

No Quick Fix For Darfur

Roberta Cohen

Roberta Cohen is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution where she co-directs the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement and specializes in humanitarian and human rights issues

On May 5th one of Darfur's main rebel groups signed an agreement with the government of Sudan following African Union mediation efforts backed by the United States and European governments. But it is questionable whether the Abuja accord will protect the people of western Sudan from genocidal acts by their own government and the Arab militias (the Janjaweed) it supports. When asked whether the agreement would lead to a significant decline in violence, then-US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, a key negotiator in the talks, responded that while the agreement is "an opportunity for peace," Darfur "is going to remain a dangerous place."¹

Under the peace accord, a cease-fire will be followed by the disarmament of the Janjaweed (a process that will take months), the integration of most rebel forces into the Sudanese army and police, and the establishment of protective buffer zones around internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps and assistance corridors. In addition, there will be power and wealth sharing arrangements, including a fund to reconstruct and develop Darfur, a commission to help IDPs and refugees to return home and a compensation fund for victims of the conflict.

The Darfur insurgency began in 2003 when rebels attacked government outposts, in response to a history of grievances and neglect from the central government. The government's response was the massacre of tens of thousands of African farmers, the rape of unknown numbers of women and girls and the torching of an estimated 2,000 villages. The government dealt with the three Darfur rebel tribes the same way it had dealt with earlier rebellions by black Africans in the South who complained of marginalization. Over the next few years, an estimated 450,000 black African men, women and children in Darfur died from violence, starvation and disease, with more than 75 percent of their villages and farms destroyed. More than 2 million became internally displaced while some 200,000 fled to Chad where they recently came under attack as the conflict spread over the border. At least 3.5 million Darfurians are dependent on international food aid. Darfur continues to be described as the world's "worst humanitarian disaster."²

Bringing this disaster under control and ensuring that the terms of the peace agreement are carried out is a challenge that will require continued international pressure and troop involvement. During 2004 and 2005, international pressure sometimes stemmed the violence and secured entry for humanitarian aid operations, which stopped a good deal of

starvation and disease. But by the end of 2005, the situation deteriorated. The Janjaweed began to attack people inside the IDP camps and to burn down the remaining black African farming villages. Darfur's rebel groups began to splinter and fight among themselves, and as their command structures disintegrated, they looted aid convoys and raided Arab nomad communities. Rebels from Chad became active on both sides of the border, and armed banditry and robbery became rampant, leading to attacks on African Union (AU) peacekeepers and humanitarian workers, undermining their operations and weakening the only protection and assistance IDPs and villagers had.

SECURITY COUNCIL DIVISIONS

The Sudanese government initially agreed to allow an international peacekeeping force into Darfur following the signing of a peace agreement, but is now trying to obstruct the Security Council's deployment of a force. The Council has long been divided when it comes to action on Darfur. It took until July 2004—more than a year after the mass killings, rapes and uprooting began—for the Council to adopt its first resolution on Darfur. In March 2005, only symbolic sanctions were introduced (personal travel bans and asset freezes) even though the Sudanese government had failed to disarm the Janjaweed and halt attacks against its civilian population. By April 2006 the Council finally agreed to apply sanctions, but against only four individuals. The Council also failed to enforce a military embargo and dragged its feet in calling for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force in Darfur after the African Union requested one in January 2006 to reinforce its own troops on the ground. A resolution in March called only for “preparatory planning” for the deployment of a force.³ It took until June 2006 to send to Darfur a needs assessment mission, which will make recommendations to the Council on the strength and mandate of a force.

China has been one of the biggest stumbling blocks to strong Security Council action on Sudan. The China National Petroleum Corporation holds a 40 percent share in the international consortium extracting oil in Sudan, making China the main foreign investor in Sudan's oil industry.⁴ As the world's second largest oil consumer, China has been looking for new resources wherever they can be found. Over the past eight years, Sudan has become a base in Africa for Chinese oil operations and a bridge to oil resources in other African countries. Every time strong action against Sudan is proposed, China has abstained, or threatened to use its veto to delay or weaken action.

Russia, which like China wields a veto in the Council, has also slowed up and opposed strong action against the Sudanese government. Evidently it fears that a precedent could be set applicable to its own scorched earth campaign against the Chechens. Moreover, Russia has been selling arms to Sudan. States like Pakistan, Algeria and Qatar, with traditionally close political ties to Arab and Islamic governments, have also protected Sudan in the international arena.

Although the United States initiated action against Sudan in the Security Council, and was the catalyst behind the May agreement, it too has had reasons to avoid head-on confrontation. Mainly, the US fears that pressing Sudan too far on Darfur would jeopardize the peace agreement that the United States and European Union had spent years trying to achieve in ending the 21-year civil war between the government and the

rebel groups in the South. Thus efforts at holding the Sudanese government to account in Darfur have often been upstaged by US “engagement” with the Sudanese government to encourage finalization and implementation of the January 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). September 11th has also proved to be a complicating factor for the US. In strengthening cooperation with Sudanese intelligence agencies in its “war against terror,” the US reportedly blocked the inclusion of Sudan’s intelligence chief and other government officials from the list of people UN sanctions could target.⁵

CHALLENGES TO AN INTERNATIONAL FORCE

Beyond the geopolitical interests of the members of the Security Council, another key challenge to the deployment of an international force to Darfur is the absence of ready international machinery to protect civilians threatened with genocide, mass killings and crimes against humanity. In his 2005 reform plan, “In Larger Freedom,” UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan underscored that when “national authorities are unable or unwilling to protect their citizens, then the responsibility shifts to the international community.” He called for developing “strategic reserves that can be deployed rapidly,” when diplomatic methods fail and Chapter VII enforcement is decided upon.⁶ At the World Summit, however, heads of government urged only the “further development of proposals” to build such reserves, although they did ask regional organizations (i.e. NATO) to “consider the option” of placing their military capacity under UN standby arrangements.⁷ In the absence of a standing police or military capacity or rapidly deployable reserves to bolster international political efforts, the “collective responsibility to protect” endorsed at the World Summit is slowed considerably.

It could take up to a year to mobilize the troops and police required to put an effective UN force on the ground in Darfur. In the interim, IDPs, civilians and aid workers in Darfur must rely upon the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), which has been on the ground since 2003. Initially, it was composed of 60 unarmed observers to monitor a cease-fire between the government and rebels. Gradually it expanded to 7,000 troops, police and observers and offered to provide a modicum of protection for IDPs, civilians and humanitarian workers.

A Brookings Institution study by William G. O’Neill and Violette Cassis has documented how AMIS forces on occasion have deterred the rape of women (indeed, many displaced women would only collect firewood outside the camps on the days of AU patrols), protected humanitarian corridors and aid convoys, stopped the looting of animals belonging to Arab nomads, and helped some displaced persons return to their fields. In late 2004, it secured the release of Catholic Relief Services workers who had been taken hostage by rebels.⁸

But the study also determined that AMIS’ small numbers, weak mandate and lack of equipment rendered it incapable of protecting millions of people in an area the size of France. It called for an increase in troop strength to at least 20,000 as well as increased logistical, transport and communications support; additional aircraft and vehicles; satellite surveillance to enable night patrols; clearer rules of engagement to authorize the use of force to protect civilians; increased female police and military to handle cases of

sexual and gender-based violence; and improved coordination and communication among AU troops and police and between AU forces and humanitarian workers.

In January 2006, the AU recognized the need to bolster AMIS and called for “a transition” to a UN operation. “We are like sitting ducks,” said an AMIS army captain as he appealed for armored personnel carriers and more ammunition.⁹ Clearly, AU troops did not have enough firepower to defend themselves from the growing attacks to which they were being subjected. In October 2005, AMIS suffered its first casualties—four soldiers and two civilian drivers were killed in an ambush. In January, another soldier was killed and ten other troops were injured.¹⁰ As a result, AMIS began to scale down its patrols and no longer was providing the minimal protection it offered earlier.¹¹

Yet, not only do IDPs and civilians need AMIS’ protection, but so do more than 14,000 humanitarian workers on the ground who are delivering food, medicine and shelter and who have come under increasing harassment by the government and even attacks by military forces, rebels and bandits. In April 2006, Sudan expelled the Norwegian Refugee Council from the biggest IDP camp, Kalma, where it was caring for more than 100,000 IDPs. Earlier, a security guard and staff member of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were killed and two staff members wounded by unknown assailants.

The government of Sudan has consistently tried to thwart the AU mission by delaying the delivery of equipment, or by opposing the expansion of the force or the strengthening of its protection mandate. The AU Peace and Security Council’s decision to delay any changeover to a UN force until September 2006 was at Sudan’s behest. Even AU patrols must regularly include members of the Sudanese military.

African governments, for their part, cannot easily increase AMIS’ troop levels. They have neither the trained and experienced personnel to spare nor the transport capability to bring them quickly to Darfur. They also lack the proper equipment. Given the situation on the ground, the governments have not wanted to put their troops in harm’s way.

US and European Union support to date has been limited. The United States and EU have provided financial and logistical support to AMIS and have helped to airlift AU troops into Darfur, to build AMIS camps, and to provide basic supplies and training. But the help has often been slow and insufficient. A donors’ conference in May 2005 pledged \$300 million to fund the AU force, whereas at least \$460 million was required to cover its expansion to only 7,700 troops.¹² Mindful of the growing budget deficit, the US Congress rejected a bill in December 2005 to renew \$50 million in aid for Darfur, despite pleas from the administration. At present, Congress is considering a new supplemental bill that would provide about \$175 million for AMIS. Deputy Secretary Zoellick in April 2006 called upon interested citizens to press for passage of this bill.¹³

Despite Zoellick’s involvement in Abuja, Darfur is not a matter of strategic or national interest for Western governments. For a long time, the West strongly endorsed the slogan, “African solutions for African problems,” in great part because it relieved them of responsibility to become directly involved. More recently, President George W. Bush and

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan have looked to NATO for help, in particular to send some 500 advisers to AMIS. However, NATO has indicated that any advisers would be deployed only at AMIS headquarters and would not directly participate in field operations—far short of initial expectations that NATO might provide a “bridging” force until a UN force could be deployed.

Western military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan has overshadowed any consideration of military action in Darfur, whether in the form of establishing a “no fly zone” or providing combat helicopters and crews to back up AMIS. Western governments have also been mindful of Arab reaction. The US led invasion of Iraq has made many in the Arab world highly suspicious of any discussion of a Western-led humanitarian intervention in Sudan. Although Iraq was not occupied for humanitarian or human rights reasons, the Bush Administration fell back on this rationale when no weapons of mass destruction were found. US expressions of concern about Darfur have met with much skepticism in the Arab and Muslim worlds, making it easy to rally sentiment against Western military involvement in another Islamic country.

The Abuja agreement requires monitoring the disarmament and disengagement of the Janjaweed and rebel forces, ensuring that they remain in restricted areas, establishing buffer zones around IDP camps and humanitarian assistance corridors, and making conditions secure for IDPs and refugees to return home. Since this far exceeds AMIS’ current capacity, the force will need to be strengthened even before a UN force is deployed. Moreover, the Janjaweed under the agreement will not have to disarm until mid October, which makes the protection of IDPs and civilians as urgent as ever.

The UN force, of which AMIS will be the core, will need to have a far more robust mandate than AMIS’ so that it can directly protect IDPs and civilians under threat and maintain the cease-fire. Sudan, however, is doing all it can to prevent a Chapter VII UN force. The composition of the force will be important as well. There have been reports that AMIS troops coming from Arab countries like Egypt or Tunisia have met with resistance from black African Darfurians, who may be Muslim but are not Arab and who have suspected them of favoring the Sudanese government.¹⁴ This suggests that peacekeepers should be rather of non-Arab Muslim background, for example from Bangladesh, Pakistan or Turkey. It might also be important to have some Western troops in the force to demonstrate commitment not only in words but also in deeds.

POLITICAL SOLUTIONS

Of course, no number of troops will resolve the root causes of the Darfur conflict. That solution will require willingness by both the government and the rebels to execute the terms of the peace agreement in good faith. The government did agree to contribute substantial sums to reconstruct and develop Darfur (although only \$30 million to compensate victims). The government will also allow the people of Darfur to choose their own leaders and determine (although not until 2010) their status as a region. There will be a senior assistant to Sudan’s President from Darfur, albeit not the Vice Presidential position sought by rebel negotiators, and a certain number of seats will be set aside in the national assembly for Darfur’s rebel movements.

Fundamentally, the Sudanese government is being asked to give up its monopoly of power and wealth and share it with black Africans on the periphery of Khartoum. Democratization, however, will not come easily to a government that is growing rich on oil and whose “relations with the rest of Sudan have been one of ruler, manipulator, exploiter.”¹⁵ For Francis M. Deng, a South Sudan scholar who was Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in Khartoum in the 1980s, the country is suffering from a crisis of identity. The ruling Arab-Islamic minority government has long depicted Sudan as an Arab-Muslim country, but the majority of the population of Sudan is African and not all Muslim. The resistance to moving Sudan in the direction of a multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-religious society stems from fear that the Arab minority will lose control of its political, cultural and economic dominance.¹⁶

Complicating matters further has been the untimely death of John Garang, the former southern rebel leader who became Sudan’s new Vice President, and who promised that he would promote a fair and just settlement in Darfur as part of a new Sudan. Unfortunately, his successors in the government do not have the same stature or commitment to make a unified state work.

Darfur’s rebel groups remain splintered and at war with one another. Their lack of overall unity puts into question whether the Abuja agreement can be successfully implemented (two of the groups have yet to sign on to the agreement, including the one representing most of Darfur’s people). Yet the growing scarcity of land and water in the region and the destruction caused by the war make it essential that the black African farming communities reach a compromise with the Arab herders and their government supporters.

Darfur has become a test case for the ability of the AU and the UN to protect people at risk within their member countries. The complexity of the issues, the rivalries among the Darfur rebels, the deviousness of Sudan’s government and the competing interests of the great powers have made a solution difficult to achieve. If the North-South agreement is any model, it has lagged in its implementation. The government, it is reported, “is now renegeing on commitments to draw down southern garrisons, share power meaningfully with rebel leaders, and settle disputes over provincial borders and the sharing of revenue from oil.”¹⁷ The Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs found no preparations to enable internally displaced persons and refugees to return home in safe and sustainable conditions on a 2005 visit.¹⁸ Moreover, it took more than a year for the UN force deployed in the South to reach 80 percent of its desired strength.

The same diplomatic pressure required to achieve implementation of the North-South accord will also be needed for Darfur. Against great odds, the AU, the UN, the United States and others involved must work to make the Abuja agreement succeed. As Nigerian President Olesugun Obasanjo warned: “Unless the right spirit, unless the right attitude and right disposition is there, this document is not worth the paper it is signed on.”¹⁹

REFERENCES

¹ Glenn Kessler, “Sudanese, Rebels Sign Peace Plan For Darfur, *Washington Post*, May 6, 2006.

² UN Regional Information Networks, April 5, 2006.

³ See Statement of the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/2006/5, 3 February 2006, and UN Security Council, Resolution 1663, S/RES/1663, 24 March 2006.

⁴ Peter S. Goodman, "China Invests Heavily in Sudan's Oil Industry," *Washington Post*, December 23, 2004.

⁵ "A President's Promise," Editorial, *Washington Post*, April 11, 2006.

⁶ United Nations General Assembly, *In larger freedom: toward development, security and human rights for all*, Report of the Secretary-General, UN Doc. A/59/2005, 21 March 2005, paras. 135, 112.

⁷ UNGA, 2005 World Summit Outcome, paras. 92-3, 170.

⁸ William G. O'Neill and Violette Cassis, *Protecting Two Million Internally Displaced: The Successes and Shortcomings of the African Union in Darfur*, Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, November 2005.

⁹ Roberta Cohen and William G. O'Neill, "Last Stand in Sudan," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March/April 2006, p.55.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Brookings Institution, Transcript, "Policy Options for Darfur," April 13, 2006, www.brookings.edu/comm/events/20060413.htm

¹² Cohen and O'Neill, p. 58.

¹³ Brookings Institution, Transcript.

¹⁴ Cohen and O'Neill, p.58.

¹⁵ Robert Zoellick, Brookings Institution, Transcript.

¹⁶ Francis M. Deng, "The Darfur Crisis in Context," *Forced Migration Review* No. 22, Oxford, January 2005, pp.44-45.

¹⁷ "Peace in Darfur?" *Washington Post*, Editorial, May 6, 2006.

¹⁸ UN Commission on Human Rights, Mission to the Sudan, Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, E/CN.4/2006/71/Add.6, 13 February 2006.

¹⁹ "Darfur Gets a Fighting Chance," *New York Times*, Editorial, May 6, 2006.