The Sudanese Genocide: Omar al-Bashir's role

While much is known about the genocide afflicting our brothers and sisters in Palestine, far less is known—or shared—about those in Sudan, who for the past 18 months have endured a silent genocide. This atrocity has killed more than 15,000 people, displaced over 10 million, and left half the population—25 million people—facing food insecurity and starvation.

What little is commonly known is that this genocide stems from the ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). However, Sudan's troubles did not begin in 2023, but rather in 1956, when the country gained independence from British-Egyptian rule. Since then, Sudan has experienced seven military coups, one of the most significant occurring in 1989, which brought Omar al-Bashir to power—a man who would rule as dictator for three decades.

After enduring 30 years of oppression, the Sudanese people finally succeeded in removing al-Bashir and celebrated their newfound freedom—freedom that was soon stripped away by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the SAF, and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, better known as Hemedti, leader of the RSF. Both men had gained immense power and wealth under al-Bashir's regime.

Omar al-Bashir's Rise

Prior to the 1989 coup that made Omar al-Bashir Sudan's ruler, the country was mired in its Second Civil War with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), led by John Garang. Garang is often accused of serving as an American proxy, pursuing U.S. interests to fracture Sudan for strategic and economic gain. These efforts culminated in the 2005 Naivasha Agreement, signed by al-Bashir and Garang, which paved the way for the independence of South Sudan.

It is worth noting that South Sudan holds vast oil reserves, prompting the U.S. to invest over $1.2 billion in the fledgling country, under the banner of "peacebuilding" and "governance", while also vying with China for regional dominance.

At the same time, Sudan's economy was collapsing. Former Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi lost popular support as citizens faced starvation, homelessness, a national debt crisis, and hyperinflation exceeding 70%, all exacerbated by a currency collapse that left people unable to afford basic necessities.

These conditions created fertile ground for al-Bashir—backed by the National Islamic Front (NIF), which aligned itself with Saudi Arabia and the United States against the Soviet Union—to stage a bloodless coup on June 30, 1989. Upon taking power, al-Bashir dissolved parliament, declared himself Head of State, Prime Minister, and Minister of Defense, and imposed strict versions of "Sharia law".

His Regime

As the new leader, al-Bashir quickly surrounded himself with loyal protectors, notably the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), within which Abdel Fattah al-Burhan rose to become Inspector General. Burhan's role was to ensure al-Bashir's security and crush any dissent.

Despite promising prosperity, al-Bashir's government swiftly began oppressing minorities. The 1990s, often called the "terror years", saw the introduction of ghost houses—secret detention centers where dissidents, including intellectuals, communists, and military officers were tortured. Floggings and public executions also began, including the execution of three men for possessing U.S. dollars, sending a wave of fear through the population.

Al-Bashir also enforced harsh interpretations of Sharia law, such as amputation for theft, even when the theft was driven by hunger or poverty. However, under authentic Islamic jurisprudence, such punishments are suspended during times of famine or hardship, as exemplified by Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab, who refused to enforce this punishment during a famine. Meanwhile, al-Bashir and his regime embezzled billions, with $90 million found in his home following his removal in 2019—highlighting his selective application of religious law.

The Wars and Genocide

Despite his brutal methods, civil wars and rebellions erupted. In southern Sudan, the Second Civil War raged on between the Sudanese government and the SPLA, costing over 2 million lives, the majority of them civilians. This war was fought largely by the SAF, with Burhan playing a key role in military operations.

Meanwhile, in Western Sudan, the Darfur region—long neglected by Khartoum—rose in rebellion. Rather than deploying the SAF, al-Bashir hired the Janjaweed militias, including Hemedti, to brutally suppress the uprising. This marked the beginning of the Darfur Genocide.

The Janjaweed, notorious for their cruelty, carried out a campaign of ethnic cleansing. Over 300,000 people were killed, 2.5 million displaced, women raped, men executed, and children abused. Hemedti and his forces were compensated through the gold mines in Darfur, making the displacement of local populations not just a military goal, but an economic one. Their "reward" for this genocide was official recognition by the Sudanese government and a rebranding as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

As al-Bashir enriched himself and celebrated, the population continued to starve, and the economy disintegrated. With South Sudan's independence, Sudan lost most of its oil wealth. A review of the national budget showed that 70% of expenditures went to the military, leaving little for healthcare, education, or food security.

Combine this with decades of corruption, stolen wealth, ballooning debt, and crushing inflation, and the Sudanese people were left to endure a three-decade nightmare. But just when they thought it had ended, and hope emerged after al-Bashir's removal, his disciples stepped in to fill the vacuum—Burhan and Hemedti, men empowered by his rule, now waging war against each other while Sudan bleeds.

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