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# Diplomacy meets conflict: Darfur, Sudan and the limits of international diplomacy

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### **Abstract**

Despite claims that the world is generally more developed and stable than previous times in man's history there are places on earth where war is still the name of the game. Tactics such as rape, murder, vandalism and ethnic cleansing are still prevalent. The paper studies the complex issues confronting Africa's largest country, Sudan. The country stands on a fragile ceasefire that ended a 2 decade civil war in 2002. The main focus is on the Darfur region which is in Western Sudan. Rebels there began fighting in 2003 and the region has been something of a conundrum of violence. The government's counterinsurgency has been called genocide and the paper examines these accusations and the evidence put forward for this. The international community has been hesitant to act discovery in this crisis due to a lack of political will possibly? The ghost of the Rwandan genocide of the early 1990s lingers though and world leaders have been pressured to act. The paper also assesses what sort of pressure is being applied on governments, their reaction and the validity of it. No pre-conceived notion of this conflict is taken to start off just to try and reach objective conclusions. The issues of genocide is complicated. Quarrels over definition seem to have limited decisive action in areas like Sudan.

## **Background**

Sudan is Africa's largest country. There are approximately 39 million people in the country, which lies on the border between the great Sahara desert and sub-Saharan Africa. The country is largely dry and arid with some Savanna areas. Rain is scarce in some parts of the country and there are pockets of fertile land in the country which have been disputed over. As far as demographics go you will find Arabs of Nubian descent in the north and in the south of Sudan are black Africans who are either Christian or animist as far as religion goes.

For approximately 20 years civil war raged between the “Muslim” north and the “Christian” south. The imposition of Sharia law on the whole country by the Arab dominated leadership led to conflict with Christians who were not willing to abide by the new hard line laws that were being enforced. The conflict caused protracted pain and despair as it dragged along throughout the years. Millions died, millions were displaced and horrors and nightmares were lived out by many. The conflict finally ended in 2002. Peace had finally come to Sudan, a nation once divided. Today Sudan is still in the clutches of unrest with the conflict now centered in Darfur, which is in western Sudan.

Back in 2003 rebel groups in the region attacked government military posts citing neglect of the region by the Khartoum regime. The government has had a counter-insurgency effort against rebels who have increased in number. The conflict has been brutal, with millions of civilians caught in the cross-fire. Over 300,000 people have lost their lives and upwards of 2million people have been displaced from their homes. The international community has spoken sporadically. Condemning the actions of the government and

rebel groups but not doing that much. The word genocide has been thrown around to describe the situation, but this has not prompted the sort of response one might expect from a world that denounced the Holocaust with the words “never again.”

## **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout history men have contributed to each other's advancement and progress through inventiveness, pursuit of knowledge and a will to make a difference in the lives of each other. We have contributed to the rebuilding of whole countries. The resettlement and protection of displaced individuals and passing of knowledge to those who may not have it. Giving a hand to those who are down trodden. In man there is a great potential for good. One can only marvel at the great things that people have done and continue doing for each other. By the same token man's potential to cause harm is high too. This is evidenced by countless numbers of incidents where civilians are slaughtered for the vaguest reasons, women are raped for the sake of war and villages are burnt to the ground. The conflict in Darfur, Sudan currently shows these conflicting human potentialities. Since the conflict began in 2003 there have been many lives lost, millions have had to move elsewhere or to a refugee camp. Millions rely on food aid and the volatile situation in the region makes it one of the most dangerous places on earth. There have been debates about what the situation is really like there: whether there is genocide in the region; who could be perpetrating it; who is to blame for the instability; how can the situation be fixed; does the world owe it to the people of Sudan to help them and are Africa's conflicts caused by the legacy of colonization. Before my research I was reluctant to formulate a thesis due to the fact that I did not know that much about Darfur. For me, this crisis is something that I have heard of without really knowing great details. It was a

process of discovery which spurred some bigger questions relating to international relations and the role of the international community in areas of conflict. My research enlightened me and I hope to contribute to your understanding through my research and the following summary of it.

I thank you for your time and I hope this paper gets you to think about what really matters in international relations and more importantly you will be compelled to act in some way and make a difference.

My research has been focused on the region's current state and what the international community has done about it. Not much is the unfortunate answer, following are my reflections on the complexity of diplomacy met with conflict, namely in Darfur:

**GENOCIDE! We said never again before, will we say it again?**

The topic of genocide is a sensitive one. My research reveals a certain level of apprehension toward the world itself. The two above incidents of genocide prompted the world to declare the end of such acts. The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of genocide served that purpose. Now since then we have had situations that can clearly be defined as genocide. In my work I decided to use the recent example of Rwanda where 800,000 were slaughtered over the course of a 100 days. These are modern times and the world was well aware of what was happening in the central African country. Some call it the first genocide broadcast live in people's homes. Why was nothing done? By definition genocide was occurring in Rwanda and the United Nations, African countries and the United States were all aware of this. When questioned

American officials avoided using the term due to its legality and obligation to act once the word was used. The Americans famously said there were , “acts of genocide,” occurring in Rwanda. Genocide was only declared after the fact, when western countries decided it was less of a risk to term it genocide and the dust had settled.

Currently in Sudan there have been accusations against the government for using the Janjaweed militia as a tool to fight other rebel groups. Killings, displacements and rapes have been reported in Darfur, with the government accused of leading this orgy of violence. The United Nations has avoided using the word genocide. Like in Rwanda diplomats have been avoiding using the term, although Colin Powell former Secretary of State IN THE United States went ahead and used the word after he visited Sudan in 2004. Although this was four years ago, movement towards addressing the situation has been lethargic. This has been showcased by the slow deployment of the hybrid United Nations-African Union peacekeeping force (UNAMID) in the Darfur region. The lack of urgency certainly worries me. Yes the United States has sanctions on Sudan, but more needs to be done. From the research I did, I found the Sudanese government to be brash and confident, in their statements and actions. Whether they are fully responsible for genocide or not they are bold enough to act decisively in whatever situation may arise.

The peacekeepers have an extremely limited mandate in the face of a lot of violence. Diplomatic pressure has been applied but to no avail. Air raids of villages by the government have been documented and the Sudanese government does not deny that it is fighting in Darfur. When we watched the PBS *Frontline* documentary on Darfur it was clear that civilians were very vulnerable even with the presence of the peace-keeping

force. The United Nations approved the deployment of a hybrid force comprising of African Union and United Nations peacekeepers called UNAMID. At over 10,000 they are just over a third of the way deployed. The U.N has no force of its own; it relies on the goodwill of its members and their abilities to contribute forces. Sometimes one wonders if the international community really has the will to see a change in some of these conflict zones. It has proven difficult to get countries to send soldiers that can help UNAMID on its tough, mission. This is not made easier by Sudan's call for non-western nationals to be peacekeepers. As a member of the United Nations they have the right to deny access to peacekeepers and they can also approve or disapprove the nationality of peacekeepers. The Sudanese government under President Omar Hassan al-Bashir are fully aware of their rights as a "sovereign" nation, and they will play on this to get wherever they need to get.

History has repeated itself, and the term "never again" might as well be replaced with "never say never." The legalities involved with international diplomacy have put nations in a place where leaders who may be able to make a difference are forced to do nothing, as much as they might care.

### **Hope?**

The stories that come out of this tragedy are almost incomprehensible for someone who has grown up in fairly comfortable surroundings. I have learnt to go beyond statistics.

As I did my research I continually saw stories and images of normal people suffering from a conflict that is no fault of their own. Children losing siblings and parents, families losing homes, husbands losing wives, farmers losing livelihoods and young men losing their lives.

I have been appalled at the level of evil human beings can inflict on each other. My outrage has cultivated a strong attitude towards what should be done, the conflict has to end! Yes I have had to temper that but I still believe that those aware of the situation in Darfur and other parts of the world cannot possibly continue as normal knowing the extent of human suffering that is occurring. Most people who are better off are not aware of situations like the one in Sudan. Hence my motivation to play a role in advocacy and raising awareness on this and other issues. When I began this study and previously from my keeping up with current affairs I have dealt mostly with statistics. This many have died, this many have been displaced. At a certain point the numbers start losing meaning. This is why the world forgets.

Whatever happened to that family that lost its home 2 months ago? Are they in Chad at a refugee camp? Are they dead? Questions that I may never get an answer to but they push me to care and not be de-sensitized by statistics. Did the dead receive a decent burial? Were the children reunited with their families? All questions that can be asked when reading the long list of atrocities committed in the conflict zone. The emotional pull that one gets from the testimonials given by innocent people in the region brings everything into perspective. You see people, who are as normal as yourself. Were they just cursed by birth? It could easily be me born into a country where nothing works and war and greed

is the name of the game. How could you possibly ignore this, how could you hide this knowledge? Is there still hope? These sentiments go in direct contradiction with the pragmatism that countries use to make their decisions.

### **The Role of the international community**

After looking at all the appalling images and hearing the horror stories from Darfuris and other conflicts in the "Third world" people tend to turn around and point to the West nations to be the ones to help address the situation. It does make sense right? They have the resources, they have the means to defeat any military that could come out of Africa. If you believe Walter Rodney they are responsible for Africa's current problems.

Colonization and the transition from it have played a part in several civil wars and disputes across Africa. The quote above highlights the pragmatic attitudes possessed by the most if not all powerful countries in the world as far as foreign policy goes. The most difficult thing I have had to learn in my research has been the fact that no nation acts for the sake of simply being good, at least it doesn't seem like it. As much as I may be heart broken by all these images and tales of woe from my motherland, a strategist from China, Britain or the United States is not at liberty to do so. Even with all their ability to make a difference the West has historically acted on what benefits them and their people first. Is this a wrong attitude to have? Pragmatism seems to trump idealism more often than not.

The quote above comes from a concerned Senator from the United States who was speaking to a Rwandan minister who was appealing for help from the United States as the genocide was taking grip of her country. Her plea fell on deaf ears. As much as there have been calls to end genocide and such crimes against humanity countries are not likely

to act unless an action will advance their interests. In 1994 Rwanda held no significance to the West, so they evacuated their nationals and gave the perpetrators of the genocide free reign over the country. The small U.N force left behind could hardly do anything in the face of the wave of killings that swept across the country. The world turned its back on Rwanda.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in the early 90s, the U.S reacted swiftly and intervened in a quick war that saw them victorious. They could not let a dangerous enemy take control of what was a very important strategic location. It was a matter of protecting interests.

Currently Darfur is not necessarily high up the interests list but there is a level of interest there with the war on "terrorism." If Sudan was where Egypt is with the Suez Canal I will venture to say that the situation would be drastically different and maybe there would be no conflict at this point. I am not going to go into whether it is moral to have this approach to foreign policy but I will say it is a common approach practiced by most if not all nations. The European Union is no different in its emphasis on self interest.

On another note, China has interests in Sudan, interests worth protecting. Sudan and China have strong economic ties. Instead of confrontation and sanctions China favors a policy of economic support and trade. The Chinese have written off millions in Sudanese debt, granted the country multi-million dollar loans and they are even financing the building of the new presidential palace. In some quarters the Chinese are seen as the biggest obstacle to proper negotiations because of the level of confidence they give President al-Bashir and his government. Western sanctions mean nothing if Sudan is financed by China.

Although there is an arms embargo on Darfur information has come out that the Chinese have ignored this embargo and sold weapons to the government. If these allegations are true it makes peace an even more difficult proposition. It is clear that the Chinese hold the key to any future negotiations with Khartoum; hence the West has been pressuring China to push the Sudanese government into working for peace. In the cases of the United States, the EU and the Chinese interests are key which influences their decision making. The United States and the EU are not that strongly tied with Sudan hence the action has not been as drastic or dramatic. They have followed a more measured approach while on the other hand the Chinese clearly support the Sudanese government because they have strong economic interests in the country. They would never allow a foreign invasion of Sudan and the West is not interested in offending the Chinese whom they trade heavily with too. This is how international relations operates, innocent Darfuris are suffering because of this three way tie. The Sudanese government stands between the West and the Chinese, the obligation to make significant progress is lessened if the West turns a blind eye to Chinese policies. The future of Sudan is heavily dependent on the whims of politicians in the most powerful countries of the world. This view is somewhat cynical but the patterns in international relations seem to prove it to be true. There are people who care though...

### **Who cares?**

Man has an innate potential to do immeasurable good. Darfur is an example of that. A region riddled with violence, Darfur is one of the hardest parts of the world to work in. The largest relief effort in the world is in Darfur. There are 75 N.G.Os (including the Red Cross and the Red Crescent) and 14 U.N agencies in Darfur. With respect to those dead

from the conflict it is hard to imagine how many lives would be at risk without these organizations. With 2.5 million people displaced the need for food aid and health facilities is all the more essential. The Sudanese government essentially does nothing to help the people affected by the violence as far as I know from the research I did. It is testament to the goodwill of people around the world, that such efforts are even possible. After learning of the *realpolitik* practiced by governments it is enlightening to know that there are people who care about the people on the ground. In my research I saw the critical role aid agencies play in sustaining the millions affected by the violence. Peace keepers have been attacked and sometimes even killed. It is very unfortunate but aid agencies have been resolute in the face of such intimidation and uncertainty. As much as aid agencies are critical for the survival of millions there is still a need for more relief efforts. Only 73% of people who need the help have access to help according to Reuters the potential for conflict is always looming. Efforts to aid the Sudanese need to be stepped up, even in this time of financial crisis. In its proposed 7 billion dollar budget for next year the United Nations is urging its members to pledge 1 billion of it to the relief effort in Darfur where people rely almost exclusively on the aid agencies. It has to be said that relief efforts are expensive and a resolution of the conflict would be cheaper in the long run.

### **Efforts for peace and justice**

The efforts to help the Sudanese people by the international community are commendable but the cost of holding up a country at war is high and it is likely to go higher as long as the conflict continues. As much as the international community has been dragging its feet, it is important that a lasting solution be found in order to stop the

killings and displacements of people. Back in July 2008 the International Criminal Court (ICC) indicted President Omar al-Bashir. He was accused of masterminding a genocide campaign, killing 35,000 people and persecuting 2.5 million refugees. Khartoum dismisses charges and says the ICC has no jurisdiction in Sudan. This is the first time a sitting president has been indicted. The International Criminal Court is a recent creation, formed in 1998 it “tries persons accused of the most serious crimes of international concern, namely genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.” Slobodan Milosevic was indicted and tried by the ICC. The indictment of al-Bashir is potentially a misstep because the ICC has no means of capturing those it indicts. Rather it relies on the 108 countries that signed on to follow through with their promises and arrest al-Bashir. Angering al-Bashir could potentially be harmful to the peace process too, whether he is guilty or not he is the current president and therefore important for any future deal in Darfur. Getting rid of him would potentially leave a power vacuum where more conflict would arise or another one of his supporters could go into power and follow an even more hostile attitude to the West. As I conducted my research I saw a very defensive attitude displayed by the Sudanese government. They are wary of any western influence in their country. This has been proven by their request to only have African peacekeepers, they dispute the statistics reported by western sources (e.g. 300,000 dead since 2003, they say the number is closer to 10,000) and the indictment of al-Bashir has been met with more resentment and suspicion.

President al-Bashir recently declared a unilateral ceasefire, "I hereby announce our immediate unconditional ceasefire between the armed forces and the warring factions, provided that an effective monitoring mechanism is put into action and observed by all

involved parties.” I was somewhat surprised by this declaration. After all what is the use of a unilateral ceasefire? Were these mind games by al-Bashir or is he trying to counter his ICC indictment? Maybe he finally cares about peace, maybe he cares for his people. Having been in power for almost 20 years one wonders how much he really cares about his people. It is fair to take this latest proposed peace deal with a large grain of salt. On November 22 hardly two weeks after the ceasefire it was reported that the government sponsored Janjaweed attacked The Sudan Liberation Army which had actually signed a peace deal in 2007. Clearly the shadow of violence still hovers over Darfur. The reasons for the ceasefire are unclear, especially with reports of continued government involvement in scuffles like these.

There are perpetrators of unrest in Darfur on the government side and the rebel side. Several indictments from the ICC have been made. The effectiveness of these is negligible as violence continues and the region remains as dangerous as ever. From what I have learnt I see no use in the pointing of fingers. Rather attempts to look for lasting peace should be doubly made, try the criminals when there is peace!

### **Advocacy and my community involvement**

This Independent study has given me a unique opportunity to learn about a part of the world I was not all too familiar with. On a broader scale I have been able to learn more about international relations and how things work on an international scale, namely in the field of conflict. In October Emmanuel Jal, a former child soldier visited Providence college and he told an incredible story that certainly touched me. The kind of real life experience he brought to the horror stories from Sudan certainly has potential to really

move people. I feel he made a major impact on people here. So much so, a group of my peers determined to continue the message of hope invited me to join an initiative to have an awareness week here at Providence College next semester. We have been meeting for the last 4 weeks and have been making significant progress. I feel that one of the parts we must play as young people is to educate ourselves so we can make informed decisions.

The more people that know what is going on the more likely it is that we will have people wanting to do something about it. We can influence decision makers or better yet become better decision makers. I have been volunteering at the International Institute Rhode Island this semester every week and although I have not met a refugee from Sudan I am still touched by the lives of refugees from places like Ethiopia, Sudan and Iraq. They are normal people like anyone else. Seeking to feed their families and live a happy life, similar goals as mine. How could I dismiss these people as mere statistics?

I have also been blogging about different world issues including Darfur, I feel that raising my voice on certain issues will influence others and hopefully make a difference in someone's life some day. This independent study has truly energized me and I am inspired to get educated about issues negatively affecting people around the world, and what is being done to help.

Here are the links to my two blogs:

<http://takasimba.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.progressiveu.org/blog/tinacho>

## **Conclusions and the way forward**

I only call this the conclusion because the paper has to end, but the crisis in Darfur rages on.

Millions have lost their homes, millions need food aid and millions are always at risk even with peacekeepers around. My research has enlightened me and I have certainly learnt that no problem can easily be characterized. No two cases are the same, if one solution worked somewhere it does not mean it will work in another place.

Darfur cannot be ignored; there is work to be done. It is important that real work is done in order for peace to come to Sudan. The world cannot stand by and watch the self destruction of another country. Somalia is embroiled on lawlessness; Sudan can easily follow a similar fate. I think diplomatic pressure should be put on the Chinese and the government of Sudan. The views of the rebels must be heard and the current ceasefire should stand. There should also be a more critical look at the arms embargo, no guns no war!

There is a need for people to not get lost in the statistics and realize that it is the lives of men, women and children that are at risk and are lost every day. It is incredible that so much aid can go to a country, but this may be nothing but a short term measure. What is needed is lasting peace and this is not beyond the realms of possibility. Where there is a will there is a way. A combination of wise leadership, disciplined negotiations and genuine research of problems in Darfur can lead us to peace in Darfur.

I hope to one day celebrate the end of conflict in Darfur, for now my hope is in raising awareness and educating myself.