cousins were assigned to the post of the Head of Presidential Offices despites their Baathist orientations.[16] On 22 February 2019, the first vice president was replaced with the military intelligence general and Ahmad Haroun was appointed as acting chief of the NCP until the next party's convention. Both men are wanted by the ICC.[17] These reshuffles were intended to ensure that those similarly indicted for war crimes would not betray Bashir. Paradoxically, Bashir's survival strategy eliminated internationally accepted officials who enjoyed popularity at home and abroad.

5.2.The Gulf Crisis

In July 2017, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt severed diplomatic ties with Qatar, accusing it of destabilizing the region with its support for radical Islamic groups. This development affected existing alliances and added a new factor to the dynamics of regional conflicts. Considerable pressure was exerted by opposing sides to join their respective camps. Turkey expressed full support to Qatar, both tied by their support to the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, and dispatched thousands of troops to Doha. Iran also expressed its support to the blockaded country through food supplies.

Sudan has found itself squeezed between these two opposing camps. Qatar has been a strong financial and political partner to Sudan for more than two decades and helped the Bashir regime overcome its never-ending crises. It has also sponsored a long and difficult peace process to end the conflict in Darfur and pledged to finance the post-conflict reconstruction of the war-torn western region. Sudan's new alliance with Saudi Arabia, however, has been important for many reasons. First, Saudi Arabia is estimated to be one of the largest financial supporters of the regime in Khartoum in reward for the latter's decision to cut ties with Iran and its military participation in the Saudi-led campaign against the Houthis in Yemen. Since the start of Saudi intervention in Yemen, tens of thousands of Sudanese land troops were deployed to the conflict zone. Second, Sudan has also expected Saudi Arabia to use its close diplomatic ties with the USA to persuade the latter to lift the two-decades-old economic sanctions. The reactions of international and local Islamist movements to the previous actions have also been a matter of concern. While siding with Saudi Arabia could have turned Islamists, a popular support base of the regime in Khartoum, against Bashir, standing by Qatar could cost Sudan its improving relations with the USA that would then hinder the efforts to lift sanctions targeting the country. Faced with such a difficult situation, the Bashir regime chose to take a neutral position and

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[16] Agence France-Presse, 10/09/2018, "Sudan's Omar Al Bashir sacks entire cabinet, appoints new PM," *The National*, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/sudan-s-omar-al-bashir-sacks-entire-cabinet-appoints-new-pm-1.768605>.

[17] 7D News, 1/03/2019, "Sudan's Bashir Hands Party Leadership to New Deputy," *7D News*, <https://7dnews.com/news/sudan-s-bashir-hands-party-leadership-to-new-deputy>.

expressed its readiness to mediate the dispute along with Kuwait. Khartoum's stance resulted, however, in disappointment within both rival camps with each abruptly cutting financial support to the Bashir regime. These examples show how a shifting political environment negatively shaped Bashir's attempts to manipulate regional uncertainty and insecurity to ensure his survival.

5.3.Sudan-EU Relations

Sudan's relationship with the EU passed through a process of challenging stages. EU member states were strident supporters of the ICC. The arrest warrant issued by the court against president Bashir in 2009 and 2010 contributed to worsening Sudanese-EU relations. However, UK and Germany later lobbied for the lifting of economic sanctions imposed on Sudan by the U.S. administration. The EU's policy changes towards Sudan occurred because of multiple factors. EU member states were determined to limit the influx of refugees from Africa in cooperation with local governments. As a source and transit country, Sudan has become an important country in the struggle against migration. The EU economic assistance provided to Sudan amounted to 100 million euros for the prevention of new waves of refugees crossing Sudan's borders into Libya.[18] EU aid may also go to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) which is in charge of border control. Such financial support by EU member states has provoked concerns among human rights organizations because of the links of these paramilitary forces, formerly militias, with the allegations of war crimes committed in Darfur. These militias accused of perpetrating many atrocities in Darfur were recruited into the paramilitary forces and were also held responsible for opening fire on anti-Bashir protestors in the capital city in September 2013. The RSF's ability to rebrand itself as a strong ally in the international community's campaign to combat illegal migration provided it with much needed internal legitimacy. Although EU member states have been main supporters of the ICC, EU financial support and cooperation with Sudan in security sector has weakened the international court and to some extent questioned these states' willingness to execute the arrest warrant.

5.4. Sudan-United States Relations

Sudanese foreign policy suffered the harsh consequences of two decades of economic sanctions which severely damaged Sudan's economy and development. The conflict in Darfur and the 'Two Areas', South Kordofan and South Blue Nile, as well as the interference of Sudanese government in the conflict in South Sudan were matters of concerns for successive U.S. administrations. The USA imposed the following conditions for the lifting of sanctions: allowing

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[18] Neven Mimica, 6/04/2016, "EU announces 100 million Euros for Sudan to address irregular migration and forced displacement," *ReliefWeb*, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/eu-announces-100-million-euros-sudan-address-irregular-migration-and-forced-0>.

access to humanitarian aid; cutting support to the Ugandan Armed Opposition, the Lord Resistance Army (LRA); and refraining from sponsoring terrorism.

In 2015, the Sudanese and American governments started a new series of negotiations., A five-track approach was adopted to monitor the progress of the Bashir regime's engagement. Competing opinions inside the U.S. government fought against each other on whether and to what degree Sudan should be brought in from the political wilderness. The intelligence community pushed for normalizing relations with Khartoum on the basis that Bashir's regime demonstrated significant improvement in the five tracks in general and in the counterterrorism activities in particular. Due to considerable pressure from a lobby coalition, namely the Save Darfur Campaign that succeeded to publicize the atrocities committed by the Bashir regime, Congress was hesitant to approve improved American relations with Sudan.[19] Khartoum made significant progress in most of the five tracks. The Sudanese regime continued to cooperate with the U.S. intelligence community providing it with information on radical groups in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan region

Sudan's former chief of national intelligence and security service was appointed ambassador to Washington. Salah Gosh, a desirable interlocutor for Washington, returned to his earlier position as chief of NISS. In its relations with South Sudan, Khartoum is reported to have significantly reduced its support for South Sudanese rebel movements. Furthermore, Sudan sponsored a long, but successful peace talks between South Sudanese armed factions and the government of South Sudan in June 2018 (*Reuters* June 25, 2018)

Sudan was able to play the role of mediator due to its past relations with South Sudanese leaders and direct knowledge of South Sudan's problems. Moreover, South Sudan's relations with its southern neighbors worsened in the aftermath of the eruption of the war because of allegations raised by rival parties to the conflict that Ethiopia and Uganda sided with the opposition and government respectively. Political stability in South Sudan was also important to Khartoum since it can benefit from the oil revenues as specified in earlier joint agreements. Removal of Sudanese opposition groups from South Sudan was another goal that Khartoum tried to achieve through its cooperation with Juba.

In Sudan, humanitarian assistance to people in need has been allowed and many international organizations restarted their activities in conflict zones throughout the country. A unilateral cease-fire has demonstrated Khartoum's good will in regard to Darfur and the 'Two Areas'. Political support for the LRA diminished and relations with Uganda has improved gradually. For all these reasons, successive American administrations, from Obama to Trump, decided to lift economic sanctions on Sudan.

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[19] "Time to Repeal U.S. Sanctions on Sudan?," 22/06/2017, *International Crisis Group*, Crisis Group Africa Briefing Number 127 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/b127time-repeal-us-sanctions-sudan>.

5.4.1. *Constraints on Sudanese-U.S. Relations*

Although Sudan-United States relations have experienced remarkable progress in recent years, many obstacles still hinder their relations in a variety of areas. The ICC indictment of Bashir is proving to be a stubborn hurdle in Sudan's normalization. The U.S. administration and European governments cannot easily ignore the domestic pressures to force Bashir to at least step down in exchange for normalizing ties with Khartoum in international politics. Former President Bashir's recognition of this reality motivated him to start seeking alternative ways to stay in power. In the aftermath of the removal of sanctions, Washington has sent clear signals that it prefers an alternative leader to assume power in Khartoum as a precondition for further cooperation with Sudan. The visit of Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan to Khartoum, meeting the then Foreign Minister Ghandour, the First Vice President and Prime Minister General Bakri Hassan Saleh, on 17 November 2017 signaled Washington's preferred choice of leadership in Sudan. Since American officials never met Bashir after the ICC indictment, he expressed his frustration on the same day of the American official's visit to Khartoum. The former president addressed a public rally in al-Jazeera region in which he declared that he was planning to endorse its state governor al-Tahir Eila for the presidency. Bashir's unequivocal and direct message to his prime and foreign ministers was that only he would decide the ruling party's candidate for the presidential elections.

On 23 November 2017, just few days after Sullivan's visit to Khartoum, Bashir visited Russia and asked for the protection of President Vladimir Putin against U.S. interference. He offered Russia a military base on the Red Sea's coast and praised Russia's role in Syria. [20] This unexpected behavior reflected the factional disunity within the Bashir regime. His visit and statements in Russia could have undermined Sudanese-U.S. negotiations. Moreover, they could also pose a challenge for Bashir since most of the GCC states, Sudan's largest financial donors, were suspicious about his new stances.

During the last several years, Bashir deployed every available diplomatic leverage at Sudan's disposal for the sake of his personal survival. This strategy for survival, however, did not necessarily align with his regime institutions' perception for its survival. Prominent members in the ruling party and security forces, who previously constituted the backbone of the regime in the past, view the prospect of an improvement in relations with the USA as the most plausible strategy to break Sudan's isolation and stem the collapse of the economy. Other factions perceive ties with Qatar and Turkish camp and solidarity with the International MB organization to be crucial in maintaining the integrity of the existing regime. These competing perceptions of

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[20] "**Sudan's President Bashir asks Putin for 'protection' from 'aggressive' US,**" *France 24*, **November 23, 2017, https://www.france24.com/en/20171123-sudan-president-bashir-asks-putin-protection-aggressive-us.**

regime survival widened Bashir's scope for action in changing sides when opportune to gain a degree of continued support inside the ruling party.

Conclusion

Shifting alliances in Khartoum's foreign policy could have not been possible without dramatic changes in regional politics. Before the wave of popular uprisings in the MENA region, Sudan was considered a pariah state. American economic sanctions were in force for more than 15 years, GCC states, except Qatar, did not have cordial ties with Khartoum, and Gaddafi's Libya posed a grave threat the regime in Khartoum through its support of opposition armed movements. Egypt under Mubarak was one of the leading members of the anti-Bashir campaign amongst Sudan's neighbors and on the world stage. In light of both the African and domestic regional dimensions, Khartoum regime's collapse was entertained as a foreseeable and realistic outcome.

The Bashir regime, however, had skillfully utilized the emerging new order throughout the MENA region to enable his regime to survive internal upheavals. Other factors such as the coinciding of popular uprisings in Arab region with the secession of South Sudan, armed conflicts in the peripheries of the country and the reality of Islamists being in power appear to have emboldened the regime in Khartoum rather than destabilizing it. The Bashir regime managed to overcome economic hardships, contained powerful Darfurian armed opposition movements, and, more importantly, circumvented the regional isolation that has lasted for more than two decades. Although it still too difficult to anticipate the impact of the changing regional political environment, mainly because of the ICC conundrum, it can tentatively be argued, in reference to the discussion in the previous pages, that Khartoum has no doubt succeeded to utilize regional instability to survive recent and past internal upheavals.

However, the rapid pace of changes in political alliances contributed to undermining Bashir's strategy of regime survival. For example, the Saudi-Iranian rift presented a golden opportunity to Sudan to abandon its controversial alliance with Iran. This decision helped Khartoum defuse diplomatic tensions not only with the GCCs but also with Israel and the United States who aimed to curtail Iran's activities in the region, such as its support to Hezbollah and Hamas. Sudan's active engagement in Saudi-led Yemen war also gave added value to the Bashir regime as an important ally.

Conversely, the later rift between Qatar and Saudi-led camp brought more threats than opportunities for Bashir's regime because Qatar was one of its most generous donors since the 1990s. Ideological ties with the MB has been also important source of power at home and Bashir still needs the organization's support to survive political upheavals. Mutual distrust between Saudi Arabia and Sudan because of the latter's inconsistent behavior and the changing stances in regional rivalries made Bashir an unreliable partner who was deemed not to be worthy substantial political and financial support.

However, the most important factor that hindered Bashir's survival strategy is the ICC indictment. The ICC's indictment hampered any stable diplomatic breakthrough since the scope for United States and Western governments to pursue cordial relations with Khartoum continues to be limited by lobby coalitions mobilizing public opinion and politicians against Bashir and members of his cohort accused of perpetrating war crimes in conflict zones. Bashir's fear that he could be replaced by powerful groups inside the ruling elite circle when he was president pushed him to sideline skillful diplomats and senior members who might pose a threat to him. The former president narrowed down the decision-making circle to his closest associates thus undermining his government's capacity to achieve significant and decisive breakthrough.

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