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Sudan Power-Sharing Deal Reached by Military and Civilian Leaders

By Declan Walsh

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Sudan's military and civilian leaders announced on Friday that they had reached an agreement to share power until elections, promising an end to the standoff that has paralyzed the African country since the ouster of President Omar Hassan al-Bashir in April.

The two sides, which resumed talks this week after a monthlong hiatus that included a bloody crackdown by the military, have agreed to form a joint military-civilian authority to run Sudan during an interim period of just over three years, a senior protest leader said.

Power will rotate between military and civilian leaders during the transitional period, a mediator from the African Union, Mohamed Hassan Lebatt, told a news conference in Khartoum. Then, elections are to be held and the military is to return to its barracks, ushering in democratic rule.

"We hope that this is the beginning of a new era," said Omar al-Degair, a leader of the coalition negotiating with the military.



Gen. Mohamed Hamdan, center, known as Hemeti, has been widely seen as the most powerful figure in Sudan since his Rapid Support Forces led a bloody crackdown on protesters in June. Yasuyoshi Chiba/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Gen. Mohamed Hamdan, deputy head of the Transitional Military Council, said, “This agreement is comprehensive and does not exclude anyone.”

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[Read about how the power-sharing deal came about.]

A military general will lead the joint council for the first 21 months, then a civilian leader will lead for 18 months, said Amjad Farid, a leader of the Sudanese Professionals Association.

The streets of Omdurman, Khartoum’s twin city across the Nile River, erupted in celebration when the news broke, according to Reuters. Thousands of people of all ages took to the streets, chanting “Civilian! Civilian! Civilian!”

Young men banged drums, people honked their car horns, and women carrying Sudanese flags chanted in jubilation.

The deal appeared to be the culmination of a popular uprising that started in December with a demonstration against the soaring price of bread, then morphed into a movement that led to the removal of Mr. al-Bashir after 30 years of turbulent and often brutal rule.



After President Omar Hassan al-Bashir's ouster, many protesters were dismayed to see power pass into the hands of his top lieutenants, including officials accused of war crimes. Bryan Denton for The New York Times

The two sides also agreed to open what they said was an independent investigation into the violence that began on June 3 when military forces cracked down on protesters, which has led to at least 128 deaths, according to the protesters. General Hamdan, known as Hemeti, has been widely seen as the most powerful figure in Sudan since his Rapid Support Forces led that bloody crackdown.

Under the new agreement, both sides will nominate five members to the council. The 11th member is to be jointly nominated, according to Mr. Farid.

It was agreed that the first leader would be Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the leader of the transitional military council, Mr. Farid said.

Mr. al-Bashir — who was wanted by the International Criminal Court, which accused him of playing "an essential role" in a genocidal purge in the Darfur region — was toppled after peaceful protesters massed for days at the gates of the sprawling military headquarters in

Khartoum. They refused to leave even as rival factions of the security forces fought gun battles around them.

Some soldiers deserted their posts to defend the protesters from armed al-Bashir loyalists, who opened fire on them. Gun battles erupted at the protest site, and several people were killed.



It was agreed that the first leader under the power sharing agreement would be Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, front center. Ashraf Shazly/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

After Mr. al-Bashir's ouster, many protesters were dismayed to see power pass into the hands of his top lieutenants, including officials accused of war crimes in Darfur. They promised to continue their sit-in until a civilian administration took office.

During negotiations led by the Sudanese Professionals Association, military leaders had presented themselves as supporters of democracy and had taken steps to meet demands for change. The generals moved Mr. al-Bashir into the notorious Kober prison in Khartoum, seized millions of dollars in foreign currency from his home and arrested several of his most senior aides.

But the military refused to hand over power immediately to the protesters.

Mr. al-Burhan moved into Mr. al-Bashir's old presidential office, and his officers sought to exploit apparent divisions in the ranks of the inexperienced protest leaders, a coalition of professional groups, leftists and small political parties that were marginalized during Mr. al-Bashir's rule.

Thousands of protesters remained camped out at the gates of the military headquarters in Khartoum, refusing to budge until the military acceded to their demand for a swift transition to civilian rule.

On June 3, soldiers with the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces swept through the protest site, raping women, shooting protesters and throwing bodies in the Nile. At least 128 people were killed over several days of violence, doctors said, and hundreds were wounded. The government admitted 61 deaths.

Ethiopia and the African Union, fearing the vast country could slide into chaos, deployed mediators to Khartoum in an effort to bring the sides together.

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