

The new civilian-military arrangement in Sudan agreed to between General Abdelfattah al Burhan and Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok on paper continues the transitional government alliance previously arranged between the Military and the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) – an amalgamation of different organizations and political parties that led the anti-Bashir struggle. The current government is, however, hardly “civilian led” as it was before the coup. The Supreme Council which will continue to be led by General Burhan will now have substantially more oversight and powers than it did before the coup. How the Prime Minister and his cabinet operate will be to a much greater extent subject to the control of the Supreme Council.

The military had argued that the very varied nature of the organizations in the FFC – ranging from Islamists which only opposed Bashir’s absolutist control of power but espoused Islamist policies, to those of the Communist party with extreme left positions – made it impossible to make headway in implementing the transitional agenda.

The need to ensure progress towards the objectives of the December Revolution, the military argued, was thus what necessitated the coup. The truth, however, was that the objective of the transition agenda was to dismantle the military’s control of the economy and bring justice to those accused of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide during the Bashir era.

Halfway through the three-year transition period, i.e., 17 November 2021, was the time the Military (Burhan) was to hand over chairmanship, and thus control, of the Sovereign Council, the highest decision-making body in the transition, to the civilian wing of the coalition. This date was fast approaching. The military simply did not want to hand over control of the major enterprises in the country, and wanted immunity from prosecution for its part in the crimes committed against civilians during the Bashir era, including the murder of peaceful demonstrators in 2019. The military also did not want the establishment of the transitional parliament which would wrench law making power from the Sovereign Council and thus diminish the role of the military during and after the transition.

It was obvious to the Sudanese forces fighting for change that the objective of the military coup was as described above. Immediately after the coup, Burhan dissolved the old Supreme Council and unilaterally nominated new members – with the result being that it will function totally under his control. The responsibility to appoint and supervise the work of the National Election Commission at the end of the transition was transferred to the Supreme Council (a power that previously sat with the transitional parliament in the old arrangement). The civilian Prime Minister has been instructed to independently appoint his Cabinet of Ministers from technocrats without any consultation with the FFC. Under the initial arrangement, the FFC nominated members for the PM to appoint to his cabinet of ministers.

The initial FFC has rejected the new agreement dictated by the military, but Abdella Hamdok (whose initial nomination to become Prime Minister was made by the FFC) has directly negotiated and accepted the new deal with the military alone. Such an agreement by the PM to work with the military has legitimized the military’s supremacy during the transition, an issue fully rejected by the former FFC and the vast majority of the Sudanese public who are up to now continuing to protest.

Prime Minister Abdella Hamdok has expressed the reason he accepted the deal with the military was to avert a civil war and further bloodshed. It is apparent however that he was also under pressure from Western governments – the US, the British and other European

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governments – perhaps equally concerned with stability as with democracy, to accept the deal. Some former Darfur based armed groups, in particular the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army led by Mini Minawi (the current Governor of Darfur), and the basically Islamist Justice and Equity Movement led by Jibril Ibrahim (the current Minister of Finance), have also welcomed the deal.

Prime Minister Abdella Hamdok has hitherto not appointed a new cabinet. The former FFC, composed of the former political parties, labor unions and other social groups, though still rejecting the Burhan-Hamdok agreement, remains divided as to what to do next except to continue the demonstrations in opposition to the new agreement that marginalizes it.

Political leadership in the opposition seems to be shifting to the former Resistance Committees, loosely organized neighborhood groups of young people who organized the major part of the street demonstrations that toppled the Bashir regime. These had been shoved to the side and remained more or less dormant once the initial transitional government was established. These committees are now, it is reported, once again in the lead of the ongoing mass demonstrations and are in the process of articulating a new political roadmap for the transition to a democratically elected and fully civilian government. Prime Minister Hamdok is also reported to be preparing, though no doubt in agreement with General Burhan, a new transitional framework more or less in line with the earlier Constitutional Framework drafted by the FFC.

The situation thus remains fluid with the demonstrators continuing daily, and the economy totally in shambles with prices of daily necessities rising beyond what average people can sustainably afford. International economic assistance to the government has been suspended, though NGOs have continued to operate their support programs but with limited effect. The demonstrators are now planning for a massive national show of force on 19 December, the anniversary of the fall of the Bashir regime.

Opinions abound suggesting that the situation cannot continue as it is for long, that the Prime Minister may resign soon. Whether he does or doesn't, the military is intent to stay in power, and the situation, both political and economic, cannot be expected to improve; neither can political stability be attained.

The only possibility for some future stability, some are proposing, is to expedite national elections, which also the army would not oppose as it hopes to control it a la Abdelfattah Al Sisi next door. In the meantime, the situation in Sudan continues to be fluid with no certain path forward.



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