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## POST-BASHIR SUDAN

The ousting and arrest of President Al Bashir on April 12 in Khartoum doesn't change the political history of Sudan much. And it surely isn't a venture that can bring democracy to the country.

Omar Al Bashir rose to power through a military coup in 1989. He was a colonel of the army who headed an insurrection, albeit a non-violent one, to oust a legitimately elected civilian government. After the coup, Al Bashir managed to govern until today with the help of the military.

Now the same military, faced with repeated demonstrations by the people, decided to remove him from his post, but this doesn't imply that they are giving up their power. They're swapping jockeys but the horse remains the same. Accordingly, the opposition in Sudan has recently denounced indiscriminate killings by the military.

Al Bashir's office was initially and "temporarily" filled by the Vice President, Minister of Defense and General, Ahmed Awad ibn Auf, who immediately made his program known: a two-year transition led by the army; a suspension of constitutional rights; a state of emergency for at least three months.

In the end, Auf was deemed inadequate because he could not 'understand' the demonstrators and was 'removed' in favor of a Military "Transitional" Council (another "temporary" solution) headed by yet another General, Abdelfattah al Buhran: an all-military rotation.

Al Buhran was given Auf's office because he seemed to be more in touch with the protesters, with whom he attempted to start negotiations. His importance in the military was probably greater than his predecessor's as well, since Auf had governed alongside Al Bashir for many years.

In addition, like his former President, Auf was also accused by the International Criminal Court of participating in genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur. The rise of Buhran offers the advantage of an international rehabilitation of Sudan and a possibility to dodge international sanctions for the offenses.

After all, Sudan's story isn't too dissimilar from other African nations. One dictator is booted out and another one fills his place. The rotation is based on considerations over power and opportunity.

### **What the demonstrators want**

The protests, organized by a coalition of qualified members of the civil society, are ongoing. No problem: the dictator gets arrested and another potential dictator fill his shoes.

Taking heed of popular resentment is theoretically a form of democracy, provided that the subsequently chosen leader is an expression of that resentment. This is not the case with Sudan. There were a series of requests on the part of the demonstrators: to freeze the assets of a number of politicians with ties to Al Bashir; to arrest the President himself; to sack a number of Generals; to sack the General Prosecutor and a number of judges; to release the military, policemen and civilians who had backed the demonstrations and are now jailed; to elect a civilian government.

The military leadership decided to agree only with the requests that didn't damage their own position. In essence, they picked the General who was liked most by the demonstrators. No more no less.

Al Bashir is becoming impopular? No problem. He gets arrested and his entourage cleansed: Prime Minister Taher Ella and the various other ministers are arrested, including the Vice President Osman Taha, the former Minister of Defense Abdul Rahim Mohammed Hussein, and Al Bashir's personal assistant and Vice President of the National Congress Party, Ahmed Mohammed Harun (whose name also appears on a black list of the International Criminal Court).

Auf is not liked? So what? He gets removed, also from his seat as a Minister of Defense. His Vice, General Kamal Abdul Maroof, is also removed.

The all-powerful head of the NISS (National Interlligence and Security Service), General Salah Gosh, is hated and feared due to his being the former regime's military arm? No problem: he is replaced by another General, Abu Bakr Mustafa. Even better: we shall reform the NISS, boasts the military regime.

The demonstrators ask for the head of Salah Gosh's predecessor, General Mohammed Atta, now Ambassador in Washington and a well-known torturer? No problem: he is also removed from his diplomatic post. The same goes for the Sudanese representative in Geneva, Mustafa Ismail.

The crowd wanted the dismantling of Al Bashir's Congress National Party? Granted. The party is dismantled, their assets frozen and its main members (whom the military have actually failed to identify this far) will be tried in court.

On top of all this, there are also a number of 'social' promises: to intensify the fight against corruption; to remove the curfew and state of emergency; to try those accused of brutality in court; to distribute food among the population, etc.

### **A civilian government?**

The only binding request, the shift to civilian rule, was promised but not maintained. The Military Council had initially promised that the transitional phase would last but two years but the shift to civilian rule is subordinated by the Military Council to two conditions: that the stability of the country and the security of its people be guaranteed. And who is supposed to guarantee the above? The military, of course. In other words, civilian rule with

a military chaperone. Even the African Union pressed for a civilian government and threatened to sanction the new regime.

Finally, an agreement is being negotiated with the opposition: A legislative council whose two-thirds are represented by the opposition and the creation of a so-called Sovereign Council, but only three years from now.

In substance, the popular revolt in Sudan was transformed into a purge inside the military regime.

But the protests had economic connotations as well: the division between the north and south of Sudan slashed oil revenues, the main cash-cow of the regime. There followed a general impoverishment of the population and a surge in the price of basic necessities, also thanks to the economic reforms enacted in 2017.

Al Bashir had already attempted to quench the protests by lowering the price of bread and other products with scarce success. The inflation had soared to 45%, making these economic initiatives useless.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates promised to send humanitarian aid (grain, medicines, even oil), which makes things a little easier for the military regime. In addition, the two Gulf countries expressed public appreciation for the work carried out by the regime. This is mostly due to the Sudanese involvement in Yemen, which was paid for with over 2 billion dollars (in addition to a promise of 15 billion dollars of investment in the near future).

### **The role of the military**

Surely Al Bashir was for 30 years a brutal dictator, but his actions were always supported by the military regime that kept him in power until last April. We are talking about the same 'elite' which now wants to judge and condemn him. In fact, the dictator initially tried to suppress protests with violence (reportedly 100 dead, a few hundred wounded and a wave of indiscriminate arrests) and by repeated changes in his government. He also refused to change the constitution, which granted him a third term in office. The results of his persecution were meager: the protest became structural, leading to his destitution and arrest.

Al Bashir carries the weight of the accusations for the repression in Darfur, which was very similar to a genocide and an ethnic cleansing. The international accusations and the arrest warrant in his name prevented the dictator from carrying out an adequate diplomatic activity abroad (with the notable exceptions of countries like Morocco, Egypt, South Africa and Saudi Arabia).

Reportedly, during a search of his residence, authorities found suitcases bloated with banknotes amounting to roughly 130 million dollars. But surely he was not the only thief in Sudan, nor the only person who became rich by milking the nation. His entourage, including the military, did the same. Alas, in the fight for survival that ensued, Al Bashir has become the only culprit for the nation's woes: violence, corruption and the economic crisis. From home arrests he was thus eventually transferred to prison.

The game being currently played by the military fluctuates between grants and promises and tries to appear above the parts, as if the military themselves had not played a central role in Sudan's past. Presently, the military regime is looking for a way shift to civilian rule that would leave their own power untouched.

### **The interests of others**

What happens in Sudan doesn't effect the Sudanese alone. With a territory among the biggest in Africa and a population of over 40 million, Sudan plays a central role in the African context. Egypt, for one, is very interested in the country's future, since it borders Sudan and shares the Nile's waters with the nation. They are afraid of a contagion effect, seen that the Cairo also has a military regime. Chad is also interested in Sudan's future: they were on very bad terms with Khartoum due to their support of the Darfur rebels.

The Gulf countries are interested due to a number of reciprocal accords and to the fact that the two countries belong to the Sunni world.

Qatar and Turkey, which share a close connection with Hassan Turabi's Muslim Brothers and his Popular Congress Party, are also keeping a close eye on Sudan. Doha is still thanking Sudan for not joining the embargo against Qatar promoted by Saudi Arabia.

With the creation of a Military Council, the USA have become privileged speakers with regards to Khartoum. In October 2017, the US administration removed – after a long and strained negotiation – the embargo that was ongoing since 1997. An embargo based on the collusion of Al Bashir with international terrorism – the same reason for the bombing of a pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum in 1998 (which the US thought was producing chemical agents).

China is, of course, interested as well. They are economically involved in the African continent and have violated the international embargo to help out Sudan. Russia is also interested, especially in the light of the 'normalized' relationship between Al Bashir and Assad's Syria. Behind Russia there is, of course, the interest of Iran in the future of Sudan. Khartoum and Teheran have had long and good diplomatic relations until the attack against the Saudi embassy in Teheran in January 2016.

### **The scary part**

The insurgence of a social crisis in Sudan, which would represent a new hotbed of instability in the African continent, scares the international community. Sudan is, of course, a Muslim country, where Osama Bin Laden found refuge for four long years (1992-1996). There is the possibility that in the future it could become a new target for Islamic terror. What happened in Libya and in Syria is a reminder for all.

International analysts want the country to be stable, regardless of whether such stability is guaranteed by a military regime or a by civilian rule. Democracy is not the bone of contention. The same is true inside the country: the middle class wants stability, security for its commerce and fears an uncertain future, which makes the military elite more acceptable in their eyes. The demonstrators' slogans about peace, liberty and justice are not on anyone's agenda. The country's future depends on other factors altogether.

## **ISLAMIC TERRORISM IN MOZAMBIQUE**

When we talk about Islamic terrorism in Africa we tend to focus geographically on the Sahel, on what happens in Nigeria with Boko Haram, in Somalia with the Shabab or on the plethora of formations that transhume between southern Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger and neighboring countries. Nations with a predominantly Muslim populations. But now phenomena linked to Islamic terrorism have also emerged in other countries where the majority of the population is not Islamic and geographically distant from the Sahel. The most striking case is Mozambique.

### **Mozambican Islam**

Although many local Muslim leaders tend to corroborate different statistical data, the Islamic community in Mozambique does not exceed 20% of the population. The data, within certain limits, is questionable because of persistence of traditional and animists rites in both Christians and Muslims. The resulting religious syncretism creates space for indeterminacy, especially considering that the traditionalists/animists represent 50% of the population. To give an example, the cult of the ancestors, propitiatory rites to anticipate great events or favor rains, the recourse to local shamans with alleged divinatory powers and contacts with spirits is widespread in both monotheistic religions.

Geographically, Muslims are concentrated along the coast, they are the result of Arab settlements over the centuries, and in the north of the country, while Catholics are mainly present in the center and the Protestants in the south. The Mozambican Islamic community is not only made up of indigenous Africans, but also of worshippers of Asian origin (especially Indians), including many Ismailis (therefore closer to Shiism rather than Sunnism).

However – and this is the most important aspect – Mozambican Islam, like most of it in Africa, was not radical until recently, but rather inspired by moderate Sufism. It wasn't linked to Qur'anic interpretations of Salafi inspiration. The prevailing school is the moderate Shafi school. The mutation took place over time, with the arrival of Wahabite charitable organizations, the consequent creation of mosques and Koranic schools, and proselytism helped by money donations.

### **The relationship between the State and religious communities**

In 1977 the Marxist regime had nationalized all the structures that belonged to religious communities (including churches and mosques) and then later decided to return them, although this never happened completely. To address and resolve this diatribe, since 1982 the Mozambican government has established, within the Ministry of Justice, a Directorate for Religious Affairs.

The Constitution establishes the freedom of worship, does not define any state religion, but prohibits the existence of parties based on religion as they are considered a threat to national unity.

Despite this prohibition, a small Islamic-inspired party exists and is tolerated, the Independent Party of Mozambique (PIMO) led by Yacub Sibindi, which has no parliamentary representation nor offices, publications nor websites. Recently he joined forces with other minority groups. Within the FRE.LI.MO. (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique) itself there is a group called "Islamic Movement" which brings together all the Muslim MPs. A sort of symbiosis between Marxism and Islam. Since 1989 all religious communities and missionary organizations have the obligation to register with the Directorate.

In addition to the aforementioned Wahabite charitable organizations, other Islamic organizations operate in the country, including the "Tabligh Islamic Call mission" and many Muslim missionaries from South Africa who have financed a series of Islamic schools ("madrasas") in the northern provinces of Mozambique. Large Islamic primary and secondary schools have been built in Maputo in the recent past; there is an Islamic university in Nampula financed by Sudanese Muslim organizations.

Over the past few years there have been a number of diatribes around the fact that the government had accepted Islamic religious celebrations (which also revolve with the lunar calendar) as national holidays, while not doing the same with the Christian ones (Afonso Dhlakama from RE.NA.MO., Resistência Nacional Moçambicana, had supported the claims of the Catholics and had thus alienated the support that he enjoyed, even during the guerrilla war, from the Muslim community). The issue rebounded when the regime decided to grant the right to respect their holidays to every faith.

Another object of litigation was the family law, which raised the age for marriage (Muslims were against the initiative to set limit at 18 for both sexes) and forbade polygamy (which was very common among traditionalists / animists and who found common ground with Muslims).

Muslims in Mozambique have their own role to play in the politics of the country. Although they are subject to the dominant Catholic Church, both because it is financially richer, and because, after the success of the mediation between RE.NA.MO. and FRE.LI.MO. orchestrated by the Community of Sant'Egidio, the political bargaining power of Catholics has increased. To date, a conference of bishops, including Anglican ones, is still a tool for dialogue and consultation with the authorities. However, Mozambique joined both the "Organization for the Islamic Conference" and the British Commonwealth in 1995.

Lately, even the Islamic Council has become a privileged interlocutor of the government as it tries to counter the rise of Islamic terrorism. Apparently, it was a dissident fringe of this body that fueled Islamic radicalism. A rebel rib of Mozambican Islam that created and registered its own organization in the north of the country under the name of "Ansar Sunna" (Partisans of the Islamic tradition) and that spread its influence through the construction of mosques and madrasas. The Islamic Council has repeatedly called for government intervention against this dissident sect without success. Only at the end of 2016 did the police intervene, arresting some members of Ansar Sunna.

## **Islamic terrorism**

The first Islamic attacks in Mozambique began on October 5, 2017 in the north of the country, in the province of Cabo Delgado, in an area near the border with Tanzania. That day a commando of 30 terrorists attacked three police stations at dawn killing 17 people. Since then the attacks have continued with continuity; the biggest victims are mainly civilians and, in recent times, perhaps to emphasize their deeds and to copy those of ISIS, those captured have been beheaded.

Terrorists attack villages, kill people and destroy homes. Recently they seem more dedicated to hitting convoys and workers working in the oil sector. And this escalation has increased with time. So far, over two hundred people have been killed and almost twice as many have been injured. The aim is clear: to terrorize the population and affect the economy of an area rich in gas, minerals and oil.

The region in which terrorists operate is one of the poorest in the country, the main economic activities being agriculture and pastoralism; the unemployment rate – especially among the youth – is very high, local Muslims feel marginalized because gas discoveries and oil have not produced any positive effects on the local economy. The proceeds deriving from energetic resources are managed centrally by Maputo and therefore the windfall doesn't reach, if not marginally, the local population. These are all causes of discontent that help the spread of terrorism fueled by social, political, economic and obviously religious problems.

The proximity with Tanzania offers terrorists the use of safe sanctuaries where to escape. There has always been a cross-border Islamic activity that is now the glue between the radical groups in Tanzania (who then ran away in Mozambique) with their Mozambican counterparts (who are now fleeing to Tanzania). Forms of collaboration have also emerged between the two groups.

### **Who are the terrorists**

The problem is that the emergence of Islamic terrorism in Mozambique finds local security authorities unprepared. There is no definite information about these groups, who finances them, who commands them, what they want (apart from the imposition of Sharia and anti-Christian and anti-Western sentiments) and how strong they are militarily. The authorities label them as criminals who feed on banditry, a bit like in the Sahel. They are involved in drug trafficking, ivory, timber, coal, ruby extraction, extortions and kidnappings. All these activities combined earn terrorists, according to some estimates, some 3 million dollars a month. An important figure if seen in the context of the endemic poverty of the Mozambican province.

The lack of information makes the hypothesis of succeeding in eradicating this terrorism uncertain. For now, the phenomenon has been confined to only one part of Mozambique, but this has not prevented local authorities to enact initiatives that can reduce social resentment. Obviously security forces have committed repeated violations of human rights, such as indiscriminate arrests, intimidations, censorship of news in the press.

Some estimates, however questionable, indicate that the militants of Ansar Sunna are around 1,000/1,500 and that they have been recruited from the local population, especially young people with a low cultural coefficient. They don't have a name. They are called "Shabaab" even though there are no links with their Somali counterparts. "Shabaab" because they are students who are therefore connected to the madrasas run by Ansar Sunna. The latter, is a name that was also borrowed from terrorists who fought US troops in Iraq.

After their attacks, the militants identified themselves as "Alhu Sunna wal Jamaa" (Organization of the followers of the Islamic tradition). They operate in small groups, they seem to have no centralized command structure and the various leaders often identify themselves as imams. In the fight against this organization, the Mozambican authorities can now rely on the technical and logistical support of Russia.

### **Risks for the future**

The government of Filipe Nyusi, the President of Mozambique, needs to solve the issue of terrorism in the north of the country. In October there will be parliamentary elections and generally, at the turn of the vote, as happened in 2014, there will be contrasts, accusations, protests and clashes between the FRE.LI.MO. in power and the RE.MNA.MO. This year negotiations are underway to avoid conflicts, but the result is not guaranteed. Furthermore, by eradicating terrorism, Nyusi could obtain greater electoral support for his party.

Another problem, as often happens in Africa, is linked to ethnic contrasts. The Shabaab mostly belong to the Mwani ethnic group, rival to the Makonde of President Nyusi. It is a recurring event in Islamic terrorism that the battle of a group attracts the attention and solidarity of other similar formations. It also happened in Mozambique, where Ugandan radical Islamic militants were recently arrested after they volunteered in support of Ansar Sunna. There have also been arrests of Tanzanians and South Africans. And it is no coincidence that the terrorists of Ansar Sunna ideologically refer to a Kenyan extremist preacher, Aboud Rogo, killed in 2012. There are therefore all the premises to internationalize the fight against the authorities of Maputo and insert it in the context of a global war by terrorists.



## **GOLAN HEIGHTS: THE DE FACTO POLICY**

US President Donald Trump believes that the Palestinian issue can be resolved with a unilateral approach, without mediation, but by openly siding with Israel. He acts with initiatives that do not take into account how complex and articulated the question of Middle Eastern relations is and moves ahead with initiatives that have in common the fait accompli. He did so when he decided to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in December 2017; he did so when he unilaterally canceled the Iranian nuclear agreement; he has done so lately by legitimizing the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights.

Apparently, the US President does not consider the history behind territorial disputes, UN Resolutions that, from time to time, both on the Golan and on the Palestinian issue with regard to Jerusalem and beyond have established boundaries, rights and duties. Trump decides unilaterally, doesn't consult with other regional actors except for Israel or his Jewish son-in-law, notoriously linked to ultra-orthodox positions, Jared Kushner. He doesn't care that someone else doesn't agree with him; above all, Trump doesn't care about the reactions from those who are penalized by his decisions. For Donald Trump, diplomacy is nothing more than relational bullying.

### **The Golan issue**

The occupation of the Golan Heights dates back to the Six Days War of 1967. In 1981, Israel formalized its annexation of the territory, although it was recognized by the international community. To confirm the provisional nature of the Israeli occupation, in 1974 the UN created a military mission and deployed a contingent, the UNDOF (United Nations Disengagement Observer Forces), to occupy and control a buffer zone to prevent clashes between Israeli and Syrian military forces. Despite its limited mandate, the United Nations' military contingents can only intervene in self defense, in almost 35 years UNDOF has avoided violent clashes between the two armies.

Israeli violations (overflights, raids, non-compliance with the military presence in the various interdiction zones, etc.) have definitely prevailed with respect to its counterpart's; however, the truce has held not because it has been imposed by the UN (deterrence is determined only by the fact that every violation is noted and exposed internationally) but because the two parties have decided not to exacerbate the level of tension. The over one thousand soldiers of which UNDOF is composed would not have enough coercive force if a conflict broke out. They limit themselves to manning observation posts on both sides of the border, to patrol, to periodically check the military positions of the two armies and if the arms and personnel limitations are respected.

### **The strategic value of the Golan**

The approximately 1,800 square kilometers of the Golan Heights allow those who control them to exercise the tactical dominance over the surrounding plains. On the Syrian side of the Golan you can visually control the desert plain that takes you to the gates of Damascus. On the Israeli side, you can control everything that happens up to the lake of Tiberias. During the 1973 war the Syrians had broken through the Israeli defense system

and could have arrived in Tiberias had they not stopped in the meantime and allowed Israel to block them with a counteroffensive.

On Mount Hermon, which is part of the local mountainous agglomeration and is over 2000 meters high, standing in between Syria and Lebanon, the Israeli presence prevents the passage of supplies and men between the two Arab countries. There is another reason for this location to be of extreme strategic value: the mountain allows to control over the rivers that form the river Jordan, the largest contributor of water for the Jewish state.

### **The political value of the Golan**

Since 1973, Israel has fortified all the Golan Heights with military outposts, bunkers and trenches, making them impregnable. Israel cannot afford the luxury of entrusting the control of the Golan to another country, especially to a hostile one such as Syria, nor to deprive itself of this defensive advantage. From this point of view, therefore, the heights are not, from the Israeli point of view, negotiable.

That said, the Golan Heights, remaining its control an issue of international legitimacy, can become the subject of a negotiation settling all the territorial issues involving Israel's borders with Lebanon, Syria and the related Palestinian question.

### **What the US decision on the Golan implies**

The definition of the legal status of the Golan Heights is important not because the international community assumes that, one day, they will return to Syria, a circumstance well known to be remote by all the regional or international powers. But it is relevant in the context of a "do ut des" once the various regional disputes are debated.

This applies to the Golan, but also to Jerusalem, where the issue is no longer military or strategic, but symbolic and religious. If these two issues are excluded from all negotiations and are granted to the Israelis without being part of a debate, whoever sits at the negotiations table will have nothing left to bargain for but to accept the fait accompli.

Donald Trump's stance on the Golan was made public in the days leading to the Israeli parliamentary elections of April 9, 2019. In practice, it was aimed at strengthening the role of Benjamin Netanyahu, who then won the electoral battle. After a decade in power, weakened by scandals and judicial inquiries, Netanyahu, also thanks to Trump, was able to push nationalist and extremist agenda. He shows no intention to negotiate on anything taking for granted the US support. The support for Benjamin Netanyahu also plays out domestically for Trump, as he sets the stage for his confirmation in 2020.

### **International reactions**

In many respects, the reversal of decades of US foreign policy in the Middle East represents a novelty whose effects are unpredictable. Especially when it seems pointing to a rise in tensions, rather than an attempt to diffuse conflict. Trump probably thinks that the danger posed by Iranian expansionism, so feared by the Sunni monarchies of the Gulf, could convince Arab countries to side with Israel and go as far as accepting otherwise

unacceptable initiatives such as the recognition of Jerusalem or the annexation of the Syrian Golan. What this might cause is yet to be seen.

The Middle East is a part of a world in continuous evolution where, moreover, tensions overlap and feed themselves. Too many actors and too many interests play a role in the region. It is not enough for the United States to decide unilaterally on every issue. There isn't only the much-vaunted Israeli "right" to self-defense, a recurring concept in the theses of Netanyahu and Trump, but there are also other rights that, although ignored in the present, can fuel resentments and tensions tomorrow.

The US recognition of the Golan Heights as an Israeli territory has certainly aroused hostile reactions in many regional actors. There was an obvious rejection by Syria. There has been a critical reception in other Arab countries, but with rather "weak" reactions. Russia has announced that the American initiative will surely have a negative impact on the peace process in the Middle East, constituting a threat to regional peace and a violation of internationally-accepted decisions. The Hezbollah, through Hassan Nasrallah, have underlined their hostility to the US decision as has Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The US Administration's stance on the Golan has two evident negative outcomes: it certifies once again how the United States does not take into due account UN Resolutions; secondly, it provides legitimacy to the right to annex a territory following a military conquest. If the same principle is implemented also on the status of the West Bank, currently internationally defined as a "occupied territory", it won't be long till Israel declares its sovereignty over the territory. One can only imagine the consequences this would have on the prospect of the creation of a Palestinian State: it would become a territorial concession under strict Israeli protection. Would this be an acceptable solution for a weakened Palestinian National Authority? Certainly not for the extremist fringes of Palestinian nationalism.