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SUDAN

The Never-Ending Crisis

Events in Sudan during 1987-88 were like a slow motion replay not only of the political scene in 1986-87 but, more ominously, of the situation that had prevailed more than 20 years earlier between 1965 and 1969.¹ The similarities were indeed striking, even to the prevailing feeling of frustration over the ongoing crises and the constant sense of impending disaster. The unfolding events were almost identical: the strained relationship of the Coalition Governments of the Umma Party and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP); the ineffectiveness of the Constituent Assembly as a national forum; the constant political Pickering between Government and Opposition; the lack of direction and purpose in foreign policy; and the economic malaise that had practically crippled the country. In the background of these daunting problems and, indeed, overshadowing them all, is the running sore in the south that seems to be inexorably seeping to the north, as though it is enacting a bizarre self-fulfilling nightmare.

In this almost surrealistic atmosphere 'the long-running, downward spiral of politics threatens to do permanent damage to political life and institutions in the country'².

POLITICAL AFFAIRS

The first of a series of political crises concerned the 'constitutional amendments' which had been one of the controversial issues since Sadiq al-Mahdi's Coalition

Government came to power in 1986. The amendments provoked criticism from opposition forces and the 'southern bloc' and dissensions among the Prime Minister's partners in government, the DUP. The amendments to the Transitional Constitution of 1985 concerned the source of legislation (Article 4) and the granting to the Government of power to issue 'provisional orders' when the Constituent Assembly was in recess (Article 100B). Opposition to the proposed amendments came mainly from the National Islamic Front (NIF), which feared that they were designed to give more power to the Executive and weaken judicial and legislative supervision of government activities. The Government argued that the proposed amendments were essential to 'achieve the goals and objectives of the 1985 April uprising'.³

To achieve a measure of consensus, the Government was forced to water down the proposed amendments before they were passed almost unanimously by the Constituent Assembly in April 1987. But hardly was that controversy resolved than a new crisis broke over the dissolution of the Cabinet by the Prime Minister in May 1987. The reasons for that measure were ostensibly to ensure more harmony in the new Cabinet and to instill more discipline in government actions. The Prime Minister referred in a press conference on 3 June 1987 to the poor personal performance by some DUP Ministers.⁴ In reality, the cabinet reshuffle was intended to remove the Minister of Commerce and Supply, Dr Muhamed Yusuf Abu Harirah, an outspoken critic of the Government's failure to curb the black market and the parasitic activities of the commercial community. When the new Cabinet was announced in early June 1987, all the other Ministers retained their positions, except Dr Abu Harirah and Zayn al-Abidin al-Hindi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs (B 536). The Prime Minister issued a statement reiterating his Government's intention to replace the 1983 September Islamic Laws with substitute laws and to work towards resolving the war in the south. To that effect, a memorandum of understanding between the Umma Party and the OUP was drawn up to clarify some of the items of the Koka Dam Declaration.⁵

The ousting of Abu Harirah was politically embarrassing to the DUP and tended to fuel the divisions within the party. There was clear resentment among the DUP leadership of the high-handed way in which the Prime Minister was manipulating his coalition partners, particularly when he attributed the collapse of his first Government to the failure of DUP Ministers, notably Abu Harirah and Zayn al-Abidin al-Hindi.

The negative effects of al-Mahdi's increasing credibility crisis were reflected not only in strained relations with his partners in government, but were undermining his claims to political leadership. In an interview with the BBC on 31 May 1987,

al-Mahdi made a distinction between Islamic Shari'a and the September Islamic Laws (which, he said, he would repeal 'at once') thus implicitly indicating that the proposed 'substitute laws' would be his own version of *Shari 'a*.

(In the same BBC interview, Sadiq al-Mahdi went on to argue that nowhere in the world could politics and religion be separated, giving as an example the role of the Queen of England as both Head of State and of the Church of England. Those who knew that Sadiq al-Mahdi was an Oxford University graduate in Political Science might have been surprised at such an unorthodox interpretation of the British political system. Those who knew him as a politician could only marvel at his exercise of cynical yet brilliant manipulation of politics and religion. To the uninitiated he sounded convincing.)

In early July 1987 the streets of Khartoum erupted with student demonstrations protesting against shortages of school materials and supplies. The two weeks of constant clashes between students and riot police were not confined to Khartoum; as the Government was trying to contain the demonstrations, some trade unions went on strike and others threatened to do so. According to *Sudanow*, 'the wave of anger resulting from the high cost of living, particularly of basic services, is being expressed by the public in one way or another'.⁶ It was obvious that the Government lacked a clear-cut policy, and was spending more time on internal squabbles than on governing the country.

In late July, a state of emergency was declared in order to enable the Government to 'stabilize market prices, maintain security, and prohibit all illegal dealings in hard currency'. Opposition parties decried the measure as a means to stifle democratic practices. In the face of mounting opposition, the Government made a partial retreat, withdrawing the emergency measures from the Constituent Assembly and confining their application to cases of 'armed robbery and smuggling'.⁷

The controversy over the emergency measures was hardly over when a new crisis between the coalition parties led to the dissolution of the Cabinet on 21 August 1987. At issue was the DUP nomination to the seat in the five-member Council of State vacated by the resignation of the DUP member. The Umma Party rejected the DUP nominee on the grounds that he had collaborated with the defunct Numayri regime. The Umma Party proposed, instead, to nominate Mirghani al-Nasri and obtained the endorsement of the Constituent Assembly, leaving the hapless DUP leadership in the lurch. The difficulties and political embarrassment of the DUP were underlined when the daily, *Al-Siyassa*, reported that it was in possession of a tape recording implicating a top DUP leader, the Deputy Prime Minister and

Minister of Interior, Sayyid Ahmad al-Hussayn, of receiving half a million Sudanese pounds from the Egyptian embassy in return for information deemed damaging to 'the national interest'.⁸ (B 537) It was an open secret in Khartoum that the incriminating taped conversation was leaked by the Umma Party.

As the situation of the crisis continued, leaving the country in a state of political limbo, there were reports of efforts to form a national government that included the NIF. The effectiveness of the NIF Opposition in making political capital out of the demonstrated failure of the coalition parties seemed to lend credibility to these reports. The Umma Party and the DUP, however, managed to patch up their differences and a new Coalition Government was formed. The NIF, on the other hand, intensified its attacks on the Government using its numerous press organs to heap abuse on the Umma and the DUP. The smear campaign was ugly, but it was highly effective in keeping the Government off-balance. In October, the Prime Minister lashed out at his opponents, both on the Right and Left. He accused the NIF of financial activities that subverted the national economy and of political actions that undermined the democratic process. The Left was denounced for trying to impose a secular system on the 'spears' of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). In a sombre editorial the independent daily, *Al-Ayam*, reminded the Prime Minister that if his accusations were correct he should take legal action.⁹

Ironically, it was the SPLA which provided the Government with a brief political reprieve when, on 11 November 1987, its forces captured Kurmuk town, on the south-eastern borders of Sudan. Although the capture of Kurmuk was a serious political and military blow to the Government, it was cynically exploited by the ruling parties as a cover for the appalling political situation in Khartoum. The war hysteria whipped up by the local Press, with the NIF taking the lead, created an unreal atmosphere in Khartoum as though the country had been invaded by aliens from outer space. The Government announced that all efforts would be directed to recapture Kurmuk. The public mobilization campaign identified the country as being threatened by the SPLA, Ethiopia and other external forces, and called the people to its defence. A southern observer noted that while southern towns had fallen in the past to the rebel forces they could safely be forgotten, but Kurmuk could not because it 'touches the northern consciousness'.¹⁰ The Sudanese Army recaptured Kurmuk on 22 December, and the event was an occasion for jubilant celebrations in the media. According to *Sudanow*, the event was 'a good present for the New Year and Independence Day, which the Sudanese people accepted with much gratitude and more faith in their Army'.¹¹ A more down-to-earth appraisal was given in an editorial of the *Sudan Times*:

If the battles over Kurmuk put to rest the notion that either side can win the war militarily, then perhaps the many lives lost in its conquest and reconquest will not be in vain ... The most important implication is the absolute necessity of achieving a peaceful resolution to the civil war. Kurmuk has served to focus the attention of the nation on the war. Hopefully, it will also focus the attention of the nation on the need for peace.¹²

After the hullabaloo over Kurmuk, the political situation reverted to its previous state of mutual recrimination and continuing squabbling. The two coalition partners, who had failed to form a new Cabinet following the dissolution of the last one, still had several problems to resolve. These centred on the conflict over control of the security organization, the redistribution of ministerial portfolios, and the authority of the Prime Minister in having veto power over cabinet nominees from the coalition partners.¹³

To break the deadlock, Sadiq al-Mahdi took a political gamble that threw the country into yet another state of political confusion and uncertainty. (B 538) On 15 March 1988, he presented a policy statement to the Constituent Assembly, outlining the achievements and the failures of the Governments he had presided over. He attributed the failures to the difficulty in a democratic process to reach agreement with his partners and to form a national consensus in the country as a whole. In order to overcome those constraints the Prime Minister asked the Constituent Assembly to endorse his policy statement, and to give him a free hand to implement his political programme for the two remaining years of the duration of the Assembly, or to accept his resignation.

It was not clear whether the Prime Minister was asking for a new mandate, or a vote of confidence, or whether he was merely flexing his political muscle. Whatever his purpose, his curious move at first seemed to rebound badly on him. The DUP declared itself against his statement and the opposition parties were up in arms against giving him any more power. There seemed to be no way for the Prime Minister to extricate himself from his self-imposed predicament, except through withdrawing his statement or trying to form a minority government with the southern political parties. According to a *Sudan Times* editorial:

What is particularly disturbing about the Prime Minister's appeal is his implicit faith in the power of words against a background devoid of action. It is all too easy for him to hide behind the argument that his Umma Party did not achieve a majority in the election, or that the democratic process is necessarily slow and complex. The fact is that the standard by which one measures the abilities and success of a national leader are the skills they bring to bear in winning the public's confidence and in building consensus around programmes. By this standard the Prime Minister has not been a

successful leader, and his appeal to the Assembly can readily be interpreted as a public acknowledgement of his failure.¹⁴

However, Sadiq al-Mahdi's tenacity in clinging to power seemed limitless. He deftly moved to secure the support of the southern political parties by proclaiming that the Sudan Transitional Charter-which he had drawn up in January-would be the corner-stone of his new policy. (The Charter explicitly stated that the issue of politics and religion would be left for the proposed National Constitutional Conference).¹⁵ The Prime Minister then moved to woo the NIF by agreeing to their condition that the 'substitute Shari'a laws' would be passed within a two-month period from the formation of a new Cabinet. Hassan al-Turabi, the NIF secretary-general, stated that his party would participate in the new Government 'so that Sudan's interests and its unity could be preserved, while the NIF still held on to its own principles'.¹⁶ The DUP was thus left with the option of joining the new Government (already dubbed the Government of 'national consensus') on Sadiq's terms, or of going into opposition. The faction-ridden DUP remained indecisive for some time but the leadership decided that being in the Opposition was not to its political advantage and meekly climbed back on al-Mahdi's band wagon. The originally controversial policy statement was passed almost unanimously by the Constituent Assembly, after being slightly amended to fit with the 'new' charter signed by the Umma, the DUP, and the NIF. The only opposition came from the four Communist Deputies. Sadiq al-Mahdi was able to turn his impending political debacle into a resounding triumph. Or so the figures indicated. One jarring note was the decision of the 'African bloc' of southern parties to go into opposition for what they called the Prime Minister's breach of faith in arriving at a separate deal with the NIF. When al-Mahdi tendered his resignation and was re-elected with the support of the Umma, the DUP, and the NIF, the majority of the southern parties nominated their own candidate, Eliaba Suror, leader of the Union of Sudan African Parties, who now became the Leader of the Opposition in the Constituent Assembly. (B539) It was an emphatic vote of protest over the trend to reintroduce Islamic *Shari'a* as a system of government.

The redrawing of the political map clearly entailed serious racial and religious implications. The Prime Minister had managed, single-handed, to replicate within the Constituent Assembly the old north-south schism that was tearing the whole country apart. The southern political parties, which had agreed to participate in the political process (and which had been denounced as docile and compliant office-seekers by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement [SPLM]/SPLA, and taken for granted as such by most northern political leaders), were signaling their lack of faith in Sadiq al-Mahdi, if not in the democratic process itself, by going into opposition. From the perspective of the SPLM/SPLA, these developments could

only vindicate their decisions to remain outside the political process and to carry on fighting. As an editorial in the *Sudan Times* warned:

The Prime Minister shows himself to have few, if any, moral scruples in regard to southern political opinion ... His actions can only inflame the attitude of southerners and serve to drive former supporters of democracy in Sudan to seek solutions outside the present parliamentary system.¹⁷

Nor was the feeling of disillusionment and frustration confined to southerners. The public at large was evidently fed up with the endless process of political wrangling, uncertainty, and the strains resulting from an almost non-existent government. The newly-forged alliance of the Umma, the DUP and the NIF was encountering difficulties even before it was consummated. At the time of writing, in April 1988, the much-heralded government of 'national consensus' had not yet been formed as the three partners continued their jockeying for position, and have so far failed to agree on an acceptable plan for power-sharing. As the tiresome saga continues, the future of government in Sudan remains as uncertain as ever.

THE GOVERNMENT (as at 15 May 1988)

Prime Minister: Sayyid Sadiq al-Mahdi (Umma)

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Transport: Aldo Ajo Deng (SSPA)

Foreign Affairs: Dr Husayn Sulayman Abu Salih (DUP)

Defence and Interim Minister of Interior: Gen. (retd.) Abd al-Majid Hamid Khalil (Umma)

Agriculture: Dr Fatih al-Tijani (DUP)

Energy and Mining: Bakri Ahmad Adil (Umma)

Cabinet Affairs: Salah Abd al-Salam al-Khalifa (Umma)

Irrigation and Water Resources: Mahmud Mohammed Beshir Jamaa (Umma)

Finance and Economic Planning: Dr Umar Nur al-Da'im (Umma)

Regional Co-ordination and Local Government: Richard Macubi (SSPA)

Health: Ohaj Mohammed Musa (DUP)

Industry: Dr Abd al-Wahhab Uthman (NIF)

Internal Trade, Co-operation and Supply: Dr Ali al-Haj Mohammed (NIF)

Economy and Foreign Trade: Mubarak Abdullah al-Fadil al-Mahdi (Umma)

Animal Resources: Dr Isma'il Abbakar (Umma) (B 540)

Public Communications: Taj ai-Sin MuslaLl Abd al-Salarn (NIF)

Education and Scientific Research: Shaykh Mahjub (Umma)

Justice and Attorney-General: Dr Hassan Abdullah al-Turahi (NIF)

Public Works and Housing Planning: Uthman Umar Ali (DUP)

Labour and Social Security: Matthew Obur (SSPA)

Culture and Information: Abdullah Mohammed Ahmad (Umma)

Social Welfare, Zakat and Refugees: Ahmad Abd al-Rahman Mohammed (NIF)

Youth and Sports: Joshua Dewal (SSPA)

Refugee Affairs and Relief: Hasan Ali Shabbu (DUP)

Public Service and Administrative Reform: Dr Fadlallah Ali Fadlallah (Umma)

Religious Affairs and Awqaf: Dr Abd ai-Malik al-Ju'li (DUP)

Tourism and Hotels: Amin Bashir Fallin (SSPA)

Without Portfolio: Angelo Beda (SSPA)

THE CONFLICT IN THE SOUTH

After months of acrimonious debate regarding the nature of the new administration in the south, the Interim Council of Southern Sudan was formed in early February 1987. The nine-member Council was to act as 'a sort of umbrella body' under which the three regions would function. The debate had centred on whether the south would be administered as one or three regions. While the Equatorian parties, represented by the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the Sudan African People's Congress (Sapco), wanted three regions, the other parties principally the Southern Sudan Political Association (SSPA) and the Sudan African Congress (Sac) were against redivision. The new arrangement was thus hardly satisfactory for either group, but it was understood that the formation of the Council was for 'an interim period pending the convening of the constitutional conference which would decide the permanent system of government in the country'.¹⁸

The long-awaited National Constitutional Conference was itself becoming a source of controversy. As every pressing national issue was left to be dealt with by the conference, it was repeatedly postponed precisely because the multitude of unresolved issues made even any proposed agenda more unmanageable than before.

Speaking on the second anniversary of the April uprising, Sadiq al-Mahdi launched a new 'peace initiative' on 6 April 1987, in which he promised that the Constitutional Conference would soon be convened. Shortly afterwards, another small civilian aircraft was shot down over the south by the SPLA, and the Government announced an end to the peace initiative. It was not clear if the downing of the aircraft was in retaliation to the brutal murder in late March 1987 of thousands of Dinka men and women at the hands of armed Rizeigat men in the town of Daien in the Darfur region.¹⁹ Both incidents did not augur well for the prospects of peace.

In a statement before the Constituent Assembly in mid-June 1987, the Prime Minister declared: 'What we face in the south is not a local mutiny but a tool of foreign intervention'.²⁰ The Trade Union Alliance (*al-Tajmuh al-Naqabi*), which had spearheaded the 1985 April uprising, accused the Government of contradicting itself by calling for peace and then for war, thus escalating the war in the south.²¹

At the same time the southern political parties expressed their misgivings about the Government's proposed 'substitute laws' as being little different from, or perhaps even worse than, the discredited September Islamic Laws. (B 541) The Sac objected to the application of the laws because they would create divisions within the country and the SSPA stated that such laws would encourage separation and discourage peace talks with the SPLM/SPLA. The Sudan Communist Party (SCP) stressed the need to uphold the Koka Dam Declaration as the basis for peace talks, and blamed the Government for deviating from its own peace initiative of April 1987.²²

The Government then found itself in the throes of yet another of its self-inflicted crises. The Prime Minister had dissolved his Cabinet in May 1987, and during the period of more than three weeks that the country was left without a new government the situation in the south had deteriorated to alarming proportions. There was widespread famine and starvation, and attempts to get supplies to the south were effectively undermined by the security situation. Transportation was the most serious obstacle impeding relief efforts. In October 1987 a train carrying supplies to the south was ambushed by the SPLA at Aweil. *Al-Ayam* warned against using the incident to frustrate the pursuit for peace.²³ An editorial in *Sudanow* suggested that an international formula be agreed upon to 'remove SPLA's fears that the extension of relief to the affected localities of the south is being used by the Government for military reinforcements'.²⁴

Most of the Khartoum media attributed the appalling situation in the south to the hostile attitude of the SPLA. But with the virtual absence of a responsible

government and the uncontrolled activities of armed tribal militias fighting alongside the Army, the spread of violence was bound to escalate. According to foreign reports-which were denied by the Sudanese Government-at least 200 civilians had been killed by government troops in the southern town of Wau.²⁵

All these actions and counteractions were hardly conducive to any serious peace effort, and the stance of some political elements in Khartoum seemed calculated to encourage a military solution. During a visit to Cairo in early July 1987, Dr Hassan al-Turabi, the NIF leader, called on the Egyptian authorities to support Sudan to achieve a military victory in the south, and warned that Sudan's failure to resolve the situation militarily could pose a threat to Egypt itself.²⁶

In a development which aroused mixed reactions in Khartoum, a delegation of the southern political parties and Anyanya II made a trip in August 1987 to Addis Ababa, Kampala and Nairobi for a round of negotiations with the SPLM/SPLA. The meeting in the Ethiopian capital issued the '4Addis Ababa Forum', which called for the convening of the constitutional conference in accordance with the Koka Dam Declaration. The reaction of the Prime Minister was to denounce the Forum's statement as 'unjust, unfair and would not be helpful to the peace process'.²⁷ According to him, the agreement would have been fair if the SPLA had been condemned for 'committing atrocities on the civilian population'.²⁸ However, when the southern parties and SPLA delegations subsequently issued the 'Kampala Declaration' and held a further meeting in Nairobi, the Government appeared to soften its initial angry reaction. The Prime Minister even praised the efforts made by Kenyan and Ugandan officials towards 'resolving the southern Sudan question'.²⁹ It was evident that while the Sudanese Government was unhappy about the whole negotiation tour of the southern political parties with the SPLA, it was careful not to link Uganda and Kenya to the kind of 'conspiracy scenario' usually reserved for Ethiopia.

When the border town of Kurmuk was captured by the SPLA in November 1987, the Government accused Ethiopia of direct involvement in the attack. Although Kurmuk had been recaptured towards the end of December, in January 1988 Kapoeta in Eastern Equatoria fell to the SPLA. (B 542) The Government decided to end talks with Col. John Garang as long as 'any part of Sudan was occupied'.³⁰ The decision was made when the security situation in the south was rapidly getting out of control. According to local reports, Juba itself was in danger of falling; all exits from the city had been sealed from early February, and the SPLA forces were active a few kilometres away.³¹ The serious security situation in the south was compounded by the appalling food crisis. It was clear that the Government was

incapable of either conducting a war or implementing a peace programme. As an editorial in the *Sudan Times* put it:

Stalemate under the conditions presently existing in Sudan is best conveyed by turning to such terms as anarchy and national suicide. Admittedly, these are strong terms, but they can already be legitimately applied to the situation in southern Sudan; barring an early and dramatic turn-around, they will soon describe life in northern Sudan as well.³²

THE ARMED FORCES

Military service was still voluntary as although conscription had been legislated it had not yet been implemented. Total armed forces numbered 58,500 and the defence budget for 1986-87 was £SI.10 bn (\$440.00m), excluding £S450m for internal security. The Army of 54,000, including air defence, had ten Regional Commands; one armoured divisional headquarters; one Republican Guard brigade; two armoured brigades; ten infantry brigades; one parachute brigade; three artillery regiments; and one engineer regiment. The Air Defence, which numbered 3,000, had two anti-aircraft artillery brigades, and one surface-to-air missile brigade (three batteries) with SA-2. Equipment (serviceability questionable) consisted of 155 T-54/-55, and 20 M-60A3 main battle tanks; 60 Chinese Type-62 light tanks; six AML-90, 15 Saladin, 50 Ferret, and BRDM-1I-2 armoured reconnaissance vehicles; 40 BTR-50/ .. 152, 30 OT-62/-64, 36 M-113, and 100 *Walid* armoured personnel carriers; 12 D-44 85mm, 40 25-pounder 88mm, 20 M-1944 100mm, Type-60 122mm, 36 M-46 and Chinese 59-1 130mm, and II Mk F-3 155mm guns; 18 M-I01 pack 105mm, and 64 M-1938/Type-54/D-30 122 mm howitzers; Al Saqr-JO 122mm multiple-rocket launchers; 100 81mm and 120mm mortars; Swingfire anti-tank guided weapons; M-167 towed and M-163 self-propelled 20mm, ZU-23-223mm, 120 M-1939/Type 63 37mm, 60 L-60 40mm, KS-12 85mm, and KS-19 towed 100mm anti-aircraft guns; and 20 SA-2 and SA-7 surface-to-air missiles.

The Navy numbered 1,500, and had four Yugoslav PBR and three 70-ton large patrol craft; four ten-t. coastal patrol craft; three reported river craft; and two Yugoslav DTM-221 tank landing craft. Serviceability of equipment was questionable. The naval base was at Port Sudan.

The Air Force of 3,000 had 43 combat aircraft (serviceability was questionable), and consisted of one ground attack fighter/interceptor squadron with some eight MiG-21; one ground attack fighter squadron with eight J-5 (MiG-17 type), six J-6 (MiG-19 type) and ten MiG-17; one counter-insurgency squadron with three BAC-167 Strikemaster (perhaps operational); two C-212 for maritime reconnaissance;

one transport squadron with four C-130H Hercules, four C-212, three Mystere-Falcon 20/50, one DHC-5D Buffalo and six EMB-II0P2 Bandeirante; one helicopter squadron with 20 IARJSA-330 Puma, ten BO-I05 and four AB-212 helicopters. Trainers included three Jet Provost Mk 55 (perhaps operational), three MiG-15UTI, two MiG-21 U, two JJ-5 (two-seat J-5), and two JJ-6 (two-seat J-6). (B 543) There were AA-2 *Atoll* air-to-air missiles. Six J-b fighters, two C-130 transporters and six AB-212 helicopters were on order.

Paramilitary forces numbered 3,000: 500 in the National Guard and 2,500 Border-Guards.

Opposition forces in the SPLA, operating only in southern Sudan, were estimated to number 20,000, organized in battalions, and equipped mainly with small arms including 60mm mortars, 14.5mm anti-aircraft, and SA-7 surface-to-air missiles.³³

SOCIAL AFFAIRS

POPULATION: The population in mid-1985 was 21.9m.³⁴

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Sudan's security crisis was not confined to the south and the south-eastern borders with Ethiopia. In Darfur region in western Sudan, the breakdown in law and order was assuming alarming proportions as a result of the -'spread of banditry, fighting between armed tribes and the spill-over of the war in Chad. The Libyan military presence was not only aggravating the security situation in the region, but was also causing considerable embarrassment to Sudan. Characteristically, the Government at first denied any presence of foreign troops in Darfur and then requested the Libyans not to use Sudanese territory to wage ~ against Chad. The discomfiture of the Sudanese Government was understandable: Sudan had launched a reconciliation bid to end the fighting in Chad, and it had earlier denied permission to France and the US to overfly Sudanese airspace near Chad's border with Sudan. Although Sadiq al-Mahdi was anxious to preserve good relations with Tripoli, the Libyans blatantly ignored his request to remove their troops. Libya's response was that 'we will confront Imperialism in the area even if that means using Sudanese territory to do so'.³⁵ The attitude of the Libyans apparently indicated that they were calling in some of the IOUs that they accumulated for their support of Sadiq al-Mahdi when he was in opposition and exile in the 1970s. They might also have been dismayed with the 'Brotherhood Charter' which al-Mahdi had signed with Egypt in February 1987. Far from being able to play a mediating role between Egypt and Libya, Sudan was finding it difficult to keep balanced relations with the two countries. 'The most striking fact is that relations between Sudan and Egypt,

on the one hand, and between Sudan and Libya, on the other, are inversely related: improvement with one is likely to upset the other'.³⁶

Relations with Egypt showed signs of improvement during 1987-88. The Prime Minister made an official visit to Cairo in February 1987, where he signed the so-called 'Brotherhood Charter' with the Egyptians. The issue of the extradition of ex-President Numayri which had been a sore point in bilateral relations since April 1985, was 'neutralized' by the Prime Minister's visit. Although the 'Brotherhood Charter' itself meant little in political terms, it was apparently taken by the Egyptians as a reaffirmation of the 'integration plans' initiated by the defunct Numayri regime. The official Sudanese view was that the charter replaced the unpopular integration agreements. It was perhaps a measure of the deterioration in relations since Numayri's overthrow that an Egyptian official described Sadiq's visit as breaking the 'psychological barrier between the two countries'. The Egyptian Press described the visit as 'a turning-point in Egyptian-Sudanese relations, opening a correct Egyptian understanding of Sudan's mentality (*sic*). Sadiq al-Mahdi himself called for the creation of a 'new formula to institutionalize the special relationship'.³⁷ (B 544) The new charter would, presumably, provide the frame-work for restructuring the process of co-operation between the two countries. It still remained to be seen how the 'freezing' of controversial issues would lend itself to the thawing of bilateral relations.

Of more substance and immediate concern was the Egyptian declaration that Cairo would support Sudan in its peace efforts to resolve the conflict in Chad, and that it would contribute to achieving stability in southern Sudan. The declaration seemed to pay more lip-service to the potential of each country to play a positive regional role in normal political circumstances than to actual political realities, given the constraints, political and otherwise, minimizing the actual diplomatic initiative that both Sudan and Egypt could undertake.

Ever since taking office in April 1986, Sadiq al-Mahdi had endeavoured to seek a regional peace role for Sudan despite the domestic problems confronting his Government. He had offered to mediate in the Iraqi-Iranian war, in the fighting in Chad, and between Egypt and Libya. In doing so he was invoking the role that Sudan had traditionally been successful in playing in the 1960s as mediator in the Arab and African conflicts on the basis that, as an Afro-Arab country, Sudan did not belong to any regional and international axis. But the Sudan of the 1980s differed from that of the 1960s. Sudan's peace-brokering was unlikely to yield any tangible results, given the complexity of such conflicts as those in the Gulf and Chad. According to foreign reports, 'Sudan's rulers, despite their desire to play a regional role, are acting at the neglect of their house'.³⁸

The most pressing issue for Sudanese diplomacy was relations with Ethiopia. The SPLM/SPLA had been conducting an effective diplomatic offensive in Africa, which was unwittingly helped by the efforts of the Sudanese authorities in trying to portray the civil war as a conflict between Arabs and Africans. Sudan had held Ethiopia responsible for the deterioration in bilateral relations and specifically accused it of complicity in the SPLA capture of Kurmuk. In its efforts to recapture Kurmuk, the Sudanese Government appealed to Arab countries '(Iraq and Libya), giving the impression that Arab-Islamic Sudan was under attack by anti-Arab African forces. The Iraqis were quick to provide military support for Sudan, and Kurmuk was recaptured. But the Sudanese authorities seemed oblivious to the long-term implications of such military and political tactics. No Arab support could win the war for the Sudanese Government; invoking the Arab versus African aspect of the civil war could only be a self-defeating exercise, not only regionally but also internally. Arab and African countries could only help Sudan to achieve peace and not win a civil war: 'The need of the moment is not to increase the rhetoric the need of the hour is, instead, to improve relations with Ethiopia as part of a wider strategy to facilitate peace initiatives in both countries'.³⁹ Instead of involving Sudan's Arab and African neighbours in 'a diplomatic assault on Addis Ababa', it would have been in Sudan's interest to 'acknowledge the disastrous effects of the war and call on friends to help bring a peaceful solution to the conflict'. It was obvious that Sudanese-Ethiopian relations needed a special attention that went beyond the rhetoric to address the root causes of strained relations:

Some of the most striking elements that we have in common at this juncture in time are that both States are at war with themselves, both blame the other of the continuation of those wars and both States look to the other as a way out of their internal difficulties Realism and progress in our relations with the Ethiopians assumes that a clear distinction be drawn between those areas that are within the purview and competence of our Governments to resolve bilaterally, and those areas that can be resolved only by Ethiopians talking to Ethiopians and Sudanese talking to Sudanese. If this distinction can constantly be borne in mind, and given sufficient political goodwill, there is good reason to look optimistically at the present round of discussions between Sudan and Ethiopia.⁴⁰ (B 545-46)

In late October 1987, a high-level Ethiopian delegation visited Sudan. The fact that the visit was taking place at all was regarded as a hopeful sign for improved relations. The delegation emphasized in a press release Ethiopia's determination to pursue and implement the principles of co-operation, friendly relations and noninterference in internal affairs of other countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit'. The delegation also conveyed to the Sudanese Prime Minister a

message from the Ethiopian leader, Mengistu Haile Miriam, calling for better bilateral co-operation.⁴¹

However, the occupation of Kurmuk in November by the SPLA, put an abrupt end to diplomatic efforts to move towards rapprochement between the two countries. But during the African summit held in Kampala in early December 1987, Sadiq al-Mahdi and Mengistu met and agreed to set up a joint committee to resolve differences and to work towards establishing more friendly relations.⁴² According to foreign reports, the meeting was the result of Egyptian mediation. Cairo's peacemaking role was again indicated during the surprise one-day visit of President Mubarak to the Sudan on 1 March 1988 when he offered to use Egypt's good relations with Ethiopia to mediate to resolve Sudanese-Ethiopian differences.⁴³ It was also reported in the local Press that Kenya's President, Daniel arap Moi, while on a visit to Cairo, called on all African countries to work on a plan to reach a peaceful solution of the southern Sudan conflict. The Kenyan President said that 'the African continent cannot hope for economic development until it secures internal peace and tranquility'.⁴⁴

It was not clear whether Egyptian mediation- which must essentially involve the assumption by Egypt of a neutral role *vis-a-vis* Sudan and Ethiopia- would be acceptable to the Sudanese authorities, particularly at a time when some political forces in Sudan (the DUP and the NIF) were invoking a supportive Egyptian attitude not only in Sudan's differences with Ethiopia, but also in the armed conflict against the SPLA. It is perhaps a measure of the confusion and lack of direction in Sudan's foreign policy that it could not articulate what is required from Sudan's neighbours and the kind of relationship, with friend and foe alike, that is acceptable to, and consistent with, national objectives.

ECONOMIC AFFAIRS (8.36 Sudanese pounds = £1; £2.93 = \$1, in March 1988)

Sudan's economic problems have been compounded by the country's difficulty in selling its cotton crop, the principal foreign currency earner, which brings in an average of \$150m. annually; this is between 40-50% of Sudan's export revenue. A breakthrough in the sale of cotton was made in early 1987 when a change in pricing policy was introduced by fixing prices in line with the international price index instead of following the uncompetitive, high prices set by Egypt. The flexibility in pricing led to a record sale that netted \$220m.⁴⁵ That was the only good news in an otherwise bleak economic picture.

Sudan's failure to reach an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) adversely affected the Government's ability to reach bilateral agreement with other

countries. In dealing with the IMF, Sudan found itself in the same predicament from which the country had suffered before. Much as the Government was willing to take some of the IMF economic prescriptions, it was well aware of their damaging political repercussions. (B 546)

In a speech before the Constituent Assembly in mid-March 1987, the Minister of Finance stated that Sudan's foreign debt would amount to c. \$10.6 bn by the end of 1987. The original debt was \$6.9 bn. and the interest charges accounted for \$3.7 bn. The Minister attributed the debt crisis to economic mismanagement and the absence of accountable and stable institutions. ⁴⁶ According to figures released in November 1987 by the Organization of African Unity during a special summit conference in Addis Ababa on the African debt issue, Sudan was identified as Africa's third most indebted nation. Sudan's debt was just over \$10 bn. third only to Egypt (\$30 bn) and Algeria (\$19 bn). Sudan was also on the list of the four least developed countries (with Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Mali). ⁴⁷ A report prepared by the World Bank dealing with the curing of the debt problem of Sudan's economy stated that:

In 1984, for a number of reasons, the rehabilitation programme came off-track. The new financial crisis is so severe that it cannot be slowed with traditional economic packages and debt rescheduling. The country has no credit-worthiness except for the most concessional forms of aid and, in fact, cannot even afford the terms of IMF facilities. The time is now pressing to find new solutions and an orderly process to address this crisis. In the absence of both strong economic measures and very generous aid, the true alternative scenario is the one whereby Sudan's balance-of-payment and debt problems would result in a sharp and chaotic downward movement of the economy at great cost to the Sudanese people. ⁴⁸

Economic estimates in the last quarter of 1987 indicated declining trade figures and greater economic pressures than ever before. While export revenues continued to fall, imported commodities- such as fuel and agricultural and industrial inputs - were paralysed by the lack of hard currency. Furthermore, the continuing conflict in southern Sudan was placing severe constraints on the economy, and more pressure was added by corruption, mismanagement, and rampant black-market activities. The Government had failed to generate hard currency exchange and to improve the worsening balance of payment deficit that amounted to \$8,750m. The production capacity of the industrial sector had been reduced to 30% due to the failure to provide industrial inputs. As a result, the cost of production and, subsequently, the cost of living had increased to unmanageable and unacceptable levels. ⁴⁹

Thus, when the Government was eventually forced to resume negotiations with the IMF, it was doing so from a considerably weakened position. On 26 September

1987, the agreement with the IMF was signed in Washington and the stringent terms immediately became clear. On 3 October, the Sudanese pound was effectively devalued by c. 80% (although the official figure given indicated a 20% devaluation). The new price of the dollar became £S4.5 instead of £S2.5. The agreement included the mandatory removal of subsidies on sugar and petrol, but other essential commodities such as bread, drugs, oils, and kerosene would remain subsidized. To curb inflation the money supply was to be kept to 23%. According to the Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, the new economic policy would generate £SS69m. The IMF would provide £S4.8 bn. within a four-year period, and redress the country's immediate balance of payment deficit of £S750m.

The expected political backlash to the IMF agreement was manifested as students took to the streets and opposition parties came out against the IMF measures. Both the NIF and the SCP expressed their opposition, and called on the Government to cancel the agreement.⁵⁰ Some Sudanese economists criticized the IMF deal as the worst agreement that Sudan could have made, and argued that the Government should have avoided negotiating from a weak position or, at least, (B547) followed the example of Brazil by refraining from repayment of arrears due to the IMF. Others maintained that further access to assistance from the international community made it imperative for Sudan to re-establish ties, however unpleasant with the IMF.⁵¹

The prospects of the Sudanese economy were very bleak indeed. Before reaching agreement with the IMF the Government declared a state of emergency, ostensibly to curb smuggling and corruption and to control black-market and currency speculation activities. In reality, the Government was preparing to be in a position to contain the political repercussions of accepting the IMF condition devaluing the Sudanese pound.

The dismal economic situation had been made clear when the Minister of Finance presented the 1987-88 Budget. He outlined the difficulties facing the implementation of the Budget as being: the absence of security in certain regions, particularly the south, which put a strain on available finance; the weak administrative performance of some public institutions; the problems related to the availability and receipt of foreign aid grants; and the lack of co-ordination between organs implementing the Budget.⁵²

THE 1987-88 BUDGET

The total of the new Budget was £S67,906m cf. £S56.655m for the previous fiscal year. Estimated revenue amounted to £S3,905.5m cf. £S2,806.3m in the previous year, while total expenditure was proposed at £S6,796m cf. £S5,665.5m for 1986-

87. The new deficit of revenue and expenditure amounted to £S2,885m, slightly over the previous Budget deficit of £S2,860m. Government earnings were expected to come from direct taxes estimated at £S2,379.3m. Current expenditure was assumed to increase by £S96.9m over the previous figure of £S3,376.6m. The deficit estimated at £S2,885m was proposed to be covered by loans and foreign grants. Loans were estimated to cover c. £S1,807m, development projects finance £S572m, and funds and corporation deposits £S249m. Security needs amounted to

31.7% of the total expenditure, with the armed forces receiving c. £S946m of the expenditure. 17.7% was allocated for education, with health services receiving 7.1 % of the total expenditure. The development budget was increased slightly from the previous year to £SI,533m (cf. £SI,381m). The regional development budget was increased by 65%. According to the Minister of Finance, the most critical issue in the Sudanese economy was related to Sudan's external debts. He told the Constituent Assembly that 'Sudan was unable to meet those debts despite the acceptance of the principle of repayment'.⁵³

The Budget deficit of £S2.5 bn. was to be covered from foreign aid and commodity loans. The Government's call for self-reliance and increased production meant little to many people who found their monthly income insufficient to meet their daily needs. As an editorial in the *Sudan Times* put it, 'Given last year's experience, we expected the Minister of Finance to come up with a more realistic Budget, yet his new proposals depend for nearly one third of the revenue on aid and commodity loans. This is major weakness of the Budget'.⁵⁴

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NOTES

1. For previous surveys of Sudan, see all 19 volumes of *ACR*, 1968-69 to 1986-87.
2. *Sudan Times*, 24 April 1988.
3. *Sudanow*, May 1987. I
4. *Al-Ayam*, 4 June 1987.
5. *Sudanow*, June-July 1987. The DUP was not a signatory to the Koka Dam Declaration of March 1987.
6. *Sudanow*, August-September I 1987.
7. *Ibid*

8. The Minister involved refused to appear before the investigation committee formed by the attorney-general (Umma) to look into the alleged 'cassette tape' case. *Al-Ayam*, 30 August 1987.
9. *Al-Ayam*, 26 October 1987.
10. Bona Malwal, *Sudan Times*, 30 November 1987.
11. *Sudanow*, December 1987-January 1988.
12. *Sudan Times*, 24 December 1987.
13. *Al-Ashigaa*, 8 March 1988.
14. *Sudan Times*, 23 March 1988.
15. According to some political observers, the Charter, which was regarded as a hollow and meaningless document, was intended to repudiate and render redundant all previous documents, such as the Koka Dam Declaration, for which the Prime Minister no longer had any use. But the interpretation of the rather ambiguous Charter had yet to be decided one way or another.
16. *Al-Rayah*, 30 March 1988.
17. *Sudan Times*, 26 April 1988.
18. *Sudanow*, January-February 1987.
19. In a published report on the Daien massacre, compiled by two lecturers from Khartoum University, it was alleged that the practice of slavery in southern Darfur was still active. The report, which received attention in the foreign media, provoked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to issue a statement denying the existence of slavery in Sudan.
20. *Sudanow*, June-July 1987.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Al-Ayam*, 18 November 1987.
24. *Sudanow*, February 1988.
25. *The Independent* (London) 21 August 1987.
26. *Sudan Times*, 2 July 1987.
27. *Ibid.*, 24 September 1987.
28. *Sudanow*, October-November 1987.
29. *Al-Ayam*, 22 November 1987.

30. *Al-Siyassa*, 7 February 1988.
31. *Al-Rayah*, 11 February 1988.
32. *Sudan Times*, 24 April 1988.
33. *The Military Balance, 1987-88* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1987).
34. *World Development Report, 1987* (New York: Oxford University Press for the World Bank, 1987).
35. *Sudanow*, May 1987.
36. *Ibid.* According to *Sudanow*, March-April 1987, 'Sudanese-Libyan relations from now on will be characterized by a lack of credibility on the part of the Libyan side. This, of course, will have a great impact on relations between the two countries in the short, if not in the long, run. The matter will be more complicated if the Libyan authorities do not understand that relations between the two countries are based on good neighbourliness and not on exchanges of favour. '
37. *Ibid.* See also *al-Tadamun*, 28 February 1987.
38. *MET*, 28 February 1987.
39. *Sudan Times*, 26 November 1987.
40. *Ibid.*, 8 January 1988.
41. *Ibid.*, 27 October 1987.
42. *MET*, 27 December 1987.
43. *Al-Ashigaa*, 8 March 1988.
44. *Al-Rayah*, 5 April 1988.
45. *AB*, February 1987. According to *Sudanow*, March-April 1987, up to the first quarter of 1987, 'Cotton harvested as far back as 1982 is still lying in warehouses at the production centres or at Port Sudan because of the failure of the Cotton Public Corporation, the body charged with marketing Sudan's cotton, to find buyers for it. '
46. *Sudanow*, 5 May 1987.
47. *Sudan Times*, 26 November 1987.
48. Cited in *Sudanow*, 5 May 1987.
49. *Sudanow*, August-September 1987.
50. As *al-Hadaf*, the organ of Sudan's Arab Ba'thist Party, put it on 11 February 1988, 'We are convinced that the scrapping of the IMF agreement was a national necessity because Sudan will continue to come under pressure from the Fund for more concessions, including further

devaluation of the Sudanese pound. We emphasize the importance of resisting such pressure and blackmail'.

51. *Sudanow*, October-November 1987.

52. *Ibid.*, August-September 1987.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Sudan Times*, 21 June 1987.

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