

Position Paper

Increasing Pressures and Depleting Resources for the Sudanese Regime

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Nearly twenty three years have passed since the regime of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir seized power in a military coup on 30th June 1989, thus breaking the record as the longest-standing government in the national history of Sudan. It has outlived the military regimes of Lieutenant-General Ibrahim Abboud (1958-1964) and Field Marshal Jaafar Nimeiri (1969-1985), which together ruled for twenty-two years. Al-Bashir's regime has lasted twice as long as all of the democratically elected governments headed by Ismail Azhari (1953-1956), Abdullah Khalil (1956-1958), Sir Al-Khatm Khalifa (1964-1965) for the transitional period following the October 1964 Revolution that toppled Abboud, Mohammed Ahmed Mahjoub (1965-1966), al-Sadiq al-Mahdi (1966-1967), Mohammed Ahmed Mahjoub once again (1967-1969), al-Jizouli Dafe' Allah (1985-1986) for the transitional period following the April 1985 uprising that toppled the Nimeiri regime, and al-Sadiq al-Mahdi once again (1986-1989).

Field Marshal al-Bashir, a paratrooper, has proven during his reign – now almost a quarter-century old – that he possesses the skills of manoeuvring and jumping over the minefields of Sudanese politics that are teeming with wars and conflicts. He is so adept that he was able to play on the inconsistencies of his opponents and rivals, and proved superior to Dr. Hassan al-Turabi, the godfather and architect of the coup that brought him to power. However, he came out from under al-Turabi's shadow in 1999 to take control of governance alone and to employ the "Islamist" figures that sided with him in his conflict with the leader of the "Islamic Movement" to consolidate his power.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed with the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement in 2005 after lengthy and faltering negotiations that lasted for more than ten years and accelerated in the last thirty months, owing to substantial American intervention, to prolong the regime's rule during the six-year transition period. The regime was hoping that economic sanctions would be lifted, that Sudan would be removed from the United States' list of state sponsors of terrorism, and that U.S.-Sudanese relations would be normalised, as promised by the Bush administration, in return for peace; and this is what the regime believed would be a prelude to international legitimacy, and the long-sought normalisation of relations with the international community. Unfulfilled American promises urged the regime to make unprecedented concessions to resolve the issue of the South. It, thus, went as far as accepting secession as a potential choice of the Southerners in the referendum for self-determination. The regime considered secession acceptable as a price for the peace equation and international recognition of its legitimacy in the general elections held during the transitional period in accordance with the arrangements of the CPA. Al-Bashir and his party won the presidency and more than ninety-five percent of the seats in parliament, in addition to all of the fifteen governorships in the north except the Blue Nile which was won by the leader of SPLM Northern Sector, Malik Agar, who was subsequently ousted after the outbreak of war between the two parties.

2011 brought along serious challenges to al-Bashir's rule. In the beginning, the majority of Southerners voted in favour of the secession of the South in the referendum on self-determination; and this was followed by the start of the revolutions of the Arab Spring. In the middle of the year, the division of Sudan was officially decided on and the South became an independent State on 9th July. The second half of the year saw the complexities of this great event as the main goals al-Bashir sought by agreeing to the secession of the South were not reached.

Revolutions in Neighbouring Countries

The regime in Khartoum seems to be at ease as it approaches its twenty-fifth year in power. It has overcome the complexity of the two previous military regimes that had ruled the country and were overthrown by popular revolutions in October 1964 and in April 1985. Over the past few years, it sought to benefit from the experience of its allies during their struggle with opposition, dismantling the infrastructure of trade unions and modern civil forces that had led the mass mobilisation of the two revolutions. In addition, it exercised a kind of progression toward limited political openness without giving up its military, security and political control over articulations of power, thus

granting the freedom to form political parties and freedom of press unknown in the two previous regimes. By doing so, it has overcome the traditional classification of the nature of authoritarian military regimes, and contributed to the reduction of frustration and the pressure of despotism. It has also succeeded in attracting all of its opponents, including the armed movements, to negotiate and sign political agreements using various tactics. Most of them consented to some form of participation in the regime's authority. Accordingly, the regime managed to deprive the opposition of any gravity that would preserve its stance against the regime as it shares with the regime the cost of its decisions without being an actual partner.

However, assurance of the unlikelihood of a popular revolution, as in the revolutions of October 1964 and April 1985, has decreased sharply with the expansion of the Arab revolutions that have succeeded amazingly in toppling unyielding regimes that were thought to be highly entrenched by their strong security grip. Revolutions swept Sudan's two closest neighbours – Egypt and Libya – thus shuffling the cards of the regime in Khartoum. They were unexpected revolutions erupting through the mobilisation of youth activists that regimes did not take into consideration, having been focusing their precautionary procedures on traditional opposition forces that did not in fact initiate these revolutions.

The biggest surprise to al-Bashir was that the spirit of change that inspired the Arab revolutions has now swept the youth of the ruling National Congress Party. They were affected by it at a time when it was expected to come from opponents. Al-Bashir faced strong and explicit demands for change from the youth and students of his party in a meeting in March 2011. In response, he made a set of promises, including that he would not run for the upcoming presidential elections scheduled to take place in three years, and that he would open the door for the youth to assume leadership positions. Furthermore, he promised to reshuffle the cabinet to leave out anyone over sixty years of age, or anyone who has spent ten years in a ministerial position. He also adopted a campaign to combat corruption which was the talk of the day. However, he did not fulfil his promises when it was the time to do so, as was evident in the formation of the new government. Thus, feelings of restlessness, resentment and suspicion increased among the activists of the ruling party and cast doubt on the possibility of real change, which subsequently led to the induction of protest mobilisation.

The latest "ultimatum war" reflects the amount of restlessness among Sudanese government staff and their feeling of the uncertainty of the future wherein al-Bashir interfered in the ongoing debate in the local press concerning the war. In an interview on state television, he criticised protest mobilisation and dismissed the behaviour of those behind the ultimatums, threatening to hold them accountable for having overtaken the party's institutions. Nonetheless, the most important thing revealed by the criticism is his rejection of the guardianship of any "entity" over the ruling National Congress, a clear indication of the "Islamist movement." This indicates a censored struggle at the peak of power following increasing calls for the revitalisation of its role, which has declined since the coup and has continued to shrink even more after the split. The party that sided with al-Bashir, led by his first deputy, Ali Osman Taha, avoids playing any political role outside the framework of the National Congress, limiting the role of the Movement to Islamist propagation. Insiders say that al-Bashir's statement rejecting what he described as guardianship of "any entity" over the National Conference coincided with controversy between the two parties, one, led by al-Bashir, calling for the dissolution of the "Islamist movement" and its integration in the National Congress, with the other, led by Vice President Ali Osman, calling for the continuity of the movement to perform the roles of Islamic propagation that cannot be done from within the ruling party. The movement is expected to hold its annual conference later this year to elect new leadership as the term of its Secretary General, Ali Osman, is coming to an end. In any case, the mobilisation caused by protest ultimatums is expected to lead to strong debate among Islamists whose criticism of the regime has begun to rise as they increasingly realise that it has reached a dead end. Intense polarisation and conflict are expected to occur over the determination of the future of the "Islamic movement" and its relationship with the ruling regime, which will necessarily have repercussions on the future of the rule.

However, the most negative impact of the Arab Spring on the government in Khartoum is, ironically, the ensuing rise of the Islamists. The Sudanese regime, which is based on "Islamic legitimacy," appeared to be swimming against the tide. While Islamic movements in the region are an integral part of the process of change and emancipation from authoritarian regimes and have won the confidence of the public, the situation of "Islamic" rule in Khartoum is in the opposite direction, being associated with Arab authoritarian regimes doomed to termination by revolutions of change. To make things worse, leaders of emerging Islamist movements in the region have distanced themselves from the rule of the "Islamist movement" in Sudan, considering it an abortive model that caused the division of the country and plunged it into civil wars, tribalism and economic underdevelopment. They prefer the Turkish model of the Justice and Development Party in spite of its secular cover. This position has caused the regime a great moral loss, while unsuccessfully trying to find for itself a role in these transformations, alleging that it initiated the Arab Spring when it rose to power in 1989, discounting its use of force in doing so and in maintaining it.

The South Is Gone but Peace Has Not Come

Khartoum had argued that although consenting to the secession of the south would cost a heavy price, it would bring a radical solution to the regime's external and internal crises in return. The continuation of war, which prompted huge international pressure, would come to an end, thus opening the door for the normalisation of relations with the international community and putting an end to the risk of the popular movement that the regime has seen as a real threat to its stay in power in light of the weakness of the northern opposition. Furthermore, the regime believed the secession would subtract the burdensome cost of war militarily and economically, and would ensure a period of tranquillity for the regime to enjoy additional years in power without disturbances.

However, none of the Sudanese government's considerations in the wager on the Naivasha agreement have not been actualised. It became clear sooner than expected that separation is not a solution to Sudan's crises. In fact, it proved to be the beginning of a more complex situation, as the pace of the worst-case scenario has accelerated. Ironically, al-Bashir himself was the first to warn against it when he expressed his fear that the country would be divided, that peace might not be achieved, and thus that war would erupt once again. This did in fact happen when war broke out in South Kordofan between government forces and the forces of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-Northern Sector. In just two months (in September 2011), another war broke out between the two parties in the Blue Nile. Thus, the two states that are adjacent to South Sudan have formed what has become known as the "New South," which is likened to the historical conflict between the north and south that lasted for decades.

Military challenges increased with the return of war before the regime could enjoy a peace truce after the secession, as the SPLA-Northern Sector formed an alliance with three of the armed movements in Darfur that stood against the peace document reached in the Doha forum between the government and the Liberation and Justice Movement. They formed what become known as the "Sudanese Coalition of the Revolutionary Front," or the Kauda Alliance, named after the location it emerged in and the stronghold of the SPLM (which declared that its goal is to overthrow the regime by all means, including military force) in South Kordofan. Thus, the new "rebellion crescent" now extends from Darfur, in the west, past South Kordofan to the Blue Nile in the south-east.

Although the Kauda Alliance did not receive the international support its founders expected, the US Presidential Envoy to Sudan, Ambassador Princeton Lyman, announced that the United States is against the use of force for regime change and prefers reform, without disclosing how. Furthermore, the coalition has not carried out a large military offensive against the regime yet, and has suffered a major setback following the death of the leader of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), Khalil Ibrahim, a prominent component of the alliance. Despite the setback, which has been promoted by the success of JEM troops in crossing Darfur and joining rebel forces in South Kordofan, the alliance has become a source of major concern to the Sudanese government, which is supposed

to fight an expensive and very stressful guerrilla war with the formal army on more than one front. The Sudanese Armed Forces are exercising full control of the cities in both states, but its control beyond these cities is limited, thus allowing ample room for the guerrilla warfare tactics of the rebels.

Moreover, the "Rebel Crescent" Alliance is an additional source of military pressure on the Sudanese government in light of continued tension with South Sudan because of the failure to settle outstanding issues: oil, the disputed region of Abyei and the demarcation of its borders, and increasing threats of total war between the two parties. Although the two countries signed a non-aggression pact in Addis Ababa under the auspices of the African Union in order to defuse the war following the collapse of oil-sharing talks, the end of support of both countries for rebel groups as provided for in the pact remains unrealistic given that the root causes of the crisis remain unresolved.

Goodbye, Oil

The Sudanese government appears to be confused by the speed and size of the great negative impact the secession had on the economic situation. Secession was expected to end the equal sharing of oil revenues, which were the lifeblood of the Sudanese economy on which it depended over the past decade, between Khartoum and Juba. About two-thirds of the budget and more than ninety percent of foreign exchange resources come from oil. When the South seceded, Khartoum was immediately deprived of generous financial sources coming from oil and was left without any real alternatives to cover the large deficit. The problem is not a direct consequence of secession but pertains to the failure of the Sudanese government's system of economic management. Oil revenues provided the Sudanese government with tens of billions of dollars over the past ten years; and instead of spending these sums on productive projects utilising Sudan's huge natural resource potential for sustainable development, it spent generously on bridging the budget deficit, most of which went to military and security expenditure for securing the regime and to political expenditure for government agencies.

When the government belatedly realised the eminent secession and the consequences of losing oil revenues without being prepared, it spent more time attempting to deny the ensuing economic effects instead of working to rectify the situation as quickly as possible. A mere few months after the secession had passed when the government realised the seriousness of its economic situation, indicated by the depreciation of the local currency (which lost 100% of its value) and inflation. The negative economic effects continue due to the government's faltering attempts to obtain loans or grants from rich Arab countries, and low agricultural production this year, falling fifty percent of the 2011 production.

Conditions are further exacerbated by the fact that the aid program adopted by the government to face this predicament and overcome it within three years has not proven effective – not because of its late adoption, but because the regime has not changed its style of governance. The government has abandoned the first pledges of the aid program regarding reduction and rationalisation of government spending, and has expanded its spending. The formation of the first government after secession came contrary to all expectations to include nearly a hundred ministers, becoming unparalleled in size not only in Sudan but in the whole region. More states have been added, entailing heavier burdens in government spending. Al-Bashir justified this orientation, which is contrary to his previous commitments to form a "svelte" government, by stating that he aims to ensure the greatest amount of "political appeasement" to attract the opposition and include it in the rule.

Deterioration of the economic situation is further exacerbated not only due to bad government performance and inability to meet the requirements of efficient management according to the criteria of economic feasibility, but also because of the reproduction of the war in the "New South". Even if fierce battles against rebel groups are on halt, the need to maintain the state of military and security alert requires

spending more already scarce money on the war and on preparation for it, instead of economic development projects that contribute to the alleviation of the crisis.

Approaching Foreign Intervention

The anxiety the Sudanese government is experiencing is not limited to internal factors such as the calls of regime supporters for reform, the demands of regime opponents for regime change, military pressure from rebel groups constantly enhanced by tension with the South, or economic hardships. Rather, it extends to external factors, the most outstanding of which is the issue of the International Criminal Court, which is still committed to its arrest warrant for President al-Bashir, issued in March 2009, on charges of war crimes and violations in Darfur. The ICC effort was renewed when its prosecutor issued an arrest warrant for the Minister of Defence, First Lieutenant-General Abdel Rahim Mohammed Hussein, a close associate and ally of al-Bashir. According to observers, this move came suddenly as a message after years of silence from influential international parties to crack down on the armed wing of the salvation regime.

Furthermore, indications of international intervention are hovering and could escalate on humanitarian grounds in the backdrop of Washington's accusation against Khartoum of blocking international relief operations to those affected by the return of war in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan. The Sudanese government insists on conditional permission for UN agencies providing humanitarian aid to displaced people through the respective government commission, fearing the leak of humanitarian aid to the rebels, as the government says had happened during Operation Lifeline during the war in south Sudan. However, statements of U.S. officials indicate that they are studying the option of intervention for humanitarian purposes should Khartoum maintain its reluctant position.

Prospects for the Future

The regime's last attempt to meet post-disengagement challenges was its initiative to form an "extensive government" to broaden the base of rule and include major opposition parties, especially the Democratic Union Party led by Mohamed Osman Al-Mirghani, and the Umma Party led by Sadiq al-Mahdi. Several months after the announcement of this government, in which al-Mirghani participated completely and Mahdi participated through his son while his party remained in the opposition, there does not seem to appear any major breakthroughs in the decomposed political scene considering unrelenting and harsh economic pressures, military pressure in the "rebel crescent, " and growing tension with South Sudan, while the Doha Agreement for Peace in Darfur continues to grope its way for implementation amidst enormous challenges.

In view of growing discontent and decreasing government capacity and resources to defuse it, there are a number of scenarios for the development of conditions in Sudan based on the positions the regime would take:

1. Initiating a change to the current exclusionary approach, and agreeing to switch to transitional circumstances whose arrangements are to be agreed upon with the active political and military forces of the opposition, and then drafting a plan for peaceful transformation to complete democracy.
2. Insisting on rejecting any profound shift in the way the regime is handling the crises the country is going through, and resisting any attempt to change, thus pushing the state of congestion to irrevocability – leading to one of three possibilities:

The first is a palace coup supported by an international protection, paving the way for a transitional stage contributing to bringing about peaceful change.

The second is a popular revolt whose cost would be reduced if the army joined, as in the revolutions of October 1964 and April 1985.

The third is that the movements of the "Rebel Crescent" try to prove their effectiveness in their quest to overthrow the government by force, which may lead to an indecisive situation, expanding the range of civil war.

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