

As the war in Darfur grinds on past its third anniversary, over 2 million refugees and internally displaced remain in camps away from their lands. Hundreds of villages have been destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people have been murdered. The April 2004 Humanitarian Cease-Fire Agreement signed by the rebel movements and the Government of Sudan is wildly ignored by all sides. Militias and disaffected rebel bands roam the area attacking humanitarian aid workers and commercial traffic indiscriminately. The African Union Mission is powerless to stop the violence.

United States policy towards Sudan is conflicted, polarized between two desires: to continue Sudanese cooperation with U.S. counter-terrorism efforts and to end what the President has called genocide. The foreign policy apparatus as we know it is turned on its head over Sudan. USAID officials, many of whom began their careers moving food and support into Southern Sudan during the long civil war, lobby for regime change by any means necessary. Defense Department officials, their forces overextended in two wars already, plausibly query whether it is wise to militarily engage a third Muslim nation. CIA operators laud Sudanese cooperation on counter-terrorism while their analysts detail arson, rape and murder committed by the government-supported Janjaweit. At Foggy Bottom it seems the strategy is to continue to substitute other nations' peacekeepers for sound U.S. policy. The Sudanese Government, so adept at pitting tribe against tribe, has managed to pit the U.S. government against itself.

Meanwhile, in Abuja, Rebel leaders and Sudanese government officials have faced-off across the negotiating table for seven rounds of talks and may be approaching some sort of agreement under enormous pressure from the international community. But, sadly, an Abuja peace accord won't stop the violence in Darfur. There are several reasons why: (1) Rebel field commanders have lost faith in the leadership of the movements. Nineteen of SLA Chairman Abdul Wahid el-Nur's commanders have publicly broken with him. Rival SLA Chairman Minni Minawi's force has splintered, with breaks by Sulieman Jamooz, Sharif Harir, Sulieman Marajan, Khamis Abdullah and seventeen other commanders. Other Minawi commanders have defected to join Abdul Wahid. At least one has defected to the Government; (2) Khartoum's negotiators do not represent the Arab tribal militias or the Janjaweit leaders, nor does the Government have a sufficient level of control over the militias to guarantee their compliance with any accord; (3) the fighting has already spread into Chad and the Central African Republic and now clearly constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Unchecked, it will degrade into a tribal war.

So what are we to do? The current strategy is to expand the African Union peacekeeping force and, with Sudanese acquiescence, enhance the force with a UN logistical backbone and UN management. This leaves in place a weak international force that has failed to carry out its mandate and will remain powerless to stop the violence. In this scenario, Internally Displaced Persons and refugees will be unable to return home, rebels and militias will continue to kill with impunity, and our work in Abuja will have been futile. United Nations planners have said privately that their worst-case scenario is one where a force arrives to keep a peace that neither party to the conflict supports or wants enforced. Unfortunately, this is also the most likely scenario.

The African Union mission in Darfur has been a stop-gap. It was put in place in haste and because at the time it was the best answer. Seen in this light, the AU mission has done well. But it has not met its mandate. Managing coalition task force operations of the type required in Darfur are beyond the current level of experience of the AU. In many cases the troops want to perform but their headquarters simply doesn't have the experience to conduct a successful peace support operation in an area larger than Iraq. And neither the force as a whole nor many of the troops and units that make up the mission are capable of conducting the militarily complex and politically thorny missions that will face a post-Abuja international security force. The question of whether the African Union has the political will to fully enforce the mandate is open as well.

Regardless of whether Abuja produces an enhanced cease-fire agreement or a complete peace accord---or even if the talks completely collapse---in order to stop the violence, rebel forces and militias will have to be mapped, counted, cantoned and disarmed. Given the lack of cohesion among the rebels and the lack of Government control over the Janjaweit militias, it seems likely that the groups will resist these steps, particularly disarmament. In this event, the international peace and security force will be required forcibly disarm them - to militarily defeat them. This is not a Chapter VI mission. The force will require the combat power and prowess - and the political will - to enforce a peace accord if it is to meet its mandate: to provide a safe and secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian aid and the return of Internally Displaced Persons and refugees. Seven UN Security Council Resolutions have been issued under Chapter VII. This must be the starting point for the follow-on force.

Stopping the violence in Darfur will require a military force with first-world leadership, first-world assets, and first-world experience. US and coalition experience in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq is relevant here. Putting together such a coalition and getting it into place to do its work will require that the United States government and our military take a lead role, at least initially. Our NATO and other first-world military partners will not be keen to step forward without our participation, and many of the traditional UN troop contributing countries lack the military capability to successfully initiate and sustain the mission.

We alone have called the atrocities in Darfur genocide. We must lead the coalition that will stop it. We must demonstrate to the world our resolve and determination to stop this genocide and to never again let genocide occur. We already lead the world in the provision of humanitarian aid to Darfur. We must not cede our leadership at the crucial moment.

During the Rwandan genocide the United States and others in the international community failed the Tutsis and moderate Hutus who were killed by the hundreds of thousands at the hands of the Interahamwe. In 1998 President Clinton went to Rwanda to apologize and said, 'We must never again be shy in the face of evidence.' In Darfur the evidence is clear. The President of the United States has said so; two Secretaries of State have said so.

Some will say that the steps outlined here are impossible. They are not. Certainly the Government of Sudan will resist. This will be a challenge to the nation's sovereignty, perhaps even to the survival of the government. Security Council members will resist. But if we fail to properly construct and mandate a Peace Enforcement Force, we will fail to stop the genocide and more people will needlessly die. Yes, it will be hard. But being hard should not deter us from doing what is right. This is genocide. If we are serious about stopping it, this is what it will take. Otherwise, which American President will be the one to apologize to the dead of Darfur?