

“Do Something About Darfur”: A Review of the Complexities

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A great many well-meaning people in the United States and elsewhere have long called upon their governments to “do something about Darfur,” citing the promise George W. Bush made to himself in the context of the earlier Ugandan slaughter, “Not on my watch.” Many, including the United States government, assert that what has occurred in Darfur is “genocide.” In this article, Professor Murphey admonishes that the facts and issues in Darfur are not nearly so simple as such a view thinks them to be. He sees the war in Darfur in the context of a long history of conflict in the Sudan and in Africa. The article will seek to be informative rather than exhortatory, leaving it to readers to form their own conclusions about what, if anything, can be done about “the situation in Darfur.”

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Sudan is geographically the largest country in Africa. It is bounded on the north by Egypt; on the northeast by the Red Sea; on the east by Ethiopia; on the south by Kenya, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; on the southwest by the Central African Republic; on the west by Chad; and on the northwest by Libya. It illustrates Sudan’s size that its western province, Darfur, is itself about the size of France.

The war that has raged, and then simmered with occasional flaring, in Darfur since early 2003 has attracted world attention, especially in the United States and Europe where there has been an active campaign among many well-meaning people to “do something about the genocide in Darfur.”

A brief overview of the war. Rebels against the Sudanese government in the capital of Khartoum are considered to have started the war in February 2003 when they overran cities in Darfur. (This is somewhat of an arbitrary designation of the beginning, however, since tribal conflict had long been going on, and in February of 2002 the rebels of what was then called the Darfur Liberation Front, which soon changed its name to the

Sudan Liberation Movement, had conducted a major campaign against government military installations and the government had counterattacked with a large-scale assault on the rebels in the Marrah Mountains.) In April 2003, rebel groups successfully attacked the government's garrison at El Fasher in north Darfur, seizing the airport there, and by mid-summer 2003 seemed to have things going well, winning 34 of 38 engagements. In May, the rebels killed some 500 government soldiers in a single battle. On August 1, they took the city of Kutum and shot most of the garrison.

The rebels' good fortunes came to an end, however, when the government struck back with its army and air power and when Arab militias known as "Janjaweed"¹ swept through non-Arab Darfurian villages. The most violent period in the war came in late 2003 and the next year, but there have been many attacks and counterattacks since then. By as early as September 2004, the United Nations set up some 147 camps for refugees fleeing into the countryside and often into Chad to the west. It is commonly reported that more than two million refugees subsist in the camps; and estimates of the number who have died, either from combat or disease or malnutrition, vary widely. The Government of Sudan says the number of dead is vastly overstated, but the United Nations estimates 450,000, while most of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are active in the region refer to a range between 200,000 and 400,000.

Over time, the rebel groups have split into several factions, causing the war to lose whatever coherence it may once have had. In October 2007, the *New York Times* reported "that the conflict has been transformed from a rebellion into a 'free-for-all among dozens of armed groups, with aid workers and peacekeepers increasingly in their sights.'" ²

The George W. Bush administration in the United States, and virtually all of the movement to "do something about Darfur," blames the war and its carnage on the Sudanese government.³ It is almost entirely against that

¹ As with most names of people and groups in the Sudan, the word "Janjaweed" is spelled in more than one way due to differences in the transliteration from Arabic. Throughout this article, we will use what we understand to be the most common way of spelling any given name. In quotations, however, we will use the spelling that was used by the author quoted.

² The *New York Times* report is cited in Valshnavi Chandrashekhar, "Attack on AU Peacekeepers in Darfur Hurts Aid," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 2, 2007.

³ As with so much that is debated about Darfur, the role of the U.S. government in opposing Khartoum is disputed. One source urging "action about Darfur" argues that the George W. Bush administration has actually been "loath to push Sudan too hard" because after

government in Khartoum that sanctions are imposed; and when calls are made for “boycotting the 2008 Olympics in Beijing” they are to put pressure on China, a major buyer of Sudanese oil, to apply leverage against Khartoum (and, more recently, to act with moderation toward Tibet).

We mention all of this by way of introduction. The information that is needed to judge the situation in Darfur is so extensive that it seems almost to form a seamless web. It will take considerable patience to spell it out a segment at a time. Anyone, however, who wants to avoid the all-too-common trap of jumping to conclusions (based on the sort of innocence that so frequently combines a lack of knowledge with an over-simplified picking of those who are good from those who are evil) will find all of the information indispensable. Those who do not want to be “disturbed by the facts” are warned to stop reading now. It won’t be the purpose of this article to persuade anybody of anything, but rather to spell out the details and allow readers to form their own conclusions.

A Note About About the Reliability of Sources

It’s appropriate that we should add early in this article that there seems to be some dissimulation, perhaps of a partisan origin, in the reporting about Darfur, making many of the facts suspect. An example: after 369 tons of food that was being provided to the refugees by the World Food Program were spirited away by truck hijackings in January 2008, the *Associated Press* reported that the Program “said it didn’t know who was behind the latest attacks, which it blamed on ‘bandits.’”⁴ 369 tons—it is hard to imagine that there was no indication of where all of that went.

We will quote frequently from Alexander de Waal, a prominent author about the Sudan who among other things wrote a study of the 1984-1985 famine in Darfur. In that study, he referred to “the disaster tourist... [who has] biases [that] serve not to hide poverty, but to exaggerate it.” Such people, he said, are “typically journalists in search of a story, relief workers trying to make an assessment of need, or politicians in search of an image that combines action and compassion.” The consequence was that the

the events of 9/11/2001 the government in Khartoum has provided intelligence information about suspected terrorists associated with Osama bin Laden. See the statement by “Voice of Witness Book Series” sponsored by McSweeney’s publishers.

⁴ Alfred de Montesquiou, “Truck Hijackings Imperil Darfur Food Aid,” *Associated Press*, January 23, 2008; to be found on the Web at <http://ap.google.com>

deaths from the famine were grossly overestimated, with a prediction that half a million would die within two months. In fact, de Waal says, about 20,000 died. It is reasonable to suppose that a similar skewing might occur (or, of course, may not) in a war situation.

In connection with the number of war dead, the *BBC News* has admonished that “with much of Darfur inaccessible to aid workers and researchers, calculating how many deaths there have been... is impossible.”⁵ Tony Lindsay at the Conflict Research Centre in the United Kingdom, who has written an extensive study of Darfur, suggests that there may be considerable exaggeration by the various tribes.⁶

The Sudan Since Independence: A History of Endless Conflict

The war in Darfur is part of a larger mosaic of conflict of long standing within the Sudan (and, in fact, within northeastern Africa—indeed, most all of Africa—in general). There is a certain unreality about seeing it just by itself, ignoring the larger cauldron of which it is a relatively small part.

Horrible events go back a long way. It is merely illustrative of them to note that in 1883 the 10,000-man Egyptian army was slaughtered by Mahdi forces at the Battle of Sheikan, and that this was reciprocated in 1898 when the British killed 10,000 Mahdis.⁷ One author refers to the “terrible months at the close of 1889,” when “the people had become so thin that they scarcely resembled human beings... ‘The dead lay in the streets in hundreds; and none could be found to bury them.’”⁸

In 1956, the Sudan became independent of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (under which it was actually Britain that administered the country after the termination of the Mahdist State at the end of the nineteenth century), although the actual transfer of power had occurred in January 1954. The country’s independence was part of the European powers’ overall relinquishment of their African colonies after World War II.

The First Sudanese Civil War. In 1955, soon before the formalities of

⁵ *BBC News*, August 1, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

⁶ Tony Lindsay, *Darfur: A Cultural Handbook*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, April 2007, p. 2; may be found on the Web at www.library.cornell.edu/africana/guides/darfur.html

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸ Francis M. Deng, *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1995), p. 51.

independence were completed, what is known as “the First Sudanese Civil War” began between the Government of Sudan and rebels in the southern part of the country. This war lasted until 1972, when the Addis Ababa Agreement granted the South broad autonomy in its own administrative region. Atrocities were committed on both sides, and it is said that “a pattern developed, sickeningly familiar, in which the civilian population was caught up in the heightening spiral of violence. Villages spared the torch by one side were burnt by the other.”⁹ Tens of thousand fled to refugee camps. (It is worth remembering the similarity of this to what has happened in Darfur.)

The Second Sudanese Civil War. The “Second Sudanese Civil War” started in 1983,¹⁰ again between the government in the north and rebels in the south. (One source says it started five years earlier, in 1978,¹¹ which illustrates how arbitrary it often is in the Sudanese context to assign a clear-cut starting date, when in fact there will have been simmering hostilities well before the more generally recognized date.) Although southern rebels felt the government guilty of serious provocations for which the blame would be on the government, the armed hostilities were started by the rebels, led by John Garang, who had been a colonel in the Sudanese army. “There were towns that had been cleared of Arabs, mass slaughters of Arab traders, their shops burned.”¹² The government in Khartoum struck back with a “strategy of total war.” The principal fighters on the side of the government were the “ *Murahaleen*,” armed horsemen from a variety of Arab tribes, including the *Beggara* from Darfur. They were similar to, but not identical with, the “*Janjaweed*” horsemen in the later war in Darfur. One author estimates 500,000 dead from military action;¹³ another author, perhaps taking into account the many deaths from disease and hunger, speaks of a much higher figure: a “bloody war which killed two million people, displaced another four million and razed southern Sudan to the

⁹ P. M. Holt and M. W. Daly, *The History of the Sudan: From the Coming of Islam to the Present Day*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), pp. 187-8.

¹⁰ J. Peter Pham, “South Sudan: Simmering Below the Surface,” *World Defense Review*, Oct. 11, 2007.

¹¹ Tony Lindsay, *Darfur: A Cultural Handbook*, op. cit.

¹² Dave Eggers, *What Is the What: Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (San Francisco: McSweeney’s, 2006), p. 65.

¹³ Lindsay, *Darfur: A Cultural Handbook*, op. cit.

ground.”¹⁴ One of the two U.S. ambassadors to the Sudan whom we will frequently quote wrote that “by 1998 two million people had died as a result of the war.”¹⁵ His estimate, though the number is the same, is obviously higher than the preceding one, since it was made six years before the war ended in late 2004. It is of some importance to understand that much of the fighting was between the rebel groups themselves: “This resulting war within the war had Garang’s Dinka rebels fighting Machar’s Nuer rebels. *So many tens of thousands were lost this way* (emphasis added)... The civil war became... a mess of tribal conflicts with no clear heroes and villains.”¹⁶

A formal peace agreement known as the “Comprehensive Peace Agreement” was signed in January 2005. The agreement provides for elections in 2009 for a Government of South Sudan. Then a plebiscite is to be held in 2011 to determine whether the southerners want to secede from the Sudan. New sources of friction have developed, however, and there is considerable potential for renewal of the conflict. One of the points in contention has to do with the Abyei and surrounding oil fields, which are located in the northern zone as the boundary was originally set by the British when they administered the country. An international commission has recently recommended the fields be shifted to the southern region by a resetting of the boundary, which has been in dispute.¹⁷

Even before the end of this Second Sudanese Civil War in 2005, the war had started in Darfur in western Sudan. (We have seen that it is commonly said to have started in early 2003.)

Other sources of conflict. Nor is this a complete recital of conflict within post-independence Sudan. Conflict has come from three additional sources, each important:

One of the realities of Sudanese life is that there have been more-or-less constant insurgencies *throughout* the Sudan. A book published in 1995 told how “outside the traditional southern heartland [where the Second Civil War was raging], regional movements in the Nuba area of southern

¹⁴ “A History of Darfur,” *New Internationalist*, June 2007; to be found on the Web at www.newint.org.

¹⁵ Donald Petterson, *Inside Sudan: Political Islam, Conflict, and Catastrophe* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), p. 187.

¹⁶ Eggers, *What Is the What*, op. cit., p. 314.

¹⁷ Alfred de Montesquiou, “Sudan Town Raises North-South Tensions,” *Associated Press*, January 1, 2008; to be found on the Web at <http://ap.google.com/article>

Kordofan, Darfur, and potentially in southern Blue Nile are threatening the central government with a widespread wave of rebellions by the marginalized non-Arab regions.”¹⁸ In May 2006, while the war in Darfur continued on, a report by *BBC News* said “there are insurgencies against the Khartoum government in every corner of Sudan, not just in the western region of Darfur; there are armed rebels in the east and in the north, and an only recently signed peace agreement in the south.” The correspondent adds that, although the government “has held the centre,” the rebels, taken as a whole, “see themselves as the ‘marginalised majority.’”¹⁹

It illustrates the widespread nature of the conflict to know that the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) involved in the Darfur war allied itself in 2004 with the Free Lions of the Rashaida tribe and the Beja Congress, both of them conducting a rebellion in the east. This was consistent with the JEM’s aspiration to win control over the government of Sudan as a whole.

The second additional area of conflict has been within the government itself. From what we have said so far, it might be easy to conclude that the “government in Khartoum” has been a monolith with which nobody can get along. It is not unreasonable to apply the usual schoolyard dictum that “if Butch fights with all the other boys, there must be something wrong with Butch.” But the reasoning is not nearly so compelling when we realize that during the slightly more than half a century of independence (and of war) there have been not just one government, but a series of governments. Sudan started with a parliamentary regime, which, torn by sectarian rivalries,²⁰ was overthrown after two years by a military coup. The country eventually went through three parliamentary governments, with intermittent military regimes. In 1969, a coup put Jaafar Numeiri in power. He was there for sixteen years, but in 1985 another coup replaced him with a civilian government. In 1989, however, one more coup installed the present regime of Omar Hassan al-Bashir and the National Islamic Front (NIF). We will see later that in 1999 a split within the NIF occurred that

¹⁸ Francis M. Deng, *War of Visions*, op cit., p. 13.

¹⁹ Mark Doyle, “Sudan’s Interlocking Wars,” *BBC News*, May 10, 2006; to be found on the Web at <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk>.

²⁰ P. M. Holt and M. W. Daly, *A History of the Sudan: From the Coming of Islam to the Present Day*, 5th ed. (Various cities: Longman, 2000), p. 146.

has fed into the war in Darfur and has produced a power-struggle that has made the war there much more intractable than it otherwise might be. Thus we see that, though two of the military regimes have stayed in power for several years, there has hardly been a “monolith.” There has been considerable conflict within Khartoum itself, and a variety of leadership in Khartoum has struggled with the various insurgencies. It would be a mistake to think the three parliamentary governments would be an exception; they were by no means immune to war, since it was continuous throughout their tenure. There has been no one “Butch.”

Third, conflict has involved several of the adjacent countries, which have often provided assistance, arms and sanctuary to assorted rebels. (Were it not for their involvement, it would be a mystery where the assorted rebels have obtained their munitions for a half-century of war.) In the 1970s and '80s, Libya's Colonel Gaddafi sought to implement his dream of “an Arab homeland across the Sahara and Sahel.”²¹ This contributed to Chad's long-standing conflict with Sudan. We are told that the pressure on Chad from Libyan expansionism “inevitably spilled over into western Darfur, exacerbating historical tensions between the non-Arab Fur and Zaghawa ethnic groups.”²² Conflict between Chad and Sudan has been incessant for many years, with raids on both sides. It is ironic, but illustrative, that in mid-March 2008 the presidents of the two countries signed a peace agreement on the very same day that “Chad's government issued a statement accusing Sudan of launching ‘several heavily armed columns’ against Chad” on the preceding day.²³ (The irony is compounded when we note that the two presidents had already signed a peace agreement on May 3, 2007.)

What we have just described had quite a direct bearing on Darfur in the late 1980s. A history of Darfur reports that “the use of Darfur by Libya's Colonel Qadafhi [the same person as the Gaddafi mentioned above] as a military base for his Islamist wars in Chad... sparked the Arab-Fur war (1987-9), in which thousands were killed and hundreds of Fur

²¹ Alex de Waal, “Who Are the Darfurians? Arab and African Identities, Violence and External Engagement,” *Justice Africa*, paper 061204, p. 11.

²² Lindsay, *Darfur: A Cultural Handbook*, op. cit., p. 34.

²³ Heidi Vogt, “Sudan, Chad Sign Peace Deal,” *Associated Press*, March 14, 2008; to be found on the Web at <http://ap.google.com>.

villages burned.”²⁴ [This will be our only mention of that war, but readers will want to be cognizant of it.]

Although Al Qaeda is not a country, it illustrates the role of outside involvement to notice that in September 2007 the Al Qaeda second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, denounced Sudan President Bashir (a/k/a al-Bashir) for “backtracking” on a pledge “to oppose the deployment of international troops to Darfur” when Bashir went along with the U.N. resolution for the creation of its intended 26,000-man force. *Reuters* says “Zawahiri accused Bashir of abandoning his Muslim brothers to appease the United States.” He “urged Sudanese Muslims... to fight” the U.N. peacekeeping force.²⁵ We don’t know whether the Justice and Equality Movement, derived at least in major part from the more radically Islamist faction of the National Islamic Front when it split in 1999, has been working with Al Qaeda, but that is hinted at by the fact that in February 2008 “the JEM warned the new U.N.-African Union peacekeeping force not to enter the area [western Darfur]” and warned that the peacekeeping troops “would be considered hostile and fair game.”²⁶

All of this helps to put the present war in Darfur in perspective. To those unfamiliar with Sudanese history, it is easy to believe that that war is a single conflict that started in 2003. Instead, it is part of a far more extensive mosaic.

Darfur and the Sudan as Part of a Much Wider Swath of Conflict

We have seen how the war in Darfur since 2003 must be understood as part of a long-standing and virtually ubiquitous conflict within all parts of the Sudan. Even that perception, however, falls far short of a complete grasp of the conflict-ridden context.

Although space won’t allow more than a cursory glance at the downward progression of sub-Saharan Africa in general since the countries received their independence after World War II, and we will need to content ourselves with a review only of the many intertribal wars in the countries that touch directly on the Sudan, it is relevant to be aware of the

²⁴ “Darfur—A History,” *New Internationalist*, June 2007; to be found on the Web at www.newint.org/features/2007/06/01/history

²⁵ *Reuters, UK*, “Qaeda’s Zawahiri Urges Attacks on Darfur Peacekeepers,” September 20, 2007; to be found on the Web at <http://uk.reuters.com/article>

²⁶ *The Wichita Eagle*, February 8, 2008.

broader sub-Saharan context. A commentary in the *Washington Post* in 2005 said that “despite billions of dollars in aid, Africa has gone backward since the 1970s on every measurable level.” Where has the aid money gone? “Much of the money vanishes in a fog of graft or neglect.”²⁷ Another 2005 news report told how “the AIDS pandemic... has infected some 25 million people in Africa.”²⁸

Conflict in the neighboring countries: The Central African Republic. An *allAfrica* news report in January 2008 said that “government troops and rebels... continue to clash despite ongoing talks of a peace agreement, and nearly 300,000 people had been driven from their homes... Even more worrying are the attacks by Coupeu de Route bandits, who continue to wreak havoc across the country’s northwest, burning and looting houses and kidnapping and killing civilians....”²⁹ *The Economist* reports in early 2008 that “the International Crisis Group... says that the CAR has dropped below the level even of a failed state. ‘It has become virtually a phantom state, lacking any meaningful institutional capacity at least since the fall of Emperor Bokassa in 1979,’ it says.”³⁰

It is amazing that, as just indicated, Jean-Bedel Bokassa’s regime provided a higher standard compared to what has followed. Historian Martin Meredith says “Bokassa’s career as dictator... combined not only extreme greed and personal violence but delusions of grandeur unsurpassed by any other African leader. His excesses included seventeen wives, a score of mistresses and an official brood of fifty-five children. He was prone to towering rages... and he also gained a reputation for cannibalism.” He had seized power in 1965 and held it until the French removed him in 1979. One of his sports was having men killed by lions and crocodiles kept in his gardens for that purpose.³¹

Uganda. In an article in late 2007, Fredrick Kisekka-Ntale of the Institute of African Studies told how the now twenty years of continuing intertribal warfare has resulted in an “estimated death toll [of] 300,000

²⁷ Commentary by the *Washington Post*, July 4, 2005.

²⁸ *The Wichita Eagle*, March 20, 2005.

²⁹ UN News Service, “Conflict Uproots 300,000, UN Reports,” *allAfrica*, January 17, 2008; to be found on the Web at www.allafrica.com

³⁰ “Beyond a Failed State,” *The Economist*, January 24, 2008; to be found on the Web at www.economist.com

³¹ Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), p. 224.

people....” “In this conflict, the northern tribes and to some extent the eastern Luo-speaking tribes,... have been engaged in a protracted conflict with the central government forces dominated by Baganda, Banyakole and Batoro, Bakiga and Banyoro.” Kisekka-Ntale says a former U.N. Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs has called it “one of the worst humanitarian disasters in the world, characterized by over 2.5 million people living in camps for internally displaced peoples.”³²

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (from 1971 to 1997 known as Zaire). The war in the DRC officially ended in 2003, but a news report in January 2008 says that “the rate at which people are dying... remains virtually unchanged,” and tells of a survey that has “estimated that 45,000 people continue to die every month... [mostly] from hunger and disease.”³³ 17,000 U.N. peacekeeping troops remained there in October 2007, “the largest U.N. peacekeeping force.”³⁴ (The force in Darfur is intended to grow to 26,000, but is far behind schedule.)

The “official end” may have come five years ago, but Bruce Dixon, in the *Black Agenda Report* in November 2007, said in the present tense that “in the Congo... local gangsters, mercenaries and warlords along with invading armies from Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola engage in slaughter, mass rape and regional depopulation on a scale that dwarfs anything happening in Sudan....” He cites 5 million as the total number of Congolese dead³⁵ (presumably in the warfare since 1997). Another report says that “in August 2007, a rebel general... led battles between his militia, made up of fellow Tutsis, and the Congolese Army. The fighting continued throughout the year, driving hundreds of thousands of people from their homes in eastern Congo....”³⁶

Part of the problem in the Congo has been that the Hutus who rampaged against the Tutsis in Uganda took refuge in camps in the Congo from which they continued their attacks. This led to a Tutsi counterattack in

³² Fredrick Kisekka-Ntale, “Roots of the Conflict in Northern Uganda,” *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Winter 2007, pp. 421-2.

³³ *The Wichita Eagle*, January 23, 2008.

³⁴ Jeffrey Gettleman, “Poison Pot of Obstacles Facing Peace in Darfur,” *International Herald Tribune*, October 17, 2007.

³⁵ Bruce Dixon, “Ten Reasons to Suspect ‘Save Darfur’ is a PR Scam,” *Black Agenda Report*, November 29, 2007; to be found on the Web at www.alternet.org

³⁶ *Information Please Database*; to be found on the Web at www.infoplease.com

1996 in which, Martin Meredith says, as many as 200,000 Hutu refugees may have been killed.³⁷

Kenya. Until the disputed election in December 2007, Kenya was something of a poster-boy country for Africa. The idyllic image came to an end with the intertribal warfare that followed the disputed 2007 election. The *New York Times* on January 8, 2008, reported that “the tribe [the Kikuyus] that has dominated business and politics in Kenya since independence in 1963 is now being chased off its land by machete-wielding mobs made up of members of other tribes.” The main tribes involved in the rebellion are the Kalenjin and the Luo (to which U.S. presidential candidate Barack Obama’s paternal family belongs). The *New York Times* reminds us that in 1992 “Kalenjin militias, stirred up by politicians who told them that the [Rift] valley was Kalenjin ancestral land, massacred hundreds of Kikuyus....” It quotes the chairman of the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights as saying that, since then, “emotions have been festering, resentments have been building and we sat around pretending ethnicity didn’t exist.”³⁸

Ethiopia. The travel author Paul Theroux observed that in 2003 the capital, Addis Ababa, “had a look of timeless decrepitude... dirty and falling apart, stinking horribly of unwashed people and sick animals, every wall reeking with urine.” He says there were 150,000 AIDS-related deaths in 2000.³⁹ Nor is Ethiopia free, even temporarily, of war: a news report in July 2007 said “the Ethiopian government is blockading emergency food aid and choking off trade to large parts of a remote region [the Ogaden region] in the eastern part of the country that is home to a rebel force [the Ogaden National Liberation Front], putting hundreds of thousands of people at risk of starvation.”⁴⁰

Chad. Martin Meredith says the ancient hostility between northern and southern Chadians caused by slave-taking in the south led to “a prolonged civil war” in the 1960s and ’70s after Chad received its independence from

³⁷ Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa*, op. cit., pp. 523-4.

³⁸ Jeffrey Gettleman, “Kenya Kikuyus, Long Dominant, Are Now Routed,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 2008.

³⁹ As cited in Dwight D. Murphey, “Eastern Africa as Seen Through the Eyes of a Realist,” *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Winter 2004, pp. 459-460.

⁴⁰ *The Wichita Eagle*, July 22, 2007.

France in 1960.⁴¹ According to the *New York Times*, “the last two leaders came to power in military putsches launched from Sudan.” The current president “shares clan links to some of the leaders of the Darfur rebellion.” For a number of reasons, “Chad and Sudan are locked in a tangle of conflicts....”⁴²

The Peoples and Cultures of the Sudan and Darfur

Complexity of the Sudan. A U.S. ambassador to the Sudan in the mid-1970s, Francis Deng, speaks of Sudan’s “enormously complicated internal configuration, fraught with diversities, tensions, contradictions, and violent confrontations.”⁴³ For his part, Ambassador Petterson tells us that “there are more than 450 ethnic groups throughout Sudan and according to the Sudan Institute of Languages, 132 languages are spoken there.”⁴⁴

Although the North speaks Arabic, the people of the South speak more than 80 of the 132 languages.⁴⁵ In the South, there are “hundreds of tribes, thousands of clans, millions of people.”⁴⁶ As we read this, we should notice that the complexity is magnified by the multiplicity not just of tribes, but of clans.

Northern Sudan and Darfur are overwhelmingly Islamic of the Sunni faith.⁴⁷

Complexity of Darfur. Arabic is the Sudan’s official language, but Darfur itself has 115 tribal dialects. “All told, there are close to 100 tribes and subtribes in Darfur,” according to Danna Harman of the *Christian Science Monitor* (who, by the way, tells us that “the Fur subtribes... fight endlessly among themselves.”)⁴⁸ The tribes in the fertile central belt are farmers, with the Fur sharing the belt with the non-Arab Masalit, Berti, Bargu, Bergid, Tama and Tunjur tribes. The far northern part of Darfur hosts the camel-nomadic Zaghawa and Bedeyat tribes (non-Arab), and the

⁴¹ Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa*, op. cit., pp. 348-9.

⁴² Lydia Polgreen, “Chad Shuts Down Capital as 1,000 Rebels March In,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2008.

⁴³ Deng, *War of Visions*, op. cit., p. 2.

⁴⁴ Petterson, *Inside Sudan*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁴⁵ Deng, *War of Visions*, op. cit., p. 27.

⁴⁶ Eggers, *What Is the What*, op. cit., p. 49.

⁴⁷ Donald Petterson, *Inside Sudan*, op. cit., p. 42.

⁴⁸ Danna Harman, “How Tragic Fuse was Lit in Darfur,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 30, 2004.

Mahajira, Irayqat, Mahamid and Beni Hussein tribes (Arab). Eastern and southern Darfur are populated by the Rezeigat, Habbaniya, Beni Halba, Taaisha and Maaliya peoples. The Baggara are also in the south, and are “a confederation of groups of cattle-herding Arabs” who “have a reputation for constantly being in conflict with the local farmers, including the Fur.”⁴⁹ We are told, in what seems like partial contradiction, however, that despite tension over grazing lands, the Beggara “had basically good relations” with the Dinka tribe, with some intermarriage.⁵⁰ “Darfur” means “land of the Fur,” but the Fur people have never constituted a majority in the province. The area in the south known as Dar Fertit means “the enslaveable peoples of the forest zone.”⁵¹

These facts about both the Sudan and Darfur suggest that, together, they possess much of what the contemporary Western ideology of multiculturalism considers ideal for a good society. Thus, Harvard’s Robert H. Bates, in his recent book on state failure in late 20th-century Africa, writes that “Africa is the continent most blessed with ethnic diversity.”⁵²

Racial Similarities, and yet Distinctions: “Arab” and “Black.” Throughout the Sudan, there is an almost universal black ethnicity, at the same time that the various tribes perceive themselves as being either “Arab” or “black African.” The Arab-black distinction is rather sharply held, even though an outsider would tend to see the peoples as virtually indistinguishable. Francis Deng, one of the U.S. ambassadors, writes that “virtually all ethnic groups in the country have their primary roots in the black African tribes. Evidence of this fact is still visible in all the tribes, including those in the North who identify themselves as Arabs.”⁵³ (In seeming contradiction to the point about ethnic similarity, however, Lydia Polgreen, writing in the *International Herald Tribune*, October 23, 2006, says that the Arab Sudanese have “tell-tale features,” which she describes as “an aquiline nose, fair complexion or fine, straight hair.”)

⁴⁹ Alexander de Waal, *Famine that Kills: Darfur, Sudan, 1984-1985* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 50.

⁵⁰ David Eggers, *What is the What*, op. cit., p. 58.

⁵¹ Alex de Waal, “Who are the Darfurians?,” op. cit., p. 2.

⁵² Robert H. Bates, *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-Century Africa* (Several cities: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 134.

⁵³ Deng, *War of Visions*, op. cit., p. 4.

For centuries, the main source of immigration into Darfur has been from the west. This has long led to a mixing of populations. Deng speaks of the “indigenous tribal groups” in the northern two-thirds of the Sudan, and says that “the dominant among these groups intermarried with incoming Arab traders and, over centuries,... heightened by the advent of Islam in the seventh century, produced a genetically mixed African-Arab racial and cultural hybrid.”⁵⁴ One author says that “for much of its history, the division between ‘Arab’ and ‘African’ has been blurred at best, with so much intermarriage that all Darfurians can claim mixed ancestry.”⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the various peoples perceive themselves as quite different from one another, and have developed ideologies of distinct ethnicity. Alex de Waal refers to “the complex history of identity formation” and says that the “identities have been radically and traumatically simplified, creating a polarized ‘Arab versus African’ dichotomy that is historically bogus, but disturbingly powerful.”⁵⁶ A strange example of this is the Beggara tribe in southern Darfur. They are said to “intimately interact and intermarry with the Dinka” [a distinctly black tribe], while at the same time “they are among the most chauvinistic about their Arabism and racially bigoted against their more African neighbors to the south.”⁵⁷

Those who call themselves Arabs believe they have lighter skin and are far more civilized than those they consider black Africans. Deng says “the northern Sudanese see themselves as Arabs and deny the strongly African element in their skin color and physical features. They associate these features with the negroid race and see it as the mother of slaves, inferior and demeaned.” He goes on to say that “most northern groups who claim genealogical links with Arab ancestry believe they are racially and culturally Arab, complemented by Islam.”⁵⁸ They identify closely with Islam, the Arabic language, Arab “supremacist ideology,” and the international pan-Arabist impulse. The dichotomy between “Arab” aggressors and “black African” victims painted by outside activists and the

⁵⁴ Deng, *War of Visions*, op. cit., p. 2.

⁵⁵ “Darfur—A History,” *New Internationalist*, June 2007.

⁵⁶ Alex de Waal, “Who are the Darfurians?” op. cit., p. 10.

⁵⁷ Francis M. Deng, *War of Visions*, op. cit., p. 401.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 3.

media, and the insistence by the international media and the United States government that the Arabs have been committing genocide, have heightened this perception of an ethnic gulf, further polarizing the peoples of the Sudan and Darfur, “cementing identities in a Manichean mold,” according to de Waal.⁵⁹

For their part, the acknowledged “black Africans” of the south, though having little in common other than their shared distrust for the “Arabs,” just as stridently assert their “blackness” and identity as “Africans.” They feel themselves part of the more general “Africanist” movement within sub-Saharan Africa. Deng tells us that “to the southern Sudanese, as indeed to most black Africans, Africanism has acquired a dimension that has racial, cultural, and national connotations.”⁶⁰

Their polarity *vis a vis* the North is accentuated, of course, by their memory of centuries of Arab slave-raiding, including that which has occurred quite recently. El Fasher in Darfur was once one of the main stops on the north-south slave route, and during the early nineteenth century the world’s largest slave market was in Khartoum.⁶¹ The British effort to abolish slavery during the second half of the nineteenth century is said to have “met with minimal success and sometimes with dismal failure.”⁶² The U.S. ambassador Petterson, writing in 1999 and citing an Embassy report, says “the practice of seizing women and children and using them as slaves was nothing new...” and that “now... slave taking seemed to be increasing [in the context of the Second Sudanese Civil War in the South], mostly in *Murahileen* raids on Dinka villages.”⁶³

The Dinka, a group of tribes in southern Sudan, are pronouncedly “black African.” Historically, they have been in isolation, with a restricted gene pool. Speaking of the southern Sudan in general, David Eggers, in *What is the What*, says that “we are by any estimation at least a few hundred years behind the industrialized world.” He tells us that “there are few cars in southern Sudan. You can travel hundreds of miles without seeing a vehicle of any kind. There are only a handful of paved roads.” The homes

⁵⁹ Alex de Waal, “Who are the Darfurians?,” *op. cit.*, p. 13, 14.

⁶⁰ Deng, *War of Visions*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁶¹ Lindsay, *Darfur: A Cultural Handbook*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁶² Deng, *War of Visions*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁶³ Petterson, *Inside Sudan*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

are built of grass and dirt. The homes have had no plumbing. When they enter manhood at about age thirteen, the males are “given scars across their foreheads.”⁶⁴ All of this suggests that the difference between North and South, even if not consisting of sharp ethnic difference, is likely one of differing levels of civilization.

The cultures. It is interesting that tribes, rather than being monolithic, are composed of sections and sub-sections. There is a variety of ways Darfuris live: in villages, nomadic societies, “homestead societies of cultivators,” urban centers, and family groups. The herders are closely attached to tribes, but the villages center around land use, as well as being Islamic religious centers. Hostility has long been commonplace within Darfur: the nomads are said to hold the villagers in contempt and to rob them freely; and “everybody” dislikes those who have gone to the cities, “turning their back on rural customs.”

So far as education and the arts are concerned, the principal sources of knowledge are the Koran and Shari’a (Islamic law). About the only written materials are religious tracts and chronologies, although the oral literary traditions are strong. There is almost no music or dance, few radios, no television; and there have been no movies since 1989.

Women and family. Arranged-marriage between families is the norm, with Muslim men being allowed four wives, and non-Muslims any number. Each wife has “her own establishment.” Divorce is common among both religious groups. Among Arabs, marriage is most desired with paternal cousins. Even after marriage, the sexes are hardly companionable, since men almost entirely consort with other men, and women with the other women and the children. Indeed, the women eat after the men, and take no part in festivities. De Waal tells us that the “household division of labor often means that the husband makes most of the decisions and the wife does most of the manual work.”⁶⁵ This is consistent with the Darfurian men’s general contempt for manual labor, which they associate with women and slaves. Women’s role is in the household, which they dominate, and in the raising of the children.

Sudanese in the cities have moved away from female circumcision, but

⁶⁴ David Eggers, *What is the What*, op. cit., pp. 21, 51, 55, 404.

⁶⁵ Alexander de Waal, *Famine that Kills*, op. cit., p. 49.

that practice increased within Darfur in the 1970s and '80s. De Waal sums things up: "The Darfurian Sudanised woman is (ideally) circumcised, secluded at home, economically dependent on her husband, meek in her behavior, and dressed in the thoub."⁶⁶

Superstitions. Much superstition is mixed with Islamic belief. Almost all illness is attributed to witchcraft, which leads to the widespread use of faith healers, sorcerers and witch doctors. The women's "Zar cults" invoke ceremonies to suppress demons and angry spirits. This is akin to other ceremonies designed to call on the help of regions' "guardian spirits." Magical figures are used both as amulets and, in the form of human figures, to bury or burn, as in Voodoo. Throughout the Sudan, the "evil eye" is much feared. Unsuccessful rainmakers were not long ago given the death penalty.

Rapid increase in population. At a meeting of the United Nations' Human Rights Council in December 2006, the Council was told that "in 1990, the National Population Committee and the Department of Statistics put Sudan's birthrate at 50 births per 1,000, for a rate of increase of 3.1 percent per year. This compares with the average for developing countries of 2.1 percent per annum, and makes Sudan's population one of the fastest growing in the world. Darfur is no exception to the rest of Sudan; its population has doubled since 1980."⁶⁷

It is worth noting about population figures, however, as well as about all other data about Darfur, that Alexander de Waal has observed that every statistic about Darfur "is almost certainly wrong." Speaking of the Sudan in general, he says that "historical estimates of the population of Sudan are considered unreliable; modern estimates are also dubious." The problem is that the population estimates are the result of negotiations between government officials and local sheikhs.⁶⁸

Famine, conflict and anarchy that preceded the 2003 war. It should not be supposed that Darfur was peaceable and doing well prior to the outbreak of the current war in 2003, but was knocked out of that benign condition by the war. In his *Cultural Handbook* on Darfur, Tony Lindsay

⁶⁶ Alex de Waal, "Who are the Darfurians?," op. cit., p. 9.

⁶⁷ Statement by Roy Brown, "Darfur: the Population Dimension," before the U.N. Human Rights Council, December 12, 2006; to be found on the Web at www.ihcu.org.

⁶⁸ Alexander de Waal, *Famine that Kills*, op. cit., p. 4.

tells how there has been a near-famine ever since the deep famine of 1984. This has resulted in an environmental disaster that the Government of Sudan hasn't been able to control. It is significant that “by the early 1990s, much of Darfur was lawless and in a state of anarchy.”⁶⁹ De Waal informs us that “the first major conflict in Darfur in recent times occurred in 1987-9.” We shouldn't overlook the fact that this “had many elements that prefigure today's war, not the least the fact that the major protagonists were Fur militia and Abbala Arab fighters known as ‘Janjawiid.’”⁷⁰

Causes of the 2003 (to-Present) War in Darfur

To realize, as we must, that the causes of the war are many and complex flies in the face of the Manichaeian oversimplification that informs the vast “do something about Darfur” movement. An African author has recently commented on a major failing in the conventional wisdom that is so commonly arrived at (on a great many subjects) in the United States and Europe: “Journalism, I believe, gives us a simple moral world, where a group of perpetrators face a group of victims, but where neither history nor motivation is thinkable because both are outside history and context.”⁷¹ It is precisely to provide that history and context that we are devoting so much attention to them here.

Why no specific cause should be given much weight. We have seen how interminable warfare between governments and tribes, and among tribes themselves, has been characteristic of all the surrounding sub-Saharan nations since they gained their independence. Each of the conflicts may be assigned its own putative causes, which vary from one region to another. It would seem foolish to think that any one of these assigned causes is definitive for a given conflict, when it is likely that the carnage would go on even if that cause were totally absent. For example, one of the causes, as we will see, cited for the war in Darfur is that the Islamic government in Khartoum has sought to impose *shari'a* (Islamic law) on the population in general. But what, then, is to explain the warfare in so many other places where that is not a factor at all?

In the context of war within all of northeast Africa, there is

⁶⁹ Tony Lindsay, *Darfur: A Cultural Handbook*, op. cit., p. 34.

⁷⁰ Alex de Waal, “Who are the Darfurians?,” op. cit., p. 8.

⁷¹ Alphayo Otieno, “Sudan: Media Must Change Tack on Darfur,” *The Nation (Nairobi)*, January 14, 2008; to be found of the Web at <http://allafrica.com>

considerable justification for the view that the whole region suffers from a chaotic scramble. We see this in the history of Darfur and the Sudan. In 1881, a certain Muhammad Ahmad had informed “the notables of the Sudan that he was the Expected Mahdi, the divine leader chosen by God at the end of time to fill the earth with justice and equity.”⁷² This led to the Mahdist State that governed Sudan from 1881 to 1898. Francis Deng tells us that the Mahdist State, though providing the initial impulse toward Sudanese independence, “generated internal divisions, intertribal warfare, and a general turmoil from which the country suffered much *and has never fully recovered.*” [emphasis added].⁷³ Nearer to the present day, we are told that “the last intertribal conference met in 1989, but its recommendations were never implemented. Year by year, law and order has broken down....” Alexander de Waal goes on to say that “even before the insurrection, Darfur was a province in arms. Every village or nomadic clan possessed automatic weapons—a necessity given that there has been no effective police force there for the past 20 years.” He adds that “since 1987 there have been recurrent clashes between the Arab militias and village self-defence groups. Their roots were local conflicts over land and water, especially in the wake of droughts, made worse by the absence of an effective police force....”⁷⁴ Another commentator says “though often oversimplified, the situation in Darfur has become a chaotic free-for-all with many chaotic pieces.”⁷⁵

Population, drought, desertification, migration. Closely related to this point about endemic chaos is an awareness that certain long-term demographic, geographical and climatic factors create a context that is almost certainly bound to create conflict. We have seen how population (as best anyone knows) has doubled in Darfur since 1980, with the population of the Sudan growing at a pace faster than any in the world. Drought has been a factor for two centuries: in his book on famine in Darfur, de Waal says that “climatologists have agreed that since the start of the nineteenth century each half century has on average been drier than the preceding

⁷² Holt, Daly, *The History of the Sudan*, 3rd edition, op. cit., p. 86.

⁷³ Francis Deng, *War of Visions*, op. cit., p. 51.

⁷⁴ Alex de Waal, “Darfur’s Deep Grievances Defy All Hopes for an Easy Solution,” *Guardian Unlimited*, July 25, 2004; to be found on the Web at www.guardian.co.uk

⁷⁵ Jeffrey Gettleman, “Poison Pot of Obstacles Facing Peace in Darfur,” *International Herald Tribune*, October 17, 2007; to be found on the Web at <http://www.iht.com>

one.” This has led to advancing “desertification” and a fall in agricultural yields.⁷⁶ Accordingly, Ban Ki-Moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations, writes of “a conflict that grew at least in part from desertification, ecological degradation and a scarcity of resources, foremost among them water.”⁷⁷ The competition for productive land is explained by Zachary Ochieng in the *East African—News*: “Historically, Arab nomadic groups migrated south seasonally... before returning to their own lands. As drought and desertification made their territory less sustainable, the Arabs stopped returning to the north, remaining instead on the southern land.”⁷⁸ (We should keep in mind, of course, that these factors, other perhaps than increasing population, are not in play in several of the other regional conflicts. Thus, although they are no doubt contributing factors, it is likely that intertribal conflict would exist without them.)

Despite all that has just been said, it shouldn’t be thought that the Sudan lacks agricultural potential. As with so much of the desperation in Africa, the misery is largely man-made and occurs in the presence of vast resources. In their history of the Sudan, Holt and Daly report that “in 1976 only seventeen million acres of *an estimated two hundred million acres* of cultivable land were actually under the plough. Most of this enormous acreage requires no artificial irrigation.”⁷⁹(emphasis added; note also that the drought and desertification of which we have spoken has not affected this land, which is said not to need irrigation). U. S. ambassador Petterson says that “Sudan’s agricultural potential... had never been realized, largely because of mismanagement by the various Sudanese governments.”⁸⁰

Is the war one of Islamic, Arab aggression by the Government of Sudan?

That part of the “international community” that follows the lead of the United States has long blamed the war on the government in Khartoum, calling for sanctions and other punitive measures. In agreement with this, a journalist writing for an opposition newspaper, *The Sudan Tribune*, argues that “we have a Darfur crisis because the ruling National Islamic Front

⁷⁶ Alexander de Waal, *Famine that Kills*, op. cit., pp. 84, 105.

⁷⁷ Ban Ki-Moon, op-ed column, *The Wichita Eagle*, September 18, 2007.

⁷⁸ Zachary Ochieng, “Rebel Factions Thick on the Ground as Hybrid Force Deploys,” *The East Africa—News*, January 27, 2008; to be found on the Web at www.nationmedia.com/estafrican

⁷⁹ P. M. Holt and M. W. Daly, *The History of the Sudan*, op. cit., p. 210.

⁸⁰ Donald Petterson, *Inside Sudan*, op. cit., p. 5.

exploited the traditional conflicts between the farmers and the herders in order to change the geopolitics and the demographics in Darfur.”⁸¹

The impression that such a drive by Khartoum would be to force Islam onto a recalcitrant population doesn't fit the case of Darfur. The First and Second Sudanese Civil Wars were between the various central governments that have held office since independence and rebels in the South. The South is religiously partly Christian and partly animist, so a conflict with the Islamic North over religion at least in part fit that situation. Darfur, however, “is home to some of Sudan's most devout Muslims,” and the fighting has not been between Muslims and non-Muslims, but among Muslims. Often an attack on a town is precisely against “the town's mosque—usually the largest structure in town.”⁸² Indeed, “Islam was a state cult in Dar Fur from the 17th century.”⁸³

In assessing whether Khartoum's drive would be to champion “Arab” over “black African,” it is worth recalling what we saw earlier about that distinction, which instead of being truly ethnic is more a matter of “ethnicity-embracing ideology.” Sudanese society does involve a feeling of supremacy by those who define themselves as “Arabs” and of solidarity (and also of superiority⁸⁴) by “black Africans.” But William Reed, the president and CEO of *Black Press International*, sees the “Arab vs. black African” explanation as of relatively little consequence when he says: “The main division in Darfur is economic: between migratory herders and sedentary farmers. The vast majority of all the people of Darfur are Muslims and all are Black. Recognizing and explaining the complicated economic and political issues there does not make for good propaganda; instead it is more convenient to portray the struggle as one of genocidal ‘Arabs’ against defenseless ‘Africans.’”⁸⁵ (It is worth noticing his mention of the charge of “genocidal ‘Arabs.’” It is the Arab-vs.-black-African image that most lends itself to the supposition that “genocide” is at work.

⁸¹ Wasil Ali, “Wake Up Mr. Ban Ki-Moon! Your Darfur Plan is Falling Apart,” *Sudan Tribune*, November 12, 2007; to be found on the Web at www.sudantribune.com

⁸² Kou Kou Angarana, “5 Truths About Darfur,” *Washington Post*, April 23, 2006; to be found on the Web at www.washingtonpost.com

⁸³ Alex de Waal, “Who Are the Darfurians?,” *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁸⁴ David Eggers, *What is the What*, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

⁸⁵ William Reed, “Perspectives: Take Another Look at the ‘Save Darfur’ Crowd,” *FinalCall.com News*, January 4, 2008; to be found on the Web at www.finalcall.com

We will discuss the “genocide” idea later.) It is significant, as de Waal tells us, that “the largest and most influential of Darfur’s Arabs are not involved, including the Baggara Rizeigat, the Habbaniya, the Maaliya and most of the Taaisha.”⁸⁶ He, too, debunks the popular image: “The depiction of ‘Arabs’ killing ‘Africans’ in Darfur conjures up, in the mind of a non-Sudanese (including many people in sub-Saharan Africa), a picture of bands of light-skinned Arabs marauding among villages of peaceable black-skinned people....” He says the presumed dichotomy has served the rebels well in eliciting support; and, ironically, that the labels are also “tactically useful” to the government, which is able to cite the concocted image as yet another “attempt by the west (and in particular the U.S.) to demonize the Arab world.”⁸⁷

It belies the image of aggressor to know that the government of President Bashir has shown a far greater willingness to end the war than have most of the rebel factions. The peace agreement reached with one rebel group in May 2006 called for a ceasefire, a transitional regional government in Darfur, a vote of the people in 2010 on whether to consolidate Darfur’s three provinces into one unit to give Darfur more political weight, and the expenditure by the government of considerable sums for reconstruction in Darfur and to provide relief to those who have suffered from the war.⁸⁸ The war continued with the other rebel groups, and in mid-2007 President Bashir made another call for an end to the war. This led to the U.N. and the A.U. to invite the rebel groups to talks in Arusha, Tanzania.⁸⁹ The talks proved unproductive when one of the main rebel factions didn’t attend.⁹⁰

The complaint of “marginalization.” A thread that runs through much of the conflict in northeastern Africa is that some tribes are ignored and “marginalized” by dominant tribes. One of the complaints by the rebelling tribes in northern Uganda is that they have been treated with “national

⁸⁶ Alex de Waal, “Who are the Darfurians?,” op. cit., p. 11.

⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 12, 13.

⁸⁸ *BBC News*, “Sudan’s Interlocking Wars,” op. cit.; *USA Today*, “Darfur Rebels Hold Out for Better Deal,” May 2, 2006.

⁸⁹ *BuaNews (Tshwane)*, “Darfur Attacks Hamper Relief Efforts,” *allAfrica.com*, July 26, 2007.

⁹⁰ *VOA News*, “UN, AU Meet on Peace Talks for Darfur,” August 4, 2007; to be found on the Web at www.voanews.com

indifference and limited government support by the southern Bantu-dominated government.”⁹¹ And yet, the reverse opposite charge is also made in other situations: that the more powerful tribes are guilty of “domination” over the less powerful. Francis Deng explains about the Second Sudanese Civil War that pitted the South against the North: “It is the political domination of the North and the imposition of its racial, cultural, linguistic, and religious identity on the whole country that the South resents and uncompromisingly opposes.”⁹² To avoid either charge, a government must be neither indifferent nor dominating.

It is the charge of marginalization that is most often heard in Darfur. A *BBC* correspondent explains: “The long-running Darfur insurgency exploded into rebellion in 2003 partly because the Darfurian groups thought the agreement to end the north-south war... was ignoring their own perceived marginalisation in Darfur.”⁹³ Francis Deng quotes a Tim Niblock about how this feeling of neglect has affected much of the Sudan: “To much of the population in the less developed fringe of the Sudan... the Sudanese state as it emerged at independence seemed a distant and alien entity, just as it did in the colonial era. The peoples of southern Sudan, and most of those in western and eastern Sudan, has little access to the benefits which the state bestowed....”⁹⁴

The war in Darfur has been in part a war between Sudan and Chad. A report in *allAfrica.com* in April 2006 told how “Chad has accused Sudan of backing the [Chadian] rebels and has broken off diplomatic relations, with President Deby [of Chad] vowing that he was going to expel the over 200,000 Darfurian refugees that have lived in Chad since violence escalated in Darfur in 2003.” It added that “Sudan denies the claim and has repeated an earlier accusation that the Chadian government is sponsoring the Darfuri rebels.”⁹⁵

Highly significant, but commonly overlooked: that the war in Darfur has been in part a war between two factions of the National Islamic Front for

⁹¹ Fredrick Kisekka-Ntale, “Roots of the Conflict in Northern Uganda,” op. cit., p. 422.

⁹² Francis Deng, *War of Visions*, op. cit., p. 6.

⁹³ Mark Doyle, “Sudan’s Interlocking Wars,” *BBC News*, May 10, 2006; to be found on the Web at <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk>

⁹⁴ Quoted in Francis Deng, *War of Visions*, op. cit., p. 133.

⁹⁵ Elkanah Chawai, “Re-Emergence of Crises in Chad,” *Daily Trust* (Abuja), April 17, 2006; to be found on the Web at <http://allafrica.com>

control of the Sudan. Alex de Waal tells us that “the Islamist movement [in the Sudan] split in 1999,” at which time “most Darfurian Islamists went into opposition.” The upshot is that “*the Darfur war is, in a significant way, a fight over the ruins of the Sudanese Islamist movement...*”⁹⁶(emphasis added). Writing in the *Washington Post*, Kou Kou Angarana of Chad has said that “although analysts have emphasized the racial and ethnic aspects of the conflict in Darfur, a long-running political battle between Sudanese President Omar Hassan Bashir and radical Islamic cleric Hassan al-Turabi may be more relevant.” He says that “before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, Turabi often referred to Osama bin Laden as a hero. More recently, the United Nations and human rights experts have accused Turabi of backing one of Darfur’s key rebel groups, the Justice and Equality Movement [JEM], in which some of his top former students are leaders.” Angarana quotes a Sudanese human rights lawyer as saying “Darfur is simply the battlefield for a power struggle over Khartoum... That’s why the government hit back so hard. They saw Turabi’s hand, and they want to stay in control of Sudan at any cost.”⁹⁷ For his part, Turabi has denied a connection with JEM.

De Waal even relates the Islamist split to the mobilization of the Janjaweed, the horsemen who took the war to so many Darfurian villages. An airforce general, who was himself a Darfurian from the Abbala Rizeigat tribe, created a Popular Defence Force, and “thus was created a set of militias popularly known as ‘Janjawiid.’”

A difficult thing to understand about the war is why the United States government, under the George W. Bush administration, has so long taken a highly partisan view of the war that has blamed the Bashir government in Khartoum and largely exonerated the rebel factions that have included the JEM which is derived from the radical Turabi Islamist faction.⁹⁸ One would think that it would precisely be the Turabi part of Islamism that the

⁹⁶ Alex de Waal, “Who are the Darfurians?,” op. cit., p. 6.

⁹⁷ Kou Kou Angarana, “5 Truths About Darfur,” op. cit.

⁹⁸ It should be noted that the United States has on occasion brought pressure on the rebels, as well. In early 2007 it sought sanctions against Khalil Ibrahim, the leader of the JEM rebels. “The group voiced outrage that Ibrahim was targeted after repeatedly meeting with U.S. officials to find a way out of the conflict.” A U.S. embassy representative answered that “meetings notwithstanding... the U.S. government regards them as obstructing the peace process.” Alfred de Montesquiou, “Sudan: U.S. Sanctions Over Darfur Unfair,” *Associated Press*, May 29, 2007.

U.S. would be most anxious to see defeated. Despite the government's entry into a peace agreement in May 2006 which was not joined in by the JEM, the United States a year later announced "fresh sanctions targeting Sudanese companies and individuals," and pushed for even broader U.N. sanctions against Khartoum.⁹⁹

The attitude of the Bush administration, Britain and France is well illustrated by the following example: On October 3, 2007, it was reported that "a force of 1,000 Darfuri rebels assaulted an African Union Peacekeeping base while the men were sitting down to dinner, killing 10 and looting the camp." The U.N. Security Council condemned the attack in a statement watered down by the efforts of the three powers. "The reason for the Western reluctance to lay the blame on the doorstep of the rebels," the report says, "is that the two major rebel factions—the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)—are opposed to the government in Khartoum."¹⁰⁰

This same skewing is evident in the anti-Khartoum campaign of the international movement that has crusaded for action to "save Darfur from genocide." That movement, which has largely been sponsored by Christian Conservative, Jewish, and neo-liberal groups¹⁰¹ and has become one of the many feel-good enthusiasms that so much prevail in American and European public opinion, has also sided with the rebels and against the Bashir government.

The Parties to the War in Darfur

The central government in Khartoum. The National Islamic Front came to power in 1989 when a military coup overthrew the third parliamentary regime. It is perhaps relevant, in light of the government's troubles all over the Sudan, that the NIF elite "is drawn from a relatively small area around the capital."¹⁰² In 1989, the NIF was "headed by Hasan al-Turabi," with Bashir being among the army officers who allied

⁹⁹ *BBC News*, "Q&A: Sudan's Darfur Conflict," July 28, 2007; and Alfred de Montesquiou, "Sudan: U.S. Sanctions Over Darfur Unfair," *Houston Chronicle*, May 29, 2007, to be found on the Web at www.chron.com

¹⁰⁰ Blogspot "Darfur," *The Belmont Club: Darfur*, October 3, 2007; to be found on the Web at <http://fallbackbelmont.blogspot.com/2007/10/darfur.html>

¹⁰¹ As per William Reed, "Take Another Look...," *op. cit.*; and statement by a former director of the Mid-Kansas Jewish Federation in the *Wichita Eagle*, November 20, 2007.

¹⁰² Mark Doyle, "Sudan's Interlocking Wars," *op. cit.*

themselves with the NIF.¹⁰³ The country was ruled by a Revolutionary Command Council until it made Bashir president in 1993.¹⁰⁴ Despite Bashir’s position, Holt and Daly in their history of Sudan say that “al-Turabi, leader of the NIF, remained the *eminence grise* of the regime, occupying before 1996 no important post but unquestionably in control of the party faithful.”¹⁰⁵ Bashir and al-Turabi were political rivals, and we have seen that the Islamist movement split in 1999.¹⁰⁶ At one point, until he was released in June 2005, al-Turabi was imprisoned in Kober prison in Khartoum, and he has long been under house arrest.

The Janjaweed (also, Janjawiid, Janjawid, Janjawed, Jingaweit, Jinjaweed and Janjaweit). We just saw how an airforce general from Darfur was among those who mobilized the Janjaweed after the split among the Islamists in 1999. The name “translates loosely as devils on horseback.”¹⁰⁷ Although the government says it has no connection with the Janjaweed, and even calls them “thieves and gangsters,”¹⁰⁸ these militias have been the principal force on the government’s side in the war. They have mainly come from the Abbala Rizeigat tribe, but de Waal tells us that Col. Gadaffi in Libya had, “recruited Chadian Arabs, Darfurians and west African Tuaregs to spearhead his invasion of Chad in the 1980s,” and that “many Janjaweed hail from the Chadian Arab groups mobilised during those days.” Writing in mid-2004, he reminded us that “most of Darfur’s Arabs remain uninvolved in the conflict.”¹⁰⁹

In public perception, the Janjaweed are almost universally seen as the demons of the war, so it is interesting to read what one of the main Janjaweed leaders (now opposing the government) has said about his reasons for going to war: “He said he took up arms against the rebels to defend his tribe after thousands of camels were stolen and scores of his

¹⁰³ Donald Petterson, *Inside Sudan*, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁰⁴ “Profile: Sudan’s President Bashir,” *BBC News*, November 25, 2003; to be found on the Web at <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

¹⁰⁵ Holt and Daly, *A History of the Sudan*, 5th ed., op. cit., p. 188.

¹⁰⁶ Although we have been speaking in terms of a split in 1999, the sources variously state the split as occurring in 1999, 2000 and 2001. See, for the 2001 date, “Sudan Timeline,” http://crawford.dk/africa/sudan_timeline.html

¹⁰⁷ Danna Harman, “How Tragic Fuse was Lit in Darfur,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 30, 2004.

¹⁰⁸ Elkanah Chawai, “Re-Emergence of Crises in Chad,” op. cit.

¹⁰⁹ Alex de Waal, “Darfur’s Deep Grievances...,” op. cit.

relatives were abducted by Zaghawa rebels of the Sudan Liberation Army” [along with JEM one of the main rebel groups].¹¹⁰ That he should say this cannot be surprising; as with so much of what we are describing, the wrongs tend to go back in infinite regress, making it presumptuous for outsiders to make an easy (and often uninformed) judgment.

Julie Flint, author of *Darfur: A Short History of a Long War*, reports that the same leader says the government in Khartoum recruited the militias by “promises to provide their nomadic communities with health, veterinary services, schools and water, and... commitments to pay militia salaries and give compensation for war dead.” The leader has now mutinied from the alliance with the government, feeling betrayed by what he says has been the government’s failure to keep its promises and by its efforts, in the face of international opinion, to distance itself from the Janjaweed. Flint considers it highly significant that there is now an on-going leakage away from the Janjaweed and toward the rebels, since “Arab militias—the so-called Janjaweed—are the lynchpin of the government’s war in Darfur. Without them, the war would soon be over.” Abdel Wahid, one of the major rebel leaders, has now “focused on reconciliation with Janjaweed.” She says “the [growing] Arab-Fur alliance is the most significant political and military development in Darfur since the war began.” In this, Flint sees “a chance that Darfur may eventually find peace and stability.”¹¹¹

Her belief that the growing disaffection of the Janjaweed with the central government may be a key to ending the war highlights how ironic it has been that the Janjaweed have been left out of the many efforts to find agreement. Flint argues that “the Arabs of Darfur [cannot] continue to be excluded from peace efforts, on the grounds that the government speaks for them.”¹¹²

Much of the central government’s war against the southern rebels in the Second Sudanese Civil War was carried on by raiders on horseback called the “Murahaleen.” Were these the same horsemen as the Janjaweed in the Darfur war? Oddly, no. The Murahaleen were Baqqara

¹¹⁰ Julie Flint, “A Seismic Political Shift is Taking Place in Darfur,” *The Daily Star*, December 31, 2007; to be found on the Web at www.dailystar.com.lb

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

(also, “Baggara”) Arabs.¹¹³ De Waal says “the Baggara are a confederation of groups of cattle-herding Arabs who inhabit much of southern Darfur.”¹¹⁴ It will be a source of utter confusion for those who like to make a convenient partition between “good” and “bad” participants to find that the “devils on horseback” came, in the southern war, from Darfur. The roles of “demon” and “victim” are easily interchangeable.

The rebel groups. At one time, early on, it was much easier than at present to keep track of the variety of rebel groups that have been fighting the government (and each other). Conflicting reports told of quite a complicated picture early in 2008: an article in the *East African—News* on January 27 spoke of “the emergence of more and more rebel factions,” and said that “Andrew Natsios, the former US presidential envoy to Sudan, recently estimated that 27 rebel groups or factions now exist in Darfur, nearly double the number that existed only one year ago.”¹¹⁵ In contradiction to this, an article in the *Jerusalem Post* just eight days earlier referred to “Darfur rebel groups, that have now merged into five distinct groups after years of fragmentation.”¹¹⁶ Whichever of these is correct, it is clear that the rebels themselves have been and still are quite divided, representing lots of differing views, factions and personalities.

The war started in 2003 with just two rebel groups: the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), which was the largest, and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The SLA had come into existence in 2001, stemming from the earlier Darfur Liberation Front that had wanted Darfur to secede from the Sudan. It consisted of members of the Fur, the Masalit and Tuer Zaghawa tribes who opposed what they perceived as the Arab supremacists. For its part, the JEM is said to have had “national, not regional, ambitions,” which would be consistent with what we have seen when discussing the fight for control over the Sudan among the two factions of the Islamist movement after its split in 1999 (some say 2000 or even 2001).¹¹⁷ The JEM has involved the Islamist followers of al-Turabi in his struggle against President Bashir.

¹¹³ Donald Petterson, *Inside Sudan*, op. cit., p. 67.

¹¹⁴ Alexander de Waal, *Famine that Kills*, op. cit., p. 50.

¹¹⁵ Zachary Ochieng, “Rebel Factions Thick...,” op. cit.

¹¹⁶ Associated Press, “Envoys Express Optimism for Restarting Darfur Peace Talks,” *Jerusalem Post*, online edition, January 19, 2008.

¹¹⁷ Tony Lindsay, *Darfur: A Cultural Handbook*, op. cit., pp. 51, 53.

A split within the SLA occurred in November 2005,¹¹⁸ half a year before the peace agreement was reached in Abuja, Nigeria, in early May 2006. A *BBC* report at the time said that “the government of Sudan and one faction of the rebel SLA, led by Minni Minnawi, signed... But another faction of the SLA, lead by Abd-al-Wahid Muhammed Nur, refused to sign.” (The JEM “also refused to sign.”)¹¹⁹

Actually, developments were somewhat more complicated than the preceding paragraph suggests—and even though it is hard to follow, the complexity is worth noting. A year and a half before the Abuja conference, in November 2004, the JEM had undergone some splintering, with a faction forming the “National Movement for Reform and Development,” which itself splintered soon thereafter. And in January 2006, four months before the conference, the Wahid portion of the SLA joined forces with the JEM to create the “Alliance of Revolutionary Forces of West Sudan.” At about the same time, parts of both the Wahid and Minnawi portions of the SLA went together to form the “Greater Sudan Liberation Movement.” And a month after the conference, the various non-signing rebel groups linked themselves under the umbrella known as “the National Redemption Front.”¹²⁰ The *BBC* referred to this last group in October 2007 as “now defunct.”¹²¹

Minni Minnawi, who had signed the Abuja peace agreement, went on to become a Senior Assistant to Sudan President Bashir and Chairman of the Regional Interim Authority of Darfur, and *BBC News* said rather indeterminantly in mid-2007 that his “men now seem to be fighting on the side of the government”¹²² The other rebel factions continued with the war against Khartoum. There have been various efforts to get the factions together to establish a common negotiating position, but even that has not proved possible, since all have not been willing to participate. Peace talks were attempted in Sirte, Libya, in October 2007,¹²³ and a “second round”

¹¹⁸ *BBC News*, “Who are Sudan’s Darfur Rebels?,” October 12, 2007; to be found on the Web at <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk>

¹¹⁹ Mark Doyle, “Sudan’s Interlocking Wars,” op. cit.

¹²⁰ Tony Lindsay, *Darfur: A Cultural Handbook*, op. cit., p. 52.

¹²¹ *BBC News*, “Who Are Sudan’s Darfur Rebels?,” op. cit.

¹²² *BBC News*, “Quick Guide: Darfur,” July 28, 2007; to be found on the Web at <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk>

¹²³ *Reuters*, “Factbox—Key Facts About the Conflict in Darfur,” October 1, 2007; to be found on the Web at www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis

was scheduled for that December, but the Wahid faction and the JEM refused to attend, in part because they felt the split-off factions should not be included.¹²⁴ (We should keep in mind that the various splitting-offs imply much bad blood within the rebel groups themselves. In addition to fighting the government, they have fought among themselves for control over territory in Darfur.¹²⁵) A United Nations peacekeeping force of 26,000 was supposed to be in place by the beginning of 2008, but there has been no peace to maintain, and the force has been very slow in obtaining both the troops and equipment it needs.

The refugees. In late July 2007, *BBC News* reported that “more than two million people are living in camps after fleeing almost four years of fighting...”¹²⁶ This is substantially in agreement with a *McClatchey Newspapers* report a month later that “the population of camps continues to rise—to 2.2 million in July...”¹²⁷

The refugees themselves are parties to the war. They are said to be under frequent attack by Janjaweed patrols if they leave the camps,¹²⁸ so in that sense they are very much on the defensive; at the same time, we are told that “most of Darfur’s camps... are teeming with rebels.”¹²⁹

An outsider might suppose that the welfare of the civilian population would be a paramount concern for all factions, especially the rebels. This seems, however, to have been of interest only to the international community, and of little interest to any of the combatants in the Darfur war. There was the same lack of concern during the Second Sudanese Civil War in the south. In the context of that earlier war, Donald Petterson, one of the American ambassadors we have quoted, has written: “Television pictures emerging from southern Sudan [show]... emaciated people, stick-like limbs, the hollow eyes of malnourished children.” Some of this suffering, he

¹²⁴ *Reuters*, “Two Main Darfur Rebel Groups Will Not Attend Talks,” October 26, 2007; to be found on the Web at www.save.darfur.org/newsroom/clips/ Also, Ophera McDoom, “Darfur Rebels Unlikely to Attend Talks in December,” *Africa—Reuters.com*, November 5, 2007; to be found on the Web at <http://africa.reuters.com/top/news>

¹²⁵ *USA Today*, “Darfur Rebels Hold Out for Better Deal,” May 2, 2006.

¹²⁶ *BBC News*, “Q&A: Sudan’s Darfur Conflict,” op. cit.

¹²⁷ Shashank Bengali, “Darfur Refugees Running Low on Water,” *Wichita Eagle*, August 28, 2007.

¹²⁸ *BBC News*, “Q&A: Sudan’s Darfur Conflict,” op. cit.

¹²⁹ Desmond Butler, “Doctor Warns of Darfur Camp Expulsions,” *Associated Press*, November 13, 2007; to be found on the Web at <http://ap.google.com/article>

says, was caused by the Sudanese army, but “most of the new additions to the toll of death, destruction, and displacement of southerners came about because of internecine fighting among southerners themselves,” and “the relief operation was hampered by both the fighting and the restrictions on access imposed by the two rebel forces and the government of Sudan.” Even more to the point, Petterson says “neither [rebel leader] saw anything wrong with taking relief food meant for starving civilians and using it to feed soldiers and officials.”¹³⁰ From all of this, it would not seem that human life is highly valued.

The war in Darfur started with a powerful military campaign by the rebels in early and mid-2003. Again, one would suppose that provision for protecting the Darfurian villages from counterattack would have been integral to the rebels’ strategy. Instead, the home villages were left wide open to Janjaweed attack, leading to the scenes that most strikingly come to people’s minds when they think of the war. The Second Sudanese Civil War in the south gave rise to the following thought by one of the “Lost Boys” who was brought to the United States: “Our villages were being attacked by the murahaleen, but the rebels left the villages unattended to fight elsewhere, against the government army. It was baffling for me....”¹³¹

We see, also, that most of the rebel groups have refused to take part in the peace talks and agreements sponsored by the United Nations. It is difficult to judge the merits of their reasons for doing so, but it is apparent that the presence of 2.2 million people in camps over long periods of time has not spurred them to hasten to the conference table. By contrast, the government of Sudan has repeatedly been willing to make peace. We are aware, of course, that the rebels may or may not be justified in refusing to seek peace, and that it is presumptuous for an outsider to say that “peace” is the highest value in a highly complex struggle. The fact remains, however, that the displaced population keeps on suffering.

The Charge of Genocide

Much of the emotion behind the movement in the United States and Europe to “do something about Darfur” has come from the perception that

¹³⁰ Donald Petterson, *Inside Sudan*, op. cit., pp. 51, 53.

¹³¹ David Eggers, *What is the What*, op. cit., p. 141.

the Government of Sudan and Janjaweed have been “committing genocide.” This is especially powerful because it evokes images of the Holocaust. The George W. Bush administration in the United States has called it a genocide, and in July 2004 the U.S. Congress made a formal declaration to that effect. One of the international groups pressing the issue is the “Genocide Intervention Network.” The Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., has said there is a “full-fledged genocide emergency.”¹³² Characteristic of the many communications that activists have made to the media during the past five years is one in the United States from a Jewish leader in Wichita, Kansas: “The world has watched since 2003 as a long process of genocide has unfolded...”¹³³ Alex de Waal, one of the most informed writers about Darfur, explains that “the impetus for the genocide finding did not come from Washington’s neocons, but rather from liberal human rights activists and members of the religious right.” He says this coalition originated in part from “the politics of support for the SPLA [a leading rebel faction in the Second Sudanese Civil War in the South] (with the Israeli lobby as a discrete marriage broker).” The Black Caucus in the U.S. Congress, remembering the slave trade and being generally supportive of “black Africa,” also joined in.¹³⁴

We should notice that much of the world has not joined in the hue and cry about Darfur. The *Voice of America* reports: “Roland Marchand is an Africa expert at the Center for the Study of International Relations in Paris. He says many African and Asian leaders believe the United States has overstated the extent of the problem in Darfur...”¹³⁵

Is the charge of “genocide” justified? There is no doubt that the situation in Darfur has been horrendous and that there have been atrocities (on all sides), as in so many conflicts in Africa and elsewhere. But the word “genocide” places it on a special level (and also points to one side as the culprit). To answer whether the charge is justified, we need to look both at the facts on the ground and the meaning of “genocide” under the 1948 United Nations convention defining the term.

¹³² David S. Hauck, “What’s Behind the Darfur Crisis—and What’s Next?,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 2, 2004; may be found on the Web at www.csmonitor.com/2004/0902

¹³³ *The Wichita Eagle*, November 20, 2007.

¹³⁴ Alex de Waal, “Who Are the Darfurians?,” *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹³⁵ Anita Elash, “UN Force for Darfur Faces Challenges,” *VOAnews.com*, August 2, 2007

David Hauck in the *Christian Science Monitor* relates that “in 1948... the UN drafted a convention defining genocide as including killing or causing bodily or mental harm ‘in whole or in part, [to] a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.’” Member states are obligated to intervene to stop genocide, but only if the UN finds one occurring.¹³⁶ So far, the United Nations hasn’t done so, holding to a UN-sponsored commission’s finding in February 2005 that the situation in Darfur did not rise to the level of genocide.¹³⁷ (The war has more simmered than raged, although with some flareups, during the four years since its early stages, but this doesn’t dissuade activists from asserting that a genocide is even now taking place.)

Those considering the subject seriously must pay particular attention to the wording of the definition that speaks of “in whole *or in part*.” If it said “in whole or in major part,” or even “in whole or in significant part,” the definition would match the world’s idea of what “genocide” is. But for it to say simply “in part” makes it so broad that it encompasses all violence, anywhere, anytime. This is so because everyone who is subject to violence is unavoidably a member of some national, ethnic, racial and (perhaps) religious group. A killing of any person, then, is the killing of part of such a group.

If it is argued that the offense necessarily requires an implied element of “intent,” and that that would narrow it, the person making the argument is referring to what the law calls a “specific intent.” This means not just the intent to commit a given act, but an additional intention. (For example, the crime of burglary requires not just the intent to break and enter, but also the “specific intent” to rob, rape or commit some other crime while inside.) “Specific intent,” if considered a part of “genocide,” would be not simply to kill or injure someone, but to kill or injure someone of a particular race, nationality, or the like. But even if this element is added, the UN convention’s definition would still go far beyond the common understanding of what “genocide” means. It would mean that any “hate crime” [i.e., one predicated upon ethnicity or the like], even against one or a few individuals, would be “genocide.”

After 1948, an international consensus developed not to employ a

¹³⁶ David S. Hauck, “What’s Behind the Darfur Crisis...?,” *op. cit.*

¹³⁷ Ewen MacAskill, “Sudan’s Darfur Crimes Not Genocide, Says UN Report,” *Guardian Unlimited*, February 1, 2005; to be found on the Web at www.guardian.co.uk

literal application of the definition.¹³⁸ Reversing this, the United States and the “save Darfur” activists have “lowered the bar,” so to speak, seeking in the Darfurian context to apply the definition literally. But doing this has necessarily made them subject to the charge that they are engaging in “selective outrage.” American columnist Charley Reese says that “if you believe anybody’s figures, 200,000 people have been killed in the Sudan. Four million have died in the Congo. Yet Washington and Hollywood are fixated on the Sudan and silent about the Congo. Why? Well, keep in mind that the United States always practices selective outrage... U.S. foreign policy is largely driven by domestic lobbies and domestic politics.”¹³⁹ William Reed, president and CEO of *Black Press International*, agrees: “Anyone who tells you that ‘genocide’ is occurring in Darfur and doesn’t in the same breath say that the same, or worse, serious situation is occurring in Uganda, the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo and occupied Palestine, is engaged in deception about the subject.”¹⁴⁰

The semantic issues aside, the facts we have reviewed in this article are not consistent with a charge of “genocide” in the commonsense acceptance. There seems to be no effort systematically to exterminate a certain people within Darfur, or even to “ethnically cleanse” Darfur of them. The causes of the war are, as we have seen, complex; and we have even suggested that it is most sensible to understand the war in the context of nearly universal conflict throughout northeast Africa.

The use of the “genocide” label would seem to have consequences that most well-meaning people who use it don’t intend. Writing for the *Washington Post*, Kou Kou Angarana observes that “rather than spurring greater international action, that label only seems to have strengthened Sudan’s rebels; they believe they don’t need to negotiate with the government and think they will have U.S. support when they commit attacks. Peace talks have broken down seven times, partly because the rebel groups have walked out of negotiations.”¹⁴¹ We should recall that one of the main rebel groups is composed of the more radical Islamist faction

¹³⁸ Alex de Waal, “Who Are the Darfurians?,” op. cit., page 13.

¹³⁹ Charley Reese, “More of the Same to Come,” *Middle American News*, July 2007.

¹⁴⁰ William Reed, “Take Another Look at the ‘Save Darfur’ Crowd,” op. cit.

¹⁴¹ Kou Kou Angarana, “5 Truths About Darfur,” op. cit.

that split off from the government in 1999.

Conclusion: An Even Larger Issue

What we see, in the end, is that a review of the facts about Darfur reveals a vast amount of information that the public in the United States and Europe most assuredly doesn't know. In the context of the international campaign about the war there, what we have is a case-study in misinformation, myth, and the simple-minded ignorance that a general population must necessarily have regarding a complex subject that it has neither the time nor the inclination to study. The public relations campaign about Darfur provides a sad commentary on the emotional and mental processes that guide the Western world. Spurred on by special interests and ideologues of various persuasions, millions of well-meaning people allow themselves to be the subject of mass manipulation. Unfortunately, the mythology that rules conventional wisdom about Darfur is just one of many examples of how partial-truths rule a gullible public's consciousness.

That myth so successfully molds the public mind on so many things raises the most profound questions about in what sense "democracy" in the West is real. What does it mean to say that the people rule when they not only are so consistently misinformed, but tacitly allow themselves to be?