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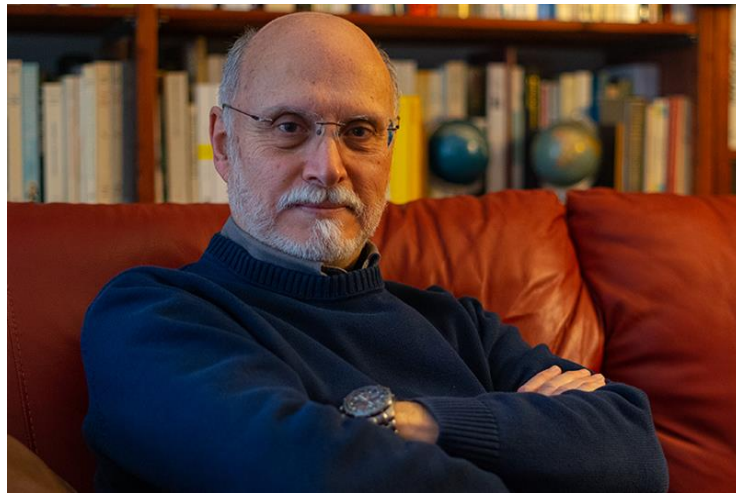
زبانهای اروپایی

By Dina Ezzat

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Interview with Professor of International Relations Gilbert Achcar

## *Sudan: 'A life-and-death struggle'*



**Sources:** South wind

*Nine days into the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (FAR), Gilbert Achcar, a keen observer of political and military challenges in the Arab world for more than a decade, reflects on a struggle he believes was inevitable due to the dual nature of military power in Sudan. Professor of international relations at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London, Achcar exposes to Al-Ahram Weekly the solutions that the confrontation can have in the worst and the best of cases in a conflict that erupted "due to the inability of the two military forces to agree on the new framework that had been negotiated through international mediation between the Sudanese military government and the Freedom and Freedom Coalition. Change."*

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The agreement was scheduled to be signed in the first week of April, when Abdel-Fatah al-Burhan, leader of the SAF, demanded the "rapid inclusion of the FAR under SAF command." Achcar thinks that "what he wanted was to end the status of the FAR as a parallel army, while Mohamed Dagalo [the leader of the FAR] was not willing to subject his troops to the command of the regular army. This is a classic case of inevitable conflict between two armed powers deployed on the same territory: sooner or later, one of the two will try to subdue the other."

Established by the former president Omar Al Bashir was deposed, the FAR was organized as an autonomous armed force, parallel to the regular army. This suited Al Bashir's intention to Counterbalance one power with another in order to shield his own personal power using the FAR for missions in which the army could not be involved, says Achcar. Dagalo was originally the leader of a paramilitary force that was propelled into politics by Al Bashir during the war unleashed by the president deposed in Darfur. "So, essentially, Dagagal owed everything to Al Bashir, but this did not prevent him from turning against him when he thought that time of Al Bashir had passed," explains Achcar. The overthrow of Al Bashir was the time when Dagalo began to aspire to play a political role a lot Boosted by the decisive involvement of the FAR in the fall of the former president in collaboration with the FAS.

Achcar believes Al Burhan knew about the Dagalo's ambition. He was just waiting for the right time to come to subdue it. That moment, he notes, came "after the October 25 coup [of 2021], when Dagalo distanced himself from the SAF and declared that the coup had been a failure." In October 2021, Al Burhan thought that the split had been produced within the Freedom and Change Coalition allowed him to advance in the Elimination of the civil-military power-sharing agreement existing since 2019 and the re-establishment of a purely military government.

"However, things were not because of the the path that Al Burhan awaited because of the vigorous opposition in the streets, and international economic pressure, mainly Western. He was forced to back down and negotiate with the Freedom and Change Coalition that he had expelled from the government and, pressured from the outside, accept a new agreement that is in fact more restrictive for the army than that of 2019," says Achcar. "This was in fact a clear manifestation of the failure of his attempt." Al Burhan became convinced that he needed to subdue the FAR to to be able to maneuver within the new political chessboard that was being defined. The SAF Needed to Improve Its Chances of

Maintaining Control of Political Power and with it that of its economic empire in Sudan, and this required an end to the Division of the Armed Forces of the country.

The Armed Forces could no longer coexist with autonomous FAR. "As much as both Al Burhan and Dagalog are sons. of the same political regime of Al Bashir, since the fall of the dictator they went to be rivals. Political power is based on the monopoly of force, and on this There is no duality that is sustained for a long time," says Achcar. Al Burhan tolerated coexistence with the FAR as long as they cooperated with the FAS in confronting opposition pressure for a civilian government, but Achcar thinks that "this has irretrievably passed into history. Therefore It is a mistake to believe that both sides could somehow reconcile. We are witnessing a life-and-death struggle between them."

Achcar agrees that this The situation is very worrying. If tomorrow the confrontation ceases without neither side would achieve a decisive victory, Sudan would be left divided into separate zones under the control of one or another military force. One Renewed political agreement between these forces, he adds, is highly unlikely. "I would demand that Dagalo accept the integration of the FAR under the sole command of the FAS. Today, this seems virtually impossible, unless a Regional force will succeed in obtaining Dagalo's consent to leave the fight."

### **War civil**

According to Achcar, the conflict could lead to a protracted civil war or conclude with a division of the country into areas controlled by one or the other of the two rival forces. "That's why there's so much concern about what is happening in Sudan, especially in a country that it shares a past and a border such as Egypt and a country that fears destabilization of the region such as the Saudi Kingdom." However, Achcar understands that portraying the current conflict in Sudan as a war for Delegation is simplistic and reductionist. "It is true that influential actors regional forces have their preferences between two forces fighting for control of Sudan." But it is hard to think that any of these powers have sought this War, which can become a muddle with regional effects potentially dangerous.

"Egypt seems to opt for neutrality" in the current conflict, despite its close relationship with Al Burhan," he says. Achcar, adding that it would also be difficult to think that the UAE may risk being openly involved in war, "despite their well-known relationship with Dagalog and his desire to make his own game in front of the Saudis, as he did in Yemen," since no one knows how this may end. conflict.

The complexity of the situation in Sudan it is not limited to the rivalry between the FAS and the FAR, adds Achcar. The forces Civilian policies that formed the political opposition to Al Bashir are also Divided. Their paths parted quite some time ago, he recalls, when in 2019 a majority of the Freedom and Change Coalition opted for the compromise political with the military, while the rest, together with the Committees of Resistance and a majority of the Sudanese Professionals Association, They rejected that agreement. The October 25 coup gave the lie to those who believed that the SAF would respect its promise to hand over power to civilians in democratic conditions.

However, international pressure to In favour of a renewed agreement influences both the military and the civil opposition, continues Achcar. Those who had been dismissed by Al Burhan in 2021 they re-entered into negotiations with the Armed Forces and signed finally the Framework Agreement, which has been rejected again by the forces Radical. "Those who were not convinced of the usefulness of collaborating with the FAS in 2019 would certainly not change their mind after the 2021 coup," he explains.

With the current armed conflict, the hopes for democracy in Sudan generated by the Glorious Revolution (such as the call there), which began in December 2018, are in question, he says. Achcar. He explains that if the SAF wins the battle, it may be a long time coming. period of military control, which would crush any prospect of establishment of democracy. On the other hand, if the FAR manages to resist, the division of the A country between the two belligerent forces could suffocate democratic prospects.

A favorable hypothesis could be that The struggle between the two military forces will weaken both and that the bulk of the Sudanese people blame them for the chaos created. In this case, the movement The people, led by the Resistance Committees, would perhaps succeed in mobilizing to the people until ending the military dictatorship and instituting democracy in Sudan. "It is clear that the armed forces are the main obstacle to any revolutionary process, both in Sudan and in other countries of the region," says Achcar. He says this is the issue they didn't take into account. the political forces in all Arab Spring countries, both in their first as in its second phase.

To succeed, they needed to earn The hearts and minds of the army, as had happened in all cases of radical change through uprisings in history, he says. The situations of war, especially in cases of defeat, could facilitate this scenario. However, it remains to be seen whether the battle being fought in Sudan It could lead to such an outcome.

A suffocating end to the current conflict the hopes for democracy in Sudan is a danger that cannot be underestimated, says Achcar. After the events of 2021 in Tunisia, such an end,

he adds, could Suppress the last democratic space achieved by the two waves successive revolutionaries of the Arab Spring in 2011 and 2019. Still, he says, even with the failed opportunity for democracy that exists in Sudan today, it would be a mistake to assume that the revolutionary potential, whether in Sudan or in any other another place in the Arab Spring countries is suffocated. "They've only passed. 12 years since the first shock wave of the Arab Spring. It is still Quite early for long-term revolutionary processes," he says. Political changes, and also The military in the Arab world has its own dynamic. "That's why he was a great It was wrong to draw parallels between the democratic revolutions of Europe and the this [in the late 1980s and early 1990s] and the Spring Arabic," he says. "In Eastern Europe there was a bureaucratic government, led by bureaucrats with relatively limited privileges. On the other hand, in The Middle East we are talking about groups with immense vested interests that they regard States as their private property and are willing to cling to power and with it to its enormous privileges by all necessary means. They are two very different situations," he adds.

Achcar is worried about the possibility of a defeat of revolutionary dreams of democracy in Sudan. It is also concerned about the wider decline in democracy in the Arab region, manifested, inter alia, in the ongoing reintegration of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad into the Arab League and the ongoing crackdown on the political opposition in Tunisia. However, he insists that this is a temporary setback in a prolonged succession of revolutionary cycles. According to Achcar, "the Arab uprisings were provoked by major structural, political, social and economic problems. The blatant failure to solve any of these problems means that it is only a matter of time before the volcano erupts again, somehow, somewhere."

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