Sudan's Revolutionary Crisis: Markets, the Quran and Army Officers

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For roape.net Magdi el Gizouli provides a detailed account of the revolutionary crisis in Sudan. Events started on 18 and 19 December last year in the small city of Atbara, but soon spread across the country. However, the forces of counter-revolution in the country are formidable. Importers, wholesale merchants, bankers, military and security officers, large landowners, sharia scholars and preachers embedded in Islamic banks, all have stakes in maintaining in the current regime. Magdi el Gizouli argues that to dismantle their powers and to fulfil the promise of the Atbara moment requires a revolution in Leninist terms. The country and its peoples have been subject to deep and dramatic socio-economic changes of which the current wave of protest is a symptom, it is so far unclear whether the leadership of the protest movement can turn elemental anger into systemic agency.

Sudan, i.e. the rump northern Sudan, is in the throes of a revolutionary crisis. The initial spark of the current wave of protests came from Atbara, a dusty town around 350 kilometres north of Khartoum. Once the capital of Sudan's railways, home to its largest assembly of proletarians and most able trade unionists, and a nursery of its indigenous modernity, Atbara is today a crisis zone of austerity.

Already under Sudan's previous dictator, Jaafar Nimayri (in office from 1969 to 1985), Atbara was punished for the audacity of its working class by cycles of austerity measures targeting the Sudan Railway Workers Union, the 'mother of all Sudanese trade unions', and the dismantling of the very railways that employs these rebellious workers.

Sudan Railways survives today only as a museum as a result of over two decades of US sanctions on Sudan which included a US Treasury ban on some 170 government entities. The combination of lack of spare parts of US manufacture, austerity and privatisation left Sudan's 5,000 km long railway outdated and dysfunctional. Atbara did not fare better. What was once a brimming hub of African modernity today carries the scars of neoliberal assault but little if any of its benefits, laid off workers surviving in an economy of peddling and scavenging and few opportunities for upward mobility apart from employment in the government's ever widening security sector or deadly adventures in Sudan's gold rush.

In its quest for rents, the government of President Bashir handed over fertile lands in the Atbara River basin and beyond to a motley band of Arab Gulf investors who grow animal fodder for export to their home economies. In July 2014, the government of Sudan signed off a 99 years lease to Saudi Arabia granting the sister country land rights over an expanse of around a million acres to be irrigated from the newly erected twin dams of Upper Atbara and Setit close to the Eritrean border, a US$1.9 billion project funded by a set of loans from China, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

It was also in the vicinity of Atbara that the industrious Sudanese had to grapple with the disciplinary and lethal edge of international finance. In March 2018, Atbara Hospital received the corpse of a 30 years old man lethally shot by Russian security guards in a dispute between a Russian company that had been granted mining rights by the government in Wadi al-Sungheir and Sudanese artisanal miners who insisted on trespassing come what may. In their attempt to resist the takeover by the Russian company, the Sudanese artisanal miners banded together and apparently ransacked some of the company's superior machinery in Luddite fashion and threatened to storm its administrative offices. Five other miners were seriously injured but survived to tell the story.

Atbara in many ways is exemplary of the conundrums facing heartland Sudan, a capital-poor rural agricultural economy unable to sustain livelihoods, receiving spurts of international capital mainly from the Arab Gulf with a decisively extractive plan of action, as a consequence land dispossession and chaotic urbanisation into an import-dependent urban economy governed by the interests of mercantile capital. Starting in December 2018 Sudan is currently witnessing the longest and widest wave of popular protest against the regime of President Bashir since its inception in 1989. It would be no overstatement to say that Sudan has arrived at a moment of revolutionary crisis according to Lenin's definition, quoted here at length:

> [1] when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the "upper classes", a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent of the oppressed classes burst forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for "the lower classes not to want" to live in the old way; it is also necessary that "the upper classes should be unable" to live in the old way; [2] when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes has grown more acute than usual; [3] when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses…. (Lenin, 1964).

A postmodern eye might dismiss these formulations of systemic social conflict around a class axis as a discredited metanarrative of no worth but how does one make sense of politics in times of economic/political crisis? Or how does one comprehend the return of the masses to politics? If anything, the ongoing wave of protests in Sudan has resurrected the notion of mass political action after a long historical break where politics was effectively hijacked by powerful contenders in government and in opposition who rotate in cycles around negotiation tables according to a rationale that Alex de Waal has aptly described as a 'political marketplace' (de Waal, 2015).

Events started on 18 and 19 December last year in Atbara. Pupils of Atbara Industrial School took to the streets angered by the tripling of bread prices following a long period of bread shortages and were soon joined by day labourers from the town market and students from other schools as well as a local university. Within hours, the headquarters of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) were on fire, local government officials had disappeared from the scene, their symbols of authority, cars and offices, ablaze and local security cabals were yet to devise a response to the rebellious young women and men who had taken control of the streets. Similar events unfolded in the following days a in a string of mostly provincial towns, Dongola, Gedaref, Rahad, Nuhud as well as the capital Khartoum.

Soon enough an umbrella of professional syndicates, the Sudanese Professionals Association, emerged as the leadership 'candidate' for the mass movement. The Professionals Association borrowed its organisational form from Sudan's two previous precedents of popular uprising, October 1964 and April 1985. Its elatedly nationalist political discourse echoes the poetics of the Graduates Congress, the first political vehicle proper of the Sudanese intelligentsia. The really existing Sudan of 2019 is another theatre of action, however. The country and its peoples have been subject to deep and dramatic socio-economic changes of which the current wave of protest is a symptom, it is so far unclear whether the leadership of the protest movement can turn symptomatic anger into systemic agency.

Wheat subsidies and the social contract

In November 2017, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) issued a separate document (Fund, 2017) ahead of its regular consultation report with the Sudanese government which came out in December. Those interested in Sudan's budgetary affairs, have learned over time to read highlights of the annual budget from what is for practical purposes an 'IMF instruction sheet.' The document prepared by three IMF economists involved in the September 2017 talks with the Sudanese government tackled primarily 'consumer subsidies.'

Political stability in Sudan's heartland, where the government's authority it today more seriously challenged than ever before, comes at a price that includes the maintenance of affordable bread and fuel prices, not an unusual situation in the region (Salvurakis, 2008). Sudan imports almost all of the wheat it consumes, around 2.5 billion tonnes per year, and since the independence of South Sudan in 2011 its fuel needs far exceed its local oil production.

The government's deep involvement in the fuel and wheat market is designed to mitigate these political risks and maintain social order. In that sense, bread subsidies constitute a critical component of an implicit social contract between the government and the middle class, and the reduction of the subsidy has been consistently associated with urban unrest, for instance in 1992 and in 2013.

The long hiatus of political accommodation between 1995 and 2013 in Sudan's heartland is runs parallel with Sudan's oil years, when oil production from the warzones of southern Sudan provided the rulers of Khartoum with a stable rent from a peak oil production of around 450,000 barrels per day (bpd). At the height of oil plenty GDP growth reached 10%, inflation dropped to around 8% and Sudan's fiscal deficit to around 1.9%. Transfers from the central government to the states multiplied between 2004 and 2007 from a meagre 1.5% to 8% of GDP, approximately 47% of total government expenditure in 2008, reflecting the dividends of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) that brought an end to Africa's longest civil war.

To maintain political loyalties and satisfy the demands of peace the government had to spend generously, eventually running a current account deficit of ca. US$4.2 billion from 2004 to 2008 on the background of a total debt of around US$33.7 billion (today the figure stands at around US$50 billion). Oil brought with it its Dutch disease and Sudan's non-oil exports (mainly gum Arabic, sesame and livestock) slumped as the Sudanese currency appreciated and public expenditure increased. The flow of external revenues fed into networks of nepotism and self-enrichment that became a defining feature of the economy and of government.

The CPA granted the southern Sudanese the right of self-determination. They were offered the choice between unity with the Sudan under the system outlined in the CPA or secession to form a new country of their own. An unchallenged majority opted for the latter and South Sudan was declared an independent nation in 2011. Overnight, the central government in Khartoum lost 75% of its foreign exchange earnings and 45% of general government finances, a budgetary loss of US$300 million per month. Inflation soared to levels around 40% and the value of money diminished within months by around 60%.

Unsurprisingly, relations between the old and the new Sudan proved difficult to manage as both sides invested in allies across the border to secure leverage and win concessions on the post-secession negotiations table. Conflict resumed in Sudan's South Kordofan and the Blue Nile and a rebellion pitting political and ethnic rivals against each other engulfed South Sudan within months of its independence.

The economy of the rump Sudan has been in free fall ever since. Virtually all economic indicators took a deep dip including foreign direct investment, the value of the currency, public revenues and expenditure and sources of external grants while inflation and the value of imports soared. The devaluation of the local currency forced an effective dollarisation of the economy and as a consequence precipitated a severe shortage of foreign currency and unbounded speculation in the foreign exchange market.

The government's response was to initiate a round of austerity measures reminiscent of the early 1990s. Public expenditure was cut and taxation was increased. The post-secession budget of 2011 included measures slashing fuel, sugar and bread subsidies, salary cuts and a 20% reduction of development budgets affecting all public corporations. The 2012 budget followed on with an increase in value added tax in the telecoms sector from 20% to 30% and the 2013 budget added another layer of taxes on the licensing of vehicles and foreign travel permits (Sharfi, 2014).

As an immediate consequence of the loss of oil revenues, Sudan's foreign exchange reserves were stripped down within a few years from a maximum of US$1.87 billion in 2005 to a meagre US$0.18 billion in 2017. The government's attempts to offset this severe shortage through loans and grants from regional allies, foremost Qatar, offered temporary relief at moments of severe crisis but did little to resolve the structural deficits of the economy.

As part of its economic liberalisation package in the early 1990 the government had adopted a floating exchange rate doing away with an earlier dual system. A stable exchange rate emerged thanks to the flow of foreign direct investments (FDI) related to the exploration of oil and subsequently oil revenues. The global economic crisis of 2008 precipitated a series of fluctuations as oil prices fell. With the loss of oil in 2011 the government resorted to fixing an official exchange rate in an attempt to control domestic prices for imports including wheat and fuel and dampen inflation as the value of the currency continued to depreciate. Inevitably, investors and businesses responded by shifting their money abroad. The Bank of Sudan attempted in vain to control the flight of capital by imposing import restrictions and capital controls thus triggering further shortages in goods as domestic importers were handicapped by increasingly limited supplies of foreign currency.

The chaotic government policy delivered during the period 2016-2018 four different US dollar exchange rates, an official central bank rate primarily for government transactions, a wheat import rate, a commercial bank rate intended to encourage Sudanese expatriates to send their remittances through the banking system and an unofficial parallel rate which exceeded the latter three by an ever-widening margin.

In response to incessant prodding from the IMF the government decided in January 2018 to devalue the Sudanese pound by around 60% and launched a new unified official exchange rate while the parallel rate continued to jump ahead. This was followed by a second devaluation in October 2018 when the government entrusted a newly formed council of bankers and foreign currency traders with the task of setting the country's exchange rate themselves. The stubborn margin between the official and parallel rates remained hard to overcome as the demand for foreign currency remains high and supply dear.

The IMF opposes subsidies' provision with an uncompromising ideological zeal. Its extraordinary document set out to detail this position and provide statistical evidence in its favour. This doctrinaire opposition to subsidies and the arguments devised by the IMF economists in that regard were the mainstay of government propaganda for the following year. President Bashir and his lieutenants did not tire of repeating the IMF mantra to an unwilling audience including their own parliamentary caucus and NCP chapters in the states.

The IMF stated in its November 2017 report:

> Sudan maintains a number of consumer subsidies which ostensibly are aimed at protecting socially vulnerable groups. These primarily include subsidies on energy (fuel products and electricity) and wheat products. However, there is a large body of international experience showing that subsidies are an inefficient policy instrument to protect lower income groups (Fund, 2017).

The IMF calculated that a removal of subsidies would result in a 216% increase in retail prices of fuel products, bread and electricity tariffs with a real income loss of ca. 15% when direct and indirect effects are considered. In total the fiscal costs of consumer subsidies amount to around 5.2% of Sudan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 4.2% for energy products and 1.0% for wheat, a percentage that equals the wheat subsidy average for countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), but is lower than in Tunisia (1.75%) and Egypt (2.5%).

To buttress its argument the IMF provided statistics that prove the regressive nature of the fuel subsidies. People in the highest income quintile of the population assume almost a 50% share of the fuel subsidies compared to a meagre 5% for people in the lowest income quintile. Conspicuously absent from the IMF comparison charts is the distribution of wheat subsidies, probably because it does not fit the model. There is also no explanation at all whether in the IMF document or in the original report published 2014 and titled 'Reducing fuel subsidies and expanding social assistance' of how the 5 quintiles were generated and what the actual cut-offs are. You would have to trust the IMF with your subsidy to take their assessment at face value.

There is also an interpretation gap that is worth addressing. It is arguably the case that the richest 20% benefit the most from fuel and electricity subsidies while the poorest 20% much less so. The IMF calculated that the lower 20% would suffer a 9% loss in real incomes as a consequence of the removal of fuel subsidies alone. What it did not dwell on is how the removal of subsidies would impact the 60% in between, your proverbial middle classes as it were. For these the difference between to subsidy or not to subsidy will determined their class position . The removal of subsidies arguably endangers their class status and threatens to push them down the social ladder. This might partially explain the social composition of the protesters in Khartoum's streets and social geography of the protests.

While subaltern elements predominated in the protests in Sudan's provincial towns, the protests in Khartoum are so far the preserve of the country's threatened middle classes, highly educated professionals, lawyers, doctors, engineers as well as university students. The famed strongholds of protest are upper middle-class neighbourhoods, where wheat bread bought from modern bakeries is a basic food item. Khartoum's peripheral zones, home to the war displaced and the abjectly impoverished are yet to join in the 'national' anger. In these neighbourhoods with names like zagalona (they threw us away) and Korea (implying the end of the world) bread, whether subsidised or not, is too expensive for the regular consumer and dietary patterns approximate rural Sudan, where sorghum and millet continue to be the staple diet of the majority.

To mitigate the impacts of the removal of subsidies the IMF, not the International Union of Muslim Scholars, advised the expansion of the state-controlled Zakat (alms) system, a religious obligation of adult able-bodied Muslims that the Sudanese state has hijacked for political utility. The IMF's enthusiasm for Zakat is the consequence of a 'neoliberal' policy in vogue since the mid-1990s, for cash transfers to the poor (Lavinas, 2013). Sudan's statist Zakat system is in a way well adapted to serve such a purpose and can neatly fit in a model of social welfare that is 'targeted' and not 'universal', 'financialised' instead of a decommodified provision of goods and services, a system that instead of recognition of needs and equal access of public goods concedes particular entitlements to certain vulnerable groups and stigmatises rather than empowers.

To the ears of the middle-class protesters, the very notion of Zakat is an insult. Many made the point that their anger was not about bread but about freedom and dignity. Their rally cry so far has been 'freedom, peace and justice.' Protesters shout slogans against their Islamist adversaries in government – 'we will stamp every koz', a metaphor of greed and rapaciousness.

Market authoritarianism and counter-revolution

The convergence of market authoritarianism and political Islam, austerity and Zakat, is a formula that Sudan's Islamist rulers devised to further an economic agenda that they ascribe to but did not necessarily author, a global agenda as it were, capitalist penetration with an Islamist face. When investigating Sudan's predicament, the tenor is usually laid on the second element, the Islamist face. Political Islam provided an idiom and a legitimising ideology for a process of capitalist penetration that had reached political deadlock with the outbreak of the 1983 civil war and the toppling of Jaafar Nimayri in 1985.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that political Islam replaced the sectarianism of the Sudan's historical political heavyweights, the Umma Party and the Democratic Unionist Party, as the ideology of the ruling segments of the Sudanese bourgeoisie and the religious state became the embodiment of counter-revolution.

The basic components of the economic agenda under question have remained essentially the same since 1978, the date that Nimayri's finance minister, Badr al-Din Suleiman – the author of Sudan's extensive privatisation programme in the early 1990s – signed the first of a series of stabilisation programmes with the IMF and the World Bank, the so-called 'Economic Recovery Programme.' The highlights of this agenda included currency devaluation; liberalisation of trade; bank credit restrictions; interest rate increases; curtailment of the money supply; reduction of the government's budget through social spending cuts, massive layoffs and removal of subsidies on goods and other consumption items; removal of all controls on profit repatriation; privatisation of government-owned enterprises and social services (Prendergast, 1989).

Sudan turned to the IMF for rescue after a series of disastrous experiments with 'development' writ large, megaprojects of scale in the 1970s under the Breadbasket Strategy focused on food production for the Arab world. By 1978 Sudan's indebtedness and trade and budgetary deficits called for salvation. Nimayri's government had accumulated a total debt from international and Arab financial institutions amounting to about US$2.4 billion . Khartoum was no longer able to meet its financial obligations to its debtors, equal to around 17.9% of its export earnings.

Right about the time Badr al-Din Suleiman, was negotiating a way out for Nimayri's financial troubles, businessmen with a reputation for nightly prayer rather than hard drink had forged an alliance with Prince Mohammed al-Faisal bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud, a Saudi royal and financier, to establish an Islamic bank in Sudan. Faisal Islamic Bank, a bank with an 'Islamic orientation' and 'Sudanese features' was inaugurated in 1977, the third in the Middle East following on Dubai Islamic Bank (1975) and the Islamic Commercial Bank of Abu Dhabi (1977). Within a few years Sudan, and even before the imposition of the 1983 sharia laws and the outright prohibition of interest, Islamic banks had gained the upper hand in the financial sector (Abdel Mohsin, 2005).

Islamic banks provided access to foreign capital – the surplus petrodollars of the oil boom in the

Gulf, at a time when the financial sector in Sudan was emaciated by Nimayri's 1970 decision to nationalise the entire commercial banking sector and the restrictions he imposed on foreign capital. Foreign banks were allowed into the financial market again by the mid-1970s but were prohibited from dealing directly with Sudanese citizens, only export-import agents and Sudanese nationals working abroad. Islamic banks in a way provided a relief to a capital-stripped commercial sector and were a tool of empowerment for the Islamic movement as a class, a credit system where political loyalty was quite often the only collateral asked of devotees. Their ideological attraction for a devoted Muslim is of course obvious.

Sudan's Islamic banking system maintains a nominal ban on interest and offers instead variations on profit and loss sharing contracts or fixed-income modes of finance. Supervisory boards of Islamic sharia scholars are embedded in the management of banks and oversee their activities. These sharia supervisors have the authority to sanction bank operations which they judge to be contradictory to sharia regulations and file complaints against individual banks or bank officials to the Bank of Sudan. Their regulatory behaviour is however often a matter of convenience. As senior employees, often of multiple banks, they rarely exert an independent function.

Rather than attract capital the system discourages lenders wary of financial losses. The total amount of deposits in Sudanese commercial banks is estimated at around 12% of GDP (2015). This structural deficiency is compounded by an entrenched lack of confidence in the banking sector born out of a history of economic and political instability.

Importantly, for two decades (1997-2017) Sudan's banks were effectively cut off from the global financial system by a comprehensive regime of US trade and financial sanctions. Under these conditions the banking sector remains weak and undercapitalised and its contribution of credit to the private sector was a meagre 6.7% of GDP at the end of 2016.

Commercial banks operate under the close supervision of the Bank of Sudan, an arrangement often justified by the recurrent risk of insolvency. In fact, the government has come as a result of repeated interventions to partially own 41% of the commercial banks. One pertinent issue has been the deployment of bank loans as tools of political patronage. During the oil decade the ratio of non-performing loans in commercial banks reached 26% compared to the 2017 figure of 3%. Omdurman National Bank for instance serves as a cash reservoir for officers of the armed forces and the security establishment and was rescued by the Bank of Sudan from impending bankruptcy in 2007. Likewise, the Bank of Livestock Wealth was declared insolvent in 2014 and the Bank of Sudan stepped in to acquire 55% of its shares.

Akin to Sudan's troubled 1980s, economic freewheeling outpaced the formal economy in post-oil Sudan. A parallel market emerged and expanded with a main focus in the foreign sector of the economy. Mis-invoicing and smuggling of exports and imports, the funneling of remittances from Sudanese expatriates to the parallel market for foreign exchange and the consolidation and expansion of rent-seeking activities came to dominate economic activity.

Sudan's post-oil economic woes came to a peak in 2018 with the collapse of the Sudanese pound, an acute shortage of foreign currency, runaway prices and inflation rates beyond 60%. The rise in prices is the third fastest in the world in recent months behind war-torn South Sudan and Venezuela. To protect the Sudanese pound the Bank of Sudan ordered severe restrictions on cash withdrawals resulting in an extreme liquidity crunch. Bank customers were initially barred from withdrawing more than the equivalent of US$160 in February and March 2017 going down to no more than US$17 US a day in September 2017.

The overall result has been a further decline in deposits as individual customers and businesses scuttled to acquire foreign currency and stash their money in their homes and offices. Out of options, the government resorted to printing higher denomination bank notes and appealed to the business sector to deposit their money in the banks. This invitation came with a lift of all import restrictions and a generous downgrade of the preferential customs US dollar exchange rate for importers, from 18 Sudanese pounds to 15 pounds compared to the official exchange rate of around 47 Sudanese pounds and an informal market rate in the range of 70-80 Sudanese pounds. Instead of subsidising bread, the government opted to subsidise loyal import traders.

Counterrevolution and revolutionary action

What could this moment of crisis deliver? Going back to the Lenin quote above, he goes on to say:

> not every revolutionary situation gives rise to a revolution…A revolution arises only out of a situation in which the above-mentioned objective changes are accompanied by a subjective change, namely, the ability of the revolutionary class to take revolutionary mass action strong enough to break (or dislocate) the old government, which never, not even in a period of crisis, 'falls,' if it is not toppled over (Lenin, 1964).

The political instincts of the network of professionals at the helm of Sudan's mass movement suggest a friendly coup as their preferred route out of the current crisis. So far, army officers are the only absentees from the list of modern professionals, doctors, lawyers, engineers, judges etc, who constitute the umbrella Sudanese Professionals Association. The political formula for this demand is a transitional government of technocrats with room for a military sovereign à la Egypt's President Sisi.

President Bashir hijacked this proposition with a series of decisions on 22 February 2019. He declared a state of emergency, dissolved the central government as well as all state governments and replaced state governors with a coterie of military and security officers. The embattled president announced himself above the fray and promised equidistance from all political actors. He handed over his authorities as chairman of the ruling NCP to a new deputy, Ahmed Haroun, a man who like the president is indicted by the International Criminal Court for egregious crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in the course of the armed conflict in Sudan's western region Darfur.

As a new prime minister, President Bashir picked Mohamed Tahir Eila, a former state governor with a reputation for business acumen and little regard for the rules of conduct among Sudan's veteran Islamists. As new vice president, he appointed his defence minister, Ahmed Awad ibn Auf, a military intelligence officer highly respected in the corps and a possible candidate for takeover. President Bashir appointed a number of reliably loyal figures as ministers in sensitive positions, defence, foreign affairs and the ministry of federal government, but left a majority of positions open for willing invitees to the cabinet, probably for the celebrated technocrats as it were.

The president's precise chess moves were widely interpreted as a severe blow to his Islamist allies who dominate the ruling NCP and as a militarisation of government harking back to the early days of his rule. But the protests did not abate. The young women and men who parade Khartoum's streets undeterred were not satisfied with the 'reforms' of President Bashir, they continued to demand loudly in the streets, 'must fall, that is all.'

The forces of counter-revolution, it must be said, are however many and dubious. The Islamic Movement that pioneered Sudan's version of neoliberal transformation has through the years metamorphosed into a social class with a shared relation to the means of production. Importers, wholesale merchants, bankers, military and security officers, large landowners who made fortunes from the reworking of land tenure system in favour of commercial agriculture, sharia scholars and preachers embedded in Islamic banks and even militia members for whom Sudan's peripheral wars and foreign deployments (for instance in Yemen) have become a livelihood all have stakes in maintaining the current regime. To dismantle their powers requires a revolution in Leninist terms, the promise of the Atbara moment.

Today, President Bashir's position is truly grave. In many ways he is already a relic from the past. Contending succession plots are being loudly hatched from close quarters in the coalition of counter-revolutionary forces that sustain the current regime with the involvement of regional powers, the Qataris and their allies versus the Saudi-Emirati-Egyptian axis and by extension the Israelis and their US patrons. Between these competitors, Bashir might just survive another day.

If and when the network of professionals at the helm of the current mass movement succeed in bringing him down in alliance with these powers or apart from them is speculation. Whatever combination of forces does will have to devise a formula for satisfying the country's appetite for imported wheat. The IMF men will arrive at the doors of the finance ministry the day after the regime is toppled, with their infamous prescriptions, your subsidies or your loan!

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