

# US to unveil new sanctions over Darfur, help strenghten South Sudan Military

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**WASHINGTON, March 29 (Reuters)** - The United States will impose tough new measures against Sudan, likely within days, to try to force it to change course on Darfur and aims to pressure Khartoum militarily by helping rebuild forces in the south, U.S. officials said.

State Department, Defense, Treasury and other U.S. officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the goal was to "tighten the screws" on President Omar Hassan al-Bashir and have him accept an international force in the vast western province.

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A White House announcement on sanctions and a further limit on dollar transactions was expected very soon, a State Department official said.

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Military options like a no-fly zone over Darfur -- which Britain wants -- or a forced intervention have been ruled out for now, but the Pentagon has done some "back of the envelope" calculations on what might be needed, a defense official said.

Some Sudan experts said the new sanctions were too little, too late.

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"This is the right idea but it is simply not enough and not multilateral enough to make an impact, a dent, in the calculations of the Sudanese regime," said John Prendergast of the International Crisis Group.

Sudan responded by saying the new measures would serve only to threaten humanitarian agreements Khartoum has signed with the United Nations and fuel violence in the region.

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"This will have negative repercussions," foreign ministry

spokesman Ali al-Sadig said on Thursday.

The United States had threatened an unspecified "Plan B" by Jan. 1 if Bashir did not agree to a U.N./African Union force in Darfur, where more than 200,000 people have been killed since 2003 in what Washington says is this century's first genocide.

That deadline passed but it was Bashir's comments that he would not accept a hybrid force that pushed the administration to roll out "Plan B," senior officials said.

Khartoum denies the allegations of genocide. Bashir has let African Union forces into Darfur but has refused to allow U.N. troops, saying that would amount to "foreign occupation."

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The U.S. government is also looking at how to change the military equation in Sudan.

One tactic is to help the government in the south build a strong force out of the former rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army which was at war with the north until a 2005 peace deal.

"If he (Bashir) is faced with a credible force in the south, he will start to relook at how his forces are dispersed and where his risks are," the defense official said.

But the initial focus will be on putting the financial squeeze on Bashir.

About 130 firms with ties to Sudan's government, including the two leading oil companies, are already on a U.S. sanctions list barring them from doing business with the United States or from using U.S. financial institutions to do dollar transactions -- the favored currency for lucrative oil trades.

Other companies will be added to the list, current sanctions will be tightened and existing loopholes closed, making it harder to do dollar deals.

"The goal is to be more pro-active and have tighter enforcement," said a Treasury Department official.

Aside from slapping travel and banking restrictions on at least three more Sudanese individuals, including a rebel leader, Washington also wants to put more pressure on splintered rebel groups in Darfur.

"You have to squeeze them all," said the defense official.  
"The goal is to get both Bashir and the rebels to come to the conclusion that they are not going to get anywhere with their current course of action."

The United States is working closely with Britain, which takes over the presidency of the U.N. Security Council next month, and is planning a new resolution on Darfur.

Britain has been pushing for a no-fly zone in Darfur but the Pentagon sees that as fraught with problems, as it does a forced military intervention which would ostracize Arab nations still smarting from the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

"When you look at a no-fly zone, the conclusion that pretty much everyone comes up with is that it will not have any impact at all," a defense official said.

It would also be a logistical nightmare maintaining a no-fly zone in an area the size of Texas, the official said, adding that Sudan had a small number of fixed aircraft anyway.