

Conflict over Sudan on United Nations Security Council

By Brian Smith
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A power struggle is developing on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) between the US, the European powers and China over the issue of Sudan.

For months, the Bush administration has been demanding military intervention in Sudan and the imposition of sanctions against the Khartoum regime, accusing the government of backing genocide in the Darfur region.

Last October, then-US Secretary of State Colin Powell declared that “genocide had been committed in Darfur,” a charge that led the United Nations to establish a five-panel commission of lawyers to investigate the allegation.

There is no doubt that the people of Darfur are suffering a massive humanitarian disaster, nor that the Sudanese National Islamic Front (NIF) government has backed the *Janjaweed* militia in its violent attacks on defenceless civilians in western Sudan. The latest reports indicate a growing food shortage across the country due to the conflict, as well as continued bombing by government aircraft of villages in the North Darfur state.

However, Powell’s designation of the violence in Darfur as “genocide” had nothing to do with genuine concern for the fate of the Sudanese people. The term “genocide” is politically loaded. By portraying the situation in Darfur in the starkest terms, US imperialism—as in Iraq and Kosovo—is seeking to use humanitarian pretensions in order to justify its efforts to establish itself as the controlling power in North Africa and throughout the continent. Under Article 8 of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, any designation of genocide is a trigger for military intervention by the UN.

The US demands for sanctions are similarly aimed at ensuring its interests dominate in Sudan.

Lying in a strategic geographic location, Sudan has huge oil reserves, estimated at between 660 million and 1.2 billion barrels. But China currently holds 40 percent of the country’s oil sector, with Russia and France also having significant holdings. Any sanctions would therefore particularly affect the US’s major rivals.

The efforts of the Bush administration to this end have so far been thwarted. The UNSC has previously rejected sanctions against Sudan, and France rejected any designation of the situation in Darfur as genocide.

An earlier US-backed resolution proposing sanctions was blocked in the Security Council by China, France and Russia. Subsequently, the US suggested military intervention into the region through a larger African Union (AU) force that would be paid for and controlled by the West—a proposal that had been backed by Britain and Australia.

Last month, the five-member UN Commission on Sudan, led by Italian judge Antonio Cassese, reported back in terms that served to undermine US demands for military intervention.

Its report found that the Khartoum forces and the *Janjaweed* militias had conducted indiscriminate acts in Darfur including killing civilians, torture, rape, pillage, enforced disappearances, destroying villages and forced displacement. However, it found no evidence that the Khartoum government had a policy of exterminating a particular ethnic group. Therefore, it concluded that the last two years of violence in Darfur do not amount to genocide, but rather to “crimes against humanity with ethnic dimensions.”

The report also “strongly” recommended that those responsible for the atrocities should be sent before the International Criminal Court (ICC) based in The Hague. An annex to the report named 51 Sudanese

officials, militia and rebel leaders who are implicated in the atrocities. The list will remain secret until a court has determined whether there is enough evidence for prosecution.

The panel's recommendation for referral to the ICC is another blow against US ambitions.

The Bush administration refuses to recognise the ICC, fearing that the court could be used to prosecute US officials for their roles in the administration's increasingly aggressive and illegal imperialist wars. The UN Commission's report reflects the position of the European powers, which fund the ICC and hope to utilise it to restrain America's unilateralist ambitions.

A further split in the UNSC arises from a draft resolution put forward by the US last week, which calls for an arms embargo on Darfur. It also threatens oil sanctions if the situation deteriorates, though support for this is lacking. The resolution further calls for an asset freeze and travel ban on those responsible for violence in the region.

The US is now proposing to prosecute war criminals in Sudan via a special court akin to that which investigated the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, rather than the ICC. Indeed, the US ambassador for war crimes, Pierre-Richard Prosper, has suggested that the very same court in Arusha, Tanzania, be used, despite the fact that the US has previously criticised it. Explaining his stand, Prosper stated baldly, "We don't want to be a party to legitimising the ICC."

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice confirmed this position when she visited Europe recently. "American views of the ICC and the dangers of the ICC haven't changed," she said. "We are not a party to it. We are concerned about unaccountable prosecutors and unaccountable prosecutions."

Since the US would probably use its veto on the Security Council to oppose the ICC, it seems unlikely that any prosecutions of those involved in atrocities in Darfur will take place. Even if the US agreed to abstain or a compromise agreement was reached on the use of an alternative court, China could still use its veto given its extensive oil interests and close ties to the Khartoum regime. In press statements, it has called for the use of Sudanese courts—opposed by both the US and Europe—and wants no referral to either the ICC or to the US-proposed court in Tanzania.

A further result of the divisions between the major

powers over Darfur is that the African Union monitoring force agreed on last summer has so far mustered only 900 troops to patrol a region the size of France. African countries have been reluctant to provide forces when little finance from the West has been forthcoming.

Whatever the outcome of the cynical machinations on the UNSC, no reliance can be placed on any of the Western powers to resolve the crisis in Darfur. A solution to the disastrous situation facing the Sudanese people, and indeed those throughout Africa, can only be found in a struggle against imperialism, the banks and multinational corporations, whose ruthless exploitation of the continent is directly responsible for the terrible conditions of impoverishment and war that now plague tens of millions.

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