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# Diplomacy Derailed: The Consequences of Diplomatic Sanctions

The U.S. government has recently begun to emphasize the need for greater engagement with problem states. Proponents of this approach argue that diplomacy is necessary, even with these regimes. Critics, however, maintain that engagement with these regimes is tantamount to appeasement and signals acceptance of behavior that ought to be condemned. In their view, there is little to be gained by talking to these states. Thus, diplomatic sanctions—or sanctions characterized by political disengagement—are seen as a low-cost means of isolating and delegitimizing regimes.

Diplomatic sanctions, however, entail a number of often overlooked consequences for the United States. The potential costs of diplomatic sanctions include not only a substantial loss of information and intelligence on the target state, but also a reduction in communication capacity and a diminished ability to influence the target state. Ironically, diplomatic sanctions may even undermine the effectiveness of other coercive policy tools, such as economic sanctions. These adverse effects ought to cause policymakers to reassess the value of diplomatic isolation as a tool of foreign policy and recognize the inherent value of diplomatic engagement.

Increasing U.S. diplomatic engagement with difficult states will not only require a diplomatically-inclined administration, but will also require gaining public and political support by building a strong case against diplomatic sanctions. Clearly spelling out the costs of diplomatic sanctions is particularly

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*The Washington Quarterly* • 33:3 pp. 61–79
DOI: 10.1080/0163660X.2010.492341

relevant at a time when politics is vulnerable to polarization, and policymakers are making an effort to encourage diplomatic engagement and restore diplomatic ties. For example, with Iran, a number of policy proposals have pushed for engaging at higher levels as a step toward normalization of relations.[1] In early 2009, during Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's Senate confirmation hearing, senate foreign relations committee chair John Kerry urged the United States to open an interests section in Tehran.[2] In June 2009, the Obama administration announced that the United States would be reinstating an ambassador to Syria.[3]

Beyond the Middle East, the administration appears to be shifting strategies toward Burma, a state with which the United States has had downgraded diplomatic relations since 1990 due to the Burmese junta's failure to honor democratic election results and its continued human rights violations. Reports indicate that the United States may be reevaluating its sanctions strategy and lack of engagement, potentially moving to an approach involving carrots as well as sticks.[4] The Obama administration has also recently made moves toward thawing diplomatic relations with Cuba by easing a number of travel and monetary restrictions that had been in place since 1960.[5] Lastly, the new U.S. strategy for Sudan openly embraces engagement in order to make progress on fighting terrorism, implementing a comprehensive peace agreement, and improving human rights.[6]

Clearly, the Obama administration is diplomatically inclined toward these problem states. What are the benefits of this approach? What are the consequences of not talking to problematic regimes?

## Diplomatic Sanctions to Date

Although studies of sanctions tend to focus primarily on economic sanctions, diplomatic sanctions have been used repeatedly by the United States against problematic states. The United States has employed them in conjunction with approximately 30 percent of its economic sanctions episodes.[7]

Formal U.S. diplomatic sanctions can take a variety of forms, differing in both severity and duration**.** For instance, cessation of formal diplomatic contact can range from a temporary or very lengthy recall of an ambassador to closing an embassy. The United States recalled its ambassador to Syria for consultations in 2005 following the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri of Lebanon, but the embassy remained open with a charge d' affaires as its highest-ranking official.[8] In other countries, such as Iran and North Korea, the United States has not only had no ambassador in place, but its embassies have been entirely shut down**.** Other forms of diplomatic sanctions involve withholding recognition of a particular regime for a period of time. The United States withheld recognition of

many of the former Soviet republics when they originally announced their independence. Once diplomatic sanctions are imposed, however, successive U.S. administrations are then faced with the decision to either continue the policy of diplomatic disengagement or take the politically difficult step of reengaging the target state.

Until the mid-twentieth century, U.S. diplomatic sanctions were commonly used as measures associated with war. During World War II, the United States cut diplomatic ties with a number of states, including Germany and Japan. More recently, it has become more common for the United States to sever contact on its own or in conjunction with other nonmilitary tools, but without accompanying military intentions or action, in order to express disapproval with another state and to try to coerce it to change its behavior.[9]

Modern-day diplomatic sanctions have primarily been used to target states for issues related to terrorism, proliferation, and an accompanying desire for regime change in some cases. In the early 1990s, for example, ties with Iraq originally were severed after its invasion of Kuwait. Diplomatic channels remained blocked on grounds related to proliferation until the United States reestablished its diplomatic presence after Saddam Hussein was deposed following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. According to the U.S. Department of State, ties with Burma were downgraded in 1990 when the State Law and Order Restoration Council—the military junta that had taken power in 1988 and established martial law—ignored the 1990 parliamentary election results and engaged in violent crackdowns on democratic opposition.[10] Similarly, the United States originally closed its embassy in Kabul in January 1989, due to concerns about the deteriorating security situation resulting from the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.[11] At the time, the United States did not intend a permanent closure of the embassy. Diplomatic ties, however, remained severed throughout the 1990s, mostly due to the rise of the Taliban regime and its connections with Osama bin Laden and related support for terrorism. Today, other examples of states in which the United States has no functioning embassy are Iran and North Korea—Iran for its ties to terrorism and nuclear proliferation activities and North Korea primarily for the latter.[12]

> The lack of an embassy in Kabul undermined human intelligence collection.

The George W. Bush administration clearly embraced such sanctions as effective and low-cost tools of coercion. Former senior director for Middle East affairs at the National Security Council, Flynt Leverett, characterized the Bush strategy as embodying the idea that:

> . . . 'rogue' regimes were to be uprooted, either by military force (as in Iraq) or through diplomatic isolation and political pressure (as the administration has tried with Iran and Syria). The United States would not offer 'carrots' to such states to induce positive changes; diplomatic engagement would be limited to 'sticks.'[13]

Similarly, national security policy documents released during the Bush administration illustrate the beliefs and accompanying policies designed to isolate problematic states.[14] One of the main pillars of the 2006 National Strategy for Combating Terrorism is to deny terrorists the support and sanctuary of rogue states. The report states that the United States will "promote [the] . . . international isolation [of state sponsors of terrorism] until they end their support for terrorists, including the provision of sanctuary. To further isolate these regimes and persuade other states not to sponsor terror, we will use a range of tools and efforts to delegitimize terrorism as an instrument of statecraft."[15]

Unfortunately, this logic fails to recognize the potential blowback that may result from diplomatic isolation and the ways diplomatic disengagement may actually undermine desired U.S. outcomes.

## The Case Against Diplomatic Sanctions

At first glance, diplomatic sanctions may appear to be a rather cost-free measure for the United States, as they do not require expenditures in terms of U.S. forces or dollars. Diplomatic sanctions, however, can lead to: the loss of valuable intelligence for the United States, diminished U.S. communication with the target state, and a reduced ability to promote U.S. interests overseas. Diplomatic sanctions may also undermine the effectiveness of other measures designed to get the target state to comply with U.S. demands.

### Loss of Information and Intelligence

Having an embassy in a country not only makes it easier to access information and track events within that country, but also allows the United States to gain a perspective it might not otherwise have. The duties of political officers include collecting and analyzing information about the attitudes and actions of foreign governments and societies. U.S. embassies report on human rights, economic trends, and future potential leadership, among other important subjects. While some argue that advances in telecommunications make an on-the-ground presence unnecessary, certain information cannot be gleaned without the special awareness fostered and developed by living and working in the target country.[16]

According to Bruce Riedel, a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) analyst, "The way the U.S. collects information about countries, having an embassy is absolutely critical. You need political staff that can go out on the street and talk to people, pick up the gossip."[17] Similarly, Professor Robert Wolfe writes:

> It might be cheaper to phone colleagues in other governments, sending in officials and ministers when needed, but the intangible assets that are a foreign ministry's stock in trade-knowing who is who in the government or the ability to interpret complex events-can only be developed and then exploited by being on the ground.[18]

An on-the-ground presence also gives the U.S. government critical information that can greatly assist in crisis management, humanitarian disasters, and negotiations with the target government. The most recent edition of the Department of State's *Foreign Service Journal* documents the integral role the U.S. embassy played after the earthquake in Haiti, in terms of both following events on the ground and assisting with relief efforts.[19]

**Diplomatic sanctions may make miscommunication or misperception more likely.**

Maintaining diplomatic sanctions, therefore, is bound to result in a dramatic loss of critical information, which is essential to crafting effective U.S. foreign policy.[20] For example, without an embassy presence in Afghanistan, along with a general lack of attention paid to the country by successive administrations, U.S. officials were clearly lacking of information on the ground throughout the 1990s. According to journalist Steve Coll, the CIA's legal authority to carry out covert actions in Afghanistan ended in January 1992. As a result, Coll writes in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Ghost Wars*, the "CIA's Afghan operations atrophied to a shadow of [their] former strength."[21] Furthermore, not only did the United States not have a CIA station in Afghanistan once the embassy closed, but Afghanistan no longer remained a priority on the intelligence agenda.[22] In addition, with no embassy in place, the United States could clearly not follow events on the ground in the same way as when it used to have an embassy.[23] The United States became increasingly reliant on information from third parties. For example, in a 1995 cable from the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad titled, "The Taliban: What We've Heard," the Department of State reports on the dynamics in Kandahar and the activities of the Taliban solely based on meetings with UN and Western journalist sources who had recently returned from the area.[24]

Similarly, Matthew Aid, an intelligence historian and former National Security Agency analyst, also notes that the lack of an embassy in Kabul undermined human intelligence collection. Aid argues that the CIA had to rely primarily on Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), for human intelligence since most U.S. intelligence was in the realm of signals intelligence. Moreover, a 1996 congressional study of intelligence coverage of rogue states found that signals intelligence was the main source of information,

with human intelligence being secondary.[25] Signals intelligence, however, can be problematic because individuals can simply stop using email and phones to communicate, which makes intelligence collection of that kind increasingly difficult. Aid also points out that a 1994 CIA assessment found that human intelligence was the most important form of intelligence to combat international terrorism.[26]

These limitations on U.S. intelligence continue to complicate the pursuit of U.S. interests today. The most recent example is that of Iran, where during the protests in the aftermath of the June 2009 Iranian election, the United States was faced with informational deficiencies due to a lack of diplomatic ties or an embassy presence in the country. According to the *New York Times*, the Obama administration had a difficult time understanding and addressing these protests due to limited information channels. As a result, information on the crisis was obtained largely via Facebook, Twitter, and other less reliable, informal sources.[27] Government officials and experts were concerned that these sources of information could not provide the United States with insight into the internal political dynamics between the Iranian leadership or the precise strength of the opposition movement in the country.[28]

#### Undermining Communication and Increasing Misperception

In addition to information collection, one of the primary roles of an embassy is to serve as a conduit for communication between the sender and target state.[29] Embassy officials constantly meet with both high-level members of the government and with citizens of their host country. Day-to-day communication is essential, not only to convey U.S. interests and understand host country concerns, but also to explain certain key U.S. decisions. Similarly, regular face-to-face communication in the target country also helps the sender state to forge relationships with people in the host state and develop these relationships over time.[30]

Diplomatic sanctions may hinder communication between the target and sender states, making miscommunication or misperception between the states more likely. Such sanctions create fewer formal channels of communication and contribute to increased resistance to other forms of state-to-state interaction in the name of isolation. Not only is communication reduced, but states are also more likely to be dismissive or uncertain about the nature of messages conveyed through alternative communication channels or third parties.

During the Korean conflict, for instance, U.S. uncertainty regarding the credibility of a message sent from China through a third-party ambassador may have influenced China's decision to enter the war. At the time, the United States and China did not have diplomatic relations. While Chinese preparations to intervene began prior to the U.S. crossing of the 38th parallel, the decision to

intervene does not appear to have been fully finalized and implemented until after the Chinese perceived Soviet support to be secured and the Americans actually crossed the 38th parallel.[31] The Chinese even issued a warning after an emergency meeting on October 2, 1950, stating, "The American forces are endeavoring to cross the 38th parallel and aim to expand the war. If they really want to do so, we will not sit still and do nothing. We will surely respond. Please inform your prime minister of this position."[32]

Diplomatic sanctions detract from U.S. public diplomacy to the target state's people.

The warning, however, was issued through an Indian diplomat, who served as the third-party communicator between China and the United States. According to Secretary of State Dean Acheson, the reports from the Indians were consistent on this issue, but were not taken to be completely credible as the United States thought that Ambassador Kavalam Pannikar of India, who conveyed the message, was not the most reliable messenger.[33] The United States viewed Pannikar as a biased messenger and distrusted him due to his "leftist" political beliefs. David Halberstam writes that Acheson "viewed Pannikar as a mouthpiece for Beijing and not a serious diplomat."[34]

More recently, the lack of diplomatic relations between Iran and the United States contributed to another situation in which a message was passed through a third party from the Iranians to the United States and ultimately ignored. In May 2003, the Foreign Ministry of Iran sent a fax to the Swiss ambassador in Tehran proposing a "grand bargain" between Iran and the United States. The document addressed terrorism, Iran's nuclear program, and Israel, calling for direct talks in addition to U.S.-Iran working groups on disarmament, regional security, and economic cooperation.[35] According to multiple sources, the United States neither responded to the fax nor seriously considered the proposal.[36] While it is unclear whether Iran and the United States could have made progress on any of the issues had the proposal been addressed, the diplomatic climate combined with the U.S. policy of isolating the regime took even considering the proposal off the table.

#### Reduced Ability to Promote U.S. Interests

Embassies and ambassadors also serve to promote the sender country's interests abroad while influencing the target state, serving as a conduit for aid and assisting in bilateral relations.[37] Part of the role of embassy staff is to project a positive U.S. image to both the host government and the population through direct contact and public diplomacy campaigns. Embassies, for example, may play a role in explaining the U.S. position on a particular issue, and may even

persuade key officials not to oppose U.S. policies by calling attention to the potential adverse consequences of such opposition. Ambassadors can also help to ameliorate potential conflicts by being able to promptly influence events on the ground in the target country.[38] For example, in 1993, U.S. ambassador to Mexico Josephus Daniels, played a key role in mitigating a potential crisis in diplomatic relations following Mexico's nationalization of the foreign-owned oil industry, by moderating the U.S. response and conveying U.S. positions to Mexico. According to Professor Yoav Tenembaum, the Mexican undersecretary for foreign affairs attributed the maintenance of U.S.–Mexico diplomatic ties to the crucial role of the ambassador.[39] Embassy officials may also play a role in lobbying other segments of the target country's population to support measures that are favorable to U.S. interests or conveying the U.S. message to the media.[40]

Diplomatic sanctions may weaken knowledge of a target state's economic vulnerabilities.

Diplomatic sanctions also detract from the United States' ability to engage beyond the government, in public diplomacy to influence perceptions on the ground in target states. Closing an embassy and the consequent disengagement with a country cuts off one very substantial official avenue for the United States to promote its image abroad and work to shape the opinions of both leaders and the public in a target state. The lack of a diplomatic presence in a country makes it difficult for the United States to give the host country a sense of Washington's thinking on various issues, which may increase the likelihood of further disagreements between the two states in the future.

#### Reduce Economic Sanctions' Effectiveness

Diplomatic sanctions may also undermine the effectiveness of other coercive measures, such as economic sanctions, in at least two ways. First, in order for the United States to craft effective economic sanctions, it needs knowledge of specific target state vulnerabilities.[41] To the extent that a lack of diplomatic presence in the target state reduces U.S. capacity for information gathering, the United States is less able to identify target state vulnerabilities and hence to craft precisely targeted "smart" economic sanctions.

Second, the absence of U.S. personnel on the ground makes tracking the effectiveness of economic sanctions over time more challenging. This decreased ability to understand the consequences of sanctions in real time makes it more difficult to alter these sanctions based on which elements of the sanctions policy succeed and which do not. Similarly, the purpose of economic sanctions can be

better explained to the population, so that the target country does not have a monopoly on conveying information about why sanctions have been imposed. A diplomatic presence also allows officials to clearly convey the conditions that need to be met for sanctions to be removed, while monitoring small and gradual shifts in behavior. Diplomatic sanctions may make it increasingly difficult for the sender state to clearly articulate its threats and to track the impact of various warnings and punishments on the target government or population.

These are not just theoretical problems. A preliminary analysis of the well-known Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott economic sanctions dataset, along with newly-collected data on diplomatic sanctions by the author, lends support to these claims. The dataset records 126 U.S. economic sanctions episodes from 1947 through 2002 (seven of these are only economic sanctions threats, where economic sanctions are never actually imposed). The dataset codes 52 percent of these cases as having a positive or successful policy outcome, in which the target state complied with the U.S. policy demand. When looking at the subset of economic sanctions episodes in which any diplomatic sanctions were also employed, however, the success rate drops to 41 percent. When examining the cases in which high-level diplomatic sanctions (e.g., closing an embassy) were used, the success rate drops even lower, to 34 percent.

While these figures only provide a rough sketch of the data, and do not control for a number of other variables or address potential selection effects, the findings are suggestive. Additional statistical analysis conducted by the author also reveals that, when controlling for a number of economic and political variables, which have been shown in previous studies to affect sanctions' success, the higher the level of diplomatic sanction employed in an economic sanctions episode, the more likely the United States will fail to get the target state to comply with its demands.[42] Furthermore, additional analysis indicates that the substantive effect of varying the level of diplomatic sanctions from no diplomatic sanctions to closing an embassy, while holding all other variables in the model constant at their means, increases the probability of sanctions' failure from 42 to 73 percent, while the probability of success drops from 58 to 27 percent.[43]

## The Case of Sudan

The case against diplomatic disengagement can be further examined by a cursory review of the impact of U.S. policy vacillations between isolation and diplomatic engagement toward Sudan. Diplomatic sanctions and isolation-based strategies appear to not only inhibit U.S. progress in counterterrorism, but also set back peace negotiations and slow progress on humanitarian concerns.[44] A review of some of the implications of diplomatic disengagement with Sudan is particularly relevant as the administration unveils its new comprehensive Sudan policy. The

strategy's content (although not released in its entirety), along with the March 2009 appointment of Special Envoy Scott Gration, emphasizes a willingness to engage diplomatically with Sudan.

In the early 1990s, U.S. concerns regarding terrorism in Sudan began to increase as bin Laden arrived in the country and Hassan al Turabi's National Islamic Front provided support to al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. During this time, Sudan essentially became a safe haven for al Qaeda's terrorist activities. In 1993, the United States designated Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism, which made Sudan subject to a litany of economic sanctions.

From 1993 to early 1996, the United States began its initial disengagement and began moving toward a more isolationist strategy primarily to pressure Sudan on terrorism. In 1993, the United States began reducing staff at the embassy. At the time, U.S. Ambassador Donald Pettersen became increasingly concerned about the staff reductions because he feared it would impede the staff's ability to carry out its mission. In his book, Pettersen writes, "I became concerned about morale and our ability to carry out our responsibility effectively. The extra workload the smaller staff had to assume and the tensions arising from our situation in Khartoum were bound to have some adverse effects." Embassy political reporting had played a crucial role in gaining insight into the Sudanese government and tracking terrorist groups. The reduction in personnel left the embassy ill-equipped to handle its mission in Sudan.[45]

**Tracking the effectiveness of economic sanctions over time becomes more challenging.**

During this period of disengagement, the United States made little progress toward reducing terrorism or ending the ongoing civil war in Sudan. Al Qaeda became increasingly entrenched in Sudan, as did other terrorist groups. Also notable during this period were the attempted assassinations of President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in Ethiopia, with suspects linked to Sudan, and of Cofer Black, the chief of the CIA station in Khartoum. In response to these events and growing concerns regarding terrorism, economic and diplomatic sanctions resolutions were passed by the UN to pressure Sudan on terrorism-related demands, but such sanctions yielded no real results, particularly with regard to demands to turn over suspects associated with the Mubarak assassination attempt.

During this time, there was also an ongoing debate in the Clinton administration about whether engagement or isolation was the right course to take with Sudan. Ultimately, diplomatic sanctions and isolationist pressure prevailed, culminating in the closure of the U.S. embassy in Khartoum in 1996.

From 1996 to 1999, U.S. policy toward Sudan was characterized by a high degree of isolation and diplomatic sanctions. According to a 2001 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies Task Force on U.S.–Sudan Policy, "The withdrawal of a full-time diplomatic presence at the U.S. embassy in early 1996 left Washington with weak information flows and no voice or platform to exert its influence."[46]

Not only did the United States lose the ability to collect information on terrorist organizations and Sudanese leadership, but it also became increasingly resistant to Sudanese offers of potential help. Following the closure of the embassy, the Sudanese government made a number of attempts to provide intelligence to the Clinton administration, along with offers to have the CIA and FBI officials travel throughout the country. Such offers were repeatedly declined due to general mistrust of the regime and Sudan's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism.[47] U.S. Ambassador Timothy P. Carney to Sudan confirmed that the United States was generally unwilling to engage with Sudanese authorities after the embassy closure in 1996, particularly in the realm of terrorism. As a result, Carney argued that "the U.S. lost access to a mine of material on bin Laden and his organization."[48]

In 1997, Clinton issued an executive order to impose additional strong, unilateral economic restrictions on Sudan for its human rights violations and support for terrorism.[49] Despite all of these efforts, however, Sudan continued to serve as a sanctuary for terrorist groups. The Sudanese still did not turn over suspects related to either the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania or the Mubarak assassination attempt. Although there were limited general rhetorical denouncements of terrorism by the regime, Sudan did not sign any international conventions against terrorism during this period.

There was also little traction in dramatically improving the humanitarian situation or resolving the ongoing civil war during this period. While the United States was able to get the parties in the conflict to talk to one another during the mid-1990s, the talks constantly broke down throughout this period and yielded no substantial agreement. In the late 1990s, following the embassy closure, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development process for resolving the conflict became increasingly ineffective and violence increased. The United States also lost many of its Sudanese contacts and became increasingly reliant on the perspectives of others with missions in the country, such as the Europeans.[50]

The United States' one limited—albeit controversial—success was to convince the Sudanese to expel bin Laden from Sudan before he went to Afghanistan. Intelligence on bin Laden, U.S. engagement with the Sudanese on this issue, and direct communication with Sudanese officials in a number of meetings all played a role in convincing them to take this step. Despite Sudanese compliance with the expulsion demand, information and communication

Potentially valuable information and influence over al Qaeda was lost in Sudan.

problems still undermined potential gains from bin Laden's expulsion. First, according to Steve Coll, the CIA station in Islamabad could not fully monitor bin Laden's arrival into the Jalalabad airport because there were no active sources in the vicinity.[51] Other reports indicate that Carney and the administration were not informed of bin Laden's departure for Afghanistan from Sudan until after he was already in transit. Second, bin Laden had training camps and support in Afghanistan, where the United States was even less able to monitor his activities. Department of State intelligence reports from 1996 (declassified in 2005) warn of the dangers of bin Laden's relocation: "his prolonged stay in Afghanistan—where hundreds of 'Arab mujahedeen' receive terrorist training and key extremist leaders often congregate—could prove more dangerous to U.S. interests in the long run than his three-year liaison with Khartoum."[52]

In addition, the United States bombed the al Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Sudan in 1998, in response to the two U.S. embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya, because the plant was believed to be a cover for nerve agent processing facility. Other than initial soil sample tests prior to the bombing, which indicated potential traces of nerve agent, there seems to be no evidence that the plant was in fact a chemical weapons facility or linked to bin Laden.[53] Carney writes:

> If U.S. embassy staff had been left on the ground, firsthand reporting might have identified the right targets or averted a strike that ultimately strengthened sympathies for Islamic radicals bent on attacking the United States. This danger has arisen again recently, as the United States takes aim at remote, and sometimes wrong, targets in Afghanistan, relying on intelligence from often questionable sources.[54]

After the al Shifa plant bombing, observers launched significant criticism at the Clinton administration for its decision to bomb the plant based on limited and faulty intelligence. Apparently, there was much debate within the Clinton administration about the selection of targets prior to the decision to strike al Shifa. According to the *New York Times*, senior intelligence officials argued that the attack was not justified; due to the uncertain nature of some of the intelligence about the plant and potential bin Laden ties. For example, the administration did not have firm and definitive information on the plant's ownership. In response to the strikes, not only did the Sudanese speak out against U.S. actions and open up al Shifa to journalists, but Sudan also released two individuals detained for possible involvement in the 1998 embassy bombings.[55]

More generally, U.S. economic sanctions against Sudan had a negligible impact on the Sudanese economy, which improved from 1996 to 2000. The economic sanctions on Sudan have been characterized by analyst Meghan O'Sullivan as "misguided" and "ineffective."[56] She writes:

> The sanctions-dominated strategy towards Sudan was neither well-structured to achieve its goals nor well coordinated with other policy tools in a way that enhanced the ability of sanctions to serve US interests more successfully .... the U.S. sought to change Sudan's behavior with a rigid unilateral sanctions regime that had little hope of containing the government of Sudan and coupled with policy tools more suited to a regime change strategy.[57]

O'Sullivan argues that inadequate dialogue between Sudan and the United States essentially undermined the ability of sanctions to modify Sudanese behavior. The Sudanese did not view sanctions as part of a bargaining process in which incremental behavioral changes would be met with adequate responses. Instead, Sudan viewed sanctions as being "monolithic" and aimed at eventually overthrowing the regime. In 2008, the *New York Times* reported that in negotiating papers exchanged between the U.S. and Sudanese governments in preparation for upcoming talks, the Sudanese complained that "despite the many positive achievements" made by its government in response to U.S. demands, sanctions had remained in place.[58] Similarly in 2000, Sudan's ambassador, Elfatih Mohamed Ahmed Erwa, was quoted by the *New York Times* as saying, "The U.S. wants to see a change of behavior. We think in Sudan there has been lots of change in behavior."[59]

Many of the problems with the construction and implementation of sanctions can be at least partially attributed to the lack of a diplomatic presence in the country, as the United States did not have the infrastructure in place to collect all the necessary information to shape an effective bargaining framework or to monitor small changes in behavior within the country. In addition, the fallout from al Shifa, which perhaps could have been avoided or mitigated with better information collection on the ground, worked to increase the regime's resistance toward compliance and contributed to the regime viewing U.S. goals as being centered on regime change. All of these circumstances contributed to limiting the regime's incentives to comply with U.S. demands.[60]

As the Clinton administration came to a close, many inside and outside the administration began reevaluating the isolationist policy the United States had adopted toward Sudan. Diplomatic isolation did not appear to have bolstered the effectiveness of sanctions or modified the behavior of the Sudanese regime. The United States had lost both influence in the country and potentially valuable information. Despite being resistant to engagement in the late 1990s, the Clinton administration began to realize that it might in fact be beneficial to engage Sudan, especially on intelligence-sharing, to gather information related

to al Qaeda.[61] Such a position did not mean immediately lifting economic sanctions or easing pressure, but it recognized that pressure and economic sanctions were not necessarily incompatible with diplomatic engagement.

In 2000, the counterterrorism strategy shifted from isolation to increased engagement. Particularly after the al Shifa bombing, some U.S. policymakers believed that increasing engagement with the Sudanese would enhance prospects in the realm of terrorism and other areas of concern. Proponents of greater engagement with the Sudanese regime also favored reopening the U.S. embassy in Khartoum and felt Sudan would be more open to changing its behavior if carrots could be integrated into a policy that had been primarily comprised of sticks.[62]

The United States began a counterterrorism dialogue with the Sudanese, and dramatically increased the pace of general engagement after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Eventually, increased dialogue and engagement slowly started to yield progress. In September 2001, President George W. Bush appointed John Danforth as the special envoy to the Sudan. In 2002, the Khartoum embassy was reopened, although without an ambassador. Danforth set forth four confidence-building measures to test if there could be a substantial degree of compliance by the Sudanese government and parties in the south. Specifically, the confidence-building tests included agreements on: 1) a humanitarian mission being allowed by the UN to go into Nuba Mountain area; 2) starting negotiations without third-party involvement and work for an internationally monitored cease-fire to pave the road to a peace settlement; 3) U.S. Agency for International Development projects; and 4) the United States organizing a review on ending slavery and abductions in Sudan.[63] After feeling that there had been adequate progress on the confidence-building measures, Danforth also recommended that the United States push forward with negotiations between the government and southern rebels involved in conflict.

With the exception of a worsening situation in Darfur in 2003 and 2004, progress was made in resolving the ongoing civil war in Sudan, as the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005. The agreement mandated a cease-fire, withdrawal of Sudanese government troops from southern Sudan, the return of refugees, and national elections. Under the renewed strategy of diplomatic engagement, Sudan's cooperation on terrorism also continued to increase. Sudan signed all major counterterrorism conventions, took substantial actions on the terrorism front, and stopped hosting conferences that attracted terrorist leaders. The Department of State has also declared Sudan a strong partner in the war on terror, although its state sponsor designation remains in place.

Engagement and dialogue with the Sudanese were key mechanisms to achieve compliance with Danforth's confidence-building measures and ultimate progress on the peace agreement. While implementation issues remained and genocide in Darfur continued to be an issue of serious concern, diplomatic engagement yielded real results on terrorism and the peace negotiations. A mix of economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and engagement on the ground proved to be a strategy that was conducive to progress in Sudan.[64]

Economic sanctions and diplomatic engagement proved conducive to progress in Sudan.

## Diplomatic Engagement is an Enabler, not a Strategy

Diplomatic sanctions are a costly foreign policy tool. Despite being politically popular and normatively satisfying, remaining diplomatically disengaged with problem states today may pose both short- and long-term losses to the United States in intelligence, communications, and in the ability to more effectively pursue coercive strategies. As the evidence continues to build, it is crucial not only for policymakers to recognize all the benefits of diplomacy and the consequences of maintaining diplomatic sanctions, but also for the American public to understand that such engagement is vital to U.S. interests.

## Notes

1. See U.S.–Muslim Engagement Project, "Changing Course: A New Direction for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World," February 2009, http://www.usmuslimengagement.org/storage/usme/documents/Changing_Course_Second_Printing.pdf and John Tirman, "A New Approach to Iran: The Need for Transformative Diplomacy," April 2009, pp. 31–32, http://web.mit.edu/cis/Publications/IRAN-Tirman_2009.pdf.
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