

Interview - Prince El-Waleed M. Madibo

Written by E-International Relations

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Prince El-Waleed M. Madibo is a Senior Analyst for the Ministry of Development in Doha, Qatar and belongs to the Sudanese nobility, as his father was Minister of Defense for Sudan. Prince Madibo has been involved in coexistence efforts in the Darfur area for many years. He established a coexistence organization in Sudan named Gouvernance Bureau, which organized multicultural festivals. Prince Madibo received a Bachelor's in Civil Engineering from the University of Khartoum, and an MA in Structural Engineering from the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Florida, Gainesville.

Patricia Woods was on his doctoral committee as Middle East expert, because of his work on Islam and institutional development in Sudan. Both communicate regularly via Skype. One conversation, reproduced below, revolved around Prince Madibo's work and career trajectory in Sudan, and, now, Qatar.

Did you have knowledge or experience growing up that made you think about coexistence work as an area of need?

When I was three years old, my dad was Defense Minister to Sudan. Once the second democracy was toppled by a military dictatorship, my father's involvement in politics took a different route. But, I never felt the pressure of politics, be it tribal or ideological politics. As I started growing up, the more I visited my relatives in Western Sudan, I started becoming more alert to the injustice that the periphery was facing. I mean, these are the most productive people in Sudan, and yet, whichever profit they make is reaped by the middle man. But it was just impressions. Those are some of the things that pushed me into studying development and comparative politics, so now I can intellectualize things. As a youngster, I could just see that these people were living, somehow, an impoverished life. But, for me, it was just material impoverishment. They were very rich, spiritually; they were very happy with the kind of life they were having. In a way, they were not deprived. Compared to today, the pre-capitalist elite back then in the 70s and 80s gave the poor just enough to survive. But now, the poor is being deprived completely of anything that could make them lead a dignified life.

Why did you choose to go to graduate school and study development, economic and institutional?

At one time, I visited Ad-Du'ayn, which is a city in East Darfur now. That's where my family on my Dad's side originated. I was passing from our family house to the *souk* [public market], and occasionally I would hear voices of women. A couple of times I asked, and they told me that it's a woman who died while giving birth. That put its imprint in my heart and in my mind. Because, I mean, I had an aunt on my Mother's side who died while giving birth. But it wasn't as frequent. In the periphery, it was happening a lot. Now that I am a development expert, I know that my observations were not totally off-course.... So, while I was growing up, my Dad had an engineering consultancy firm, and I was just following my Father's footsteps.... I even insisted, when I came to the U.S., to do my first Master's in Structural Engineering. After having worked in Engineering in America for a couple of years, I realized that Engineering was not for me; or, more importantly, it wasn't answering the questions that mattered to me... So I decided, I'm going to do a Ph.D. in Economics. The closest that anything resembled Humanities to me was Economics. But, once I started my first semester, I realized that Economics was not for me, either, and that I am more of an interpretivist than a rational choice person. So, I went to the Dean of the Liberal Arts. He looked at me and he said, "Son, go ahead. I was a pilot, and I moved into Business Administration. So, I know exactly where you're

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coming from.” So, I found myself in the political science department. With the patience and help of my professors, I persevered. I managed.

***Gouvernance Bureau*. Why did you start it, and what are its basic activities?**

When I moved back to Sudan, I realized that, not only do the leadership lack the vision, but they don't have the developmental strategy. Even worse, they were not planning to put any form of institutional capacity that we need to put the nation into a brighter future. So, together with some experts, we decided that, rather than just speaking about the negatives of the regime, let us try to positively influence the direction of things by bringing in an enlightened and scientific view of politics. That's where my interest in *Gouvernance Bureau* came in. In addition to conducting seminars for civil society groups, for policy makers, lawyers, women's groups and the like, we arranged for some cultural festivals. We felt that culture is a really strong tool by which you can bring people together. You can provide a window through which they can see life differently. Those programs were financed mainly by USAID. They were, some of them, successful stories. We did lectures. We arranged for coexistence festivals. We utilized the things that people loved most, which was horse racing and some other sports activities.

How did you get into government work?

A friend of mine called me to visit Qatar. They were looking for some development experts. I came at a time when Qatar was involved in the planning and implementation of its national development strategy. So, that was, I mean, I believe that everything is determined by a Godly act. But, when I moved into the Ministry [of Development], I realized that, only now do I understand development. Because now I am part of an apparatus. It is a practitioner's desk. So, only now could I combine the practitioner's and the academic's perspectives. Thinking about academia, I know I can only now speak about the structural, institutional, and behavioral challenges in doing development in a specific context, especially an area of the Middle East. And, I think, the Gulf Area has some particularities and idiosyncrasies.

Do you have any advice for faculty or graduate students who are interested in going into government work?

I think they ought to read more into the practitioner's story. In graduate school, we didn't necessarily feel the need for a practitioner's point of view. But their view is very important.... And I think there is a lesson in this from Trump. I mean, look at all the predictions. All of these scientists, statisticians, academics, technicians, and policy analysts, they missed the point. Probably, the tools that we were using were wrong.

Do you have any advice for Trump, as someone who has been on both the scholar's and the practitioner's side?

Trump listened well to the pulse of the American public. But, he should not allow himself to be carried too much following that intuition. At some point, it has to be an educated Intuition. Now that he has won, he ought to listen to experts.... I, personally, I like the guy. I like his bluntness. I am less a critic of Trump than of the capitalist system itself.... He shouldn't assume that people hate him. Because, obviously the election showed that there are people who like him. I mean, I am an African Muslim who speaks Arabic, and, yet, I like him. If he is to rule the free world, he ought to be looking out for friends all over the world, not only in America. And definitely in Sudan.... For me, Obama was just a cheer leader. Yes, he brought unemployment down, but he was so careful playing by the rules of the game that he compromised his own soul.... When [Columbia University Professor Joseph] Stiglitz told Obama that he should nationalize the banks instead of bailing them out, Obama wouldn't do it. Trump is a very successful guy. He obviously has some qualities. You can't just rule him out. I think that if Trump is to fulfill his promise to the American people, he ought to bring in some socialist views.... I can't see how he is going to fulfill his promise to the American people by adopting a private enterprise philosophy. It ought to be a national economy theory.

So, he has to ride a line between being too constrained by the policy people around him, and being too much of a maverick?

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Yes. And he shouldn't assume that people hate him. Because, obviously the election showed that there are people who like him. I mean, I am an African Muslim who speaks Arabic, and, yet, I like him. So, he has to look out for people and not assume that they hate him. I mean, he should not assume that every African, every Black, every Muslim, everyone who speaks Arabic, for example, that they are enemies. Because, if he is to rule the free world, he ought to be looking out for friends all over the world, not only in America. And definitely in Sudan. I am a big fan of his. If I were a Prime Minister for my nation, I would consider Trump a friend. For me, Obama was just a cheer leader. Yes, he brought unemployment down, but he was so careful playing by the rules of the game that he compromised his own soul. Is that too harsh?

How do you explain the American election?

I think that the Americans were very clever in making a differentiation between public morality and private morality. I think that, although they wanted to catch Trump on that saying of his [about women], people look at it more as a private morality issue than an issue of public morality. So, Clinton failed on an issue of public morality. Trump should not have said what he said in "locker room talk." But, that is nothing compared to bailing out a group of thieves and making them more rich, so rather than having a \$5 million yacht, you now have a \$15 million yacht. That's what I mean about Obama selling his soul. He couldn't go against the establishment even in this matter. When [Columbia University Professor Joseph] Stiglitz told him that he should nationalize the banks instead of bailing them out, Obama wouldn't do it. I think that if Trump is to fulfill his promise to the American people, he ought to bring in some socialist views. If someone made that much money independently, he has some qualities. There is no way you can just rule him out. I think he is going to learn to be more politically correct. And he is definitely courageous. I relate to him, somehow. But I can't see how he is going to fulfill his promise to the American people by adopting a private enterprise philosophy. It ought to be a national economy theory.

Do you have some concluding thoughts for students of international politics?

My doctoral mentor once told me, "Waleed, it is one thing misreading a question; it is another designing a policy that would negatively affect the lives of millions." This is the moral lesson. It is the one that matters most when we go out into the world.