
Hearings on Sudan

Special Envoy Proposes U.S. Policy Shift

by Lawrence K. Freeman

July 31 (EIRNS)—On July 30, the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee conducted a more than two-hour hearing on Sudan, chaired by Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), who steered the discussion in a productive direction. The most explosive testimony was provided by Maj. Gen. Scott Gration, Special Envoy to Sudan, and Amb. David Shinn, an expert on the Horn of Africa.

Gration dropped two “bombshells” on needed changes in U.S. policy towards Sudan. First, he called for removal of Sudan from the State Department list of countries that are accused of sponsoring terrorism. Gration said, there is no evidence from the U.S. intelligence community that supports the claim that Sudan is supporting terrorism. He shocked the committee and audience when he bluntly stated, that the decision by the State Department to keep Sudan on the list of terrorism sponsors “is political.” He went on to discuss the consequences of the sanctions that followed that “political” decision.

But, the biggest surprise in his testimony, was Gration’s request that the U.S. government lift its sanctions against Sudan. In answer to Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), who repeatedly asked, “What can we do after five years to improve the situation in the camps in Darfur, where internally displaced people are living under horrible conditions?” Gration’s reply was not the one people expected to hear. He said: “We need space on these sanctions . . . we need help from the Congress.” He then elaborated how sanctions were hindering economic development in Southern Sudan, “preventing us from doing what we absolutely need to do.” He further said: “At some point, we’re going to have to unwind some of these sanctions. This is the first time that the issue of lifting sanctions on Sudan has been raised at this level in the

Congress, and appropriately in front of Senator Kerry’s [Senate Foreign Relations] Committee.”

To the consternation of many, Gration continued to insist that the conditions in Darfur, which have been falsely characterized as genocide, are not the same as they were in 2003-05. “There’s significant difference between what happened in 2004 and 2003, which we characterized as genocide, and what is happening today,” Gration told the committee. Senator Kerry concurred.

In response to repeated attempts by Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) to get Gration to describe the events in Darfur today as genocide, Gration responded that he was not interested in debating “genocide,” but that he is dedicated to lessening the hardship of the people in Darfur, to making their lives better. He said that the government of Sudan is acting in good faith, and carrying out what they agree to do.

In his testimony, Shinn added that, “It is time to drop the ‘genocide’ label. There is no genocide in Darfur today, and it does not serve U.S. policy well to call it that.” Shinn also made clear that the desire for success of unity in Sudan is supported by

the overwhelming majority of Sudan’s nine neighboring countries.

At the conclusion of the hearing, Shinn emphasized that the government of Sudan is reaching out to U.S. for the first time, that Gration is on the right track, and that he is a somewhat optimistic. Kerry responded by saying, “I am optimistic, too.” Kerry also said he thought that Gration “is on the right track, and his engagement has saved lives.”

Significantly, representatives of the now-discredited Save Darfur/ENOUGH “anti-genocide lobby” were not included in the two panels of speakers, but were instead relegated to handing out glossy brochures to the packed committee room, and impotently protesting Gration’s testimony, afterwards. This crowd is furious about Gration’s bold proposal, and are alarmed that, at least some in Congress are beginning to question their anti-Khartoum ideology, which has dominated Washington for the last five years.

The danger is that while a new U.S. policy towards Sudan is being formulated, they will attempt to manipulate the Administration away from the path being cleared by Gration.



Maj. Gen. Scott Gration