

Sudanese Resistance to Condominium Rule (1900 – 1914)

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Abstract:

It was often thought that the reconquest of the Sudan by the Anglo – Egyptian Army put an end to all forms of opposition and resistance and launched the Sudan into a period of peaceful development and tranquillity, which remained undisturbed until the First World War. This is far from true. In fact, opposition to the new administration sprang up from the very beginning in different quarters and for different reasons and motives. In the first two decades of the Condominium, one may notice that the Sudan Government relied on a reputation for achievement won by guns and reinforced by the absence of serious revolt. Indeed, the determination of the British Government in the Sudan to resort to massive military campaigns was a remarkable feature of its policy towards the peoples of the Sudan.

Key words: Resistance, Condominium rule, military expeditions, opposition

Résumé

Résistance soudanaise durant le Condominium (1900 - 1914)

On pensait souvent que la reconquête du Soudan par l'armée anglo-égyptienne mettait fin à toutes formes d'opposition et de résistance et donnait au Soudan une période de développement et de tranquillité pacifique qui resta intacte jusqu'à la Première Guerre mondiale. C'est loin d'être vrai. En fait, l'opposition à la nouvelle administration a surgi dès le début dans différentes régions et pour différentes raisons et motivations. Dans les deux premières décennies du Condominium, on peut remarquer que le gouvernement Britannique au Soudan s'est appuyé sur une réputation de triomphe remportée par les armes et renforcée par l'absence de sérieuse révolte. En effet, la détermination du Gouvernement Soudanais à recourir à des campagnes militaires massives est un trait remarquable de sa politique à l'égard des peuples du Soudan.

Mots clé : Résistance, Condominium, expéditions militaires, opposition

INTRODUCTION

The biggest opposition movement was led by *Ali Dinnar*, Sultan of Darfur. He had opposed the new administration from the beginning, but his defeat was not finally achieved until 1916; only then did Darfur become part of the Sudan. Darfur, an old sultanate in Western Sudan, (an area as large as France) was founded in the fifteenth century and continued for about four hundred years as an independent state ruled by the descendants of Sultan *Suliman* until it was annexed to the other parts of

the Sudan during the Turco-Egyptian regime by *Zubeir Pasha*. It later surrendered to the *Mahdi's* armies in 1884. *Ali Dinnar*, descendant of the Fur (1) kings and sultans had at first kept aloof from the Mahdists. He was, however, made to go to Omdurman in 1897 and participate in the battle of Karari (2). After the defeat at Karari, *Ali Dinnar* collected his men and returned to Darfur. There he drove the *Khalifa's* agent out and proclaimed himself Sultan of Darfur.

FIRST STRUGGLES AGAINST BRITISH DOMINATION

Conflict between *Ali Dinnar* and the Sudan Government became acute with the outbreak of the First World War. The leading Muslim state, at the time Turkey, entered the war on the side of Germany and Austria, who thereupon called on the Muslims to revolt against the British. When the propaganda reached the Sudan, the Sudan Government was afraid that this would affect its relations with its Muslim subjects. *Sayid Ali Al Mirghani* and *Sherif Yousif Al Hindi*, together with other tribal and religious leaders proclaimed themselves on the side of the British Government, and called on their followers to support Britain and the Sudan Government.

Ali Dinnar took a different stand from the Sudan religious leaders. To him the Sudan Government belonged to the enemies of Islam who had declared war on Turkey, and deposed the Khedive of Egypt. Therefore, as part of his great Jihad, it was his duty to oppose and fight the Sudan Government, what he openly expressed in his letters to the government and to *Sayid Ali Al Mirghani*(3). In 1915 *Ali Dinnar* declared his independence, and the only way open to the Sudan Government was to conquer Darfur in May 1916. *Ali Dinnar* was killed by a group of Sudanese soldiers led by Huddleston, later Governor General of the Sudan. Once the government's main enemy was removed from the scene, Darfur became a province of the Anglo – Egyptian Sudan on January 1, 1917.

The conquest of Darfur brought once again the British and the French, who were advancing from the west, face to face. Boundary problems were finally settled in 1919, and in 1924 the western frontiers of the Sudan were defined in a protocol signed by the French and British governments.

But *Ali Dinnar* had not been the only opposing force; a number of tribes in the Southern Sudan and in the Nuba Mountains continued to resist the invading forces of the Anglo – Egyptian administration. The Nuba Mountains is the wild frontier region between the Northern, Arab Muslim Sudan and the African, non-Muslim South. There the British encountered steadfast resistance and employed fiercely repressive measures of pacification before some semblance of government authority could be imposed. The Nuba of Kordofan took to the hills in the eighteenth century in self-defence against nomadic Arab tribes, who drove them to retreat to the mountains where no outside authority was able to reach them. Some groups among them were well armed and powerful, confident in their ability to defend their land and stimulated by a strong distrust to all external interference.

COLONIAL REPRESSION AND SOUTHERN RESISTANCE

The Sudan Government's aim in the Nuba Mountains was the establishment of the new administration with the least possible disturbances. But it must be remembered that these mountaineers were never submissive. Their desire to pursue their own way of life, which included inter-tribal raids, and their wish to remain independent were so strong that they opposed all forms of foreign authority. This inevitably conflicted with the government's policy to establish law and order. In 1904, for example, a patrol was sent to punish the Nuba of *Jabal Shatt* and *Jabal Dayer* for non – payment of tribute and for raiding . Another patrol, led by the governor of Kordofan, was sent the same year against *Jabal Mandal* but had to retire, leaving a psychological victory to the Nuba and a shameful defeat to the government. In May 1906, a serious incident occurred at Talodi. The notables arranged a feast, at which the invited officers, officials and soldiers were attacked. Forty six people, including the *ma'mur* were killed. The rebels were eventually besieged by a strong government force in June, and about 400 rebels were killed (4).

Nuba resistance continued throughout the First World War. In 1915, the MiriNuba organized a revolt against a government post stationed at Kadugli . The leader of the revolt was captured and hanged. Subsequent risings in the Jabals were characterized by the desperate ferocity of Nuba resistance and the brutal government methods of suppressing it. In 1917-18 operations were launched against the population of the Hills, with the objective to cease their tribal raids. To accomplish this, a massive force, led by 2,875 men and soldiers, eight artillery pieces and eighteen machine guns, was despatched (5). On 6 June 1917, six villages were burnt, four more on the 19th, and several on the 27th (6). The water supply was cut to the villagers, and most of the surviving Nuba surrendered because of thirst; some simply died out of thirst rather than come down from the mountains.

Indeed the decision of the Sudan Government to resort to massive military campaigns of deliberate ferocity was the remarkable feature of its policy towards the resistant peoples of the Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. By giving 'nothing but taking taxes', the government relied on force of arms alone to impose its will. Weapons existed to be used; if the total subjection of an entire people was required to win acceptance of government authority, so be it. But despite Britain's material superiority, the various risings against the Sudan Government were not hopeless acts of desperate men. Instead, they were viewed as glorious acts of intractable courage that History never forgets to mention.

In fact, the common factor of these revolts and outbreaks in the Southern Sudan – as was the case in the Nuba Mountains – was again the opposition to outsiders and taxation. Their experiences under the Turco-Egyptian regime and under the slave traders had led these tribes to suspect and resist the imposition of any alien rule. In 1901 the Agar Dinka murdered a British officer, Scott Barbour, and a force was sent against them. The villages which had any hand in the matter were burnt, the Sheikhs shot and their cattle confiscated (7). Tribal and inter-tribal disturbances and local incidents required a rapid and ruthless suppression by the Egyptian Army under British officers. In 1903 an expedition was dispatched to quell the revolt of AwotDinka on Lau River. Additional expeditions were sent in 1907 and 1910, but the rebels were never completely subdued. They continued to resist the new regime whenever they could until 1917 when finally an armed force was able to restore peace.

The NyamNyam tribe revolted in 1903 and attacked an army patrol under Captain Wood. The Sultan Yambio himself led his people against the government troops in 1905 but he was defeated and died of

his wounds. His son; however, continued to be hostile to the British and it was not until 1914 that he was arrested and deported to Khartoum where he died in 1916.

In the Southern Sudan as a whole, inter – tribal raids prevailed for a long time and it was necessary to send punitive expeditions against the Dinka, Nuer, Annuak and Beir tribes. From 1907 to 1912 the Beir of Mongalla Province launched a series of attacks against the Dinka , and in 1914 there were raids by the Dinka on other tribes . The Beir caused trouble in 1916 and 1917. There were Shilluk disturbances in 1915 and Nuer disturbances in 1913, 1914 and 1917. An expedition against the Annuak in 1912 cost the lives of three British and three Sudanese officers and forty-two soldiers (8). Anuak villages were destroyed but the Anuak were not subdued. A second armed force was planned to invade their land in 1914, but the operations were concealed at the outbreak of war in Europe. It was not until 1926 that the last of the rebellious southern tribes – the Topossa – was brought under control.

Along the first twenty – five years of British rule in the Southern Sudan, resistance to government authority was widespread and persistent .The defeated Anuak became far better armed than the Nuer, who continued to defy the outsiders. British attempts at control could hardly pass for administration in these areas of insecurity. Yet, though conditions for unrest existed, the British officials were completely confident that their weapons were sufficiently powerful to defend their presence. But it is essential to note that this primary resistance could not be interpreted as ‘nationalistic’. It was tribal resistance motivated by tribal beliefs and conceptions. These uprisings were directed to an outsider who tried to impose its own laws and values, a feature common with the nationalist movements which emerged in the Sudan later on.

RELIGIOUS REVOLTS

Away from the Nuba Mountains and the Southern Sudan , opposition to the new administration was linked to religious inspiration and the cult of NebiEisa (prophet Jesus). Although Mahdism was defeated in the battlefields, its ideology remained and outbursts of neo-Mahdist movements continued for a long time. A number of self-styled NebiEisas appealed to tribal discontents by preaching that after the defeat of the Mahdi, Jesus Christ would descend from Heaven and lead the faithful Ansar (followers) against the anti-Christ, with whom the British were identified.

The first of these neo-Mahdists’ manifestations occurred in 1900, in Omdurman. Ali Abd al-Karim (one of the first NebiEisas to appear) and several followers were arrested and brought before a religious court, which convicted them of preaching Mahdism and inciting the people to revolt. The leader and five disciples were imprisoned at WadiHalfa. The second of these religious movements took place in August 1904 when Mohamed Wad Adam, from Dongola, proclaimed himself the NebiEisa in Sennar. He and nine followers were killed in a skirmish in which the *mamur* of Singa also lost his life. In January 1906 a Jaali tailor at Wad Madani, Suliman Wad al Bashir, was arrested for declaring himself another NabiEisa. A native of Borgu, Moussa Ahmed, was imprisoned at Kassala in December 1906 after having made the same claim. Two more claimants appeared in 1907; both were exiled.

The most important rising with Mahdist overtones to occur was that of Abdel Qader Wad Habuba, on the Blue Nile, in April 1908. Abdel Qader belonged to an influential family of the Halaween tribe in the Gezira, and had been a devoted partisan of the Mahdi . After the Anglo-Egyptian conquest, he returned to his home to find that his family's loyalties had been divided. One of his brothers had led a few Halaween and fought with Kitchener's army in the battle of Omdurman. An uncle, Abdullah Musad , *Umda* of Katfia was among the first to welcome the new administration when it occupied the Gezira . Besides, he found that his land had been settled by relatives who had supported the invaders. This family antagonism reinforced Abdel Qader's Mahdists' beliefs by the evident injustice of the new regime, and he secretly started sowing the seeds of rebellion in the Gezira.

When news was received that Abdel Qader was collecting followers near Wad Shenania , the deputy inspector at Rufa'a, Scott Moncrieff , went with them *amur* of Kamlin to investigate, but were murdered by Abdel Qader and some followers. Within a few days, Abdel Qader was captured by villagers and delivered to the government. He was tried at Kamlin and publicly executed at Hillat Mustafa, the market town of Halloween, on 17 May.

This last rebellion showed that the death of the Mahdi and the defeat of the *Khalifa* had not resulted in the total extinction of the Mahdists' faith. Even after the execution of Abdel Qader Wad Haboba , the spirit of Mahdism was very alive, and many religious uprisings occurred in different places. For the British, this latent Mahdism needed to be closely watched out before it could develop into a general revolt. Again in 1908, a Mahdist, Abdel Wahab of Tengassi Island, was intending to raise a rebellion, and praying for the return of Mahdism. He and several of his followers were arrested in Dongola . In August 1910 Sherif Mokhtar Wad Al Sharif Hashim from Al Damer proclaimed himself a prophet. A small police force was sent to arrest him, but two policemen were killed. He was finally arrested and hanged (9).

Other disturbances with religious overtones may be briefly summarized. In June 1909 Abdallah Fadlallah, a Nubawi, proclaimed himself the Mahdi, and was imprisoned in Khartoum. In 1912 Fiki Akasha Ahmed, who was disturbing the peace in southern Kordofan, was killed with eight followers by the Anglo-Egyptian Army. In 1915 Ahmed Omar claimed in Darfur to be the Nebi Eisa. A police force was sent against him and, like the other claimants, he was killed.

THE SUDAN ARMY'S OUTBREAK

More serious than all these outbreaks and small revolts was, perhaps, the spirit of discontent and hostility shown by the Sudanese troops straight after the re-conquest. The history of the Sudanese units of the Egyptian Army went back to 1898 where six Sudanese battalions were raised mostly from deserters or prisoners from the Khalifa's armies. Together with twelve Egyptian battalions they formed the bulk of Kitchener's army which conquered the Sudan. As has been mentioned earlier, the senior officers in all units, Egyptian and Sudanese, were British. The colonial policy was that no British officer would serve under an Egyptian superior. In all the Sudanese battalions, the junior officers were

Egyptians who had been trained in the military school of Cairo, and a few Sudanese who were promoted from the ranks.

When Kitchener departed for South Africa, the Fourteenth Sudanese battalion raised the banner of revolt in January 1900. To express their discontent under Kitchener's harsh treatment, they arrested their British officers and seized a large quantity of ammunition. Arrests were made and the mutiny was broken. In a private letter Cromer gave his explanation of the mutiny:

"...A potent cause has been the discontent occasioned by the very harsh rule of the late Sirdar. Kitchener's sole idea was to rule by inspiring fear and the fear he inspired was such that it is conceivable that the present trouble would have not occurred had he remained in the Sudan...Certain other causes may be added such as the numerous charges which have recently taken place amongst English officers, injudicious treatment of the native troops by some of the English officersthe construction by military labour of a large, expensive and very unnecessary palace at Khartoum for the Governor General and the neglect of the military school(10)" .

Colonel Jackson was sent to Omdurman to investigate the trouble and render a report on the cause of the mutiny. His report confirmed what Cromer said, but he added a new piece of information. Some of the Egyptian officers, who had secretly founded a patriotic club or society with headquarters in Cairo, were suspected to incite Sudanese officers and men against their British superiors.

The Egyptian Army, visible guarantor of rule, was mistrusted by the government it was supposed to protect. In fact, Wingate and his military staff were preoccupied with the possibility of Egyptian insubordination. Whether British suspicion created Egyptian disloyalty, or Egyptian resentment engendered British suspicion, there was no doubt that suspicion and resentment existed. It was therefore Wingate's policy to separate the Sudanese and Egyptian elements of the army, and to foster an identity of interests with the Sudanese. Unreliability of the Egyptian army necessitated not only a British garrison at Khartoum to guard the Sudan Government, but also the recruitment and training of Sudanese troops to enforce its authority in the provinces. Thus the 14th Sudanese battalion, disbanded in 1902, was reformed in 1906 with new recruits from the Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. And in order to avoid trouble in the future, the military school was established in 1905 at Khartoum. Sudanese cadets, mostly black Sudanese since non-black Sudanese preferred to enter the Gordon Memorial College, were recruited and an officer class began to appear in the Sudan from 1908 onwards. This new officer class was destined to play an important role in the history of the Sudan, first in the 1929 revolution, and later after the Sudan became independent in 1956.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE SUDAN STATUS

The outbreak of the First World War raised anew the question of Egypt's status, which technically remained that of an Ottoman province. The Ottoman entry into the war rendered the problem acute,

and in December 1914 Britain declared a protectorate over Egypt. The next day, Abbas Hilmi , who was in Istanbul, was deposed and an uncle, HussainKamel, was installed with the title of Sultan. Wingate saw the declaration of a protectorate over Egypt as a good opportunity to advance Sudan's independence (from Egypt). He wrote that « the present status of Egypt makes the Sudan more British than ever, and I am inclined to think that the time is not far distant when it may be possible to have a Sudan army » (11).

Thus Turkey entered the war against Britain, and the Sudan, with its reputation for Islamic fanaticism was expected to react. But except in Darfur with *Ali Dinnar*, nothing happened in the Sudan. *Ali Dinnar's* revolt had no direct connection with the war. As already mentioned, the relations between *Ali Dinnar* and the Sudan Government had been deteriorating for a long time, and the war provided only a British pretext to invade Darfur, the plans of which were made long before. It must be remembered that the Sudan suffered under the Turco-Egyptian regime and memories under those unhappy times were still alive in the minds of many people. The Mahdists who were expected to seize the opportunity created by the war and rise against the British did not do so. In fact, the Mahdists were the traditional enemies not only of the Turks but also of the Egyptians. Both, in the eyes of the *Ansar* (the Mahdists' followers), were corrupt and decadent. They were held responsible for the general decline of Islam in recent times and for numerous iniquities in the treatment of their Sudanese subjects during the Turco-Egyptian regime of Mohamed Ali and his son Ismail. Therefore, there was no reason for them to co-operate with the Turks in the name of Islam.

The response to Wingate's appeal in 1914 to the *ulamas* and notables in the Sudan to support Britain was remarkable. Subscriptions were made to the Red Cross Fund and the Prince of Wales Fund, and though the collected sums might not have been very large, they indicated the extent of the support and enthusiasm of a more or less poor population. The urban notables together with the religious leaders demonstrated their support to the Governor General. Wingate seemed to be genuinely surprised and was clearly relieved by such a support, and more, from important elements of the population. By 1914 these notables, who undoubtedly commanded wide influence, were vehemently pro-British as vivid memories of the Turco-Egyptian maladministration were still alive. Their enmity of the Turks made them meet the Government on common ground.

The outbreak of the war was, in a sense, a turning point for the leaders of the Tariqas, especially the *Ansars*. Until then, Sayid Ali Al Mirghani stood alone as the only great religious leader in whom the Government placed confidence. Sayid Abdel Rahman, son of the Mahdi, who was living obscurely in Omdurman, came forward to render his services. He was sent for the first time to the Gezira – where his father's revolt had started – to obtain the loyalty of the Sheikhs and *umdasto* the Sudan Government. This was done with enormous success, and Abdel Rahman al Mahdi emerged as the undisputed leader of the Mahdist family. In return, close supervision and restrictions imposed by the Sudan Government were lightened on him. The rehabilitation of Sayid Abdel Rahman was a chance for his advancement, which made him and his followers be convinced that they had been 'officially recognized', and that the government needed their support.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, with regard to the Sudan, Britain had given the impression of acting as Egypt's adviser and trustee. But after some years, it became clear to the Egyptians that Britain was in fact determined to be permanent master not only in the Sudan but in Egypt as well. In fact, to Cromer, hoisting the British and Egyptian flags jointly after the reconquest served three main purposes: it emphasized the point that the Khedive could not act in the Sudan without the consent of his senior partner in London; it served as a clear warning to the Sultan in Turkey; and it indicated to the French and to the entire world that the Sudan had become an English possession.

The periodical resistance movements and outbursts in the army, in the South and the Nuba Mountains served as a reminder to the British that the spirit of revolt existed and was still latent in certain groups and regions of the country. All risings, after the fall of Omdurman, were contained with strong force of arms. The end of the First World War marked the end of a phase in the history of the Sudan and introduced a new phase which was to see the growth of a new type of political activity whose orientations and objectives differed from those of the resistance movements of the early years.

NOTES

1. Daly, M.W., *Empire on the Nile, The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1898-1934*, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.op.cit., p. 248
2. Beshir, O., Mohamed, *Revolution and Nationalism in the Sudan*, London, Rex Collins Ltd., 1974, p.43, see also Daly, p. 160
3. Daly, op.cit., pp. 160-161
4. Beshir, op.cit., pp. 8-9
5. Ibid., p. 48
6. Ibid
7. Daly, op.cit., p. 132
8. Ibid
9. Ibid
10. Daly, op.cit., p. 119
11. In Wingate's view, Egypt's protectorate status made the Sudan more British than ever. In fact, Wingate was planning for a Sudanese army within a separate and independent Sudan Government, more or less unconnected with Egypt. Though few shared this view at that time, this policy was later carried on by his successors. Daly, *Empire on the Nile*, pp. 45-47 and p.155

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