

The Yarmouk complex: Sudan in the world

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By Magdi El Gizouli

October 30, 2012 - Sudan's Military Industry Corporation (MIC), established according to its website in 1993, has as its motto the phrase 'for peace we gather all our effort'. The phrase mocks the fact that the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) which grew out of the Egyptian-clad and British-disciplined Sudan Defence Force (SDF) has been consumed throughout its history in battling insurgencies within the country's territories. Ghazi Suleiman, once a regime-critical human rights lawyer and today a loud enthusiast for President Bashir, did not mince words in spelling out the esprit de corps of the SAF officer class with reference to the envies and passions of his own social milieu, the educated effendis of the professions. An innocent-looking TV presenter asked Ghazi over Eid whether there was anything he regretted during his rather dramatic life of political zigzags. Ghazi, priding in his frankness, said he regretted the decision to enter the law faculty of Khartoum University instead of joining the army. Had I been an officer, he said, I would have surely managed to pull off a coup and realise my dream of becoming the country's president, the uncontested Bringi (number one).

Ghazi's fantasy is shared by many an effendi, officers and civilians alike. In an address to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) on 5 September this year Mubarak al-Fadil al-Mahdi effectively invited his interlocutors to back a coup plot against President Bashir, justified as is the habit with the necessity to facilitate the leap to democracy. "The army could be the conduit for transition, as happened previously in Sudan, and recently in Egypt and Tunisia", said Mubarak, another president hopeful whose political ambitions are perennially thwarted by the superior clout of his cousin and chairman of the National Umma Party Sadiq al-Mahdi. The perpetuation of Sudan's civil wars stems in part from this investment in the power of guns to short-circuit political struggle. Combine Ghazi's officers and Mubarak's marketing strategy and you arrive at the elemental features of effendi political projects, shared by the rulers and their contenders: self-referential with little regard to the people to be 'saved', 'liberated', 'delivered'...etcetera, and extraverted, whereby external anchor is sought to compensate for the deficiency in domestic legitimacy.

With that in mind it might have been cheaper for Israel to solicit the cooperation of the security-military establishment in Khartoum rather than bomb the Yarmouk complex, in particular that a history of joint ventures is not lacking. Jaafar Nimayri, Sudan's president between 1969 and 1985 and President Bashir's role model, partnered with Israel without as much as a whimper in Operation Moses which involved the air-lift of Ethiopian Jews or Falashas to Israel via Sudan in 1984. In recent years Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) evolved into a trusted subcontractor of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the 'war on terror', delivering "important, functional and correct" information in the words of a State Department official in 2005. President Bashir's government, handed over Carlos the Jackal to the French with a price-tag attached, offered to ship off Osama bin Laden to the Saudis and then to the Americans, and transferred al-Qaeda suspects to the mercy of the CIA with little discretion. Israel was apparently compelled by domestic political concerns and wider geo-political constraints of its anti-Iranian zeal to strike at Khartoum rather than bargain. In that sense, Israel and Iran were text-messaging in missiles over Sudan's territories, and Khartoum but a screen.

President Bashir, the proverbial naked king, picked up the Palestinian wrap to cover up his exposed 'defences' in a televised meeting of the Council of Ministers the day after. Israel, he said, targeted Sudan because of its position against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Nafie Ali Nafie, ran off with mantra. Sudan will not be deterred by Israel's aggression from supporting the Palestinian cause, he told a function of the ruling National Congress Party. The claim is to say the least hypocritical. The commitment of the ruling elite in Sudan to the Palestinian liberation struggle is as sincere as Ghazi Suleiman's human rights antics, convertible if priced. Short of allies to support its counter-insurgency campaigns President Bashir's government picked up weapons wherever it could find them, Iran being one provider. The bill, it seems, included space for Teheran's military to operate in, much like the readiness of the government to rent off thousands of acres of agricultural land in the country to any foreign investor able to flash some cash. Ali Mazrui developed the concept of 'multiple-marginality' to define Sudan's predicament, a notion that could well be employed to grasp its multiple-dependencies, and consequentially the promiscuous foreign policy of its effendi rulers.

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