

Africa
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Sudan - avoiding another dark stain in international history

As a former ambassador to Sudan, I can see through the double criteria used by the Khartoum government. The Darfuri people are entitled to have the same rights and integrity like all human beings. The Arab League and Jordan should stand against the atrocities committed to force Darfuri Muslims to be Arabised.

Some say it is a clash for power between Arab Muslims and African Muslims in Sudan's western province of Darfur. Others say the West, particularly the US, is aiming at the oil, gas and other hydrocarbon and mineral deposits in Sudan. Yet others see it as a Western plot to topple the government of Omar Hassan Al Bashir. Indeed, there are the conspiracy theory advocates who, ridiculously, think it is a Zionist Mossad plot to divide Sudan into four independent states and deny Egypt the water and strategic advantages it used to enjoy.

No matter what the reason, the reality is that hundreds of thousands are suffering, and it could indeed be the worst humanitarian crisis that the world has seen, as the UN describes it.

What has the world done about it? Yes, Sudan is under international pressure, and it should indeed be, given the magnitude of the crisis that is bound to generate many other crises. Governments have the responsibility to protect their own people, but in Sudan we see just the opposite. Notwithstanding its loud rejections and denials, we know that Khartoum has been backing and indeed even arming the Janjaweed militiamen who

have been massacring, Arabising and evicting Muslim African tribes from the Darfur province. The region was an Islamic sultanate with a people proud of their identity and a noble heritage. It was an independent seat of power, learning and trade before being annexed by the British to Sudan. The Darfurians pride themselves on never having been subjugated by the slave traders coming from Khartoum. The goal, as we could see from our perspective, is to terrify the tribes into leaving Darfur and quelling the region's demand for better treatment in terms of development and share of power in the central government.

It is obvious that the 18-month flare up in the 20-year-old Darfur rebellion owes itself to the process that led to a peace agreement between the Khartoum government and Christian and animist rebels in the south. The inhabitants of Darfur saw that the southerners were successful in securing international support and negotiating for themselves a better share of power at the centre, as well as obtaining an option to break away from Sudan after a referendum in a few years. The people of Darfur want a similar deal for themselves. They are backed by elements from the southern rebel movement. Obviously, the government in Khartoum believes that it should not allow the Darfur dissidents to succeed because it would eventually lead to a dilution of power of Arab Muslims in Khartoum and possibly the disintegration of the country, given that the Nubians of eastern Sudan are also getting rest-

less and could present their own demands supported by yet another revolt.

It is also clear that Khartoum believes that the United States is behind what it views as a conspiracy against the Muslim-led government in Sudan. It also sees that the US might not be adverse to the idea of dividing Sudan.

Sudanese officials have

producing countries.

Precious metals and minerals are another possibility.

It is against this backdrop that Sudan is trying to resist international power, but it is unlikely to succeed in warding off the inevitable - sitting down with the Darfur dissidents and working out a deal that would give the Darfur tribes autonomy.

Musa Keilani

M. F. Port

government to make much larger concessions to the Darfur dissidents than it has to if it were to make a deal today.

Khartoum's insistence on restoring order in Darfur through the African Union (AU) is unfounded, since the AU does not have that kind of clout to influence developments in Sudan that are of interest to the international community.

Sudanese Agriculture

in the province itself.

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On the other side, the rebel groups - the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudan Liberation Movement - are afraid that if they allow themselves to be disarmed, they would be stripping themselves of the means to defend themselves, given that the Janjaweed militia is not disarmed.

Sudan says there are moves to disarm the Janjaweed, but the Darfur rebels do not trust Khartoum. Again, there are also signs that the government might have created a monster in Darfur in the form of the Janjaweed, since elements in the militia are said to be resisting calls for them to surrender their weapons. Forgotten in the wrangling are the hundreds of thousands of people in Darfur who have suffered a lot and continue to suffer from the terror unleashed by the Janjaweed and the uncertainty of their future.

The first priority of the international community should be to help alleviate the suffering of the Darfurians and not to allow the politics of negotiations drag efforts to send relief and distribute them among the displaced in the region. At this juncture, the West should set aside its political agenda for Sudan and focus on the humanitarian aspect there. The failure to do so would be another dark stain in international history.

Sudanese

Agriculture Minister Majzoub

Al Khalifa Ahmed, who is head of the government delegation at the ongoing talks in the Nigerian capital Abuja, has declared that the UN deadline was never a serious point of consideration in Khartoum. He believes that continuing negotiations will give Sudan the screen it wants to achieve more in terms of undermining the Darfur dissident movement in the province itself. The UN, of course, realises that the Aug. 30 deadline offered Sudan just enough time to achieve tangible progress on solving the Darfur crisis. Settling the problem once and for all would take much more time and effort.

charged that the US wants to topple the regime and wants unfettered access to the country's oil and gas resources. What has been discovered of oil and gas in Sudan so far is not really on a scale that would warrant such intense international or American interest, but there is a possibility that the country holds unknown reserves of a size that dwarfs other African oil-

Khartoum is making a big mistake by insisting that it would not respect the Aug. 30 deadline set by the UN Security Council to end fighting in Darfur. Adopting such a position would only add to the pressure it is already under, since there is no doubt that the US would push for sanctions against the country and follow them up with much tougher action, to force the Sudanese

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