

Bad to Worse in Darfur

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If you thought the situation in Darfur couldn't get any more dire, think again. True, things are already terrible: Some 400,000 Darfuris have perished; more than two million have been driven from their homes to squalid and dangerous camps; and the United Nations estimates that altogether roughly four million people in the region need humanitarian assistance.

But two developments from last Friday suggest that the Darfur genocide will only accelerate in the near future. First, the African Union decided not to turn over the task of securing the region to the United Nations for at least another six months. The African Union, out of its depth in Darfur, has proven unable to stop the genocide; and there is little reason to believe it can do any better in the months to come. Second, Jan Egeland, head of U.N. humanitarian operations, explained to his colleagues that humanitarian efforts in Darfur are facing a major shortfall in funding. In an internal e-mail sent Friday to U.N. personnel, Egeland worried that "the massive gains we made on the humanitarian front over the past year will be lost, and that the tide is starting to turn against us." If the African Union's decision and Egeland's warning are any indication, the twenty-first century's first genocide will not slacken any time soon. On the contrary, it will grow worse.

FOR almost two years, the African Union has provided the only security in Darfur, in the form of a mission tasked with monitoring a ceasefire negotiated in N'Djamena, Chad, in April 2004. This ceasefire never held, and is now utterly without meaning. And while the A.U. mission has slowly increased to its present strength of 7,000 personnel, it has always lacked the resources needed to stop a genocide: numbers of troops, equipment, transport, intelligence, and administrative capacity. Most significantly, it has no meaningful mandate to protect civilians or humanitarian operations.

The need to replace the A.U. force with a robust international peacemaking mission has long been clear. In January Kofi Annan argued in a *Washington Post* op-ed that such a mission would need "to be larger, more mobile and much better equipped than the current African Union mission." In other words, it would need to be led by countries with the required military assets: NATO countries.

But the United Nations and the West were far from finished with their dithering. Despite the fact that the United States held the presidency of the U.N. Security Council during February, the month passed without any meaningful action from the Council. The nominal reason for the delay was that the African Union had not formally agreed to hand

over the mission to the United Nations, under whose auspices NATO personnel might have deployed a short-term bridging force to protect civilians and humanitarians--until the notoriously slow-moving U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations was ready to send a mission of its own.

The African Union had committed "in principle" to a handover to the United Nations in January. But the genocidaires in Khartoum used the intervening weeks to remarkable diplomatic effect, pledging to withdraw from the African Union if there were a handover to the United Nations, implicitly threatening to unleash Al Qaeda on Western forces, and lobbying A.U. nations. Egypt weighed in on Khartoum's behalf, creating the prospect that the African Union might split along "Arab" and "African" lines.

Last Friday's decision by the African Union to keep the Darfur mission for another six months revealed just how effective these threats and lobbying efforts had been. Because the African Union reaffirmed its support in principle for an eventual U.N. mission, some at the United Nations sought to put a positive spin on the outcome. But the approving noises from Khartoum suggest how disastrous the decision is.

In fact, Khartoum's triumph is as great as it could reasonably have hoped for. Continuing A.U. control of the mission ensures that there will be no change of mandate: The troops will continue to be officially tasked only with monitoring a non-existent ceasefire. In addition, there will be no international force to staunch the flow of genocidal destruction into Chad, conducted by both Khartoum and its murderous Arab militia allies. West Darfur will remain largely beyond humanitarian reach. Camps for displaced persons and refugees will continue to be vulnerable to the Janjaweed: Men will be killed because of their ethnicity; women and girls will be raped; and crops and croplands will be destroyed. No wonder Khartoum's foreign minister called the A.U. decision a "success."

THEN there is the news from the United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The United Nations provides food and medical care for refugees in Darfur by financially supporting both its own operations and those of NGOs. Unfortunately, funding for those operations now appears to be in peril. Last Friday's e-mail from Egeland laid out the problem in stark terms: Of the \$650 million that the United Nations believes it requires for 2006, only \$130 million has been committed--less than 20 percent of what is needed. It is not at all clear where the more than \$500 million in additional funds will come from. "These shortfalls are extremely troubling given the overwhelming needs and deteriorating conditions in many areas," wrote Egeland, adding that the financial commitments that have been made "are most welcome but are not nearly enough to maintain the largest humanitarian operation in the world." He went on to note that

"A number of major agencies are warning of pipeline breaks, cuts in essential services, including health and water, and the closure of entire field offices. Yet again, we are rapidly running out of time to preposition relief supplies before the onset of the rainy season."

He also highlighted "the very serious access problems in many parts of Darfur, as well as security threats that are only increasing further at the moment." As if to sharpen Egeland's point, the U.N. High Commission for Refugees announced last week a 44 percent cut in its operations for Darfur because insecurity had so curtailed its activities. "Interventions and assistance become extremely difficult when direct access to beneficiaries is limited," the agency explained.

These numbers are ominous because the African tribal populations of Darfur--largely sedentary agriculturalists--have no remaining resources of their own. Three years of genocidal counterinsurgency warfare have left them without food reserves, without cattle (their traditional means of preserving wealth), without access to land or water. The agricultural economy of the region has collapsed, and this year yet another planting season, which traditionally begins in May, will be missed. Concentrated in camps, many with deteriorating sanitary conditions, Darfuris are vulnerable to disease. During the rainy season, which runs from June to September, cholera, dysentery, and other illnesses could easily claim tens of thousands of lives.

In surveying this chaotic tableau of human suffering, we must not forget why it has taken place. This is not a "natural disaster," as one U.N. information site has suggested. Nor is it an accidental by-product of armed conflict--a massive case of collateral damage. This human destruction is intended. It grows out of racial and ethnic hatred, deliberately inflamed by the National Islamic Front regime in Khartoum. It is genocide. And after last week, we have every reason to believe that it is far from over.

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