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## **Sudan: Attempts at National Reconciliation**

By no means uncharacteristically for the Sudan, 1977, produced a number of quite unexpected developments-notably the return of Said al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, the former Prime Minister and leader of the Ansari Muslims, from exile in London. Then, when everything seemed to be set fair for a return to national reconciliation and stability, a major political upset occurred in the elections in the Southern Sudan in February 1978, which brought the downfall of Abel Alier's government there. While the new government is unlikely to change its relations towards the North, there were further unexpected developments in Khartoum. The early honeymoon with Sadiq had not gone as well as hoped, and he returned to London for a time in February 1979, but went back to Khartoum after a month.

Meanwhile, by early 1978 the Sudan appeared to have undergone another swing of the pendulum, reverting to many of the less satisfactory features of the political period before the 1969 military coup. These included the re-emergence of the politically divisive sectarian politics of the two Islamic groups, the *Ansar* and the *Khatmiya*, as well as the official recognition given to the formerly clandestine Islamic Charter Front. Very little of the Left-wing revolutionary character of President Ja'afar Numeiry's Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) appeared to have survived the changes of 1977.

Sudan came very close to the brink of war with Ethiopia in July 1977, but by December an agreement was signed between the two neighbours setting them on the road

to reconciliation. However, General Numeiry continued to pursue a policy of extreme hostility towards the USSR over its role in the conflict in the Horn of Africa, and generally to consolidate those trends in foreign policy established after the abortive 1971 coup: closer ties with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, a pro-Western and strongly anti-Soviet orientation. The year also saw major adjustments in economic policies and the beginning of a new Six-Year Development Plan.

The interdependence of these domestic, foreign and economic issues was specially marked during 1977. There was a growing realization that political stability cannot be maintained in the face of continuing economic difficulties, persistent outside pressures and internal opposition. The rapid economic development envisaged in the Six-Year Plan cannot be achieved without the uninterrupted flow of foreign investment, which in turn cannot be guaranteed unless stability is maintained. Equally, outside challenges and pressures—particularly from hostile pro-Soviet neighbours—cannot be effectively met or resolved without assistance from the West and pro-West Arab countries, and without the consolidation of the internal front and the economic base. Hence, the mounting emphasis in 1977 on national unity, on the ‘opening to the West’ and on the economic ‘big push’.

## **POLITICAL AFFAIRS**

The most dramatic event of 1977 was the national reconciliation between President Numeiry and opposition elements led by Sadiq al-Mahdi. In many ways it was as unexpected and dramatic as Sadat's spectacular visit to Israel. Like Sadat's visit too, the issue of national reconciliation raised a whole series of new Questions. Was it a desperate 'act on President Numeiry's part to try to consolidate his internal position at a time of serious external challenges and pressures by Libya, Ethiopia and, as he saw it, the Soviet Union? Or was it a shrewd tactical move by him to sow division and discord within the opposition forces of the National Front? On the other hand, could it have been a tacit admission by Sadiq that armed and underground resistance to Numeiry's regime was no longer viable after the experience of 2 July 1976?<sup>1</sup> Or was it a preliminary move in an attempt to infiltrate the regime and undermine its institutions from within? Perhaps there were outside pressures for reconciliation in order to maintain the kind of internal stability most conducive to economic growth and foreign investment. Or perhaps there was a secret deal between Numeiry and Sadiq to share power. If so, what would be the impact of such an agreement on their respective allies and supporters? To what extent, in fact, was it a natural coming together of two groups politically opposed in terms of the exercise of power, but whose class interests have nevertheless remained identical? More specifically, what kind of repercussions would the 'reconciliation' have on the delicate

situation in Southern Sudan? Before examining how and why the move towards reconciliation took place, it is necessary to review the course of events that preceded it.

1977 began, like any other year, with the celebrations of Independence Day during which there was no let-up in the continuing denunciation of 'the treacherous Libyan invasion' of 2 July 1976. In his anniversary speech, Numeiry roundly condemned "those agents who sold themselves to the devil in an attempt to come back and rule the people again".<sup>2</sup> More surprising was a statement published in the local press by Ahmad al-Mahdi, Sadiq's uncle, in which he denounced "the suspicious criminal moves aiming at the destruction of the Sudan and its people" and hailed "the sincere efforts of President Numeiry to realize the welfare and progress of our country".<sup>3</sup> At the time, many were puzzled by the attitude of Ahmad al-Mahdi. Few believed he had undergone a genuine conversion to the regime. The more likely explanation was that he was motivated to preserve whatever was left of the interests and welfare of the Mahdi's family. With Sadiq in exile—sentenced to death in absentia—it might have become incumbent on his uncle (who had been a political rival of his nephew in pre-1969 days) to assume the leadership of the *Ansar* in Sudan and to arrive at some sort of *modus vivendi* with the regime.

On 25 January, the 2,600-delegate Second National Congress of the ruling Sudan Socialist Union (SSU) convened in Khartoum. Officially, the function of the Congress was to participate in reorganizing the political machinery, to choose the Executive Bureau and the SSU Central Committee and, more important, to elect the President of the SSU for a six-year term—a position which automatically leads to nomination as Head of State. Numeiry, who was the sole nominee, was unanimously re-elected.

Although the main theme of the Congress was unity, it had hardly disbanded when news came of yet another 'coup attempt' in Juba, capital of the Southern Region. In the early hours of 2 February, mutinous members of the Air Defence Force occupied Juba airport for several hours before loyal troops recaptured it. Nine Sudanese soldiers and one American civilian pilot were killed.<sup>4</sup> The abortive mutiny came at an embarrassing time and seemed to be in sharp contrast with the atmosphere of national solidarity and unity which had emanated from the Second National Congress. The Government, however, lost no time in identifying those behind it. Abel Alier, Vice-President and Chairman of the High Executive Council for the Southern Region, declared that "the Juba conspiracy was motivated by foreign powers". The President was more specific; he pointed an accusing finger at "the tripartite alliance of Sadiq al-Mahdi, [Philip Abbas] Qabush, and their sources of finance and planning in Tripoli".<sup>5</sup>

In an interview in April 1977, Numeiry played down the 'Juba incident'. What had happened in Juba, he said, could not be described as an attempted coup or even a mutiny; "it was simply an attempt at sabotage and disruption by an isolated few. Their aim was to mar the celebrations of the fifth anniversary of Unity Day and thus to cast doubts on

Sudan's national unity and stability". This time, however, the President accused two of the exile National Front leaders, Sharif Hussain al-Hindi and Qabush, with Libya and Ethiopia behind them, of masterminding the attempt.<sup>6</sup> He emphatically denied that these repeated coup attempts indicated instability or even some basic flaw or malpractice in the political system. On the contrary, he argued, they were an indication that Sudan was moving in the right direction. When Sudan was 'the sick man of Africa' nobody bothered about it; but with its emergence as 'a dynamic force' in the continent, its enemies could no longer afford to ignore it.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, the 'Juba incident' came as a rude reminder to the regime of potential dangers at a time when it had not yet recovered from the events of 2 July 1976. The regime seemed too readily anxious to explain away disturbances and setbacks in terms of 'conspiracies' hatched abroad. No serious mention was made of possible involvement of disaffected *Anyanya* guerrillas and/or diehard Southern separatist politicians who opposed the peace settlement. Instead, the regime readily linked what happened in Juba—which could very well have been a local and isolated affair—to a wider regional conspiracy involving Libya, Ethiopia and, indirectly, the Soviet Union. In any case, no concrete evidence was ever presented on the complicity of outside powers, or even of the Opposition leaders. Indeed, one would have thought that the South (a particular stronghold for the government whose people have no particular love for the politicians of the old regimes) would be the last place where they could attempt to stage a come-back to power.

The President announced another Cabinet reshuffle 'on 11 February 1977. The Prime Minister, al-Rashid al-Tahir Bakr, and most Ministers retained their posts. However, four senior Ministers—among them Mamoun Bihairi, the Minister of Finance, and Badr al-Din Suliman, the Minister of Industry—were removed. Notable among the new arrivals were Abd al-Wahab Ibrahim, who became Minister of Interior while still retaining his job as head of Public Security; and Dr Mansour Khalid, who returned to the post of Foreign Minister which he had first held from August 1971 to January 1975. Dr Mansour's reinstatement was widely interpreted as an indication of the government's determination to continue the policy of strengthening Sudan's relations with the West, especially with the US. The local verdict was that 'the reshuffle represented essentially a change in the executive and not a change in policy'.<sup>8</sup>

The national referendum on General Numeiry's second term as President was held in mid-April 1977. According to official figures, of 5,769,342 registered voters 5,672,507 went to the polls; of these 5,620,020 voted in favour and 48,377 against. The President's candidature was thus endorsed by a 98.3070 vote.<sup>9</sup>

In May, the regime made a move towards decentralization in government. The President decreed the dissolution of the Ministry of People's Local Government and the

splitting of the Ministry of Transport and Communication. In addition, a new Ministry of Energy and Mining was formed. In place of the dismantled ministry, a new office was created in the Presidency charged with ensuring greater participation in government at the local level. In August, the People's Local Government Act was amended to facilitate the process of decentralization, and during September, a series of 'enlightenment campaigns' were conducted to generate popular enthusiasm for the decentralization drive.

Despite the massive endorsement of the President in the April referendum (which opponents found too overwhelming to be entirely convincing), it was evident that the regime recognized the need not only for stronger political organization, but also for asserting its own legitimacy more positively so as to make a repetition of the all-too-frequent coup attempts less likely in the future.

It was in his inauguration speech in May that Numeiry made his first conciliatory gesture to the Opposition. He declared that the Sudan had decided “in response to the efforts and good offices of friendly governments and individuals to welcome back all those who have been misled into committing crimes against their country”.<sup>10</sup> The gesture went almost unnoticed at the time. Few realized that it was directed specifically at the leadership of the National Front, including Sadiq; fewer still thought that Sadiq, who had only recently called Numeiry a 'mass murderer' and vowed to overthrow him, would be inclined to respond positively. In an interview in June, Numeiry stated that Saudi Arabia and other countries were behind his call for reconciliation. He asserted that he made his move from ‘a position of strength and self-confidence’, and hinted that ‘some important personalities’ in the Opposition had responded to his call for unity.<sup>11</sup>

Then in his monthly ‘Face the Nation’ television and radio address on 18 July, Numeiry announced that he had met Saddiq al-Mahdi on 12 July in Port Sudan. He asserted that he saw himself as “the symbol of national unity”, as “the President not of a faction of the Sudanese people but of them all”. He was prepared to “meet the devil himself” to make that unity materialize; his duties and responsibilities made it imperative to consolidate the unity of all Sudanese.<sup>12</sup>

From his exile home in London, Saddiq al-Mahdi confirmed his meeting with Numeiry. “In politics”, he said, “there is nothing permanent”. With this confirmation, the question arose as to what an agreement between the two leaders would likely entail, or as one commentator put it, “whose political funeral is it going to be?”<sup>13</sup>

Speculation was rife in Khartoum. According to one theory, Numeiry's reasons for taking this initiative were his dissatisfaction with the functioning of the SSU and his disappointment in the performance of some of his top political associates. At the time, one of the leading figures of the regime, Abu al-Qasim Muhammad Ibrahim—who was reportedly out of favour with the President even before the issue of national

reconciliation arose—was outside the country; his absence was readily interpreted as a sign of his fall from grace. Some even claimed that he was in self-imposed exile in protest against the regime's reconciliation with the National Front.

Left-wing opposition forces had their own explanation for the moves towards national reconciliation. In a clandestine pamphlet dated 31 August, the Sudanese Communist Party (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 Numeiry and his clique while retaining the basic pillars of the social system”. The pamphlet attributed the move to internal and external factors, namely: the growing isolation of Numeiry's regime; the setbacks and strains sustained by the Right-wing opposition after 21 July 1976; and the economic and political pressures exercised by Saudi Arabia, directly and indirectly (through the Cairo-Riyadh axis) in coordination with American policy and the ‘big monopolies’ investing in Sudan.<sup>14</sup> 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 creation 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”.<sup>15</sup>

When the General Amnesty Act of 1977 was announced on 7 August, more than 1,000 political detainees were released. The Act offered amnesty to any Sudanese “provided that he consents to submit to the provisions of the permanent Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Sudan ... and provided further that such a person agrees to return to the Sudan if he has been living abroad”.<sup>16</sup> Lists containing the names of 30 Opposition leaders who came under the Amnesty Act were published on 14 August. They included not only Sadiq al-Mahdi and Sharif Hussain al-Hilli, but also leading members of the underground SCP and of the Muslim Brethren.<sup>17</sup>

Despite, or perhaps because of, the persistent speculation and rumours, official pronouncements and newspaper editorials continued to strike reassuring notes. On 27 July, *al-Ayam* commented that the President's call for the people to rally around the SSU indicated that “the revolution continues and we must carry on with the struggle for freedom, democracy and socialism”. Commenting on Libyan and Ethiopian broadcasts that reconciliation was conditional on certain concessions, *al-Ayam* declared on 1 August, “The May Revolution stands on such solid ground that it is impossible for its enemies to change its direction or to deflect its objectives”. However, rumour and speculation persisted, fuelled no doubt by uncertainty about the nature and scope of ‘national reconciliation’. Some of the regime's supporters, both northern and southern, openly voiced their concern at the risks involved in dealing with such seasoned and ambitious politicians as Sadiq al-Mahdi and Sharif Hussain al-Hindi. In August, an editorial in the official monthly, *Sudanow*, by the Minister of Information (a Southerner), called on

Sadiq al-Mahdi and Sharif Hussain to “reassure us” of 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 would be to seek the legitimacy of the illegitimate and... the recognition of the illegal”.<sup>18</sup>

On 10 August, Dr Hassan al-Turabi, Secretary-General of the banned Islamic Charter Front, and Dr Ja'far Shaikh Idris, another Front leader, were appointed to the committee set up to revise the laws of the Sudan in conformity with Sharia law.<sup>19</sup> Both men were prominent leaders in the National Front and had only recently been released from imprisonment. There were also two other significant appointments to the committee—Ahmad al-Mahdi and Ahmad al-Mirghani, the two sons of the famous old religious leaders who had for so long led the *Ansar* and *Khatimya* sects in bitter political hostility. To many it seemed that the return to the centre of politics of the scions of the Islamic sects might end the hope that religious sectarian politics (one of Numeiry's most striking achievements) had been permanently ended. Although Ahmad al-Mahdi is the uncle of Sadiq, the two had been strong political opponents in the old Umma party. These appointments seemed to indicate the regime's intention to emphasize the role of Islam in the political system—a move which both Sadiq and the Muslim Brethren strongly advocate, and which the Saudis were bound to look upon approvingly.

Numeiry, made another surprising move on 16 August by announcing the resignation of Muhammad al-Bagir ‘for reasons of ill-health’ from the post of First Vice-President, and the appointment of the controversial and supposedly self-exiled Abu al-Qasim Muhammad Ibrahim in his place. Abu al-Qasim was also to retain his powerful position as Secretary-General of the SSU.<sup>20</sup> The President's announcement was preceded by an angry attack on “those with sick imaginations who spread malicious rumours and misleading lies”. He insisted that he made his move from a position of strength. His objective was not ‘national reconciliation’; nor was it the building of “national unity”: it was to reinforce the potential of an already existing unity.<sup>21</sup>

Far from clarifying the situation, these developments seemed to confound an already confused public and to send speculation running in all directions. The exponents a secret-deal ‘theory’, who had just been denounced as ‘rumour-mongers’, continued to argue that the deal was still on and that Abu al-Qasim had merely been ‘kicked upstairs’ in advance of being stripped of his powerful position as Secretary-General of the SSU. Others speculated that the deal, assuming there was one, was now definitely off; therefore Numeiry had to mend his bridges with the old guard and reassert emphatically, as he did, that he had made no concessions. In reality, the Government itself was largely to blame for the prevalent atmosphere of rumour and counter-rumour. For instance, during Abu al-Qasim's absence abroad in mid-July, there was a virtual black-out of news about his trip in the government-controlled media, lending credibility to rumours of his imminent

downfall. With his unexpected elevation to the post of First Vice-President, news about him immediately dominated the headlines, thus indicating a sudden change of attitude.

More seriously, the regime's insistence, underlined by the President's angry remarks of 16 August raised serious questions as to what exact role the Opposition leaders were expected to play upon their return to Sudan. Sadiq himself stated in London that his sole condition for meeting Numeiry was the release of political prisoners and the guarantee of civil and human rights in the Sudan. He also indicated that both parties had agreed to discuss 'substantive' topics and to find "a new political formula to accommodate his proposals, the views of the *Ansar* sect as well as Numeiry's system of government"<sup>22</sup>. Sadiq endorsed the Addis Ababa Agreement (which had ended the civil war with the South)<sup>23</sup> and agreed that the pre-1969 multiparty system should not be resurrected. He suggested, however, that there was a need to increase Muslim influence in the South through intensified 'cultural intercourse' and to strengthen Islamic institutions in the country.<sup>24</sup> Such views seemed to coincide with the increasing Islamic orientation of the regime, underlined both by the establishment of the committee to adapt existing laws to the *shari'a* and by the inclusion of leading opposition elements in its membership.

The President sprang yet another surprise on 10 September when he sacked some of his leading Ministers, including Dr Mansour Khalid, the Foreign Affairs Minister, and al-Sharif al-Khatim, Minister of Finance and National Economy. Al-Rashid al-Tahir was removed from the Premiership and assigned instead to the Foreign Affairs Ministry. Numeiry himself took over the Premiership and the Finance portfolio.<sup>25</sup> The 'rumour-mongers' could hardly have been blamed if they saw in the removal of these two powerful Ministers, and in the demotion of Rashid al-Tahir, a confirmation of their 'theories'. The President's move clearly suggested the Premiership and the Finance Ministry were being kept vacant for Sadiq and al-Hindi respectively, posts which they had held in the pre-1969 period.

On the eve of his departure for home, al-Mahdi said in an interview that the July coup 1976 had taught both his National Front and Numeiry's SSU several important lessons.<sup>26</sup> The Front learnt that it could not topple Numeiry as easily as it had assumed, and Numeiry learnt that the opposition forces were stronger than he had allowed for. Both sides had come to realize that their policies of violent confrontation could be continued only by attracting external support, which resulted in strengthening foreign involvement in the Sudan's internal affairs. It had also taught all Sudanese that a society like theirs could only prosper under a system that allowed for adequate democratic participation by all the major political forces in the country. He concluded that the time had therefore come for Sudan to develop a new political system which would make non-violent political change possible. He disavowed any idea that he shared the aspirations of the Muslim Brothers, claiming that he himself rejected the notion of a theological state.



He envisaged his own role as that of a leader providing ideas about how a new political system suitable for Sudanese needs might be evolved.

Sadiq al-Mahdi returned home to a hero's welcome by his supporters on 27 September. He reiterated his support of Numeiry's policies and called for the consolidation of unity through “a genuine and unified stance towards democratic practices, basic human rights, Islamic legislation and real participation by all the Sudanese people at all levels in the task of national reconstruction”.<sup>27</sup> This new emphasis on the role of Islam increasingly became a source of grave concern—not only among non-Muslim Sudanese—that Islam might be accorded a special status in the political system.

In an interview in December 1977, Sadiq declared that Numeiry's initiative for reconciliation was “realistic and I would not like to attach any value judgment on it”.<sup>28</sup> In order to resolve political differences, a 'consensus' had become imperative—a consensus which would better serve the cause of stability, development and non-interference by third parties. According to Sadiq, it is possible to construct a system based on consensus without necessarily allowing a multiplicity of political parties. But in working for such a consensus-based system, Islam has significant role to play—“a role which can be ignored only at the risk of wasting a major social force”. Sadiq expressed his conviction that Islam could be revived and made to apply in modern society “without impairing the religious autonomy of non-Muslims”.<sup>29</sup>

Numeiry emphatically asserted that Sadiq's return would not constitute any deviation from the declared objectives of the regime. But what about Islamic legislation? According to the President, making Islam the major source of legislation would not mean the enforced conversion of non-Muslims. “We are giving them what in Islamic law is good for the people here”.<sup>30</sup>

However, the increasing religious orientation of the regime, particularly in setting up the committee to review Sudanese laws in conformity with the *shari'a*, aroused some fears about the implementation of the Islamic constitution. In an editorial in *Sudanow*, Bona Malwal, a Southerner and Minister of Information and Culture, wrote: “The recent addition of a few extremist names to the membership of the 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 operation of the principle of “religion to the individual and the country to all”.<sup>31</sup> In another article published in *Sudanow*, Dr Abdullahi al-Na'im, a Muslim Northerner and lecturer in the Faculty of Law, University of Khartoum called for the immediate dissolution of the committee because it was likely to be exploited by sectarian and extreme Right-wing elements. He argued that traditional *shari'a* could not be reconciled with modern

constitutional government since most of its detailed rules were based on three fundamental inequalities: political, economic and social. "Anyone who maintains otherwise is either unfamiliar with the basic principles of traditional *shari'a* or is playing a huge political confidence trick".<sup>32</sup> Joseph Lagu, the former leader of the *Anyanya* rebels and Commander-in-Chief in Southern Sudan, said in an interview that the adaptation of Sudan's laws to the *shari'a* was being viewed 'with great concern' in the South, and that to give any religion priority in Sudan would cause 'discomfort'.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, as 1977 drew to a close, fears about the Islamic orientation of the regime and uncertainties surrounding the whole issue of national reconciliation remained unresolved. The situation was further complicated when, in an interview with the Lebanese newspaper *al-Nahar* in November, Sharif Hussain al-Hindi ruled out the possibility of his early return to the Sudan, and hinted strongly that the regime had reneged on its agreement with the Opposition. He gave a pessimistic appraisal of the country's economic situation and made his return conditional on some drastic changes in certain policy aspects to the joint defence pact with Egypt, the existing security laws, and the foreign economic orientation of the regime.

The President announced the dissolution of the People's Assembly on 14 December, with elections for the new Assembly scheduled for January 1978. The election rules stipulated that every candidate had to secure endorsement by the SSU and refrain from campaigning along party or sectarian lines. However, there appears to have been an understanding that none of the prominent SSU or National Front personalities would contest the elections. This made it difficult to analyze accurately the significance of the results announced in February 1978. However, it was immediately clear that many of those elected to the new Assembly were prominent old traditionalists like the Chief of Dongola and two of his sons who had remained carefully in the background during the radical years of the RCC.

It is, perhaps, characteristic of 1977 that the year ended with renewed speculation that the move towards national reconciliation had come to a dead end; that the Muslim Brethren faction in the National Front had definitely defected to the regime; and that Sadiq seemed to be unhappy with the existing state of affairs.

By early 1978, with Sadiq's role still unclarified, it appeared that the task of effecting reconciliation was perhaps more difficult than either of the two leaders had foreseen. Nevertheless, neither seems to have been daunted. In March, there was a report that a Council on Policy was to be set up on which both Numeiry and Sadiq would serve, together with a number of their prominent supporters.

## **SOUTHERN SUDAN**

### *1978 Regional Assembly Elections:*

The elections held early in 1978 for the Southern Sudan Regional Assembly turned the political situation almost upside down. Seven of the 15 Regional Ministers in Abel Alier's High Executive Council were defeated, causing Alier himself to resign as chairman, though still remaining a Vice-President of the Sudan. Prominent among those defeated were Hilary Logali, the Speaker of the Regional Assembly and an Assistant Secretary-General of the SSU; Mading de Garang, Information and Culture; Ali Tamim Fartak, Youth and Sports; Dr Gamma Hassan, Agriculture; Lubari Ramba, Public Service; and Dr Oliver Albino, Housing. A number of the most outspoken critics of the Alier administration (some of whom had been in detention) were elected. They included Clement Mboro, Joseph Oduho, Benjamin Bol and Ezboni Mundiri . Mboro who had been Minister of Interior in Saddiq's pre-1969 government, became the new Speaker.

An initial analysis suggests that the results were caused by at least three factors. First, there was a sense of frustration over the relative lack of development which was blamed on insufficiently militant leadership in forcing greater concessions from Khartoum. Second, some disillusionment was felt over nepotism and alleged corruption in the administration. Third, a successful assertion by the Dinka group associated with the Sudan African National Union (SANU) formed by the late William Deng, which was one of the two wings of the *Anyanya* liberation movement. It seems that the former commander of the *Anyanya* and later chief of the Southern Sudan Military Command, Gen Joseph Lagu, was closely identified with the swing against Abel Alier's leadership. Lagu himself (who is on close terms with General Numeiry), succeeded Alier as chairman of the new High Executive Council. While the election outcome is likely to result in greater Southern pressures on Khartoum for higher development fund allocations, it seems most unlikely that the basic relations between the North and the South will change, especially as Gen Lagu is a strong protagonist of unity. Nor is it likely to affect the position of prominent Southerners in the Government such as the Minister of Information and Culture, Bona Malwal Madut Ring, or Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dr Francis Deng.

### *Five Years of Autonomy:*

'The eagle with the broken wing' was the description of the Sudan used by one of the earlier generation of Southern politicians, Buth Diu. The broken wing was the South; without it, he argued, the great Sudanese bird could not fly. That truth finally brought the 17-year old civil war to an end and produced the Addis Ababa Agreement of 23 February 1972<sup>34</sup> which allowed a considerable measure of regional autonomy to the three Southern provinces—Upper Nile, Equatoria and Bahr al-Ghazal—with their capital in Juba. (These were sub-divided in 1976 to create three additional provinces: Lakes, Jonglei and Western Equatoria). The anniversary of the first five years of the new South's

autonomous relationship within a federal Sudan was a time for celebration and stocktaking on 23 February 1977.<sup>35</sup> President Numiery said the trial period had shown the value of building unity “on the basis of diversity which enriches it, and makes regional self-government the pillars of unity”. The Vice-President of the Republic and Chairman of the South's High Executive Council, Abel Alier, recalled how his new government began five years earlier with only one borrowed car, eight civil servants and one office; now the Regional Government has 1,054 heavy duty vehicles and small cars and 16,460 employees; a new block of government offices is almost completed at New Juba. Two of the major tasks, he said, had been to re-establish the value of ‘tilling the soil’—in which even the ‘man in the necktie’ and the *effendiyat* had set an example; and to get people to abandon their old traditions of living far apart. In Western Equatoria, the habit had been to move to new land every time a husband or wife died; in Eastern and Western Equatoria and Bahr al-Ghazal, it was because people were haunted by fear of being poisoned by their neighbours; while in Bahr al-Ghazal, Jonglei and Upper Nile, people would not settle near their in-laws ‘for fear of being exposed and shamed by their actions and social weaknesses’.

While the consensus of the stocktaking was that the new constitutional experiment was living up to expectations, most Southerners still felt that the two continuing weaknesses were the inadequate flow of funds from Khartoum and poor communications. Although an ILO report had recommended that a minimum of £S 70m be spent annually in the South, in fact an average of only £S 10.8m was provided in the first five years. However, the new Six-Year Plan proposes to spend £S 180m during the period in development funds alone. Meanwhile, local self-generated revenue provides only 20% of the Region's present total expenditure.

#### *Opposition Elements:*

Opposition elements in the South continue to criticize the Northerners for parsimony and lack of goodwill; they accuse the more influential Southern leaders of failing to use their positions more effectively to compel Khartoum to give a better deal to the South, especially since it has become a vital power-base for President Numeiry's regime.

During the past five years, opposition has come from diverse sources. There were pockets of localized opposition, as in Nuer in 1973-74, where five *kujurs* (prophets)—Kai Riek, Ruei Kuic, Goni Yut, Matai and Tut Kuac—sought to establish their local power. Kai Riek was shot by the army in 1974, and the others surrendered. Some elements among the former *Anyanya* have also mutinied—most seriously in Wau in February 1976. Two former *Anyanya* political leaders, Gordon Mortat and Aggrey Gadein, refused to accept the Addis Ababa Agreement and remained in exile; but Gadein finally relented and returned home in 1977. An attack by well-armed Bagarra Arab tribesmen on a Dinka settlement in March 1977 has not yet been properly explained. The incident occurred just north of the regional border and resulted in 300 Dinka men, women and children being

killed; the official explanation was that it was simply a tribal vendetta. The Bagarra Arabs are mostly members of the *Ansar* sect. An exile group which calls itself 'The Serving Movement for the National Independence of the Immatong Republic', declared itself in favour of the South's complete independence.<sup>36</sup> An attempt was made in 1975 to get the Assembly to pass a motion of no confidence in Abel Alier's government; this was led by four prominent political leaders-Joseph Oduho, Clement Mboro, Benjamin Bol Akok and Philip Pedak Lieth. The former two were arrested and were in detention up to the elections; the latter two fled to Ethiopia from where they are believed to have had a hand in the insurrection of February 1977 (see above). "We in the South Want nothing less than independence", Lieth declared in a statement in 1977.<sup>37</sup> The alleged leader of the plot, Sergeant Paul Deng, and 98 others were brought to trial in July 1977 accused of attempting to overthrow the Government and Constitution, but their trial was adjourned.

Southerners showed signs of being worried in 1977 by Numeiry's new commitment to strengthening the role of Islam throughout the country—a source of historic suspicion as the Southerners are mainly Christian and animist. These tensions are discussed above. Another potential source of conflict is the ambitious Jonglei project (see below), although Abel Alier remains a vigorous champion of the great benefits which he believes will accrue from it to the people in the Sudd.<sup>38</sup>

The new University of Juba, which opened with 120 students in October 1977, was criticized in some quarters in the South as being no more than 'a glorified technical school' since it is heavily oriented towards vocational training. This view was strongly condemned by Bona Malwal as failing to recognize the contribution it could make to the real needs of the South for reconstruction. He also saw the university as important in the development of a two-way flow of intellectual life between the North and the South.<sup>39</sup>

## **SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

### *Living Standards:*

The official cost of living index prepared by the Department of Statistics shows a rise of c. 20% a year since 1970. A report by the economic committee of the Sudan General Federation of Trade Unions, prepared in early 1977, examined the movement in prices of essential commodities for the years 1974-75 and 1975-76. It reveals that sesame oil has increased from 10pt to 20pt a pound, wheat from 40pt to 80pt a *ruba*, and *waika* (dried okra) from £S 1.20 to £S 2.00 a *ruba*. Though the price of some commodities, notably *dura* and sugar, remained relatively stable, the overall impression is of real rises far in excess of the official figures. The report also points out that transport costs have risen between 100% maximum and 10% minimum, according to area, over the same period. Rents, too, have risen by up to 50% since 1973. The Trade Unions conclude that if

present prices are compared with those existing before July 1974, the ratio of increase is 98%. Since the maximum increase in wages is 17%, the actual decrease in workers' incomes is 81%. The statutory minimum wage in Sudan in 1977 was £S 16.50, unchanged since 1975, although wage rates prevailing in the market are difficult to assess. Public sector wages are paid in seven bands ranging from £S 16.50 a month for a newly employed unskilled man to a maximum of £S 70.05 a month. To reach the top end of the scale, a worker must have special training in a particular skill and at least 20 years service according to an official from the Labour Department.

When President Numeiry returned from the OAU summit in Gabon in July, he launched a serious attack on the problem of rising prices. In his 'Face the Nation' broadcast on 19 July, he devoted a great deal of time to explaining how the difficulties arose, and what measures were being taken to stop price rises in sugar, bread, petrol, salt and meat. He argued that shortages "are mainly caused by defects in the distribution system" which allowed profiteers to sell at high prices on the black market. Certainly, since exit-factory prices are controlled, it is in the wholesale and retail areas that price additions are most easily made. In August, the First Vice-President Abu al-Qasim went further, suggesting that high prices and shortages were artificially created by black-marketeers hoarding commodities. He urged citizens not to pay black market prices, and to report any deviation from the official price. The President also pointed out that many people were making excessive profits on imported goods. There are strict controls on such transactions; the invoices and selling prices have to be presented to the authorities. But loopholes still exist.<sup>41</sup>

#### *Education:*

Two new universities were opened during 1977 at Gezira and Juba (see Southern Sudan above) The University of Khartoum adopted a new two-semester year, with examinations held at the end of each semester. However, pressure for university places continues to be a major problem. This is relieved to some extent by rigorous standards in marking examination papers for the school-leaving certificate. Of 35,157 higher secondary school students who sat their examinations in 1977, only 16,723 were passed. Failure in Arabic or two other subjects meant disqualification.

There has been considerable public debate over the value of students training abroad, with complaints that much of their education fails to equip them for suitable employment.<sup>42</sup> Britain provides 80-100 education grants annually; West Germany 70; the USSR 35; Japan 25; East European and EEC countries between 5-20 each.

## **Students abroad 1976—77<sup>43</sup>**

### *What they studied:*

Engineering and industry	300
Agriculture, Irrigation, and Veterinary Sciences	269
Medicine	135
Economics	74
Journalism, TV and Radio	61
Law	42
Public Administration and Personnel Management	29
Geology and Mining	24
Business Administration	15
Others	630
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,579</b>

### *What level:*

Technical training	257
University degree	40
Post graduate	<b>1,282</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,579</b>

### *Who paid:*

Government scholarships	938
Foreign grants	641
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,579</b>

### *Press:*

The Council of Ministers established a Journalists' Union by a special Act, with the aim of raising the standard of journalism and promoting members' rights. A registration committee will decide who is entitled to qualify as a journalist; newspapers and news agencies will in future only be allowed to employ those registered. It remains to be seen whether this proposal will be used negatively to disbar certain journalists from seeking employment.

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Sudan's foreign relations in 1977 were closely linked to domestic developments. In his address on the anniversary of Independence Day, the President denounced “the repugnant role of some neighbouring regimes in harbouring and encouraging 'elements hostile to the Sudan’”, and threatened to use Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees to “export unrest and problems to Ethiopia”.<sup>44</sup> Early in January 1977, an Ethiopian army unit of 96 men took refuge in Sudan after it ran out of supplies. On 8 January, the Ethiopian government officially asked for their repatriation, claiming that they were not engaged in any hostile activity against the Sudan.<sup>45</sup> Khartoum's reaction was to refer again to continued hostile action by Ethiopia and Libya, and to remind both countries that the joint defence pact between Egypt and Sudan<sup>46</sup> “embodies' and confirms the shared belief that the security of the two countries is a joint responsibility”.<sup>47</sup>

There was official concern in Sudan over the riots and disturbances which took place in Cairo in late January 1977. Numeiry condemned ‘subversive designs’ against Egypt, blamed Libya for them, and appealed to the Arab countries to offer material aid to Egypt.

The Soviets' growing support for Libya and Ethiopia led to increasingly antagonistic statements by Numeiry on Russian involvement in Africa. The official view in Khartoum was that events in and around Sudan were interrelated: they were part of a coordinated strategy by the Soviet Union to undermine the Sudanese and Egyptian regimes which constituted a barrier to Soviet expansionism.

In late February 1977, President Sadat and President Assad of Syria arrived in Khartoum for a tripartite summit in which they agreed to create a Unified Political Command. The joint communiqué issued after the meeting stated that the three Presidents focused their discussion on issues related to the Arab world and to the security of the Red Sea, and emphasized their keenness to keep the area outside great power pressures and manoeuvres.<sup>48</sup>

The Khartoum mini-summit could also be seen as fitting into the emerging pattern of the ‘moderate' Arab states establishing formal alliances for political and economic co-operation, and to act as counterweights to the ‘militant' Arab camp. For Sudan, membership of this new alliance came at a critical time when the country appeared isolated in the region and was facing internal opposition backed by Libya and Ethiopia.<sup>49</sup>

The origins of Sudan's problems with Libya and Ethiopia can be traced not only to domestic factors but to the wider context of Arab politics. For one thing, the quarrel with Gaddafi began when Sudan refused to endorse his pan-Arab line and opted out of the Tripoli Charter. The Libyan leader might have been concerned with the defection of a country that, in his view, could have been the bridgehead of Arabism in Africa. It is more



likely, however, that he was mainly interested in Sudan as “a kind of soft underbelly in an operation essentially aimed at Egypt, the pivot of the Arab world”.<sup>50</sup>

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 alignments in the Horn of Africa, and by Moscow's active support of the Addis Ababa military regime. Moreover, the Eritrean insistence that the Israelis have bases on the islands of Halib and Fatma, south of the port of Assab, has helped to link the question of Red Sea security to the Arab-Israeli conflict. According to David Greig, “unified Arab control of the waterway would obviously strengthen their negotiating hand at the proposed Geneva conference...and deter the Israelis from any pre-emptive strike on the Arab frontline states”.<sup>51</sup>

The situation in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Ethiopia, became (as one high-ranking source in Khartoum put it) “a pivotal point in Sudan's foreign policy”. Obviously, the Sudan was directly affected both by the constant flow of Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees (more than 150,000 during 1977), and by the presence of Sudanese opposition elements (estimated at more than 2,000) in training camps in Ethiopia. But Khartoum stressed that developments in the Horn had now become an Arab concern rather than a strictly Sudanese one. Accordingly, the emphasis of Sudanese policy was on Red Sea security which Khartoum believed could not be regarded separately from the security of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean.

President Numeiry made a tour of Gulf and Red Sea littoral states in March 1977; on his initiative, the Presidents of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), Somalia and Sudan, met in Ta'izz and agreed on the need to convert the Red Sea into ‘a lake of peace’. The objective behind the Sudan's Red Sea initiative was to construct a Pan-Arab policy and a united Arab bloc, backed by Saudi Arabia that would guarantee the Red Sea area against super-power involvement and Israeli infiltration. For Sudan, such a formidable bloc would have special advantages: not only would it act as a counterweight to the 'militant' camp of Arab regimes, but it would also make external aggression and/or internal subversion against the Sudanese regime less likely.

Numeiry's Red Sea diplomacy included an invitation to Somalia to join the Joint Political Command of Egypt, Sudan and Syria—a not 100 subtle attempt to wean the Somalis away from the Soviets; they were then still receiving Russian military support, but were already beginning to be worried about Moscow's shift to Ethiopia. Somalia's later active involvement in the Ta'izz conference was therefore important. President Siyad Barre praised Sudan's initiative and endorsed his call for a united Arab strategy.<sup>52</sup>

In April, Ethiopia sent a strongly-worded message accusing the Sudan of 'invading Ethiopian territory' and of providing military support to internal dissidents. Khartoum denied the accusation, claiming that it represented "a futile attempt to cover up the repeated internal defeats sustained by the regime in Addis Ababa".<sup>53</sup> It was an open secret, however, that the Sudanese regime was giving active support to the Eritrean Liberation Front and the Ethiopian Democratic Union.

In mid-April, Khartoum was anxiously awaiting the outcome of the fighting in Zaire's Shaba province. In Numeiry's mind, the events in Zaire were not seen as a local or isolated occurrence; certain parallels were readily found between the 'Shaba invasion' and the Libyan-backed coup attempt in Sudan in 1976. During his visit to the US in April, Foreign Minister Mansour Khalid implied a possible Libyan-Ethiopian-Soviet involvement when he stated that if Sudan was unable to aid Zaire militarily, it was because Sudan was defending itself against the same forces that were trying to overthrow President Mobutu.<sup>54</sup> There were fears in Khartoum that if the 'invasion' succeeded, it would add a third hostile neighbour on the sensitive Southern border, the others being Uganda and Ethiopia. This is what Numeiry had in mind when he declared that "any danger to Zaire has a direct impact on Sudan's security and national unity". In Cairo, too, the events in Zaire were seen as an ominous sign of what could happen in Sudan: any pressures to undermine the Sudanese regime could weaken the Egypt-Sudan axis and so expose Egypt's southern flank.

The strain in Soviet-Sudanese relations became more evident in May when the Sudan abruptly terminated the contracts of Soviet military experts and drastically reduced the size of the Soviet embassy staff. According to the official explanation, these experts were no longer needed since the Sudanese army was phasing out the use of Soviet equipment, for which it had not, in any case, received spare parts.<sup>55</sup> As if to underline the break with the Soviet Union, Numeiry left for a week's visit to China early in June.

Sudan's efforts to find alternative sources of arms in the West corresponded with the shifts in regional alignments. In Khartoum, it was hoped that Sudan's increasing identification with the moderate and pro-West Arab regimes, as well as its mounting condemnations of Soviet intervention in Africa, would encourage the West to provide alternative sources of arms. One objective of Numeiry's visit to France in May 1977 was to negotiate the purchase of French arms. Military sources in Paris had indicated that France would supply the Sudan with 15 Mirage fighters, 10 Puma helicopters and a number of armoured personnel carriers at a cost of \$85m to be paid by Abu Dhabi.<sup>56</sup>

Britain, too, announced its readiness to supply the Sudan with arms, and in March 1977, one of Britain's leading counter-insurgency experts was engaged by the Sudanese army. This came at a critical time for Numeiry's regime which "faced internal subversion backed by two hostile neighbours, Libya and Ethiopia, who are negotiating military deals

with the Soviet Union and Cuba".<sup>57</sup> President Carter had agreed in April to the sale of six Lockheed C-130 transport planes (the bill was paid by Saudi Arabia) . Since then the Americans have strongly hinted at the possibility of supplying loans for military aid, Sudan's anti-Soviet stance was dramatically and emphatically asserted at the OAU Summit Conference at Libreville, in July 1977, where Numeiry angrily denounced "the new socialist imperialism" of the Soviet Union which was 'threatening to turn the continent into a vast area of conflict'.<sup>58</sup> According to the London *Daily Telegraph*, many of the delegates were visibly shocked by the force of the attack. This Tory paper noted with satisfaction that "many independent observers now see the Sudanese leader... as the most powerful single influence in Africa against Soviet encroachment".

The OAU Conference also heard Addis Ababa's complaint that the Sudan was encouraging the disintegration of Ethiopia with the support of 'imperialism and reactionary Arab countries'. Col Mengistu described their combined support of Eritrean secessionist forces as amounting to "an Arab war ... against an African Ethiopia". The Sudan's answer was that the Eritrean problem could not be described as internal; nor did Sudan's involvement in it constitute a case of interference as interpreted in the OAU Charter. For one thing, the refugees had Africanized if not internationalized, the problem. "Any settlement must bear in mind their effect on the Sudan as a country of refuge, where they are undoubtedly a constraint on development. The settlement must enable all the Eritreans to return to their homeland, and Mengistu's military solutions are therefore unacceptable". Moreover, it was the Ethiopian government in 1952 which had unilaterally abrogated a UN resolution on Eritrea—an abrogation which the Eritreans have since then contested.<sup>59</sup> The OAU Conference referred the Sudan-Ethiopia dispute to a mediation committee under the chairmanship of Sierra Leone.<sup>60</sup> "Nigeria urged the OAU to set up a special body with powers to stop conflicts between African countries.

Such conflicts were not lacking during 1977. In July, the protracted war of words between Libya and Egypt erupted briefly into actual fighting in which the Egyptians claimed to have 'taught the Libyans a lesson'. Since Egypt had the upper hand, the Sudan (which under the joint defence pact was pledged to come to Egypt's aid) did not intervene militarily.<sup>61</sup>

The close nature of Sudanese-Egyptian relations was again highlighted in late October when members of the Sudan People's Assembly held a joint session in Cairo with their Egyptian counterparts. The emphasis was on unity built through step-by-step integration in the economic, political and military fields. The final communiqué of the joint parliamentary meeting put Sudanese-Egyptian relations in the wider context of Afro-Arab co-operation. "This strategic depth in our nation, in the heart of the African continent and in a huge region stretching from the equator to the Mediterranean . . . makes our historic meeting an event the repercussions of which are not limited to our two

states, but extend to the rest of the Arab and African States which are interested in the security and stability of the region”.<sup>62</sup>

The reconciliation with Saddiq al-Mahdi seemed to remove a major source of conflict with Libya; indeed, Numeiry declared that there was no longer any reason for continued hostility. During the Arab Foreign Ministers' Conference in Tunisia in November, the Egyptian and Sudanese Foreign Ministers met with their Libyan counterpart and agreed to resume diplomatic relations. The Sudanese Foreign Minister, al-Rashid al-Tahir, expressed the hope that “this step would consolidate the struggle of the Arab nation for unity and progress”.<sup>63</sup> (As it turned out the hope was premature: Egyptian-Libyan relations were almost immediately ruptured over the issue of Sadat's visit to Israel.)

The pattern of alignments in the Red Sea area again shifted when Somalia ended its 1974 Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation with the Soviet Union and broke relations with Cuba. Numeiry called on Moscow to pull out of Africa or “face forcible expulsion as happened in Somalia and, before that, in other states”. Exports of arms, said the President, constituted “an assassination of the principles of peace, justice and non-alignment”.<sup>64</sup>

The tug-of-war in the Horn of Africa was approaching its most crucial stage at the end of 1977; on 13 December, President Stevens of Sierra Leone appealed to Ethiopia and Sudan to show “flexibility, maturity and an attitude of mutual accommodation”, and to avoid recourse to ‘the distracting influences of external forces in settling their differences’.<sup>65</sup> The OAU mediation committee which met in Freetown in December to deliberate on the Ethiopian-Sudanese dispute recommended ‘normalization’ of relations between the two countries, and called on them to resolve peacefully their political differences, particularly the Eritrean problem. Sudan announced its readiness to “work seriously for the resolution of the problems affecting relations between the two countries”.<sup>66</sup>

President Sadat made his dramatic and controversial peace mission to Jerusalem on 19 November. In the face of the mounting and bitter opposition of the ‘rejectionist’ states, it was now Numeiry's turn to come to the aid of his Egyptian ally. Sudan was among the first and very few, Arab League states to openly endorse Sadat's action. The Sudanese Cabinet and party leadership publicly praised Sadat's speech to the Israeli Knesset. In Cairo, Numeiry hailed Sadat's initiative as “a bold courageous step”, and added, “I believe those who oppose this step understand nothing of what is going on in the Arab region. We hope they will understand, we hope they will rejoice soon for what they are rejecting now”.<sup>67</sup>

Sudan's growing ties and closer identification with Egypt were bound to cause concern among both Right and Left-wing elements in Sudan. For one thing, the

traditional animosity of the *Ansar* towards Egypt has never really changed. In a December interview, Sadiq al-Mahdi discussed Sudan's relations with neighbouring countries: "As to Egypt, there are now no Egyptian troops in the Sudan".<sup>68</sup> The underlying implication was that their departure was one of the conditions of his return, or at least an act of which he strongly approved.

The same interview revealed other differences on foreign policy between Numeiry and Sadiq. Sadiq acknowledged the President's concern about "some of the excesses of Soviet arms policies in Africa". But he pointedly added: "However, we should also be in a position to tell the US that it is wrong, for instance, to arm South Africa and Israel. This is the meaning of being independent and neutral".<sup>69</sup> The clear implication was that Numeiry was being too pro-American. Sadiq also indicated that Western policy in the Horn of Africa needed to be changed, for it was based on wrong premises: "I strongly question the assumption that, if the [Mengistul regime is overthrown, a pro-Western regime will be restored. The alternative to the present regime could be even more Left-wing".

The view of the Left-wing opposition, as expressed in SCP clandestine publications, was that the Numeiry regime, through both its domestic and foreign policies, had tied itself to Western strategies in Africa and the Arab world. The objective of American policy was to build a Saudi-Egyptian-Sudanese alliance as a striking force for Western interests in Africa and the Middle East. The support that this bloc gave to Zaire during the Shaba rising, and its involvement in 'the military encirclement' of the Ethiopian revolution, were seen as indications of the total commitment of Numeiry's regime and the Cairo-Riyadh axis to Western policies and interests.<sup>70</sup>

The SCP denounced Sadat's visit to Israel as 'an act of treason'. According to *al-Midan*, the underground organ of the SCP, Numeiry had no right to support Sadat in the name of the Sudanese people, whose freedom of expression he had in any case confiscated: Numeiry could only speak for himself and his clique for whom support and commitment to 'treason' was no new thing.

What was perfectly clear at the end of 1977 was the completeness of President Numeiry's commitment to an anti-Soviet pro-West stance—a commitment in which both Egypt and Saudi Arabia are likely to continue to play crucial roles. Unless opposition elements, either Right or Left, come to exercise a significant influence on Sudan's foreign policy—at present an unlikely event—this trend will certainly continue to characterize the country's policy in the future.

## **ECONOMIC AFFAIRS** (0.68 Sudanese pounds = £1 sterling)

The Sudan's long-term economic potential is extremely promising provided that the political stability of the country is sustained long enough to overcome very serious short-term problems. Having abandoned the Numeiry regime's earlier phase of wholesale nationalization and rigidly doctrinaire socialism, the Sudan embarked on a new course in 1973-74. While still maintaining the basis of a mixed economy, the regime has opted for a three-pronged approach to rapid development. First, in seeking to establish a partnership between the Sudan, the Arab world and the West, it is opening up its considerable land and other resources: out of 200m acres of arable land, only 10% is effectively cultivated, while 60m acres of pasture land could carry 40m head of cattle. Second, it is attracting large-scale Arab economic resources, both for investment and in partnership arrangements, for industrial and agricultural development projects. Third, it is seeking Western technology and investment. The overall aim is to convert the Sudan into 'the breadbasket for the Third World'.

### *Agriculture:*

The first phase of the Rahad agricultural project was completed in December 1977.<sup>71</sup> The project aims at the development of irrigated agriculture on an area on the east bank of the Rahad River, using water pumped from the Blue Nile. Principal benefits of the project will be the production of cotton and groundnuts from irrigated farmland, which was formerly unproductive and semiarid.<sup>72</sup>

Controversy over the Jonglei project erupted again—this time in a desertification conference in Nairobi in September 1977.<sup>73</sup> The Jonglei canal, originally proposed by the British in 1904, aims at eliminating water losses in the Sudd region of Southern Sudan and increasing the White Nile flow for agricultural use. The extent of agricultural and ranching area potentially affected is estimated at 3.75m feddans. The total cost of the Jonglei Canal itself is estimated at £570m, to be shared equally by Sudan and Egypt. However, a report by a group of environmentalists claimed that the project would destroy the nomadic tribes' way of life in the area. Sudanese scientists and development officials condemned the report as inaccurate, although some of the ecological worries are in fact acknowledged. The Sudanese are currently spending £12m on research projects on various aspects of the scheme and will eventually spend £30m on development projects for the affected tribes.<sup>74</sup>

### *Programme Against Desertification:*

The desert is estimated to be moving forward at the rate of 5-6 km annually, which is especially affecting agriculture in Kordofan province; a farmer there needed five times more land in 1973 than in 1961 to produce 7,3,000 tons of groundnuts. The government has launched a S£ 26m programme under its Desert Encroachment Control and Rehabilitation Programme.

### *The Six-year Development Plan:*

Sudan has been described, perhaps unkindly, as living on its potential and never realizing it.<sup>75</sup> But in 1977, at least the prospects for the future were better than before; the year also saw the introduction of the Six-Year Plan, the first phase of a highly ambitious 18-Year Plan to turn the Sudan into the 'breadbasket' of the Third World. (The plan was reviewed in some detail in *Africa Contemporary Record* 1976-77, pp. B119ff.) Principally, the Plan aims to 'achieve an accelerated and balanced growth in the Sudan economy combining development with social equity'. More specifically, target is an annual growth rate of 7.5070, with agriculture continuing to be the pivot of productive development.<sup>76</sup> Although the emphasis is firmly on agriculture, the Plan recognizes the organic unity between this sector and others. Industry in particular is to be developed as a complementary sector to agriculture, with priority given to agro-industries and import substitution. Basic infrastructure will be consolidated and expanded, particularly in the field of transport and communications, power resources, marketing and storage facilities. The Plan envisages the provision of more social services of a higher standard.

The balance of payments position is expected to be improved through expansion of exports and production of import-substitutes. The private sector, both foreign and local is to be encouraged to play its role fully and effectively in development. Public and private savings are to be increased and mobilized. The Plan's strategy aims to "base central development firmly on regional planning so as to ensure that development programmes and projects reflect the potentialities and needs of every region. This would, at the same time, engender balanced development within and between regions within a framework of regional specialization and complementarities". It is expected that 48% of the Plan's investment will be financed from domestic sources and 52% from external sources, of which £S 556m has already been secured. External resources for the private sector would consist partly of private foreign investment, mainly in the form of joint ventures, and partly of foreign loans.

External finance will be a crucial element in the success of the Plan. The gross inflow of external capital is expected to be £S 1,785m, out of which c. £S 400m is estimated to be used for debt servicing, leaving a net inflow of £S 1,385m for financing development. (See also Tables at the end of this chapter.)

### *Foreign Investment:*

During 1977, Sudan intensified its efforts to create the ideal atmosphere for private investment in the country's development. The rehabilitation of private business continued and the year saw a phase of rising private investment, both domestic and foreign. Incentives for private investment range from concessions facilities and guarantees against nationalization, to generous tax exemptions, substantial relief from import and excise duties and full freedom for investors to repatriate all profits accruing

from the investment of any foreign capital. The principle of no discrimination between domestic and foreign capital, and between private and public investment, is also upheld.

There was a steady stream of foreign businessmen arriving in Khartoum during 1977. Since the President's visit to the US in June 1976, there have been great expectations of heavy American investment in agriculture and industry. The President established an inter-ministerial committee under the chairmanship of Dr Mansour Khalid to assess the results of American-Sudanese contacts and facilitate investment and trade between the two countries, especially the expansion of technical and economic cooperation.

The USAID office in Khartoum has been planning several projects in road building, agriculture extension, manpower development and health. But final approval by Washington has still to be secured. In an interview with the *Journal of Commerce* (New York) in April, Dr Khalid expressed Sudan's interest in a substantial increase in the current low level of development aid and trade: 'We are very satisfied with the speed and effort shown by US companies investing in Sudan. We would like to see a similar rapid response from the US government'.<sup>77</sup>

Sudan signed a letter of intent with Tenneco Inc in April 1977 as the first step in a development programme to exploit the potential of 775,000 acres over a 15-year period at an estimated total cost of c. \$1 bn.

Sudan's growing economic ties with Western Europe also became more evident in 1977. The EEC provided the Sudan with consultancy expertise for the 1978 Khartoum International Fair. France has promised to contribute FF 400m to offset part of the rising costs of the Kenana sugar project and to provide FF 26m for the transporting and digging equipment of the Jonglei Canal. The French also agreed to provide technical aid and to establish a joint committee to organize and coordinate co-operation between the two countries. Britain has committed f28m in capital aid and technical co-operation.

The Sudan has also strengthened its economic ties with West Germany. Many of the German investment and aid programmes focus on developing the necessary infrastructure required for industrial and agricultural development. The Germans are particularly interested in development schemes in the Southern region and, apart from direct aid and investment, they are committed to providing Sudan with loans

A delegation of top Japanese businessmen visited Khartoum in October 1977 and met the President. They expressed interest in investing in agriculture and were investigating the possibility of establishing a pilot farm near al-Duiem. Japan granted a \$1.7m loan towards starting an experimental rice farm at Abu Qabash in the Blue Nile Province.

During the President's visit to China in June, the Chinese renewed their commitment to provide development aid to the Six-Year Plan, which would include the



construction of a new bridge over the Blue Nile at Sennar, as well as an extension to the rice scheme at Malakal in Southern Sudan. Sudanese exports to China in the first half of 1977 reached £12.27m sterling and included cotton, sesame and gum arabic. China's exports in the same period were £7.5m sterling, mainly in rice, textiles and light manufactures.

South Korea also agreed to provide development aid. A South Korean company, DAE-WOO, which started operations in Sudan in 1976, was expected to win the construction contract for a 400,000 ton per year cement project at Marsa Arakiyai on the Red Sea near Port Sudan. It is perhaps indicative of the growing economic ties between Sudan and South Korea that diplomatic representation was elevated to ambassadorial level in June 1977.

*Arab investment:*

Outside observers believe that development finance is not expected to constitute any serious constraint on Sudan's ambitious development plan since Arab funds are steadily flowing into the country. According to David B. Ottaway, Arab countries (mostly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) have drawn up a £5.7 bn investment programme for Sudan. "The oil powers of the Arabian Peninsula", he wrote, "are becoming daily more committed to uplifting Sudan as part of their own long-term economic survival strategy, particularly in food production".<sup>78</sup> The first step in realizing this strategy was taken when the Arab Authority for Investment and Agricultural Development was set up in April 1976 to finance agricultural development in Arab countries, beginning with Sudan. The Arab strategy to make Sudan the primary source of food for the whole Arab world has also the advantage of creating an alternative source of investment to the industrial West for surplus Arab petrodollars. According to this plan, it is projected that by 1985 Sudan will be able to supply 42% of the vegetable oil consumed by Arab countries, 58% of their foodstuffs and 20% of their sugar needs.<sup>79</sup>

Since such an economic transformation calls for considerable capital investment, some questions naturally arise about Sudan's ability to absorb a large influx of foreign capital. Moreover, certain problems still remain to be surmounted, such as the inadequate transportation system and limited port facilities, the chronic shortages of unskilled labour, and the growing scarcity of skilled workers. These are obviously the kinds of problems experienced by many developing countries. What is perhaps more serious in Sudan's case is the tendency of some Arab countries and multinational companies participating in investment and management of projects to become engaged in internal rivalries and power struggles and manipulate their positions in order to gain immediate advantage.

As a result of such activities, some projects under construction during 1977 were meeting long delay and generating serious cost overruns. A case in point is the Kenana sugar project, a joint venture between Sudan Development Corporation, Kuwait, Kuwait

Foreign Trading Contracting and Investment Company (KFTCI), Japan and Lonrho. Another project which faced difficulties and delay was the Port Sudan-Khartoum oil pipeline, which finally became operational in September. The 821-km pipeline was originally due to open in 1976, but suffered a number of setbacks. When the pipeline was completed in 1977 by the Kuwaiti group, Kuwaiti Metal Pipe industries, it was discovered that large sections were not functioning and needed relaying—a task which was costly and time-consuming. The opening of the pipeline did not prevent the government from imposing an unexpected and unexplained 22% increase in the price of petrol at service stations (from 45 to 55 piasters per gallon).

Another controversial deal is a proposed Sudanese-Kuwaiti agreement under which Kuwait will take over the 32,000 sq metres of the Mogran area in Khartoum. The People's Assembly refused to endorse the agreement in July 1977 and returned it to the Council of Ministers for redrafting. (This time the Assembly was not presented with a *fait accompli*).

The Kenana crisis and certain aspects of the proposed Mogran deal, not to mention the intricacies of the pipeline saga, raise certain misgivings about the dangers inherent in internal squabbles of multi-national ventures, about questionable financial practices and deals, and about persistent under-estimates of project costs. In commenting on the controversial Kuwaiti loan Agreement to provide additional funds for the Kenana project, *Sudanow* lamented in May 1977: “The end will justify the means even where the means include loan agreements with terms as crippling as these, and the only end so far attained is the project's prestige. Until production starts in November 1978, Kenana's sugar will remain bitter”.

The Arab commitment to help uplift Sudan economically and turn it into the 'breadbasket' of the world, is an ambitious, far-sighted and mutually beneficial strategy; but if not checked, short-term, narrow-minded not to say selfish considerations could kill the goose before it has laid any golden eggs at all.

**NOTES** (Unless otherwise stated, all the references are to Khartoum publications)

1. See *Africa Contemporary Record* (ACR) 1915- 76, pp. BI06ff.
2. *Al-Sahafa*, 2 January 1977.
3. *Al-Ayam*, 7 January 1977.
4. For details see *ACR* 1976-77. p. B111
5. *Al-Ayam* 12 February 1977.
6. *Al-Hawadith*, Beirut, 29 April 1977.
7. *Ibid*
8. *Al-Sahafa*, 12 February 1977.
9. *Sudan News Agency* (SUNA), Daily Bulletin, 21 April 1977.
10. *Al-Sahafa*, 26 May 1977.
11. *Al-Sayyad*, Beirut, 2-9 June 1977.
12. *Al-Ayam*, 19 July 1977.
13. *Africa*, London, September 1977
14. The Central Committee of the Sudan Communist Party, *Democracy is the Key to the Solution of the political Crisis*, August 1977.
15. *Ibid*
16. *Al-Ayam*, 8 August 1977
17. *Al-Sahafa*, 14 August 1977. Communist underground publications, however, claimed that while Right-wing political prisoners were being released, Left-wing prisoners, especially trade unionists, were still being detained.
18. *Sudanow*, August 1977
19. *A-Sahafa*, 10 August 1977.
20. *Al-Ayam*, 16 August 1977 .
21. *Ibid*
22. *Africa*, September 1977.
23. See *ACR* 1972-73, pp. B97ff.
24. *Africa*, September 1977 .
25. *Al-Sahafa* 11 September 1977.
26. Interview with Colin Legum in London, 26 September 1977.
27. *Al-Ayam* 28 September 1977.
- 28 Interview with journalist, Fulvio Grimaldi, in *The Middle East*, London, December 1977
29. *Ibid*
30. *Ibid*
31. *Sudanow*, October 1977.
32. *Sudanow*, November 1977.
33. *The Middle East*, December 1977.
34. See *ACR* 1972-73 pp. B97ff
35. For a review of developments in the South see *ACR* 1973-74, 1974-75, 1975-76 and 1976-77
36. *Voice*, London, 29 September 1977
37. Quoted by David Ottaway in *the Guardian*, Manchester; 17 April 1977.
38. *Sudanow*, August 1977.
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40. *The Military Balance* 1977-78 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies).
41. David Greig in *Sudanow*, September 1977.
42. *Sudanow*. December 1977 .
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68. *The Middle East*, December 1977.
69. *Ibid*.
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73. for earlier developments, see *ACR* 1976-77, p. 8116; 1975-76, p. 8126; 1974-75, p. b110
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79. *Ibid*