

## Rethinking the Policy on Humanitarian Aid

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### Abstract

For developed nations the solution to the ongoing conflict in Darfur, Sudan has been humanitarian aid in the form of money, supplies, and people. This solution has been problematic as it has not addressed the underlying reason for the conflict itself. Another solution must be devised if the conflict is to be resolved.

Most people who have observed the ongoing genocide in Darfur feel that something must be done. The temporary solution has been sending humanitarian aid, money, and workers to Sudan in an effort to save the people who survive being accosted by the Janjaweed and the Sudanese government. The problem is that the attacks have not stopped, the number of refugees continues to rise, and the humanitarian aid project has no end in sight. Sudan is considered by many economists an unstable nation-state that has unequally concentrated regions of power, no civilian loyalty to the government, poor social institutions, and many divisive factions of people. In the past, countries including the United States have attempted to provide aid directly to the government of Sudan in an effort to democratize and stabilize this war torn country. Unfortunately, this has proved fatal for the people that the Sudanese government target for extermination. The money pledged to the government has ultimately been used to further their own selfish gains and equip the executioners of the Darfuri people. Additionally, the U.N. and the governments that belong to the U.N. hesitate to get directly involved. Some fear that the region is too unstable to transform with military or peacekeeping action, while some may feel it is a lost cause. Whatever the reason for inaction, the situation in Darfur poses such a threat to every industrialized country that inaction will lead to the developed world's undoing. The concept of outside intervention is problematic, as the source of the conflict in Darfur is obviously internal. Help from outside of Africa can not solve the complex, internal divergence issues that have taken hundreds of years to come to this point. The tension in Sudan cannot be solved with the current policy of providing only humanitarian aid. A new approach must be sought in order to strengthen human rights, encourage the government of Sudan to honor all of its people, exploit resources to develop a national product for a solid source of revenue, and create social institutions that foster a loyalty and patriotism by the Sudanese people for their country. The current policy of humanitarian aid is problematic and needs to be retooled.

In 2003 the conflict brewing in Darfur finally came to international attention. The reaction was purely humanitarian in nature, with the U.N. sending of millions of dollars in food, medicine, and workers to Darfur. Almost six years later, the dollar amounts requested by the U.N. have increased every year, and the Sudanese government still denies that there was ever genocide or that it had a hand in the annihilation

of its own people. Although humanitarian aid has been relied upon by the refugees as their only source of hope, the developed world needs to pledge more targeted assistance for the Darfurian people and for the country of Sudan. Merely providing humanitarian aid has done all it can and it is time to make a real change in the lives of the troubled nation-states of Africa.

The policy of pledging only humanitarian aid has been problematic because aid cannot help nation-states if they are unstable. In their essay entitled “With Friends Like These, Who Needs Enemies?: Aiding the World’s Worst Dictators,” Christopher Coyne and Matt Ryan, both PhD’s of economics and critics of foreign aid say that, “Aid can benefit growth in countries with sound policies, but it does not contribute in countries with poor political institutions and policies. Aid is beneficial for growth only after political authorities adopt policies conducive to growth” (Coyne & Ryan, 38). They maintain that aid pledged to countries with weak social institutions and even weaker policies, like the extermination of an entire people to thwart a supposed rebellion, cannot possibly have any positive effect. This sentiment is echoed in President Obama’s speech in Ghana July 11, 2009 when he says, “Development depends on good governance. America will . . . increase assistance for responsible individuals and responsible institutions, with a focus on supporting good governance” (Obama). It is widely recognized that aid can only help when people in positions of power are not corrupt. The pledge of the American President is that aid is available, but will only be distributed if tyranny is abandoned by crooked governments and some form of democracy is sought. Aid cannot provide the fundamental structural change that is needed to ensure a long-lasting, successful government and nation. New approaches need to be explored by experts to replace purely humanitarian aid in Darfur. In fact, Christopher Coyne and Matt Ryan feel that foreign aid to Sudan has allowed bad institutions to perpetuate themselves. Aid that has been given to Sudan in the past has provided the government the means to train and arm the Janjaweed, to oppress all who oppose them, and “[allow] brutal thugs to take full advantage of what those perverse institutions have to offer” (Coyne & Ryan, 36). In this way, humanitarian aid has had the opposite effect of its intended aim. A stable government is beneficial to America and other developed countries because instability breeds terrorism and threatens the world’s security. Humanitarian aid is problematic in that it does not address the instability that threatens the security of developed countries.

The unsteady structure of Sudan provides an optimal headquarters for terrorists and dissidents. Martin Reigl is the Editor-in-Chief of the Czech Republic journal, *The New Presence*, and is a research fellow in the faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University in Prague. In his article “The Paradox of Failed States,” Reigl states that “For the post-industrial world, weak and failing states are not just a sad reality show, but real strategic threats” (Reigl, 55). Where there is no civil order, little moral fortitude, and weak human rights, murderous and tyrannous groups find a welcome home. There are no checks and balances for the occupants of despotic countries, and money speaks louder than ethics. Sudan, clearly, has no moral imperative to oust terrorists as they, themselves, terrorize their own people on a regular basis. John Prendergast is an influential human rights activist who regularly addresses members of the United States government and Don Cheadle is an actor-turned-activist. Together they co-wrote the book, *Not on Our Watch: The Mission to End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond*. They see the strategic threat as the government of Sudan and the oppressed people, not in the terrorist organizations that may be stationed in Sudan when they state, “History has taught us that regimes that target their own people rarely confine their murderous ambitions within their own borders” (Prendergast & Cheadle, xiii). Making a clear reference to Adolph Hitler, among others, Prendergast and Cheadle point to the dangerous precedence of power hungry leaders expanding their tyranny beyond their own boundaries. Ignoring this replication of the darkest hours in our history is dangerous and potentially lethal. The violations of human rights abroad should cause outrage; if it is allowed in one part of the world then it can spring up anywhere in the world. This violation of our most basic rights as human beings threatens us all and needs to be addressed not only in terms of providing food, medicine, and human assistance, but in providing a real solution to the

problem of instability in the region. Prendergast and Cheadle also make a case for the oppressed people in Darfur turning into security threats for developed countries, “Some [victims of genocide] radicalize, taking up arms against their assailants, and, eventually, join criminal or even terrorist networks. The violence spreads; the innocents suffer” (Prendergast & Cheadle, xiii). The sociological concept that violence begets violence is tried and true. If oppression and aggression are seen as successful in achieving goals, the people affected will use the same approach to achieve their own goals. People in Darfur are waiting for someone to come to their aid, not just to sustain their lives, but to free them from the grips of genocide. If the post-industrial world fails them, the anger of the unfulfilled promise will be ferocious. Because the U.S. fears insecurity, seeks new markets, new sources of raw materials, and new strategic allies, it is in our best interest to find a better solution to the ongoing crisis in Darfur. In Darfur, humanitarian aid suffers another setback by attempting to strengthen Sudan from the outside.

To strengthen a weak state, empowerment must come from within the borders. Many authorities on African politics agree that the key to fortifying the social landscape lies within Africa itself. Andrew Mwenda is a Ugandan journalist who holds a masters degree in economics and has openly criticized aid to Africa. In his article entitled “Africa Does Not Need Foreign Aid,” Mwenda makes the case quite clearly, “Most of Africa’s problems are internal, not external, and concern domestic policies and institutions. Until those internal problems are addressed, no amount of Western assistance could postpone much-needed reforms in the way that African countries are governed” (Mwenda, 68). Mwenda has a unique insiders view of the problems faced by many African nation-states, infrastructure. Many economists agree that what is needed most is infrastructure aid, but without a sound government, infrastructure aid will never be realized. The only way to pressure corrupt governments to start behaving diplomatically is to have the pressure come from within Africa. This is not to say that only Africans should deal with Africa’s problems; developed countries have a duty to assist the journey to democracy. As outsiders, foreign governments may not have the best interests in mind for the African people and should not be relied upon for sole assistance. The U.S. government knows how to strategically support a burgeoning democracy and provide guidance when needed, but the U.S. government does not know how to solve all of Africa’s problems. Blinded by ethnocentrism, our urge is to do what is best for Africa, even though our belief systems are very different. One binding principle that Africans and Americans have in common is that humans should have access to the basic necessities of life and be free to pursue happiness. As President Obama said in his speech in Ghana, “We all share common aspirations -- to live in peace and security; to access education and opportunity; to love our families and our communities and our faith. That is our common humanity” (Obama). It is clear that the old policy of throwing money at the problem in Darfur is out of date and a new policy must be created that takes into account the deeper issue at hand.

There is the argument that humanitarian aid has a good track record of success. Jeffrey Sachs, a famous American economist and a special advisor to the U.N. Secretary General, feels that aid has been very beneficial, “development assistance based on proven technologies and directed at measurable and practical needs-increased food production, disease control, safe water and sanitation, schoolrooms and clinics, roads, power grids, Internet connectivity, and the like-has a distinguished record of success” (Sachs, 63). It is agreed that humanitarian assistance has, for the most part, a good record; however, when there are more complex issues underneath the crisis that humanitarian aid can not possibly address, it is ineffective. Some people may see the African Union as weak and unstable, unable to handle internal conflicts with any sort of efficacy. At this time, the A.U. is in its infancy, and as such blunders and makes mistakes. Assisting the A.U. in its growth and guiding its development will surely promote not only a strong organization, but a strong partnership with the developed world. It is believed that military intervention is the only solution to the crisis in Darfur. The U.S., especially, is spread very thin as far as the military is concerned. The enemy in Sudan is savage and has slack rules of war, as seen in pictures

and stories of genocide in Darfur. The U.S. is often criticized for imposing our ideals on others. Developed countries must not insinuate themselves on weak nations any longer, and we must not send troops trained in obstacle courses to a war zone they could not even fathom. The A.U. must decide whether or not to militarily intervene and not developed countries; it is not our place.

The movement to bring as much humanitarian aid as possible to Darfur has failed. The amounts of money needed increase year after year and the obstacles to ending genocide have never gone away. The efforts of the U.N. and developed nations of the world to be altruistic have been admirable, but unfortunately, not enough. As the famous American Economist and special advisor to the U.N. Secretary General, William Easterly, states in his article, "Can Foreign Aid Buy Growth?" "Aid should set more modest goals, like helping some of the people some of the time, rather than trying to be the catalyst for society wide transformation" (Easterly, 23). Focusing only on humanitarian aid, the U.N. has been relying on money and the goodwill of others to solve a multifarious issue. The developed world must realize that the intricacy of the matter in Darfur requires more commitment on their part. It is difficult to separate a nation's interests from their intervention in Darfur, so relying on an organization that has Africa's interests at heart would be the best approach. Humanitarian aid cannot address the issue of the instability inherent in Sudan. Only an organization from inside Africa can put the right kind of pressure on an African nation-state to change. The success that the democratic states within Africa have had should be an example to other African states. Africans must take an interest in their own destiny, and the developed world must support them in their interest. The world's continued security, civility, and growth depends upon encouraging Africa to mature.

#### **Works Cited**

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