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The Ties that Bind Bush and Bashir

‘War on Terror’ Ties Undermine U.S. Action to Protect Darfur

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This February, the Sudanese government launched a series of direct assaults on towns and villages in West Darfur that harkened back to the worst periods of violence since the current conflict in Sudan’s western region began in 2003. Military aircraft, including Antonov transport planes used as bombers and helicopter gunships accompanied Sudanese Armed Forces and government-supported proxy militia in attacking the towns of Sirbu, Silea and Abu Siruj, among others. While these towns were located in a region controlled by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebel group, no evidence provided by the government of Sudan, international journalists or human rights groups indicates that rebel elements were present in these communities at the time of assault.

Regardless, as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch report, the tactics used by Janjaweed militia and supporting government troops made no attempt to discriminate between civilians and present or imagined rebel combatants. Such deliberate attacks on civilians characterize the strategy of counterinsurgency by genocide that the Sudanese government has pursued since rebellion broke 5 years ago. Although it acknowledges the genocide, the Bush administration has failed to make Darfur a U.S. foreign policy priority. The resistance to turn rhetorical opposition to the genocide into real action is summed up by the cynical words of Congressional Research Service analyst Raphael Perl, “Darfur is not terrorism.”¹

In response to growing public pressure, the Bush administration has repeatedly stated that they are doing their best to stop genocide in Darfur and promote peace across Sudan. In fact, the U.S. government has undermined its leadership on these areas by instead prioritizing intelligence cooperation with President Omar al-Bashir’s brutal state security agency as a part of the global “war on terror.”

This report documents these extensive linkages. It breaks down the hypocrisy of how U.S. policy on the one hand condemns Khartoum as guilty of genocide and continues to name Sudan as a state sponsor of terror and on the other coddles the genocidaire as “damn good partners”² worthy of chartered flights to CIA headquarters.

¹ Josh Meyer. *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 2007. “U.S. report describes Sudan as ‘strong partner’ in war on terrorism.”

² Ibid.

The Clinton years

While U.S. government suspicions about links between the National Islamic Front regime (NIF, now known as the National Congress Party or NCP) in Khartoum and chemical weapons date to 1991, Sudan was first placed on the official list of state sponsors of terrorism in August 1993.³ Since then, U.S. intelligence has linked Sudan to the activities of groups designated by the U.S. as “terrorists” including Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Abu Nidal.⁴ Osama bin Laden lived in Sudan from roughly 1991 to 1996.⁵

Declining relations between Sudan and the U.S. in the 1990s included sanctions, the closing of the CIA station in Khartoum in 1995 and withdrawal of the U.S. ambassador in 1996. Eager to escape sanctions and normalize relations, the Bashir government repeatedly made overtures to share intelligence with U.S. officials in order to appeal to growing U.S. concern about terrorism connected to Islamic extremism. In 1996, Khartoum went so far as to offer to turn over Osama bin Laden to the government of Saudi Arabia so that the U.S. could prosecute him, a proposal that the Clinton administration ultimately declined and resulted in the al-Qaeda chief fleeing to Afghanistan.⁶

The Clinton administration never pursued an intelligence-sharing relationship with the Sudanese government. Instead, a U.S. policy of aggressive isolation and containment toward Sudan under Bill Clinton culminated in the disastrously misguided 1998 airstrike on the private Al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum, believed by some in the U.S. government to be manufacturing chemical weapons. In reality, the factory was actually just producing medicine as its owner claimed. One man was killed and 11 people were injured in the tragic attack, which demolished the factory.⁷

September 11 – from pariah to partner

The terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001 and George W. Bush’s subsequent launch of the so-called “war on terror” brought Washington and Khartoum much closer together. By November 2001, the CIA had reopened a station in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum, and both CIA and FBI officials were actively engaged in collaboration with the Sudanese National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) also known as the Mukhabarat.⁸ As the *Los Angeles Times* reported in April 2005, the CIA flew Salah Abdallah Gosh, then head of the Mukhabarat, via private jet to Washington for a series of secret meetings with the CIA and other U.S. security agencies.

³ James Risen. *New York Times*, October 27, 1999. “Question of evidence.”

⁴ Ted Dagne. Congressional Research Service Report for Congress. January, 2002 “Africa and the War on Terrorism.”

⁵ Preeti Bhattacharji. Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder, April 2, 2008. “State Sponsors: Sudan.” http://www.cfr.org/publication/9367/state_sponsors.html

⁶ Barton Gellman. *Washington Post*, October 3, 2001. “U.S. was foiled multiple times in efforts to capture Bin Laden or have him killed.”

⁷ Human Rights Watch. November 25, 2003. “Sudan, Oil and Human Rights.” <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/sudan1103> For more on the al-Shifa incident, see Daniel Pearl’s coverage for *The Wall Street Journal*.

⁸ Ken Silverstein. *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 2005. “Official pariah valuable to America’s war on terrorism.” This expose was the first public report of these intelligence ties, and much of this section draws from it.

At the time, Gosh was under intense scrutiny by activists and Members of Congress as one of the key figures orchestrating the genocide in Darfur. In February 2006, UN expert investigators referred his name to the Security Council as one of 17 individuals recommended to be targeted for sanctions because of their documented roles in planning and carrying out crimes against humanity and obstructing the region's peace process.⁹

This VIP treatment of Gosh was hardly an isolated incident. Rather, it characterized a systematic pattern of collaboration that has grown to the point where the latest State Department Country Report on Terrorism for Sudan (April 30, 2007) described the Sudanese government as "a strong partner in the war on terror." Much of this collaboration has focused on monitoring the movements and activities of al-Qaeda and other groups through Sudanese territory and in the Horn of Africa, in support of U.S. counterinsurgent strategy in Iraq and other countries in the Middle East. Not only has Sudan shared information on Islamic extremists traveling from its territory to Iraq, but direct NISS access to these transnational "pipelines" (as a result of having facilitated their creation in the 1990s) has helped the Sudanese intelligence service create a network of informants on insurgents in Iraq. CIA officials suggest that one other reason Sudan is so valuable is because its operatives are Arabs who can blend into Iraqi populations much more easily than white or other non-Arab American officers.¹⁰

Sudanese intelligence has also been important in U.S. military intervention in Somalia.¹¹ According to Sudanese Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail, the NISS has served as the "eyes and ears" of the CIA in Somalia.¹² In December 2006, backed by the U.S. government, Ethiopia invaded Somalia on the pretext of removing the threat of an Islamic fundamentalist regime that was supporting international terrorists. In January 2007, U.S. cruise missile strikes targeting suspected terrorists in Somalia supplemented the Ethiopian assault. The strikes succeeded in killing none of their top targets, but killed an unconfirmed number of civilians, likely in the dozens, including children. In March 2008, the U.S. again launched air strikes on a suspected terrorist target in Somalia, reportedly killing three women, three children and seriously injuring dozens of other people.¹³

In direct contradiction to the Bush administration's public anti-genocide rhetoric, dominant elements of the NCP regime are literally embraced by the U.S. government. An October 2005 report from *The Guardian* describes a scene from a conference of African intelligence officials held in Khartoum, which included U.S. and British counterterrorism operatives as observers. "In full view of the assembled company, [the senior CIA agent] gave General Salah Abdallah Gosh,

⁹ Mark Leon Goldberg. *American Prospect*, February 17, 2006. "The Test."
<http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?articleId=11167>

¹⁰ Gregg Miller/Josh Meyer. *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2007. "US relies on Sudan despite condemning it."

¹¹ While the deposed Union of Islamic Courts was an extremely conservative Islamic government with extremist elements, its period of rule had provided the highest degree of stability and rule of law in parts of Somalia that the country had seen since its former government imploded in 1994. It provided a mechanism for Islamic politicians to be integrated into the government, where they were beginning to be held accountable for their behavior, rather than driven to violent warfare or terrorism. The U.S./Ethiopian proxy Transitional Federal Government that now nominally administers Somalia has minimal credibility with the Somali people. As governance and rule of law have collapsed in the past 18 months, the region around Mogadishu has erupted into the worst humanitarian and security conditions seen in years. Intelligence provided by the Sudanese government likely helped facilitate this U.S. intervention.

¹² Silverstein. *Los Angeles Times*, 2005.

¹³ Nicole Lee. *Final Call News*, March 27, 2008. "Is America terrorizing Somalia?"
http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/article_4484.shtml

Sudan's intelligence boss, a bear hug. The general responded by handing over a goody-bag, wrapped in shiny green paper."¹⁴

In 2004, the African Union established the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) to promote cooperation among African governments through the AU to address the diverse peace, security and stability challenges facing the continent. According to Dennis Dlamini, CISSA's Executive Secretary, "sanctity of human life, individual security and not regime security and shunning genocide" were all among the guiding principles of the body.¹⁵ At a CISSA workshop held in Kigali in November 2007, Rwandan officials urged representatives from the 46 African countries present to make stopping genocide a top priority for the body and for African governments.¹⁶

Yet in June 2007, Khartoum hosted CISSA's fourth full conference, and just as in the 2005 meeting described above, senior CIA officials were present. There, the CIA's Director of Operations for Africa described the Sudanese as "very much on top of the international situation," and lauded their professionalism in sharing tips about new al-Qaeda-related activities on the continent.¹⁷ Reports described the interaction between NISS chief Salah Al-Din Abdullah Mohamed and Western operatives as jovial, featuring back-slapping and dancing while a pop band played.¹⁸ His predecessor, Salah Gosh, chaired the conference.

It is disturbing to see the same officials who have organized the Janjaweed militia and orchestrated the genocide in Darfur taking leadership roles in this new multilateral initiative that supposedly aims to protect human security in Africa and prevent crimes against humanity. Just as troubling is the role of high-level CIA officers in these meetings. U.S. intelligence operatives have a long history of secret, often-coercive support for brutal dictators on the continent as long as they served narrowly defined U.S. national security interests. For some of today's policymakers, the anti-Soviet litmus test of the Cold War has been simply replaced by the deeply flawed "war on terror" framework.

Because of this shameful calculus, the Bush administration has been so far unwilling to move beyond public criticism of Khartoum to the real action of sustained, concerted diplomatic pressure to follow through on its words and actually end the genocide. Instead, the CIA lauds its cooperation with the "professional" Mukhabarat. Beyond U.N. documented links of NISS officials like Gosh to crimes against humanity in Darfur, the latest State Department Country Report on Human Rights for Sudan (March 11, 2008) documents how that same Mukhabarat "frequently harassed" political opponents, detaining "an undetermined number of political detainees" who were reportedly "detained without charge, tortured, and held incommunicado."¹⁹

¹⁴ Jonathan Steele. *The Guardian*, October 7, 2005. "Darfur wasn't genocide and Sudan is not a terrorist state."

¹⁵ Hans Pienaar. *Sunday Tribune*, June 10, 2007. "Spooks, hacks party in secretive Sudan."

¹⁶ James Munyaneza and Felly Kimenyi. *New Times*, November 6, 2007. "Prioritise war against genocide, continent told."

¹⁷ Vivienne Walt. *Time/CNN*, June 20, 2007. "A quiet American in Khartoum."

<http://205.188.238.181/time/world/article/0,8599,1635502,00.html>

¹⁸ Paul Moorcraft, *Business Day*, June 22, 2007. "Strange bedfellows in Khartoum."

¹⁹ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100506.htm>

No punches pulled? – The Bush administration’s explanation

Although the media has done little to follow up on the investigative reporting of the *Los Angeles Times* that has provided much of the public information on the “war on terror” ties between Presidents Bush and Bashir, last summer, concerned leaders in Congress challenged the administration’s hypocrisy on this issue. Senators Ron Wyden, Russell Feingold, Olympia Snow and Sheldon Whitehouse, all member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, wrote a letter on May 4 to Michael McConnell, U.S. Director of National Intelligence.

“How is it not a paradox for the State Department to describe the Sudanese Government as a ‘strong partner in the War on Terror’ while at the same time listing Sudan as a ‘State Sponsor of Terror’?” Senator Wyden said.²⁰ “We need to understand the basis for this description, especially since some are suggesting that Sudan’s cooperation on counterterrorism is a good reason for the U.S. not to intervene to stop the genocide in Darfur.”

The Bush administration has yet to publicly respond to their direct concerns. Director McConnell’s February 2008 public testimony to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence described the situation in Darfur in pessimistic terms, but failed to mention CIA or any other U.S. intelligence cooperation with Khartoum.

Previous comments by administration officials, however, have been to bluntly deny that a coherent U.S.-Sudan policy is important, insisting that the issue of the “war on terror” and U.S. efforts to end the genocide are completely unrelated. Andrew Natsios, then U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan, said the following in December 2006: “We appreciate the cooperation between the Sudanese Government and us on counterterrorism. It is not driving U.S. policy, it is not the first principle, it is subordinated to the human rights issues and its humanitarian principle.”²¹

The June 2005 comments of Charles Snyder, Natsios’ predecessor at the State Department, sound remarkably similar. “We have not at all pulled back our punches based on what we’re doing on the intelligence side. Certainly, Secretary Powell didn’t pull his punches when he called it genocide.”²² Yet that’s exactly what Colin Powell did when, in flagrant disregard of the Geneva Convention, he declared “no new action is dictated” by the U.S. government determination that genocide was taking place in Darfur in 2005.

The United Nations as scapegoat

In January, Richard Williamson, widely regarded as a capable career diplomat, replaced Andrew Natsios as the new U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan. President Bush framed this appointment as a step toward increased U.S. diplomatic pressure to end the genocide in Darfur and promote peace in Sudan. Williamson has been publicly vocal on the issue of UNAMID deployment and CPA implementation in 2008, particularly in March, and has reflected a strong understanding of the need to link these two issues together in U.S. policy. While this is a definite improvement, some of his energy has been misdirected, and the U.S. still refuses to take the most critical steps necessary to achieve these goals.

²⁰ <http://feingold.senate.gov/~feingold/releases/07/05/20070504.html>

²¹ <http://www.state.gov/p/af/rls/spbr/2006/79561.htm>

²² *Democracy Now!* June 1, 2005. “CIA secretly restores ties to Sudan despite ongoing human rights abuses in Darfur.” http://www.democracynow.org/2005/6/1/cia_secretly_restores_ties_to_sudan

Much of Special Envoy Williamson's public lambasting has been directed not at Khartoum or its UNSC guardian, China, but at the UN as an institution for failing to expedite UNAMID's deployment. Whatever challenges the various UN agencies working on Sudan face in achieving the full peacekeeping mission authorized by UNSC 1769 stem less from any organizational deficiencies than from the reality the United Nations is still an organization whose ability to act depends on the political will of its member states. Of these, the U.S. is the most powerful member, so the failure of the institution to follow through on its commitments is the failure of U.S. foreign policy.

Williamson has repeatedly expressed his "frustration" at the lack of urgency in getting "boots on the ground" in March press conferences, attempting to shift the blame for UNAMID's deployment from Khartoum, China, or Russia to the UN. This tactic is designed to take political pressure from activists off of Washington so that it can continue its intelligence-sharing relationship with Khartoum without being forced to expend the diplomatic capital within the UNSC and other venues necessary to actually get UNAMID in place. Despite ongoing NCP obstruction of UNAMID's full deployment, even U.S. public rhetoric against Khartoum has softened in recent months, as the blame has shifted to the UN.²³

This has emboldened Sudanese officials to make increasingly aggressive public statements that U.S.-Sudan ties are closer than ever to normalization, with various proclamations by government spokespeople in both the NCP and SPLM putting the timeline at a matter of months. Abdalmahmood Abdalhaleem, Sudan's ambassador to the UN, termed this a "strategic shift."²⁴ While U.S. officials maintain that relations will normalize only if Khartoum addresses the crisis in Darfur and follows through on its CPA commitments, neither President Bush nor Special Envoy Williamson have spoken out clearly and forcefully to enunciate exactly the conditions under which such a normalization would occur. President Bush should publicly state that the U.S. will never normalize relations until UNAMID is fully deployed and freely operating in Darfur, and the NCP-dominated regime in Khartoum has followed through on all of its commitments to the CPA, putting the country on track for the 2009 elections mandated in that treaty.

Special Envoy Williamson has suggested that the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) should concentrate on getting more troops deployed immediately, rather than waiting until issues such as logistical support or the presence of military equipment such as the two dozen helicopters the mission requires to operate in Darfur's vast landscape are resolved. For the people of Darfur, it is vital that all the elements of UNAMID authorized by UNSC 1769 are implemented. The complete deployment of the 26,000 international peacekeepers and police with full resources and equipment is what matters on the ground. Rather than simply blaming an institution in which it is a leading member for these shortfalls, the U.S. should work with its European allies to secure helicopter contributions, or with Russia, who in early March suggested it might be willing to loan helicopters to UNAMID if they were operated by another country's personnel²⁵ In addition, while President Bush's announcement of \$100 million in new U.S. UNAMID funding during his visit to Rwanda in February received much media fanfare, the U.S. remains \$668 million in arrears to the UN this year for UNAMID and other peacekeeping operations worldwide.

²³ Wasil Ali. *Sudan Tribune*, March 21, 2008. "Sudan Racing against time to normalize ties with U.S."

²⁴ Maggie Farley. *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 2008. "U.S. offers to restore ties with Sudan."

²⁵ <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.gIKWLeMTIsG/b.3967539>

Pressure on China – a window of opportunity

As a March 2008 Human Rights First report documented extensively, China has supplied the overwhelming bulk of the weapons and military equipment used by the Sudanese government and its proxy militias to carry out genocide in Darfur.²⁶ China also has acted as a guardian to President Bashir's regime in the UN Security Council, vetoing or threatening to veto resolutions or language in resolutions that would ensure the full deployment of an effective, robust peacekeeping force. The growing activist movement focused on the 2008 Summer Olympic Games while sponsoring genocide in Darfur has put the Chinese government in a public relations scramble to downplay their linkages with the genocidaires, and may have helped push China to contribute several hundred personnel to the hybrid force.

Now, more than ever, the U.S. government has a strategic opportunity to put pressure on China in the UN Security Council and other diplomatic forums to remove its support for Khartoum and use its leverage with the Sudanese government to protect the people of Darfur. Yet according to Western diplomats familiar with recent UN Security Council meetings, "neither Washington nor Russia was using its full diplomatic clout with China."²⁷

U.S. priorities – all bark and no bite on human rights

International cooperation on issues including intelligence is important to stopping terrorism, but despite the collaboration with the CIA described above, the government of Sudan still supports groups that the U.S. defines as terrorists. Even more glaringly, Khartoum continues to engage in the most extreme crime against humanity possible – genocide – against its own people, while the absence of substantive U.S. leadership has paralyzed the international response.

Some analysts have suggested that by responding with public condemnation but without accompanying action to end the crisis, the U.S. response may have made the humanitarian and security situation on the ground even worse and impeded peace efforts.²⁸ Whether or not this is true, it is inescapable that life for Darfuris is worse than ever from a humanitarian standpoint, and in the past several months, the government has engaged in as blatant acts of state-directed violence deliberately targeting civilians as it ever has. From this perspective, the lack of a serious international response to protect these vulnerable communities is utterly unacceptable to the conscience of the American people, the United Nations, and the world.

Can the U.S. trust the manipulative and notoriously self-interested Sudanese government for legitimate information to prevent terrorist attacks on the United States? It doesn't matter – restraining from taking the diplomatic steps necessary to end the genocide in Darfur and promote peace for Sudan in order to prioritize the "war on terror" reflects the racist judgment that the lives of Africans in *immediate* danger are worth less than those of Americans *potentially* at risk of terrorist attacks. Ultimately, using this intelligence to facilitate the destabilization of Somalia at the expense of civilian lives and to promote the general militarization of Africa fuels a climate of anti-Americanism, poverty and political and social injustice that encourages terrorists. A better U.S. counterterrorism policy would be to pursue a strategy of just security, promoting

²⁶ Human Rights First, March 2008. "Investing in Tragedy, China's Money, Arms, and Politics in Sudan." <http://www.humanrightsfirst.info/pdf/080311-cah-investing-in-tragedy-report.pdf>

²⁷ Louis Charbonneau. *Reuters UK*, April 2, 2008. "U.S. urges UN to speed up Darfur deployment."

²⁸ Such as Alex de Waal, Julie Flint and Johan Brosché, among others.

human development and working with African governments and civil society alike to support genuine people-driven democracy across the continent.

The trade-off being made by the Bush administration here is unambiguously unacceptable. The benefit? The U.S. gains access to intelligence from one of the canniest, most deftly manipulative anti-American regimes in the world in order to promote a flawed militaristic approach to national security in Africa and other regions. The cost? The tactics of government supported violence in the first genocide of the 20th century have returned to their height of brutality, and at the current pace, over 400,000 people will be newly displaced from their homes Darfur this year.²⁹

Scholars and journalists have proven without doubt that lack of political will, not the absence of knowledge, was the reason the Clinton administration allowed 800,000 people to die in the Rwandan genocide of 1994.³⁰ President Bush has repeatedly stated that this time, the U.S. response is different. In his own words, “I promise this to the people of Darfur: The United States will not avert our eyes from a crisis that challenges the conscience of the world.”³¹ Yet by deciding to speak out without acting, he remains as complicit to genocide as his predecessor.

For further information:

- **Africa Action’s Talking Points on How to Stop Genocide in Darfur, Sudan**
<http://www.africaaction.org/newsroom/index.php?op=read&documentid=2425&type=14&issues=1024>
- For more on the militarization of U.S.-Africa policy, see **Africa Action’s Statement on AFRICOM**, or the **2008 Africa Policy Outlook**.
<http://www.africaaction.org/newsroom/docs/AFRICOMStatement082.pdf>
<http://www.africaaction.org/resources/docs/AfricaPolicyOutlook20082.pdf>
- To **listen** to former Africa Action Executive Director Salih Booker discuss U.S.-Sudan “war on terror” ties with *Los Angeles Times* investigative journalist Ken Silverstein and Representative Donald Payne in 2005, please visit the archives of the Pacifica Radio program *Democracy Now!*
http://www.democracynow.org/2005/5/3/bush_administration_allied_with_sudan_despite

²⁹ This figure is based on the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimate released on March 3 that 80,000 people had been newly displaced so far in 2008 from Darfur, 58,000 in February from West Darfur as a result of Sudanese government attacks on villages.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/RMOI-7CJM3Y?OpenDocument>

³⁰ See Samantha Power’s *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (2003) for a particularly strong account of the Clinton administration’s (lack of) response to the Rwandan genocide.

³¹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/05/20070529.html>