

Briefing: For peace, freedom, social justice, civilian government and democracy in Sudan



Background

- In December 2018, on the back of major public disturbances in the city of Omdurman over the sudden hiking of the cost of bread, a popular uprising began against the near 30-year-old Islamist-Military dictatorship headed by Omar al-Bashir. The growing street protest movement of Sudan's poor and disenfranchised was supported by the country's civic society organisations, notably including the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA); trade unions; and progressive political parties.
- The al-Bashir regime initially responded with its default brutality, attempting to rally its dwindling support base, and utilising its various organs and apparatuses to target the main currents of the protests - including the Resistance (or Neighbourhood) Committees, informal grassroots networks set up to organise civil disobedience to the regime, which had proliferated throughout Sudan.
- In April 2019, al-Bashir's military high command lost their nerve and removed him from office, placing him under 'house arrest' and promising the Sudanese people that their demands had been heeded and that reform would follow. However, it soon became clear that this was a ruse whereby the hated figurehead would be sacrificed in order to save the regime and that the military were not about to willingly loosen their grip on power.
- Despite the steadfast opposition of the civil society groups, trade unions, and the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) and

the bravery of protesters in the streets, who refused to disband their vigils and return to their homes - even in the face of horrific acts of violence against them by the military - certain political currents agreed to enter into a joint military-civilian government, the Transitional Sovereignty Council, supposedly set up to oversee the country's orderly transition back to civilian rule. A framework and set timetable for this political transition was agreed upon and publicly backed by several foreign powers, including the US and Britain. However, it is apparent that this exercise was designed to counter and exclude the influence of those opposition elements pushing for more radical and far-reaching change in Sudan and who had been the main forces in the movement for the overthrow of the al-Bashir dictatorship.

- Following months of intransigence and deadlock on the part of the military officials in the government, the military staged a coup on 25 October 2021 and suspended the transitional process. Civilian Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok was removed and General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the Commander-in-Chief of the Sudanese armed forces, became de facto ruler of the country. As his deputy, al-Burhan appointed General Mohammad Hamdan Dagalo (also known as Hemedti), the head of the notorious Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia, which was responsible for crimes against humanity in committed in Darfur two decades ago as well as elsewhere.
- With the emergence of two rival spheres of influence between the Sudanese military and the RSF, each with their own

international backers, an ensuing power struggle escalated into open and full-scale fighting between the two camps on 15 April 2023. Despite various ceasefires, significant fighting has continued, and Sudan now stands dangerously close to the precipice of all-out civil war.

International Response

- A number of ceasefires have been negotiated but these have proved to be short-term lulls, allowing brief windows for the removal of the dead and evacuation of those civilians with the resources and connections to leave, and have quickly collapsed only to be followed by the resumption of heavy fighting.
- Countries around the world have focussed on evacuating their own citizens from Sudan, but comparatively little parallel pressure has been brought to bear on the warring parties to end the fighting and come to the negotiating table - or to honour commitments made regarding the transition to civilian rule in the country, and the democratic rights of the Sudanese people.
- On 11 May 2023, Saudi Arabia and the US brought key representatives of the

army and the RSF together in Jeddah and a new ceasefire was negotiated to take effect from 22 May 2023. However, this agreement is for another short-term ceasefire to facilitate humanitarian assistance and the restoration of essential services, and nothing more.

Priority Demands

- An immediate end to the fighting and the flagrant human rights violations being committed in Sudan.
- An end to the targeting of hospitals and humanitarian facilities, and ensuring the protection and safety of civilians - including all those attempting to flee the conflict.
- Bring to justice all those responsible for this bloodshed and the perpetrators of crimes against the people.
- An end to all foreign interference in Sudan fuelling the current conflict with the aim of controlling and plundering the country's resources and natural wealth.
- Support for the legitimate aspirations of the Sudanese people for freedom, social justice, civilian government, and democracy.

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