ESSAY

Sudanese totalitarianism: violent *jihad* as a state policy

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Abstract

The case of Sudanese violent jihadism is a specific one, starting from 1881–1899 Mahdist's uprising. Since the 1956 independence, the history of Sudan has been marked by civil wars taking place in various parts of its huge territory; violence under the outwardly jihadist banner culminated in the 1990s. The Islamic state used violent jihad, by the army and by militias, as a way to impose unitary rule (state-building) and shari'a law upon a significantly diversified population. Violent Jihad was thus called for three purposes: to mobilise resources for fight with non-Muslim southern Sudanese; to consolidate the Muslim north internally in the context of the struggle of the totalitarian regime against opposition and struggles within the regime itself; and to define the international role of Sudan as a supporter of radical Islamic movements. The case of Sudan is thus one in which violent jihad was part of the state ideology and an instrument of policy.

Keywords

Sudanese political system; jihadism; sharia law; political violence

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Author roles: Zielińska K: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing

Competing interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information: The author(s) declared that no grants were involved in supporting this work.

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How to cite this article:
For printed version: Zielińska Karolina. "Sudanese totalitarianism: violent *jihad* as a state policy". *Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations* 60, (2024): 201–223. Printed 2024. https://doi.org/10.12688/stomiedintrelat.17828.2.

For online version: Zielińska K. **Sudanese totalitarianism: violent *jihad* as a state policy.** Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations 2024, **4**:7 https://doi.org/10.12688/stomiedintrelat.17828.2

Introduction

The history of the Sudan is permeated with political violence and civil war. The epicentre of brutality moved from North to South, from East to West of Sudan's vast territory. The state's politics were characterised as cruel, what Gallab[1] described as a perpetual "war of attrition" between political opponents, with steadily increasing use of private and state-led armed violence. Much of it took place under the banner of *jihad*, either by default – as an expression of the Muslim identity of perpetrators – or on purpose, as an inherent part of dominant Islamist ideology. Eventually, crimes committed in the South Sudan and in the western Darfur province earned Sudan a reputation of a country literally soaked with blood. Simultaneously, the Sudanese government's support for global *jihadist* networks resulted in tough sanctions against its regime.[2]

This Article reconstructs the history and characterises the key features of the Sudanese violent *jihadism* since its first, 1881 *Mahdist* revelation until the 2019 fall of Omar al-Bashir. It gives particular focus to the years 1989–2019, when violence under the banner of *jihad* became part of the state ideology and practice, leading to mass atrocities against the population and turning Sudan into a designated state supporter of terrorism.[3]

Vast literature exists dealing with the political history of the Sudan or describing and analysing the root causes and the course of armed conflicts within the state. Numerous sources documenting the Islamist regime's atrocities are available. Yet, most of these sources mention the theme of violent *jihad* only in passing, without specifically focusing on the phenomenon. The one exception might be the reports detailing the state's support for international terrorism.[4] Elsewhere, de Waal and Abdelsalam[5] as well as Gallab[6] question and try to explain the Sudanese Islamists' embrace of violence, while Kaplan[7] suggests the possibility of framing it as part of

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[1] A.A. Gallab, *The first islamist republic. Development and disintegration of Islamism in the Sudan* (London: Routledge, 2008), 49.

[2] M. Rubin, "In the war against terrorism, where goes Sudan?," The Washington Institute, October 10, 2001, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/war-against-terrorism-where-goes-sudan.

[3] C. Hudson, "Removing Sudan's terrorism designation: proceeding with caution," Atlantic Council, March 16, 2020, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/removing-sudans-terrorism-designation-proceeding-with-caution/.

[4] S.J. Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift: Fault-lines of the African Jihad* (London: Hurst & Company, 2019).

[5] A. de Waal and A.H. Abdelsalam, "Islamism, state power and Jihad in Sudan," in *Islamism and Its Enemies in the Horn of Africa,* ed. A. de Waal (London: Hurst, 2004), 71–113.

[6] Gallab, *The first islamist republic. Development and disintegration of Islamism in the Sudan*.

[7] J. Kaplan, *Terrorist groups and the new Tribalism* (London: Routledge, 2010).

the global terror's fifth wave. In turn, Sharkey[8] observed that Sudanese "*jihads (…) have been more about affirming or defining the self than about striking at enemies. They have entailed assertions of power and sometimes calls for change, both between and within religious communities.*"

This article uses existing academic, governmental, and third-sector documents to try to capture the phenomenon of Sudanese violent *jihad,* in particular as a political instrument. Consequently, it does not delve into the history of Sudanese polity (political parties, system of government, influence groups etc.), complex histories of its civil wars or manifold factors causing them, as these are well explained in the existing literature. It also does not tackle the issue of atrocities committed by Islamists' enemies, which fall outside of the scope of the paper.

For the purpose of this article, political Islam – Islamism – is understood as endeavours at solving political and policy problems by applying solutions derived from religious teachings. Islamists parties are those that advocate such solutions. Such parties represent a broad range of approaches and cannot be automatically treated as fundamentalist. Legal systems that base on precepts derived from Islamic teachings are known as shari'a - Islamic Divine Law[9] systems. Jihad is understood as a "struggle in the cause of God".[10] As shown by Danecki,[11] it was originally focused on conquest and consolidation of territory, as well as conversion of inhabitants, then codified (though no universal interpretation emerged) to be pursued through "heart, tongue, hands and sword"[12] – with only the latter one related to war. As pointed out by Allahdad[13] "Jihad as a concept in Islamic terminology means to fight and struggle against uncovenanted unbelievers in the path of Allah (…), and spending great effort in defence and expanding of His religion, Islam (…). To define jihad in a broader sense, it is to learn and live according to religious orders and to teach it to others, to command goodness and to avoid evil, to communicate Islam, and to fight against external enemies". In a reductionist interpretation, jihad related to war is excluded and denied; in a global-radical interpretation, jihad is interpreted as a call for political violence and mandated on every Muslim.[14]

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[8] H.J. Sharkey, "Jihads and crusades in Sudan from 1881 to the present," in *Just wars, holy wars, and jihads: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim encounters and exchanges,* ed. S.H. Hashmi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 263–282.

[9] R. Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan* (Cambridge: Yale University Press, 2008).

[10] Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, 2008.

[11] J. Danecki, *Podstawowe wiadomości o Islamie Tom I* (Wydawnictwo: Dialog Warszawa, 2002), 251–258.

[12] Danecki, *Podstawowe wiadomości o Islamie Tom I* (2002), 255.

[13] A. Allahdad, "Perception and Interpretation Problems of Contemporary Approaches of the Concept of Jihad," *TALİM: Journal of Education in Muslim Societies and Communities* 3, no. 1 (2019): 7–30.

[14] Allahdad, "Perception and Interpretation Problems of Contemporary Approaches," 13, 17.

According to Mura,[15] "Jihad, the 'effort' in the path of Islam, while signifying in legal doctrine a plurality of approaches to religion (from more spiritual to material), also implied a military interpretation – either defensive, as a collective duty in cases of aggression, or expansive, as a way to Islamise new lands, as an alternative or in association to da'wa, the Islamic call (missionary persuasion)." Violent jihad, in turn, refers in this article to fulfilment of revolutionary causes, elimination of internal and external enemies, territorial expansionism and Islamisation of populations (including Muslims representing other strands) pursued through violence which is rhetorically justified as a religious duty. The term is not new, allows for distinction between violent and non-violent struggles, and was used by academics in a range of disciplines [for example, Baker, Muluk, Obaidi[16]] as well as the media.[17] In fundamentalist interpretations, political Islam is often blended with an emphasis on violent jihad. The major strand of such interpretations is embodied by the Muslim Brotherhood organisation creators and ideology, which heavily influenced Sudanese ideologues that implemented violent jihad in contemporary Sudan.[18]

Sudanese case of violent jihad is a special one, since it is not one of the frequent cases of a terrorist group acquiring power over certain territory and therefore engaging in governance (with relevant examples analysed and compared by Margolin & Zelin[19]). Rather, it is a case of state apparatus embarking upon violent jihadist rhetoric and practice, in order to enhance their governance over a particularly complex and diversified polity with the use of religiously justified state brutality and state-sponsored non-state violent actors. It is from this particular, understudied angle that the contemporary Sudanese political history is looked at in this article, recognising the existence of literature which outlines this history in general, including such specific aspects, as ethnic tensions, Arabisation policies and modernisation (other important drivers of violence against West and South provinces).[20] Obviously,

[15] A. Mura, *The Symbolic Scenarios of Islamism a Study in Islamic Political Thought* (Ashgate, 2015).

[16] P. Baker, R. Vessey and T. McEnery, *The Language of Violent Jihad* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); H. Muluk, N.G. Sumaktoyo and D.M. Ruth, "Jihad as justification: National survey evidence of belief in violent jihad as a mediating factor for sacred violence among Muslims in Indonesia," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 16, no. 2 (2013): 101–111; M. Obaidi *et al*., "The personality of violent Jihadists: Examining violent and nonviolent defense of Muslims," *Journal of Personality* 92 (2024): 1172–1192.

[17] F. Gardner, "The enduring appeal of violent jihad," BBC, January 27, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47000188.

[18] J. Danecki, *Podstawowe wiadomości o Islamie Tom II* (Wydawnictwo: Dialog Warszawa, 2002), 119–149; M. Kobayashi, "The Islamist movement in Sudan: the impact of Dr. Hassal al-Turabi's personality on the movement," Doctoral thesis, Durham University, 1996.

[19] *Jihadist Governance and Statecraft*, eds. D. Margolin and A. Zelin (Washington Institute, 2024), https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/sites/default/files/pdf/PolicyFocus180MargolinZelinIndex.pdf.

[20] R. Cockett, *Sudan: The Failure and Division of an African State* (Yale University Press, 2016); Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*.

it is neither the aim of the article nor the competence of the author to determine whether the Sudanese violent jihad embodied an accurate interpretation of the Islam. Neither it is enabling determination of whether the rulers that employed violent jihad did that out of deep conviction that this is the correct interpretation of Islam, or rather used it cynically as a political tool, and thus also their rhetoric was just a political discourse rather than a manifestation of true faith. In other words, as an international relations article, it approaches the phenomenon discussed from a political, and not theological perspective.

The first violent *jihad* and origins of totalitarianism

The first "modern" or "nation-wide" Sudanese *jihad* was called in 1881 by a scholar Muhammad Ahmad, who declared himself a *Mahdi* (Mahdi, in Sunni Islamic tradition, is defined by Collins[21] as "an inspired holy man who will come at the End of Time to bring justice and revive the glory of 'Islam" and by Cockett[22] as "literarily the 'guided one', the man who would lead Muslims to a reform of the Islamic world" and proclaimed holy war against the Turco-Egyptian regime. In 1885, his forces took over Khartoum and killed governor-general Charles Gordon.[23] Strict Islamic laws were introduced, including curtailed freedoms of women and harsh punishments (amputations, beheadings). Mahdi's successor, Abdullah ibn Mohammed not only concentrated on the creation of a religious state in Sudan. He also embarked on an expansionist war against Ethiopia (1884–93). The invasion that at its height led to the conquest of the capital city of Gondar (1887) had distinct *jihadi* undertones; including the demand that the Ethiopian emperor, eventually killed on the battlefield, converts to Islam. While Mahdists' expansion in that direction (1890–93) was stopped by the Italians, they embarked on a Southern-Sudanese front, conquering Equatoria (1893; in present-day South Sudan). Labelling all opponents, Muslim and non-Muslim, as infidels enabled the Mahdists to market their wars as *jihad,* which in turn legalised looting.[24] Mahdist adventure became perceived in the Muslim world as the first successful *jihad* against the West[25] it was also a prelude to what happened later on the domestic front, when intra-Muslim *jihad* against Sufis employed such violent measures as forced migration and resettlement.[26] Yet in the early 20th century, after the 1898 defeat of Mahdists by Anglo-Egyptian forces, the expansion of Islamism was limited. The rulers closed off three Southern provinces for Muslims and cared for incorporation of local Muslim elites into power structures, while much power was delegated to local sheikhs. Still in 1916, a short-lived *jihad*

[21] Collins, *A History of Modern*.

[22] Cockett, *Sudan: The Failure and Division.*

[23] Sharkey, "Jihads and crusades in Sudan from 1881 to the present," 263.

[24] Sharkey, "Jihads and crusades in Sudan from 1881," 266.

[25] Kaplan, *Terrorist groups and the new Tribalism* (London: Routledge, 2010), 127.

[26] Sharkey, "Jihads and crusades in Sudan," 268.

against the condominium was waged by a Darfuri sultan. The major political forces that emerged in the meantime, demanding independence, referred to Muslim identity, but not necessarily identified with Islamism.[27]

Following independence, Mahdists and Islamists[28] constituted separate political powers. While their political programmes and the ultimate aim of the Islamic state were ostensibly very similar,[29] the former were more moderate, for example when it comes to the preferred fate of the non-Muslim minorities or attitudes towards gaining power by force.[30] In practice, the Islamists were struggling for power in an environment already permeated by Islam;[31] and against political forces which to a large extent recognised its role, i.e. as a basis for state's law (the principle of abiding by the *shari'a* prescriptions). Even forces that stood behind democratic uprisings in 1964 and 1985 largely backed "*Islamic constitution and shari'a law*", though the moral and religious agenda was ascribed by Islamists to the 1964 revolution post-factum and mostly artificially.[32] In the meantime, Islamisation (alongside Arabisation) of the South started to be perceived as indispensable for Sudan's national unity – that is, Sudanese state-building as a unified nation – against Southern quests for either recognition of internal diversity within the state, or independence. Already in 1962–3, Arabic was enforced as the state language, works of religious (Christian) schools and missionaries in the Southern provinces started to be curtailed, and the official day of rest was moved from Sunday to Friday.[33]

Ja'far Nimeiri, the dictator in power in the years 1969–85, was nevertheless for years espousing socialism and violently fought Islamists. He entered into an alliance with them only in 1977. Following the Iranian Islamic revolution (1979) and aware of rise in sentiments that might endanger his power, he embarked on an Islamisation project of his own. While coercive and intolerant, his effort relied largely on the Sufi denomination, paving the way for later events in which Islamists clashed with Sufis. In 1983, *sharia* law was promulgated (so-called September Laws). This was largely a populist move meant to consolidate Nimeiri's power

[27] R. Łoś, *Konflikty w Sudanie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2013), 23–26, 29; Sharkey, "Jihads and crusades," 270.

[28] Sudanese Islamist movement incarnations include: Muslim Brotherhood (1964), Islamic Charter Front (1964–9), National Islamic Front (1985–89), National Congress (1998–9), Popular Congress (1999); Gallab, *The first islamist*, 9, 61.

[29] C. Fluehr-Lobban, "Islamization in Sudan: A Critical Assessment," *Middle East Journal* 44, no. 4 (Autumn, 1990): 610–623.

[30] G. Warburg, "Mahdism and Islamism in Sudan," *Int J Middle East Stud* 27, no. 2 (1995): 219–236.

[31] G.M. Ahmed, "One Against All: The National Islamic Front (NIF) and Sudanese Sectarian and Secular Parties," Chr. Michelsen Institute, Special Working Paper, 2008, 5, 6, https://www.cmi.no/publications/3115-one-against-all-the-national-islamic-front-nif.

[32] W. Berridge, *Civil uprisings in modern Sudan* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 5, 30, https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/25790.

[33] Łoś, Konflikty w Sudanie (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2013), 41.

against urban opposition and judges. 1983 laws marked another milestone in Islamisation – overall and in the South by extension, too.[34] The laws were written by members of the Sufi order, chief among the al-Hassan Turabi's Muslim enemies; that however felt threatened by al-Turabi's rise. al-Turabi backed them in a tactical move.[35] This Islamist's ideologue and *spiritus movens ("an authoritarian ideologue, more in the mold of a Bolshevik than a hidebound cleric" – Packer*[36]*)*, joined the Nimeiri regime as Attorney General in 1977, using the post to fill his office with Islamists. The Islamists tactically endorsed "imam Nimeiri" at the time, while planning his overthrow and introduction of their own, "properly Islamic" ways.[37] Numerous cases of flogging, limbs' amputations and executions in line with the 1983 laws followed. "Within eighteen months, more than fifty suspected thieves had their hands chopped off. A Coptic Christian was hanged for possessing foreign currency; poor women were flogged for selling local beer."[38] More moderate Islamists were jailed.[39] In the meantime, al-Turabi's movement consolidated its grip on the state through elaborate influence-building in the army (including introduction of radical preachers who indoctrinated regular soldiers) and overtaking such institutions as Faisal Islamic Bank of Sudan, created in 1977 and gathering much of the revenues sent by Sudanese expatriates employed in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia in particular.[40] Since the 1960s, it already built-up influence on campuses through student organisations dubbed after iron rods they used against ideological opponents, in what Berridge[41] described as a "*culture of violence* [which] *went hand in hand with the Islamist dominance of the student union executives*". So-called "Societies for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice" which started to act as an equivalent to the police force in the early 1980s must be added to this picture of an increasingly coercive and intolerant polity.[42]

Once introduced, Islamic rhetoric was becoming ever more indispensable for the consolidation of power. During the 1985 uprising, the Islamic religion, though not violent *jihad,* was already a major point of reference (alongside Arab nationalism). This was the consequence of the 1983 introduction of *shari'a* and of years of compulsory Islamic schooling, which placed Islam in the centre of public discourse.

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[34] Łoś, *Konflikty w Sudanie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2013), 54.

[35] Ahmed, "One Against All: The National Islamic Front (NIF) and Sudanese Sectarian," 4.

[36] G. Packer, "The Moderate Martyr," *New Yorker*, September 3, 2006, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/09/11/the-moderate-martyr.

[37] Gallab, *The first islamist republic. Development and disintegration of Islamism*, 2008, 73, 74, 81.

[38] Packer, "The Moderate Martyr," *New Yorker*, September 3, 2006, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/09/11/the-moderate-martyr.

[39] Packer, "The Moderate Martyr," *New Yorker*, September 3, 2006.

[40] Berridge, *Civil uprisings in modern Sudan* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 134, 135.

[41] Berridge, *Civil uprisings in modern Sudan,* 2015, 107.

[42] Berridge, *Civil uprisings in modern Sudan*, 107.

Post-1985 leaders were sympathisers of Islamic law and *shari'a* was not abandoned, while Islamists which participated in Nimeiri's regime were left unpunished. At the same time, the 1985 revolution was used by Islamists and by extension, Omar al-Bashir's affiliates, to garner influence in Sudan's intelligence forces. National Islamic Front's (NIF's) build-up of economic and military power ultimately allowed it to take the state over by force, against popular will. It furthermore allowed them to build upon and even rehabilitate certain elements of Nimeiri's violent regime in the process.[43] Al-Turabi, who joined the government in 1988, would unequivocally perceive the Islamic nature of the state as a notion backed by the majority, which in his eyes justified *jihad* against its opponents; and therefore leave no margins for compromise in the ongoing battles with the South.[44] As pointed by Packer,[45] "journalists started calling him [al-Turabi] 'the Khomeini of the Sunnis' and 'the pope of terrorism'".

In the 1986 elections, the NIF scored third after receiving 18.5% of votes. This might be interpreted as showing that its actual accumulation of power is exaggerated beyond its true popularity. In 1989, a military coup against the democratically elected civilian government led by Sadiq al-Mahdi took place. Since then, the actual rulers of the state have been the orchestrators of the coup: Lieutenant General al-Bashir, al-Turabi, the NIF and the army under al-Bashir. The system was initially dominated by al-Turabi, and post-1999 – by al-Bashir. Islamisation of the law, aimed at "purification" of the society (1/3 of which was non-Muslim) through enforcement of Islamic values and public morality roles was proclaimed. It included separation of sexes[46] and a new, ever harsher penal code, promulgating various kinds of amputations and death penalties for an increased number of crimes.[47] Tortures and executions of those who rejected conversion to Islam became widespread. Hundreds of thousands were killed, and many more were displaced.[48] Summarising the process of the Islamist takeover, de Waal[49] enumerated the following milestones: "*the entry of the Islamists into government in 1977, the setting up of Islamic banks in 1978, the adoption of Islamic law in 1983, the embrace of international Islamist militants in 1990, the adoption of the "Comprehensive Call" in*

[43] Berridge, *Civil uprisings in modern*, 55, 88, 187, 191–194, 198.

[44] G.R. Warburg, "The sharia in Sudan: implementation and repercussions, 1983–1989," *Middle East J* 44, no. 4 (1990): 624–637.

[45] Packer, "The Moderate Martyr," *New Yorker*, 2006.

[46] M. Nduru, "Sudan: laying down the law for Allah," *Index on Censorship* 20, no. 2 (1991), https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03064229108535031.

[47] A.M. Tier, "Islamization of the Sudan laws and constitution: its allure and its impracticability," *Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America* 25, no. 2 (1991): 199–219.

[48] Łoś, *Konflikty w Sudanie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN), 67.

[49] A. de Waal, "Sudan: what kind of state? What kind of crisis?," Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, Occasional paper 2, 2007, 11, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/56373/op2.DeWaal.pdf.

1992, the declaration of jihad in the Nuba Mountains in 1992, and the adoption of an Islamic constitution in 1998."

The jihad as a state's practice

Ideological basis

It appears that the vast embrace of violence justified through Islam (violent *jihad*) by the "Sudanese Islamic republic"[50] could to a large extent be explained by its historical background: the political culture of Sudan, permeated with strife throughout, and the majority population's embrace of an idea that the state laws should follow the *sharia*. Yet, an additional factor played a great role: the one of a profound personality, which was both a revered ideologue and a charismatic leader. Curiously, al-Turabi, the architect of the ideology which governed the Islamist republic – its use of violence included – was Western-educated and credited for moderate rhetoric and writings reconciling Islam with liberal modernity. However, his Islamist ideology was in fact expressly revolutionary, upgrading violence to a whole new level as a legitimate and irrefutable instrument of Islamist polity. This thinking was applied both internally – where violence was used as a measure necessary for the top-down transformation of the society; and externally – as the Republic aimed to inspire other Sunnis.

Gradually, the NIF asevolved from a political party competing for popularity; it rather becameinto a revolutionary force, (creating the Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation after the 1989 coup), legitimised through external, divine power of religionand seeking an alternative society. It was explicitly fundamentalist in its assumption that Islamisation of the society needs to happen through state power. It fused Islamism with totalitarianism understood as a regime where a one-party-dominated state apparatus, filled with people chosen based on their loyalty rather than competence, was allowed to use terror to affect all matters of individuals' lives.[51] This "Civilisational Project", according to Gallab[52] "*perceived the Sudanese not as worthy citizens with civil and human rights, but as mirror images of individuals and groups owned by the state who must be brought into society. Consequently, the Islamists forged an elaborate apparatus of coercion, religious indoctrination and conversion, political mobilization, and various forms of local* jihad *carried out by paramilitary PDF in order to transform the Sudan into a model of an Islamist state. This was the essence of the first Islamist republic*."[53]

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[50] Fluehr-Lobban, "Islamization in Sudan: A Critical."

[51] Gallab, *The first islamist republic. Development and disintegration*, 2008, 7, 12.

[52] Ahmed, "One Against All: The National Islamic Front (NIF)," 118; W. Berridge, "The "Civilizational Project" and the Southern Sudanese Islamists: Between Assimilation and Exclusion," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 15, no. 2 (2021): 214–235.

[53] Gallab, *The first islamist republic. Development*, 2008, 11.

Manifold authors bring forward empirical material that justifies those analytical conclusions. In 1992, violent *jihad* was explicitly permitted by the religious elites in *fatwas* (local religious edicts) that applied to fighting in the Nuba Mountains in Kordofan (south from Khartoum) and in non-Muslim South Sudan. Chiefs of local militias were titled *amir al-jihad*, while al-Bashir earned himself the designation as *imam al-jihad.* Phillips[54] cites the following quote showing that the ideological background of the *jihad* was contested by internal Muslim opposition: "*The regime talked about a jihad. But that is not true Islam. Their jihad was to take freedom away. I would myself be ready to fight against them because as an Imam I do not believe this is a true jihad*". Yet, the government answered to such sentiments with an edict which declared everybody opposing the regime an apostate, therefore, a rightful target for the said *jihad.* Paradoxically, this violence included vandalization of mosques and tearing copies of the *Quran.* Even more so the brutality was aimed against the non-Muslims, who were effectively expelled from the political community and thus became even more legitimate targets. In this, al-Turabi's ideology was uncompromising and rebellious. His Civilisational Project of planned Islamisation of masses through da'wa, commonly understood as invitation to religion, here was interpreted as a "comprehensive call" (da'wa al-shamla) described by de Waal & Abdelsalam[55] as having a fluid definition centring around comprehensive Islamisation project, for the aim of which particular bureaucracy was created. The aims included "unification of education, proselytising, humanitarian, developmental, financial and counter-insurgency"[56] efforts. "Education became a form of indoctrination: small children learned jihadist chants; school uniforms were replaced with combat fatigues; students engaged in paramilitary drills and memorized the Koran; teachers overhauled the curriculum to focus on the glory of Arab and Islamic culture."[57]

Nevertheless, the fall of al-Turabi in 1999, caused by his failed attempt to curtail al-Bashir's powers, undermined the fundaments of the Islamist state as a shaikh-led project,[58] led to an increase in internal divisions within the regime, contributed to the Darfur 2003 uprising and ultimately furthered ideological disintegration of al-Bashir's rule.[59] Crucially, the Sudanese case thus shows that violent *jihad* failed to untangle the internal tensions within political Islam related to aspiration for combining modernism with unified societies,[60] regarding declarative

[54] J. Phillips, "To stop Sudan's Brutal Jihad, support Sudan's opposition," *Heritage Foundation,* June 13, 2001, https://www.heritage.org/africa/report/stop-sudans-brutal-jihad-support-sudans-opposition#pgfId=1146736.

[55] de Waal and Abdelsalam, "Islamism, state power and Jihad in Sudan," 89–93.

[56] de Waal and Abdelsalam, "Islamism, state power and Jihad," 90.

[57] Packer, "The Moderate Martyr," *New Yorker*.

[58] Gallab, *The first islamist republic. Development*, 2008, 97.

[59] Berridge, *Civil uprisings*, 200.

[60] de Waal and Abdelsalam, "Islamism, state power," 75, 106; See also Packer, "The Moderate Martyr," 2006.

equality of women, and Nageeb[61] when used as a state-building model. Mura[62] brings forward similar notions when discussing failures of Islamist states' governance. Ultimately, while it cannot be concluded if, in the Sudanese case, the state-building-related argumentation of nation's unity was mis-used to justify the violent jihad, or the other way round, South Sudan's ultimate 2011 independence demonstrates that the effort failed.

Of note, *jihadi* terminology was at times also used by the regime's opponents (modern Mahdists of the Umma party) yet they mainly referred to a non-violent *jihad*. They didn't see violence as necessary for Islamist revolution; and saw jihad as defensive instrument, not applicable in the South.[63] They also recognised the impossibility of imposition of *shari'a* laws on non-Muslims. This opened the path to negotiations with the South, based on the assumption that strict Islamic laws could be abolished or their application could be territorially limited. As a consequence, this was also the trigger of the al-Bashir's and al-Turabi's 1989 military-Islamist revolt against these forces.[64]

Internal dimension

Throughout modern Sudanese history, violence was key to obtaining power. The local political culture was militarised to an extreme extent, permeating all the structures of the state as well as media.[65] Coupled with the expansion of the Islamist ideology, this resulted in violent *jihad* becoming nearly the default mode of political violence. Militarisation of society was a direct consequence of al-Turabi's ideology and implementation of the Civilisational Project through *da'wa* – – here understood as an Islamic call "correcting" and unifying the path of all Muslims – as he proclaimed the need for dissolution of the army within the society, so that the society becomes the army itself, ready for mobilisation at any time. The creation of a popular paramilitary force was a logical consequence.[66] Use of violence by the Islamist movement was not a new occurrence; in the 1990s, this mode of operation was meant to engage the entire society. As Sharkey[67] observed, already since 1983 "*Muslim ideology played an important role in the*

[61] S. Nageeb, "Appropriating the mosque: women's religious groups in Khartoum," *Afrika Spectrum* 42, no. 1 (2007): 5–27.

[62] Mura, *The Symbolic Scenarios of Islamism*, 4, 5.

[63] For more on modern Mahdists' thinking in contrast to al-Turabi's, see Kobayashi, "The Islamist movement in Sudan," 324.

[64] Warburg, "The sharia in Sudan," 636.

[65] de Waal, "Sudan: what kind of state? What kind of crisis?," Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, Occasional paper 2, 2007, 16.

[66] See Gallab, *The first islamist republic. Development*, 117, 118, 121.

[67] Sharkey, "Jihads," 275.

central government's discourses. To rally popular support and justify military drafts among northern Muslims, Khartoum regimes portrayed the civil war as a jihad *and proclaimed that its war dead were martyrs. By the mid-1990s, the government had set up large murals of "martyrs" along major streets in the capital and was inculcating militant Islam even in girls' elementary schools, where uniforms were made out of camouflage fabric*." 1991 National Charter declared that "jihad (…) shall be regarded as binding, to safeguard the society against every internal or external threat (…) The training and armament [sic] of the people is prerequisite to the consolidation of the jihad's values and confirmation of the basic role of the Popular Defence in backing the Armed Forces and the other regular forces."[68] Similar ideology was also embedded in the 1992 National Service Law, applying to regular armed forces, which spoke of the need for "spirit of *jihad*" and dissemination of "spirit of martyrs".[69] Article 7 of the 1998 Constitution declared furthermore that "*Defence of the motherland is an honour and* Jihad *is a duty. The State is responsible for the popular armed forces and their defence of the political and territorial integrity of Sudan and the State shall care for the wounded in war and martyrs' families*", while its article 35 mandated every citizen to "*respond to the* Jihad *call*".[70]

The Popular Defence Forces (PDF; most commonly known as Janjaweed, though this term is not strictly defined and shall rather be applied merely in the post-2003 Darfur context) were formally created by law in 1989 as an auxiliary for the regular army, a paramilitary force, or an umbrella over a number of such forces – numbering tens of thousands and serving under the Sudanese supreme commander. The PDF was modelled after the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. Service was compulsory for certain groups of civil servants and – since 1992 – for all students.[71] "Islamist militia" and "*mujaheddin"* (a person engaged in jihad) were terms widely used to depict its nature. NIF-affiliated youth also filled its ranks. In many places, the PDF slowly replaced more traditional tribal structures. It comprised diverse sub-groups, such as elite corps, local militias, or civil servants, students and civilians forced to participate in training. Some recruitment and training of *jihadi* militants took place in religious schools.[72] Young Arab men and women

[68] Kobayashi, "The Islamist movement in Sudan," 158, 159.

[69] *Sudan. A country study*, ed. B. La Verle (Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 2015), 331.

[70] Constitution of the republic of Sudan. Unofficial trans. C.F. Doebbler, 1998, https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/constitution_sudan_1998_-_en.pdf.

[71] *Sudan. A country study*, ed. B. La Verle, 2015, 341; The exact quote: "This umbrella group of militias, which was under SAF control, was modeled on Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The PDF was frequently referred to as the paramilitary wing of the NIF. According to the Popular Defense Forces Act (1989), an organization called the Council of the Popular Defense Forces advised the commander in chief on all matters affecting the PDF. PDF training was compulsory for all male and female government employees over the age of 33, but there were reports that the PDF recruited children under the age of 18. PDF training also has been compulsory since 1992 for all male and female students in institutes of higher education. Female prisoners could, in theory, secure their release by attending PDF training for 45 days."

[72] Rubin, "In the war against terrorism, where goes Sudan?," 2001.

were recruited into this proxy militia *en masse* upon promises of salary and other rewards (such as land to settle), and importantly – based on the strong ideological motivation which combined racial and material resentments with Islamist zeal, as displayed by the PDF's Charter.[73] In fact, the PDF recruits were tempted openly with a promise of martyrdom and a place in heaven.[74] Service in PDF was also for many years treated as fulfilment of the compulsory service. PDF's 2005 disbandment was fictious, and it continued to operate as a support for al-Bashir's power,[75] first within the Border Guard, and since 2013 under the name Rapid Support Forces (RSF).[76]

On the level of local authorities, instances occurred of chiefs being given *jihadist* military titles[77] and possessing private police forces and detention centres. Elsewhere, and in Darfur in particular, war leaders happened to effectively take over local tribal governance structures.[78] The genocidal violence in Darfur[79] can be to a large extent explained through two reasons: racial divides (African vs Arab tribes) that were purposefully over-simplified and instrumentalised; and economic disparities (pastoralists vs nomads, environmental stress, unequal distribution of oil wealth). Here it important to note how such violence was also enabled by the Islamist call for the "unity of the Islamic nation" and deep apprehension against the less politicised and less militant Sufi Islam.[80] As for the South, "the government has been using the armed forces and the PDF in fighting. The war efforts of the Islamist government in the South are regarded as part of jihad. Between 1989 and 1994, the government seems to have sought to resolve the problem in the South mainly by force."[81] According to Nageeb,[82] "the old civil war between the north and south of Sudan was reinterpreted as a holy war – a jihad. Extensive and elaborated Islamic frames were offered and spread, through the media, NIF youth and students' organisations and Islamic non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to change the

[73] Kaplan, *Terrorist groups and the new Tribalism*, 2010, 150, 159.

[74] R. Martin, "Sudan's perfect war," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 2 (2002): 111–127.

[75] "Information and refugee board of Canada: Sudan: the Popular Defence Forces," May 18, 2011, https://irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=453441.

[76] A. McGregor, "Gold, Arms, and Islam: Understanding the Conflict in Sudan," *The Jamestone Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 21, no. 9 (2023), https://jamestown.org/program/gold-arms-and-islam-understanding-the-conflict-in-sudan/.

[77] The exact quote from de Waal, 2007 "(...) under the current government, the militarisation of local authority has reached new heights. In the Nuba Mountains, chiefs were given Jihadist military titles in 1992, and some of them came to operate private police forces and prisons."

[78] de Waal, "Sudan: what kind of state? What kind of crisis?," Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, 2007, 9.

[79] J. Apsel, "The Complexity of Destruction in Darfur: Historical Processes and Regional Dynamics," *Human Rights Review* 10 (2009): 239–259.

[80] Kaplan, *Terrorist groups and the new Tribalism*, 131, 132.

[81] Kobayashi, "The Islamist movement in Sudan," 163.

[82] Nageeb, "Appropriating the mosque: women's religious groups in Khartoum," 10.

public opinion about the conflict between the north and the south: from civil war to a jihad".

On the individual level, propensity to violence was rewarded. In the so-called "peace camps", young people were indoctrinated to the point of altering their identities, and mobilised for violence[83] in particular against the "infidels" in the South. "Turabi declared that the jihadis would ascend directly to Paradise. Actors simulated 'weddings' between martyrs and heavenly virgins on state television."[84] Local *jihadi* militias were formed in order to humiliate and silence opposition at university campuses, in times of war and peace alike, and in order to recruit more followers.[85] Methods of state coercion against political opponents and dissenters (ie. those reluctant to adhere to the towards compulsory service, public morality rules or dress code) included curfews, arbitrary detentions, torture within a network of "ghost houses", beatings and killings.[86] Heavy involvement of a network of special services contributed to the large scale of these atrocities. The implementation of *da'wa* in relation to fellow Muslims included such *jihadi* practices as land confiscations, forced relocations and violent crack-downs on local Islamic practices; in relation to non-Muslims, dispossession, starvation, relocation to "peace camps" and enslavement were methods used towards the official aim of forced Islamisation. Needless to say, these practices only exacerbated existing conflicts; and also created new ones.[87]

In fact, paradoxically, the oppression motivated through Islam against the South encouraged conversions to Christianity,[88] increasing the conflict of religious identities which the very *jihadist* endeavour was meant to eradicate. Furthermore, the war in the South could apparently not be logically negotiable (possible to end with a comprise) as long as it was branded as *jihad* against "*crusaders and communists*" that supposedly posed an existential threat to the Muslim community, claiming numerous "martyrs" and meant to extend the Islamic endowment through the inclusion of the Southern territories at its conclusion.[89]

A brief thaw followed al-Turabi's temporary arrest in 1999. Within military dictatorship, Islamist ideology was increasingly reduced to a façade of rhetoric. Yet alienation of the core of the Islamist movement from the regime quickly proved to not fundamentally change its violent nature and use of the religious rhetoric

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[83] de Waal, "Sudan: what kind of state? What kind of crisis?," Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, 7.

[84] Packer, "The Moderate Martyr."

[85] "Pro-regime \'jihad units\' fuel unrest on Sudan campuses," *The Arab Weekly*, June 5, 2016, https://thearabweekly.com/pro-regime-jihad-units-fuel-unrest-sudan-campuses.

[86] Gallab, *The first islamist republic*, 112; Packer, "The Moderate."

[87] de Waal and Abdelsalam, "Islamism," 92–97; Phillips, "To stop Sudan's Brutal Jihad, support Sudan's opposition."

[88] de Waal, "Sudan: what kind of state? What kind of crisis?," Crisis States Research Centre.

[89] Gallab, *The first islamist*, 115.

of *jihad* to justify violence against opponents.[90] Al-Bashir's use of violent *jihad,* in name and practice, as an instrument of internal battles was thus not affected. The *jihad* continued against the rebelled South,[91] in confrontations with political opponents among the Northern elites – and then started also in the West. The holy war with the Muslim, non-Arab rebels in the Western province of Darfur (2003–20) was a joint effort of an army and the state-sponsored Janjaweed, and targeted rebels and civilians equally, from destruction of livelihoods, looting and forced displacement to bombings eradicating entire villages, based on their ethnicity (thus constituting ethnic cleansing, with more mundane undertone of "cleansing" of oil fields from unfriendly populations[92]). Rape of women and kidnapping of children were normalised instruments of warfare.[93] According to Kaplan[94] these are key characteristics that permit the identification of this chapter of Sudanese religiously-motivated/justified terrorism with the terrorist fifth wave: genocidal violence, killing for the sake of killing, and disproportionate focus on women (which either serve the *jihadi* cause, or need to be humiliated and eliminated) and children (who, kidnapped and acculturated, can be subject to "purification" and subsequent inclusion into the *jihadist* world). Moreover, the religious rather than political goals of this terror and the lack of a centralised Muslim authority providing unified interpretations meant there was no possibility for any negotiation over what the perpetrators themselves identified as the "will of God". Their quest for "purity" was thus uncompromisable. As was in the case of the war in the South, such a paradigm resulted in at least theoretical elimination of any potential chance for conflict's amelioration.

In the later years of al-Bashir's rule, new fronts were opened and the logic of *jihad* was applied to Internet contents that posed dangers – in the eyes of the regime – to harm state security or public morality. The Cyber Jihadist Unit was thus created within the powerful National Intelligence and Security Service in order to monitor and tackle online dissent, as well as to infiltrate, misinform and harass political opposition.[95]

The opposition was however never eliminated. It operated continuously in the form of political parties (even within a formally one-party system in the years 1958–64 or 1993–98) and civil organisations. It was active also within the core

[90] A. Kodouda, "Sudan's Islamist resurrection: al-Turabi and the successor regime," *African Arguments*, February 24, 2016, https://africanarguments.org/2016/02/sudans-islamist-resurrection-al-turabi-and-the-successor-regime/.

[91] Berridge, "The "Civilizational Project" and the Southern Sudanese Islamists."

[92] Martin, "Sudan's perfect war," (2002): 120.

[93] Łoś, *Konflikty w Sudanie*, 2013, 123, 124.

[94] Kaplan, *Terrorist groups and the new*.

[95] ReliefWeb, "Cyber Jihadist unit monitors Sudan's online communication," December 11, 2014, https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/cyber-jihadist-unit-monitors-sudan-s-online-communication.

of Northern Muslim elites, as demonstrated by Fluehr-Lobban[96] who described backlash against Numayri's early 1980s reforms perceived as "reign of terror engineered in the name of Islam". Still, the Sudanese Islamic state "was not a genuine revolution like the Iranian one; it was more of an élite project that never gained legitimacy outside of student, intellectual, and military circles".[97] As mentioned, the internal cohesion of the regime degraded gradually, and the Islamist movement was increasingly fractured. In the case of the regime formed in 1988, milestones in the process included: al-Turabi's demise in 1999, after which he joined the opposition and was frequently arrested, and his death in 2016; negotiations with South Sudan rebels that led to the signing of a peace accord in 2005 and ultimate referendum and independence of the province in 2011 (an obvious and deadly blow to the state ideology of national unity through Islamisation); 2013 urban riots, caused by economic hardship, which resulted in 200 deaths, as they were suppressed by PDF; confrontations around the rigged presidential elections in 2015; subsequent waves of protests, including the 2018 ones during which al-Bashir, in front of PDF militia, again declared *jihad* against his opponents. People contesting high prices and economic austerity measures were thus called "*the enemies of Islam*".[98] Similarly, Islamic law was reportedly cited by al-Bashir in order to justify violence against April 2019 protesters – anti-government, yet Muslim, including in the centre of Khartoum.[99]

Ultimately, the regime was overthrown by a 2018–9 popular uprising, yet dismantling of the Islamist "deep state" and de-politicising the army and other institutions, in particular security and intelligence structures, posed a challenge for the transitional authorities.[100] The most profound example was Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, chief of the Janjaweed during the *jihad* against Darfur. While admitting to his crimes, he continued to be an influential member of the transitional regime as the Deputy Head of the Sovereign Council of Sudan. The PDF itself remained operative in the form of the Rapid Support Forces; it is headed by Dagalo and was active against pro-democracy protestors demanding the final institution of a fully civilian government, instead of the military-civilian power-sharing.[101] The

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[96] Fluehr-Lobban, "Islamization in Sudan," 620.

[97] Packer, "The Moderate."

[98] M.A. Suleiman, "The arrogant and tyrant Omer Bashir of Sudan remains cruel and beyond the borders," *Sudan Tribune,* February 27, 2018, https://sudantribune.com/article62981/.

[99] J. Tubiana, "The man who terrorized darfur is leading Sudan's supposed transition," *Foreign Policy,* May 14, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/14/man-who-terrorized-darfur-is-leading-sudans-supposed-transition-hemeti-rsf-janjaweed-bashir-khartoum.

[100] M.A. Assal, "Sudan's popular uprising and the demise of Islamism," *CMI Brief,* CHR Michelsen Institute, 2019, 3, https://www.cmi.no/publications/7062-sudans-popular-uprising-and-the-demise-of-islamism.

[101] O. Rickett, "Sudan coup: where is Hemeti?," *Middle East Eye,* October 29, 2021, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudan-coup-where-is-hemeti.

October 2021 crack-down on protestors was followed by a coup d'état by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and a return to a military regime.

International dimension

After years of groundwork, Al-Turabi had a vast network of acquaintances among fellow Islamists in other countries. Already in the 1970s, young Sudanese Islamists, then in opposition to Numeiri, trained in Ethiopia, and later on in Libya.[102] Libya "flooded" Darfur with Kalashnikovs in the 1970s, alleviating machine-gun violence; subsequently, the government replaced Libya in this effort.[103] After the 1983 proclamation of the *shari'a* and renewed fighting against the South, the rhetoric of *jihad* was on the rise also in the external relations of Sudan, as it was widely used to garner foreign support. Most notably, financing from Saudi Arabia allowed for furthering of the Islamisation programme, such as building of mosques and religious schools in the country's non-Muslim periphery.[104] Al-Turabi's teachings, including their modernisation aspirations as well as justifications of violent jihad also influenced other Islamist leaders, including the leader of Tunisian Ennahda party Rashid Ghanushi[105] and Yemeni UN-sanctioned terror supporter Abd al-Majid al-Zindani.[106]

Sudanese 1989 Sunni revolution encouraged other Islamist movements: those seeking to topple Arab regimes and exporting the revolution further, against the Western, Christian world. Coincidence with the fall of the Soviet empire was promising them a new era in which communism would be replaced by Islamism, and the Sudan was the source from which the inspiration flown. This perception was not only enhanced by state propaganda, but also through deliberate turning of Sudan into a focal point hosting, protecting, training and supporting *jihadists* from abroad, while also offering them ideological content and networking opportunities through Popular Arab and Islamic Council and Popular Arab-Islamic Conferences held in 1991, 1993 and 1995.[107] According to Hansen,[108] this was part of al-Turabi's agenda of unifying Islamic organisations worldwide (including Shiite ones), and "*support the wider jihad in the world*". Al-Bashir turned away from such conservative partners as Egypt and Saudi Arabia towards radical regimes of Iran and Libya. The Islamic Republic in Teheran was eager to exploit the situation to advance the

[102] Gallab, *The first*, 2008, 85, 125.

[103] Kaplan, *Terrorist groups*, 128, 129.

[104] Sharkey, "Jihads," 275.

[105] K. Elgindy, "The Rhetoric of Rashid Ghannushi," *The Arab Studies Journal* 3, no. 1 (1995): 101–119.

[106] P. Dresch and B. Haykel, "Stereotypes and Political Styles: Islamists and Tribesfolk in Yemen," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 4 (1995): 405–431.

[107] Gallab, *The first*, 16, 17.

[108] Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift: Fault-lines of the African*, 2019, 54.

export of its own revolution: not only Iranian weapons and officers, offering training, but also Iranian *da'wa* (in the shape of a radio station) radiated, engulfing Sudan further.[109] Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani praised that the Sudanese regime "*alongside Iran's pioneer revolution, can doubtless be the source of movement and revolution throughout the Islamic world*".[110] The internal, Southern Sudanese *jihadist* front was rhetorically connected to the world affairs so as to construct a new international role of the Islamist Sudan. Based on Israeli support for the Southern rebels, the struggle against Christians and animists seeking a socialist, secular state was thus framed as a part of a broader Arab-Islamic fight with a supposed Zionist conspiracy against Islam.[111]

As a consequence, Sudan became the base for radical non-governmental groups and for state-sponsored violent *jihadism*. While information-gathering on the issue remains difficult[112] it can be ascertained that in 1989–91, al-Qaida moved around 1500 of its operatives from Afghanistan to Sudan. Its head Osama bin Laden found refuge there in the years 1991–6, until he was expelled under US pressure. He established around 30 companies in the Sudan dealing with such sectors as agriculture or construction. The Sudanese regime guaranteed him protection, in exchange for multi-million investments (roads, an airport, a regime-affiliated bank).[113] Hosting him and using his organisation for internal and international purposes, until he became a liability,[114] Sudan became the birthplace for a new fundamentalist terrorist-international, gathering Afghan war veterans, *jihadists* from Algeria (Islamic Salvation Front), Ethiopia, Eritrea (Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement[115]), Egypt (al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya), Lebanon (Hezballah), Palestine (Fatah – Revolutionary Council, Palestine Islamic Jihad, Hamas), Somalia, Philippines and Tunisia. Al-Qaida and Sudanese intelligence cooperated on smuggling weapons to Yemen.[116] Numerous training camps were located *inter alia* in the capital city of Khartoum and its vicinity. Iranian operatives came to receive training themselves as well.[117] Sudanese

[109] Łoś, *Konflikty w Sudanie*, 70.

[110] J. Schanzer, "The Islamic Republic of Sudan?," *Foreign Policy,* June 10, 2010, https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/06/10/the-islamic-republic-of-sudan-2/.

[111] Nduru, "Sudan: laying down the law."

[112] Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift: Fault-lines*, 51.

[113] D. Shinn, "Al-Qaeda in East Africa and the horn," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 27, no. 1 (2007); "Sudan and Terrorism: Hearing before the subcommittee on African affairs of the committee on Foreign relations United States senate one hundred fifth congress first session 1997," Prepared Statement of S. Emerson, May 15, 1997, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-105shrg40875/html/CHRG-105shrg40875.htm.

[114] Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift*, 64.

[115] For more on cooperation between the Sudanese regime, Eritrean Islamic Jihad and al-Qaida see Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift,* 55–57; the case of Somalia: Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift,* 58–61.

[116] Hansen, *Horn, Sahel*, 55.

[117] Łoś, *Konflikty w Sudanie*, 71; Rubin, "In the war against terrorism."

meddling with *jihadi* undertones was furthermore apparent in the al-Bashir's intelligence services' support for Islamist rebels in Uganda throughout the 1990s till the 2000s. The process was to a large extent facilitated by Sudanese influences in eastern Congo and fuelled Ugandan-Congolese tensions.[118]

The notoriety of international terrorist activity that this reality enabled quickly led to listing Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism by the American State Department. This happened already in August 1993, following *inter alia* Sudanese involvement in the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City.[119] UN economic sanctions contained within the Security Council Resolution 1054 followed in 1996, after Khartoum refused extradition of the assailant that tried to shoot Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in June 1995.[120] Of note, Sudanese institutions also facilitated that attack in the first place.[121] In 1998, the US retaliated against Sudan for 1998 bombings of its embassies in Kenya and Tanzania (committed by Saudi nationals) by striking targets near Khartoum presumed to house plants producing chemical weapons for terror groups. The perpetrator of the 2000 bombing of USS Cole was furthermore found to be an al-Qaida affiliate trained in Sudan. American pressure led to a temporary push against foreign jihadists on Sudanese soil which went beyond just al-Qaida and therefore resulted in an improvement in relations with the US. This was however very quickly overshadowed by crimes in Darfur[122] and because of continued Sudanese support of Hamas, including tolerance for Iranian smuggling of weapons to Hamas through its territory; as well as training of Iraqi militants. In 2005, an international embargo on weapons for the Sudanese regime and its *jihadist* proxies was added to the list of restrictions imposed on Sudan. Yet it was systematically violated by Russia and China.[123]

Sudan, under the Islamist regime, was thus not able to get external financing such as loans from other states or international organisations. As a result it turned to banks and charities enforcing Islamic rules, such as lack of interest.. Crucially, the funding obtained through such sources from abroad did not support the state budget, but was transferred directly to the army, PDF, and other militants, under the control of the party.[124] The expulsion of bin-Laden and apparent cooperation with the US on its "war on terror" following the September 11th 2001 attacks undermined the cohesion of the "terrorist international" under Sudanese patronage. During the Darfur genocide, world Muslims were called by the al-Qaida leaders,

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[118] J. Barnett, "The 'Central African' Jihad: Islamism and Nation-Building in Mozambique and Uganda," Hudson Institute, October 29, 2020, https://www.hudson.org/node/43467.

[119] Phillips, "To stop Sudan's Brutal Jihad."

[120] Rubin, "In the war."

[121] "Sudan and Terrorism: Hearing before the subcommittee on African affairs."

[122] Hudson, "Removing Sudan's terrorism designation."

[123] *Sudan. A country study*, ed. B. La Verle, 332; Łoś, *Konflikty*, 127.

[124] de Waal, "Sudan: what kind of state? What kind of crisis?," 11, 12.

bin-Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, to join the Sudanese Islamist fight which in their words constituted part of the global fight against "Zionists" and "Crusaders".[125] However, the call was largely unsuccessful and might be interpreted as a failed endeavour to regain influence in the Sudan, lost after bin-Laden's expulsion and subsequent distancing of the Sudanese regime from al-Qaida.[126] The simultaneous development of Sudan's oil fields made the Khartoum regime less financially dependent on foreign Islamists.[127]

In the place of alliance with al-Qaida, reliance on enhanced cooperation with a fellow Islamic terror-sponsoring state, Iran, steadily grew. In 2008, the two signed a military cooperation agreement. Allegations followed such as that secret arms factories were built on the Sudanese territory, owned by the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.[128] This alliance was ultimately abandoned in 2016 when Sudan broke relations with Iran. Since then, in the regional competition for dominance, it backed Saudi Arabia instead of Iran. The move was motivated by two hopes: for investments saving Sudan's economy, devastated by the sanctions; and for curtailing of Sudan's isolation within the Muslim world, dating back to when Sudan backed Iraq in its aggressive war against Kuwait in 1991.[129] Already since 2015, a special branch of several thousands of PDF members was deployed in Yemen, within the Saudi-led coalition against Shia Houthi rebels.[130]

Crucially, *jihadist* atrocities in Sudan became eventually the subject of International Criminal Court proceedings. Al-Bashir was charged on "*five counts of crimes against humanity: murder, extermination, forcible transfer, torture, and rape; two counts of war crimes (…); three counts of genocide (…), allegedly committed at least between 2003 and 2008 in Darfur, Sudan*".[131] He however remained in the Sudan, protected by the army which refused his extradition (despite being the actual force that deposed him in the first place; he was tried internally for corruption). Also, the ICC charges against him were protested by the African Union, the Arab League and manifold Arab governments. In 2022, ICC proceedings started against

[125] Kaplan, *Terrorist*, 170.

[126] Shinn, "Al-Qaeda in East Africa."

[127] Martin, "Sudan's perfect war," (2002): 119.

[128] Schanzer, "The Islamic Republic of Sudan?."

[129] "AFP: Why has Sudan ditched Iran in favour of Saudi Arabia?," *The Guardian,* January 12, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/12/sudan-siding-with-saudi-arabia-long-term-ally-iran.

[130] N.A. Heras, "Sudan's controversial rapid support forces bolster Saudi efforts in Yemen," *Terrorism Monitor* 15, no. 20 (2017), https://jamestown.org/program/sudans-controversial-rapid-support-forces-bolsters-saudi-efforts-yemen/.

[131] International criminal Court, "Al Bashir Case," https://www.icc-cpi.int/darfur/albashir.

Janjaweed militia leader Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman (Ali Kushayb) on 31 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.[132]

While the Islamist regime was already in shambles, many young people became radicalised and recruited at the universities to join the fight of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Actual efforts by the Sudanese Islamist state to prevent extremist preachers from disseminating their propaganda failed to stave off students' departures. Particular resonance was won by the case of the University of Medical Science and Technology in Khartoum, from where also many British-Sudanese nationals were recruited and travelled to Syria and to Libya.[133] Also, after April 2019 al-Bashir's fall, there appeared suspicions that Sudan might remain a refuge for international *jihadi* terrorist organisations (including remnants of Islamic State), due to internal instability and the state's inability to control its borders.[134]

On the other hand, in what appeared to mark a radical departure from *jihadist* ideology, Sudan embarked on partial normalisation of ties with Israel in 2020. This was one of the American conditions for cancelling Sudan's status as a state-sponsor of terrorism, yet, characteristically, the process was ambiguous, paradoxical, and incomplete. It was backed by the military part of the transitional government, which includes remnants of Janjaweed, but opposed by the civilian parties, among them Islamists (late al-Turabi's Popular Congress Party) and Mahdists (Umma Party). The endeavour was halted following the October 2021 backlash against protests.[135]

Conclusions

The modern-day violent *jihad* in the Sudan, while its perpetrators are in conflict with contemporary Mahdists, displayed similar characteristics to its late-19th century iteration. The common features included harsh, shari'a-inspired laws; using *jihad* as a tool against all opponents, including co-religionists; targeting the civilian population; and being an inspiration for the wider Muslim world's confrontation with the West. Since independence, the Sudanese state has been embroiled in violent conflicts: in the South, where the discriminated non-Muslim population

[132] J. Tanza, N. Biajo and M. Atit, "Darfur protesters outside ICC Trial Demand Bashir's Handover," *Voice of Africa,* April 8, 2022, https://www.voaafrica.com/a/darfur-protesters-outside-icc-trial-demand-bashir-s-handover/6521365.html.

[133] J. Havlicek, "Inside the Islamic state's radicalization and recruitment machinery of Sudanese medical students," Middlebury Institute for International Studies at Monterey, 2019, https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/sites/default/files/2019-11/CTEC%20Jan%20Havlicek.pdf.

[134] P. Chalk, D. Gartenstein-Ross and C.P. Clarke, "Can Sudan escape its history as a transit hub for violent extremist organizations?," RAND, July 24, 2020, https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/07/can-sudan-escape-its-history-as-a-transit-hub-for-violent.html.

[135] G. Deutch, "U.S. warns Israel not to move on Sudan normalization," *Jewish Insider*, May 27, 2022, https://jewishinsider.com/2022/05/israel-sudan-abraham-accords-normalization/; TOI Staff and AP, "Key Sudanese parties blast normalization deal with Israel, vow to oppose it," *The Times of Israel,* October 24, 2020, https://www.timesofisrael.com/key-sudanese-parties-blast-normalization-deal-with-israel-vow-to-oppose-it/.

sought independence (with particular intensity in the years 1956–1972 and since 1977 until 2003); in the Western province of Darfur where local fighting continues to this day; in the East (since 1994) and in the North, the heart of the statehood, where ruling elites fought against each other (1972–77 and 1993–97, in particular).[136] The Islamists were part of the Sudanese political scene from the beginning and actively participated in internal political struggles either as part of the opposition or as the ruling party. In the years 1989–2019, the Islamist regime was responsible for genocidal *jihadist* civil wars against the South and the province of Darfur. While political violence was caused by, or ostensibly justified by manifold underlying reasons – such as clashes of ethnic and religious identities, centre-periphery relations (inequalities, neglect or exploitation), conflicts over resources, state's weakness and struggle to consolidate its power, in-fights within the ruling elite or the overall "culture of violence"[137] – the call for *jihad* was instrumental in justifying brutality and mobilising perpetrators throughout, pointing to a significant scope of instrumentalization of this particular religious concept for political and military aims. State policy of violent jihad continued even after the demise of al-Turabi, when the regime was solely dominated by al-Bashir. State violence became the pillar on which the Sudanese "Islamic republic" stood. As the first modern Sunni Islamic state, the Sudan became a source of inspiration, support and a safe harbour for *jihadists* from abroad. It maintained its distinct features, most notably – the assumption that Islamisation of the domestic society as well as external expansion would follow a complete take-over of the state's apparatus. Sudanese Islamisation through violent *jihad* at the same time shared with similar such projects certain features. These included its totality and its hate of compromise; the very characteristics which ultimately, after causing enormous suffering and insurmountable carnage, are also usual contributors to such projects' demise. Irreversibly, at the same time, the Islamists and their religious rhetoric remained part of the Sudanese polity. This polity also remained not democratised in a way which would allow minimisation of the use of violence in power struggles. Therefore, the resurgence of violent *jihad*, either by name only (as a rhetorical decoration) or a one born out of a true religious zeal, either by fringe groups or by state actors, cannot be ruled out in the future as well. In fact, the October 2021 military coup stopped democratisation processes and revived internal ethnic tensions, instrumentalised by rival politicians.[138] In 2023, unresolved crises led to an outbreak of a civil war that confronted the Sudanese state army with the RSF. Destabilisation in general, and linkages between local forces and international terrorist networks in particular,

[136] de Waal, "Sudan: what kind of state?."

[137] de Waal, "Sudan."

[138] McGregor, "Gold, Arms, and Islam: Understanding the Conflict in Sudan," (2023).

caused fears of "turning Sudan once again into a hub for jihadist terrorism",[139] though this time, rather through state's inertia than will.

Data availability

No data are associated with this article.

[139] H. Maack, "One Year On, Civil War Risks Reviving Jihadism in Sudan," *The Jamestone Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 22, no. 9 (2024), https://jamestown.org/program/one-year-on-civil-war-risks-reviving-jihadism-in-sudan/.