

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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BANGLADESH: POLITICAL POLARIZATION MAKES RETURN OF TERRORISM INCREASINGLY LIKELY

Brian M. Perkins

Incidents of terrorism have declined significantly in Bangladesh over the past several years following the devastating attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka on July 1, 2016 that claimed the lives of 29 people, including 18 foreign nationals. The decline came as the Bangladeshi government and security forces adopted a brute force counterterrorism strategy spearheaded by the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit. The number of successful terrorist attacks are down, but there are questions as to the long-term efficacy of the government’s strategy as the counterterrorism operations are not taking place inside a vacuum. Instead, they are occurring amid a backdrop of increasing political polarization and Islamist radicalization.

Counterterrorism operations have led to the arrest of more than 1,000 individuals and the death of more than 100 suspects. The operations have managed to disrupt the networks and leadership of the main militant groups—Ansar al-Islam and Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh

(JMB)—but both have remained resilient and appear to have been able to reorganize both within Bangladesh and in India. Recent arrests, including that of a regional JMB commander in March, have indicated that the group is still actively rebuilding and recruiting ([Dhaka Tribune](#), March 30).

Meanwhile, the ruling Awami League won a landslide victory in the December 2018 elections, securing not only the prime minister position but also 288 of the 300 parliamentary seats. The victory was heavily contested by the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, whose activists are regularly the subject of government crackdowns and purges within the military. The landslide victory has eroded confidence in the country’s democratic process and has led to the disenfranchisement of younger opposition activists, who are already bordering on the more violent side of politics. The Awami League government has also, despite its purported secular agenda, grown increasingly close with the more hardline Islamist party, Hefazat-e-Islam, giving the group an even more significant voice and riling secular activists. Similarly, the Awami League’s political maneuvering and realignment with parties based in the volatile Chittagong Hill Tracts has seen a significant escalation in violence ([Dhaka Tribune](#), April 1). The Chittagong Hill Tracts are a

fertile ground for militant recruitment due to longstanding political and economic grievances.

With militant groups already reorganizing in Bangladesh and India and the increasingly polarized political environment in Bangladesh—which is trending toward a one-party state—the return of terrorism is seemingly becoming more likely as the months pass. While brute force counterterrorism operations have been helpful in disrupting terrorist activity, the country's political environment is stifling efforts to completely eradicate militancy and politically motivated attacks.

Brian M. Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: NEW ISLAMIC STATE BRANCH COULD CAPITALIZE ON ADF NETWORK

Brian M. Perkins

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been grappling with rising ethnic violence as well as a decades-long insurgency by militants from the Allied Democratic Front, and now the country is faced with the emergence of the latest Islamic State branch—Islamic State Central Africa Province. DRC's restive Nord Kivu province has long been the center of ADF activity, with the group regularly carrying out violent attacks on security forces and civilians alike, and many expected the group was behind an attack against the army near Beni in mid-April. However, the Islamic State later claimed responsibility for the attack, which reportedly left several soldiers dead, via its official Amaq News Agency ([Twitter.com/SimNasr](https://twitter.com/SimNasr), April 18). The claim of responsibility was followed by a communique in which the new IS branch claimed to have raided an Army barracks in the Beni region, killing three soldiers and wounding five others. The communique was the first instance in which the Islamic State in Central Africa Province name had been used but IS ties and overtures have long been present in the region.

Evidence of ties between ADF and IS have been mounting over the past few years as the ADF's agenda and ideology has increasingly shifted from political to a more radical Islamist view in line with that of IS. The majority of the evidence linking the two groups has been tentative, mostly consisting of instances in which IS propaganda and books have been found at ADF camps and the groups adoption of the name Madina at Tauheed Wau Mujahedeen (MTM), meaning "The city of monotheism and of those who affirm the same" ([Congo Research Group](#), November 14, 2018). Further, while Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi was in Washington in early April, he warned of the threat that IS would seek to exploit the situation in the country and linked that threat to the ADF ([Digital Congo](#), April 8).

While ties between the ADF and IS are evident, the extent of the relationship between the two is unclear, as is the composition of the newly minted Islamic State Central Africa Province. The announcement of Islamic State Central Africa Province does not yet indicate a rapid deterioration of the security environment in DRC, and it

does not signal a significant, quick shift in the jihadist landscape or the type of violence employed in the region. After all, the ADF has become known for its violent tactics and for brutally killing civilian women and children. The ADF, however, does provide a ready and resilient network of militants with strong ties to local tribes—for years members have married into local tribes in the areas they operate. ADF also provides a leadership framework akin to that of other IS provinces, with highly isolated leadership and dispersed factions capable of operating autonomously.

The coming weeks and months will likely shed further light on the nature of the new IS branch's activities and local ties, and while its emergence does not signal a drastic change in the environment, it is a startling development that could have significant long-term repercussions. Unlike IS' other branches in Africa, the branch in the DRC would not have to contend with significant contingents of both local and international forces, such as France's Operation Barkhane or the African Union Mission in Somalia. As such, IS has particularly fertile ground to grow and a ready-made network of militants with deep local roots from which it could draw upon. Further, DRC could be a particularly appealing destination for foreign fighters due to the lack of international security forces as well as the lower cost of travel and ease of entry into the country.

Brian M. Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor

Operations Against Hasm Continue but Security Forces Still Face Challenges

Muhammad Mansour

Egyptian security forces killed seven alleged Hasm militants in a shootout that left one police officer wounded in Giza province, according to a statement made by the Ministry of Interior on March 7. [1] This latest incident underscores the continued threat Hasm militants pose to mainland Egypt.

According to the statement released by the country's official TV network, Egypt's police killed three Hasm members while they were driving a truck containing improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The exchange of fire occurred when the truck was approaching a police checkpoint stationed at the ring road near Giza province ([Mada Misr](#), March 7). The three militants had fled an apartment in the Sixth of October city (a city in the Giza governorate) where seven militants were hiding. In a preemptive attack, security forces tracked them, raided the stronghold, and exchanged fire with the seven alleged members. Four were killed there, while the other three fled the scene and were killed in the explosive-laden truck ([Albawabh News](#), March 7).

Egypt has labeled the Hasm movement as a militant wing of the Muslim Brotherhood. The brotherhood is an Islamist group listed as a terrorist organization since the military, backed by mass protests, overthrew Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated President Mohammed Morsi in 2013.

The Hasm movement came to the surface after launching its militant operations in mid-2016 in the aftermath of the murder of Mahmoud Abdel Hameed Sadek, head of investigations of the Tamyia district in the governorate of Fayoum, located 100 kilometers (62 miles) southwest of Cairo. The province has a reputation as fertile soil for extremists, including Omar Abdel Rahman, known in

the West as the Blind Sheikh ([Al-Youm Al-Sabae](#), July 16, 2016).

In August 2016, Hasm claimed responsibility for the attempted assassination of Egypt's former Grand Mufti Sheikh Ali Gomaa, which occurred while he was entering a mosque in Sixth of October city to preach Friday prayer sermon. One of Gomaa's body guards was injured in an exchange of fire with masked members of Hasm ([Al-Youm Al-Sabae](#), August 5, 2016).

Hasm carried out its largest bombing on a police checkpoint in Haram Street in Giza, which claimed the lives of six police personnel and injured three others in December 2016 ([Misr Al-Arabia](#) December 9, 2016). In November of the same year, the militant group also claimed responsibility for the attempted assassination of judge Ahmed Aboul Fotouh. A car bomb targeting Foutouh was detonated near his home in Nasr City ([Al-Watan](#), November 5, 2016).

One of Hassm's most successful operations came in October 2017, when the group claimed responsibility for detonating an IED outside of Myanmar's embassy in Cairo. The attack was in retaliation for Myanmar's military crackdown on Rohingya Muslims ([Al-Hayat](#), October 2, 2017).

Unlike Islamic State in Sinai, or Wilayat (province) Sinai, Hasm has been targeting Egypt's high-profile figures in the judiciary and police in the country's mainland. The peak of its attacks occurred after its launch in 2016, and after a year of intensive counterterror operations, the group was weakened to the level that it no longer posed a major threat to Egypt's security apparatus.

Security forces have killed and arrested dozens of alleged Hasm members since November 2016. Hasm, however, is still considered by many experts to be the largest militant group in Egypt's mainland. Over the past several months, the group has carried out multiple attacks that have made it particularly well known while other militant organizations have faded out.

The fact that the police have foiled several attacks by Hasm indicates that counterterrorism strategies appear to be working, to an extent. Yet, it is unlikely that the group will be completely eradicated soon, largely due to geographical complications. Unlike Wilayat Sinai, whose strongholds and cross-border networks are easily tracked by the military, Hasm members are embedded and live in urban and densely populated neighborhoods. As such, police raids and counterterror operations must be carried out with strict procedures to capture or kill the targets while averting civilian injuries.

Understanding that Egypt's militant groups are interconnected in both Sinai and the mainland, the Egyptian military has recently demolished ten tunnels connecting North Sinai with Gaza Strip, aiming to dry up arms smuggling channels that fuel the capacity of Wilayat Sinai militants in North Sinai as well as other groups such as Hasm in the mainland. As part of the campaign, fuel, vehicles, and IED-making materials were found in the tunnels ([Masrawy](#), March 11).

Most recently, Egypt's military issued a detailed statement, profiling its counterterror operations in which 46 suspected militants across the country had been killed and another 100 were arrested and 204 explosive charges were detonated in north and central Sinai. The statement also reported that the military destroyed 15 militant strongholds ([Egyptian Ministry of Defense](#), March 11).

As a result of the continuous military's crackdown on militant groups across the country, Hasm's activities have waned since the end of 2017. Successful operations against Wilayat Sinai have also impacted the morale of other militant groups, making them more cautious to adopt violent tactics. Yet, to completely eradicate militancy activities, which is a necessary step to create a stable climate for investments and economic growth, the military's counterterror campaign needs a broader contribution from civil society. The gap between Egyptian society and the security apparatus is partly caused by economic malaise as well as the increasing restrictions on freedom of expression and speech,

which isolate civil society from the military's counterterrorism efforts and negatively affects grassroots opposition to militancy.

Muhammad Mansour is a highly accomplished investigative journalist with more than ten-year, solid track record of producing high-quality print and online reports for international media outlets, including The Washington Post, The Guardian, The Times and Egypt Independent. He covers a broad range of topics related to Egyptian politics and global affairs. Mansour examines the junctions of Egyptian politics and society as they slowly disintegrate under the pressure of a ruthless military dictatorship.

Notes

[1] See video of Ministry of Interior's statement <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHthvcsvLhs>

Ireland Faces Conundrum of Jihadist Returnees

James Brandon

During the past few months, the mainly-Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have captured several jihadists of Irish nationality, forcing Ireland to confront the fact that up to several dozen of its citizens have joined the Islamic State (IS) in recent years. These include both native-born converts and more recent immigrants. The developments have come as a shock to Ireland, which has typically viewed itself as more successful at integrating immigrants than other European states, including the United Kingdom. Ireland has also prided itself on its detachment from foreign conflicts and global geopolitics on account of its long-standing neutrality. The IS detentions have therefore ignited significant debate in Ireland about both the extent of domestic radicalization and how the country should deal with such individuals. Ireland's police estimated in 2018 that around 30 people from Ireland had joined IS ([Independent](#), May 16, 2018). One of the best-known militants, Khalid Kelly, formerly a prominent member of radical Salafist groups in London and Ireland, died while conducting a suicide attack near Mosul in 2016 ([Irish Times](#), November 6, 2016).

Public coverage of the IS detainees has focused heavily on Lisa Smith, a former member of the Irish Defence Forces, who left the military in 2011, converted to Islam and married a Muslim man. Following the collapse of this marriage, she traveled to Syria in 2015 ([The Journal](#), April 7). During her time in the group, she married a British IS militant, Sajid Aslam. He was part of a group of British radicals who had traveled to Syria in 2014—he was reportedly killed fighting for the group in late 2018 ([BBC](#), February 24, 2016). Later, in early 2019, Smith was detained by Kurdish fighters when leaving Baghouz, IS' last territorial holding in northern Syria. In her first media interview, she said that she had joined IS because she wanted to live in a "Muslim country and environment" and had predicted that IS "wasn't over yet" ([Irish Times](#), March 10). However, in subsequent interviews, she dialed down her support for the group, saying she only joined the organization because she "just ran with the crowd", saying she would "never join" a similar group again, and adding her daughter by Aslam—who was born in IS-held territory—is her "number one priority" ([RTE](#), April 7).

Other Irish citizens involved in IS include Alexandr Ruzmatovich Bekmirzaev, a Belarusian living in Ireland who had converted to Islam at some point in Dublin before traveling to Syria in around 2013 ([Irish Times](#), January 12). He was also captured in December by Kurdish forces in Syria, alongside two U.S. and two Pakistan IS members seeking to flee the group's remaining territory. His story is more obscure, but he appears to have been part of an obscure radical Salafist network in Ireland in the early 2010s, which was centered around a Jordanian extremist who was deported to Jordan in 2016. This potentially involved Khalid Kelly, who was prominent in such circles in the early 2010s, and who may have helped radicalize Bekmirzaev and inspire him to travel to Syria. In an interview after his capture, Bekmirzaev said that he was motivated to travel to Syria in response to the actions of President Assad, however, he soon found himself in IS-held territory, although he said that he was "just a driver" ([The Independent](#), February 10). This suggests that like many former IS members, he now aims to downplay his role in the group in order to avoid punishment.

The Irish Government's response to the revelations that a number of its citizens had not only been active in IS, but had been captured and, like Lisa Smith, now expect to come "home" has been hesitant and largely ad-hoc. Following the detention of Smith, whose case, as an Irish-born woman and former soldier, has attracted the most attention, Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar said that allowing her to return to Ireland would be the "compassionate" thing to do. However, he also said that an assessment of her risk to others would be carried out on her return and that prosecution for any crimes committed abroad was possible. At the same time, he rejected suggestions that he should strip Irish citizenship from IS members, saying that "is the case with all Irish citizens, they will be permitted to re-enter the State should they try to do so" ([The Journal](#), March 11). This relatively soft approach to IS members largely reflects that there is little public evidence linking these radicals to specific crimes, unlike the various UK and French radicals who were filmed conducting various atrocities. The lack of attacks to date in Ireland means that public opinion is still somewhat receptive to arguments that IS members were merely misguided, a sentiment fueled by the tone of Smith and Bekmirzaev's recent statements.

Meanwhile, in the next few years, Ireland may face the return of one of the most famous of all international ji-

hadists, John Walker Lindh, a U.S. national. Lindh was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment for supporting the Taliban in 2002, following his capture while a member of the group in Kunduz, Afghanistan in 2001. Since then, Lindh, who obtained Irish citizenship in 2013, has reportedly remained highly radical in prison, for instance translating high profile jihadist texts, as well as calling himself "Sulayman al-Irlandi", in reference to his Irish heritage ([Foreign Policy](#), June 26, 2016). Lindh is due to be released in 2021, and there has been speculation that he may then seek to travel to Ireland. If this is the case, as Varadkar's comments above indicate, Ireland seems likely to allow him entry.

The above developments will put pressure on Ireland's institutional capacity to counter jihadist militancy, as well as to contain more subtle forms of pro-jihadist radicalization. The Irish authorities enjoy close relations with the UK secret services, although for obvious political-historical reasons these are rarely publicized, which is likely to help contain most foreign-originated plots against the country. However, much of the country's counter-terrorism force is focused on issues such as pro-Republican Irish militancy, and expertise in jihadism is still limited. The country, due to its small number of jihadists and Islamist extremists, also lacks both counter-radicalization and de-radicalization programs. At present, it seems unlikely that jihadists will target Ireland directly, as its neutral foreign policy means it is relatively unappealing compared to other countries such as the UK. Indeed, two of those involved in the 2017 London Bridge attack, one of whom was married to a radicalized Irish woman, had two years previously examined possible targets in Dublin, before deciding instead to focus on the UK ([The Independent](#), September 24, 2017). That said, Ireland's increasing social liberalism, as illustrated by Varadkar being openly gay and having a same-sex partner, could mean that domestic jihadists nonetheless are tempted to stage an attack in the country which would resonate with Muslim conservatives. If Smith, Bekmirzaev and, perhaps, even Lindh himself, succeed in returning to live freely in Ireland it is possible that they could form the nucleus for small groups of pro-jihadist admirers, just as in previous jihadist generations, returnees from Bosnia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan helped, wittingly or unwittingly, to inspire new generations of militants.

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“Old Wine in Old Bottles?” A Security Q and A on Post-Coup Sudan

Andrew McGregor

Veteran opposition politician Yasir Arman called the April 11 military coup in Sudan nothing more than “old wine in old bottles.” Arman suggested it had preserved “the political and economic structures of the old system,” the military-Islamist alliance that has ruled Sudan since an Islamist-backed military coup brought Brigadier Omar al-Bashir to power in 1989 ([Sudan Tribune](#), April 12). Al-Bashir’s regime was based on three pillars: Islamism, military governance and Arab supremacy.

Despite the coup, demonstrations and sit-ins continue at military facilities beyond the capital, in places such as Port Sudan, al-Gedaref, Kadugli, al-Obeid, and camps for the internally displaced in Darfur ([Radio Dabanga](#), April 16).

The coup leaders have formed a Transitional Military Council (TMC) under Lieutenant General ‘Abd al-Fattah al-Burhan, who commanded Sudanese forces in Yemen, where he formed ties to the Saudi military and its Gulf allies. Most recently he was Inspector General of the Sudanese Army. Al-Burhan replaced the first leader of the TMC, Lieutenant General Muhammad Ahmad Awad ibn Awf, who lasted less than 24 hours. Ibn Awf is a prominent Islamist and al-Bashir loyalist who has worked closely with Darfur’s Janjaweed militias ([Al-Jazeera](#), April 20). Under U.S. sanctions for his activities in Darfur, Ibn Awf was unacceptable to both Washington and the protesters. The former chief of Sudan’s Joint Staff, Lieutenant General Kamal ‘Abd al-Maruf al-Mahi (a leading Islamist suspected of having political ambitions), was relieved of his post as deputy chief of the TMC at the same time General Ibn Awf was replaced. [1]

The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), a leading force in the demonstrations, is demanding nothing less than a civilian government ([Asharq al-Aswat](#), April 13). The SPA is part of the Alliance for Freedom and Change, which includes the leftist National Consensus Forces and Nidea Sudan, a Paris-based group including opposition politicians and the leaders of armed movements ([Middle East Online](#), April 16). The army is unlikely to clean

house, which will continue to frustrate those demanding significant change.

What is al-Bashir's fate?

Al-Bashir and his two brothers have been moved to the notorious Khobar Prison in Khartoum North ([Al-Jazeera](#), April 17). The military council has stated it will prosecute al-Bashir inside Sudan ([APA News](#), April 12). The military has been repeatedly purged until the officer corps consists mostly of men whose fortunes and views are closely aligned with the ex-president's. These officers may seek to send al-Bashir to a safe haven outside Sudan and avoid a nasty and public prosecution of regime misdoings. Uganda has said it is willing to consider offering asylum to al-Bashir ([Monitor](#) [Kampala], April 16).

Al-Bashir still faces two ICC arrest warrants for "massive human rights violations" including war crimes and genocide. However, the ICC lacks the means to detain the former president, and 33 nations (including China and Russia) have ignored the warrants by allowing al-Bashir to make visits to their countries. The ICC is demanding that the new government in Khartoum surrender al-Bashir as well as four other individuals wanted on charges related to the Darfur conflict, including NCP leader Ahmad Muhammad Harun, Janjaweed leader 'Ali Muhammad 'Ali 'Abd al-Rahman (aka 'Ali Kushayb), former minister of defense Abd al-Rahim Muhammad Husayn and Darfur rebel 'Abdallah Banda Abakr Nourain ([Al-Ahram](#) [Cairo], April 12; [AIS Special Report](#), March 3). The military council will not take action on these demands and it would require a massive and unprecedented power shift in Sudan for a future civilian government to surrender these individuals for ICC prosecutions.

What Happens to the National Congress Party (NCP)?

Recognizing the hold the ruling NCP had over the Sudanese political system, the SPA has demanded its dissolution and the arrest of its leaders. The TMC has said NCP representatives will not be part of the transitional government ([Sudan Tribune](#), April 16).

What Happens to the Rapid Support Force (RSF)?

The RSF (*Quwat al-Da'm al-Seri*), was created by the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) in 2013 to absorb Janjaweed gunmen into a more manageable unit with central government control ([Terrorism Monitor](#), May 30, 2014). The intent was to deploy the RSF as a

counter-insurgency and counterterrorism force composed mostly of Darfur Arabs. The unit is led by Muhammad Hamdan Daglo, "Hemeti," a member of the Mahariya branch of the Northern Rizeyqat Arabs of Darfur. Daglo is now the deputy chief of the TMC.

Though reviled by many Sudanese for its methods, the RSF has had some success in counter-insurgency operations in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile State. It operates in large numbers along the border with Libya, where it hunts Darfuri rebels and interrupts the flow of illegal migrants from east Africa through Sudan to Libya and on into Europe. It has also been deployed in the Saudi-led war in Yemen, where Daglo served under al-Burhan, who may now rely on the RSF's support.

There have been calls in Sudan to disband the RSF since its creation and its use of violence in the streets of Khartoum to repress the anti-regime demonstrations has not made it any more popular.

The appointment of Hamdan as deputy leader of the TMC does not indicate major change in the power structure and will anger the Darfur rebel movements who accuse him of ordering atrocities. Nonetheless, Daglo has been meeting with U.S. and UK diplomats as the TMC's representative ([Anadolou Agency](#) [Ankara], April 14).

What Happens to the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS)?

The SPA and many demonstrators have called for the dissolution of the much-feared NISS (*Jihaz al-Amn al-Watani wa'l-Mukhabarat*) and the regime's paramilitaries, such as the RSF, the Popular Defense Forces (PDF) and the Haras al-Hudud (Border Guards) ([Reuters](#), April 16). NISS director Salah 'Abdallah Muhammad Salah (Salah Gosh) resigned on April 13 but was not detained. He was replaced by Lieutenant General Abu Bakr Mustafa, putting the intelligence agency under military control for now. ([Reuters](#), April 14; [AFP/France24](#), April 14).

Gosh was NISS director from 2004 to 2009 but was suspected of plotting against al-Bashir in 2012. He was brought back into the fold in February 2018, when he was once again made chief of the NISS in order to subdue dissent. The NISS used rubber bullets, tear gas, and live ammunition to disperse the demonstrators ([Al-Jazeera](#), April 8). Roving squads of agents in pick-up trucks seized individuals and took them away to "ghost houses" where their unrecorded detention usually in-

cluded torture. The NISS announced the release of all political prisoners on April 11, but there are reports that many protesters remain in detention ([Radio Dabanga](#), April 16).

The snipers who continually took shots at demonstrators from buildings outside the army's compound in Khartoum were believed to be NISS agents who defied the army by engaging in firefights with soldiers ([Middle East Monitor](#), April 9). The clashes were indicative of the serious differences the NISS has with the military. The NISS was given extraordinary and extrajudicial powers to act as al-Bashir's personal protection and enforcement unit. The opportunities for enrichment presented by NISS membership created a sore point with the poorly paid military.

There is no consensus in the opposition as to what should be done with the NISS. The Islamist Popular Congress Party (PCP), led by Dr. 'Ali al-Haj, is calling for the dissolution of the NISS and the transfer of its responsibilities to the police ([Radio Dabanga](#), April 16). However, the Umma Party of two-time Sudanese Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi and the center-left Sudanese Congress Party (SCP) of Omar Yusuf al-Digair have called for only a change in the NISS leadership ([Sudan Tribune](#), April 16).

The United States will watch Salah Gosh's fate carefully—the notorious NISS director cooperated closely with the CIA on counterterrorism issues and was even welcomed in Washington.

Will Armed Opposition Continue?

Since independence, Sudan has been dominated by three powerful riverine tribes from Sudan's north—the Ja'alin, Danagla and Sha'iqiya (al-Bashir is Ja'alin). This has created enormous internal tensions as Khartoum tries to control restive non-Arab ethnic groups in guerrilla-friendly regions such as Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile State. While a host of armed opposition groups operate in Darfur, the armed opposition in Blue Nile State and South Kordofan consists of two factions of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), led by Malik Agar and 'Abd al- Aziz al-Hilu respectively (for al-Hilu, [see MLM](#), July 31, 2011).

Most of the major rebel movements have refused to engage with the regime for years and appear ready to wait for a new civilian government to renew negotiations, likely under African Union (AU) mediation.

Al-Burhan's appointment as head of the TMC has angered many in Darfur, who accuse him of being "the architect of the genocide" in Darfur and regard his new role as "a play of the Islamists to retain power" ([Radio Dabanga](#), April 15). Burhan is well known in Darfur for his threats to exterminate the Fur people. A leading Darfur rebel, 'Abd al-Wahid al-Nur (Fur), said that the Sudan "we dream of, cannot come through these racists like 'Abd al-Fatah al-Burhan, Awad Ibn Awf, Omar al-Bashir and their ilk" ([Sudan Tribune](#), April 16).

The South Kordofan and Blue Nile factions of the SPLM/A-N declared a unilateral three-month ceasefire on April 17 to give the military "a chance for a peaceful and quick transfer of power to civilians" ([Al-Jazeera](#), April 17). Nonetheless, there are reports of escalating violence in Darfur, where hundreds of thousands of displaced indigenous Africans see an opportunity to take revenge on regime associates and reclaim land seized by the regime and given to Arab settlers, many from outside Sudan ([Al-Jazeera](#), April 17).

Darfur's rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) has demanded the release of all war-related detainees from Darfur, Kordofan, and Blue Nile State, saying that a refusal to release them "is a call for the continuation of the war" ([Radio Dabanga](#), April 15).

What About the Army?

The Army has invited the opposition groups to nominate a new civilian prime minister, but the question is whether the PM would serve under or above the TMC, which is unlikely to relinquish control until arrangements have been made for leading military and security figures to make a post-coup "soft-landing."

During the demonstrations outside military headquarters in Khartoum, low-ranking troops and junior officers emerged at times from the military headquarters to interact with the demonstrators or offer refuge from NISS snipers. Al-Burhan listened to the demonstrators, but he and other officers will view their ongoing role as preventing the disintegration of the country, by whatever means necessary.

The military says it is only interested in holding the defense and interior ministries, which could remove the security sector from civilian oversight and bring the police and intelligence services under military control ([Africanews](#), April 15).

Can the Islamists Use the Coup to Their Advantage?

Much of the Islamist political elite has been put under arrest, including al-Bashir loyalist and former prime minister Muhammad Tahir Ayala, leading NCP member Awad al-Jaz, and two former vice-presidents, Berri Hassan Saleh and 'Ali 'Uthman Muhammad Taha, the latter a powerful Islamist who can call on his own supporters for political muscle. It should be recalled, however, that such arrests are often for show—the Islamist behind al-Bashir's 1989 coup, Dr. Hassan al-Turabi, was sent to prison for several months after al-Bashir's coup in 1989 to disguise the Islamist nature of the new regime.

The military has excluded Islamist parties from talks on Sudan's political future. Islamists and supporters of the old regime are painting the demonstrators as secularists intent on attacking Sudan's traditional Islamic faith ([Middle East Monitor](#), April 9). The dissolution of the NCP would weaken the Islamist grip on Sudan, but the movement has proved to be highly resilient in the face of setbacks.

Besides hosting Osama bin Laden and his followers in the 1990s (they were eventually expelled), religious extremists outside of Khartoum's control were kept largely in check through most of al-Bashir's rule. Neighboring states fear a new regime might allow extremists to operate in Sudan, whether deliberately or through negligence. According to an Egyptian government source, Cairo "cannot afford a leadership emerging in Libya or Sudan that tolerates, or even worse condones, militant Islamic activity. This is why we...are keeping a close eye on any possible transition of power in Sudan" ([Al-Ahram](#) [Cairo], April 10).

What of the Economic Crisis?

The security situation in Sudan cannot be eased until the uncertainty created by the ongoing economic crisis is resolved. The problems are many, and include a declining currency, raging inflation, massive unemployment, inability to replace oil revenues lost with the separation of South Sudan, and the cost of fighting endless rebellions in the provinces.

If the general staff possesses any economic skills, they have yet to be revealed. Unfortunately, most of the TMC's attention will be drawn to carefully watching their colleagues and rivals for signs of a counter-coup, a persistent danger in these conditions. The generals will also be concerned for their own future; as indicated by their

demand for the defense and interior ministry portfolios in a future civilian government, they will work hard to ease their own safe transition into a new regime.

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Note

[1] The TMC, as announced by al-Burhan, consists of:

General 'Abd al-Fatah al-Burhan, President
Lieutenant General Muhammad Hamdan Daglo
"Hemeti," Vice President
Lieutenant General Shams al-Din Kabbashi Ibrahim Shanto, member and spokesman
General Omar Zine al-'Abdin Muhammad al-Shaykh, member
General Jalal al-Din al-Shaykh al-Tayib, member
General Mustafa Muhammad Mustafa Ahmad, member
General Yassir 'Abd al-Rahman al-Atta, member
Airforce General Salah 'Abd al-Khalig Said 'Ali, member
Police General al-Tayib Babikir 'Ali Fadl, member
Rear Admiral Engineer Ibrahim Jabir Ibrahim, member
([Sudan Tribune](#), April 16).