

VOLKER PERTHES

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Last but not least, Volker Perthes and of course, you are responsible for another slightly troubled part of the world, Sudan.

Volker Perthes

Thank you, John. I am not even going to try to predict the future, but I will tell you a story about Sudan that I think has some significant elements of possible paths forward. Sudan is more influenced by African developments than by classical Middle East ones, but I still think what happens in Sudan is significant or what happens in Sudan could be a signifier for developments in the Middle East. The revolution that we had in Sudan in 2018 – 2019 was a real revolution by the way and significant in at least three aspects for this region, the Middle East, North Africa. First, it was triggered by the same grievances that people had in the so-called Arab Spring. Two, it was the first real popular revolution against an Islamist regime, so Muslim Brotherhood Islamists do not necessarily have to be successful in revolutions and can sometimes be on the receiving end, as was the case in Sudan. Three, the Sudanese have actively learnt a lot from the failures of the Arab Spring and have learned to avoid the paths of Syria or Libya by agreeing and accepting a power sharing formula between the military, civilians and some rebel groups that joined the fray later. Since that revolution and the agreement on a power sharing formula, Sudan has been in a triple transformation process. They have had basically 60 years of uninterrupted civil wars and have now moved from authoritarianism to pluralistic democratic governance, from civil wars to domestic peace, and also from economic mismanagement and high debts to economic recovery and more equitable development.

Will Sudan succeed? I do not know; I am just working for its success, but I am pretty sure that it can. We are halfway through the transition period, which is supposed to end by January 2024. So far, as you would expect, the record is mixed but I would say that the glass is closer to full than empty and the record is more positive than negative. Peace agreements have been signed with the main rebel movements, of course implementation is a challenge and takes time. The economy is recovering after having been in free-fall. The main difficult part but also the most interesting dimension of this transition for this region, the Middle East and North Africa, is the political transition. This is the most difficult because power sharing between the military and the civilians is rather exceptional in this part of the world. In addition, this arrangement is not a marriage of love, nor even a marriage of convenience, at best it is a marriage of reason built from the reasonable realization that one part cannot do without the

other or do away with the other without risking the entire country and risking domestic peace. It is a massive transition, and you would not expect it to be otherwise and in just the last two weeks we have had a couple of attempts to reset the balance of forces in Sudan.

Why is it significant for the Middle East and North Africa? All the elements we have in the Sudanese microcosm as it were, are present in the larger region. We have authoritarianism or the remnants of authoritarianism that resist change. We have rent seeking dysfunctional economies that resist change and reform. We have, as Bernardino already mentioned, an extremely young population that can be a challenge and an opportunity at the same time. We also have, and I emphasize that because it is so important, a society that is much more connected to the world, more technology savvy and open to the world, than the old elites that were overthrown in the coup and then the revolution of 2019. If Sudan can succeed in this transition, with very difficult starting points economically, then I think the rest of the region can to.

That brings me very briefly to the geopolitical picture. As I said in the beginning, Sudan is much more influenced by developments in Africa, Ethiopia, Chad, South Sudan, than by developments in the classical Middle East. The question for me, which is probably an academic one to an extent, is whether this concept of Middle East, North Africa will still be relevant in 2030. Is it not rather that we will have different subregions with different orientations and different levels of integration? Indeed, I think the answer to the question of which geographical concepts, geopolitical concepts apply in 2030 lies in the patterns of integration and connectivity. It could well be that parts of North Africa are much more part of a wider European economic space than of a MENA region. It could well be that the Gulf is a much stronger player in the Indian Ocean and Africa than in North Africa or the classical Middle East. It could well be, and I hope it will be, that Sudan will be a center of integration in East Africa. Political influence will come through connectivity and linkages rather than the traditional ways of buying off your clients in a neighboring country and subverting the neighbor if possible.

To conclude, I think the Gulf States, and since we are in the United Arab Emirates and happy to be here, will have a great opportunity to help peaceful development not only in Sudan but in the entire subregion, by thinking about connectivity and linkages. By not only investing in port infrastructure, as I know the United Arab Emirates is doing along the African coast, but also the linkages between the ports and the deeper inner side of Africa as it were through rail and road, for example, to Sudan's landlocked neighbors, Chad, Central African Republic, South Sudan and Ethiopia. That would make Sudan not only a center of integration but also a pillar of stability and regional development.

Finally, if I may, my advice to regional and international players who see that the situation in Sudan and many other countries is still fluid, is to invest geoeconomically in connectivity. It helps your economic interests and those of the countries you invest in and invest politically in institutions and power sharing, rather than in trying to find your own clients or to manipulate the political outcomes.

John Andrews

Thank you very much indeed, Volker.