



## Politics

06

OCT  
12:11 UTC

### **Sudan Analysis: Impending shortages of essential goods, splintering of DFC coalition leaves political transition in precarious position, raises risks of civil unrest**

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#### **Executive Summary**

- Continued tensions between the government and the High Council of Beja over the blockade of Port Sudan despite a September 27 agreement highlights the Beja Council's use of critical infrastructure to achieve political objectives.
- The government will remain reluctant to agree to the Beja Council's demand of the removal of armed groups such as the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF), given the length of often arduous negotiations between the two groups resulting in a historic agreement in 2020.
- The political deadlock from the crisis in eastern Sudan is likely to have a direct impact on everyday life nationwide, with shortages in essential goods such as medicine and wheat likely to continue. These shortages heighten the possibility of mass scale civilian protests against the government over the coming weeks.
- Meanwhile, the splintering of the ruling civilian Declaration of Freedom and Change (DFC) coalition by armed groups is likely opportunistic in nature. However, the move will likely fracture the government's civilian wing and enable the military to further consolidate influence in Khartoum.
- **Those operating or residing in Khartoum, as well as other urban centers across Sudan, are advised to avoid the vicinity of all gatherings and protests given the associated risks of violence.**

#### **Please be advised**

- Reports from October 4 indicate that the government warned that logistical and supply chain disruptions caused by the continued closure of roads, and shuttering of the port in Port Sudan, Red Sea State by the High Council of Beja is causing shortages of essential medicine, fuel, and wheat.
- Earlier on September 27, the government announced that it had reached an agreement with the Eastern Sudan protesters to allow the resumption of crude oil exports from South Sudan following [ten-day-long regional unrest](#) calling for the end of the Eastern Sudan Track of the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement.
- Further sources indicate that Beja leaders demand a new, inclusive conference, and the allocation of 50 percent of eastern Sudan's resources to Red Sea, Kassala and El-Gedaref states.
- Meanwhile, reports on September 28 indicate that 16 armed groups, including the Darfur-based

Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), as well as the National Umma Party (NUP) announced the formation of a separate faction within the ruling civilian Declaration of Freedom and Change (DFC) coalition on September 28.

- The new faction accused four unspecified blocs within the DFC of ‘monopolizing power’ and excluding other groups within the movement. The new group also signed a new charter entitled “The National Consensus Charter for the Unity of the Forces of Freedom and Change”.
- Meanwhile, tens of thousands of people attended the [September 30](#) protest called by the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) in Khartoum, organized to denounce the perceived deliberate stalling of the political transition by the transitional government.
- The SPA again called for the dissolution of all government structures, including both military and civilian components of the current administration.

## Assessment & Forecast

### Continued blockade of logistical facilities in Red Sea State creates conditions for multifaceted crisis, political deadlock in long term

1. The continued closure of Eastern Sudan’s main port, railways, and roadways in Port Sudan highlights the rushed nature of the September 27 agreement between the government and the High Council of Beja. This illustrates Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok’s immediate need to avoid a total economic collapse, for which the resumption of oil pipelines-related logistics was crucial. That said, [lasting unrest](#) suggests that the protesters’ key demands remain still pending, further underscoring the short term nature of the agreement.
2. The blocking of ports and airports also continue to highlight the Beja authorities’ leverage of regional infrastructure to have an oversized impact on the national economy. While the Beja Council has thus far not fully articulated its demands from the government, public perception is that the group retains their demand for the full dissolution of the Eastern Sudan Track of the Juba 2020 Agreement. The group claims that the inclusion of Darfuri rebel groups such as the Sudanese Revolutionary Forces (SRF) umbrella is not acceptable to local populations, and fails to grant them any legitimate representation in the government.
3. While these claims by the Beja Council may be legitimate, the perceived linkages between a prominent Beja community leader with the administration of former President Omar al-Bashir and the now dissolved National Congress Party (NCP) likely undermines their case with the government. The weight of this linkage is further exemplified by Hamdok’s explicit connection between the [September 21](#) foiled coup and the Eastern Sudan unrest. In this context, to agree to the Beja Council’s demands would undo all of the government’s efforts in securing SRF inclusion in the government in Khartoum, which was a notable achievement, given the multiple rounds of negotiations with disparate groups. The agreement with the SRF is particularly crucial since it came after decades of brutal policies during the al-Bashir era against the local Darfuri population.
4. **FORECAST:** Sudan’s current state of economy and subsequent heightened associated potential for violent unrest has exacerbated Hamdok’s necessity to engage in negotiations with the High Council of Beja in a bid to mitigate the consequences of the blockade. However, the Beja Council will likely remain strident in their demand that the SRF be excluded from government, a demand that Khartoum will be reluctant to agree upon. Any government concession to the Beja Council will likely agitate the SRF coalition which would threaten to pull out of government, which would undermine any progress made in the transition considering the challenges posed by multiplying negotiating parties. Ultimately, both entities are likely to fully use their leverage available to pressure Hamdok, meaning that the government has few good options. In this context, while short-term agreements might be reached in the coming days, there remains a heightened probability of a political deadlock, along with further shortages in essential goods in the long term.

## **Splintering of ruling DFC symptomatic of multifaceted coalition, to favor military's consolidation of power, to galvanize SPA's narrative**

1. The announcement of the new faction within the Declaration of Freedom and Change (DFC) is highly significant and effectively negates efforts by Hamdok to inculcate varied stakeholders within the government. To that end, Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) leader Gibril Ibrahim and National Umma Party (NUP) leader Mariam al-Mahdi, both rebel leaders previously considered dissidents, were granted prominent ministerial posts in the cabinet in February. In this context, the fact that the JEM and NUP withdrew from the DFC despite being attributed a high-ranking government position further heightens polarization with the multiple parties within the DFC, and makes further negotiations between the different factions fraught. Additionally, the lack of explicit unified agenda and positions of the newly formed DFC faction is notable, and reflects the likely opportunistic nature of the splintering as these groups' leaders likely capitalized on the transitional government's momentary lack of control in a bid to advance their interests.
2. The DFC's fragmentation further entrenched public perception of a divided civilian front that is crucial in challenging the military's influence within the government. The ongoing threat of unrest renders the military crucial for the transitional government to maintain a governing presence and avoid such civil action devolving into an even wider political crisis. **FORECAST:** The military is expected to capitalize on the ongoing national security challenges such as notable militant activity in the capital on [September 28](#), [October 4](#), and [October 6](#) to further cement its influence within the government. The military leadership is likely to use these incidents as further proof that the army is acting as the 'guardians of the revolution' as compared to civilian politicians who are using the transition period to further their political capital. PM Hamdok's position will likely be made even more fraught as he struggles to reconcile the rival civilian DFC factions, while increasingly relying on the military to maintain domestic stability.
3. Meanwhile, the SPA's continued express mistrust towards both the government's civilian and military components has only escalated since its withdrawal from the DFC in July 2020, culminating into its demands for the complete dissolution of the transitional government institutions. The SPA's disillusionment with the political and economic state of affairs is especially significant considering its wide support from the Sudanese civil society, as well as the fact that some of its components are represented in government. **FORECAST:** In a scheme of reusing the 2019 revolutionary discourse, the economic consequences arising from the Eastern Sudan unrest such as rising prices of essential goods will further galvanize the SPA momentum among the public, as seen already by the well-attended September 30 protest in Khartoum. The DFC's fragmentation is likely to be instrumentalized by the SPA to discredit the government, and bolster its support base. Ultimately, these socio-economic conditions, along with political turbulence, means that the security situation in Sudan is poised to be volatile over the coming weeks.

## **Recommendations**

1. Those operating or residing in Khartoum, as well as other urban centers across Sudan, are advised to avoid the vicinity of all gatherings and protests given the associated risks of violence.
2. We advise against all travel to the Darfur region as well as Red Sea State given the volatile security situation.
3. For any further questions or consultation, please contact us at [intel@max-security.com](mailto:intel@max-security.com) or +44 203 540 0434