

After years of attacking protesters, Sudan's army and paramilitary RSF turn on each other

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Photo: Xinhua

More than 500 people have been killed and 4,000 injured since fighting broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on April 15.

Groups such as the Sudan Doctors Union are worried the fighting could escalate after the evacuation of foreign nationals. Thousands have already fled the country. Over 69 percent of the hospitals in and around the conflict zones are inoperable. There is a severe shortage of medicine, food, water, and electricity.

The fighting is the latest in a series of political convulsions since [massive pro-democracy protests overthrew long-time dictator Omar al-Bashir](#) in April 2019. Army chief General Abdel-Fattah Burhan, who is the chair of the ruling military junta, and his deputy and RSF head, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, aka Hemeti, were key members of Bashir's regime. The RSF was [formed out of janjaweed militias](#) who were responsible for mass killings in Darfur during Bashir's reign.

Burhan and Hemeti took over de facto control after Bashir's fall and were responsible for the [massacre of more than 100 protesters](#) who were demanding civilian rule at a sit-in in Khartoum in June 2019. In its aftermath, they negotiated [with right-wing parties](#) in the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) coalition and inaugurated a civilian-military transitional government in August.

While this government [had a civilian Prime Minister, Abdalla Hamdok](#), defense, police, and foreign policy were under the control of the army, with [Burhan heading a 'Sovereignty Council.'](#) The army controls a substantial chunk of the economy while the RSF has gorged on the mineral wealth of Darfur.

The transitional arrangement was supposed to pave the way for civilian rule. Instead, in October 2021, [Burhan and Hemeti took complete control in a coup.](#)

Throughout the years since the coup, protesters took to the streets, [often in the](#)

[hundreds of thousands](#), refusing any compromise with the junta and demanding genuine democracy and civilian control of the military. The protests were spearheaded by the [Resistance Committees \(RCs\)](#), a [network of over 5,000 neighborhood organizations](#). Left forces, including the Sudanese Communist Party, were a key force too. Over 120 people were killed in the attacks on demonstrations in the months following the October 2021 coup.

[Disregarding popular sentiment](#) against any negotiations with the junta, the international community—the UN, U.S., UK, European Union, African Union, and the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development—supported renewed talks between the junta and the FFC.

This negotiation led to the [Framework Agreement in December 2022](#), which was to be concluded with a final political agreement that would have led to the formation of another joint government with civilians on April 11, 2023.

This plan did not materialize as the SAF and RSF turned on each other after disagreeing over the timespan for the integration of the latter into the former.

The Sudanese Communist Party has reiterated its [rejection of any compromise](#) with the junta. It maintains that international support for another power-sharing compromise after the October coup served to legitimize the junta, which eventually led to this infighting.

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