

MUNICH, 3 September 1971 (CAA/X).

The signing on May 28 of the 15-year friendship treaty between Egypt and the Soviet Union led the Beirut newspaper, Al-Nahar, to speculate on June 25 that Russia might be hurrying to sign agreements with Arab countries out of fear of Chinese expansion. If this were so, then Sudan was undoubtedly high among Moscow's priorities, as a country with both Arab and African links which could offer port facilities on the Red Sea comparable to those Russia now enjoys on Egypt's Mediterranean coast. A recent increase in Chinese aid offers was an added incentive.

Sudan clearly presents a worthwhile target for Soviet influence, but Soviet ambitions received a blow when President Nimeri returned to power three days after being ousted by the Communist-backed coup of July 19. Although, in the interests of wider policy objectives, Moscow had previously supported Nimeri and had largely ignored his efforts to curb the Sudan Communist Party (SCP), Russian sources gave a cautious welcome to the insurgents; so when Nimeri, restored to power, executed the SCP leadership, Moscow protested bitterly, as did most other Communist Parties. However, as Moscow Radio pointed out on August 4, China had not done so; she had "even welcomed those whose hands were stained with the blood of Sudanese Communists and democrats". In fact, Chinese comments on Sudanese events have been minimal, but a New China News Agency (NCNA) reference to the rebels as a "coup clique" indicates that Peking supports Nimeri. The President himself told the Cairo Akhbar al-Yawm that China's stand was honourable and sound because it comprehended all the events. He said he did not want relations with the Soviet Union to deteriorate, "but if this hostile attitude continues we will counter it with a similar attitude. We cannot keep quiet about any country trying to interfere in our internal affairs".

Evidence that the estrangement between the two countries was likely to affect Russian aid to the Sudan came in the statement of the Sudanese Minister for the Economic Sector, Mohamed Idris Mahmud, reported by Omdurman Radio on August 9. He claimed that the Soviet "hostile attitude" and the suspension of imports from Russia would not harm Sudan's economy; rather the Soviet Union would be affected. He added that cotton exported to Russia under the payments agreement had been re-sold to India and other countries. Of almost equal significance was the announcement by the Sudanese Planning Minister, Brigadier Mohamed Abd al-Halim, on August 7, that Sudan would strengthen its economic ties with China but would refrain from co-operation with countries blocking its development. Yet now that there are unconfirmed but persistent reports that Soviet experts in Sudan - recently estimated to number 2,000 - are returning to Russia, while the Defence Minister, Major-General Khaled Hasan Abbas, is leading a delegation to Peking for talks on strengthening bilateral relations, it seems probable that Nimeri intends to change the source of his aid in the Communist world.

The President visited China in August, 1970, and is known to have been much impressed by what he saw. It is unlikely that China could offer aid on the scale which the Russians could afford, but her assistance could still be substantial and perhaps exert a psychological attraction, since the discrepancy between the donor and the recipient of the aid is not so apparent. China's efforts to create a modern industrial economy have, in the past decade, been largely an exercise in self-help. Cut off from Soviet aid and expertise, Peking has nonetheless reached the stage where it is able to offer modest help to other countries, such as the Sudan, which faces similar problems. An aid agreement with China

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is therefore nearer to an arrangement between equals than a gift of technological expertise from an economically and technically developed nation to an underdeveloped one.

Although trade and technical agreements were in operation before Nimeri's visit to China, his visit gave new impetus to co-operation; detailed economic, technical, cultural and scientific agreements were concluded on August 12, 1970, the day before the President left. He later said that the Chinese would provide a loan of over £19 million sterling, interest free and repayable over ten years. The agreements also provided for the construction of a fertiliser plant, textile, sugar and paper factories and other small industries, and for the supply of consumer goods. Nimeri commented that China provided top quality equipment which met international specifications, and at international prices.

As a result of the agreements, small groups of Chinese experts began to arrive in Sudan. In December, 1970, 23 Chinese experts reached Khartoum to study projects for establishing factories and a further 14 followed. These may have included three Chinese survey teams who came in late December to work on Chinese-assisted industrial projects covered by the August agreements. Chinese surveyors helping to build a conference hall in Khartoum were received by Nimeri on June 19, 1971. Sudanese Press sources reported in May, 1971, that six Chinese experts were in Khartoum drawing up a programme for co-operation in rice-growing. In the same month Omdurman Radio said that a Chinese delegation was carrying out soil experiments north of Hasahisa as part of a joint project to establish a textile factory. A trade protocol for 1971 was signed in March, fixing the value of trade exchanges at £12 million sterling, a claimed increase of 24 per cent over the previous year. On June 10, Omdurman Radio reported that China had agreed to finance and implement the Wad Medani-Gedaref road project within the framework of the August, 1970, economic agreement; China has provided a loan of £14,500,000 sterling and has also sent experts to Sudan to study further projects suitable for Chinese finance. Middle East Press reports in the same month quoted Japanese estimates that China has promised 42 million dollars in foreign aid to the Sudan. Other projects in which the Chinese are believed to be interested include the development of the fishing industry in Lake Nasser, the expansion of veterinary services, a factory to make medicines and the supply of medical equipment.

Medicine has so far provided the main area of non-economic Chinese aid to Sudan. In November, 1970, the Sudanese Minister of Health discussed medical co-operation with the Chinese Ambassador and on December 14 signed a health protocol between the two countries. The discussions also dealt with the activities of a Chinese medical mission to Sudan, probably the same as the Chinese medical team later reported to be working at the Buluk hospital in Omdurman, whose work was praised by the Sudanese Government and welcomed by the people, according to the NCNA on May 10, 1971. The visits to China of a Sudanese friendship delegation in May and a government delegation in June are further indications of Khartoum's approval of Chinese aid efforts.

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