

Uprising in Sudan: What we know now
Eric Reeves
28 September 2013

(A continuation of the overview of September 26: <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=4334>)

In the wake of large, ongoing demonstrations throughout Khartoum/Omdurman on Friday into Saturday (September 28), as well as in other parts of northern Sudan, a tipping point appears to have been reached: people are now more angry than afraid, and nothing could be more dangerous to a regime that has lived by creating fear through its brutal security services and army. Al Arabiya reports that 5,000 people demonstrated in Khartoum on Friday (September 27), and the number continues to be in the thousands today.

We may be sure that the National Islamic Front/National Congress party regime, headed by President and indicted génocidaire Omar al-Bashir, has watched carefully the course of uprisings in Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. It has learned a good deal, and we are seeing the results of this unfortunate "education" in dramatic fashion in Khartoum and elsewhere. Though information is highly fragmentary, coming from many different sources of varying reliability, there is sufficient overlap and redundancy in accounts to make out the strategy of a regime trying to maintain its stranglehold on national wealth and power.

But despite the brutality of the regime and its bloody crackdown on protests and demonstrations—and in many ways because of it—there appears to be a change in how Sudanese civil society thinks about the current uprising:

"People will not be stopped by the killings until this rotten regime leaves," one witness and Umma Party member, Mohammed al-Mahdi, told The Associated Press. Lawyer and member of the opposition Umma Party, Nafeesa Hagar, said she was injured in the back by rubber bullets during the march. "There is no way people will retreat. We entered a new phase where the street is facing the regime that left us no option but confrontation," she said. (Agence France-Presse, September 27)

There does seem to be a recognition in some quarters of the regime that events are spiraling out of control; Sudan Tribune reports today that:

More than two dozen officials from the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) sent a memo to president Omer Hassan al-Bashir on Saturday urging him to reverse recent economic measures and put an end to killing of protestors who took to the streets following the lifting of fuel subsidies. (September 28)

Reuters reports, also today ("Islamists, ruling party members chide Sudan's Bashir amid protests"):

Islamists and members of Sudan's ruling party called on President Omar Hassan al-Bashir on Saturday to cancel deeply unpopular austerity measures, the first sign of dissent inside ruling circles after a week of unrest that has killed dozens. Police fired teargas to break up thousands of people in the capital during a sixth day of protests against cuts to subsidies on cooking oil and fuel that doubled pump prices overnight. Some in the crowd chanted "Freedom, Freedom" and "Bashir, you are a killer", said witnesses. "Mr President, in the light what is happening we demand an immediate stop of the economic measures," read a petition signed by 31 members of the quasi-official Islamist Movement and the ruling National Congress Party (NCP).

This demand may in fact provide an acceptably "dignified" way for al-Bashir to back away from the decision to lift fuel subsidies and to abandon other economic measures, although it calls into question both his authority and his political judgment at a critical moment. But such a reversal would do nothing to diminish the scale of the economic implosion that will only accelerate if subsidies are reinstated (see part one of this update: <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=4334>).

There is no exit for the regime, not after years of gross mismanagement of the economy, endemic graft, massive self-enrichment, misguided spending priorities, and a vast and expensive system of political patronage. The value of the Sudanese pound will fall even faster; the cost of imports will grow at a devastating rate; inflation will accelerate, though not with the precipitous nature of the nearly 100 percent increase in the price of fuel and cooking oil that has been experienced over the past six days. Reinstating subsidies would also ensure that the IMF abandons the regime.

There is no way to predict which way al-Bashir will jump; but if he remains committed to "confrontation," we may be sure that it will be bloody and may well be long, given the nature of the response already in evidence.

To date the international community has registered publicly very little of the outrage that should greet civilian massacres. Nor has the world expressed support for an opening of Sudanese political life, certainly not with any enthusiasm or evident comprehension of what the people of Sudan are rebelling against.

[1] Utter ruthlessness is called for; whatever is required in the way of action by security and military forces will be taken; "shoot-to-kill" orders have been given to security forces acting in particular neighborhoods of Khartoum/Omdurman and selected cities. A measure of how indiscriminate the regime is prepared to be in its violence is suggested by a Reuters dispatch (September 27, Khartoum) that: "In Khartoum's centre, army trucks mounted with anti-aircraft guns, usually only deployed in strife-torn regions such as Darfur, were stationed in the street" (all emphases in all cited material has been added). Deployed against civilians, high-caliber anti-aircraft fire would be utterly devastating.

In the words of Interior Minister Ibrahim Mahmoud Hamid, a thoroughly vicious man:

We will not allow anyone to sabotage our society and to terrorize citizens. This is considered a red line for the government. I have issued direct instructions to all security institutions, especially the police forces, that we will not tolerate anyone to destabilize the security situation," Hamid said. (Radio Dabanga, September 27)

[2] Control all information as fully as possible, including the various media for disseminating photographs, first-person accounts, casualty figures coming from hospitals, the scale of the violence, and the nature of the economic implosion that has brought Sudan to this point. The regime has always controlled all news broadcast media, and exercised relentless censorship of print news. Various radio and television programs scripted by the regime now present a wholly distorted account of events, even as all newspapers have either been shut down or told that if they do not report the regime's account of events—exclusively—they will be shut down. Social media are nimble and constantly moving; but as Wednesday's precipitous shut-down of all Internet access demonstrates, there is a fierce determination to limit dissemination of accurate information. Two Arabic news sources have been shut down in Sudan.

(The specifics of newspaper closures, as well as the burgeoning the social media response, are summarized below.)

[3] Propaganda and misinformation are longtime staples of the regime's political control of Sudan, and have been on full display since the uprising began Sunday (actually, the first incidents were in Wad Medani, south of Khartoum, on September 22). The violence that has claimed over 100 lives is attributed to criminals, vandals, and the Sudan Revolutionary Front. One report from a reliable source indicates that there are many reports of leaflets put out in the name of the Sudan Revolutionary and characterized by the vilest racism. "Sudan's Revolution in English," a new Facebook page, reports today that:

Dr. Augeel Alnoor Siwaraldahab, director of Khartoum's morgue resigns from his post in refusal to NISS commands to fake death reports.

The director of the Omdurman hospital was fired for having given an accurate account of the number of corpses and wounded he had seen. There has never been any reason for crediting NIF/NCP statements; an unprecedented propaganda effort must now define any assessment of what the regime says.

[4] Intimidation comes in many forms, and it is clear that the regime intends to do as much as possible to intimidate the uprising into submission. But here the regime seems not to have understood one of the most salient lessons of the "Arab Spring": violence begets more violence; murder generates anger that will allow people to overcome fear; families not otherwise involved become so when a member of what are often extended families is killed. Associated Press reports (September 28, Khartoum):

In Khartoum's Burri district, home to a top government official, more than 1,000 people gathered for the funeral of one of the victims, Salah Mudathir, a doctor from a prominent merchant family with strong ties to the government Reuters reported. "Bashir, you are a killer," a witness said about 2,000 marchers men, women and youths shouted after Mudathir's burial according to AFP....

"The people want the downfall of al-Bashir" rang across the cemetery where 26-year-old pharmacist Salah al-Sanhouri was buried. Women, crying and hugging, blocked a side-street while chanting "Rebel! Rebel!" as his male relatives laid him to rest. His relatives say he was shot in the street outside his pharmacy as a march went by Friday, in the same street where the protest came under attack again on Saturday.... The deaths have the potential to spread discontent among Sudan's powerful extended families. The Sanhouris are prominent in the capital, and one mourner identified himself as a senior official in the intelligence services.

As more and more people are affected by the murderous tactics of the regime, anger will only increase.

[5] Flight must be undertaken before events spiral fully out of control. There are already a number of reports of army units joining the uprising (Radio Dabanga, September 27), specifically in the area east of Kalakla (south of Khartoum). There are further reports about the movement of families of senior regime officials that have come to me from a reliable source:

* Families of 80 members of the ruling party and ministers have left Sudan for Dubai on diplomatic passports (September 27)

* Additional reports that senior regime officials, with their families, left Khartoum for Dubai (September 27)

* Prominent NIF/NCP leaders left the country today for Germany and Dubai (September 28)

All senior members of the regime long ago sequestered vast amounts of money and tangibles outside Sudan; they will be able to live comfortably in one of the Arab Emirates, or perhaps another Arab country (notably, however, UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar bin Mohammed Gargas said that the UAE is "deeply concerned" about the "violent and unjustified" dealings with these events and the impact it has on the Sudanese society," Sudan Tribune, September 28). The location will be one in which there is no fear of extradition to the International Criminal Court, which has already indicted al-Bashir and Abdel-Rahim Mohamed Hussein, current defense minister and former minister of the interior, the latter for multiple counts of crimes against humanity. Foreign minister Ali Karti, which a great deal of blood on his hands from the days of the North/South civil war and in Darfur, is the official who has been specifically named as having sent his family to Dubai.

• More detailed information for the preceding overview:

Wherever possible, the most reliable news sources have been cited: Reuters, Agence France-Presse, and Associated Press. But there are other international journalists and Sudanese on-line newspapers published in exile are also providing very substantial information on the basis of informants cultivated over many years: the Sudan Tribune (based in Paris), Radio Dabanga (based in The Netherlands), and (in Arabic) al-Hurriyat, edited by el-Hag Warrag in Kampala. The proliferation of social media reports is at once often suggestive, but makes eliminating redundancy and establishing veracity extremely difficult.

There is, perversely, simply too much information, of varying degrees of reliability, emerging on an hourly basis. With this as context, the following reports have all been received in the last 48 hours.

- THE DEMONSTRATIONS

(Reuters, September 28, Khartoum):

More than 2,000 people demonstrated in Khartoum's northern Bahri district, a hot spot for days, and in other areas, witnesses said. Police also used teargas in those areas. In Khartoum's centre, [N.B.] army trucks mounted with anti-aircraft guns, usually only deployed in strife-torn regions such as Darfur, were stationed in the street. More than 100 soldiers, policemen and plain-clothes agents patrolled the government district on the banks of the Nile.

(Reuters, September 27 in Khartoum):

In the last few days, protests have drawn more than 5,000 people, the biggest for many years in Khartoum where Bashir—wanted by the International Criminal Court on genocide charges—has ruled since a coup in 1989. About 3,000 people, angered by a police crackdown on demonstrations against the lifting of fuel subsidies, took to the streets after Friday prayers in Khartoum's twin city Omdurman, across the Nile, shouting "Freedom! Freedom!" and "The people want the fall of the regime!"

Defying a massive security presence, the crowd marched to the central market, holding up banners saying "No, no to price increases!" Police fired teargas, sending some protesters running for cover. But most remained, some hurling stones at the police, others torching cars. More than 2,000 people also demonstrated in Khartoum's northern Bahri district, a hot-spot for days of unrest, and other areas, witnesses said.

(Radio Dabanga on life in Khartoum, September 27):

The riots have also inflicted heavy damages to gas stations, public transportation buses and some police stations. This has created long queues at the few opening and operational gas stations. The government has cut off the Internet on Wednesday and part of Thursday. Yesterday Sudan TV carried a message that a cyber blackout will be imposed from 12 am for the next 48 hours without explanation.

(Agence France-Presse in Khartoum, September 27):

Schools have been ordered closed until Monday and most shops remain shuttered, deepening the sense of crisis and sending residents scrambling to hoard supplies. "I want my family to have what we need because we don't know where this is all going," said Ahmad Hassan, 50, stocking up on canned goods....

Faisal Saleh, a political commentator in the daily newspaper Khartoum, said the new protests were significant because of their geographical extent, the variety of protesters and the bloody response by the security forces. "This only reflects that the government feels endangered by the protests. We have seen secondary school students shot to death for only chanting against the regime, not even throwing a rock," he said.

- NUMBER KILLED

On the basis of a reading of all available reports, from all areas of Sudan, I find it entirely implausible to suggest that fewer than 100 people have been killed. Indeed, this figure is certainly low even for the number of those killed in Khartoum and Omdurman:

The death toll from a week of protests is sharply contested. Youth activists and doctors at a Khartoum hospital told The Associated Press that at least 100 people died since Monday. Sudanese police have reported at least 30 deaths nationwide, including policemen. (Associated Press, September 27, Khartoum)

The regime's figures have been consistently unsupportable:

Dr Sid Ganaat, medical doctor at the Omdurman Hospital said that the number of protesters transferred to the hospital on Wednesday during the 7am-7pm shift, was tallied at 74—38 of them injured and 36 dead.

Meanwhile, activists have begun to put together pictures, names, and details of each slain protester—the truth will out. But the portents for more killings are everywhere; Radio Dabanga reports (September 27):

An army of thousands of soldiers and police and security officers in civilian clothes but armed with Kalashnikovs and automatic rifles was deployed to defend the government buildings in the centre of Khartoum.

- MEDIA CRACKDOWN:

(Agence France-Presse, September 27, Khartoum)

In an apparent bid to impose a media blackout on the unrest, Sudanese authorities shut the Khartoum office of pan-Arab satellite channel Al-Arabiya after summoning its correspondent for questioning, the network said. The correspondent for a second region-wide channel, Sky News Arabia, told AFP that authorities banned him from working and seized equipment from his office. Authorities also confiscated or blocked publication of three newspapers, although they are considered pro-government, journalists said. The Al-Sudani and Al-Majhar al-Siassi dailies were seized at the printing press while Al-Watan was ordered not to print after covering the unrest in its Thursday edition, they said.

(Radio Dabanga, September 27):

Today, the security service closed the bureaus of UAE-based Al-Arabiya and Sky New Arabic Service television stations, accusing them of false reporting on this week's events. Al-Sudani and Al-Meghar Al-Siyasi newspapers were banned from publication for Saturday edition. Diah Al-Deen Bilal, editor in chief of Al-Sudani said he was notified of the temporary suspension but no reason was provided. He noted that the newspaper has not been able to publish since Thursday. Bilal stressed that the decision prevents them from reaching their readership on top of the financial losses. He slammed the Sudanese Journalists syndicate for playing a "zero role" in the protection of newspapers against the crackdown now or in the past. Journalists of the independent newspaper Al-Sahafa also decided today to resign collectively from the daily to protest against the censorship imposed by the security service.

(Radio Dabanga, September 27):

"Only papers like Al Sahafa newspaper have started to follow the instructions of the government, others have stopped. Most column writers have stopped publishing their views." Faisal Mohamed Saleh told Radio Dabanga further that the Sudanese are now entirely depending on media operating from abroad, like Al Jazeera, Radio Dabanga and others. Faisal Mohammed Saleh was a former editor of a daily newspapers and Teeba Press receiving international awards for courageous journalism.

- GROWING GEOGRAPHIC DISPERSION OF THE UPRISING AND INCREASING PRECISION IN REPORTING OF LOCATIONS:

(Radio Dabanga, September 27)

[I]n Wad Madani, 180 kilometer south-east of Khartoum four people lost their lives after police fired at them. Friday was the fifth day of massive protests against the rise of fuel prices, inflation and violent attacks of demonstrators having killed at least 111 people according doctors on Thursday, Radio Dabanga reported. The two largest demonstrations with several thousands of unarmed protestors had

started in Bahri (Khartoum North) and Omdurman (twin city of Khartoum). But also reports have come in from Atbara, El Obeid, Wad Madani and in Omdurman (Wad Nubawi).

Also in Khartoum in Street 60 near Juba Road and in Street 40 in Omdurman around 15:15, protestors were gathering, while police forces were taking their position. Initially the police was constraining itself from using violence, but at 15:50 the police started using heavy teargas in Street 40 in Omdurman. In Street Sixteen (East Khartoum near Manshiat), special forces were gathering near the mosques, where also prominent members of the Popular Congress Party of Al Turabi gather. Riots have started in Wad Madani earlier today (Friday) were reportedly four people have been killed during the protests in front of the Big Mosques. Radio Dabanga received pictures from inside security buildings in Khartoum, where arrested demonstrators were gathered and flogged.

In Omdurman, demonstrations occurred today in the Umbadda, Abasia, Suq Omdurman, El Thawra, Suq Sabrin, and at Shuhada Square near El Azhari house. Security forces shot one person dead at the Suq Omdurman and injured dozens. Hundreds of people were arrested. The tension in Omdurman was high. On Thursday evening a funeral of five casualties moving towards the Ahmed Sharafi cemetery in Omdurman was stopped by security forces attacking them with tear gas.

The two biggest demonstrations in Sudan took place in Omdurman and Khartoum North (Bahri). In Bahri more than 3,000 people were gathered when the police opened fire on protestors. In El Kadaru and Shambat in Khartoum North, the protesters were headed by political party leaders, including secretary of the Communist Party, Mohamed Mukhtar El Khatib; the head of the Sudanese Congress Party, Ibrahim El Sheikh, spoke to them. They were marching towards El Ma'una Street where they clashed with the police.

• REPORTS UNVERIFIED BUT JUDGED CREDIBLE ON THE BASIS OF OTHER EVIDENCE OR THE CHARACTER OF THE SOURCE:

* According to new accounts today, the governor of Gezira state has fled his residence in Wad Madani, a university city 180 kilometers east of Khartoum. (Radio Dabanga, September 27)

* Shops and markets are closed. The streets are deserted in some areas in Khartoum. Some areas there reportedly suffer from bread shortage. In some cities angry protesters have blocked the roads. (#SudanRevolts, September 26)

* Officially the government is saying that 27 only were killed while activists and opposition movements say that over 130 protesters including women and children have been killed in the past 48 hours. Hundreds are transferred to hospitals every hour as far I could tell from the tweets and updates I read on Facebook. The director of Omdurman hospital was arrested after speaking to the media. The tragedies continue and activists are reporting that the Omdurman morgue refuses to let the families to bury their relatives except when they sign papers that those relatives are thugs and criminals. (#SudanRevolts, September 26)

* Elements of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) have refused to kill civilians; there are divisions inside the army and reports of shooting inside the General Headquarters of the Army. (confidential source)

* Long-time regime heavyweight Nafie Ali Nafie returned from giving a propaganda speech in northern Sudan, and attended a funeral for one of the young men killed in Khartoum:

"Nafie Ali Nafie in returning to Khartoum, went to a funeral of one of the young men killed in Khartoum, he was confronted by fierce chantings against his government and some yelling "our son's blood is on your hands." He was forced to leave with his guards and entourage. (confidential source)

* There are some sympathisers with the protesters within the security apparatus of the regime. The following is alleged plan of the regime to quell the on going protest, leaked by one sympathiser and now published on the net and social media (confidential source):

[a] Specific areas in Khartoum have been designated as "Red Zones" by the security apparatus. These areas are mostly inhabited by marginalised people (from Darfur, Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile, South Sudan). The instructions to the uniformed and non-uniformed security forces are to use the maximum lethal force.

[b] Specific cities are designated "Red Zones," Nyala (Darfur), Atbara (northern Sudan, where most residents are workers in railroad shops and factories), Port Sudan. Maximum Lethal force to be used.

[c] Blame the property damage on SRF and SRF supporters to create that racial rift in Khartoum.

[d] If Demonstrators continue, Sudan Air Force to fly jet fighters in the skies of Khartoum at low altitudes to scare demonstrators into thinking that bombs will drop from the air.

[e] The regime mobilized about 109,000 of the troops (Army, Popular Defence Forces, Police, Security) in Khartoum alone.

[f] 17,000 of those forces are considered core of those loyal to the regime. They are the ones doing most of the killings among the demonstrators.

[g] Six Antonov AN24's landed in North Khartoum from Darfur on Wednesday (September 25) carrying Janjaweed militias ready to be used if demonstrations continue.

[h] Use of mass media to warn Khartoum residents that "strangers" from Sudan Revolutionary Forces (SRF) have infiltrated the demonstrations to destroy properties, loot, and will commit rapes against the Northern women.

[i] Distribution of leaflets in the name of SRF that carry racial slogans and threats of revenge.

[j] By Saturday if demonstrations continue, electrical power, water may be turned off from certain neighborhoods.

• OTHER SOURCES OF NEWS ON THE UPRISING IN SUDAN:

* Sudan's Revolution in English: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sudans-revolution-news-in-english/510498889028523> (Facebook page on revolt, in English; begun 2pm ED, September 28)

* Girifna: the oldest and most sustained campaign attempting to topple the regime:
<https://twitter.com/girifna>

* #SudanRevolts: <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23SudanRevolts&src=hash> (English)

* SudanChangeNow: <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23SudanRevolts&src=hash> (mostly Arabic)