

Press Releases: Senior Administration Officials on Sudan Sanctions

Special Briefing
Senior Administration Officials
Via Teleconference
October 6, 2017

MODERATOR: Thank you. Thank you, and good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us today for today's background call on Sudan sanctions. To discuss our decision in more detail, we have [Senior Administration Official One]. He from here forward will be referred to as Senior Administration Official One. We also have [Senior Administration Official Two]. He will be referred to as Senior Administration Official Two. And we have [Senior Administration Official Three]. He will be referred to as Senior Administration Official Three.

As a reminder, today's call is on background, and it will be embargoed until 1:30 p.m. I also want to flash that at 1:30 p.m. we will have an on-the-record statement that you'll be able to use as well.

So with that, I'll turn it over for brief remarks to [Senior Administration Official One], and we'll take it – then we'll take questions from you. Thank you. [Senior Administration Official One]?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Good afternoon. The United States has decided to formally revoke a number of economically focused sanctions on Sudan in recognition of the Government of Sudan's sustained positive actions in five key areas. I'll outline these areas for you: first, to maintain a cessation of hostilities in the areas of its internal conflict, including Darfur and what we refer to as the two areas, the states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile; second, to improve humanitarian access across Sudan; third, to end destabilizing activity in South Sudan; fourth, to build and deepen U.S.-Sudan cooperation in countering terrorism; and fifth, improving regional security with a particular focus on countering Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army.

So to implement this decision as set forth in previous executive orders, Secretary Tillerson will publish a Federal Register notice. And as we heard before, we'll provide a report to the President on the Government of Sudan's sustained positive actions over the last nine months. That report's going to be available on our website, and it details progress in the noted five areas. There'll be a link in the forthcoming spokesperson's statement.

The revocation will be effective as of October 12th. And to give you some more context, this action basically comes after a 16-month high-level focused and hardnosed diplomatic effort with Sudan through what we've called the five-track engagement plan, which began in June of 2016. In that time, Sudan has taken some significant steps to address these policy priorities.

The decision today is an important milestone marking progress in our bilateral relations, but it's also important to keep it in perspective. This marks one step forward on a long and hard road where much more progress is needed.

Going forward, we're going to engage the Government of Sudan to ensure that there is no regression on its positive actions to date, and secondly, to work for continued progress both on the issues in the five track areas, and to advance additional administration priorities. Basically, we want to build on the positive momentum to develop a follow-on framework for progress.

Now, I want to be clear, the framework is still being developed, but there are some areas that we will certainly seek progress on, including, as I noted, achieving a sustainable peace. This goes beyond simply a cessation of hostilities, but also to come to a negotiated and sustainable peace. It's also important we continue to improve humanitarian access. This is an ongoing process where we remain committed to doing as much as we can, both working with the government and our international partners.

Looking forward, it's also important that we work to improve Sudan's record on human rights and religious freedom. That will be a key part of our discussions in the future. And also ensuring our top international security priority, which I'm sure will come as no surprise to anyone, that Sudan fully complies with all the Security Council resolution requirements regarding North Korea.

So we want to be clear that we want to ensure that the progress to date is maintained and sustained. And we've been clear with the Government of Sudan that we want improved relations, we want to continue to improve relations, but if – to further normalize any bilateral ties, there can be no regression on the progress they've made, and that they need to be a partner with us in continuing progress both on the five track issues and some of the additional issues that we will be seeking to engage more formally on.

We've got a lot of tools at our disposal, including targeted sanctions programs, and which we will use to apply pressure to the Government of Sudan if it steps back or regresses on the progress it's made or takes other negative actions in some of these areas.

Further, it's important to emphasize that Sudan will remain on the state sponsors of terrorism list. The action today does not affect that. And this also means there are related restrictions on foreign assistance, defense export and sales, and controls over exports of dual-use items, among others, that will contain to remain in place. Further, we have Darfur-related targeted sanctions under Executive Order 13400 that are in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1591 that will also remain in place.

So I think, again, the report will cover in detail progress under the five areas. We can try to answer questions if you have some in the specific tracks. I think with that I will stop and see what questions you may have.

MODERATOR: Great, thank you very much. We'll now go to your questions. Please, limit your questions to one because we have a lot of people on the call and want to get through as many as we can. So thank you. We'll take the first question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, to queue up for questions you may press * followed by 1. Once again, for questions please press * followed by 1 at this time.

And we'll take our first question from Nick Wadhams with Bloomberg News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Could you tell us what evidence there is for Sudan to remain as a state sponsor of terror, why the decision was made to retain that designation, and cite specific evidence? And could you also tell us why three months ago the decision was made to postpone this move, but now what evidence is there particularly in the delivery of humanitarian aid that made you make this decision? What changed in the last three months that made you comfortable doing this?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Nick, what I can say – and my colleagues from the National Security Council may want to speak – is that the decision we made today was based on an agreed framework in the five tracks and focused on that. It did not deal with the separate process that would have to be in place to talk about the state sponsors list. At no time was that on the table in this process. And again, I'm not going to get into any of the underlying issues there and wanted to see if any of my colleagues from the National Security Council had any comment on that particular part of your question.

MODERATOR: Okay. We'll go to the next question.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: No, no, I want to also address the other parts of what he said, what he asked, which was basically in the last three months, there was – we spoke at that time very clearly about why the delay was put in place, but I think if you saw, we had a change of administration and I think it's a very fair thing to have the administration have time to look at this further. We've seen continuous progress on humanitarian access and I wanted to give my colleague from USAID the chance to address that, if he wanted to.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: Thanks, [Senior Administration Official One]. In regards to the directness of that question, after that – the extension of the review period, we did continue to receive reports from our partners that increased access to areas, including some of those areas in Jebel Marra as well as South Kordofan and Blue Nile, continued to be available to our partners. So in essence there was no fallback or backslide during that review period, as well as continued and even increased access in some of those places. And this was a general feeling of all of the

humanitarian community at that time.

MODERATOR: Okay, great.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: I'd like to jump in here from the NSC. We also used that extension in the review period to allow Sudan further time to demonstrate its continued cooperation on counterterrorism, and during that period it did so, and that was another indicator that Sudan was willing to follow through with this agreement and that track.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. Now on to the next question.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That will come from Carol Morello, *Washington Post*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you for doing this. Did you get any promises from the Government of Sudan that they would cut off diplomatic ties with North Korea? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Let me turn to my colleagues from the NSC.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: We did not ask Sudan to cut off ties with North Korea. What we have asked is that they comply with the UN resolutions to cease any arms deals with North Korea. So we have asked that Sudan comply with the cessation of any arms imports from North Korea, and they do understand that we will be closely monitoring that, and that will affect our bilateral relations going forward.

MODERATOR: Okay, move on to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That's from Laura Koran with CNN. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks so much for doing the call. You said you didn't ask Sudan to cut off ties with North Korea, but could you address whether they told you they would be cutting off ties with North Korea? And if so, even though that goes beyond the five tracks, did that play any role in this decision? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: The Government of Sudan has given us their commitment that they would not pursue arms deals with North Korea, and that is what we asked of them. So we will not necessarily take the government at their word; we will be closely monitoring the situation, and they understand that we have zero tolerance for continued arms deals with North Korea.

MODERATOR: All right, thank you. On to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That will come from Matt Spetalnick with Reuters. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes. Again – I wanted to follow up on that question again. Did – was that commitment necessary, the commitment not to pursue arms deals with

North Korea, necessary as a condition to go ahead with the lifting of the sanctions? And also on the state sponsor of terrorism issue, will that be reviewed going forward whether to keep them on that list or not?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: So as the first speaker I think has made clear, the North Korea issue was not part of the original five tracks that we negotiated with them. The previous administration undertook a negotiation with North Korea. We were very explicit on the terms, and under this administration we want to honor that agreement, demonstrating that the U.S. does keep its commitments if other governments keep theirs. And so North Korea is not part of the five tracks and not part of this lifting of sanctions.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: [Senior Administration Official Two], if I might, I think you may just have misspoken. You meant that negotiation with Sudan, not North Korea.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Thanks. Thank you, [Senior Administration Official One].

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Just wanted to make sure. I would also note that on the state sponsors list, I mean, it's clearly a priority for the Government of Sudan to get off that designation. And I don't want to speculate much, but I am certain that will be something that they will raise going forward.

MODERATOR: On to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That comes from Michele Kelemen with National Public Radio. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thanks. You said that the extra few months gave you some more time to see what more they would do on counterterrorism, but can you give any concrete examples of what they've done?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I think – go ahead, [Senior Administration Official Two].

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: So since January I can say that the Government of Sudan has continued to cooperate with the United States to counter terrorist groups in Sudan and North Africa. They've worked with us to detect and deter terrorist attempts to transit Sudanese territory, and the government's actions against terrorists have been crucial in the fight against global terrorism. I can't give you specific examples, of course, but I can say that that cooperation has continued unabated.

MODERATOR: Okay, on to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That will come from Ian Talley with *The Wall Street Journal*. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yeah, thanks. The North Korea angle has been beaten over, shall we say. I'm wondering – was there any division internally within the

administration about whether to proceed with this? And did the North Korea arms commitment, while the negotiation was on the five terms, did that not push it over the scales?

And secondly, were there areas of improvement in the five areas – were there greater areas of improvement than others, say on the counterterrorism cooperation, that you see?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: So we thoroughly discussed and vetted the North Korea decision in the interagency and presented it to the President. And so there is no issue of (inaudible).

With regard to the five-track decision, similarly, that was carefully deliberated in an interagency process. We've come to consensus on the five-track program. So – and it was authorized by the President. So all the tracks in the five tracks were equally important and were equally weighed and vetted at the interagency process.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: And I can just add on to that, [Senior Administration Official Two], that when the report appears there will be a good bit of detail on progress on some of – in some of the tracks that will be laid out in it. Obviously, the – it's hard to say what's equivalent in progress in vastly different sort of areas of subject, but there has been clear forward movement in all of them.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: That will come from Kylie Atwood with CBS News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi there, thank you. Sorry, I just want to go back to the North Korea thing for one clarifying question. You guys said that the Government of Sudan has given their commitment that they wouldn't pursue arms deals with North Korea. So are you saying they have not told the U.S. that they are cutting off all diplomatic ties with North Korea? Because that's been reported this week, so I just wanted to make sure, if they've told you guys that as well, or not. Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: What I can say to just start with is that Sudan does not have diplomatic – formal diplomatic relations right now with North Korea. There is no embassy or exchange of embassies or anything, and we don't see that changing anytime soon.

MODERATOR: On to the next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That will come from Nike Ching, with Voice of America. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes. Thank you so much for this call. Could you please address urgent concerns from American lawmakers that Sudan has not paid compensation to American victims from the 1998 embassy bombings? Shouldn't there have been a provision for victims of terrorism as part of the sanction relief package?

And then secondly, I just wanted to make sure I understand. The Darfur-

related sanctions will also remain in place; is that correct? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: The Darfur Sanctions under Executive Order 13400 will remain in place.

On this question of compensation, to be clear, the decision we're taking today only relates to the sanctions set out in the executive orders related to the five-track framework.

But that said, this is a very important issue. Going forward, we are going to urge Sudan to take steps to address these claims, these outstanding court judgements made by the victims of terrorism and their family – and their families.

Sudan wants to move toward more normalized bilateral relations. And our increased engagement with them and this clear desire, I think, gives us additional leverage on this issue. So again, we are going to address this going forward with Sudan. And we have – by the way, it has been a subject we've addressed, but it's been in the courts for a long time. And again, this is something very important for us, because the people who were killed in these embassies were part of our greater family at the State Department.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. As a reminder, to queue up for questions you may press *1. Once again, *1 for questions.

Our next question comes from Alicia Rose with NHK. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you. Actually, my question has already been addressed.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That's from James Martone with Sky News Arabia. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. What happens if for – you come up with proof that there are deals with – going on with North Korea, or that there have not been improvements in this – on the combatting terrorism front? How quickly would these economic sanctions snap back into place?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Look, we're not going to be able to sort of answer a question like that now, until we see what happens and the extent of any change in circumstances, whether – regarding negative action.

So what I can say is that this – I think [Senior Administration Official Two] has been absolutely clear. This – anything related to North Korea – is very top of the – of our priorities on national security and will be given the utmost, utmost scrutiny going forward. But we're also looking at progress on other things.

For example, one of the really important outcomes of this negotiating process is that Sudan has stopped its military offensives that used to happen on a

regular basis in Darfur and have also stopped dropping bombs on – in Darfur, stopped aerial bombardment, which has saved – was – used to be a very important – was and is a very important issue, and the cessation of these activities has saved lots and lots of lives. If they start to drop bombs again, I think that'll be very obvious to us and we will – we will react accordingly because, again, that's a very, very key security issue and one of the things that we've achieved in this that has had a direct impact improving the security situation of thousands of people on the ground.

MODERATOR: Okay. Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That will come from Lukman Ahmed with BBC News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Oh, yes, thank you. With regard to Darfur – actually, you are going to keep the Darfur-related sanctions – what kind of conditions that you are demanding to be met in order to lift it in the future? And have you ever come across Mr. – the situation of Mr. al-Bashir with the ICC, whether that's been discussed or not? And for the diplomatic relationship, are you going to go to the level of ambassadors exchange between the two countries? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: That was a three-for-one. What I can say is that we have not – and I can't – I'm not in a position to answer what it would take to change the situation with the Darfur sanctions. Regarding the question of the ICC, our views on this haven't changed. Essentially, we continue to call for all those responsible for crimes in Darfur to be held accountable and to support the – justice for all the victims of the crimes in Darfur. And basically, that was why Darfur was – and the cessation of hostilities there was a key priority and I think one of the key achievements of the five-track plan.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll go take our last question now.

OPERATOR: Thank you. That will come from Dan Ryntjes with Feature Story News. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks for doing this very useful call. My question is this: In terms of what is by – from October the 12th, what sanctions are being relaxed and what effect will that have, real world, on economic relations and the like? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I can – I can outline the specific sanctions a bit more and tell you what they are, but I think to get into the real impact, that's a question for our colleagues at Treasury. But the specific sanctions being revoked are Sections 1 and 2 of Executive Order 13067, which dates from November 5, 1997, and also all the elements of Executive Order 13412, which dates from October 13, 2006.

In a very small nutshell, these executive orders put out a range of sanctions that included a trade embargo and blocking of Government of Sudan-related assets. So again, the revocation's going to be effective October 12th.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. That concludes our call today. I'd like to

remind everyone this call is on background, remains embargoed until 1:30 p.m., and our speakers should be referred to as Senior Administration Officials One, Two, and Three. Thank you very much and have a good day.

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