

AFRICA

U.S. Warns South Sudan May Face Sanctions

African nation's leaders have mid-November deadline to form a unity government



South Sudan President Salva Kiir PHOTO: JOK SOLOMUN/REUTERS

By Jessica Donati

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WASHINGTON—The U.S. may impose sanctions on South Sudan's ruling elite if leaders fail to meet a mid-November deadline to form a unity government, a senior U.S. official warned Thursday.

The world's youngest nation, South Sudan plunged into conflict two years after separating from Sudan and gaining international recognition in 2011. The country's feuding factions agreed last year to form a power-sharing unity government as part of a deal to end the war. The deadline is Nov. 12.

"We're not prepared to continue to see delays, we're not prepared to continue to hear arguments for why more time must be given," said Bryan Hunt, Sudan and South Sudan office director at the State Department.

The U.S. could levy sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Act, a 2017 law that targets human-rights abusers and their families by imposing travel bans and freezing their assets.

Mr. Hunt said that the U.S. isn't considering broader sanctions targeting South Sudan's economy, such as its oil, because they would risk worsening the plight of people who live in a country that is partly dependent on foreign aid for survival.

South Sudan's embassy in Washington didn't respond to a request for comment. The conflict between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar has led to nearly two million people fleeing the country, mass hunger and atrocities ranging from rape and sexual mutilation to murder.

South Sudan got most of Sudan's oil fields and produced up to 350,000 barrels of oil per day before the outbreak of war. Several firms, including Malaysian oil company Petronas and China National Petroleum Corp., are working with the local producer Nile Petroleum Corp.

Mr. Hunt and U.K. Special Representative for Sudan and South Sudan Robert Fairweather said at a joint briefing that the international community should act to end violence in South Sudan.

"We believe that international sanctions are the strongest message to send to South Sudan," said Mr. Hunt, listing United Nations sanctions as an option. U.N. sanctions would require broad international support and China could veto any decision.

The watchdog group Sentry, co-founded by actor George Clooney, published a report last month outlining links between oil companies, including state-owned CNPC, Mr. Kiir and atrocities committed by forces loyal to him.

"The country's natural resources have been plundered, lethal militia and military units responsible for atrocities have received financing and kleptocrats have lined their pockets with untold billions of dollars," the report released last month said.

China's embassy in Washington didn't immediately respond to a request for comment on whether it would back U.N. sanctions on South Sudan, or the allegations concerning CNPC in the Sentry report. CNPC couldn't be reached for comment.

The number of dead resulting from the war is unknown, but an academic study funded by the United States Institute of Peace last year put the figure at nearly 400,000 people. USIP hosted the briefing with Messrs. Hunt and Fairweather on Thursday.