

STAT

Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R00904A000500010017-0

Next 3 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R00904A000500010017-0

~~SECRET~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

13 November 1959

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 47-59 (Revised)

SUBJECT: THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE SUDAN

1. In The Outlook for the Sudan (SNIE 72.1-59, 6 January 1959), we estimated that, for the short-run at least, General Abboud's regime could probably maintain its authority through its control of the army and its support from conservative political and religious leaders. The estimate also emphasized the long-range difficulties of satisfying both the traditional politico-religious factions, on the one hand, and nationalist-minded junior officer elements on the other. The short-run is now showing some signs of running out.

2. On 17 November 1958, Abboud and other senior army officers staged a bloodless coup with the apparent knowledge and consent of the then Prime Minister Abdullah Khalil (it appears that Khalil expected to remain the dominant force in

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

the government -- an expectation which was not fulfilled). The coup was motivated by a desire to rid the country of "degeneration, chaos and instability." Political parties were dissolved, the constitution was suspended, and press and other freedoms severely limited. The move was welcomed by the public and the army, who looked upon it as a deliverance from the corruption and venality of Sudanese politicians, businessmen and newspapers, and who disliked the Khalil government's overt pro-Westernism. The major political and religious leaders went along, probably hoping that their influence would soon be restored under more stable conditions.

3. The Abboud government has, in fact, accomplished much of what was expected of it. The economic situation has improved largely as a result of the sale of the Sudan's cotton in western markets. Corruption has been reduced and the press controlled. Relations with the UAR have been improved to the extent that a Nile Waters agreement has been announced. While the Sudan has continued to accept American and British aid and refused aid from the Soviets, it has recognized Communist China and otherwise made gestures toward

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

neutralism. At the same time, the Communist Party has been kept under tight control and subversive activities of both the Soviets and the UAR have been reduced.

4. Abboud, however, has shown three major weaknesses; (a) he has not been able to develop a flair for dramatizing his accomplishments; (b) he has been unable to maintain the discipline and loyalty of the junior officers of the army; and (c) he has been unable to suppress effectively the activities of the political and religious leaders. These deficiencies have gradually eroded the prestige of his government.

5. The most recent threat has come from the junior officer element. For years, junior officers have been restive under the Sudanese politicians. As early as June 1957, a number of junior officers were sentenced to long prison terms for plotting against the government, and military conspiracies have continued under Abboud's regime. The most notable uprising occurred in March 1959, when Brig. Gen. Shannan of the Northern Command and Brig. Gen. Abdullah of the Eastern Command led troops on Khartoum demanding a voice in the government,

-3-

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

~~SECRET~~

removal of unpopular members from the Supreme Council, and the release of the imprisoned officers. The display of force was only partly successful. Shannan and Abdullah received posts in the cabinet, several Council members were removed, and imprisoned officers released. Subsequently, however, Shannan proved unable to establish his dominance on the council, and in May, Shannan and Abdullah, with an assist from Council member, Maj. Gen. Ahmad Abdullah Hamid, attempted to repeat their March coup de force. The action aborted, however, and Shannan and Abdullah were arrested, tried, and imprisoned. Hamid was cashiered from the army.

6. If Abboud had acted with dispatch during the coup attempt in March, he could probably have arrested its leaders, restored discipline in the army and guaranteed his position for some time to come. Abboud vacillated, however, and missed his opportunity. In May, Abboud showed uncharacteristic resolve in arresting Shannan and Abdullah. Nevertheless his subsequent purge of the army did not reach far enough, with the result that plotting among the pro-Shannan junior officers has increased, spurred by the additional motive of vengeance for their fallen leaders.

~~SECRET~~

7. On 10 November after many postponements, a group of pro-Shannan junior officers again attempted to overthrow the Abboud regime. Details of the attempt are still sketchy but it appears the latest coup was poorly organized and was almost certainly penetrated by the government. In any event, the necessary support did not develop, a number of the leaders were quickly arrested, and the movement was easily suppressed. It remains to be seen whether Abboud this time will follow up his initial success with a wholesale cleanup of dissident elements in the army. Based on past performance it seems unlikely that he will. In the absence of prompt and decisive action on Abboud's part, it must be presumed that a sizable number of antigovernment officers remain, especially in the outlying provinces. While these elements certainly need better organization and more courage than they have shown heretofore, their potential for causing trouble for the regime cannot be discounted.

8. The exact makeup of the junior officers rather amorphous Membership is not fully known, but it includes many of the more radical junior officers who have been

-5-

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

plotting since the early days of independence. It hopes to overthrow Abboud and establish a Revolutionary Command Council composed of junior officers and an Advisory Council of "elder statesmen" -- Shannan, Abdullah, and Hamid. Their program is still obscure, though they claim to be neutralist and Arab nationalist, and to favor restoration of the freedoms denied by Abboud. The group has been variously reported as being pro-Western and pro-Communist, and probably includes elements of each. Many of the officers are believed to be distrustful of Nasser. (Perhaps significantly, of those arrested since the 10 November effort, a disproportionate number appear to have been Communists. At least two were implicated in an earlier pro-Nasser plot, although they claim they have since become disillusioned with Nasser.) If the group eventually succeeds in seizing power, it is likely that an internal struggle for power will ensue. If such a struggle were to take place concurrently with an abrupt restoration of political freedom, a degree of chaos not unlike that in Iraq may result.

9. Abboud's strength has also waned with conservative political and religious leaders. Initially Abboud was bolstered by a pledge of support from Sayyid Abd-al-Rahman al Mahdi, leader of the Ansar sect which, in turn, comprises the great bulk of the powerful Umma party. When the Mahdi died last March his son and

~~SECRET~~ NOFORN

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

successor, Sadiq al Mahdi, honored his father's pledge. Sadiq, however, has been repeatedly offended by slights on Abboud's part, and now appears to feel he is no longer bound by his pledge. Leaders of the other major Sudanese party, the National Union Party (NUP), have also been angered by Abboud's failure to broaden the base of his government. Once cowed by the appearance of army solidarity, leaders of both the Umma and the NUP have become increasingly emboldened by Abboud's troubles with the junior officers. It is not clear whether the Umma or the NUP are actively conspiring against the government, but leaders of both parties have expressed the view that the army has demonstrated its incapacity to govern and are obviously awaiting Abboud's downfall with considerable anticipation.

10. There is some evidence that the junior officers and members of Umma may have established contact. It is highly unlikely, however, that the conservative Umma and the radical junior officers have anything in common other than their desire for power. Any cooperation between the two would probably be short-lived. A more likely possibility is that the Umma and the NUP may gang up on the regime and indeed there is recent evidence that they are already acting in concert. In view of the lack of discipline in

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~

~~SECRET~~/NOFORN

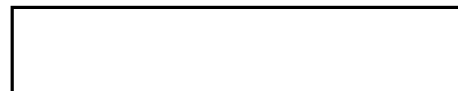
the army and the fact that both parties have army adherents, this possibility poses a continuing threat to Abboud.

11. Abboud's position, however, is not hopeless. He is obviously aware that plotting is going on, and may still possess the strength and resolve to cope with it. The recent successful conclusion of the Nile Water talks could do much to restore public confidence in the regime if presented properly -- though both the politicians and the junior officers have already begun to charge that he sold out Sudanese interests. If Abboud should, in the near future, take measures leading toward the addition of prominent civilians into the cabinet and the resumption of constitutional life, he might be able to recoup much of his position with the disgruntled politicians especially if he concurrently plays up the leftist aspects of the recent coup attempt. Having parried the threat from this quarter, Abboud would have much greater freedom to cope with the situation in the army. The loyalty of the Umma Party in particular would be a great asset during a period of army reform since a large portion of the army is made up of members of the Ansar sect. The first anniversary of the Abboud coup is approaching and provides him with a ready made opportunity for taking the

~~SECRET~~/NOFORN

~~SECRET~~

necessary steps to restore a measure of political life. Unless he acts quickly and dramatically, however, increased instability in the Sudan is nearly certain and the downfall of the Abboud regime may be not far off.



STAT

~~SECRET/NOFORN~~