

On Alex de Waal's view of the uprising in Sudan: A brief critique
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Alex de Waal presumes to offer in the *Sudan Tribune* his view of how to "make sense of the protests in Khartoum" (<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article48459>). There is much that is useful in his account, but also much that is tendentious—especially in characterizing the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), with its large and growing number of deeply disgruntled mid-level officers. And there is also much that is fuzzy or wrong-headed, particularly in his account of the economic forces that have brought Sudan to the point of 50 percent inflation, an increasingly worthless currency, a lack of foreign exchange currency—which is creating severe problems for the economy, as well as more inflation—and continuing profligate military expenditures on weapons and a vast security apparatus. De Waal mentions the once crucial agricultural sector only briefly in passing ("the agricultural sector [will be hit hard] as diesel prices rise"); and yet the virtual collapse of the agricultural sector is one of the most destructive legacies of the Khartoum regime's 24 years of economic mismanagement.

There is also much that is simply pusillanimous, including the sniping at the forms "social media" have so far taken, inside and outside Sudan, among Sudanese and non-Sudanese. He suggests there is one dominant model, but this isn't the case, as is readily apparent if one actually takes the time to look at the emerging "social media" and think about all that this phrase encompasses. To be sure, there is at present, as de Waal asserts, a critical lack of organization and leadership, precisely because the regime has honed so well its skills at repression, using much that it has learned from other "Arab Spring" countries. But the organizing and leadership efforts continue and make progress daily.

But most disturbingly, de Waal is intellectually dishonest in speaking about the National Islamic Front/National Congress Party regime, as well as its murderously brutal security forces and the future of the Sudanese economy. He declares:

"Sudan's political economy needs a structural transformation, and dismantling the ruling party and security institutions will not achieve that."

What de Waal doesn't say is that the only way such a "structural transformation" *can* take place is to "dismantle" this deeply corrupt and grossly self-enriching regime, as well as its vast political patronage system, and end the unconstrained brutality of the "security institutions" that preserve the regime's hold on power. True, such removal won't in and of itself produce a transformation of the political economy—but removal is the *necessary* cause. What might be the *sufficient* cause for economic "transformation" is still unclear, and it will take some time for Sudanese to find their way. The challenges are many.

But nothing is helped by de Waal's obvious confusion of *necessary* and *sufficient* causes of change in Sudan. This is finally a form of intellectual dishonesty—or extraordinary logical stupidity—and it thoroughly vitiates the largest claims—explicit and implicit—in his analysis.