

Bush decrees new sanctions against Sudan

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President Bush Tuesday announced that his administration is imposing a fresh set of economic sanctions on Sudan, claiming the measures are designed to pressure the government in Khartoum to halt the bloodshed in the country's western-most province of Darfur.

The sanctions target 30 Sudanese government-owned companies along with a company that Washington accuses of trafficking arms to Sudan, barring them from any financial relations with the US and making it a crime for American corporations or individuals to do business with them.

Three individuals—two senior Sudanese officials and a rebel leader—are subjected to similar economic sanctions under the presidential edict.

Bush also vowed to seek a new United Nations Security Council resolution imposing a tighter arms embargo on Sudan and creating conditions for further military intervention.

Four years of fighting in the Darfur region between armed separatist rebels, government forces and the Janjaweed, an ethnic Arab pro-government militia, have divided indigenous Arab and non-Arab tribes and left an estimated quarter of a million people dead—most of them from disease and hunger—while displacing some 2 million others.

While Washington has consistently sought to place the entire onus for the continuation of the conflict on the government in Khartoum, there is ample evidence that the separatist rebels have little incentive to reach a settlement, believing that a continuation of the violence could increase pressure for Western intervention and further their aims of regional autonomy and power-sharing.

In his speech Tuesday, Bush justified the new set of sanctions by accusing Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir of blocking the deployment of a United Nations peace-keeping force.

The Sudanese government has resisted the deployment of UN troops, fearing it could turn the country into a de facto Western protectorate. Instead, it has called for an expanded African Union force, with UN backing.

Once again, Bush labeled the humanitarian crisis in Darfur “genocide.” This assessment that has been rejected by both

the United Nations and a number of aid organizations active in the region, which acknowledge that Darfur constitutes one of the world's greatest humanitarian disasters, but dispute the inference that violent repression carried out by the government in Khartoum constitutes an attempt to exterminate an entire people.

The use of this term has an unmistakable purpose. Under the UN charter, the determination of genocide in a given country requires armed intervention. Washington's accusations of genocide have gone hand-in-hand with an attempt to portray the conflict as a racial struggle pitting “Arabs” against “black African” tribes, a gross simplification and distortion of the conflict aimed at inflaming public sentiments.

The “genocide” label is also utilized for domestic political purposes. Floated first by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell in the run-up to the 2004 election, the accusation was popular both with the Christian right and Zionist organizations, which have adopted the cause of Darfur for their own reasons.

The Bush administration had until recently dropped the use of the word genocide, but has resurrected it in the last several months.

“For too long, the people of Darfur have suffered at the hands of a government that is complicit in the bombing, murder, and rape of innocent civilians,” Bush declared in his White House speech Tuesday. “My administration has called these actions by their rightful name: genocide. The world has a responsibility to help put an end to it.”

If one were to remove the word “Darfur” and substitute “Iraq,” the entire passage would stand as a fitting indictment of the Bush administration itself. The number of Iraqis who have lost their lives as a result of four years of US war and occupation is at least three times as great as number who have died in Darfur, and a far greater percentage of these deaths is directly attributable to military action. Twice as many Iraqis have been driven from their homes, either internally displaced or forced into exile, and every essential social institution and aspect of basic infrastructure has been decimated.

Washington is not pursuing a policy of genocide in Iraq;

its aim is not to wipe out the Iraqi people or exterminate its Sunni population. Rather, it is to suppress all opposition to its semi-colonial control of the country and its strategic oil wealth, a goal that has unleashed violence and death on a near genocidal scale.

Nor is the government of al-Bashir out to exterminate the non-Arab people of Darfur, but rather has sought to suppress a challenge to its centralized control, an aim that has also entailed widespread death and suffering.

There is, of course, a noteworthy difference in these two tragic processes. George Bush heads the militarily and economically most powerful nation on the face of the planet, while al-Bashir is the president of one of its most impoverished—a nation that bears the scars of protracted colonial domination and which was an arena throughout the latter part of the twentieth century for bloody wars fomented by US imperialism in an attempt to block Soviet influence in the region.

The present improbable attempt by George W. Bush to masquerade as a champion of human rights is driven by similar geo-strategic interests. Sudan is a significant producer of oil, with reserves estimated as high as 1.2 billion barrels. Moreover, as the country with the largest land mass in Africa, it straddles the strategic Red Sea, the Maghreb, Central Africa and the Horn of Africa.

Last, and certainly not least, it has become the focal point of a bid by China to secure its steadily rising demand for oil by cementing close economic and political ties with the African continent.

China has invested some \$15 billion in Sudan since 1999, and it owns a 40-percent stake in the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Co., which runs Sudan's oil fields. Its Sudanese oil imports have increased nearly six-fold over the past year, reaching 220,000 barrels a day, according to customs figures released by Beijing earlier this month.

Not surprisingly, Bush's imposition of unilateral sanctions and his demand that the UN follow suit drew sharp criticism from Beijing, which has no intention of ceding its interests in the region. According to the Associated Press, Liu Guijin, China's special envoy to Sudan, commented, "Willful sanctions and simply applying pressure are not conducive to the solution of the problem and will only make the issue more complicated."

Having just returned from a trip to Darfur's refugee camps, Liu said he believed Sudanese factions and international negotiators were working to resolve the humanitarian crisis in the region.

"I didn't see a desperate scenario of people dying of hunger," the Chinese envoy told the press. He added, "The Darfur issue and issues in eastern Sudan and southern Sudan are caused by poverty and underdevelopment. Only when

poverty and underdevelopment are addressed will there be peace in Sudan."

Opposition to the US sanctions was echoed by Russia and South Africa. Russia's ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, questioned the timing of Washington's measures, commenting to Reuters that the UN had been working with Sudan and "there have been some positive developments."

South Africa's UN ambassador, Dumisani Kumalo, also expressed skepticism about the US sanctions. "Right now the surprising thing was that we were thinking the government of Sudan was now beginning to take the right actions and agree to what we were going to do," he said. "It's not clear which way we are going."

Washington has no interest in the stabilization of Sudan or a resolution of its humanitarian crisis. Its policy there, as in Iraq, has since well before the Darfur crisis been one of regime change, with its supposed humanitarian concerns serving merely as a useful cover. As China—perceived by Washington as its principal rising global rival—has expanded its influence in the country, this desire for regime change has only strengthened.

There is also undoubtedly within this new-found campaign over Darfur an attempt to shift public attention from the catastrophe that US imperialism has created in Iraq.

The Bush administration enjoys the strongest support for this diversion from within his ostensible opposition, the Democratic Party, whose leading politicians have sought to cast a US intervention there as some kind of moral crusade. Last month, Senator Joseph Biden, the Delaware Democrat who heads the Foreign Relations Committee and is a candidate for the party's 2008 presidential nomination, called for direct US military intervention.

"I would use American force now," he said at a hearing of his committee. "I think it's not only time not to take force off the table. I think it's time to put force on the table and use it."

Similarly, in February, New York Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton, the party's putative front-runner in the presidential race, called for US action "to stop the genocide in Darfur." During testimony by Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, she asked the Pentagon chiefs whether the Bush administration would send in American warplanes to enforce a no-fly zone over Sudan.



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