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Sudan's military coup

Philipp Jahn in Khartoum on why Omar al-Bashir's fall from power doesn't mean the end of the regime in Sudan

Read this interview in German.

After months of mass protests against the Sudanese government, the armed forces arrested President Omar al-Bashir on Thursday. What exactly has happened?

On Thursday afternoon, the Sudanese defence minister announced in a televised speech that the armed forces had arrested al-Bashir and would now oversee a two year transition period. On the morning of the same day, the military had occupied the state TV station and other strategic locations in the capital Khartoum. They then closed down the Sudanese airspace for 24 hours and announced a curfew for the night.

People in Khartoum went out on the streets to celebrate in the eight hours between the military's take-over of power and the TV speech of the defence minister. Honking cars with Sudanese flags drove through the streets. The celebrations took part mainly in the protesters' camp right in front of the military's headquarters. After the announcement of the two-year military rule however, the mood changed significantly.

Opposition groups condemn the coup and, despite the curfew, protest against the new military government. What are their demands?

All observers agree that Omar al-Bashir's fall from power doesn't mean the end of the regime. The latter has just sacrificed the president when it couldn't choke off the protests in any possible way. On top of that, more and more people from the military's ranks had defected to the protesters. There've also been several shootings between the military and the secret service in the past four days. The regime had to act for reasons of self-preservation before totally losing control.

However, the protesters perceive the face of the military regime, defence minister Ibn Ouf, as a core representative of the old regime. He's an officer and has only been appointed as vice-president by al-

Bashir as late as February this year. The protesters now demand real political change and the formation of a civil transitional government of technocrats.

How does the army behave in relation to the protesters?

The situation is very complex and confusing. Today, on Friday, there's been another press conference by the military. My impression was that the military touts for the protesters' sympathy and understanding. The situation within the regime seems extremely unstable. We cannot exclude the possibility of further armed conflicts within the regime.

The role of militias and the secret service is entirely unclear. Their leaders seem to be integrated in the new military government but we hear differing accounts about their respective roles. The protesters also seem to disagree partially. Some of them hoped for military intervention. But the young generation on the streets is dissatisfied with the result. The protesters' political leadership and the military regime now need to find a political solution, supported by the people on the streets and the military's ranks.

The International Criminal Court in The Hague has issued an arrest warrant for Omar al-Bashir because of genocide. The Sudanese military already announced that they will not extradite him. What will then happen to al-Bashir ?

The military government wants to bring him to court in Sudan. But it also explicitly mentioned that a civil government could, later on, hand him over to the International Criminal Court. I understand the international community's claim for punishment. However, beyond Darfur there are also legitimate claims for punishment by the Sudanese population. In the protests over the last four months alone, more than 60 people have been killed – that's at least seven per week.

The interview was conducted by Joanna Itzek.



Philipp Jahn

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Philipp Jahn manages the country office of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Khartoum, Sudan. Previously, he worked for GIZ in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Azerbaijan and Germany. He worked for three years as a consultant for anti-corruption and integrity for the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). He studied law in Berlin, Madrid and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London.