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REF Telegrams of March 2 and 4 from Khartoum

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SUBJECT: MISSION ON BEHALF OF UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT TO CELEBRATIONS ATTENDING OPENING SECOND SESSION SUDANESE PARLIAMENT

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I refer to my telegrams of March 2 and 4, sent from Khartoum under the signature of the American Liaison Officer in that capital, Mr. Joseph Sweeney. These telegrams, as the Department will recall, related to the curtailment, and indeed the disruption, of the program for guests attending the official opening of the Sudanese Parliament, as a sequel to disorder and violence on the late morning of March 1, day of the projected opening of the Parliament.

As of possible interest to the Department in the above regard, and with no desire to infringe on the political reporting prerogatives of the liaison officer at Khartoum, the following chronological account of my days in Khartoum is reported.

Accompanied by my wife, I reached the Cairo airport at the awkward hour of 1:30 a.m. on Saturday, February 27th, but was nevertheless courteously and helpfully met by Mr. Barr Washburn, Administrative Officer of the Embassy, and his assistant, with a Cavass and automobile.

Arrangements having been made at the Heliopolis Palace Hotel, we spent the remainder of the night there, departing by Misrair at 6 a.m. for Khartoum. On our arrival at Khartoum, we were met not only by Liaison Officer Sweeney, but also by Mr. Mubarek Zarrug, Camp Sudanese Minister of Communications, and Major Eales, Aide de Camp to Governor General Sir Robert Howe.

I was informed that accommodations had been reserved for us at a handsome new house at Omdurman, owned, but not yet occupied, by Mr. Mustafa Abou Lela, a Sudanese cotton merchant. The house, reported to have cost 60,000 pounds, adjoined the open square by the tomb of the Mahdi and the house of the Khalifa, so had a setting in the shadow of Sudanese history.

With us were quartered two Indian representatives and a

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delegate of the Uganda Administration. (Mr. Sen, the chief Indian representative, had headed the electoral commission which had worked nine months during 1953 in the Sudan).

Soon after arrival at Mr. Abou Lela's house, the secretary of the Reception Committee handed me invitations together with the program for the events of the Parliamentary celebration. A copy of this program is enclosed with a view to indicating the somewhat elaborate nature of the organized program.

The Sudanese Administration, indeed, showed a great deal of good will, accompanied, however, by a measure of improvisation and informality. For example, I was quite unable to ascertain what dress the hosts considered appropriate for the Prime Minister's announced official dinner, and found inattention to dress a notable contrast to my Egyptian experience, where elaborate sartorial effects were the rule rather than the exception.

Again, on the day of my arrival at Khartoum, while speaking to Mr. Sweeney at my place of residence, two Sudanese heads projected themselves, without any advance warning, through the doorway of the room. These belonged to two deputies, Mr. Abdel Gadar, representative for Giubara, a member of Parliament for Kassala. The latter announced he had been designated to act as a kind of guide for me during my stay in the Sudan.

The following day, February 28, brought the opening official event of the program, in the shape of a garden party offered by the Governor General at the Palace. On the occasion of this quite charming fete, Mr. Sweeney, who with Mrs. Sweeney accompanied my wife and me, was not only willing, but also able, to introduce me to the Prime Minister and other members of the Cabinet, and to ranking members of the two principal political groups of the country, the National Union Party and Ansar, or minority faction in Parliament. These partisan chieftains sat down to tea with us and manifested every evidence of good will, as did indeed the Prime Minister. At no time, however, was I approached with a request for material aid from the United States Government to the Sudan, although the Prime Minister, in particular, did express appreciation of the friendly attitude toward Sudanese aspirations shown in the United States. Indeed, I found the Sudanese, along with their informal friendliness, to possess a great deal of dignity of bearing. This likewise impressed me favorably.

Unfortunately, this agreeable initiation of the program ended in a manifestation of violence, attended by fatalities,

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no later than the late morning of Monday, March 1, that is, a few hours prior to the expected opening of Parliament.

Shortly before the time of the brief riot (which could hardly have lasted more than a half hour at most) my wife and I were driving through Khartoum toward Mr. Sweeney's office, in an automobile with a Sudanese chauffeur. (This had been provided by the Reception Committee.) On arriving at the park surrounding the statue of General Gordon-on-camel, we noted a large number of Sudanese carrying Ansar banners (the old Mahdist flag showing a crescent supporting a spearhead.) These people, apparently to the number of several hundred or more, on foot or in trucks, seemingly formed the rear guard of a procession, or else were anxious to hear some speaker. They were all hurrying toward the waterfront between the Palace and the Civil Secretariat building. I alighted to take some photographs of the colorful groups, who showed no evidence of hostility to me, and who insofar as I could judge were not in an ugly or menacing mood. Indeed, on resuming our drive, we grazed two or three with the fender of our car, but even these showed no resentment. Accordingly, while talking to Mr. Sweeney in his office, we were startled to hear reports which could have been, and apparently were, gunfire, and to learn some minutes later from the office messenger that there had been fatal shootings between the Palace and the Civil Secretariat. However, on looking out of the front window of the office, the street seemed to be quite calm, so that we started down through town with a view to gaining Kitchener Avenue, the waterfront boulevard which leads toward Omdurman, lunch time being near. The chauffeur indeed, drove up the very street where the riot must have taken place, without our noting either dead or wounded, and merely more or less numerous groups of Sudanese in white gowns and turbans moving away from the waterfront. Shops, it being an official holiday, were closed by the usual iron shutters. However, there were no signs of attempted looting, and as a matter of fact the groups of men were neither gesticulating nor apparently in a state of effervescence. Accordingly, I was astonished later to learn that over thirty men, over half of whom had been policemen, had been killed and more than a hundred wounded. The police and hospitals must have been very efficient indeed in removing traces of violence.

However, on approaching the area between the Palace and the Secretariat we encountered a considerable mounted detachment of the Sudan Defense Force, by whom we were motioned to turn round. This our chauffeur did, driving along a parallel street, which exhibited neither more nor less than the usual noon activity, to the Grand Hotel, where people were having pre-luncheon refreshments on the terrace. There was no evidence of anxiety on the part of the guests.

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At the ensuing luncheon at our house in Omdurman, we had a report from an eye witness of much of the riot. This informant, an Englishman, had been making a call in the Civil Secretariat when the disturbance began. It was his opinion that since it must have been known to the authorities that large numbers of men, armed in accordance with Sudanese custom with knives and small axes, had been moved by train and truck from villages in the White Nile area, some two hundred miles from Khartoum, and since these men were known to have been partisans of the Ansar Party, the police might well have taken more serious advance precautions than they apparently did. It would have been well to have had the police re-enforced by the Sudanese Defense Force, in advance of any demonstration. According to this informant, who appeared to be factual and reliable (he had come from the Uganda for the ceremonial observances) the police had first, without difficulty, persuaded a detachment of NUP youth which had come to the Palace gate to cheer General Naguib, to disperse along Kitchener Avenue beyond the Civil Secretariat. ((General Naguib had arrived the same morning from Cairo with his suite, traveling in three airplanes and had been welcomed at the airport not only by the Governor General, but also by NUP partisans, to the number of between twenty and thirty thousand. General Naguib had, however, been brought to the Palace by a circuitous and unannounced route. The Governor General later informed me that he had noted that the usual route from the airport to Khartoum was bordered by a large number of Ansar partisans (i.e. those favoring complete independence for the Sudan without ties with Egypt.) A largely successful attempt had been made to exclude them from the airport area. The Governor General went so far as to express to me his belief that partisan feeling might have run so high as to endanger both his and General Naguib's lives, had they followed the announced route. This statement by Sir Robert Howe surprised me, since General Naguib, who has family connections with the Sudan, seemed to be personally very well regarded by all elements with which I came into contact. In fact, Naguib's momentary fall from power in Egypt, news of which had reached Khartoum on or about the day of my arrival, had caused a considerable feeling of depression, he being regarded as a friend of the Sudan.))

To return to the riot: Apparently in persuading the NUP youth to leave the Palace area, the police had placed themselves in an indefensible position at some distance from the Palace wall. As a result, when the Ansar procession arrived they were not in a sound physical position to defend themselves should the crowd prove intractable. Possibly because the police, as I was informed by a competent authority, are mostly NUP partisans, their efforts to drive the crowd away resulted in more cudgeling of the manifestants than the situation may have required. Thus, although

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many of the police were armed solely with sticks, they and especially their mounted members, charged in and out of the crowd, harrying the citizenry. At this point the British Chief of Police and his Sudanese deputy intervened and tried to bring their men into a more defensible position. By this time, however, the crowd had seemingly become incensed and, producing knives, killed both the Chief and his deputy, as well as some policemen. The police thereupon used tear gas bombs, while armed members of the police shot into the crowd, thus increasing the number of fatalities and wounded. The crowd, however, as a result of these forceful methods, appears to have begun to disintegrate.

It is interesting that very little disorder is reported to have occurred in other parts of Khartoum, while the provinces remained quiet. Accordingly, while indeed the Ansars were brought into town in defiance of an order of the Prime Minister, it seems probable that they did not anticipate or intend the use of force in presenting their political views to Naguib at the Palace. The fact that they did not attempt to loot when dispersed by the police may be due in part to the fact that they were countrymen for, as one Sudanese remarked to me, had they been composed of the Khartoum city mob, they might easily have reacted by trying to break into shops.

In any event, it seems that General Naguib's determination to be present at the opening of Parliament, despite the selection of the Minister of Wakfs as the official Egyptian representative, occasioned these Sudanese partisan concentrations and manifestations. Thus, I am reliably informed that the Sudanese elections late in 1953 occurred without violence, and that the initiation, or organizational opening of Parliament in January 1954, was attended by no disturbances.

On the afternoon of the day of the rioting, the official delegates of the States represented at the Parliamentary ceremonies (some sixteen, mostly Middle Eastern countries) received a request from the Governor General to meet at the Palace at 6:30 p.m. This we did, and were promptly told by His Excellency that the ceremonial program had been cancelled, and that while Parliament would convene probably on March 10, it would do so informally and without ceremony. As the company was leaving the room, Prime Minister El Azarhi bustled in to express regret over the occurrences of the day.

Although the Governor General's rather blunt announcement that there would be no show was subsequently lubricated by the serving of lemonade and other refreshments on the terrace of the Palace, Sir Robert Howe's decision to eliminate the foreign

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contingent was unmistakable and was so understood by all present.

The Sudan Government's dinner, due to take place that evening, was, of course, abandoned without further word, as was the remainder of the program, due to extend through March 7. Visitors began to depart the following day.

This day, March 2, began for Dr. Sen, the Indian delegate, and myself, when Mr. Mirghani Hamza, Minister of Education, called, without prior arrangement, as we were having breakfast. The occasion of the Minister's call was to express regret over the occurrences of the previous day, and to express the hope that we would not judge the Sudan by such manifestations, which were indeed unusual, and even unprecedented in recent years. In the course of his talk, which was made at table where the British Uganda representative was also present, the Minister remarked on the existence of a serious obstacle to complete realization of Sudanese aspirations. On Mr. Cartland's asking if he had the British Civil Service in mind, the Minister replied affirmatively, although at the same time and quite illogically observing that the Sudan had need of as many competent men as possible for its administration.

At this point a telephone call came from the Reception Committee stating that the Prime Minister would like to receive us at 10:30 o'clock. The Minister thereupon took his departure.

The meeting in the Council Chamber of the Cabinet, was attended not only by the visiting delegates, but also by the Prime Minister and his Cabinet. Mr. El Azarhi, on opening the meeting, asked the Cabinet members to introduce themselves by name and rank, and then requested the visitors to do likewise. He followed up this pleasant idea with generous glasses of Pepsi Cola (which seems to have made successful inroads into the Sudan) and again expressed regret over the occurrences of the previous day, adding somewhat vaguely the thought that the Government would be glad to have the visitors see something of the Sudan. The Prime Minister did not, however, become more definite or indicate that the cancelled program had been revived or revised. Those present, therefore, took his remarks to mean little more than an expression of good will and of regret that the celebration should have been disrupted.

Following this meeting, which was represented as the first held in the Council Chamber, those present posed for photographs in the garden.

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