

Hearing on Sudan before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of the U.S. Congress, Washington, DC: Current Conditions in Sudan (March 4, 2015)

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Thank you for this opportunity Congressman McGovern and Congressman Pitts and distinguished members of this Caucus.

I must be blunt, direct, and unsparing in my comments today, for without the most urgent action by the United State and other international actors of consequences, we are likely to see accelerating, indeed wholesale human destruction in Darfur, the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan, and Blue Nile State, all in Sudan. The Khartoum regime has become increasingly desperate with the accelerating collapse of the Sudanese economy, growing domestic popular opposition, and an inability to achieve victory on the various battlefields to which it has committed huge national resources. An almost total lack of foreign exchange currency has prevented imports of even the most essential items. Bread lines and bread shortages, for example, have been reported in Khartoum and other northern cities; the regime, which has spent profligately on military equipment, army and militia salaries, and security forces, doesn't have the money to buy the wheat to be ground into flour for bakers.

The face of the Khartoum regime

Domestic uprisings, such as that of September 2013, have been controlled with the immediate issuing of "shoot to kill" orders (more than 200, and likely more than 400 people were killed by the gunfire of security forces in that single episode). But at some point anger among ordinary Sudanese will overcome fear, and the regime will fall. Knowing this, the regime is in full-on survivalist mode, and no means are too extreme in the effort to retain full control of national wealth and political power. These men, let us recall, are responsible for serial genocides: in the Nuba Mountains during the 1990s, in the oil regions along the north/south border (1997 – 2002), in Darfur beginning in 2003, and now again in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile State, beginning in summer 2011.

The evidence of accelerating violence, increasing political repression, and economic collapse is everywhere if officials of the Obama administration were only to look, but they have not—not with any real comprehension. And yet these current realities grow in large part out of antecedent actions and the policies of international actors, including most consequentially the United States. I offer two quotes from the last two special envoys for Sudan prior to the present envoy, Donald Booth, who is unable to obtain a visa to travel to Khartoum.

The first comes from retired Air Force Major-General Scott Gration in September 2009—half a year into his disastrous stint as special envoy. Speaking about inducing the Khartoum regime to change its genocidal ways, Gration—who had no diplomatic experience, no real knowledge of Sudan, and no Arabic—declared:

"We've got to think about giving out cookies. Kids, countries—they react to gold stars, smiley faces, handshakes, agreements, talk, engagement."

It is impossible for me to imagine a more damagingly naïve suggestion about the calculations of a regime that has ruthlessly maintained its monopoly on national wealth and power for over 25 years, having come to power by military coup in order to further a radical Islamist and Arabist ideological agenda—an agenda that is very much alive today.

More dangerously, Gration's successor, Ambassador Princeton Lyman, declared of the Obama administration in December 2011:

“We do not want to see the ouster of the [Khartoum] regime, nor regime change. We want to see the regime carrying out reform via constitutional democratic measures.”

It is simply preposterous to believe that the Khartoum regime might preside over reform by "constitutional measures," and surely Lyman knew as much. I'll conclude my remarks today by asking about the motives for such a cynically disingenuous assessment. That the assessment is preposterous is made clear in numerous public statements as well as in various leaked documents containing the minutes of secret meetings attended by senior security and military officials, including President Omar al-Bashir ([July 1, 2014](#) and [August 31, 2014](#)). One comment, however, stands out as representative. In the July 1, 2014 meeting, with President al-Bashir in attendance, Defense Minister Abdel Rahim Mohamed Hussein declares:

"We have instructed the Air Force to bomb any location—whether it is a school, hospital or a nongovernmental humanitarian organization—where operations are in rebel-controlled areas without permission from the government. This presence is offensive and should be destroyed."

Both Hussein and al-Bashir have been indicted by the International Criminal Court for massive crimes against humanity in Darfur; al-Bashir has also been indicted on multiple counts of genocide. That their actions are animated by the sentiments expressed here is clear from any number of examples, but in the last year alone I would note the following in particular:

The Mother of Mercy Hospital near Kauda in the Nuba Mountains (South Kordofan) was bombed on May 1 and 2, 2014 by a Sukhoi-24—an advanced, Russian-built military jet aircraft. The hospital has been repeatedly targeted over the past three and a half years (the Sukhoi-24 was identified by an American physician, Dr. Tom Catena, the only surgeon operating in the Nuba Mountains, and all too familiar with Khartoum's military aircraft). The hospital of Nobel Peace Prize-winning Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Frandala, South Kordofan was bombed twice, once prior to and once subsequently to Hussein's vicious declaration of July 1, 2014—on June 16, 2014 and January 20, 2015. The second attack was again carried out by a Russian-made Sukhoi-24.

The first attack on MSF in Frandala came just four days after U.S. ambassador to the UN Samantha Power declared ([as reported by the BBC](#)):

The US ambassador to the United Nations accused Sudan Thursday [12 June 2014] of intensifying attacks on civilians in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, and of deliberately bombing schools and hospitals. Samantha Power condemned “in the strongest possible terms”

attacks she said were being carried out by the Sudanese government and its rapid support forces against ordinary people.

Four days later, Khartoum deliberately bombed Frandala (MSF had actually given its location coordinates to Khartoum in the mistaken belief that this might protect them from attack). And yet nothing was said by the U.S. after the attack to make good on the implications of a “strongest possible condemnation”—an attack that was clearly Khartoum's reply to Ambassador Power. The regime of course publicly denies these attacks, or attributes them to accident. But the comments of Defense Minister Hussein make clear such attacks are military policy.

These attacks are a continuation of the thousands of aerial attacks on humanitarians and civilians over more than two decades. I have made a comprehensive and detailed study of such assaults by Khartoum going back to 1999 (www.sudanbombing.org). The targets have included many hospitals, churches, mosques, schools, markets, villages with no military presence, and increasingly agricultural production, especially in the Nuba Mountains. Many of the bombings are savagely destructive, and collectively have killed and maiming countless civilians and aid workers. I have seen literally thousands of photographs and videographic clips of the grim aftermaths, coming from scores of sources; I must say they are simply soul-destroying. It should be obvious that the men who order such attacks, knowing full well their consequences, are not men who respond to "smiley faces" or "gold stars."

Moreover, despite the evident hopes of the Obama administration, Khartoum simply cannot be trusted to abide by any agreement it might make, no matter what rewards are offered. In the twenty-five years since the National Islamic Front (renamed as the innocuous-sounding National Congress Party)—seized power by military coup, it has never abided by any agreement made with any party—*not one, not ever*. And there is not a shred of evidence that the regime has somehow changed in character. It would take me a very long time simply to recite the names of the agreements abrogated by this regime: with other Sudanese parties, with the UN, with the U.S., with the African Union, and many others (see this lengthy but still [partial compendium of recent agreements abrogated](#)).

Ambassador Lyman's absurd hope for democratic reform overseen by this regime is belied by everything we know:

- Political repression has increased dramatically since Lyman's expression of hope that the regime would preside over the democratic transformation of Sudan;
- Freedom of speech has been severely curtailed: recently the regime's security forces seized fourteen daily newspaper runs on a single day. Extreme self-censorship defines the character of all news reporting; all broadcast media are fully regime-controlled;
- When in September 2013 a popular uprising emerged from the desperate economic circumstances created by the regime's disastrous mismanagement of the Sudanese economy, security forces put down the uprising by following "shoot to kill" orders that were given as soon as the demonstrations began to grow. This has been [authoritatively established by Amnesty International](#);
- The minutes of the August 31 meeting of the most senior security and military officials included the comments by senior party official Ibrahim Ghandour, recently officially invited to the United

States by the Obama administration State Department. In lengthy comments recorded in the minutes, Ghandour outlines in extraordinary detail how the regime will engineer its victory in the April 2015 presidential election. No consideration is ignored; no calculation of electoral perceptions—national and international—is neglected; the amount of money required to buy off various political opponents, or apparent opponents, is precisely calculated. All contingencies have been considered.

- At one point in the minutes for the July 1 meeting, General Daleel al-Daw Mohamed Fadlalla, Chief of Staff of the Navy, declares “No one other than the Sons of the Islamic movement can rule Sudan. Today the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) are an Islamic movement, from the Chief of Staff of the Army down to the most junior officer. We reject any attempt that might be made to a transitional government or the holding of a constitutional conference.” This is hardly auspicious for Lyman’s vision of the “regime carrying out reform via constitutional democratic measures.”

I should say that both Arabic documents containing the minutes in which these comments are recorded have been thoroughly scrutinized by many Sudanese native Arabic speakers as well as Arabic-reading specialists on Sudan. The overwhelming consensus is that the minutes are authentic.

Darfur

Genocide continues under this regime—and this never augurs well for democratization. How can we be sure that genocidal counter-insurgency against the Darfur rebels? We have just marked the grim twelfth anniversary of the outbreak of ethnically-targeted violence in Darfur, and the regime remains undeterred in pursuing the ambition articulated in August 2004 by Musa Hilal, the most notorious of the *Janjaweed* militia leaders. In a memo of policy that went to all the security services deployed by Khartoum, Hilal declared that his task and that of other Arab militia forces was to “change the demography of Darfur” and “empty it of African tribes” (Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, *Darfur: A Short History of a Long War*; Zed Books, 2005). Those who quibble about issues of “genocidal intent” in Darfur cannot have read this memo with comprehension.

How can we be sure that Khartoum remains committed to the ambition to “change the demography of Darfur” and “empty it of African tribes”? Last year the UN reported that almost 500,000 people were newly displaced, overwhelmingly from African tribal groups; since this includes only those people registered by UN agencies, the actual number is likely much higher. It is the greatest number of newly displaced civilians since the very beginning of the genocide. And throughout the Darfur genocide human displacement has always correlated highly with violence, indeed is our best measure of the extent and locations of violence. The total figure, acknowledged implicitly as an under-estimate by the UN, is now 2.4 million people registered as displaced persons. Many of course never make it to the camps, either dying or living in other, typically tenuous circumstances. Many have fled to eastern Chad. Almost always forgotten are the 380,000 Darfuri refugees in eastern Chad, and their number has grown sharply over the past several years. Ominously, the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps to which people flee are increasingly under-served or simply inaccessible to the humanitarian community—both because of rapidly escalating insecurity and intensifying hostility on the part of the regime to all relief organizations, UN and nongovernmental.

The UN has not offered a mortality estimate for seven years—and even then it was a crude calculation, excluding a great deal of data. The figure promulgated by the chief UN humanitarian official in April 2008 was 300,000 dead from violence and the direct consequences of violence; this was sufficiently staggering that it continues to be cited by nearly all news organizations. In fact, surveying all the data extant in August 2010, I concluded that the mortality figure should be much closer to 500,000. If I am right—and I’ve received no correction from any epidemiologist—then 200,000 lives statistically elided from reporting on Darfur because, as one senior UN official informed me, the UN was simply too fearful to conduct further mortality studies. Indeed, Khartoum has made brutally clear its opposition to any reporting on mortality, malnutrition rates, or the vast epidemic of sexual violence that is a primary weapon of war in Darfur.

I have been haranguing the UN for years about the failure to provide credible data on malnutrition in Darfur, to no avail. Last fall, however, I received from a highly reliable source an internal UNICEF document giving a statistical overview of malnutrition throughout Sudan, including separate figures for Darfur. The levels of malnutrition are utterly shocking, and while I can’t offer even a summary of this highly revealing report, I can report one key statistic that tells us far too much.

Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) is perhaps the single most important humanitarian indicator, especially for children under five years of age. In a war zone the threshold for a humanitarian emergency among young children is a GAM rate of over 10 percent within the population. In North Darfur, two years ago, the GAM rate for “under fives” was 28 percent, almost three times the humanitarian emergency threshold. In the intervening two years, North Darfur has seen the worst of the violence in Darfur, particularly in the more heavily populated eastern Jebel Marra region, west of el-Fasher, capital of North Darfur. There is every reason to believe that the violence in North Darfur, in addition to displacing a disproportionate number of civilians, has compromised agricultural production; it has certainly made humanitarian access extremely challenging. The UN’s World Food Program in particular is desperately short of “implementing partners,” those who actually distribute the food that WFP brings to major towns, but not to individual locations and most IDP camps. Rations per person have been repeatedly, sometimes arbitrarily cut.

Indeed, even such access as presently exists may collapse entirely in the near future, as more and more humanitarian organizations withdraw because of insecurity or because they are expelled by Khartoum (more than twenty-five organizations have been expelled to date, often having to endure rapacious “asset stripping” on departure). The dismaying failure of the UN/African Union “Hybrid” Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) will likely culminate on the occasion of the next meeting of the Security Council to vote on re-authorizing the Mission (its current authorization ends in four months). The Mission in meaningful form will almost certainly not be re-authorized, not with the reality of Russia and China poised to veto any re-authorization not approved by Khartoum. For its part the regime has demanded that UNAMID expeditiously draw up an “exit strategy” and indeed withdraw from Sudan, even as the Mission has proved hopeless in protecting civilians and humanitarians. It will almost certainly go down in UN peacekeeping history as its greatest failure.

The obstacles were formidable, given Darfur’s remoteness and the transport and logistical challenges. Moreover, from the beginning Khartoum, in violation of yet another agreement—the Status of Forces Agreement signed in February 2008—has obstructed, harassed, impeded, threatened, and killed UNAMID personnel. [The murder of UNAMID soldiers is typically the work Khartoum-allied militias](#), but there can be no doubt about sponsorship.

It must also be said UNAMID never had adequate material support from militarily capable nations in the West—or the Arab world or India or Japan or Brazil, or indeed the African Union; a particular shortcoming was in the failure to provide the number of helicopters essential in a region as large as Darfur. With its cumbersome, indeed unprecedented “hybrid” nature and Khartoum’s unrelenting hostility—as well as the lack of equipment, trained men, logistics, and a coherent command structure—UNAMID was set up to fail. And it has by any measure. Since the Mission formally took up its mandate on January 1, 2008, more than 2 million Darfuris have been newly displaced, some for the second or third time. Here it important to note again that from the very beginning of the genocide, displacement and violence have correlated extremely highly. That has certainly been the case even after UNAMID’s deployment as the successor force to the hopelessly inadequate African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). There have been more than 100,000 killed in the years in which UNAMID was providing civilian protection.

Sexual violence in Darfur has finally made it into the news with a report from Human Rights Watch about the rape of more than 220 women and girls (some as young as eight years of age) in Tabit, North Darfur. That the rapes were carried out by regular Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) soldiers made this a particularly terrifying event. Moreover, Human Rights Watch has been able to establish on the basis of interviews with defecting soldiers that men were *ordered by their officers* to rape women and girls. UNAMID’s own initial investigatory report concluded simply that there was “no evidence of rapes,” even as the investigators knew that the people being interviewed were closely scrutinized at every step by security personnel and gave only obviously scripted answers.

But an internal UNAMID document describing this deep intimidation reached me some days after the event; my publication of this report—along with a dispatch by Agence France-Presse—infuriated Khartoum, which demanded that UNAMID immediately draw up an “exit strategy.” Given the expense of UNAMID, and its failure as a mission, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations—particularly its feckless chief, Hervé Ladsous—was happy to oblige. The force had already been drawn down by 6,000 personnel on the basis of Ladsous’ wholly factitious finding in 2012 that security had improved sufficiently to allow for the draw-down (violence was escalating at the very moment Ladsous made this determination). Further, according to one reliable report the UN deployed 400 4x4 vehicles from Darfur to Western Africa to assist in the Ebola crisis. They have not returned, leaving UNAMID even less mobile than previously.

But as ghastly as the rapes at Tabit were, they are still only symptomatic. [I have written extensively on the use of rape as a weapon of war in Darfur](#)—and as a form ethnic/racial aggression—and surveyed all the reports that have been produced on the subject (obviously none is recent). Using these reports and the myriad dispatches from Radio Dabanga, covering all of Darfur, I believe that we must assume many tens of thousands of women and girls have been raped over the past twelve years—often gang-raped, raped in front of their families, and scarred or branded to ensure that in the conservative Muslim society of Darfur, a terribly disgracing event will not be forgotten or overlooked. The campaign of rape has had devastating physical and emotional consequences for these women and girls. Many have either been shunned by husbands and families or sunk into deep clinical depression; many will never be able to marry; many, especially children, have died from the trauma.

Predictably, Khartoum both denies that any rapes could possibly have occurred at Tabit—and yet refuses UNAMID investigators further access. The regime’s denier-in-chief is Foreign Minister Ali Karti, recently invited to the National Prayer Breakfast, nominally hosted by the Congress. In other words, in your name, Congressmen, using a multi-year, multi-entry visa granted by the State Department, a man who denies atrocity crimes for the regime was invited as the “cultivated face” of the regime to this interfaith event. Evidently no consideration was given to the fact that Ali Karti was appointed head of the particularly brutal paramilitary force known as the Popular Defense Forces in 1997, thereby assuming command responsibility for some of the worst atrocity crimes of the war in South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains.

[Radio Dabanga](#), which reported on the Tabit rapes the day after the orgy of violence ended, is a news outlet created by Darfuris in exile in The Netherlands, and has chronicled in excruciating detail over the past six years countless incidents of rape, gang-rape, mass rapes, the rape of young girls, and the indifference that inevitably greets complaints from the victims. We know as much as we do about the massive escalation of violence in Darfur, again especially North Darfur, primarily because of Radio Dabanga. It has been a voice of truth and courage, with an extensive network of contacts on the ground in Darfur; its reports are authoritative, highly detailed, and reflect the ideals of Western news reporting. It is almost universally ignored.

The Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan

Turning to the Nuba Mountains, we are seeing a reprise of the campaign of human annihilation that defined most of the 1990s for the African peoples of this region, a campaign that very nearly succeeded. There is presently a complete embargo on humanitarian assistance to civilians in rebel-controlled areas; relentless, indiscriminate aerial attacks have destroyed much of the Nuba’s agricultural production; people have been forced from their homes and villages to live in caves or flee to South Sudan; hospitals, schools, and churches are targeted; there is, in short, a campaign of civilian destruction that is in high gear. Here is a brief excerpt from the August 31, 2014 minutes. The speaker is General Siddiq Amer, Director of Military Intelligence and Security:

“This year the Sudan People’s Army [Sudan People’s Liberation Army-North] managed to cultivate large areas in South Kordofan State. ***We must not allow them to harvest these crops. We should prevent them. Good harvest means supplies to the war effort. We must starve them,*** so that commanders and civilians desert them and we recruit the deserters to use them in the war to defeat the rebels.” (emphasis added)

“We must *starve* them.” This is a fully accurate translation of the Arabic at this point in the meeting minutes. The regime has been as good as Siddiq’s words, and there have been multiple reports of sorghum crops burning before harvesting last fall, as well as aerial and ground attacks against food storage sites. One humanitarian organizations that retains a tenuous and very risky presence in the Nuba Mountains reported privately that:

The Sudan Armed Forces has been deliberately burning large community farms, estimated to be as much as 400-500 fedans of sorghum fields in Dalami County. One fedan of cereal crops provides between 3-6 months of staple grain for a family of six. Thus, 500 fedans equates to 1,500 people with no staple food for a year. (confidential source)

This is one part of one county in South Kordofan. Despite the commitment to resolve the crisis in the Nuba Mountains militarily, the Sudan Armed Forces and the Rapid Response Forces (RSF, the new *Janjaweed*) have met stiff resistance from the Sudan People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N). In fact, the SPLA-N has recently inflicted several significant defeats on Khartoum's forces, each time capturing more weaponry, ammunition, supplies, and intelligence.

Since Khartoum is waging a similar campaign in Blue Nile State to the east, in addition to war in Darfur, its military forces are stretched very thin—hence the continuing emphasis on recruiting more RSF fighters. But many of these young men and boys have no real military training, are motivated primarily by promises of easy booty, and are quickly demoralized, as are many of the unwillingly conscripted soldiers in the SAF. By contrast, the SPLA-N is highly motivated, soldiers knowing that they and their families will be destroyed if they lose this war. My own experience in the Nuba, talking with many civilian and military leaders, convinces me that the people there they will indeed fight to the death.

Khartoum's response has been to refuse all meaningful peace negotiations with rebels in any of the conflict areas, and to recommit to an even more ambitious military response, however many civilians are killed or displaced. It refuses to grant any humanitarian access to the more than 1.5 million people in rebel-controlled areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile. For again—and this fact governs all Khartoum can and will do—the regime is fighting knowing that the ticking time-bomb of economic implosion is about to go off. If possible, their methods of violent destruction have become even more extreme.

This is the regime with which the Obama administration is evidently seeking rapprochement.

Rapprochement between Khartoum and the Obama Administration

How do we reconcile all this with the outspoken words of Senator, candidate, and President Obama, who has repeatedly, explicitly labeled Darfur the site of genocide? His trip to eastern Chad in 2006 would certainly have provided him with the opportunity to speak with victims of Khartoum's genocidal counter-insurgency war against the African tribal groups in Darfur, perceived by Khartoum as the civilian base of support for the rebel groups. A year later, comparing Darfur to Rwanda and Bosnia, presidential candidate Obama made a promise about what he would do as President of the United States:

“When you see a genocide in Rwanda, Bosnia or in Darfur, that is a stain on all of us, a stain on our souls. . . . We can't say ‘never again’ and then allow it to happen again, and as a president of the United States I don't intend to abandon people or turn a blind eye to slaughter.” (Video recording available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEd583-fA8M#t=15>)

But it is clear that the Obama administration has in fact abandoned the people of Darfur, of South Kordofan, and of Blue Nile. I would also argue that in trying to be done with South Sudan as a policy concern, the Obama administration irresponsibly pressured the government in Juba to “compromise” further on the historically important Abyei region straddling the North/South border. This was entirely unreasonable, and as some of the most acute students of Sudan said at the time, deeply counter-productive. For what then-Senator John Kerry, special envoy Gration, and Secretary

of State Hillary Clinton were pressuring the government of South Sudan to do was compromise in ways that went well beyond the compromises already contained in the Abyei Protocol of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (January 2005), and also went beyond the recommendations of the Abyei Boundaries Commission stipulated by the CPA (July 2005). Indeed, in fall 2010 they were pressuring the nascent government of South Sudan in Juba to “compromise” further than the “final and binding” terms stipulated by the International Court of Arbitration (July 2009)—committed to in advance by both Juba and Khartoum. The ruling, questioned by a number of experts, was highly favorable to Khartoum; Juba nonetheless accepted this further reduction in the area of Abyei that was guaranteed its own self-determination referendum by the CPA.

Khartoum, it soon became clear, never intended to allow for such a referendum to take place, and when a military build-up around Abyei began in early 2011, there was a last chance for the U.S. and others to warn Khartoum off such aggression. Khartoum, seeing there was no willingness to defend the South’s interests in Abyei, began on May 20, 2011 a two-day campaign that effectively seized all of Abyei. The protests from the UN, the U.S. and others that followed were tepid and inconsequential—yet another signal to Khartoum, and no doubt part of the reason the regime felt so confident in beginning hostilities in South Kordofan just two weeks later (June 5, 2011). And even then special envoy Lyman continuously played down the significance of the murderous, ethnically-targeted—and well documented—campaign against all Nuba in and around Kadugli, capital of South Kordofan; he refused to credit reports of mass graves, even as they were being confirmed by the UN human rights officers on the ground and the Satellite Sentinel Project with unambiguous satellite imagery. Lyman refused to credit Khartoum’s ambition to destroy the Nuba people, despite clear evidence from human rights groups and intrepid reporters that agriculture and livelihoods were the primary targets of a massive bombing campaign that continues to this day.

Given all this, given Obama’s declaration that “as a president of the United States I don’t intend to abandon people or turn a blind eye to slaughter,” what can account for his administration’s consistent refusal to devise a strategy, presumably with European and other allies, to bring sufficient pressure on the Khartoum regime to compel a change in its genocidal ways?

To be sure, there are many foreign policy issues and crises on the administration’s plate at the moment, particularly ISIS and Ukraine. We might expect that Darfur would not get the full attention it deserves despite being the scene of ongoing slaughter. But it is the misfortune of Darfur’s victims to be black, Muslim, and without great natural resources underground. Beyond this, however, Darfur has an even greater misfortune: in the elaborate steps of *quid quo pro* arrangements that are currently part of a “rapprochement dance” between Washington and Khartoum, Darfur was long ago traded out. Indeed, in November 2011 a “senior State Department official” announced that when it came to counter-terrorism, and terrorism issues more broadly, Darfur had been “**de-coupled.**” This is not a word of my invention, but rather the word of an unnamed senior figure in the State Department, [recorded in an official transcript of the November 8, 2011 meeting](#).

There were of course also the obligatory words about continuing concern:

“[By de-coupling Darfur] we would in no way undermine the importance that we attach to having a resolution of the humanitarian and political problems that have plagued Darfur for the last decade”

But this was all for show: the signal given to Khartoum by the Obama administration's "de-coupling" of Darfur was that the regime could do what it wished in the region and this would not affect the singularly important strategic issue in the bilateral relationship: concern for terrorism and counter-terrorism intelligence on the part of the U.S., *and* a desire for international rehabilitation by Khartoum, along with the lifting of U.S. sanctions. Khartoum, all too predictably, read the "de-coupling" statement in precisely this fashion. Of note, since November 2011 approximately 1 million Darfuris have been newly displaced; as I have noted, last year alone approximately 500,000 civilians were newly displaced, more than in any year since candidate Obama declared that Darfur was the site of genocide—and this year promises to be worse.

The most basic fact about Obama's Sudan policy is that it is governed by a lust for counter-terrorism intelligence from Khartoum, something that extends back to the Bush administration. The U.S. has already spent or will spend several hundred million dollars on a new embassy in Khartoum, designed to be the "listening post" for northern Africa. Some \$200 million has already been expended and yet the embassy is not equipped with what will be necessary for it to serve its intended purpose.

And there can be no doubt that North and East Africa will be areas of ongoing terrorist activities—radical Islamic groups, *jihadis*, and apparently ISIS are making their presence felt, as Khartoum well knows. But in the lust for counter-terrorism intelligence, is the administration getting anything like what it bargained for in this deal with the devil? a deal that entails the "de-coupling" of Darfur and the abandonment of efforts to secure humanitarian relief for highly distressed populations in South Kordofan and Blue Nile?

I have in recent years become something of a magnet for confidential and leaked information, a strange experience, even as the phenomenon seems to be self-reinforcing. The most potent confidential documents that have come to me in my entire sixteen years of Sudan research and advocacy are the minutes for two key meetings attended by the most senior military and security officials of the regime: one set of minutes for a meeting of August 31, 2014, and very recently the minutes for a meeting of July 1, 2014—this one attended by President al-Bashir. In the August 31 minutes—which have been thoroughly vetted by experts for months now, with an overwhelming consensus that they are authentic—Defense Minister Hussein again offers words whose implications are worth considering closely:

America is facing the crisis of the ISIS and the other Jihadist movements that are newly formed and can move freely outside the traditional surveillance networks. Currently, there are twenty thousand (20,000) Jihadists and fifteen (15) newly formed Jihadist Movements who are scattered all over, from Morocco to Egypt, Sinai, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, all the Gulf States, a wide presence in Africa and Europe and nobody owns a data-base on that as the one we have. ***We release only limited information to the Americans*** and according to specific requests; ***the price is the armed movements file.***

We may take Hussein at his word here about the parsimonious conveyance of counter-terrorism intelligence to the U.S. Indeed, it has long been the opinion of many that Khartoum gives very little of value. What is most alarming is the assertion that in order to get even this counter-terrorism intelligence, some part of the U.S. government is providing payment in the form of "the armed movements file." Do the "armed movements" include the Sudan People's Liberation

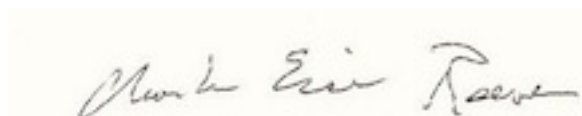
Movement/Army North? The only force that stands between Khartoum's military forces and the annihilation of the Nuba people? I cannot obtain a convincing answer from the U.S. government or even an acknowledgement that the document containing these minutes exists.

Moreover, Khartoum is hardly out of the terrorism business itself and the minutes for the August 31 and July 1, 2014 meetings make clear Khartoum's support for radical Islamist groups, including armed groups such as Hamas in Gaza, the Houthis in Yemen, the Libya Dawn movement in Libya, and Séléka in Central African Republic. Minutes from the August 31 meeting make abundantly clear, and in detail, Khartoum's view of Iran as its strategic ally in the region; Iran is of course also one of the four countries remaining on the U.S. State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism. In addition to Hussein's comments, the minutes at various points indicate the vast amount of regional intelligence on terrorism and radical Islamist/*jihadist* groups that the regime possesses. It is certainly not a regime that has any intention of surrendering its place in the world of radical Islam or becoming an ally in the war on terror.

By inviting regime officials like Ibrahim Ghandour to Washington, by lifting sanctions even partially, by sending a State Department official to Khartoum, and by offering the reassuring words of Princeton Lyman ("we don't want to see regime change)," we are sending the worst possible signal to a militaristic, genocidal regime that has lost all sight of the importance of economic well-being for the people it rules with fear and brutality.

It is difficult to imagine a Sudan policy that does more to renege on candidate Obama's commitment: "As a president of the United States I don't intend to abandon people or turn a blind eye to slaughter." Sudan today is engulfed by ethnically-targeted slaughter, in Darfur, in South Kordofan, and in Blue Nile. By engaging with Khartoum on present terms, the Obama administration is, precisely, "abandoning" Sudan's long-suffering people. Certainly it is only with a "blind eye" that one can survey the immense landscape of human suffering and destruction wrought by the Khartoum regime and not be moved to action.

Submitted electronically, February 27, 2015 by

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Eric Reeves", written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Eric Reeves