

War in darfur

Literature



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From independence from the British in 1956, Sudan has not been a “ nation state” in any traditional form. It has not created a national economy, it does not control all of its territory, and it certainly does not have either the allegiance or the control over all its people. It does not have a monopoly of violence over its territory. It is not a state.

Sudan has been a highly divided society, a society divided between an Arabic and Islamic north and a Christian and pagan south. Wars have flared up fairly regularly, and some might say the war is continuous, reflecting the irreconcilable nature of the two “ nations,” nations trapped in one state. Recently however, with the accession of Gen. Omar Bashir, who took power in a coup in 1989, many elite agencies and organizations, such as the U. S. government and the U. S. Holocaust Museum, have accused the Islamic government in the north of genocide. It should be noted that Amnesty International has avoided the use of this term in relation to Bashir’s government.

In the list of international crimes, genocide is considered the very worst: it is the destruction of a culture, a people, a nation either physically or culturally. It is destruction of a nation based on mere membership in that nation, in genocides most formal form. The reasons for this contempt are often complex, and certainly cannot be taken as “ sides” in a morality play, as some writers occasionally do. To fully understand the situation, one must not merely rely on elite organizations and self-interested governments, but take all sides and variables into account, and hence, then paint a complex, rather than black and white, picture. This is the only method that will bring true results, rather than the results the conflicting parties want to hear. Prima

facie, there is no more reason to doubt the word of General Bashir than the word of refugees from Darfur so often relied upon by western journalists.

1. The motives in the alleged mass killings are economic, ideological and religious. In the early 1980s, several rebel groups in the Darfur region developed, including the Darfur Liberation Front, and the Justice and Equality Movement, claiming that their region was neglected by the Khartoum government. Since the gradual Islamicization campaign of the early 1980s, the southerners saw their way of life and religious freedom threatened. Even the Muslims of the south saw this movement as a means to extending Khartoum's control over the rest of the country, and resisted. Furthermore, the south saw water resources being monopolized by the northern government, as well as economic exploitation of the southern natural resources to enrich the small elite of Khartoum and the Islamic north. The northern state wishes an Islamic, unified national state, where the southern rebel groups, and they comprise many, demand either autonomy, greater national investment, or outright independence.

The renewed civil war marks the biggest onslaught so far by the mainly Northern Sudanese elite on the resource base of the South and the great cattle economies of the Nilotic groups. A small but significant number of Southerners have also been drawn into this elite, while the majority of Southerners suffered the accelerated breakdown of social structures which had already been weakened through years of neglect.[1]

Since 2003, the civil war between the Sudanese Military and the northern Janjaweed militias and the southern Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), among others, has been raging at unprecedented heights. Estimates

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of the casualties have ranged from the governments 9, 000 to the U. S. governments 500, 000. Suliman continues:

The SPLA, unlike the Anyanya movement, announced that it was not fighting for an independent South: its declared aim was a unified secular and democratic Sudan. The SPLA saw itself as an integral part of the struggle of all the marginalized groups in Sudan, including the Nuba and Fur. John Garang has repeatedly called for a national constitutional conference to agree on a secular and democratic constitution for the whole country.

It has always been questionable, however, whether the SPLA would be able to maintain this position in the face of huge practical and psychological obstacles, not least that most of its rank and file were motivated to fight by ethnic and religious differences. During the early years of the movement, Ethiopian government support was crucial to the SPLA, and since Ethiopia had problems with its own secessionists it would have been unwilling to assist in action likely to lead to a re-drawing of international frontiers. (Since the fall of the Dergue in May 1991, of course, the Eritreans have succeeded in just such a revision).[2]

2. What is the most important set of variables in dealing with the alleged genocide of the Bashir state is the horrid economic conditions of the society. Sudan, the largest country in Africa, is one of the poorest. Deforestation, desertification and endless drought hampered the already slim bases for the development of economic life. This is a set of facts accepted by all. Capital and education are nowhere to be found, and scarce government money has gone into fighting the war rather than to economic development. Basically, the war is less over the obvious racial and religious differences between

north and south as the “ glaring inequalities” between the two regions.[3] Most scholars have concluded that it is economic marginalization of the Darfur region (and the Muslim Fur tribe in particular) that has created the civil war, and the racial differences have merely exacerbated it.[4]

Lack of water supplies and drought are the main reasons for the lack of progress in the South apart from the war itself. Desertification has caused less and less land to be placed under cultivation. Significantly, the IMF, whose track record in these things is mixed at best, attempted to create a Sudanese recovery as the “ bread basket” of the Arab world. The IMF sought to create an intensely agricultural economic for export to the Middle East.

This plan ended in failure. There are several reasons for the failure that led to the current crisis. First, desertification meant that, though the IMF was advocating intensive farming, less and less land could be farmed. Second, choice land was given the northern interests. Third, the farming techniques used were inefficient, leading to soil erosion. Last, many “ start-up” farms came into existence, with a shadowy background, practicing nearly slash and burn techniques, leading to quick profits with no follow up. The project was a disaster, and the mis-allocation of water resources merely magnified the failure. Today, Sudan’s soil is in worse shape than at independence.[5] Even worse, this failed project created a huge number of dispossessed nomads and farmers whose anger at the regime knows no bounds. The rebellion is also tied into this.

A relatively new variable in southern Sudan has been the discovery of oil by the Chevron Corporation in 1974. Here, yet another possibility for substantial economic development was destroyed. The oil was found in the south. It

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coincides with the development of militant separatism there, whose cause is clear based, at least in part, in the desire to carve out an oil empire for themselves. Soon, Chevron was under military attack from southern sources, destroying the pipelines and infrastructure Chevron had developed. The attacks became so fierce that Chevron sold the rights to these fields to the Sudanese government in 1992.[6]

As it stands, both French and Chinese concerns now control these fields. This adds an area of complexity to an already difficult situation: a major rival to the US, both the Islamic world and the Chinese, clearly have control over major oil resources in the region, giving the west every reason to exaggerate the claims made against the Bashir government. The French, generally supporting the Arabs, is a part of this movement, making the situation even more uncomfortable. An author on the situation writes:

The central government outsourced much of the conflict to militia groups in the south just as they have with the Janjaweed in Darfur. They financed a lot of this conflict with money from Chinese, Canadian and Swiss oil companies. Recently, the Chinese have purchased most of the oil rights in Sudan from other companies.[7]

It can be surmised that a southern-based control over the oil fields would benefit the west. Earlier, southern attacks on Chevron were done under a different government, one in league with the western oil concerns. Now, if the west were to reinvest in Darfur as an enemy of Bashir, they would receive the support of the south. It can be theorized that the genocide claims are part of a strategy to reclaim these fields for western capital. The present

result is that the Chinese have blocked all sanctions against the Bashir government on the Security Council of the United Nations.

Human Rights Watch writes the following:

In addition to its regular army, the government has deployed militant Islamist militias to prosecute the war, and has armed southern factions in a policy of ethnic manipulation and destabilization... The Sudanese government has used the oil money in conducting scorched-earth campaigns to drive hundreds of thousands of farmers and pastoralists from their homes atop the oil fields. These civilians have not been compensated nor relocated peacefully-far from it. Instead, government forces have looted their cattle and grain, and destroyed their homes and villages, killed and injured their relatives, and even prevented emergency relief agencies from bringing any assistance to them.[8]

Hence, HRW holds to the idea that this is an international economic issue: France, China and Khartoum under Bashir are waging a war financed by oil money to destroy southern separatism. This adds further impetus to the idea that the west has every incentive to vilify Bashir, and hence to be able to exploit a new reserve of oil.

3. The reports on the methods of genocide in the south are unremarkable. It is a similar litany of rape, destruction and pillage without concern, without discrimination. It is a method by which southern identity can be destroyed. Reeves writes for the BBC: “ This destruction has included the burning of thousands of villages, deliberate poisoning of water wells with human and animal corpses, destruction of food- and seed-stocks, and looting of cattle

(representing generations of wealth).[9] This is a common litany, and is predictably denied by the Khartoum government.

PBS describes the methods further:

The stories are pretty consistent, that a linkage of the Janjaweed militia, who are labeled Arab, and the government of Sudan, is always part of the story. They come in the early morning, surround the villages, systematically go from one end of the village to the other, drive out the men and kill them if they resist, rape the women if they find them, burn down the houses, burn the grain stores, uproot the trees, poison the wells by dropping animals down them, and essentially create a scorched earth and killing field that is driving the people that are nearer the border with Chad.[10]

This description can be multiplied in hundreds of similar news stories from around the globe. The language is nearly identical.

The government of Bashir has (diplomatically) responded in several ways. First, the government claims that the rebels are far from unified, and form many factions, some more militant than others, some in fact, extremely violent. In some cases, the rebels have committed atrocities of their own, necessitating harsh measures by the state. If Israel can do it with American money, why are we vilified? Seems to be the response.[11] The Embassy of the Sudan in the U. S. has made the claim that the rebels are the true source of instability. Second, the government has claimed that it has engaged the rebel factions over 30 times since the accession of Bashir for talks, only to be rebuffed every time. Not only that, the fluid nature of these rebel groups

make it very difficult to truly know who speaks for whom. The government has written:

Nevertheless, the joint statement [condemning Bashir] was concerned with two issues, Darfur and the CPA. It is troubling that the statement failed to mention anything concerning the two-dozen rebel groups in Darfur, as if to suggest that their presence amongst civilians were benign. Those that are privy to the realities on the ground however, have contradict the allegation that the Government is the principal source of instability in the region. Impartial observers have identified the rebels as the cause of violence and the major variable fueling the Humanitarian crisis. Their assault and robberies against aid workers, attacks on international peace keeping forces in addition to using civilians as shields are some of the heinous crimes condoned by the " Save Darfur" coalition as they refrain from speaking about them.[12]

Even further, Bashir claims, in the interests of peace, that he has attempted to create a " southern forum" where all factions of the southern rebels can come together and voice their grievances with the state. None have taken his invitation. If Human Rights Watch can be taken at their word, why not Khartoum? If true knowledge is to be had (as opposed to ideological constructs), then both sides need to be taken seriously.

4. The pinpointing of blame is difficult. The reality is the majority of journalists who cover these areas do not speak native languages and do not know native customs. They have the habit of rejecting everything Bashir says, and accepting everything the refugees say. This is suspicious, but it is present from PBS to the BBC. Few are experts on east African history. There

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are several issues, however, that have no answers so far in the scholarly literature:

a. To what extent does Bashir control the army? Western media reports claim that this control absolute, but not proof is ever given.

b. To what extent does wither Bashir or the army itself control the nomadic and Islamic Janjaweed movement, a movement that has been blamed for many crimes?

c. Does the army have the will to “ stop” this militia from continuing action? Does it have the means? Does it have an incentive? Does it make sense for Khartoum to open up another front inthe war, all to satisfy western governments that are irreconcilable towards Bashir?

These are hard questions that are, as of today, not being asked in the journalistic or scholarly literature. These should be the directions for further research into this fields. And this present writer predicts, if the methods are honest, some uncomfortable truths will be confirmed about this now infamous crisis. The Sudanese government writes to the American people:

The incumbent, which ever of the candidates the American people choose [prior to the US 2008 election], should heed the calls for peace coming from the people of Darfur. The government of Sudan has made over 30 attempts to negotiate with the rebels but it has been unsuccessful. The reasons are well known by any unbiased observer. Solving the problem begins with sincere intentions to change the situation, as such, Sudan calls on the peace loving international community to push the rebels to end this catastrophe once and for all by getting them to the table of negotiations to help map out

a peaceful future for their country. The incoming president's push for "change" will only have an impact on the people of Darfur when that change he/she advocates for has taken stock of all their realities.[13]

5. In terms of stopping the crimes that have been committed in Darfur, it seems that the only route is to increase the number of African peacekeepers in the south, free from any taint of western intervention. The oil question should be at the end of the list, for the government in Khartoum has spent enough time claiming that the accusations of genocide are strategic. Ultimately, the south should be granted independence, with the proceeds from the oil wealth split between the two countries. Bashir has agreed to an autonomy deal that will, after 6 years, end with a referendum on independence. Hence, Bashir, at least on paper, is on board for an intelligent solution.

Genocide is not so much being committed by the Bashir government, but is a clear consequence of the war. Hence, genocide is a reality in Darfur. Millions of refugees (and this number is generally not contested), grinding poverty and large numbers of casualties will ensure either the destruction of the southern way of life or at least, its severe weakening in the future. Whether Bashir is a genocidal leader or an improperly vilified general in a harsh military situation has yet to be determined. And military intervention need be kept on the back burner until Gen. Bashir's statements have been completely proven false (which has yet to occur). At the same time, it seems that the brunt of the peacekeeping must come from other African states, such as Ethiopia and Chad, rather than from the west, which will invariably be seen as neo-colonial or biased in some way. This crisis must be dealt with

by Africans, while the western world can assist by the best methods of providing food aid and farm implements as possible.