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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE  
PRESIDENT OF THE SUDAN AT 3.20 PM ON FRIDAY 9 DECEMBER 1983  
AT 10 DOWNING STREET

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Present:

The Prime Minister  
Mr. Luce  
Mr. A.J. Coles

President Nimeiri  
General Abdel Salam  
Sudanese Ambassador

In reply to the Prime Minister's enquiry as to his health, President Nimeiri said that he was now feeling more rested.

The Prime Minister said that we in this country watched the situation in the Sudan with great interest but also with anxiety. The President's achievement in stopping the civil war in the south some years ago was much admired but for that very reason we watched any signs of unrest with concern. President Nimeiri said that peace and security was still being maintained in the south. The Sudan had bad neighbours who tried to subvert the Sudanese people. Ethiopia, Libya and South Yemen had come together in an agreement directed against the Sudan and were supported by the Soviet Union. The Russians were angry with the Sudan because it had been the first country to expel Soviet personnel. Egypt and Somalia had followed the Sudanese example. Moscow saw the Sudan as a strategic target in Africa - and regarded the Southern Sudan as the weak point in the Sudanese armoury.

Islamic laws had been introduced to support the Islamic way of life. The intention was not to interfere with non-Muslims but of course all had to be guided by the law. The Russians opposed his policy of strengthening his country through economic development rather than by acquiring arms from Moscow. The Soviet Union proclaimed the view that African countries should be given weapons with which to free themselves. It was not clear from what they were supposed to be freed. Moscow described his government as bad because it did not comply with Russian instructions. Libya was financing 24 camps for training Sudanese on the Ethiopian border.

/ Growing

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Growing numbers of Eritrean refugees were reaching the Sudan, there were now half a million refugees including Ugandans and Chadians. The Sudan worked with the United Nations to ensure that the refugees received proper care and attention.

The Prime Minister said that she had met President Obote at CHOGM. Her impression was that he was at last bringing back some order and liberty to Uganda. President Nimeiri said that the Sudan was helping him in this respect.

The Prime Minister then reverted to the question of Islamic laws. What was their impact on the south? President Nimeiri said that one-fifth of the southerners were Muslim, one-fifth Christian and the rest were pagans. The Prime Minister asked what changes in practice had come about. There had been much comment in this country. President Nimeiri said that he assumed that we ourselves wished to stop alcoholism, adultery and stealing. This was his aim. Under the Shari'a system, sentences could be more lenient than under the previous law. For example, there was a system whereby the offender could pay compensation to the aggrieved and thus evade sentence. He himself had read the Bible several times and knew that it stated that where a person erred, his hand should be cut off. The view taken in the Sudan was that if someone was guilty of theft, it was the duty of the Government to cut off his hand. The purpose under Islamic law was to set a deterrent for others. The Prime Minister said that she believed that most religions had reinterpreted their original law according to more civilised standards. We in this country would not wish to envisage the cutting off of hands today. President Nimeiri repeated that it was necessary to establish a deterrent. He recalled that the Prime Minister had refused to release a prisoner in Northern Ireland who was on hunger strike because of the impact that would have had on others. The Prime Minister said that the person in question had been free to choose whether to go on hunger strike or not. But whatever his decision, we would not have done more than keep him in prison.

We in this country did not like to hear criticism of the Sudan. The river of the Sudan and the river of Britain had flowed together in history. So we had anxieties for the future.

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/ President Nimeiri

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President Nimeiri said that Britain had abolished capital punishment some years ago but it was very difficult to do this in the Sudan. The Prime Minister said that in her personal view this sentence should sometimes be carried out - in the case of the most terrible and barbaric crimes.

She wished to raise with the President the case of Mr. Booth who had just been sentenced to 25 lashes plus a fine and imprisonment for being in charge of his company's legally imported beer stocks while awaiting official guidance on how to handle them. We were particularly concerned because this had happened during the transitional period between the old law and the new. President Nimeiri said that this had been a wrong decision. Lashes should be given for drinking, not for possessing drink. He would investigate the matter.

Mr. Luce said that we had many British citizens in the Sudan. Considerable problems could arise if they were suddenly subjected to a way of life which they did not understand. President Nimeiri said that the British Ambassador in Khartoum had discussed this subject with him. He had raised with the Ambassador the case of two British citizens who had approached his own Residence in an inebriated condition and who had not stopped when challenged by the guard.

The Prime Minister asked whether the new Islamic laws were popular, for example in the South. President Nimeiri said that they were because they were not directed against anyone. The purpose of the laws was to support those who wished to lead a good life. The aim was to stop drinking, adultery and theft. It was of interest that the first person in the Sudan who had tried to stop the consumption of alcohol was Abu Alier who had found that Southerners were not able to work because of their consumption of alcohol. Five per cent of those who consumed alcohol were addicts. Nothing could be done about this. But the aim was to deal with the ninety-five per cent.

/ Mr. Luce

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Mr. Luce said that there was tremendous affection for the Sudan in this country and this was shared by MPs of all parties. We had considerable trade with the Sudan and we had an important economic and military assistance programme. There was great admiration for the President's statesmanship when, ten years ago, he had brought the war in the South to an end. We wanted the President to succeed. That was our anxiety. President Nimeiri said that there was a big campaign against his Government. A number of magazines in London and in Paris, financed by Libya, were hostile to the Sudan. Libya was training Sudanese to engage in subversion. Qadhafi thought that because he (Nimeiri) was in favour of Camp David and opposed to Libyan actions in Northern Chad, he must bring down the Sudanese Government.

The President then raised the question of Ethiopia. He hoped to see Mengistu in the next day or so. The Prime Minister said that on the last occasion when the President had visited London he had said that he hoped to persuade Mengistu to move away from the Soviet Union. President Nimeiri said that that possibility had existed at that time. He had asked Saudi Arabia to help by supplying oil to Ethiopia but the Saudis had demurred. He had asked the United States for assistance but they were too slow. The Russians were alert to the possibility that their hold on Mengistu might be weakened so they were cultivating his Deputy. Soviet intervention in Ethiopia showed a certain similarity with events in Grenada and Afghanistan. The Prime Minister said that she noted that there was little hope of detaching Mengistu from the Soviet Union. But she could not understand why, as the President had implied, he was afraid of his Deputy. These things were normally dealt with fairly easily in the Communist world. President Nimeiri said that Mengistu was inhibited by the presence of large numbers of Russians, Cubans and East Germans in Ethiopia.

/The Prime Minister

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The Prime Minister asked about the condition of ordinary Ethiopians. President Nimeiri said that they had no voice. The only exception was the army. A number of Ethiopian officers had come to the Sudan but Mengistu had killed a large proportion of the officer class. He had attacked Eritrea six times but had not succeeded because his army was not interested in conflict with the Eritrean people. He was very angry with the Sudan because he believed that the Sudan had helped the resistance in Eritrea.

The Prime Minister said that we were concerned about the Princesses of the former Imperial Family who were no threat to anyone. We sometimes asked our friends in Africa to bring pressure to bear on Mengistu. President Nimeiri said that he had raised this matter with Mengistu who had been negative. Mengistu wanted to secure the return of members of the Royal Family who were outside Ethiopia and also some former members of the armed forces who were in the Sudan. He lived in an ivory tower. When he (Nimeiri) had visited him last year he had gone to Mengistu's home and the Ethiopian officers who had accompanied his party had said that it was the first time that they had seen the building. The Prime Minister asked how then pressure could be brought to bear on the Ethiopian regime. The Sudanese Ambassador [redacted] said that the first thing was to get the Cubans and other foreigners out. Then the Ethiopian people would express themselves. President Nimeiri said that the Ethiopian Government controlled only the towns, not the countryside.

In reply to a question from the Prime Minister about the economic situation in the Sudan, President Nimeiri said that the Sudan would become self-sufficient in sugar this year. But there was now a problem of electric power. A company called Coppernile, a subsidiary of NEI, had been supposed to complete a new project in Khartoum this October. But the company were now saying that they might not even finish it by next August. So emergency generators were needed. The Prime Minister said that she was aware of this problem but

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would the President want help with these generators even if it meant that we had to reduce the balance of payments support which we expected to offer shortly? President Nimeiri said that his priority was balance of payments support. The Prime Minister said that we would examine the question of whether we could help with the generators.

President Nimeiri said that he wished to raise one other matter. No British company had a permanent office in Khartoum. He much wanted Lonhro to establish such an office and to help with a number of projects.

In conclusion, President Nimeiri said that he would be passing through Cairo on his way to Nairobi where, on 10 December, he expected to meet a number of Heads of State.

The conversation ended at 1610.

A.F.C.

9 December 1983

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cc MASTER SET



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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

9 December 1983

*Dear Sir,*

Call by the President of the Sudan

President Nimeiri called on the Prime Minister at 3.20 pm this afternoon. I enclose a record of the conversation.

*Yours ever*

*John Goss*

P.F. Ricketts, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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