

Senators question report labeling Sudan a "Strong partner in the war on terror"

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

WASHINGTON, D.C. " In a letter to Director of National Intelligence, Michael McConnell, members of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence raised concerns about the State Department's recent characterization of the Sudanese government as a "strong partner in the War on Terror." Citing the state-sponsored genocide that has killed hundreds of thousands of people in the Darfur region of Sudan, U.S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR), Russ Feingold (D-WI), Olympia Snowe (R-ME) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) asked McConnell to clarify the assertion that the Sudanese government has "aggressively pursued terrorist operations directly involving threats to U.S. interests and personnel in Sudan."

"How is it not a paradox for the State Department to describe the Sudanese Government as a "strong partner in the War on Terror" while at the same time listing Sudan as a "State Sponsor of Terror"? Wyden said. "We need to understand the basis for this description, especially since some are suggesting that Sudan's cooperation on counterterrorism is a good reason for the U.S. not to intervene to stop the genocide in Darfur."

"The Administration needs to explain why its recent terrorism report described the government of Sudan, a state sponsor of terrorism which has been behind the genocide in Darfur, as a "strong partner in the War on Terror," Feingold said. "As we seek to stop the genocide, it is critical that Congress have all necessary information related to this administration's policies and priorities in Sudan."

The Senators' letter to Director McConnell is below:

Michael McConnell
Director of National Intelligence

Dear Director McConnell,

As members of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, we are writing with regard to U.S. counterterrorism cooperation with the Government of Sudan. The State Department's 2006 Country Reports on Terrorism, released April 30, 2007, states that "The Sudanese government was a strong partner in the War on Terror and aggressively pursued terrorist operations directly involving threats to U.S. interests and personnel in Sudan." As Sudan remains a state sponsor of terrorism, we would like to learn the reasoning behind this assessment. We also seek more information on Sudanese counterterrorism cooperation in the context of overall U.S. policy toward Sudan, including whether such cooperation affects or is affected by U.S. pressure to stop the genocide in Darfur.

As a result of state-sponsored genocide, hundreds of thousands of people have died in Darfur. Two million

more have been forced to flee their homes. In recent years, the violence has spread into Chad and the Central African Republic, furthering the region's instability. As recently as April 18, President Bush, in a speech at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accused the Sudanese government of bombing villages, supporting the janjaweed militias responsible for much of the killing and obstructing UN peacekeeping efforts. He stated that the United States has a "moral obligation" to stop the genocide in Darfur, and asserted "It is evil we are now seeing in Sudan" and "we're not going to back down." These statements, about a country which the State Department describes as a "strong partner in the War on Terror," raise serious questions about competing policies and priorities. The failure of the 2006 State Department Country Reports on Terrorism to acknowledge "significant concern" about the actions of the Government of Sudan in Darfur, as the report did last year, highlights the apparent divergence of U.S. policy goals.

To fully evaluate the description of Sudanese counterterrorism cooperation included in the State Department report, we would like answers to the following questions:

1. In what ways is the Sudanese government a "strong partner in the War on Terror"? In what manner did the Sudanese government "aggressively pursue [] terrorist operations directly involving threats to U.S. interests and personnel in Sudan"? What specific actions has the government taken?

2. The State Department's 2005 Country Reports on Terrorism stated that Sudan "continued its cooperative commitment against known and suspected international terrorist elements believed to be operating in and out of Sudanese territory" but did not describe the Government of Sudan as a "strong partner." To what extent has Sudanese cooperation increased in the last year and to what extent has the partnership been strengthened?

3. The 2005 report stated that, while "Sudan continued its progress in cooperation to combat terrorism locally and internationally," there remained "some areas of concern." The 2006 report does not include a similar caveat. To what extent have the "areas of concern" that existed in 2005 been resolved?

4. The 2005 report stated that "there is no indication that al-Qaida elements have had a presence in Sudan with the knowledge and consent of the Sudanese Government for at least the past five years." Given that the 2006 report includes no similar statement, has the assessment about al-Qaida in Sudan changed?

5. The 2006 report states that the "Sudanese government" worked to disrupt foreign fighters from using Sudan as a logistics base and transit point for Jihadists going to Iraq. What is the extent of this effort? The report also states that "there was some evidence to suggest that individuals who were active participants in the Iraqi insurgency have returned to Sudan and were in a position to use their expertise to conduct attacks within Sudan or to pass on their knowledge." What is the nature of this threat, and to what extent has the Government of Sudan sought to counter it? The 2005 report stated that "significant gaps in knowledge and capability to identify and capture [jihadists traveling to and returning from Iraq] remain." Have those gaps in knowledge and capability been resolved?

6. The 2006 report states that “Sudanese officials welcomed HAMAS members as representatives of the Palestinian Authority (PA) but limited their activities to fundraising.” How does Sudan’s position with regard to HAMAS square with its status as a “strong partner in the War on Terror”?

We look forward to receiving a briefing addressing these and other questions related to Sudan.

Sincerely,

Ron Wyden Russell D. Feingold Olympia J. Snowe Sheldon Whitehouse

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