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EDITORIAL

Playing Sudan's Game

After four years of genocidal massacres that have killed more than 200,000 people, the Darfur region of Sudan desperately needs a peace agreement and a robust multinational force to carry it out. Regrettably, this week's internationally sponsored peace conference in Libya is doing little to meet those urgent needs.

The problem is not just Sudan's continuing duplicity — it announced a cease-fire and then promptly violated it. Sudan does not really want a peace agreement. It merely wants more time to let the janjaweed militias it backs in Darfur finish killing or drive off what remains of the region's non-Arab population.

Many of the rebel groups that claim to be Darfur's defenders also bear serious responsibility. Some of the best-known rebel leaders failed to show up. And so, the killing is likely to proceed, with Sudan taking maximum advantage of the rebel's fecklessness, the diplomatic timidity of those closest to it and the failure of an Iraq-distracted Bush administration to pay consistent, high-level attention to the Darfur issue.

The Arab League, to which Sudan belongs, and China, a major customer for Sudan's oil, have at least started talking about Darfur. But they have yet to apply real pressure on Khartoum.

The Arab League is reportedly readying proposals for Darfur's future economic development that all but overlook the far more pressing problem of creating the peace that is essential for development. China's tepid complaints seem aimed more at fending off Darfur-related protests at next year's Beijing Olympics than stopping the slaughter. President Bush's words on Darfur have been admirably strong, but he has not followed up with the high-level diplomacy and focus needed to rally effective international pressure on Sudan.

These failures, large and small, go a long way toward explaining why the killing continues monthly despite worldwide protests, White House speeches, American sanctions, African peacekeepers and Security Council resolutions. They make it easier for Sudan to take credit for announcing cease-fires that it has no intention of honoring, agreeing to peacekeepers that it has no intention of cooperating with and attending peace conferences that have no realistic possibility of bringing peace.

Meanwhile, the genocide goes on.

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