

## **Why Darfur intervention is a mistake**

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*Analysts say that Darfur is Rwanda in slow motion, that we should send troops to protect African civilians from their Arab killers and disarm the infamous Janjaweed.*

In the Rwandan genocide, a million people were slaughtered in a hundred days. It was Africa's holocaust. Few would have opposed a short sharp episode of colonial-style armed intervention to stop it.

The British Foreign Secretary, David Milliband, certainly leans towards such a policy for Darfur.

"Too many times, in the aftermath of mass atrocities, we've promised 'never again'," he said.

"But in a world where so many states remain wedded to the principle of non-interference and the primacy of sovereignty, how do we make the responsibility to protect a reality, not a slogan?"

His are good intentions but they pave the way to a problem from hell.

Darfur is a war - a horrible war, but first and foremost, it is a war.

Ninety per cent of the deaths occurred four to five years ago and the government and its militia proxies were the main culprits.

Today many fewer are being killed and it is hard to make a moral distinction between the sides.

The rebels started the recent offensives - notably the attack on the capital, Khartoum - some Arabs have switched sides, and Chadians have plunged in on both sides.

The UN peacekeepers are too few and too poorly equipped to make a difference.

"Send them helicopters!" we are told. But helicopters will not stop this war.

### **Responsibility to protect**

If government and rebels want to fight they will fight and the best thing for peacekeepers to do is keep their heads down.

When the rebels attacked the capital on 10 May, the vast and vastly expensive peacekeeping operations were just bystanders.

Should we not protect civilians?

Each month 100 civilians are killed by one side or another and there will probably be more when the army tries to clear rebel strongholds after the attempted putsch.

UN patrols around the displaced camps could stop many of these killings and monitors following army operations can deter others. I am all for this.

But let us not pretend that they would stop the war.

Like emergency food rations, this sort of protection is a stop-gap measure that saves lives until a political solution can be found.

The one thing that has really worked in Darfur is emergency relief.

It has kept millions alive.

Humanitarian aid in wartime is an exercise in making a disaster just about tolerable.

Relief is now so proficient that death rates among Darfur's children have been brought down to pre-war levels. We should keep that aid effort going.

But these measures are not enough for the advocates of the "responsibility to protect" - R2P in the jargon. They want military intervention, preferably by NATO, as in Kosovo.

Let us have no illusions about what that would mean.

First, the Sudan government would close down the humanitarian operation. How many tens of thousands of lives might that cost before peace came?

Some believe that threatening a Kosovo-style aerial attack would frighten Khartoum into surrender.

That is a big gamble. In fact, it might make both sides fight harder and longer.

Khartoum believes NATO peacekeepers are the camel's nose poking into the tent and the rest of the beast intends to follow.

President Omar al-Bashir fears the West's aim is regime change or secession for Darfur.

And we are not disabusing them.

American Congressmen are calling for Kosovo-like action.

French troops are supporting Chad's President Idriss Deby, who is in a state of war with Sudan.

Quite logically, Khartoum is doing its best to stop the UN operating freely in Darfur.

It is also destabilising Chad.

The UN protests that it is not the vanguard of an invasion, just a poor overstretched peacekeeping force.

That it is, but the UN Security Council authorised it to use force to protect civilians.

It is trying to chart a middle way between fighting and peacemaking. And it is finding that no such middle way exists.

And the rebels think that if NATO comes in, the Sudanese government will be driven out and the province will be handed over to them, as in Kosovo.

So why make peace if you can have it all by hanging tough?

What if we actually used force against Khartoum?

Might it work, or might we find ourselves with an open-ended commitment to policing a violent and divided region of the world, part of the problem and not the solution?

David Milliband asks, "How do we make the responsibility to protect a reality, not a slogan?"

But it is just a slogan.

In big and complicated wars - like Darfur - successful armed intervention is so unlikely that it is foolish even to make the threat.

What Darfur needs is old-fashioned peace and peacekeeping and state-of-the-art humanitarian technology.