

# Türkiye – Sudan Relations in Post-Bashir Era

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**Abstract:** This study aims to scrutinize the diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Sudan in the post-Omar al-Bashir period. Historical relations between the Republic of Türkiye, established in 1923 as the successor to the Ottoman Empire, and Sudan have had a positive impact in contemporary times across political, economic, socio-cultural, and security domains. While relations during the Republican period were relatively limited when Sudan gained independence from Britain, they saw a significant improvement with the administration of Omar al-Bashir and Hasan al-Turabi, who came to power in 1989. Following Türkiye’s declaration of “Africa Year” in 2005, Sudan emerged as a prominent country in Ankara’s Sub-Saharan Africa policy. Particularly, the Africa Opening Action Plan initiated in 1998 and the deepening of policies by AK Party governments strengthened relations with Sudan. However, following the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir in 2019, transitional periods and political crises in Sudan have adversely affected Türkiye – Sudan relations. This article follows a historical methodology in which the construction of the historical process on relations and its impact on parameters are taken into account. This study will address these relations during this period, initially focusing on political, economic, security, and socio-cultural parameters. Subsequently, the study will examine the causes of the crisis in Sudan and the trajectory of relations. Findings from the post-Bashir era indicate that, despite challenges, relations between the two countries have endured. Nevertheless, the escalation of internal disputes in Sudan into conflicts casts uncertainty on the future of these relations.

**Keywords:** Türkiye - Sudan Relations, Abdulfattah al-Burhan, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, Omar al-Bashir, Political Transition in Sudan.

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# Türkiye – Sudan İlişkileri: Beşir Sonrası Dönem

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**Öz:** Bu çalışmanın temel amacı; Ömer el-Beşir dönemi sonrası Türkiye-Sudan diplomatik ilişkilerini mercek altına almaktır. Osmanlı Devleti’nin devamı olarak 1923 yılında kurulan Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Sudan arasındaki tarihsel ilişkiler, günümüzde siyasi, ekonomik, sosyo-kültürel ve güvenlik alanlarında pozitif bir etki oluşturmaktadır. Cumhuriyet dönemi ilişkileri, Sudan’ın İngiltere’den bağımsızlığını kazandığı dönemde sınırlı düzeydeyken 1989’da iktidara gelen Ömer el-Beşir ve Hasan el-Turabi yönetimiyle yakınlaşmış, 2005’te Türkiye’nin “Afrika Yılı” ilan etmesiyle Sudan, Ankara’nın Sahraaltı Afrika politikasında öne çıkan bir ülke hâline gelmiştir. 1998’de hazırlanan Afrika Açılım Eylem Planı ve AK Parti hükümetlerinin politikalarını derinleştirilmesi, Sudan ile olan ilişkileri güçlendirmiştir. Ancak, Ömer el-Beşir’in 2019’da devrilmesinin ardından, Sudan’daki geçiş dönemleri ve siyasi krizler, Türkiye-Sudan ilişkilerini olumsuz etkilemiştir. Bu makale, tarihsel sürecin ilişkiler üzerindeki inşasının ve parametreler üzerindeki etkisinin dikkate alındığı tarihsel bir metodoloji izlemektedir. Çalışma, ilk olarak ilişkilerin siyasi, ekonomik, güvenlik ve sosyo-kültürel parametrelerine odaklanmakta, ardından Sudan’daki krizin nedenlerini ve ilişkilerin seyrini ele almaktadır. Beşir sonrası döneme dair bulgular; iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerin zorluklara rağmen ayakta kaldığını göstermektedir. Ancak, Sudan’daki içsel anlaşmazlıkların çatışmaya evrilmesi, ilişkilerin geleceğini belirsiz kılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye - Sudan İlişkileri, Abdülfettah el-Burhan, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, Ömer el-Beşir, Sudan’da Siyasi Geçiş.

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# العلاقات التركية السودانية: فترة ما بعد البشير

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## الملخص

الهدف الأساسي من هذا المقال هو دراسة العلاقات الدبلوماسية بين تركيا والسودان في فترة ما بعد عمر البشير. إن العلاقات التاريخية بين السودان والجمهورية التركية التي تأسست عام 1923 كامتداد للدولة العثمانية، لها تأثير إيجابي اليوم في المجالات السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية الثقافية والأمنية. وبينما كانت العلاقات في حقبة الجمهورية محدودة خلال الفترة التي حصل فيها السودان على استقلاله من بريطانيا، إلا أنها توطدت مع نظام عمر البشير وحسن الترابي اللذين وصلا إلى السلطة عام 1989. ومع إعلان تركيا «عام إفريقيا» في عام 2005، أصبح السودان بلدا مهما فيما يتعلق بسياسة انقرة تجاه منطقة إفريقيا جنوب الصحراء الكبرى. كما أن خطة العمل والانفتاح على القارة الإفريقية التي أعدت في عام 1998 وانتهاج حكومات حزب العدالة والتنمية سياسات أكثر توجهها نحو إفريقيا، ساهمت في تعزيز العلاقات التركية مع السودان. لكن الفترات الانتقالية التي شهدتها السودان بعد الإطاحة بعمر البشير عام 2019، والأزمات السياسية التي نتجت عن ذلك داخل البلد، أثرت بشكل سلبي على العلاقات التركية السودانية. يتبع هذا المقال منهجية تاريخية تأخذ بعين الاعتبار بناء المرحلة التاريخية على العلاقات الثنائية وتأثير تلك المرحلة التاريخية على الأبعاد المحددة للعلاقة. كما تركز هذه الدراسة في البداية على الأبعاد السياسية والاقتصادية والأمنية والاجتماعية الثقافية للعلاقات، ثم تناقش أسباب الأزمة في السودان ومسار العلاقات التركية السودانية. وتشير النتائج المتعلقة بفترة ما بعد البشير، أن العلاقات بين البلدين لا تزال قائمة رغم الصعوبات المحيطة بها. لكن تحوّل الخلافات الداخلية في السودان إلى صراع يجعل مستقبل هذه العلاقات غامضا.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** العلاقات التركية السودانية، عبد الفتاح البرهان، محمد حمدان دقلو، عمر البشير، الانتقال السياسي في السودان.

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## Introduction

The Republic of Türkiye, established in 1923 as the successor to the Ottoman Empire, has a deeply rooted historical background in its relations with Sudan. The reflections of this historical past have positively influenced the current political, economic, socio-cultural, and security relations between the two countries. During the Republican period, Türkiye – Sudan relations were at a “limited” level following Khartoum’s independence from Britain. The relations between the two countries began to strengthen during the administration of Omar al-Bashir and Hasan al-Turabi, who came to power in 1989, and Sudan became a prominent country in Ankara’s Sub-Saharan Africa policy, especially after Türkiye declared “Africa Year” in 2005.

Going through no colonial past, Türkiye in its historical background, has consolidated the limited relations established since Sudan gained independence from Britain in 1956, particularly through the Africa Opening Action Plan initiated in 1998 and continued by the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) governments. The deepening of policies by these governments, especially in 2005 when Türkiye declared “Africa Year,” elevated Sudan to a “pilot country” in Ankara’s Sub-Saharan Africa policy. The strengthening of relations was evident, especially through the Africa Opening Action Plan initiated in 1998 and the deepening of policies by the AK Party governments. However, after the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir in 2019, transitional periods and political crises in Sudan negatively impacted Türkiye – Sudan relations.

This study aims to examine post-Bashir Türkiye – Sudan relations within the framework of transitional periods in Khartoum. The approach will first focus on the fundamental parameters of political, economic, security, and socio-cultural aspects of Türkiye – Sudan relations. Subsequently, the study will delve into the fundamental causes of the crisis in Sudan and the topic of relations under Abdullah Hamdok’s premiership, the military intervention in October 2021, and the period of civil war. The conclusion will present findings regarding the post-Bashir period in bilateral relations. This article follows a historical methodology in which the construction of the historical process on relations and its impact on parameters are taken into account.

## Key Parameters of Türkiye - Sudan Relations

The basic foreign policy strategy of the Republic of Türkiye, established in 1923 as the successor to the Ottoman Empire, has been characterized by a Western-oriented, status quo-oriented, and pragmatic identity. Türkiye’s general approach to Africa, specifically Sudan, has occurred within the limits

of this identity. Until the period following the end of World War II, when African countries gained independence from colonial powers, Türkiye's relations with Sudan were maintained through the British-Egyptian joint administration. Recognizing Sudan's independence in 1956 and establishing diplomatic relations, Türkiye was among the first countries to do so. However, "secondary foreign policy issues" like Africa, especially during the NATO membership period, did not constitute a fundamental agenda item because Türkiye's foreign policy strategy was based on the fundamental parameter of "Westernization," which was consolidated during this period to achieve the level of development in Western countries.<sup>1</sup>

From 1956 to 1990, relations between Türkiye and Sudan, despite a meeting in Ankara between Sudanese President Jaafar al-Nimeiry and Turkish President Kenan Evren in 1982, had limited engagement in political and economic areas. During these 34 years, relations between the two countries involved some disagreements on the Cyprus issue, differences of opinion during the Arab-Israeli conflict, and limited economic engagements. However, the signing of the first commercial agreement between Ankara and Khartoum in 1980 and the agreements on trade, culture, and science during leaders' meetings in Ankara laid the groundwork for the development of economic relations between the two countries in the following years<sup>2</sup>.

The years after 1990, particularly during Turgut Özal's presidency, brought about a more favorable position for Türkiye's relations with Sudan, setting the stage for deepening ties in the 2000s<sup>3</sup>. Although the "Africa Opening Action Plan" presented in 1998 could not be implemented due to the political and economic crises in Türkiye during that period, protocols were signed between Türkiye and Sudan in the areas of air transportation and quality control in oil and mineral exploration during the eight years. This progress in diplomacy and trade was not only reflected in the data on foreign trade between the two countries during these years but also prepared the ground for the development of relations in the post-1998 period.

Türkiye's strategy of opening up to Africa, presented in 1998, gained significant momentum from 2002 onwards, especially with the governments of the AK Party.<sup>4</sup> This momentum was fueled by the ongoing political and

1 Kaan Devecioğlu, "Türkiye-Afrika ilişkilerinin politik ekonomisi: Sudan örneği." Unpublished Master's Thesis, *Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University*, 2017, p. 85.

2 Yusuf Fadl Hassan, Sudan Özelinde Türk – Afrika İlişkilerinin Bazı Yönleri, *TASAM*, 4 April 2007.

3 Kaan Devecioğlu, "Türkiye-Afrika ilişkilerinin politik ekonomisi: Sudan örneği." Unpublished Master's Thesis, *Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University*, 2017.

4 Eldeen, Mayada Kamal. "Ak parti dönemi Türkiye-Afrika ilişkileri: Sudan örneği (2002-2015)." PhD dissertation, 2019, p. 131 - 167.

economic crises in Türkiye until the AK Party took office and the dissatisfaction with the level of relations with the European Union in the early 2000s.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the “Enhancement Strategy of Economic and Commercial Relations with Africa” implemented by Türkiye in 2003 paved the way for an acceleration in economic relations with Sudan. In a meeting between the then State Minister Kürşad Tüzmen and the Sudanese Foreign Minister Ismail and his delegation, it was emphasized that Sudan was an important country for opening up to other African countries, and the trade volume between the two countries had reached significantly higher values than in the past, indicating the positive results of past steps.<sup>6</sup>

Following the implementation of the “Africa Opening Action Plan” in 1998, the first significant political step was taken in 2005, when Türkiye declared Africa Year. With this step, Türkiye aimed to deepen and coordinate its political, economic, security, and socio-cultural relations with African countries<sup>7</sup>. In line with this goal, Türkiye activated not only embassies but also the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA). Project coordination offices were opened in Ethiopia in 2005, Sudan in 2006, and Senegal in 2007 as the three pilot countries of the action plan. TİKA offices were subsequently established in Libya, Somalia, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, Djibouti, Algeria, Namibia, and Kenya. In countries where TİKA does not have an office in Africa, activities are carried out through embassies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>8</sup>

After 2005, Türkiye’s relations with Africa in general, and Sudan in particular began to develop. Unlike other African countries, there was a historical background between Türkiye and Sudan that facilitated the establishment of strong relations. After 2005, the two countries became closer than ever before, with high-level visits by the President and Prime Minister that had not occurred for a long time.<sup>9</sup> With this positive atmosphere, not only did political and economic engagements develop between the two countries, but various projects were also developed through public institutions and Turkish NGOs to improve administrative and social structures in Sudan in the fields of education, culture, health, agriculture, and mining.<sup>10</sup>

5 Mehmet Özkan and Birol Akgün. “Turkey’s opening to Africa.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Volume 48, No 4, 2010, p. 525-546.

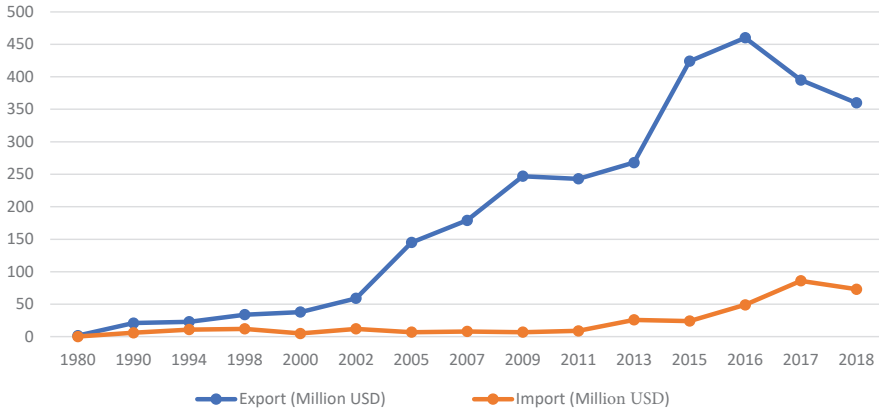
6 “Türkiye – Sudan ilişkileri ivme kazandı”, *NTV*, 26 July 2004.

7 Mehmet Özkan and Birol Akgün. “Turkey’s opening to Africa.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Volume 48, No 4, 2010, p. 525-546.

8 Elem Eyriçe Tepeciklioğlu, Ali Onur Tepeciklioğlu, and Betül Aydoğan Ünal. “Türkiye’nin sahra-altı Afrika’da yürüttüğü kamu diplomasisi faaliyetleri.” *Ege Academic Review*, Volume 18, No 4, 2018, p. 605-618.

9 Kaan Devecioğlu, “Türkiye-Afrika ilişkilerinin politik ekonomisi: Sudan örneği.” Unpublished Master’s Thesis, *Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University*, 2017.

10 Mehmet Ozkan. “A new actor or passer-by? The political economy of Turkey’s engagement with

**Chart 1. Türkiye – Sudan Commercial Data (1980 – 2018)**

Source: TUIK

In terms of the development of socio-cultural relations between the two countries, the opening of the branch of the Yunus Emre Institute (YEE) in Khartoum in November 2016, in addition to Maarif Foundation schools, made significant contributions. Acting with the mission to increase Türkiye’s visibility, credibility, and reputation internationally and to connect Türkiye with people around the world, YEE has been active in teaching Turkish and conducting cultural activities to increase interaction between the two countries. It has also contributed to the Türkiye Scholarships Program of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities. Thus, YEE works towards sustaining relations between the two countries.<sup>11</sup>

Türkiye and Sudan have witnessed significant developments in the economic sphere alongside the political, social, and cultural relations that have evolved between the two countries. In 2001, an agreement on the “Elimination of Double Taxation” was signed regarding income taxes between the two nations. This agreement was signed in 2001, officially published in 2003, and came into effect in 2005<sup>12</sup>. Consequently, commercial engagements through private enterprises between the two states flourished, constituting a significant pillar of economic relations. Presently, the majority of Turkish entrepreneurs operating in Sudan are notably involved in the construction sector.<sup>13</sup>

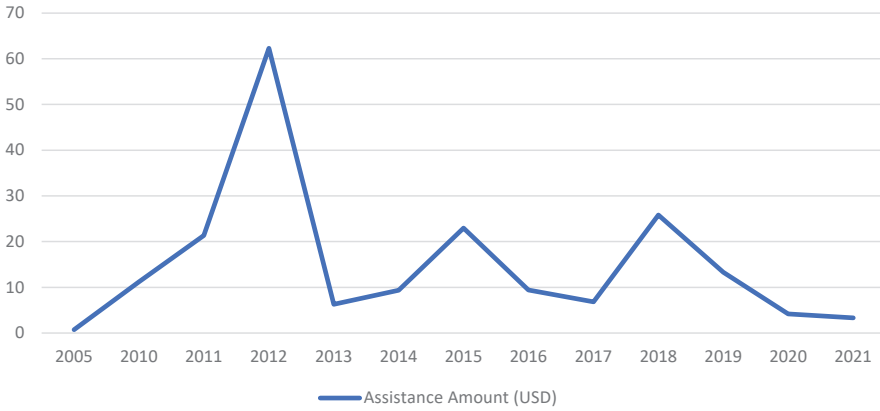
Africa.” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Volume 14, No 1, 2012, p. 113-133.

11 Erman Akıllı, “Yunus Emre Institute As a Tool for Cultural Diplomacy and Nation Branding.” *Electronic Turkish Studies*, Volume 13, No 22, 2018, p. 26-28

12 For more detailed information: [http://www.gib.gov.tr/fileadmin/mevzuat/uluslararasi\\_mevzuat/SU-DAN.htm](http://www.gib.gov.tr/fileadmin/mevzuat/uluslararasi_mevzuat/SU-DAN.htm)

13 For more detailed information: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-sudan.en.mfa>

**Chart 2. Ratios of Development Assistance Provided by Türkiye to Sudan (2005 – 2021)**



Source: TİKA

Türkiye has carried out numerous development aid projects in Sudan through the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) since 2006. In Sudan, TİKA has been implementing projects based on sustainable development in areas such as the preservation of historical and cultural heritage, education, health, energy, agriculture, banking and finance, emergency humanitarian aid, water and sanitation, foreign relations and partnerships, social assistance, and other infrastructure and services since 2005. In this context, the activities of Türkiye's TİKA, YEE, and Maarif institutions have contributed to the deepening of diplomatic and commercial relations between the two countries.<sup>14</sup>

The deepening of Türkiye – Sudan relations can be attributed to the visit of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Khartoum in December 2017. During this visit, agreements were signed in 12 different strategic areas, including agriculture, mining, technology, culture, and security. Among these agreements are the restoration of historical artifacts on Suakin Island, a shared historical heritage, and the house of Ali Dinar, a prominent figure in Darfur, which is used as a museum.<sup>15</sup> Suakin Island, located on the Red Sea coast, became part of Ottoman territory in 1517 with the conquest of Egypt by Yavuz Sultan Selim and hosted governors of the Habesh for a long time. However, Suakin

14 Kaan Devecioğlu, "Sudan'da Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma ve Türkiye'nin Rolü", Kuzey Afrika'da Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma: Türkiye'nin Yardımları ve TİKA, ed. Recep Yorulmaz, Ankara: Orient, 2022. p. 339 – 393.

15 "Turkey's Erdogan visits Sudan on Sunday" *Sudan Tribune*, 22 December 2017.



came under British control in 1882<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, Ali Dinar fought as the Governor of Darfur during the British occupation of Sudan in response to the Ottoman Empire's call for jihad.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Turkey's opening of a branch of Ziraat Katılım Bank in Sudan after Erdoğan's visit in 2017 draws attention as an important investment in the development of economic relations between the two countries.<sup>18</sup>

In general, the fundamental parameters of Türkiye – Sudan relations are the deepening of diplomatic relations based on historical background and socio-cultural harmony. These parameters have been developed in an interconnected process involving political, economic, socio-cultural, and security relations following the declaration of the Africa Year in Türkiye in 2005. However, progress in bilateral relations has stagnated due to the inability of the post-Omar al-Bashir administration in Sudan to overcome the crises in the political, economic, social, and security domains. This situation is examined in more detail in the following main heading.

### The Emergence of the Sudan Crisis and Relations with Türkiye

In December 2018, protests began in Sudan against the economic problems and corruption allegations spanning over 30 years under the rule of then-President Omar al-Bashir. Lasting about six months, these protests led to the intervention of the Sudanese Army in April 2019.<sup>19</sup> The Military Transitional Council, established after the coup, signed an agreement with groups organizing protests in August 2019, forming the Sovereignty Council, consisting of 6 civilians and 5 military members. The council assigned ministries to agreed-upon individuals and granted the authority to establish the government to Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok, representing civilians.<sup>20</sup> However, subsequent processes, including economic improvement, the formation of the legislative body, and the organization of democratic elections, were not realized. Disagreements between civilians and the military deepened during this period, and in October 2021, the military forcibly took over the government by placing Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok under house arrest.<sup>21</sup> In the following period, a new Sovereignty

16 Tarig Mohamed Nour Ali, *Osmanlı Sudan'ı*, İstanbul: İskenderiye Kitap, 2020, p.346-350

17 Muhammed Tandoğan, "Darfur Sultanı Ali Dinar: Siyaset ve Mukavemet (1898-1916)", *Afrika'nın Önder Şahsiyetleri*, ed. Ahmet Kavas and Muhammed Tandoğan, Kocaeli: Alelmas Yayınları, 2019, p.265 – 270.

18 Ömer Erdem, "Ziraat Katılım ilk yurt dışı şubesini Sudan'da açtı" *Anadolu Ajansı*, 23 November 2020

19 İsmail Numan Telci, "Devrim karşıtı güçler Sudan'da 'Mısır senaryosu' peşinde", *Anadolu Ajansı*, 11 Haziran 2019.

20 Kaan Devecioğlu, "Sudan'da yeni hükümet: Başarı mümkün mü?", *Yeni Şafak Düşünce Günlüğü*, 15 October 2019.

21 İsmail Numan Telci, "İç ve Dış Dinamikler Bağlamında Sudan'da Siyasi Kriz", *Sabah Perspektif*, 30 Ekim 2021.

Council, coordinated by the military, reinstated Abdullah Hamdok as the Prime Minister.<sup>22</sup>

After Abdullah Hamdok resigned from the transitional premiership, new disagreements arose among both civilian groups and between civilian groups and the military, intensifying the political crisis. In response to this, the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) initiated facilitation talks to ensure a fragile democratic transition in the country.<sup>23</sup> Volker Perthes, the special representative of UNITAMS, announced during a press conference in Khartoum that the initial talks would involve individual consultations among various actors, and the second talks would include direct or indirect negotiation rounds. Perthes stated that the Sudanese army, rebel groups, political parties, and protest movements, as well as civil society and women's groups, would be invited to participate in the process. In this context, the Sudanese Professionals Associations (SPA), an activist alliance in anti-Omar al-Bashir rallies, categorically rejected UNITAMS' proposal to normalize relations with the new Sovereignty Council, highlighting the organization's commitment to achieving a completely civilian administration. After the initiation of facilitation talks, the lack of public announcements drew attention. In this regard, UNITAMS representative Volker Perthes regularly attended briefing sessions at the UN Security Council.<sup>24</sup>

The leading civil opposition coalition in Sudan, the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), expressed support for any international efforts contributing to the Sudanese people's resistance to the coup and the re-establishment of a civilian and democratic state.<sup>25</sup> Meetings coordinated by UNITAMS, including roundtable discussions with Emergency Lawyers, the Doctors' Union, and the Journalists' Union, were held.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, sporadic protests continued

22 Kaan Devecioğlu, "Framework Agreement in the Face of the Crisis of Transitional Administration in Sudan." *ORSAM Policy Brief*, No:229, 2022, p. 1-2

23 Daniel Forti, "Walking a Tightrope: The Transition from UNAMID to UNITAMS in Sudan." *IPI*, February 2021, p. 1-2.

24 "UNITAMS SRSR Mr. Volker Perthes Remarks to the Security Council 24 May 2022," *UNITAMS*, 24 May 2022.

25 Susan Stigant, "In Sudan, a Narrow Opportunity to Get the Democratic Transition Back on Track", *USIP*, 7 July 2022.

26 "Situation in the Sudan and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan", *United Nations Security Council*, 2 March 2022.

\* Groups that signed the agreement: National Umma Party, Sudan Congress Party, Federal Front, People's Congress Party, Ansar al-Sunna Movement, Democratic Union Party led by Hasan al-Mirghani, Sudan Alliance, Revolutionary Front led by El Hadi Idris, National Baath Party, and Sudanese Professional Associations Union. Groups that did not sign the agreement: Communist Party, Sudanese Professional Associations Union, Sudan Resistance Committees, Arab Socialist Baath Party, Ummah Party, Bija Tribe Council President Muhammad Ahmed al-Amin Tirik from eastern Sudan, Sudan Liberation Movement/Democratic Bloc leader and Darfur Region President Mini Arko Minawi, Justice and Equality Movement leader Jibril Ibrahim, Original Democratic Union Party led by Jaafar Mir-

against UNITAMS and other foreign actors' interventions in Sudan's internal politics by those supporting the military. Despite the contributions of the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in East Africa, and Eritrea to the UNITAMS negotiations, the protesting public persisted in demanding a purely civilian administration.

In December 2022, the military administration reached a new understanding with some civilian groups through the "Political Framework Agreement."<sup>27</sup> The agreement focused on five key issues. Firstly, it addressed the justice system during the transition period, ensuring the rights of individuals who have been subject to human rights violations in society since 1989. Secondly, it pertained to security reform, emphasizing that democracy could not be achieved in the country without establishing a professional and national army. The third issue concerned the completion of the Juba Peace Agreement. The fourth issue involved the respectful removal of elements from the Omar al-Bashir era that were withdrawn from the administration, ensuring compliance with fundamental rights. The final issue concerned the resolution of the Eastern Sudan problem, requiring appropriate arrangements to allow the political participation of all stakeholders in the region and adherence to the solution to the Eastern Sudan issue. This compromise was considered a significant step in resolving the political crisis in the country; however, the non-participation of some groups emerged as a fundamental problem that undermined the agreement. In the following days, protests by opposition groups took place on the streets of Khartoum.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, on April 15, 2023, conflicts erupted between the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces, the two key actors in the Political Framework Agreement, in many parts of the country, including Khartoum and South Darfur. Therefore, the latest attempt at peace among Sudanese groups has yielded negative results, negatively impacting Sudan's relations with Türkiye and other countries. Against this backdrop, post-Omar al-Bashir Türkiye – Sudan relations are examined in three sub-headings: during Abdullah Hamdok's premiership, post-October 2021 military intervention, and the period of civil war.

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ghani, Sudan People's Call group, and some Islamic movements. Additionally, Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) leader Abdulaziz El-Hilu and Sudan Liberation Movement (Army) (SLM/AW) leader Abdel Wahid Nur also did not sign the agreement. For more detailed: Mohammed Amin, "Sudan's rivals sign framework deal for transition", *Anadolu Agency*, 5 December 2022.

27 Kaan Devecioglu, "A New Dimension in the Sudan Crisis: Clash Between Army and Rapid Support Forces", *ORSAM*, 30 April 2023.

## Abdullah Hamdok's Premiership Era

Following the agreement reached by civilian and military groups in August 2019, the Sovereignty Council was established, and Abdullah Hamdok's cabinet, as the Prime Minister, undertook the task of purging individuals associated with the Omar al-Bashir era from both civilian and military bureaucracies. The focus shifted towards resolving economic and social crises. However, the new administration, influenced by the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic from Wuhan, China, in December 2019, also concentrated on the country's foreign relations. The priority of the Khartoum government in 2019 and 2020 was to acquire medical equipment, drugs, and vaccines to build immunity against the virus. Consequently, during this period, Türkiye – Sudan relations took shape within the framework of the pandemic conditions and fell below the expected level. In this context, Türkiye supplied health equipment to Sudan during these years.<sup>28</sup>

By 2021, with the discovery of vaccines against COVID-19 and the increase in immunity, mobility had increased in Sudan and other parts of the world. In this regard, Türkiye – Sudan relations achieved a significant milestone in 2021 with high-level visits for the first time since the military overthrow of the Omar al-Bashir regime in Sudan. The first high-level meeting between the two countries took place during the visits of Turkish Republic Vice President Fuat Oktay and Sudan Sovereignty Council Deputy Chairman Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo in April 2021, during their visits to Niger. Subsequently, Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo officially visited Türkiye on May 27, 2021. During this visit, agreements previously signed during the Omar al-Bashir era were reviewed, areas requiring regulation were identified, and satisfaction was expressed for Türkiye's support of Sudan during the transitional period.<sup>29</sup>

Sudan Sovereignty Council President Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, accompanied by various ministers, visited Ankara for a two-day working visit on August 12, upon the invitation of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. During the meetings held during this visit, agreements signed in 22 areas during Erdoğan's visit to Sudan in 2017 were reviewed. After the meetings, al-Burhan stated in his remarks that he believed the trade volume between Türkiye and Sudan, which was \$500 million, could be increased to \$2 billion<sup>30</sup>, and agreements were

28 Jeyhun Aliyev, "Turkey to donate medical aid to Sudan", *Anadolu Agency*, 15 July 2020.

29 Kaan Devecioğlu, "Türkiye and Sudan's strategic cooperation is emphasized in the recent meeting between the two countries", *Mena Affairs*, 29 May 2021.

30 Nazlı Yüzbaşıoğlu and Muhammet Tarhan, "Sudan Egemenlik Konseyi Başkanı Burhan: Türkiye ile ticaret hacmimizi 2 milyar dolara çıkarabileceğimize inanıyorum", *Anadolu Ajansı*, 13 August 2021

signed in six different areas, including energy, foreign affairs, treasury and finance, military, and media<sup>31</sup>.

Progress was also made in the agricultural cooperation agreement signed between Türkiye and Sudan in 2013. Following the meetings, it was announced that the allocation of 100,000 hectares, equivalent to 1 million acres, of land to Türkiye had been realized, according to Vice President Fuat Oktay. Under the agricultural cooperation agreement between Türkiye and Sudan, 80% of the company established will be owned by TİGEM (Türkiye Agricultural Enterprises General Directorate), and the remaining 20% will be owned by the Sudanese side. These new lands are located on fertile soil along the White Nile, and vegetables, fruits, and tropical fruits will be cultivated.<sup>32</sup>

Another significant aspect of Türkiye – Sudan trade relations is the signing of a free trade agreement. Although there were ongoing efforts in this regard, it was brought back to the agenda with the visit of Türkiye’s Ambassador to Khartoum, İrfan Neziroğlu, to the Sudanese Minister of Trade in March 2021. In this context, Sudan’s Minister of Trade, Ali Cidu, stated that Türkiye would be Sudan’s gateway to Europe. Additionally, the development of animal husbandry is crucial for the progress of bilateral commercial relations.<sup>33</sup> Sudan, a country with approximately 100 million large and small livestock, heavily engages in live animal exports, facing significant issues, especially in engagements with Saudi Arabia. In 2021, Saudi Arabia rejected and detained small livestock, causing considerable damage to Sudan. In this regard, a Turkish company, Cantek, stands out as a good example with its investment in a modern meat processing facility in Sudan.<sup>34</sup>

During Abdullah Hamdok’s premiership, bilateral relations were maintained under the leadership of the Sovereignty Council President and Deputy, but Hamdok did not develop a significant relationship with the Ankara administration. In October 2021, due to the deepening of internal political, social, and economic problems, the Sudanese Army removed Prime Minister Hamdok from office and restructured the Sovereignty Council.

31 Enes Kaplan, “Türkiye ile Sudan arasında farklı alanlarda 6 anlaşma imzalandı”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, 12 August 2021.

32 Abdullah Yasir Güler “Sudan’da 1 milyon dönüm tarım arazisi Türkiye tarafından işlenecek”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, 13 August 2021.

33 Ömer Erdem, “Sudan Ticaret Bakanı Ali Cidu Adem: Türkiye, Sudan’ın Avrupa’ya açılan kapısı olabilir”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, 24 August 2021.

34 Kaan Devecioğlu, “Sudan’da Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma ve Türkiye’nin Rolü”, *Kuzey Afrika’da Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma: Türkiye’nin Yardımları ve TİKA*, ed. Recep Yorulmaz, Ankara: Orient, 2022. p. 339 – 393.

## Post-October 2021 Military Intervention

A failed coup attempt occurred in Sudan a month before the military intervention in October 2021, setting the stage for the subsequent military involvement<sup>35</sup>. Regarding the failed coup attempt in September, the Chairman of the Sovereignty Council, Abdelfattah al-Burhan, revealed that a group allegedly affiliated with Omar al-Bashir within the military had attempted the coup. In the following weeks, major tribes and sects from various regions, particularly Darfur and Port Sudan, organized pro-military rallies in the capital, Khartoum. This popular support became a crucial factor in strengthening the military's hand against civilians, leading to the coup on October 25.<sup>36</sup>

Following the October 25 coup, Sovereignty Council Chairman General Abdelfattah al-Burhan, in his statement, emphasized the divisions among civilian groups, refraining from using the term “military intervention” and instead describing the events as a “takeover of administration.” Burhan underscored that the takeover was deemed necessary to prevent a civil war. After the military intervention, Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok was placed under house arrest, and numerous ministers and political party leaders were reported to have been arrested. Additionally, Burhan announced that elections in 2023 would not include military candidates, and during this period, a new Sovereignty Council, Prime Minister, and a cabinet appointed by the latter would oversee the process, ensuring a technocratic administration.<sup>37</sup>

Despite being placed under house arrest, Abdullah Hamdok was reinstated as Prime Minister through an agreement with the military. However, this move led to significant divisions among civilians, intensifying protests within the country. While Burhan characterized these events as a “restructuring to complete the revolution,” opposition groups, especially the Sudanese Professional Associations (SPA) and the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), continued to support protest demonstrations, advocating for a “completely civilian administration.” In a televised interview, Hamdok explained that he reached an agreement with the military to prevent “fraternal bloodshed” within the country.<sup>38</sup> However, opposition protests persisted, and eventually, on January 2, 2022, Hamdok resigned after talks with SPA and other opposition groups.

Despite these challenging circumstances, Türkiye – Sudan relations continued to develop in the political, economic, security, and cultural fields after the military intervention in October 2021. Notably, representatives from

35 Mürsel Bayram, “Sudan’da Darbe İçinde Darbe”, *ORSAM*, 30 October 2023.

36 Eliza Mackintosh, “Sudan PM detained in military takeover”, *CNN News*, 25 October 2021.

37 “Military will exit politics after 2023 vote, says Abdel Fattah al-Burhan”, *Mena Affairs*, 5 December 2021.

38 “Sudan’s PM Hamdok backed military takeover, says general”, *Al Jazeera*, 26 November 2021.

Türkiye participated in the “Political Framework Agreement” meeting signed on December 5, 2022<sup>39</sup>. Another significant political development in 2022 was the meeting between the then Vice President of the Republic of Türkiye, Fuat Oktay, and Sudan’s Minister of Economy and Finance, Gibril Ibrahim. The meeting took place during the 38th Ministerial Meeting of the Permanent Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (ISEDAK) held in Istanbul in November 2022, where the importance of a railway project connecting all member countries, especially African nations, was emphasized.<sup>40</sup>

In terms of economic relations, the importance placed by Sudanese ministers on Turkish investments in the mining and health sectors indicated positive developments.<sup>41</sup> Particularly, Sudan’s Minister of Mining, Mohamed Bashir, expressed confidence in removing obstacles for all Turkish investors, including the activities of the Mining Technical Exploration Institute (MTAIC) affiliated with the Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources.<sup>42</sup>

Other notable areas in Türkiye – Sudan relations after the October 2021 military intervention include cooperation in the security domain and increased interest in the Türkiye Scholarships program by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). In the security domain, Türkiye provided a 12-day training program on handling societal incidents to 95 Sudanese police officers. The graduation ceremony for Sudanese riot police, trained by officers assigned by the Security Directorate General of the Turkish National Police, took place on November 17, 2022, in the Special Operations Directorate of the Khartoum Police. Additionally, in 2022, around 10,000 Sudanese applied for the Türkiye Scholarships, a program initiated by the YTB in 2012. On September 15, an experience-sharing and farewell event was organized at the Khartoum branch of the Yunus Emre Institute for the 150 Sudanese students awarded scholarships.<sup>43</sup> In addition, following the earthquake that occurred in Kahramanmaraş, Türkiye, on February 6, 2023, the Sudanese search and rescue team promptly responded to Türkiye’s call and traveled to the region to assist Turkish efforts.<sup>44</sup>

39 “Türkiye welcomes framework deal for Sudan civilian-led transition”, *Middle East Monitor*, 5 December 2022.

40 Harun Kutbe, “Cumhurbaşkanı Yardımcısı Oktay, Sudan Ekonomi ve Finans Bakanı İbrahim’i kabul etti”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, 29 November 2022.

41 Fuat Kabakçı, “Sudan Sağlık Bakanı İbrahim: Sudan Türk ürünleri için iyi bir pazar konumunda”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, 9 September 2022.

42 Ömer Erdem, “Sudan Maden Bakanı, Türk yatırımlarının önündeki engelleri kaldırma sözü verdi”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, 4 July 2022.

43 “A Farewell Event Held in Sudan for Students Who Won Turkish Scholarships”, *YEE*, 16 September 2022.

44 Ömer Erdem, “Sudan arama kurtarma ekibi için Hartum’da karşılama töreni düzenlendi”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, 21 January 2023.

Despite the signing of the “Political Framework Agreement” between civilian and military groups in Sudan in December 2022, the country has not achieved political, economic, and social stability as anticipated. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) Commander, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, a politically influential figure strengthened after the October 2021 coup, aimed to extend the integration of the RSF into the national army over 10 years, drawing reactions from both civilian groups and the Sudanese Army under Burhan’s leadership. Moreover, the Sudanese Army elite, led by Burhan, engaged in talks with civilian groups from the al-Bashir era, triggering reactions from both civilian groups and the RSF. Consequently, internal conflict erupted between the Army and RSF on April 15, 2023, confirming the existing tensions between the two groups, particularly discussed among Sudanese elites since January 2023. In January 2023, Turkish National Intelligence Organization Chief Hakan Fidan visited Sudan, conducting separate meetings with Sovereignty Council Chairman Abdelfattah al-Burhan and his deputy Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.<sup>45</sup>

## Sudanese Civil War

The conflicts that emerged on April 15 between the army and the HDK in Sudan are fundamentally rooted in the power-sharing issue between two key actors.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, the alliance of Burhan and Dagalo, after the intervention in October 2021, had failed to appoint a prime minister for 18 months. Prompted by the mediation efforts led by the African Union, the United Nations, and IGAD, on December 5, 2022, Burhan, Dagalo, and 10 civilian actors within the Forces for Freedom and Change signed the “Political Framework Agreement.” Politically, the answer to why Burhan and Dagalo could not agree lies in the developments during this period.<sup>47</sup> These developments include Dagalo characterizing the October 2021 intervention as a mistake, engaging in diplomatic talks in civilian attire, which drew the attention of political and military leaders, Dagalo’s emphasis on a democratic transition while preparing for a civilian political alliance, both Burhan and Dagalo sending more troops to Khartoum in recent months; Dagalo’s desire to have equal security and training equipment with the RSF (he requested military helicopters from Russia but was denied); while Dagalo wants integration within 10 years, Burhan prefers completion within 2 years, causing the negative impact on the approach of military elites to the RSF, as

45 Ömer Erdem, “Sudan Egemenlik Konseyi Başkanı Burhan, MİT Başkanı Fidan ile görüştü” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 17 January 2023.

46 Tunç Demirtaş, “Sudan Krizi’nin Bölgesel Etkileri ve Türkiye’nin Pozisyonu, SETA Kriter, Mayıs 2023.

47 Enver Arpa, “3 SORUDA - Sudan’da iç çatışmaların arka planı” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 19 April 2023.



Dagalo’s soldiers receive higher salaries than Sudan Army soldiers; Dagalo’s dissatisfaction with the rapprochement of Ali Karti, former Foreign Minister during the El-Bashir era, and Commander of the People’s Defense Forces, with Burhan.<sup>48</sup>

After the conflicts erupted, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan held phone conversations with Burhan and Dagalo, urging that “brotherly blood should not be shed in Sudan.” Türkiye expressed its readiness to host mediation for peace between the parties and stated that they were in contact with the UN for urgent humanitarian aid to the Sudanese people.<sup>49</sup> Following an attack on the car of Türkiye’s Ambassador to Khartoum, Ismail Çobanoğlu<sup>50</sup>, the embassy in Khartoum was temporarily moved to the city of Port Sudan, and neither the Sudanese Army nor the RSF claimed responsibility for the attack. However, due to Burhan’s statement that negotiations would not take place unless the RSF withdrew from Khartoum and Dagalo’s refusal to meet with Burhan at all but only with the “honorable” soldiers of the army, Türkiye’s mediation offer did not materialize.

Another key issue in Türkiye’s relations with the Khartoum administration after the conflicts was related to the evacuation processes of Turkish citizens. Following the conflicts on April 15, Türkiye evacuated a total of 1,700 citizens via land routes to Ethiopia starting on April 23 and by air on April 28. Additionally, Türkiye facilitated the evacuation of 300 people from 22 countries. The evacuation efforts were coordinated by the Turkish Embassy in Sudan. Turkish citizens who reached Addis Ababa via buses from the neighboring Ethiopian city of Gondar then flew to Istanbul. Direct evacuations by air were carried out from the Wade Saeydna military airbase in Omdurman, northeast of Khartoum, using Turkish Air Force C-180 planes. During the landing of the evacuation plane on April 28, a minor attack occurred, but it did not result in significant problems, and the responsible party did not claim the attack.<sup>51</sup> Among the civilians evacuated by Türkiye were nationals from Azerbaijan, Japan, China, Mexico, and Yemen. The relevant authorities of these countries expressed thanks and appreciation for Türkiye’s rescue efforts. In addition, during the evacuation operations, the UK, which remained relatively passive, positively acknowledged Türkiye’s efforts. CNN reported that U.S. citizens in Sudan joined the evacuation convoys organized by the United Arab

48 Kaan Devecioğlu, “Sudan Krizinde Yeni Boyut: Ordu ve Hızlı Destek Kuvvetleri Arasında Çatışma”, *ORSAM*, 30 April 2023.

49 “Erdoğan, Sudan’da durumun normalleştirilmesi konusunda Türkiye’nin ara buluculuğunu teklif etti” *İletişim Başkanlığı*, 9 May 2023.

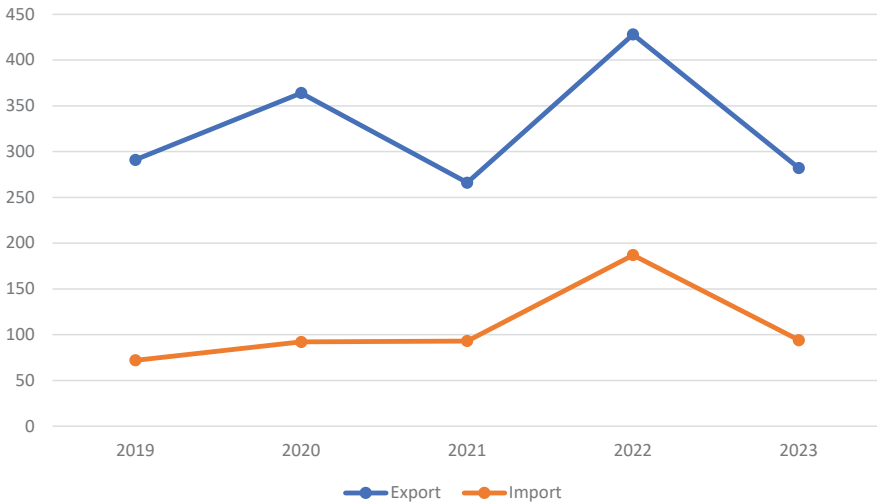
50 “Türkiye’nin Hartum Büyükelçisi Çobanoğlu’nun aracına silahlı saldırı” *TRT*, 6 May 2023.

51 “Sudan crisis: Turkish evacuation plane fired on”, *BBC*, 28 April 2023.

Emirates and Türkiye, highlighting Türkiye's significant role in evacuating U.S. citizens in a process where the U.S. government was unprepared.<sup>52</sup>

Due to the prevailing conditions, Türkiye's relations with Sudan during the conflict period have continued to be centered on diplomatic discussions both at the embassy and in Ankara. Delegations from Khartoum regularly visit Türkiye, as do all foreign actors considered friends. The latest high-level visit between the two countries occurred when the Chairman of the Sovereignty Council and Army Commander Abdul Fattah al-Burhan and his delegation were received by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Ankara. The meeting was held behind closed doors.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, Ambassador İsmail Çobanoğlu visited Port Sudan on December 9, 2023, at the invitation of the Artega tribe. During the visit, the Turkish Embassy delegation, welcomed by the local community, examined the ongoing restoration of Ottoman-era structures on the island of Suakin, carried out by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA). Later, a dinner event was organized in honor of the delegation in the customs building restored by TİKA.<sup>54</sup>

**Chart 3. Türkiye – Sudan Commercial Data (2019 – 2023)**



Source: TUIK

52 Eliza Mackintosh, "Foreign powers rescue nationals while Sudanese must fend for themselves", *CNN International*, 24 April 2023.

53 "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Sudan Egemenlik Konseyi Başkanı Burhan ile bir araya geldi", *Anadolu Ajansı*, 10 October 2023.

54 "Türkiye'nin Hartum Büyükelçisi Sevakın'ı ziyaret etti", *Son Dakika*, 10 December 2023.

After the fall of the Beşir regime, economic relations between Türkiye and Sudan were indirectly negatively affected. Although there was a significant decrease in the trade volume recorded in 2019, 2020, and 2021, the volume returned to the 2019 level in 2022. However, the progress recorded in 2022 has dropped by approximately 100% due to developments in 2023. In light of this background, the conflicts have become an undesirable situation for Türkiye, which has medium and long-term projects with Sudan in various fields. Indeed, the conflicts have deepened instability in Sudan, leading to a challenging and long-term process. Therefore, Türkiye's projects in political, economic, security, and socio-cultural areas with Sudan have come to a halt in the short term. The implementation of projects in the medium and long term will be shaped depending on the course of the conflicts, considering various complex factors such as Sudan's internal political dynamics, economic situation, and regional security.

## **Conclusion**

This study sheds light on Türkiye – Sudan relations after the post-Ottoman Republic of Türkiye was established in 1923, following the era of Omar al-Bashir. The period of rapprochement between the two countries, which began with the governments of Omar al-Bashir and Hassan al-Turabi, who came to power in 1989, and Türkiye's deepening Sahel Africa policy, especially after the launch of the Africa Opening Action Plan in 1998 and the continuity of this policy by the AK Party governments, provides an important background for post-Bashir diplomatic relations. Türkiye's lack of a colonial past and the independence of its African policies from issues with Europe have contributed to the consolidation of relations.

In the development of diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Sudan, internal political and foreign policy factors, as well as the role of trade, cooperation, and socio-cultural interactions, have been crucial. Commercial engagements among businessmen and humanitarian aid projects by Turkish NGOs, in particular, have contributed to a positive foundation for diplomatic relations. However, as emphasized in the study, political changes in Sudan in 2019 have impacted the course of relations with Türkiye. The transitional periods and political crises following Omar al-Bashir's removal from power have negatively affected Türkiye – Sudan relations. This situation has been the focal point of the study, deepening the analysis of post-Bashir relations. In this context, Türkiye – Sudan relations have survived despite the challenges of transitional periods and internal problems. However, the future of these relations will be shaped by a series of complex factors, such as Sudan's internal

political dynamics, economic situation, and regional security considerations. The conflict between the army and RSF on April 15, 2023, has, to some extent, frozen the progress recorded between the two countries.

In conclusion, Türkiye has achieved a strong position, especially following President Erdoğan's official visit to Khartoum in 2017, where various agreements were signed in various fields. Despite facing challenges in sustaining the strategically important agreements in agriculture, mining, and tourism signed with the Bashir administration, Ankara managed to continue them in the post-Bashir era. The period was marked by diplomatic crises and internal political dynamics suppressed by protests and challenges, but not conflicts in today's sense. Therefore, during this time, Türkiye's Ambassador in Khartoum, İrfan Neziroğlu, took the initiative to strengthen communication with Sudanese parties with a focus on sustaining existing agreements, leading to the normalization of relations with the visits of El-Burhan and Dağalo to Türkiye. However, conflicts in Sudan's internal politics have evolved into a conflict-centered dimension. Consequently, bilateral relations have been compelled to shift towards security-centered diplomacy, and the fate of existing agreements will be shaped according to the stability achieved in Sudan's internal politics.

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