

Sudanese Foreign Minister on Deployment of UN Troops in Darfur, US Sanctions

Interview with Sudanese Foreign Minister Lam Akol by Michel Abu-Najm in Paris; date not given: "Sudanese Foreign Minister: We Categorically Reject UN Troops Under Chapter 7"

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(Abu-Najm) There is a feeling that there is ambiguity or hesitation in the Sudanese Government's stance on the issue of deploying UN troops in Darfur. Does the Sudanese Government have one or several positions on this issue?

(Akol) We have one clear and unambiguous position on this issue. The issue of replacing the African Union (AU) forces by UN troops was raised in January but that was associated with questions and doubts by some parties, including the Sudanese Government. You know that pressures were put on the AU to issue a decision transferring its mandate to the UN troops, but the AU does not have the power to turn a bilateral agreement between it and Sudan into an agreement with another party. A problem then occurred because the AU's decision said it supported this transfer in principle but it did not issue a statement stressing the need to make this transfer. Our reservation stemmed from the fact that the UN resolutions were based on this ambiguous paragraph. Also the UN Security Council has absolutely not consulted with the Sudanese Government before issuing its resolutions. This led to many suspicions. We ask: Why has the UN Security Council not consulted with us? Therefore, we rejected the UN Security Council resolution on the entry of UN troops and so did the National Assembly (parliament). We have earlier announced that after signing the Darfur peace agreement we will not object to negotiations with the United Nations in order to know the role it wants to play in implementing the peace agreement, but the agreement gave the AU's forces the role of supervising the implementation of security arrangements as stated in the agreement. Therefore, when demand for a UN Security Council role increased, we expressed our surprise for the clear reason that that demand preceded the peace agreement. The agreement did not take note of this although the organizations and countries concerned with the UN Security Council resolution were there in Abuja to sign the peace agreement. They were there but the agreement did not talk about a role by the UN troops.

(Abu-Najm) What is the truth now about Sudan's position on the deployment of UN troops in Darfur?

(Akol) The Sudanese Government wants to know the role the UN troops will play and whether this is part of the peace agreement. It wants to know the required troops and what is needed for implementation. These are the details we are today discussing with the United Nations. For the first time there is now direct dialogue between Sudan and the UN Security Council.

(Abu-Najm) This means that you in principle have no reservations about the dispatch of UN troops to Darfur.

(Akol) The security arrangements -- ceasing fire and overseeing its implementation and filling the security gap -- are part of the Darfur peace agreement. As I said, these tasks are entrusted to the AU forces. We want to know if the UN troops will interfere in the security arrangements. We also want to know the purpose.

(Abu-Najm) This is a legal excuse. What are the political reasons for Sudan's rejection of the UN troops?

(Akol) We rejected the deployment plans due to the background I have just explained and due to the ambiguity engulfing the situation. Dialogue took place via the news media although we stressed the need to discuss the issue directly with the United Nations.

(Abu-Najm) As a sovereign country, do you have fears about the deployment of UN troops?

(Akol) We do not have fears, but as a sovereign country we have the right to decide who comes to our country and who does not. There is caution. I remind you that when we called for a UN role in the south, we defined this role and the size of the forces and the places of their deployment. Now if the United Nations wants to play a role in Darfur, it has to discuss with us the tasks of the force, its size, its deployment, and so forth. Based on this discussion, we can say if we agree or not.

(Abu-Najm) This means there is no rejection in principle.

(Akol) Yes, in principle there is no rejection. This role must be discussed so that agreement can be reached between the two sides (Sudan and the UN Security Council).

(Abu-Najm) Some in Sudan talk about the return of colonialism, violation of sovereignty, and other such things.

(Akol) The Sudanese Government has categorically rejected a role by the United Nations under Chapter 7. But it is possible for the United Nations to play a role in supervising the implementation of the peace agreement after holding negotiations with us.

(Abu-Najm) Will rejection of the UN troops under Chapter 7 be valid tomorrow as it was valid yesterday?

(Akol) This is completely rejected and out of the question after signing the peace agreement (on Darfur).

(Abu-Najm) Will Sudan ask for assurances or set some conditions for its acceptance of a security role?

(Akol) We are not talking about assurances but are discussing the details of this role.

(Abu-Najm) Why are the countries with which you are negotiating not convinced of Sudan's reasons? Have you succeeded in convincing French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy of the soundness of your position?

(Akol) Some countries had certain positions and we explained the situation. They are convinced that there should be dialogue between the United Nations and Sudan on any UN role in Darfur.

(Abu-Najm) Negotiations began in Asmara between the Sudanese Government and a delegation representing the Eastern Front. Do you think it is possible to reach agreement?

(Akol) Had there been no hope of reaching agreement, negotiations would not have been held.

(Abu-Najm) Do you count on a positive role by Eritrea?

(Akol) Yes, Eritrea plays the role of mediator. Agreement has been reached with the Eritrean president on the way to reach a negotiated solution in eastern Sudan.

(Abu-Najm) How do you conceive this solution?

(Akol) I do not want to talk about issues under discussion. The Sudanese negotiators are fully authorized to hold negotiations with the other party in order to reach an agreement that spares Sudan trouble. I do not want to get into the details.

(Abu-Najm) But what is the form of a possible solution in general?

(Akol) We want a comprehensive peace agreement to solve all Sudanese issues. This is the same framework within which we worked to reach a solution in Darfur and this will be the basis of a solution in the east.

(Abu-Najm) Is the government ready to respond to the demands of the Eastern Front?

(Akol) I do not want to anticipate events.

(Abu-Najm) Will the nonparticipation of the Justice and Equality Movement in the negotiations weaken the chances of reaching a solution?

(Akol) This movement has no role to play in the east. It was one of the factions which negotiated in Abuja on the issue of Darfur, but it is not at all expected to play a role or participate in the eastern negotiations.

(Abu-Najm) Are you satisfied with the way the peace agreement which put an end to war in the south is implemented?

(Akol) The implementation of the agreement is carried out by the two sides of the national unity government -- the (Sudan) People's (Liberation) Movement and the National Congress. We know that no agreement can be implemented on the basis of an advance concept. For example, only 30 percent of the funds they promised us in Oslo reached the World Bank. There was commitment to pay these funds in order to implement the agreement. Not paying leads to a delay in deadlines and commitments. We have discovered that some of the deadlines we reached in Naivasha are difficult to meet. Real problems are facing the implementation of the agreement. The two sides realize that there is a delay in implementing the agreement, but this does not undermine the two sides' determination to fully implement the agreement. Therefore, the two sides met at the end of May to discuss the way to overcome difficulties and expedite implementation. There is full commitment to a complete implementation.

(Abu-Najm) How would you describe your current relations with Washington?

(Akol) Our relations are difficult. The US Government promised us a great deal when we were holding negotiations on a comprehensive peace agreement. They promised to lift the (economic) sanctions, upgrade diplomatic representation, and extend much humanitarian and economic aid, but nothing took place after signing the agreement. On the contrary, the US language toward us became unfriendly and Washington found in the situation in Darfur an excuse and said a peace agreement should be reached in Darfur.

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