

A mist over Darfur

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Darfur holds important indicators of contemporary geo-politics, reminiscent of the colonial Scramble for Africa

By Ammara Durrani

On the eve of US invasion of Iraq in early 2003 as war drums reached their fevered pitch, Palestinian intellectual, late Edward Said, had sadly observed in one of his columns that even an otherwise sober *The Economist* had joined the chorus of war mongers, thus making suspect its respected intelligence. Indeed, a regular reader of the prestigious newspaper would recall how single-mindedly and consistently it had called upon and encouraged the Bush Administration to send US troops to Iraq to deal with the perceived monstrosity of Saddam Hussain and his weapons of mass destruction.

A year down the road, the latest cover of *The Economist* (July 31st-August 6th, 2004) features a bunch of hapless Sudanese children, driven away from their homes by the menace of the ferocious Arab Janjaweed militias who are accused of heinous crimes against humanity, in Darfur province of Sudan. The cover headline has an all too familiar impassioned urgency to it: "Sudan can't wait". Arguing in its leader piece that "sometimes, force is the only answer", the newspaper once again calls upon the US and its allies to take the military road for resolving the crisis on hand: "This regime [Sudanese Government] will only stop killing if forced to. It was largely outside pressure that pushed it to talk peace with the south-and that peace process is at risk if the mayhem in Darfur continues...As a last resort, outsiders should be prepared to use force. If certain members of the UN Security Council, mindful of their own ugly records in terrorising turbulent provinces, veto such a proposal, a coalition of the willing should go ahead regardless. There is a precedent: without approval from the Security Council, Nato intervened in Kosovo to curb ethnic cleansing."

disarming the militias and stopping the violence in 30 days.

For its part, the Sudanese Government has been resisting international pressure. In spite of grudgingly assuring to work towards implementing the UN resolution, it sees outside interest in Darfur as interference in the country's internal matters. Sudan's army has denounced the UN resolution—drafted by Washington—as an American "declaration of war" on Sudan, announcing that it is "prepared for whatever developments" that may take place if the UN conditions are not met. On Wednesday, tens of thousands of Sudanese marched on the UN headquarters in Khartoum in protest at the possibility of Western military intervention to deal with the crisis.

As these lines went to the press on Thursday, the UN special envoy to Sudan, Jan Pronk, was reported to have said that he and Sudan's foreign minister, Osman Mustafa Ismail, had agreed on a plan to tackle the humanitarian crisis in Darfur and avert sanctions threatened by the UNSC.

To Intervene or not to intervene?

Not since the days of Nato strikes in Kosovo (1999) has the debate of humanitarian intervention gathered as much momentum as in the case of Darfur. In fact, the subject has long remained an enigma for scholars of International Relations, who find themselves grappling with issues of state sovereignty and international law on one hand, and the moral responsibility associated with human rights violations on the other.

But 1999 was different from present-day realities in several respects. What makes Darfur the point of so much international concern and debate is the completely altered post-Nine Eleven international system, in which use of force has assumed highly controversial and

intervention was faced both by the UN-as the weak international body responsible for world peace; and by the US-as the world's sole but 'reluctant' superpower with its sheer military strength. Between the two of them, these post-Cold War conflicts were treated with differing approaches, and the questioned always boiled down to a choice between universal legitimacy and politico-military power. Ultimately, Kosovo remains the only 'success' story in post-Cold War history of humanitarian intervention.

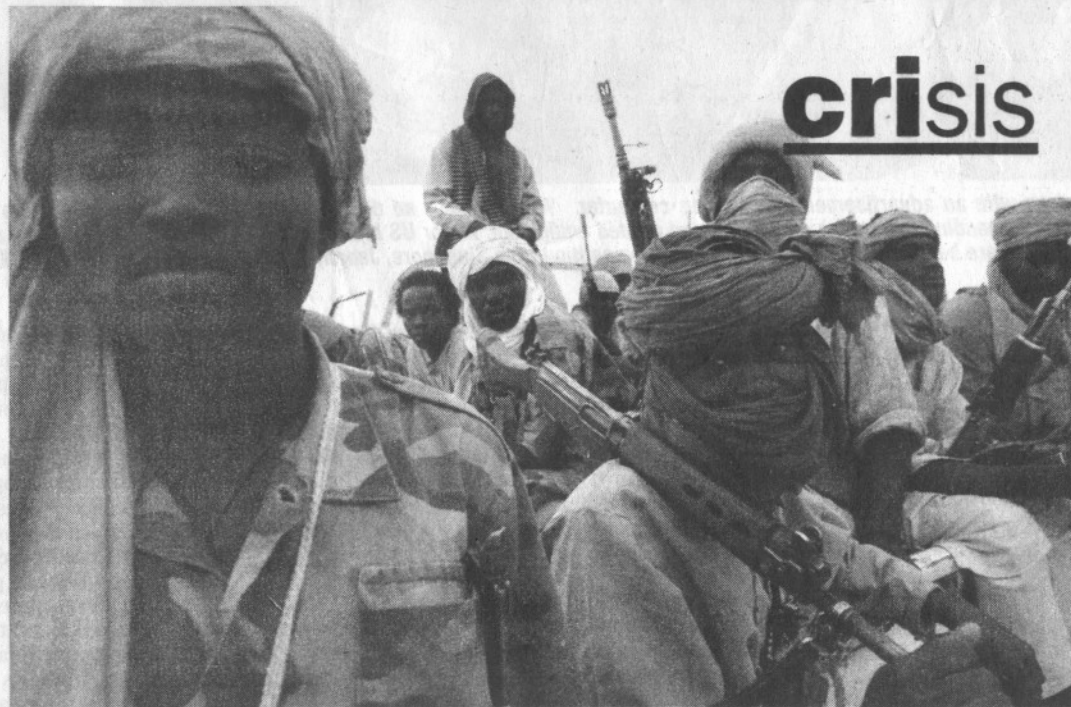
The world since Nine Eleven is a different place, however. Today, its starkest features are America's 'war on terror'; its troops inside two of the most volatile countries of the world that happen to be Muslim.

vociferously by the Muslim countries, which see a systematic pattern and sinister motive to America's new war.

It seems that the Darfur crisis is also being dragged into the larger conflict between the US and the Muslim world. Despite the clearly different nature of the conflict in Sudan, neighbouring Arab governments are nervous at the prospect of the US meddling in the affairs of yet another Muslim country. The Sudanese Government itself has warned against intervention, which it says could lead to regional instability.

Is it the oil, wise-head?

But it is not just Islam, which jumps out at any observer of the situation. Critics of the US are now



Rebels of the Movement for Justice and Equality (MJE), fighting Sudanese troops in northern Darfur region.

immediate effort to rein in its killers, its main source of hard currency should be shut off. The French and Chinese Governments may not like this idea, however, as their oil firms have interests in Sudan." This leaves the US and the UK in the UN Security Council-incidentally, the only two countries ready and willing to militarily intervene. Sounds familiar again!

And now that we are at it, why not toss some more conspiratorial dough into the oven! Let one forgets, Sudan played host to the elusive Osama Bin Laden from 1991 to 1994 during which he strengthened his terrorist network and carried out attacks against US interests in Yemen and Somalia. It was under tremendous US

Pakistan's proactive role in resolving the Darfur crisis. Pakistan and China were the only two countries, which abstained from voting on the UN Resolution 1556. In the Explanation of Vote on Pakistan's abstention on Resolution 1556, read out in a statement in the open plenary session of Security Council on July 31st, Pakistan's Acting Permanent Representative Ambassador Masood Khalid said: "Our President [Pervez Musharraf] was approached by international leaders to assist in resolving this humanitarian situation...He has been invited to visit Sudan in this context. However, while we understand the intentions of the sponsors regarding the objectives, regarding the means adopted and the fact that no space and time has been given, we would not like to prejudice the position accorded to our President and country as a neutral party trying to assist all sides in the search for an effective solution."

It is certainly no coincidence that US Secretary of State, Collin Powell deemed it necessary to publicise his telephone conversation with General Musharraf, in which he asked for a proactive Pakistani role in the crisis. Pakistan, however, is sympathetic to Khartoum's stand on the issue. Earlier this week, Foreign Secretary Riaz Khokhar flew to the Sudanese capital carrying General Musharraf's "special message" for President Umar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir.

Given the sheer number of fronts that the government is currently engaged at-war against terror, Wana, Balochistan, troops for Iraq, peace process with India etc-its quick interest and speedy diplomatic moves in the Darfur crisis has impressed many foreign policy watchers. In particular, accolades are being showered for the government's clear-cut approach to Darfur in stark contrast to the question of Pakistan

In the pressure cooker

Even though the charges leveled are quite different, there is an eerie similarity between last year's pressure mounted on Iraq to disarm, and this year's urging of Sudan to fix its internal crisis. In the weeks since the harrowing images of Darfur's persecuted black (Muslim) Africans fleeing their homes first started appearing in the global media, the Sudanese Government has come under intense pressure from various quarters—most notably the US and its European allies and the UN—to reign in the pro-Khartoum *Janjaweed*, which the Sudanese Government is accused of instigating against the rebels of Darfur. On July 30th, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1556 that threatened unspecified action against Khartoum, if it did not make substantial progress towards

system, in which use of force has assumed highly controversial and grave proportions. In 1999, the US was sweeping away what it considered Cold War residues in the Balkans, to establish its New World Order. A tired and broken Russia's displeasure at Nato action in its backyard proved futile in the face of America's newly accomplished unparalleled power. For the US, the world in 1999 contained no major security threats. Furthermore, the Balkans was familiar territory for the US-led Nato, unlike the distant Somalia where a US intervention in 1992-1994 had gone embarrassingly awry. Moreover, the then US President Bill Clinton did not want another criticism like the one he earned on his inability to dispense timely intervention in Rwanda (1994) because of the bitter lesson his government had learned in Somalia. In all these cases, the dilemma of

most volatile countries of the world that happen to be Muslim; a rising tide of anti-Americanism in most countries; and an ever-increasing crisis of credibility for the on-going US military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. A far cry from 1999, America is currently facing many enemies, and its every word and action is instantly put under intense scrutiny and measured with heavy doses of salts of suspicion. The superpower is reluctant no more, and here lies the problem.

The crisis in Darfur has yet again raised the dilemma of intervention vs state sovereignty, which underlines the fundamental question asked by all members of the international system: who or what has the legitimate authority to intervene in a sovereign state's internal affairs? Since the post-Nine Eleven wars on Afghanistan and Iraq by the US and its allies, this question has been taken up more

situation. Critics of the US are now citing Sudan's vast oil reserves as the 'real' reason for America's interest in the region. Sounds familiar, does it not? In an article published on Monday in *The Guardian* newspaper, British writer John Laughland has lashed out against what he perceives as "The mask of altruism disguising a colonial war", openly claiming that oil will be the driving factor for military intervention in Sudan. Indeed, the stakes are high in Sudan for the major powers, which explains the absence of consent on the question of intervention. *The Economist* notes: "There are several levers that could be used, but the great powers are not pulling in the same direction. An arms embargo would be a start, but Russia, which is selling fighter jets to Khartoum, is likely to oppose it. The threat of an oil embargo would be more potent. Unless the Sudanese Government makes a serious and

Somalia. It was under tremendous US and Saudi pressure that Sudan expelled Bin Laden in 1994, even though subsequent reports reveal that earlier on the Clinton Administration refused Sudan's offer of Bin Laden's extradition to its custody. Since then, Sudan has remained high on the US terror watch, also coming under US missile attack in 1998 for alleged production of chemical weapons. In September 2001, the UN lifted sanctions against Sudan, which were imposed in 1996 over accusations that it harboured suspects who attempted to kill Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. In November 2001, the US extended unilateral sanctions against Sudan for another year, citing its record on terrorism and rights violations.

What's in it for Pakistan?

At home, by far the most interesting aspect of the situation is

contrast to the question of Pakistani troops for Iraq, on which the government has yet to announce a final decision.

Several questions plague the mind when contemplating Pakistan's role in the Darfur equation. What's in it for Pakistan, prompting it to engage in hectic diplomacy in a distant country, when matters at home are quite a handful? Does the US want its Muslim frontline ally to level the field for American role in the region? Is Pakistan complimenting the economic interests of its old friend China in Sudan? Are the Arab governments relying on Pakistan to veer off Western interest from their backyard, because Iraq is already a handful?

Darfur's humanitarian crisis has grabbed the headlines and ignited calls for immediate action. But the power politics behind the crisis remains covered under the mist of state diplomacy.