

A Troubled Road Ahead: 'Power-Sharing' and What It Means For the Future of Sudan

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Mohammed Soliman is a Huffington Fellow at the Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, where he focuses on US strategy in the Middle East. He appears frequently on television interviews to provide expert commentary on unfolding current events in the Middle East. Soliman has published in several media outlets, including Foreign Affairs, Open Democracy and La Stampa, as well as analysis for the Middle East Institute.



Brief Analysis

Following months of unrest and bloodshed in the Sudanese streets, a critical power-sharing agreement was signed (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/world-africa-49379489#sa-link_location=story-body&intlink_from_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bbc.com%2Fnews%2Fworld-africa-49394908&intlink_ts=1566226369721-sa) on August 17 between the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and the civilian opposition alliance—better known as the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC). The agreement has established a transitional council with 6 civilian and **5 military leaders** (<https://www.vox.com/2019/7/5/20683001/sudan-power-sharing-agreement-sovereign-council-protests>), who will rotate the leadership of the council during the transitional period. The military will run the transitional council for **21 months** (<https://www.africanews.com/2019/07/17/sudan-s-president-bashir-steps-down-govt-sources/>) and the FFC will run it for the following 18 months. This agreement will allow the FFC to be in control of the transitional government—with the exception of the interior and defense ministers. The FFC will have a two-thirds majority in parliament in addition to appointing the prominent economist **Abdullah Hamdok** (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49425702>), as the first civilian prime minister since Omar al-Bashir took power in 1989.

The agreement represents a way forward for Sudan, but also presents a number of challenges for the FFC—namely maintaining its support among the Sudanese public. Simply sharing power may invite greater criticism upon the FFC and 'guilt-by-association' from the public. For example, the TMC enforced an internet and communications blackout to limit media flow out of Sudan to block coverage of human rights violations committed by Rapid Support Forces (RSF) across the country. The return of internet services flooded the internet with **viral** (<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/shock-and-anger-as-videos-of-brutal-sudan-raid-belatedly-go-viral-11722136>) videos of the brutal crackdown on **June 3rd** (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/03/world/africa/sudan-security-forces-protesters-violence.html>) in front of the military headquarters in Khartoum, which has increased resentment of the TMC among the Sudanese public. Suddenly, in the aftermath of the power-sharing agreement, the public was exposed to the **hundreds** (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/04/world/africa/sudan-war-facts-history.html>) killed, injured, or raped by

the forces of the TMC. If the FFC decides to grant TMC members immunity from these human rights violations—as it may be pressured to do during the transition—it risks losing support from the Sudanese public and therefore its legitimacy as a governing body.

This is of particular concern given that the FFC based its legitimacy as civilian representation through local and international campaigns to expose the military's atrocities, by organizing mass civil disobedience, and by advocating for justice for the victims of the brutal crackdown in Khartoum. The FFC's massive support base of millions of Sudanese people has demonstrated its power to the military's regional backers.

Nevertheless, the FFC is both more constrained in its power than the TMC and more likely to be held accountable for the road bumps ahead due to the strong expectations of the Sudanese public. With the political agreement signed, the FFC may face a major political rift due to the lack of consensus among its factions. Most notably, the FFC has already lost the support of the Sudanese Revolutionary Front, which includes the Justice and Equality Movement, rebel movements in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile states, and the Sudan Liberation Movement.

These groups rejected the power-sharing agreement, claiming that they had previously reached an **agreement with the FFC in Addis Ababa (<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article67933>)** to integrate their paramilitary units and militias into the Sudanese military and to reach a final power-sharing agreements with the central government in Khartoum. The subsequent exclusion of these military groups will pose a major threat to the democratic transition in Sudan and the credibility of the FFC.

Given the potential threats, the FFC needs the support of the international community, and more specifically the United States, to pressure for a successful peaceful transition towards the civilian government in Sudan. Washington should link the transition towards democracy with the removal of Sudan as a designated State Sponsor of Terrorism.

The United States has specifically designated former Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service director Salah Gosh for his involvement in "gross violations of human rights." The United States must expand on this by threatening to impose sanctions on prominent Sudanese military leaders implicated in human rights violations—including the TMC chairman General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahman Burhan as well as the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and its leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo Hemedti. Most notably, this action will showcase the United States and the international community's commitment to a smooth democratic transition from the TMC leadership, and helping to curb any ambitions of RSF leader General Hemedti to spoil the current agreement between the TMC and the FFC.

Sanctions will also deter the Sudanese military and the RSF from committing further human rights violations, which could lead to widespread unrest in Sudan. And concrete actions against human rights violators in Sudan could also signal that regional powers should limit their support, which the TMC and RSF have enjoyed since ousting President Omar Al-Bashir.

The FFC is currently a dominant force in Sudanese politics and has succeeded in mobilizing the Sudanese public behind its demands. To reap maximum benefits from the power-sharing agreement with the TMC, the FFC should not align itself with the TMC by providing any sort of legal protection or it risks losing support among Sudanese protestors and other FFC bodies. However, the FFC should not be assumed to be powerful enough to tackle these issues alone. To ensure a smooth democratic transition, the United States and members of the international community must help Sudan exert pressure on the TMC and RSF. A mishandling of this opportunity could result in widespread atrocities, a resurgence of Islamist groups, and a massive flow of refugees in to the surrounding countries. It is important to approach this situation with caution, as a failed democratic transition could bring continued atrocities as Sudan faces a critical juncture in its history. ❖

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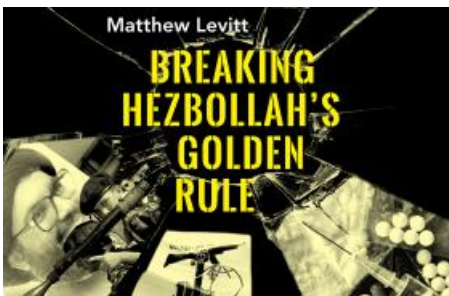
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