

Sudan military leaders sack defence minister in purge of top officials

Monday 15 April 2019, by [BURKE Jason](#) (Date first published: 14 April 2019).

Talks with protest organisers continue during Khartoum sit-in calling for civilian rule.

Sudan's military council has removed the defence minister, Awad Ibn Auf, from his role and appointed a new intelligence chief, a spokesman has said.

Lt Gen Abu Bakr Mustafa will replace Salah Abdallah Mohamed Saleh, known as Salah Gosh, as chief of Sudan's national intelligence and security service (NISS).

The spokesman also announced the sacking of Sudan's ambassadors to Washington and Geneva and said all army and police officers who participated in street protests which led to the ousting of [Omar al-Bashir](#) as president last week would be released.

The latest purges on Sunday follow continuing talks between Sudan's new military rulers and protest organisers demanding the immediate "transfer of power to a civilian government", as thousands of demonstrators remained camped outside the army headquarters in the capital Khartoum for an eighth day.

The traditional military council has also arrested members of the former government, according to the BBC, and committed not to disperse protesters.

The armed forces [took power on Thursday](#) after forcing Bashir to step down after 30 years of repressive rule.

A 10-member delegation representing the protesters delivered their demands during talks late on Saturday, according to a statement by umbrella group the Alliance for Freedom and Change.

The group insists civilian representatives should be accepted on to the military council, and that a fully civilian government should be formed to run day-to-day affairs.

"We will continue our sit-in until all our demands are met," said one of the alliance's leaders, Omar al-Degier.

The Sudanese foreign ministry urged the international community on Sunday to back the country's new military rulers to help "democratic transition".

"The ministry of foreign affairs is looking forward to the international community to understand the situation and to support the transitional military council in order to achieve the Sudanese goal of democratic transition," it said.

Sudan's main protest group - the Sudanese Professionals (SPA) - reiterated its call for the immediate handover of power to a civilian transitional government and said it would maintain street

demonstrations to push for its aims.

The SPA, which has demanded civilians be included on the transitional military council and for Bashir's close associates to leave, called on the council "to immediately transfer power to a civilian government".

But a transitional council spokesman told a news conference in Khartoum on Sunday the military was ready to work with opposition groups to establish a new civilian government.

"The ball is now in the political forces' court when it comes to the prime minister or a government," Shams El Din Kabbashi said.

"If they are ready today to approve anything, we are ready to implement it," he added.

On Saturday, the new chief of the military council, Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, [vowed to dismantle Bashir's regime](#) and lifted a night-time curfew with immediate effect.

In a broadcast to the nation, Burhan praised the "peaceful revolution" and the sacrifices made by Sudanese people.

The 60-year-old soldier ordered the release of hundreds of political detainees and promised inclusive dialogue with all involved with the aim of forming a civilian government acceptable to everyone.

Burhan took the oath of office on Friday after his predecessor, Gen Awad Ibn Auf - a defence minister and long-time aide of the deposed president - stepped down little more than 24 hours after ousting Bashir.

Protests erupted on 19 December in Sudan's eastern city of Atbara after a government decision to triple the price of bread. This quickly evolved into nationwide demonstrations against Bashir's 30-year rule. Tens of thousands of people have massed outside the army headquarters [since 6 April](#), initially to urge the armed forces to back their demand that Bashir be removed.

Burhan comes with less baggage from Bashir's deeply unpopular rule than Ibn Auf.

But while celebrating the fall of Bashir and then Ibn Auf, protesters remain cautious. "We surely want our demands to be met, but both sides will have to be flexible to reach a deal," said a protester who spent the night at the army complex.

The delegation for the talks includes several members who have only recently been released after months of detention.

The newly formed 10-member transitional council contains individuals who played key roles in Bashir's regime.

On Saturday evening, the new military ruler named the NISS deputy head, Jalaluddin Sheikh, to the council. He also nominated Mohammad Hamdan Daglo - known as Himeidti - a field commander for the rapid support forces (RSF) counter-insurgency unit, which rights groups have accused of abuses in war-torn Darfur.

The fall of Bashir has intensified a competition for influence in [Sudan](#), one of Africa's biggest countries, by Middle East powers.

Key regional powerbrokers Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates voiced backing for the

transitional council. Burhan's nomination "reflects the ambitions of the brotherly people of [Sudan](#) for security, stability and development", said the UAE state news agency WAM.

Sudan is part of a UAE- and Saudi-led military coalition fighting Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. The decision to ally with the two powers marked a dramatic shift by Khartoum, aligning itself with the Gulf Arab monarchies and dropping close ties with their arch-rival Iran.

The international criminal court has longstanding arrest warrants against Bashir for suspected war crimes during the regime's campaign of repression in Darfur, where a decade and a half of conflict has killed 300,000 people. The military council has said it would never extradite Bashir or any other Sudanese citizen.

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