

AFRICA

Signing of Power-Sharing Deal in Sudan Begins Anxious Wait for Democracy

Military and protesters seal pact on path to elections in 2022



People marched in Khartoum, Sudan, on Wednesday to celebrate the signing of a power-sharing agreement between the military and the civilian opposition. PHOTO: MARWAN ALI/EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK

By Justin Scheck in Khartoum, Sudan and Nicholas Bariyo in Kampala, Uganda

Updated July 17, 2019 2:09 pm ET

Rani Farah quit a lucrative job in Saudi Arabia, spent two months in jail and took a bullet to the chest, all to bring democracy to his country Sudan after 30 years of dictatorship.

The ink is still fresh on a power-sharing deal signed Wednesday by the military and the protesters who rose against longtime President Omar al-Bashir. But days before the signing, the 27-year-old civil engineer said he was uneasy with the pact.

Like many of the young professionals who spearheaded the protest movement, he has found that getting an elected government in this northeast African nation with strategic importance to the U.S., Gulf states and Iran is more complicated than ousting a strongman.

The agreement hands the military an extra 21 months of control over Sudan's executive before civilian leaders can take over. "Emotionally I'm completely against it, but logically am with it," Mr. Farah said.

It is the delay, and the fear that the military will ultimately try to stay in power, that concerns Mr. Farah and others. The two sides have yet to settle on the powers of the transitional government, which will also include civilian representatives, and how military and militias responsible for the killing of dozens of protesters will be held accountable. Elections for a new parliament and president are scheduled only for 2022.

Popular uprisings against authoritarian regimes across North Africa have mostly failed to bring the democratic governments and more-equitable opportunities demanded during the Arab Spring. Nearly a decade later, Sudan's civilian protesters worry that their revolution will follow in the footsteps of those that came before it and give rise to a new dictatorship under one of the country's powerful generals.

Still, after four months of demonstrations to remove Mr. Bashir and a three-month standoff with the military junta that ousted him in April, many say they want to avoid further deaths and give the transitional government a chance.



Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, right, representing the Sudanese military, and opposition coalition leader Ahmad al-Rabiah shake hands after signing a power-sharing deal in Khartoum, Sudan, on Wednesday. PHOTO: REUTERS

"The blood of the martyrs is precious, but the blood of the living is more precious," said Mr. Farah, the bullet that nearly killed him still lodged between two ribs.

Shortly after dawn on June 3, he was recording video on his phone from the main sit-in site near military headquarters in central Khartoum and live streaming it on Facebook, when he heard gun shots. The video shows Mr. Farah looking down at his chest, where a red blotch was spreading across his shirt. Mr. Farah gave his phone to a stranger to continue filming, took a couple of shaky steps and fell as other protesters caught him and carried him to medical care.

At least 128 civilians died that day, when police and a paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces stormed the sit-in and other protest sites across the country, according to the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, which supports the protesters. Many others were beaten, raped and arrested. The military has confirmed 61 casualties, including three soldiers.

Recordings of the atrocities, including Mr. Farah's video, were being shared on social media this week after authorities ended the weeklong internet blackout that followed the June 3 raid.



Rani Farah talks with another activist outside his home in Khartoum, Sudan, three weeks after he was shot in the chest in a raid on protesters by police and a paramilitary group. PHOTO: MACKENZIE KNOWLES-COURSIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The killings deepened civilian leaders' distrust of the military, in particular Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commander of the RSF, who signed Wednesday's deal on behalf of the military. Gen. Dagalo, better known as Hemedti, has emerged as the face of the military in recent weeks, though he is formally the second in command in the transitional council that took over after Mr. Bashir's ouster.

Many Sudanese say the RSF has barely changed since the days of the Janjaweed, the feared militia in which it is rooted. The Janjaweed contributed to the genocide in the southern region of Darfur in the early 2000s.

RSF troops, many still in their teens, are camping on street corners across Khartoum, lounging next to jeeps with heavy-gauge machine guns and bundles of rocket-propelled grenades. On Sunday, members of the militia fired at thousands of people commemorating 40 days since the June 3 massacre, and at least six civilians have been killed by the militia throughout Sudan since then, the doctors' committee said Tuesday.

Gen. Dagalo has blamed the violence on rogue actors impersonating the RSF.

With military and civilian leaders yet to agree on what Sudan's new constitution should look like,



Sarah Nugdallah, secretary-general of the Umma Party, shown in Khartoum in June, said that to achieve democracy, Sudan needs to free itself from the grip of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. PHOTO: MACKENZIE KNOWLES-COURSIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

splits have emerged between the many constituencies that supported Mr. Bashir's ouster. The opposition includes moderate and conservative Islamists, socialists, decades-old political parties and hungry schoolchildren and workers without political affiliation.

Many people such as Mr. Farah—young, urbanized and cosmopolitan in their outlook—want a quick transition to democracy without some of the constraints that were placed on citizens under Mr. Bashir's Islamist regime.

More established parties with constituencies in rural areas, meanwhile, are attached to institutions such as Shariah law, which was a guiding principle of Sudan's rule under Mr. Bashir.

Any major group that feels alienated by a new government could throw the country into new chaos.

"It's going to be very dangerous," Altayeb Mustafa, a relative of Mr. Bashir and head of a coalition of conservative Islamist parties, said in an interview in his Khartoum office last month.

Mr. Mustafa said some of his constituent groups have affiliated militias and any deal that excludes them could lead to violence. "I will do my best to prevent people taking arms because it's catastrophic for Sudan," he said.

At the other end of the political spectrum is Sudan's Umma Party, a liberal Islamist group, whose chief, Sadiq al Mahdi, was the country's last democratically elected leader until the coup that installed Mr. Bashir in 1989.

The party's secretary-general, Sarah Nugdallah, said that to achieve democracy, Sudan needs to free itself from financial reliance on Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. She said the Gulf nations are mainly interested not in restoring Sudan to democracy, but in getting natural



Altayeb Mustafa in June at his office in Khartoum. Mr. Mustafa, the head of a coalition of Islamist parties, warned that any deal that excludes them could lead to violence. PHOTO: MACKENZIE KNOWLES-COURSIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

resources and young soldiers to fight for them in Yemen.

At the moment, she said, Sudan's leaders are in "a relationship of master and slave" with the Gulf states. The U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia have been using soldiers from Sudan's military and the RSF to help fight their war in Yemen.

Both Gulf governments have said they support the power-sharing deal and pledged fresh aid for the new transitional government. In April, days after Mr. Bashir's removal, the two countries had already announced a \$3 billion lifeline to stabilize Sudan's ailing economy.

Mr. Farah said he was first jailed in January of 2018, after intelligence officials arrested him at a protest. After intermittent beatings and interrogations, Mr. Farah said, he was released about two months later. Early this year, he said, he got five stitches in his scalp after being hit with an officer's rifle butt at a protest. "It just makes you more determined," he said.

Mr. Farah said that he and other protesters are ready to return to the streets to keep a check on the military if it doesn't hew to the promise of a democratic transition.

"We know it hasn't fallen yet," he said. "And we'll make it fall with our own ways."

— *Abdullah Mohieen in Khartoum contributed to this article.*

Write to Justin Scheck at justin.scheck@wsj.com and Nicholas Bariyo at nicholas.bariyo@wsj.com

Appeared in the July 18, 2019, print edition as 'Anxious Wait for Democracy Begins in Sudan.'

