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Situation Assessment | 27 August 2023

The Malik Agar Initiative in Sudan: Premises and Prospects for Solving the Conflict

Unit for Political Studies

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Series: **Situation Assessment**

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Unit for Political Studies

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I. Premises of the Initiative

On 15 August 2023, Vice Chairman of Sudan's Sovereignty Council Malik Agar proposed a "roadmap" initiative to end the conflict beginning with a comprehensive, durable ceasefire, then a political process culminating in general elections. These contests will produce a civilian government to take charge of rebuilding state institutions on democratic foundations. The initiative has met with varying reactions, some of which have been supportive: viewing it as a potential way out of the ongoing conflict between the army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Other responses have been more circumspect and cynical, arguing that the proposal is unrealistic given the current polarized climate.

Agar, who was appointed Vice Chairman of the Sovereignty Council on 19 May 2023, presented his initiative four months after the army-RSF conflict broke out in Khartoum and elsewhere in the country – at a time when clashes have come to a standstill despite the inability of either party to achieve a decisive military victory and the faltering of the Saudi- and US-sponsored Jeddah talks. The roadmap begins with the cessation of hostilities between the conflicts and removal of the RSF from the residential areas in which they are garrisoned, then the formation of an interim government charged with two main tasks: first, to resume the provision of essential services and rebuild what the war destroyed; and second, to work with political actors to create a favourable climate to hold a constituent assembly in preparation for general elections to form a permanent government.

The initiative also entails expediting relief operations, delivering humanitarian aid, safeguarding salaries for public sector employees, providing essential commodities, and so on. The initiative pledges to be resolute in handling the issues of prison fugitives and the leaders of the former regime who have been released from prison.¹

Through the address in which he launched the ceasefire initiative, Agar conveyed several messages. He apologized to the people for failing to establish an institutions-based state, something he considers a principal cause of the current war. Addressing the regime forces, Agar spoke of the need for a unified and professional national military, then urged RSF leaders to put a stop to abuses against civilians and to reconcile themselves to the idea that there cannot be two armies within a single state. Agar stressed that those responsible for abuses against civilians must be held to account and called on parties and political and civil powers to stand behind ceasefire efforts, as an initial step before the launch of a national dialogue that is truly inclusive. He called on neighbouring states to coordinate efforts to end the war and discouraged competitiveness at the expense of the Sudanese people.²

¹ "Sovereignty Council Interim Vice Chairman Malik Agar's Address", *Sudan News Agency (SUNA)*, 15/08/2023, accessed on 21/08/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3E63hao>

² Mohamad El-Husseini, "Text of Malik Agar's Address to the Sudanese People", *Broadcast News*, 15/08/2023, accessed on 22/08/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3P1sLfw>



II. Viewpoints of Sudanese Stakeholders

Agar's announcement of the initiative has met with a series of reactions, ranging from support to opposition to scepticism:

1. The Sudanese Armed Forces

While the army has not articulated a definitive stance on the initiative, armed forces head General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan had given an address one day ahead of the announcement stressing that those he described as “insurgents and traitors” must face military defeat. Some have interpreted this as proof that there are rifts within the Sovereignty Council. Others explain it as due to a difference of opinion or argue that it is the product of an agreed-upon distribution of labour between al-Burhan and Agar and that the palpable dissimilarity between the two speeches in fact reflects a desire to arrive at an agreement to end the conflict.³ However, this would not come to pass without approval from both sides.

2. The Rapid Security Forces (RSF)

The RSF has repudiated the initiative, with RSF head Dagalo's political advisor Yusuf Izzat stating that the militia “do not recognize Agar's authority” and are “bound only by the Jeddah talks”.⁴ Izzat also accused Agar of pro-army bias, given that the latter blamed the RSF for the abuses of civilians and called for them to vacate private homes and civil service facilities and for those responsible for the abuses to face the consequences.⁵

3. The Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC)

The Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) has announced their agreement with most of the Agar initiative while simultaneously distancing themselves from the caretaker government proposal. Former Sovereignty Council member and current FFC leader Mohamed al-Faki commented on the initiative, stating that the group “support all efforts leading to the suspension of hostilities and the transition to a political process”.⁶ FFC leader Mohamed Esmat praised the initiative for adopting the principle of negotiation as a means to conflict resolution and attending to the humanitarian aspects and interests of the people, then commended Agar for urging officials from the former regime to

³ Muhammad Jamil Ahmed, “Speeches from Sovereignty Council Chairman and Vice-Chairman... Messages from Wartime”, *The Independent Arabic*, 17/08/2023, accessed on 22/08/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3KSdDyt>

⁴ “RSF Respond to al-Burhan Deputy's Initiative: [We] Do Not Acknowledge His Authority”, *Alquds Alarabi*, 16/08/2023, accessed on 20/08/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3KONdNY>

⁵ Abdelhamid Awad, “Despite Narrowing Horizons for Foreign Resolutions... A Sudanese Blueprint to End the War”, *The New Arab*, 16/08/2023, accessed on 20/08/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3YKgkIO>

⁶ “FFC Respond to the Agar Initiative: We Support All Efforts to End the War in Sudan”, *Alquds Alarabi*, 16/08/2023, accessed on 21/08/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3QPFNOT>

assess their experience. Yet Esmat expressed misgivings about the caretaker government formation proposal, asserting that “it will not be accepted or recognized by any party”.⁷ The civil society groups that signed the framework agreement held a meeting in Addis Ababa on 14 August 2023, the conclusions of which largely mirrored the ideas of the Agar Initiative: ending the war and addressing its causes, seeking a comprehensive, nonviolent political resolution that paves the way for a new state, addressing the conflict’s humanitarian aspects, protecting civilians and stopping abuses, reconstruction, alleviating the consequences of war, and laying the foundations for a democratic, civilian system of governance and a united, national, professional military.⁸

Some political stakeholders have concluded that the large similarity between the Agar initiative’s proposals and the outcomes of the civil society gathering in Addis Ababa (attended inter alia by the FFC) indicate the possibility that the Sovereignty Council and RSF could arrive at a cessation of hostilities agreement.⁹ But there is no evidence in support of this conclusion that would demonstrate coordination between the FFC and RSF on the ideas proposed at the Addis Ababa meetings.

4. The Islamist Movement

The Islamist movement has rejected the Agar initiative and released a statement refuting its contents.¹⁰

III. Foreign Viewpoints

The Agar initiative has yet to see significant involvement from regional and international powers. Despite Agar’s intensive foreign visits spanning Russia, Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda to rally support for his pro-ceasefire views and the launch of a comprehensive national dialogue, these states did not adopt a particular stance toward his initiative when it was launched. Though there has been no reaction from the sponsors of the Jeddah talks, the US and Saudi Arabia, some have noted tacit approval of the Agar initiative’s essence in US foreign policy circles.¹¹

IV. Prospects

Coming in the wake of the stalled Jeddah negotiations and abortive ceasefire efforts, the Agar initiative is a native Sudanese endeavour to resolve the crisis that features several points of consensus

⁷ “Discrepancies around the Aqar Initiative on Ending the War and the Political Resolution”, *Dabanga Radio*, 17/08/2023, accessed on 20/08/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3E7cEH3>

⁸ “Khaled Mohamed Ali Writes on Malik Agar Initiative and Political Controversy”, *Alsudan Today*, 21/08/2023, accessed on 22/08/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3E7QDrA>

⁹ “National Entity Forces Assembly Releases Statement on the Malik Agar Initiative”, *Alhayah Alyoum*, 19/08/2023, accessed on 22/08/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/47KjIGY>

¹⁰ “Islamic Movement to Malik Agar: We Have No Need for Your Distorted Messages and Your Inflammatory Demands”, *Alsudani News*, accessed on 20/08/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3YFp2Yj>

¹¹ Ahmed.



between various political stakeholders, such as ending the war and launching a comprehensive political process to lay the foundations of a civic democracy. Although some resent the initiative's omission of important issues that would present a major challenge to any political compromise and that in fact were among the chief reasons for the outbreak of hostilities (e.g., the fate of the RSF: whether to incorporate them into the army, discharge them, incorporate some and discharge the rest, etc.), the Agar initiative could be an opportunity to move forward from the crisis as long as it is accompanied by steps to end the war, such as restricting the flow of weapons and fighters from neighbouring states, guaranteeing broad support for the initiative on the street and among political powers, implementing a mechanism to form an interim "caretaker" government boasting the broadest possible political representation, and securing the support of neighbouring countries for the initiative's implementation.

V. Conclusion

Four months since the outbreak of the conflict, with thousands killed or wounded and nearly 3.5 million displaced according to UN estimates, the once-enticing prospect of a decisive military victory now appears more remote than ever. Sudan has two options: either to draw out a devastating, protracted war that will eliminate the country's remaining unity and cohesion, or to end hostilities and work toward a consensus-based political solution. The crux of such a process would be the presence of a single army in the country, an acknowledgement of the distinction between that army and militia groups (in terms of status, accountability to the Sudanese people, and abuses against civilians), and room being made for all political actors to take part in reconstructing a democratic, pluralist state.

The Agar initiative, provided it succeeds in constructing a broad-based coalition of national powers, could be developed into a platform on which to formulate a solution. It must then turn to forming an interim government with a fixed term and tasked with specific duties that conclude with general elections and the formation of a permanent government deriving from the will of the people, thereby turning the page on the conflict and concentrating on development and state-building.