Sudan's Normalization with Israel: A Break with the Past or Another Phase of Extraversion?

Rawia Tawfik

Abstract: Sudan's decision to normalize relations with Israel sparked controversy about its reasons for doing so and the potential impact on the country's fragile political transition. The decision was mostly attributed to American pressures, new regional alliances, and Sudan's economic crisis. Tawfik offers a different perspective by linking Sudan's normalization with Israel to domestic power rivalries, suggesting that Sudanese political actors at critical historical moments have sought Israeli patronage to strengthen their power positions and exploring the potential implications of normalization on civil-military relations. In addition to relying on secondary sources, Tawfik draws conclusions based on official documents and interviews with Sudanese officials published by various news outlets.

Résumé : La décision du Soudan de normaliser ses relations avec Israël a suscité une controverse quant aux raisons de cette décision et à son impact potentiel sur la fragile transition politique du pays. La décision a été principalement attribuée aux pressions américaines, aux nouvelles alliances régionales et à la crise économique du Soudan. Tawfik offre une perspective différente en liant la normalisation du Soudan avec Israël aux rivalités de pouvoir nationaux, suggérant que les acteurs politiques soudanais, à des moments historiques critiques, ont recherché le patronage israélien pour renforcer leurs positions de pouvoir et explorer les implications potentielles de la

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normalisation sur les relations civiles-militaires. En plus de s'appuyer sur des sources secondaires, Tawfik tire des conclusions à partir de documents officiels et d'entretiens avec des responsables soudanais publiés par divers organes de presse.

Resumo : A decisão, por parte do Sudão, de normalizar as relações com Israel desencadeou uma controvérsia em torno das razões para o ter feito e do potencial impacto na frágil transição política do país. A decisão foi maioritariamente atribuída às pressões americanas, às novas alianças regionais e à crise económica sudanesa. Tawfik apresenta uma perspetiva diferente, associando a normalização das relações entre o Sudão e Israel às rivalidades políticas internas, sugerindo que, em momentos históricos-chave, os atores políticos sudaneses procuraram obter o apoio de Israel para reforçar as suas posições de poder e explorando as potenciais implicações da normalização das relações civis e militares. Além de se basear em fontes secundárias, Tawfik retira as suas conclusões a partir de documentos oficiais e de entrevistas a altos responsáveis sudaneses publicadas em vários meios de comunicação.

Keywords: Sudan; Israel; normalization; extraversion; civil-military relations; December 2018 Uprising

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Introduction

Sudan's decision to normalize relations with Israel announced by the White House on October 23, 2020, and the linking of this course of action to its removal from the State Sponsors of Terrorism List (SSTL), have sparked much controversy about the impact of the decision on the country's political transition, the timing of the decision, and the sustainability of amicable bilateral relations. Some scholars variously considered the decision an expedient and opportunistic move by Sudan's counter-revolutionary forces,[1] a "rushed" step that would endanger the country's fragile transition,[2] or a "temporary solution that would provide a short-term relief, rather than offer a structural remedy" to its predicaments (El-Nour 2020b). Others viewed this step as a watershed event that would "further Sudan's political and economic transformation,"[3] and a "realistic" policy choice that could save Sudan from its fast economic downfall (Hamad 2020). Officials in Khartoum justified the decision based on Sudan's "national interest." A statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted that the decision was taken in the context of the December 2018 revolution and the country's new foreign policy, which was now designed to prioritize the "ambitions of the Sudanese nation and the stability of the Sudanese State".[4]

As far as the timing of the announcement is concerned, several commentaries have shed light on the domestic, regional, and international contexts in which normalization was pursued. Domestically, the Sudanese transitional government had been facing a pressing economic crisis inherited

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from the ousted regime of Omar Al-Bashir. Shortages of basic commodities, including bread and fuel, which triggered the new wave of protests in December 2018 that toppled Al-Bashir's regime, worsened after his downfall. In this context, it was argued that the Sudanese transitional government was blackmailed by the United States to accept normalization as a condition to end American sanctions and ease Sudan's economic malaise (El-Nour 2020b). This economic objective featured clearly in the joint statement announcing normalization of Sudan-Israel relations that was issued by the US White House. The statement referred to Sudan's attempts to reduce "debt burdens, including advancing discussions on debt forgiveness consistent with the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative" and the commitment of the US and Israel to helping Sudan improve its food security and tap into its economic potential.[5]

Regionally, Sudan was the third country to accept a normalization of relations with Israel, only a few weeks after the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain took the lead, promising a new regional alliance. This emerging alliance was meant not only to strengthen the US-led coalition against Iran, but also to demonstrate new foreign policy successes for an American president seeking to win the votes of the far right in his bid for re-election, a related international variable that might help explain the timing of the normalization decision.[6]

Rather than focusing only on these domestic economic, regional, and international variables, this article takes a different approach by linking Sudan's normalization with Israel to domestic politics and power rivalries. Building on the history of secret and open contacts between Sudanese political forces and armed movements on the one hand, and Israel on the other, it argues that normalizing relations with Israel is a continuation of the efforts by Sudanese incumbent leaders and opposition movements to pursue relationships capable of counterbalancing or overcoming their rivals during critical historical periods. In other words, rather than representing a break with the past, Sudan's normalization of relations with Israel presents another phase of extraversion, seen in the mobilization of political and economic resources by political actors from their external patrons to strengthen their power positions at home or to accumulate wealth (Bayart 2000).

To substantiate this central argument, the article is divided into five sections. The first section reviews literature on Sudanese relations with Israel and sheds light on the concept of extraversion and its explanation of the model of foreign policy pursued by African countries. The second section contextualizes these relations by mapping the competing political and military actors in Sudan following the country's independence. The third section illustrates the strategies of extraversion employed by these actors that had sought to establish links with Israel since the 1950s. The fourth section focuses on the recent decision by the Sudanese transitional government to normalize relations with Israel, examining whether it is a shift away from ideological foreign policy or a continuation of extraversionary strategies by new actors in a different political context. The fifth section assesses the

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historical rewards that Sudanese political actors gained in the past from their extraversionary strategies, the potential rewards they stand to gain from the recent normalization decision, and the impact of their relations with Israel on the balance of power during Sudan's third post-revolutionary political transition.

In addition to secondary sources, this article draws from governmental Israeli sources, memoirs of former Israeli officials, statements issued by different Sudanese political forces, and interviews with Sudanese senior officials published by various news outlets.

Understanding Sudan's Relations with Israel: Existing Literature and Guiding Theory

A few studies have analyzed the connections between different Sudanese political forces and Israel before and after Sudan's independence. Most of these studies have focused on Israel's, rather than Sudan's, foreign policy objectives and tools. Unsurprisingly, Arab nationalist scholars were concerned with Israel's interests in Sudan, arguing that its aim was to divide and weaken this Arab-African country by exacerbating its divisions. According to Mahmoud Muhareb, for instance, Israel sought to find "cracks in the Arab body" and "common interests with sectarian and ethnic minorities in the Arab world."[7] Amany Al-Taweel (2012) states that Israel has succeeded in deepening Sudan's internal divisions and contradictions to assert its regional hegemony and threaten Arab national security.

While not sharing the same concerns, other scholars highlighted the foreign policy principles that governed Israel's policy toward Sudan and the tools used to implement these principles. Gabriel Warburg (1992) cited the historical attempt of the newly independent Jewish state to forge an alliance with Muslim-Arab and African states and its rapprochement with the Umma party in Sudan in the 1950s in this context to challenge the Arab boycott of Israel. Yusri Hazran (2020) and Yoel Guzansky (2014) examined Israel's relations with South Sudanese African minorities and armed movements as an example of Israel's "Periphery Doctrine." According to this principle, Israel sought to develop its military and political ties "with states and minority groups in and outside the Arab world or in strategic locations," to reduce Israel's isolation and put pressure on rival Arab countries (Guzansky 2014:1–2).

In addition to the political and military ties identified by the above literature, Yotam Gidron (2018) explored the involvement of Mossad, Israel's National Intelligence Agency, in designing and disseminating propaganda material for Sudanese Southern rebels during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He explained how Israel helped the Southerners portray the war in the South as an African fight against Arab imperialism to draw the attention of the western public, media, and diplomatic circles away from anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian propaganda after the 1967 war.

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In most of this literature that focused on Israel's interests and policy toward Sudan, Sudan is portrayed as the weaker participant in the relationship. Sudan's social configuration and the failure of its consequent political regimes to manage diversity, which will be illustrated in the next section, have increased its fragility and vulnerability to external influence, including from Israel. At the same time, Sudan's relations with Israel have significantly been affected by its links with Egypt, its former co-domini, and the Arab world at large on the one hand, and its occasional rapprochement with the US, on the other.

One exception to this interpretation is Jacob Abadi's analysis of Israel-Sudan contacts, which he considered as driven by "pragmatic considerations on both sides" (1999:20). While Israel was motivated by a desire for friendship with an Afro-Arab country bordering its historical nemesis, Egypt, Sudan's political leaders sought to achieve different results, ranging from achieving independence in the 1950s to forging closer ties with the US through Israel in the beginning of the 1980s. Yet, Abadi has not sufficiently explained the domestic rivalries between different Sudanese political forces and the extent to which Israeli support for one force over the other has contributed to changing the domestic balance of power. He also emphasized that it was Sudan's relations with the Arab world that prevented the development of "consistent and more meaningful relations with Israel" (Abadi 1999:23), thus echoing Sudan's position of dependency in the region.

While not denying the impact of Sudan's domestic fragility and the influence of regional and international powers on its relations with Israel, this study argues that the existing literature downplays the role of Sudanese political actors and their deliberate attempts to use Israeli leverage to gain an edge in domestic power rivalries. To address this gap, this article historicizes Sudan's relations with Israel, demonstrating how different political regimes and opposition movements have approached Israel during critical periods in order to take advantage of its political, economic, or military support. In this manner, it not only contributes to a better understanding of Sudanese foreign relations in general, and its relations with Israel in particular, but also explores how domestic Sudanese policies affect and are affected by these relationships.

The concept of extraversion is useful to achieve these objectives. Jean François Bayart coined this concept to refer to strategies whereby "factions and groups which squabbled over power and access to wealth called on foreign support to overcome rival parties and to ward off the threats of internal revolution" (1993:24). This concept does not deny the existence of unequal power relations between African countries and the rest of the world, which is the focus of the dependency theory, but qualifies the central argument of the theory by highlighting the role of African elites in maintaining this dependency (2000:219).

Along the same lines, Christopher Clapham argues that the central motivation of the foreign policy of most post-independent African countries was to mobilize external resources to "maintain domestic power structures"

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(1996:62). Ian Taylor added that this impetus is not confined to African political elites, but extends to non-state actors as well (Taylor 2010). The most important actors that used extraversion strategies in the case of Sudan are the rebel movements. The concept of extraversion is applicable here in its analysis of the "the overlapping between the internal and external dynamics" of Africa's foreign relations (Bayart 1993:18). The next four sections apply this concept to explain the policies of Sudanese political regimes and opposition movements toward Israel and the recent decision by the Sudanese transitional government to normalize bilateral relations.

Contextualizing Sudan's Relations with Israel: Sudan's Competing Political Forces since Independence

Sudan's post-independence history has been shaped by various competing forces, which sought external alliances to consolidate their domestic power positions. On the eve of independence in the mid-1950s, three different forces adopted divergent visions of domestic politics and foreign relations. The Umma party, the political arm of the Ansar Sufi order and the historical Mahdi movement that struggled against the Ottoman-Egyptian rule, represented the nationalist forces that historically emerged in Western Sudan, raising the slogan of "Sudan for the Sudanese." On the other hand, the Khatmiyya Sufi order and its allied forces of the "Unity of the Nile Valley" that formed the National Unionist Party (NUP) represented the Northern-Nilotic cultural and political forces connected to Egypt and the Arab world at large. The third group was the political forces representing the African ethnic groups in the South, which called for a degree of autonomy from the Arab North. These three actors reflected the complexity of Sudan's social configuration that posed a challenge to its nation-state building (Haj Hamad 1996); this challenge emanated from the country's geographical location both in the Arab world and on the African continent, and the colonial and post-colonial policies that deepened the rift between its African and Arab social components.

Following independence, in spite of their internal divisions and consequent splits, the two traditional sectarian political parties, Umma and NUP (later renamed the Democratic Unionist Party, or DUP), led the limited periods of civilian democratic rule in Sudan, forming short-lived coalition governments. Modern forces, including progressive political parties such as the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP), labor and student movements, and professional associations, led successful popular uprisings that toppled the military regimes of Ibrahim Abboud and Ja'far Nimeiri in October 1964 and April 1985, respectively. However, the return to military rule in 1969 and 1989 indicated what has come to be known as the "Sudan Syndrome," in reference to the repeated failures of democratic transitions (El-Battahani 2019:78–79). Competition between traditional and modern civilian forces, and between these forces and the military, has shaped post-independence Northern Sudanese politics.

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This is not to deny the tactical alliances between some of civilian and military forces. It was the Umma party that invited and supported the military coup led by Abboud in 1958 after increasing domestic opposition. Leftist forces also backed Nimeiri and his Free Officers movement takeover in 1969. During the second democratic transition in the mid-1980s, a new Islamist political party, the Islamic Charter Front (ICF), under the leadership of Hassan Al-Turbai, emerged as an influential political actor that provided an ideological backing to the military coup of Omar Al-Bashir in 1989. Although Al-Turabi split from the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) in 1999, forming the opposition Popular Congress Party (PCP), the regime continued to use an Islamist discourse to mobilize popular support (Ali & El-Battahani 2011:298–300). More generally, all these tactical civilian-military alliances ended when the military regimes started to gradually distance themselves from their civilian allies and monopolize power in a way that motivated these allies to join forces to topple the regimes (El Haj Ali 2017). Yet, civilian forces that were strong and united enough to overthrow military regimes proved to be too weak and divided to manage democratic transitions, thus contributing to the perpetuation of the "Sudan Syndrome."

In Southern Sudan, other dimensions of the syndrome were unfolding as well. Before independence, Northern political elites promised the South that they would consider implementing a federal system, a promise that was not fulfilled after independence. Disappointed by the reneged promise and government-forced Arabization, the first armed resistance, led by the Anya-Nya movement, emerged in the South with the aim of liberating the region from the domination of the Arab North. The signing of the Addis Ababa peace agreement in 1972, which granted self-rule to the South, brought peace and promised development to the historically marginalized southern region. However, the attempt of the regime in Khartoum to interfere in South Sudanese politics and the final abrogation of the agreement by Nimeiri in 1983 led to the resurgence of the war. During the second civil war, a new movement emerged that dominated South Sudanese politics and represented the South in negotiations with the Northern regime and opposition; this was the Sudan People's Liberation Movement /Army (SPLM/A). While the leader of the movement, John Garang, a former Colonel in the Sudanese army, aimed at achieving a united, secular Sudan, other members in the movement defended the right of self-determination as a way to solve the South's predicament. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) negotiated between the SPLM and the government of Sudan between 2002 and 2005 with regional mediation and strong international support represented a compromise between these two options. It allowed for a transitional period (2005–2011) of self-rule, during which policies would be pursued to make unity attractive. At the end of the transitional period, Southern Sudanese citizens would vote in a referendum for or against independence (Malwal 2015).

While negotiating peace agreements with the South to end Africa's longest civil war, the regime in Khartoum was fighting a new war in Darfur.

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The marginalization of this vast region in Western Sudan was another example of the center-periphery discrepancies that continued to be problematic. Both Arabs and non-Arabs in the region "received less education, less healthcare, less development assistance and fewer government posts than any other region" even the South (de Waal 2004:720). Combined with local competition over scarce resources associated with the wave of drought in 2003, the political marginalization of the Darfur region gave rise to two major armed groups, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). While these two movements aspired for a degree of autonomy for the region and representation at the center, SLA had a secular leaning, while JEM had strong links with the Islamists who split from Al-Bashir's NCP. Like northern traditional parties and modern forces, these movements, especially the SLA, split into different factions seeking to maximize their share of the national power and wealth (de Waal 2004).

To conclude, Sudan's post-independence politics has been characterized by competition between traditional and modern forces, contestation between military regimes and civilian forces, and armed confrontation between the center and the peripheries, all of which reflected the failure of consecutive governments to remedy the developmental discrepancies left by the departing colonial powers. The next three sections illustrate how various actors in these contestations have occasionally sought Israeli patronage to offset the strength of their rivals and how this same approach contributes to understanding the recent Sudanese decision to normalize and further develop relations with Israel.

Approaching Israel: Extraversion Strategies of Sudanese Forces

According to the concept of extraversion, political actors and rebel movements use different strategies when seeking the patronage of external forces to maintain their power position or accumulate wealth. Political strategies may include introducing limited changes in their discourse and/or institutions, while maintaining the extant power structures. Military extraversion exists where governments and/or armed movements secure external support during civil or inter-state wars. This form of military extraversion is often combined with another form of economic extraversion that finances war by exporting the country's resources, or by leveraging the contributions of its diaspora (Clapham 1996:62–63; Bayart 2000). Extraversion may also be cultural, when actors adopt the cultural symbols and practices of their patrons. The choice of one extraversion strategy or the other depends on many factors, including the country's location, economic resources, regional influence and relations with neighboring countries, leadership skills, the level of domestic support to incumbent leaders or warrying factions, the degree of dependence of external patrons on the concerned state to achieve their interests, and the level of competition between these patrons (Clapham 1996). African elites often have a different "extraversion portfolio," various sources and linkages which they occasionally use separately or combined in

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different situations to maximize both their benefits and their relative autonomy vis-à-vis external patrons (Peiffer & Englebert 2012).

In the case of Sudan, the various political actors illustrated in the last section have used different strategies to secure several kinds of Israeli support. The first of these strategies was utilizing Sudan's strategic location in Africa and the Arab world, with its long coastline along the Red Sea and its shared border with Egypt, Israel's historical foe and Sudan's former co-domini. The first Sudanese political actor to capitalize on these strategic assets was the Umma party. In the beginning of the 1950s, Egypt supported the unity forces, providing generous financial support to the NUP, which contributed to its overwhelming victory in the transitional elections of 1953 (Haj Hamad 1996). In its quest for allies against Egypt, the Umma party approached Israel, requesting financial support and Israeli diplomatic influence to convince the US to support Sudan's independence forces (Warburg 1992). Siddiq Al-Mahdi, the party's president, met Israeli diplomats in London in mid-1954 to discuss these objectives. Talks between the two parties continued in 1955 to discuss how Sudan could achieve further economic independence from Egypt (Sharett 1996).

Since all political forces, including the NUP, which raised the slogan of unity with Egypt only to balance the power of the Umma and its British ally, came to recognize the inevitability of Sudan's independence, Umma's move to seek Israeli support was about gaining more power in its long-standing competition with the Khatmiyya. In return for the desired support from Israel, Umma offered the promise of recognition of, and economic relations with, Israel once independence was achieved (Warburg 1992). Umma's secret contacts with Israel continued after Sudan's independence to mobilize financial support to compete with the NUP in post-independence elections and to weaken Egyptian influence in post-independence Sudan. In this context, the sale of future harvests of Mahdi's cotton crop to Israel was proposed.[8]

For its part, Israel considered supporting the Umma party to influence Egypt's strategic interests in Sudan. According to the Israeli Prime Minister Moshe Sharett, the party was a convenient partner in promoting Israeli plans to "face Nasser's arrogance" (Sharett 1996:618). Additionally, as noted earlier, Sudan seemed to Israel as the "weak link" that could undermine the Arab boycott of Israel. At the same time, there was evidence to suggest that Israel did not want to antagonize Egypt and decided not to further its contacts with Umma leaders (Warburg 1992:389).

Other Sudanese political actors, especially some armed movements in South Sudan and Darfur, have used the same extraversion assets, namely location and the common enemy, to mobilize Israeli political and military support in their wars against the government in Khartoum. Southern rebels began approaching Israeli diplomats in various African and Western capitals, asking for diplomatic and technical assistance as early as the beginning of the 1960s, but Israel was reluctant to provide such support (Gidron 2018). After Sudan's support for Egypt in the Six-Day War of 1967 against Israel, the Israeli government was ready to get more vigorously involved in the conflict in South

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Sudan. Following the war, Joseph Lagu, the founder and commander of South Sudan's armed movement Anya-Nya, sent a letter to Levi Eshkol, at that time the Israeli prime minister, to congratulate him on "his victory against the Arabs." In an interview with Haaretz, Lagu revealed that he had asked for Israeli assistance, offering to "tie down the northern Sudanese army" so as to prevent it from joining Egypt and other Arab armies in future wars against Israel. In response, Israel invited Lagu to visit Tel Aviv in 1969. This ushered in a phase of Israeli military and technical support for the movement, a reflection of its "Periphery Doctrine" and its attempt to keep Sudan busy with its internal wars. Israel sent weapons and military advisors to Southern Sudan through Kampala (Harman 2011). Israeli military officers provided training to South Sudanese fighters and sent medical teams to South Sudan, while some of the movement's junior figures, including Garang, traveled to Israel to receive military training (Hazran 2020; Al-Taweel 2012). The signing of the Addis Ababa agreement between the government of Sudan and the Southern rebels in 1972 temporarily stopped the military confrontations in the South, thus halting Israeli support for Anya-Nya movement.

With the resurgence of civil war in the South in 1983, different sources offered contradictory accounts of Israel's relations with the SPLM. Some sources referred to the continuing Israeli military and logistical support for the movement during the late 1980s and the 1990s, although senior leaders of the movement denied these allegations (Al-Taweel 2012; Abadi 1999; *Executive Intelligence Review* 1999). Yasir Arman, the leading figure of the movement in the North, claimed these allegations were fabricated by Al-Bashir's regime to mobilize support from the Arab and Islamic world, in hopes of defaming the movement and limiting its popularity in the North.[9]

Cultural extraversion has also been used by some Sudanese political forces approaching Israel to secure its patronage against their rivals. Southern rebels have occasionally used this type of extraversion to appeal to Israel's own quest to portray itself as a defender of black marginalized communities who suffered humiliation just as the Jews did. This missionary quest has its roots in Theodor Herzl's ambitions to "assist the process of redemption and revival of the black people" (Oded 2010:125). It continued to inspire some Israeli commentators who called for a renewed "Alliance of the Periphery" by defending the rights of Southern Sudan and of the people of Darfur as a "Jewish cause," a call also aiming at making friends in a region full of enemies (Cohen 2012). Capitalizing on this quest, Lagu addressed Israelis as "God Almighty's chosen people" in his first letter to Eshkol (Harman 2011). Another Southern leader, Joseph Oduho, appealed to the "Jewish collective memory" in his communications with Israel by comparing the execution and destruction faced by South Sudanese to the persecution of Europe's Jews. In its turn, Israel provided propaganda support for Anya-Nya to promote its cause, an often-overlooked means of support. As noted earlier, Mossad produced and disseminated "shocking images that prove the cruelty of Arabs," while also highlighting the emergence of a united nation in Southern Sudan in the struggle against the Arabs (Gidron 2018:11).

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Since the eruption of the conflict in Darfur in 2003, some Darfurian rebels have also benefited from Israeli public propaganda to promote their cause. Capitalizing on their concern with genocide, Jewish organizations in the US led a campaign to bring Darfur and Sudan into the American and international spotlights. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and the American Jewish World Service organized a Darfur emergency summit in July 2004 which established the "Save Darfur" Coalition. The Coalition expanded to bring together other faith-based and human rights organizations to provide humanitarian support and lobby western governments to put pressure on Al-Bashir's regime to stop the war (Lanz 2009).

Additionally, some rebel leaders in Darfur counted on Israeli patronage to strengthen their positions vis-à-vis their rivals in Western Sudan. Following divisions within the SLA on a peace deal with Khartoum, Abdel Wahed El-Nur, the leader of one of the movement's factions, took the unprecedented step of opening an office for the movement in Tel Aviv in 2008.[10] In the same year, El-Nur was received by senior State Department officials in the George W. Bush administration, which sought unsuccessfully to unite factions in the SLA to facilitate a deal between the movement and the regime in Khartoum. One year later, he visited Israel in a publicized trip with a group of European Jews. In interviews with media outlets, El-Nur declared that his relations with, and visit to, Israel were meant to maintain contacts with SLA's members who had fled to Tel Aviv and promised to normalize political relations with Israel if his movement gained power. While acknowledging that part of the movement's popular base in Darfur rejected its relationship with Israel, he opined that Israel had saved thousands of Darfurians from massacres by hosting them in Tel Aviv, and that an actual social normalization of relations with Israel already existed through intermarriages and business relations between Sudanese refugees and Israelis.[11] This position indicates that El-Nur was seeking Israeli (and American) patronage, believing that this would strengthen his power position in spite of the controversy this might cause among some of his supporters at home.

Political and economic extraversion which sought Israeli patronage had even been used by incumbent Sudanese leaders. Faced with increasing political and economic challenges during his last years in power, President Ja'afar Nimeiri brokered deals with Israel for mobilizing American aid and for self-enrichment. Nimeiri came to power in a military coup supported by leftist forces, including SCP, and committed himself to the Arab struggle against Israel by engaging the Sudanese army in the war of attrition and providing political and financial backing to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (Abadi 1999). However, his domestic power base was gradually eroded after his crackdown on the SCP following a coup plot in 1971 and his tensions with the Islamists in the beginning of 1985. On the economic front, Sudan was facing a pressing crisis, forcing Nimeiri to apply austerity measures that increased public discontent (Berridge 2015).

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In this context, Nimeiri secretly received an Israeli delegation in Sudan in 1979 to discuss bilateral economic cooperation, and he met the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Yigdal Yadin in New York for the same purpose.[12] In May 1982, Neimiri also secretly met the Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. According to Sharon, the meeting came in the context of Israel's persistent periphery strategy and was meant to forge a new alliance against Soviet-backed regimes in Africa, especially Libya, which was "one of the most inveterately hostile towards Israel" (Sharon & Chanoff 2005:415). In 1984 and 1985, Nimeiri cooperated with the Israeli Defense Forces and US intelligence in Operation Moses to smuggle more than 8,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel.[13] In return, Nimeiri received USD60 million in his personal account and in the accounts of other close aides who were involved in the operation, in addition to a commitment by the US to provide an additional USD200 million in aid to Sudan (Abadi 1999).

Even Al-Bashir's regime, in spite of its hostility toward Israel, opened a debate in its last few years in power on normalizing bilateral relations. Al-Bashir's international and regional alliances oscillated dramatically during his three decades in power from opening its territories to armed and, especially Palestinian, resistance movements in the beginning of the 1990s to becoming "a cooperative partner of the US in counterterrorism" a decade later.[14] Yet, disappointment with the continuation of American sanctions on Khartoum led to closer cooperation with Iran, especially in the military and security sectors. This made Khartoum a center for Israeli attacks in 2009 and 2011, which allegedly targeted military sites or equipment intended for delivery to resistance movements in Palestine.[15]

Faced with a deteriorating economic situation after the secession of the oil-rich South in 2011 and waves of protest in the wake of the Arab uprisings, Al-Bashir changed his regional coalitions again to mobilize economic and political support for his regime. Following Khartoum's decision to join Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in their war in Yemen, Sudan officially severed relations with Iran in January 2016. Simultaneously, political circles in Sudan opened a debate on the potential normalization of relations with Israel. Former Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour stated during his participation in a workshop on Sudanese-American relations in January 2016 that Sudan might consider normalizing relations with Israel.[16] Three days later, the *Sudan Tribune* reported a debate and division on relations with Israel inside the National Dialogue sessions convened by the ruling National Congress Party (NCP). Leading and influential figures, including the head of the party's political bureau Mustapha Othman Ismael, voiced no clear opposition to normalization and preferred to leave the decision to the concerned committees in the dialogue.[17]

Nimeiri's contacts and deals with Israel and the discussion of normalization of bilateral relations under Al-Bashir indicate that Sudan's domestic political and economic crises and its shifting regional alliances provided a conducive environment for extending relations with Israel, but these relations can also be understood against the background of Nimeiri's and

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Al-Bashir's attempts to seek more external allies in their struggle to maintain power.

In conclusion, both incumbent leaders and opposition parties and movements have occasionally used different extraversion strategies to mobilize various sorts of Israeli extraversion rewards. Rebel movements in the South and Darfur capitalized on Sudan's assets (such as its advantageous location and historical engagement in the Arab-Israeli conflict), and on the tensions between its Arab and African social components. Incumbent leaders capitalized on Sudan's strategic location and importance in regional power competitions and confrontations (between revolutionary Arab-African regimes and Israel in the case of Nimeiri, and between Iran and Israel in the case of Al-Bashir) to seek Israeli support and mediation with Washington to strengthen their position amid declining political legitimacy and worsening economic crisis.

Sudan's Third Post-Revolutionary Democratic Transition: A New Phase of Extraversion?

On October 23, 2020, the White House announced an agreement between Israel and Sudan to normalize their relations. The announcement came after intensive pressures by the administration of President Donald Trump on Sudan's transitional government. During the previous August, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had discussed the issue with Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, who appealed to the US for the removal of Sudan from the SSTL. Sudan's acute economic crisis contributed to Sudan's response to American pressures to normalize relations with Israel. In mid-September 2020, the Sudan government announced an economic state of emergency after a historic decline in the Sudanese pound and an increase in inflation to 124% (compared to 82% in 2019). Against this background, the Sudanese transitional government hoped for the removal of international sanctions to increase financial flows to an ailing economy and facilitate the country's eligibility for the HIPC initiative relief. Sudan's external debts in 2019 reached USD55 billion, 76% of which were owed to bilateral creditors.[18] Additionally, the Sudanese transitional government was forced to pay USD335 million to compensate victims of terrorist attacks on the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salam in 1998 and the Navy destroyer Cole in 2000.

However, American pressures and economic constraints are not sufficient to completely explain the decision of the transitional government to normalize relations with Israel. Evidently, domestic power rivalries also contributed to the gradual shaping of this decision. The most notable rivalry has been between civilian and military forces. Following Al-Bashir's removal from power, Sudan's transition was managed by a military-civilian Sovereign Council, a collective body that assumed the responsibilities of the Head of State, and a civilian government supported by the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), the revolutionary coalition that toppled Al-Bashir. The FFC brought

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together the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) which included armed movements, and the National Consensus Forces (NCF) which included traditional parties and leftist forces, such as the SCP and Arab nationalist parties. The constitutional document signed by the military council and the FFC in August 2019 defined the mandates of the transitional government structures. The coalition selected Hamdok as Prime Minister and also nominated other ministers.

Yet, tensions between the civilian and military partners in these structures were rife. Hamdok openly addressed these tensions in his government's first anniversary speech, when he listed civil-military relations as "the first, most crucial, and serious" challenge facing Sudan's democratic transition. While expressing appreciation for the military's decisive role in overthrowing Al-Bashir, Hamdok stated that the role of the army must be confined to protecting the country's borders and its constitutional order, rather than shielding military despotic regimes or promoting the interests of its senior officers. He further argued that the economic enterprises owned by the security apparatus (military and para-military institutions) should be subject to the authority of the civilian government.[19] The military overthrow of Hamdok on October 25, 2021, further increased these tensions between civilian and military actors. Hamdok was reinstated on November 21, 2021, but resigned a few weeks later following his failure to bridge the gap between different civilian and military forces, and among civilian groups as well, which indicated the wide divisions between all of the involved parties.

Against this background, Sudan's decision to normalize relations with Israel partly reflects the broader tensions among the influential forces in Sudan's transition, and sheds light on the extraversionary nature of emerging Sudan-Israel relations. Importantly, it was Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, Chairman of the Sovereign Council, who took the first step toward normalization when he met with former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Entebbe in February 2020. Al-Burhan justified this step by alluding to his responsibility to "maintain Sudanese national security and achieve the supreme interests of the Sudanese people."[20] Another politically and economically influential military figure who has also backed normalization is Lieutenant General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (better known as Hemedti), the deputy head of the Sovereign Council and the head of the Rapid Support Force (RSF), a para-military organization implicated in mass human rights violations in Darfur. In an interview two weeks before the announcement of the normalization of relations with Israel, Hemedti criticized the position of the anti-normalization camp, claiming that they did not represent the Sudanese people and were not qualified to speak on their behalf, an indication of the civil-military divisions on handling this file. In defending his pro-normalization position, Hemedti stressed that Al-Bashir would have normalized relations with Israel if he had remained in office, an interesting remark which reveals the continuity of Sudanese forces' extraversion policies rather than the proclaimed radical shift of foreign policy to achieve "national interest."[21] It is also noteworthy that, although the military

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is not homogenous given the existence of para-military forces, the most notable of which is the RSF, there is an agreement between the leaders of the army and the RSF on normalization with Israel. However, it is not clear whether the less senior officers in the two institutions and members of other para-military forces set up by the Al-Bashir regime, such as the Popular Defense Forces (PDFs), support this decision.

Accordingly, the decision to normalize relations with Israel was a decision taken by a transitional military leadership and accepted reluctantly by a transitional government struggling to establish a new political dispensation. Following Al-Burhan's meeting with Netanyahu, which was publicized by Israeli official sources, Sudan's transitional civilian government issued a statement that it was neither consulted nor informed of the meeting. The FFC criticized Al-Burhan's step, claiming that he breached the constitutional document.[22] According to the document, initiating international treaties and bilateral agreements is one of the mandates of the transitional government.[23]

Prime Minister Hamdok used a similar argument while receiving Pompeo in August 2020. He turned down the US request to normalize relations with Israel on the basis that it had to be approved by the yet-to-be formed transitional legislative council. Hamdok further demanded the delinking of Sudan's terrorism delisting from normalizing relations with Israel.[24] The government rejection of normalization was so sweeping that it fired the spokesperson of its foreign ministry, Haider Badawi Siddiq, after he declared that Sudan was getting ready to normalize relations with Israel. This official position changed a few weeks later, when Hamdok joined the trilateral meeting in the White House announcing the establishment of diplomatic relations between Sudan and Israel.

Against this background, several Sudanese civilian forces viewed the initiative to normalize relations with Israel by the military leadership as an attempt to gain power and influence vis-à-vis civilian institutions that reluctantly accepted this initiative. According to a statement by the NCF, normalization is a breach by the military and the Sovereign Council that assumed mandates which were supposed to be practiced by the civilian government and the yet-to-be elected transitional legislative council.[25]

Yet, as illustrated earlier, the FFC has not been homogenous and has become increasingly fragmented, which poses another challenge to Sudan's democratic transition. Some political actors that actively took part in the December 2018 revolution, such as SCP, refused to negotiate with the military and later withdrew from the FFC. The Umma Party also withdrew from the FFC in April 2020, as a result of disagreements over the yet-to-be formed legislative council and the appointment of state governors. At the same time, by negotiating and signing the Juba agreement with most of the rebel groups in October 2020, the military has co-opted these groups in the transitional government and gained their support vis-à-vis the FFC.

These divisions were also reflected in the positions of these parties on relations with Israel. Arab nationalists recalled Sudan's history in the

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Arab-Israeli conflict; they highlighted the role of Khartoum as host of the historic Arab summit following the Six-Day war in 1967 that declared the Arab rejection of recognition, peace, and negotiation with Israel, or the "Three No's" as it became to be known (El-Nour 2020a). The Umma party rejected normalization on the basis of defending the just Palestinian cause and resisting American blackmailing.[26] Some political Islamist parties, such as the PCP, stressed Sudan's commitment to side with Palestinian rights to defend their lands and Islamic holy sites.[27] Leftist forces, including the SCP, emphasized that normalization is a surrender to international imperialism and regional sub-imperialist forces.[28] Along the same lines, SPA called Israel a "racist, extremist and discriminatory" state that contradicts in its practices all the principles of the December revolution.[29]

At the other end of the political spectrum, a few civilian forces sided with the official position in defending the normalization decision based on achieving Sudan's "national interests," indicating a division within the civilian political forces. One example of these forces is the Congress Party, a member of the NCF, which welcomed the ending of hostilities between Israel and Sudan and the prioritization of Sudan's interests.[30]

To conclude, although Sudan's pressing economic crisis, combined with pressures from the Trump administration, have pushed Sudan to accept the normalization of relations with Israel, this decision also must be examined within the context of power competition between military and civilian forces and, to a lesser extent, among the various civilian forces.

Extraversion Rewards and the "Sudan Syndrome": The Impact of Israeli Patronage on Civil-Military Relations

Based on the concept of extraversion, the objective of the competing forces seeking external patrons is to mobilize support to outweigh, or at least counterbalance, their domestic rivals. Drawing on Sudan's historical experience, this section examines the extent to which domestic political forces seeking Israeli patronage have achieved this objective, and the potential impacts of this patronage on the ongoing Sudanese transition.

As far as the current transition is concerned, there are general direct and indirect rewards resulting from Sudan's decision to normalize relations with Israel. The removal of Sudan from SSTL on December 14, 2020, after 27 years and the associated economic benefits of this step are the most direct results of this decision. Gaining more financial rewards from the United Arab Emirates, another patron supporting the military and the process of normalization, is another potential consequence. Yet, in light of the historical "Sudan Syndrome" and the tense civilian-military relations cited above, the deeper political implications of normalizing relations with Israel need to be taken into account.

Given that the normalization decision in Sudan was promoted by the military leadership, the first sphere of bilateral cooperation was the security sector. This came in spite of the reference in the joint statement issued by the

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White House to the priority of economic and trade relations with an initial focus on agriculture. In November 2020, an Israeli security delegation from the military and intelligence institutions visited Khartoum and met with senior Sudanese military officials. The spokesperson of the Sovereign Council at that time, Mohamed Al-Faki Suleiman, declared that the visit was "of a technical and military nature" and included a tour of the defense industries system of the Sudanese armed forces. Commenting on the tensions between the government and the military members of the Sovereign Council which followed the visit, Suleiman admitted that the transitional government was not informed of the visit because it was not "of a political nature."[31]

Two months later, the Israeli Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen made a public visit to Khartoum, where he signed a memorandum of understanding with the Defense Minister Yassin Ibrahim to fight "terrorism and exchange defense strategies and knowledge."[32] At a time when the Sudanese Foreign Minister, Mariam Al-Mahdi, downplayed ties with Israel, indicating that they were only meant to remove Sudan from the SSTL, Israeli security officials continued to meet with senior Sudanese officials, including the influential General Hemedti (Magid & Staff 2021).

Although the full details of these visits and new agreements were not disclosed, the fact that they prioritized security cooperation may explain the military's continued support for normalizing relations with Israel. This priority has been admitted by General Al-Burhan, who noted that since the announcement of normalization of bilateral relations, cooperation "has primarily focused on security and military areas." Al-Burhan further argued that the exchange of intelligence information with Israel allowed the Sudanese government to detain terrorist groups that might have endangered Sudan's security and the stability of the region at large.[33]

In light of the tensions with the civilian forces illustrated in the last section, and the continued demonstrations against the military overthrow of the civilian government in October 2021, military relations with Israel would promote the army's security and intelligence capabilities without having to subject it to the Security Sector Reform agenda requested by the civilian forces and by some other foreign partners. In African authoritarian regimes, the cooperation of armies with foreign partners has played an important role in shaping civil-military relations. In strategically located countries, these relations increasingly reflect "the intersection of external security interests and internal political imperatives" (Day et al. 2020:164). A similar impact has been noted with respect to armies that have dominated or shielded political regimes in the Middle East, where the military has often sought strong foreign relations to acquire new technologies and implement its vision of modernization to promote its legitimacy (Droz-Vincent 2007).

In addition to boosting the army's security capabilities and political strength, Sudan's military leaders may have sought to use Israel's influence in Washington to secure a more amicable American position toward the military component in Sudan's transition, an extraversionary strategy which had been used by other political forces in the past. Al-Burhan expressed his

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disappointment with the American position toward the developments in Sudan following the military takeover in October 2021, arguing that it was based on "misleading," one-sided information from the overthrown unelected government.[34] This American position partly reflected the Sudan Democratic Transition, Accountability and Fiscal Transparency Act of 2020, which defined Security Sector Reform as one of the objectives of US policy. According to the Act, the US should encourage "civilian oversight over, and professionalization of the Sudanese security and intelligence services," "civilian control over the finances and assets of the Sudanese security and intelligence services," and the elimination of illicit trade by these institutions in mineral resources. The Act further made the provision of American assistance to the Sudanese security and intelligence institutions conditional on progress in implementing these SSR measures.[35] It was in light of this policy line that the former Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa Jeffrey Feltman expressed the need "to develop a new vision for Sudan's national security to guide the security sector reform agenda under civilian authority while recognizing the integral role that the armed forces will have in a democratic Sudan."[36]

This policy line indicated a degree of continuation of the American engagement in Sudan that has focused in the last two decades on countering terrorism, while not ignoring the end of war and atrocities in the peripheries and the promotion of minorities' rights and democracy, a policy influenced by pressures from Evangelical groups and think tanks (Brown 2003; Cohen 2012). Israel's emerging Sudan policy priorities differ somewhat from this American policy line. Its intensive exchanges with Sudan's security officials have signaled its support for the military side in Sudan's political dispensation, which was the main advocate of normalization. It was thus unsurprising that Israel preferred to remain silent after the October 2021 military takeover, departing from the position of the US which called for the "immediate restoration of the civilian-led transitional government and institutions" and the release of all detainees.[37] The appointment of the former Member of Parliament and strong defender of normalization, Abu Al-Qasim Bortom, in the new Sovereign Council was also seen by the removed civilian government as a message to Israel that the military intends to promote bilateral relations.[38]

By promoting relations with pro-normalization military leaders in Sudan, Israel has actually confirmed its preference for dealing with military figures and movements rather than political organizations or democratically elected political figures, who may not have the willingness and/or capability to impose normalization with Israel. It was with the military regime of Nimeiri that Israel struck the Falasha Jews deal. Israel also signaled its willingness to build bridges with Al-Bashir's regime to contain the Iranian presence in the region, advising the US and Europe to take advantage of Sudan's new rapprochement with moderate Arab countries to promote a dialogue with Khartoum. Israel reminded its Western allies that such a move would help Sudan with its external debt, warning that Sudan's economic collapse could

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endanger stability in the Horn of Africa and provide fertile grounds for terrorist movements (Ravid 2018).

On the other hand, post-uprisings elected governments in the mid-1960s and mid-1980s generally followed foreign policies which ran counter to Israel's best interests. It was under Abdallah Khalil's democratically elected government that Khartoum hosted the Arab summit declaring the "Three No's." In a foreign policy criticized as controversial, the elected government of Al-Sadiq Al-Mahdy in the mid-1980s struck an alliance with Libya and Iran, provoking other moderate regional powers, the US, and consequently Israel. Libya was a convenient ally for Al-Mahdy since it hosted him during his opposition years, and given its rivalry with Egypt, Umma's historical foe and Nimeiri's ally (Sidahmed & Sidahmed 2005). Al-Mahdy strengthened relations with Tehran, hoping to mobilize Iranian financial and military aid in Khartoum's war with Southern armed movements, and claiming that these relations were meant to restore a "positive" balance in Sudan's foreign relations to correct Nimeiri's western-oriented policies (Lefebvre 1993:400). As illustrated in the last section, most civilian forces in the ongoing transition have raised their concerns about normalizing relations with Israel, or at least about the way in which this normalization took place.

Finally, whether Israeli patronage of the military leaders in Sudan's ongoing transition would tip the balance in their favor remains uncertain. Historically, Israeli support of rebel movements in the Sudanese peripheries has remarkably empowered them. The Israeli weapons and training given to the Southern rebels in the 1960s turned the struggle around and helped the movement to tip the scales in its favor and become "a force to be reckoned with" (Harman 2011). Israel's political and diplomatic support have attracted the attention of Western political and media circles to government atrocities in Darfur, putting pressure on Khartoum whose senior politicians, including Al-Bashir himself, were targeted by International Criminal Court arrest warrants. However, the impact of Israel's relations with the powers at the center has been less consequential. Nimeiri enjoyed American patronage by presenting himself as an ally against Soviet-backed regimes in Africa and the Arab world and did not follow most Arab countries in severing diplomatic relations with Egypt after the signing of its peace agreement with Israel in 1979. Operation Moses consolidated Nimeiri's position as an ally of the US, but this did not save him from the popular uprising that ousted him during his visit to Washington in April 1985. According to several sources, the US did not directly support the uprising but was not committed to supporting Nimeiri's survival (El-Affendi 2012; Berridge 2015). The same can be said about Al-Bashir's regime. Neither its cooperation with the US in countering terrorism, nor the Israeli positive response to Khartoum's readiness to normalize relations with Israel, has removed Sudan from the SSTL or saved Al-Bashir from the sweeping demonstrations that toppled him in April 2019.

Based on this conclusion, and to transcend the extraversionary historic nature of Sudan's foreign policy, both civilian and military forces need to engage in a dialogue to elaborate a clear vision for the country's foreign

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policy and national security, based on an agreed definition of its "national interest" and its links to Sudan's values and identity. However, the tense relationship between the military and civilian forces following the December 2018 uprising and the deep divisions among the various civilian groups suggest that the model of extraversion is here to stay, at least in the short and medium terms.

Conclusion

Due to its geostrategic location, Sudan has been one of the centers of attraction in northeast Africa for several regional and international powers, including Israel. While most literature tends to view Sudan as the weak party in its foreign relations, owing to its social and political fragility, this article has focused on the agency of Sudan's military leaders, armed movements, and civilian actors in shaping these relationships. In the context of Sudan-Israel relations, Israel historically has used Sudan's domestic conflicts to implement its "Periphery Doctrine" of forging relations with marginalized African and non-Arab minorities in the Arab world. Yet, it was Sudan's rebel groups, including the Anya-Nya movement in the 1960s and El-Nur's SLA in Darfur four decades later, that approached Israel to seek its support in the war with the government in Khartoum and, in the case of the SLA, in its rivalry with other movements in their region. Civilian opposition forces, such as the Umma party in the 1950s, and military leaders, including Nimeiri in the 1980s, have also sought Israeli patronage at critical historical junctures to counterbalance their political rivals. Even Al-Bashir's Islamist regime considered normalizing relations with the Jewish state to gain new external patrons amid increasing domestic challenges.

Against this historical background, Sudan's decision to normalize relations with Israel in October 2020 comes as no surprise. Sudan's pressing economic crisis, which exacerbated popular discontent, and direct pressures from the Trump administration on Sudan to join other African and Arab countries that normalized relations with Israel to achieve another foreign policy success prior to the American elections, have contributed to this step in this time. However, the decision also must be viewed in light of contestation between different forces in Sudan's transition, in an attempt to build new foreign alliances and seek influential external partners to shift the domestic balance of power in their favor.

In the context of the "Sudan Syndrome" of short-lived post-uprisings democratic governments and long-serving military regimes, it was top military figures in the post-December uprising that opened the lines of communication with Israel, offering themselves as reliable partners to both the US and Israel. Faced with divided civilian forces that have not presented a coherent vision for managing foreign relations during and after transition, the military was able to impose the normalization decision and start developing contacts with Israel in the areas of security and intelligence. Normalization with Israel offered the military the benefits of boosting its intelligence capabilities

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without subjecting the institution to the security sector reforms demanded by some civilian forces and the American administration, and could allow military leaders to influence American positions through Israel.

Viewed in this manner, the military's normalization of relations with Israel is more of a continuation of the policy of extraversion than an ideological break with the past. Yet, normalizing relations in a context of transition characterized by tense civil-military relations, and struggle to set a basis for a new state and for nation-building based on equal citizenship rights and decentralized development, adds more pressure on Sudan's fragile transition.

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