

## Sudanese Opposition: The day after

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February 26, 2013 - If the Sudanese opposition were to overthrow the NCP and come to state power the question posed here is what would be the major challenge to be faced the day after?

Sudan is presently suffering an economic crisis and it can be assumed that with the overthrow of the NCP government, growing insecurity, and a collapsing currency that the in-coming government will be confronted with an even deeper economic crisis.

But the very soon after coming to power the new government can expect a visit from an International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation which will offer a bridging loan to deal with the crisis. It will also remind the government that Sudan is in arrears in meeting the terms of its \$40 billion international debt (a debt it should be recalled was largely contracted by President Nimeiri and amounted to only \$9 billion, thus making clear the unethical nature of such loans). The IMF will no doubt inform the in-coming government that both it and other international holders of Sudan's debt will be more sympathetic to cancelling some of this debt and be prepared to arrange a more acceptable schedule of interest payments than was possible with the NCP.

But before the new government breathes a sigh of relief the IMF officials will then explain what the conditions will be for an emergency loan and a new schedule of payments on the national debt. The conditions will be:

- An across the board wage freeze
- Devaluation of the currency
- Introduction of an austerity program
- Raising taxes and fees for government services
  - Ending subsidies
  - Selling off state assets

In other words after mobilizing the Sudanese people around the promise of better days to come with the dismissal of the NCP, the first demands of the international community for the new government will be that it further reduce the standard of living of the people and that Sudan give up much of its economic sovereignty. And while the new government is coming to grips with this shock the American ambassador to Sudan may inform it that the World Bank and IMF are largely controlled by the US and Western countries (the US government appoints the head of the World Bank while the EU appoints the head of the IMF) and the economic 'benefits' promised will also be dependent upon radical changes to Sudan's foreign policy. This will involve:

- ending Sudan's relations with Iran
- ending support for Hamas and other 'terrorist' organizations
  - ending the government's 'extreme' opposition to Israel
- bringing the government's policies in line with the interests of the US and the West

In other words, after the IMF demands that Sudan give up its sovereignty over economic policy the US will demand that it further give up sovereignty over its foreign policy.

And how will the new government respond to these demands? Given its make-up it is reasonable to assume that after a lot of bluster the government will give in to the demands. Following the SPLM-S, the SPLM-N has worked to develop close relations with US government officials, members of Congress, and various American opinion makers and almost certainly it has already given the Americans assurances that its policies - should it come to power - will closely mesh with those of the US government. So like its colleagues in Juba, it is safe to predict that the SPLM-N will bend to the will of the Americans. Since its overthrow by the NCP in 1989, the Umma National Party under Sadig Al-Mahdi has endeavoured to convince the international community of its bone fides and lack of 'extremism' (as defined by the West) and since it is by no means a party of the left, it too can be expected to fall in line with the US/IMF/World Bank. Likewise the Mirghani wing of the DUP has little ideological conviction, it is highly business oriented, and thus it too should have little problem in ceding Sudanese autonomy to ensure the survival of the new government and protect the patron's economic interests. Predicting the response of the PCP is more problematic, but since Turabi is a leading exponent of privatization and the market he will probably bend on the economic demands, but will have trouble turning his back on Iran and Hamas. Although the youth led the street struggles they carry little political weight, have focused almost exclusively on overthrowing the regime, and have not given much thought to what comes after the NCP is removed, and hence they will not likely be an obstacle to the demands of the international community.

Lastly, there are a range of minor leftist parties and factions which will be outraged by the threat posed to Sudan's sovereignty and the hurt the demands of the IMF will cause the people, but they will not have the power to dissuade the government from giving in. Moreover, their position will be weaker because if they have an alternative approach to dealing with the economic crisis they have not popularized it among the Sudanese people and not gained its acceptance either in the National Consensus Forces or among the signatories to the New Dawn.

The opposition has roundly condemned the NCP dictatorship and posed as the champions of democracy, but its notion of democracy resembles that favoured by the US which confines democracy to a narrow political realm and holds that economic issues should be resolved by the 'market', which in practice means the dominant financial interests of the West. Indeed, the West prefers democracy - as defined by it - over dictatorships precisely because democratic governments are generally more effective at containing the economic demands of its people. While bombs and military invasions remain part of the arsenal of the West to control governments opposed to its interests, in the present era it much prefers using international financial institutions that it controls at arm's length.

The new Moslem Brother government in Egypt will almost certainly be forced to accept stringent conditions that will compromise that country's sovereignty to get a US-backed IMF loan. And an in-coming government in Sudan does not have either the economic strength of Egypt or its regional political weight that it could use when negotiating with the international financiers. The opposition calls for an extended transitional period, but that will do little to prepare it for the demands of the US/IMF/World Bank which it would have to confront within days of assuming power. Moreover, given the lack of a debated and agreed upon economic alternative policies by the opposition, the desire of many in the opposition to win the favour of the West, and what can be expected to be the pressures posed by a dual economic and political crisis when it comes to power, there is good reason to expect that a major outcome of the overthrow of the NCP will be a rapid decline in living standards of the very people that brought the opposition to power, a transfer of power from the Sudanese state to the international financiers, and the formulation of a foreign policy that meets the needs of the West over the Sudanese people. By focusing almost entirely on formulas to reach tactical and largely opportunistic agreements on how to come to power and avoiding consideration of the ideological divisions between them, the various opposition parties have given almost no consideration to how they will respond to the eminently predictable economic and political crisis it will face upon assuming power. The result will be that the opposition will have replaced the tyranny of the NCP with that of the US/IMF/World Bank.

*The author published recently [The Fate of Sudan: Origins and Consequences of a Flawed Peace Process](#) - by Zed Books. The Arabic version is currently being translated by Sutour Publishing House in Cairo and should be available in June.*