On 30 June 1989, a military coup overthrew the democratically elected government of al-Sadiq al-Mahdi in Sudan and replaced it with a fundamentalist Muslim dictatorship headed by Colonel Omar Hasan al-Bashir and adhering to the radical Islamic ideology of the National Islamic Front (NIF), under the leadership of Dr. Hasan al-Turabi. Since June 1881 when Muhammad Ahmad ibn Abdallah declared that he was the expected mahdi, the religious–political scene of Sudan had been largely dominated by Mahdists and Khatmiyya adherents. Even under colonial rule, in the years 1899–1955, Mahdism continued to flourish despite the fact that the British rulers treated it with suspicion and preferred Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani, leader of the more docile Khatmiyya Sufi order. The defeat of the Mahdist Umma Party in the first general elections in 1953, by a coalition of secularists and Khatmiyya supporters was only a temporary setback.1 After Sudan became independent, in 1956, Mahdist supremacy was challenged both by the Khatmiyya and other groups, but its mass support among the Ansar, a political Islamic movement, enabled them to gain control, except during brief periods when so-called secularists governed independent Sudan. This happened in 1953–56 when the Khatmiyya joined forces with the intelligentsia, and again between October 1964 and March 1965 when the country was governed by a secular, transitional, nonelected government that was ousted from power as soon as the sects regained control. Secularism also thrived briefly under the military dictatorship of Jaafar al-Numayri between 1969 and 1977. Yet, Numayri was to revise his policy and reconciled himself with Sadiq al-Mahdi and Turabi. This is not to say that secularism has no place in Sudan's future. But in this article we are concerned with the past and with the types of Islamic government that have been proposed by the neo-Mahdist Ansar, on the one hand, and by the Islamists, on the other. The Khatmiyya order, although a major religious political force, does not feature in the present study. It collaborated with whoever was in power—except with the Mahdiyya—but so far has not presented a model of its own of an Islamic alternative.

NEO-MAHDISM AND THE REEMERGENCE OF THE ANSAR

The supporters of the Sudanese Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmad ibn Abdallah (d. 1885), were disbanded in 1898 following their defeat by the Anglo–Egyptian army. Their
surviving commanders were imprisoned, and the Mahdi’s and the Khalifa Abdallah’s offspring were kept under surveillance. The Mahdi’s ratib (prayer book) and other Mahdist writings were banned. However, beginning in 1908 Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi, the Mahdi’s son, started to regroup the Mahdist followers as a religious order (tariqa). First, he built a family mosque in Omdurman with a loan from the government. Subsequently, he was permitted to cultivate part of the Mahdi’s lands on Aba Island; this enabled him to claim his position as imam of the Ansar and to establish there the spiritual, political, and economic center of the movement. To allay government suspicions Abd al-Rahman (the Sayyid) emphasized his peaceful aims and denounced every so-called Mahdist antigovernment action or uprising as un-Islamic. He declared that the Mahdist da’wa (religious message) favored the status quo and hence should not be declared illegal. Legalization was granted in 1915 when the British governor-general, Sir Reginald Wingate, sought Muslim allies against the Turks during World War I, and Abd al-Rahman responded by touring Mahdist strongholds on Aba and elsewhere. Revealing the depth of Mahdist loyalties, thousands of Ansar armed with their swords greeted the Sayyid wherever he went, claiming that “the day had arrived” (al-yawm ata). According to Sadiq al-Mahdi, the Mahdi’s great-grandson, historical movements are successful only if their mission withstands the test of time. The Mahdist da’wa did just that when it emerged victorious from the battles against the combined forces of Turkey and Egypt. The main credit for success went to Sayyid Abd al-Rahman who rebuilt the Ansar with patience and perseverance and renewed the Mahdi’s bay’a (oath of allegiance). Although the Sayyid had been forbidden to organize the Ansar, in effect that was what he had done. His representatives in the provinces collected sadaqa (a voluntary donation) and spread the Mahdi’s ratib among his followers. In 1923 an edition of 5,000 copies of the ratib was published and sent to the Ansar throughout Sudan. Government inconsistency in its dealings with the movement probably helped it inadvertently. Between 5,000 and 15,000 Ansar made their annual pilgrimage to Aba where they then stayed to supply the Sayyid with dedicated followers and cheap labor for his agricultural ventures. The Mahdiyya, although essentially a religious renewal movement, liberated Sudan from foreign rule and founded an independent Islamic state. The same happened when neo-Mahdism established itself as a political force in the 20th century. When the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium ended in 1955, the Ansar were the largest Muslim sect in Sudan. Whenever there was a threat to independence, thousands of armed Ansar were prepared to come to the rescue. Already in March 1954 they had demonstrated against unity with Egypt. When in July 1961 7,000 Ansar who had gathered to celebrate the Prophet’s birthday (mawlid) clashed with the police, eight policemen and twelve of the Ansar were killed and many wounded. Some politicians suggested to Siddiq al-Mahdi (d. 1961), the Ansar’s new imam, that he seize the opportunity and overthrow General Abd’s military dictatorship, but he refused, stating: “I do not wish to meet God with the blood of Moslems on my hands.”

During Ja’far al-Numayri’s military rule (1969–85) the Ansar, by then headed by the imam al-Hadi al-Mahdi, prevented the army from landing on Aba. The subsequent bombardment of the island where some 40,000 Ansar were living, which started on 22 March 1970 and lasted for two days, led to thousands of casualties.
Others were killed in the Ansar quarter in Omdurman. In Ansar folklore the Aba Island massacre is compared to the battle of Karari in 1898, where over 10,000 Ansar died fighting the Anglo-Egyptian army. Later, the Ansar, headed by Sadiq al-Mahdi (b. 1935), led several armed uprisings in an attempt to overthrow Numayri’s regime. Finally, following Numayri’s deposal in April 1985, the Ansar supported the Umma Party in the 1986 elections, making it the largest political party in the country with some 2 million supporters and enabling al-Sadiq to become prime minister.

AL-SADIQ AL-MAHDI

Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi received a traditional Muslim education and was then sent to study first at Victoria College in Alexandria, then at Khartoum University, and finally at St. John’s College, Oxford, where he read philosophy, economics, and politics. His rise to prominence started in 1961 when the death of his father, al-Siddiq al-Mahdi, left the Ansar without an imam and the Umma Party without a president. As was customary, Siddiq had appointed a shūrā (consultative council), shortly before his death, to decide on his succession. The council resolved to separate the role of imam of the Ansar from that of Umma Party leader. The reasons given were that Sadiq was too young to be imam and that his Western education made him unsuitable for the role in any case. The shūrā elected Siddiq’s brother, al-Hadi al-Mahdi, as imam and appointed Sadiq al-Mahdi to lead the Umma Party.

In the general elections of 1965, Sadiq had not yet reached the statutory age of thirty and could not be elected to parliament. Consequently, Muhammad Ahmad Mahjub, an Umma leader with whom al-Hadi found it easier to cooperate, became prime minister. In time al-Hadi and Sadiq clashed when the imam, backed by the party council, opposed the reforms of the Umma Party as proposed by Sadiq and disregarded his claim to the premiership when he turned 30 in December 1965. Sadiq outmaneuvered his uncle and Mahjub, and in July 1966 he became prime minister of a government that all assumed would be progressive. Instead he collaborated with the Muslim Brothers’ Islamic Charter Front (ICF), led by Hasan al-Turabi, and came out in favor of an Islamic state and an Islamic constitution. With Sadiq’s help the ICF gained influence in government affairs and particularly in the Constitution Commission, which had been appointed by Sadiq in 1966. This collaboration continued within the National Front, which opposed Numayri and during the period of national reconciliation in 1977–83. After the implementation, in September 1983, of the so-called Islamic laws—which were vehemently opposed by Sadiq but supported by Turabi—the two movements drifted apart. However, despite mutual recriminations between 1983 and 1986, Sadiq again cooperated with the NIF when he was prime minister in 1986–89.

THE ISLAMIC STATE ACCORDING TO THE ANSAR

The Ansar are an activist, revivalist, Islamic movement seeking to convert Muslims to their concept of an Islamic state through political rather than mystical actions. They view themselves as representatives of true Islam who aim to reestablish
a puritanical Muslim state. According to Sadiq, Islam is in a position to provide spiritual and moral leadership for all basic requirements of the modern state. This can be achieved only if the whole corpus of law is reviewed on the basis of the holy texts, the formulations of the four schools of Sunni Islam, and an awareness of current problems and other legal systems. This revised Islamic legal system will bring about the “revival of the Islamic legislative credibility.” Modern formulation of shari' a should be entrusted to universities, with lay scholarly supervision. Otherwise, “shari' a will wither away and we shall finally have abdicated our trust.”

Historically, reasoning and reinterpretation (ijtihād) had been manipulated by despotic Muslim rulers for their own purposes, which brought about the uncritical adoption of legal decisions through imitation (taqlīd) and discouraged new interpretations by learned jurists. Sadiq believed that “the regime of taqlīd is responsible for destroying the inner vitality and purposefulness of the Islamic ummah and so preparing it for foreign domination.” He demonstrated the flexibility of Islam in various spheres and claimed that in Islamic government only two conditions had to be applied: a set of general principles needed to organize society politically, and the application of Islamic legislation. He stated that “any system which fulfills those two conditions is entitled to be called Islamic.” In the legislative sphere Islam can also accommodate change due to the fact that out of 6,000 verses of the Qur'ān, only 245 deal with the aspects of social legislation. Of these 70 are concerned with personal affairs, 70 with civil and financial matters, 30 with criminal offenses, 30 with adjudication and witnessing, 10 with economic affairs, 10 with constitutional issues, and 25 with international affairs. “Thus in Islam while religion is integral to politics and society, there is a distinction between that which is immutable and that which is subject to change and development.” A high degree of flexibility is possible even when legislation is based on explicit holy texts, such as the hudūd (unalterable punishments prescribed by shari’ a) or the farā‘īd (fixed shares in an estate). In both there are circumstantial considerations that can be applied by the learned jurists, through consensus, analogy, or preference, in order to postpone or qualify their application.

In the economic sphere there were two general principles that had to be applied: first, wealth is collectively owned by mankind and private ownership is only legitimate if accumulated through one's efforts, whereas society is bound to provide for the poor; second, the establishment of special injunctions such as zakāt (a tax levied on cattle and crops authorized by shari’ a), inheritance laws, the prohibition of usury, and so on. Thus, there is no contradiction between Islam and a modern economic system. Islamic international relations, according to Sadiq, were based on peaceful coexistence with other people and justified war only to deter aggression and not as a way to enforce Islam. Even pagans were not converted by force: “Those who claim that jihād is enforced Islamization cite Sura 9:5 for support: ‘fight and slay the pagans whenever ye find them.’” But, claims Sadiq, this Sura refers to a particular “treacherous group of pagans who betrayed the Prophet and initiated violence.” Islamic international relations are based on five principles: human brotherhood, the supremacy of justice, the binding character of all contracts and trusts, and reciprocity in the conduct of relations.
Islamic states may be traditional, modernizing, or revolutionary as long as they abide by Islamic constitutional principles, base their legal systems on shari'a, and treat human beings with honor and justice. Western views that Islam is fatalistic and has encouraged despotism and stagnation are totally mistaken. These mistaken ideas were based on three historical encounters between Islam and Christianity—the Andalusian, the Crusades, and the Ottoman—which resulted in fear and misunderstanding. Orientalism had also led to misconceived ideas of Islam because it studied Islam in the colonial context. The poor performance of civilian and military Westernizing elites in Muslim states proved conclusively that Islam was the only solution, while Muslim thinkers such as al-Afghani, Muhammad Iqbal, and Ali Shariati expressed the dynamism and universality of Islam most eloquently. Finally, the failure of capitalism and communism and the predominance of Islam in the south–north encounter, have made the West realize that Islam was indeed dynamic and capable of reinterpretation.

Sadiq emphasized the wide gap separating Mahdism from Islamist ideology: “Muslim Brothers think of Islam in terms of the traditional pattern. They seek to revive the past image. . . . They are a branch of a movement which originated and developed outside Sudan. We [Ansar] have developed in Sudan and would give it a leading role in the revival of Islam.” The Muslim Brothers were elitist and obsessed with their struggle against communism, whereas the Ansar were a popular mass movement. Sadiq insisted that the main problems facing Sudan in the 1980s were the quest for identity and modernization. He claimed that communists and secularists wanted modernization at the expense of identity, whereas the Brothers were concerned with identity at the expense of modernization. Only the Ansar satisfied both quests. Sadiq defined Mahdist ideology as a synthesis between the Sunni, Shi'a, and Sufi schools of thought. He claimed that Islam is a religion of moderation in which fanaticism is the exception.

Only circumstances prevailing in the Islamic world help to explain how this alien phenomenon emerged. First, whereas Islam had pioneered freedom and human rights at its inception, it has fallen behind in modern times. Second, the Arab Muslim world today leads in social injustice. Third, Muslim sensitivities to honor and self-esteem have been overshadowed by the cultural and ideological attacks launched against it. Hence, while other nations have moved toward stability and moderation, Muslims have been left behind and are craving stability. Fourth, Muslims, as part of the poor south, are discriminated against in all spheres by the rich north. Finally, the robbing of Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim rights by Zionist aggression has led to continuous anger in the Arab Muslim world. These five causes, according to Sadiq, have bred extremism, and there will always be someone who will clothe violence in a religious garb. Therefore, once in power, as in some of the Arab countries at present, the Islamists tear the body politic apart, leading to frustration and enabling the international community to justify intervention.

Sadiq rejected military rule even as a temporary ally in the creation of an Islamic state. He claimed that military regimes, be they communist or Islamist, have excelled only in bloodshed and oppression and have failed in other respects. However, it should be noted that the Umma Party supported the first military coup in
SADIQ AL-MAHDI’S PROGRAM FOR THE SOUTH

Between 1985 and 1987 Sadiq published a number of articles dealing primarily with the relation of Islam with the non-Muslim south. Sadiq blamed British policy for arbitrarily having terminated Islamization and Arabization in the region. The Umma Party had recognized, as early as 1966–67, that a nation-state required a common language and religion, both of which were lacking in certain parts of Sudan. It therefore advocated limited autonomy for the south and other non-Arab regions of Sudan. But it rejected the clause in the 1973 constitution that granted Islam, Christianity, and tribal religions equal status and included both Islam and tribal law as sources of legislation. As to the future of Islam in the relationship between north and south, Sadiq rejected the separation of “church” and “state” as unacceptable. He was also against maintaining the September 1983 Islamic laws because they were un-Islamic and unconstitutional. He defended southern grievances against these laws, which effectively made them second-class citizens in their own country. Modern Islam, according to Sadiq, provided for flexibility in the imposition of Islamic laws so as not to infringe on the equal rights of non-Muslim citizens.

In May 1986, realizing the advantages the Muslim Brothers had gained as a result of better organization, finances, and tactics, the Umma Party and the Khatmiyya-oriented Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) signed the Sudanese Charter of National Unity, which called for the adoption of an Islamic constitution and demanded the abrogation of all the laws passed by the Numayri regime, “particularly the laws of September 1983 which were promulgated in the name of Islam and which were a falsification of Islam, the expression of absolutist power and an affront to human dignity.” Sadiq and his colleagues demanded that religious laws such as the forbidding of alcoholic beverages or of eating pork should be imposed only on Muslims and that a similar attitude be adopted with regard to zakāt. Taxes should be levied on all citizens according to a nonreligious law decreed by the state, and discriminatory taxes such as the jīzāya (poll tax levied on non-Muslims) should be abolished. Islam should, however, be declared the religion of the state and the shari‘a its major source of legislation, since the majority of Sudanese were Muslims. Sadiq agreed to maintain traditional sources of positive law but insisted that shari‘a was superior and more suitable for the cultural and social realities of Sudan. In Sadiq’s view the south would ultimately become fully Arabized and Islamized. This would come about through the assimilation of tribes, the impact of Muslim Sufis, jurisprudents and merchants settling in the south, and economic projects emanating from the north and benefitting the south. Finally, the massive settlement of southerners in the north would make them recognize that imperialism and “white civilization” were the common enemy. This recognition had convinced even black Americans to embrace Islam and thus would certainly bring about the Islamization of the south.
In August 1992 Sadiq published a new brochure listing the lessons to be learned from the conflict between north and south and his proposals for a just peace in Sudan. In it he reiterates many of his earlier ideas and adds a few new ones. First, Sadiq proposes a seven-point program leading to peace. He suggests a plebiscite to determine the extent of decentralization, between regionalism, federation, or confederation. Legislation will be carried out democratically and will respect the limits set by decentralization. Development will be planned in accordance with regional and sectional needs, and all national groups will participate in administration, defense, and security, taking into account the needs of “technical competence.” Foreign policy will be based on regional and international charters, and will uphold “Arab, African, and Islamic solidarity . . . in a balanced way.”13 It is noteworthy that Sadiq refrains from calling for Islamization of the south, which he had advocated in the past and which the NIF continues to enforce at present. Whether this is a change in policy or an opportunistic attempt to seek southern support remains unclear. Second, the proposed bill of rights, as suggested by Sadiq, seeks to guarantee equality of Muslims and others regardless of religion, ethnicity, or culture. Finally, Sadiq rejects partition as one of the options put forward by sections within the NIF, claiming that it would inevitably lead to the emergence of two hostile states and be unacceptable to the majority of Sudanese.

THE MUSLIM BROTHERS

The Muslim Brothers claim to present a modern alternative to the traditionalist Islam propagated by the Khatmiyya and the Ansar. The Brothers started to attract adherents among Sudanese students in Cairo in the 1940s.14 They succeeded in setting up branches in small Sudanese towns, in 1947–49, but were forbidden to act openly unless they dissociated themselves from the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, who were at the time an illegal organization. In 1947 the Sudanese Brothers founded the Islamic Liberation Movement (ILM) at Gordon College, a move which enabled them to act legally on campus, primarily in order to fight communism. Most Brothers came from riverain regions of northern Sudan and this enabled them to adopt a modern Islamic ideology without cutting their ties with their Khatmiyya families. This dual loyalty hardly disturbed the Khatmiyya because it did not regard the Brothers as serious rivals.

In 1952, ties between the ILM and the Egyptian Brothers were strengthened through the mediation of Sadiq ʿAbdallah ʿAbd al-Majid and other Sudanese living in Egypt, but it was not until 1954 that Sudanese Muslim Brothers were founded officially. Al-Rashid al-Tahir, one of their first and most charismatic student leaders, became the movement’s murāqib al-ʿamm (general supervisor). He established relations with Egypt’s Free Officers, especially with Salah Salim, who had been entrusted by Egypt’s Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) with matters concerning Sudan. The relationship ended when, following the assassination attempt on President Nasser, in October 1954, the Muslim Brothers in Egypt were persecuted and banned. Sudanese Brothers demonstrated against Nasser and joined forces with the Ansar–Umma bloc, which advocated independence. The movement was soon
split between those recommending radical action, alongside spiritual and educational activities, and those who advocated an emphasis on education. The latter were headed by Hasan al-Turabi and Muddathir ʿAbd al-Rahim, who had joined the Brothers in 1954 while undergraduates at Khartoum University College.

After the military coup led by General Ibrahim ʿAbbud in November 1958, the Muslim Brothers were at first allowed to continue their activities as a religious movement. But, following an article criticizing the regime, publication of their weekly al-Balāgh was halted in June 1959. On 9 November 1959, Rashid al-Tahir, against the explicit decision of the Brothers’ executive, plotted to overthrow the regime with the help of an illegal cell of Muslim Brothers within the army, which had been founded by Bashir Muhammad ʿAli in the early 1950s, together with Communists and others. When al-Tahir and the plotters were arrested, the Brothers lost their few cadres in the army as well as their leader. Their recovery started only in 1964 with the return of Turabi and some of his colleagues to Sudan.

DR. HASAN ʿABDALLAH AL-TURABI

Hasan al-Turabi was born in Kasala, on the Sudanese–Ethiopian border, in 1932. He received a traditional Muslim education from his father, a qadi in a sharīʿa court. Following secondary school, he graduated from Khartoum University College in 1955. Subsequently, he received a Master of Law degree from London University in 1957, and returned to Khartoum to be elected to the ILM executive. From 1959 to 1964 he studied at the Sorbonne, in Paris, where he submitted his doctoral dissertation on the power of the executive under a state of emergency in constitutional law in 1964.15

Turabi returned to Sudan shortly before the October 1964 civilian uprising and was appointed professor of law at the university. He proposed that the Brothers reorganize themselves as a nonpartisan pressure group because they had failed to broaden their membership beyond the boundaries of the institutes of higher learning. Moreover, many supporters, on finishing their studies, reverted to their pre-student sectarian loyalties, usually the Khatmiyya. Turabi believed that as an elitist group, seeking an Islamic state and the implementation of sharīʿa, the Brothers could pressure the Khatmiyya and Ansar into supporting these aims in Parliament, especially since Sayyid ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Mahdi and Sayyid ʿAli al-Mirghani had issued, early in 1957, a joint demand that Sudan become an Islamic republic with sharīʿa as the main source of legislation.16 Turabi’s standing as a Western-educated professor of law and later dean of his faculty gave him the prestige that the Muslim Brothers had lacked until then. In a number of speeches, he and other faculty members belonging to the Brothers accused the ʿAbbud regime of being responsible for the southern catastrophe and demanded an immediate return to civilian rule. The Brothers’ militancy rallied many of the students around Hasan al-Turabi as their new star leader. Turabi’s entrance into national politics can thus be attributed to ʿAbbud’s downfall.

Turabi’s anti-Communist crusade, which undermined their predominance in the student union and the professional associations, was typical of his future tactics. Communists and Muslim Brothers had much in common and competed for the same
Mahdism and Islamism

constituencies. Both rejected the reactionary message of the sects and succeeded in population centers in which the latter were weak: towns, universities, professional associations, and trade unions. Finally, both realized that in order to attract support they had best conceal their identity with front organizations. This led Turabi and his colleagues to set up, in 1965, the ICF, which was comprised of Muslim Brothers, Ansar al-Sunna, and several Sufi orders. In the March 1965 general elections, which were boycotted by the Khatmiyya, the ICF had 100 candidates, including 15 in the graduates' constituencies. Its election platform called for the establishment of an Islamic state, a peaceful solution to the southern problem, and economic reforms. It won eleven seats, including two graduates' constituencies, one of which was won by Turabi. Rashid al-Tahir, the Brothers' leader in the 1950s who had led the abortive coup against Abbud in 1959, also won a seat but in July 1965 he disassociated himself publicly from the ICF and joined the National Unionist Party.

Turabi, who was now the unchallenged leader, convinced the ICF to side with Sadiq al-Mahdi in fighting for an Islamic constitution. Following his appointment as prime minister in 1966, Sadiq rewarded the ICF by implementing several Islamic laws and appointing three of its members to the Constitution Committee. The latter's impact on the committee's recommendations, submitted in January 1968, was remarkable. After Sadiq's dismissal from office in May 1967, the New Forces Congress—composed of the ICF, Sadiq's faction of the Umma Party, and William Deng's section of the Sudan African National Union (SANU)—cooperated in order to defeat the old order—the Khatmiyya and Imam al-Hadi's faction of the Umma Party. However, in the 1968 elections the ICF appeared to have backed the loser as Sadiq's Umma was crushed by its rivals, and he was defeated in his own constituency. Of the ICF's twenty-nine candidates, only five were elected to parliament, and Turabi himself was defeated. The ICF's relative success in 1965 may thus be attributed to the boycott of the parliamentary elections by the Khatmiyya-backed bloc. Once the latter reappeared on the political scene in the 1968 elections—as part of the newly constituted Democratic Unionists—the ICF lost most of its parliamentary seats to Khatmiyya nominees.

COLLABORATION WITH NUMAYRI AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SHARI'AH

When Numayri and the Free Officers assumed power in May 1969, Turabi and his followers viewed them as pro-Communist secularists. But the Brothers could not act against the regime because the students, their sole power base, were on summer vacation. When they decided to act during the mawlid festivities, they were either arrested or forced to escape. Some fled to Aba and were later killed in the March 1970 uprising or were arrested when they tried to escape to Ethiopia with Imam al-Hadi. Others left the country and joined the National Front (NF) of the opposition parties. Turabi and some of his colleagues who had stayed behind were also arrested.

After the abortive Communist coup of July 1971, the mutual hostility between Numayri and the Brothers gradually subsided. Many of the Brothers were released from prison and regained their positions in the universities. They founded the
Students Unity Front and even risked a showdown with the regime. A first split within the NF followed the failure of the August–September 1973 uprising, which had been centered at the university and consequently harmed the Brothers. They accused the NF of letting them down, whereas Sadiq claimed that the Brothers had acted on their own in order to boost their declining popularity. An indirect result of this split was that after 1975, Turabi and most of his followers supported a pragmatic policy and opposed the attempts to overthrow Numayri that were planned and executed by the NF leadership from its headquarters in exile.22 Turabi, therefore, had no difficulty in cooperating with Numayri once the latter changed course in 1977. This enabled the Brothers to gain first-hand experience with the state apparatus, legislation, and media and gave them easy access to state funds. They had no qualms in rushing to support whatever positions the government proposed. Although a minority within the Brother's shūrā constantly opposed this pragmatic approach, the majority led by Turabi were soon fully identified with the regime. In 1979, Turabi himself was appointed attorney general, and his colleagues accepted positions in the judiciary and the Sudan Socialist Union (SSU). An important aspect of their collaboration with Numayri was their penetration into the armed forces, which they realized was crucial if they hoped to achieve power. This was openly admitted by Rashid al-Ghanushi, one of the Brothers’ leaders, who in 1979 stated that an unacceptable regime should be removed by military force, if all else had failed. Because Islamists viewed their route to power by peaceful means as blocked by the regime, they justified penetrating the army and subsequently using it to achieve their aim. There were several routes into the armed forces. First, the Brothers were invited by Numayri to conduct religious teaching and prayers within the army. Second, they urged their student members to join the army officers corps upon graduation from their engineering, accountancy, or medical studies. Since graduates in these fields rarely volunteered for military service, the Brothers gained a strong influence within these branches. A third method entailed the search for ex-Brothers who served in the army in order to lure them back into the movement. All this took place during the years 1978–85, when conditions within Sudan were ripe for revolt.23

Turabi, continuing his pragmatism, supported Numayri’s so-called Islamic laws in September 1983. He had not been directly involved in their final formulation; he realized their shortcomings and admitted that they were neither Islamic nor was the manner in which they had been imposed constitutional. Yet he dismissed the claim of certain Muslim leaders that one cannot impose morality by law, stating that similar objections could be raised against any law. The Hudūd, according to Turabi, were part of an educational process whereby the state hoped to improve the morals of its citizens.24 Turabi had an additional reason for lending his support because he knew that the regular courts would refuse to implement the Islamic laws, which had not been ratified constitutionally. Numayri’s newly established “prompt courts,” presided over by his Sufi mentors and the Muslim Brothers, were ordered to implement these laws and did so eagerly. Many top government officials, including ex-army officers, were brought before these courts and humiliated publicly to the delight of the crowds. The Muslim Brothers thereby enjoyed power for the first time in their history, and many of the small Sufi orders joined in
order to share their good fortune. One of these, al-Mikashfi Taha al-Kabbashi, presided over the Court of Appeal as of 1984. It was empowered to overturn decisions of lower courts and those of the attorney general. Kabbashi had played an important role since 1983 in the committee appointed by Numayri that revised the laws in accordance with the shariʿa. In his book, *The Implementation of the Shariʿa in the Sudan between Truthfulness and Falsehood*, Kabbashi fully supported Numayri’s Islamic laws and their implementation, including the execution of Mahmud Muhammad Taha for apostasy in January 1985, in which he was personally involved as president of the Court of Appeal. The execution was challenged by leading personalities in the Muslim world including Islamic scholars. One of them, Professor ʿAbdallahi Ahmad An-Naṣīm, claimed that it violated freedom of religion and contradicted Islamic law. Furthermore, he denounced the fact that judges often sat on appeals or revisions of cases they had tried themselves. “In at least one major case, the same judge was sitting as a trial judge and on the Supreme Court Panel which considered a constitutional challenge to the legality of the trial proceedings.”

Improvement in the Brothers’ fortunes under Numayri also followed in the financial sphere. Since the early 1970s they had gained partial control of the Islamic banking system through their connections in Saudi Arabia and their collaboration with Numayri. Following the establishment of the Sudanese branch of the Faysal Islamic Bank (FIB), in 1978, Muslim Brothers became employees and investors and gained access to credits and profits. The FIB also helped the Brothers to establish international financial contacts, primarily in the Arabian Peninsula.

When, in March 1985, Turabi and his followers were accused of treason and put behind bars, they were given a handy alibi since Numayri’s regime was toppled a month later. Abdelwahhab El-Affendi describes this crackdown as the culmination of a gradual process brought about by the growing animosity between some of Numayri’s corrupt aides and the Muslim Brothers, who in many cases sentenced them in the shariʿa courts. According to Affendi, the arrest of the Brothers’ leadership was, however, the result of U.S. pressure following Vice-President George Bush’s visit to Sudan in March 1985. Numayri, in hindsight, claimed that his two gravest mistakes while president had been to implement the shariʿa laws and to trust Turabi.

**THE NATIONAL ISLAMIC FRONT AFTER NUMAYRI**

Following Numayri’s fall in April 1985, the newly founded NIF had considerable influence within the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and the cabinet, several of whose leading members were sympathizers or supporters. These included Siwar al-Dhahab, the head of the TMC, and al-Jazuli Dafaʿallah, the prime minister, who had openly declared his support for the shariʿa laws in 1983. In addition, al-Bashir Hajj al-Tum, minister of education, and ṢUmar ṢAbd al-ṢAti, minister of justice, were
NIF supporters. Hence, despite its unpopularity as a result of its long collaboration with Numayri, the NIF enjoyed full support within the TMC because of its insistence that the September 1983 laws not be abrogated. Siwar al-Dhahab agreed with Turabi that the Islamic laws should be revised but not abrogated.30

Collaboration with Numayri had enabled the NIF to enter the April 1986 election with a clear advantage in its organization and finances, as seen in the election results. It won a total of fifty-one seats in parliament, including twenty-three graduates’ constituencies, and became, for the first time in its history, the third largest party, with 42 percent of the seats in Khartoum and 29 percent of the total vote. It had ample funding from Islamic banks and gained support from groups not previously associated with the Muslim Brothers. Last but not least, the NIF even succeeded in penetrating the Ansar’s strongholds in the west.31 Turabi attributed the NIF’s election success to numerous factors. First, the movement was well organized and had solid finances. Second, its young generation had been liberated from sectarian bonds as a result of economic independence and better education. Third, the NIF’s support for Western-style women’s liberation had gained it massive votes in that sector. (This, according to Turabi, was a major breakthrough. The Brothers had realized in the 1970s, when many of their leaders were in prisons, that women could play a crucial role in the movement’s fortunes. Consequently, a historical change occurred in the position of Sudanese women in Muslim society and politics.) Fourth, the establishment of the NIF was supported by the smaller Sufi orders who feared being submerged within the Khatmiyya or the Ansar. Fifth, in the south the NIF gained support from both Muslims and non-Muslims due to its intensive work in those regions. Finally, the dedication of NIF members who organized conferences and “political nights” throughout Sudan—in which their commitment to the Islamic constitution and their insistence on preserving the Islamic laws were propagated—brought the movement massive support.32

The NIF’s new strategy involved anti-Mahdist propaganda, after twenty years of collaboration. Turabi argued that since their battle against communism, the common enemy, had been won, the NIF had become a challenge to the Ansar and they now attacked each other. He accused the sects of misusing religion to further their inherited political ambitions. The NIF, according to Turabi, was the natural inheritor of the Islamic legacy in Sudan, and the masses, who had previously followed the traditionalists, had now turned their backs on them. This led to broader international relations—including Islamist movements in Tunisia, Pakistan, Kuwait, and Yemen—and these ties were consequently stronger than those with the Egyptian Muslim Brothers. Islam in its modernized version guaranteed the prosperity of the Umma and was the only way to save it from its present condition of impoverishment.33

The final chapter started on 30 June 1989, when the military once again assumed power, acting as the saviors of Islam. Whether the NIF was directly involved in the coup is of little relevance since we can judge its collaboration through subsequent results. Of the 20,000 government officials dismissed from office after the coup, up until the end of 1990—including judges, army and police officers, university professors, and others—many were replaced by NIF supporters or members. Further-
more, the political trend of the new regime becomes quite clear if we note that nine out of the fifteen members of President Bashir’s RCC were either members of or closely associated with the NIF. The Council of the Defenders of the Revolution, set up by Bashir’s regime, was also dominated by forty NIF members who, in reality, dictated government policy. Finally, Bashir and several of his colleagues had been trained in the courses on Islamic ideology and instruction that the NIF had been entrusted to give to members of the armed forces since 1977.34

THE NATIONAL ISLAMIC FRONT AND THE SOUTH

The Muslim Brothers’ policy toward the southern question changed in the 1970s. Instead of the seemingly liberal attitude of Turabi and his followers in 1964–65, some now advocated partition, claiming that as long as Sudan remained united an Islamic state would be impossible. But the majority decided that “if the Sudanese Islamic state is to be a bastion for Islam in Africa, it cannot shirk its responsibility to the South.” The 1972 Addis Ababa agreement and their close ties with Numayri enabled the Brothers to penetrate into the south and propagate Islam freely. They founded the Association of Southern Muslims and established Islamic schools and villages in the south, funded by Kuwait and the Gulf Emirates. The close relationship between the NIF and southern Muslims helped the party in its 1986 election campaign in the south.35

In January 1987 the NIF published its national charter in which it elaborated on its special relationship with the south. Turabi proposed a policy in which the NIF would play the leading role in Islamizing the non-Muslims, with the traditionalists forced to follow suit. In a concession to southern realities the NIF accepted the right of all citizens, regardless of religion, to hold public office. It advocated freedom of conscience and equality before the law, stating that in a federal state, non-Muslim regions would be allowed to opt out of the Islamic legal system. Turabi claimed that shari‘a was closer than any other legal system to the African cultural heritage. It “protects the entity and the culture of the non-Muslims,” and through its flexibility guarantees the compromises required by non-Muslims. In the realities of Sadiq al-Mahdi’s coalition governments, in 1986–89, these liberal formulations, supported also by Sadiq, remained empty words.36 In a meeting in May 1992, Turabi stated that he regarded the provisions made for ahīl al-dhimma as a sufficient guarantee for the equality of non-Muslims. Once the civil war was settled, the south would be offered regional control of the administration of criminal law and would not be required to punish for the use of alcohol or carry out capital punishment for theft and so on.37

THE ISLAMIC CONSTITUTION

The Muslim Brothers had advocated an Islamic state based on shari‘a since their foundation.38 Their concept of democracy was the establishment of a shūrā wherein ulama and scientists would counsel the executive power in all matters pertaining to legislation and policy making. Their 1956 Islamic constitution proposed the establishment of an Islamic republic under a Muslim head of state, with a parliamentary
democracy based on Islamic law. A period of five years was set for the state to be Islamized and for all its laws to comply with shari’a. There would be no discrimination on the basis of race or religion, and non-Muslim citizens would enjoy all rights traditionally granted them under Muslim law.39

Following the 1964 revolution Turabi proposed a pragmatic approach that departed from the “rejectionism” that the Brothers had inherited from Abul Ala Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb and advocated interpretations in line with modern society. Tajdid (renewal) became Turabi’s most cherished idea, on which the newly formulated Islamic Charter was based. Islam, according to the charter, was capable of readjusting itself to the needs of modern society and was the only force able to mobilize the masses and lead them to a just and prosperous society. The charter proposed the setting up of a presidential rather than a parliamentary system and emphasized regional rights, including those of minorities. A complete revision of personal law was also proposed in order to grant full rights to women. Although Islam advocated the unity of all believers in an Islamic Umma, the charter called upon Muslims to recognize the realities of their geographic divisions and to accept the existence of separate Muslim states. Therefore, a Muslim state should be set up which encompasses only Sudan, and “no Muslim outside Sudan should be included in it, while [resident] non-Muslims be citizens with equal standing, guaranteed the freedom of religion, decentralization and public rights.”40

Turabi advocated the democratic interpretation of Islam leading to popular consensus (ijma’). But the historic shura (“mutual consultation”) limited to scholars was no longer necessary, as a result of education and learning, and shura could now become an open popular process. Shūrā was superior to Western democracy because the latter depended on the ultimate sovereignty of the people, whereas shūrā was based on the ultimate sovereignty of God and hence did not suffer from shortcomings of human reason. Islam, through tajdid, would overcome sectarian divisiveness and establish the just society based on its tenets.41

The 1968 draft constitution was influenced by the views of the ICF. The rationale for an Islamic constitution was stated in its introduction. First, Islam represented the religious beliefs and historical heritage of the majority of the people. Second, Islam is a democratic religion and tolerates freedom of thought and expression. Third, since Islam is not a religion alone but embraces politics, economics, and social thought, its predominance in the daily life of the people was essential. The newly drafted constitution stated that Islam is the religion of the state and Arabic its official language. It proclaimed Islam as the main source of legislation and required that all laws that contradicted shari’a would be revised. Finally, in line with Turabi’s and Sadiq’s view, article 33 of the draft constitution declared that communism was illegal. The constitution was never ratified by parliament because of the military coup of May 1969.42

Under Numayri the Muslim Brothers decided that no option should remain closed in the fight to establish an Islamic state. Turabi refused to commit his movement to the observance of legality and peaceful transition to an Islamic order, stating that Islamists should be prepared for all eventualities. This meant joining the NF’s efforts to overthrow Numayri and establish an Islamic state, or, if that failed, collaborating with Numayri for the same purpose.43 In a meeting with
American scholars in May 1992, Turabi stated that Islam remained the only national doctrine with indigenous values strong enough to withstand the West. Furthermore, Turabi believed in the inevitability of Islam’s victory, stating that if “you want to avoid Islam, you have to avoid the ballot box completely because if you resort to it, Islam will win.” Thus, Turabi’s justification for supporting Bashir’s military regime becomes self-evident since it saved Sudan from abandoning the Islamic path. In line with this view, the ḥudūd, which had been suspended since April 1985 when Numayri was overthrown, were renewed on 31 December 1990.44

Turabi viewed the Gulf War as the main reason for the success of the popular, as opposed to the traditional, Islamic movements. The Western-dominated anti-Iraqi coalition brought about a popular Islamic resurgence. What frightened the enemies of Islam was the worldwide success of the Islamic revolution, especially its present victory in Algeria, on the threshold of Europe, which threatened the status quo. Hence, the Islamic movement in Algeria was crushed by the military with the blessings of Western democracies. Sudan’s condemnation as a dictatorship by Western democracies was thus hypocritical. Only if the West can be convinced that Islam seeks peaceful coexistence will it cease to be viewed as a threat.45

CONCLUSION

The major differences between the Ansar and the NIF and between Sadiq al-Mahdi’s and Hasan al-Turabi’s concepts of an Islamic state seem to be political and tactical rather than ideological. Sadiq regards the historical heritage of the Mahdiyya as proof of future success. Moreover, because the Mahdi and the Ansar were the ones who successfully established an Islamic state in 19th-century Sudan, there seems to be no reason why the future Islamic state should not be headed by a Mahdist such as al-Sadiq himself. Turabi and his followers viewed the traditionalists, whether they were Khatmiyya or Mahdist adherents, as reactionary dynasties who could not be entrusted with leading a modern Islamic state. A party whose loyalty is to a family (wašlā' li-bayt) and not to an ideology, and an Islam which is based on inheritable partisanship (ʿaṣabiyya), is, according to Turabi, historically doomed. The Khatmiyya and the Ansar have lost support in the south and other regions, as well as among the intelligentsia and the women. The NIF, however, is not concerned with past loyalties, be they Ansari, Khatmi, Sufi, or something else. Hence, it has approached all Sudanese to become part of one united national (qawmi) movement. The role of guiding the future Islamic state is therefore safer in the hands of modern Islamist movements.46

A second difference between Mahdists and Muslim Brothers seems to be in the manner in which they sought to gain power. With the exception of the ʿAbbud coup in 1958, which was supported by the Umma Party’s leadership and even received Sayyid ʿAbd al-Rahman’s tacit blessings, the Ansar have opposed military involvement in politics and have supported the use of force only to overthrow military regimes. Sadiq admits that parliamentary-style democracy has failed in Sudan because the economic and social conditions did not enable the new political forces to be represented. But the military, according to Sadiq, have also failed because they
represented narrow class interests and repressed the interests and civil rights of the vast majority. The Brothers and the NIF have, however, declared their willingness to achieve an Islamic state even by force. Their reasoning was that whenever an Islamic constitution was about to be promulgated by democratic means, the army intervened on the side of the secularists who constituted a minority. Furthermore, the achievement of power by democratic means would entail Islamist acceptance of secularism as a framework for action in the political arena. But even if they gained a democratic majority, they would not be granted legal recognition, let alone power, as illustrated both in Sudan and in Algeria. Turabi therefore advocated the use of force quite openly, stating that the Islamic movement had the full right to assume power by all means, including military force.47

Third, Turabi and his colleagues regard themselves as pioneers of a worldwide movement, which embraces Muslim thinkers and leaders from Pakistan to Tunisia and Algeria. With the demise of communism they regard their brand of Islamism as the only bastion against Western consumerism and corruption. Although Sadiq al-Mahdi may share this outlook, he cannot boast of the same following in other Muslim countries. According to Islamists, Mahdism is a local, outmoded brand of Islam which may be tolerated and with which one may even cooperate if need be, but which is not qualified to lead. Modern Islamist leaders did not inherit their leadership roles but had to fight in order to achieve them. It is their ability and charisma—as well as their intellectual and ideological superiority—that makes their type of Islamic state the only solution in a modern society.

Sadiq al-Mahdi may at present denounce Turabi’s brand of Islamism, claiming that for him human rights, democracy, and Sudan’s unity are the main issues. But were these not the central issues while he was prime minister? Is it only in opposition or under house arrest that one becomes sensitive to such crucial problems? Turabi’s claim that the NIF is part of a worldwide movement of Islamists who have massive support not only in Sudan but also in Algeria, Tunisia, Pakistan, and other Muslim countries is at present quite true. But a political upheaval in Sudan may yet bring the Mahdists back to power, since their grass-roots support is probably greater than that of the NIF. Such an upheaval may even lead to a secular state, although this seems even less likely.

NOTES

5For details, see Andrew Vincent, “Religion and Nationalism in a Traditional Society: Ideology, Leadership, and the Role of the Umma Party as a Force of Social Change in the Northern Sudan” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1988), 173–84; also Mansour Khalid, The Government They Deserve, the


7Ibid., 238–39; for details see Warburg, “From Revolution to Conservatism,” 88–111.

8Sadiq al-Mahdi, Forum 64 (February 1980), 38–41.


12Ibid., 419–20; also Sadiq, Janib Sudden, 16–20.

13Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, “Salām ‘adil fi al-Sudan” (Omdurman, 1992). Sadiq sent an English translation of this brochure, entitled “Blue-Print for a Just Peace in the Sudan,” to several southern leaders. Quotations are from the English version.


18Five graduates' constituencies were first created in the 1953 electoral law to enable the Sudanese intelligentsia to play its part in the country's politics. After the 1964 civilian revolution, which overthrew General Ḥabib's military regime, their number was increased to fifteen and finally, in the 1986 elections, to twenty-eight constituencies.


20Affendi, Turabi’s Revolution, 70–81.

21Ibid., 104–7; according to Turabi he spent some 2,250 days in prison under Numayri; see also Aṣṣar al-tuhaf biyūn al-Ikhwān wa-Numayrī,” Awwāq 'Arabiyā 7 (1988): 62–76.


27Mikashfi, Taḥbiq al-sharī’a, 8.

28Islamic Banking in Sudan: The Case of Faisal Islamic Bank,” Monograph series no. 21 (Khartoum: Development Studies and Research Centre, University of Khartoum, 1985), 29.


236 Gabriel Warburg

37_Islam, Democracy, the State and the West, a Round Table with Dr. Hasan Turabi_, ed. Arthur L. Lowrie (Tampa, Fl., 1993), 32–35.
40“Limādha nunādī biʾl-Islām nizāman liʾl-ḥayāʾ?” (Why do we advocate Islam as a way of life?), in _Al-mithaq al-Islāmi_ (Omdurman, 1965); the quotation is from p. 21 of the charter; Affendi, _Turābī’s Revolution_, 166–68.
44The quotation is from Lowrie, ed., _Islam, Democracy, the State and the West_, 20–21; for the re-introduction of the _ḥudūd_, see Bona Malwal, “First Victim of Islamic Punishments a Christian!,” _Sudan Democratic Gazette_, May 1991, 3.
45Muḥammad Ṭahā Muḥammad ʿAḥmad, _Muḥāwalat ʾightiyāl al-Turābī . . . asrār wa-khīfāya_ (Khartoum, 1992), 27–30; also Lowrie, ed., _Islam, Democracy, the State and the West_, 55–56.