

## Another coup in Sudan : the politics of temptation

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By Magdi El Gizouli

November 27, 2012 - The contradictions ravaging the Sudanese Islamic Movement (SIM) matured in the folds of its 8th General Conference into an antagonism between loyalists and dissidents, an antagonism that the state attempted to resolve by means of a purge. Media coverage tended to portray the first as 'hardliners' and the second as 'reformers', a mystification compounded by the drama of the foiled coup plot which landed Salah Gosh, Sudan's former spy chief, and Brigadier General Mohamed Ibrahim Abd al-Jalil, the 'emir of the mujahideen' better known to his admirers as 'Wad Ibrahim', and their associates in detention. Instead of reaping the benefits of their political investment in reform rhetoric, meagre as they may appear, the dissident 'Saihoon' of the SIM and National Congress Party (NCP), a pregnant Arabic term that translates in this context roughly into 'God-seeking wanderers', were tempted by the presence of combat-hardened officers and paramilitary 'jihadists' in their midst to try their luck at a putsch, the routine folly of the notoriously self-indulgent and vicissitudinous Sudanese petty bourgeoisie.

In the late hours of 21 November operatives of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) arrested their former chief Salah Gosh and his alleged associates, among them the celebrated Wad Ibrahim, a man who once commanded the President's guard, the former commander of the Sudanese-Chadian Border Force Fath al-Raheem Abdalla Suleiman, and the senior military intelligence officer Adil al-Tayeb. Fingers were instinctively directed at Ghazi Salah al-Din, assistant to the President and leader of the NCP's parliamentary caucus, as the suspected poster boy of the coup plot. Ghazi was the Saihoon's revered candidate for the leadership of the SIM. He withdrew from the competition once it became clear that the loyalist camp had engineered a safe majority to drown the immediate demands of the Saihoon in the General Conference.

The 'democratic' exercise did not satisfy the Saihoon's ambitions. They accused the SIM leadership of swarming the conference with rustics from the provinces who did not know better, the standard argument raised by elite Islamists against the transformation of the SIM under the NCP from a closely-knit vanguard of predominantly petit bourgeoisie composition to a mass 'tareeqa' with little in the way of entry requirements and wide exit door.

In defeat, the Saihoon announced themselves an inner-party platform of the NCP. They issued a statement under the name of the 'NCP - Reform Platform' pleading President Bashir to release the detainees. The Saihoon fulminated against the Minister of Defence, Abd al-Rahim Mohamed Hussein, asking for his immediate dismissal. The Minister, said the statement, was responsible for the poor performance of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Popular Defence Forces (PDF) in the Sudanese war zones and directly to blame for the failure of the army to respond to repeated Israeli attacks on the country. "We remain in expectation of the decisions you will make. Be assured that they [the detained officers] all love, adore, and respect you [President Bashir] but your minister of defence has left them with no other option," concluded the statement addressing President Bashir. The Minister, complained the Reform Platform, forced the chief of military intelligence and other senior officers into retirement because they offered their advice and counsel, and is currently "creating problems with the commander of the Armoured Corps". The demand for 'reform' with a popular and national scope unravelled to read like the imploring of a jealous lover anguished by an unforeseen spell of neglect. Indeed, the Saihoon could only remember their immediate effendiya concerns, positions in the SAF hierarchy in this case, when surprised by the counter-intrigue of the state apparatus.

While Sudanese commoners went on with their daily lives recording the coup attempt as another instance in the long tale of petit bourgeoisie squabbles over control of the state, star dissidents of the historic Islamic Movement came out in defence of the 'reform' putschists. Abd al-Wahab El-Affendi, a Westminster University scholar and coordinator of its 'Democracy and Islam Programme', praised 'Wad Ibrahim' to the holy heavens. Wad Ibrahim is more popular in the officer corps than the Minister of Defence, he wrote. This is a man who still lives in a humble government-owned house, and does not possess a house of his own, a man unstained by corruption, he added. The same could have been said about President Bashir before he assumed office of course. To the great mass of the Sudanese the state-sponsored life-style of Wad Ibrahim, a salary and a government house and car and possibly government-funded Hajj, is the object of revolutionary envy, one severe enough as to ignite the rebellions that he excelled in combating over the years of his career in the SAF. El-Affendi, as if by instruction, attempted in a terribly twisted argument to make the claim that Salah Gosh, a Sudanese Yagoda if any, was arrested together with the 'noble' officers led by Wad Ibrahim, in order to taint their "good reputation". He then went on to make the argument for a "move by the army", i.e. a coup, as the less costly route to effecting democratic change in the country. Either way, he concluded, whether an initiative of the army supported by the people or a popular movement supported by the army, the countdown of the regime has started. Well, when it took over power by the same putschist route in 1989 the National Islamic Front (NIF), the political cloak of the SIM at the time, traded the same alibi, 'salvation' by conspiracy. Petty bourgeoisie oscillation between the 'path of the masses' to use a preferred phrase of the late Abd al-Khalig Mahjoub, i.e. collective emancipatory action, and the fantasy of a swift short-cut to 'genuine democracy' led by a circle of 'progressive' officers could not be better illustrated. El-Affendi titled his piece "[The army sides with the people \(in advance\)](#)".

*The author is a fellow of the Rift Valley Institute. He publishes regular opinion articles and analyses at his [blog Still Sudan](#). He can be reached at [m.elgizouli@gmail.com](mailto:m.elgizouli@gmail.com)*