

Aid workers charge political motives in US claim of “genocide” in Darfur

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Citing international aid workers, an October 3 article in the British *Observer* newspaper challenges the US government’s characterization of the crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan as “genocide.”

US Secretary of State Colin Powell, in testimony last month before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, declared that “genocide has been committed in Darfur...and that genocide may still be continuing.” Powell made his speech after the US Congress had unanimously adopted a resolution labelling the events in Darfur as genocide.

But in the *Observer* article, headlined “US ‘hyping’ Darfur genocide fear,” Peter Beaumont reports allegations made by international aid workers in Sudan that “American warnings that Darfur is heading for an apocalyptic humanitarian catastrophe have been widely exaggerated by administration officials....Washington’s desire for a regime change in Khartoum has biased their reports.”

Beaumont draws attention to reports by the US government’s aid agency, USAID, warning “between 350,000 and a million people could die in Darfur by the end of the year.” He continues, “Other officials, including Secretary of State Colin Powell, have accused the Sudanese government of presiding over a ‘genocide’ that could rival those in Bosnia and Rwanda.”

He then writes, “Concern about USAID’s role as an honest broker in Darfur have been mounting for months, with diplomats as well as aid workers puzzled over its pronouncements, and one European diplomat accusing it of ‘plucking figures from the air.’ “

According to Beaumont, eyewitness reports have “comprehensively challenged” the US government’s estimation of the situation in Darfur. The nutritional survey of the region, by the United Nations World

Food Programme (WFP), makes clear that “although there are still high levels of malnutrition among under-fives in some areas, the crisis is being brought under control.”

One person involved in the WFP survey told Beaumont, “It’s not disastrous, although it certainly was a disaster earlier this year, and if humanitarian assistance declines, this will have very serious negative consequences.”

An aid worker told the reporter, “I’ve been to a number of camps during my time here, and if you want to find death, you have to go looking for it. It’s easy to find very sick and under-nourished children at the therapeutic feeding centres, but that’s the same wherever you go in Africa.”

Another aid worker commented, “It suited various governments to talk it all up, but they don’t seem to have thought about the consequences. I have no idea what Colin Powell’s game is, but to call it genocide and then effectively say, ‘Oh, shucks, but we are not going to do anything about that genocide’ undermines the very word ‘genocide.’ “

Beaumont continues: “While none of the aid workers and officials interviewed by the *Observer* denied there was a crisis in Darfur—or that killings, rape and a large-scale displacement of population had taken place—many were puzzled that it had become the focus of such hyperbolic warnings when there were crises of similar magnitude in both northern Uganda and eastern Congo.”

This is an important question, which was addressed in the recent WSWs article: “Sudan: why Powell calls Darfur violence ‘genocide’”.

The article stated that Colin Powell’s designation of “genocide” in Darfur was not motivated by humanitarian concern for the plight of the million

displaced people of Darfur. Rather, the choice of that highly charged term signalled “an escalation in American imperialism’s efforts to establish itself as the controlling power in North Africa and throughout the continent.” US interest in northern Africa, which has substantial oil reserves, has grown along with its concern over finite oil resources and social and political instability in Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf sheikdoms.



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