

Open Letter to United States (US) President Donald Trump, the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Members of the US Congress

29 November 2019

Dear Honourables,

We, the undersigned Sudanese intellectual, academic, civic, political and private sector actors, and members of civil society organizations write to urge the swift removal of Sudan from designation as a 'state sponsor of terror' (SSoT).

Sudan is at a crossroads: after extraordinary action by its people to topple the despotic and ideologically motivated regime of Omar Al Bashir there is finally an opportunity for the country to emerge from thirty years of conflict, oppression, economic mismanagement and isolation into a democratic era of peace and prosperity.

Support from the international community is vital if the people of Sudan are to succeed in dismantling the architecture of corruption and violence which kept the country in penury and division for so long. **Your help for the swift removal of the US 'state sponsor of terror' (SSoT) designation is a critical precondition for this transformation.**

The origins of the designation

As you know, the United States designated Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1993 and later imposed economic sanctions, declaring a US national emergency under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. This state of emergency has been renewed annually since 1997, keeping Sudan in the spotlight in American policy.

The previous dictatorship of "Alingaz" Omar El Bashir did indeed have a long record of support for groups connected with international terrorism. The regime harbored many committed to an extreme vision of political Islam from around the world, providing passports to facilitate their movement and allowing them to establish training camps and education and economic infrastructure within Sudan, generating threats to regional and global peace and security. Considering Sudan's deep rooted democratic tradition such travesties would have been impossible if unspeakable atrocities had not kept the people from expressing their objection.

Re-engagement

In 2015, however, the US administration formally entered negotiations aimed at normalizing relations with the Bashir regime. A new stage was reached in 2017, with the removal of economic and trade sanctions. Many in Sudan spoke out against this process at the time—including some of the signatories of this letter: they were concerned that enhanced relations with the United States would not encourage the regime to change its policies, but strengthen both it, and the forces of terror and conflict on which it fed. Indeed, little changed in the regime's stance, whether in terms of repression and war at home or its support for destabilizing forces abroad.

A new beginning for Sudan

In the end, however, it was not pressure from outside, but the courageous actions of millions of Sudanese in peaceful street protests, that put an end to that dreadful saga, forcing the removal of Bashir in April 2019. After four arduous months of negotiation, a civilian government took their oath of office in August 2019 to represent and serve the true interests of the Sudanese people.

The new cabinet, led by renowned former international civil servant Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdoug, now faces a series of serious challenges, from turning around the economy, to negotiating peace, introducing democratic and human rights reforms, and dismantling the deep-rooted structures of corruption and exclusion. A range of destabilizing forces, including those allied with international terror with whom the old regime had a symbiotic ideological and financial relationship, are eager to undermine the new dispensation: they may represent an immediate existential risk to the Sudanese civilian transitional process.

Friends of Sudan have two options: the first is to sit back and watch the civilian government tackle this obstacle to stability alone. The second is to support them to challenge this dark legacy of the previous regime. One critical tool is lifting the SST designation. Removing the SST designation would have two key impacts.

First, it would **allow Sudan's new leaders to seek debt relief and open the door to increased international and regional investment and trade**. This is vital to turning around Sudan's plummeting economy. The rising price of food, medicine, and other basic commodities is putting huge pressure on the people, pressure which the supporters of the ousted regime are eager to manipulate.

Second, engagement with the mechanisms of the international banking system would **strengthen the capacity of the new government to tackle corruption and terror and dismantle funding streams for criminal networks**, bolstering internal efforts with international cooperation. Bashir turned Sudan into a safe haven for corruption, money laundering and facilitating transfers to terrorist groups, including as a consequence of US sanctions which pushed Sudan out of the international banking system. The lifting of sanctions in 2017 did little to correct this, primarily because there was no intention on the part of the regime to alter its own practice, but also because the international banking community was extremely wary of opening up to a regime which appeared to have done little to have merited a change in policy. This all changed with the April- December 2019 revolution: the world is now ready to re-engage formally once the way is cleared.

The people of Sudan should not be punished for the sins of the regime which caused them so much suffering and for which they sacrificed so much to remove.

The SST roadmap

Some have argued that little can be done quickly, that lifting the designation is a long process, including requiring the conduct of a six-month evaluation by the US State department. Over a year ago, however, the United States was already on the path to lifting the designation in the context of the old regime. In early November 2018 the State Department announced the roadmap for a review of the SSOT: expanded cooperation on counterterrorism, improved human rights protection including freedoms of religion and press, increased humanitarian access, cessation of fighting with rebels and work towards peace talks, and demonstration that the regime had ceased supporting terrorism.

The work of the Sudanese people to overthrow the Bashir regime has effectively achieved these targets.

A genuine cessation of hostilities and peace process is underway stewarded by the new transitional government and humanitarian access has been re-established. With champions of religious and media freedom in ministerial positions—some who served years in prison for their human rights activism under the old regime—the stance of the government on fundamental freedoms is unequivocal. The personal histories and ideologies of the Forces for Freedom and Change in Sudan and the new cabinet—in addition to the practice and policy changes which they have already instituted in their first few months of office—are clear evidence of their committed stand against radicalization and fundamentalism.

Foreign policy

Maintaining the SSoT designation is using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. A range of other measures, including targeted sanctions, can be taken against criminal networks that do not injure the people of Sudan and their transitional authority as a whole. Most critically, a strong civilian government and a supportive popular constituency are the best bulwarks against a resurgence of the forces of darkness and their supporting networks. The minority of skeptics in Sudan are only associating, perhaps unknowingly, with a minority clique of former regime supporters and day-dreamers of a comeback to their lost paradise. The overwhelming majority of Sudanese, however, have a conviction that the current course of peaceful change is irreversible. The SSoT designation puts an unjust economic and political burden on the shoulder on a government that is working in extraordinary conditions to establish democracy, peace, justice and stability in an exhausted country. We believe it is also against the US's own interests.

As former President Jimmy Carter has urged, “President Donald Trump's administration should work with Congress to remove Sudan from the SSoT list immediately and give democracy there a chance”.

Yours sincerely,

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