

## Power struggle in Khartoum

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By David L. Phillips and Ahmed Hussain Adam

November 16, 2012 - Sudan is on the brink. Its military has suffered humiliating defeat and dishonor. The economy is in free-fall. Islamist factions are breaking ranks with the regime. President Omar al-Bashir's allies can see the writing on the wall. Khartoum has become a snake-pit, with everyone trying to promote their power and privilege in the event of Bashir's demise.

Bashir is seeking to consolidate control by embracing Islamists and Shariah law. The so-called "Islamic Movement Conference" will convene later this month to choose a new Secretary General of the Islamic Movement for Sudan. Nothing new will come from the Conference, even though Islamist leaders from around the world may join. The Movement is just a symbolic body, with no real political authority or integrity.

More and more of Bashir's backers are anticipating Bashir's demise. Disaffected security officers are coalescing around Nafie Ali Nafie, Bashir's Assistant and Deputy Chairman of the National Congress Party (NCP). Nafie led the Mukhabarat, Bashir's feared military intelligence. His hands are bloody with crimes committed during the ethnic cleansing of Darfur, South Sudan and South Kordofan. Nafie is brazenly ambitious. He wants power to ensure impunity for his crimes.

Ali Osman Taha, the First Vice President, is no better. His clique, which includes Islamist cells and some opportunists from his Shaygia tribe, is pragmatic and ruthless. While Taha is closely tied to Bashir, he is working behind the scenes reaching out to Islamist groups within the regime. His goal is to secure the mantle of NCP leadership.

NCP youth groups are discontent with the country's direction, including its corrosive corruption. They are also disaffected with Bashir for his stewardship of the economy and opposed to the Islamist Movement's bold-faced bid for power. They do not, however, stand for real change. They are rank opportunists espousing internal reform as a way to power.

General Bakri Hassan Salih, the Presidency Minister, is one of the few people that Bashir really trusts and upon whom he relies. Bakri and General Abdul-Rahim Mohamed Hussein, the Defense Minister, are proven loyalists. Bakri is well-placed to take over from Bashir.

Bashir's would-be successors - Bakri, Taha and Nafie - are cut from the same cloth. They will not hesitate to intensify aggression against dissidents within Sudan. They will also continue Sudan's destructive collaboration with Iran and Hamas.

Now is the time for the Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan resistance movements to join with genuine democratic forces and seize the momentum of the Arab Spring. The resistance movements, disenfranchised since independence in 1956, have chosen armed struggle because no other course is open to them. Youth groups, women's organizations, and some business leaders are other genuine change agents. They should unite with the resistance movements behind a national program for peaceful democratic change in Sudan.

The international community can also play a role. Bashir is rumored to have malignant throat cancer. Under indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for genocide and crimes against humanity, Bashir should not be allowed to leave the country for medical care. It is shameful that Saudi Arabia has recently welcomed him at a five-star hospital in Riyadh.

Nor does Bashir deserve a safety net. The United States should dissuade its ally, Qatar, from trying to broker a power-sharing deal that would keep Bashir in power or replace him with a member of his criminal clique. Instead of sheltering war criminals, the international community should help execute current arrest warrants issued by the ICC including a warrant for General Hussein.

Sudanese are thirsting for information. Youth groups from Egypt and Tunisia have experience with new media technology as an effective tool for political mobilization. They should share their know-how with Sudan's university-educated democracy advocates.

Sudan's long national nightmare may soon be ending. Sudanese deserve dignity, democracy and development. So do their neighbors in South Sudan who have suffered from Khartoum's aggression. Across the region, people are looking for change they can believe in. Nothing less than accountability for Bashir and his cronies will do.

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