

# Islam in from the Cold

## A Muslim Brother's Reflections on the Past, Present, and Future of the Islamic Movement in the Sudan

BY MARIE BESANÇON

Ahmed found himself in Khartoum's notorious Kober prison with Sheikh Hassan al-Turabi, éminence grise of political Islam, shortly after the 1989 coup d'état in the Republic of the Sudan.<sup>1</sup> He and the coup leader al-Turabi, who infamously welcomed Osama bin Laden into the country in 1991, were close friends for years before he served as one of the leading members of the Sudanese Islamic Movement's shura.<sup>2</sup> Thus prison began the saga of the second Islamist rule in the Sudan with all of its twists and turns, and a watershed moment in Ahmed's long journey as a Muslim Brother.<sup>3</sup>

Handsome and dynamic at eighty plus years old, Sayyed Ahmed Abdul Rahman Mohamed Ahmed—who was born in 1933, one year after Sheikh al-Turabi—easily claims the privilege of elder statesman.<sup>4</sup> Clad in the long white *jalabiya* and turban of ancient Sudan and defying the 100 plus degree temperatures of summer, Ahmed coolly reflects on the grand scheme of creating a modern Islamic government and society in the Sudan, and offers revisions and recommendations—giving an inside glimpse of his spiritual and political ambitions at the beginning, and what they are thinking now about the parlous future of the Sudan.

It is of paramount importance for the world to understand Islamists who are not intent on killing infidels, but focused on their own national political system in a world where the violence

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of radical movements such as Daesh threatens to define all Muslims. “The world now is taking for granted that the Sudanese are synonymous with Islamists,” and it is not particularly accurate from Ahmed’s perspective. There are many identities within the Sudan—while the majority are Muslims, they would not necessarily consider themselves Islamists. Most of the Islamists also distinguish themselves as apart from any extremist organization. They see themselves as religious and promoters of political Islam, but certainly not terrorists.

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traditional Muslim countries—and would like to build closer ties with the United States—they have the potential for being a force for stability in the region.<sup>5</sup> It is a crucial time in history to know who the Sudanese Muslim Brothers are and who are the Sudanese people, not the least because the new U.S. Administration is poised to label the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization.<sup>6</sup>

The Sudanese Islamists themselves had fundamental differences with the Cairo Brothers from the beginning; the Sudanese were more focused on gaining independence from Egypt and Britain, and were not

interested in spreading their political beliefs—only in establishing their own Islamic political institutions and identity.<sup>7</sup> Their original vision may have evolved, morphed, and changed, but it is by no means dead.<sup>8</sup> The pioneers are loath to let go of their political dreams that began in the 1960s and crystalized into a political party during stints in Kober and Suakin prisons—culminating in their Islamic Revolution.

### **In Kober Prison with al-Turabi, The Sudan’s Third Coup d’état**

Ahmed describes the spacious white prison cell in Kober that he shared with five others including Sheikh al-Turabi in 1989 as fairly lavish compared to the prison digs of the ordinary criminals. Their common room had a ceiling fan, comfortable furniture, and a television set where they could watch other world events besides their own coup d’état—the dissolution of the Iron Curtain, the aftermath of Tiananmen Square, and Apartheid’s demise. After all, Sheikh al-Turabi, the leader of the Islamic Movement and engineer of the coup, knew he was going to jail and had made arrangements to have some of his books and other personal items brought to the prison. So did Ahmed and his other colleagues in the movement, who shared their cell with the Secretary General of the Sudanese Communist Party and one of the National Umma Party (NUP) notables.<sup>9</sup>

It was all part of the elaborate deception of the coup—to hide the fact that it was staged by a small group of nationalist and Islamist officers directed by Sheikh al-Turabi. Even though the Ba’athist military officers were preparing a coup themselves, the Islamists secretly upstaged them; so for a few days, the world thought it was a military coup

similar to Mubarak's takeover in Egypt.<sup>10</sup> Sheik al-Turabi was behind the entire charade and had chosen Omar Hassan al-Bashir, then a committed Muslim Brother, to lead the coup—surprising those who thought he would pick Osman Hassan, the plot's acting coordinator. Al-Bashir's military colleagues held him in high regard as a decorated officer, thus he was a strategic choice; even the Ba'athists had wanted him to lead their efforts.<sup>11</sup>

Ahmed was privy to the coup's entire projected course of action, so to help reinforce the ruse, he and his closest collaborators served time together along with the ousted sectarian leaders—NUP Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi (Ansar Sufi) and Mohamed Osman al-Mirghani from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Khatmiyya Sufi leader—whose shared cell was across the compound from the others. Ahmed found it ironic that al-Mahdi and al-Mirghani ended up sharing the same accommodation in prison considering their family rivalries that dated back prior to the British times.<sup>12</sup> As the Khatmiyya generally were supporters of the government of the day it was odd for them to be in jail at all.<sup>13</sup> During their three months of internment in Kober prison and one month in Gezira prison, Ahmed and his fellow detainees all slept outside at night in the private prison yard reserved for the political incarcerates to escape the heat. During the day, the athletic and fit Prime Minister Sadiq joined in the organized sports with the other prisoners. He and his tough Ansar followers from western Sudan easily outplayed the more delicate intellectuals from the Khatmiyya and the Muslim Brothers.

The deposed Prime Minister called upon Ahmed to be a mediator when some of his

Ansar followers objected to Sheikh al-Turabi leading the daily prayers and readings from the Quran while in prison. They felt that since Sadiq had taken over the mantle of Imam of the Ansar when his uncle Hadi al-Mahdi was killed, that he should be the one leading prayers. Ahmed reasoned with him that al-Turabi, who had come to the prison several days before Sadiq, had already assumed the prayer leadership, and moreover, he knew the Quran better than anyone else in the prison. Ahmed then suggested that Sadiq could lead the Ansar prisoners in prayer repeating parts of the *Ratib* twice daily at the *Asr* (afternoon prayer) and the *Maghrib* (sunset prayer)—and Sadiq agreed. The prison yard reflected the historic and ongoing competitive relationship between the sectarian Sufi parties of the Ansar and the Khatmiyya, and the Muslim Brothers who were vying to take over power. It would be hard to say which were most fundamentalist.<sup>14</sup>

The early iterations of the Sudanese *Ikhwan*—the Muslim Brotherhood in the Sudan that had multiple nomenclatures including the Islamic Charter Front, finally settling on the Sudanese Islamic Movement (SIM)—had practiced more of a traditional *uluma* role in the Sudan—that is of advising and directing political leaders from behind.<sup>15</sup> But in 1985, after President Jaafar Mohammed Nimeiri kicked Ahmed, al-Turabi, and the other *Ikhwan* members out of his government and put them in prison, they consolidated their plans to form a bona fide political party—the National Islamic Front (NIF)—and effectively to make the political decisions themselves.<sup>16</sup> This much less comfortable month and a half of imprisonment for Ahmed—first in Khartoum's Kober prison, then in Darfur's disreputable Shalla

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Ansar praying near the Madhi's tomb during ceremony for Eid al Adha. (Besançon)



prison where they nearly starved during their week's stay, and finally a month in Suakin prison—gave Ahmed and his fellow Muslim Brothers plenty of time together to scheme, plot, and organize.<sup>17</sup>

Before the 1989 coup, the leadership of the coalition government under Prime Minister Sadiq and his NUP had become weak and ineffective. Granted, they had taken over an impossible economic situation after Nimeiri's dictatorship had left the government deeply in debt as well as embroiled in a second civil war. Ahmed recollected that things had deteriorated to the extent that "the Secretary-General of the Democratic Unionist Party stated openly in the parliament that even a dog that tried to take over the government would find little resistance." The people were ready for a change; the NIF thought it was time to take charge to ensure their group would not be sidelined again if another party such as the Ba'athists took power.

Though the NIF officially was dissolved with all other parties at the time of the coup along with the constitution, the name continued to be used mostly by their detractors. Sheik al-Turabi as head of the Islamic Movement's Central Committee (small *shura*)—backed by the military's Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation—governed the country. As they were still a minority group in power, eventually they had to do something to expand their power base; so in 1996, they formed the National Congress Party (NCP), ostensibly to be an inclusive body with 40 percent from the Islamic Movement and 60 percent from other parties and community leaders, including the southerners.<sup>18</sup> Some of the Ba'athists, some former communists, businessmen, and others had joined them so

as to be close to the new power brokers. Local government leaders joined simply to be a part of the current government; they did not particularly care who it was.

### Ahmed's Interest in Political Islam

Like many of the Islamists, Ahmed's interest in political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood started well before he met al-Turabi—Sudan's most well-known and decidedly controversial Islamist. In his early childhood, he was influenced by his maternal uncle, Dr. Sayem Ibrahim Mousa, who was one of the major founding members of the student anti-communist movement—the nucleus of the Ikhwan in the Sudan. Ahmed's life began in Berber, just north of Atbara; the oldest of nine children, he attended the *khalwa* (Quranic school) like most young Muslim children at the age of five, where he learned the Quran, prayers, basic social duties, and chores.<sup>19</sup> Ahmed's father was a railway stationmaster who moved frequently because of his job, so Ahmed's uncle Sayem and his grandmother Medina took on some of the responsibility of raising the children. After his first year of primary school in Berber at age seven, Uncle Sayem took him to Omdurman for his second year—near the capital Khartoum.<sup>20</sup> When Uncle Sayem decided to pursue a law degree in Cairo, he sent Ahmed to live with his grandmother and attend intermediate school in Berber. Life in Berber from the 1930–50s was fairly carefree except for the World War II years, when the air raid warnings sent the children running home from the *khalwa* or diving into the nearest ditch.<sup>21</sup>

It was in 1949 during his secondary schooling in Omdurman, where he had formally joined the Ikhwan, that Ahmed met

al-Turabi who was at the University of Khartoum. Since Ahmed had returned to Berber after secondary school to teach intermediate school for a few years, he was a fairly mature student when he studied at the University of Khartoum from 1954–58. His stint back home teaching afforded him time for Islamic studies, to save a little money, and to develop his political activism.

During this era, religion classes took place during the last school period of the day, particularly in intermediate school, and everyone found them boring. Ahmed wanted to try to make the religious instructions more interesting and relevant to the students, and to deepen their religious knowledge. In addition to teaching English and geography, Ahmed said: “When I got back to Berber, I was in a position that I had been asked to teach the Islamic program in the intermediate school... so I had to take it more seriously.” The Sudanese schools were mostly teaching the Maliki school of thought from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, so Ahmed added some studies that were more modern in his curriculum. He said: “As we grew up we started to read and were influenced by what we received from the Islamic movement in Egypt—culturally and politically.<sup>22</sup> When we were at the University, we read and were knowledgeable about Islamic revivalists in Asia, India, and Pakistan.”<sup>23</sup>

In Khartoum in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Muslim Brothers taught the new members verses and talking points from the Quran according to the Muslim Brother’s program from Egypt. They taught them in small groups of followers (cell groups) to preach and spread the word.<sup>24</sup> Sheikh al-Turabi’s philosophy however, was that the university students should read the whole

Quran, not just limit themselves to the particular verses chosen by the Egyptian Brothers. His father was a *sharia* judge, so he himself wanted to be well versed in all Islamic studies and encouraged his followers and colleagues to do the same.<sup>25</sup>

At the University of Khartoum Ahmed was active in the Students’ Union and the Islamic Students Movement. The University would have a decades-long debate between the Islamists and the communists; although both were small groups nationally, they were the dominant student organizations. Ahmed and his fellow student activists succeeded in changing the Students’ Union Board to a proportional representative system from majoritarian, adding communists and other party members beyond just the Islamists who dominated during that period (19 out of 40 were Islamists, 9 or 10 communists, and the rest were independents).<sup>26</sup> This system was later rescinded under President Nimeiri in the 1970s. The issue of who should be represented in the Students’ Union was again contentious last year, with inter-rivalry between the students of various political parties and persuasions one of several causes of violent demonstrations.

These were politically tumultuous years in Egypt, the Sudan’s neighbor to the north, where Gamal Abdel Nasser led the overthrow of the monarchy in 1952, and was now actively confronting the Muslim Brothers in Cairo. They had been in solidarity with him in deposing the monarchy, and the only organization that Nasser had allowed to remain after his coup d’état; however, he had no intention of sharing power. After an attempt on his life in 1954, Nasser executed some of the Muslim Brother leaders and jailed many others. Ahmed along with the



Inside the Tomb of Sayyid Hassa in Kassala, Sudan on the border of Eritrea. Ahmed served four years of civil service in Kassala. (Besançon)

other students at the University of Khartoum held weekly demonstrations in support of the Egyptian Brothers; and the National Assembly held prayer vigils for the souls of the departed. Even though the Sudanese Ikhwan had never been a part of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as an organization, after what happened in Cairo Ahmed and his colleagues temporarily aligned with the Egyptians in mourning their dead.

After completing his undergraduate courses, Ahmed studied an additional year in the School of Administration under the Faculty of Law. The program required the graduates to work as civil servants in the field after the course; thus Ahmed functioned as a town clerk in Kassala, near the Eritrean border, where he stayed for four years before returning to the Institute for Public Administration in Khartoum. The United Nations had newly established the Institute to train the civil service and provide study abroad opportunities in the United States or Europe. A master's degree offered at the International Institute for Social Sciences in the Hague appealed to Ahmed so he started the program in 1963. He ran for the board of students while he was there, was elected President of the Board, and served as co-Chair with the wife of the Institute Director.

Ahmed had campaigned for the board on African Asian solidarity because he had represented the Khartoum students in the African Asian People's Conference on Solidarity in Cairo back in 1957. While he served on the board, he took the opportunity to include others in the administrative responsibilities and became adept at delegating tasks—skills of both a leader and administrator.

### Ahmed's Early Political Career and the Rise of the National Islamic Front

At the same time that Ahmed was studying in the Hague, al-Turabi was finishing up his PhD studies in Paris. The two friends were closely in touch via visits and letters; and prior to the 1964 October Revolution, al-Turabi made sure that Ahmed was involved in the events beforehand and the activities after the demonstrators succeeded in bringing down General el-Ferik Ibrahim Abboud's government, that had come into power in 1958 in the Sudan's first coup d'état.<sup>27</sup> In the late 1960s he took a high paying job for a few years helping the Saudis set up some administrative reforms as part of his duties at the Institute of Public Administration in Riyadh; he had insisted on being paid the same salary as his American coworkers.

When he received word of the 1969 coup d'état of Nimeiri—the Sudan's second coup—Ahmed was still in Saudi Arabia about to commence teaching in Jeddah at King Abdullah University—where he took a huge cut in salary because he wanted to be in closer proximity to his family in the Sudan, just across the Red Sea.<sup>28</sup> Ahmed asked to meet with the uncle of Saudi Arabia's King Faisal; and then was invited to meet King Faisal himself, to discuss the implications of a communist leaning regime taking over in the Sudan.<sup>29</sup> The three were in agreement on the gravity of this taking place during the Cold War era and the potential of it destabilizing the region.

After the coup, and before commencing teaching in Jeddah, Ahmed traveled to Beirut, Lebanon to meet with a contingent of young leaders in opposition to President Nimeiri: Osman Khalid Mudawi (Ikhwan), Mubarak

al-Fadel al-Mahdi (NUP/Ansar), Omar Nour al-Dayyim (NUP/Ansar), Mahdi Ibrahim Mohamed (Ikhwan), and Sharif al-Hindi (DUP). The Ansar were the main “muscle” behind the newly formed Sudanese National Front’s militant arm under the blessing of Imam Hadi al-Mahdi, their leader. Initially Ethiopia’s Emperor Haile Selassie, who was neither a friend of communism nor of Nimeiri, hosted the Sudanese National Front in Addis Ababa where they had Saudi support. The National Front planned an attack against President Nimeiri’s government in 1970 from the Mahdi family’s Aba Island a few hundred kilometers south of Khartoum. Having been tipped off, Nimeiri—allegedly with air support from Egypt—led a brutal counter-offensive killing hundreds of mostly Ansar.<sup>30</sup> When al-Hadi lost his life in the aftermath of the battle, his nephew Sadiq al-Mahdi assumed the Ansar and the Front’s leadership role.<sup>31</sup>

Although Ahmed himself was not a part of the actual battles on the ground against the government in the 1970s and was generally against violence, he definitely was part of the opposition planning. He was the head of the National Front’s branch in Jeddah while he was teaching there until 1976 when the Saudis politely asked him to leave. Saudi Arabia wanted the National Front to reconcile with Nimeiri after he had defeated the communist counter-coup attempt in 1971, and to make peace.<sup>32</sup> The Saudis also did not like the fact that Qadhafi was now training the National Front in Libya. The Front had not by any means given up after being defeated at Aba Island. On the civil side, it organized a successful peaceful uprising spearheaded by the University of Khartoum students in 1973. Through the support of the

Libyans, they launched another military offensive against the regime in 1976, which did not end well.<sup>33</sup> Nimeiri crushed them, threw most of the leaders in jail, and sentenced Sadiq al-Mahdi to death in absentia since he had eluded capture and escaped abroad. Ahmed said that if he had to do it over again, he would not have had any part in planning militant takeovers; the 1976 insurgency had been particularly ugly and in his words “shameful.”

Through the mediation of a childhood friend of Nimeiri’s, Sadiq al-Mahdi returned to the Sudan in late 1976 to meet with President Nimeiri in Port Sudan.<sup>34</sup> As the leader of the Sudanese National Front he officially reconciled with the President, who then released everyone else from prison.<sup>35</sup> Sadiq had not consulted with the other members of the National Front before the meeting with Nimeiri; nevertheless, Ikhwan leader al-Turabi agreed with his decision and backed him.<sup>36</sup> Ahmed was in London at the time, as was a contingent of other Ikhwan members of the Sudanese National Front; hence al-Turabi sent his close colleague Ali Osman Taha (future vice president) to London to meet with them and persuade them that reconciliation was the right move. Ahmed had started his graduate studies at the School of African and Oriental Studies, so remained in Great Britain, later continuing PhD studies at the University of Edinburgh.<sup>37</sup> Focused on administration in the early Islamic period, he finished all but his dissertation; then returned to the Sudan in 1977 to join Nimeiri’s government as al-Mahdi and al-Turabi had already done.

A few stable years for the Ikhwan ensued, but then suddenly in 1985 Nimeiri expelled the Ikhwan from the government at the

advice of some of the Arab leaders and then U.S. Vice President George H. W. Bush, imprisoned Ahmed, al-Turabi, and 30 some odd Ikhwan government leaders—officially giving birth to the NIF, a move that the Ikhwan had been planning for decades.<sup>38</sup> Nimeiri's government fell that same year. Ahmed had served as the Minister of Internal Affairs under Nimeiri's regime. Subsequently he ran for parliament, where the NIF won a significant minority, and then was appointed Minister of Social Affairs under Sadiq al-Mahdi's elected government before joining the coup that overthrew Sadiq.

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those who started the Sudanese Islamic Movement.<sup>39</sup> Ahmed mused: it was "our way to try to see and find our identities, so we became more knowledgeable to find ourselves, to say we would like to have something Sudanese, or Islamic. We are still in the search for this, we can hardly say we have found it." Ahmed and his colleagues longed for new identities as Muslims—and not just identities but a government that "abided" by religious teaching in both theory and practice.<sup>40</sup> They wanted religion to govern all aspects of human life—to them it was not just an issue between the individual and God.

This trend had not arisen through the traditional religious schools, but spread

through the secular schooling system established by the British.<sup>41</sup> Sheikh al-Turabi and his Ikhwan colleagues were all highly educated and most had attained graduate degrees from the West. Al-Turabi himself had become a widely influential Islamic writer and philosopher whose impact extended as far as Tunisia. Ahmed, al-Turabi, and the other Islamists had had the chance to see what worked technically in the Western regimes and then to contemplate how Islam could be incorporated as the political system in the Sudan making them uniquely modern, Sudanese, and Islamic at the same time. They wanted to be free of any negative foreign influence.

While it was not that difficult for them to overthrow the al-Mahdi government in 1989, it was not so easy for the Ikhwan to build their dreams into workable institutions on the ground, or to realize the notions that existed in their imaginations and in the writings of the Islamic scholars. Their choice to operate as a political party (NIF) and to make policy had been a break from traditional Islamic thinking. But they had seen how the government had been operating over the years without properly applying Muslim mores and practices in governing, though many individuals in their society were good practicing Muslims. As Ahmed recounted: "We found that there was a dichotomy between what we were taught in our religious heritage and what we saw in real life. We were taught in the Quran and the Prophet's teachings, and in the traditions of the community what is good and what is not good; but we did not see that this was respected and observed by the former governments."

Ahmed and those who had formed the NIF along with al-Turabi wanted a political party that had a vision to change the community socially and economically on the basis of Islamic thought and doctrine. In their minds, introducing the Islamic banking system was a success—though the system is now posing serious challenges and needs development and revision.<sup>42</sup> They also established an official government department charged with collecting and distributing the *zakat* (Islam’s form of tithing 2.5 percent of their gross capital for charity). Their comprehensive national strategy stated that the government should be based on belief in the existence and the oneness of God; and that humans are bound by values of equality, brotherhood, and justice.<sup>43</sup>

To Ahmed, whose daughter Afaf (now serving in parliament) was his most favored child, the issue of equality and inclusion of women, particularly in leadership, was an important new trend in Islamic practice and set the Sudanese apart from their Muslim neighbors in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.” So we came early to try to say that Islam is calling all individuals to contribute to making their lives better (women and men). Whatever we do in the male sections then is wasted if we ignore the other half—the female. Even in our organization we said men and women are the same, they can both compete for leadership of the party, this was very early. In all echelons of the organization we find women; this is unique in the Sudan.”<sup>44</sup> But the policies for all citizens to “abide” by Islam’s teachings in all aspects of life also set them apart from their Muslim neighbors who followed secular governance paradigms like Egypt and Jordan.

Shortly after the Islamic Movement took power in the Sudan, al-Turabi—with the

backing of the Central Committee—created the Popular Arab and Islamic Congress (PAIC), which held three international conferences during the next decade.<sup>45</sup> Though essentially most of the Middle Eastern/North African Arabs considered the Sudanese as Africans rather than Arabs, al-Turabi and his colleagues wanted to raise the status of the Sudan in the Arab world through the PAIC. Al-Turabi invited rebel, radical, and Islamic individuals and organizations from around the world to join the Congress. The long list included the likes of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Palestinian Liberation Front (Fatah), al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya, the Eritrean Islamic Jihad, and the Islamic Salvation Front of Algeria.<sup>46</sup>

Though Ahmed was supportive of some of the organizations, he was not particularly supportive of the ensuing activities of the PAIC. However, the new government wanted to prove that the views of the West toward the Sudan were not particularly fair and that the Sudan indeed did have friends and allies. This strategy did not pan out well and the Sudanese to this day have not been able to shake the stigma. Initially it helped to gain domestic support for a small party that had taken over in a military coup, but ultimately it was one of many missteps catapulting the Sudan into international pariah fame. The Saudis were not happy about the PAIC, the Egyptians were not happy about it, and some Sudanese intellectuals were not happy about it; but it did attract some of the youth and new followers to the party and movement. It also succeeded in drawing the attention of the Arabs in particular to the importance of the Sudan and its ability to be both a “threat as well as a blessing” in the region.

Ahmed, among others, had expected the leaders to hold elections soon after the 1989 coup; however, the prevailing rhetoric was that the multiparty system had constantly failed, thus why risk voting again too soon. They also were keenly aware that as a minority party, they had a very short time in which to consolidate their power. The military Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation remained in place for four years before there were any kind of elections, after which a few of the military officers including al-Bashir were then incorporated into the Central Committee headed by al-Turabi, who essentially was directing all traffic in the country. Though he had initially acted in consultation with the others, al-Turabi shrewdly assumed complete control. He was running the organization and country as a charismatic absolute ruler steering them uncomfortably close to radicalism. The Islamist intellectuals and the rest of the party disagreed strongly with this turn of events, ultimately leading to a split in the party and the movement; al-Turabi apparently had forgotten that the intellectuals that supported him had minds of their own.

Though Ahmed was not one of the signers of the famous “memorandum of ten” that purportedly led to the schism in the Islamic Movement and he never broke ties with al-Turabi, he was, however, in support of the memo.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, he was not in favor of the procedure; he felt that any serious question should be properly vetted through the Islamic consultation channels of the Central Committee (small shura) then to the larger National Congress Party. Those behind the “memorandum of ten” had acted behind al-Turabi’s back and it smacked of a conspiracy; however, since he wielded absolute

power, there was no other way. Consequently al-Bashir took over power at the end of 1999 with the backing of the majority of the Islamist intellectuals and al-Turabi was expelled from the party and government.<sup>48</sup>

Ahmed points out that the NIF had stood for granting the Sudan’s southerners a federal system embodied in the Sudan Charter of 1987; contrary to the traditional northerners who had mostly sidelined the southerners.<sup>49</sup> The intentions of a federalist system for the south were never fully implemented from pre-independence time up to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. The south chose to secede after the 2011 referendum ultimately destabilizing the areas of Abyei, the Nuba Mountains, and the Blue Nile State—and the entire newly formed South Sudan itself.<sup>50</sup> Ahmed observed that “the Sudan joined the Arab League right after independence and the northerners were not even cognizant of its negative impact on the southern question. After the October Revolution of 1964, the traditional leaders ignored implementing the recommendations of the ‘12-man committee,’ which called for regional administration for the South.”<sup>51</sup> Now we are paying the price.” His analysis is that this also was partially a question of identity; those in the north wanted to identify with the Arabs so they ignored the African parts of their heritage. This is slowly changing, but the glacial pace should not be so difficult to understand when viewed in the perspective of only 60 years of independence, and in view of years of struggles with racial tensions and ethnic identities in many other nations including the West.<sup>52</sup> Paradoxically in 2014, the Southern Sudanese requested to join the Arab League likely in disenchantment with the fate of the South.<sup>53</sup>

## The Islamist Experiment

In Ahmed's opinion the Islamist experiment has been mostly successful, yet he also says that no one can say that what we are doing now is real Islam—the government was not manifesting Islamic values before the coup, but it is far better now than before the coup. There is still a gap between the ideals and their realization. Ahmed revealed that several months before al-Turabi died in 2016: "In the Congress Party there is a very active youth organization.<sup>54</sup> All of the leaders met with al-Turabi in his house after fasting for Ramadan—honestly they asked him, was the Islamic experiment a success? The experiment is a success with some weak points—he said the 'weak points' in a very light Arabic way. Now he has come back to reality, he would like to see this dialogue continue, but in a broader arena because he would like to join the government again." By then al-Turabi had joined the national dialogue that President al-Bashir initiated in 2014 and was very much obsessed with the possibility of re-uniting the Islamic Movement—to leave a positive legacy in his final years. Some of his former colleagues including Ahmed supported this move and were convinced that al-Turabi had reformed, but not everyone believed so. Many were still wary of his motives.

The evening before President al-Bashir introduced his national dialogue initiative to the public, Ahmed had hosted al-Turabi and former Vice President Ali Osman Taha in his house for dinner—they had not been on speaking terms for years. Taha, who had been one of al-Turabi's closest colleagues, had backed President al-Bashir over al-Turabi when the Party split, leaving behind a deeply acrimonious rift. This historic meeting at

Ahmed's house was to discuss the importance of uniting the Islamic Movement as well as the grave potential for chaos arising in the country. According to Ahmed, al-Turabi was ambitious and confident that he could re-unite the movement, but the government was reluctant to trust him again.

Ahmed believes that the NCP will remain in power. He says the nucleus of the party's reference is Islam, but the new direction is that religion should be geared to serving the people, which brings it back to politics. He thinks that is why the younger members of the party are now politically and religiously

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moved to join. "Some of the youth are saying that the Congress Party is the only (majority) party, but not all of them. If you have elections, or call on people to go to the ballot, a good number—one third—will be for the Congress Party.<sup>55</sup> The Islamists have put a lot of time on the youth because they think it is the future, this is the strength of the movement. Families were not taking care of the youth, so the Islamic Movement was paying special attention to this—we were organizing everything for the youth."<sup>56</sup>

Ahmed the politician—and pragmatist according to some of his contemporaries—knows that the Sudan is at another crossroads

and now there is a crucial call for social and economic change. “The Sudanese should have the right to talk loudly about change both within the NCP and without,” he says. It is his opinion that the party should not be afraid of change and should accept what will come. “Some of the leading people in the NCP are for competition, but what is missing is trust. There are still members who believe that competition means encouragement of dissent within their own party.” According to Ahmed, it is in the interest of the party and the country to have an opposition. “Islam says that had it not been for challenge and

***Ahmed suggests that the Islamic Movement should be more about what they are for rather than what they are against. Moreover, they should clearly articulate these goals to their regional partners and the world.***

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opposition, the world would be a worse place. You don’t see your own mistakes, but others will.” He says that the government is now striving to create a better record for the Sudan globally and domestically, fighting poverty and backwardness, and repairing alliances in the region. The Sudan had a rich heritage for centuries prior to the Ottoman and Anglo-Egyptian times—and could again build regional leadership and stability beyond any of its own post-colonial civil wars and governmental failures. Embedded corruption, repeated conflicts, and an omnipotent security system, however, are not simple things to eradicate.

As a former teacher and administrator, Ahmed is a strong advocate of education and recognizes that the education system has to

improve and change. “For an Islamic society to work, literacy needs to be high and poverty needs to be low, but reality is the opposite in the Sudan.” Ahmed himself is now on the board of a privately owned university (Sudan International University) dedicated to teaching some practical skills; and he is the Secretary-General of the Sudanese Association of Arab–Chinese Friendship Societies that is charged with educational, economic, and business exchanges with China. Two of Ahmed’s four children have graduate degrees from the United States, his only daughter obtained undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Khartoum, and his eldest son was educated in Turkey and Sudan. The Sudanese, far ahead of some of their fellow Muslim countries, are big advocates of education for women, at least in the urban centers. The University of Khartoum’s enrollment boasts more than 60 percent females and the Sudan has one of the oldest African universities dedicated to educating women, particularly the disadvantaged—Ahfad University for Women.<sup>57</sup>

Ahmed suggests that the Islamic Movement should be more about what they are for rather than what they are against. Moreover, they should clearly articulate these goals to their regional partners and the world. They ought not to be afraid to address what went wrong as well as what was right with the system. To the West, since Islam does not separate itself from the state, it is a theocracy; however, to ignore Islam in a Muslim society is contrary to how most Muslims think. When asked if he thinks people should be forced to follow Islam, Ahmed said: “No. One of the most important tenets of Islam says that religion should be by conviction, and not be by compulsion. Islam is very clear on this. An

Ahmed at a function in Omdurman Islamic University 2005. (Besançon)



Islamic government should come with the consent of the people, whether they do so by direct or indirect election, but not by force.” It is vital to articulate this concept in a world where Islam is frequently equated with extremism and terrorism. The majority of the Sudanese Islamists fall far to the moderate end of the Islamic spectrum.

The Sudanese Islamic Movement however, is not without its conundrums—the Islamists say that they want a government that will abide by Islamic values and “be” Islamic values and yet they say they want the support of the people to implement these Islamic rules.<sup>58</sup> When faced with this dilemma, Ahmed’s answer is that the majority of Muslims will consent.<sup>59</sup> As previously indicated, a partial but significant piece of the puzzle for the Islamists wanting Islam to be the basis of governance in the Sudan was an identity issue; the Sudanese wanted to separate themselves from their past colonial legacy and the “meddling” of foreigners, to create a uniquely modern Muslim, Sudanese society.

As also noted, making the ideal into a reality is not and has not been straightforward: economically, institutionally, or socially. There are ever the challenges of those who are not Muslims in the Sudan, those of Muslim heritage who are not religious, and a sizable number who are wholly from African non-Muslim origins. Ahmed muses further that, “Islam itself says we will be rewarded according to our obligations and intentions. Our intentions were and are to try to implement Islamic values and principles in the midst of the modern challenges of a heterogeneous society...and this world is getting smaller and smaller.”<sup>60</sup>

## Concluding Thoughts

The elder statesmen who joined the Ikhwan in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s achieved their goal of sidelining communism in partnership with the West, and partially of making Islam the basis of the government.<sup>61</sup> These urbane Islamist intellectuals and scholars of the Sudan bear little to no resemblance to the modern jihadists of today’s news.<sup>62</sup> Though they came from the same basic roots as the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, which spawned al-Qaeda and other extremist groups, they took a very different path. Nonetheless they share elements of the traditional Islamists of the Arab world and have a deep understanding of the roots of radicalism in general and Islamist radicalism in particular and most take a strong stance against it.<sup>63</sup>

Consultation with some of these scholars could prevent the younger generation from suffering the same political and radical pitfalls they experienced, and lend helpful guidance to politicians and diplomats from the international community.<sup>64</sup> The Southern Sudanese are now calling for the Sudanese to become more involved with their troubled nation. Some of the scholars are meeting with the youth in nascent efforts to regroup and reformulate what could democratically work in contemporary Sudan and merge with the rest of the world. Through the more capable technocratic elements of the NCP, civil society members, and some of the opposition groups, the national dialogue of the past two years has formulated a more inclusive representational framework with some durable solutions for the Sudan.<sup>65</sup> The test will be how soon and how well the

government adopts these plans that include a new constitution.

Unlike most of the other parties, the Islamists and the NCP always seem to have a design and a vision. The larger sectarian opposition parties, that the West tends to support for the simple reason that they were at one time elected, have stagnated into archaic family operations that lack new leadership or strategies other than to actively impede the sitting government, or passively support it.<sup>66</sup> These parties are no less Islamic than the Islamic Movement. Though the NUP has a large potential constituency of Ansar followers, to appeal to the current generation they would need a leader that is not a family member and to have a better blueprint than the current government—clinging to the old ways has not advanced either their cause or the cause of the Sudanese people. The Umma Party as well as the Popular Congress Party (PCP), the party that al-Turabi started after he was barred from the NCP, could be instrumental in stopping the civil wars if they wanted to, but their goals are to topple the current government so they can return to power.<sup>67</sup> The government has been alternately attempting to negotiate a peaceful solution to its civil rebellions while trying to militarily beat the rebel insurgents outright. International support and internal opposition support for the rebel groups throw insurmountable obstacles to either solution.

While some of the smaller opposition groups have leadership, and civil society groups including university professors have proposed much needed changes to the government, the solution needs a larger cohesive constituency with a credible leader willing to compromise with the sitting government, which also wishes to retain

power.<sup>68</sup> Much as that sounds distasteful to the Western ear, the NCP still has the majority backing and is still the most organized body in the country.<sup>69</sup>

The Sudan has had its share of oppressive governments and economic *contretemps*, and the international community has indeed judged it harshly for its internal wars and its human rights record.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, the Sudanese surprisingly lack hostility toward the United States; though they blame the United States for continuing the sanctions imposed by President Clinton, Congress, and

***The Sudanese, who are Sunni and support the Saudi “Operation Decisive Storm” with troops on the ground in Yemen, and medical care for the Yemeni wounded, fear that the United States is deliberately exacerbating the Shia–Sunni divide in the Middle East North Africa region.***

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the United Nations in spite of many verbal promises by various U.S. leaders to abolish them.<sup>71</sup> They have a legitimate complaint that the United States retains them on the “State Sponsors of Terrorism” list when they have signed all the international conventions against terrorism and have been cooperating with the United States since expelling bin Laden from the country in 1996. They never fail to bring up the fact that the United States is easing Iran’s economic dilemmas, while keeping the Sudan under fire. The Sudanese, who are Sunni and support the Saudi “Operation Decisive Storm” with troops on the ground in Yemen, and medical care for the Yemeni wounded, fear that the United States is deliberately exacerbating the

Shia–Sunni divide in the Middle East North Africa region.

Dealing with the current government means dealing with an establishment that has fairly functioning institutions, maintains relative stability, and a government that is glacially on the way to transforming itself.<sup>72</sup> Dissolving the current government begs the question of who or what would take its place. The major grievances of the Sudanese people are: the economy, the sanctions (that have entrenched the current government), the corruption, and the control and concentration of the wealth with the NCP and the Islamists.<sup>73</sup> The people also object to the heavy-handed security forces that put down most forms of dissent—though these same forces also keep extremist groups at bay and keep a close eye on young folk wanting to join Daesh. Some intellectuals question Islam’s role in the government but most Muslims accept that Islam should be part of the government—though not the implementation of the more draconian punishments.<sup>74</sup>

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>This article reflects multiple interviews and exchanges with Sayyed Ahmed Abdul Rahman and portrays what he remembered and wanted to convey from his experiences with the Sudanese Muslim Brothers and how he sees the future of the Islamic Movement and Sudan. The author first met and interviewed Ahmed in 2005, then in 2009; regular weekly or monthly interviews from January–May 2016, then occasional interviews from August 2016 to January 2017.

<sup>2</sup>A *shura* is a consultative council. The small *shura* in the Sudan is also referred to as the Central Committee of the Sudanese Islamic Movement, which is comprised of an estimated 40 members. The larger *shura*, is the entire party or movement depending on if you are talking about the National Congress Party or the Sudanese Islamic Movement.

<sup>3</sup>The first Islamist rule in the Sudan was in the 19th century, imposed by the conquest of the warrior Imam Mohamed Ahmed al-Mahdi, the purported chosen savior or “expected one” of Islam.

<sup>4</sup>Instead of referring to individuals by title and surname, as is *PRISM* standard, this article employs a tailored approach that acknowledges the extensive use of particular given and surnames in the region. This approach reflects common usage and seeks to minimize confusion between actors with shared given or surnames.

<sup>5</sup>The Sudanese have a significant number of troops in Yemen supporting the Saudis as part of “Operation Decisive Storm.” They also have cut off ties with Iran, closed the Iranian cultural centers in Khartoum and have forged bilateral alliances with Chad, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Uganda in the past five years, and formed numerous business and cultural ties with Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and other European countries.

<sup>6</sup>H. A. Heliver, “Will Trump be Open to Dialogue with the Islamists?” *Al Monitor*, November 16, 2016, available at <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/11/trump-stance-islamists-brotherhood-sisi-turkey-erdogan.html>>. Peter Baker, “White House Weighs Terrorist Designation for Muslim Brotherhood,” *New York Times*, February 7, 2017, available at <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/07/world/middleeast/muslim-brotherhood-terrorism-trump.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=first-column-region&region=top-news&WT.nav=top-news>>.

<sup>7</sup> While most of the Sudanese Muslim Brothers opted out of the International Muslim Brotherhood and their Cairo base decades ago, they would not necessarily consider it a terrorist organization, and most Sudanese revere founder Hassan al Banna as a philosopher and scholar. Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya and al-Qaeda—among others—radical organizations that broke off from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, have already been declared terrorist organizations. Egypt's jailing of tens of thousands of Muslim Brothers and their families has done little to stem the tide. Mary Anne Weaver, *A portrait of Egypt: a Journey Through the World of Militant Islam*, Macmillan, 2000). There are individual Muslim Brothers in the Sudan that are connected with the Cairo Branch, though the Sudanese Islamic Movement is not.

<sup>8</sup> M. Besançon, "The Evolution of an Islamist," *Wilson Quarterly* (Winter 2016), available at <<http://wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/the-post-obama-world-the-evolution-of-an-islamist/>>.

<sup>9</sup> Ahmed mentioned these particular individuals who shared their cell by name: Ibrahim Sanousi, a colleague of al-Turabi's, Fathi Abdul Rahman Abdoum, a military pilot and paratrooper contemporary of al-Bashir, also Ikhwan, Muhamed Ibrahim Nugud, the head of the Communist Party, and Idris al-Banna from the Umma Party.

<sup>10</sup> The Ba'athist Party is a pan-Arab party that originated in Syria, through Syrian Christian thinkers, with fundamental differences from terrorist organizations. A philosopher and thinker on political Islam, an organization, the Sudanese chose then the party extended to Iraq—in both countries they formed the ruling elites. Their aim was to restore the Arabs to bygone glory days, primarily through coups d'état; recruiting mostly military, they were somewhat fascist. Factions formed in different Arab countries with allegiances either to the Iraqis or the Syrians, but the Iraqi Baath Party outside Iraq was the strongest. During Saddam Hussein's era, a Sudanese person was responsible for the formation of offshoots of the Iraqi party. The party got its start in the Sudan after independence and before the October Revolution (1957–64). The Ba'ath Party in the Sudan is secular with members from multi-religions and, although one of the main parties in the Sudan, it is a small, secretive one. The NCP, DUP, and the NUP are the three largest parties, and essentially the only ones with sufficient constituencies to win an election. Information obtained from discussions with a retired Sudanese official in Khartoum, January 2017; and from Mohamed Ali Jaden, *The Nationalist Current and the*

*Sudanese Baath Party*, (Khartoum: Azzah Press, 2011) – title and sections translated from the Arabic for the author by Dr. Sahar El Faki – University of Khartoum.

<sup>11</sup> Other author interviews in Khartoum during 2014 revealed that al-Bashir was chosen among several military officers that al-Turabi had in mind to lead. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has accused President al-Bashir of crimes against humanity and genocide; however, this past year several African Union members have opted out of the ICC in protest of Africa centric indictments.

<sup>12</sup> The Ansar are followers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century warrior Imam Mohamed Ahmed al-Mahdi and those who inherit the family title of "the Mahdi." Most of the Mahdi's supporters were from western Sudan (Darfur) and farther west in Africa. The political party is the National Umma Party, or just the Umma Party (NUP).

<sup>13</sup> The Khatmiyya Sufi sect hail from eastern Sudan, have their roots in Saudi Arabia, and claim the closest ancestry to the Prophet Mohammed (Interview with former permanent undersecretary: Khartoum January 2014). They formed the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and favored unity with Egypt at independence. Many of the Muslim Brothers came from this sect.

<sup>14</sup> The Ansar, the Khatmiyya, the Muslim Brothers, and Jaafar Nimeiri's Islamist allies all advocated a constitution based on *sharia*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ikhwan* means the brotherhood and will be used for the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood here at its inception, though it was separate from Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

<sup>16</sup> The plans had been a couple of decades in the making, but only launched after this particular prison stint.

<sup>17</sup> Nimeiri did not want al-Turabi near any borders in case he tried to escape, so on the way from Shalla to Suakin, the plane stopped in al-Obeid to leave Turabi and two other of the Muslim brothers in al-Obeid prison. The plane then landed in Khartoum where the rest of the prisoners stayed a couple of hours in Kober Prison before they were transported the rest of the way to Suakin Prison on the coast.

<sup>18</sup> According to the former Secretary General of the NCP, the NIF was dissolved at the time of the coup d'état on 30 June 1989 along with all political parties, and the name "National Congress Party" was officially adopted at the 1996 internal *shura* elections. The Muslim Brothers adopted the name Sudanese Islamic Movement (SIM) or the Islamic Movement. NIF and the NCP are not coterminous though they often are

incorrectly used conterminously. According to Ahmed and the Secretary General of 1996, the percentages for members of the NCP stated in text are correct.

<sup>19</sup> Ahmed's ancestors were from the Ababda tribe who came from Iraq to Egypt, then on to the Berber area of the Sudan. The tribe was famous for reading the stars to navigate the trade routes. His grandmother claimed to be a descendant of Abdullah Ibn Al Zubair.

<sup>20</sup> His uncle was transferred to the town of Wad Medani, south east of Khartoum, so Ahmed finished his primary years at the Nahar School.

<sup>21</sup> The Sudanese Defense Forces supported the British in North Africa and Ethiopia in World War II.

<sup>22</sup> Sayyid Qutb and Hassan al-Banna were the main scholars influencing the Muslim Brotherhood. W. E. Shepard, "Sayyid Qutb's Doctrine of Jahiliyya," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 35, no. 04 (2003), 521–545. James Toth, "Islam in Southern Egypt: A Case Study of a Radical Religious Movement," *Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 4 (2003), 547–52.

<sup>23</sup> Sheikh Mohammad Nasir ud-Din al-Albani, Abul Ala Maududi, Maulana Abul Hassan al-Nadwi, and the poet Mohammed Iqbal.

<sup>24</sup> The communists operated in the same way, spreading communist doctrine in small furtive cell groups.

<sup>25</sup> Islamic law according to Ahmed, is a way of life, guided by certain principles written in the Quran, and supported and interpreted by the Prophet Mohammed's traditions and his companions (Sahaba) as recorded in the hadiths. This is a broad way of life calling for the belief in one God; fasting at Ramadan; praying five times a day; going to the *hajj* once if financially able; and paying *zakat* to the poor. Though *sharia* teaches kindness and tolerance to one's neighbors, it also gives instructions for punishments for the determined transgressors. Similar edicts are mandated in the Old Testament. In the Sudan the law is a mixture of *sharia* and British law. The death penalty is mostly bought out—as is permitted and encouraged under *sharia* and traditional tribal laws—instead of meted out. The most egregious application of *sharia* punishment was under Nimeiri when he imposed the September laws in 1983, encouraged by al-Turabi and continued initially under his regime. The enforcement came from politicians and advocates who were not well versed in *sharia*—to the protest of the well-educated chief justices and lawyers who opposed the September laws, but not *sharia* in general. To them, proper interpretation of the law in accordance with the will of the people rarely results in executions or amputations. Such

punishments have not occurred in the Sudan for years and lighter punishments such as flogging (mostly symbolic public humiliation for such things as drunk driving) are more commonly implemented. There are still reports of interrogations and torture by the security forces (NISS—National Intelligence Security Services), which has little to do with Islam.

<sup>26</sup> Ahmed said that the NUP and DUP worked under the umbrella of independents, they were not ready to openly commit to anything politically yet.

<sup>27</sup> General Abboud was the Republic of the Sudan's first military dictator. Al-Turabi was one of the chief organizers of the student led demonstrations that ousted him from power in the 1964 October Revolution. After Abboud was deposed, Sadiq al-Mahdi had one of his first elected terms of office in a coalition government that alternated with Mohamed Ahmed Mahjoub. They were deposed in a coup where Nimeiri assumed power. For an eye witness account of the uprising see: Mahmoud A. Suleiman "52nd Anniversary of the Glorious October 21, 1964 Sudanese revolution," *Sudan Tribune*, October 21, 2016, available at <<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article60608>>.

<sup>28</sup> Initially Ahmed was a lecturer in Management, after that, he was the Director of Admissions and Administration.

<sup>29</sup> Nimeiri's Sudanese Socialist Union (SSU) party was the sole legal party in the country during his tenure in office as an autocrat.

<sup>30</sup> Some reports say that on Aba Island thousands (10,000) were killed in the attack, but at least one of the warriors who was there said it was only hundreds. This warrior was one of several of the Muslim Brothers who were involved in importing arms to stash on Aba Island (with the consent of the Mahdi family) both for this attack and the 1976 attack on Khartoum.

<sup>31</sup> Imam Hadi al-Mahdi was captured trying to escape at the border with Ethiopia and likely killed by Nimeiri's security.

<sup>32</sup> Nimeiri had ousted most of the communist leaders from his government, inciting their ire and instigating an attempted coup to retake the government.

<sup>33</sup> The Ansar made up the bulk of the attackers. Ikhwan had around 33 out of the estimated 1,000 who attacked Khartoum in 1976. M. Besançon, "Evolution of an Islamist," *Wilson Quarterly* (Winter 2016).

<sup>34</sup> Fatha al-Rahman al-Bashir was an old friend of Nimeiri's from grade school, who was a trusted community leader. Sadiq al-Mahdi was hesitant to

meet with Nimeiri in the Sudan, but was reassured by Fatha, a fellow Ansar. Ahmed had met Sadiq in London and encouraged him to go meet Nimeiri, assuring him that Nimeiri had likely consulted with the Saudis and the Egyptians on the reconciliation move.

<sup>35</sup> Some of the revolutionaries, who had been captured after the coup attempt, had already been executed after coming before the military tribunal.

<sup>36</sup> Ahmed suspected that the agreement that Sadiq had brokered might be just for himself and not on behalf of the entire National Front, so with al-Turabi's blessing, he traveled to Sudan to speak with Nimeiri. Fatha al-Rahman al-Bashir had arranged the meeting for Ahmed as he had done for Sadiq, however, some of Nimeiri's SSU party members who were strongly against the Muslim Brothers, barred him from seeing Ahmed. Ahmed stayed five days in the Sudan meeting with various factions (some in favor and some not in favor of reconciliation like al-Hindi), then met with Nimeiri's representative. Ahmed made his point that the Muslim Brothers were committed to reconciliation, and Nimeiri sent a message back to Ahmed that he also was committed to reconciliation with Ikhwan. Ahmed then returned to London.

<sup>37</sup> The University of Edinburgh at the time had one of the pre-eminent Western scholars on Islam, Dr. William Montgomery Watt.

<sup>38</sup> Though the date for formation of the NIF differs, according to Ahmed they officially declared themselves a political party after the 1985 jail term beginning in Kober prison and ending in Suakin prison. It was a mystery as to why the Vice President of the United States delivered the message that Nimeiri should kick the Ikhwan out of the government. The southern stability ended in 1983 with the resumption of the civil war following Nimeiri's split of the south into three states and the introduction of the September laws; however, this is another story.

<sup>39</sup> This was also a move against the secularism and "Godlessness" of communism of the era.

<sup>40</sup> The author would have preferred using the word "imposed" instead of "abided," but the Sudanese Arab/Africans prefer speaking "lightly" as they say.

<sup>41</sup> Linda S. Bishai, *Sudanese Universities as Sites of Social Transformation*, United States Institute of Peace Special Report No. 203, 2008, available at <<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr203.pdf>>. The University of Khartoum taught its courses entirely in English and was one of the oldest, most elite universities in Africa. Almost all of the older Islamists speak excellent English as a result of their privileged

educations. In the early 1990s, the Islamist government began changing the curriculum to Arabic. This was in-line with evolving Middle Eastern philosophy that Arabic should be the dominant language according to a former Minister of Education. The Islamic leaders now regret this move, as it has disadvantaged their students and lowered the quality of education in the Sudan.

<sup>42</sup> Other opinions including some of the CEOs and general managers of the Islamic banks are not as optimistic about the success of the Islamic banking experiment. In discussions with the author, in Khartoum 2016.

<sup>43</sup> El-Shafie Mohamed el-Makki, "Sudan's Relations with the West (1989–2014)," (working paper, University of Khartoum, 2016).

<sup>44</sup> Al-Turabi in particular was seen as a champion for women and is perhaps quietly even more revered by the Muslim Sisters than the Muslim Brothers. This does not cancel out Turabi's more nefarious actions.

<sup>45</sup> PAIC: the official Arabic name—*al-Mu'tamar al-Sha'bi al-Arabi al-Islami*—translated means Popular Arab and Islamic Conference. It is also referred to as the Popular Arab and Islamic Congress and the Pan Arab and Islamic Conference.

<sup>46</sup> Though it is difficult to find an official list of all of the nefarious organizations that participated in the PAIC because when the Sudanese Security raided the Popular Congress Party's offices, they confiscated all of their documented material, Wikipedia and the World Heritage Encyclopedia list more than thirty organizations that participated in the Congress. For an unofficial list of attendees of the conferences see: *World Heritage Encyclopedia*, "Popular Arab and Islamic Congress," available at <[http://www.gutenberg.us/articles/popular\\_arab\\_and\\_islamic\\_congress](http://www.gutenberg.us/articles/popular_arab_and_islamic_congress)>.

<sup>47</sup> The Ikhwan do not deny that certain elements of the security apparatus were implementing draconian, cruel, and unnecessary enforcement methods during this time (ghost houses, etc.) and many claim that Turabi was aware of these events, even behind them, but chose to publically ignore them. In late 1999 ten of the Islamist intellectuals crafted a memorandum condemning al-Turabi's control of the government.

<sup>48</sup> He subsequently formed his own party the Popular Congress Party (PCP).

<sup>49</sup> A rare copy of the Sudan Charter from Muslim Brothers has the date January 1987.

<sup>50</sup> Senator John Danforth, President Bush's Special Envoy to the Sudan, was adamantly opposed to splitting the Sudan toward the end of his tenure. M.

Besançon, “Blessed are the Peacemakers: Senator Danforth as Special Envoy to the Sudan,” *Harvard Business Review*, Case Study CR14-09-1905.0 (October 14, 2009).

<sup>51</sup>This was a committee put together by the international community after the Round Table Conference that included seven leading African countries. They discussed regionalism for the south. According to Ahmed, Turabi put a lot of effort into convincing others to give the south its own regional administration, but general Arab sentiment in the MENA region was against federalism. Robert S. Kramer, Richard A. Lobban Jr., Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, *Historical Dictionary of the Sudan* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 627.

<sup>52</sup>The Minister of Justice Awad al-Hassan al-Nour in a *Sudan Vision Daily* article said that the Sudanese were drafting a bill prohibiting and criminalizing discrimination, religious hatred, and racism. He additionally pointed to recent law amendments that abolished execution by stoning for offenses like adultery, and abolished criminalizing apostasy and an amendment to Article 152 regarding indecent clothes. Zuleikha Abdul Raziq, “Sudan: Armed Conflicts Represent Major Challenge to Human Rights,” *Sudan Vision Daily*, October 2016, available at <<http://news.sudanvisiondaily.com/index.php/new-posts/local-news/174-media-coverage-of-the-navy-yard-shooting-2>>.

<sup>53</sup>“South Sudan and Chad apply to join the Arab League,” *Middle East Monitor*, April 12, 2014, available at <<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140412-south-sudan-and-chad-apply-to-join-the-arab-league/>>. This is also receiving renewed attention in 2016 with articles in the *Sudan Tribune*.

<sup>54</sup>Sheikh Hassan al-Turabi passed away in March 2016.

<sup>55</sup>Four years ago, Ahmed was dispatched by President al-Bashir to visit ten states in the periphery to assess the support for the NCP. He said he found little organized opposition. No other party has a large majority.

<sup>56</sup>Turabi chose many, even women, to go to the United States for education—he thought they were future leaders.

<sup>57</sup>According to a professor at the University of Khartoum, current statistics place the number of female students higher than 60 percent. Interviews with women’s groups from a decade ago already claimed the number of women at the University of Khartoum as greater than 50 percent.

<sup>58</sup>“Abiding” by Islam and following the new government was enforced with a heavy hand at the new government’s inception. The Islamists now say that while it was done to consolidate power at the beginning of the regime, oppression should not be a part of the behavior of the government.

<sup>59</sup>In principal, most Muslim Sudanese are not opposed to *sharia*—though many wish for alcohol consumption to be legal. This means to them, the proper interpretation of *sharia* from learned lawyers and judges rarely resulting in the more draconian measure of execution, stoning, or amputation.

<sup>60</sup>In December 2016, Ahmed, who still has good connections in Cairo, headed a delegation from the Sudanese Council for Foreign Affairs that met with the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, and the Secretary General of the Arab League. They discussed vital questions of bilateral relationships and regional development with reference to the Renaissance Dam.

<sup>61</sup>International Crisis Group, *Sudan’s Islamists: From Salvation to Survival*, Briefing No. 119, March 21, 2016, available at <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/sudan%E2%80%99s-islamists-salvation-survival>>. Al-Turabi did multiple interviews with *al Jazeera* and instructed them to be released after his death. In them he has been accusing others of what he was accused of doing. Though al-Turabi instigated the Islamic program, he also torpedoed much of its success by his actions.

<sup>62</sup>This does not mean that there are not some hardliner radicals in the Sudan including some more fervent members of the *Ansar al Sunna*, but radicalism is not Sudan policy or the policy of the Sudanese Islamists in general. *Ansar al Sunna* is not coterminous with Ansar, which refers to the large Sufi sect of the Mahdi’s followers. Most of the *Ansar al Sunna*, at least among the students are not radical, but they are against Sufism and their practice of Islam is extremely conservative.

<sup>63</sup>Consultation with some of the State Department officials working on the Sudan in 2016 and some of the former ambassadors contributed to and affirmed some of these conclusions as well as the wording.

<sup>64</sup>Most of the elder Muslim Brothers and the elder civil servants have close contact with each other and with the current regime—that often ignores their sage advice. They are an underutilized resource that could potentially have a positive influence in the region and on Hamas, a group they support politically.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 62

<sup>66</sup> Imam Sadiq al-Mahdi, the head of the NUP, has refused to take part in the national dialogue. Abdulrahman al-Sadiq al Mahdi, Sadiq al-Mahdi's son retains the position of assistant to the president, and Mohamed al Hassan al-Mirghani, one of the al-Mirghani family, also holds the position of presidential assistant under al-Bashir.

<sup>67</sup> Since they have a large constituency from Darfur, the Umma Party/Ansar hold sway in the Darfur conflict. Turabi's cohorts have a lot of influence on one of the rebel factions, the Justice and Equality Movement. Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror* (Three Rivers Press, May 25, 2010); Julie Flint and Alex DeWaal, *Darfur: A New Short History of a Long War* (Zed Books, March 1, 2008).

<sup>68</sup> The University of Khartoum—the seat of most of the political movements of the Sudan—has drafted and submitted election reform and proportional representation plans to the government several times in the last decade, but so far the implementation is weak or non-existent.

<sup>69</sup> Kramer et al record that in the 2010 elections Bashir won with a 68 percent majority. Robert S. Kramer, Richard A. Lobban Jr., Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, *Historical Dictionary of the Sudan* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> All of the groups, rebel and government are guilty of brutality toward each other, however as official keeper of the law, the government bears the greater responsibility.

<sup>71</sup> Christopher Shays (R-CT) and Richard Swett (D-NH). "Enough Already on Sudan Sanctions," *The Hill*, January 23, 2017, available at <<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/315586-enough-already-on-sudan-sanctions>>. Zach Vertin, "Punishing the Sudan is Not a Strategy: But Engaging a Bad Regime Could Make it Better," *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 1 (January 30, 2017).

<sup>72</sup> The President and his military backers essentially control the government and the Sudanese Islamic Movement. Members of the Islamic movement, in discussion with the author, 2014–16. Atta el Battahani, "The Sudan Armed Forces and Prospects of Change," *CMI Insight*, no.3 (April 2016). The opposition parties decry the lifting of sanctions now, but publically called for the lifting of sanctions before. They are stirring trouble on campuses and do not want stability; they want to bring down the government so they can again be in power.

<sup>73</sup> The opposition—al-Mirghani (DUP) and the al-Mahdi (NUP) families—also hold a vast amount of

wealth. There is a large show of wealth in Khartoum and some of the other cities and villages, but the poor are evident everywhere. There is an influx of Syrian refugees that run good businesses and the Ethiopians and Eritreans come to the Sudan for jobs. The Yemeni wounded are said to prefer treatment in the Sudan.

<sup>74</sup> Some people have traumatic memories of the amputations from Nimeiri and Turabi's times. Current laws are phasing out the older punishments.