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A NATO Solution for Sudan's Genocide

By Kurt Bassuener and Eric A. Witte

The Sudanese genocide in Darfur is on a faster track than the diplomacy hoping to stop it.

True, the Aug. 31 United Nations Security Council resolution to replace the African Union's underpowered observer force in Darfur with a stronger U.N. mission of over 17,000 troops clearly worries the Sudanese regime. But its fear that the world may finally summon the will to intervene forcefully has led to Khartoum's initial decision to expel and now try to co-opt the AU's ineffectual force. The regime seems to bet that by wiping out rebels and accelerating the genocide this fall, it can preclude any intervention.

At the U.N. Security Council earlier this month, Secretary General Kofi Annan reported that Sudanese aircraft have renewed bombardment of civilians, and that Sudanese army regulars are on the march. The genocidaires' plan has been kicked into overdrive. Even an agreement to a meaningful U.N. force now may come too late.

But the West's current tactics—such as British Prime Minister Tony Blair's announcement two weeks ago that he would try to engineer an invitation from Khartoum—will never convince Sudan to allow a "permissive environment" for deploying the kind of international force that Sudanese leader Omar Bashir categorically rejects. His threats of jihad against intervening troops are clearly designed to spook a Western public already jittery about terrorism at home and hot conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The Security Council's insistence on walking through an open door rather than displaying the will to kick it down gives Sudan an effective veto over any force deployment. China and Russia, for reasons of oil, arms, and precedent would no doubt veto Security Council authorization of a deployment unless Sudan consents.

The only way Beijing, Moscow and Khartoum might change their minds is if the alternative is even less palatable: a force in which they have no say. Coercing the necessary Sudanese consent and convincing likely resisters on the Security Council to demur, as U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice hinted at Friday, is possible if the West moved outside the U.N. framework. NATO could rapidly alter the strategic and diplomatic equation by creating a no-fly zone and denying Sudanese control over Darfur's skies. It wouldn't be the first time for NATO to stop ethnic cleansing "unilaterally."

In 1999, NATO intervened in Kosovo to end Serbian atrocities without approval of the divided Security Council and thus paved the way for a U.N.-approved ground

force under NATO and a U.N. civilian mission. Later that year, New Zealand's foreign minister mooted intervention without U.N. approval in East Timor, prodding China and others to rethink their resistance to a strong U.N. force.

But who could lead such a NATO force? Boggled down in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. is unlikely to take charge. It is Europe and particularly France, recently more vocal than ever on Darfur, that hold the keys to meaningful international action. French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy said earlier this month that it was "essential" for Khartoum to accept the U.N. force and even alluded to a deployment of troops without Sudanese consent. "Do we go there, in spite of them?" Mr. Douste-Blazy said at a Paris news conference. "That's not on the table; nobody has asked the question like that. But it's a real question," he stressed. The answer must be a resounding yes.

Despite its commitment to lead the augmented U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon, France remains the best-positioned power to take the lead on Darfur, given its military bases in neighboring Chad. European NATO forces—acting through the alliance or as an EU-led Combined Joint Task Force availing itself of NATO assets, such as logistics and airborne battlefield management—could quickly establish a no-fly zone over Darfur and eastern Chad from French airfields there. This could immediately end Sudanese strafing of Darfuri villages and provide a foundation for deploying reinforcements to AU troops without unduly stretching NATO military resources. In so doing, Khartoum—denied control of its western airspace and with its ground forces as vulnerable as the civilians the regime has been attacking—would find it hard to continue resisting a U.N.-mandated ground force.

If, despite a no-fly zone, the Sudanese government still were to block the deployment of a robust U.N. force, NATO could up the ante and strike at Janjaweed and government forces that continue to attack civilians. It should also begin staging a heavily armed brigade in Chad as the core of a future U.N.-approved, Chapter VII peace enforcement mission.

The only thing that could secure Sudan's agreement to a U.N.-mandated force is a NATO force prepared to act without one.

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