**WHEN DARFUR WEEPS: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

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**ABSTRACT**

Sudan is the largest state in Africa geographically and has a population of about 41 million people, of which 70% are Sunni Muslims by religion. (CIA, 2006). The non-Muslim population resides mostly in Southern Sudan and is either Christian or of indigenous religions. Darfur consists of three provinces in the western part of Sudan: North ("Shamal") Darfur, West ("Gharb") Darfur, and South ("Janub") Darfur. The greater Khartoum province, an area nicknamed the "Arab Triangle," has become a developed and industrialized part of the country. This financial development has been driven by Sudan's oil trade. However, oil has brought war, death, and hunger for a vast majority of the Sudanese living in the squalor of Africa**.** This paper outlines the historical background of Sudan, the history of the war in Sudan, the Darfur conflict, and the causes and effects of the Darfur crisis. It also examines the interests and interventions aimed at de-escalating the Darfur crisis. The conclusion reached is that solutions to the decade-old conflict in Sudan must adapt and change as necessary if they are to remain relevant and effective.

**Keywords:** Darfur crisis. Darfur conflict, Sudan conflict

**INTRODUCTION**

In this paper, I will outline the historical background of Sudan, the history of the war in Sudan, the Darfur conflict, and the causes and effects of the Darfur crisis. We shall also examine the interests and interventions aimed at de-escalating the Darfur crisis. The conclusion reached is that solutions to the decade-old conflict in Sudan must adapt and change as necessary if they are to remain relevant and effective, which is Similar to the northern Sudan proverb which says, "I cannot feed my donkey only when I need to ride it, but must keep it well all the time so that it can be ready whenever it is needed." (Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naim, 2005)

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SUDAN**

"Sudan is the largest state in Africa geographically and has a population of about 41 million people, of which 70% are Sunni Muslims by religion." (CIA, 2006). The non-Muslim population resides mostly in Southern Sudan and is either Christian or of indigenous religions. Darfur consists of three provinces in the western part of Sudan: North ("Shamal") Darfur, West ("Gharb") Darfur, and South ("Janub") Darfur. Located in the northeastern part of Sudan, Khartoum has been named the capital city. According to Andrew Natsios (2007), "the greater Khartoum province, an area nicknamed the "Arab triangle," has become a developed and industrialized part of the country." This financial development has been driven by Sudan’s oil trade. The remaining parts of the country, namely the South and Darfur in the West, have historically been underdeveloped and neglected by the central governments. Sudan is surrounded by many states. According to Surajit Sarma (2015), "Sudan’s neighbors are Chad, Central African Republic (CAR), and Libya in the west; the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Uganda, and Kenya in the south; Ethiopia and Eritrea in the east; and Egypt in the north".

Sudan gained independence from British colonial rule in 1956. Between 1964 and 1984, Sudan was ruled by General Jaafar Nimeiri under a military regime. After a period of civilian government, the National Islamic Front (NIF), led by Hassan al-Turabi, assumed power as a result of a coup d'etat by allies, the "National Salvation Revolution," in June 1989. Sudan's current president, General Omar al-Bashir, took over power through a military coup in 1989. Hassan al-Turabi founded the NIF, later renamed the National Congress Party (NCP), with an Islamic ideology. In 2002, al-Turabi was ousted from the government by al-Bashir and is now an opposition voice against the al-Bashir government.

**THE HISTORY OF SUDAN’S WAR**

The Darfur conflict in Sudan has heightened since 2003 to become Africa's greatest humanitarian catastrophe. Amid vague and anecdotal accounts, reports of deaths and two million displaced people now indicate the scale of casualties. The United Nation Food Programme (NFP) (2006) estimated in early 2006 that more than 3.5 million people in Darfur needed food. "An estimated 13,000 humanitarian aid workers, mostly Sudanese working for international organizations, are providing aid to victims." (NFP 2016). The African Union (AU), as of last year, had about 7,000 troops in Darfur to protect refugee camps and monitor ceasefires.

Sudan has been plagued by civil war for most of its history since independence. During British rule, the north and south were administered primarily as two distinct colonies. After independence, clashes emerged between the non-Muslim south and the Muslim north. A ceasefire was achieved in 1972 with an agreement signed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. But this agreement was broken in 1983 when Nimeiri reorganized Sudan into a federal state and eliminated the autonomy of the south. In the same year, 1972, the introduction of sharia, or Islamic law, to the entire country created further tension between the government and the non-Muslim population in the south. According to the Sudan Tribune (2007), the southern rebel group, the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), was formed in 1983, and a civil war ensued over the next two decades. During this period, the conflict resulted in an estimated two million deaths from war-related causes and famine, and four million displaced people. Most of the displaced relocated to camps in the Khartoum region, while others fled to refugee camps in neighboring countries.

A ceasefire has held sway since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 between the government and the SPLM. The CPA was mediated by the international community and incorporated the SPLM into the central government in Khartoum through the Government of National Unity (GNU), a ruling coalition formed with the NCP. The CPA also created a distinct government structure in southern Sudan and established a revenue-sharing arrangement for oil production in the south. The CPA set out a six-year transitional period to be followed by national, regional, and local elections in the south with the possibility of regional partition. According to the Sudan Tribune (2007), the implementation of the CPA remains tenuous. The report further argued that "cabinet position distribution in the central government has been viewed as unfair by the south, particularly with both the Energy and Finance ministries going to the NCP instead of the SPLM." Nevertheless, about $1.5 billion was transferred in 2006 to the southern government under the CPA. (Sudan Tribune, 2007).

**THE DARFUR CONFLICT**

It is interesting to know that in the Darfur conflict, religion does not appear to be a factor because the parties involved are predominantly Muslims. Ted Dagne (2006, P. 3) argues that "ethnic distinctions in the region are often ambiguous—there are some 30 ethnic groups settled in the Darfur region, with intermarrying mixes of Africans and Arabs." Nevertheless, the struggle is frequently delineated as between Arab nomadic groups and African settled tribes. The depiction has been enhanced by the government-supported militias called "Janjaweed," or "devil on a horse," Arab militias who have worked with the Sudanese government in attacking villages to uproot the settlements of rebel groups in Darfur. Three African tribes are generally identified with the resistance in Darfur: the Zaghawa, who are in North Darfur; the Masseleit, of West Darfur; and the Fur, who reside around the Jebel Marra Mountains in the eastern part of North Darfur. The name Darfur is often referred to as the "land of the Fur".

For decades, nomadic groups have attacked settled tribes in the competition for land and resources in the hostile Sub-Saharan climate; settled farmers require land to grow crops, while migrant herders require fertile fields for their animals to graze. In the mid-90s, some self-defense militias were organized among the Masseleit tribes in Western Darfur in response to raids by nomadic groups. In 1995, the Governor of West Darfur exacerbated an already tense situation by dividing traditional Masseleit lands into 13 emirates and allocating some of them to Arab groups. In February 2003, the three Darfur tribes launched the Darfur Liberation Front and changed its name to the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A). The rebels attacked police stations and a government arms cache at the airport in El Fasher, the capital town of North Darfur. This was the spark that has since escalated the violence in Darfur.

**POSSIBLE CAUSES OF DARFUR CONFLICT**

The issues underlying the conflict in Darfur are complex. Ted Dagne (2006, P. 3) argues that some aspects to consider include:

[…]To begin with, the conflict taking place in Darfur has many interwoven causes. While rooted in structural inequality between the center of the country around the Nile and the 'peripheral' areas such as Darfur, tensions were exacerbated in the last two decades of the twentieth century by a combination of environmental calamity, non-sustainable fast population growth, desertification, political opportunism, and regional politics.

Since the 1930s, settled tribes that needed land for farming have had to come into conflict with nomads that needed land for their livestock to graze. This conflict flared up in the 1980s, and the arming of rebel groups and "janjaweed" escalated the violence. This happened as a result of the failure of traditional systems for the allocation of land and water resources and the mediation conflict. This failure is compounded by a combination of extreme environmental changes and negative human manipulation. As the ability of local communities to cope with drought and famine declined over the last two decades and the capacity of their traditional systems of conflict increased, the civil war in southern Sudan resumed in 1983.

The central government in Khartoum has historically neglected the peripheral parts of the country. As a result of this, the rebel groups had to organize to combat the government for their interests. In 2005, the discovery of oil was announced in Darfur. It remains uncertain whether the potential resources motivate the parties to negotiate a deal similar to the CPA or represent a contributing factor to the complications of the conflict. Another cause is the area of genocide. The Janjaweed are Arab militias who are undertaking an ethnic cleansing campaign of African tribes. And accounts have been reported in which Janjaweed claims ethnic cleansing as a rationale for the killing of men and rape of women. It is difficult to separate or rank these underlying and aggravating "causes", as they tend to interact with and reinforce each other, sometimes looking to broader or very local factors.

**THE EFFECTS OF THE DARFUR CRISIS**

According to the United States Government Accountability Office (2006), more than two million Darfurians, a third of the region's population, have been internally displaced as a result of the systematic destruction of villages; some 200,000 refugees have fled to neighboring Chad. An estimated 400,000 people in the region have died as a result of violence, disease, and starvation. Sexual violence is also rampant.

Complicating matters is the fact that over the past year and a half, the rebel groups have become fragmented under the strain of a failing rebellion combined with active recruitment and payoff by the Khartoum regime, leading to more infighting and more "warlordism" on the ground in Darfur in rebel-controlled territories. As a result of this disaster in Darfur, human rights organizations such as the Save Darfur Coalition have called for greater international pressure on the Sudanese government to put an end to the massacres and destruction of villages. When it comes to the condition of people in the camps, the crisis is not one exhibited by measurable data but by human suffering. People are stuck in these camps in an environment that is becoming increasingly politicized and violent. They have no idea if or when they will return to their ancestral home; are unable to move outside the camps to collect the necessities of life for fear of rape and other forms of sexual violence; and are assaulted by the Sudanese government forces and rebel militias. This is the fate of those who have the dubious luck of being confined in the "open prisons" that are the displaced camps of Darfur. Whatever the precise cause and effect, there is no doubt the current political climate has produced this particular "pressure cooker" that is squeezing out humanitarian assistance through violence and closing in a large population under constant intimidation and death threats.

**WHAT HAVE BEEN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S REACTION, SANCTIONS, INTERESTS, AND INTERVENTION?**

Here, we shall briefly mention some of them. In July 2004, the U.S. Congress declared that genocide was occurring in Darfur. In September 2004, US Secretary of State Colin Powell agreed: "We conclude that genocide has been committed in Darfur and that the government of Sudan and the Janjaweed bear responsibility." (ReliefWeb, 2006). The United States, along with the United Kingdom, has been active in pressuring for a greater UN role in Sudan and has also taken part in recent peace negotiations. American businesses have been prohibited from dealing with Sudan since 1997, when an executive order by then U.S. President Bill Clinton placed terrorism-related sanctions on Sudan. The United States and the UN Security Council will approve coordinated sanctions on Sudan, including the freezing of international financial transactions. In the area of interests, U.S. relations with the Sudanese government have been defined by conflicting security and humanitarian concerns. Diplomatic pressure successfully led to the Sudanese government's cooperation in ending terrorist training camps, including the expulsion of Osama bin Laden, who had lived in Sudan between 1991 and 1996. Since September 11, the Sudanese government has been cooperating with U.S. agencies in the war on terror. And the 2005 U.N. World Summit created the "Responsibility to Protect (R2P)" doctrine to guide collective action by the international community on humanitarian grounds. According to Ahmed Abuzaid (2019), UN Security Council Resolution 1706 made Sudan the first country referenced concerning "R2P". The principles were developed by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), which was formed in 1991 to examine when and how international intervention should override the sovereignty of a state.

**EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION**

Considering the analysis of the Darfur crisis so far, it is clear that the Darfur crisis reflects the paradox of the post-colonial state in Africa: asserting the prerogatives of sovereignty while not really being sovereign "on the ground" and without fulfilling its responsibilities to the citizens. While immediate and effective action must be taken to relieve the suffering of the civilian population, longer-term strategy must also confront this paradox by consistently holding African governments accountable for their sovereign responsibilities even in times of relative peace. At present, western governments are happy to deal with corrupt regimes to exploit oil resources and to reap huge profits from the trade in arms and ammunition on all sides of a civil war or armed conflict, with no responsibility to the African populace. The arms used to kill civilians in Darfur are all manufactured in developed "civilized" countries. Yet, when a crisis like that in Darfur breaks out, the same western governments express outrage and "profound" concern, though such tragedies are made possible by their policies and industries. The agencies involved in the Darfur crisis should keep in mind that both short-term and long-term responses must be based on the clear understanding that conflict over power and resources is a permanent feature of all human societies, but it does not have to and should not be violent. Where there is violent conflict, the west must understand that it cannot end violence and mediate conflict without addressing the underlying causes as well as providing immediate relief for victims. Neither is appropriate nor sufficient alone, nor should either be done in ways that obstruct or constrain the other. The most compelling reasons to care about the crisis in Darfur are moral; as in the Golden Rule, we care for others so that they care for us. But do we Africans limit this to our compatriots in the United States or fellow Christians across the world, and not our physical neighbors in a foreign country or of another religion?

Finally, there should be a system of collective, consistent, and institutional action, which must be constantly maintained to operate in all cases, not just "invented" for selected crises we wish to resolve. As Africans, we share the same donkey, and as I earlier mentioned, we must all cooperate to keep it well so that it will be ready for any of us to ride when needed.

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