

Sudan: Al-Bashir on Sanctions, Regional Relations

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(Interview with Sudanese President Lieutenant General 'Umar al-Bashir by Sa'id Muhammad al-Hasan in Khartoum; date not given)

(FBIS Translated Text) (al-Hasan) The government has emphasized its eagerness to improve and strengthen Sudan's foreign relations but it seems that Security Council Resolutions 1044 and 1054 will prevent that. How can openness to the outside world be achieved?

(Al-Bashir) There are numerous circles of foreign relations -- African, Arab, and Asian. We have plans for movement in all these directions. Foreign relations are certainly wider and more comprehensive than all that because they cover all the diplomatic, political, economic, commercial, cultural, and technical aspects. Despite the Security Council's resolution imposing some measures, we feel that many states have not implemented it because they are not convinced of its causes. Some Security Council members even believe that Sudan was punished without evidence.

We can say that the recent Security Council resolution showed the extent of the injustice to Sudan and led to sympathy with it making it possible to exploit that sympathy in expressing its own view regarding these measures. So far, the Arab and African states are maintaining the same level of relations with us. We have received nothing to indicate that they are implementing these measures.

Furthermore, the resolution does not prevent improvement of relations. There are signs pointing in that direction. On our visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia we managed to achieve positive results removing all the blemishes in Sudanese-Saudi relations. We hope they will flourish in the interest and for the good of both peoples and countries.

(Al-Hasan) Have there been contacts with Kuwait?

(Al-Bashir) Our endeavors continued with Kuwait for the normalization of relations following the setback in these relations as a result of the Gulf war and other factors. Our efforts to improve relations with other states are continuing.

(Al-Hasan) When Salim Ahmad Salim, secretary general of the OAU, came over he warned the Sudanese Government of the consequences of falling into the web of the international sanctions scenario because of the difficulty of coming out of it. Do you expect more sanctions?

(Al-Bashir) Sudan has been punished without evidence.

We do not rule out the possibility that the same forces which were behind that measure would impose punishment but we will continue to move to expose the plotting against Sudan and to convince others of the injustice done to Sudan, which should be lifted. Our aim will be to explain the situation on the basis of facts.

(Al-Hasan) The U.S. Administration has its own agenda and its own charges against Sudan, pertaining to terrorism, human rights, pluralism, and democracy. How do you deal with it?

(Al-Bashir) The Americans have talked about terrorism without evidence. We have held several dialogues with them and asked them about their evidence. You cannot make accusations without evidence. When the incident of the assassination attempt on President Husni Mubarak occurred in the summer of 1995 they found the pretext they were looking for and stuck to it.

It is clear that the matter of that attempt was geared to be exploited against Sudan. And so came the escalation by Ethiopia and Egypt who hoped that Africa, through the OAU, would play that role. The mechanism for the settlement of disputes was activated so that Sudan would be charged and condemned. The case was submitted to it without the approval of the second party, namely Sudan, and without its presence, invitation, or notification even though it was the accused party. The indictment was made by the mechanism committee in our absence. When we acted and exposed the erroneous measures and an OAU delegation came to Khartoum and made inquiries and held meetings, and when we attended the second meeting of the mechanism committee, the result was positive and the mechanism committee was convinced that there was no case to answer, but it asked Sudan to search for the suspects and hand them over to Ethiopia if found.

The forces behind Resolution 1054, however, felt that that mechanism did not achieve what they wanted and were hoping for, and took the file to the Security Council. The United States was behind that issue and it pushed Ethiopia and Egypt into it, but in the end the Egyptian position on the sanctions changed. They were the ones who had sponsored the sanctions issue. When the nonaligned states refused, the United States intervened and imposed the recent resolution. The Americans are not happy about

Sudan's position of independence dating back to the Gulf war when it opposed the interference of U.S. forces in the region.

(Al-Hasan) Does Sudan's position on the Middle East peace process have anything to do with it?

(Al-Bashir) There is a Sudanese position on the Middle East. On the Palestinian question, we believe that some Arab territories are still occupied. We have no reason to work for the normalization of relations with Israel. The claims that have been made are unfounded. I sent envoys, delegations, and messages to a number of capitals in the course of the campaign and moves against Security Council Resolution 1044.

(Al-Hasan) What is the latest regarding your invitation to fraternal Egypt to enter into a dialogue to resolve the differences?

(Al-Bashir) We have demonstrated clear intentions for the improvement of relations with Egypt and we have shown sufficient goodwill. Now it can be said that the ball or the matter is in the Egyptian court.

(Al-Hasan) You have also called for the improvement of relations with the neighboring states but, according to some reports, the borders with Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Uganda are on fire and there are military concentrations.

What are your plans?

(Al-Bashir) We are convinced that the states hostile to Sudan are the states which have links with the United States. We have nine neighboring states. Excluding those three states, we have excellent relations with Kenya, Zaire, Chad, Central Africa, and Libya. It is clear from the provocations of the three states that they are under U.S. influence, but our efforts to improve relations with the neighboring countries will continue because the security of the region is an integral process and, despite the instability or the attempt to destabilize Sudan, that process is important for the region. The fact is that we are neighbors and our fate is to cooperate in the region and to use the resources and capabilities to serve the interests of the peoples of the region. We should realize that going along with foreign designs serves neither national nor regional interests.

(Al-Hasan) How do you view the killing of the French monks?

(Al-Bashir) We are against violence, assassination, hostage-taking, and indiscriminate killing. That is against Islamic principles. Islam has clear principles. The killing of hostages, ambassadors, or envoys is against and runs contrary to Islam, its values, and

its teachings. Such actions are alien to Islam and its good values. We see such actions as a distortion of Islam and they are harmful to Islam, giving others who are opposed to Islam an excuse to attack Islam and link it to terrorism. Islam is a religion of tolerance and humanity. Even in the days of the old Islamic conquests, and with the admission of their enemies, Muslims were more tolerant with them. Islam does not condone or accept what has happened.

(Al-Hasan) After the presidential elections and the meetings with the political and ideological forces, observers expected broad participation in the government to tackle current problems. What prevented that?

(Al-Bashir) After the elections and the announcement of the results, which proved categorically that the people are behind the Salvation, we promised to open the way for consultation, which is a basic principle and feature of the Islamic nation -- "and they should consult among themselves on their affairs" (Koranic verse) -- we heard the views of various people and their assessment of the past and visions of the future. The views were sometimes identical and sometimes opposite or different. Meetings have been held in the context of the possible start of a dialogue. We were in disagreement on some basics in these talks but we do not say that this is the end of the road, for we and those we met with were in agreement on the importance of that approach and the need to continue with it on all these issues. I believe that consultation and listening to various views is important, especially in the case of those with some experience. The dialogue will, therefore, continue and we have no barri(Al-Hasan) Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, former prime minister and leader of the Ummah Party, has stated that his meeting with you was the summit of the will for understanding but did not provide any opportunity for achieving a political solution for the time being. What is your comment?

(Al-Bashir) There was a dialogue and views were expressed. The dialogue will remain open. We agreed not to give details of what went on between us because we wanted to avoid exaggeration. We also agreed that our points of disagreement would remain open to discussion and what we agree upon would be announced openly.

(Al-Hasan) The peace charter the government signed with the faction of Machar and Carabino covered points addressed in previous conferences and agreements, such as the referendum. Why was it not proposed to all the forces concerned?

(Al-Bashir) From the beginning, we made efforts to establish peace, and we persevered but the attempts showed that collective agreement was difficult. At the second Abuja meeting no agreement was reached but the process for the establishment of peace continues and contacts are also continuing, and that includes the John Garang faction.

There has been no rejection of the peace charter except out of stubbornness. There will be peace, God willing.

(Al-Hasan) What are your plans for ending or easing economic pressure on the public who have suffered much from that?

(Al-Bashir) On the question of the economic pressures, it is a question of inflation and the causes are clear and are to be found in the balance of payments deficit. We are trying to increase revenues and reduce demand for foreign currencies, and we are also endeavoring to activate exports and find new markets with new exports.

We are also encouraging Sudanese expatriates to transfer some of their income to the country, that is Sudan is offering them favorable rates. Hence the creation of the foreign currency exchange centers. These were criticized but the aim is clear. They now have clear hard currency income and have stabilized exchange rates. We will continue to assess development plans and to have special priorities to lessen the demand for dollars and reduce import of luxury goods. We are also trying to remedy the question of the oil bill. The policy on provision of oil has achieved tangible success over the past seven years and the waiting lines and congestion have disappeared. As far as the general budget is concerned, we are trying to cut government expenditure and program the necessities, and we are also trying to increase revenues by expanding the tax umbrella to include sectors that were not covered before, in order to bridge the gap. The electricity subsidy is a very great concern because it reach (Al-Hasan) There have been many reports about Sudanese oil. When will it reach the filling stations?

(Al-Bashir) There have been reports about oil indeed.

Refining will begin end of June 1996 at al-Abyad refinery with production of 10,000 barrels and at Khartoum refinery with production of 5,000 barrels. Massive efforts are being made in developing fields and building roads in muddy areas which have high technical and financial requirements, and in the maintenance of railroads in al-Muglad and al-Abyad, and the same goes for river transport. Certainly, the start of production will cut the oil imports bill and the electricity bill. We hope that production will increase to 70,000 barrels within two years once the al-Abyad pipeline is completed. After achieving self-sufficiency we will move to the stage of export, God willing.

(Al-Hasan) The recent cases of deaths in the operations room of the Khartoum Hospital reflected a deterioration in medical services as well as an increase in the cost of treatment. What measures have you taken to tackle that problem?

(Al-Bashir) Indeed, the cost of treatment has become very high and the state is trying to cover a part of the cost. We may perhaps recall that when the Salvation Front took over it found the capital's main hospitals in semi-collapse. It made great efforts and made major financial allocations for the maintenance of these hospitals but, most regrettably, after billions were spent it was clear that the failure was administrative.

We will remedy that, especially in the major hospitals. A health security plan is being envisaged to provide free treatment, and a special body has been formed for all participants.

(Al-Hasan) After years of National Salvation rule, how do you assess the Front's performance?

(Al-Bashir) If we are to speak very briefly we would speak about the basics and about the important matter of security. What is a human being's life without security?

That is what the Salvation Front provided, security, and it broke the back of the mutiny and liberated very vast areas in the south, and even in the north in Darfur. That is a clear achievement.

We must remember that when the Salvation Front came in June 1989 Sudan was a "famine state" suffering difficulties and a high cost of living.

Now Sudan is different from that famine state, and the deterioration has been stopped. The state has urged farmers to expand and increase production, and it has supported producers. The countryside is now different from what it used to be. It now has wealth and we have followed a special policy to protect the consumers in the cities.

Now expansion is under way in medical services, and whatever is said about bad conditions, a comparison of the number of beds in the hospitals with the number before the Salvation rule would show the extent of the expansion that has occurred in that field where new hospitals, complexes, and treatment centers have emerged. There has also been expansion in the field of general education and secondary and higher education as well as university education.

As far as the infrastructures are concerned, numerous roads have been built in many areas of Sudan.

More roads are under construction in northern and western areas, and there have been repairs on the Khartoum- Madani road and the Khartoum-Port Sudan road. A number of airports have also been built at Port Sudan, Danaqilah, al- Fashir, and Nyala. We have also expanded sea ports and equipped Sawakin port which now receives ships.

Work is now in progress on raising the level of al- Rusayris dam, maintaining the Sanar dam, and deepening the al-Hamdab and al-Jabbar dams. Shipping movement has been secured. Tractors now reach areas in the south. Trains now reach Waw. They were all at a standstill before 30 June 1989.

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