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SUBJECT: Ismail El Azhari ~~Secretary~~ Minister

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.3
 NND 822900 9-1986
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Ismail El Azhari, President of the National Unionist Party, was elected first Prime Minister of the Sudan on January 6, 1954. Azhari was nominated by Mirghani HAMZA, frequently spoken of as Azhari's main rival for NUP leadership, and his nomination was seconded by Bullen ALIER, a Southerner. The Opposition proposed the independent Mohammed Ahmed MAHGOUB who was nominated by Sayed SADDIK, President of the Umma Party, and seconded by Butu DIU, the Nuer leader. In the ballot that followed Azhari received 56 votes, Mahgoub received 37 votes, 3 Socialist Republican Party members abstained and one NUP member was not present. (The absent NUP member had been on a spree for two days and he was "persuaded" by NUP leaders not to appear in the House of Representatives where his condition would cause embarrassment to the party.)

Mohammed Ahmed Mahgoub at once congratulated the Prime Minister elect and promised that the Opposition would support the Government if it followed a national policy for the welfare, best interests and independence of the Sudan. Mahgoub further pledged the Opposition to a purely constructive criticism in which the interest of the Sudan alone will be considered.

Azhari then made a speech to the House thanking his supporters for his election and the Opposition for their congratulations and good wishes. He pledged himself to carry out his task without favoritism or prejudice and dedicated himself to the welfare of the Sudan and to carrying out the Anglo-Egyptian agreement in the letter and in the spirit. He was then carried out of the House on the shoulders of his supporters and received an ovation from the crowd that had assembled.

Ismail el Azhari is a complex individual who considers the furtherance of Sudanese nationalism as his mission in life. Thus far his interpretation of that nationalism has been pro-Egyptian. The extent to which this pro-Egyptian feeling has been a reflection of his anti-British feeling remains to be seen. He is flexible and to an extent opportunistic. Some of his closest friends feel that basically he wants the independence of the Sudan,

free from...

J.Sweeney:md
 REPORTER

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free from any major outside influence, and I am inclined to go along with this view. The British administration dislike him as a rabble rouser. At the time of the Governor General's reception on the occasion of the culmination of the Anglo-Egyptian agreement I stood next to Azhari as we approached the Governor General to extend our greetings. Azhari looked over the palace and the grounds as we went up the steps and turning to me said, "This is the first time I have ever been in this place." Some time later I was talking to the then Assistant Civil Secretary, Gawain BELL and asked him if he knew Azhari. He answered that he did not and had no desire to, explaining "That chap is nothing but a jailbird." (Azhari was jailed by the British administration for sedition.) Azhari is a prodigious worker and has the ability to arouse the complete loyalty of his close associates. He is shrewd, surprisingly well read, and has a smile that is always at hand.

Now in his 52nd year, Azhari was born in Omdurman where his father was a well-known religious leader. He is married and has one daughter. He attended the old Gordon Memorial College and graduated as an intermediate school master. The Education Department sent him to the American University of Beirut where he obtained a bachelor's degree in mathematics. He returned to the Sudan and was a teacher of mathematics in Gordon College until 1946 when he resigned. One version is that he was disappointed because he was overlooked in the promotion list and the other, and the more plausible, is that he had decided to devote his full time to politics.

Azhari began his political career in the Omdurman Schools Club. In this organization, oddly enough, Azhari was on the pro-Ansar side and in a conflict with the pro-Khatmia side his faction won and he became Secretary of the Club and subsequently its President. His next important office was President of the Graduates Congress (the nationalist movement started by secondary school and college graduates in the Sudan.) Not satisfied by the Congress, in part because of its limited membership and because he did not think it was nationalistic enough, Azhari decided, spurred by British opposition to the moderate aims of Congress, to start a new party. He inaugurated the Ashigga Party (meaning brothers of the same father and mother, and referred to the Sudanese-Egyptian connection) and led it from the beginning. In 1945 the Graduates Congress, at the time under Azhari's leadership, accepted a decision placing the Sudan under the Egyptian Crown (Azhari had visited Egypt the previous summer). In 1947 Azhari led an all party delegation to Cairo just prior to the Siäki-Bevin protocol. Azhari subsequently visited London and America with NOQRASHI Pasha. Azhari has been pro-American since his days at the American University of Beirut and he was confirmed in this attitude by his American visit. In 1948 Azhari was sentenced to two months imprisonment when he led an Anti-Legislative Assembly demonstration in Omdurman. Azhari was one of the most powerful factors leading to the boycotting by his Ashigga followers of the British sponsored Legislative...

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sponsored Legislative Assembly which gave extremely limited rights of self-government to the Sudanese under the Governor General. In 1950 Azhari was sentenced to 4 months in jail for sedition on the basis of statements he made against the Sudan Government concerning shortages of food stuffs in the Red Sea area. In 1952 Azhari was one of the prime movers in the amalgamation of parties which led to the formation of the National Unionist Party and was elected its President. His hold on party leadership is a strong one, he is adept at playing off conflicting interests against each other so that in the end he seems to emerge as the winner. He is not a wealthy man and some of those close to him emphasize that he is dependent on revenue from the party which, it is claimed, in turn depends on Egyptian support. He himself refutes this claiming that his salary is paid by the party which obtains it from the party press and printing business (Colonel Abdul Fattah HASSAN, Egyptian member of the Electoral Commission once in-formed Warwick PERKINS, the American member that the only money Egypt gave to the NUP was to subsidize its press.) Some people claim he is in the direct pay of the Egyptian Government.

In the heat of the minor crises which have beset Sudanese politics in the interval between the conclusion of the elections and the establishment of parliament, Azhari has displayed a commendable degree of statesmanship and he has not allowed himself to be deflected from his main aim of setting up a Sudanese Government.

Joseph Sweeney,
United States Liaison Officer.

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