

Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi

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[Interview] with al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, leader of the Ummah Party, by Amina al-Naqqash: "We Will Not Ally Ourselves with the Muslim Brotherhood, which Swore Allegiance to Numayri as Leader and Sold Itself for a Paltry Price"; in Khartoum, date not specified

[Text] In the Sudan, it is said that al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, leader of the Ansar order and president of the Ummah Party, is a political leader who knows his religion, not the shaykh of a Sufi order whose leisure time hobby is politics. He understands that Islam, as a movement, is not a turning toward texts, but a method of establishing freedom, equality, and social justice--or what al-Sadiq calls "the socialism of believers."

The Ansar movement, as al-Sadiq al-Mahdi told me, is the contemporary extension of Imam al-Mahdi's revolution in the last century. It considers itself an Islamic movement and a school of thought. Its social base relies on small farmers and cattle-raisers, and it has recently attracted a large proportion of residents of the cities and new community villages.

In the past, the relationship between the Ansar leadership and the Ansar popular base rested on traditional foundations in which historical loyalty played the principal role, and political activity within its ranks was not directed toward the social equation, but rather toward political mobilization and the achievement of independence.

"Now, however, the situation is different. The issue of social justice has come to be in the forefront of our concerns, especially since a large part of the people who form the base of the Ansar are the oppressed of the Sudan and residents in its most backward areas," as al-Sadiq al-Mahdi says.

Against Camp David

I said to al-Sadiq al-Mahdi: "What is the Ummah Party's place on the Sudanese political map? What differentiates its program from that of other parties?"

[Answer] The Ummah Party is the largest of the old parties in size. Of the large parties, it is the only one that grew up in the modern sector. It is unique among these parties in knowing the art of modern politics; the other big parties are still ruminating over the style of the fifties. Then too, the Ummah Party is the one organization that can enter into dialogue with all the other political parties without any sensitiveness, as we are acceptable to right, left, and middle, to army and civilians, and to the south.

We in the Ummah Party believe that the capitalist road to development is of no use to our country. We call for development led by the public sector, for just distribution of the national wealth, and for subjection of the private sector to regulations to prevent its engaging in exploitation. In foreign policy, we call for the Sudan to free itself from dependency on any international camp, and for the independence of the national economy from any foreign grip. We naturally reject the Camp David Agreements. As far as we are able, we shall work to change the Sudan's official stand on them, for the Sudan has no interest in supporting the Camp David Agreements, nor does Egypt itself have any interest in their survival.

'No' to al-Turabi's Front

Question What is your response to Hasan al-Turabi's call for the creation of a front of Islamic parties?

Answer We believe that it is not possible to disregard the May experiment as if it had never happened. On the Islamic level, the so-called Islamic experiment was an improvised experiment without any value. Its intention was political exploitation and opposition to the consensus of the Islamic movement in the Sudan. It is a discarded experiment, one that harmed and distorted Islam and played games with Islamic law. Its real place is the dustbin of history. It was an unjust experiment; it cut off the hands of 200 hungry people, while it announced to the rich that they would be free if they returned the millions they had stolen. In the very shadow of his Islamic experiment, Numayri sold out on the Sudan's Islamic and nationalistic commitment: He supported Israel in evacuating the Falashas; he sold the Sudan's honor by agreeing to the burial of American atomic wastes in the soil of the homeland; and he described his political enemies as infidels and apostates, according to his personal whim. The Muslim Brotherhood remained silent. How then can one ally oneself with them after all these differences? That was not all; they swore allegiance to Numayri as a religious imam! So before the Muslim Brotherhood thinks of an alliance, let them answer the question of how they allowed themselves to swear allegiance to an ignorant, unjust, and utterly unqualified man as religious leader.

Those who swore allegiance to Numayri have made light of religion and country. Anyone who was a partner in his crimes ought to be brought to account according to the law of deterrent popular retribution; anyone who merely swore allegiance ought first to repent of his sin. It is unwarranted to speak about "allegiance sworn to Numayri on conditions that he did not keep." That would be ignorance of the system of swearing allegiance in Islam. Numayri's lack of competence as an object of allegiance was clear before they swore; their swearing despite their knowledge of his incompetence was a crime.

We in the Ummah Party are advocates of unity of the serious and conscious Islamic movement. We believe that those who cannot prove their consciousness and seriousness cannot talk about the unity of the Islamic movement, and that they are incapable of speaking frankly about Numayri's experiment, an experiment that we consider to be his insult to Islam. It is difficult for us to come to an understanding with anyone who does not consider it in this way.

Circumstances of the Reconciliation

Question What were the circumstances of the Ummah Party's alliance with Numayri and the circumstances of the rupture of this alliance?

Answer We did not ally ourselves with Numayri. We opposed his system from its first day. We prepared a memorandum of democratic demands, which the martyred Imam al-Mahdi presented to Numayri during his first days. Then there were a succession of movements and uprisings, in the course of which a large number of people were killed as martyrs or imprisoned. Through its sacrifices and boycotting of the regime and its agencies, the Ansar lost the greatest part of its advantages and property. After the 1976 uprising, which tried to overthrow Numayri by force, the regime became afraid and rushed to seek national reconciliation. He offered us reconciliation; we accepted on the basis that we would work to do away with the regime by means of the ballot box and by attempting to form student and professional or worker union organizations distant from the domination of the gangs of the Socialist Union. We presented him with a 9-point program. He made evasive moves about accepting or rejecting it; so we decided that reconciliation had come to a dead end, and we concentrated on building up our own presence within the Sudan.

However, national reconciliation gave the opportunity for the growth within the Sudan of independent trade union organizations capable of moving against the will of the regime. It also made possible relations between us and men in the armed forces.

Question What is your evaluation of the events of 26 March?

Answer It was a popular uprising in the full sense of the word, the culmination of the Sudanese political movement's position and of its continued opposition to the regime. A quick look at the scenario of events seems necessary. Omdurman Islamic University began the first move of the revolution; its student union kindled the first spark. This union played an important part in breaking the monopolization of the student movement and releasing it from the grip of the Muslim Brotherhood, who were supporters of the May regime, and who had dominated most of the student unions during the last year and a half, paralyzing their activity and thereby frustrating the historical role of the Sudanese student movement, which was always the living conscience of the Sudanese people. The Muslim Brotherhood did this in return for narrow partisan gains; what they obtained

in return from Numayri was hardly worth mentioning. The Omdurman Islamic University union was the first union to break the Muslim Brotherhood's exclusive hold on the student unions. The ansar students formed an alliance with the independent students, which led to the overthrow of the Brotherhood. Their downfall followed in the rest of the other unions; and for the first time, by virtue of the alliance of independent and democratic elements with the Ansar, the student movement was removed from the grip of the Muslim Brotherhood, and consequently from the paralyzing grip in favor of the regime. The demonstration at Omdurman Islamic University was the laboratory that prepared the Sudanese street to ring out in harmony with the call of all factions of the opposition, until there took place with great efficiency the general civil disobedience of the Wednesday preceding the movement of the army. In our consultations with the other professional and party forces, we suggested the proclamation of a covenant of national salvation, and the other parties accepted.

I contacted some of the high-ranking officers of the army shortly before Wednesday and said to them, "You are sons of this people and its protectors. Your only alternatives are to attack the demonstration or to remove Numayri." They said to me, "We will not oppose the demonstration; however, whether we move positively depends on the comparison we make between Wednesday's people's parade and the parade to be organized on Tuesday by Numayri's deputy, 'Umar al-Tayyib, in support of the regime. Tuesday's parade turned out to be a sparsely attended farce; Wednesday's was large and overwhelming. I think that the army leaders decided after comparing the two parades that the people had decisively rejected the regime. Thus we played a part in bringing about the history-making accord between the people and the army. The other political forces played other roles, so that finally the people's revolution became a reality. The Muslim Brotherhood had not the least relation to the uprising; they probably wished that it not occur at all.

It is not true that Numayri was afraid of the Muslim Brotherhood. Really, he took them lightly and thought that he had bought them off at a paltry price. He knew that they were afraid of him and that they had many interests for which they were afraid.

Guarantees to Secure the Revolution

Question What guarantees do you think are necessary in order to realize the goals of the revolution?

Answer The basic guarantee is a commitment to the National Salvation Covenant; the second is that the people exercise their political rights, with the granting of freedom of expression and organization, freedom of opinion and publication; also, the continuation of the sweeping popular wave, since the agitation of the Sudanese streets is a constant guarantee against arbitrary and tyrannical rule. Also among these guarantees is the military oath, to which loyalty to the transition period covenant has been added.

Question Do you not think that the matter of reviving the National Democratic Front is one of these guarantees?

Answer The National Democratic Front, in its old structure, is a matter of the past. There is, however, no doubt of the need to pursue a nationalistic line that will include all Sudanese political forces without exception, as long as the groups accept the general foundations of this nationalistic line.

Pitfalls of the Iranians

Question What is your opinion of the Iranian revolution?

Answer Unlike many Arab forces, we have had relations with the Iranians both before and after the Iranian revolution. It overthrew an arbitrary and tyrannical regime. It presented Islam from the standpoint of independence from foreign domination and of justice toward the oppressed. We see these as great and shining ideas.

However, the revolution fell into the pitfall of taking its point of departure from a Shi'ite ideology. We believe that the revolution must begin from the Koran and the Sunna, not from a particular sect, which would deprive it of its revolutionariness. In Iran, the religious establishment monopolizes all the measures taken on various problems; the Iranian outside of this establishment has no way to take a leadership role. Then again, the revolution covered over sensitive national areas, rather than treating them. The revolution was unable to produce contemporary models for the Islamic political and economic experiment; it gave the initiative and lead to the repositories of tradition--the Ayatollahs--alone, even though they are not conversant with the problems, features, and culture of this age. All these things were pitfalls that brought it about that our expectations for this revolution were not realized.

Prospects for South

Cairo AL-AHALI in Arabic 8 May 85 p 10

Article by Amina al-Naqqash: "The South: The Most Complicated of the North's Problems"

Text The recent Libyan announcement of a halt in military aid to the Popular Movement for the Liberation of the Sudan and to its army that has been waging an armed war in the South since 1983 under the leadership of John Garang presents a new opportunity to discuss the problem of the South, a problem that is one of the most complicated on the list of the Sudan's afflictions after its deliverance from the affliction represented by Numayri, since it is connected with the problem of stability, security, and unity.

This step may play a part in bringing closer together the divergent points of view of the ruling military council in the Sudan and of the Popular Movement led by Garang, a former officer in the Sudanese army. The movement began with a military mutiny against Numayri's attempt to wrest from the South the gains that it had won in the self-rule law and against his appointment of three commissioners for the three southern regions. It was able to obtain support from a number of officers and soldiers of the Sudanese army itself, as well as support from the tribes of the South. It mobilized elements from them into its army, together with elements from the older local movements. In addition, it obtained political and moral support from Ethiopia and Libya, particularly when it undertook to contest the activity of the multinational corporations that Numayri had granted oil prospecting concessions in the South. It destroyed their rigs and prevented them from operating. Because of the movement's reliance on jungle warfare, two previous military campaigns have failed to abort it.

It did not, however, turn into a traditional sessionist movement, nor did it rely in its opposition to Numayri's rule on a call for the secession of the South. Its covenant called specifically for the institution of a socialist transformation in the Sudan, north and south, the building of a unified socialist Sudan, consideration of the South as an inseparable part of the country, and the combatting of secessionist tendencies by offering a democratic solution to the problems of ethnicities and religion within the same framework.

In the wake of the April uprising, John Garang, who enjoys wide popularity within the political forces in the North, announced his refusal to deal with the new government, considering it an extension of Numayri's regime. He appealed to the Sudanese political parties to cooperate with him in realizing what he called "the final elimination of the May regime."

It appears that the new military leadership's hesitation in expressing its willingness to discuss the demands of the Popular Front--the legitimate representative of the southerners--has veiled its leaders' fears, in spite of the fact that the political forces in the North all recognize the legitimacy of the front's leadership and representation of the South.

The front's demands take as point of departure the objective reality of the South: a population of 4 million, encompassing a large number of religions, some monotheistic, such as Christianity, but most of them pagan and tribal religions, not to mention the region's large number of languages and cultures, its overall backwardness in comparison to the Islam dominated North, and its low level of culture and civilization. All of this creates sensitive problems requiring a treatment that will satisfy the legitimate demands of the southerners, who control a large portion of the Sudan, including as yet unexploited natural riches.

The dispute about how to exploit these riches and how to distribute the revenue from their exploitation represents one of the difficult problems now faced by the Sudan. The most prominent demands of the southerners may be summed up as follows:

1. Repeal of the Islamic Shari'a laws, which they see as having harmed both Muslims and non-Muslims; separation of religion from the state; and the allowing of freedom of religion, provided that this freedom not be misused for political purposes.

The difficulty in this demand lies in the fact that the revolutionary leadership's announcement of readiness to review certain provisions of these laws has met with resistance from most organizations of the Islamic political current. The latter have warned against complete repeal and have announced that criticism of the law's application does not mean that secularism is the alternative.

It does not appear that the southerners will under any circumstances welcome being subject to a religious central government in the North. Such a government would not normally be in their interest as long as there exist among them pagans and adherents of tribal religions whom Islamic law decrees ought to be fought, while it gives believers in the monotheistic religions a choice between Islam, the sword, or payment of a special poll tax. This creates the problem of reconciling an insistence on preserving Islamic laws and the demand for keeping the South within the framework of a united Sudan.

2. The southerners also demand revived implementation of the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement during the transitional period. The latter was the agreement which put an end to a 17-year civil war between North and South, and which stipulated regional autonomy for the southerners within the framework of a single region. Numayri torpedoed the agreement in June 1983, when he redivided the South into three regions.

In the light of their experience of how this agreement was implemented and the northern rulers' inclination to overturn it, southerners may be expected to demand a broadening of the scope of the rights granted to them under it. Doubtlessly, this will create certain difficulties arising from the discovery of mineral wealth in the South, wealth which will make its people desirous of wider freedom to use this wealth than was set forth in the agreement.

Although the military council in the first days issued a decree to reimplement the Addis Ababa agreement, it went back and issued other decrees which the southerners considered to have violated the first decree, since in accordance with the latter a military administration of three generals was appointed for the three southern regions (Upper Nile, Bahr al-Ghazal, and Equatoria). In the opinion of the southerners, this action violates the letter and spirit of the agreement.

3. The southerners also demand a review of the public corporations and foundations that draw up economic policies and set local development plans, so that the southerners shall have a voice heard in them, a voice that would lead to the development of their various regions and would lessen the cultural gap between North and South.

The southerners believe that there have been attempts by the North, begun by Numayri, to redraw the boundaries so that the North would include the areas rich in mineral wealth such as oil, uranium, zinc, and nickel.

4. The southerners call for a freeze on work on the Jonglei Canal and cancellation of the integration and joint defense agreements with Egypt. The southerners believe that these were signed at the expense of their rights to the wealth of their country, especially their right to the waters of the Nile.

5. The southerners believe that an attempt was made, after the seizure of power by the armed forces, to exclude them from consultation regarding the choice of a new prime minister, and to assign them certain ministries, as if these were their due, in spite of the fact that these ministries had no connection with the centers of political decisionmaking--not to mention the fact that those who were chosen for them were southerners from the North.

In spite of these and many other difficulties, the Libyan decision and the attempt of all the Sudanese forces to unite and work in a common front to rebuild are factors that will doubtlessly cast their shadow on the position of the southerners. It is this that may perhaps resolve much of the complexity of the southern problem and consequently solve the greatest of the Sudan's problems.

Egyptian-Sudanese Relations

Cairo AL-AHALI in Arabic 8 May 85 p 10

/Article by Amina al-Naqqash: "The Future of Egyptian-Sudanese Relations"/

/Text/ The principles that President Mubarak announced in his recent speech about Egyptian-Sudanese relations do not appear to be a response that is in agreement with what the Sudanese are seeking as new foundations for the relations between the two countries, since he limited himself to generalities about the everlasting nature of the relationship of the Sudan and Egypt, the right of the Sudanese to choose their own way, Egypt's wish for their independence, and non-intervention in their affairs.

What the Sudanese seek is more detailed and definite, and more complicated to put into practice.

In spite of the many friendly declarations exchanged by Egyptian and Sudanese officials, observers of political forces in the Sudan, and even diplomatic circles, including Egyptian, perceive that a new era in relations

between the two countries will have to begin, and that the Sudanese hope that Egypt will be able to correct the error it committed when it put all its eggs in Numayri's basket. During the uprising and the first days following it, some Egyptian declarations caused a negative reaction in Khartoum. Among these was a threat to intervene, a threat that was not accompanied by a reservation of utmost importance: that such intervention would take place on the basis of a request from the Sudanese. Then too, the suggestion by the Egyptian authorities that they had cognizance of what was going on in the Sudan was not reassuring to the Sudanese.

Although it seems that Egypt has been able to neutralize the consequences of these negative actions, there still remain a number of basic points on the agenda of the new formula for Egyptian-Sudanese relations. They are:

1. The consensus of Sudanese political forces of every denomination in rejecting the Camp David Accord, based on the fact that Numayri's joining the camp of those who accepted the agreement harmed the Sudan's relations with the Arab states and placed it, along with Egypt, in isolation from them, in spite of the fact that the agreement contained nothing in the interest of the nation. Cairo should not expect support, popular or official, from the Sudan for such agreements.

2. The Sudan's relations with its neighbors ought to be determined in the first instance by Sudanese interests, not by Egypt's problems with those neighbors. It is the consensus of these political forces that Egypt has exploited the Sudan to oppose Libya and Eghioptia, and that the Sudan has no interest in such a policy. Rather, the opposite is true: the fact that the Sudan's abilities to defend its borders--seven African or Arab states border it--are less than Egypt's abilities makes it in the overall national interest of the Sudan to improve its relations with its neighbors. It was no accident that the first high-level visit to Khartoum was that of 'Abd-al-Salam Jalud at the head of a large Libyan delegation.

Within this framework, these political forces demand the cancellation of the Egyptian-Sudanese mutual defense treaty, which grants Egypt the right to intervene in Sudanese affairs even if the Sudan does not request it.

3. The consensus of Sudanese political forces, including the Muslim Brotherhood, on the necessity for a reexamination of the issue of integration between the two countries and their agreement that integration as it presently exists was nothing but a security gift to protect a popularly rejected regime, as well as a military axis aimed at certain countries, and a political axis to gain passage for certain policies that contradict the Arab position on the Palestinian question. These forces also agree that Numayri worked for integration from a position of weakness, seeking any support for his regime, and that the Sudan therefore came out in an inferior position in the matter. These political forces accordingly demand that the integration issue be reexamined and carried out on foundations that take into account the interests of the two peoples, Sudanese and Egyptian, and their free democratic choice. They demand that it not take place in the absence of mass, popular, and party organizations, but rather with their full participation.

4. The problem between the North and South of the Sudan has an aspect related to Egypt. The southerners object to the Nile water distribution agreement that gives Egypt a larger proportion of the water than the Sudan. They believe that development projects in the South require abundant water, making a review of the agreement mandatory. Beyond that, they oppose the Jonglei Canal project signed between Egypt and the Sudan and demand that work on it cease, based on their desire for a larger share of the water to be provided by the canal, not to mention their opposition to the plan to settle 2.5 million Egyptian peasants along the canal. It is worth mentioning that political forces in the North accept the southerners' demands in this area and consider them legitimate.

5. In spite of the fact that the remaining in Cairo of Numayri--"the Sudan's Shah and Sadat," as he is called by al-Sadiq al-Mahdi--appears to be a marginal issue, it does enter into the fabric of these issues and takes on an importance greater than the issue's value in itself, since the Sudanese people's bitterness over what Numayri did to them is obviously mingled with their bitterness over the Egyptian regime's support and defense of Numayri. It seems that the very least that Egypt's closest friends in the Sudan expect from Cairo is that Numayri leave it for any other capital.

The preceding points are offered to decisionmaking circles in Egypt, whose duty, as the Sudanese say, is to become aware of the fact that the Sudan after the popular uprising is by no means as it used to be previously.

12937

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