

The Price of Sudanese Politics: Violence and Khartoum's Economic Agenda

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Abstract

This paper analyses possible causes of violence in Darfur, acknowledging both economic and racial factors as relevant candidates. It examines the relationships and interconnections of both viable causes and offers an argument in support of economic incentives at work in Darfur. No one can truly deny the evidence that backs up Khartoum's racial motives that fuel their crusade in Darfur, but evidence and past patterned behavior also suggest a strong presence of Khartoum's responding to economic incentives that affect Darfur negatively. Acknowledging and pursuing economic goals is a fundamental part of everyday life and human behavior. It cannot be discounted completely in the examination of the behavior of any institution. Likewise, self interest and economic motives must be at play to some extent in Khartoum's actions against the Darfurians.

Everyone at some point in their lives makes decisions that unknowingly harm the interests of others. It is often an inescapable consequence of simply living in our environment. We all know the woman who became badly burned from a McDonald's coffee because they'd made it horribly hot, little to their knowledge. We've experienced the unpleasant feeling of stepping on chewed gum or a dropped thumb tack hidden deep within the carpet. On a larger scale, an influential party holds true to the argument that industrial pollution harms our atmosphere and threatens our way of life, and many believe the government at times imposes too high a tax for too little a purpose. So many people invest in household security systems to protect their valuables from intruders bent on taking them. For the people of Sudan, consequences like these are an expectation of their government's choices all too well understood. In 2003, the government of Sudan closed off the entire region of Darfur, in western Sudan, and sent specially trained militia in to pillage and cleanse the area of its citizens. Many suspect the government will not stop their violent campaign until the entire population of Darfur ceases to exist. Since 2003, the bloody conflict has claimed the lives of an estimated 400,000 people. Activists, coupled with the international community, vie to find a solution to stopping the campaign for good (Cheadle and Prendergast 5-6). Many scholars debate over the actual causes and events that led to Darfur's genocide, but the country's government follows a repeated pattern of violence for the sake of economic interest, or maximizing their personal gain, and the consequences of that pattern look very similar to what's happening in Darfur today. When the Sudanese government seeks to get all they can from the monetary gain available to them, they are responding to their economic environment or incentives. They do this in variety of ways.

The Sudanese government in Khartoum, Sudan's Capital, induces violent and angry racial conflict to achieve their goals, which has caused trouble for the country in the past and is based on disputes over resources. They engineer special ethnic militia to cause dissent in target areas. Today, we can see a pattern persisting in Khartoum's responses to foreign trade interests, prospective oil operations, and the finances of southerners, and it is clear that they defend their interests with violent action. Khartoum has attacked entire populations for the sake of oil, and uses force to defend foreign petroleum operations. As it was in the past and continues to be today in Sudan, violence not unlike what's happening in Darfur is at times only a side effect of the Sudanese government's pursuit of economic incentives. Evidence suggests that Darfur might simply be no more than this.

It was after Sudan's independence from Britain, as Prendergast and Cheadle, along with Maitre describe, when violence mainly appeared as a result of Khartoum's self interested agenda. When British leaders abdicated Sudan to fight WWII, they left power in the hands of an elite few in the capital. This garnered distrust in a less wealthy South and set the stage for Sudan's first civil war (Cheadle and Prendergast 52-54). Following ten years of fighting between the North and South over what southerners viewed as northern economic and racial oppression, Jafaar al-Nimeiri held power in the capital during the 60s, 70s and 80s. After experiencing damaged relations with the Soviet Union in the 1970s, who supplied the North with most of their arms then, Nimeiri signed the Addis Ababa accords with the South. These agreements gave southerners financial autonomy, a place in power sharing, and the right to collect government taxes on southern financial operations. Nimeiri's appointed Islamic regime resented these provisions and pressured him to break the agreement. When oil was discovered in the South, the Islamic regime redoubled their efforts against the Addis Ababa and began the first iteration in the pattern of causing violence for the sake of the government's economic gain. Elites in the north moved to maximize oil profits and Nimeiri "...stole southern proceeds from an oil licensing deal and set in motion plans for a pipeline to take oil from the South to Port Sudan, for export..." (Cheadle and Prendergast 55). Around the same time, Nimeiri ordered southern troops defending oil sites in the south to abandon their posts and replaced them with northern troops. Several southern battalions fled and resisted, giving rise to the Sudanese People's Liberation Army and compounding Sudan's civil war (55-56). Here, violence was a nasty side effect of the choices made by Sudan's leaders. Their behavior is a popular practice in present day Sudan.

Nimeiri's regime came to an end in "1985, but its legacy continues largely unchanged in contemporary Sudanese politics" (Maitre 60-61). Nimeiri acted to maximize his own gain without any regard to the violent consequences that could result. His behavior reflects most of Sudan's political choices since their independence and it meant escalated civil war and violation of the Sudanese people's autonomy. This sort of behavior with these sorts of consequences continues to be practiced by Khartoum today. It is a continually repeated pattern. When confronted with the prospect of great personal gain, the Sudanese government has a habit of inducing violence through its pursuit. As well, there are effective tools available to them to do so.

Khartoum always has the opportunity to exploit certain resources that make it easier for them to continue violent gain maximizing behavior today and exacerbate its consequences. Tribal conflict in Sudan's history also follows a pattern of resulting in violence. Khartoum uses it to make their goals more accessible. There is a record in Sudan of tribal conflict over natural resources that sometimes carried troublesome results. In Darfur, conflict is likely centered on separation of Arab and African Muslim population segments and compounded by economic competition between sedentary peasants and cattle herding nomads (Maitre 58). The ethnic identification is not completely clear, and made complex by disputes over resource allocations (Maitre 60). Violent tension between herding groups, particularly the Fur in Darfur, and tribal capitalists jumped to full speed when a money economy was introduced in Sudan

during the 1950's. Most of the country's wealth had accumulated in the hands of the Jellaba tribe and they began, "...incorporating all areas of Sudan into money commodity relations" (Haaland 1982). The integration of a new monetary system caused hostility from various ethnic groups towards the Jellaba and other capitalist tribes. In response to the new system as well, there was an overall increase in livestock herding, niche trade of the Fur and Baggara tribes, as other groups incorporated cattle into their production schedules. As a result, Nielson describes, the Fur and Baggara's normal pasture and herd routes become over-crowded and the two tribes fought over the land with open violence and cattle rustling (Haaland 1982). The evidence he presents also supports the fact that similar tribal conflicts have probably been dealt with in the same ways, through, "accommodation and greater symbioses or by displacing one of the groups..." (Barth 1969). This legacy of conflict over resources continues in Sudan today. According to a New York Times article from Aug 3, 2009, clashes between tribal groups over cattle rustling and herding resulted in the deaths of about 160 people ("160 Killed in Sudan in Tribal Attack" A10). Tribal conflict in Darfur doesn't come without an external cost, and violent disputes are a very common thing. If groups, especially the Fur in Darfur, were harmed by Khartoum economically in the past, imagine the kind of impact similar action might have on them today.

Cheadle and Prendergast, and Rebecca Tinsley talk of evidence that points to Khartoum's engineering of special militant forces to inflame violent tribal conflict and attain their economic goals. Not unexpectedly, dealings like this result in violence, as they frequently have in Sudan. It is speculated that the Sudanese government, "...armed, trained, and provided logistical support for horse-mounted militias..." to attack certain tribal groups and clear the way for foreign oil development (Cheadle and Prendergast 58). The idea is to exploit the bloodshed that results from tribal hatred and economic disputes and Khartoum likely uses it to pursue their economic agendas (Cheadle and Prendergast 58-62). Evidence supports the fact that Khartoum..."clear[ed] out populations of huge swathes of south central Sudan in order to secure the way for oil companies to begin exploiting oil" (Cheadle and Prendergast 62) They likely engage in this activity with their ethnic militias, as Tinsley describes foreign-made arms being handed to the militia who help defend their interests (Tinsley 12). Though such a measure necessarily entails violent consequences, those consequences are likely bolstered because they involve Sudan's tribal animosities. The ethnic resource of conflict has been used by Khartoum in the past for its own self interest, and they still adhere to a pattern of pursuing that self interest, regardless of the costs. Khartoum's behavior naturally entails bloodshed, intentional or not.

There is such a large foreign interest in the country's resources that they carry the pattern of violence and self interest to extreme measures, resulting in human harm not unlike Darfur. China is the largest foreign investor in Sudan (Forsyth 271), along with Russia, Britain, France and Switzerland offering them everything from power plants to heavy weapons (Tinsley 13). Tinsley offers evidence supporting Chinese armament of Khartoum's mercenaries who in turn defend Chinese oil installations violently. When rebels kidnapped nine Chinese Petroleum Corporation staff members in 2008, Khartoum responded with force that resulted in the deaths of Chinese workers (Tinsley 12-13). In clearing out areas for oil development, Cheadle and Prendergast argue, Khartoum has the support of Canadian, Malaysian, and Chinese oil companies (Cheadle and Prendergast 62). As discussed above, Khartoum likely uses their ethnic militia to cleanse entire populations and make way for foreign oil development, and militias aren't the only grim strategy they employ.

Can it be any surprise that Khartoum has blocked relief flights destined for starving populations who are forced to leave their areas (Cheadle and Prendergast 62)? Evidence doesn't directly support that this was their intention, but given their history, can it not be reasonably assumed? The pattern of violence for the sake of self interest must persist in Khartoum's agenda today. Cheadle and Prendergast assert, "Oil exploitation has lined the pockets of mass murders in Khartoum and financed the arms the government

uses to terrorize its citizen...numerous countries happily profit from Khartoum's barbarism" (62). A news report from a local Sudanese newspaper on August 4th, 2009, said three humanitarian relief organizations were protesting against the Sudanese government recently, claiming their efforts to get aid to Darfur were thwarted because Khartoum took \$5.2 million in assets and funds from them. This included payment to workers helping transport equipment, who were consequently fired ("Three expelled aid groups say Sudan seized \$5.2 m of their assets"). Violence and harm is a necessary consequence of Khartoum's self interest or economic agendas. Is the situation in Darfur, where 400,000 have lost their lives to raiding militia, much different from other consequences of this action by Khartoum? With the violence in Darfur being closely related to other outcomes in a pattern of Khartoum's behavior, it is easy to speculate that it too might only be a side effect of their pursuit of economic incentives. However, there is also sufficient evidence linking Darfur to other causes, namely racial diversity and hatred.

There is evidence that Khartoum engages in violence simply for the sake of hatred or dislike. For instance, the history given by Maitre and Nielson of ethnic conflict in Darfur could indicate that Khartoum was acting out of hatred for opposing economic tribes, rather than manipulating them to inflame conflict. Perhaps tribal bloodlines have control of Khartoum's decisions. Likewise, Nimeiri and the leader before him, Ibrahim Abboud, attempted to Islamize the South by force, sufficing for a degree of the South's discontent (Cheadle and Prendergast 53-54). The International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for current Sudanese president, Omar al-Bashir, for hate crimes, human rights abuses, and genocidal conduct ("International Criminal Court" screen "Reports on Activities"). Rebecca Tinsley believes that China's armament of Sudanese forces is only for the sake of violence against citizens (Tinsley 12). Forsyth also classifies Khartoum's motives as being genocidal (Forsyth 271). There is undeniable evidence supporting instances of Khartoum acting violently for the sake of racial hatred.

With so much evidence and argumentation supporting violent situations similar to Darfur in Sudan being caused by Khartoum's racial agenda and economic agenda, we have to accept both as equally-likely causes. A pattern of racial hatred persists in present day Sudan just as much as one of economic interest. Human self interest goes to great lengths at the expense of other parties just as much as hatred. It is a probable case for Darfur just as well.

Is there evidence for similar outcomes in Darfur to those regular of Khartoum's economic agenda today? It's difficult to verify this, as Darfur is currently a very inaccessible warzone. Much of what goes on there today probably happens unaccounted for. However, a recent news report claims government Militias take slaves in Darfur to clear up their land for exploitation by Arabic-speaking nomadic groups (Wallstreet Journal "Sudan's Slaves"). Also, Brian Steidle, while on military observation duties in the area, discovered an oil pipeline in the Nuba Mountains, a location dangerously close to Darfur. He also gathered intelligence during his mission in the area pointing to the fact that Darfur gets the short end of the deal in Sudanese foreign trade, which the pipeline is a result of (Steidle and Wallace 31-38). Though no evidence is entirely conclusive, there are facts indicating that Darfur could very probably be another step in Khartoum's pursuit of their economic incentives. It is true that ethnic hatred could undeniably be a major contributing factor to Darfur, but with what evidence we have, it should be reasonable to conclude that both economic and racial interests contribute to Darfur's violence in some way through Khartoum. Economic causes may more subtly operate behind the curtain in Darfur, but common causes with common outcomes from Khartoum's history and present day evidence should prevent us from overlooking it as an important precipitating factor in Darfur's situation.

Ever since independence, Khartoum has adhered closely to economic activity that came with violent outcomes. Quite effectively, they have and do employ racial hatred that also comes with bloody consequences to aid their economic efforts. Events in Sudan are likened to the same choices and

outcomes Khartoum followed in their past. Like the sibling who dropped the tack in the carpet, this comes at great human costs for the Sudanese people. Darfur's situation looks similar to violence that resulted from Khartoum's patterned agenda. It has to be suspected equally as a cause to the region's troubles if Khartoum's behavior has remained unchanged up to present day. Perhaps if more research were conducted into the matter to discover exactly what the leading cause of Darfur is and what its implications are, the international community could better respond to Khartoum's political choices and end their campaign. Information as well of how racial and economic agendas interrelate in Khartoum's planning would likely support international efforts and put the causes to be treated into a clearer understanding. If we can understand the causes of Darfur's particularly terrible human rights abuse, maybe in the future we can take quicker action against other similar situations, and perhaps we could use the information to gain a better perspective on past instances of human rights abuse. Is there a causal pattern, or universal general cause for human rights abuse and violence? And if so, what role do economic motives play in it? What about racial motives? As atrocities in Darfur toil on, messages of Khartoum's economic motives from further research may reach those with the power to act and goad the world to take the next step in ending the violence.

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