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Conclusion

Why is it that the Sudanese public were able to overhaul two military governments and establish liberal democracies in their place in an era when autocracy was the norm? First, it is important to recall the nature of the regimes that were overhauled, as well as that of the military institutions that stood behind them. In the wider Middle East between the 1960s and 2000s, the corporate identity of the military and the tenacity with which military leaders held on to power tended to militate against the likelihood that established regimes would be overthrown by purely civil action. The situation in Sudan is somewhat different. This study has proved the continuing relevance of Woodward's observation that the Sudanese army acts as a 'mirror of society'. Both in 1964 and 1985, the fact that army and police officers hailed from the same homogeneous urban elite as the professional activists and party leaders who spearheaded the uprisings dictated against the security forces using extreme violence to keep the incumbent government in place. As a result of the social and cultural interlinkages between the branches of the security establishment and other sectors within the northern riverain elite, it has been a very risky strategy for Sudan's rulers to play the various security organs off against each other. Nimeiri learnt this to his cost in 1985, when the oppositionists who led the April *Intifada* exploited the divide he had fostered between the army and the SSO.

Were the first and second military regimes really brought down by committed pro-democracy activism, or by more structural weaknesses that oppositionists exploited but did not create? It is easier to claim the former when discussing the first of the two uprisings, since Abboud's government had appeared relatively compact up until the point of his downfall, and Sudan was not facing the kind of economic crisis it was in 1985. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Sudan Communist Party had been active in plotting the downfall of the military regime in the years before the October Revolution, although neither was able to fully dictate the manner in which the eventual uprising unfolded. Although al-Qurayshi's martyrdom and the series of events that followed were determined to some extent by the plans that these two parties had laid, they were still in many other respects highly spontaneous in nature. Both of the principal opposition fronts, the United National Front and the Professional Front, were formed during the revolution and not before it. It is fair to say that Abboud, being bereft of the 'degree in obstinacy' that would characterize later dictators, played a significant role in the peaceful conclusion of the Revolution by giving in to the demonstrators' demands as quickly as he did. However, the sheer extent of the demonstrations and the comprehensive success of the general strike indicated that this was no ordinary transfer of power.

The case was somewhat different in 1985. When the regime fell, it had already been severely weakened not just by the catastrophic economic situation but also by Nimeiri's own breakdown and his consequent self-destructive policies. In the period leading up to Nimeiri's downfall, the various political parties had been active against the regime, but not in a particularly coordinated manner. In spite of the fact that Nimeiri's ouster had loomed far more obviously than Abboud's did, they were unable to establish a single political front in the years leading up to his downfall. While the professional groups had shown an impressive degree of coherence in the year leading up to the Revolution and had conducted strikes that had brought the regime to its knees, they responded to the *Intifada* in a somewhat spontaneous and frenetic manner. In this sense, it is probably fair to say that the emergence of a civil movement favouring a return to democracy was not the principal cause of Nimeiri's downfall. What it did achieve was to ensure that there would be no straightforward transfer of power to another military autocrat favoured by one of the global superpowers.

It is highly significant that many of the 'democrats' of 1964 and 1985 espoused one form or another of political Islam. One key theme that this book has attempted to illustrate is the folly of defining anti-regime uprisings in the Islamic world as either 'secular' and 'democratic' events based on 'civil society' that rely on imported European leftist and liberal thought, or 'religious', 'anti-democratic' movements driven by political Islam. It is important to remember that during 1964 and 1985 the *khutbas* in mosques and religious funeral ceremonies were utilized by oppositionists to mobilize anti-regime activity at the same time as secular spaces such as football grounds, public squares, university campuses and walls upon which anti-regime slogans were daubed.

It is difficult to deny that the 'modern forces' played a more critical role in the uprising than any openly religious organization. As we have seen, the Sudanese term 'modern forces' often equates to what European political scientists term 'civil society' – forms of association separated from the state, such as student bodies, and workers' and professional unions. However, a considerable number of those who represented the 'modern forces' during the 1964 and 1985 uprisings identified with various types of political Islam – Hasan al-Turabi, Muhammad Salih Umar, Rabie Hasan Ahmad, Anwar Nur al-Hadi, Umar Abd al-Ati, Hussein Abu Salih, Mirghani Nasri and Jizouli Dafa'allah, to name a few. Some were active members of the Muslim Brotherhood (although not in 1985), while others were ex-members who still sympathized with the same ideals (Jizouli Dafa'allah), or ex-members who had established their own more liberal 'Islamist' parties (Mirghani al-Nasri), or simply believed that Islam should play some role in law and politics (Umar Abd al-Ati). The majority of these people espoused during the 1964 and 1985 uprisings the values that are now associated with 'post-Islamism', including a commitment to developing democratic values and political liberties within an Islamic framework. Of course, Hasan al-Turabi in particular has been accused of disingenuousness many times, openly betraying as he did his commitment to the democratic ideal by allying himself with Jafa'ar Nimeiri in 1977 and Umar al-Bashir in 1989. However, it is worth noting that his decision to express regret over his military alliances and commit himself to democratic politics reflects a return to the values he espoused in 1964 just as much as it illustrates his desire to ride the 'post-Islamist' wave.

Acknowledging the role played by advocates of Islam within the 'modern forces' does not mean denying the agency of their secular, leftist, liberal and Arab nationalist counterparts. While *Ikhwani* lecturers and an *Ikhwan*-led KUSU may have played the most significant role in the crucial seminars that sparked the October Revolution at the University of Khartoum, it was the communists and their sympathizers in the professional and workers' unions who would push the general strike towards a successful conclusion and exercise a significant influence in the first transitional government. While the SCP may have been a broken force in 1985, it is still true that a number of the leading professionals who constituted the National Alliance sympathized with left-wing ideology. At the same time, it is worth noting that although the Sudanese political arena has since the decline of Arabism and Nasserism come to be characterized as a Manichaeian duel between Communist and Islamist ideologies, in both 1964 and 1985, men who were committed to the more secular forms of Arab nationalism also played their role as a part of the 'modern forces.' In 1964, the Free Officer movement was more of an Arab nationalist organization than a left-wing one, and a number of the interim ministers labelled as 'communists', such as Khalafallah Babikir, identified with Egypt more closely than they did with Russia. The man who some say proposed the general strike in 1964 was not a communist but a Ba'athist, Shawgi Mallasi. While the Sudan branch of the Ba'ath Party may have entered a period of comprehensive decline following the measure al-Bashir took against the army Ba'athists after the failed Ramadan coup of 1990, in 1985 it was highly active as a political force and was probably more effectively involved in anti-regime mobilization than the SCP.

It is often assumed that there is a natural divide between communism, Arab nationalism and 'Islamism', but during October 1964 and the transitional period that followed it, the proponents of these ideologies often espoused broadly similar revolutionary aims. Each of these groupings had opposed a military regime that had made little effort to identify with any particular ideology; they all maintained a commitment to social transformation and a 'cleansing' of the old political order; and they all agreed upon the principle of dismantling the Native Administration. It is also important to remember that the leaderships of each of these various groupings hailed from the same homogenous northern urban elite and thus tended to share the vision of the Sudanese nation that was embraced by this elite. While the notion of the 'Sudanese nation' has been heavily deconstructed by academics as a result of the emergence of separatist movements in the peripheries, in this era the urban intellectuals of Khartoum maintained a firm attachment to it, just as much as they did to their own ideological precepts. This is why al-Turabi refused to refer to his movement as the 'Muslim Brotherhood', preferring to see it as a Sudanese party rather than a branch of a wider ideological movement.

It was not until the paranoia that surrounded the events of the 'night of the barricades' on 9 November 1964 that the Islamists broke decisively with the communists in the Professional Front. In 1985, the divide was more stark from the outset, since the ICF was left out of the Alliance on account of its recent collaboration with the May Regime and refusal to enter a coalition that included the SCP. The non-ICF Islamists in the Alliance also came to heads with the leftists and the secularists at a very early stage over the issue of the September Laws. However, this does not undermine the fact

that Islamists, secularists and liberals had cooperated closely to establish the National Alliance and overthrow Nimeiri.

If we are to critique the notion that the 1964 and 1985 uprisings were the product of a civilian, secular urban elite, we must also analyse the role played by Sudan's 'sectarian' parties – the PDP, NUP, DUP and, particularly, the Umma Party. While it is true that the political parties with closer links to the 'modern forces' probably played a more decisive part in the uprisings, the role of these parties was not as marginal as is often assumed. In October 1964, the presence of Sadiq al-Mahdi guaranteed the success of al-Qurayshi's funeral procession. These parties had closer ties to the students' unions than is usually acknowledged, and it is probably the case that the Umma Party helped to inspire the demonstration that was led by the students of Omdurman Islamic University on 26 March 1985, and provided the initial spark for the April *Intifada*.

In fact, these parties have tended to stick more rigidly to the principle of 'one man, one vote' than their leftist, Arab nationalist and radical Islamist counterparts within the riverain elite whose reliance on narrow urban support bases has tended to militate against their sympathizing with the principle of liberal democracy. Indeed, the fact that the more ideological groups have fared so badly in multi-party elections explains why they eschewed the liberal democratic principles they espoused in October 1964 so readily by supporting the military coups of 1969 and 1989. As we have seen, Babikir Awadallah and a number of senior Professional Front figures joined Nimeiri's 'May Regime' in 1969, while al-Turabi, the man whose calls for political liberalization in the Khartoum University exam hall had given the October Revolution its initial impetus, collaborated with Umar al-Bashir to overthrow the third democratic regime. In this sense, the line between 'democrats' and 'autocrats' is a weakly defined one. At the same time, there were also those whose commitment to the democratic ideal was less shallow. It was only a minority within the SCP and a minority within the FOO that backed the Free Officer coup of 1969, while, as seen before, a number of the members of the 1985–6 transitional government who were committed to the ideal of political Islam did not support al-Bashir's coup.

If we are to understand why the 1964 and 1985 uprisings failed to generate long-term democratic change in Sudan and, indeed, why Sudan failed to revisit the experiences of October and April in 2011 when so many other regimes in the Middle Eastern region were successfully overthrown by civil protest movements, it is essential to look at the role that Sudan's oft-mooted 'centre-periphery dynamic' played in the uprisings. The uprisings were brought about by political forces operating within social centres of Sudanese society, specifically within the developed urban regions of the riverain north. It is important to understand that the political, social and economic situation in Sudan's rural peripheries helped to define the manner in which power struggles at the centre played out in 1964 and 1985, the manner dictated by the northern riverain elite. Factions within the riverain elite have always been able to exploit the chaotic situation in the rural periphery to serve their own agenda at the centre.

Hasan al-Turabi's decision to transform a debate on the 'southern question' into a criticism of authoritarianism in the north, which helped spark the October Revolution but did little to resolve the inequalities between north and south, offers a clear example

of this tendency of 'central' politicians to use the struggles of the periphery for their own purposes. Nevertheless, during the Revolution and the transitional period that followed it, there were flashes of hope that seemed to indicate that the old pattern of 'centre and periphery' might be broken. At one stage, the appointment of Clement Mboro as minister of interior seemed to offer a hope that the progressives in the north would be able to help southerners obtain a voice right at the centre of Sudanese politics, but Mboro's position was soon weakened by the events of 6 December 1964. The Black Sunday riots demonstrated that conflict in the peripheries could have resonances in Khartoum, but their only practical impact was to isolate Mboro and rigidify the outlook of the conservative majority in the north.

Admittedly, the October Revolution – in spite of its capital origins – at one stage offered a great deal to the peoples of provincial Sudan, at least in the north. Provincial populations all over the north, even in Darfur, identified with the slogans of the revolution, clashed with local branches of the armed forces, established their own branches of the 'Professional Front' and launched mini-campaigns against the existing social, political and administrative order. However, the urban radicals of 1964 were ultimately unable to breach the social gulf between centre and periphery sufficiently enough to disrupt the patrimonial social networks that empowered Sudan's more conservative northern political parties, such as the NUP, PDP and, particularly, the Umma. The Umma Party was able to exploit this failure by marching its own supporters from the rural peripheries of the north into Khartoum to force a change in the composition of the interim government and effectively de-radicalize the revolution.

The pattern of relations between 'centre' and 'periphery' in 1985 was not dissimilar to that which had obtained in 1964, although at this stage political debates focused on the woes of east, west and south instead of just the south. There were a far greater number of 'marginalized' people attempting to subsist within the urban centre, and while they contributed to the *Intifada*, they did so in a manner dictated by the educated riverain northerners who marshalled their demonstrations. Though the re-introduction of parliamentary democracy facilitated the re-emergence of regionalist political parties, its practical impact was to re-empower the riverain, professional elites who had guided the uprisings. While the uprisings spread to the principal northern cities, it tended to be the local technocrats hailing from the riverain areas who took the central role and as such it is difficult to characterize these events in any way as 'regional uprisings'. Meanwhile, the inability of the National Alliance to forge effective cooperation with John Garang's SPLA rebels in the south ensured that, like the October Revolution, the 1985 *Intifada* would fail to cross the divide between the affluent urban centres and the marginalized rural periphery.

Today's would-be imitators of Sudan's glorious revolutionary past know that if they are to achieve what their predecessors failed to do and establish a firmly entrenched democracy following their uprising, they must succeed in bridging both the gap between 'centre and periphery' and that between the secular and Islamist political forces. It is certainly possible that a future *Intifada* will succeed without resolving the conflicts between the marginalized and central regions, and the conflict between those who advocate *shari'a* and those that do not – this was, of course, the case

in 1964 and 1985. However, unless they are able to establish political compromises that satisfy these competing interest groups, any 'third *Intifada*' is likely to repeat the failings of the first two and establish a frail democracy that will be overthrown by an authoritarian regime similar to that of Abboud, Nimeiri or al-Bashir. Nostalgists for October and April must learn from their inadequacies, just as much as trying to reproduce their successes.