

# THE TABLET

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## LONG KNIVES IN THE SUDAN

A NUMBER of intriguing questions arise out of the unsuccessful Communist *coup* in the Sudan. They affect not only that country but Africa and the Middle East and—at one remove—the interests of the super-Powers.

The Sudan is not only the largest country in Africa, it is also the link between the Arab world and the world of black Africa. Two-thirds of its population are Arab Muslims, one third Christians or animists. Bordering on Egypt, Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic, the Congo, Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia and looking over the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia and the Yemen, the Sudan is clearly a country whose rulers can have lines open to key points over a vast area.

### Background to the Hijacking

The attempted *coup* coincided with the nineteenth anniversary of Colonel Nasser's successful *coup* against King Farouk, and with the opening of the televised trial of the pro-Soviet Egyptian leaders, accused of having plotted against President Anwar Sadat. It did not take the Cairo Establishment completely by surprise. First it was believed that the Soviet military mission stationed in the Sudan approved of the conspiracy. Later, increasing and substantiated evidence came to hand that Communist China was also supporting the uprising against el Numeiry. In the context of Chairman Mao's new foreign policy, this was as disturbing to the Russians as to President Sadat, not to mention General el Numeiry. The Sudanese Communist Party has, for some time, been split from top to bottom. No exact answer can be given as to which of the two Communist Powers had the largest share in preparing the *coup*. General el Numeiry, in his bloody purge, aims at eliminating both Maoist and Brezhnev-type Communists.

Who carried out the hijacking of the British aircraft, from which the Communist President-to-be, and the Prime Minister-to-be, were taken off by the Libyans, and sent to el Numeiry in Khartoum? The most interesting element in the story is the part played by Flight Information Region, Malta. It is run by International Aeradio Ltd., in which BOAC is the largest shareholder. Only its three top officials are British, the rest are Maltese. When Captain Bowyer received the order to land at Benghazi, he called Malta and requested clearance to return to Rome. The answer was yes. But a few minutes later, simultaneously with the Libyan threat. "For the safety of the souls on board you are to land in Benghazi". Malta advised him that Rome had rescinded

its permission. One would require proof of this to believe it. In view of the friendly relations between Dom Mintoff and Colonel Mansur Ghaddafy, and the negotiations for a fifteen-million-pound grant "without strings" from Libya, Malta's action is significant.

Can General el Numeiry join the Egypt-Libya-Syria confederation? He was present at the original meeting of the three Heads of State (President Nasser was still alive) and signed the Tripoli Alliance. But when the plan was made final last April, he tactfully bowed out without appending his signature. His official reason was two-fold: that the confederation included Syria, a non-African State, and that it was moving too rapidly towards political union.

In actual fact, el Numeiry cannot join the Tripoli Alliance, for this would block for ever a peaceful solution of the southern problem—a euphemism for the civil war which has been raging in the South for the last fifteen years (see *The Tablet*, 15 February 1971). The rebel Anyana leaders would never reach settlement with the north if the Sudan were part of an Arab bloc.

Colonel Ghaddafy of Libya regards himself as the new Mahdi, the Holy Man, who is to purify the Muslim faith and lead one hundred million Arabs to greatness. They must wage a Holy War against Israel and wipe it off the map. Ghaddafy resents el Numeiry's caution, and his "excessive concern" over his African subjects; but he is in complete agreement with el Numeiry's anti-Communist attitude.

### Russians Beset

Finally, how will Moscow react to the failure of the first effort to establish a Communist régime on African soil? It is known that the Moscow leaders were somewhat concerned over the unstable attitude of General el Numeiry—for instance when he suddenly, without any previous preparations, flew to Moscow. Yet el Numeiry succeeded in obtaining Soviet support without having to change his tactics towards the Sudanese Communists. Last September he dismissed from the Revolutionary Command Council Major Hasem al Atta, Colonel Babikr el Noor Osman and Major Farouk Hamadallah Osman, who staged the latest *coup* against him. Now, el Numeiry is wiping out the Sudanese Communist leadership, and is purging Communists from all walks of life. Whether he will succeed in changing the minds of the Omdurman railway workers, who are convinced Marxists, remains to be seen.

The Soviet leaders have had to learn—what the West is also apt to forget—