

Intelligence brief from the US Department of State on the future of Sudan (Washington, 1 August 1955)

Caption: On 1 August 1955, in view of Sudan’s likely proclamation of independence, the Office of Intelligence Research in the US Department of State drafts an intelligence brief on the implications for Egyptian–Sudanese relations of an independent Sudan.

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Intelligence Brief

No. 1806

August 1, 1955

IMPLICATIONS FOR EGYPTIAN-SUDANESE RELATIONS OF AN INDEPENDENT SUDAN

Office of Intelligence Research

Present indications are that the Sudanese will choose independence rather than union with Egypt when the time comes early in 1956 for them to decide their future. Although Egypt is still actively promoting union, particularly among southern Sudanese, the Egyptians will probably accept the emergence of an independent Sudan once this becomes explicit. Should the consequent Sudanese Government disintegrate into warring factions -- and this is not beyond the realm of possibility -- any resulting threat to Egypt's share of the Nile waters would be sure to provoke a strong Egyptian reaction which in its extreme might take the form of forcible intervention.

Steps Preliminary to Self-Determination. The basic procedures by which the Sudanese will choose independence or union with Egypt were established in the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement on the Sudan of February 1953. This agreement provides that once the Prime Minister has certified the successful completion of the Sudanization of the administration, the Parliament may pass a resolution asking that arrangements for self-determination be put in motion and that the codomini withdraw their troops within three months. The Sudanese Government will then draw up a draft law for the election of a Constituent Assembly subject to the approval of the existing Sudanese Parliament and the Governor General.

Sudanization is now complete and an extraordinary session of the Sudanese Parliament (elected in December 1953) is expected to meet in August to pass the necessary legislation. Although the Egyptian and UK governments have not yet reached final agreement as to precise procedures to be followed, an international commission will then be established to supervise the election of the Constituent Assembly, probably in the winter of 1955 or early 1956. This assembly

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will have three functions: (1) to choose independence or some form of link with Egypt, (2) draw up a constitution for the Sudan, and (3) draft an electoral law for the election of a Sudanese Parliament. The responsibilities of the international commission will cease once the Parliament has been elected. Considerable sentiment exists in the Sudan for a direct plebiscite on self-determination, but there are no present indications that the procedures set forth in the UK-Egyptian agreement will be amended.

Probable Outcome of the Vote on Self-Determination. Once the Constituent Assembly is elected, there is every indication that it will choose independence for the Sudan. The membership of the new body is likely to include a majority of the present Parliament, which overwhelmingly favors independence. Although the two major parties -- the majority National Union Party (NUP) and the Ummah Party -- oppose each other on many issues, they appear to be agreed on the question of independence. A small segment of the NUP under the leadership of the pro-Egyptian former Minister of Public Works Muhammad Nur al-Din, may break away from the party but this will not affect the result. Deputies of the small Republican Independence Party, which split off from the NUP in early 1955, are also committed to independence. Deputies from the largely illiterate southern Sudan are still uncommitted.

The Egyptian Position. Egypt, crucially dependent on the uninterrupted flow of the Nile for its livelihood and anxious for an even greater share of the waters in order to realize a development program on which the ROC's political future may hang, has a definite stake in the future of the Sudan. Egypt has long feared the emergence of an independent Sudan because the two countries have competitive economies which could give rise to serious political divergencies. The Nasir regime believes that its interests would best be served by a federation of the two countries under which Egypt would have a controlling voice in policies of common interest.

The Egyptians have been discomfited by the NUP's abrupt abandonment of its pro-Egyptian, unionist policy in April 1955 and by the inconclusiveness of Sudanese-Egyptian talks on the division of the Nile waters. The abortive negotiations held in Cairo during late 1954 and early 1955 ended in mutual recrimination, and subsequent discussions have not yet led to concrete agreement.

From the 1953 Sudanese elections until late 1954, Egyptians under the aegis of Minister of Sudan Affairs Salah Salim were active and free-spending in their efforts to win over Sudanese political leaders. There followed a lull of several months

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in Egyptian activities in the Sudan, concomitant with reports from Cairo that the RCC was apparently gradually accepting the inevitability of an independent Sudan. More recently, and particularly since the breakdown in the Nile waters talks, Egyptians have been reported active in the southern Sudan. On the basis of these reports, it would seem that Egypt may be seeking out the "soft underbelly" of the Sudan in a last-ditch effort to break up the independence movement.

Egyptian persuasiveness, money, and incitement can be expected to generate some support in the southern part of the country, which is culturally separate if not antipathetic to the Arab-oriented north.¹ For the most part, however, southern political leaders distrust the Egyptians even more than they do the northern Sudanese and many of them would prefer the British to either. While the deputies from the largely illiterate southern Sudan are the most venal in Sudan public life, this long-standing distrust of Egypt will militate against any sweeping success for the current Egyptian campaign.

In an apparent effort to improve Egyptian-Sudanese relations, Sudanese Prime Minister al-Azhari attended the anniversary celebration of Egyptian Revolution in Cairo on July 23, where he reportedly intended to urge the Egyptians to recognize and accept the strength of Sudanese sentiment for independence.

Will Egypt Accept an Independent Sudan? The Egyptian regime will probably accept the emergence of an independent Sudan. Such a development is not likely to damage seriously the Egyptian regime's internal prestige so long as Egypt and the Sudan can arrive at some mutually acceptable agreement on the division of the unallocated Nile waters. Both parties hope for early agreement. Successful conclusion of such an agreement remains of paramount political importance to the Egyptian regime.

Should post-independence developments lead the Egyptian Government to believe that its interests in the Nile waters are threatened, Egypt might attempt to intervene forceably to protect its interests. It is unlikely that the Egyptians would resort to such intervention for any lesser reason.

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Significance for the Area Should Egypt and the Sudan be Unified.
Should, as a remote possibility, the Sudanese choose unity with Egypt, "unity" would probably mean loose ties between the two countries. Real Egyptian control of the Sudan, even if it could be realized, would be very difficult to maintain since large and influential elements of the population would almost certainly be strongly opposed to such a regime. Egypt at present lacks the military force to hold the Sudan against the will of the Sudanese, especially in view of continuing Egyptian reluctance to move effective troops out of Egypt as long as tension with Israel remains high.

Even such limited union, quite aside from Egyptian military occupation, would probably arouse the opposition of Ethiopia and give rise to apprehension among the British in Kenya and Uganda. In the face of a possible coalition of the above forces and unrest within the Sudan itself, it is unlikely that such a hypothetical Egyptian occupation of the Sudan would result in Egyptian expansion beyond the Sudanese borders.

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