

Letter to Congress from Former Special Envoys for Sudan, Throwing Their Weight Behind Lifting of Sanctions on Sudan

June 29, 2017

Honorable Members House Committee on Foreign Affairs U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515

RE: U.S. POLICY ON SUDAN

Dear Members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee:

We write to you today regarding U.S. policy on Sudan, and the objectives we all share: ending conflict in Sudan and promoting reforms toward a peaceful and more sustainable system of governance.

[This is a terrifying echo of Lyman's words from December 2011: "We want to see the regime carrying out reform via constitutional democratic measures."—ER]

To this end, we urge you to continue supporting the existing five-track engagement strategy

[This isn't a strategy; it is transparently an effort to put a "smile" on capitulation to the regime in return for the counter-terrorism intelligence Khartoum is believed capable of providing the U.S.—ER]

and the opportunity it now affords the United States to advance those objectives. In the same vein, we urge caution in rushing any new legislative action that might undermine this opportunity for progress going forward.

[This is a preemptive strike against possible Congressional imposition of a new sanctions regime on Khartoum—ER]

Over the last seven years, we have together spent considerable time engaging Sudanese officials inside and outside government; we know how

imperfect are the choices when it comes to Sudan, and how critical is a strategy of engagement.

[If in this considerable time these men have decided still to cleave to Lyman's 2011 assessment—"we want to see the regime carrying out reform via constitutional democratic measures"—then it is all too clear that their "engagement" is extraordinarily ignorant of what this regime truly is.

Here we might bear in mind the staggering ignorance of Charge d'Affaires Koutsis: "None of these other issues [human rights, religious toleration, ending chattel slavery] were the point of sanctions, and none of these other issues, therefore, should be linked to the lifting of sanctions."—ER]

As you know, the State Department is mandated to submit a July 2017 assessment on the five-track engagement plan, which was first initiated in June 2016. That strategy was initiated with a view toward smarter and more results-oriented engagement with Sudan.

[I have cataloged above [and seriatim at www.sudanreeves.org/] the "results" of U.S. engagement since the beginning of the Obama administration, and in particular since Lyman's extraordinarily, incomprehensibly misguided assessment of the regime's "democratic" instincts—ER]

It is designed to use existing tools to leverage changes in behavior by Khartoum's government in key areas, including a ceasefire and humanitarian access.

[Let's judge the "success" of Lyman's and Booth's efforts in light of the facts presented above. In particular, claims about improved "humanitarian access" have been consistently untrue. Former U.S. Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power spoke in January, during her last press conference as Ambassador, of a "sea change" of improvement in humanitarian access. This characterization was rejected by every knowledgeable figure in the humanitarian community—on the ground in Sudan and in the broader humanitarian community internationally; even the State Department could offer no explanation of what led Power to this deeply troubling falsehood. And the basic reality is that a total humanitarian embargo remains in place, as it has since summer 2011, on SPLM/A-N-controlled areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile States. This recalcitrant fact led U.S. Charge

d’Affaires Koutsis to the truly bizarre strategy of blaming the SPLM/A-N for the continuation of the embargo—a symptom of how misguided U.S. thinking about the critical issue of humanitarian access has been—ER]

The State Department’s first assessment in late 2016 noted the changes the government made in response to the plan, which then resulted a first round of sanctions easing.

[Again, let’s judge this glib celebration of what President Obama referred to vaguely as “positive actions” by the realities in Sudan today, and as represented by the facts presented above—ER]

The U.S. engagement plan was not intended as a one-off effort, but rather is intended to initiate a framework for sustained bilateral engagement toward the realization of U.S. objectives. The United States retains considerable leverage over Khartoum, which seeks to see additional sanctions removed, its designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism rescinded, its path to debt relief cleared, and full diplomatic and military relations restored.

It is important that the Trump Administration and Congress show unity in carrying forward this initiative, and in turning early progress into sustained reform.

[In other words, “Believe us: we’re experienced diplomats and former special envoys for Sudan—ignore the realities that are all too conspicuous.”—ER]

Progress on the agreed tracks in this first phase of engagement, and lifting the agreed sanctions, moves the U.S and Sudan to the next phase of engagement,

[This is hopelessly vague and non-specific, ignoring both military/security and humanitarian realities in Sudan; evidently all three men count on the ignorance of those in the Trump administration making the decision, and are trying to silence the Congress—ER]

to include more steps toward respect for human rights,

[But the point is that there have been no steps toward respect for human rights”—none! –ER]

sustained humanitarian access,

[These callous men simply can't bring themselves to discuss honestly the realities of humanitarian access in Sudan, and the degree to which the Khartoum regime obstructs the work of the world's finest international relief organizations—this is finally despicable—ER]

and a lasting peace.

“Peace” for the regime means, and has always meant, military victory—now, after fourteen unspeakably bloody years, essentially achieved in Darfur—and the goal for South Kordofan once U.S. sanctions are lifted permanently. That these men were both content to assert the viability of the “Doha Document for Peace in Darfur,” long after its failure on all counts was conspicuous, should be noted—ER]

Stopping the process now would undermine progress to date and prevent forward movement.

[Again, there has been no progress—merely an expedient suspension of aerial attacks and military offensives in South Kordofan; these will resume when sanctions have been removed permanently. And judged by every other meaningful criterion—human rights, humanitarian access, economic development, democratization, infrastructure investment—the regime has continued to fail miserably and international rankings in each of these areas bear out this characterization—ER]

It would also bind the hands of the new administration and erase the momentum it has inherited.

[Again, there is no “momentum”—merely capitulation before Khartoum's patient determination to get what it wants; it may trim its military behavior as necessary, make noises about improving humanitarian access—but there has been no “progress,” there is no “momentum”—the regime remains fully in power, although it presides over a collapsing economy that is galvanizing Sudan's political opposition. Lifting sanctions permanently

throws and economic lifeline to the regime at precisely the wrong moment—ER]

The U.S. plan represents an acknowledgement that sanctions alone had long failed to produce the changes we all hope to see—while also imposing unduly negative consequences on many ordinary Sudanese citizens.

[The “unduly negative consequences” suffered by “ordinary Sudanese citizens” are not a function of U.S. sanctions but of the catastrophic mismanagement of Sudan’s economy by the NIF/NCP regime over 28 years, enriching itself and its politically important cabal of cronies in a vast kleptocracy (see | <http://www.enoughproject.org/blogs/enough-forum-release-kleptocracy-khartoum>)

Failure to invest in the agricultural sector and instead selling and leasing vast tracts of arable land to Arab and Asian countries interested in securing their own future food security; the collapse of the once thriving Gezira Scheme is symptomatic—and has nothing to do with U.S. sanctions;
Failure to invest in infrastructure, hence the badly deteriorating water delivery system, which is a primary cause of the wild spread of cholera in the country, including Darfur as the rainy season begins in earnest;
Failure to plan for the consequences of the secession South Sudan (July 2011) and the consequent extremely severe shortage of Foreign Exchange Currency (Forex), now required for the import of more than \$1 billion of wheat per year and even refined petroleum products (the regime refused to use the ample oil revenues of 1999 – 2011 to build a significant domestic refining capacity—again, this has nothing to do with U.S. sanctions.
Skyrocketing inflation, the precipitous drop in the value of the Sudanese Pound, the inability to import key commodities—including food and basic medicines—these are not a function of U.S. sanctions but gross economic mismanagement and terribly skewed budgetary priorities, devoting resources primarily to the military and security services;
History has demonstrated that a punitive sanctions regime cannot alone yield progress in Sudan.

[Of course one must ask, then, why is the regime so eager to see them lifted permanently—it is most certainly not out of concern for the “ordinary Sudanese citizens,” who have suffered grievously under this regime’s tyranny for 28 years—ER]

Only through the credible and consistent use of both incentives and pressures, and a view toward long-term reform, can we realize our objectives.

["Long-term reform" becomes the illusory fiction to rely on when there is no short-term reform to point to—politically, economically, or in the humanitarian arena; this is the response to the conspicuous absurdity of Lyman's declaration of five and a half years ago: "We want to see the regime carrying out reform via constitutional democratic measures." There is no reform in evidence and no evidence that it will occur under this regime—no evidence whatsoever, which is why this perverse letter is so completely without specifics—ER]

To this end:

It is imperative that the United States follows through on the letter of the engagement plan, and do so on the basis of the Administration's multi-pronged assessment.

[This "imperative" has not been demonstrated, merely asserted by interested parties—interested insofar as they represent policies that have enabled a genocidal regime to continue its tyranny and kleptocratic ways for the entire duration of the Obama administration these men represented—ER]

Delaying the process may seem an attractive option, but in reality it would damage U.S. credibility and squander the opportunity now before us.

[Again, the "opportunity" is completely unspecified—we are somehow to take it on faith from men who have been shown to be repeatedly and grossly in error in the past—ER]

We must continue to work with those who seek long-term reform

[And again, the revealing emphasis on "long-term reform": this is what one stipulates when there is no "short-term reform" to point to—ER]

and Sudan's re-integration into the global community. And we must avoid doing any favors for Sudanese hardliners who represent the worst of the

government, and who oppose the very objectives we are seeking to achieve.

[This is simply bizarre and reflects an extraordinary ignorance of who really controls power in Khartoum: “Sudanese hardliners who represent the worst of the government.” It is precisely the hardliners who have exerted most control since 2011 and the military decisions that led to the seizure of Abyei and to war in South Kordofan and Blue Nile; it was the hardliners who created the Rapid Support Forces, now the dominant militia force in Darfur and destined to play a similarly large role when Khartoum inevitably moves to seize full military control of South Kordofan and Blue Nile. The characterization offered here by Booth, Lyman, and Lanier is but an updated version of an old claim that “if only the ‘moderates’ in the regime can be strengthened...” There are no moderates! Minutes of an August 31, 2014 meeting of the regime’s most powerful military and security officials make fully clear who commands power within the regime—and they are all “hardliners” by any meaningful definition of the phrase (these minutes have been fully authenticated, including by the U.S. State Department)—ER]

We believe that now is not the time for legislation that would complicate our sanctions regime and confuse our diplomatic strategy.

[If Booth and Lyman revealed anything during their tenure, it was that they had no “diplomatic strategy”—hence, for example, the celebration of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, a peace agreement without any buy-in from either Darfuri civil society or the significant rebel movements. What has distinguished the Obama administration is not a diplomatic strategy but rather fashioning the best tactical means by which to secure Khartoum’s cooperation in providing counter-terrorism intelligence—ER]

Introducing new benchmarks—especially those that cannot be effectively measured or achieved—will not help us in realizing our objectives.

[This is pure tendentiousness: there is no coherent set of objectives that has any chance of being realized once sanctions are lifted—again, the lack of specifics in this letter, and the refusal to acknowledge errors and failures of judgment of the past, are all too revealing—ER]

If Sudan walks back progress to date,

["Progress to date": how can this phrase possibly be made to comport with the realities I've detailed above? This is "argument by bald assertion," untroubled by realities on the ground in Sudan—ER]

or fails on the next phase of engagement, the Administration and Congress can re-assess and take appropriate steps— including punitive measures if necessary—at that juncture.

Thank you, as always, for your continued interest and commitment, and we stand ready to discuss these important issues with you further.

Sincerely,

Ambassador (Ret.) Princeton Lyman

Former U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan

Ambassador (Ret.) Donald Booth

Former U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan

Ambassador (Ret.) Jerry Lanier

Former U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to Sudan