

Sudan: Sudan Minister on South, Foreign Relations

London al-Sharq al-Awsat in Arabic 9 Aug 98 p 6

AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT

Saturday, August 15, 1998

Journal Code: 1431 **Language:** ENGLISH **Record Type:** FULLTEXT

Document Type: Daily Report; News

Word Count: 1,769

Report by Muhammad Sa'id Muhammad al-Hasan in Khartoum

Dr. Ghazi Salah-al-Din, Sudanese Government official spokesman and information and culture minister, has stated that the period after the promulgation of the constitution is not an interim period and that there is no intention to hold parliamentary or presidential elections at present.

The minister stressed that the government did not interrupt its contacts with the political figures in and outside Sudan whether directly or through mediators.

Salah-al-Din said that military operations in the south are completely under control and that the situation in general is reassuring. He said that the failure of the recent negotiations with Garang's movement, the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement, does not mean that steps toward peace will not be taken and that no new methods will be adopted to achieve the aspired objective. He described Ethiopian President Isaias Afworke as conceited and suffering from two complexes. He views his country as playing the same role in the region as Israel is playing in the Middle East.

He denied that Egyptian-Sudanese relations have gone back to square one. He said that for our part, we did all that we can do and say. We do not antagonize the United States and we are eager to build constructive and fruitful relations with it.

He made these statements in an interview with Al-Sharq al-Awsat in which he discussed many domestic, regional, and international issues. On the post constitution promulgation stage and the fact that no changes have been made during that stage, the Sudanese minister said: Laws need efforts and time to be implemented and the implementation of the constitution requires many changes and developments which in turn need laws to regulate them, such as the law on local government. The need arises sometimes to issue new laws like the law on political groupings which defines rights and obligations. As stipulated in the constitution, this law will specify how any group or party can organize itself in accordance with this law. He added that the period which followed the promulgation of the constitution is not a transition period or a new era as the transition period means passing from one era to the other. The present state of affairs is just to bolster the present institutions that are elected on. On an initiative by

the government to achieve national accord or Sudanese national unity, Salah-al-Din said that the Government used to make initiatives in deeds and not words to unite the Sudanese people. In his speeches and interviews, President al-Bashir has been calling on the Sudanese residing abroad to return to the sound path. For its part, the state has secured liberties, including the right to grouping within whose framework national work is allowed, and opened the doors for constructive participation.

The minister stressed that talks between the government and the political figures in and outside Sudan whether directly or through mediators have not been interrupted and contacts with many political groupings continue to take place.

On the situation in the south, Dr. Salah-al-Din explained that the military operations are under complete control and added that this alone is a positive step.

At the same time, he added, the situation is returning to normal in the southern states. Mr. Salah-al-Din added that this is necessary as it creates a suitable atmosphere that will enable the southern states governments carry out their responsibilities and tasks, particularly those of enhancing the concept of peace. He explained that this concept should also be supported by productive work and that these regions which suffered from the disasters of war should be developed.

He added: As for the negotiations with the Garang movement, we can say that its observance of the cease-fire is a positive stand though conditions were set with respect to the time and place. We can also say that the approach of the parties participating and following up the negotiations began to change in favor of understanding the government's stand and proposal for negotiations. On this basis, we hope that the current round of negotiations with the Garang movement will be much more successful than previous ones, and I can say we are optimistic.

On whether the round of talks with the Garang movement in Addis Ababa will be final or decisive, Dr.Salah-al-Din said: We heard IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) officials say that the current round of talks will be decisive. As for the Sudanese Government, it will adopt a stand that is in line with the progress of the negotiations. If it finds out that there will be no chance for any progress in the future, then it might stop taking part in these negotiations. At the same time, we are very much concerned with achieving peace. Signing agreements with the other factions in the southern region is a proof to that.

We also adopted flexible stands in the previous rounds of talks. This is an indication that we are ready for peace. Even if the IGAD abandons its initiative to end the war and achieve peace in the south, this does not mean that we will stop adopting steps towards peace or new methods to achieve the aspired objectives.

On the expansion of IGAD's umbrella to include other countries, he said that the government does not mind expanding the IGAD umbrella whether through increasing its members or observers. He added that on our part we are not against that.

Asked about the stand of a few IGAD Members which Khartoum views as hostile such as the Eritrean and Ugandan stands, the Sudanese information minister said: We have expressed reservations toward these countries.

Unfortunately, these countries have not only adopted a biased stand, but have also encouraged the war by supporting the rebels. We in fact depend on the stands of the wise members of the IGAD, particularly on Kenya's President Daniel Arap Moi to end the belligerence of these countries and to maintain the independence of the IGAD initiative. We also hope that the negotiations will be transparent so that the world will stand witness to our stands and intentions. This alone will prevent the IFAD initiative from deviating from its course to serve the hostile objectives of some member states.

Salah-al-Din accused the Eritrean President Isaias Afworki of suffering from two complexes. One of them is conceit that incites him to attack others. He has attacked all his neighbors like Sudan, Yemen, Djibouti, and Ethiopia. The second complex is that he believes that his country plays the same role Israel is playing in the Middle East region and that's why he has established special relations with Israel. He believes that he is the protector of western interests in the region, particularly by being hostile to the Arabs. He added: We do not expect an end to his fierce hostility against Sudan if these complexes are not overcome.

On Sudan's relations with Egypt and whether they have gone back to square one he said that Sudan's relations with Egypt did not go back to square one but there are still many differences to be overcome and many points to be clarified. He said: We focused on the strategic side of our bilateral relations embodied in our common fate and interests and common factors that we share. Therefore, temporary differences do not scare us and we hope that Egypt thinks the same thing. On how true are the reports that the Sudanese Government intends to ask Egypt to hand over a number of those involved in the recent bomb attacks in the capital, the government's official spokesman said that these kinds of issues are subject to legal procedures and specifying the charges against those involved. Also, the court sessions on the recent bomb blasts have not yet started and will not start before the completion of the legal procedures. Therefore, from a legal point of view, we will not demand the handing over

On the diplomatic level, he said, we explained to our brothers in Egypt our point of view that it is not in the interest of the two countries to allow those who resort to terrorism and violence as a course of action to work in the political arena.

On Egyptian Foreign Minister 'Amr Musa's recent statement that Egypt is committed to the strategic relations with Sudan and that Egypt will undertake an initiative for a reconciliation between the Sudanese Government and the opposition in Sudan, Dr. Salah-al-Din said: We appreciate the Egyptian foreign minister's concern for the strategic side of the bilateral relations and we thank God that he pursues this line and has not abandoned the concept that Egyptian-Sudanese relations are strategic ones.

Salah al-Din added: As for the Egyptian initiative to mediate between the Sudanese Government and the political factions, we have not heard about such an initiative. However, our stand is clear, he added. We, as a government, held a dialogue with our most lethal enemies, with those with whom we have entered into a war. We have told them that they can exercise their rights under the constitution if they abandon war and violence. What actually applies to John Garang applies to others as well. In principle, all factions and citizens abroad have the right to return home and the right to exercise what they find suitable so long as they adhere to the basics of a political course of action. On this basis, we have no objection to hold talks with anybody, regardless of the stand he might adopt against the regime. In any case, there are no direct initiatives made apart from the statements made.

On the give and take policy in the US-Sudanese relations, he said that Washington has the answer to this question. He added: On our part, we will not be the aggressors and will not take any measure in return for the series of measures and punishments adopted against us. Though they have not affected us, these measures have spoiled the essence of the dialogue.

We believe that the US Administration is still overwhelmed by the feeling of victory over Communism and it is not yet in the mood to negotiate with Sudan. He ended his statements by saying that in principle Sudan is not against the United States and seeks to build fruitful and good relations with it. We have done all that we can in words and deeds with respect to these bilateral relations.

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AFS Document Number: DRAFR08151998000092

City/Source: London al-Sharq al-Awsat

Descriptors: FBIS Translated Text

FBIS Document Number: FBIS-AFR-98-227

Geographic Names: Sub-Saharan Africa; East Africa; Sudan
NewsEdge Document Number: 200303261477.1_c0ab00839bccff0e
Original Source Language: Arabic; Article_Type BFN
Region: Sub-Saharan Africa
WNC Document Number: 0EXWCI900ROYL5
WNC Insert Date: August 18, 1998

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Dialog® File Number 985 Accession Number 84400348

