

Rizeigat-British Cooperation and the Dilemma of the 14 Miles

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Northern Bahr el Ghazal was not fully part of the Anglo-Egyptian administration until 1922.

On 21st February 1922, the British troops from Wau under the command of Bimbashi Middleton clashed with a force loyal to Araithdit and defeated them in Akuoya (Alok) at Pongo River. The assault went ahead to Wundiing the headquarters of the resistance and destroyed the based, but the leader escaped to Mareng village near Aweil town.

On 7 March 1922, Araithdit surrendered to the colonial authority at Mareng without causality. He was arrested and sent to Wau for imprisonment and from there he was transferred to Omdurman and finally to el-Damer where he spent 14 years before he was released in 1936.

Bol Yel, a young man of Fariath sub-klan from Wundiing Abiem West disappeared from local population 1915 and returned home after two years with a strange stick and divine name Araithdit. He claims that he was summoned by God for divinity and had returned to take Dinkas to a happy land where there are no governments. He made several miracles in Abiem, Twic, and Ngok areas, which convinced the local population that he is a real prophet.

In 1918, a group of people who were angered from presence of the government at Nymalell and the way the taxes were being collected attacked for the first time the station established there since 1911. The situation at Nymalell had been calmed before Ariathdit announced his resistance against the authorities. This led to the perception that the group was influenced and mobilized by him.

Messages of his teaching reached other neighboring communities in Tonj, Rumbek, Raja and Wau. The colonial administration fears that if the situation continues, it will undermine its authority in Bahr el Ghazal. So, it was decided to dispatch troops to arrest him after he refused government's initiatives for peaceful settlement.

The declaration of the resistance against colonial administration in Bahr el Ghazal headed by Ariathdit came shortly after the downfall of Ali Dinar Sultanate in 1916.

Rizeigat and Messeriya as Arab origin tribes played a big role in the downfall of the Fur kingdom, in Darfur. They were very cooperative to the British authority to bring down the Fur Kingdom. It was on this token the so-called Savile Burges- Watson agreement of 1918 on the grazing rights to the Arab nomads emerged as a reward to the allies.

The Savile- Watson agreement could be interpreted under two conditions; that it was done as a reward to Rizeigat and Messeriya for their role in fighting along with British troops against Ali Dinar and secondly, that Dinkas were hostile to the colonial administration and the danger of the rebellion spreading all over the Dinka territories, especially in the northern part of the area could be reduced by allowing Arab nomads to herd their cattle up to 40 miles south Kiir, an area which covers most of Pajouk land.

During that time, the Dinka Malual territory was divided into two sections; Pajouk covers the area extended north Kiir River up to Lol River and Paliupeny which extends from south Lol River up to the border with Western Bahr el Ghazal.

Chief Autiak Majak (Chak Chak) was the prominent leader of Paliupeny based at Nymalell where colonial authorities established their based in 1911 through a force invading the area from Western Bahr el Ghazal.

It was reported that Chak Chak was the first chief of the Dinka Malual, who sent emissary with a letter of support to the colonial authorities in Wau 1902 (Stefand 1977).

The second area was Pajouk ruled by Wal Doorjok as overall chief plus other chiefs. After he died his son Yor Wal took over, and he was not in good relations with the administration because of his previous malignity to Turko-Egyptian rule who imprisoned him in Wau. A certain trader namely Dirar Ali who spoke Dinka fluently left to Wau reported to the authorities that Yor Wal was the one behind Araithdit's rejection of peaceful settlement (Dut 1984). This is why the Pajouk area was badly targeted by allotting part of their land to Arab nomads.

After the resistance suppressed, and its leader arrested the government moved its headquarters from Nymalell to Aweil in 1922, and Mr. B. Owen made a District Commissioner of Northern Bahr el Ghazal. The issue of the borders with Rizeigat was brought into attention of the District Commissioner by the chiefs as an urgent matter.

He took initiative and wrote to the governor proposing a meeting that should bring together the authorities and the local leaders instead of conducting official meetings alone to discuss communal affairs, which has been the case since he assumed the official.

His request was considered, and the meeting scheduled to take place in April 1924, at the time when the leaders of the two communities are at the River.

On April 22nd 1924 the meeting convened at Adiem (Safaha), and the following people were presence (Wol 2009) . Mr. M.J. Wheatley Governor of Bhar el Ghazal province, Mr. P. Munuro, Governor of Darfur Province, Mr. B. Owen District Commissioner of Northern Bhar el Ghazal , E.S. Fiddes District Commissioner of Southern Darfur and Mr. R.T. Johnston Assistant District Commissioner of Baggara.

The Rizeigat tribes were represented by eleven delegates headed by Nazir Ibrahim Musa Madibo and the delegation includes his brother Yahia Musa, Amir el Momin, Dawod Abu Khelik, bdullahi Abul Ghasim, Fadhallah Bombome, Mohamed el Nur Wad Hamid, Bashir Abdullhi, Younis Damass, Mohamed Dom Fellati and Kheir el Nur.

Meanwhile, the Dinka delegation composed of eight chiefs namely; Auitak Akot, Lual Dau Marac, Anyoun Aturjong, Diing Wol, Nyang Amash, Tong Bek, Gout Tong and Lual Habishe.

The meeting made a resolution by reviewing Savile Burges-Watson Agreement of 1918 and reduced the distance to 14 miles instead of 40 miles. The discussion went on positively and in the end of the meeting, the Dinka delegates were misinformed the Savile-Watson agreement was cancelled. Other issues, including child abduction, fishing, hunting and trading were discussed, and the meeting announced closed. The new agreement was named after the two governors; Wheatley-Munuro.

In the following year the situation did not change on ground. Arab nomads were still crossing the River. They went as far as demanding permission from the Dinka chiefs to go to the River. Again, the meeting was requested by the Dinka chiefs but convened at the time of the new governor of Bahr el Ghazal Mr. Ingleson 1935.

Rizeigat tribes on their part start naming the Dinka wouts situated at the River and the nearby areas.

For example, Maijot was changed to Dar el Harr, Piany Thou becomes Dar el Heglig, Kang-a Bar replaced to el Bagheili, Kang-a Gok, Adiem Ajowak of Chief Anyoun Aturjong changed to Agar, Safaha and el Seleimi respectively. Bour Pieny of the Chief Ngang Jonkor changed to el Dumug el Telieh, Kang a-Bek and Wair Liad of the Chief Diing Wol were named as Jabaya, and Abu Guma respectively. Doup of the Chief Nyoul Deng changed to Ardieba, Kang-a Diat of the Chief Acien Yor named as el Hamara, Pieny Gaut of the Chief Diing Majok changed to el Grief.

When the Dinka chiefs learnt their lands were demarcated as grazing corridors to Rizeigat nomads and the new occupants renamed all areas, they sent a delegation to Aweil and met with the new District Commissioner Capt. J.M Stubbs, who took over from Mr. Owen.

The new District Commissioner picked up the matter seriously and convinced the Governor of Bhar el Ghazal Mr. P. Ingleson to convene a meeting as a way of trying to bring tensions down. The meeting was convened and attended by Mr. C.G. Dupuis, Governor of Darfur and the Rizeigat tribal leaders in 1935.

The resolutions of the Wheatley-Munuro agreement were read out for the first time to the Dinka delegation. Chief Anyoun Aturjong protested and marched out of the meeting.

The expectation of the Dinka was not met hence they wrote again to the Governor of Equatoria, who was also governing Bhar el Ghazal when the two provinces were merged to be administered as one administrative unit.

On the 25th November 1938, the governor wrote to Civil Secretary in Khartoum arguing for immediate abrogation of Wheatley- Munuro Agreement. The appeal says,

“There is a sense of injustice felt by the Dinka at the present application of the Munuro-Wheatley agreement, and it should be cancelled (Governor Notes 1938). However, the Civil Secretary sent the Equatoria Governor’s message to the Acting District Commissioner of Southern Darfur Mr. E.H. Nightingale, who replaced “If the changes advocated by Governor Equatoria were effected, the Rizeigat would feel a sense of injustice at least as great.” From that point the civil secretary turned down the issue and did not write back to the governor.

Let us go back to the conditions said above as reasons why the colonial rule gives out 14 miles of the Dinka land as grazing corridors to Rizeigat nomads, and agree that those reasons were irrelevant and the real intention was for peaceful coexistence between the two communities across the borders such that the cattle of Arabs do not die. If we take this latter assumption as a real reason yet you find that there were no essences the Dinkas denied their neighbors the grazing rights in the history. Sometimes it is the Rizeigat political leaders who were/are submissive to Khartoum try to confuse peaceful coexistence between the two communities.

I do not think the grazing right is a problem between Dinka Malual and Rizeigat. However, if Khartoum continued to instigate

the neighboring tribes as means of implementing its own agenda, then the nomadic communities in the borders with South Sudan will pay heavily.

Rizeigat tribal leaders should continue persuading peaceful coexistence with their counterpart at South Sudan- Sudan borders and do not listen to greedy politicians in Khartoum whose aims have no relation to the surfaces, but undergrounds. As long as they stand by peace nothing could prevent their animals to come to the river.

Therefore, it is believed the ongoing claims of the 14 miles have nothing to do with Rizeigat tribes, but it is the business of Khartoum in order to trade off other territories of South Sudan which they claimed their ownership.

SAF and its militias attempted recently to capture the area but taught a lesson they will never forget.

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