

# Sudan: Protests and the Politics of Regime Change

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The protests that have broken out in Sudan are, on the surface, the manifestation of legitimate grievances. Portrayed in the Western media as a direct response to austerity measures implemented by Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, these protests indicate a strong current of dissatisfaction among the people of the country. However, seen from a broader, more critical perspective, the demonstrations are the tangible fruits of a carefully constructed destabilization campaign incorporating opposition political parties, civil society groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Hollywood celebrities and Western financiers. These powerful forces have aligned against the government in Khartoum in order to execute the geopolitical agenda of the imperialist ruling class in the West.

## The Development of the Protests

The immediate impetus for the protests, which broke out in recent weeks in and around the capital of Khartoum, was the announcement of the removal of fuel subsidies. This troubling development, coupled with other austerity measures such as the reduction of government jobs and the devaluation of the currency, were designed to mitigate the effects of soaring inflation in Sudan. However, because of the integral role of fuel prices in the Sudanese economy, the move seemed to spark mass indignation. In a country already dogged by high unemployment and rampant poverty, these difficult decisions inflamed already high tensions throughout the country.

Reports from inside Sudan suggest that a small group of female demonstrators gathered outside dormitories at the University of Khartoum and began protesting the fuel subsidy cuts, among other issues. This was the first in what became a series of daily demonstrations against a whole host of grievances. Central among these was the feeling, widespread among particularly young people, that the government in Khartoum was punishing the people while continuing to spend “lavishly” on defense. Many groups directly involved in the protest movement, groups such as Sudan Change Now and the popularized twitter moniker #SudanRevolts, have used the demonstrations as a springboard for a much broader and, it could be argued, more opportunistic agenda, one that is directly in line with the geopolitical interests of the United States and the Western imperialist ruling class: regime change.

This is, of course, not to diminish the genuine grievances of many of the demonstrators. Instead, it is important to maintain a critical understanding of the way in which these sort of movements are hijacked or otherwise cynically manipulated through a variety of means by those in the West for whom power and hegemony are the goals above all else.

## The Wizards Behind the Curtain

In order to understand the way in which the protests in Sudan, and movements like them all over the world, are manipulated, influenced, or otherwise controlled by Western powers, we must first examine the major players and the often deliberately obscured connections between them, western intelligence networks, and international financiers.

In Sudan, we've seen an extraordinary proliferation of western-financed NGOs that have entrenched themselves in the civil society of the country, particularly in an urban center such as Khartoum. Organizations such as Sudan Now and the Enough Project (the latter of which is directly connected to George Clooney, the US State Department and George Soros) indicate the degree to which humanitarian concerns and NGOs are utilized by the US imperialists as cover for their geopolitical agenda. In fact, in the case of Clooney and the Enough Project, we see the presence of John Prendergast, head of the organization and former Director for African Affairs at the National Security Council. His participation, not to mention his close relationship to UN Ambassador Susan Rice, Samantha Power, and the International Crisis Group, should illustrate the degree to which this and other organizations working inside Sudan are either directly or tangentially part of the US intelligence establishment.

The Enough Project is also significant because of its ability to sell a Western-constructed narrative of Sudan to an unsuspecting and generally ill-informed public. George Clooney who, along with Council on Foreign Relations member Angelina Jolie, has cultivated an image as a politically progressive humanitarian, is able to construct a particular discourse in the American public's imagination: Bashir is a monster and the United States must act decisively including possibly using force, to remove him from power. Such a dominant narrative, once entrenched in the public discourse, becomes difficult, if not impossible, to deconstruct.

The Enough Project and other humanitarian organizations alone are not the whole story, however. Important players inside the country are also playing an integral role in the attempt at regime change in Sudan. One such important individual is Dr. Hassan al-Turabi, head of the opposition Popular Congress Party (PCP), one of the leading factions within the often-fragmented political opposition. Turabi, a longtime "progressive Islamist", is not merely a major player in Sudanese politics. In fact, he's one of the leading "experts" on Sudan with long-standing connections to the US State Department-funded National Endowment for Democracy (NED). In fact, as recently as 2008, Turabi was one of the keynote speakers at the NED in Washington DC where he presented on, among other things, how to bring about regime change in Sudan. Though the usual covers of "democracy promotion", "transparency", and other such high-minded abstractions are utilized by Turabi and the NED, these are merely the rhetorical devices used to obscure the obvious goal of such a conference.

Turabi's association with the NED and the US intelligence community is not only significant in demonstrating the role that those institutions are playing in destabilizing Sudan. It also demonstrates the way in which the US imperialists have long-standing ties with so-called "Islamists", a conclusion made ever more apparent by the ascension of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the deployment of Al Qaeda and other religious militants in Libya, Syria, and elsewhere. In this way, a clearer understanding develops of just how the Western imperialists are able to utilize a variety of means, many of which are "Islamist" in nature, to destabilize regimes they deem to be unfriendly.

## **International Subversion**

Aside from having to deal with powerful forces engaged in the internal struggles in Sudan, Bashir's government has also been faced with extraordinary international pressure. Not only has Bashir himself been accused by the ICC (itself an arm of US-NATO power projection) of being a war criminal for his purported role in the conflict in Darfur, he has also watched as the United States and other Western powers fomented a brutal civil war, only to then partition the country, carving out South Sudan, and create the conditions for the current situation. Essentially, Bashir has had to try to maintain his grip on the country in the face of a multi-pronged effort to destroy his regime and the Sudanese state.

The conflict with South Sudan has taken a heavy toll on the Sudanese economy. Because of the loss of an estimated 75% of total oil reserves located in the South, inflation has dramatically increased and Khartoum's revenue from trade with China and other major oil importers has decreased sharply. Additionally, the skirmishes and other armed conflicts between North and South have focused Bashir's attention to the Abyei Province and other border areas and, consequently, away from other pressing concerns inside the country. This was precisely what the Western powers intended when they began pushing for the partition of the country a few years ago.

The imperialist aggression against Libya was an indication to many keen observers that the imperialist ruling class had every intention of completely consolidating control over all of North Africa by removing any vestiges of nationalism and any leaders who might pose a challenge to AFRICOM and the neo-colonial agenda. Gaddafi met his barbaric end at the hands of a vicious lynch-mob or, as they're called in the West, "freedom fighters". They and their NTC masters such as Mahmoud Jibril, now the head of the so-called Libyan government, were merely puppets of the West, supported for purposes of economic exploitation of natural resources and to create a safe haven for terrorists to then menace the rest of the region. Likewise, Bashir is on the target list and, without taking precautions, could meet the same fate.

## **What Do They Want?**

The United States and its western partners have a number of goals in seeking regime change in Sudan. As is the case in so many other conflicts around the world, the main objective is to block Chinese economic development. The Chinese have, for years, been the biggest importer of Sudanese oil and, other than Angola, Sudan was its main supplier on the continent. Aside from oil however, Sudan had become one of the main markets for Chinese economic investment. In fact, by 2002, Sudan was China's fifth biggest source of revenue and had become a major player in the power generation and other markets. For these reasons, China began to pose a threat to US hegemony in East Africa and, from the perspective of the imperialists, had to be checked.

Aside from China, the United States has other geopolitical and economic reasons for destabilizing Sudan. Washington seeks to consolidate control over East and Central Africa and, in order to do so, must eliminate one of their biggest obstacles, Sudan. The US has gone to painstaking lengths to maintain compliant puppet governments in Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and elsewhere. In so doing, the US is able to keep Central and East Africa under their thumb, at least to some degree. By destroying the Bashir regime, these imperialists believe they will be able to project US hegemony forward for the foreseeable future and, as a result, secure unfettered access to the wealth of raw materials in the region.

There is also an element of opportunism to this plan. The West looks to capitalize on the still viable discursive construct of the Arab Spring as a means to their end. So long as this idea can inspire masses of disaffected youth to take to the streets, the United States and its partners can continue to impose their will in the region. However, as the conflict in Syria has unequivocally shown, without such mythological pretexts, it becomes impossible for the imperialists to achieve their goals.

In examining the situation in Sudan, it is important to keep in mind that a critical, anti-imperialist perspective does not mean that one absolves Bashir of any wrongdoing. In fact, it should illustrate the ways in which Bashir and his government have contributed to creating the climate that breeds such protests. However, by analyzing this uprising and investigating simultaneously the positive and insidious forces at work within it, we can begin to apply a broad understanding to the issue and, in so doing, work to prevent the Western imperialist ruling class from destroying yet another sovereign state.

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