

With the constitutional agreement, the Sudanese Revolution Enters a New Phase

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The Sudanese Revolution has won major victories. But it still needs to wrestle control from the military to popular forces.

The constitutional agreement between Sudan's people's movement and the country's armed forces was signed on Saturday, August 17. The following article sheds light on the circumstances of this agreement. It was first published in the Arabic daily, *Al-Quds al-Arabi* [1], on July 30 and reproduced on the website of the Sudanese Communist Party [2].

On July 5, jubilant Sudanese masses celebrated the victory they had achieved under the leadership of the Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change (FDFC) when the Transitional Military Council (TMC) was forced to backtrack in the wake of the huge demonstrations organized on June 30. The military had to give up their attempt at quelling the mass movement, allow back its free development, including the restoration of the Internet, the movement's main communication means, and revert to the track of negotiation and compromise after having failed to impose their will by force of arms.

The Sudanese Revolution entered a third phase at that point, after a first phase capped by the fall of Omar al-Bashir on April 11 and a second one capped by the TMC's retreat on July 5. The FDFC, particularly their main component, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), have proved their full awareness that each phase is more difficult and dangerous than the previous by maintaining the mass mobilization and consolidating it in view of the ongoing as well as future confrontations.

Victories achieved until now have been only partial indeed: they are essentially compromises between the old regime represented by the TMC and the revolution led by the FDFC.

The compromise inaugurating the third phase was formulated in the political agreement between the two forces on July 17. It reflects the duality of power on the ground in this transitory phase, between, on the one hand, a military leadership that insists on keeping the ministries of defense and the interior (that is, all military and security forces) under its control, as the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces had done in Egypt after getting rid of former president Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011, and on the other hand, a revolutionary leadership that mobilizes the masses in confronting the military and seeking to steer the mass movement into a war of positions that would allow it to gradually control the country.

The FDFC's aim is to win over a majority of the armed forces in support of the movement's civilian and peacemaking goals, so as to isolate their most reactionary wing. The main figurehead of the latter is the commander of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo (known as Hemedti), backed by the regional reactionary axis constituted by the Saudi kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, and the Egyptian regime of Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi.

It is in this context that the Sudanese Communist Party is leading the ranks of the critics of the July

17 political agreement and the FDFC concessions that it entailed, pledging to carry on the struggle until the complete fulfillment of the revolution's goals as summarized in the Declaration for Freedom and Change adopted on January 1 of this year. Those who regard this position as divisive of the revolutionary movement and believe that it weakens it are wrong.

Other key forces of the movement, especially within the SPA, share the Communists' resentment of the conditions that the military insist on imposing as a price for accepting to share power. It is in the best interest of the Sudanese Revolution that a section of the movement keeps exerting revolutionary pressure without being bound by the agreement in order to fuel the radicalization of the ongoing process and counterbalance the reactionary pressure exerted by the Islamic fundamentalist forces, a pressure which the TMC invokes constantly in hardening its position.

The next stage of the present phase consists in adopting the Transitional Constitutional Document, which combines very progressive principles, more advanced than all Arab states' constitutions, including the new Tunisian constitution, with the formalization of the present balance of forces and duality of power in legalizing the military command's participation in the exercise of political power in a way that is worse than Egypt's present constitution.

And yet, even this compromise with all its defects is still jeopardized by a military command that is intensely trying to circumvent the movement's demands and pervert them in practice as it did recently with the purported investigation in the massacre perpetrated by the RSF. The armed forces' most reactionary wing keeps trying moreover to subvert the compromise and push the situation toward a military coup, as illustrated by the killing of demonstrators in El-Obeid on July 29.

"Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun," says one of the best-known quotations from the leader of the Chinese Revolution, Mao Zedong. This statement echoes a revolutionary experience that won by force of arms through protracted people's war. It conveys nevertheless the elementary truth that political power is never complete without the control of armed force. The Sudanese Revolution's major challenge consists indeed in eventually achieving control of the armed forces by steering the force of the unarmed popular movement to that end.

If the revolution manages to move peacefully into a fourth phase, with the duality of political power embodied in governmental institutions in which the popular movement is predominant, the revolutionary leadership's ability to fulfill the masses' aspiration to peace and their social and economic demands will become crucial in allowing it to gain control of the armed forces and democratize them. Short of this, the Sudanese Revolution will be stuck halfway, and may thus end up digging its own grave as happened to previous experiences in Sudan's history and the history of popular movements worldwide.

Gilbert Achcar

P.S.

• Jacobin. 08.18.2019:

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/08/sudanese-revolution-fdfc-constitutional-agreement-signed>

• ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gilbert Achcar is a professor at SOAS, University of London. His most recent books are *Marxism*,

Orientalism, Cosmopolitanism (2013), *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (2013), and *Morbid Symptoms: Relapse in the Arab Uprising* (2016).

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=2178682>

[2] <https://bit.ly/31nfKkT>