

In Sudan, the route to peace is through negotiations

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The Cold War was a time of hot diplomacy. Because in Europe the great contest of the second half of the last century was deadlocked on the battlefield, it was fought largely at superpower summit meetings and lower-level arms control talks. The subject matter was technical and, barring an occasional breakthrough, progress was slow. But the issues were huge, and for that reason politicians and the press followed the negotiations closely.

Now the stage is reversed. A plethora of hot wars over the last decade has turned people cold on diplomacy. The Churchillian adage that jaw-jaw is better than war-war is forgotten in favour of the faulty notion that applying superior military power is the best way to handle stubborn political conflicts.

One reason is television, which increasingly sets the agenda for newspapers as well as governments. If there is no image there is no message, so political negotiations are condemned as inherently dull, if not irrelevant, compared to the visual drama of war. The other is the cult of impatience, caused by the new craze for humanitarian intervention and the excessive injection of morality into international disputes. If a conflict is projected as a struggle against evildoers, then there is not a moment to lose. Delay itself

becomes a form of moral appeasement and wickedness. When military action is crowned with rapid results and the bad guys' defeat, as in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, the illusion is created that a solution has been reached.

The current media-driven push for military intervention in Sudan's western province of Darfur has all the hallmarks of the run-up to the West's last three wars. The fact that none has yet produced stability or justice is overlooked.

The narrative in Darfur, which has been told repeatedly in recent weeks, is not new. Douglas Johnson's authoritative study, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, describes how war has been going on in Darfur at a low level among different groups of herdsman and farmers for two decades. Successive Arab-led governments in Khartoum took sides, using Janjaweed militias, designated in 1989 as popular defence forces, who targeted villagers, killed and displaced civilians, and burned crops while the divide between "Arabs" and "Blacks" was deliberately sharpened.

What has changed is the emergence of two ambitious rebel movements with political agendas, their decision to launch

surprise attacks on government garrisons, and Khartoum's over-reaction with the use of air power and helicopter gun ships. The government also gave a green light to the Janjaweed for widespread raids on villages that support the rebels. In spite of this disastrous escalation, a peace process has begun. Not many conflicts of this intensity have a channel for negotiations as well as international observers to try to keep them on track. Getting talks started while fighting is under way is usually a major hurdle.

In having a peace track Darfur is lucky, though one would not know it from most media commentaries, with their impatience for sanctions or military action. Virtually every report of last week's UN Security Council resolution, which gave Sudan 30 days to show progress in disarming the Janjaweed, avoided mention of a paragraph which made demands on the rebels too. It criticized their leaders' boycott of the latest peace talks. It urged them to stop their cease-fire violations and drop all preconditions for attending the next round of talks under African Union sponsorship.

Darfur is also lucky in that the gap between the parties is not as wide as in many con-

flicts. Neither rebel movement is calling for independence. This is not Kosovo or Chechnya. A model for the autonomy they want for their western region exists in the deal reached this year between Khartoum and the southern rebels. To expand that agreement to take in Darfur or forge one on the southern formula of decentralization and wealth-sharing ought not to be too hard.

Diplomats and experts on Sudan say the rebel movements are not clear who to designate as leaders, or how representative the current spokespeople are. Some hesitate to attend talks for fear of being exposed or denounced. Another problem is that the rebels may think they can get their way, in the present climate of anti-Khartoum moralizing, without compromise or long-term thinking. In any hostile intervention a key test is regional backing. On Kosovo, though there was no UN mandate for war, European governments took the initiative for military action. There was no comparable backing for the US-led wars on Afghanistan and Iraq from most of those countries' neighbors. Similarly in Darfur, the African Union has no interest in military interference against Khartoum's wishes, especially now that the government has agreed to an African cease-fire monitoring force.

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Civil wars in Africa

NATIONS around the world solemnly noted the 10th anniversary this spring of the Rwandan genocide in which some 800,000 people were slaughtered. In the midst of the commemorations, the Sudanese government was sponsoring and taking part in the killing of tens of thousands of its own citizens in its Darfur region.

Sudan is not the only country in the area plagued by civil war. Three nations in central Africa's Great Lakes region — Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) — have suffered ethnic conflicts for a decade. The week-end massacre of at least 160 Tutsis who fled Congo for a U.N. camp in neighbouring Burundi is the latest example, one that

threatens to reverse promising steps toward peace.

Thousands attended burials of the victims Monday near the massacre site, and the Burundi government said it would allow the establishment of a secure camp farther from the border. The vulnerability of the camp overrun Friday night should have been clear to the U.N. and, especially, to the government in Bujumbura, Burundi's capital.

A hard-line Hutu rebel group, the sole holdout from the process that brought a tentative peace to Burundi, claimed responsibility for the attack, which it said was aimed at Burundian soldiers and Congolese Tutsi militia hiding at the camp — a ludicrous claim considering that most of the vic-

tims were women and children killed with grenades, machetes or guns. Some survivors and Burundi officials said Hutu extremists based in Congo joined the rebel assailants.

The United Nations did not have its own soldiers protecting the camp, which — with others nearby — shelters perhaps 25,000 Congolese who have crossed the border since June. U.N. officials understand that locating camps farther from borders increases safety, but doing so is difficult because refugees seek to be close to their homes to cross back and forth when possible. The primary responsibility for safety rests with the host government, in this case Burundi.

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