

## **Sudanese President Al-Bashir on National Reconciliation, Relations with Egypt, USA**

*Cairo Akhbar al-Yawm in Arabic 21 Jul 01 p 5*

**AKHBAR AL-YAWM**

*Saturday, July 21, 2001*

**Journal Code:** 640 **Language:** ENGLISH **Record Type:** FULLTEXT

**Document Type:** Daily Report; News

**Word Count:** 1,509

Interview with Sudanese President Umar al-Bashir by Muhammad al-Sharaydi in Khartoum; date not given

(FBIS Translated Text) In an exclusive interview with Akhbar al-Yawm, Sudanese President Umar al-Bashir announced that he expects all Sudanese factions to take part in a national reconciliation conference within three weeks. He stressed that the Sudanese people are anxious to find out the outcome of this conference and hoping that a solution would be found for the problem of the civil war in the south. He emphasized that US-Sudanese relations are constantly improving and that the US administration has revised its position on Sudan. He also pointed out that Egypt played a key role in persuading the US administration to revise this position.

President Al-Bashir said Shaykh Hasan al-Turabi (Chairman of the People's National Congress Party) would be released if he cancelled his agreement with (the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement) John Garang against the Sudanese government. He also announced that the issue of visas between Egypt and Sudan would be resolved soon through a special agreement and that new Egyptian consulates would be opened in various parts of Sudan. The following is the full text of the interview.

(Al-Sharaydi) What are the latest results of the Egyptian-Libyan initiative and what practical steps will be taken to implement it?

(Al-Bashir) The initiative proceeded in such a fashion that might have surprised observers because of the great confidence in its co-sponsors, sisterly Egypt and Libya. The initiative proposed the final nine principles after studying various other plans. The main obstacle was the lack of trust and the general tension that surrounded these plans and prevented them from achieving positive results.

There is great confidence in the two sponsors of the joint initiative, Egypt under the leadership of brother President Husni Mubarak and sisterly Libya under the leadership of the brother leader Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi. The Sudanese people have embraced this initiative in an amazing way without comments or complications. This will accelerate

the subsequent practical steps. Now that all the parties concerned have approved the declaration of principles, everybody is prepared and we, in Sudan, are ready to sit at the negotiating table within 24 hours. This spirit has helped the co-sponsors of the initiative cut many procedures short. There is no need for a preparatory or preliminary meeting before convening a comprehensive reconciliation conference. Many of these steps could be ignored in order to hold direct talks on reconciliation. The co-sponsors of the initiative have been consulted and they agreed to do this.

(Al-Sharaydi) Has a date been fixed for the start of negotiations and at what point will they start?

(Al-Bashir) We, in the Sudanese government and the existing political parties inside Sudan, are ready to engage in negotiations immediately, but we expect the actual talks to begin no later than three weeks from now.

(Al-Sharaydi) Mr. President, do you think that the quick approval of the initiative's principles reflected tactical positions of hidden agendas as some Sudanese political observers say?

(Al-Bashir) So far, we have sensed a great deal of seriousness from all factions, but as the Arab public opinion realizes, John Garang has had some reservations. We are not completely confident about his position, but all the others are taking this issue seriously and responsibly.

(Al-Sharaydi) Colonel Al-Qadhafi announced that during his recent meeting with Garang, a new tendency to reach a cease-fire agreement and end the conflict emerged. What do you think?

(Al-Bashir) In the course of the recent Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), which was held in Nairobi, Garang came and the Sudanese government proposed a comprehensive cease-fire. All the IGAD member states sympathized with this proposal, but he rejected it. A few days later, he attacked new areas and displaced many families who fled to refugee camps. We do not trust Garang's statements. He has many problems nowadays and many southern people are against him because they have their own political agendas. Moreover, many of the parties that used to support him have started to distance themselves from him. However, we take the statements of the brother leader Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi seriously and we will study them together with our previous experiences with Garang.

The brother Colonel Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi conducted important contacts with African leaders and Sudan's neighbors to secure their support for the joint initiative. Such

efforts compliment the role of the initiative, which addresses all the people of north and south Sudan.

(Al-Sharaydi) Will the IGAD peace plan have any role in the coming stage?

(Al-Bashir) IGAD has a role to play and we have gone a long way in this direction. We have reached good results that could be built upon to highlight the good positions of our neighboring states. However, the IGAD plan has run into well-known obstacles and we are trying to use the results of the joint initiative because the IGAD plan addresses only the problem of the south.

(Al-Sharaydi) Have the relations between Sudan and the United States witnessed any new changes? Did Arab efforts have anything to do with these changes?

(Al-Bashir) We sense a great US interest in Sudan and its problems nowadays. We also sense the US administration's willingness to participate in solving those problems. The previous administration did not want to deal with Sudan, but the current administration brought a new vision and revised US stances vis- -vis Africa in general and Sudan in particular. Moreover, the US administration used to shape its relations with us in accordance with the pressure applied by certain influential groups whose interests and agenda were placed ahead of US interests. Those groups have tarnished Sudan's image and undermined US relations with Sudan. Now, the current administration is reassessing these relations. Many Arab countries played key roles in changing the US point of view, foremost among which were Egypt, Jordan and Morocco. They have managed to explain the Sudanese stances and improve the negative US views about Sudan.

(Al-Sharaydi) The secretary-general of the ruling Sudanese party stated that the success of the joint initiative hinges on the release of Shaykh Hasan al-Turabi. Do you think this is true?

(Al-Bashir) I do not think a statement like this was made. We hope that all Sudanese parties would embrace the joint initiative with sincere and honest intentions. As far as we know, Shaykh al-Turabi and the People's National Congress Party have released official statements to support the initiative and we hope that all political forces would join us at the national reconciliation conference. We have no fears regarding any positions. If any faction opposed the initiative, it would lose the support of the Sudanese people, who are ready and incredibly eager to have peace. Those who raise doubts, reservations or choose to isolate themselves from the Sudanese people will also incur tremendous losses.

(Al-Sharaydi) Could reconciliation be achieved between you and Shaykh Hasan Al-Turabi, within the context of the desire to achieve conciliation with all opposition factions?

(Al-Bashir) The highest level of improvement in relations involved Al-Turabi's registration of his party and acceptance of political work in accordance with the existing political parties system. However, Al-Turabi's signing of a memorandum of understanding with Garang constituted a major violation of democratic work through a political party and a deviation from the ways of the state. This is the real problem. We could return to the previous positions through political party work, if the memorandum signed with Garang was cancelled. However, I do not expect a direct reconciliation.

(Al-Sharaydi) What about other political prisoners?

(Al-Bashir) This is where the importance of the joint initiative lies. It means understanding and concord and agreement on political issues. This where things could be different particularly with respect to the politicians who were arrested for attempting to seize power by force or collaborating with a foreign embassy official to find ways to seize power. If a complete reconciliation was reached, those people will be pardoned, just like all civilized countries behave.

(Al-Sharaydi) The problem of requiring visas to enter Egypt is a source of concern for the Sudanese people. How could this problem be solved?

(Al-Bashir) Some of these problems might occur, but the situation is different now and many facilities have been initiated. Moreover, the Joint Egyptian-Sudanese Committee is preparing an agreement on entry visas. This issue has been settled and it will be resolved within days.

Moreover, discussions on opening several new Egyptian consulates to facilitate such measures are under way. The doors of Egypt and Sudan will be open to both peoples without restrictions or obstacles.

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**AFS Document Number:** GMP20010721000058

**City/Source:** Cairo Akhbar al-Yawm

**Descriptors:** FBIS Translated Text

**FBIS Document Number:** FBIS-NES-2001-0721

**Geographic Names:** Near East & South Asia; The Americas; Arab Africa; Near East; North America; Egypt; Jordan; Libya; Morocco; United States

**NewsEdge Document Number:** 200303171477.1\_3628006c0e86a1e4

**Original Source Language:** Arabic

**Region:** Near East & South Asia; The Americas

**WNC Document Number:** 0GGXUC1029PLAS

**WNC Insert Date:** July 23, 2001

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Dialog® File Number 985 Accession Number 137900427

