

Mounting evidence of US destabilisation of Sudan

Brian Smith

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An extraordinary meeting of the United Nations Security Council takes place on November 18-19 in Nairobi, at the request of the United States, which will focus on Darfur and the southern Sudan peace deal. It is only the fourth meeting in 50 years to take place outside of New York.

The meeting will review a resolution put forward by Britain, which condemns the Sudanese government as responsible for the humanitarian disaster in Darfur and threatens sanctions and military intervention if it fails to stop the crisis. The resolution calls for a 10,000-strong peacekeeping force, with additional wider powers beyond mere monitoring duties. The resolution also dangles the prospect of an international donor's conference for Sudan.

"The draft resolution is the carrot," said Britain's UN ambassador, Sir Emry Jones Parry. "We are saying that if you [the Sudanese government] get your act together to get a stable state and live together, then this is what we can contribute: a major peacekeeping operation by the UN, humanitarian relief, law and order, help with infrastructure and establishing the rule of law and democratic structures."

The UK draft resolution amounts to a plan to re-establish colonial control, albeit indirect, over Sudan. It is the culmination of a protracted effort by the US to undermine the existing government. In this the US has had the support of the UK, the former colonial power. Meanwhile, other powers, particularly France and Germany, have demonstrated their reluctance to be shouldered aside.

The two key reasons for the desire of the West, and particularly the US, to control Sudan are oil and water. Water is strategically important, given that the Blue Nile and the White Nile meet in Sudan and constitute the lifeline of Egypt immediately north. Recent pressure from Anglo-American interests led Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania to question the old Nile treaties with Egypt, which has extensive interests in Sudan.

At present, the oil sector is controlled largely by China (with 40 percent), but Pakistan, Malaysia, Russia and France also have holdings. From the mid-1970s, extensive oil exploration began in Sudan. The US is currently excluded from sharing in Sudan's oil wealth due to its own embargo, though Chevron previously spent \$1.2 billion and discovered oil fields in southern Sudan. The Frankfurter *Allgemeine Zeitung* reported in July 1998 that Chevron estimated "Sudan had more oil than Iran and Saudi Arabia together." It is currently pumping 345,000 barrels per day, and the US Energy Information Administration estimates that reserves just in the oilfields presently being exploited amount to between 660 million and 1.2 billion barrels.

All of this makes Sudan a valuable prize and one that at the moment is in the hands of America's rivals. An earlier US-backed resolution threatening sanctions was stalled in the Security Council by China, France and Russia, which wield vetoes, and which oppose sanctions against the oil sector in which they have stakes. Following this, the US began floating the idea of military intervention in July of this year. Both Britain and Australia jumped to defend the US proposal. Britain suggested that it would be prepared to send 5,000 troops if necessary, and Australia

dishonestly suggested that Canberra had received a request from the UN to provide troops for a UN force, with Foreign Minister Alexander Downer saying that there was "a good chance that we will send some troops to Sudan."

In September, then-US Secretary of State Colin Powell declared that the situation in Darfur amounted to genocide. This cleared the way for supposedly "humanitarian" military intervention and was intended to establish the US as the controlling power in North Africa and across the continent. The US has recently conducted a media campaign around the question of genocide, and has been calling for a larger African Union (AU) force that would be paid for and controlled by the West.

Sudan strongly rejects the accusation of genocide and has warned of "incalculable consequences" if foreign intervention is undertaken, warning that Sudan could "fall into a chaos like Iraq." The situation in Darfur allows the West, and primarily the US and UK, to propose military intervention for humanitarian purposes. And it also allows a slavish media, particularly in the US, to pronounce on their own moral concern for Darfur and to criticise the UN for its inaction in order to line up behind the call for military intervention.

Last month, more than \$20 million worth of US government contracts were awarded to US firms to operate in Darfur in support of the AU mission. This included an unspecified mission for Dynacorp, which runs a security operation in Afghanistan for the US government. This puts potentially armed US civilian contractors with close US ties into Darfur.

The European Union (EU) has until recently stopped short of declaring genocide and prevaricated over the question of military intervention. But it is increasingly coming around to the idea of intervention, fearing that it will be left behind as it was in Iraq. Germany indicated in September that it would be prepared to contribute soldiers to a UN mission, with German Defence Minister Peter Struck referring to the crisis as genocide. The German government is also seeking parliamentary approval to send transport planes to airlift AU troops, following the AU's request for EU help in deploying the enlarged monitoring force.

The French navy has also begun a cooperation programme with the Eritrean Navy as part of the US anti-terrorist operation "Enduring Freedom." French troops in Chad have already moved to the border region with Darfur, ostensibly to aid the humanitarian effort and stop cross-border raids by Sudanese-backed militias.

A deal signed on November 9 in Abuja, Nigeria, saw both the Sudanese government and the Darfuri rebels agreeing to lay down their arms, and to cooperate fully with a 3,250-strong AU truce monitoring force. Khartoum has also agreed to a no-fly zone. The ceasefire signed in April, however, is shaky—with many reports of violation by both sides, which are increasingly losing control of their forces. A UN report last week cited evidence of war crimes and mass abuses by all parties. This situation is expected to worsen as the end of the rainy season allows greater movement.

Just hours after the Abuja deal was signed, a refugee camp in Darfur

was attacked by armed soldiers in an attempt to force the residents to leave. It is unclear exactly who attacked the camps, whether official Sudanese forces or militias, or an independent offshoot, but the attack played into the hands of those seeking military intervention.

Responding, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said he hoped that the incident alerted the international community to the scale of the problem. He referred to videotape evidence of the attack, hoping that the “concrete evidence” would be broadcast in the capitals of Security Council members “who frankly have thought that it is time to slacken our efforts in Sudan, rather than increase the pressure.” He suggested that the panel could impose sanctions on the Khartoum government if it finds serious abuses of civilians have taken place.

The UN estimates that 70,000 people have died from violence, starvation and disease as a result of the conflict in Darfur, with around 1.5 million displaced. However, 15 percent of deaths are due to “injuries and violence” according to the World Health Organisation, with diarrhoea, fever and pneumonia the largest causes of deaths in the refugee camps.

Of primary concern to the US is the conclusion of the southern peace deal between Khartoum and the US-backed Sudan People’s Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA), which will allow access for US oil companies to the large oilfields in the south. The deal has been close to agreement since May.

The International Crisis Group (ICG) stated in a report earlier this year that the SPLA had trained 1,500 Darfurians near Raja, southwest Sudan, in March 2002. These constituted the core of the young fighters in what became the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) who began attacking government installations in February 2003 and sparked the current conflict and crisis in Darfur. The SLA’s first political declaration in March 2003 was also edited by the SPLA.

SPLA leader John Garang denies aiding the SLA, but the ICG reports that supplies appear to be being delivered by the SPLA to the SLA from Uganda (which has also historically backed the SPLA against Khartoum) and Kenya (where the ongoing negotiations over the southern peace deal are taking place). The SLA also receives support from Eritrea, and supplies from Chad, which both France and the US have enormous influence over and whose president, Idriss Deby, shares cultural ties with Darfur.

The US has suggested that the southern peace deal is transferable to Darfur, and UN envoy to Sudan, Jan Pronk, has told the Security Council that the southern deal could serve as a model for Darfur. This has strengthened the resolve of the SLA and Darfur’s other rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), to win the same concessions as the SPLA. They also see that US actions are weakening Khartoum’s position and that they may be able to hold out for greater concessions. The southern deal includes the possibility of secession, and *Stratfor*, an intelligence review close to the US government, notes that the US sees a federal Sudan as one possible solution for the future.

Garang has recently called for 30,000 “neutral” soldiers, funded by the UN, to be deployed in Darfur to “stop the killing.” In September, he addressed the Congressional Black Caucus and suggested that these forces should be made up of 10,000 of his own (US-backed) forces, 10,000 Sudanese government forces and 10,000 (Western-backed) African Union Forces. Garang also called for a change of regime to one of “national unity,” which is in keeping with US government thinking.

Sudan remains on the US State Department’s list of states that sponsor terrorism, and the Sudan-based Islamic African Relief Agency (IARA) was recently declared to be a Specially Designated Global Terrorist organisation by the US—which may now seek for it to be included on the “asset-freeze” list. This provoked a furious response from Khartoum, which is threatening to sue the US government. The IARA has a cooperation agreement with the World Food Programme to distribute food-aid in Darfur.

Sudanese President al Bashir’s regime is not well regarded by the US government, but Washington denies that it is seeking his removal, “in large part because no alternatives exist,” according to *Stratfor*. An overthrow would also have disastrous consequences, particularly whilst al Bashir still has a civilian base and the support of the military. US backing of rebel groups, however, creates a precarious and ultimately untenable position for al Bashir—he must either crush opposition groups and risk international condemnation or reach peace agreements with them that will alienate his nationalist support and undermine his control. The US also supports Sudanese opposition groups such as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), of which the SPLA is a member.

Another direction from which US intervention seems to be coming is Eritrea. *Stratfor* points to growing agitation by rebels in the northeast of Sudan, where the Beja Congress is increasing its activities with support from neighbouring Eritrea, which also has a Beja population. The Beja number about 2.2 million people, divided into five major tribes and many smaller sub-tribes with several languages. They cover an area from Eritrea right along the Red Sea coast and into Egypt—i.e., Sudan’s entire seaboard.

The US maintains good relations with Eritrea, which was recognised by the US less than two years after it broke from Ethiopia, and continues to send tens of millions in humanitarian and military aid. In October, the US made an official military visit when the missile destroyer USS *Hopper* docked in Masawa. Eritrea is also on good terms with Israel, which recognised its independence at the same time as the US in 1993, and is accused by Sudan of running rebel training camps in Eritrea, and also of being involved with the rebels in Darfur.

The Eritrean opposition has recently accused the Eritrean government of giving the Darfur rebels military training in Eritrea. The SLA and JEM were almost crushed a year ago but suddenly got stronger, leading to speculation about their possibly having received Western and regional aid. The government of Sudan has officially complained to the UN about Eritrea’s backing of several armed groups fighting against Khartoum. The NDA has openly begun negotiations with Eritrea, with which it is heavily connected

“When considered in context of the broader situation in Sudan,” *Stratfor* observes, “US support of Eritrea, and by extension Beja rebel groups, begins to make sense.... The support of the Beja rebels is in accordance with Washington’s overall policy, but is also linked to a greater strategic vision.”—i.e., in helping to create a Red Sea region favourable to US and Israeli interests. Also, the oil pipeline from the southern oil fields cuts across Sudan to the Red Sea at Port Sudan in the Beja territory.

Facing a three-front war, and with the obvious example of Iraq, the al Bashir government was obliged to concede almost all of the demands put forward regarding the southern peace deal. This agreement is set to establish Garang as vice-president of Sudan, giving him far-reaching powers over policy across the whole country, and more control than the central government will gain over the south. His appointment will give the US unprecedented control over Sudan.



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