

South Sudan Will Talk With Rebels, Kerry Says

By MICHAEL R. GORDON

JUBA, South Sudan — Secretary of State John Kerry said Friday that he had secured a commitment from Salva Kiir, South Sudan's president, to open talks with his rebel opponent as early as next week.

The talks, which would take place in Addis Ababa under the auspices of Ethiopia's prime minister, represent the Obama administration's latest bid to halt the fighting that has killed thousands of people, displaced more than a million and is ripping apart a nation whose independence was championed by the United States.

Mr. Kerry said that Riek Machar, the rebel leader, had previously signaled to Ethiopia's prime minister that he was also prepared to attend. In a call Friday night, Mr. Kerry also urged Mr. Machar to participate in the meeting. The talks would focus on implementing the cease-fire that was agreed to by the two sides in January but was widely ignored, as well as on the formation of a possible transitional government.

Providing new details of the parallel effort to provide security for the thousands of civilians trapped in the fighting, Mr. Kerry also said he expected that some 2,500 African troops would be sent to buttress the beleaguered United Nations effort here.

In December, the United Nations Security Council authorized an increase in peacekeepers to 13,200 from 7,700. Mr. Kerry acknowledged that the 2,500 new troops would be less than half the number that had originally been anticipated.

"It may be that, depending on the situation, more will have to be contemplated," he told reporters after a meeting with Mr. Kiir. "But for the moment that is the limit."

The peacekeeping troops would protect international monitors and help implement the cease-fire agreement. Before the African troops can be sent, however, the Security Council has to adopt a new resolution approving their mandate. Mr. Kerry said he hoped that would happen soon so the troops could be sent in "weeks."

Given the bitter violence, the disruption of aid deliveries and fear of widespread famine, it is far from clear that the diplomatic push will be sufficient to reverse

South Sudan's downward spiral.

Some American lawmakers and nongovernmental organizations have charged that the Obama administration has been too slow to implement the economic sanctions it has threatened against individuals who are responsible for the conflict. President Obama signed an executive order on April 3 that provides the legal authorization to freeze assets and to ban travel to the United States, but no sanctions have yet been imposed.

"President Obama's 'go slow' approach is simply not working," Raymond C. Offenheiser, the president of Oxfam America, said in a statement. "This visit and subsequent follow through by the administration must demonstrate to all that the U.S. will not tolerate a prolonged conflict," he added, referring to Mr. Kerry's trip.

Mr. Kerry, however, insisted that the United States was prepared to impose sanctions if the two sides failed to take steps to stem the violence and ease the delivery of humanitarian aid. And he has been pushing Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia to prepare similar measures.

"We are not going to wait," Mr. Kerry said. "There will be accountability in the days ahead where it is appropriate."

South Sudan became Africa's 54th nation in July 2011, achieving its independence after decades of guerrilla struggle.

In December 2013, Mr. Kiir accused Mr. Machar, whom he had dismissed from his post in July, of mounting a coup. Mr. Machar, who had suggested that he might challenge for the leadership of their party, has denied the allegation.

While urging the two sides to discuss a transitional government, Mr. Kerry did not explain how it might be structured or whether it might involve a power-sharing arrangement, saying such matters would be up to the people of South Sudan. But Mr. Kerry cast Mr. Kiir as the legitimate elected leader of the country, emphasizing that there should be "no equivalency" between his government and the rebel forces.

"If both sides do not take steps in order to reduce or end the violence, they literally put their entire country in danger," Mr. Kerry said. "And they will completely destroy what they are fighting to inherit."

A Voice of Dissent in Egypt Is Muffled, but Not Silent

THE SATURDAY PROFILE



DAVID DEGNER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"Dancing over the corpses of adversaries does not build an advanced homeland."

BELAL FADL, above right

By MAYY EL SHEIKH

CRITICS here called his films "vulgar" and "damaging to the public's taste." When the Muslim Brotherhood came to power last year, one Islamist preacher called him "Satan's prayer caller." But after two decades of mocking the powerful as a popular columnist and screenwriter, only now has Belal Fadl been blacklisted.

His offense was a newspaper column he wrote in February ridiculing the promotion of Gen. Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi — the military leader who ousted Egypt's first democratically elected president, Mohamed Morsi — to the exalted rank of field marshal even though he has never entered a battlefield.

Mr. Fadl has likened Mr. Sisi, who has since resigned from the military to run for president, to Hosni Mubarak, who was forced from the presidency in 2011, and Mr. Morsi, who was ousted last year by the field marshal himself. "They are all politically responsible for shedding Egyptian blood," Mr. Fadl wrote last October.

A leader of Egyptian political satire, Mr. Fadl has inspired a generation to voice its dissent more vividly than Egyptians had dared during Mr. Mubarak's rule. But the irreverent style that made him a household name has now run afoul of the hypernationalism that swept Egypt after last summer's military takeover.

His column on Mr. Sisi may also have irked one of the newspaper's owners, whose long-ago writings Mr. Fadl quoted to criticize Mr. Sisi. But despite Mr. Fadl's national following, no other publication has been willing to hire him after he quit over the refusal of the newspaper, Shorouk, to publish the column.

Mr. Fadl is hardly the only critic of the government to come under pressure. The government has filed criminal charges against intellectuals, like Emad Shahin and Amr Hamzawy, who have criticized the military takeover. And it has jailed journalists from news outlets that the government contends support the Islamist opposition, like Al Jazeera television.

But Mr. Fadl, who is no friend to the Brotherhood, has a potent and credible voice: His writing is funny and accessible, and his criticism is far sharper than others' in the Egyptian news media. Even his friend Bassem Youssef, a comedian celebrated in the West as Egypt's Jon Stewart, is more circumspect in his criticism of the top military leaders.

"Dancing over the corpses of adversaries

does not build an advanced homeland," Mr. Fadl wrote in Shorouk in January. "It creates a chicken coop for the sanctification of the victorious rooster."

Pro-military commentators call Mr. Fadl a "traitor," part of a "fifth column" plotting to destroy the country, and call his trimmed beard evidence of hidden Islamist affiliations. Mr. Fadl "stabbed Egypt in the heart with his poisoned dagger," wrote Dandrawi Al Hawari, a columnist for the newspaper Youm el-Saba.

But Mr. Fadl, sipping tea at a crowded street cafe, laughed off their jabs. "If I allowed my spirits to be controlled by the impact of my writing, I would have been in a ward for the insane by now," he chuckled.

"I'm only expressing my opinion," he said, and readers "can either read it or throw it away."

"There is no need to take it personally," he added.

MR. FADL, 39, worries little about appearances: He wore the same brown shirt, jacket and pants to two interviews in the same week. He lives in a congested middle-class neighborhood in downtown Cairo. He spends his spare time telling profane jokes with friends at cafes where thick Turkish coffee sells for about 15 cents a cup.

Born to a Yemeni father and an Egyptian mother, Mr. Fadl grew up in relative poverty in the coastal city of Alexandria, sharing a house with 10 siblings. After moving to Cairo to study journalism in the early 1990s, he wrote freelance articles to cover his expenses. In 1995, the journalist Ibrahim Eissa, then an outspoken critic of the Mubarak government, started an independent newspaper and hired Mr. Fadl, eventually giving him his own column. Mr. Fadl called it "Alameen," meaning "two pens" in formal Arabic and "two slaps on the face" in the colloquial Egyptian dialect.

His frankness stunned Egyptian readers. He referred to government ministers as "donkeys" and wrote that the government should be proud of its care for the mentally ill: "Egypt is the only country that allows the mentally challenged to reach decision-making circles."

Mr. Fadl's films feature underprivileged protagonists and pointed messages. His first, "A Thief in Second Grade," in 2001, was a comedy that told the story of a burglar who cares for his partner's daughter and falls in love with her teacher. Another, "Haha and Tofa-

ha," is a ribald farce about a brother and sister who are trying to get each other to move out of their apartment.

"Journalists always ask me about these films thinking they will see tears of regret in my eyes," Mr. Fadl said, noting that the story lines were borrowed from the lives of his friends and family. "These are films that represent my original class. This is how they laugh and have fun — offensively, obscenely."

WHEN Mr. Morsi was elected president and the Muslim Brotherhood came to power, Mr. Fadl wasted no time turning his pen against the country's new elite, writing that they "read the events with their bottoms, not their minds."

Though he initially supported the protests last June to remove Mr. Morsi from office, and even cheered when the military did so, Mr. Fadl quickly noticed similarities between the two governments.

"God knows, I detest you," he said, addressing the Brotherhood in a column he wrote after the military takeover. But he noted that he was nonetheless compelled to defend the rights of Islamists against the government's repression. "I detest you exactly as I detest those who kill you in cold blood," Mr. Fadl wrote. "I detest you all because you are exactly the same as each other."

He also has had a public falling-out with his mentor, Mr. Eissa, now a stalwart supporter of the military-led government.

In several columns, Mr. Fadl accused Mr. Eissa of turning a blind eye to the government's mass killings of protesters and abandoning the liberal activists he once encouraged. "He let his ego inflate," Mr. Fadl wrote. "He doesn't take a break to catch his breath and consider his positions."

Mr. Eissa, in an interview, echoed the government's view of the protesters who support the Brotherhood. "There is no such thing as rights for terrorists," he said. He also dismissed Mr. Fadl as "marginal," adding: "He can say whatever he wants. I'm not concerned with commentary."

Mr. Fadl marveled at what seemed to be the unanimity of public commentators who appear to support the military-backed government.

"Everybody is singing in the same martial band," Mr. Fadl said in the interview. "They have the entire public, the media and the businessmen behind them," he added. "So why are they so annoyed by these few different voices?"



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Secretary of State John Kerry met police officers and American peacekeepers with the United Nations mission in South Sudan.

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MIDDLE EAST

Egypt: Militants Set Off 4 Bombs

Four separate bombings killed at least five people on Friday in a sharp escalation of militant violence just weeks before the country is scheduled to hold a presidential election. The first two attacks occurred in the southern Sinai region, shortly after dawn, when suicide bombers struck a military checkpoint, killing at least one officer, as well as a civilian bus carrying tourism workers, wounding four passengers, the Interior Ministry said. A few hours later, a traffic officer was killed in the Heliopolis neighborhood of Cairo when an explosive device detonated at a traffic post. And on Friday evening, a man whom the authorities identified as a military officer was killed when a bomb exploded in his car in downtown Cairo. While attacks on Egypt's security forces have become routine, violence directly singling out civilians, like the bus bombing, has been rare. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Friday's bombings. In recent months, jihadi groups have claimed responsibility for the deadliest attacks, often framing them as retaliation for a government crackdown on Islamists. Also Friday, at least two people were killed during a march by antimilitary protesters in Alexandria, the Interior Ministry said. KAREEM FAHIM

Libya: Deadly Clash in Benghazi

Gunmen attacked a security forces headquarters in Libya's eastern city of Benghazi early Friday, killing nine people and wounding 24, the authorities said. The government blamed Ansar al-Shariah, an Islamic extremist group accused of being behind the attack on an

World Briefing

American diplomatic post in Benghazi. Six army commandos and three police officers were killed, officials said. The government said a number of militants were killed, and others were wounded and arrested. The attackers may have been trying to get their hands on a car loaded with weapons and ammunition that the security forces had confiscated the previous night from a Libyan militia, the authorities said. (AP)

ASIA

South Korea: Subway Trains Crash

A train pulling into a Seoul subway station on Friday smashed into the back of another train that had stopped because of a mechanical problem, injuring 170 passengers, city officials and local news reports said. No fatalities were reported. Photos that witnesses sent to local news outlets showed that the windows of the rear and front of the two trains had been shattered. One photo showed blood on the floor of a subway car. But the national news agency Yonhap reported that no one was seriously injured. Passengers jumped out of their cars and walked along the tracks to the station, it said. Seoul Metro, which operates the subway line, said it was investigating why the operator of the incoming train failed to notice the other train soon enough to prevent the crash. CHOE SANG-HUN

India: Militants Assault Villages

Eleven people were killed on Thursday night in two separate attacks on villages in the northeastern Indian state of Assam, where long-simmering tensions have pitted mem-

bers of the Bodo tribal group, who are demanding a separate state, against non-Bodo residents. All 11 victims were Muslim, including nine women. The attacks were carried out by militants with the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, a group that has been fighting for a separate state for decades, said a police official, A. P. Raut. He said many militants lived in camps in the forest outside the villages. L. R. Bishnoi, a police official in Kokrajhar, said that the violence was not ethnic in nature, and that the militants had singled out several different groups aside from Muslims in the past. NIDA NAJAR

AFRICA

Central African Republic: Gunmen Kill at Least 15 in a Border Town

Gunmen killed about 15 people, including children, in an attack on a town in the Central African Republic near the border with Chad, a local official and aid workers said Friday. The raid in the town of Markounda on Thursday was about 18 miles from the site of an attack on a health clinic run by the medical group Doctors Without Borders last week that killed 16 people. It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the attacks. Mainly Muslim rebel forces seized the capital, Bangui, in March 2013, setting off a wave of killing and looting that prompted the Christian majority to form self-defense militias. Despite the presence of French and African peacekeepers, thousands have died in inter-communal violence in the country, a former French colony, and close to a million have been displaced. (REUTERS)