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General historical background

The year is 1883 in the Country of the Sudan, which was then under the control of Egypt. An uprising has taken place led by a man called the Mahdi who had inspired his followers to rise up and throw off the shackles of Egyptian oppression.

Poorly led and trained Egyptian forces had suffered defeat after defeat at the hands of the Mahdi and now even Egypt itself was threatened. Apart from the capital city of Khartoum and a few other larger towns, the Country was all but under Mahdist control and nothing was looking like stopping its total conquest.

Britain at this time had a major influence on Egyptian foreign policy and advocated a withdrawal from the Sudan, as it had no desire to get involved in another costly colonial war.

One of those larger towns mentioned above still holding out against the Mahdi’s forces was the Red Sea port of Suakin.

The defence of this in 1883 was carried out by poorly led and equipped Egyptian troops, and some recently landed British Naval detachments, who had added their ships guns to its defence.

The British thought it best to hold the port should the evacuation of Egyptian troops and officials from the Sudan be thought necessary and then later as a base for operations against the Mahdi.

In 1884 Charles Gordon was sent to Khartoum to organise the evacuation of the city, but like all good Victorian heroes, he decided not to evacuate but stay and hold it.
The British Government, due to overwhelming public opinion in having shamefully left an Englishman to fend for himself all alone in a foreign land, without one British soldier to offer him succour, were eventually forced into trying to rescue Gordon. A British column was sent to fight its way across the Sudan and then race up the Nile to Khartoum in a gunboat. However, despite many heroics from would be British rescuers and the Mahdi’s followers, they were two days late, as Khartoum had fallen on January 25-26 1885.

Some years later the Sudan was invaded by a large Anglo British army all keen as mustard to avenge Gordon and restore their own form of order over the Country.