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Situation Assessment | 7 December 2021

Sudan's Political Scene after the November Agreement

Unit for Political Studies

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Despite the agreement reached between the Military Council and Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in Sudan on 21 November 2021, according to which Hamdok returned to lead a technocratic government until general elections in July 2023, doubts remain about the future of the transition process and the intentions of the military personnel involved. The military have repeatedly flouted the commitments and agreements outlining this process following the overthrow of the regime of former President Omar Hassan al-Bashir and have failed to provide any real guarantees that would prevent a recurrence of the October 2021 coup.

The Agreement

Four weeks after Abdullah Hamdok's government was dismissed and he was placed under house arrest, in addition to the arrest of about 300 political and party figures, local and international mediations resulted in an agreement between General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Prime Minister Hamdok on 21 November. The agreement included about 14 terms, the most important of which emphasize that the Constitutional Document of 2019 and the 2020 Amendment are the main reference for completing the transitional period, taking into account the specific situation in eastern Sudan, and amending the Constitutional Document by consensus to ensure comprehensive political participation. It also emphasizes the existing civilian and military partnership and government competencies, and stipulates that the Transitional Sovereignty Council supervises the implementation of transitional period responsibilities, and manages the transitional period according to a political declaration that defines the framework of partnership between political and civil forces, the military, the civil administration, resistance committees, youth and women, and Sufi orders. The declaration also stipulates the release of political detainees, and the accelerated formation of transitional governance institutions, the launch of an expanded dialogue for the establishment of the constitutional council, a restructuring of the committee formed to dismantle the former regime, a review of its work, and the establishment of a unified national army.¹

Responses to the Agreement

The agreement came as a surprise to some of the revolutionary forces and the demonstrators supporting Hamdok, chanting for him in defiance of the coup that overthrew his government, with some considered it treason. Other political forces had mixed reactions to the agreement, which was met with both opposition and support. There were three main groups of opposition:

- The first group rejected the agreement altogether, including a number of political forces within the Central Council of the Forces of Freedom and Change, especially the Sudanese Congress parties, the Unionist Alliance and the Arab Baath Party. They are forces that were

¹ "Sudan: Al-Burhan and Hamdok Sign a Political Declaration amid Rejectionist Demonstrations," *The New Arab*, 21/11/2021, accessed on 6/12/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3pzkmlI>.

involved in the dismissed Hamdok government, along with the professional association in its two wings. This group demanded the orchestrators of the “coup” be taken to trial. The parties of this group do not reject the constitutional document, nor do they reject the participation of the military in the transitional process, but they do not accept participation of the personalities who led the coup.

- The second group is represented by the National Umma Party, whose members have expressed contrasting opinions, reflecting the different currents within it. Leaders represented by the party leader and general secretary, participated in the mediation committee that reached the agreement. The head of the party, Fadlallah Barama Nasser, defended and expressed his support for the agreement,² and the party’s Secretary-General, Al-Wathiq Al-Barer, expressed views that are consistent with basic provisions contained in the agreement.³ But the party leadership was forced to withdraw from the signing ceremony of the agreement because of the strong opposition in the party ranks. The deputy head of the party and foreign minister in the dismissed Hamdok government, Maryam Al-Sadiq Al-Mahdi, announced her rejection of the agreement. Furthermore, a group of party youth demanded the withdrawal of confidence from Barama Nasser, and for those who participated in arranging the agreement to be held accountable. Ibrahim al-Amin, the deputy head of the party, spoke at the demonstrations against the agreement.

- The third group rejects the agreement in addition to the constitutional document and the government that Hamdok will form, represented by the Communist Party. The party’s Secretary-General, Muhammad Mukhtar al-Khatib, announced, in a press conference on 24 November 2021, that his party would work to bring down the October coup, the government that Hamdok would form, and the constitutional document. Along with this political line is a faction of the Professionals Association that identifies with the positions of the Communist Party. This group rejects the participation of the military in power and insists on transferring power to civilians.

Among the supporters of the agreement, the armed movements that signed the Juba Peace Agreement stand out. The agreement guarantees the implementation of the Juba Agreement and quotas for these movements in the Sovereignty Council and the Council of Ministers. It was also supported by parties from the Central Council of the Forces of Freedom and Change, who consider the agreement an important step, such as the National Unionist Party headed by Youssef Mohamed Zain; The Nasserist Social Justice Movement headed by Sate’ al-Hajj, and the Haq Movement headed by Ahmed Shaker. The heads of these parties met with others from the Central Council of the Forces of Freedom and Change, on 23 November 2021, and demanded the release the detainees and that those dismissed after 25 October be reinstated.

² “Interview with the National Umma Party President Fadlallah Barama”, Al-Hilal ‘Windows’ program, 25/11/2021, accessed on 28/11/2021 at: <https://bit.ly/3EvCaEe>.

³ Al-Wathiq Al-Barer, “The National Crisis and Prospects for Solutions: Clarification of Public Opinion and Contribution to National Affairs,” Umma Party Facebook page, 29/11/2021, accessed on 29/11/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3DsaHSE>
<https://2u.pw/SqiR7>.



The Democratic Union Party (or what was left of the party after its split), under the auspices of Mohamed Osman el Mirghani, is the most prominent party outside the Forces for Freedom and Change that supported the agreement, as well as a camp within the Umma Party, led by Mubarak al Fadil al Mahdi, and leaders from the civil administrations and Sufi leaders.

Most international responses have been positive and have welcomed the agreement, especially the Egyptian regime, which refrained from expressing a public position on the 25 October coup. According to *Africa Intelligence*, the Egyptian intelligence services set up an operations room to follow up on developments in Sudan after the coup, and sent a team to Khartoum to mediate between the two parties and ensure that any agreement would be in the interest of the military. The delegation met with Hamdok while he was under house arrest and met members of the Central Council of the Forces of Freedom and Change.⁴ Saudi Arabia and Qatar, along with the Troika (the United States, UK, and Norway), the European Union, the League of Arab States, the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) and the African Union all welcomed the agreement.⁵

Hamdok's Return

Assigning new undersecretaries on 1 December 2021 to run the ministries, replacing the general managers who were assigned by Al-Burhan after 25 October, is considered Hamdok's most important assignment since resuming his duties following the agreement. A number of these civil servants had held positions in government institutions during Hamdok's first term. Based on the background of the new undersecretaries, Hamdok wants to send a message to the street and his former allies that he is back on the same track as before the coup and that he is in control of the appointment of senior positions in the government. But this aim was offset by the military's insistence on asserting their own authority. After the release of the political detainees who were arrested on 25 October, some of them were once again arrested for a short period, and the State Security Prosecution began investigating them. These include Mohamed al-Faki Suleiman, a former member of the Transitional Sovereignty Council, and Wajdi Saleh, a leader in the Arab Socialist Baath Party and a member of the Empowerment Removal Committee. Charges of inciting discontent against the armed forces were filed against them and they were released on bail. This step indicates that the military seeks to limit criticism that can be directed at it and confirms that it is the final decision-maker in managing state affairs, proving that its ambition to seize power stands. The military has thus accepted the agreement and the return of Hamdok but without the parties, under international pressure, and to confuse the street opposition to the coup, in a way that splits the civil forces.

⁴ "Sissi Sets up a Diplomatic Front to Defend Burhan," *Africa Intelligence*, 23/11/2021, accessed on 28/11/2021, at: <https://2u.pw/g0Hlr>

⁵ "Statement of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on the political agreement reached in Sudan," African Union website, 11/21/2021, accessed on 29/11/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/330h5E8>.

New Political Alignment

The interaction of events in Sudan reflects the emergence of a new political incubator, which began to replace the old incubator formed by the parties of the Central Council of the Forces of Freedom and Change, which was divided over the agreement. Mariam Al-Mahdi had indicated, in a statement on 24 November 2021, that there are differences within the Forces for Freedom and Change Alliance regarding “how to deal with the Burhan-Hamdok agreement.” The new incubator consists of parties supporting the agreement, in addition to the regional groupings, civil administration leaders, and Sufi orders, mentioned previously. In addition to these forces, a statement by the National Ummah Party’s general secretariat accused Hamdok of trying to split the party and stated that the latter “unfortunately began to move towards creating a new political incubator, bypassing the forces of the revolution, seeking to split the ranks between the political components and the resistance committees,” after he met with some provincial party leaders, while the party “still adheres to the demands of the street, expresses its opinions, and adheres to its declared paths in the face of the coup.”⁶ Similar accusations came from the resistance committees, which stated that Hamdok is trying to split the ranks of those committees, after he met with members.⁷ He was accused of seeking, through his political appointments and his immediate policies to reassure the street mobilized against him and the military and his political opposition, that he is carving out a path independent of the Military.

Meanwhile, the parties and forces of the dismissed government, along with a number of resistance committees, both wings of the Professionals’ Association, and the Communist Party, are opposing the government that Hamdok will form. The degrees of opposition vary between the complete rejection of the military’s participation in power and the drafting of a new constitutional document, and the participation of a new group of officers in power while retaining the current constitutional document supported by other parties in the opposition. The main mechanism that the opposition will rely on will be the street, to organize demonstrations to pressure the new government. In fact, the demonstration schedule for December 2021 has been announced. The challenge for the new opposition remains the ability to maintain the momentum of the demonstrations, amid a dire economic situation and social fatigue, in a political environment that is undergoing continuous transformations.

Conclusion

The political developments taking place in Sudan reflect a state of sharp polarization and the fragmentation of political forces over the November 2021 agreement. Instead of facilitating a solution

⁶ “Press release,” Sudanese National Umma Party Facebook page, 29/11/2021, accessed on 28/11/2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3pyi4TA>.

⁷ Fadwa Khazraji, “Extensive Statements from the Resistance Committees Refuse Unauthorized ‘Dialogue’ in their Name,” *Al-Jarida*, 30/11/2021, p. 3.



to the crisis that started in October, the agreement is producing new crises clearly expressed by the state of political fluidity in the country. At the same time, the agreement does not dispel fears of the military's desire to retain power, as they are waiting for an opportunity to get rid of the civilian partners imposed on them by the constitutional document and dodge the international and internal pressures that opposed their recent coup.









