

## China and Darfur

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A strong United Nations force is needed to halt the genocide in Sudan's Darfur region. If it is not sent soon, it may be too late for many thousands of potential victims. The immediate cause of the delay is the refusal by Sudan's president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, to agree to a U.N. force, which he preposterously claims would attempt to recolonize his African nation. He is able to get away with this largely because China, a permanent member of the Security Council, continues to protect him with the threat of using its veto.

One reason Beijing stands behind Mr. Bashir is oil. China is trying to diversify its oil sources beyond the crisis-prone Middle East, and Africa is one obvious alternative. Already, some 7 percent of China's imported oil comes from Sudan.

Another factor is Beijing's extreme sensitivity to any U.N. encroachments on national sovereignty. China fears that by assenting to U.N. intervention in Darfur over the protests of the Sudanese government, it might open the door to unwanted meddling in its own affairs—with regard to Tibet, for example. No such precedent would be established, however, if China used its influence with Mr. Bashir to win his agreement to a U.N. force.

China is generally pretty thick-skinned about human-rights criticisms. Its practices at home leave much to be desired, and it does business with more than its share of unsavory regimes abroad. But genocide is different, and Beijing knows it. China is already embarrassed by its support for Mr. Bashir. When Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited Africa recently, he pointedly did not go to Sudan.

Surely Beijing does not want the world to see it as the main obstacle to sending a U.N. force to end the killing in Darfur. But right now, that is exactly the case. Other countries, like Russia, are also hanging back. But if China dropped its objections, they would probably follow its lead.

Washington, for its part, needs to build up its own pressure on Mr. Bashir. With the recent departure from government of Robert Zoellick, the administration's highest-ranking diplomat working on Darfur, there is a real danger that crucial momentum will be lost. President Bush needs to appoint an envoy to Sudan right away, before the genocide's toll—already more than 200,000 deaths—grows still larger.

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