

Sudan and the United States: Policy Options

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Let me first express my appreciation for giving me the opportunity to testify on one of the most difficult foreign policy challenges facing the United States. Unfortunately, and despite multiple efforts to bring peace and stability in Sudan, the people of Sudan continue to suffer. Many believed and hoped that the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement or the Darfur Peace Agreement will bring peace and stability. The hopes and expectations of many Sudanese have been crushed repeatedly by a regime at war with its own people. The courageous and visionary leader of the SPLM, the late Dr. John Garang, once said the NIF regime is too deformed to be reformed. For those who pushed for a policy of appeasement believing that there are some moderates within the NIF, have been proven wrong many times.

Fourteen years ago the international community, including the United States, turned a blind eye in the face of a gruesome genocide in Rwanda. For most of the 21-years civil war in South Sudan, the people of Sudan have died fighting for freedom with little help from outside. In Rwanda an estimated one people died in less than 100 days and the people of Darfur are still waiting for the suffering to end. A Member of Congress once said, "If Rwanda was a black mark on our conscious, Darfur is a cancer that will destroy the moral fiber of our society." Unfortunately, as time passes, Darfur will face the same fate as other tragedies did in the past: it will soon be forgotten and abandoned.

Sudan's efforts to improve its image in Washington over the years have had no visible effect on U.S. policy. In May 1996, then U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and the current Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, called Sudan "a viper's nest of terrorism." Over the past decade, the United States has imposed a series of sanctions on the NIF regime. Washington suspended its assistance program after the NIF-led coup in 1989, placed Sudan on the list of states that sponsor terrorism in August 1993, and supported United Nations Security Council sanctions on Sudan. Despite these punitive measures, the NIF regime remains a threat to regional stability and its own people. One does not have to look at Darfur to see abuses by this government.

In May 2008, the NIF forces burned Abyei town to the ground and displaced more than 60,000 people. I was in South Sudan in May and at the height of the crisis, people talked about the suffering of the citizens of Abyei, but never saw the extent of the damage and abuse. A few of us decided to go to Abyei to document and inform people about what was happening in Abyei. Here are some of the photos we took in May. I went back last month to see if the displaced have returned home. Unfortunately, for many there was nothing to return to.

For some observers and U.S. policy critics, the U.S. policy is too focused on punitive measures. The fact the matter is, if one looks at closely at our policy over the past two decades, we never disengaged. While the Bush Administration has imposed a number of sanctions on Sudan, yet senior Administration officials have been actively engaged with senior Sudanese officials. In fact, one of the architects of the Darfur genocide was invited to Washington a few years ago at an American tax payers expense. This week, the Sudanese delegation is led by another architect of the Darfur genocide, Vice President Taha. Both Taha and Salah Gosh have been named by Members of Congress in a resolution and letters as being behind the terror link and the Darfur genocide. In early, 2008, Special Envoy Richard Williamson launched an effort to normalize relations with the Sudanese regime. Although the normalization talks have been suspended, the Government of Sudan was able to get some important concession for very little in return, including the release of three terrorist suspects from Guantanamo.

What are the policy options available in dealing with Sudan?

The United States has a number of unilateral and some multilateral policy options to consider in dealing with the crisis in Sudan. These options are complicated by a number of factors. Members of the international community are divided over Sudan.

Engagement. One option is engagement with the Government of Sudan. The government of Sudan is eager to appease the international community as long as it can avoid punitive sanctions and ensure its own political survival. Unfortunately, this option is likely to fail because engagement with this regime has not succeeded in changing the behavior of the. In fact, engagement has made the regime reckless and brutal by using engagement as a cover.

Sanctions. Many observers assert that the current regime only responds to real pressure. The Clinton and Bush Administrations imposed comprehensive economic and trade sanctions over the past decade; the impact of these sanctions are mixed.

But targeted sanctions, including an oil and arms embargo, travel ban and asset freeze, might have serious psychological and political impact on the regime. But the government of Sudan has survived years of sanctions imposed by the United States and the United Nations.

Regime Change. A regime change in Khartoum could bring a swift end to the crisis in Darfur, help implement the North-South agreement, and end the regime's support to extremist and terrorist groups. The United States, with the support of its allies in the region, could provide assistance to credible opposition elements. Moreover, the United States could consider covert operations to weaken and undermine the regime to enable a takeover from within or by opposition elements.

Strengthening the SPLA. The Government of South Sudan is a staunch ally of the United States. The SPLA is a formidable force. Strengthening the SPLA could serve as a guarantor for peace in Sudan and the region. The SPLA is strong but requires support in air defense system and air power. The SPLA can also benefit from secure military communication system and intelligence sharing by strengthening its Intel gathering capabilities.

International Intervention. Another option is military intervention by the international community. The international community could disarm the Janjaweed and provide protection to civilians in Darfur by deploying large numbers of peacekeepers with a Chapter VII mandate. But an international force led by the UN or the African Union have proved ineffective in protecting civilians or bringing peace and stability in places like Sudan.

Unilateral Military Option: The United States has the option to use its military assets in the region to destroy or significantly weaken the Sudanese Government by destroying its air force, its intelligence and military headquarters, and mechanized forces. All these measures can be achieved without boots on the ground. The destruction or weakening of the armed forces of Sudan could trigger a coup or could enable the opposition to takeover power in Sudan.

Effective Use of the ICC Process. Instead of questioning the ICC charges against President Bashir and other leaders in Sudan, the United States could use the ICC process indirectly to force change in Sudan. Two options to consider. Coordinate and collabrate with others to arrest those charged by the ICC. Second, use the ICC process, to secure peace in Sudan and force the resignation of Bashir in exchange for a transparent internal judicial process.