

Daily Press Briefing: Discussion on South Sudan

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January 29, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on South Sudan

Washington, DC

QUESTION: So today the South Sudanese have released seven of the eleven detainees that had been held for a few weeks. I wondered if you had a reaction to that. But alongside that, they've decided that four of the remaining leaders – opposition leaders – are going to be put on trial for an attempted coup against President Kiir. Given that, I think it was back at the beginning of the month, I think it was Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield said there was no evidence from the U.S. side that this was an attempted coup. I wondered if you had a reaction for us.

MS. PSAKI: Sure. Well, we of course welcome today's release by the Government of South Sudan of seven of eleven political detainees. This is an important step towards an inclusive political dialogue under the auspices of IGAD. As you mentioned, four of the detainees remain detained, so we urge the Government of South Sudan to release the remaining four.

Last weekend, as you all know, there was a cessation of hostilities agreement signed. That, of course, was a good step, but more needs to be done and we're encouraging that at this point. So as South Sudan's leaders continue to work to fully implement the agreement, we're encouraging them to focus on starting an inclusive political dialogue to resolve the underlying causes of the conflict, and that's what our focus remains on at this point.

In terms of – oh, go ahead.

QUESTION: Well, I was just going to say, I mean, if you still have four of them in custody facing charges, is that going to threaten the ceasefire, which has been sort of holding, but there's still fighting going on in parts?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I think it's more the challenge – the question of how would it impact the political dialogue, because some of these individuals are players – and we've talked about this from the beginning – but who would be pivotal to that discussion. So we've said from the beginning, and this is one of the arguments that we continue to make, that the full participation of all of the political detainees is critical to a political dialogue.

And as per the January 23rd agreement on the status of the detainees signed by the government and the opposition, the expeditious release of the detainees is critical to moving that piece forward. So that's where our focus is.

MS. PSAKI: Absolutely it remains a pillar. The fact that the Secretary is planning what I believe is his fourth trip, if my math is correct – but Matt will check me on the math here --

QUESTION: I think it's fifth.

January 23, 2014

Marie Harf, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on South Sudan

Washington, DC

MS. HARF: ... The United States welcomes the signing of a cessation of hostilities between the Government of South Sudan and opposition forces. This agreement is a critical first step toward building a lasting peace in South Sudan, but it is only the beginning of a much longer process to resolve the underlying causes of the conflict, to foster reconciliation, and to hold accountable those who committed horrific abuses against the South Sudanese people. We call on all of South Sudan's leaders to honor their commitments to the people of South Sudan by working quickly and earnestly toward an inclusive and comprehensive political dialogue. With the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and other friends of South Sudan, we will continue our efforts to expedite the release of the detainees and ensure their meaningful participation in a political dialogue.

It is also important to ensure that assistance can reach the hundreds of thousands of people who have been affected by this conflict. To this end, we call on all parties to facilitate the immediate and unfettered provision of humanitarian assistance to all those in need in South Sudan regardless of where they are located.

We congratulate the IGAD mediation team for its crucial work in realizing this critical step in resolving the conflict in South Sudan. The United States continues to stand with the people of South Sudan, the United States Mission in South Sudan, humanitarian actors, and all those that continue to work under difficult and dangerous circumstances to alleviate the suffering and protect innocent civilians affected by this crisis.

MS. HARF: Whatever six months is from January 20th. Obviously, there's also an option to extend for another six months. Let me double-check the date. I think that's right.

QUESTION: This six-monthly reduction is mandated by the Congress, right?

MS. HARF: Yep. And the Secretary sent waiver – the President delegated waiver authority to the Secretary on Monday. The Secretary sent the waivers up to the Hill the same day that implementation took place.

QUESTION: Okay. So he has signed the waiver?

MS. HARF: The waivers went up on Monday. The deal with the Joint Plan of Action and what we are waiving to Congress, yes, those went on Monday.

QUESTION: Normally, you release those waivers.

MS. HART: We did. We released them. They all went out on our website on Monday. They're all up there. Treasury obviously also has a part of this as well. I'm trying to see if I can find the date of – I don't know where the last day is. I'm just trying to see if I can find it. But yes, we sent the waivers up on Monday, the day of implementation. Treasury also posted some information on their website for businesses and other – and countries about what to do in terms of sanctions.

January 21, 2014

Marie Harf, Spokesperson

**Daily Press Briefing, selections on South Sudan, via telephone
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: Can we move to Africa? I have two questions, one on South Sudan and the other one on Central African Republic.

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: On South Sudan, sorry, you have probably seen that an emergency regional summit, which was scheduled for Thursday, has been canceled on short notice and without any explanation. So I would like to know if you have any reaction to that or any explanation to this cancelation? And if you could update us on the last U.S. diplomatic efforts to try to resolve the crisis after five weeks of heavy fighting on the ground. And on the Central African --

MS. HARF: Let's do South Sudan first, then you can ask your Central African Republic question.

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS. HARF: So, Nicolas, we don't have a lot of updates. I -- what -- hadn't seen those reports about it being canceled. Let me check with our folks and we can get you something after the briefing.

As you know, we've been working with the different parties to try to have the talks continue, to try to get some progress continue to be made. I just don't have any updates for you on those efforts. I'm happy to check with our folks and see if there are and to get you a comment on the other thing being canceled.

January 10, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

**Daily Press Briefing, selections on Sudan/South Sudan
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: We heard the Linda Thomas-Greenfield testimony today and she answered some of the questions that we have here about the coup or not coup. But to the question of these Riek Machar detainees in Juba, from the podium this week you've called for their release.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: The Kiir government says, well, they're alleged coup plotters, and South Sudan has a system of justice that will carry on as it should. So what are you doing there about that?

MS. PSAKI: We're continuing to press that we believe that these detainees should be released as quickly as possible. We're disappointed that they have not been released. To Jo's question yesterday, we don't believe that the detainees – the release of the detainees should be a precondition for a halt to the fighting, which I think is a really important point. And the role that they could play is, some of them would be participating in the negotiations, and that's the importance – one of the important components of their release.

So we're continuing to press that on the ground. The talks are ongoing. The mediators returned from Juba last night. Special Envoy Booth met with them last night, and they also were able to see the detainees. They reported that the detainees are in good health and continue to be willing to participate in a political dialogue.

QUESTION: Are you coming down more on the side of the former Vice President Machar by calling for the release of these detainees? There was a statement from Linda Thomas-Greenfield today that the United States has no evidence that there was a coup attempt. It would seem to suggest that you might be supporting more the side of the former vice president than the side of the president.

MS. PSAKI: I don't – it's not from the United States – it's not an effort on behalf the – by the United States to take one side. Our goal here is not where this started – to focus on where this started, but where it's going to end. And the important piece here is the one I just touched on, which is that these detainees could play a role in the discussions and negotiations, and what we're trying to do here is get to a point where there's an end to the violence and the hostilities.

January 9, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on South Sudan

Washington, DC

QUESTION: We heard the Linda Thomas-Greenfield testimony today and she answered some of the questions that we have here about the coup or not coup. But to the question of these Riek Machar detainees in Juba, from the podium this week you've called for their release.

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January 9, 2014

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of African Affairs
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Testimony
Washington, DC

The Situation in South Sudan

Introduction

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I know that the subject before us is one about which you and other members of Congress care deeply. I regret to inform you that Special Envoy Booth is unavailable to testify today as he is in Addis Ababa working to get the peace process underway.

Situation in South Sudan

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker, three years ago today, on January 9, 2011, the people of South Sudan voted in overwhelming numbers for independence from the Republic of Sudan. After decades of war, they were peacefully and joyfully voting for separation and for a new future. Then-Senator Kerry was there to witness that historic moment. The United States played a critical role in getting the world's youngest country on the map.

Today, tragically, the world's youngest country and undoubtedly one of its most fragile democracies is in danger of shattering. The United Nations has reported more than a thousand people have died and over 240,000 have fled their homes including a number of refugees in neighboring countries. Political rivalries have taken on ethnic dimensions, atrocities are being committed, and men, women, and children are caught in the crossfire. This is not the future for which the people of South Sudan voted.

South Sudan's crisis began less than a month ago, on December 15th, with a political struggle that escalated into broader violence. However the fighting began, a few things are crystal clear. First, neither the United States nor the international community will countenance the armed overthrow of the democratically elected government. Second, hostilities must stop, any and all violence directed at civilian populations must end, and those responsible for perpetrating human rights abuses must be held accountable. Third, this crisis will not be solved on the battlefield. Although fighting started less than one month ago, the roots of this conflict are much deeper, and resolution can only come through immediate dialogue between the two sides and an inclusive reconciliation. Finally, all parties must permit immediate and unconditional humanitarian access to all in need, to tens of thousands of South Sudanese men, women, and children who are the real victims of this violence.

The United States has engaged in an all-out diplomatic effort to help bring an end to the fighting, with engagement by Secretary Kerry, National Security Advisor Susan Rice, and other high-ranking officials with President Kiir and former Vice President Machar as well as with the heads

of state and foreign ministers in neighboring countries and around the world. We have galvanized support to end hostilities and open a broader dialogue between the two sides; called for accountability for atrocities; sought to secure the release of political detainees now being held in Juba.

But while we need a political settlement among the fighting parties, the immediate security situation remains critical – particularly for the thousands of internally displaced civilians who have sought the UN’s protection – and must be addressed as well. As the crisis began to unfold, we proposed and the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution nearly doubling the authorized troop ceiling for UNMISS. In turn, we are now actively encouraging member states to provide additional troops and police units to the UN mission, including through the transfer of contingents from other missions in the region. As my colleague, Assistant Administrator Lindborg will discuss, we have just committed an additional \$50 million in emergency humanitarian assistance in response to pressing new needs arising from the crisis.

The President’s Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, Ambassador Donald Booth – who, as I noted, could not be here to testify today because he is in Ethiopia – is actively trying to help resolve this crisis. Ambassador Booth has been in the region since December 22nd, working around the clock, as we all have in supporting his efforts. He has met repeatedly with President Kiir and other officials, had lengthy discussions with former Vice President Machar, secured the first official visit with the group of political detainees, and sat down with local religious leaders and civil society members to help find a way out of this crisis.

This is an all-out effort on our part, and given our special history in South Sudan, we are working closely with South Sudan’s neighbors, through East Africa’s Intergovernmental Authority on Development or IGAD, who are spearheading mediation efforts. A special summit on South Sudan was held at the head of state level just 12 days after the conflict began, and thanks to robust engagement, representatives of both parties arrived in Addis for negotiations just a few days later. We are encouraged by IGAD’s leadership in convening the parties and strongly support the efforts of former Ethiopian Minister Seyoum Mesfin and Kenyan General Lazaro Sumbeiywo to find a peaceful solution through political dialogue. South Sudan’s neighbors are also providing asylum for new South Sudanese refugees who may number in the hundreds of thousands if the fighting does not end soon.

These negotiations offer the best hope for South Sudan and the region. An agreement to end hostilities will provide much needed time and space for dialogue to begin on the core political and governance issues that are at the root of this crisis. Both sides must recognize that there can be no military solution. We have made clear to the rebels that we will not recognize a violent overthrow of a democratically elected government. At the same time, we are encouraging the government to open political space to allow for greater inclusion. The United States also strongly believes that the political prisoners currently being held in Juba must be released. These individuals should join discussions in Addis to enlarge the chorus of those seeking constructive solutions to resolve this growing catastrophe. Each day that the conflict continues, the risk of all-out civil war grows as ethnic tensions rise, more civilians are killed, injured, or forced to flee, the humanitarian situation grows more dire, and those who have remained on the sidelines are pulled into the conflict.

Let me conclude by saying that I am gravely concerned that the crisis in South Sudan has the potential to escalate even further. While we do not know the scale of atrocities that have been committed thus far, there is clear evidence that targeted killings have taken place, with Dinka killing Nuer, and Nuer killing Dinka. Countless civilians, particularly women and children, have become victims of violence perpetrated by both government and rebel forces alike. Each violent act threatens to return South Sudan to the cycle of violence and destruction that South Sudanese of all ethnicities and backgrounds voted to end when they voted for independence in 2011. Stopping the violence, and ensuring that Africa's newest nation continues to move forward rather than backwards, is of highest priority to the United States and the international community.

In addition to calling for an end to the violence, humanitarian access, dialogue, and the release of political prisoners in Juba, the United States is exploring the possibility of appropriate pressures against individuals on both sides who interfere with the peace and reconciliation process in South Sudan or are responsible for serious human rights abuses.

I want to thank you for your continued commitment to the people of South Sudan, and I look forward to your questions.

January 8, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on South Sudan

Washington, DC

QUESTION: I saw yesterday that you'd told us that Secretary Kerry had spoken with South Sudan President Kiir and urged --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- urging him to release all the political detainees in Juba. Is that because the -- you consider that their treatment is -- they're being poorly held, or is it more that you believe that these guys could actually have some kind of role in the negotiations that are being held?

MS. PSAKI: We believe that they need to be present at the IGAD talks for discussions on political issues in order for them to be productive. So we believe they should be released immediately.

QUESTION: Okay. On the ground, are you hearing any -- whether there's any easing of that? Whether they're likely to be released in the upcoming future?

MS. PSAKI: Well, let me give you a brief update that touches on this. Special Envoy Booth remains in Addis Ababa supporting the IGAD-led talks. Negotiating teams from both sides remain in Ethiopia. IGAD mediators were in Juba today to meet with President Kiir and visit political detainees. IGAD has presented the parties with a draft proposal on a cessation of hostilities and on the release of political detainees. The discussions have made progress on a proposed cessation of hostilities. Disagreements remain on the issue of the release of political detainees. Obviously, the discussions are continuing, but that's where things stand at this moment.

QUESTION: So what is the main sticking point for the release of the political detainees? Are you able to tell us that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything beyond that in terms of what I can outline. I think it's safe to say that some are supportive of releasing them and some are not, so obviously working through the challenges with that issue is what they're focused on.

QUESTION: And is the cessation of hostilities dependent on the release of the political detainees? Could you -- can you have one without the other?

MS. PSAKI: That's a good question. Obviously -- as I understand it, the draft proposal addresses both, so I'd have to ask for some more clarification on whether they could be separated.

QUESTION: And what kind of progress has been made on the cessation – I can't say that word – of hostilities?

MS. PSAKI: It's a hard word. As I said, the progress has been working towards getting the sides to agree. Obviously, they're still working through the proposed – the draft proposal, so – but there has been more progress made on that than the other issue.

QUESTION: Any suggestion of a timeframe?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any prediction of a timeframe at this point.

January 7, 2014

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on South Sudan

Washington, DC

QUESTION: Do you have a readout of the conversation Secretary Kerry had --

MS. PSAKI: I do.

QUESTION: -- yesterday with President Kiir? And are you optimistic about the outcome of the talks which have started in Ethiopia? Because the fighting seems to continue on the ground.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm. Well, let me do the readout of the call first. Secretary Kerry spoke yesterday with South Sudanese President Kiir to discuss ways to advance the talks taking place in Ethiopia between the parties to the conflict in South Sudan. He also -- Secretary Kerry also reiterated his support for the democratically elected Government of South Sudan. He urged President Kiir to use the talks to find a peaceful, democratic way forward and reiterated the need for senior SPLM members currently detained by the Government of Sudan to be present for political discussions to be meaningful and productive. He asked President Kiir to make good on his commitment to release all political detainees immediately.

The two also discussed the urgent need for both sides to immediately halt fighting on the ground and protect civilians even as talks continue. The Secretary reiterated that the United States will deny support and work to apply international pressure to any elements that use force to seize power from the Government of South Sudan.

As you know, Special Envoy -- the President's Special Envoy Booth is in Ethiopia, has been for the last couple days in support of the talks between the parties which are ongoing. He's pressing them to reach a ceasefire and ensure humanitarian access. We still believe, of course, and continue to reiterate the fact that we believe these negotiations need to be serious, both sides need to listen to the region and the international community. They're ongoing, so Nicolas, it's hard for me to give an analysis of how things are going day to day. We can talk to our team and see if there's more we can provide to you either later today or tomorrow when we meet again on how we view the talks and how they're going.

QUESTION: Given how much energy both the Bush and the Obama administrations have put into the creation of this new country, how did the world get to this point where they are on the verge of civil war, and the leader of this new country is looking to someone who was, up until, I guess, three days ago considered a mortal enemy, President Bashir of Sudan, as someone to help him maintain political power? This is not what people were anticipating when there was the ceremony for independence three years ago now.

MS. PSAKI: Well, you touched on the fact that it was three years ago now, and as we know, there can be challenges and ups and downs in any transition. Obviously, the Secretary, as part of his conversation, reiterated his support for the democratically elected Government of South Sudan. He is urging dialogue. That's where our focus is now. And that is what we feel is in the best interests of the people of South Sudan.

We don't – also don't have any indication that Sudan is playing a negative role in the current political crisis in South Sudan. I understand there have been reports that President Bashir is on the ground. I don't have more details on that, but from our reports from the ground, we don't have an indication they're playing a negative role as they work toward peace talks.

QUESTION: But two weeks ago, he was supporting the other guy. I mean, he was supporting (inaudible) – so is he playing maybe a double role here? Is he sort of playing both sides of this fight?

MS. PSAKI: I think I said we don't have any indication that he's playing a negative role in resolving these difficult --

QUESTION: Is his role being – I mean, do you approve of his role?

MS. PSAKI: Do I – do we approve of his role?

QUESTION: Do you approve of his role, his involvement?

MS. PSAKI: I think we have spoken out when we've had concerns about a variety of things he's done --

QUESTION: Right.

MS. PSAKI: -- and I'm not going to go into all of those. But in terms of this specific case, we don't believe – we have no indication that Sudan is playing a negative role in the current political crisis in South Sudan.

QUESTION: Jen --

QUESTION: Can you say whether you think that he can play a positive role?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any more details on what specifically he's doing, Matt, so --

QUESTION: Okay. Because – well, all right. Well, I think the reason that there are – a lot of these questions are being asked is --

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- the U.S. has taken a dim view when other independent sovereign countries have allowed President Bashir, who is under indictment by the ICC for war crimes, to visit. Now if you're saying that you think that it's possible he could play a positive role in helping to avert a civil war in South Sudan and that his visit there could possibly be productive, it would seem that you're taking a slightly -- you're --

MS. PSAKI: I don't believe that's what I said. I think the question was --

QUESTION: No, I know, but that's why -- but I'm -- you're saying -- your answer is: We don't think that he -- that Sudan proper is playing a negative role.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: The question is whether you think President Bashir can play a positive role in helping to resolve the situation in South Sudan. And if you do think that, are you no longer concerned about a sovereign country welcoming in an indictee of the ICC?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't have any details on exactly what he was doing there or is still doing there, so let me talk to our team and see if there's more to say about what role he is or isn't playing there.

QUESTION: Well, especially too, because --

QUESTION: Well, and also about what role you would like him to play.

MS. PSAKI: Sure, sure.

QUESTION: Well, especially too because there's still unresolved boundary issues, there's still unresolved questions about the status of Abyei, they still haven't made any progress on the sharing of petroleum revenues.

MS. PSAKI: I understand all of that. I think the original question was about whether he was playing an unhelpful role by being there, so that was the question I was answering, and I will check with our Africa team and see if there's more we can convey or report from our end about what role he is or isn't playing. I'm not even sure if there is a role that he's playing, so --

QUESTION: But do you see this conflict --

QUESTION: On the issue of his indictment, could this be a path for redemption for Mr. Bashir to get rid of that indictment?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not going to do any more analysis until I have more details on what he is or isn't doing there.

Go ahead, Nadia.

QUESTION: Jen, do you see this conflict as a tribal conflict between the Dinka and Nuer, or more than a power struggle between two men? And if this is the case, does it worry you more because it is – it's open for an open conflict, actually, not just settling political scores between Riek Machar and President Kiir?

MS. PSAKI: Obviously, the talks are ongoing on the ground. As you know, there are a number of countries that are engaged in this and who want to see regional stability. I don't want to do too much more analysis from here on the causes and the reasons to jeopardize anything that's happening on the ground.

Go ahead, Scott.

QUESTION: The would-be members of the Machar delegation who are detained in Juba --

MS. PSAKI: Yep.

QUESTION: -- are detained, as you know, under suspicion of plotting a coup against the Kiir government.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: In calling for those people to be released, are you asserting, then, that it is not your belief that they were involved in an effort to overthrow the Kiir government?

MS. PSAKI: Let me talk to our team about that. I just – I'm still catching up here, I have to admit, on this particular issue. I mean, we also said that we would deny support and work to apply international pressure to any elements that used force to seize power from the Government of South Sudan, so we are watching and concerned about those reports at the same time. But let me talk to our team and see if we can spell that out a little more clearly.

We only --

QUESTION: Can we go to Iraq real quick?

MS. PSAKI: I have to go up to the bilat in a moment, so --

January 6, 2014

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on South Sudan
Washington, DC

QUESTION: What sort of readout can you give us on the Salva Kiir call?

MS. HARF: I do not have a – it literally happened, I think, right before I came out here. I know that it was a fairly lengthy call. I'm happy to check in when I get off the podium and see.

A quick South Sudan update, in case folks are interested: Special Envoy Booth is in Ethiopia today to support the talks between the two parties, as he has been. He is pressing them to reach a ceasefire and ensure humanitarian access. As Secretary Kerry said on Sunday, these negotiations need to be serious and both sides need to listen to the region and the international community, because, of course, getting to the table is progress, but we also need a halt to the fighting on the ground. As I said, Ambassador Booth is very deeply engaged with this, and if I have more of a readout, I'm happy to provide it.

QUESTION: One of the issues here is the people who are detained in Juba.

MS. HARF: Yes.

QUESTION: Is it the view of the United States Government that these are alleged coup plotters who should face justice, or they're members of the Riek Machar delegation who should be freed to go to Addis?

MS. HARF: The latter. We do believe that to be meaningful and productive, senior SPLM members currently detained in Juba need to be present for discussions on political issues which are happening in Addis. To help move these talks forward, we urge the Government of South Sudan to uphold its commitments and release political detainees immediately.

QUESTION: Presumably, the Secretary discussed that with – in his call?

MS. HARF: I would definitely assume so. Again, I'm happy to get a readout. It happened right before I came out.

QUESTION: Quite apart from the call, though, it appears that both sides in this situation are preparing for --

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- major new fighting.

MS. HARF: Oh, major new – I thought you were going to say preparing for negotiations.

QUESTION: Well, no. It looks like as they're – as these talks are trying to get underway, that they're – that both are building up for some kind of – for some new violence. So I'm just wondering what you have to say about that.

MS. HARF: Well, I don't have a recent battlefield assessment. Obviously, we've said – I'm just not sure what the situation is in terms of what you just asked about. What we've said is that we don't believe this dispute can be resolved through violence and that they need to work towards getting these negotiations up and running. The group organizing them, IGAD, announced on – when we echoed on Saturday that the parties were at the table. They're now negotiating the modalities of how these talks will move forward. But they need to move forward quickly because this can't be solved through violence. And we've said that there are consequences --

QUESTION: Right.

MS. HARF: -- to this violence, certainly, both in terms of U.S. support and how the relationship looks like going forward.

QUESTION: When you say you don't believe this can be solved through violence, that's the same as saying you don't believe there's a military solution too?

MS. HARF: They're similar.

QUESTION: Right?

MS. HARF: Yeah.

January 3, 2014

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on South Sudan

Washington, DC

As you saw this morning with our statement, today, due to the deteriorating security situation and out of an abundance of caution, the Department of State ordered the departure of most remaining U.S. Government personnel from South Sudan. The U.S. Embassy is therefore only able to offer very limited emergency services to U.S. citizens in the Republic of South Sudan. Due to the drawdown of our personnel in Juba, we recommend the U.S. citizens who are in need of emergency assistance in South Sudan first contact the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi. In the coming days, we'll continue to work to keep our remaining diplomatic personnel safe, to help Americans seeking to leave the country, and to support regional and international efforts to bring the fighting to an end.

As I said in my statement this morning, even as we draw down our personnel, we continue to be engaged in and strongly support regional and international efforts to bring the violence to an end. Secretary Kerry and other senior officials have been in touch repeatedly with leaders in the region and in South Sudan. And our ambassador there, Susan Page, does remain in Juba, where she is in constant communication with South Sudanese officials and her foreign counterparts.

Just one more official to note: Our special envoy, Ambassador Donald Booth, is in Ethiopia for talks between the two parties as well.

With that, Matt.

QUESTION: Can – just on that, do you have any idea how many, if any, Americans are still in South Sudan who want – who wanted to get on the evacuation flights that you had and might not have been able to? I'm not asking about total number or about --

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: -- or about people who are there intentionally and they're --

MS. HARF: Who don't want to leave.

QUESTION: -- there because of the situation --

MS. HARF: Right.

QUESTION: -- but people who actually had expressed a desire to the Embassy to want to leave.

MS. HARF: I don't know the answer. I'm happy to look into that. Just updated numbers on that: We've evacuated over 440 U.S. officials and private citizens and more than 750 citizens of at least 27 other countries on eight chartered flights and nine military aircraft. This morning there were two more DOD C-130s.

The answer is I don't know. We've had, as I said, a bunch of flights going out, but I'm happy to check and see.

QUESTION: And will those continue, even though you are -- have limited -- presumably, some of these people who are being drawn down were helping in these evacuations flights. Is that correct?

MS. HARF: It's people who had remained at the Embassy. Let me see what -- if I have any --

QUESTION: Does this -- does the drawdown mean that those -- that there will be any impact on future evacuation flights if there had been any --

MS. HARF: We'll keep looking, and if we need to do more, we're certainly open to doing that, as we've been throughout. Who remains: the ambassador, a few key personnel, and of course, security at our facility there, both ours and DOD. But I think we're certainly open to doing more evacuations if there's a need, depending on the security, of course.

...

QUESTION: On South Sudan. Ethiopia and foreign governments announced that ceasefire conference would start in the South Sudan. So do you have any more information about that?

MS. HARF: Let me see what I have. I know this is obviously a fast-moving situation and this is what I mentioned, Ambassador Booth is in Ethiopia for talks between the parties. As I've mentioned -- let me pull up a little information on the talks if I have that. These are the IGAD discussions. The Inter-Governmental Authority for Development nations are supporting this political dialogue in Addis. We do understand that delegations representing both the South Sudanese Government and former Vice President Machar have arrived in Addis to discuss an immediate cessation of hostilities and consider a political way forward.

We are grateful to the Ethiopian Government for hosting these discussions, welcome the leadership of the other countries involved. I will check and see what the latest is in terms of the exact negotiations. I know this is an ongoing and moving situation, and that's sort of the latest I have. But as we have more to share over the weekend, I think we'll be happy to.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: Do you have any information on Kiir or Machar getting a lot of help from Bashir, president of North Sudan?

MS. HART: I have not heard anything about that. I'm happy to check with our team. I just don't know the answer, Said. I'm happy to check.

January 3, 2014

Drawdown of Diplomatic Personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Juba, South Sudan

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson

Press Statement

Washington, DC

Due to the deteriorating security situation in South Sudan, today the United States has further drawn down staffing at our Embassy in Juba. We are taking this step out of an abundance of caution to ensure the safety and security of our diplomatic personnel. As a result of this drawdown, the U.S. Embassy in Juba will not be able to provide consular services to U.S. citizens in South Sudan. The U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya will provide consular services for U.S. citizens in South Sudan until further notice. We continue to strongly recommend that U.S. citizens in South Sudan depart immediately.

Even as we draw down our personnel, the United States remains deeply and actively committed to supporting regional and international efforts to end the violence in South Sudan, including the vital work of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). We are exploring what more we can do to further strengthen UNMISS and support its efforts to protect civilians. At the same time, we are working closely with international partners to help meet the humanitarian needs of internally displaced persons and refugees.

Today the United States announced an additional \$49.8 million in assistance to help address the humanitarian crisis. Secretary Kerry and senior U.S. officials have been in touch with President Kiir and have spoken with regional leaders. Special Envoy Booth is in Ethiopia supporting the negotiation efforts led by the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and urging the parties to reach an immediate cessation of hostilities, ensure full and unfettered humanitarian access, and outline tangible steps toward resolving their differences peacefully that can be implemented immediately. U.S. Ambassador to South Sudan Susan Page remains in Juba where she is in constant communication with South Sudanese officials, UNMISS, and her foreign counterparts. A U.S. Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) based in Nairobi continues to lead U.S. efforts to support humanitarian operations and meet the needs of the people of South Sudan.

The people of South Sudan deserve a better future – a future that gives them the chance to realize the hopes and dreams they celebrated at independence, not one characterized by the violence, unrest, and instability we see today. As President Obama said, too much blood has been spilled and too many lives have been lost to allow South Sudan's moment of hope and opportunity to slip from its grasp. Now is the time for South Sudan's leaders to show courage and leadership, end the violence, ensure the protection and security of civilians, and reaffirm their commitment to building a more peaceful, unified, democratic state.

December 30, 2013

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on South Sudan
Washington, DC

QUESTION: On South Sudan --

MS. HARF: Yes.

QUESTION: -- what phone calls have been made to get the ceasefire going? Number two, how optimistic are you that there will be a ceasefire in the next few days and that the sides will come together? And number three, what kind of other -- we had today the Ugandan President Museveni saying that the region should move in to defeat the South Sudanese. That could mean military, it could mean a bunch of other things. What is your reading of his comments?

MS. HARF: Yeah. So a few points -- just a couple calls, just facts here to read out, and then I'll talk a little bit about them: That Secretary Kerry and other senior Administration officials have been in regular contact with leaders in the region and in South Sudan to push for an immediate cessation of hostilities to allow for a mediated political dialogue and critical humanitarian access for populations in dire need.

The Secretary has spoken with South Sudan President Kiir and former South Sudan Vice President Machar, both of them on Saturday, December 28th; both of them on Thursday, December 26th; both of them on Tuesday, December 24th. He spoke with President Kiir as well on December 23rd, 21st, and 20th. I know we read a bunch of these out, but just so they're all in one place. These are ongoing discussions. Special Envoy Ambassador Donald Booth is in the -- has been in the region all week, is in Juba today attempting to work with both President Kiir and former Vice President Machar to finalize the details of a political dialogue, hopefully to arrange for negotiations to begin in the coming days, working through the Intergovernmental Authority for Development nations. There's a number of nations that are a part of this that are working to help move these negotiations further.

And I didn't see those comments. I'm happy to look at them. I don't know what he meant, quite frankly.

QUESTION: Does the U.S. feel that this is moving closer to resolving itself, or is it still very tentative and not -- I mean --

MS. HARF: Well, I think probably a little of both, right. I think that's why we have folks on the ground encouraging the parties to come and start negotiations in the coming days, but it's a very complicated, tenuous situation. Obviously, our first priority is keeping our folks safe, helping them leave the country.

Just a quick update on that: So far, we've evacuated more than 400 U.S. officials and private citizens, and approximately 700 citizens of at least 27 other countries on seven chartered flights and six military aircraft. So that work is ongoing.

QUESTION: And the 400 is private as well as the --

MS. HARF: Correct. More than 400 U.S. officials and private citizens, and approximately 700 citizens of at least 27 other countries.

QUESTION: Is this, in your view, a tribal war that has taken on political dimensions, or a political conflict that has taken on tribal dimensions?

MS. HARF: Well, I don't want to put a label on it. What we've said is that there's no place for violence here, that the sides need to take a step back and move towards a mediated, negotiated political dialogue here. So I don't know if I'd put any of those words on it. I think suffice to say, we've made very clear what our position is.

QUESTION: I guess my question is: When the Secretary of State talks to Machar, for instance, who apparently commands an army of 25,000 people that are ready to attack, according to accusation by the president of the country, what does he tell him? What is --

MS. HARF: Well, the Secretary has clarified in these conversations that any effort to seize power through the use of military force will -- excuse me, I'm tripping over my words here, it's been a week -- will result in the end of longstanding support from the United States and the international community. He also has noted that all parties in this conflict have a responsibility to prevent atrocities. Those that violate international law, commit atrocities or other serious human rights abuses will be identified and held accountable.

So I think -- and President Obama said this in his statement -- that South Sudanese leaders have a choice here. They can choose to end the violence. They can choose to work to resolve these tensions peacefully. And now is the time for all of these leaders who have helped with this process of creating a new nation to take the right steps and make the right decisions, and they still have an opportunity to do so.

QUESTION: Could you tell us anything about the role of the Africa Corps or Africa Command?

MS. HARF: AFRICOM?

QUESTION: AFRICOM?

MS. HARF: I don't think I have anything on that. I'm happy to check, Said. I don't -- let me see if I have anything. I'm not sure I do.

QUESTION: Because there were something like 250 soldiers that were deployed --

MS. HARF: I'm happy to check. DOD probably has more details, but I'm happy to check.

QUESTION: One other thing?

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: One way to force these sides to come together is to also say – is a withdrawal of aid, number one, the foreign assistance; and number two, the possibility of sanctions. Have any of those been raised with them?

MS. HARF: Not to my knowledge. But I think what I said is that the Secretary made clear that if there is a use of military force to seize power, we would obviously not look on that favorably. I don't want to further outline what those detailed diplomatic conversations look like. I think what the Secretary and Ambassador Booth and others are focused on right now is getting the parties to the table and not talking about those kind of things.

QUESTION: Well, what would that look like? Do you have any idea of where they would meet?

MS. HARF: I don't.

QUESTION: How they would meet?

MS. HARF: I don't.

QUESTION: Who would be around the table?

MS. HARF: As I said, IGAD, the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development, is a group of countries in the region that would arrange for negotiations to begin in the coming – to begin. I don't have details. I'm happy to check on that.

QUESTION: Would it be U.S. and UN involvement, or --

MS. HARF: I don't know. I will check.

QUESTION: And you said – and you just repeated that any effort to seize power through military force would result in an end to the longstanding support of the U.S. and international community. And that's been expressed to both sides, has it, both to --

MS. HARF: I can check.

QUESTION: And what does it mean, exactly? I mean, would it be an immediate cutoff of --

MS. HARF: I don't think I have further details about that to outline, but I'm happy to check.

December 24, 2013

U.S. Calls for Immediate Mediated Political Talks in South Sudan

Jen Psaki, Department Spokesperson

Press Statement

Washington, DC

Over the past twenty four hours, U.S. officials including Secretary Kerry have made calls to leaders throughout Africa and the world seeking a solution to the crisis in South Sudan. This morning, Secretary Kerry urged both South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar to accept a cessation of hostilities and begin mediated political talks. U.S. Special Envoy Donald Booth is in Juba today to attempt to secure final commitment from both President Kiir and Former Vice President Machar to begin talks, and is working with leaders from the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) nations to arrange for the negotiations to begin in the coming days.

The United States urges all parties in the crisis in South Sudan to implement an immediate cessation of hostilities. This will offer critical humanitarian access to populations in dire need and open a space for a mediated political dialogue between the opposing sides.

The ability of the parties to implement the ceasefire will send a strong signal to the citizens of South Sudan and the world that as leaders they have the courage to accept compromise and work for the best interests of all of the people of this young nation. We hope and pray today that the leaders of South Sudan will acknowledge the international community's commitment and understand that those who seek to take or hold power by violence or division along ethnic lines will not have our support and may be in violation of international law. Violence today will not pave the way for a more stable or prosperous tomorrow.

December 23, 2013

Remarks on the Current Situation in South Sudan

Ambassador Donald Booth, Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan

Via Teleconference

Okay, good morning, afternoon, whatever it is there. Let me go ahead and start with just a short statement on today's visit to Juba.

I visited Juba today, where I had a frank and open discussion with President Salva Kiir; the discussion focused on a range of measures to halt the devastating violence in South Sudan. Importantly, President Kiir committed to me that he was ready to begin talks with Riek Machar to end the crisis, without preconditions, as soon as his counterpart was willing.

President Kiir facilitated my access to meet the group of 11 senior SPLM figures who remain detained in Juba, and I can report that they are secure and well taken care of. These individuals communicated to me their desire – and their readiness – to play a constructive role in ending the crisis through peaceful political dialogue and national reconciliation. I will be following up to see how the government may utilize this constructive position.

The United States welcomes the recent political engagement of IGAD in South Sudan, and I encourage IGAD to move swiftly in engaging the government and opposition forces with a view to beginning talks on ending hostilities and their underlying political causes. The United States emphasizes the urgency of the situation and stands ready to support these efforts as necessary.

So that's the end of the statement I wanted to give, which is the readout of my meetings today in Juba.

December 22, 2013

U.S. Citizen Evacuation in South Sudan
Jen Psaki, State Department Spokesperson
Press Statement
Washington, DC

This morning, the United States -- in coordination with the United Nations and in consultation with the South Sudanese government -- safely evacuated American citizens from Bor, South Sudan. U.S. citizens and citizens from our partner nations were flown from Bor to Juba on UN and U.S. civilian helicopters. The United States and the United Nations, which has the lead for securing Bor airport in South Sudan, took steps to ensure fighting factions were aware these flights were a humanitarian mission.

The U.S. government is doing everything possible to ensure the safety and security of United States citizens in South Sudan. We are working with our allies around the world to connect with and evacuate U.S. citizens as quickly and safely as possible. For their safety and security, we will not outline specific evacuation plans.

So far, we have evacuated approximately 380 U.S. officials and private citizens and approximately 300 citizens of other countries to Nairobi and other locations outside South Sudan on four chartered flights and five military aircraft. Other U.S. citizens may have left through other means.

We strongly recommend U.S. citizens in South Sudan depart immediately, and we encourage those who remain to keep in touch with the Embassy and update their locations and status by contacting us at southsudanemergencyusc@state.gov.

December 20, 2013

Violence in South Sudan

John Kerry, Secretary of State

Press Statement

Washington, DC

The international community is laser-focused on the deeply alarming violence in South Sudan. We are all determined to continue standing for the aspirations of a people who have endured far too many years of conflict and sacrificed far too much to allow their young country to plunge back into turmoil. With the world watching and South Sudan's people yearning for a country marked by peace and prosperity not conflict and division, peace is the only option.

Last night, I called South Sudanese President Kiir and urged him, as president of all of South Sudan, to protect all South Sudanese citizens and work toward reconciliation. We recalled the difficult decisions that led to the remarkable moment when so many stood in long lines for a referendum to give birth to South Sudan, knowing all too well that the toughest decisions were still to come. Now is the time for leadership that makes those decisions through dialogue.

Now is the time for South Sudan's leaders to rein in armed groups under their control, immediately cease attacks on civilians, and end the chain of retributive violence between different ethnic and political groups. The violence must stop, the dialogue must intensify.

To help facilitate this process, we have asked our U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, Ambassador Donald Booth, to travel to the region and support regional efforts already underway. He will be departing today.

The United States strongly condemns yesterday's attacks on the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) base in Akobo County in Jonglei State, South Sudan. We offer our condolences to the UN and victims of this attack. We call on all parties to respect UNMISS, to refrain from any attacks on its personnel, and to help facilitate its mission to protect civilians who have sought shelter from the turmoil secure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all those in need.

The United States and other partners are committed to the realization of South Sudan's full political, social, and economic potential, but make no mistake: these cooperative efforts will be undermined if political disputes drag the country back into senseless conflict and strife. Moreover, any armed attack on the capital will be seen as an attempt to achieve an unlawful usurpation of power, which would be universally condemned. Those who seek to take or hold power by violence or division of South Sudanese along ethnic lines will not have our support. Violence today will not pave the way for a more stable or prosperous tomorrow.

December 19, 2013

Marie Harf, Deputy Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on South Sudan

Washington, DC

MS. HARF: Hi, everyone. Welcome to the daily briefing. I have a few quick things at the top and then I will open it up for questions. Just one quick update on evacuations from South Sudan. Today, we safely and successfully evacuated a fourth group of U.S. citizens from South Sudan. A private charter flight departed Juba at 0844 Eastern carrying roughly 130 passengers, both private U.S. citizens and third-country nationals. In addition, a small number of U.S. citizens were able to fly out aboard a UK military aircraft.

December 18, 2013

Update on South Sudan

Marie Harf, Deputy Department Spokesperson

Press Statement

Washington, DC

The United States is deeply troubled by the recent fighting in South Sudan. We call on the country's political leaders to refrain from any action that could escalate an already tense situation or fuel the violence. It is absolutely critical that political differences be resolved by peaceful and democratic means.

This morning we safely and successfully evacuated three groups of U.S. citizens from South Sudan. Two Department of Defense C-130 aircraft and a private charter flight departed Juba at 0530, 0535, and 0940 EST, respectively, carrying non-emergency Chief of Mission personnel, private U.S. citizens, and third country nationals. We continue to urge U.S. citizens to depart South Sudan and will work to arrange for additional transportation as necessary to accommodate demand, taking into account security conditions and availability of regular commercial flights. The Department of State expresses our sincere gratitude to Department of Defense colleagues for their critical assistance.

Today, Ambassador Page met with President Kiir in Juba to discuss our concern about the continued violence, increasing death toll, and growing humanitarian challenges. She raised the arrests of several opposition members and called on the government to ensure their rights are protected in accordance with South Sudan's constitution and international humanitarian and human rights laws and norms.

December 18, 2013

Marie Harf, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on South Sudan

Washington, DC

MS. HARF:...This morning, we safely and successfully evacuated three groups of U.S. citizens from South Sudan. Two Department of Defense C-130 aircraft and a private charter flight departed Juba at 0530, 0535, and 0940 Eastern Time respectively, carrying non-emergency chief of mission personnel, private U.S. citizens, and third country nationals. We continue to urge U.S. citizens to depart South Sudan, and will work to arrange for additional transportation as necessary to accommodate demand, of course taking into account security conditions and availability of commercial flights. The Department of State expresses our sincere gratitude to our colleagues at the Department of Defense for their critical assistance.

As you know, we're deeply troubled by the recent fighting in South Sudan. Today, Ambassador Page met with President Kiir in Juba to discuss our concern about this violence, the increasing death toll, and growing humanitarian challenges. She also raised the arrests of several opposition members, and called on the government to ensure their rights are protected. And I would note finally that we are encouraged by President Kiir's remarks today welcoming dialogue going forward. Of course, that's what we're calling for.

QUESTION: Question on Sudan.

MS. HARF: Then I'll come to you all. Uh-huh.

QUESTION: With the airlifts you announced at the --

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- earlier today and at the top of the briefing --

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- do you expect more of those to happen as -- if the situation deteriorates, or how is this going to --

MS. HARF: So -- no, it's a good question. We are working to arrange for additional transportation as necessary to accommodate demand. I don't have anything to announce at this point, but certainly are open, working with the Defense Department or private contract aircraft, to help other folks get out as well. As I mentioned, we evacuated U.S. officials, private U.S. citizens, foreign diplomats, some NGO folks, foreign private citizens. We sort of -- we're trying to help with -- get a wide range of folks out.

QUESTION: Do you know how many U.S. --

MS. HARF: And there are also commercial flights. The airport is now open for a limited amount of time, and there are commercial flights that are flying out, so that's sort of another way folks can get out as well.

QUESTION: Do you know how many U.S. diplomats still remain in -- or are U.S. citizens?

MS. HARF: It's the emergency personnel. We don't give out official numbers on that, but we do have a contingency there that is focused on securing our facilities, on providing emergency services to U.S. citizens, and of course reporting back here on the situation on the ground there.

QUESTION: On this, I -- in the travel, or in the announcement of the two C-130s and the --

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: -- chartered aircraft, you said that they had taken chief of mission personnel.

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is there some reason you didn't use the word Embassy personnel?

MS. HARF: A number of folks fall under chief of mission, right, whether it's USAID or Department of Defense or other -- I mean a whole host of folks fall under chief of mission authority in a country, not just someone at the Embassy.

QUESTION: So it's U.S. Government officials generally?

MS. HARF: Yeah. Yeah.

QUESTION: And just on that, do you have an indication of -- you said according to need.

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: Have you any estimation of how many more people are wanting to get out?

MS. HARF: We -- I don't -- we don't have good estimates of that. I would say that we evacuated approximately 150 private U.S. citizens as part of these evacuations. That is one number I'm able to give out. I attempt to whenever I can. I don't have a good sense for how much else there is.

QUESTION: So the evacuation was actually higher than that, then, because you --

MS. HARF: Yeah. That was just private U.S. citizens.

QUESTION: Right.

MS. HARF: There were three planes – U.S. officials, foreign diplomats, other folks as well.

QUESTION: Are you able to say which are the countries the foreign diplomats represented?

MS. HARF: I don't actually know. I'm happy to check. I know a number of other countries are also evacuating their folks.

QUESTION: So DOD used the number 120, so --

MS. HARF: For the planes?

QUESTION: Yeah. For – yeah, for --

MS. HARF: For the C-130s?

QUESTION: Well, I wasn't sure if they were --

MS. HARF: Let me double-check. That sounds accurate. I just need to double-check.

QUESTION: They were only talking about two planes, so I was thinking it was just 120.

MS. HARF: Right, there are two planes.

QUESTION: So maybe there was another --

MS. HARF: Right, there are three planes. There's the two Defense Department C-130s --

QUESTION: Plus a private charter.

MS. HARF: -- and then the private charter that we chartered ourselves.

QUESTION: So what's the 150?

MS. HARF: Those are the number of private U.S. citizens in a combination of all three planes --

QUESTION: Okay.

MS. HARF: -- that we evacuated.

QUESTION: These private U.S. citizens --

MS. HARF: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: -- have you any idea what do they do? Are they mainly business people? Are they scholars?

MS. HARF: I don't. I don't have a breakdown for that.

QUESTION: Are they NGOs?

MS. HARF: Some are NGOs. Some have dual citizenship. I just don't know.

QUESTION: Is Washington playing any role in the reconciliation between President Kiir and his vice president?

MS. HARF: Well, we're certainly encouraging it. I mentioned today that Ambassador Page met with President Kiir. We're certainly encouraging all folks to not move forward with violence, to take a step back here, and to work on addressing their issues they have peacefully. So we're certainly going to keep making that point very clear.

QUESTION: And there is a group of African foreign ministers going to Juba soon. Do you expect anything from them?

MS. HARF: I'll check on that. I wasn't aware of that trip, but I'm happy to check.

QUESTION: With the airlifts you announced at the --

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- earlier today and at the top of the briefing --

MS. HARF: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- do you expect more of those to happen as -- if the situation deteriorates, or how is this going to --

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QUESTION: Okay. Got it.

MS. HARF: Yeah.

QUESTION: So it's U.S. Government officials generally?

MS. HARF: Yeah. Yeah.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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MS. HARF: Some are NGOs. Some have dual citizenship. I just don't know.

December 17, 2013

Marie Harf, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on South Sudan

Washington, DC

MS. HARF: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the daily briefing. I have a couple items at the top, then happy to open it up for questions....

Many of you may have seen our updated Travel Warning that's gone out. We are deeply troubled by the fighting that continues today in Juba, in South Sudan. We encourage the country's political leaders to refrain from any action that could further escalate an already tense situation, and urge them to calm their supporters. It is absolutely critical that political differences be resolved by peaceful and democratic means. We also call on the government to respect the rule of law, refrain from arbitrary arrests, and adhere to the principles laid out in their constitution.

Just as the United States stood with the people of South Sudan as their country was founded, we stand with them today and will continue to stand with them through this turmoil. The people of South Sudan have endured too many years of conflict and sacrificed far too much for their country to be plunged back into turmoil.

Again, we put out an updated Travel Warning with some information in it. I'm sure there may be some questions from folks about that as well. So Deb, do you want to go ahead and get us started?

QUESTION: Yeah. On South Sudan. Is there really a coup going on there, or do you have some doubts that maybe there's something else?

MS. HARF: There have been a lot of conflicting reports. The situation is, of course, very fluid. We will continue to monitor it closely. And at this point, it's still premature to say what sparked the violence. Until we have a better sense of the situation that's unfolding, I'm not going to characterize it one way or the other. We'll just keep looking at the facts and see if we have more to share at that time.

QUESTION: So it's possible that it's not really a coup?

MS. HARF: Again, the situation is fluid and still unfolding. We'll take a look. I'm not going to characterize it in any way. We'll take a look and see if we want to do so in the future.

QUESTION: A couple of practical things on this. Was – you say – in the Travel Warning, you say that you've ordered non-essential U.S. Government employees. That means more than just diplomats? In other words, it's non-essential other U.S. Government employees?

MS. HARF: Well – and thank you for bringing this up – because of the ongoing – for folks who didn't see the Travel Warning, because of the ongoing political and social unrest, on December 17th, the State Department ordered the departure of non-emergency personnel from South Sudan. I can double-check. I think that might be standard language. I can just double-check and see what that means.

QUESTION: You also said that you were – that the Embassy in Juba was suspending normal operations until further notice. Other than not being able to provide regular consular services to any U.S. citizens who might choose to remain, what else is it not doing? Is it not processing visa applications, for example? And is it doing its normal work of gathering political and other information about the country?

MS. HARF: Right. So basically what that means is it's closed for public services, so things the public would come to. It still will provide emergency services to American citizens. In the Travel Warning, it outlined how you can get in contact with someone. Obviously, it will only be emergency personnel left. I'll see if I can get more of a detailed readout of what they'll be doing. Obviously, part of it is security --

QUESTION: Right.

MS. HARF: -- for the facilities as well.

QUESTION: And – but presumably included in the things that the public would normally go to the Embassy for, that includes visa issuance for South Sudanese people who might wish to visit the United States. So that's suspended?

MS. HARF: For – if that's certainly a public service, then yes. Obviously, our folks there will still be monitoring the situation on the ground --

QUESTION: Right.

MS. HARF: -- providing that kind of analysis. But yeah, I'll double-check and see if there's more of a list.

QUESTION: And Marie, what --

QUESTION: Are you assigning responsibility or blame in this particular case? Do you blame the government?

MS. HARF: As I said, at this point, it's too early to determine what sparked the violence. But what we would say going forward is that it's on the onus of everyone to take a step back and move forward, because a peaceful resolution of political differences is the only thing that will

move South Sudan's new democracy forward. That's certainly what we're calling on all sides to do going forward.

QUESTION: Marie, what practical steps are you actually doing from Washington to try and help the South Sudanese? As you say, the United States was very much behind the founding of this new country --

MS. HARF: Absolutely.

QUESTION: -- the world's newest nation. And what practically are you doing to try and stop this violence and get the country back onto a semblance of an even keel?

MS. HARF: Absolutely. We were certainly very involved, as you said, in the founding. We've provided, I think, hundreds of million dollars of assistance, humanitarian, security assistance across the board. Ambassador Donald Booth, who's the President's special envoy, spoke with President Kiir this morning. The special envoy called for a peaceful resolution of the situation, for an end to the violence, underscored the importance of the rule of law, avoiding arbitrary arrests, and also talked about ways to get South Sudan back on track towards realizing the vision that their country set forth for itself in independence. So we're engaging at a high level, clearly. And if we have anything additional in the coming days, we're happy to detail it.

QUESTION: What sort of ways? Could you outline what ways specifically they could get back on track?

MS. HARF: Well, the onus is certainly on the parties themselves to take a step back here and avoid further violence. Certainly our biggest concern is about the security and safety of U.S. persons and U.S. employees, which is obviously what today's ordered departure speaks to. But again, we're talking to the government about their -- helping with getting our folks out. We're talking to them about moving forward to get on a path towards nonviolence on all sides. And if there are more specifics, I'm happy to look into it.

QUESTION: Okay. Thank you.

MS. HARF: And more on this, more on South Sudan?

QUESTION: I mean, when you say they are advised to leave, I mean, they are advised to leave or departure -- I mean, or they are evacuated?

MS. HARF: Right. So let me just read from the Travel Warning. It warns U.S. citizens -- and this is a little different than the last Travel Warning for South Sudan, which I believe was October 22nd. This warns U.S. citizens against all travel to South Sudan and recommends that U.S. citizens currently in South Sudan depart immediately. In terms of what we're actually offering to do for U.S. citizens, we're still looking at logistics for (a) our ordered departure, but

we're also reviewing all available options to assist U.S. citizens who may wish to depart South Sudan. We've called on the government to open points of entry. We've called on them – think it would be good if the airport opened, for example. So we're looking at options, and if we can help, we will do so.

QUESTION: Is the government of al-Bashir involved in any way, of the north, in these struggles?

MS. HARF: Again, I --

QUESTION: To the best of your knowledge.

MS. HARF: To the best of my – I don't know the answer to that question. I'm happy to check with our team. Again, it looks like this is violence that's really centered in and around the capital of Juba. It doesn't look more widespread, and certainly we don't want it to become more widespread. But I'm happy to take a look at what our assessment is.

QUESTION: But didn't the government of Khartoum in the past try to interfere in the affairs of the South?

MS. HARF: Again, I haven't seen any indication of that, but let me double-check with our team, Said. And welcome back. I haven't seen you in a few days.

July 26, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, Selections on Sudan/South Sudan
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Obviously there's been – I've seen the statements that you put out in last couple of weeks –

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- notably the day before yesterday, about the South Sudanese President sacking his cabinet. And then there's been some concerns about what's happening in Jonglei.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I just wondered if you could update us on where we are with getting a new special envoy.

MS. PSAKI: Envoy?

QUESTION: Mm-hmm.

MS. PSAKI: I don't, unfortunately, have an update for you or any personnel announcements today. This is a priority of the Secretary's. As you know, he met with officials when he was in Ethiopia and this is an issue that he continues to discuss and has a history on, actually. And I know he plans to. I don't have an update on any announcements though.

QUESTION: I mean, if – the longer it takes, presumably the harder it becomes for you to have a very strong influence on the events that are happening in South Sudan and Sudan.

MS. PSAKI: I think the Secretary has been evident in – by his public comments as well, is very focused on putting a senior-level team in place in all of our bureaus, and this certainly would be applicable to that.

QUESTION: And how concerned are you about what's happening in South Sudan, which, after all, the United States was the main backer for the birth of this newest nation? And it seems after two years there are real concerns about human rights violations and also with the President's sacking his cabinet –

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: -- and that political upheaval as well.

MS. PSAKI: The – we are deeply concerned. I know we put out a statement, I believe, yesterday on this by the risk to stability as you mentioned. The Secretary – I'd have to check if he has, but he was scheduled to speak with President Kiir today, so we can venture to get you an update on that. But that, of course, speaks to how important and concerned we are.

QUESTION: Because when Jo talks about making the situation tougher the longer that there is no special envoy, there's also still the outstanding issue of the sharing of oil revenues, which primarily derives from South Sudan. Does that add any urgency, especially when it comes to making certain that both countries become more economically viable than they have been to date?

MS. PSAKI: Well, certainly, as part of our conversations, we urge Sudan to reverse its decision to stop the flow of South Sudanese oil transported via Sudan's pipeline. We also urge both Sudan and South Sudan to fully and immediately implement all of the September 27th cooperation agreements without preconditions. This is an issue that has come up in conversations in the past and is one we're continuing to press and we certainly recognize the importance and the impact on economic stability.