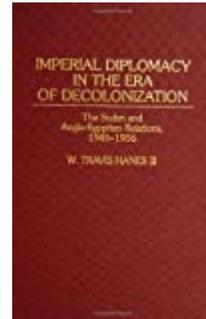




W. Travis Hanes, III. *Imperial Diplomacy in the Era of Decolonization: The Sudan and Anglo-Egyptian Relations, 1945-1956.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995. ix + 190 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-29341-2.



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Published on H-Africa (November, 1996)

The Sudan was a serious problem for British imperialism and diplomacy after the Second World War. As the first British dependency in the postwar period to gain independence in Africa, the Sudan helped to shape world opinion on the dissolution of the colonial empires and demonstrated the many dilemmas of British decolonization. The Sudan was also a central issue in Anglo-Egyptian relations and contributed to the origins of the Suez crisis of 1956. Britain's administration of the Sudan from 1945 to 1956 not only had a profound impact on the territory itself and the relationship between London and Cairo, but also had far-reaching consequences for the histories of Britain, Africa, and the Middle East and for the Cold War.

The Sudan had long been an imperial and diplomatic concern for Britain and Egypt. Determined to protect the strategically important headwaters of the Nile, London negotiated an agreement with Cairo in 1899 that placed the Sudan under a joint Anglo-Egyptian "condominium." In 1924, Britain forced Egyptian troops out of the Sudan and ended Egypt's effective participation in the condominium. The British Foreign Office, not the Colonial Office, administered the dependency through the elite and largely autonomous "Sudan Political Service." An Anglo-Egyptian military alliance signed in 1936 formally reinstated Egypt as a joint partner in the condominium, but

left Britain in sole control. In 1946, Egypt and the new British Labour Government agreed to revise the terms of this treaty.

W. Travis Hanes III provides a new study of Anglo-Egyptian relations and the Sudan during these critical postwar years. Hanes, who describes his work as "quite frankly, revisionist," argues that Labour Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin's policies were forced on him by the top British administrators of the Sudan condominium government. Despite Bevin's image as a tough negotiator who held to certain fundamental principles, including the notion of "self-determination" for colonized peoples, he was willing to endanger the Sudanese right to decide their own future status in order to secure a new treaty that would guarantee Britain's strategic requirements in Egypt. In short, Bevin was "fully prepared to buy his Egyptian treaty at the expense of the Sudan" (p. 3). What prevented him, according to Hanes, was the stubborn resistance of officials in the Sudan Political Service, "in many ways more vehement proponents of Sudanese nationalism' than the Sudanese themselves" (p. 3).

Little has been written specifically about decolonization in the Sudan. Hanes's book, based on his dissertation completed in 1990 at the University of Texas at Austin under the supervision of William Roger Louis, not only adds to the standard accounts by Louis himself, but also joins

the recent work of M. W. Daly, Peter Woodward, Peter Hahn, and David Sconyers.[1] While Hanes insists that his study is “not a book about Ernest Bevin,” he argues that his conclusions do much to “refute the image” of the foreign secretary “so carefully and sympathetically built up” by historians such as Louis and Lord Bullock.[2]

Imperial Diplomacy is also an important addition to the recent scholarly literature concerning individual British colonial officials in Africa.[3] Hanes’s attention to leading members of the Sudan Political Service including Sir Hubert Huddleston (Governor-General of the Sudan, 1940-1947), Sir James Robertson (Civil Secretary of the Sudan, 1945-1953, and Governor-General of Nigeria, 1955-1960), and Sir Robert Howe (British minister to Addis Ababa, 1942-1945, and Governor-General of the Sudan, 1947-1955) substantially augments A.H.M. Kirk-Greene’s scholarship concerning the particular ethos of the service.[4] Hanes’s book also appears on the heels of a new collection of papers edited by Graham F. Thomas entitled *The Last of the Proconsuls: Letters From Sir James W. Robertson* (London, 1994).

Hanes’s study is based on British diplomatic and private records held at the Sudan Archive at Durham University, the Public Record Office in London, and the Rhodes House Library at Oxford University. He draws heavily on the Foreign Office “General Correspondence” files (FO 371) at the PRO as well as “Sudan Political Intelligence Summary” reports and “Robertson’s Monthly Letters” at Rhodes House. In addition, Hanes makes use of British Cabinet files, the private papers of several Sudan officials, published memoirs, and his own personal correspondence with two former members of the Political Service. Except for a few secondary sources, newspaper extracts located in the Foreign Office files, and *Le Journal d’Egypte (al-Misr)*, Hanes cites few Egyptian or Sudanese sources.

The author divides his work into seven crisp chapters. After a brief introduction, he describes the first stages of Anglo-Egyptian negotiations concerning the condominium in early 1946 and the problem of sovereignty in the Sudan. After much debate, Bevin and the Egyptian Prime Minister, Sidqi Pasha, agreed that London would confirm Egypt’s “symbolic sovereignty” in exchange for Cairo’s assurance that the Sudan’s “right of independence” was a universal principle (p. 77). Since Bevin was afraid that Egypt might go before the United Nations if the issue was not resolved, conceding “symbolic sovereignty” was a small price to pay while protecting Sudanese self-determination. Hanes points out, how-

ever, that Sidqi was careful to insist that the treaty should not contain any written terms concerning Sudanese self-determination since the inhabitants were “not yet ready for such a decision” (p. 79). This ambiguous “solution” formed the core of the “Bevin-Sidqi Protocol” of October 1946.

Chapter 4, entitled “The Revolt of the Sudan Political Service and the Failure of the Anglo-Egyptian Negotiations,” is the best and contains the heart of his main argument. The British and Egyptian governments began to argue over what “symbolic sovereignty” and “self-determination” really meant. Hanes explains how British officials in Khartoum undermined the Bevin-Sidqi Protocol. Governor-General Huddleston and other top Sudan officials disobeyed orders from the Foreign Office, leaked information to the press, manipulated Sudanese nationalist leaders, and worked with allies outside of government in Britain to accuse Labour ministers of “appeasement.” From the Sudan Government’s point of view, the Protocol was a “betrayal” and a “sellout” of the Sudanese who were never consulted about their fate. Hanes argues that by early 1947, the steady resistance of the Sudan Political Service was so successful that “Anglo-Egyptian negotiations were dead” (p. 107).

In his remaining chapters, Hanes explains the United Nations’ inability to resolve the Anglo-Egyptian dispute and the impact of the Egyptian revolution of 1952. When the new regime in Cairo abandoned its claim to sovereignty in the Sudan altogether and revived negotiations with Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s Conservative government, Sudanese nationalists, particularly Sayyid Abd al-Rahman and his Umma Party, quickly began to play Egypt and Britain off one another to achieve their own political goals. Despite last minute attempts by British officials in Khartoum to keep the South, with its strong cultural, ethnic, and geographic differences, separate from the North, the Sudan government could not prevent an Anglo-Egyptian agreement in 1953, which required Britain to leave the dependency within three years. Still, as Hanes points out, conflicts continued in Anglo-Egyptian relations and “it is not too much to say that the Sudan Political Service helped generate the atmosphere of bitterness and frustration in which the Suez debacle would finally occur” (p. 168).

Imperial Diplomacy is a valuable reminder of the importance of both bureaucracies and individuals in understanding modern British diplomatic and imperial policy. Hanes is entirely convincing when he concludes that “the Sudan Government in Khartoum, dominated as it was

by the largely British Sudan Political Service, was by no means simply an agent of the British Government in London" (p. 169). He goes on to suggest that the Service, motivated by its own sense of imperial paternalism and "trusteeship," was willing to follow its agenda even "to the clear detriment of British interests in both the Sudan and the Middle East" (p. 170). This judgment should interest those historians of postwar British diplomacy who assume that decisions in Whitehall mattered most and underrate the impact of colonial administration on international relations. Similarly, scholars of Africa who primarily concern themselves with local priorities may find Hanes useful for explaining the larger forces that shaped some of these priorities.

The close, detailed nature of *Imperial Diplomacy* also illustrates the complex, and often contradictory, nature of British imperial and foreign policy during the era of decolonization. British officials not only had to confront the competing interests of individuals and institutions, but had to contend with the forces of international law, outside pressure groups, an international organization, the media, public opinion, and deep cultural differences. These pressures, tied to ambiguous definitions of "sovereignty" and "self-determination," made Anglo-Egyptian relations difficult under the best conditions. Lastly, Hanes provides historians of international relations and modern Britain with another example of how the paralyzing power of the word "appeasement" in the postwar period hampered policy debate in Britain and contributed to the level of misunderstanding and antagonism that marked the Suez crisis and much of the Cold War.

Imperial Diplomacy is not without shortcomings. For example, the sketchy identifications of R. C. Mayall, Margery Perham, Dean Acheson, and Sir William Strang, combined with Hanes's tendency to place his footnotes at the end of paragraphs rather than at the relevant points, may confuse some readers. Further, since the question of sovereignty may have been "the single most important dispute" between Britain and Egypt (p. 6), Hanes's work needs a much more systematic discussion of international law. What was the opinion of outside international legal experts? Why did Bevin not consult the British Law Officers on the matter? What did legal authorities in Egypt say? Lastly, given his claim of being "quite frankly, revisionist," it would have been helpful had Hanes more directly engaged the secondary literature. In many ways his views are not unlike those of D. K. Fieldhouse, who argues that "Labour's position on imperial issues was almost identical with that of most Con-

servatives and that their policies in office were shaped by circumstances rather than by principle." [5]

A more serious limitation is the primary source material. Attempting to examine "Anglo-Egyptian relations" almost exclusively from British Foreign Office files and the papers of British officials in Khartoum poses certain difficulties in interpretation and evidence. Statements such as "Bevin's decision.... convinced many Egyptians that the British Labour Government was now prepared to negotiate in good faith" (p. 25) or "Sidqi Pasha clearly wanted a treaty" (p. 52) or "the outcome of the United Nations hearings had shocked the Egyptian Government" which had "fully expected to be upheld in their case" (p. 124) may be entirely true, but these accounts of the assumptions, motivations, and reactions of "the Egyptians" are scarcely persuasive when based solely on British documents. Further, while the Sudan Political Service may have undermined the Bevin-Sidqi Protocol, without an understanding of the opposition groups in Egypt, the internal debates of the Egyptian government, and Sidqi's interpretation of events, it is hard to be sure that British officials in Khartoum alone caused the failure of Anglo-Egyptian negotiations in 1947.

Hanes's source material will also trouble scholars interested in African perspectives. While Hanes is careful to insist that the history of Sudanese nationalist development is "beyond the scope of this study," he suggests that the Sudan Political Service succeeded in preserving "the Sudanese right to exercise their own sense of national identity and to assert their own independence from Egypt." As a result, "it might well be said that the modern Sudan owes its very existence to the expatriate nationalist vision of these British colonial administrators" (p. 173). This may be true, but without much reference to Sudanese documents or interviews with participants in the Sudanese nationalist movement, such conclusions are not likely to sway specialists in Sudanese history.

Every major research library should have a copy of *Imperial Diplomacy*. Upper-division undergraduates, graduate students, and historians of international relations, British imperialism, and modern Africa can profit from reading this book. Since Hanes describes the Sudan as a focus of the last stages of a rivalry of two imperialisms, British and Egyptian, his work is an appropriate addition to the "Contributions in Comparative Colonial Studies" series by Greenwood Press. It deserves a wide readership.

Notes

[1]. W. R. Louis, *The British Empire In the Middle East, 1945-1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Post-war Imperialism* (Oxford, 1984); *Suez 1956: The Crisis and Its Consequences* (Oxford, 1989) and "The Coming of Independence in the Sudan," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19 (1991): 137-58; M. W. Daly, "The Transfer of Power in the Sudan" in Prosser Gifford and W. R. Louis, eds., *Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfer of Power, 1960-1980* (New Haven, 1988); Bonds of Silk: The Human Factor in the British Administration of the Sudan (with Francis Mading Deng), (*East Lansing, Mich.*, 1989); *Imperial Sudan: The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, 1934-1956* (Cambridge, 1991) and *Sudan* (Oxford, 1992 edition); Peter Woodward, *Condominium and Sudanese Nationalism* (New York, 1979); *Sudan, 1898-1989: The Unstable State* (London, 1990) and *Nasser* (London, 1992); Peter Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991); David Sconyers, "Servants or Saboteurs? The Sudan Political Service During the Critical Decade of 1946-1956," *The British Society for Middle East Studies Bulletin*, 14, 1 (1987) and *Perspectives and Challenges in the Development of Sudanese Studies* (edited with Ismail Abdella), (Lewiston, 1993).

[2]. In his introduction, Hanes specifically cites Bullock's *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951* (New York, 1983), but also lists Peter Weiler, *Ernest Bevin* (Manchester, 1993) in his bibliography. Hanes may not

have had the opportunity before the publication of his book to consider Steven Merritt Miner, "Ernest Bevin and British Foreign Policy, 1945-1951" in Gordon A. Graig and Francis L. Lowenstein, eds., *The Diplomats, 1939-1979* (Princeton, N.J., 1994).

[3]. For a few examples, see L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, eds., *African Proconsuls: European Governors in Africa* (New York, 1978); Harry A. Gailey, *Clifford: Imperial Proconsul* (London, 1982); Robert D. Pearce, *Sir Bernard Bourdillon: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Colonialist* (Oxford, 1987) and Richard Frost, *Enigmatic Proconsul: Sir Philip Mitchell and the Twilight of Empire* (London, 1992).

[4]. "The Sudan Political Service: A Profile in the Sociology of Imperialism," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15 (1982) and *The Sudan Political Service: A Preliminary Profile* (Oxford, 1982).

[5]. "The Labour Governments and the Empire-Commonwealth, 1945-51" in Richie Owendale, ed., *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments 1945-1951* (Leicester, 1984). Also see F. S. Northedge, "Britain and the Middle East," in the same volume.

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Citation: Michael D. Callahan. Review of Hanes, W. Travis, III, *Imperial Diplomacy in the Era of Decolonization: The Sudan and Anglo-Egyptian Relations, 1945-1956*. H-Africa, H-Net Reviews. November, 1996.

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