

Africa Report by Mary Lalevée

Libya wins elections in Sudan

U.S. backing for the International Monetary Fund has strengthened the hand of Libya, Iran—and the Soviets.

Two weeks after the official closing of the 12-day elections in the Sudan, April 1-12, a government had still not been formed. As most observers predicted, the Umma Party led by Sadiq el Mahdi won the majority of the contested 264 seats (elections in 37 districts in the south were postponed as anarchy reigns there, due to the rebellion by the Southern People's Liberation Army [SPLA]). The Umma party won 48% of the vote, gaining 99 seats, while the Democratic Unionist Party won 63 seats, and the National Islamic Front a surprisingly high score of 51 seats, though its leader, Hassan el Turabi, was defeated in his own constituency in Khartoum.

As we reported in our April 4 issue, el Mahdi has received substantial support from Libya. He was in Tripoli on March 15 to ask for campaign funds. His stop in Tripoli was on his way back from Geneva, where he had attended an international Islamic seminar, with Islamic fundamentalists from Europe and the Middle East. Sadiq el Mahdi's victory means that Libyan involvement in Sudan will increase.

The largest country in Africa in area, Sudan borders Egypt, Libya, Chad, Zaire, Uganda, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, and Kenya. A strong Libyan position there would increase pressure on the Chad government, already battling against Libyan-backed rebels in the north, and facing a permanent Libyan military occupation of the Aouzou strip along its northern border. Zaire has also been

troubled by Libyan interference, and the Central African Republic has been hit by several bombings in the capital, Bangui, reportedly Libyan work.

The Umma Party's official policies are not particularly extremist. Their manifesto calls for defeat of the Islamic Brotherhood of Hassan el Turabi, the suspension of the Islamic Fundamentalist Sharia laws, and the removal of the remnants of Numayri's regime. A spokesman for El Mahdi said after the elections that he had an "understanding" with the United States, that the party would pursue a "non-aligned" foreign policy, and would not challenge U.S. interests in Africa and the Middle East.

Sadiq el Mahdi has been a leading political figure in Sudan since independence in 1956. His party's support comes from its traditional followers, the Ansar. He was involved in an abortive—Libyan-backed—coup attempt against Numayri in 1976.

The other traditional party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), led by Mohammed Osman el Mirghani, gets its support largely from the Khatmiya Islamic sect (though it is seen as "liberal" compared to the NIF), and from the business and merchant class. The party has called for revision of the Islamic law, and concessions to the Christian and animist parts of the population. The party calls for union with Egypt, which has recently lost it some popularity.

The National Islamic Front (NIF) is the party of the fanatics, strongly backed by Iran. Hassan el Turabi calls

for an Islamic state, and has threatened to declare a holy war if the Sharia legal system is changed. On April 17, just after the elections, el Turabi made a show of strength in Khartoum, bringing 10,000 into the streets in favor of the Sharia and in his support. If the new government does not move against Turabi's Islamic fanaticism, unrest among the non-Islamic communities will rise, especially given the economic crisis. If the government does act, it faces violent actions by the NIF extremists.

The NIF virtually controls Sudan's Islamic banking system, and is reported to have earned \$25 million from helping to arrange the sending of Ethiopian Falashas to Israel. They are also reported to be heavily involved in selling sacks of cereal, given as food aid, on the open market.

Numayri's fall in April 1985 was due to the unpopularity of International Monetary Fund measures being imposed. U.S. backing for the IMF has led to anti-American demonstrations and support for Libya. In the South, Ethiopian-backed SPLA rebels are stepping up their military offensive, expecting the early collapse of an Umma-led government, and hoping to be in control of the entire south of the country when that happens.

Libyan intervention has not only included financial backing for Sadiq el Mahdi, but military aid: Two Soviet-built Tupolev bombers were lent to the Sudanese government for missions against the SPLA rebels. At the beginning of April, 300 trucks crossed the Libyan border into Sudan, bringing food and arms for the demoralized Sudanese army units fighting the rebels. The suspension of Western economic aid after the IMF's declaration that the country was in default, in February, leaves Sudan at the mercy of the Libyans and Iranians, with the Soviets not far behind.