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FROM

1954-12-31, Azhari, Reshuffe, Hamza

USLO KHARTOUM

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

DESP. NO. December 31, 1954

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SUBJECT: Cabinet Crisis: December 1954

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I. SUMMARY
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An unexpected personal dispute between Mirghani Hamza, the political leader of the Khatmia and Ismail El Azhari, the Prime Minister, developed into a cabinet split which has thrown the Sudanese political scene into unresolved confusion. With the advice of the Egyptian Government and the support of the remaining members of his Cabinet, the Prime Minister has dismissed Mirghani Hamza, Minister of Education, Agriculture and Irrigation, Khalafalla Khalid, Minister of Defense and Ahmed Gelli, Minister without Portfolio. These three men were the leading Khatmia in the Cabinet. A great deal now depends on what action Sayed Eli El Mirghani (SAM), religious head of the Khatmia, takes. Both sides expect his backing. Parliament will not reconvene until February 14 and little in the way of resolution can be expected before that time. When Parliament does meet Mirghani Hamza will try to form a Khatmia Government; he can only do so in the first instance with the approval of SAM and in the second instance even with this approval he will probably need Umma support. This Umma support will be forthcoming if he agrees to lower the British and Egyptian flags everywhere in the Sudan except over the Governor General's Palace (to increase a sense of Sudanese nationalism) and to introduce Sudanese currency in place of Egyptian (to stop or at least make more difficult Egyptian subsidization.) If, however, as now seems likely SAM does not take sides but in fact allows Azhari to continue, the NUP will be badly split and it will be clear that its main support is Egyptian money and planning. Mirghani Hamza, in this case, will attack SAM. The Umma do not want to form a Government at this time. There is some evidence to suggest that Azhari and his followers would not be too disappointed if they were in the Opposition against an Umma Government as they believe such an Umma Government would be weak and they could strengthen the idea of unity with Egypt more effectively in opposition. This Cabinet crisis is the most important as well as the most confusing development in Sudanese politics since the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement in the Sudan in February 1954.

J.Sweeney:am
REPORTER

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II. DETAILS

The following detailed account of what has happened contains all of the known important facts and speculations and underlines what a highly complicated political squabble is going on.

1. Neither the Prime Minister nor Mirghani Hamza wanted or expected the break to come at this time. The reporting officer had lengthy discussions with both the Prime Minister and Mirghani Hamza just before the Prime Minister left for a trip to Darfur on December 12 (see Khartoum despatches 100 and 104). From these talks it seemed clear to me that there was a difference, perhaps a fundamental one, between these two men with the Prime Minister clinging to the idea of some form of unity with Egypt and Mirghani Hamza holding out an independent Sudan. However, each thought he could bring the other around to his way of thinking and the last thing that either one of them wanted at this time was a split in the NUP high command.

2. How the Break Started. At midnight December 12, after the Prime Minister's lengthy talk with me, he received unexpectedly a note from Mirghani Hamza in which the Khatmia leader wrote, "My doubts have become clear that things in the Council of Ministers will not be all right during your absence, and that it will put me in a position that contradicts with my dignity. Therefore be advised that I will not attend the sittings of the Council of Ministers under its present position." This was apparently Mirghani Hamza's way of telling the Prime Minister: (1) that the PM should be careful of his tactics in working through an inner Cabinet in his pro-Egyptian campaign; and (2) that the PM should delegate authority to Mirghani Hamza while away on his trip to Darfur. The Prime Minister did not answer this note. He did not delay his trip and reportedly thought the Council of Ministers could proceed without Mirghani Hamza until he returned from his trip and straightened the matter out.

The next day a Cabinet meeting was scheduled to pass some matters concerning Sudanization. Mirghani Hamza appeared to find Mubarrak Zarroug, Minister of Communications who acted for the Prime Minister on his European trip, presiding. Mirghani Hamza put his hand on Mubarrak's shoulder and said, "I am going to say something, but I want to assure you all it is not personal against Mubarrak, we are old friends and I have nothing against him. (Mubarrak Zarroug, though able, is quite young and was still a child when Mirghani Hamza was the highest Sudanese official in the Civil Service) I feel that the dignity of the position that I occupy because of my age, experience and political leader of the Khatmia is being affronted by delegating this responsibility to a young and junior Minister, and I will not participate in the Cabinet meetings until the Prime Minister returns." He then walked out of the Cabinet meetings. Khalafalla Khalid followed him and this, plus the fact that some Ministers were in Egypt and some with the PM on his trip, meant that the Cabinet did not have a quorum and could not get on with the very important work of approving the recommendations of the Sudanization Commission (this approval's importance is seen from the fact that the first step that must be completed before the transitional period can be brought to an end and the request for self-determination be made is Sudanization). Mubarrak Zarroug communicated this information to

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the Prime Minister who did not interrupt or accelerate his trip but returned to Khartoum on December 18. During this period some of the above leaked out to the public but few people had any idea that a really serious crisis was brewing.

3. The Prime Minister was confused about what to do until he talked by phone with Major Salah Salem. When Azhari returned to Khartoum on the 18th he summoned a Cabinet meeting and then cancelled it to have a private discussion with Mirghani Hamza. This private discussion did not smooth things over and on the 19th the Prime Minister issued a public statement to the press in which he made the whole incident public and stressed the following points without naming names (as I have done for clarity): (1) Ahmed Gellil, Minister without Portfolio had sent him a message while on his European trip that unless Yahia El Fadli and Mohamed Nur Sa'adim were dismissed from the Council of Ministers he would overthrow the Cabinet; (2) the importance of Sudanization and the key role of Cabinet approval in this matter; (3) Mirghani Hamza's letter above, which he quoted, was sent to him just before midnight when he was to depart the following day, thus giving him no time to act; and (4) rather than place blame on anyone he thought it best to clarify the matter to the public so that "the people will recognize the dangers from which the country will suffer if things continue in this manner."

The Prime Minister's statement was written by Yahia El Fadli, about this there is no question; but whether Yahia did it all by himself or on Egyptian instructions, is a matter of conjecture. Yahia's self-asserted idea in authoring this kind of announcement for the Prime Minister was to bring the matter of Mirghani Hamza's opposition to the Prime Minister out into the open and mobilize support for the Prime Minister. Furthermore, Yahia and the Prime Minister both thought Mirghani Hamza had put himself in a weak spot by quarreling about whether or not he should be appointed Acting Prime Minister, as they insisted on interpreting his behavior. At the same time, it should be recognized that for the Prime Minister to reveal to the public disension within his cabinet was an unprecedented act. To reveal that the motivator of this disension was Mirghani Hamza, a notoriously hot-tempered man, was to court an unpleasant reaction.

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Initial/reaction to the Prime Minister's statement was split about evenly between those who thought the statement too vague and those who thought Mirghani Hamza was acting like a prima donna. Mirghani Hamza and his two colleagues were stung by the statement, as they assumed that this difference would remain in the Cabinet. Since the Prime Minister had made his side of the dispute public, they insisted they had a duty to make their side public too and so they too issued a statement for all three written by Mirghani Hamza. This statement took the Prime Minister to task for making public an essentially "family" dispute. They accused the Prime Minister of taking important decisions after consulting a small inner cabinet of pro-Egyptian members and insisted that he refused to discuss these matters with the whole Cabinet. Among these matters of importance which were not considered by the whole Cabinet were: secret meetings with Egypt about the position of the Sudan, the future of Nile Waters, the Prime Minister's visit to the United Kingdom and the Azhari clique's policy of justifying the dismissal of Neguib. In concluding this stinging criticism

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of the Prime Minister and his pro-Egyptian associates, Mirghani Hamza and his colleagues said,

According to the Sudan Agreement the responsibility of the Cabinet must be a collective one and we take oath before God and before the nation that we will not accept anything that does not satisfy our responsibilities toward our country and our fellow citizens.

This strong challenge put the fat in the fire and it was clear that some sort of a show-down was a distinct probability. The Prime Minister expressed great concern because he realized (he confided to intimates) that Sayed Ali El Mirghani would not countenance his dismissal of the three members of the Cabinet who were closest to him. Furthermore, Dardiri Mohammed Osman, SAM's closest advisor came out publicly in support of Mirghani Hamza. Khartoum hummed with this first major quarrel of the NUF Cabinet. On the evening of the 19th at a Sudan Defense Force dinner all the participants were present in an atmosphere in which the strain was noticeable. At this dinner the Prime Minister sent for the Chairman of the Governor General's Commission, Mian Ziaud Din, and asked him as a personal favor not to adjourn the commission for a couple of days because of the seriousness of the current situation. Ziaud Din had intended to adjourn the Commission on the 20th but agreed to postpone the adjournment although he stressed that in his opinion the situation was not one at this stage that concerned the Governor General's Commission. On the 20th the BBC broadcast news of a serious Cabinet split and the Khartoum press was full of it.

Three members of the Cabinet, Hamad Tewfik, Minister of Finance, Khidr Hamad, Minister without Portfolio and Secretary-General of the NUF, and Dr. Amin es Sayed, Minister of Health constituted themselves as a mediating team and attempted to reconcile the two factions. Hamad Tewfik, whom the local press dubbed "the pigeon of peace", had flown down from Cairo with instructions from SAM that there were to be no dismissals. The three dissenting Ministers publicly demanded the following conditions before they could cooperate with the Cabinet: "(1) The Prime Minister must withdraw the accusations against them; (2) he should clarify the future relations of the Sudan with Egypt, and; (3) there should be a clarification of the responsibilities of the Ministers to eliminate an 'inner Cabinet'."

On the 21st the Prime Minister telephoned to Major Salah Salem and told him the full situation and confessed that he did not know what to do next. Salem asked for time to think the situation over and then informed the Prime Minister (according to an intimate of the Prime Minister's) that he should do just what the RCC did in the case of Neguib. The RCC finally decided that Neguib must go and they did not consult SAM in advance, despite his obvious interest and concern. When Neguib had been deposed SAM sent for Major Salah Salem and said, "Why did you do this, and particularly without letting me know?" Salah replied that the RCC had taken this action for these and these reasons which he detailed at length. The RCC hoped SAM would approve of their action. However, if he did not there was nothing SAM could do about it because the action had been taken and the RCC intended to stick by it. Salah ordered

SECRET

Authority MD 8295
By A NARA Date 3/2/78

Page _____ of _____
Encl No _____
Desp No _____
From _____

Azhari to do exactly this in the Sudan (the Egyptians were of course delighted with the possibility of getting rid of Mirghani Hamza who has interfered with their plans for control of the Sudan and exploitation of the Nile Waters). Azhari should dismiss all three of the Ministers involved and he should ask any Minister who did not agree with this action to clarify his position. Then he should go to SAM and confront him with a fait accompli. SAM would have no choice but to accept it because the only way that he could maintain his present position of control of the Sudan with Egyptian backing was by supporting Azhari.

Azhari conveyed this order to his brain and hatchet men, Yahia El Fadli, who said this was excellent advice and just what he himself had been thinking. They talked again with Cairo and it was agreed that the Prime Minister should obtain from his Cabinet the full authority to handle the Cabinet crisis as he thought best, i.e., to obtain Cabinet approval for the dismissal of Mirghani Hamza, Khalafalla Khalid and Ahmed Gelli. On the morning of October 21st he met with the Cabinet (none of the three above were in attendance) and the Cabinet gave him full authority. Ziaud Din was waiting in the ante room to see the Prime Minister. When this decision was taken Hamad Tewfik rushed out of the room and seeing Ziaud Din went to him and said, "This is terrible, you must intervene!" Ziaud Din pointed out quite correctly that it would not be within his role to intervene and said this was a matter for the Cabinet. The Prime Minister then saw Ziaud Din and told him he had decided to sack the three Ministers and it would be quite all right for the Governor General's Commission to adjourn as this was not their affair.

⁴The reaction. The decisiveness of the Prime Minister's action of December 23 stunned Sudanese public opinion. By and large he appeared, at least in the early stage, to "have gotten away with it". Majority opinion in that remarkable sounding beard, the Omdurman suk (market) appeared to sympathize with the Prime Minister. At the same time everyone expressed curiosity about what Mirghani Hamza, a redoubtable fighter and a man of courage would do next. The Umma Party refrained at this point from any official comment of any kind on the advice of Khatmia leaders who pointed out that they would not benefit from involvement in an essentially Khatmia quarrel. In passing, the individual reaction of the three Ministers as they received their dismissal notices, as described to me by the Sudanese Bimbashi who delivered the letters from the Governor General, is interesting. Ahmed Gelli received his letter in complete silence and made no comment. Khalafalla Khalid started to shake visibly when the Sudanese aide to the Governor General entered his office and had physical difficulty in opening the letter. He turned grey when he read the letter and sat in a state of emotional disturbance muttering incoherently as the aide left him. Mirghani Hamza read his letter, smiled, said, "This is the best thing that ever happened to me." He then picked up some papers from his desk, stuffed them into his brief case, stood up, waved to the aide and said, "I'm off," and left his office before the aide.

It was clear at this point that both sides would wait for SAM's reaction. Both sides publicly expressed confidence that they would receive his support. Both sides also indicated that little could happen until Parliament met for its next session on February 14th. Public opinion expressed considerable curiosity

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as to what the Umma Party would do.

5. The Umma Party's proposal to Mirghani Hamza. Initially, the Umma Party decided they would not support Mirghani Hamza as they thought it would be good for the NUF to stew in the juice of its own internal dissension. SAR personally wanted to try and form an Umma Government, but his advisors talked him out of this. With SAR's full approval and participation the Umma high command came to a new decision on a proposal to Mirghani Hamza made on December 26th. For the first time since I have been in the Sudan the Umma Party leaders have taken a secret decision and kept it relatively secret. The British Administration, the Azhari wing of the NUF and the Parliamentary Leader of the Opposition have not yet learned of it. As detailed to me by the man SAR commissioned to deliver the proposal it is: if Mirghani Hamza can secure SAM's approval to form a Khatmia Government, the Umma Party will vote for the formation of this Government but will not participate in it, provided Mirghani Hamza will agree to introduce Sudanese currency in place of the present Egyptian currency and order all British and Egyptian flags taken down throughout the Sudan with the sole exception of the one on top of the Governor General's palace. The provision about currency was made because Umma believes that a change in currency would make it more difficult for the Egyptian Government to bribe its way into influence in the Sudan. There exists in London all the necessary plates for Sudanese money, as approved a few years ago by the Executive Council, a pro-Umma body. This currency could be printed and brought to the Sudan within three months of an order given by the Prime Minister and his Cabinet. The provision about the flags is not quite as clear but Umma believes it would increase the sense of Sudanese nationalism, and a contest could be held to select a Sudanese flag. It will be seen that the price Umma asks to support a Mirghani Hamza Government is neither a high nor impossible one. At the same time it would mean that SAM would be depending on Umma support--this would not only be distasteful to him but he would not feel that he could rely on continued Umma support. The Umma chief advisors to SAR are convinced that at all costs they must avoid forming an Umma Government. In fact they believe that if they had to form an Umma Government now it would mean they would lose the eventual fight for independence, as they fear the Azhari wing in opposition could bribe its way into some sort of unity with Egypt.
6. Mirghani Hamza's plans. Mirghani Hamza intends to ask SAM to support him and repudiate Azhari. If SAM does this Mirghani Hamza will try to form a Khatmia Government. He is convinced that with full backing from SAM he could form a Government without the support of the Umma Party and he would prefer this. But, if he cannot form a Khatmia Government without Umma support, he will accept the two conditions laid down and oust Azhari. If SAM does not give Mirghani Hamza full support he now says that he intends to denounce SAM and claim that he is a tool of the Egyptians. Such an action would, of course, be considered sacrilegious by a large number of Khatmia. If Mirghani Hamza is forced to denounce SAM, majority opinion believes he would be committing political suicide, however, it is impossible to say what effect this example of unprecedented courage would have on the Sudanese people. Mirghani Hamza is disturbed at the obvious weakening of the NUF that has resulted from his quarrel with Azhari, but he is convinced that he will be able to carry most of the party with him provided he

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 By D NARA Date 3/21/88

has SAM's support. Mirghani Hamza frankly admitted that he had not had SAM's prior approval of his actions. He now believes that his dismissal was an Anglo-Egyptian plot and he insists, fantastic though it sounds, that Britain's Anthony Nutting and Egypt's Salah Salem concurred in making the necessary arrangements.

7. Prime Minister Azhari's plans. Azhari is full of confidence that he has done the right thing and that SAM has no alternative but to condone if he does not actually approve of his actions. Yahia El Fadli has spent large sums of money during the past week obtaining personal allegiance to Azhari from NUP members. Of 30 NUP members of Parliament who took the traditional Moslem oath that they would all divorce their wives if Azhari did not stop his pro-Egyptian activities, when the crisis first broke, all but one has now been bought over. Azhari has appointed new Ministers (see Khartoum despatch 110) and a host of Under-secretaries of Ministries. By careful count he claims to have 32 NUP members of Parliament bound to his personal fortunes because he has given them remunerative Government positions and some 7 more have been given licenses for pump schemes and similar concessions. Azhari is all too aware of the fact that in the Sudan he who takes a bribe today to act one way is also capable of taking a larger one later to act another. Yahia El Fadli has let it be known on Azhari's behalf, and the same story has originated from local Egyptian sources, that while Azhari wants to remain as Prime Minister he would not be too disappointed if his Government fell on the basis of a personal quarrel with Mirghani Hamza because it would give Azhari and his followers greater freedom to work for the welfare of the Sudan and to clarify the future of the Sudan's relations with Egypt. Some of the more perceptive local observers claim without evidence that the Egyptians would prefer Azhari to be in the opposition as he could show that any Government under Mirghani Hamza or under Umma leadership would be inferior to Azhari's Government. It is also alleged that Yahia El Fadli would be more free to distribute Egyptian bribes if he were in Opposition.

Azhari made a master political stroke by issuing a statement defining his own attitude toward the future (see Khartoum despatch 111) which was initially well received. He flew to Port Sudan on December 27th with his new Ministers and had a half-hour talk with SAM upon his arrival and then introduced to him the new Ministers who met with SAM for fifteen minutes. No statement has been made as a result of this meeting. Eyewitnesses have informed me that SAM was not cordial when he first met Azhari and they claim he is disturbed that Azhari took such an action without his permission. At the same time, SAM did not immediately denounce Azhari and so long as SAM says nothing Azhari can claim, as he is doing, that SAM will not interfere.

Yahia El Fadli is already master-minding a campaign to discredit Mirghani Hamza and he is a genius at this type of attack.

8. The British Administration's View. The British Administration is united in saying that the situation is "confusing". None of them expect SAM to make a clear cut statement at all and certainly not in the near future. All of the prominent British Administrators, except W.H.T. Luce, Advisor to the Governor General, believe SAM will side with Mirghani Hamza. Luce believes

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Authority 140 8295
 'By A NARA Date 3/2/78

Page _____ of _____
 Encl No. _____
 Desp No. _____
 From _____

SAM will side with Azhari because it is the only way he can stay in power without Umma help. Luce believes that Azhari's position will be eventually discredited by a collapse of the RUC in Egypt at which time he believes Azhari will come out for independence in order to stay in power. Luce is convinced that Azhari is now a paid stooge of the Egyptian Government. He believes it is a healthy political development to have the pro-Egyptian Azhari publicly lose the support of the pro-independent Mirghani Hamza. The Governor General has no intention of interfering in this crisis.

Comments: It seems clear from what is known that neither of the two main personages in this cabinet crisis wanted a show-down at this time. Nor, apparently, was this an Egyptian engineered action until the crisis had already developed. Azhari played his cards skillfully even though the moves had already been directed from Egypt. Mirghani Hamza did not prepare the ground for this crisis, and the most likely explanation of why he started this quarrel seems to be that he, a hard-working Minister with three important Ministries, was irritated by the Prime Minister returning from a European trip and almost at once going off on a visit to the Western Sudan. Once Mirghani Hamza got into the quarrel he was too stubborn and honest to extricate himself. He would have been much more powerful if he could have provoked the trouble on a major issue when Parliament was in session. Basically, however, the struggle between Mirghani Hamza and the Prime Minister is the struggle between independence ~~and~~ for the Sudan and unity with Egypt.

SAM's role is difficult to foretell. His whole desire is to remain the supreme power in the Sudan and he would sooner cooperate with the Egyptians than SAR and the Umma Party. His strength has always been exerted deviously. He seldom takes a public position. It is expected that he will wait a few weeks before even giving an indication of where he stands. Mirghani Hamza, however, is probably the only Khatmia with the stubborn courage to stand up to SAM and try to force him into a choice. The Umma too, have played their role skillfully and have not allowed their attitude to affect this Khatmia quarrel.

Little is expected to happen until Parliament assembles on February 14, and while it is impossible to be precise about what will happen in this confusing situation, as of the moment, Azhari is firmly in control and the preponderance of current evidence suggests he will remain Prime Minister without opposition from SAM for the immediate future.

cc: London, Cairo

Joseph Sweeney
 Joseph Sweeney
 United States Liaison Officer

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