

Special Envoy Booth's Khartoum Visit: Opportunity to Refocus U.S. Policy on Sudan

August 25, 2015 -- The U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan's visit to Khartoum provides an important opportunity to enhance U.S. policy on Sudan. The current international approach emphasizes endless peace negotiations and a sham national dialogue while allowing the Bashir regime to determine—and effectively deny—humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations suffering from state violence. This approach has done little to end the conflict, ameliorate suffering, or prevent mass atrocities.

To create the pressure necessary to change calculations in Khartoum, the U.S. government should employ a much broader strategy of financial pressure to target those individuals and entities that profit from this untenable status quo. Ambassador Booth can use his trip to Khartoum to signal this new approach, as follows:

- Ambassador Booth should make clear that normalized relations with the U.S. government, including U.S. support for debt relief to Sudan under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, are not possible until the Sudanese government ends its deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians—including aerial bombardment, stops the obstruction of humanitarian aid, and revamps the framework for the national dialogue to allow a credible, genuine conversation about Sudan's future.
- To escalate financial pressure on key decision-makers in Khartoum, the U.S. government should increase targeted sanctions enforcement against political elites and their financial enablers, support stolen asset recovery and return, and open criminal investigations and possible prosecutions into economic crimes, like pillage and money laundering, where they have a nexus to the United States. During his engagements with high-level Sudanese officials, Ambassador Booth should emphasize that the U.S. government will move beyond relying on existing blanket country-wide sanctions to also focus more targeted financial pressure on the individuals and entities benefitting from corruption and conflict and preventing peace.
- Ambassador Booth should cite recent examples of violent contestation and displacement around gold mines in Darfur and Blue Nile, and he should publicly state that gold being exported from Sudan is conflict-affected, high-risk, and that Sudan's gold trade is helping to destabilize Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan, the country's main conflict zones.
- Following Ambassador Booth's visit, the United States should remain committed to Sudanese civil society organizations, especially human rights, anti-corruption, and transparency groups. We appreciate Ambassador Booth's willingness to meet with civil society organizations while in Sudan, which demonstrates U.S. support of their important work in an increasingly constrained political environment. Beyond this trip, Ambassador Booth should also engage more deeply with the Sudan Call, a coalition that prioritizes a peaceful transition to democratic rule through an inclusive and comprehensive political process, by building the coalition's capacity to advance a coherent economic policy platform and participate in future negotiations and dialogue.

The Bashir regime has survived for more than 25 years by successfully looting the state and its considerable resource wealth and by responding to all opposition with unsparing violence. Past policy approaches have failed to counter the regime's ability to finance conflict and to remain in power through corruption and patronage. As long as it is able to benefit from conflict and silence opposition, the regime has no incentive to pursue peace.