



## THE DARFUR CRISIS

by Harvey Glickman

What do George Clooney, Manute Bol, Elie Wiesel, and Olympic speed skater Joey Cheek have in common? They have all publicly called for the UN Genocide Convention of 1948 to be applied to Darfur and for greater intervention to halt genocide there.

Over the past few years, the U.S. government has agreed, at least in rhetoric. On July 23, 2004, the U.S. Congress passed a unanimous joint resolution declaring a genocide event in Darfur, as defined by the Convention, Article II of which defines genocide as:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Signers of the Convention, which include the U.S., are supposed to act to bring such events to an end. In September 2004, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell testified to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "Genocide has been committed in Darfur, and the government of Sudan and the Janjawid [militia] bear responsibility."

In March 2006, President Bush declared, "This is a serious business. This is not playing a diplomatic holding game. . . . When we say genocide, that means genocide has to be stopped." In June 2006, taking a somewhat different tack by acting to intervene in a humanitarian crisis, the U.S. House of Representatives approved \$450 million for assistance to Sudan, including \$138 million for the Darfur region. Commentators such as former diplomat Timothy Carney take another approach, seeing Khartoum as "the key to terrorism"--i.e., an ally in the war against violent jihadists. They are therefore hesitant to act in Sudan's internal affairs without the cooperation of the present government, led by President Omar Bashir. (On April 29, 2005, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Salah Abdallah Ghosh, the head of the Sudan security service, was flown to Washington in a CIA jet to review terrorism information gathered by the service.)

U.S. action on Darfur has largely been hortatory. Despite the anti-genocide rhetoric, the U.S. has acted largely as a cheerleader for the African Union (AU) or the UN to provide the boots on the ground in any peace-enforcement operation. Numerous calls around the world from media observers and human rights organizations for U.S., NATO, UN or AU intervention to halt genocide have succeeded only sporadically in shining a spotlight on the atrocities committed in Darfur, with the main achievement the May 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) brokered by the AU at a conference in Abuja, Nigeria, between the Sudanese government and only one of the three rebel factions.

Such an agreement reflects what appears to be a tacit aim of U.S. efforts, namely, not to alienate the government of Sudan, which provides assets to the U.S. effort in the war on terrorism; to track militants with murderous intent, to provide intelligence on the movements of suspected terrorists, and to keep the spigot open on oil in an extremely tight world petroleum market. Similar to our unacknowledged position on Pakistan, we need some "friendly (semi-) tyrants."

The DPA also, however, tacitly ratifies the Sudanese government's interpretation of the struggle as a civil war, rather than the state-sponsored ethnic cleansing it actually is (the government arms and equips the notorious janjaweed militia). What burst onto the world scene in 2003 as a thinly-disguised government effort to depopulate an area as large as France has proceeded long enough to now disintegrate into militia clashes, rebel factional disputes, banditry, and reciprocal cross-border raids

between Chadian irregulars harassing the Sudan government forces and Sudanese irregulars helping Chadian rebels. So what started as an effort to extend the control of the central government elites over an unruly countryside has--sadly, like many African conflicts--degenerated into internal factional clashes and international skirmishes. This complicates the urge to thrust cleanly and forcibly into mass injustices in order to put things right.

Although Kofi Annan and other UN officials have denounced the janjaweed raids, the rapes, the pillaging, and the displacement of thousands upon thousands of villagers, and the UN has helped set up and administer refugee camps on the fringes of Darfur and over the border in Chad, the DPA does not bring in a UN force to replace or shore up the ineffective AU contingent of 7,000 monitors. Four days after the DPA was signed, villagers in the Kalma refugee camp looted an AU police post and killed a Sudanese translator. Indeed, now there are reports of rebel factions imitating janjaweed tactics in their escalating internal struggle.

The DPA estimated that 200,000 are dead and 2 million displaced into camps in Darfur and in Chad. President Bashir's government agreed to assume certain responsibilities and looks toward the possibility of UN forces' supplementing the undermanned troops of the AU, who have been observing and supposedly enforcing a cease-fire in Darfur. That cease-fire, of May 12, 2006, provided for 5,000 rebels troops to be incorporated into the Sudanese army. The DPA also allows for wealth and power sharing as part of a new political architecture in relations between the central government and Darfurians. Khartoum is supposed to disarm the janjaweed and commits to contributing \$30 million to a compensation commission, a sum many regard as inadequate. Most close observers do not expect the cease-fire to end the fighting. The abovementioned General Gosh, on the 2006 anniversary of the coup of June 29, 1989 that brought General Bashir to power, asserted that Sudan's leadership prefers death and martyrdom over living in a country whose sovereignty is not respected. In his own address Bashir stated flatly, "We will not allow international troops under the UN to deploy in Darfur."<sup>1</sup>

At present the Sudan government continues to agree to its commitments but appears unwilling to implement them; it has broken its promises five times already. With no provision in the DPA for the UN to take over peacekeeping from the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS), Khartoum has merely agreed to allow a UN planning mission to visit the area. Yet most international observers and commentators believe that only a muscular international intervention can end the violence and provide human security. Such an intervention would include a Security Council resolution applying Chapter VII authority to intervene; the application of sanctions against violators on any side; U.S. and EU financial backing for a UN-expanded AU military contingent to enforce the cease-fire and relief operations for refugees; and U.S., NATO, and EU provision of monitoring and logistical capabilities.

As noted, similar to many places in Africa today, reality--and policy--is not simple. While Christians have been persecuted by self-styled enforcers of an Islamic code of conduct in the South of Sudan, that is hardly the whole story of north-south relations. While darker skinned people from the South have been "sold into slavery" to northerners, that does not mean that racism fully defines north-south relations. While many years of international involvement in Sudanese politics have focused on bringing a north-south civil war to an end, that is not the only civil divide in the country. Indeed, Sudan's geographic boundaries are not historically organic, and the country is crisscrossed by important east-west divisions, as well. Like most countries in Africa, Sudan's present boundaries reflect colonial residues and compromises--in its case, by the Ottomans and the British, the latter of whom administered the territory "in partnership" as Anglo-Egyptian Sudan prior to the country's achieving independence.

In the context of the complicated politics of Sudan today and of a sober assessment of U.S. interests and capabilities, an effective U.S. policy is not obvious, and certainly not so clear-cut that grassroots events such as the "Save Darfur" rally held in Washington this past April can solve the problem. But the U.S. has not offered clear leadership, either. At one time or another in the past three years, the U.S. or its official representatives have denounced a genocide and blamed the Sudanese government, called the crisis a tribal conflict, acted as if settling the north-south civil war would spill over to settle the Darfur conflict, called on NATO and the UN to intervene to help beleaguered AU peacekeepers, and supported the Abuja peace accords, which await a UN plan and Sudanese government permission to send peacekeeping forces.

#### CIRCLES OF CONFLICT IN SUDAN

To fully comprehend the Darfur crisis and the policy implications, one must conceptualize Sudan and its problems in terms of overlapping circles of conflict. Sudan as a whole has been in the midst of a humanitarian crisis for some years, with drought and desertification pushing south and west, placing cattle-raising nomads in direct conflict with peasant gardeners. This resource conflict is central to the Darfur strife. Peacekeeping alone, in the absence of famine relief and economic development, will be insufficient.

Broadly overlapping is a clan conflict among the Fur people, who are nomads and peasants, and a conflict between government-supported militia and locals, within a context of ethnic, status, and color differences among a governing elite and local peasants. Most recently, these conflicts have morphed into a Chad-Sudan conflict in which rebels against the government of Chad's President Idriss Deby are being supported by the Sudan government as a result of Deby's provision of safe haven for Darfur refugees and his suspected support for Uganda-based southern rebels against the Sudan government during the

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<sup>1</sup> "Sudan security chief rejects UN force, calls for martyrdom," *Sudan Tribune*, June 30, 2006.

course of the long north-south civil war.

Darfurians, all Sunni Muslims, attach themselves to three groups: the Zaghawa and the Massaleit, both settler groups, and the Fur. In 2005 the Sudan Liberation Army split into two factions: the SLA-Abdul Wahid, largely Fur, and the SLA-Minni Minawi, largely Zaghawa. The recent maneuverings shadowing the humanitarian crisis have been complicated by internal Sudanese politics and cross-border clashes. An attempted coup in 2006, supported by the Khartoum government, was repelled by President Deby (a Zaghawa) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) forces as the Chadian (and Sudanese) rebels reached the outskirts of Njamena, the capital of Chad. This was seen as retaliation for the help Deby offered JEM against Khartoum in January 2006. Both the invasion and the coup failed.

Complicating all this is a decades-long struggle in Sudan over the nature of the state--how far a supposedly militant Islamist regime can go in reformulating political and cultural life in the country. As early as 1966, Sadiq al-Mahdi, descendent leader of a historical and respected political community and head of the sometime governing Umma party, declared, "The dominant feature of our nation is an Islamic one . . . and this Nation will not have its entity identified and its prestige and pride preserved except under an Islamic revival."<sup>2</sup> Militant Islamists in Sudan, however, push for the programmatic exclusion of other beliefs.

Seeded in the 1940s as an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Sudanese Islamism rose to political prominence in the 1960s under Hasan al Turabi, a European-educated lawyer and articulate philosopher-politician. His Islamic Charter Front political party grew to prominence as the National Islamic Front (NIF) in 1986, pulling together elements of the urban intelligentsia, students at Khartoum University, small business owners interested in challenging big-business ties with the traditional parties, and suffering lower classes. The NIF backed the coup by General Bashir in June 1989. Bashir banned the older parties and utilized the NIF as the ideological basis for the governing Revolutionary Command Council. By 1993, the U.S. State Department Country Report on Human Rights for Sudan declared "The NIF-dominated regime pursued religious, ethnic and ideological discrimination in almost every aspect of society." In 1996 Turabi became speaker of a new parliament, and the next year Bashir assumed the title of president.

In September 2004, the Islamist movement in Sudan split after an unsuccessful coup led by Hassan al Turabi, now the ideological guru of Sudanese Islamism. (Sudanese politics regularly features divisions and realignments, especially, as one would expect, among faith-based ideologies.) Turabi wound up in detention, but his influence and support prevented his full suppression. Turabi actually came out in support of JEM, and was critical of the Abuja Peace Agreement. Alex de Waal, a leading commentator on Darfur and northeast African political history, writes that the war in Darfur is partly the result of the failure to broaden the Islamist base in the Nile Valley to embrace all sympathizers with Sufi (a spiritual theme in Islam, characterized by regional and clan "saints," sometimes erupting into puritanical sects) over the whole of Sudan.<sup>3</sup>

The Islamist project in Sudan clearly cannot be encapsulated into a committee of radical jihadists who train suicide bombers. At the time of the simultaneous bombings of the American Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden had been savoring the victory of the Afghan jihad over the Soviet forces in the Afghan civil war. By fall 1989 he turned up in Khartoum, invited by Turabi to transplant his organization there. Initially Bin Laden helped Turabi in the campaign against Christian Africans in the south of Sudan. By 1991 Al Qaeda was firmly ensconced in Sudan, at the center of a world network of banks, business enterprises and civic organizations that were underwriting terrorist activities.<sup>4</sup> Al Qaeda represented but one violent entity in a wide-ranging ideological and political projection of power by Turabi and his temporary support in the Sudan government, which encompassed internal and international elements.

Under Turabi's direction in 1991 Sudan hosted the "Popular Arabic and Islamic Conference" that challenged the Arab League and other world Muslim organizations. In the years 1991-96 Islamist forces pursued forcible ideological transformation of local governments inside Sudan and pursued the civil war in the southern provinces in order to crush opposition to Islamism as the adopted state ideology and practice.<sup>5</sup> But concerted and enduring resistance in the south of the country eventually brought about a military-political settlement and a new constitutional arrangement in 2005. John Garang, the long-time leader of the Southern People Liberation Army (SPLA) and finally transformed from rebel to statesman, was poised to assume a vice-presidency of a reconstituted Sudanese Federation when he died in a plane crash.

Shortly after 9/11 the Sudan government supposedly divested itself of Al Qaeda ties and shared intelligence with the U.S. in the war on terror. At present Islamism remains an undercurrent of politics in Sudan as an outlier program to continue a half-century campaign to turn an essentially multi-ethnic Sudan into an Islamic state.

## THE DARFUR PROVINCE

The Darfur crisis plays out against this background. Unrest in this province goes back at least to the 1987-89 civil war between militias of the Fur versus government-sponsored militias (similar to today), which was settled by a peace conference arranged

<sup>2</sup> Cited by Abel Alier, "The Southern Sudan Question," in Dunstan M. Wai, ed., *The Southern Sudan: The Problem of National Integration* (London, 1973), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> "Who Are the Darfurians? Arab and African Identities, Violence and External Engagement," *African Affairs*, April 2005.

<sup>4</sup> *9/11 Commission Report* (New York: Norton, 2004), pp. 55-58.

<sup>5</sup> See Harvey Glickman, "Islamism in Sudan's Civil War," *Orbis*, Spring 2000, pp. 273-279.

by al-Mahdi. Islamists found considerable support in Darfur in the 1980s and it is said that the jihadi militia supporters of Turabi came in large part from Darfur. In 1991 an SPLA uprising in Darfur failed, following a defection from the NIF. In April 1992 the Islamist government sponsored a jihad in Kordofan which resulted in a genocide-like result there. By 1999 western Fur supporters of the NIF had deserted the Arabized elite of the Nile valley, a separation reflected in differences among the Darfur rebels today. And among the Darfur rebels, strength to continue the civil war ironically came in the form of international pressure on the Sudan government to rein in the janjaweed, as well as the assumed parallel to the settlement of the civil war in the south of Sudan.

Nevertheless, banditry and atrocities on the part of rebel factions pale in comparison to a multi-year campaign on the part of the Sudan government through sponsored janjaweed militias to kill or displace the peasant population of Darfur. Most of the 200,000 dead and 2 million displaced are not due to rebel in-fighting. As John Prendergast and Colin Thomas-Jensen of the International Crisis Group state, “Sudanese military intelligence agents manipulate local ethnic divisions and exacerbate tensions, and then the government blames the bloodshed on lawlessness and tribalism.” President Bashir has said recently, “the so-called Darfur conflict is an invention by foreign interests.”<sup>6</sup>

#### WHERE FROM HERE

Genocide it is; and it is an international disgrace that it has not been stopped; but unilateral intervention to halt it can only be a stopgap measure, without considerable international, especially African and Sudanese cooperation. Consciousness-raising among humanitarian activists outside Sudan with good intentions unfortunately play into unhelpful stereotypes and distort the political realities. To portray all African Darfurians as victims of historical predatory Arabization aids in mobilizing international sentiments, but it does not accurately depict the political reality and blocks the very humanitarian assistance that is required. To insist on finding only Arab villains –such as characterizing the conflict as “Arabs” attempting to exterminate Africans -- contributes to the stereotype prevalent in the Middle East of the Arabs always as subject to the “Orientalist” Western interpretations of the world. Indeed in the Middle East and many parts of Muslim Africa, the way “genocide” has been characterized appears to some Muslim commentators as an unfair planned denigration of the Arabs. To more partisan Sudanese and sensitive Africans it brings back neo-colonial interventionism. And, of course there are always those who see “a Zionist plot.”

Much of the support generated for “the genocide coalition” in the international community stems from an alliance of admirable international human rights groups, African and African American supporters of the SPLA and its long march to recognition of special status for the south of Sudan and its peoples, anti-slavery and Christian political activists--largely in the U.S., and some antiterrorism commentators who see the Sudan government as an outpost of a typical authoritarian Islamic regime.

Despite its muddled implementation in Iraq and elsewhere, we have placed our marker since 2001 on the side of democracy and international justice; Darfur and Sudan are a clear test. Arab and African sensitivities aside and despite realists’ warning that we need Khartoum’s cooperation in counterterrorism, if the secretary of state and the president of the U.S. both implicate the Sudan regime in genocide, how can it not serve U.S. national interests to act vigorously to end this atrocious event? In the words of President Bush, “there has to be a consequence for people abusing their fellow citizens.” It is certainly in the realm of near-term possibility that the U.S. work with the AU and NATO to designate a lead country to secure and mobilize a UN-mandated, fully-funded force of sufficient number to help the AU-AMIS stabilize peacekeeping and enforce the cease-fire. That would be a beginning.

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<sup>6</sup> John Prendergast and Colin Thomas-Jensen, “Matching Rhetoric with Action in Darfur,” [allAfrica.com](http://allAfrica.com), March 17, 2006.