

Military and Opposition Forces Reach Agreement in Sudan While Tensions Persist

Several killed in clashes as United States continues to interfere in the internal affairs of oil rich nation

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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*Representatives from the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) and the Forces of the Declaration of Freedom and Change have been holding talks with the Transitional Military Council (TMC) for several weeks since the coup against ousted **President Omer Hassan al-Bashir** on April 11.*

An announcement on May 14 indicates that the two sides have reached a settlement on the establishment of a joint civilian-military administration which will govern the country until national elections are held within a yet to be designated time period.

Sudan has been wracked with mass demonstrations since December when the economic crisis inside the nation escalated pushing up prices of bread and other consumer goods. The demands of the protesters quickly escalated beyond the call for lower prices to insisting upon the resignation of al-Bashir and his cabinet.

Demonstrators began marching in the streets challenging the security forces consisting of police, the vast intelligence apparatus and the military. Violence has erupted on numerous occasions since December leaving dozens dead and hundreds more injured.

Thousands of opposition supporters began a sit-in on April 6 outside the military headquarters in Khartoum challenging the authority which has been the underpinning of the al-Bashir government since it took power in a coup in 1989. Al-Bashir is a former military official and after seizing power the military was highly politicized through the creation of the National Congress Party (NCP) in 1998, which has been the dominant entity in the administration for over two decades.



Sudan demonstrations led to the ouster of President al-Bashir

Even though the president was forced to resign by his top military generals on April 11 as the social conditions worsened, there was no agreement over the composition of a transitional regime until May 14. The internal pressure has prompted the African Union (AU) to set a timetable for the resumption of what they consider civilian rule.

After the announcement of the agreement between the TMC and the opposition groupings, security forces were said to have opened fire on demonstrators outside military headquarters leaving at least five people dead, including one police officer. There are conflicting reports over who initiated the clashes. Some say it was a lone gunman who targeted protesters while others claim it was the authorities.

An article published by the Independent said of the incident that:

“One policeman and three protesters were killed in Khartoum and many other demonstrators were wounded, state TV said. Heavy gunfire was heard in the capital late into the evening, but Reuters could not immediately confirm the scale of casualties or who triggered the violence.” (May 14)

This same report went on to emphasize:

“The Transitional Military Council (TMC) blamed saboteurs. ‘Behind this are groups that... are working hard to abort any progress in negotiations.’ Early on Tuesday the TMC said it would not allow citizens’ safety to be jeopardized. ‘Neither the (paramilitary) Rapid Support Forces or the army will fire one shot at our protesting brothers, but we repeat: we do not allow chaos,’ it said.”

The Role of the United States in Sudan

The country has been suffering immensely since the partition of the former British colony in 2011, creating the neighboring Republic of South Sudan, the world’s newest state. A large proportion of the oil resources were taken out of the control of the government in the capital of Khartoum. Washington, London and Tel Aviv were major supporters of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), the ruling party now governing in Juba.

After the breaking up of the Republic of Sudan, once Africa's largest geographic nation-state and the founding of the Republic of South Sudan, the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) was forced to adjust to the new international situation. South Sudan was immediately recognized by both the United Nations and the African Union (AU) as a sovereign state.

There were disagreements over the border demarcations in the aftermath of the partition particularly as it related to petroleum resources. A brief skirmish erupted creating a crisis in 2012 between Juba, the capital of South Sudan, and Khartoum.

Since late 2013, the SPLA/M government in Juba has been split resulting in a civil war. A recent peace agreement is yet to be fully implemented between President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Reik Machar, now of the SPLM/A in Opposition.

After the ascendancy of former leader al-Bashir, the country moved closer to the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Relations worsened in August of 1998 when the U.S. under President Bill Clinton bombed a pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum claiming it was a chemical weapons factory. There was never any prove that the facility was producing chemical weapons and was in fact manufacturing medicines.

China began to play a leading role in oil exploration and marketing in Sudan controlling 80 percent of petroleum concessions by the end of the first decade of this century. Iran developed economic and military links with Khartoum as well, leading to accusations that Sudan was serving as a conduit for the funneling of weapons to Hamas in Gaza.

Nonetheless, since 2015, Sudan has shifted its foreign policy due to pressure from the economic crisis. Al-Bashir sent troops to fight alongside Saudi Arabia and its allies against the Ansurallah resistance forces in Yemen. Diplomatic relations with Tehran and Damascus (Syria) were severed while overtures aimed at normalizing relations with Washington have been ongoing. Sudan has since reestablished relations with Damascus.

After a ceasefire agreement was signed with the SPLM/A and the transition to independence began in the south, another insurgency broke out in the western Darfur region. The NCP government responded to the armed rebel groupings with force in an effort to re-establish order in the region.

Allegations of human rights violations and genocide were made against al-Bashir by the U.S. and other imperialist powers. The International Criminal Court (ICC) based in the Netherlands indicted the former president and other leading officials of the NCP administration and sought their extradition to The Hague to stand trial on the charges.

Although Washington is not a signatory to the Rome Statue which created the ICC and therefore not bound by its ostensible jurisdiction, the charges against the Sudanese government were used to foster instability internally and the isolation of al-Bashir internationally. Since the removal of al-Bashir, some within the opposition have demanded the former head-of-state be placed on trial for repressive tactics used against demonstrators since December. It is not clear whether al-Bashir will be tried inside the country or sent to The Hague under the outstanding warrants issued by the ICC.

U.S. embassy officials have been quick to blame the TMC for the outbreak of violence on May 14. U.S. and other western embassy delegations of diplomats have visited protesters to express their support. These actions angered the Sudanese Foreign Ministry which took

offense at what they perceived as another unwarranted interference in the domestic affairs of the country.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on May 12, it said:

“All the visits by Western ambassadors, including the head of the EU mission to the sit-inners were carried out without coordination with the Foreign Ministry, which should be notified of movements in dangerous sites so as to be able to provide protection in accordance with its international obligations.”

When U.S. Charge d'affaires **Steven Koutsis** visited the protesters' site outside the Defense Ministry he was protected by the Red Vest security team appointed by the opposition leaders. Sudan's military and other security forces have no official presence at the sit-in.

Future of Sudan Uncertain

Even with the possibility of the creation of a joint civilian-military governing council, there are still many more unresolved issues which will impact the Sudanese people. It is obvious that Washington is attempting to influence the future direction of the government.

It remains unclear what political line the joint civilian-military council will take on relations with China, Iran and other neighboring states within Africa. Also the role of other opposition parties which have had substantial support in Sudan historically and are not a part of the Forces of the Declaration of Freedom and Change may differ significantly with the those interests now considered the leading opposition groupings. These parties will have to be allowed to contest any upcoming election.

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