

Some Aspects of the British Sudanese Relations

During the Condominium Rule

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Abstract

This paper starts with the ceremony that was held to celebrate the decisive victory of the Anglo- Egyptian forces over the Mahadists state. The Memory of Gordon had developed into a legend amongst the British public. It showed the Sudanese resistance to the Turko-Egyptian rule till the mahalist revolution. The paper traced back the condominium agreement between Britain and Egypt. The task of that agreement was to establish law and order after the defeat of the mahadist forces. Britain aimed at modernizing the Sudan by introducing modern technology in order to make it self sufficient financially, and establishing the modern civil service. The main problem that faced the government was how to control the vast country with inadequate troops?. They seek so the assistance of traditional tribal leader. The paper showed that the ambition of France and Belgium in the upper Nile, and the policy of Isolated districts and its objectives. The paper also, touched the economic condition in that period, the sources of financial loans, and the Second World War and its impact on Sudan.

Keywords: Turko-Egyptian, Anglo- Egyptian, Gordon, Mahadist, Lord Cromer, modernizing the Sudan, civil services, Tribal leaders, French and Belgium ambitions in Upper Nile, Isolation policy, missionary societies, education, medical care, Second World War.

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المستخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة العلاقات السودانية البريطانية في فترة الحكم الثنائي ، بدأت بمراسم الاحتفال الذي أقيم بمناسبة انتصار القوات الانجليزية المصرية الزائف على قوات المهديّة ، ثم استعرضت المقاومة السودانية للحكم التركي المصري حتى قيام الثورة المهديّة. استعرضت الورقة أيضاً اتفاقية الحكم الثنائي بين بريطانيا ومصر ، والذي هدف لتوطيد الأمن والاستقرار بعد هزيمة قوات المهديّة. هدفت بريطانيا لتحديث السودان بإدخال التكنولوجيا الحديثة من أجل جعل السودان مكتفياً ذاتياً من ناحية التمويل ، و تم إدخال الخدمة المدنية الحديثة . ومن أهم المشكلات التي واجهت الحكم الثنائي هو كيفية إدارة هذه المساحة الواسعة بعدد قليل من القوات ، مما جعل الحكم الثنائي يلجأ إلى الإدارة الأهلية للقبائل. أوضحت الورقة الأطماع الفرنسية والبلجيكية في أعالي النيل وسياسة المناطق المقفولة وأهدافها . تحدثت الورقة عن الأوضاع الاقتصادية خلال تلك الفترة ، ومصادر القروض التي تحصلت عليها الدولة، وتحدثت عن آثار الحرب العالمية الثانية علي السودان .

كلمات مفتاحية: التركية المصرية، الانجليزي المصري، غردون باشا، المهديّة، اللورد كرومر، تحديث السودان، الخدمة المدنية، زعماء القبائل، الأطماع الفرنسية البلجيكية في أعالي النيل، المناطق المقفولة، الحرب العالمية الثانية.

On Sunday morning of Sept 4th 1898, in the ruins of the Palace of the former Turco-Egyptian Governor General of the Sudan an official ceremony was held to celebrate the decisive victory of the Anglo-Egyptian forces over the Mahdist's State (1885- 1898), at the battle of Karrari two days before at which eleven thousand Mahdist's fighters were annihilated by rifles, cannons, maxims and guns onboard the gunboat Melek. The ceremony was presided over by Sir (Lord) Herbert Kitchener who had led the victorious Anglo-Egyptian forces, and in his presence and that of the British and Egyptian Units, the British and Egyptian flags were hoisted thus symbolizing the combined efforts the two states in this operation.

A religious service inaugurating the new regime was led by the army chaplains where the solemn words of the bible were read. Then the assembled army observed a memorial service in honour of General Gordon the last Governor General of the Turco-Egyptian administration who was killed when the Mahdi captured Khartoum. There the bands played their dirge and Gordon's favourite hymn 'Abide by me'.

The memory of Gordon had developed into a legend amongst the British public. "His spirit" - according to Donald Howley - "continued to inspire the condominium administration". Indeed weeks after his death the Church Missionary Society established the Gordon Memorial Mission to begin work as soon as the Sudan was pacified. At that ceremony there was hardly any mention of Islam, the religion of the majority of the invading army comprising both Sudanese and Egyptian in the rights of whose khedive the campaign was launched. Or was the prime objective of the campaign to avenge Gordon?

The Sudanese people resisted and resented the Turco-Egyptian rule since its inception. The Mahdist revolution of 1881 was provoked primarily by the oppressions and inadequacies of Turco-Egyptian administration. The people resented, the heavy taxation, the crude manner by which they were collected and above all because of the appointment of Christian governors and rulers. Britain also which in 1882 had just occupied Egypt refused to comply with the initial

Egyptian request to suppress the rebellious Sudanese provinces. It only sanctioned operations for the relief of Gordon from Khartoum.

Britain sought control over the Sudan for its strategic relevance to the security of the Suez Canal and the Red Sea route to India and to preclude other European powers from taking possession of the sources of the Nile (upon which the Egyptian economy largely depended). However the declared British justification for the conquest was the restoration of the Turco-Egyptian sovereignty.

The new administration was devised by the Anglo-Egyptian condominium agreement masterminded by Lord Cromer –the British Agent and Consul General in Egypt. The agreement came into effect on January 19th 1899 and remained in operation until the Sudan regained its independence. The declared objective was the welfare of the Sudanese people. By virtue of this agreement the Sudan was given a separate novel political status: sovereignty was theoretically jointly shared by the two co-domini. The Sudan was neither a colony nor a dominion. Britain had by virtue of the right of conquest gained control of the Sudan and this was maintained by the *Pax Britannic*.

The administrative system of the condominium government was by and large grafted onto that of the preceding Turco-Egyptian regime. Further Egyptian influence returned in the company of the invading army and remained to the present time. However the impact of Britain was even greater.

The Anglo- Egyptian task of establishing law and order was formidable. The Mahdist forces though defeated both at Atbara and Karrari continued to resist. The bombardment of the Mahdi's tomb and the barbaric behavior that followed and the killing of the wounded Mahdist fighters that ensued in the Battle of Karrari showed an apparent contempt on the part of Kitchener for Muslim beliefs and sacred institutions. That ungallant conduct shocked many Sudanese and hardened their attitude towards the aggressors.

The new rulers found it difficult to comprehend the spirit that encompassed Mahdism and the utter belief in its teachings which aroused endless courage except by small encompassing reference to

fanaticism. Fear of fanaticism and the survival of the cult of Mahdism daunted the government for many years. However force prevailed and law and order were established in the north, Hence a large measure of security was established by 1914. In the Southern region it was only accomplished by 1930.

Britain the uncontested partner of the condominium aimed at modernizing The Sudan by introducing modern technology to the subsistence economy (in other words to make it self sufficient financially) and to implement British liberal institution to the Sudanese traditional society.

To serve the imperial interests of Great Britain a modern civil service was established in the Sudan. Nomination and selection to this service was based on strict measures of academic merit, physical fitness and qualities of leadership. District commissioners who were the pillars of the administration were all British.

The main problem that faced the government was how to control a vast country with inadequate troops and small number of British inspectors? The answer was to enlist the assistance of the traditional tribal leader, Shaykhs in the North and Chiefs in the South. This practice was developed in the late 1920^s into the system of "Indirect Rule" in which politically unassertive tribal leaders were appointed. In the Sudan context District Commissioners were given absolute local authority.

The District Officer had to cover sparsely populated wide tracts of land where he attended to the simple needs of the people in a "fatherly" manner probably animated by a sense of mission or stimulated by the White Man's Burden". This paternal attitude which could come close to condescension was frowned upon by the educated elite in urban areas. Yet the system would not have worked without the cooperation and the acquiescence of those governed. In certain instances relationship of trust and admiration seem to have emerged but they remained formal and impersonal.

The Sudan's government's first concern in the Southern Sudan was to check the French and the Belgian ambitions in the upper Nile.

This was successfully carried out in 1898 and 1906. The second and the third objectives were to extend government control and establish law and order by 1918 a network of government posts were established throughout the region, garrisoned by Sudanese troops and administered by British inspectors. They gradually managed to establish government authority by 1930, although at a high cost. The Southern Sudanese regarded the British as just another wave of intruders who came to exploit them and hence they encountered the British with fierceness and sustained resistance. By 1930 southern Sudanese resistance was completely crushed.

Having pacified the southern region the British administrators began to accelerate the process of sealing it off from any Northern Sudanese, Arab or Islamic influences. The alleged reason for this policy of isolation was to protect it from the ravages of the slave-trade with which some Northern Sudanese were earlier associated. The real motive in my opinion was that Christian missionaries and many government officials were to say the least opposed to the expansion of Islam in that region. They sought to keep East Africa free from Arab and Islamic influences. This attitude was summed up in Kitchener's memorandum on the future of Uganda in 1892. A similar view was expressed by Wingate in 1904 and then by R.C.R Owen Governor of Mongalla.

As hinted earlier missionary societies argued that the conquest of the Sudan gave them the chance to disseminate Christianity. Some argued that Islam and Islamic education would be inconsistent with the welfare of the Southern Sudanese. In the end, the Sudan the government gave the missionaries a free hand to proselytize in the area south of latitude 10⁰N. Fortified with the moral backing of the British officials and government financial support missionary societies enjoyed a monopoly of education in the south.

Free contacts between the Northern and Southern regions were severely restricted by the Passports and Permits ordinance of 1922. Northern Sudanese traders were replaced by Christian merchants, Arabic was debarred. The spread of Arabic and Islamic influences was impeded through "The Memorandum of Southern Policy". It

entailed the replacement of Northern Sudanese personnel by Southerners.

The Northern Sudanese never pardoned the English colonial administration for keeping them out of the Southern Sudan thus arresting a natural free cultural communication.

From its inception the Sudan government depended on external finance chiefly from Egypt. From Egypt development loans were obtained to cater for the construction of the railway line and Port Sudan harbour. It paid a subsidy to the budget and met the entire cost of the army until 1924. This financial support empowered the government to pursue a policy of low taxation. Most investment was concentrated on the Gezira Scheme which was developed to make the Sudan self-sufficient financially and to produce cotton for the English textiles industry. The government succeeded in preventing foreigners from speculating in land. There was hardly any economic development in the south.

Besides the establishment of law and order a measurable provision was allocated to social services especially education and health. The first Director of Education designed a system of education that would enable the masses to understand the machinery of government, to train a small class of artisans and a small administrative class. Gordon Memorial College built by generous donations from the British public was inaugurated as a primary school and came to be the nucleus of the University of Khartoum. It was in the field of secular higher education that the impact of Western Europe particularly Britain that had been felt most. The role of the Gordon Memorial College and Kitchener School of Medicine is testified by the cultural, professional, social and political leadership they manifested in the Graduates' General Congress which was the vanguard of political awareness and the spearhead of independence.

In the Southern Sudan the development of education was slender and slow. Most of the graduates of the missionary schools were tailored to fill junior government posts. With the termination of the missionary monopoly of education in 1944, efforts were exerted to

intensify development of education in the southern region. The central point in the new policy was to prepare the Southern Sudanese to stand up for themselves as equal partners with the Northerners in the Sudan's future. Rumberk Secondary School was opened in 1948.

In health: a medical care service was introduced, it embraced two main functions. Firstly the eradication of widespread disease like small pox, malaria, sleeping sickness and kalazar. It also took the form of improving the environment. Secondly the concept of free medical care was introduced. Hospitals were manned by British and Sudanese doctors (most of whom graduated from Kitchener School of Medicine).

In the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936 the two governments confirmed that "the primary aim of their administration must be the welfare of The Sudanese" a phrase regarded as condescending by the Sudanese political activists. What worried the educated Sudanese most was the fact that important decisions pertaining to the future of their country had been decided without consultation with them. Consequently educated Sudanese: graduates of Gordon Memorial College and others constituted the Graduates' General Congress in February 1938.

Their declared objectives as stated in a letter addressed to the Governor General were to serve the public interest of the country and the graduates. The government while encouraging the formation of the congress as a social organisation warned its members not to engage in politics.

The Second World War brought the Sudan into close contact with the outside world. Emboldened by external factors and genuine nationalist sentiments The Graduates' General Congress presented a memorandum in which it demanded a joint declaration by Britain and Egypt granting the Sudan the right of self-determination after the end of the 1939 war. Newbold, the Civil Secretary, discourteously rejected the memorandum.

However by 1942 and 1943 Newbold was convinced that it was politically crucial to promote the Sudanese into higher administrative

posts. Then he initiated the establishment of the Advisory Council for the Northern Sudan. This was followed by the Legislative Assembly. By May 1952 The Legislative Assembly passed a draft for the Self-Government Statute which was sent to the British and Egyptian Governments for ratification.

With the conclusion of the 1953 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty we enter the final stage of the condominium government. I do not intend to go into the details of the transfer of power or the lengthy competition, intrigues and squabbles that ensued between the pro-independence and the unionist parties. It suffices to the state that both sides had from parliament unanimously chosen independence.

History had involved Great Britain in the Sudan at the time when tracts of large land in Africa and Asia had fallen under the yoke of European colonization. At that time imperialism was characteristic of the age. Though the Sudanese were conquered they never despaired regaining their freedom. They knew that the Anglo-Egyptian forces were fully equipped with modern weapons that were capable of crushing any armed resistance. Furthermore, they were aware of the imminent transformation that was to encompass them. They did not have many alternatives.

Those who had the opportunity opted for mastering the techniques of their new master: they learnt their language (the essence of their culture and civilization), the art of government and democratic ideas. Others cooperated in one sense or the other; a third group joined the Egyptians to fight the common enemy. Lastly a considerable number of Sudanese kept their distance and were least involved in the cultural exchange that took place. Among them were probably those who would prefer to remain uneducated and unfettered than fall under alien domination however beneficial.

The British administrators recognized that the Sudanese were conscious of self-respect and self-integrity. They took account of that human dimension and hence they were judicious in their relations with them. The Sudanese, I think, respected the sense of moderation with which they were ruled, yet they continued to pursue their

struggle for freedom. Once the British were encompassed by the resolution by which the nationalists fought their objective, they began to hasten the process of relinquishing their authority. The process of shaking off the paternally yoke” was void of bitterness.

However, whatever the benefits of the colonial period were, that should not mask our vision from the inherent indignities and humiliations of the colonial dominations and traumas that went together with it. Nevertheless the Anglo-Egyptian interaction was not devoid of positive cultural understanding, appreciation and influence. Can we identify the attributes of that regime? The answer is not easily arrived at. In 1956, the Sudan had definitely acquired many of the attributes of a modern state. The British had established the basic structure of a united state, with recognized borders. It had acquired the essential infrastructure in the form of a railway line and a telegraph system. Probably its major economic achievement was the Gezira Scheme.

The Condominium Government had left behind a credible civil service and prevented foreigners from speculating in land. An important development, probably more of side effects were the massive reports, memoires, and the collective contribution to *Sudan Notes & Records*, left by the British Civil Service. This massive material constitutes a very important source for the study of all aspects of the Sudanese heritage.

Among the major weaknesses of the Condominium Government were its uncompromising policies towards issues like religion and the problem of Southern Sudan.

For further information on this subject see *The Sudanese British Relations* Papers from an International Conference, Khartoum February 2001, ed. Yusuf Fadl Hasan and Awad Al-Sid Al-Karsani, Khartoum University Press, Khartoum, 2002: especially the chapter entitled ‘The Historical Relationships: main highlights on Sudanese British relations’, pp 9-29