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Sudan

# The Fall of Sudan's "Morsisi"

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### **The Sudanese people just toppled their longtime autocratic leader, Omar al-Bashir. It's a confirmation that the revolutionary ferment of the Arab Spring didn't die out in 2011.**

On December 17, 2010, the self-immolation of a young street vendor in Central Tunisia set off a revolutionary fire that spread across the region. Eight years later, on December 19, 2018, the Sudanese government's implementation of austerity measures prescribed by the International Monetary Fund sparked a new upsurge of mass protest. [1] And two months after the Sudanese uprising exploded, the Algerian population started its own revolt, squaring off against an arrogant military regime poised to renew the presidential mandate of the sickly, barely functional Abdelaziz Bouteflika. [2]

The two uprisings, while still eclipsed by the conflagrations of 2011, have made the regional situation look more and more like an Arab Spring redux. [3] More fundamentally, the new outburst of revolutionary ferment "following the ebb that began in 2013 and still persists in countries like Syria, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen" is a strong confirmation that the 2011 explosion was not merely a "spring," in the sense of a brief and smooth phase of political democratization. [4] It was rather the initial phase of a long-term revolutionary process, driven by a structural crisis related to the social and political nature of the region's regimes. Indeed, even though the winds of reaction and restoration have been buffeting the region since 2013, the social turmoil never entirely dissipated: local eruptions of social anger have occurred in various countries of the Arabic-speaking world, such as Iraq, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco. Iran, though not an Arabic-speaking country and a very peculiar kind of state, also joined the fray.

The Sudanese military junta's announcement yesterday that it has toppled its former leader, Omar al-Bashir, and is assuming power for two years before handing it over to an elected government, is suddenly giving the redux an air of *déjà vu*. [5] It resembles the Egyptian military junta's announcement on February 11, 2011 that it was dismissing Hosni Mubarak and seizing executive power for a transitional period. [6] There are two major differences, however, between Sudan and Egypt "and they'll help shape the outcome of the Sudanese upheaval.

The first relates to the Muslim Brotherhood and the military. In all key countries of the "Arab Spring," the most prominent and powerful current in the opposition was the Muslim Brotherhood. Even though the group didn't initiate the popular revolts "jumping on the bandwagon once they were in motion and gathering momentum" the Muslim Brotherhood managed to sideline the real initiators, a ragtag coalition of left-wing and liberal groups ranging from political and social organizations to youth networks connected by social media. In Egypt, the Muslim Brothers were instrumental in fostering illusions about the military in the first half of 2011. They expected that the military would bring them to power as partners.

We know how that story ended. The military seized on mass disillusionment with Mohamed Morsi, the elected president from the Muslim Brotherhood, in order to depose him and install one of their own, Field Marshal Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi. [7] What the Muslim Brothers had hoped for in 2011 was not a figment of their imagination, however, but a reproduction of the model that prevailed south of the border, in neighboring Sudan, ruled since 1989 by Field Marshal Omar al-Bashir in collaboration with the local Muslim Brothers.

Al-Bashir was a "Morsisi" "combining the features of both a military dictatorship and a Muslim Brotherhood-led regime. In recent weeks, this peculiarity led to the rather surprising spectacle of regional enemies rushing to al-Bashir's rescue: the anti-Muslim Brothers military dictatorship of Sisi's Egypt, the pro-Muslim Brothers anti-military regime of Erdogan's Turkey, the anti-Muslim Brotherhood Saudi kingdom and United Arab Emirates; the emirate of Qatar, sponsor of the Brotherhood.

This crucial difference between the Egyptian and Sudanese cases is closely related to a second: the Sudanese Muslim Brothers are unable nowadays to foster illusions about their country's military junta. And the Sudanese population is less likely to be duped than their Egyptian counterparts: they know that the military has been the backbone of al-Bashir's rule. In fact, there are many indications that what prompted al-Bashir's regime to sever its own head is the generals' fear of the revolutionary contagion that started spreading among the troops in recent days, with soldiers joining the demonstrators and defending them against the regime's thugs and other repressive corps.

For now, the situation in Sudan is wide open, and it is impossible to predict the outcome. But it won't be a repeat of the Egyptian scenario that brought Sisi to power, or at least not with popular consent. In Sudan as in Algeria and likewise in all the region's countries the fate of the revolutionary process hinges upon the emergence of progressive leaderships able to steer the mass movement across the dire waves of the regional counterrevolutionary forces (the old regimes and their Islamic fundamentalist contenders or supporters) and toward radical social and political democratization. There is no other way out of the destabilization that has been rocking the region since 2011.

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[Jacobin](#)

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[1] <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/01/sudan-protests-unions-bashir-youth>.

[2] <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/03/algeria-protests-bouteflika-movement>.

[3] <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/achchar-arab-spring-tunisia-egypt-isis-isil-assad-syria-revolution>.

[4] <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/01/arab-spring-authoritarianism-rosa-luxemburg>.

[5] <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/world/africa/omar-bashir-sudan.html>.

[6] <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/02/egypt-tahrir-revolution-mubarak-sisi-elections>.

[7] <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/04/sisi-trump-military-egyptian-revolution-mubarak>.