Changing Patterns of Civilian-Military Relations in the Sudan

Research report No. 46

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- The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies -

Uppsala 1978

ISSN 0080-6714
ISBN 91-7106-137-1

Printed in Sweden by
Uppsala Offset Center AB
Uppsala 1978

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INTRODUCTION

The involvement of the military in governmental and political affairs is a familiar feature of contemporary societies - particularly in the emergent countries of Africa and the Third World. But the Sudanese pattern of civilian-military relations, though it reflects many of the usual characteristics of the same phenomenon elsewhere, differs from that of other African countries in three respects.

In the first place, the Sudan's experience of military involvement in politics is a well established tradition which preceeds independence and the colonial period and goes back to the traditional system which existed before.

Secondly, the armed forces, during the long course of their evolution in the Sudan, have assumed different forms of organisation varying from guerilla-type bands of part-time volunteers to modern standing armies of conscripts and professional soldiers. The roles which they played in the political and social life of the Sudanese have also varied from time to time. In certain cases, armed forces were the instruments of foreign conquest and oppression; in others the agents of national liberation and religious reformation. And since the achievement of independence in 1956, armed forces have twice "intervened" in politics: on one occasion primarily in order to restore stability and safeguard the country's existing system of law and order; on another - more recent occasion - with a view to fostering social and political change by revolutionary means.

The third distinguishing feature of civilian-military relations in the Sudan has been the "civilian coup" which resulted in the overthrow of General Ibrahim `Abboud's military regime and the restoration of civilian government in October 1964. This is, in itself, an interesting, and as yet, unparallelled event which merits attention in its own right, especially since the existing regime of General

Jaafar Nimairy, which came ot power in May 1969, regards itself as a continuation, not of General `Abboud´s military regime, but of the civilian coup which brought `Abboud´s regime to an end and resored civilian government instead.

The purpose of this paper is to trace, in outline, the development of the military involvement in Sudanese politics and make some suggestions towards the general assessment of its nature and consequences. Apart from any implication or other interest it may have for the comparative study of civilian-military relations in Africa as a whole, this should serve as a background against which the present regime in the Sudan may be seen and its policies or political orientations understood.

I. THE TRADITIONAL PATTERN

Considering the first of the aboved mentioned features of Sudanese experience in civilian-military relations we need to refer, briefly, to the emergence of the modern Sudan as a microcosm of Africa, i.e. as a largely Arabized and Islamized African country, at the turn of the sixteenth century.[1] For although the Islamization and Arabization of the country was mainly the result of peaceful penetration of the Christian Kingdoms of Nubia by Muslim - Arab immigrants, the actual downfall of `Alwa, the last of the Christian kingdoms of Nubia´,[2] did not come about until Abdalla Jammaa and 'Umara Dongos forcefully took Soba, the capital, in 1504 and established their Islamic Kingdom of the Funj - a term which, incidently, was variously interpreted to mean: the conquerors, the lords or free citizens.[3]

As may be expected, the Funj Sultanate was a charactistically militant frontier-state which was soon involved in what Gibbon, referring to medieval Christiandom and Islam in general, called an intermittent armed debate with the most important neighbouring Christian kingdom i.e. Abyssinia. In the process the Funj built up a standing army which - like the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria, the Jannissaries of the Ottoman Empire and comparable bodies throughout the history of Islam - was mostly drawn from captives and slaves, and with similar consequences. Following a celebrated victory against the Abyssinians in 1774, Shaikh Muhammad Abu al-Likailik, the leader of the Funj army during this encounter, staged a coup d´etat in Sinnar, the capital, and assumed effective control of the state. "From that time onwards" the Funji chronicler tells us, "the authority of the Funj (Sultans) began to weaken and the business of government was left to the Hamaj"[4] - i.e. Shaikh Abu al-Likailik´s relatives and kinmen.

The`Hamaj´ however did not themselves become kings or sultans, but used the Funji monarchs as puppet kings while controlling public affairs themselves: a situation closely resembling that of the Caliphate of Baghdad before the Mogul invasion of 1258 and, afterwards, under the Mamluks of Egypt until 1517.[5] Under these conditions corruption, intrigue and even murder became common practices among the ruling classes of Sinnar - just as had been the case in

Cairo and Baghdad. Sinnar's control over the tribes which constituted the Sultanate weakened, civil war and internal friction increased and the structure of the Sultanate began to crumble. By 1820 when the Ottomen Egyptian forces of Muhammed'Ali Pasha of Egypt marched into the Sudan, there was no effective authority to direct the defence of the country and the puppet king of the day surrendered, on 14th June 1829, without fighting.

The Pasha's main objective in the Sudan was to build an efficient modern-type army of Sudanese Mamluks which, he had hoped,would enable him to carve for himself an Egyptian-Arab empire independent from that of the Sultan in Istanbul; "You are aware that the end of all our efforts and this expense", Muhammad'Ali reminded one of his generals in the Sudan, "is to procure Negroes. Please show zeal in carrying out our wishes in this capital matter"[6]. It being impermissible for Muslims to enslave Muslims, the raids for slaves had to be directed to the `pagan' hinterlands of the White Nile and the Nuba Mountains from where about ten thousand slaves were annually exported to Egypt.[7] Egyptians, Europeans, Northern Sudanese Arabs as well as chiefs and members of the so called `pagan' tribes of the Southern Sudan themselves participated in this human traffic.[8] A certain proportion of the captives was absorbed in domestic slavery; but all able-bodied males were recruited in Muhammad'Ali's French-trained army. In this capacity many of them distinguished themselves during the campaigns in Syria, Arabia, and, during Said's reign, in Mexico, where they fought on the side of the Pasha's friend, Napoleon III.[9]

If the ultimate objectives of Muhammad'Ali's conquests in the Sudan were military, the administration of the country throughout the Ottoman-Egyptian period of its history was also military. Being viewed as a province of Egypt the Sudan was, at first, put under the control of area military commanders who answered to a Mudir (or Governor), himself an army officer, whose headquarters were in Khartoum, a small hamlet which, from 1833, became the capital of the Sudan. In 1835 however the Mudir of the Sudan was elevated to the position of Hakimdar (or Governor General) in whose person both civil and military powers in the Sudan were vested. At the same time, the provincial military commanders, hitherto known as Mamurs(roughly meaning executives) were designated Mudirs.[10] The personal of the

new regime was a mixture of Ciroassian, Turkish, European and Armenian officers of the Ottoman-Egyptian army who were helped, at the lower levels of administration, by Sudanese Shaikhs and tribal leaders.

But the administration was subjected to continuous and, often, arbitrary interference from Cairo; there was no regular system of pay; and politically undesirable persons were often exiled to the Sudan where they were given military and administrative posts. Under those conditions inefficiency and arbitrariness, especially in the levying and collection of taxes, gradually assumed phenomenal proportions and the seeds of discontent were thereby sown. The difficulties of the empire were further augmented by the policy of rapid but poorly organized expansion which was followed by Muhammad 'Ali's successors especially Khedive Ismail. He, moreover, tried to abolish the slave trade by means of force. General Charles Gordon, Stanley Baker and other mercenaries and expatriates were employed by the Khedive to implement this policy as well as help with the administration of the country in general. But Baker's and Gordon's violent and yet ineffective efforts in abolishing the slave trade had the effect of causing considerable social and economic dislocation and to that extent weakened the government's control over the country. Financial difficulties which finally led to the deposition of Khedive Ismail in 1879 added to the already mounting waves of discontent in the Sudan.

When the Sudanese religious leader Muhammad Ahmad 'Abdalla claimed that he was the Mahdi (i.e. the Divinely Guided Saviour) in March 1881 and called upon the people to rally with him against the Turks and for the reformation of Islam, Rauf Pasha, the Governor General at the time, did not take the matter seriously. Under the able leadership of the Mahdi the apparently minor rebellion was rapidly transformed into a Jihad and a nation-wide revolution. After four years of guerilla warfare during which the Mahdists won a succession of dazzling victories against government forces, Khartoum fell to the Mahdi on 26th January 1885 and General Gordon was killed.[11]

Thereafter until the reconquest of the Sudan by the Anglo-Egyptian forces of General Kitchener in 1898, the Sudan was governed by the

Mahdists as a militant Islamic state which was dedicated to the revival of Islam on puritanical lines, not only in the Sudan, but throughout the Muslim world and beyond. The thirteen years of the Mahdiyya therefore consisted of a series of campaigns against rebellious elements in the Western Sudan; against the Abyssinians in the east; and against the British-occupied Egypt in the north.[12]

Considering the nature and the objectives of the Mahdiyya the Sudan then, naturally, became a garrison state in which soldiers and generals held central positions in the government and administration of the country.

Until his death, in June 1885, the Mahdi occupied a supreme and unique position by virtue of his divine tenure and - though a lot of power was delegated to his subordinates both civil and military - he remained in full control of the movement he had originated and the soldiers and generals on whom it depended.[13] After his death the Khalifa 'Abdullahi assumed the leadership of the state. Having been the Mahdi's right hand man, Amir Juyush al-Mahdiyyia(i.e. the C-in-C of the armed forces of the Mahdiyya) and the Commander of the Black Flag (al-Raya al-Zarqa), one of the most powerful of the Mahdist divisions, Khalifa 'Abdullahi continued to dominate the generals in Omdurman, the Mahdist capital, as well as in the metropolitan provinces which had neither separate standing armies nor military governors of their own.

By contrast the more distant provinces of Barbar and Kordofan and the frontier provinces of Dongola, Qallabat, Sawakin and Darfur had military governors each of whom had his own provinicial treasury for the maintenance of local armies.[15] In the circumstances these proved more difficult to control though none of them could actually ignore or contradict the Khalifa's orders and directives. For ultimately they and the Khalifa alike were all responsible for the maintenance and protection of the Mahdiyya so that the faithful, helped by the judges and the 'ulema(i.e. scholar jurists), may be able to live in accordance with the divine law as interpreted by the Mahdi.

The Mahdist state itself was brought to an end only thirteen years after the conquest of Khartoum. The collapse of the Mahdiyya in 1898 was not the result either of internecine warfare or of internal decay as had been the case with the Funj Sultanate even before the Ottoman Egyptian invasion of Muhammad'Ali, but was essentially the result of the inability of the Mahdist State and military machine to resist the mounting pressure of the Scramble for Africa which was then rapidly closing in on the Sudan.

II. THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: THE COLONIAL ERA

The British (nominally Anglo-Egyptian) colonial administration which was established in the Sudan after the destruction of the Mahdiyya has been aptly described as "an autocracy on military lines for civilian purposes"[16] As in the days of the Ottoman Egyptian regime the country was put under a Governor General who was a military officer and in whose person was vested the supreme military and civil command of the Sudan. Until 1925 he was also the Sirdar, or C-in-C of the Egyptian Army. His chief lieutenants - both in Khartoum and in the provinces - were British officers on secondment from the army of occupation who were assisted by Egyptian officers and military personnel.

Lord Cromer who had engineered both the conquest of the Sudan and the building of its new administration found this a distasteful state of affairs and strongly felt that soldiers should be replaced by civilians.[17] Both for financial reasons and because the process of "pacification" was still far from complete however he was convinced that the soldiers - though they could not really be entrusted with the government of any country - would, for some time at any rate, be indispensable. As it happened it was not until 1919 that the first civilian provincial Governor was appointed while a large number of engineers, doctors and even judges continued to be drawn from the army until well after the First World War. The country as a whole was put under martial law until 1926 when a civilian was, for the first time appointed to the post of Governor General. But the administration continued to have a military flavour which survives to this day in the khaki uniforms and coloured stripes of the provincial Governors and local government officers of the independent Sudan.[18]

The military character of the administration during the first half of the Anglo-Egyptian regime was paralleled, on the part of the Sudanese, by an equally striking inclination to express nationalist sentiments through mutiny and armed rebellion. But this has been dealt with elsewhere.[19] Here it is sufficient to note that, both in order to minimize the risk of the outbreak of rebellions and mutinies and so as to be better able to deal with them when they did occur, the British administration of the Sudan found it expedient to establish a purely Sudanese army to replace the Egyptian Army of conquest.

The Sudan Defence Force, as it was called, was established in 1925. It took an oath of allegiance to the Governor General and not to the Khedive of Egypt as had been the practice. Until the Military College which had been closed down in 1924 was reopened two decades later, the officers of the S.D.F. were promoted, under close supervision and control of British Commanders and general staff, from among the ranks. The result was that the S.D.F., far from being a seedbed of nationalist rebellion or a source of resistance to the regime, became one of the most dependable prods of the British colonial administration in the Sudan - and beyond.[20]

Several factors induced the British to make the S.D.F. the professional, if comparatively small, army which it was commonly recognzed to be. One consideration was the Sudan's pivotal position between Britian's strategic interests in East Africa and the Middle East - particularly in Egypt and the Suez Canal area. The Loss of the Indian Army to the Imperial Defense system after the Second World War provided another reason for the maintenance of the S.D.F. as an efficient military machine. And this became even more important in view of the reluctance of Mr. Attlee's Labour Government to offset the loss of the Indian Army by an equivalent commitment of British troops at home.[21]

During the War the S.D.F. effectively fought the Italians in Abyssinia and made an even more significant contribution in the North African campaigns of 1942. The experience which was thus gained in the battle-field, coupled with the appointment and promotion of some seventy Sudanese officers during the War and the progressive "Sudanisation" of the officer corps in the course of the following years - particularly during the transitional period (1953/55) which preceded independence and witnessed the Sudanisation of the entire S.D.F. as well as the judiciary and the civil service[22] - had the effect of making the Sudan "the one African country south of the Sahara to emerge from the colonial period with a modern military establishment possessing the attributes of an independent national army".[23]

III. THE INDEPENDENT SUDAN: MILITARY RULE AND THE CIVILIAN COUP

At the time of independence in 1956, the Sudan was equipped with a professional and, apparently, apolitial army, a well developed civil service having a high reputation for efficiency and incorruptability and a parliamentary system which enjoyed the confidence of the people and their leaders. The then popular notion that the Sudanese were a `naturally democratic' people[24] and that the Westminister model perfectly suited their genius was formally confirmed by the recommendation of the National Constitution Committee that the existing parliamentary system should, with a few modifications, be maintained.

While the subject was still under consideration however the parliamentary democracy of the Sudan was swept aside by the military regime of General Ibrahim'Abboud which assumed power in November, 1958. The military take-over was largely brought about through the agency and with the apparent approval of the Prime Minister, Sayyid'Abdalla Khalil, who, having had the longest association with the development of parliamentary institutions in the country, was generally presumed to be one of the pillars of parliamentary democracy in the Sudan.

Chief amongst the factors contributing to the collapse of parliamentary government was the fact that, throughtout the greater part of the period since independence, the country was governed by an incongruous coalition of the Mahdists and the Khatmiyya who having been at loggerheads for three quarters of a century were brought together, on the eve of independence,[25] by their common hostility to Sayyid Ismail al-Azhari and his National Unionist Party. The Umma Party and the Peoples Democratic Party, the political organs of the Mahdists and the Khatmiyya respectively, had earlier given their grudging support to Azhari until independence had been formally celebrated on 1st January 1956. Shortly afterwards however they ousted Ashari and formed their own coalition government under'Abdalla Khalil, the Secretary of the Umma Party, as Prime Minister.

The Umma - P.D.P. coalition was able to function with comparative ease and harmony over the less controversial issues of internal and foreign policy. Thus, during this period, the Sudan established itself in the international field, joining the U.N., the Arab League and later on, the O.A.U. Internally, social services were expanded;

the University College of Khartoum was raised to full university status; railway extensions south of Sinnar in the Blue Nile and in Darfur were completed; and the first part of the Managil extension of the Gezira scheme began operating, in July 1958, with a gross irrigable area of 200,000 acres.

But serious differences paralysed the coalition in other matters both political and economic. Thus, during the Suez crisis the P.D.P. felt that Egypt should have been given greater support than the Prime Minister was willing to give while some Umma spokesmen accused the P.D.P. of softness towards, if not actual complicity with Egypt when a minor border dispute arose between the two countries in Februray 1958. And whereas the Umma Party favoured a presidential form of government with Sayyid'Abdal-Rahman al-Mahdi as first President the P.D.P. and the Khatmiyya could not agree. A third difficulty arose from the deteriorating financial and economic situation which, having initially resulted from failure to dispose of the cotton crop of 1957, was compounded by exceptionally poor crops in 1958. With the country's reserves falling rapidly, severe and unpopular restrictions had to be imposed and the Prime Minister felt that foreign aid should be sought. But the P.D.P., already worried by what it considered was the unduly pro-Western policy of Abdalla Khalili was strongly opposed to American aid.

Elections were held in February 1958 in the hope that the result would be the formation of a more united and effective government. Given the numerous divisions of Sudanese society - regional, tribal, religious and political - however no single party was able to form a government on its own (either on this or on any subsequent occasion) and the already strained Umma-P.D.P. coalition was returned to power. Realising the futility of this arrangement the President of the Umma Party, Sayyid al-Siddiq al-Mahdi, then sought an alliance with Azhari's N.U.P. But this was unacceptable to the Prime Minister who was the secretary of the Umma Party. 'Abdalla Khalil, who was also the Minister of Defence and had been a senior officer in the S.D.F. before entering the political arena, then started consultations with senior army officers about the possibility of a military coup. From his point of view this seemed to be desirable because it would, at one stroke, solve his intra-party problems vis-a-vis Sayyid al-Siddiq and, at the same time, save the country from the consequences of the paralysing differences with the P.D.P. which had arisen over questions of foreign aid and relations with the U.A.R.[26]

There is no evidence to suggest that the senior officers who were contacted by 'Abdalla Khalil had previously contemplated the possibility of an army take-over. Some of them subsequently pointed out that they had in fact been positively opposed to the idea and openly said so when the suggestion was made by the Prime Minister.[27] In view of the fact that the suggestion was made by none other than the Prime Minister who was also Minister of Defence however, the C-in-C and his lieutenants naturally began to develop a different attitude. Another consideration was the fact that the junior officers were on the whole inclined to admire the triumphant post - Suez Nasir and nursed a different view of the role of the armed forces in society from that of their seniors. In fact a group of young officers, led by the thirty-four year old Major Abdal-Rahman Kibaida were arrested in June 1957, for building a secret organisation in the army with the purpose of staging a coup. Kibaida and his associates were convicted and given heavy sentences of imprisonment, but army intelligence continued to report the presence of similar movements amongst the ranks of junior officers. In order to forestall such movements, maintain the unity of the armed forces and safeguard their own future therefore, senior officers felt that it was expedient to act on the advice of the Prime Minister.[28]

The Coup d'etat was launched on 17th November 1958. To the people in general it came as a relief after the wrangling and differences of the parties. General'Abboud assured the country that his aim was the restoration of stability and sound administration at home, and the fostering of cordial relations with the outside world, especially the U.A.R. For the politicians and those Sudanese who prized the Sudan's democratic institutions, however, the coup, followed by the suspension of the constitution and the dissolution of parliament and the parties, was a serious set-back. But there was at first no sign of active opposition and the two leaders, al-Mahdi and al-Mirghani, gave their blessings to the new regime on the understanding that the army would not stay in power longer than was necessary for the resortation of stability.

The military regime made a good start by following a realistic cotton sales policy which ensured the sale of both the carry over from the past seasons and the new crop. Loans from various international institutions and aid from the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R. and

elsewhere were successfully negotiated. The money was used to finance such projects as the completion of the Managil extension and the construction of the Bosairis Dam on the Blue Nile and the Khashm al-Gibra Dam on the Atbara.

But discontent soon began to spread with the feeling that many officers had become corrupt and were using public funds for private gain. The result was that when the country was again gripped by financial and economic difficulties in 1964 the public was convinced that this could not be accounted for in terms of the poor cotton crop of that year, nor in terms of over-ambitious economic development schemes; in short they no longer trusted the government.

In the field of administration other than financial a system of provincial administrations not unlike Pakistan's "Basic Democracies" was introduced in 1961 and this was crowned in 1962 by the creation of a Central Council which met for the first time in November 1963. The idea was to train the people in responsible self-government through institutions which, it was said, would be more suitable to their genius than imported ones such as Westminister - type parliaments and the administrative system inherited from the pre-independence era.[29] While this was, to most people, perfectly acceptable in principle the actual working of the system turned out to be very different in practice. Consequently, it not only failed to win the politically sophisticated but also alienated the civil service and professional administrators many of whom were involved in frictions with army officers. Therefore when the civil service was called to join the judiciary, university staff, workers and others in the general strike which followed the outbreak of the revolution in October 1964, the response was both complete and enthusiastic.

The immediate cause of the revolution was the government's heavy handed administration in the South. This was based on the mistaken idea that the problem of the Southern Sudan was a military, not a political, problem and that it was mainly the result of the activities of the missionaries who had participated in the implementation of the 'Southern Policy' of the British administration.[30] But the expulsion of missionaries in February 1964 dramatized the problem for the outside world rather than helped to solve it while military action against both the Anya Nya rebels and the civilian villagers

who were sometimes obliged to give them food and shelter had the effect of forcing thousands of Southerners to live as refugees in neighbouring countries and convinced many that the only solution of the problem was for them to have a separate and independent state in the South.

Indignant about the treatment of their compatriots and concerned for the unity of the country, politicians, university students and others started campaigning for the view that the country could not be saved except by the removal of the military from authority and the restoration of democratic government. Orders forbidding public discussion of the Southern problem and other political matters were issued but were defiantly disregarded by students. On October 21st the police, determined to break up such a discussion, opened fire on the students within the precincts of the university. One student died and the revolution was thereby set in motion. A general strike brought the country to a standstill and General 'Abboud was forced to start negotiations with a Committee of Public Safety to which he subsequently agreed to surrender political power. His decision was partly dictated by the fact that the army was known to be divided and that the younger officers especially were reluctant to open fire on unarmed civilian demonstrators with whom they generally sympathised.

IV. THE SECOND FAILURE OF CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE REVOLUTION OF MAY, 1969

The exhilarating success of the 'civilian coup' in eliminating General'Abboud's military regime gave rise to high hopes not only for the peaceful settlement of the problem of the Southern Sudan which was the most burning of the issues that led to the revolution, but also for the restoration of civilian government on more healthy and permanent basis. These objectives, together with such principles as the independence of the judiciary and of the University of Khartoum, were enshrined in the National Charter[31] which also provided for the election, at an early date, of a Constituent Assembly which would draw up a permanent constitution for the country as well as perform the usual functions of parliament until new institutions had been created.

The Provisional Government which took over from General'Abboud restored the freedom of the press throughout the country, declared a general amnesty in the south and appealed to Southern leaders inside and outside the country to help solve the problem by peaceful means. On March 16th 1965 a Round Table Conference in which Northern and Southern parties participated was opened in Khartoum. The Conference agreed on a constructive programme of immediate action which included the repatriation of refugees and the restoration of order, freedom of religion and unrestricted missionary activity by Sudanese nationals and the training of Southerners for army, police and civil service. As no general agreement had been reached on the subject however, the constitutional future of the country was referred to a Twelve Man Committee on which all parties were represented. The result of the consultations which followed in this and, subsequently, in the political Parties Conference, was the proposal, finally embodied in the Draft Constitution which was submitted to the Constituent Assembly in 1968, that the country be divided into nine regions each of which was to have its own parliament and executive within the framework of a united Sudan.[32]

By this time however other developments had already begun to undermine both the concensus which had been gradually building up regarding the settlement of the problem of the Southern Sudan on the basis of regional autonomy and the chances for survival of the civilian

regime on which so many hopes had been put after the revolution of October, 1964. Amongst these were the serious disputes which arose over the two proposals, also embodied in the Draft Constitution, that the country should have a presidential and not a parliamentary executive[33] and that the permanent constitution be based on the principles of Islam. Constitutional Islamism, which had been vigorously canvassed by the Islamic Charter Front and endorsed by the N.U.P., the P.D.P. and the Umma Party, was inevitably resisted and regarded with suspicion not only by the Communist Party and radical Northern opinion in general but also, and more importantly, by the great majority of the Southern Sudanese parties and spokesmen - the interesting exception being Sayyid William Deng and his faction of SANU.[34]

Technically it was also generally agreed that stability and effective government could be better safeguarded under a strong executive system such as was proposed in the Draft Constitution. Since it was obvious that the chief runners for the presidency under the proposed constitution would be Sayyid Ismaʿil al-Azhari of the N.U.P. and Sayyid al-Hadi al-Mahdi of the Ansar and the Umma Party however, the remaining groups - including the P.D.P., the Khatmiyya, the Communists and the Southern Sudanese Parties - opposed the system in question and continued to fight a rear guard battle in the name of parliamentary democracy so as to better their chances of a say in Government. Thus the Constituent Assembly was unable to fulfil its chief function, namely the adoption of a permanent constitution for the country - even after its duration was twice extended beyond the originally agreed date.

But the Assembly did not only fail to carry out its basic function. It also precipitated two constitutional crises which, together, brought the regime to the verge of final collapse. The first of these was in connection with the banning of the Communist Party and the unseating of its eleven representatives from the Constituent Assembly in November 1965. This act was contested in the courts which, in December 1966, ruled that it was illegal. But the Assembly, acting in its capacity as constitution maker, overruled the courts' judgement - the result being a crisis in which the judiciary and the Assembly confronted one another.

The second crisis began in January 1968. During the preceeding weeks the Government then in office[35] had been defeated on several occasions

by the opposition. This coupled with the growing P.D.P. and Communist opposition to the Draft Constitution based on Islamism, regionalism and a strong executive on the presidential model, led the Government to dissolve the Assembly on 7 January 1968. The opposition contested the constitutionality of this act in the courts but, following their experience over the banning of the Communist Party, the courts were in no mood to rush with a judgement. To keep the government under pressure, the leader of the opposition, Sayyid Sadiq al-Mahdi, then dispatched a memorandum to the administrative heads of ministries and government departments, including the armed forces, informing them of the views of the opposition regarding the unconstitutionality of the existing administration and calling upon them to abide by the ruling of the courts once their judgement in the constitutional case before them had been pronounced. Before any judgement was pronounced however new elections were held in April 1968 and a new Assembly was brought to office.[36]

The disorienting effects of this succession of constitutional crises and maneuvers were compounded by acute political disagreements which, between June 1965 and May 1969, resulted in the formation and dissolution of four governments each of which was a barely tenable coalition more or less continuously torn by internal dissent and disputes.[37] In the meantime the economic and financial condition of the country continued to deteriorate while the post - October optimism about an early settlement of the problem of the Southern Sudan by peaceful means gave way to a situation in which government forces and Anya Nya rebels were reportedly involved in a series of clashes in which hundreds of people, mainly civilian villagers, were killed. The result was a state of general disillusionment in which the main topic for consideration in clubs, private discussions and even university tutorials, was the idea that the question for the Sudanese people was no longer whether or not the existing set up could ever be saved but what the alternative should be.

In the circumstances few people were surprised when, on 25 May 1969 Col. (later Major General) Ja'afar Muhammad Nimairy, assumed control of the country - and none rose to defend the fallen regime.[38] The coup took place at a time of general disenchantment with the Constituent Assembly and the civilian politicians who tried to run it. This was an important initial advantage of the new regime and distinguished it from General 'Abboud's military regime. A second contrast was

that whereas the coup of November 1958 had been executed by the C-in-C and his senior generals working in close cooperation with the outgoing Prime Minister, the May 1969 coup was engineered by a group of junior officers who belonged to the younger, post Second World War generation of army officers most of whom had been commissioned at a time when Jamal'Abd al-Nasir had already established himself as a model leader of great appeal throughout the Third World and especially in the Middle East and North Africa.

One consequence of this was that the entire group of generals and brigadiers who had occupied senior posts before May 1969 were, without exception, retired from the armed forces and not allowed any say in the new regime. But a much more important consequence was the fact that in contrast with General'Abboud and his lieutenants, General Nimairy and his associates saw themselves, not as the leaders of a coup whose objective was the restoration of stability and the maintenance of law and order within the framework of the existing social set up but as the makers of a social revolution which would trasform Sudanese society in the same way as Nasir´s had transformed Egyptian society.

A longer time will have to pass before an accurate assessment of the ideological character of Nimairy´s regime and its place in Sudanese history can be made. As of now however it can be said that the regime has passed through two principal phases.

During the first phase, lasting from May 1969 till July 1971, the regime followed distinctly radical policies. This tendency - inherent in Nimairy´s declared commitment to a programme of "Sudanese Socialism" which was regarded as an expression of the essential spirit of the October Revolution of 1964 - was accentuated by the fact that the Communist Party and its supporters then enjoyed a uniquely dominant position in governmental and policy-making processes. The close alliance which was then forged between the officially dissolved Communist Party and the new military rulers of the country was a function of the fact that the leaders of the more effectively banned traditional political parties and of the Tariqas (i.e. the Ansar and the Khatmiyya) were regarded as having betrayed the October Revolution of which Nimairy and his friends saw themselves as the true heirs and perpetrators. Accordingly, and in order to effectively exclude the traditional

parties from the political arena, Nimairy decided to work in close cooperation with likeminded civilians - not on personal and purely administrative basis as had been the case with 'Abboud - but with a view to building a permanent base of popular support on the model of the Arab Socialist Union, Egypt's one-party organization. Thus were laid the foundations of the Sudanese Socialist Union.

In the meantime Nimairy announced the formation of a predominantly civilian cabinet some of whose members - including a number of communists who had chosen to follow his lead rather than that of their officially dissolved party - had played prominent parts in the October Revolution. At first Sayyid Babiker 'Awadalla, a former Chief Justice, was appointed Prime Minister and thus became the only civilian member of the Revolutionary Council. But he was subsequently replaced as Prime Minister by General Nimairy who had been President of the Revolutionary Council and was subsequently elected first President of the Sudan.

Under this leadership the country was given the new name of "The Democratic Republic of the Sudan". Banks, together with a wide variety of firms and companies, were nationalized. The property of certain persons, including members of the Mahdi family, was confiscated. Several former ministers and members of traditional parties were put on trial on charges of bribery and corruption. Following an attempt on the life of General Nimairy, the chief source of opposition to the regime - namely Imam al-Hadi al-Mahdi, who had for some time been gathering weapons and supporters at Aba Island on the White Nile - was crushed in March 1970.

With regard to the southern provinces in particular, the regime declared its commitment to a policy of regional administrative autonomy supported by a programme of economic development and reconstruction on socialist lines. A special Ministry for Southern Affairs was created which, under the guidance as Minister of Joseph Garang - a Southern Sudanese lawyer who was a member of the Communist Party - was charged with the responsibility of spelling out the details of the said policy and the supervision of their implementation.[39]

In the field of foreign affairs, one of the first decisions taken by the regime was to recognize the German Democratic Republic. This

was followed by the forging of closer diplomatic and trade relations with China, the USSR and Eastern Europe. In the Middle East the regime's policy was, above all, characterized by its militant support for the Arab cause over the Palestine question and, for some time after the Libyan coup of September 1969, with Qadhāfi of Libya as well as with Nasir and the UAR. Subsequently, General Nimairy personally participated in the resolution of the Jordanian crisis and, in November 1970, it was declared that Presidents Nimairy, Sadat and Qadhāfi had decided to unite the Sudan, Libya and the UAR into one federal state.

This was unacceptable to the Communists who, having already suffered serious internal strains resulting from differences over the question of how best to handle the new regime, now feared that they would be subjected to the same fate as their Egyptian counterparts.[41] The growing mistrust and hostility culminated in an open bid for power by the Communists. This took the form of a coup which, led by Major Hashim al-'Ata, resulted in the overthrow of General Nimairy on 19th July 1971, and the subsequent liquidation of some thirty officers who were known to favour Nimairy and his policies.

The communist coup however proved abortive. Its proclaimed head of state, Colonel Babiker al-Nur and his lieutenant, Major Faruq Hamadalla had been in London and while on their way back home the BOAC plane carrying them was forced down in Libya. The Libyan authorities then handed them over to Nimairy who had in the meantime regained power as a result of a popular rising which brought the newly born communist regime to an end only three days after the putsch of 19th July. A massive purge of communists followed and fourteen people were executed. Apart from Major Hashim al-'Ata who had set the coup in motion in Khartoum and the two leaders back from London, the Communist Party's Secretary General, 'Abd al-Khāliq Mahjoub and two prominent members of the party: al-Shafiá Ahmad al-Shaikh, the Secretary General of the Federation of Sudanese Workers' Union, and Joseph Garang, who had been Minister for Southern Affairs, were eliminated after summary trials before a military tribunal.

The events of July 1971 ushered in the second phase of Nimairy's regime.

In so far as foreign relations were concerned this phase was characterized by a cooling off of relations with the Soviet Union and its East European allies which was matched by a gradual improvement of relations with the USA and Western European countries. This reversal of attitudes was prompted by the open encouragement which had been given by Bulgaria and the German Democratic Republic to the abortive coup of July 1971 and also by the unusually strong condemnation, by Soviet and East European governments, of the executions which followed Nimairy's return to power. Diplomatic relations however remained intact. In the meantime Nimairy received strong support from President Sadat of Egypt.

Commonly regarded as the nation's saviour from militant atheism Nimairy's personal popularity rapidly soared in the wake of the abortive coup. And when the first Presidential elections in Sudanese history were held in October 1971 he received almost four million votes with only 56,000 opposed. A new government was formed, the Revolutionary Command Council was dissolved and the Sudanese Socialist Union was recognized as the only legal political party in the Sudan.

The vitally important Addis Ababa Agreement between the Sudanese Government and the Anya Nya southern Sudanese rebels was signed in March 1972. As a result the long standing dispute was settled on the basis of regional autonomy for the three sourthern provinces. A Regional Peoples Assembly for the south was established at Juba with representatives in the national Peoples Assembly and a High Executive Council of its own. The Head of the Executive Council would also be a Vice President of the Republic - a post which has since been held by the former judge and politician Abel Alier.[42] The Agreement also provided for the return and rehabilitation of southern Sudanese refugees abroad and for the integration of the former Anya Nya rebels into the Sudan armed forces. The ceasefire came into effect on 12 March 1972 and the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction of the region has since been gathering momentum with continued support from Khartoum and President Nimairy personally.

At the national level these developments have been matched by a gradual disengagement from the ideologically inspired postures of earlier days and the adoption, instead, of measures for the economic and social development of the country on basis of a more pragmatic nature. Thus, in January 1973, a presidential decreee repealed the previous orders of expropriation and a policy of `denationalization` affecting some of the firms and companies which had previously been taken over by the state has been inaugurated. Laws intended to encourage foreign investments have also been promulgated and a strategy aimed at the marrying of Western technology and Arabian petrodollars to the vast agricultural potential of the Sudan at a time of pressing shortages of international and regional food supplies has been launched. Thus the political and economic strategies of the country - whether internally or in regard to its relations with the outside world - have been greatly transformed since 1971.

Throughout its two phases however the regime has shown a consistent determination to exclude the leaders of the traditional parties and their generally right-wing supporters from the political arena. These have accordingly organized themselves into a "National Front" which, supported - since 1971 - by the Communist Party and its sympathisers, has operated as a largely external opposition to the regime. Reportedly harboured and sustained by Libya`s Qadhāfi (since the deterioration of relations between Libya and the Sudan which followed Sudan´s interception of Libyan planes carrying weapons intended for Uganda´s General Amin in 1972) as well as by Ethiopia since its more recent revolution, the National Front has, on several occasions, attempted to topple Nimairy by force - the latest in this series of abortive attempts having taken place in September 1975 and July 1976.

Whatever the fate of this regime and of its opponents however it is clear that they are all operating in the context of a well established tradition: a tradition in which the military - ever since the emergence of the modern Sudan at the begining of the sixteenth century - have played important and,often, decisive roles in determining the destinies of the Sudanese. Although it may, under certain circumstances, be modified to a greater or lesser extent-as has in fact happened during certain phases of the country´s evolution in the course of the last five centuries - this is a tradition which is not likely to be completely changed in the foreseable future.

NOTES

1) The use of armed forces as instruments of conquest had been a recurring feature of Sudanese history since the Pharaohs and the subsequent conquest or attempted conquest, of both Egypt and the Sudan, by the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. On the Islamization and Arabization of the Sudan see author's article "Arabism, Africanism and Self-Identification in the Sudan" in the Journal of Modern African Studies, July 1970 and Y.F. Hasan: The Arabs and the Sudan. Edinburgh, 1967.

2) The spread of Christianty in the Sudan in the early middle ages was, in large measure, due to the religious `Scramble to Africa' of Justinian and Theodora in the sixth century. Cf J, Arkell: A History of the Sudan to 1821, London, 1955, p.181 and Sir W. Budge: The Egyptian Sudan. London, 1908, Vol II p 294. The terms `Nubia', Cush' and `Ethiopia' were used by the Ancient Semites, Egyptians and Greco-Romans with reference to the area which regouhly corresponds with the modern Sudan. Cf Arkell, p 171ff.

3) J. Bruce: Travels in Nubia. Edinburgh, 1913 Vol. VI, pp 379-380.

4) Shaikh Ahmad Katib al-Shouna: Tarikh Muluk al-Sudan, ed.by M. Shibaika, Khartoum, 1944, p.7. The word "Hamaj" itself is a derogatory term meaning `rustics' or`uncivilized'.

5) Cf. Ibn Tabataba's classic work: Al-Fakhri Fil-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya and Sir T. Arnold: The Caliphate Oxford, 1924.

6) Quoted in Richard Hill's: Egypt In the Sudan. London, 1954, p.13.

7) R.Gray, A History of the Southern Sudan. London, 1961 pp. 5-6. Also see R.O. Collins: The Southern Sudan 1883-1878, Yale, 1962.

8) Gray, pp. 68ff.

9) Hill pp. 24-28 and 104. Certain parts of the present article have been adapted from the present writes's "Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan", Oxford, 1969.

10) Hill, pp. 22-23.

11) P.M. Holt: The Mahdist State in the Sudan. Oxford, 1958 p. 96.

12) Ibid, pp. 132-165.

13) Ibid, p. 101.

14) Ibid, pp. 104 and 226

15) Ibid, p. 205.

16) Sir Harold MacMicheal: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. London, 1932, p. 108.

17) Gromer believed that the military career `besides much that is worthy of admiration has the tendency to excite some of the worst passions in the human breast´, while soldiers turned administrators always seemed to him "to treat the population as if they were so many inanimate pawns on a chessboard". He therefore urged that "there must be some sort of general control over the soldiers or else they will land us in all sorts of trouble". Quoted in Muddathir 'Abd al-Rahim: Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan, Oxford, 1969 pp. 41-42.

18) Cf. imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan, especially, chapters III and IV.

19) Ibid, p. 89ff.

20) James Coleman, and Belmont Brice Jr. `The Military in Sub-Saharan Africa´ in John J. Johnson (ed): The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries. Princeton University Press, 1962. p. 336ff.

21) Ibid.

22) Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan, especially chapter IX.

23) Coleman and Brice p. 366. The number of men and officers of the S.D.F. was about 5,000 in 1956. By 1961/62 it had grown to about 12,000 and was approximately 20,000 in 1956/66.

24) The pride of the Sudanese in their parliamentary institutions was often displayed - almost xenophobically - in the course of comparison between Egypt and the Sudan particularly between 1954 when Najib was removed from office and late 1956 when, following the nationalization of the Suez Canal and the subsequent tripartite agression against Egypt, Nasir´s persoanlity and style of government began to gain popularity in the Sudan.

25) The famous "Iltigaa al-Sayyidayn, - or Reconciliation of the two Sayyids i.e. 'Ali al-Mirghani of the Khatmiyya and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi of the Ansar - was formally announced on 3rd December 1955. I have used certain parts of my article on the history of the Sudan published in Africa South of the Sahara (Europa Publications, London, 1971) in the present paper.

26) Al-Tahqiq Fil-Asbab Allati Addat Ila Inqilab 17 November 1958 (Proceedings of the Judicial Inquiry into the Causes of the Coup d´etat of 17 November 1958). Ministry of Justice, Khartoum, 1956 - particularly the statements by Generals Ibrahim 'Abboud and Ahmed 'Abd al-Wahhab pp. 21-30. With regard to the third point of difference between the P.D.P. and the Umma Party, it is interesting to note that 'Abdalla khalil apparently entertained the hope that Sayyid 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi would become president even after the military coup and, according to 'Abboud, actually asked the latter to consider the suggestion about one month after the coup. Ibid., p.28.

27) Ibid, especially the statement by Ahmad 'Abdalla Hamid, pp. 44-46.

28) Ibid, especially the statements of Ahmad 'Abd al-Wahhab and Husein 'Ali Karrar pp. 21-25 and 51-53.

29) Taqrir Lajnat al-Tata wurat al-Dusturiyya (Report of the Constitutional Developments Committee) Khartoum, 1962. The Chairman of the Committee was Chief Justice Muhammad Ahmad Abu Rannat.

30) This is discussed in Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan See also the Development of British Policy in the Southern Sudan in Middle Eastern Studies, London, April, 1966.

31) The National Charter was essentially an agreement drawn by representatives of the political parties and the Professioanls Front which had called for the general strike that forced General 'Abboud to dissolve his Supreme Council and then surrender power to the caretaker government.

32) Al-Lajna al-Qawmiyya lil-Dostoor: Nashru al Dostoor al-Mugaddam lil-Jamiyya al-ta'asisiyya (The National Constitutional Committee: Draft Constitution submitted to the Constituent Assembly) January 1968. Chapter VII.

33) The proposed presidential system was closer to the de Gaulle French model rather than the American model.

34) 'The Sudanese African National Union' had been formed by Sayyid William Deng and Sayyid Joseph Oduhu in Uganda before 1964; it subsequently split into two main factions within the Sudan. Deng and his wing of SANU felt that the Islamic character of the proposed constitution, though it may not be psychologically soothing to non-Muslims, could not rationally be objected to since the constitution guaranteed religious freedom and the right to propagate other faiths without reservations.

35) This was Sayyid Muhammed Ahmad Mahjoub's second government. The opposition was then led by Sayyid al-Sadiq al-Mahdi and his faction of the Umma Party, Sayyid William Deng and his wing of SANU and Dr Hassan al-Turabi's Islamic Charter Front - the three together being known as the New Foreces Front.

36) Neither Sadiq nor Turabi nor William Deng were elected to the new Assembly. Sayyid William Deng was tragically ambushed and killed while campaigning in the southern provinces.

37) Following the elections of June 1965 Sayyid Muhammed Ahmed Mahjoub formed his first Umma - UNP coalition government. This lasted until 25 July 1966, after which Sayyid Sadiq al-Mahdi headed a coalition government of his faction of the then split Umma Party and the NUP. Sadiq's government was defeated on 16 May 1967 and Mahjoub then formed his second NUP - Umma (Hadi) coalition government and continued in office until the dissolution of the Assembly in January 1968. After the elections of April 1968 Mahjoub formed his third coalition government which was overthrown by the 25 May 1969 Revolution.

38) A day or two after the coup the Islamic Charter Front distributed leaflets in which it attacked the new regime on account of its association with the communists.

39) For Garang's views on the nature of the problem of the Southern Sudan and his approach to it see Mondo Afro Asiatico, Rome, April 1970. Also Dunstan Wai (Ed) The Southern Sudan: The Problem of National Integration, London, 1973.

40) Sir Harold McMichael: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, London, 1932, p. 67

41) Fuad Matar: al-Hizb al-Shiyu'iy al-Sūdani-Naharūhu am intahar. Beirut, 1972. The appended documents are particularly interesting.

42) For his view of the nature of the problem of the Southern Sudan see Dunstan Wai, Ibid.