

Sudan: “The Generals’ fight for power is not our fight”

An interview with Muzna Alhaj, a Sudanese Resistance Committee organizer

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Shireen Akram-Boshar and brian bean interview Muzna Alhaj, a member and organizer of a Khartoum Resistance Committee, about the escalating armed conflict between rival factions of the ruling junta and its impact on the revolutionary dynamic in Sudan.

by brian bean and Shireen Akram-Boshar

Since April 15, rival factions within the Sudanese military junta have escalated their conflict into open armed warfare. Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo or “Hemedti,” has engulfed the country. The outbreak of war occurs in the context of a long process of negotiations, aimed at tamping down Sudan’s popular uprising that began in 2018; a popular uprising that has demanded civilian rule in lieu of military control of the country. The latest phase of negotiations saw the Forces for Freedom and Change (one coalition of the civilian opposition) agree to a power-sharing transitional “Framework Agreement” in December 2022. The grassroots revolution, including the neighborhood Resistance Committees, have rejected all negotiations, including the latest. But the escalating armed conflict of the past three weeks poses dire challenges to the ongoing revolutionary movement in Sudan. Shireen Akram-Boshar and brian bean interview Muzna Alhaj, an activist, political analyst, and a member of a Khartoum Resistance Committee, about these recent developments.

Shireen Akram-Boshar and brian bean: How would you characterize the current political situation in Sudan?

Muzna Alhaj: What’s happening in Sudan right now is a war. It is a full-fledged armed conflict between the two generals, Burhan and Hemedti, and the forces they control. Ending this war is of the utmost priority now, and the situation puts all other efforts on hold. Nonetheless, our survival in these tough times is a continuation of our struggle for democratic, civilian rule, of the struggle we began in 2018 and even before that.

SA-B & bb: The RSF and the military jointly carried out the coup of October 2021. Why have they now turned against each other?

MA: Back in 2019, after [the ouster of Omar al-Bashir](#), Hemedti and the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) developed a relationship in which the RSF seemed more or less to be the military wing of the FFC, though the two parties drifted apart before the October 2021 coup. After realizing that the coup would not resolve in his favor, Hemedti moved closer to the FFC and began to portray himself, ironically, as a self-anointed “democracy defender.” At this point, the statements of war

between him and Burhan escalated, as Burhan continued to resist signing the final agreement until the issue of RSF integration into the Sudanese Armed Forces became a main condition. Pro-military groups associated with National Congress Party loyalists blame the FFC Central Council for being behind the RSF's "battle for transition to democracy." [The National Congress Party is the party associated with the old regime of Omar al-Bashir - Eds.]

On December 5, 2022, the head of the RSF and the Sudanese Armed Forces signed the Framework Agreement with the FFC. Even then, it was obvious that Burhan was never serious about the agreement and had no intention of moving forward with it.

To take a step back, the two factions—the RSF and the military (Sudanese Armed Forces)—have a conflict of interest. Hemedti, [the] shapeshifter that he is, saw a greater opportunity for his political survival in supporting the so-called Framework Agreement. But supporting a new sham transition is not his main concern anymore as much as his fear of being targeted by National Congress Party loyalists who were brought back to the scene by this coup. In fact, Hemedti expressed regret for being part of the coup.

This current conflict between the two generals was inevitable, as they both had ambitions to rule and to become the number one man in Sudan. In addition to this, they have drifting local, regional, and international alliances. The outbreak of fighting would have happened sooner or later. If only the two were wise enough to understand the toll of war.

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SA-B & bb: How are the Resistance Committees responding to the outbreak of violence? Are they able to organize themselves at the current juncture?

MA: Yes, the organizing among the Resistance Committees has continued, but in different forms based on the situation at hand. First, our priority was to get out the "no to war" message to make clear our independence from the war and the two dictators and their violence. 'No to war' will continue to be our slogan and we shall take neither side in what we see as a reckless act of violence that targets the Sudanese people. Second, we are working in the field to establish clinics within the neighborhoods' health centers, to provide food and water, to try to evacuate people who are caught in the areas of fighting, and to provide shelter to those who are stranded. We have put together a database for all medical cadres, functioning pharmacies, and shops. We spread awareness about how to avoid unexploded weapons and artillery that have fallen into homes.

SA-B & bb: Is there a risk of this conflict sliding into a prolonged war, and how can that be prevented?

MA: Unfortunately, protracted war is a potential risk. With time, the war could also draw in other civilian parties, either because of increased ethnic or tribal polarization, or alignment with one of the two warring forces.

Advocating for ending the war should be the main priority for those who support Sudan. We don't have faith in the international community to ask it to push the two generals to stop. This war was foreseen by everyone and numerous states regionally and internationally have intervened since 2018 to further enable and strengthen the two warlords. This allowed them to believe that they were invincible and abetted the outbreak of the conflict.

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SA-B & bb: If there is no faith in international states, what force would be required to stop the war?

MA: The international community has failed by taking an elitist and exclusionary approach to Sudan, by talking and listening only to traditional political actors, whether parties, leaders, or military generals, and marginalizing the people, the neighborhood Resistance Committees, the true change makers and pro-democracy mobilizers. They simply thought that the Sudanese people were not ready for democratic, civilian rule. Besides, when it was crucial to use force rather than diplomacy, international states failed to sanction the generals and hold them accountable. They instead empowered and legitimized them with recognition.

The Sudanese people want to recover the ownership and leadership over the future of their country's political process. We are face to face in a battle with our enemies, the men who deprived us of hope and life. We will continue our struggle to stop the war and get rid of the war criminals on our terms, through the consolidation of our resistance, by further organizing within our neighborhoods and establishing local councils for residents that will be nuclei to the state system manifesting in multi-level legislative councils. This war could exhaust and potentially end the two warring generals and their allies, while also providing the space for local solutions to rise and potentially succeed. We are done with Western powers who think that we are too primitive to have democracies.



April 16 2023 poster of the Coordination Body of the Khartoum East Resistance Committees. The images of the generals are crossed out with slogans that read: "The Generals' fight for power is not our fight," and "We don't stand behind any gun."

SA-B & bb: The Coordination Body of the Khartoum East Resistance Committees released this poster on April 16, a day after the fighting began. The image features both Hemedti and Burhan, whose images are crossed out, with text that says "The Generals' Fight for Power is Not our Fight," and "We don't stand behind any gun." Why did the resistance committees feel the need to reiterate this?

MA: There is strong state-led propaganda insisting that those who are not on the side of the Sudanese Armed Forces are traitors. We made it clear once again that we are against war and against the militarization of the state. The resistance committees remain adamant that we will never support the same military leadership that has killed our comrades in cold blood for the past five years. We stand with the soldiers and low-ranking officers who protected us in the sit-ins of 2019 and we hope that they one day take over the Sudanese Armed Forces to rescue this institution from the corrupt generals.

SA-B & bb: What effect do these developments have on the revolutionary project in Sudan?

MA: This whole war is counter to the revolutionary project; it is meant to hinder it and erode it, to bring about military-Islamist dictatorial rule once again. It is an elitist power struggle. For us, the path is clear, as our slogan has been in the streets throughout the revolution: "All the power and wealth to the people." We will continue to serve the Sudanese people throughout this dire conflict, and continue organizing and working on our revolutionary project. Just last night, the Kosti Resistance Committees carried out a lively protest against the war and the crimes of the generals. So we are here, we are alive and we will spare no effort in making this revolution prevail.

SA-B & bb: Is there anything else you want to add?

MA: We would like to highlight that we are for the people's right to life. That is the matter of utmost importance now. Then comes our slogan calling for the dissolution of the RSF militia and the formation of a unified, united, national, civilian-controlled Sudanese army.

P.S.

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