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## **Calling Their Bluff**

*While Tony Blair and the Bush administration have yet again resumed their tough talk on Darfur, action to intervene looks unlikely.*

By Eric Reeves

Responding to the failure of the May 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement (Abuja, Nigeria) and to the rapid collapse of security for civilians and humanitarian operations throughout Darfur, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1706 on August 31, 2006, authorizing deployment of a robust peace support operation to Darfur, including 22,500 troops and police. The force was to have an explicit protection mandate (per Chapter VII of the UN Charter), as well as responsibility for staunching the increasing flow of genocidal violence from Darfur into eastern Chad. The National Islamic Front/National Congress Party regime in Khartoum adamantly rejected deployment of this force, even as it began a major offensive in North Darfur that has entailed massive civilian destruction, including helicopter gunship and bombing attacks on defenseless villages. The offensive continues to this day, and has expanded into West Darfur.

Yet again, as during the most violent phase of genocidal destruction in 2003-2004, Khartoum has mobilized—and heavily re-armed—its Janjaweed militia forces. Widespread civilian destruction of an almost unimaginably brutal sort is reported daily from all three Darfur states, as well as eastern Chad. A number of the attacks are on camps for displaced persons or refugees.

The UN estimates the population of conflict-affected persons in the greater humanitarian theater at a shocking 4.5 million human beings. Insecurity and a campaign of harassment and obstruction have forced a number of humanitarian organizations to withdraw entirely from Darfur; those that remain have access to dramatically fewer locations where desperately needy civilians are concentrated. Perhaps half a million people have already died from violence, disease, and malnutrition since the outbreak of large-scale insurgency warfare in February 2003; but mortality is poised to surpass this number in the coming year.

Two and a half months after passage of Resolution 1706, with no progress toward implementation, a “High Level Consultation,” chaired by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and African Union Commission Chairman Alpha Oumar Konare, recently convened in Addis Ababa, African Union headquarters (November 16). The “Consultation” included representatives of the Permanent Members of the Security Council and various African countries, as well as senior representatives of the Khartoum regime. The task of the

“Consultation” was to craft what Khartoum judged to be an acceptable alternative to 1706, since no country was willing to see the Resolution implemented over Khartoum’s objections.

The “Consultation” failed utterly, and resulted in no formal agreement. It did not create a “hybrid” UN/AU military force, despite disingenuous claims to the contrary by Kofi Annan; it did not specify a mandate or rules of engagement for a civilian and humanitarian protection force; it left undecided the critical questions of troop size and command structure; and it established no discernible time-frame for deployment of whatever force may finally and formally be determined.

Khartoum has understandably celebrated the outcome of the November 16 “Consultation” as a “diplomatic victory” and the occasion for “happiness.” As the regime’s leaders have been quick to point out, the new document effectively rescinds Resolution 1706, which had brought such vehement objection from Khartoum. Moreover, no firm commitments were extracted from the regime beyond a modest expansion of the currently overwhelmed African Union monitoring force, by perhaps fewer than 4,000 personnel. The UN will provide only “technical” and logistical aid, according to Khartoum’s reading of the Addis document.

It is thus exceedingly odd that Kofi Annan would describe the results as “a turning point” in the UN response to the Darfur crisis, particularly since President Omar al-Bashir had insisted earlier in the week that even the distinctive UN blue berets could not be worn by any UN personnel in Darfur—only the green berets of the AU. Jean-Marie Guehenno, head of UN peacekeeping, declared that this “will not be acceptable for the United Nations.” But the UN and international community are now desperate for some sort of face-saving agreement, and given the abject failure to implement Resolution 1706, it is difficult to speculate about what will or will not be accepted.

Tony Blair has yet again resumed his tough talk on Darfur, of a sort wearily familiar from many months of similar blustering. Speaking of “tougher measures” Khartoum will face if it fails to act on the Addis agreement, Blair conveniently ignores the fact that there is no agreement (e.g. two key issues—force command and size—were left undetermined in the “Conclusions” document). Nor has Blair offered any persuasive account of what these “tougher measures” are and why they might move a triumphant and obdurate Khartoum regime.

The US has been just as expedient. More than two years after declaring realities in Darfur to be “genocide,” the Bush administration has still done nothing to halt the ethnically-targeted destruction that is again rapidly accelerating. Andrew Natsios, President Bush’s special envoy for Sudan,

this week declared that if no agreement is reached on a UN force in Darfur by January 1 (six deadly weeks from now), then the US is prepared to move to “Plan B.” All too predictably, there is no “Plan B”—certainly nothing that Natsios could articulate when pressed.

Yet again the US and the international community are bluffing—bluffing with a regime that has dealt consistently and defiantly with bluffs since it came to power by military coup in June of 1989, deposing an elected government, and deliberating aborting the most promising chance for a north/south peace agreement since independence in 1956. Resolution 1706 was a bluff, and successfully called by Khartoum’s génocidaires; the Addis Ababa “Conclusions” document is yet another bluff, and there is no reason to think that Khartoum will not call this one as well.

There will be no timely or truly significant augmenting of the AU force on the ground; command (and a very poor command structure) will remain entirely with the AU; there will be no “blue berets”; and there will be no operating independence, as Khartoum will continue to impose curfews, flight restrictions, and debilitating fuel shortages on whatever augmenting force is eventually deployed.

Meanwhile, civilians are dying in ever greater numbers, insecurity is paralyzing virtually all of Darfur, and more humanitarian organizations are on the verge of withdrawal. Before our very eyes, the genocide will continue to unfold, with no end in sight.

“Plan B” amounts to waiting for Khartoum’s final solution to its Darfur problem to be completed.

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