

Statement of Ambassador Princeton Lyman, U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan

U.S. House of Representatives Sub-Committee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights Hearing on “The North-South Sudan Conflict, 2012”

April 26, 2012

Introduction

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, Members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee’s Sub-Committee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights, thank you for the opportunity to come before you again to discuss the present state of relations between Sudan and South Sudan.

Defining the Problem

The state of that relationship is terribly strained. For some months there have been clashes along disputed sectors of the Sudan / South Sudan border. On April 10, South Sudan’s army invaded Heglig, a region of Sudan responsible for roughly 12 percent of that country’s oil production and 50 percent of its oil processing. South Sudan’s actions significantly escalated tensions between the two countries. A previous flare up of border fighting—with South Sudanese troops entering Sudan and Sudan bombing South Sudan—had scuttled what appeared to be a promising new approach to negotiations over oil between the two countries. Our efforts are focused on bringing an end to this cycle of violence and retaliation, and getting both parties back to the table for serious negotiations on all of the issues that divide them.

Mr. Chairman, neither of these countries truly wants a full-scale war. They know that they cannot afford it, and that neither of them can win it. However, given the high emotional pitch of the last few weeks and continued fighting and tensions along the border there is a risk that they could gravitate toward it. We are deeply concerned by the sort of emotional rhetoric coming out of Khartoum, denouncing the South and disavowing a return to negotiations. That is a worrisome tendency, in so far as it actually constrains the Sudanese government’s freedom of maneuver. Sudan has continued to bomb across the border even after the South Sudanese withdrew their forces last weekend, including aerial bombardments of civilian areas. The United States is strongly opposed to, and we continue to condemn, attacks across the border by either side.

Given these persistent tensions, the road back to negotiations will be a difficult and long one.

Mr. Chairman, both countries are arguing about security. South Sudan says their security has been violated over a long period of time, and that they have reacted accordingly and they want guarantees that, if they draw their forces back from the contested border, they will not be subject to future attacks by Sudan. The Government of Sudan says its security is at stake because of Southern support for rebel groups within Sudan who have publicly committed to overthrowing the government. The Sudanese believe that the Southern government is still a revolutionary movement committed to working with Sudanese rebel groups to achieve violent regime change. Such mutual suspicions, coupled with an undemarcated border and a lack of effective mechanisms for communication between the two states have fueled these recent violent clashes. So, in spite of South Sudan's withdrawal from Heglig, the potential for conflict remains.

Finding a Solution

In my travel to the region last week, my message to President Kiir and to all his colleagues was that they should note the reaction of the international community to their attack on Heglig. That reaction was one of quick, unanimous condemnation. In the eyes of the world, South Sudan had taken a dangerous step and one that had to be reversed. Heglig may be a disputed area, but an invasion is not the means by which nations should handle such disputes. We commend South Sudan's April 20 decision to respond to the international community's united message and withdraw its forces from Heglig. Its focus now is less on pressing a territorial claim to Heglig than on obtaining security guarantees that will prevent future conflict along that border.

Mr. Chairman, the United States is not working alone to defuse this crisis. The African Union (AU) has a strong team led by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, former Burundian President Buyoya, and former Nigerian President Abubakar—the AU High level Implementation Panel (AUHIP)—to facilitate negotiations. In response to this crisis, we have encouraged the AU Peace and Security Council to support a specific action plan under the auspices of the AUHIP. Unified AU support for a roadmap to end the conflict and bring the parties back to the negotiating table is essential to support the process of talks.

We are working to mobilize a united and strong international effort behind the AU's action plan, and in support of its specific goals. Over the last week I and

many other senior officials of our government have been engaged with international stakeholders in Europe, Africa, East Asia, and the Middle East. The international community has spoken with considerable unity during this crisis and we will strive to maintain that unity in support of the AU's approach to the parties. We are working in particular with the UN Security Council and the Arab League to advance the AU's efforts.

The Security Council has been expressing its growing alarm for the past few months about the worsening situation in Sudan and South Sudan, and issued its most strongly-worded Statement from the President yet on April 12 following briefings from AU HIP Chair Mbeki and UN Special Envoy to Sudan Menkerios, unanimously demanding a “complete, unconditional and immediate end to all fighting; withdrawal of the SPLA from Heglig; end to SAF aerial bombardments; end to repeated incidents of cross-border violence between Sudan and South Sudan; and an end to support by both sides to proxies in the other country.” We were encouraged that South Sudan responded to this call from the international community by announcing the withdrawal of its forces from Heglig. However, we remain very concerned that the aerial attacks from Sudan against South Sudan continue.

Just the day before yesterday, following three cross-border bombardments of oil fields, a bridge and a marketplace in Unity State by the Sudanese Air Force, the Security Council requested further updates from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and both UN Special Envoys to Sudan and South Sudan to assess the constantly-changing situation on the ground and evaluate further actions. I wish to commend Ambassador Rice for her leadership on this issue during our Security Council Presidency, and recognize her ongoing commitment to working with her colleagues on the Council to bring peace to the area and support the co-existence of two viable states at peace internally and with each other. It is more critical than ever that the international community continue to speak with one voice on this issue.

We are also in very close touch with China—building on President Obama and Secretary Clinton’s very positive discussions with the Chinese about coordination on Sudan and South Sudan policy. President Kiir is currently traveling in China, and we have had very good conversations with the Chinese about how that visit can help advance the peace process.

Two Areas Humanitarian Situation

Mr. Chairman, while the international community is rightly focused on helping the two nations to de-escalate tensions and avoid war, we have not forgotten the humanitarian needs stemming from the border conflicts in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states. More than 140,000 Sudanese refugees have been displaced from these two states since last June. We continue to be deeply concerned about the lack of humanitarian access to the civilian population in these two states, and about the conflict there. We stress the need for both parties to act in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. To this end, the United States has repeatedly called on the Government of Sudan to halt aerial bombardments targeting civilian areas in the Two Areas, as well as in South Sudan.

As long as the conflict in the Two Areas continues, neither country will enjoy a secure or peaceful border. Thus, political talks between the SPLM-N and the Government of Sudan must be part of the path to mutual security. While political talks ultimately represent the only way out of the conflict plaguing that region of Sudan, humanitarian access to the civilian population is an a-political issue. All parties must allow it and allow it at once.

Months ago, the UN, the Africa Union, and the Arab League offered a joint proposal for monitored international humanitarian access. The SPLM-N accepted the proposal. UN Special Envoy Menkerios has been engaging Sudan in support of it. In my meetings last week I pressed the Sudanese government yet again to approve this reasonable proposal, and approve it immediately, noting that the rainy season— which will make the delivery of humanitarian aid significantly more difficult, more dangerous, and more expensive— is nearly upon us. The Sudanese government has agreed to the proposal in principle, but they have questions about its implementation. I have urged them to move forward on this proposal right away; the implementation problems can be solved thereafter.

This is not only vital to the lives of civilians affected by conflict in the two states. I am also hopeful that the announcement of a coordinated, multilateral humanitarian assistance program would set the conditions for a cessation of hostilities in the two states, creating a more peaceful and stable border region for both countries.

Closing Remarks

Mr. Chairman and committee members, over the past year that I have spent working on Sudan issues, we have seen great achievements, but also terrible crises and missed opportunities on both sides. Yet, in spite of the conflicts and crises, I draw some confidence from the fact that peacemakers and pragmatists do exist on both sides of the border. They may be sidelined from time to time by hardliners, but they are always present, and I think their impulses better reflect the aspirations of their war-weary citizens. The United States remains committed to the growth and development of Sudan and South Sudan as two independent, viable states at peace internally and with one another. What is tragic in this latest conflict is the lost opportunity for economic progress for the people of Sudan and South Sudan. As President Obama said to the Sudanese and South Sudanese people in a message this week, “Conflict is not inevitable. . . . You still have a chance to avoid being dragged back in to war, which only leads to one place – more suffering, more refugees; more death; more lost dreams for you and your people. . . . Now is the time to choose peace.”

Mr. Chairman, we will continue to work with the African Union, the United Nations, and all other international partners to advance a peaceful settlement to this conflict.

Thank you.