

Occasional Papers Series

THE POLITICS OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN THE SUDAN:
THE NUMAYRI REGIME AND THE NATIONAL FRONT OPPOSITION

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November 1984

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"I don't see much sense in that." said Rabbit.
"No," said Pooh humbly, "there isn't.
But there was going to be when I began it.
It's just that something happened to it on the way."
A.A. Milne. *The House at Pooh Corner*.

INTRODUCTION

The Historical and Political Background

Located astride a number of significant cultural and strategic boundaries, the Sudan occupies a key position between the Arab and African worlds. Its modern history can be traced to the Egyptian invasion in 1820, under the nominal sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire. The Turco-Egyptian occupation lasted for over sixty years and was ended in 1885 by an Islamic nationalist movement under the leadership of Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi. The Mahdist revolution succeeded in the reconstruction of a politically independent and unified Sudan; but the Mahdist state itself was short-lived. Al-Mahdi's successor, the khalifa 'Abdullahi, was defeated in 1898 by the combined forces of Britain and Egypt, and the Sudan came to be ruled under the so-called Anglo-Egyptian "condominium."

The political and administrative nature of this "dual rule" was to influence the evolution and orientation of the Sudanese nationalist movement. While the Mahdist followers, the Ansar, became identified with the idea of independent Sudan linked with Britain to undercut Egyptian influences, the rival religious sect the *Khatimīa* became associated with Egypt under the slogan of unity of the Nile Valley to counter British dominance in the country. The emergence of the major political parties followed the same sectarian lines: on the one hand, the Umma Party appeared as the political arm of the *Ansār*; and the other hand, the *Khatimīa* supported the Ashiqqa Party, later the National Unionist Party (NUP) and the pro-Egyptian People's Democratic Party (PDP), an offshoot of the NUP.

With the coming of self-rule in the early 1950s, the proposed *anschluss* with Egypt began to lose its attraction; it was, in fact, the NUP's first national government under Ismā'il al-Azhari which opted for the complete independence of the Sudan, officially proclaimed on January 1956. But because the nationalist movement and political parties were drawn along partisan and sectarian lines, the immediate post-independence period was marked by the intensification of old rivalries and intrigues and the creation of new political divisions.

In November 1958, the military stepped in under General Ibrāhīm 'Abbūd with the declared aim of finding effective solutions to the problems of nation-building and national integration. But the 'Abbūd junta only managed to exacerbate existing problems and corrosive domestic cleavages. The suppression of civil liberties in the north and the harsh and brutal policy to quell the rebellion in southern Sudan were hardly conducive to fostering any sense of social cohesion and national unity. The overthrow of the military government by a unique popular uprising in October 1964 seemed at first to herald a new era in the history of the Sudan but it, too, soon proved to be another false dawn. The traditional political parties, which resented the leftist composition and radical orientation of the transitional government, moved quickly to undermine its authority and by early 1965 made a successful bid to reassert their political ascendancy. The return of party politics, however, failed to resolve the "southern problem" and to find an acceptance formula for a permanent constitution.

By 1969 regional, sectarian, and ideological divisions were becoming sharper and wider while the continuing civil war in the south was driving the country to the verge of national disintegration. In May 1969, the military moved in again and took power, this time under young army officers headed by Colonel Ja'far Muhammad Numayri. According to one observer, "in contrast to the 'Abbūd regime, the seizure of power by President Numayri and his fellow free officers appeared to herald something new, and certainly Sudanese politics changed considerably in subsequent years, though not always in ways that could have been predicted at the outset."¹ The new regime began by effectively excluding traditional forces of the old party system from any active political role. This led to a bloody confrontation with Mahdist followers in March 1970 in which *the Ansār* spiritual leader and patron of the Umma Party, Imam al-Hādi al-Mahdi, was killed.

During this period, the new regime was supported by some prominent leaders of the Sudan Communist Party (SCP) as well as by other leftists and Sudanese Arab nationalists. These groups

identified with the ideological commitment of the young army officers to a program of political and socio-economic transformation that drew its inspiration from the Arab socialism of President Gamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir of Egypt. But the SCP leadership was badly split over the issue. While a faction opted for collaboration with the new regime because of its radical and socialist orientation, the rest of the leadership under Secretary-General 'Abd al-Khāliq Maḥjūb refused cooperation with a regime whose military mentality and ideological and political stance they still considered suspect. For his part, Numayri became increasingly hostile toward the SCP and began a crackdown on its leadership.

The crunch came in July 1971 when a group of communist army officers made an unsuccessful bid to seize power. Numayri reacted by brutally crushing leftist opposition; the officers involved, together with the SCP leaders, including Maḥjūb, were executed. After the abortive coup there was a steady shift in the regime's internal and external policy orientation—from the previous radical posture to a more conservative approach. Numayri moved quickly to consolidate his position by trying to "institutionalize" and legitimize his political system. In October 1971 he staged a plebiscite that elected him to the first presidency of the republic. Numayri established for himself an important southern power base when, in March 1971, he concluded with southern leaders the Addis Ababa agreement that ended the civil war in the south. In January 1973 the Sudan Socialist Union (SSU) was inaugurated as an umbrella organization to act as the political arm of the regime. A series of denationalization measures were initiated in 1973 to dismantle some of the economic institutions established during the early radical phase. The government launched a new policy of *infitāḥ* (economic 'open-door' policy) designed to attract Western and Arab investment to the country. In foreign policy, the regime made a complete reversal of the earlier pro-Soviet stand and committed itself to the Cairo-Riyadh axis and, by proxy, to Western strategies in the Arab world and Africa.

But the break with the leftists and the subsequent reappraisal of the regime's economic and foreign policies did not signal any immediate rapprochement with the leadership of the traditional and right-wing political parties. Indeed, the hostilities and the mutual feeling of animosity tended to intensify rather than to abate. The two main exiled opposition leaders were Ṣādiq al-Mahdi of the Umma Party (a nephew of the late Imam al-Hādi and a former prime minister) and Ḥusaīn Sharif al-Hindi of the NUP (a former minister of finance and veteran politician). In addition to these two was al-Mahdi's brother-in-law and former professor at Khartoum University, Hassan al-Turābi of the Islamic Charter Front (ICF)—a grouping of Muslim Brotherhood activists who advocated an Islamic constitution and were the ideological rivals of the SCP and leftist groups. During their years of political exile, these leaders formed an opposition National Front with the avowed aim of bringing down Numayri's regime. Libya and Ethiopia, which for different reasons sought the same goal, provided opposition forces with funds, sanctuary, and training bases near the Sudanese borders. The National Front was able to mount a number of coup attempts which came close to overthrowing Numayri in September 1975 and July 1976. As one writer put it in 1976, the Numayri regime "has already eclipsed all Sudanese records for governmental longevity on the one hand and for enduring -and surviving-a staggering number of coup attempts on the other, as paradoxical as this may seem."²

It was against this background of recurrent crises and violent confrontations that the move was made to initiate the policy of "national reconciliation."

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The Reconciliation Initiative: How and Why?

The move toward reconciliation between the Numayri regime and the National Front opposition was initiated by two Sudanese, Khalid Farah and 'Ismat Zūlfū, who resided in the United Arab Emirates at the time. These two had family and personal ties with both sides and eventually succeeded in gaining the consent of President Numayri and Ṣādiq al-Mahdi to establish a series of contacts.³ The result of these contacts, in which Sudanese businessman Fath al-Raḥman al-Bashīr played the central role of go-between, was the meeting of the two leaders in Port Sudan on 12 July 1977, which set in motion the reconciliation process.

President Numayri made the first declarative move, however, in his second-term inauguration speech on 24 May 1977 when he promised to "open a new page to those of goodwill who wish to return to the homeland and contribute to the reconstruction of the nation."⁴ At the time this conciliatory gesture went almost unnoticed. So did the president's statement in an interview in June that "some important personalities" in the opposition had responded positively to his call for reconciliation and unity.⁵ Few people in Khartoum thought that these were real indications of a possible rapprochement between Numayri and his diehard opponents.

Then, on 18 July 1977, the president disclosed in his monthly Face the Nation broadcast that he had met with Ṣādiq al-Mahdi a few days earlier in Port Sudan. Numayri stated that it was his goal and responsibility to consolidate national unity and that he was ready to "meet with the devil himself, if it is in the interests of my country."⁶ In London, Ṣādiq al-Mahdi confirmed his meeting with Numayri, pointing out that "in politics there is nothing permanent." With this confirmation the question naturally arose as to what an agreement between the two sides would likely entail or as one Commentator put it. "whose political funeral is it going to be"⁷

What remained a secret at the time was the kind of agreement worked out in Port Sudan. Both sides at first denied the existence of any such agreement, but in an Interview In 1978: Ṣādiq al-Mahdi revealed that at the Port Sudan meeting President Numayri accepted an eight-point program which was subsequently approved by the National Front executive on 14 July 1977.⁸ The agreement contained the following points: the release of all political prisoners; the abrogation of all actions taken against individuals for political reasons; the reform of the structure and operation of the SSU; the revision of the constitution so as to ensure more protection to individual liberties; greater emphasis on neutralism in the Sudan's foreign policy; the repeal of laws restricting personal liberties, particularly the State Security Act; the review of the local government system; and the revision of the prejudicial attitude toward members of the *Ansār* sect.⁹

The implementation of this secret agreement seemed to start smoothly when, on 7 August 1977, the General Amnesty Act Was announced and about 900 political detainees were released. According to the act, "amnesty was granted to any Sudanese who had committed any crime punishable under the state security laws, provided that the person concerned has willingly consented to abide by the constitution ... and provided further than any such person agrees to return to Sudan if he is residing abroad."¹⁰ On 14 August, lists were published that contained the names of thirty opposition leaders covered by the Amnesty Act: they included Sadiq al-Mahdi and Sharif al-Hindi as well as leading members of the ICF and the underground SCP."¹¹

The move of Numayri and the National Front leadership from confrontation to reconciliation was, indeed, a surprising one; considering the mutual feelings of intense hostility that had been baptized in blood in 1970, 1975, and 1976. Both Şādiq al-Mahdi and Sharif al-Hindi had been condemned to death in absentia, and al-Mahdi had called Numayri a "mass murderer" for his summary executions of National Front participants in the failed coup of July 1976.

Paradoxically enough, the bloody confrontations between the regime and the opposition might have created an atmosphere conducive to reconciliation. On the one hand, the events of July 1976 had left Numayri's regime in a weakened and exposed position both internally and externally. Internally, the abortive coup had shown that opposition forces could organize armed resistance inside the country, and the fact that they came so close to over-throwing Numayri's regime indicated that they were stronger than he had estimated. It was clear that reconciliation with such powerful rivals would not only ease the regime's feelings of insecurity but would also endow it with a certain measure of legitimacy.

Externally, Libya and Ethiopia's support of dissident Sudanese groups, combined with the two countries' alleged complicity in the abortive coups of 1975 and 1976, had complicated the regime's relations with these countries and thus compounded its security problems.¹² Moreover, It was evident that the rapid economic development, envisaged in the 1976 Six Year Plan, could not be achieved without the uninterrupted flow of foreign investment which, in turn, would not be guaranteed unless domestic stability was maintained. The Saudis and the Americans were known to favor a conciliatory approach to right-wing opposition.

On the other hand, some of the National Front leadership had also learned some hard lessons from the events of July 1976. The first was that the Numayri regime could not be easily overthrown since it apparently still retained the loyalty of the Sudanese army and had the immediate support of Egypt. From a personal perspective, it might have become incumbent on Şādiq al-Mahdi to do what he could in order to preserve whatever was left of the interests and welfare of the Mahdi family. From a political one, he must have realized that internal and external threats to the Numayri regime had only made it move even deeper into the fold of its security arrangements with Egypt-a development which was bound to be anathema to the *Anşār*, whose traditional animosity toward Egypt had intensified during the sect's years in the political wilderness.

Al-Mahdi and his associates came to realize that there were certain limitations to the use of violence in resolving political differences. Accordingly, when the initiative for reconciliation was taken, they decided to agree to it and to work from within the regime in order to bring about the changes they sought. Such a move must have been made easier by the fact that Numayri's steady retreat from his initial radical orientation had reduced significantly the ideological cleavage separating the two sides.¹³

Left-wing opposition groups saw Numayri's reconciliation with the National Front as the natural coming together of two sides politically opposed in terms of the exercise of power but whose class interests had nevertheless remained identical. They attributed the reconciliation move to the growing isolation of Numayri's regime, to the setbacks and strains sustained by the right-wing opposition after July 1976, and to the economic and political pressures exercised by Saudi Arabia directly and in coordination with American policy and the "big monopolies" investing in the Sudan."¹⁴

The combined impact of these related domestic, external, and economic factors tended to create a more auspicious set of circumstances that readily lent itself, on both sides, to the ideal of national reconciliation.

II

The Reconciliation Policy: Elements of Uncertainty

The announcement of reconciliation took the public by surprise. In Khartoum it was seen at first as an indication of President Numayri's dissatisfaction with the functioning of the SSU and his disappointment in the performance of some of his top political associates. There were also rumors of intense internal opposition within the regime, led by original members of the defunct Revolutionary Command Council, to any accommodation with the National Front.

Indeed, some of Numayri's associates were rather vocal in stating their suspicions and concern. In an editorial in the official monthly, *Sudanow*, Bona Malwal (a southerner and minister of information and culture at the time) called on Ṣādiq al-Mahdi and Sharif ai-Hindi to declare their public recognition of "the legitimacy of the May revolution." and reminded them that they were welcome only as individuals. "To do or to think otherwise," the editorial stated, "would be to seek the legitimacy of the illegitimate and the recognition of the illegal."¹⁵

Thus, from the beginning, the reconciliation policy was shrouded in controversy and ambiguity and this, in turn, led to the prevalence of a general atmosphere of uncertainty and speculation. In reality, the regime's actions were largely responsible for this state of affairs. Rumors that Numayri's moves apparently did not meet with the complete approval of some of his associates seemed to gain validity when on 16 August 1977, the president announced the resignation of his first vice-president, Muhammad al-Bagir ("for reasons of poor health"), and replaced him with Abu al-Qāsim Muhammad Ibrahīm, who also retained his position as SSU secretary-general. The president preceded this announcement with an angry attack on "rumor-mongers" and an

emphatic assertion that he had made no concessions and had acted not from internal or external pressures, but from "a position of strength."¹⁶

Far from clarifying the situation, these developments immediately sparked a new wave of rumors and counter-rumors. Since Abu al-Qāsim Muḥammad Ibrāhīm was, rightly or wrongly, suspected of opposing reconciliation, his unexpected elevation to the first vice-presidency seemed to signal Numayri's retreat, presumably in the face of internal opposition, from the reconciliation move. On the other hand, there was also counter-speculation that Ibrahim had merely been "kicked upstairs" in advance of being stripped of his powerful post as SSU secretary-general-thus removing a major obstacle to reconciliation.

President Numayri made another surprising move on 10 September 1977 when he dismissed some of his leading ministers, including Mansur Khalid, the foreign affairs minister, and al-Sharīf al-Khātīm, minister of finance and national economy. Al-Rashīd ai-Tāhir was demoted from the premiership to the foreign affairs ministry while Numayri himself took over the premiership and the finance ministry.

The "rumor-mongers" could hardly have been blamed if they saw in the removal of these two powerful ministers, and the demotion of al-Rashīd al-Tahir, a clear suggestion that Numayri was temporarily assuming the premiership and the finance portfolio with the intention of later transferring them to Sādiq al-Mahdi and Sharif al-Hindi, respectively. It did not seem much of a coincidence that these were the exact posts that the two leaders had held in the pre-1968 period.

In any case, whether that was Numayri's original intention or not was never put to the test. The situation was complicated, on the one hand, by Numayri's insistence that he had made no concessions to the former opposition, and on the other hand, by the continued refusal of Sharīf al-Hindi to return to the Sudan unless drastic changes were made in major policy aspects related to the joint defense pact with Egypt, the existing security laws, and the foreign and economic policies of the regime.

While the uncertainty surrounding national reconciliation remained unresolved, the increasing Islamic orientation of the regime was becoming another source of concern. It raised the question of whether the policy of reconciliation would entail the introduction of a political system in which Islam would enjoy a special status. The establishment of the committee to adapt existing laws to the *shari'a*, and the inclusion of some former opposition leaders in the committee's membership (notably Hassan al-Turābi of the ICF) seemed to point in the same direction.

After his return to the Sudan in late September 1977, Ṣādiq al-Mahdi said in an interview that a consensus-based system could be established that would not necessarily involve a multiplicity of political parties, but one which would give Islam a significant role in the political system-"a role which can be ignored at the risk of wasting a major social force." Islam, al-Mahdi stated, could be revived and made to apply to modern society "without impairing the religious autonomy of

non-Muslims."¹⁷ This view seemed to be in line with President Numayri's belief that making Islam the major source of legislation would not mean the enforced conversion of non-Muslims. According to the president, it would mean giving them "what in Islamic law is good for the people here."¹⁸

Such reassurance, however, seemed insufficient to dispel concern and disquiet among the opponents of the Islamic constitution. In an interview, Joseph Lago, former *Anyā Nya* leader and commander-in-chief in southern Sudan at the time: said the adaptation of existing laws to the *sharī'a* was being viewed with "great concern" in the south, and that to give any religion priority in the Sudan would cause "discomfort."¹⁹ One northern Muslim intellectual called for the immediate dissolution of the *sharī'a* committee because it was likely to be exploited by sectarian and extreme right-wing elements. He argued that traditional *sharī'a* could not be reconciled with modern constitutional government since most of the *sharī'a*'s detailed rules were based on three fundamental inequalities: political, social, and economic. "Anyone who maintains otherwise," he concluded, "is either unfamiliar with the basic principles of traditional *sharī'a* or is playing a huge political confidence trick."²⁰

The controversy over the issue of Islamization tended to give the reconciliation policy some religious overtones that were potentially divisive. It was clear that President Numayri could not implement the Islamization program without alienating his support base in southern Sudan and among northern secularist groups.

While the exact role of the former opposition leadership in the political system was left unclarified, thus raising persistent questions as to how reconciliation would be consummated, the strengthening of the Islamic character of the state, advocated by Ṣādiq al-Mahdi and Hassan al-Turābi, struck sensitive nerves in both the south and the north, thus raising concern over the nature of these regions' role and influence in the political process.

These elements of uncertainty and concern, which were reflected in the twists and turns of the reconciliation process, were to remain a major source of ambivalence and confusion not only to the general public, but to some of the protagonists themselves.

III

The Reconciliation Process: Ups and Downs

The elections to the People's National Assembly in February 1978 provided the first test to national reconciliation. Although the former opposition groups were able to put forward their own candidates, they had to run under the banner of the SSU and in accordance with its rules. Despite these restrictions and the fact that they conducted a low-key campaign, former opposition candidates acquitted themselves well in the elections.²¹ Their individual performances were, indeed, impressive for people who had been absent from the political arena for almost a decade.

What the election results did not clarify was whether these successful candidates would continue to be influenced by their old party affiliations or whether their involvement in the political process would gradually erode previous allegiances. Indeed, this issue was, in essence, the real test of national reconciliation: the outcome was bound to depend on the nature of the former opposition's role and the regime's perceptions of, and reactions to, its involvement in the political system. It did not augur well for the prospects of reconciliation that the regime's first reaction was one of apprehension. In a post-election editorial reflecting concern over this issue, *Sudanow* reminded the country that "it had been stressed that the election results do not indicate any move towards the return of a multi-party system."

After the elections, President Numayri appointed 57 new members, who included Ṣādiq al-Mahdi, Ḥassan al-Turabi, and some of their associates, to the 490-member Central Committee of the SSU. Both leaders were also appointed to the smaller and more powerful SSU Politbureau.

Ṣādiq al-Mahdi inaugurated his membership in the Central Committee in March 1978 with a speech critical of the SSU. He called for genuine elections to the political organization from the grassroots, and for "cuts in SSU expenses. And more liberty to sectoral and mass organizations, reforms of the press, and wiping out 'dualism' by unifying the role of the leadership in the political and executive offices."²²

Al-Mahdi's speech (which, significantly, was not published in the government-controlled daily press) caused uproar among SSU Central Committee partisans who construed his critical remarks on the political organization as reflecting on the regime as a whole. Al-Mahdi boycotted the meeting of the Central Committee and declined to take up his appointment to the SSU Politbureau. In an interview, he insisted that his attitude had nothing to do with any reservations concerning reconciliation but that it would be "premature" for him to get involved in the actual structure of an organization of which he disapproved.²³

Despite this relative setback, the reconciliation process seemed to undergo a new uplift when, on 12 April 1978, it was announced that an agreement had been concluded in London with Sharif al-Hindi. The main points in the London agreement were the dismantlement of all training camps of dissident forces abroad, the endorsement of the Addis Ababa agreement of 1972, and support for the permanent constitution with emphasis on the rule of law.²⁴ Joint committees were to be set up to monitor the implementation of the agreement and, more importantly, to look into such matters as civil liberties, emergency laws, political organization, and resettlement of the "returnees."

The London agreement meant that the third partner in the National Front (i.e. the NUP group under al-Hindi) had agreed to join in national reconciliation. What remained unclear was why al-Hindi had changed his mind. One explanation was that al-Hindi's dissatisfaction with, and opposition to, the secretive agreement between Numayri and Ṣādiq al-Mahdi was not due to any objection to national reconciliation per se, but to his own different conception of how to approach it. While al-Mahdi was prepared to return to the Sudan and work for change from

within on the basis of verbal reassurances, al-Hindi insisted first on a negotiated agreement that would publicly commit both sides to a specific program. Since the London agreement seemed to meet his basic demands, al-Hindi apparently no longer had sufficient interest or justification in continuing to oppose the policy of reconciliation.

The reconciliation drive appeared to be further consolidated when the Reverend Philip 'Abbas Qabūsh, leader of the United Sudanese Liberation Front, announced in Nairobi on 5 July 1978 the dissolution of his organization because he no longer had any doubts about the "genuine democracy being built in Sudan" under President Numayri.²⁵

During these developments and despite persistent reports in the Khartoum media about his imminent return, Sharif al-Hindi remained conspicuously absent. Al-Hindi explained in an interview that the real test of the London agreement was the fulfillment by each side of its basic commitment. He referred to the hostile press he had recently received in Khartoum, and indicated that certain elements in Numayri's regime were actively working to blunt the reconciliation initiative.²⁶

As this writer noted at the time, "several factors might have contributed to the widening gulf between al-Hindi and the regime. In the first place, it is true that there was internal opposition to the London Agreement in particular and more generally to the whole issue of national reconciliation. This opposition emanated partly from genuine concern over possible risks to the regime itself and partly from private considerations of self-interest. Secondly, each side seemed to read into the London Agreement more-or less-than it warranted. It is possible that while al-Hindi expected immediate and substantial changes in the nature and structure of the regime's institutions, Numayri had in mind only minor changes to accommodate Ṣādiq al-Mahdi and al-Hindi but without losing his power base in the SSU and the Army."²⁷

Consequently, al-Hindi could have been tempted to seek more evidence and further demonstration of Numayri's resolve to implement the agreement and this, in turn, might have played into the hands of internal opponents of the agreement by giving them both the chance and the justification to wreck it.

Just as al-Hindi's defection tended to undermine the national reconciliation process, a dramatic development in Khartoum seemed to take it to a new and more effective phase. Ṣādiq al-Mahdi announced in a press conference in late July 1978 that he had reached agreement with President Numayri on a unified plan to transform the SSU from a governmental organization to a popular one. The plan called for direct elections at all levels of the SSU, for an amendment of the constitution to give "better expression to the Islamic and democratic sentiment of the Sudanese people:" and for an end to the restrictions on civil and political liberties.²⁸

Some of Numayri's top associates publicly deplored the plan as tantamount to "a *de facto* dissolution" of the SSU.²⁹ Al-Mahdi's announcement led to speculation that the government reshuffle announced by President Numayri on 29 July 1978 would give some of the *Ansār* leaders executive positions in the government. However, the reshuffle, which was made against

a background of acute economic difficulties, was not radical, though there were important changes in the SSU leadership posts.

The proposed plan to reform the SSU never materialized. Indeed, the regime's attitude toward the former opposition seemed to be toughening. In a hard-line address to a mass rally organized by the SSU in September 1978, First Vice-President Abu al-Qāsim Muḥammad Ibrahīm declared that suspicion and indifference could not be tolerated and that partisanship and sectarianism would not be allowed to flourish. The regime, he said, "will strike with an iron fist against those who want to resurrect the dead past."³⁰

Although the government launched in late 1978 an "enlightenment" campaign designed to broaden the base of popular participation within the framework of the SSU, it was clear by then that Numayri was unwilling or unable to make any drastic changes in the structure and functioning of the political organization.

The reconciliation process was again seriously strained when, on 20 October 1978, President Numayri announced his "qualified" support of the Camp David Accords, Ṣādiq al-Mahdi saw the president's action as a blatant violation of their agreement, which called for greater neutrality in foreign policy. Indeed, one of the *Anṣār*'s major motivations in accepting reconciliation was to attempt to reduce the Sudan's close identification with Egypt. With Numayri's public endorsement of President Sadat's controversial policies, Ṣādiq al-Mahdi resigned all his official posts and left the country. While abroad, he was reported to be engaged in resurrecting the National Front opposition.³¹ However, his associates in Khartoum tried to dispel any notion of a final break with the regime, and reaffirmed the commitment of the former opposition to the reconciliation policy.³²

Despite these protestations of good faith, the reconciliation process seemed to be foundering. During the sessions of the SSU Central Committee in March 1979, Ṣādiq al-Mahdi and other opposition leaders came under strong attack. Al-Mahdi's prolonged absence abroad, which was seen as a political move, was criticized and some members called for disciplinary measures against him for making anti-SSU remarks to the foreign press. The former ICF leaders were attacked for maintaining their old allegiances and partisan practices.³³ In his address to the Central Committee, President Numayri himself accused some of the former SSU political parties' members of being "wolves in sheep's clothing," and of attempting to turn the political organization into "a vehicle for struggle between the revolutionary forces and the old party elements."³⁴

However, some of the tension in the reconciliation process began to dissipate by mid-1979. Some 350 *Anṣār* exiles returned from Libya in late May after a repatriation agreement was concluded between Sudanese and Libyan authorities. The repatriation of the *Anṣār* seemed to clear the way for the revival of the reconciliation drive. It was not coincidental that these developments took place at a time of relative strain in the Sudan's relations with Egypt, following the conclusion of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in March 1979.

The improved atmosphere in the reconciliation process gave rise to renewed speculation that Ṣādiq al-Mahdi might be tempted to resume his participation in the regime's institutions. Reuters reported in June 1979 that al-Mahdi was expected to be offered the post of prime minister; however, *Anṣār* sources in Khartoum said that he would be reluctant to assume any official position that could prevent him from publicly voicing his differences with the regime.³⁵

After his return to Khartoum in June 1979, Ṣādiq al-Mahdi attributed his absence abroad largely to his efforts to mobilize Arab and Islamic opinion against the Camp David Accords. He insisted that the Sudan's support of these agreements had created "a set of new realities, including the threat that this support posed to the security of the *Anṣār*." As to reconciliation, al-Mahdi allowed that "certain things have been achieved, including dialogue and the freedom necessary to undertake such dialogue." But, he said, "no specific program has so far emerged which could be used as the basis for the permanent achievement of reconciliation."³⁶

The Numayri regime was faced in early August 1997 with a grave crisis as student riots and worker strikes erupted in Khartoum and a number of provincial capitals, following another increase in commodity prices. The groundswell of popular discontent forced President Numayri to take immediate steps to avert the serious political threat to his regime. In a series of 'confrontation' meetings with the SSU leadership, he made scathing attacks on all the "negative aspects" of the political organization. In particular, he deplored the failure of the SSU to resolve "the ongoing feud" within its ranks-between "the old-guard" of the regime and the political "returnees".³⁷

The president then took the bold step of dismissing his influential first vice-president and SSU secretary-general, Abu al-Qasim Muhammad Ibrahim from all his official posts. Numayri appointed his defense minister General 'Abd al-Mājid Ḥamid Khalīl, as first vice-president, while he personally took over the key political post of SSU secretary-general.

Ibrahim's fall from grace could be attributed largely to his continued hard-line opposition to the reconciliation process at a time when Numayri urgently needed to widen his popular base by reviving it. Ibrahim's dismissal was followed by a wholesale shakeup of the cabinet and party organization. According to *Sudanow*, the changes in government and party leadership reflected an extension of the reconciliation policy, "designed to tempt al-Mahdi's men-if not Ṣādiq al-Mahdi himself-into the government."³⁸ Indeed, Numayri's harsh criticism of the SSU seemed to echo some of the charges made by Ṣādiq al-Mahdi in the past.

Although the structural changes in the SSU fell very short of al-Mahdi's expectations of radical and far-reaching reforms, *Anṣār* insiders said they regarded them as "positive and a breakthrough."³⁹ Some of the former opposition leaders were appointed to key positions. Hassan al-Turābi was made attorney-general (an appointment which was seen as a significant step in the move to adapt existing laws to the *shari'a*) and 'Abd al-Ḥāmīd Sālih, a close associate of al-Mahdi, was appointed controller of the People's National Assembly.

Thus, the reconciliation process, which had been at its nadir early in the year, seemed to reach new heights by August 1979. Its advocates argued that with the return of the exiled *Anṣār*, the process was no longer contingent upon the views of individuals and had, in fact, entered the post-reconciliation phase of participation in government—a phase which had, in turn, become possible because "the gap dividing government and opposition views on political organization and foreign policy had narrowed."⁴⁰

The prospects of reconciliation, however, were still marred by the regime's apparent reluctance to undertake major reforms in the constitutional, political, and legal fields, and by the continued hostility of the exiled opposition forces. Sharif al-Hindi blamed the August 1979 riots on "dictatorial rule, corruption, starvation and poor administration."⁴¹ In London, a Sudanese Democratic Front was formed, comprising al-Hindi's group and a number of other opposition groups, including the SCP. The front called for free elections and the return to a multi-party liberal democracy.⁴²

In Khartoum, the former opposition leadership hoped that President Numayri would use the occasion of the SSU Third National Congress, held from 16 January to 2 February 1980, to resolve once and for all some of the outstanding obstacles facing national reconciliation. During this meeting, however, SSU hardliners seized the platform to dramatize their own opposition to reconciliation.

At issue was the relationship between the former opposition and the political system. On the one hand, Ṣādiq al-Mahdi called for the reform of existing institutions along what he called "alternative democratic lines."⁴³ On the other hand, SSU partisans regarded some opposition leaders' participation in government as an adequate concession. Indeed, some SSU partisans called into question the whole policy of reconciliation and openly accused the former opposition of using public forums "for ends contrary to the principles of the May revolution."⁴⁴

The outcome of the SSU congress amounted, in effect, to maintaining the status quo. The *Anṣār*'s high hopes were further aggravated by President Numayri's announcement in February 1980 that the new elections to the People's National Assembly could be contested only within the framework and under the rules of the SSU.⁴⁵

The *Anṣār* reacted to this situation by contending that the elections were not being held within the agreed formula of radical reformation which primarily envisaged changing the structure of the political organization itself. According to Ṣādiq al-Mahdi, to contest elections under such circumstances would mean accepting the SSU as both "the adversary and the referee."⁴⁶

Consequently, the *Anṣār* decided to boycott the elections and the reconciliation process reached yet another impasse. Still, Ṣādiq al-Mahdi was anxious to prevent any drift into an irrevocable break with the regime. Thus, while his criticism of the policies and practices of existing institutions continued, underlined pointedly by his own nonparticipation in government and party organs, he still reiterated his belief that the Sudan, as a result of national reconciliation was "enjoying a political climate freer than in many Arab and African States."⁴⁷

This rather ambivalent stance contrasted sharply with the attitudes of other former or active opposition groups. On one side, some Unionist elements traditionally associated with the *Khatimā* sect and Hassan al-Turābi's ICF group opted to participate in the political system. On the other, exiled opposition forces continued their campaign to bring down Numayri's regime. Toward the end of 1980, the Sudanese Democratic Front shifted its opposition tactics from advocating armed uprisings to calling for civil disobedience and political strikes. The tactical change was made in order to avoid direct confrontations with the Sudanese army which, according to al-Hindi, was becoming increasingly alienated from Numayri's regime."⁴⁸

By contrast, Sādiq al-Mahdi seemed to straddle the middle ground; he was neither willing to come out openly against the regime (as al-Hindi and the SCP had done) for its failure to deliver the necessary reforms, nor was he yet able to work from within the regime (as al-Turābi was doing) to attempt to influence its political orientation.

Al-Mahdi, however, insisted that his position was right and that both his former partners had deviated from the reconciliation agreement. In an interview, he argued that events had vindicated his analysis of the situation since "more people [around Numayri] who hitherto had maintained an attitude of hostility or indifference towards reconciliation, are reviewing their position in the sense that they can see that some change needs to be made to face the issue and the challenges. This is the new factor in the old process of national reconciliation."⁴⁹ The appointment of First Vice-President 'Abd al-Mājid Ḥamid Khalīl, in September 1980, as SSU secretary-general was seen by the *Anṣār* as a positive measure which could lead to an objective assessment of the political organization by someone who was not involved in partisan issues.

Yet no radical reforms were undertaken and internal and external events increasingly overshadowed the issue of national reconciliation from 1981 on. The Libyan presence in Chad was perceived by the regime as a direct threat to its security and President Numayri moved to strengthen his ties with Egypt-much to the resentment and chagrin of anti-Egyptian elements who now included an ideologically disparate assortment of *Anṣār*, leftists, Southerners, and Muslim Brothers. The excessive dependence on U.S. economic and military assistance also served to underline the isolation of the Numayri government from other Arab states. "The regime has unprecedented dependence on an American administration whose credibility and foreign policy goals have been severely criticized by most states in Africa and the Arab world."⁵⁰

The situation was further complicated by the country's chronically unstable political and economic climate, which made President Numayri more unpredictable in coping with the pressures of government and increasingly autocratic in his decision-making style.

In an apparently desperate attempt to salvage what had remained of the reconciliation policy. Ṣādiq al-Mahdi stated in a pamphlet dated 20 October 1981 that the crises of stability and development in the Sudan could not be resolved unless five conditions were met. First, a political organization must be established with a popularly elected and politically accountable leadership. Second, both the leadership and popular base had to be linked together through

commitment to a clear ideological program. Third, the target of economic development should be to ensure sufficiency and an equitable distribution of economic returns. Fourth, the civilian-military relationship must be regulated and stabilized through a balanced formula that would guarantee legitimacy and hegemony to the popular authority, and political participation and adequate preparation to the armed forces. Finally, national sovereignty must be preserved and upheld to prevent internal disintegration or foreign domination.⁵¹

It was clear that meeting these conditions would entail the dismantlement of the regime's structure at a time when the president was showing no inclination to share power or even to tolerate criticism from any quarter. In the face of the groundswell of popular protest to his policies, particularly to the adoption of the International Monetary Fund-imposed austerity measures, Numayri moved to reassert his position. He quelled a show of dissent within the army by dismissing twenty-two high-ranking officers including his own first vice-president and army commander-in-chief, General 'Abd al-Mājid Ḥāmid Khalīl. In April 1982, the president dissolved the leadership of the SSU and formed a committee to work out solutions to the political, social, and economic problems. But no attempt was made to involve opposition leaders and the recommendations of the committee were neither made public nor implemented.

Instead, the SSU secretary-general announced in January 1983 that the "spirit" of the organization's leadership had been "revitalized" and that there was no need for further "dialogue" with opposition elements since the phase of national reconciliation had already been "transcended."⁵²

Various developments coalesced to further fuel the tensions and the sentiments of confrontation. The move toward decentralization, which entailed the emergence in 1980 of five regional governments in northern Sudan, culminated in 1983 with the division of the south into three separate regions. While the division of southern Sudan provoked there the resurgence of the cancerous civil strife which, ironically, President Numayri had been instrumental in resolving in 1972, the extension of regional governments to the north did not signify any real move to establish democratic practices and popular participation. Although the regime went through the rituals of holding regional elections, these were regarded by many Sudanese as being of the same nature as the periodic referenda that invariably gave the President 99 percent of the popular vote. The whole process in fact dramatized the simple fact that real devolution could not be imposed by presidential fiat."⁵³

In yet another controversial and arbitrary move, President Numayri decreed on 8 September 1983 the imposition of *sharī'a* law as the legal code of the country—an issue which the regime had been deftly sidestepping since the reconciliation policy began in 1977, precisely because of its potentially divisive nature. Paradoxically, this monumental decision, described by Numayri as a "judicial revolution," was a move not to revive national reconciliation but rather to finally dispense with it. Following the decree, Ṣādiq al-Mahdi was placed under what the authorities described as "protective custody" ostensibly because of an internal squabble in the Mahdi family over who would become the imam of the *Anṣār*. In reality, al-Mahdi was detained as a result of his public criticism of Numayri's *sharī'a* measures; he objected to the incomplete

manner and the circumstances of *sharī'a* application. In a public address to his followers on 24 September 1983, he declared "if the distribution of wealth is unjust and the means of lawful sustenance are blocked to the poor and the unemployed, and if meanwhile the opulent acquire wealth through unlawful means, then applying the punishment for theft in such a society will only lead to enhancing social injustice. Islamic *ḥūdūd* (legal sanctions) cannot be separated from the Islamic political system which strives for justice in all spheres of life."⁵⁴

While the application of *sharī'a* law could be superficially seen as a triumph for the ICF, the reverse could actually be the case. The president's move seemed to undercut the influence of the Muslim Brothers by co-opting their ideological platform just as he had, through national reconciliation, co-opted their political support. Indeed, after the promulgation of the *sharī'a*, there were signs of strain in Numayri's relations with his ICF allies. The president made several public admonitions, unmistakably directed against zealous Muslim Brothers, and warned that "no one can claim guardianship of Islam."⁵⁵ It was significant that prior to the adoption of *sharī'a* law, Hassan al-Turābi was removed from the potentially influential post of attorney-general and was appointed to the more ceremonious, but politically insignificant, position of presidential adviser on foreign affairs. The dubious nature of such a "promotion" was revealed by al-Turābi himself when he remarked to the foreign press that "advisers to the President receive more advice than they are allowed to give."⁵⁶ According to one foreign observer, "the Muslim Brotherhood is now politically prone. It is popularly identified as the main influence behind the *sharī'a*, and with a minimum of manipulation could therefore be ostracized, even politically annihilated on the grounds that it is seeking supreme power by devious means."⁵⁷

Yet while President Numayri might find it politically expedient to clip the wings of the ICF following the implementation of *sharī'a* law, it is unlikely that he gave this much consideration before the event. After all, with his Islamization gamble the president stood to lose substantial support in the south, within the army, and among northern secularists; it is also difficult to imagine that he had lost his political acumen to such a degree as to risk losing that support just to manipulate the ICF—an important factor in the country's politics, but a minority element nonetheless. The exiled opposition regarded Numayri's adoption of the *sharī'a* as a desperate resort to give an Islamic uplift to his tottering regime and to cover up the deteriorating economic, social, and political conditions.⁵⁸ Other Islamic opposition groups feared that the imposition of Islamic laws by a "corrupt and discredited" regime would undermine Islamic ideals, thus playing into the hands of "atheist" elements in Sudanese society.⁵⁹

The president's move seemed to be more in line with his increasing impulsiveness and unpredictability than with a calculated political strategy. This was evidenced by the confusion and *ad hoc* clarifications in the process of the *sharī'a* implementation. Numayri could also have turned completely to Islamization as a means of insulating himself from the more mundane and onerous means of survival. Instead of attempting to arrive at some form of political consensus, President Numayri had become increasingly insensitive to the impact of his actions and more intransigent in the face of any opposition, real or imagined, to his policies. The rigidity of confrontational politics had replaced the flexibility of compromise, and in the process the

president had retreated progressively into blissful isolation, discarding advice and apparently believing in his own infallibility and political immortality.⁶⁰

IV

National Reconciliation: A Balance Sheet

The process of national reconciliation followed a curious pattern that alternated between possible fulfillment and imminent collapse. What was even more striking was that the recurrence of this pattern seemed to be replicated in the Sudan's external relations; thus, the ups and downs in the process tended to affect-or be affected by-the fluctuations in this country's relations with some of its neighbors.

The alternating pattern of the reconciliation process did not mean that it was an on-off arrangement. Nor did it necessarily imply that reconciliation was being cynically used as a front to cover other maneuvers. Both President Numayri and Ṣādiq al-Mahdi had reiterated their convictions of their mutual and genuine commitment to reconciliation. There was, obviously, an element of self-interest: for Numayri, reconciliation was important in terms of the legitimacy and security of his regime; for al-Mahdi, rehabilitation of the *Anṣār* was a primary motivation. But, although such self-interest considerations might have contributed to the erratic course of the reconciliation process, these should not be automatically attributed to bad faith and duplicity, or to prior intentions of using reconciliation for ulterior motives. The confusion, uncertainty, and vacillation in the process emanated partly from the impact of domestic and external issues, partly from the lack of an institutionalized framework for reconciliation, and partly from the element of secrecy that surrounded it.

While the interplay of these various factors tended to complicate the politics of reconciliation, the process itself had negative and positive aspects. On the negative side was the fact that reconciliation did not include all opposition elements. More seriously, there were, between and among the concerned parties, acute differences over interpretations of the process itself and disagreements over policy decisions and arrangements arising from it. Thus, there had been differences between Ṣādiq al-Mahdi and Sharif al-Hindi, disagreements within the regime itself, and disputes between al-Mahdi and the regime.

These differences resulted largely from the regime's tendency to ignore the views of the former opposition leaders in almost all important policy aspects. In foreign affairs, Numayri's close ties with Egypt and his strident anti-Soviet policy ran counter to the opposition's call for a more neutral stance in inter-Arab affairs and in relations with the superpowers. In the economic field, the former opposition had been critical of the policy of *infitāḥ* and called for an effective and efficient public sector, which was seen as essential for the very survival of the private sector. According to Ṣādiq al-Mahdi, "the more uncharted liberalization there is, in the present state of affairs, the more will we be subjected to the forces of a very unscrupulous international market. This is what is happening now."⁶¹

Thus, the foreign and economic policies of the Numayri regime were too Western-oriented, even for pro-Western elements in the former opposition. In a sense, Numayri was assuming the classic role of being "more royalist than the king." Indeed, the only substantive issue upon which the regime and the former opposition appeared to agree was endorsement of the Islamization program. Even then, however, the adoption of Islamic laws came after the virtual collapse of reconciliation, and this issue could be a source of new national divisions.

On the positive side, national reconciliation had tended, at least in the beginning, to encourage a mood of relative tolerance and a relaxation of repressive measures on the part of the regime. As one observer noted in 1978, "political life in Sudan has become more relaxed... A number of prominent returnees are now working within the regime's institutions. These developments have naturally encouraged people to be more open in the expression of their views: there is a realization that the expression of critical opinion is no longer likely to lead to governmental reaction."⁶² Some efforts were made to generate genuine debate, to democratize political institutions, and to reform the SSU.

Yet, in the final analysis, these efforts either failed, or failed to measure up to the expectations of opposition groups. Indeed, if the general direction of national reconciliation was toward liberalization of the political system, such a move proved abortive.

Beyond these general aspects of national reconciliation, there remained the more specific question of what it meant, in practical terms, to the various parties concerned.

President Numayri emerged as the major beneficiary of national reconciliation. He was able to contain the potential threat from former opposition forces without making substantial political concessions or drastic changes in the nature and structure of his regime. Internal and external opposition had been badly split and seriously weakened by the neutralization of the *Ansār* and the co-optation of the ICF into the government. Had the *Anṣār* and the ICF remained in the forefront of opposition forces the regime's ability to survive the series of political and economic crises from 1978 on is perhaps questionable.

More significant, if less tangible, is that as a result of reconciliation the regime gained a measure of legitimacy (which had been denied it in the past) by a combined opposition representing almost all parts of the political spectrum. Reconciliation had given the president a relative freedom of action to consolidate his power base in the army and the political organization, removing in the process all opponents and some rivals within his own clique.

This need not imply that national reconciliation provided Numayri with bullet-proof security, or that the *longevity* of his rule-to which reconciliation might have contributed-is necessarily synonymous with *stability*. Indeed, one of the destabilizing factors in the country was President Numayri's highly personalized style of government.⁶³ The absence of any constitutional or political constraints that could effectively check the wide range of powers Numayri exercised contributed to the unpredictability of his actions, the uncertainty and confusion in the decision-making process, and consequently the failure to come to grips with the multitude of economic,

social, and political problems afflicting the country. Thus, while the reconciliation process consolidated President Numayri's power in the short term, its overall impact tended to erode his power in the long term. If the old dictum that absolute power corrupts absolutely is true in the Sudanese context, so too is its implied corollary that such power contains the seeds of its own destruction. The late Shah of Iran put it succinctly in 1976: "My real opposition is myself."⁶⁴

The ICF emerged from reconciliation politics as a minor beneficiary, although in its case too many immediate gains might be of an ambiguous nature and could be fraught with considerable future risks. Some of the ICF leadership was appointed to senior posts in the government and used these positions to reorganize the movement and consolidate its influence in some important areas, notably higher education institutions and finance. However, the price of collaboration for the ICF could prove costly in political terms should the Numayri regime collapse, or should it decide, for one reason or another, to crack down on the movement itself. In light of past events in Egypt and recent ones in the Sudan, both developments remain distinctly possible, if not probable. While the ICF might have been the driving force behind the orientation of the regime toward Islamization, it is questionable whether the implementation of *shari'a* law by an unpopular regime is actually conducive to the advancement of either the ICF cause or its political prospects. Collaboration with the regime also had been an internally divisive issue within the ICF leadership—a situation ominously reminiscent of the fatal divisions over the same issue within the SCP leadership between May 1969 and July 1971.

Except for the brief period of flirtation with the Numayri regime following the stillborn London agreement of April 1978, Sharif al-Hindi's group remained firmly outside the reconciliation process. Al-Hindi was able to forge an alliance with the SCP and some Sudanese Ba'athist elements to work for the overthrow of President Numayri. Al-Hindi's sudden death in January 1982 deprived opposition groups of a valuable symbol and focus of resistance. It was ironic that his death occurred at a time when Numayri was extremely vulnerable as a result of political and economic crises. Although al-Hindi had managed to maintain his image as a reputable and formidable opponent of Numayri, his successors were less successful. The ensuing squabble for leadership left the exiled NUP opposition factionalized, disorganized and demoralized.

The SCP, whose members inside the Sudan were systematically subjected to constant vigilance and detention by the security forces, had been consistent in its opposition to national reconciliation and any form of accommodation with the regime. The party's view was that reconciliation was "a desperate attempt to restore the credibility of a politically isolated regime that had failed to carry out its own promises of liberalization"⁶⁵

Paradoxically, Ṣādiq al-Mahdi's ambivalent approach of neither collaborating with the regime nor joining the opposition had, over a considerable period of time, averted the complete disintegration of the reconciliation policy and, at the same time, highlighted the enormous difficulty of consummating it. Al-Mahdi's prolonged ambivalence tended to reduce his credibility as a national leader, and it might even have undermined his leadership claims among the rank and file of the *Ansār*. He had little to show for his agreement to reconciliation: the *Ansār* expectations of radical changes were disappointed and their views on major policy issues were

not heeded by the regime. When Sādiq al-Mahdi made his belated move to renounce reconciliation and denounce the regime's high-handed policies, the result was his re-incarceration.

Any final judgment of national reconciliation must take into account two seemingly contradictory yet related factors. The reconciliation process managed to dramatize, even when it failed to achieve, the urgent need for change. But reconciliation had also immobilized (through the collaboration, neutralization, or factionalization of various opposition elements) the forces and pressures which could have made the Numayri regime less insensitive to opposition views and less reluctant to institute the required changes in attitude and policy. The regime had thus survived, but largely by default-or as one Sudanese analyst put it, through the absence of "leadership for revolt."⁶⁶ Yet if the lack of obvious alternatives had been a critical factor in President Numayri's survival stakes, the odds were that it could not continue indefinitely. Given the uncertainty of Sudanese society and the mood of spontaneous protest that had already manifested itself, the emergence of a "leadership for revolt" might be only a question of time.

Notes and References

1. Peter Woodward, "Sudan's Domestic Politics and Relations with Neighbouring States" *Post-Independence Sudan* (proceedings of a seminar held at the Centre of African Studies. University of Edinburgh, November 1980).
2. Peter K. Bechtold. *Politics in the Sudan*, (New York. 1976). p. 278.
3. Timothy Niblock, "Sudan: An Essay in Reconciliation," *Middle East International* (March 1978). According to Khalid Farah, the initiative for reconciliation was his own, but since he was "blacklisted" in Sudan he sent Zūlfū to meet with Māmūn 'Awad Abu Zaīd, a close associate of Numayri. Abu Zaid took the matter to the president, who authorized him to meet with Ṣādiq al-Mahdi in London. The meeting ended in agreement to continue the process of negotiation which the two sides did with Fath al-Raḥan al-Bashīr replacing Abu Zaīd as the go-between. "Interview of Khalid Farah by Sally Ann Baynard" (Khartoum). 22 July 1981.
4. *Al-Saḥāfa* (Khartoum), 26 May 1977.
5. *Assayād* (Beirut). 2-8 June 1977.
6. *Al-Ayām* (Khartoum), 19 July 1977.
7. *Africa* (London). September 1977.
8. Considering that the Port Sudan meeting took place on 12 July and the meeting of the National Front executive two days later in London, it becomes clear that Ṣādiq al-Mahdi did not consult with the front's other leaders before meeting Numayri. According to Khalid Farah, al-Mahdi left a tape recording of his plans before going to Port Sudan. The meeting of the Front's executive was a stormy one and Sharif al-Hindi in particular was furious that al-Mahdi would go that far without consulting them first." Interview of Khālid Faraḥ by Sally Ann Baynard. This dispute might have triggered the subsequent estrangement between al-Mahdi and al-Hindi.
9. *The Financial Times* (London) 13 July 1978
10. *Al-Ayām* (Khartoum) 8 August 1977
11. *Al-Saḥāfa* (Khartoum) 14 August 1977. Communist underground publications, however, claimed that while right-wing political prisoners were released, left-wing detainees, especially trade unionists, were still being held.
12. The origins of the Sudanese regime's problems with Libya and Ethiopia could be traced not only to domestic factors but also to the wider context of Arab and regional politics. The quarrel with Libya began when Numayri decided to pull out of the Tripoli Charter of 1969. With the deterioration of Egyptian-Libyan relations, Libya became mainly interested in the Sudan as "a kind of underbelly in an operation essentially aimed at Egypt" (*Africa*, London, April 1977). The difficulties with Ethiopia originated basically from the Eritrean problem – a running sore in bilateral relations. The situation was compounded by the emergence of new patterns of alignment in the Horn of Africa, and by Moscow's active support of Ethiopia and, later, Libya. However, the links of the National Front with these two countries owed more to opportunism than to ideology.
13. A less tangible but potentially motivating factor in the move toward reconciliation is the concept of 'reconciliation, itself in the context of Sudanese society. In social terms, 'reconciliation' (*muṣalāḥa*) is seen as an honorable undertaking more indicative of strength and integrity than weakness and appeasement. Personal animosities are rarely carried on indefinitely or to the bitter end. Sudanese of all political

persuasions tend to put an end to, or at least suspend, personal and other differences during social or religious occasions.

14. In a clandestine pamphlet the SCP stated that “there is no basic contradiction between the ruling authorities and the circles of capitalist development in the country. The right-wing opposition aims at a limited change at the top, confined to the removal of Numayri and his clique while retaining the basic pillars of the social system”. In view of the changed balance of forces created by the move of the National Front from a position of opposition to one of negotiation, the SCP advocated the establishment of a “democratic front “ open to all parties, organizations and personalities” to continue the struggle for democracy, basic human rights and “the overthrow of dictatorship” *Al-lajna al-markazīa lil al-ḥizb al-shū’i alsūdāni: al-dimūqarātīa muftāḥ ah-ḥal lil-azma al-siyāsīa* (The SCP Central Committee: Democracy is the Key to the Solution of the Political Crisis) Khartoum 1977

15. *Sudanow* (Khartoum) August 1977

16. *Al-Ayam* (Khartoum) 16 August 1977

17. *The Middle East* (London) December 1977

18. *Ibid*

19. *Ibid*. In an editorial in *Sudanow*, Bona Malwal noted that, “the additions of a few extremist names to the membership of the [shari’a] committee, although welcomed as part of the national reconciliation effort and therefore necessary, has complicated the public view of the committee’s work, and may indeed have reinforced some people’s fears”. The editorial called on the committee to ensure the principle of “religion to the individual and the country to all” *Sudanow* (Khartoum) October 1977

20. Dr. ‘Abdullahi A. al-Na’īm in an article published in *Sudanow* (Khartoum). November 1977.

21. According to outside analysts, the opposition candidates gained as many as 140 of the 274 Assembly seats-enough in the view of some opposition elements to upset the SSU. Sadiq al-Mahdi’s followers won approximately 30 seats, as did candidates affiliated with the NUP. The Muslim Brothers took approximately 20 seats and from 40 to 60 seats went to independent candidates (The Washington Post. 11 April 1978). It is important, however, to point out the difficulty of pinning down exact numbers since all candidates ostensibly ran under the banner of the SSU. In some cases the only way of classifying successful candidates was to refer to their pre-1969 political allegiances which gave a fair, but not always accurate, indication of their present political affiliations.

22. *Sudanow* (Khartoum), April 1978.

23. *Africa* (London) May 1978.

24. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. 14 April 1978.

25. *Africa Research Bulletin* (Exeter). 1-13 July 1978.

26. *Al-Mustaqbal* (Paris). 3 June 1978.

27. *Africa Contemporary Record*. Vol. II, 1978-1: >79 (London).

28. *Sudanow* (Khartoum), September 1978.

29. In an extraordinary editorial in *Sudanow* in September. Bona Malwal voiced the concern felt within the institutions of the regime over the nature of negotiations between the president and Ṣadiq al-Mahdi, which he said should have followed the pattern adopted in the 1972 Addis Ababa talks. Bona Malwal ended his editorial by calling on President Numayri and Ṣadiq al-Mahdi "now that they are both members

of the same revolution" to make public "in the interests of history" the agreements they had reached since the Port Sudan meeting in 1977. By all accounts, this was a remarkable challenge to come from a senior minister.

30. *Al-Saḥafa* (Khartoum), 9 September 1978.

31. Some foreign reports claimed that Ṣadiq al-Mahdi had visited Tripoli and Baghdad in order to forge a "common strategy" among exiled opposition elements, and that such activities marked "the end of national reconciliation." *Afrique-Asie* (Paris), 19 March 1979.

32. Dr. Ḥassan al-Turābi stated that there was a consensus among the former opposition leaders to renounce the use of violence and to work from within the framework of the one-party organization. He called for an "objective handling" of all issues concerning reconciliation in order to "transcend the difficult period of psychological readjustment and gradual conversion." *Al-Ayām* (Khartoum), 2 January 1979.

33. *Sudanow* (Khartoum), April 1979.

34. *Al-Ayām* (Khartoum), 19 March 1979.

35. *Sudanow* (Khartoum). June 1979.

36. *Ibid.*, August 1979.

37. *Al-Ayām* (Khartoum), 7 August 1979. The president criticized the "negative aspects" of the SSU reflected in its "complete absence" in the face of rampant consumer problems; its "neutrality" toward lethargy and corruption in executive organs; its "silence" over the problems facing some development projects; its "tolerance" of anti-revolutionary moves inside and outside the country; and its "lack of efforts" in transforming national reconciliation into reality.

38. *Sudanow* (Khartoum), September 1979.

39. *Ibid*

40. *Ibid.* January 1980

41. *The Daily Telegraph* (London), 15 August 1979.

42. *Sudanow* (Khartoum), January 1980.

43. *Al-Mustaqbal* (Paris), 12 April 1980.

44. *Sudanow* (Khartoum), March 1980. It was clear at the time that these sentiments reflected the views of former SSU secretary-general Abu al-Qāsim Muḥammad Ibrahīm. He had caused some sensation in December 1979 when he unexpectedly announced his candidacy for the post of SSU president which, in constitutional terms, meant challenging Numayri for the presidency of the republic. Local observers saw Abu al-Qāsim's challenge as an attempt to air some of the differences that had led to his dismissal. However, he was eventually persuaded to withdraw his candidacy for fear that it might be exploited by opponents of the regime. Thus, this extraordinary challenge was not allowed to run its full course.

45. *Al-Saḥafa* (Khartoum), 18 February 1980. Some outside observers saw the president's decision to hold new elections as another attempt to "further enhance his popularity and give the lie to opposition claims of popular support." *Africa Confidential*, (London). 26 March 1980.

46. *Al-Mustaqbal* (Paris), 12 April 1980..

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Al-Dastur* (London), 8-14 December 1980.
49. Unpublished interview with Şadiq al-Mahdi (Khartoum), 29 November 1980.
50. Peter K. Bechtold, "The Contemporary Sudan" *American-Arab Affairs*, No.6 (Fall 1983).
51. *Al-Sudan ila Ayn?* (Whereto Sudan?), cited in *Africa Contemporary Record*, Vol. 14 (London 1982).
52. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London). 5 January 1983.
53. M. B. Ḥamid, "Devolution and the Problems of National Integration in the Sudan"; Paper presented to the Marga Institute, *Dialogues on Devolution and Ethnicity*, 12-17 December 1983 (Colombo. Sri Lanka).
54. Sādiq al-Mahdi's speech appeared in pamphlet form entitled *Raf'a shi'arāt islamīa wa-tatbīq tashīr'āt juzy'īa yaḍur bi qadīyat al-da'wa* [Raising Islamic Slogans and Implementing Partial Legislation is Detrimental to the Islamic Cause]. (Khartoum, 24 September 1983)
55. *Al-Saḥafa* (Khartoum). 22 October 1983.
56. *Le Monde* (Paris). 4 October 1983.
57. *Africa Confidential* (London). 19 October 1983.
58. *Al-Dastur* (London). 7 November 1983.
59. *Al-Alām* (London). January 1984.
60. See the Sudan chapter in *Africa Contemporary Record*, Vol. 16, (London. 1984).
61. Unpublished interview with Şādiq al-Mahdi.
62. Niblock, "Sudan: An Essay in Reconciliation" , *op.cit*
63. See the author's "Confrontation and Reconciliation within an African Context." *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 5. No. 2 (April 1983).
64. Interview in *Le Monde* (Paris), 1 October 1976.
65. *Le Monde* (Paris), 8 March 1980.
66. *International Herald Tribune* (Paris). 18 February 1982.