

THE GAP BETWEEN NARRATIVES AND PRACTICES

DARFUR: THE RESPONSES FROM THE ARAB WORLD

7. REALIGNING US FOREIGN POLICY WITH REALITY IN DARFUR: FORMULATING A WHOLE-OF-SUDAN POLICY

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A COLLECTION OF PAPERS TO PROMPT AN INTER-ARAB DIALOGUE ON POLICIES TOWARDS THE CONFLICT IN DARFUR

This paper is part of a collection of seven research papers published within the framework of the project '*The Gap between Narratives and Practices. Darfur: Responses from the Arab world*' undertaken by FRIDE from October 2008 to March 2010.

The project aims to develop an understanding of Arab states and society, as well as their attitudes and policies towards massive violations of human rights in their region. The research conducted for this purpose is manifold and aims at facilitating an inter-Arab dialogue; as well as the generation of ideas about how other actors may play a positive role to engage the Arab world in redressing the massive violations of human rights in the particular case of Darfur and beyond.

The project undertaken by FRIDE and funded by the Ford Foundation has gathered together a number of researchers and activists to develop background research, meet in an international conference in Tunis in October 2009 to discuss their findings and draw conclusions and recommendations in different thematic areas, including Arab perceptions of the crisis, Arab policies as individual states and within the framework of regional and international organisations, and other external responses related to or that influence what Arab actors could do regarding the Darfur conflict.

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THE PUBLICATIONS, FOLLOWED BY THE AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES, ARE:

1. DARFUR AND ARAB PUBLIC OPINION: STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Jacob Høigilt

2. ARAB OFFICIAL POSITIONS TOWARDS PRESIDENT AL-BASHIR'S INDICTMENT

Noha Bakr and Essam Abdel Shafi

**3. BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN NARRATIVE AND PRACTICES:
THE ROLE OF THE ARAB LEAGUE IN DARFUR**

Annette Weber

4. THE AFRICAN UNION IN DARFUR: UNDERSTANDING THE AFRO-ARAB RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

Sarjoh Bah

5. THE UN RESPONSE TO THE DARFUR CRISIS

Joanna Weschler

6. THE EU'S ROLE TOWARDS THE DARFUR CRISIS FROM 2003 UNTIL TODAY

Giji Gya

**7. REALIGNING US FOREIGN POLICY WITH REALITY IN DARFUR:
FORMULATING A WHOLE-OF-SUDAN POLICY**

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7.

REALIGNING US FOREIGN POLICY WITH REALITY IN DARFUR: FORMULATING A WHOLE-OF-SUDAN POLICY

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CONTENTS

LEADING UP TO 2003

APPROACHING DARFUR

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN NARRATIVES AND REALITY

US POLICY UNDER THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

While the current project titled ‘Darfur: the Responses from the Arab World’ highlights ‘The Gap between Narratives and Practices’, when it comes to the foreign policy conducted by the United States in the past several years, the more pertinent and underlying issue proves to be the gap between narratives and reality. The US, as a country, has had an almost obsessive – though many would argue, ineffective – relationship with the violent conflict that erupted in Darfur, in 2003, which generated widespread activism among US grassroots, religious and civil society organisations. This activism, focused on mobilising advocacy campaigns, led to years of hyped-up rhetoric and attention by Washington with regard to Darfur. In fact, much of US policy and many of the official statements regarding the Darfur crisis have been influenced by the widespread public awareness of the crisis thanks to the activism carried out by an influential and extensive coalition of US civil society organisations, especially since 2004.

The present text will review the United States’ role in the Darfur crisis, the policy and positions that Washington has taken towards it since 2003, and the current administration’s actions since taking office in late January (2009), up until the announcement of its current policy outline, in October 2009. No less important in this particular case, we will also review the approaches advocated by the largest and most influential civil society movement on behalf of Darfur in the United States, its influence on public opinion and in turn its effects on policy. Moreover, we will address the immediate future of US-Sudan relations, including the conflict in Darfur and the current state and degree of implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the North and South insofar as reaching a durable peace throughout the *whole-of-Sudan*.¹

LEADING UP TO 2003

The United States government has a history of political engagement and disengagement with the government of Sudan (GOS). US relations date back to the Cold War era when Sudan’s strategic location, surrounded by Eastern bloc-backed neighbours, was of interest to Washington. Further into the Cold War, Sudan continued to capture the attention of US policy-makers when Moammar Gadhafi set his sights on creating an ‘Arab belt’ in the region and Washington sought to contain the Libyan leader’s Pan-Arab objectives. The discovery of oil in Sudan’s southern region saw Africa’s largest country grow even further in importance to the United States. It has been asserted that for all of the above reasons, the US government initially opted to turn a blind eye towards Khartoum’s marginalisation of its peripheral regions (deliberately deprived by the central government of basic services like education and healthcare, and denied economic and political rights, etc.); subsequently, Washington would go on to ignore the crushing policies the GOS inflicted on these very regions during rebel uprisings in protest of such neglect and injustice, as was the case of the SPLA – Sudanese People’s Liberation Army, led by John Garang in the North-South civil war. In effect, as will be observed, during times of good US-Sudan relations, US policy ignored grave humanitarian situations caused directly or indirectly as a result of GOS policies, in order not to upset the political status quo with Khartoum.

In 1989, however, shortly after the coup that brought General Omar Hassan al-Bashir to power, US engagement with Sudan shifted radically. Although Washington attempted initially to maintain its engagement (in keeping with the above-mentioned interests), it became clear that al-Bashir and his administration aimed to turn Sudan into an Islamist state, with an increased presence and role among its fellow Arab countries, which complicated US-Sudan relations. Eventually, ties between the two countries fell apart. The divergent paths were made manifest when Sudan supported Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, in 1990; with the Clinton administration’s decision to bomb a pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum, in 1998; and with Washington’s designation of Sudan as a ‘state sponsor

¹ The concept of “whole-of-Sudan” comes from the concept of “whole-of-government” policy approaches. Whole-of-Sudan, in this paper, refers both to the geographical extension of the entire country and to comprehensive, coherent, cross-sectoral policy approaches, aimed at addressing the effects of the conflict and mitigating its root causes.

of terrorism'. It was during this time that US official political engagement with Sudan shifted and Washington began to engage with opposition and rebel movements in southern Sudan and charged USAID with carrying out activities in SPLA-controlled communities. Over time, the United States came to engage more actively with the GOS again upon the opening of negotiations that led to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended the 22-year civil war between the North and the South. In the midst of such diplomacy, and reaching out to Washington after the attacks of 11 September 2001, Khartoum began to co-operate with the United States on matters related to counter-intelligence, despite official declarations and lists coming from Washington that placed Sudan on the side of those states that were *against* the United States.

APPROACHING DARFUR

While the peace process was underway to bring the North-South civil war to a close, the situation in western Sudan was deteriorating rapidly. As the phenomenon of desertification in the Sahel region diminished the fertile land, drought and famine ensued and a growing number of land disputes broke out between farmers (mostly ethnic 'Africans') and nomadic herders (mostly 'Arabs'), who had managed their activities and use of land peacefully up until then. Darfur – an already impoverished and historically-neglected peripheral region – was suddenly faced with less arable land, scant food supplies and no responses – or acknowledgement of the situation – from Khartoum.

Moreover, the civil war between the North and the South had captured the attention of the international community, leading to the brokering of a formal peace accord, which addressed the underlying issues that had caused the initial and prolonged violence. Meanwhile, in Darfur, local tensions began to flare. Impoverished, marginalised, facing an increasingly desperate fate and aware that the South's SPLM was gaining political ground thanks to the international community's US-led involvement in the peace negotiations with Khartoum – Darfurians also turned to violence. Armed rebel groups in the region (which would become the Sudan Liberation Movement, or SLM, and the Justice and Equality Movement, or JEM) attacked military garrisons and state installations in protest of their situations. Khartoum's response, like its tactics against rebellion in the South, was to send janjaweed militias to Darfur to crush the rebel uprising, leading directly or indirectly to the eventual death of approximately 300,000 people according to estimates from the United Nations, as well as the displacement of two million people and the destruction of villages, razed to the ground by military and militia scorched earth policies.

With US policy and diplomatic efforts to Sudan focusing primarily on the southern part of the country, the violence in Darfur escalated significantly in early 2003. However, despite these developments, US policy – in keeping with its history of ignoring humanitarian crises in order not to upset US-Sudan relations – continued to forge ahead with peace negotiations with the South, making little or no effort to hold Khartoum accountable for what was transpiring in the west. Indeed, despite being titled 'Comprehensive Peace', the agreement signed in 2005 did not address the conflict already being waged in the western province. In its haste to conclude negotiations and secure a peace agreement between the North and the South, the United States failed to address the rising tensions and high-scale violence in Darfur. Crucially, this decision would prove to be a missed opportunity to prevent or at least curtail the genocidal tactics against rebels and unarmed civilians of their villages, as well as the widescale massacres and massive displacements of the people of Darfur.

During the initial escalation of violence in Darfur, Khartoum significantly impeded humanitarian access to the region, hindering the possibility of a large-scale, much needed, humanitarian operation. Therefore, when the GOS announced the end of military operations in Darfur and a partial lifting of the blockade on humanitarian activity in February 2004, USAID, several humanitarian NGOs, European donors and the World Food Programme were able to begin preparing a response to the emergency, which would go on to become one of the world's largest humanitarian operations.

Around this time, in April 2004 – a year after the intense violence erupted and, strangely, at the end of the period in which the great majority of massacres were committed² – Darfur began to catch the attention of media headlines. The ten-year anniversary of the Rwandan genocide provided a dramatic backdrop for the press and set the stage for appeals to the US government to prevent another ‘Rwanda’ from happening in western Sudan. This media coverage in turn appears to have forced the government’s hand and led Washington to issue a statement on its position and policy. By September of that year, both the US Congress and President G. W. Bush himself were calling the situation genocide, and the urgency of the plight of the people in Darfur was proclaimed with fervour in the media. Pleas for help and action were made for a situation that was portrayed, for the most part, as a ‘black and white’ issue, that is, one in which there were easily identifiable and clear dividing lines between the victimizers and the victims, or in other words, the ‘vicious Arabs were killing the defenceless Africans’.

Nevertheless, despite labelling the situation as genocide, thereby acknowledging its urgency and opening the door to justify a possible intervention, US policy between 2004 and 2008 hardly went beyond hyped-up rhetoric of harsh threats and calls for Khartoum to halt the terror and killing and make humanitarian assistance accessible to the Darfurians. Indeed, in the face of ongoing ‘genocide’, Washington’s policies consisted of little more than relief aid; support of the AU Mission; engagement in peace negotiations leading to the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in 2006 (although these proceedings would prove to be another missed opportunity for peace, once again largely due to an over-eagerness in signing a deal regardless of its viability); support of UN-AMID (at 68.75%, as of July 2009, of its mandated number of 26,000 deployed troops); and indirect support of the International Criminal Court’s indictment of Sudanese government officials and President al-Bashir for crimes against humanity. Lee J.M. Seymour succinctly explains Western policy-relations with Khartoum in the following manner:³

There is a long-standing pattern in the pas de deux between the NCP and the West. In recent years, the NCP’s intransigence has led to vocal demands for action from the US and European states. The NCP’s response has invariably been symbolic acquiescence, with concessions made in areas of lesser importance to insulate those of greater strategic consequence. Different dossiers, including Darfur, Southern Sudan, oil investment and counter-terrorism cooperation, are balanced against one another.

In order to attempt to understand the US policy of *seeming* to pay so much attention to Darfur we must look beyond the White House and Congress. It is impossible to speak of US policy and Darfur without addressing the role that US activism has played in terms of guiding or moulding public opinion and in turn official policy towards Darfur and, consequently, the Sudan, as a whole. Today, the plight of Darfur is a common focus for many humanitarian NGOs, activist groups and policy think-tanks; however, no single organisation or movement has had the scope of influence as the Save Darfur Coalition.⁴

Thanks, largely, to the efforts of this activist-machine, called the Save Darfur Coalition, Darfur has practically become a household word or cause among public opinion in the United States. While it is likely few could explain what ‘Darfur’ is, most know that ‘it’ must be saved. Beginning in the summer of 2004, the founding members of what would eventually become the Save Darfur Coalition sounded the alarm about the genocide and ethnic cleansing taking place in western Sudan and proclaimed the need to act urgently and decisively. The coalition firmly advocates intervention – a military operation – in Darfur in order to save the people from certain death, appealing to the international community’s responsibility to protect the population (R2P). First calling upon the United States to use its influence to launch an intervention, activists later supported the creation of AMIS, then

² ‘According to Alex de Waal, ‘The period of intense conflict in Darfur was from about April 2003 to January 2005. The great majority of massacres were committed between July 2003 and April 2004’ in ‘Dueling Over Darfur: A human rights activist and an Africa scholar disagree -vehemently- on the best way to help Sudan. *Newsweek Web Exclusive*, 8 November 2007: <http://www.newsweek.com/id/69004>, accessed 6 August 2009.

³ ‘No Peace to Keep: Darfur in Perspective’, SWP Comments, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, May 2007, http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/produkte/swp_aktuell_detail.php?id=7647&PHPSESSID=7c4a0bd70244c1b969aaf0f1d6c17f3d, accessed 7 July 2009.

⁴ The Save Darfur Coalition’s roots date back to the summer of 2004 when it was founded at the Darfur Emergency Summit in New York; although it began as a meeting organised by the US Holocaust Museum and the American Jewish World Service, today it consists of over 190 faith-based, humanitarian and human rights organisations. Its mission is to raise public awareness and mobilise a massive response to the atrocities in Darfur. It engages and educates the American public on the situation in Darfur and applies political pressure to elected leaders to end ‘the first genocide of the 21st century’. See the 2008 Annual Report at: http://issuu.com/savedarfurcoalition/docs/2008_sdc_annual_report.

UNAMID and recently the indictment of Sudanese officials, including President al-Bashir, by the ICC. Currently, calls from supporters of the coalition and related organisations, like Enough Project, are beginning to go as far as to insist on the viability, timing, appropriateness and effectiveness of removing al-Bashir from power in order to – now – proceed with a *whole-of-Sudan* approach, as fear of the possible collapse of the CPA becomes more widespread and credible.⁵

In the past couple of years, increasing criticism of the activism carried out by the founders, directors and supporters of the coalition has emerged.⁶ Initially, this backlash amounted to no more than a few critical voices like that of Alex de Waal, who criticises it for promoting a simplistic description of the crisis, fearing that – albeit with good intentions – the overwhelming monopoly of media coverage achieved for the crisis by the group will (and to some extent already has) undermined the peace process in the southern region by turning political attention away from the South and to the west, with the focus switching to a humanitarian response rather than a comprehensive, political approach towards the entire country. More recently, Columbia University professor, Mahmood Mamdani, launched harsh and public criticism against the coalition, insisting – among other allegations – it is a neo-colonialist movement and questioning the ulterior motives and objectives of its founders and leaders, generating a considerable polemic.⁷

It is not the purpose of this paper to address the intricacies of the civil society activism in the United States for Darfur; however, it is crucial to understand the linkages between the widespread campaigning of the activists and US policy, because it is clear that such activism has indeed played a powerful role in terms of US policy-making towards Sudan since 2004.

... the Darfur campaigns have made a difference to US policy – certainly in rhetoric, and significantly in substance. For a start, humanitarian agencies working in Darfur have little difficulty in getting the funds they demand from the US government, and no presidential candidate can outline a position on foreign policy that doesn't have some reference to what he or she proposes to do in Darfur. Without the campaigners there would have been no genocide determination and no referral to the International Criminal Court, and it's unlikely that there would have been an effort to change the African Union force to United Nations peacekeepers.⁸

What is worrying about the relationship between Darfur activists and US policy-makers is that the latter seem to have become overtaken by the increasing demands on them to take action by their constituents, who have been influenced by the former's hugely successful awareness campaigns across the country and throughout Europe. Seemingly, there is no problem with this scenario as this cause and effect relationship would be the goal of any kind of activist movement. However, in the case of Darfur, it is the very nature of this relationship, the widespread passion and energy, coupled with a lack of understanding of the conflict itself, which has led to continuous, ineffective policy.

On the one hand, we have an activist organisation that has successfully mobilised civil society to get and keep Darfur on Washington's radar; however, on the other hand, we have a failure in terms of linking that mobilisation to effective policy with regard to changing the reality in Darfur. Legislators, responding to their constituents' calls to save Darfur, have produced humanitarian responses, at best, and harsh (yet empty) rhetoric calling for bold interventions, instead of viable policy solutions responding to the underlying causes of the problems faced by Darfurians, in particular, and the Sudanese, in general. In other words, political responses have been formulated to meet the needs of US constituents, not necessarily those of the people of Darfur.

⁵ John Prendergast and Colin Thomas-Jensen, 'Sudan: A State on the Brink?' in *Current History*, May 2009, <http://www.currenthistory.com/Article.php?ID=691>, accessed 15 July 2009.

⁶ David Lanz, 'Commentary: Save Darfur: A Movement and its Discontents', *African Affairs*, Oxford University Press, 18 August 2009, accessed 27 August 2009 http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/pdf_extract/adp061v1.

⁷ See 'The Politics of Naming: Genocide, Civil War, Insurgency' in *London Review of Books*, 8 March 2007, accessed 9 July 2009, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n05/mamd01_.html and *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror*, New York: Pantheon, 2009.

⁸ Alex de Waal, 'Dueling over Darfur: a human rights activist and an Africa scholar disagree – vehemently – on the best way to help Sudan. An exclusive online forum', *Newsweek Web*, 8 November 2007, accessed 17 August 2009, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/69004>

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN NARRATIVES AND REALITY

What we appear to have at hand with regard to US policy towards Darfur and towards the whole of Sudan is a gap between reality on the ground and public narratives regarding the situation, which has in turn led to ineffective or non-existent policy. On the one hand, an increasingly powerful public opinion demands legislators address Darfur; therefore, elected officials respond. Political figures attend marches, make trips to the region, stand alongside prominent activists and Hollywood actors in support of fundraisers and make adamant speeches about Darfur; indeed, they seem to address the issue, heeding their constituents' requests. Nevertheless, despite the fact that such rhetoric and non-binding political activities have little or no effect on the ground for the people of Darfur, constituents witness or are made aware of their politicians' efforts and many people consider political efforts to be underway.

Understanding the critical difference between needs on the ground and demands of public opinion is of the utmost importance, as policy responses – if they are indeed meant to save Darfurians and facilitate lasting peace – must go well beyond mere statements and photo opportunities. Policy responses must not only stabilise the security situation and alleviate the ongoing humanitarian state-of-emergency among the displaced in the region, they must also mitigate the underlying causes of the crisis in Darfur by working towards economic, political and social reforms.

Furthermore, the widespread awareness campaign that has many – constituents and legislators, alike – continuing to believe that there is an ongoing genocide in Darfur may serve to catch people's attention, but it does not necessarily serve to facilitate peace in Darfur in the long-term. This is not to say that genocide did not occur; nor does it mean that the crimes against humanity and human rights violations should go unpunished. However, by placing an emphasis on an ongoing genocide, the risk of misconstruing priorities and consequential (misaligned) responses ensues. Decision-makers, overwhelmed by demands to end genocide, may feel pressured to implement policies that they are incapable or unwilling to implement (e.g. intervention), and therefore rest upon policies that they can handle, i.e. humanitarian aid, rhetoric and monetary or material support of international missions, much in keeping with US policy since the beginning of this conflict, even if they prove ineffective. Such action, or lack thereof, becomes the policy instead of focusing on the more complicated, long-term and essential measures of mitigating both the consequences of the genocide and mass human rights abuses of the Darfurian population, including the underlying root causes that led to the initial outbreak of the crisis.

In this case, the issue is not about the gap between narratives and practice, because the action to date has reflected to some extent the most public narratives among mainstream public opinion in the United States. US policymakers have not only heeded the demands of civil society, they have – perhaps naively, perhaps irresponsibly – taken civil society's understanding of the crisis as reality. When public, renowned and official voices – like that of Luis Moreno-Ocampo – assert that 5,000 war-related deaths continue to occur each month⁹ or that there is an 'ongoing genocide' (Ambassador Susan Rice), as recently as the summer (2009), it is of little surprise that few question these assertions or argue against the heart-felt campaigning for intervention in Darfur.

Despite such narratives from high-ranking, public officials – and celebrities – there is increasingly more evidence from the field that reveals a crisis quite different in scale than the one put forth by well-known activists and campaigns. The joint UN-AU special representative designates Darfur as a low-intensity conflict in which 130-150 people are dying a month from violence.¹⁰ Upon studying the numbers mentioned by Moreno-Ocampo

⁹ Andrew Natsios states that the ICC's chief prosecutor made this claim during a lecture at Yale University on February 6, 2009, but questions the validity of the data, for which no source was cited, and references the figure by Genocide IN that about 1,500 people were killed in Darfur in all of 2008 (See 'Waltz with Bashir: Why an Arrest Warrant Against Sudan's President will serve neither Peace nor Justice' in *Foreign Affairs*, 23 March 2009, accessed 24 August 2009, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64904/andrew-natsios-waltz-with-bashir>), and, shed in a different light, the same figure was quoted in Patrick and Brown's Expert Brief (2009) in support of the need to stop Bashir. The Council on Foreign Relations analysts cited their quote from a Newsweek interview with Ocampo-Moreno in which he specified that the 'extermination is committed using humber', 'Rocking the Courtroom' in *Newsweek* by Arlene Getz, 21 March 2009, accessed 30 August 2009, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/190392/page/1>.

¹⁰ Briefing the UNSC, Rodolphe Adada said: According to figures collected by UN-AU peacekeeping mission in Darfur, known as UNAMID, some 2000 people died from violence in the region during the 15 months between 1 Jan. 2008 and 31 March 2009, one third of them civilians. Source: 'UN Says Darfur is now a Low Intensity Conflict' in *Al Arabiya*, 28 April 2009, accessed 15 May 2009, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/04/27/71572.html>.

and the nuanced, additional figures from the UN, the most serious vulnerability facing Darfurians is not violence, but rather food and health security, as has been the case for years. Herein lies the problem with the solutions demanded by American civil society of their legislators: they do not align with the reality on the ground. Moreover, the obsessive focus on saving Darfurians misrepresents the historical factors and context (i.e. political, economic and social marginalisation of the peripheral areas outside of Khartoum) of their plight and impedes a more comprehensive vision and approach, which could be addressed through a whole-of-Sudan policy, taking note of the advances made by the South in the negotiated CPA. Post-conflict processes involving all aspects of peacebuilding and institutional reform are essential in order to plan for a durable peace throughout Sudan, including Darfur.

US POLICY UNDER THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

Since October 2009, there is a unified, official stance on Darfur and Sudan within the still fledgling Obama administration. Bridging the gap between reality on the ground in Darfur and narratives about it affords the government a new opportunity to address the existing gap within the greater community between narratives and practice. We are at a time in US policy in which conditions could prove ripe for constructive policymaking with regard to the whole-of-Sudan – not just focusing on Darfur or the CPA or the east, individually – but with a truly comprehensive approach to alleviate the human suffering within the borders of Sudan and facilitate processes to lay the foundations for stability and durable peace throughout the entire country.

The Obama administration now includes former presidential candidate-rivals including Hillary Rodham Clinton and Joseph Biden, who during the 2008 campaign spoke strongly about the need to step up decisive action in Darfur in the form of establishing and enforcing no-fly zones in the region, as well as Susan Rice, current US ambassador to the United Nations, who has called for a bombing campaign to save the victims.¹¹ President Barack Obama was also very vocal about the need to save Darfur's victims, referring to the crisis 'as a stain on our souls', promising to address their plight if elected. Since taking office, the Obama administration has moved cautiously and taken its time to conduct a comprehensive review of Sudan, avoiding concrete actions that would affect the status quo. After much pressure and criticism from the activist community for not acting sooner, in March of 2009, Obama named retired air force general, J. Scott Gration, as his special envoy to Sudan. This action came after the official ICC indictment of al-Bashir for crimes against humanity and upon his subsequent decision to expel thirteen humanitarian aid groups from Darfur.

During his first months in the position, Special Envoy Gration's efforts were focused on organising humanitarian relief to fill the huge gaps left behind by the expelled organisations. Dialogue and diplomacy appear to have been the initial aims of this appointment, as Gration – since March – has travelled to and met with officials and representatives from such countries as Sudan, Chad, China, Egypt, France, Libya, Norway, Qatar and the United Kingdom. Gration has worked to regain and strengthen international commitment and support for the full implementation of the CPA as well as peace and stability in Darfur, having regrouped the 'Sudan Troika' (Norway, the United Kingdom and USA) and formed the 'Envoy 6', consisting of the special envoys to Sudan from the EU, China, France, Russia, the UK and USA. His approach, while not to the liking of Darfur activists who wanted immediate 'action', formed part of the Obama administration's comprehensive review of the issues related to Sudan.

Public statements made on various occasions by Gration, Ambassador Rice and Secretary of State Rodham Clinton during the summer indicated significant differences in their positions with regard to Darfur. While Gration attempted to move the discourse away from the loaded nomenclature of genocide and towards an integrative policy approach, the US ambassador to the United Nations and secretary of state seemed to be driving a much

¹¹ 'Obama names retired general as Sudan envoy' in International Herald Tribune, by Peter Baker, 18 March 2009, accessed 21 March 2009, <http://www.ihf.com>.

harsher line of policy. In a statement titled, 'Toward a Comprehensive Strategy for Sudan', during testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 30 July 2009, Gration emphasised the importance of engagement in order to change conditions on the ground.¹² In the meantime, however, activists and other administration officials called his approach naïve, highlighting Khartoum's lengthy history of failing to fulfil its commitments.

In the end, after months of numerous and arduous talks and negotiations among senior policymakers in the administration and outside experts (including activists), a compromise seems to have been reached and on 19 October 2009, Secretary Rodham Clinton, joined by both Rice and Gration, outlined the new US strategy to Sudan. Absent from the policy are both the forthright *carrots* on which it appeared Gration was basing his approach, as well as the *sticks* proposed by other members of the Obama administration, including military measures like that of a NATO-enforced, no-fly zone. Instead, a compromise seems to have been reached and the principal measure will be the extension of existing sanctions. The novelty of this new policy involves the offering of incentives if and when verifiable changes on the ground occur, and disincentives for 'backsliding' or static movement by any of the parties involved. However, the disclosure of what these incentives and disincentives would be, as well as the benchmarks that will be used to measure the change on the ground, was not forthcoming.

The policy follows Gration's efforts to engage with both the government in Khartoum, local and regional parties and international and multilateral partners; however, whereas Gration supported accepting the status quo and providing rewards in anticipation of positive steps from Khartoum, the compromise obligates Khartoum and other actors to make the first move and have their positive actions verified before being rewarded. In contrast, despite references in this new strategy to focus on reversing the dire human consequences of genocide, official White House language will support Ambassador Rice and refer to the genocide 'taking place' in Darfur. This concession, however, seems odd considering the administration's decision to consider only political and economic 'disincentives' and not adopt a hard-line approach, which would be more appropriate and coherent if the government indeed believed genocide was still ongoing.

The new US strategy outlines three principal objectives: 1) bringing an end to the conflict in Darfur; 2) the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement; and 3) ensuring a Sudan that does not provide a safe haven for terrorists. For the most part, initial reaction – even from activists – with regard to the government's outline has been tempered. While it is not the hard-line policy that many activists called for or that members of the administration, including President Obama, advocated during the 2008 presidential campaign, it does include key aspects like holding Khartoum and other parties in Sudan accountable, confirming verifiable changes on the ground and working in coalition with international partners to bring about lasting peace throughout all of Sudan. Nevertheless, activists and observers are concerned by the absence of specific penalties that Khartoum and other parties will face if they undermine the peace or even continue with the status quo and take no steps to promote stability. This concern stems from the belief that Khartoum and al-Bashir will only react with hard-line tactics.

Some see the solution for saving Sudan in the form of regime change in Khartoum – a position supported by a growing number of activists, including John Prendergast¹³ and the Council on Foreign Relations.¹⁴ However, others, like Andrew Natsios, warn against such objectives, insisting that not supporting al-Bashir right now would be disastrous for all parties involved with Sudan. History has demonstrated that peace and stability cannot be built on 'humanitarian intervention'; similarly, it has also shown that democracy and justice cannot be installed through regime change. Consequently, it is most surprising that such policies would be considered to bring about peace in Sudan.

¹² 'Toward a Comprehensive Strategy for Sudan: Gration Testimony before Senate Foreign Relations Committee', 30 July 2009, accessed 10 August 2009, <http://www.state.gov/s/sudan/rem/index.htm>.

¹³ John Prendergast and Colin Thomas-Jensen, 'Sudan: A State on the Brink?' in *Current History*, May 2009, <http://www.currenthistory.com/Article.php?ID=691>, accessed 15 July 2009.

¹⁴ Stewart M. Patrick and Kaysie Brown, 'Stopping Bashir: Obama's 'Never Again' Moment of Truth', *Expert Brief*, Council on Foreign Relations, 23 March 2009, http://www.cfr.org/publication/18908/stopping_bashir.html, accessed 17 July 2009.

Key to this policy outline will be the implementation of the strategy. While the administration emphasises the importance of its comprehensive nature, it is in fact only comprehensive to US policy interests (Darfur, CPA and counter-terrorism), not necessarily to comprehensive peace. Establishing a comprehensive peace strategy – developing whole-of-government policies – is crucial and should be addressed in conjunction with local actors, multilateral agencies and international partners. The United States, in this regard, could consider strengthening the Department of State's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilisation in order to contribute civilian personnel and know-how to peacebuilding and post-conflict processes throughout Sudan, once general security is established. In this regard, activists should be encouraged as key players in terms of formulating a comprehensive peace strategy. Their ability to educate and influence public opinion will facilitate in raising public awareness of peacebuilding measures, paving the way for the continued, long-term support of policymakers and donors, whose interest and support often wane before the peacebuilding process is complete.

The administration is now calling the implementation of the CPA a 'priority', and Darfur an 'urgency', stating that both will be addressed simultaneously and in tandem. This direct assurance from the government is important considering that history indicates Washington does not usually hold Khartoum accountable for its actions in one peripheral region, while it is engaged with the GOS in another. That said, however, concern has been raised that the third item of the strategy, which has received the least attention – counter-terrorism – could overshadow both Darfur and the CPA.

The solution to Darfur involves a solution for all of Sudan and right now engaging with Khartoum is the chosen path. All in all, there is reason for hope. Despite his stance before entering office, President Obama appears to be moving cautiously but steadfastly beyond erroneous narratives and taking steps to realign policy with the reality on the ground through a process of diplomatic engagement. While criticism of the character and personal approach of the special envoy continue to be put forth by both activists and observers, the immediate reaction to the current policy approach is positive, as the strategy itself leaves the administration room for manoeuvre, given that the classified status of the measures of incentives and disincentives could provide greater flexibility in terms of responses. Nevertheless, the implementation of the Obama administration's policy to Sudan remains to be seen and must be monitored in the short-term to determine its effectiveness not only in terms of the demands of American constituents who seek responses for Darfur, but in terms of its coherence in realising verifiable change on the ground with regard to lasting peace and stability throughout all of Sudan.

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“The Gap Between Narratives and Practices. Darfur: Responses from the Arab world”

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