

COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

EXPANDED AU FORCE IN DARFUR NOT A PERMANENT SOLUTION

INTERVIEW OF ROBERTA COHEN BY STEPHANIE HANSON

Tuesday, October 10, 2006

P R O C E E D I N G S

ANNOUNCER: This is a podcast from CFR.org, the web site of the Council on Foreign Relations.

MS. HANSON: The UN Security Council has authorized a large peacekeeping force for Sudan's violence-torn Darfur region, but the Sudanese Government refuses to accept the troops. With the Security Council paralyzed, the African Union has agreed to expand their peacekeeping force. They currently have 7,000 troops in the region and will add 4,000 additional troops, extending their mandate until the end of this year.

I am on the phone with Roberta Cohen, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and an expert on humanitarian and refugee issues.

Roberta, how does the expansion of the AU force compare to the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force?

There have been reports that the AU force is under-trained and under-funded. Do you agree?

MS. COHEN: Yes, I do. The AU force is under-trained, under-funded. The numbers are

Anderson Court Reporting
706 Duke Street, Suite 100
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
Tel. (703) 519-7180 Fax. (703) 519-7190

insufficient. They also have a very weak mandate. The quality of the troops is also an issue. African countries do not have that many experienced troops that they can spare.

The deployment is always a problem as well. It took the African Union several years to bring their forces up to the 7,000 that they now have.

MS. HANSON: Is the AU force a solution to the need for peacekeepers?

MS. COHEN: If it is an interim arrangement until there is a political solution and a UN force and that these can be seen to be coming, then it could be a useful deployment, but if this is the solution and this is all we will have, then the African Union is being used to create the impression that something is being done to help the people of Darfur, and that would be a travesty. Everyone knows this has been a very under-manned, under-staffed, under-trained, and under-resourced force.

Sudan has also used the African Union, allowing them to stay as a gesture to international pressure, knowing full well that the international

support for them will be too weak to let them be successful.

MS. HANSON: What is the AU force's mandate? Does it allow them to protect civilians?

MS. COHEN: The AU itself acknowledged it doesn't have the ability to protect Darfur civilians. The AU has put that in writing three times.

It is very unclear what the mandate is at this point. There is a Security Council Resolution that gives a mandate to a UN force, but the Sudan Government has rejected that. There is a Darfur Peace Agreement that gives the AU a role in monitoring and implementing that agreement including protection, and yet that agreement, the UN says, is in a coma and has been rejected by the rebels. So are we speaking of their earlier mandate which is an ambiguous one and a weak one that is a mandate that is somewhere between a peacekeeping operation and a monitoring operation, and it has some protection in it, but there are a lot of caveats?

I don't think anyone really knows what mandate they have at this point. So it is not clear

then what exactly they would do to strengthen it. They say they will strengthen it to protect violence and protect civilians.

MS. HANSON: How likely is it that the Sudanese Government will accept a UN peacekeeping force?

MS. COHEN: It is going to depend on the degree to which the UN and western governments make it a priority to try to persuade the Government of Sudan to allow in the UN troops into Darfur. I think that western governments will have to make this a real priority in their political agendas, and it is not clear that Darfur is a national security interest for the United States or other western governments.

It also will require that western governments try to persuade China to use its leverage with Sudan to get it to allow in UN forces. China has been Sudan's patron and the shield behind which it manages to defy the UN and also resume military operations in Darfur.

MS. HANSON: I have been speaking with Roberta Cohen, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings

Anderson Court Reporting
706 Duke Street, Suite 100
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
Tel. (703) 519-7180 Fax. (703) 519-7190

Institution. For CFR.org, I am Stephanie Hanson.

ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to this Council on Foreign Relations podcast. For additional expert analysis of international news in audio, video, and text as well as a full menu of RSS feeds, please visit us online at CFR.org.

* * * * *