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Democratic Transition

The Path of Democratic Transition in Sudan and Algeria: Opportunities and Challenges

Background Paper

Barely a decade since the revolutions of 2011 that marked a significant transformation in the region's social and political history, a new upsurge erupted in several Arab countries, proclaiming the persistence of popular aspiration for change despite the challenges and setbacks that beset the first wave. Two popular revolutions in Sudan and Algeria gave rise to unexpected changes in dominant ruling regimes clinging fast to their positions: faced with sweeping mass demonstrations President Omar al-Bashir was overthrown on April 11, 2019, while only days earlier massive waves of protest in Algeria had prompted President Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika to end his term as President of the Republic, on April 2, 2019. Since these developments, Sudan and Algeria each embarked on a difficult process of political transition towards a democratic system based on concepts of pluralism, rule of law, citizenship and protection of civil and political freedoms. The path of transition in the two countries faces many obstacles and challenges.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) will devote its Tenth Annual Conference on Issues of Democracy and Democratic Transition – supervised by The Arab Center *Project of Democratic Transformation and Transition Phases in The Arab Countries* - to the study of these two countries that are undergoing the political transition process in critical local, regional and external contexts.

First, the Sudanese Case

The Sudanese revolution that broke out on December 19, 2018, was not simply a second wave of the Arab revolutions of 2011 calling for dignity, democracy and justice; it also reflected a recurring Sudanese pattern of events. Since independence, Sudan has witnessed several transitional periods aimed at establishing pluralistic democratic rule, as well as three military coups and three revolutions or popular uprisings. The three uprisings aimed to overthrow political regimes installed by the military. The “October 1964 Revolution” led to the overthrow of the Ibrahim Abboud regime established in a November 1958 military coup; then the April 1985 revolution led to the overthrow of the regime of Jaafar Nimeiri, who likewise came to power via military coup in May 1969; then the popular “December 2018 revolution” toppled the regime of Omar al-Bashir, which had ruled Sudan since a coup in June 1989. Most of the military coups arose, however, from division among political elites and civilian parties contending for power, some of whom, to better confront their civilian opponents, invited military officers to take charge.

In addition to the weakness of political parties and civilian elites, the interference of the military in power, and a consequent authoritarian legacy extending throughout all sectors of society, Sudan has suffered other severe problems including ethnic and regional problems, civil wars in the south and in the Darfur region, the escalation of the role of armed militias, not to mention the problems of poverty, backwardness, corruption, and weakness of state institutions that it shares with many countries of the south. Sudan's government and people also suffered from the problem of terrorism and being included on the United States' list of states sponsors of terrorism and the consequential economic sanctions that isolated Sudan from the global economy for decades, exacerbating its social and economic problems.

The transition process in 2019 / 2020 was in no way an easy one, with many falling victim to confrontations with the security forces and the army, after the coup against al-Bashir, especially in the Khartoum General Command sit-in massacre. The country then witnessed a difficult period of negotiations between the civilian forces that were at the forefront of the popular uprising and the military establishment – the country’s main organizing institution – before concluding an agreement known as the “Constitutional Document” on August 17, 2019 between the Transitional Military Council, which assumed power after the ouster of Bashir and the “Coalition of Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change”. External factors, seen in Ethiopian and African mediation, played a pivotal role in this agreement. A few months beyond the transitional rule, Sudan witnessed the announcement of a normalization of its relationship with Israel; there were differing views amongst the pillars of the transitional civilian government, but the military settled the matter in favor of normalization.

The democratic transition process in Sudan is still unstable due to the intervention of external forces interested to see continued military rule; their influence increased with disagreements amongst civilian forces active in the revolution over the relationship with the army; over the nature of the transition phase; over the exclusion of some civilian forces after the revolution; over normalization with Israel; as well as owing to the newness of Sudanese internal peace agreements with armed movements.

Hence the Sudanese case suggests many topics for research, including:

1. The road to the revolution and its actors: What political, economic, social, demographic and cultural determinants and structural factors shaped the revolutionary moment? Were there transformations that adequately enabled a mass movement to chart the revolution’s course and facilitate the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir’s regime? What composed the forces of revolution? Why didn’t they resemble the youth forces that dominated the scene of the first wave of Arab revolutions? How did traditional party and trade union forces maintain their momentum under an authoritarian regime such as that of al-Bashir? How did they manage the mobilization against the regime? What persuasive instruments were available to them? How might the system’s responses be evaluated? How did the coalition of the Forces of Declaration of Freedom and Change take shape? What interests brought its members together? Can the coalition remain a major force for achieving the revolution’s goals? What are the other opposition forces, apart from the coalition? What are commonalities and differences between the two sides of opposition?

2. The former regime and the military establishment: What are the components of forces seen as siding with the previous regime? What interests brought them together? How did they form their positions on the revolution’s demands? How should one understand the positions on the revolution taken by the army and armed militias? How did the military’s position on the revolution evolve? Can these forces remain in the political arena or return to power?

3. The balance of power between different parties and determinants of the negotiating context:

How was the Coalition of the Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change able to take the lead politically and negotiate with the Military Council? After overthrowing al-Bashir, what were the instruments of pressure and influence at the disposal of the Coalition of Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change and the Military Council that took power, respectively? How did civilians deal with the evasiveness of the military? What was the outcome of negotiations between them? How does the “constitutional document” reflect the balance of power between the two sides? Do they include guarantees for effecting a true transition towards democracy? Under what circumstances might Sudan witness a new military coup?

4. Managing the transitional phase and its challenges: Can the transitional government’s institutions and those of Abdullah Hamdok’s government manage the transitional phase and facilitate the daily life of citizens, given high expectations of the state in the wake of the revolution? How do Sudanese social structures affect this path? Do the transitional institutions have the capacity to establish a democratic political system and carry out the many tasks stipulated in the constitutional document (*namely*: bringing peace to the south, Darfur and Kordofan; opening “political space” for freedoms and legislative reforms; instituting transitional justice and accountability; reforming military institutions; salvaging the economy; ensuring the inclusion of women and youth in state policies; creating more than ten independent commissions; preparing for a constitutional conference and a permanent constitution... and more)? Under what circumstances might the institutions of the transitional government survive, or collapse?

5. The risk of internal division: The current transitional period is the first period to witness the exclusion of an important political bloc, the Islamists, and it is also a transitional period slated to continue for several years without elections. This raises several questions: What is the future of democracy in the country considering unprecedented political polarization, difficult economic conditions and a huge authoritarian legacy? Will the government succeed in achieving a national consensus before the elections? And how will the political arena crystallize before and after the elections (if held), considering the ideological, regional and ethnic polarization?

6. The legacy of wars and role of armed movements: The civil wars that first erupted with Sudan on the threshold of independence were important in fueling popular uprisings (and most of the coups as well). The task of containing conflict and establishing peace presented a challenge to every transitional regime known by Sudan, with failure a precursor to ensuing coups. At present, the transitional government partially succeeded in concluding peace agreements with most of the armed movements accepting to share power. Will Sudan finally be liberated from wars and witness a period of peace and stability? How will incorporating armed movements in the peace agreement affect restructuring central power? How will the relationship between the center and the regions be formed, given calls for radical decentralization? What will be the impact of movements that still reject peace, and those calling for secession?

7. Reforming military and security institutions: Has the army leadership abandoned its political ambition to lead the state, do forces such as the Rapid Intervention Forces adhere to this, and are both committed to democracy and the tasks of transition to it? What are the prospects for reforming military institutions, given that the constitutional document assigns this task to the military institutions themselves? Under what conditions might democratic civilian control over the armed forces be established in Sudan? What are the lessons learned from Sudan's previous experiences and from the experiences of other countries?

8. The role of external factors: How can the external role be evaluated in mediating between the Sudanese actors and reaching a political agreement, especially the role played by Ethiopia and the African Union? What are the implications of the growing relations between military leaders in the Sovereignty Council and governments of in the region opposed to Arab democratic revolutions such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel? How have the issues of terrorism and removal of Sudan's name from the US list of states sponsoring terrorism impacted the transition to democracy? Has Sudan been subjected to US blackmail? How does normalization fit in this context? Why did the military accept normalization, while civilian politicians opposed it?

Second, the Algerian Case

Algeria remained under one-party rule (of the National Liberation Front) from independence in 1962 until the early 1990s, with the People's National Army the main force in the country, alongside and strongly represented within the party. Popular pressure in the wake of the "October 1988 Uprising" compelled the army and the National Liberation Front to open the public domain in December 1991 for the country's first pluralist legislative elections, but the army turned against and annulled their results, throwing the country into a bloody stage of armed violence, prior to installation of an authoritarian regime with a formally pluralistic façade and a margin of freedoms. In February 2019, a peaceful popular revolution overthrew President Abdelaziz Bouteflika (1999-2019), prompting the army to intervene politically. The revolution did not encounter violent repression or acts of violence, state and army apparently benefitting from what Algerians call the bloody "black decade" in the country's history. A difficult transitional period began, culminating in a top-down political reform process led by the regime and the army, with the declared aim of instituting a truly democratic pluralistic system.

In all these stages, the Algerian army remained the main force in the country, deriving its legitimacy from the Revolution of Liberation (1954-1962) which enabled it to play a pivotal role in choosing presidents of the republic over a period of five full decades, in addition to seeping influentially into key sectors of the state via governors and department heads officially appointed by the president. The rentier economy based primarily on oil resources provided huge financial revenues for expanded patronage and clientelism networks to shore up long-term survival of the regime through purchased social harmony, the fragility of which, since October 1988. President Bouteflika adopted the same strategy of buying loyalty to the regime's apparatus of power, but by this point the system had been ravaged by corruption

and a previously unknown overlapping of the president's family with businessmen. In the two cases of the one-party regime (1962-1989) and the formally pluralistic regime (since 1989), the regime maintained a delicate balance between society's demands and its maintenance of effective control. However, instead of a single state party, there were *two* parties controlling parliament, government and political life, supported by the army: the National Liberation Front and the National Democratic Rally, with a presence of smaller loyalist and weak opposition parties – all with the continued domination of a narrow military and political elite over the reins of power.

Although the country has had regular presidential, legislative and local elections since 1997, with the participation of several political parties and civil society organizations, and has seen adoption of numerous constitutional texts stipulating freedoms and rights (starting with the 1989 constitution, to the 1996 constitution and through the 2002, 2008, 2016 and 2020 amendments), political power has remained in the hands of the military establishment and the political elite allied with it, in the presidency and other state institutions. The regime was able to continue to survive, through direct repression of opponents, legal restrictions on forming and financing of parties and of civil society organizations, expanding the circle of the regime's beneficiaries and resources through salary increases, granting of privileges and benefits to loyalists, manipulating elections, control of media and newspapers, systematic corruption enriching regime allies and marginalizing critics, and selective privatization of the economy with the creation of a class of corrupt businessmen loyal to the regime and the army. Opposition parties in addition suffered structural problems that also contributed to the continuation of the regime: partisan divisions and splits; control of historical figures; the absence of internal democracy and internal power rotation; and their continuous inability to value political programs with a capacity for popular mobilization.

In terms of the revolutions of 2011, the regime succeeded in maintaining the traditional balance between popular demands and its control by circumventing protests and demonstrations, the demands of which were limited and did not include regime change. The first decade of the new millennium witnessed steps of political and constitutional reform, but they were cosmetic and did not lead to any real change.

With Bouteflika announcing his intention to run for a fifth term at the end of 2018, and with aggravated economic problems due to low oil prices and the erosion of foreign exchange reserves, the budget deficit increased, and the state adopted austerity policies such that the regime had to discontinue clientelist practices previously vital to its preservation – amid increasing cases of corruption and the impunity of corrupt businessmen from accountability. The regime's underestimation of people's intelligence in nominating President Bouteflika for another term despite his severe illness and complete inability to rule, resulted in the eruption of popular outrage, on February 22, 2019, massive protests flared up with initially limited demands, basically rejecting Bouteflika's candidacy for the fifth term. However, these expanded after a few weeks to include the demand for the departure of all regime "figures," and even reaching the point of calling for a transitional foundational authority. The revolution was characterized by its peacefulness and continuity, as well as by the revolution's

public's clear distrust of the regime, with large circles of the public harboring misgivings about democratic reforms even after the revolution halted, amid widespread election turnouts.

The Algerian case suggests numerous topics for research including:

1. The road to the popular Hirak (movement) and its social structure: How did economic and political conditions affect the outbreak of the Algerian protests in February 2019? What is the social structure of this movement? What distinguished this movement from previous popular protests? How does the social structure in Algeria and the middle-class movement affect the popular movement calling for democracy? How is this movement affected by the nature of the rentier state in Algeria, and by economic crises, including the decline in state oil revenues? How did the demands of the movement evolve? Why? What is the position of the presidency, the intelligence apparatus and the army regarding these demands? How did the central authority deal with the economic demands of the protesters? How was the Amazigh question used in this context? What are the high value cards owned by the regime and the popular *Hirak* movement?

2. The role of the army: What interests did the army defend? What are the positions it has adopted and the roles it has taken since the outbreak of the *Hirak* movement? What explains the changes that took place in its positions and roles, from supporting President Bouteflika to calling for his departure? What is the size of the influence exercised by the military establishment regarding critical decisions on the future of the regime and power balances within? And how did the relationship of President Bouteflika and his intelligence services supporters with the army affect the positions of the two sides after the outbreak of the movement? And how was the coalition supporting the president broken, especially within the two presidency-allied parties (the National Liberation Front and the National Democratic Rally) and the non-partisan organizations supporting him, such as the Forum of Heads of Institutions, the General Union of Algerian Workers, the National Organization of Mujahideen and Trade Unions?

3. The Transition path: How was the regime able to impose its vision after Bouteflika's resignation on April 2, 2019 and pushing forward with what he called the constitutional path as opposed to the political path advocated by the protests and opposition parties were pressing for, based on rules other than the current constitutional ones, to achieve true democratic transition? How did the polarization in the political arena over these two paths affect the balance of power between the two sides? Why did the *Hirak* movement refuse to nominate representatives to enter negotiations on terms for a true transition towards democracy with the government and army?

4. Presidential elections: Why did the popular movement not nominate opposition political figures as candidates in the presidential elections on 12 October 2019 to face those of old regime? Why did the main opposition parties boycott the elections? Why did national consensual political figures (such as *Mouloud Hamrouche*, *Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi*, and *Ahmed Benbitour*) refrain from candidacy

in elections and taking advantage of the momentum of the popular movement whose demands they supported? How can the rounds of national dialogue sponsored by the regime be evaluated? On what constitutional and legal basis were the elections held? How were the elections affected by factors such as: repressive crackdowns and arrests; the survival of figures of Bouteflika's rule; and the continued intervention of the army in politics despite the issuance of a law prohibiting army retirees of the army from political activity for five years after concluding their military service? What are the implications of the victory of Abdelmadjid Tebboune, a technocrat affiliated with the deep state, in the first round of the elections, given the boycott of the *Hirak* and some opposition parties?

5. Constitutional amendment: How has the spread of the Coronavirus epidemic in early 2020 affected the *Hirak* and Tebboune's policy of political reform? What is the political and social context in which the 2020 draft constitutional amendments were proposed? What are the contents of these amendments? Did they include guarantees for a true transition to democracy? On what legal basis was the referendum on constitutional amendment of November 2020 conducted? What were the positions of different groupings on the amendments? How did the army's position in the Algerian constitutions evolved from its role in "aspects of the country's political, economic and social activity within the scope of the ruling party" (the National Liberation Front) in the 1963 constitution, to permission, with approval of two-thirds of the members of Parliament, for the army to be deployed on foreign missions?

6. External factors: What are the stances of the main international and regional powers towards the popular movement in Algeria? What explains the lack of international attention to the situation in Algeria, in general? Why did the Algerian case not see any external mediation, as in Sudan, for example? What is the impact of geopolitical and strategic factors (Algeria being a pivotal partner in the so-called "war on terror," its relationship with France, its strong security and trade partnership with the United States, the complexity of the situation in Libya, and instability in the Sahel region ...) on the positions taken by the military establishment on the transition to democracy?

7. Prospects and opportunities for transition to democracy: Is what is happening in Algeria a process of transition to democracy or is it a reproduction of the old regime? What is the future of the popular movement in Algeria? Under what conditions can real democratic transition be achieved under the leadership of the current authority and considering the new constitution that they voted on November 1, 2020? What are factors preparing for establishment of civilian control over the Algerian armed forces? What should the popular movement and the opposition parties do, given these factors? How do the university-educated and other Algerian elites see the future of this movement? How can the current transitional path in Algeria benefit from other cases of transition that have succeeded in the past few decades?

The reference paper raises these questions for the purpose of stimulating thinking in choosing topics of the papers for participation in the conference and discussion within it, in anticipation of new research and innovative treatments of (or additions to) existing research. Hence, the research space is also available to consider other questions, such as those related to the conceptual and theoretical

frameworks of studies of the transition to democracy and the Sudanese and Algerian experiences, or that compare the two experiences in one or more aspects, or between one of them and one or more of the other experiences of democratic transition.

Guidelines for Participation

- Researchers interested in taking part in the meeting should submit a brief abstract/proposal with the main outline of their proposed paper, of between 700 and 1,000 words in length. This proposal should include: 1. The research topic and its problems, or research questions; 2. The objectives of the research and its importance; 3. A concise exploration of relevant literature, sharply defining the proposed novel research treatment / addition to the topic; 4. The methodology and proposed theoretical approaches; 5. The suggested structure for the paper; 6. An initial reference list.
- The researcher must submit - along with the research proposal - an updated curriculum vitae, and the titles of papers s/he has written in fields related to the conference topic, if any.
- Only original research intended specifically for this conference will be accepted. Authors must ensure that their submissions have not previously been published elsewhere or that they were used at an earlier conference.
- Research proposals are due by **January 31, 2021**. Submitted proposals are subject to a refereeing process.

Complete drafts of accepted proposals of between 7,000 and 8,000 words will be accepted up to **May 15, 2021**. These completed drafts must follow the general guidelines for submitted research papers and conference papers, set out separately online (<https://bit.ly/37efV7F>).

Authors are reminded that not all completed drafts will be accepted for participation in the conference, even in cases where the proposal has been accepted.

The conference Academic Committee will accept papers submitted in Arabic and English.

The ACRPS will cover all travel and accommodation costs for participating authors whose papers are accepted.

The ACRPS reserves the right to publish most of the papers selected for the conference in book form at a later time.

All correspondence, and the submission of papers, should be addressed to the Academic Committee at: democracyproject@dohainstitute.org