

SUBJECT: Sudan: The General Staff's Relationship with Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi

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Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Sudan: The General Staff's Relationship with Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi

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Summary

The Sudanese People's Armed Forces (SPAF) General Staff appears content for now to concentrate its attention on military affairs, but friction between the General Staff and Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi is increasing. The General Staff shares Sadiq's determination to seize the military initiative against the southern insurgents, but will be more inclined than the Prime Minister to pursue a negotiated settlement if the return of the rainy season in April brings significant military losses. The General Staff is likely to push for stronger relations with Egypt and the United States in hope of obtaining military assistance, even to the detriment of relations with Libya--which Sadiq may be less willing to risk.

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Barring major civil disorders that might impel the military to take power, we do not see indications of a coup. Civil-military relations are likely to be increasingly strained in the coming year, however.

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This memorandum was prepared at the request of the Sudan desk officer, International Security Affairs, Department of Defense by [redacted] the Egypt-Sudan Branch, Arab-Israeli Division. Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis and [redacted] Office of Leadership Analysis. Information as of 15 March 1987 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be directed to Chief, Arab-Israeli Division [redacted]

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Civil-Military Strains

Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi in September 1986 dismissed the Sudanese People's Armed Forces (SPAF) General Staff's five officers and appointed replacements, but the move did not give him full control over the organization. Sadiq's nominees for the positions had to be approved by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)--Sadiq's Umma Party coalition partner in the government and the political arm of the Khatmiyyah sect, the traditional rival of Sadiq's Ansar sect. As a result of DUP bargaining, the Commander-in-Chief and his principal subordinates are not Sadiq loyalists, although the US Attache in Khartoum reports that the General Staff impressed him as essentially nonpolitical, focused on military affairs and supportive of a civilian government.

[redacted]

[redacted]

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Decisions by the Prime Minister which the military considers to be encroachments into its affairs will erode the General Staff-Sadiq relationship. It probably deteriorated with Sadiq's decision to request the removal of prepositioned US equipment from Port Sudan.

[redacted]

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The General Staff was irritated by the unilateral civilian decision at a time when the military wants greater cooperation with the United States.

[redacted]

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In our judgment, Sadiq also has aggravated his relationship with the General Staff by attempting to increase his control and monitoring of the military.

[redacted]

[redacted]

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[redacted]

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--Sadiq reassigned a younger brother to monitor the politically strategic armored unit at al-Shagara. He also aroused General Staff ill-feelings by arranging for the brother to attend the Jordanian military academy. The Staff felt the opportunity should have been given on a competitive basis.

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--Sadiq's use of the Umma Party security organization to monitor the military is apparently causing dissension among officers.

[redacted]

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Sadiq's likely future use of the Umma Party's security apparatus to monitor the military and continuing attempts to place loyalists in key positions are certain to irritate the General Staff. [redacted]

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Differences Over the Southern Insurgency

We believe the General Staff shares Sadiq's determination to seize the military initiative against the southern insurgents in dry season operations, but there is good evidence that they are skeptical that there can be a military solution to the southern conflict. Lieutenant General al-Sir, for example, has argued that insurgent leader Colonel John Garang has to be challenged militarily before he would be ready for serious negotiations, according to the US Embassy in Khartoum, but has conceded that only a political solution could bring peace. [redacted]

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[redacted]

[redacted]

The wet season begins in April, and will limit government mobility and restrict its forces to garrisons in the south; the rebels will enjoy increased freedom of movement and are likely to step up their operations. Heavier government casualties could cause Army morale to plummet, perhaps leading to mutinies. Under these circumstances, the General Staff would have increased incentive to press Sadiq to pursue a negotiated settlement. [redacted]

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Sadiq's Approach to Neighboring States

The General Staff will continue to support Sadiq's hard line toward Ethiopia, given Addis Ababa's support for the southern Sudanese insurgents and periodic air attacks in Sudan. [redacted]

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[redacted]

[redacted]

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We expect the General Staff, however, to continue to be leery of Sadiq's dealings toward Libya. Despite Tripoli's past military assistance to Khartoum for its fight against the insurgents, the General Staff is suspicious of Libyan intentions and aware of the political strings attached to Tripoli's assistance.

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[Redacted]

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--The General Staff strongly supported Sadiq's refusal of the Libyan request in early January to use Sudanese territory for an attack against Chad. The General Staff argued, in part, that supporting Libya against Chad would jeopardize military and economic assistance from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United States.

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The sporadic and conditional nature of Libyan military assistance probably has contributed to the General Staff's incentive to look to Sudan's traditional allies for sustained assistance. The officers are favorably disposed to stronger ties with the United States and Egypt.

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[Redacted] the military believes that Sadiq will not get meaningful support from Iran, Iraq or the Soviet Union and that Sadiq's solicitations for assistance from these countries jeopardizes military support from the United States and Egypt. According to the US Embassy in Cairo, Egypt has resumed military assistance and training to maintain close ties with the Sudanese military.

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The General Staff successfully persuaded Sadiq to reaffirm Sudan's commitment to the Sudanese-Egyptian Defense Treaty during the Prime Minister's recent visit to Cairo,

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[Redacted] The General Staff argued that the treaty is an effective deterrent against Ethiopian aggression.

[Redacted]

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[redacted]

General Staff, however, may have used the argument to exploit Sadiq's animosity toward Ethiopia as an added incentive to the Prime Minister to pursue increased Egyptian military assistance.

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Sadiq probably will resist General Staff efforts to establish strong military relationships with the United States and Egypt, given his nonaligned foreign policy. Closer ties to Washington and Cairo risk Libyan retaliation, including Tripoli's resumption of support to the southern insurgency, the arming of tribes in western Sudan, or the sponsorship of terrorist attacks in Khartoum. The General Staff is more inclined than Sadiq to believe that the benefits from closer relations with the United States and Egypt outweigh the risks.

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### Outlook

In our view, the General Staff supports Sadiq, and prefers to concentrate its efforts on military affairs. We believe the military probably will continue this support in the near term, barring a major crisis sparked by civil disorder in which the General Staff might decide it had a responsibility to intervene.

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In the coming year, however, friction between the General Staff and Sadiq al-Mahdi will build. Sadiq's efforts to gain a tighter hold on the military and the likelihood of insurgent gains in the rainy season will be key points of conflict. Tensions may prompt Sadiq to try to replace members of the General Staff to make it more responsive to his agenda, deepening the rift.

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## APPENDIX

## The General Staff

Gen. Fawzi Ahmad al-Fadl. Commander-in-Chief. Member Khatmiyyah sect...respected by officers who consider him tough, decisive and fair...served as military attache to Cairo (1976-7) during period of close Sudanese-Egyptian ties...regards Libya and Soviet Union as threats to Sudanese security. [redacted]

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Lt. Gen. Abd al-Azim Sadiq Muhammad. Chief of Staff. Intelligent and action oriented, but critics say he is deficient in overall military knowledge...attended Infantry Officer course at Fort Benning, Georgia in 1967. [redacted]

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Lt. Gen. al-Sir Muhammad Ahmad. Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. Career intelligence officer who had tour as Director of Military Intelligence (1982-3)...long considered by US officials as one of Sudan's most capable officers...has criticized United States for not granting more assistance to Sudan...favored Sudan's past close relationship with Egypt and regards Libya as a threat to Sudanese security. [redacted]

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Lt. Gen. Faysal Mansur Shawir. Deputy Chief of Staff for Administration. Has impressed US officials as knowledgeable and shrewd...attended a six-month training course in the Soviet Union (1969) and served as military attache to Moscow (1978-80)...unpleasant experience in Soviet Union and Moscow's refusal to supply Sudan with spare parts for its Soviet-built equipment have left him anti-Soviet. [redacted]

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Lt. Gen. Muhatassim Saraj Ahmad. Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics. Very able officer who has been described as interested in politics...believed to favor close ties with Egypt. [redacted]

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