

Democratic Transition Further Delayed by Military Clashes in Sudan

RSF and SAF units wage a conflict to maintain their survival in a rapidly shifting regional and world situation.

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During the days leading up to Saturday April 15, there were indications of a possible showdown between the two official military structures in the Republic of Sudan.

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) both claimed in the days leading up to the proposed signing of yet another transitional agreement, that they were committed to a new democratic dispensation.

Nonetheless, beyond the public statements by **General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan** of the SAF and his counterpart in what is often referred to as a paramilitary or militia formation, **General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo** (also known as Hemeti) of the RSF, there were large troop movements among both structures. The date originally slated for the signing of the agreement between the military and the designated civilian leadership was postponed until after April 6.

Although the RSF is described by some elements in the international press as a militia, its leader, **General Hemeti**, had been appointed as the second-in-command of the latest iteration of the militarily dominated Transitional Sovereign Council. Hemeti has been involved in negotiations with regional and foreign governments while appearing alongside General al-Burhan as the public face of the Sudanese state.

A combined effort by Hemeti and al-Burhan resulted in the toppling of the Sudanese Congress Party (SCP) administration of President al-Bashir in early April 2019. The former president remains in custody as the current security crisis worsens for the majority of the people living in the country.

The initial Sovereign Council represented a coalition of leaders from the Forces for Freedom

and Change (FFC), which grew out of the demonstrations and rebellions beginning in December 1918, combined with the military leadership. During the period between the establishment of the original Sovereign Council in mid-2019 to the coup of December 2021 led by the military, an interim Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok served as a figurehead to the transitional structure.



After being held under house arrest by the Generals, Hamdok was reinstated by the military as PM where he served for several weeks until he finally resigned. All during this period, the resistance committees continued to hold mass demonstrations demanding the immediate transition to civilian rule. The suppression by the military of the rights of mass organizations to hold demonstrations and participate equally within the national dialogue, made many people domestically and outside the country highly skeptical about the intentions of both the RSF and SAF.

After the announced postponement of the renewed political agreement, the power dynamics were such that fierce fighting erupted in key areas of Sudan, a nation with a population of 47 million. In the capital of Khartoum there are clashes surrounding the presidential palace, the military headquarters, international airport and other areas. There are also reports of clashes between the RSF and the SAF around the strategic Port Sudan on the Red Sea along with Merowe in the north of the vast country.

Several Egyptian Air Force personnel stationed at the airport in Merowe were detained by the RSF. There were claims that the home of the European Union (EU) envoy was attacked by the RSF, says the SAF in a press statement. A convoy of United States diplomatic personnel were also fired on in their vehicles during the third day of the fighting.

Sudanese speaking from inside the capital of Khartoum say that their power had been disconnected since April 15, the first day of the clashes. One woman said her household had a solar-powered battery which allowed the family to recharge their mobile phones.

There are critical shortages of food and water in the capital and other areas. Reports indicate that many hospitals have been evacuated due to safety concerns. There have been two failed attempts at a temporary ceasefire to allow a humanitarian corridor where the injured could leave the capital of Khartoum. Three employees of the World Food Program (WFP) were killed and two others were injured during clashes between the RSF and the SAF in the northern Darfur region.

In regard to the detention of the Egyptian Air Force technicians, [Sudan Tribune said](#):

“The Rapid Support Forces announced on Wednesday (April 19) that the 27 military officers and technicians of the Egyptian Air Force, who were arrested in Merowe last

Saturday, will be released as soon as possible. The RSF had stormed the military air base where the military trainees had been stationed five days prior. The RSF released a video on Wednesday showing an officer standing with two Egyptian officers and the other detainees sitting on the ground of a large room. The militia officer announced that all the detainees had been transferred to Khartoum and were unharmed. One of the Egyptian officers stated that they were safe and would return to their home country probably today. The RSF also released a statement confirming that all Egyptian military personnel present at the Merowe base are safe.”

Egypt has maintained a solid relationship with Sudan over the years. **President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi** is a former military leader who later ran and became head-of-state after leading a coup against the previous government of Muslim Brotherhood member President Mohamed Morsi. After the uprising of 2011, a national election was held the following year resulting in the ascendancy of Muslim Brotherhood. Morsi only served as president for one year until the coup in June 2013. Morsi was imprisoned where he died several years later.

The military forces in Egypt and Sudan are heavily entrenched in the administrative apparatus of the states. Therefore, it is not surprising that there has been tremendous resistance in Khartoum and Cairo against the realization of democratic rule.

Regional and International Implications of the Sudan Conflict

There has been considerable diplomatic attention paid to the Republic of Sudan by several African Union (AU) member-states for obvious reasons. Sudan prior to its partition in 2011 was the largest geographic nation-state on the continent.

The vast country shares borders with seven other African states making it a gateway to northern, eastern, and central regions of the continent. Sudan is rich with oil, natural gas and gold. The Port of Sudan on the Red Sea is the focus of a planned development project involving the Russian Federation. RSF leader and the former deputy within the military-dominated Transitional Sovereign Council, General Hemeti, traveled to Moscow in February 2022 where he held high-level discussions with the Russian Federation leaders.

A stable democratic and progressive government in Sudan could make a powerful contribution to the overall struggle for African unity and development. With the adoption of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by many states throughout the continent, Sudan utilizing its natural wealth and strategic geographic location would play an indispensable role.

It is for this reason that the imperialist states and their allies within the Gulf region have over the years interfered in the internal affairs of the country. The previous President Omar Hassan al-Bashir had faced sanctions as well as indictments issued by the Netherlands-based International Criminal Court (ICC). Even prior to the ascendancy of al-Bashir as the head-of-state in 1989 as a result of a military coup, the U.S. sought to secure Sudan as a willing or unwilling partner in the desire to maintain global hegemony.

Under the previous U.S. administration of **President Donald Trump**, interim **Prime Minister Hamdok** during 2020 was pressured into accepting the “normalization” of relations between Khartoum and the State of Israel. This was done despite the constitutional prohibition of such relations based upon the Israel Boycott Act signed into law in 1958, just two years after the national independence of the country from British imperialism.

The establishment of diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv carried along with it pledges to not support terrorism. Sudan had been on the list of state sponsors of terrorism as defined by the U.S.

Hamdok had agreed to pay hundreds of millions of dollars from Sudanese government funds to the families of victims of terrorist attacks which did not even take place inside Sudan. All of these western-oriented foreign policy decisions would ultimately lead to loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, among other western financial institutions.

Nonetheless, irrespective of which armed structures or bourgeois politicians that are favored by Washington, it will take a united front of the masses of Sudanese workers, farmers, youth and professionals to overturn military rule. The removal of the military as the principal governing unit within the state will provide the ability for a genuine democratic debate inside the country.

The regional organizations of East Africa along with the AU, EU, U.S. and United Nations are all calling for an immediate ceasefire in Sudan. In addition, these regional and international organizations have warned other states about providing support to either side in the conflict. A high-ranking military official in Sudan has accused two regional states of providing military assistance to the RSF without specifically naming them. (See [this](#))

The eruption of the internal conflict within the Sudanese military structures should serve as a warning to the AU. Efforts to unify the continent and to “silence the guns” must continue to be a priority for the continent and its people.

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