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The Overthrow of Omar el-Bechir

Certain pockets of Sudan are still at war, and the Khartoum government is still military. Nothing has changed despite the fact that President Omar el-Bechir has been toppled. For Thierry Meyssan, Sudan's problem, after 30 years of dictatorship by the Muslim Brotherhood, is above all cultural. Current events have no relation with an aspiration for liberty, but only with freedom from starvation.

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During an official ceremony, President Omar el-Bechir (right) in the company of General Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf (left), who overthrew him.

The similarity between events in Algeria, Libya and Sudan evoke what happened in 2011 in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. For some, it was a revolutionary movement against dictatorships, while for others, it was a replay of the organisation by the British of the Great Arab Revolt of 1916.

Concerning 2011, the publication of internal Foreign Office e-mails by whistle-blower Derek Pasquill, the role and coordination of the Muslim Brotherhood in all these countries, and finally the outcome of events, leave no room for doubt – it was indeed a movement prepared over 7 years by the British, and finalised with the help of the United States, to replace the nationalist secular régimes with pro-Western religious régimes.

But what about 2019? It would be pretentious to attempt to answer this question when these events are just beginning, and that we know little about the new actors, or the intentions and capacities of foreign powers. At best, we can try to avoid fooling ourselves by repeating the slogans of Western communications.

We have often written about the situations in Algeria and Libya. Here we will examine the situation in Sudan, and demonstrate the particularity of this country.

The Sudanese President, Omar el-Bechir, was overthrown on 11 April 2019 at a time when massive demonstrations were igniting the country. He had seized power during a military coup d'état 30 years ago, and was expelled by another military coup d'état. During his reign, the country has never known either peace or credible elections.

Sudan has played a particular role on the international stage, that of the Big Bad Guy, while maintaining, more or less under cover, privileged relations with the Western powers, which secretly support him. In this context, the Press, which pretended that it was unaware of the reality of this double-dealing, linked the fall of Omar el-Bechir to a revolution against the crimes which are attributed to him. This is absolutely false.

First of all, the war which bloodied and continues to damage Sudan was seeded before the First World War. A sect inspired by Islam rose up against Anglo-Egyptian colonisation. Considering its chief, the « Mahdi », as its Messiah, it fought against the Anglo-Egyptian Christian-Muslim troops, attempting to impose a way of life which would leave plenty of room for slavery and corporal punishment, and destroying the tombs of saints and mosques of the « infidel » Muslims. In this very particular context, the British did not attempt to convert the country to Christianity as they did elsewhere, but with the help of the Grand Mufti of Egypt and the al-Azar university, they tried to invent a form of Islam compatible with colonisation.

Forty years later, even before the country became independent (1956), the war sparked off again. After a relative cease-fire from 1972 to 1983, it started yet again. Omar el-Bechir only gained power in 1989. He is therefore in no way responsible for the start of this war, of which he became a protagonist only later. Throughout this century, and all across this immense country, the war sets a population which seeks to liberate Sudan from the colonists and impose its own way of life against the animists, the Christians, and the traditional Muslims who resist them.

The two indictments of Omar el-Bechir by the International Criminal Court (ICC), first of all for crimes against humanity and war crimes (2009), then for genocide (2010), are founded on an interpretation of events which refuses to consider their context, and, on principle, loads all responsibility onto the head of state. They are based on the fantastical instructions of the corrupt rapist prosecutor, Luis Moreno Ocampo. They have also been rejected by the Arab League and the African Union.

For a long time, the paratrooper Omar el-Bechir relied on the charisma of the intellectual Hassan el-Tourabi. The two men were members of the Muslim Brotherhood, and attempted to adapt Sudan to the ideology of Hassan el-Banna and Sayyed Qutb. El-Tourabi tried to sideline el-Bechir in 1999, but failed. el-Bechir managed to have him imprisoned in 2004 and 2005. Finally, he pardoned el-Tourabi, who died of natural causes in 2016.

This situation is especially confused since the Muslim Brotherhood was created by the Egyptians in the context of the alliance between the Grand Mufti of Egypt and the British against the Sudanese Madhists – disbanded by the Egyptians after the Second World War, and finally re-activated by the British.

Like all the Muslim Brothers, el-Bechir and el-Tourabi spoke differently according to their interlocutors, who qualified them alternately as sincere or hypocritical, fascists or communists. Besides which, since they reproduced the conflict of the Madhists against the Egyptians, they were out of tune with the rest of the Brotherhood. They therefore adopted the same ambiguity, not only when confronted with the public at large, but also with the other Muslim Brothers.

For 30 years, Omar el-Bechir played his cards skilfully in order to hold on to his place in power, without ever giving a thought to waking the spirit of his people.

He re-established the Sudanese interpretation of the Sharia as a criminal law in the majority of the country. The excision of the clitoris of young girls became the norm – allegedly in the name of Islam. Homosexuality is punishable by death. Flagellation and death by lapidation or crucifixion is still applied, even if they have been less prevalent over the last few years.

It is customary to blame the massacre of the populations of Darfur on Omar el-Bechir alone. This would be to forget that the Baggara militias (the « Janjawid ») were supervised by a private US military company, DynCorp International, tasked by the Pentagon with supporting the crime in this oil-rich area in order to prevent its exploitation by China.

At the international level, Sudan offers the Western powers a neutral zone in the midst of regional ideological conflicts. Sudan therefore shelters anyone who says they are « anti-American », whether the claim is true, like the anti-imperialist Ilich Ramírez Sánchez (« Carlos »), or false, like the NATO auxiliary Oussama ben Laden. Nonetheless, it handed over Carlos to the French, and protected Ben Laden.

Sudan engaged in foreign theatres of war, particularly against Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the Central African Republic, by supporting a bloodthirsty sect, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

During the present period, Sudan has received a billion dollars from Qatar to retire the head of the Arab League mission in Syria – he had refuted the propaganda about a « revolution » against President el-Assad. From 2015, Sudan sent troops to Yemen – many of them minors between 14 and 17 years old - to fight the Houthi Chiites under Saudi-Israëli command. In 2017, it rented the island of Suakin from Turkey for a lease of 99 years in order to control the Red Sea against Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israël. In 2018, Omar el-Bechir came to represent no-one knows who during an official visit to Damascus. Etc... There was no apparent logic to these acts, but they seemed to be a cleverly-mastered tactic making Sudan a special country, simultaneously the friend and the enemy of everyone else.

In any case, the current uprising has no connection with a desire for democracy, but only with the rise in prices which has been shaking the country since the independence of Southern Sudan (2011) and the loss of its oil fields. The economic collapse which followed was especially cruel for the poorer citizens. An elaborate plan by the International Monetary Fund was implemented in 2018. In the space of a few months it caused inflation reaching 70% and, in December, the brutal triple increase in the price of bread, to which the population reacted by taking to the streets. This led to a military coup d'état which swept away Omar el-Bechir. His successor, General Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf, resigned the next morning, leaving his place to General Abdel Fattah Abdelrahmane al-Burhan. He should preside for a transition period of two years before handing power to a civilian government. Meanwhile, the Constitution has been repealed.

Since we do not know what has become of Omar el-Bechir, nor whether his successors are members of the Muslim Brotherhood, it is impossible to explain what is going on.

So far, the situation has become unstable, but nothing has changed, either at the cultural level or the political level. Sudan is still an « Islamic » society, governed by a military dictatorship. These events are a reaction to the fear of starvation that Darfur experienced in the 1980's - a famine which was not caused by the scarcity of food, but by the impossibility for the poor to gain access to any of it. The events have no connection with what is happening in Algeria, which is an educated country, but whose government has been privatised by a cartel of three gangs. They also have no connection with conditions in Libya, where the destruction of the State by NATO and the assassination of Mouamar Kadhafi have made it impossible to reach an agreement between the tribes, a primary condition for a democratic solution.