



**Director  
Central  
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# The Outlook for Sudan

**Special National Intelligence Estimate  
Memorandum to Holders**

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**MEMORANDUM TO HOLDERS OF  
SNIE 78-82**

**THE OUTLOOK FOR SUDAN**

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**THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS.**

*The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Memorandum:*

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organization of the Department of State.

***Also Participating:***

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force

The Director of Intelligence, Headquarters, Marine Corps


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### SCOPE NOTE

The purpose of this Memorandum to Holders is to assess developments in Sudan this year and evaluate the threats to President Nimeiri's continued rule over the next six months. Nimeiri's coming meeting with President Reagan occurs at a time of serious political difficulty in Sudan. Nimeiri has made controversial major changes in the political landscape of Sudan this year, most notably the division of the Southern Region into smaller administrative units and the imposition of Islamic law. Moreover, chronic problems, including Libyan-backed subversion, shortages of consumer commodities, and low morale and coup plotting in the Army, present continuing challenges for the regime.

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## KEY JUDGMENTS

President Nimeiri has made a number of controversial decisions this year that could generate a serious challenge to his position. Two moves—the declaration of Islamic law and the division of southern Sudan into three administrative regions—have been especially divisive. Nimeiri now faces a broader array of serious problems than at any time since he seized power in 1969.

The vigor with which Nimeiri attempts to implement Islamic law and his actions in the coming months regarding southern Sudan will be crucial in determining the future level of opposition to his government. We believe that Nimeiri's strong personal and political motivation is leading him to act without sufficient regard for the consequences of his policies, and his ability to survive in office will be seriously threatened if he continues on his current path.

Banned political parties and southern opposition groups are making new attempts to organize national and southern fronts against the regime. Personal, ethnic, religious, and ideological rivalries, however, are likely to impede the effectiveness of such coalitions.

Libya and Ethiopia are continuing efforts to destabilize the Nimeiri government. Realizing the ferment Nimeiri's actions have caused in the south, they are encouraging southern dissidents based in Ethiopia to launch larger and more frequent raids into southern Sudan.

The controversial measures imposed this year have added to chronic disgruntlement in the armed forces over economic hardships and old equipment. The recently discovered coup plot in the military heightens concern over the loyalty of the armed forces. We consequently believe that many in the armed forces would not wholeheartedly defend Nimeiri in the event of a coup attempt or popular uprising.

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Sudan's serious political and security problems are compounded by chronic economic difficulties. The country is struggling with a serious debt problem. Sudan will have to come to terms with the International Monetary Fund not only for a 1984 standby but for the next several years to avoid defaulting. The chances of implementing the structural changes needed for long-term economic recovery are dim, in part because Nimeiri has little interest in or understanding of economic matters.

Nimeiri's sudden demise could lead to a serious political struggle since there is no clearly acceptable successor on the scene. The President is not grooming First Vice President Umar al-Tayyib as his heir apparent, and he has retired many top officers in the Army over the past few years, especially those who appeared politically ambitious or who disagreed with his policies.

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## DISCUSSION

### Significance for the United States

1. Sudan, the largest country in Africa, occupies a strategic position in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. In recent years the government of President Gaafar Nimeiri has played an important role that supports US efforts to prevent the further growth of Libyan and Soviet influence in the region and to protect US access to vital oil supply routes.

2. In March 1981, the Sudanese Government offered to allow the United States the use of military facilities in Sudan. The Sudanese this year formally agreed to permit the United States to pre-position military equipment in Port Sudan for the US Central Command. President Nimeiri also allowed US AWACS to deploy to Khartoum International Airfield during the crisis in Chad this summer.

3. Nimeiri has been supportive of US political goals in the area as well. He supported the Camp David agreements and in September 1982 publicly endorsed the US Middle East peace initiative. Sudan has welcomed private investment from the United States, and American firms are deeply involved in exploration and development in the petroleum sector.

### Major Changes in 1983

4. President Nimeiri has made a number of controversial decisions this year that hold the potential for generating a serious challenge to his position. The most divisive changes have been the declaration of Islamic law; the ending of the special status of southern Sudan as a single, autonomous region; and the unsuccessful attempt to move some southern troops to the north. Each change has been welcomed by some segments of Sudanese society. These moves, however, also were opposed by many Sudanese, especially in the south, and may spur them into antiregime activity. The vigor with which Nimeiri tries to impose Islamic law and his future actions toward the south will largely determine how severe the backlash against his policies will be. Nimeiri also must prove to an increasingly skeptical

populace that he is capable of providing effective leadership for the country.

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6. Southern Sudanese—largely animist or Christian—have been the most vocal opponents of the Islamic measures. The decrees have revived age-old fears of domination and discrimination by the Muslim north. Many southern leaders, including those who had supported Nimeiri's earlier policies toward the region, have privately criticized Islamization, and in October several thousand southerners participated in protest demonstrations in Juba against the new laws. Many northerners who are not religious are also alarmed, but no public manifestations of their concern have yet been noted. Secular Sudanese probably in-

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clude a significant proportion of the armed forces officer corps, the intelligentsia, at least the upper ranks of the civil service, and the intelligence and security agencies. Even "quiet" opposition by them would further undermine Nimeiri's position.

7. The Governments of Saudi Arabia and Egypt are both concerned that Nimeiri's Islamization campaign will create political problems for him. Both, however, are committed to a moderate and sympathetic government in Sudan. Egyptian leaders were upset that Nimeiri did not consult with them before suddenly imposing Islamic law, but their commitment to defend Sudan against outside aggression remains strong.

8. There have been some hints of moderation from the President regarding the Islamic laws, including a public statement that the bans and harsh punishment on alcohol consumption and adultery will not apply to non-Muslims. Nonetheless, Nimeiri has emphasized in recent speeches the prominent role Islam is to play in Sudanese affairs. Highly visible measures such as the installation of Islamic judges in the south or the creation of Islamic consultative bodies in the government would aggravate the situation.

### Problems in the South

9. Nimeiri's decision in June to divide the Southern Region into three smaller regions was described by him as part of a nationwide program to decentralize authority and make the government more responsive. The plan, however, was opposed by the Dinka, the largest tribe in the south, who had controlled most regional governments since the end of the civil war in 1972. Some smaller tribes favor the proposal as a way to end Dinka domination and gain power in areas where they form a majority. Other non-Dinka have viewed the maneuver as an attempt by Nimeiri to "divide and rule" the south by taking advantage of tribal tensions. Many southerners view division as a breach of the Addis Ababa accords which gave special status to the south. Problems in staffing and funding the three new regional governments in the south also have caused a number of former proponents of the plan to question its viability.

10. Division of the south has driven a number of southern politicians who had served in the former regional government to opt out of the new, gerryman-

dered system. Some reportedly have made contact with southern dissident movements. Any future moves by Nimeiri that are seen as harming the area's interests are likely to push more southerners into the opposition.

11. Southern Sudan has been plagued by a series of violent incidents in 1983, and the security situation there could well deteriorate over the next several months. American personnel and property in the region may be targeted for attack by southern dissident groups. Responsibility for individual raids in the south is often difficult to determine. Much of the violence, especially in the Upper Nile Region bordering Ethiopia, can be attributed to any of several southern Sudanese dissident factions. At least some of the incidents, on the other hand, are the result of the tribal skirmishing or banditry that is common in the south.

12. Since Nimeiri's decision to divide the south and an attempt by the government to force some southern troops to serve in the north, southern oppositionists have attempted to organize against the regime. Disaffected southern politicians, leaders of southern dissident factions, and southern officers who deserted when Khartoum tried to force troop rotation have reportedly met in Ethiopia on a number of occasions. Tribal and personal rivalries, however, are likely to impede efforts to forge a broad and cohesive southern opposition front. Nonetheless, some factions may already be coordinating their activities to a greater extent than before. Rebel groups may also be gaining new recruits because of the increased opposition to the regime's recent policies.

13. Libya and Ethiopia are aware of the ferment Nimeiri's recent actions have caused in the south, and probably view the current situation as an excellent opportunity to destabilize the Sudanese Government.

14. The Sudanese armed forces and police in the south are poorly prepared to handle any major increase in dissident activity. Troop morale suffered due to desertions after the attempted troop rotations earlier

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this year. Southern units also are handicapped by equipment and fuel shortages even more severe than those elsewhere in the country.

15. A sharp escalation of violence in the south in the next several months could force the government to send more northern units to the area. Such a move would be risky, however, since southerners are extremely sensitive about the presence of Arab troops in their region. A large-scale deployment of northerners might be effective in securing major towns or facilities, but would cause still more southerners to join opposition ranks.

### Domestic Opposition

16. None of Sudan's banned political parties is strong enough individually to challenge Nimeiri seriously. Since seizing power in 1969, Nimeiri has watched closely parties on both the left and the right, and has alternately suppressed them or sought reconciliation.

17. The Ansar Muslim sect, with 5-6 million adherents, is potentially the strongest opposition force. Although its leader, Sadiq al-Mahdi, was involved in the 1976 coup attempt, subsequently he assumed a lower profile and had become a "quiet critic" of the regime. Sadiq's actions in the past year, however, suggest he has been returning to a more active opposition role. In October 1982, he returned to Sudan from self-imposed exile and began working to heal internal splits within the movement. When Sadiq made public statements highly critical of the government in September, he and his key advisers were imprisoned. The jailing of the Ansar leaders has left the sect organizationally adrift and may have lessened the threat of action against the regime in the short term. If and when Sadiq is released, however, he might intensify his antigovernment activities.

18. Other outlawed opposition parties are in various stages of disarray. Internal security services have kept close watch on the leftist parties—the Sudanese Communist Party and Sudanese Ba'th Party—and key leaders of both are in jail. The National Unionist Party has been floundering and consumed by internal squabbles since the death of its longtime leader in early 1982.

19. In recent months, some members of the Ansar, Communist, Ba'th, and National Unionist Parties have renewed efforts to reestablish a national front to oppose Nimeiri. [redacted]

these individuals may already be cooperating in a coalition or coalitions known as the Sudanese Peoples' Grouping or the Charter Group, which may have links to Libya. A broad and cohesive national front could pose a serious threat to Nimeiri, but the illegal parties share few common goals besides Nimeiri's ouster and probably will not be able to work together effectively.

20. Students in Sudan are often the first to react to economic problems or unpopular actions by the government. Scattered student demonstrations took place in late summer in reaction to the severe shortages of food and fuel and the breakdown in public services. Internal security services have moved quickly to contain such protests. They are sure to react rapidly in the future to prevent students from providing the spark that ignites more massive demonstrations. However, if a general uprising occurs we are uncertain that the security services would be willing to suppress it.

21. Labor, cowed by the regime's crackdown on striking railroad workers two years ago, has also showed signs of renewed restiveness. Judges, lawyers, university employees, and doctors have all gone on strike, or threatened to, in 1983. The job actions were prompted by pay or parochial concerns in most cases, but political grievances have also been raised. Leftist parties have considerable influence in many unions and would seek to exploit their grievances. If unrest were to grow, some labor organizations with their considerable membership might join in to further their own political goals.

### The Role of the Military

22. The Sudanese armed forces reflect the diversity of the country's population, and many soldiers are distressed over one or more recent developments in Sudan. Because of the increased disgruntlement in the military, we believe that many troops would not wholeheartedly defend Nimeiri in the event of a coup attempt. The arrest in September for plotting of soldiers in the armored corps and the airborne brigade—units with a countercoup mission—has caused resentment in the armed forces to spread. Many

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military personnel believe that their colleagues were arrested for nothing more than grumbling.

23. In the event of serious domestic unrest, Nimeiri would rely on the Army to fulfill a critical internal security role. For the most part, the armed forces are professional and loyal to the chain of command, but we are not certain of their reliability should such unrest occur. The Army intervened in politics in 1958 and 1969, but in the last decade generally has remained aloof.

24. Several divisive issues could further erode military support for Nimeiri in the months ahead. The armed forces appear split between those who favor the forceful suppression of southern dissidents and those who are concerned over taking any action that might provoke another civil war. Some troops, especially at the lower ranks, probably favor Nimeiri's Islamization campaign, but others, particularly in the officer corps, are no doubt disturbed by its potentially disruptive impact on Sudanese affairs.

25. Even if there were no dissension in the ranks, the armed forces' ability to contain external and internal threats has been weakened by a number of other factors. The military is under strength, and equipment shortages and logistic problems have long detracted from their capabilities. Recent unrest in the south has forced Khartoum to move resources to that region. Troops and equipment were already spread thin and any new threats on the long border with Ethiopia would compound the military's problems.

#### The Economic Situation

26. Sudan's serious political and security problems are compounded by chronic economic difficulties. Because of insufficient funds, the government has been unable to maintain basic public services or to ensure adequate supplies of consumer goods. The country is struggling with a serious debt problem. The real gross domestic product fell by 2 percent in the fiscal year ending in June, but the performance of some sectors of the economy has improved. The government also made some progress controlling the budget and current account deficits in the fiscal year ending in June, and the real value of both deficits declined. The inflation rate, however, rose to 41 percent.

27. Sudan's external debt is approximately \$9 billion—an amount exceeding one year's gross domestic product. If Sudan were required to meet its existing payments obligations, it would have to disburse close to \$1 billion yearly in principal and interest to creditors, more than its entire export earnings. Previous debt reschedulings in 1979 and 1982 were inadequate because the full extent of the debt problem was not correctly assessed.

28. Sudan is currently operating under a standby agreement reached in February 1983 with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and Sudanese compliance with the terms has been acceptable to the Fund. The negotiations in October for a 1984 standby stalled when Sudanese negotiators were unwilling to accept new IMF conditions. The IMF is seeking revenue increases, expenditure cuts, slower monetary growth, and a shift of export proceeds to the free market exchange rate. In the months ahead, Sudan will come under increased pressure from the IMF and major donors to privatize some inefficient government activities—especially petroleum importation and distribution and river transport.

29. Sudan will have to come to terms with the IMF not only for a 1984 standby but for the next several years to avoid defaulting. The chances of implementing the structural changes needed for long-term economic recovery are dim.

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probably agitate another. Backing off dramatically from Islamization, for example, would probably thrust the Islamic fundamentalists back into an active opposition role. The current ferment in Sudan, moreover, raises the odds of an attempt to assassinate or overthrow Nimeiri.

35. A number of possible developments in the next six months would significantly increase the threat to Nimeiri. Although there are factors that mitigate against their ultimate success, there have been tentative indications of first steps toward:

- Meaningful cooperation between Ansar, Communist, Ba'thist, and National Unionist Parties in a national front.
- Broader coordination between southern insurgents, military deserters, and disaffected politicians in a southern front.
- Serious coup plotting involving key units in the capital area.

36. The most likely successors to Nimeiri remain those discussed in SNIE 78-82, *The Outlook for Sudan*. Under the Constitution, First Vice President Umar al-Tayyib would become interim president. Senior officers in the Army would be likely to play a major role in any future government.

37. Nimeiri's sudden demise, however, could lead to a serious political struggle since there is no clear successor on the scene. The President is not grooming Tayyib as his heir apparent, and he has retired many top officers in the Army over the past few years, especially those who appeared politically ambitious or who disagreed with his policies. The very qualities that have permitted Tayyib and current military leaders to retain positions of authority under Nimeiri—a lack of both assertiveness and popularity—probably would work against them if they gained power.

#### Outlook/Succession

33. Nimeiri's reputation as a political survivor is legendary. He has faced many threats during his 14 years in power, including serious coup attempts in 1971 and 1976. In the past, when the going has gotten tough Nimeiri has reacted vigorously. He has survived through a combination of will, force, skilled negotiations, and luck.

34. Nimeiri today faces a broader range of serious problems than he has at any one time in the past. If he cannot defuse the tensions now rending Sudanese society—especially unrest in the south and unease in many quarters over Islamic law—his position will be seriously threatened. Nimeiri's task is all the more difficult since concessions he might make to placate one party in Sudan's diverse political mosaic would

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## INSTABILITY INDICATORS

- Increase in public protests in urban areas, particularly by student groups, directed against the government.
- Indications of coup plotting among elements of the military, particularly those units in the capital area charged with internal security.
- Consumer commodity shortages and government-imposed austerity measures leading to public unrest.
- Evidence of cooperation among key opposition groups, such as the Ansars or the Muslim Brotherhood.
- Growing labor unrest, especially in the critical transportation sector.
- Increased acts of terrorism and sabotage inside Sudan by Sudanese dissidents backed by Libya and Ethiopia.
- Increase in north-south tensions and incidents in the south that require the intervention of northern troops.
- Increased concern by key Sudanese over Nimeiri's erratic behavior.

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