

Stop the Genocide in Darfur: Bribe the Chinese

Personal Comments of Asst. Dean Lydia Lazar, Chicago-Kent College of Law

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You have to give the Bush administration's deputy secretary of state Robert B. Zoellick credit: he certainly appears to be doing the best he can to stop the genocidal violence in Sudan's Darfur region. He has been to the area four times in six months and, as was reported this week, has met with the President of Sudan as well as with the warring rebel factions. He has been 'fact finding' in the refugee camps, he has listened to the African Union's peacekeeping commanders describe what is happening and he has listened to what the government officials responsible for the region have had to say. Listening and fact finding are crucial elements of diplomatic intervention and Zoellick is by all accounts a skilled and honest negotiator and deal-maker. But the violence continues; men, women and children are being senselessly murdered everyday by the so-called "janjaweed," Sudanese government sponsored militia on horseback, and no amount of political discourse appears likely to bring these rampaging cowboys (janjaweed means 'gun and horse') to heel.

A quick **review of the facts:** The Sudan is Africa's biggest country, Khartoum is its capital city, it has multiple religious, ethnic and socio-economic divisions between Muslims (70%), Animists (25%), and Christians (5%), between Arabs and Africans, and between nomads and farmers. Since independence from the British in 1956 there has been nearly constant conflict in the Sudan. While the larger Sudanese conflict could be characterized as an attempt to Islamize the animist and Christian south, the conflict in Darfur was, until recently, an essentially geographic/economic clash between nomads and farmers, exacerbated by a drought in the 1980s which forced northern Africans from the Zaghawa tribe to drive their herds south into Arab tribes' grazing lands.

In the larger civil war between the Muslim north and the animist/Christian south, Khartoum's strategy to fight the southern rebels during the 1980s was to arm Arab tribesmen from Darfur and these armed, mounted militias (proto-janjaweed) served as army irregulars fighting the Sudanese rebels led by John Garang. Unfortunately, when peace negotiations finally took place between Garang's SPLA and Khartoum, representatives from the Darfur area were excluded and they took up arms in 2003 to fight for a place at the table. The Darfur rebellion was led by African tribal activists fighting to get a share of the country's wealth into Darfur in the form of investments in schools, roads, hospitals and the like. To fight this rebellion, Khartoum uses its regular army but has also turned again to the Arab tribesmen and created more janjaweed militias to serve as irregulars, terrorizing the African tribespeople and implementing a "scorched earth" policy that the government does not, supposedly, control.

The **humanitarian crisis in Darfur** is complicated but not impossible to understand: the Darfur rebels attack government positions in and around villages and then the government attacks back, using both ground troops and helicopter gunships to rout the rebels. After the rebels are driven out, the janjaweed attack the same villages, justifying their attacks by characterizing the villagers as sympathetic to the rebels. The janjaweed loot, burn and kill the inhabitants and force survivors to flee to refugee camps.

In this way, thousands of people have been displaced from Darfur, and genocidal killing has been going on for at least three years. But what is really going on here? It turns out that in 1978 oil was discovered in the Sudan, and more recently, oil was discovered in Darfur. **The fighting in Darfur is over who will control the money that flows from Darfur's oil riches.** The Darfur conflict, which was originally a local dispute over water and grazing rights, has metastasized into a power struggle over the control of oil, the curse of the developing world. The humanitarian disaster in Darfur is a result of the Khartoum government's inability or unwillingness to stop the janjaweed from massacring the people of Darfur as they clear the area of inconvenient people. By depopulating Darfur for Khartoum, the janjaweed pave the way for the oil companies to come in so that the oil can flow - corporate ethnic cleansing by proxy, as it were. It is certainly easier to carve up the land and award oil concessions to global companies if there aren't any farmers on it. Scroll down to the end of this article for a map of the Sudan's oil concessions to date.

It does not help that the Darfur rebels are divided and disorganized, as this has played right into the hands of Khartoum, which made its peace with the SPLA and is by all accounts working towards its long promised oil-rich future. The civil war has been over for nearly a year, and this week Mr. Zoellick officially opened a US consulate in Juba, the capital of the new Southern autonomous region. Last week Khartoum agreed to share Sudan's oil wealth with the former SPLA southern rebels and now both the northern and the southern Sudanese governments are busy cutting deals with the Chinese, the Indians, the Japanese and others to mine the country's oil. See the Sudan Tribune 'Oil in Darfur' http://www.sudantribune.com/mot.php3?id_mot=37 and in the Guardian: <http://business.guardian.co.uk/story/0,16781,1637403,00.html>

The US oil industry has been a frustrated bystander to the exploitation of the oil in Sudan, and the Bush administration policy objective has been to get a peace agreement between Khartoum and the SPLA so that it could lift the economic sanctions which have been in place since 1997 and which have prevented our firms from working in Sudan. With the peace agreement in place, and the emergence of a ruling elite for Southern Sudan, it would seem likely that the sanctions could soon be lifted and the US oil companies could get into the game. However, increased attention to the genocide in Darfur has made it difficult to get the sanctions lifted, because activists are agitating for the US and the world community to put pressure on Khartoum to shut down the janjaweed and the economic sanctions on US firms are seen as both our biggest stick and our best carrot.

Recently, the Bush administration has lifted the sanctions to permit Khartoum to hire a US public relations company to improve its image, but is that really the most strategic move we can make at this point? It depends on our objectives, of course. If all we really want to do is buy time so that Darfur can be cleared and the oil concessions awarded, then our current policy is spot on, and starting the PR campaign for the new peaceful Sudan makes perfect sense. But if we really wanted to stop the genocide now, we wouldn't be enabling Khartoum to improve its image; instead we'd bribe the Chinese, or the Indians, to get them to force Khartoum to close down the janjaweed and in fact, make peace with the Darfur rebels.

The good news is that China recently abstained from vetoing a UN security council measure that condemned Sudan's terrible human rights record in Darfur, so there are signs that the Chinese are paying increasing attention to what the world thinks about them. There must be something that the Chinese want from us that we can offer as a bribe to get them to pro-actively intervene in the Darfur situation. And why should the Chinese "accept" our "bribe" to close down oil fields 4, 6 and 7 (see map)? **Because the savagery in Darfur demeans all of us, whether we are Chinese,**

European, North American, Malaysian, or African. As the activists say, one people, one planet.

- Lydia Lazar

