

# Sudan's diplomatic faux pas denying retention of a DC lobby



President Omar Hassan al-Bashir of Sudan

h/t Scott Morgan. Even before President Trump deferred lifting 20 year sanctions against the regime of ICC indicted President Bashir in Khartoum, the lobbying efforts went into action. In early June, news came that the K Street lobby firm, Squire Paton Boggs LLP was retained by the Government of the Republic of Sudan (GRS) on May 23, 2017 at a fee of \$40,000 a month. Prominent among the SPB firm members are former Sens. John Breaux (D-La.), Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and former House Speaker [John Boehner](#) (R-Ohio). Here is a [link](#) to the SPB Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

According to a signed letter, dated May 25, 2017, between SPB and Sudan's Ambassador to the US, His Excellency Maowia Osman

Khalid, the scope of work included “a program to: (i) to avoid ‘snap back’ of U.S. sanctions on Sudan pursuant to Executive Order 13761; and (ii) identify and implement strategies to improve Sudan’s investment climate.” The SPB FARA was docketed as Registration No. 2165 by the NSD/FARA Registration Unit on May 31, 2017.

The SPB firm members and the Sudan lobbying agreement were promptly blasted by Hollywood actor George Clooney and John Pendergast of the Enough Project in a July 6, 2017 *Time Magazine* [op ed](#). They wrote:

Over the last four administrations, Congress has led bipartisan U.S. efforts to isolate the Sudan regime. [...] So it’s surprising that Squire Patton Boggs has taken on this account. It’s also possible they don’t know that the government of Sudan continues to use starvation as a weapon of war on its own people, still funds militias that murder its own innocent civilians, and continues to loot the country of its natural resources and funnel the wealth of Sudan into the hands of regime leaders through massive corruption.

In February 2017, Sudan signed a \$300,000 fixed fee contract with Cooke Robotham LLC to advise Sudan on how it could restructure the more than \$55 billion in outstanding debt shortly following former President Obama signing Executive Order 13761.

Yesterday’s *Sudan Tribune* headlined a report from Khartoum, “[Sudan denies hiring U.S. firms to lobby for lifting of sanctions](#)”. It reported State Minister Hamid Mumtaz saying “We are a responsible country that does not work through (lobbying) companies, but through the official institutions to end the (economic) embargo imposed on Sudan. We have worked with the official channels in the previous period, we will continue to work in the coming period.”

Despite suspension of the Special Committee activities by President Bashir following Trump's signing the deferral order, State Minister Mumtaz stated in the *Sudan Tribune* report:

Mumtaz reiterated that Bashir's decision does not mean to suspend contacts and communications with Washington.

The suspension of the negotiating committee with Washington on lifting sanctions does not mean ending communication adding that contacts will continue through diplomatic and political channels as well as popular efforts of civil society groups, friends and partners.

He called on the foreign affairs committee at the parliament to contribute to repeal the economic embargo on Sudan.

In my meeting with the National Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee, I answered the MPs' questions with all transparency and clarity about the consequences of the postponement, its negative and positive aspects.

Today's *The Hill* headlined an article, "[Sudan sanctions spur intense lobbying](#)". It reported:

The Sudanese were disappointed by Trump's decision to extend a temporary easing of the sanctions, arguing that they had made enough progress on the benchmarks.

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir ordered the "suspension of the committee that was negotiating [the lifting of the sanctions] with the United States until October 12," according to the official SUNA news agency.

One source told *The Hill* that others in the government are trying to walk back Bashir's comments so that they can work with the U.S. on lifting the sanctions.

It's a posture that may make diplomatic relations between

the United States and Sudan difficult moving forward, but there is a sense of optimism among some working on the issue.

“There are decades of mistrust between both governments churning behind all of this. And because of that, the current rapprochement – while striking – is delicate as both sides struggle to build confidence in one another,” said the person familiar with Sudan’s advocacy efforts, who emphasized the government is prepared to address its human rights record.

Among the proponents of lifting Sudan sanctions is a former US Special Envoy Princeton Lyman. Lyman, has been criticized for having a questionable relation with the Bashir regime. *The Hill* noted a report authored by a host of former US diplomats and National Security Council experts with the support of *The Atlantic Council*:

Several former ambassadors and National Security Council officials released an in-depth report for the Atlantic Council arguing that the Sudan sanctions had not worked and that the U.S. government should instead increase diplomatic efforts.

“It doesn’t work to say, ‘When you’ve completely changed, we’ll lift the sanctions.’ It’s not the way change comes about,” said Princeton Lyman, a former U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan who took part in the Atlantic Council report.

The Atlantic Council held an event in Washington last week to roll out the report.

“We have been waiting for the Sudanese economy to collapse, waiting for [Bashir’s government] to fall, waiting for the popular uprising to begin, but it hasn’t,” said Cameron Hudson, a former aide to Lyman in the Obama administration, during the discussion.

Former US Envoy Lyman's comments may be overblown. *The Sudan Tribune* [reported](#) on July 17, 2017 :

Sudan's Minister of Finance, Mohamed Salih al-Rikabi said Khartoum has received a letter from the U.S. Department of Treasury stating the full resumption of financial transactions between Sudan and international banks as of last Thursday.

al-Rikabi described the U.S. Department of Treasury letter as "significant breakthrough" in Sudan's relations with the international financial sector and international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, foreign investors, as well as all Sudanese expatriates whose annual remittances are estimated at \$6 billion.

*The Wall Street Journal* [gave](#) no recognition of Finance Minister al-Rikabi's "significant breakthrough" in a story out of Khartoum. However, it did note who is keeping Bashir's rickety economy afloat under the US 20 year sanctions:

The International Monetary Fund says investments from Persian Gulf states have been critical in keeping this struggling economy afloat, especially after 2011, when the oil-rich south seceded to become independent South Sudan, taking most of the country's revenue with it.

Pockets of Khartoum are starting to look like Gulf capitals. Skyscrapers bankrolled by Saudi, Kuwaiti and Qatari investments tower over the Blue and White Nile rivers that converge here. One recently developed business and residential district is called Riyadh.

The Saudis had entreated former President Obama to temporarily lift Sudan sanctions against the Bashir regime. Ostensibly it was allegedly for his cutting off relations with Iran in exchange for billions in baksheesh to have the Sudan National Army forces involved in the war against Shia Houthi rebels in Yemen supported by Iran. Problem is Sudan is

playing two sides against one another, while pursuing genocidal cleansing of indigenous African people in the conflict zones of Darfur, Nuba Mountains, South Kordofan and the Blue Nile State. An operation involving Mujihadeen recruited from the Sahel region of Africa and ISIS fighters from the Middle East funded by Qatar with the ultimate goal of establishing a Caliphate based in Khartoum.

As Alice in Wonderland might have opined about the conundrum of lifting or retaining Sudan sanctions, “curiouser and “curiouser.”