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BACKGROUND BRIEFING

Senior Administration Officials on Sudan

October 19, 2009
Washington, D.C.

MR. CROWLEY: We're now going to shift from on the record to on background, where we have anywhere from two to four experts who will try to help fill in some of the blanks. [Senior Administration Official], you want to come up, [Senior Administration Official], you want to come up? [Senior Administration Official], you're going to stay?

Yeah, this is a background briefing attributable to Senior Administration Officials. So you just know who's in the room, we have [Senior Administration Officials]. So [Senior Administration Officials], you want to come up and get started?

QUESTION: Shouldn't the experts start by answering the question on money if they know? (Laughter.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Yeah. They're – as you probably are aware, the United States has been one of the largest contributors to the humanitarian effort – relief effort in Darfur and will continue to be a substantial contributor to that program. We are also one of the largest contributors to the UN peacekeeping force.

At this point, there is no additional money allocated for this effort, but we expect that we will continue to be the largest single contributor to the humanitarian peace – the humanitarian effort in Darfur, and also a significant contributor to the peacekeeping efforts.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: I would just add that there's no question that resources will continue to be needed as they have been, and the U.S. spends over \$2 billion in FY 2009, all told, for all of the Sudan portion. And there will be some shifting around, particularly when one considers the needs of Southern Sudan. So the only thing I wanted to add is that there are a number of assessments underway right now that can help give us a sense of sort of the universe of what will need to be done in the short and medium term at various aspects of the Sudan problem before us. And so those assessments will certainly help to guide our plans regarding resources.

MR. CROWLEY: Go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes, I would like to understand what kind of relationship there will be in the coming few months with President Bashir, who is already indicted and accused of genocide.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: We have no intention of working with – directly with President Bashir. We firmly believe that he should get himself a good lawyer, present himself to the ICC, and face the charges that have been leveled against him. But equally, we think that it is important to engage with interlocutors within the Sudanese Government in order to resolve the issues that continue to exist both in Darfur and in the North – the implementation of the North-South agreement.

QUESTION: Just to get this right, you said you have no intentions of working with General Bashir; is that right? That's the position of the State Department, then?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I didn't hear the --

QUESTION: Working directly with General Bashir.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: No intention.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, correct.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Secretary Clinton made reference that the incentives and the disincentives are part of a classified annex of this plan. So I guess that means you can't elaborate on what those incentives and disincentives are. And therefore, I don't really see anything new here in terms of the policy. What is new? What are you announcing today that is new?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Well, I think there are a number of things that are new. First, the very clear elevation of full implementation of the CPA. So I think that it's fair to say that for quite some time, policy has been understandably focused on urgent crisis in Darfur, and CPA implementation fell behind, and you can see this in the timelines in the CPA itself that were not met, so fundamentally, this idea that we're moving forward on these two critical tracks simultaneously.

Another thing that's new is that we're dealing with a different timeline in this Administration, right. We're moving up to 2011 and the referendum in Southern Sudan. So there are a set of fundamentally different dynamics that have to be addressed in a very short period of time. In terms of the U.S. approach that – another element that is new and extremely explicit within the strategy is what the Secretary talked about, which is looking critically at conditions on the ground. And in the annex, there are a number of sort of benchmarks we're going to be looking at to make our assessments about whether or not we're achieving progress or seeing backsliding or failure to move toward these different objectives.

So we have a sort of more rigorous way of assessing where we're going. In part because the timeline is so short and urgency's so great, we need clear standards to know how to guide our policy. So those are a range of things that are new. Yes, it's true that the incentives and disincentives are classified in the annex, but the Secretary's quite right; they encompass a range of diplomatic, economic, and other possibilities, many of which have been discussed through the public sphere before and have – the things that have been discussed, you're all familiar with.

QUESTION: But can I just follow up? Why was the decision made to keep it classified and presumably just, I guess, convey it to the Sudanese Government privately?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: We don't think it's in the interest of the success of the policy to lay it all out at this time. But one of the things that this process was concerned with, and people spent a lot of time on, was ensuring that the leverage that we have, both positive and increased pressure, is real. And so we're not going to get into the position of issuing threats that aren't – ultimately aren't sort of true and viable. So we feel confident that what we have in the classified annex as quite serious; it does involve all elements of national power, and we think that it's conducive to the success of the strategy for us to keep that in that annex at this time.

QUESTION: Can I ask – and then if we can't talk about the pressures and incentives specifically, can you talk at least a little bit about what specific results you hope to see within the next six months before the election? I mean, are you looking for more humanitarian groups to be allowed in? Are you looking for a certain number of people to have their lives changed in some way? I mean, can you tell us what measures you're looking at?

And then second, you said that you won't be dealing directly with President Bashir, but with other interlocutors. Could you tell us a little bit about what kinds of interlocutors? Who are we talking about?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Maybe just a few points on the – what are we looking for. The kinds of things we're looking for are reduced tensions between Chad and Sudan, for example, improved security on the ground in Darfur, end of aerial bombardment and security operations. A ceasefire, ultimately, is what we're looking for in Darfur, and full engagement of the government with the rebels in Doha and a proposal that the rebels can respond to.

For North-South, we're looking at the referendum law, which we need to see that very soon, very urgently. We're looking for final preparations for the elections so it can be free, fair, and credible. And we're looking for other milestones that are critical to full implementation of the CPA, including the boundary – finalizing the boundary area, demarcation and delimitation, so it can be finalized.

And so there's benchmarks both in Darfur and in the CPA that need to be moved on urgently, as both Secretary Clinton and Special Envoy Gration commented on.

QUESTION: So what about the interlocutors? Who are you going to be dealing with then in Sudan?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, just to make one point. Currently, General Graton's involved with presidential advisor Dr. Ghazi Salahuddin, and he is the current interlocutor for General Graton. He's also meeting, however, with Vice President Taha or other members of the NCP administration, as necessary. But similarly, he is working with President Kiir, obviously, in the South and full members of the SPLM administration. We're trying also to engage the government together within the confines of the government of national unity. And so we're working with many players in the government and many international players, obviously. There's chief mediator Jibril Basoli, who is in charge of bringing peace to Darfur, as mandated by the African Union and the United Nations. We're meeting with, obviously, President Deby, who is very important in the peace process to lower tensions between Chad and Sudan. We're also meeting with Libya, Egypt, Ethiopia, and other members of IGAD as well. In fact, there's not many people we're not meeting with. The special envoy has traveled to China. He's been to Beijing. He's been to Moscow recently. Frequent trips to Doha, where the peace process is.

So it's a very inclusive process. It's a very intensive process of meeting officials in Sudan, in the region, and internationally.

QUESTION: Can you expand upon Secretary Clinton's third goal – creating a – that Sudan is less of a terrorism safe haven? And how do you balance that with the first two goals that she outlined, as far as the policy is concerned?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Okay. So the point I would just make on that is I think it's clear what we mean, the importance of ensuring that Sudan is not a safe haven for terrorists. But it is quite explicit in our policy that no -- none of the objectives will be sacrificed for the other. So just to make quite plain, there's no possibility that you move forward on goal three and the U.S. delivers a bunch of incentives when there isn't progress on these other fronts. We don't see that as achieving our interests at all, and it's quite explicit in the strategy that that wouldn't happen.

QUESTION: Hi, Kim Ghattas from the BBC. I'm still a little bit puzzled about how this strategy is going to work if the man who's at the center of everything, Omar Bashir, is not somebody you're going to engage with. I'm not saying that you should absolve him, but is he really going to cooperate and allow his government to cooperate on these efforts if he's still facing an indictment in the ICC?

And also, I don't know if I missed something, but I'm still unclear about what is in the annex. And I understand you don't want to make it public because it might jeopardize the success of the policy, but does the Government of Sudan know what they might get or what they might not get, if they don't cooperate with you?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I think it's possible to conduct successful negotiations with the Government of Sudan without, in fact, engaging directly with President

Bashir. I think that [Senior Administration Official Three] has outlined clearly a number of people inside the government at high levels with whom we are dealing on a regular and frequent basis. So I think it is possible to move forward with progress and with success without engaging the president of the country.

On your second issue, the Sudanese Government clearly knows what we want. They have a clear idea of our policy and our policy objectives. They know what we want from them, and we have a clear idea of what they want from us. And I think on the basis of that, we can in fact, talk fairly specifically with them about the issues.

MR. CROWLEY: Sir.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

MR. CROWLEY: I'm sorry, go ahead.

QUESTION: What do you want from the Sudanese Government to do?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I think we just – I think [Senior Administration Official Three] just indicated clearly what we want.

QUESTION: Yeah. Several steps to show cooperation with the United States and with the international community.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I think that [Senior Administration Official Three] just clearly stated what those things were. We want to see the full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. We want to see the resolution of issues related to the census. We want to see national elections occur. And we want the referenda to move forward in accordance with the CPA, which allows the people of the South to determine whether they want to remain a part of Sudan or whether they want their independence. We want to see the full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that was negotiated in January – completed in January of '05 implemented.

On the – in the case of Darfur, broadly speaking, we want to see an end to the humanitarian suffering, and we want an end to the political crisis there, which has divided the groups inside of Darfur amongst themselves, as well as with the government in Khartoum. But we have been fairly clear in what we are seeking in both resolution of the North-South issue as well as in Darfur.

MR. CROWLEY: Kirit.

QUESTION: Can I just ask about the rhetorical shift? The Secretary referred to this again as ongoing genocide, and there's been a debate between the Administration about that. How does that square with your efforts now in this new policy to kind of dial back rhetoric to engage the government a little bit more? Can you explain that, please?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think it's important to – there is no question about the commitment of the Secretary to end the humanitarian crisis that has occurred in Darfur, and to deal with the issues that are on the ground. But we feel that the best way to do this is through active diplomacy. Let us move ahead, deal with the issues of negotiating and end to the humanitarian problems in Darfur, an end to the fighting, to the political conflict, the instability, and the conditions that give rise to the humanitarian suffering that we've seen there since 2003. We're interested in moving ahead in engaging in the diplomacy and the negotiations that are required to ensure that we can bring a total end to the problems that have existed in the region.

QUESTION: Several things. Over the last five, six years, there have been various NGOs such as, say, Darfur Coalition, Africa Action, and numerous people here in Washington as well as, I would assume, in England and elsewhere, that have actually gone to Sudan. One is Jerry Fowler, another has worked both at the White House and I suppose over here, Gayle Smith, John Prendergast and others, such as celebrities as Mia Farrow and, of course, George Clooney. (Laughter.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Is there a question there?

QUESTION: The question is – they've highlighted this. It's been in the news. Now, you mentioned elections in the next six months. Do you want to see the same rubber stamping of elements that the present government brought into a new government? Are there such entities that you wouldn't want to see? And also, the Russians and Chinese, they've been shipping arms. Do you want to see an end to those arms shipments?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: It's up to the people of Sudan to select their leaders, both in the North and the South. What we do want to see is an election process that is open, transparent, free, and fair, in which people have a right to vote and vote for their individual leaders. So we're not in the business of selecting leaders.

With respect to the arms embargo, there is an arms embargo against the Khartoum government, and we would like to see that arms embargo continued and fully implemented by everyone who signed on to it.

MR. CROWLEY: Go ahead.

QUESTION: If you don't mind, just minutes ago, President Obama issued a statement on this. And I'm quoting from the email of the White House saying that if the Government of Sudan acts to improve the situation on the ground and to advance peace, there will be incentives. If it does not, then there will be increased pressure imposed by the United States and the international community. I mean, is this the kind of things that we should be expecting that will be applying on all parties, and can we have more on that?

MR. CROWLEY: We've had that question in three different forms already. We've gone as far as we can go on that.

QUESTION: Coming back to the question of the interlocutors, and it's a little bit more complex than just not dealing with an indicted president, for example. And it also raises the issue of keeping balance between the three foci of this policy. I mean, for example, Ghazi Salahuddin has been, and may still be, on the list related to terrorism. There are other people in the Sudan Government that have been named in conjunction with terrorism and other problems. So how do you find this balance, and how do you keep the process going without compromising parts of it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Well, I would just say that, you know, we can't have the kind of frank dialogue with the Government of Sudan that we need to have if we were to sort of choose for ourselves only the individuals who we feel best about dealing with. The situation is way too urgent to not proceed with completely frank dialogue about exactly what needs to happen to move forward.

But I would say that we do not lack for information about – as the Secretary said, as Ambassador Rice said, about the status of any of the objectives and where we stand on them. And so I don't think that we're going to find ourselves confused about who is standing in the way of achieving these objectives and who is not.

QUESTION: I have one specific question, and I'm sorry if this came up earlier. But you mentioned on terrorism before that you wouldn't give any incentives if they just move on that and not on other issues. But there's one big thing is the terrorism list. And General Gration had suggested that that might be something – an area that can change. And I wonder if you – if that depends on Darfur and South Sudan, or is it just a purely – a pure decision based on if they're cooperating on terrorism.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: We have to see significant, tangible, concrete progress across the board. It is not a quid pro quo for completion in one area. We have to see progress in all three areas for that to occur.

MR. CROWLEY: Thank you very much.

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