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From Disintegration to Fragmentation: The Islamic Movement and the al-Inqadh Regime in Sudan

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ABSTRACT

The Islamic Movement of Sudan established the first Islamist regime in the Sunni Islamic world by a military coup. By seizing state power, the Islamic Movement tried to overhaul the political system of Sudan. However, what it brought to the politics of Sudan was far from what its leader Hasan al-Turabi envisioned. It was largely due to the failure of the Islamic Movement to institutionalise its control over state power, originating from its design to conceal the nature of the coup which prevented it from claiming the official leadership of the state. The military Islamists leading the coup continued to run the state publicly. The institutions of the Islamic Movement itself were weakened in the process, making it more difficult to lay the national politics on an institutional foundation. The division and conflicts among the Islamists could not be solved in an institutional framework, leading to the split of the Islamic Movement. The Islamists were further fragmented after the split, both within and without the regime, opening the gate for factional politics.

KEYWORDS

Islamic movement; Islamism; institutionalisation; factional politics; Sudan

1. Introduction

On 11 April 2019, Sudanese President Omar Hasan al-Bashir's rule was terminated by senior military officers who formed the Transitional Military Council to govern the country in a transition period following a four-month protest movement triggered by roaring prices and severely deteriorating living conditions.

Nearly thirty years before, a group of army officers led by Omar al-Bashir overthrew the elected government led by al-Sadiq al-Mahdi in a bloodless coup, which was plotted and organised by *al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah* (the Islamic Movement). This so called *al-Inqadh* (salvation) Revolution elevated the Islamists to power for the first time in the Sunni Islamic world.

The al-Inqadh Regime was unique among the Arab regimes not only in its Islamist ideology but also in how it was established and organised. Many analyses assumed that the Islamic Movement was the real master pulling string behind the al-Inqadh

Regime, at least in its first ten years. But a closer look at this period makes this argument doubtful. It is more correct to argue that the prominent Islamists ruled the country as members of a group of ruling elites. Due to the weak institutionalisation of the Islamic Movement, it didn't function as an integrated and strong organisation providing an institutional foundation for the regime throughout its thirty-year rule.

By examining the development of the institutions within the Islamic Movement, this article argues that it went through a process of disintegration and then fragmentation.¹ This had a great impact on the orientation and performance of the al-Inqadh Regime and can explain why the Islamist-military regime failed to realise the grand transformation the Islamists envisioned of the politics, economy and society of Sudan.

2. The Islamists and the Establishment of the al-Inqadh Regime

2.1. *The Islamic Movement and the State*

The Islamic Movement of Sudan dates back to the late 1940s, when Sudanese students felt disillusionment with the traditional nationalist parties and embraced ideologies such as Islamism and communism. A student organisation called the Islamic Liberation Movement was formed in Gordon Memorial College in 1949, laying the foundation of the modern Islamic Movement of Sudan. Its aim was to liberate Sudan from colonial rule and establish an Islamic society and an Islamic state.² This Islamic order in their imagination was not a return to the model of medieval Muslim societies, but a modernity which promised prosperity and rejected the western cultural values not appropriate with the indigenous society.

To realise its ideal of Islamic modernity, the Islamic Movement had to confront three obstacles. First was the secularists, represented by leftist political parties, especially the Sudanese Communist Party. Second was the two traditionalist Islamic parties which inherited state power from the colonial regime. Although their social base was the two most influential Islamic sects in Sudan, Ansar al-Mahdi and al-Khatmiyyah order, they were not eager to establish an explicitly Islamic political order. Third was the Sudanese society itself, a majority of which was illiterate and rural, having not been reached by the influence of modern education and technology by the time of the independence of Sudan.

To transcend these three obstacles on the road to their envisioned Islamic modernity, the Islamic Movement concentrated their political endeavour on the modern state, which was first introduced to Sudan by foreign powers. Only by the power of the state could a marginal socio-political movement like the Islamic Movement enforce their agenda and bring radical changes to the Sudanese society.

To reach state power, the Islamic Movement relied on their allies in the traditionalist parties at first. This strategy achieved some success. However, the May Coup of 1969 swept all that away. This coup, led by a group of leftist officers in the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), taught the Islamic Movement about the mightiness of military

¹As to the pivotal doctrines of Islamism, see Z. Liu and P. Fan, 'On the three pivotal doctrines of Islamism', *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 13(3), (2019), pp. 295–309.

²A. El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution — Islam and Power in Sudan* (London: Grey Seal, 1991), p. 48.

force. The leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood³ were arrested even before the senior governmental officials,⁴ suffering years-long detention. Influenced by this traumatic experience, a growing number of them began to believe that a military coup was the shortcut to seize state power.

The first attempt of the movement to take power by force was made by some Islamists in cooperation with other opponents of the May Regime. Trained and armed by Libya, these exiled opposition members infiltrated back into Sudan to launch an armed rebellion in 1976. Although they failed to topple the regime, this military campaign made the regime realise that it had to reconcile with the opposition. The Islamists took the olive branch offered by President Nimeiri, joining the government and the ruling party, the Sudanese Socialist Union, in 1977.

The decision of reconciliation was part of a great strategy which began to form before the 1976 Uprising.⁵ After the failure of the armed rebellion, the leaders of the Islamic Movement agreed on this strategy, aiming to seize power for itself by any means. This reconciliation offered political opportunities the Islamic Movement urgently needed to rebuild and enlarge its organisational network, and also gave them access to the state apparatus, the most important of which was the SAF.

It was after the reconciliation that the Islamic Movement managed to infiltrate into the army by encouraging its young members among secondary school graduates to enrol in the military college.⁶ What was more important was those established officers who were historically members of the Islamic Movement, such as Omar al-Bashir and Abd al-Rahim Muhammad Hussein, and those who had been co-opted into it in the 1980s, such as Bakri Hasan Salih and Zubeir Muhammad Salih.⁷ It was these senior Islamist officers who later led the military takeover.

2.2. The Islamist Military Coup

After Nimeiri was toppled in 1985, the Islamic Movement formed a political party called the National Islamic Front. The party once joined the coalition government led by the leader of Ummah Party, al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, but was excluded later following a memorandum presented by the army commander-in-chief, Fathi Ahmad Ali, who demanded a peaceful solution to the Southern problem. This intervention of the Sudanese military in the politics reminded the Islamists of their experiences of suffering state violence during the military rule of Nimeiri. If the leaders of the movement hadn't reached a consensus on the military coup, then most of them agreed on it after this military intervention, feeling the need for urgent action to pre-empt any possible military takeover by their rivals.⁸ To enforce the military plan, a committee of seven

³The Sudanese mainstream Islamists adopted this name for their organization by a resolution of their congress in 1954.

⁴A. El-Affendi, *al-Thawrah wa-l-Islah al-Siyasi fi al-Sudan* (London: Ibn Rushd Forum, 1995), p. 220.

⁵M. Hamdi, *The Making of an Islamic Political Leader: Conversations with Hasan al-Turabi* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), p. 19.

⁶W. Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi: Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 84.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁸A. al-Rahman, Interview in Muhieddin, Abd al-Rahim Umar, *al-Turabi wa-l-Inqadh: Sira' al-Huwiyya wa-l-Hawa* (Damashq: Ekrema Press, 2006), p. 539.

was formed under the supervision of Secretary-General Hasan al-Turabi to contact with the Islamist army officers and lead the preparation work.⁹

Considering the predictable reactions of the neighbouring countries and Western governments to an Islamist regime, the Islamic Movement carefully plotted to hide their role in the coup. It was decided that the NIF was dissolved along with all the other political parties. The Islamists even deliberately sent their leaders including Hasan al-Turabi to prison with other established political figures of the country. Their attempt to conceal the nature of the coup was so successful that even the Egyptian intelligence service was deceived into the belief that this coup was in their favour. However, this arrangement also meant that the Islamic Movement could not officially claim the leadership of the country. The Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation was formed to officially assume power after the coup; most members of which were army officers whose Islamist backgrounds were not known to the public. The civilian cabinet appointed after the coup did not include well-known Islamists either.

The implications of the way in which the Islamic Movement took power had more profound and lasting influence on the political structure than what its leaders had expected. The leaders' initial plan was that the officers leading the coup would publicly run the state for a certain time (three years at most according to Al-Mahboub Abd al-Salam) before the Islamic Movement gradually emerged to take over.¹⁰ In Hasan al-Turabi's perspective, those army officers were just delegated to take power for the movement, to which they all swore an oath of allegiance.¹¹ However, different visions had existed even before the coup. Brigadier 'Uthman Ahmad al-Hasan, the leader of the Islamist group in the SAF, who was supposed to lead the coup, insisted that the military should have full control over political power after the coup. The Islamists replaced him with Omar al-Bashir only a few days before the coup.¹²

What happened later proved that Hasan al-Turabi overestimated the influence of his Islamist ideology on those Islamist officers, while underestimating the strength of the military force as an institution to shape the mind and thoughts of those affiliated to it. The Islamist officers did not go back to the barracks after the coup, leaving power to the civilian Islamists. Although the Revolutionary Command Council was dissolved in 1993, al-Turabi failed to persuade al-Bashir and most of the military Islamists to resign from the army.¹³ That might be the first sign of division between al-Turabi and al-Bashir who insisted that his position as an army commander was a guarantee of the survival of al-Inqadh Regime.

The power structure after the coup showed that those Islamist officers were more than soldiers taking orders. After the coup, a Leadership Office was established to run the Islamic Movement and the government, the membership of which consisted of

⁹Y. al-Imam, Interview in Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa-l-Inqadh*, pp. 175–176.

¹⁰Abd al-Salam, *al-Mahboub, Al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah al-Sudaniyyah: Da'irat al-Daw' – Khuyut al-Zalam* ([Cairo?] Dar Madarik and Dar al-Ulum, 2010), p. 98.

¹¹Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa-l-Inqadh*, p. 189.

¹²A. Gallab, *Their Second Reepublic: Islamism in the Sudan from Disintegration to Oblivion* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), p. 28–29; also see Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa'l-Inqadh*, pp. 192–193.

¹³Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa-l-Inqadh*, p. 194; also see Abd al-Salam, *al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah al-Sudaniyyah*, p.132.

four civilian Islamists and four military Islamists.¹⁴ In this structure, the Islamist officers were equal stakeholders at the top of the regime instead of soldiers taking orders.

What made the situation more complicated was the development of institutions of the Islamic Movement after the coup. As the next section will discuss, the weakening of institutions within the movement undermined the organisational strength of it, leaving the control of the Islamic Movement over the regime more shadowy.

3. The Transformation of the Islamic Movement after Taking Power

One thing that made control of the Islamic Movement over the regime more questionable was the weakening of the Islamic Movement as a disciplined organisation itself.

One of the most important developments of the Islamic Movement after the 1989 coup was the dissolution of the Shura Council of the movement. With the Shura Council dissolved, the democratic mechanism within the Islamic Movement was halted and the contact between its leaders and the rank-and-file was weakened. Critical Islamists blamed this for the lack of accountability within the movement and the regime, which left those in charge to exercise their powers as they wanted without answering to any formal institutions.¹⁵ This move can be attributed to both ideological and pragmatic considerations of the leaders of the movement.

3.1. Hasan al-Turabi and the Dissolution of the Shura Council

Al-Turabi seemed to bear the biggest share of responsibility for dissolving the Shura Council. According to Ibrahim Ahmad Omar, then the chairman of the Shura Council, the suggestion of dissolving the existing institutions of the Islamic Movement was presented by al-Turabi, Secretary-General of the Executive Bureau to the Shura Council.¹⁶ The argument for the decision was that the Islamic Movement had to adapt to the new situation after the 'revolution' by rebuilding and broadening itself. This was a continuation of the strategy advocated by al-Turabi since the late 1960s, which emphasised opening up the organisation to the broad society.

Al-Turabi called this strategy a 'strategy of comprehending the society.'¹⁷ As he argued, it was necessary to comprehend the society with all its dimensions into allegiance of the movement and to compete with 'traditional parties' which had wide mass allegiance, and to achieve that, the overall framework of the movement must expand so it would become a 'comprehensive people's Islamic front'.¹⁸

To turn the movement from an elitist group to a 'people's movement', al-Turabi advocated some major organisational reforms in the second half of the 1960s, the most important of which was forming a political party called the Islamic Charter Front. This party was parallel to the Muslim Brotherhood, absorbing many members from outside the latter, allowing people to join this 'front' collectively as groups and sects

¹⁴Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa-l-Inqadh*, p. 188.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁶I. Omar, Interview in Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa-l-Inqadh*, p. 209.

¹⁷H. al-Turabi, *al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah fi al-Sudan: al-Manhaj wa-l-Kasb wa-l-Tatawar* (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, 2009), p. 51.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 51.

without severing their primitive allegiance. The same strategy was adopted when the NIF was formed in 1985 to ally as many supporters and sympathisers as possible with the Islamic Movement in what was a tough time for it.

Continuing this strategy, the dissolution of the Shura Council after the 1989 coup was conceived as the first step to rebuild and broaden the Islamic Movement by absorbing elites from backgrounds other than the movement.

But the motivation behind that decision was more than ideology. Dissolving the principal formal institution of the movement was also a move to disguise the nature of the coup. Moreover, the decision would also free al-Turabi from answering to the movement's democratic body, leaving him almost unrestrained power as the supreme leader of the movement as he thought.

The organisational strength of the Islamic Movement was greatly undermined by the dissolution of the Shura Council, and even the 'rebuilding' of it led to weakening instead of strengthening the movement. This was to a large extent because the rebuilding and broadening adopted a top-down approach. A council of 40 (or 30 according to some accounts) was first established as a core, and then prominent figures from different backgrounds were absorbed.¹⁹ Without expanding the organisational networks at the foundation level, the Islamic Movement failed to 'comprehend the society' as al-Turabi conceived.

The rebuilding process was more co-opting various elites than broadening the social base of the movement. In the re-established 400-people Shura Council, 60% of its members came from outside the old Islamic Movement.²⁰ Representatives of other socio-political forces were co-opted into it, including former officials of the May Regime, representatives of the Libyan-backed 'Revolutionary Committees,' a branch of the Sudanese Ba'athist movement, splinter factions of the Democratic Union Party, the Salafist Ansar al-Sunna Movement and officers from various security services.²¹ This broad alliance of various social and political elites had anything but ideological homogeneity. Instead of playing the role of an ideological and institutional core of the al-Inqadh Regime, the Islamic Movement 'melted' itself in this process of rebuilding. By absorbing elites from other backgrounds before building a rigid organisation, the rebuilding process opened the gate to factional politics within the Islamic Movement and later the ruling party too.

3.2. The Transformation to the National Congress

At the same time of the dissolution and rebuilding of the Shura Council, the so called 'system of congresses' was established as a nonpartisan political system. In this system, the congresses whose members would include all adult residents of a certain district or village would be held regularly all over the country. These congresses would elect their representatives to congresses of a higher administrative level, then all the way to the National Congress.

¹⁹J. Omar, Interview in Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa-l-Inqadh*, pp. 210–211.

²⁰Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa-l-Inqadh*, p. 159.

²¹W. Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi: Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan*, p. 87.

Theoretically, this system would provide channels for the Sudanese people to participate in the political affairs and lay the foundation of formal institutions of the regime. However, the System of Congress failed to function as a political system with wide and direct political participation of citizens. The process of creating this system was more top-down than bottom-up. Moreover, these congresses didn't manage to function as the principle decision-making bodies of the regime. The real power was still controlled by the Leadership Office and executive governors of the regions.

Hasan al-Turabi himself did not consider the congresses as real ruling bodies at the time of their establishment. He tried to substantialise the National Congress later to build a new political platform for the Islamic Movement and lay the al-Inqadh Regime on a legal-rational foundation. It was decided that the Islamic Movement was formally dissolved and all its institutions were moved to the National Congress, including the student wing, the security committee and the most important, their re-established Shura Council.²² By this, Hasan al-Turabi attempted to transform the Islamic Movement into a formal political party, the National Congress Party, which would rule the country publicly.

However, even after this major institution building, the National Congress still failed to function as the main decision-making body of the regime. During the 1996 elections, it was only allowed to nominate 125 out of 400 representatives for the National Assembly.²³ Hasan al-Turabi later made greater efforts to transform the National Congress into a real ruling party by taking the position of Secretary-General of the party in 1998. His attempt to transfer the real power to the party was one of the main reasons of the division between him and his opponents within the Islamic Movement and the regime.

4. The Conflicts and the Split within the Islamic Movement and the Regime

The weakening of the formal institutions within the Islamic Movement was accompanied by the rise of a shadowy 'Super-Tanzim' (super organisation). It was first the Committee of Seven which supervised the military take-over, and then the Leadership Office running the Islamic Movement and the state after 1989. In the process, the senior leaders of the Islamic Movement were side-lined, and a younger generation of Islamists, such as the Deputy Secretary-General 'Ali 'Uthman Taha, 'Awad Ahamad al-Jaz, 'Ali al-Haj Mohammad and so on, rose to prominence. Many of these younger Islamists handpicked and raised by al-Turabi later stood with his rival and threw their 'father' into prison.

4.1. The Rise of the Second Generation of Islamists

Those Islamists of the second generation raised to the highest positions of the regime played a crucial role in the split of 1999. Had they not sided with the military Islamists in *al-Infisal* (the Split), al-Turabi could not have been excluded from power so easily.

²²Nafi' 'Ali Nafi', Interview in Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa-l-Inqadh*, p. 219.

²³W. Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi: Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan*, p. 88.

A few years after being thrown out of office by his former disciples, al-Turabi famously remarked that 'we have heard of the revolution that eats its children, the cat that eats its kittens, but we have never heard of the kittens that eat their fathers'²⁴. When saying this, al-Turabi might forget that it was he himself that side-lined the senior members of the movement by dissolving the Shura Council, replacing them with prominent Islamists of the second generation.

As al-Turabi and many others assumed, the second generation of the Islamic Movement was under his substantial influence. However, they were introduced to the movement in his absence from 1969 to 1977 when he was in prison. For example, 'Ali 'Uthman started his political career as a student leader, elected as the president of the University of Khartoum Students' Union in 1970. After graduation, 'Ali 'Uthman assumed responsibility of the Islamic Movement's student sector and also inherited the authority of Secretary-General during the absence of most of the leaders of the movement.²⁵ Another group of young Islamists fled the country after 1969 and devoted themselves to an anti-regime military campaign in the Libyan training camps. Al-Turabi had little influence on these environments where the young Islamists were introduced into politics. They acted on their own, without al-Turabi's political guidance.

Al-Turabi's ideological influence on them was not so significant, either. He had not produced most of his works on Islamic politics by the late 1970s.²⁶ So the young Islamist students were probably introduced to the Islamist ideology by other sources such as Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi. They were much less committed to al-Turabi's ideology than he had expected, which was proved by later events.

4.2. The Role of the Security Apparatus

During the era of Nimeiri, the security organs within the Islamic Movement played a significant role when the movement tried to protect itself from the repression of the regime. Many leading figures among the 'successor' generation of the movement, such as Nafi' 'Ali Nafi' and Salah Gosh, played an important role in establishing the intelligence and security apparatus of the Islamic Movement.

This apparatus grew more powerful in the early years of the al-Inqadh Regime which faced many threats at home and abroad. A substantial part of military and civilian services were questionable in their loyalty, while western powers and neighbouring countries were not happy to see an Islamist regime which might export Islamic militancy to the region. Surrounded by threats, the al-Inqadh Regime heavily relied on the security apparatus to consolidate its power. Moreover, with the Shura Council dissolved, the security apparatus filled the vacuum of political institutions, playing a central role in running the organisational network and mobilising political support for the regime.²⁷

²⁴W. Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi: Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan*, p. 92.

²⁵A. Gallab, *Their Second Republic*, p. 143.

²⁶W. Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi: Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan*, p. 93.

²⁷A. El-Affendi, *al-Thawrah wa-l-Islah al-Siyasi fi al-Sudan*, pp. 46–47.

In the late 1990s, when al-Turabi was promoting the building of democratic institutions and pushing Sudan's politics into a more pluralistic direction, those Islamists associated with the security apparatus had every reason to feel threatened. The opening up of the political system not only meant that their importance to the regime was going to decline, but also, in their view, endangered the existence of the al-Inqadh Regime itself. As the institution most responsible for the brutal repression of the regime suffered by Sudanese citizens, they couldn't help but worry about what a democratically elected government would do to them. For them, it was an existence issue. So it is no wonder to see that Islamists like Nafi' 'Ali Nafi' were the most fierce opponents to al-Turabi's agenda of democratic reform. When the *Tawali* ('mutual allegiance') law was passed at a meeting of the Shura Council to legalise political parties in 1998, Nafi' stormed out in protest.²⁸ That's why they sided with al-Bashir in his conflict with their sheikh al-Turabi.

4.3. *The Split of the Islamic Movement*

The conflict between al-Turabi and his supporters with al-Bashir and who sided with him among the military and civilian Islamists originated from a time much earlier than when it surfaced in 1998.

Several of al-Turabi's policies caused the discontent of al-Bashir and the military and 'security' Islamists. First, his idea of creating Popular Defense Forces (PDF) threatened the military junta. Al-Turabi declared that the purpose of the PDF was not to complement but – in the long term – to replace the regular military.²⁹ Second, al-Turabi's ambitious agenda of exporting Islamism also worried his allies in the regime who feared that it would bring ire from the Western powers. His policy of providing refuge to radical Islamists from all over the world including Osama Bin Laden led to Sudan being listed as a state sponsor of terrorism by the US.

The failed attempt to assassinate Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak intensified the conflicts within the regime. The Sudanese security service was involved in this plot, drawing condemnation and sanction from the UN Security Council. Al-Turabi was kept in the dark before it happened according to most sources in the Islamic Movement.³⁰ Then he realised that the security organs needed to be controlled. He and al-Bashir made the decision together to remove those responsible for the plot from the security service, one of whom was Nafi' 'Ali Nafi'. However, those dismissed seemed to resent their sheikh al-Turabi more than anyone else for such treatment, later managing to regain their positions from which they could take revenge on him.³¹

Al-Turabi's disagreement with his former disciples became more obvious when he made greater efforts to accelerate the opening up and democratisation of the political system. It may be argued that al-Turabi's democratic reform agenda aimed to help him take back control of political power in Sudan. In the early 1990s, his attention and energy was largely diverted to expanding the international influence of his Islamist

²⁸A. al-Salam, *al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah al-Sudaniyyah*, p. 189.

²⁹W. Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi: Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan*, pp. 99–100.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 103; see also Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa-l-Inqadh*, pp. 549–551.

³¹W. Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi: Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan*, p. 105.

project. When he felt frustrated at the limited achievements of his adventurous international projects, he decided to reassert himself inside Sudan.³² At this point, a large portion of real power had slipped out of his control. His deputy 'Ali 'Uthman cultivated close relationships with President al-Bashir and Vice President Zubeir Muhammad Salih, who together managed to decide high-profile appointments against the will of al-Turabi.³³

However, it is oversimplified to argue that the conflict between al-Turabi and his rivals was simply over power. As al-Turabi and his supporters argued after the split, his efforts to promote the democratisation of the political system was exactly what his rivals among the military and 'security' Islamists could not stand. In al-Turabi's perspective, the constraints on the freedom of press and political organisations after the coup were only necessary because the regime had not yet been consolidated, and they should be lifted after the 'revolution' succeeded in introducing the society to an Islamic orientation. In his article 'The Islamic State', he emphasised that an Islamic state cannot be established without an Islamic society in precedence, and 'any attempt at establishing a political order for the establishment of a genuine Islamic society would be the superimposition of laws over a reluctant society. This is not in the nature of religion; religion is based on sincere conviction and voluntary compliance'.³⁴ Whether to lift constraints on public freedoms was indeed a main division between al-Turabi and his rivals. 'Ali 'Uthman opposed legalising political parties, fearing that it would let the traditional parties take back power. He argued that lifting restrictions should wait until Sudan managed to export oil so that some prosperity would be achieved and the masses could be persuaded by the economic benefits.³⁵

In the conflict over democratic reform, al-Turabi achieved some successes at first, including the *Tawali* Law which legalised political parties. In 1998, al-Turabi was elected as Secretary-General of the NCP. By occupying this position, al-Turabi tried to make the NCP a rigid political party and the real decision-making body of the regime.

After that, the Vice President Zubeir died in a plane crash. Three names were presented to al-Bashir as candidates of the successor with Hasan al-Turabi among them.³⁶ This might cause the discontent of al-Bashir who thought it an evident sign of al-Turabi's attempt to succeed him as the president.³⁷

The conflict was then greatly escalated by the incident of the 'Memorandum of the Ten.' Presented to a Shura Council meeting of the National Congress on 10 December 1998, the memorandum called for revival of *shura* within the party and transforming some of the Secretary-General's power to the president of the party al-Bashir. Critics of the lack of *shura* were heard from time to time before that, but they had never been put forward overtly in such a form, which could not have happened if not for the support of al-Bashir and his allies among the senior Islamists. Nafi' was one of the ten signatories to the memorandum. 'Ali 'Uthman didn't put his name on it, but he

³²Ibid., p. 97.

³³A. al-Salam, *al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah al-Sudaniyyah*, pp. 155–156.

³⁴H. Al-Turabi, 'The Islamic State', in R. Euben and M. Zaman, ed., *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 213.

³⁵A. al-Salam, *al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah al-Sudaniyyah*, p. 154.

³⁶Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa-l-Inqadh*, p. 287.

³⁷Ibid., p. 287.

was believed to be the architect of the memorandum. Al-Turabi suffered a great setback when the Shura Council meeting approved this memorandum.

Al-Turabi counter-attacked in the general conference of the National Congress in October 1999. Having rallied enough support from delegates from the regions outside Khartoum, he manipulated the conference to exclude all the signatories to the memorandum from the Leadership Office and secure his position as the leader of the ruling party.

The confrontation then moved to the legislative body. As the speaker of the parliament, al-Turabi pushed forward legislations that would greatly change the power structure of Sudan. One of the proposed legislations would make governors of the regions elected by residents of the regions instead of being selected by the president. Al-Turabi also tried to make himself an executive prime minister, leaving al-Bashir a president without real power. The possibility of these legislations being passed through the parliament was high, forcing al-Bashir to act. On 12 December 1999, he declared a state of emergency, dissolved the National Assembly and removed al-Turabi from his official position. Many of the most prominent Islamists, such as 'Ali 'Uthman, Nafi' 'Ali Nafi,' Ghazi Salah ad-Din, all sided with al-Bashir against their sheikh.

After the National Assembly dissolved, Hasan al-Turabi tried to counter-attack from his position as Secretary-General of the NCP. But he overestimated his influence among the rank and file of the party. Without hope for a victory within the party, al-Turabi declared his new party, the Popular National Congress Party, with his supporters leaving the NCP, thus formally splitting the Islamic Movement and the ruling party.

5. Fragmented Islamists and Factional Politics within the Regime

This split of the NCP and the Islamic Movement had a great impact on the al-Inqadh Regime. The fierce accusations and rebukes exchanged between the two sides after the split not only revealed the role of the Islamic Movement in the coup but also greatly damaged the ideological credibility of its Islamic agenda. Al-Turabi even caused greater shock among the Islamists when he signed a memorandum with John Garang, the leader of the southern rebel group Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Threatened by his move, the regime threw al-Turabi and cadres of his party into prison, but this didn't put an end to the conflicts between the Islamists. Following the split, factions of the Islamists remaining within the regime soon started to fight with each other, while the Islamic Movement became more insignificant as an organisation.

5.1. The Hollowed Organisation and Fragmented Islamists

After the split, the Islamic Movement itself became insignificant. This was a trend started long before 1999. With its organisational strength and ideological homogeneity weakened, as discussed in the former sections, the Islamic Movement didn't function as the institutional foundation of the regime. This was more obvious after the split. Even the establishment of the so called 'Special Body' of the Islamic Movement failed

to reverse this trend. It only played a consultative role, whose decisions were not binding to the government. Moreover, with its leadership positions occupied by senior governmental officials, this organisation was no more than an affiliated agency of the regime.³⁸

Thus the reorganised Islamic Movement after the split failed to provide institutional integration to the regime. The rivalries between the Islamists within the regime continued. These rival Islamists competed with each other both within and without the formal institutions of the regime. Each of them had their own resources and networks of supporters, operating as factions and competing with each other. For example, 'Ali 'Uthman and Nafi' 'Ali Nafi,' who were arch-rivals, each had been financing their own clients among the Islamist students, whose activism on campus manifested the rivalry between their respective patrons.³⁹ The rivalries between factions of the Islamists had great influence on the political development of Sudan after 1999.

Another faction led by Ghazi Salah ad-Din, one of the former disciples of al-Turabi revolting against him, withdrew from the NCP in 2013, forming a new organisation called 'Reform Now Movement.' These Islamists were self-branded 'reformers' who were dissatisfied with the way in which the regime ruled the country. They attracted many younger Islamists by acknowledging the 'mistakes' of the Islamic Movement and calling for reinvigorated *da'wa* (preaching), an end to corruption and a 'peaceful' transition to democracy.⁴⁰

This new movement is one part of a new trend among the Islamists that came to be known as the *sa'ihun*, or wanderers. The *sa'ihun* are those Islamists disenchanted with the regime, whether because of its corruption, the 'loss' of South Sudan, or the continuing rivalries within the regime.⁴¹ The al-Inqadh Regime gradually lost its social base when more and more Islamists in the society lost faith in it. They stopped seeing the regime as 'Islamic' in any sense.

In recent years, some other movements emerged representing reform-inclined Islamists, such as the 'Democratic Islamists' Movement led by Hasan al-Turabi's loyal disciple al-Mahboub Abd al-Salam, and 'Initiative of Reform and Revival' which contains many former fighters against the SPLM/A in the South.⁴² Many reformist Islamists stayed in opposition and took part in the demonstrations beginning in December 2018 which led to the final collapse of the al-Inqadh Regime on 11 April 2019. A younger generation of Islamists who were born after 1989 united with their more secular-minded peers to stand against the regime of al-Bashir.

5.2. Factional Politics and the Transformation of the Regime after the Split

For those Islamists siding with al-Bashir in the split, their political survival was bound with the latter and they were faced with a dilemma. On one hand, they were afraid

³⁸Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa-l-Inqadh*, p. 234.

³⁹K. Medani, 'Between grievances and state violence: Sudan's youth movement and Islamist activism beyond the 'Arab Spring'', *Middle East Report* (Summer 2013), p. 41.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 41.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 41.

⁴²M. Ibrahim, 'Tarikh al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah fi al-Sudan', *Al-Idha'at*, available at: <https://www.ida2at.com/history-islamic-movement-sudan/>.

that al-Bashir would become another Nimeiri throwing them back into a powerless position. Especially after the death of the former Vice President Zubair, al-Bashir was the only one who could combine the military with the Islamists.⁴³ On the other hand, they wanted to maintain at least pretensions of a continuity of their 'revolution', which so much sacrifice had been made for. To gain legitimacy among their followers, they needed to prove that their agenda was greater than just staying in power.

After the split, 'Ali 'Uthman rose to the second powerful position in the regime. He understood this dilemma very well. Meanwhile, al-Bashir knew he needed 'Ali 'Uthman and the Islamists he commanded, too. Only they could provide the political cover the President needed after he purged al-Turabi.⁴⁴ The two worked closely to navigate the regime out of the nightmare of the split. Their approach was to improve the international relationships of Sudan and promote an 'economic salvation' agenda.⁴⁵ They took advantage of purging al-Turabi to improve the relations of Sudan with neighbouring countries, the most important of which was Egypt, and also the Arab Gulf countries to gain aid and investment which were essential to ambitious economic development plans. Also benefiting from billions of petrodollars arriving, coincidentally, with the split, 'Ali 'Uthman and al-Bashir were able to finance these grand projects and to build patronage networks, which consolidated the foundation of their rule.

In this 'golden age' of the oil boom, al-Bashir and 'Ali 'Uthman maintained their partnership, despite regular rumours about disharmony. But this relationship didn't survive the dramatic political change brought by the North-South peace process. Achieving peace in the South was central to 'Ali 'Uthman's endeavour to reinvent the al-Inqadh Regime. To push forward the peace negotiation with the SPLM, 'Ali 'Uthman decided to dedicate himself to it personally. In his view, peace was central to further improving the international environment of Sudan and thus creating more economic opportunities. And achieving peace would also be very popular among the people in the North. Besides, for 'Ali 'Uthman personally, succeeding where his 'political father' had failed – a final solution to the South problem – was very appealing.⁴⁶

However, not everybody in the regime believed in the peace agenda advocated by 'Ali 'Uthman. Nafi' 'Ali Nafi, then occupying the position of presidential advisor, favoured a hardline stance and bitterly opposed the reconciliation approach. As the antagonist to 'Ali 'Uthman, he grew close to President al-Bashir and deliberately took advantage of the absence of 'Ali 'Uthman while he was negotiating a peace agreement with John Garang to introduce himself as a critic of the peace deal.⁴⁷ In the process of negotiation, 'Ali 'Uthman had to deal with the spoiling tactics of hardliners and those Islamists who weren't satisfied with concessions to the SPLM/A. This can explain why the peace process was much less transformative than the official clauses of the final agreement promised.

Eventually, 'Ali 'Uthman reached the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with John Garang. According to the agreement, the NCP and SPLM would share power in a

⁴³H. Verhoeven, 'The rise and fall of Sudan's al-Inqadh revolution: the transition from militarised Islamism to economic salvation and the comprehensive peace agreement', *Civil Wars* 15(2), (2013), p. 131.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 130–131.

⁴⁷A. Gallab, *Their Second Republic*, pp. 163–164.

five-year transition period, in which the peace partners were supposed to make unity an attractive option presented to a referendum at the end of the transition period. However, the al-Inqadh Regime actually cared more about consolidating its own power base in the North than making unity attractive. What actually happened was that the peace partners secured their hegemonies in their respective domain. In the 2010 National Assembly election, the NCP secured an overwhelming majority in the North, while the SPLM won most of the seats in the South.

The internal contradictions of the peace process surfaced after the South formally seceded, taking away three quarters of the oil reserve of Sudan. This led to a dramatic decline of the regime's revenues. Consequently, the patronage networks which had grown exponentially for years began to shrink, causing great discontent with the regime. 'Ali 'Uthman was under harsh criticism from his rivals for being responsible for the secession of the South. The failure of 'Ali 'Uthman's strategy led to the downfall of his power. His resignation from his positions in the government and the ruling party were announced by President al-Bashir in December 2013. It was widely believed that he was forced out of the office by his rivals.⁴⁸

After the independence of South Sudan, the politics in Khartoum became more fragmented. With most of its oil revenues lost, the regime had to rely on diversified sources of revenue, including artisanal gold mining, deploying troops in Yemen, smuggling and payments from Middle Eastern patrons.⁴⁹ Those mastering these resources were empowered, the most prominent of whom was Mohammad Daglo 'Hemeidti,' the leader of the Rapid Support Force (RSF). He controlled the biggest gold mine in the country and also received grand returns from Gulf Arab states for deployment of his troops in Yemen. Accompanied by this process, the security apparatus of Sudan grew fragmented. One of its reasons was al-Bashir's strategy to prevent a coup d'état by multiplying security forces that are mutually distrustful.⁵⁰ He created the RSF out of former Arab paramilitaries in Darfur and put it under his direct command to balance the powerful National Intelligence and Security Service, which commanded its own security forces. Besides these forces, there are also SAF, Popular Defense Forces and various paramilitary forces in the security arena. Fragmented security apparatus is the worst consequence of the disintegration and fragmentation of the al-Inqadh Regime and one of the greatest challenges facing the current political transition in Sudan.

6. Conclusion

When the Sudanese Islamic Movement seized power in 1989, they were optimistic about their Islamist project, calling it a 'Salvation Revolution' which was meant to build new political, economic and social systems in Sudan. However, the regime built by the Islamists failed to bring the reforms and changes they promised, ending up in inner squabbles, corruption, economic failure and separation of the country.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 138.

⁴⁹A. de Waal, 'Sudan: a political marketplace framework analysis', *World Peace Foundation and Conflict Research Program Occasional Paper No. 19*, (August 2019), p. 21.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 17.

The failure of the al-Inqadh Regime could first be attributed to the means by which it was established. The Islamic Movement relied on its military wing to take power, thus giving the latter an equal position with the civilian leaders in the power structure of the regime. This structure proved to be unstable and paved way for the power struggle in the following decade.

What made genuine political reform more impossible was the weak institutionalisation of the Islamic Movement itself. Neither the Islamic Movement nor the National Congress functioned as the principle decision-making institution which held the government accountable. Without strong formal institutions, the division between the ruling elites could not be solved in an institutional way, opening the gate for clashes and conflicts outside the institutional framework. The 1999 split to some extent was the consequence of this institutional weakness.

After the split, both sides did not refrain from using any means to destroy each other, causing a series of severe consequences for the Islamists and the regime, undermining its legitimacy further.

With al-Turabi purged, the Islamic Movement became more insignificant. It was not only reduced to an affiliated organ of the regime but also failed to link the regime with its social base, the pious middle class and Islamist students. The ruling elites alternatively relied on economic resources to mobilise support. But with the revenues cut sharply after the separation of the South, the regime had to reduce the distribution of benefits and public goods, which was an important reason leading to its downfall.

What lessons can the politicians now leading the political transition of Sudan learn from the experiences of the Islamic Movement and the al-Inqadh Regime? Like the Islamic Movement thirty years ago, the Alliance of Declaration of Freedom and Change (AFC) has to take great care to navigate through the tricky relationship with its military ruling partner. To achieve that, it has to make sure it has popular support behind it at every moment, which makes the organisational networks reaching out to its supporters very important. Another important lesson the AFC can learn from the past is that the institutional integration is important to the stability of a political structure. Fortunately, the AFC has been seen make efforts to build its inner institutions. To reverse the fragmentation of Sudanese politics, the incumbent leaders of Sudan have to spare no efforts in building strong institutions.

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