

The civil war threat in Sudan

by Thierry Lalevée

Only a few weeks after the April 6 coup which overthrew Gaafar Numayri, another coup may already be in the making in Khartoum. Should it happen, no one has any doubt that it would plunge the country into a pro-Soviet shift, a bloody civil war, and the ultimate partition of the country with the "independence" of the southern region dominated by the Dinga tribe.

The ingredients of such a coup are now all too visible. But uppermost is that not one of the basic economic problems of Sudan have been tackled. And indeed, how could they be? Four to seven million Sudanese verge on starvation thanks to the loan "conditionalities" of the International Monetary Fund, backed by Washington.

Washington and Saudi Arabia did promise an "emergency financial package," but nothing concrete has been forthcoming. Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, on the other hand, has given a precise figure, \$5 billion—that is, were Khartoum to break with the United States.

Many know that Libya promised Morocco billions which never materialized, but the promise's precision helps make it tempting, as does the fact that Libya holds some of the purse-strings of the rebels in the south. Even without money, Qaddafi could deliver peace in southern Sudan!

Guerrilla warfare between Khartoum and the southern forces of Col. John Garang, backed by both Libya and Ethiopia—hence, the Soviet Union—has cost the government \$2 million a day since November 1983—close to \$1 billion. Numayri could not afford it. Nor can the new regime.

The junta is already displaying a coolness toward Washington. On April 15, Gen. Siwar ad Dahab told the press that he wanted good relations with Libya and Ethiopia and wanted to re-establish relations with the Soviet Union and Syria. Together with a declaration a day earlier that Sudan would abide by IMF conditionalities—the very measures Dahab had personally ordered repealed while Numayri was abroad a day before the coup—this gives a strange and contradictory picture that can only be taken as an indication of how transitional Ad Dahab's junta is.

Lobbying for power

Directly influencing the new regime are, first, the traditional Sufi sects such as the Khatmiyya to which General Dahab belongs and which supported the Union with Egypt against the British in the 19th century. There is also the Ansar

Sufi sect of Sadeq al Mahdi. A bitter enemy of the British in the last century, it ended joining hands with them against the Khatmiyya and Egyptians. Until Numayri's 1969 coup, the Khatmiyyas and Ansars shared political power in Sudan.

Since 1969, many new parties have emerged, and now, they are all lobbying for power. For example, the shadowy forces of the Iraqi Baath party: "If a young military turk were to overthrow Dahab, there is an 80% chance that he will be from the Baath party," was the assessment of several knowledgeable sources, who stressed Baath infiltration of the army. The Baathists are reportedly also powerful within the trade-union movement, which organized mass anti-Numayri demonstrations in the days before the coup. This is especially true of the medical trade union of Gizzouli Daffala, mooted to be the next civilian prime minister. The alternative to Daffala would be Mirghani el Nasri of the lawyers union, who was a founding-member of the Islamic Socialist Party.

Muslim Brotherhood comeback

However, now controlling the streets is the Muslim Brotherhood of Hassan al Turabi, the former chief justice under Numayri whose short stay in jail during that regime's final weeks gave him a new political lease on life. On April 13 and 16, two political rallies of the Brotherhood gathered no less than 40,000 sympathizers.

Turabi didn't blush while declaring that the Brotherhood had always opposed Numayri. He launched a challenge to the new military regime: "We are ready to die fighting to defend the Islamic law," the brutal *Sharia*, and announced the creation of an Islamic National Front to defend the *Sharia*. Upon visiting a Khartoum jail, journalists discovered that it includes the use of crucifixion. In fact, another leader of the Brotherhood, Ahmed Hajj, denounced Numayri's corruption and called for his crucifixion!

With little voting strength (8%), the real power of the Brotherhood is financial, and linked to institutions associated with the Saudi Royal Family. Most important is the Faisal Islamic Bank, closely associated with the banking empire of Prince Mohammed al Faisal's Dar al Maal al Islami. Interestingly enough, Faisal bank was one of the first institutions to be attacked by demonstrators in late March. They accused it of giving the Brotherhood cheap credit for speculation on food prices. Turabi is able to actually buy participants in his rallies—cheap in a country where more than 10 million are starving.

Addressing the issue of the Sudanese Christians and animists in the South, Turabi declared on April 16: "They will all convert to Islam as soon as they understand that it is a religion of tolerance and justice for all." With the symbol of the *Jihad* (holy war) in the background, such a declaration is the kind of call for civil war which the new regime cannot tolerate. Shortly, it will have to confront the Brotherhood. Unless the powerful financial backers of the Brotherhood decide that the stability of Sudan is more important than a few fanatics, this could mean mass bloodshed.