

**How is Sudan in October 2021 after the Coup? What about the Perspectives?
Statement by Professor Karl Wohlmuth, University of Bremen, Germany
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1) There's limited information available about the situation in Sudan, but how would you assess the gravity of the situation?

This is the end of the democratic movement in Sudan for some time. The civil government of Prime Minister Hamdok, an economist with high reputation, was captured by military forces along with some civilian ministers and other democratic government staff. Although there were disputes between the military and the civilian representatives of the transition government since the mid of 2019, the instable power balance did hold for around two years. All the time over the military and paramilitary forces and the civilian followers of the former president Al-Bashir on the one side and the people of Sudan represented and supported by a trade union called Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) and some personalities from traditional Sudanese parties on the other side tried to consolidate their positions. The civil society organisations, the academic people and the media did win the people to support the civilian government. Hundred thousand followers demonstrated last week for the civilian government to counter small demonstrations in support of the military by beneficiaries of the “deep state” which was created by Al-Bashir (security people, economic elites who have benefitted from privatisation, and even from the large family of Al-Bashir).

The main reason of the coup now is the expected transition of power from the head of the Sovereignty Council, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, to a civilian head of the Sovereignty Council in November 2021, as this change was negotiated and confirmed in August 2019. The new civilian head of the Sovereignty Council should have prepared in cooperation with the Transitional Government for the first democratic election in 2023, four years after the removal of President Al-Bashir in April 2019. This turnover of power would have changed the power relations to the civilian side. But the power-sharing clashes between the military side and the civilian side of the transitional government started already in 2019. It can be expected that Al-Bashir will not be sent to the International Court of Justice for the war crimes in Darfur. The change of power to the civilian side would have affected the economic positions of the security people (army, paramilitary forces, secret services). The heads of the military forces (the army and paramilitary forces) are not ready to allow any control or removal of their role they have in public enterprises (monopolies of import and export trade) and in extractive businesses (gold production all over the country, arid land for sale, etc.). The civilian government was also weakened by the economic situation which was deteriorating over the last two years (despite of the lifting of the US sanctions and the peace accords in the country with rebel movements). The austerity claims of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to consolidate the budget as a precondition for a reduction of the huge debt burden of the country affected the prices of key products by reduced subsidies (for bread, fuel, and pharmacy). These claims led to conflicts with the own political basis of the civilian government, especially the trade unions and key civil society organizations.

2) Pro-democracy groups have reported urged street protests. Are we likely to see massive demonstrations? Can it lead to clashes with the military?

Clashes between demonstrating people and the military forces, especially the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), occurred and escalated already on Monday, 25 October 2021. It can be expected that they will spread to other towns, also provincial capitals. Nearly 80

people died in clashes in 2019 before the transitional government was formed. It can be expected that even larger clashes can follow as the military is obviously not ready for any further compromise. They want to stay in power, and they even managed a blockade of the harbour of Port Sudan to deteriorate further the supply situation of key products for mass consumption (imports of wheat, pharmaceutical products, and fuel). The aim was to mobilize demonstrations against the civilian government. It could also be seen in recent weeks that the periphery of Sudan (East Sudan and Darfur) was used by the military to weaken further the civilian government, by supporting dissident forces and militias there who were not satisfied with their roles and their benefits they were given from the transition government. Some parts of the Beja ethnic group in the East and some ethnic groups in Darfur supported the military forces. Although the civilian government was very successful in arranging peace in the country in accords with various rebel groups, such as in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile Province, the economic crisis with increasing poverty has increased the tensions also in the periphery again.

3) What is your general prognosis? How do you expect the situation to unfold?

Sudan has a long period of military governments, and President Al-Bashir even was in power for 30 years (1989-2019). The democratic party structure is still weak, and the civil society was since 2019 not strong enough to counter the attacks of the “deep state” forces. Al-Bashir created a deep state around his extended family and all the beneficiaries of his privatisation policies (especially in the telecommunication sector, the media, the chemical industry, the pharmaceutical industry, the metal industry, the agribusiness, etc.). The growing defence industry and the economic monopolies of the military and the paramilitary forces (such as in the gold production) gave him the power to govern even out from the prison with some strawmen. The military forces of Sudan are also supported by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and by Saudi Arabia, with money, trade deals, and weapons. Funds are transferred by the military heads from Sudan to these countries and are not invested in Sudan. There are again bleak perspectives for the Sudan, as the traditional parties are weakly organized and as they are not united and open for divisive strategies. The Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) consists basically of lawyers, journalists, and doctors. The SPA is united, but not strong enough to shoulder the political situation without support from the traditional parties and local and international civil society groups. It can be that even the political situation in South Sudan will be negatively affected, as the Hamdok government cooperated with the government of South Sudan to get the internal peace accords in Sudan managed. This process has also helped to consolidate the peace agreement in South Sudan between the Dinka and Nuer ethnic forces. It can be expected that Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, China, and Russia will deepen their relations with the military government in Sudan.