

Sudan's military seek to crush opposition demanding civilian rule

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Sudan's security forces killed at least three and wounded 100 people taking part in Saturday's mass demonstrations in the capital Khartoum against the seizure of power by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

It brings the total number killed in recent days to at least 12, according to the Central Committee of Sudan's Doctors, although a senior US official believed the death toll had reached at least 20-30 people, and the number injured 170, even before Saturday's protests.

There have been days of protests and strikes calling for a return to civilian rule, including of many federal and state government workers and bank workers, leading to a severe cash shortage in a country without an ATM infrastructure.

Demonstrators chanted, "The people are stronger and the revolution will continue" and carried banners reading, "No to military rule." They demanded the release of all civilian leaders, including Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. Many schools and shops remain closed. The strikes are set to continue this week, with another rally due in Khartoum on November 6.

Defying arrests and beatings at the hands of the security forces, tens of thousands have taken to the streets in days of nation-wide protests since al-Burhan, who headed the joint civilian-military Sovereign Council that has led the country since August 2019, seized power. The Sudanese diaspora has mounted demonstrations in cities in Australia, Indonesia, Italy, Lebanon, Norway, the United States and the United Kingdom, calling for their governments to oppose the coup.

Al-Burhan dissolved the Sovereign Council on October 25, weeks before he was due to hand over his position to a civilian. He dismissed Hamdok's civilian "technocratic" government, arrested Hamdok and

several members of his cabinet and declared a state of emergency, shutting down the internet and closing the capital's main bridges. He has sacked the Chief Justice presiding over crucial reforms to the judicial system and released key figures in and around former dictator Omar al-Bashir's ruling National Congress Party, which was outlawed after his ouster in 2019.

The general said the coup was necessary to avert a "civil war" and that the military would establish a new government, promising elections in July 2023. While Hamdok and his ministers have been released, they remain under house arrest, even though al-Burhan has publicly offered Hamdok his job back. Al-Burhan has been unable to find any credible civilian figures willing to join a new government.

The strikes, rallies and demonstrations are the largest since the mass protests that precipitated the April 2019 pre-emptive military coup, led by al-Burhan with the support of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, that ousted President Omar al-Bashir and his Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated military dictatorship, which had ruled since 1989. Al-Burhan and the military had sought to prevent the overthrow of the entire state apparatus in which he was a leading light.

After seizing power two years ago, he opened negotiations with the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) that had led the protests—an umbrella group of 22 bourgeois and petty bourgeois opposition groups and political parties, including the trade unions and the Sudanese Communist Party. Just weeks later, soldiers and paramilitaries massacred more than 1,000 unarmed protesters, chasing them through Khartoum, tying concrete blocks to their feet and throwing them into the River Nile.

Despite this, the FFC signed a treacherous deal with the military, agreeing to serve in a transitional

“technocratic” government, headed by Hamdok, a former economist at the African Development Bank and later the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The government operated under the control of the Sovereign Council, in effect a joint military-civilian presidency headed by al-Burhan.

The political and economic path followed by the Hamdok government brought it into conflict with the economic, social and political interests of Sudan’s military, which controls much of the economy.

Hamdok sought to end Sudan’s pariah status by aligning the country with US imperialism and its regional allies, including Israel, in an anti-Iran block. He handed al-Bashir to the International Criminal Court for war crimes in Darfur, where 300,000 people were killed and millions displaced in fighting between 2003 and 2008. His government investigated and sanctioned military and security officials involved in human rights abuses, rooted out corruption and privatized hundreds of Sudan’s state-owned corporations. This was the political price for economic aid, loans and investment needed to shore up the country’s economy that has all but collapsed following the secession of South Sudan in 2011 and the loss of oil revenues upon which the government depended.

The conflict that had been brewing for months burst into the open in September. The army, seeking to capitalize on social discontent generated by increasing poverty and social inequality, mounted an abortive putsch, widely viewed as a dress rehearsal for last month’s coup, and organized mass demonstrations in support of the generals.

The coup has attracted almost unanimous condemnation from the major imperialist powers. The US is determined to prevent Sudan’s social tensions, replicated across the region, spreading to their allies Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. The Biden administration has demanded the Sudanese military restore the civilian government, suspended its \$700 million aid programme in the country and sent its fixer for the Horn of Africa, Jeffrey Feltman, back to Khartoum to try and impose a civilian fig-leaf for the military. The World Bank has suspended \$2 billion in aid and debt relief packages.

The European powers are also anxious to avoid any instability in Sudan, strategically located in the Horn of Africa alongside the Red Sea and the entrance to the

Suez Canal, that might disrupt oil supplies or generate a new wave of refugees. It takes place as Ethiopia, Africa’s second-most populous country and the Horn’s powerhouse, has descended into a civil war that threatens to break the state apart. It is expected that the European Union and the Paris Club of creditors will follow Washington’s lead in suspending funding.

While al-Burhan believed he could count on Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have joined the US in calling for a return to civilian rule while Cairo has not openly backed him.

To form the now overthrown civilian-military transitional government, the FFC and the Sudanese Professionals Association, under the influence of the Sudanese Communist Party, built a broad alliance subordinating workers to the political parties and armed groups that had dominated Sudan since independence. The claim that such a government would be capable of resolving the enormous social and economic problems confronting Sudanese workers was a dangerous trap. But these liberal and pseudo-left forces in the middle class will stop at nothing to block a social revolution, as their record throughout the Middle East and Africa has shown.

The only way to combat the offensive of the military and the imperialist powers and to establish a democratic regime in Sudan is through a struggle led by the working class, on a revolutionary socialist perspective. This must be directed at taking power, expropriating the regime’s ill-gotten wealth in the context of a broad international struggle of the working class against capitalism and for the building of socialism. This requires the construction of a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Sudan, as well as sections in Egypt and all the countries of North Africa and the Middle East.



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