

THE SUDAN
IN ANGLO-EGYPTIAN
RELATIONS

A CASE STUDY IN POWER POLITICS

1800-1956

L. A. FABUNMI

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*Of revolution and intrigue
The war, its causes, course and
The ups and downs of peace and
And wounds as yet unhealed
Such are the themes you treat
(A risk which many at heart
To stir hot ashes, which may
At any moment to a flame.*

*It is an undertaking of some
the cause of public disorders,
such an enquiry, he will be
touches the true grievance,
into persons of weight and
cooperated at the discovery
the occasion of correcting the*

ED

at a conference in Cairo on 12 October. Resolutions to the effect that Egypt should remain independent, and British forces in Egypt and Sudan be withdrawn; that the Egyptian Government should declare that the Governor-General of Sudan should be appointed by the Egyptian Government.

Both Governments chose to be elected by their respective parliaments. Thus in the King's Speech to both Houses of Parliament in 1951, the abrogation of the 1936 Treaty and the 1949 Agreement was declared illegal and invalid. The King's Speech resolved to press forward with their policies in the Middle East, and to maintain the Sudan under the terms of the 1936 Agreement; and to allow no power to interfere with the rights of the Sudanese people themselves the future status of their

In his Speech, Mr. Winston Churchill, the Conservative regime, intimated that the Sudan should retain their rights under the 1936 Treaty and that a new constitution is necessary.²

The Egyptian Government issued a statement re-affirming British support to give the fullest support to the Sudan in the administration of the Condominium Agreements. In the House of Commons, Mr. Dean Acheson, supported the Egyptian position. On 10 October, he pointed out that it was a matter of general concern to the 'free world' in the Middle East Area. 'The U.S. Government's international obligations requires that the Condominium Agreements and the 1936 Treaty) be maintained and not terminated by unilateral action.' Similarly, the British stand in this matter.

The Executive Committee of the Arab League met in Cairo and gave to Egypt the absolute support of the Arab League. In May, the Syrian Parliament adopted,

Commons Official Report, Vol. CCCCXCIII,

with one voice, a resolution which supported Egypt's abrogation of the 1936 Treaty and the Condominium Agreements.

In the Sudan the abrogation move was received with mixed feelings and opportunism. The Umma Party which stood for Sudanese independence from both the British and the Egyptians but which was generally regarded as pro-British, sent a telegram to the United Nations and to the British and Egyptian Foreign Ministers on 11 October, asserting that the Sudan was not a party to the Anglo-Egyptian Agreements on the Sudan and had never recognized them. 'We take the opportunity', said the telegram, 'of Egypt's abrogation move to declare to the world that we have regained our sovereignty and will accept nothing short of Sudanese Government.'¹ However, on 14 October, the Executive Committee of the Party accepted the abrogation by issuing a resolution saying that it considered that the British administration based on the Anglo-Egyptian Agreements had ceased to function in view of the abrogation and added that it regarded the existing administration as a transitional government until self-determination in the Sudan. Another Sudanese reaction was the resignation of a Minority of the Commission, under the Chairmanship of a British Judge, which was set up to agree on the principles of a temporary constitution aimed at self-determination in the country. The Sudanese Minority asserted that Egypt's abrogation of the Condominium had created a vacuum in the sovereignty of the Sudan. They considered that the Sudan should, therefore, be immediately put under the umbrella of the United Nations.

H. A. R. Gibb, at that time Professor of Arabic at the University of Oxford, addressing the Royal Empire Society, stated that it was clear from the diplomatic documents which had been published on both sides that throughout 1950 and 1951, all representations by the Egyptian Government met with nothing 'but evasive and procrastinating answers from the Foreign Office'. In the circumstances, Professor Gibb explained, there was nothing left for the Egyptian Government to do but cut Egypt loose from a Treaty 'which we had ourselves destroyed as a morally valid instrument and which had become nothing more than a figment and a legal incubus'.²

The Abrogation of the Treaty and the Condominium Agreements was followed by incidents that temporarily worsened Anglo-Egyptian relations. The Wafdist Government endeavoured to make the position

¹ *The Times*, 12 October 1951, p. 4b, see also Keesing's *Contemporary Archives*, Vol. VIII, p. 1746.

² *United Empire*, Journal of the Royal Empire Society, London, March-April 1952, p. 73.

of the British forces in the Canal Zone untenable. Egyptian civil employees of the British forces were withdrawn by force of propaganda or police intimidation. Road and rail communications of the forces were attacked by saboteurs. The British, on the other hand, reinforced their garrison with civilian labour imported from East Africa, Malta and Cyprus. When Egyptian guerrillas, who attacked the Suez water filtration plant, used the village of Kafr'Abdu as a strong-point, it was demolished by British military action. A British observer in Cairo commented afterwards: 'If a military necessity, it was an unfortunate political set-back; if not a military necessity, it was a psychological blunder and something approaching a political disaster.'¹

By the Egyptian Government it was bitterly denounced as an extreme atrocity. There were further clashes and several persons were killed in defending the Ismailia police headquarters against a major British assault on 25 January 1952.

The Times correspondent commented sadly: 'Nothing was more distressing to any Englishman with pleasant memories of Egypt than to experience the hatred of Britain as was then apparent in the native quarter of Ismailia.'² The Egyptian Ambassador was recalled from London; British employees of the Egyptian Government were relieved of their jobs. A violent mob, including incendiary squads, destroyed British property and killed a number of English persons in Cairo, on Saturday, 26 January 1952, now known as 'Black Saturday' in the history of Egypt.

Following these incidents, King Farouk dismissed the Wafdist Government, which had proved, contrary to speculation in London when they won the 1950 elections, anti- rather than pro-British; he appointed Ali Mahir to form a new Ministry. Ali Mahir resigned on 1 March and the King appointed Ahmad Nagib al-Hilali as Prime Minister. The new Prime Minister and the British Ambassador reopened exploratory negotiations; but the British Government would make no concession without Sudanese agreement, though the Sudanese were not invited to any of the Anglo-Egyptian talks.

This was the state of affairs before the revolutionary regime came into the picture as from July 1952, when the personality and understanding of General Neguib, himself partly Egyptian and partly Sudanese, brought in a fresh atmosphere of congeniality and manoeuvring, which resulted in an Anglo-Egyptian Agreement in February 1953.

¹ Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Great Britain and Egypt*, p. 184.

² *The Times*, 24 January 1952.

But before dealing with this Agreement of the hidden factors apart from the Egypt to the abrogation of the Canal Treaty, in 1951—a psychological war decline of Britain.

There was the impression, admitted widespread in most parts of the world, first-class to a third-class power. In the ground that Britain had become depressed sufficiently by one means. Indeed Britain was weak, but Egypt first place, in a nation, as in an industrial states are possessed of a strong desire enough to pull Britain through, and. In the second place, a Nigerian (Yoruba, *ṣugbon o ni aburo ti o gbojule*)—strength of another is strong enough, cousin was young, strong and will admit that 'the United States had had of the Canal and the restoration of

Sir Oliver Franks, an experienced in his years of service as British Ambassador remarked to his radio audience on *Affairs* in 1954: 'But you know how we think and minimising what we fear from overseas.'³ The Egyptians must, though strained and weakened by their unity and their drive for power.

Again, during the six months before the Iranian Government under Dr. Musavi evacuated Abadan on 1 October 1952, Britain, whilst it encouraged confidence in the government organ remarked: 'This is the struggle with the British. It is only the prestige in the Middle East is finished

¹ Literally, the proverb reads: 'Dada cannot be less he has a younger brother upon whose strength

² *Time* weekly magazine, Chicago, 4 February 1952.

³ B.B.C. Reith Lectures (1954), *Britain and the World*.

⁴ *Bourse Egyptienne*, 4 October 1951.