

Darfur: The Final Decision

Paralysis at the UN as Khartoum prepares to resume genocidal onslaught

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The final moment of diplomatic truth for Darfur has at last arrived. All evidence suggests that the international community is prepared to acquiesce before the military onslaught Khartoum's National Islamic Front is preparing for North Darfur, an offensive that will target both rebel military forces and non-Arab civilians who do not support the deeply flawed "Darfur Peace Agreement" (May 5, 2006, Abuja, Nigeria). Fighting in North Darfur over the past two months has increasingly involved collaboration between the forces of Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) faction leader Minni Minawi (a member of the Zaghawa tribe and the only Darfuri signatory to the Abuja agreement) and Khartoum's regular military. This collaboration has produced attacks that have focused primarily on Fur villages. As Refugees International President Kenneth Bacon reports in a July 21, 2006 letter to President Bush (following an eleven-day assessment mission to Darfur):

"Minawi's forces are attacking Fur villages in North Darfur. According to the United Nations, some of these attacks show the same signs of genocidal intent demonstrated by the government-back Janjaweed militia---the targeted killing of young men."

The impending Khartoum-orchestrated offensive has been reported authoritatively by many sources on the ground, as well as by Hedi Annabi (UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping) in a confidential report to the UN Security Council (August 17, 2006):

"We have received reports that a build-up of Sudan Armed Forces in Darfur has already begun and that a number of extra battalions have been deployed in El Fasher and Nyala." (Paragraph 9)

The US government, with extensive intelligence capabilities, has also belatedly spoken out about the ominous military developments in Darfur:

"The United States [] said on Friday [August 25, 2006] [the Government of] Sudan was preparing a new offensive in its devastated western [Darfur] province and that rebels there were rearming." (Reuters [dateline: Washington], August 25, 2006)

Given the current climate of insecurity, Khartoum's offensive could result in catastrophic human mortality. The UN's Annabi also reports:

"These negative [security] trends have been accompanied by an unprecedented level of deadly attacks against humanitarian workers. As a result, humanitarian organizations now have full access to only slightly more than fifty percent of the 3.6 million civilians affected by the conflict [there are an additional 350,000 conflict-affected persons in eastern Chad---ER]. If conditions deteriorate further, many humanitarian organizations may be forced to completely withdraw from North Darfur, where more than 1.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance." (Paragraph 4)

How has the UN Security Council responded to the rapidly accelerating security crisis in Darfur, evident for the past year but particularly since the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement in May? What is happening right now that might work to avert the catastrophe that Annabi grimly outlines? So far, there has been little more than strenuous clucking from the Security Council. To be sure, a resolution has been introduced by the UK and US, which gives shape to the comprehensive peace support operation proposed in July by Kofi Annan, based in turn on a thorough assessment by the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations (up to 24,000 troops and security personnel).

But there is simply no evidence that Khartoum will consent to the deployment of a UN force, even if it were authorized by the Security Council. On the contrary, the NIF regime gives every sign of hardening in its opposition to any UN force, with language that is deliberately, provocatively threatening. Opposition is expressed at every turn by some of the most senior members of the regime, including (most stridently) President and Field Marshal Omar el-Bashir. These most recent comments are frequently making headline news in Khartoum's regime-controlled news media.

And yet, perversely, there is an altogether encouraging context for Khartoum's adamant refusal to accept the only sort of force that might begin to stabilize the security crisis in Darfur: UN and Western diplomats unanimously insist that there will be no UN deployment of forces without Khartoum's acceptance---precisely what the regime gives all signs it will not offer. The UK's ambassador to the UN, Emyr Jones Parry, has "stressed that no UN force will deploy in Darfur without the consent of the government. 'We know that the agreement of the government of Sudan is quite crucial'" (Associated Press [dateline: UN, New York], August 17, 2006). Secretary-General Annan and US officials have echoed these sentiments; the US envoy currently in Khartoum, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer, emphasized as much in her comments prior to departure (August 24, 2006). So too has Annabi, though with a more revealing inflection in his comments:

"If we fail to secure the Government of Sudan's consent, the international community would be facing stark choices: we would either have to find new ways to support and reinforce [the African Union mission]; or risk the consequences of a security vacuum in Darfur, which would be the result if [the African Union mission] is left to wither away." (Paragraph 23)

Annabi dutifully contemplates here only two possibilities: the latter is catastrophic in implication; the former---creating an adequate AU mission---is entirely unrealistic, as all observers have concluded, with the exception of Khartoum and its unquestioning Arab League supporters (for its part, the AU has publicly conceded that it is incapable of providing security in Darfur).

There is of course an alternative that Annabi is institutionally constrained from speaking of: non-consensual deployment of a robust international force, one fully adequate to protect endangered civilians and humanitarians, and to produce a military stand-down by the combatants. Although this is the professed wish of virtually all Darfuris---both in the diaspora as well those directly threatened in the camps and rural areas---there are no international actors of consequence, nor

even human rights or policy organizations, willing to support decisively the option of non-consensual deployment, even if the consequence of inaction is the readily foreseeable acceleration of genocidal destruction.

Moreover, despite disingenuous language from the US State Department about an October 2006 deployment of the force proposed first in July by the UN Secretary-General, Annabi offers a sober realism about how shamefully belated current diplomatic efforts are:

“The Secretary-General’s [July 2006] report [on a Darfur peace support operation] further recommends the expansion of the UN Mission in Sudan [currently working primarily in southern Sudan] into the Darfur region beginning from 1 January 2007. We do believe an earlier date would not be realistic.” (Paragraph 14)

Though for political reasons the US State Department wishes to declare an earlier time-table feasible, Annabi pointedly notes:

“if we succeed in obtaining the consent of the Government [of Sudan], it would be important to recognize the practical complexity of deploying and sustaining the envisaged UN operation in Darfur. A hasty transition, we believe, would result in the deployment of only the most superficial command and control elements and would not provide time for troop contributors to deploy critical enabling units, which represent the most effective deterrent to spoilers. Those intent on destabilizing Darfur and on opposing a UN operation would no doubt exploit this situation and inevitably test this nominal United Nations presence by attacking it. An insufficiently robust response to such early challenges would undermine the credibility of the operation and its ability to deter violence through its presence from the very beginning.” (Paragraph 24)

Only a force that had NATO-quality resources at its core could deploy more rapidly (and indeed certainly much more rapidly and robustly). But despite President Bush’s expedient declaration that he favored “NATO stewardship” for a Darfur mission (February 2006), neither Washington nor Brussels has shown the slightest interest in such “stewardship.”

DOES KHARTOUM HAVE THE LAST WORD?

There is certainly no mistaking the adamant nature of Khartoum’s refusal to consent to a UN deployment of the sort proposed by the UN Secretary-General and the UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations (again, this proposal is the primary basis for the resolution tabled by the US and the UK). Although some wish to hear the recalcitrant language from the National Islamic Front as mere bluffing, it is important to understand just how firmly the regime has dug in its heels. Herewith some particularly important recent statements concerning the UN resolution, which on present diplomatic terms will pass only with Khartoum’s consent---and without a Chinese veto, which remains a clear and present threat:

“Sudan's ruling party has rejected a US-UK draft Security Council resolution to deploy UN peacekeepers in Darfur, saying it would violate national sovereignty, the official media reported Thursday [August 24, 2006]. According to Radio Omdurman and the SUNA news agency, the

draft was discussed by the National Congress Party's [National Islamic Front's] ruling council and a parliamentary group chaired by President Omar al-Bashir at a meeting Wednesday [August 23, 2006] night."

"The draft resolution is worse than the previous ones because it constitutes an attempt to impose complete guardianship on the Sudan,' lawmaker Ghazi Salah Eldin Atabani said after the meeting. 'It did not pay any consideration to the bodies set up for implementation of the Darfur peace agreement and was not presented to the Sudanese authorities.' He said any council member who supported the draft would be considered an enemy of Sudan." (Associated Press [dateline: Khartoum], August 24, 2006)

Ghazi Salah Eldin Atabani, who is also party chairman of the NIF parliamentary organization, here makes a blunt threat that will certainly not be misread by the Chinese:

"Any council member who supported the draft would be considered an enemy of Sudan."

Reuters reports the same outcome:

"Any country that would adopt this resolution would be from a hostile position towards Sudan and thus it is rejected and non-negotiable,' the state-owned news agency SUNA quoted Ghazi Salaheddin, head of the ruling National Congress Party's [National Islamic Front's] parliamentary body, as saying. 'Our position hasn't changed,' Foreign Minister Lam Akol said on Thursday [August 24, 2006] of the [UN] draft resolution." ([dateline: Khartoum], August 24, 2006)

The BBC also reports on the language of Ghazi Salah Eldin Atabani:

"The draft resolution is worse than previous ones as it is an attempt to impose complete tutelage on the Sudan,' Mr Atabani was quoted as saying after a meeting chaired by President Omar al-Bashir." ([dateline: Khartoum], August 24, 2006)

NIF Justice Minister Mohamed Ali al-Mardhi was equally adamant:

"Sudan's Justice Minister Mohamed Ali al-Mardhi denounced the US-British draft on Sunday, calling it 'wicked' and 'misleading.' He warned the government would not protect international forces against attacks from Sudanese people and others from neighboring countries." (Associated Press [dateline: UN, New York], August 22, 2006)

Al-Mardhi's is a scarcely veiled threat to encourage violence against UN peacekeepers if they are deployed. This threat should be borne in mind by those who speak of deploying into a "permissive" environment in Darfur. For of course the African Union mission has operated in a nominally "permissive" environment, and yet Khartoum (as well as rebel and Janjaweed elements) has made deployment exceedingly and gratuitously difficult for the AU: obstructing fuel supplies, imposing curfews, throwing up bureaucratic obstacles, restricting flight time. No matter what it may nominally agree to, Khartoum will continually re-calibrate, on the basis of international pressure, just how "permissive" it must be in responding to any force in Darfur.

This is the context in which Voice of America reports that,

“Sudanese Justice Minister Mohamed Ali al-Mardhi told reporters on Sunday that a draft UN resolution to deploy 17,000 peacekeeping troops in Sudan's Darfur region would be considered a military occupation.” ([dateline: Nairobi], August 21, 2006)

Agence France-Presse reports al-Mardhi as saying that the UN peacekeeping resolution would “thus literally make of them forces of occupation” ([dateline: Khartoum], August 21, 2006).

And as NIF President al-Bashir has made clear, such “occupation” will be vigorously resisted. Having previously threatened that any international peacekeeping force would find Darfur to be its “graveyard,” el-Bashir now takes inspiration from more current events:

“Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir said Sudan has taken inspiration from Hezbollah and would battle a proposed international peacekeeping force in the Darfur region, the state news agency reported Tuesday [August 15, 2006]. The statements by al-Bashir appeared to strengthen Sudan’s resolve to resist a possible UN-backed force to end the bloodshed and ongoing refugee crisis. ‘We are determined to defeat any forces entering the country just as Hezbollah has defeated the Israeli forces,’ the official Sudanese News Agency quoted al-Bashir as telling an armed forces gathering Monday.” (Associated Press [dateline: Khartoum], August 15, 2006)

Some continue to argue that all this is merely bluster on Khartoum’s part and that the regime will eventually accede to UN wishes. But given the insistent tenor of comments currently coming from the NIF regime, it is difficult to see how a resolution authorizing an appropriately robust UN peacekeeping deployment could overcome the threat of a Chinese veto. And if there is no passage of a resolution, there is no leverage with Khartoum. The regime’s agreement must, in other words, be secured before a Security Council vote, or the resolution will not pass; indeed, it is not at all clear that either the US or the UK has the stomach to move the resolution beyond its present draft stage without securing agreement from both Khartoum and Beijing.

This is why President Bush’s very recently deployed envoy to Khartoum, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer, could speak only vacuously when asked why she expected Khartoum to accept the US position:

“‘Why do we think we are going to succeed? Necessity and past history,’ [Frazer] said. ‘The past history is that the government of Sudan also opposed the African Union bringing a force to Darfur. Eventually, they saw the wisdom of that action.’” (State Department press conference, August 24, 2006)

This is dangerously naïve or obscenely disingenuous, and if the basis for optimism that Khartoum will accede to US wishes, a vicious contrivance. There is no “necessity” for Khartoum to do what the US wishes, as the Bush administration has amply demonstrated for years. The north/south Comprehensive Peace Agreement (January 2005) was a diplomatic triumph of the moment, but it is now deeply imperiled because Khartoum refuses to abide by the terms of various key protocols (boundary delineation, security, wealth-sharing, power-sharing). Renewed

war continues to loom threateningly in various flash-points throughout the South. The Darfur Peace Agreement, rammed through in Abuja by an impatient and short-sighted Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, has produced only greater violence in Darfur, while every deadline and key benchmark of the agreement has passed or been allowed to slip. What evidence is there of the “necessity” Frazer speaks of, as Khartoum brazenly flouts its formal “obligations” in these agreements?

Frazer speaks of “past history” in Darfur, mendaciously invoking an AU “success story.” She says nothing of Khartoum’s relentless obstruction of AU personnel and missions, its limiting of flight time, its imposition of curfews, its compromising of investigations of cease-fire violations, its denial of fuel for aircraft. Nor, most conspicuously, does she mention the inability of the AU to secure from Khartoum a meaningful mandate for civilian protection. And there is of course nothing about the steady fall-off in the number of AU patrols, the inability of the AU to enter the vast majority of camps for displaced persons (where they are despised, even hated because of their ineffectiveness), and the confessions by even the AU leadership that it has been completely overwhelmed by the challenges of Darfur

If it is “history” that Frazer would have us consider, let us recall some of her own past remarks on Darfur, and then ask about her sense of “necessity”:

[1] As security was continuing its long downward spiral in the fall of 2005, Frazer...

“cautioned against dwelling too much on the current level of violence in Darfur. In an interview, she said ‘this is a long process’ that over time has begun to show progress. ‘If you look at one moment, you will miss the dynamic movement,’ [Frazer] said. The fighting among rebel forces, for example is ‘one snapshot’ but she said that was a ‘not uncommon effect of the end of a war’ as groups jockeyed for position in negotiations.” (Washington Post, November 4, 2005)

The error, the foolishness, the ignorance, and sheer tendentiousness of these remarks tells us far too much about Frazer’s sense of “history” and “necessity” in Sudan. Later that month Frazer testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, declaring: “The African Union effort in Darfur has demonstrated why deployment of African troops is a viable option [for security in Darfur]” (Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Africa Subcommittee, November 17, 2005).

“History” has revealed only that the African Union mission has failed---abjectly. It has never been a “viable” option for security in Darfur, as many policy organizations had made clear by the time Frazer testified, and as the sorry history of AU performance reveals with tragic clarity.

Frazer’s dangerous foolishness has persisted. As this writer noted in May 2006 (“The New Republic, May 27, 2006), Frazer---when asked what the US planned to do if Khartoum did not accept UN peacekeepers---said she was “‘certain Khartoum would agree.’ As she went on to explain, ‘There is no need to do the contingency plan [for military intervention] if you expect the government of Sudan to agree to a UN operation.’” But “expectations” are not the same as “outcomes,” and Frazer’s smug confidence is now revealed as badly misplaced. The Khartoum regime is explicitly, adamantly opposed to “a UN operation,” and the US has no “contingency

plan.”

IS KHARTOUM NONETHELESS BLUFFING?

Some informed observers at the UN believe that despite all, Khartoum is still only bluffing with its opposition to the robust UN peacekeeping force defined by the US/UK resolution. They believe that at the end of the day, despite all the strenuous language suggesting otherwise, Khartoum will use its “refusal” as a bargaining chip. On this view, Khartoum is bargaining for any number of “carrots,” as well as the elimination of a range of “sticks”---preeminently the looming threat of prosecution at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity (among the 51 names confidentially referred to the ICC are many of the most senior NIF genocidaires). An elimination of sanctions, particularly US sanctions, is also on Khartoum’s wish-list, as is removal from the US State Department list of state sponsors of international terrorism. Khartoum further wishes to eliminate the vague threat of sanctions contained in UN Security Council Resolution 1591 (March 2005), although to date only one mid-level and retired member of the NIF military/security apparatus has been sanctioned.

What are the “carrots”? High on the list are debt relief and improved relations with both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (under NIF management of the Sudanese economy, Sudan has become---on a per capita basis---one of the very most indebted nations in the world). US commercial and capital investment would also be welcome, as would a lifting of the nominal European Union arms embargo. The list of “carrots” is in fact a very long one. Perhaps at the very top of the list is “international respectability,” desired precisely because of the regime’s long association with international terrorism, genocide in the Nuba Mountains, brutal scorched-earth warfare in the oil regions of southern Sudan, current genocide in Darfur, and systematic political and economic marginalization of populations throughout Sudan.

And what would confer most in the way of “international respectability”? There is a well-founded report that Assistant Secretary of State Frazer is carrying to Khartoum a promise from President Bush to meet with NIF President el-Bashir if he agrees to deployment of UN forces per the terms of the US/UK resolution (presumably subject to at least some whittling down by Khartoum).

Such a meeting between Bush and el-Bashir would be an obscenity: to reward the leader of a military junta that has for 17 years ruthlessly murdered, tortured, displaced, arrested, and starved its own citizens is diplomatic bankruptcy of the first order. To reduce negotiating efforts, when the issue is halting massive genocidal destruction, to the offer of an expedient photo-op---certainly craved by Khartoum’s genocidaires---is beyond expediency: it is utter moral failure.

Moreover, there is no reason to believe that Khartoum would simply accept, as its part in this nefarious deal, the UN force that is now proposed. If Khartoum should, despite all evidence, be bluffing in its present refusal to accept a robust UN peacekeeping force, then the primary negotiating goal will be measured not in terms of “carrots” and “sticks”; it will be defined by an effort to determine the mandate, nature, and time-table of the deploying UN force. And Khartoum’s success in this effort spells disaster for security on the ground in Darfur. For instead

of a mandate with the authority of Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, Khartoum will push hard for Chapter 6 deployment; indeed, this will be Khartoum's "red line" issue.

The difference in enforcement power for any peace support operation is critical. Chapter 7 (which defines the key elements of the present UK/US resolution) is precisely what would give the essential military authority to any UN force on the ground; thus the language of Paragraph 12 of the resolution:

"Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, [the Security Council]

[a] decides that the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) is authorized to use all necessary means, in the areas of deployment of its forces and as it deems within its capabilities:

to protect United Nations personnel, facilities, installations and equipment, to ensure the security and freedom of movement of United Nations personnel, humanitarian workers, assessment and evaluation commission personnel, to prevent disruption of the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement by armed groups, without prejudice to the responsibility of the Government of the Sudan, to protect civilians under the threat of physical violence, in order to support early and effective implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, to prevent attacks and threats against civilians, to seize or collect, as appropriate, arms or related material whose presence in Darfur is a violation of the Agreements and the measures imposed by paragraphs 7 and 8 of Resolution 1556 [July 2004], and to dispose of such arms and related material as appropriate."

No comparable authority is conferred on a UN force deploying under Chapter 6 of the UN Charter, which is appropriate only for a situation in which peace has actually been achieved on the ground and monitoring is the essential task (Chapter 6 personnel typically carry only side-arms). Securing a Chapter 6 resolution would be Khartoum's chief diplomatic goal in any "negotiating" of its previous categorical refusal to consent to a UN operation, although it is worth noting that el-Bashir has explicitly ruled out even a Chapter 6 deployment:

"On August 13 [2006], President Bashir addressed the closing session of the National Congress [National Islamic Front] Leadership Council in Khartoum. According to local press, President Bashir reiterated his opposition to UN forces in Darfur, whether under Chapter VI or Chapter VII." (UN Mission in Sudan "sit rep" [Khartoum], August 14, 2006)

The force currently contemplated in the UN resolution is a minimum, and in the judgment of many military experts is still inadequate to the force requirements for the difficult and remote Darfur region---certainly if Khartoum creates a "non-permissive" environment for deployment. Without the deployment of critical "first-world" military assets, of the sort specified by Ron Capps, former US Deputy Chief of the Political/Economic Section of the US embassy in Khartoum (see my overview, "Security in Darfur: Donors' Conference in Brussels Fails to Take Action," <http://www.sudanreeves.org/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=113>), there is a very considerable chance of a UN failure comparable to that of the AU.

KHARTOUM'S "SECURITY PLAN" FOR DARFUR

In addition to refusing to attend an urgent meeting called by the President of the UN Security Council, Nana Effah-Apenteng of Ghana (scheduled for Monday, August 28, 2006), Khartoum has presented to Secretary-General Kofi Annan its own “security” proposal for Darfur. The terms of the proposal are a measure of how brazen the regime has become as a consequence of its growing certainty that there is no stomach for non-consensual international deployment in Darfur. In this failure of will---before conspicuous genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity---we see some of the most painful consequences of the recent crisis in Lebanon and the US-led war in Iraq.

As it refuses an invitation even to discuss the UN Security Council resolution on security in Darfur, what has Khartoum proposed instead? Our best guide is again the report of Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Hedi Annabi (to the Security Council, August 17, 2006):

“the plan does not indicate a willingness on the part of the Government of Sudan to agree to a transition to a United Nations operation in Darfur. In addition, the plan seeks to address the security situation outside the framework of the relevant Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) bodies. In particular, it envisages the combined deployment of 26,500 additional Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM)/Minni Minawi troops to Darfur by the end of the year. As members of this Council will appreciate, this would not only be inconsistent with the DPA’s restriction on military deployments outside of agreed areas of control, but would also violate the arms embargo imposed by the Security Council in paragraph 7 of resolution 1591 (2005).” (Paragraph 8)

Peter Takirambudde, Africa Director of Human Rights Watch, offers the most incisive assessment of Khartoum’s “security” plan:

“‘This Sudanese plan is just the latest maneuver to prevent a UN force from helping protect civilians in Darfur,’ said Takirambudde. Human Rights Watch said the Sudanese plan ignored the carefully negotiated provisions for civilian protection that appeared in the Darfur Peace Agreement. ‘Where is the permanent ceasefire, the demilitarized zones around the displaced camps, the buffer zones between forces?’ asked Takirambudde. ‘There is nothing about demobilization, disarmament or the withdrawal of forces. If this government plan is accepted there will be nothing left of the peace agreement.’” (Human Rights Watch press release [New York], August 18, 2006)

The Human Rights Press release continued:

“At the same time that it submitted the plan to the UN, the Sudanese government began moving large numbers of troops to el-Fashir, North Darfur, apparently readying for an assault on rebels in that state. Shortly before that troop movement, the African Union and the UN denounced a similar government plan to launch attacks in West Darfur as a violation of the permanent ceasefire in the Darfur Peace Agreement.”

Human Rights Watch here refers specifically to the Jebel Moon area of West Darfur, which is also poised to explode in violence, with terribly predictable consequences for civilians and humanitarian access.

Of Khartoum's "security" plan, Human Rights Watch researcher David Buchbinder also makes the essential point about the military build-up (presently concentrated in North Darfur, but easily moved to other parts of Darfur):

"More than a diplomatic road map, this [proposal by Khartoum] is showing their military intentions," said Buchbinder []. "I don't think this in any way is going to protect civilians." (New York Times [dateline: Khartoum], August 21, 2006)

In fact, Khartoum has failed to meet any of the important deadlines specified in the Darfur Peace Agreement (see my synopsis of the UN's "Darfur Peace Agreement Monitor" of July 2006, at <http://www.sudanreeves.org/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=116>); this should signal to all just how little commitment the regime feels toward the terms forced in haste upon Darfuris by US and European diplomats in Abuja.

Moreover, as the African Union mission in Darfur has continued to collapse, the AU leadership has taken the path of least resistance in responding to Khartoum's military ambitions. Of particular concern is AU acquiescence before Khartoum's demand that representatives of non-signatory rebel groups be expelled from the AU camps on the ground in Darfur:

"This week the AU expelled non-signatory rebel representatives from its camps, saying it could no longer guarantee their safety because the [Khartoum] government called them terrorists after some of the groups formed a new alliance which has attacked the government since the May deal. The non-signatories said that in doing this the AU had terminated a shaky truce signed in April 2004 by all the parties to the conflict." (Reuters [dateline: Khartoum], August 19, 2006)

Earlier Reuters had reported more specifically on the consequences of these expulsions demanded by Khartoum:

"One AU official confirmed the [expulsion] decision, which had been requested by the government in Khartoum, but did not give further details. The government says those who did not sign the agreement in May are outlaws. The move could hinder investigations of truce violations as AU troops may not be able to travel safely in areas controlled by the two factions that did not sign the peace deal." (Reuters [dateline: Khartoum], August 16, 2006)

Khartoum is, of course, more than pleased that there will be no AU presence in those areas where military activity is destined to accelerate rapidly when the planned offensive begins. Under cover of the Darfur Peace Agreement, Khartoum's regular armed forces---including a great many previously incorporated Janjaweed militia fighters---and Minni Minawi's SLA faction will claim to be "disarming" non-signatory combatants for "security" purposes. In fact, what we will see is a reprise of the brutal violence that prevailed throughout 2003-2004, now to be directed primarily against surviving Fur villages. And there will be no witnesses because the AU, having expelled non-signatory rebel military observers from their camps, will not be allowed into those areas where non-signatory military forces control territory---precisely where the fighting will be concentrated. The same pattern will soon be repeated in West Darfur, and eventually in South Darfur. This is the real meaning of Khartoum's plan to deploy more than

26,000 of its regular troops as well as its “new Janjaweed,” the forces of Minni Minawi.

END GAME

This is the final stage in Khartoum’s genocidal campaign in Darfur. It occurs against a backdrop of extraordinary suffering and continually declining humanitarian access and resources. In July the UN’s World Food Program was unable to reach almost 500,000 people in need of food relief. More broadly, Annabi stressed in his briefing of the Security Council that:

“humanitarian organizations now have full access to only slightly more than fifty percent of the 3.6 million civilians affected by the conflict [again, there are an additional 350,000 conflict-affected persons in eastern Chad---ER]. If conditions deteriorate further, many humanitarian organizations may be forced to completely withdraw from North Darfur, where more than 1.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance.” (Paragraph 4)

Cholera is poised to explode if water sanitation or supplies deteriorate further. A shocking nine humanitarian aid workers were killed in July. Khartoum continues its policy of systematically obstructing and harassing humanitarian workers and operations. We should remember that in June Khartoum “punished” the UN for moving rebel leader and humanitarian coordinator Suleiman Jamous by shutting down all UN operations in Darfur except those of UNICEF and WFP; the same threat still looms for some other “provocation.” Rape has recently soared in the area of the giant Kalma camp south of Nyala, a terrible reality unto itself and a telling barometer of insecurity. Malnutrition rates are rising rapidly. Humanitarian resources and funding are declining just as rapidly. Some 50,000 civilians have been displaced in recent weeks (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks [dateline: Nairobi], August 24, 2006). And the full brunt of renewed violence has yet to be felt, though it is only a matter of days---weeks at most---before this changes.

If under these circumstances the international community is unwilling even to threaten non-consensual intervention to protect civilians and humanitarians in Darfur, then Khartoum may rightly, in full throat, exult in its savage triumph. It is a triumph that has been long in coming; one that might have been stopped with sufficient will at any point; but one that is now terribly close to culmination.

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