

Wolf Criticizes Obama's Abdication Of Leadership In Sudan
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WOLF CRITICIZES OBAMA'S ABDICATION OF LEADERSHIP IN SUDAN
Special Envoy Position Still Vacant While Human Rights Situation Deteriorates
and Indicted War Criminal Bashir Remains at the Helm in Khartoum

Washington, D.C. (July 11, 2013) – Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA), co-chairman of the Congressional Caucus on Sudan and South Sudan and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, as well as a longtime advocate for human rights and religious freedom globally, today released the following statement charging the Obama Administration with neglect in dealing with the deteriorating human rights situation in Sudan.

Wolf noted that this Friday marks the three-year anniversary of the International Criminal Court (ICC) issuing an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar Bashir on charges of genocide in Darfur including overseeing acts of torture, the rape of thousands of women, and the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Sudanese people – and yet Bashir continues to travel the globe with virtual impunity, he said.

Wolf was the first member of the House of Representatives to travel to Darfur in 2004, and visited South Sudan most recently in 2012. In February, Wolf called on Secretary of State John Kerry to appoint a new special envoy to Sudan, a position that has been vacant for nearly four months.

Wolf's remarks, which were submitted to the Congressional Record, are the second in a series of statements he will make highlighting the administration's failure to prioritize human rights and religious freedom in U.S. foreign policy. On Monday, Wolf took to the House floor and announced his intention to outline the administration's silence or ineptitude "in country after country when it comes to advocating for the oppressed, the marginalized and the vulnerable."

The full text of Wolf's remarks on Sudan are below:

Obama's Abdication of Leadership in Sudan

Mr. WOLF: Mr. Speaker, Friday marks three years since the International Criminal Court (ICC) released an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar Bashir on charges of genocide in Darfur including overseeing acts of torture, the rape of thousands of women, and forced displacement of hundreds of thousands.

And yet, almost inexplicably, Bashir continues to travel the globe with virtual impunity thanks in no small part to the Obama administration's morally bankrupt posture when it comes to the regime in Khartoum.

For four months now the position of Sudan Special Envoy has been vacant. This vacancy is symptomatic of a president that has all but forsaken the people of Sudan.

Last December a group of prominent Sudan activists and advocates wrote a letter to the administration, which I submit for the Record, expressing their "grave concerns that the current U.S. policy is ineffective at stopping mass atrocities in Sudan." They urged President Obama, in his second term, to embrace "an urgent shift in the U.S. policy to finally end the humanitarian crises and bring about a just and lasting peace in Sudan."

The letter cited the president's own words from 2007 when he rightly called the genocide in Darfur a "stain on our souls" and said that "as a president of the United States I don't intend to abandon people or turn a blind eye to slaughter."

And yet, I can't help but wonder if the people of Darfur, who have been displaced from their homes and brutalized by violence for ten years now, do in fact feel abandoned by this president and this administration.

The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan, Ali Al-Za'tari, released a statement on July 7, prompted by the recent tragic death of two World Vision humanitarian workers caught in a shootout between government forces and rebels in Darfur, in which he commented on the "continuing unstable security" in the region which threatens to disrupt the flow of vital aid to an already desperate populace.

Not only is Darfur's nightmare ongoing, but Khartoum's brutality has only spread, consistent with its decades' long effort to systematically and ruthlessly consolidate power resulting in the death and displacement of untold thousands. More recently the Nuban people have been driven from their homes, targeted for killing and terrorized because of the color of their skin. Khartoum has indiscriminately bombed civilian populations — disrupting an entire way of life for this largely farming population. Starvation, death and despair have followed.

According to the UN Humanitarian Affairs office approximately half a million people have been displaced because of the conflict in Nuba. Last week a Sudanese jet reportedly attacked the routes typically taken by refugees from the Nuba region to the Yida refugee camp in South Sudan killing an unknown number of civilians.

I have visited Yida and talked with the people personally. I have heard their pleas for help and I have conveyed their message to this administration — a message which fell on largely deaf ears.

On March 19, USA Today featured a joint op-ed by actor and co-founder of the anti-genocide organization Not On Our Watch, Don Cheadle, and John Prendergast the co-founder of the Enough Project, in the op-ed wrote, "By excluding all but a narrow clique of Sudanese from access to the power and wealth of the country, marginalized groups from the west (Darfur), south (Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains) and east have all taken up arms against that regime...Any peace effort should deal comprehensively with all the rebel movements, the unarmed opposition, and civil society, in search of a solution for the whole of Sudan. Until the abusive governing system in Sudan is radically reformed, there will be blood."

Indeed, much blood has been shed, and yet inexplicably this administration has embraced a policy of engagement marked by conciliatory outreach to Khartoum, including the prospect of debt relief for a genocidal government.

While there has been criticism of two successive special envoys, ultimately they were merely the implementers of a policy that is inherently flawed and ultimately ineffective.

In a February 12 letter to Secretary of State Kerry I wrote, "Our approach to Sudan and South Sudan needs reinvigorating. It demands a renewed sense of moral clarity about who we are dealing with in Khartoum—namely genocidaires. It necessitates someone who can speak candidly with our friends in South Sudan about their own internal challenges, including corruption, and shortcomings as a new nation. While an envoy alone does not a policy make, a high-profile special envoy, from outside the department, with the knowledge and mandate to aggressively pursue peace, security and justice for the people of Sudan and South Sudan, is an important step in the right direction."

The model of an effective special envoy that I often refer to is that of Senator John Danforth. In 2001, I was at the Rose Garden ceremony when Senator Danforth, standing between President Bush and Secretary of State Powell, was appointed as Sudan Special Envoy. President Bush's leadership in appointing Danforth and giving him this charge was instrumental in securing, after two and a half years of negotiations, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), thereby bringing about an end to the war and ultimately paving the way for South Sudan's independence. Danforth was a high-profile envoy. He had the ear of the president and the secretary and didn't get bogged down in the department's bureaucracy. He was uniquely positioned to negotiate and his stature, prior to taking the job, communicated a clear sense of urgency and priority on the part of the U.S. He didn't require a sizeable staff, or even a full-time

State Department post, but the diplomatic feat he accomplished, with President Bush's blessing and support, was nothing short of remarkable.

Meanwhile, not only has the Obama administration failed to fill the Sudan Special Envoy post, it has actively sought to block efforts in Congress, which I initiated, to isolate Bashir. Last year I offered an amendment to the State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill which would have cut non-humanitarian foreign assistance to any nation that allowed him into their country without arresting him. The amendment was adopted with bipartisan support by voice vote despite the department's opposition.

This approach of using our increasingly scarce aid dollars to effectuate change and further our foreign policy objectives is a tried and true method. When Malawi allowed Bashir to enter the country to attend a regional trade summit I pressed the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) to end Malawi's compact. The MCC was initially opposed to this course of action but ultimately, in the face of a deteriorating human rights situation internally, reversed course and suspended Malawi's compact, citing Bashir's visit as one of the reasons.

Fortunately Malawi's new president, Joyce Banda, hoping to reinvigorate her country's relationship with donor countries, last year took a firm stand in refusing to allow Bashir to visit her country for the African Union (AU) summit. President Banda went so far as to decline to host the summit lest her country and her government be placed in the position of being forced to host a war criminal. Given her principled stand I made clear to the MCC Board that I supported Malawi's compact being reinstated which it ultimately was.

However, other countries, including large recipients of U.S. foreign assistance, have not followed suit and the administration has failed to embrace this approach to spur such action. As recently as yesterday, reports surfaced that Bashir would soon travel to Nigeria—yet another country which has signed up to the Rome Statute—the founding treaty of the ICC.

The amendment I proposed would effectively isolate Bashir and make him an international pariah as is befitting a man with blood on his hands. It is noteworthy that the amendment garnered the support of 70 prominent Holocaust and genocide scholars. Dr. Rafael Medoff, director of the Wyman Institute, which initiated a letter of support to the administration from these scholars, said: "Halting aid to those who host Bashir would be the first concrete step the U.S. has taken to isolate the Butcher of Darfur and pave the way for his arrest. If the Obama administration is serious about punishing perpetrators of genocide, it should support the Wolf Amendment."

Sadly that support never materialized.

When it wasn't busy opposing Congressional efforts to isolate Bashir the administration was cozying up to elements of the regime in Khartoum and granting them an air of legitimacy. On April 23 the Associated Press reported that "The Obama administration is preparing to welcome a senior Sudanese delegation to the United States for some rare highest-level diplomacy between the countries." The delegation was to include Sudanese presidential adviser Nafie Ali Nafie.

Upon learning of this invitation I immediately wrote the president and expressed my strong opposition citing an October 2008 Los Angeles Times profile piece on Nafie which opened with the following, "He's accused of torturing enemies, cozying up to Osama bin Laden in the 1990s and plotting to assassinate Egypt's president." The Times piece continued, describing him as, "the leader of the hardline faction in the ruling National Congress Party," and the one who "opposed allowing U.N. peacekeepers into Darfur and believed that the ruling party gave up too much power in signing a 2005 U.S.-brokered peace treaty that ended a 21-year civil war with southern rebels."

The article quoted a former University of Khartoum science professor and critic of the Khartoum government who was arrested in 1989 as saying that Nafie was his interrogator. Specifically he said, "I was tortured, beaten and flogged in his presence...He was administering the whole thing. He did it all in such a cool manner, as if he were sipping coffee."

I am not opposed to diplomacy. But there are plenty of locations, including through our embassy in Khartoum, to engage in these talks. Why the administration would choose now to reward Khartoum,

specifically the likes of Nafie Ali Nafie, with an invitation to Washington is beyond me. It is further worth noting that the invitation is utterly at odds with Obama's own 2011 Presidential Proclamation refusing entry into the United States of anyone who has "planned, ordered, assisted, aided and abetted, committed or otherwise participated in, including through command responsibility, war crimes, crimes against humanity or other serious violations of human rights, or who attempted or conspired to do so."

The administration's misstep in inviting Nafie was met with grave expressions of concern from many in the Sudan advocacy community. Eventually, at a Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing focused on Sudan just last month the administration indicated the invitation was now off the table—although they did not rule out another change of course in the future.

Candidate Obama purported to be deeply concerned by the crisis in Sudan and committed to bold actions.

Have we seen a fraction of that concern or anything close to bold action since he became president?

Candidate Obama was sharp in his criticism of President Bush's handling of Sudan.

Have we seen President Obama take even fleeting interest, beyond the occasional talking point, in the deteriorating situation in Sudan marked in part by a growing humanitarian crisis in the Nuba Mountains?

In a piece in the August 4, 2011 Christian Science Monitor noted Sudan researcher and activist Eric Reeves, wrote, "If the world refuses to see what is occurring in South Kordofan, and refuses to respond to evidence that the destruction of the Nuba people, as such, is a primary goal of present military and security actions by Sudan, then this moment will represent definitive failure of the 'responsibility to protect.'"

Meanwhile in an April 23, 2012 speech at the U.S. Holocaust Museum President Obama lauded his commitment in the realm of genocide and mass-atrocities prevention, saying, without a hint of irony, "We're making sure that the United States government has the structures, the mechanisms to better prevent and respond to mass atrocities. So I created the first-ever White House position dedicated to this task. It's why I created a new Atrocities Prevention Board, to bring together senior officials from across our government to focus on this critical mission. This is not an afterthought."

He continued, "...we need to be doing everything we can to prevent and respond to these kinds of atrocities -- because national sovereignty is never a license to slaughter your people."

I couldn't agree more. And yet, I think most in the Sudan watchers would hardly be able to claim that this administration has done everything it can to prevent and respond to Khartoum's assault on its own people.

Arguably, the Obama administration's moral equivalency and silence in the face of atrocities in Sudan has only, in the words of famed Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, helped the oppressor and encouraged the tormentor.

With tensions between Sudan and South Sudan on the rise and nearing a tipping point, thousands starving in the Nuba Mountains, refugees fleeing aerial bombardment and pouring over the border into South Sudan, violence persisting in Darfur and an internationally indicted war criminal at the helm in Khartoum who travels the globe with seeming impunity, it is time for a fresh policy and a renewed commitment to peace and justice in Sudan.

To date, this president has offered nothing more than an abdication of leadership and a failure of vision, which has culminated in human suffering and misery.

Obama has failed the people of Sudan who yearn for peace, justice and basic human rights.

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