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ECHOES OF GENOCIDE IN DARFUR AND EASTERN CHAD

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Is the genocide in Darfur over? Is what is happening now in Darfur and eastern Chad a matter of anarchy, chaos, and “inter-tribal” warfare?

Reports in major news outlets suggest that genocidal attacks by Khartoum-sponsored militia are a thing of the past and that Darfur’s agony is borne of anarchy.¹ Clearly, the violence in Darfur has escalated—but suggesting that the crisis there is now a free-for-all, with the moral equivalency that phrase implies, ignores the political logic driving a catastrophe that appears, on the surface, to be defined by armed chaos. The reality is far different—and for the recently-authorized AU-UN peacekeeping force and upcoming peace negotiations to be successful, that reality must be understood.

A recent opinion piece in the Washington Post stated as “fact” that genocide has “concluded” in Darfur.² However, the notion that there has been a definable transition “from genocide to anarchy,” as Alex de Waal and Julie Flint titled their piece, misses the broader context of the process that is underway in Darfur. The Darfur these authors melodramatically describe—a “murky world of tribes-in-arms and warlords who serve the highest bidder” —is precisely what the architects of genocide in Khartoum had in mind when, beginning in mid-2003, Sudan’s government set forth to destroy and displace the civilian support base for Darfur’s rebel groups. The promotion of anarchy and inter-communal (or, popularly, “inter-tribal”) fighting is part and parcel of Khartoum’s genocidal counter-insurgency campaign. The conditions in Darfur and eastern Chad today are not evidence of an end to genocide and the onset of an entirely new and different war—they are the echoes of genocide.

The regime’s behavior is unswerving. Khartoum employed a similar divide-and-destroy strategy during its war with the Sudan People’s Liberation Army, or SPLA, during the 1990s. Having sown the seeds of divisions between various southern Sudanese ethnic groups, government officials in Khartoum

sat back and watched as inter-communal violence tore southern communities to pieces. Some of the worst violence occurred when Dinka and Nuer commanders in the SPLA fought in Upper Nile, leading to the deaths of tens of thousands of people. Only when the SPLA reunified and communities began to work toward reconciliation did a peace deal for southern Sudan become possible.

WHO IS PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE?

In Darfur, the same government officials lit the match to ignite the genocide and fuel the chaos we are witnessing today. As the government’s divide and destroy policy envisioned, there is indeed increased fighting between and among communities, including among Arab groups which previously had worked together to destroy non-Arab villages. But this masks the more intentional, better-resourced, and well-camouflaged strategy of the Sudanese regime, within which many of those leading the fighting on the ground today in Darfur are but pawns.

With varying degrees of intensity, the regime and its assortment of militia allies and turncoat rebels continue to employ multiple tactics to achieve its objectives to destroy the Darfurian opposition, to permanently alter the demographics of Darfur, and to deny Darfurians a meaningful role in national politics, including:

- killings resulting from direct attacks against non-Arab civilians by Sudanese armed forces and allied militias;
- rape and sexual violence;³
- forced displacement of civilian populations into camps;
- systematic destruction of livelihoods;⁴

- aerial bombardments;⁵
- resettlement of Arab civilians (including citizens of Chad and Niger) onto land belonging to the displaced; and
- anarchic conditions that prevent displaced persons from returning home and relief workers from saving lives.

Violence is unrelenting in Darfur, but “tribes-in-arms” do not have a monopoly on violence against civilians. More than 500,000 people have been displaced in the last 15 months, most often from attacks by government army and air force, the former rebels under Minni Minawi’s command that have joined the government, or other government-backed militias. In June 2007, a large-scale government offensive in the Jebel Marra region displaced 30,000 civilians. In August, another 25,000 civilians fled from government-sponsored attacks and inter-communal violence. And recent heavy fighting between Darfur rebel groups and government forces spilled into Western Kordofan state.

The phenomenon of Arab militias turning on each other fits neatly into the government’s strategic agenda as well. Having cut deals and granted impunity to various Arab militias to kill, rape, and loot non-Arab civilians, the government now derives strategic benefits from watching its former allies attack each other over the spoils. First, these agreements guarantee that no stakeholder in Darfur can assume military, strategic, or economic control of Darfur, and thus ensures itself an upper hand in peace negotiations. Second, they intensify the disruption of relief programs in Darfur.

THE HUMAN TOLL

As a direct result of policy decisions made at the highest levels in Khartoum, humanitarian conditions continue to deteriorate. Chronic insecurity

generates a steady flow of displaced civilians into large camps, putting further strain on UN agencies and non-governmental organizations already caught in the line of fire. In the last 12 months attacks against humanitarian workers have increased by 150 percent. What better way to restrict access than by fomenting violence and lawlessness? The regime learned much from its 20-year war with southern Sudanese rebels about how best to undermine humanitarian operations through helping to create conditions of insecurity that then prevent relief agencies from regular access. Unsurprisingly, despite some of the press accounts, malnutrition rates are increasing substantially for the first time since the end of 2004.⁶ Many of the largest camps in all three provinces of Darfur, are reporting a significant spike in the number of malnourished children and adults. For the first time in the last three years, malnutrition rates are climbing above emergency levels.⁷ Contrary to what some authors have recently suggested, Darfur is not “saving itself.”⁸

The recent uptick in violence has come at the worst possible time. Darfur is in the middle of the rainy season and the hunger gap; humanitarian access is already restricted and surplus food supplies are depleted. Weakened by hunger, the victims of Khartoum’s policies are even more susceptible to cholera, malaria, typhoid, and other communicable diseases that increase during the rainy season. Strangely, some “analysts” have focused on the uncertainty surrounding how many people may have actually died so far in Darfur.⁹ Without any remotely comprehensive mortality study, such an argument is counter-productive and not based on any empirical evidence. The real issue is not some abstract number-crunching debate, but significant pressure on the Khartoum regime to stop blocking aid agencies from conducting the kind of comprehensive mortality and morbidity studies that help inform their work and help create more realistic estimates of the number of lives lost in this tragedy.

With its presence in the field, the humanitarian community is best placed to determine the facts on the ground, and the Darfur they describe in confidence is a place where civilians continue to die in large numbers. Yet aid groups are walking a tightrope: speaking out publicly about the worsening situation would almost certainly elicit a strong reaction from Khartoum and jeopardize the only lifeline for 4 million people in need of assistance. In late August, the government of Sudan expelled the country director of the non-governmental organization CARE, which provides assistance to nearly 525,000 Darfurians (and implements humanitarian and development projects to assist millions more Sudanese citizens). The message is clear: Khartoum is in firm control of the humanitarian community in Sudan, and can expel anyone, at any time, for any reason. In this case, the regime had obtained an internal CARE email outlining security conditions on the ground and various scenarios for maintaining the security of CARE staff.

The government also expelled Canadian and European Union diplomats. Why is the government of Sudan stepping up its intimidation of humanitarians and diplomats now, so soon after it agreed to the deployment of the hybrid AU-UN peacekeeping force? The answer is very simple: The pragmatic

and survivalist policy-makers in the ruling National Congress Party constantly calculate how much they can get away with. And with the hybrid force's deployment foremost in the minds of the international community, Khartoum believes that the international community will respond meekly to these expulsions for fear that strong condemnation could jeopardize the hybrid agreement. (The purpose of course is to strengthen the regime's hand in dictating the terms of the hybrid force's deployment and in influencing the next steps in the peace process.) Evidently the government of Sudan is correct; the EU apologized, and their representative was allowed to stay on in Khartoum. (Canada, on the other hand, responded appropriately—condemning the Sudanese government and expelling a Sudanese diplomat from Ottawa.)

While a violent free-for-all between numerous armed groups—rebel factions, Arab militias, and organized criminals—has consumed parts of Darfur, the ruling National Congress Party in Sudan has managed, for the most part, to contain the chaos in Darfur and export it to Chad with minimal disruption to its main business: Hoarding Sudan's growing oil wealth while it undermines the landmark 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the SPLM.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN AND WHAT SHOULD WE DO

The policy implications of this analysis are urgent.

Peacemaking: The Sudanese government has by no means diminished its efforts to win the Darfur war militarily and destroy all forms of opposition in the region. Regime negotiators will press for further implementation modalities for the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement, because it has become a tool in the regime's counter-insurgency strategy of buying off individual rebel movements and co-opting them into doing the regime's dirty work in Darfur. All efforts must be made by negotiators to work tirelessly to create unity among Darfur's armed and unarmed groups around a series of sound and acceptable proposals at the peace talks, and to connect such efforts with a renewed push to implement the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the SPLM.

Protection: The UN Security Council and the African Union must be steadfast in their demands that the protection of civilian populations be the central organizing principle for the deployment of the AU-UN hybrid force in Darfur and the planned EU-UN force for eastern Chad. This protection strategy must take into account the Sudan government's continuing fueling of the Darfur fire, as it also deals with the symptoms of increased banditry and inter-communal militia attacks on both sides of the border.

Punishment: There must be a clear message from the UN Security Council and the European Union that there will be direct, multilateral consequences for anyone who undermines the deployment of the hybrid force or the peace process. The Council should be prepared to impose targeted sanctions on the responsible government or rebel officials immediately upon reports of significant obstruction.

CONCLUSION

As the echoes of genocide reverberate in Darfur and eastern Chad, it is critical that the appropriate context and motivation are adequately understood. Without it, as these journalists and experts would have you believe, it is all Somali-like chaos. Darfur and eastern Chad are not yet that. There are still significant chains of command and a major state actor with a vested interest in generating that chaos. It is not too late to reverse this process. But it will require correct analysis and increased engagement on the part of key Security Council and AU countries to ensure that the regime's effort to create total anarchy in Darfur and eastern Chad doesn't succeed.

The world has done little over the last four years but condemn Khartoum's actions while granting its wishes. It should be no surprise to any observer that the violence has increased, that rebel factions have splintered, that militias have turned against one another, or that Darfur's civilians are paying the price.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 See Jeffrey Gettleman, "Chaos in Darfur Rises as Arabs Fight With Arabs," *New York Times*, September 3, 2007, front page.
- 2 Alex de Waal and Julie Flint, "In Darfur, From Genocide to Anarchy," *Washington Post*, August 28, 2007.
- 3 As detailed in a soon-to-be-released UN Special Rapporteur report. See "Darfur's people need more protection - Special Rapporteur," IRIN, August 7, 2007.
- 4 As documented comprehensively in a 2006 report by Physicians for Human Rights. See Physicians for Human Rights, "Darfur - Assault on Survival: A Call for Security, Justice and Restitution," January 2006.
- 5 In May, the United Nations Secretary General condemned aerial attacks in North Darfur, and there are unconfirmed reports of bombing campaigns in South Darfur during late August. See "Secretary-General Urges Sudan to End Attacks Following Darfur Bombardments," UN News Report, May 9, 2007; and Opheera McDoom, "Darfur rebels say bombing drives thousands from homes," *Reuters*, August 30, 2007.
- 6 See Edmund Sanders, "Death rate declines in Darfur," *LA Times*, August 26, 2007.
- 7 "Malnutrition, lawlessness are increasing in Darfur, UN official says," *Associated Press*, August 31, 2007.
- 8 See Julie Flint, "Darfur, Saving Itself," *Washington Post*, June 3, 2007, at B02; and Jonathan Steele, "Unseen by western hysteria, Darfur edges closer to peace," *The Guardian*, August 10, 2007.
- 9 See Sam Dealey, "An Atrocity That Needs No Exaggeration," *New York Times*, August 12, 2007



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ENOUGH is a project founded by the International Crisis Group and the Center for American Progress to end genocide and crimes against humanity. With an initial focus on the crises in Darfur, eastern Congo, and northern Uganda, ENOUGH's strategy papers and briefings provide sharp field analysis and targeted policy recommendations based on a "3P" crisis response strategy: promoting durable peace, providing civilian protection, and punishing perpetrators of atrocities. ENOUGH works with concerned citizens, advocates, and policy makers to prevent, mitigate, and resolve these crises. To learn more about ENOUGH and what you can do to help, go to www.enoughproject.org.



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