

M/E -- SUDAN: AFTERMATH OF THE COUP

MUNICH 25 August 1972 (CAA/X)

Although the abortive, Communist-backed coup of July, 1971, deprived President Nimeri of power for only three days, its aftermath appears to have wrought major changes in Sudan's foreign and domestic policies. At home, Nimeri - much strengthened by his success in ending the 17-year-old rebellion in Southern Sudan - has formed his Sudanese Socialist Union (SSU) unhindered by opposition from the Sudan Communist Party (SCP), which was destroyed as an effective political force following the failure of the coup. In his foreign policy, he has denounced the Soviet Union and most of its European allies for their attitude to the attempt and has turned both to China and to the West for economic and trade alternatives.

Moscow has long been ambivalent in its dealings with the Nimeri regime. Prior to July, 1971, it had largely ignored his efforts to curb the powerful SCP, preferring, as in Egypt, to cultivate the party in power. But when the coup appeared to have succeeded, Soviet sources gave a cautious welcome to the insurgents; and this turned to bitter protest when Nimeri, restored to power, executed SCP leaders. The Soviet party organ *Pravda*, on July 31, 1971, denounced "the mass-scale bloody reign of terror... in particular against the leaders and members of the Sudanese Communist Party", while a meeting of Communist Party leaders in the Crimea on August 2, 1971, attended by Bulgaria, Hungary, East Germany, Mongolia, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, condemned "the anarchy and acts of repression committed by the Sudanese authorities" (*Moscow Radio* August 3, 1971).

For his part, President Nimeri expelled the Bulgarian Ambassador and the Soviet Counsellor. Egyptian sources reported that he did not seek a deterioration in relations with the Soviet Union, "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". The Sudanese Government also closed the East German cultural centre as from April 23 "for reasons connected with the security of the country", in the words of Omar al-Haj Musa, then Acting Foreign Minister. On February 2, 1972, in an interview with the Beirut *Al-Ahwar*, the President described relations with Moscow as "extremely bad", adding that "the Soviet Union encouraged the Sudanese Communist Party to oppose the Sudanese revolution". The President developed the theme of Communist subversion at

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a Khartoum rally, reported by *Omdurman Radio* on August 10, 1972, when he was speaking of the value of scholarships abroad. He said:

"I caution you against sending your sons to East Europe... because the children there have slipped from the government's and your hands. There is very strong pressure to push them into becoming Communists... I advise not only the Sudanese, but every State friendly to me, and particularly the Arab-African States, not to send their children there. The Communists infiltrate all activities: they sabotage and do not work".

The Russians, however, have apparently been trying to improve relations with Sudan. Soviet diplomatic staff in Khartoum have been changed and in May, Major Awad Abu Zeid, Secretary-General of the SSU, claimed that Sudan was beginning to respond to Soviet efforts. He did not go into detail, but evidently spoke out of turn, for on May 29, *Omdurman Radio* announced his dismissal from the SSU post. On the same day, *Moscow Radio* reported that President Podgorny had congratulated Nimeri on the occasion of the third anniversary of the May 25 revolution. In an interview with the Beirut magazine *Al-Hawadith*, reprinted in the Sudanese newspaper *Nile Mirror* on June 22, Nimeri commented: "Astonishingly enough, he did not congratulate me on my safety following the July abortive coup nor on the occasion of Sudan Independence Day".

But the most surprising evidence of Moscow's *volte-face* was broadcast by *Omdurman Radio* on February 15, 1972, when it quoted the Sudanese newspaper *As-Sahafa* for a report that Vasil Bilak, a Presidium member and Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party with special responsibility for relations with fraternal parties, had strongly criticised Sudanese Communists for the attempted coup. Bilak was certainly speaking for Moscow; as Soviet forces still occupy Czechoslovakia, a man in his position could hardly do otherwise. His remarks were also reported by the independent French newspaper *Le Monde* of February 12, 1972, which said that he had made them as early as October 21, 1971, in a closed session of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak party, and they had only since come to light. Bilak claimed that the then Secretary-General of the SCP, Abd al-Khaliq Mahgoub, had "begun to prepare a military coup of which neither we nor the other fraternal parties knew anything". The coup, he said, had been badly planned, had lacked the support of the masses and had been directed against "the progressive officers of Nimeri" who had themselves overthrown a government representing feudal and big bourgeois interests. Bilak added: "It would not have been wise willingly to abandon positions acquired with difficulty in Sudan or elsewhere. We would only have played into imperialism's hands..." This view contrasted sharply with that of the Czechoslovak party newspaper *Rude Pravo* on July 29, 1971, which in an obituary to Mahgoub expressed "resolute condemnation" of the measures taken against the Sudanese Communists.

It is in economic relations that Nimeri's distrust of Moscow is most obvious. The barter basis of much of the trade between the two countries has made it difficult to estimate the exact value of trade and aid agreements, but according to *Moscow Radio* in February, 1970, an agreement for 1971-75 stipulated that the Sudan would pay for Soviet goods by traditional exports, which the USSR would buy at a fair price. The

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report added that in the preceding three years, Sudan had exported goods worth some 30 million roubles (\$33,300,000 at the official exchange rate) to the Soviet Union, including 30,000 tons of cotton. Reports in March, 1970, foresaw an increase in the volume of trade to over \$48 million. Cotton plays a major role in Sudan's economy, constituting some 60 per cent of her foreign earnings: at the time of the coup, the Soviet Union was dominating cotton exports, sending in exchange some \$36 million worth of arms, tractors and consumer goods and \$3 million in cash. This led to Sudanese criticism that, while it is easy to value cotton at world prices, it is not easy to value Russian helicopters. There have also been complaints about the quality of Russian goods, particularly of the tractors, which were felt to be overpriced and inefficient.

Economic tension emerged publicly in the wake of the coup. Press reports in mid-August, 1971, quoted Mohamed Idris Mahmud, the Sudanese Economic Minister, as saying that imports from the Soviet Union had been suspended after Moscow had violated a trade agreement. He accused the Russians of charging 30 per cent more than international rates on its sales to Sudan under the bi-lateral trading agreement, and also of selling Sudanese cotton at discounts of ten per cent in Sudan's traditional markets. His Ministry said that Moscow had bought almost 60 per cent of Sudan's cotton, paying for it one quarter in hard currency and three quarters in military equipment. It had then sold it to India and other countries. Sudan has taken action to prevent Soviet re-sales (a problem which has also embarrassed Egypt intermittently since the 1950s) and Mahmud promised revisions of all the violated agreements. However, he praised China and Yugoslavia for respecting their trade agreements to the letter.

Increased cooperation

Mahmud's reference to China was an indication of future Sudanese policy. Cooperation with China has gathered impetus since July, 1971, although it was already extensive following Nimeri's visit there in August, 1970, when detailed economic, technical, cultural and scientific agreements were concluded. China offered a loan of \$42 million, interest free and repayable over ten years, and agreed to build a fertiliser plant, textile, sugar and paper factories and other small industries, and to supply consumer goods. In March, 1971, a trade protocol aimed to secure trade exchanges of \$12 million each way (or nearly \$63.5 million, double the recorded 1969 turnover). On June 10, *Omdurman Radio* reported that China had agreed to finance and implement the Wad Medani-Gedaref road project and in the same month Beirut Press reports quoted Japanese sources as saying that China had promised \$42 million worth of aid to Sudan.

Economic contacts increased greatly after the coup: on August 24, 1971, the two countries signed a \$42 million economic agreement in Khartoum. In December, a Sudanese delegation led by the former Vice-President, Maj.-Gen. Khalid Hassan Abbas, visited China and obtained a loan of \$40 million on easy terms. *Omdurman Radio*, reporting the agreement on December 24, added that loans from China to Sudan since August, 1970, amounted to some \$80 million. On January 10, 1972, the radio said that Sudan was to import \$14 million worth of building materials and on May 27 it reported that under an agreement signed that day, trade exchanges between the two countries would amount to \$80 million, equally shared.

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These developments have caused an influx of Chinese personnel and there has long been speculation that the Chinese were replacing Soviet experts. *New China News Agency (NCNA)* reported on March 1, 1972, the "warm hospitality" accorded to Chinese technicians by the Sudanese people. *Omdurman Radio* said on June 20 that 77 Chinese engineers and technicians had begun surveying the Wad Medani-Gedaref road, and some sources claim that up to 1,000 Chinese are now working in the Sudan.

It is, however, in military assistance that the Chinese have made their most spectacular contribution. On April 16, 1972, *Omdurman Radio* reported that they had agreed to help in training the Sudanese armed forces; but the appearance of ten Chinese-made tanks and some MiG aircraft at the revolution anniversary parade in Khartoum, on May 25, indicated that Sudan had become the first Arab country to receive heavy Russian-type, though Chinese-made, military equipment. On June 1, Beirut's *Al-Hawadith* carried an interview with the Sudanese Chief of Staff, Maj.-Gen. Khalafallah, and with Nimeri. Khalafallah said the Chinese had delivered the arms promptly and had supplied every tank and aircraft with a complete set of spare parts, "unlike the Russians who used the spare parts as a pressuring tool and sold these parts at several times the price of the weapons themselves". Nimeri said that the weapons were a gift and that Peking had "supplied us with a complete brigade of tanks and eight MiG-17 aircraft". He added: "We could have saved a lot of the hard currency we had paid to the Russians" for arms. At the Khartoum rally he said of Moscow and its allies: "We do not need them... With your permission I shall even offer them their weapons at half price" (*Omdurman Radio*, August 10).

Soviet delays

Nimeri told *Al Hawadith* that the Chinese discharged their commitments conscientiously, "the reverse of the Soviets who are slow in implementing agreements and who delay the delivery of machinery". A chest hospital being built by the Russians at Suba was useless, according to the President, "because it is below the standard of progress that has been made in dealing with such diseases. We have to re-build it at our own expense in accordance with the modern standards of science and progress. Although the loan had been agreed ten years ago, execution of the project did not begin until recently". He added that the Chinese rejected the idea of "planting military experts and technicians in nationalist armies"; when their training mission was accomplished "they immediately left the country. Russian experts are quite the opposite. They are still with us now, but I will not renew any of their contracts". The President said he did not fear that any "strings" would be attached to Chinese aid, Chairman Mao having explained to him that China herself was "a developing country of the Third World". However, Sudan's experience with the Russians "suggests that they dictate their terms and are reluctant to listen to our point of view". They also charged the living expenses of their experts to the offered loan, unlike the Chinese, and required seven per cent interest on loans, whereas Chinese offers were interest free.

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Substantial though its aid is, Peking is unable to offer assistance on the scale that Moscow can afford and that Sudan needs. For that, Nimeri is turning to the West, and it is likely that Western aid will increase. In a speech at Juba on July 1, Nimeri thanked the United States for aid amounting to \$18 million towards the relief and resettlement of refugees in Southern Sudan. He said that this was the largest sum received from abroad and had led him to consider seriously the question of diplomatic relations with Washington. These were duly resumed on July 25 after a break of five years. (Sudan also resumed diplomatic relations with Federal Germany on December 23, 1971.) At the Khartoum rally (*Omdurman Radio*, August 10) the President announced that he had recently reached agreement with a British-American company to set up an investment organisation worth \$600 million; he expected this to improve Sudan's possibilities in industrialisation "for tens of years".

On ideological considerations, Nimeri made his attitude clear in a Press statement on May 25, 1972. According to a *Libyan Radio* report, "President Nimeri asked why economic and trade dealings with Western countries were called deviation and dealings with the Soviet Union 'progressiveness'. Sudan dealt with all who did not interfere in her domestic affairs; 'We respected all principles and scientific theories of the world. We took from them what suited us and rejected what did not suit us. We had chosen China, North Korea, Romania and Yugoslavia - Communist countries - as countries friendly to Sudan because we felt that their dealings with us were not followed by intervention in our domestic affairs. We dealt with other countries on the same principle. We did not care about the regimes or systems of these countries whether they were capitalist, Socialist or royalist. Every people was free to choose its regime and determine its future. We did not decide what regimes others should have'".

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