

Egyptian Claim to Sudanese-administered Areas North of 22nd Parallel.-Sudanese Appeal to Security Council.

A crisis in relations between Egypt and the Sudan developed during February as a result of claims put forward by the Egyptian Government to two areas lying north of the 22nd parallel, which have been administered as part of the Sudan since 1902. The dispute was precipitated by the approach of the plebiscite on the formation of the United Arab Republic, held on Feb. 21, and of the Sudanese general elections, which began on Feb. 27.

The Egyptian claim was based on the agreement of 1899 establishing the Anglo-Egyptian condominium in the Sudan, which laid down that the 22nd parallel should form the boundary between Egypt and the Sudan. This frontier, however, divided in two certain villages and the territories of certain nomad tribes, and the Governor-General of the Sudan accordingly issued a decree in 1902 whereby two areas north of it were incorporated in the Sudan for administrative purposes and a third area south of it became Egyptian territory. The Egyptian Minister of the Interior subsequently issued a decree in 1907 recognizing the new boundary.

In support of the Sudanese claim to the disputed areas, it was pointed out that the transitional Constitution defined Sudanese territory as that forming the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan at the date of its entry into force on Jan. 1, 1956. The Egyptian Government, on the other hand, maintained that the transitional Constitution, having been drawn up unilaterally, did not affect the 1899 agreement, which was the only international treaty on the subject. The Sudan pointed out, however, that the inhabitants of the disputed territories possessed Sudanese nationality and had voted as such in the first Sudanese parliamentary elections in 1953, which had been held in implementation of the Anglo-Egyptian agreement of February 1953 on self-government for the Sudan; on the other hand, they had never voted in any Egyptian parliamentary election or plebiscite.

Three areas were involved in the dispute: (1) a large triangular area bounded on the east by the Red Sea, on the south by the 22nd parallel, and on the west by a line running north-eastward from a point about 150 miles west of the coast to reach the coast roughly at the 23rd parallel, it includes the fishing village of Halaib, where there is a Sudanese police post, and contains some mineral deposits. (2) A desert area of Egyptian territory to the west of the first area, lying south of the 22nd parallel. (3) About 140 square miles of Sudanese territory north of the 22nd parallel, on both banks of the Nile north of Wadi Halfa, which would be submerged if the Egyptian project for the Aswan High Dam were carried out.

[Talks on the revision of the 1929 Nile waters agreement, including the effects of the Aswan Dam project on the Sudan and any compensation payable to the displaced Sudanese population, had been resumed in Cairo in December 1957 between a Sudanese delegation led by Mr. Mirgani

Hamza (Minister for Irrigation) and an Egyptian Government delegation, but had been suspended to “permit the delegations to consult their Governments.”]

The Egyptian Government put forward its claim (*a*) in a Note of Feb. 1, which drew attention to the fact that the Sudanese Government were making arrangements for elections in areas north of the 1899 frontier, and (*b*) in a second Note of Feb. 13, which asked for an early settlement and offered to exchange the Egyptian territory south of the 22nd parallel for the two Sudanese areas north of it. Although the Sudanese Government asked for the question to be postponed until after the general elections, a third Egyptian Note (Feb. 16) stated that Egyptian officials would be sent into the disputed area to conduct the plebiscite on the United Arab Republic.

Meanwhile the Sudanese Government had despatched a small Army unit to Halaib after it had received reports on Feb. 9 that Egyptian troops were being sent to the area. Another Army unit was subsequently sent to Wadi Halfa following the unexpected arrival in Sudanese waters on Feb. 16 of an Egyptian steamer carrying a number of Egyptian officials, who were turned back by the Sudanese authorities because they had no entry permits.

A fourth Egyptian Note was presented in Khartoum on Feb. 18 protesting against the Sudanese Government's action in sending troops to Halaib, demanding their immediate withdrawal, and insisting that the area should be included in the Egyptian plebiscite.

A communiqué issued in Cairo on the same day denounced the Sudanese troop movements as a “flagrant violation” of the 1899 agreement; denied that the Egyptian officials who had entered the Halaib area had been accompanied by troops, and alleged that the Sudanese Government, by making the dispute public, had broken an agreement that the exchange of views between the Governments should be kept secret. In a message to Sayed Abdel Rahman (leader of the Ansar sect, which is closely connected with the ruling Umma Party), President Nasser strongly protested against allegations that Egypt had “invaded” the Sudan, which had appeared in the Umma Party press and which he categorically denied.

The Sudanese Cabinet immediately rejected the demands contained in the Egyptian Note of Feb. 18, in a statement issued the same day it declared that “we shall not hesitate in defending our sovereignty, territory, and dignity with all the power we possess if Egypt persists in her present attitude.”

Earlier the same day (Feb. 18) the Sudanese Foreign Minister (Mr. Mahgoub) had flown to Cairo for talks with President Nasser and Dr. Fawzi, the Egyptian Foreign Minister. Mr. Mahgoub proposed that the Egyptian officials and police in the Halaib area should be withdrawn, and that elections to the Sudanese Parliament should be held in the disputed areas on the understanding that this would not prejudice Egypt's claim in later negotiations. This proposal was rejected by the Egyptian Government, which suggested that either all forces should be withdrawn from the disputed areas and neither the plebiscite nor the elections should be held there, or alternatively that both should be held, but that the population should vote at polling stations outside the disputed areas. Both proposals were rejected immediately by the Sudanese Cabinet, and Mr. Mahgoub returned to Khartoum.

The Sudanese Government sent a letter on Feb. 20 to the U.N. Secretary-General (Dr. Hammarskjöld) alleging that there had been a "huge infiltration" of Egyptians into the dispute area, "backed by a concentration of Egyptian troops on the border," and requesting an immediate meeting of the Security Council so that that body could "use its offices to stop the Egyptian aggression." After setting out the legal arguments in support of the Sudanese claim, the letter expressed "deep concern" at the "unprovoked and illegal attitude of the Egyptian Government, which constitutes a breach of Sudanese sovereignty." It declared that "since the Sudan is determined to defend its territory, the situation might result in a breach of the peace and, if uncontrolled, may develop into armed conflict."

Thirteen Egyptian officials who landed on Feb. 20 from a Nile steamer at the village of Debeira (in the western disputed area north of Wadi Halfa) to conduct a plebiscite were detained by the Sudanese authorities, together with their 13 man escort (including six Army and police officers) and the ship's crew of 14. In the eastern disputed area, however, the Egyptian flag was hoisted on Feb. 21 at Abu Ramada (15 miles north of Halaib and 80 miles within the Sudanese administrative boundary) by the Egyptian electoral commissioner (Colonel Jawheri), who refused to leave the area when requested to do so by the local Sudanese district commissioner. Reports from Khartoum alleged that Colonel Jawheri was in command of a military force, though estimates of its strength varied from "a small border guard" to 200-300 men.

The Egyptian Government announced on Feb. 21 that it had decided to postpone the settlement of the frontier dispute until after the Sudanese elections, and that negotiations on all undecided questions would begin after the new Sudanese Government had been elected. The statement added: "Egypt will not reply to provocations which have attempted to present the position in the form of an armed intervention or of an invasion of the Sudanese territories, at a time when only normal frontier patrols are on the southern borders."

Cairo Radio stated that the Government had made its decision after studying messages which had been received from Sayed Aliel Mirghani (leader of the Khatmia sect) and Mr. Azhari (the leader of the National Unionist Party, and former Sudanese Premier). No official intimation of this decision, however, was sent to the Sudan Government, which protested strongly on Feb. 22 against this omission, and also against the hostile attitude of Cairo Radio and the Egyptian Press.

When the Security Council met on Feb. 21 to consider the Sudan's complaint, the Sudanese delegate (Mr. Osman) said that it was with "profound regret" that his Government had brought the "grave situation" before the U.N., and expressed the hope that the Council would "adopt measures which will calm the situation." Mr. Omar Loutli (Egypt), announcing his Government's decision, said that he was confident that the dispute would be "settled within the framework of friendly relations which for centuries have bound the two nations together." He deplored the Sudanese Government's "hasty" appeal to the Council, which, he said, had been made before other means of settlement had been exhausted.

The Sudanese Government announced on Feb. 25 that the Egyptian flag had been hauled down at Abu Ramada and that the Egyptian forces there had moved, although it was not known whether or not they had left Sudanese territory. The Egyptians who had been detained at Debeira were

released on Feb. 28, together with their ship. (Times-Daily Telegraph-U.N. Information Centre, London-New York Times)

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