

Mass protests resume against Sudan's junta

By Jean Shaoul
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Tens of thousands protested in the capital Khartoum Sunday, demanding Sudan's military junta hand power to a civilian-led government in a rally dubbed the "march of millions." They were joined by thousands more in cities across the country seeking justice for the victims killed in the months-long movement for democracy.

Protesters were met with tear gas, stun grenades and live ammunition that killed at least seven people and injured 181 more, according to the Sudan News Agency. This comes almost one month after security forces launched an assault on the two-month long, mass sit-in outside the defense ministry headquarters in Khartoum, killing at least 128 protesters, including 40 people whose brutalized bodies were dumped in the Nile, injuring nearly 1,000 more and raping many women.

That assault on peaceful protesters was led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagolo, vice president of the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and head of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), an offshoot of the Janjaweed, notorious for its brutal suppression of the Darfur rebellion. Dagolo aspires to take the place of former dictator Omar al-Bashir, his former patron, deposed by the military in April.

Since the June 3 crackdown, the capital has been in virtual lockdown. All access to the internet and social media has been blocked to prevent the spread of information. Opposition groups have been refused permission to organise public forums. The on-off talks between the military and opposition groups over the composition and powers of a civilian-fronted transitional government were cancelled.

The June 3 rampage came in the wake of Dagalo's trip to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, and trips by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of the TMC and Sudan's de facto ruler, to Abu Dhabi and Cairo, where he received advice on

how to drown a revolution in blood from Egyptian dictator General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

While the Trump administration has viewed the instability caused by the military crackdown with some concern, it has supported the main allies of US imperialism in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, who fear for their own shaky regimes, in their bid to shore up Sudan's military dictatorship. The Saudi monarchy and Emirati sheiks have pledged \$3 billion to prop up the TMC. In turn, the RSF has sent thousands of its members to fight in the Saudi-led assault on Yemen.

Since then, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Washington's key ally in the Horn of Africa, and the African Union (AU) have been trying to negotiate a deal between the TMC and the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), an umbrella coalition made up of some 20 opposition groups that includes the Sudanese Professionals' Association (SPA) that has organised many of the strikes.

While TMC spokesperson Lieutenant General Shams El Din Kabbashi said on Saturday that the council had rejected Ethiopia's proposal, which the opposition coalition had accepted, it had agreed "in principle" to the AU's plan, although he gave no details about its proposals.

The European Union has issued pro forma statements calling for a return to civilian rule, but its chief concern is to ensure that the authorities continue to uphold a filthy \$400 million deal—at least some of which has found its way to the RSF to police Sudan's borders—aimed at preventing the migration of Sudanese people to Europe.

The June 3 crackdown served to destroy any illusions among protesters that the military represented a benevolent force that would usher in a new era of democracy and prosperity. Within weeks, demonstrators took to organising neighbourhood

protests and were regularly back on the streets of Sudan's towns. On June 23, a Sudanese court ordered telecom operator Zain Sudan to restore internet services in response to a civil suit, although it is unclear what impact the ruling has had.

In the days before the rallies, the TMC sought to prevent the FFC from publicizing the rally, blocking it from giving a press conference, and arrested the head of a teachers' committee and a leading member of the FFC.

Last Monday, dozens of students rallied outside the National Ribat University near the Ministry of Defence headquarters in Khartoum, chanting "civilian rule." Security forces used batons to beat the students and break up the demonstration.

Sunday's mass protests took place on the 30th anniversary of the coup that toppled Sudan's last elected government, bringing former president al-Bashir to power. Al-Bashir's ouster by the military was carried out in a bid to prevent the four-month long protests from overthrowing the regime of the tiny venal clique that has ruled Sudan since independence from Britain in 1956.

Organised by the FFC, the protesters were determined to show their opposition to the military, turning out despite the junta's threats to respond with force.

On Saturday, RSF chief Dagalo had warned that he would not tolerate any "vandalism" at the protests, saying, "There are people who have an agenda, a hidden agenda, we don't want problems." He said he would hold the FFC "fully responsible for any spirit that is lost in this march, or any damage or harm to citizens or state institutions."

He later tried to justify the killing of unarmed civilians by claiming that there were snipers among the protesters who had injured at least three members of the armed forces and several civilians. The claim was dismissed by the organisers of the march, who pointed out that Dagalo had used similar accusations to justify the June 3 bloodbath.

Eye-witnesses in Nyala, the capital of South Darfur, said that the RSF had not only violently suppressed the protests, but had actively instigated clashes, with one witness tweeting, "Thousands assaulted in Nyala market with whips and canes by RSF forces, as well as verbal assault to draw them into violence. Market has

been shut down and surrounded by RSF vehicles, as well as some police vehicles. Anyone walking around the market is attacked."

Other witnesses reported that the armed forces had opened fire at crowds in el-Obeid in North Kordofan, Kadugli in South Kordofan and Kassala, the capital of Kassala state.

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