



# Peace & Security Council Report

With four new members, is the PSC at a crossroads?

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The PSC should put Sudan on its agenda

## With four new members, is the PSC at a crossroads?

On 7 February 2019, at its 34<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session, the Executive Council of the African Union (AU) elected four new members to the Peace and Security Council (PSC) for a three-year term.

Southern Africa will be represented by Lesotho, which joins the PSC for the first time. For the Central African region, Burundi comes back to the PSC after a two-year stint on the council between 2015 and 2017. Algeria also re-joins after it stepped down last year to allow Morocco a seat on the PSC – the first time since it re-joined the continental body in 2017 following a 33-year absence. Kenya also left the PSC in 2018 and is now back for three years. Nigeria ‘naturally’ retained its seat as agreed within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Only Eastern Africa saw a contest in these elections, as Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan vied for the three-year seat. The others had been decided through consultation within the respective regional blocs.

### Lesotho and Burundi a challenge for a stronger PSC

In the past two years there have been calls for a strengthened PSC from member states wishing to prevent what they consider interference from the AU Commission. Burundi’s return and Lesotho’s joining the council could further that objective.

The two countries could use their time on the PSC to prevent their internal problems from being tabled, since the PSC has in the past been used by countries to shield themselves from external scrutiny.

Burundi has been mired in a serious political crisis since 2015. At the height of the crisis the Burundian regime used its presence on the PSC to lobby against the deployment of an AU peace mission to the country.

Currently, the country is still in the throes of ongoing political instability. In May last year President Pierre Nkurunziza strengthened his grip on power and potential longevity at the helm by amending the constitution to allow him to remain president until 2034.

In December 2018 the Burundian government also asked for the closure of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council office in the country. This was in response to a comment made by former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, who called Burundi one ‘of the most prolific slaughterhouses of humans in recent times’.

The country also made news at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU where it reportedly distributed a leaflet to explain the issuance, in November 2018, of an international arrest warrant against former president and AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel Pierre Buyoya. This

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### Current PSC Chairperson

#### His Excellency Hermann

**Immongault**, ambassador of Gabon to Ethiopia and permanent representative to the African Union.

### PSC members

Angola, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Togo, Zambia, Zimbabwe

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move has been interpreted as part of an attempt by the government to eliminate its opponents.

Burundi is likely to push its own agenda at the PSC in the run-up to next year's presidential elections and prevent discussions that could lead to the PSC's involvement in the country. With a term on the PSC that extends beyond the presidential polls, it, along with Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, will form an even stronger front against any intended changes to give the PSC more power to intervene.

### **Political instability in Lesotho**

Lesotho too has experienced political instability for over a decade now, and in a more sustained manner since 2014. Ultimately, healing internal dissensions should be the focus of the government, with the support of the international – especially African – community.

SADC has led mediation efforts in Lesotho, which resulted in a transfer of power in 2015

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has led mediation efforts in the country, which resulted in elections and a transfer of power in 2015. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa is the designated SADC mediator and he has now delegated these powers to former deputy chief justice Dikgang Moseneke. Efforts are underway to organise a national dialogue and to draw up a new constitution.

Last year the PSC undertook a field mission to Lesotho. It recommended that SADC prolong its military intervention in Lesotho to stabilise the security sector, which has caused havoc over the last few years. SADC, however, withdrew the force in November, saying the situation had stabilised sufficiently.

### **Algeria returns 'home'**

Algeria is back on the PSC, its natural home by virtue of the country's leading presence in engagements with continental peace and security questions, both at the AU Commission and in the PSC, which it joined in 2004 and only ever left between 2013 and 2016.

It is obvious that Algiers' ceding its seat to Morocco last year was a win-win strategy aimed at appeasing tensions

with Rabat and securing it a three-year seat on the council. Less clear is what Algeria can actually contribute to a better PSC at this point, given that its attention is focused on presidential elections in April.

### **Kenya back on the PSC and could join the UNSC**

Kenya earned 37 votes to get back on the PSC, defeating Ethiopia and Sudan in the process.

Its return to the council is not seen as a potential impediment to an eventual move towards strengthening the PSC. It has vowed to contribute to addressing extremism and associated terrorism on the continent.

Kenya is also currently embarked on a bid to secure a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC), to be decided in September this year for the period 2021–2022. If successful, this will give the country a bigger voice on peace and security on the international and continental stage.

In the end, the four new PSC members are unlikely to fundamentally change the way in which the council works on their own. But the PSC is at a crossroads with regard to fully playing its role of promoting and preserving peace and security on the continent.

### **The PSC needs a reboot**

Besides structural drivers of conflict often exacerbated by poor governance, the PSC is often what stands between continental early warning and early action in addressing impending or developing conflicts on the continent.

At the core of the problem is non-adherence to the criteria to get a seat on the PSC. The regional representation system has favoured a form of electoral cronyism that allows anyone to get on the PSC. States often ignore the requirements of the Protocol establishing the PSC. According to the protocol, PSC members should commit to the principles of the AU, contribute to the maintenance of peace and security on the continent, and respect constitutional governance, the rule of law and human rights.

It is crucial to ensure that the criteria for getting a seat on the PSC are respected and the modalities of elections are tightened. Although the current election practice has ensured balanced regional representation on the PSC, it has not adequately produced early responses to crises. This is because a country that is not at peace can hardly contribute to peace elsewhere.

## Egypt's el-Sisi will need to sustain the momentum for reform

On 2 February, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi held a cabinet meeting to review final preparations for his chairmanship of the AU which began on 10 February. As a founding member of the Organisation of African Unity, and chair in 1964, 1989 and 1993, Egypt is not new to such important continental roles.

This is the first time since the AU's founding in 2002 that Egypt gets to steer the organisation's affairs. It's a significant development considering the frosty relationship in recent years between the AU and Egypt. In 2013, Egypt was suspended from the union following the political crisis in the country during the 2011 Arab Spring.

The role comes at a time when both the AU and Egypt are undergoing major changes. AU reform is aimed at more effectively addressing the continent's challenges. Egypt is trying to reposition itself in sub-Saharan Africa to pursue and protect its strategic interests. So the timing of Egypt's chairmanship is an opportunity to contribute to the AU's quest for reforms while pursuing its foreign policy goals.

### Six priority areas

In the run-up to the AU summit in Addis Ababa, the Egyptian foreign ministry has outlined six priority areas for their 2019 AU chairmanship: building bridges among Africa's people; cooperating with partners; economic and regional integration; economic and social development; institutional and financial reform of the AU; and peace and security. What do these priorities imply for Africa?

Egypt seems to suggest that the economic development of the continent is a top priority for its chairmanship

The choice of priorities defines Egyptian interpretation of Africa's current problem and what the country's leadership thinks it can contribute. Egypt sees itself as having a background of national economic, social and structural reforms that have helped its development – and provide lessons for African countries on the same trajectory.

Egypt has prioritised the promotion of intra-African trade as per Sisi's statements at the Africa 2018 Forum at Sharm El-Sheikh in December 2018. According to Sisi, Egypt was 'keen on increasing its investments in Africa during 2018 by \$1.2 billion to reach \$10.2 billion'.

With two key priority areas dedicated to economic matters, Egypt seems to suggest that the economic development of the continent is a top priority for its chairmanship. This could boost ongoing efforts to implement the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement if Egypt leads on promoting intra-regional trade and broader economic issues.

Governance issues should have been considered because they are central to Africa's underdevelopment

However Egypt is yet to ratify the AfCFTA. How can it push an agreement without being part of it? Besides working to bring other big economies like Nigeria on board, the first task for Egypt's chairmanship in promoting intra-African trade and associated benefits should be to ratify the AfCFTA.

### A focus on economic development

A focus on economic development would also be useful if it contributes to attracting foreign direct investment to improve Africa's industrial and infrastructural base. Without the right industries to add value to African commodities, promoting intra-regional trade on a continent where most states are raw material exporters and are outward looking in their choice of trade partnerships is bound to be a mirage.

Underlying the Egyptian economic agenda is an Egyptian understanding that economic challenges are key to the African problem. Governance issues should also have

been considered in the six priority areas, because they are central to Africa's underdevelopment. The absence of governance is a major policy gap.

It is also evident that the focus areas are shaped by Egypt's own interests. On peace and security, for instance, Egypt's priorities include pushing for the establishment of the AU Centre for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development in Cairo, and the launch of a high-level continental dialogue forum in Aswan, Egypt – the Aswan Forum for Peace and Sustainable Development.

The two projects are expected to help achieve peace and lasting solutions to forced displacement, which align with the AU's theme of the year. These proposals are laudable, but pushing for their implementation in 2019 will reinforce perceptions that the AU chairmanship is being used by some African powers to shape regional and domestic agendas.

Even though the chairman has considerable power to influence the AU's agenda, overall change requires action from the entire institution, not the chairman alone

Besides Egypt's priorities, several continental problems await the new chair. These are the Libyan crisis, terrorism in the Sahel, ongoing protests in Sudan, conflicts in South Sudan and Somalia, the impact of climate change, the management of the Nile, and border disputes.

The Red Sea crisis is another important issue for Egyptian foreign policy. This and the tensions around the Nile have made the East and Horn of Africa a hotbed of competing regional and international interests. It remains to be seen whether an Egyptian chairmanship will prioritise these issues for the AU to deal with.

## Managing perceptions

Perhaps the biggest test the chair will face in 2019 is managing perceptions in some sub-Saharan African circles about Egyptian interests on the continent and commitment to ongoing AU reform.

Notwithstanding the challenges, many North Africans have high expectations of Sisi's 2019 leadership of the AU. According to the Egyptian foreign ministry, the country is keen to 'achieve tangible results'. Even though the chairman has considerable power to influence the AU's agenda, overall change requires action from the entire institution, not the chairman alone.

For Sisi to make a meaningful contribution at the helm of the AU, he needs to keep up momentum for reform, which will help the continental body achieve results.

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\$10.2 billion

EGYPTIAN INVESTMENT  
IN AFRICA IN 2018

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## South Africa can bring the AU closer to the people

South Africa's election to chair the AU in 2020 confirms the return of major powers on the continent to steer the organisation's affairs. After having been led by smaller economies like Rwanda (2018), Guinea (2017) and Chad (2016), this year it's Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and then, if the African National Congress is re-elected in May, President Cyril Ramaphosa.

The last time that South Africa held the position was in 2002. The country will be tasked with setting the AU's agenda and hopefully launching new initiatives that drive the continent forward.

The AU Commission in Addis Ababa has in the past few years been fraught with infighting among representatives of its 55 member states, a shortage of human capital and capacity, and an apparent lack of clear direction. Former AU Commission chairperson, South African Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, tried to bring some efficiency to the bureaucracy in Addis Ababa, but she stayed only one term and wasn't really able to change the institution.

The country will be tasked with setting the AU's agenda and hopefully launching new initiatives

In the past two years, however, thanks to the ambitious leadership of Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, supported by AU Commission chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, things have changed. The AU is now moving towards funding its own operations instead of relying on the European Union and others. The AU Commission will have fewer departments from 2021, and from this year will only hold one costly full-scale summit with all Africa's leaders.

### A role behind the scenes

The organisation also now has better systems of financial accountability. South Africa has played an important role in this regard. The country's outgoing ambassador to the AU, Ndumiso Ntshinga, led an effort by member states to ensure money was better spent.

But since Dlamini Zuma's departure in 2017, South Africa hasn't occupied any key posts in the AU Commission.

The highest-ranking official at the AU is Sivuyile Bam, head of the AU's peace support operations division. South African academic Eddy Maloka heads the African Peer Review Mechanism, which he has revived.

At this stage it seems clear that the continent's economic integration, embodied in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), will continue being a priority for South Africa. At the recently concluded AU summit, Ramaphosa ratified the AfCFTA, saying it 'opens up the opportunity for progress for the entire Africa'.

This brought the ratifications to 18, just short of the 22 needed for the AfCFTA to enter into force. This is expected to happen before July's extraordinary summit on the AfCFTA. South Africa's trade and industry minister Rob Davies, who was present at the signing in Addis Ababa, has expressed support for the trade bloc.

### Good governance and democratisation

South Africa can also contribute in an area where the AU has been lacking, namely good governance and democratisation. As a bare minimum, the focus should be on ensuring free and fair elections, and freedom of speech – achievements South Africa is known for.

The Electoral Commission of South Africa has since the late 1990s done excellent work to build capacity across the continent. But this has all been mainly on a technical level. South Africa will have to risk sticking its neck out when elections are not free and fair. This was not the case during the recent flawed polls in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The AU should take a strong stand against governments cutting off access to the Internet and

social media at a whim. South Africa can put this on the agenda. In the DRC, the government simply shut down access as soon as vote counting started to prevent people from relaying the real results.

The same happened in Zimbabwe recently. In Chad social media is still not accessible for citizens and in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon the Internet hasn't worked for months. Ironically, in many of these places, South African companies Vodacom and MTN are some of the biggest service providers.

## Free movement of people

A priority for ordinary Africans is the implementation of the Protocol on the Free Movement of People, adopted by the AU in January 2018. Uptake has been slow. If goods can travel thanks to the AfCFTA, why not people? Of course this is a tricky issue, especially for South Africa where the issue of xenophobia and incoming migrants is a hot potato.

Another major task for South Africa next year is the AU's stated aim of 'silencing the guns by 2020'. As a non-permanent member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council for the next two years, South Africa has indicated that making peace on the continent will be one of its main priorities in New York.

As a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council South Africa has indicated that making peace on the continent will be one of its main priorities

Being on the Security Council and chairing the AU will be a unique opportunity for South Africa. From this vantage point, it can build greater international support for 'silencing the guns' and try to bridge the gap between the UN and the AU.

South Africa currently chairs the Security Council's ad hoc working group on conflict prevention and resolution in Africa. It has vast experience in this regard. Going back to the late 1990s and early 2000s, South Africa made an important contribution to peace in the DRC and Burundi.

Former president Thabo Mbeki was mediator in Zimbabwe for many years, and ongoing efforts in Madagascar and Lesotho seem to be paying off. South Africa has deployed peacekeeping troops across the continent and is currently in the UN Force Intervention Brigade in the DRC

Chairing the AU presents South Africa with significant opportunities. Preparations should start this year if the country is to lead the AU in serving the continent and its citizens more effectively than has been the case up to now.

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January 2018

THE PROTOCOL ON THE  
FREE MOVEMENT OF  
PEOPLE ADOPTED

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## Renewed focus on refugees in 2019

As part of the ongoing reform of the AU, there is a proposal to shift the portfolio for refugees and displaced people away from political affairs, where it is currently based. This restructuring coincides with the AU's decision to designate 2019 as the 'Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons.'

The issue is clearly a priority for the continental body, and the move sends a strong message that opposes the global trend of dealing with refugees and migrants as a political and security issue.

The plan is to shift the AU Commission's Humanitarian Affairs, Refugees and Displaced Persons division from Political Affairs to a new department for health, humanitarian affairs and social development. The new department will replace the current Department of Social Affairs and is one of the six departments suggested by the reform team at the November 2018 AU summit.

Africa hosts over one third of the world's forcibly displaced people, including 6.3 million refugees and 14.5 million internally displaced people

Currently, Political Affairs is in charge of forced displacement issues including refugees and internally displaced people, while Social Affairs deals with migration.

### A willingness to address root causes

The new departments will be operationalised with the elections of the new Commission in 2021.

After the 32<sup>nd</sup> AU summit, Political Affairs and Social Affairs will come together to discuss the technicalities of the proposed new department for health, humanitarian affairs and social development. This will form the basis for decisions on the restructuring and its financial implications.

Africa hosts over one third of the world's forcibly displaced people, including 6.3 million refugees and 14.5 million internally displaced people. The decision to dedicate a department to humanitarian affairs shows that the AU is seriously concerned about the situation and is, more than ever, willing to address its root causes.

African leaders have grappled with forced displacement for decades. The main aim of the Organisation of African Unity (the AU's predecessor) was the liberation of African states from colonial powers, which resulted in mass

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2021

A NEW AU COMMISSION  
TO BE ELECTED

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displacement. The recognition of this challenge led to the adoption of the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

The AU's theme this year is partly to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this convention. It also marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2009 AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention).

The Kampala Convention was developed by the AU in response to the growing internal displacement crisis on the continent

The 1969 refugee convention is a progressive instrument which upholds the principles in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. It also provides an expansive definition of refugees, by including flight from aggression, occupation, foreign domination and events that lead to serious public disorder as grounds for claiming asylum.

The Kampala Convention was developed by the AU in response to the growing internal displacement crisis on the continent and the need to address the root causes through continent-wide efforts.

## Raising awareness

This year, the AU wants to raise awareness about the two conventions so that member states can renew their commitments to protecting forcibly displaced people. Nine of the 55 African member states are not party to the 1969 refugee convention, and 30 have not signed up to the Kampala Convention.

The AU has developed a roadmap outlining various activities related to the theme of the year, which is expected to be adopted at this week's summit. A secretariat has been established by the AU in collaboration with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), to lead and coordinate action.

A steering committee chaired by the director of Political Affairs was set up to ensure participation of all actors, including civil society and research organisations. This is a rare opportunity for external actors, and a positive step.

These developments are encouraging, but the AU's theme must result in action beyond 2019. As AU reform moves toward implementation, the best possible structure for addressing the issues of refugees, IDPs and migrants equally is needed. Establishing three divisions, one for each of these matters, would be ideal.

The AU should also consider including the issues of 'refugees, returnees and IDPs' in the implementation plan of Agenda 2063 so that they can be part of the AU's long-term plans.

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1969

THE OAU CONVENTION  
GOVERNING THE SPECIFIC  
ASPECTS OF REFUGEE  
PROBLEMS IN AFRICA

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## Will the AU-led peace deal in the Central African Republic hold?

On Wednesday 6 February 2019, the government of the Central African Republic (CAR) signed a peace agreement in Bangui with 14 recognised armed groups. This is the eighth such agreement since the CAR descended into violent conflict in late 2012.

The deal came after 10 days of talks in Khartoum between the protagonists, after more than two years of intense negotiations under the AU Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the CAR. The AU initiative prevailed over all other parallel initiatives – notably one initiated by Russia and Sudan – and finally united them in one single process in order to increase the chance of reaching a successful peace and reconciliation agreement. This agreement could be a turning point for peace in the CAR, given the protracted nature of the conflict and the fact that armed groups control about 80% of the territory.

Although this is a diplomatic success for the AU and its partners, some are sceptical about the viability of this latest peace deal. How is this agreement different from the previous seven, and from the half-dozen major agreements signed since the 1997 Bangui Accord? Will the February 2019 agreement stick?

### A classic peace agreement

The agreement is a comprehensive document covering the fundamental principles of a sustainable resolution of the conflict. It also outlines the roles and responsibilities of the government, armed groups, region and international community.

The accord contains provisions on the key issues of disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and repatriation; justice and national reconciliation; seasonal cattle migration (transhumance); transitional security arrangements; and democratisation. Also included in the text is a mechanism for the implementation of the agreement and its monitoring.

With the above provisions, the agreement does not really depart from the norm for peace deals.

### Challenges for the February 2019 deal

There were two major bones of contention throughout the months of consultation with stakeholders. The divisive issues, especially between the government and armed groups, were the questions of impunity and power sharing.

Although ready to grant some concessions regarding power sharing, the CAR government was reluctant to send the wrong message and undermine the legitimacy of the duly elected president, Faustin-Archange Touadera.

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8

PEACE AGREEMENTS  
SIGNED IN THE CAR

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The government was also unwilling to grant a general amnesty to armed groups, as impunity was recognised as a major contributor to the recurring violence in the CAR. Demands for accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity were also explicitly made by the CAR's citizens during the 2015 Bangui Forum of National Reconciliation. This position is reaffirmed in the February 2019 peace agreement.

However, some of its clauses do include concessions by the key players and provide for a measure of power sharing, which could help to restore peace and stability; other provisions could allow impunity. Clauses on decentralisation and the establishment of an inclusive government following the signing of the peace agreement address the question of power sharing.

A potentially divisive issue will be the composition of the expected inclusive government. It remains to be seen which ministerial portfolios will be allocated to armed groups and whether all of them will be included. Their reaction to those appointments and to further power sharing in the administration, including at the regional level, will be crucial to the viability of the peace.

It is also proposed that the National Assembly pass a law giving former CAR heads of state special status with pecuniary benefits. This decision seems to favour former presidents Francois Bozizé and Michel Djotodia, who have been in exile since 2013 and 2014 respectively, and who were consulted during the peace negotiation process. Some might be opposed to a special status for Bozizé and Djotodia.

### The divisive issues between the government and armed groups were the questions of impunity and power sharing

Even though general amnesty is not explicitly granted in the agreement, two clauses leave room for restorative justice and presidential discretion. First, there is the establishment of the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC). Such a commission is not a novelty and more often than not is conducive to peace and stability, as it adds a measure of restorative justice.

Perhaps more curious and under the same heading of justice and national reconciliation, mention is made of the possibility of the president (Touadera) using the presidential pardon in a discretionary manner. This appears to be a guarantee of being pardoned should certain individuals – particularly the leaders of the armed groups – be found guilty and sentenced. However, the TJRC's decisions cannot affect cases before the International Criminal Court or the CAR Special Criminal Court.

One obvious limit to this approach is that violence could break out between the moment an individual is arrested or sentenced and a presidential pardon is eventually given. Another issue is that selective presidential pardons may seem unfair to those who do not receive any and so take the country back to its darkest days.

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2013

FORMER PRESIDENT  
BOZIZÉ EXILED

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Before reaching this point, however, the parties – government and armed groups – have to begin implementing the peace agreement. This has not happened in the past, as attested by the failure to implement the previous peace agreements. Getting the parties to sign is no small achievement – and the AU initiative did deliver in this regard – but the real work starts with implementation.

Currently, resistance seems to come from individuals on both sides. A new government is still keenly awaited. The absence at the Bangui signing of some key armed group leaders, notably Nouredine Adam, Abdoulaye Hissen and Ali Darassa, also raises concerns about the next steps.

The planned establishment of transitional mixed special security units – composed of government forces and members of armed groups – as provided in the agreement, will be a real test of the willingness on both sides to work together.

### **Different context, new possibilities?**

Overall, however, the current context seems to favour an enduring peace deal. The AU peace initiative's success in uniting all stakeholders under one banner signals that there is a level of commitment from all external actors to seeing the agreement through, in spite of some dissenting voices. In the past, external actors to the CAR lent financial and material support to different internal factions, thus exacerbating tensions and undermining the return of a lasting peace.

The establishment of mixed special security units will be a test of the willingness on both sides to work together

It is evident that the burden is also on the CAR protagonists themselves to commit to the implementation of the peace deal. Getting all the armed groups in Khartoum at the same time – and for the first time – is in itself an indication of a desire on their part to change the status quo. Additionally, the insistence of the AU and the government on limiting the dialogue to the government and armed groups, so as to avoid a repeat of the Bangui Forum, was an appropriate strategy.

When Touadera became the CAR president in 2016, following a tumultuous political transition that lasted three years, he vowed to engage in a substantive dialogue with the plethora of armed groups wreaking havoc in the country.

The process has been long and gruelling, but this month's peace deal could be the foundation upon which to finally build a peaceful and prosperous CAR. The AU, as the head guarantor and facilitator of the CAR peace process, must remain steadfast on implementation. It should ensure, through taking the appropriate measures enshrined in the agreement, that the hard work it has done to get to the signing of the agreement does not go to waste and, more importantly, that the people of the CAR finally see a lasting peace.

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2016

TOUADERA  
BECAME PRESIDENT

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## The PSC should put Sudan on its agenda

A government committee investigating the ongoing protests in Sudan admitted, in early February, that the body of Ahmed El Kheir, a teacher who had died in the custody of the dreaded National Security Service, showed signs of torture.

Ahmed's death is one of only a few since the beginning of the protests to make the news, but it is not an isolated incident. The Sudanese government has used brute force in an attempt to suppress protests that have rocked the country since mid-December 2018.

The protests began in the north-eastern Sudanese city of Atbara over bread and fuel price hikes on 19 December 2018. They have since snowballed into weeks of widespread anti-government protests demanding regime change and the fall of President Omar al-Bashir's three-decade rule.

More than 50 people have died in the protests between mid-December 2018 and early February

While this is not the first time Sudan has seen popular street protests, the significance of these lies in their underlying economic and political drivers, and the fact that they are led by the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) rather than Sudan's perennially weak opposition groups.

According to human rights groups, more than 50 people have died in the 56 days between mid-December 2018 and early February. The number of fatalities translates into almost one death a day during this period.

### Is it just about al-Bashir?

On the lips of the protesting masses is a chant for freedom, demanding that al-Bashir goes. This suggests that most people see the president as one of the reasons for the country's problems, if not the biggest. The demand that he step aside encapsulates layers of discontent that must be situated within broader overarching questions on reforming the

underlying structural issues driving the country's current problems.

The protests, in that context, are therefore not an attempt to subvert the Sudanese state but an avenue to draw attention to the prevailing discontent in the country. They apportion blame to those who the masses believe have been key in creating those problems. The upheaval is also an urgent call for structured engagement on the political and security future of the country.

### Unwillingness to look at underlying drivers of the protests

Al-Bashir has characterised the protests as an attempt to subvert his power and undermine the state. He has described the protesters variously as 'infiltrators', 'outsiders trying to infiltrate and destabilise Sudan', 'people getting orders from outside the country', 'international and regional countries trying to obstruct the use of Islamic laws in Sudan', and 'a copy and paste of the Arab Spring' amplified by the media, among others.

More recently, however, he has described the protests as the work of mostly youth with poor prospects.

Al-Bashir has characterised the protests as an attempt to subvert his power and undermine the state

Does this mean dialogue is an option? If so, how will the protestors induce a leader who is politically paranoid and has stayed in office for so long, to agree to talks? Since the International Criminal Court's indictment of al-Bashir in 2009, his response to emerging political issues has been one of self-preservation.

The current characterisation of the protests and subsequent use of force raise questions about the government's appreciation of the seriousness of

people's demands and the existential nature of the agony of the common Sudanese.

### Missing the call for reforms

The government is missing the real message of the Sudanese people's call for comprehensive reforms that could make their lives economically bearable within a democratic space characterised by freedom of speech, political tolerance and respect for human rights.

Instead, it has prioritised the use of force. Yet, contrary to expectations that the crackdown will deter protesters, it has rather drawn more people onto the streets. It has also further eroded the government's popularity and increased tensions between the state and citizens.

The SPA, the leading organisation behind the protests, has also been denied an opportunity to fully articulate the totality of the protests' agenda. At the same time the hardliners in al-Bashir's government benefit from a misrepresentation of popular demands, as it enables them to rally their support base and use the state's instruments of force.

Clearly, the protests warrant closer attention from the Peace and Security Council (PSC).

### Options for the PSC

The government's use of force in the face of popular resolve for change is bound to continue to affect the stability of Sudan. And notwithstanding the threatening stalemate, the crisis is yet to be appropriately prioritised by the PSC. To help de-escalate the situation, the PSC should consider tabling Sudan for discussion. That would register the importance of Sudan's crisis in the quest for peace and security on the continent.

To help de-escalate the situation, the PSC should consider tabling Sudan for discussion, which would register the importance of Sudan's crisis

Such a move could be followed by deploying a fact-finding mission to independently interact with various stakeholders, giving the council first-hand information on the situation. On the basis of the fact-finding mission, the PSC could then draw attention to and condemn the use of excessive force when suppressing protests, as other stakeholders such as the European Union have already done.

Finally, the PSC could consider facilitating a visit by a key member of the council to reinforce concerns about the excessive use of force against citizens and highlight the need to initiate dialogue as a non-violent response to the demands for comprehensive reforms in Sudan.

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2009

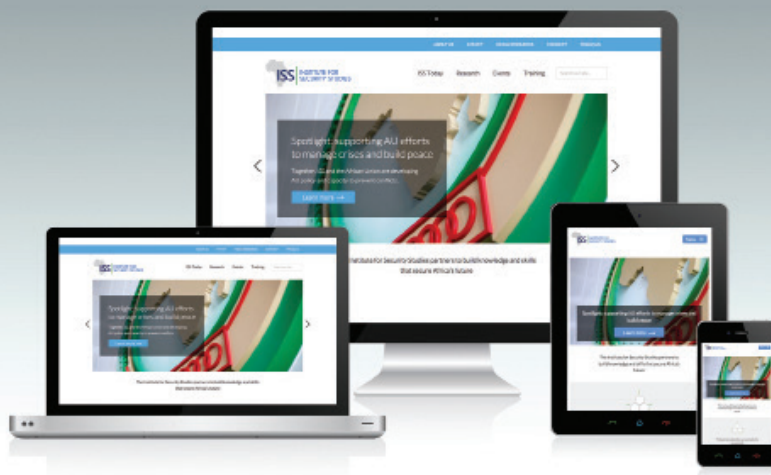
PRESIDENT AL-BASHIR  
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