

IMPLICATIONS OF TRIPARTITE PACT FOR ETHIOPIA, SUDAN ANALYZED

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[Article by Riyad Najib al-Rayyis: "Are the Sudan and Ethiopia Ghosts of International Alliances, Or Is Each Afraid of the Other"]

[Text] Among Gulf circles there is a lot of talk about the Tripartite Friendship Treaty between Ethiopia, Libya, and South Yemen which was signed in Aden last August. The only thing new about what they are saying in these Gulf circles is that their words are characterized by a sense of uneasy inquiry about the role played by Ethiopia in Arab issues which has been provided for by this treaty. This is the first instance in which a non-Arab nation has been brought into Arab alliances and, at the same time, been brought into Arab disputes. These Gulf circles feel that it is unnecessary for Ethiopia, no matter what ideological position it takes, to be a party in aiding one side against another and to be a weapon in the hands of one side against another--especially when all of the parties involved are Arab nations.

In regard to the Tripartite Friendship Treaty, the Gulf nations were alarmed about Ethiopia in particular because Ethiopia was a nation with which the Gulf nations were not acquainted and the Gulf nations did not know Ethiopia's political position with regard to issues concerning them. This was true until the role played by Ethiopia began to become clear during the last few weeks, after the assassination of President Sadat, when the Sudanese president, Ja'far Numayri, became a shining star as far as U.S. policy-makers were concerned. Numayri has received a lot of attention since the U.S. suddenly discovered, right after the assassination of Sadat, that the Sudan is an important country as far as the strategy of the Western nations in Africa is concerned. The U.S. also discovered that the Sudan is a vast country, with about 20 million inhabitants, and constitutes a basic force both in the Arab and African worlds.

President Numayri was prepared to be this shining star within the framework of the new U.S. policy in Arab Africa, and proclaimed that his country was being threatened by a Libyan invasion and that the U.S. should quickly and immediately provide him with financial support and give him weapons so that his regime would not fall into the hands of Co Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi. The effect of this Sudanese proclamation was enhanced by the fact that Egypt's new president, Husni Mubarak, hastened to say that Egypt would stand by the Sudan if Libya tried to bring down its regime. The U.S. also tripled the amount of military and economic aid which it had been providing, and it was as if the Nile Valley was on the point of drying up.

The nature of Ethiopia's role began to become clear among all of this U.S.-Sudanese excitement which claimed that Col Qadhdhafi was knocking at the Sudan's doors, that Libya had already begun to "invade" the Sudan from the border with Chad, and that the entire Nile Valley was about to be lost and maybe fall into the hands of the Soviet Union. Just as Numayri, after the assassination of Sadat, had found his opportunity to become the object of U.S. concern, the Ethiopian chief of state, Col Mengistu Haile Mariam, discovered his own opportunity in the form of utilizing the Tripartite Friendship Treaty (with two Arab nations) to play the role of a judicious intermediary between a rich distant ally and a poor neighbor.

The treaty between Ethiopia, Libya, and South Yemen has become useful to Numayri to the degree that it provides Mengistu with a role to play among the Arab nations and allows him to come close to establishing an unofficial alliance between Khartoum and Addis Ababa. Such an alliance, even though unofficial, is still an alliance. Like any alliance between two parties—whether official or unofficial—it is based on the fundamental premise of rendering services to one another. As soon as this mutual rendering of services in each other's interests begins, the alliance has already become a fact.

This was how the situation was with regard to relations between the Sudan and Ethiopia, even though they represent two opposing and differing positions both in terms of international politics and in terms of domestic policy.

The Sudan is linked to the Western nations and has a regime which is of the individualist type. Ethiopia, on the other hand, is linked to the Soviet Union and has a Marxist regime. However, this has not prevented Numayri from beginning to aid Ethiopia by preventing Ethiopians, who are opposed to Mengistu's Marxist regime, from utilizing Sudanese territory as a refuge, as a place where they can regroup their forces, and as a base from which to launch their operations. In return for this, Mengistu is exerting pressure on Libya (by virtue of the treaty which links Libya and Ethiopia) in order to keep Col Qadhdhafi from threatening the Numayri regime. The alliances between Khartoum and Addis Ababa are intermeshed and intertwined like political ghosts, and political observers suspect that the motive behind these alliances is their fear of each other and their need of each other. These days Ethiopia needs friends just as badly as the Sudan needs aid. Although the Tripartite Friendship Treaty between Ethiopia, Libya, and South Yemen aroused apprehensions among the neighbors of these three countries, the fears felt by Ethiopia were even much greater than the fears felt by all of these neighboring countries together. This was what impelled Ethiopia to enter into this tripartite treaty. Ethiopia was afraid of the encirclement operation which the U.S. had already begun to mount against it--utilizing its allies such as Somalia, Kenya, Egypt, and the Sudan, in addition to the Gulf nations on the other side of the Red Sea. The tripartite treaty, as such, stipulates mutual defense among the three parties, but does not define the concept or nature of this "defense."

In the past the signatory nations of this Tripartite Friendship Treaty have already aided each other in matters which they considered to be defense-related, even before the existence and signing of such a treaty.

For example, South Yemen sent a whole military division to Ethiopia when Somalia began the Ogaden war in 1977. And in that same year the South Yemeni government

sent an artillery unit to help the Ethiopian government defend the port of Mitsiwa against onslaughts being waged by the Eritrean rebels. And although Ethiopia denies it, it is a fact that many officers and enlisted men from the Ethiopian armed forces--in fact more than 280,000 men--have been trained in South Yemen.

So cooperation in military and defense matters among the tripartite treaty nations already existed before it was made official, and it has already shown its effectiveness in practice, under very difficult wartime circumstances.

This was how Ethiopia militarily needed South Yemen. But Ethiopia has an even greater need of Libya. Ethiopia needs Libya just as much as it needs Sudan in order to check the rebels who are hostile to the Mengistu regime. Ethiopia wants Libya to help it in the following ways:

1. Keeping the Eritrean rebels from making any military--and consequently political--progress by means of putting a definite halt to Libyan support for the Eritrean rebellion. In the past Libya was the largest and most important supporter of this rebellion. The Mengistu regime hopes that, if Libya definitely ceases to give support to the Eritrean rebellion and if the Sudan helps to close its borders in the face of the other rebels [opposed to the Ethiopian regime], then the Mengistu regime will be able to definitely put an end to the Eritrean rebellion which has been going on for the last quarter of a century.
2. Cessation of Libyan aid to the Somali rebels in Ogaden, and preventing any possibility for rapprochement between Libya and the regime of Siad Barre.

It is true that Libya, more than a year and a half ago, ceased its military and financial aid and political support for the Eritrean rebels and the rebels in Ogaden. However, in spite of the existence of the tripartite treaty, the Ethiopian regime is still very afraid that Libya, due to its national identity and religion and due to political factors of change in the Arab world, might once again support these two rebellions in one form or another.

3. Increasing Libyan financial aid to Ethiopia, especially since the decline in prices of coffee in the world--and coffee is Ethiopia's most important export--has plunged Addis Ababa into a deficit amounting to \$2.5 billion. Libya has promised to pay this deficit during the next 7 years, with the first payment being in 1981.
4. Increasing the amount of Libyan investments in Ethiopia. This would be done by means of economic participation in a network of mines and mining projects for the extraction of gold, silver, copper, and zinc. Ethiopia also wants to increase its exports of cattle to Libya and wants more aid for its agricultural projects.

As far as Mengistu is concerned, the Tripartite Friendship Treaty has proven to be beneficial in a number of areas. Consequently there has come to be a clear answer to the question asked by Gulf circles concerning why Ethiopia wanted to be a party in the treaty. At the same time Mengistu has remained faithful to the principles of the accord which he agreed to with Numayri last year. The Ethiopian-Sudanese accord has begun to provide positive results for the Ethiopian regime, as is shown by the following:

1. Last August the Sudan closed the Eritrean Liberation Front's offices in Khartoum and in the other cities of the Sudan.

2. Last September the Sudanese government began to round up all of the thousands of Eritrean rebels in Sudanese territory and put them in particular camps after disarming them.

3. In October of this year the Ethiopian minister of state security visited Khartoum in order to express his thanks to the Sudanese government for helping to finish off what was left of the Eritrean rebellion.

In return for these services rendered by the Sudan to Ethiopia, Numayri has demanded that Mengistu have his regime arrested and detain the Sudanese in opposition to Numayri's government who seek refuge in Ethiopia. This summer an armed group of people opposed to the Sudanese regime crossed the border from Ethiopia to the Sudan and caused trouble on a large scale in a number of villages and areas of the Sudan. In spite of the Sudanese government's attempts to pursue them and although the government arrested some of them, most of them managed to disappear and this represents a threat to the security of the Uumayri regime. Ethiopia apologized to the Sudan for its failure to take care of these matters--as had been agreed upon!

But Numayri's security problem is not due to the opposition of the southern Sudanese coming over the border from Ethiopia, but rather the Sudanese opposition supported by Libya which comes across the border from Chad. This is the role Mengistu is to play in protecting Numayri. It is the role which qualifies him to be a partner in the Tripartite Friendship Treaty with Libya. Numayri wants his Ethiopian neighbor to pressure its Libyan ally to stop its provocations against the Khartoum regime and to cease its support and encouragement to the various schools, branches, and trends of the Sudanese opposition. However, Numayri does not set any great store by Col Mengistu's influence with Col Qadhdhafi. This was the reason for the large-scale arrests which took place in the Sudan last week and which involved the detainment of 1,300 persons in Khartoum alone--in addition to the 20,000 people who had already been arrested last September.

This is why, right after Sədat's assassination, Numayri let out a cry of fear of a Libyan invasion of his country so that the U.S. would hasten to provide him the \$100 million of military aid which it had promised.

In view of this situation, the danger of which was exaggerated, Numayri--on the basis of the friendship which his country enjoys with the Gulf nations and which was built by the sweat, effort, and skills of his countrymen--reassured the Gulf governments that the treaty between Ethiopia, Libya, and South Yemen does not constitute a danger for them and that his Ethiopian ally should not be blamed and approached for what Libya or South Yemen does. In 1885 Gen Gordon, the ruler of the Sudan, was killed on the steps of his residence in Khartoum. Britain waited 10 years before sending Lord Kitchener to avenge him and to suppress the Mahdi's national revolt. In 1981 President Sadat, the ruler of Egypt, was killed as he was reviewing his army. But the U.S. did not even wait 10 days before proclaiming its fear for the Sudan--not in an effort to avenge Sadat but rather out of fear for his allies which are also the allies of the U.S.

President Ja'far Numayri should take a good look into the history of relations between the U.S. and its allies and he should read more carefully the history of the Sudan so that no more Gordons will be killed, no more Kitcheners will oppress his country, and so that the theory of international revenge is not put into practice.