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FROM : USLO, Khartoum

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

REF : USLO despatch No. 243, May 5, 1954

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5-20	F	OTHER
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SUBJECT: Cabinet Approves Action Against Siddik for Involvement in March 1st Riot

The Sudanese Cabinet considered what action it should recommend as a result of evidence submitted to it showing that Sayed Siddik el Mahdi (President of the Umma Party and son of Sayed Abdel Rahman el Mahdi) was involved in the Khartoum riot of March 1st in the course of a meeting on May 6, 1954. In full awareness of the possibility that legal action against Siddik might lead to civil war, the Cabinet decided "to let the law take its course". This decision could not have been postponed much longer as the public hearings have been accelerated after considerable delay and will now commence on May 8, 1954.

The following additional details highlight what promises to be a significant development in Sudanese history.

1. The evidence submitted to the Cabinet showing the involvement of Siddik, Abdulla Bey Khalil, Secretary General of the Umma Party, and Amin el Tom, Assistant Secretary General, is "police evidence". In this instance this means the oral testimony of policemen who were present at the time of the riot. Normally in the Sudan oral evidence can be and generally is countered by conflicting oral testimony (Siddik and the Umma leaders can produce hundreds of Ansar followers who will deny the police accusations).
2. The Cabinet considered: (a) a general amnesty freeing everyone who was involved in the March 1st riot as an example of letting bygones be bygones; (b) taking legal action against those who were arrested and warning Siddik and his fellow leaders that they should not have been involved in the riot; and (c) letting the law take its course, even though they do not have an absolutely water-tight case against Siddik. The Cabinet, after lengthy discussion and in full awareness of the possible consequences, decided on the latter course.
3. Although the Cabinet deliberations were secret, the gist of them was communicated to the Permanent Under Secretary of the Interior (the post corresponding to the old Civil Secretary), Gawain Bell. Although Bell is hopeful that trouble will be avoided because the Government will be unable to prove its case, he has secured the Prime Minister's approval to bring additional units of the Sudan Defense Force to Khartoum at once as a precautionary move.

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8 MAY 1954

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4. The Foreign Office and the Governor General who is now in London have been informed of these developments by the top British administrative staff who have most of the foregoing details.

Joseph Sweeney

Joseph Sweeney
United States Liaison Officer

cc: London
Cairo

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