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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Terrorism and Political Violence

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftpv20>

### The Sudan under Islamist rule

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Published online: 21 Dec 2007.

To cite this article: Gabriel R. Warburg (1996) The Sudan under Islamist rule, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 8:2, 25-42, DOI: [10.1080/09546559608427344](https://doi.org/10.1080/09546559608427344)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546559608427344>

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# The Sudan under Islamist Rule

GABRIEL R. WARBURG

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On 30 June 1989 a group of army officers seized power in Sudan and overthrew the democratically elected government headed by al-Mahdi. The coup was engineered by the NIF, founded in 1985 by the Muslim Brothers. This article examines how the Muslim Brothers succeeded in penetrating the army and gaining a foothold within the officer corps, and attempts to explain why a political-religious movement opted for a military takeover. The political and ideological basis of the NIF are examined, including its adamant insistence on an Islamic state. The Sudan presents a unique case study: its three major political parties are led by leaders of Muslim movements who all support the promulgation of an Islamic constitution leading to an Islamic state. Why could Sudan not agree on an Islamic agenda without resorting to a military coup?

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On 30 June 1989, a group of army officers headed by Lt. Col. 'Umar Hasan al-Bashir overthrew the democratically elected government of al-Sadiq al-Mahdi and assumed power in Sudan. It was the third military coup since the Sudan became independent in January 1956 and the second time that the military had seized power with the blessing of a political party. However, President Bashir's dictatorship marks the first time that a military junta assumed power in order to enforce a radical Islamist regime.

The first time the military intervened, in November 1958, they did so under the authority of the army's high command and were led by the chief of staff, General Ibrahim 'Abbud. The move was prompted by the Prime Minister, 'Abdallah Khalil. Khalil was the leader of the Umma Party, the political organization of the Ansar. His initiative had the tacit approval of Sayyid 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi and Sayyid 'Ali al-Mirghani, the respective leaders of the Ansar and the Khatmiyya, the two major Islamic religious-political blocs in the Sudan. Bashir's coup, 31 years later, was inspired by the National Islamic Front (NIF), the largest opposition party at the time. The NIF feared that the government would rescind the Islamic Laws, implemented by the Numayri regime in September 1983 with the active support of the Muslim Brothers, in order to achieve a compromise with the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA), which was leading the civil war.

A second similarity between 'Abbud and Bashir is that both of them denied the link between a political party and their respective coups. In 'Abbud's case, the truth came to light in 1965 when, following the regime's downfall, both the military and several of the civilians who had been

involved admitted their complicity in the 1958 plot. In Bashir's case, the collusion of the NIF and its leader, Dr. Hasan 'Abdallah al-Turabi, can be assumed despite the denials of both Bashir and Turabi. Bashir's denial, in an interview with the London *Observer*, even went so far as to claim: 'We have no relations with the NIF, before, during or after the coup. We have no intention of co-operating with them'.<sup>1</sup> Irrespective of Bashir's rhetoric, it was not long before an alliance between the NIF and the new military junta was firmly established.

The second military coup occurred in May 1969 and was led by Col. Muhammad Ja'far al-Numayri. It started out as a secular-leftist regime following in the footsteps of President Nasir and the Egyptian Free Officers. However, after 1977 it changed course and gradually became identified with the Islamist movement. The shift culminated in the implementation of the so-called 'Shari'a Laws' in September 1983 and with the attempt to establish an Islamic state. In fact Hasan al-Turabi, who was then leader of the Muslim Brothers and had opposed Numayri in the early stages of his regime, became one of his closest collaborators after 1977.<sup>2</sup>

An additional peculiarity of the Sudan relevant to this study is the fact that its Islamist movements have dominated the political scene since the state achieved its independence in January 1956. The oldest and largest of these movements is the Mahdist Umma Party, led by al-Sadiq al-Mahdi. Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi is the great grandson of Muhammad Ahmad, the 19th century Mahdi of the Sudan. The Mahdist movement was started in June 1881 and succeeded in overthrowing the Turco-Egyptian rulers which had dominated the Sudan since 1821. It established an Islamic autocracy that was subsequently destroyed by the Anglo-Egyptian invaders in 1898. A second religious-political force is the Khatmiyya Sufi order. Surfacing in the 19th century as well, it stood in alliance with the Turco-Egyptian regime in opposition to the Mahdiyya. The Khatmiyya Sufi order continued to play an important political role during the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium and since Sudan achieved independence in 1956 has remained a prominent component of the Democratic Unionist Party. The third and youngest of the movements is Turabi's NIF, founded by the Muslim Brothers in alliance with several Sufi orders in April 1985. Not unlike the FIS in Algeria or the Palestinian Hamas, it is a militant Islamist movement that views itself as modernist.

Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi and Hasan al-Turabi, the leaders of the Ansar and the NIF, besides being brothers-in-law, have much in common. Both were born in the early 1930s and, after receiving a traditional Muslim education, went on to study in secular schools and universities. They both then became leading politicians in the 1960s. As leader of the Umma Party, Sadiq served as prime minister from 1966 to 1967 and again from 1986 to 1989. Turabi has

led the Muslim Brothers since 1964 and, following a long period of collaboration with the Umma Party, became a close ally of President Numayri in 1977.<sup>3</sup> Following Numayri's downfall in April 1985, Turabi's newly founded NIF succeeded in becoming the third largest party in the 1986 elections. It then participated in the coalition government led by al-Sadiq al-Mahdi. It is in this period that Turabi and his followers became involved in the military coup which overthrew the democratically elected government and replaced it with the present military-Islamist regime under Bashir. It is this phase of the NIF's political evolution that is the topic of this study.<sup>4</sup>

### Islamism, Democracy and Power

Hasan al-Turabi and the NIF, despite their participation in the 1986 elections and their subsequent inclusion in the government, are committed neither to the observance of law nor to a peaceful transition to an Islamic order. In this respect, they possess much of the same self-righteousness of many modern Islamists who look down on their 'less Islamic' compatriots and seek to impose their superior version of Islam on them. In Sudan most Muslims, whether supporters of Ansar or Khatmiyya, viewed the arrogance of Turabi and his followers with growing suspicion, bordering on hostility, following Turabi's enthusiastic cooperation with Numayri and the Muslim Brothers' support of the 'Shari'a Laws' in September 1983. After Numayri's fall from power in April 1985, the Khatmiyya and the Ansar also voiced their opposition to the rigidity of the NIF regarding its position on an Islamic constitution and its refusal to compromise with the non-Muslim South. According to Turabi, the victory of Islam could only be brought about through modern Islamist movements and through the application of *ijtihad*.<sup>5</sup>

[T]he modern Islamist movement looks like the only hope for rescuing modern Muslim societies from the endemic cycle of instability caused by the inherent illegitimacy of the secular political systems ruling over them.... For a worldview that remains unchallenged theoretically, that places its adherents at the centre of the universe as the divinely-sanctioned leaders of humanity, replacements are hard to find, especially if they all entailed third- or fourth-class membership in the community of nations.<sup>6</sup>

Islamists like Turabi claim that their movement is basically democratic in origin and only 'became revolutionary because there was very little option left. The domestic order denied them freedom of organization and freedom of expression.' In a way, the Islamist movement was 'exiled from democracy'. Since Islamists view western democracy as corrupt and hypocritical, they do not believe that they can achieve power democratically.

Indeed, even should they gain the majority in democratic elections, they do not believe that they would be granted legal recognition, let alone power. The cancellation of Algeria's December 1991 election results by the military provides them with an apt illustration to that effect. To quote al-Turabi, 'Islam seems to be inevitable' and 'if you want to avoid Islam, you have to avoid the ballot box completely because if you resort to it, Islam will win'.<sup>7</sup>

The alternative for Sudanese Islamists was to act by force, stage a revolution, and impose their conception of Islamic norms on society. As members of the Muslim Brothers have done in other countries, the Sudanese Muslim Brothers began to infiltrate into the Sudan Defence Force (SDF) officer corps. They first did so in 1955, in the wake of the 1952 Egyptian Free Officers' coup and with the active help of a member of the secret organization of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood who had escaped to Sudan following an assassination attempt on President Nasir in November 1954. However, it was a rather clumsy effort of a politically immature movement.

Following President Numayri's 'National Reconciliation' attempt in July 1977, the Muslim Brothers and Turabi undertook a concerted effort with a definite political goal and succeeded in gaining a solid foothold in the military. Their better-educated membership, experience, superior organization and relative financial affluence gained as a result of the new Islamic banking system introduced by Numayri with al-Turabi's prompting, enabled the Brethren to achieve a high degree of success in the army. Their first initiatives took the form of voluntary religious teaching and prayer services, all with the blessing of the SDF's high command. Second, they urged their graduates to join the officer corps following the conclusion of their medical, engineering or accountancy studies. Third, they searched for former Muslim Brothers and their relatives serving in the SDF and lured those that they could back into the movement.

All these efforts were undertaken during the years 1978–85. Throughout this period, conditions within both the Sudan and the SDF were ripe for revolt due to a deteriorating economy, growing corruption and renewal of the 1983 civil war. The Brethren had two principal aims: the creation of conditions within the army which would enable the Muslim Brothers to impose an Islamic state by force of arms if other methods failed, and the laying of a foundation for an Islamic army to replace the SDF. This second objective was central because the Brothers perceived the existing armies of the Muslim world as supporters of the status quo and the last resort of secularism.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Turabi's tacit support of the seizure of power by a group of NIF Islamist adherents within the SDF on 30 June 1989 came as no surprise. As mentioned above, both Turabi and Bashir have continuously denied NIF complicity in the coup and to prove the point Turabi was even put under

temporary arrest together with other political leaders. However, it soon became clear that al-Turabi and the NIF controlled the reins of power behind al-Bashir's throne. One telling example of the growth of NIF influence was the acquisition by the NIF of control over all institutes of higher learning. This became apparent in 1990 when Dr. Ibrahim Ahmad 'Umar, an NIF adherent and the minister of higher education, dismissed the university presidents as well as the deans of numerous faculties and reorganized higher education in Sudan's five public and private universities, doubling the number of students. This allowed NIF members, many of whom were university graduates, to benefit from the increased opportunities of employment offered by fellow Brothers within the higher echelons of power. These included senior posts in academic, financial, economic and political institutions, and diplomatic positions abroad. Academic institutes had been a Muslim Brothers stronghold ever since they were founded in the 1950s. Now that the Muslim Brothers exercised complete control, they sought to rid themselves of their competitors, whether Umma supporters, Khatmiyya adherents or communists.

In an interview published in *Trends* in 1994, Turabi confirmed his support of the 1989 military coup.<sup>9</sup> When asked: 'How would you respond to the charge that Sudan is an Islamic dictatorship and where do you stand *vis-à-vis* the democratic process?', he responded that Islam is based on the *shura* (consultation) and is neither a dictatorship nor a single party model: 'In Islam we don't like multi-party bias. As Muslims we don't present our views as a member of a party, or *tarika*, or *madhab*, because in front of Allah we will be individually responsible: it is not the party or group which will go to heaven or hell.' According to Turabi, 'a multi-party system in the Sudan would not be democratic because political parties or a government governed by the House of *Khatmiyyah* and the House of the *Mahdi* was a dynastic thing'.<sup>10</sup> Turabi also argues that initially no one rejected Bashir for his alleged dictatorial tendencies. He was welcomed by the Sudanese masses as well as by the rulers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United States. It was only once they realized that he was following the path of Islam that they turned against him. This is because the West will never allow conceptions that it finds unacceptable to gain power.

Although Turabi condoned the assumption of power by force in order to secure the Islamic state, he ostensibly condemned terrorism and rejected its use by fellow-Islamists in Egypt and Algeria. 'Islamization cannot be achieved by force...Because the Islam of force has nothing to do with true Islam and force should be used [only] for self-defence'.<sup>11</sup> Yet he refused to condemn specific acts of terrorism committed under the banner of Islam, stating that he could not condemn someone with whom he wanted to have a dialogue. Thus, when asked whether the killing of innocent Frenchmen in

Algeria was morally justified, Turabi responded: 'If I was in Algeria and the government was persecuting me...I would think that France is guilty of supporting these persecutors, this terrorist government, and I could attack France in any way whatsoever. But ultimately, I do not think it is correct to kill an ordinary Frenchman who is visiting the country.'<sup>12</sup> This was as far as Turabi was willing to go in condemning terrorism. But, as is well known, Islamic-led terrorism also exists in the Sudan and Sudanese Islamists were allegedly involved in the attempt to blow up the World Trade Center in New York in February 1993. The 26 June 1995 assassination attempt on the life of President Husni Mubarak in Addis Ababa once again indicated Sudanese involvement in Islamist terrorism across its borders and triggered off an acute crisis between Egypt and Sudan. The real issue was radical Islamism, which had been behind the assassination attempt. Egypt accused the Sudanese authorities of having trained the would-be assassins and of smuggling them across its border with Ethiopia. Though Sudanese involvement was not proved, it seemed clear that the Egyptian Islamists who had plotted the assassination had been granted asylum in Sudan.

A western journalist who visited the Sudan in 1994 and interviewed Turabi and others, both Islamists and their opponents, commented: '[T]here hangs about Turabi himself an atmosphere of reflexive denial. Rather than overtly plotting the political terror, the Islamists turn their backs on it, and let it happen as a matter of distasteful necessity in revolutionary times.'<sup>13</sup> To put it bluntly, Hasan al-Turabi and his fellow Islamist leaders within the NIF are probably not involved in plotting or executing terrorist acts. However, they refuse to condemn them and attempt to offer justification based on their Islamist ideology.

According to al-Turabi, the Islamic system of government and public affairs has been absent from Muslim life for centuries and its implementation will take many years: 'This must be seen as the first step towards the ultimate unity of the *umma*.... Establishing an Islamic system in one country is not the end but the start of such an end.... May Allah bless the Islamic state of Sudan and make it successful as the first link which will lead to one *umma* united under a central Islamic government.'<sup>14</sup> In a press conference Turabi praised Bashir for having created an Islamic state and asserted that during 1995 a total civilianization of the regime would take place and 'a government of consultation [*shura*] headed by an Imam' set up.<sup>15</sup>

Al-Turabi advocates a democratic interpretation of Islam, based on *shura* and leading to popular consensus (*ijma'*). *Shura*, according to Turabi, guarantees the Islamic state against the misuse and abuse of *shari'a* by despotic rulers. Unlike democracy, which is founded on the sovereignty of the people, *shura* is based on the sovereignty of God as embodied in a divinely revealed textual authority. Hence while democracy suffers from the

shortcomings of human reason, *shura* does not because it is based on *tawhid* (the unity of God) and on the divine texts which will ultimately end conflict and unify the *umma*. *Shura* is also the only way to achieve Islamic liberation from despotic local and western domination. Thus, Turabi calls on Muslims to use the term democracy with caution since, as manifested in the Third World, it has frequently led to coercion and the monopolization of authority.

The Muslim should reclaim democracy, in its pure Islamic form, by aligning it with *shura*. Clearly, al-Turabi only accepts the formal part of democracy and not its substance, since its ultimate determinant rests on God's revelation and not on the people's legislation. To the Islamists, *shura* is superior to western democracy since it does not suffer from the shortcomings of human reason.<sup>16</sup> Unlike traditional jurisprudence, which worked within the consensus of the Muslim *umma* and rejected radical reform and revolution, Turabi advocates removing all restraints inherent in traditional Muslim states in pursuit of the Islamic state. For him there are no limits on revolutionizing the structure and the mentality of the *umma*. 'No limits on revolution and freedom...are imposed; thus *ijtihad* rearranges *shari'a* without any institutional regulative principle'.<sup>17</sup> Turabi further emphasized the need for wide-ranging *ijtihad*, stating: 'The most serious thing we have found is that most of the Islamic literature has been written centuries ago, and much of it is irrelevant today, in the field of economy, law, politics, government, etc. Therefore a great deal of *ijtihad* is required.'<sup>18</sup>

Turabi's justification of the use of force while propagating so-called Islamic democracy is probably tied up with his belief in the urgent need for the adaptation of Islam to modern times. Since the establishment of an Islamic state is the most urgent goal on the Islamist agenda, how it is achieved is of less importance. Therefore, the Algerian experience is rather useful as it provides an excuse for the use of force in order to achieve power and establish the Islamic state.

### Islamism and the South: Religious and Ethnic Minorities

Civil war has burdened the Sudan since independence and serves as a case in point when discussing the pros and cons of an Islamist order. Sudan is a state whose borders were artificially created in the nineteenth century by colonialist conquerors attempting to impose a unitary form of government on a population which was ethnically diverse and culturally and religiously divided. How does the Islamist movement in Sudan confront this conflict?

Throughout the nineteenth century, attempts to Islamize the non-Muslim South were pursued both under Turco-Egyptian rule and the Mahdiyya. Likewise, when Great Britain ruled the Sudan during the Anglo-Egyptian

Condominium, it introduced the so-called Southern Policy aiming to bring Christianity to the South with the active help of various missionary societies. However, neither Muslim nor Christian missionaries made significant progress and the majority of the South has remained true to its own tribal religions. Thus when independence was finally achieved in January 1956, the predominantly Christian southern political elite agreed to join their northern Muslim compatriots in a united Sudan on the mistaken assumption that it would be a secular-federal state in which they would enjoy full civil rights. North-South hostilities first erupted on the eve of independence and, apart from a period of ten years from 1973 until 1983, relations have never been peaceful.

Abel Alier, a southern lawyer and politician who was instrumental in bringing about the February 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement and later appointed as first Vice-President of the South, wrote in retrospect: 'For the first time in 73 years since the beginning of the condominium administration Southerners were responsible for their own people'.<sup>19</sup> It was therefore no wonder that Alier regarded the abrogation of that treaty, on 5 June 1983, as a tragedy for the Sudan and a personal rebuff. Alier lists the underlying issues that led to this disaster. He regards Numayri's reconciliation in July 1977 with the National Front (NF), which had opposed the Numayri regime since 1969, and especially with the Mahdists and the Muslim Brothers and their respective leaders as the major cause of the agreement's collapse. Both al-Sadiq al-Mahdi and Hasan al-Turabi objected to the three southern provinces being united into one political unit. They demanded an Islamic constitution for the whole Sudan under which the head of state would always be a Muslim. The Muslim Brothers promised Numayri that if he followed its advice 'he would go down as the greatest Sudanese leader in history and would regain the following of the bulk of the Northern Sudan'.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately for the Sudan, Numayri did in fact follow the Islamist's advice and thus led the state directly back into civil war in 1983.

The newly founded SPLA, under the command of Dr. John Garang, a former SDF officer, also included elements from the western Sudan, especially the Nuba Mountains, and was even supported by some northern Muslim politicians such as Dr. Khalid Mansur, a former minister of foreign affairs. It demanded the abrogation of the so-called Islamic laws as a precondition for resuming the peace talks. A compromise was agreed upon, in November 1988, between Sayyid Muhammad 'Uthman al-Mirghani, the leader of the Khatmiyya sufi order and of the Democratic Unionist Party, and the SPLA. It was reluctantly adopted by al-Sadiq al-Mahdi's government, since the Khatmiyya was a senior partner within his coalition government and the compromise enjoyed both popular and military support, especially within the senior officers' corps. It might have put an end to the

civil war had it not been rejected by the NIF as a betrayal of the Islamic mission. This in turn led to the 30 June 1989 coup which brought the Sudan under the present Islamist junta.

In January 1987, while in opposition to al-Sadiq al-Mahdi's government, the NIF published its 'Sudan Charter' in which it sought to define the nature of the Sudanese state under the heading 'National Unity and Diversity'.<sup>21</sup> In the document's introduction, the NIF states that the Sudanese are one nation 'diversified by the multiplicity of their religious and cultural affiliations'. Since most southerners are 'non-believers', they are free to choose their respective religions, practice them and educate their children in accordance with their principles. However, Muslims constitute the population's majority and therefore have: '[A] legitimate right, by virtue of their religious choice, their democratic weight and of natural justice, to practice the values and rules of their religion to their full range – in personal, familial, social or *political* affairs.' Other religions would be granted the freedom to adhere to their values 'in private, family or social matters'. However, as noted, *political* affairs are excluded.<sup>22</sup> The superiority of the Muslim majority is also applied to the sphere of law: 'Thus Islamic jurisprudence shall be the general source of law: It is the expression of the will of the democratic majority. It conforms to the values of all scriptural religions; its legal rules *almost correspond* to their common legal or moral teachings. It recognizes as source of law, the principles of national justice and all sound social customs.' All matters relating to family and personal status would be conducted in accordance with the person's religious affiliation, much in line with the *millet* system applied to certain non-Muslim minorities under Ottoman rule. However, in the northern (Muslim) provinces, Islamic laws including the *hudud* would be applicable to non-Muslims as well.

In the section titled 'Ethnicity and Nationhood', the charter elaborates on the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Sudan and promises to treat all elements of the population with due respect. It states: 'But ethnicity is a natural trait not deriving from human attainment and no good as a basis for discrimination between people or citizens in socio-political or legal relations'. The charter therefore implies that ethnic or tribal origins should not be allowed to interfere with the creation of a national entity. It thus proposes that the Sudan remain united under a federal system, granting the South and other regions a large measure of autonomy with 'immunity from interference by central authorities'. This would include the rights of these regions to retain a 'reasonable share' of the income from economic projects situated in them.

Finally, the NIF calls for a cease-fire in order to allow for the preparation of a National Conference: 'The conference shall determine all the issues of substance concerning the ordering of public life in the Sudan, especially its justice as to differences of religious association and cultural

identity or as to distribution of power or wealth, and shall consider any constitutional or political matter relating thereto.<sup>23</sup>

Despite these seemingly liberal statements, the NIF remained adamant in its opposition to any attempt to compromise the Sudan's Islamic order for the sake of a settlement with the SPLA. The NIF has put forth its own version of the events that led to the June 1989 Islamist military coup. They argue that the weak and indecisive government in Khartoum under al-Sadiq al-Mahdi was the main cause for SPLA victories in the field and its confidence in the political arena. The SPLA, according to 'Ali al-Hajj, refused any attempts at a negotiated settlement and between June 1985 and June 1989 rejected eleven initiatives to settle the conflict.<sup>24</sup>

Al-Bashir opened a new peace initiative on 3 July 1989, three days after he assumed power, when he offered a general amnesty to all 'rebels' and invited John Garang to join in the formation of the Revolutionary Command Council and the Council of Ministers as part of a move towards a final agreement. The SPLA failed to respond and instead intensified its armed rebellion. In September 1989, a National Dialogue Conference on peace was called by the government. Once again the SPLA refused to attend. Nevertheless, the conference drafted resolutions which were then presented to the 'rebels' and recognized by them as a 'good basis for negotiations'. But the SPLA continued to shift the agenda in order to justify their rebellion which, according to al-Hajj, was no more than inter-tribal warfare with John Garang as the main obstacle to peace.<sup>25</sup> In the subsequent fights which broke out between the various groups, thousands of civilians were massacred and human rights were disregarded by the southerners themselves. Consequently, the unified movement disintegrated and it has become quite clear that neither Garang nor the National Democratic Association, allied to western powers, were interested in a peaceful solution. Their aim was to topple the government, even if it meant continued war.<sup>26</sup>

It is within this context that we have to understand the pronouncements of the present regime and the NIF on the Sudan's internal conflict. The June 1989 coup was, in a way, a protest against al-Sadiq al-Mahdi's willingness to reach a compromise with the Sudan's People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) over the issue of Islamic law.<sup>27</sup> This has been openly admitted by spokesmen of the NIF who claim that since the majority of Sudanese are Muslims they had every right, as the lawful democratic majority, to enforce their views regarding their most important beliefs on the non-Muslim minority. Furthermore, if the non-Muslims refused to abide by such 'democratic' decisions, there was no reason for the majority to give way and the southerners should be allowed to secede. The NIF, as stated above, views the Islamic state as its prime goal and hence will not compromise even if this implies a continuation of civil war and eventual partition.

On several occasions spokesmen of the present regime have stated that the internal conflict in Sudan was fostered by western powers. In an interview broadcast on *Radio Monte Carlo* on 17 November 1993, President Bashir accused the United States of promoting the conflict under the pretext of defending human rights and the right of self-determination for the southerners, the people of the Nuba Mountains, and other neglected regions. He stated that his government had proposed a federal solution which would exclude the South from the implementation of the *shari'a* laws. He claimed however, that 'the call for self-determination and separation has never been one of the demands of the rebellion movement.... The claims we now hear are dictated to the rebellion movement by some foreign powers that do not want to see an end to this war'.<sup>28</sup> Sudan's foreign minister, Dr. Husayn Abu Salih, accused the United States of promoting the southern rebels to further its own interests: 'We openly declare that the United States intends to intervene in the south so that the situation would become similar to that in Somalia.... The US Administration's aim is to exhaust the Sudan in the south and drag it into wars and battles and then control and dominate it.'<sup>29</sup> Hasan al-Turabi has also claimed the war in the South has been won and there is no longer any need for outside mediation. According to Turabi, the victory was the result of the new Islamist People's Defence Forces (PDF), which had replaced 'the unreliable and unmotivated professional army'. Turabi accused the West in general and the United States in particular of meddling in the Sudan's internal affairs and promoting trouble in certain regions. He accused the West of being motivated by its hostility to Islam rather than by a commitment to peace or democracy, since it is opposed to any Islamic government even if elected democratically and capable of bringing about peace. However, no matter what the West did, Islam would succeed because 'we are believers while they are not'.<sup>30</sup>

It seems at present that neither the SPLA high command nor the leaders of the present regime have made up their minds with regard to the Sudan's future. As late as 1992, the SPLA was in favor of a united Sudan and most northern politicians believed in a solution which would leave the Sudan undivided. However, during the 1994 peace talks, sponsored and mediated by the four member states (Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda) of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), the Sudan government declared its commitment to the southerners' right to determine their future status by referendum, following an interim period. The main difference between this offer and the SPLA's demand of self-determination was the latter's insistence on including parts of the northern Sudan, such as the Nuba Mountains and other so-called 'Marginalized Regions' within those areas that would be granted the right to determine their own future. In addition, the government has refused to adopt the term

'self-determination'. It is noteworthy, however, that they seem to prefer secession to compromise over Islam.<sup>31</sup>

The demand to grant this right has been on the southern agenda since the Juba conference in 1947 and has been raised repeatedly since independence. But it had never before been adopted by either the southerners or the government as official policy. It is the present Islamist regime, prompted by the NIF, which has brought about this change and which may ultimately lead to a partitioning of the Sudan. To quote a prominent southern leader: 'The fact that Islam and Arab culture dominate in the corridors of power in Khartoum today does not make them acceptable options for the whole country... Even if the North was to agree to a secular and democratic state in the near future, that would not mean the abandonment of self-determination by the South.'<sup>32</sup> In a recent speech, Abel Alier, president of the executive council of the Southern Sudan and vice-president of Sudan under Numayri, stated that those in the North who claim that self-determination must lead to separation have only themselves to blame since they ruled the country for 40 years and had a chance to unite it:

Those who are scared about separation today and interpret self-determination as separation...are guilty of being in the habit of imposing their own social values on others; they pay lip service to social diversities and at the same time dig in for assimilation. These are the real separatists.... They are capable of driving the aggrieved people to the wall.<sup>33</sup>

Hence the abrogation of the 1972 agreement, in 1983, and the radical Islamism of the present regime may already have tipped the scales in favor of partition, leading to an independent southern state. How this will affect other regions of the Sudan remains unclear though the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which includes all the northern opposition parties as well as the SPLM, has issued a declaration in which it committed itself to the right of self-determination as the only way to preserve unity.<sup>34</sup> In an interview with *al-Hayat*, in December 1995, al-Sadiq al-Mahdi stated that the Sudan's future depended on a democratic regime, based on equal rights for all citizens, and on the right of self-determination for the South. 'The separation of religion and state had to be implemented to guarantee human rights to all citizens.'<sup>35</sup> For al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, the leader of the Mahdist Umma Party, to declare openly in a widely circulated newspaper such as *al-Hayat* that he favors the separation of religion and state would have seemed impossible in the 1980s. Whether he and other Islamist leaders, such as Muhammad 'Uthman al-Mirghani, will remain true to such declarations once the present regime is overthrown, remains to be seen.

### Islamism in Regional and International Relations

Hasan al-Turabi defined the international aims of the Islamists at a 'Round Table' held with American scholars in May 1992.<sup>36</sup> When asked about the future aims of Sudan's Islamic revolution, Turabi responded that the Sudan's borders were artificial and hence the revolution is easily exported. This is especially true with respect to Sudan's relations with the Black African neighboring states. Relations with non-Muslim states are predicated upon peaceful relations governed by the *shari'a*. However, in Turabi's view, just as in Sudan's domestic affairs, the West perceives the Muslim challenge to the international status quo as a threat which has to be stopped. Therefore, Turabi insisted, 'Islam will challenge those who enjoy an advantage under the present world order' since it has no other choice. Muslims, according to Turabi, insist on equality at the international level where at present they are treated unjustly.<sup>37</sup>

Those who enjoy an advantage now under the present world order... will see that Islam constitutes a challenge because if it seeks justice, then it seeks to have someone concede a little bit so that we ultimately reach an equitable equation. This is not because Islam is hostile to Christianity.... The Muslims will not allow the world to be molded in one pattern, one form of democracy, one form of economic system, one form of whatever. It is in the interest of humanity that people be allowed the freedom to develop different models.<sup>38</sup>

Al-Turabi further expounded on this idea in an interview with Olivier Rolin for *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Quoting from a speech made by the governor of Omdurman province – 'The orientation of Islamic civilization is leading us to establish an Islamic state in Sudan and throughout the entire world' – Rolin asked Turabi whether this was not an imperialistic position. Turabi responded by stating that Islam was neither imperialistic nor nationalistic and only sought to spread its true mission peacefully wherever it could: 'Here, now, in Sudan we are in the process of establishing a model not just for the Sudanese, but for the entire world, because now humanity is one'.<sup>39</sup>

Al-Turabi viewed the Gulf War as a first step in this direction since it helped Islamists to turn their movements into popular mass movements, radicalizing even those in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, whose present rulers rightly feel threatened. He predicted the downfall of these regimes in the not too distant future, though he admitted that in Egypt this might take a little longer because of the regime's entrenchment. 'Yet the Egyptian government fears the Sudanese model because Islam could prove its undoing.'<sup>40</sup> Turabi's election to the post of Secretary-General of the Arab and Islamic People's

Congress, in April 1992, with its headquarters in Khartoum, further raised the suspicions of moderate Muslim governments. It clearly indicated Turabi's supreme position among his fellow Islamists as the spokesman of what has become known as radical 'Islamic Pan-Nationalism', Islam opposed to the status quo. Turabi attributed his election to the Gulf War which served to unite Muslims against the West and its Muslim collaborators: 'I personally owe a lot to the Gulf War, because without it I could not have organized the Popular Arab and Islamic Convention... which is essentially Islamist, and to assign the post of Secretary-General to someone like myself who is known to be an Islamist.'<sup>41</sup>

In an audience with the American ambassador, who warned him that the United States would react if its interests were threatened, Turabi responded that western military threats could only help the Sudan: '[H]istorically I know that a country cannot develop if there is no challenge.... The whole of the Sudan is in military training, almost a million Sudanese are already trained, and if they have to defend this territory, they will. I know there are very powerful Zionist/Christian fundamentalist lobbies in the USA, that want to crush Islam in Sudan before it can spread.'<sup>42</sup>

With regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the NIF rejected the Madrid talks when they were first started. According to Turabi, Sudan 'was the only Arab state that said no'. But in 1993 it seemed to adopt a more pragmatic point of view when it approved, though reluctantly, the Washington Accords between Israel and the PLO. Turabi explained this shift by stating that since the Islamic government in Khartoum realized that Arafat had agreed to the Madrid formula 'as an act of necessity...we should not try to be better than Yasser Arafat himself or to embarrass him'. He further stated that the official Sudanese position left the freedom of decision making to the Palestinians themselves. In February 1993, Turabi demonstrated his claim to international-Islamic leadership when he chaired the Khartoum talks between the PLO and Hamas. It was an attempt to establish a united front for interaction with Israel and the United States. Such a role would have been unthinkable for any Sudanese Muslim leader prior to the June 1989 coup and the Gulf War. Turabi demonstrated his pragmatism when he stated in an interview with *al-Sharq al-Awsat* that the Arabs should accept Security Council Resolution 242, which entails recognition of Israel within its pre-1967 borders. According to al-Turabi, this was permissible as it would not be the first time that Muslims had relinquished a section of their land, provided that Israel also withdrew from its conquered lands.<sup>43</sup>

How should one interpret these seemingly moderate utterances from an Islamist leader who at the same time claims not to be guided by political considerations and who on other occasions has totally rejected compromise? In his capacity as the Secretary-General of the Popular Arab and

Islamic Conference, Turabi criticized the Washington Accords without aiming the criticism against Arafat or the PLO leadership. His basis for criticism was that these accords did not lead to the establishment of two states 'but rather to the establishment of a Palestinian municipality in Gaza and Jericho'.<sup>44</sup> Turabi was even more outspoken when he addressed a press conference on 5 December 1993, informing the journalists about the decisions reached at the Popular Arab and Islamic Conference which had just concluded in Khartoum: 'The conference declared its total rejection of the Gaza-Jericho agreement and called on the Arab and Islamic nations not to normalize their relations with the enemy until the Palestine people restore their legitimate rights.'<sup>45</sup> In an interview titled 'Our Islam for the Entire Earth', published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in August 1994, Turabi rejected the Palestinian-Israeli agreement as an act of desperation forced on Arafat. When asked whether this was a defeat, Turabi answered: 'When you are trapped, you accept any compromise whatsoever. The Arabs are unanimous in saying: No Israel. Israel is not a democratic phenomenon. It is an example of usurpation.' His response as to whether he accepted Israel's existence was: 'How can you accept that people occupy your country, drive you out and then say it is an accomplished fact? You [France] left Algeria, why? I do not question the existence of Jews, but of Israel, yes. The Jews are free to go anywhere and the Muslims accepted them when they were persecuted in Europe.'<sup>46</sup>

### Conclusion

Several reports, written mainly by foreign correspondents who have visited the Sudan and met with leading personalities, indicate that many within the NIF are disillusioned with the present regime and fear the repercussions of its inevitable downfall on their movement. Whereas they continue to believe in the Islamic revolution, they have realized that its performance in the Sudan leaves much to be desired. To quote one of many such reports:

The Islamic revolution is caught in a dilemma. If it is to deliver genuine solutions it will have somehow to abandon the cynical pursuit of power.... But if, instead, in the pursuit of *ijtihad* and modern forms of justice, it returns to purer principles of Islam, it may find impossible standards there. That is the lesson of Sudan. No one has yet shown that the modern Islamist creed is an ideology suited for governing.<sup>47</sup>

Whereas this and other reports are based on outsiders' impressions, their volume suggests that the regime is facing increasing pressures, probably as a result of its prolonged isolation from even its closest neighbors such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, Libya and Chad. Hasan al-Turabi's response

to such allegations would be that the Islamic revolution cannot be judged according to a trial period of five years. Moreover, as an active participant in Sudanese politics since independence and as a critical observer of the political bunglings of Arab nationalism, Arab socialism and other so-called secular attempts, he would most likely respond to such charges by stating that, compared to the utter failure of all the ideological and political movements mentioned above, Islamism has already proved its ability to govern. To this, one could add that Turabi and his fellow Islamists throughout the Muslim world have claimed consistently that the Islamic state cannot be judged on its performance in a single territory and only after it has spread to Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Egypt and other regions will it be able to create the modern Islamic order that will become the only real challenge to the western bloc.

One may also address the question of whether the Sudan's Islamist dictatorship is indeed heading towards an Islamic state, as prophesied by Turabi, or whether the much larger neo-Mahdist movement might once again 'rise from its own ashes' as it did both after its destruction by Kitchener in 1898 and after the Aba Island massacre carried out by Numayri in March 1970. According to al-Sadiq al-Mahdi 'the scenario is the same through succeeding Kitcheners up to the latest'.<sup>48</sup> However, al-Sadiq al-Mahdi can hardly be viewed as an unbiased observer. Nor can there be any conclusive answer to the question posed above, since much depends on the stability of the present regime, the length of its survival in power and its consistency in following the NIF's formula for an Islamic state. If the NIF's dream comes true and the radical Islamists maintain power into the twenty-first century, then the likelihood of a smaller, divided Sudan seems a real one.

Another alternative is the replacement of the present regime either by a military coup, a civilian revolution or a combination of both. All three alternatives have occurred before in Sudan and are therefore credible. However, even if this should happen it seems unlikely that the present regime will be replaced by one advocating the separation of Islam and politics, as suggested by the opposition leaders including al-Sadiq al-Mahdi. It is one thing to preach 'secularism' while in exile and opposition; it is quite another thing to carry it out once you assume power in a state such as Sudan. Graham Thomas' suggestion that the leaders of the Khatmiyya and the Ansar should withdraw from active politics and devote themselves to their religious missions, so that a united party of the Sudan could lead the country democratically without sectarian divisions, seems as utopian today as it did when it was preached by British members of the Sudan Political Service during the Condominium.<sup>49</sup>

The most likely scenario seems to be the one foreseen by al-Sadiq

al-Mahdi. It is based on the assumption that the Mahdists continue to constitute the single largest Islamic grouping in the Sudan and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Therefore, even if the Umma Party remains true to its present moderate position *vis-à-vis* the South, it seems unlikely that it will lead Sudan towards the separation of state and religion. The Islamic state envisioned by Mahdi and his supporters, prior to 1989, is likely to remain their ideal even after the present regime comes to its end.

## NOTES

1. Quoted by Graham F. Thomas, *Sudan's Struggle for Survival* (London: Darf 1993) pp.105–6. Thomas was a senior official in the Sudanese government during the 1950s and has maintained close ties with the Sudanese elite, especially al-Sayyid 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi and his offspring.
2. For details, see G.R. Warburg, 'The Sharia in Sudan: Implementation and Repercussions, 1983–1989', *Middle East Journal* 44/4 (Autumn 1990) pp.624–37.
3. For a more detailed treatment of the politics and ideology of the Ansar and the Muslim Brothers, see G.R. Warburg, 'Mahdism and Islamism in Sudan', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 27 (1995) pp.219–36.
4. For a more detailed biographical treatment, see Ahmad Muhammad Shamuq (ed.), *Ma'ajim al-shakhsiyyat al-Sudaniyya al-ma'asira* (Khartoum: bayt al-thaqafa 1988) pp.41–2, 205.
5. *Ijtihad* refers to independent reinterpretations of legal theological questions in line with modern change.
6. Abdelwahab El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution Islam and Power in Sudan* (London: Grey Seal 1989), pp.164–6, 183–6; quotation from p.185. El-Affendi is one of the most eloquent spokesmen of the Muslim Brothers' cause and his book is the best account of the movement's history, ideology and politics. For Islamist ideology and policies in the South, see Arthur L. Lowrie, *Islam, Democracy, the State and the West, a Round Table with Dr. Hasan Turabi* (Tampa: Florida State University, May 1992).
7. Lowrie (note 6) pp.18–21.
8. *Ibid.*, p.21. Also see Haydar Taha, *Al-Ikhwan wa'l-'Askar, qisas al-jabha al-Islamiyya wa'l-sulta fi al-Sudan* (Cairo: markaz al-hadara al-'Arabiyya li'l-'ilam wa'l-nashr 1993) pp.61–3. Thomas (note 1) p.108 writes that Turabi proudly admitted to him that the NIF had 14 cells within the army.
9. 'Inside Sudan Turabi Speaks', Interview with Muhammad al-Turabi, *Trends* 5/5 (1994). Analysis in the following passages is based on information provided in this interview.
10. Lowrie (note 6) p.26.
11. 'Al-Turabi Criticizes Islamists' Violent Methods in Algeria and Egypt', FBIS-NES-93-220, 17 Nov. – translated from *al-Hayat*, 13 Nov. 1993.
12. FBIS-NES-94-166, 26 Aug. – quoting from Olivier Rolin's interview with al-Turabi, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 25–31 Aug. 1994.
13. W. Langewiesche, 'Turabi's Law', *The Atlantic Monthly* (Aug. 1994) p.32.
14. 'Inside Sudan Turabi Speaks' (note 9).
15. *Sudan Democratic Gazette* 54 (Nov. 1994) p.9 (hereafter SDG). SDG is published monthly in London by Bona Malwal, a prominent southern politician and writer who lives in exile.
16. A.S. Moussalli, 'Hasan al-Turabi's Islamist Discourse on Democracy and Shura', *Middle Eastern Studies* 30/1 (Jan. 1994) pp.57–61.
17. *Ibid.*, p.55 – quoted from Hasan al-Turabi, *Qadaya al-huriyya wa'l-wahda wa'l-shura wa'l-dimuqratiyya* (Jedda 1987) pp.10–11.
18. 'Inside Sudan Turabi Speaks' (note 9).
19. Abel Alier, *Southern Sudan, Too Many Agreements Dishonoured* (Exeter: Ithaca Press 1990) p.89.
20. *Ibid.*, p.237. Bona Malwal, who served at the time as minister of information and culture under Numayri, ultimately resigned in protest against this policy.

21. National Islamic Front, *Sudan Charter* (Khartoum, Jan. 1987). The following quotations are from this document.
22. *Ibid.*, p.2; italics are mine.
23. *Ibid.*, p.10.
24. Dr. Ali El-Hajj, 'The Problem of the Southern Sudan and the Shifting Agenda: With Whom Can We Conclude Peace?' (Paper presented to the National Committee for the Celebration of Sudan's Independence 1956-1993, London, 8-10 Jan. 1993) pp.7-9; the author, who was born in Chad and settled with his family in Darfur in 1947, presented himself as a spokesman for Darfur although no one in Darfur regarded him as such. According to *SDG 53* (Oct. 1994) p.3, he had been involved in attempting to convince and even bribe both southerners and Darfurians to accept the Islamist agenda since 'he feels that he has arrived in the elite Arab camp because he has embraced Islamic Fundamentalism'.
25. Ali El-Hajj (note 24) pp.9-11.
26. *Ibid.*, pp.15-19.
27. In an interview published in *al-Hayat* (Dec. 1995), quoted in *SDG 68* (Jan. 1996), al-Sadiq al-Mahdi explained why he had failed in his commitment to abolish the Islamic Laws between 1986 and 1989: soon after the 1986 elections he learned that the DUP and the NIF had secretly agreed to oppose any abrogation of these laws and, since they held enough votes in parliament to defeat any motion calling for an abrogation, he was forced to modify his position.
28. FBIS-NES-93-221, 18 Nov., p.22 - the interview was conducted and broadcast in Arabic on *Radio Monte Carlo*, 17 Nov. 1993.
29. FBIS-NES-93-191, 1 Oct. - quoting from an interview published in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 1 Oct. 1993.
30. *SDG 55* (Dec. 1994) p.8 - quoting from an interview with Turabi in *al-Wasat*, 7 Nov. 1994.
31. P.N. Kok, 'Guest Column: NIF Accepts Self-determination by Definition', *SDG 52* (Sept. 1994) p.10. My discussion is based on this article as well as on accounts published in *SDG* from Oct. to Dec. 1994.
32. *SDG 53* (Oct. 1994) pp.2-3.
33. *SDG 69* (Feb. 1996) p.10.
34. 'NDA Leadership Adopts Plan for Overthrowing NIF Regime', *SDG 69* (Feb. 1996) pp.6, 10.
35. Quoted in *SDG 68* (Jan. 1996) p.7; *al-Hayat*.
36. Arthur Lowrie and Louis J. Cantori (eds.), 'Islam, Democracy, the State and the West', *Middle East Policy* 1/3 (1992) pp.49-61; Summary of a lecture and round-table discussion with Hasan Turabi, University of South Florida, 10 May 1992; this is an early version of the Lowrie account (note 6).
37. *Ibid.*, pp.52-3.
38. Lowrie (note 6) pp.30-31.
39. *Le Nouvel Observateur* (note 12) p.26.
40. Lowrie and Cantori (note 36) p.57.
41. *Ibid.*, p.56.
42. Inside Sudan Turabi Speaks' (note 9).
43. Muhammad al-Hasan Ahmad, 'Al-zahir wa'l-batin fi mawaqif jabhat Turabi', *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 23 Jan. 1993; the author states that Turabi's position remained ambivalent and that he continued to reject negotiations with Israel.
44. Arlit Khuri, 'Al-Turabi Criticizes Islamists' Violent Methods in Algeria and Egypt', FBIS-NES-93-220, 17 Nov. - translated from *al-Hayat*, 13 Nov. 1993.
45. BBC ME/1865, 7 Dec. 1993; quoted from *Radio National Unity* (Omdurman), 5 Dec. 1993.
46. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, pp.34-5 - the following quotations are from the FBIS version (note 12).
47. Langewiesche (note 13) p.33. The reason that all such reports are published abroad, either by Sudanese opposition members or by foreigners, is obvious since under the present regime it is dangerous for Sudanese residents to air such views in public.
48. Thomas (note 1) p.131. Quoted from a private letter that Mr. Thomas received from al-Sadiq al-Mahdi on 10 March 1992. Sadiq's reference to 'Kitchener' when referring to Numayri and Bashir is far from complimentary.
49. *Ibid.*, p.146.