

UPDATE ON DARFUR
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Two critical issues now facing Darfur are the tension between the African Union, Khartoum, and the United Nations, and the fighting amongst the rebel groups which is causing further disintegration of the situation in Darfur.

I. The African Union - Khartoum - The United Nations Dilemma

African Union officers have repeatedly spoken of the frustrations of its mission — to oversee a peace deal and to monitor a cease-fire that few respect. “We are frustrated and feeling so useless,” said one major from southern Africa based in Kebkabiya, a government-controlled town that is home to thousands of people displaced by the conflict. “We are not able to move freely and do our work. Sometimes I wonder if there is any reason for us to be here at all.” But as weak as the African Union force is, nearly all agree it is better than no troops at all.¹

The African Union has said repeatedly that it wants to hand over its mission to the United Nations. The Security Council voted earlier this month to authorize a force of more than 20,000 troops and police officers for Darfur. In the hopes of compelling Sudan to accept a United Nations force, the United States and other donor-countries who have paid for the African Union (“A.U.”) mission have refused to continue paying after its mandate ends on Sept. 30, 2006.²

Sudan has consistently rejected having a United Nations force in Sudan. “The African Union has never been a big nuisance and nor was it a big threat,” said J. Stephen Morrison, director of the Africa program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “The

¹ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, “With Little Authority, African Union Force Struggles With Its Mission in Darfur,” September 9, 2006.

² Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, “Africa Monitors Threatening to Quit Sudan,” September 6, 2006.

Sudanese always had an A.U. that was split in its opinion and never had the rules of engagement or the capacity to push them around,” he added. “So it was vulnerable to being manipulated and weakened along the way.” These are problems that any new United Nations force would undoubtedly want to fix. But Sudan has argued that a United Nations force will undermine the country’s sovereignty by transferring too much authority to outsiders. A lack of authority is precisely what many A.U. officers have lamented.³

Sudan has offered to pay for the African Union troops with money donated from the Arab League. The A.U. refused the offer, saying that their troops would compromise their neutrality if they took money from Sudan and its allies.⁴ In an on-going dance of rhetoric and brinksmanship, on

³ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, “With Little Authority, African Union Force Struggles With Its Mission in Darfur,” September 9, 2006.

⁴ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, “Africa Monitors Threatening to Quit Sudan,” September 6, 2006.

September 5, 2006, the African Union said that it would leave the Darfur region by the end of September if Sudan did not agree to allow United Nations peacekeepers to take over its mission there. (“The African Union reiterates its position that it will terminate the mission,” said Nouredine Mezni, spokesman for the African force. But the troops will stay “if there is the necessity for the transition to the United Nations.”)⁵ Khartoum responded by telling the African Union that it must leave by the end of September, when its mandate ends, if it cannot work on its own.⁶ (Khartoum has also proposed using Sudanese as peacekeepers.⁷)

Apparently, Khartoum has taken the measure of the international community and believes it will face no consequence for continuing to support the Janjaweed and for blocking a United Nations peacekeeping mission. As one high-ranking Sudanese government official brazenly told John Prendergast of the International Crisis Group in July that “The United Nations Security Council has threatened us so many times, we no longer take it seriously.”⁸

A.U. soldiers have begun to curtail their already limited patrols, often at the insistence of Sudanese officers stationed in their bases. According to its mandate, the A.U. is supposed to be able to move freely throughout Darfur without any impediments such as the travel permits required for aid workers and journalists wanting to visit the region. But in practice, the movements of the A.U. forces have been hampered by government officials. A Sudanese Army captain assigned to the Kebkabiya base tried to prevent a patrol from visiting villages in the area, relenting only when the Cameroonian major who was leading the A.U. patrol firmly insisted that it go ahead. On the patrol, the Sudanese captain repeatedly told villagers not to speak to visiting journalists and not to allow the journalists to take photographs. Such interference is a violation of the African force’s independence, but the policy of the A.U. force has been to avoid confrontation rather than testing the limits of its mandate.⁹

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, “Darfur Trembles as Peacekeepers’ Exit Looms,” September 10, 2006.

⁷ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, “Africa Monitors Threatening to Quit Sudan,” September 6, 2006.

⁸ John Prendergast, *The Boston Globe*, “A Dying Deal in Darfur,” July 13, 2006.

⁹ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, “With Little Authority, African Union Force Struggles With Its Mission in Darfur,” September 9, 2006.

II. The Tension Between the Rebels

The Darfur Peace Agreement signed in May 2006 was supposed to end the fighting in a conflict between non-Arab rebel groups and the Arab-dominated central government. (The conflict arose when the rebel groups sought a greater share of Sudan's wealth for its long-neglected Darfur region.¹⁰) Only a portion of the Sudan Liberation Army, that led by Minni Arcu Minnawi, signed the agreement. The Sudan Liberation Army ("SLA") had been the main rebel group fighting the government, but during the peace-agreement negotiations, the SLA split along tribal lines: the Zaghawa and the Fur. The Zaghawa-faction, led by Mr. Minnawi, signed the agreement, but the Fur-led faction did not. The Fur majority has become suspicious of the Zaghawas, claiming that they have joined with the government to oppress the Fur.¹¹ The Fur-elements of the SLA and the Justice and Equality Movement, a significant rebel group which also did not sign the peace agreement, have joined forces to form the National Redemption Front, which is firmly opposed to the agreement.

Mr. Minnawi, the leader of the Zaghawa-faction of the Sudan Liberation Army who signed the agreement, has become the senior assistant to the Sudanese President al-Bashir, as stipulated by the agreement. However, there are now allegations that his troops are carrying out bloody raids in North Darfur to try punish other rebel groups that have not signed the agreement. A United Nations report released in early July 2006 said that Mr. Minnawi's troops were "indiscriminately killing, raping women and abducting children."¹²

III. The Increasingly Dangerous Situation in Darfur

The Sudan government is insisting that it has reached a political settlement with those willing to make peace (a portion of the Sudan Liberation Army) and has started a military offensive against the new rebel alliance that rejected the agreement, the National Redemption Front. The government is bombing villages controlled by the National Redemption Front. According to A.U. officials, these renewed attacks on villages is a violation of the peace

¹⁰ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, "Deaths of Aid Workers in Darfur on Rise, U.N. Says," August 9, 2006.

¹¹ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, "Darfur Trembles as Peacekeepers' Exit Looms," September 10, 2006.

¹² Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, "Deaths of Aid Workers in Darfur on Rise, U.N. Says," August 9, 2006.

agreement, but its troops watch helplessly as the Antonov bombers and attack-helicopters take off from the El Fasher airstrip.¹³

There has been an increase in violence as the May 2006 peace agreement has begun to falter. The United Nations has designated vast regions where aid workers cannot go, leaving people trapped in camps and villages, without food handouts, medical care and clean water. About 14,000 workers are in Darfur, 1,000 of them foreigners. "The level of violence being faced by humanitarian workers in Darfur is unprecedented," Manuel Aranda da Silva, the top United Nations aid official in Sudan, said. The violence has limited the scope of aid operations in many areas.¹⁴

As a result of the increasing violence, international aid workers are leaving Darfur. Perhaps the enormity of the problem can best be understood through this one example of a refugee camp near Tawila, called Rwanda:

Death is no stranger here. Malaria and diarrhea course through the camp, picking off children first, then the old. There are no doctors or nurses or medicine. There is no clean water. There are no toilets or latrines. And yet the conflict, unchecked even by the presence of the African peacekeeping force, drives more people from their homes into the camp each day.

Mariam Ibrahim Omar buried her son Ismail in a graveyard near here Wednesday. She was not sure what had killed him, only that he burned with fever, heaved and vomited. She took him to a clinic run by the aid organization Relief International in town, carrying him on her back swaddled in rags, only to find its doors locked and its doctors and nurses long gone. The lone aid organization still operating here is the United Nations World Food Program, usually the last to go in even the direst situation.

Ismail was 21 months old. They buried him in a growing graveyard on a small rise above the camp. Two bricks stood atop his grave, indicating where his tiny head lay, pointed toward Mecca, as Islamic custom demands.¹⁵

The camp is named Rwanda for the Rwandan soldiers of the A.U. based here as the

¹³ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, "With Little Authority, African Union Force Struggles With Its Mission in Darfur," September 9, 2006.

¹⁴ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, "Deaths of Aid Workers in Darfur on Rise, U.N. Says," August 9, 2006.

¹⁵ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, "Darfur Trembles as Peacekeepers' Exit Looms," September 10, 2006.

cease-fire monitors. But the camp's sheiks say the name has a darker meaning, "one that reveals their deepest fears."¹⁶

Along with Relief International and its midwives, nurses, vaccinators and nutrition counselors, Save the Children also left the refugee camp called Rwanda after attacks on their workers and vehicles. A World Health Organization car traveling with the World Food Program was hijacked Thursday, September 7, 2006 by rebel gunmen. A dozen aid workers have been killed since May 2006, all of them Sudanese.¹⁷

On a different note, separate from the deep humanitarian needs of the people of Darfur, the region is becoming increasingly unsafe for reporters. Paul Salopek, a Pulitzer Prize-winning, foreign correspondent for *The Chicago Tribune*, and his driver, Idriss Abdulrahman Anu, and his interpreter, Suleiman Abakar Moussa, both Chadians, were detained in the western region of Darfur by a militant group allied with the Sudanese government on August 6, 2006. The group turned them over to the government, which charged the men with espionage and with illegally crossing the border from Chad. All three were released on Saturday, September 9, 2006, on "humanitarian grounds," after Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico met with Sudan's president, Omar al-Bashir. (Mr. Salopek and his wife have a home in New Mexico. Mr. Richardson flew to Sudan on Friday at the invitation of the Sudanese government.)¹⁸

The arrest of Mr. Salopek is one in a series of recent actions against journalists in Sudan. Censors have been assigned to newsrooms, excising articles and sometimes whole pages of newspapers. Newspapers have been confiscated, and reporters have been beaten and harassed while trying to cover unrest over increases in the price of gasoline and other essential items. On September 9, 2006, Sudanese officials confiscated the entire press run of *Al Sudani*, an independent newspaper, saying articles in it would compromise the investigation into the beheading of a prominent newspaper editor, Mohammed Taha, last week. (Some have suggested that Mr. Taha was beheaded because he had published articles last year about

¹⁶ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, "Darfur Trembles as Peacekeepers' Exit Looms," September 10, 2006.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, "Sudan Agrees to Free U.S. Reporter Accused of Spying," September 9, 2006; and see Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, "Sudan Releases an American Journalist From Jail in Darfur," September 10, 2006.

the Prophet Muhammad which some Islamists considered blasphemous. However, no group has taken responsibility for the beheading.)¹⁹

IV. The Continuing Role of the Janjaweed

The Janjaweed²⁰ continue to be “[t]he greatest threat to [the] peace agreement right now,” according to a senior military intelligence officer with the African Union. “It is not clear what is in it for them or how it serves their interests to disarm. No one is sure what they will do or who exactly controls them.” The leader of the Janjaweed is believed to be Sheik Musa Hilal, who leads a powerful Arab tribe in Darfur called Um Jalul. Sheik Hilal’s claims that his followers are not Janjaweed and that he has no control over any militia are not believable, according to Alex de Waal, an Africa scholar who studies Sudan.²¹ Indeed, his men are well-trained and well-equipped, living in vast barracks in the village of Mistariha. (Officially, Mistariha is called the headquarters of the government's Border Intelligence Unit, though it is about 120 miles from the nearest border, with Chad.)²²

One of the most critical steps of the faltering Darfur Peace Agreement is the disarmament of the Janjaweed. The government pledged to submit a plan to disarm the Janjaweed of their heavy weaponry one month after signing the agreement and to complete the disarmament by the end of October 2006. However, the disarmament has not yet begun, and few have expectations that the government will fulfill its obligation.²³

¹⁹ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, “Sudan Releases an American Journalist From Jail in Darfur,” September 10, 2006; and see Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, “Sudan Agrees to Free U.S. Reporter Accused of Spying,” September 9, 2006.

²⁰ The term “Janjaweed” has long been used to refer to highwaymen and bandits from tribes living across Sudan's western border in Chad who roamed the vast, semidesert plains of Darfur, robbing Arabs and non-Arabs, nomads and farmers. The word took on new meaning after rebels attacked a government outpost in Darfur in 2003, sparking the current conflict that engulfed the region and had now spilled into Chad. The militias that came to be known as the Janjaweed were deployed by the Sudan government in place of and sometimes alongside its own military. These fighters were paid a small stipend, but their greatest reward was the right to loot and seize livestock and land from the Fur and Zaghawa, non-Arab tribes from which the rebels drew their ranks. (Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, “Over Tea, Sheik Denies Stirring Darfur's Torment,” June 12, 2006.)

²¹ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, “Over Tea, Sheik Denies Stirring Darfur's Torment,” June 12, 2006.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ See John Prendergast, *The Boston Globe*, “A Dying Deal in Darfur,” July 13, 2006; and see September 10, 2006/ 17 Elul 5766

In June 2006, John Prendergast of the International Crisis Group, an organization that studies violent conflicts, identified the requirement that the Janjaweed be disarmed as “the weakest link in an otherwise deeply flawed agreement.” He observed that this requirement relied on an often-made and never-fulfilled promise that “the government is principally responsible for reining in and otherwise neutralizing the murderous militias. It hasn't happened before and there is no new reason why it would happen now.” Mr. Prendergast asserts that rather than be disarmed, the Janjaweed has been integrated into Sudan’s official paramilitary Popular Defense Forces and the regular army.²⁴

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The resistance of the Sudanese government to comply with United Nations demands that U.N. troops assist or replace African Union troops raises the difficult question of whether a country which oppresses its own citizens can reject international interventions on the grounds of sovereignty. And resolving the question raises the equally difficult question of the extent to which sister nations will engage in force to defend the oppressed citizens of the other country. What are the protections and limitations of sovereignty? When do such protections or limitations rightfully cease to exist?

Updated by Honey Kessler Amado
Jewish World Watch

Refugees International Bulletin, August 17, 2006, “Sudan: Saving the Darfur Peace Agreement.”

²⁴ Lydia Polgreen, *The New York Times*, “Over Tea, Sheik Denies Stirring Darfur's Torment,” June 12, 2006.

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