

# Why the British hate Sudan: the Mahdia's war against London

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

One reason that the British harbor such a visceral hatred for Sudan, is that they have never fully recovered from their experience with the Mahdist state, which lasted from the early 1880s to 1898. This was an independent, sovereign Sudanese state founded by a charismatic Islamic leader—an “Islamic fundamentalist”—which treated the colonial British as no other state had done. The Mahdi, according to a commemoration published in the Khartoum monthly *Sudanow* (December 1991), “was the leader of the first African nation to be created by its own efforts” and “laid the foundations of one of the greatest states in the nineteenth century which lasted for 13 years after his death.” His “greatest achievement was his insistence on a centralized state and his success in building it.”

It is no exaggeration to hear in certain aspects of modern Sudan's fight for national unity and sovereignty echoes of the Mahdist heritage, although the current Sudanese government has no sympathies for the Islamic sect which the Mahdi led. The fact that the Mahdist experience took place during the lifetime of the grandparents of today's Sudanese, helps explain how that heritage has shaped the Sudanese identity.

## The nature of the Mahdia

The Mahdia was established by Dunqulawi Muhammad Ahmad b. 'Abdallah, in 1881, when he declared himself the Mahdi, that is, the “expected one,” inspired by the Prophet to cleanse society of corruption and the infidels. Muhammad Ahmad was born in 1844 the son of a boat-maker, in the Dongola province, and the family moved to Kereri, near the capital Khartoum, when he was a child. He showed an aptitude for religious studies and went in 1861 to study with Sheik Muhammad Sharif Nur al-Da'im, whose grandfather had founded the Sammaniya religious order in Sudan. After a disagreement separated the two, he later studied with Sheik al-Qurashi w. al-Zayn, a rival leader of the Sammaniya and, following the latter's death in 1880, assumed his place as leader, and then as the Mahdi. The Mahdi, in Sunnite tradition, was “the guided one,” expected to appear to lead the Islamic community, and to restore justice. His coming was expected to precede the second coming of Christ.

After years in seclusion and study, Mohammad Ahmad presented himself as the Mahdi first to a small group of

followers, then to the notables of Kordofan and El Obeid, its provincial capital. Then, from a retreat on the island of Aba, he sent out letters to notables, announcing that he was the Mahdi, and urging them to join him, in a *hijra*, a flight for faith, modelled after the Prophet's flight from Mecca to Medina. The Mahdi moved into the Nuba Mountains, on the border of the Kordofan and Fashoda provinces, where the tribal chief welcomed him.

The Mahdi's appeal was both spiritual and social. It was an appeal to return to the original spirit of Islam. His was also a protest against the oppressive practices of the Egyptian khedive, who had ruled Sudan since 1821, under Ottoman suzerainty. The Egyptian government, known as the “Turkiya,” bled the poor tribes through taxation, and sent the bashibazooks, militia tribesmen armed with hippopotamus-hide whips, to exact payment. In a proclamation issued some time between November 1881 and November 1882, the Mahdi wrote:

“Verily these Turks thought that theirs was the kingdom and the command of [God's] apostles and of His prophets and of him who commanded them to imitate them. They judged by other than God's revelation and altered the *Shari'a* of Our Lord Mohammed, the Apostle of God, and insulted the Faith of God and placed poll-tax [*al-jizya*] on your necks together with the rest of the Muslims. . . . Verily the Turks used to drag away your men and imprison them in fetters and take captive your women and your children and slay unrighteously the soul under God's protection.”

His call to arms was based on the same protest: “I am the Mahdi,” he is quoted as saying, “the Successor of the Prophet of God. Cease to pay taxes to the infidel Turks and let everyone who finds a Turk kill him, for the Turks are infidels.”

Government forces, fearing this potential, set out to arrest him, but several expeditions ended in failure. After each military success of the Mahdi and his followers, known as the Ansar (the name also taken by the followers of Mohammed), his ranks and prestige grew.

The Mahdi organized tribal leaders, themselves in various stages of revolt against the administration, behind him into a burgeoning national movement. A campaign which started in summer 1882 in Kordofan province unfolded as a series of tribal attacks against the administration, in different

areas, and a central attack on the provincial capital, El Obeid. Though repulsed during their first attack in September, the Ansar returned, equipped with captured rifles, trained military from government troops who had come over to the Mahdi (known as the Jihadiya), and in January 1883 forced the enemy to capitulate. El Obeid became the Mahdia headquarters.

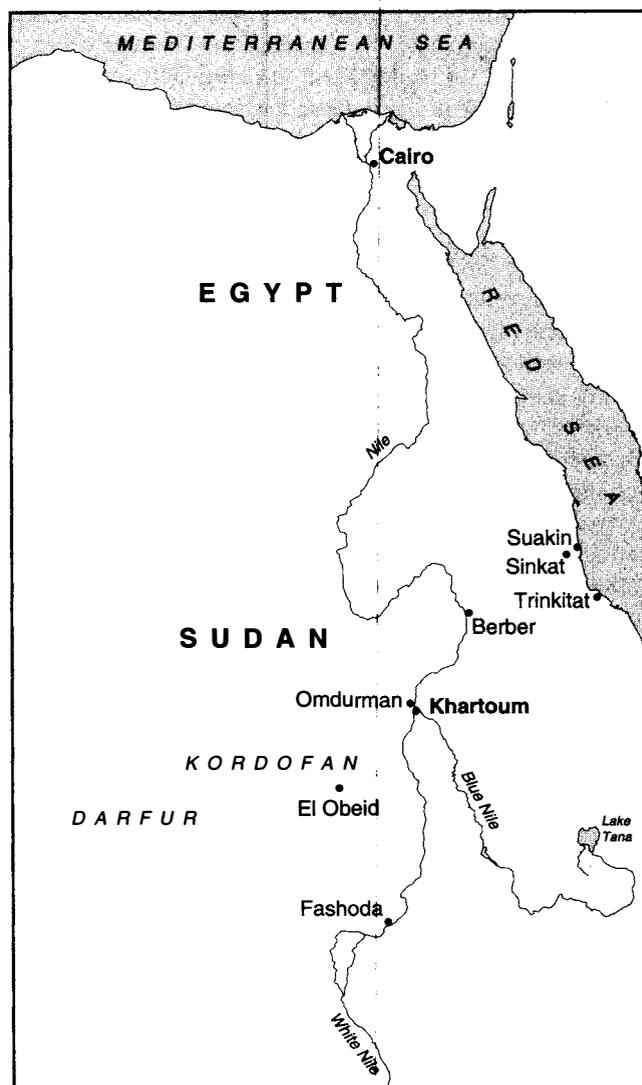
### British invasions: Hicks and Gordon

Two other expeditions failed which were of immense significance to the British. In 1882, Egypt came under British occupation, and Britain ruled the Sudan as well, through Cairo. The two expeditions were those of Col. William Hicks and "the hero," Charles "Chinese" Gordon, nicknamed for his success in defeating the Taiping rebellion in China.

Hicks, a retired officer from the Indian Army, was sent as chief of staff, on behalf of the Egyptian government, to halt the Mahdi. Equipped with a total of 10,000 men, Hicks marched from Khartoum (the Egyptian administrative capital) toward El Obeid through Bara, from the north. Among his guides, unbeknownst to him, were a number of Mahdist agents who relayed information to the Ansar. Suffering from lack of food and especially water, Hicks and his troops were harassed, their communications cut, until they were surrounded and attacked by the Ansar in November 1883 at Shaykan. When the assault started, Hicks's troops, organized in the British square formation, fell into confusion and commenced firing on each other. All but 250 men were killed, including Hicks and a number of British journalists. The massacre of Hicks's force was hard for the British to comprehend. Gordon is reported to have believed that they all died of thirst, and that no military encounter had even taken place! The fall of Shaykan led to the success of the Mahdist revolt in Darfur and Bahr al-Ghazal, and the continuing attachment of tribal units to the Ansar forces.

Gordon's expedition and fate have gone down in history. Gordon had two missions in the Sudan. The first started in 1874, when he was named by the khedive as governor of Equatoria province. Backed by a European staff, Gordon worked to bring this region of the Upper Nile under centralized control, which meant, among other things, breaking the power of the slave-traders. He decreed a government monopoly of the ivory trade, banned imports of munitions, and halted the creation of private armies. He reorganized the financial system and established military stations there, with a headquarters at Lado. In 1877, Gordon received the governorship for the whole of the Sudan; in that year, while Egypt was at war with Abyssinia and popular protest against increased taxation was rising, Britain sealed the Slave Trade Convention with the khedive. It called for ending the passage of Abyssinian and other slaves through Egypt, and terminating all slave-trading in the Sudan by 1899. Gordon called in Europeans and Sudanese to replace Egyptian officials in his administration. When faced with rebellions in the Upper

### Sudan in the nineteenth century



Nile, Gordon resorted to brutally repressive tactics, and set one tribe up against others. When the khedive was deposed in June 1879, Gordon quit his post, resigning from the Egyptian service in 1880.

Years later, after the Mahdi had swept through one province after the other, an alarmed British government again called on Gordon. The British government's declared intention in January 1884 was to arrange for the evacuation of Egyptian officers and civilians from Sudan.

Thus, Gordon's initial mandate was merely to go to Suakin, on the Red Sea, and "consider the best mode of evacuating the interior of the Sudan." En route to Cairo, Gordon drafted a memo outlining his mission: Prepare Egyptian evacuation, and establish a stable successor government in an independent Sudan, by bringing back to power the petty

sultans who had ruled before the Egyptian takeover. To carry out this executive function, Gordon insisted that he be named governor general. When he reached Cairo for talks with Sir Evelyn Baring, the banker agent in Cairo, Gordon got what he wanted. While in Cairo, Gordon also met with al-Zubayr Pasha, a leading slave-trader who had been imprisoned in Egypt. Gordon immediately proposed that this man be put forward as the alternative leader to the Mahdi.

By February 1894, the Mahdi's forces had extended their control over Trinkitat and Sinkat, on the Red Sea coast, through the military campaigns of one of the Ansar's most able leaders, Osman Digna.

On arrival in Berber, and later, in Khartoum, Gordon hastily announced the dismissal of Egyptian officials, who would be replaced by Sudanese, and the plans for evacuation. He also declared taxes for 1883 to be eliminated and those for 1884 to be halved. Finally, he announced that the 1877 convention against the slave trade was not operational. The rationale behind this sudden reversal of British policy, seems to have been, that the only way to ensure the return of the ruling sultanates would be by legalizing the slave trade they were involved in.

In Khartoum, Gordon organized a dramatic happening, whereby tax books and the hated whips used by tax-collectors were brought out into the square and burned. Adulatory accounts relate that women threw themselves at Gordon's feet. Lieutenant Colonel Stewart, who accompanied him, wrote, "Gordon has won over all the hearts. He is the dictator here. The Mahdi does not mean anything any longer."

Apparently convinced he was dealing with just another petty tyrant who, like all petty tyrants, has a price, Gordon sent a letter to the Mahdi, announcing his magnanimous decision to grant the Mahdi the position of sultan of Kordofan. This, to a man who not only controlled Kordofan already, but who was about to take Khartoum, thus completing his unification of the nation! Adding insult to injury, Gordon sent along with the message ceremonial red robes and a *tarbush*. The Mahdi responded:

"Know that I am the Expected Mahdi, the Successor of the Apostle of God. Thus I have no need of the sultanate, nor of the kingdom of Kordofan or elsewhere nor of the wealth of this world and its vanity. I am but the slave of God, guiding unto God and to what is with Him. . . ."

Three dervishes of the Mahdi's following delivered this note to Gordon, returning to him the red robes and offering the garment worn by the Ansar: a patched *jubba*, with the invitation that he adopt Islam and follow the Mahdi. Gordon rejected the Mahdi's offer with indignation. This occurred in March 1884. By April, the Mahdi had decided to organize the siege of Khartoum.

In late February, responding to news that his proposal that al-Zubayr be reinstated as a puppet had been turned down in London, Gordon made the following proposal:

"If Egypt is to be kept quiet, Mahdi must be smashed up. . . . If you decide on smashing Mahdi, then send up another £100,000, and send up 200 troops to Wadi Halfa, and send officer up to Dongola under pretense to look out quarters for troops. . . . Evacuation is possible, but you will feel effect in Egypt, and will be forced to enter into a far more serious affair in order to guard Egypt. At present, it would be comparatively easy to destroy Mahdi."

### Gordon's ignominious defeat

Throughout the summer, Gordon, holed up in Khartoum, engaged the forces located there in skirmishes with the Ansar, but made no headway militarily. The Mahdi, meanwhile, was continuing to extend his control, taking the city of Berber on the Nile, thus further isolating Gordon in Khartoum. Osman Digna on the Red Sea coast, and Mohammed al-Khayr who was controlling Berber, blocked access from Khartoum to the east or the north. Gordon, for his part, dug in. He recounts that the people in the city spread broken glass on the ground, and others planted mines. Gordon concentrated on hoarding goods for the siege, and sending urgent requests to London via Baring for reinforcements. In September, Gordon sent the British and French consuls down the Nile on a steamer, in an attempt to run the blockade of the Mahdist forces, and to get news of the situation of besieged Khartoum to the world. The steamer was attacked before it reached Abu Hamed, and all the Europeans were killed. In October, the Mahdi moved with his forces to Omdurman, preparing for the assault on nearby Khartoum.

Finally, the British government decided to send a relief expedition, but by the time the steamers actually reached Khartoum, on Jan. 28, 1885, the British officers saw no Egyptian flag flying, and concluded correctly that the city had fallen to the Mahdi. The steamers turned around and fled.

The end of Gordon has remained somewhat wrapped in mystery. The common version is that he was killed in battle, on the staircase of his palace, by Mahdist forces armed with spears. Decapitated, his head was taken for identification to Rudolf Slatin, the Austrian governor of Darfur for the Egyptian administration.

The dead Gordon was to become an object of hero-worship in Britain, mostly for the purpose of whipping up jingoistic support for an expedition under Gen. Herbert (later Lord) Kitchener, to destroy the Mahdia and Sudan.

A few words about Gordon, the man, so to speak. Although painted as a quasi-god by his idolators (for example, *Gordon: der Held vom Khartoum. Ein Lebensbild nach originalquellen*, Frankfurt am Main, 1885), Gordon turns out to have been just one more pervert in Her Majesty's service.

As Ronald Hyam wrote in *Britain's Imperial Century 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion*: "The prince of pederasts (in the sense of small-boy lover) was unquestion-

ably an even more important figure: Gen. Charles Gordon, hero of campaigns in the Sudan and China. Totally and irredeemably boy-oriented, he was almost certainly too honorable or inhibited ever to succumb to physical temptation, and so this emotion was heavily sublimated into serving God, the Empire and Good Works. He spent six years of his life (from 1865 to 1871) trying to create in London his own little land where the child might be prince, housing ragged urchins (his 'kings' as he called them), until packing them off to sea when the onset of puberty occurred."

### The Khalifa's rule

Gordon's ignominious defeat signalled the completion of the creation of the Mahdia as a national institution. The Mahdi established his headquarters in Khartoum, but did not live long thereafter. He died on June 22, 1885, and was succeeded by the Khalifa, who was to rule the Sudan until General Kitchener's forces invaded in 1898.

There was never any question as to who would succeed the Mahdi on his death. Modelling his reign on that of the Prophet, the Mahdi had named Khalifas (followers, or successors, deputies), and had designated Abdellahi b. Muhammed, as his successor in a proclamation on Jan. 26, 1883. But the consolidation of the national state was severely hindered by economic crises, in part triggered by the many years of a war economy, and aggravated by bad harvests leading to famine.

Following the Mahdi's death, Abdellahi organized the construction of a tomb and, across from it, the house and related buildings from which he was to rule united Sudan. Abdellahi, like the Mahdi, was acknowledged leader (after some initial clan conflicts) by the taking of an allegiance oath on the part of the leading tribes.

The state which the Mahdi had established had three institutional branches—the high command, the judiciary, and finances.

The Khalifa served also as the Commander of the Armies of the Mahdia, a kind of chief of staff, and, like the other khalifas, headed up a division of the army under his flag. Under the khalifas were the amirs, or commanders, who functioned as military governors. Under them were *muqaddams* or prefects, and the followers in general were known as *darawish* (dervishes). They dressed in the patched *jubba*, with a white turban and sandals, signs of simplicity and asceticism.

The financial organization of the Mahdia was based on two sources of revenue: booty of war and taxation. The Mahdi as Imam was to receive one-fifth of all booty taken in war. The other four-fifths were to be divided up "in accordance with the commandment of God and His Apostle" and distributed through the treasury to the needy. Furthermore, the *zakah*, a tax established as a tenet of Islam, was levied on the crops and the cattle of the tribes. Although taxes were thus

paid in kind, coined currency, issued by the Mahdia (a silver dollar and a gold pound) were used in trade.

The Mahdi (later the Khalifa) was the supreme judge of the judiciary, and his khalifas and emirs acted as judges on the provincial and local levels. The main focus of attention was the status of women and land ownership. In accordance with the *Shari'a* (Islamic law), laws were promulgated to legalize the status of women whose husbands had been killed in war, or whose marriages had otherwise been broken. Modesty in dress was prescribed for women, who were forbidden to roam through the marketplace. Regarding land, those dispossessed by the Turks were allowed to reclaim their land (going back seven years from 1885) and those who had abandoned their land because they could not pay excessive taxation to the Turks, were allowed to repurchase their land at the price given. Finally, the Mahdia fought with legal means against various popular superstitions, outlawing amulets and the like, as well as excessive wailing at funerals.

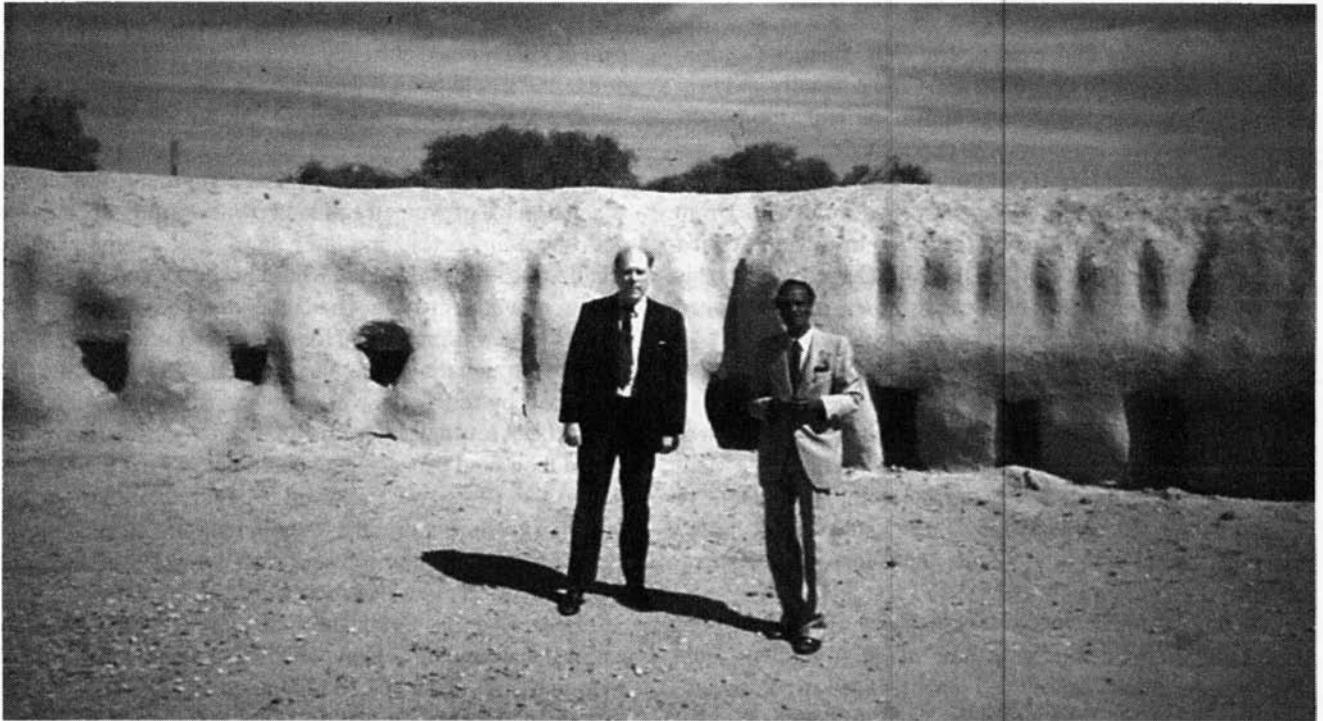
Tribal rivalries continued to threaten the integrity of the national state and throughout 1885-87, Abdullahi had to deal with uprisings from the Madibbu, the Salih, and the Fur tribesmen. His policy was to bring recalcitrant or hostile tribal leaders to Khartoum to thrash out differences, and win them over to the national cause. Those who refused the come to terms, were threatened with military might, and most acquiesced.

The Khalifa did not initially turn outward in search of military conquests. In 1889, however, he deployed his military commander al-Nujumi in an Egyptian campaign, which turned into disaster. Due to inferior logistics and supplies, the Mahdist campaign was defeated by the Anglo-Egyptian forces at Toshki in August 1889, which was to be a turning point for the Sudan.

The combination of military defeat and serious social problems deriving from the onset of famine due to a bad crop in 1888, led the Khalifa to make a number of economic policy shifts. He forbade the army from entering houses or damaging crops, and decreed that only licensed merchants could sell grain, in order to thwart black market tendencies, and to make sure that garrisons would be adequately supplied. He relaxed trade restrictions with Egypt, which helped alleviate scarcities, and led to the return of thousands of refugees from Egypt back to their homeland.

However, Lord Kitchener in August 1890 ordered that the port of Trinkitat, held by the Egyptians, be closed, and that grain shipments be blocked, under the pretext of a cholera scare. "It appears that cessation of supplies of grain from Suakin to the dervishes, owing to quarantine regulations, is having the effect anticipated, in breaking up the camp at Handub, as well as causing the Handub tribe to see the necessity of keeping on good terms with the government," Kitchener reported.

Despite this food warfare, and the general conditions of



*Lyndon LaRouche (left) with his host Abed el Rahman Abdulahi Mohamed El Khalifa of the National Board for Antiquities and Museums, a grandson of the Khalifa who fought the British during the last century. Here, the two are visiting the defensive lines of Sudanese resistance to the British on the Nile.*

dire need for the population, the Khalifa's rule was intact, largely because no matter how tough conditions were, they were certainly better than they had been under the Turks (via the Egyptians). As Sir Reginald Wingate, head of intelligence from Egypt, noted in 1892, a source named Mustafa al-Amin, a tradesman, stated that the Khalifa was trying to introduce "a more lenient and popular form of government," and that the Islamic monarchy, as he saw it, which had been installed there, was much preferred to the earlier condition under Egyptian rule. Mustafa gauged that the Sudanese, though in need, were optimistic about the future, and would, in the event of an invasion from Egypt, certainly rally to defend their nation.

The threat to Sudan came in 1890 from the east, where the Italians and Anglo-Egyptians had established a presence. The Italians had taken Eritrea in 1890, and in 1891 Tukar was occupied by the Anglo-Egyptians. In 1894, the Italians took Kassala. But the most important theater was in the south, in the Upper Nile, where the British-French conflict, which was to climax at Fashoda, was to be the backdrop for the Kitchener invasion of Sudan.

### **Kitchener's invasion**

After the 1881-82 nationalist uprising in Egypt under al-Arabi and the defeat of Gordon, the British were eager to deploy their military might to secure their strategic position in Egypt and Sudan. Furthermore, the British were fully

aware of the strategic importance of control over the Upper Nile: Who controls the Upper Nile controls Sudan and Egypt.

The British, who took over Egypt, and therefore its territories, in 1882, signed a deal in 1890 with the Germans, whereby a British sphere of influence was recognized over Uganda and Kenya. This area was said to go up to the western watershed of the Nile and "to the confines of Egypt" in the north.

The British decision to reconquer Dongola province was communicated in a telegram to Kitchener on March 13, 1896.

The French must have been fully aware of the British plan. The French counterplan was to ensure the survival of the Mahdia state, at least until France could secure its position in the Upper Nile. The French appear to have offered a protectorate not only to Abyssinia, but also to the Sudan of the Khalifa. During a secret audience, the Abyssinians handed over a French flag to the Khalifa telling him "to raise this flag on the frontiers of his kingdom in order to be an independent king in his kingdom and France would be a protection to him." The Khalifa did not accept the offer, because he was committed to an independent Sudan.

The British did not intend to strand Kitchener, as they had Gordon. Accordingly, to ensure supply lines, the British launched a railroad project to bring a line from the Red Sea to Abu Hamed, as a supply line for Kitchener's army. The British-Egyptian force was equipped with vastly superior military means.

Knowing that the attack was coming, the Khalifa had concentrated his forces in Omdurman and begun to fortify the city. Kitchener's forces advanced through Dongola province to Fort Atbara, where Kitchener attacked on Good Friday 1898. Despite their valorous resistance, the Sudanese, overwhelmed by superior military technology, were mowed down. More than 3,000 died and 4,000 were wounded, as contrasted to a reported 510 Anglo-Egyptian casualties.

In September 1898, as the French Capt. Jean-Baptiste Marchand was secure in Fashoda, the British marched hurriedly on Omdurman with 25,800 men. Kitchener had 44 guns and 20 machine guns on land, plus 36 guns and 24 machine-guns on the gunboats. The British had the Martini-Henry .450, fast-firing Maxim Nordenfeldts, and Krupp cannon. Despite their hopeless inferiority in weaponry, the Mahdist forces fought to the end. Their strategy was to attack, in three locations. In one phase of the battle, Osman Digna let a few of his forces (whom the British had dubbed the "Fuzzy Wuzzys," in their inimitable racism!) be seen by the British cavalry, to lure them into an attack. He knew that once they charged over the ground, his men (about 700), who were concealed in a ravine, could ambush them, confuse the cavalry, and engage the enemy in hand-to-hand combat. In the battle that followed, lances and spears against guns, there occurred 40% of all British casualties in the war.

When the British began bombarding Omdurman on Sept. 2, 1898, they took *the Mahdi's tomb* as their primary target! The British, with gunboats and machine guns, could not be stopped militarily. It is estimated that 11,000 were killed and 16,000 wounded in a few hours of British assault. The figures for the wounded have often been questioned, because it is well known that Kitchener's forces killed the wounded.

But when the British marched into Omdurman they found that the Khalifa had eluded them. Once in the city, they dug up the grave of the Mahdi, and Kitchener ordered that the body be burned. One version has it that Kitchener ordered the bones of the Mahdi to be thrown into the Nile and that he sent the skull of the Mahdi to the Royal Surgeons College, apparently to submit it to phrenological examinations. It is said that Her Majesty Queen Victoria didn't take to the idea, and ordered the skull buried. Other accounts have it that Kitchener had the head buried at Wadi Halfa, the border town with Egypt. On Sept. 4, 1898, Kitchener's crew held memorial services for Gordon. On Sept. 5, they tried to capture the Khalifa, but failed.

In January 1899, Kitchener's forces signed the Condominium Agreement with Boutros-Ghali, grandfather of the current secretary general of the United Nations. Revolts in both Sudan and Egypt followed; the British realized that unless they killed the Khalifa, they would not be able to subdue the territories taken. In November 1899, Wingate went with a well-equipped force of 3,700 men to Jadid and Um Dibekrat, where they located the Khalifa. The Khalifa withdrew with his closest followers and placed himself upon

his prayer rug. According to an account in *Sudanow*, his 2,000 combat troops attacked Wingate's vastly superior forces. The Khalifa, together with his amirs Ali Wad Hilu, Ahmad Fadil, Bashir Ajab Al-Fiya, Hamid Ali, Sidig Ibn Mahdi, and Haroun Mohammed were all machine-gunned down as they prayed. Another of the khalifas, Mohammed Sherif, who was the Mahdi's son-in-law, was arrested together with two of the Mahdi's sons, by the British in August 1899. They were accused of a conspiracy to reinstate the Mahdia, and were promptly executed; they were probably innocent.

Wingate, Director of Intelligence from 1899, who accompanied Kitchener into Sudan, was reportedly "obsessed" by the Mahdia, and directed a propaganda war to inflame the passions of ordinary Britons, to support the genocidal attack against Sudan. To accomplish this, he organized publishers who would put out memoirs of Europeans who had been taken captive by the Mahdia, including the opportunist Slatin (*Fire and Sword*, 1896), the priest Ohrwalder (*Aufstand und Reich des Mahdi and Ten Years Captivity*, 1892), Rosignoli, and many others. Referring to the crisis in the Sudan in 1896 at the time the book Wingate co-authored with Slatin appeared, it is related that the publisher told his wife, "It is a joke between myself and my partner here that Major Wingate has fomented this just at the right time by means of his secret agents!"

As for Kitchener, one of the many adulatory accounts of the late Lord, called *With Kitchener to Khartoum*, published by G.W. Stevens, in 1899, paints the picture of a superman, "over six feet, straight as a lance. . . . His precision is so inhumanly unerring, he is more like a machine than a man. . . . So far as Egypt is concerned he is the man of destiny—the man who has been preparing himself 16 years for one great purpose. For Anglo-Egypt he is the Mahdi, the expected; the man . . . who has cut out his human heart and made himself a machine to retake Khartoum." The last characterization apparently refers to Kitchener's famous disregard for the condition of men in battle, whether in his own army or that of the enemy.

According to the previously cited Ronald Hyam, Kitchener was one of the many "inveterate bachelors" that filled Her Majesty's foreign service. "Kitchener was a man whose sexual instincts were wholly sublimated in work; he admitted few distractions and 'thereby reaped an incalculable advantage in competition with his fellows.' There is no evidence that he ever loved a woman; his male friendships were few but fervent; from 1907 until his death his constant and inseparable companion was Capt. O.A.G. FitzGerald who devoted his entire life to Kitchener. He had no use for married men on his staff. Only young officers were admitted to his house—'my happy family of boys' he called them; he avoided interviews with women, worshipped Gordon, cultivated great interest in the Boy Scout movement, took a fancy to Bothas's son and the sons of Lord Desborough, and embellished his rose garden with four pairs of sculptured bronze boys."