

NEVER AGAIN, NO LONGER?

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Two weeks ago I visited the refugee camps in Sudan and Chad serving those who fled the state-sponsored pogrom that began 17 months ago in the Darfur region of Sudan. This campaign of violence is often compared with the genocide in Rwanda, both because of its brutality and because it reached its peak close to the 10th anniversary of Rwanda's mass slaughter. The comparison is not quite right: so far the Sudanese dead number in the thousands or tens of thousands, not the hundreds of thousands, and the mayhem appears not to have been designed to exterminate an entire class of victims. The right analogy for Sudan isn't Rwanda; it's Kosovo.

The refugees' stories reminded me of the tales of expulsion I heard in Kosovo, except that they were even more horrible. They all involved the Janjaweed, the Cossack-like ethnic Arab marauders that the Sudanese government unleashed in order to crush a rebellion in Darfur and punish members of the rebels' tribes -- much as the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic unleashed paramilitaries to crush Kosovar rebels and civilians. In the Chadian camp of Iridimi, a woman named Aza Jamaa Tegel told me that her village of Janga had been attacked the previous October. "The Janjaweed came," she said, "and they burned everything in the village. Then the helicopters came and dropped bombs. They killed my brother, my husband and four of my six children." Aza and her two children and the other surviving villagers rode on donkeys for 13 days before reaching the border. All over Darfur, women who were caught by the Janjaweed were raped. Now, 1.2 million of Darfur's 6 million people live in abysmal camps or in impromptu settlements. Several hundred thousand may die of starvation or disease -- in which case the human toll might end up closer to that of Rwanda than to that of Kosovo.

In the case of Kosovo, intervention to roll back ethnic terror ultimately worked: NATO's 78-day bombing campaign forced Milosevic's paramilitaries to withdraw. And yet neither the United Nations Security Council nor any other body has contemplated such an act in Sudan. Last month, the council failed to pass a resolution criticizing Sudan. The Bush administration wanted one, but neither China, nor Pakistan and Algeria, the two Muslim countries now serving on the Security Council, did. Now Aza's ability to return home depends on a series of promises that the Sudanese government made two weeks ago in a "joint communiqué" signed with the United Nations.

This is surely not what Secretary General Kofi Annan and other worthies meant when they said in the aftermath of the Rwanda debacle that massacres could never again go unchallenged. What happened? Some part of the answer is specific to this one situation. Nobody wanted to provoke the Sudanese government while it was negotiating with Christian rebels to end 21 years of civil war. And as we know from the case of Rwanda or Sierra Leone or Liberia, Africa is not Europe: Western public opinion will not be as

moved by the plight of the Sudanese as by that of the Kosovars, and Sudan's own neighbors have neither the capacity nor the political will to intervene themselves.

But that's not all; humanitarian intervention is also yesterday's problem. Though the Bush administration has been seriously engaged with the situation in Darfur, it is, after all, supremely preoccupied by Iraq and, more broadly, by the war on terror. And the truth is, so are we all. We simply do not think as much as we used to about the vulnerability of distant people now that we are so consumed by our own vulnerability. And the war in Iraq has hopelessly muddied the waters on the legitimacy of intervention. Darfur is the first case of large-scale human rights abuse since 9/11; what it tells us about our emerging system of collective security is not pleasant.

It's hard to remember now, but the question of when states were obliged to prevent or limit catastrophic harm was a burning question in the 1990's. Among the defining events of that time were the disasters in Somalia, Rwanda and the Balkans. The great, if very tardy, successes of the international order were the interventions in Kosovo and East Timor. The old cold-war conflict between hawk and dove was shuffled and re-formed, with liberal (and neoconservative) interventionists on one side and "realists" on the other. The debate between the two sides was perfectly captured in an anecdote that both Colin Powell and Madeleine Albright recall in their memoirs, though to very different effect. After Powell, still chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1993, described the dangers of sending troops to stop the slaughter in Bosnia, Albright, then the ambassador to the United Nations, burst out, "What are you saving this superb military for, Colin, if we can't use it?" Powell thought the story was about recklessness; Albright thought it was about moral timidity.

In 2000, George W. Bush was surrounded by realists like Powell and Condoleezza Rice, and Al Gore by interventionists. In their second debate, Bush said that in foreign policy he would be guided by "the best interests of the United States"; Gore, by contrast, said, "I see it as a question of values." What they were differing about, above all, was the appropriate use of force. During the campaign, Bush made it clear that if another Rwanda occurred on his watch, he would not favor sending troops.

The 9/11 attacks made the entire issue seem academic. Who would now ask what our military was for? It was there to defend our core national interests. And the crusade against terrorism also seemed to have erased the distinction between "interests" and "values," since the wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq, whatever their original motives, had the effect of liberating a people from tyranny.

But how seriously would we take those values when our interests were not implicated? After all, if humanitarian intervention must involve vital interests, then humanitarianism itself is irrelevant. One of the consequences of 9/11 may be that vital interests have come to feel so pressing that humanitarianism has become an unaffordable luxury. Judging by the near global silence over Darfur, this impulse toward self-protection may extend far beyond our own borders. Or perhaps the Bush administration's effort to repackage the

immensely unpopular war in Iraq as a Wilsonian crusade to free a subject people has discredited the very principle of humanitarian intervention.

The agreement that Kofi Annan made with President Omar Hassan Ahmed al-Bashir commits the Sudanese to "immediately start to disarm" the Janjaweed, to deploy a "strong, credible and respected police force" in refugee areas and to "end impunity," among other things. What do we do in the likely event that the Sudanese don't hold up their end? When Milosevic refused to make similar pledges at the Rambouillet conference in early 1999, he was bombed into submission. Al-Bashir has every reason to believe that he faces no such threat.