

## Analysis: The winds of change in Sudan

Wednesday 26 September 2012

By Sudan Change Now

September 26, 2012 (KHARTOUM) - Is there a Revolution on the horizon in Sudan? On the evening of June 16th 2012, the voices of a small group of female students from Khartoum University's Barracks dorms broke out in unison, chanting against the ruling National Congress Party (NCP); setting off a chain of events that signaled that a barrier of fear has been broken. For two straight months after that, protests continued for a number of reasons; although both the regional and international media focused on the 'austerity measures' as the main driving force behind the protests; failing to recognise the entrenched historical role of students in the country's civil movements and resistance in bringing about social and political change.

Since the coup in June 30th 1989 student groups and unions were severely undermined and replaced with ones that are forged groups simply complying with the NCP's policies. As such the roots on why the students went out were not simply the result of the current political developments and economic crisis but we can say they were the catalysts; an expected turn of events in light of the malaise the country finds itself in after the independence of South Sudan which resulted in the loss of nearly 75% of the oil wealth. This loss of valuable national revenue was how the NCP and its members accumulated staggering wealth by which they further strengthened their own party and the security apparatus at the expense of the people and other political parties, something which Sudan did not witness throughout its modern history.

The instability left by the secession of the South created the most appropriate factors for a revolution in Sudan. As a result inflation rates have hit 41%, according to an August 2012 report by the Central Bureau of Statistics while the International Monetary Fund reported the economic growth rate went down by 7%. The Khartoum government then pursued another highly flawed strategy in an attempt to further legitimise its rule by launching wars and ethnically targeting the people of both the Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains thereby using them as justifications and distractions to the economic disasters that many were facing as a result of their policies and to further exert their control over the rest of the country. However, what occurred was the collapse of the government's budget even before they succeeded in using political interference following the Heglig conflict with South Sudan.

It's important to note that the NCP regime has never enjoyed political legitimacy except relatively in the period following the signing of the Nivasha agreement and subsequent ones in Cairo, Abuja and Asmara, from 2005 until January 2011 - the South's independence. A number of resistance groups and parties have emerged throughout the NCP's rule from the armed groups in Darfur to university demonstrations which were a regular occurrence throughout the 1990s well into the new decade are all forms of revolts against the regime. Kajbar and the Manaseer, and the victims of the dam were also revolts against the regime while the ongoing wars in the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile and Eastern Sudan are a continuation of the resistance movements.

The NCP was never on solid footing but the events of June 2012 had a different to them - they brought on hope and belief that change will occur.

The reasons behind this recent spurt of mobilisation were mainly due to:

1. The people's discontent that has been building up since the 1990s and has increased ten-fold as a result of the recent dire economic situation, something which Sudan has not seen nor experienced since the first years of the coup.
2. The regime's legitimacy has been slowly eroded and the cover has been blown on its political and economical veneer.
3. The lack of solutions or 'ways out' for the regime especially in light of its growing isolation in the international arena.
4. The 'Arab Spring' has brought about a change to the people in the region - the belief that change is possible and that the peoples play a big part in determining their futures.

### **What we have been able to achieve so far?**

Sudan has not witnessed protests of this size nor magnitude or with this persistence for years. These protests encouraged people to reconsider the culture of peaceful protest and resistance, and restored confidence in the fact that the street and the masses can bring about change.

A significant number of new actors have joined the political movement further broadening the base from being exclusively just activists and traditional groups.

The recent protests attracted the attention of the world's media and the sympathy of international civil society – and this has helped in highlighting the democratic movements in Sudan and prompted analysts to rethink their approach regarding the political situation in the country.

A new generation of leaders has emerged as a result of the protest movement at both the national and regional levels. This can be viewed as nothing less than a positive step for the future of Sudan's political scene.

Awareness and the need to 'rebuild' unions was another positive step; as a result, activists went on to form new, more active professional unions and syndicates covering doctors, lawyers, teachers and journalists. Although the nature of the social structure and economic activism has changed from when it was in 1985 for example the objectives remain the same and they continue to have an important and influential role in the process of change both in the pre and post regime era.

The protests only served to further emphasise and bring about divisions and rifts within the ruling regime and the system it has put in place. Voices within the government and party began to question whether it's possible to retain complete power in the near future and already exit plans and steps are being made.

### **Why is Sudan Not There Yet?**

#### *Lack of Leadership*

In all its years of rule, the NCP has systematically and efficiently worked on demolishing the political and trade unions which in the past were the heart and base of Sudanese political activism; and had a leading and well respected position in the streets of Sudan in regards to it answering the people's demands and interests. As such there is a vacuum of leadership and an inability to bridge this gap.

1. At the political level, with a lot of the opposition parties being based abroad has led to a 'break down' between their leadership and the parties' support base resulting in a long period of authoritarian rule thereby creating internal structural problems related to the political and democratic practices within the parties themselves. This only served to negatively affect the effectiveness of these parties. What was noticeable during the recent protests even with the absence of any organised activism via the political parties was that some adopted a negative, undermining role in the protests, others remained silent and simply watched while a third opted to join forces with the ruling regime by using bargaining and negotiation tactics.

2. The politicisation of the mandatory civil service has also played a big part in dismantling state institutions that brought together professionals from various sectors resulting in the breaking of links of association between them.

3. The new demographic in the country is a factor as the doubling of the urban population in relation to the rural rising from 20% in 1989 to more than 40% in 2011. This drastic change has caused the rural areas to be void of traditional leaders and cities populated with people who have no social or cultural links, therefore a limited sense of camaraderie and kinship ties.

4. The vast numbers of emigrants whether for political or economic reasons has been very high especially amongst those in the professional spheres and who can form and provide alternatives to political leaders.

All these factors have combined to creating a wide gap in the leadership of those calling for change and no real alternatives have been made until today.

Poor coordination and organisation: the protesters went out with one goal – to bring about change even if they did so without sufficient or appropriate organisation on the ground. However the emergence of a number of youth movements, including Sudan Change Now, is strong evidence that the belief and vision for change is alive and kicking. However, there are still many big challenges and duties ahead for all activists in realising this vision, to have a revolution that will restore democracy.

Imbalance of power: The regime has accumulated vast fortunes after years of oil production since 1999 and like all totalitarian regimes nothing was spared in install the pillars of its rule, using the money of the people to further enhance its security and military to protect itself but not the nation nor the citizens. Huge amounts of money were also invested in the NCP to further enhance its position whilst simultaneously weakening all other political parties resulting in a huge imbalance of power between the ruling party and all other civil forces.

### **Does this mean the winds of revolution will not pass through Sudan?**

Many fear the decline in the wave of protests is a wasted chance that will be difficult to replicate in the foreseeable future.

These concerns can't be ignored as the protests did not achieve decisive 'victories' that would serve as a turning point regarding how the public would view future demonstrations or propel them to join in larger numbers. With the exception of those who went out in Nyala, Gadarif, Khartoum University, El Deim and the Friday of 'Lick your Elbow' at Wad Nubawy, demonstrators could not sustainably compete nor stand up to the security forces. But despite this there are still factors that cannot be overlooked. The rapid deterioration of the economy will not be halted by austerity measures or by any other 'brake' mechanism deployed by the government. The Khartoum regime is isolated internationally and no single entity is

willing to put its neck out and bail them out. Budget deficits are estimated to be in the range of \$2.4 billion while other independent estimates put the figures between \$7-10 billion. Foreign exchange resources are almost depleted and the system will not be able to withstand a lot even if agreement with South Sudan regarding the oil transit fees is reached.

We must also look with great skepticism into whether the regime is capable of continuing with the repressive tactics used to clamp down the demonstrations, contrary to the Libya or Syria scenario erupting in Sudan that some politicians fear. The regime does not have a solid base drawn on sectarian or ethnic lines that cannot be dismantled. This became evident when protests started in cities in central Sudan, where the regime claims that it's ethnic support is based.

### **What to do?**

Among some of the detrimental factors affecting mass mobilization raised here was the point of the weakness in the NCP's leadership and hierarchy. Below are the steps SCN believes should be in the next phase:

Work amongst the masses: it's indisputable that we've inherited a very lean political spectrum following two decades of NCP rule which has limited the scope and outreach of civil powers amongst the people and disconnected it from its social roots in one form or the other. The obligatory duty is to continue the work already initiated at the grass roots, by educating and mobilising various forces in society to recover our rights, build a new nation based on our aspirations, visions and dreams.

Create a national project that combines the instruments of change: an arena of Sudanese political forces that are active on the field of political and social change. We should take advantage of the capabilities of the political parties, the armed movements, the youth, trade unions and civil society to create a project for both political and social change; one that is based on democracy, social justice and peace for all.

Rewrite the political discourse of the forces of change: the complexity of Sudan's crisis and their ramifications on all activists involved in the process of change is a serious responsibility on them which demands the need of a conscience, responsible and disciplined national political discussion that doesn't focus on one factor and ignores the others.

Rehabilitation of trade union work contributed to the recent protests: the emergence of the professional unions was evident and their objectives and importance goes beyond the process of simply bringing down the regime but to also help build the state afterwards. As such, the existence and strengthening the institutional construction is a vital factor in change.

Diversification and innovation in peaceful means of resistance: Sudanese resistance movements have a rich history but we can also learn and use some of the experiences of movements from other parts in the world and find a system or method that suits and fits the existing one in our country.

The Active Role of the Diaspora and Opposition Abroad: what the recent protests have shown is the interaction and involvement from Sudanese living abroad who also contributed to garnering the media's attention by holding peaceful sit-ins in front of Sudanese embassies in various cities and locations. Their role could be bigger by utilising broader organisation, exposing the regime and supporting the opposition internally through political, financial, material and publicity means.

### **Scenarios of Change:**

Predicting the path to change is difficult but necessary so as not to be left to variables and possibilities - we must contribute positively to determining the course of change.

There are several possible scenarios listed below to be examined with the view of taking the necessary measures in order to achieve our goal. These scenarios primarily depend on the balance of power vis-a-vis change. Pushing for mass movement and organisation is a critical factor in bringing about the change that will go a long way in attaining genuine democratic transition and also ensure that the bleak and detrimental scenarios do not unfold.

1. A Popular Uprising Scenario (Sudanese Model): is a repeat of what happened in October 1964 and April 1985 - a popular revolt with the support of the army with civilian technocrats to lead the transitional period. This scenario best fits but there remains deep concerns regarding the army and the how deep NCP's sympathising generals are embedded especially as it appears the army is very much in-tune and in-line with the regime; nonetheless all this remains hypothetical at best. Other factors that must be carried out by the transitional body such as the composition of a civil union group of such which will facilitate the process of governmental change. The type of transitory civil union that emerged following the April uprising is not available for us at this time as the gap between the political forces, both in the civil and army branches, is too deep and too big. As such it is imperative to build on an agreed political project and entity that best expresses the means to facilitate the transition following the toppling of the regime and one which takes into account all the expected scenarios and hypothesis.

2. The Coup Scenario: the system is not just one man but the political and economical developments have expanded the cracks within the NCP so much that the wealth, so useful in the past in helping to export the ambitions and interests, has decreased dramatically resulting in schisms developing within the ranks. These factors are also present within the armed

forces further increasing the possibility of an internal coup.

3. Partial Transition Scenario (Yemeni Model): one possible prognosis that may apply to Sudan is that of the partial transition involving elements of the regime, especially if this is to occur before the complete maturation of the revolt. It is one possible analysis that must be dealt with great caution as it can result in the hijacking of the revolution. Furthermore, it's an easy model to market both locally and internationally however like stated before the strength of the mass movement and its organisational effectiveness will be the basis of the form of change.

4. All Out War: there are war fronts that are ticking time bombs and could explode at any moment with the continuing changing balance of power and military only adding to the situation. Whether Khartoum continues with its military endeavours which leads to a state of ethnic and ideological polarisation which is likely as its choice in regards to resolving conflicts in the country is via the use of weapons, the chances of all out war remains a probability that is fuelled by the absence of a political vision. This cannot be ignored if we are to witness a shift in Sudan's governmental future.

5. Temporary Sedation: A number of international actors since the South seceded have envisioned a picture of political balance/settlement between the two sides and is an analysis based on the same premise at the core of the Naivasha agreement and has dominated the NCP thinking in the north and the SPLM in the south. The amended version of this scenario is based on reaching wholesome agreements between the two states while pressuring the rebellious groups opposing both regimes with settlements following the Aboja example, which does not give the weaker parties in this equation - namely The Revolutionary Front - anything. Reaching a settlement here depends on International pressure in the first place, and if implemented will stifle the public uprising and delays any hopes for a serious break through in the change process for an unknown period of time.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper is an attempt by us in Sudan Change Now to look at some of the issues related to the process of change and is an initial effort to read into what is occurring now in the country and what may happen in the future along with some requirements that must be carried out by the mass movement at this time of hardship. This shortened vision does not take into account all the complexities of the political scene, but we do not claim perfection is being made but it's in the hands of the people for dialogue, discussion and action. We believe the time for change has arrived and that this system is on very shaky ground, like a house of cards that will collapse very soon. The obligatory duties now is for all of us to think of the overall movement of change from this moment on, to build a nation that is free, democratic and just.

*Sudan Change Now is a non-violent opposition group seeking the downfall of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP).*